THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

{Omnibus}



12 BOOKS PACK

RAMESH MENON

RUPA

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THE COMPLETE

MAHABHARATA

Adi Parva

{1}

RAMESH MENON

The Mahabharata of Veda Vyasa is the longest recorded epic of the world. With almost 100,000 verses, it is many times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey combined and has deeply influenced every aspect of the Indian ethos for some 4,000 years.

The main theme is the Great War on Kurukshetra, but the epic teems with smaller stories, and other stories within these, all woven together with a genius that confounds comparison. As its heart, it contains Krishna's immortal Bhagavad-Gita, the Song of God.

The Mahabharata embodies the ancient and sacred Indian tradition, in all its earthy and spiritual immensity. Famously, "What is found here may be found elsewhere. What is not found here will not be found elsewhere."

Many believe this most magnificent epic to be the greatest story ever told. Yet, the only full Indian translation of the Mahabharata into English is the 19th century one by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli accomplished his task, and the language he used is now sadly archaic.

This new 12 volume series retells the great epic, line by line, in fresh, easily readable English prose. With it, we hope to bring the Mahabharata alive again, for the contemporary and future reader.



The Complete Mahabharata
Adi Parva

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RAMESH MENON

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For Sri RK Mehra,
valued friend, great Publisher

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the Epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa & Co, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the Great Epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

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CANTO 1

PARVA SAMGRAHA

AUM! I bow down to Narayana and Nara, the most exalted Purusha, and to the Devi Saraswati, and utter the word Jaya. Ugrasrava is the son of Romaharshana; he is a Suta and a master of the Puranas. One day, bowing reverently, he came to the great Rishis of flinchless austerity who sat at their ease after attending the twelve years' yagna of Saunaka Kulapati, in the Naimisha vana. The Munis were eager to listen to the marvellous legends of Ugrasrava, who had come to their asrama in the forest. The holy ones welcomed him with respect. He greeted those Sages with folded hands and inquired after the evolution of their tapasya.

When the Rishis all sat again, Romaharshana's son also humbly sat upon the seat they offered him. Seeing that he was comfortable, and refreshed, one of the Rishis said, 'From where are you coming, lotus-eyed Sauti, and where have you been spending your time? Tell me, who asks you this, in detail.'

The eloquent Sauti replied appositely and at length in that large conclave of illustrious tapasvins; the language he used was chaste and high, suited to their way of life.

Sauti said, 'I heard the diverse, sacred and marvellous tales, which Krishna Dwaipayana composed in his Mahabharata, and which Vaisampayana narrated at the sarpa yagna of the noble Rajarishi Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit, foremost among Kshatriyas.

Later, I ranged the Earth, visiting many tirthas and other shrines. I journeyed to Samantapanchaka, revered by the Dvijas, where the sons of Kuru and those of Pandu fought their Great War, with all the Kshatriyas of the land fighting for one side or the other.

From there, being eager to meet you, I have come into your presence. Worshipful Sages, you are all like Brahman to me. Most blessed ones, you shine in this yagnashala with the splendour of the Sun. You have finished

your dhyana and have fed the holy fire. Now you sit here, at your ease, with no cares.

Tell me, greatest of Dvijas, what would you hear from me? Shall I recount the sacred tales of the Puranas, which tell of dharma and artha, or shall I tell you about the deeds of enlightened Rishis and of the kings of men?'

The Rishis replied, 'The Purana that was first propounded by the great Dwaipayana. When both the Devas and the Brahmarishis had heard it, they said it was the foremost of all Itihasas, histories. It varies in both diction and divisions, has intricate and subtle meanings, logically combined and gleaned from the Vedas, and it is a most holy work. It is composed in elegant language and includes the subjects of every other book. Other Shastras elucidate this Purana, and it reflects the inmost meaning of the four Vedas. We want to listen to that Itihasa, which is also called the Bharata, the magnificent Vyasa's holy masterwork, which dispels the fear of evil. We would hear it exactly as the Rishi Vaisampayana told it, joyously, under the direction of Dwaipayana himself, at the sarpa yagna, the snake-sacrifice of Raja Janamejaya.'

Sauti then said, 'I bow to the Primordial Being, Isana, to whom the people all make offerings, whom the multitude adores. He is the true and immortal One – Brahman, manifest, unmanifest and eternal. He both exists and appears not to. He is the Universe and also distinct from the Universe, the creator of all things, high and low, the ancient, exalted, inexhaustible One. He is Vishnu, benign and benignity personified, worthy of all worship, pure, perfect. He is Hari, sovereign of the faculties, the mover of all things, mobile and motionless.

I will now narrate the sacred thoughts of the illumined Muni Vyasa, of marvellous accomplishments, whom all here revere. Some pauranikas have already taught this Itihasa, some now teach it, and others will hereafter disseminate it across the Earth. It is a vast treasure of knowledge, and its fame is established through the three Lokas. The Dvijas, the twice-born, possess it both in detail and in full. The erudite delight in it for being adorned with elegance, with conversations human and divine and with myriad poetic metres.

When this world was without light, plunged in absolute darkness, a Mighty Egg appeared, the First Cause of creation, the single, infinite, inexhaustible seed of all created beings. This is the Mahavidya, formed at

the beginning of the Yuga, when, we hear, Brahman the true light, the eternal, inconceivable Being, was present equally everywhere, the unseen and subtle Cause, whose nature is both of being and nothingness.

From this Egg, Pitamaha Brahma emerged, the first Prajapati, along with Vishnu Suraguru and Siva Sthanu. Then the twenty-one Prajapatis appeared – Manu, Vasishta and Parameshthi, ten Prachetas, Daksha, and the seven sons of Daksha.

Then appeared the incomprehensible Purusha, whom all the Rishis know, and also the Viswedevas, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Aswin twins, the Yakshas, the Sadhyas, the Pisachas, the Guhyakas, and the Pitrs.

After these, the wise and most holy Brahmarishis were created, and the numerous Rajarishis distinguished by every noble quality. So too, the waters, the heavens, the earth, the air, the sky, the cardinal points of the heavens, the years, the seasons, the months, the fortnights—called pakshas—with day and night, in proper succession. Thus, all things that are known to man were made.

And when the Yugas end, whatever is seen in the Universe, animate and inanimate, will again be dissolved. When the next Yugas begin, all things will be renewed and like the many fruits of the Earth, succeed one another in the order of their seasons. So the Wheel revolves ceaselessly in the world, without beginning and without end, destroying all things.

The generation of Devas, in brief, was thirty-three thousand, thirty-three hundred and thirty-three. The sons of Div were Brihadbhanu, Chakshus, Atma, Vibhavasu, Savita, Richika, Arka, Bhanu, Asavaha and Ravi. Of these Vivaswans of old, Mahya was the youngest, whose son was Devavrata. Devavrata's son Suvrata had three sons—Dasajyoti, Satajyoti and Sahasrajyoti; each of them sired numerous offspring. The illustrious Dasajyoti had ten thousand progeny, Satajyoti ten times that number, and Sahasrajyoti ten times as many as Satajyoti.

From these descended the clans of the Kurus, the Yadus, and of Bharata; the lineage of Yayati and of Ikshvaku, and also all the Rajarishis. Numerous, too, were their generations, and abundant were the creatures and their places of abode. The triune mystery—the Vedas, Yoga and Vijnana Dharma, Artha and Kama; the many books upon the subject of Dharma, Artha and Kama; rules for the conduct of humankind; also, histories and discourses upon various Srutis all these the Rishi Vyasa saw. They are here in their proper order, and mentioned as examples of the Shastras.

The Rishi Vyasa promulgated this vast treasure of knowledge in both a comprehensive and an abridged form. The learned of this world always want to know both versions. Some read the Bharata from the invocatory mantra; others begin with the story of Astika, others with Uparichara; while some Brahmanas study the entire epic.

Men of learning exhibit their different knowledges of the text when they comment upon the composition. Some are skilful at expounding its meaning, while others remember its contents in complete detail.

Having, with penance and meditation, tapasya and dhyana, analysed the eternal Veda, the son of Satyavati later composed this sacred history. When that knowing Brahmarishi, of fierce vows, the noble Vyasa, son of Parasara, finished this greatest of all epics, he considered how he could transmit it to his disciples and leave it behind for posterity. And Brahma, who owns the six attributes, who is the Guru of the world, knew the anxiety of the Rishi Dwaipayana. Brahma appeared in the place where Vyasa was: to grant the Sage what he desired and thus benefit the people of the Earth.

Vyasa sat lost in thought, surrounded by all the tribes of Munis. Seeing Brahma, he rose in astonishment, and standing with joined palms, the Rishi bowed low and ordered a darbhasana fetched for the Pitamaha. Vyasa circumambulated in pradakshina Him who is called Hiranyagarbha, seated upon that especial and lofty grass throne, and came and stood near Him. Brahma Parameshthi commanded him to sit near the asana, and Vyasa did so, his heart full of love, and smiling in joy.

The glorious Vyasa said to Brahma Parameshthi, “Divine Brahma, I have composed a kavya, a poem, which is highly regarded. In it, I have explained the mystery of the Veda and the other scriptures; the rituals of the Upanishads with their angas; the Puranas and Itihasas that I have compiled and named after the three divisions of time, the nature of ageing and decay, of fear, disease, being and non-being; a description of different varnas and the various stages of life: laws for the four varnas, the true import of the Puranas; an account of sannyasa and the duties of a brahmacharin; the dimensions of the Sun and Moon, the planets, galaxies, and stars, along with the duration of the four ages; the Rik, Sama and Yajur Vedas; also, the Adhyatma; the sciences of Nyaya, the diagnosis and the treatment of disease; charity and Pasupatadharma; births heavenly and human, for different ends; a description of the tirthas and other holy places, of rivers, mountains, forests, the ocean, of the unearthly cities and the Kalpas; the art

of war; the different nations and languages, the nature and customs of the people; and the All-pervading Spirit – all these I have told of in my poem. But now I cannot find anyone to be my scribe for this work, not on this Earth."

Brahma said, "In this gathering of Munis renowned for their sanctity, I honour you for your deep knowledge of divine mysteries. I know you have revealed the Divine Word, from its first utterance, in the language of truth. You have called your present work a kavya, a poem, and so it shall be a poem. No other poet's work shall ever equal this kavya of yours, even as the other three asramas of life are forever lesser than the grihastasrama. O Muni, let us consider Ganesha to become your amanuensis, to write this epic poem down."'

Sauti said, 'Having spoken thus to Vyasa, Brahma left for his own realm, Brahmaloka. Vyasa now thought prayerfully of Ganesha; and Ganesha, remover of obstacles, always ready to fulfil the desires of his devotees, came immediately to the place where Vyasa sat.

When he had been worshipped, welcomed and was seated, Vyasa said to him, "O Guru of the Ganas! I beg you, be the scribe for the Bharata, which I have conceived in my imagination, and which I shall narrate to you."

Ganesha answered, "I will be your scribe if my nib does not stop writing for even a moment."

Vyasa said to that Deity, "Wherever there is anything that you do not properly understand, you must stop writing."

Ganesha signified his assent by saying AUM! and was ready to begin. Vyasa began his narration; and to divert Ganesha, and to gain time, he wove the warp and weft of his legend exceedingly close, with many a diversion.

By this ruse, he dictated his work and never allowed Ganesha's nib, which was a tusk he took from his own face, to be still for a moment, for he was always ahead of his scribe.'

'I am,' continued Sauti, 'acquainted with eight thousand and eight hundred verses, and so is Suka, and perhaps Sanjaya. From the mysteriousness of their meaning, O Munis, no one is able, to this day, to penetrate those close-knit and difficult slokas. Even the omniscient Ganesha took a moment to consider; Vyasa, however, continued to compose more verses, abundantly.

As an instrument for applying kohl does, this awesome work has opened the eyes of the inquisitive world, blinded by the darkness of ignorance. As

the Sun dispels the darkness, so does the Bharata by its treatises on dharma, artha, kama, and final moksha dispel the ignorance of men. As the full Moon unfurls the buds of the water lily with his soft light, so this Purana reveals the light of the Sruti, and makes the human intellect bloom. The torch of this Itihasa destroys the darkness of ignorance, and then the entire mansion of Prakriti becomes illumined.

This work is a tree. The chapter of contents is its seed; the divisions called Pauloma and Astika are its root; the portion called Sambhava is its trunk; the books called Sabha and Aranya are roosting perches; the Parva called Arani, the knots on the bole; the Virata and Udyoga Parvas, the pith; the book named Bhishma, the main branch; the book called Drona, the leaves; the Karna Parva, the fair flowers; the book named Saya, their sweet fragrance; the books entitled Stri and Asthika, the refreshing shade; the book called Shanti, the mighty fruit; the book called Aswamedha, the immortal sap; the Asramavasika, the place where the tree grows; and the book called Mausala is an epitome of the Vedas and held in great reverence by virtuous Brahmanas. The tree of the Bharata, as inexhaustible to mankind as the clouds, shall be a source of livelihood to all poets of distinction.'

Sauti continued, 'I will now tell you of the immortal flower and fruit of this tree, whose scent is pure and flavour delicious, and which not the Devas can destroy.

Once, when implored by Bhishma, the wise son of Ganga, and by his own mother Satyavati, the spiritual and virtuous Krishna Dwaipayana fathered three sons, who were like three fires, upon the two wives of Vichitravirya; and having sired Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura, he returned to his asrama to continue his tapasya.

Not until after these three were born, grown and, even, departed on their final journey, did the great Vyasa make the Bharata known in this world of men. When Janamejaya and thousands of Brahmanas begged him, he commanded his disciple Vaisampayana, who sat next to him; and Vaisampayana, sitting with the sadasyas, the guests, recited the Bharata, during the intervals in the rituals of the snake sacrifice, for the others repeatedly urged him to do so.

Vyasa has described exhaustively the greatness of the house of Kuru, the virtuousness of Gandhari, the wisdom of Vidura, and the constancy of Kunti. The noble Rishi has dwelt upon the divinity of Krishna, the dharma

of the sons of Pandu, and the evil ways of the sons and confederates of Dhritarashtra.

Originally, Vyasa composed the Bharata in twenty-four thousand verses, without the digressions and upakathas; the learned recognise only these as the Bharata. Later, he composed an outline in one hundred and fifty verses, comprising the introduction and the chapter of contents. This he first taught to his son Suka; and after, he gave it to some of his other sishyas, who possessed the same gifts as his son.

After this, he composed another six hundred thousand verses. Of these, thirty lakhs are known in the world of the Devas; fifteen hundred thousand in the world of the Pitrs; fourteen lakhs among the Gandharvas, and one hundred thousand in the world of men. Narada recited these to the Devas; Devala to the Pitrs; and Suka to the Gandharvas, Yakshas and Rakshasas. In this world, they were recited by Vaisampayana, one of Vyasa's disciples, a man of dharma and foremost among the knowers of the Veda.

Know that I, Sauti Ugrasrava, have also repeated one hundred thousand verses.

Yudhishtira is a vast tree, formed of adhyatma and dharma; Arjuna is its trunk; Bhimasena, its branches; the two sons of Madri are its fruit and flowers; and its roots are Krishna, Brahma, and the Brahmanas.

After he had subdued many kingdoms by his wisdom and prowess, Pandu went to stay with some Munis in a forest. He came to hunt, but brought misfortune upon himself when he killed a stag in the act of mating with its hind. This became a warning that guided the conduct of the princes of his house, his sons, throughout their lives.

To fulfil the laws of grihasta, Kunti and Madri invoked the Devas – Dharma, Vayu, Indra; and the divinities the twin Aswins, and these gods sired sons upon them. Their sons grew up in the care of their two mothers, in the society of hermits, in the midst of tapovanas and holy asramas of Rishis. Then the Rishis brought the sons of Pandu to Hastinapura, into the presence of Dhritarashtra and his sons; they came wearing the habits of brahmacharis, following their masters as students, with their hair tied in topknots on their heads.

"These sishyas of ours," said the Rishis, "are as your sons, your brothers, and your friends; they are Pandavas." Saying this, the Munis vanished.

When the Kauravas heard they were the sons of Pandu, the noble ones among them shouted for great joy. Others, however, said they were not the

sons of Pandu; others said they were; while a few asked how they could be his sons, when he had been dead for so long.

Yet voices on all sides cried, “They are welcome! Through divine Providence we see the family of Pandu again! Let their welcome be proclaimed!”

When the people fell silent, a great applause of invisible spirits rang everywhere, so every direction of the sky echoed. Showers of divinely fragrant flowers fell upon the Earth, and the deep sound of conches and batteries of kettledrums was heard when the young princes arrived. The joy of all the citizens reverberated from Bhumi, the Earth, and reached back up into Swarga, the Heavens.

The Pandavas had already imbibed the Vedas and the other Shastras, and they began living in Hastinapura, respected by all and fearing none.

Men of influence in the city were pleased by the purity of Yudhishtira, the strength of Bhima, the valour of Arjuna, the submissiveness of Kunti to her elders, and the humility of the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva; and the people rejoiced in their noble traits.

Later, Arjuna won the virgin Krishnaa [1] at her swayamvara, in a great gathering of kings, by performing an incredibly difficult feat of archery.

Then on, he was revered in this world as the greatest bowman; and upon fields of battle, too, like the Sun, his enemies could hardly face him: so brilliant was he, so superior. And having vanquished all the neighbouring Kshatriyas and every considerable tribe, he enabled the Raja Yudhishtira, his eldest brother, to perform the greatest martial sacrifice, the Rajasuya yagna.

With the knowing and shrewd counsel of Krishna and by the valour of Bhimasena and Arjuna, Yudhishtira slew Jarasandha, the hitherto invincible king of Magadha, and the proud Chaidya Sishupala. Then, he had indeed gained the right to perform the grand and superabundant Rajasuya yagna, which bestows transcendent punya, spiritual merit.

Duryodhana came to this sacrifice. He saw the vast wealth of the Pandavas, in evidence everywhere, the bounty of the offerings, the precious stones, gold and ornaments. He saw their wealth in the form of cows, elephants and horses; the rare silks, brocades, garments and mantles; the precious shawls and furs and carpets, made of the skin of the Ranku deer. Envy and grief welled up inside him.

And when he saw the great and exquisite sabha of Mayaa Danava, the Asura architect, as wonderful as any unearthly court, he burned with rage and jealousy. When he was deceived by some cunning architectural illusions that Mayaa had created in his sabha, Bhimasena mocked him heartily in the presence of Krishnaa Draupadi; he laughed at his cousin as he might at a servant.

News came to Dhritarashtra, that, though his son Duryodhana was surrounded by every luxury and indulging in every pleasure, and lived amidst untold riches, he was pale and wasting away, as if from some secret sickness. In a while, out of his excessive fondness for his eldest son, Dhritarashtra gave his consent to their playing a game of dice against the sons of Pandu.

When Vasudeva Krishna heard about this, he was furious. Yet, he did nothing to prevent the game of dice, and the terrible consequences that accrued from it for the Pandavas. Despite Vidura, Bhishma, Drona, and Kripa, the son of Saradwan, Krishna stoked the fire that caused the awesome war that ensued, and consumed the very race of Kshatriyas.

When Dhritarashtra heard the dreadful news that the Pandavas had won the war, he remembered the resolves of Duryodhana, Karna and Shakuni. He pondered in silence for a while, then, spoke to Sanjaya, his sarathy and counsellor.

"Listen carefully, Sanjaya, to everything I am about to say, and let it be beneath you to treat me contemptuously. You know the Shastras well; you are intelligent and wise. I was never in favour of fighting the war, and I took no delight in the destruction of my race. I made no distinction between my own children and the children of Pandu. My sons were wilful and despised me because of my age and infirmity. Being blind and powerless, and because I loved my sons as every father does, I suffered it all.

I was foolish, and my thoughtless Duryodhana's folly grew day by day. In Indraprastha, he saw the wealth and incomparable power of the mighty sons of Pandu. They mocked him for his clumsiness in the Mayaa sabha. He could not bear it, and yet neither could he face the Pandavas in battle. Though he was a Kshatriya, he dared not attempt to find fortune by fighting an honourable war. Instead, he sought the help of the king of Gandhara and contrived a game of dice. It was not a fair game, for the dice Shakuni used were loaded.

Hear, Sanjaya, all that happened thereafter and came to my knowledge. And when you have heard what I say, remember everything as it transpired, and you will know that I had prophetic foresight of what would happen finally.

When I heard that Arjuna bent the bow, pierced the difficult target, brought it down, and took the young woman Krishnaa triumphantly, under the eyes of the assembled Kshatriyas, already, O Sanjaya, I knew we could never hope to prevail.

Then I heard Arjuna had married Subhadra of the race of Madhu, in gandharva vivaha, by the rite of abduction, in the city of Dwaraka. I heard that her brothers, Krishna and Balarama, the two heroes of the race of Vrishni, went to Indraprastha, without any resentment and as friends of the Pandavas, and then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope that we could prevail.

I heard that Arjuna, with uncanny archery, held up the storm sent down by his father Indra, king of the Devas. I heard that Arjuna had pleased Agni by giving him the forest of Khandhava to consume, and then, O Sanjaya, I lost hope of success.

When I heard that the five Pandavas with their mother Kunti had escaped from the house of lac, and that Vidura had helped them effect their escape, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success.

When I heard that, after having pierced the mark in the arena, Arjuna had won Draupadi, and that the brave Panchalas had joined the Pandavas, then, O Sanjaya, I knew we would never have victory.

When I heard that Jarasandha, crown jewel of the royal line of Magadha, and sunlike among all Kshatriyas, had been slain by Bhima with his bare hands, then, O Sanjaya, I knew we had no hope of prevailing.

When I heard that the sons of Pandu had vanquished the kings of all the kingdoms throughout the land and performed the imperial Rajasuya yagna, then, O Sanjaya, I knew our cause was lost. When I heard that Draupadi, her voice choking with tears, full of agony, and in her period, wearing a single cloth, had been dragged into our court, and though she had protectors, had been treated as if she had none, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that my evil wretch Dushasana was trying to strip her of that single garment, but could only pull reams of many-hued cloth from her body into a heap, but not arrive at its end, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that, beaten by Shakuni at the game of dice and deprived of his kingdom, Yudhishtira still had his invincible

brothers with him, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of ever prevailing. When I heard that the righteous Pandavas wept in shame and torment, when they followed their elder brother into the wilderness and occupied themselves variously to lessen his discomfort, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Snatakas and other noble Brahmanas, who live by alms, had followed Yudhishtira into the wilderness, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When I heard that Arjuna had pleased the God of gods, Tryambaka, the three-eyed, who came disguised as a hunter, and that he received the Pasupatastra from Siva, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that the honest and renowned Arjuna had gone to Devaloka, and had obtained Devastras there from Indra himself then, O Sanjaya, I knew we could never win. When I heard that Arjuna had vanquished the Kalakeyas and the Paulomas, arrogant with the boon they had which made them invulnerable even to the Devas, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that Arjuna Parantapa, scourge of his enemies, had been to the realm of Indra to kill those Asuras, and had returned victorious, then, O Sanjaya, I knew we were doomed. When I heard that Bhima and the other sons of Pritha, accompanied by Vaisravana, had arrived in the country that is inaccessible to man, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that my sons, misled by Karna's advice, while on their Ghoshayatra, had been taken prisoners by the Gandharvas and then freed by Arjuna, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When I heard that Dharma, the God of Justice, came as a Yaksha and asked Yudhishtira some questions about dharma, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that my sons had failed to discover the Pandavas in disguise, while they lived with Draupadi in the kingdom of Virata, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that the great Kshatriyas of my kingdom had all been vanquished by Arjuna, by himself, in a single chariot, in the country of Virata, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Vasudeva of the race of Madhu, who covered this Earth with one stride, was committed to the welfare of the Pandavas, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that the king of the Matsyas had offered his virtuous daughter Uttaraa to Arjuna and that Arjuna had accepted her for his son Abhimanyu, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Yudhishtira, beaten at dice, his wealth and kingdom snatched from him, exiled and his old connections severed, had still assembled an army of seven Akshauhinis, then, O Sanjaya, I had

no hope of victory. When I heard Narada declare that Krishna and Arjuna were Nara and Narayana and that he, Narada, had seen them together in Brahmaloka, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of being victorious. When I heard that Krishna was anxious to make peace, for the good of humankind, and came to the Kurus, but went away without having been able to accomplish his mission, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Karna and Duryodhana resolved on imprisoning Krishna, but he revealed his Viswarupa, his body the Universe, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that as he was leaving Hastinapura, Pritha stood, sorrowing, near his chariot and Krishna consoled her, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope that we could have victory. When I heard that Vasudeva and Bhishma, son of Shantanu, counselled the Pandavas and that Drona, son of Bharadwaja, blessed them, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When Karna said to Bhishma, 'I will not fight while you are fighting', and left the field, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of winning the war. When I heard that Krishna, Arjuna, and the bow Gandiva of untold prowess these three of fearsome tejas, energy had come together, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that Arjuna was seized by compunction in his chariot and ready to abandon the war, but Krishna showed him all the worlds within his body, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope that we could prevail. When I heard that Bhishma, the desolator of our enemies, who killed ten thousand warriors every day in battle, had not slain any of the Pandavas, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope. When I heard that Bhishma, the righteous son of Ganga, himself told the sons of Pandu how he could be slain in battle, and that the Pandavas slew him joyfully, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When I heard that Arjuna placed Sikhandin before himself in his chariot, and shot the invincible Bhishma of boundless courage with a torrent of arrows, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that the aged Kshatriya Bhishma, having all but razed the race of Shomaka, was felled and lay upon a bed of arrows, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of being victorious. When I heard that upon Bhishma's being thirsty and asking for water, Arjuna pierced the ground with the Parjannyastra and quenched his thirst, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When Vayu, with Indra and Surya, united as allies for the success of the sons of Kunti, and beasts of prey terrified our legions by their inauspicious presence, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When the exceptional warrior Drona, though he showed a myriad marvellous varieties

of the art of war, did not slay any of the Pandavas, then, O Sanjaya, I lost hope that we might win. When I heard that the Maharatha Samsaptakas of our army who meant to bring Arjuna down were all killed by Arjuna, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that our impenetrable vyuha, guarded by the mighty Drona, had been cloven, singly, and entered by Subhadra's valiant son, O Sanjaya, I lost hope of victory. When I heard that our Maharathas, unable to vanquish Arjuna, had surrounded and murdered the boy Abhimanyu, and crowed over this slaughter with beaming faces, then, O Sanjaya, I lost hope of success. When I heard that the foolish Kauravas shouted for joy after killing Abhimanyu and that the enraged Arjuna swore to kill Jayadratha, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When I heard that Arjuna fulfilled his vow in the face of all his enemies, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope. When I heard that when Arjuna's horses were overcome with tiredness, Krishna unyoked them, made them drink and harnessed them again before he brought them back into battle, Sanjaya, I lost every hope. When I heard that while his horses were exhausted and went to drink, Arjuna remained in his chariot and held all his attackers at bay, Sanjaya, I knew our cause was lost. When I heard that Satyaki of the race of Vrishni struck panic into the invincible elephant legions of the army of Drona and rode easily to the side of Krishna and Arjuna, then, Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that after having Bhimasena helpless and in the eye of his arrow, Karna allowed him to escape with his life, only taunting him and dragging him a short way with the end of his bow, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Drona, Kritavarma, Kripa, Karna, Aswatthama, and the heroic Salya, king of Madra could not prevent the slaying of Saindhava Jayadratha, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Krishna's cunning made Karna use the celestial Sakti, given him by Indra, against the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha of the dreadful visage, then, Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that in the duel between Karna and Ghatotkacha, that Sakti, which could surely have slain Arjuna, had been cast at Ghatotkacha, Sanjaya, I lost hope again. When I heard that Dhristadyumna broke every law of honourable battle, and slew Drona who sat alone, unresisting and determined to die in his chariot, then, O Sanjaya, I lost every hope. When I heard that Madri's son Nakula engaged Aswatthama in single combat before both armies, proved equal to Drona's son and drove his chariot in circles around Aswatthama, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of

victory. When, upon the death of Drona, his son invoked the Narayanastra but failed to consume the Pandavas, then, Sanjaya, I had no hope. When I heard that Bhimasena drank the blood of his brother Dushasana on the battlefield without anybody being able to stop him, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that the boundlessly valiant, invincible Karna was slain by Arjuna in that duel between brothers, mysterious even to the gods, then, Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that Yudhisthira Dharmaraja defeated the tameless Aswatthama, Dushasana, and the fierce Kritavarma, too, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that Yudhishtira killed the brave king of Madra, who always dared Krishna to do battle with him, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of success. When I heard that the evil Shakuni, who owned occult powers, who was the very root of the gambling, and indeed, all the bitter feud, was slain by Pandu's son Sahadeva, then, O Sanjaya, I lost hope of success. When I heard that the exhausted Duryodhana fled to a lake and sought sanctuary in its waters, lying there alone, his strength gone and without a chariot, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of succeeding. When I heard that the Pandavas arrived at that lake with Krishna, and standing on its shore, called out contemptuously, tauntingly to my son, who could never tolerate an insult, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of prevailing. When I heard that while, after showing in circles a dazzling array of innovative styles of gada yuddha, he was unfairly struck down, at Krishna's behest, then, Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that Aswatthama and his confederates slaughtered the Panchalas and the sons of Draupadi in their sleep, a horrible and dastardly deed, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of victory. When I heard that, pursued by Bhima, Aswatthama discharged the first of weapons, Aishika, which direly wounded the embryo in the womb of Uttaraa, then, O Sanjaya, I had no hope of winning. When I heard that Arjuna repulsed Aswatthama's astra, the Brahmashira, with another weapon over which he pronounced the word Sasti, and that Aswatthama had then to give up the jewel-like growth on his head, then, O Sanjaya, I lost all hope. When I heard that upon the embryo in the womb of Virata's daughter being wounded by Aswatthama with a mahastra, Dwaipayana and Krishna pronounced curses on Drona's son, then, O Sanjaya, I lost every hope.

Alas! I must pity Gandhari, childless now, all her grandchildren slain, her parents, brothers and kindred gone. Oh, hard indeed has been the

achievement of the Pandavas: they have recovered a kingdom and left no rival to challenge them.

Alas! I have heard that the war has left only ten alive: three from our side, and from the Pandavas', seven; that dreadful war has claimed eighteen Akshauhinis of Kshatriyas, all slain! All around me is darkness, and a swoon comes over me. Consciousness leaves me, Sanjaya, and my mind is far from me."'

Suta said, 'Thus bemoaning his fate, Dhritarashtra was overcome by anguish and swooned for a while; when he revived, he addressed Sanjaya again.

"After what has happened, Sanjaya, I want to put an end to my life at once; I find not the slightest advantage in preserving it any longer."'

Suta said, 'Sanjaya, wise son of Gavalgana, now interrupted the distraught lord of Earth, who lamented thus and sighed like a serpent, repeatedly fainting. Words of deep import spoke Sanjaya.

"You have heard, O Rajan, of the mighty men of immense valour, spoken of by Vyasa and the Rishi Narada: Kshatriyas born of royal families, splendid with every quality, versed in astras, glorious like amsas of Indra; men who conquered the world with dharma and performed sacrifices with offerings to Brahmanas, who having obtained renown in this world, at last succumbed to time. Such men were Saibya, the valiant Maharatha; Srinjaya, great amongst conquerors; Suhotra; Rantideva and the magnificent Kakshivanta; Balhika, Damana, Saryati, Ajita, and Nala; Viswamitra, destroyer of foes; Ambarisha, of matchless strength; Marutta, Manu, Ikshvaku, Gaya, and Bharata; Rama the son of Dasaratha; Sasabindu and Bhagiratha; Kritavirya, the fortunate, and Janamejaya; Yayati of untold punya who performed mahayagnas, in which the Devas themselves assisted him, and by whose vedis and stambas this entire Bhumi, with her peopled and uninhabited realms, is marked. The Devarishi Narada spoke of these twenty-four kings once to Saibya, when that king grieved over the loss of his children.

Besides these, other rajas had gone before, still more powerful, Maharathas of noble mind, resplendent with every worthy quality: Puru, Kuru, Yadu, Sura and Viswasrava of great glory; Anuha, Yuvanaswa, Kakutstha, Vikrami, and Raghu; Vijaya, Vitihorta, Anga, Bhava, Sweta, and Vripadguru; Usinara, Sataratha, Kanka, Duliduha, and Druma; Dambhodbhava, Para, Vena, Sagara, Sankriti, and Nimi; Ajeya, Parasu,

Pundra, Sambhu, and holy Devavridha; Devahuya, Supratika, and Brihadratha; Mahatsaha, Vinitatma, Shukratu, and Nala, the king of the Nishadas; Satyavrata, Santabhaya, Sumitra, and Subala; Janujangha, Anaranya, Arka, Priyabhritya, Chuchi-vrata, Balabandhu, Nirmardda, Ketusringa, and Brhidbala; Dhrishtaketu, Brihatketu, Driptaketu, and Niramaya; Abikshit, Chapala, Dhurta, Kritabandhu, and Dridheshudhi; Mahapurana-sambhavya, Pratyanga, Paraha and Sruti. These, O Rajan, and other kings, we hear enumerated in hundreds and thousands, and still others in millions, princes of power and wisdom, who renounced abundant kingdom and pleasures and met death just as your sons have done. Their dharma, valour and generosity, their magnanimity, faith, truth, purity, simplicity and mercy have been recorded for the world by holy pauranikas of bygone ages, men of great gyana. Though endowed with every noble virtue, they yielded up their lives. Your sons were malevolent, inflamed by passion, greedy and evil. You are versed in the Shastras, O Bharata[2], and are intelligent and wise; those whose hearts are guided by the Shastras never succumb to misfortune. You, O Kshatriya, know both the kindness and severity of fate; this anxiety for your children does not become you. It does not befit you to grieve over the inevitable: for who can avert the dictates of inelucatable fate? No one can escape the path marked out for him by Providence. Existence and non-existence, pleasure and pain, all have Time as their root. Time creates all things and Time destroys all creatures. It is Time that burns living beings and Time that extinguishes the fire. All conditions, good and evil, in the three worlds, are caused by Time. Time cuts short all things and creates them anew. Time is awake when all other things sleep; Time cannot be overcome. Time passes over all things without being slowed by any. Knowing, as you do, that all things past and future and all that is in the present moment are children of Time, it does not befit you to cast aside your reason."'

Sauti said, 'Thus, Sanjaya comforted the king Dhritarashtra, overwhelmed by grief for his sons, and restored some calm to his mind. And using these arguments of Sanjaya for his subject, Dwaipayana composed a holy Upanishad that has been given to the world by learned and holy Pauranikas in the Puranas they composed.

The study of the Mahabharata is an act of piety. He that reads a mere foot of it, with faith, has his sins washed away entirely. Here, Devas, Devarishis, and immaculate Brahmarishis of punya have been spoken of;

likewise, Yakshas and great Uragas, the Nagas. Here also the eternal Vasudeva, possessed of the six attributes, is described. He is the truth, and just, the pure and holy, the eternal Brahman, the Paramatman, the constant light, whose divine deeds the Sages recount; from whom the manifest and unmanifest Universe, with its principles of generation and evolution, and birth, death and rebirth issue. That which is called Adhyatma, the Sovereign Spirit of nature, that partakes of the attributes of the Panchamahabhuta, the five elements, is described here. Adhyatma has also been called Purusha, being above such names as 'unmanifest' and the rest; it is also that which the greatest Yatis, who are exempt from common destiny and endowed with the power of dhyana and tapas, behold abiding in their hearts, rather like a reflected image in a mirror.

When the man of faith, devoted to piety, and constant in virtue, reads this canto, he is set free from sin. The believer who constantly hears this canto of the Bharata, the Introduction, being recited, from the beginning, never falls into difficulties. The man that repeats any part of the introduction during the two sandhyas of dawn and dusk is freed from the sins he commits during the day or the night. This canto, the very body of the Bharata, is truth and nectar. As butter is to curd, the Brahmana among bipeds, the Aranyaka among the Vedas, and Amrita among medicaments, as the sea is among water bodies, and the cow among quadrupeds, so is the Bharata among Itihasas, great legends.

He that causes it, even a single metre of it, to be recited to Brahmanas during a sraddha, his offerings of food and drink to the manes of his Pitrs become inexhaustible.

With the help of Itihasas and the Puranas, the Veda might be expounded; but the Veda fears the man of small intellect lest he should try to expound the scripture. The learned man who recites this Bharata Veda of Vyasa finds great gain; why, he is saved from the sin of killing a child in the womb, apart from other heinous sins. He that reads this holy chapter of the Moon as good as reads the entire Bharata. The man who listens daily, with reverence, to this sacred work acquires long life and renown, and finds Swarga for himself.

In elder days, the Devas placed the four Vedas on one side of a balance and the Bharata on the other, and weighed them against each other. Since the Bharata was found to be weightier than the four Vedas with their mysteries, then on it was called the Mahabharata, the great Bharata. It has

been judged to be superior to the Vedas both in substance and gravity. He who fathoms its meaning is released from all his sins.

Tapa is innocent, study is harmless; the codes for living that the Vedas prescribe for all the tribes are harmless; the acquisition of wealth by exertion is not injurious; but when these are abused in their practice, they become sources of evil.'

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[1]Krishnaa is Panchali, the Pandavas' wife, while Krishna is the Avatara. Both are dark.

[2]Bharata is used for the great king of that name, and Bharata for his descendants. Of course, the land of Bharata, Bharatavarsha, is named after King Bharata, the Great.

CANTO 2

PARVA SAMGRAHA CONTINUED

The Rishis said, 'O son of Suta, we want to hear in detail from you about the place that you called Samanta-panchaka.'

Suta said, 'Listen, O Brahmanas, to these sacred descriptions. Best of men, you deserve to hear about the place known as Samanta-panchaka. In the hiatus between the Treta and Dwapara Yugas, the mighty Rama, son of Jamadagni, greatest among those that ever bore arms, was infuriated by the sins of the noble race of Kshatriyas and savaged them repeatedly. And when that meteorlike Brahmana annihilated the entire race of Kshatriyas, single-handedly, he formed at Samanta-panchaka five lakes of blood. We hear that he lost his reason from anger and offered oblations of blood to the manes of his ancestors, standing in the sanguine waters of those lakes.

His Pitrs, of whom Richika was first, arrived there and said to him, "Rama, O blessed Rama, O scion of Bhrigu, we are appeased and gratified by the worship that you have offered your ancestors. We are pleased by your valour, O mighty one! Our blessings are upon you. Illustrious one, ask for any boon that you want."

Rama said, "If, O Sires, you are favourably disposed towards me, the boon I ask is that I be absolved from the sins born of my having slaughtered the Kshatriyas in fury, and that these lakes that I have made become famed in the world as holy tirthas."

The Pitrs said, "So be it, but now be pacified."

And Rama was pacified. From that time, the region around those lakes of blood has been Samanta-panchaka, a holy tirtha. The wise have said that every country must have a name significant of some special circumstance that might have made it renowned. The Great War between the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas was fought at Samanta-panchaka, on the cusp between the Dwapara and the Kali Yugas. In that holy place, even and without ruggedness of any kind, eighteen Akshauhinis of warriors gathered,

eager for battle. And, O Brahmanas, having come there, they were all slain: hence the name Samanta-panchaka for that sacred and most delightful place, which is renowned and celebrated through the three Lokas.'

The Rishis said, 'We want to know, O son of Suta, what the term Akshauhini means. Tell us in detail how many horses, footsoldiers, chariots and elephants comprise an Akshauhini, for you certainly know this.'

Sauti said, 'One chariot, one elephant, five footsoldiers, and three horses form one Patti; three pattis make one Sena-mukha; three sena-mukhas are called a Gulma; three gulmas, a Gana; three ganas, a Vahini; three vahinis together are called a Pritana; three pritanas form a Chamu; three chamus, one Anikini; and ten anikinis form, as it is called by the experts, an Akshauhini. O Brahmanottama, best among Brahmanas, mathematicians calculate that the number of chariots in an Akshauhini is twenty-one thousand eight hundred and seventy. The number of elephants is the same. Pure ones, the number of footsoldiers is one hundred and nine thousand, three hundred and fifty; the number of horses is sixty-five thousand, six hundred and ten. These, O Brahmanas, are the numbers of an Akshauhini, as decided by those that know numbers. Best of Brahmanas, the eighteen Akshauhinis of the Kaurava and the Pandava armies were made up according to these numbers. Time, Kaala, whose acts are wonderful, gathered them in that place and, making the Kauravas the cause for the war, slew them all.

Bhishma, master of astras, fought for ten days. Drona led the Kaurava Vahinis for five days. Karna, the desolator of his foes, was the Kaurava Senapati for two days; and Salya for half a day. Then, the gada yuddha between Duryodhana and Bhima lasted for half a day. When that day ended, Aswatthama and Kripa massacred the remnants of Yudhishtira's army, while the Panchalas and Draupadi's sons slept with no fear of danger.

O Saunaka, this best of narrations called the Bharata, which I have begun to relate at your yagna, was once told at the sacrifice of Janamejaya by a most intelligent disciple of Vyasa. It is divided into many cantos. In the beginning are the Paushya, Pauloma and Astika Parvas, which describe in detail the valour and fame of kings. This is a work whose descriptions, diction and meanings are varied and extraordinary. It contains accounts of numerous customs and rituals. It is accepted by the Sages as the state called Vairagya by men who wish for mukti. As the Atman among things to be known, as life among things that are dear, so is this Itihasa, which provides

the means of coming to the knowledge of Brahman, the first among all the Shastras. There is not a story that exists in this world that does not depend on this legend, even as the body depends upon the food that it consumes. As masters of noble lineage are always served by servants that desire advancement, so is the Bharata cherished by all poets. Words that form the numberless branches of knowledge that pertain to the world and the Veda show just vowels and consonants; this excellent legend displays only the highest wisdom.

Listen, O Rishis, to the outlines of the several Parvas of this Itihasa called the Bharata, replete with deep wisdom, of chapters and meters that are varied and wondrous, of subtle meanings and logical interconnections, and embellished with the essence of the Vedas.

The first Parva is called Anukramanika; the second, Sangraha; then Paushya; then Pauloma; then Astika; then Adivansavatarana. Then comes the Sambhava of enthralling events. Then comes the Jatugri-hadaha (the burning of the house of lac) and then the Hidimba-vadha (the killing of Hidimba) Parvas. Next comes Baka-vadha (the slaying of Baka) and then Chitraratha. The next Parva is called Swayamvara (where Panchali chooses a husband), in which Arjuna won Draupadi's hand. Then comes Vaivahika (marriage), followed by Viduragamana (the advent of Vidura), Rajyalabha (the acquisition of a kingdom), Arjuna-vanavasa (the exile of Arjuna) and Subhadra-harana (the abduction of Subhadra). After these we find Harana-harika, Khandava-daha (the burning of the Khandava forest) and Mayaa-darshana (the meeting with Mayaa, the Asura architect). Then we come to Sabha, Mantra, Jarasandha, Digvijaya (the conquest of the four quarters). After Digvijaya come Rajasuyaka, Arghyaviharana (the theft of the Arghya) and Sisupala-vadha (the killing of Sisupala). After these, Dyuta (gambling), Anudyuta (the second game of dice), Aranyaka (in the forest), and Krimira-vadha (the killing of Krimira). The Arjuna-vigamana (the journeys of Arjuna), Kairati, in which the battle between Arjuna and Mahadeva in the guise of a Kirata hunter is described. After this Indraloka-vigamana (the journey to the realm of Indra); then follows that treasure trove of dharma and virtue, the Nalopakhyana (the story of Nala, full of pathos). After this, there follows Tirtha-yatra or the pilgrimage of Yudhishtira, the death of Jatasura, and the battle with the Yakshas. Then the battle with the Nivatakavachas, Ajagara, and Markandeya-samasya (the meeting with Markandeya). Then the meeting of Draupadi and Satyabhama, Ghoshayatra,

Mriga-swapna (the dream of the deer). Then comes the story of Brihadaranyaka and then Aindradrumna; then Draupadi-harana (the abduction of Draupadi), Jayadratha-vimoksana (the release of Jayadratha). Then the story of Savitri, which illustrates the great punya and power of marital chastity. After this, we shall come to the story of Rama. The next Parva is called Kundala-harana (the theft of the earrings), and after that Aranya and then Vairata. Then the arrival of the Pandavas in the Matsya kingdom, and how they kept their ajnatavasa, of living undiscovered for one year. We come next to the killing of the Kichakas, then the attempt by the Kauravas to steal to take the cattle of Virata. The next Parva is named after the marriage of Abhimanyu to Uttaraa, the daughter of Virata. The next is a wonderful Parva called Udyoga, of deliberations, followed by Sanjaya-yana (the journey of Sanjaya). Then comes Prajagara (the insomnia of Dhritarashtra from anxiety). Then Sanatsujata, which contains the mysteries of spiritual philosophy. Then Yanasaddhi, and then the arrival of Krishna. Then the story of Matali and then of Galava. Then follow the stories of Savitri, Vamadeva, and Vainya; after which we find the story of Jamadagnya and Shodasarajika. Next, Krishna arrives in the Kuru court, and then Vidulaputrasasana. Then the mustering of the armies and the story of Sheta. Then comes the quarrel of the noble Karna with Bhishma, after which both armies march on Kurukshetra. The next has been named for the enumeration of the Rathis and Atirathas. Then the messenger Uluka comes to the Pandavas, bringing Duryodhana's message that kindles the wrath of the sons of Pandu. Then we come to the story of Amba, followed by the enthralling description of the installation of Bhishma as the Kaurava Senapati. The next Parva deals with the creation of Jambudwipa; then of Bhumi; then the description of the formation of all the dwipas, the island continents. Then, the Bhagavad-Gita; followed by the fall of Bhishma. Drona is made Senapati; after which Arjuna razes the Samsaptakas. The death of Abhimanyu, followed by the vow of Arjuna to kill Jayadratha before the Sun sets. The death of Jayadratha is followed by the killing of Ghatotkacha. Then, you must know, comes the story of the extraordinary death of Drona, and after that the loosing of the Narayana astra. Then, as you know, is the command of Karna, and that of Salya. We come to Duryodhana's immersion in the lake, and the gada yuddha between Bhima and Duryodhana. This is followed by Saraswata, then the descriptions of holy shrines and tirthas, and then genealogies. Then comes Sauptika that

tells of events that bring disgrace upon the honour of the Kurus, followed by the Aisika of harrowing events in the night. Next comes Jalapradana, oblations of water offered to the manes of the dead, and then the lamentation of the women, in Stree Parva. The next Parva must be called Sraddha since it describes the funeral rites performed for the slain Kauravas. Next the Rakshasa Charvaka, who disguised himself as a Brahmana to deceive Yudhishtira, is slain. Then the wise and gentle Yudhishtira is crowned in Hastinapura. The next Parva is Grihapravibhaga, followed by Santi, Rajadharmanusasana, Apaddharma, and Mokshadharma. The Parvas that follow are Sukaprasna-abhigamana, Brahmaprasnanusana, the origin of Durvasa, and the disputations with Mayaa. The next is the Anusasanika Parva, which is followed by the ascension of Bhishma. Then the account of the Rajasuya yagna, listening to which all one's sins are washed away. The next Parva is the Anugita. Those that follow are called Asrainvasa, Puttradarshana (meeting the spirits of the dead), and the arrival of Narada. The next Parva is Mausala, full of dreadful and savage happenings. Then comes Mahaprasthanika Parva and the ascension into Swarga. Then comes the Purana called Khilvansa, which contains Vishnuparva, Vishnu's games and exploits as a child, the killing of Kamsa, and finally, the truly amazing Bhavishyaparva, with its uncanny prophecies about the future.

The Maharishi Vyasa composed a hundred Parvas (the above are only some of them). Dividing them into eighteen books, large Parvas, Ugrasrava, the son of Suta Romaharshana narrated them in the Naimisha vana.'

Said Suta, 'The Adi Parva contains Paushya, Pauloma, Astika, Adivansa-vatara, Sambhava, Jatugrihadahana, Hidimbavadha, Bakavadha, Chitraratha, Draupadi Swayamvara, Vaivahika, Viduragamana, Rajyalabha, Arjuna vanavasa, Subhadraharana, Harana harika, Khandava dahana, and Mayaa darshana.

The Paushya Parva deals with the greatness of Utanka, and the Pauloma Parva, of the sons of Bhrigu. The Astika describes the birth of Garuda and of the Nagas, the churning of the Ocean, the birth of the celestial steed Uchchaishrava, and finally, the dynasty of Bharata: all as described during the Sarpa yagna of King Janamejaya.

The Sambhava Parva describes the birth of numerous kings and heroes, and that of the Rishi Krishna Dwaipayana: the amsavataras of the devas, the generation of Danavas and Yakshas of great power, and Nagas, Gandharvas,

Avians, and indeed of all creatures; and finally, the life and adventures of King Bharata—progenitor of the royal line named for him—the son born to Shakuntala in the asrama of the Rishi Kanva. This Parva also describes the greatness of Ganga, the births of the Vasus into the house of Shantanu and their ascension into heaven. This Parva also tells of the birth of Bhishma, who had in himself amsas of the divine energies of the other Vasus, his renunciation of the throne and his vow of brahmacharya, his guardianship of Chitrangada, and after the death of Chitrangada, his stewardship of the younger brother, Vichitravirya, and his crowning of Vichitravirya. This Parva tells of the birth of Dharma among men because of the curse of Animandavya; of the births of Dhritarashtra and Pandu through the seed of Vyasa, and the birth of the Pandavas.

Jatugriha Parva decribes Duryodhana's plot to send the sons of Pandu to Varanavata, and the evil intentions of the sons of Dhritarashtra towards the Pandavas. We shall hear the advice that Vidura, their well-wisher, gave Yudhishtira as the Pandavas left for Varanavrata, in the mlechchha bhasha. The Parva goes on to describe the excavation of a tunnel, the immolation of Purochana and the woman of the fowler caste, with her five sons, in the house of lac.

Hidimba-vadha Parva continues with the Pandavas meeting Hidimbi in the dreadful jungle, and how Bhima of untold strength kills her brother Hidimba. The birth of Ghatotkacha follows; the meeting of the Pandavas with Vyasa, who sends them to the town called Ekachakra to live disguised as Brahmanas themselves in the house of a Brahmana.

Baka-vadha Parva tells of the slaying of the Asura Baka, and of the amazement of the people at the sight of his corpse. The tale of the extraordinary births of Krishnaa and Dhrishtadyumna follows; upon hearing about the swayamvara from a wandering Brahmana, the Pandavas leave for Panchala, also at Vyasa's behest, and equally because they are powerfully stirred to win Draupadi on learning the tidings of the swayamvara.

Chaitraratha Parva tells of how, on the way, Arjuna defeats a Gandharva called Angaraparna on the banks of the Ganga; he befriends his adversary, and the Pandavas hear the history of Tapati, Vasishtha and Aurva from Angaraparna.

Swayamvara Parva describes the journey of the Pandavas towards Panchala, how Arjuna pierces the matsya yantra, while all the rajas fail, and wins Draupadi; in the battle that follows, Salya, Karna and all the other

crowned kings are routed by Bhima and Arjuna; Balarama and Krishna see this remarkable performance and realise that these are the Pandavas; the Yadava brothers come to the house of the potter, where the Pandavas are living.

Vaivahika Parva tells how Drupada is horrified to hear that Draupadi will marry five husbands; consequently, Vyasa tells the wonderful story of the five Indras; the extraordinary wedding of Draupadi.

Viduragamana Parva tells how Dhritarashtra's sons send Vidura to the Pandavas as their messenger; Vidura arrives and is overwhelmed at seeing Krishna; the Pandavas in Khandavaprastha, from where they rule over half of the Kuru kingdom.

Rajyalabha Parva tells of how Narada comes to Indraprastha and, at his advice, the Pandavas decide that each of them will spend a year, by turns and exclusively, as Draupadi's husband. Here Narada tells the tragic tale of Sunda and Upasunda.

Arjuna-vanavasa Parva then tells of Arjuna's exile when he intrudes on the privacy of Yudhishtira and Draupadi, when he is forced to enter his brother's apartment to fetch his bow to rescue the cattle of a Brahmana from some thieves. Arjuna meets Ulupi, the Naga Princess, on the way; Arjuna's tirtha yatra; the birth of Babhruvahana; Arjuna delivers five Apsaras from the curse of a Rishi that turned them into ferocious crocodiles.

Subhadra-harana Parva describes Arjuna's meeting with Krishna at holy Prabhasa; encouraged by Krishna, he abducts Subhadra in a wondrous chariot that flies over sea and land, and through the air, at the very thought of the one that rides in it.

Harana-harita Parva tells of how Arjuna leaves for Indraprastha with his wife and her dowry; Subhadra conceives Abhimanyu, the prodigy; Draupadi Yagnaseni gives birth to her children.

Khandava-daha Parva tells how Krishna and Arjuna come to the banks of the Yamuna and acquire the Sudarshana Chakra and the famed bow Gandiva; Arjuna burns the Khandava vana; he rescues Mayaa; Aswasena the Naga escapses the inferno; the Rishi Mandapala fathers a son in the womb of the bird Saringi. Vyasa divided this Parva into two hundred and twenty-seven cantos, containing eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-four slokas.

The second great Parva is the dense Sabha Parva. This Parva tells of the creation of the splendid Mayaa sabha in Indraprastha; Narada describes the Lokapalas and the realms of heaven, which he knows well; the Pandavas prepare for the Rajasuya yagna; the killing of Jarasandha; Krishna delivers the Kshatriyas incarcerated in the mountain-pass; the digvijaya; the Kshatriyas come to the Rajasuya yagna bringing tribute; the death of Sisupala during the sacrifice, over the dispute about the purodasa; Bhimasena ridicules Duryodhana in the sabha; Duryodhana's grief and envy at seeing the grandeur of Indraprastha and the lavishness of the Rajasuya yagna; the preparations for the game of dice; the wily Shakuni beats Yudhishtira at dice; Dhritarashtra releases the grief-stricken Draupadi from the bondage of servitude that Yudhishtira incurs during the gambling; she is like a skiff in a tempest. Duryodhana contrives to engage Yudhishtira in a second game of dice; Yudhishtira loses again and is exiled, with his brothers. These events constitute what Maharishi Vyasa has named the Sabha Parva. This Parva is divided into seventy-eight cantos, O noblest of Brahmanas, of two thousand, five hundred and seven slokas.

The third Parva is called Aranyaka, of the forest. This Parva tells of the Pandavas leaving for the forest; some Brahmanas follow them; at Dhaumya's telling him to, Yudhishtira worships Surya Deva, God of Day, so he can feed the Brahmanas; the gift of the Sun: the magical platter; Dhritarashtra expels Vidura for speaking on the Pandavas' behalf, and for his brother's own good; Vidura goes to the Pandavas and returns to Dhritarashtra when the remorseful king calls him back; incited by Karna, the evil Duryodhana plots to kill the forest-dwelling Pandavas; Vyasa appears and frightens Duryodhana, prevents him from prosecuting his plan; the history of Surabhi; the arrival of Maitreya; Maitreya's discourse to Dhritarashtra on dharma and karma; Maitreya curses the haughty Duryodhana; Bhima kills Kirmira in the forest; the Panchalas and the Vrishni princes learn of the false game of dice, rolled by the deceitful Shakuni, and arrive in the jungle to meet Yudhishtira; Arjuna allays the wrath of Krishna; Draupadi laments before Krishna; Krishna consoles her; the Rishi also describes the fall of Sauba here; Krishna takes Subhadra and her son to Dwaraka; Dhrishtadyumna brings the sons of Draupadi to Panchala; the sons of Pandu enter the charmed Dwaitavana; the exchange of words between Bhima, Yudhishtira, and Draupadi; Vyasa comes to the Pandavas and endows Yudhishtira with the occult power of Pratismriti; the

Pandavas repair to Kamyakavana; mighty Arjuna goes in quest of astras; he duels with Siva who comes in the guise of a kirata; Arjuna meets the Lokapalas and receives divine weapons from them; he journeys to Devaloka to receive astras from Indra; the anxiety of Dhritarashtra when he hears this; Yudhishtira laments to the Maharishi Brihadaswa, who tells the sacred and sad story of the noble Nala and Damayanti, who is the very embodiment of patience. Yudhishtira learns the arcane secrets of dice-play from Brihadaswa; Rishi Lomasa arrives from Devaloka, bringing word of and from Arjuna to his noble brothers; the Pandavas journey to the various sacred tirthas across Bharatavarsha, at the word of Indra that Lomasa brings, during which pilgrimage they gain great punya; Narada's pilgrimage to Putasta is described. The magnificence of Gaya; the story of Agastya, where the Rishi devoured the Asura Vatapi, and his union with Lopamudra from the desire for children. The story of Rishyasringa who was a brahmachari from his very boyhood; the legend of Jamadagni's son Rama of untold glory and prowess, which tells of the slaying of Kartavirya and the Haihayas; the Pandavas and the Vrishnis meet at sacred Prabhasa; the story of Sukanya, where Bhrigu's son Chyavana Maharishi makes the Aswini twins drink Soma rasa, during the sacrifice of king Saryati, while the other Devas had so far kept them away from it; the grateful Aswini twins bless Chyavana with permanent youth. The Parva then tells the story of King Mandhata; the tale of Prince Jantu, who was King Somaka's only son, who his father offered in a sacrifice and received a hundred sons in return; the excellent story of the hawk and the pigeon; Indra, Agni and Dharma test King Sibi; the story of Ashtavakra, where a dispute arises during Janaka's sacrifice, between that Rishi and the great logician, Varuna's son Vandi; Ashtavakra has the better of Vandi, and releases his father from the ocean deep. There follows the story of Yavakrita, then of the great Raivya; the Pandavas leave for Gandhamadana and the asrama called Narayana; for Draupadi, Bhimasena goes after the saugandhika; he meets Vayu's son the mighty Hanuman in a grove of banana trees; Bhima bathes in the pool on the river and devastates the flowers growing there to gather the exotic saugandhikas; he battles the powerful Rakshasas and the Yakshas, and Hanuman with them; Bhima kills Jatasura; the Pandavas meet the Rajarishi Vrishaparva; they depart for the hermitage of Arshtishena and live there for a time; Draupadi incites Bhima to revenge. Now Vyasa narrates how Bhima climbs Kailasa and his tremendous battle with the

Yakshas headed by Hanuman; the Pandavas meet with Vaisravana Kubera. Arjuna returns after he has obtained many diverse devastras to use for Yudhishtira; he describes his encounters with the Nivatakavachas of Hiranyaparva, with the Paulomas and the Kalakeyas: how he slew them all; Arjuna is about to reveal the divine and awesome weapons for Yudhishtira, when Narada appears to prevent him from bringing disaster down upon them; the Pandavas come down from Gandhamadana; a python big as a mountain seizes Bhima in the jungle; Yudhishtira answers the great snake's questions to secure his brother's release; the Pandavas return to the Kamyaka vana. Krishna returns to meet the sons of Pandu; Markandeya arrives there, and regales them with many legends; the story of Prithu, son of Vena; the stories of Saraswati and the Rishi Tarkhya. The legend of Matsya; other ancient tales Markandeya tells: those of Indradyumna and Dhundhumara; then the story of the chaste wife; the story of Angira. Draupadi and Satyabhama meet and speak together; the Pandavas return to the Dwaita vana. Duryodhana's ghoshayatra to gloat over the Pandavas' plight; he is captured by the Gandharva and rescued by Arjuna: a terrible humiliation. Yudhishtira's dream of the deer. The Pandavas return to the Kamyaka vana; the long story of Brihidraunika; the story of Durvasa; then Jayadratha abducts Draupadi from the asrama; Bhima, swift as the wind, chases Jayadratha, catches him and shames him dreadfully by shaving half his hair and moustache. Now follows the long story of Rama, during which that immaculate prince kills Ravana. The story of Savitri appears here; then Indra takes Karna's golden kundala from him, and compensates Karna with an inexorable shakti, which, however, can be used only against one enemy, whom it will certainly kill; then comes the story called Aranya, where Dharma Deva advises his son Yudhishtira; the Pandavas receive a boon and journey towards the west. All these comprise the third Parva, called Aranyaka, of two hundred and sixty-nine cantos, and eleven thousand, six hundred and sixty-four slokas.

The next great Parva is the Virata. The Pandavas arrive in the kingdom of Virata and see a great sami tree in a burial ground on the outskirts of the city. They hide their weapons in this tree, then enter the city in disguise. In Virata, Bhima kills the vile Kichaka, who, mad with lust, tries to molest Draupadi. Duryodhana sends forth his spies in every direction to scour the land for the Pandavas, but they fail to discover the mighty sons of Pandu. The Trigartas make off with Virata's herd and a fierce battle is fought;

Virata is taken by the enemy and rescued by Bhimasena; Bhima retrieves the herd, as well. The next day, the Kurus make off again with Virata's kine; Arjuna vanquishes the Kuru host single-handed and releases the cattle; Virata offers his daughter Uttaraa to Arjuna, who accepts her to become the bride of his son and Subhadra's: Abhimanyu, destroyer of his foes. These are the contents of the fourth Parva. The Maharishi Vyasa composed the Virata Parva in sixty-seven cantos, with two thousand and fifty slokas.

Listen now to the outline of the fifth Parva, which is known as Udyoga. While the Pandavas stayed at Upaplavya in the Matsya kingdom and prepared for war, Duryodhana and Arjuna both went at the same time to Dwaraka, and said, "Fight on our side in the war". The Mahatman Krishna replied, "Choose between me—and I will carry no weapon nor strike a single blow during the war—and one whole Akshauhini of my troops. Which of these shall I give to which of you?" The foolish Duryodhana asked for the troops, while Arjuna eagerly accepted just Krishna, as a counsellor who would not fight. We will see how, when the king of Madra rode to join the Pandavas, Duryodhana cunningly entertained him on his way, with lavish hospitality and gifts, never revealing himself until he asked for a boon: which was that Salya would fight for him.

Having given his word, Salya cannot refuse. But he goes to the Pandavas and comforts them by recounting the tale of how Indra triumphed over Vritrasura. The Pandavas send a purohita to the Kauravas. Mighty Dhritarashtra listens to the message of the priest and to the story of Indra's victory and sends Sanjaya to the Pandavas suing for peace. We shall see the terrible insomnia and anxiety that ravages Dhritarashtra, when he hears about the army that the sons of Pandu have collected and about their allies, Krishna and the others. Now Vidura expounds dharma to his brother. Sanatsujata appears and discourses on the atman and dharma for the benefit of the terrified and grieving sovereign. The next morning, Sanjaya speaks, in the court of the king, about Arjuna and Krishna being Nara Narayana. Moved by compassion, Krishna, the illustrious one, comes himself to Hastinapura, to sue for peace. Duryodhana dismisses the embassy of Krishna. The story of Dambodbhava is related, as well as that of the noble Matuli's search for a husband for his daughter; then the story of the Maharishi Galava; the story of the training and discipline of the son of Vidula. Then, before the assembled kings, Krishna learns that Duryodhana and Karna are plotting to take him hostage and reveals his cosmic powers of

Yoga. While leaving Hastinapura, Krishna takes Karna apart in his chariot and, telling him who he, Karna, truly is, asks him to join the Pandavas, who are his brothers. Karna refuses the offer, out of pride and loyalty to Duryodhana. Krishna, scourge of the evil, returns to Upaplavya, and tells the Pandavas everything that happened in Hastinapura. Then the Pandavas, having heard all, and having deliberated and discussed the matter deeply, begin to prepare in earnest for war. From Hastinapura, for battle, footsoldiers, horses, charioteers and elephants set forth. The legions of both sides are described. On the day before the commencement of battle, Duryodhana sends Uluka as his messenger to the Pandavas. The charioteers, rathikas, of different classes are described. The story of Amba is told. All this comprises the fifth Parva, Udyoga, of the Bharata, full of events relating to both peace and war. O Munis, the great Vyasa composed one hundred and eighty-six cantos in this Parva, with six thousand, six hundred and ninety-eight slokas.

Then comes the Bhishma Parva, which abounds with marvellous events. Here Sanjaya describes the formation of Jambudwipa, followed by an account of the dejection of Arjuna before the battle, his crisis at the prospect of killing his own flesh and blood. Krishna expounds the Sanatana Dharma to him and the path to mukti, and reasons with him to discard his doubts and to fight. The first ten ferocious days of battle. Krishna sees Bhishma slaughtering the Pandava army, while Arjuna hardly fought him, and jumps down from their chariot, whip in hand, and runs at Bhishma to kill him himself. Krishna scathes Arjuna, bearer of the Gandiva, most valiant and gifted of all Kshatriyas, with a tirade. Greatest among archers, Arjuna sets Shikandin before him and shoots Bhishma with his most potent arrows, felling him. Bhishma falls onto a bed of arrows, upon which he lies. This is the sixth Parva of the Bharata, of one hundred and seventeen cantos and five thousand, eight hundred and eighty-four slokas, recited by Maharishi Vyasa, master of the Vedas.

Next we recite the excellent Drona Parva, thick with incident. First, the great Acharya Drona is made Senapati of the Kaurava army; delighted, he vows, that master of arms, to take Yudhishtira his captive during the battle, to please Duryodhana; the Samsaptakas draw Arjuna away from the field; Arjuna kills Bhagadatta, who bestrode the field upon the elephant Supritika like a second Indra; the slaying of the teenaged Abhimanyu by Jayadratha and the Maharathas, while the heroic youth fought alone; Arjuna razes

seven Akshauhinis of the enemy and fulfils his vow to kill Jayadratha; Bhima Mahabaho and that best of Maharathas, Satyaki Yuyudhana, penetrate deep into the Kaurava army, impregnable even by the Devas; the two come at Yudhishtira's command, in search of Arjuna; the massacre of the remaining Samsaptakas. The Drona Parva tells of the death of Alambusha, of Srutayus, of Jalasandha, of Shomadatta, of Virata, of the Maharatha Drupada, of Ghatotkacha and countless others; in this Parva, stirred beyond reason by the death of his father, Aswatthama looses the dreadful Narayanastra. The glory of Rudra is told and the burning of the Tripura described. Vyasa arrives and sings the glory of Krishna and Arjuna. This is the seventh Parva of the Bharata, in which all the mighty Kshatriyas mentioned are slain. This Parva contains one hundred and seventy cantos, and eight thousand, nine hundred and nine slokas composed after much dhyana by Rishi Vyasa, son of Parasara, owner of true gyana.

Then comes the truly exhilarating Karna Parva, in which Salya, wise king of Madra, is persuaded to become Karna's sarathy. The history of the fan of the Anita Triputa is told. Karna and Salya favour each other with harsh words as they set out into battle; Salya makes the insulting comparison of the swan and the crow; the lofty Aswatthama kills the Pandya king; Dandasena dies; Darda dies; Yudhishtira's duel with Karna before both armies, in which Karna shames the Pandava; Yudhishtira and Arjuna quarrel, and Krishna pacifies an angry Arjuna. In this Parva, Bhima keeps his vow by tearing open Dushasana's chest and drinking the blood from his heart. Arjuna kills the great Karna in single combat. Those that know the Bharata call this eighth Parva the Karna Parva. It contains sixty-nine cantos and four thousand, nine hundred and sixty-four slokas.

Next, the wondrous Salya Parva; after all the Maharathas are dead, the king of Madra becomes Senapati of the Kaurava army. One after another, the duels of the remaining rathikas are described. Yudhishtira Dharmaputra kills the great Salya. Sahadeva kills Shakuni. When a mere smattering of troops remained alive after the great slaughtering, Duryodhana went to the lake and submerging himself, as he knew how, lay underwater for a while. Bhima learns from the fowlers where Duryodhana is; the knowing Yudhishtira taunts the sensitive Duryodhana until he emerges from the lake. Duryodhana and Bhima fight the gada yuddha, a mace battle, during which Balarama arrives at Samanata-panchaka; a description of the sacred Saraswati; the mace fight continues; Bhima hurls his gada with tremendous

force to break Duryodhana's thighs. All this is contained in the ninth Parva, which Vyasa, who spread the renown of the Kauravas, composed in fifty-nine cantos and three thousand, two hundred and twenty slokas.

Next I will relate the Parva called Sauptika, in which horrible incidents occur. When the Pandavas leave Duryodhana to die slowly, painfully, of his mortal injury, the Maharathas Kritavarma, Kripa and Aswatthama come to Samanta-panchaka in the evening and see King Duryodhana lying on the ground, his thighs broken, and covered with blood. Then Maharatha Aswatthama swears in terrible fury that he will never remove his armour until he has killed all the Panchalas and Dhrishtadyumna, and the Pandavas and all their allies. The three warriors leave Duryodhana and enter the great forest just as the Sun sets. They sit, shocked, under a large pipal tree in the night, when they see one great owl killing a number of crows asleep in the branches, one after the other. Taking this as an omen, Aswatthama, his heart full of rage to think of his father Drona's death, decides to murder the Panchalas in their sleep. Arriving at the gates of the enemy camp, he sees there a Rakshasa of frightful countenance, the demon's head in the very sky, guarding the entrance. The Rakshasa is proof against all the astras of Drona's son, who then quickly worships three-eyed Rudra. And then, with Kritavarma and Kripa, he kills all the sons of Draupadi, all the Panchalas with Dhrishtadyumna and the rest of their kinsmen, all of whom slept unsuspectingly in the night, since the war was over. On that night, all of them perish except the five Pandavas and the Maharatha Satyaki. These escape because Krishna advises them to sleep away from the camp that night and to be on their guard. Dhrishtadyumna's sarathy brings word of the night's savage massacre to the Pandavas. Demented by the death of her sons, her father and her brothers, Draupadi sits before her husbands, resolved to fast unto death. Dreadful Bhima, stirred by what Draupadi says, hefts his mace and rides after the son of his Acharya, to take revenge on Aswatthama for Draupadi's sake. From fear of Bhima and moved by fate and anger, Aswatthama looses a final astra, crying, "This will be the end of all the Pandavas". But Krishna cries, "That shall not be!" and makes Aswatthama's words ineffectual. Arjuna counters Aswatthama's astra with an identical missile of his own. Seeing Aswatthama's vile intention, Dwaipayana and Krishna curse him and he curses them back. The Pandavas take the jewel that grew in Maharatha Aswatthama's head, and are delighted. Boasting of their triumph they come back to the battlefield and

give it to Draupadi to assuage her grief. This is the tenth Parva, called Sauptika, which Maharishi Vyasa, peerless Pauranika of revelations, composed in eighteen cantos and eight hundred and seventy slokas. In fact, in this Parva he has combined two Parvas: Sauptika and Aishika.

After these comes the heartrending Parva, Stri, in which stricken and enraged by the killing of his precious Duryodhana, blind Dhritarashtra crushes an iron statue of Bhima, adroitly given to him by Krishna. Vidura consoles the king with a discourse on dharma and moksha. Sad Dhritarashtra and the women of his house make their way to the tragic field of Kurukshetra. The wives of the dead Kshatriyas lament. Gandhari and Dhritarashtra swoon from grief and wrath. The Kshatriya women see their sons, brothers and fathers lying dead on the field, never to return to them. Krishna calms the wrath of Gandhari, raging when she sees the corpses of her sons and grandsons. Yudhishtira of dharma, best among men, has the bodies of the dead kings and princes cremated. While tarpana is being offered for the Kshatriya princes, Kunti confesses her long kept secret that Karna was her son. Maharishi Vyasa describes these events in the eleventh Parva, full of pathos, which moves any feeling heart and even brings tears to one's eyes. It has twenty-seven cantos and seven hundred and seventy-five slokas.

Twelfth is the Santi Parva, which deepens understanding and wisdom. It tells of the dejection of Yudhishtira at having killed his elders, cousins, nephews, uncles and relatives by marriage, at having seen his sons slain. Lying on his bed of arrows, Bhishma expounds Kshatriya dharma and the dharma of kings; he tells of how to deal with crises, in detail, discussing occasion and cause. Understanding these discourses can lead one to true gyana. The mysteries of moksha are delved into and expatiated upon. This twelfth Parva is the favourite Parva of wise men. It has three hundred and thirty-nine cantos, and fourteen thousand, seven hundred and thirty-two slokas.

Next comes the fine and exalted Anusasana Parva. It describes how Yudhishtira, king of the Kurus, finds peace of mind and reconciliation upon hearing Bhishma, the son of Ganga's exposition on dharma. This Parva deals in detail with the codes of dharma and artha; it deals with dana, charity, and its merits; it defines the qualities required to give charity and the laws pertaining to the giving and receiving of gifts. This Parva also describes the rituals of individual dharma, the codes of conduct and the

unequalled punya of truth. This Parva dwells on the great merit of Brahmanas and sacred cows, and unravels the mysteries of dharma with relation to time and place. All this is enshrined in the excellent Parva Anusasana, of numerous tales and events. It goes on to narrate Bhishma's ascension into Swarga. This thirteenth Parva, which lays down in detail the dharma for men, has one hundred and forty-six cantos, and eight thousand slokas.

The fourteenth Parva is Aswamedhika. We will tell the fine tale of Samvarta and Marutta; then describe the unearthing of the golden treasure trove; the birth of Parikshit follows, and how Krishna revives the stillborn infant after Aswatthama's astra had killed him in his mother's womb. Arjuna, the son of Pandu, follows the sacrificial horse across Bharatavarsha and gives battle to the Kshatriyas who dared seize the animal. We shall describe the duel between Arjuna and his own son Babhruvaha by Chitrangada, daughter of the king of Manipura. There follows the story of the mongoose during the Aswamedha yagna. This Aswamedhika Parva contains one hundred and three cantos, and three thousand, three hundred and twenty slokas composed by the most knowing Vyasa.

The fifteenth Parva is called Asramvasika. Here, Dhritarashtra abdicates his kingdom, and sets out for the forest with Gandhari and Vidura. The virtuous Kunti, who always loved and served her elders, also leaves the court of her sons, to follow the old couple. This Parva describes the supernatural meeting of Dhritarashtra with the spirits of his slain children, grandchildren and other princes, returned from the other world by the power and grace of Vyasa. Then the king abandons his grief and, with Gandhari, finds the highest punya of his good deeds. In this Parva, Vidura, who always lived in virtue, attains moksha in the forest. The learned son of Gavalgana, Sanjaya, also restrains his passions perfectly, and that foremost of ministers attains the blessed condition. Yudhishtira of dharma meets Narada, who tells him about the destruction of the Vrishnis. This wonderful Parva Asramvasika has forty-two cantos, and one thousand five hundred and six slokas composed by Vyasa who knows the highest truth.

After this, as you know, comes the Maushala Parva, full of pain. The lion-hearted Vrishnis, who wore the scars from countless fields on their bodies, are cursed by a Brahmana. Drunk out of their wits, urged by fate, they slew one another on the shores of the salt sea with the eraka reeds, which turned in their hands into deadly thunderbolts. After provoking the

extermination of their race, Balarama and Krishna, their own hour having come, succumb to all-consuming kaala. Arjuna, best of men, comes to Dwaravati and finds Dwaraka empty of Vrishnis. Grieftsricken, he performs the last rites for his uncle Vasudeva, noblest of the Yadus. Arjuna comes to the place where the Vrishnis had drunk and sees them lying in the postures of death. Arjuna cremates the bodies of Krishna the lustrous and of Balarama, as well as the other Vrishni chieftains. Taking the women and children, the old and the decrepit—all that remained of the Yadu race Arjuna journeys towards Indraprastha and meets disaster on the way in the form of murderous and rapacious highway bandits. He can no longer use the mighty Gandiva nor summon any astra to defend his wards. The downcast Arjuna goes to the Rishi Vyasa, and following his advice, comes home to Yudhishtira and seeks his leave to adopt sannyasa. This is the sixteenth, Maushala, Parva, which contains eight cantos and three hundred and twenty slokas, composed by the Muni Vyasa, who knows the supreme truth.

Mahaprasthanika is next, the seventeenth Parva. Here, those greatest of men, the Pandavas, relinquish their kingdom and, taking Draupadi with them, set out on their final journey, Mahaprasthana. They arrive on the shore of the sea of red water, and meet Agni Deva. Agni tells Arjuna to worship him and to return the unearthly bow Gandiva to the Fire God, which Arjuna does. In this Parva, the Pandavas embark on their last journey up the great mountain. One by one, his brothers and his wife fall to their deaths, leaving Yudhishtira to climb on alone, never once looking back for them. This seventeenth Parva Mahaprasthanika has three cantos and three hundred and twenty slokas, composed by Vyasa, knower of the truth.

The eighteenth Parva is the exceptional Swarga, in which celestial events are described, happenings in Devaloka. Seeing the heavenly vimana come to fetch him bodily to Swarga, Yudhishtira is full of pity for the brown dog that accompanied him through his journey from the gates of Hastinapura. He refuses to ascend in the vimana without his companion. Dharma Deva sets aside his canine form and reveals himself to his son of perfect virtue. Yudhishtira comes into Swarga and experiences a taste of hell. A celestial servitor takes him through an illusory naraka, where Yudhishtira, soul of righteousness, hears the heart-rending lamentations of his brothers and Draupadi, who appear to be dwelling in that realm, being tormented by Yama. Dharma and Indra show Yudhishtira the zone of sinners. Then

Yudhishtira abandons his body by bathing in the Ganga as she flows through Swarga, and attains the heaven that his dharma deserves, where he lives in joy, honoured by Indra and the other Devas. This is the eighteenth Parva as told by the illumined Vyasa; it contains two hundred and nine slokas.

Such in brief are the contents of the eighteen Parvas. The appendix (Khila) contains the Harivamsa and the Vavishya. The Harivamsa contains twelve thousand holy slokas.'

These are the contents of the canto called Parva-samgraha.

Sauti continues, 'Eighteen Akshauhinis of warriors came together for battle. The dreadful war lasts for eighteen days. He that knows the four Vedas with all the Angas and Upanishads but does not know this Itihasa cannot be regarded as having wisdom. Vyasa of fathomless intellect has called the Mahabharata a treatise on Artha, Dharma and Kama. Those who have listened to his awesome legend can never bear to listen to others, even as they who have heard the sweet song of the male kokila cannot stand the raucous cawing of the crow. As the Universe is formed from the Panchamahabhutas, the inspiration of every poet is derived from this wonderful Bharata. O Brahmanas, as the four kinds of creatures depend on space to exist, the Puranas depend upon this Itihasa. As the senses depend on the modes of the mind for their functioning, so does all karma and dharma depend upon this treatise. There is not a story in the world but it depends on this legend, even as the body does upon the food it consumes. All poets cherish the Bharata, even as servants that desire advancement serve masters of noble descent. Just as the blessed grihastasrama, of the householder, can never be excelled by the other three asramas, no poet or poets can surpass this poem.

O Munis, shake off all inertia. Fix your hearts on punya, for virtue is the only friend that accompanies a man out of this world. The most intelligent man can never really possess wealth or wife, not by cherishing them to distraction; they are fleeting. The Bharata uttered from the lips of Dwaipayana is unequalled; it is, verily, dharma, and it is sacred. It destroys sins and generates goodness. He that listens to it being recited does not need to bathe in the holy waters of Pushkara. Whatever sensual sins a Brahmana might commit during the day, he is freed of them by reading the Bharata in the evening. Whatever sins he may commit in the night, of deed, word or thought, he is freed from those by reading the Bharata at dawn, during the

first sandhya. He that gives a hundred cows, their horns covered in gold, to a Brahmana versed in the Vedas and all the Shastras, and he that daily listens to the sacred stories of the Bharata, acquire equal punya, spiritual gain. As ships help men who own them, easily cross the Ocean, so does this canto Parva-samgraha help those who study this extensive legend of great beauty and profound meaning.'

CANTO 3

PAUSHYA PARVA

Suta said, 'Once, Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit, and his brothers conducted a great and extended yagna on Kurukshetra. His three brothers were Srutasena, Ugrasena and Bhimasena. And as they sat at the sacrifice, a whelp of Sarama, the celestial she-dog, arrived there. Beaten by Janamejaya's brothers, he ran to his mother, crying in pain. And Sarama asked, "Why are you crying like this? Who beat you?"

He replied, "The brothers of Janamejaya."

His mother said, "You have done something wrong that you were beaten."

He answered, "I have done no wrong. I did not lick the sacrificial ghee, nor did I even look at it." Hearing this, his mother Sarama grew distraught and went to the place where Janamejaya and his brothers were at their extensive sacrifice.

Angrily she cried to Janamejaya, "My son has done no wrong; he has neither looked at your sacrificial ghee, let alone lick it. Why, then, was he beaten?"

They did not reply, at which she said, "You have beaten my son who committed no fault, and evil will come upon you when you least expect it."

Janamejaya was terribly alarmed and depressed to hear this imprecation. After he completed his yagna and returned to Hastinapura, he began to search high and low for a purohita who could absolve his brothers and himself of their sin and turn away the curse.

One day, Janamejaya, while hunting in a forest that was part of his kingdom, saw the asrama of the renowned Rishi Srutasrava. Srutasrava's son, Somasrava, was a most accomplished priest and sat in deep dhyana there. Wanting to make this Sage his purohita, Janamejaya, son of Parikshit, saluted the Rishi Srutasrava and spoke to him, "O owner of the six great qualities, let your son be my purohita."

The Rishi answered, “Janamejaya, my son of deep tapasya, a master of the Vedas, and blessed with the full potency of my sannyasa, was born of a Nagina, who drank my semen. He can free you from every sin except one committed against Mahadeva. Yet, he has one trait that he will never abandon: he must give a Brahmana whatever he asks for. If you can countenance that, certainly take him with you.”

Janamejaya replied, “Let me then take him.”

Accepting Somasrava as his purohita, he returned to his capital, where he said to his brothers, “This is the man that I have chosen for my Guru; you must do whatever he says, unquestioningly.” And his brothers did as they were told. The king marched to Takshashila and conquered that country.

Around this time, there was a Rishi called Ayoda-Dhaumya, and he had three disciples, Upamanyu, Aruni and Veda. The Rishi told one of these sishyas, Aruni of Panchala, to go and stop a leak in the watercourse in a field. At his Guru’s command, Aruni of Panchala went to the place and saw that he could not stop the breach in the watercourse in any common fashion. He was distressed because he could not do his Guru’s bidding.

He thought for a while and said, “Well, there is one way by which I can stem the leak.”

He climbed down into the breach and lay there, and the water was contained by his body. After a while, the Guru Ayoda-Dhaumya asked his other disciples where Aruni of Panchala was. They replied, “Master, you sent him to stop the leak in the watercourse in the field.”

Dhaumya remembered and said, “Let us all go to the place where he is.”

Arriving there, he shouted, “Ho, Aruni of Panchala! Where are you? Come here, my child.”

Hearing his Guru’s voice, Aruni quickly emerged from the watercourse, and stood before his master. Aruni said, “I lay in the breach where the water leaked, since there was no other way to do as you said. But now I heard your voice and came to you, allowing the water to escape again. I salute you, Guru, command me.”

The Guru said, “Because you rose from the ditch at my command, I bless you to be called Uddalaka. Because you have obeyed me, you shall find great fortune. The Vedas shall shine in you and all the Dharmashastras also.”

And blessed by his Guru, Aruni went to the country that he loved.

Upamanyu was another of Ayoda-Dhaumya's sishyas. Dhaumya said to him, "Go, Upamanyu my child, and tend the herd." And Upamanyu took the cattle to pasture. Having watched and grazed them all day, he returned to his master's house in the evening, and saluted him respectfully.

His Guru saw him healthy and untired, and asked, "Upamanyu, my child, what did you feed on that you look so healthy and plump?"

He answered, "Lord, I ate by begging alms."

His Guru said, "You should not eat the alms you get without first offering them to me."

The next day, Upamanyu brought the alms he begged to his master. His Guru took all the food and Upamanyu went to graze the herd. He watched the cattle all day and returned in the evening to his master's asrama. He stood before his preceptor and saluted him with reverence. His Guru saw that he was still in fine fettle, and said, "Upamanyu, my child, I took all that you begged as alms from you, then how do you still look so healthy, even fat?"

Upamanyu said, "Guru, I gave you all the alms I begged the first time, then went begging a second time for food."

His master then said, "This is not how you should honour my command to you. By begging alms twice, you are depriving someone else that lives by alms for their subsistence. You have proved yourself to be greedy."

Upamanyu bowed to acknowledge what his master said, and went away. The next morning, too, he took the herd out to pasture and was with them all day. In the evening, he returned to his Guru's home and stood, hands folded reverently, before his master. His preceptor observed that he was still fat, and said, "Upamanyu my child, I take all the alms you beg and you do not go begging a second time, and you are still in robust health, and fat. How is this?"

Upamanyu replied, "Master, I drink the milk of the cows now."

His Guru said, "You may not drink the milk without my permission."

Again, Upamanyu agreed to do what his Guru asked, and the next day took the herd to pasture. When he returned to his master's dwelling in the evening, he stood before him and saluted him as usual. His master saw that he was still fat, and said, "Upamanyu my son, you do not eat the alms you beg anymore, nor do you go begging a second time, nor do you drink milk from the cows. How do you remain healthy and fat?"

Upamanyu replied, “Master, I sip the froth that drips from the mouths of the calves as they drink from their mothers’ teats.”

The master said, “The loving calves must drip a good deal of froth for you to drink. But you are depriving the young ones of their nourishment. I forbid you to drink the froth.” And Upamanyu, bowing his assent, went away.

The next day, he took the cows to graze. Obeying his Guru, he did not feed on alms, nor drink any milk or froth. Savaged by hunger in the forest, he ate the leaves of an arka[3], which are pungent, saline and poisonous. He became blind. He crawled sightless on the forest floor and fell into a disused well. When he did not return to his Guru’s asrama by evening, when the Sun sank over the western mountains, his master asked his other sishyas where Upamanyu was. They said that he had gone out with the cattle.

The Guru said, “I have prevented him from eating anything, and he must be annoyed. Let us then go looking for him.” The Guru went with his sishyas into the forest and began to shout, “Ho Upamanyu! Where are you?”

Upamanyu heard his master’s voice and answered loudly, “Here I am at the bottom of this well.” His Guru asked how he got there. Upamanyu replied, “I ate the leaves of an arka plant and they made me blind. I could not see anything and I fell into the well.”

His Guru then said, “Give praise to the Aswin twins, who are the physicians to the Devas, and they will restore your sight.” At his master’s word, Upamanyu began to hymn the Aswini twins, in slokas from the Rig Veda.

“You have existed since before creation! O first-born beings, it is you that are displayed in this marvellous Universe of five elements. I wish to attain to you by the faculty of hearing and of dhyana, for truly you are infinite. You are the very course of Prakriti and of the intelligent Purusha that pervades that unfolding. You are birds of exquisite plumage perched on the body that is like a tree. You are without the three attributes that are base in every soul. You are incomparable. Your spirit is in every created thing; you pervade the Universe.

You are golden eagles! You are the divine essence into which all things dissolve! You are free from faults and know no decay. Your beaks are beauty embodied, and never strike unjustly. You are victorious in every

battle. You are immortal, and prevail over time. Having created the Sun, you weave the wondrous cloth of the years with the white thread of day and the black thread of night. And with the cloth woven, you have established two ways of karma, one for the Devas and the other for the Pitrs. You set the bird of Life, seized by Time, which has the strength of the Infinite Atman, free and deliver her to endless joy. They that are plunged in ignorance, deluded by the senses, think of you, who transcend matter and its attributes, as having form. Three hundred and sixty cows that are three hundred and sixty days produce one calf between them: the year. That calf creates and destroys all things. Seekers of truth, treading myriad paths, draw the milk that is true knowledge from the calf. O Aswins, you are the creators of that calf!

The year is just the hub of a wheel to which seven hundred and twenty spokes are attached: days and nights. The circumference of this wheel of twelve months is endless. The wheel is full of delusions and knows no decay. It affects all creatures, of this and the other worlds. Aswins, you set this wheel of time in motion!

The wheel of Time, in the year, has a nave of six seasons. The spokes attached to that nave are twelve, the signs of the Zodiac. This wheel of Time manifests the fruit of all karma. The Devas who rule Kaala abide in the wheel. O Aswins, I am bound by the misery of the wheel; liberate me from the wheel of Time. Aswins, you are this Universe of the Panchabhutas. You are the objects that are enjoyed in this and in the next world. Set me free from the five elements! Though you are the Supreme Brahman, yet you move over the Earth with bodies and forms, enjoying the pleasures that the senses afford.

In the beginning, you created the ten cardinal points of the Universe! Then you set the Sun and the sky on high. The Rishis perform their yagnas by the movement of the same Surya, and the Devas and men, as well, according to their svadharma, perform sacrifices and enjoy the fruit of those rites. You mixed the three colours, and produced all that is seen. From these creations the Universe issued, in which the Devas and men perform their svadharma, and, indeed, all creatures receive life!

Aswins, I worship you! I also adore the Akasa, which you made. You are the bestowers of the fruit of karma, the laws of which bind even the Devas. Yet you yourselves are free from the results of whatever you do!

You are the father and mother of us all! As male and female, you consume food, which then develops into life-creating seed and blood. The newborn drinks at its mother's breast. You take the shape of the infant. O Aswins, return my sight to me that I may protect my life!"

The twin Aswins appeared and said, "We are pleased. Here is a sweet cake for you. Eat it."

Upamanyu said, "Your words, O Aswins, have never proved untrue. But I cannot eat your cake without first offering it to my Guru."

The Aswins now told him, "Once, your Guru invoked us just as you have. We gave him a cake just like this one, and he ate it without offering it to his master. Do as your master did."

Upamanyu said to them, "Aswini Devas, I beg your forgiveness, but I cannot eat your cake without first offering it to my master."

The Aswins now said, "O, we are pleased by your Guru bhakti. Your master has iron teeth for eating the cake without offering it to his Guru. You shall have teeth of gold. Your eyes will see again and great fortune will attend upon you."

With this blessing from the Aswins, Upamanyu recovered his sight. He came before his master and, saluting him reverently, told him all that had happened. His Guru was pleased with him and said, "You shall have great fortune, as the Aswins have said. The Vedas shall illumine you, and all the Dharmashastras."

This was the trial of Upamanyu.

Then Ayoda-Dhaumya called his third sishya, Veda, and said to him, "Veda, my son, stay awhile in my house and serve your Guru. You will gain from it."

Veda readily agreed, and remained in his master's house, serving him and his family. Like an ox bearing its master's burdens, he suffered heat and cold, hunger and thirst, always without a murmur of complaint. Before long, his Guru was satisfied and blessed Veda to have good fortune and universal knowledge. This was the trial of Veda.

Taking his Guru's permission, when he had finished his tutelage, Veda left his master's house and entered grihastasrama, became a householder. In his own house, he had three sishyas. But he never treated them harshly, or had them obey him unquestioningly or perform rough tasks for him, but was the kindest master because of his own difficult experiences in his Guru's house.

The two Kshatriyas Janamejaya and Paushya came to this Veda's home and asked him to be their Upadhyaya, their spiritual guide and mentor. One day, when he had to go out on some work, Veda told one of his disciples, Utanka, to take charge of his household.

"Utanka," said Veda, "you must do whatever needs to be done in my home without neglect, even as I would." And he set out on his journey.

Utanka began living in his Guru's house and was heedful of his master's command in every particular. One day, the women of the household came to Utanka and said, "Utanka, your mistress is in her fertile time. Your master is away, and it falls to you to take his place."

Utanka said to the women, "I cannot do this at you women's bidding. My Guru did not tell me to commit a sin."

After a while, his Guru came home, and when he heard what had happened, Veda was pleased.

He said, "Utanka, my child, what boon do you want from me? You have served me faithfully and my affection for you has grown. You may leave now, and let your every wish come true."

Utanka said, "Let me do something for you, Guru. For I have heard told of the master who teaches without receiving dakshina and the sishya who receives instruction without giving dakshina, that enmity springs up between them, and one of them dies. You have taught me and I must give you some gurudakshina."

His master replied, "Utanka, my son, wait a while."

Some days passed, then Utanka again asked his master, "Command me, Guru, what dakshina shall I bring for you?"

His Guru said, "Dear Utanka, so often you have asked me what dakshina I want from you for what I taught you. Go inside then, and ask my wife what you should bring as dakshina. Bring whatever she says."

Utanka went to his master's wife and said, "Mistress, my Guru has given me leave to go home, and I want to give you something as dakshina for the instruction I have received, something that will please you, so that I do not leave with a debt to my Guru. I beg you tell me what dakshina I should give."

His Guru's wife replied, "Go to King Paushya and beg him for the earrings that his queen wears, and bring them here. The fourth day from today is a sacred day and I want to wear those earrings when I serve the

Brahmanas who will dine with us. Do this for me, Utanka! If you succeed, you will find good fortune; if you fail, what fortune can you expect?"

Utanka went away to fetch the earrings, if he could. As he went along, he saw a bull of extraordinary size and a man of huge stature mounted upon it. That man said to Utanka, "Eat the dung of this bull." Utanka refused. The man said again, "Utanka, eat it. Your master ate it before you." Now Utanka agreed and ate the dung and drank the urine of the bull. Then he rose respectfully, washed his hands and mouth, and went to meet King Paushya.

Arriving at the palace, Utanka saw Paushya upon his throne. Utanka approached the king and greeted him by pronouncing formal blessings over him. He said, "I have come to you as a supplicant."

King Paushya returned Utanka's greeting and asked, "Brahmana, what can I do for you?"

Utanka said, "I have come to beg a pair of earrings for my Guru's wife, to be my dakshina to my master. I ask you to give me the earrings that your queen wears."

King Paushya replied, "Go, Utanka, into the antahpura, and ask the queen for the earrings."

Utanka went into the harem, but he could not find the queen. He came back to the king and said, "It is not right that you treat me deceitfully. Your queen is not in the antahpura, I could not find her there."

The king thought a moment, then said, "Recollect, Brahmana, whether you have defiled yourself with something that you ate or drank on your way here. My queen is a chaste wife and cannot be seen by anyone who is sullied from partaking of leftovers. She will not appear before someone that is impure.

Utanka now thought for a moment, then said, "Yes, it must be. Being in a hurry, I must have performed my ablutions while standing."

King Paushya said, "You cannot purify yourself properly while standing, not even while you are on a journey."

Utanka agreed. He sat down facing the east and washed his face, hands and feet thoroughly. Then, without making a sound, he thrice sipped clean water, free of froth and dirt, and not warm, in achamana: just enough to reach his stomach, and he wiped his face twice. He touched the apertures of his organs with pure water.

Having done all this, he went to the women's quarters again. Now he saw the queen. As soon as the queen saw him, she greeted him respectfully and said, "Welcome Brahmana, tell me what I can do for you."

Utanka said, "Give me your earrings, I wish to give them to my Guru's wife as my daskhina to him."

The queen was pleased with Utanka's deportment and his intentions. She felt that he was deserving of this charity, and immediately took off her earrings and gave them to him.

The queen said, "Takshaka, the serpent king, has always coveted these earrings. So be very carfeul how you go with them."

Utanka said to the queen, "Lady, do not worry, Takshaka cannot catch me."

He took solemn and grateful leave of the queen, and went back into the presence of Paushya. Utanka said, "Paushya, I am gratified."

Paushya said to Utanka, "Someone truly deserving of daana comes along once in a rare while. You are a worthy guest, a qualified sadasya, and I want to conduct a sraddha. Stay a while with me."

Utanka replied, "I will stay, but I beg you to have the food for the sraddha fetched quickly."

The king assented readily and began to entertain Utanka as the atithi for his sraddha. Utanka saw that the food set before him had hair in it and felt that it was cold, and deemed it unclean. He said to Paushya, "You have given me unclean food and you will go blind for it."

Paushya retorted, "And because you say that clean food is unclean, you will have no children!"

Utanka rejoined, "It does not become you to curse me back, after offering me unclean food. Look for yourself."

Paushya looked closely at the food and found that it was indeed unclean, being cold and mixed with hair, because it had been prepared by a woman with long braids.

The king sought to pacify Utanka, "Brahmana, the food set before you is indeed cold, and does contain hair. It was prepared without proper care and I beg you, forgive me. Let me not become blind."

Utanka replied, "What I say must come to pass. However, though you go blind you can recover your sight soon, provided your curse does not affect me."

Paushya said to him, “I cannot revoke my curse, for my wrath is not appeased. But you cannot know this because a Brahmana’s heart is as soft as freshly churned butter, even if his words carry a sharp razor. But this is not so with the Kshatriya, whose words are soft as freshly churned butter, but his heart is like a razor, and hard. Because I am a Kshatriya and unforgiving, I cannot withdraw my curse. Go your way now.”

Utanka said, “I showed you that the food was unclean, and just now you were pacifying me. Besides, you first said that because I said the food was unclean when it was in fact clean I would not have children. But the food is unclean, so your curse cannot affect me. Of this I am certain.”

And Utanka left with the earrings.

On the road, Utanka saw a naked beggar coming towards him, most strangely: for sometimes he was visible and at others he vanished. Utanka put the earrings on the ground and went to bathe in a wayside tank. The beggar flashed up, seized up the earrings and ran away. Utanka completed his ablutions, purified himself, bowed worshipfully to the gods and his Gurus and went after the thief as fast as he could. With some effort he overtook him and laid hold of the fellow.

At once, the naked one was no longer a beggar but Takshaka, who dived down into a hole in a ground. Once in, Takshaka sped down into his realm, Nagaloka, the under-world of serpents.

Utanka remembered what the queen had told him and tried to pursue the Naga. With a stick, he tried to excavate the hole into which Takshaka had vanished but could not make any headway. Indra saw his distress and sent his Vajra to help him. The thunderbolt entered the stick and plunged along the hole, tunnelling its way like lightning. Utanka went in and down after the Vajra. He saw Nagaloka, amazing and magnificent, seemingly infinite in extent, with hundreds of palaces and elegant mansions, with turrets, domes and high arched gates, full of the most enchanting parks and gardens for sport and for love.

Awestruck, Utanka sang the praises of the serpents with these slokas:

“O Nagas, subjects of King Airavata, splendid in battle, pouring forth astras in battle like clouds full of lightning driven by the winds! Many-formed, radiant and handsome, with ear-studs of many colours, O children of Airavata, you shine like the Sun in the sky! On the northern banks of the Ganga are many habitations of Nagas. I regularly worship the great serpents there. Who but Airavata would want to move about under the burning Sun?

When Airavata's brother Dhritarashtra goes forth, twenty-eight thousand and eight serpents follow him in train. You who move near him and you that remain at some remove: I worship all of you that have Airavata for your elder brother.

I worship you also, O Takshaka, who once lived in Kurukshetra and the Khandava vana: to have the queen's earrings from you! Takshaka and Aswasena, O constant companions that dwell in Kurukshetra on the banks of the Ikshumati! I worship Takshaka's younger brother, the lustrous Srutasena, who lived in the tirtha Mahadyumna in order to become lord of the Nagas."

Though he paid homage to all the great Nagas, the Brahmana Rishi Utanka did not get the earrings. He fell thoughtful. He looked around and saw two young women at a loom weaving a piece of cloth with a fine shuttle, using black and white threads. He saw a wheel with twelve spokes, turned by six boys. And he also saw a man astride a blazing magnificent steed. And he addressed these mantras to them, resonantly:

"This wheel that has twenty-four cantos, for the changes of the Moon, also has three hundred spokes! Six boys, the seasons, keep it always turning! These women are Prakriti, ceaselessly weaving their cosmic cloth with threads of black and white, creating countless worlds and the beings that live on them. And you who send down the thunder, who protect the Universe, who slew Vrita and Namuchi, O Illustrious one wearing a black robe, riding Uchchaisravas churned up from the bottom of the sea, the horse that is an amsa of Agni Deva Lord of Fire, I bow to you, Paramatman, Lord of the three worlds, O Purandara!"

Then the man on the horse said to Utanka, "I am pleased with your worship. What boon shall I give you?"

Utanka replied, "Let me have power over the Nagas."

The man said, "Breathe upon this horse."

Utanka blew his breath onto that horse. From every aperture of the horse's body, dreadful flames and smoke issued to consume Nagaloka. Shocked, singed and terrified, Takshaka flew out from his palace with the earrings, and gave them to Utanka.

"I beg you," said the Naga king, "take back the earrings." And Utanka did.

But having recovered his earrings, Utanka realised, "This is the holy day of which my Guru's wife spoke. I am so far from their home; how will I

give her the dakshina in time?"

The man in black said to him, "Ride this horse, Utanka, and he will bring you to your master's home in a moment."

Utanka mounted the horse and immediately arrived at his Guru's house.

It was morning. His master's wife had bathed and sat combing her hair, thinking of how she would curse Utanka if he did not return in time with the earrings. Utanka entered his Guru's home, greeted his master's wife and respectfully gave her the earrings.

"Utanka," said she, delighted, "you have arrived at the right time in the right place! Welcome my child, you have done what you set out to do, and I will not curse you. Good fortune is written for you. Let all your wishes come true and success attend your every endeavour!"

Utanka went to his Guru. His master said, "Welcome! Where were you all these days?"

Utanka replied, "Master, Takshaka kept me from returning sooner. I had to go to Nagaloka, where I saw two women at a loom, weaving a fabulous cloth with black and white threads. What was it? I also saw a wheel with twelve spokes turned endlessly by six boys. What did that mean? Who was the man that I saw, mounted upon the horse of awesome size?

And while I was on the road, I saw a man mounted on a gigantic bull. He said affectionately to me, 'Utanka, eat of the dung of this bull, which your Guru also ate.' So I ate the bull's dung. But who was the man? I beg you, enlighten me about all these."

His Guru said to him, "The two young women you saw are Dhata and Vidhata; the black and white threads are nights and days; the wheel of twelve spokes was the year and the boys that turned it, the six seasons. The man was Parjannya, Lord of rain, and the horse was Agni, the Fire God. The bull on the road was Airavata, Lord of elephants; the man riding the bull was Indra; and the dung of the bull, which you ate, was Amrita, which saved you from certain death in Nagaloka. Indra is my friend and showed you favour. That is how you have come back safely with the earrings. Good child, I give you leave to go now. You will find fortune."

With his Guru's leave and blessing, Utanka went grimly toward Hastinapura. Anger stirred his heart and he wanted to avenge himself on Takshaka. The excellent Brahmana soon reached Hastinapura. Utanka came into the presence of Raja Janamejaya, who had returned victorious from

Takshashila some days ago. Utanka saw the triumphant king surrounded by his ministers. He blessed them all, formally.

Utanka spoke to the king at an apposite moment, in fine language and a mellifluous voice. "Rajarishabha, best of kings! How is it that you waste your time childishly, when another critical matter demands your attention?"'

Sauti said, 'Janamejaya saluted the noble Brahmana and replied, "I am discharging the dharma of my royal line by spending time with my subjects. Tell me, what is the urgent matter which has brought you here?"

The great Brahmana Utanka, distinguished by his fine deeds, replied to that munificent king, "O Raja! the matter is urgent because it concerns you. So make haste to attend to it. King of kings, Takshaka took your father's life, and you must take revenge against the vile snake. The time has come, I believe, for the vengeance ordained by fate. So avenge the death of your great father whom the vicious Naga stung, without cause, and burned him into the Panchabhutas like lightning striking a tree. Takshaka, most evil of Nagas, is so drunk with power that he dared bite your godlike sire, scion of your race of Rajarishis.

Cunning beyind measure, he persuaded Kashyapa, prince among physicians, to turn back when that Rishi was on his way to save your father. It will be fitting for you to burn Takshaka in the fire of a sarpa yagna, a sacrifice of serpents!

Rajan! Command the sarpa yagna to begin instantly, it is the only way to avenge your father. And with this sacrifice, you will do me also a great favour. For, most virtuous Kshatriya, the malignant Takshaka once obstructed me when I was on a crucial errand for my Guru."'

Sauti continued, 'Hearing this, the king's fury against Takshaka was kindled. What Utanka said inflamed the Kshatriya like ghee poured into an agnikunda. Grief welled up inside Janamejaya, and he asked his ministers for an account of his father's journey to Swarga. When he heard the circumstances of his father's death from Utanka he was stricken with pain and sorrow.'

Here ends the canto named Paushya, of the Adi Parva of the blessed Mahabharata.

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[3]Asclepias gigantea

CANTO 4

PAULOMA PARVA

Suta Ugrasrava, son of Romaharshana and a master of the Puranas, stood before the Rishis of Naimisha vana, during the twelve-year sacrifice of Saunaka Kulapati. He had studied the Puranas with meticulous devotion and knew them thoroughly. Hands folded, he said respectfully to the Sages, 'I have told you the story of Utanka in detail, and his tale was one of the reasons for King Janamejaya's sarpa yagna, his snake sacrifice. What, holy ones, do you wish to hear now? What shall I narrate?'

The Rishis replied, 'Son of Romaharshana, we will ask you whatever we most want to hear, and you must recount the stories, one by one. Our master Saunaka is at worship in the sacred agnigriha. He knows the divine legends of the Devas and Asuras. He knows well the Itihasas of men, the Nagas and Gandharvas. Further, Sauti, the learned Saunaka is the chief priest at this yagna. He is able, keeps his vratas faultlessly, he is wise, a master of the Shastras and the Aranyaka, speaks only the truth, is a lover of peace, mortifies his flesh, and performs tapasya by the laws laid down for austerity. All of us revere him. It is only proper that we wait for him. And when he sits upon this darbhasana, you shall answer whatever that best of Dvijas wants to know from you.'

Sauti said, 'So be it. When that mahatman sits with us and asks me to, I will tell you sacred tales that deal with a variety of subjects.'

After a while, having finished all his karma, having worshipped the Devas with prayers and the Pitrs with tarpana, the great Brahmana Saunaka returned to the yagnashala, where the other Rishis of stern vows sat relaxed, with Sauti before them. And when Saunaka sat among the Ritviks and Sadhyas, he spoke to them.

CANTO 5

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Child, son of Romaharshana, your father studied all the Puranas and the Bharata, with Krishna Dwaipayana. Have you imbibed them, as well? Those ancient chronicles contain fascinating stories and the history of the first generations of Rishis, all of which we heard from the lips of your father. First of all, I want to hear the history of the race of Bhrigu. Recount that lineage, and we will listen carefully to you.'

Sauti said, 'I have learnt everything that the noble Brahmanas of old, Vaisampayana among them, once studied and recounted. I have gleaned all the knowledge that my father possessed. O scion of the race of Bhrigu, listen then to everything that relates to that lofty race, honoured by Indra and all the Devas, by the tribes of Rishis and Maruts. Mahamuni, first of all, I will relate the history of this clan as told in the Puranas.

The blessed Maharishi Bhrigu, we are told, was created by Swayambhuva Brahma from the agni during the sacrifice of Varuna. And Bhrigu had a son named Chyavana, whom he loved dearly. Chyavana had a virtuous son called Pramati. Pramati had a son named Ruru by Ghritachi the Apsara, and to Ruru, by his wife Pramadvara, was born a son named Sunaka. He, O Saunaka, was your great, exceptionally virtuous ancestor. He was devoted to sannyasa, had wide renown, was proficient in dharma, and pre-eminent among those that knew the Vedas. He was honest and self-controlled.'

Saunaka said, 'O son of Suta, why was the illumined son of Bhrigu called Chyavana? Tell me all.'

Sauti answered, 'Bhrigu had a wife named Pauloma, whom he loved. She became pregnant by him. One day, while the chaste Pauloma was in that condition, Bhrigu, foremost among those that are true to their dharma, left her at home and went out to perform his ablutions.

At this time, a Rakshasa whose name was Puloma came to Bhrigu's asrama. Entering, the Rakshasa saw Bhrigu's irreproachable wife and was filled with lust, quite losing his reason on seeing her. The beautiful Pauloma entertained the Rakshasa with roots and fruit of the forest. The Rakshasa, aflame, was so delighted, good Rishi, he decided to carry her away, who was so pure and faithful.

"I shall have what I want," said the Rakshasa, and seizing the beautiful woman, carried her away. And it was true that her father had once betrothed her of the lovely smile to the same Rakshasa, though later he gave her to be Bhrigu's wife with Vedic ritual. O Saunaka of the race of Bhrigu, this hurt rankled deep in the Rakshasa's mind and he found the moment now to abduct her.

The Rakshasa saw the agnishala in which the sacred fire always burned bright, and he asked the Fire God, the blazing elemental, "Tell me, O Agni, whose wife this woman is. You are the mouth of the Devas, you must answer me. Was this woman with skin soft as petals not first offered to me by her father? And did I not accept her? But then her father married her to the deceitful Bhrigu. Tell me truly if this beautiful woman is indeed the wife of Bhrigu, because I have found her alone today and mean to take her from this asrama by force, if she is the same woman. My heart burns to think that Bhrigu has this slender-waisted woman who was my betrothed."'

Sauti continued, 'Again and again, the Rakshasa asked flaming Agni if the woman was Bhrigu's wife. And the god was afraid to answer.

"O Agni," said the Rakshasa, "you dwell within every creature, as the witness of their paapa and punya. Worshipful Agni, answer me truly. Has Bhrigu not stolen the woman that I chose to be my wife? Tell me truthfully, having been given first to me, is she not rightfully mine? When I have your answer, I will carry her away from this asrama, even before your eyes of fire. So answer me with the truth."'

Sauti continued, "The Seven-flamed Deva listened to the Rakshasa and was dismayed, being afraid to tell a lie and equally afraid of being cursed by Bhrigu. At length, the god replied, hesitantly and slowly:

"You did indeed first choose Pauloma, O Rakshasa, but you did not marry her with sacred rites and mantras. Her father gave this renowned beauty to Bhrigu because he wanted Bhrigu's blessing. She was not formally given to you, Rakshasa; rather, Rishi Bhrigu made her his wife with Vedic ceremony and me for witness. This is she. Yes, I know her. I

dare not tell a lie. O best of Rakshasas, lies never find honour in this world.'"

CANTO 6

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'O Brahmana, the Rakshasa heard what Agni said, in a flash assumed the form of a boar and carried Pauloma away as fast as the wind, even as quickly as thought. It was then that Bhrigu's son, lying in his mother's womb, was outraged by the violence and fell out of her body. For this he was called Chyavana. The Rakshasa saw the infant drop from his mother's womb, shining like the Sun, and he instantly released Pauloma, fell down and became a mound of ashes. And the beautiful Pauloma, grief-stricken, O Brahmana of the race of Bhrigu, took up her child, Chyavana, the son of Bhrigu, and walked away. And Brahma, the Grandsire, Pitamaha of all, saw her, the blameless wife of his son, weeping pitiably. And Brahma comforted her, seeing how she loved her baby. The tears that streamed down Pauloma's face became a great river. And that river followed the Maharishi Bhrigu's wife. And the Pitamaha of the worlds saw that river flowing after Pauloma and he called it Vadhusara. And it flowed beside the asrama of Chyavana, her son. This was how Chyavana of great tapasya, the son of Bhrigu, was born.

Bhrigu saw his child Chyavana and its beautiful mother. And the Rishi flew into a rage and demanded, "Who told the Rakshasa about you that he came to carry you away? O you with the sweet smile, the Rakshasa could not know that you were my wife. Tell me who told him, that I can curse the one who did."

Pauloma replied, "Owner of the six gunas! Agni Deva identified me for the Rakshasa, who carried me away, while I wailed like a kurari.[4] Your splendid son saved me, for when the Rakshasa saw him being born he released me, fell down and turned into ashes."

Bhrigu heard this and was furious. In rage, he cursed Agni, saying, "You shall eat all things, clean and unclean!"'

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[4] Female osprey

CANTO 7

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Enraged by the curse of Bhrigu, Agni Deva roared at the Rishi, "Brahmana, what is this rashness that you have shown me? What was my fault, who did everything, both to keep dharma and to speak the truth, impartially? The Rakshasa questioned me and I answered truthfully. A witness who lies about something that he knows ruins his ancestors and his descendants for seven generations, above and below. He who suppresses the truth that he knows is equally guilty. I could also curse you, except that I hold Brahmanas in high regard. You do know all about me, Bhrigu, yet I will tell you about my attributes again. So listen.

Multiplying myself with tapasya, I assume myriad forms: at the daily hotra everywhere, at sacrifices that last for years, where any holy rites are performed: births, upanayanams, weddings, deaths, and at other yagnas. The Devas and Pitrs are worshipped and appeased by the ghee that is poured into my flames as offering, as prescribed in the Veda. The Devas are the sacral waters; the Pitrs are also the waters. The Devas and the Pitrs have equal rights to the Yagnas, Darshas and Purnamasas. The Devas are the Pitrs, and the Pitrs the Devas. They are identical beings, worshipped together and separately, too, during the different phases of the Moon. The Devas and the Pitrs consume what is poured into me. I am known as the mouth of the Devas and the Pitrs. On Amavasya, the new Moon, the Pitrs, and during Paurnima, the full Moon, the Devas are fed through my mouth, partaking of the ghee poured into me. Bhrigu, being as I am, the mouth of the Devas and Pitrs, how shall I then eat all things, clean and unclean?"

Then Agni thought deeply for a while and withdrew from every place in which he burned: from the daily homa of Brahmanas, from all long sacrifices, from all holy rites, and every other ceremony. Deprived of their AUMS and Vashats, their Swadhas and Swahas, all the living were plunged in grief at losing their sacrificial fire.

The panic-stricken Rishis went to the gods and said to them, "Immaculate ones! The three worlds are in turmoil that Agni has abandoned them and they cannot perform their sacrifices anymore. We beg you, say what must be done, without delay."

The Rishis and the Devas went together to Brahma. They told him about Bhrigu's curse on Agni, and how the Fire God had withdrawn from every sacrifice and ritual.

They said, "Master of Fortune, Bhrigu has cursed Agni to eat all things clean and unclean. But Agni is the mouth of the Devas and he first partakes of every sacred offering. He drinks the sacrificial ghee. How can he consume all things, clean and unclean?"

The Creator of the Universe heard them and he summoned Agni. Gently, Brahma said to Agni, who was also the creator of all, and immortal, "You create and destroy the worlds. You preserve them. You support every sacrifice and ritual throughout the three worlds. You must not flout your dharma so the sacred rites are interrupted. You who consume the sacrificial ghee, who are the Lord of all things, why are you being so foolish? You alone are always pure in the Universe, and you are its only eternal foundation. I say to you, not all of you shall partake of all things, clean and unclean. Only the flames of your baser parts shall devour all things alike. Your body which, dwelling in the bellies of carnivores, devours flesh, shall also eat all things, clean and unclean. And as everything touched by the Sun's rays becomes pure, so shall everything that is burnt in your flames be purified. O Agni, you are the supreme energy born from your own power. Then, O Deva, by your own tejas let the Rishi's curse come to pass. Continue to receive the havis offered into your mouth: the offering that is yours and that which is for the other Devas."

Agni replied to the Pitamaha, "So be it," and he left to follow Brahma's dictate. The Devas and the Rishis also went to their homes, quite delighted. The Rishis performed their rituals and sacrifices as before. And the gods in heaven and all creatures of the world rejoiced. And Agni also rejoiced because he was free from having to sin.

Thus, O Saunaka, owner of the six qualities, the Maharishi Bhrigu cursed Agni once in time out of mind. This is the ancient legend about Pauloma, the death of the Rakshasa, and the birth of Chyavana.'

CANTO 8

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'O Brahmana, Bhrigu's son Chyavana Muni fathered a son by his wife Sukanya, and that was the illustrious Pramati of dazzling vitality. Pramati sired in Ghritachi a son called Ruru. Ruru begot on his wife Pramadvara a son called Sunaka. I will tell you in detail, O Rishi, the entire story of Ruru of boundless elan. Listen to it now, in full.

Once there was a great Rishi called Sthulakesa of great tapasya shakti, deep gyana and compassion toward all creatures. Brahmana Muni, this was the time when Viswavasu, king of the Gandharvas, is said to have enjoyed sexual relations with the celestial Apsara Menaka. Bhargava, when her time came, Menaka delivered her child near the asrama of Sthulakesa. Abandoning the newborn baby on the banks of the river, O Brahmana, Menaka, who had neither pity nor shame, went away.

The Rishi Sthulakesa, of great dhyana, found the infant lying forsaken in a lonely place on the riverside. He saw that it was a girl, bright as the child of an immortal, ablaze with beauty! Maharishi Sthulakesa, foremost of Munis, was filled with compassion. He took the child and raised her. The exquisite child grew up in his holy asrama, and the noble and blessed Rishi performed all the sacred ceremonies for her, beginning with the one at birth, as laid down in the divine Shastras.

She excelled all those of her sex in goodness, beauty and every noble quality, so the maharishi called her Pramadvara. The pious Ruru once saw Pramadvara in Sthulakesa's hermitage and his heart was pierced by Kama Deva's arrow; he was stricken with love for her. Through his friends, Ruru told his father Pramati, son of Bhrigu, about his love. Pramati went to Sthulakesa of renown and asked for Pramadvara's hand in marriage for his son. Her foster-father gave the maiden Pramadvara in betrothal to Ruru, and fixed the wedding for the day when the Varga-Daivata nakshatra, Purva-phalguni, was rising.

A few days before the one appointed for the wedding, Pramadvara was at play with her sakhis and, her time come, stepped on a snake, which bit the lovely girl. She fell to the ground unconscious; colour drained from her face and all the vital signs of life fled her person, one by one, as she writhed in pain. Her hair limp and wild, she who had been so beautiful and attractive in life was the very opposite in death's throes; her companions could hardly bear to look at her.

In a while, calm came over her face and the reed-waisted girl, quelled by venom, lay as if asleep. Now she was even more beautiful in death than she had been alive. Sthulakesa and the other Rishis of the forest came and saw her lying there bright as a golden lotus. Many noted Brahmanas came to that place and they sat around the dead girl in pity and sorrow. Swastyatreya, Mahajana, Kaushika, Sankhamekhala, Uddalaka, Katha and Sweta of great fame; Bharadwaja, Kaunakutsya, Arshtishena, Gautama, Pramati, his son Ruru and other forest-dwellers came there as the news spread and, seeing Pramadvara lying dead, her life quenched by the snake's poison, they sat there and wept. But Ruru could not stand the sight and stumbled away in agony.'

CANTO 9

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'While the illustrious Brahmanas sat around Pramadvara's corpse, Ruru ran deep into the jungle and he sobbed aloud; he wailed out his grief.

Thinking of his love, he cried, "Ah, she that was so beautiful and delicate lies unmoving on bare ground. What could be more dreadful for us who knew her? If I have been charitable, if I have performed any tapasya, if I have ever revered and served my elders, let all my punya be spent in bringing my love back to life. If since my birth I have restrained my passions, kept my vratas, let sweet Pramadvara rise alive from where she lies!"

While Ruru lamented the loss of his bride to have been, a messenger from heaven came to him in the forest. Said the divine one, "O Ruru, you rail in vain against time. Blessed one, she whose days in this world have run out can never return. The mortal days of this daughter of a Gandharva and an Apsara are exhausted. So, child, snatch your heart back from sorrow."

Then he paused, before adding softly, "But, there are exceptions and the gods have already provided one condition by which life might be restored to her. If you can fulfil that condition, you might have your Pramadvara back."

Ruru asked, "Messenger from Swarga, what is the condition of the Devas? Tell me, tell me in detail, that I might fulfil it. Ah, good Duta, save me from this grief!"

The divine messenger said to Ruru, "Ruru of Bhrigu's clan, give up half your own life to her and Pramadvara shall live again."

Never hesitating, Ruru cried, "I gladly offer half my life if my bride returns to me, lovely as she used to be!"

Then the Gandharva king and the divine messenger, both of them splendid and great, went to Dharmaraja, the Lord Death, and said to him,

"If it please you, Lord, let Pramadvara's life be restored with a portion of Ruru's life."

Dharmaraja replied, "Devaduta, messenger of the gods, if it is your wish, let Pramadvara, Ruru's betrothed, live again with a portion of Ruru's life."

Even as Dharmaraja said this, Pramadvara of exquisite complexion rose from death as if from sleep: with a portion of Ruru's life. Of course, his offering would shorten Ruru's own life.

On the auspicious day, their fathers joyfully married Ruru and Pramadvara with the proper rituals. The couple was devoted to each other. Ruru had a rare wife, lovely and bright as the filaments of a lotus, and he swore to wreak vengeance on all serpents for the snake that had bitten Pramadvara. Whenever he saw a snake, he would become furious and kill it with some weapon.

One day, O Brahmana, Ruru went into a great forest, and he saw an aged serpent of the species called Dundubha lying on the ground. Ruru raised his staff in wrath, even like the Yama danda, to kill it, when the Dundubha spoke to Ruru, "I have done you no harm, O Brahmana! Why do you want to kill me in such anger?"'

CANTO 10

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'When Ruru heard what the snake said, he answered, "A snake bit my wife, dear to me as life. And I swore then that I would kill every serpent I saw. That is why I will now kill you with my staff."

The Dundubha said, "O Brahmana, the snakes that bite man are a different species from us. Why should you kill Dundubhas, who are serpents but in name? We are prey to the same misfortunes as other snakes but do not share their venom. We have the same sorrows but not the same strengths or joys. It is a mistake for you to kill the Dundubhas."

Rishi Ruru listened to the snake and saw how it trembled with fear, unlike a serpent, though it was indeed a snake, but more like a human; and he did not kill it. Ruru, owner of the six great attributes, asked the snake, "Tell me, O Dundubha, who are you really that lie here as a snake?"

The Dundubha replied, "Ruru, I was once a Rishi and my name was Sahasrapat. The curse of a Brahmana transformed me into a snake."

Ruru asked, "O best of snakes, why did a Brahmana curse you? How long will you be a snake?"

CANTO 11

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'The Dundubha said, "Long ago, I had a friend called Khagama. He had considerable spirtual power by his tapasya and was short-tempered and rash of speech. One day, while he performed the Agni-hotra, I made a snake of grass and playfully tried to scare him with it. He fainted from fright. But when he regained consciousness, that honest Rishi, who always kept his vows, cursed me in anger, 'Since you made a snake of grass to frighten me, become a snake yourself, and as powerless as a grass snake, for you shall have no venom!'

O Muni, I knew how powerful he was by his penance. I bowed low before him, with folded hands and a pounding heart, and said, 'My friend, it was only a jest to make you laugh. I beg you, pardon me and take back your curse.'

Seeing me desperate, the Sage was moved to pity. Still breathing hard he said, 'I cannot revoke my curse and you must become a snake. But Muni, when Pramati's pure-hearted son Ruru appears before you, the curse will end.'

You, my friend, are that same Ruru. When I have my true form back, I will tell you something that will benefit you." The Dundubha was transformed before Ruru's eyes and he was again an illustrious Brahmana, radiant as the day.

He said to the powerful and peerless Ruru, "Best among created beings, sparing a life is the highest virtue, and a Brahmana should never kill any creature. A Brahmana should always be gentle and non-violent. This is the most sacred injunction of the Vedas. A Brahmana should be versed in the Vedas and Vedangas, and should inspire all men with faith in God. He should be kind to all creatures, truthful and forgiving. His prime dharma should be to study and remember the Veda. The dharma of the Kshatriya is

not for you. To be stern, to wield a sceptre and to rule his subjects is the dharma of the Kshatriya.

Listen, O Ruru, to how the race of serpents perished at Janamejaya's sarpa yagna of old, and how a great Brahmana, Astika, master of the Vedas and potent with spiritual powers, delivered the Nagas."'

CANTO 12

PAULOMA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'Ruru asked, "Best of Dvijas, why did King Janamejaya want to slaughter the race of serpents? Why did Astika save them, and how? Tell me in detail."

The Rishi replied, "Other Brahmanas will tell you the wonderful story of Astika." Saying this, he vanished.

Ruru ran here and there in the jungle looking for the disappeared Rishi. But he did not find him, though he ran far and hard; he fell exhausted on the ground. He thought of what the Rishi had said and was bewildered. The world spun round and he fainted. Regaining consciousness, he went home and asked his father to tell him the story of Astika. And his father told him that tale.'

CANTO 13

ASTIKA PARVA

Saunaka asked, 'Why did that tiger among kings, the magnificent Janamejaya, decide to sacrifice the race of snakes in the fire of a sarpa yagna? Suta, tell us every detail. Tell us why Astika, best among the twice-born, best among Rishis, rescued the Nagas from the blazing flames. Whose son was the king that undertook the terrible snake sacrifice? Whose son, also, was Astika?'

Sauti said, 'Most eloquent Saunaka, the story of Astika is a long one. I will tell it in full, if you will listen.'

Saunaka said, 'I am eager to hear every detail of the enchanted tale of the Rishi Astika, best among Brahmanas.'

Sauti said, 'This tale was first told by Krishna Dwaipayana, and Brahmanas call it a Purana. Vyasa's sishya, my Sage father Romaharshana once narrated the story when asked by the Munis of the Naimisa vana. I was there on that occasion and, great Saunaka, since you now ask me I will repeat the tale of Astika exactly as I heard it. Listen to the entire sin-destroying story.

Astika's father was as powerful as Prajapati. He was a brahmacharin, always in tapasya. He ate very little, was a great sannyasi, and his lust was under complete control. His name was Jaratkaru. Foremost among the Yayavaras, virtuous, keeping stern vratas, blessed with great taposhakti, Jaratkaru once went on a yatra through the world. Diverse places he visited, bathed in many sacred tirthas, and rested where night fell. Possessing enormous vigour, he practised such austerities as few men can, who are not souls of deep self-restraint. The Rishi lived imbibing only air, and he never slept at all. Ranging across the Earth like fire, one day he saw his ancestors, hanging in a great pit with their heads pointing down and their feet up.

Jaratkaru addressed them, "Who are you that hang upside down by a rope of virana fibres being gnawed all round and all the time by the rat that

lives in this pit?"

The ancestors said, "We are Rishis of stern vows; we are the Yayavaras. We sink down into the Earth because we have no descendants. We have a son named Jaratkaru. Alas, the wretched child lives a sannyasi's life. He does not even think of becoming a grihasta, of taking a wife and having children! We fear that our clan will become extinct and that is why we are hanging in this hole. We have every wealth but live like indigents, in this misery.

Noble stranger, who are you that grieve for us like a friend? Tell us who you are, best of men, that stands here and tell us why you grieve for us miserable ones."

Jaratkaru said, "You are my sires and grandsires, for I am Jaratkaru.Tell me how I can serve you."

The fathers answered, "Do everything in your power, child, to beget a son to continue our line. Then, noble boy, you will gain punya for yourself and for us. Not by good deeds or by long tapasya does a man acquire the punya that he does by becoming a father. Therefore, son, we command you: marry a wife and beget children. In this lies our highest welfare."

Jaratkaru said, "I shall not marry for my own sake, nor earn wealth for my enjoyment, but I will do both for your felicity. My condition, by the Shastras, is that I find a bride who bears my own name, and that her friends and family give her willingly to be my bride. But then, who will give his daughter to a poor man like me? I will cetainly accept any woman given to me as alms. O my fathers, I will do everything in my power to marry! I give you my word, and will not break it. Once I marry, I will have children so you might be saved and attain to the realms of eternal bliss.'"

CANTO 14

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Jaratkaru of great vratas ranged over the Earth in search of a bride, but found none. One day, he went into a jungle and, remembereing his ancestors, prayed thrice in a weak voice for a wife. Vasuki rose up before him and offered his sister to the Rishi. The Brahmana hesitated: did she have the same name as himself? Noble Jaratkaru thought, "I will not marry any woman that does not bear my own name."

The wise Rishi, of severe penance and great wisdom, asked mighty Vasuki, "Tell me, O Naga, the name of your sister."

Vasuki replied, "Jaratkaru, my younger sister is called Jaratkaru. I offer her to you; take the slender-waisted one to be your wife. I have kept her for you, O best among Brahmanas, so take her."

And he brought the lovely Jaratkaru, his sister, to the Rishi, who married her with proper rites.'

CANTO 15

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'O foremost among the knowers of Brahman, the mother of the Nagas had cursed them once: "Agni, whose sarathy is Vayu the Wind, shall burn all of you at Janamejaya's sarpa yagna!" It was in order to nullify that curse that Vasuki, king of snakes, married his sister to the Rishi Jaratkaru. When Jaratkaru had married the Nagina Jaratkaru with Shastraic rituals, a great soul was born to them, a son they named Astika. Astika was an illumined Rishi, who knew the Vedas and all their Angas. He regarded all beings with an equal eye, and allayed the anxieties of both his mother and his father.

When, some time after Astika's birth, a king from the Pandava line undertook a great sarpa yagna, it was Astika who delivered the Nagas, his brothers, maternal uncles and other serpents, too, from dying in the flames of Janamejaya's snake sacrifice.

Thus Jaratkaru delivered his father's ancestors by begetting children. By his tapasya, O Brahmana, and by keeping many vratas and studying the Veda, he freed himself from all debt. Performing diverse yagnas, at which different kinds of offerings were made, he worshipped the Devas. By practising brahmacharya, he pleased the Rishis, and by fathering children, he gratified his Pitrs.

Jaratkaru repaid the debt he owed his sires, who then rose into Swarga from the pit where they had hung. Acquiring profound spiritual merit, punya, after a long life of many years, Jaratkaru left his body and found heaven for himself, leaving Astika behind.

This is the story of Astika. O Tiger of the race of Bhrigu, what would you hear from me next?'

CANTO 16

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Sauti, tell us in more detail about the life of the learned and sage Astika. We are agog to hear more, for, O most pleasant one, you speak sweetly, with immaculate intonation, and your narration pleases us. Why, you speak as well as your father, who was always ready to please us. Tell us the whole story of Astika, even as your father told it to you.'

Sauti said, 'O Chiranjivis, blessed with long lives, I will indeed tell you the story of Astika as I heard it from my father. Brahmana, in the Krita Yuga, the golden age, Prajapati had two daughters. Sinless Muni, the sisters were wonderfully beautiful. Kadru and Vinata became the wives of Kashyapa. Kashyapa found great pleasure in his two wives and he, who resembled Prajapati himself, granted them each a boon.

When they heard this they rejoiced. Kadru wished for a thousand Nagas to be born as her sons, all of them equally splendid. Vinata wished for two sons stronger, greater, more powerful, having more vitality and splendour than Kadru's thousand.

Kashyapa said, "So be it!" granting Kadru her boon of a thousand sons, and Vinata hers for two. Vinata was delighted with her two superior sons, as was her sister with her thousand. "Carry the embryos carefully," said Kashyapa, and then he went away into the forest, leaving his two wives pleased.

Noblest of Dvijas, after a long pregnancy, Kadru brought forth a thousand eggs, and Vinata two. Their maidservants placed the eggs separately in warm vessels. Five hundred years passed; then one day Kadru's thousand eggs cracked open, resonantly as thunder, and her thousand splendorous sons were born. But Vinata's sons did not appear.

Vinata was jealous, and she broke open one of her eggs before time. Inside, she found a child whose upper limbs were fully formed, but not the

lower part of his body, which was still undeveloped, stunted. The child in the egg cursed his mother, "Since you broke my egg prematurely, you will be a slave. If you wait five hundred years and not try to crack open the other egg, the lustrous child within it will deliver you from slavery. If you truly want a strong child, you must lavish tender care on the egg for all these five hundred years."

Having cursed his mother, the child rose into the sky. Brahmana, he was Aruna, the charioteer of Surya, whom we see every morning at dawn. When five hundred years passed, the other egg burst open, and from it emerged magnificent Garuda, the serpent-eater. Bhriguvyaghra, as soon as he saw light of day, Vinata's son left his mother. The Lord of all birds felt hungry and took wing in quest of the food that the Creator of all things had ordained for him.'

CANTO 17

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Muni, about this time the two sisters saw the marvellous jewel among horses, the calm and magnificent Uchchaisravas, whom the Devas worship. He arose when the Kshirasagara was churned for the Amrita, and he was divinely graceful, ever-young, Creation's masterpiece, irresistibly vigorous and bearing every auspicious sign and mark upon his person.'

Saunaka asked, 'Why did the Devas churn the Ocean for the nectar? How and when did the mighty and resplendent Uchchaisravas come forth from its waves?'

Sauti said, 'There is a mountain called Meru, which appears like a great stack of blazing light, for its peaks reflect the golden rays of the Sun that fall upon them. Devas and Gandharvas come regularly to the Golden Mountain, past compare, immeasurable and unapproachable by men, to expiate their many sins. Terrible beasts of prey range over it, and numerous magically life-giving herbs illumine its sides. Meru is the first of mountains and stands towering, and kissing Devaloka, as it were.

Ordinary folk cannot even dream of climbing Meru. Mystic trees of wishes and enchanted streams abound upon Meru, and its slopes and valleys ring with the songs of choirs of fabulous birds. Once the Devas met upon its jewelled peak in conclave. They had performed severe penance to obtain the Amrita, the nectar of immortality, and it seemed that the time had come for them to seek it.

Seeing the celestial gathering's anxiety, Narayana said to Brahma, "You must churn the Ocean with the Devas and the Asuras, and you will find divine medicament and jewels you cannot imagine, and many other wonders. O Devas, churn the Kshirasagara and you will discover the Amrita."'

CANTO 18

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'There is a mountain called Mandara whose peaks seem like clouds. It is the best of mountains, and cloaked by herbs growing thickly all over it. Countless birds sing their sweet songs upon it, and dangerous predators range its slopes. The Devas, Apsaras and Kinnaras come to sport and make love upon Mandara. It rises eleven thousand yojanas into the sky, and its roots plunge down as many yojanas into the earth. The Devas wanted to uproot it to use for their churning rod, but they could not. They came to Vishnu and Brahma, who sat together, and said, "Lords, tell us how we can dislodge Mandara to serve our purpose."

Son of Bhrigu, Vishnu and Brahma agreed. Lotus-eyed Vishnu gave the difficult task to the mighty Ananta, Prince of snakes. O Brahmana, Ananta tore up the mountain, with its forests and all the denizens of those forests.

The Devas came to the shore of the Ocean with Ananta and said to the Sea of Milk, "Ocean, we have come to churn your waters to have the Amrita."

The Ocean replied, "Tathaastu! So be it, since I will have my share. I can bear the prodigious churning with the mountain."

The Devas went to the king of tortoises and said to him, "O Kuurmaraja, you must support the mountain on your back!"

The Tortoise-king agreed, and Indra set the mountain on his shell.

The Devas and the Asuras made a churning rod of Mandara, Vasuki their rope, and began churning deep for the nectar. The Asuras held Vasuki's hood and the Devas held his tail. Ananta, who was with the gods, would at times suddenly lift the Naga's hood and lower it as abruptly. Flames and black smoke spewed from Vasuki's jaws. These turned into clouds, charged with lightning, and poured down rain that refreshed the tired Devas. Flowers also rained from every side over the gods, flying from the trees of whirling Mandara, covering them in cool fragrances.

Then, O Brahmana, from the ocean deeps came a tremendous roar like the thunder of the clouds of the Pralaya, the Apocalypse. Countless fish and other creatures of the Sea were crushed by Mandara and perished in the salt water. Numberless denizens of Patala, the under-world, and of the world of Varuna, died.

Great trees, with birds in their branches, upon spinning Mandara were torn up by their roots and flung into the water. Rubbing roughly against one another, many of these caught fire; fires broke out all round the churning and upon the mountain itself, licking through its forests. The mountain looked like a mass of black clouds veined with lightning. O Brahmana, the fire spread to the mountain, and immolated lions, elephants and the other creatures that lived on Mandara.

Then Indra put out the fire with some lashing rain.

After the churning had been underway for some time, O Brahmana, the extrusions of some herbs and treees, which were nectarine, mingled with sea-water, as did the liquid gold from the belly of the mountain.

And the Devas drank this water and felt immortal. Slowly, the milky water of the churned Kshirasagara turned into ghee, because of those rare extrusions. But the Amrita itself still did not appear.

The gods came before Brahma, Granter of boons, upon his Lotus throne, and said, “Sire, we are spent and have no strength left to continue churning. The Amrita has not yet surfaced and we must resort to Narayana to help us now.”

Hearing them, Brahma said to Narayana, “Lord, bless the Devas with strength to churn on.”

Narayana said, “Devas, I will infuse you with my own strength. Go, put the mountain back in place and churn the sea again.”

Their strength renewed, the gods began churning again. In a while, the softly luminous Moon emerged, thousand-rayed, from the Ocean. Then the Devi Lakshmi, incomparable, clad in white, rose out of the waves, followed by the dazzling white Uchchaisravas, and the celestial ruby Kaustubha that Narayana wears upon his breast.

Lakshmi, Soma and the Horse swift as the mind all came before the Devas. Now, the divine and original physician Dhanvantari rose from the waters, bearing a pale chalice with the Amrita.

The Asuras saw him and roared, “It is ours!”

Airavata, of mammoth body and with four gleaming white tusks, came forth. Indra who wields the Vajra, the thunderbolt, took him. The churning continued and, last of all, the dreaded poison Kalakuta appeared, smoking, staining the waves black. In a trice, it engulfed the Earth, blazing up like a fire. The toxic fumes of the Kalakuta stupefied the three worlds, Swarga, Bhumi and Patala. Brahma begged Siva to save the worlds, and Siva quaffed the poison to preserve creation. Maheswara held the Kalakuta in his throat, which was burnt blue, and from that time Siva is also called Nilakanta, blue-throated.

Seeing all these wonders, the Asuras despaired, and prepared to fight the Devas for Lakshmi and the Amrita. Narayana summoned his Maya, his feminine power of illusion. He assumed the form of Mohini, a dark and irresistible seductress, and flirted with the Danavas, arousing them past reason. Enchanted by her, the Demons gave the chalice of Amrita, which they had snatched from Dhanvantri, into her hands.'

CANTO 19

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'The Daityas and Danavas, the Asura sons of Diti and Danu, clad in superb armour and bearing unworldly weapons, were ready to attack the Devas for the ambrosia. But Mohini, the Enchantress, deceived the Demons and gave the Devas all the Amrita, which they greedily drank, in their terror of the Asuras, and they became immortal.

While the gods were drinking the nectar of immortality, a Danava called Rahu assumed the guise of a Deva and, sitting among them, he also drank the Amrita. But Surya and Soma discovered him and Vishnu lopped off Rahu's head with the Sudarshana Chakra when the Amrita had only reached his throat. And the grisly head of the Demon Rahu, big as a mountain, rose into the sky and began to cry out dreadfully.

The Danava's headless body fell on the Earth, making her tremble, all her mountains, forests and islands. From that time, Rahu has hated Surya and Soma, and to this day he swallows them during the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon.

Then Narayana was no more the Mohini of untold temptation, but Himself again, and cast inexorable astras at the Danavas, weapons that made them tremble, weapons that killed thousands of them in a wink.

Thus, on the shore of the salt-water Sea, the dreadful battle between the Devas and Asuras, the Devasura yuddha broke out. Sharp javelins and spears, and thousands of every kind of weapon filled the air on every side, darkening the sky. Dismembered by the Sudarshana Chakra, mangled by swords, crushed by maces, pierced through by arrows, burned by astras, Asuras beyond count lay dead upon the Earth in pools of blood from their wounds and blood they had vomitted. A rain of heads glinting golden crowns and ornaments, hewn from their necks with razor sharp blades, fell onto the ground. Drenched in gore, great Asuras lay dead everywhere like ruddy peaks of mountains, so huge were they.

And when the Sun rose in glory, thousands of warriors hacked at one another with diverse weapons. Screams rang out on all sides, and roars. Warriors that fought from a distance struck each other with arrows and iron javelins; those that fought hand to hand slew one another with blows of their fists.

The air was thick with shrieks of pain. Everywhere deep voices roared, “Cut him down!”, “Run him through!”, “Off with his head!”, “At them!”, “Burn him!”, “Kill!”, and “Forward!”

As the battle raged, Nara and Narayana entered the fray again. Narayana saw the celestial bow in Nara’s hand and remembered his own weapon, the Sudarshana Chakra, scourge of the Danavas. No sooner did he think of it, that the Disc, bane of his enemies, bright as Agni, truly dreadful in battle, flared down from the sky. Receiving it, Narayana of limitless energy, his arms like the trunks of elephants, cast that blinding weapon, which could consume enemy cities in a flash, at the Asuras. Burning like the Fire that devours the world when the Yuga ends, the Chakra, wheeling everywhere, slew millions of Demons all around.

At times it burnt them into ash mounds, at others desiccated them, flashing through phalanxes and whole legions in a wink; and sometimes, it went among them like an army of pisachas and drank their blood!

On the other side, white as clouds from which the rain has fallen, having untold strength and fearless hearts, the Danavas flew up into the sky, and from a great height, hurled down a thousand mountain peaks over the Devas, harrying them constantly. Those huge mountains, like banks of thunderheads, flat-topped and mantled with trees, collided as they fell from the sky, with so many claps of thunder.

And when a million warriors roared without pause and those wooded mountains clashed together, the Earth and all her forests trembled.

Then Nara the divine appeared at the terrific battle between the Asuras and Siva’s Ganas. With golden-headed arrows, he smashed the falling mountains to dust, and covered the firmanent in a haze. Repulsed by the Deva legions, and seeing the blazing Sudarshana consuming their forces on every side and in the fields of heaven, many doughty Asuras plunged down into the Patalas in the bowels of the Earth, while others dove down deep into the salt-water Sea.

The victorious Devas worshipped Mount Mandara and set him back in his place, so he was rooted again. Having the Amrita for themselves, the

Devas shouted for joy, making Swarga echo with their shouts, and returned on high to their own realms. Great were their celebrations when they returned to Devaloka, and Indra and the other gods gave the chalice of Amrita to Narayana for safekeeping.’

CANTO 20

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'This is the tale of how the Amrita was churned up from the Ocean, and that was when Uchchaisravas, the original and peerless steed, also arose. It was this horse about which Kadru asked Vinata, "Tell me, good sister, briefly, what colour is Uchchaisravas?"

Vinata answered, "The prince of all horses is perfectly white. What do you think, my sister? You say what colour he is, and let us make a wager upon it."

Kadru replied, "O my sister of the sweet smile, I think the horse has a black tail. Beautiful one, let us make a bet and let she that loses become the other's slave!"

Having made their wager, the sisters went to their homes, resolving to ascertain who was right about the colouring of Uchchaisravas the next day, by examining him closely.

Kadru was bent upon winning the wager, and she commanded her thousand sons to become a thousand black hairs and immediately cover the divine steed's tail. She would not become a slave!

But when her sons, the Nagas, refused to do as she asked, she cursed them, "During the sarpa yagna of the wise Pandava king Janamejaya, Agni will devour you!"

Brahma Pitamaha heard this savage curse of Kadru and knew that fate had subtly influenced the entire episode, for he saw that the race of serpents multiplied with alarming swiftness and threatened the rest of his creatures. Brahma and the other Devas gave their sanction to the curse of Kadru. The snakes were virulently poisonous, had great speed and strength and were vicious in the extreme; and it might be said that their own mother's curse was for the good of the rest of creation.

Fate punishes those that seek the death of other beings with death: with such observations, the Devas did not oppose Kadru's curse, and went away

to their realms.

Brahma called Kashyapa and said gently to him, “Pure one, vanquisher of all your enemies, their mother Kadru has cursed your sons the Nagas, huge and their venom virulent and always intent on biting other creatures. Do not grieve over the curse, my son, for the burning of the race of serpents in the sarpa yagna was written long ago.”

The Creator of the Universe consoled Kashyapa and also taught him the secret vidya of rendering snakebites harmless.’

CANTO 21

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'When the night ended and dawn broke, O you who are rich in tapasya, Kadru and Vinata went impatiently to inspect Uchchaisravas. On their way, they saw the Ocean, into which all waters flow, vast and deep, rolling with waves, roaring mutedly, teeming with whale-eating timmingalas, monstrous crocodiles and thousands of other species, gigantic tortoises and other monsters of the deep.

The Ocean was a veritable mine of all kinds of gems: the home of Varuna Deva, the wonderful abode of the Nagas, the Lord of all rivers, where the submarine fire of the Apocalypse slumbered, the refuge of the Asuras, the terror of all creatures, the majestic reservoir of water: the immutable Ocean.

Holy is the Sea, benign to the Devas, the source of the Amrita, boundless, inconceivable, and altogether wonderful. Dark is the Ocean, subtly sounding with the speech of marine creatures, its waves roaring endlessly, and spinning with fathomless whirlpools.

All creatures fear the Ocean. Stirred by the winds blowing from its shores, rising up agitatedly, it appears to dance with wave hands raised everywhere. Swelling and ebbing with the waxing and waning of the moon, father of Vasudeva's mighty conch shell Panchajanya, treasure trove of jewels, the Ocean was once cloven and tossed about violently when Vasudeva of incalculable strength plunged into the depths of the Sea as Varaha, the Great Boar, to retrieve the Earth, Bhumi Devi, lying submerged on the bed of the Ocean, which is lower than the Patalas, the realms of nether.

The Rishi Atri of vast tapasya and stern vratas could not fathom the deeps of the Ocean, not when he had toiled for a hundred years. Whenever a Yuga ends, the Ocean becomes the Ekarnava, the bed of Vishnu

Padmanabha, while that God of measureless power lies plunged in Yoga Nidra, his plumbless sleep, his profound cosmic meditation.

Sagara is the refuge of Mainaka, who fears Indra's Vajra, and the sanctuary of the Asuras whenever they are vanquished in war. The Ocean offers water as ghee into the fire blazing out from the mouth of Badava, the Fire of the End, who has the form of a Sea Mare. Fathomless he is, and limitless, immense, immeasurable, the Lord of rivers.

Kadru and Vinata saw thousands of mighty rivers plunging with haughty currents into the Ocean – even like rivals in love, each one wanting to be the first to unite with the beloved, each wanting to stop the others.

They saw that the Ocean was always full, ever dancing with waves. They saw it was as deep as time and as wide as the sky, that awesome receptacle of water!'

CANTO 22

ASTIKI PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'The Nagas consulted among themselves and decided to do as their mother wanted, for if they did not she might well withdraw her love and burn them up. If, on the other hand, they pleased her, she might release them from her curse. They said, "We will make the horse's tail black," and they became the hairs on the tail of Uchchaisravas.

Brahmanottama, best among Brahmanas, the sisters Kadru and Vinata, the daughters of Daksha, flew along in some delight to see the far shore of the Ocean. On their way they saw the calm, redolent and wonderful Ocean being suddenly agitated by the wind, and roaring. They flew quickly over it.'

CANTO 23

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Having crossed the Ocean swiftly, Kadru and Vinata alighted near Uchchaisravas. They saw that first of steeds, fleetest of all, was white as the rays of the Moon; however, its tail was black. Kadru made Vinata, who had lost their wager, her slave, and Vinata grieved very much and was dejected past telling.

Meanwhile, when his time came, resplendent Garuda cracked open the egg in which he had lain so long and burst forth from it, dazzling the Universe. Ah, magnificent he was, beyond compare. He could assume any form at will, fly anywhere with a thought, and summon limitless strength and energy.

He was like a mass of fire; he was terribly brilliant. His lustre was that of the fire at the end of the Yuga; his eyes were like streaks of lightning. As soon as he was born, he grew immeasurably and flashed up into the sky. Fierce he was, and his keening cries shook the firmament; he seemed as dreadful as a second Badava.

When the Devas saw him, they were terrified and flew to Agni Vibhavasu. Bowing low to that deity of many forms upon his throne, the Devas said, "Agni, why have you spread your body out? The mass of flames you have extruded spreads everywhere to consume us!"

Agni replied, "Enemies of the Asuras, it is not as you imagine. This is not I but great Garuda, as strong and as splendid as I am. He has been born to be the joy of Vinata and the mount of Vishnu. Why, the very sight of his refulgence has made you afraid! He is the son of Kashyapa, bane of Nagas, guardian of the Devas, and an enemy of the Daityas and Rakshasas. Come, let me show you."

The Devas said, "you are a Rishi, a knower of every mantra. You receive the largest portion of the havis from every sacrifice, always glorious."

Agni and the Devas cautiously approached Garuda. They worshipped him, the Lord of birds, why, the sovereign spirit of everything animate and inanimate in the Universe.

"You are the destroyer of all things, the creator of all! You verily are Hiranyagarbha; you are Daksha and the other Prajapatis, the progenitors of creation; you are Indra; you are Hayagriva; you are the astra that Vishnu became in Siva's hands when Rudra burned the Tripura; you are the Lord of the Universe; you are the mouth of Vishnu; you are the four-faced Padmaja; you are the Brahmana, wise; you are Agni, Vayu and the gods of everything in the Universe.

You are gyana; you are maya, which binds us all; you are the pervasive Brahman; you are the Lord of the Devas; you are the great Truth; you are fearless; you are immutable; you are Nirguna Brahman; you are the energy of the Sun; you are the intellect; you are our great guardian; you are the sea of holiness; you are purity; there is no darkness in you; you own the sashta lakshana, the six lofty qualities; you are invincible in battle.

All things came from you, O you of the magnificent deeds; you are everything that has been and all that has not yet been. You are pure knowledge; as Surya does the world with his rays, you illumine this Universe, animate and unmoving. You dim the splendour of the Sun, each moment, and you are the destroyer of all things. You are all that is mortal and all that does not perish as well. You are as splendent as Agni, and you burn up everything even as Surya burns the fallen creatures in anger when the age ends.

O terrible one, you are proof against the fire that devours the Universe at the Dissolution, the Mahapralaya. Mighty Garuda, who range the firmament, we seek refuge in you. Lord of birds, awesome is your vitality, your irradiance that of fire, your brilliance that of lightning, which no darkness can approach. You are as lofty as the clouds; you are cause and effect, of matchless prowess and the granter of boons.

Lord, the Universe is heated by your splendour of molten gold. Give refuge to the noble Devas, who are terrified by you and dash about hither and thither through the sky in their vimanas from that fear. Greatest of birds, Lord of all, you are the merciful Rishi Kashyapa's son; be not wroth but take pity upon the Universe. You reign supreme; O, quieten your anger and watch over us.

Your voice is like thunder and, at your cries, the ten cardinal points, the firmament, Swarga, Bhumi and our minds quail, O Avian. We beg you diminish your body that resembles Agni. Dim your lustre, which is like Yama's when he is angry; for at the sight of your brilliance, our hearts lose their calm and pound out of all control.

Lord of birds, be propitious to us that solicit your mercy. O lambent one, bless us with fortune and joy."

When the Devas and Rishis worshipped him, that bird of fair feathers dimmed both his energy and his fearsome brilliance.'

CANTO 24

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'In truth, when it heard about its size and looked at itself, the Bird made itself smaller.

Garuda said gently, "Since you fear this dreadful form of mine, I will diminish myself. Let no creature be afraid."

Then Garuda, sky ranger, who could travel anywhere at will, who could call upon any degree of energy, set his brother Aruna upon his back and flashed away from his father's asrama to his mother upon the far shore of the Ocean. He set the shining Aruna down in the east, just at a time when Surya had decided to consume the worlds with his blazing rays.'

Saunaka asked, 'When did Surya want to burn the three worlds? What did the Devas do to provoke his wrath?'

Sauti said, 'Anagha, sinless, Surya and Soma pointed Rahu out to the Devas, while he sat among them and drank the Amrita, when the Ocean was churned. Since then he hated them. When Rahu tried to devour Surya Deva, the Sun God became furious. He thought, "What I did benefited all the gods, but I alone must suffer for saving them, and no one comes to help me when the Demon is about to swallow me before their very eyes; instead, they watch calmly, as spectators. I will destroy the worlds for this callousness!"

He journeyed to the western mountain. From there, he began to burn fiercely, to spew forth dreadful heat to consume the worlds.

The great Rishis went to the Devas and said, "A terrible heat has arisen in the middle of the night, striking terror in every heart and threatening to destroy the three worlds!"

The Devas and the Rishis went to Brahma and said, "Pitamaha, what is this terrible heat at midnight that makes the worlds panic? Surya has not yet risen but it already seems as if the Apocalypse is here. Lord, what will happen when he rises?"

The Grandsire replied, “Truly, Surya is preparing to rise today and burn the worlds. As soon as he rises, everything will become ashes. But I have a solution. We all know Kashyapa’s intelligent son Aruna. He has a vast body and great splendour. Let him sit before Surya as his charioteer, and he will absorb the dreadful heat of the Sun. By this the worlds, the Rishis and the dwellers in Swarga shall find their remedy.”

At Brahma’s command, Aruna sat before Surya, and the Sun rose with his heat dimmed by Aruna’s huge form. This is the story of Surya’s wrath and how Garuda’s brother Aruna became his sarathy. Listen next to the answer to your other question.’

CANTO 25

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'As I told you, the many-splendoured Garuda flew across the ocean to his mother's side, where Vinata lived in misery, as her sister's slave. Once Kadru called Vinata and said to her in the presence of her son, "Gentle Vinata, in the midst of the Ocean is an enchanting island where the Nagas dwell. Take me there!"

Vinata, mother of the Bird of splendid feathers, carried her sister, the mother of the serpents, upon her shoulders to that island. Commanded by his mother, Garuda carried the Nagas on his back. Vinata's sky-ranging son flew high, near the Sun, whose heat scorched the snakes and they fainted. Kadru saw her sons unconscious and began to pray to Indra.

"I bow to you, Lord of all the Devas. I bow to you, slayer of Vritra. I bow to you, slayer of Namuchi. O thousand-eyed, O Consort of Sachi. I beg you to protect my sons from searing Surya with your rain! Best of the Devas, you are our great Guardian. Purandara, you pour down torrents. You are Vayu, the clouds, fire, and the lightning in them. You are the propeller of clouds, and you have been called the Great Cloud, which will darken the galaxies at the end of the Yuga. You are deafening thunder and the roaring thunderheads. You are the Creator of the worlds and their Destroyer. You are unvanquished. You are the light of all creatures, Aditya, Vibhavasu, and the Panchamahabhutas. You are the king of the Devas. You are Vishnu. With your thousand eyes, you are the final recourse. You are, O Deva, Amrita and the most precious Soma.

You are the moment, the day, the bala, the kshana. You are the bright fortnight of the waxing Moon, and the dark fortnight, too. You are kaala, kashta, and truti. You are the year, the seasons, the months, the nights, and the days.

You are the Earth with her mountains and forests. You are the sky, resplendent with the Sun. You are the vast Ocean, heaving with waves,

teeming with whales, timmingalas that eat whales, and makaras, and countless fish. You have great fame, always worshipped by wise men and Maharishis, with their minds focused in dhyana.

For the weal of all creatures, you drink Soma rasa at yagnas and the clarified butter offered with holy mantras. Brahmanas worship you with sacrifices to fulfil their desires. O incomparably strong one, the Vedas and Vedangas sing your praises, which is why wise Brahmanas who want to perform sacrifices study the Vedas carefully.'"

CANTO 26

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Upon having his praises sung by Kadru in worship, Indra, king of Devas, who rides Uchchaisravas, finest of steeds, covered the sky with bank upon bank of rainclouds, and commanded them, "Let fall your sacred and life-giving rain!"

Crackling with lightning, roaring at one another in the firmament, the clouds loosed their rain in torrents. In that deluge, the sky looked as if the end of the Yuga had come. It seemed as if the sky danced madly with the waves risen into it, the roar of the clouds, the gashes of lightning, the violent winds that blew. Pitch darkness fell, which no ray of Sun or Moon pierced. Only the deluge raged on.

The Nagas revived and were overjoyed by Indra's downpour. The Earth was covered by water, and the cool, clear liquid flowed down into the Patalas. Bhumi Devi was covered by waves and waves of water, everywhere.

The snakes and their mother arrived safely on the island called Ramaniyaka.'

CANTO 27

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Yes, drenched by Indra's deluge, the Nagas felt cool and happy. Borne by the Eagle of white feathers, they arrived swiftly upon the island. The Creator had appointed that island to be the home of the makaras.

First they saw the eerie Lavana Samudra, the Ocean of Salt. Then they beheld an exotic forest, washed by the waves of that Sea. They heard the heavenly music of Gandharvas and Apsaras. Wondrous trees grew thickly, bearing rare flowers and fruit. They saw magnificent mansions upon the island, with tanks brimming with lotuses. They saw shimmering, azure lakes, and scented fine breezes laden with the fragrance of incense. They saw that the trees here were those that grow only upon the Malaya Mountain, and they reached into heaven, so tall were they. Other trees, as lovely, had their vivid flowers blown everywhere by the breeze.

That enchanted forest was dear to the Gandharvas, and they came to it always for it delighted them. The bees all around seemed drunk and maddened by the sweet honey they drank from the flowers. And the sight of all this was exceedingly delightful. In every way, that forest was charmed and full of rare delight and sacredness, and the sons of Kadru rejoiced to see it and to listen to the sweet songs of its birds.

The Nagas commanded Garuda of great energy, "Fly us to another island as beautiful as this one and where the water sparkles pure. Sky ranger, you must have seen many exquisite places while flying through the air!"

Garuda thought for a moment then asked his mother Vinata, "Why must I do the bidding of the snakes?"

Vinata said to her son, who possessed every virtue, and enormous vitality and power, "Best of birds, I have fallen on bad times and become my sister's slave. The snakes deceived me so that I lost my wager with my sister, which left me as her slave."

Hearing this, the dejected Garuda said to the serpents, “Tell me Nagas, what can we do to become free from our bondage to you?”

The snakes replied, “Bring us the Amrita and then, O Bird, you will be free.’”

CANTO 28

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'When the snakes said this to him, Garuda said to his mother, "I will go and fetch the Amrita. But I want to eat something on my way. Tell me where I can feed."

Vinata replied, "On a remote island in the midst of the Ocean, the Nishadas have their beautiful home. Eat the thousands of Nishadas that live there, and then bring the Amrita. Remember never to harm a Brahmana, for of all creatures, a Brahmana must never be killed. An angry Brahmana is like Agni or Surya, like poison or a sword. A Brahmana is the master of all creatures, and is worshipped by the virtuous. Not even in anger must you kill a Brahmana; enmity with a Brahmana is a sin. My sinless child, neither Agni nor Surya is as devastating as an austere Brahmana when provoked to wrath. A good Brahmana can be known by various signs. He is the firstborn of all creatures, the foremost among the four varnas, the sire and master of all."

Garuda asked, "Mother, what is a Brahmana's form, how does he behave and what is his strength? Does he blaze like fire, or is he of tranquil disposition? Mother, tell me the auspicious signs by which I can recognise a Brahmana."

Vinata replied, "My child, if you swallow a good Brahmana, he will savage your throat like a fish-hook or burn it like a live coal. O, never must you kill a Brahmana, not even in anger."

Out of her love for him, Vinata repeated herself to Garuda, "Your stomach will not receive or digest a good Brahmana."

Though she knew the incomparable strength of her son, she still blessed him with all her heart, for, having been deceived by the snakes, she was still grief-stricken. She said, "May Vayu protect your wings, and Surya and Soma your back; may Agni watch over your head, and the Vasus your whole body.

I will also sit here, performing constant rituals for your wellbeing and success. Go, my son, and fulfil your mission."

Garuda spread his wings and flew up into the sky. Soon he fell upon the Nishadas on their island home, with terrible ferocity, like a ravenous Yama. He raised a squall of dust with his wingbeats, covering the sky; he drained a great part of the Sea, and lashed the forests of the mountains of that island with the waters. Then he spread his gigantic beak wide and blocked every highway of the Nishadas' city. Not knowing where they ran, the panic-stricken Nishadas, blinded by the pall of dust, rushed into that yawning maw, even as birds in a forest swarm into the open sky when their trees shake in a gale.

The hungry Lord of birds, serpent-eater, sky rover, of limitless strength and thought-like speed, clamped his beak shut, swallowing thousands of the Nishada fisherfolk in a blink.'

CANTO 29

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'Now it happened that a Brahmana and his wife also went down the throat of Garuda, and began to burn him like live coals.

Garuda said to him, "O best of Brahmanas, I will open my beak and you must come out quickly, for I must never kill a Brahmana even if he sins."

The Brahmana said, "This Nishada woman is my wife. Let her come out with me."

Garuda said, "Bring the woman with you, but come out at once! Hurry, before the blazing juices of my belly digest you."

The Brahmana and his Nishada wife emerged in a trice and went their way, singing Garuda's praises. Now Garuda spread his wings again and flew up once more into the sky, quick as a thought.

He saw his father, and greeted him reverentially. The Maharishi Kashyapa asked him, "Are you well, my child? Do you have enough to eat daily? Is there enough food for you in the world of men?"

Garuda replied, "My mother is well, as is my brother, and so am I. But father, I do not always get enough to eat, and am at poor peace for that. Now the Nagas have sent me to fetch the Amrita. I mean to find it and bring it back even today, so my mother's slavery will end. My mother said to me, 'Eat the Nishadas.' I ate thousands of them but my hunger is not appeased.

Holy one, tell me what else I can eat to find the strength to wrest the Amrita away by force from the Devas. Tell me what I can consume, by which I can both satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst."

Kashyapa Muni replied, "This lake before you is sacred. It has renown even in Swarga. In it is an elephant, his head turned down, ceaselessly battling a great tortoise who is his elder brother. I will tell you about their enmity from another life. Listen to why they are here.

Once, long ago, there was a great Rishi called Vibhavasu. He was a Sage with a quick and fiery temper. He had a younger brother called Supritika. Supritika did not want to hold his inheritance jointly with his brother and always spoke of partitioning it.

Vibhavasu told Supritika, "Only fools who are blinded by the love of wealth ever think of partitioning their patrimony; for once the patrimony is divided the wealth will delude them and they will fight over it. After the division, invariably false friends will poison the selfish ones' minds against one another, confirming their enmity. Further divided, they will surely fall, and complete ruin will swiftly overtake them.

The wise never endorse the partitioning of a patrimony between brothers, because once that happens the brothers live in constant fear of one another and cease to honour the most sacred Shastras. But Supritika, you will not listen to my counsel but always want to cleave our inheritance. I say to you, you shall become an elephant!'

Supritika cursed Vibhavasu back hotly, 'You will become a tortoise and live in water!'

And so, out of the love for wealth and property, these two have become an elephant and a tortoise. Both are proud of their great bodies and strength, and fight each other with unremitting hatred, without pause. Look, here comes the handsome and enormous elephant Supritika, as always in anger."

The giant tortoise heard him trumpeting and surfaced, agitating the lake violently. Seeing him, the elephant curled his trunk and rushed into the water. The mighty pachyderm beat the water roughly with his trunk, his head and tail; he stamped it angrily with his massive feet, so waves rose and the numberless fish in the lake were swept along upon them, panic-stricken. And the mountainous tortoise lifted his huge head high and, accepting the elephant's challenge, swam eagerly forward for the encounter.

The elephant was six yojanas tall and twice that measure around. The tortoise was three yojanas high and ten around. Wildly, full of wrath, the two began to butt and strike each other, their roars filling the air.

Said Kashyapa Muni to his son Garuda, "Eat both these, bent upon killing each other. Eat that savage elephant who looks like a mountain and the ferocious tortoise like a bank of clouds, and then go forth to fetch the Amrita."

Kashyapa blessed Garuda, "I bless you for your battle against the Devas. May all things auspicious shower their blessings upon you – vessels brimful

of holy water, Brahmanas, sacred cows, and everything else that can bless you. My mighty son, when you fight the Devas let the Riks, the Yajus, the Samas and all the profound mysteries of the Upanishads be your strength!"

Garuda went to the side of the lake, and looked at the expanse of lucid water upon which waterbirds floated. Remembering what his father said, Garuda, swift as the mind, seized the elephant in one claw, the tortoise with the other, and soared into the sky.

He came to a sacred place called Alamba, and saw many divine and lustrous trees there, kalpavrikshas. Those trees trembled in the gusts of wind that his wings raised. The trees of golden branches feared they would be broken. Seeing the kalpavrikshas shaking with fright, Garuda flew to some other trees, indescribably beautiful. They were gigantic, and their branches were made of many shimmering jewels and their fruits were of gold and silver. Water from the sea washed their trunks.

Among these, and even loftier than the others, stood a great patriarchal Nyagrodha. Seeing Garuda flaring towards it, swift as the mind, that Pipal said, "Sit upon this branch of mine, a hundred yojanas long, and eat the elephant and the tortoise."

Garuda, best of birds, big as a mountain, alighted on that prodigious bough, and at once the great leafy branch, home to thousands of lesser birds, broke with a sound like a clap of thunder.'

CANTO 30

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'As soon as Garuda's feet rested upon it, that branch snapped like a twig. Garuda cast his gaze around him in wonder and saw Balakhilya Rishis hanging, head down, from the branch, in deep dhyana. Fearing that they would die if the branch fell on the ground far below, in a wink, still clutching the elephant and the tortoise in his claws, Garuda also seized the falling branch of a hundred yojanas in his beak. He rose into the sky with his new burden and the old one. The Rishis were wonderstruck at what the Avian had done, which no Deva could have achieved.

They said, "Let this greatest of birds be called Garuda, for the impossible burden that he bears."

At his ease, Garuda flew through the sky and whenever he passed above a mountain it shook in the gusts from his wingbeats. Many lands and wonders he saw beneath him as he flew along at his great leisure. Then he spied a place where he could land softly, saving the tiny thumb-sized Balakhilyas: it was Mount Gandhamadana, dwarapalaka to the heavens.

He saw his father Kashyapa sitting in tapasya upon the fragrant mountain. Kashyapa also saw his radiant and vital son, big as a peak, quick as light, deadly as a Brahmana's curse, inconceivable, ineffable, fearsome, blazing like Agni, invincible so not the Devas, Danavas and the greatest Rakshasas could vanquish him; that sky ranger who could crush mountains, drain away whole seas, and, indeed, destroy the three worlds, looking as fierce as Yama.

Seeing Garuda approach and knowing what his son wanted to achieve, the illumined Kashyapa warned him, "Be very careful, my son, for you might have to suffer if you are rash or impatient. If you annoy the Balakhilyas, who live by imbibing the rays of the Sun, they might smite you with their tapasysa shakti."

Then, for his son's sake, Kashyapa addressed the Balakhilyas of great fortune, whose sins had been consumed in the fire of their asceticism.

Kashyapa said, "You whose wealth is tapasya, Garuda is on a mission for the welfare of every living creature. Great is the task upon which he goes forth. Bless him, great ones."

When they heard what Kashyapa said, the little Munis relinquished the branch and went away to the sacred mountain Himavat to continue their tapasya. After the Rishis had gone, Vinata's son spoke to his father, and his voice was unclear for the massive bough in his beak.

Garuda asked, "Illustrious father, where shall I let down the arm of the tree? Show me a place where there are no men."

Kashyapa now told Garuda about a mountain, always covered with snow, full of sheer valleys and deep caves, where no ordinary creatures could go even in imagination. Kashyapa gave his son directions to find that mountain. Carrying the branch, the elephant and the tortoise, Garuda flashed away towards that inaccessible hidden mountain. The branch of the tree that he carried in his beak could not be circumscribed by a rope made from the stretched hides of a hundred cows.

For lakhs of yojanas flew Garuda, in a mere moment. And following Kashyapa's directions, he arrived over the isolated mountain and dropped the tremendous branch from his beak. It fell with a great sound, and that prince of mountains shook when the storm that Garuda's spanless wings raised struck it. Its trees poured down their flowers in a helpless rain. Its jewelled peaks were themselves loosened and came crumbling down all its sides.

The bough felled countless trees with dark leaves and golden flowers, which seemed like clouds with lightning in them. The fallen trees, dyed in mountain metals, shone as if the Sun bathed them in his light.

Garuda now perched on the summit of that mountain, and ate both the elephant and the tortoise. Finishing his great meal, he spread his wings and rose into the sky, quick as a thought.

In Devaloka, frightening omens appeared and the Devas trembled. Indra's Vajra blazed as if in terror. Flaming meteors fell out of the sky, smoking, as plain by daylight as they might be in the night. The weapons of the Vasus, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Sadhyas, the Maruts and other Devas began to spend themselves in contention against one another. Why,

nothing like this had happened even during the war against the Asuras, the Devasura yuddha.

Rough winds blew, peals of thunder threatened to crack open the sky, and meteors continued to stream down in thousands. Without a cloud in its vacancy, the sky roared and roared. Blood flowed copiously from the body of the king of the Devas. The divine garlands the other Devas wore faded and they felt weak in all their limbs.

Then clouds scudded into the sky and poured down a heavy rain of blood. The dust raised by the winds dimmed the lustre of the crowns the Devas wore. Indra, of a thousand yagnas, and the other gods trembled with fright and said to their Guru Brihaspati, "Master, what are these dreadful omens? I see no enemy on the horizon, then why do the very elements assail us?"

Brihaspati replied, "O Indra of a thousand eyes, you have been careless and have sinned. And a being born by the tapas of the Balakhilyas, the mighty son of Kashyapa and Vinata, one who is a sky ranger and can assume any form he chooses, is coming to take the Amrita from you. The bird is the strongest of the strong and can do what seems impossible. He will indeed take the Amrita from you."

Indra said to the guardians of the Amrita, "Brihaspati says that a bird of measureless strength and energy is on his way to steal the Amrita. I am warning you, so he does not take it by force."

The Devas were amazed, but they prepared to defend the Amrita. All of them stood around the Nectar, and Indra who wields the Vajra of thunder stood with them. The Devas wore priceless golden breastplates, jewelled, and impenetrable armours of hide. They carried sharp blades and numberless other strange and powerful weapons, which gave off sparks of fire, and smoke. They carried chakras and spiked gadas, trisulas, khatvangas, all great and awesome: weapons suited to each great god, mystic astras: supernatural missiles.

Wearing unearthly ornaments, splendid with the brilliant armour and weapons, the Devas waited, now calmly determined, those peerless ones, to protect the Amrita. They who could devastate the cities of the Asuras stood there in forms as awesome and bright as fire. The battlefield to be sparkled with thousands of spiked and jewelled maces, even as the sky was lit by the rays of the Sun.'

CANTO 31

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka asked, 'Sauti, son of Suta, what was Indra's sin, his carelessness? How was Garuda born by the tapas of the Balakhilyas? How did Kashyapa Muni, a Brahmana, have the king of birds for his son? How was Garuda invincible and the strongest of creatures? How could he go anywhere at will? How did he have such boundless vitality? If the Purana has answers to these questions, I would hear them.'

Sauti said, 'Indeed, the Purana deals with what you ask. Listen, O Dvija, to the answers to your questions.

Once upon a time, Kashyapa Prajapati undertook a yagna to have children, a putrakama yagna, and the Devas, the Rishis and Gandharvas all came to help him. Kashyapa gave Indra charge of fetching the sacrificial fuel for the fire, and with him the Balakhilyas and all the other Devas. Indra of untold strength easily hefted a mountainous portion of firewood and was bringing it to the yagnashala. On his way, he saw a number of tiny, less than thumb-sized Rishis, who together carried along a single strand of a palasa leaf. Those Rishis were obviously starving, for they were skin and bones. Suddenly, they staggered into a pool of water collected in the indentation on the path made by the hoofprint of a cow. They flailed about and struggled in that minuscule pool.

Purandara, Indra proud of his strength, looked at them bemused; then, laughing uproariously, calling out to the little Munis in mockery, he left them there: why, he stepped right over their heads. Those Rishis blazed with sorrow and wrath. They prepared to perform a great yagna to have their revenge, and hearing about it Indra became terrified.

Listen, O Saunaka, to what those excellent and austere Balakhilyas did. They poured ghee into a fire of sacrifice, chanting mantras loudly:

"Let there be another Indra among the gods, who can fly anywhere at will, summon limitless strength and energy, and strike fear into the Deva

king. By the fruit of our tapasya, let such a one arise, swift as the mind, and fierce!"

And the king of the Devas, he of a hundred yagnas, heard about the Balakhilyas' sacrifice, and flew to Kashyapa of the austere vrata for protection. When Prajapati Kashyapa heard what Indra said, he went to the Balakhilyas and asked them if their sacrifice had been successful.

And those honest Rishis replied, "Let it be as you say!"

Kashyapa pacified them, "At the word of Brahma, Indra has been made Lord of the three worlds. You Munis want to create another Indra, but it does not become you, noble Sages, to render Brahma's word false. Yet, let not your sacrifice become futile: let there come into being another Indra, but a king of birds, a Pakshiraja of untold strength, vitality and speed. Indra begs you to take pity on him."

The Balakhilyas first offered Kashyapa Prajapati worship, then said to him, "Prajapati, our yagna is for an Indra! It is also a putrakama yagna for you to have a son. We leave its completion to you; do what you see as being proper and wise."

Meanwhile, Daksha's chaste, fortunate, virtuous daughter Vinata wanted to have children and, having completed her worship and bathed, she came to her husband Kashyapa, in her fertile time.

Kashyapa said to her, "Devi, the yagna I undertook has borne fruit, and you shall have what you want. Two heroic sons you will bear, who shall become lords of the worlds. Because of the tapasya of the Balakhilyas and by my own penance, your sons shall have great fortune and be worshipped throughout Swarga, Bhumi and Patala."

Kashyapa and Vinata came together and then he said to her, "Bear these auspicious seeds with great care. Your two sons will be the lords of all winged creatures. These valiant rangers of the sky will be revered in every realm, and have the gift of assuming any form they choose.

The gratified Prajapati then said to Indra, "You will have two brothers of boundless tejas and strength, who will never harm you but be friendly towards you. Do not grieve anymore, you will continue to be Lord of the worlds. But never again slight those that worship the Brahman, nor dare insult the Munis, who are wrathful and whose curses are more potent than your thunderbolt."

Hearing this Indra's fears were stilled, and he returned to Devaloka.

Her purpose fulfilled, Vinata was also joyful, and, in time, she gave birth to two sons, Aruna and Garuda. And Aruna, of the flawed limbs, became the charioteer of the Sun. And Garuda was given sovereignty over the race of birds. O you of the line of Bhrigu, Bhargava, now hear about the great achievement of Garuda.'

CANTO 32

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, "Great Brahmanas, the Devas prepared for battle, and soon enough Garuda appeared before those ones of light. When the gods saw how great he was, how bright and strong, they shook with fright; why, they began to strike one another with their weapons.

Among those guarding the Soma was a certain Brahmana, the divine architect, measureless in might, bright as a bolt of lightning and terrifically vital. The encounter between Garuda and him lasted a mere moment, before, devastated by talons, beak and wings, the Deva lay dead on the field.

Garuda raised such a squall of dust with his massive wings that the three Lokas were darkened by it, and the Devas swooned in that stormy darkness of dust. The immortal guardians of the Amrita were blinded and no longer saw Garuda. Then, freely, at his will, he raked them with beak and claw; he swatted them like flies with his wings; he mangled them as he chose in Swarga.

Indra, God of a thousand eyes, commanded Vayu the Wind, "Scatter the dust quickly, Maruta, or we are lost!"

Vayu blew away the pall of dust and, when they saw again, the Devas attacked Garuda. He began to roar like the stormclouds of the Pralaya, terrifying every creature alive. He spread his wings, and the king of birds rose into the sky, and the Devas armed with every conceivable weapon, including chakras bright as suns, saw him above them. Never pausing, Garuda attacked them from above, and indeed from every side, with a storm of many weapons, with talon, beak and wing.

Raked by his claws, savaged by his beak, the Devas bled in rills. Overwhelmed by the lord of birds, the Sadhyas and the Gandharvas fled eastward, the Vasus with the Rudras to the south, the Adityas to the west,

and the Aswins towards the north. Having great tejas, they retreated while fighting, always gazing back at their redoubtable enemy.

Garuda battled the Yakshas, Aswakranda of great valour, Rainuka, the bold Krathanaka, Tapana, Uluka, Swasanaka, Nimesha, Praruja and Pulina. And the son of Vinata smashed them with wings, talons and beak, like punitive Siva himself, who wields the Pinaka in wrath when the Yuga ends. Those dreadful and fearless ones soon looked like great black clouds raining blood from all their limbs.

Having slain the Yakshas or put them to flight, Garuda came to the chalice of Amrita. He saw that it was surrounded by fire on all sides. And the hissing flames of that fire covered the very sky and, fanned by gusts of wind, they seemed to want to devour the Sun himself.

Shining Garuda sprouted ninety times ninety beaks, drained the waters of many rivers with them, flew back to the fire that guarded the Amrita, and doused it with those waters.

Now he became diminutive, very small indeed, so he could enter into the niche where the chalice of Amrita was kept.'

CANTO 33

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Having assumed a golden body, bright as a Sundrop, the bird king flashed into the chamber of the Amrita like a cataract into a sea. He saw that a wheel, its edges sharp as razors, spun at great speed, endlessly around the Amrita. The Devas had created it to cut any hopeful thieves into slivers. Garuda made himself smaller still and easily flew through the deadly wheel. Now he saw two huge blazing serpents, forked tongues like streaks of lightning, jaws spewing fire, eyes aflame, restless and hissing like twin storms, their venom deadly. Their lidless unwinking eyes burned with quenchless ferocity. Either of them would have instantly made ashes of any intruder they spied.

The bird of fair plumage threw dust into their eyes and, when they could not see, he set upon them, beak and talons flashing, from every side. In moments, Vinata's son ripped those Nagas into shreds.

Immediately, he took the chalice of Amrita from its niche, smashing the uncanny humming contrivance that surrounded it with a blow of his beak, and rose away with the nectar, at speed of thought. He emerged with the Amrita, but did not drink it, and tireless as ever, he flew homewards, dimming the light of the Sun in the sky.

On his way, Vinata's son met Vishnu in the firmament. Narayana was gratified that Garuda had not drunk the Amrita. That God who knows no decay said to the sky crosser, "I want to grant you a boon."

Garuda replied, "Let me then stay above you." He said again, "Let me be immortal and free from every sickness without drinking Amrita."

Vishnu said to the son of Vinata, "So be it."

Garuda received the two boons, and said to Vishnu, "I also grant you a boon, so ask me for something, O owner of the six gunas."

Vishnu asked mighty Garuda to become his vahana, his mount. He made the Pakshiraja sit upon the flagstaff of his vimana, saying, "Even so you

shall stay above me."

And King Bird replied to Narayana, "So be it," and flashed away, racing the wind.

As Garuda coursed along with the Amrita, Indra cast his Vajra at him. But Garuda only laughed when the thunderbolt fell on him. He said to Indra, sweetly, "I worship the Rishi Dadichi from whose bones the Vajra is made. I worship the Vajra and you, too, O Lord of the thousand yagnas. I feel no twinge of pain from your thunderbolt, but now I cast off one feather of mine, and you shall not find its end."

The Pakshiraja gave up one of his feathers and every creature saw that shining feather and felt incredibly glad, for it was so beautiful and radiant. They said, "Let this bird be called Suparna, he of the fair feathers."

Thousand-eyed Indra Purandara watched this magical happening and felt the bird was truly some very great Being, and spoke to him. Indra said to Garuda, "Pakshishreshta, O best of birds, I want to know the extent of your awesome strength, and I want to have eternal friendship with you."

CANTO 34

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'Garuda said, "Purandara, let there be friendship between us, just as you wish. You know my strength is hard to resist. Indra of a thousand yagnas, the virtuous never extol their own prowess, nor do they praise themselves.

But since we are now friends and you ask me, I will tell you about my strength, though I repeat that never do the good speak of their own merits.

O Sakra, I can bear the Earth, with all her mountains, forests, oceans and you yourself standing upon her, on a single feather of mine. I am blessed with such strength that I can bear the three worlds, and all they contain, mobile and unmoving, and never feel tired."

O Saunaka, when Garuda said this, Indra, king of the Devas, who wears the crown of the three worlds and always works for their weal, said, "Truly it must be as you say, for anything is possible with you. Accept my deep and heartfelt friendship now, and if you have no need for the Amrita, return it to me: for those to whom you are taking it will always be our enemies."

Garuda answered, "There is a reason why I am taking the Amrita. I shall not give it to anyone to drink, O thousand-eyed; as soon as I set it down you can make away with it again, O Lord of Swarga!"

Indra said, "Greatest Avian, I am satisfied and I thank you. Ask me, O Pakshiraja, for any boon you want."

Garuda remembered how the sons of Kadru turned the tail of Uchchaisravas black, making his mother Vinata a slave.

He said, "I will always do your bidding, O Indra. Let snakes become my food!"

The slayer of the Danavas said to him, "So be it!" and flew to Hari, Devadeva, God of gods, Mahatman, and Lord of Yogins. Vishnu sanctioned everything Garuda had said.

The lustrous King of Swarga said to Garuda, "I will bring away the Amrita as soon as you set it down," and with that bid farewell to Suparna.

Garuda flew like an arrow to his mother, and cried in joy to the serpents, his half-brothers, "I have brought the Amrita; let me set it down on some kusa grass.

O Nagas, you must bathe and perform your worship, then come back here and sit down to drink it. And from today, as you promised, let my mother no longer be a slave, but free, for I have done what you asked, I have brought the Amrita."

The snakes said, "So be it," and went to perform their ablutions.

Meanwhile, Indra took the chalice of Amrita and flew back to Swarga. The Nagas bathed, performed their nitya karma, their daily devotions, and other sacred rites, and hurried back, in great excitement to drink the Amrita. They found the bed of kusa grass, on which the chalice had been placed, empty. In frenzy, they fell to licking the sharp grass and their tongues, bisected by the kusa blades, have been forked ever since.

Having been touched by the Amrita, the kusa grass was sanctified and has been sacred ever after. This is how Garuda fetched the Amrita from Devaloka, and how the serpents had their tongues divided.

Then Suparna sported in delight in the surrounding forest, in the company of his mother. Mighty and worshipped by all beings that traverse the sky, he further pleased his mother by feeding on the snakes.

The man who listens to this story, or recites it to a gathering of pious Brahmanas, surely finds heaven for himself, for great is the punya to be gained by recounting the legend of Garuda.'

CANTO 35

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Son of Suta, you have told us why Kadru cursed her sons the serpents, and also why Aruna cursed his mother Vinata. You have told us how Kashyapa, their husband, blessed Kadru and Vinata with boons. You have told us the names of Vinata's sons, but you have not told us the names of the sons of Kadru. We are keen to hear the names of the greatest among Kadru's sons.'

Sauti said, 'Great Munis, to name all the serpents would be a lengthy task, and I will tell you the names only of the main among them. Listen, O you whose wealth is tapasya.

First born was Sesha, after him Vasuki. Then came Airavata, Takshaka, Karkotaka, Dhananjaya, Kalakeya, Mani, Purana, Pinjaraka, Elapatra, Vamana, Nila, Anila, Kalmasha, Savala, Aryaka, Ugra, Kalasapotaka, Suramukha, Dadhimukha, Vimalapindaka, Apia, Karotaka, Samkha, Valisikha, Nisthanaka, Hemaguha, Nahusha, Pingala, Vahyakarna, Hastipada, Mudgarapindaka, Kamvala, Aswatara, Kaliyaka, Vritta, Samvartaka, Padma, Mahapadma, Sankhamukha, Kushmandaka, Kshemaka, Pindaraka, Karavira, Pushpadanshtraka, Bilwaka, Bilwapandara, Mushikada, Sankhasiras, Purnabhadra, Haridraka, Aparajita, Jyotika, Srivaha, Kauravya, Dhritarashtra, Sankhapinda, Virajas, Subahu, Salipinda, Prabhakara, Hastipinda, Pitharaka, Sumuksha, Kaunapashana, Kuthara, Kunjara, Kumuda, Kumudaksha, Tittri, Halika, Kardana, Bahumulaka, Karkara, Akarkara, Kundodara, and Mahodara.

These, O best of Dvijas, are the main Nagas. The sons of these and their sons are beyond counting: they are thousands of millions.'

CANTO 36

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Child, you have named many of the most powerful Nagas. What did they do when they heard about the curse?'

Sauti said, 'Sesha, first among them, of great renown, left his mother and performed rigorous tapasya. Observing stern vratas, he sat in penance upon Gandhamadana, at Badari, at Gokarna, the forest of Pushkara, and the foothills of Himavat. He dwelt in those sacred places, some holy for their waters and others for their earth.

Never swerving from his vows, single-mindedly, his passions under perfect control, he did tapasya. Brahma, Pitamaha of all, saw that ascetic with matted jata, wearing rags, and his body and skin shrivelled and parched by his severe austerities.

Brahma said to the fortunate hermit of rare fortitude, "What are you doing, O Sesha? Think also of the well-being of the creatures of the worlds. Sinless one, you are afflicting every creature with your searing penance. Sesha, tell me what desire impels this tapasya."

Sesha replied, "All my full brothers are evil-minded, and I do not want to live among them. Grant me this boon, Lord. They are like enemies, always envious of one another, and that is why I am sitting alone in tapasya. I do not want to even see them. They are cruel to Vinata and her son.

Is Vinata's son, who ranges the sky, not another brother of ours? But they envy him. He is also much stronger than us through our father Kashyapa's boon to him. Because of my brothers' envy and their viciousness I am sitting here in tapasya, and I mean to cast off this body so that I never need to be with my evil brothers, even at another stage of our lives."

Brahma said, "Sesha, I know what your brothers are and they are in mortal danger from your mother's curse: this I have ordained. Don't grieve for them, but ask me for a boon. I am pleased with you and I will give you

anything. You are set on the path of virtue; may your heart journey far down this high way and become ever more established in goodness and tapasya."

Sesha said, "Divine Pitamaha, Lord of all, this is the boon I want: that my heart always delights in goodness and in sacred tapas."

Brahma said, "Sesha, I am gratified with your self-denial and love for peace. But I have a task for you, O Naga: bear this world, unsteady with her mountains and forests, her seas, cities and asramas, so that she becomes stable."

Sesha said, "Lord of all creatures, bestower of boons, Lord of the Earth, Lord of the Universe, I will do as you say. Set Bhumi upon my head."

Brahman said, "Nagottama, best of snakes, burrow beneath the Earth; she will give you a tunnel to pass through. O Sesha, by bearing the Earth upon your head and holding her steady, you shall certainly do something that I will greatly value."

Then the elder brother of Vasuki, king of the snakes, entered a hole in the ground and passed through to the other side of the Earth. He supported the Goddess Bhumi Devi upon his head, with her girdle of seas.

Brahma said, "Sesha, best of snakes, you are Dharma Deva himself, because you support the Earth, with all that she bears, by yourself, even as I might, or Indra."

The Naga Sesha, the Lord Ananta, of untold might, lives under the Earth, supporting her at the word of Brahma. The illustrious Grandsire, foremost of immortals, then gave Vinata's son Suparna to Ananta, to help him.'

CANTO 37

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'Vasuki, best among Nagas, heard his mother's curse and wondered how to escape it. He consulted with his brothers, Airavata and the rest.

Vasuki said, "Sinless ones, you know about the curse of our mother, and we must try to escape it. There is a remedy for every other curse, but none for one pronounced by one's mother.

When I think that this curse was spoken in the presence of the Almighty, Infinite and True One, my heart trembles. Ah, surely we are as good as dead. Otherwise, why did the Lord not prevent our mother from cursing us?

We must waste no time, but think how we can escape the curse. You are all wise and intelligent. Together, we can surely find a remedy: why, even as the Devas found Agni of old, when the Fire God hid himself in a cave, we must find a way to stop Janamejaya from undertaking his sarpa yagna, a way to save our lives!"

The assembled Punnagas, all wise sons of Kadru, then gave their counsel for avoiding death at the snake sacrifice.

One group of serpents said, "We will disguise ourselves as lofty Brahmanas and go and tell Janamejaya, 'This yagna of yours is sinful and you should not undertake it.'"

Other Nagas said, "We should turn ourselves into his closest counsellors. He will certainly ask for our advice, and we shall tell him to avoid the sarpa yagna at all costs, listing the many evils it will bring down upon the world."

Another vicious Naga advised, "Let one of us bite the sacrificial priest who is to conduct the sarpa yagna. Indeed, let us kill every Brahmana alive that knows how to conduct a sarpa yagna and might become the Ritvik at the king's sacrifice!"

One more virtuous and kindly said, "This is evil counsel, and nothing is as dangerous as killing a Brahmana. When one's life is threatened, one must

depend on the ways of virtue to save oneself, for evil ways finally destroy the very world."

Another Naga suggested, "We will turn into clouds full of lightning, and pouring down rain onto the yagna fire, extinguish it!"

Other snakes, the best of their kind, said, "Let us go in stealth by night and steal the vessel with the Soma rasa. That will interrupt the sacrifice."

"Let us unleash millions of our kind around the yagna, to bite men everywhere and spread terror and panic."

"Let us defile the sanctified offerings of food with excrement and urine."

"Let us become the king's Ritviks, and ask for our dakshina when the yagna begins. He will be in our power and give us whatever we ask for. We can ask that the yagna be stopped."

"When the king swims in the river, let us bind him and carry him away to Patala. That way the yagna will never be performed."

Other Nagas, who thought themselves sage, said, "Let us go and bite Janamejaya. When he dies, the threat will have been torn up by its root. O you that hear with your eyes, this is our counsel, and let us decide on the best course and act immediately."

Now silence fell, and they waited for Vasuki to decide. After some moments' thought, Vasuki said, "I do not like the counsel of any of you; I do not think any of it will benefit us. I think that only the grace of Kashyapa can save us. Nagas, my heart does not believe that there is another way that will truly bring welfare upon my race and me. I am anxious, for I am the one who must decide what to do, and I must take responsibility for the decision, the praise or blame for it."'

CANTO 38

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'When the other snakes and Vasuki had spoken, Elapatra said, "We cannot prevent the sarpa yagna. Also, it is not from King Janamejaya of the Pandavas that this terror issues, so that we can avoid calamity by attacking him. O Vasuki, one cursed by fate has recourse only to fate; nothing else can save him. Fate is the root of our fear and anger.

Listen to me. When she uttered her curse, I lay trembling in our mother's lap. O Best among Nagas, O splendid Lord Vasuki, coiled there I heard what the shocked Devas said to Brahma Pitamaha.

The Devas said, 'Pitamaha, Devadeva, who but the vicious Kadru could give birth to such precious children and then curse them, even in your holy presence? And you, O Brahma, endorsed her curse, saying, "So be it." Tell us why you did not prevent her, instead.'

Brahma replied, 'The Nagas have multiplied. They are cruel, terrible and venomous. I did not stop Kadru because I wish the welfare of my other creatures. The serpents that are poisonous and those that otherwise sin, biting men and beasts for no reason other than the pleasure they take from inflicting pain and death, shall indeed be killed. But the serpents that are virtuous and harmless shall not be affected.

Listen to how, when the time comes, the good snakes might escape death. In the race of the Yayavaras a great Rishi called Jaratkaru shall be born, wise and his passions controlled. Jaratkaru shall have a son called Astika. He will stop the sarpa yagna, and all the good snakes will escape death.'

The Devas said, 'O knower of truth, on whom will the Mahamuni of great asceticism and virility father his illumined son?'

Brahma replied, 'That best of Brahmanas shall beget a son of great tejas on a wife bearing the same name as him. Vasuki, king of the Nagas, has a

sister called Jaratkaru. Astika shall be born to her, and he will save the race of snakes.’

Elapatra continued, “The Devas said to Brahma, ‘So be it then,’ and the Pitamaha returned to Brahmaloka, loftiest world.

O Vasuki, I see your sister Jaratkaru here. I say to you, to save us all give her to the Rishi Jaratkaru as alms, to be his wife. For I heard that this shall be the means to our release from the curse, and the Sage is abroad seeking a wife who bears his own name.”’

CANTO 39

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Dvijottama, best of the twice-born, the serpents were delighted when they heard what Elapatra said.

"Well done!" they cried, and "Well said!"

From that time, Vasuki raised his sister Jaratkaru with the greatest care and joy. Not long after, the Devas and Asuras churned the Kshirasagara together, Varuna's domain. Vasuki, the mighty, became their churning-cord.

As soon as the churning was over, the serpent king came before Brahma Pitamaha, with the Devas. The Devas said, "Lord, Vasuki suffers terribly for fear of his mother's curse. He wishes for the deliverance of his race, and we beg you to remove his grief. This king of the Nagas has always been our friend and helpmate. Devadeva, be kind to him, assuage the fever in his heart."

Brahma replied, "Devas, let Vasuki do as Elapatra told him. The time has come, and only those that are evil shall die, not the good. Jaratkaru has been born, and the Brahmana sits in stern tapasya. At an auspicious time, Vasuki should give his sister to the Muni. Devas, Elapatra spoke the truth and nothing less."

Vasuki, king of the Nagas, ordered his people, who were gathered there in great numbers, "Keep a close watch on the Rishi Jaratkaru. As soon as he asks for a wife, come and tell me. The salvation of our people depends on it."

CANTO 40

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Son of Suta, tell me why the brilliant Muni whom you call Jaratkaru, was so named in the world. Tell us the etymology of that name.'

Sauti said, 'Jara means to waste, and Karu implies vastness. This Rishi's body was once enormous, and he gradually wore it away with relentless penance. O Brahmanas, Vasuki's sister was called Jaratkaru for the same reason.'

Saunaka, the virtuous, said with a smile, 'Yes, this is true, I have heard what you say before. But tell me how Astika was born.'

Sauti replied from what he knew from the Shastras. 'After Vasuki commanded his Nagas to inform him the moment Rishi Jaratkaru asked for a bride, many days passed but the Sage continued his tapasya. His seed retained within his body in brahmacharya, he wandered the Earth without fear and showed no sign that he wanted to take a wife.

Later, O Brahmana, a king named Parikshit was born into the race of the Kurus. Like his great-grandsire Pandu, he was mighty-armed, the greatest bowman of his time, and he was fond of the hunt.

He ranged the jungles at will, hunting deer, boar, wolf, wild buffalo and many other beasts as well. One day, he shot a deer with an arrow and that creature ran from him, which no deer had ever done before. He chased it deep into the forest, even as Rudra once pursued the deer Yagna through the skies, bow in hand.

This deer plunged deeper and deeper into the forest and the king after it. Exhausted and thirsty, Parikshit broke into a clearing and saw an emaciated Rishi who sat drinking the froth from the milk that some calves sucked from their mother's teats. Running up to the Muni, and raising his bow, the tired and hungry king demanded, "Brahmana, I am Parikshit, son of

Abhimanyu, and king of the Kurus. I shot a deer with my arrow and it escaped me. Have you seen the animal?"

But that Muni had sworn a mowna vrata, a vow of silence, and did not reply. The king saw a dead snake lying nearby. In anger, he picked up the carcass with the end of his bow and draped it across the silent Muni's shoulders. The Sage made no protest, and still spoke no word, good or bad. Parikshit's anger left him; he was full of remorse.

He turned back to his capital, while the Muni sat on in dhyana. The Sage knew that Parikshit was a tiger among kings, and a sovereign of dharma. Though he had been insulted, the Muni forgave the king and did not curse him. Parikshit of the race of Bharata did not know that the one he had insulted was a Rishi, otherwise he would never have behaved as he did.

That Rishi had a son called Sringin, a youth gifted with great tejas, of solemn vows and profound penance, but easily angered and difficult to appease. He invariably sought to work for the good of all creatures and often sat rapt before his Guru, in dhyana and worship.

At his Guru's word, he was on his way home when, O Brahmanottama, a friend of his, another Sage's son called Krisa told him what had happened to his father while he was away: how Parikshit had draped the dead snake round his neck.

Sringin blazed up in anger, smoking like poison.

Krisa said laughing, "Be not proud ever again, Sringin; though you are a Muni and have great tejas, your father wears a dead snake round his neck! Dare not speak haughtily to us true Rishis' sons, ever again. You have lost your manhood today when you see your father with a dead snake round him and can do nothing about it. Ah, but your father has done nothing to deserve such humiliation, and that saddens me most of all, even as if I myself have been punished for some crime I did not commit."'

CANTO 41

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Mighty Sringin's eyes burned in wrath. He asked Krisa in a soft, dangerous voice, "How does my father wear a dead snake today?"

Krisa replied, "King Parikshit draped the snake round your father's neck."

Sringin asked, "What wrong did my father do that evil king? Krisa, answer me this, and I will show you the power of my tapasya shakti."

Krisa said, "The son of Abhimanyu was out hunting and wounded a stag with his arrow. The creature escaped him and he chased it through the forest and came upon your father sitting in dhyana. The excited and tired king demanded to know if your father had seen the wounded deer.

Your father had taken a mowna vrata, and did not reply. Hungry, thirsty and tired, Parikshit repeatedly asked your father the same question and he got no reply. In anger, the king picked up the snake's carcass with the tip of his bow and draped it round your meditating sire's shoulders. Sringin, your father has yet to stir from his dhyana, and Parikshit has returned to his capital Hastinapura, city of elephants."

Sringin's eyes turned red and, in the grip of fury, the Rishi's son touched some holy water and cursed Parikshit. "In seven nights' time, the serpent Takshaka will take the sinner Parikshit, who dares defile a Brahmana with a snake's carcass, to the land of Yama!"

When he had cursed the king, Sringin went home and saw his father sitting in dhyana, the dead snake still around him. Sringin's anger and grief flared up again. He sobbed and said, "I have cursed the wretched Kuru king for what he dared do to you, and in seven days Takshaka's bite will take him to the land of the dead."

But his father said, "My son, I am not pleased with you. Rishis should never give in to anger. We live in that great king's country; he protects us with his dharma. We should forgive him any transgression. If you break

dharma, my child, I say to you, dharma will break you. If the king did not protect us, we could never pursue our spiritual lives in peace and safety, and find the great punya that we do; he deserves a portion of our punya.

Parikshit protects his subjects even as his great-grandsire did, and he should be forgiven anything he does. The Rajarishi was tired and hungry, and he did not know about my vow of silence. My son, a country without a king is plagued with all kinds of evil and disasters.

The king punishes criminals, and the fear of punishment creates peace. In peace, the people pursue their svadharma, their natural duty, undisturbed, just as we do our spiritual lives and perform our sacred rites. The king establishes dharma; he brings Swarga to Bhumi. He protects yagnas from being desecrated or disturbed, and this pleases the Devas. They send down timely rains, which grow grains and herbs, which nourish and preserve men.

Manu says that a sovereign Kshatriya ruler of the destinies of men is equal to ten Brahmanas who know the Veda. Parikshit did what he did because of exhaustion, hunger and ignorance of my vow. O, why have you cursed that great one in rash childishness? My son, in no way does the king deserve a curse from us.'"

CANTO 42

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Sringin said to his father, "Whether I have been rash or childish, my father, whether you like it or not, whether what I have done is dharma or adharma, my curse shall not be proved vain. For I have never lied in my life, not even in jest."

His father Samika said, "My son, I know that you have great power and you are truthful. I know your curse will be fulfilled. Yet, even a grown son must always seek his father's advice so the good son might find great fame. You are just a boy, how much more you need wise counsel.

You are always at tapasya, but the wrath of even the illumined, who own the six lofty qualities, only grows. You do certainly keep your vows and observe dharma. But you are young, still rash and prone to anger, and I know that I must counsel you.

You live eating the fruit and roots of the forest, and it is your nature to do so. You must not murder the punya that accrues from your asceticism, but kill this dreadful anger instead. You acquire your merit with great pain and effort; anger robs you of so much virtue.

Those who lose their punya cannot find calm, and only calm bestows success on the long labours of Rishis. You must conquer your passions, especially your anger; you must become forgiving. With forgiveness a man gains worlds that even Brahma cannot have.

I live the way of peace, and I must do whatever good I can. I must send word to the king and tell him that my son, a callow youth of undeveloped intellect, has cursed him in anger, at seeing what Parikshit did to me."

That Maharishi sent his disciple Gaurmukha of gentle manners and deep tapasya to Hastinapura, telling him that he must first enquire formally and politely after the king's health and well-being, and only then deliver his dreadful message.

Soon, Gaurmukha came to the city and the palace of the monarch of the Kuruvamsa. He first sent word of his arrival to Parikshit through a palace guard at the gate.

When he entered the king's sabha, Parikshit duly honoured the Dvija. When he had refreshed himself after his journey that Brahmana delivered his terrible message, exactly as his Guru Samika had instructed him to, in the presence of all the king's ministers.

Gaurmukha said, 'Rajadhiraja, king of kings, in your kingdom there lives a Rishi called Samika, virtuous of soul, his passions controlled, peaceful, and given to stern penance. O tiger among men, while the Rishi kept a mowna vrata, you draped a dead snake around his neck with the tip of your bow.

Samika himself forgave what you did, but not his son. Rajadhiraja, his son cursed you, without his father's knowledge, that within seven nights the Naga Takshaka will kill you. Samika repeatedly asked his son to save your life, but, alas, there is no one who can undo the boy Sringin's curse.

Sringin still remains enraged, O King, which is why Samika has sent me to you, for your welfare."

The Kuru Rajarishi heard the savage message, and remembered his own angry sin. He became dejected and remorseful, especially when he heard that the Maharishi Samika had sworn a vow of silence. Parikshit felt doubly contrite when he realised how kindly and forgiving Samika was that he had sent Gaurmukha to warn him about the curse.

The king, who looked like a Deva, did not grieve as much for his impending death, as he did for what he had done to the Rishi Samika.

He sent Gaurmukha back, saying, "Let Samika Muni bless me."

When the messenger left, anxiety struck Parikshit like an arrow. He consulted his ministers and decided to immediately erect a mansion in the air, supported upon a single smooth column. Night and day, it would be closely guarded. All around it and within, too, there would be the finest physicians with the most potent herbs, and Brahmanas that were experts in the mantras of healing.

Protected on every side, the king, surrounded by his ministers, discharged his dharma from that mansion. No one could approach him; why, they say the very air could not come near Parikshit.

When the seventh day arrived, Rishi Kashyapa was on his way to Parikshit, to cure him after Takshaka inevitably struck: for the knowing

Brahmana had heard all about the curse.

The Prajapati thought, “I will cure the king after he has been bitten, and I shall gain punya by what I do and wealth also.”

But Takshaka, who had assumed the guise of an aged Brahmana, accosted Kashyapa on his way. The prince among snakes said to that bull among Munis, “Where are you going in such haste? What urgent business makes you hurry so?”

Kashyapa replied, “Today Takshaka will consume Parikshit of the House of Kuru, bane of his foes, with his venom. I am in haste because I am going to cure the great Pandava king after the snake, virulent as Agni, bites him.”

Said Takshaka, “O Brahmana, I am the same Takshaka who will burn that Lord of the earth. Turn back Kashyapa, because you cannot cure one that I bite.”

Kashyapa retorted, “I know the most powerful mantras for snakebite, and I will go to the king and cure him.”’

CANTO 43

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Takshaka said, "If what you say is true, let me see you revive this pipal tree after I bite it. Brahmanashreshta, I will show you the power of my venom. You show me the potency of your mantras."

Kashyapa replied, "Bite the pipal then, O King of serpents, and I will bring it back to life."

Takshaka bit the tree, and his venom reduced the pipal to ashes. Takshaka said to Kashyapa, "First among Brahmanas, let me see you bring the lord of the forest back to life!"

Kashyapa gathered the ashes in his hands and said, "By the power of my mantras, I will revive the nyagrodha before your eyes."

Chanting arcane incantations over the ashes, Kashyapa first sprouted a green shoot from the ashes; two leaves grew from the sprout. He set these down, and continued to chant. In no time, a full grown trunk appeared, branches, leaves and all, and the pipal, lord of the forest, stood there exactly as before.

Takshaka breathed, "A miracle! O Mahamuni whose wealth is your tapasya, what other wealth do you desire that you go to cure the king? Difficult as it might prove, I will give you whatever you are after.

Besides, remember that, because the king has been cursed by a Rishi to die of my bite, his lifespan has been shortened. O Kashyapa, your fame and honour pervade the three worlds. If you fail to restore Parikshit to life after I sting him, your fame will vanish like the splendour of the Sun during an eclipse."

Kashyapa said, "I am going for gold. If you give me the gold I seek, O Naga, I will not go to Parikshit for it."

Takshaka said, "Dvijottama, I will give you more gold than you expect from the king. So do not go to Hastinapura."

Kashyapa, best of Brahmanas, sat down for a moment and was plunged in dhyana. He meditated upon Parikshit and saw in his mystic heart that the lifetime of the Pandava monarch was indeed exhausted. He asked Takshaka for a great deal of gold and the serpent gave it to him. Taking the gold, Kashyapa turned back.

Now Takshaka flashed on towards Hastinapura. On his way, he heard how Parikshit was living in a mansion in the air, protected by potent mantras and yantras that rendered snake venom ineffective, and by rare herbs and other specifics for curing snakebite.

The snake thought, "I must use some deception to approach the king. What shall I do?"

Takshaka sent some of his snakes disguised as Rishis to Parikshit. They brought gifts of fruit, kusa grass, and holy water. Takshaka said to these, "Go to the king, calmly, just as if you only want to give him the flowers, fruit and holy water. Show no anxiety or impatience."

Those snakes did as they were told; they brought those offerings to Parikshit, and he accepted the fruit, the grass and the water. Then he said to them, "Now leave me."

When the snakes disguised as Rishis had left, Parikshit said to some ministers and friends that were with him, "Come, eat these excellent fruit that the Rishis brought."

Indeed, Fate impelled the king and his companions to eat those fruit. Fate made the king select for himself the fruit in which Takshaka had hidden himself. As the king bit into the fruit, O Saunaka, an ugly worm appeared from it, its eyes glittering black with coppery slits.

The king saw the worm and laughed. Great Parikshit said, "The sun is setting on this seventh day, and I need not fear poison anymore. Takshaka has not come. Let this worm become the serpent king and bite me so the words of the Rishis are not proved false!"

His time had come and his ministers laughed with him. Smiling, Parikshit put the tiny worm on his neck. In a flash the worm turned into gigantic Takshaka, eyes blazing, and wrapped his gargantuan coils around the king's neck. With a roar, Takshaka bit that Kshatriya.'

CANTO 44

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'The king's ministers saw Parikshit in Takshaka's coils and turned white with terror, and cried out. When Takshaka roared, they fled as a man. And as they ran, screaming, sobbing, they saw awesome and wondrous Takshaka flying through the sky above them, like the scarlet streak in a blue lotus, like the vermillion-filled parting that divides the hair on a woman's head.

The mansion in the air blazed up with Takshaka's poison, and the king fell dead, burnt to ashes as if he had been struck by lightning. When Takshaka's poison had consumed the king, his main minister and his royal priest, a most holy Brahmana, performed the last rites for him, though there was nothing left of the noble Parikshit for them to cremate.

The citizens all gathered and crowned the dead sovereign's minor son the new king. Janamejaya they called that scion of the race of Kuru. Though he was still a boy, Janamejaya was mature and wise in his mind. With the guidance of his counsellors and the royal priest, Parikshit's eldest son ruled the kingdom even like his great-grandfather Yudhishtira.

The ministers saw how he kept his enemies at bay, and went to Suvarnavarman, king of Kasi, and asked him for his daughter Vapushtama to be Janamejaya's bride. Having made some enquiries about the young Kuru monarch, Kasiraja gave Vapushtama to be Janamejaya's queen, with every proper ritual and ceremony. Janamejaya was delighted in his wife and he never gave his heart to any other woman, ever.

Youthful and energetic, he ranged the world cheerfully with his lovely queen, journeying on rivers and lakes, and in forests and through fields of flowers, steeped in pleasure and joy. He enjoyed his life even as his ancestor Pururavas of old had, when the Apsara Urvashi became his. Vapushtama was the most beautiful of women and she pleased him in every way, as he did her.'

CANTO 45

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

'Meanwhile, the Rishi Jaratkaru ranged the Earth, making his home for the night wherever he found himself when the Sun set. He roamed at will, observing the most difficult vratas, which only evolved Sages can keep, and bathing at many holy tirthas. The Muni lived on just air for his food, and had no sensual desires of any kind. Daily, he grew more emaciated.

One day, he saw the spirits of his ancestors, hanging heads down in a hole, by a cord of virana roots, of which only one strand remained unbroken. And that thread was gradually being eaten away by a large rat also living in that pit. And the Pitrs in the hole were starving, macilent, pathetic, and eager for salvation.

Jaratkaru approached the pitiable ones humbly, and asked, "Who are you hanging by this cord of virana roots? Just one strand remains and the rat living in the hole gnaws away at it, and soon it will give way and you will plunge down into this bottomless pit, headfirst.

Ah, my heart is moved to pity seeing you like this. Tell me how I can help you; I am prepared to sacrifice a quarter, nay a third, why a full half of my tapasya for you. No, take all my penance if you will, if that can save you from your plight."

His Pitrs said, "Brahmacharin, you want to save us but you cannot do that by your tapasya. Child, eloquent of speech, we have our own considerable tapasya, but we have no children, and that is why we are hanging here and shall soon plunge headfirst into hell.

Brahma himself has said that having a son is great punya. We are bewildered as our time runs out swiftly. Child, we don't know you though, no doubt, your fame is spread across the Earth. You are fortunate and venerable, who take such pity on us and grieve over our plight so sincerely.

Brahmana, listen to who we are: we are Rishis of the Yayavara clan, of flinchless vratas. Muni, we have fallen into this pit from a lofty realm because we have no offspring. All our tapasya has not yet been consumed; we still have a single thread, by which we hang.

Our one strand, our last hope, is called Jaratkaru. That unfortunate has mastered the Vedas and their Angas and he is a lone ascetic. He keeps lofty vows, engages in the most difficult penance, controls his desires perfectly, and has no desire for the fruit of his rigours.

He just as well might not exist, as far as we are concerned: it is because of him that you find us in this condition. He has no wife, no son, no kin! And so we hang in this hole, barely sentient, men who have no one to look after them.

If you ever meet him, be kind enough to tell him, 'Your Pitrs hang head down in a hole in great sorrow. Jaratkaru, take a wife and beget children. Brahmana, you are the single thread by which your ancestors hang.'

Brahmana, the once many-stranded rope of virana roots by which we hang is the rope of our clan. The strands that have been eaten away are we whom time has devoured. The single root that remains is Jaratkaru, who has chosen brahmacharya. The rat you see is inexorable time. The rat gradually gnaws away at the wretched Jaratkaru, who thinks only of himself.

Brahmana, his asceticism will not save us. Look how we have been uprooted from higher worlds and fallen down into this pit: barely conscious beings any more, gnawed incessantly by kaala, devolving like the worst sinners. And when the last strand gives way and we plunge into hell, Jaratkaru will go with us. Dear friend, no tapasya, yagna or any sacred pursuit can compare with a son.

Child, you have seen us; we beg you, tell Jaratkaru about us in detail. Brahmana, since you are kindly disposed towards us, persuade him to marry and father children. Ah, we feel how lovingly you grieve for us, and we wonder who you are: a friend of Jaratkaru's or, perhaps, even one of our own? Tell us, O fine one, who are you that remain here so patiently?"'

CANTO 46

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Hearing all this, Jaratkaru was plunged in gloom. His voice choking, tears in his eyes, he said to his Pitrs, "You are my sires and grandsires! I am the sinner Jaratkaru; so chastise me, wretch that I am, and command me what to do."

The Pitrs replied, "O son, son, truly it is our great fortune that you have arrived here on your wanderings. Brahmana, why have you not married?"

Jaratkaru said, "My fathers, I have always wanted to keep my vital seed inside my body and thus take my body into the next world. So I decided that I would never marry, but always remain celibate.

But now I have seen you hanging here like bats, I have turned my heart away from brahmacharya. I will do as you ask. I will marry if I can find a girl who has the same name that I do. She must give herself to me without my asking, as alms, and I should never have to maintain her. Sires, if I find such a woman I will marry, not otherwise. And the child that I beget on her shall be your salvation, O my fathers, and you shall live in grace forever, without fear."

Having given his word to his manes, Jaratkaru set out once more, wandering the face of the Earth again. O Saunaka, he was old and could find no wife, and he thought of his Pitrs hanging in their hole and he grieved terribly. However, he continued seeking a bride.

Once, in a deep jungle, he was quite unmanned by sorrow and began to sob loudly. The Brahmana cried out loud, "I want a wife!" three times. "All of you that can hear, mobile and unmoving, and all that are here invisibly, hear me! My stricken manes have commanded me to marry and father a son. I range the world at my Pitrs' word, in poverty and in dire sorrow, to find a wife who will be given to me as alms.

If any among you has a daughter who bears the same name as I do, and one that I will not have to support, let him give her to me. O let him give

her to me so I can save my fathers who hang precariously in the hole in the ground!"

The snakes that had been following Jaratkaru, waiting for just this moment, sped back to Vasuki and told him what had happened. The Naga king took his sister Jaratkaru with him, decked in her finest ornaments, and went to the jungle where the Rishi was.

Brahmana, there Vasuki offered his sister Jaratkaru as alms to the noble Sage. He did not accept her immediately: he was not certain that she had his name and also the matter of upkeep had not been settled. He was silent for a few moments, then, he asked, "What is the girl's name? You must know that I shall not maintain her."'

CANTO 47

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Vasuki said to the Rishi Jaratkaru, "Best of Brahmanas, she has the same name as you do. She is my sister and has done tapasya. I will look after her, so take her for your wife. I swear that I will protect her with all my resources. Greatest of Maharishis, I have nurtured her carefully just for you."

The Rishi replied, "Do we agree that I shall not maintain her and also that she will always obey me? If she displeases me once, I will leave her."

Vasuki gave the Muni his solemn word on both counts. Jaratkaru now entered Vasuki's home and took the hand of the serpent king's sister, offered to him with all proper Shastraic ritual. Then, Jaratkaru Muni took his bride and went into the lavish apartment and bedchamber that Vasuki showed him.

And in the private chamber was a great bed covered with priceless sheets of silk. The Rishi said to his wife Jaratkaru, "You must never say or do anything that is against my wishes or liking. If you ever displease me in the least thing, I will leave you and go away. Remember this well."

The Nagina princess, Vasuki's sister, quickly agreed, in anxiety and some sadness, "So be it". Wanting to be useful to her clan, for she knew why she had been married to the Rishi, that chaste princess served her husband with the wakefulness of a dog, the timidity of a deer, and the uncanny sensitivity to his mood, which a crow has.

And one day soon, after her period was over, Vasuki's sister purified herself with a ritual bath, went to her husband the Muni, and she conceived. The embryo was like a flame in her womb, of terrific tejas, and shone like fire. It grew inside her like the waxing moon.

One afternoon, during her pregnancy, Jaratkaru of great renown, tiredly put his head in his wife's lap and fell asleep. While he slept, the Sun entered his mansion in the Western Mountain and began to set.

Brahmana, Vasuki's sister became worried, she was afraid that her husband might lose his punya. She thought, "What should I do? Shall I wake my husband or not? He is exacting and meticulous in his rituals, and must say his twilight sandhya prayers before the Sun sets. But if I wake him, I risk his wrath. Which is worse: that he is angry with me or that he loses his punya?"

Deciding that losing his punya was worse than risking his fury, Vasuki's sister said in the softest voice to her great husband lying like a flame with his head in her lap, "Most fortunate, illustrious one, you must wake up. The Sun is setting and you must bathe, say the name of Vishnu, and perform your sandhya vandana. Twilight is upon us, my lord, awake."

Jaratkaru opened his eyes, his lips quivered in anger, and he said to his wife, "You have insulted me, O lovely Nagina, and I will no longer live with you but go back to where I came from. O woman of the soft thighs, the Sun cannot set while I am asleep in your lap. No one should continue to live where he has been insulted, least of all a Brahmana like me."

Jaratkaru, his wife, trembled with fear. She said to him, "Oh, Brahmana, I did not wake you from any wish to insult you. I only woke you so that you would not lose your punya by not observing your sandhya vandana."

Rishi Jaratkaru was furious and he wanted to abandon his wife. Said he, "Beautiful one, I have never spoken a lie, and leave you I shall. I have been happy with you but I did tell your brother that the day you displeased me I would go. When I have left, tell Vasuki that I have gone, and do not grieve for me."

Jaratkaru of faultless features was grief-stricken and terrified. Somehow, she mustered the courage to speak to her husband. Her heart trembled and she had gone pale.

Folding her hands to him, tears streaming down her lovely face, she said, "It is not right that you leave me when I have done no wrong. You walk the way of virtue and so do I, with my heart set upon saving my race. Best of Brahmanas, the purpose for which I was given to you has not yet been fulfilled. What will Vasuki say to me?

Brahmana, the son that my kinsmen want from me to save them from our mother's curse is not yet born. I beg you do not leave me until you give me children. I am sinless, why are you being cruel to me?"

The Muni Jaratkaru said to his wife, "You have conceived and the being in your womb is a Maharishi, brilliant as Agni himself, a master of the Veda

and the Vedangas.”

With that, Jaratakaru Rishi went away, his heart set on resuming his tapasya.’

CANTO 48

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'O you that have such great punya, when her husband left, Jaratkaru the Nagina went straight to her brother Vasuki and told him what had happened. Vasuki turned paler than his sister on hearing her news.

He said in despair, "You know why you were given to be the Rishi's wife. Only if a son is born to you by your husband can our race be saved from Janamejaya's sarpa yagna. Brahma himself said so, with the Devas present.

Sister, it is not proper for me to ask, but have you been with the Sage? Has he made you pregnant? I dare not follow the Rishi, for he might curse me if I do. But tell me everything that transpired between you two. Ah, remove the arrow of terror that has lain buried in my heart for so long."

Jaratkaru consoled her brother, saying, "My husband said to me that I have conceived, and then he went away. I have never known him to tell a lie, even jokingly. He would surely not have lied about such a grave matter. He said that I should not grieve, because I will have a son who blazes like Surya Deva.

He said this much to me before he went away. So be comforted, my brother, and let the deep sorrow in your heart vanish."

Vasuki, king of snakes, cried in joy, "Tathaastu, so be it!" And he gave his sister the finest gifts and wealth, and praised her to the skies. Brahmana, the splendid foetus inside her grew like the Moon waxing during the bright fortnight.

When her time came, the Nagina Jaratkaru gave birth to a child who was dazzling as a Deva child, and by his birth he assuaged the fears of his ancestors and his mother's people. The child grew up there in the house of Vasuki, king of snakes.

He studied the Vedas and their Angas from Chyavana Muni, Bhrigu's son. And even when he was a mere boy, he kept the most stringent vratas. He was gifted with great intelligence, with virtue, knowledge and freedom from mundane indulgences. He was a saintly child.

They called him Astika, which meant "There is", for that was what his father had said before leaving, when his mother asked him if there was a child conceived in her. He was a solemn and grave child, endowed with exceptional intellect. The Nagas raised him with the greatest care, and they said that he resembled golden Mahadeva, who wields the trisula. As he grew, day by day, he was the delight of his entire clan.'

CANTO 49

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Tell me again in detail everything that King Janamejaya asked his ministers about his father's death.'

Sauti said, 'O Brahmana, listen to what Janamejaya asked them and also to what they said in reply about the death of Parikshit.

Janamejaya asked them, "You know what happened to my father. Tell me how that king of great renown met his end. Once I hear the truth from you I shall decide what is to be done, if it benefits the world. Otherwise, I will do nothing and let the matter pass."

One of the ministers replied, "Hear, O Rajan, about the life of your illustrious father, and also how he left this world.

He was the most virtuous and noble Kshatriya, who always protected his people. Listen to how he conducted himself, why, like an embodiment of dharma, watching over the four varnas, each discharging their svadharma, and watching over Bhumi Devi. He was blessed with untold prowess and immense fortune.

No one disliked Parikshit and he disliked no one. Like Brahma himself, he was equal-minded towards all the living. Rajan, your father protected Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra, impartially. Widows and orphans, the deformed and the poor, he supported.

He was as handsome as another Soma Deva. The matchless Saradwat was his Guru at arms. Janamejaya, your father was always dear to the Lord Govinda. He was born to Uttaraa when the Kuru race was almost extinct and, because he was tested with death while in his mother's womb, Abhimanyu's mighty son was named Parikshit.

He knew the Shastras that describe the dharma of kings, in detail, and virtue was part of his nature. His passions were under his control; he had a profound and powerful intellect and a prodigious memory, the matchless Parikshit.

He knew the nuances of dharma and politics as well, and he ruled over his people for sixty glorious years. Then he died tragically and was mourned by all his subjects. After him, you, great Janamejaya, were crowned when you were a mere child, and you have ruled the Kuru kingdom for a thousand years. Like your father, you are virtuous and protect every creature that lives in your land."

Janamejaya said, "Never has a king been born in the House of Kuru who did not seek the good of his people, or one that his people did not love. Consider especially my grandsires, the Pandavas of awesome deeds.

But tell me again, how did my father, with all his virtues, meet his death? Describe everything to me as it happened. I want to hear it all."

Commanded by their sovereign, his councillors told him all that had happened.

"Rajan, your father, guardian of the very Earth, foremost among those that live by the Shastras, became addicted to hunting, just like his ancestor Pandu Mahabaho, greatest among archers. He would leave the governance of the kingdom to us, from the most trivial to weighty matters, and be off hunting in the forest.

One day, he shot a deer with an arrow and when it did not die, he followed it deep into the jungle, armed with his sword and his bow and quiver. However, he could not find the stag. Being sixty years old, he was soon tired and hungry.

Suddenly, he saw in the heart of the forest a radiant Rishi. The Sage had sworn a mowna vrata, a vow of silence. The king asked him repeatedly if he had seen the deer, but the Muni made no reply. Suddenly, the king lost his temper at the Sage who sat like a block of wood. Parikshit did not, in fact, know that this was a Rishi observing a vow of silence. O Bharatarishabha, your father scooped up a dead snake that lay on the ground with the tip of his bow and draped it round the neck of the Rishi at his dhyana. The Sage still did not say a word, and no hint of anger touched his pure and tranquil heart. He sat on in silence, now with the dead snake around him.'"

CANTO 50

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'The ministers said, "Maharaja Parikshit returned to Hastinapura. The Muni had a son, who was born of a cow; his name was Sringin. He was famed for his great spiritual powers and brilliance, and also his quick temper.

He would go every day to the house of his Guru to worship and serve him. Released for the day by his master, Sringin was on his way home, when a friend of his told him what your father Parikshit had done to his father. Sringin heard that his sinless father now sat in meditation, as still as a statue, with a dead snake around his neck. Rajan, the Rishi whom your father mocked was a great Sannyasin, his passions restrained, always absorbed in tapasya and also performing many wonderful deeds. He was an illumined one, all his senses under perfect control.

All that he did and said was invariably full of grace and sweetness. No greed or desire came near him; he was a contented one. No envy or pettiness touched him, or rage, never. He was old now and frequently kept a vow of silence. Most of all, he was a sea of kindness in whom any creature in distress could seek sanctuary.

This was the Sage that your father insulted, and he did not react at all to what Parikshit did. However, when his son Sringin heard what had happened, he cursed your father in fury. Sringin was a mere youth, but he had potent spiritual powers. Touching holy water with his fingers, blazing in anger, he said, 'Wretched king, behold the power of my tapasya shakti! I curse you that, within seven days, Takshaka will burn you with his poison, that you dared drape a dead snake around my father.'

Then Sringin went to where his father sat with the snake still around him. He told his father that he had cursed Parikshit. At once, his father sent a disciple of his, Gaurmukha, a good-natured, virtuous and well-mannered young man, to your father's court, to warn him.

Arriving in Hastinapura, Gaurmukha rested a while, and then delivered his master's message to the king: 'O Rajan, my callow son has cursed you that, in seven days, Takshaka will burn you with his poison. Be warned, Parikshit, take every care.'

Janamejaya, when your father heard the terrible message, he quickly made arrangements to take all precautions against Takshaka.

When the seventh day arrived, Kashyapa Muni was on his way to your father, when Takshaka, disguising himself as a Brahmana, accosted him on the road.

The Naga king said to Kashyapa, 'Where are you going in such a hurry? On what business are you going?'

Kashyapa replied, 'Brahmana, I am going to meet King Parikshit, best of the Kurus, for today Takshaka will burn him with his poison, and I shall restore him to life with my power.'

Takshaka said, 'Why do you want to revive the king, Brahmana? I am Takshaka, and I say to you, you will fail to restore Parikshit to life after I have bitten him. You do not know how virulent my poison is. Let me show you.'

Takshaka buried his fangs in a great nyagrodha tree, a looming king of the jungle. At once, the tree was burnt to ashes. But Kashyapa, O King, revived it with his mantras.

Takshaka was wonderstruck and said to the Sage, 'Tell me what you want from Parikshit for saving his life.'

Kashyapa, said, 'I am going to him for gold.'

Takshaka said softly, 'Sinless, I will give your more gold than you expect from Parikshit. Take it and go home.'

Kashyapa Prajapati accepted a fair treasure from Takshaka, gold and jewels to his heart's content, and turned back home.

Takshaka disguised himself again, and going into the presence of your good father, who was living in a mansion in the air supported on a single column, blasted him with his poison, burning him to ashes.

When your father's last rites had been performed, O tiger among men, you were made the king. This is the story of how your father died, and we have told it to you as it happened, savage though it was. You have heard about how Maharaja Parikshit draped the snake around the Rishi Samika's neck, how Sringin cursed him, and how horribly he died. Now you must decide what you want to do."

King Janamejaya, Parantapa, bane of his enemies, said to his ministers, "How did you know about the meeting between Takshaka and Kashyapa, about the pipal tree being burnt to ashes and then revived by the Muni?

It is certain that Kashyapa could have saved my father's life with his mantras. But fearing the world's ridicule if he failed to kill noble Parikshit, the vile snake bribed the Rishi to return home.

I have already thought of how I mean to punish Takshaka. However, the meeting between Takshaka and the Sage occurred in the heart of the jungle, on a lonely path. How do you know in such detail everything that was said and done on that occasion?"

The ministers said, "Rajan, a Brahmana's servant had climbed that pipal tree to break some dry branches for his master's sacrificial fire. He told us about the meeting between the Sage and the Serpent king, and neither saw him.

When Takshaka burned the tree, Rajadhiraja, this man was also reduced to ashes. When Kashyapa gave life to the tree, the fellow lived again, and came to tell us what had happened in the forest's heart. Now you must decide what you will do to avenge your great father."

Janamejaya heard what his ministers said, and began to cry and to wring his hands in anguish on hearing how his father had died. The lotus-eyed king sighed and gasped; he sobbed and even screamed aloud. His eyes blazed, and he touched holy water with his fingers to sanctify what he was about to say.

Composing himself somewhat, Janamejaya said to his ministers, "I thank you for telling me how my father perished. I have decided to take revenge on the malignant Takshaka. It is true that Sringin first cursed my father, but for what reason except the evil and pride in his heart did Takshaka turn Kashyapa back? If he had allowed the Sage to come to Hastinapura, my father's life would have been saved.

Takshaka did not know what my wrath would be when I discovered what he did. He gave gold to the Brahmana and turned Kashyapa back. In what way had my father offended Takshaka that he did this? Why, the Rishi Samika forgave my father easily. I will have terrible revenge on Takshaka, for my own satisfaction, for Samika's and for the satisfaction of all of you that loved Parikshit."'

CANTO 51

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti continued, 'The ministers approved as a man, thunderously. Janamejaya, Lord of the Earth, that tiger of the race of Bharata, called his chief priest and his Ritviks. In chaste language, he said to them, "I must avenge myself on Takshaka for killing my father. Do you know how I can cast the low snake and all his clan into a fire? I want to burn the serpent just as he did my father."

The chief priest answered, "Rajan, there is a yagna by which you can accomplish your desire, a great sacrifice created by the Devas. It is called the sarpa yagna and has been described in the Puranas. Scholars that know the Puranas have told us that only you, mighty king, can perform the sarpa yagna."

O Saunaka, Janamejaya felt exhilarated as if Takshaka had already been burnt and flung into the blazing maw of Agni, which consumes the havis of every sacrifice.

The king said to those Brahmana masters of mantras, "Let us prepare for the sarpa yagna! Tell me what you need for the snake sacrifice."

The king's learned Ritviks measured out land for the yagnashala, as prescribed in the Shastras. The platform was adorned with auspicious and priceless articles required for the yagna, and with Brahmanas.

Jewels in abundance, and paddy decked the yagnashala. The Ritviks sat upon it in comfort. When the dais was built, in strict accordance with Shastraic injunction, the Brahmanas installed Janamejaya as the Sacrificer, so that he could fulfil his purpose.

Just before the sacrifice got underway, something happened that did not portend well for the completion of the sarpa yagna. As the yagnashala was being built, a professional Suta builder of great intelligence, an expert in the craft of laying foundations, and a master of the Puranas, declared, "The soil upon which this dais is erected and the time the measurements for it were

taken both indicate that the yagna will not be completed, and a Brahmana shall cause its obstruction."

When the king heard this, he ordered his dwarapalakas not to let anyone enter the yagnashala without his permission.'

CANTO 52

ASTIKA PARUA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'The snake sacrifice began at the proper time, and the priests, wearing black robes and their eyes red from the smoke that issued from the agnikunda, poured ghee into the fire, chanting the prescribed mantras.

They said the names of the Nagas aloud, as they poured clarified butter into the mouth of Agni, and chanted the dire incantations. Wherever they were, the hearts of the serpents quailed in fright. Drawn helplessly into the blazing fire, the snakes came from wherever they were, and piteously crying out to one another, fell into the flames.

In millions, their bodies swollen, panting and hissing, they came and, twining around one another in their final moments, plunged headlong into the agni kunda. White, black, blue, old and young fell alike into the blaze, crying out in various voices. There were those measuring a krosa, others a yojana long, those of the length of a gokarna; and all of them fell in a torrent into that greatest of fires.

Millions upon millions of Nagas died, with no control over their own bodies, pulled inexorably into the flames by the fell mantras of the priests. Amongst those that perished were some Nagas like horses, others like the trunks of elephants, and yet others as big as elephants and with the strength of pachyderms in musth. Varicoloured, their venom smoking and virulent, always vicious, looking like great maces with spikes, those Nagas cursed by their mother Kadru streamed into the leaping jaws of the flames and died.'

CANTO 53

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka asked, 'Which Maharishis were the Ritviks during the sarpa yagna of Janamejaya of the line of the Pandavas? Who were the Sadasyas at the sacrifice so fearsome and tragic for the serpents? O son of Suta Romaharshana, tell us in detail so that we might discover which Rishis knew the rituals for that yagna.'

Sauti replied, 'I will recite the names of the Sages who became Janamejaya's Ritviks and Sadasyas. The Brahmana Chandabhargava was the Hotri. Great was his renown, and he was born into the lineage of Chyvana and was among the foremost masters of the Veda.

The learned old Brahmana, Kautsa, was the Udgatri, and chanted the Vedic hymns. Jaimini was the Brahmana, and Sarngarva and Pingala the Adhvaryus. Vyasa with his son and disciples was present, and Uddalaka, Pramataka, Swetaketu, Pingala, Asita, Devala, Narada, Parvata, Atreya, Kundajathara, Kalaghata, Vatsya, old Srutasravas always absorbed in japa and the study of the Vedas.

Kohala, Devasharman, Maudgalya, Samasaurava, and many other Brahmanas, all Vedic masters, became the Sadasyas, the guests of honour at that sacrifice of Parikshit's son.

When the Ritviks began to pour ghee into the fire, the most dreadful Nagas, who struck terror into every creature, began to pour into the flames. The fat and marrow of the snakes consumed by the fire flowed in streams. The air was filled with a fearful stench as the snakes burned. The screams of the snakes in the flames and those of the serpents about to fall into the flames were a single incessant cry.

Meanwhile, Takshaka, prince of snakes, heard that Janamejaya had begun his sacrifice and he flew to Indra's palace. Shaking in terror, confessing his sin, he sought sanctuary from Purandara.

Indra said to him, ‘Takshaka, while you are here you have nothing to fear from the sarpa yagna. I worshipped Brahma for your sake, so have no fear.’

Sauti continued, ‘Taking heart from this, Takshaka began living in Indra’s realm, joyfully. But Vasuki, king of the Nagas, saw how his people died without let, how his family was being reduced moment by moment, and he was full of sorrow, his heart breaking.

Calling his sister Jaratkaru, he said to her, “My body burns and I cannot see the cardinal points of the sky anymore. My mind is a whirl, my sight fails me, my heart is breaking and I am about to faint. I feel certain that Janamejaya’s fire, kindled to consume our race, draws me irresistibly, and I too will fall into it today. I feel certain that I will also find Yama’s realm for myself. The time has come, sister, for the purpose to be fulfilled for which you were married to the Rishi Jaratkaru. Best among Naginas, Astika must put an end to the sarpa yagna. Brahma himself told me this, long ago. Tell your son, my child, who is a master of the Vedas and so esteemed even by his elders, that he must save me and those that depend on me.”’

CANTO 54

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'The Nagina Jaratkaru called Astika and said, "The time has come for you to fulfil your destiny, the reason why my brother gave me in marriage to your father. My son, do what you have to."

Astika asked, "Why did my uncle give you in marriage to my father? Tell me everything so that I might do what I feel needs to be done."

Jaratkaru, who remained calm though she was anxious for the lives of her people, said, "My son, Kadru is the mother of all the Nagas. Do you know that she cursed her sons in anger? She cursed them saying, 'You have refused to become black hairs on the tail of Uchchaisravas, so that Vinata becomes my slave. I curse you that Agni, whose sarathy is Vayu, shall consume you all during Janamejaya's sarpa yagna! And dying, you shall find hell for yourselves, where unredeemed souls dwell.'

And Brahma himself ratified her curse, saying, 'So be it.'

Vasuki heard that curse and also Brahma approving it. My brother sought the protection of the Devas, by becoming their churning rope when they churned the Ocean for the Amrita. When they had the Amrita, the Devas took Vasuki to Brahma Pitamaha. They beseeched the Lotus-born One to nullify the curse of Kadru.

The Devas said, 'Lord, Vasuki, king of the snakes, is dejected for his people. How can his mother's curse be turned away?'

Brahma replied, 'Rishi Jaratkaru will marry a wife who bears his own name. The Brahmana born from her will save the Nagas.'

And so, Vasuki gave me to your noble father well before the sarpa yagna began. My child, radiant as a god, you were born from that union. That time of your destiny has come, and you must save my brother and me from Janamejaya's fire. Tell me what you think, Astika my son."

Astika said simply to his mother, "Yes, I will."

He turned to the pale and terrified Vasuki and, as if breathing new life into him, said, "Great Vasuki, best of snakes, I will save you from the curse. Abandon your anxiety, there is nothing to fear anymore. Never have I spoken a falsehood, even in jest, so I certainly do not lie now. Let me go to Janamejaya's sacrifice and pacify him with sweet words and blessings, too, and make him stop the sarpa yagna. O Nagaraja, trust me, for I will do as I have said."

Vasuki breathed, "Astika, my head spins and my heart is breaking. I cannot see the cardinal points anymore. Ah, my mother's curse is upon me."

Astika said, "Nagottama, best of snakes, do not worry, for I will dispel your fear of Janamejaya's fire. I will extinguish the flames of revenge that burn like the fire at the end of the Yuga."

Astika now sped away to the king's sacrifice, taking, as it were, his uncle's terror with him; the Nagas felt relieved. Arriving, Astika saw the wonderful yagnashala and the many Sadasyas seated upon the dais, holy men as bright as Surya and Agni.

Janamejaya's dwarapalakas refused to let Astika enter. Astika won them over with sweet words and blessings. Entering the yagnashala, that great Brahmana began to fulsomely praise the king of vast power and accomplishments, as well as the Ritviks, the Sadasyas, and the sacred fire.'

CANTO 55

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Astika said, "Soma, Varuna and Prajapati performed yagnas in time out of mind at Prayaga. O Bharatarishabha, son of Parikshit, your sacrifice is in no way inferior to theirs. Ah, may it bless those dear to me!

Indra performed a hundred yagnas, but this one yagna of yours is equal to ten thousand of Sakra's sacrifices, O Bharatarishabha, son of Parikshit. Ah, may it bless those dear to us!

Your yagna is like the yagna of Yama, of Harimedha, or Rantideva, O Bharatarishabha, son of Parikshit. Let those dear to us be blessed!

Like the sacrifice of Mayaa Danava, of King Sasabindu, or of King Vaisravana (at which he was himself the chief priest), is this sacrifice of yours, O Bharatarishabha, son of Parikshit. Let those dear to us be blessed!

Your yagna equals the sacrifices of Nriga, of Ajamida, of Dasaratha's son Rama, O Bharatarishabha, O son of Parikshit. Let those dear to us be blessed!

Like the yagna of King Yudhishtira, the son of a Deva, of Ajamida's race, renowned even in Swarga, is this sacrifice of yours, O Bharatarishabha, O son of Parikshit. Let those dear to us be blessed by it!

Like the yagna of Krishna Dwaipayana, the son of Satyavati, in which he himself was the chief priest, is this sacrifice of yours, O foremost of Bharata's race, O son of Parikshit. Let those dear to us be blessed by it!

These Ritviks and Sadasyas who attend your yagna are as magnificent as Indra who slew Vritrasura, as splendid as Surya. There remains nothing that they do not know, and the gifts offered them produce inexhaustible punya.

I am convinced that no Ritvik in the three worlds can equal your Ritvik Dwaipayana. Why, all his sishyas become matchless Ritviks and range the Earth performing their dharma. I see how Agni Deva—gold his seed and black smoke marking his path, Agni who is called Vibhavasu and

Chitrabhanu—blazes with flames that sway to the right and bears your libations of ghee to the other Devas.

O Janamejaya, no king on Earth protects his people as you do. O, I am pleased with your abstinence and your restraint. I feel that you are either Varuna or Yama the Lord of dharma. Why, you watch over the creatures of the Earth even like Indra, with his Vajra in hand. In this world, you have no equal for greatness and for sacrifice. I say that you are like Khatvanga, Nabhaga and Dilipa.

You are as strong as Yayati and Mandhatri, as splendorous as Surya; your vows as stern as Bhishma's, your hidden tejas like Valmiki's, who sat covered by an anthill. Like Vasishtha you have mastered your anger. Your sovereignty is as Indra's. Your grandeur and lustre are like Narayana's. You dispense justice like Yama. Like Krishna, every virtue adorns you.

You are as fortunate as the Vasus; you are the home of yagnas. You are as mighty as Dambodbhava. You are as much a master of the Shastras and arms as Jamadagni's son Parasurama. Your tejas matches that of Aurva and Trita. Your gaze inspires terror even as Bhagiratha's did."

With such fulsome adoration, Astika addressed Janamejaya, the Sadasyas, the Ritviks and the sacrificial fire. Janamejaya saw omens all around.'

CANTO 56

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Suta said, 'Janamejaya said, "This is a boy, but he speaks like a wise old man. He is not a boy but wise, an old soul. I think I want to grant him a boon. Brahmanas, I ask your leave to do that."

The Sadasyas said, "A Brahmana, even if he is a boy, deserves the respect of kings. A learned Brahmana more so. This boy deserves to have every desire of his satisfied, but not before Takshaka comes into your fire."

But the king was eager to grant the young Brahmana a boon. "Ask for a boon," he said.

The Hotri did not approve, "Takshaka has not yet come to our sarpa yagna."

Janamejaya said, "Let us strive to complete the yagna quickly. Takshaka must come and die, for he is my enemy."

The Ritviks said, "Rajan, the signs of the Shastras and the fire both say that Takshaka dwells in Indra's realm, in fear for his life."

The illustrious Suta Lohitaksha, master of the Puranas, had already told the king this.

When Janamejaya asked again why Takshaka had not appeared, the Suta replied, "Sire, the Brahmanas speak truly. I know the Puranas and I say to you that Indra has granted Takshaka a boon. Indra said to the Naga, 'Remain hidden with me and Agni will not burn you.'"

Hearing this, Janamejaya the Sacrificer was dejected. He urged the Hotri to bend his will to his task. The Hotri chanted mantras, and poured more ghee into the fire, and Indra came there on high.

The Deva came in his vimana, covered by thick clouds, with all the gods around him, and following him, Gandharvas and bevies of Apsaras. Takshaka, terrified, hid in Indra's robe.

In rage, Janamejaya cried again to his mantra-chanting Brahmanas, "If Takshaka hides with Indra, then cast him into the fire with Indra himself!"

The Hotri poured more libations into the fire, calling Takshaka's name. As the ghee fell into the flames, the terrified Takshaka was revealed in the sky with Indra. Purandara saw the yagna and grew afraid. He abandoned Takshaka in a trice and flew back to his world. Slowly, ineluctably, the potent maledictions drew the trembling Takshaka toward the flames."

The Ritviks said, "Maharaja, your yagna is complete. You may now grant the excellent Brahmana a boon."

Janamejaya said to Astika, "O Brahmana, so handsome and boyish, I want to grant you a worthy boon. Ask me for whatever you want, and I swear you shall have it even if it is something well nigh impossible to give."

The Ritviks said triumphantly, "Rajan, look how Takshaka draws close. Listen to his screams and roars as he nears the flames. Indra has forsaken him and, weakened by the mantras, he falls out of heaven. Look where he falls swooning, and hissing like a storm!"

Just before Takshaka fell into the sarpa yagna fire, Astika asked Janamejaya for his boon.

"O great King, if you want to grant me a boon, let this sacrifice of yours cease at once, and not another snake fall into the flames!"

O Brahmana, Parikshit's son was dismayed and pleaded with Astika, "Illustrious one, I will give you gold, silver, cows, and whatever else you want, but don't let my yagna stop."

Astika replied, "I do not want gold, silver, cows or anything else, O King, but only that this sacrifice ends and that my mother's kinsmen are spared."

Again and again, Janamejaya begged Astika, "Brahmana ask me for another boon, and my blessings be upon you!"

But, O Saunaka of Bhrigu's race, he would not ask for another boon. Finally, the Sadasyas, all knowers of the Veda, said to Janamejaya in one voice, "Give the Brahmana the boon he wants!"'

CANTO 57

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Saunaka said, 'Sauti, tell me the names of all the Nagas that fell into Janamejaya's fire."

Sauti replied, "Billions of snakes fell into the fire, most excellent Brahmana, beyond count. But listen to the names of the main Nagas, as many as I can remember.

First listen to the names of the kindred of Vasuki, who were coloured red, blue and white, all of them ferocious and their venom deadly. Helplessly afflicted by their mother's curse, they poured into the flames and sizzled to death, just like libations of ghee.

Kotisa, Manasa, Purna, Chala, Pala, Halmaka, Pichchala, Kaunapa, Chakra, Kalavega, Prakalana, Hiranyabahu, Charana, Kakshaka, Kaladantaka – all these sons of Vasuki fell into the fire.

Brahmana, besides them, numberless other serpents, highborn, terrible and powerful, burned to ashes in the fire. Listen to those that died which belonged to Takshaka's clan: Puchchandaka, Mandalaka, Pindasektri, Ravenaka; Uchochikha, Charava, Bhangas, Vilwatejas, Virohana; Sili, Salakara, Muka, Sukumara, Pravepana, Mudgara, Sisuroman, Suroman and Mahahami.

Of Airavata's kin, Paravata, Parijata, Pandara, Harina, Krisa, Vihanga, Sarabha, Meda, Pramoda and Sauhatapana perished. Brahmanashreshta, from the clan of Kauravya those that were burned to ashes were Eraka, Kundala, Veni, Veniskandha, Kumaraka, Vahuka, Sringavera, Dhurtaka, Pratara and Astaka.

Of the kinsfolk of Dhritarashtra, who are as swift as Vayu and their poison virulent, Sankukarna, Pitharaka, Kuthara, Sukhana, Shechaka, Purnangada, Purnamukha, Prahasa, Shakuni, Dari, Amahatha, Kumathaka, Sushena, Vyaya, Bhairava, Mundavedanga, Pisanga, Udraparaka, Rishabha, Vegavat, Pindaraka; Raktanga, Sarvasaranga, Samhriddha, Patha, Vasaka,

Varahaka, Viranaka, Suchitra, Chitravegika, Parasara, Tarunaka, Maniskandha and Aruni were consumed.

Brahmana, these were the most prominent snakes that perished, known for their mighty deeds and accomplishments. I cannot begin to name all the snakes that died, for they were truly beyond count: the sons of the great Nagas that I have named died, and their sons. So many those flames devoured!

Some had three heads, some had seven, others ten, and their poison was like the fire at the end of the Yuga and they were all dreadful to behold.

There were others, immense, swift as lightning, lofty as mountain peaks, long as a yama, a yojana, even two yojanas, who could assume any form at will, and who were as strong as they wanted to be, their venom like Agni – all cursed by a mother, all of them became ashes in the flames of that great yagna.'

CANTO 58

ASTIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'Listen to something else rather wonderful that Astika did. When Janamejaya was about to grant Astika's boon, Takshaka, abandoned by Indra and hurtling towards the Earth, suddenly stopped falling and remained suspended in the air. Janamejaya was puzzled by this since the Ritviks still chanted mantras and poured butter into the agni that blazed in his name.'

Saunaka asked, 'Suta, were the mantras impotent that Takshaka stopped falling?'

Sauti replied, 'While Takshaka plunged firewards, by now unconscious with weakness and fear, Astika said thrice, "Stay! Stay! Stay!" And at this, Takshaka remained suspended in midair.

Then, urged repeatedly by his Sadasyas, Janamejaya said, "Let the yagna end and no more snakes perish. This is my boon to Astika."

Shouts of joy and praise rang through the air. Thus the sarpa yagna of the son of Parikshit, king of the Pandava race, stopped. Janamejaya, scion of the race of Bharata, was pleased with his sacrifice, and gave away untold wealth to the Ritviks and Sadasyas who had attended his great sacrifice.

He also gave gold beyond count to the Suta Lohitaksha, the expert at building foundations, who had said before the yagna began that it would be interrupted by a Brahmana. The munificent king also gave Lohitaksha fine garments and food, and was gratified.

Finally, that king concluded his yagna with the prescribed rituals. Showing Astika all reverence, Janamejaya sent him home in joy that his mission had been accomplished.

Janamejaya said to Astika, "You must come again and be a Sadasya at my Aswamedha yagna, my imperial horse sacrifice."

Astika replied that he would, and returned home, the king and he both satisfied. Arriving home in delight, he touched the feet of his mother and his

uncle, and he told them all that had happened.

All the Nagas there heaved a great sigh of relief and were delighted with Astika that he had removed their fear. They said to him, “Gifted child, wise Astika, ask us for any boon.”

Astika promptly said, “Let anyone who reads this holy story of what I did, either at dawn or dusk, with concentration and a cheerful heart, never have to fear anything from you.”

The snakes said happily, “Let it be exactly as you want, nephew! Anyone that recalls the names of Astika, Artiman and Sunitha, by day or by night, shall have no fear of snakes. He who says, ‘I remember Jaratkaru’s son Astika, who saved the race of Nagas from perishing at the sarpa yagna, so do not harm me and go away, O Naga!’ shall be safe from every one of our kind.

The snake that still bites such a man shall have his hood spilt in a hundred pieces like the fruit of the Sinsa tree.”

That great Brahmana was satisfied and pleased. Now the Mahatman set his heart upon leaving the world, and when his time came, he rose into Swarga, leaving his son and grandsons behind.

This is the tale of Astika, exactly as it happened. It is certainly true that relating this story dispels the fear of snakes. O Brahmanas, O Maharishi of Bhrigu’s line, I have told you the legend of the holy Astika just as your ancestor Pramati told it to his son Ruru. Listening to this tale fetches great punya, O Saunaka, and I hope that having told it from the beginning, I have satisfied your curiosity.’

CANTO 59

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA

Saunaka said, 'Child, Suta, I am very pleased with you that you have told me this story beginning with the sons of Bhrigu. Now I ask you again, to narrate for us, O Ugrasravas, the Bharata that Vyasa composed. I want to hear all the myriad and exciting stories told among those illumined Sadasyas who came to Janamejaya's sarpa yagna, during the intervals between the rituals they performed at the prolonged sacrifice – the tales and the lessons to be learnt from them: tell me both, O Sauti, in full.'

Sauti said, 'Those Brahmanas spoke of many matters derived from the Veda, when they had the time, but Vyasa recited the magnificent Itihasa called the Bharata.'

Saunaka said, 'I want to hear that sacred history called the Mahabharata, which has spread the fame of the Pandavas across the world, the Itihasa which Krishna Dwaipayana recited when Janamejaya asked him, after the sarpa yagna was over.

That legend was conceived in the oceanic mind of Maharishi Vyasa, his soul purified by yoga. You have whetted my thirst with whatever you have said so far, but not appeased it, O Suta.'

Sauti said, 'I will narrate Vyasa's great Itihasa, the Mahabharata, for you, from beginning to end. Nothing will give me more pleasure, O Saunaka.'

CANTO 60

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Sauti said, 'When the Rishi Krishna Dwaipayana heard that Janamejaya had been installed as the Sacrificer for the sarpa yagna, he came to that yagna. Vyasa, grandfather of the Pandavas, had been born on an island in the Yamuna, to the virgin Kali by Shakti's son Parasara Muni. As soon as he was born, miraculously, he was a full-grown Sage, who already knew the Vedas and the Vedangas and all the Itihasas.

Naturally he possessed vast inborn knowledge and illumination that no other could hope to have through tapasya, studying the Veda, keeping vratas, fasting, having sons or by performing yagnas. Greatest among those that knew the Veda, Vyasa divided the single Veda into four. The Brahmana had knowledge of the Parabrahman, knew the deep past by intuition, was a truly holy one, and treasured the truth. His ways sacred and his fame great, he sired Pandu, Dhritarashtra and Vidura, so that the line of Shantanu might not be extinguished.

With his disciples, all knowers of the Vedas and their Angas, this Mahatman walked into the yagnashala of Rajarishi Janamejaya. He saw Janamejaya sitting there like Indra himself, surrounded by his Sadasyas, by numberless kings who had all performed sacred ablutions, and by masterly Ritviks who were like Brahma himself.

When Bharatottama Rajarishi Janamejaya saw Vyasa Muni, he rose quickly and came with his guests and his kinsmen to welcome the Sage in great joy. With his Sadasyas' warm approval, the king offered the Rishi a lofty golden seat, just as Indra had to Brihaspati.

When Vyasa, who is worshipped by the Devas and can grant great boons, sat on the golden seat, the king of kings worshipped him with rites set down in the scriptures. The king offered his grandsire Krishna Dwaipayana water to wash his feet and rinse his mouth, arghya and gifts of

sacred cows. Vyasa accepted the formal offerings, asked for the cows to be protected, and was pleased with the Pandava.

After these adorations, Janamejaya bowed to his great grandsire, then sat down with him in joy and asked after his well-being. The illumined Muni looked at the king with love, asked in turn after his welfare, and offered homage to the Sadasyas who had all already adored him.

When all this was done, folding his hand reverentially, Janamejaya asked that great Brahmana, "Lord you saw with your own eyes the lives of the Kurus and the Pandavas. I want to hear their story from you. What caused the enmity between them, which resulted in such extraordinary events?

Also, what led to the Great War between my grandsires, which killed countless men? Why was their good sense dimmed by fate? Best among Brahmanas, I beg you, tell me in full all that happened."

Krishna Dwaipayana turned to his disciple Vaisampayana seated at his side, and told him, "You tell the king all about the enmity that sprang up between the Kurus and the Pandavas, exactly as I told it to you."

At his guru's dictate, the blessed Vaisampayana narrated the entire story to Janamejaya, his Sadasyas and the other Kshatriyas and Brahmanas gathered there. He told them all about that enmity and the Great War that devastated the Kurus and the Pandavas.'

CANTO 61

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA CONTINUED

'Vaisampayana said, "I first prostrate in sashtanga namaskara, eight limbs touching the ground, before my guru, with absolute devotion in my heart. I also worship this sacred assembly of learned Brahmanas. I will now narrate all that I heard from the Mahamuni Vyasa, greatest among geniuses in the three worlds. O King, surely, since the Bharata has come to you, you deserve to hear the awesome epic. My heart might otherwise tremble to undertake this immense narration, but having my guru's command I feel no trace of fear.

Listen, O Janamejaya, to why discord broke out between the Kurus and the Pandavas; hear about the envious lust for kingdom that led to the game of dice and how the Kurus sent the Pandavas into exile in the forest. I will tell you everything that happened, O best among kings.

When their father Pandu dies, those young Kshatriyas, the Pandavas, come home to Hastinapura. In quick time, they become masters of archery. The Kurus see that the sons of Pandu are exceptionally gifted with strength, vitality, intelligence and fortune, and that the people love them; and the Kurus are stricken with envy.

The devious and perfidious Duryodhana, with Karna and Duryodhana's uncle Shakuni, son of Subala, begins to persecute the sons of Pandu, and to plot to have them exiled. Swayed by Shakuni's evil counsel, Duryodhana schemes to kill the Pandavas, so that he can have undivided sovereignty. Dhritarashtra's demonic son feeds poison to Bhima, mixed in some sweets, but Bhima of the stomach of the wolf digests the poison, and only falls asleep from it on the banks of the Ganga.

Duryodhana binds Bhima hand and foot and, casting him into the river, walks away. But Kunti's enormously strong son awakes, easily breaks the thongs that bind him and Bheemasena Mahabaho surfaces, all his sluggishness gone.

While he falls, sleeping, into the water, black watersnakes bite him all over his great body, their venom deadly. But that nemesis of his enemies still does not die.

All the while that their cousins plot to murder them, their noble uncle Vidura helps the sons of Pandu in every way that he can, frequently saving their lives. As Indra watches over the world from Swarga does Vidura watch over the Pandavas and keeps evil away from them.

By many means, covert and open, Duryodhana attempts to do away with his cousins. Time and again he fails, for the fates protect the Pandavas, keeping them safe for the great destiny they have been born to fulfil – the very annihilation of the race of kings.

Duryodhana sits in dark conclave with his coterie—Karna, Dushasana and some others—and, with Dhritarashtra's knowledge, has a house of lac built in Varanavrata, in Kasi. Out of inordinate love for his son, as well as blind ambition to keep the throne, Dhritarashtra colludes with Duryodhana to send the innocent Pandavas to Varanavrata. As the sons of Pandu are leaving Hastinapura with their mother Kunti, Vidura discreetly warns them of mortal danger and tells them how to escape it.

Kunti and her sons arrive in Varanavrata and begin living in the lacquer palace; Duryodhana's agent Purochana, who has built the edifice, takes them there. For a year they live in the deadly mansion, on their guard all the while, watching Purochana's every move.

Meanwhile, Vidura sends them an expert tunneller, who secretly excavates an underground passage leading out of the house of lac. One night, the Pandavas set fire to the palace, immolating Duryodhana's spy within, and escape through the secret tunnel.

In great anxiety at the murderous plot hatched against them, the sons of Pandu flee with their mother. In the forest, near a natural fountain, they see a Rakshasa, but do not slay him for fear of giving themselves away to their enemies, whom they want to think them dead, burnt alive in the lacquer palace at Varanavrata. Instead, they flee into the deep jungle, from fear of Duryodhana and his brothers.

In that vana, Bhima takes Hidimbi for his wife, for some time, after killing her brother, the Rakshasa Hidimba. He sires Ghatotkacha on her. The Pandavas, knowers of the Vedas, observing their vratas, find their way to the town called Ekachakra. Disguising themselves as Brahmanas, those

bulls among men live in the house of a Brahmana, begging alms for a living.

Here the tigerish Bhima Mahabaho slays the ferocious Rakshasa Baka, the man-eater, and delivers the people of Ekachakra from their constant terror. Here, too, they hear about Krishnaa, the princess of Panchala, for whom her father is to hold a swayamvara, at which she would choose a husband for herself.

The Pandavas go to Panchala and win the hand of Draupadi to be the wife of all five of them. After living in Panchala for a year, their presence is discovered and they return to Hastinapura with their bride.

King Dhritarashtra and Shantanu's son Bhishma say to them, 'We have learned sadly of the rancour between yourselves and your cousins. We have decided to bestow ancient Khandavaprastha on you as your patrimony, half the kingdom, so there is no further cause for dispute. Go without envy in your hearts, for great is Khandavaprastha, its highways broad and its expanse wide.'

Without argument, the sons of Pandu leave for Khandavaprastha, with some friends and followers, taking many precious jewels, ornaments and gold with them. For many years, the Pandavas live in peace in Khandavaprastha which they now call Indraprastha.

They subdue many kingdoms and Kshatriyas by force of arms, and live in constant dharma, and truth. Always serene and humble, unmoved by wealth, crushing many forces of evil in their kingdom, the Pandavas rise to great power.

Now mighty Bhima conquers the kingdoms of the East, the heroic Arjuna, the North; Nakula, the West; Sahadeva, doom to his enemies, the South. When this is done, they hold sway over all of Bharatavarsha. Why, with the five Pandavas, the Earth seems as if six Suns shine upon her!

Then, Yudhishtira Dharmaputra is forced to send his brother Arjuna, greatest and ambidextrous bowman, dearer to him than life, into the forest for twelve years. That Purushavyaghra, tiger among men, resolute, gifted with every virtue, lives in the wilderness for eleven years and as many months.

During his exile, Arjuna visits Krishna in Dwaravati. In Dwaraka, Ocean City, he takes Krishna's younger sister, the lotus-eyed Subhadra, her voice sweet like honey, to be his wife. She marries him joyfully, even as Sachi

married Indra; she unites, in gladness, with Arjuna, the son of Pandu, as Sri did with Vasudeva.

Later, O best of kings, Kunti's son Arjuna and Krishna please Agni, who bears the havis from every yagna to the Devas, by burning the Khandava vana with its potent herbs, and that cures Agni of indigestion. Arjuna, with Kesava to help him, finds the task of burning the forest easy, for nothing is difficult for Vishnu of infinite resources.

Agni gives Kunti's son the divine longbow, the Gandiva, and an inexhaustible quiver, and a war-chariot that flies Garuda on its banner. It is then that Arjuna saves the great Asura Mayaa from being consumed by the fire.

The grateful Mayaa builds an unearthly sabha for the sons of Pandu, adorned and encrusted with every kind of priceless jewel and gemstone. When the evil Duryodhana sees the Mayaa Sabha he wants to own that palace.

Duryodhana arranges to play a game of dice with Yudhishtira, at which Subala's son Shakuni uses loaded dice, rolling them with his cunning fingers. Beating the eldest Pandava at the false game of dice, Duryodhana sends the Pandavas into exile for twelve years and a thirteenth year to be spent in disguise, so no one discovers them: on pain of going back into exile.

In the fourteenth year, O King, the Pandavas return to claim their kingdom, but Duryodhana refuses to return it. War is declared, and the Pandavas regain their ravaged kingdom, but only after the very race of Kshatriyas perishes on the field of Kurukshetra, and finally Duryodhana also dies.

This is the story of the Pandavas, who never allowed adharma, evil, to rule them, and of their enmity with their cousins the Kauravas, and of the Great War with which the sons of Pandu recover their kingdom," said Vaisampayana,' says Sauti to Saunaka and his rishis.

CANTO 62

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Janamejaya said, "Most excellent Brahmana, you have now briefly told me the Itihasa known as the Mahabharata, which is about the great deeds of the Kurus. O Muni rich in tapasya, now narrate the entire epic in full, for I am desperately eager to listen to its every detail.

Hearing an abbreviation of this awesome legend does not satisfy me. I feel certain that there must have been great cause for the virtuous and mighty Pandavas to kill their own kin, something for which they are still praised.

Why did those tigerlike men, themselves innocent and capable of destroying their cousins, quietly suffer the persecution and ignominy dealt out to them?

Why, O Brahmana, did the mighty-armed Bhima, strong as ten thousand elephants, restrain his anger, though he was so wronged? Why did Drupada's daughter, the chaste Krishnaa, not consume the Kauravas with fire from her eyes? Why did Pritha's sons Bhima and Arjuna, and Madri's princes Nakula and Sahadeva, obey Yudhishtira, who had such a weakness for gambling?

Why did Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, the very embodiment of rectitude, quietly endure the extravagance of injuries heaped upon himself and his family? Why did Dhananjaya, whose sarathy was Krishna himself, Arjuna who later sent teeming hosts of dauntless Kshatriyas to the next world, suffer in silence?

O mighty Tapasvin, tell me everything that happened, exactly as it did, and describe whatever those Maharathas did."

Vaisampayana said, "O Rajan, appoint a time for the narration of the entire Mahabharata, for the legend wrought by Krishna Dwaipayana is long indeed; this is just the beginning. I will certainly recite the entire epic of the

illumined Vyasa of fathomless intellect, who is worshipped in all the worlds.

The Bharata contains a hundred thousand sacred slokas, composed by Satyavati's son of untold genius. He that recites it, and they that listen to it, attain Brahmaloka and become like Devas. The Mahabharata is equal to the Vedas; it is sacred and beautiful; it is the most wonderful of all legends; it is a Purana, which the rishis worship.

It dwells in depth on artha and kama, profit and pleasure. This sacred epic makes the heart yearn for mukti. Men that narrate this Veda of Krishna Dwaipayana to men of liberality, honesty and faith earn great wealth. The most grievous sins, even killing an embryo in the womb, are burnt to ashes by this Itihasa. However vicious and sinful a man might be, if he hears this legend, he escapes from his sins as the Sun does from Rahu when the eclipse ends.

This Itihasa is called Jaya; those that wish for victory should listen to it or read it. A king who hears the Mahabharata with a heart full of faith vanquishes all his enemies and conquers the world. This history is a Mahayagna on its own, and yields the most auspicious and blessed fruit.

A young king should always listen to it in the company of his queen, for the couple shall then beget heroic and noble children, heirs to the throne. This Bharata is the exalted and holy science of Dharma, Artha and Moksha, as well: Vyasa of immeasurable intelligence says so.

This Itihasa is recited today and shall be told and read in the dim future. They that hear it or read it have children and servants who are always obedient to them. Every sin, of body, word or mind, immediately leaves them that listen to this legend. Those who hear, without mockery or criticism, the story of the birth of the Bharata princes will never have to fear any sickness, let alone fear dying or the world to come.

Krishna Dwaipayana composed this epic to spread the fame of the Pandavas and of the other Kshatriyas, noble, learned, of great repute; he wished also to bring welfare to the world through his profound and monumental work.

Reading the wonderful Bharata bestows fame and blesses a man with long life, for it is a divine and sacred legend. He that retells this epic to holy Brahmanas gains inexhaustible punya; he who recites the advent of the renowned Kuru generations is instantly purified, acquires a large family and honour in the world.

The Brahmana who regularly studies the sacred Mahabharata during the four months of the monsoon is redeemed from all his sins. He who has read the Bharata can be regarded as knowing the Vedas.

This epic contains accounts of the Devas, Rajarishis, Brahmarishis, the immaculate Krishna, of Mahadeva Siva, God of gods, and the Devi Parvati, of the birth of Karttikeya born from the union of Siva and Parvati and raised by six mothers. The Mahabharata tells of the greatness of Brahmanas and of the sacredness of cows.

The Bharata is a compendium of all the Srutis and every virtuous person should listen to it. The learned man who recites it to Brahmanas during the sacred months is washed of all his sins; he ceases to care about the pleasures even of Swarga, and attains union with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

He who tells even a single foot of this Kavya, this epic Poem, to Brahmanas performing a sraddha, makes the ritual immortal, since then the Pitrs become deeply gratified with all the offerings made to them.

Listening to the Mahabharata destroys every sin, conscious and unconscious, which we commit daily with our senses or in our hearts.

The legend of the lofty births of the Bharata princes is called the Mahabharata; he who knows the etymology of that name is saved from all his sins. Indeed, this Itihasa of the race of Bharata is so extraordinary that it purifies anyone, who hears it, of every sin.

The Maharishi Krishna Dwaipayana took three years to compose his epic. Rising early, performing his sacred ablutions and daily worship, he would sit down to compose this Mahabharata. Therefore, Brahmanas must listen to it with the formal reverence of keeping a vow.

He who narrates Vyasa's sacred epic and those that hear it are all saved from being affected by the fruit of their karma, good and bad. He who truly wants to gain lasting punya should listen to the entire Bharata, for this single Kavya is equal to all the others, and hearing it purifies the heart.

The joy and satisfaction that a soul experiences upon attaining Swarga is hardly equal to those to be had from hearing this holy legend. The virtuous man who narrates the Mahabharata with faith in his heart gains the punya derived from an Aswamedha or a Rajasuya yagna.

The Bharata is a treasure trove of precious jewels to rival the endless Ocean and golden Meru. Surely, surely, this legend is sacred; it is exquisite

and magnificent; it is equal to the Vedas; it must be heard; it is pleasing to the ear and the heart; it washes away every sin and confers great virtue.

O King, he who gives a copy of the Mahabharata as a gift, gives the very Earth as a present with her girdle of seas. O son of Parikshit, this is the beautiful Poem, which bestows virtue and victory, which I am going to recite for you in full. Listen.

Yes, the Rishi Krishna Dwaipayana woke early every day for three years and composed this epic full of wonders: the Mahabharata. O Bharatrishabha, bull among the Bharata kings, whatever has been said about dharma, artha, kama and moksha might surely be found elsewhere; but nothing that is not contained in the Mahabharata is to be found anywhere."'

CANTO 63

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA CONTINUED

'Vaisampayana said, "There is once a Paurava king of dharma called Uparichara. He is also called Vasu and is addicted to hunting. Commanded by Indra, he conquers the beautiful kingdom of Chedi. Later, he renounces the use of weapons and, living in an asrama, practises the most rigorous penance. Indra and the Devas, fearing that Uparichara's tapa would make him king of Devaloka, manifest themselves before Vasu, and with honeyed words and flattery make him abandon his penance.

The Devas say, 'Lord of the Earth, you must protect this world lest dharma fades from her face while you sit here in tapasya. If you protect dharma in the world, dharma in return will protect the Universe.'

Indra says, 'Rajan, be the vigilant guardian of dharma on Earth. You are virtuous and, after this life, you will discover many marvellous and sacred realms. Though I belong to Swarga and you to Bhumi, you are my friend and precious to me.

Lord of men, you live in a land of many delights, sacred, abounding in game, fertile and rich, safe and well guarded even like Devaloka, its climate kindly, and furnished with every object of enjoyment and pleasure.

King of Chedi, mines of gold and silver embellish your lands, as do a plenitude of precious stones of every kind. Your cities and towns live in dharma; your people are honest and contented; they do not lie even in jest.

Sons never ask for their patrimony to be divided, and are always mindful of their parents' welfare. Lean or weak cattle are never yoked or made to haul or bear burdens. They are first fed, kindly and generously.

In Chedi the four varnas always adhere to the performance of their svadharma, their natural and inherent duties.

Vasu, I mean to allow you to range the three worlds at will, for I will give you a crystal vimana such as only the Devas have. Among mortal men, only you shall own such a vimana and fly in it like a god.

I will also give you a garland of unfading lotuses, which will make you invincible in battle, for, while you wear it no weapon shall injure you. And, O King, this holy and peerless garland, known in the world as Indra's mala, shall be your emblem.'

Indra, slayer of Vritra, also gives Uparichara Vasu a bamboo staff with which to protect the good and men of peace. When a year passes, Uparichara plants this bamboo stick in the ground to worship the one that has given it to him.

From then on, Rajan, every king of the Earth begins to plant a pole in the ground to worship Indra. Having erected the stamba, they adorn it with cloth made of gold thread, garlands and precious ornaments, and daub it with rare perfumes. This is how the Deva Indra comes to be worshipped with garlands and precious ornaments.

Indra comes as a swan to accept the worship of Uparichara Vasu.

Delighted with the adoration, Indra says, 'All kings, and any men who worship me in the way the king of Chedi has done, and observe this festival of mine, shall bring glory and victory to their countries and kingdoms. Their cities shall grow and be prosperous, and their streets and homes flow with joy.'

Thus Indra blesses King Vasu; and it is true that all men who observe the festival of Indra with gifts of land, gold and precious stones, find success, honour and fame throughout the world. Vasu, Lord of the Chedis, is always magnanimous and performs countless great yagnas; and Indra honours him and blesses him generously so that he rules the world from Chedi, with dharma as his sceptre. And to worship Indra, he unvaryingly observes the festival that he himself has begun.

Vasu has five sons of great strength and energy. He makes them rulers of various provinces of his boundless kingdom. His son Brihadratha becomes the ruler in Magadha; he is also known as Maharatha. His other sons are Pratyagraha, Rusamba—also called Manivahana—Mavella, and the invincible Yadu.

These, O King, are the five sons of the Rajarishi of dazzling tejas. The five sons of Vasu founded kingdoms named after themselves and separate dynasties that endure through long ages.

When Vasu sits in his crystal ship of the air, Indra's gift to him, and flies through the sky, Gandharvas and Apsaras fly to greet him. It is because he ranges the higher realms that he is named Uparichara.

The river Suktimati flows beside Uparichara, Vasu's capital. An animated and lust-maddened mountain called Kolahala once attacks the gentle river, and forcibly embraces her. Vasu sees the attempted molestation and kicks the mountain. The river escapes from Kolahala's sinister embrace through the hole in the mountain made by Uparichara's kick.

But Kolahala begets twin children, a boy and a girl, on the river he has forced. In gratitude, for having freed her from Kolahala, Suktimati gives the children to Vasu. That Rajarishi makes the boy the Senapati of his army, and the girl Girika he marries himself.

One day, after her period is over, Girika bathes and comes alluringly to her husband wanting a child from him. However, that same day Vasu's Pitrs have appeared to him and told him to kill a deer for their sraddha.

Not wanting to disobey his ancestors' spirits, the king goes into the jungle to hunt a deer, but his mind is full of thoughts of the luscious Girika, as lovely as Sri herself. It is spring, and the forest is as enchanting as the garden of the king of the Gandharvas.

Asokas, Champakas, Chutas and Atimuktas abound, as do Punnagas, Karnikaras, Bakulas, Divya Patalas, Patalas, Narikelas, Chandanas and Arjunas, all sacred trees, ancestral plants splendorous with scented flowers and shining fruit.

The sweet, haunting songs of the kokila hold the forest in thrall; the ecstatic drone of honeybees is their sruti.

The king is stricken by desire and he sees his Girika before his mind's eye, but not before him in the flesh. Maddened, he ranges that charmed forest and spots a lovely Asoka tree, its foliage rich and its branches covered in a riot of flowers. The king sits down at the foot of the tree, and excited beyond measure by the heady fragrances of spring all around him, by the caressing breeze that whispers through the forest aisles, his mind full of images of his wife, Uparichara Vasu spills his seed into the palm of his hand.

He sees a falcon in a branch quite near him. Vasu, knower of the nuances of artha and dharma, says to the bird, 'Friend, take this seed to my wife Girika, for her season has come.'

The falcon takes the precious semen in its beak and flashes away towards the king's capital, quick as a thought. A fishing hawk, perched in a tree beside the Yamuna, sees the falcon winging along with the royal seed in its beak and thinks the falcon is carrying a shred of meat.

The hawk flies at the falcon. Locking wings, they fight in the air and Uparichara Vasu's seed falls from the falcon's beak down into the waters of the Yamuna below.

An Apsara called Adrika lives in the river; she has been turned into a fish by a Rishi's curse. She sees Vasu's shimmering seed strike the water, and swimming to it in a flash, she swallows the king's semen. Ten months after she swallows the seed, she is taken by some fishermen. In their very boat, the great fish gives birth to resplendent human children: a boy and a girl.

At once, the curse ends, just as the Brahmana who cursed her said it would, and the fish is a celestial nymph again. She rises into the sky along the path that Rishis, Siddhas and Charanas tread, and vanishes.

The wonderstruck fishermen bring the children to King Uparichara and tell him what has happened. They cry, 'My Lord, we found these two human children inside the body of a fish!'

Uparichara takes the male child and raises him. Later, he would become the King Matsya of great dharma.

The king gives the girl child, who smells of fishes, to the fishermen, saying, 'Let her be your daughter.'

The chief of those fishermen adopts the girl and calls her Satyavati. The Apsara's daughter, and the king's, grows into an exceptionally beautiful girl, with a lovely smile and a friendly nature, though she still smells of fishes. She plies a ferry across the Yamuna for her foster-father.

One day, the Maharishi Parasara, abroad on his pilgrimage, sees the girl, and is struck by love's thunderbolt, at least by irresistible desire. Riding in her ferry, Parasara Muni says to the girl with the smooth skin and exquisite thighs, 'Lovely girl, give yourself to me!'

Satyavati replies, 'Holy one, look at the Rishis standing on either bank of the river. How can I give myself to you with them watching?'

Parasara raises his hand in an occult mudra, and they are plunged in thick fog. It covers the river and both banks in darkness and fills Satyavati with awe.

She blushes now, and says shyly, 'Muni, I am a virgin living with my father. Sinless one, if I give myself to you, my virginity will be lost. Rishi, how will I face my father? Indeed, how will I live with that shame? I beg you, Holy One, think of this and then do as you decide.'

Parasara Maharishi replies, 'You will have your virginity back after you grant my desire. Also, you shall have any other boon you want from me, bashful and beautiful girl, and my words have never proved false.'

Satyavati says, 'Let my body smell sweet and not of fish anymore.'

'So be it,' says mighty Parasara.

She is so pleased with her boon that Satyavati straightaway comes into season. She allows the Rishi to embrace her. She now becomes so wonderfully fragrant, that men calls her Gandhavati, and they can smell the heavenly scent of her body from a yojana away. She is also called Yojanagandha, while they had called her Matsyagandhi before.

Having slaked his desire, Parasara goes away.

Satyavati rows to an island in the Yamuna and gives birth immediately, magically, to Parasara's child. He is splendid, and a full-grown Rishi as soon as he is born, and seeks his mother's permission to go and perform tapasya.

As he leaves, he says to her, 'If you ever have need of me only think of me and I shall come to you.'

So it is that Vyasa is born to Satyavati and Parasara Muni. Because he is born on a dwipa, an island, he is called Dwaipayana, island-born, and Krishna because he is dark complexioned.

The island-born Sage knows that dharma loses one leg in every yuga, beginning with four and finally standing on just one in the Kali Yuga. He knows that the lifespan, the strength and intellect of men also wane with the passing yugas. Having worshipped Brahma and the great Brahmarishis so he could divide the Veda to suit the coming age, Dwaipayana makes four Vedas out of one. For this he is called Vyasa, the arranger, or compiler, and Veda Vyasa, compiler of the Veda.

The Maharishi teaches Sumanta, Jaimini, Paila, his own son Suka and Vaisampayana the four Vedas, and the Mahabharata is like the fifth. Of course, the Mahabharata is his own composition.

Some years after this, Bhishma, of stunning vigour, fame and untold splendour is born to Ganga and his father is King Shantanu of the Kurus. He is an amsavatara of the Vasus of heaven.

There is a renowned Rishi calls Animandavya. He is a master of every interpretation of the Vedas, an illustrious one of great tejas and high repute. Once, he is falsely accused of theft, and the old and innocent Muni is impaled upon a spike.

He summons Dharma and says to the Deva of justice, 'When I was a boy I pierced a little insect with a blade of grass. O Dharma, I remember that one sin I committed but cannot recall any other. But since then I have done penance, thousandfold. Has my sin not been removed by all that tapasya?

Also, killing a Brahmana is the most heinous of all sins, and you, O Dharma, have sinned. You shall be born on Earth as a Sudra for this sin.'

From that curse Dharma is born as a Sudra –the wise Vidura, pure in body and perfectly virtuous.

The Sutaputra Karna is no Suta but born of Kunti while she is a maiden in her father's house, and Surya Deva is his father. He comes out of his mother's body wearing a natural coat of armour like his skin and golden earrings like sundrops: kavacha and kundala.

Vishnu, worshipped by all the worlds, is born to Devaki and Vasudeva to bless the three Lokas. He is Un-born and immortal, of untold splendour, the Creator of the Universe and the Lord.

He is the invisible cause of all things, undecaying, the pervasive Atman, the still universal centre around which everything revolves, the primal essence in which the three gunas of Nature, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, are born, the Viswatman, the unchanging One, the substance from which the Universe is made, the Creator of the Universe of the Panchamabhutas, the Sovereign, the Antaryamin who abides unseen in everything, who owns the six lofty qualities, who is Pranava, Aum of the Vedas, infinite, moved only by his own will, lustrous, the embodiment of Sannyasa, who floats upon the waters of eternity before the creation, who is the germ of this cosmic plant, the great combiner, Un-created, invisible essence of everything, transcendent, Nirguna who cannot be known by the senses, the Universe, who has no beginning, birth or decay, infinitely wealthy, the Ancestor of every creature He incarnates into the race of the Andhaka Vrishnis to promote dharma in the world.

Satyaki and Kritavarman, masters of astras, warriors of fierce tejas, learned in the Shastras, servants of Narayana in all things: these two are born to Satyaka and Hridika.

From the seed of Maharishi Bharadwaja (of profound tapasya), which he ejaculates into an earthen pot, a drana, Drona is born. The seed of Rishi Gautama, spilt into a clump of reeds, grows into twins the mighty and sage Kripa, and his sister Kripi, who will marry Drona and become the mother of Aswatthama.

Dhrishtadyumna, blazing like Agni, born to become the nemesis of Drona, comes forth from a yagna fire, as does his sister Krishnaa: Draupadi whose dark and unrivalled beauty will cause the war upon the crack of two Yugas.

Prahlada's sishya Nagnajit, and Subala are born into the world. Subala's son is Shakuni, who is cursed by the Devas and becomes the enemy of dharma in the world, and a slaughterer of men. Subala also has a daughter called Gandhari, who becomes the mother of Duryodhana and his brothers. Shakuni and his nephew are experts at amassing wealth, and inexhaustibly avaricious.

Vyasa begets upon the widows of Vichitravirya the Kuru princes Dhritarashtra, who would become king, and the valiant and mighty Pandu. Dwaipayana also fathers, upon a Sudra woman, the sagacious and intelligent Vidura, sinless and a master of both artha and dharma.

Pandu's two wives, Kunti and Madri, give him five sons, like Devas. The eldest, Yudhishtira, is the natural child of Dharma: Yama who is the God of Justice. Bhima, his stomach a wolf's, is the son of Vayu the Wind. Arjuna, Dhananjaya the fortunate, greatest of archers, is Kunti's third son and Indra himself, king of the Devas, is his father.

Nakula and Sahadeva, the handsome twins always obedient to their elders, are born to Madri, and their fathers are the Aswins.

The wise Dhritarashtra sires a hundred sons, Duryodhana and his brothers, by Gandhari, and also Yuyutsu, who is born of a Vaisya woman. Among those hundred and one, eleven are Maharathas: Duryodhana, Dushasana, Duhsaha, Durmarshana, Vikarna, Chitrasena, Vivimsati, Jaya, Satyavrata, Purumitra and Yuyutsu.

Krishna's sister Subhadra gives birth to Abhimanyu; Arjuna is the prince's father, making Pandu his grandfather. The five Pandavas each has a son by their wife Panchali. Radiant and handsome are these princes and masters of the Vedas and the Shastras.

Yudhishtira's son is Prativindhya; Bhima's, Sutasoma; Arjuna's, Srutakirti; Nakula's, Shatanika; and Sahadeva's son is the powerful Srutasena. In the forest, Bhima also begets Ghatotkacha, the Rakshasa prince, on Hidimbi.

Drupada also has another daughter, Shikhandin, who later turns into a male child. Sthuna the Yaksha effects the transformation in the jungle to help Shikhandin accomplish her life's obsession.

Why, hundreds of thousands of Kshatriyas fight the Great War of the Kurus. Ten thousand years would be too few for me to name all their names. But the main protagonists, with whom this Itihasa deals, I have told you about.'"

CANTO 64

ADIVAMSAVATARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, tell me in detail about those you have named and those that you have not. Tell me what happened to those thousands of crowned kings, and why they are born into the world, those Maharathas."

Vaisampayana said, "It has been said, O King, that what you ask is mysterious even to the gods! However, I bow to Narayana, and shall do my best to answer your question.

Jamadagni's son Parasurama massacres the Kshatriyas in twenty-one savage encounters, so the Earth is rid entirely of the race of kings, and then he makes his way to Mahendra, most excellent mountain, and sits there in tapasya to expiate his sins of violence.

When Parasurama has exterminated the Kshatriya men, thousands of women of the royal race resort to Brahmana men, austere Rishis, in order to have sons. It must be said that intercourse takes place between them only when the princesses and queens are ovulating, never otherwise or from mere lust.

The Kshatriya women conceive and give birth to countless children, sons and daughters, of great vitality and lustre, and it seems that Kshatriya kind will flourish once more. This is the new generation of the Kshtariya race, sired by Brahmanas of mighty tapasya.

Indeed, the new Kshatriyas thrive, and live in dharma, accumulating great punya. The four varnas, with the Brahmanas at their head, are re-established. During this time, lust vanishes and men go to their wives only when the women are in season, and never out of carnal desire.

Why, O Bharatarishabha, at this time the same is true of every species on Earth, even birds of the air. Thus, O Protector of the world, lakhs and crores of creatures are born, all virtuous, living in a burgeoning swath of dharma, and free from sickness and sorrow.

O King with the elephant's gait, once more the Kshatriyas rule Bhumi, with her mountains, jungles and cities. They rule with dharma as their sceptre and joy is upon the world and the four varnas, of whom the Brahmanas are pre-eminent.

Free from every vice generated by lust and anger, the Kshatriya kings rule justly, punishing those that deserve chastisement. Thousand-eyed Indra, of a hundred Mahayagnas, sees how righteously the Kshatriyas rule, and he sends down timely rains, which bless all creatures.

Rajan, those are days when no one dies prematurely, but only in the fullness of time, and when no man knows a woman carnally before he has come of age Bharatrishabha, the Earth is filled from sea to sea, coast to coast, with long-lived men of dharma.

The Kshatriyas perform great sacrifices and give away vast wealth as charity. All Brahmanas study the Vedas and the Vedangas religiously, Bharatarishabha, and the Upanishads, as well. In those days, no Brahmana ever teaches for gold, or ever reads the Veda aloud in the presence of a Sudra.

The Vaisyas dutifully till the Earth with their bullocks, and they never yoke their beasts themselves, but their servants, the Sudras, do. The herd is cared for lovingly, and every cow and bull and calf fed well. Men never milk cows before their calves are weaned.

No merchant ever tampers with his scales of measure in those days. Purushavyaghra, O tiger among men, all men cleave to dharma, and whatever they do, they do with dharma in mind. All the varnas live by their svadharma alone, and dharma is maintained and does not decay or diminish, but indeed only grows.

Bharatarishabha, human women and cows give birth when their time is full, not before or after. Trees bear flowers and fruit in their proper season. Rajan, the Krita Yuga having begun, Bhumi teems with myriad species, all in harmony.

Then, O Bull of the race of Bharata, the Asuras begin to take birth in the royal Houses. The sons of Aditi, the Devas, repeatedly crush the sons of Diti, the Daityas, and those of Danu, the Danavas, in battle. Their unearthly kingdoms lost, Swarga gone, the Demons begin to incarnate on Earth.

The powerful Asuras, wanting sovereignty over Bhumi, begin to be born not only among Kshatriyas and other humans, but among all the species: as cows and bulls, horses, donkeys and asses, camels, buffaloes, among the

Rakshasas and the other magical races, among elephants and deer. Through the passage of the Yugas, owing to these demonic births, Bhumi Devi's burden of evil increases to the extent that she feels she cannot support the weight anymore and will plunge down into the Narakas, into hell.

Some of the sons of Diti and of Danu, cast out of heaven, are born on Earth as kings of terrible hubris. With terrific energy, the forces of evil swarm over the Earth in various forms and shapes. They teem in the world, from sea to sea.

With their undeniable strength, they begin to persecute Brahmana and Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra, and indeed every virtuous creature of the Earth. Striking terror into every heart, they go about committing rapine, pillage and murder. They range the world in great bands, of hundreds of thousands, veritable armies of the night. Mocking truth and virtue, intoxicated by their strength and arrogance, they even desecrate and slaughter holy Rishis in their asramas in the hearts of sacred forests.

Oppressed and ravaged by these unrestrained, powerful, wealthy and daily swelling legions of evil, Bhumi Devi thinks in despair of Brahma. Only the combined strength of awesome ones like Sesha Naga, the Kuurma Avatara and the great Diggajas is able to continue to support the weight of the Earth with her mountains and oceans.

O King, now terrified by the burden of the Asuras upon her, the dreadful load of their wantonness and savagery unleashed, Bhumi frantically seeks Brahma's help to save her from plunging down into the void.

She sees Brahma, the Creator, Pitamaha of all creatures, undecaying Grandsire, surrounded by the Devas, Brahmarishis of great fortune, being worshipped by Gandharvas and Apsaras, who are the eternal servitors of the gods.

Wanting protection, the Earth begins to tell Brahma her woes, in the presence of those Regents of the worlds. Rajan, the omniscient, Svayambhuva, Self-created, and supreme Lord already knows her petition. Bharatarishabha, being the Creator and Sovereign of the Universe, shall He not always know whatever is in the hearts of his creatures, including the Devas and the Asuras?

Rajan, the Lord of the Earth, the Creator of all creatures, who is calls Isa, Sambhu, Prajapati, speaks to Bhumi Devi. Brahma says, 'Bhumi Devi, womb of wealth, I will appoint all the celestials to accomplish what you wish. Now go back.'

When she has gone, Brahma says to the Devas, ‘Go, be born in amsa on Earth and seek war with the Asuras who hold sway over her and torment her.’

The Creator calls all the Gandharva tribes and all the Apsaras and says to them, ‘Go be born into the world in amsa in whatever forms you like.’

Indra and his Devas decide they will do as Brahma commands. They first go to Narayana in Vaikuntha, He that bears the Chakra and the Gada, whose skin is the hue of a thundercloud, who wears pitambara robes, of blinding splendour, Padmanabha from whose navel the Lotus grows in which Brahma is born, whose lotus eyes gaze down at his great chest, looking within, ever in dhyana, who is the bane and the slayer of the Asuras, who is the Lord of Prajapati himself, Devadeva the mighty who bears the Srivatsa whorled upon his breast, who animates the faculties of all beings and whom all the Devas worship.

Indra says to that most exalted Purusha, ‘Lord, be incarnate!’

Hari replies, ‘Tathaastu! Be it so.’”

CANTO 65

SAMBHAVA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Indra and Narayana speak together about how He would be born on Earth, and how the Devas, too, would incarnate in amsa. When every Deva knows his role, Indra returns from Vaikunta.

One by one, over time, the Devas are born on Earth in amsa to kill the Asuras already born there and to remove the burden of Bhumi, Swarga and Patala. They incarnate as they please as Kshatriya kings, as Brahmarishis and Rajarishis, and they kill the Asuras born as Rakshasas and Gandharvas, as Nagas, and as other dreadful creatures. The Danavas cannot resist the avenging Devas, so mighty are the gods."

Janamejaya said, "I want to hear from the beginning about the births of the Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the men who are more than men, the Yakshas and the Rakshasas."

Vaisampayana said, "I bow down to the Svayambhuva, and will tell you what you wish to know.

Brahma has six sons born immaculately of his spirit: Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu. Marichi's son is Kashyapa, and from Kashyapa all the creatures are born.

One of the original Prajapatis, Daksha has thirteen daughters of great beauty and fortune. Tiger among men, O Scion of the race of Bharata, these thirteen are called Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kala, Danayu, Simhika, Krodha, Pradha, Viswa, Vinata, Kapila, Muni and Kadru.

The sons and grandsons of these, all of burning tejas, are beyond count. Aditi gives birth to the twelve Adityas, Lords of the Universe. They are Dhatri, Mitra, Aryaman, Sakra, Varuna, Ansa, Vaga, Vivaswat, Usha, Savitri, Tvashtri and Vishnu. The youngest is the greatest of them all.

Diti has one son called Hiranyakashyipu, and he has five sons, renowned throughout the worlds. The eldest is Prahlada, the next Sahradha, then Anuhrada, Sibi and Vashkala.

O Bharata, Prahlada has three sons Virochana, Kumbha, and Nikumbha. Virochana's son is Bali, the Great. And the son of Bali is the great Asura Bana. The blessed Bana is a bhakta of Rudra, and is also known as Mahakala.

O Janamejaya, Danu has forty sons. The eldest of them is Viprachitti of great fame, then Sambara, Namuchi and Pauloman; Asiloman, Kesin and Durjaya; Ayahsiras, Aswasiras, and the powerful Aswasanku; Gaganamardhan, Vegavat and Ketumat; Swarbhanu, Aswa, Aswapati, Vrishaparvan and Ajaka; Aswagriva, Sukshama, Tuhunda of vast strength, Ekapada, Ekachakra, Virupaksha, Mahodara, Nichandra, Nikumbha, Kupata, Kapata; Sarabha, Sulabha, Surya, and then Chandramas these are the best known in the race of Danu.

The Devas Surya and Chandramas, the Sun and the Moon, are different beings, not the sons of Danu of the same names. These other ten, also of untold strength and vigour, are also, O Rajan, the sons of Danu: Ekaksha, Amritapa of fathomless valour, Pralamba and Naraka, Vatapi, Satrutapana, the great Asura Satha; Gavishtha, Vanayu and the Danava Dirghajiva.

Bharata, the sons and the grandsons of these are countless. Simhika gives birth to Rahu, the tormentor of the Sun and the Moon, and to three others: Suchandra, Chandrahantri and Chandra Pramardana.

The numberless progeny of Krura, also called Krodha, are as devious and as vicious as she is. Hers is a clan full of wrath, and merciless to its enemies.

Danayu has four sons who are bulls among the Asuras. They are Vikshara, Bala, Vira and Vritrasura the Great. The sons of Kala are all like Yama himself, boundlessly vigorous smiters of their foes. Kala's sons are calls Vinasana, Krodha, Krodhahantri and Krodhashatru.

Kala has many other sons, as well. Shukra, the son of a Rishi, is the chief priest and Acharya of the Asuras. Shukra has four sons, also priests of the Asuras. Tashtadhara and Atri are two, and there are two others, fierce tejasvins. They are like the Sun himself, and ambitious enough to want to conquer Brahmaloka.

These are the sons of the Devas and the Asuras as told in the Purana. The progeny of these are past counting, O King.

Vinata's sons are Tarkhya and Arishtanemi, Garuda and Aruna, and Aruni and Varuni.

Kadru's sons are Ananta Sesha, Vasuki, Takshaka, Kumara, and Kulika.

Bhimasena, Ugrasena, Suparna, Varuna, Gopati, Dhritarashtra, Suryavarchas, Satyavachas, Arkaparna, Prayuta, Bhima and Chitraratha - the famed, learned one, master of his passions - Kalisiras, Parjannya Kali and Narada these Devas and Gandharvas are the sons of Daksha Prajapati's daughter Muni.

Anavadya Manu, Vamsa, Asura, Marganapria, Anupa, Subhaga, Vasi are the daughters of Pradha, and her sons are Siddha, Purna, Barhin, Purnayus of wide renown, Brahmacharin, Ratiguna, Suparna, Viswavasu, Bhanu and Suchandra. All these are Gandharvas of heaven.

Pradha also bears her husband Kashyapa the delectable Apsaras Alambusha, Misrakesi, Vidyutparna, Tilottama, Arunaa, Rakshita, Rambha, Manorama, Kesini, Subahu, Surata, Suraja and Supriya. Her most famous sons are Atibahu, Haha and Huhu, and Tumburu.

The Amrita, Brahmanas, sacred cows, the Gandharvas and Apsaras, are born to Kapila Deva, as the Purana says.

This account of the birth of the Gandharvas and Apsaras, of the Nagas, Suparnas, Rudras, and the Maruts, of cows, Brahmanas of great fortune and holy deeds, is sacred and extends the life of he that reads it, and delights the ear and the mind.

He who reads or narrates the birth of the exalted beings in the presence of the Devas and Brahmarishis has many excellent children, finds fortune, fame, and attains to the best of worlds in the hereafter."

CANTO 66

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "We have seen how the six Maharishis are the mind-born sons of Brahma. He has another son called Sthanu. Sthanu, of huge tejas, has eleven sons Mrigavayadha, Sarpa, Nirriti of great fame, Ajaikapat, Ahivradhna, Pinaki - bane of his enemies, Dahana, Iswara, the splendorous Kapali, Sthanu, and the illumined Bharga. These are the eleven Rudras.

Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu are the brilliant sons of Brahma. The world knows that Angiras has three sons—Brihaspati, Utathya and Samvarta, all profound tapasvins.

Rajan, the sons of Atri are many, all of them Maharishis, masters of the Veda, Sannyasis, Atmaramas, their souls at perfect peace.

Rajavyaghra, tiger among kings, the sons of the wise Pulastya are Rakshasas, Vanaras, Kinnara fauns and Yakshas.

O King, the sons of Pulaha are the Salabhas (winged insects), lions, Kimpurushas (manticores), tigers, bears and wolves.

The sons of Kratu, sacred as yagnas, are the devout Balakhilyas, mighty tapasvins, who are the companions of Surya.

Protector of the Earth, the illustrious Rishi Daksha, peerless Sannyasi, his soul absorbed in infinite peace, springs from the big toe of Brahma's right foot. And from the big toe on his left foot, Daksha's chaste and noble wife emerges. The Muni begets fifty daughters upon her, all of them flawless of face and limb, their eyes like lotus petals.

Having no sons, he makes Putrikas of his daughters, which meant that their sons would be his sons as well as the sons of his daughters' husbands. Daksha marries, with sacred rites, ten of his daughters to Dharma, twenty-seven of them to Soma the Moon, and thirteen he gives to Kashyapa.

The ten wives of Dharma are Kirti, Lakshmi, Dhriti, Medha, Pushti, Sraddha, Kriya, Buddhi, Lajja and Mali.

Soma Deva's twenty-seven wives are they that show the time they are the Nakshatras, the asterisms of the Moon. They are Yoginis because they help maintain the worlds.

Brahma has another son called Manu. Manu has a son called Prajapati, who has eight sons, known as the Vasus. They are Dhara, Dhruva, Soma, Aha, Anila, Anala, Pratyusha and Prabhasa.

Of these, Dhara and the enlightened Dhruva are born from Dhumra; Chandramas (Soma) and Swasana (Anila) are born to the intelligent Swasa; Aha is the son of Rata; Hutasana (Anala) is Sandilya's son; Pratyusha and Prabhasa are the sons of Prabhata.

Dhara has two sons, Dravina and Hutahavyavaha. Dhruva's son is Kaala (Time) who devours the worlds. Soma's son is the splendent Varchas. Varchas begets Sisira and Ramana on his wife Manohara.

Aha's sons are Jyotih, Sama, Santa, and also Muni. Agni's son is the many-splendoured Kumara, born in a forest of sara reeds; he is Saradvata. He is also calls Karttikeya since the six Krittikas raised him.

Agni's other sons are Sakha, Visakha and Naigameya. Anila's wife is Sivaa, and their sons are Manojava and Avijnataagati.

The son of Pratyusha is the Rishi Devala. Devala has two sons, famed for their forbearance, forgiveness and their great intellects.

Brihaspati's sister, who always speaks the truth, performs tapasya and ranges over the Earth, becomes the wife of Prabhasa, the eighth Vasu. And she bears him the illustrious Viswakarman, from whom all the arts began: a thousand of them. He is the architect of the Devas, fashioner of the first and matchless ornaments among the stars; he is indeed the original artist. Viswakarman creates the celestial vimanas of the gods; and humankind lives on because of the countless precious inventions of Viswakarman, the universal artist. Men worship him for this reason, and he is an eternal one and changeless.

Dharma, who bestows joy, takes a human face and emerges from Brahma's right breast. Ahasta (Dharma Deva) has three sons who can enchant everyone; they are Sama, Kama and Harsha: Peace, Desire and Joy. They support the worlds with their activity.

Kama's wife is Rati, Sama's is Prapti, and the wife of Harsha is Nanda. Yes, indeed, upon these the worlds depend.

Kashyapa is the son of Marichi, and the Devas and Asuras are the sons of Kashyapa. Hence, Kashyapa is the Father of the worlds.

Tvashtri, who assumes the form of Badava, a mare, becomes the wife of Savitri. She gives birth in the sky to twins of great fortune and fame: the Aswini Kumaras.

Rajan, Aditi has twelve sons, Indra being the eldest. The youngest is Vishnu in whom the worlds are founded.

There are thirty-three Devas eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, twelve Adityas, Prajapati, and Vashatkara.

Let me tell you about the sons of these, by their Pakshas, Kulas and Ganas. The Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Maruts, the Vasus, the Bhargavas and the Viswedevas are each reckoned as being one Paksha. Garuda the son of Vinata, the mighty Aruna, and the illustrious Brihaspati are counted among the Adityas. The Aswin twins, all perennial plants and the lesser animals are counted among the Guhyakas.

These are the Ganas of the Devas, O King! Listening to this recitation washes away his every sin from a man.

Lustrous Bhrigu comes forth, tearing open Brahma's breast. Shukra, learned and wise, is Bhrigu's son. Shukra becomes a Graha, a Planet, and, traversing the sky, commanded by Brahma, sends down and withholds the rain, looses and holds back calamities, and nurtures the lives of every creature in the three worlds.

Shukra of unfathomed intellect and sagacity, of stern vratas, always a Brahmacharin, cleaves himself in two with his tapasya shakti, and becomes a spiritual Guru to both the sons of Diti and of Aditi.

When Brahma has thus gainfully employed great Shukra, Bhrigu begets another son Chyvana who blazes like the Sun, and is virtuous and famed. He emerges from his mother's womb in anger and rescues her from the clutches of the Rakshasas.

Chyvana marries Manu's daughter Arushi, and sires Aurva of matchless fame on her. Aurva tears open his mother's thigh to be born. Aurva begets Richika, who, even as a child, possesses awesome spiritual power and brilliance, and every virtue as well.

Richika's son is Jamadagni, who has four sons, the youngest being Parasurama, who is his older brothers' superior in every way, and a master of his passions. A master also of astras and of every weapon, he slaughters the race of Kshatriyas.

Aurva has a hundred sons, Jamadagni being the eldest. These hundred father thousands of children, across the Earth.

Brahma has two other sons, Dhatri and Vidhatri, who stay with Manu. Their sister is the auspicious Lakshmi, who dwells amidst lotuses. Lakshmi's spiritual sons are the horses that go through the sky.

Shukra's daughter Divi becomes Varuna's first wife. She bears him a son called Bala and a daughter Sura, the goddess of wine, much to the delight of the Devas.

Adharma, Sin, is born when creatures felt hungry and began to eat one another. Adharma is a destroyer of every being. Adharma's wife is Nirriti, and the Rakshasas that are their children are calls Nairritas. She has three other savage sons, always sinful and cruel: Bhaya who is fear, Mahabhaya who is terror, and Mrityu who is Death, forever killing. Because he is such a ceaseless killer, Mrityu has no wife or child.

Tamra gives birth to five daughters, known throughout the worlds Kaki the crow; Shyeni the eagle; Phasi the hen; Dhritarashtri the goose, and Suki the parrot. Kaki generated crows, Shyeni eagles, falcons, hawks and vultures, Dhritarashtri ducks, geese, swans and the fabled chakravakas, and the sweet and auspicious Suki brings forth parrots and parakeets, and their ilk.

Krodha gives birth to nine daughters, eight of them wrathful by nature Mrigi, Mrigamanda, Hari, Bhadramana, Matangi, Sarduli, Sweta, Surabhi, and the ninth, the virtuous and good-natured Surasa.

King of men, Mrigi's children are deer; Mrigamanda's are bears and also srimaras, of the sweet feet. Bhadramana begets the celestial elephant Airavata. Hari's children are monkeys, and also horses and all bovine creatures: golangulas, the cow-tailed ones.

Sarduli begets lions and tigers in vast numbers, leopards and other powerful predators. Rajan, Matangi's progeny are the elephants of the Earth. Sweta bears one elephant of extraordinary size and speed, named Sweta after her.

Surabhi gives birth to two daughters, the sweet-natured Rohini and the famous Gandharvi. O Bharata, she has two other daughters, Vimala and Anala.

Rohini is the mother of all kine, and Gandharvi of all equine beasts. Anala gives birth to the seven kinds of trees that yield soft fruit the date, the palm, the hintala, the tali, the little date, the nut and the coconut. She has another daughter called Suki, the mother of parrots.

Surasa bears a son calls Kanka, a species of long-feathered birds. Shyeni, the wife of Aruna, gives birth to two sons of great tejas and strength: Sampati and the mighty Jatayu. Surasa also bears the Nagas and Kadru, the Punnaga snakes. Vinata has two sons, Garuda and Aruna, whose fame is limitless.

Great King, of the mighty intellect, this is the genealogy of all the main species. Listening to this, a man is purified of his sins, finds great knowledge, and finally attains to the most exalted condition in the life to come."

CANTO 67

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Holy One, I want to hear in detail about the advent as men of the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, Rakshasas, lions and tigers, the other animals, the Nagas, the Pakshis, and indeed all creatures. I want to hear everything that they did when they had human forms."

Vaisampayana said, "Lord of men, I will first tell you about the incarnations of the Devas and Danavas that were born as men. The great Danava Viprachitti is born as that bull among men, Jarasandha of Magadha.

Diti's son, the Daitya Hiranyakashyipu, is born as Sishupala of Chedi. Samhlada, the younger brother of Prahlada, comes down as Salya, that tiger amongst the Balhikas. The spirited Anuhlada, the youngest, becomes Dhrishtaketu.

Rajan, the Daitya Sibi, incarnates as King Druma, while the great Asura Vashkala becomes the mighty Bhagadatta. The five ferocious great Asuras – Ayahsira, Aswasira, Aysanku, Gaganamurdhan and Vegavat are all born in the House of Kekaya and all become powerful kings.

The other indomitable Demon Ketumat incarnates in the world as the terrible King Amitaujas. The Asura Swarbhanu becomes the fierce King Ugrasena.

The Asura Aswa is born as the King Asoka, invincible in battle and choleric. Aswa's younger brother, the Daitya Aswapati, is born into the world as the Kshatriya King Hardikya.

The formidable and fortunate Asura Vrishaparvan becomes King Dirghaprajna. His younger brother Ajaka is born as Shalva, dark sorceror. The powerful Aswagriva comes to the world as King Rochana.

Rajan, the Asura Sukshma, of subtle intelligence and great achievements, becomes the famous Brihadratha.

The noted Demon Tuhunda becomes the King Senabindu. Ishupa becomes Nagnajita; Ekachakra becomes Pritivindhya; Virupaksha, master

of a thousand arts of war, is born as Chitravarman.

The valiant Danava Kara, who shatters the pride of his enemies, is born as Suvahu; Suhtra, of great energy, destroyer of his enemies, becomes the King Munjakesa of glowing fortune. Invincible, intelligent Nikumbha is born to become King Devadhipa.

The Asura known amongst Diti's sons as Sarabha becomes on Earth the Rajarishi Paurava, while Kupatha is born on Earth as the famed monarch Suparshva. The Asura Kratha incarnated as the royal Sage Parvateya, splendid as a golden mountain.

The Asura called Salabha becomes the King Prahlada in the country of the Balhikas. Chandra, the Daitya who is as handsome as the Lord of stars who also has his name, the foremost among the sons of Diti known by the name of Chandra, becomes Chandravarman in this world, the Kambhoja king.

Arka, Danavarishabha, becomes the Rajarishsi Rishika. That best of Asuras, Mritapa incarnates as Paschimanupaka; Garishtha becomes King Drumasena. Mayura becomes King Viswa; his younger brother Suparna becomes Kalakriti.

Chandrahantri becomes the Rajarishi Sunaka; Chandravinasana comes as the king called Janaki. That bull among the Danavas, Dhirghajihva, becomes Kasiraja; Simhika's son Rahu, tormentor of Surya and Soma, is born as Kratha.

Danayu's eldest son, Vikshara, becomes Vasumitra on Earth. Her second son Bala becomes the Pandya king; her third Vira, also called Balina, becomes Paundramatsyaka. Rajan, Danayu's fourth son, the great Vritrasura, incarnates as the Rajarishi Manimat. Vritra's younger brother Krodhahantri becomes known in this world as the King Danda. Krodhavardhana becomes Dandadhara.

The eight sons of the Kaleyas are all born as kings, strong as tigers. The eldest becomes King Jayatsena in Magadha; the second, mighty as Indra, becomes Aparajita; the third is born a matchless king of the Nishadas, strong and devious; the fourth is to become the royal sage Srenimat. The fifth becomes King Mahanjas, destroyer of his enemies; the sixth, of huge intelligence, becomes Abhiru, another famed Rajarishi; the seventh has boundless fame and is the King Samudrasena, knower of the Shastras. The eighth of the Kaleyas becomes Brihat, a king of dharma, always working for the welfare of all beings.

The mighty Danava Kukshi, incarnated as Parvatiya, is named for his lustre, which is that of a golden mountain. The Asura Krathana becomes King Suryaksha in the world; the handsome Demon Surya becomes a king of the Balhikas called Darada.

Rajan, I told you about the tribe of Asuras called the Krodhavasas. Many fearless Kshatriya kings of the Earth are Demons of that tribe – Madraka, Karnaveshta, Siddhartha, Kitaka, Suvira, Subahu, Mahavira, Balhika, Kratha, Vichitra, Suratha, the handsome Nila, Chiravasa, Bhumipala, Dantavakra, Durjaya, Rukmi the tigerish Kshatriya, your namesake Janamejaya, Ashada, Vayuvega, Bhuritejas, Ekalavya the brilliant Nishada, Sumitra, Vatadhana, Gomukha, the Kshatriyas of the clan of Karushakas, Khemadhurti, Srutayus, Udvaha, Brihatsena, Kshema, Ugratirtha, the Kalinga king, Matimat, the King Iswara. Yes, all these are Krodhavasa Asuras, incarnated as human kings.

A most powerful Demon called Kalanemi is born as the son of Ugrasena of Mathura, and he becomes Kamsa, the Great and the Terrible.

The Asura Devaka, lustrous as Indra, is born into the world as a king of the Gandharvas.

Rajan, you must know that Bharadvaja's son Drona is not born from any woman, but is an amsavatara of Brihaspati. He is a peerless archer, with power over every astra, of great tejas and greater achievements. He is also a master of the Vedas, the pride of his kind.

O King, Drona's son is the heroic Aswatthama, his eyes like lotus-petals, a terror to his enemies, of tremendous energy, is an amsavatara of equal embodiments of Siva, Yama, Kama and Krodha.

Because of Vasishta's curse and also Indra's dictate, the eight Vasus are born into the world as the sons of Ganga and Shantanu. The youngest Vasu, Prabhasa, is Bhishma, of the grand vow. He is the light of the House of Kuru, a knower of the Vedas, of lofty intellect, the most eloquent speaker, who melts the legions of his enemies in battle. Why, Jamadagni's son Parasurama Bhargava could not vanquish Bhishma when he fought a duel with him.

The Brahmana Sage Kripa, a man among men, is an amsavatara of the Rudras.

Shakuni, O King, who crushed his foes, is none other than Dwapara, the third Yuga incarnate!

Satyaki, pride of the Vrishnis, whose aim never falters, is an amsavatara, an incarnation of the Maruts, who are Vayu's companions. The Rajarishi, the Panchala King Drupada, greatest among bowmen, is also an incarnation of the Maruts, as indeed is the Vrishni Kritavarman, that bull among bulls among Kshatriyas; so, too, is King Virata.

Arishta's son Hamsa is also born into the clan of the Kurus and becomes a king of the Gandharvas.

Dhritarashtra, born of the seed of Krishna Dwaipayana, and blessed with long and mighty arms and unrivalled strength, he of prophetic vision, is blind because of his mother's indelicacy and the consequent anger of the Rishi Vyasa.

Pandu is Dhritarashtra's younger brother, of prowess that defies description, devout and truthful; why, purity incarnate. Their brother Vidura, I have told you, O King, is an avatara of the son of Maharishi Atri: Dharma, Lord of Righteousness and Justice.

As for Duryodhana, incalculably evil king, who ruins the honour of the Kuruvamsa, he is an amsavatara of the Kali Yuga, the Demon Kali. He is the cause of the Great War that devastated the Earth; he lit the fire that finally consumed everything.

The Rakshasas, who are once born as the sons of Pulastya Muni, now take birth as Duryodhana's hundred evil brothers, Dushasana being the first of them. Bharatrishabha, Durmukha, Duhsha and others of these hundred, who always supported Duryodhana's most treacherous and murderous schemes, are all sons of the same Pulastya Muni.

Of course, Dhritarashtra has another son, not by Gandhari but by a Vaishya woman in his palace, and we have seen that this is the virtuous Yuyutsu, who always sided with his cousins the Pandavas of dharma."

Janamejaya said, "Illustrious Suta, tell me the names of Dhritarashtra's sons in order of birth, beginning with the eldest."

Vaisampayana said, "O King, Duryodhana is the first, then Yuyutsu, Dushasana, Duhsaha, Duhshala, Durmukha, Vivimsati, Vikarna, Jalasandha, Sulochna, Vinda, Anuvinda, Durdharsha, Subahu, Dushpradharshana, Durmarshana, Dushkarna, Karna, Chitra, Vipachitra, Chitraksha, Charuchitra, Angada, Durmada, Dushpradharsha, Vivitsu, Vikata, Sama, Drananabha, Padmanabha, Nanda, Upanandaka, Sanapati, Sushena, Kundodara, Mahodara, Chitrabahu, Chitravarman, Suvarman, Durvirochana, Ayobahu, Mahabahu, Chitrachapa, Sukundala, Bhimavega,

Bhimabala, Balaki, Bhimavikrama, Ugrayudha, Bhimachara, Kanakayu, Dridhayudha, Dridhavarman, Dridhakshatra, Somakirti, Anadara, Jarasandha, Dridhasandha, Satyasandha, Sahasrabahu, Ugrasravas, Ugrasena, Kshemamurti, Aparajita, Panditaka, Visalaksha, Duradhara, Dridhahasta, Suhasta, Vatavega, Suvarchasa, Adityaketu, Bahvasin, Nagadatta, Anuyaina, Nishangi, Kuvachi, Dandi, Dandadhara, Dhanugraha, Ugra, Bhimaratha, Vira, Virabahu, Alolupa, Abhaya, Raudrakarman, Dridharatha, Anadhrishya, Kundaveda, Viravi, Dhirghalochana, Dirghabahu, Mahabahu, Vyudhoru, Kanakangana, Kundaja and Chitraka[5].

Dhritarshtra also has a daughter by Gandhari called Duhsala, who is not of the hundred, and neither is Yuyutsu, the Vaishya woman's son. I have recited the names of the hundred in order of their births.

All these are mighty Kshatriyas, great warriors. All of them knew the Vedas, and, Rajan, all the other Shastras besides. They are invincible, in attack and defence, and truly learned besides.

When they are of age, they marry suitably beautiful and accomplished princesses; and the Kaurava king gives his daughter Duhsala to be the wife of Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus. This is done on the advice of Dhritarashtra's brother-in-law, Shakuni.

O King, Yudhishtira is an amsa of Dharma; Bhimasena of Vayu; Arjuna of Indra; Nakula and Sahadeva, handsomest of men, their looks unrivalled on Earth, of the Aswin twins.

Soma Deva's son, Varchas the strong, becomes Arjuna's son of stunning genius, the dashing Abhimanyu. When Varchas is to be born, Soma says to the other Devas, 'I cannot live without my son. So let him incarnate on Bhumi, but live a short human life before returning to me after killing countless Daityas.

Nara, whose companion is Narayana, will be born as Indra's son Arjuna the Pandava. Let my Varchas be born as Arjuna's son and become a Maharatha. Let him be away on Earth for sixteen years, and when he is sixteen the Great War shall be fought, and, Devas, all your amsavataras shall raze the Asuras and the very race of Kshatriyas.

Yet, one day during the war, a great encounter will occur inside a cunning Chakravyuha. Krishna and Arjuna, Nara Narayana, will not have part in that battle, but my son shall pierce the impenetrable spinning wheel of warriors and take devastation to the enemy.

On his own, my son will send a quarter of the entire enemy army to Yama's realm, in the space of half a day. None will be able to stand before him, but finally, near dusk, a ring of Maharathas will combine to slay my mighty child with treachery, and Varchas shall return to me.

Abhimanyu will beget the single heir to the Kuru throne, and prevent the royal line of Bharata from becoming extinct.'

The Devas assent, 'So be it.' Why, they applaud him all together and offer him worship, that Lord of the stars. This, Rajan, of course, is the story behind the birth of your father's father.

The fireborn Maharatha Dhrishtadyumna is an amsa of Agni. Prince Shikhandin, who was once a princess, is the amsavatara of a Rakshasa.

Bharatarishabha, the celestial Rishis are born as the five sons of Draupadi – Prativindhya, Sutasoma, Srutakirti, Satanika, Nakula and Srutasena, endowed with terrific energy.

Vasudeva's father is Sura, a great Yadava chieftain. He has a daughter called Pritha, whose beauty is unmatched in this world. Sura has vowed, with Agni as his witness, that he would give his firstborn child to his cousin Kuntiboja, who is childless.

He gives Pritha to Kuntibhoja, who adopts her as his daughter. She becomes a charming and attentive young hostess in the palace of her adoptive father, especially to visiting Rishis and Brahmanas. Once, she waits graciously upon the Rishi Durvasa, a master of the profoundest mysteries of the spirit, but his temper also a legend.

Pritha, now called Kunti by her doting foster-father, looks after the irascible Sage's every wish and whim with such affection and care, that, as he is leaving, he says to her, 'I am pleased with you, my child. I am going to teach you a secret mantra with which you can summon any Deva you wish. By their grace, one day you shall bear divine children.'

He teaches her the recondite incantation, and then leaves.

Some days pass; then seized by curiosity, the young Kunti, still a maiden living in her father's home, chants Durvasa's mantra one morning and summons Surya Deva, the Sun God. You might imagine her surprise when the blazing Deva actually appears before her and begets a child on her, a son who becomes without equal among the archers of the world.

Kunti gives birth in magical secrecy, with Surya's blessing, and from fear of the censure of the world and her relatives, she floats her Sun-child, irradiant and handsome as the Sun himself, and born wearing golden

armour and earrings, his body of perfect proportions, away on the river that flows at the bottom of her father's palace garden.

The husband of Radha sees the wooden box of that shining infant floating downstream, and takes him home to his childless wife to be their son. They name him Vasusena, and when he grows up he becomes a master of weapons, of all the Shastras and sciences, learns the Veda, and, the truth being his strength, there is nothing he would not give away as alms to a Brahmana who comes begging to him, so generous is he.

Then, Indra, who is the origin of all things, comes to that mighty son of Surya and asks him for his natural kavacha and kundala as alms. Indra wants to disadvantage Vasusena against Arjuna, who of course is Indra's own son.

Promptly, that unequalled warrior strips off his armour, removes his magical earrings, both of which are his father Surya's protection to him, and gives them to Indra. Astonished by his truthfulness (for he has sworn not to refuse anyone that comes to him at high noon for whatever they ask of him as alms), and moved by his fearless generosity, Surya gives Vasusena his own Shakti, saying, 'Invincible hero, anyone at whom you cast this Shakti will die, be he not a Deva, an Asura, a Manava, a Gandharva, Naga, Rakshasa or any other celestial or earthly being.'

Surya's son is first called Vasusena, but later, because he has cut his coat of golden mail from his body to give it as alms to Indra, Surya's prince, Kunti's eldest son, is called Karna.

However, that natural Kshatriya grows up in the home of a Suta; Radha and her husband are the only parents he ever knows. Later, O King, Karna, noblest of men, greatest of archers, slayer of his enemies, the finest amsa of the God of Day, becomes the closest companion and advisor of Duryodhana the Kaurava.

Then there is born into the world Vaasudeva Krishna, indomitable and unrivalled in every way, an Avatara of Narayana, Devadeva the Eternal One. His brother Baladeva is an amsa of Sesha Naga.

Rajan, mighty Pradyumna is Sanatkumara incarnate. Many other dwellers in Swarga incarnate themselves in the race of the Vrishnis, swelling its glory.

And, O King, the portions of the tribe of Apsaras which I have mentioned already, also becomes incarnate on Earth according to Indra's commands. And sixteen thousand portions of those goddesses become, in

this world of men, the wives of Vasudeva. And a portion of Sri herself becomes incarnate on Earth, for the gratification of Narayana, in the line of Bhishmaka. She is the chaste Rukmini.

And the faultless Draupadi, slender-waisted like the wasp, is born of a portion of Sachi (the queen of the Devas), in the line of Drupada. She is neither short nor tall; she is of the fragrance of the blue lotus, of eyes large as lotus-petals, of thighs fair and round, of dense masses of black curly hair. And endowed with every auspicious feature and her complexion like that of the emerald, she enchants and steals the hearts of the five Pandavas, greatest among men of the world.

The two goddesses Siddhi and Dhriti are born as Kunti and Madri to become the mothers of those five. The Devi Mali incarnates as Gandhari, daughter of Subala, who becomes blind Dhritarashtra's wife.

This, Rajan, is the narration of the incarnation of the Devas, the Asuras, Gandharvas, Apsaras and Rakshasas as invincible kings and lovely queens of the Earth.

I have told you about the exalted ones born as Yadavas and Vrishnis, the others born as powerful kings in other royal houses, and those who take birth as Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.

This account of the incarnation as amsavataras of the God and Demons can bestow wealth, fame, children, longevity and success, if one listens to it with faith. He that hears it learns the true nature of the creation, preservation and destruction of the world, and thus finding wisdom, he is never conquered even by the gravest sorrow."

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[5] These do not add up to a hundred, and there seem to be two Mahabahus.

CANTO 68

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, you have indeed told me about the incarnations in amsa of the Devas, the Danavas, the Rakshasas, the Gandharvas and Apsaras. But I want to hear the genealogy of the Kuruvamsa again, from its inception. I beg you, Vaisampayana, relate this to me before all these auspicious and illumined Rishis."

Vaisampayana said, "O noblest of Bharata's race, Dushyanta of blazing tejas is the founder of the Paurava line. He is the Guardian of the Earth bounded by four seas, and has complete sway over the Four Quarters of this world. Moreover, he is sovereign of myriad islands in the midst of the ocean. Bane of his enemies, he even holds sway over the distant countries of the Mlechchas.

While Dushyanta rules, the varnas remain pure and there are no children born of mixed caste. No one tills the soil, because the Earth herself yields every manner of produce, spontaneously, as she does precious metals and gemstones: magically.

There are no sinners and all men are good, and live in dharma and virtue; whatever they do their motives are pure and selfless. There is no fear from thieves, famine, or disease – for none of these exist. The four varnas delight in their svadharma, for its own sake, not performing any karma from desire for gain.

His people feel perfectly secure during the golden reign of Dushyanta, and Indra sends down the rains in proper season and the Earth flourishes. Rich is the yield of the field and the bough. The world abounds in wealth of every kind and every species of animal, bird and plant, great and small.

Brahmanas perform their sacred dharma punctiliously; they are truthful to a fault. The young king is marvellously strong, his body hard as Indra's Vajra, and he can lift Mount Mandara, with all its forests, and hold it up, easily.

He is a master of the four forms of gada-yuddha, mace fighting – hurling it from afar, striking with it at close quarters, whirling it around to strike many adversaries, and staving off a combatant with it. He is an expert at every form of warfare, a master of every weapon; he rides an elephant and a horse with equal skill.

Dushyanta is as strong as Vishnu, brilliant as Surya, deep and grave as Varuna, and as patient as Bhumi Devi. His contented people love their king and he rules with dharma as his sceptre."

CANTO 69

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Tell me now about the birth and the life of Mahatma Bharata and about the birth of Shakuntala. Holy one, tell me how Dushyanta, that lion among kings, married Shakuntala. O most erudite among men, great Vaisampayana, tell me all."

Vaisampayana said, "Once, Dushyanta Mahabaho sets out for the forest with a large complement of soldiers. Hundreds of horses and elephants go with the king. Footsoldiers, chariots, cavalry and elephant mounted warriors travel with Dushyanta – Kshatriyas bearing swords and spears, maces and heavy cudgels.

Yes, surrounded by hundreds of great warriors, that king sets out and the Earth and Sky echo with the tigerish roars of those warriors, and with booming conches, batteries of drumrolls, the clatter of chariot wheels, the trumpeting of elephants, the whinnying of horses, the din of weapons being clashed together and against breastplate and armour – it is deafening, the noise that force makes as it goes forth.

Beautiful and noble women line their sprawling terraces to watch the grand march of mighty King Dushyanta. The women see how magnificent he is, like Indra himself.

They say, 'This tiger among men is a match for the Vasus in battle; no enemy can stand before him.'

The women shower flowers down on their king in joy. Followed by the greatest Brahmanas, chanting out their blessings ceaselessly, the king proceeds towards the jungle in some delight. He goes to hunt deer. Not only Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, but Vaishyas and Sudras follow Dushyanta who rides a haughty elephant even as the king of the Devas does. The people follow him until he forbids them to go with him any further.

Then Dushyanta climbs down from his royal elephant and into his chariot, yoked to steeds swift as thoughts, and the sound of his chariot

wheels fill Earth and Sky. Soon, he sees a great forest before him and, entering it, sees that it is like the heavenly garden Nandana.

Bilwa, Arka, Khadira, Kapittha and Dhava trees he sees and that the ground is strewn with crags that have come loose and fallen from surrounding hills. He sees no water anywhere, no humans, and the jungle stretches away on every side for yojanas. There are deer in plenty in that forest, as well as lions and other fierce predators.

Dushyanta and his men begin to hunt in that forest, slaughtering countless beasts. That tiger among kings kills many a tiger, within range, with unerring arrows; he wounds many others that he sees at great distances; then he leaps on other striped terrors that are too near to be slain by arrows and kills them with his sword.

There are beasts he kills by casting spears at them that pierce their hearts, and others he fells with mace and club. Fearlessly, he ranges through that jungle, strewing carcasses everywhere. The forest is in turmoil.

Lions flee that jungle in prides; elephant herds, their tuskers slain, crash away in panic in every direction, trunks raised high, screams filling the air, spraying urine and dung in terror, some vomiting blood. Some wounded beasts trample many of the king's men who are not quick enough to escape their wild charges.

Exhausted, the mastodons soon fall down, for there is no water anywhere to drink. The king's hungry warriors eat many of those that have died, some raw and some roasted over spits.

That jungle, which teemed with animals a short while ago, is quickly filled with dead beasts and hardly any that live, because those that do live flee for their lives, so savage is the hunt of Dushyanta and his men."

CANTO 70

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Having slaughtered thousands of innocent beasts in that forest, until there is no game left in it to hunt, Dushyanta goes towards another forest, to hunt on.

By now, his force has scattered and he has just two of his men with him – his priest and his minister. Tired, hungry and thirsty, the king stumbles upon a desert at the edge of the second forest. Crossing this plain of sand, where no green thing grows, Dushyanta and his men enter the second forest, like a garden in heaven, full of Rishis and their asramas.

Dark, deep and enchanting this forest is, with cool and fragrant breezes whispering through stands of trees laden with flowers in every colour. Velvet grasses cover the ground, as far as they can see, and the sweetest songs of birds fill the air most of all, the inspired melodies of the male kokila and also the twanging of cicadas.

Ancient and magnificent are the trees of this forest, their lofty branches entwining high above the jungle floor to form a verdant awning. Flowering vines cling to many of these and bees hum over them, drinking their nectar.

No tree here but that which bears some luscious fruit; none without the bees swarming over its flowers; and none that has any thorns. Yes, truly the whole forest rings with the symphonies of feathered choirs. And the flowers? A carnival, a riot of them, from every season, in every colour, some from dreams. After the march through the arid sands, the green shade is like balm to the king and his men.

The breeze seems to welcome Dushyanta, gently dislodging a small rain of flowers to fall over his head as if in benison. So lofty are those patriarchs of the jungle, clad in rainbow flower garments of every hue, honey-throated songsters perched on their branches, that their crowns surely must thrust themselves into Swarga above.

Their branches, though, are bent with the weight of the flowers they bear. Gazing at all this, hearing the drone of the bees like the sruti to the song of the birds, great Dushyanta is enchanted.

Bands of Siddhas, Charanas, tribes of Gandharvas, Apsaras, Vanaras and Kinnaras come to this charmed forest, to sport, to make love and become inebriated with its enchantment.

The soft breezes scented with flowers blow everywhere, with no method, as if they play with the trees. The king sees that this forest grows in a great loop of a river and, looking at a singularly lofty stand of trees, like some great and incredible column, he is reminded of a gaudy stamba erected at Indra's festival.

Wandering in that forest, Dushyanta comes closer to that auspicious grove of trees in which there is an asrama of some Rishis, serene and brimming, as it were, with the joy of the Spirit. A sacred fire burns solemnly in the agnikunda at its heart. The king sees that many Yogis, Balakhilyas and other Munis sit around the fire and offer worship there. There are many kutilas that comprise the hermitage, each with a holy fire alight within it. The flowers fallen from the trees form a thick bright carpet over the ground.

Perhaps even more lovely than the rest of that forest is this asrama nestling in the grove of lofty trees, their boles so wide and great. The limpid river Malini flows beside that asrama, waterbirds of every kind swimming, playing, on her transparent current.

The Rishis bathe in her, and she suffuses their hearts with bliss. On her banks Dushyanta sees herds of deer that seem fearless and even tame; he sees chakravakas on her wavelets crested with the purest white foam; he sees the abodes of Kinnara fauns on the far bank of the sacred Malini. Monkeys and bears he sees in large numbers, elephants, tigers and snakes.

Of course, there are numerous asramas that dot the course of the river, where Rishis live in dhyana, imbibing the Scriptures. The fine asrama on the banks of that river, which Dushyanta sees first, belongs to the Maharishi Kashyapa, and many of his disciples live therein, Rishis of profound tapasya.

Dushyanta sees the river, many islands on her stream, her banks gorgeous, and the asrama that seems truly like the hermitage of Nara Narayana upon the banks of the Ganga; and he decides he would enter that asrama. In some transport at everything he sees and feels, Dushyanta,

whose chariot is inexorable to his enemies, walks into that sanctuary as lovely as a bit of Devaloka fallen into this world.

The forest, which is even like the garden of Chitraratha, the Gandharva king, echoes with the cries of peacocks. Dushyanta wants to meet the Maharishi Kanva of the line of Kashyapa, a Sage whose lustre is such that it is difficult to even look at him.

Earlier, when they rejoined him at the hem of the second forest, Dushyanta had said to his flagbearers, the horsemen and the elephant riders, 'I will go alone to see the mighty Rishi of Kashyapa's race, the one without darkness. Wait here for me.'

Going into the blessed jungle with just his priest and his minister, Dushyanta immediately forgets his hunger and thirst; indeed they leave him. Great joy surges through him. He puts aside all his royal insignia, his armour and weapons, and goes forward without ornaments to see that Sage who is an immortal sea of the Spirit.

The forest is like a piece of Brahmaloka. Above the birdsongs and the nectar-drunk bees, Dushyanta hears the chanting of Riks by sonorous and beautifully modulated Brahmana voices. Elsewhere, he sees Yagnas, and hears the Vedangas and the Yajur mantras being chanted. Other asramas resonate with the harmonies of the hymns of the Saman being sung by Rishis of deep tapasya. Still other zones of that jungle are adorned with Munis who are masters, obviously, of the Atharva Veda.

The king walks on, in awe, and hears the Samhitas being recited, exquisitely. Other Brahmanas, healers, are chanting other arcane mantras. Truly, this is equal to being in Brahmaloka, thinks Dushyanta.

He sees Brahmanas that are experts at creating yagnashalas; others that are masters of the rules of krama for sacrifices; others are master logicians and adept at all the sciences of the mind, all these fully knowing the Veda; masters of language and grammarians; those that know the most secret rituals; those that tread the path of Moksha Dharma; dialecticians and metaphysicians with minds like rapiers that quickly cut away any dross and arrive at the truth of a philosophical proposition.

The king sees Brahmanas who know prosody, Nirukta; astrologers; men that know the nature of matter and its underlying illusion; those learned in the fruit to be obtained from various yagnas; those that can converse with birds and monkeys; those that know vast treatises on every subject, backwards – in short, men who know all there is to be known.

Dushyanta hears their melodious and strong voices at japa, chanting the sacred names of God; he sees them performing homa, making burnt offerings in the holy fire.

He is received respectfully wherever he goes, and he wonders at the delectable carpets those Brahmanas offer him to sit upon. Seeing and hearing all that he did in that forest, he truly feels that he has entered Brahmaloka. Yet, he wanders on because he has not found the asrama of the Muni Kanva.

Finally, that tiger among kings arrives, with his minister and his priest, at the hermitage of Kashyapa, where the loftiest Sages of incomparable asceticism and vows live."

CANTO 71

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now, the king leaves his two companions at the entrance to that asrama and goes in alone. He does not see the Rishi Kanva or any other Sage, and calls out loudly, 'Is anyone here?'

His deep voice echoes like thunder in that silent place. Then, a young woman, a girl as beautiful, surely, as the Devi Sri herself, appears. She is wearing the simple, rough clothes of a hermit's daughter. She is fair and her eyes are black, and she receives the king with honour and welcomes him.

She brings him a darbhasana to sit upon, gives him padya, water to wash his feet, and offers him arghya. Respectfully, she inquires after his health and his peace of mind.

With utmost reverence she says, 'O Rajan, tell me what I can do for you. I await your command.'

The king says to that flawless beauty, her voice and speech so sweet, 'I have come to worship the most exalted Rishi Kanva. Lovely one, tell me where he is.'

Shakuntala replies, 'He has gone into the forest to gather fruit. He will return shortly. I beg you, wait for him here.'

The king gazes at her, helplessly, and sees that she is beautiful past reason; her face and form are perfect. He sees how sweet her smile is, and how she is radiant with her tapasya, and her humility. Besides, she is in the bloom of lush youth.

Captivated, Dushyanta says, 'And who are you? Whose daughter are you? Why do you also live in the forest when you are so beautiful, and obviously so chaste? Ah, you have stolen my heart and I want to know all about you, everything.'

She smiles and says sweetly, 'Rajan, I am the daughter of Maharishi Kanva.'

Dushyanta says, 'That Sage, whom the Universe worships, is a Brahmachari. Dharma Deva might break a vow, but not the Rishi Kanva. How can you be his daughter, beautiful one?'

Shakuntala replies, 'I will tell you, Rajan, how I became the Muni's daughter. Once, another Rishi came here and asked the same question. I will tell you what my father said to him.

My father Kanva said to that Rishi, "Once, long ago, Viswamitra performed such an awesome tapasya that Indra became anxious that the Rishi blazing with tejas would usurp his throne in Amaravati, and cast Indra down from Swarga.

Indra called the Apsara Menaka and said to her, 'You are the most beautiful of your kind, Menaka, and I want you to do me a small service. The Rishi Viswamitra blazes like the Sun with the power of his tapasya. I fear his penance will cast me down from my throne.

Sweet Menaka of the slender waist, I want you to seduce the Sage from his dhyana, and interrupt his penance. Go and tempt him; use all your weapons: your youth, your beauty, your charms, your smile, your sidelong glances, your soft voice.'

Menaka replied, 'Lord, you know how powerful Viswamitra is and he is quick to anger, too. Why, he has made even you anxious. Then shall I not fear him? He caused the death of Vasistha's children. You know that Viswamitra is born a Kshatriya and only later became a Brahmana through tapasya.

Why, when he wanted a holy river near him, in which to perform his ablutions, he created the deep and swift Kausiki. You know how the Rajarishi Trishanku, whom a father's curse turned into a Vetala, fed Viswamitra's wife during a famine, while Viswamitra was away at his penance.

When Viswamitra returned after the famine was over, he changed the name of the Kausiki near his asrama to Para, and then became Trishanku's priest to help him rise bodily into Swarga.

Why, you refused to drink the Soma rasa from that yagna, O Indra, and when you commanded the rising Trishanku to fall back to the Earth, Viswamitra in fury created a second Universe (with all the stars beginning with Sravana), for Trishanku to rule.

I am terrified of such a one, my Lord. If you want me to do what you ask, you must tell me how I can escape being consumed by his wrath. He

can burn the three worlds with his tejas, or make the Earth quake with a stamp of his foot. He can pluck up Meru by his roots and cast him as far as he pleases. He can fly around the Earth, all her ten cardinal points, in a moment.

How can even an Apsara like me hope to move such a one, alight with his tapasya like a fire, his virtue perfect, his passions controlled? His mouth is like Agni; the pupils of his eyes are like Surya and Soma; his tongue is like Yama.

O Devendra, how will I dare touch him? Yama, Soma, the great Rishis, the Sadhyas, the Visis and Balakhilyas are terrified of Viswamitra! How can I dare even look at him?

But because you command it, I will go to the dreadful Rishi, to accomplish your purpose. But O Indra, devise a plan by which you can protect me from his anger if it is roused. Vayu should go with me, as well, and fill the asrama with the scents of spring, snatch my garment from my body so that I stand naked before the Rishi, and let Manmatha, Kama, roiler of minds, be there as well to turn the Sage's heart to me.'

When Indra gave her all that she asked for, and said that he would be at hand himself near Viswamitra's asrama, invisibly, to rescue her if the Sage became angry, Menaka went to Kaushika's hermitage to seduce Viswamitra from his penance.'"

CANTO 72

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Shakuntala continues, 'My father Kanva said, "Indra commanded Vayu, who goes wherever he pleases, across the Earth, to be with Menaka when she approached Viswamitra, as also Kama Deva.

Timidly, her heart pounding, the exquisite Menaka went into the Rishi's asrama and saw Viswamitra sitting there in dhyana, bright as a fire himself, he that had burnt his sins to ashes in the other fire of his tapasya; and he still sat on, in intense dhayna.

She folded her hands and greeted the Sage, then began to dance before him, and to sing softly. In a moment, Vayu whisked the single white garment from her body, leaving her bare. With a cry, as if in terrible bashfulness and annoyance, she ran after the flying cloth, white as the moon.

Viswamitra, his tejas like cosmic fire, gazed upon her naked body and saw how perfect she was, and youthful, no blemish upon her ravishing nakedness. He saw how graceful she was, and shot by Kama Deva with one of his subtle flowery shafts of love, that bull among Sages was pierced through by lust.

Hoarsely he called to her, and she went to him willingly and he took her ardently to himself. They were together for many years, and so happy were they that those years passed like a single day.

Viswamitra begot a child on Menaka. As her time drew near, Menaka went to a secluded place on the banks of the Malini, gushing through a verdant valley of Himavat. There she gave birth to a daughter, and, Apsara that she was, she abandoned her child beside the river and went away.

A flock of vultures saw that baby lying there helpless in a forest that teemed with lions, tigers and leopards, and the great birds flew down and sat around the infant in a protective ring, and no predator approached her, no Rakshasa or carnivore took her life.

Later that day, I went to the river for my ablutions and saw the strange sight of the vultures guarding Menaka's daughter in the heart of the wilderness. I brought her home and made her my daughter.

You know that they who create the body, who protect life and who provide food are all fathers, according to the Shastras. Because birds, Shakuntas, protected her in the jungle, I named her Shakuntala. Brahmana, this was how Shakuntala became my daughter and the sinless child also looks up to me as being her father."

This, O King, is what my father said to the Rishi who asked him the question that you have asked me. I have never known my natural father and I do indeed think of Kanva Muni as being my only father. This is my story, O Dushyanta!'"

CANTO 73

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "King Dushyanta says, 'This is wonderful! I love you Shakuntala, and want you to be my wife. Whatever your heart desires you shall have: golden necklaces and earrings, priceless robes of silk, great moon pearls from distant lands, golden coins, the finest carpets, and whatever else you want. Why, let all that I have, and my kingdom, be yours from today.

Only come to me now, marry me in Gandharva vivaha, beautiful one. It is considered to be the first form of marriage and the best. Be mine now, this very moment!'

Shakuntala says, 'O King, my father has gone to gather fruit in the forest. Wait but briefly and he will give me to you to be your wife.'

Beside himself, Dushyanta replies, 'Flawless, perfect one, exquisite one, I want you to be my life's companion. From now I live only for you and my heart is yours.

One belongs first and last to oneself; each of us depends finally on himself or herself. And so it is lawful for you to give yourself to me. The eight kinds of marriages are Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisacha.

Brahma's son Manu, the Lawgiver, has said that all these are proper depending on who one is. The first four are proper for Brahmanas, and the first six for Kshatriyas. For kings even Rakshasa vivaha is allowed. Asura vivaha is allowed only to Vaishyas and Sudras.

Of the first five, three are sattvik, while two are not. The Paisacha and Asura vivahas are violent and unsafe. These are the laws of dharma, and they must be followed.

To Kshatriyas, Gandharva and Rakshasa vivaha are allowed. You must not be afraid; for us either of these, or even a mixture of both, is perfectly

lawful. Fair one, I am full of desire for you, and if you feel the same for me, let us marry now by Gandharva vivaha, and consummate our love!'

Shakuntala listens to the impatient king, then says, 'If it is indeed true that we are allowed to marry by Gandharva vivaha, if I can truly give myself to you in dharma, listen O Purushottama, to my conditions, and you must swear solemnly to give me what I ask.

The son that you beget in me must become the Yuvaraja and king after you. Grant this one condition, Dushyanta, and let us marry and be one flesh.'

The king does not think a moment before crying, 'So be it! I will even take you, my beauty with the sweetest smile, to my capital. I swear this to you, lovely one, for you deserve no less.'

With that he takes her to be his wife in Gandharva vivaha, and possesses her immediately. Then he leaves her, after repeatedly reassuring Shakuntala, 'Beloved, I will send my finest legion, of the four varnas, to fetch you to my city.'

Having sworn this, Dushyanta leaves that asrama and that forest like a bit of heaven on earth. As he rides home, he begins to think of Kanva. He wonders, 'What will the Rishi say when he discovers what happened?' With this thought, he arrives in his capital.

As soon as Dushyanta leaves the asrama, Kanva returns. Ashamed and feeling guilty, Shakuntala does not go out to meet him as she usually does. But that great Sage is a mystic and already sees everything that has transpired with his inner eye.

Not annoyed, but pleased, he says, 'My child, there is no sin in what you did today, secretly, without waiting for me to return. You have been with a man, but you have not broken dharma by giving yourself to him. Why, the Shastras say that Gandharva vivaha between a man and a woman who desire each other is the highest form of marriage for Kshatriyas.

Dushyanta is a noble and virtuous king, and you have taken him for your husband with all your heart. Your son by him shall be mighty and illustrious. He will be invincible in battle and have sway over Earth and Sea.'

Shakuntala now goes to her tired father and washes his feet. She takes the load of fruit he has brought, and sets it down. She says softly, 'I beg you, bless Dushyanta and his ministers, too.'

Kanva replies, ‘Sweet child, for your sake I will bless him. Also, ask me for any boon you want.’

Shakuntala thinks of Dushyanta whom she loves, and says, ‘May every Paurava king be virtuous and may they never lose their kingdom or their throne.’”

CANTO 74

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Dushyanta leaves the asrama, promising Shakuntala that he will send for her. But the months pass, her time comes and she delivers a magnificent child, a boy of shining tejas. When the child is three years, he blazes like agni. He is handsome, generous, and quickly, very accomplished as well.

Kanva performs all his rites of passage and teaches the child of great intelligence everything that he needs to know, so day by day he grows more splendid. His teeth are pearls, his locks shine, and even as a young boy he is so strong that he can kill lions. He has every auspicious line and mark in his palms, his brow is broad and lofty, his beauty and strength swell like the Moon waxing during the bright fortnight.

He grows like the son of a Deva. When he is just six, he seizes lions and tigers, bears, bison and even elephants and ties them to the great trees around the asrama. Some of these beasts he rides, and others he chases for sport.

The Rishis in Kanva's asrama name him Sarvadamana because he subdues any beast, however strong. Boundless are his strength and vigour. When Kanva sees all this, he tells Shakuntala that the time has come for Sarvadamana to be crowned the Yuvaraja of his father's kingdom.

Kanva says to his disciples, 'Take Shakuntala and her son to her husband's city. Women should not live so long in their parents' homes, for it tarnishes their reputation, even their virtue. Take her to Dushyanta, without delay.'

The disciples set out with Shakuntala and her son for Hastinapura, city of elephants. Thus, the lovely forest woman and her son, handsome and radiant like a god, his eyes like lotus petals, leave the forest where both have grown, and where Dushyanata first met and knew Shakuntala.

Arriving in Hastinapura, she enters the king's palace and presents their son, who looks like the rising sun, to his father. Maharishi Kanva's sishyas bring Shakuntala to the king and immediately return to their hermitage.

Shakuntala greets the king, formally, love shining in her eyes. She says to Dushyanta, 'My Lord, this is your son, now make him the Yuvaraja. You, Rajan, sired this child like a Deva in me, and it is time you fulfilled the oath you swore that he would become your heir. Remember, O Dushyanta, everything that you said to me in my father Kanva's asrama.'

The king remembers her well, but he says harshly, 'I do not remember anything. Who are you, evil woman, dressed as a Sannyasini? I do not recall having any relations with you, not of dharma, artha or kama. You may go or stay here, as you please. I have nothing to do with you.'

Stunned, stricken, Shakuntala stands as if she has turned to stone, or a wooden post. Then rage grips her and her eyes turn the colour of copper and her lips quiver. The looks she gives the king seem as if they would burn him to ashes. But she restrains herself and, with a great effort, quenches her rising fury.

Composing herself, though her heart seethes with rage and sorrow, equally, she looks straight at Dushyanta and says to him in a quiet and dangerous voice, 'Dushyanta, you remember very well everything that happened between us. How do you now say, like some lowborn man, O King, that you do not know me? Your heart is my witness, whether I speak truly or not.

Do not demean yourself, for the liar is one who robs his own soul. He is capable of every sin. You think that you are the only one who knows what you did with me. Don't you know that the Ancient, Omniscient Narayana dwells in every heart and every moment?

He knows your every sin, and yet you dare to sin in his presence. Every sinner thinks that his sins pass unnoticed; but the Devas see everything as does He who lives in every heart. The Sun, the Moon, the Air, the Fire, the Earth, the Sky, Water, the heart itself, Yama, the day, the night, both sandhyas, and Dharma – all these witness everything that any man ever does.

Surya's son Yama ignores the sins of a man with whom Narayana, the omniscient witness, is pleased; but Yama torments the man with whom Narayana is not pleased. The Gods never bless those that degrade themselves with falsehood; why, his own soul will not bless such a man.

I am a devoted wife. It is true that I come here myself; but do not insult me because of that, O King. I am your wife and I deserve respect from you. Dare you dishonour me because I come here myself? Dare you treat me like some prostitute in the presence of all your court?

I want for nothing in the forest, and neither do I lead a sorry life. Do you hear me Dushyanta? If you refuse to do what I ask, my curse will burst your head open, in a hundred pieces. A husband enters his wife's womb as seed, and emerges again as his son. This is why the Sages who know the Vedas call a wife Jaya: she of whom one is born.

And a son born to those that know the mantras of the Veda becomes the saviour of departed ancestors. A son rescues his manes from the hell called Put, and so Brahma has named a son as Putra. Begetting a son, one conquers the three worlds; with a son's son a man finds eternity. Through a great grandson, his grandsires obtain everlasting joy.

A true wife is skilled in household matters: she who bears a son is a dharmapatni, a good wife, as is she who is devoted to her husband. The good wife is chaste and knows no man other than her husband. His wife is half of a man; she is his dearest friend; she is the very root of dharma, artha and kama; she is the seed of moksha.

Married men perform their dharma, living contentedly in grihastasrama. They are cheerful that have wives; they find fortune. Sweet-spoken wives are like friends in whose company a man is joyful; in the performance of dharma, they are like fathers; when a man is ill or sad, they are like mothers.

Even when he travels through deep and dangerous forests, a good wife is a man's companion and solace. Everyone trusts a man who has a good wife. O Rajan, a wife is a man's most treasured possession. Why, even when a man leaves this world for Yama's realm, his wife, if she is devoted, goes with him. A wife who departs before her husband waits for him; but if the husband goes first, the chaste wife follows close.

Rajan, this is why marriage exists; a man enjoys his wife's companionship not only in this world but in the next. Then, the Rishis all say that a man himself is born as his son: so he whose wife bears him a son must look upon her as his mother. Why, when a man sees the face of his son, like looking into a magical mirror, he feels as joyful as a virtuous man who attains Swarga.

Men suffering in the world, from all its trials of body and mind, feel as refreshed by their wives' company as one does having a cool bath on a hot and sweaty day. Not in anger should a man ever displease his wife, for, everything his joy, fortune and virtue depend upon her.

A wife is the sacred field in which the husband sows his seed and is born again. Not Rishis can procreate without having wives. Which happiness can match what a father feels when he sees his son running into his arms and hugging him, be the child covered in dust and dirt?

Ah, then why are you so callous to your child who has come to you and looks with such longing at you, to take him onto your lap? Even ants nurture their eggs with tender care; then why do you, a great king of dharma, refuse to acknowledge your son?

Not the touch of the softest sandalwood paste, of the most feminine woman, of the purest, coolest water on a hot day, can equal the feeling of clasping one's child in one's arms. A Brahmana is the first among all creatures that walk on two legs; the cow, the best of those that walk on four; a king, the foremost among one's guardians; and one's own son is the best of all beings and objects to touch and to hold.

Embrace your beautiful son, O Dushyanta, and you will find no sensation on Earth can equal that joy. O Parantapa, I bore this child in my womb for a full three years before I brought him forth to become the dispeller of all your sorrows. O Paurava king, when I gave birth to him, an asariri from the sky said: "He shall perform a hundred Aswamedha Yagnas!"

Why, men that travel to distant lands, take other men's children onto their laps, sniff their heads and feel great joy.

Dushyanta, you know the Vedic mantras that Brahmanas chant when a son is born: "You are born, O son, of my body. You have sprung from my heart. You are my own self come as my son. Live to be a hundred years. My life depends on you, and the continuation of my family. O son, live in great joy for a hundred years!"

Yes, this lustrous child has sprung from your body; look at him and see yourself as you would your image in a still lake. He has been kindled by you: even as a sacrificial fire is from a domestic one. You are but one; through him you have made yourself two.

Rajan, you came hunting in the wilderness. I was a virgin living in my father's asrama and you importuned me. The six most beautiful Apsaras are

Urvasi, Purvachitti, Sahajanya, Menaka, Viswachi and Ghritachi. Among them, Brahma's daughter Menaka is the first. She came down to the Earth and Viswamitra begot me on her.

She gave birth to me in a valley of Himavat, and then, feeling no maternal love, she abandoned me as if I was someone else's child. Ah, I wonder what sin I committed in some other life that first my parents abandoned me, and now you, my husband, do the same. For myself, I am content to return to my father Kanva's asrama, but you must not renounce this child, your son.'

Dushyanta listens to all this, but then says savagely, 'Shakuntala, women are given to lying, and I do not remember having begotten any child on you. Who will believe what you say? The promiscuous Menaka, who knows no affection even for her own child, is your mother, as you yourself say. She abandoned you upon Himavan's slopes just as one discards the flowers offered to the Devas during worship, when the worship is over.

Your father, the lustful Viswamitra, was a Kshatriya but chose to become a Brahmana; he, too, is cruel and heartless that he abandoned you. But it is true that Menaka is the first among the Apsaras, and your father foremost of Rishis. You are their daughter, yet you talk like a whore, obscenely.

You do not deserve to be believed. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, casting aspersions, especially against me? Leave at once, you harlot dressed as a Sannyasini. Where is the Maharishi Viswamitra and where is the Apsara Menaka? Why are you, deceiving, vile woman, dressed as an ascetic? As for your son, he is grown up, while you insist on calling him a child.

You say he is a boy, but look how strong and powerful he is. If he is just six, as you claim, how is he so big, like a Sala tree? For sure, you are a lowborn, lying whore. You are begotten lustfully by Menaka, and not in love.

I don't know you or anything that you say. Go away, go wherever you like!'

Shakuntala replies, 'O King, you see the faults of others, be they not as small as a mustard seed, but not your own which are bigger than a bilwa fruit! Menaka is an Apsara, indeed she is reckoned to be the most beautiful of the Apsaras, their queen. Dushyanta, I am of much nobler and higher birth than you. You walk upon the Earth, O Rajan, but I rove the Sky at

will. The comparison between you and me is as between a mustard seed and a mountain. Such is my power, mortal king!

I can fly to the worlds of Indra, Kubera, Yama and Varuna. What I came here to tell you, King of dharma, is from the purest motives and not from any greed. Listen to me and forgive me for these comparisons between yourself and me.

But an ugly man thinks of himself as being better looking than other men and mocks them – until he looks at his own face in a mirror for the first time. Then he sees the truth, and the real difference of nature between himself and other men. The truly handsome man does not mock anyone.

The evil man is always a reviler. Just as swine look for filth even in a garden of flowers, the mocker always hears only vileness in anything that another tells him, whatever it is. However, a wise man listens to the speech of others, good and evil mixed, but like the goose, which knows how to drink only the milk from a mixture of milk and water, he takes only the good.

The honest man always hesitates to speak ill of others, but the evil ever delight to do so. The good always delight in showing regard to their elders, but the evil always find pleasure in disparaging the good. The good are happy in never seeking faults; the evil are happy only in finding them. The wicked always speak ill of the good and the honest; yet, even if hurt by them, the good do not wound the evil.

What can be more absurd than those that are themselves evil accusing the good of being so? When even atheists grow angry at those that abandon truth and virtue, and become like virulent serpents, what shall I say about myself, who have grown in faith?

He who begets a son who is his very image, and yet does not accept or love him, never attains to the worlds that he desires, for the Gods destroy his fortune and take his possessions from him. The Pitrs have said that a son continues the race and bloodline, and so a son is the greatest yagna and dharma. No man should abandon his son.

Manu tells of five kinds of sons: a son begotten upon one's own wife, one gained as a gift from another, one bought for a consideration, a child who becomes a son from love, and sons begotten upon women other than one's wife. All these are sons.

Sons support the dharma and the achievements of their fathers, enhance their joy, and save the spirits of dead ancestors from hell. So, O tiger among

Kshatriyas, it does not become you to abandon a son like yours. Accept and cherish your child, O Dushyanta, like your own self. Lion among kings, you degrade yourself by being deceitful.

The creation and dedication of a tank brings more punya that digging a hundred wells. Performing a yagna confers more merit than creating a sacred tank. A son is far more auspicious than a sacrifice, and the truth more sacred than a hundred sons.

Once, the punya from a hundred Aswamedhas was weighed against the truth, and the truth was found to be immeasurably heavier. Dushyanta, the truth is equal to the study of all the Vedas and bathing at all the sacred tirthas together. There is no other virtue to equal the truth, and nothing superior to the truth. The truth is God himself, O Kshatriya; truth is the highest vrata.

So do not break your word to me, and be one with the truth. If you set no value by what I say I will go away with no protest; indeed, I must avoid the company of a man like you. But, Dushyanta, when you die, this son of mine shall surely rule all this Earth surrounded by the four seas and be crowned by the king of mountains.'

With this, Shakuntala turns on her heel and walks out of the king's presence. No sooner has she left, than a great asariri, a disembodied voice, speaks echoingly from the air to Dushyanta who sits amidst his priests, his Gurus and ministers.

The voice says, 'A mother is only the sheath of flesh; the son born from her is the father himself. O Dushyanta, cherish your son and do not demean Shakuntala. Best of men, a son is a form of the father's seed and he rescues the spirits of the ancestors from the realm of Yama.

You are this child's father, and Shakuntala spoke the truth. The husband cleaves his body and is born from the wife as a son. Dushyanta, accept and love your son by Shakuntala. To try to live by forsaking one's living son is a terrible misfortune. Paurava, cherish your lofty son born to Shakuntala. And because you will accept and nurture this child at our word, he shall be called Bharata, the precious and cherished one.'

In that voice the very gods speak thunderously to Dushyanta before all his court and people. Suddenly, Dushyanta's face lights up with great joy.

That king cries, 'Did you all hear what the asariri says? The command of the Devas! I always knew that this child was mine. Yet, if I had accepted

him merely at what Shakuntala said, my people would have been suspicious, and always harboured a doubt that the prince was not mine.'

O Bharatottama, once the heavenly voice has established that the child Bharata is indeed his son, Dushyanta is full of joy. He rises and clasps the powerful boy in his arms, and performs every ritual that a father should for his son. He never stops hugging him and sniffing his head in adoration.

The Brahmanas shower their blessings over the child and the bards of the court, the Sutas, sing his praises. Dushyanta feels the unearthly delight that any father does when he touches his child.

Dushyanta calls Shakuntala back and now welcomes her with fond and great love. Pacifying her for the ordeal he has subjected her to, he says, 'Devi, O Goddess, you and I were married in seclusion, with no witness. I was afraid that my people would think that it is no proper vivaha but a chance encounter of lust, and hence our son illegitimate.

They would have resented him being crowned the Yuvaraja. Oh my love, I forgive everything you said to me in anger because I love you more than my life and have since I first saw you!'

The Rajarishi Dushyanta now welcomes his queen with offerings of perfumes, food and drink. Thus, the Paurava names his son Bharata, and crowns the magnificent child his heir. In time, the brilliant and famed wheels of the chariot of Bharata the Great would fill every corner of the Earth with their sound, even like the vimanas of the Devas.

The son of Dushyanta subjugates every other King of the Earth, and he rules with dharma and unequalled is his fame. Becoming a king of kings, the invincible Bharata becomes known as Sarvabhauma, Lord of all the world, and Chakravarti.

Countless sacrifices he performs, even like Indra, lord of the Devas. Maharishi Kanva is the chief priest at those Mahayagnas, at which Bharata gives bounteous gifts to Brahmanas. The Cow Sacrifice and the Horse Sacrifice Bharata performs, and gives Kanva a thousand coins of gold as the Ritvik's dakshina.

This is the mighty Bharata, of numberless great achievements, after whom the lordly race of kings into which you are born is named. And in that royal house, godlike kings of great lustre are born, kings like Brahma himself. Their number is past counting. But, Scion of the race of Rajarishi Bharata, I will name the main ones for you, kings blessed with fortune to rival that of the Devas, men of dharma, devoted to the truth."

CANTO 75

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Listen to this sacred genealogy of those Rajarishis, which enhances dharma, artha and kama.

Daksha Prajapati, Manu, the son of Surya, Bharata, Ruru, Puru and Ajamidha. Sinless King, I will also recite the genealogies of the Yadavas, the Kurus and kings of the line of Bharata. These are sacred indeed, and their narration is an act of worship, which confers wealth, fame and a long life. Rajan, the men I have named are radiant as Maharishis, and as powerful.

Prachetas has ten sons, all of them ascetics and righteous. In the most ancient times, they consume with fire from their mouths, forests of poisonous plants and fell trees that covered the Earth.

Prachetas' eleventh son is Daksha, and from him all the creatures originated, and so he is called Prajapati.

The Muni Daksha takes Virini to be his wife and begets a thousand sons upon her, all great tapasvins. Narada teaches Daksha's thousand sons the Samkhya marga as a way to moksha, and they never become creators or progenitors themselves, but wander the galaxies to find the ends of the Universe, for Narada Muni subverts their minds.

O Janamejaya, Daksha Prajapati then begets fifty daughters, for his intention is to further creation, have it multiply and flourish. He says that their sons would belong to him as well as to their husbands. He gives ten of his daughters to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa and twenty-seven to Soma, and these Nakshatras chart the course of the Moon.

Marichi's son Kashyapa begets the Adityas, among whom Indra is the eldest and the Lord, on Daksha's eldest daughter; he also fathers Surya, who is also called Vivaswat, in her.

Vivaswat, who is also called Martanda, begets Yama. He then sires another son, of brilliant and fathomless intellect, called Manu. Manu

possesses profound wisdom and is devoted to dharma. He becomes the father of the human race, and they are called Manavas or Manushyas after him. Be they Brahmanas, Kshatriyas or any other humans, they are called Manavas for they are all descended from Manu.

Later, O King, the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas mix their races. Manu's Brahmana sons devote themselves to studying the Veda.

Manu sires ten other children: Vena, Dhrishnu, Narishyan, Nabhaga, Ikshvaku, Karusha, Saryati, a daughter named Ila, Prishadhru and Nabhagarishta. All these live as Kshatriyas.

Manu has fifty other sons on Earth, but they die fighting one another. The learned Pururavas is Ila's son, and it is told that Ila is both his father and his mother. Pururavas the Great holds sway over thirteen Dwipas, continents, and though he is a man, his companions are all celestials.

Drunk with power, his reason lost, Pururavas crosses the Brahmanas and robs them of their wealth, without fearing their anger. Sanatkumara comes down from Brahmaloka to advise him against this rashness, but Pururavas ignores his counsel. The Maharishi grows angry and with a curse destroys that greedy king in a moment.

Pururavas first brings from the realm of the Gandharvas the three kinds of sacred fires for worship. He also brings the Apsara Urvashi to be his wife, and the son of Ila fathers six sons on Urvashi – Ayus, Dhimat, Amavasu, Dhridhayus, Vanayus and Satayus.

Ayus begets four sons, Nahusha, Vriddhasarman, Rajingaya and Anenas, on the daughter of Swarbhanu. Of all the sons of Ayus, Nahusha is the most intelligent and powerful, and rules his vast kingdom with dharma.

Nahusha has the support of the Pitrs, Devas, Rishis, Brahmanas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Rakshasas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, for he is friendly towards all of them. He puts down crime and bands of brigands ruthlessly, and peace pervades his kingdom.

But in his arrogance, he once commands the greatest Rishis to carry him upon their backs in his palanquin, like beasts of burden, and they curse Nahusha. Before that he fascinates the Devas themselves with his charm and beauty, his asceticism, his strength and his brilliance. He rules like another Indra.

Nahusha begets six sons, all well-spoken, called Yati, Yayati, Sanyati, Ayati and Dhruva. Yati takes Sannyasa and becomes a Muni, like Brahma himself. Yayati becomes a sovereign of great power and dharma. He rules

all of the Earth, performs innumerable sacrifices, worships his Manes and the Devas unfailingly, and is never vanquished in battle.

Yayati's sons are all great archers, and splendid with every virtue. He sires them in his two queens Devayani and Sarmishta. Devayani's sons are the twins Yadu and Turvasu, and Sarmishta's are Drahyu, Anu and Puru.

When he has ruled wisely and justly for many many years, suddenly one day, through a curse, the infirmity of old age strikes Yayati like some dread disease: gone is his splendour, his handsomeness, his virility.

He calls his sons Yadu, Puru, Turvasu, Drahyu and Anu, and says to them, 'My sons, I want my youth back to enjoy the company of young women. You must help me.'

His eldest son by Devayani says, 'What do you want us to do?'

Yayati replies, 'Take my age and give me your youth, my son. Ah, Rishi Usanas cursed me and I have aged overnight. I have not satisfied my desires and they torment me. Oh, give me your youth to take my pleasures with it!'

At first, none of those sons would do what he asks. Then his youngest son Puru says, 'I will take your infirmity upon myself and let you have my youth. I will rule your kingdom as you command, while you satisfy your every desire.'

The Rajarishi Yayati uses his tapasya shakti to take Puru's youth and give the young man his own old age. Yayati is young again and Puru is an old man, and Puru rules the kingdom in his father's name.

A thousand years pass, and Yayati, Rajavyaghra, remains as strong and virile as a tiger. He enjoys his wives to his heart's content, and in the gardens of the Gandharva king Chitraratha, he enjoys the Apsara Viswachi. But even after a thousand years and more, the king finds that his desires rage on, undimmed.

Yayati remembers something he has read in the Purana: 'Desire can never be quenched by indulgence. It is like pouring ghee into a fire to extinguish it; the flames only burn more fiercely.

Not he that owns all the wealth in the world, all its gold, diamonds, beasts and women will find himself satisfied, but will only crave for more. Only the man who does not sin in thought, deed or word attains to the purity of Brahmana, and finds joy and peace in his own soul.

When a man fears nothing, and is feared by nothing and no one, when he wishes for nothing but is content, when he harms no living thing, he attains eternal peace, Brahmanirvana.'

After his long years of every indulgence, Yayati is wise enough to realise that desire can never be satisfied with indulgence. Yayati stills his mind with dhyana. He takes his old age back from his son and returns Puru's youth to him. He crowns Puru king, and says to him, 'You are my true heir, my only real son. From now let our royal line be known by your name. Let my vamsa be called the Pauravas.'

Then Yayati leaves for the mountain of Bhrigu to devote himself to Sannyasa. After years of tapasya, and acquiring great spiritual punya, his wives and he fast until their spirits leave their bodies, and they attain Swarga."

CANTO 76

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Profound Muni, rich with ascetic wealth, tell me how my ancestor Yayati, born in the tenth generation from Prajapati, manages to make the daughter of Shukra his wife. Tell me of this in detail. Also, tell me about all the kings that founded the different dynasties."

Vaisampayana said, "King Yayati is as splendid as Indra himself. I will tell you, O Janamejaya, how both Shukra and Vrishaparvan give him their daughters to be his wives; I will tell you especially about Devayani.

Of old, the Devas and the Asuras fight for the sovereignty of the three worlds and everything in them. The Devas make Angiras' son Brihaspati their priest to perform their yagnas for them, and the Asuras make Shukra, also called Usanas, theirs. Between the two Brahmanas there is always rivalry, each deriding the other and extolling himself.

Shukra knows the Mritasanjivini vidya, the arcane art of bringing the dead back to life, and during any Devasura yuddha—a war between the gods and the demons—he would revive the Asuras that are slain, and the Danavas and Daityas would come roaring back to fight.

The Asuras also kill many of the Deva warriors, but Brihaspati does not know the Sanjivini and cannot bring them back to life. The Devas despair; they are in terror of Usanas' vidya.

They go to Brihaspati's eldest son Kacha, and say to him, 'We bow to you, and ask you to do us a service that we consider a great one. We beg you learn the Mritasanjivini from Shukra Bhargava, O that mighty Brahmana. You will find him in the court of Vrishaparvan; he always protects the Asuras, but not us.

You are younger than he is, and you can worship him reverently. You can also pay tribute to Devayani, who is Shukra's favourite daughter. Surely, only you, Kacha, can please both of them, and by flattering

Devayani with every sweetness, fawning on her, you can acquire the Sanjivini from her father.'

Brihaspati's son says, 'So be it,' and goes to Vrishaparvan, the Asura king's, capital. Seeing Shukra in the Danava's lavish court, Kacha folds his hands and says humbly, 'I am the grandson of Rishi Angiras and the son of Brihaspati. I am called Kacha; take me for your sishya. If you become my Guru, I will be a brahmacharin for a thousand years, and your disciple. Command me, O Brahmana!'

Shukra, who is called Kavya or Usanas as well, says, 'You are welcome Kacha. I will take you to be my disciple and treat you with regard, for I will be showing Brihaspati regard if I do.'

Kacha says, 'I thank you, my lord,' and at once swears a vow of Brahmacharya, celibacy, for a thousand years. With that he becomes Shukra's sishya and begins to serve and please both his master, as well as Shukra's daughter Devayani.

Kacha is young, as is Devayani, and he would sing and dance for her, and play on several instruments. O Bharatottama, devoting himself, he brings her flowers and fruit, and does her bidding with alacrity, whatever she wants done. She, too, sweet-natured maiden, would sing for him and look after his every need, when they are alone together, even as he kept his vow unflinchingly.

When five hundred years pass, the Danavas learn Kacha's true intention. They are furious, and seeing him alone in the forest one day with Shukra's cows, they kill him, cut his body into pieces and feed him to wolves and jackals. They have no compunction about killing a Brahmana. They detest Brihaspati, and of course they want to keep Kacha from acquiring the secret of the Mritasanjivini, the art of reviving the dead.

Come twilight and the cows return to their fold without Kacha. Devayani says to her father Shukra, 'Your evening fire has been lit and the Sun has set, father. The cows have come home, but Kacha is not with them. He is either lost or dead, and I cannot live without him!'

Shukra says, 'I will bring him back.'

With the Sanjivini vidya, Shukra calls Kacha to return. The shreds of the disciple's body tear open the bodies of the jackals and wolves that have eaten him, and unite into a living Kacha, who, full of joy, appears before his Guru.

Devayani demands of him, 'Why are you so late?'

Kacha says to Bhargava's daughter, 'I was dead. I was coming home with fuel for the fire, with kusa grass and wood. I sat under a nyagrodha tree, and the cows also cropped grass in the shade. Some Asuras saw me and asked, "Who are you?" I replied, "I am Brihaspati's son." As soon as I said this, the Danavas killed me, cut my body into pieces and fed it to wolves and jackals. Then they went away, singing for joy. Sweet Devayani, then your father called out to me and I have returned to you from the dead.'

Another day, Kacha goes into the forest to gather flowers for Devayani. The Danavas see him, kill him again and, pounding him into a paste, dissolve him in the sea.

When he does not come home, Devayani again goes in tears to her father. Once more, Shukra calls Kacha with his Sanjivini and the disciple appears whole and alive before his Guru, and recounts what had had happened.

The third time the Asuras kill Kacha, they burn his body to ashes, and then mix those ashes in wine and give the wine to Shukra himself to drink.

Come night, and when Kacha does not return, Devayani says to her father, 'Father, Kacha went to pick flowers for me, but he has not come home. He is either lost or dead, and I will not live without him.'

Shukra says, 'Child, Brihaspati's son has been killed again. Each time I bring him back from Yama's realm, and again he is killed. I am afraid I can do nothing for Kacha.

Devayani, don't cry. You should not grieve over a mortal. Why, because of my power, the Brahmanas, the Devas with Indra, the Vasus and Aswins, the Asuras, and indeed all the Universe worship you, during the three sandhyas. Forget Kacha now, because he is killed as often as I revive him.'

Devayani replies, 'How can I forget him, and not grieve for him, whose grandfather is the ancient Angiras, whose father is Brihaspati, both great Rishis, and who is himself an ocean of tapasya. Kacha is a Brahmacharin and a Sannyasi, always caring, and skilled in everything that he does. I mean to fast to death and follow Kacha where he has gone. Oh father, I love the handsome Brahmana!'

Maharishi Shukra sees his daughter grief-stricken, and grows angry. He says, 'The Asuras dare kill my sishya who lives in my house! Killing a Brahmana is the worst of all sins and would consume Indra himself. The Rudrabhakta Asuras make me a party to their crime when I revive Kacha and they kill him again. They want me to lose my character as a Brahmana.'

Compelled by Devayani, Shukra is about to call Kacha back again from the dead. But Kacha fears what might happen to his Guru, and says from his master's belly, 'O Master, I am Kacha who worships you. Treat me like your own son, be kind to me Lord.'

Shukra says, 'How did you enter my stomach? I will leave the Asuras this moment and join the Devas!'

Kacha says, 'By your grace, I remember everything that happened. My punya is intact, and my tapasya shakti. With these, I am able to endure the pain that savages me. O Guru, the Asuras killed me, burnt me to ashes, then mixed the ashes in your wine. That is how I am in your belly. But as long as you are alive, the craft of the Asuras will never prevail over the science of the Brahmana.'

Shukra says to Devayani, 'My child, how can I help you now? Kacha is inside me. The only way he can live again is if I die. He cannot emerge unless he rends my belly and kills me.'

Devayani sobs, 'Both your lives are equally precious to me, and both your deaths would savage me equally! If either of you dies, so will I.'

Then Shukra says, 'O son of Brihaspati, you can count yourself successful in all your endeavours, because Devayani loves you well. If you are not Indra disguised as Kacha, learn the Mritasanjivini from me today. No one can come out alive from my stomach. But a Brahmana must not be killed.

So learn the Sanjivini from me, then be born even as my son, rending my belly. But be sure that when you are alive again, you act with grace.'

Kacha learns the secret art of reviving the dead from Shukra; then he tears open his master's belly and emerges as luminous as the Moon on the fifteenth day of the bright fortnight. He sees his Guru's remains lying before him like a heap of tapasya, and using the Sanjivini, Kacha restores Shukra to life.

Worshipping him with love, Kacha says to his Guru, 'I was ignorant until you poured Gyanamrita, the nectar of knowledge, into my ears. You are my father and my mother, Lord. He who is ingrate enough to take knowledge from his Guru, who is the most precious of all precious things in the world, who must be worshipped, and then causes his master injury, shall be hated in the world and damned to find hell for himself.'

Shukra looks at the handsome Kacha, and thinks of how he had drunk him mixed with wine. He thinks furiously of how the Asuras had deceived

him when he was drunk.

Rising in anger, Mahatman Shukra cries, ‘From this day, any Brahmana who drinks wine shall lose all his punya and be considered as having committed Brahmahatya. He shall be despised in this world and all the others.

I, Shukra Bhargava, declare this, and let the Brahmanas, honest men, the Devas, men that revere their superiors, and the three worlds hear this edict of mine, which shall regulate the conduct and preserve the dignity of Brahmanas everywhere.’

Then he summons the Asuras, whom fate has robbed of their reason. He says to them, ‘Foolish Danavas, Kacha has what he wants. He has learnt the Sanjivini Vidya and is now as powerful as Brahma himself. He will live with me.’

With that Shukra fell silent. In some disarray, the confounded demons return to their homes. Kacha has now spent a full thousand years with his Guru and prepares to return to Devaloka, with his master’s leave.”

CANTO 77

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the thousand years of his vow end, Kacha, with his Guru's permission, is about to depart for Devaloka, when Devayani says to him, 'O Kacha, grandson of Angiras Muni, resplendent are your birth and conduct, your learning, humility and your asceticism. Even as my father worships and honours the Muni Angiras, I adore and revere your father Brihaspati.

Remember this and listen to what I have to say. Recall how I disported myself with you during the years of your vow of Brahmacharya. Now the time of your vrata is over. Now I ask you to turn your love towards me. I ask you to marry me with mantras from the Veda.'

Kacha replies, 'I respect and worship you just as I do your father! Why, beautiful and faultless Devayani, I adore you even more than him. My Guru Shukra Bhargava loves you more than his own life. As his daughter, you merit my worship. I beg you do not ask me to marry you!'

Devayani replies, 'You, also, are the son of a great father and deserving of my reverence and worship. O Kacha, best among Brahmanas, have you forgotten the love I showed for you when the Asuras killed you time and again? Recall that affection, and my devotion, and do not now abandon me for no fault of mine. I truly love you.'

Kacha says, 'Punyavrata, do not ask me to commit such a sin! Lovely one, be kind to me instead. I hold you in higher esteem than I do my master. Virtuous one, your face like the moon, your eyes long as lotus petals, you are Shukra Kavya's child; do not forget that I, too, was born from his body. You are my sister, and we have passed our days happily together.

We understand each other perfectly and I now beg you to allow me to return to my home in the sky. Bless me that I have a safe journey. Whenever you think of me, or speak of me, you must remember me as one who did

not break dharma. I ask you to always serve my Guru readily and single-mindedly.'

Devayani replies in anger, 'If you refuse to make me your wife, even after I have begged you, O Kacha, may all your tapasya and gyana be fruitless!'

Kacha says, 'I have refused you only because you are my Guru's daughter, and not because you have any flaw or fault. Also, my Guru has not said anything to me about marrying you. If it pleases you, curse me.

I have told you what I must do, being a Rishi. I do not deserve your curse, Devayani, but you have cursed me. You have cursed me from passion and not from any sense of dharma. What you want shall never happen, and I say to you that no Rishi's son will ever marry you. You have said that my learning will prove fruitless. So be it. But I say that it shall prove fruitful to whomever I teach the Vidya.'

With that, Kacha flies back to Devaloka, where Indra and the other Devas come out to worship him, with padya and arghya.

Indra says, 'You have achieved what seemed impossible and you shall have immortal fame for this. O Kacha, you will have a share in the havis from every sacrifice.'"

CANTO 78

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Indeed, the celestials are overjoyed that Kacha has acquired the Sanjivini Vidya. Immediately, he teaches them the secret science of bringing the dead back to life, and the Devas are certain that they can vanquish the Asuras in battle.

Gathering around Indra of a hundred Mahayagnas, they cry to him, 'The time is here to show our might. Kill your enemies, O Purandara!'

Indra Maghavat roars, 'So be it!' and goes forth with his celestial army. On his way he sees some lovely women bathing in a lake in the charmed gardens of the Gandharva Chitraratha. Becoming invisible, he quickly mixes up the women's clothes, which they have arranged neatly on the bank of the lake.

When the women finish bathing, it happens that Vrishaparvan's daughter Sarmishta mistakenly wears Devayani's clothes. Devayani is furious. She cries at Sarmishta, 'Asuraputri, daughter of an Asura, you are my sishya, my inferior. How dare you wear my clothes? You are presumptuous and no good will ever befall you.'

Stung, Sarmishta flashes back, 'Your father is like a hired chanter of praises, a vabdhi in my father's court! He fawns over my father, while Vrishaparvan sits at his ease or even lies stretched out upon his couch. You are just the daughter of a singer of the praises of my father, and one who lives on alms besides.

My father, on the other hand, is the king whose praises your father sings. He is a giver of alms, not a receiver. You are a beggar's daughter and a beggar yourself. Swear at me, if you like, swear to be my enemy; cry in anger, I do not care. You live by the alms of my father, and I can harm you if I choose, but not you me. You want to pick a fight with me, but I do not consider you my equal, beggar!'

Devayani is beside herself. She runs at Sarmishta and tries to tear her clothes from her body. The Asura princess pushes her into a well and goes home, fuming, believing that she has killed her friend and quite pleased with what she has done.

Nahusha's son Yayati is out hunting nearby. His horses are tired and thirsty, and so is he. He sees the well and rides up to it. Peering over its edge, he sees it is shallow and dry, but he also sees a young woman inside who is bright and beautiful as a flame, her skin shining like a goddess'.

Gently, he says to her, 'Who are you? Your fingernails gleam like burnished copper, and the jewels in your earrings are not of this world. Why are you crying? How did you fall into this well covered with grass and reeds? Say, slender-waisted beauty, whose daughter are you?'

Devayani replies, 'I am the daughter of Shukra, who gives life again to the Asuras that the Devas kill in battle. My father does not know what has happened to me. O King, you are wellborn, wellbred and noble. Great are your prowess and your fame. Here is my right hand, its nails as you say like burnished copper. Take my hand and pull me out of the well.'

King Yayati hears that she is a Brahmana's daughter and he draws her out of the well by her right hand. He gazes for a long moment at her long and fine legs, her soft thighs that are exposed; then bowing and smiling at her, he goes back to his capital.

When Yayati has gone, Devayani sees her sakhi Ghurnika who has come in search of her. Sobbing, Devayani tells her what has happened, how Sarmishta pushed her into the well and left her for dead.

'Tell my father everything, Ghurnika, and tell him that I will never enter Vrishaparvan's city again.'

Trembling with rage, Ghurnika stamps back into the Asura's palace and finds Shukra there. Her mind clouded by anger, Ghurnika says to Kavya, 'Great Brahmana, Vrishaparvan's daughter insulted Devayani in the woods and even tried to kill her!'

Shukra, who dotes on Devayani, hurries to the woods, and when he sees his daughter he clasps her in his arms. His voice choking, the wise Shukra Bhargava says, 'My child, whatever fortune or misfortune befalls any of us is because of our own karma. You must have sinned at some time, and this has been the retribution and expiation for you.'

Her eyes still full of fire, Devayani replies, 'Retribution or not, listen to me, father. Listen to what Vrishparvan's daughter Sarmishta dared say to

me. Her eyes red as plums, she says viciously that you, O my father, are only her father Vrishaparvan's hireling, a chanter of his praises, a mere vabdhi.

She said, "You are just the daughter of a singer of the praises of my father, and one who lives on alms besides. My father, on the other hand, is the one whose praises your father sings. He is a giver of alms, not a receiver. You are a beggar's daughter and a beggar yourself."

Not once but many times she said this to me, that arrogant princess, her eyes burning. Father, if what she says is true and I am indeed the daughter of a hired chanter of praises, of one who lives on alms, then I must offer worship to Sarmishta and hope to receive her grace.'

Shukra says, 'Devayani, you are no daughter of a hired adorer, and neither do I take alms or receive gifts. You are the daughter of one who worships none but is worshipped by everyone. Vrishaparvan knows this, as do Indra and Yayati also. The ineffable Parabrahman, the Ultimate and sovereign Godhead, is my support and strength. Brahma himself has said that I am the master of all things in Heaven and Earth. I send down the rains, Devayani, to nourish all creatures and green plants, to nurture everything that lives.'

Thus, Shukra tries to console his distraught daughter."

CANTO 79

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisapayana said, "Shukra continued, 'Devayani, he who masters anger and learns to ignore the meanest words of his enemies, conquers all. The Sages say that the true charioteer never gives slack to his reins. The true man or woman also never gives in to his or her anger. He who subdues his own anger conquers everything.

A Mahatman always forgives, sloughing off his fury as a snake does its skin. He or she who never yields to rage, despite being provoked by evil words or deeds, certainly finds dharma, artha, kama and moksha.

Between the man who ceaselessly performs penance and sacrifices every moon for a hundred years and he that never feels anger, the second is the superior. Children, boys and girls who do not know right from wrong, surely quarrel. The wise do not imitate them.'

Devayani responds, 'Father, I also know the difference between anger and forgiveness and which is superior. But when a disciple is disrespectful, his Guru should never forgive him if the master truly wants his sishya to mend. Therefore, I do not desire to live any longer in a country where evil has such sway. The wise, who live in dharma, will not live among those that speak ill of noble birth and courteous conduct. Father, one should live where pure birth and noble conduct are both respected; indeed, the Rishis have said that this is the best kind of place in which to live. The vicious words of Vrishaparvan's daughter burn my heart, like dry fuel that men use to kindle a fire.

Nothing in the three worlds is more wretched than for a man to adore his enemies, when they are blessed with fortune and wealth while he himself has none. Why, the greatest Sages have said that death is preferable for such a man.'"

CANTO 80

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now Shukra Kavya, greatest of Bhargavas, becomes angry. Having lost his temper, he goes to Vrishaparvan, and without weighing his words, says irately, 'O King, like the very Earth, sins do not bear fruit immediately. But gradually, secretly, they destroy the sinners.

The fruit of sins are visited either upon oneself, one's sons or grandchildren, even; for sin must bear fruit. Like heavy food, it cannot be digested. You killed the Brahmana Kacha, Angiras' grandson, a virtuous man, a knower of dharma, again and again, while he lived in my asrama as my dutiful and loving disciple.

O Vrishaparvan, for this crime and for your daughter Sarmishta's intolerable abuse of my daughter Devayani, I am going to leave you and your race. Why do you stare at me, O King; do you think I am lying to you, or that I am a fool? I see that you want to make light of your sins, rather than correct them and find some forgiveness.'

Vrishaparvan says, 'O Bhargava, I have never said that you are a liar or tried to find any fault with you. Indeed, you are the very embodiment of dharma and satya, virtue and truth.

I beg you be merciful to me! O Bhargava, if you actually leave us, we shall plunge down into the Patalas and dwell there in the depths of the Ocean, for there is nothing else we could do.'

Shukra retorts, 'Asuras, go to the bottom of the Sea or fly and scatter in every direction: I do not care! I cannot bear to see my daughter grieve. She is more precious to me than my life; why, my life depends on her.

You must placate her. Even as Brihaspati always seeks the welfare of Indra, so have I always sought yours with my tapasya shakti.'

Vrishaparvan says, 'O Bhargava, you are the absolute master of whatever the Asura lords of this world possess – their elephants, cows,

horses, and even myself!'

Shukra says, 'If you speak the truth then you will placate Devayani.'

Shukra goes and tells Devayani what Vrishaparvan said. But she answers him, 'Bhargava, Father, if you are indeed the Lord of the Asura king and all his wealth, let Vrishaparvan come here and tell me so himself.'

Vrishaparvan comes to Devayani and says, 'Lovely Devayani of the sweet smile, I will give you whatever you ask for, do whatever you want, however difficult it might be.'

Devayani says at once, 'I want Sarmishta, with a thousand sakhis, to attend on me as my handmaiden. She must also come with me to my husband's house, wherever my father chooses to give me.'

Vrishaparvan says to a maid that waits on him, 'Go and fetch Sarmishta here at once. She will do as Devayani says from now.'

The sakhi goes to Sarmishta and tells her, 'O Sarmishta, come with me and save our people. Shukra Bhargava has threatened to leave the Asuras unless Devayani is pacified. Princess, you have to become Devayani's handmaiden from now, and serve her in everything.'

Sarmishta replies, 'I will come happily. Shukra and Devayani must not leave the Asuras through any fault of mine. I will become Devayani's handmaiden.'

At her father's command, Sarmishta emerges from her father's great palace in palanquin, with a thousand of her sakhis. She folds her hands to Devayani and says, 'These thousand girls and I are all your servants. I will follow you wherever your father gives you away.'

Devayani replies tartly, 'I am the daughter of one who chants your father's praises and lives by the alms that your father gives him. You, Sarmishta, are the daughter of one whose praises my father sings, who gives alms to my father. How can you become my servant?'

Sarmishta murmurs, 'One must always serve one's family and one's race, and I will do as my father asks, happily. I will be your handmaiden and go with you wherever you are given in marriage.'

When Sarmishta says this, Devayani turns to Shukra and says, 'Father, greatest of Brahmanas, I am satisfied. I know now that your power and your wisdom are not in vain. I will enter the Asura's city again.'

Happily, Shukra goes back into Vrishaparvan's city and the Danavas all worship him, their Guru, devoutly."

CANTO 81

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Some weeks pass, then Devayani goes to the same woods to take her pleasure there. She goes with Sarmishta and two thousand sakhis attending on her. Happy together, the young women roam freely through the charmed garden of Chitraratha, drinking nectar from flowers, feasting on rare and delicious fruit. Joy goes with them.

Nahusha's son Yayati, out hunting deer again, arrives there once more, tired and thirsty again. That king sees Devayani, Sarmishta and the other sakhis, all wearing unearthly ornaments, and full of voluptuous languor because of the flower wine they have drunk freely. Devayani, the most beautiful among them, her smile dazzling, her skin the softest and fairest, lies stretched upon some lush grass, while Sarmishta gently massages her feet.

Yayati sees all this, and says to the two of them, 'Lovely ladies, tell me your names and whose daughters you are. It seems to me that these two thousand handmaidens all attend on the both of you.'

Devayani answers him, 'Manavottama, best of men, I am the daughter of Shukra Bhargava, the Asura Guru. This is my sakhi and my handmaiden Sarmishta. She attends on me wherever I go and she is the daughter of Vrishaparvan, king of the Asuras.'

Yayati wants to know, 'How is the lovely princess your handmaiden? I marvel at this.'

Devayani replies, 'Fate is responsible for everything that happens. Do not marvel, because Fate has made Sarmishta my handmaiden. By your face, and from your attire, you seem to be a king. You speak chastely, and nobly; your language is of the Veda. Who are you, whose son, and where have you come from?'

Yayati says, 'While I was a brahmacharin, I heard and studied all the Vedas. I am known as Yayati, a king's son and a king myself.'

Devayani asks, 'King, why have you come here? To gather lotuses, to fish, or to hunt?'

Yayati says, 'Lovely one, I have been out hunting deer and felt thirsty. I came looking for water. I am exhausted, but say a word and I will leave.'

Devayani answers, 'Leave? My two thousand sakhis and my handmaiden Sarmishta are here to serve you. I ask you to become my friend and my lord. And may fortune be with you.'

Yayati replies, 'Beautiful Devayani, I do not deserve you. You are the daughter of a Brahmana, Shukra Bhargava, and you are immeasurably my superior by birth. Your father cannot give you away even to the greatest king.'

Devayani replies, 'Brahmanas have married Kshatriyas before, and Kshatriyas have married Brahmanas. Your father is a Rajarishi and so are you. Son of Nahusha, marry me!'

But Yayati says, 'Most beautiful one, it is true that the four varnas sprang from the same Body. But their dharma and natures are not the same. The Brahmana is the purest and the highest of the four.'

Devayani says, 'No man other than you has ever touched my hand before. You took my hand once and I ask you to take me for your queen. For how will any other man ever touch this hand which you, a Rajarishi, have touched?'

Yayati says, 'The wise know that a Brahmana is more dangerous than an angry snake or a blazing fire, and must be avoided.'

Says Devayani, 'Purusharishabha, why do you say that a Brahmana should be avoided like an angry snake or a blazing fire?'

The king replies softly, 'The snake kills one person, even as the sharpest weapon does. But an angry Brahmana consumes whole cities, why kingdoms, in a moment. Therefore, bashful one, a Brahmana is more dangerous than a snake or fire. I cannot marry you unless your father gives you to me.'

Devayani says, 'I have chosen you to be my husband and you are saying that you will take me for your wife if my father gives me to you. Fear nothing and you will not even have to ask my father for my hand.'

Devayani despatches one of her sakhis to her father, to tell him everything. As soon as he hears what has happened, Shukra arrives in

Chitraratha's garden and sees Yayati, who worships him reverently and then stands with folded hands, awaiting the great Bhargava's command.

Devayani says, 'Father, this is the son of Nahusha. He took my hand and saved me when I was in the well. I beg you give me to him to be his wife, for I will not marry any other man.'

Shukra exclaims, 'Splendid Kshatriya, my daughter wants you for her lord. I give her to you freely. O son of Nahusha, take her for your wife.'

The cautious Yayati says, 'O Brahmana, I want your blessing that I shall be spared the sin of begetting a half-breed child upon her.'

Shukra says, 'I will absolve you of the sin. Do not be afraid to marry my exquisite child. Keep her well, and may you enjoy transports of joy in her company.

You must also look after every need of the other young woman, Vrishaparvan's daughter. But you must never call her to your bed.'

Yayati circumambulates the Brahmana in pradakshina, and he marries Devayani with every auspicious ritual prescribed in the Shastras.

Honoured by the great Shukra and his disciples the Asuras, receiving in some joy the precious Devayani, and her sakhis, Sarmishta and the other two thousand, Yayati returns to his kingdom, at Shukra's behest."

CANTO 82

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yayati returns to a joyous welcome from his people. His capital is even like Indra's city, and he brings his wife Devayani into his private royal apartments, in his antahpura. Devayani then asks her husband to build a fine mansion for Sarmishta and her thousand sakhis in the asokavana in the palace garden. Yayati has such a mansion built in quick time, and spares no effort in seeing to Sarmishta's every comfort and luxury.

Nahusha's regal son dallies only with Devayani, even like a Deva, for many years, in perfect bliss. Then, one day, Devayani conceives and gives birth to a fine son. A thousand more years pass—for the beings of those days are far longer-lived than in these dwindled times, they are indeed like gods in their years and days and nights—and Vrishaparvan's daughter Sarmishta attains puberty and sees that she is in season.

She becomes anxious, 'My season has come, but I have not taken a husband. Whatever shall I do? My body yearns for a strong man and to have his child. Devayani has become a mother and my youth seems to be doomed.

Shall I take Devayani's husband for my own and bear his child? Yes, that is what I will do. I will ask to meet him in private and the great king will not refuse me.'

As fate is mysterious, just as she is thinking these forbidden thoughts, Yayati strolls through the asokavana, aimlessly. He sees Sarmishta appear from behind a tree and stops in his tracks. She stands silently before him, a flush on her fair cheeks. He sees how her womanhood has bloomed.

Smiling bewitchingly, now that she is alone with him and nobody watching them, she folds her hands and says, 'O son of Nahusha, I have heard that no one can see the women who live in the private chambers of Soma, Indra, Yama, Varuna, and in yours, O King.

You know, Yayati, that I am wellborn and beautiful as well. I have seen you gaze at me. I am in my season, O Rajan. I beg you let my womanhood not be wasted; make a mother of me!'

Yayati replies, 'I know very well how nobly born you are, in the proud race of the Danavas, and you are beautiful almost past compare; why, I see no hint of any flaw in your face or your form. It is true that I desire you powerfully, but you also know what Usanas' command was when I married his daughter: that I would care for your every need, but I would never summon Vrishaparvan's daughter to my bed.'

Sarmishta says, 'O King, it is said that it is no sin to lie: in jest, about a woman a man wants to enjoy, to be married to, when in mortal danger, and if one's entire fortune is about to be lost. A man who lies about these five incurs no sin.

Devayani and I have both come here for your pleasure, and you have sworn to do everything in your power to please us both. When you said that only she would come to your bed, you lied, O King!' says Sarmishta archly.

Yayati replies, 'A king should always be an example to his people. A king who lies will certainly sin, and find his destruction. As for me, I dare not lie, even if the greatest calamity threatens me.'

Says Sarmishta, 'Rajan, a woman can look upon her dear friend's husband as being her own. A friend's marriage is one's own. You have married my friend, and by doing so you have married me. You are my husband, too! Besides, you did swear to do everything in your power to keep me happy.'

Yayati says, still doubtfully, 'I have indeed sworn to give you whatever you want. Tell me what I should do.'

Sarmishta then says, 'Save me from sin, Yayati. Father a child in me, and let me fulfil a woman's highest dharma, of becoming a mother. I am Devayani's slave, and you are her lord and master. You are my lord and master, too, as much as you are hers. I beg you, make love to me, great King, and make me a mother.'

So enticing is she that Yayati allows her to persuade him. There beneath an asoka tree, he grants her wish. When he has made love to her several times, they part affectionately, Sarmishta returning to her mansion and Yayati to his palace.

The lovely Sarmishta conceives, and in due course gives birth to a child as splendid as a Deva child, his eyes as long as lotus petals."

CANTO 83

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Devayani hears that Sarmishta has had a baby, envy stings her like a serpent, O Bharata. Devayani goes to Sarmishta and says angrily, 'You have sinned, lustful woman!'

Sarmishta replies, 'A Rishi of great dharma and a knower of the Vedas came here and I asked him to grant me a boon, and father a child on me, for I was in my time. In dharma, he did as I asked and this child is his.'

Devayani says, 'If this is true, then you have not sinned. But tell me the name and gotra of the Brahmana, if you know them.'

Sarmishta says, 'He is as splendid as Surya Deva. Seeing him was enough; I felt no need to ask for his name or gotra.'

Calming down, Devayani smiles, 'Well, if this is true and you have a child by a noble Brahmana, I have no reason to be angry with you, but to rejoice.'

They embrace and spend some time together happily, talking and laughing, then Devayani returns to her palace. Rajan, Yayati also begets two sons, Yadu and Turvasu, upon Devayani and they are like Indra and Vishnu.

And that Rajarishi fathers three sons on Vrishaparvan's daughter Sarmishta: Drahyu, Anu and Puru.

One day, Devayani and Yayati go walking in a secluded part of the asokavana. Suddenly, they see three children of unearthly beauty playing there, innocently.

Devayani asks in surprise, 'Whose children are these, Rajan, who are so handsome that they seem like a Deva's sons? Why, they are as resplendent and beautiful as you are!'

Without waiting for his reply, Devayani goes up to the trusting children and asks, 'Who are you? Who is your father?'

The children point at Yayati, and say their mother is Sarmishta. They then run to their father and lovingly hug his legs. Yayati dares not caress

them back before Devayani, but stands as if turned to stone. Crying that he ignored them, the boys run to their mother.

But Devayani follows them, and rounds angrily on Sarmishta, 'You have betrayed me, you have lied to me, even being my friend and dependent on me. How did you dare, Sarmishta? This is your Asura nature, to lie!'

Sarmishta says, 'Sweet friend, I did not lie to you, what I said about a splendid Rishi is true. I have done nothing to break dharma and I do not fear you.

When you chose the king to be your husband, so did I in my heart. My beautiful Devayani, a dear friend's husband is one's own, as well. You are the daughter of a great Brahmana and I love and respect you. But I love and revere this Rajarishi even more!'

Devayani now turns on Yayati, 'You have betrayed me and I will not live here any more!'

Her tears flowing from eyes red with rage, she turns and walks away. Alarmed and sorry for her, Yayati goes after her. But try as he will to pacify her and persuade her not to leave, she will not listen. Soon enough she comes before Shukra, the son of Kavi, with Yayati right behind her.

Devayani folds her hands to her father and takes the dust from his feet. Yayati does the same, worshipping the Bhargava.

Then Devayani sobs, 'Father, adharma has vanquished dharma. The lowly have scaled great heights and the noble have fallen. This King Yayati has fathered three sons on Vrishaparvan's daughter Sarmishta, while I, my father, have just two.

O Bhargava, Yayati is famed for his knowledge of dharma. But I say to you, O Kavya, he has left the path of righteousness.'

Shukra says angrily, 'Kshatriya, you have embraced vice though you know dharma in every nuance. I curse you that infirmity paralyses you!'

Yayati says, 'Holy One, the Danava king's daughter asked me to make her womanhood fruitful, while she was in her season. I only did as she asked from a sense of dharma, and not from any wantonness or lust. The man who will not beget a child on a woman in her season, who asks him, is called an embryo-killer by those that know the Vedas. O Bhargava, when a man is approached by a woman in her time, full of desire, and he refuses her, surely he is a sinner. I went to Sarmishta in dharma and not from lust.'

Shukra replies, 'Son of Nahusha, you should have first asked me and awaited my command. What you did is a betrayal of dharma, as well as

theft. I curse you to lose your youth and become an old man!'

At once, Yayati becomes old and decrepit.

Yayati says, 'Bhargava, I am not yet satisfied with my manhood or with being with Devayani. I beg you, withdraw your curse.'

Shukra answers, 'I can never lie. Even now, O King, my curse is upon you. But you can, if you wish, exchange your decrepitude for the youth of another.'

Yayati says, 'Brahmana, say that whichever of my sons gives me his youth and takes my age shall be my heir and have great virtue and fame.'

Shukra replies, 'So be it. Think of me, O son of Nahusha, when you exchange your age for your son's youth, and he shall be your heir, have a long life, universal fame and many children!'"

CANTO 84

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "His youth gone, trembling with weakness and age from Shukra's curse, he calls his eldest, and also the most accomplished son, Yadu, and says, 'My child, look what Usanas' curse has done to me. I am old and infirm, my skin is wrinkled and my hair all grey.

But I have not yet satisfied the desires of my manhood. Yadu, take this age from me and give me your youth. When a thousand years have passed, I will return your youth to you and take back my age.'

Yadu replies, 'With age one cannot eat and drink as one wants. O King, I cannot do what you ask. White hair, dejection, weakness, wrinkles, emaciation, not being able to work and being defeated by one's companions – these are not for me, I could not bear them.

Father, you have other sons, more precious to you than I am. You know all about dharma: ask one of them to take your age and give you his youth.'

Yayati says, 'You are born from my heart, but you will not give me your youth. I curse you that your sons shall never be kings!'

He now calls Turvasu, 'Turvasu, take this age of mine and give me your youth for a thousand years, for my desires are not fulfilled. After a thousand years, I will return your youth to you and take back my age and weakness.'

Turvasu replies, 'I detest old age, father; it takes away every appetite and pleasure. It robs one of strength and beauty, of intellect and one's very life.'

Yayati says to him, 'You are born from my heart, my son, but you will not give me your youth. Turvasu, your race shall become extinct. Wretched prince, you will be a king of half-breeds, among whom lowborn men father children on blue-blooded women. You will rule tribes of meat-eaters, mean-spirited, who don't think twice before sleeping with their masters' wives, who live like animals and birds, sinners with no trace of nobility in them!'

Yayati now calls Sarmishta's son Drahyu and says, "Drahyu, my child, take my age for a thousand years and give me your youth so I can satisfy all my desires. After a thousand years, I will return your youth to you and take back my infirmity.'

Drahyu replies, 'Father, how can an old man enjoy riding on elephants and in chariots; how can he ride horses or women? I cannot take your age and give you my youth.'

Yayati says to him, 'You are born from my heart, but you will not give me your youth. Your most ardent desires shall never be fulfilled! You will be a king, and only in name, of a land where there are no roads for men, horses, chariots and elephants; not even for mules and goats, or for bullocks or palanquins. You will be a king where the only paths are waterways and the only transport boats and rafts.'

Yayati calls Anu and says, 'My son Anu, take my age and give me your youth for a thousand years. I will return your youth to you after a thousand years, and take back my age.'

Anu replies, 'The old eat like dribbling children and are incontinent. They cannot offer libations into the sacred fire at yagnas. They are unclean and impure. Father, I cannot take your age from you.'

Yayati says to him, 'You are born from my heart, but you will not give me your youth. You find so much wrong with old age that old age will overtake you anyway. Anu, your children shall die as soon as they become youths, and neither will you ever perform any yagna before a sacred fire.'

Finally, Yayati calls his youngest son Puru and says to him, 'You are my youngest son, Puru, but it seems you shall become my heir. Look at this age that the curse of Kavya has brought upon me: my hair turned white, my skin wrinkled. But I have not satisfied the desires of my youth and manhood. Puru, my child, take my age from me and give me your youth. When a thousand years pass, I will return your youth to you and take back my old age.'

Puru replies without hesitating, 'I will do whatever you say, father. O King, I will take your old age upon myself and do you take my youth and enjoy every pleasure of life with it. And I will live as you command.'

Yayati says, 'Puru, I am well pleased in you. And for that I say to you, yours shall be a great reign and everyone in your kingdom will be happy and contented. They shall have their every desire fulfilled.'

The Rajarishi Yayati then thinks of Shukra Bhargava and takes his son Puru's youth from him, giving the young prince his decrepitude."

CANTO 85

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The great King Yayati begins to enjoy himself, to indulge his every appetite, with his son's youth. O Bharata, he lives in dharma while pursuing his pleasure, and never leaves the path of virtue and sanctity.

Yayati worships the Devas with yagnas; he adores his Pitrs with Sraddhas; he pleases the poor with generous daana, charity; he gives munificently to deserving Brahmanas; he entertains everyone entitled to hospitality with a king's food and drink. He protects Vaishyas; he is kind to Sudras.

He puts down crime and criminals in his kingdom, so that it is a haven of safety and order. Yayati is like another Indra to all his subjects, high and low. Powerful like a young lion, he enjoys every happiness and pleasure, but never transgressing dharma; he sates his every desire. His only sorrow is that the thousand years of youth he has taken from his son must end one day.

He is a master of the mysteries of time, its divisions – auspicious and otherwise. Reading the suitable kaalas and kaasthas, he dallies with the Apsara Viswachi, sometimes in Indra's exotic garden Nandana; at others in Alaka, Kubera's exquisite city; at times, on the peaks of Mount Meru in the North.

When a thousand perfect years have passed, that king of dharma calls his son Puru, who is an aged man, and says to him, 'My son, bane of your enemies, I have enjoyed every pleasure with the youth you gave me, each in its season, indulging my every desire as much I as could.

But I have learnt that desires do not subside with indulgence; they burn more fiercely like fire fed with ghee. Why, if one man owned the Earth and everything that is in her—all her paddy and barley, her silver, gold and gems, her animals and women—he would still not be satisfied.

One should renounce one's very desire, the very hunger for enjoyment. Desire is the deadly enemy, the fatal sickness. Only he that has cast away his desires (hard indeed for sinners and the evil minded to do), which do not wane with age or infirmity, only such a man can be truly happy.

For a thousand years, my heart was bent upon satisfying my every desire. The more I indulge my desires the stronger they grow. Now I mean to cast off desire itself and fix my mind on the Parabrahman. I will go away into the forest and pass the rest of my life among innocent deer, with no thought of possessions or enjoyments of the flesh.

Puru my son, as for you I am well pleased in you, my child, very well pleased. Here, take back your youth. Take my kingdom, as well. You are my truest son, the one who has served me in every way; why, you sacrificed your youth for me.'

Nahusha's son Yayati takes back his old age from Puru and restores his son's youth to him. Now Yayati wants to crown Puru king. But the four varnas, led by the Brahmanas of the kingdom, protest.

They say, 'Lord, how can you make Puru the king, passing over Devayani's son Yadu, who is the great Shukra's grandson? Yadu is your firstborn son, after him Turvasu, and of Sarmishta's sons the first is Drahyu, then Anu, and Puru is indeed the very youngest. How does the youngest prince deserve the throne over his elder brothers? This is not dharma as we see it, and we ask you to observe dharma in this momentous matter.'

Yayati then says to the four varnas, the Brahmanas at their head. 'Listen, my people, to why Yadu, my eldest son, should not have the kingdom. I asked him to do something, but he would not; he disobeyed me. The Rishis say that a disobedient son is no son at all.

But the son who obeys his parents, always seeking their welfare, being agreeable to them, is indeed the true son. Yadu did not do what I asked of him, nor did Turvasu; Drahyu and Anu showed scant regard for my wishes. Puru alone obeyed me; why he gave his youth to me for a thousand years, after Shukra cursed me.

Therefore, my youngest son shall be my heir. He took my age upon himself; why, he is more than a son, he is a true friend. Also, Kavi's son Shukra himself has said that the son that obeys me, and only he, shall become my heir. The Bhargava says that prince would bring the world under his sway. So, I beg you my friends, let Puru become your king. He is

the most deserving and righteous among my sons, the only one truly fit to become king.'

The people then say, 'You speak the truth, O King, and even if he is the youngest, the son that seeks the welfare of his parents and obeys them, deserves to prosper. From what you say, Puru deserves the crown; besides, if Shukra himself has commanded it, we have no further argument.'

His people content, Nahusha's son Yayati crowns Puru king. Having made the kingdom over to his youngest, Yayati performs the ritual initiation to take Sannyasa and retires into the jungle. When he has taken the vows, he leaves his great city forever, accompanied by some Brahmanas and Rishis.

The sons of Yadu come to be called the Yadavas; Turvasu's sons become the Yavanas. Drahyu's sons are the Bhojas, while the Mlechchas are the sons of Anu.

However, the progeny of Puru are the noble Pauravas, into which royal house, O Rajan, you have been born: to rule with dharma as your sceptre, and your passions under perfect control."

CANTO 86

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Having crowned his precious son Puru as king, Nahusha's son Yayati goes away into the vana and becomes a hermit. He lives in an asrama with some Rishis, keeps many severe vratas, eating only fruit and roots, subjecting himself to every privation; and finally Yayati ascends into Swarga.

In Swarga, he spends some years in perfect bliss, but then Indra casts him down from his heaven. I have heard, Rajan, that though he is cast down, Yayati does not fall to the Earth but remains suspended in the firmament. I have heard that, later, he enters Devaloka again with Vasuman, Ashtaka, Pratardhana and Sibi."

Janamejaya said, "Tell me why Indra cast Yayati down from Devaloka, and how he enters Swarga again. O Brahmana, tell me this in the presence of all these Rishis.

Yayati, lord of the Earth, is truly like the king of the Devas himself. The progenitor of the mighty race of the Kurus is as splendorous as the Sun. Tell me everything about his life in Swarga and Bhumi, for he is a lustrous one, his fame known throughout the world, and his deeds and achievements are matchless."

Vaisampayana said, "I will tell you the sacred tale of Yayati's adventures on Earth and in Heaven. The legend consumes the sins of those that listen to it, for it is holy indeed!

Having made Puru the king, Yayati, son of Nahusha, expels his other sons, Yadu the eldest of them, out among the Mlechchas. He then enters the forest and lives there as a Vanaprastha, subsisting on fruit and roots.

He gains immaculate control over his mind and his passions, and performs many sacrifices to gratify the Devas and the Pitrs. He pours libations of ghee into the agni, according to the rites prescribed for Vanaprasthas. He entertains guests and strangers with roots and fruit, and

offerings of ghee, and then he himself eats the seeds of wild corn which he forages for in the forest.

For a thousand years, Yayati lives as a forest-dwelling hermit. He keeps a mowna vrata, a vow of silence; and now, his mind perfectly controlled, he eats nothing and lives just on the air he breathes; neither does he sleep at all: for a whole year.

For another year, he intensifies his austerities, sitting amidst five fires, four that he kindles around himself and the fifth is the Sun above. Then, still never eating or sleeping, only breathing (occasionally), he stands on one leg for six months, still as a stone.

Thus, Yayati rises straight into Devaloka, and his sacred fame has spread across Bhumi and Swarga."

CANTO 87

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “While Yayati, kings of kings, lives in Devaloka, the Devas, the Sadhyas, the Maruts and the Vasus revere him.

His mind perfectly stilled, the king would, from time to time, journey from Devaloka to Brahmaloka. I have heard that long years he spent in the realm of the Devas.

One day, while Yayati is with Indra, the Deva king asks the king of the Earth, ‘Yayati, what did you say to your son Puru when he took your decrepit age from you and gave you his youth? What did you say when you gave him your kingdom?’

Yayati replies, ‘I told him that all the lands between the Ganga and the Yamuna were his. This was the heart of the kingdom; while his brothers would rule the outlying countries. I also told him that those without anger are always superior to those under its sway; that those who forgive are always better than the unforgiving.

Man, I said to my son, is superior to animals. Among men, the learned are higher than the ignorant. I said that if he was wronged, he should never wrong in return, for a man’s anger does not burn his enemy but only himself. Indeed, it takes away his every virtue and bestows it upon the one that he wounds with his fury.

I said to him that he should never injure anyone with harsh or cruel words; never vanquish his enemies by vile means; never speak scornfully of anyone, or utter sinful words that might hurt another.

He that wounds others with sharp words, as if with thorns, I said to my son, is a man that bears Rakshasas upon his tongue. Prosperity and fortune fly at his very sight. I said that he should make men of dharma his models, and always compare what he did with their exalted deeds, while ignoring whatever the evil say.

He must imitate the deeds of the Sages; for those wounded by savage words weep day and night because cruel speech strikes at a man's very entrails. Wise men, gentle men, never loose these barbs at anyone.

Nothing in the three worlds surpasses kindness, friendship, charity and sweet speech to all. Always speak soothingly, never scorchingly. I said to my son that he should always revere those that deserve his reverence; that he should always give and never beg!'"

CANTO 88

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now Indra asks Yayati, 'O King, after you had performed your dharma, you became a Vanaprastha and a Sannyasi in the jungle and performed tapasya. Tell me, Yayati, son of Nahusha, who is your equal in penance and austerity?'

Yayati replies, 'Vasava, in tapasya, I see no one who is my equal; not among men, the Devas, the Gandharvas or the Maharishis.'

Indra says sternly, 'King! You disrespect your superiors, your peers and even your inferiors with this hubris. You do not know their true worth in punya or tapasya. Your own punya has dwindled by this and you must fall from my world.'

Yayati says, 'Sakra, if my punya has indeed diminished and I must fall from Swarga, let me, O King of the Devas, fall among the good and the honest.'

Indra says, 'Rajan, you will fall among the wise and the virtuous, and you will find great fame for yourself. But hereafter, Yayati, never underestimate or demean your equals or your superiors.'

Yayati falls from Devaloka. As he is falling, the Rajarishi Ashtaka, protector of dharma, greatest of royal Sages, sees him.

Ashtaka asks, 'Who are you, O youth whose beauty equals Indra's, who blaze like Agni, falling from on high? Are you Surya Deva emerging from behind a cloudbank? Why, seeing you fall by the path of the Sun, brilliant as Agni or Surya, all creatures swoon, while wondering who you are.

We see you upon the path of the gods, your tejas like Indra, Surya or even Vishnu's, and we ask you: who are you? If you had greeted us, we would not have been rude enough to greet you first. But now tell us who you are and why you are falling into our realm.

Ah, be without fear; may all your sorrow and afflictions be over! You are now with the virtuous and the wise; even Indra, who slew Bala, can do you

no harm here. O you seem to be as mighty as Indra. We, the wise and the virtuous, always relieve those that are stricken by misfortune and grief.

Everyone here is as wise and honest as you are. So remain here in peace. Only Agni can give heat; only Bhumi can make a seed germinate; only Surya can illumine all things; so, too, only the Sadasya, a Guest, can command the wise and the virtuous.'"

CANTO 89

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yayati says, 'I am Yayati, son of Nahusha and the father of Puru. My punya is reduced because I showed disrespect for every creature, and I am cast down from the realm of the Devas, Siddhas and Rishis. I am older than all of you, which is why I did not greet you first. I know that a Brahmana always reveres his elders.'

Ashtaka says, 'You say an elder is worthy of reverence, but the real elder is he that is one's superior in gyana and tapasya.'

Yayati replies, 'Sin devastates the punya from the four kinds of dharma. Vanity contains the seed that leads one to hell. The good never follow the evil, but always live in dharma so their punya increases.

I had great punya myself, but I have lost it all now, and I will hardly be able to recover it, not with the severest tapasya. Seeing my fate, let anyone who seeks his own welfare abjure vanity.

He who acquires great wealth should perform great sacrifices; he that is profoundly learned must remain humble; he who has studied the entire Veda must withdraw his mind from every sensual pleasure and devote himself in dhyana. Such men shall surely find heaven.

Let him who acquires great wealth not exult; let not the man who has studied the Veda in full become proud. Men have different natures, and destiny reigns supreme. Power and effort are both in vain. Wise men know that Fate rules everything and they neither exult nor lament whatever fate might bring them, fortune or misfortune.

When men truly realise that sorrow and joy depend not upon their exertions, nor are these in their power to control, but Fate bestows both, each in its season, they will learn to rise above exulting and grieving.

The Sage is always contented, not celebrating at fortune nor lamenting over misfortune. Destiny is supreme; it is unbecoming to exult or grieve over anything.

O Ashtaka, I never allow myself to yield to fear. I never succumb to grief. I know that I shall be exactly as the Great Lord of all things has ordained that I be. Insects and worms, all plants, snakes and other creatures that crawl, vermin, fish in the water, stones, grass, wood, indeed, all things moving and immobile shall be united with the Parabrahman once they are free from the results of their karma.

Joy and sorrow are ephemeral. Hence, O Ashtaka, why should I ever grieve? We cannot fathom what we must do to avoid misfortune, or why it comes; but we can decide not to grieve over it!'

Yayati of great dharma is in fact Ashtaka's maternal grandfather. Now, in the Sky, Ashtaka asks him, 'Rajadhiraja, King of kings, tell me all about the worlds you have been in and enjoyed; tell me how long you were in each one. You speak of the precepts of dharma like the greatest masters who know the deeds and the teachings of the greatest Beings, intimately.'

Yayati says, 'I was a great king on Earth, and the whole world was my domain. Leaving my kingdom to my son, I sat in tapasya for a thousand years and gained many lofty realms with my punya. I dwelt in these for another thousand years and then attained to a still more exalted realm: Indraloka, of untold beauty, a hundred yojanas on every side, realm of a thousand portals.

There, too, I lived a full thousand years and then attained to a higher world yet: Brahmaloka, of perfect grace and bliss, where there is no ageing or decay. Here, too, I lived for another thousand years, and then ascended to a loftier world, Vishnuloka, realm of the God of Gods. There I spent another thousand years, blissfully.

I have dwelt in countless worlds, which the Devas adore, and I was as powerful and lustrous as a Deva. I could assume any form I chose, and I spent a million years in the enchanted and incomparable Nandana, dallying with Apsaras under trees so grand and wondrous that I can hardly describe them. Their flowers are exquisite and the scents of these truly heavenly.

After countless years, of unalloyed beatitude, one day a grim-faced messenger cried thrice to me in his voice of thunder, 'Ruin! Ruin! Ruin!' O lion among kings, immediately I fell from Nandana, for my punya was ruined. I heard the Devas crying in dismay, 'Alas! Yayati's punya is ruined and the king of dharma is falling.'

As I fell, I cried to them, 'Where, O Devas, are the wise ones amongst whom I can fall?'

They pointed this sacred yagnashala out to me. I saw smoke rising from your fires, I smelt the ghee that is being poured ceaselessly into it; guided by these, I have fallen towards you, and my heart is glad to see you all.'"

CANTO 90

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Ashtaka says, 'You lived in the Nandana for a million years and you could assume any form you chose. Then why, O greatest among the kings of the Krita Yuga, have you been forced from that world and come here?'

Yayati answers, 'Just as, on Bhumi, family and friends forsake men who lose their wealth, in Swarga, Devendra and his Devas forsake those who lose dharma and their punya.'

Ashtaka says, 'How can a man lose his dharma and punya in that realm? Also, tell me, mighty King, the various karmas that lead to the various lofty worlds. I know that you have intimate acquaintance with the lives and teaching of Great Beings.'

Yayati says, 'Holy One, men that praise themselves find the hell called Bhauma. Though they are in fact macilent, they grow fat on Earth, and have sons and grandsons, all of whom become food for vultures, dogs and jackals. One should never praise oneself. Tell me, O King, what more you wish to hear.'

Ashtaka says, 'When age kills the body, vultures, peacocks, insects and worms devour it. Where does the man go? How does he return to life? And I have not heard of this hell called Bhauma on Earth.'

Yayati answers, 'When he quits one body the man enters a mother's womb, according to his karma, and remains there formlessly, until his time comes and he becomes an embryo, and then is born again into the world and walks upon the surface of the Earth.

This Earth is Bhauma, the hell into which he falls because he does not regard death or work toward attaining mukti. Some live in Swarga, by their punya, for sixty thousand years, others for eighty thousand; then, inevitably, they fall. When they fall, they suffer attacks from various Rakshasas, who

appear as sons, grandsons, and other relatives. Finally, they withdraw their hearts and in despair seek moksha.'

Ashtaka asks, 'For what sin do the Rakshasas attack the fallen? Why are they not destroyed? Why do they enter another womb, and grow organs and develop senses?'

Yayati replies, 'Falling from heaven, the being becomes a subtle fluid. This fluid becomes semen, the seed. The seed enters the mother's womb in her season, develops into an embryo and emerges as a child, just like a fruit from its flower.

Entering trees, plants, water, air, earth and space, the spirit fluid becomes all the creatures that are to be seen.'

Ashtaka says, 'Tell me, O Sire, for I do not know, does the being that is born human enter the womb in human form or some other? How does the foetus acquire its form, with eyes and ears, and the other senses, and consciousness as well? Father, you are one that knows the deeds and the thoughts of Great Beings.'

Yayati says, 'Its karma is already inherent in the subtle being, the sukshma rupa, when he is seminal fluid. In the womb, what is latent develops into physical form, first as embryo, then as the infant born; later, he becomes conscious of himself as a human: the ears hear sound, the eyes see the world of forms and colours, the nose is sensible of various scents and smells, the tongue of taste, the body of touch, and the mind of ideas.

Thus, O Ashtaka, the sthula rupa, the material body, develops from the sukshma, the subtle or spirit body.'

Ashtaka asks, 'On death, the body is burnt or otherwise consumed. Reduced to nothing, how does it take rebirth?'

Yayati says, 'Lion among kings, on dying the man assumes a subtle form, remembering all his deeds and life, as in a dream, and quick as a thought he enters into another body, as seed, then again a mother's womb.

If he has led a good life, he evolves to a higher form, and if he has sinned, a lower one. The worst sinners devolve into worms and insects. I have no more to say on this subject, O pure and noble-souled Ashtaka!

I have told you how beings are born, live, die and are reborn as creatures four-footed, those with six and more legs. What else do you want to ask?'

Ashtaka says, 'How, O Pitr, do men attain to the higher realms from where they do not return to life on Earth? Is it by tapasya or by gyana,

asceticism or knowledge? Tell me, can one gradually evolve into these blissful realms? I beg you tell me everything there is to know about this.'

Yayati answered him, 'The Rishis say there are seven gates through which a man may enter Swarga: asceticism, benevolence, tranquillity, self-control, modesty, simplicity and kindness to all creatures. The Sages also say that vanity robs a person of all these seven.

The man who acquires knowledge, then begins to think of himself as a great scholar, and with his learning disparages or destroys the reputation of others, never finds the realms of immortal felicity; neither does his learning lead him to the Brahman.

Study, humility, worshipping before a holy fire, and sacrifices — these four remove every fear. However, when they are contaminated by vanity, they create fear instead. The wise man never exults at being honoured, nor does he chafe at being dishonoured. For only they that are themselves wise honour the wise; the evil will never revere the virtuous, but will insult and try to destroy them.

"I have given so much daana, so much charity; I have performed so many yagnas; I have studied so much; I have kept so many vratas" – this vanity is the very root of fear. Never indulge these feelings; do not entertain these thoughts.

But learned men who know that the changeless, ineffable Brahman is their lone support, the Spirit who always showers his blessings on good men like yourself, such men find perfect peace, here and hereafter.'"

CANTO 91

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Ashtaka says, 'Knowers of the Veda differ about how the four Varnas should lead their lives, the Brahmacharins, the Grihasthas, the Bhikshus and the Vanaprasthas, so they might acquire punya.'

Yayati replies, 'A Brahmacharin living in his Guru's house must learn from his master only when he is called for a lesson; he must serve his Guru without being called or asked; he must rise before his Guru does, and sleep after his master sleeps.

He must be humble, with his passions controlled, patient, vigilant and devoted to his studies. Only then will he succeed.

The oldest Upanishads say that a Grihastha must acquire wealth legitimately and honestly, and perform sacrifices. He must always give some of what he earns in charity. He must be hospitable to anyone who comes to his home, and should never partake of anything without sharing some portion of it.

A Bhikshu does not seek a forest to sit in tapasya. He roams the world, depends on his own strength, is never vicious, gives some charity always, and never causes pain to any living creature. Only then does he achieve success.

The true Bhikshu lives by alms, is very learned and accomplished, has his passions under perfect control, has no worldly desires, concerns or attachments, does not sleep under a Grihastha's roof, and has no wife. Journeying a little every day, he travels over most of the country.

A learned man becomes a Vanaprastha when he has truly mastered his desire for pleasure and his acquisitiveness; then he embarks upon the path after the prescribed rituals. He that dies in the forest while living the life of a Vanaprastha causes the mukti, the liberation and dissolution into the Brahman of ten generations of his ancestors and his progeny, himself included.'

Ashtaka asks, ‘How many kinds of Munis are there, who keep the mowna vrata of silence?’

Yayati answers, ‘He is a Muni who lives in a forest though he is near a town, as is he who lives in a town that is near a forest.’

Ashtaka asks, ‘What is a Muni?’

Yayati replies, ‘A Muni withdraws from the world and lives in a forest. He never seeks to possess worldly goods, but is able to obtain anything at all with his mystical powers. Thus, he lives in a forest with a town or city near him.

Again, a Muni who has withdrawn his mind from all worldly things might well live in a town or village, as a Sannyasi. He never shows any pride of birth, family or learning. He wears threadbare clothes, yet he can imagine that he wears the richest garments.

He eats just enough to support his life. Such a man, even if he lives in a town or village, in truth lives in a forest.

He who restrains his senses and passions, and keeps a vow of silence, refraining from any karma, all action, and allowing no desire to capture his mind, surely succeeds. Why should we not worship a man who sustains himself on pure food, never injures any living being, whose heart is always pure, who is swathed in a halo of asceticism, who is free from the leaden weight of desire, who does not cause injury even when dharma sanctions it?

Emaciated by penance, his very flesh, marrow and blood thinned, such a man conquers not just this world but the highest one. When this Muni sits absorbed in dhyana, indifferent to joy and sorrow, honour and insult, he leaves this world and communes with the Brahman. Why, when the Muni eats and drinks, even wine or the flesh of animals, without relish or desire, but like a baby feeding at his mother’s breast, he is still like the pervasive Brahman and one with the Universe. The Muni attains salvation.’”

CANTO 92

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Ashtaka asks, 'O King, of the man of asceticism and the man of knowledge, both working tirelessly toward moksha, even like the Sun and the Moon, which one first finds communion with the Brahman?'

Yayati replies, 'The Vedas help the learned man quickly realise that the perceived universe is only illusion, maya. Upon this realisation, he immediately attains to the Supreme Brahman, the original font, the only blissful reality.

Those that follow the path of dhyana and Yoga arrive at the same goal, but they usually take a longer time: for they depend upon experience alone to rid themselves of samsara.

If a Yogi does not attain mukti in one lifetime (perhaps having been led astray now and then by the allurements of samsara), whatever evolution he achieves goes with him into his next life. But the Gyani always sees only Immortal Unity, and even if he is steeped in the enjoyments of the flesh, they never affect him or his heart. Nothing impedes his salvation.

He that fails to find knowledge must resort to pious karma, to sacrifices. However, no man who performs a yagna with an eye on its fruit ever achieves moksha. His yagnas remain fruitless, and are indeed rajasic, even cruel by nature.

But a man who performs his dharma seeking no gain, but in a spirit of immaculate detachment, his karma is Yoga itself: it is communion with God.'

Ashtaka says, 'Rajan, you look like a young man; you are handsome and wear a heavenly garland. You are lustrous and splendid. From where are you coming and where do you go? Are you someone's messenger? Are you going down to the Earth?'

Yayati says, 'I have fallen from heaven, having lost all my punya. I am doomed to fall into Bhauma, the hell on Earth. Yes, as soon as I finish speaking with you, I will fall down into the world. Ah, even now the Lokapalas command me to hurry. O Ashtaka, I have a boon from Indra that though I shall fall into the Earth, I will fall among the wise and the virtuous, men of dharma. Surely, all of you here are men of dharma, both wise and virtuous.'

Ashtaka says, 'You know everything. I want to know from you, O Yayati, are there any worlds that I might enjoy in Swarga or in Akasa? If there are, then I say to you, you shall not fall.'

Yayati says, 'O King, there are as many worlds above for you to enjoy as there are cows and horses on Earth, and all the other beasts of the wild and the hills together!'

Ashtaka says, 'Rajan, if indeed there are worlds on high for me to enjoy, as the fruit of my punya, I give them all to you. Thus, you shall not fall. Take all those worlds from me quickly, and grieve no more.'

Yayati replies, 'Best of kings, a Brahmana who knows the Brahman may accept such a gift but not you or I. Rajan, I have myself given gifts to Brahmanas, even as one should. But let no man who is not a Brahmana bring dishonour upon himself by taking alms; let the wife of a learned Brahmana never take alms. While I am in the world below, I shall, as I have done before, perform much dharma. When I have never accepted a gift before, how can I take one from you now?'

Another Rajarishi there says, 'Resplendent one, I am Pratardana. I ask you, are there any worlds in Swarga or Akasa for me to enjoy with my punya? Tell me, for you know everything.'

Yayati says, 'Rajan, there are worlds beyond count, full of bliss, where sorrow and pain cannot enter, for you to enjoy; they are as bright as the face of the Sun. Live in each one for just seven days, and they shall yet never be exhausted.'

Pratardana says, 'Then I give all those to you, so that you will not fall. Let the worlds that I have gained become yours, be they in Akasa or in Swarga. Take them quickly, and be sad no more!'

Yayati answered, 'Rajan, no king should ever accept from an equal what he has earned by Yoga and Tapasya; that is not dharma. No wise Kshatriya should leave the path of dharma, particularly when fate visits him with calamity. A king must keep dharma in view always, and walk in dharma. I

would debase myself if I take what you offer. There are others, who seek to acquire punya, who never accept gifts. How, then, shall I?'

Another of those kings of dharma now spoke to Yayati. 'I am Oshadasva's son Vasumat. Tell me, Yayati, are there any worlds that I can enjoy, by my accumulated punya, in Swarga or in Akasa? Mahatman, you know all those sacred realms!'

CANTO 93

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Yayati says, 'There are as many realms for you to enjoy as there are places in the sky, the ten directions of the Universe and on the Earth that the Sun illumines.'

Vasumat then says, 'I give them all to you; let all the worlds meant for me become yours. And you shall not fall anymore. And if it is not proper for you to take them from me as a gift, O King, then buy them from me: their price is a straw.'

Yayati replies, 'I do not remember ever having bought or sold anything usuriously. No king ever has; then how shall I now?'

Vasumat says, 'If you consider buying them as being against dharma, then take them freely from me, as a gift, because I say to you that I will never go to those worlds myself. So let them be yours.'

Now Sibi says to Yayati, 'I am Usinara's son Sibi. O Pitr, are there any worlds in Swarga or Akasa for me to enjoy by my punya? You know all the worlds that a man might gain through tapasya.'

Yayati says, 'You have never failed to help honest and good men who asked for your help. There are infinite worlds for you to enjoy in heaven, all bright as lightning.'

Sibi says, 'If you think it wrong to buy them from me, I give them to you as my gift. Take them all, O King, for I will never go there, to those realms where the wise never feel any disquiet.'

Yayati says, 'O Sibi, powerful as Indra, you have indeed earned an infinity of heavenly realms for yourself. But I have no wish to enjoy worlds given to me by others. I fear I cannot accept your gift.'

Now Ashtaka declares, 'O Pitr, we have all offered you the higher realms that we have earned by our tapasya and dharma. You refuse to accept them. But we are going to leave them to you, and ourselves go down into Bhauma, hell on Earth.'

Yayati replies, 'You are all wise and honest. Give me what I deserve; I cannot do what I have never done before.'

Ashtaka says, 'Whose are these five golden chariots? Do men that fly to the realms of permanent bliss go in them?'

Yayati says, 'Indeed, the five glorious chariots that blaze like fire would bear you to the realms of bliss.'

Ashtaka says, 'Yayati, take the chariots and fly into Swarga. We can wait; we will follow later.'

Yayati says, 'Look! The path to Swarga is revealed before us. We can all go together, for it seems that we have all conquered heaven.'

All those noble kings climb into the chariots of the Devas and fly up into Swarga, illumining all the sky with the radiance of their virtue as they go.

Breaking the silence, as they flash along, Ashtaka asks, 'I always thought that Indra is especially my friend, and that I would enter his realm first. But how does Usinara's son Sibi leave the rest of us behind?'

Yayati says, 'Usinara's son relinquished his every possession to attain Brahmaloka. So he is the first among us. Besides, the liberality, asceticism, truth, virtue, modesty, forgiveness and friendliness of Sibi, as well as his burning desire to do good have been such that no one can measure them.'

Again curious, Ashtaka asks his mother's father, Yayati, who is like Indra himself, 'O King, tell me truthfully who you are, from where you come and whose son you are? Has any other Brahmana or Kshatriya on Earth done all that you did?'

Yayati replies, 'Truly, I am Yayati, Nahusha's son and Puru's father. I was Lord of all the Earth. You are all my daughters' sons, and I am your grandfather. I conquered the world, then gave rich garments to Brahmanas, and also a hundred pedigreed horses that are fit to be sacrificed at Aswamedha yagnas.

Such sacrifices please the Devas and they bless those that perform them. I gifted the Earth that I had conquered to the Brahmanas, the world with all her horses, elephants, gold, every kind of treasure, and also a hundred arbudas of the finest milch cows.

Why, Earth and Sky, Bhumi and Akasa, exist because of my dharma; Agni still burns in the world of men because of my dharma and my truth. I have never spoken a single word that is a lie; and for this the wise worship the truth.

Ashtaka, everything that I have told Pratardana, Vasumat and you is true. I know beyond doubt that the Devas, the Rishis and all the realms and homes of the blessed are full of grace and bliss because they are all founded in Truth.

He that reads or hears this account of our ascent into Swarga, with no evil in his heart, shall himself find the worlds to which we go.'

Thus did mighty King Yayati of old, saved by his grandsons, re-enter Swarga from where he fell, while his fame spread throughout the three worlds."

CANTO 94

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "O Vaisampayana, worthy of worship, tell me about the sons of Puru, and the kings that descended from them. Tell me about the power and deeds of each one. I have heard that every king in the line of Puru is a man of dharma and great prowess, and that each one has excellent sons. O you, who are rich in tapasya, tell me the lives of those kings of deep learning and great achievements."

Vaisampayana said, "Listen then to the lives of the heroic kings born into the House of Puru, every one of them as strong as Indra, owning boundless wealth, and the adoration of all in consequence of their dharma and their awesome deeds.

By his wife Paushti, Puru has three sons: Pravira, Iswara and Raudraswa, all of them redoubtable Maharathas. Of these, Pravira begets upon his wife Suraseni a son called Manasyu.

Manasyu, whose eyes are as wide and long as lotus petals, holds sway over the world, bounded by the four seas. Manasyu's wife is Sauviri, and he fathers three sons in her: Sakta, Sahana and Vagmi. And they are great Kshatriyas in battle and Maharathas.

Puru's son Raudraswa begets upon the Apsara Misrakesi ten sons, all great archers. They grow to be tremendous Kshatriyas, performing countless yagnas to worship the Devas. Each of them begets sons who acquire deep learning of every kind and are men of dharma.

The ten sons of Raudraswa are Richeyu, Kaksreyu and Vrikeyu: of great strength; Sthandileyu, Vaneyu and Jaleyu: of great fame; Tejeyu of great strength and intellect; Satyeyu strong as Indra; Dharmeyu and Sannateyu both powerful as Devas.

Of these, Richeyu becomes sovereign ruler of the Earth and is known as Anadhrishti. He is as strong as Indra among the Devas. Anadhristi's son

Matinara becomes a renowned king of dharma, who performs the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha yagnas.

Matinara has four sons of untold prowess: Tansu, Mahan, Atiratha and Druhyu the glorious. Among these, the mighty Tansu becomes the perpetuator of Puru's line. He subdues the Earth and gains great fame, honour and splendour.

Tansu's son is the mighty Ilina, who becomes the greatest among all conquerors, and also brings the whole world under his sway. Ilina begets five sons upon his wife Rathantara, and Drohmanta is the eldest; they are as mighty as the five elements, the Panchabhutas.

Ilina's sons are Dushyanta, Sura, Bhima, Pravasu, and Vasu. And, O Janamejaya, the eldest of them, Dushyanta, becomes king.

By his wife Shakuntala, Dushyanta has a fine son, Bharata, who becomes king. The royal race that he founded bears Bharata's name, and because of his greatness its fame spread across the Earth.

Bharata marries three wives and begets nine sons by them. None of them is like his father and Bharata is not pleased. Growing angry, their mothers kill their sons. Finally, Bharata performs a great putrakama, with Bharadvaja as his priest, and begets a son called Bhumanyu.

In this prince, Puru's magnificent descendant Bharata is pleased; he feels that this boy is his worthy heir and crowns Bhumanyu Yuvaraja. Bhumanyu marries Pushkarini and sires six sons in her: Suhotra, Suhotri, Suhavih, Sujeya, Diviratha and Kichika. The eldest, Suhotra, inherits the throne and he performs many Rajasuyas and Aswamedhas. Suhotra brings the whole world, with her girdle of seas, her forests teeming with elephants, her lands with cows and horses, and her treasure troves of gold and jewels, under his sway.

The Earth, burdened with numberless humans, elephants, horses and chariots seems as if she might sink down into Patala. During the reign of Suhotra of dharma, lakhs of yupastambas, stakes of sacrifice, cover the face of Bhumi. Suhotra begets upon his wife Aikshaki three sons: Ajamidha, Sumidha, and Purumidha. The eldest, Ajamidha, becomes king and he sires six sons: Riksha by Dhumini; Dushyanta and Parameshthin by Nili; and Jahnu, Jala and Rupina are born from Kesini. All the tribes of the Panchalas are descended from Dushyanta and Parameshthin. And the Kushikas are the sons of Jahnu of measureless might.

Riksha, the eldest, becomes king and he begets Samvarana, who furthers the royal line. O King, I have heard that during the reign of Riksha's son Samvarana, famine, pestilence, drought and disease sweep across the Earth, killing millions. For the first time, enemies defeat the Bharata princes. The Panchalas, with footsoldiers, cavalry, elephant warriors and chariot fighters, conquer the world. With ten Akshauhinis, the Panchala king vanquishes the Bharata king.

Samvarana flees with his wife and ministers, sons and relatives, and hides in the forest on the banks of the river Sindhu, which extends to the foot of the Himalaya. The Bharatas live there for a full thousand years, in a fortress they build.

When a thousand years pass, one day the illumined Rishi Vasishta comes to see the Bharatas in exile, and they come out to worship him with arghya. Welcoming him reverently, they tell him everything that has happened. When the Rishi sits in a lofty chair, Samvarana himself says to the sage, 'Be our priest, O Holy One! For we wish to regain our kingdom.'

Vasishta replies, 'Aum', consenting.

Vasishta makes Samvarana the sovereign of all the Kshatriyas in the world; with his recondite mantras, he makes the heir of Puru like the horns of the bison, the tusks of the elephant. Becoming Lord of the Earth once more, Samvarana performs many Mahayagnas and the gifts he gives the Brahmanas are magnanimous beyond description.

Samvarana marries Surya Deva's daughter, Tapati, and begets on her a son called Kuru. Kuru's dharma is flawless, he is the soul of rectitude, and the people make him king. The field called Kurukshetra or Kurujungala, renowned in the world, is named after this great sovereign: for he sits in that field in tapasya for long years, and sanctifies it through his penance.

Kuru's wife, Vahini of the lofty intellect, bears him five sons: Avikshit, Bhavishyanta, Chaitraratha, Muni and the celebrated Janamejaya. Avikshit begets the mighty Parikshit, Savalaswa, Adhiraja, Viraja, Salmali of great strength, Uchaihsravas, Bhangakara, and Jitari is the eighth.

From their dharma and tapasya seven Maharathas, Janamejaya their leader, are born into this royal House. Parikshit's sons are masters of dharma and artha. They are Kakshasena, Ugrasena, Chitrasena of enormous vitality, Indrasena, Sushena and Bhimasena.

The sons of Janamejaya are all endowed with inordinate strength and become celebrated the world over. They are Dhritarashtra – the eldest,

Pandu, Balhika, Nishadha of tremendous tejas, the mighty Jambunada, Kundodara, Padati, and Vasati is eighth. They too are steeped in dharma and artha, and compassionate to all living creatures.

Dhritarashtra becomes king, he has eight sons: Kundika, Hasti, Vitarka, Kratha, Havihsravas, Indrabha, and the invincible Bhumanyu. Numberless grandsons has Dhritarashtra, but only three of them acquire renown: Prateepa, Dharmanetra and Sunetra.

Of these, Prateepa has no rival on Earth. O Bharatarishabha, Prateepa has three sons, Devapi, Shantanu, and the Maharatha Balhika. Devapi, the eldest, becomes a Sannyasi, for he wants his brothers to have the kingdom. Shantanu and Maharatha Balhika inherit the Earth.

Rajan, besides all these, countless mighty, mighty Kshatriyas are born into the race of Bharata, each of them blessed with burning energy and like Devas in their dharma and tapasya.

So, too, many Maharathas, great chariot-warriors, all as irresistible as Devas, are born into the race of Manu. Their numbers increase the Aila dynasty beyond calculation."

CANTO 95

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, you have told me the history of my ancestors, and about the great kings born into our royal line. However, you have only told me briefly about this ancestry. I beg you, O Vaisampayana, recount the lives of these great men in some detail, beginning with Manu, Lord of creation.

Who would not be enchanted to listen to such a narration, for it surely is sacred? Why, the fame of these kings has spread across Swarga, Bhumi and Patala, such is their wisdom, their might, their lofty characters and their dharma. Your Itihasa is like Amrita; rare delight fills me when you speak of their liberality, power and strength, their intelligence, their vigour and fortitude!"

Vaisampayana said, "Listen then, O Rajan, in full to the legends of your race, just as I heard it from my master Dwaipayana.

Daksha begets Aditi, who begets Vivaswat, who begets Manu, who begets Ila, and Ila begets Pururavas. Pururavas begets Ayus, who begets Nahusha, and Nahusha begets Yayati.

Yayati has two wives, Usasanas' daughter Devayani, and Sarmishta the daughter of Vrishaparvan. Devayani gives birth to Yadu and Turvasu; and Vrishaparvan's daughter Sarmishta gives birth to Druhyu, Anu and Puru.

The descendants of Yadu are the Yadavas and those of Puru are the Pauravas. Puru has a wife called Kausalya, in whom he begets a son called Janamejaya, who performs three Aswamedhas and another great sacrifice calls Viswajit; after which he goes away into the forest and takes Sannyasa.

Janamejaya has Ananta, the daughter of Madhava, and she bears him a son called Prachinvat. This prince has his name because he conquers all the eastern countries up to the very land where the Sun rises. Prachinvat marries Asmaki, a Yadava princess and fathers in her a son called Sanyati.

Sanyati marries Varangi, the daughter of Drishadwata, and she bears him a son called Ahayanti. Ahayanti marries Bhanumati, the daughter of Kritavirya, and she gives him a son called Sarvabhauma.

Sarvabhauma marries Sunanda, the daughter of the Kekaya king, by abducting her. He fathers Jayatsena in her. Jayatsena marries the Vidarbha king's daughter and she bears him Avachina. Avachina also marries another Vidarbha princess, Maryada. Her son is Arihan. Arihan marries Angi and their son is Mahabhauma. Mahabhauma marries Suyajna, the daughter of Prasenajit. She bears him Ayutanayi. He bears this unusual name because he performs a sacrifice for which the fat of an ayuta of male creatures is specified.

Ayutanayi marries Kama, the daughter of Prithusravas, and their son is Akrodhana, who marries Karambha, the daughter of the king of Kalinga. Their son is Devatithi, who marries Maryada, the princess of Videha, and their son is Arihan.

Arihan marries Sudeva, the princess of Anga, and he sires in her the prince Riksha. Riksha marries Jwala, the daughter of Takshaka, and their son is Matinara, who performs a twelve-year yagna on the banks of Saraswati, a great and potent sacrifice. When it is complete, Saraswati appears before the king and makes him her husband, and their son is calls Tansu.

Tansu marries Kalingi and begets a son called Ilina. Ilina marries Rathantari and they have five sons, of whom Dushyanta is the eldest. Dushyanta marries Viswamitra's daughter Shakuntala, and their son is Bharata the Great.

'The mother is only the receptacle in which the father begets the son. The father is himself the son. Therefore, O Dushyanta, accept your son and do not humiliate Shakuntala. God among men, the father becomes the son and rescues himself from hell. Shakuntala speaks the truth when she says that you are this child's father.'

Thus the asariri, the divine voice, spoke in the court of Dushyanta, and Dushyanta then accepts his child; and Bharata has his name for that: the accepted one.

Bharata marries Sunanda, the daughter of Sarvasena, king of Kasi; and their son is Bhumanyu. Bhumanyu marries Vijaya, the daughter of Dasarha, and their son is Suhotra, who marries Suvarna, the daughter of Ikshvaku.

Their son is Hasti, who indeed founded this great capital of yours, and it is after him that it is named Hastinapura.

Hasti marries Yasodhara, the princess of Trigarta, and their son is Vikunthana, who marries Sudeva, the princess of Dasarha. They have a son called Ajamidha. Ajamidha has four wives, Raikeyi, Gandhari, Visala and Riksha. And he begets two thousand and four hundred sons upon them.

Of all these, Samvarana becomes king and perpetuates the dynasty. Samvarana marries Vivaswat's daughter Tapati, and their son is Kuru, who marries the Dasarha princess Subhangi, and their son is Viduratha. Viduratha marries Supriya, a Madhava princess, and their son is called Anaswan. Anaswan marries Amrita, another daughter of the Madhavas, and their son is Parikshit, who marries Suvasa, a Bahuda princess, and their son is Bhimasena.

Bhimasena marries the Kekaya princess Kumari, and begets upon her Pratisravas, whose son is Prateepa. Prateepa marries Sunanda, the daughter of Sibi, and they have three sons:Devapi, Shantanu and Balhika. When he is just a boy, Devapi goes away into the jungle and takes Sannyasa. Shantanu becomes king.

Here is a sloka about Shantanu:

'Old men whom this king touched not only felt indescribable joy, but had their youth restored to them.'

Indeed, so is he named Shantanu. And Shantanu marries Ganga, who bears him a son Devavrata, who is later known as Bhishma, of the solemn vow.

Wishing his father to find happiness (for Ganga has left him), Bhishma helps Shantanu marry Satyavati, who is also known as Gandhakali for the fragrance of her body. When she is a young virgin Satyavati bears the Rishi Parasara a son, upon an island in a stream of the Yamuna: he is my Guru Dwaipayana.

She bears Shantanu two other sons, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. But Gandharvas slay Chitrangada before he grows to manhood. Vichitravirya becomes king, and he marries the two daughters of the king of Kasi, Ambika and Ambalika. But Vichitravirya dies before they can bear him any children.

Satyavati bends her mind to the task of how the race of Dushyanta can be continued. She remembers her first son, the Rishi Dwaipayana. He appears before her, and asks, 'What shall I do for you, mother?'

She says, ‘Your brother Vichitravirya has left this world without fathering any sons. Beget sons of dharma for him.’

Dwaipayana fathers three children, Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura, to continue the royal line. By his boon to his son, Dhritarashtra has a hundred sons by his wife Gandhari. Among those hundred, four achieve renown: Duryodhana, Dushasana, Vikarna and Chitrasena.

Pandu has two jewels among women for his wives: Kunti (also called Pritha), and Madri. One day, while hunting in the forest, Pandu sees a stag covering its mate. Callously, the Kshatriya kills that deer with an arrow before its desire is slaked.

Pierced by the king’s arrow, the deer suddenly changes into a Rishi (who has taken, with his wife, the form of deer to enjoy lovemaking),and says to Pandu, ‘O Pandu, you are a man of dharma and you also know the pleasure a man has satisfying his desire. My desire is not gratified and you have killed me. When you next make love to your wife, you will also die before finding fulfilment!’

With that the Rishi dies, and also his wife and mate as if they shared the same life. Pandu trembles at the curse and from then would not go to his wives.

He says to them in that forest, ‘I am cursed through my own fault. But I have heard that the childless never find Swarga or any heaven at all.’

He begs Kunti to bear him sons. She acquiesces; by Dharma Deva, she bears him Yudhishtira; by Vayu, she bears him Bhimasena; and by Indra she gives him Arjuna.

Pandu is delighted with his sons. He says to Kunti, ‘Madri has no sons; use your mantra to help her bear children as well.’

‘So be it,’ says Kunti and speaks the incantation for her husband’s second wife, and Madri bears him Nakula and Sahadeva, twin sons by the Aswins of heaven.

One day, Pandu sees Madri wearing just her ornaments and bathing in the river, naked. His long repressed desire kindled, he thrusts himself upon her on the riverbank. Immediately as he does, he dies. Madri burns herself on her husband’s funeral pyre, to go with him into Swarga, for his desire remained unsatisfied.

She says to Kunti, ‘Raise these twins of mine like your own sons, with love.’

After their father's death, some Rishis of the forest bring Kunti and the five Pandavas to Hastinapura and present them to Bhishma and Vidura. Immediately, the Munis vanish before all eyes, while flowers fall out of the sky when those Sages name the sons of Pandu, saying whose natural child each one is, and divine drumrolls reverberate across the clear blue heavens.

Bhishma takes the Pandavas in. They describe the death of their father, and perform the last rites for him in Hastinapura. When the evil, spoilt Duryodhana sees that his cousins are to be raised in the city, violent jealousy possesses him. Even like a Rakshasa, he does everything in his power to do away with them. But Fate will take its course inexorably, and all Duryodhana's malignant schemes are frustrated.

Finally, in despair, he has the Pandavas sent to Varanavrata by his doting father; they go willingly, and at first innocently. There he tries to immolate them in a cunningly built house of lac, but they are saved yet again by the warning and the help of their uncle Vidura.

Later, the Pandavas kill Hidimba and then go to Ekachakra. Here Bhima kills the Rakshasa Baka, and after that they go to Panchala, where they win Draupadi for their wife, before returning to Hastinapura, and then going to Khandavaprastha, where they live in peace for a while, and beget children.

Draupadi bears Yudhishtira a son calls Prativindhya; Bhima's son is Sutasoma; Arjuna's is Srutakriti; Nakula's is Satanika; and Sahadeva's son by Draupadi is Srutakarman.

Yudhishtira also marries Devika, the daughter of Gobasana of the Saibyas, at her swayamvara, and their son is Yaudheya. Bhima also marries Balandhara, the daughter of the king of Kasi, by offering his strength as dowry, and has a son by her called Sarvaga.

Arjuna goes to Dwaraka, Dwaravati, and carries away Subhadra, Krishna's soft-spoken sister, and brings her home to Indraprastha. Arjuna and Subhadra have a son called Abhimanyu, a splendidly gifted prince and a favourite of Krishna's.

Nakula also marries Karenumati, princess of Chedi, and their son is Niramitra. Sahadeva marries Vijaya, daughter of Dyutimat, king of Madra, being chosen by her at her swayamvara, and they have a son called Suhotra.

Of course, the firstborn of all the sons of the Pandavas is Ghatotkacha, Bhimasena's son by Hidimbi. These are the eleven Pandavaputras, and among them Abhimanyu is the one that continues the royal line.

He marries Virata’s daughter Uttaraa and she gives birth to a stillborn child, a premature baby who has been burnt in his mother’s womb by Aswatthama’s astra. Krishna tells Kunti to take the lifeless child onto her lap, and he says, ‘I will revive this child of six months.’

Krishna brings the infant back to life and gives him great strength, vitality and brilliance. Having restored him to life, Krishna says, ‘Because this child has faced death before being born, he shall be called Parikshit, the tested one.’

Parikshit marries Madravati, O King, and you, Janamejaya, are their son. You married Vapushtama, and have two sons called Satanika and Sankukarna. Satanika has married the princess of Videha and their son is Aswamedhadatta.

This, Rajan, is the lineage of the House of Puru and the Pandavas. Let Brahmanas that keep vratas, devout Kshatriyas who practise svadharma and protect their subjects, attentive Vaisyas and reverent Sudras, who serve the three higher varnas, all listen to this sacred Itihasa, for it increases punya.

Those that recite this sacred genealogy or listen to it with reverence find Swarga for themselves, and go to the realms of the blessed. The Devas, Rishis and all men honour them.

The enlightened Vyasa composed this holy Itihasa, the Bharata. Brahmanas that know the Vedas and other men that listen to it with pure and worshipful hearts gain great spiritual reward and, it is told, conquer the heavens.

Even if they sin, they find honour, for a sloka describes this Itihasa thus: ‘This Bharatais equal to the Vedas; it is beautiful and it is sacred. It bestows wealth, fame and a long life. Let all men listen to it with absorption.’”

CANTO 96

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "There is a king called Mahabhisha born into the race of Ikshvaku. He is Lord of all the Earth, and always speaks the truth and is mighty indeed. With a thousand Aswamedhas and a hundred Rajasuyas he adores Indra, and finally attains Swarga.

One day, the Devas have gathered to worship Brahma. Several Rajarishis are present at the yagna and so is Mahabhisha. Ganga, queen of rivers, also comes to offer adorations to the Grandsire. Suddenly a gust of wind blows her clothes, white as moonbeams, away from her body and she stands exposed.

The Devas bend their heads, turning their eyes away from her. But Rajarishi Mahabhisha stares brazenly at the queen of rivers.

Brahma curses Mahabhisha, 'Wretch, you forget yourself at the sight of her! You will be born on Earth as a man. She shall also come to you as a woman in the world, and she will cause you anguish, repeatedly. Only when you lose your patience and turn on her in anger will you be free of this curse of her tormenting you. Finally, after a full life as a mortal, Mahabhisha, you will return to Swarga as yourself.'

King Mahabhisha thinks of all the great kings of the world and wishes to be born as the son of the awesome Prateepa. And, if truth be told, Ganga also desires Mahabhisha when she sees him stare at her unabashedly with such desire in his eyes. She, too, wants him, as she leaves that conclave of the Devas and journeys down towards the Earth.

On her way, she sees the eight Vasus of heaven also travelling, forlorn, on the same path as herself. The queen of rivers asks them, 'Why are you so dejected? O Swargavasis, heaven dwellers, is all well with you?'

The Vasus reply, 'O Ganga, Rishi Vasishta has cursed us for a sin we committed against him. He sat at his sandhya vandana and we could not see

him in the fading light. We crossed before him, disturbing his worship, and he cursed us in anger, “Be born as men!”

We cannot escape the curse. We ask you, O Ganga, become a human woman and bear us as your children. Queen of all rivers, we cannot enter the womb of a mortal woman.’

Ganga says, ‘So be it.’ Then she asks them, ‘Which great man on Earth will you make your father?’

The Vasus replies, ‘Prateepa will have a son called Shantanu whose fame will mantle the Earth even as the rays of the Sun do. We wish to be born from his seed.’

Ganga smiles, ‘O Vasus, sinless ones, this is exactly as I wished. I will become Shantanu’s wife and you shall be our children.’

The Vasus says, ‘O Tripathagaa, who flow through Swarga, Bhumi and Patala, you of the three courses, cast us, as each one of us is born, into the water so we do not have to live long in the dreadful mortal world.’

Ganga says, ‘I will do as you ask, but let not my lovemaking with him be entirely fruitless. One of you must survive and live a full life as our son.’

The Vasus says, ‘We will each give up an eighth part of our life energy to create a single son for you, one to fulfil your every wish, who will live a full life as a man. But he himself shall beget no children.’

Making this pact with Ganga, the Vasus immediately go on their way; they are in a hurry to see an end to the curse of mortality.”

CANTO 97

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “There is a king called Prateepa, who is compassionate towards every living thing. He spent many years in tapasya at the source of the Ganga.

One day, Ganga rises from her waters as a ravishing woman and approaches that king. She goes directly to the Rajarishi at his dhyana and sits upon his right thigh, which is as strong as the trunk of a Sala tree.

Opening his eyes and seeing the beauty on his lap, the king says, ‘Lovely one, what do you want from me?’

She says, ‘I want you for my husband, O King. Kurusthama, best of the Kurus, be mine, for to refuse a woman who offers herself to you is condemned by the Rishis.

Prateepa answers, ‘Fair one, I never go to another man’s wife or women that are not of my varna from lust. This is my dharma vrata.’

Ganga says, ‘I am neither inauspicious nor ugly. I am worthy of being enjoyed. I am a celestial woman, and my beauty is unearthly. I want you for my husband; do not refuse me, Kshatriya.’

Prateepa answers, ‘I have sworn a vow of continence; if I break my vrata, sin will consume me. Besides, lovely one, you have sat on my right thigh and put your arms around me. But you must know that the right leg is the place for daughters, while the left lap is for wives. Peerless woman, I am forbidden to enjoy you as a lover, but shall indeed accept you: as my daughter-in-law, as my son’s wife.’

Ganga says, ‘King of dharma, let it be as you say: I will become your son’s wife. Out of my regard for you, I shall be a queen of the hallowed line of Bharata, whose kings are the sanctuary of every other king on Earth. Why, a hundred years would not suffice for me to count the virtues of your royal house.

The majesty and dharma of the renowned kings of your royal line are beyond calculation or compare. But, Lord of the Earth, I must tell you that when I am your son's wife, he shall not be the judge of what I do, be it anything at all. Be assured, though, that I will be a faithful wife to him and please him in every way. Finally, he will find heaven for himself because of the sons that I bear him, and because of his own dharma.'

Ganga vanishes, and Prateepa now waits for the birth of his son to keep the word he has given her. Indeed, at this very time, Prateepa, bull among Kshatriyas, and his wife are performing penance to have a son, for they are childless.

They are quite old when a son is born to them, and he is Mahabhisha whom Brahma has cursed. They call him Shantanu, because his father has already calmed his passions with penance when he is born: Shantanu, the one born of serenity.

Shantanu, finest among the Kurus, realises early that the realm of immortal bliss is gained only by one's deeds; he treads the path of dharma, devoutly.

When Shantanu grows into a youth, Prateepa calls him one day and says, 'Shantanu, some years ago, before you were born, a celestial woman came to me and I gave her my word that you would marry her and beget children upon her. If you happen to meet her, secretly, and if she asks you to sire children in her, take her for your wife.

Also, my pure child, you must never judge what she does, whatever it might be, fair or foul, nor ask who she is, or where she comes from, but take her for your wife. This is my command to you.'

Prateepa makes Shantanu king, and goes away into the forest to become a Vanaprastha. Shantanu, blessed with great intelligence and as splendid as Indra, spends a great deal of his time in the forest: he is an avid hunter, addicted to the sport, numberless deer and bison he kills.

One day, ranging the banks of the Ganga on his hunt, he comes to a place frequented by Siddhas and Charanas. He sees a woman there who seems to be as beautiful as the Devi Sri: faultless of face and form, her teeth like pearls, wearing unearthly ornaments and garments so fine and resonant that they might have been woven from the filaments of lotuses.

Shantanu feels uncanny rapture surge through him; his hair stands on end for delight. He drinks in the sight of her, and, helplessly, drinks on. The woman sees Shantanu, magnificent and brilliant, and feels a pang of love.

She also gazes helplessly at him, and gazes on as if she could never tear her eyes away from him.

Shantanu says softly to her, ‘You with the waist like a lotus stalk, you whose beauty is divine, I do not know if you are a Devastri or a Danavi, a Gandharvi, an Apsara, a Yakshi, a Nagini or a mortal woman, a Manushi. But I want you to become my wife.’”

CANTO 98

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "She sees his smile, she hears what he says, so tenderly; she remembers her word she gave the Vasus; she remembers Mahabhisha, and she speaks to him, her voice perfect and her every word making his heart quiver in thrall.

She says, 'O King, I will be your wife and obey you in all things. But I have one condition: you must never question what I do, whatever it might be, good or bad, or ask me who I am. You must never say a harsh word to me. As long as you treat me kindly and never question me, I will be a devoted wife to you. But the moment you say a cross word to me or question me, I will leave you forever.'

Shantanu does not hesitate to agree, 'So be it.' He gives his solemn word.

She is delighted to become his wife and he is ecstatic to be her husband. Great joy and pleasure they give each other. Shantanu keeps his word to her: he never asks her who she is, nor questions her ever. And she is a perfect wife to him, and Shantanu, Lord of the Earth, is more than content for she gratifies him in every way, by her beauty, her conduct, her generosity, her loving affection and her ardour, too.

The Devi Ganga, Tripathagaa of the three courses, has assumed an exquisite human form, and she is entirely happy being the wife of that tiger among kings, Shantanu, who is as mighty as Indra himself; it is as if she now enjoys the fruit of all her past punya.

In turn, she delights him, by her unearthly beauty and her love, her womanly wiles and her lovemaking, with her songs and by dancing for him; indeed, theirs is an almost unalloyed happiness, while months, seasons and years fly by and the king hardly notices them pass.

But when Ganga first becomes pregnant and delivers a son as beautiful as a Deva child, she takes the newborn straight to the river and casts him

into the foaming current. She says to Shantanu, who is aghast, 'This is for your own good. Trust me, ask me nothing.'

Shantanu does not question his otherwise perfect wife for fear that she will leave him. Seven times this happens, and the king never says a word, though gradually he becomes a broken man, seeing his sons sink in the Ganga.

But when the eighth child is born, and his wife, with a smile, is about to cast the baby into the river, Shantanu cannot bear it anymore. He cries to her, 'Stop! You will not kill my son. Who are you? Whose daughter are you? What are you that can kill your own children? Murderess, your sins are too dreadful to even think of.'

She replies calmly, 'If it is children you want, you are already the most blessed of fathers. I will not kill this child. But you have broken your word that you would never question me or say an unkind word to me and I must leave you now forever. I am Jahnu's daughter Ganga. The greatest Rishis worship me. I lived with you for all these years to fulfil a purpose of the Devas.

Vasishta cursed the eight Vasus to mortal births. On Earth there is none but you that deserved to become their father. Also, there is no one but I who could become their mother. I took this human form to give birth to them. Shantanu, by becoming the father of the eight Vasus you have gained many Swargas for yourself, realms of permanent bliss.

The Vasus also made me swear that I would set them free from the darkness of mortal bondage as soon as they are born. I did not kill them, as you saw it, but only liberated them from the curse of Apava Rishi, Vasishta.

I must leave you now, O King, my time with you is over. Be blessed and raise this child. Call him Gangadatta for me. He shall be great beyond all measure and bring fame and honour to your royal house.'"

CANTO 99

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Shantanu asks, 'Who was Apava Muni and what did the Vasus do, that he cursed them to human birth? What has this eighth child of yours done for which he must live a full human life? O Jaahnavi, tell me everything in detail.'

Ganga replies, 'Bharatashreshta, Vasistha, the Sage who was later known as Apava, was the son of Varuna. He had his asrama on Meru, king of mountains, in a green forest. The place was sacred, with birds and animals of every kind abounding. Flowers of every season bloomed perennially in the magical place. Bharatottama, Varuna's son, best among men of dharma, sat in tapasya in that forest, full of streams flowing with sweet water and with sweet roots and fruit aplenty.

Daksha Prajapati had a daughter called Surabhi. Bharatarishabha, she bore her husband Kashyapa Muni a daughter, Nandini, who was born as a radiant and divine cow of wishes, who could fulfil any desire. Vasishta took Nandini to help him with his ritual homa. Nandini lived in his asrama and adored by all the Sages in that sacred forest, ranged through it at will.

One day, O Bharatarishabha, the Vasus, with Prithu at their head, came to that forest which the Devas and Devarishis love. They ranged through that vana at their leisure, with their wives, all of them enchanted by the glorious mountain and the forest of delights.

Then the slender, gorgeous wife of one of the Vasus saw Nandini, the cow of wishes, through the trees. She saw how lovely Nandini was, her eyes large, her teats ample and full of milk, her tail fine, her hooves as beautiful as jewels, bearing every other auspicious sign, and radiant. The Vasu's wife pointed Nandini out to her husband Dyu.

O King who are as strong as the elephant Airavata, Dyu saw Nandini and admired her many excellences. He said to his wife, "O my black-eyed beauty of the tapering thighs, the cow belongs to the Rishi who lives in this

tapovana. My wasp-waisted one, do you know that a mortal who drinks Nandini's milk does not age for ten thousand years?"

Best of kings, the reed-waisted and beautiful Devi said to her irradiant husband Dyu, "I have a precious human friend in this world, her name is Jivati. She is so beautiful and young, that daughter of that Deva among Manavas, the Rajarishi of great dharma and intellect, Usinara.

My lustrous husband, I want to give this cow and her calf to my friend. I want Jivati to drink Nandini's milk and be free from age and death. My illustrious lord, grant me my wish, I beg you. Oh, nothing would please me more!"

Dyu wanted to please his wife and, with the help of his brothers Prithu and the others, he spirited away Nandni and her calf. Indeed, when his wife batted her long eyes at him, Dyu forgot to whom Nandini belonged. He forgot dharma and that he might fall terribly through this crime.

When Varuna's son returned to his asrama in the evening with the fruit he had gathered, he did not see Nandini or her calf. Vasishta searched the charmed tapovana for her, high and low. When he could not find the cow, he used his mystic vision and saw exactly what had happened, how the Vasus had spirited her away.

In rage he cursed the Vasus, crying, "They dared to steal my sweet Nandini with her lovely tail, and milk like Amrita. Let the arrogant Vasus be born into the world of men, on Bhumi!"

Bharatrishabha, this was how the Rishi Apava cursed the eight Vasus. Having pronounced his curse, Vasishta sat down to meditate again. When the awesome Brahmarishi cursed them those celestials were instantly aware of it, and flew down to his asrama in distress. They did their utmost to pacify the Rishi, but Apava, knower of dharma, would not relent.

However, the righteous and kindly one said, "Vasus, Dhava and you others, I have cursed you. Yet you shall be free from my curse within a year of being born into the world. But Dyu is he that led you to this sin, and he must spend a full human life in the world of men.

Though I cursed you in wrath, my curse cannot prove vain. Dyu, you shall indeed live on Earth but you will beget no children. You shall know the Vedas and the Shastras and be a man of profound dharma. You will be an obedient son to your father, but you will never enjoy intimate relations with a woman and remain celibate all through your mortal life."

With that, Maharishi Vasishta left the Vasus. They then came together to me and, O King, they implored me for the boon that as soon as I gave birth to them I would set them free from Vasishta’s curse by casting them into the river. Best of kings, I only did what they asked so that they could be free from this world. Also, this eighth child, who is Dyu, must live a full mortal life from Vasishta’s curse.’

With that, she takes her child and vanishes; she would bring him back to his father when he is older. Shantanu’s son is called both Gangeya and Devavrata, and he excels his father in accomplishment.

After Ganga leaves, Shantanu returns sadly to Hastinapura. Let me tell you now about the dharma and the fortunes of this great king of the House of Bharata. For this wondrous Itihasa is known as the Mahabharata.”

CANTO 100

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Well loved by the Devas and all Rajarishis, Shantanu is famous in all the worlds for his wisdom, his dharma and his truthfulness: never would he tell a lie. He is self-controlled, liberal, forgiving, intelligent, modest, patient and energetic, that bull among men.

Blessed with all these qualities, a master of dharma and artha, he protects the race of Bharata and indeed all men and women. His throat is marked with three lines, like a sankha, a conch; his shoulders are massive and wide and he is as strong as an angry elephant. It seems that every auspicious royal sign dwells in the person of Shantanu as if they consider him to be their choicest abode.

Men who observe the deportment of Shantanu become convinced that dharma is infinitely superior to artha and kama, that rectitude is loftier than wealth and enjoyment. Truly, there is never another king like Shantanu. When the other kings of the Earth see his absolute devotion to dharma they make him an emperor, a king of kings, and then on, during the reign of Shantanu the Great, those kings are free from fear and sorrow.

They sleep in peace and awake every morning having dreamt beautiful and joyful dreams. Because Shantanu is like Indra himself in tejas, vital and brilliant, every king of the Earth becomes a king of dharma, liberal and always performing yagnas and deeds of deep goodness. When Shantanu and other kings like him rule the Earth, the dharma of every varna, of men and women of every persuasion, grows incalculably. The Kshatriyas serve the Brahmanas; the Vaisyas wait upon the Kshatriyas; and the Sudras, worshipping the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, wait upon the Vaisyas.

Shantanu lives in Hastinapura, the wonderful capital of the Kurus, and he holds sway over all the Earth, bounded by the four seas. He is honest and straightforward, and as much a master of dharma as the king of the Devas.

He combines in his person such liberality, religion and austerity that great fortune comes to him and, through him, spreads in tides across the world he rules. He knows no malice or anger; he is as handsome as Soma Deva; he is as brilliant as Surya Deva; and as strong as Vayu the Wind God. His wrath, if roused, is like Yama's, yet he is ordinarily as patient as Bhumi Devi, who bears all things upon herself.

Rajan, while Shantanu rules the Earth, no deer, boars, birds, or other animals are killed wantonly. Great kindness towards all living creatures pervades his kingdom, and he himself is the very soul of mercy, knowing neither desire nor anger, but extending his protection to all creatures.

He performs yagnas to the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitrs, and never is any creature killed in sin. Shantanu is king and father to all and, particularly, to those that are wretched, who have no one else to watch over them; a guardian of birds and beasts he is, indeed, of every created thing.

And during the rule of the best of the Kurus, of that king of kings, speech and truth are the same thing, and men's minds flow always towards liberality, virtue and love of their fellow beings. Shantanu enjoys domestic happiness for thirty-six years and then goes away into the forest to become a Vanaprastha.

Shantanu's son, the Vasu Dyu, born of Ganga and named Devavrata, is as handsome as his father and also like him in his dharma and his learning. He is a prodigy at every branch of knowledge, mundane and spiritual, skilful beyond description. Prodigious are his strength and vigour, too. He becomes a Maharatha, effortlessly; indeed, he becomes a great ruler, though he never actually becomes king.

One day, some years after Ganga leaves him, taking their eighth infant with her, Shantanu follows a deer he has wounded with his arrow along the banks of the Ganga, when he suddenly sees the river turned to a mere trickle, indeed, run almost dry. Shantanu gazes at this in wonder: what could do this to that mightiest of rivers?

Then he sees a youth as handsome and radiant as Indra, who holds up the river's flow with his astra, an unearthly weapon. The king watches in astonishment. The youth is Shantanu's son, but having last seen him as a babe in arms, Shantanu does not know him.

However, the boy knows his father at once but he chooses to vanish using his maaya shakti, his power of illusion, making himself invisible.

Shantanu now suspects that the boy is his son, and he speaks to the river that flows again, 'Let me see that youth!'

Ganga assumes the form of a beautiful woman and appears before the king, holding the boy, wearing unearthly ornaments and raiment, with her right hand. Shantanu does not recognise the woman, clad in shimmering white robes and also wearing unworldly ornaments. She has been his wife for many years, but this is another form in which she appears.

Ganga says, 'Tiger among men, this is your eighth son that you begot on me. He is a master of astras, and of every other weapon. O King, take him with you now to your city of heroes. I have raised him with great love and care.

Our brilliant son studied all the Vedas and the Vedangas with Vasishta; as an archer, he is Indra's equal. O Bharata, the Devas and the Asuras have both blessed him. Whatever Shukra Bhargava knows, my son knows as well, having learnt from him; he also knows all the Shastras that Angiras' son Brihaspati, whom the Devas and Asuras both adore, knows, having studied them from the Guru himself.

He has learnt the use of weapons from Jamadagni's son, the invincible Parasurama Mahabahu. O bravest of kings, I have brought your heroic son to you; he is a matchless bowman and knows the dharma of kings in its every nuance and detail.'

She gives the boy's hand into Shantanu's, and vanishes. Shantanu brings his son, glorious as Surya, back to Hastinapura. That scion of the line of Puru blesses his great fortune as he rides into his capital, which resembles Amaravati in heaven, bringing his radiant boy with him. He calls all the Pauravas together and formally crowns his son Devavrata as the Yuvaraja.

Bharatarishabha, so noble and able is that prince that, quickly, his father and the other members of the Paurava clan, and also the people, see that he is certainly the jewel of that illustrious line, and they love him. As for Shantanu, he dotes on the youth; that powerful king's joy at living with his son knows no bounds.

Four years pass, then one day the king ranges through some woods on the bank of the Yamuna, when suddenly he smells a scent of heaven, and cannot tell what its source is. Here and there he goes, desperate to find what it is that smells so sweet.

Finally, he sees a black-eyed young woman, her beauty unworldly: a fisherman's daughter.

Shantanu says to her, ‘Who are you, and whose daughter are you? What are you doing here?’

She answers him, ‘Be blessed, stranger! I am the daughter of the chieftain of the fishermen on this river. By his command, I ferry travellers across the river in my boat.’

Shantanu gazes at that beauty, friendly and so fragrant, and for the first time after Ganga left him, he feels desire stir in him, powerfully. He wants her for his wife. Shantanu goes to her father and asks for her hand.

The fishermen’s chieftain says, ‘O King, I will gladly give my daughter to be your wife, but I have a condition. You are a man of dharma and you must fulfil my condition if you want to marry my daughter. If you give me your word on it, I will certainly give you my daughter for I could never hope to find another husband for her who is your equal.’

Shantanu says, ‘Tell me your condition, the word you want from me. If it is in my power to grant what you want, I certainly will. But unless I know what it is, how can I give you my solemn word?’

The fisherman says, ‘Rajan, what I want is that the son born to my daughter shall become king after you, and no other.’

O Bharata, Shantanu desires the fishergirl desperately, but he thinks of Devavrata and knows he cannot agree to the fisherman’s condition. Burning within himself to possess the fragrant girl, his mind full of just her, he sadly turns back to Hastinapura.

Back in his capital, Shantanu is plunged in gloom.

One day, Devavrata goes to his grieving father and says, ‘Why do you grieve like this? Every good fortune is yours; all the chieftains and kings obey you. Yet you shut yourself up alone and speak no word to anyone, not even to me.

You do not go out riding anymore. You are pale and losing weight every day; despondency envelops you and you have lost the very spark of life. Father, I beg you, tell me what illness you are suffering from, so that I can find a cure for you.’

Shantanu says, ‘It is true what you say, my son, that I have become melancholy. I will also tell you why sorrow is upon me. Gangeya, you are my only son, the only heir to the throne of Bharata. You are a Kshatriya and are frequently at arms or sport with weapons.

My child, human life is always uncertain. O Gangaputra, if some danger befalls you, we shall be heirless. To me, you by yourself are worth a

hundred sons, and I have no wish to marry again. I only pray that fortune always attends on you, and that our dynasty continues.

The Rishis say that he who has only one son has no son. Sacrifices performed before a holy fire and the knowledge of the three Vedas bestow immortal punya; but such punya does not have a sixteenth part of the spiritual merit that one gains by having a son.

Why, men and beasts are hardly different from each other in this respect. My wise child, I have no shadow of doubt that a man finds Swarga for himself when he has a son.

Even the Devas regard the Vedas, which are the root of the Puranas, as having scriptural authority and the Vedas are full of examples of this. O Bharata, you are a Kshatriya and bold and daring, and as I said, always at arms or in battle. I fear that you might be killed one day in battle.

If that happens, my child, what will become of the royal house of Bharata? What will happen to our dynasty? Some pretender, some usurper will sit upon our hallowed throne. This is the thought that dejects me and fills me with sorrow and anxiety.'

Devavrata does not reply immediately, but that perspicacious young man suspects the truth, the real cause of his father's misery. He goes to the old minister who has devoted his life to the king's personal well-being and asks him what causes his father's depression.

Bharatarishabha, the aged minister tells Devavrata about the fisherman's condition, for which he would give his daughter Gandhavati to Shantanu. Immediately, taking many venerable old Kshatriya lords with him, Devavrata goes to the home of the fisherman and begs him for his daughter's hand for Shantanu.

The fisherman receives him respectfully in his court of fishermen. When Devavrata sits comfortably, the fisherman says, 'Bharatarishabha, you are Shantanu's only son and the greatest warrior on Earth. Your prowess is great indeed. Let me say this to you: if Shantanu asks for the hand of the daughter of Indra himself, Indra could not dream of rejecting the proposal.

Satyavati is not my natural daughter. The Rajarishi from whose seed she was born is your equal in birth and dharma. He has often told me about your father Shantanu and that only he is worthy of marrying my child.

Why, the Brahmarishi Asita has asked me for her hand more than once, and I have refused him because I have believed that your father is destined to be her husband. However, there is one great fear I have in giving her to

your father: that he already has a son and that son is you. If my daughter's sons have you for a rival, how will they fare?

Parantapa, scourge of your enemies, even if he was a great Asura or Gandharva no enemy could hope to prevail against you, mightiest of all Kshatriyas. Be blessed, great Devavrata. But understand clearly what I am saying, and that the decision of whether or not my daughter will marry your father does not rest with me.'

O Bharata, hearing this, Devavrata says in that rustic court of fisher-chieftains and Kshatriyas, 'Honest friends, then listen to the vow that I swear. I agree to your condition, fisherman: your daughter's son shall be king of Hastinapura. I renounce my right to the throne forever. No other man in this world, I tell you, would swear such an oath. But for my father's sake, I will not break it!'

The fisherman's eyes shine. This is good fortune that he could hardly credit. But that shrewd man now says, 'Prince of dharma, you have come here on behalf of your father Shantanu, whose glory is beyond measuring. I ask you now to also represent my interest—you and you alone—in this matter of my Satyavati marrying the king.

Most excellent Kshatriya, I have something to add, something else that you must consider. Parantapa, any father who has a care for his daughter would say what I am about to. You are certainly a man of dharma, Mahabaho, Mighty-armed, and I have no doubt that you will honour the solemn word you have just sworn before all these worthy ones. But what about your sons after you? How can I trust them?'

O King, Ganga's son says, 'O Fisherking, most worthy friends, listen to what I now swear in the presence of all of you. Kshatriyas, I have already relinquished the throne of my ancestors. I will now settle the question about my sons. Fisherman, from this day, I swear to remain a Brahmachari, a celibate all my life. Even if I die without having a son, I will find the highest heaven for myself, realms of eternal bliss.'

The hairs on the fisherman's body stand on end in unbridled delight, he can hardly believe this great fortune. His eyes shining, he says, 'I give my daughter to be your father's wife!'

The Devas, Apsaras and myriad tribes of Rishis pour down a rain of flowers from the sky, over Devavrata's head, and heavenly voices cry in awe, 'Bhishma! Bhishma!' , because his vow is so terrible.

Bhishma, as we shall call him from now, bows to Satyavati, and says, ‘Mother, come, climb into my chariot and let us go home to Hastinapura.’

Bhishma helps the beautiful and fragrant one into his chariot. Coming to Hastinapura he brings her straight to Shantanu and tells him everything. The great Kshatriyas who had gone with him say, ‘Truly he is Bhishma!’

When Shantanu hears what his son has done for his sake, he blesses him, saying, ‘Death will come to you only when you call him; otherwise no power of Heaven or Earth will end your life.’”

CANTO 101

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "O King, Shantanu marries Satyavati with all the prescribed and proper rituals. Then he takes her to himself with great delight.

Soon, Satyavati bears an intelligent and heroic son and he is called Chitrangada. He is endowed with terrific vitality and strength and becomes a great man. Shantanu of untold prowess also begets on Satyavati another son: Vichitravirya, who becomes a mighty bowman and the king after his father. But before Vichitravirya grows to manhood, Shantanu the Great yields to Time.

When Shantanu passes on to Swarga, Bhishma, with the support of Satyavati, installs Chitrangada on the throne. At an early age, Chitrangada, with Bhishma for his master, proves himself a matchless warrior, indeed no man other than his elder brother is his equal at arms.

He vanquishes every king of the Earth, and when his namesake, the Gandharva king Chitrangada, sees that the prince of the world could easily subdue men, Asuras and even the Devas, the celestial challenges the Kuru prince before his power grows beyond controlling.

They meet on the hallowed field of the Kurus, Kurukshetra, and the battle between them lasts a full three years, on the banks of the golden Saraswati. Fierce and dreadful is that battle and the sky is thick with banks of arrows and spears, and lusty mace blows ring out; but finally, with superior strategy, indeed with subtle deception, the Gandharva kills the human Chitrangada and flies up into heaven.

When Chitrangada, tiger among men, of strength beyond all measure, is killed, Bhishma, son of Shantanu, performs his last rites. Then he crowns the young boy Vichitravirya as king, while he himself rules as regent in his younger brother's name. Vichitravirya, for his part, worships his older brother, and Bhishma loves him like a son, that fine prince of dharma."

CANTO 102

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Scionof the House of Kuru, thus Bhishma rules the kingdom with the support of Satyavati, when Vichitravirya is a boy. When his brother grows into a young man, the wise Bhishma decides to get him married.

He hears that the king of Kasi is to hold a combined swayamvara for his three daughters, all said to be as beautiful as Apsaras. With Satyavati's approval, Bhishma Maharatha, Parantapa, rides to Kasi in a single chariot.

Shantanu's son sees all the kings come from across the land, from every direction in the hope of winning one of the princesses' favour; he sees the three exquisite Rajakumaris, each of whom would choose her own husband.

As the names of the gathered kings are being recited, Bhishma declares that he chooses the three princesses to be his brother's wives. In a flash, Ganga's awesome son has the amazed young women in his chariot. He speaks to the assembled kings in a voice like the rumbling of thunderclouds.

'The Rishis have said a maiden may be given to an accomplished groom, by inviting him to the girl's house and giving her away, decked in fine jewellery and with valuable dowry besides.

Others might give their daughters away by accepting a pair of cows or bulls as brideprice. Yet others take gold for giving their daughters in marriage, while some men carry away their brides by force.

Some men marry young women with their consent; others drug them into giving their consent; and still others by getting the permission of the girl's parents. Some men marry wives for having sat or helped at yagnas.

Of these, the Sages always laud the eighth form of marriage for Brahmanas. Kshatriyas however, approve of the fifth, swayamvara, where the girl consents herself and chooses her own groom. Kings marry by this custom.

But the Rishis say that the wife taken by force, from a conclave of Kshatriyas invited to a swayamvara, after a battle, after slaying adversaries, is the most prized. Therefore, O Kshatriyas, look, I am taking these three by force for my brother. Do your best to stop me, if you dare; come, defeat me or be vanquished!'

With that the invincible Kuru prince Bhishma thunders away in his chariot with the three princesses. The challenged kings jump up, slapping their arms and their thighs in anger. Such a din they make, throwing down their fine ornaments in haste, and pulling on their armour.

O Janamejaya, jewellery and armour being flung down and pulled on flashes like meteors in the night sky. Their great brows knit and eyes red with fury, the Kshatriyas rush towards the fine chariots that their sarathys bring, yoked to steeds of lofty pedigree.

Weapons raised, and roaring, the magnificent Kshatriyas give hot chase to the great Kuru lord. Then, O Bharata, ensues the dreadful battle between all those warriors on one side and Bhishma on the other. Ten thousand arrows they shoot at him, at once, and he cuts them down with an incredible volley of shafts as numerous as the down on one's body.

The kings surround him and rain arrows on him like thunderclouds do upon the crest of a mountain. Bhishma not only stops that downpour of barbs, he pierces every king surrounding him with three arrows, in a flash. They strike him back with five arrows each. But the shafts fall off his mighty body like straws, Rajan, and he shoots each Kshatriya again with two arrows.

The encounter swells and arrows stream around Bhishma's chariot so that it becomes like the Devasura yuddha of old. Men that do not fight but only watch, brave men tremble. Bhishma breaks bows with his fusillades, cuts down flagstaffs, severs coats of armours and sloughs off human heads, in thousands.

So light, swift and sure is his hand, so awesome his prowess and skill as he keeps them at bay, that soon the kings around him, their breath taken away, put down their weapons and begin to applaud him. With a quick bow, he turns his chariot and flashes away towards Hastinapura, capital of the Bharatas, taking the princesses with him.

Suddenly, the Maharatha Salva roars out a challenge to Bhishma. He thunders towards Bhishma like a great tusker rushing at another and goring

it with his tusks for the sake of a cow elephant in heat. Salva wants the princesses for himself and cries, 'Stop and fight!' to Bhishma.

Bhishma, tiger among men, desiccator of enemy armies, blazes up in anger. He knits his great brow, reins in his chariot and, bow in hand, turns to face Salva: for this is Kshatriya dharma. The other kings grow still to watch this duel.

The fight begins, and their roars are like the trumpeting of bull elephants that fight over a cow elephant in season. Salva shoots a hundred thousand arrows at Bhishma, quick as thinking. The other kings are wonderstruck by his archery and shout out their praise.

Infuriated by the yells of the crowd of kings, Bhishma cries to his sarathy, 'Ride at Salva! I will kill him as Garuda does a snake.'

Warding off Salva's cloud of shafts, the peerless Kuru fits the Varunastra to his bowstring, and harries Salva's four horses. And, O tiger among kings, in a flash Bhishma kills Salva's charioteer, while he keeps his enemy's fire at bay. Next moment, Shantanu's son, fighting for the princesses, kills Salva's pedigreed horses with the Aindrastra, Indra's weapon.

He shoots the bow out of Salva's hands and has him in the eye of his arrow, but spares his life. Bhishma turns his chariot round and rides back towards Hastinapura.

Bharatarishabha, the humiliated Salva returns to his kingdom, and rules again, justly. The other Kshatriyas who have come to the swayamvara do the same; they all go home empty-handed, and routed: those that do not die.

Bhishma rides back like the wind, with his three prizes, towards Hastinapura, from where Vichitravirya, prince of dharma, rules the Earth as righteously as his father Shantanu had. Rajan, through many forests rides Bhishma; he fords many rivers, and arrives swiftly.

The son of Ganga who flows into the Ocean, invincible Bhishma comes home to Hastinapura, having killed countless Kshatriyas; and not a scratch on him. He brings the daughters of the king of Kasi to the home of the Kurus, tenderly, as if they are his daughters-in-law, younger sisters, or his own daughters. Bhishma Mahabaho brings the lovely and accomplished princesses to Vichitravirya and offers them to his brother.

Bhishma, knower of dharma, immediately begins to make preparations for a royal wedding. When all is ready and the arrangements have been made by Satyavati and Bhishma, the eldest princess from Kasi, Amba, says smiling shyly, 'Long ago, I gave my heart to Salva, Lord of Saubha, and he

too loved me. My father approved of our love and I would have chosen him at the swayamvara. Mighty Bhishma, you know dharma better than anyone. You decide what you must do.'

Bhishma falls thoughtful; he consults the Brahmanas present there, all knowers of the Veda; then he says to Amba, 'Princess, you may do as you please.'

But he marries Ambika and Ambalika to Vichitravirya with every proper ritual. The handsome and youthful Vichitravirya is a virgin, a brahmacharin so far. But when he marries the exquisite princesses of Kasi desire seizes him powerfully.

They are tall, these girls, their soft skin like liquid gold, their tresses thick and curly, their fingernails raised and red, their hips ample and rounded, and their breasts full and their cleavage deep. They bear every auspicious mark upon their ravishing bodies, and those young women of one of the oldest and noblest royal houses see the handsome Vichitravirya as being worthy of themselves in every way, and they love him passionately. For, indeed, he is as strong as a Deva and as handsome as the Aswin twins, and he could steal the heart of any woman.

Seven rapturous years Vichitravirya spends with his two wives. Then, in the prime of his youth, he catches a galloping consumption. Those around him do everything in their power to effect a cure, but the Kuru prince dies, like the sun setting.

Bhishma is stricken. Satyavati and he perform the last rites for the dead prince, solemnly, with many learned priests and all the great Kurus present, all of them shocked."

CANTO 103

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Grief-stricken herself, having lost her second son, Satyavati performs the funeral rites for Vichitravirya, with her weeping daughters-in-law and the broken-hearted Bhishma, greatest of Kshatriyas. Then, summoning her great woman's strength, she consoles them as best as she can.

When the formal mourning is over, Satyavati thinks of dharma, she recalls the great ancestry of the Kuru line. She calls Bhishma and says, 'Now the pinda, the glory and the future of the line of the great Shantanu of the house of Kuru all depend on you. Just as Swarga and punya are inseparable, as longevity is inseparable from truth and faith, Bhishma and dharma are inseparable.

Virtuous son, you know dharma in theory and in every detail of practice; you know all the Srutis, the Vedas and Vedangas. You are equal to Shukra and Angiras in steadfastness in dharma, in the knowledge of family tradition and customs, and you know that crises require unusual solutions. Therefore, O best of good men, I am relying on you to find a solution to our crisis. You must listen to me and then do as I say. Manavarishabha, your brother Vichitravirya, my son who you loved so much, has left us and gone childless to Swarga, when hardly more than a boy himself.

Your brother's wives, the young and lovely daughters of Kasiraja, want to become mothers. Mahabaho, mighty-armed, I command you to father children in your brother's widows, so that the line of Kuru might have heirs. You must protect dharma from being lost. Crown yourself king now and rule the kingdom of the Bharatas. Take a wife and beget sons. Do not let your ancestors' spirits fall into hell.'

Indeed, not only Satyavati but others in the palace, friends and kinsmen, say the same thing to Bhishma Parantapa.

Bhishma replies, ‘Mother, what you are asking of me is certainly dharma. But don’t you know my vow that I will never beget children? Surely, you have not forgotten the brideprice that your father asked and which I readily gave: my solemn vow.

Satyavati, I will renounce the three worlds, the empire of Swarga, anything that might exceed these, but I will never break my oath, or renounce the truth. The Earth may cease to be fragrant, Water might no longer be wet, Light may not illumine forms anymore, Air might relinquish its nature of touch, the Sun might cease to be glorious, the Moon might stop being cool, Agni might not burn anymore, Akasa might not create sruti, sound, Indra, who slew Vritra, might cease to be strong, Dharma may lose his impartiality, but I cannot abandon the truth or break my vow.’

Satyavati says to Bhishma, ‘Bhishma whose strength is dharma, I know that you never swerve from the truth. Why, with your dharma you can create another Swarga, Bhumi and Patala.

Bhishma, I know that you swore your oath on my account. But now you must think of our crisis, and the dharma that you owe your ancestors. Parantapa, scourge of your enemies, you must ensure that the House of Kuru has an heir, that the line of father and son that has come down the ages since the dawn of time is not now broken. You must ensure that our well-wishers and kinsmen do not grieve, that our people do not grieve.’

Desperately, sobbing, she speaks, still pierced through by grief at the loss of her son, and it seems that she urges him to break his vow and dharma, too.

Bhishma says, ‘O Queen, do not turn your face from dharma. Do not destroy us all. No Shastra ever tells a Kshatriya to break his solemn oath. Yet, I will tell you what Kshatriya dharma prescribes so that Shantanu’s bloodline does not become extinct.

Listen to what I have to say, then consult with your learned and devout Brahmanas, and others who know the remedies that are allowed to alleviate a crisis, and also consider honourable social mores, before deciding what you will do.’”

CANTO 104

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma continues, 'In ancient days, wrathful at the death of his father, Jamadagni's son Rama killed the Haihaya king Arjuna with his Parasu, his battle axe. Rama cut off the Haihaya's thousand arms, which no one else could have hoped to do. Not content, he set out in his chariot to conquer the world. Bow in hand, spewing awesome astras, he ranged the Earth to raze the very race of Kshatriyas.

Twenty-one times, single-handedly, he annihilated Kshatriya armies mustered to quell him, that illustrious Bhargava. And when he had indeed killed the last Kshatriya, Kshatriya women across the world resorted to Brahmanas, knowers of the Veda, to have children.

The Vedas say that a son so begotten belongs to the man who marries the woman. The Kshatriya women went to the Brahmanas not from lust but for the sake of dharma. Indeed, the very Kshatriya race was thus revived.

On this subject there is another olden tale, which I will tell you. In the most antique times, there was a great Rishi called Utathya. His wife was Mamata and he loved her dearly. One day, Utathya's younger brother Tejasvin Brihaspati, Guru to the Devas, importuned Mamata. But she told that most eloquent of the great that she was pregnant by her husband, Brihaspati's elder brother, and that he should not seek to lie with her.

Mamata said, "Illustrious Brihaspati, the child in me has already imbibed the Vedas with their six Angas. How can my womb make space for another child? It does not become you to ask to satisfy your desire in me at this time."

But even the wise Brihaspati could not help himself and sought to thrust himself upon her.

Then the child in her womb spoke to him, "Sire, stop! There is no room here for two, and I am already here. Wise one, do not make me suffer."

Brihaspati would not listen and still sought to have intercourse with Mamata of the most beautiful eyes. He grew enraged to hear what the child said, and cursed his brother's Utathya's son, "You dare speak to me from there at this moment of a pleasure that all creatures crave? I curse you to remain in darkness forever!"

Because of Brihaspati's curse Utathya's child, whose tejas equalled Brihaspati's own, was born blind. He was called Dirghatamas, enveloped in long darkness. Dirghatamas knew the Vedas, and was a true Sage, and though he was blind he married a beautiful Brahmana girl, Pradweshi. He fathered many children upon her, Gautama the eldest. But they were covetous and sinful.

Dirghatamas, master of the Vedas, studied under Saurabhi's son, and began to practise the rituals of that Tantrik order, fearlessly and reverently. The other Munis who lived in the asrama were outraged, seeing sin where none was, for Dirghatamas' heart was pure, as were his intentions.

Those Sages said, "This man has broken every law of dharma. He does not deserve to live among us anymore. Let us cast the sinner out!"

They said worse about Dirghatamas, and then his wife turned on him as well.

Dirghatamas said to Pradweshi, "Why do you also turn against me?"

She replied hotly, "A husband is called the Bhartri because he supports his wife. He is called Pali because he protects her. But you neither support nor protect me, for despite all your tapasya, you are blind and it is I that support and protect you and your children. But from now I will not."

Dirghatamas was annoyed and said to her and her children, "Take me to the Kshatriyas and I will get you wealth."

His wife replied, "I do not want any riches that you get, for that will never make me happy. Brahmana, do what you like; I cannot look after you anymore."

Dirghatamas cried in rage, "I declare that from today all women shall have only one husband for life. Even if he dies, it shall be unlawful for her to take another man. The woman that breaks this law shall be a fallen woman. A woman without a husband shall always be inclined to sin. And even if she is wealthy she will not enjoy her wealth. Calumny and disrepute will darken her life."

Pradweshi screamed to her sons, "Throw him into the Ganga!"

The evil Gautama and his brothers, slaves of greed and folly, said, “Why should we support this old fool?”

They bound the Munito a raft, cast him to the mercy of the river, and came home with no twinge of conscience. The blind old man floated through the lands of many kings. One day, a king called Bali, a knower of dharma, went to the Ganga to perform his ablutions, when the raft bearing Dirghatamas floated up to him. Bali drew the raft ashore and untied the Sage.

When he learnt who this Rishi was, the virtuous Bali said to him, “Maharishi, I am childless and I beg you to father some children of dharma and wisdom on my queen.”

Dirghatamas of great tejas agreed. Bali built an asrama for the Rishi, installed him there and asked his queen Sudeshna to go to him. But when Sudeshna learnt that the Sage was old and blind, she did not go to him herself but sent her sakhi, a maidservant, in her place.

Dirghatamas begot eleven children on that Sudra woman, Kakshivat the eldest. All eleven became masters of the Veda and chanters of the Brahman; all of them possessed great spiritual powers.

One day, King Bali asked Dirghatamas, “Are these my children?”

The Muni replied coldly, “No, they are mine. Your queen Sudeshna saw that I was old and blind and she insulted me by sending me her Sudra maidservant rather than coming to me herself. Kakshivat and his brothers are my sons begotten on the sakhi.”

The king pacified Dirghatamas, begging his forgiveness. He sent his queen to the Sage. The Rishi only touched her with his fingers and said, “You will have five sons as glorious as Surya Deva. Call them Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Pundra and Suhma. The kingdoms they found shall be known by their names.”

Thus Bali’s lineage was continued by a Maharishi. So, indeed, many great warriors and Maharathas have been born to Kshatriya women by Brahmana fathers.

You know my opinion now, mother; do as you see fit,’ says Bhishma to Satyavati.”

CANTO 105

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma continues, 'Mother, this is how we can continue the royal line of Bharata. Let us offer substantial wealth to a great Brahmana Sage and have him father children upon Vichitravirya's wives.'

Now smiling shyly, blushing, Satyavati says, 'Bharata, Mahabaho, what you say is true. I, too, have something to tell you in confidence. You are the punya of our House and its dharma, too; you will not refuse what I am going to ask you, when I have told you my secret, which no one else knows.

My father was a man of dharma. For dharma he plied a ferry on the river, to help wayfarers make the crossing. One day, when I was in my early youth, the Maharishi Parasara wanted to cross the river and I was rowing him across.

As we went, suddenly desire seized the Sage and he importuned me, softly. I was afraid of my father, but feared the Rishi's curse more, if I refused him. He blessed me with a rare boon and then I could not refuse him. Parasara covered the river in thick fog, so that my father could not see us anymore and he took his pleasure of me in the boat.

Until that day, my body had always smelled pungently of fish, but Parasara removed the stink and instead gave me the fragrance of heaven spreading on every side for a yojana. He also blessed me that though I would immediately give birth to his son upon an island in the stream, I would have my virginity restored to me.

Bhishma, my son by Parasara Muni has become a great Sage of profound tapasya. For where he was born, he is called Dwaipayana. He has divided the Veda in four to suit our times; he is also called Vyasa, the arranger, or divider. He is dark of complexion and is also known as Krishna.

He is perfectly truthful, free from passion, a mighty Yogin, who has made ashes of all his sins with tapasya. For, he went away with his father as soon as he was born.

If I summon him here, and we both ask him to beget children on Ambika and Ambalika, he will not refuse us. He is a glorious one himself and will sire wonderful sons.

When he left, that day, and he was full-grown as soon as he was born, he said to me, “Mother, think of me if you need me and I will come to you.”

If you wish, O Bhishma, I will summon Dwaipayana even now. If you agree, Mahabaho, he will certainly sow his seed in Vichitravirya’s field.’

When he hears the Maharishi’s name, Bhishma joins his palms together and says, ‘The intelligent man regards dharma, artha and kama judiciously. He considers these patiently and carefully, then acts in a manner so that dharma leads to more dharma, artha to further artha, and kama to future kama: virtue, profit and pleasure.

Mother, what you have suggested conforms to dharma and must lead to artha and kama. It is the best course, and you have my complete consent.’

O Kuru, Satyavati now thinks of her son Dwaipayana. The Muni has engaged himself in interpreting the Vedas, but as soon as he senses his mother summoning him, he appears before her in a moment. Satyavati greets her son, embraces him, bathing him in her tears, for the fisherman’s daughter has not seen him since he was born.

Maharishi Vyasa sees his mother crying and tenderly washes her tears with cool water. Then, bowing to her, he says, ‘I have come, mother, to do your bidding. Tell me what you want that I may satisfy your wish.’

The family priest of the Bharatas now worships the Maharishi formally, and Vyasa accepts his offerings, chanting the apposite mantras. Gratified by that adoration, he sits in the high chair offered him.

When he sits, Satyavati makes the customary inquiries about his well-being and his life, then says, ‘Most learned one, sons are born through both their mother and their father; they belong equally to both parents. The mother wields as much right and power over her son as his father does.

By law, O Brahmarishi, you are my firstborn, my eldest son; and Vichitravirya is my youngest. Just as Bhishma is Vichitrvirya’s brother on his father’s side, you are Vichitravirya’s brother on his mother’s side, and yours.

I am not certain what you will think or say but I am going to tell you what I think and want from you. Shantanu’s son Bhishma refuses, because of dharma and his vow that he once swore, either to become king or to beget children. So, out of love for your brother Vichitravirya, in order to

continue this royal line come down from Bharata himself, because Bhishma asks you and because I command you as your mother, out of compassion for all the living, for the protection of the people and from the generosity of your heart, sinless one, you must do what I ask.

Your younger brother has left behind two widows of youth, beauty and grace which compare with those of the Devastris. For the sake of dharma and moksha, they want to have children. You are the ideal person to make mothers of them. So, my child, beget sons on Ambika and Ambalika, sons worthy of this House and worthy to continue the royal lineage of Bharata.'

Vyasa listens to this quietly, then says, 'Satyavati, you know what dharma is both in this life and the next. Also, you are devoted to dharma. So, at your command, with dharma as my motive, as well, I will do what you ask.

Indeed, what you ask conforms to Sanatana Dharma, and I will beget sons on my brother's wives, sons who shall be like Mitra and Varuna. I will give them a stern vrata to keep for a year, and then they shall be purified. For no woman who is not pure can come near me, let alone bear my sons.'

Satyavati says, 'Anagha, sinless, do what is needed for the princesses to conceive immediately, for danger threatens. In a kingdom that has no king, the people are destroyed without protection; sacrifices no longer take place; evil holds sway; the clouds send down no rain and the gods vanish. A kingdom without a king is quickly destroyed.

No, my daughters-in-law must conceive at once. Bhishma will watch over the children while they are in their mother's wombs.'

Vyasa says, 'If I am to impregnate my brother's wives unseasonably, then let them bear my ugliness, and that shall be the sorest penance for them. Let the Kosala princess bear my smell, my grim and ugly face, my filthy clothes and my black body, and she will conceive an excellent child.'

Vyasa then says to Satyavati, 'Let her wear clean clothes, put on her ornaments and wait for me in her bedchamber,' and he vanishes before her eyes.

Satyavati goes to her daughter-in-law Ambika, privately, and says to her, 'O Kosala princess, listen to me for what I have to say is dharma. From my ill fortune the race of Bharata has become extinct. Seeing me grieve and faced with the end of his father's line, Bhishma has suggested a solution, which, however, depends on you.

Do this for dharma, my daughter, and resurrect the lost lineage of Bharata. O child of the fair hips, bring forth a child as resplendent as the king of the Devas. Let him inherit the kingdom and bear its heavy burden.'

Ambika demurs at first, when she hears what is being asked of her, but Satyavati insists and finally, with great reluctance and anxiety, the chaste Ambika is persuaded that what she is being asked to do is no violation of dharma. To celebrate, Satyavati feeds Brahmanas, Rishisand numerous other Sadasyas who arrive for the occasion; she feeds them a banquet."

CANTO 106

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Then, Ambika's next period is over. Satyavati bathes her and takes her to the bedchamber. Making her sit upon the luxurious bed, Satyavati says to her daughter-in-law, 'Kosala princess, your husband has an elder brother, my firstborn son. He will come to you tonight and enter your womb as seed. Do not sleep, but wait for him.'

Satyavati leaves and the beautiful princess lies back on the bed. In her mind, she prays to Bhishma and the other elders of the Kuru House. Then Dwaipayana enters that room in which a taper burns. Ambika sees him, dark as a moonless night, with coppery matted jata hanging down to his shoulders, his beard thick and unkempt, his eyes like fire, and with a shiver and a moan of terror Ambika shuts her eyes tightly.

But having given his word to his mother, Dwaipayana takes her, while she lies beneath him trembling and never once opens her eyes. When he has finished he emerges from that chamber and immediately Satyavati accosts him.

Excitedly she demands, 'Will the princess have a great son?'

Vyasa replies, 'He will be as strong as ten thousand elephants. He will be a Rajarishi, of great learning, intellect and energy. He will beget a hundred sons. But because of his mother's sin against me, that she never opened her eyes when I was with her, he will be born blind.'

Dismayed, Satyavati says, 'Muni, how can a blind man become a worthy king of the Kurus? How will he protect his clan and uphold the ancient glory of his father's race? You must give the Kurus another prince, who can be king.'

Vyasa says, 'So be it,' and vanishes. In due time, Ambika gives birth to a blind son, a mighty boy.

Now Satyavati goes to Ambalika, her younger daughter-in-law, and once more tells her what she wants from her – to conceive a child by Vyasa.

Securing her consent, Satyavati summons Vyasa again.

Dwaipayana comes again and goes in to Ambalika, who sees him and turns white as a sheet from fright and remains thus. O Bharata, Vyasa keeps his word to his mother and sows his seed in Ambalika, too.

But as he is leaving, he says to her, ‘Because you turned pale to see my face, your son shall be born pale, an albino with no pigment in his skin. Beautiful princess, your son shall be called Pandu, the pale one.’

With that, he leaves the chamber, that best of Rishis. His mother is waiting for him in the corridor to ask about this child he has fathered. Dwaipayana tells her that he would be white and named Pandu.

Satyavati begs him to father one more son, on Ambika again.

‘So be it,’ Vyasa Muni gives her his word.

Nine months pass and Ambalika gives birth to a son who is indeed without colour in his skin, a pale child, an albino. Yet he is radiantly handsome and bears every auspicious mark upon his body. Later, he, Pandu, would become the father of those five matchless bowmen, the Pandavas.

Again, when Ambika has just finished her period and is in her fertile time, Sayavati goes to her and says that she must receive Vyasa once more. Ambika, as lovely as a Deva’s daughter, remembers how grim and fierce Vyasa had been; she remembers the strong smell of his body.

She does not go to Vyasa herself, but sends a maid of hers instead. This woman is as beautiful herself as an Apsara and she waits for the Rishi, wearing her mistress’ ornaments.

When Vyasa comes in, the maid rises and greets him reverently. She welcomes him and waits on him respectfully and when he calls her to him she does not demur but goes gladly. O King, that stern Rishi is well pleased with her.

When he rises to leave, he says, ‘Beautiful, humble one, you will no longer be a slave. Your son will be the most intelligent of men, fortunate, wise, and of unswerving dharma. I, Vyasa, bless you.’

Rajan, that son of Krishna Dwaipayana begotten on a maidservant is Vidura. He is the brother of Dhritarashtra, the eldest, and the illustrious Pandu.

Vidura is free from the bonds of desire and passion; he is a master of the laws of kingship and governance; why, he is Dharma Deva, God of Truth, born on Earth through the curse of the Rishi Mandavya. Emerging from his encounter with Ambika’s maid, Vyasa meets Satyavati again and tells her

how her daughter-in-law has deceived her, and that he has begotten a son in the Sudra woman whom the princess sent to him.

Then Vyasa vanishes before her eyes, just as he had come. Thus, in Vichitravirya's field, his elder brother Dwaipayana sows his seed, and from him are born sons as splendid as children of Heaven, to continue the race of Kuru."

CANTO 107

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya asked, “What did Dharma Deva do that he was cursed? Who is the Rishi who cursed him to be born a Sudra?”

Vaisampayana said, “There was a Brahmana called Mandavya. He knew dharma and devoted himself to truth and tapasya. The Maharishi sat under a tree just outside his asrama, his arms raised skyward and keeping a vow of silence.

For years he sat thus, when one day a band of thieves, laden with booty, arrived in his hermitage. Bharatarishabha, some of the king’s soldiers were hot on the heels of those thieves and in panic they ran into Mandavya’s asrama and hid there.

Almost immediately, the pursuers arrived and saw the Rishi under his tree.

They asked him, ‘O Muni, which way did the thieves go? Show us before they escape.’

Rajan, the Rishi made no response at all. The soldiers entered the asrama and discovered the robbers with their plunder. Now the king’s men suspected the Sage as well, and seized him and brought Mandavya before the king. The king sentenced him to be executed with the thieves.

The king’s men impaled the renowned Muni with the bandits, and gave the king the gold they had recovered. Though impaled on a stake, and given neither food nor drink, the Rishi Mandavya did not die.

With his tapasya shakti, his ascetic power, he summoned other Rishis to him. They came at night as birds, and saw him impaled but deep in dhyana. The Sages were grief-stricken.

They spoke to Mandavya, telling him who they were. They asked, ‘Brahmana, tell us what sin you committed that you are suffering this dreadful torture.’”

CANTO 108

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "That tiger among Munis answered those Rishis rich in tapasya, 'Who shall I blame for this? Only myself.'

Hearing him speak after being impaled for so long, the king's soldiers rushed to tell the king about the miracle. Now the king consulted his ministers and realised his folly: that he had impaled a true Sage. He ran to where the stake was planted and began to pacify the Rishi who hung on it.

The king said, 'O Mahamuni, I have done you great harm in my ignorance. I beg you, forgive me. I beg you do not be angry.'

Mandavya was pacified. When the king saw anger ebb from the Sage's face, he had the stake taken down and attempted to remove it from the Rishi's body. But he could not, so he cut it off where it entered the Sage's person; and that greatest of Rishis continued his life with a portion of the stake inside him. He walked, performed the most rigorous tapasya, and attained countless lofty realms that others could not dream of.

For the portion of the stake that remained inside his body, he became known through the three worlds as Ani Mandavya: Mandavya with the stake within.

One day, that Brahmana who knew the highest dharma went to the home of Dharma Deva, God of Justice. Seeing Dharma upon his lofty throne, the Rishi asked reproachfully, 'Tell me what sin I have committed that I am punished like this. Tell me now, and behold my tapasya shakti!'

Dharma Deva replied, 'Once you impaled a little insect on a blade of grass; this is your payment for that sin. O Rishi, just as daana, charity, however small, bears great fruit, multiplied many times over, so does paapa, sin, bring pain in its wake, inexorably.'

Ani Mandavya asked, 'Tell me when I committed this sin because I cannot remember.'

Said Dharma, ‘When you were a child.’

The Rishi said, ‘The Shastras do not recognise any sin done by a child until his twelfth year. The punishment you have inflicted on me is unjust, out of all proportion.

Dharma Deva, Brahmahatya, killing a Brahmana, is a sin greater than killing any other living being. You have committed Brahmahatya, O God of Justice, and for that you shall be born as a Sudra in the world!

Also, from today I declare that no sin committed by a child below fourteen years shall be any sin or punishable, but only by those above fourteen.’

Cursed by that illumined Rishi, Dharma Deva is born as Vidura to a Sudra mother. Vidura is learned indeed, with an uncanny knowledge of dharma, of politics, and of artha too. He is absolutely without greed and anger. Having deep foresight and an imperturbable mind, he is always selflessly devoted to the welfare of the House of Kuru.”

CANTO 109

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When those three children are born, Kurujungala, Kurukshetra, knows untold prosperity. The Earth yields unprecedented harvests, and the bountiful crops are all uncommonly flavoursome. The clouds bring rains in season, and the trees bring forth flowers and fruit. Draught cattle are contented and the wild birds and beasts, too, are full of delight.

Flowers are fragrant and fruit sweet; merchants, artisans, traders and artists of every kind teem in towns and cities, and thrive. The people are all brave, learned, honest and happy. There are no robbers then, nor does anyone sin. It seems as if a Satya Yuga, a golden age, permeates every corner of the kingdom.

The people are devout, truthful, follow dharma, perform yagnas, are generous and charitable, and full of love for one another; and they prosper. They are free from pride, anger and greed; they are pure-hearted and find delight in natural and innocent things.

Hastinapura, capital of the Kurus, is another Amaravati, as full of beauty and joy as the sea is with water. Hundreds of great palaces and mansions line its wide avenues and highways; its lofty gates and archways are dark as clouds.

Elsewhere in the kingdom, the people swim and frolic in rivers, lakes and tanks; they roam and sport in charmed forests and airy woods. The southern Kurus, in virtuous rivalry with their northern kinsmen, keep company with Siddhas, Charanas and Rishis.

Throughout the blessed kingdom, no Kuru man is miserly and no woman a widow. The wells and lakes are always full of sweet water; the forests are rich with wonderful trees; the homes of Brahmanas are full of riches, and life is a constant and joyful celebration.

O King, Bhishma rules the kingdom with dharma and he covers it with hundreds of yupastambas, sacrificial posts. Indeed Bhishma's rule brings such contentment to the Kuru kingdom that people from other kingdoms migrate to Kuru lands, swelling the population.

And the people all watch the three splendid young Kuru princes grow and are full of hope for the future, as well. O Rajan, in the homes of the Kuru nobility you could always hear the words *give* and *come eat with us*.

From their very births, Bhishma raises Dhritarashtra, Pandu and the exceptionally intelligent Vidura like his own sons. With every prescribed and successive ritual of their varna being performed timely for them, the princes devote themselves to vratas and study.

They grow into truly exceptional youths, versed in the Vedas and skilled at all sports. They become excellent bowmen, horsemen, mace-fighters, swordsmen, elephant warriors, and deep scholars of dharma. They know Itihasa, the Puranas and all the arts and sciences. They know the great truths and wisdom enshrined in the Vedas and the Vedangas; their education is profound and extensive.

Pandu is soon the best of all archers, while Dhritarashtra is the strongest man; and no one is Vidura's equal in his knowledge of and devotion to dharma, to virtue and morality. Seeing the extinct line of Shantanu restored, people the world over begin to say that, among mothers of Kshatriyas, the princesses of Kasi are foremost; of kingdoms Kurujungala is the best; of men of dharma Vidura is the finest; and of cities Hastinapura has no rival.

Dhritarashtra is blind and Vidura is the son of a Sudra woman, so Pandu becomes king. One day Bhishma, first among those that know the Rajaneeti, the code of kings, as well as the laws of dharma, calls Vidura, wise in matters of the spirit himself."

CANTO 110

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma says, 'Ours is an ancient and glorious royal line, shining through the ages with the lustre of countless magnificent kings of dharma. The enlightened Krishna Dwaipayana, Satyavati and I myself have raised you three princes, so that the royal lineage of Kuru does not become extinct.

You and I must see to it, my wise Vidura, that our dynasty grows again and expands like the very sea. I have heard that there are three princesses worthy of being married into our house. The first is the daughter of Surasena of the Yadavas; the second is Subala's daughter, the Gandhara princess; and the third is the princess of Madra.

My son, all three are of the purest descent, beautiful and accomplished as well; truly, they are fit to marry into our royal house. Most intelligent child, I feel that we should make these princesses and no others our daughters-in-law, to continue our race. But tell me what you think, Vidura.'

Vidura replies, 'You are our father and our mother, as well. You are our Guru. Do whatever you think is best for us.'

Soon after this, Bhishma hears from some Brahmanas that Subala's lovely daughter Gandhari has worshipped Lord Siva, and Hara has granted her a boon that she would have a hundred sons. Bhishma, the Kuru patriarch, immediately sends his messengers to the Gandhara king, asking for his daughter's hand for Dhritarashtra.

At first, King Subala is reluctant because Dhritarashtra is blind. However, when he thinks of the prince's ancestry, and the majesty and dharma of the House of Kuru, he agrees to give his devout daughter to become Dhritarashtra's wife.

When the chaste and deeply religious Gandhari hears that her husband to be is blind, she puts on a blindfold to share her husband's disability, which she would never remove until the very end of her life.

Subala's son Shakuni brings his beautiful sister, in the flower of her youth, to Hastinapura and formally gives her away to Dhritarashtra. Under Bhishma's watchful and loving eye, Gandhari is received with great honour, and the wedding ceremony is conducted with great pomp and celebration.

The valiant Shakuni brings a fine dowry for his sister, and many costly garments and ornaments, and Bhishma welcomes him with respect. When the marriage has been solemnised, he returns to his own city.

O Scion of the Bharatas, the beautiful Gandhari pleases all the Kurus with her demeanour, her affection and her reverent attention to her elders. She is a perfectly devoted wife, so chaste that she never so much as speaks another man's name or refers to an elder by their name."

CANTO 111

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "There is a Yadava chieftain called Sura; he is Vasudeva's father. He has a daughter called Pritha who is the most beautiful young woman on Earth. O Bharata, the honest Sura gives this firstborn child of his to his childless cousin, his father's sister's son Kuntibhoja, whom he loves and to whom he has promised his first child.

In the palace of her foster-father, where she is called Kunti because Kuntibhoja so dotes on her, Pritha has charge of the household, especially of looking after visiting Brahmanas and other guests.

Once, the dreaded Durvasa Muni, famed as much for his quick and fierce temper as his spiritual greatness and profound knowledge of the recondite aspects of dharma, comes to visit Kuntibhoja. Pritha looks after him so well and worshipfully that the great Sage, who indeed has clear foreknowledge of the curse that Pandu would one day incur in the forest, teaches her a mantra by which she can summon any Deva she chooses to give her children.

Durvasa says, 'Any Deva you summon shall come and give you children.'

After the Rishi leaves, curiosity gets the better of Kunti. One day, she says the mantra thinking of Arka: Surya Deva, the Sun God. As soon as she says the secret words, the refulgent deity, witness of the world, appears before her.

That exquisite princess, no flaw in her features, is awe-stricken. The Sun God Vivaswat comes near her and says, 'Black eyes, here I am, now say what you want from me.'

Trembling, Kunti says, 'O bane of your enemies, a Rishi taught me this mantra as a boon. Lord, I was curious and said it only to see if it actually worked. I beg your forgiveness; my lord, whatever her offence a woman must always be forgiven.'

Surya replies, 'I know that Durvasa gave you this boon. But sweet, shy girl, do not be afraid and come to me. Lovely woman, you cannot summon a Deva in vain; my coming must bear fruit. You have called me and if it is for nothing, you shall incur sin for sure.'

Vivaswat says many sweet things to her, but, O Bharata, she would not go to him out of modesty and fear of her family.

Bharatarishabha, blazing Akra says again, 'Princess you will not sin if you come to me, for I desire you.'

Then he would not be resisted anymore, and the irradiant Tapana, who illumines the Universe, has his way with Kuntibhoja's delicate daughter. From their union, immediately, is born a splendorous son, clad in natural golden armour and earrings, who would become renowned throughout the world as Karna.

Karna is to be the greatest of all warriors, blessed with fortune and as handsome as a Deva child. As soon as he is born, the lustrous Tapana restores her virginity to Pritha and vanishes back into Devaloka.

Now the Vrishni princess despairs that she has borne an illegitimate son and begins to think feverishly about what she should do. Out of her fear of her relatives and her father, and the censure of the world, she decides to keep her folly secret. She floats her divine child of supernatural prowess down the river in a wooden box.

A famous Suta, whose wife is Radha, sees the shining infant floating upon the current and brings him home to his wife. The couple looks at his golden kavacha and kundala in wonderment, and names him Vasusena: he who is born with wealth.

Blessed with prodigious strength and genius, as he grows, he becomes expert at wielding weapons of every kind. Owning terrific energy, he would worship the Sun from dawn to high noon, until his back is hot from the rays of Arka. During the hours of his worship, there is nothing on Earth that the valiant and brilliant Vasusena would not grant as a boon to any Brahmana who asks him for one.

One day, knowing that this magnificent warrior could kill his son Arjuna, Phalguni, Indra comes to Vasusena during his time of worship. Indra comes as a Brahmana and asks for Vasusena's kavacha, the golden armour with which he has been born: as alms. Vasusena folds his hands reverently, cuts the armour from his body and gives it to Indra. The king of

the Devas is so moved by the generosity and the truth of Karna that he, in turn, gives Vasusena an irresistible weapon, a shakti.

Indra says, 'This shakti of mine will kill any Deva, Asura, Manava, Gandharva, Naga or Rakshasa, anyone at all that you use it against. But it will kill just one enemy and then return to me forever.'

Until that day, Surya's son has been called only Vasusena, but when he cuts the natural kavacha from his body and gives it to Indra, he becomes Karna, he who cut the armour from himself."

CANTO 112

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Kuntibhoja's daughter, Pritha of the large eyes, is not only exquisite, she is a most accomplished and capable young woman. She is virtuous, youthful, and possesses every desirable feminine quality. Yet, strangely, no Kshatriya comes to ask for her hand.

Kuntibhoja arranges a swayamvara for his princess, and invites kings and princes from across the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha to attend it. As soon as she enters the arena where her hopeful suitors have gathered, her eyes sees just one of them – Pandu, king of the Bharatas, tiger among kings.

She sees him regal as a lion, his chest wide, eyes like a bull's, rippling with tremendous strength, making all the other kings seem plain beside him, for he is as magnificent as Indra. Kuntibhoja's lovely daughter, no trace of any flaw among her features, trembles to look at Pandu. It is as if the sight of him pierces her through.

Going forward shyly, her head bent, her hands quivering with powerful emotion, she drapes the garland of flowers in her hand around Pandu's neck. When the other kings see Kunti choose Pandu, they return to their kingdoms as they had come, on elephants, horses, and in chariots. When the others have gone, Kuntibhoja has the wedding ceremony performed. O King, the Kuru prince blessed with great fortune and the daughter of Kuntibhoja are as radiant a couple as Maghavat and Paulomi, Indra and his queen Sachi.

Best of Kuru kings, when the wedding ceremonies are over, Kuntibhoja gives his son-in-law great wealth and sends the couple back to Hastinapura. The Kuru prince Pandu returns triumphantly to his capital, with his vast army holding aloft and waving bright and colourful flags and banners, with Brahmanas singing his praises, and Maharishis chanting benedictions.

Entering his palace, Pandu ensconces his queen therein."

CANTO 113

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "A while later, Bhishma wants Pandu to marry a second wife. Taking an army, with elephants, horses, chariots and footsoldiers, taking court elders, Brahmanas and great Rishis with him, he goes to the capital of the king of Madra.

When the bull of the Balhikas, the Madra king, hears of Bhishma's arrival, he comes out of his city gates to receive him. Welcoming him reverentially, he brings the great Kuru into his palace, where he offers him a chaste white carpet to sit upon, padya, water to wash his feet, arghya; and he pays him every customary and formal homage.

Later, when they sit together at their ease, the king asks Bhishma why he has come. Bhishma, supporter of the honour of the Kurus, says to that king, 'Parantapa, I have come seeking the hand of a princess. We have heard that you have a sister called Madri, blessed with great beauty and every virtue, as well. I want my brother Pandu to marry her.

O King, you are perfectly worthy of an alliance with us, as are we with you. Consider this, and accept my proposal.'

The sovereign of Madra replies, 'To my mind, there is no other royal family on Earth with whom I can enter into an alliance. But in our family we have a custom, which all my ancestors observed, for good or bad. I cannot break the tradition, which is a well-known one and no doubt you are familiar with it. Bhishma, it is not apposite that you just say to me, *Give me your sister.*

You know the custom of which I speak, and that is our family tradition. For us that is dharma, and we must preserve it. This is the only reason why, Parantapa, I cannot accede unconditionally to your request.'

Bhishma says, 'The custom to which you allude is certainly dharma. Why, Brahma himself has said so. Your ancestors upheld the tradition, and no fault can be found with it. It is established, O Salya, that the tradition

relating to family honour finds approval with the Sages and all the virtuous.'

And Bhishma, of blazing tejas, gives Salya gold beyond count, coined and uncoined, jewels of every hue in thousands, numberless elephants, horses and chariots, rich cloths and incomparable ornaments, yes, great pearls and resonant corals from the sea as well.

Salya receives these priceless gifts joyfully, and then gives his sister, wearing rich silk and jewellery past compare, to that bull of the House of Kuru. The sage Bhishma, son of the ocean-going Ganga, delightedly takes Madri back to Hastinapura, the city named for the elephant.

There, on an auspicious day and time, chosen by the Brahmana astrologers, King Pandu marries the princess Madri. When the wedding ceremony is concluded, the Kuru king installs his second wife in regal apartments.

Rajadhiraja, Pandu then enjoys his two lovely wives, why, unto the very limits of his desire. When thirty days have passed, Pandu goes forth from Hastinapura to conquer the world.

He prostrates himself before Bhishma and the other elders of the Kuru clan, bids fond farewell to Dhritarashtra and to every other member of the family. With their blessings and leave, he sets out on his grand campaign, taking with him an immense force of elephants, horses and chariots. He goes well pleased by the blessings chanted over him and the auspicious rituals performed for his success by the priests and the people.

Taking an awesome army with him, Pandu goes forth against myriad enemies. That tiger among men, who is to spread the fame of the Kurus across the world, first subdues the bandit tribes of Asarna. He next turns his army of countless elephants, horsemen, footsoldiers and charioteers, flying standards of many brilliant colours, against Dhirga, haughty king of Magadha, who has given offence to more kings than a few.

Pandu attacks his capital and slays him. The Kuru empties Dhirga's treasury, takes all his chariots and other vehicles, and his numberless beasts of burden.

Pandu next marches to Mithila and subjugates the Videhas. Then, Manavarishabha, he leads his army against Kasi, Sumbha, and Pundra, and by his prowess spreads the fame and empire of the Kurus.

Indeed, Pandu Parantapa is like some great conflagration sweeping across the Earth, its flames his arrows, its lustre the weapons of his legions,

and consuming every king and Kshatriya who dares stand against him. Those whom he vanquishes, along with their armies, become vassals of the Kurus.

Finally, every king is subdued and they all look upon Pandu as the Devas do Indra in Heaven. With folded hands, they pay him homage and bring him tribute of every rare kind: jewels and gold, pearls and corals from ocean deeps, silver and superior kine, exceptional steeds, chariots and great war elephants, donkeys, camels and buffaloes, goats and sheep, beautiful blankets and hides, and furs.

The king of Hastinapura takes these offerings and returns to his capital, to the delight of his people. Joyfully, the citizens and the noblemen all now say, 'The fame and achievements of the great Shantanu, tiger among kings, and indeed of Rajarishi Bharata were about to be extinguished. But Pandu has restored them; indeed, he has swelled the glory of the House of Kuru. He has crushed those that steal land and wealth from us, and they now pay him tribute.'

When Pandu returns from his expedition, Bhishma and all the people of Hastinapura come out of the city to receive him. They have not gone far, when they see the king's servitors laden with the extravagant spoils of war—a train of every kind of conveyance, bearing wealth of every sort, elephants, horses, bullocks, camels and other beasts of burden—a train so long that they cannot see its end.

Then Pandu sees Bhishma and comes to prostrate himself at the patriarch's feet; he greets every other elder and citizen according to their status. Bhishma embraces Pandu, who is like a son to him, in great joy, for has he not ground the enemies of the Kurus underfoot? Bhishma weeps for joy.

Finally, borne upon a veritable tide of joy, Pandu enters Hastinapura triumphantly, to a resounding flourish of trumpets, conches and kettle-drums."

CANTO 114

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, at Dhritarashtra's command, Pandu offers the spoils of his conquests to Bhishma, to Satyavati, and to Ambika and Ambalika. He gives some of the wealth to Vidura, as well as his other kinsmen. All these are well pleased with him, and his great prowess. Especially his mother Ambalika is beside herself for joy, and embraces her peerless son, with delight equal to that of Sachi when she embraced Jayanta. Using the wealth that Pandu won, Dhritarashtra[6*] performs five Mahayagnas that are like a hundred great Aswamedhas; the offerings made to the Brahmanas during these sacrifices are counted in hundreds and thousands, be it gold, jewels or sacred cows.

Soon after, O Bharatarishabha, the triumphant Pandu goes into the forest with his wives Kunti and Madri. He leaves the luxury of his palace, with its soft beds, and devotes himself assiduously to the hunt. He begins living in a charmed jungle of great sala trees, on the southern foothills of the Himalaya, and ranges that forest in complete abandon.

The handsome Pandu roams those pristine jungles with his two wives quite like Airavata with two she-elephants, grandly. The forest-dwellers see the magnificent Bharata prince, with his sword, his bow and arrows, his gleaming armour, with Kunti and Madri, and they feel certain that he is a Deva come amongst them.

At Dhritarashtra's command, his servants keep busy seeing that Pandu is supplied with everything he needs for his pleasure in the wilderness.

Meanwhile, Bhishma hears that King Devaka has a young and exquisite daughter by a Sudra wife. Bhishma fetches her from her father's home and marries her to the wise Vidura. Vidura begets many children upon her, all as virtuous and accomplished as himself."

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[6] There seems to be some ambiguity about who was, in fact, the king, Pandu or Dhritarashtra

CANTO 115

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “O Janamejaya, Dhritarashtra fathers a hundred sons on Gandhari, and another son upon a Vaisya wife. Pandu has five sons by Kunti and Madri, all of them Maharathas, their natural fathers being Devas, invoked by Kunti to continue the Kuru lineage.”

Janamejaya said, “Dvijottama, how did Gandhari give birth to a hundred sons? How many years did this take her? How long were they destined to live? Tell us how Dhritarashtra begot his son upon a Vaisya woman. How did Dhritarashtra treat his loving, always obedient, and chaste queen Gandhari?

Tell us in detail how Pandu had five sons, the Maharathas, even after the Maharishi, whom he kills, cursed him. Ah, I am still athirst to hear everything about my sires.”

Vaisampayana said, “One day, Dwaipayana comes to Hastinapura, tired and hungry. Gandhari lavishes her reverential hospitality upon him, and well pleased, the Rishi grants her the boon she wants from him: that she will bear a hundred sons, each one as strong and accomplished as Dhritarashtra.

Soon after, Gandhari conceives and she carries the great burden in her womb for two years, but does not deliver. She is in anguish and pain, when she hears that Kunti has borne a son who is as radiant as the morning Sun.

Demented by the news, especially after her long discomfort, Gandhari strikes herself in the belly, violently, without Dhritarashtra knowing. At once, she is delivered of a single mass of flesh, hard as a ball of iron. She is about to have it cast away, when Dwaipayana arrives there, having intuited what has happened.

That Maharishi sees the solid ball of flesh and cries to Subala’s daughter, ‘What did you do?’

Gandhari does not lie, but says, 'I heard that Kunti has borne a son as splendid as Surya Deva, and struck my womb in grief. O Muni, you said that I would have a hundred sons but all I have is this lump of flesh.'

Vyasa says, 'Gandhari, my words shall never prove false; no falsehood has ever left my lips, even in jest. Have a hundred pots full of ghee fetched at once. Meanwhile, let the lump of flesh be sprinkled with cool water.'

When the lump of flesh is sprinkled with cool water, Vyasa divides it into a hundred shreds and one, each about the size of a thumb. The Rishi has each bit placed in a separate pot of ghee, in a secret chamber, tightly sealed and carefully guarded. Vyasa says to Gandhari that the seals should be broken only after a full two years.

With that, the enlightened Dwaipayana goes away to the Himalaya, to perform tapasya.

When the time comes, first of all, Duryodhana is born from a piece of flesh slightly larger than the others in the hundred pots of ghee. Thus, Yudhishtira is the eldest in his generation. News of the haughty Duryodhana's birth comes to Bhishma and Vidura. It is on the same day that, in the forest, Bhima Mahabaho of immeasurable strength is born.

As soon as Duryodhana is born, he begins to cry horribly: he brays like a donkey. At these unnatural sounds, every donkey, vulture, jackal and crow for yojanas around, answer his weird cries in evil cacophony. Violent winds blow everywhere, crookedly, and dreadful fires spume up from the very Earth all across the land.

Terrified, King Dhritarashtra summons Bhishma, Vidura and other friends and ministers. He calls all the great Kurus and their countless Brahmanas and says to them, 'Pandu's eldest son Yudhishtira is the heir to our line, for he is born first. I have no argument with this, but will my son Duryodhana, born next, succeed Yudhishtira as king? I want to know what is dharma in this matter.'

No sooner has he spoken, O Bharata, than the wild cacophony of hideous cries by jackals and other predators and scavengers, every fell creature of night, resounds all around; ominously they howl.

Hearing and seeing the macabre omens, the Brahmanas and the wise Vidura say, 'Rajan, Narapumgava, the omens at his birth all cry aloud that your eldest son shall be the nemesis of your race. If we are to prosper, no, even survive, you must kill him now. You will still have ninety-nine sons after his death.

But if you let him live, calamity will strike the House of Kuru, why, the very Earth. O Bharata, if you wish for the welfare of your ancient race and the world, abandon this child, do away with him.

O King, it has been said that an individual should be sacrificed for the sake of a family; a family for the sake of a village; a village for the sake of a country; and the very Earth for the sake of the Atman, the Soul.'

But from his love for his firstborn son, Dhritarashtra cannot bring himself to do what Vidura and the Brahmanas ask of him. In a month's time, a hundred sons are born to Dhritarashtra from the hundred pots of ghee; and the hundred and first is a daughter.

During the second year of Gandhari's long pregnancy a Vaisya maidservant of hers would attend on Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra sires a son on her, a boy of great intelligence called Yuyutsu.

Thus the wise Dhritarashtra has a hundred sons, all heroic Maharathas, and a daughter, all by Gandhari, and Yuyutsu, tejasvin, by a Vaisya woman."

CANTO 116

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, 'Sinless, you have told me in some detail about the Rishi's boon, which led to the birth of the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra. But you have not said anything about how his daughter comes to be born, saying only that beyond the hundred, he has Yuyutsu by a Vaisya woman and a daughter. Maharishi Vyasa, of measureless energy, said to the Gandhara king's daughter that she would have a hundred sons; illumined one, now you say that she also has another child, a daughter. If the lump of flesh was divided only into a hundred parts, and if Gandhari did not conceive again, how was Duhsala born? O Rishi, I am curious, tell me how this happened."

Vaisampayana said, 'O Scion of the Pandavas, your question is well asked and I will answer it. The illustrious Dwaipayana sprinkles cool water over the hard lump of flesh and begins to divide it in a hundred pieces; as he does this, the midwife takes each portion and places it in a pot of ghee.

Even as this is being done, Gandhari feels the desire for a daughter and thinks, 'I will surely have a hundred sons from the Rishi's boon, but how wonderful if I also had a daughter younger than the hundred. Why, then my husband would attain to the realms that are conferred by the birth of a daughter's sons. Besides, a mother-in-law has a special love for her son-in-law. Ah, if I have one daughter after my hundred sons, my joy will be complete.'

She made a fervent wish, 'If I have ever done tapasya, if I have given charity, if I have performed homa through Brahmanas, if I have revered and served my elders, then let me have a daughter as well!'

Meanwhile, Dwaipayana continues dividing the lump of flesh. Finally, finishing, he says to Gandhari, 'Here are your hundred sons; I, Vyasa, did not lie to you. However, there is a hundred and first part, smaller than the

others, which shall bless you with a daughter and her sons. Yes, she will be a charming and fortunate girl.'

The Sage has a hundred and first pot of ghee fetched and immerses the last shred of flesh in his hands in it. From it, O Bharata, in time, Duhsala is born. Now tell me what you want to hear next."

CANTO 117

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "I beg you, recite the names of Dhritarashtra's sons in the order of their birth."

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana, Yuyutsu, Dushasana, Duhsaha, Duhssala, Jalasandha, Sama, Saha, Vinda, Anuvinda, Durdharsha, Subahu, Dushpradharshana, Durmarshana, Durmukha, Dushkarna, Karna, Vivimsati, Vikarna, Sala, Satwa, Sulochana, Chitra, Upachitra, Chitraksha, Charuchitra, Sarasana, Durmada, Durvigaha, Vivitsu, Vilatanana, Urnanabha, Sunabha, Nandaka, Upanandaka, Chitravana, Chitravarman, Suvarman, Durvimochana, Ayobahu, Mahabahu, Chitranga, Chitrakundala, Bhimavega, Bhimabala, Balaki, Balavardhana, Ugrayudha, Bhima, Kanakaya, Dridhayudha, Dridhavarman, Dridhakshatra, Somakitri, Anudara, Dridhasandha, Jarasandha, Satyasandha, Sada, Suvak, Ugrasravas, Ugrasena, Senani, Dushparajaya, Aparajita, Kundasayin, Visalaksha, Duradhara, Dridhahasta, Suhasta, Vatavega, Suvarchas, Adityaketu, Vahvashin, Nagadatta, Agrayayin, Kavachin, Krathana, Kunda, Kundadhara, Dhanurdhara, Ugra, Bhimaratha, Virabahu, Alolupa, Abhaya, Raudrakarman, Dridharatha, Anadhrishya, Kundabhedin, Viravi, Dhirghalochana, Pramatha, Pramathi, Dhirgharoma, Dirghabahu, Vyudhoru, Kanakadhvaja, Kundasi and Virajas.

And then there is the daughter Duhsala. All hundred are heroes, Atirathas, and great warriors. All of them know the Vedas, and are masters of astras and every other kind of weapon.

Rajan, in due course, suitable wives are chosen for them, with the utmost care. And when his daughter Duhsala comes of age, Dhritarashtra gives her to be the wife of Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu."

CANTO 118

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "O Chanter of Brahman, you have told us all about the exceptional births of Dhritarashtra's sons, through the boon of Dwaipayana. You have also told us their names, in the order of their births. Indeed, Brahmana, all this we have heard, but now tell me about the sons of Pandu.

When you narrated the incarnations of the Devas, the Asuras and other unearthly beings into the world, you said that the Pandavas were the most illustrious, powerful as the Devas, and indeed amsas of the gods themselves. I want to hear everything about these extraordinary princes, from the beginning, the moments of their births. O Vaisampayana, tell us about their glorious achievements."

Vaisampayana said, "O King, one day Pandu ranges through the forests on the southern slopes of Himavat, which teem with both deer and predators, when he sees a great stag, seemingly the leader of his herd, in the act of mounting his hind. As soon as he sees them the Kshatriya strikes them with five arrows, plumed with golden feathers.

Rajan, of course it is no stag but the son of a Rishi of profound tapasya, who assumed the form of a deer to enjoy his wife. Shot through by Pandu in the very act of coition, he falls onto the ground crying out in a human voice; bitterly he laments and sobs.

The deer says to Pandu, 'Kshatriya, even men that are slaves to lust and anger, and always sinning, do not commit such a savage crime. You, O Bharata, are the scion of a great house of dharma. How have you allowed passion and wrath to sway you, and make you lose your reason that you have done this dreadful thing?'

Pandu replies, 'Mriga, O Deer, Kshatriyas are ruled by the same impulse when they slay deer that rules them when they kill their enemies. You must

not blame me for what I did; it is my innate nature. We kill animals of your species openly or from hiding; and this is the way of kings, of yore.

Of old, when he performed a Mahayagna, the Rishi Agastya hunted every deer in the forest and offered them to the Devas as part of his sacrifice. It is he that sanctioned the slaying of your kind; then why do you blame me now? For his most special sacrifices Agastya always uses the fat of deer, to perform the homa.'

The deer says, 'King, men do not loose their arrows at unprepared enemies, but only after declaring themselves. Such killing is not censured.'

Pandu says, 'But deer are killed openly or by stealth. Why do you blame me for what I did?'

The deer says, 'Shura, I do not blame you for killing a deer, nor even for the pain you have caused me. But you killed me while I was mating; you should have waited until I had finished. Which wise man of dharma will kill a deer while it mates? Coition is an intense pleasure for every species, and brings goodness to all.

Kshatriya, I was in the very act of satisfying my desire with my mate, and you have killed me before I finished. O King of the Kurus, you are a scion in the line of Pururavas, a house known for its dharma; what you have done is unworthy of you and your race.

Bharata, what you have done is despicable, vile, cruel and sinful in the extreme, and deserves to be punished with hell. You know the pleasures of sexual intercourse; you know the dictates of dharma. Why, you are like a Deva, and this does not become you.

Best of kings, it is your Kshatriya dharma to punish anyone who is cruel and sinful, anyone who abandons dharma, artha and kama, as they are laid down in the Shastras. Manavottama, what have you done by killing me, who gave you no offence? Raja, I am a Muni living on roots and fruit, though I have assumed this form of a deer. I lived peacefully in this forest, giving no offence to any living creature, rather, in harmony with all.

Yet you have killed me and I will curse you for it. I curse you Kshatriya, that for your savagery towards a mating couple, you will die as soon as you indulge your own desire. I am the Muni Kindama of great tapasya. I was mating as a deer because I felt bashful to have intercourse in human form in this forest where other Rishis abound. I often roam deep in this forest in the company of other deer.

You slew me without knowing that I am a Brahmana, so the sin of Brahmahatya shall not cling to you. But, O witless man, because you have killed me while I mated with my wife your fate shall be the same. When desire next takes you to your wife and you join with her, as I have with mine, you will leave your body and enter the world of spirits. And your wife, with whom you are having intercourse, will follow you out of this world, out of her love and adoration, to the realm of Yama.

You brought me anguish when I was in transport; grief will visit you when you are in ecstasy.'

With this curse, the deer breathes its last, and Pandu stands stricken, staring at the corpses."

CANTO 119

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Long and bitterly Pandu and his wives grieve over the deer.

Pandu cries, 'Ah, even if they are born into pure and noble families evil men are quickly brought to grief by their own sins, for their passions delude them into sinning violently. I have heard that, though he was the son of the noble Shantanu, Vichitravirya died young because he had become a slave to his lust.

In the soil of the lustful Vichitravirya the enlightened Muni Krishna Dwaipayana, who has never told a lie, begot me. Though I am the natural son of such a Mahatman, my heart is evil: look at me, ranging the forest, daily killing innocent deer. Oh, the gods have forsaken me, and I mean to seek my redemption, mukti.

The great obstacles on the path to salvation are the desire to father children, as well as other mundane attachments and concerns. I mean to swear a vow of brahmacharya and follow in my natural father's immortal footsteps. I will perform stern tapasya and bring my lust and every other passion under control.

I will abandon my wives and the rest of my kin, shave my head, and wander the Earth alone as a Bhikshu, begging fruit as alms from the trees I find. I will cover my body with dust, forsake every object of attraction or distaste, and shelter under trees or in deserted huts that I find. No joy or sorrow will move me; I will look upon blame and praise equally. I will not seek blessings or adoration.

I shall be at peace with everything, and accept no gifts. I will never mock anyone, or frown at anyone, but always be cheerful and devote myself to the welfare of all creatures. I will do no injury to any of the four forms of life, mobile or unmoving, but treat them all as if they are my own children.

Once a day I will visit five or ten families, at most, and beg for alms. If I receive none I will not eat. I will never beg from the same person twice. I will not go to more than ten homes, and shall remain as unmoved as a Rishi whether I get food or not. I will look equally upon someone who hacks away my arm with an axe and another who smears it with sandalwood paste. I will not curse the first or bless the second.

I will not be pleased to remain alive or grieve if I am to die; I will look equally upon life and death. Cleansing my heart of every sin, I will rise above the sacred rituals that men perform, during auspicious times, in order to attain happiness. I will relinquish all dharma and artha, as well as rituals that gratify the senses.

I will become as free as the wind, going where I please with no sin or attachment to bind me. Fearlessly shall I tread the path of Sannyasa, until the day of my death arrives. Now that I cannot father children, I shall walk in dharma, never leaving the golden path to walk the vile alleyways of the world, all of which lead to sorrow.

Whether the world honours him or not, the man who begs from greed is certainly like a dog. I cannot have children and I must never ask another to give me sons.'

Wiping his tears, Pandu fetches a deep sigh and says to Kunti and Madri, 'Let my mother, my uncle Vidura, King Dhritarashtra, all our friends, the Devi Satyavati, Pitama Bhishma, our family priests, the Brahmanas who keep stern vratas and drink Soma rasa, and all the elders in our city be told that Pandu has taken Vanavasa and will lead the life of a Sannyasi.'

Kunti and Madri say, 'O Bharatarishabha, there are other paths of Sannyasa that you can follow, and perform the sternest tapasya, in which we can join and serve you: paths that also lead to moksha and liberation from rebirth. We, too, shall control our passions, forsake every luxury, and be austere in all things. But, O king of great wisdom, if you abandon us, we will take our own lives this very day.'

Pandu replies, 'If what you say is dharma, then I will tread the immortal way of my ancestors with both of you. I will renounce the comforts of towns and cities, wear valkala, eat only fruit and roots, and wander in the deepest jungles, performing tapasya.

Bathing morning and evening, I will perform homa. I will wear animal hide, or rags, jata on my head, and emaciate my body by hardly eating. I will ignore hunger and thirst and expose myself to extremes of heat and

cold; living in solitude, I will abandon myself to dhyana, a life of meditation.

I will eat such fruit as I find, raw or ripe; I will make offerings to the Pitrs and the Devas, of mantras, holy water and the fruit of the jungle. I will not see any of the creatures of the wild, much less harm them; I will never again see any of my friends or kinsmen, or any that live in towns or cities.

Until I leave this body, I will keep the most extreme observances of the Vanaprastha Shastras, always seeking out the most difficult and harsh ones.'

Pandu now gives away the large jewel in his crown to Brahmanas, as also his golden necklace, his bracelets, his heavy earrings, his opulent robes, along with all the jewellery of his wives.

Calling his servants, he says, 'Go back to Hastinapura and tell everyone there that Pandu has renounced wealth, every desire, pleasure, even his sexual life, and has become a Sannyasi in the forest.'

He speaks quietly, but when they hear him, his attendants set up a loud lament, crying, 'Ah, we are ruined!'

Hot tears streaming down their faces, they leave their prince and, taking the gold and ornaments he has given them to be distributed as charity, return to the city of elephants. When Dhritarashtra, best among men, hears the news that those servitors bring, he weeps for his brother. He is plunged in gloom, and, now, hardly takes any delight in the pleasures of his palace, with its soft beds and seats, its exquisite cuisine.

Pandu goes to the mountains called Nagasata, with Kunti and Madri. Eating fruit and roots, they cross the Chaitraratha, the Kalakuta, and finally crossing the Himalaya, they arrive on fragrant Gandhamadana. Watched over by Mahabhutas, Siddhas and Maharishis, Pandu lives at times in the plains and at others on mountains.

He journeys to Lake Indradyumna, and then crossing the Hansakuta Mountains, arrives at the range of a hundred peaks, Satasringa, where he lives in tapasya."

CANTO 120

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, 'Pandu devotes himself to his austerities. Quickly, he becomes a favourite with all the great Siddhas and Charanas who live on that mountain. O Bharata, he serves his spiritual masters, with his mind perfectly controlled, with complete humility, and gains enormous ascetic powers. Some of the Rishis would call him their brother, others their friend, while others love him like a son.

Bharatarishabha, pursuing his tapasya with intense devotion and singlemindedness, Pandu, though he is born a Kshatriya, soon becomes even like a Brahmarishi.

On a day of the new moon, amavasya, some awesome Rishis gather to set out to see Brahma, in his lofty realm. Pandu asks them, 'Great ones, where are you going?'

The Rishis reply, 'There will be a great Satsangha today in the court of Brahma, of Devas, Pitrs and Maharishis. We want to see the Svayambhuva, the Self-Created Lord, and are going to the sacred conclave.'

Pandu jumps up in excitement; he wants to go as well. But as he is about to follow them with his two wives, the Munis who are travelling north of Satasringa say, 'As we journeyed north, gradually climbing the King of Mountains, we have seen many marvellous realms, which are inaccessible to ordinary men.

We have seen the worlds of Devas, Gandharvas and Apsaras, with hundreds of palaces, wondrous past describing, echoing softly with heavenly music; we have seen the enchanted gardens of Kubera, spread across plains and rising into mountain slopes, with mighty rivers flowing through, and deep and secret caves.

Many of those heights are covered in perennial snow and ice, places where no animals live or plants grow. Other realms are uninhabitable, indeed inaccessible, for the torrential rains that pour down upon them. Why,

other beasts, even birds do not venture into these. Only the air dares go freely through those glacial realms, as do Siddhas and Rishis with great powers.

O Pandu, how will your wives, these tender princesses, climb those pinnacles of the Lord of mountains? They are not used either to the hardship or the inevitable pain; they will not survive. Therefore, O Bharatarishabha, you must not come with us.'

Pandu replies, 'Most fortunate ones, it is told that the sonless can never enter Swarga. I have no son! I speak to you in great grief for I have not been able to repay the debt I owe my manes. Ah, I feel certain that when this body of mine dissolves into its constituent elements, my ancestors, my Pitrs on high, shall fall into hell.

Men are born into this world with four debts: those due to the Pitrs, the Devas, the Rishis, and to other men. In dharma these must be paid. The wise all agree that no blissful realms await those that do not discharge these debts.

The Devas are paid with yagnas; the Rishis are paid by gyana, dhyana and tapasya; the Pitrs are paid by begetting children and by offering tarpana and pinda; and one's fellow men by leading a blameless life that gives no injury.

I have done my dharma by the Devas, the Rishis and toward my fellow men. But ah, my sires, my Pitrs will surely perish because I have not paid my dues to them; I have not fathered any children. O Munis, I am still in debt to my ancestors. The best men are born into this world to father children, so their ancestors are liberated. Wise ones, I ask you now, should children be begotten in my field, even as I was in my father's, by the great Dwaipayana?'

The Rishis say, 'Virtuous Kshatriya, you shall indeed have sons, sinless princes, blessed with fortune and brilliant like the Devas. We see this clearly with our eyes of prophecy. So, Purushavyaghra, O tiger among men, accomplish destiny's purpose, for intelligent men act after clear and careful thought and invariably find great punya. We see the shining fruit that shall be your sons. Pandu, that is your direction.'

But Pandu remembers the curse of the stag and his enforced celibacy. He thinks hard and deep about what the Sages said to him before they departed towards the north. Then he calls the chaste Kunti and says to her privately, 'In this time of our distress you must try to bear children. Rishis who

expound the Sanatana Dharma say that having a son fetches a man virtue and fame in the three worlds.

No sacrifices, charity, penance, or the sternest vows can bestow punya on a man who has no son. O my Kunti of the sweet smile, I fear that I will never attain Heaven because I have no son. Ah, a vile and wretched sinner I was, addicted to violence and savagery, so the deer cursed me that I can never have children.

The Shastras speak of six kinds of sons that are both kin and heirs, and six more that are not heirs but only kin. Pritha, the first of these is a son that a man begets upon his wife; the second is a son fathered by another sage and accomplished man upon one's wife, out of kindness; the third is a son begotten by another upon one's wife for money; the fourth a son begotten upon a wife after her husband's death; the fifth a son born to an unwed mother; the sixth a son born to an unfaithful wife; the seventh is a son given as a gift; the eight is a son bought for money; the ninth is a son adopted; the tenth is a son that comes with an already pregnant bride; the eleventh is a brother's son; and the twelfth a son begotten upon a woman of a lower caste.

If a woman cannot conceive by her husband of her own varna, she must try to conceive with a man of the next varna. If a man cannot father a child, he may ask his younger brothers to father children for him. Manu himself has said that when a man cannot beget a son, he can have another good man father a son on his wife, because having a son is the highest punya.

Kunti, I cannot sire a child in you, and I command you to conceive a child with a man who is either my equal or my superior. Let me tell you the story of the daughter of Saradandayana, whose husband asks her to bear him children by another man.

When her period ended and she came into her fertile time, that Kshatriya woman bathed in the evening and went out at night to a crossroads. Soon enough, a Brahmana of tapasya came along and Saradandayana's daughter asked him for children. He poured ghee as offering into a sacred fire, in the ritual called Pumsavana, and then sired three mighty Maharathas in her, Durjaya being the eldest.

My precious and fortunate Kunti, I want you to follow that Kshatriya princess' example. I want you to bear me a son by the seed of a Brahmana of lofty Sannyasa.'"

CANTO 121

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Kunti says to her husband, that bull among the Kurus, ‘O my lord, do not say this to me! Lotus eyed Pandu, I am your wife and I love you. Bharata Mahabaho, come and beget your children in me yourself, sons of great tejas! When they are born, I will follow you out of this world into Swarga. But not even in my imagination or dreams can I let myself be embraced by another man.

Besides, which man in this world is your equal, let alone your superior? My husband of dharma, let me tell you a story from the Purana, O Pandu of the large eyes.

Long ago, in ancient times, there was a Puru king calls Vyushitaswa. He was devout, truthful and a man of dharma. Once, while the mighty and pure Vyushitaswa was performing a sacrifice, Indra, the Devas and the Devarishis came to his yagna. Indra and the Devas were so drunk with the Soma rasa that the king offered them, the Brahmanas so delighted with the munificent gifts he gave them, that the Gods and the Sages began to perform the rituals at that Rajarishi’s yagna.

Vyushitaswa shone as brightly as the Sun when he appears after the winter of snow; he was twice as splendid as before, more splendid than any other man. Soon, O best of kings, the magnificent Vyushitaswa, as strong as ten elephants, performed the Aswamedha yagna, vanquishing every other ruler of the East, the North, the West and the South, and received tribute from them all.

Kurushreshta, all the Pauranikas sing a tale about that Manavottama, the brilliant Vyushitaswa. When he had conquered all the Earth, from Sea to Sea, that king protected his people, all the varnas, just like a father would his own children. He performed great yagnas, at which he gave away untold wealth to Brahmanas.

When he gathered precious jewels past counting, he arranged to perform still greater sacrifices. He also performed the Agnishtoma,and other arcane Vedic sacrifices, extracting copious quantities of Soma rasa.

Rajan, Vyushitaswa's wife was the daughter of Kakshivat, Bhadra, whose beauty was unrivalled on Earth, and the two of them loved each other deeply. King Vyushitaswa seldom left his wife for any length of time, but united with her always, as frequently as he might. However, this excessive sexual indulgence caused a galloping consumption, which killed the king in a matter of days. He died like the Sun setting, in glory.

The beautiful Queen Bhadra had no son and she was plunged in grief; day and night she wept. With tears streaming down her face, Bhadra said, "Women serve no purpose when their husbands are dead; she is a dead woman that survives her lord, dragging on a wretched misery that is no life, but a terrible death. Ah Bharatarishabha, my Lord Vyushitaswa, I have no wish to live without you. I beg you be merciful and call me to you.

Every moment I live without you is a lifetime in hell. Oh, be kind, beloved King, call me to you quickly. O tiger among kings, I will follow you wherever you go, through rough and smooth. You have gone and will never return; let me come to you as your shadow. O I will be your slave, and do everything you want, whatever pleases you.

O my lotus eyed husband, without you, day by day, anguish will overwhelm me; grief will consume my heart. Oh, I am a wretched sinner and must have been the cause of separating some loving couple in another life that I have to suffer being apart from you in this one. Rajan, Rajan, the woman who lives for even a moment after her husband's death lives only in Naraka. My Lord, do you not see the torment I am in?

I shall lay myself down on a bed of kusa grass, and neither eat nor drink, so that I might see you again soon. O tiger among men, show yourself to me! O my sweet lord, let me hear your voice again, commanding your wretched, grief-stricken wife!"'

Kunti continues, 'Pandu, thus the lovely Bhadra wept when her husband died. She clasped his corpse in her arms and sobbed. Suddenly, an asariri, a disembodied voice spoke to her, "Rise O Bhadra and leave this chamber of death. Woman of the sweet smiles, I grant you a boon: I will beget children in you. Bathe after your period on the eighth or fourteenth night of the waxing moon and wait for me in your bed, and I will come to you."

Bhadra did as the voice asked, so that she might have sons. The chaste Bhadra did as the voice said, and her husband's corpse begot seven children upon her, three Salvas and four Madras.

Bharatarishabha, you can do the same as Vyushitaswa, by using your occult siddhis, your mystical powers.'"

CANTO 122

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Pandu says to Kunti, 'Vyushitaswa of yore did indeed do what you say; why, he was like a Deva. But let me tell you about a custom of old, of which the Rishis who know every nuance of dharma approve.

Lovely Kunti of the sweet smile, in ancient times, women were not confined to their houses, nor did they depend upon their husbands or other male relatives; they were free, and indeed they took their pleasure where they pleased and were not faithful to a single man. And this was not considered sinful, but was perfectly lawful and sanctioned, of old.

As the birds and beasts of the wilds do today, with no jealousy or possessiveness, the women of antiquity did, and the greatest Sages approved heartily. Why, even today, the Northern Kuru women live in the same manner and meet with no reproval. The very idea of a woman being bound for life to a single husband is a very recent one, and I will tell you how it came about, who is responsible for it and why.

There was a great Sage, Uddalaka, whose son was the Rishi Swetaketu, who was also a Sannyasi of great punya. My lotus eyed Kunti, monogamy for women was first established by Swetaketu and he did it from wrath.

Listen to the reason. One day, in the presence of Uddalaka, another Brahmana seized Swetaketu's mother's hand, and said, 'Come with me!' and she went with him. Thinking his mother had been taken by force, Swetaketu was furious.

Seeing his son's anger, Uddalaka said gently, 'Do not be angry, my child. The women of every varna are entirely free, and their freedom is accepted since time out of mind. In sexual matters, they behave even like cows, and it is lawful and just.'

But Swetaketu would not listen to his father and pronounced that, from that day, women shall be faithful to their husbands and be considered

sinners if they strayed. His law bound only human beings and not the other creatures of the Earth. From that time, women who were not chaste would be guilty of the sin of foeticide; and men who violated the chaste wife of another man would be condemned for the same sin.

However, the woman who does not give her husband children, though he commands her, is also guilty of the same crime, O my Kunti of the tapering thighs.

My timid wife, it was Uddalaka's son Swetaketu who imposed monogamy on humans, in defiance of the freedom that women enjoyed since the dawn of time. I have also heard, my wife of the softest thighs, that when her husband Sadasa commanded her, his chaste wife Madayanti gave him a son called Asmaka, by the Rishi Vasishta. She did this out of her love for her husband.

Why, lotus eyes, you know very well how my brothers and I were begotten by Krishna Dwaipayana to continue the Kuru line. Chaste Princess, consider these precedents, which do not violate dharma, and do what I ask.

Of old it has been said that a devoted wife always seeks her husband during her fertile time, while at others she has her liberty. The Rishis say that this is the ancient way of dharma. Also, whatever a husband asks his wife to do, sin or not, the Veda says that she must obey him.

Most of all, beautiful Kunti, I who cannot father children, long to see sons before me; you must not refuse to do what I ask. Look, sweet Kunti, I fold my red-fingered hands into a lotus-cup, and place them on my head to implore you. Beloved Kunti, I beg you, beget children for me by some lofty Brahmana. For only then, because of you, I will find my way into the Swarga meant for men that have sons!'

Having heard him out in silence, attentively, now Kunti says, 'When I was a young girl, it fell to me to look after the most honoured guests who visited my father's palace. Reverently I waited upon Rishis of vast tapasya. Once, I served the great Brahmana Durvasa, whose mind is perfectly controlled and who is a master of the deepest secrets of religion.

He was pleased with my devotion and Durvasa Muni taught me a mantra with which I could summon any Deva I chose.

The Rishi said, 'Any Deva that you summon with this mantra shall perforce come to you and give you children.'

O Bharata, the Brahmana said this to me when I was a maiden in my father's house, and surely Durvasa Muni could never tell a lie. It seems that the time has come when the Rishi's boon might bear fruit. Rajarishi, if you command it I can summon any Deva and bear his children for you. Tell me, my lord, which god shall I call? I will do what you say.'

Pandu replies excitedly, 'Exquisite Kunti, use the mantra even today! Woman of great fortune, summon Dharma Deva, who is the most virtuous of all the gods and can never stain us with any sin, the God of Truth. Also, then, the world shall never point a finger at us that we strayed from dharma.

Besides, the son he gives us shall be a paragon of virtue, certainly the best of the Kurus. Dharma Deva being his natural father, his heart will never turn to the least sin. Sweet woman, keep dharma before your mind's eye, purify yourself with the proper vratas, and waste no time in summoning the God of Justice with both your beauty and your mantra!'

Says Kunti, best among women, 'So be it.' She bows deeply to touch his feet, walks around him in pradakshina, and resolves to do what her husband asks.'"

CANTO 123

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Janamejaya, Gandhari has already been pregnant for a full year with her torpid conception, when on Satasringa, Kunti invokes the Deva Dharma, to have a son by that God. She makes various offerings to the God, and begins to chant the mantra that Durvasa had taught her.

Compelled by her incantation, Dharma Deva flies down to Kunti in a vimana bright as the Sun. Smiling, he asks, 'O Kunti, what would you have from me?'

Smiling, bashful, overwhelmed, she replies, 'Give me a son.'

The beautiful Kunti and the God of Truth have intercourse between them, and in time Kunti gives birth to a shining son, who would be devout and devoted to the welfare of every living creature. This radiant child, who would acquire fame that would spread across the worlds, is born at the eighth muhurta, Abhijit, at high noon of a most auspicious day, the fifth of the bright fortnight, during Kartika, the seventh month, on that very auspicious day of the seventh month when the asterism Jyeshta is conjoined with the waxing Moon.

As soon as he is born an asariri pronounces from the sky, 'This child shall be the most virtuous of all men. He will have great strength, and perfect truthfulness, and he will surely rule the Earth. Let this first son of Pandu be called Yudhishtira, and his fame shall spread through the three worlds!'

Then Pandu goes to Kunti again, and says, 'The Rishis have said that a Kshatriya must possess great physical strength or he is no Kshatriya. Beget another son, of immense strength, who can be Yudhishtira's support.'

Kunti invokes Vayu, the Wind God, strongest of the Devas. He comes to her riding upon a deer, and says, 'O Kunti, what is in your heart that you have called me. What would you have of me?'

Smiling bashfully, she says, ‘O best of Devas, give me a son endowed with great strength, great limbs, a great heart, and one that can humble the pride of anyone at all.’

The God of winds sires a child of untold strength and great arms upon her, who would be known as Bhima. As before, O Bharata, when Bhima is born, a disembodied voice speaks in thunder from the sky, ‘This child shall be the strongest of all men.’

O Janamejaya, I must tell you about something else very wonderful that happens after Vrikodara Bhima’s, birth. One day, he falls out of his mother’s lap onto the slope of the mountain, and the crag he falls upon far below is smashed to pieces, while his child’s body has no scratch or bruise, and he does not even cry. The reason he falls is that a tiger suddenly appears before Kunti, sitting at the edge of a sheer drop, with Bhima asleep in her lap. She jumps up in alarm and Bhima falls over the edge, onto a large rock many hands below.

When Pandu sees how Bhima’s body, hard as adamant, crushes the rock and suffers no harm, he marvels.

Also, it is on the same day that Bhima is born on Satasringa that far away, in Hastinapura, Duryodhana is also born, Duryodhana, who too, would one day rule the Earth.

After the birth of Vrikodara, a persistent ambition begins to haunt Pandu: ‘How shall I have a truly exceptional son, superior to every other man, and who will achieve everlasting fame? Everything in this world depends on both destiny and effort; but destiny by itself is fruitless without timely effort.

‘Indra is the King of all the Devas; immeasurable is his strength, his power, his energy and his glory. I must worship him and persuade him to give me a son of matchless prowess. The son that he gives me must become the greatest Kshatriya on Earth, with no rival, and one who can vanquish every other man and every creature in this world. Yes, I will perform a stern tapasya, and be perfectly austere in thought, speech and deed.’

Pandu seeks the advice and guidance of the Maharishis of that forest, and then tells Kunti that she must observe a vrata of austerity for a full year. Then Pandu, O Bharata, begins to stand upon one leg, from dawn to dusk, his mind withdrawn in dhyana and worshipping the Lord Indra. Other rituals also he performs to please the Deva King.

In some months, Indra becomes gratified with Pandu's adorations and appears before him.

Indra says, 'O King, I will give you a son who will be the best of all men. Invincible in battle, he will be celebrated across the Earth. He will uphold dharma, be a guardian of Brahmanas, cows and all good men. He will be a Parantapa, the scourge of the evil, the joy of his friends and kin. He will become an inexorable slayer of his enemies.'

Overjoyed at what Indra says, Pandu goes to Kunti and cries, 'Your vrata has borne fruit! The King of the Devas is pleased and has agreed to give us the son we want. Our child will be wise past compare, his achievements superhuman and his fame unequalled.

'He will be a Mahatman, the bane of his enemies and of the forces of evil. His splendour will be as the Sun's, and he will be as handsome as a God. O Kunti of the swaying, fair hips, Kunti of the sweetest smile, the Lord of the Devas has become pleased with you! Call him to you with your mantra, and bear a son who will be the very embodiment of every Kshatriya virtue.'

Kunti invokes Sakra, Indra the Deva king, who comes to her and sires in her the one who would be known throughout the world as Arjuna. As soon as Arjuna is born, an asariri like the rumbling of thunderheads fills the sky with its echoing tones.

The disembodied voice says to Kunti, and every creature in that forest hears it clear, 'O Kunti, this son of yours will be as strong as Kartavirya and as powerful as Siva. Invincible like Indra himself, he will spread your fame across the Earth. Even as Vishnu, her youngest son, causes the joy of his mother Aditi to swell, so will this boy swell yours.

He will subdue the Madras, the Kurus, the Somakas, the Chedis, Kasi and Karusha, and he will preserve the glory and prosperity of the House of Kuru. Agni will feast upon the fat of the fell creatures of the Khandava vana, by the might of your son's arms, when your prince burns that forest.

This mighty Kshatriya will vanquish all the kings of the Earth, effeminate before him, enabling himself and his brothers to perform three Mahayagnas. O Kunti, his prowess shall be no less than that of Jamadagni's son Parasurama or Vishnu. By his extraordinary archery, he will find unparalleled fame.

Why, he will delight the Lord Siva by having a battle with him, and the Lord Sankara Mahadeva will give him his own Pasupatastra, the greatest of

all weapons. This mighty son of yours will also kill the Nivatakavacha Daityas, the enemies of the Devas. He will acquire every kind of Devastra and this Purusharishabha, this bull among men, will restore the very fortunes of his clan!'

Kunti lies in the room where she has given birth to Arjuna, and listens to these awesome prophecies. Hearing the divine asariri speak in thunder from the sky, the Rishis who live on the mountain of a hundred peaks, and all the Devas and Indra in their vimanas in the firmament are overjoyed.

Celestial drumrolls fill the sky, as do divine cries of joy; all of Satasringa is covered by a deluge of unearthly flowers flung down by unseen hands. Many divine beings arrive on the mountain of a thousand peaks to adore the son of Pritha – the sons of Kadru, the sons of Vinata, the Prajapatis,the Lokapalas, the Saptarishis,Bharadwaja, Kashyapa, Gautama, Viswamitra, Jamadagni, Vasistha, and the irradiant Atri who lit up the world when once the Sun was lost.

Marichi, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha Prajapati, the Gandharvasand Apsarascome there as well. The many tribes of Apsaras,wearing unworldly ornaments and garlands, raiment past describing, arrive in the forest asrama and dance for joy, while they sing the praises of little Arjuna.

All around, Rishis chant mantras of blessing, while Tumburu and his Gandharvas sing in their superlative voices. Among the celestial minstrels are Bhimasena, Ugrasena, Urnayus, Anagha, Gopati, Dhritarashtra, Suryavarchas, Yugapa, Trinapa, Karshni, Nandi, Chitraratha, Salisirah, Parjannya, Kali, Narada, Brihatta, Brihaka, Karala Mahatman, Brahmacharin, Bahuguna, Suvarna the famed, Viswavasu, Bhumanyu, Suchandra, Saru and the renowned people of Haha and Huhu – all come and sing in abandon, in divine voices.

Among the Apsaras that dance to the music of the Gandharvas, O Rajan, are Anchana, Anavadya, Gunamukhya, Gunavara, Adrika, Soma, Misrakesi, Alambusha, Marichi, Suchika, Vidyutparna, Tilottama, Ambika, Lakshmana, Kshema Devi, Rambha, Manorama, Asita, Subahu, Supriya, Subapuh, Pundarika, Sugandha, Surasa, Pramathini, Kamya and Saradwati.

Menaka, Sahajanya, Karnika, Punjikasthala, Ritusthala, Ghritachi, Viswachi, Purvachiti, Umlocha, Pramlocha and Urvasi, all with large and lustrous eyes, the nymphs of heaven, also come there and sing in their voices past all compare: *choros nympharum*.

Dhatri, Aryaman, Mitra, Varuna, Bhaga, Indra, Vivaswat, Pushan, Tvastri, Parjanya and Vishnu: the twelve Adityas come to that hermitage to bless Pandu's son. And, O King, Mrigavyadha, Sarpa, Niriti, Ajaikapada, Ahivradhna, Pinakin, Dahana, Iswara, Kapalin, Sthanu, Bhaga: these eleven Rudras also come to see and bless the glorious child.

The Aswin twins, the eight Vasus, the mighty Maruts, the Viswedevas, and the Sadhyas come to Satasringa, too; as do Karkotaka, Vasuki, Kachchhapa, Kunda and the great Takshaka – mighty and fierce Nagas of immense tapasya. Tarkshya, Arishtanemi, Garuda, Asitadvaja, many other Nagas arrive upon the blessed mountain, as do Aruna and Aruni of Vinata's race.

Only the Maharishis of lofty spiritual evolution see all these divine beings who either walk upon the mountain or look down from their vimanas in the sky. Those great Munis see the Gods and the rest of the unworldly ones and are amazed, and their love for the sons of Pandu grows in tide.

Some time passes, then Pandu wants to have more children. He asks Kunti to conceive again, but she says, 'The Sages have not given their sanction to have a fourth child, not even in a crisis. The woman who sleeps with four men is a swairini, while she that has five is a whore.

My most learned lord, you know very well what the Shastras say about this, then why do you allow your greed for children to make you forget dharma?'"

CANTO 124

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, 'After the birth of Kunti's sons and the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, Madri comes privately to Pandu one day.

She says, 'Shatrughana, scorcher of your enemies, I never complain though you pay me scant attention. I do not mind that though I am higher born than Kunti her position is higher than mine. I do not grieve, O Kurusthama, that Gandhari has a hundred sons. However, I am terribly sad that while Kunti and I are both your wives, she has three sons and I have none for you.

If Kuntibhoja's daughter can help me also become a mother I would be beholden to her forever, and she would also be giving you more sons, as you want. She is my rival for your love, and I cannot ask her this myself. But if you want to be kind to me, O Purushavyaghra, tell her to grant me this boon.'

Pandu says eagerly, 'Madri, I have often thought of exactly what you are saying. But I never mentioned it lest I offend you. Now that you say you want the very same thing, I will certainly speak to Kunti and she will not refuse me.'

Pandu speaks alone to Kunti, 'O Kunti, give me more sons to increase my clan and to benefit the world. Sweet wife, let us make sure that my Pitrs and I, and your manes, too, always have pinda offered them. Be kind to me, Kunti, and in that be most kindly towards the very Earth. Let your heart be moved to find immortal fame, and do what you might find difficult to do.

Though he is King of the Devas, Indra still performs yagnas: only to enhance his fame. O lovely Kunti, Brahmanas who know the Veda and have acquired lofty punya still approach their Gurus reverently: only for their fame. All the Rajarishis and Brahmarishis achieved their most strenuous accomplishments only out of a desire to have fame.

I ask you, chaste Kunti, to help make Madri a mother, too, and save her like a raft from the sea of grief in which she is drowning, and so acquire undying fame for yourself!'

Kunti agrees readily, and calls Madri and says to her, 'Think of any Deva you like and you shall have a child by him.'

Madri considers a few moments then thinks of the Aswini twins in her heart, as Kunti softly chants Durvasa's irresistible mantra. As soon as Madri is alone the splendid Aswini Kumaras come to her and beget two incomparably handsome sons on her, also twins, who come to be called Nakula and Sahadeva.

As soon as they are born, a disembodied voice speaks, 'These children will surpass the Aswins themselves in tejas and beauty.' And truly, the infants are so lustrous that they light up the mountain.

Rajan, when these five children are born, the Rishis of Satasringa come to bless them, and lovingly perform their birth rites and name them. Kunti's eldest son is named Yudhishtira, her second Bhimasena, her third Arjuna; Madri's older child is called Nakula and the second Sahadeva.

Those magnificent sons, born a year apart, look even like five years embodied. Pandu would look at his sons of divine handsomeness and boundless energy, of incalculable strength, of great generosity, and be overwhelmed with joy. Of course, those five become the favourites of all the Rishis of the mountain of a hundred peaks, and of their wives, all of whom dote on them.

Some time passes, when Pandu asks Kunti to enable Madri to have another child. But Kunti says, 'I chanted the mantra for her once and she deceived me by having two sons. If I say it for her again, I cannot tell who she will invoke but she will have more sons than me. She is always envious and this is the way of women like her.

As for me, I am naïve that I did not think to invoke the Aswins myself so that I could have had two sons. My lord, I beg you do not ask me to use the mantra for Madri again.'

Thus, Rajan, Pandu has five sons begotten by Devas: princes of immense strength, who achieve great fame and increase the glory of the House of Kuru. Each of them bears every auspicious mark upon their bodies; each is as handsome as Soma. As they grow, they are majestic as the lion – in gait, in the broadness of their chests, in the largeness of their hearts and their

eyes, their powerful necks and vast strength; each becomes a master archer, and they are, all five, truly like Devas themselves.

Watching them grow, seeing their virtues grow with them, the great Munis who live on that snowcapped and holy mountain are wonder-stricken. Swiftly they grow, the five sons of Pandu on Satasringa and the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra in Hastinapura, as swiftly as a bank of lotuses in a lake."

CANTO 125

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Watching his sons grow in the great vana upon the charmed mountain, Pandu feels the final strength in his body assert itself again.

One day in spring, which maddens every creature with desire, Pandu is out walking with Madri in the forest, where every tree is decked in fresh new blooms. He sees Palasas, Tilakas, Mango trees, Champakas, Parihadrakas, Karnikaras, Asokas, Kesaras, Atimuktas and Kuruvakas, all with swarms of inebriated bees humming over their blossoms. Parijatas are in full heady bloom, and the Koyals sing their hearts out, ah so sweetly, against their sruti of the humming of the black bees.

Pandu sees other trees, branches bent with the weight of their abundant flowers and fruit. He sees crystalline pools brimming with delicately fragrant lotuses. Pandu looks at all this, he feels spring in his blood; he feels his blood quicken with soft desire. As Pandu ranges through that enchanted realm, like a god, the still youthful Madri beside him wears a single diaphanous garment. Pandu looks at her and suddenly the long suppressed desire of all the years of enforced celibacy flares up and overwhelms Pandu.

She sees the look in his eye and cries out, but he seizes her roughly, her of the eyes like lotus petals. She does everything she can to resist him, for she has not forgotten the curse of the deer. O Kurusthama, compelled by fate, overpowered by lust, Pandu forces himself on Madri, just as if he wants to end his life. Her strength is as nothing before his, and he thrusts himself into her, and immediately becomes senseless. Pandu of dharma dies even as he is joined with Madri.

Madri clasps her dead husband's body and sets up a loud wailing. Kunti, her sons and Madri's twins hear her cries and come running to the place. When Madri sees them some way off, she cries to Kunti, 'Leave the children and come alone!'

Telling the princes to stay where they are, Kunti runs to Madri and sees what has happened. She sees Madri and Pandu as they are, and her husband dead. Dementedly, she cries, 'Madri, what have you done? I watched over him all these years, my own passion controlled, so that he would be protected. How did he forget the Rishi's curse, O how did you? How did you let him near you thus aroused? He always grieved over the curse, then how did he forget it? How did you allow him, how could you tempt him in solitude?

Ah daughter of Bahlika, finally you have prevailed over me and proved yourself the more fortunate one, for you saw desire on his face and joy as he united with you!'

Madri sobs, 'O my sister, I tried to stop him, but he could not control himself. It was as if he was determined to fulfil the Rishi's curse.'

Kunti is quiet, then says, 'I am the older of his wives; the first karma must belong to me. Madri, you must not try to stop me from doing what must be done. I must follow our husband to the land of the dead.

Get up Madri, and let me have his corpse; and from now, you raise these children.'

Madri replies, 'I still hold him within my body. My desire is unslaked, so I must be the one to follow him. You are my elder sister; I beg you, let me have this one boon from you. This Bharatottama was joined with me in intercourse when his spirit left his body. He died without having his desire satisfied; must I not follow him, as we are, to Yama's realm so that he can satiate himself on me?

Besides, O my adored sister, if I am the one to live and you die I shall not be able to treat your sons and mine equally, and you know that is true. I will sin and in all likelihood divide the princes among themselves. But you, Kunti, will raise my sons as your own, making no difference between them.

Our lord Pandu sought me out and he remains within me. He has gone to the realm of the spirits; it is right in every way that my body is not separated at this time from his but that I am burnt with him. Kunti, my sweet sister, you were always his first wife in this world; let me be the one to go with him out of it. Do not deny me this, I beg you!

I know that you will be the best of mothers to all the children; I have no other wish or request to make of you.'

So, indeed, the daughter of the king of the Madras is burnt upon the funeral pyre of her husband Pandu, that Purusharishabha, that bull among

men, while he still lay in her arms.”

CANTO 126

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Now the godlike Rishis see Pandu dead, consult together, and declare, ‘Pandu relinquished power and throne to come among us to live in tapasya upon this mountain. He has left us and gone to Swarga, leaving his wife and sons as a sacred trust in our hands. It is our dharma now to take them to Hastinapura.’

The Maharishis decide to take Kunti and the sons of Pandu to the kingdom of elephants and deliver them into the custody of Bhishma and Dhritarashtra. They set out immediately, taking the woman and the children with them, as well as the unburnt remains of Pandu and Madri, which they wrap tightly and carefully so no portion of them is visible.

She has always lived a life of comfort, yet now Kunti sees the long and arduous journey as a short and almost happy one.

Arriving in Kurujangala, Kunti comes to the main gate of the great city and presents herself there. The Rishis command the dwarapalakas to inform the king within the city of their arrival. The excited guardsmen run into the court with their amazing message. When the citizens of Hastinapura hear about the arrival at their gates of thousands of Munis and Charanas they are wonderstruck, and soon after dawn begin to throng to those portals in crowds, with their wives and children.

In chariots and other regal vahanas, in thousands, come the Kshatriyas with their wives; the Brahmanas arrive with their women; as do the Vaisyas and Sudras with theirs. It is a calm crowd, for the people of Hastinapura are all given to dharma; they are a pious people.

Bhishma, son of Shantanu, comes to the city gates, as do Somadatta, Bahlika, Rajarishi Dhritarashtra whose vision is his wisdom, Vidura the sage, the venerable Satyavati, the princesses of Kosala, Ambika and Ambalika, Gandhari, and other noble women of the royal household.

The hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, decked in lavish ornaments, also emerge from the gates of the ancient city.

The Kauravas and their Kulaguru, the family priest, worship the Rishis from Satasringi by bowing low to them, and then they sit before the Sages. The citizens also bow to the hermits, touch the ground with their hands in reverence, and then they also sit down.

When the great gathering is perfectly still and silent, Bhishma worships the Rishis, offering them padya, water to wash their feet, and arghya.He then speaks to them about the kingdom and the kingship.

Then the eldest Rishi, jata piled on his head and animal hide covering his loins, stands up and speaks for all the Sages. 'You all know that Pandu, sovereign of the Kurus, renounced the pleasures of this world and became a Sannyasi on Satasringa of a hundred peaks. He became a brahmachari, yet for some inscrutable reason of the Gods, Pandu's eldest son Yudhishtira was born upon the mountain and he was begotten by Dharma Deva.

Pandu's second son, this Bhima, strongest among all men, is the son of Vayu, the Wind God. This third prince, begotten upon Kunti by Indra, is Arjuna who will one day be the greatest of all bowmen on Earth.

Now look at these young vyaghras, tigerish twins, whose mother is Madri and their fathers the Aswins of heaven. They, too, are great archers. Living in dharma as a Vanaprastha in the forest, Pandu did thus revive the illustrious lineage of his grandsire, a line threatened with extinction.

You will no doubt be delighted to learn of the birth, the growth and the Vedic education of these sons of Pandu. After cleaving unwaveringly to dharma, seventeen days ago, Pandu left this world, leaving these children behind.

His wife Madri burnt herself with him on his funeral pyre; she too has gone with her lord to the realm of chaste wives. You must now perform whatever rites need to be done for the two of them. Here are their remains.

Here also are their children, these Parantapas, and their mother Kunti. Welcome them now with honour.

When the first funeral rites have been completed let the first annual sraddha, the sapindakarana, be performed for Pandu of dharma, who always defended and spread the honour and glory of the Kurus; let him thus find his formal place among the Pitrs of your royal clan.'

When the eldest Rishi has spoken, all those Rishis and Guhyakas vanish before the very eyes of the people of Hastinapura. Astonished to see the

Munis and Siddhas dissolve even like wisps of cloud, which come and go in the sky, the people slowly return to their homes."

CANTO 127

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Now Dhritarashtra says, 'Vidura, arrange for great royal funerals for my brother, the Rajasimha Pandu, and his wife Madri. Spare no expense, for these rituals are for the souls of our beloved departed. Let everyone that asks be given as much as they ask for – cattle, clothes, jewels, gold and every kind of wealth.

Let Kunti arrange for the last rites for Madri, in whatever fashion pleases her. Let Madri's remains be so closely wrapped that not Surya Deva or Vayu sees them. Do not mourn for Pandu; he was a great Kshatriya and has left behind five sons as magnificent as Devas.'

O Bharata, Vidura says, 'Tathaastu, so be it,' and consulting with Bhishma finds a sacred and auspicious place to perform the funeral rites for Pandu. Without delay the family priests go there, carrying the sacred agni from the palace, fragrant with the ghee they fed it.

Now friends, kinsmen and followers bathe Pandu's body, wrap it in cerement, sprinkle it with fine perfumes and strew flowers over it.[7*] They set Pandu upon a hearse, which also they adorn with garlands and rich hangings. Madri's body is placed beside Pandu's and the colourful bier is lifted onto sturdy shoulders.

The white parasol of state is unfurled over that hearse, yak-tail whisks waved over it, and hundreds of musicians play as the funeral procession makes its way through the streets, looking bright and festive: for death, after all, is a release.

Hundreds of palace servitors give out precious jewels to the people who line the streets in crowds. Later, more beautiful robes, more sovereign white parasols, and larger yak-tail chamaras are fetched for the great ceremony.

The priests, wearing white, walk at the head of the procession, ladling libations of clarified butter into the sacred fire burning in an ornamental

vessel. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, in their thousands, follow the dead Pandu.

They lament loudly, sobbing, 'O Prince, where did you go, leaving us behind, wretched forever?'

Bhishma, Vidura and the Pandavas all weep. Finally, they come to a charmed glade in the forest on the banks of the Ganga. They set down the bier on which the lion-hearted Pandu and Madri lie. They bring sacred water in golden vessels, wash the Kshatriya's body, which has been smeared with many kinds of fragrant unguents; they smear it again, all over, with sandalwood paste.

They cover him in white homespun cloth, and now Pandu seems as if he is alive and asleep upon a luxurious bed.

Guided by the priests, they proceed to perform the last rites meticulously. When these are over, the Kauravas touch the bodies of Pandu and Madri alight, and fetch lotuses, sandalwood paste and other fragrant substances to the blazing pyre.

Seeing the bodies burning, Ambalika wails, 'My son! My son!' and faints. Seeing her fall, the people of Hastinapura and also the rustic people from the provinces set up a great lament. Why, even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are moved to grief hearing the lamentation of Kunti. Bhishma, son of Shantanu, the sagacious Vidura – they too grieve.

Weeping, Bhishma, Vidura, Dhritarashtra, the Pandavas and the Kuru women together perform tarpana for the departed Pandu. When this is done, the people, sorrowing, come up and, with touch, kind words, with embraces and their love, console the sons of Pandu.

The Pandavas mourn and sleep on bare ground. Seeing this, the Brahmanas and indeed all the other citizens of the city of elephants do the same, giving up their beds. Young and old, they mourn the dead Kshatriya with his sons who weep ceaselessly for twelve days."

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[7*] It is not clear how much of the bodies the fire in Satasringa consumed, since definitely Madri also comes as a corpse to Hastinapura.

CANTO 128

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "At the end of twelve days, Bhishma and Kunti with their kinsfolk and friends, perform the sraddha for the dead prince and offer the pinda for his soul. After this, they arrange for great feasts and give away vast pieces of land and great gemstones as gifts.

The people return to Hastinapura with the sons of Pandu, now cleansed of the impurity that attends a father's death. Again, the citizens weep for the departed Pandu, as if they have lost one of their kin.

When the sraddha has been performed, Vyasa Muni sees how all the people are plunged in despair, and says quietly one day to Satyavati, 'Mother, the days of joy have left the world and those of danger and calamity have begun. The power of sin increases, day by day, for the world has become old. Because of the swelling force of evil, the Kuru empire will crumble.

It is best that you retire to the forest and embark upon a life of dhyana and yoga. From now, human society will be full of deceit and treachery. Evil will have sway, and all goodness and dharma will cease to be. Do not stay here anymore, to watch the destruction of your clan.'

He prophesies more, and she sees her son, the Sage, means what he says, and Satyavati goes into the antahpura and says to her elder daughter-in-law, 'Ambika, your grandsons shall cause the ruin of the House of Kuru; the very race of Bharata and all its people will perish because of what they do. If you agree, I mean to take sannyasa in the jungle with Ambalika, who is heartbroken at the death of Pandu.'

Unexpectedly, Ambika says that she will also accompany the other women. In the vana, Satyavati practises rigorous penance and profound dhyana, and in time leaves her body and finds Swarga for herself, as do her daughters-in-law, later.'

Now, the sons of Pandu undergo the purificatory and initiatory rites prescribed in the Veda, and for the first time, begin to live as princes in their dead father's house.

Quickly, while the youngsters play together, it is obvious that the Pandavas are stronger than their cousins, the Kauravas. The ebullient Bhima by himself is more than a match for Dhritarashtra's sons – he is faster and stronger than they are; his aim is truer, more unerring, his appetite grander. Vayu's son pulls the Kauravas' hair and drags them roughly on the ground; he mischievously makes them fight with one another, and kicks dust into their faces. The gardens of the palace ring with his loud laughter as he does all this.

Vrikodara easily beats up the hundred and one sons of his uncle, as if they are not a hundred and one but just one. When he seizes their hair, flings them down and hauls them over the rough earth, he cuts open some knees, some heads, and dislocates some shoulders.

At times, he holds ten Kauravas together under water, until they nearly drown. When Dhritarashtra's sons climb a tree to pluck its fruit, Bhima delivers a tremendous kick to the tree and brings fruit-pluckers and fruit raining down from the branches.

Yes, the king's sons are no match at all for the son of the Wind, not in strength, speed or skill. However, Bhima is innocent and all the mischief he wreaks is out of a huge sense of playfulness and fun, and never seriously malicious. His heart is truly a child's.

But the king's eldest son, the mighty Duryodhana, hitherto unchallenged in the palace, sees these marvellous feats of strength and swiftness from Bhima and begins to hate his cousin to distraction, seeing clearly and astutely that the young giant is the greatest threat to him in the future. And being neither innocent nor childlike in his heart, but already evil, the ambitious and ruthless Duryodhana conceives a sinister plot.

He says to himself, 'No one else is nearly as strong as Pandu's second son Bhima. He is the main threat to me, so I will have to kill him with cunning. Perhaps I will push him into the Ganga and drown him. Later, I will imprison Yudhishtira and Arjuna, who are nothing without their brother's strength, and rule as the only king of the Kurus, unopposed.'

Having decided on his course, Duryodhana is always on the lookout for an opportunity to do away with Bhima. O Bharata, the devious Duryodhana has a palace built in beautiful Pramanakoti on the banks of the Ganga. He

has it furnished with fine tapestries and every other lavish embellishment. He has the palace provided with every manner of entertainment, the finest food, and of course it is ostensibly a place for the Kuru princes to visit so they can swim in the river, a retreat for water sport.

Bright flags wave on this mansion, which is called the House of Water Sport. Master cooks prepare every kind of delicacy. When the preparations are complete, his men tell Duryodhana that everything is ready. That evil prince says to the Pandavas, 'Let us all go to the banks of the Ganga, and swim and play in the water.'

Yudhishtira agrees, and the sons of Dhritarashtra set out from Hastinapura with the sons of Pandu, mounted on massive elephants born in the jungle and in chariots as big as towns.

Arriving at the House of Water Sport, they dismiss their attendants, admire the fine gardens and groves of trees, created for their pleasure and their games, and enter the great mansion as a pride of young lions does a mountain cave.

With perfect skill, the architects have designed the palace, and masons plastered and painted the walls and the ceiling. The windows are gracious and large, and the artificial fountains elegant, splashing softly.

Both inside and out are tanks of clear water, in which banks of lotuses bloom, in regal profusion. Upon their banks grow numberless other flowers, whose scents fill the air headily.

The Kauravas and the Pandavas begin to sport there and to enjoy themselves. As they play, in some delight, they feed each other small portions of the fine fare laid out for them by the cooks and servants. Meanwhile, Duryodhana mixes a potent poison into some food, to kill Bhima. Honey on his tongue and a razor in his heart, he is absolutely friendly towards his cousin today, and soon manages to feed him a goodly quantity of the poisoned food. Certain that he has achieved his purpose, he is glad.

Soon the Pandavas and the Kauravas begin to swim and play in the river. When they finish, they put on white robes and fine jewellery. A little tired, they decide to rest in the pleasure-house in the garden.

Bhima, who has exerted himself the most, swum the fastest and longest, feels most tired of all. He comes out of the river and flops down on its bank. The poison is taking effect and great exhaustion sweeps over the second

Pandava. The cool evening breeze seems to enhance the effect of the poison, and Bhima immediately loses consciousness.

Now Duryodhana, who has not gone with the others, quickly binds Bhima with some strong vines and creepers, and rolls him into the water. The unconscious Pandava sinks down into Nagaloka, the realm of the Nagas. Alarmed by the sinking titan, thousands of serpents, their venom virulent, bite him.

The snake venom acts as an antidote to the vegetable poison in the blood of Vayu's son. The serpents bite him all over his body, except for his chest, which their needle sharp fangs cannot pierce, so tough is its skin.

Bhima awakes, and easily snapping the green thongs that hold him, falls upon the snakes, trampling hundreds of them. The rest flee to their King Vasuki, and cry, 'Nagaraja, a human sank into the river, his arms bound with cords of vines and creepers. It seems he drank poison before he fell into the water, because he was unconscious when he fell among us. But when we bit him he awoke, broke his bonds and fell on us dreadfully. Lord, you must find out who he is.'

Vasuki goes to where Bhima is; with him is an aged Naga, Aryaka. Aryaka is Kunti's great grandfather. Seeing Bhima, Aryaka knows him at once and embraces him fondly.

When Vasuki realises who this magnificent youth is, he says to Aryaka, 'We must please him. Let us give him vast gold and jewels.'

Aryaka says, 'Nagaraja, he does not need wealth as long as you are pleased with him. Let him drink from the rasakunda, the chalices of nagamrita, and acquire immense strength. Each chalice contains the might of a thousand elephants. Let this prince drink as much as he can bear.'

Vasuki agrees, and the Nagas perform auspicious initiatory rituals for the nectar drinking. Purifying himself with care, Bhimasena faces the east and begins to drink the amrita of the snakes. In one gulp he drains the first chalice; in another, the next; and so on, until he drinks eight full chalices of nagamrita.

Now, at last, he can drink no more and feels drowsy. The Nagas make a soft bed for him and he lies upon it and falls asleep."

CANTO 129

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, the Kauravas and the Pandavas finish their games and swimming, and set out home for Hastinapura, without Bhima. Some princes ride horses, others elephants, while still others go in chariots.

On the way, Bhima's brothers and some others say, 'Bhima must have gone alone before us.'

Duryodhana is the only one who knows the truth, and his heart is bursting for joy as he enters Hastinapura, but he says nothing, nor does he show what he feels. Of course, Yudhishtira is so virtuous that he thinks of everyone else as being as good-hearted as he is; he does not yet know what vice and evil are.

Kunti's eldest son goes straight to her, and after bowing to her, asks, 'Mother, has Bhima come home? I do not see him here. We searched for him on the banks of the river, in the garden and in the woods there, but he is nowhere to be found. We decided that he must have returned alone, before the rest of us.

But mother, I do not see him here. Have you sent him on an errand? Ah, I am sick with worry. My mighty brother was asleep beside the river and now he has vanished. I fear for his life.'

Kunti gives a small scream, and says, 'My son, I have not seen Bhima. He did not come to me. You must go back to Pramanakoti and look for him again. Go with your brothers, hurry!'

In great distress, she summons Vidura, and says, 'Illustrious Kshattri, Bhima is missing. All his other brothers have returned from the pleasure house by the river, but not my Bhima. Where has he gone?

O Vidura, Duryodhana hates my child. The Kaurava prince is evil and rash; he openly covets the throne. Oh, I am terrified that he has killed my Bhima out of his ambition. Vidura, my heart feels as if it is on fire.'

Vidura replies, ‘Say nothing Kunti, think of your other sons. You must protect them. If you accuse Duryodhana, he might kill your other boys as well. The great Dwaipayana has foretold that all your sons shall live long lives. The Sage’s words shall not be proved false. Bhima will come back safely to you.’

Vidura returns to his own palace, not wanting to arouse any suspicions, while Kunti remains in hers, in terrible anxiety, with her sons.

Eight nightmarish days pass for Kunti and her sons in Hastinapura. On the eighth, Bhima awakes from his deep slumber after drinking the nagamrita. He feels awesome new strength in his body – strength past measure.

Seeing him awake, the Nagas set up a cheer, crying, ‘Bhimasena, the nagamrita you have drunk has given you the strength of ten thousand elephants! No one will ever be able to vanquish you in battle now. Kururishabha, now bathe in this sacred water, and go back home. Your brothers are full of anxiety for you.’

Bhima bathes in those sacral waters, puts on white robes and garlands of white flowers. He eats the paramanna, of rice and sugar, which the Nagas give him.Wearing unearthly ornaments, he receives worship and blessings from the serpents, and saluting them, thanking them, he rises up from Nagaloka in Patala.

The Nagas brings the lotus-eyed Bhima up from under the river and set him back in the same garden, on the bank where he had fallen asleep eight days ago. Then they vanish before his eyes.

Great Bhimasena now runs back to his mother, as quickly as his father Vayu flies. He bows to her and to his eldest brother Yudhishtira, and sniffs the heads of his younger brothers. She, in turn, and those other rishabhas, his brothers, embrace him, the scourge of all his enemies.

With boundless love, they cry repeatedly, ‘Ah, what joy today, what wondrous joy!’

Now Bhima, the mighty, tells his brothers about the murderous treachery of Duryodhana, and also everything that happened in the realm of the Nagas.

Then Yudhishtira says, ‘Do not speak of this to anyone but be silent. But from today be vigilant and all of you watch over one another closely.’

And vigilant indeed they are from then. Lest they lapse into carelessness, Vidura is always cautioning the sons of Kunti.

Some time passes, then again Duryodhana mixes some deadly poison in Bhima's food. But Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra's son by a Vaisya woman, who loves the Pandavas, warns them. However, Bhima eats the food that Duryodhana gives him, and digests it, poison and all, with no ill effect at all.

The poison failing to do its work, Duryodhana, Karna and Shakuni hatch many other plots to kill the second Pandava. The sons of Pandu know about every one of these, but having been warned by Vidura, they never let on that they do, and never show their anger in the least way.

Meanwhile, Dhritarashtra sees the Kuru princes becoming idlers, and turning to mischief to pass their time, and appoints Kripa as their Guru, and sends them to him for instruction. Born in a bank of reeds, Kripa is a knower of the Vedas, and he becomes the Kuru princes' first master at arms."

CANTO 130

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, tell me everything about the birth of Kripa. How was he born in a bank of reeds, and where did he get his weapons from?"

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, Maharishi Gautama had a son called Saradwat, who was born holding some arrows in his hand. Parantapa, Saradwat showed an exceptional gift for mastering the use of weapons but no special genius for any other branch of learning. He acquired all his astras with the rigours with which other Brahmanas study the Vedas.

Indra became afraid of the astras, the might and the tapasya of Saradwat. Kurusthama, the king of the Devas summoned an Apsara calls Janapadi and said to her, 'Go and distract Saradwat from his tapasya.'

Janapadi went to Saradwat's enchanting asrama, and proceeded to tempt the hermit armed with bow and arrows. Saradwat saw the nymph, who wore a single diaphanous robe over her peerless and unearthly body, and his eyes widened. His bow and arrows slipped from his hands, and his body shook with powerful emotion.

Somehow, he summoned the strength to resist her temptation, but the initial surge of excitement that seized him at the sight of her made him ejaculate involuntarily. He sprang up, left his bow and arrows and his deerskin, and fled from Janapadi as if for his life. His seed, though, had fallen into a clump of reeds, where it was divided in two. From the two portions of semen, twin children, a boy and girl, were born.

At that time, King Shantanu was out hunting in the same forest, and one of his soldiers came upon the magically born twins. The man saw the abandoned bow, quiver and deerskin, and felt the children might belong to a Brahmana who was a master at arms.

He picked up the bow and arrows, and the twins, and brought them to Shantanu. Moved to pity, Shantanu said, 'Let them be as my own children,'

and took them to his palace.

Purushottama Shantanu, son of Prateepa, had the ritual karma performed for Saradwat's twins. Because he had adopted them out of pity, and because he considered them to be God's gifts of kindness to him, he called them Kripa and Kripi.

Meanwhile, having left his old asrama, Saradwat continued earnestly with his study of the science of weapons. With occult vision, he learnt that his twins were growing in the palace of Shantanu. He went to the king and told him who he was, and then he taught his son Kripa the four branches of the science of arms, and also the Vedas and other secret and hermetic mysteries.

In short time Kripa also became a master of the astra shastra. Later, Dhritarashtra's hundred sons, the Pandavas, the Yadava princes, the Vrishnis, and indeed young Kshatriyas from many other kingdoms all learnt the arts of weapons and warfare from Kripa Acharya."

CANTO 131

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, Bhishma thinks it is time that his grandsons receive a higher education than what Kripa can give them, and he begins to seek a Guru for his wards, a master of exceptional tejas and an even greater master of astras than Kripa.

Deciding, Bharatottama, that only he is sufficiently intelligent, illustrious, a great enough master at arms and truly one that himself possesses godlike prowess, Ganga's son, O Purushavyaghra, appoints Bharadwaja's son Drona, who knows the Vedas deeply, to be the preceptor of Kuru princes. Drona, famed throughout the world as being the greatest master of weapons, is pleased by the warm welcome and the honour accorded him by Bhishma, and he accepts charge of the Kuru princes.

He teaches them all the skills of weapons and warfare, and in quick time, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, all endowed with great strength and talent, become highly proficient in the use of every kind of weapon."'

'Janamejaya asked, "Brahmana, how was Drona born? How and where did he acquire his astras? Why did he come to the Kurus? Whose son was he, that he possessed such tejas? Also, tell us about Drona's son Aswatthama, who was also a great warrior, and how he was born.

All this I want to hear in detail, O Muni. I beg you tell me about it all."

Vaisampayana said, "At the source of the Ganga, there lived a Maharishi called Bharadwaja, always at stern and ceaseless tapa. One day, long ago, he went with many other great Rishis to the river to bathe before performing the Agnihotra. Arriving on the banks of the river, he saw the beautiful and youthful Apsara Ghritachi in the water, bathing.

Her lovely face was haughty, and now suffused with the languor of her bath, as, finishing, she rose from the water. As she stepped softly onto the bank, the single garment she wore parted, showing her shining nakedness.

Seeing her like that the Rishi Bharadwaja was stricken by such desire that in a moment he ejaculated.

Hastily the Sage caught his emission in the waterpot he carried, his drana. Later, a splendid son was born from his seed, and Bharadwaja called him Drona for the vessel from which he was born.

Drona mastered the Vedas and all their angas. In the past, Bharadwaja, master of astras, had taught the secret of the fiery Agneyastra to the Rishi Agnivesha; now Agnivesha, the fireborn Sage, imparted the secret to Drona, the son of his Guru.

King Prishata of the Panchalas was a great friend of Bharadwaja. Prishata had a son, whom he named Drupada. Every day that Kshatriyarishabha, Drupada, came to Bharadwaja's asrama, to play with Drona and study with him.

Rajan, when Prishata died, the mighty-armed Drupada became king of the northern Panchalas. About this time, the illumined Bharadwaja also left his body and rose into Swarga.

Drona continued living in his father's asrama and performing tapasya. He mastered the Vedas and Vedangas, made ashes of his sins with penance, and then married Saradwata's daughter Kripi. She was chaste, always performing tapa and the agnihotra, and she gave birth to a son. As soon as he was born, he neighed delightfully, even like a small Uchhaisravas.

An invisible being spoke from the sky, 'Let the child whose cry has echoed everywhere be named Aswatthama,' which, of course, means horse-voiced.

Drona's joy knew no bounds when little Aswatthama was born; the child was the very vision of his eye. He continued living in his father's hermitage and devoted himself to the study of astra shastra, the science of weapons.

Rajan, around this time, Drona heared that the great Brahmana Parasurama Jamadagnya, son of Jamadagni, slayer of his foes, greatest of all warriors, of incalculable learning of every kind, had declared that he meant to give away all his wealth to deserving Brahmanas.

Drona had heard all about Rama's unrivalled knowledge of arms and especially the Devastras, as well as his knowledge of dharma. Drona wished fervently for both, and set out with his disciples for the Mahendra Mountain. Arriving there, he saw the Bhargava, the radiant son of Bhrigu, sitting in dhyana with his mind perfectly controlled.

Drona and his sishyas approached Rama, and Drona told the Avatara his name and that he was born into the line of Angiras. He laid his head on the ground at Parasurama's feet in worship.

Drona said, 'I am the son of Bharadwaja, but I am not born of any woman. I am a highborn Brahmana, called Drona, and I have come to you for the wealth you want to give away.'

The illumined savager of the Kshatriyas replied, 'You are welcome, Dvija! Tell me what you want from me.'

Drona replied, 'I want your immortal wealth, O you of vratas beyond count!'

'Tapasvin,' replied Rama, 'All my gold and other wealth I have already given away to various Brahmanas. This Earth also, adorned with towns and cities as with a garland, down to the very Sea, I have given to Kashyapa. I now have only this body and my astras. I can give you either of these. Say which you want, quickly!'

Drona replied, 'O Bhargava, I beg you, give me all your astras, and the mantras to cast and recall them.'

Parasurama said, 'So be it' and gave all his astras to Drona; he made a gift to him of the very astra shastra, the science of weapons, with all its mysteries and laws. Drona received this greatest gift in joy, and prostrating gratefully at Bhargava's feet, set out for the city of his childhood friend Drupada."

CANTO 132

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O King, Bharadwaja's mighty son presents himself before King Drupada, and says joyfully, 'I am your friend Drona!'

But the lord of the Panchalas does not like what he hears. Deluded by power and wealth, he knits his brows in anger, and his eyes turn red.

Drupada replies, 'Brahmana, surely you are dimwitted that you suddenly claim to be my friend! Fool, how can a great king like me and a pauper like you be friends? Yes, once we were both students in your father's asrama and then we were equals and also friends.

Time wears away all things and friendship as well. In this world, no friendship endures in any heart, for time gnaws at it and anger destroys it. Forget, Brahmanashreshta, that we were ever friends. That old friendship I had with you was for a specific purpose: you were my Guru's son.

Between a rich man and a poor one, between a learned man and an unlettered one, between a hero and a coward, how can there ever be friendship? Why do you want to be my friend? There can be friendship or even enmity between equals in wealth or in strength. A beggar and a king can neither have friendship nor enmity between them, for they are not equals but a superior and an inferior.

A pure born man can never have friendship with a lowborn one. A man who is a Maharatha cannot be the friend of a man who is not a Maharatha; and a king cannot be the friend of one who is not a king! Tell me, foolish Drona, why do you invoke our old friendship and dream of renewing it?'

Drona trembles with wrath. He says nothing, but considers for a moment what he would do to Drupada, to humble the Panchala king. Turning on his heel, he strides out from Drupada's court and makes his way towards the capital of the Kurus, named after the elephant."

CANTO 133

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Drona comes to Hastinapura and, without disclosing his presence in the city, begins living in the house of his brother-in-law, Kripa. During the intervals between Kripa's classes to the Kuru princes, Drona's son Aswatthama gives Kunti's sons some casual hints about the use of arms. But he does not reveal his true skills even to them, or how mighty he is.

Drona has been living secretly in Kripa's house for some time, when, one day, all the Kuru princes come out of the city together. They begin to roam about, in freedom, and to play with a ball, which soon enough falls down a well. The young Kshatriyas do their best to retrieve the ball, but in vain; they cannot fetch it out.

They feel ashamed and begin to look at one another with some anxiety: Imagine, the great scions of the House of Kuru not being able to get a ball out of a well! Suddenly, they see a rather dark-skinned, lean Brahmana quite close to them; he has obviously just performed the Agnihotra and sanctified himself with it, and finished his nitya, his daily worship.

The princes are drawn to the stranger and surround him. Smiling slightly, Drona says, 'Well, Princes, a shame upon your Kshatriya prowess, and a shame also upon your skill at arms. To think that you are born in the race of Bharata and cannot retrieve a ball from a well. Promise to feed me tonight and I will fetch out your ball for you with these blades of grass. Look, I will throw my ring after your ball and fetch that as well.'

Drona pulls a valuable ring from his finger and throws it into the well.

Yudhishtira says, 'Brahmana, you ask for a trifle. With Acharya Kripa's leave, ask us for something that will last you a lifetime.'

His smile widening, Drona says, 'With mantras I will make astras of these long blades of grass. This grass will have powers that other weapons

do not. One blade will pierce your ball, another my ring, and the rest shall form a chain and fetch both out of the well.'

Without a moment's hesitation, Drona does exactly as he says. The princes goggle; they feel their chests will burst with wonder and disbelief.

They whisper, 'We bow to you, O Brahmana, no one on Earth has your skills. Tell us who you are, tell us whose son you are. Tell us what we can do for you.'

Drona replies, 'Go to Bhishma, describe me to him and tell him what I did. He will know who I am.'

The princes cry, 'We will!' and run to their grandsire, and tell him about the extraordinary Brahmana's feat. Bhishma knows at once that this is Drona they describe. He knows that this is the Guru he has been seeking for his grandsons, and goes out himself to welcome the Brahmana reverently, and brings him into the palace.

Bhishma, greatest of warriors, asks Drona, 'What brings a Mahapurusha like you to Hastinapura?'

Drona tells him his story. 'Mighty Bhishma, I once went to the Rishi Agnivesha to learn the use of weapons and the astra shastra from him. I lived as a brahmacharin, with jata on my head, and served my Guru humbly for many years.

At that time, the Panchala prince Drupada Yagnasena also lived in the same asrama, serving Agnivesha as I did for the same reason that I did. He and I became friends; he always looked after me and we grew close as brothers, loving each other dearly. As I said, many years we spent together.

O Kurusthama, we were together from our early boyhood, studying together, and Drupada always did and said whatever he felt would please me. Once, O Bhishma, he said to me, "Drona, I am my great father's favourite son. When I become king of the Panchalas, my kingdom shall be yours. My precious friend, this I swear. My kingship, my wealth and my happiness will all depend on you, O Drona."

Finally, we finished our tutelage, and he left for home. We parted warmly; he repeated what he had said to me, and ever since I have kept it in my heart.

A while later, my father wanted me to marry and since I also wanted to have a son, I married Kripi of the short hair, of great intelligence, who kept many stern vratas and always performed the agnihotra and other austere rituals.

In time, she gave birth to our son Aswatthama, who is as splendid as the Sun and as powerful. I was as delighted when my son was born as my father had been when I was born. I doted on him.

One day, Aswatthama saw some rich men's sons drinking milk, which we could not afford, and began crying. I felt so stricken that I lost my very reason, why, I could not have told east from west, or north from south, so sad did I feel. I could have begged for a cow, but it would have been of someone who had only a few cows himself and would have perhaps had to stop performing his sacrifices and lost punya because of that.

Instead, I decided I would beg a cow from someone who had many cows and would not feel the loss of one. I wandered from country to country, kingdom to kingdom, but I could not get myself a milch cow.

When I returned home, disappointed, I saw something that truly broke my heart. Some of my son's playmates mixed powdered rice in water and gave it to my little Aswatthama, telling him that it was milk. My poor child drank it eagerly, and began to dance for joy, crying, 'I have drunk milk! I have drunk milk today!'

His friends grinned at his naïveté. Then there were those that whispered, but within my hearing, 'Drona claims to be the greatest master of weapons on earth. But he makes no effort to earn a livelihood and his son drinks rice powder mixed in water and dances for joy thinking that it is milk.'

I was desperate, but I still decided that even if I had to live as an outcast, I would not become anyone's servant for the sake of wealth. Then I heard that Drupada, my old friend, had become king of the Somaka Panchalas. In great joy, the words he had once said to me ringing in my mind, fondly remembering our old friendship, I took my wife and my child and went in great hope to Drupada's kingdom.

He made me wait a day before he even allowed me into his court, but I never doubted him for a moment. Entering his grand sabha, I cried, 'Purushavyaghra, tiger among men, I am your friend Drona, to whom you promised your kingdom!'

I approached him confidently, as a friend should. But Drupada laughed in my face; he mocked me, saying, 'Brahmana, surely you are dimwitted that you suddenly claim to be my friend. Fool, how can a great king like me and a pauper like you be friends? Yes, once we were both students in your father's asrama and then we were equals and also friends.

Time wears all things away and friendship as well. In this world, no friendship endures in any heart, for time gnaws at it and anger destroys it. Forget, Brahmanottama, that we were ever friends. The old friendship that I had with you was for a specific purpose.

Between a rich man and a poor one, between a learned man and an unlettered one, between a hero and a coward, how can there ever be friendship? Why do you want to be my friend? There can be friendship or even enmity between equals in wealth or in strength. A beggar and a king can neither have friendship nor enmity between them, for they are not equals but a superior and an inferior.

A pure born man can never have friendship with a lowborn one. A man who is a Maharatha cannot be the friend of a man who is not a Maharatha; and a king cannot be the friend of one who is not a king. Tell me, foolish Drona, why do you invoke our old friendship and dream of renewing it?

I do not remember ever having promised you my kingdom, but Brahmana I will certainly give you shelter for a night, and food.'

With my wife and child, I left his palace and his city immediately, vowing in my heart to do what I certainly will, and soon. Anger seethes in me, O Bhishma, ever since Drupada humiliated me. His mockery rings in my ears. I have come to the Kurus to find gifted and obedient pupils; I have come to fulfil your wishes. Tell me what I should do now.'

Bhishma says to Bharadwaja's son, 'String your bow, Brahmana, and make the Kuru princes master warriors. You shall have honour and worship in Hastinapura, and a fine home filled with every luxury, which you must enjoy to your heart's content. Drona, from now you are the lord of whatever wealth the Kurus own, and of their kingdom and sovereignty.

From today, the Kurus belong to you, so whatever the wish that burns your heart: consider it already accomplished. You, O Brahmana are the fruit of our greatest punya and fortune. By coming here you confer the greatest favour upon me.'"

CANTO 134

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Honoured by Bhishma, that Manavottama Drona, tejasvin, now begins living openly among the Kurus, who duly revere him. When he has rested, Bhishma brings his grandsons to the Brahmana, and also many precious gifts. The mighty Bhishma joyfully gives Bharadwaja's son a fine house in which to live, stocked with rice and furnished with every comfort and all manner of wealth.

Drona, best of archers, now accepts the sons of Pandu and the sons of Dhritarashtra to be his sishyas. He takes them apart, makes them touch his feet, and then says to them with some emotion, 'There is something that I want you to do for me when I have made you master warriors. Tell me, princes, that you will do what I want.'

All the other Kuru princes remain silent, but without a moment's hesitation Arjuna says, 'I will do whatever you want.'

Drona clasps Arjuna in an embrace, sniffs the top of the prince's head repeatedly in affection, and tears roll down his cheeks. The princes' tutelage begins, and he teaches them the use of weapons both mundane and unearthly. Bharatarishabha, apart from the young Kurus, many other Kshatriyas princes from other lands come to Drona for instruction, including the Suta's son Karna.[8*]

Karna is envious of Arjuna and frequently taunts the Pandava; Duryodhana befriends him and together they always mock all the sons of Pandu. But Arjuna is entirely devoted to the study of the astra shastra, and becomes like his master's shadow. He excels all the rest in his natural gifts, his prowess especially with the longbow, and his dedication and perseverance.

Drona teaches them all equally, but quickly Arjuna outstrips the others, and the master is soon convinced that none of the rest could ever hope to match the skills of this pupil, the son of Indra.

Drona's lessons continue, and one day he gives all his pupils earthen pots to fill with water from the river and bring back. To his own son Aswatthama he gives a pot with a larger mouth than all the rest. He says that the lesson would begin as soon as the first student arrives in his presence with a full waterpot. Of course, Aswatthama arrives earlier than the princes and his father imparts some choice secrets of the astra shastra to him.

Arjuna chafes at this for some days, then, one morning, he arrives with a filled waterpot long before even Aswatthama, and in honour now, Drona teaches this exceptional pupil before the others; he shares his special secrets with Arjuna, who has used the Varunastra to fill his vessel.

So, Aswatthama loses his advantage and Arjuna serves his Guru so diligently and lovingly that he becomes Drona's favourite sishya, yes, as dear to him, at least, as his own son.

One day, Drona summons the palace cook and says to him, 'Never serve Arjuna his meal in the dark, and do not tell him that I said anything to you.'

However, just a few days later, while Arjuna is eating his night meal a sudden gust of wind blows out the lamp upon his table. Arjuna continues eating in the dark, by force of habit his hand taking the food to his mouth without the help of his eyes. That brilliant prince does not fail to notice this. It means that now he can continue to practise his archery at night!

The same night, Drona hears the lone twang of a bowstring, and coming out embraces his favourite sishya. The Acharya cries, 'I swear that you will be the greatest archer in the world, and no one shall be your equal.'

Now Drona teaches Arjuna the art of fighting from horseback, from the back of an elephant, from a chariot, and on the ground. He teaches Arjuna all about the mace, the sword, the lance, the spear and the dart; he teaches him how to fight many opponents simultaneously.

Drona's fame as an unrivalled master spreads across the land, and princes and even kings arrive in Hastinapura from the most far-flung places, in thousands, to have some instructions from the Acharya. Among those that come, in hope, O Rajan, is Ekalavya, son of Hiranyadhanush, king of the Nishadas. Drona senses the boy's genius at once and refuses to take him as his pupil, saying that he is a Nishada. The master fears this youth might surpass all his highborn sishyas.

But, O Parantapa, Ekalavya lays his head at Drona's feet, makes his way into the deep jungle, where he fashions a lifelike image in clay of Drona,

and begins to worship the statue as if this is Drona himself, whom the youth has taken in his heart for his Guru.

Before that clay image Ekalavya ceaselessly practises with his bow and arrows. Such is his devotion to his master, his extraordinary talent, and the rigour of his discipline that he quickly becomes an exceptional archer. Effortlessly he fits arrows to his bowstring, aims and looses them with unerring accuracy: the three parts of archery. His skill is prodigious, matchless.

One day, with Drona's leave, the Kuru and Pandava princes go hunting in their chariots. A servant follows them, with a hunting dog and carrying whatever the princes might need in the wilderness.

Arriving in the forest, the young Kshatriyas earnestly begin their hunt. The dog wanders off on its own and comes upon Ekalavya. It sees the black Nishada, covered in dirt, wearing a black hide, his hair tangled in wild jata, and barks at him.

Quick as thinking, Ekalvya turns and shoots seven arrows into the dog's mouth, silencing it. Whimpering, the dog runs back to its masters, the princes. They gape in wonder and disbelief at the beast. They feel humbled, for certainly none of them could have shot seven arrows into the dog's mouth so swiftly and unerringly, when it must have turned to run after receiving the first one.

The princes comb the forest for the hidden archer. Soon enough, they find him, shooting arrows from his bow in an incredible, endless stream. Seeing the grim faced stranger, they ask, 'Whose son are you?'

He replies, 'Kshatriyas, I am the son of Hiranyadhanush, king of the Nishadas. Know that I am the sishya of Drona, and I toil to become a master of the longbow.'

The Kuru princes learn all there is to know about Ekalavya, ride back to Hastinapura and go straight to Drona, to whom they describe the miraculous archery that the young Nishada in the forest displayed.

Arjuna is terribly distressed, trembling with envy. He draws Drona aside privately and says accusingly, 'Master, you clasped me in your arms with love and told me that no other pupil of yours would be my equal, and that I would be the greatest archer in the world. How, then, is the Nishada king's son clearly better than I am?'

Drona thinks for a moment, and quickly decides what he must do. Taking only Arjuna with him, he goes into the jungle to where Ekalavya

was. He sees the Nishada prince, wearing filthy rags, matted jata on his head, his body covered in dirt, with a bow in his hands from which the arrows flare in a ceaseless, effortless tide.

When Ekalavya sees Drona, he runs to him, touches his feet and prostrates himself before the Brahmana. Worshipping Drona, the Nishada tells him that he is his sishya and then stands with folded hands, awaiting his Guru's command.

Rajan, now Drona says to Ekalavya, 'If, O Archer, you are truly my sishya, then you must give me dakshina.'

Beaming to hear this, Ekalavya cries, 'O my Guru, tell me what you want as dakshina, for there is nothing that I will not give my master.'

Drona says, 'Ekalavya, give me the thumb of your right hand.'

Never pausing, the smile of joy still on his face, Ekalavya slices off his right thumb with a sharp arrow and hands it to Drona. When his wound heals, and he begins to shoot again without his thumb, he is not the archer he has been; he has lost his lightlike swiftness and sureness of hand. Arjuna's feverish jealousy leaves him.

Two of Drona's pupils are masters of the mace: Duryodhana and Bhima, who, of course, are inveterate rivals, as well. Aswatthama excels all the others at the secrets of the most mysterious astras; Nakula and Sahadeva are the finest swordsmen; Yudhishtira is the best rathika, chariot warrior. However, as a complete warrior, Arjuna has no equal by a long way: he is the most intelligent, resourceful, tireless and persevering prince.

A great master of every weapon, he outstrips the greatest of Maharathas, and his renown spreads across the world, from sea to sea. Though all the princes receive the same instruction, none can approach Arjuna at archery, or, indeed, in the devotion he bears to his Guru.

Amongst all the princes, Arjuna alone becomes an Atiratha, a chariot warrior who can face sixty thousand enemies at once! Dhritarashtra's fell sons see the awesome strength of Bhima and the matchless archery of Arjuna, and envy roils their very entrails.

Narapumgava, one day, when their tutelage is complete, Drona wants to test the skills of his disciples, and gathers them together. Before this, he has a wooden bird, a vulture, made and perched on the highest branch of a lofty tree, to be a target.

When the princes stand before him, Drona says crisply, 'Pick up your bows and aim at the bird in the tree. As soon as I tell you, shoot to cut its

head off. You will each have one shot, turn by turn.'

Drona, best among all Angira's descendants, says first to Yudhishtira, 'Yudhishtira, you will have the first chance.'

Yudhishitra picks up his bow and aims at the faraway wooden bird. Bharatarishabha, now Drona asks Yudhishtira, 'Prince, do you see the bird on the treetop?'

Yudhishtira replies to his Guru, 'I do.'

Drona now asks, 'What else do you see? Do you see the tree, your brothers, and me?'

Yudhishtira says, 'I see the tree, yourself, my brothers and the bird.'

Drona repeats his question, and Yudhishtira's reply is the same. Apparently annoyed, Drona says, 'Stand back, Yudhishtira; you will not strike the bird.'

Now Drona calls, one by one, the other princes, Duryodhana and his brothers, Bhima and also the princes from other lands who are his disciples. He asks each one the same question, and from each he has the same answer that Yudhishtira gives him: 'I see the tree, yourself, my fellow sishyas, and the bird.'

Drona does not give any of them a chance to shoot at the wooden bird but reproachfully tells them all to stand down."

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8* There is some doubt about Karna appearing here. It seems likely that he enters the picture only later, during the exhibition of arms.

CANTO 135

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When all the other princes have failed his test, Drona, with a smile, calls on Arjuna. He says, 'It seems you are the one to bring the bird down. Raise your bow and aim, my son.'

Arjuna raises his bow, bends it and takes aim. He stands very still, then Drona asks softly, 'Arjuna, do you see the bird, the tree and me?'

Arjuna replies, 'I only see the bird, master, not the tree or you.'

Drona seems pleased with Arjuna's answer. He asks that Pandava Maharatha, 'If you see only the vulture, describe it to me.'

Arjuna says, 'I see only the head of the vulture, not its body.'

The hair on Drona's body stands on end in delight. He says to Partha, 'Shoot it.' Arjuna looses his arrow and neatly severs the wooden vulture's head, bringing it down. Drona clasps Arjuna in his arms; he feels certain that Drupada and his allies are as good as vanquished.

Some days after this, Bharatarishabha, Drona goes to bathe in the holy Ganga, taking all his pupils with him. As soon as Drona enters the water an enormous crocodile, which seems to have been sent by Yama himself, seizes him by the thigh. Now, the Brahmana is quite capable of killing the beast and saving himself. Instead, pretending to be helpless, he cries as if in a panic to his sishyas on the shore, 'Save me! Save me!'

The words hardly leave his mouth, when Arjuna has shot the monstrous crocodile with five terrific arrows, cutting it in five pieces so it releases Drona's leg and dies, while the others still stand dazed on the riverbank. Once again, seeing how vigilant Arjuna is, how quick his reflexes are, Drona is pleased no end.

Bharadwaja's illustrious son says to the irresistible rathika Arjuna, 'Powerful one, receive this ineluctable astra from me, and the mantras for discharging and recalling it. It is the Brahmasirsa, the weapon formed like

the heads of Brahma. You must never cast it at any human adversary, for if invoked against an inferior enemy it can consume the very universe.

Child, they say that this astra has no equal in the three worlds. Keep it with the utmost care. If ever a superhuman enemy threatens you, you can use the Brahmasirsa to kill him, and only then.'

Arjuna swears that he will do as Drona says, and then, folding his hands to his Guru, receives that Mahastra.

Drona says to him, 'No one on Earth shall become a better archer than you. No enemy shall ever vanquish you, and your achievements shall be unparalleled.'"

CANTO 136

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Bharata, when Drona sees that his pupils, the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu, are masters at arms, he goes to the blind king and speaks to him in the presence of Kripa, Somadatta, Bahlika, the sage Bhishma, Vyasa and Vidura.

Drona says, 'Greatest of the Kuru kings, your children's tutelage is complete. I crave your leave for them to show their skills to the people, at an exhibition of arms.'

Dhritarashtra says in joy, 'Brahmana, you have accomplished a great task. You decide the time, the place and the nature of the exhibition. Ah, today sorrow overwhelms me that I am blind and I envy those blessed with sight who can watch my children perform. Vidura, my brother, give Drona all the help he needs; nothing will make me happier.'

Vidura assures the king that he will, and goes with Drona. Drona selects a plot of land where no trees or bushes grow, but which has a good number of wells and small springs. Upon that land, he worships and offers a sacrifice to the Gods, on a day of an auspicious nakshatra, in the presence of the people. Bharatarishabha, the king's artisans build a large and elegant arena and dais on that land, by the rules for such a construction laid down in the Shastras. They bring every kind of weapon to the dais.

They build a separate, fine enclosure for the women, while the common citizens build themselves tiered stands from where to watch the princes' display, while the richer ones pitch bright and luxurious tents for themselves around the arena.

Comes the day of the tournament and Dhritarashtra arrives at the royal enclosure, of almost unearthly beauty, made from gold, adorned with strings of pearls, and with lapis lazuli. Bhishma and the great Kripa walk before Dhritarashtra, and his ministers come with him.

Wearing rich finery, accompanied by their sakhis, Gandhari, of great fortune, Kunti and the other ladies of the royal household climb the steps to their platforms, even as the Devastris do the Sumeru Mountain, in joy.

People of the four varnas throng the arena, to watch the princes show their skills. So impatient are they that the teeming crowd assembles there in what seems like a single moment. Trumpets blare, drums sound on every side, and the voices of the people echo as a single great voice. The arena is like a disturbed sea.

Finally, Drona, wearing white, the sacred thread around his body white, his hair all white, and his beard, as also the garland he wears, and his body smeared with white sandalwood paste, enters the arena, with Aswatthama at his side. They appear like the full Moon in a clear sky with Mangala, Mars, beside him.

Entering, the son of Bharadwaja performs the apposite worship, and other Brahmans, all knowers of mantras, perform every auspicious and solemn ritual. Melodious music is played on stringed and wind instruments, then some servitors enter, bearing armfuls of shining weapons, which they set down upon the dais.

Now the Bharata princes, mighty Kshatriyas, file in, led by the eldest prince, Yudhishtira. They wear gauntlets, and carry bows and quivers, and march in, in order of their age, and begin a breathtaking display of their skills at arms.

So powerful and swift is that exhibition that some of the people lower or cover their heads in fright, that arrows might fall upon them from the sky, while others watch calmly, but wonder-stricken.

Targets are set up, each bearing one prince's name. Flying around the arena on horseback every prince finds his own target, unerringly, with a clutch of arrows. So magnificent are they that the people feel they have been transported to a city of Gandharvas.

And, O Bharata, suddenly hundreds of thousands of voices are raised, crying, 'O well done! Well done!' The people gape in wonder.

Repeatedly, the princes show their mastery at the longbow, their stunning skills as charioteers. Then they pick up their swords and small shields, and begin to circle the arena, like a pride of young lions. The people stare unwinkingly at their magnificent physiques, their agility, grace and lightning-swift control over their weapons, with which they hew and strike at one another, but never once so much as nick their adversaries' skin.

Next, like two mountains Bhima and Suyodhana enter the arena, maces in hand, both of them inwardly delighted at the prospect of this duel. They gird their loins and, drawing deep breaths, roar like two elephants trumpeting against each other for the favours of a cow-elephant.

Like two enraged elephants, the two awesome Kshatriyas circle each other, right and then left, and then they strike out like thunder and lightning at one another, while Vidura describes their duel to the blind Dhritarashtra and Kunti does the same for Gandhari, whose eyes are bound."

CANTO 137

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "When Duryodhana and Bhima, strongest of all Kshatriyas, fight in the arena, they immediately divide the spectators between them.

Some of the people cry, 'Look at the mighty Suyodhana!'

Others shout, 'Bhima! The invincible Bhima!'

There is great uproar, and seeing the crowd like an agitated sea, Drona immediately calls his son and says, 'Stop them! They must not divide the people like this and provoke the fury of the crowd.'

Aswatthama comes between the combatants, who have their maces in the air and are like two swollen oceans agitated by the winds of the Pralaya. Reluctantly they stand apart.

Now Drona walks into the arena himself and holds his hand up so the musicians stop playing and silence falls. Drona speaks in a voice like rumbling clouds, 'Now you will see the skills of Arjuna, dearer to me than my own son. Partha is the son of Indra and a master of every weapon, like Vishnu's younger brother himself!'

The young Arjuna performs the rites of propitiation, and walks into the arena wearing his finger-guards, carrying his bow and his quiver full of arrows, clad in golden mail. He appears like an evening cloud that reflects the sun's last rays, and is lit by the colours of a rainbow, and also by streaks of lightning.

The crowd is beside itself to see this prince, and conches resound all around the stadium, and the musicians take up again in celebration. There is a great roar in that place, for thousands of voices are raised at once in praise of Arjuna.

'Here is Kunti's son, so full of grace!'

'This is the third Pandava, the middle one!'

'He is the son of Indra!'

‘The protector of the Kurus!’

‘The greatest warrior!’

‘The greatest man of dharma!’

‘No one is as dignified, respectful and well behaved as Arjuna!’

When Kunti hears all this, her breasts well with milk, and the tears of joy that stream from her eyes mingle with the milk.

Dhritarashtra hears the uproar of affection for Arjuna, and in some delight asks Vidura, ‘Kshatri, what is this din, like an ocean suddenly risen to tear open the sky?’

Vidura replies, ‘Rajan, Arjuna, the son of Pandu and Pritha, has entered the arena wearing his kavacha. The crowd is shouting for him!’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Mahatman, I am blessed, favoured and protected by the three fires that have sprung from the sacred fuel which is Kunti!’

When the excited people are somewhat calm again, Arjuna begins an amazing display of his skills at arms. He makes fire with the Agneyastra, creates water with the Varunastra, winds with the Vayavyastra, and clouds in the sky with the Parjannyastra.

With the Bhaumastra he creates land, earth, and with the Parvatyastra he makes mountains; then, with the Antardhana, he makes all these vanish in a wink. With other weapons, he makes himself great and minuscule; one moment, he appears at his chariothead; the next, he rides in the chariot; and the next instant he stands upon the ground.

He strikes targets set up for him with dazzling volleys of different shafts, some soft, some slender and others thick. An iron boar flies, swift as time, around the arena, and the peerless bowman shoots five arrows, like a single shaft into its mouth, all five together from his bowstring. He looses twenty-one shafts into a hollow cow’s horn hung from a rope swaying wide.

Sinless one, Arjuna shows his magical skills at the longbow, the sword and the mace, as he walks around the arena.

Bharata, when Arjuna has almost finished his stunning display, when the crowd has fallen hushed by it, and the music, too, has stopped, suddenly, from the main gate to the arena comes a sound of someone slapping his arms against his shoulders and chest, like thunder, announcing himself and his might.

O King, the people cower at that sound, thinking, ‘Are the mountains being riven, is the Earth herself cracking open, or are thunderheads roaring from a clear sky?’

Every eye is turned to the gate. Drona stands very still, with the five Pandavas around him, looking like the Moon surrounded by the five stars of the constellation Hasta. Duryodhana jumps up, surrounded by his hundred brothers and Aswatthama with them. The Kaurava prince and his brothers with their weapons raised looks like Indra, in the eldest days, surrounded by his celestial warriors just before the war against the Danavas."

CANTO 138

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “Slowly, wide-eyed, the people make way for that Purandara, and Karna enters the arena majestically, a walking mountain of presence, with his natural golden armour, his golden earrings that he is born with, his sword at his waist and his bow in his hand.

The great-eyed hero, who would become a razer of enemy armies, is Kunti’s son, born when she is a virgin in her father’s house. He is an amsa of the livid Sun, and his strength and his energy are those of a lion, a bull or of a tusker that leads his herd. He is as splendid as Surya, as handsome as Soma, and he blazes like Agni Deva. He is tall, like a golden palm tree, bursting with vital youth, and he can kill a lion with his bare hands, that son of Surya.

Handsome is Karna, and beyond counting his gifts and accomplishments. He walks haughtily into the arena and bows cursorily to Drona and Kripa, barely inclining his head. No one in the crowd can take their eyes off him for a moment and a single impatient thought is in everyone’s mind: ‘Who is he, this godlike warrior?’

The Suryaputra says to Arjuna, his brother he does not know, in a voice deep as rumbling thunderheads, ‘I will better your every feat, O Partha, before this staring crowd, and you will be astonished.’

In a moment, that crowd is on its feet, as if compelled to rise by an unseen and irresistible force. O Purushavyaghra, suddenly Duryodhana feels a tide of joy in his blood, while Arjuna feels a rush of shame and anger.

Taking Drona’s permission, formally, Karna proceeds calmly to perform every feat that Arjuna has; only he excels the Pandava’s exhibition, effortlessly. Duryodhana and his brothers run to embrace the golden warrior.

Duryodhana cries in joy, ‘Welcome, O Mahabaho, great hero! It is my great fortune that has brought you here today. Live among us as long as you please, for I am yours to command, as is this kingdom of the Kurus.’

Karna replies, ‘When you say it, I think of it as being already done. But, Suyodhana, I want only your friendship and your love. Also, my lord, I now challenge Arjuna to single combat, a duel.’

Duryodhana says, ‘Enjoy the best that life has to offer with me. Be my friend and my benefactor. O Parantapa, grind the heads of your enemies beneath your feet.’

Feeling humiliated, Arjuna says to Karna, who stands among the Kauravas like some shining cliff, ‘Karna, you shall find the fate of the unwelcome intruder and the uninvited speaker, for I will kill you.’

Karna replies, ‘This arena is not your private preserve, Arjuna, but meant for everyone to show their skills. The Kshatriya regards deeds not words. Argument is for the weak. Bharata, talk to me with arrows and I will strike your head off with arrows, why, in the very presence of your Guru.’

His brothers embrace Arjuna, one by one, and bowing to Drona, Partha stands forth, ready for the duel. On the other side, Duryodhana and his brothers embrace Karna, and he also stands forth with his bow and arrows. Suddenly the sky fills with dark clouds, gashed by lightning, and Indra’s bow, the rainbow, the Indradhanush, flashes its colours across the stadium and the arena. A flight of white cranes wings its way across the clouds, which seem to rumble with laughter at the pale birds.

Seeing Indra looking down upon the arena of the Kurus, out of love for his son, Surya dispels the clouds above his son, bathing Karna in golden light. Arjuna is hidden by the darkness of clouds, while Karna shines in the rays of the Sun.

Dhritarashtra’s sons stand with Karna, while Drona, Kripa and Bhishma stand behind Arjuna. The crowd is also divided in its loyalty, as are the women in their enclosure. Realising who the golden warrior is, Kunti faints. Helped by the women of the palace, Vidura revives her by sprinkling sandalwood paste mixed with water over her.

Waking, Kunti sees her two sons, wearing armour, facing each other, and fear grips her. But she is helpless to do anything. Saradwat’s son Kripa sees the two warriors with their bows in their hands, strung, ready for the duel. He knows the rules for such an encounter and speaks to Karna.

Kripa says, ‘This Pandava of the House of Kuru is the youngest son of Kunti, and stands ready to battle with you. Mahabaho, you must also declare yourself. Tell us your lineage, the names of your father and your mother, and of the royal line of which you are the jewel. When you have declared your ancestry, Arjuna will decide if he will fight you or not. For the sons of kings never engage lowborn men.’

Suddenly Karna’s face falls; he is like a brilliant lotus turned pale and its petals shredded by lashing rain.

But now Duryodhana speaks. ‘Acharya, the Shastras clearly say that three kinds of men can claim royalty for themselves: those that are born royal, great heroes and men that lead armies. If Arjuna will not fight anyone that is less than a king, I say to you I will crown Karna king of Anga!’

Immediately calling for a golden throne to be fetched, with dry rice grains, flowers, urns with holy water, gold for daana, Duryodhana has his Brahmanas formally crown Karna king of Anga, which is part of the Kuru kingdom but has no ruler. The white sovereign parasol is unfurled over Karna’s head, and yak-tail chamaras waved around that most graceful and tremendous warrior.

When the lusty cheering of the section of the crowd loyal to Duryodhana subsides, Karna, now a king, says to the Kaurava prince, ‘Tiger among princes, what can I give you in return for this gift of a kingdom? I will give you anything at all.’

Suyodhana says to him, ‘I want your friendship.’

Karna replies, ‘That is already yours.’

They embrace in joy, and feel untold delight.”

CANTO 139

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, 'Now Adhiratha walks into the arena, sweating, trembling, and supporting himself with a staff.'

Karna sees his adoptive father, puts down his bow and bows his head still dripping with the waters of the abhisheka that has made him a king. The Suta charioteer quickly covers his feet with his cloth and clasps Karna in his arms, his son who has become a king! His tears of love and joy fall onto Karna's head, mingling with the water of the coronation.

Bhima sees Adhiratha and mocks Karna, 'Suta putra, son of a charioteer, you do not deserve to die at Arjuna's hands. Throw away your bow and take up a horsewhip; it better suits your birth and your station. Lowborn fellow, surely you deserve to be king of Anga as much as a dog deserves to feed on the ghee from a yagna fire!'

Karna fetches a resounding sigh and looks up in despair at the Sun God in the sky, for he cannot respond to Bhima's taunts. But now, like a maddened elephant rising from a bank of lotuses, Duryodhana rises in wrath from amongst his brothers.

He says to the mighty Bhima, 'Vrikodara, your words demean you. A Kshatriya is always judged by just his prowess, and a Kshatriya even if he is a lowborn, deserves a fight if he is powerful. The origin of the greatest heroes is like the spring of a great river: unknown, hidden.

The Badava that consumes the world in flames rises from the Sea; the Vajra that burns the Danavas is made from a bone of a mortal man: Dadhichi. The lineage of the lustrous God Kartikeya, who is an amsa of every other Deva, the deity Guha, remains a mystery. Some say he is the son of Agni; some say he is Krittika's son; others say he is the child of Rudra, and yet others say he is Ganga's son.

We have all heard of men born as Kshatriyas becoming Brahmanas. Viswamitra and other Rajarishis, too, attained the Parabrahman. Our

peerless Acharya Drona is born from a waterpot, and Kripa of the race of Gautama in a clump of reeds. O Pandavas, consider your own births!

I ask you, can a doe bring forth a tiger like this Karna, as splendid as the Sun, and bearing every auspicious mark upon his body, and born with natural kavacha and kundala? I tell you this prince among men deserves to be not merely king of Anga but of the world! For he is so mighty, and I have sworn to obey him in all things. If there is anyone here who disagrees with what I have done for Karna, let him climb into his chariot and bend his bow with his feet!'

There is a loud and somewhat confused murmur among the crowd at what Duryodhana says. But now the Sun sets and Duryodhana takes Karna's hand and leads him out of the arena, now being lit with countless lamps. Rajan, the Pandavas, with Drona, Bhishma and Kripa, also return to the palace. The people also go to their homes, some with Arjuna's name on their lips, others with Karna's and others praising Duryodhana's deed.

Kunti, who recognises her firstborn son from all the auspicious marks upon his body, is delighted to see him made king of Anga. As for Duryodhana, having made a friend of Karna, he banishes the fear of Arjuna's stellar archery from his heart. Karna, great warrior, gives his wholehearted friendship and loyalty, and speaks sweetly and gently to the Kaurava prince, pleasing him in every way.

Yudhishtira is certain that there is no warrior on Earth like Karna."

CANTO 140

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Now that their education is complete and the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu are proficient at arms, Drona feels the time has come to ask them for Guru dakshina. He calls them together one day and says, 'It is time you gives me my dakshina for what I have taught you. I want you to vanquish the Panchala king Drupada in battle, bind him and bring him before me as a captive.'

Without hesitation, the young Kshatriyas reply, 'We shall!' They climb into their chariots and ride out of Hastinapura, taking Drona with them, to give their Guru the fee he wants. Those Purusharishabhas, bulls among men, sweep through Panchala lands, disdainfully razing any resistance they meet, and lay siege to Drupada's capital.

Duryodhana, Karna, mighty Yuyutsu, Dushasana, Vikarna, Jalasandha, Sulochana and so many other tremendous Kshatriya princes are now keen to lead the attack on the city. Riding in fine chariots, the princes follow the first charge of their cavalry, burst into the Panchala capital and thunder down the city streets.

Drupada, meanwhile, sees the attacking force; he hears the din it makes as it breaches his city gates and emerges from his palace with his brothers to face the intruders. The great Drupada Yagnasena is mighty indeed, but the Kurus roar all together and cover him with their arrows. But Drupada is a quenchless Kshatriya, with hardly an equal on Earth at arms; he flies at the enemy in his flashing white chariot, flitting here and there, and assailing them with a veritable gale of arrows from his wizardly bow.

Before this battle begins, and while the Kauravas are beating their chests to be at the city and its king, Arjuna does not string his bow but says quietly to his master, the great Brahmana, 'None of these can ever hope to take captive Drupada in battle. Let him exhaust them and then we will ride.'

Thus, the Pandavas wait a yojana outside the city, while the Kauravas attack it. Inside Drupada's capital, in the main city-square outside the palace, Drupada by now has the measure of the Kuru princes; his arrow storms steadily beat the marauders back, injuring almost every prince. So swiftly and adroitly does he manoeuvre his chariot that the Kurus feel that not one but a hundred terrible Drupadas harry them.

From every side, that dauntless king's shafts fly at the Kuru force, and then everywhere conches boom and drums are heard, in thousands and thousands, sounding the general alarm for the Panchalas to rouse themselves, for danger threatens. Quickly, a great Panchala force gathers and faces the enemy; from that teeming host there arises a roar like some mythic lion's; the twanging of their bowstrings threatens to tear open the sky.

This only enrages the dauntless Duryodhana, Vikarna, Subahu, Dirghalochana, Dushasana and their brothers. They loose fierce volleys of arrows at the Panchalas, wounding even their king.

But Prishata's son, O Bharata, the invincible Drupada raises his own archery to another realm. He whirls across the field like a wheel of fire, and in the twinkling of an eye strikes Duryodhana, Vikarna and even Karna, as well as countless other enemy warriors, with his fierce barbs, as if to quench those shafts' thirst for blood.

And now the people of the Panchala capital attack the Kurus from every side, with any kind of weapon on which they can lay their hands. Young and old rush into the fray, hurling spears and staffs and pestles at the enemy like clouds pour raindrops upon the Earth. The Kauravas are overwhelmed; they panic, and flee howling back out of the city and to where Drona waits with the Pandavas.

The Pandavas hear the wails and screams of their cousins, as they turn tail, and now the sons of Pandu calmly climb into their chariots. Arjuna quickly tells Yudhishtira that, as the heir to the throne of Hastinapura, he must not take part in this skirmish. Drona endorses the view, and Yudhishtira remains with his Guru.

Bhima, mace in hand, leads the charge of four brothers, while Nakula and Sahadeva ride beside the chariot wheels of Arjuna following his titanic brother, whose roars shake the Earth and the Sky. The Panchalas roar back, but their yells are drowned by the thunder of the chariot wheels of Atiratha Arjuna.

Like a great makara entering the Sea, Bhima Mahabaho rushes eagerly into the Panchala ranks, mace in hand, and he is like another Yama. His roars are like a tempest raging upon an ocean. Bhima first goes among the Panchala war elephants and smites them with his dreadful gada, like Death himself.

The mountainous beasts fall all around him, their heads smashed like melons. Their blood spraying everywhere, running in streams down their own bodies the mastodons collapse like cliffs struck by thunder and crumbling.

Meanwhile, the carnage Arjuna brings to the elephants is as savage as his mace-wielding brother's: he fells them at will with searing fusillades of arrows. Nakula and Sahadeva are not far behind in the havoc they fetch. The Pandavas fell thousands of elephants and horses, shatter chariots beyond count, and kill as many footsoldiers and rathikas.

Bhima drives the Panchalas before him, on pachyderms, horses or in chariots, as a herdsman in the forest does his cattle!

Remembering the purpose of their mission, remembering the word he has given Drona, Arjuna shoots Drupada down from the back of the elephant that king now rides. Again, he turns his attentions to the rest of the Panchala army, and once more consumes them all around him, even like the fire at the end of the Yuga. In thousands upon thousands he razes the enemy.

Roused, the Panchalas and the Srinjayas loose a gale of every manner of weapon at Arjuna. Roaring to shake the ground beneath their feet and chariot wheels, they fight frantically against the Pandava. A pitched, brutal battle breaks out.

Hearing the enemy roar at him, the eyes of Indra's son turn red and he charges at them, covering them with a dense swarm of deadly arrows, falling on them with renewed ferocity. Those that watch Arjuna, his body bright, see his hands as a blur; they see no pause in his archery: it is a single, constant stream, a thing of marvel. The screams of those that Arjuna slays mingle with the helpless cries of admiration that he draws from his enemies at his unearthly archery.

Drupada, king of the Panchalas, with his Senapati Satyajit at his side, rushes at Arjuna, rather as the Asura Sambara did at Indra during their contention in time out of mind. Arjuna covers him in a cloak of brilliant arrows. A dismal cry erupts from the Panchala host, like that of a herd of elephants when a lion springs at the leader of the herd.

Satyajit sees Arjuna bearing down on Drupada to seize him, and the mighty Panchala Senapati flies at the Pandava. They fight, circling in their chariots, like Indra and Virochana's son Mahabali did of yore. Suddenly, Arjuna shatters Satyajit's defences and strikes him with ten arrows, drawing a gasp from the watching army.

But the doughty Satyajit looses a hundred shafts in reply at Arjuna. Quick as thinking, Maharatha Arjuna tightens his bowstring and raises his archery. He breaks the bow in Satyajit's hand and speeds towards Drupada again. But Satyajit seizes up a stronger bow and, in a flash, strikes Arjuna, his chariot, his horses and his sarathy with a cluster of arrows.

Arjuna is not forgiving, but retorts with a rash of shafts that find Satyajit's horses, charioteer, shred his banner, break his bow, pierce agony through his left hand that loosed fire, and shoots the warrior who guards his back. Finding his bows repeatedly cut in twain and his horses slain, Satyajit gives up the unequal fight and retreats.

Drupada sees his Senapati beaten and looses a flurry of arrows at Arjuna, who breaks the Panchala king's bow, also his flagstaff, and strikes his horses and his sarathy, all with five shafts each. Suddenly, with a roar, Arjuna throws down his bow and quiver, seizes up a curved sword, and leaps from his chariot into his adversary's ratha.

In a wink, he sets the sword to Drupada's throat and seizes him, as Garuda does a great sea serpent after stirring the waves with his wings. The Panchala soldiers flee in every direction.

Roaring still, triumphantly at having shown his prowess in his first actual battle, Arjuna issues from the Panchala army and the city gates, with his captive now in his own chariot. Seeing him, Bhima roars like ten lions and falls even more ferociously upon the hapless Panchala troops, while Nakula and Sahadeva also begin to raze the city.

Arjuna cries to them, 'This best of kings is related to the Kurus. Spare his men, Bhima. We come only to give our Acharya his dakshina, and that we have now.'

Reluctantly, for he has not had his fill of bloodshed, Bhima stops his slaughtering. The Pandava princes ride back to Drona with Drupada, whom they offer to their master for his fee.

Drona sees Drupada his captive, to do with as he pleases; he sees the Panchala king humbled and helpless, and he remembers how his childhood friend had humiliated him.

Says Drona, ‘I have laid waste your kingdom and your capital. But do not fear for your life, though it is now in your enemy’s hands. Tell me Drupada, do you now want to be my friend again?’ Drona smiles, ‘No, have no fear for your life, because we Brahmanas are forgiving by nature. Kshatriyarishabha, I have not forgotten our old friendship and love, from when we were boys together in our Guru’s asrama.

And so, O King, I ask you once again for your friendship, and in return, as my gift to you, I will give you back half your kingdom, which is now mine. You once told me that only one king could befriend another; so, O Yagnasena, I will keep half your kingdom.

You will be king of all the Panchala lands south of the Ganga, while I become king of those north of the river. Panchala, if it pleases you, be my friend again.’

Drupada replies, ‘You are a noble soul and mighty indeed, O Drona, and I am not surprised by your generosity. I wish for eternal friendship with you.’

Drona releases the Panchala king, O Bharata, and formally returns half his kingdom to him, believing innocently that the past is forgotten and they are both pleased. Thereafter, Drupada begins to live, in some sorrow, in the city of Kampilya in the province of Makandi on the banks of the Ganga. He still rules over many towns and cities.

After Drona vanquishes him, Drupada also rules the southern Panchalas up to the bank of the Charmanwati, and he is utterly convinced that he can never hope to defeat the Brahmana in battle because Drona is immeasurably more powerful than he is: in Brahma shakti.

But being a Kshatriya, Drupada is determined to have his revenge. He ranges the world, wishing for a son who will one day kill Drona.

Meanwhile, Drona lives in Ahicchatra, ruling over the northern Panchalas. Thus, indeed, is the land of Ahicchatra, full of towns and cities, won in battle by Arjuna and given to Drona for his Guru dakshina.”

CANTO 141

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "A year passes, then Dhritarashtra makes Pandu's son Yudhishtira the Yuvaraja, the heir apparent. It is the wish of the people and the eldest Pandava is an embodiment of dharma: in his rectitude, his firmness, fortitude, patience, kindness, frankness and perfect honesty.

Very quickly, Kunti's son overshadows even his father Pandu's great deeds. So punctilious and righteous is Yudhishtira, so devoted to the kingdom and his people.

At about the same time, Bhima Vrikodara receives further lessons from Balarama at mace fighting, and fighting with a sword and from a chariot. When he completes his tutelage, Bhima is as mighty as Balarama himself, and he is as devoted as ever to his brothers.

Arjuna, of course, wins great renown for his archery: his swiftness of hand, the firmness of his grip, his incredible accuracy. Besides, he is a master of the kshura, the naracha, the bala and the vipatha; why, he is an expert at every weapon, be it straight or crooked, heavy or light. Drona openly endorses the belief that there is no archer, no complete warrior on Earth to rival Arjuna.

One day, in the presence of all the Kuru princes, Drona says to Arjuna, 'Agastya Muni has a disciple in the astra shastra, and his name is Agnivesa. Agnivesa was my Guru, and I was his sishya. I performed tapasya and served my master diligently, so he gave me the Brahmasirsa, which never fails, which is like thunder, and which can consume the very Earth.

O Bharata, that astra can now pass from one sishya to another. When he gave it to me, my Guru said, "O son of Bharadwaja, you must never cast this astra at any Manava, especially not at one who is not himself a great warrior." Kshatriya, you and you alone have received that weapon from me, and no one else deserves to have it. But you must honour the command of the Rishi Agnivesha. Also, Arjuna, now swear in the presence of your

brothers and cousins, and other kin, that you will give me whatever dakshina I demand from you.'

Arjuna says, simply, 'I swear, Acharya.'

Drona says, 'Sinless, if you ever meet me in battle, you must fight without giving me any quarter.'

Arjuna is startled, but he bows his head, swearing to do what his master asks. He then touches Drona's feet for his blessing, and taking it, goes away to the north.

Soon, a cry ranges through the world, a great shout that covers the Earth and her girdle of seas: that there is no bowman anywhere like Arjuna the Pandava. It is true; no one can face him in battle, with the mace, the sword, in a chariot, and especially with a bow. His skills and his prowess are unearthly.

Sahadeva learns dharma, all the laws of morality and duty, from Brihaspati, and he continues living under the control of his elder brothers. Nakula, the favourite of his brothers, becomes a Maharatha, a master of chariot warfare, and his guru is Drona.

Arjuna and the other Pandavas become so powerful that they kill the great Sauvira in battle, Sauvira who has performed a yagna that lasted three years, easily repulsing the constant raids of marauding Gandharvas.

Arjuna subdues the king of the Yavanas, whom even Pandu had failed to conquer. The brilliant Arjuna makes Vipula, a Sauvira king, of great might, who had always shown disregard for the Kurus, feel the keen edge of his power. He humbles King Sumitra of the same race, who is also called Dattamitra, who had challenged him contemptuously.

Bhima and Arjuna, by themselves, in a single chariot, subdue all the kings of the East, who have ten thousand chariots. Arjuna by himself conquers the entire South, and sends back vast wealth to Hastinapura; he is then called Dhananjaya, winner of wealth.

Thus, the Pandavas extend the Kuru kingdom in every direction, with their unearthly, irresistible prowess. Seeing their astonishing achievements, suddenly Dhritarashtra is stricken by envy, which enters his heart like poison. Dreadful anxiety seizes the king in green talons and he can hardly sleep."

CANTO 142

SAMBHAVA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The wretched Dhritarashtra sees his nephews become more powerful than he likes, and he calls his wily minister Kanika to him. This man is an expert politician and a trusted advisor.

Dhritarashtra says, 'Brahmanashreshta, daily the Pandavas increase their power over the Earth, and envy stings my heart like a serpent. Shall I live in peace with them or become their enemy? Kanika advise me well, for I will do what you say.'

Kanika replies, 'Listen carefully, sinless king, and, Kurusthama, do not be angry when you hear what I say.

Kings should always increase their own power, and keep their maces raised always to crush anyone who threatens them. A king must be most discreet himself, and ever watchful of the indiscretions of his enemies. If a king is always prepared to strike, everyone fears him. So, a king must be ever ready to punish those that transgress his will, or threaten his power.

He must conduct himself so he shows no weakness, ever, while he finds any chink in his enemy's armour and then hunts him down and kills him. A king keeps his own weaknesses hidden, like the tortoise hides its soft body in its shell, as also his purposes and his means to achieve them.

Once he sets a course for himself, he does not rest until his end is achieved; he never turns back. My lord, if you do not remove a thorn completely from your flesh, it festers and creates a sore. So, too, if a king has an enemy, he must not let him live, but kill him. If his enemy is powerful, he must watch and wait for his evil hour, his enemy's time of misfortune, and then strike him down ruthlessly.

Sire, you must never underestimate an enemy, however contemptible he might be; you must never mock him openly or show your enmity towards

him. A small spark can consume a great forest, if it can leap from one tree to the next.

Kings must sometimes pretend to be deaf and blind to faults they most want to punish, enemies they most want to crush, especially when they are powerless to effect the killing they wish for in their hearts. When powerless, they must think that their bows are made of straw, while being always as vigilant as a herd of deer sleeping in a jungle.

When the enemy is in your power strike and destroy him without mercy, openly or secretly, by fair means or foul. Why, he might seek your protection, but your heart must be like a stone, and you must not spare him, for then later he will surely take revenge on you. Spare no expense to kill your enemy, and then you will have peace, for the dead can never be a threat to you.

You must destroy your enemy's resources: the three, the five and the seven. You must destroy your enemies, root and branch. Then you must destroy their friends and allies, who cannot flourish anymore once their leader dies. If you tear up the root of the tree, the branches and twigs will wither and die of themselves.

Keep your own purpose secret and hidden, and watch your enemy like an eagle, always watching for his weakness. A king must always be vigilant and watch his enemies anxiously.

First win the confidence of your enemy by keeping the fire of sacrifice lit, by wearing valkala and jata, and sleeping on animal hide. And when he lets you near him, spring on him like a wolf! It has been well said that to acquire wealth and kingdom even a guise of holiness can be adopted, as a hooked staff to draw the branch down to you so you can pluck the ripe fruit from it.

So, too, should you select the enemy that is ripe for killing. Support your enemy, carry him upon your shoulders, until the right moment arrives to fling him down and break him in pieces like an earthen pot hurled down on a rock. Let your enemy beg piteously for his life; you must not spare him.

An enemy can be destroyed by artful conciliation, by lavishing money on him. Cause dissension among his friends and allies; poison their minds subtly against him. Yes, use whatever means you need to, that is in your power, do anything that you must to kill the enemy who is dangerous to you.'

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Tell me truly how an enemy can be destroyed by conciliation or gifts, by dissension and finally by the use of force.’

Kanika replies, ‘Listen, O King, to the story of the jackal who lived once in the forest and was a shrewd master of politics. Yes, he was a wise jackal, who lived with four friends in the jungle: a tiger, a mouse, a wolf and a mongoose.

One day the five friends saw a powerful, well-fleshed stag in the forest, a leader of his herd, but they could not catch or kill him, so strong and so swift was he. They called a council to discuss how the stag could be hunted.

The jackal said, “Tiger, many times you have tried to stalk and kill the stag, but you haven’t succeeded because he is young, quick and intelligent. Let the mouse go and gnaw his hooves while he sleeps, and when this is done, you, Tiger, will be able to seize him. Then all of us can feast on him.”

They agreed with him, and the mouse ate into the deer’s hooves while it slept, weakening them, and then the tiger easily killed the stag. When the tiger had broken his neck and the stag lay motionless on the ground, the jackal said to his companions, “We are blessed today! Go now and bathe in the stream before we begin our feast. I will watch over the carcass until you return.”

The others promptly went off to bathe and the jackal sat with the fat carcass of the stag, lost in thought about what he should do next. The mighty tiger returned first after bathing. He saw the jackal plunged in thought.

The tiger said, “Wise one, why do you seem so sad? Most intelligent Jackal, let us feast on the stag.”

The jackal said, “Mahabaho, listen to what the mouse said. He said, ‘Fie upon the strength of the king of beasts! I killed the deer, and because of me the tiger will eat his fill today.’

After hearing his brag, I have no wish to eat today.”

The tiger said, “If this is what the mouse said, from today I will kill any creature I find in the jungle by myself and eat alone.” With that, the tiger left.

Soon, the mouse arrived, and seeing him the jackal said, “Blessings, O Mouse, but have you heard what the mongoose said? He said, ‘The carcass of this stag is poisoned by the claws of the tiger and I will not eat it.’ But, if you allow me, O Jackal, I will kill the mouse and feed on his flesh.”

The mouse heard this and fled down into his hole in the ground. And after the mouse had gone, O King, the wolf arrived there after his ablutions.

The jackal said to him, “The king of beasts is angry with you, and I fear evil will overtake you. He is on his way here with his mate, and you must do as you please.”

The wolf, of course, slunk away and, immediately after, the mongoose arrived. The jackal said, “I have vanquished the others who want to eat the stag, and they fled. You, too, must fight me first if you want to eat.”

The mongoose replied, “When you have beaten the tiger, the wolf and the intelligent mouse, all heroes in their way, you must be truly strong. I do not want to fight you.”

The mongoose also left. When the others had all gone, the jackal feasted alone on the stag. My lord, if kings would be as wily as that clever jackal, they would always prevail over their enemies, and always be happy.

You must defeat the timid by playing on their fears, the brave and the strong by conciliation, the greedy by gifts, and your equals and your inferiors by an open show of strength.’

Kanika pauses before continuing, ‘Listen, O King, to something else. If your son, friend, brother, father, your Guru or anyone at all becomes your enemy, you must never hesitate to kill him, if you wish your own happiness. Never disdain to kill an enemy, whoever he might be.

If two enemies are equally strong, and uncertain of success in an open encounter, the diligent one will prosper. If your Guru himself is vain, lacks discrimination about what needs to be done and what needs to be left alone, if he is cruel, even he must be punished.

Even if rage burns your heart, never show your anger but always speak with a smile. Never reprove anyone angrily. O Bharata, instead speak most sweetly to the one you mean to strike down, why, even as you kill him! Once the killing has been done, then grieve loudly for the victim, shed copious tears in public.

Lull your enemy into false security with conciliation and gifts, sweet words; the moment his guard is down, strike without scruple or mercy. As king, you must always strike down the sinner who dons a disguise of virtue, for being outwardly virtuous only hides his true nature, his sins, as dark clouds do a mountain.

When you have killed an enemy, be sure you burn his house down, and his kin. Never let beggars, atheists and thieves live in your kingdom. Kill

your enemy by a surprise attack, an ambush, by corrupting his allies with gifts and wealth; kill him secretly with poison. You can be as ruthless as you like, my lord; sharpen your teeth to deliver a fatal bite.

And when you strike, be certain that you do so with finality, so that the one you strike can never raise his head again. Be ever vigilant; suspect even those from whom you apparently have nothing to fear, let alone those that are a known threat to you. For the one who apparently poses no threat can be the most dangerous enemy, especially if he is powerful and decides to strike at you, when you least expect it from him.

Never trust those that are disloyal, and do not overly trust even those that are loyal. For, if a faithful one turns against you, you are certain to be destroyed. Employ spies, after making sure of their loyalty. Use them within your kingdom and in other kingdoms, in the courts of other kings. Your spies abroad must be masters of deception, preferably men that roam the Earth as Rishis.

Deploy your secret agents in public gardens, places of amusement, temples and other holy places, drinking halls, in the streets, and close to the eighteen tirthas of your kingdom: your Prime Minister, the Chief Priest, the Yuvaraja, the Senapati, the Dwarapalakas of the court, those that work in your inner apartments, your Jailor, your Surveyor, your Treasurer, the General Executor of all your ordinances, the Head of your own Police, the Chief Architect, the Chief Justice, the President of your Council, the Chief of the Department of Punishment, the Commander of the Fort, the Chief of the Arsenal, the Commander of the Frontier Guards, and the Keeper of the Forests.

Deploy your spies in places of sacrifice, near public wells, on mountains and at river ferries, in forests, and in every place where people congregate. Speak sweetly and humbly, my lord, but let your heart be sharp as a razor.

Even while you do the most savage and vicious deed, wear a smile on your lips, while speaking. If you desire lasting prosperity, you must cultivate the arts of humility, of swearing falsely when required, of conciliation, of creating hope, why even of worshipping your enemies by bowing your head at their feet.

A man who knows how to conduct himself politically is like a tree always adorned with flowers but never bearing fruit. If indeed there are any fruit they grow only from the loftiest branches, and if any of these do ripen, make sure that they look raw.

A king who learns how to conduct himself thus will never wane. Dharma, artha and kama all bear fruit, both good and evil. The wise man knows how to take the good fruit and avoid the evil.

Men that follow only dharma become unhappy for want of artha and kama, wealth and pleasure. Men who only pursue wealth become afflicted for want of dharma and kama. Those who chase only after pleasure suffer from not having virtue and wealth.

You must pursue all three in a balanced fashion, never neglecting any of them, so that the lack of none afflicts you. Consult your Brahmanas, O King, but those that have humility and attention, no envy, and the utmost sincerity, if you wish to accomplish your most secret purpose.

If you fall, raise yourself up again, by any means – fair or foul, gentle or violent; when you have resurrected your fortunes, then by all means practise dharma. One who has not suffered or experienced some calamity can ever hope to prosper. You can see this from the life of anyone who survives misfortune.

If a man be grief-stricken, in dire straits, you should comfort him by narrating the olden legends to him, of others that suffered and then recovered good fortune: the tales of Nala and of Rama. He whose heart has been riven by sorrow should be consoled with hope of future prosperity.

Comfort the learned and the wise with gifts and pleasing responsibilities. But remember that a man who makes peace with an enemy and then allows his guard to drop, as if the enmity itself is finished, is like one that chooses to fall asleep on the highest branch of a tree: he will surely fall!

A king should always keep his own counsel. His scrutiny must always be on his enemies, gazing upon them through the eyes of his spies; and he must be careful to keep his own feelings hidden from the spies of his enemies. Even as a fisherman cannot prosper without killing and gutting his catch, a king cannot hope to prosper without ripping out the innards of his enemies, without committing some violence.

You must raze the armies of your enemies, destroying them directly, or setting the scourges of disease, hunger and thirst upon them, mowing them down like weeds. A needy man never goes to a rich man out of love, but to gain from him; and when he has what he wants he will turn his back on the one whose help he sought when he was needy.

So, when you help someone, never give him everything that he wants but leave something that he still desires, so that he will continue to serve

you.

The king who wishes to prosper must diligently seek out allies, and conduct his wars with their help, with the utmost care and careful preparation. He must be unwaveringly prudent, so that neither his friends nor his enemies know his true motives and purposes, before he actually acts.

Only when the deed has begun or ended, must they discover your purpose. Until danger shows itself, you must behave as if you are afraid. But when it comes, you must face it fearlessly and only then reveal that you were always well prepared for it. He that trusts an enemy whom he has once subdued by force is like the she crab that calls her death to her when she conceives.

You must always think of danger as having already arrived, and threatening you, otherwise you will not have the calm and perfect preparedness required for facing it when mortal peril actually does come. Prudence, O King, grave caution at all times, and the correct choice of time and place for action: these lead to prosperity.

A king must know that destiny can be moderated by mantras and yagnas; the king must always have his eye on the proper balance of dharma, artha and kama. Time and place must always be carefully considered to reap the greatest benefit from one's deeds.

Even if an enemy is slight, you must not scorn or ignore him; he might grow swiftly to become dangerous, like the palm tree plunging its roots down with great speed and growing, or the spark in the forest that blazes up to become the devouring conflagration. Just as a small fire fed with faggots soon becomes great enough to devour the biggest blocks of wood, so does the power of the enemy that forms alliances and friendships grow apace, and he becomes a formidable adversary.

Give hope to your enemy of great favour, but keep him hoping and postpone satisfying his wish; when the time comes to keep your word to him, defer its fulfilment again, find or create some excuse. Let that excuse appear to be founded upon some real reason, and that reason again upon another.

In the matter of destroying their enemies, kings must be like razors, in every detail and particular: as ruthless as they are sharp and keen. They must keep their intentions hidden as blades in sheaths of leather, and strike when opportunity presents itself, razing their enemies with all their friends

and families in a fell sweep – just as a fine razor blade will shave a face without leaving a single hair.

O you who support the honour of the Kurus, you must behave with the Pandavas and others, too, in a manner that is politic, so you do not later regret what you do. You are blessed with every auspicious sign of fortune and grace. I say to you, O King, guard yourself against the Pandavas!

The sons of Pandu are more powerful than your sons. So Parantapa, let me tell you plainly what you must do. Hear what I say, and let your sons listen to me as well, and having done so, move to achieve your purpose. Rajan, you must make sure that you have nothing to fear from the Pandavas. Yes, you must act in such a manner, which is perfectly politic, so that you do not grieve in the future.'

Having said so much, Kanika leaves the presence of Dhritarashtra and returns to his home, while the king is plunged in melancholy and dark brooding."

CANTO 143

JATUGRIHA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, Subala's son Shakuni, Duryodhana, Dushasana and Karna are already conspiring in evil to do away with Kunti and her sons. They seek Dhritarashtra's leave and hatch a plot to immolate the Pandavas and their mother, burn them to death.

However, the wise and gifted Vidura, who can read men's inmost thoughts and intentions by looking at their faces, sees what is afoot. Sinless Vidura, illumined by true knowledge, devoted to the sons of Pandu, decides that Kunti and her sons should fly from their deadly enemies.

Arranging for a boat that can withstand wind and wave, he says to Kunti and her princes, 'Dhritarashtra has been born to ruin the honour and the sons of the race of Kuru. His heart is evil, and he is about to abandon dharma.

Dear Kunti, I have readied for you and your sons a boat that shall be stable in wind and against wave; escape in it from the net of death that is tightening around you.'

Kunti is stricken to hear what Vidura says, and she boards the boat with her sons and crosses the Ganga. Leaving the boat, as Vidura advised, taking the wealth their enemies had given them in Varanavrata, the Pandavas enter the deep emerald jungle on the other side.

Meanwhile, in the house of lac, which the Kauravas built to immolate the Pandavas, a Nishada woman and her five sons are burnt to death, as is that vilest of mlechchas, Purochana, who has actually built the house of lac for Duryodhana.

Believing the Nishada woman and her sons' corpses to be Kunti and the Pandavas, the sons of Dhritarashtra and their conspirators are deceived. Thus, Vidura saves the lives of his nephews and their mother. But the people of Varanavrata also do not know that the Pandavas have escaped

secretly, and when they see the lacquer palace burn down, they are grief-stricken.

They send messengers to Dhritarashtra, saying, 'Evil King, your vile ambition has been achieved. The Pandavas have been burnt to death. Your wish has come true, and you and your murderous sons can now enjoy the kingdom.'

Hearing the message, Dhritarashtra and his sons make a great show of grief. With the Kshattri Vidura, Bhishma the Kuru patriarch, and the rest of the family, the blind king performs the last rites for the Pandavas and their mother, but, unknowingly, with the remains of the Nishada woman and her sons."

Janamejaya said, "Brahmanottama, I want to hear in full this story of the burning of the house of lac and how the Pandavas escaped the fire. Ah, that was a dire thing that the Kauravas tried to do, at the dark counsel of the evil Kanika. Tell me every detail of it, O Suta, for I burn with curiosity to hear that story from you."

Vaisampayana said, "Parantapa, O King, listen then to the tale of the burning of the house of lac and the escape of the sons of Pandu.

The malignant Duryodhana sees that Bhima is stronger than everyone else; he sees Arjuna excel at arms, and he is envious and dejected. Karna Suryaputra and Subala's son Shakuni try, in many ways, to kill the sons of Pandu. But the Pandavas escape every time, and, obeying Vidura's counsel, avoid ever making these attempts on their lives public or accusing Duryodhana of trying to kill them.

The people see how noble the Pandavas are and how accomplished, and they become the topic of conversation and praise at every street corner and public gathering. In open courtyards and other places where the citizens assemble all the talk is about how Yudhishtira should become king.

The people say, 'Dhritarashtra might have the eye of knowledge, but being born blind he is never truly a king. How can he rule now? Shantanu's son Bhishma will never accept the kingship because of his solemn oath. Yudhishtira is young, a great warrior, versed in the Veda, honest and kind. It is time that the eldest Pandava becomes our king, and is crowned with every proper ritual and ceremony.

He worships Shantanu's son Bhishma, as well as Dhritarashtra; knowing dharma, Yudhishtira will care well for both these, as well as the sons of Dhritarashtra, and keep them in every luxury.'

When Duryodhana hears what the people are saying, he cannot bear it. Beside himself with jealousy, he comes to Dhritarashtra, alone. Greeting his father reverently, the evil prince says to the king, 'Father, I hear fell words being spoken by the people. They want Yudhishtira to be king, not you anymore, or even Bhishma. Bhishma will agree because of his oath.

The people wish to do us grave harm. Pandu ruled by his deeds and not you, because you are blind. If Pandu's son inherits the kingdom, after him his son will rule, then his son, and so on, and theirs shall become the royal line, while we and our children will be inconsequential, minions at best, with neither power nor honour.

We shall be dependants for our very food, and lowliness and distress be our lot. Rajan, you must prevent this from happening. You are the king and your son must rule after you, regardless of what the people say.'"

CANTO 144

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Dhritarashtra, whose eyes are his gyana, remembers all that Kanika has said to him. Sorrow grips his heart and his mind falters.

Duryodhana, Karna, Subala's son Shakuni, and Dushasana have already plotted secretly before Duryodhana goes to the king.

Duryodhana now says, 'Father, somehow contrive to send the Pandavas to Varanavrata and we shall never have anything to fear from them again.'

Dhritarashtra falls thoughtful, then, says, 'Pandu always walked the way of dharma and was dutiful to all our kinsmen, and most of all to me. He cared little for the pleasures of this world, but rather gave everything that was his to me, including the kingdom.

Yudhishtira is as devoted to dharma as his father was; he is as gifted and accomplished as Pandu. His fame has spread across the world and the people all love him. He has powerful allies; how can we ever hope to banish him from his father's kingdom?

Pandu nurtured all the counsellors of the sabha, as well as the commanders of the army, and their sons and grandsons, too. The people loved him dearly. My son, will all these not kill us now for the sake of Pandu's son?'

Duryodhana replies, 'What you say my father is true. But take thought for the evil that looms for you and yours. Let us win the people over with lavish gifts and wealth, and being what they are they will stand with us. My lord, the treasury and the ministers of state are already under our control.

Send the sons of Pandu away to Varanavrata, gently. And when, O Bharata, I have taken the reins of power firmly into my hands, let Kunti and her sons return.'

Dhritarashtra replies, 'Duryodhana, you speak my very mind, but I dared not give in to this thought for its sinfulness. Also, Bhishma, Drona, Kshattri

and Gautama Kripa would never countenance the Pandavas being exiled. My child, the wise ones see the Pandavas and ourselves as being equals in the House of Kuru.

If we exile the sons of Pandu shall they not say that we deserve to die at the hands of the Kurus for our sin, why, to die by their very hands? Shall the whole world not say the same?'

Duryodhana says, 'Bhishma has no partiality and will take no side in any dispute between the Pandavas and us. Aswatthama is on my side, and where the son is so shall the doting father be. Saradwat's son Kripa will not oppose Drona and Aswatthama; he will never go against his sister's husband and son.

As for Kshattri Vidura, he is indeed our secret enemy, but he depends on us for his livelihood. Besides, even if he sides with the Pandavas, by himself he can do us no harm.

So, my lord, banish the Pandavas to Varanavrata without fear. Indeed, I say to you, do it today and by this put out the grief that burns my heart like fire, pierces it through like an arrow, robs me of my sleep.'"

CANTO 145

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana and his brothers begin working assiduously to win over the people with liberal gifts of land and wealth. Honours and encomiums are bestowed, cannily.

Then, instigated by Dhritarashtra, some of his chosen ministers one day begin to eulogise the town of Varanavrata in the royal sabha of Hastinapura. They say that the festival of Pasupati Siva has just begun in Kasi, and that it is indeed the most wonderful gathering of worshippers on Earth. It enchants all that are fortunate enough to witness it, for the people come wearing their finest attire and most precious ornaments.

Listening to the fulsome and cunning praise of Kasi, the Pandavas feel stirred to visit the sacred city of Siva. When Dhritarashtra senses that his nephews' curiosity and interest have been aroused, Ambika's son, the blind king, says to them, 'Ah, these men of mine always speak of Varanavata as being the most delightful town in the world.

Children, if you feel the desire to attend the festival of Pasupati, with your friends and followers, by all means go and enjoy yourselves like the very Devas, to your hearts' content. Take pearls and other jewels with you to give to the Brahmanas and the bards and musicians you find in Kasi.

And when you have sported there like the gods, and satisfied yourselves with every pleasure, return to us in Hastinapura, in your own time, at your leisure.'

Yudhishtira immediately understands Dhritarashtra's intention. Yet, he knows the king is powerful and he himself relatively weak. He says quietly, 'So be it.'

Turning to Shantanu's son Bhishma, the sage Vidura, Drona, the Kuru Bahlika, Somadatta, Kripa, Aswatthama, Bhurisravas, the other ministers, Brahmanas and Rishis, the priests and the people and the regal Gandhari, he says slowly and humbly, 'At my uncle's command we will go to sacred Varanavrata with our friends and followers. I beg you, bless us that we go happily and incur no sin in Kasi.'

The Kaurava chieftains all cheerfully bless them, saying, ‘Pandavas let the Panchamahabhutas themselves bless you on your way, and not the least evil befall you.’

The Pandavas perform the rituals so they will inherit their due share in the kingdom when they return, make their preparations, and set out for Varanasi.”

CANTO 146

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana, O Bharata, is delighted. Bharatarishabha, he calls his trusted man Purochana, privately, seizes his right hand and says to him, 'Purochana, this world, replete with wealth, belongs to me; and you share in it equally. So you must protect the world from our enemies.

There is no one I trust more than you, my lord, and I rely on you to kill my enemies for me, cunningly. Dhritarashtra has sent the Pandavas to Varanavrata, to enjoy the festival of Pasupati.

Take a cart drawn by our swiftest mules; fly to Kasi, and there build a square palace near the arsenal. Furnish it lavishly, watch over it keenly, and, Purochana, make it with hemp and resin and every flammable material you can find. Mix earth with ghee, lard, oil and fat, and all the lac on which you can lay your hands. With this deadly mixture plaster the walls of the palace.

Strew and grease the precincts and the insides of the palace with more hemp, ghee, lacquer and wood, but so craftily that neither the Pandavas nor anyone else suspects a thing, for even a moment.

When you have built the mansion, Purochana, go to the Pandavas, offer them every reverence and invite Kunti and her sons and all their company to come to stay in the palace of lac.

Let the chairs and thrones, the beds and all the furniture be of the finest craftsmanship, things of beauty, so the Pandavas shall be well content, and Dhritarashtra receive no complaint from them. You must manage all this without anyone in Varanavrata suspecting anything until our aim is accomplished.

When you are certain that the Pandavas sleep fearlessly, unsuspiciously, in the lacquer palace, Purochana, apply a torch to the outer door. When the palace burns and the sons of Pandu are immolated inside, the people will say that a terrible accident killed them.'

Purochana does not hesitate to say ‘So be it’ to his evil prince, and leaves immediately for Varanavrata in a swift mule cart laden with all the incendiary materials he will need for his dastardly mission. Arriving in the sacred city, he loses no time in doing what Duryodhana has asked of him.”

CANTO 147

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, the Pandavas are about to climb into their chariots, yoked to horses as fleet as the wind. They touch Bhishma's feet, in sorrow, Dhritarashtra's, their Acharya Drona's, Kripa's, Vidura's and those of all the elders of the House of Kuru.

Reverently saluting their elders and embracing their equals fondly, being hugged in farewell by the little children of the clan, and bidding sad farewell to the royal ladies of the palace, walking around them in pradakshina, taking loving leave of the people of Hastinapura, the sons of Pandu, men of dharma, set out for Varanasi.

Vidura of untold wisdom, along with other bulls among the Kurus and the citizens, as well, all grieving, follow the Pandavas some way.

In that grief, seeing the Pandavas full of sorrow, some of the citizens and the people from the countryside, too, begin to say aloud, 'Dhritarashtra is evil and turns away from dharma. Not sinless Yudhishtira, not Bhima mightiest among men, not Kunti's youngest son Arjuna will ever sin by revolting against this crime against them. Then how will the sons of Madri go against their older brothers' wishes?'

'Dhritarashtra inherited the kingdom from Pandu, and he could not bear his brother's sons. But how does Bhishma sanction this crime and allow the Pandavas to be exiled to that wretched town? Shantanu's son Vichitravirya and Rajarishi Pandu cared for us like their own children. But now that Purushavyaghra Pandu has left this world, Dhritarashtra cannot bear to see his sons beside his own vile princes. But we the people cannot tolerate this adharma and we will leave our homes and this great city and come with you, Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, wherever you go.'

Yudhishtira grows sad and thoughtful, then speaks to the distraught people. 'The king is our father, worthy of worship. He is our Guru and our superior. It is our dharma to do his bidding, never suspecting his motives.

You are all our friends. I beg you, walk around us in pradakshina, then give us your blessing and turn back to your homes.

When the time comes for you to go with us or help our cause otherwise, we shall surely be grateful for your support. This is not that time.'

Gently he spoke, and his resolve they see is firm. The people do as he asks. They make a pradakshina around the sons of Pandu, bless them and then return to their homes.

When the people no longer follow the Pandavas, Vidura, knower of dharma's every nuance, speaks to Yudhishtira to make him sensible of the peril he is in. The learned Vidura speaks to Yudhishtira in the dialect of the mlechchas, which only they two understand.

Vidura says, 'He who knows that his enemies are plotting against him must take care to guard himself against danger. He who knows that there are weapons other than blades of steel, which can kill the body, and who knows how these can be rendered harmless, shall always be safe from his enemies.

The wise man protects himself with the knowledge that neither the consumer of straw nor the drier of dew burns those that live in a hole in the heart of a jungle. The blind man does not see into the future; he has no sense of direction. He whose purpose is not firm, never finds prosperity.

Remember this, and be vigilant. He who accepts the perfidious offering of a deadly weapon, not made of steel, from his enemy, to dwell in, escapes death by fire by burrowing like a jackal underground: a tunnel with many exits. Ranging over the world a man acquires knowledge of its ways; by the stars he finds his direction; and he that controls the five senses remains safe from his enemies.'

Yudhishtira says to Vidura, 'I have understood you.'

Now Vidura walks around them in pradakshina, bids farewell to them and turns back into the city. When the people, Bhishma and Vidura have all gone back, Kunti goes up to Yudhishtira alone, and asks, 'Kshattri spoke to you strangely and softly, and you replied in the same tongue which none of us understood. If I can know what he says, tell me.'

Yudhishtira replies, 'The virtuous Vidura said to me that we should be warned that the mansion built to house us in Varanavrata has been built with incendiary materials. He said, "The path to escape will be revealed to you," and also "Those that can control their five senses shall gain sovereignty

over the whole world." What I said to the good Vidura is "I have understood you."'

The Pandavas set out on the eighth day of the month of Phalguna, when the Rohini nakshatram is rising. Arriving in Varanavrata, they see the sacred town and its people."

CANTO 148

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Full of joy, the people of Kasi come out to greet the sons of Pandu, in crowds. They come on foot and in myriad vehicles, bringing everything auspicious that the Shastras recommend with them, to welcome those greatest among men.

They approach Kunti's sons, bless them, cry *Jaya!* and crowd lovingly around their chariots. Purushavyaghra Yudhishtira looks like Indra among the Devas, with the Vajra in his hands.

Being adored and adoring in return, the Pandavas enter the town of Kasi that has been decked out for the great festival. The Kshatriyas first go to the homes of the Brahmanas of Kasi, who live by their svadharma. They go next to the homes of the officers of the town, then to the homes of the Sutas and the Vaishyas, and then also to the houses of the Sudras.

Bharatarishabha, with Purochana leading the way, the Pandavas finally go to the old palace of the city. They see the fine seats, beds and carpets, the airy rooms full of light; they eat the delectable royal fare that Purochana serves them and drink the excellent wine. Thus arriving in Varanasi, clad in royal finery, the Pandavas live in that ancient palace, being served and adored by Purochana and the people of Kasi.

When ten days pass, Purochana tells them about the 'Blessed House' that he has built for them. Wearing royal silks, those tigers among men go with Duryodhana's man to the treacherous house of lac. They enter like Guhyakas entering Lord Siva's palace on Mount Kailasa.

Yudhishitra looks around the edifice, and drawing Bhima aside tells him that it has been built with every possible incendiary material. The eldest Pandava smells the fat mixed liberally with ghee and lac, and says to his brother, 'Parantapa, our enemies have used clever artisans to create this palace. They have built it with hemp, resin, heath, straw and bamboos, all soaked in ghee.

The villainous Purochana is Duryodhana's man and he stays close to us because he wants to immolate me in this murderous palace. But, my brother, the keen Vidura knew about the danger and warned me of it. He warned me that Duryodhana has plotted to kill us all.'

Bhima says, 'We must return to the old palace.'

Yudhishtira replies, 'No. We must continue living here otherwise Purochana will know that we suspect him. They might kill us suddenly then, for surely Purochana has no conscience, and is his murderous master Duryodhana's man. Yet, we must be constantly vigilant.

If we die by fire, will our Pitama Bhishma be enraged? No, for what use will it be then to show his wrath to the Kauravas, and risk their anger in return? But, perhaps, he will be angry, outraged by such a sin.

It will matter little if we are dead. If we flee this palace of lac, Duryodhana will certainly have us murdered by other agents, other assassins, for he wants to be king.

Moreover, being the king's son he has both influence and power today, while ours are small by comparison. He has allies and wealth, a full treasury; we have neither. Will he not easily manage to have us slain, by any means?

Our way ahead is that of secrecy and stealth. We must escape from here without their knowing that we have fled; then, we must go disguised, living as nomadic hunters in the hearts of jungles, in remote places, while our enemies believe us to be dead.

Only thus shall we effectively escape our enemies and become familiar with these parts of the world. Even today, we shall, in utmost secrecy, have an underground tunnel excavated out of our chamber, and this house of death, and when the time comes escape through that passage.

Thus, no fire shall burn us and our enemies will remain in the dark. So, my brother, we must continue to live here and plan to make our way out in such privacy that not Purochana or indeed anyone in Varanavrata suspects anything of our intentions.'"

CANTO 149

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “The same day, a miner, a friend of Vidura’s, comes to the Pandavas and says to them in private, ‘I am a master tunneller, and your uncle Vidura sent me to you. Tell me what you want me to do. Vidura, who trusts me, said, “Go to the Pandavas and help them.”’

‘Tell me what I can do for you.’

‘I have learnt that Purochana means to torch this house of lac on the fourteenth night of this dark fortnight. He will fire the front door and immolate the Purushavyaghras, the Pandavas, and their mother Kunti while they sleep.”

The vile Duryodhana has plotted your murder, my lords. So that you believe me Vidura said these words to me in the mlechcha bhasha, the very ones he spoke to you as you left Hastinapura, and also the reply you made to him in the same tongue.’

The miner repeats Vidura’s conversation with Yudhishtira in the rare dialect. Hearing those words, Yudhishtira is satisfied. He says to the miner, ‘Welcome friend! I know now that you are indeed a true and trusted friend, devoted to my loving uncle Vidura, and that he has sent you.

There is little the wise Vidura does not know. Make no difference between him and us: as you are to him, from now you are to us. We are as much yours as he is. Friend, protect us as our loving uncle always has and still does.

I know that Purochana has built this deadly mansion at the command of Dhritarashtra’s son. Strong with allies and confident with wealth he hunts us relentlessly. Friend, save us from the fire that Duryodhana has planned, for if we die here his most cherished purpose will be fulfilled.

Look how cunningly Purochana has built this great house of lac. It is slick against the arsenal of Varanavrata, with its lofty ramparts and no

escape on any side when the fire breaks out. Thus Vidura guessed at the murderous intention of Duryodhana; the mortal peril the Kshattri sensed is at our very door. You must save us, good friend, without Purochana suspecting a thing.'

The miner replies, 'So be it,' and immediately and carefully begins his excavation, to create a large subterranean tunnel leading out of the palace. The mouth of the tunnel is in the very heart of the palace, level with the floor, covered over by planks of wood and a carpet, so Purochana who is always at the front door never suspects a thing.

The Pandavas sleep at night in their bedchambers with their weapons beside them, ready for use. During the day, taking Purochana with them, they go hunting afar, from forest to forest, to have some fair idea of the lie of the surrounding lands. O King, they live vigilantly in the palace of lac, with every show of friendship and trust in Purochana, while in fact they are anxious and intensely sensible of danger.

The citizens of Varanavata never know anything, either, about the Pandavas' plans. Indeed, apart from themselves, only Vidura's trusted friend, the miner, has any inkling of what is afoot."

CANTO 150

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Purochana sees the Pandavas apparently comfortable and unsuspicious in the house of lac, and he is glad. Seeing him relaxed, Yudhishtira says to Bhima, Arjuna and the twins, 'We have deceived this ruthless fellow and his guard is down. I believe the time has come to escape. We must torch this deadly palace ourselves, with Purochana inside it, and flee through the tunnel. No one must know that we have gone, but believe us dead, too.'

On the day of an almsgiving, Kunti has a feast for Brahmanas, and a poor-feeding, as well. It is an extravagant feast, to which a large number of women come, and drink and eat to their hearts' content and more, and finally leave, with Kunti's permission.

Among those that come, as if fetched by fate, are a Nishada woman and her five sons. Rajan, this woman and her youths drink so much wine that they fall asleep or unconscious inside the house of lac.

A sharp wind blows through the night, and while Purochana also sleeps from a surfeit of wine with which Bhima plies him, Bhima sets fire to the room where Duryodhana's man lies. He then sets his brand to the front door and to other parts of the deadly house, which blazes up fiercely, as it has been built to do.

The Pandavas and their mother go down into the miner's tunnel. As the palace burns, the heat and the roar of the towering flames awaken the people of Varanavrata, who come running out of their homes.

Their hearts breaking to see the inferno, they cry, 'Ah, Duryodhana's evil man built the palace with incendiary materials under our very noses. And now he has murdered the sinless sons of Pandu, as if they are enemies. A curse be upon Dhritarashtra, who allowed this. Purochana has already paid with his life for his sin; one day the king and his demonic son will also pay.'

And they weep, helplessly, for by now the fire has all but consumed the great edifice. All night, the people stand around the blazing mansion, and lament.

Meanwhile, Kunti and her sons emerge from the mouth of the tunnel, some way from the palace and melt away into the night, unobserved. But they are full of sleep and fear, and they cannot go as quickly as they want, since Kunti is with them. The others, too, are faint from exhaustion, all but one of them.

Then, Rajan, Bhima of untold strength and the fleetness of his airy father picks up all his brothers and his mother, and carrying them easily, plunges along through the night. He sets Kunti upon his shoulders, the twins on his hips, and carries Yudhishtira and Arjuna in either arm. Vrikodara, son of the Wind, goes along like a strange gale, thrusting down trees that loom in his path with his brawny chest. His footmarks fall deeply upon the Earth."

CANTO 151

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “At this same time, Vidura has sent another man he trusted, a pure soul, into the forest surrounding Varanavrata. This man sees the Pandavas making their way through the trees with their mother. He sees them trying to measure the depth of the river in a certain place, obviously wanting to ford the water to safety on the other side.

Vidura knows well how deep Duryodhana’s hatred runs and how murderous his agents are. He sends his trusted agent to the Pandavas to help them, and this man now brings the sons of Pandu to a boat tethered to the riverbank, an extraordinary craft with engines and sails, made by the finest shipwrights, one that is proof against wave and wind, a boat that flies across any current as swiftly as a thought.

The man now says to the Pandavas, ‘O Yudhishtira, listen to what I have to say, so that you know that I am indeed sent by your uncle Vidura. “The wise man protects himself with the knowledge that neither the consumer of straw nor the drier of dew burns those that live in a hole in the heart of a jungle.”

These are the very words Vidura said to you and by these know that I am his trusted man and his agent. Vidura, who knows all things, says to you, “Kuntiputra, you will one day surely prevail over Karna, Duryodhana and his brothers, and the evil Shakuni in battle.”

My boat is ready to bear you away, far from these places of danger. It is a marvellous boat and goes softly and smoothly over the river.’

Then, seeing Kunti and her sons apprehensive and forlorn, the tall man goes on the boat with them himself.

He says again to them, ‘Vidura, who sniffed your heads in love and embraced you fondly, says that you must be ever vigilant, for the peril to your lives is very real.’

With that, he takes the Narapumgavas and their gracious mother across the Ganga. He helps them ashore there and softly cries *Jaya!* Then he leaves them, that good man, who is yet so mysterious, and melts back to wherever he comes from.

The Pandavas send a secret message through him back to Vidura, and then enter the great jungle that lies ahead of them on the far shore of the sacred river. They go quickly and stealthily."

CANTO 152

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When day breaks, a great crowd of townspeople converge at the house of lac. When they have put out the last flames, they see the edifice has indeed been built with hemp and lacquer. They find the corpse of Purochana.

The people begin to wail loudly, 'It is certain that Duryodhana had this treacherous palace built to murder the sons of Pandu. Surely, his father knew of the plot and acquiesced in it, or he would have prevented this dire crime.'

'There is little doubt that even Shantanu's son Bhishma, Drona, Vidura, Kripa and the other Kauravas did not follow dharma by sending the Pandavas here to die.'

'Let us send word to Dhritarashtra saying, "You have achieved your heart's great desire. You have immolated the noble sons of your brother Pandu in the house of lac."'

They fetch water and put out the embers that still burn, and begin a search for the bodies of Kunti and her sons. They find the charred corpses of the poor Nishada woman and her five sons. Vidura's miner, the tunneller, goes with the people and cunningly covers the mouth of the underground passage, which he has dug, with debris and ashes, so that no one discovers it.

The people of Varanavrata send a message to Dhritarashtra that the Pandavas, Kunti and Purochana have perished in the fire in the palace. Dhritarashtra hears the message and begins to sob loudly.

He says, 'Today my magnificent brother has died in the persons of his wife and sons! O, go at once to Varanavrata and perform the funeral rites for the daughter of Kuntiraja and her great Kshatriya sons. Sanctify the bones of the dead with the proper rituals, and give alms, and do everything that is proper and sacred at such a grave occasion.

Let all the relatives and friends of the dead go to Kasi. Let no expense be spared so that their spirits find peace.'

Surrounded by his kinsmen, Ambika's son Dhritarashtra offers tarpana for his nephews.

The Kurus weep, crying out the names of the princes whom they believe dead.

Some cry, 'Ah Yudhishitra, Yuvaraja, you have left us!'

Others sob, 'Oh, magnificent Bhima!'

Yet others cry, 'Phalguna, you have gone, and the Earth is dim!'

'Ah, the twin sons of the Aswins, Nakula and Sahadeva, the young ones handsome as Devas!'

'Oh Kunti, you have also gone!'

Thus they lament and offer tarpana, oblations of water to allay the thirst of the dead on their final journey. The people weep as well, only Vidura seems strangely composed, though he does shed some tears to show that he grieves. But then, he knows that the Pandavas are not dead.

Meanwhile, Kunti and the Pandavas cross the Ganga swiftly, helped by the strength of the boatman's sinews, the river's rapid current and a timely wind that favours them. Leaving the boat, they go south, making their way through the moonless night by the light of the stars that fill the sky.

They enter a deep and dense jungle. They are overcome by exhaustion and thirst; they can hardly keep their eyes open, for sleep comes strongly over them.

Yudhishtira turns to Bhima in some despair, 'My brother, this is terrible; we are in the deep jungle and cannot tell which way to turn. And fatigue numbs us. Ah, are we certain that the vile Purochana is dead? How shall we ever be safe again? Danger is still near us, my brother. Bharata, you are the only one among us that is not tired, for you are as strong and swift as the wind. Take us up again, Bhima, and fly through the forest.'

The mighty Bhimasena picks up Kunti and his brothers again, and once more, speeds through the trees."

CANTO 153

JATUGRIHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "As the tremendous Bhima hurtles along, the entire forest seems to tremble at his footfalls; the trees that strike or brush his great chest shake and sway. His thighs churning the air raise a wind like the ones that blow during the months of Jyeshta and Ashadha.

Bhima brings trees that stand in his path crashing down and tramples on them, rending the creepers and vines which clung to their branches, crushing their flowers and fruit. He goes through that jungle like the king bull of a great elephant herd, a musth maddened angry tusker of sixty years, in his prime and in rut, when the ichor bursts forth from his temples and trickles down his body.

Indeed, so vigorously does Bhima, as swift as Garuda or Vayu, go, that his brothers swoon at his speed. Often he plunges headlong and easily across deep and swirling streams and rivers, difficult to cross.

The Pandavas have cast away their royal finery and disguised themselves as hunters, for fear of the ubiquitous spies of the sons of Dhritarashtra. Bhima now carries just his delicate mother upon his shoulders across the undulating banks of rivers.

O Bharatarishabha, towards evening, still carrying his mother, and now also his brothers, Bhima arrives in a dreadful jungle, where there seem to be no fruit, roots or even water, and where the cries of the birds and beasts are eerie and threatening. As twilight grows into night, these cries and roars grow fiercer and more ominous.

Soon, the darkness is complete, and a howling gale blows out of nowhere, felling trees, big or small, in its path like straws. Exhausted beyond all measure and with raging thirst having its way with them, the princes collapse onto the jungle floor. They sit there panting, parched and also not having eaten.

Kunti, who cannot bear her searing thirst anymore, cries weakly, 'I am the mother of the five Pandavas, and I am with all five of them. Yet, I burn with thirst.' Again and again, as if demented, she repeats this.

Bhima cannot bear it. Springing up, picking up his brothers and mother again, he charges once more through that fearful jungle, out of love for them, in quest of water. No living soul does he see anywhere, indeed few beasts, which slink away through the undergrowth and vanish; until suddenly he arrives in a clearing and sees before him a great and beautiful pipal tree, with spreading branches.

Gently he sets his family down beneath that tree, Bharatarishabha, and says softly to them, 'Rest, while I go to search for water. I hear the sweet cries of waterbirds not far from here. There must be a lake or at least a large pool at hand.'

Yudhishtira whispers through arid lips, 'Go.'

Bhima runs towards the dim squawking of the waterfowl, and soon enough comes upon a lovely lake into which he plunges, bathing and slaking his thirst. Quickly, then, he soaks his upper cloth with water and speeds back to Kunti and his brothers, half a yojana away. Tenderly he squeezes the precious life-giving water through their lips. They sigh to drink it and then sleep again.

Bhima sits in vigil over them. He sees Kunti swooned, where she sits, and wilted, and seized by terrible grief, Bhima begins to sigh like a snake. His gaze roves over his regal mother and brothers asleep on bare ground in the midst of this wilderness, and tears trickle down the mighty Vrikodara's great face.

'Ah, miserbale wretch I am that I have to see this sight today of my mother and my brothers asleep on bare forest ground. What can be more painful than this? In Hastinapura and even Varanavrata, they slept on the softest, costliest beds of down.

I am a sinner that today my eyes see Kunti, Vasudeva's sister, daughter of the formidable Kuntiraja, she who bears every auspicious mark upon her regal person, the daughter-in-law of Vichitravirya, wife of the incomparable Pandu, mother of the five Pandavas, she who is radiant as the filaments of a lotus, as tender and delicate, her body only fit to sleep on the softest bed. But today that Kunti lies on rough earth.

She who has borne the sons of Dharma, Indra and Vayu, who has always slept in palaces, now lies exhausted, in a swoon, on the ground under a tree.

Ah, what more terrible sight shall my eyes ever see than these Purushavyaghras, my noble brothers, asleep beside our mother? Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, who deserves to have sovereignty over the three worlds, lies on the crude ground. Arjuna, his skin the hue of thunderheads, who has no equal among men, lies like any common man on the ground.

Oh, what can be more painful than this? And the young twins, handsome as their sires, the Aswins, also lie like ordinary men upon rough earth.

Truly, truly, he that has no envious, evil kinsmen lives in this world like a lone tree in a village, happily. The tree that stands alone in a village, fruit and leaves, is worshipped by everyone. Yet, there are those that have noble and righteous kinsmen and live joyfully in their midst, depending on one another, giving each other strength and support. These grow day by day in prosperity and strength, like great trees growing together, in a stand, inside a jungle.

But as for us, we are banished by the evil Dhritarashtra and his murderous sons, and narrowly escaped death by fire. Now here we are under this tree in the heart of a forest. After everything we have suffered, where do we go next?

Ah, evil cousins, enjoy your success, for it will be short-lived! For now the gods certainly favour you, but I swear you still live only because Yudhishtira does not tell me to have done with you. Otherwise, Duryodhana, I would already have sent you to Yamaloka, with your brothers, your sons and your friends, with Karna and Shakuni.

But I am helpless because my elder brother is a man of such dharma that his rage has not yet been roused.'

Full of grief and wrath, Bhima clenches his great fists and sighs. Vrikodara looks at his sleeping mother and brothers again, and his fury flames up like a fire fed with ghee.

Then, calming himself with an effort, he says, 'There is sure to be some town not far from here. Let them awake and we will slake our thirst together, and be refreshed. Afterwards, we can consider what to do next. Until then I must stay awake and watch over them.'

Bhima sits in vigil over his sleeping family."

CANTO 154

HIDIMBAVADHA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, "Not far from the place where the Pandavas sleep is a Rakshasa called Hidimba who lives in a lofty sala tree. Feral and ugly, his fangs are as long and sharp as daggers.

Hidimba is hungry; he is filled with the yearning today to feast on some human flesh. Long are his legs, great and distended his belly, and his wild hair and beard are red.

His shoulders are as wide tree boles; his ears are pointed like arrows; altogether, his face is savage and dreadful. Waking from a slumber in his branch, casting his crimson eyes around, the ravenous Hidimba sees the sons of Pandu sleeping in that jungle, some way off.

He shakes his horrid head, scratches his tangled hair, with his talons pointing up, yawns, looks at the Pandavas, looks away, and back again at them. His skin is as dark as thunderclouds; he is quite enormous, and his body gives off a dull sheen.

More than any other meat, Hidimba loves human flesh. He dilates his nostrils and sniffs the delectable scent upon the air: of the sons of Pandu.

He turns to his sister Hidimbi and says languidly, 'Ah, so long since I smelt sweet human meat. My mouth is watering. How long it is since I sank my eight fangs into the finest flesh of all. What can match sinking my fangs into a human throat, and drinking the blood as it sprays? Fresh, frothy human blood; and it seems that today I will drink to my heart's content.

Go and see, my sister, who these humans are. Oh, the scent of them invades me; it conquers me! Go, Hidimbi, kill all of them and bring them here. They are asleep in my jungle, in Hidimbavana.

Have no fear but go quickly. Do what I say and we shall feast on them, tearing the meat from their bones as we please. And my sweet sister, when we have had our fill, we shall dance together to various songs!'

Bharatarishabha, Hidimbi the Rakshasi flies to where the Pandavas are under the tall and graceful pipal tree. Arriving near them, she sees four Pandavas sound asleep under the nyagrodha; she sees Kunti, also sleeping beside her sons, and then her eyes fall upon the mighty Bhima, awake and keeping watch over his family.

Hidimbi sees Bhima, rugged and handsome, like a sala tree himself, full of raw vigour, and she falls immediately and hopelessly in love with him.

The Rakshasi sighs. She tells herself, 'Oh, look at him, his skin like molten gold, his arms like tree branches, his shoulders like a lion's, his throat marked with three auspicious lines like a conch shell, his eyes like lotus petals, and altogether splendid.

I want him for my husband. I will not kill him as Hidimba wants. A woman's love for her husband is stronger than her fondness for her brother. If I do kill him, Hidimba and I will enjoy him briefly, momentarily. But if I marry him instead, I can enjoy him forever.'

The Rakshasi can assume any form she wishes, and now she turns herself into a stunning human beauty and walks slowly towards Bhima Mahabaho. She wears unworldly ornaments, a smile on her full lips; her gait is modest and she comes up to him and says, 'Who are you, Narapumgava, and how did you come here?

Who are these warriors of heavenly beauty that sleep beneath the tree? Who, Sinless, is this woman, her loveliness also unearthly, who sleeps here in this jungle as trustfully as she might in her own bedchamber?

Do you not know that this jungle belongs to a terrible Rakshasa whose name is Hidimba? He is my brother and he sent me to kill you for his meal. But then I saw you, magnificent as a Deva, and I knew that I would have no one else for my husband.

I love you, Manava; you surely know dharma and, knowing that I have given my heart to you, do as you see fit. Oh, Kama's arrows have pierced my heart and my body. I want you for myself; I beg you, make me yours.

Mahabaho, I will rescue you from my brother; Anagha, only become my husband. We will fly far from here and live together upon the breasts of great mountains where no ordinary men ever set foot: for I can fly through the sky at will. Mighty one, you will enjoy me in those secret realms, I will give you great joy and pleasure.'

Bhima replies, 'Rakshasi, perhaps a Muni, who has all his passions controlled and no attachments whatever, could abandon his sleeping mother

and brothers. But I certainly cannot go with you to satisfy my desire, leaving my brothers and my mother as food for a Rakshasa.'

Hidimbi says, 'Then wake them up and I will bear you all away from danger.'

But Bhima says, 'Rakshasi, I am not afraid of your vile brother that I will awaken my family that sleeps so peacefully under the tree. Timid one, no Rakshasa has ever resisted the strength of these arms. Beautiful-eyes, no Manava, Gandharva or Yaksha can withstand my might. Sweet one, ah your form so fine, stay or leave as you please. Or even send your brother here, I do not care.'"

CANTO 155

HIDIMBAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Hidimba Rakshasa finds that his sister has not returned. He clambers down from his tree, and stalks towards where the Pandavas lie asleep.

His eyes are red, his arms powerful, the wiry hair on his head sticks out, his slavering mouth hangs open, his body is like a mass of dark clouds, his fangs are like great needles, and he is a terrifying sight.

Hidimbi sees her brother climb down from his sala tree. She sees the anger on his face and trembles. She says to Bhima, 'My evil brother comes in wrath. I beg you awaken your brothers and mother and we must fly. I am as strong as any Rakshasa, O Fearless, and I can go wherever I like. Climb onto my back and I will carry all of you away from here.

Parantapa, wake them up quickly and let us fly!'

Bhima says, 'O fair hips, fear nothing. As long as I am here no Rakshasa can harm any of us, slender waist. I will kill your brother in front of you. I tell you this scourge of the jungle is no match for me, why, not all the Rakshasas of this world together can stand the strength of these arms.

Look at my arms, sweet one, each is like an elephant's trunk! Look at my thighs, like iron maces; look at my chest, how wide it is, and hard like adamant. My beautiful one, today you shall see my strength like Indra's. Fair hips, do not imagine that I am just an ordinary man. I beg you do not look upon me with contempt or dislike.'

Hidimbi says, 'Purushavyaghra, who are as handsome as a Deva, I have no contempt or dislike for you, but only love. But I have seen what Rakshasas do to Manavas, how much stronger they are than men.'

Bharata, now that he is closer, Hidimba hears their conversation. He sees his sister has assumed a human form, her hair woven with jasmine garlands, her face like the full moon, her nose, her eyes and brows exquisite, her

complexion fair and her skin soft, her nails of lovely hue, her ornaments beautiful, and wearing a flowing diaphanous robe.

The Rakshasa suspects at once that she desires the human, and his eyes blaze. Glaring at his sister, he growls at her, 'When I am so hungry what witless creature dares keep me from eating? Have you lost your mind, Hidimbi, that you do not fear my anger? Fie on you, disloyal Rakshasi.

You are flushed with lust and do not think twice about hurting me. Why, you are ready to dishonour our very race and all your ancestors. I will kill you, wretched woman, and all these that are with you.'

Eyes smouldering, fang grinding against fang, Hidimba runs roaring at his sister to have done with her. But great Bhima jumps up in his way and cries, 'Stop!'

Bhima smiles contemptuously at the Rakshasa. He says to him, 'Hidimba, why do you want to wake my brothers and mother, who sleep so peacefully? Evil one, you should not kill a woman, especially one that has not sinned.

Rakshasa, fight me first. This young woman has not sinned that she desires me, for it is Kama Deva, the God of Love, who inflames her as he does all the living. Wretch, your sister came here at your command; she saw me and lusted after me.

What harm has she done to you by desiring me? It is Kama that offends you, Rakshasa, and you will not hurt her while I am here; you will not kill a woman. Come, let us go some way off and fight, for, vilest of Rakshasas, today I mean to send you to Yamaloka.

Rakshasa, I will crush your head today as if an elephant stamped it. When I have killed you, herons, jackals and kites will gleefully tear the flesh from your limbs and feast on your carcass.

For too long you have ruled this jungle with terror, and it shall be rid of you in a few moments. Hidimba, you are as big as a hill but your sister will soon see you being dragged about like a fallen elephant by a great lion. Vilest of Rakshasas, when I have killed you, men shall pass in safety through this vana again, and without fear.'

Hidimba replies, 'Manava, grand boasts indeed. But do what you say you will and then perhaps you might surely boast. Come, let us not waste a moment. You are strong indeed but today test your strength against me.

I swear that I will not kill your brothers until I have killed you. Till then, let them sleep in peace. But when I have killed you, O fool and braggart, I

will drink your blood and then kill your family, and finally my sister, as well, for she has betrayed me.'

Hidimba stretches out his huge arms and rushes at Bhima Parantapa. In a flash, almost playfully, terrible Bhimasena seizes the Rakshasa's arms. Roughly, as easily as a lion might some small creature of the jungle, the Pandava drags Hidimba some krosas from that place where his brothers and mother sleep.

Outraged, enraged, startled to feel the strength of the human, the Rakshasa gives an earthshaking roar. Bhima drags him farther away lest his roars and curses awaken Kunti and his brothers.

Now they lock together, the Manava and the Rakshasa, and fight like two grown tuskers mad with rage. They uproot the trees that grow around them and strike each other with their trunks. Such a noise do they make that the other Pandavas and Kunti awake, and see Hidimbi sitting before them, disconsolately."

CANTO 156

HIDIMBAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Waking and seeing the extraordinary beauty of Hidimbi, Kunti and her sons are full of wonder. Kunti speaks to her sweetly.

'Who are you that are as beautiful and radiant as a child of the Devas? Fair one, whose daughter are you, where have you come from? If you are the Devi of this vana or an Apsara, tell me about yourself and why you are here.'

Hidimbi replies, 'This great jungle, of the colour of a blue cloud, is the domain of a Rakshasa called Hidimba. Most beautiful and gracious lady, I am his sister and he, O blessed one, sent me to kill you and your sons.

But when I arrived here I saw your mighty son who sat awake. Gracious lady, Kama, who pervades the nature of all the living, struck me with his flowery arrows, and I fell in love with your great son and chose him in my heart for my husband.

I told your son that I would carry all of you away from this place, but he would not allow me. When I did not return to Hidimba, my brother came here and your son hauled him away. Now they fight, the Manava and the Rakshasa, both of them endowed with untold strength, and make the vana tremble with their dreadful roars and blows.'

Yudhishtira jumps up, as do Arjuna, Nakula and tejasvin Sahadeva, and they see that Bhima and the Rakshasa do indeed fight some way off, like two lions. The dust they raise with their flying heavy feet seems like the smoke from a forest fire. Covered by that dust, their massive bodies are like two cliffs shrouded in mist.

Arjuna sees Bhima a little beleaguered by Hidimba, for the Vayuputra has not rested at all. With a smile, Arjuna says to his brother, 'You are tired, Bhima. Let Nakula and Sahadeva watch over our mother, and you must rest. I am here now, I will kill the Rakshasa.'

Bhima retorts, ‘Look upon this fight as a spectator, Arjuna. For he has come within reach of my hands and he will not escape with his life.’

Arjuna says, ‘Then why, O Bhima, do you let him live so long? Parantapa, we must be on our way. He will become stronger with dawn, as his kind always do, during the three sandhyas. He will also use his maya shakti then. Do not toy with him any longer, but use all your strength now and kill him, my brother.’

Blazing up, Bhima summons the awesome strength that his father Vayu employs during the Pralaya. With a roar, he seizes Hidimba and lifts him easily into the air. He spins the Rakshasa’s great body, blue as thunderheads, around, a hundred times in a moment.

Bhima says, ‘Rakshasa, you are blessed with intelligence in vain. You have fed for too long on unsanctified meat. You deserve an unholy death. I will rid this vana of you today, and make it a jungle without thorns. No more, Hidimba, will you feast on human flesh.’

Arjuna says again, impatiently, ‘Bhima, if you are finding it difficult to kill the Rakshasa, let me help you. Kill him quickly or let me do it. You are tired and must rest.’

Bhima flings Hidimba Rakshasa down savagely onto the ground. He plants his foot on the Rakshasa’s back and breaks his body in two like some twig. Hidimba lets out a dying cry that echoes through that vana, deep as the sound of a wet drum.

His brothers crowd around Bhima, slayer of all his enemies, and embrace him.

Then Arjuna says, ‘Jyeshta, I believe there is a town not far from this vana. Let us go and hide there, so Duryodhana’s spies do not find us here.’

His brothers, those Maharathas, those tigers among men, agree, ‘So be it.’

They set out, with Kunti, and Hidimbi the Rakshasi following them.”

CANTO 157

HIDIMBAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Bhima sees Hidimbi following them and turns on her with a soft growl.

He says, ‘Rakshasas avenge themselves on their enemies with impenetrable deception. So, Hidimbi, you must also go after your brother.’

He would have killed her, but Yudhishtira intervenes. ‘Bhima, Purushavyaghra, however angry you are you must never kill a woman. Pandava, dharma is more important than protecting one’s life.

You have killed Hidimba who came to kill us. This woman is surely his sister, but what harm can she do us even if she wants to?’

Hidimbi folds her hands before Kunti and Yudhishtira as well. She says, ‘Gracious lady, you know the pangs that Kama makes a woman feel. He torments me now with them, with love for your son Bhimasena. I live only for the moment when your son will soothe the fever that consumes me. The time has come, sweet lady, and I hope that he will make me glad.

I abandoned my brother and my people only to have Bhimasena for my husband. Most illustrious lady, if he will not have me I will kill myself. Fair one, gracious, beautiful one, be merciful to me. Think of me as being either a fool or your slave, but let your son Bhima, handsome as a Deva, marry me now and let me take him with me, where I go, where I will.

Noble lady, trust me, I will bring him safely back to you. Also, think of me at any time and I will come to you immediately and take you wherever you wish to go. I will protect you from every danger, and carry you over the most inaccessible and remote places, upon my back, through the sky.

Ah, be merciful and tell your son to make me his wife. The Rishis have said that in times of peril one should protect one’s life by any means at all, without considering scruples. Yet, he that keeps to dharma in times of duress and trial is the best of men, for distress is the greatest threat to men of dharma.

Dharma protects life; indeed, dharma is called the giver of life. Thus, nothing one does to keep dharma and save one's life can be censured. I am the means to your safety; tell your son to make me his.'

Yudhishtira now says, 'Hidimbi you speak truly. But slender-waisted one, you must keep your word. After his morning ablutions, his prayers and dawn rituals, Bhima shall be yours during the days, until the sun sets. Enjoy the days with him as you please and wherever you like. But Hidimbi, who can fly as swiftly as the mind, you must bring him back to us at nightfall of every day.'

Bhima bows his head to what Yudhishtira says, for he does indeed desire Hidimbi. He says, 'Slim-waisted Rakshasi, I promise to remain with you and to be yours until you have a son.'

Joyfully Hidimbi cries, 'So be it!' She then picks Bhima up effortlessly, rises up into the sky with him and flashes away. She flies with him to lofty mountains, sacred to the Devas, of unearthly beauty, where nameless and rare birds sing as they do nowhere else in the world.

Upon their peaks, on their sides where magnificent trees grow, great sires of their kind, and in their secret valleys, Hidimbi makes love with Bhima all day long. She assumes the most beautiful form for him, wears ornaments past compare, and often breaks into fine song herself, singing more sweetly than the birds.

They take their deep pleasure of each other in the hearts of impenetrable forests, beside lakes like great jewels upon the Earth, fragrant and laden with lotus and lily, on exquisite islands that stand in the flow of great rivers, on soft sands and smooth pebbles, in caves hidden behind towering waterfalls, upon the sylvan Himalaya, in crystalline pools at the foot of these cascades, upon which, also, resplendent lotuses shine, on seashores, great and empty beaches where no man has ever set foot, where gold dust and nuggets sparkle and pearls shine like small moons, in great towns and cities, in sprawling gardens, in sacred tapovanas, upon myriad hills, in the hidden domains of the Guhyakas and Siddhas, on the banks of the Manasarovara, where flowers and fruit festoon the radiant giant trees perennially.

Indeed, Hidimbi flies swiftly as the mind, and she makes love with Bhima in all these places, until she becomes pregnant and in her time delivers a mighty son. His eyes are fierce, his mouth wide, his ears long and pointed like arrows; he is altogether ferocious to behold.

His lips are coppery, his teeth sharp fangs, his arms great, his strength greater, and that child quickly becomes a master archer. His nose is long and sharp, his chest wide as houses, his calves are tremendous, his swiftness incredible, and there is nothing human about his face or appearance though he is indeed the son of a man.

As soon as that child is born, within an hour, he grows into a youth. He is stronger than any Pisacha, of any tribe, and any Rakshasa, too.

Quickly, taught by his great uncles, he becomes a master of every weapon. Rakshasa women give birth the very day they conceive; it is an ancient blessing given them by the Devi Durga, so they do not have to forgo sexual pleasure for any length of time. Of course, they can assume any form they choose, terrible or beautiful.

Bhima and Hidimbi's son has no hair on his head. When he is born, he bends to touch the feet of his mother and his father. Hidimbi remarks that his head is as smooth as a Ghata, a waterpot, and his parents name him Ghatotkacha, the pot-headed.

Ghatotkacha is devoted to his father and his uncles, and he is soon their favourite. But now Hidimbi knows that her time with Bhima has come to an end. She takes sad leave of them and goes away, to range the world as she pleases.

Ghatotkacha, greatest among Rakshasas, takes their blessing, as well, and, promising to appear before them whenever they need him and summon him with a thought, also leaves them and journeys north.

It is told that Indra gives an amsa of himself to create Maharatha Ghatotkacha. His reason for this is to create a worthy adversary for Karna, sadly one that he could finally kill with the deadly shakti, inexorable weapon which Indra himself gives that matchless warrior."

CANTO 158

HIDIMBAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Pandava Maharathas wander from jungle to jungle, hunting deer and other animals for their food. Their travels take them through the kingdoms and lands of the Matsyas, the Trigartas, the Panchalas and the Kichakas, with their emerald forests jewelled with lakes like the faces of the purest diamonds.

The brothers all wear their hair in matted jata, and valkala for garments, or animal hides: those redoubtable Kshatriyas wear the garb of wandering Sannyasis; and Kunti goes with them, their mother. At times, the Maharathas carry her upon their backs, and hurry along their way when they fear that they might be discovered. They go in disguise across the world's wild places.

They study the Rik and the other Vedas, as well as the Vedangas, and the other Shastras that deal with dharma and politics, too. During their wandering, they meet their grandsire Krishna Dwaipayana, the Maharishi Vyasa. They prostrate at his feet, then stand before him with folded hands, the Pandavas and Kunti.

Vyasa says, 'Bharatarishabhas, I know everything that has happened, indeed I had foreknowledge of it during my dhyana. I have come to bless you and to tell you that all that has transpired, your suffering and exile, will finally turn out for the best, and you will benefit from it. Do not grieve over any of this; it is all for your final happiness.

It is true that Dhritarashtra's sons and you are all the same to me. Yet, I must be partial to those that have suffered during their tender years; so, certainly, my affection for you is now greater, and because of that love I want to bless you and do some great good to you.

Not far from this place is a fine little town, where you will be perfectly safe. Take yourselves there, disguised, and wait for me to come to you again.'

Satyavati's son Dwaipayana comforts the sons of Pandu and leads them to the township of Ekachakra.

The Muni also consoles Kunti, 'Live long, daughter! For your son Yudhishtira, devoted as he is to truth, this radiant Purusharishabha who has conquered the world with his dharma, will soon rule over all the rulers of the Earth and be a king of kings.

Arjuna and Bhima will subdue the world in their brother's name, the Earth with her girdle of seas, and Yudhishtira will rule as emperor. Your sons and Madri's Maharathas, as well, will enjoy all power and every luxury and pleasure.

These Purushvyaghras will perform many great sacrifices, including the imperial Rajasuya yagna and the Aswamedha yagna, and munificent shall be the gifts they bestow upon the Brahmanas of the world.

Your sons will one day also rule over the kingdom of their ancestors, the Kuru kingdom, and they will keep their friends and kinsmen in great comfort, wealth and joy.'

Vyasa brings them into the home of a Brahmana in Ekachakra. Then the island-born Rishi says to Yudhishtira, 'Live here and wait for my return. Adapt yourself to the place and your situation, and I, Vyasa, say to you that happiness waits for you around the corner of the days.'

The Pandavas fold their hands humbly to him, and say, 'So be it.' The illumined Dwaipayana then leaves them and returns to his asrama, from where he has come."

CANTO 159

BAKAVADHA PARVA

King Janamejaya asked, "Dvijottama, best of Brahmanas, what did those mighty Maharathas, those Kuntiputras, do in Ekachakra?"

Vaisampayana said, "They live for a time in the home of a Brahmana, disguising themselves as Brahmanas, too. During the day they go begging for alms, and return at dusk with whatever they have received and give it all to Kunti, who divides the alms in two equal portions. Bhima eats one portion, while the other is shared by Kunti and her other sons.

They range far, the sons of Pandu, wandering through enchanting forests, past crystalline lakes and frothing, clear rivers, and they become great favourites with the people of Ekachakra for the manner in which they deport themselves. Thus, O Bharatarishabha, some time passes.

One day, while four of her sons are out begging alms, Bhima is in the room in the home of the Brahmana, their host, with his mother Pritha. Suddenly, Kunti hears piteous sobs echoing from within the Brahmana's house. She hears the man, his wife and children all crying in the most heartbroken manner.

Kunti cannot bear it and says to Bhima, 'My son, we are living peacefully and happily in the house of this Brahmana, who shows us such kindness and respect. Duryodhana has no idea where we are, but believes us to be dead.

My child, I am always blessing this Brahmana in my heart and wondering what great good I should do to him. The true man, my Bhima, always pays back more than he receives. Some terrible tragedy has overtaken our host. If we can be of any help at all to him, we must requite his generous hospitality.'

Bhima says at once, 'Mother, find out what ails the Brahmana. Whatever it might be, I will do everything I can to remove his distress, however difficult that might prove.'

They hear more anguished cries from the Brahmana and his wife. Kunti rises and runs towards the inner chambers of the house of their host, even like a cow does to her tethered calf. She pauses at the door and sees the Brahmana, his wife, their son and daughter all sitting in utmost dejection, with tears streaming down their faces.

The Brahmana says, 'Oh, curse this worldly life! It is as hollow as a reed, pointless, and founded just on sorrow. It begins and ends in grief and knows no freedom. Life is a disease, a tale of misery.

The Atman is one, but it must pursue dharma, artha and kama. And because it does so, and all at the same time, discord arises, and then untold grief. Some say that moksha is our final desire and goal, but I am certain that it can never be attained.

The acquisition of wealth is hell; the pursuit of it attended by misery; and when one finally does acquire wealth one is even more miserable for one has grown attached to one's hard-earned possessions and lives in constant anxiety of losing them.

And today mortal danger has entered my life, and I cannot see how to escape it. Wife of mine, how often I told you let us leave this town and go somewhere else, where we would be happy. But you would not listen.

You always replied, simple woman, "I was born here and have grown old here. This is my home, the place of my ancestors."

But your mother and father left this world a long time ago; all your relatives are also dead. Then why did you want to go on living in this wretched place? No, you would not listen to me, and now that terrible time has come for you to lose one member of your family.

What could be more terrible for me? But no, it is I that will offer myself to death because I could never sacrifice any of you, while keeping myself alive. You have been such a good wife to me, a helpmeet in any punya that I undertook, always self-effacing, and always as loving as a mother.

The Gods gave you to me as a true companion and you are my mainstay, my greatest support. My parents got us married. Your lineage is as pure as your nature is sweet. You are the mother of my children, devoted, chaste and innocent. I married you with every holy rite and I will not abandon you now, who have been so constant in your vratas. I will not sacrifice your life to save mine.

Ah, how will I sacrifice my son who has not yet attained puberty? How will I sacrifice my daughter, my own child given to me by God to become

the mother, one day, of my grandchildren, through whom my ancestors and I will attain those realms that only a daughter's sons can bestow upon our souls?

There are those that say that a father loves his son best, while others insist that a daughter is a father's favourite. But for me both my children have always been equal and equally loved.

It is plain that I cannot sacrifice the life of any of you, yet if I die myself who will look after you when I am gone? What peace will my spirit have even in the next world? You will certainly perish, as well, without me.

Oh, there is no cure for the horrible tragedy that has overtaken us, no escape. I do not know what to do. It seems the only course is for all four of us to go and die together. Yes, that seems the only way.'"

CANTO 160

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing the Brahmana's stricken words, his wife says, 'O Brahmana, you must not grieve like an ordinary man. This is no time for lamenting. You are learned and you know that all who are born must surely die; you must not grieve over the inevitable.

A man seeks a wife, a son or daughter, all for his self. You are a wise man; kill your grief. I will go in your place, for it is the highest dharma of a woman to save her husband's life by sacrificing her own. I could hope for no greater fortune. By doing this I will find joy and great fame in this world, and eternal bliss in the next.

I tell you, my husband, this is a woman's highest dharma, and by this we shall both find both punya and sukha. I have fulfilled my womanhood by bearing you our children; I owe you no further debt. You are able and can support and nurture our son and daughter; but not I.

You are my life, my wealth, and my lord; without you, how will I feed or care for these young ones, why, how will I support myself? If I am a widow and without a lord, how will I keep the three of us alive and still lead a chaste and honest life?

If arrogant or otherwise unworthy suitors come for your daughter's hand, how will I protect her? My lord, even as birds fly hungrily at discarded meat, so do men seek out a woman who has lost her husband.

Brahmanottama, my virtue might well falter if evil men repeatedly importune me. Then how will I be able to set this innocent daughter of yours upon the pure path which all her ancestors have walked?

As for your son, how will I, as a widow, teach him everything that he should know, so that he becomes as accomplished and virtuous as yourself? Like Sudras that demand to hear the Veda, base men will come for your daughter's hand, and how will I resist them? Even if I refuse, they might

well take her by force, like crows stealing sacrificial ghee, this pure child blessed with all your qualities.

And when the world sees your son become so unlike his father, and your daughter married to some low man, it will despise and dishonour me, even the worst in it, and I will certainly die. And when the both of us are dead, these children will also perish like fish when they have no water in which to live.

So, O Brahmana, you must allow me to sacrifice myself. Also, those that know dharma always say that for a woman who has borne children to die before her husband is the greatest punya. Ah, I am more than ready to abandon my son and my daughter, all my kin, and life itself for your sake.

For a woman to serve her husband is her highest dharma, loftier than yagnas, vratas, sannyasa or any kind of daana. So what I mean to do is the purest dharma and punya for you and your race.

The Rishis say that a man treasures his wife, children, relatives and all his possessions to save himself from danger and sorrow. He watches over his wealth to keep danger away and with this wealth he supports and protects his wife. And himself he protects through both his wealth and his wife.

The Sages truly say that a man acquires a wife, a son, wealth and a house in order to safeguard himself against any misfortune, expected or unforeseen. The ancients have also declared that all one's relatives together are not equal to oneself. So, my lord, you must sacrifice me to save yourself. I beg you let me sacrifice myself so that you can care for these young ones of mine.

Besides, those who know dharma always say that a woman must never be killed. Rakshasas also know the laws of dharma. It is certain that the Rakshasa will kill a man but not so that he will dare kill a woman. This is another reason for you to send me to the Rakshasa.

My lord, I have enjoyed great happiness, so much joy and pleasure, and I have also acquired a good deal of spiritual punya. I have borne you these two children who are so precious to me. All my womanly wants and needs have been fulfilled, and I have lived a long life. I am not afraid to die.

I am always eager to serve and please you, that is my nature; keeping all this in mind, I have arrived at my resolve. When I am gone, you can marry another wife, and through her find more religious merit. There is no sin in it. For a man to take a second wife is punya, while for a woman it is a sin to

marry a second husband. Remember all this, my lord, and also that for you to sacrifice your life is sinful.

And so, do not delay, but set us all free from our burden of grief: yourself, your family, and these children of ours.'

Bharata, the Brahmana embraces her emotionally, and tears stream down their faces, while grief and silence fill the room."

CANTO 161

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “Listening to her parents, the daughter is stricken and cries, ‘Why do you lament and cry like this, as if you have no one to care for you? Hear what I have to say, O my father and mother, before deciding what you are going to do.

Is it not true that one day you will have to send me away, give me to someone to be his wife? Since you must sacrifice me one day, let it be today, and so save three lives for the price of one.

Men wish for children, believing that they will save them in this world and the next. So, today, ford the river of your misfortunes by making a raft of me, your child. The Sages call a child a Putra, a saviour, because a child does indeed save its parents both in this world and the next.

The Pitrs wish for grandchildren from me, to become their special saviours. But by saving my father’s life today, I will become a saviour to them myself. My brother, this little one is young and tender. There is no doubt that he will not survive if you die. If both my father and my brother perish, there will be no one left to offer the pinda and tarpana for the spirits of our manes. Nothing could be more terrible.

And if you both leave me, and my mother will certainly not survive your deaths, I will sink into the deepest despair, and die myself, a heartbroken death. However, if you, my mother and father, and this little one continue to live, our family will continue and the ancestral pinda will also continue to be offered.

A son is a man’s very soul; his wife is his dearest friend; but a daughter is only a burden. Rid yourself of this burden, father, and let me tread the high path of dharma. I am a girl; if you die, I will become helpless and certainly come to grief, one way or another.

That is why I have decided to save our clan and gain the punya of this fearful sacrifice. Dvijottama, if you leave me and go to the Rakshasa

yourself, I will never recover from the grief of it. Be merciful to me, Purushottama, for all our sakes, for the sake of dharma, and for our clan. You must sacrifice my life and live on. You must send me away one day soon, it is inevitable; let this be that day.

What could be more terrible than if you are to die and we are forced to live on, begging for our food like dogs, at the mercy of any stranger who wants to take advantage of us? But if you live on, I will surely find great joy in Devaloka.

I have heard that if a man sacrifices his daughter, offering her like an oblation to the Devas and the Pitrs, he and his shall find prosperity.'

Tears roll ceaselessly down her face as she speaks, and her parents are plunged deeper into despair. The three of them hug one another and sob.

Seeing them, the son of the house, the little innocent, says in the sweetest lisp, and his eyed wide and shining, 'Don't cry, my mother, my father, my sister.'

He goes up to them smiling and brandishing a blade of grass in his small hand. Screwing up his face into a delightful snarl, he cries, 'I will slay the Rakshasa who eats people!'

At which, despite their predicament and their terror, the other three burst out laughing. Kunti sees her moment and enters the room. She speaks to them and truly what she says revives their spirits as amrita does a dying man."

CANTO 162

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'Tell me the cause of your grief and I will remove it if I can.'

The Brahmana replies, 'Sannyasini, I thank you for your noble intention, but our grief cannot be removed by any human agency.

Not far from our town there lives a Rakshasa calls Baka, and he is the lord and master of all these lands. He is inordinately strong and rules our country. He is also the lord of all the Rakshasas and thus he protects our town from the rest of them, and we fear no enemy at all.

However, in return for his protection we must send him a regular offering of food: a cartload of rice, drawn by two buffaloes, and the human that drives the cart. Every family's turn comes to send the Rakshasa his offering, and there being so many homes in our country, each one's turn comes after many years.

If any household tries to escape their turn when it comes, Baka descends on them and kills the entire family, men, women and children, and eats them.

The king of this country lives in a city called Vetrakiya. He is a wanton and an imbecile, and does nothing to protect us. And continuing to live in the kingdom of such a weak and impotent monarch, we surely deserve our fate.

No one can force a Brahmana to dwell permanently in any place, and they are like birds that migrate from kingdom to kingdom, in complete freedom. The Rishis have always maintained that one must first find a good king, then a good wife, and then seek wealth. Acquiring these three one becomes capable of saving oneself and one's clan.

But I have been foolish in my pursuit of the three, and today I find myself plunged in a sea of mortal danger and misery, for today it is my turn to send Bakasura his offering of food, which will destroy my family.

I do not have the money with which I might buy a man willing to sell his life and take Baka his cartload of rice. I cannot think of sacrificing my wife or my children. I see no ray of hope or escape, and am sinking in the sea of dread.

I have decided that the only course for us is to go all together to the monster and let him devour us all.'"

CANTO 163

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says with a smile, 'Do not grieve anymore, good Brahmana, for I have a way to save you from the Rakshasa. You have just one son, and besides he is a young child, and only one daughter, as well, also a tender girl. I see no reason why either of them, your wife or even you should sacrifice yourselves to satisfy the Rakshasa.

Brahmana, I have five sons. Let one of them take the cart of rice to Baka.'

But the Brahmana is aghast at the idea, 'I can never allow someone else to sacrifice his life for me! You are Brahmanas and my guests. Why, even a lowborn man would not accept your offer. It has always been said that one should sacrifice oneself and one's children for the sake of a Brahmana, and certainly not the reverse. I believe this, and if I have to choose between the death of a Brahmana and my own, I will always choose to die myself.

Brahmahatya is the most heinous sin of all, and there is no expiation for it. It is better to sacrifice one's own life, however sadly, than a Brahmana's. Noble, blessed lady, I will not be committing suicide if I go to the Rakshasa, and no sin will cling to me in my next life. But if I countenance a Brahmana giving his life for mine, I would sin grievously and would never escape the consequences.

The Rishis have said that abandoning or betraying someone who comes to your home for protection, as well as participating in the death of one that seeks death at your hands are both dreadful sins. The Sages say this in the context of what is permissible in grave danger and distress.

So, dear lady, it is far better for me that I die with my wife and children today than that I sacrifice a Brahmana's life so that I can continue living.'

Kunti replies, 'Brahmana, I also believe firmly that a Brahmana should never be sacrificed. And as for me, even if I had a hundred sons instead of

the five that I do, none of them would be any less dear to me than the others. But the Rakshasa will not kill my son because this son of mine is blessed with strength beyond your imagination. He is also a master of occult mantras.

He will deliver the offering of food to the Rakshasa, but will escape with his life. It will not be the first time, either; I have seen, more than once, my son killing the most powerful Rakshasas, fiends big as hillocks.

But Brahmana, you must not tell anyone this secret, for then those that want this secret power for themselves will never leave my sons in peace. The Rishis have said that if my son teaches his secret knowledge to anyone without his Guru's leave, he himself will lose his strength.'

Hearing what Pritha says, incredulous joy fills the Brahmana and his wife, for surely her words are like amrita to them. Kunti takes the Brahmana to Bhimasena Vayuputra, and tells him about the Rakshasa and what she wants him to do.

Bhima replies casually, as if this is nothing, 'So be it.'"

CANTO 164

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “After Bhima gives his word, O Bharata, saying ‘I will’, the other Pandavas return with the alms they have begged during the day. Yudhishtira takes one look at Bhima’s delighted expression and guesses at what has transpired while he is out.

Yudhishtira sits beside his mother and says quietly, ‘What task has Bhima undertaken? Did you command him or did he take it upon himself?’

Kunti replies calmly, ‘I told Bhima Parantapa to do this great thing for the sake of the good Brahmana and to liberate this lovely township from fear.’

Yudhishtira says sharply, ‘What rashness, mother. You do not know what you have done. This is like telling Bhima to commit suicide. The Sages never approve of abandoning one’s child.

O my mother, why do you want to sacrifice your own son to save another’s life? This is not only unnatural for humans but against everything that the Veda teaches.

We sleep peacefully at nights because of Bhima’s strength. We have some hope of recovering our kingdom from the envious sons of Dhritarashtra because we rely on Bhima’s strength. Duryodhana and Shakuni do not sleep at night because the thought of Bhima’s strength haunts them.

We escaped from the house of lac because of Bhima’s strength; countless other perils he has saved us from. Bhima killed Purochana. Because of him we already think of ourselves as killing Dhritarashtra’s sons and ruling the Earth again very soon, and over all the wealth that is in her.

Mother, what were you thinking when you decided to sacrifice Bhima to the Rakshasa today? Have you lost your reason Kunti, or have our recent trials clouded your mind?’

Kunti says, ‘I have not lost my reason, neither is my mind clouded, Yudhishtira, and you need have no fear for Bhima. We have been living safely in this Brahmana’s house, undiscovered by Duryodhana, and our host has shown us great respect and affection.

We are in his debt, and gratitude is the mark of a noble man; indeed, the true man returns more than he receives. And it is to repay our debt to the good Brahmana that I decided to send Bhima to the Rakshasa.

I have now seen Bhima’s strength, when we escaped from the house of lac, when he killed Hidimba, and I have complete faith in him. My son is as strong as ten thousand elephants; that is how he carried five of us, each one weighty as an elephant, from Varanavrata.

No one on Earth is as strong as Bhima, why, I venture that he may well defeat Indra, who wields the Vajra and is the greatest warrior. Soon after he was born, he fell from my lap down onto the mountain below. The fall left no scratch on him, but the rock onto which he fell was shattered. Pandava, even then I knew my son’s matchless strength.

No, neither rashness nor foolishness made me decide to send Bhima against the Rakshasa, or any ulterior motive. Deliberately, and after careful thought, I decided to do this thing.

Yudhishtira, we shall repay our deep debt to our host by this deed as well as gain great punya by it. A Kshatriya who serves a Brahmana in any manner acquires many lofty realms of bliss in the hereafter. A Kshatriya who saves a Brahmana’s very life certainly finds great fame in this world and the next.

A Kshatriya who helps a Vaisya becomes very popular, and a warrior must not hesitate to help even a Sudra who comes to him for refuge, for then he shall be born into the noblest of royal houses in his next life, and be prosperous and have great honour from other kings.

O Scion of the House of Puru, the illustrious Dwaipayana himself told me all this once. Remembering what he said, I made my decision.’”

CANTO 165

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Now, Yudhishtira is contrite. He says, 'Mother, what you have done is wise and excellent. Our Bhima will certainly kill the Rakshasa and come back alive, not only for his indomitable strength but for our mother's unfaltering kindness towards Brahmanas.

But, mother, you must get the Brahmana's solemn pledge that he will say nothing of this to anyone else.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "At dawn the next day, Bhimasena sets out for the Rakshasa's lair, with the cartload of fine food which the Brahmana's wife has prepared. As he goes towards the forest where the Rakshasa lives, Bhima himself begins to eat, and how he relishes the Brahmana woman's cooking!

As he eats, the great Pandava begins to roar out the Rakshasa's name, to taunt him. Baka hears him, and flies out in a rage from his cave towards the impertinent cartman. He is immense, as is his strength; his eyes are red, and so are his hair and beard; he is altogether terrible as he strides along, his footmarks deep upon the earth.

His maw stretches from one ear to the other, and his ears are sharp, pointed like arrowheads. Three deep furrows mark his thick brow. The Rakshasa arrives where Bhima sits contentedly eating the food; Baka bites his lip and glowers.

Softly, in a voice full of menace, he says, 'Who is this fool that dares eat my food before my very eyes? Who is this fool that wants to see Yamaloka at once?'

Bhima only smiles in contempt, and continues eating; he does not so much as turn to look at the Rakshasa. Baka gives the most dreadful roar, thrusts out his long hirsute arms and rushes at Bhima.

Bhima Parantapa gives him just one brief glance, then goes back to eating the Rakshasa's food with undimmed relish. Baka strikes Vrikodara a

tremendous blow from behind, smiting him with two clenched fists. Kunti's son does not stir; he still does not look at the Rakshasa, only continues to eat.

Beside himself, Baka tears up a tree and advances upon Bhima again. Meanwhile, Vrikodara finishes the last of the great meal. He washes his hands and now turns with a smile to face the Rakshasa, ready at last to fight him. Baka casts the tree like a javelin at Bhima, who catches it in his left hand.

More trees Baka tears up and casts them in a fair blizzard at the Pandava. Bhima also now pulls up trees and hurls them at the monster. Soon, the entire forest around the dreadful two is denuded of trees.

Baka roars, 'I am Baka!' and he springs at Bhima and seizes him with his hands. Bhima seizes the Rakshasa, too, and they begin to drag each other about violently. The ground shakes beneath their great feet, and the trees they cast at each other snap in pieces and are crushed.

Baka tires quickly, and Bhima flings him down on the ground, holds him down with his knees and begins to rain awesome blows on the supine Rakshasa. Then, in a flash, he turns Baka on his face, plants one knee on his spine and, seizing the Rakshasa's neck in one hand and his waistcloth in the other, begins to bend him back in two.

Baka's screams and roars shake that place. Rajan, he vomits blood as Bhima inexorably breaks his back."

CANTO 166

BAKAVADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Finally, with a resounding crack, Baka’s back breaks and, with a last scream, the Rakshasa, big as a hill, dies.

Terrified by the sounds of that battle, Baka’s kinsmen run out, Rajan; they come with their servants to see what the matter is, and find their lord broken upon the ground and his slayer standing over him.

Seeing them terror-stricken, trembling and grieving, Bhima comforts them. But he says, ‘Never again kill a Manava, for if you do, you will also die as Baka has died.’

Those Rakshasas say, ‘So be it,’ giving their solemn word. And indeed, from that day on, the people of Ekachakra and that entire region find those Rakshasas gentle towards humankind, those of the fiends that do not fly that country after they see Baka killed by the mighty Bhima.

Bhima brings Baka’s corpse back to Ekachakra. Unobserved, he leaves the great carcass at one of the town gates, by dark, and returns to the house of the Brahmana, where he tells Yudhishtira what has happened.

Next morning, some people of Ekachakra come out and see the hilly Rakshasa, covered in blood and dead. Seeing how he has been mangled by whoever killed him, their hair stands on end.

They run back into the town and the news spreads like wildfire. Now the people come out in thousands, men, women and children, to the gate where the Rakshasa lies like a fallen cliff. They stand stunned by the sight, and at the thought of who could have done this thing.

Rajan, those people give fervent thanks to all their gods, and then they begin to think whose turn it was to take the cart of food the previous day to Baka. Soon they arrive in the house of the good Brahmana, and demand to know what has happened.

At first, he will say nothing. But when they press him repeatedly, that Brahmanarishabha says, ‘Yesterday, a Brahmana, a master of mantras, saw

me crying with my family at the fate that had overtaken us. He asked why we wept and when I told him, he consoled me, smilingly, and said, "Fear nothing, for I will take his food to the Rakshasa."

At first I would not allow him, but he assured me that he would come to no harm. Surely, he slew Baka and has done us all a great service.'

All the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas of Ekachakra are wonderstruck, and the Vaisyas and the Sudras also rejoice. Indeed, they decide to mark that day with a festival to worship the Brahmana stranger who had freed them from the terror of Baka."

CANTO 167

CHAITRARATHA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, “After the slaying of Baka, and the ceremony they hold to celebrate the amazing feat by the unknown Brahmana, the people of Ekachakra go back to their homes and resume their daily lives.”

Janamejaya asked, “Brahmana, what did the Pandavas, those Purushavyaghras, do after they kill Baka Rakshasa?”

Vaisampayana said, “Rajan, they continue to live in the house of the good Brahmana, who constantly studies the Veda. A few days later, yet another austere Brahmana arrives in the home of the Pandavas’ host. Always generous to a fault, the Ekachakra Brahmanarishabha welcomes the visitor and makes him stay in his own home.

Hearing from their host that the newcomer is a gifted raconteur, one evening Kunti and her sons ask him to tell them about his wanderings and experiences. The Brahmana begins by telling them about his journeys and pilgrimages through various lands, their holy shrines and tirthas and rivers. Of great kings that he has met he speaks, and describes many wonderful kingdoms and cities.

When he has done this, O Janamejaya, the Brahmana begins to tell them about the forthcoming swayamvara of the daughter of Drupada Yagnasena of the Panchalas. He describes the unusual births of Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandi, and of the princess Krishnaa Draupadi, who also is born not from a woman but from a holy fire during a great yagna that Drupada performs.

Their curiosity aroused to hear about the extraordinary events in Drupada’s life, the Pandava Purusharishabhas ask the Brahmana, ‘Brahmana, how was Dhrishtadyumna born from a yagna fire? How was his sister Krishnaa born from the heart of the yagnashala? How did Dhrishtadyumna acquire all the astras from the peerless Acharya Drona? And, O Brahmana, how did Drupada and Drona become enemies?’

And the itinerant Brahmana tells them about the exceptional birth of Draupadi.”

CANTO 168

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

"The Brahmana says, 'Where the Ganga flows down into the plains, there lived a Maharishi called Bharadwaja, a great brahmacharin, who practised the most severe austerities. Stern were his vratas and profound his wisdom.

One day, he came to the river to perform his daily ablutions and saw the Apsara Ghritachi, who had finished bathing and stood on the river's bank, gazing across its flow.

Just then a gust of wind blew her single garment from the Apsara and she stood entirely naked, and ravishing. Seeing her like that, Bharadwaja was stricken with lust. He was a brahmacharin, continent from puberty, but now he helplessly ejaculated.

As soon as his semen spurted from him, Bharadwaja caught it in his drana, his waterpot. From the Sage's seed in the pot there emerged a lustrous son, whom the Rishi named Drona, the one born from the pot. Drona mastered all the Vedas and Vedangas.

Bharadwaja had a friend called Prihasta, who was king of the Panchalas. At almost the same time that Drona was born, Prihasta also had a son, whom he called Drupada. The Kshatriyarishabha Draupada would go daily to Bharadwaja's asrama, to study and play with Drona.

When Prihasta died, Drupada became king of the Panchalas. At this same time, Drona heard that the mighty Parasurama had decided to take final Sannyasa and had decided to give away all his wealth before doing so.

Drona went to Parasurama and said, "Brahmanottama, I am Bharadwaja's son Drona who has come to receive your wealth from you."

Rama replied, "I have already given away all my wealth. All that I now have are my body and my astras. Brahmana, ask me for either of these and I will give it to you."

Drona said, “I beg you, Lord, give me all the astras you have, and teach me how to loose and to recall them.”

Parasurama Bhargava said, “So be it,” and bestowed all his astras upon Drona, including the great Brahmastra, loftiest among weapons. Drona thought of himself as being the most fortunate man alive, and indeed, having the Brahmastra did render him superior to almost every man.

A master of untold prowess now, Bharadwaja’s son, tiger among men, went to Drupada and said to him, “I am your friend Drona.”

But Drupada replied scornfully, “A lowborn man can never be the equal or friend of a king of pure lineage. A man who is not a Maharatha can never become the friend of a Maharatha. So, too, though once we might have been friends, Drona, a commoner can never hope to be the friend of a king. Our friendship is a thing of the past.”

Shaken and humiliated, Drona, blessed with great intelligence, left the Panchala kingdom and came to the capital of the Kurus, the city named after the elephant. His heart was set on taking revenge on Drupada.

In Hastinapura, Bhishma welcomed Bharadwaja’s mighty son, appointed him as Guru to his grandsons, the Kuru scions, and gave the Brahmana much wealth, as well. Drona called his disciples and said to them, “Sinless princes, when I have taught you the use of weapons, made master warriors out of you, you must give me the dakshina that I will ask for, for it is something I hold very dear.”

Arjuna and others said to their Acharya, “We shall.”

And when they did become proficient at arms, and their aim was true, Drona asked for his dakshina, “Prihasta’s son Drupada is king in Chatravati. Take his kingdom from him and give it to me!”

The Pandavas defeated Drupada in battle, took him captive, and brought him with his ministers to Drona; they offered him to their master as dakshina. Drona looked at the humbled king and said, “Drupada, I still want your friendship. But you say that no man who is not a king can be the friend of a king. So, Yagnasena, I will divide your kingdom, which now is mine, in two. You shall rule the Panchala lands south of the Bhagirathi, while I will be king of the northern lands.”

Drupada said to that best among Brahmanas and foremost among masters of astras, “Noble son of Bharadwaja, let us be friends forever!”

With that they embraced and went to their separate abodes. However, while Drona naïvely believed that he had struck peace and friendship with

Drupada, that Kshatriya never forgave him, and his every moment was full of the rancour of his humiliation. He wasted away, thinking of it ceaselessly,' says the Brahmana at Ekachakra."

CANTO 169

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “The Brahmana continues, ‘Drupada began to roam the jungles in quest of Brahmanas that were masters of yagnas, who could relieve his terrible distress. He was grief-stricken and he had no children who were superior enough to avenge what Drona had done.

Over and over Drupada would say, “Fie on my weakling children, none of them can avenge me. Fie on my kinsmen, weaklings all,” and he would hiss and sigh like a serpent, from dejection.

O Bharata, that mightiest of kings never stopped thinking about it, but he saw no way by which he could, with all his Kshatriya might, defeat the discipline, prowess and the accomplishments of Drona.

One day, as he ranged the banks of the Yamuna and the Ganga, Drupada came upon a sacred asrama of some Brahmanas, all of them Snatakas, of stern vratas and tapasya, and of deep dharma and lofty punya. There he saw two Rishis called Yaja and Upayaja, masters of the spirit, most evolved and powerful of Sages.

They belonged to the race of Kashyapa and had devoted themselves to the study of the most ancient and arcane scriptures, arts and sciences. Drupada knew at once that, if anyone, those Brahamanashreshtas could help him. Assiduously, singlemindedly, he began to worship and to cultivate them.

He found the austere Upayaja, the younger of the Rishis, possessed of great wisdom and power, and he offered him measureless wealth, privately. He served that Rishi like a common acolyte, always speaking the most flattering and sweet words to him, prostrating at his feet, and offering him everything that any man might desire.

One day, after offering his usual worship, Drupada said to Upayaja, “O Brahmana, if you perform a putrakama yagna for me through which I have

a son who will kill Drona, I will give you ten thousand cows, or whatever else you want from me."

But the Sage replied, "I cannot."

However, Drupada would not give up and continued to serve and worship the Rishi diligently. When a year passed, one day Upayaja said sweetly to Drupada, "One day, as he roamed in the heart of the forest, I saw my elder brother Yaja pick up a fruit which had fallen from a tree. He did not care to examine the purity of the ground on to which it had fallen. Why, he has no scruples about accepting impure gifts. He that can be impure in one instance can well be the same in others.

While we were students in the home of our Guru, studying the Shastras, my brother had no compunction about eating the unclean leavings from feasts. He always delighted in food, and has no distaste for any kind of food. I would surmise from this that my brother Yaja would in general be fond of mundane acquisitions.

O King, I suggest that you approach my brother; he will perform the yagna you desire."

Drupada heard this and surely had no great esteem for Yaja, but went to him nonetheless. He worshipped Yaja, and said, 'Master, perform a putrakama yagna for me and I will give you ten thousand cows. Hatred for Drona consumes me; only his death can put out the fire that burns my heart.

Greatest among those that know the Veda, Drona has the Brahmastara and I cannot vanquish him in battle. Bharadwaja's son is a great genius and he is Guru now to the Kuru princes. No Kshatriya in the world is his equal.

His formidable bow is twelve feet long and his arrows can kill every living thing. Bharadwaja's son, awesome bowman born as a Brahmana, denudes the power of the Kshatriya the world over. Why, he is like another Parasurama, born to destroy the very race of kings.

No man on Earth can withstand the ferocity of the astras of Drona. He is like a fire fed with ghee; he combines the power of the Brahmana with the prowess of a Kshatriya, and razes his adversaries.

But, O Yaja, your Brahma shakti, by itself, is greater that Drona's Brahma shakti and his Kshatriya shakti. As for me, I have only my Kshatriya shakti and I am no match for Bharadwaja's son. I have come to beg for your help, using your Brahma gyana that is far superior to Drona's.

Great Yaja, perform a yagna for me by which I might have an invincible son who will kill Drona. I will give you ten thousand cows for this, or any

wealth you wish."

Yaja said, "So be it,"and he turned his mind to remembering all the rituals for such a sacrifice. Realising that it was a weighty undertaking, he sought the help of his brother Upayaja, who had no desire for any worldly possessions.

When Upayaja agreed to help, Yaja began the yagna that would one day kill Drona. Upayaja detailed everything that they would need for the fire sacrifice, by which the king would have a son.

The Sage said, "Rajan, you will have a son such as you want, of matchless strength, vitality and valour."

Drupada began to make preparations for the great yagna. When everything was ready, Yaja poured libations of ghee into the sacred agni, and called Drupada's queen, "Come here, O daughter-in-law of great Prihasta, for, look, a son and a daughter have arrived for you."

The queen said, "Great Brahmana, my mouth is still full of saffron and other sweet things. My body is still daubed with perfume; I am not pure or fit to accept your offering of ghee that will give me children. O Yaja, I beg you, wait a little for me."

But Yaja replied, "Queen, it matters little whether you come or no. I have the oblation ready and Upayaja has sanctified it with his mantras. Let the object of the yagna be fulfilled!"

With that, Yaja poured the sanctified libation into the fire, and immediately a resplendent and fierce looking prince arose from the flames, a youth who looked like a Deva and shone like fire himself. He wore a crown upon his head, and excellent armour upon his body, carried a bow and arrows, and let out resounding roars from time to time.

As soon as he was born he climbed into a fulvid chariot, which also arose from the yagna flames, and dashed about in it for a while; and the overjoyed Panchalas shouted, "Jaya! Jaya!" They were so full of joy that it seemed the Earth at that moment could hardly contain them or bear them.

Then, an asariri spoke from the sky, "This prince has been born to kill Drona. He will remove all the fear of the Panchalas, and spread their fame across the world. He shall dispel the anxiety of his father, the king."

As soon as the voice has spoken, from the heart of the yagnashala there arose a princess of unearthly beauty and great fortune, and she would be called Panchali. Her skin was dark, her eyes were black and long as lotus petals, and her hair was deep blue, a glossy cascade of curls. Her nails were

curved, as brilliant as burnished copper, her eyebrows were fair, and her bosom was deep. She was like the daughter of a Deva born into the world of men.

Her body was fragrant like a blue lotus, and this exquisite scent of her spread a full two miles. Her beauty had no equal on Earth. She was like a Goddess herself, and any Deva, Danava or Yaksha would gladly choose her for his wife.

When this incomparable princess, her hips wide and delicate, was born, again a disembodied voice spoke out of the sky. "This dark girl will be the best of all women and she shall cause the destruction of Kshatriya kind. This slender-waisted one will fulfil the deep purpose of the Gods, and with her advent all danger shall overtake the House of Kuru."

All together, the mighty Panchalas gave a great lion's roar, and the Earth trembled at that sound as if she would be cloven. Then, looking at the two fireborn children, Drupada's wife wanted them for her own, and she said to Yaja, "Let these two never know any other mother except me."

Yaja said, "Tathastu. So be it."

Then the Brahmanas who were present named the two children, with whom they were absolutely gratified. "Let Drupada's son be called Drishtadyumna for his terrific valour and because, like Dyumna, he has been born wearing armour and carrying weapons."

"Because the princess of matchless beauty is dark, let her be called Krishnaa."

Thus, from Drupada's great yagna those splendorous twins were born. And when Drona heard the news, he brought Drishtadyumna to his own kingdom in northern Panchala and taught him all the astras: to pay, as it were, for half the kingdom that he had taken from Drupada.

Bharadwaja's son was a Mahatman enough to know that fate is ineluctable, and by what he did he swelled his fame,' says the Brahmana at Ekachakra."

CANTO 170

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Kunti’s sons listen to what the Brahmana says, and it seems as if their hearts are pierced by subtle arrows; gone is their peace of mind.

Honest Kunti sees her sons distracted and says to Yudhishtira, ‘Many days and nights we have lived here in Ekachakra and our time has passed pleasantly, living off alms that these good people have given us.

Parantapa, we have ranged through all the fine woods and forests in this region of the Earth, and they hold no freshness for us anymore. Also, Scion of the House of Kuru, alms are not as easy to find as before. If you wish, I think we should now go to Panchala. We have never seen that country and, Kshatriya, we should find some delight in it.

I have heard, O scourge of your enemies, that alms are not difficult to find in Panchala, and that King Drupada himself is a great patron of Brahmanas. I feel that it is never good to live too long in one place. So, my son, if you also agree let us leave for the Panchala country.’

Yudhishtira agrees immediately, ‘It is our dharma to do whatever you wish, mother. I am willing to leave at once, but I do not know what my brothers will say.’”

CANTO 171

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Kunti speaks to Bhimasena, Arjuna and the twins about going to the Panchala kingdom. Immediately, they agree, 'Tathastu, so be it!'

Rajan, now Kunti and her sons bid farewell to their host, the Brahmana, and set out for Drupada's wonderful city.

While the Pandavas live disguised in the home of the Ekachakra Brahmana, Satyavati's son Vyasa comes to see them one day. Those Kshatriyas see him coming and come out to receive him. They worship him with folded hands, and stand thus silently before him.

The Maharishi is pleased by their welcome and asks them to sit down around him. When they do so, he speaks to them cheerfully, 'Slayers of your enemies, are you living in dharma and the way of the Shastras? Do you worship the Brahmanas? I do hope that those that deserve your adoration duly receive it.'

He continues genially, but speaking of matters of great depth and import, words of dharma, and which dwell upon many a fascinating theme.

Then Dwaipayana says, 'Once, an illumined Rishi, who lived in his asrama, had a tender-waisted daughter, a girl of lovely lips, fine eyebrows, who was accomplished in every way. However, as a result of her karma from a past life, this maiden was taken by misfortune: she was chaste and she was beautiful, but she could not find a husband.

In sorrow she began to perform tapasya so that she would find a man to marry her. So excellent was her penance that she quickly pleased the Lord Siva, who appeared before her and said, "Ask for the boon you want, for I am Sankara who will give you whatever your heart wishes for."

In transport she cried, "Lord, give me a husband. Give me a husband blessed with every quality and virtue!" Indeed, five times she repeated this.

The Lord Isana said, “Blessed child, you will have five husbands from among the Bharata princes, and they shall be the best of men.”

She was taken aback, “Lord, I want just one husband through your grace.”

Siva said to her, “Five times, young woman, you asked me for a husband; so, in another life, five husbands you shall have.”

Bharatarishabhas, that young woman of unworldly beauty has been born as the daughter of Drupada, and she, the flawless Krishnaa of the line of Prihasta, is destined to become the wife of all five of you. Mighty Kshatriyas, go to the capital of the Panchalas and live there, and when you have made Panchali your wife you will find untold joy.’

Saying this to the Pandavas, their august and illustrious grandsire bids them farewell, and the Maharishi returns to his asrama from where he had come.”

CANTO 172

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After Dwaipayana leaves, the Pandavas bid their host the Brahmana a warm farewell, and set out for the Panchala kingdom, with Kunti walking at their head and joy brimming in their hearts. Those slayers of all foes go north towards their destination, walking by night and day, and arrive at a holy temple to the Lord Siva, with the crescent Moon upon his brow.

Then the Pandava Purushavyaghras arrive on the banks of the Ganga. Maharatha Arjuna Dhananjaya now walks before them with a brand lit in his hand to show the way, and to protect them from wild animals.

A haughty Gandharva king is in the river with his wives, at pleasure in that secluded place. The Gandharva hears the footfalls of the Pandavas as they near the river. He flares up in anger to see Kunti and her sons approach.

Bending his terrible bow in a circle, he cries, 'Apart from its first forty instants, it is known that the grey twilight which comes before nightfall has been kept for Yakshas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas to range the Earth; and all of these can go anywhere they wish. Manavas have been given the rest of the day for their work, but if mortal men dare approach us during the third sandhya, roaming the world for gain, both the Rakshasas and we Gandharvas kill the fools.

No one who knows the Veda will ever approve of any human, be he not a king leading his army, daring to approach a pool or a river during this hour. Stay away, mortals; stay far and do not come near me. Can't you see that I am bathing in the Bhagirathi?

I am the Gandharva Angaraparna. Mighty I am, proud, and a friend to Lokapala Kubera. This forest on the banks of the Ganga, where I sport to please all my senses, belongs to me; it is calls Anagaraparna after me. Not Devas, Kapalikas, Yakshas, Gandharvas or Rakshasas dare come to this

vana of mine, for I am the brightest jewel on the crown of Kubera. How dare you paltry Manavas approach me?'

Annoyed by the Gandharva's arrogant tone, Arjuna replies, 'Fool, be it day or night, dawn or dusk, who can prevent anyone from going to the Ocean, the Himalaya or to the banks of this holy river? Sky ranger, be one's belly empty or full, be it day or night, there is no prescribed time when one might or not come to the Ganga, greatest of rivers.

As for us, we are powerful and do not care that we disturb you. Vain Gandharva, only those that are weak will have any regard for you. This Ganga springs from the golden peaks of Himavan, and she flows into the Ocean in seven sacred streams. They that drink the waters of Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Vitashtha, Sarayu, Gomati, and Gandaki are washed of all their sins.

Gandharva, this most holy Ganga when she flows through the heavens is called Alakananda; in Pitriloka, realm of the manes, she is Vaitarani that no sinner can cross, Krishna Dwaipayana himself has said so. She is auspicious and blessed; there is no danger in her, and she can lead those that touch her waters to Swarga. Why do you want to keep us away from her? It is not dharma that you do.

We will not obey you, Gandharva, but touch the holy waters of the Bhagirathi. No one shall prevent us.'

Angaraparna replies with a flurry of lightlike arrows, narachas like serpents. But, Arjuna easily strikes them aside with a shield in one hand and with the brand he carries in the other.

Says Dhananjaya again to the raging Gandharva, 'Gandharva, you cannot frighten those that know arms,for your weapons dissolve before me like wavefroth. Yet, I feel that you are a better archer than mortal men, and I will fight you, using astras and with no maaya or deceit.

Look, this Agneyastra that I cast at you was given to Bharadwaja by Indra's Guru Brihaspati. Bharadwaja taught it to Agnivesya, from whom my Guru had it. Drona gave this astra to me.'

With a roar, and in some fury, Arjuna casts the Agneyastra, weapon of fire, at Angaraparna. The astra burns the Gandharva's chariot to ashes and flings him unconscious on to the ground. In a flash, Arjuna seizes his long hair, wreathed with fine garlands, and drags him toward his brothers.

The Gandharva's wife Kumbhinasi runs to Yudhishtira, wailing, 'Noble one, I am Kumbhinasi and I am this Gandharva's wife. I seek your

protection, great one. I beg you spare my husband's life!'

Seeing her terrified, Yudhishtira says to Arjuna, 'Parantapa, child, who will kill a beaten enemy, whose honour is lost that a woman begs for his life, for he himself cannot defend himself anymore?'

At once, Arjuna says, 'Keep your life, Gandharva. Leave us and go in peace, for Yudhishtira, lord of the Kurus, commands me to show you mercy.'

The Gandharva says, 'You have vanquished me and consumed my chariot. I will give up my name Angaraparna, Blazing Chariot, for, O friend, I have no right left to it when you have humbled me. From now I shall call myself Burnt Chariot for what you did to my ratha.

I am fortunate to have found you, O mighty Arjuna, for you have spared my life and there is no greater gift. In return, I would give you, O Astradhari, a power that only the Gandharvas possess. It is calls the Chakshushi, the art of creating illusions, and I acquired it through tapasya of old.

Manu taught Soma the Chakshushi; Soma Deva taught it to Viswavasu, who gave it to me. Though my Guru gave me this potent gift, it withers now with me, who have been defeated in battle and have lost my tejas.

I have told you only about some of the powers of the Chakshushi; he who owns it can see whatever he wishes to, anywhere, in any time, and in any manner that he chooses. Usually, the occult power can be had only after standing on one leg in tapasya for six months. But I shall give it to you freely, without your having to keep any vrata or perform any penance.

Kshatriya, it is for this power that we Gandharvas are superior to Manavas: for using the Chakshushi, we see all things with spiritual sight and are equal to the Devas.

Purushottama, I also mean to give each of your great brothers a hundred horses born in the realm of the Gandharvas. Their colouring is unworldly and their speed that of the mind. The Devas ride them and the Gandharvas. They are lean but they never tire or slow.

In the olden days, the original thunderbolt was made for Indra to kill Vritrasura. But when he cast it at Vritra, it shattered in a thousand pieces. The Devas still worship those fragments of the thunderbolt. What is called glory in this world of men is just one fragment. The Brahmana's hand, with which he pours libations into the holy fire, the Kshatriya's chariot, the

Vaisya's charity, the Sudra's service to the higher varnas, all these are fragments of the thunderbolt.

Horses are a part of the chariot of the Kshatriya; for this, they are called immortal. Also, they are the children of Badava, the fire of the Pralaya which dwells beneath the Ocean, as a mare of flames. The steeds that are foaled in the land of the Gandharvas can go anywhere, at any speed their owners will, and assume any colour their masters choose.

My horses will always obey your every wish.'

Arjuna says, 'Gandharva, if you want to give me your mystic power and your horses because I spared your life, I will not accept your gifts.'

The Gandharva replies, 'To meet a great man is always an honour and joy, and you have also given me the gift of my life. For this I will give you the Chakshushi. However, so that the obligation is not one-sided, I will also take something in return from you, O Arjuna: Bharatarishabha, give me your unearthly Agneyastra.'

Arjuna says, 'I will accept your horses in return for my astra, and may we be friends forever. But friend, tell me why we Manavas must go in fear of the Gandharvas. We are virtuous, the terrors of our enemies and knowers of the Veda. Yet, Gandharva, by twilight, you censured and challenged us.'

Says the Gandharva, 'You have no wives or asrama of life, though you have completed your tutelage. Pandavas, no Brahmana walks before you as your priest and mentor, and that is why I challenged you.

The Yakshas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Uragas and Danavas are all wise and well acquainted with the history of the race of Kuru. Kshatriya, I myself have heard about the great dharma of your illumined ancestors, from Narada and other Devarishis. Why, while I ranged over the Earth, girdled by her oceans, I have seen with my own eyes the might and power of your great race of kings.

Arjuna, I know Bharadwaja's son, your Guru, who is renowned throughout the three worlds for his knowledge of the Vedas and for his mastery over the science of weapons.

Kuruvyaghra, Prithaputra, I also know Dharma, Vayu, Sakra, the Aswins and Pandu, as well: your sires, divine and human. I know that you five brothers are learned and noble, greatest among warriors, brave, virtuous and keepers of your vratas.

Knowing that your hearts and minds are pure and wise, and your conduct faultless, still I have censured you – because, O Kurus, no man

who is honourable and a warrior will endure being slighted in the presence of his wife. Kuntiputra, the prowess of the Gandharvas increases during the hours of darkness, and for this reason also I challenged you, for my wife is with me and I was inflamed.

Yet you vanquished me, O Pandava, and I will tell you why. Your brahmacharya, your continence, gives you great power; and with that strength you have defeated me. Parantapa, let any Kshatriya who is married fight a Gandharva by night, and he will not escape with his life. Yet, it is also true that a Kshatriya, be he married or not, who has been blessed by Brahman and who has given the burden of his kingdom into the hands of a Brahmana – such a one might indeed humble any ranger of the night.

O Tapatya, son of Tapati, wise Kshatriyas should always have learned and self-controlled Brahmanas in their employ, so that fortune favours them and they acquire everything that their hearts wish for.

The Brahmana who knows the Vedas and their six Angas, who is pure and honest, who is virtuous and restrained, is worthy of being the priest of a king. The king whose priest is a good Brahmana, who knows the laws of dharma, who is eloquent, pure and of taintless conduct: that king is always victorious and finally finds Swarga.

A king must choose an accomplished Brahmana to gain what he does not possess and to protect what he does. The Kshatriya who wants to prosper must submit himself to the guidance of his priest, and then he can become lord of the sea-girt Earth.

Tapatya, not through the noblest birth or by the most valiant or glorious deeds alone can a Kshatriya ever hope to gain a kingdom. He must have a Brahmana priest to guide him. For, O Scion of Kuru, the kingdom in which Brahmanas wield influence lasts forever.'"

CANTO 173

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'More than once you have called me Tapatya. Why, good Gandharva? As sons of Kunti, Kaunteyas we surely are, but who is Tapati that we should be called Tapatyas?'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Then the Gandharva tells Arjuna a tale known through the three worlds.

'Pandava, most intelligent of men, listen to the reason in full, for it is a charming story: the reason why I call you Tapatya. He in the sky who bathes this world in his light, had a daughter called Tapati, who was his very equal. Vivaswat's daughter Tapati was the younger sister of Savitri, the Sannyasini renowned throughout the Trilokas and famed for her tapasya.

No Asuri, Yakshi, Rakshasi or Gandharvi was as beautiful as Tapati. Flawless were her features, her black eyes large and lustrous, most elegantly attired, she was chaste, and immaculate were her deportment and character.

When the Sun looked at his daughter Tapati, he thought that there was no one in Swarga, Bhumi or Patala fit to become her husband. She came to puberty and the Sun God had no peace for he was always thinking about who in the three worlds could be a suitable husband for his daughter.

At this very time, O Kaunteya, the Kururishabha, mighty King Samvarana, son of Riksha, worshipped Surya Deva with arghya, vanamalas, fine perfumes, and vratas and tapasya of every kind. Indeed, Samvarana worshipped the glorious Sun constantly, with deep and humble bhakti.

Surya saw Samvarana, unequalled for his beauty and his dharma, and felt he was the only man fit to marry Tapati. Vivaswat decided that he would give his precious daughter to King Samvarana to be his wife, for just as Surya himself filled the sky with his lustre, so too did Samvarana pervade every part of the Earth with the light of his dharma.

Partha, all men, other than Brahmanas, worshipped Samvarana. He was blessed with great fortune and surpassed Soma the Moon in soothing the hearts of his friends, and Surya in searing the minds of his enemies. Kaurava, Tapana Surya did indeed decide to give his peerless daughter Tapati in marriage to Samvarana of matchless virtue and deeds.

One day, Samvarana went hunting in the jungles on the foothills of the mountains. As he rode in quest of deer, his pedigreed steed fell and died under him, from hunger, thirst and exhaustion. Leaving the dead horse, Arjuna, Samvarana roamed the mountain, and he saw a young woman more beautiful than any other, and her eyes large.

That Parantapa, Rajavyaghra Samvarana, was by himself, as was she; they stood transfixed, gazing at each other. She was so beautiful that the king felt sure that she was the Devi Sri Lakshmi. Then he thought of her as being the rays of Surya Deva, embodied.

She was a brilliant flame, yet also soft and lovely as a clear digit of Soma. Black-eyed, she stood upon the mountain like a shining golden statue; why, the very mountain, with all its plants and vines and trees, seemed to be made of gold because of the beauty and raiment of Tapati.

Samvarana looked at her and he felt contempt for every other woman he had seen before; seeing her he thought that the vision of his eyes had at last been blessed. Nothing he had ever seen, from the day he was born, could compare with the beauty of this young woman.

His eyes were riveted to her, as was his heart, as if an unseen rope bound them to her; he stood transfixed, gazing, seeing nothing but her. Samvarana thought that he that had created such beauty could have done so only after he churned all the worlds of the Devas, Asuras and Manavas.

His own mind churning within him, that king felt certain that no woman in any of the three worlds could rival this one for her abundance of beauty.

The highborn Samvarana looked at Tapati and Kama Deva's arrows pierced his heart and the king's peace of mind left him. Burning with desire's scorching flame, Samvarana asked that full-grown yet innocent young woman, "Who are you and to whom do you belong? Why are you here, sweet smiles, wandering in this lonely vana by yourself?

Ah, you are flawlessly beautiful, in every feature, as are all the ornaments that you wear, which seem to covet you for their ornament. You do not seem to me to be a Devastri, an Asuri, a Yakshi, a Rakshasi, Nagini

or a Gandharvi or a Manushi but from a race of your own, for none of the loveliest women that I have ever seen could remotely rival you for beauty.

Ah, exquisite one, I look at you more beautiful than the Moon, your eyes like lotus petals, and Kama Deva has his way with me. Ah, he burns me with desire for you."

Samvarana's voice quivered with desire, but the young woman made no reply to his ardent speech. Instead, like lightning in clouds, she of the great eyes vanished before the king.

Samvarana staggered through that forest like a mad man, seeking her of the lotus eyes, desperately. He did not find her and his heartbroken cries echoed against the mountainside; he sobbed and fell unconscious.'"

CANTO 174

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Gandharvacontinues, 'When that young woman vanished, Samvarana, razer of enemy armies, fell onto the ground, stricken by Kama. As he lay in a swoon, she of the wide round hips stood before him again.

Favouring the king with her sweet smile, she said to the scion of the House of Kuru in her voice like honey, "Arise, arise Parantapa! Rajavyaghra, tiger among kings, it does not become a world renowned personage like you to faint."

Samvarana opened his eyes and saw her again, she of the full hips and breasts. Still blazing with desire, he spoke to her of the black eyes in a voice tremulous with emotion, "Be blessed, O most beautiful among all women. I burn for you, why my very life leaves me for what I feel for you. Black eyes, you who are as radiant as the filaments of a lotus, Kama strikes me with his arrows, mercilessly, every moment, one after the other, for your sake. He sinks a viper's fangs into me.

Lovely one, O you of the flaring hips, you of perfect features, you who are as lovely as the moon, soft as a lotus petal, whose voice is as sweet as a singing Kinnari's, my life depends on you. I cannot live without you, O timid, bashful one.

Ah, Kama strikes me relentlessly. Take pity on me, young woman whose eyes are like lotus petals. Big eyes, black eyes, it does not become you to abandon me, to cast me aside. Instead, save me. Grant me your love and soothe my anguish.

You have taken my heart captive at first glance. My mind wanders wildly, madly. I look at you and never want to see another woman. O be merciful, for I am your slave, your ardent servant.

Accept me, peerless one, put out Kama's terrible fire with the waters of your love. Be mine, O you beauty, and appease the God of Love who is

here with his sugarcane bow and his flowery arrows, sharp as daggers. Marry me by Gandharva vivaha, O fair one with swaying hips, for it is said to be the finest form of marriage."

Tapati said, "I am not my own mistress, but a maiden commanded by her father. If you truly want to marry me, ask my father for my hand. O King, you say that I have stolen your heart, and I say to you that I have also fallen in love with you at first sight.

But no woman is mistress of herself, and that is why I dare not make love to you. Ah, which woman in the three lokas would not want you for her husband, for not only are you most nobly born but you are like a father and kindly to all your people.

So, Rajan, when opportunity presents itself, ask my father Aditya for my hand; worship him, perform tapasya and keep vratas so that I become yours. For if my father gives me to you I shall be your loving and obedient wife forever.

I am Savitri's younger sister and my name is Tapati. O Kshatriyarishabha, I am the daughter of Surya who illumines Earth and Sky," said she,' says the Gandharva."

CANTO 175

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “The Gandharva continues, ‘Saying this much to Samvarana, Tapati rose straight up into the sky and disappeared. The king fell unconscious on the ground once more.

Meanwhile, his ministers and soldiers combed the forest for him, and finally found him supine in that lonely place, that magnificent king, great archer, lying like a rainbow fallen on to the Earth. His chief minister was like a man scalded by fire. He rushed to his sovereign’s side, Samvarana who had fainted from desire.

This minister was a man as advanced in age as wisdom, in achievements as in policy, and he gently roused his unconscious lord, and became reassured that he lived.

Thinking that the mighty Samvarana had been felled by hunger, thirst and exhaustion, the minister said kindly, “Be blessed, sinless one. Rajavyaghra, tiger among kings, fear nothing.”

The old man sprinkled cold water, made fragrant by lotus petals over his monarch’s crownless head. Slowly, Samvarana awoke and ordered all his men and companions away, keeping only the old minister with him.

When they had all gone, the king rose and purified himself with a bath. He then sat upon that Lord of all Mountains, with his hands folded and his face turned heavenward. He sat worshipping Surya Deva. Samvarana, scourge of his enemies, also thought of his Kulaguru Vasishta, Brahmanottama. Night and day, Samvarana sat thus in dhyana, unmoving.

On the twelfth day, Brahmarishi Vasishta, priest to the Kuruvamsa, arrived on the mountain, and with mystic intuition he knew at once that Tapati was the cause of Samvarana’s condition, the cause for his tapasya. He comforted the king of unswerving vratas.

Then, before Samvarana’s eyes, the illumined Sage rose up into the sky to meet Surya Deva; the Rishi was like a luminary himself. With folded

hands, the Brahmana approached the God of a thousand rays, and said, "I am Vasishta."

Vivaswat of terrific tejas said, "Maharishi, be welcome! Tell me what brings you here, for, most blessed and eloquent one, I will give you whatever you ask of me, however hard I might find it to give."

Vasishta bowed to the splendid Deva and said, "Vibhavasu, I have come to ask for the hand of Savitri's younger sister, your daughter Tapati's hand, for Samvarana. Great are the dharma and the achievements of that king, he is a Mahatman. Sky crosser, he will make a worthy husband to your daughter."

Vibhakara Surya, who had already decided to give Tapati to Samvarana, says to Vasishta, "You are the greatest of Munis, Samvarana is the greatest of kings and Tapati the best of women. How can I refuse to give my daughter to him?"

So saying, the Deva Tapana gave his blemishless Tapati into the hands of the Rishi, to convey her to Samvarana to be his bride. Accepting her formally, the Brahmarishi brought her back to the Earth, to the place where the Kururishabha, his accomplishments godly, sat in worship, waiting anxiously.

The king saw Vasishta bring the unearthly Tapati to him and felt as if his heart would burst for joy. She came down from the sky like lightning from clouds, dazzling the ten cardinal points of the firmament. The twelve nights of King Samvarana's vrata and tapasya had ended when the Rishi Vasishta brought Tapati to him.

Samvarana, that Narapumgava, bull among men, took Tapati's hand upon that mountain, where Devas and Gandharvas roamed. He sought Vasishta's leave to be with his new wife in the wilderness, and he proclaimed Brahmarishi Vasishta to be regent of all of his kingdom, his capital and all his forests, mountains and plains.

Vasishta blessed Samvarana and left him. For twelve years, that king then sported and made love with Tapati in the forests and foothills of the Himalaya. But Bharatottama, the thousand-eyed Indra sent no rain down on Samvarana's kingdom for twelve years.

Men perished in that drought, as did animals, trees and plants. No drop even of dew moistened the arid Earth and no ear of corn grew during that time. The people fled the kingdom to all parts. Men abandoned their wives and children, and lawlessness reigned. Those that survived were reduced to

skin and bones, hardly more than skeletons, and Samvarana's great capital resembled the city of Yama, full of ghosts.

Vasishta saw the piteous condition of the people and fetched Samvarana back to his city, with Tapati, after twelve long years. As soon as the king returned, the thousand-eyed Deva, destroyer of Asuras, sent down copious rains. Corn sprouted everywhere, and with the drought and the famine ending, joy returned to the kingdom.

Samvarana and his queen Tapati performed great yagnas for twelve years, sacrifices such as Indra and Sachi perform in Devaloka. Partha, such was the story of Tapati, the daughter of Vivaswat. Samvarana begot a son upon his beautiful queen. That prince was Kuru, greatest among Rajarishis. You have been born into the race of Tapati's son Kuru, O Arjuna, and that is why I called you Tapatyas. And it was with the help of the Brahmarishi Vasishta that Samvarana gained his wife and continued his royal line,' says the Gandharva to the Pandavas.

Arjuna, mighty bowman, Kurusthama, best among all the Kurus, is deeply moved and stands with folded hands before the Gandharva.

The Pandava is curious indeed about the Sage Vasishta. He says, 'O greatest of Gandharvas, tell me everything about the Maharishi Vasishta, who was the priest of our ancestors.'

The Gandharva says, 'Vasishta is Brahma's son, born immaculately from his spirit. The Rishi was the husband of the chaste Arundhati. He has vanquished desire and wrath, kama and krodha, which hardly any man ever subdues; why, lust and rage washed Vaishta's feet, for they were his servants.

Once Viswamitra tempted Vasishta's anger, but Muni Vasishta did not raze the race of Kaushikas to which Viswamitra belonged. His sons perished at Viswamitra's hands, but Vasishta behaved like a powerless one, though truly he is far from that. Even as the Ocean does not transgress the shores of his continents, Vasishta did not bring his dead sons back from Yama's realm, though he well could have with power such as his.

Ikshvaku of yore and other awesome kings had Vasishta for their Kulaguru when they conquered all the Earth. Scion of Kuru, with Vasishta as their Ritvik, their chief priest, those kings performed many Mahayagnas. Pandavottma, he enabled those kings to perform their sacrifices even as Brihaspati does for the Devas.

And that is why I say to you, Pandavas, find a lofty and accomplished Brahmana to become your priest, a man who knows the Veda, and whose heart is replete with dharma. For, O Partha, the Kshatriya who wants to conquer the world and have great kingdom must first have a fine and great Brahmana to be his spiritual guide. Arjuna, I say again to you, seek out a learned Brahmana, whose senses are under perfect control, who knows all about dharma, artha and kama, and set him before you as your priest.'"

CANTO 177

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Arjuna asks, 'Gandharva, both Viswamitra and Vasishta dwell in unearthly asramas. Tell us, how was there hostility between these two?'

The Gandharva says, 'Partha, the legend of Vasishta is thought of as being a Purana throughout the three realms. Listen and I will narrate it in full.

Bharatarishabha, in Kanyakubja, there once was a king whose fame echoed throughout the world. He was Gadhi, the son of Kusika. Gadhi of dharma had a son called Viswamitra, who became king after his father. Viswamitra, bane of his enemies, lord of a great army comprising countless men, beasts and chariots, would range over the Earth with his ministers, through deep jungles in quest of deer and wild boar, killing them wherever he saw them.

One day, while thus out hunting, the king was tired and thirsty and he came upon the asrama of Vasishta. The Brahmarishi saw him and welcomed him with great respect, offering him padya, water to wash his face and feet, and arghya, wild fruit and ghee.

The Rishi had a cow of wishes, Nandini, who yielded anything that he asked of her. He would merely ask and she would give him whatever he wanted. Fruit and grain she gave, wild, or as are grown by men in orchards and fields. She gave milk like amrita, and every kind of unworldly delicacy to gratify the six tastes, by way of food and drink, ambrosial, and she gave incomparable ornaments, gemstones and raiment also, not of this world.

Arjuna, Maharishi Vasishta made offerings of all these wonderful things to King Viswamitra and his men; and they were delighted and amazed. The king gazed in wonder upon the wondrous cow, with six long legs, her flanks glossy, her eyes bulging and utterly beautiful, her udders and teats full, high

and perfect, her ears straight and erect, her horns beautiful, as also her head and her neck.

Kshatriya, well pleased and praising the cow Nandini, Gadhi's son said to the Rishi, "Brahmana, Mahamuni, I will give you ten thousand fine milch cows or my kingdom for your Nandini."

Vasishta replied, "Sinless one, I keep Nandini for the sake of the Devas, for honoured guests like you, and for the Pitrs, as well as for my yagnas. I cannot give her to you and take your kingdom."

Viswamitra said, "I am a Kshatriya, while you are a Brahmana, an ascetic devoted to meditation and study. You are a man of peace, with your senses and your mind perfectly controlled. If you do not give me what I want when I offer you ten thousand cows in exchange for her, why I will even take your Nandini from you by force, for that is the way of the Kshatriya, and you can do nothing to stop me, Brahmana."

Vasishta smiled. "You are indeed a mighty Kshatriya king. Why wait? Do what you will, but remember that you are not pausing to think of dharma."

Partha, Viswamitra had his men seize Nandini, white as the moon or a swan; they began to drag her away, injuring her smooth flanks, marking her with stripes of violence. Lowing piteously, Nandini broke free of her captors and ran to Vasishta and stood before him with her face raised and tears flowing down her cheeks. She would not leave the Sage's hermitage.

Vasishta saw her and said sadly, "O Susheela, sweet one. You cry, my Nandini, and I hear you. But I am a Brahmana, sworn to forgiveness and peace. How can I prevent Viswamitra from taking you from here forcibly?"

Terrified by the threatening Viswamitra and his fierce soldiers, Nandini came still closer to the Rishi and said, "O illustrious one, are you not my master, do you not love me, that you can be so unmoved when Viswamitra's cruel men beat me so savagely, marking me with their lashes, and when you hear me crying?"

Still Vasishta did not lose either his patience or turn away from his sworn vow of non-violence. He said, "The Kshatriya's strength lies in his might, the Brahmana's in his kshama, his forgiveness and patience. I cannot renounce my kshama; so Nandini go with the king."

Nandini sobbed, "Do you then abandon me and cast me out, Illustrious? For, if you do not, O Brahmana, no one can take me from you, not with any force on Earth."

Vasishta said, “Blessed, I do not cast you out or abandon you. If you can, stay. But look, they have your calf tied with a thick rope and it is already weak by struggling against the noose around its neck.”

Hearing the word “stay” from Vasishta’s lips, Nandini raised her head higher, tossed her horns and suddenly she was terrible. Her eyes crimson, lowing as if she roared, deafeningly, she flew at Viswamitra’s men on every side, a dreadful storm of wrath.

They ran and they struck her again and again, and her anger grew, until she blazed with fury and was like the Sun at high noon, her eyes turning redder by the moment. From her rear she sprayed a shower of burning coals over Viswamitra’s soldiers.

Next moment, she brought forth an army of Pallavas from her tail, and from her teats another of ferocious Dravidas and Sakas; and from her womb there issued a great force of Yavanas. She dropped dung and from that there sprang up an aksauhini of Savaras, while from her urine a legion of Kanchis arose and another army of Savaras from her flanks.

Paundras, Kiratas, Yavanas and Sinhalas, and the barbarian tribes of Khasas, Chivukas, Pulindas, Chinas, Hunas, Keralas, and numberless other Mlechchas sprang forth from the foam of her mouth. The teeming host of Mlechchas wore motley garb, carried diverse and strange weapons, and as soon as they materialised they were deployed in battle formation and attacked Viswamitra’s legions with savage yells and roars.

That king’s men were outnumbered by six and seven to one. Assaulted by a storm of weapons, Viswamitra’s men broke rank and fled, even as he watched in dismay. However, Bharatarishabha, Nandini only chased away the enemy troops; her Mlechchas did not kill a single man.

Indeed, the wild horde chased the king’s men for a full three yojanas, and Viswamitra’s men fled shrieking and no one could help them.

Viswamitra saw what happened, hung his head and raged, “O fie on the power of the Kshatriya, it is as nothing compared to Brahmana bala! The power of tapasya is the only true strength.”

That king renounced his vast kingdom, all his regal glory, turned his back on every mundane pleasure, and sat in a searing tapasya. After a long time and many trials, his dhyana grew so awesome that it began to burn the three worlds with its heat, scorching every creature in them. Brahma appeared before the Kshatriya at his penance and declared him to be a Brahmana, a Brahmarishi and the equal of Vasishta.

Finally, Kusika’s son drank Soma rasa with Indra himself in Swarga,’ the Gandharva says.”

CANTO 178

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The Gandharva continues, 'Partha, once there was a king called Kalmashapada, of the race of Ikshvaku, and he had no equal for strength or power on Earth.

One day, he went hunting in the forest and killed many deer and boar with his arrows; in open glades in the heart of the jungle, he killed many a great rhinoceros. Finally, tiring after a long hunt, the king decided that he would rest for a while.

Some time ago, the great Viswamitra, of tremendous splendour, had wanted to make this king his disciple. Now, as Kalmashapada went weakly along a trail through that vana, hungry and thirsty too, he encountered Vasishta's lustrous son Saktri, his firstborn of a hundred sons, upon that path.

The invincible king saw the Muni coming towards him and cried haughtily, "Get out of my way!"

The Rishi replied gently, in the sweetest tone, "Rajan, by dharma the right of way is mine. Every Shastra says that a Kshatriya must always make way for a Brahmana."

But Kalmashapada cried again, "Out of my way!" Vasishta's son replied in the same words, but softly.

The Rishi was in the right and so he would not give in; the king would not yield out of pride and anger. Suddenly, Kalmashapada lost control and, growling like a Rakshasa, lashed out at the Sage with his whip.

At the lash, Saktri Muni also lost his temper and lashed out at the king with a curse. "Basest of kings, dare you strike a Brahmana! You have behaved like a Rakshasa, so become a Rakshasa from this moment and wander the Earth in a demon's form, living on human flesh."

At this moment, Viswamitra arrived in that place. There was dispute between Vasishta and him about whose sishya Kalmashapada would be.

Partha, Viswamitra knew with mystic insight that Vasishta's son had cursed the king; he knew that Saktri was his father's equal in spiritual power.

Viswamitra made himself invisible.

As soon as the Sage cursed him, the king began to beg Saktri for mercy. Kurusthama, Viswamitra feared that the two might make peace between them, and he sent a Rakshasa to enter Kalmashapada's body. The Rakshasa Kinkara possessed the king, at Saktri Muni's curse and Viswamitra's command. Viswamitra melted away from the forest path. Saktri also left.

Upon being possessed, Kalmashapada was no longer himself and another Brahmana came upon him in that condition. This Brahmana was tired and hungry and begged the king for some food, cooked with meat.

The Rajarishi Kalmashapada, known for his generosity and kindness, said, "Brahmana, stay here for a while. I will go and bring you the food that you want."

Leaving the Brahmana in the vana, Kalmashapada returned to his palace and his royal chambers, but only after he had roamed the forest for some hours. Tired himself, he fell asleep. At midnight, he suddenly awoke and remembered his promise to the Brahmana. He summoned the palace cook.

Said the king, "A Brahmana is waiting for me in the forest. He is hungry and wants some meat to eat. Hurry, cook some meat and take it to him."

The cook went looking for meat but could find none at that hour. He went back to the king, and said with some trepidation that he had not been able to find any meat.

Now it was the Rakshasa Kinkara who spoke from the king's mouth, "Feed him human flesh."

Trembling, the cook said, "Tathastu, so be it."

He went to the king's execution chamber, cut some flesh from a corpse there, washed it, cooked it, covered it with fragrant rice and ran to the waiting Brahmana with that meal.

But the Brahmana, who had occult sight, immediately saw that the food was unclean. His eyes turning red, he cried, "This worst of kings sends me unholy food, so let him crave human flesh himself! Let the Rishi Saktri's curse come true and let Kalmashapada wander the Earth as a fiend."

When the curse was repeated, it became twice as powerful. The Rakshasa within him gained complete control. A while later, Kalmashapada saw Saktri again, who had first cursed him and screamed, "You first cursed me to become a cannibal, so let me begin by eating you!"

He pounced on Saktri Muni and devoured him like a tiger does its prey. Seeing Saktri killed, Viswamitra began to repeatedly instigate Kinkara to eat Vasishta's other sons as well. Like an angry lion swallowing small animals, the Rakshasa quickly killed and ate all of Vasishta's hundred sons.

Vasishta knew that Viswamitra was responsible for the death of his sons, but he did nothing; only bore his grief as the Great Mountain does the Earth. He would rather sacrifice his own life than yield to anger and commit any violence against the race of Kusikas. That illumined Sage threw himself down from the summit of Meru but he fell on hard rock thousands of feet below as if onto a bed of cotton-wool.

Pandava, when he did not die from his leap, Vasishta lit a forest fire, a blazing conflagration, with his power of yoga and walked into it. But the flames did not even singe him but were like cool water upon his skin.

Next the grief-stricken Sage looked at the Sea, tied a heavy stone around his neck, and flung himself into the water. But the waves washed him gently ashore. Distraught that he could not even do away with himself, Vasishta returned to his asrama,' says the Gandharva."

CANTO 179

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The Gandharva goes on, 'The Rishi saw his hermitage empty of his sons and again the tide of sorrow surged in his heart. He walked away from the asrama. Partha, Vasishta ranged over the Earth, dementedly, and one day, during the monsoon, he saw a river in spate sweeping away hundreds of trees and plants that grew on its banks.

O Kurunandana, the Muni bound his own hands and feet firmly with strong rope and cast himself into that cataract. Parantapa, the river loosened the knots of the rope and tenderly set him ashore. Rising, Vasishta called that river Vipasa, the knot-severer.

Restless with the sorrow which tore at his heart, Vasishta could never remain in one place. With no peace, he wandered along the banks of many lakes and rivers, through many deep forests and climbed more than one mountain.

One day, he came to the banks of the river that is called Hymavati, she who flows from Himavan. He saw huge and ferocious crocodiles and other sharp-toothed predators in the water, and once more threw himself into the river, hoping to be devoured. However, the river mistook the tejasvin Brahmana for a mass of fire, and in terror split herself into a hundred rillets and plunged away in every direction. Since, she has been called Shatadru, river of a hundred courses.

Vasishta found himself on dry land again and cried, "Ah, it is impossible for me to kill myself!" and he turned his face towards his asrama again. Back through many kingdoms, over mountains and through the forests of several countries, the Sage returned to his hermitage.

Unknown to the Muni, a daughter-in-law of his, Adrishyanti, had been following him all the time, hiding herself so that he never saw her. Now, as he neared his asrama, suddenly he heard from behind his back the Veda

being recited in the most chaste and erudite tones, embellished with the six graces of elocution.

Turning, Vasishta asked, “Who follows me?”

His daughter-in-law said, “It is Saktri’s wife Adrishyanti. Lord, I am chaste and ascetic, yet I find myself lost and without support.”

Vasishta asked, “Daughter, who was just reciting the Veda and the Angas exactly in the voice and tone of my son Saktri?”

Adrishyanti said, “Saktri’s son is in my womb. He has been there for twelve years, and it is his voice that you heard reciting the Veda.”

Vasishta gave a cry of sheer joy, “A child of my race lives!”

Now, Partha, every thought of killing himself left the Sage, and he brought his pregnant daughter-in-law into his hermitage.

Then, one day, O Bharata, when Vasishta was out walking in the vana with Adrishyanti, he saw the King Kalmashapada, whom the Rakshasa Kinkara had possessed. The Rakshasa roared in rage, and rushed towards the Muni, to make a meal of him.

Adrishyanti cried in terror, “O illustrious, look, the savage Rakshasa rushes at us, with his cudgel raised. He comes to devour us, Holy One, and no one in the world can save us today but you.”

Vasishta said calmly, “There is nothing to fear, my child. This is no Rakshasa but the great and renowned King Kalmashapada, who now lives in this forest.”

The king possessed by the Rakshasa ran on towards them, and then Vasishta stopped him in his tracks by uttering a resonant humakara, a ringing *hummmm*. The Muni then sprinkled holy water sanctified with mantras over the king and exorcised him of the Rakshasa.

After twelve years of being possessed by Saktri’s curse, even like the Sun being seized by Rahu during an eclipse, Kalmashapada was free. Now his natural lustre lit up all that wild vana, as the sun’s rays do the clouds of dusk.

Regaining his mind and his senses, the king folded his hands reverently to the Rishi, and said, “Munisthama, I am Sudasa’s son and I am your sishya. Command me, lord, I will do whatever you ask, give you whatever you want.”

Vasishta replied, “I already have what I want. Go back to your kingdom now and rule your people. And, Purushottama, never insult a Brahmana again.”

Kalmashapada said, “Never, my lord, shall I cross any Brahmana but worship them instead. However, Brahmanashreshta, greatest among all that know the Veda, let me be free from the debt I owe to the race of Ikshvaku. I beg you bless me with a worthy and splendid son, a prince of dharma to become king after me.”

Vasishta answered that great archer and king, “I will.”

Vasishta went with Kalmashapada to his capital, famed throughout the world, the city of Ayodhya. The people came out in crowds, in joy to welcome back their king; they were like the celestials of Swarga coming to receive Indra.

With Vasishta going before him, Kalmashapada entered his capital after twelve years in the wilderness. The people gazed at him as if he was the rising Sun, for so radiant was he and so handsome; his splendour filled Ayodhya even as the glory of the autumn Sun does all the sky.

Kalmashapada looked at his city, its streets swept and washed and bright with banners and arches, and he, too, was full of joy. O Prince of Kuru’s race, yes, truly, Ayodhya seemed wonderful as Amaravati does when Devendra is in his heavenly city.

When the Rajarishi entered his palace, he ordered his queen to go to Vasishta. The Maharishi swore a solemn vow with her, and then he had congress with her. Shortly, she conceived and, having accomplished what he had come for and receiving Kalmashapada’s reverences, the Sage returned to his asrama.

For a long time, twelve years, the queen carried her child within her. When she could not bear to wait any longer, she cut her belly open with a sharp stone and brought forth the Purusharishabha Asmaka, the Rajarishi who would one day found the city of Paudanya,’ says the Gandharva.”

CANTO 180

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Gandharva continues, 'In Vasishta's asrama, O Partha, when her time came, Adrishyanti gave birth to a son who was verily like another Saktri in every way. Best of the Bharatas, Maharishi Vasishta performed the sacred ceremonies for his grandson. Because that child was responsible for Vasishta abandoning his resolve to take his own life, he was named Parasara, he who gives life to the dead.

From the day he was born Parasara regarded Vasishta as his father and treated him as such. One day, O son of Kunti, the child called Vasishta, "Father", while Adrishyanti was present.

His mother's eyes filled on hearing his sweet voice say that word. Adrishyanti said tearfully to her son, "My child, do not call your grandfather 'Father'. My son, a Rakshasa ate your father in another forest. This holy one is your great father's father."

Hearing this, Parasara flared up in terrible grief and wrath, and cried that he would burn up all of creation. Then Vasishta Muni, son of Mitravaruna, greatest among the knowers of Brahman, forbade his grandson with these arguments. Listen, O Arjuna, to what Vasishta Muni said to Parasara to change his mind.

Said the Sage, "Once, there was a renowned king calls Kritavirya, and that Rajarishabha of the Earth was a sishya of the Bhrigus, who knew the Veda. After Kritavirya performed the Soma yagna, he gave immense wealth, grain past calculation and other incomparable gifts to those Brahmanas.

Later, when Kritavirya left this world and rose into Swarga, there came a time when his descendents became impecunious. Knowing that the Bhrigus were wealthy, the princes went to those best among Brahmanas, even as beggars.

Some Bhrigus buried their vast treasures under the ground; others gave it away to fellow Brahmanas, for they feared the Kshatriyas, while still others did give the Kshatriyas whatever they wanted.

Some Kshatriyas dug the earth all around the house of one of the Bhargavas and uncovered a great and rich hoard. All the Kshatriyarishabhas saw that buried treasure and they grew furious because of what they thought of as being deceit and treachery by the Bhrigus.

They seized their bows and slaughtered the Brahmanas in a hail of arrows, even while the Bhargavas begged for mercy. Why, those wrathful Kshatriyas wandered the Earth killing even unborn foetuses in the wombs of Bhrigu women. As they swept across the world, exterminating the very race of Bhrigu, many Bhrigu women fled to hidden fastnesses of the Himalaya.

Among these women was one who bore an embryo of terrific tejas in her thigh. However, another Brahmana woman, from fear, told the Kshatriyas about her. The Kshatriyas swarmed to the cave where she was, going forth to kill her unborn child and her as well.

Arriving at the cavemouth, the princes saw the woman ablaze with the splendour of her child. At that moment, the child came tearing its way out from her thigh. He was as refulgent as the noonday Sun and his light made the Kshatriyas blind. Sightless, they wandered, lost over those mountains for a long time.

At last, the stricken princes decided they must beg the sinless Bhrigu woman to help them. Like a fire that has burnt out, they came in great softness and anxiety to her.

They said to her, 'Be gracious to us, O lady, and let us see again. We will go back peacefully and never again sin. Most beautiful one, we kings and princes beg mercy from you and your child,'" said Vasishta Muni to his grandson,' the Gandharva says."

CANTO 181

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The Gandharva says, 'Vasishta went on, "The Bhrigu woman said to the Kshatriyas, 'Young ones, I have not taken your sight from you, and I am not wroth at you either.

However, this Bhrigu child is indeed wrathful at the massacre of his race. Princes, for a hundred years you killed even the embryos in the wombs of the Bhrigu women, and for those hundred years this child remained inside me.

The Vedas and their Angas came to my child even while he lay in my womb, so that one day fortune would return to the race of Bhrigu. He wishes you ill, Kshatriyas, and it is his cosmic splendour that has made you blind. You have murdered his sires and he wishes for your death.

Do not beg me, but this child for your sight. Pay him homage and appease his fury. Children, it is the only hope for you.'

The Kshatriyas turned to the thigh-born child, 'Forgive us, we seek your mercy.'

At once, the marvellous child turned merciful; the Kshatriyas had their sight back and returned to their homes. Because he was born from his mother's thigh, that splendid child is known as Aurva, thigh-born, throughout the three worlds.

His wrath unappeased, Muni Aurva of the race of Bhrigu decided that he would destroy the whole world, and every creature in it; he would give this as havis, a burnt offering to his murdered ancestors.

Aurva sat in terrible tapasya, and soon the heat of his penance began to scorch the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas, too. Then the Pitrs, his manes, learnt what the child of their race intended and they came down to him from their lofty realm.

The Bhrigus said, 'Child, Aurva, your tapasya has been stern and fierce, and we have seen your power. But turn kindly towards the three worlds;

restrain your anger. Son, we Bhrigus did not allow ourselves to be killed by the Kshatriyas because we could not defend ourselves. The truth is that we grew weary of the interminably long lives given to us, and we wanted to die. Indeed, we subtly used the Kshatriyas to accomplish our own end.

We buried the treasure beneath one of our houses even so that the princes would discover it and become infuriated. Dvijottama, when we wished for Swarga, of what use could gold and jewels be to us? Kubera, Lord of Treasures, kept a great trove for us in Devaloka. But we found we could not die.

It is then that we decided to have the Kshatriyas kill us, for we could not kill ourselves, either, since no suicide ever attains to realms that are blessed. The Kshatriyas only helped us achieve what we wanted, and we are not pleased at what you now mean to do. It is a great sin that you intend, to consume all of creation in the flames of your tapasya.

Precious child, do not kill the Kshatriyas or burn the seven worlds; instead, quell your anger, which renders your penance sinful,' say his Pitrs to Aurva," Vasishta said to Parasara,' the Gandharva tells Arjuna."

CANTO 182

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Gandharva continues, 'Vasishta went on, "Aurva heard what his manes said and spoke to them.

Aurva Muni said, 'O my Pitrs, how can the vow I swore, even in anger, to consume the worlds go in vain? I cannot become one whose anger is impotent and his oaths hollow. For, if I cease my penance, my fury will devour me as fire does dry wood.

The man who represses rightful anger, provoked by grave injustice, becomes incapable of accomplishing the Purusharthas of dharma, artha and kama. The rage that kings use to conquer and rule the Earth is not a trifling thing; it keeps the evil in fearful restraint and protects good men of dharma.

Whilst I lay in my mother's thigh, I heard the screams of the Bhrigu women whom the Kshatriyas were slaughtering. O Pitrs, when the savage Kshatriyas began to murder the unborn children of our race, untold wrath filled my soul.

My mother and our other women, all heavy with child, and my terror-stricken father could not find anyone in the wide world to protect them. In panic, my mother lowered me into her thigh and held me there, so that her pregnancy would be hidden.

If there is justice and punishment for crimes in the world, then sinners hesitate to sin; if there is no chastiser, the numbers of criminals grow and their crimes become more terrible. The man who owns the power to punish and prevent crime but does not do so becomes a criminal and sinner himself; he shares in the sins of the sinners.

When the kings that could have saved my sires from the fury of the Kshatriyas did not do so, but remained immersed in their pleasures instead, I have more than just cause to turn my fury upon them. I have the power to punish these criminals. I wield absolute power over the worlds; I cannot do what you ask.

I must have revenge on the sinners, for otherwise they will again commit heinous murdering. Besides, if I do not burn them with the fire of my wrath, it will consume me instead.

Ah, my Sires, I know that all of you unswervingly wish for the weal of the worlds. Tell me what I should do, so that it benefits both creation and me.'

The Pitrs say, 'Cast the fire of your rage, which would consume the worlds, into water, and in water let it dwell, consuming water. That will benefit you and the worlds as well, for it is said that the worlds are made of water, why, the very universe has emerged from primal waters.

Brahmana, let the fire of your fury live in the Ocean, so that, sinless child, your vow is not proven false, so that you are not harmed by the fire, and neither the three worlds, or the Devas, Asuras and Manavas.'

The child Aurva cast the fire of his anger into the realm of Varuna, the Ocean. It lives there still, consuming the waters of the deeps, and there it has assumed the form of a great horse's head, so that those that know the Veda call it Badavamukha. It flames forth from its own mouth and ceaselessly quenches itself with the waters of the fathomless Ocean.

You, precious Parasara, wisest Muni, are like Aurva, a blessed one. You know the lofty realms of Swarga; it does not become you to destroy the worlds in anger," said Vasishta to his grandson,' says the Gandharva to Arjuna."

CANTO 183

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Gandharva continues, 'When his illumined grandfather Vasishta spoke thus, gravely, to him, Parasara controlled his anger and refrained from destroying the worlds.

However, that tejaswin Rishi, of terrific energy, the son of Saktri, performed a great Rakshasa yagna, and to avenge the killing of his father Saktri, he consumed Rakshasas, young and old, in the fires of his sacrifice. Now Vasishta did not attempt to restrain his grandson, because he did not want to force him to break a second vow.

Mahamuni Parasara sat before three blazing fires, himself like a fourth one. Saktri's son, bright as Surya emerging from behind clouds, poured copious libations of ghee into those tall flames and all the sky was lit up.

Vasishta and the other Rishis of the worlds saw Parasara ablaze, truly like a second Sun, and it seemed no one could stop his yagna. The compassionate Maharishi Atri came to Parasara's yagnashala. Parantapa, with him came the Devarishis Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu, all to save the Rakshasas.

Bharatarishabha, when Pulastya Muni saw how many Rakshasas had already been killed, he said to Parasara aflame, "Child, I hope nothing hinders your yagna! But what joy do you find in killing even those Rakshasas that have nothing to do with the death of your father?

This is not the dharma of a holy Brahmana; it does not become you to take innocent lives. Peace is the highest punya. Parasara, make your peace, for you are a superior man and I wonder that you commit this dreadful sin.

How can you do this, who are the son of Saktri, who was a man of unswerving dharma, a man of peace? How do you kill any living creatures at all? Scion of the race of Vasishta, your father died because he broke dharma in anger and cursed Kalmashapada.

Saktri was taken to Swarga for his own fault. Parasara, no Rakshasa on Earth could kill the great Saktri, unless the Muni contrived his own death. Even Viswamitra was merely a tool in the hands of fate.

Besides, know that both your father Saktri and King Kalmashapada have indeed found Swarga, and enjoy every felicity there. Your father's brothers, Vasishta's other sons, are in heaven also, and finding untold joy in the company of the celestials.

Why, even you, Parasara, son of Saktri, son of Vasishta, are only a blind instrument of fate in this yagna of yours, which destroys countless Rakshasas. O be blessed, Parasara, and abandon your Rakshasa yagna. You have done enough killing."

Now Vasishta added his voice to what Pulastya Muni said, and Parasara ceased his fell sacrifice. He cast the fires that he had lit into the deepest vana north of the Himavat. To this day, that fire burns all year even in the dead of winter, even when rains lash the mountain, devouring trees and the very stones around it, and also any Rakshasas that come anywhere near its flames,' the Gandharva says."

CANTO 184

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said to Janamejaya, "Arjuna asks, 'Gandharva, why did the King Kalmashapada tell his queen to resort to Vasishta Muni, master of all the Vedas? And why did Vasishta, who knew all about dharma, agree to lie with a woman with whom he should not? Dear friend, did Vasishta not sin by what he did? I am full of dark doubt, and beg you to remove my fear.'

The Gandharva says, 'Irresistible Dhananjaya, I will answer your question about the Sage and the King. Listen.

Bharatottama, I have told you about how Vasishta's radiant son Saktri cursed Kalmashapada. With the curse falling on him, that king, who crushed all his enemies, left his capital with his queen. His eyes were red and spun in their sockets from anger. Kalmashapada wandered dementedly through the wild forest, the curse roiling him.

The vana teemed with deer and every other animal, and was thick with every plant and great tree. With hunger ravaging him, one day Kalmashapada ranged the jungle in search of food, uttering wild and terrible cries. Driven by hunger, he arrived in the very heart of the forest and suddenly came upon a Brahmana and his wife making love there.

Terrified to see the possessed and wild looking king, the couple jumped up and ran from him, with their desire unsatisfied. Kalmashapada ran after them, growling, and seized the Brahmana.

The Brahmani wailed, "Great King, the world knows that you are a sovereign of the Suryavamsa, devoted to your elders and betters, and a king famed throughout the world for his dharma. It does not become you to commit this sin, O invincible one, not though the Rishi's curse has robbed you of your reason.

I am in my season and was joined with my husband in desire. I am not satisfied yet; I beg you be merciful, O best of kings, set my husband free."

But Kalmashapada paid no heed to her pitiful entreaty and, ignoring her screams, devoured the Brahmana like a tiger does his prey. Her fury terrible, the tears of the Brahmani turned to drops of fire and burned up everything around her.

In that rage, in her grief, she cursed Rajarishi Kalmashapada, "Vile King, for what you have done I curse you that if you ever go to your wife again you will instantly die. Wretched Raja, also let your wife conceive and deliver a child by the Rishi Vasishta whose sons you have killed and eaten. And that child, O worst of kings, shall be the one that continues your race."

Having pronounced her curse, that chaste Brahmani of the race of Angiras, every auspicious mark upon her body, walked into the fire kindled by her tears and became ashes before the king's eyes. Parantapa, even as this happened, Vasishta knew about it with mystic intuition.

The years passed. Kalmashapada was freed from his curse, and taken with desire one night, the king went to his queen Madayanati. However, she reminded him of the curse of the Brahmani and would not lie with Kalmashapada. Bitter tears of regret that king shed; bitterly he regretted what he had done.

Purushottama, this is why King Kalmashapada asked Maharishi Vasishta to beget a son upon his queen,' says the Gandharva."

CANTO 185

CHAITRARATHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Arjuna asks, 'Gandharva, you know everything; so you tell us which Vedagyani Brahmana we should make our priest.'

The Gandharva replies, 'In this very vana there is a holy shrine calls Utkochaka. Devala Muni's younger brother Dhaumya performs tapasya there. If you want a priest for yourselves, you will find no better Brahmana than him.'

Delighted with their encounter, Arjuna gives his Agneyastra to the Gandharva, with the proper rituals. The Pandava says, 'Gandharvottama, let the horses that you wish to give us remain with you for a time, until we have need for them and then we shall take them from you. Be you blessed!'

The Pandavas and the Gandharva salute each other reverently and part ways upon the enchanted banks of the Bhagirathi. The Pandavas go to Utkochaka, to Dhaumya's sacred asrama, and ask him to become their Kulaguru, their family priest. Best of those that know the Vedas, the profound Dhaumya receives the sons of Pandu with offerings of wild fruit, succulent roots, and he does agree to what they ask of him.

When the great Dhaumya agrees to be their priest, the Pandavas and Kunti feel a stirring elation: they feel that that they have already regained their kingdom, as well as won the daughter of Drupada for their queen, at her swayamvara. Truly, the Bharatrishabhas feel that in Dhaumya they have found a powerful guardian of their future and their fortunes.

Dhaumya, Mahatman, knower of the true meaning of the Veda, knower of every law of dharma, becomes the Guru of the Pandavas, and he makes them his Yajamanas, his spiritual disciples. The Brahmana sees those Kshatriyas endowed with strength, intelligence and fortitude such as the Devas possess, and he also feels that they have already regained their rightful kingdom.

When Dhaumya has blessed them, by uttering holy mantras over them, they think it is time to set out for the Panchala kingdom, to the swayamvara of the Princess Panchali."

CANTO 186

SWAYAMVARA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, "Those five Purushavyaghra brothers, the Pancha Pandavas, tigers among men, set out for Drupada's kingdom, to gaze upon that wonderful country, and especially its princess Draupadi.

As they go along, their mother with them, they see some Brahmanas on the way. Those Brahmacharis see the sons of Pandu, O Rajan, and ask, 'Where are you going? And from where do you come?'

Yudhishtira replies, 'Brahmanarishabhas, we five are brothers and this is our mother. We are coming from Ekachakra.'

The Brahmanas say, 'Take yourselves to the city of Drupada in the kingdom of the Panchalas, for there is a great swayamvara to be held there at which Drupada will give away great wealth. We are also going there and we can journey together.

Exceptional celebrations will take place there for Yagnasena has a daughter who is born from the heart of an agnikunda during a yagna. Her beauty is past compare, her eyes like lotus petals, her features flawless, her intelligence and beauty legend.

Why, Draupadi of the slender waist emanates a fragrance from her body, a scent as of a blue lotus, and it spreads around her a full yojana. Her brother is the mighty Dhrishtadyumna, who has been born to kill Drona. The prince is also born from the sacrificial flames, wearing natural armour and carrying a bow and arrows, and blazing himself like a second fire.

Yagnasena's daughter will choose a husband for herself from amongst all the Kshatriyas that have been invited to her swayamvara. And we are going there to witness the celebrations, which we believe will be like a festival in Devaloka.

Kshatriyas, munificent kings and princes from diverse lands who perform great sacrifices at which they give untold wealth to Brahmanas,

will attend the swayamvara of Draupadi. They are handsome Kshatriyas, full of vigour, brilliance and learning, Maharathas and masters of weapons. Wanting to win Draupadi's favour, and so her hand, they will distribute great wealth, countless cows, wonderful food, and many other gifts to be enjoyed.

Taking all this and witnessing the swayamvara, we will depart Drupada's city and go our separate ways.

Many actors and bards, Sutradharas and Pauranikas, champion athletes, heralds, entertainers and performers of every ilk and hue, from across the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha, will come to the swayamvara. You shall see many marvellous sights in the city of Drupada, receive many rich gifts, and then go your way, as you please, or come with us.

Besides, you are all as handsome as Devas. Seeing you, perhaps the dark Princess Krishnaa will choose one of you for her husband!' And pointing to Arjuna, 'This brother of yours seems blessed with extraordinary fortune; he might well earn wealth past imagining in the city of Drupada.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Brahmanas, we will go with you to the princess' excellent swayamvara.'"

CANTO 187

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Janamejaya, the Pandavas go with those Brahmanas towards the kingdom of southern Panchala, over which Drupada rules. On their way, those Kshatriyas see the luminous and sinless Dwaipayana. They worship him, and taking his blessing, continue their journey towards Drupada's kingdom.

The Maharathas go slowly on their way, often lingering to admire the fine forests and shimmering lakes that they see. Finally, the devout, taintless princes enter Panchala lands and come to Drupada's capital, where they begin living in the home of a potter.

Still disguised as Brahmanas, they go begging for alms and no man recognises them for who they are.

Now, Drupada Yagnasena has always wanted to give his daughter Draupadi to the heroic Arjuna to be his wife. But he never speaks of this to anyone. O Janamejaya, thinking of Arjuna's matchless archery, the Panchala king has an exceptionally inflexible and stiff bow fashioned, which he thinks that no one other than Arjuna will be able to bend.

He also erects an unusual yantra, a device upon which he suspends an extraordinarily difficult target to shoot.

Drupada declares, 'The archer who can shoot the hanging target shall have Draupadi for his wife.'

Thus does the Panchala king proclaim his daughter's swayamvara, and every worthy Kshatriya in Bharatavarsha arrives in his capital. Countless Rishis also arrive, to witness the swayamvara, for it promises wealth and excitement.

Among the warriors that come, O King, are Duryodhana and the Kurus, and Karna with them. The highest born, most learned Brahmanas from every kingdom and land flock to Drupada's city. The great Drupada receives every king and Sage reverently.

Come the day of the swayamvara and the people of the city throng the tiers and platforms that have been raised around the arena for the swayamvara. The noise they make is like a sea roaring. That stadium has been erected upon a level and auspicious plain to the north-east of Drupada's capital. Fine mansions, set in their sprawling grounds, surround the majestic construction.

Lofty walls enclose the arena, as well as a deep moat circling it around, while fine archways at regular intervals lead into it, and a bright, many-coloured canopy covers the stands. The king enters the stadium through its north-eastern gate, to the resounding bass of a thousand conches.

The stadium is fragrant with the scent of black aloe, and with the holy water mixed with sandalwood paste with which it has been liberally sprinkled, and also with the extravagance of garlands made with every flower, hanging everywhere.

The lofty mansions that encircle it are snow-white and seem like the peaks of Kailasa that kiss the clouds. Their windows are filled by lattices of gold, their walls encrusted with diamonds, and priceless carpets of silk lie upon their gleaming floors. They are all adorned with garlands in every colour and of every fine fragrance, and they are indeed as radiantly white as the necks of swans.

The scent of aloe and the other redolences that those mansions exude can be smelt a yojana away. Each one has a hundred doors, each of these wide enough for a small crowd to enter through them at once. They are furnished extravagantly, beautifully, and they are like the peaks of Himavan.

The kings and princes, all the distinguished Kshatriyas coming from far-flung kingdoms, are housed in those seven-storied palaces. Invited by Drupada, each one has come to vie with the others for the hand of Draupadi, and they come wearing their finery and sparkling ornaments.

When the people of the Panchala capital and countryside come to the grand stadium of the swayamvara, they see those leonine Kshatriyas within the white mansions, all of them strong and vital, as great souls are. Those magnificent kings all wear the fragrant paste of the black aloe upon their persons. Liberal and majestic they are, worshippers of Brahman, invincible guardians of their kingdoms against every invader, and loved throughout the world for their dharma.

The Pandavas also enter the stadium, sit among the Brahmanas and see the unrivalled wealth of the Panchala king and the great and generous gifts

that he gives. Lively troupes of actors, musicians and dancers perform daily, attracting more people, day by day.

Bharatarishabha, on the sixteenth day, when the stadium is packed to capacity, Draupadi bathes, puts on the most resplendent clothes and jewellery and she enters the arena carrying a golden chalice with the arghya in it and also a garland of wildflowers. The Kulaguru of the House of the Moon, a holy Brahmana who knows all the apposite mantras, lights the sacrificial fire and pours libations of ghee into the flames.

When Agni Deva has been appeased with ghee, the priest makes all the Brahmanas present utter auspicious mantras to bless the occasion. He raises his hand to stop the musical instruments that play all around the stadium and calls for silence among the people. When that vast crowd falls completely silent, Dhrishtadyumna takes his sister's hand, steps into the middle of the arena, and speaks in a voice deep as bass drums or thunderheads.

Sweetly, yet, he says, 'O mighty Kshatriyas, here is the bow, these are five sharp arrows and above is the target. Find the target through the aperture in the yantra, the device above which it hangs, and I solemnly swear, upon my lineage, my honour and my strength, that my sister Krishnaa shall belong to the archer who succeeds.'

Dhrishtadyumna turns to Draupadi and begins to recite the names, lineages and achievements of the great Kshatriyas of the Earth who have come to her swayamvara."

CANTO 188

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Dhrishtadyumna proclaims, 'Duryodhana, Durvisaha, Durmukha, Dushpradharshana, Vivimsati, Vikarna, Saha, Dushasana; Yuyutsu,Vayuvega, Bhimavegarava; Ugrayudha, Balaki, Kanakayu, Virochana, Sukundala, Chitrasena, Suvarcha, Kanakadhwaja; Nandaka, Bahusali, Tuhunda and Vikata are all the mighty sons of Dhritarashtra. My sister, these and many other valiant brothers of theirs have come to vie for your hand; and with them the indomitable Karna.

Many other great kings and princes, all Kshatriya bulls, have come for you. Sakuni, Saubala, Vrisaka, and Brihadbala, all sons of Gandhara are here. Aswatthama and Bhoja, best among masters of astras, are here, glittering in rare ornaments.

Brihanta, Manimana, Dandadhara, Sahadeva, Jayatsena, Meghasandhi, Virata with his two sons Sankha and Uttara, Vardhakshemi, Susarma, Senabindu, Suketu with his two sons Sunama and Suvarcha, Suchitra, Sukumara, Vrika, Satyadhriti, Suryadhwaja, Rochamana, Nila, Chitrayudha, Agsuman, Chekitana, the mighty Sreniman, Chandrasena, powerful son of Samudrasena, Jarasahdha, Vidanda and Danda, father and son, Paundraka, Vasudeva, Bhagadatta of terrific vigour, Kalinga, Tamralipta, the Pattana king, Maharatha Salya king of Madra, and his valiant son Rukmangada, Rukmaratha, Somadatta of the Kurus and his three sons, all Maharathas and great Kshatriyas, Bhuri, Bhurisrava, Sala, Sudakshina, Kamboja all of the race of Puru, Brihadvala, Sushena, Sibi, son of Usinara, Patcharanihanta, the king of Karusha; Baladeva Samkarshana, Vasudeva Krishna, the matchless son of Rukmini, Samba, Charudeshna, son of Pradyumna, Gada, Akrura, Satyaki, the Mahatman Uddhava, Kritavarman, son of Hridika, Prithu, Viprithu, Viduratha, Ranka, Sanku, Givesshana, Asavaha, Aniruddha, Samika, Sarimejaya, the heroic Vatapi, Jhilli, Pindaraka, the powerful Usinara, all these Vrishnis, Bhagiratha, Brihatkshatra, Jayadratha

son of Sindhu, Brihadratha, Balhika, Maharatha Srutayu, Uluka, Kaitava, Chitrangada and Suvangada, the most intelligent Vatsaraja, the king of Kosala, Sisupala, the awesome Jarasandha, and many more kings celebrated throughout the world, have come, my blessed sister, for you.

All of them are great archers. They shall all shoot at the target, and he that brings it down will have you for his wife.'"

CANTO 189

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Kshatriyas, young and not so young, their earrings sparkling, each one feeling that he is mighty indeed, all brandish their weapons. Intoxicated with the pride of being handsome, powerful, learned, of noblest birth, wealthy, youthful and vigorous, they are like Himalayan elephants in musth, in the season of rut when their temples split open from an excess of ichor.

Seized by Kama, God of Desire, viewing one another with extreme contention, they all rise up at the same moment and roar, 'Krishnaa will be mine!'

The Kshatriyas gathered in that stadium look like the Devas of old did, when they gathered around Uma, the Mountain King's daughter. Kama Deva pierces them all, subtly, with his invisible flowery arrows, and they are without exception lost in a dream of winning the exquisite Draupadi. They stride into the arena and now favour even their dearest friends with glares of competition and animosity.

The Devas come to that stadium in their vimanas, with the Rudras and the Adityas, the Vasus and the twin Aswins, the Swadhas and all the Marutas, and Kubera with Yama at their head.

The Daityas, Suparnas, the great Nagas, the Devarishis, the Guhyakas, the Charanas, Viswavasu, Narada, Parvata and the main Gandharvas with the Apsaras are all there.

Halayudha Balarama and Janardana Krishna are there, as are the chieftains of the Vrishni, Andhaka and Yadava tribes, all of whom Krishna commands. Krishna sees the five Pandavas in disguise, like five elephants in rut drawn to Draupadi even as wild tuskers in season are to a lake blooming with lotuses; he sees them disguised as Brahmanas, covered with ashes, and he sees the great fires that those holy ashes conceal.

Krishna says softly to his brother Rama, 'Look, there is Yudhishtira; those are Bhima and Arjuna Jishnu; and there are the twins.'

Balarama sees the sons of Pandu and gives Krishna a look of great satisfaction. However, every other Kshatriya there, sons and grandsons of kings, their eyes bulging to see her unearthly beauty, many chewing their lips from intense desire, gaze only at the Princess Draupadi and see nothing other than her. The sons of Kunti and Madri's twins also look at Panchali, and struck by Kama's subtle shafts of love, they, too, see nothing else.

The sky is so crowded with Devarishis, Gandharvas, Suparnas, Nagas, Asuras and Siddhas, so fragrant with the scents of Swarga, with heaven's flowers cascading out of it, reverberant with deep conches, drums and the endless Pranava, the *AUM*, as well as softer, unworldly music from flute, lute and tabor, that the vimanas of the Devas find passage through those throngs difficult.

Now the trial of the swayamvara gets underway. Karna, Duryodhana, Salwa, Salya, Aswatthama, Kratha, Sunitha, Vakra, the king of Kalinga and Vanga, Pandya, Paundra, the lord of Videha, the chief of the Yavanas, and countless other Kshatriya princes—sovereigns of great lands, their eyes like lotus petals—begin, one by one, to display their prowess in order to win the hand of the princess who so obviously has no remote rival on Earth for beauty.

Yet, for all their fine crowns, necklaces, bracelets and all their ornaments, for their mighty physiques, their tremendous arms, bursting as they are with manhood, strength and vigour, most of those Kshatriyas cannot bend or string the great bow of the trial, not even in their dreams.

As they make their attempts, one by one, muscles bulging, veins standing out upon them, each according to his ability, the great weapon flings the best of them—who do indeed bend it a little—violently onto the ground, where they lie senseless for some moments.

Drained, their fine crowns askew, the garlands they wear ragged, panting, their ardour for the princess quickly cools; for they know that they can never hope to bend or string that dreadful bow. Mournful they are, those Kshatriyas, and give vent to their disappointment.

Karna, of the Sutas sees the crestfallen Kshatriyas. That greatest of all archers rises, strides up to the bow, picks up that awesome weapon effortlessly, bends it with no more effort, strings it, sets an arrow to the string and draws the string back so that the bow forms a circle.

The Pandavas look at that son of Surya, who is as bright as Agni, Soma or Surya Deva himself, and they quail, for they feel certain that the target has already been brought down.

Suddenly, the princess Draupadi cries, ‘I will not marry a Sutaputra!’

Karna stops still. His lips curl in a sneer, he laughs bitterly and he flings the great bow down in disgust, in disdain, in anguish.

Now Sishupala, son of Damagosha and king of the Chedis, mighty as Yama, comes forward to string the bow, but the weapon brings him to his knees instead.

Jarasandha of Magadha, invincible king, walks up to the bow and stands before it like some mountain, as if to burn it up with his scrutiny. However, when he tries to bend it, the bow flings him down as well, on his knees. With a roar, he rises and stalks out of the stadium like a great wounded lion, to return to his kingdom.

Now the magnificent Kshatriya Salya, king of Madra, tries to bend and string the bow, and it brings him also to his knees. Finally, it is plain that none of the Kshatriyas present are up to the task, and a wave of snickers ripples through the crowd. Arjuna Jishnu, son of Kunti, feels that he wants to make his attempt to win the dark Panchali’s hand.”

CANTO 190

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "When all the Kshatriyas have given up and sit down, frustrated and fuming, Arjuna of the lofty soul rises from the enclosure of the Brahmanas. The foremost among the Brahmanas see him get up, his skin the colour of Indra's banner, and they shake their deerskins and set up a loud noise: some of them are happy, while others shout their displeasure.

Among the most intelligent of them say, 'Brahmanas, how can a stripling of ours string the bow that the greatest Kshatriyas on Earth, men like Salya and the rest, equally powerful, and trained masters moreover in arms, failed?'

'If this callow youth fails, he will bring ridicule upon all of us Brahmanas. The Kshatriyas will pour scorn over us. He is vain and immature, which is why he even dares think of attempting the impossible task. He must be prevented from this rashness.'

But others say, 'No one shall mock at us even if he fails, and the kings will not be displeased.'

'Why, the handsome boy has a powerful physique, even like the trunk of some great tusker. He is as calm as Himavan. His gait is a lion's. He is formidably determined, and he appears to be as strong as a bull elephant in musth. It is quite possible that he will succeed!'

'He is strong and resolute. Otherwise would he dare rise up and approach the bow on his own? Also, remember that among all men it is the Brahmana who can accomplish anything to which he sets his mind. A Brahmana might not eat at all, or he might subsist on fruit and roots; he might become macilent and seem weak; but he will always be ablaze with the power of his own tejas.

Let him appear to be right or wrong, no one should ever underestimate a Brahmana or consider him incapable of accomplishing anything at all, great

or little, any task, be it fraught with joy or sorrow.'

'Let us not forget how Jamadagni's son Rama vanquished all the Earth's Kshatriyas in battle, by himself. Agastya drained the very Ocean with his Brahma shakti. So let us all say in one voice, "May the youth bend the bow and bring the target down easily!"'

And many of the Brahmanas say, 'Tathastu, be it so!'

As the Brahmanas continue with their debate, Arjuna comes up to the bow and stands before it like a mountain. After a long moment, he walks solemnly around the great weapon, with his head bent in prayer to the Lord Isana, granter of boons, and then with a fervent thought of Krishna, he picks up the bow.

In a wink, effortlessly, Indra's son Jishnu, as strong as Indra's younger brother Vishnu, strings the weapon which so many mighty Kshatriyas like Rukma, Sunitha, Vakra, Duryodhana, Salya, and others could not manage to do though they poured every ounce of their strength into the effort. Quicker than the eye can see, he picks up all five arrows, in a blur, and shoots the target suspended above the yantra, so it falls onto the ground through the aperture in the uncanny device.

A moment's stunned silence, and then a huge shout from all the celestials shakes the sky, and the stadium reverberates with deafening cries and applause from the crowd. The Devas pour down a shower of unworldly blooms over Partha Parantapa.

Thousands of Brahmanas wave their upper cloths in the air, and shout for joy, while the Kshatriyas cry out in disbelief and agony. Flowers continue to pour out of the sky over the stadium and the arena. The musicians strike up a celebrant song, while bards and heralds sing and cry out praises of him who has achieved the staggering feat.

Drupada, slayer of his enemies, looks at Arjuna and is full of joy. If the need arises, he will deploy his army to help or protect this hero. While the uproar rises to a crescendo, the Brahmanas rapturous and the Kshatriyas furious, Yudhishtira Purushottama quickly leaves the stadium with the twins, to return to the potter's house.

The Princess Draupadi, Krishnaa, sees the target brought down, she looks at Arjuna who has found his mark, and joy sweeps through her. With a white silken robe and a garland of flowers in her hands, she walks up to the bowman as handsome as Indra himself.

When Arjuna, who could do the impossible, wins dark Panchali's hand, every Brahmana in the stadium rises to bow to him, to honour him. Like a lion, he walks out of the arena, with his newly won wife following him."

CANTO 191

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “Drupada rises to say that he will give his daughter in marriage to the Brahmana archer, when suddenly all the other Kshatriyas look at one another and are seized by wrath.

They say, ‘Drupada dares treat us lords of the Earth like wisps of straw, and he will give his daughter, best among all women, to a Brahmana! Having planted a lovely tree he wants to cut it down when it is about to bear fruit. He has humiliated us and we must kill him.’

‘He deserves neither respect nor reverence for his age; let us kill both him and his son, for they have insulted all the Kshatriyas of the Earth. He called us kings and princes here, fed us sumptuously, and finally he dishonours us. In this assembly of kings that is like a gathering of Devas, can the vile Drupada not see a single worthy Kshatriya, one that is fully his equal, that he gives Draupadi to a Brahmana?’

‘The Vedas clearly say that a swayamvara is only for Kshatriyas and no Brahmana may be chosen for a husband during a swayamvara. O Kings, if this princess cannot choose any of us Kshatriyas to be her husband let us throw her into the fire along with her father and her brother, and return to our kingdoms.

But as for this Brahmana, either from arrogance or malice, he has indeed insulted us kings. Yet, being a Brahmana, he must not be killed, for our kingdoms, lives, wealth, sons, grandsons, and everything that we own exists because of and for the holy Brahmanas.

Yet, we must not leave him unpunished, so that never does another swayamvara end in such disgrace. We must teach him a public lesson that will be remembered for all time, a lesson that will keep the varnas each in their proper place.’

When they have spoken amongst themselves, the incensed Kshatriyas seize up their weapons, iron maces with spikes among them, and rush

towards Drupada to kill him at once. Drupada sees the Kshatriya horde run at him in rage, with bows and arrows, and he seeks refuge in the Brahmanas.

Suddenly, Bhima and Arjuna stand between the charging Kshatriyas and Drupada, at whom they run like rut-maddened elephants. Raising their weapons in gloved hands, the kings turn roaring on the two Pandavas, now determined to kill them.

In a flash the tremendous Bhima, powerful as thunder, tears up a big tree from the ground and strips its leaves away. Bhima Mahabaho, son of Pritha, decimator of his enemies, stands next to his brother Narapumgava Arjuna; Bhima is like Yama, the Lord Death himself with his mace.

Jishnu wonders at his brother's awesome strength, and now, mighty as Indra himself, Arjuna also stands forth fearlessly, bow in hand, ready to face their host of adversaries.

Seeing them, Krishna Damodara of divine intellect, his deeds past understanding, murmurs to his brother Balarama, 'If I am Vaasudeva, O Samkarshana, that shura there, whose tread is like a lion's and whose bow is a full eight feet, is certainly Arjuna! The other hero who has torn up the tree to be his weapon is Vrikodara Bhima, for none but he can do such a thing.

And that other prince, eight feet tall, his eyes like lotus petals, who just left the stadium, his gait like a lion's yet full of humility, too, his skin fair, his nose prominent, is Dharma Deva's son Yudhishtira. The twins who also left, each one like another Kartikeya, I feel sure are the sons of the Aswin twins.

I did hear that Kunti and her sons escaped the fire that burnt down the house of lac.'

Balarama Halayudha, fair as rainless clouds, says joyfully to Krishna, 'My brother, how happy I am to hear that our father's sister and her sons escaped death!'"

CANTO 192

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now all the Brahmana bulls there, those Dvijarishabhas, wave their deerskins and shake their coconut-shell kamandalus, and cry to Arjuna and Bhima, 'Fear not, we will fight the Kshatriyas!'

Arjuna smiles at them and says kindly, 'Stand aside and be spectators, dear friends, while I turn back these angry kings with arrow storms, just as snakes are with mantras.'

Arjuna raises the bow with which he has shot the target, and stands calmly beside Bhima; they are like mountains. Then, next moment, the brothers attack the Kshatriya host led by Karna, like two elephants charging as one.

Eager for battle, the kings roar, 'It is permissible to kill anyone who is bent on a fight!' and rush at Bhima and Arjuna disguised as Brahmanas.

Tejasvin Karna faces Arjuna, while the great Salya, king of Madra, lumbers at Bhima truly like a tusker in musth charging another tusker for the right to mate with a cow-elephant in heat. Duryodhana and some others give light, playful fight to the general throng of Brahmanas.

Arjuna sees Surya's son Karna advance upon him and pierces him with a lightning swift flurry of arrows, and Radheya Karna faints. Recovering quickly, Karna now fights Arjuna with greater intent. Fiercely, intensely, they duel, those greatest of all archers. Such is their speed and skill that they shroud each other in showers of arrows so both become invisible to the spectator crowd.

But what they roar at each is clearly audible: 'See the strength of my arms!'

'I have the answer for that!'

They say more, which is subtle, and only other great bowmen can fathom that exchange, full of the high secrets of archery.

Karna finds Arjuna indomitable and the Suryaputra raises his own exceptional archery. Arjuna looses shafts like thunder at him, and Karna roars and parries them. The Kshatriyas all applaud.

Karna cries to his opponent, 'Dvijottama, you are a matchless and tireless bowman, and your arrows are tremendous. Are you an Avatara of the Astrashastra? Or are you Parasurama, Indra himself, or his younger brother Vishnu Achyuta, come in the guise of Brahmana?

For I know that none but Indra or Pandu's son Arjuna Kiriti can face me in battle when I am roused.'

Arjuna, Phalguna, replies, 'Karna, I am not any Avatara of the Astrashastra, nor am I Parasurama of divine prowess. I am just a Brahmana but I am the greatest archer on Earth. Through my Guru's grace, I have the Brahmastra and the Paurandarastra, and I am here to vanquish you, O Shura, in a very short while.'

Karna lowers his bow and stops fighting, for that Maharatha knows that the Brahmastra is irresistible. Meanwhile, nearby, Salya and Bhima fight like two elephants in musth, striking each other with fists and knees. They shove each other mightily, flinging one another down, and hauling the fallen adversary face down along the ground.

Their blows are like granite blocks crashing together and the stadium echoes. After a brief struggle, Bhima Kurusthama picks Salya up bodily and hurls him down roughly, with enormous force, so that the crowd gasps. Yet, Bhimasena Purusharishabha flings Salya down subtly, too, so that he does not seriously injure the Madra king.

Seeing Salya supine and Karna lowering his bow in fear, all the other Kshatriyas become alarmed. Quickly, they throng round Bhima and say in placatory tones, 'These Brahmanarishabhas are certainly great warriors! We must know their gotra and where they live, for who can face Radha's son Karna in battle other than Drona, Rama or Pandu's son Arjuna?

Who can withstand Duryodhana except Devakinandana Krishna and Saradwan's son Kripa? Who also can hurl Salya down except the great Balarama, Shuravirya Duryodhana or the Pandava Bhimasena?

Let us not fight these excellent Brahmanas anymore, for however much a Brahmana offends he must be protected. At least let us first discover who they are, if indeed they are Brahmanas, and later consider fighting them with clear hearts.'

Having watched Bhima throw Salya down, Krishna is convinced that the two Brahmanas are indeed Kunti's sons. In his quiet but immediately arresting voice, he says to the Kshatriyas, 'The Brahmana has won the princess's hand fairly.'

He persuades the kings to abandon battle and to return peacefully, if amazed and wondering, to their kingdoms.

The other Brahmanas who have come to the event are jubilant. 'The Brahmanas have proved victorious and one of us has made the princess of Panchala his wife!'

They throng round Bhima and Arjuna, who wear deerskin, and now make their way with some difficulty through the rapturous crowd. Having been pressed hard by the Kshatriya enemy, blood upon them, the two shuras, those heroes, emerge from the milling crowd like the full Moon and the Sun emerging from behind dark clouds; Krishna follows them.

Meanwhile, in the potter's house, Kunti waits anxiously for her sons to return, for today they are late indeed. Her imagination conjures all sorts of fell happenings that might have overtaken her sons. One moment, she thinks that the sons of Dhritarashtra have recognised her princes and killed them. Next, she trembles to think that some powerful Rakshasa, with powers of maya, has slain them.

She even thinks, 'Ah, could Vyasa himself have been a victim of darkness of the mind when he told my sons to come to this city?'

Out of her love for her sons, Kunti's anxieties grow moment by moment. Then, in the stillness of late afternoon, Arjuna walks into the potter's house, like the Sun appearing from behind the clouds on an overcast day; following him comes a throng of festive Brahmanas."

CANTO 193

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Kunti's splendid sons come to the potter's house, bringing Draupadi Yagnaseni with them. Kunti is in the inner chamber when they call to her, 'Mother, come and see the alms we have brought today.'

From within, in great relief at their return, she replies, without seeing the alms that they mean, 'Share the alms you have brought and enjoy it equally.'

Next moment, she sees Draupadi and cries, 'What have I said?'

She clasps the lovely, ecstatic Panchali, but a shiver of fear runs through Kunti. Taking Draupadi's hand in hers, Kunti says to Yudhishtira, 'Your younger brothers called Drupada's daughter the alms they had brought home, and without seeing her I replied, "Share the alms you have brought and enjoy it equally."

Yudhishtira, Kururishabha, how can what I say not become a lie and yet no sin touch the Princess Panchali?'

Yudhishtira thinks for a moment, then puts his arm consolingly around his mother, turns to Arjuna and says, 'Phalguna, you won her at the swayamvara and it is only just that you should marry her. Parantapa let us light a holy fire and you must take her hand with all the sacred rituals.'

But Arjuna says, 'Rajan, do not make me commit this sin, for what you are saying does not conform to dharma. You are the eldest and you must marry first; then Bhima, then I, then Nakula and finally the youngest of us, Sahadeva.

Think well upon what would be the right thing to do, what would be just, honourable and also beneficial to King Drupada. Bhima and I, the twins and the Princess Panchali all wait for your decision. We will do what you say.'

Arjuna speaks with the utmost respect and affection. Now all the Pandavas turn to gaze upon the peerless princess, the dark Krishnaa; and

she, in turn, looks at not just one but at all five of them. The sons of Pandu then look at one another, and they all sense one another's fervent desire.

They sit on the floor and are all plunged in a single absorption: of Draupadi, and her alone. Once they have gazed at her, Kama Deva easily captures their hearts, paralyses their senses, and fills them with one desire: easily, because Brahma himself has created this princess to be more beautiful than any other woman on Earth. Such is her beauty that she can enchant any man, why, any creature that lives.

Kuntiputra Yudhishtira looks at his younger brothers and clearly sees what is in their hearts. Now he remembers clearly what Krishna Dwaipayana, their grandsire Vyasa had said to him.

The bull among men fears that Draupadi will divide brother against brother unless he chose wisely for them all. Yudhishtira says quietly, 'The auspicious princess shall become the wife of us all.'

Such joy breaks out upon the faces of his brothers.

The great Shura of the Vrishnis, Krishna, now arrives at the potter's house with Rohini's Balarama. They see Yudhishtira Ajatashatru sitting there, his arms graceful, mighty and long; they see his younger brothers brighter than flames around him.

Krishna goes up to Kunti's eldest son, touches that Kshatriya's feet and says, 'I am Krishna.'

Rohini's son Balarama does the same. The Pandavas cry out in delight to see the divine Yadava brothers, who then proceed to touch the feet of Kunti, who is their father's sister.

Kurusthama Yudhishtira formally and lovingly inquires about the health of Krishna and Baladeva, and then asks in some amazement, 'O Krishna, how did you discover us when we are disguised as Brahmanas?'

Krishna says with a smile, 'Rajan, even if it is covered by ashes, fire can be known. Who among Manavas other than the Pandavas could do what Bhima and Arjuna did today? Parantapas, O sons of Pandu, the greatest good fortune helped you escape the fire at Varanavrata which Duryodhana and his conspirators lit.

Bless you! May your fortune increase like a fire that is lit inside a hidden cave and then spread out to cover the Earth. But now, lest we are seen here and you discovered, we must return to our own lodgings.'

Taking Yudhishtira's leave, Krishna, whose fortune never wanes, quickly leaves the potter's house with Balarama."

CANTO 194

SWAYAMVARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Bhima and Arjuna leave the arena of the swayamvara and make their way towards the potter's house, the Panchala prince Dhrishtadyumna follows them discreetly. He goes alone, dismissing his attendants, and hides himself in a dark corner of the potter's dwelling.

As dusk falls, Bhima and Arjuna return from their evening round of begging alms. They bring what they have received to Yudhishtira.

Kunti says kindly to Draupadi, 'Sweet child, take one portion of the alms, and having offered it to the gods, give it away to some Brahmanas. Give another portion to any other atithis, guests that have come to us to be fed.

Divide what remains in two halves. Give one half to Bhima, for this fair son of mine, who is as strong as an elephant king, this shuravirya always eats well. Divide what remains into six portions, my child, four of them for my other sons and one each for you and for me.'

Happily, Draupadi does as her mother-in-law asks, and those heroes eat the food that the princess serves them. Dhrishtadyumna watches from concealment as Madri's son Sahadeva now spreads a wide bed of kusa grass on the floor. Each brother spreads his deerskin upon the grass and they all lie down to sleep, with their heads facing south.

Kunti lies crosswise above the heads of her sons, and the princess Panchali at their feet. The lovely princess Krishnaa lies at the feet of the Pandavas even as if she is their lowly foot pillow, but she feels no shame or sorrow, and neither does a wrong thought of those Kururishabhas cross her heart.

Those shuras begin to speak softly among themselves, while Dhrishtadyumna listens avidly from his hiding place; he is intrigued and excited by what he hears, for those princes, each one capable of being a

Senapati, speak of nothing but vimanas, astras, war elephants, swords and various kinds of arrows, and of battle-axes, too. He sees how his sister lies contentedly at the feet of the five.

With dawn the potter opens his front door and the Panchala prince slips out quietly and runs to his father to report everything he has seen and heard. Drupada is dejected because he does not know that it is indeed the Pandavas that have taken his daughter.

As soon as his son comes into his presence, he cries, 'Where is my Krishnaa? Who are they that have taken her from us? Has a lowborn Sudra or a deceitful Vaisya stamped on my head and made off with my precious child? O my son, has our fragrant garland of flowers been cast into a cemetery?

Or perhaps some noble Kshatriya or a Dvija has won her? Ah, has some mean fellow set his left foot upon my crowned head and taken my Panchali? Ah, my prince, I would not grieve at all but be so full of joy if Purushottama Arjuna had married my child today! Dhrishtadyumna, are Kurusthama Vichitravirya's grandsons alive? Is it indeed Arjuna who bent the bow and brought the target down?'"

CANTO 195

VAIVAHIKA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Dhrishtadyumna, best among princes of the House of the Moon, says to his father, 'The youth with long reddish eyes, who wore deerskin and is as handsome as a Deva, who strung that best of bows and shot the target, was quickly thronged by festive Brahmanas who all paid him homage for what he had done. He looked like Indra of the Vajra standing among the Devas and Devarishis.

As for Krishnaa, she held onto the youth's deerskin and followed him as joyfully as a she-elephant does the lord of a herd. When the incensed Kshatriyas advanced on them, another hero rose to stand beside the archer. He tore up a big tree and rushed at the kings and princes, smashing them down all around him even as Yama does all the living.

Rajan, the Kshatriyas stopped their assault and stood still, while the two shuras, who are like the Sun and the Moon, took Krishnaa with them and left the arena. I followed them discreetly to the house of a potter in the suburbs of our city. Inside the potter's house there sat a woman who is like a flame. I am sure that she is their mother, and around her there sat three other splendid heroes, each one like an Agni.

The two shuras touched the woman's feet and bid Krishnaa do the same. They left Panchali with the lady and went out to beg for alms. Returning, they gave what they had received to Draupadi, who offered one portion of it to the gods, gave away another as daana to Brahmanas, gave part of what remained to the noble woman, and divided the rest amongst the five young men. Finally, she kept a little for herself and ate when the others had all eaten.

O Father, when they had eaten they lay down to sleep and Krishnaa lay contentedly at their feet, even like a foot pillow. They lay upon a bed of kusa grass on which they spread their deerskins.

Before falling asleep the five spoke amongst themselves in voices deep as thunderheads rumbling, and from what they spoke about they are not Sudras or Vaisyas, nor even Brahmanas. I have no doubt that they are Kshatriyas, for they spoke knowingly of things that only bulls among warriors discuss.

Father, it does seem that our hopes have not been in vain, and that what we heard about the Pandavas having escaped the fire in the house of lac is indeed true. From the manner in which the youth strung the great bow and shot the mark, and from what I heard them say to one another in the potter's house, I am certain, O King, that these are the sons of Pritha disguised as Brahmanas.'

Drupada is overjoyed and he sends his priest to the brothers to discover if they are indeed the Pandavas. Coming to the potter's house, the priest lauds them, and delivers Drupada's message.

'Exalted ones, Drupada, most munificent king, has sent me to ask who you are. He saw the feat of this youth who shot the mark, and his joy was great. Tell us to which race, clan and family you belong, and trampling the heads of your enemies, complete the joy of the Panchala king and his kin, and mine as well.

King Pandu was a dear friend of Drupada, who loved him as he did himself. Drupada always wanted to give his daughter in marriage to a son of Pandu. Flawlessly handsome Shuras, Drupada has long wanted Arjuna of the long and mighty arms to marry Panchali by winning her hand at the swayamvara.

If that is what has happened, ah, nothing could be more auspicious or fortunate.'

Delivering his message, the priest falls silent and waits for their reply. Yudhishtira says to Bhima, 'Offer the Brahmana padya and arghya; he is Drupada's Kulaguru and deserves exceptional reverence and worship.'

Bhima washes the feet of the Brahmana and offers him arghya, while the priest sits there happily, at ease.

Yudhishtira then says to him, 'The Panchala king did not give his daughter away freely, by Kshatriya custom, but by a trial of skill. Drupada should ask no questions about the race, clan or family of this hero who won the princess's hand fairly. Let us say that his every question has already been answered by the stringing of the bow and the bringing down of the target.

This brilliant shura won Krishnaa amidst the gathered Kshatriyas and brought her away. After that, let not the king of the House of Soma entertain any regrets about what happened, for they will only serve to make him unhappy and not to answer any questions that he might have.

Let it suffice to say that whatever the king wished for his beautiful princess, who bears every auspicious mark upon her person, will come to pass. No one weak or lowborn, none that is not a great master of arms could have strung that bow or shot that mark. Once done, the feat cannot be undone either, not by anyone in this world.

It does not become the king to grieve for his daughter today, indeed to grieve over what is inexorable. Fate will take its course now.'

Even as Yudhishtira speaks, another messenger arrives hotfoot from Drupada and announces, 'The banquet is ready!'"

CANTO 196

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The messenger says, 'King Drupada has prepared a grand feast for the bridegroom and his party. Finish your nitya karma, your daily rituals, and come quickly. The Princess Krishnaa's wedding will be solemnised there. Do not delay. Look, Drupada sends these chariots adorned with golden lotuses and drawn by the noblest steeds for you. Ride in them to the palace of the king of the Panchalas.'

Soon, those Kuru bulls send Drupada's Brahmana back. They help Kunti and Draupadi into one of the gleaming chariots and, climbing into the others themselves, drive to the palace.

Meanwhile, O Bharata, his priest brings back Yudhishtira's message to Drupada and that king prepares a subtle test of sorts to find out to which varna the five young men belong. He has fruit and sanctified garlands set out; he fetches shining coats of armour and war-shields, the keenest swords, fine horses and chariots, the best bows and arrows, and rare lances, battle-axes and spears worked with gold; he has carpets on view, fine bedsteads and other expensive furnishings and artefacts; and he also puts on show cattle, seeds for sowing and some farming implements.

Arriving at Drupada's palace, Kunti and her sons enter the king's inner chambers. Joyfully the women of the palace welcome her, with honour and worship. Rajan, Drupada, his ministers, his sons, his friends and attendants all look at the Narapumgavas, the sons of Pandu, each one with the gait of a lion, wearing deerskin, their eyes like those of great bulls, their shoulders wide, their arms long and powerful, hanging at their side like great and sinewy snakes, and the Panchalas are delighted.

They see how those shuras sit without hesitation and indeed with comfortable familiarity, upon the fine chairs to which they are shown, with silken footstools, in order of their ages at the king's high table. When they sit, liveried servants, male and female, bring fare of kings to them, wine in

crystal decanters and rare delicacies steaming on silver and golden platters. They eat and drink with relish and discerning appreciation: the wine and every kind of meat as well, again with easy familiarity.

When they have dined, those young men look with keen interest at the weapons and the other warrior's things that Drupada has shrewdly put on display, ignoring everything else which might have attracted a Brahmana or a Vaisya. Drupada and Dhrishtadyumna see all this, as do their ministers, and they are certain that the young men, those sons of Kunti, are Kshatriya princes. The Panchalas' joy swells."

CANTO 197

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "A beaming Drupada now speaks to Yudhishtira, in the form used to address a Brahmana.

'Should we know you to be Kshatriyas, Brahmanas, or as Devas who have disguised yourselves as Brahmanas to range over the Earth, and have come here to win our Krishnaa's hand? We are full of uncertainty and beg you to tell us the truth! How happy you will make us by dispelling our doubts.

Bane of your enemies, has fate been kind to us? Tell us the truth gladly, for the truth is better suited to Kshatriyas than sacrifices or the dedication of sacred tanks. Do not hide the truth from us any longer, O you who are as handsome as a Deva, O Parantapa. I must make arrangements for my child's wedding in accordance with the varna to which you belong.'

Yudhishtira replies, smiling, 'O King, let every anxiety leave your heart, and let it fill with joy. For your heart's fondest desire has come true. My lord, we are Kshatriyas, we are the sons of Pandu.

I am Yudhishtira, the eldest son of Kunti, and these are Bhimasena and Arjuna, who took your daughter from the swayamvara from amidst the gathering of kings. The twins and Kunti are with Krishnaa. Narapumgava, we are Kshatriyas, so banish the sorrow from your heart. O King, like a lotus, your daughter has only been moved from one lake to another. Rajan, you are our revered elder, our superior and our main sanctuary. I have told you the truth, the whole truth.'

Drupada is rapturous; his eyes shine and for some moments he is speechless for delight. Controlling himself with some effort, he finally asks Yudhishtira how they had escaped from Varanavrata. Yudhishitira describes their escape from the burning house of lac in detail. When Kunti's son finishes, Drupada has stern censure for Dhritarashtra, and he has warm

reassurance to offer Yudhishtira. Drupada swears to restore the Pandava to his ancestral throne.

Drupada says that Kunti, the Pandavas and Krishnaa must live with him, and he shows his guests the greatest regard. The Panchala king then says to Yudhishtira, 'Mahabaho, let Arjuna marry my daughter on this auspicious day. Let us begin the wedding ceremonies.'

Yudhishtira Dharmaputra replies, 'Maharaja, I must also marry.'

Drupada says, 'Then you take my daughter's hand yourself, or let her marry any of your brothers that you choose for her.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O King, we shall all marry your daughter and she shall become the wife of all five of us, even as our mother says she should be. I am not married, neither is Bhima. Arjuna won your jewel-like daughter's hand. We have always shared every precious jewel that we have ever got; best of kings, we cannot make an exception for this the most priceless one.

Krishnaa will become the wife of us all; one after the other, each of us shall take her hand before the sacred fire.'

Drupada cries, 'O Scion of Kuru, it has been said that one man may marry many wives, but never that one woman can marry many husbands! Kaunteya, you are pure and you know the laws of dharma well. You cannot commit this sin, which mocks both common practice and the Vedas. O Kshatriya, why has your mind been darkened by this vile thought?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Rajan, dharma is subtle; we do not understand the course of fate. Let us follow the path that great men of bygone yugas did. My tongue has never spoken a lie, and my heart never turns towards a sin. My mother commands us to share Draupadi equally among ourselves, and my heart accepts it, as well.

Hence, O King, for me what I propose is consonant with dharma. Let us do this without any fear; no sin will accrue from it.'

Drupada says, 'Son of Kunti, let your mother, my son Dhrishtadyumna and you decide among yourselves what is proper. Tell me what you decide and tomorrow I will do what you say is dharma.'

O Bharata, even as Yudhishtira, Kunti and Dhrishtadyumna deliberate among themselves, Dwaipayana on his wanderings arrives in Drupada's palace."

CANTO 198

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “The Pandavas, the illustrious Panchala king and everyone else present rises and pays homage to the enlightened Rishi Vyasa. The Mahatman greets them in turn, asks after their welfare and sits on the floor upon a golden carpet. He, of measureless tejas, asks the others to sit, as well, and those best of men do so, upon their costly chairs.

In a while, Prihasta’s son gently brings up the matter at hand with the Sage, regarding the marriage of his daughter Draupadi.

Drupada says, ‘Muni, how can one woman become the wife of five men without sinning? Is this possible? I beg you tell me the truth about this strangest thing.’

Vyasa replies, ‘Rajan, this ancient practice was discontinued since it is against both Vedic injunction and common custom. But I would like to hear what each of you thinks about it.’

Drupada speaks first, ‘To my mind it is a sin because it is against both the Veda and custom. Dvijottama, I have never seen, anywhere, one woman having many husbands. The great men of ages gone by also never did such a thing. No wise man ever dares to commit a sin. I cannot countenance this in good conscience. To me it seems immoral and adharma.’

After Drupada has finished, Dhrishtadyumna speaks. ‘Dvijarishabha, if an elder brother is a man of character how can he go to his younger brother’s wife? The ways of dharma are always subtle, and we cannot fully fathom them. In the most obvious things, we cannot say with conviction what is dharma and what is not. Then, how can we agree to this unusual proposal with a clear conscience? O Brahmana, how can I say, “Let Draupadi become the common wife of five brothers?”’

Now Yudhishtira says, ‘My tongue never speaks a lie and my heart never veers towards a sin. My heart approves of this, and it cannot be sinful. Also, I have heard in the Purana of Jatila, a woman of great virtue, of the race of

Gautama, who married seven Rishis. Another Sage's daughter, born of a tree, married the ten brothers, all named Prachetas, all of them Mahatmas and illumined by great tapasya.

Best of those that know dharma, to obey one's elders and betters is always dharma. Among all elders and betters, there is none to equal one's mother. Our mother has told us to share Draupadi whom we brought to her as alms, equally among ourselves. Most of all, Dvijottama, I consider the five of us marrying the princess to be the highest dharma.'

Kunti says, 'I agree with my virtuous Yudhishtira. O Brahmana, I am terrified if what I say to my sons should prove a lie. Must I not be saved from the sin of falsehood?'

When they have all finished, Vyasa says, 'Truly, Susheela, how will you be saved from the sin of untruth? For truth is Sanatana Dharma. O Panchala Pathe, Drupada, I will not speak of this ancient practice before all of you, but to you in private. I will tell you when this form of marriage was established and why it is ancient and eternal. But this much I will say here: Yudhishtira speaks the truth and what he says is dharma!'

The great master Krishna Dwaipayana, the illustrious Vyasa, rises, takes Drupada's hand and leads him into a private chamber. Kunti, her sons and Dhrishtadyumna wait for them to return. Alone together in the other room, Vyasa begins his profound discourse to the great king on the subject of sacred polyandry, and why it is not sinful."

CANTO 199

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Vyasa says to Drupada, 'In the elder days, the Devas once performed a Mahayagna in the Naimisa vana. During that sacrifice, Vivaswat's son Yama, Death, was appointed to perform the animal sacrifices that were made as offerings.

Long that yagna lasted and while it continued Yama slew the sanctified beasts, but during all that time he did not take the life of a single human. Death, O King, left humankind alone and their numbers swelled greatly on Earth; their population was enormous.

Soma, Indra, Varuna, Kubera, the Sadhyas, the Rudras, the Vasus, the Aswin twins and the other celestial ones went in alarm to Brahma Prajapati, Creator of the universe.

They said to the Lord of Creation, "The race of Manavas has increased frighteningly on Earth, and we have come to you for protection."

The Pitamaha said, "You have nothing to fear from the humans. You are all immortal, while they are not."

The Devas said, "The mortals have become immortal; there is no difference anymore between us and them. We are unhappy; we do not like them to be equal to us. Make some distinction between the races of Swarga and Bhumi."

Brahma said, "Vivaswat's son is absorbed in the Mahayagna and that is why mortal men have stopped dying. But when Yama's part in the great sacrifice is over, men will die again. Infused with the power of all of you, he will sweep away millions of Manavas, weakened by time and unduly long lives."

Reassured by what the First-born God said, the Devas returned to the Naimisa vana, where the yagna was underway. Sitting beside the Bhagirathi, they suddenly saw a great many golden lotuses being borne upon the river, and were wonderstruck. Indra wanted to discover from

where the golden blooms had come and he traced the river back to her source, from where the Ganga springs.

He saw there a woman as splendid as fire, bathing in the stream and all the while she wept. As her tears fell into the water they turned into golden lotuses. The Vajradhari went up to the woman and asked, “Who are you, beautiful one? Tell me, why do you cry?”

The woman replied, “O Sakra, you can only know who I am and why I am crying, if, O Devendra, you come with me. Follow me and you will know everything.”

Indra followed her as she led the way. Soon, he saw a handsome youth and a young woman of great beauty sitting upon a throne and playing dice upon a peak of Himavat.

Indra, king of the Devas, said to the youth, “Intelligent boy, I am the master of the universe.”

However, the young man was so absorbed in the dice that he did not respond to Indra, who grew furious and cried again, “I am lord of the universe!”

The youth was the Lord Mahadeva and only glanced at Indra and smiled to see him enraged. That momentary look froze Indra where he stood and he could not move but stood there like some stake.

When the dice game was over, Isana Siva said to the weeping woman, “Bring Sakra here. I will make sure that pride never enters his heart again.”

As soon as the woman touched Indra he fell upon the ground. The glorious Lord Isana said to him, “Never be arrogant again, Sakra. You have great strength and vigour. Roll this stone away from the cavern that it covers; enter the cave and you will see some others there, all of them as brilliant as the Sun, all of them your equals.”

Indra rolled away the rock and saw a great cave upon the breast of that king of mountains. Within the cave were four others exactly like him.

Seized by anxiety, Indra cried, “Shall I also become like these?”

Then the Lord Girisha glared at Indra, and said in anger, “You of a hundred yagnas, down into the cave with you! You have insulted me from your pride.”

His limbs turning weak with shock, Indra trembled like the leaf of a Himalayan fig-tree at Siva’s dreadful curse. His hands folded, shaking from head to foot, Indra said in a quivering voice to the God who rides the Bull,

the fierce Lord of myriad manifestations, “O Bhava, you are the Lord of the universe!”

The God of terrific tejas smiled, “Those that are vain like you never find my grace. Once, the four inside the cave were all like you. Down into the cave with you and lie there for a while. All your fates shall be the same. You will be born into the world of men, where you will face untold hardship, and with much effort and after much travail, you will kill thousands and thousands of Manavas, and by that punya, you will return to Indraloka.

Yes, you will experience and accomplish everything that I have said and much more, besides.”

Their glory lost, the four Indras in the cave said, “May we descend from on high to the world of men, where salvation is hard to gain. But let the Devas Dharma, Vayu, Maghavat and the Aswin twins become our fathers, and beget us upon our terrestrial mothers. We will fight the Manavas on Bhumi with weapons of men and the gods, and reclaim Indraloka.”

The Vajradhari said to Mahadeva, “I will create a Manava with an amsa of mine, a man of great tejas, to become the fifth of these to be born on Earth to raze the humans.”

The first four Indras were Vishwabhuk, Bhutadhaman, Sibi, Santi, and Tejaswin was the fifth Indra of yore. And Siva Pinakin, from his great mercy, granted the five Indras their wish. He also declared that the woman of exceptional beauty, she who had been weeping, who was none other than the Devi Sri herself, would become the wife in the world of all five of them.

Taking the five Indras with him, Lord Isana went to Narayana of fathomless tejas, to the infinite, uncreated, eldest, eternal One, Soul of universes without limit or count. Narayana approved of what they meant to do.

The five Indras were born into the world of men. Narayana plucked two hairs from his body, one black and the other white; he sent the two hairs down the mandalas and into the wombs of two women of the race of Yadu: Devaki and Rohini. The white hair became Balarama and the black one Krishna, who was Narayana himself.

The Indras who had been sealed in the cave upon Himavat are none other than the sons of Pandu, of extraordinary energy. Amongst them Arjuna, who is Savyasachin the perfectly ambidextrous, is the amsavatara of Sakra.

Rajan, these Pandavas are indeed those same Indras of old, and your daughter of matchless beauty, Draupadi, born to become their wife, is the Devi Sri herself. Otherwise, how could she have been born as she was, so exceptionally, rising out of the very Earth at your yagna, lustrous as the Sun or the Moon, and the fragrance of her spreading for a yojana on every side?'

Vyasa Muni pauses, then suddenly says, 'Rajan, I now give you occult vision: see for yourself who these sons of Pandu actually are. See them in their sacred and unearthly forms of old!'

Vyasa of great spiritual power gifts mystic vision to the king and Drupada sees all five Pandavas in their pristine forms. He sees them with divine bodies of light, wearing golden crowns and unworldly garlands. Each one is an Indra, irradiant as Agni or Surya, shimmering with ornaments of heaven, ever-youthful and handsome past describing, their chests wide and great and all of them some twenty feet tall at least.

Incomparable celestial raiment they wear, the most wonderfully fragrant garlands. Drupada sees them as three-eyed Sivas, or Vasus, Rudras or dazzling Adityas. The Panchala king sees Arjuna as Indra himself, in amsa, and is enthralled, as well as wonderstruck and bemused by the deep and subtle mystery of what he sees: that manifestation of the power of heaven.

Drupada then turns to look, with mystic eyes, at his daughter, most beautiful of all women in the world, and now sees her truly as splendid as the Fire or the Moon, a Goddess; his heart knows beyond doubt now that she is indeed born to be the wife of the five Indras, for her beauty, her glory, and also her renown.

When he sees that vision, Drupada touches Vyasa's feet, crying, 'Maharishi, no miracle is beyond you!'

Dwaipayana continues merrily, 'Once, in an asrama there lived a Rishi and his daughter, who was chaste, accomplished and beautiful but she has not found a husband. The young woman worshiped the Lord Siva with a stern tapasya. Pleased by her devotions, Mahadeva Sankara, the benign, appeared before her and said, "What boon do you want?"

The young woman said over and over, "Lord, give me a great and worthy husband!"

The best of Gods replied, "Susheela, you will have five excellent husbands."

She said, "Sankara, I want just one husband, Lord, who owns every virtue."

The God of gods said, "Kanye, you said five times to me, '*Lord, give me a husband.*' You shall have five wonderful husbands: not in this life but in another one, in the future."

Drupada, this daughter of yours, of unearthly beauty, is that young woman, and the flawless Krishnaa born into the race of Prihasta, is destined to become the wife of five husbands. It is the Devi Sri herself, who performed intense penance for the sake of the Pandavas, who has been born as your daughter from the fire of your Mahayagna.

Because of her own karma, the peerless Devi whom all the gods and other celestials serve, will marry five husbands; indeed, Brahma created Draupadi just for this. Now I have told you all there is to know, Raja Drupada, and now you must do as you want.'"

CANTO 200

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Drupada says, 'Mahamuni, I knew nothing of all this when I objected to my daughter marrying all five Pandavas. Now that I know, how can I go against the will of the Gods? I will do as you say, for the knot of destiny cannot be undone.

We do not decide anything that happens in this world, and while I had once thought that my child would marry one husband, she will now marry five. Draupadi herself said five times to Mahadeva, '*Lord, give me a husband!'* Siva himself gave her the boon of marrying five husbands, and He knows the dharma or adharma of this.

As for me, I cannot sin by doing what Sankara has ordained, be it right or wrong. I am content: let the five princes marry my daughter happily, with the appropriate rituals!'

Dwaipayana, the illustrious, comes to Yudhishtira and says, 'Today is an auspicious day, O Pandava, for the Moon has entered the Pushyami nakshatra. Marry the Princess Krishnaa this very day, you first and then your brothers as well.'

When Vyasa has spoken, Drupada Yagnasena and his son Dhrishtadyumna quickly make preparations for the wedding. The king brings out numberless priceless wedding gifts. He then fetches his daughter Krishnaa, who has bathed and put on royal finery and ornaments past value, to the kalyana mantapa.

All the king's well-wishers, friends, kinsmen and relations, his ministers and countless Brahmanas and the common people of his city, besides, come to the princess' unusual wedding. They are seated according to their respective stations.

Graced by that assembly of great men, its sprawling courtyard strewn with lotuses and lilies, striking lines of warriors standing mighty around and

within, diamonds and every other precious stone sparkling upon its walls, King Drupada's palace looks like the sky with the stars shimmering in it.

Having bathed, putting on earrings, the costliest silken robes, smearing their magnificent physiques with sandalwood paste, the Kuru princes perform their daily religious rituals; then, with their priest Dhaumya, bright as agni, they enter the wedding hall, one after the other, in order of age, their hearts alight, like great bulls going into a cowpen.

Dhaumya, knower of the Veda, lights the sacred fire and, chanting the appropriate mantras, pours ghee as libation into the flames. First, he calls Yudhishtira and marries him to Draupadi. Taking each other's hands, the bride and groom walk around the fire.

When that ceremony is complete, Dhaumya takes his leave of Yudhishtira, jewel among Kshatriyas, and leaves the palace. After this, those Kuru Maharathas, richly clad and adorned, marry the Panchala princess, first among all women, one after the other, over the next four days, with Dhaumya as their priest for each wedding.

Rajan, the Devarishi Dwaipayana told me a most wonderful thing which happens to Draupadi during those five nights, each spent with a different husband—that she of the slender waist is a virgin afresh on every one!

When the five weddings are solemnised, Drupada gives those Maharathas, his sons-in-law, untold gifts and wealth. He gives them one hundred chariots with golden standards, each drawn by four horses of the noblest bloodlines, all of them with bridles of gold. He gives them a hundred elephants, all with the most auspicious marks upon their temples and faces, caparisoned richly, so they seem like a hundred mountains with golden peaks.

Drupada gives the Pandavas a hundred women to serve them, all beautiful and in the prime of their youth, all richly attired, bejewelled and wearing wildflower garlands. Yes, with Agni as the sacred witness to his gifts, the king of the House of the Moon gives those princes of unworldly splendour gold, the rarest, finest, costliest garments, and invaluable ornaments of antiquity, craftsmanship and brilliance past compare.

Having married Krishnaa, who is like another Sri, as well as incalculable wealth, the mighty Pandavas live happily, truly like five Indras, in the capital of the Panchala king."

CANTO 201

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the sons of Pandu have married his daughter, all anxiety and fear leaves King Drupada; why, he does not fear the Devas anymore. After the weddings, the noble women of Drupada's antahpura come to Kunti, and introducing themselves, telling her their names; one by one, they worship her by laying their heads at her feet.

Wearing resonant red silk, and the auspicious and ceremonial thread around her wrists, Krishnaa also pays reverence to her mother-in-law and stands happily before her, with folded hands.

Overwhelmed by affection, Pritha blesses Draupadi, of matchless beauty, who bears every auspicious mark upon her person, and has the sweetest nature and the noblest character.

Kunti says, 'May you be as precious to your husbands as Sachi is to Indra, Swaha to Agni, Rohini to Soma, Damayanti to Nala, Bhadra to Vasiravana, Arundhati to Vasishta, as Sri Lakshmi is to Narayana! Sweet child, may you become the mother of long-lived, heroic children, and may you have everything that will make you happy.

May fortune and prosperity always wait upon you. May your husbands perform Mahayagnas, and may you always be devoted to them. Let your days pass in welcoming and caring for guests and strangers that come to your home, holy men and the elderly, children and betters.

May you become Queen of Kurujangala in its capital, beside your husband King Yudhishitra Dharmaputra. My daughter, may you gift the whole world, subdued by your husbands of incomparable strength, to Brahmanas at an Aswamedha yagna.

Accomplished child, may the rarest gemstones on Earth, those of great virtue, come to belong to you, fortunate one, and may you be joyful for a full hundred years. Daughter-in-law, as I rejoice today to look at you

wearing the red silk of your wedding, I will rejoice again when I see you become the mother of a son!'

When the sons of Pandu are married, Krishna sends them lavish gifts of golden ornaments set with giant pearls and lapis lazuli, black gems. He sends rare and priceless robes made in many kingdoms, as well as the softest, finest blankets and skins of great value, and precious carpets and expensive bedsteads and palanquins.

Hundreds of shining vessels, chalices, goblets, and other ware he sends, all encrusted with jewels. Krishna gifts them young, accomplished and beautiful women servants, thousands of them, also from diverse and far-flung countries: all these richly attired and wearing costly ornaments. He gives them masterfully trained elephants, all from the land of Madra, countless fine horses in golden harness, and chariots, too, with fine steeds, with large teeth, yoked.

Madhava Krishna, of fathomless soul, sends them gold coins, crores and crores of them, in separate piles. Wanting to please Krishna, Yudhishtira the just accepts all his gifts joyfully."

CANTO 202

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Now their spies in Drupada's city bring news to all the Kshatriya kings and princes who had come to her swayamvara of how Draupadi has married the five Pandavas. They tell their masters that it was Arjuna, greatest of warriors and archers, who shot the target, and that he who had dashed Salya to the ground and terrified the others with the tree he pulled up, who had stood utterly fearless facing them all, was Bhimasena, razer of enemy armies, whose very touch is enough to kill his adversaries.

The kings are amazed at how the Pandavas had managed to remain so long disguised as docile Brahmanas, and wonder how they are still alive for they have all heard how Kunti and her sons had been burnt to death in the house of lac. They even think of them as having returned from the dead.

The kings of the Earth remember again Purochana's vile treachery, and say, 'A curse on Bhishma, a curse on Dhritarashtra of the race of Kuru!'

When the swayamvara is over and they hear the news that Draupadi has married the Pandavas, the kings that still remained in Drupada's city set out each to his own kingdom. When Duryodhana hears that Arjuna of the white steeds has won Panchali's hand, he falls into dark dejection. His heart heavy, he sets out with Sakuni, Asvatthama, Karna and Kripa for Hastinapura.

Flushed with the humiliation of it, he says softly, feelingly, to his brother, 'If Arjuna had not disguised himself as a Brahmana he could never have won Draupadi. No one recognised him. My lord, I fear that Fate rules supreme; all our efforts have been in vain, my brother, and the wretched Pandavas are still alive!'

Cursing Purochana for his ineptitude, they arrive in Hastinapura, utterly defeated and depressed. Now they see that the mighty Pandavas have escaped with their lives and are also bound by their marriage to the

formidable Drupada. They think of the prowess of Sikhandin and the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna and their hearts quail.

On the other hand, when Vidura hears that the Pandavas have won Draupadi and that Dhritarashtra's son has returned humiliated to Hastinapura, he is delighted. Vidura Kshattri goes to Dhritarashtra and says, 'Great fortune has come to the Kurus!'

Dhritarashtra also cries gleefully, 'Such great fortune, Vidura, such luck!'

Dhritarashtra orders fine ornaments to be wrought for Draupadi, and declares that Duryodhana and the princess must be received with unprecedented pomp and ceremony and festivity in Hastinapura.

When he pauses to draw breath in his fervour, Vidura quietly tells him that the Pandavas have won Draupadi for their bride; he tells Dhritarashtra that the sons of Pandu are alive and that they now live with great honour in the palace of Drupada. He does not fail to mention that all Drupada's powerful kinsmen and allies, every one the lord of a great army, and many other Kshatriya kings who had come to the swayamvara, have now aligned themselves with Kunti's princes.

Dhritarashtra says, 'Those children are as dear to me as they are to Pandu! No, they are dearer to me. Let me tell you why, Vidura. My heroic nephews are alive and well. They have garnered many friends and relations as allies, all these very powerful. Tell me who would not want the great Drupada and his kinsmen for an ally?'

Vidura says, 'My lord may your wisdom not change for a hundred years!' and returns to his own palace.

Then, Rajan, Duryodhana and Radheya Karna come into the presence of the blind king.

Duryodhana says, 'Lord, we can never speak freely in Vidura's presence. Now we have found you alone and shall speak our minds. We heard what you said, O King. What is this that you mean to do? Do you truly look upon the fortune of our enemies as if it was your own, that you spoke so lovingly and proudly to Vidura about the sons of Pandu?

Sinless, you do not do what you should be doing – everything in your power to undermine the Pandavas, to destroy them. O my father, we must confer and act quickly before the Pandavas devour us all, with our friends, children and kinsmen!'"

CANTO 203

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra replies, 'I also want to do exactly as you would have me but should I betray my intention to Vidura by even a muscle twitching? That is why, my son, I praised the Pandavas and spoke affectionately of them. I would not betray what is really in my heart to Vidura, by the smallest sign.

Suyodhana, Vidura has gone, so now tell me what you think we should do, and Radheya, you also share your thoughts with me.'

Duryodhana says, 'Father, let us use subtle and cunning Brahmanas to create division between the sons of Kunti and Madri's twins. Or let us bribe Drupada, his sons, and all his ministers with vast wealth so that they abandon the cause of Kunti's son Yudhishtira.

Or let our agents persuade the Pandavas to remain in Drupada's kingdom, convincing them, individually and separately, how dangerous it would be for them to return to Hastinapura. Let the best of our spies create dissension among the brothers, by sowing the seeds of envy among them.

Better, let them incite Draupadi against her husbands; she has five of them, the task should not be difficult. Or let our secret men whisper such words that make the Pandavas displeased with Krishnaa; if they show displeasure, any of them, she will not be happy.

Best of all, let us send our finest assassins to kill just Bhima. He is the strongest of them; without him, the rest are nothing. Since we were young, they always depended on his strength to fly in our faces as they chose. If Bhima dies, they will not have the nerve to try to regain their kingdom.

My lord, Arjuna is certainly invincible in battle – as long as Bhima stands behind him! Without Bhima, Arjuna is not a fourth part of the archer that Radheya Karna is. If Bhimasena dies, the Pandavas will fear us and abandon every hope of recovering the kingdom.

Or if they do come here and prove to be docile, we will grind them underfoot. Else, we can seduce them with the most luscious women, and turn Krishnaa against them. Or let us have them brought here, and then kill them all secretly.

Father, choose whichever of these methods appears to you to be the best. Time flies, and we must strike quickly, one way or another, before their bonds with Drupada Rajarishabha grow even stronger, and their relationship with him takes deep root. Once that happens, we will not succeed.

Father, this is how I think we should deal with the sons of Pandu. You be the judge of the worth of my thoughts. And now, Karna, tell us what you think.'"

CANTO 204

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “Karna says, ‘Duryodhana, I do not concur with your thoughts. O Perpetuator of the Kuru race, none of these methods will succeed against the Pandavas. Shuraveerya, haven’t you tried such methods before and always failed to kill your enemies? That was when they lived here with you. That was when they were young and callow; and you still could not harm them.

Now they are far away; they are full-grown men. You cannot hope to bring Kunti’s sons to grief with any of these subtle, underhand methods. This is my firm belief. It seems that Fate herself colludes with the Pandavas; they want to recover the kingdom of their fathers and no power in the world can hurt or stop them.

You will never succeed in dividing them against one another. How can five brothers who have married the same woman ever be divided? No agent or spy of ours can hope to turn Krishnaa against them; do not forget that she chose them for husbands when they appeared before her as indigents. Will she abandon them now when she knows who they are, now that they prosper again? Besides, women always want to have many husbands and Krishnaa has five. You can never turn her heart against them.

As for Drupada, the Panchala king is honest to a fault, and a man of dharma. There is no lust for wealth in him, or any greed. Even if you offer him the whole Kuru kingdom, he will not betray the Pandavas or turn against them. Drishtadyumna is no less than his father and has always been attached to Pandu’s sons.

No, you cannot harm the Pandavas by any covert or cunning means in your power. However, Narapumgava, bull among men, we can attack them openly and kill them in battle when they are unprepared! We are stronger than the Panchala king; let us strike now when they do not expect us to. Let us strike and kill them all without mercy or scruple.

Son of Gandhari, Gandhareya, before they muster their numberless chariots and allies, and loyal clansmen, strike! Before the mighty Panchala king and his sons decide to attack us, attack them first! Before the Vrishni, Krishna, comes to Drupada's city with the Yadava host to help win back their kingdom for the Pandavas, my lord Dhritarashtra, strike! For there is nothing—wealth, every enjoyment, kingdom—that Krishna will not sacrifice for Pandu's sons.

The magnificent Bharata conquered all the Earth just by his own prowess. Indra won sovereignty over the three worlds just by his might. O King, prowess and valour are the ways of the Kshatriya; Kshtriyarishabha, might is the first virtue of a hero.

So let us immediately take our great army, with its four kinds of forces, to the Panchala kingdom, crush Drupada and drag the Pandavas back here, powerless. The Pandavas cannot be subdued by conciliation, gifts or bribes, or by cunning division. You must vanquish them in battle, and having done so, Duryodhana, rule this Earth unopposed.

I see no other means to achieve what we want.'

Dhritarashtra hears Karna out and praises him fulsomely. The king says, 'Sutaputra, you are not only a great warrior but have much wisdom, as well. Your view that we must take arms against the enemy suits you well, noble one. However, you both must consult Bhishma, Drona and Vidura, also, before deciding what must be done, which will benefit us.'

Dhritarashtra summons all those great ones and takes their counsel."

CANTO 205

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Dhritarashtra asks Bhishma for his advice, the patriarch says, 'Dhritarashtra, I can never endorse a war with the sons of Pandu, for Pandu was as dear to me as you are, and Kunti's sons are as precious to me as Gandhari's. I must protect them exactly as I do your sons, Dhritarashtra.

I love the Pandavas as well as all the Kurus do; nothing should lead us into battle against them. Rather, make peace with Kunti's princes; bring them home and give them half the kingdom, for this is beyond doubt the ancestral kingdom of those best among the Kurus, as well.

Duryodhana, if you look at this kingdom as belonging to your father so do the Pandavas see it as being their father's. If Pandu's magnificent sons do not inherit this kingdom, how can you, or indeed any other scion of the race of Bharata?

If you think of yourself as having lawfully inherited this kingdom, I believe that they can also think the same, and before you. Quietly give them half the kingdom, keeping half for yourself. Narapumgava, this will be best for everyone. If you do otherwise, evil will befall each one of us, and you will cover yourself in shame and dishonour.

Duryodhana, a good name and honour are the very root of one's strength; do everything you can to maintain them. It is said that he who has lost his reputation lives in vain. Kaurava, as long as a man has fame and honour, he does not die. A man lives as long as his honour lasts, and dies when he loses his reputation.

Son of Gandhari, act in accordance with your noble birth; act as a Kuru should. Mahabaho, do as your ancestors would have done. We are fortunate that the Pandavas did not die, that Kunti still lives. We are fortunate that the wretched Purochana died himself but did not succeed in his vile attempt on their lives.

From the day that I heard Kunti's sons had died in a fire, Gandhareya, I was sick at heart and hardly able to meet or speak to anyone. Purushavyaghra, when the people heard that Kunti had perished they did not blame Purochana as much as they did you.

Now that the Pandavas have reappeared, obviously having escaped from the fire, Duryodhana, you must do away with your ignominy. And I say to you, O Scion of the Kurus, as long as Pandu's sons live, not the Vajradhari Indra himself can prevent them from regaining their rightful share in this kingdom.

The Pandavas are virtuous and united, and have been deprived of their birthright by adharma. If you want to make amends and do the right thing, seeking the welfare of everyone, yourself and your subjects, give them half of the kingdom.'"

CANTO 206

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Bhishma has finished, Drona speaks. 'Dhritarashtara, Rajan, I have heard that a friend, asked for advice, should always speak truthfully, justly and in an honourable manner. My lord, I am entirely in agreement with the great Bhishma – a share of the kingdom must be given to the Pandavas. This is Sanatana Dharma.

O Bharata, send a well-spoken messenger to Drupada immediately, taking with him a treasure for the sons of Pandu. Let this man carry priceless gifts for the bride and her husbands. He must tell Drupada that you are pleased and proud that your power and glory have increased vastly after this new alliance, by marriage, with him.

O King, let your messenger tell Drupada how delighted both Duryodhana and you yourself are at what has transpired. Let him repeat this often to the Panchala king and to his son Dhrishtadyumna. He must say that the union is entirely agreeable to you and that you consider it as being fitting and a perfect and equal match.

Let your messenger repeatedly conciliate Kunti and Madri's sons. Rajan, order a bounty of the purest golden ornaments sent to Draupadi. Also, Bharatarishabha let excellent gifts be taken for all Drupada's sons. And when all these have been given and he has spoken sweetly to everyone, let your messenger propose that the Pandavas return to Hastinapura.

Once Drupada, mollified, gives them leave to return, Dushasana and Vikarna must go out with a handsome retinue to receive them. Once they enter Hastinapura, you must yourself welcome those Narapumgavas with the greatest affection. Then, Dhritarashtra, set them upon the throne of their fathers for that is what the people of the realm want.

This, O King of the House of Bharata, is how I think you should behave towards the Pandavas, who are like your own sons.'

When Drona finishes, Karna rises and says hotly, ‘Dhritarashtra, you have lavished your wealth on both Bhisma and Drona! You have always thought of them as being your most trusted, closest friends and well-wishers. What could be more amusing, then, than to find them strongly urging you to act against your own interest?

It can never be wise to approve of counsel given by those whose true intentions are evil, if well concealed. In a time of adversity, no friend can either help or harm a man: each one’s fortune or misfortune depends only on fate. Let him be wise or a fool, young or old, alone or with many allies – he will find joy and sorrow, alternately each in their season, regardless.

I once heard of a king of old called Ambuvicha, whose capital was Rajagriha and he was king of all the Magadha chieftains. He never attended to affairs of the state: his only exertion was breathing! His minister Mahakarni effectually ruled the kingdom, and in time became so powerful that he had scant regard for the king.

Indeed, the wretch took everything for himself – all Ambuvicha’s wealth and even his queens. However, these did not satisfy Mahakarni but only inflamed his greed. Now he began to hanker after the throne. But, this he could not get.

Rajan, what else can we conclude from this other than that it was Ambuvicha’s destiny to remain king though he spent his time just breathing the air? Hence, O Dhritrashtra, if Fate has willed that the Kuru kingdom will remain with you, undivided, and pass on to your son, then that is what will happen, even if the whole world becomes your enemy.

Equally, if fate has willed otherwise, whatever you do you will not keep your kingdom! Wise King, remember this when you gauge the sincerity or lack thereof of your advisors. Think carefully about which of them have spoken with evil in their hearts and which honestly, wishing your welfare.’

Drona retorts to Karna, ‘As you are full of adharma, it is plain that you speak with evil intentions. You want to harm the Pandavas and that is why you dare point your finger at us. But be certain Karna, that I spoke for the good of all the Kurus. If you consider what I say to be ill intentioned or evil, let us hear what you would have us do instead.

I say to you that if the counsel that Bhishma and I have given is not heeded, it will not take long before the very race of Kuru is annihilated.’”

CANTO 207

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After Drona finishes, Vidura speaks. He says, 'Dhritarashtra, King, I have no doubt that what your friends say is for your good. Yet, I fear you do not like to listen to what they tell you and their wise words fall on deaf ears. What that greatest among all the Kurus, Shantanu's son Bhishma says is sagacious, excellent and will benefit you. But you do not listen to him. What Acharya Drona says is for your good, but Radha's son Karna does not seem to think so.

Yet, my lord, after deep thought I myself can think of no one who is a truer or wiser friend of yours than these two lions among men, old in years, in wisdom, and in learning, and always looking at you and at the sons of Pandu with equal eyes.

I have no doubt, O Bharata, that these two great ones are both no less than Dasaratha's son Rama or the great Gaya in their honesty and virtue. Have they ever given you evil counsel before? And you too, O King, have never done them any injury. Then why should these Purusharishabhas, who never have truck with falsehood, now advise you falsely, especially since you have not harmed them ever?

My lord, these great and wise men will never give you evil counsel. They cannot be tempted by any wealth to offer you false advice, for they are both knowers of dharma. Everything they have said, O Bharata, is for your good and in your best interest.

Be certain, my lord, that the Pandavas are as much your sons as Duryodhana and his brothers. Those that urge you to harm the sons of Pandu do not have your interest at heart. If you nurture partiality for your sons in your heart, they that seek to bring it out do you no favour.

O King, these illustrious ones, these two splendid elders, have not said a false or evil word. Yet, you do not seem to realise it. What these Narapumgavas say about the Pandavas being invincible is the simple truth.

Purushavyaghra, O tiger among men, do not deceive yourself for a moment that it is otherwise.

A blessing be upon you, my lord! Can even Maghavat vanquish Pandu's brilliant son Arjuna, who looses his arrows with both hands with equal ease and force? Can the Devas subdue Bhimasena, strong as ten thousand elephants in battle? Which man who values his life would dare face the twins, who are Yama's very sons, in war? And how can the eldest, in whom patience, mercy, forgiveness, truth and might all find their home, be overcome?

They that have Rama for their ally, Janardana Krishna for their mentor, and the dashing Satyaki for their friend have already vanquished all their enemies in battle. Drupada is their father-in-law; Drupada's sons, Dhristadyumna and the others born into Prihasta's race are their brothers-in-law: they are invincible, my lord.

Remember all this, Duryodhana, and that their right to the kingdom is before yours. Dhritarashtra, treat them justly. Already your name is tainted by Purochana's crime. Be kind and noble now to Pandu's sons and wash that stain from yourself. If you behave righteously and mercifully towards the sons of Pandu, what you do will bring great punya down upon us all, powerful blessings that will protect everyone who belongs to the race of Kuru, why, it will nurture all Kshatriya kind.

Once we fought against Drupada. If we can now make him our ally how much stronger we shall become. My lord, the Dasarhas are numerous and formidable; all of them will go where Krishna does. Also, know that where Krishna is, victory will certainly go. Dhritarashtra, only a man who has been cursed by the Gods would seek war when he can achieve his purpose and serve his best interest by conciliation.

The people have heard that the Pandavas are alive, and they rejoice and are beside themselves to see their princes again. My lord, you must do as your people want.

Duryodhana, Karna and Subala's son Sakuni are untutored in dharma; they are brash and sinful. Do not listen to them, I beg you. Virtuous as you are, O King, think back to what I said to you many years ago, that because of the terrible sins that would be committed by your son Duryodhana, the very House of Kuru and the people of this kingdom shall perish!'"

CANTO 208

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When they have all finished speaking, Dhritarashtra says, 'Shantanu's son, the great Bhishma, the illustrious Rishi Drona, and you, my brother Vidura, have indeed spoken truly and given me the counsel that is in my best interest.

By dharma, as Kunti's sons, the Maharathas, are the sons of Pandu and they are my sons, also. And just as my sons should inherit this kingdom, so, too, must the Pandavas. So, hurry, my brother, go and fetch Pandu's princes and their mother home; persuade them affectionately and kindly.

Bharata, also bring Krishnaa, whose beauty is not of this world, here. Ah, it is such fortune that Pritha's sons are still alive and greater fortune that the Maharathas have made Drupada's peerless daughter their wife. Surely, we have become stronger than ever before with this alliance, and it also our good fortune from which the vile Purochana died.

My resplendent Vidura, fortune has slain my grief and ended my mourning for my brother's sons.'

At Dhritarashtra's command, a joyful Vidura goes to Drupada Yagnasena and the Pandavas. Bharata, he takes a fair treasure of gold and ornaments and priceless jewels for Draupadi, the princes, and for Drupada, as well. Arriving in Drupada's palace, Vidura, master of dharma, master of court etiquette, greets the king formally, properly and with honour; and Drupada, too, receives Vidura respectfully and both ask after each other's health with every kindness.

Then Vidura sees the Pandavas and with them Krishna of Dwaraka; embracing them in joy, tears in his eyes, he asks after their welfare. The Pandavas and Vaasudeva Krishna greet Vidura, of measureless intellect, with every reverence. As for Vidura, he is overcome, O King, and repeatedly asks his nephews how they are, and says that their uncle Dhritarashtra also asks warmly about them.

Now he gives the Pandavas, Kunti and Draupadi, and Drupada and that king's sons all the priceless gifts that he has brought from Hastinapura, from Dhritarashtra and the Kauravas.

This done, the humble, soft-spoken Vidura speaks to the good King Drupada, in the presence of Kesava Krishna and the sons of Pandu. Vidura, of profound intelligence, says, 'Great King, listen to what I have to say, you, your sons and ministers, as well.

Overjoyed by this new alliance with you, my brother King Dhritarashtra repeatedly inquires after your welfare, and so do his sons and his ministers. Rajan, Bhishma the wise, son of Santanu, Drona, also of deep wisdom, the son of Bharadwaja and your dear friend, and also all the other Kurus ask after your welfare, in every particular.

The learned Drona says that he embraces you in his mind and hopes that you are well in every way. Lord of the Panchalas, let me say again that Dhritarashtra and all the Kurus consider themselves greatly fortunate and blessed by this alliance with you. Yagnasena, they are more happy than they would be upon acquiring a whole new kingdom! Now that you know all this, I beg you, allow the sons of Pandu to return to their home, the kingdom of their fathers.

Every Kuru is agog to see the princes again. These Narapumgavas have been away from Hastinapura for so long; I am sure that their mother and they must be as eager to see Hastinapura again as the people of the city are to see them. Also, all the royal Kuru ladies and the people are beside themselves to see the Panchala princess, the exquisite Krishnaa.

O King, I ask your leave for the Pandavas to return to Hastinapura with their wife. If you give your leave, I will send word back to Dhritarashtra through my swiftest messengers. Then, O Drupada, the sons of Pandu can set out with Kunti and Krishnaa.'"

CANTO 209

VIDURAGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Drupada listens carefully to what Vidura says, then he replies, 'Wise Vidura, everything is as you say and I, too, am greatly pleased by our alliance. I agree with you that it is only just that these splendid princes return to Hastinapura. However, it is not for me to force a decision upon them.

If Kunti's valiant sons Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna, as well as the Purusharishabhas, the twins, wish to return to the home of their fathers, if Baladeva and Krishna, both of whom know every nuance of dharma, are of the same mind, then by all means let Pandu's sons return to Hastinapura. For, I do declare that the Purushavyaghras, Rama and Krishna, always have the best interest of the Pandavas at heart and always do their best for them.'

Now Yudhishtira says, 'O King, my brothers and I are your dependants and we will happily do what you tell us.'

Then Krishna says, 'I feel that the Pandavas should return, but we must do whatever Drupada decides, for he knows every aspect of dharma.'

Drupada says at once, 'I agree with what this greatest of all men feels. Pandu's great sons are now to me just as they are to Kunti, and I know that not Kunti's son Yudhishtira himself can decide what is good for himself and his brothers as well as this tiger among men, Kesava, can.'

Thus, with Drupada's leave, O King, the Pandavas set out with Draupadi and Kunti, with Krishna and Vidura for the city named after the elephant. On their leisurely way, they stop in many places of great beauty or sanctity, and take their pleasure as they please.

When Dhritarashtra hears that those shuras are nearing his capital, he sends the Kauravas out to receive them. O Bharata, Vikarna of the great bow he sends, as he does Chitrasena, Drona, greatest of warriors, and Kripa of the line of Gautama. Those five mighty heroes enter Hastinapura

majestically, surrounded by these and others, all of whom enhance their glory.

Indeed, the entire city is radiant with the celebrant crowds that throng its streets to see the tigerish sons of Pandu return to them, and how they rejoice. All along their slow and triumphal progress towards the palace the Pandavas hear cries of affection from the people, who truly love their great and precious princes.

Some say, 'The Purushavyaghra of dharma who looks after us as if we are his nearest kin, has returned to us!'

Others cry, 'Ah, it is as if Pandu has come home from the forest today, bringing our lost fortune back with him! For sure he comes to do us great good.'

'What good remains to be done to us when Kunti's heroic sons have returned to our city? If we have given daana, poured libations of ghee into the holy fire, if we have any punya, may the sons of Pandu remain in Hastinapura for a hundred years!'

Finally, the Pandavas arrive at the palace and prostrate at the feet of Dhritarashtra and of Bhishma. They touch the feet of everyone else present who are elders and worthy of worship. They ask, individually, after the welfare of everyone there. When all this is done, at Dhritarashtra's command, they enter the apartments that have been kept for them.

When the sons of Pandu have rested, King Dhritarashtra and Shantanu's son Bhishma summon them to the royal sabha, the ancient court of Hastinapura.

Dhritarashtra says to Yudhishtira, 'Kaunteya, listen to what I have to say, your brothers and you. I want you to go to Khandavaprastha, so that never again does any dispute arise between your cousin and yourselves. If you live there, no one can or will do you any harm. Take half of the kingdom and, protected by Arjuna as the Devas are by the Vajra, live in peace in Khandavaprastha.'

The Pandavas accept what Dhritarashtra says, and paying him homage, those bulls among men set out from Hastinapura for Khandavaprastha, which is a desolate wilderness.

Arriving in that desert, those brilliant shuras, with Krishna at their head, create a new city in the desolation, truly like another Swarga on Bhumi. Dwaipayana helps the Maharathas choose an auspicious place; he performs the sacred rituals and measures out the land for their city.

When it has been built, some say by Indra's command to Viswakarman, the divine artisan, and at Krishna asking for Indra's help, that city has a moat encircling it, which is as wide as a sea. It has outer walls that touch the sky, walls white as rainless clouds or rays of the moon. Ah, the newly made city is as wondrous as Bhogavati in Patala, where the great Nagas dwell.

Palatial mansions it has; many gates lead into it, gates as great and wide as the outspread wings of Garuda, gates that are as formidable as massed thunderheads, and as lofty as the Mandara Mountains. So great are the walls and so well stocked with myriad weapons that no enemy army could even dream of ever breaching them or making any impression on them with any astras.

Those walls and gates are armed with thick banks of arrows and other missiles, narachas like twin-tongued serpents. The turrets along the walls are bursting with mighty warriors in superb condition and training; soldiers past counting line the entire length of those city walls.

Deadly sharp hooks, satagnis that can raze a hundred enemies in a blink, and other machines of war are planted upon those walls. Great iron wheels, which can be whirled down upon the legions of any invader also deck those ramparts. Yes, truly, with all these and more is that best of cities protected.

Within the walls, the streets are wide and excellently laid, so there is never any fear of accidents or collisions along their courses. And as numerous and so magnificent are the homes and mansions of the city of the Pandavas that it truly looks like another Amaravati on Earth, and some say that is why it is named Indraprastha.

In the most choice and auspicious precinct of Indraprastha, Viswakarman creates a majestic palace for the sons of Pandu. It is filled with every kind of treasure, and is so opulent that it is like the palace of Kubera, Lord of Heaven's Treasures, himself. Ah, it is like a great mass of cloud shot through with lightning.

O King, when the city has been built, a host of Brahmanas arrives there, all of them masters of the Vedas, and begin living in Indraprastha. Vaisyas from across the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha come to Indraprastha, and thrive in trade and earn great wealth in the city of fortune. Artists, the finest and of every kind, flock to Indraprastha, and begin living there.

Around the city are many enchanting gardens, with countless fruit-and flowering-trees – amras, amaratakas, kadambas, asokas, champakas,

punnagas, nagas, kakuchas, panasas, salas, tola palms, tamalas, bakulas, ketakas with their fragrant blossom-loads. Great, gorgeous amalakas bend their branches down with the weight of their fruit; lodhras and akolas in bloom; jambus, pastalas, kunjakas, atimuktas, karaviras, parijatas, and many others all stand resplendent with flower and shining fruit, alive with birds and small creatures of every feather and species.

The green vanas ring with the cry of the excited peacock and the kokila in love. Myriad pleasure-houses, bright like mirrors, dot these woods and gardens, as do fine bowers of creepers, charming man-made hillocks, and of course crystalline pools and lakes brimful with water.

There are sparkling tanks perfumed by lotuses and lilies, jewelled with ducks, swans and chakravakas. The smaller pools are overgrown with water-plants, rare and exotic, and there are large ones, too, also of great beauty.

Rajan, the Pandavas live in that blessed, auspicious kingdom, peopled by pious men of dharma, and their joy waxes day by day.

And so it is that, because of the dharma shown them by Bhishma and also King Dhritarashtra, the sons of Pandu begin living in Khandavaprastha. With those five brothers living in it, each one equal to Indra himself, that best of cities truly resembles Bhogavati in Patala, the fabulous city of the Nagas.

O King, when he sees the Pandavas settled into Indraprastha, Krishna the magnificent takes their leave and returns with Rama to Dwaraka."

CANTO 210

RAJYA-LABHA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "O you possessed of ascetic wealth, what did those Mahatmans, my grandsires the Pandavas do when they had the kingdom of Indraprastha? How did their wife Draupadi serve and obey them all? Having one wife, Krishnaa, how is it that no dissension arose among those great Kshatriyas? O you of the wealth of asceticism, tell me in detail about how they are amongst themselves, after they marry Krishnaa."

Vaisampayana said, "Having gained their kingdom at the command of Dhritarashtra, those parantapas, the Pandavas, pass their days in great joy in Khandavaprastha, with Krishnaa. With his brothers beside him, Yudhishtira of tejas, always abiding by dharma, rules that kingdom. The sons of Pandu, endowed with wisdom, devoted to truth and virtue, and having vanquished their enemies, live there happily.

Sitting upon invaluable thrones, the Purusharishabhas discharge the duties of state. One day, as they sit together in their royal sabha, the Devarishi Narada, on his eternal wandering, comes to them. When he sees the Sage, Yudhishtira rises and offers him his own throne. When the Maharishi sits, Yudhishitra offers him arghya with his own hands, and the king formally tells Narada Muni about the state of his kingdom.

The Sage takes the offerings and is pleased. Showering his blessings on Yudhishtira, Narada asks him to sit beside him. The king sits and then sends word to the antahpura to Krishnaa, to inform her of the arrival of the illumined one.

Bathing, putting on fresh clothes, Draupadi comes reverently into the sabha where the Rishi is with the Pandavas. The chaste princess of Panchala worships the Sage's feet, and then stands before him with folded hands, her head bowed and her face veiled.

Narada blesses her many times with a variety of blessings, and then tells her that she may leave. When Krishnaa has gone, the Rishi speaks privately

to just Yudhishtira and his brothers.

Narada says, ‘The princess of Panchala is the wife of all of you. You must create a law among yourselves, so that disunity never rears its head amongst you. Once, there lived two Asura brothers called Sunda and Upasunda, famed through the three worlds, and so mighty that none could kill them unless they slew each other.

They ruled the same kingdom, lived in the same house, slept on the same bed, sat on the same throne, and ate out of the same plate. Yet, they killed each other for the sake of Tilottama. So, Yudhishtira, have a care to preserve your love for one another by making a rule for yourselves, which will keep you united forever.’

Yudhishtira asks, ‘Mahamuni, whose sons were the Asuras Sunda and Upasunda? How did they fall out, and how did they kill each other? Whose daughter was this Tilottama for whose love the brothers killed each other? Was she an Apsara or the daughter of some Deva? O you whose wealth is tapasya, we want, O Brahmana, to hear everything that happened in detail. Indeed, we are agog to hear this story.’”

CANTO 211

RAJYA-LABHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "To what Yudhishtira asks, Narada replies, 'Son of Pritha, listen, you and your brothers, to this olden tale; I will tell you everything exactly as it happened.

In ancient days, a mighty Daitya called Nikumbha, of untold strength and vigour, was born into the race of the great Asura Hiranyakashyipu. Sunda and Upasunda were the sons of Nikumbha, both awesomely powerful Asuras. Fierce were those brothers and their hearts evil.

They were as close as could be, sharing every resolve, striving together to achieve their common ends. They shared equally in each other's joy and woe. They were always together, and always spoke lovingly and pleasingly to each other. They were alike in every way, and truly seemed like one individual divided in two.

Slowly, they grew to manhood, and they had the same purpose – to conquer the three worlds. After being duly initiated, they went to the Vindhya Mountain and performed intense tapasya. Long they sat in penance, until, emaciated by hunger and thirst, their hair tangled in jata upon their heads and wearing valkala, treebark, they finally attained the ascetic power they wanted.

They had smeared themselves with dirt from head to foot, lived on just the air they breathed, stood on their toes, and from time to time cut off and threw pieces of their flesh into the sacred fire. Their arms were upraised, and their eyes stared unwinkingly at one spot, and long they stood thus, keeping their terrible vows unflinchingly.

While they performed tapasya, something marvellous happened – the Vindhya Mountain, at being heated by their rigours for so long, began to exude geysers of steam, from every slope and peak. The Devas watched the Asuras' great tapasya and were alarmed. They sought to obstruct the penance of the brothers with all sorts of interruptions.

Repeatedly, the gods tempted the Daityas, with the most enticing treasures and with the loveliest women. The brothers did not break their penance. The Devas now used their powers of maya, of creating illusions, on the brothers. The Asuras' sisters, mothers, wives, and other kinswomen, their hair, clothes and ornaments in disarray and askew, seemed to run towards them in terror, pursued and often struck by a Rakshasa wielding a long spear.

The women cried out to Sunda and Upasunda, "Save us! Save us!"

To no avail, for the brothers did not stir from their rigid postures of penance; and the mayic women and the Rakshasa vanished.

At last, the Pitamaha Brahma, the Lord who seeks the weal of all his creatures, appeared before the great Asuras and told them to ask for whatever boon they wanted. Now the mighty Sunda and Upasunda rose and stood with folded hands before the Grandsire of the worlds.

Together, they said to the God, "Pitamaha, if you are pleased with our tapasya and would grant us a boon, give us knowledge of all the astras and mahamayas, and power over them all. Give us enormous strength, and the power to assume any form and shape we wish. Finally, Lord, let us also be immortal."

Brahma says, "You will have all that you have asked for, but not unconditional immortality. Name any one way in which you can be slain, be it not so unlikely that you do indeed become equal to the Devas. Because you have performed your tapasya purely from desire for sovereignty I cannot grant you immortality. You did your great penance to subdue the three worlds, and for that, mighty Daityas, I cannot make you immortal."

Sunda and Upasunda said, "Then, Pitamaha, let no creature or creation of yours, mobile or unmoving, be able to kill us but just we ourselves, one the other. Let us fear no one but each other!"

Brahma said, "I grant everything that you have asked, and this last boon as well."

With that, the Pitamaha made them stop their penance and returned to Brahmaloka. With Brahma's boons, the Daitya brothers became invincible, and they returned to their home. Their friends and kinsfolk saw those matchlessly intelligent Asuras, resplendent with the boons they now had, and rejoiced.

Now Sunda and Upasunda sheared away their matted jata and wore golden crowns on their heads. Clad in priceless garments and wearing the

richest ornaments, they were incomparably handsome. Why, the Moon rose full, nightly over their city, even when it was not his season to do so.

Abandoned and joyous celebrations erupted, with great feasts, flowing wine, with singing and dancing, and lavish entertaining in every home. One could hear loud revelry, with ringing laughter and the happy clapping of hands echoing throughout the city of the Daityas. Of course, they could take any form they chose at will, and indulged in every manner of sport and gaiety, never noticing the passage of time; why, a whole year passed like a day,' says Narada Muni in Indraprastha."

CANTO 212

RAJYA-LAHBA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Narada continues, ‘When that great and prolonged celebration ended, the brothers Sunda and Upasunda called a council of their greatest commanders, kinsmen and advisors, and then ordered their legions to be raised, for they wanted now to conquer the three worlds and have lordship over them.

With the assent of their friends and relatives, of the great Daitya elders, and of their ministers of state, the brothers performed the initiatory rituals of departure and sallied forth at night, when the constellation Magha was rising. They went with a teeming force of Daityas, wearing mail, armed with maces, battle-axes, lances and cudgels.

With joy in their hearts, the Daitya shuras set out with the charana bards chanting auspicious hymns that foretold their future triumphs. Ferocious and savage in battle, the brothers, who could go anywhere at will, flew straight up into the sky and arrived in Devaloka. When the Devas, who knew about all the boons that Brahma had granted them, learnt of their advent, they fled their realm and sought refuge in Brahmaloka.

The fierce and tameless Asura heroes quickly subdued the world of Indra, and vanquishing and killing myriad clans of Yakshas and Rakshasas, and indeed every creature that ranged the sky, they came away from on high. Next those Maharathas plunged down into the Patalas and quelled the Nagas of the under-worlds. Then they tamed all the races of the Ocean, and then all the Mlechcha tribes.

Now they wanted to conquer Bhumi, all the Earth. The inexorable brothers mustered their fell legions and issued this dire command:

“Brahmanas and Rajarishis, who make offerings of ghee and havis at Mahayagnas, swell the power and energy of the Devas, and their prosperity too. Those who perform these sacrifices are the enemies of the Asuras. So

let us all band together and kill them all, wipe them from the face of the Earth!"

With that savage, ringing command to their legions swarming upon the eastern shore of the Great Ocean, the Asura brothers struck out in every direction with their terminal resolve. Anywhere they saw a yagna being performed, they instantly slew those engaged in the sacrifice and the Brahmanas who sat over them. The Asura brothers slaughtered them brutally and flew on again to their next quarry and prey.

Meanwhile, their soldiers doused the sacrificial fires in the asramas of Maharishis, great men who were masters of their souls. However, the fiery curses of those Sages did not affect the Asura brothers in the least, for Brahma's boon protected them.

When the Brahmanas saw that their curses had about as much effect as arrows shot at rocks, they scattered and fled in every direction, abandoning their yagnas and their vratas. Even the greatest Rishis on Earth, perfect masters of their emotions, men absorbed in samadhi, ran in terror from the Daitya brothers, as serpents do at the approach of Vinata's son Garuda.

The Asuras overran and trampled the holy hermitages. The sacrificial urns were smashed and their sacred contents rudely scattered on the ground. The universe appeared empty, as if a Mahapralaya had come and swept away all its creatures.

Rajan, when the Rishis all made themselves scarce or invisible, the two dreadful Asuras began to assume many different forms, for they were bent upon slaughtering the Sages. They became rut-maddened bull elephants, their temples cracked from a surfeit of, and oozing, the wild juice of musth; the demon pair rooted out the holy ones from caves in which they had hidden and despatched them to the land of Yama.

At times, Sunda and Upasunda would become lions, then tigers, then they would vanish – with all these, and other means, too, the violent twain hunted the Sages and massacred them. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas were extirpated, and sacrifices and study of the Veda ceased in the world. The Earth became devoid of yagnas and every holy rite and festival.

The people were terror-stricken, and screamed and wailed; all trade ceased, no one bought or sold anything anymore. The Earth was without religious rite and ceremony, and no marriages took place. Farming went to seed and nobody tended to their cows anymore.

Strewn everywhere with skeletons and bones, Bhumi assumed a dreadful visage. No sraddhas were performed for the Pitrs; nowhere was the holy sound of Vashat to be heard: all sacred observances fell into desuetude. The Earth became a fearsome spectacle, and Surya and Chandra, the Navagrahas, the Nakshatras, the Mandalas and all those that dwelt in the heavens watched the atrocities of Sunda and Upasunda; and they grieved much.

However, having violently subdued the three worlds, the Asura brothers began living in Kurukshetra, and nowhere had they any rival,' Narada says."

CANTO 213

RAJYA-LABHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada continues, 'The Devarishis, the Siddhas, the Mahatmans of sthitaprajna, all watched the universal slaughter perpetrated by the Daitya brothers, and they mourned deeply. Their passions, senses and minds perfectly controlled, they went to Brahmaloka, for they were stirred by mercy for the universe.

Arriving, they saw the Pitamaha upon his throne, surrounded by the Devas, the Siddhas and Brahmarishis. Mahadeva, God of gods, was there, as were Agni, Vayu, Soma, Surya, Indra, all the Rishis that live absorbed in the dhyana of the Parabrahman: the Vaikhanasas, the Balakhilyas, the Vanaprasthas, Marichipas, Ajas, Avimudhas and other Yogins of immense tejas.

All those Rishis sat around the Pitamaha, when the Devarishis and the other visitors came sadly to complain to Brahma about the relentless savagery of Sunda and Upasunda. In gory detail, they described everything that the Asuras had done, how they had done it, and in what order. All of them implored the Creator that He must put an end to the Asuras' unholy reign of terror.

Brahma listened to everything that they said, and thought for a mere moment before deciding what he would do to destroy the Asura brothers. Summoning Viswakarman to him, the Pitamaha of absolute Brahmattva said to the divine artisan, "Create a woman who can enchant every heart."

Bowing down to Brahma, receiving that command reverently, the great artificer of the universe carefully created an Apsara. First, he gathered individually every exquisite feature of that celestial nymph. Those shone like a mass of jewels. When he had put her together with his divine art, she was the most beautiful woman in the three worlds.

There was no minute part of her, not the smallest portion, which was not so lovely that it could instantly fascinate anyone that looked upon her. She

was like Sri herself; she stole the hearts of every creature whose gaze fell on her even for a moment.

Because she had been fashioned with the highest essences of every gemstone in existence, used in minuscule measure, Brahma named her Tilottama. As soon as the Pitama breathed life into her, she bowed low to Brahma, and with folded hands, said, “Lord of all creatures, why have I been created, what task do you want me to accomplish?”

The Grandsire answered her, “Tilottama, go to the Asuras Sunda and Upasunda. O Susheela, seduce them with your peerless beauty. Apsara, then do what you must to make the brothers fall out amongst each other, whenever they look at you.”

She bowed to the Pitamaha, saying, “Tathaastu! So be it.”

Then she walked in pradakshina around that divine congregation. Brahma sat facing the east, as did Mahadeva also; the Devas all faced north, and the Rishis in every direction.

As Tilottama walked around the gathering of the celestial ones, only Indra and Sthanu Mahadeva remained still. Yet, Mahadeva was also so intent on watching Tilottama as she circled around the assembly of Gods and Sages, that when she was at his side, he sprouted a second radiant face on the southern side of his body, and it was like a full-blown lotus. When she was behind him, another face appeared on the western side of the Great God; when she had crossed to his left a fourth face appeared, on his northern side.

Indra grew a thousand eyes, all large and reddish, all over his body. So it is that Sthanu came to have four faces and Sakra, the slayer of Bala, a thousand eyes. As for the rest of the Devas and the Rishis, they all turned their heads to watch Tilottama’s progress, as she walked around them. Apart from Brahma, they all gazed avidly at Tilottama’s body, and when she set out for the city of the Asura brothers, taking the shining wealth of her beauty, all of them felt certain that their purpose was as good as achieved.

When Tilottama had left, Brahma, First Cause of the Universe, sent away the Devas and Rishis,’ Narada says.”

CANTO 214

RAJYA-LABHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Narada continues, 'Meanwhile, the Daitya brothers had quelled the Earth and ruled without any rival. The tiredness of their exertions left them, and having the triloka under their sway, they felt they had nothing more to accomplish. They had brought home as spoils the greatest treasures of the Devas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Nagas, Rakshasas and Kshatriyas and they began to live in sumptuous luxury and untold pleasure.

They had no fear of any enemy, and they lived in perpetual enjoyment, even as the Devas do. They gave themselves up to every kind of pleasure – indulging themselves in women, the finest perfumes, garlands, wine, rare delicacies of the table, and in every other conceivable object of desire.

In mansions, fine woods, great gardens, on hills and in forests, wherever they liked the brothers spent their time at pleasure, like the immortals. One day they went to please themselves to a tableland of the Vindhya Mountain. It was a place of rock, smooth and flat, with flowering trees growing all around. When they had indulged in everything they cared to, the brothers sat upon a fine throne, joyful and surrounded by handsome women. Music played, and the women danced for the brothers and sang countless sweet songs praising the indomitable pair.

Just then, wearing a single piece of red silk, which hid none of her charms, Tilottama arrived there, plucking wildflowers on her way. Slowly, she wended her way to where the brothers sat. The Asuras had drunk copiously, and with one look at the Apsara of unearthly beauty, were smitten.

Getting up quickly, they rushed to her: both stirred by lust, each wanted her for himself. Sunda seized her of the fair face by her right hand, and Upasunda by her left. Intoxicated with the assurance of their boons, with their strength, unhinged with all the power and wealth taken from every

quarter, and with all the wine they had drunk, maddened by all these, and most of all maddened by lust, they knit their brows and spoke angrily to each other, for the first time.

"She is my wife and your superior," growled Sunda.

"She is my wife and your sister-in-law," retorted Upasunda.

Each said to the other, "She is mine, not yours!"

Quickly anger seized them. Mad for her beauty, they forgot their deep love for each other. Losing their reason from lust, they seized up their dreadful maces. Each roared, "I was first!" and they struck each other at the identical moment, each a thunderous blow.

Those savage Asuras fell on the ground, their bodies bathed in blood; they were like two Suns fallen from the sky.

Seeing this, all the other Asuras there and the women fled trembling and shrieking, in grief and in terror, and plunged down into the Patalas. Now the taintless Brahma came to that place, with him the Devas and the Maharishis. The glorious Pitamaha acclaimed what Tilottama had done and granted her a boon.

Before she could speak, he said, "Lovely one, you will range the realm of the Adityas, and so brilliant shall you be that no one will be able to look at you for long."

With that, the Grandsire of all the living returned sovereignty of the worlds to Indra and the others, and went back to Brahmaloka. So it was that the Asura brothers, always united before, killed each other in anger over Tilottama. So Bharatottamas, out of my affection for you, I say to you that, if you wish to do something to please me, have a care to make the most meticulous arrangement amongst yourselves, so that you five never fall out over Draupadi.'

The Pandavas take counsel among themselves and then lay down an inviolable rule with regard to Draupadi, in the presence of the Devarishi of measureless tejas. The covenant they make is that if any of them intrudes upon the privacy of another brother when he is alone and intimate with Draupadi, the intruder would spend twelve years in exile in the forest, as a brahmacharin.

When the good Pandavas have established that law amongst them, the great Narada is pleased. Blessing them, he leaves their city and goes his way. Thus, O Janamejaya, Narada Muni persuades the Pandavas to create a

law among them about how they would conduct themselves with their common wife.

Indeed, this is the reason that no dispute ever arose among them over the exquisite Panchali."

CANTO 215

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Having established the new code, the Pandavas continue to live in Indraprastha. By the might of their arms they bring countless kings under their sway. Krishnaa becomes the loving and obedient wife of all five sons of Pritha, those lions among men, of incomparable energy.

She is like the River Saraswati delighting in the great elephants that bathe in her – they repeatedly take their pleasure in her, and she from them. The sons of Pandu are men of exceptional dharma, and consequently, all the race of Kurus are sinless, happy and prosperous.

Then, when some time has elapsed, one day, some robbers lift the cattle of a Brahmana of that realm. As the thieves make away with his herd, the Brahmana, beside himself with anger, comes to Khandavaprastha and begins to berate the Pandavas in stricken tones.

The Brahmana cries, 'Pandavas, in your very kingdom, my kine are even now being lifted by vile brigands. Give chase to them. Alas, wretched crows are going to eat the sacrificial ghee of a peaceful Brahmana. The Rishis have said that a king who takes a sixth part of the produce of his kingdom but does not protect his subjects is the greatest sinner in the world. A Brahmana's wealth is being stolen by thieves. Dharma itself is being injured. Ah, take my hand and help me, Pandavas, for I am plunged in grief!'

Kunti's son Arjuna hears the Brahmana sobbing bitterly and railing. At once, he reassures the man, 'Do not fear.'

However, at that time, Yudhishtira Dharmaputra is alone with Krishnaa in the chamber in which the Pandavas keep their weapons. So, though the Brahmana continues to wail and to beg him, Arjuna cannot go with him for he cannot intrude upon his brother's privacy.

The Brahmana sobs on, and moved to pity, Arjuna decides that he must wipe the innocent man's tears. He thinks, 'The Brahmana has come to our gates and weeps without let. If I do not help him, my apathy will bring sin upon the king. Our adharma will be spoken of throughout the kingdom and we will all find great sin for ourselves.

Yet, if I enter the room I will certainly insult my brother; also, I will have to serve a twelve years' exile in the wilderness. But now, I must not let that stop me from helping the Brahmana, not if I have to go into the jungle and die there. Dharma is higher than the body and it lives on after the body dies.'

Arriving at this resolve, Arjuna Dhananjaya enters the private chamber and speaks softly to Yudhishtira. He emerges with his bow and quiver, and says cheerfully to the Brahmana, 'Let us hurry, Brahmana, so the thieves do not escape. I will come with you and restore your herd to you.'

Armed with his bow, which the perfectly ambidextrous Arjuna uses with either hand with equal skill, wearing mail and riding his war-chariot that flies his standard, Arjuna gives chase to the cattle thieves. His arrows fly at them in a storm, and they instantly abandon the cattle and flee for their lives through the forest.

Arjuna brings the herd to the Brahmana, now beside himself with gratitude, and having won great fame, the Pandava returns to his city. He pays homage to all the elders there, is applauded by everyone present, and finally comes before Yudhishtira.

Arjuna says to his elder brother, 'My lord, allow me to keep the vow that I swore. I saw you alone with Draupadi and I have broken the law we made for ourselves. I must go into exile in the jungle, for that is the covenant we swore.'

Suddenly hearing this, Yudhishtira is stricken and cries agitatedly, 'Why?'

He falls quiet for a while, then says sadly to Arjuna of the curly hair, who never swerves even by a hair's width from his vows, 'Anagha, sinless, if you consider me an authority worthy of your respect, then listen to what I have to say. Shura, I know why you came into my chamber and thereby did what you think of as being distasteful to me. But you did not displease me in the least.

A younger brother may always, without fault, go into the room where his older brother is with his wife. It is only the elder brother who causes

offence by entering a room where the younger brother is alone with his wife. Mahabaho, so you must not think of going into exile. Do as I say, your dharma has not suffered in the least. You have not disrespected me at all.'

Arjuna replies, 'I have heard, even from you, one should not split hairs in discharging dharma. Truth is my weapon.'

Then, with Yudhishtira's leave, Arjuna prepares to go into exile in the forest, for twelve years."

CANTO 216

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Arjuna Mahabaho, who spread the renown of the race of Kuru throughout the world, sets out, Brahmanas who know the Vedas and the Vedangas, and are devoted to contemplating the Parabrahman, follow that great hero. Skilled musicians, many pious Devabhakta ascetics, masterly Pauranikas, and other narrators of sacred lore, all Brahmacharins, Vanaprasthas, other Brahmanas who told celestial Itihasas in mellifluous voices, and many other devotees, too, gifted bards from different varnas, go with Arjuna, and he journeys like Indra being followed by the Maruts.

O Bharata, the Bharatarishabha travels through many pristine and enchanted forests, pausing beside sparkling lakes, gushing rivers, endless seas, passing through several countries and kingdoms. Finally, he arrives at the source of the Ganga and feels that he will settle there for some time.

Listen, O Janamejaya, to something wonderful that happens while Arjuna lives there. In that holy place, Kunti's son and the Brahmanas who have gone with him perform countless Agnihotras, sacrifices of the sacred fire. O Rajan, because those devout, illumined and learned Brahmanas, who never leave the path of dharma, daily worship beside the holy river, because of their lighting their sacrificial fires with mantras, after bathing, because of the oblations of ghee they pour into the fires, the flowers they offer before the flames, that entire place for yojanas around blooms and becomes lustrous in every way and full of grace.

One morning, that Pandava bull goes as usual to the Ganga to perform his ritual ablutions. When he has finished, and has offered tarpana to his dead Pitrs, he is wading out from the water, when, suddenly, the Naga princess Ulupi, moved by Kama Deva, drags Arjuna down to the bed of the river, and indeed below it.

Under the riverbed, Arjuna finds himself borne helplessly into the wondrous palace of the Naga King Kauravya. There he sees a fire of sacrifice already lit for him to worship. Arjuna performs his daily rites with deep bhakti, and seeing how calmly and fearlessly that hero offers his worship into the Fire God's manifest flames, in the alien place, Agni is pleased with Arjuna.

When he has finished worshipping the sacred fire, Kunti's son sees the daughter of the Naga king, and says to her with a smile, 'Lovely one, what is this rashness you have committed? Bashful one, to whom does this beautiful realm belong? Who are you, whose daughter?'

Ulupi replies, 'There is a Naga called Kauravya born into the line of Airavata. O Kshatriya, I am Kauravya's daughter and my name is Ulupi. Purushavyagra, I saw you bathing in the river and Kama Deva pierced me with desire which snatched away my reason. Anagha, sinless one, I am not married and Kama torments me with love for you. Scion of the Kurus, give yourself to me today, gratify my desire.'

Arjuna replies, 'Susheela, gentle one, fettered by the command of King Yudhishtira, I have sworn to be a brahmacharin for twelve years and I am not free to do as I please. But, water ranger, I am still willing to please you if at all I can. I have never told a lie in my life. Naga Kanya, tell me how I can do as you want and still not break my dharma or be guilty of lying.'

Ulupi answers him, 'O Pandava, I know why you are wandering the Earth and why your elder brother has told you to be a brahmacharin. Yes, this is the pact you made amongst yourselves, that he who goes into a room where his brother is alone with Draupadi must live in the forests as a brahmacharin for twelve years.

But your exile, Kshatriya, is only from Draupadi, and also your brahmacharya only with regard to her, and that dharma you are already discharging. By slaking my desire you will not break your dharma in the least. Besides, large eyes, it is also your dharma to assuage a woman in distress. By relieving my pang for you, what diminution will your dharma suffer?

Besides, Arjuna, even if your virtue does suffer some slight damage by satisfying my desire, you will find great punya for yourself by saving my life. Oh Partha, know me to be one that worships you, give yourself to me! My lord, the Rishis all say that a man must satisfy a woman who asks him

to. If you do not come to me, be certain that I will take my life; so, Mahabaho, earn great punya by saving it.

Purushottama, I seek sanctuary in you. Kaunteya, you always protect those that are persecuted and masterless. Look, in tears I seek your comfort. I am full of desire, and I importune you. Do what I want you to; you must give yourself to me!'

Making dharma his motive, and the Naga princess is surely most desirable, Arjuna does all that she wants. The mighty Pandava spends that night in the palace of Kauravya, and with dawn the next day, he returns with Ulupi to the sacral pool of the Ganga, from where she flows down to the plains. The chaste Ulupi bids farewell to him there and returns to her under-world.

Bharata, before she goes she blesses Arjuna with a boon that he would be invincible in water, saying, 'You will be able to prevail over all creatures of the water and all creatures that dwell both in the water and on land.'"

CANTO 217

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The son of the Vajradhari tells the Brahmanas what has happened and then sets out for the slopes of Himavat. He first comes to the place that is called Agastyavata, then continues and arrives at Vasishta's peak, from where Kunti's son goes on to the summit of Bhrigu.

Having purified himself with many rituals there, he ceremonially gives away thousands of cows and numberless homes to those Brahmanas and the others who have accompanied him; then, he goes on to the holy asrama calls Hiranyabindu. There, also, he performs ritual ablutions, and journeying, that Pandavottama sees many sacred places of unworldly beauty and sanctity. Finally, he comes down from the mountains, O Bharata, still accompanied by the Brahmanas, and that lord of men turns east, to see the realms that lay in that direction.

The Kurusthama sees many holy tirthas, one after the other. In the Naimisa vana, he is enchanted to look upon the river Utpalini, flowing with a denseness of lotuses, the Nanda, the Aparananda, the Kausiki of wide renown, and the mighty waters of Gaya and Ganga.

He bathes ritually in all those tirthas and gifts more cows to the Brahmanas. All the sacred fords in the lands of Vanga and Kalinga Arjuna visits, bathing in them all and giving away great wealth in solemn daana. Now, O Bharata, at the gates of the kingdom of Kalinga, all the Brahmanas who had followed Pandu's son, bid him farewell and turn back.

The valiant Dhananjaya, the son of Kunti, takes his leave of them and goes on towards the Ocean, just a very few servitors and companions going with him. The mighty warrior crosses the land of the Kalingas, and journeys on, passing through many kingdoms and countries, holy tirthas, seeing great and lovely cities and towns with their superb and varied mansions and palaces and homes.

He sees Mount Mahendra adorned with Rishis, and travels leisurely on, along the sea-shore, to Manipura. Having gazed upon all the sacred waters and other shrines and naves of worship in that realm, the Mahabaho son of Pandu finally comes into the palace of Chitravahana, king of Manipura.

This king has a remarkably beautiful daughter calls Chitrangada, and wandering through Chitravahana's palace, Arjuna sees her one day and he desires her. The Pandava goes to the king and says to him, 'Give your daughter to me, Rajan, I am a great Kshatriya's son.'

The king asks, 'Whose son are you?'

Arjuna replies, 'I am Dhananjaya, the son of Pandu and Kunti.'

Taking brief pause, Chitravahana says gently and sweetly to Arjuna, 'In our race, of old there was once a king calls Prabhanjana, who had no child. He performed a tapasya to have a child. Partha, he pleased Mahadeva, Umapati, God of gods, Paramatman, Pinakin, with the intensity of his penance.

The refulgent Lord blessed him that every scion of his line would have just a single child. Because of Siva's boon, one child is born into every generation of our royal House. All my ancestors each had a son, but I have only a daughter to continue our line. However, Bharatarishabha, I always look upon this daughter of mine as my son, and I have made her a Putrika.

If you marry her, one of the sons that you beget upon her must become the heir to my throne and the one to perpetuate my race. Bharata, that son is the dower for which I will give my daughter to you. Pandava, if you agree, you can take her on this condition.'

Arjuna agrees immediately, saying, 'Tathaastu, so be it.'

Making Chitravahana's daughter his wife, Kunti's son lives in that city for three years. Finally, Chitrangada gives birth to a fine son and Arjuna embraces the child lovingly. Then, taking his leave of Chitravahana, the Pandava sets out again on his wandering."

CANTO 218

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now, that Bharatarishabha journeys down to the holy southern Sea, her shore bejewelled with the Rishis that dwell there. Five great and holy rivers lie strewn in that realm, but the Sages shun all five. They are called the Agastya, Saubhadra, the most sacrosanct Pauloma, the greatly auspicious Karandhama, which yields the fruit of an Aswamedha yagna to those that bathe in her waters, and finally the Bharadwaja, ah, powerful washer of sins.

The Kurusthama sees the five rivers, and also that they are deserted, avoided by the hermits who live near them. With folded hands he asks those Rishis, 'Why O Sages, do the chanters of Brahman shun these holy waters?'

The Munis reply, 'Five great crocodiles live in the rivers and they devour any of us that dares bathe in them. That is why, Kurunandana, we do not go to the rivers.'

Arjuna Mahabaho hears this and says he will go closer to see the rivers. The ascetics try to prevent him, but he walks directly up to the bank of the great river Saubhadra, and the Parantapa plunges straight into her current. Immediately a huge crocodile seizes his leg in its jaws, but Dhananjeya Kaunteya seizes the crocodile in his mighty arms and drags it ashore.

No sooner has he hauled it onto land than the great lizard vanishes and a startlingly beautiful young woman, wearing unworldly ornaments and raiment, stands there in its place. O King, she is brilliant, her skin and her form shine!

Wonder-stricken, Arjuna asks her, in some joy, 'Lovely one, who are you? Why are you the water beast? What is your terrible sin?'

The beauty replies, 'Mahabaho, I am an Apsara who once frolicked in these woods. Kshatriya, my name is Varga and I am the beloved of Kubera, Lord of Treasures. I have four other friends, and all of us are beautiful and could go wherever we wished.

One day, we five were on our way to Kubera's home, when we saw a strikingly handsome and solitary Brahmana, a tapasvin, who sat immersed in studying the Veda. All the vana in which he sat was radiant with his splendour; he illumined the forest even like a Sun.

We flew down to where he sat, for both his fervid dhyana and his wonderful beauty drew us irresistibly. We meant to distract him from his tapasya. Saurabheyi, Samichi, Vudvuda, Lata and I approached that Brahmana, O Bharata, all together. We began to smile, sing and to otherwise tempt him.

Kshatriya, he was not to be tempted; not for a moment did his heart sway towards us. Purusharishabha the only gaze he cast in our direction was one of anger.

Glaring at us, he said, "Become crocodiles and swim in these waters for a hundred years!"' says the Apsara."

CANTO 219

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Varga continues, 'Bharatottama, we were shocked by the curse and tried to mollify that Brahmana who would not swerve from his vows. We said to him, "Arrogant of our beauty and youth, and stirred by Kama Deva, we have behaved abysmally. O Brahmana, we beg you, forgive us.

Surely, it is our very death which tempted us to try to tempt you. However, the Sages always say that women must never be killed. May your punya swell, Brahmana, do not kill us, it does not become you. O, you know dharma well, and it is a Brahmana's dharma to always be a friend to every creature. Let what the Rishis say about Brahmanas be true of you: the superior man always protects those that seek refuge in him. We seek your protection; it becomes you to forgive us."

O Kshatriya, the high-souled and virtuous Brahmana, as bright as the Sun or the Moon, grew kindly towards us. He said, "The words hundred and hundred thousand all mean eternity. However, in this case I did not use the word hundred to mean time without end.

So, you will indeed become crocodiles and seize and feed on men for a hundred human years. When those years end, a great man will come and drag you out from the water, and you will have your true forms back. I have never told the smallest lie, not even in jest, and everything that I say must come to pass.

Once the hero delivers you five, the five sacred waters will be known the world over as the Naari-tirthas, the waters of the women, and the wise and the good shall know them as being holy and purifying."

We listened to what the Brahmana said, folded our hands to him and walked around him in pradakshina. Dejectedly, we left that place, thinking, "Where will we meet the great man who will remove the curse from us?"

At that moment, O Bharata, we saw the Devarishi Narada of measureless tejas and our hearts filled with joy. Saluting him reverently, Partha, we stood before him, with flushed faces. He asked us the cause of our grief and we told him everything.

The Rishi said, "In the plains that lie alongside the southern Ocean are five realms of water, enchanting and deeply sacred. Go there, and soon, the Purushavyaghra Arjuna, Pandava Nishkalankaatma will rescue you from your sad plight."

Shura, at the Muni's words we came here, and, Anagha, sinless, you have today delivered me from the curse. But my four friends are still bound by it and live in these rivers. Kshatriya, I beg you, save them as well.'

Rajan, that Pandavottama of untold prowess calmly does as Varga asks. Rising out of the water, the four other Apsaras have their true and beautiful forms back. Having freed the Apsaras from the curse and the holy rivers from the danger of the crocodiles, Arjuna allows the nymphs to go where they please.

His heart turns once more to Chitrangada and he returns to Manipura. Arriving in the city, he sees the child he has sired on the princess seated upon the throne, the prince called Babhruvahana. Having seen Chintrangada again, O King, Arjuna sets out for the place known as Gokarna."

CANTO 220

ARJUNA-VANAVASA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now the mighty Arjuna sees all the holy rivers, lakes and shrines on the shore of the western Sea. Vibhatsu arrives in sacred and wondrous Prabhasa, in disguise. Madhusudana Krishna, however, knows that he has come and goes to meet his friend and cousin, Kunti's son.

Meeting, they embrace fondly and ask after each other's well-being. The two great friends, who are none other than the Rishis Nara and Narayana of old, sit down together.

Krishna asks Arjuna, 'Why, Pandava, do you wander the Earth, from tirtha to tirtha, shrine to shrine?'

Arjuna tells him all that has happened, and then the incomparable Vrishni hero says softly, 'This is as it should be.'

When they have spent some time at Prabhasa, Krishna and Arjuna go to the Raivataka Mountain, to pass some days there. Before they arrive, Krishna has the mountain adorned by countless fine artisans. At his command, a goodly amount of food is laid out there.

Enjoying everything, Arjuna sits with Vasudeva to watch the actors and dancers perform. Finally, the noble Pandava dismisses them all, with every courtesy, and stretches himself on a great and marvellous bed prepared for him. Lying there, he describes his travels to Krishna, telling him all about the holy rivers, the forests, lakes and mountains that he has seen.

As he speaks, O Janamejaya, lying upon that unworldly bed, sleep steals over him. At dawn, he awakens to sweet songs, mellifluous vina naadam, and the praises and blessings of bards. When he has finished his morning ablutions and worship, the great dark Vrishni comes affectionately to him.

Riding in a golden chariot they set out for Dwaraka, capital of the Yadavas. O Janamejaya, Dwaraka is brilliantly decked out, adorned to

receive Kunti's heroic son. Eager to set eyes on Arjuna, the people pour out into the streets and highways, in thousands upon thousands.

In public squares and thoroughfares, countless women are out together with the men, in the teeming, milling crowd of Bhojas, Vrishnis and Andhakas. All the noble scions of those races welcome Arjuna reverently. He worships those that are his elders, receiving their blessings, and blesses those younger than him.

The young Yadava men receive him excitedly and warmly, and he repeatedly embraces those that are his equals in age. Slowly, they make their way to Krishna's marvellous palace, full of untold riches, rare gemstones and other indescribable treasures, replete with every object of enjoyment. Arjuna spends many days there with Krishna."

CANTO 221

SUBHADRA-HARANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Best of Kings, a few days after Arjuna's arrival, a great festival begins upon the Raivataka Mountain, a festival of the Vrishnis, Andhakas and Bhojas, of all the Yadavas. During the mountain-festival, the Kshatriyas of those tribes give away untold wealth in charity, to thousands of Brahmanas.

Rajan, all around that massif stand countless magnificent mansions of wondrous beauty, all embellished with jewels, as are the artificial trees in livid and fantastical colours. The musicians strike up their lively song, the singers sing and the gifted dancers weave their lively rhythms. How glowingly handsome are the Vrishni youths, majestic and vibrantly strong, wearing fine jewellery, riding in chariots chased with gold.

Yes, the great citizens of Dwaraka turn out in hundreds of thousands, on foot, in fine chariots, with their wives and entourages. The Lord Balarama Halayudha is there roving where he pleases, inebriated with a surfeit of wine, his wife Revathi with him, and followed by numerous musicians and singers.

The awesome king of the Vrishnis, Ugrasena, is there, with his thousand wives, also followed by sweet singers.

Rukmini's son Aniruddha and Shamba are also there, both tameless in battle, also flushed with drink, wearing the costliest garments and garlands of supernatural beauty, wandering about like two Devas. Akrura, Sarana, Gada, Babhru, Nisatha, Charudeshna, Prithu, Viprithu, Satyaka, Satyaki, Bhangakara, Maharava, Hardikya, Uddhava, and countless others whose names are lost – all adorn the mountain festival on the Raivataka, each with his wives and with bands of singers.

When the festival of indescribable grandeur begins, Krishna and Arjuna range the place, arm in arm. As they roam together, gladly, they see Vasudeva's exquisite daughter Bhadra, beautifully attired and bejewelled,

surrounded by her sakhis. Arjuna takes one look at her and Kama Deva pierces his heart fairly through.

Bharata, the Purushavyaghra Krishna sees Arjuna gaze adoringly at the princess, and says with a smile, 'Ah, how can this be? That the heart of a vanaprastha, a forest-rover, is shaken by Kama? That girl is my half-sister, Partha, and Balarama Sarana's sister.

Be you blessed, her name is Bhadra and she is my father's favourite daughter. So tell me if your heart is fixed upon her, and I will speak to my father Vasudeva myself.'

Arjuna replies, 'She is Vasudeva's daughter and Vaasudeva's sister; she is so beautiful, who could resist her? Krishna, if this sister of yours, princess of the Vrishnis, becomes my wife, I will truly find fortune in all things. Tell me, Janardana, how can I make her mine? I will do anything that a man can possibly do to gain her.'

Krishna says, 'Purusharishabha, for Kshatriyas the way of swayamvara is ordained. Yet it is uncertain, chancy, Partha, since we do not know the girl's mind. For daring Kshatriyas, the Sages advocate marriage by abduction. Arjuna, carry my beautiful sister away forcibly, for who knows whom she might choose at a swayamvara.'

Having decided, Krishna and Arjuna send swift messengers to Yudhishtira in Indraprastha, telling him what they intend. Yudhishtira gives his consent immediately."

CANTO 222

SUBHADRA-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaismapayana said, "Arjuna receives news of Yudhishtira's concurrence, O Janamejaya. He goes to Krishna's father, Vasudeva, and gets his consent as well. The bull of the race of Bharata learns that Subhadra has gone to the Raivataka and rides there in Krishna's mighty golden chariot, upon which rows of little bells ring, in which every kind of weapon is stored, which is as bright as blazing fire, whose wheels rumble like thunderheads, to which the magnificent steeds Saibya and Sugriva are yoked, which ratha strikes terror in the hearts of all enemies.

Wearing kavacha, carrying his sword, his fingers sheathed in gloves of leather, Arjuna sets out as if on a hunt!

Meanwhile, Subhadra has worshipped Raivataka, prince among hills. She has worshipped the Gods and made the Brahmanas say blessings over her; she has walked around Raivataka in pradakshina and is on her way back to Dwaravati, when all on a sudden, Kunti's son, shot through by the flowery shafts of Kama, swoops upon the flawless Yadava girl, hauls her into his chariot and flashes away towards Indraprastha, that tiger among men, with the girl of sweet smiles.

When Subhadra's armed guards see what has happened, and there is nothing they can do about it, they run shouting and crying out, back to Dwaraka. Arriving in the city, and rushing into the divine sabha, the Sudharma, hysterically they describe what has happened to the court's chief official, telling of Partha's inexorable prowess.

That man sounds his golden trumpet echoingly, calling everyone to arms. From every side, the Vrishnis, Bhojas and Andhakas swarm in response to the clarion blast – those that had been eating leave their food and come, they that had been drinking fling aside their goblets and fly to answer the sound for danger.

Those Purushavyaghras, irresistible Yadava warriors, fill the grand sabha and take their places upon the thousand golden thrones within the court, its floor covered by unworldly carpets, and its walls and seats sparkling with myriad jewels, with corals that blaze like red fire. Indeed, they take their places upon those thrones, like fires ablaze themselves, just fed with fresh faggots to burn more brightly.

When they all sit in that sabha that is indeed like a court of the Devas, the chief official of the sabha relates what Arjuna has done, while those standing behind him, who bring the news, add details. Almost all of them red-eyed at that hour with drink, the haughty Vrishni heroes rise as a man in rage.

Some cry, 'Yoke our chariots!'

Others say, 'Fetch our weapons!'

Others roar, 'Get our bows and our armour!'

Some of them shout commands to their sarathies to harness their rathas, while some are so impatient that they run out to do it themselves, yoking their fine horses caparisoned in gold to their chariots. Such a din they make, while their chariots, mail and standards are being fetched.

Fair and tall as the peak of Kailasa, wearing blue robes, colourful vanamalas of wildflowers from the forest, great, proud and drunkest of all, Baladeva, the mighty Balarama says, 'Fools, what are you doing when Krishna sits silent? All of us rage and roar in vain until we know his mind. Let Janardana Mahatman tell us what he thinks we should do, and then do what he says.'

Immediately, the others all cry, as a man, 'Excellent! Excellent!' and then fall silent and sit down again in their places in the Sudharma.

Decorum restored, Balarama Parantapa says to Krishna, 'Why, Krishna, do you sit silently gazing? Achyuta, for your sake we welcomed and honoured Kunti's son, but it seems that the wretch hardly deserved our adorations. What honourable or well-born man would break a plate after having eaten from it? Even if he did wish to marry her, should he not have remembered how well we treated him, and not acted so rashly?

The Pandava has shown us and you his contempt today! He has dared outrage Subhadra: he has courted his own death. He has set his foot upon the crown of my head. Krishna, shall I bear this tamely? Shall I not resent it, even as a deadly snake does being trodden upon? Why, by myself I will

rid the Earth of all the Kauravas today! I will not tolerate what Arjuna has done.'

To the last man, every Bhoja, Vrishni and Andhaka present approves of what Baladeva says: they roar all together, as reverberantly as a battery of deep drumrolls or thunderclouds."

CANTO 223

HARANAHARANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "When all the Vrishni heroes repeatedly echo Balarama's angry sentiments, Krishna speaks these words of true dharma, full of profound meaning.

'Arjuna has not insulted or dishonoured our clan by what he did, rather he has honoured us. Partha knows that we Satwatas are never mercenary. The Pandava also thought the outcome of a swayamvara was uncertain. Then, who could approve of being given a bride as a gift, just as if she were some animal? And what man on Earth worth his name would sell his child?

I believe that Arjuna considered all these possibilities, saw their shortcomings, and only then decided to abduct Subhadra, as is consistent with the highest Kshatriya dharma.

This is a proper and equal match. Subhadra is a well-renowned girl, and Partha also has great fame. Is it not possible that Arjuna thought carefully of all this before abducting her?

Who would not want Arjuna, scion of the race of Bharata and Shantanu, son of Kuntibhoja's daughter, besides, for his friend and ally? Other than the three-eyed Lord Mahadeva, no one in the three worlds, including Indra and the Rudras, can vanquish Partha in battle.

His chariot has much fame, and yoked to it are my own horses. As a warrior, Partha has incomparable renown; his lightness of hand is legend. Who will defeat him?

This is my opinion, and I think that you should go happily after Arjuna and bring him back to Dwaraka with conciliation. If he defeats us in battle and returns to his city, we will have lost our honour. But in conciliation there is no disgrace.'

O King, they listen to Krishna and do as he says. Accosted with respect by the Vrishnis, Arjuna returns to Dwaraka and is formally married to

Subhadra. Adored by the sons of the House of Vrishni, steeped in every pleasure, in delight, Arjuna spends a full year in the Ocean city.

Later, he leaves with Subhadra and spends the final year of his exile in sacred Pushkarakshetra. When he has served twelve years in exile, he returns home to Khandavaprastha and first of all comes before the king, and worships his elder brother. He next reveres the Brahmanas of the court. Only then, does he go to Draupadi.

In the grip of jealousy, Draupadi flashes angrily at him, 'Why are you here, Kaunteya? Go to the Satwata princess! A second knot always loosens the first one.'

And Krishnaa sobs piteously. Dhananjaya pacifies her, repeatedly asking her to forgive him. He then goes back to where Subhadra waits outside the city, wearing red silk. Arjuna brings her into the palace dressed not as a princess but as a simple cowherdess. However, she only looks more regal and beautiful than ever in that humble attire.

Bhadra of great fame, of the big and slightly red eyes first goes to touch the feet of Kunti and have her blessing. Overwhelmed by affection, Kunti lovingly sniffs the head of the young woman of flawless features, and pronounces infinite blessings upon her.

Then Subhadra, her face like the full moon, goes to Draupadi and says straightaway, 'I am your daasi, your maid!'

Krishnaa jumps up and hugs Vaasudeva Krishna's sister to her in love, crying, 'May your husband be without an enemy!'

Delighted, Subhadra cries back, 'Tathaastu! So be it!'

From that time, O Janamejaya, those great Kshatriyas, the Pandavas, live in great happiness together, and Kunti, too, is happy.

When Krishna Parantapa, Nishkalankaatma, his eyes also pure as lotus petals, hears the Pandavottama Arjuna has returned to Indraprastha, he goes there with Balarama and other great shuras and Kshatriyas of the Vrishni and Andhaka tribes, and with his own brothers, sons and many magnificent heroes.

Krishna comes with a great army to protect him; with him, comes the most liberal and intelligent Akrura, Senapati of the Vrishni legions. Anadhrishti of mighty prowess, Uddhava of great fame and wisdom, Mahatman and Brihaspati's own sishya ride with Saurin Krishna, as do Satyaki, Salyaka, Kritavarman, Satwata, Pradyumna, Samba, Nisatha,

Sanku, Charudeshna, Jhilli of untold might, Viprithu, Sarana Mahabaho, Gada, greatest among learned men.

These and many other Vrishnis, Bhojas and Andhakas come to Indraprastha, bringing wedding gifts for Arjuna and Subhadra, past counting. When King Yudhishtira hears that Madhava has arrived, he sends the twins out to receive him. Received by Nakula and Sahadeva, the glittering Vrishni host, flying bright flags and standards, enters Khandavaprastha.

The streets have been swept, washed, and decked with garlands and a profusion of flowers. They are again sprinkled with water mixed with sandalwood paste, which renders them cool and fragrant. The scent of burning aloe fills every corner of the city, which bustles with its healthy, happy people, with fine merchants and tradesmen.

Purushottama Kesava Krishna, Mahabaho, enters Indraprastha, with Rama and many other great Vrishnis, Bhojas and Andhakas, and is worshipped by the people, and by thousands of Brahmanas. At last, Krishna arrives at the king's palace, which is like the palace of Indra himself.

Yudhishtira first welcomes Balarama, the eldest, with every ceremony. He then sniffs the top of Krishna's head and embraces him. Krishna, gratified, humbly worships Yudhishtira. He pays homage to Bhima, that great tiger among men. Kunti's son Yudhishtira now receives the other Vrishni, Bhoja and Andhaka chieftains with honour and appropriate ceremony: he reveres his elders and affectionately welcomes the rest as equals. In their turn, some of them worship him, while others greet him affectionately.

Now, Krishna of immense fame gives the clan of Arjuna, the bridegroom, lavish wealth; he gives Subhadra the gifts that her kinsfolk have sent. Krishna gives the Pandavas a thousand chariots of gold, adorned with fine rows of bells, each yoked to four pedigreed horses, and driven by the finest charioteers.

He gives them ten thousand cows from the land of Mathura, all of rich colouring and yielding copious milk. Happily, Janardana also gives a thousand mares, with golden harnesses, steeds white as moonbeams. He gives them a thousand mules, highly trained and obedient, and quick as the wind: these are white, as well, with black mane.

He of the lotus petal-like eyes gives the Pandavas a thousand young girls, skilled at drawing baths and pouring wine and at every other form of

personal service, all of them virgins yet to have their first period, each one beautifully clad and wearing a hundred bits of gold around their necks, their skins like satin.

Janardana also gives them lakhs of draft horses from the land of the Bahlikas as part of Subhadra's opulent dowry. Krishna, best of the Dasarhas, also gives Subhadra ten palanquins of gold, blazing like fire, some purified and some still ore.

Balarama Halayudha, ever fond of battle and brave deeds, gives Arjuna a thousand war elephants – tuskers with ichor flowing in three streams[9] from their great bodies for a wedding gift. Each one is as big as a mountain peak, inexorable in battle, carrying fine thrones upon their richly caparisoned backs, adorned with golden ornaments, tinkling golden bells.

It is a tide of treasures that the Yadavas give as Subhadra's dower, and the fine silks, shawls and carpets are the foam of that great wave, the war elephants its crocodiles and sharks, and the banners and flags, its floating reeds! All these flow into the wealth of the Pandava ocean, filling it to the brim, so that their enemies grieve sorely.

Yudhishtira accepts those gifts humbly and worships all the great warriors of the Vrishni and the Andhaka races. The shining heroes of the Kurus, the Vrishnis and the Andhakas spend their days together in uninterrupted revelry and enjoyment, even as good men do in heaven's delights after they die.

The Kurus and the Yadavas amuse themselves variously, at times their loud shouts of joy echoing against the sky, and the clapping of hands, too. Many days they spend together, in sport and merriment of every sort, the guests being honoured and adored by their hosts, until at last the Yadavas turn home towards Dwaravati upon the Sea.

The great Vrishni and Andhaka warriors set out with Balarama at their head. They take with them the gemstones that shine with the purest rays, given them by the Kurusthamas. O Bharata, Krishna Mahatman remains in Indraprastha with Arjuna. They range the banks of the Yamuna together in quest of deer; Krishna hunts both deer and boar with Arjuna, piercing them with arrows.

In a while, Krishna's favourite sister Subhadra gives birth to a resplendent son, even as Puloma's daughter, Sachi, queen of Devaloka, brought Jayanta forth. The child has long arms, a wide chest, and eyes as

big as a bull's. They name that little hero, that bane of his enemies to be, Abhimanyu, because he is both fearless and ferocious.

Arjuna begets the magnificent prince in the Satwata princess, even as fire from a sami twig by friction. When Abhimanyu is born, Yudhishtira gifts ten thousand cows and golden coins past counting to holy Brahmanas. From his infancy, the boy is a favourite of Krishna, Arjuna and his uncles, even as the Moon is of all Manavas!

When he is born, Krishna performs the rites of childhood for him, and Abhimanyu grows like the Moon waxing during the bright fortnight. Quickly, he masters the Vedas and the sastra shastra, the use of weapons both mundane and celestial, which has four great branches and ten smaller divisions, from his father Arjuna.

Endowed with great strength, the boy also learns how to counter astras loosed at him by others; his lightness of hand, and his fleetness of foot in every direction, forwards and backwards, sideways and all around, wheeling, are past remarkable. Abhimanyu is his father's equal in his knowledge of the Shastras and kriya-karmas.

Arjuna looks at his boy and is filled with joy. As Indra Maghavat would become joyful whenever he gazes down upon Arjuna, so does Dhananjaya become delighted when he sees Abhimanyu, who has upon his body every auspicious sign and mark, and who is invincible in battle, and can kill any adversary that comes before him.

He is broad-shouldered as a bull, great and wide is his face like a serpent's hood, and he is as proud and magnificent as a lion. He wields a great bow, and his prowess is like that of an elephant in musth. Ah, he is as handsome as the Moon when he is full; his voice is as deep as booming drums or rumbling thunderheads; why, he is his uncle, Krishna's, equal in courage and energy, in his sheer beauty and the perfection of his features.

Meanwhile, Panchali also has five sons, one by each of her husbands, and those princes are all exceptional warriors, invincible in battle, unshakable as hills. She bears Prativindhya by Yudhishtira, Sutasoma by Vrikodara, Srutakarman by Arjuna, Satanika by Nakula, and Srutasena by Sahadeva – she brings forth those five shuras even as Aditi did the Adityas.

Prescient and mystic Brahmanas say to Yudhishtira that because his son would bear the missiles of his enemies as the Vindhya Mountains do raindrops, he should be called Prativindhya.The son Draupadi bears

Bhimasena is born after Bhima performs a thousand Soma yagnas, and so he should be named Sutasoma.

Arjuna's son is born after his return from his exile, during which he performs so many legendary feats, so that prince is named Srutakarman, for his father's fame.Nakula names his son Satanika after an enlightened and great Rajarishi of yore, born in the line of Kuru.

The son that Draupadi bears by Sahadeva is born under the constellation Krittika, or Vahni Daivata, and he is named after the Senapati of the army of the Devas: the Lord Srutasena, who is more commonly known as Kartikeya.

Draupadi's five sons are all born a year apart, and they grow to be famous and devoted to one another. Rajan, Dhaumya performs all their childhood rites in accordance with the Shastras – the chudakarana, when their heads are first shaved, and the upanayana – the investiture with the sacred thread.

They are all princes of dharma, well behaved and of excellent vows; when they have studied the Vedas, they go on to learn archery and to acquire the astras, both mundane and celestial, from Arjuna. O Tiger among kings, the Pandavas see their broad-chested magnificent sons truly equal to Devaputras all turn into Maharathas, and they are filled with joy."

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[9] From their temples, ears and anus.

CANTO 224

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Living in Indraprastha, after having been sent there by the command of Dhritarashtra and Bhishma, the Pandavas begin to bring other kings under their sway. Their subjects live in the realm of Yudhishtira Dharmaputra as happily as a soul does in a body that bears every auspicious mark and has great punya.

Bharatarishabha, Yudhishtira lives by dharma, artha and kama, in due proportion, as if each of them is his friend dear to him as his own self. Indeed, it appears that these three purusharthas become personified on Earth, and King Yudhishtira shines among them as the fourth aim of life.

With Yudhishtira for their king, his people find a ruler who devotes himself to the regular study of the Vedas, one who constantly performs the Mahayagnas, and one who is the guardian of all the good. Through Yudhishtira's influence, all the kings of the Earth find unwavering good fortune; their hearts turn naturally in dhyana to the Parabrahman, and dharma swells in a tide everywhere, in every way.

And with his four brothers around him, and helped by and depending on them, that king shines forth as a great sacrifice does, when the four Vedas attend upon it. Countless learned Brahmanas, with Dhaumya at their head, each one like a Brihaspati, wait upon Yudhishtira, just as the Devas and other celestials do upon Brahma.

The people love Yudhishtira; their eyes and their hearts are full of him who is like a stainless full moon. They adore him not only because he is their king but for himself. On his part, he always does what is good for them, what delights them. Sweetly-spoken, intelligent and wise Yudhishtira never speaks a harsh word, nor a lie or anything hurtful or inappropriate.

That best of all kings of the line of Bharata, blessed with unflagging vitality, passes his days in joy looking after his people as well as he looks

after himself. With their dauntless prowess, his brothers bring other kingdoms under Yudhishtira's power, and they also spend their days in blemishless happiness, without an enemy to threaten their peace.

One day, Arjuna says to Krishna, 'Summer is here, Madhusudana. Let us go to the banks of the Yamuna and sport there all day and return in the evening with our companions, Janardana.'

Krishna says, 'Kaunteya, my very wish! Let us go and sport in the waters as we please, Partha, taking our friends with us.'

With Yudhishtira's leave Arjuna and Krishna set out with many friends for the banks of the river. Arriving at a certain place, sylvan with tall trees, and with many fine and lofty mansions, furnished with rare food and drink, with dazzling garlands and scented with fine perfumes, all for the pleasure of Krishna and Arjuna, a place that looks like a city in Devaloka, the companions immediately go into the lavish apartments within, shimmering with precious jewels, and out of the heat of the day.

Once inside, they begin to take their pleasure as they please, O Bharata. The women, all with full round hips, deep bosoms and large bright eyes, unsteady on their feet from the wine they have drunk, begin to cavort exactly as Krishna and Arjuna direct them to.

Some women go into the woods and frolic there, others wade directly into the river, while the rest make merry inside the mansions. Draupadi and Subhadra, exhilarated with wine, begin to give away their costly robes and ornaments to those women, some of whom burst into joyful song while others dance in abandon; others joke and laugh loudly, all the while imbibing more drink.

Soon, some of them argue and quarrel among themselves, while others speak intimately together in soft voices. Those mansions and the woods all around are full of the enchanting music of flute, lute and quiet drums; ah, it is a place of delight and fortune embodied.

Things being so, Krishna and Arjuna go off by themselves into the nearby forest to another place also full of fascination. The great souled Krishna and Arjuna, conqueror of enemy cities, sit there upon two priceless thrones; they sit talking about many things, among these, of great heroes of the past and their legends.

Suddenly, a Brahmana appears before Krishna and Arjuna, sitting there like the Aswin twins of heaven. The Brahmana is tall as a sala tree; his skin

is like molten gold; his beard is bright yellow and tinged with green; and his body great and wide in proportion to his height.

He wears jata on his head and rags upon his body, but he is as brilliant as the morning Sun. His eyes are wide and long as lotus petals and tawny; he truly blazes with splendour. Seeing this Brahmana coming towards them, Arjuna and Krishna quickly rise and stand respectfully, waiting for him to speak.”

CANTO 225

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “That Brahmana speaks to Arjuna, and to Krishna of the Satwatas, saying, ‘You, who are so near the Khanadava vana, are the greatest Kshatriyas on Earth. I am a voracious Brahmana and I always eat a lot. O Vrishni, O Partha, I ask you to appease my raging hunger: give me enough to eat!’

Krishna and the Pandava say, ‘Tell us what food you want and we will try to give it to you.’

The blazing Brahmana says, ‘I do not crave ordinary food. Know that I am Agni! Give me food that I can consume. Indra constantly protects this Khandava forest, and for that reason I cannot devour it. Deep in this vana there lives the Naga Takshaka, with his brood and his followers, and he is Indra’s friend.

For his sake, the Vajradhari protects the forest and all the other creatures that live in it. Ah, I long to devour the Khandava vana, but the might of Indra prevents me every time I try. Whenever I blaze forth in flames, Indra pours down torrents of rain that extinguish them. Many attempts have I made to consume this vana and always I have failed.

I cannot contain my hunger for this forest and I come as a supplicant to the both of you, who are masters of weapons. If you help me, I know that I can have the food that I want – this jungle. With your astras, keep Indra’s rains from falling and prevent any creature that dwells inside the Khandava vana from escaping, when I begin to feed!’ says Agni in his deep and crackling voice.”

Janamejaya said, “Why did Agni want to devour the Khandava vana, full of all kinds of creatures and protected by the king of the Devas? Surely, there must have been some grave cause for him to want to do this thing. O Brahmana, tell me about it in detail. Tell me also, O Muni, how the Khandava vana was consumed of old.”

Vaisampayana said, "Purushottama, I will tell you the tale of the conflagration that consumed the Khandava vana, as it has been told by the Rishis in the Purana.There was a king called Swetaki blessed with untold strength and valour, who was an equal of Indra himself. No one on Earth was his peer, in yagnas, in daana or gyana.

Swetaki performed the five Mahayagnas and many others, too, at all of which he gave bountifully to the Brahmanas present. That king's heart, Rajan, was always turned towards sacrifices, religious rites, and charity and gifts of every kind.

King Swetaki of great intellect undertook an endless sacrifice, until the Ritviks who performed the rituals grew weak with exhaustion, their eyes sore from years of being exposed to smoke from the agnikunda, and they left that king, never wanting to participate in his yagnas anymore. However, the king never ceased asking his priests to return, which they refused to do because of their sore and painful eyes.

Those Ritviks told him to ask other priests to complete the sacrifice that they had begun, which he did. After a short interval, the king wanted to perform yet another sacrifice, now one that would last a hundred years. But no priest could he find to help him with it.

Taking his family and friends with him, that famed king went and repeatedly implored the Ritviks, bowing to them again and again, praising them with the sweetest words, and with more munificent gifts. All of them refused to undertake to perform the king's grand yagna.

Now that Rajarishi flew into a rage. He said to those Brahmanas in their asramas, 'Brahmanas, if I were a sinner, or if I did not revere you properly or serve you as I have done, surely I would deserve to be abandoned by all of you, without scruple. But neither am I depraved, nor do I fail to pay unfailing homage to you. Brahmanottamas, it does not become you to abandon me and to prevent me from performing the Mahayagna on which I have set my heart.

Brahmanas, I seek refuge in you! Bless me, be kindly towards me. If you do not help me, it would seem to be out of enmity, and without just cause; and I will then take my service, my homage and my gifts to some other Brahmanas, and beg them to perform my sacrifice.'

With this, the king fell silent. Parantapa, those priests knew very well that they could not sit at Swetaki's yagna. So they pretended to be annoyed and said acerbically, 'Best of kings, your sacrifices are incessant and

endless! By performing them for years and years we have become tired and weak: in view of this, it becomes you to spare us.

Anagha, sinless, you have lost your judgement and impatiently come to us again and again. Go to Rudra! He will help you with your yagna.'

Now King Swetaki became truly angry. He went away to the mountains of Kailasa, and sat there in tapasya. Rajan, keeping the sternest vratas, Swetaki worshipped Mahadeva Siva with fervid dhyana. For a long time, he ate only fruit and roots, at times at the twelfth hour, at others only at the sixteenth of the entire day.

For six months, King Swetaki stood in meditation, with his arms raised skywards and his eyes unblinking, like the trunk of a tree or a stone column planted in the ground. O Bharata, finally Sankara became pleased with that tiger among kings, and appeared before him.

The God spoke in a calm, solemn voice to Swetaki, 'Rajavyaghra, Parantapa, I am pleased with your tapasya. Be you blessed. Ask me now for the boon that you want, O King.'

The Rajarishi bowed low before Rudra of measureless tejas, and said, 'Most Illustrious, O you whom the three worlds worship, if you are truly pleased with me, Mahadeva, then help me perform my sacrifice yourself, O Devadeva.'

The God smiled and replied gently, 'We do not perform sacrifices ourselves, but since you have done such penance, Rajan, I will indeed help you with your yagna, but on one condition.

Rajaadhiraja, King of kings, if you pour libations into a sacred fire without pause for twelve years, with perfect devotion, being celibate all the while, then you shall have what you have asked for.'

King Swetaki did what Rudra said, and when twelve years had passed he came back to the Trisulin, to Maheswara. When Sankara, Creator of the worlds, saw the most excellent King Swetaki, he said at once, gratified, 'You have satisfied me, Rajottama, with what you have done. However, Parantapa, it is the Brahmana's dharma to perform yagnas. So, scourge of your enemies, I will not help you myself with your yagna.

On Earth, there lives a most pure and high Brahmana who is an amsa of mine. His name is Durvasa and that mighty tejaswin will help you perform your sacrifice. So, go and make all preparations.'

Swetaki heard what Rudra said and then returned to his capital, and began collecting everything he needed for his great sacrifice. When this had

been done, he went again to Rudra and said, 'Devadeva, by your grace I have gathered everything needed for the sacrifice: all my preparations are complete. Let me be installed as the Sacrificer tomorrow.'

Rudra summoned Durvasa, and said, 'Durvasa, this is Swetaki, best among kings. Best of Brahmanas, at my command, you must help the king perform his yagna.'

The Rishi Durvasa said to Rudra, 'So be it.'

The mahayagna of King Swetaki got underway, with every proper ritual ordained, each in its proper season. Profuse gifts were bestowed upon all the Brahmanas present, and when, at last, the yagna was completed, the other priests who had come there at Durvasa's behest all went away, with the Muni's leave.

All the other Sadasyas, the resplendent guests who had been installed at the yagna, also departed. Now the noble king entered his own palace, adored by Brahmanas that were masters of the Vedas, and eulogised by panegyrics and warmly congratulated by the people.

This is the story of the Rajarishi Swetaki, who, later, upon his time coming, rose into Swarga, leaving behind incomparable fame on Bhumi, and also accompanied by the Ritviks and Sadasyas who had helped him accomplish his great sacrifice.

During Swetaki's own worship, Agni drank ghee, uninterruptedly, for twelve years, the clarified butter being poured in a constant stream into his mouth for that period. Having drunk so much ghee, Agni was so full and tired that he could not drink ghee from any other hand, at any other yagna.

Agni Deva became pale and wan, lost his colour, and he did not blaze as before. From that excess of twelve years, he lost his appetite, his vitality was sapped and he became sick. When he felt ill and weak, he went to the abode of Brahma, whom everybody worships.

Approaching the great Deity upon his throne, Agni said, 'Highest, I have drunk a surfeit of ghee at Swetaki's yagna, and I suffer from that excess even now. Lord of the Universe, my splendour and my strength both wane daily, and I need your grace to regain my original nature.'

Hearing Agni Hutavaha, Brahma Pitamaha said with a smile, 'Mahatman, you drank a ceaseless stream of ghee for twelve years, and you have become ill from it. But do not despair, O Agni, you will soon have your health back and your pristine nature, for I will cure you of your sickness, the time has come.

The fearful Khandava vana, home of the Asuras, which you once consumed with flames at the behest of the Devas, is now a home to myriad creatures. When you have devoured the fat of all those, you will have your glory back. So make haste, O Agni, consume the forest and all that live in it! That will be your cure.'

Hearing the Paramatman, Agni flew towards the Khandava vana. Arriving, he erupted, blazing forth in wrath, with his friend Vayu fanning his flames gustily. Seeing the forest on fire, those that dwelt within it strove hard to quell the conflagration.

Hundreds of thousands of elephants, thundering about in fear and rage, fetched water from rivers, lakes and streams in their trunks and tried to douse the flames. Thousands of many-hooded snakes, panic-stricken, spewed water on the fire from their countless mouths. So, too, Bharatarishabha, every creature that lived in the forest, each in its way, joined in the effort, and they quickly extinguished the inferno.

Agni flared forth again, and again the denizens of the jungle quenched his flames; yet again, Hutavaha burned, and yet again they put him out: all of seven times."

CANTO 226

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Frustrated and raging, Agni Havyavahana, his ailment uncured, went bank to Brahma, and told the Pitamaha what had happened.

The refulgent God thought for a moment, then said, 'Anagha, I know how you can consume the Khandava vana even today and in Indra's very sight. The ancient Gods Nara and Narayana have incarnated in the world of men to fulfil a purpose of the Devas. On Earth they are known as Arjuna and Krishna Vasudeva.

At this moment, they are in the Khandava vana. Go to them and ask them to help you consume the forest. If they agree, you will succeed even if all the other Devas are arrayed against you. The two will surely keep the creatures of the Khandava from escaping, and even thwart Indra, if he comes to protect the ancient jungle. I assure you of this.'

Agni came speedily to Krishna and Partha. O King, I have already told you what he said to them.

Rajavyaghra, when Arjuna Vibhatsu hears that Agni wants to consume the Khandava vana, against Indra's will, he says to the blazing Deva, come as a Brahmana, 'I have countless great Devastras, enough to battle with many Vajradharins, but, Lofty One, I have no proper bow from which to loose my astras, no bow strong and powerful enough to bear the prowess with which I infuse my archery. Also, so quicksilver is my archery that I will need an inexhaustible supply of arrows.

My chariot, alas, is not mighty enough to bear the stores of shafts with which I would like to stock it. I wish for a chariot with the splendour of Surya, the thunder of whose wheels is like the roaring of stormclouds. I also wish for unearthly horses white as moonbeams, fleet as the wind.

Then, Krishna has no weapon to match his tejas, no shastra with which Madhava can kill the Nagas and Pisachas of the vana.Exalted, you must

provide us with these instruments with which we can thwart Indra when he sends his downpour to put out your flames. Pavaka, we are ready to do everything that manliness and strength can achieve, but you must give us what I have asked for,' Arjuna says to Agni."

CANTO 227

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When he hears what Arjuna says, the smoke-bannered Hutasana wants to see Varuna, who is one of the Lokapalas, who rules the element of water and dwells in the deeps. Agni turns his thought to that son of Aditi. Immediately, Varuna appears before Agni.

The Fire God reverently greets the Lord of Seas, the fourth Lokapala, and says to him, 'I want you to give me the bow and quiver and the chariot that flies the flag of Hanuman, which you got from Soma the Moon. Partha will accomplish a great task with the Gandiva, and Krishna with the Sudarshana Chakra. So give both to me today, O Varuna!'

Varuna immediately says, 'Here, I do give them to you.'

He gives Agni the wondrous jewel of a bow, of incomparable energy, the bow that no weapon can withstand, which is the powerful enhancer of great deeds and renown. It is the lord of weapons, and the scourge of all the rest. It is equal to a hundred thousand other bows and it razes enemy armies. Brightly varicoloured is the Gandiva and it is the acquirer of kingdoms. Beautiful it is to behold, bejewelled, with no flaw, weakness or mark upon it anywhere. The Devas and the Gandharvas worship the Gandiva.

Varuna also gives Arjuna two inexhaustible quivers, and a ratha, stocked with unearthly weapons, a chariot that flies a banner with a great Vanara upon it. Yoked to that chariot are horses as silvery as fleecy clouds, foaled in the realm of the Gandharvas, with golden harnesses, and as swift as the wind, why, even as the mind.

Every implement of war that ratha bears, and neither Deva nor Asura can arrest its careen. Dazzling is its sheen and tremendous the sound of its wheels. It is a delight to the heart of every creature that sets eyes upon it, for it has been made by Viswakarman, Architect of the Universe, one of the Lords of creation, after great and intense tapasya.

The chariot is as brilliant as the Sun, so that no one could gaze upon it for long. This is the very ratha, riding which Soma Deva had crushed the Danavas. Resplendent, glorious, it looks like an evening cloud reflecting the light of the setting sun. Golden and exquisite is its flagstaff, and the celestial Ape who adorns it is as fierce as a lion or a tiger. Flying high, he seems determined to burn up everything he sees.

Upon other flags on the great chariot are other large creatures, whose yells make enemy soldiers faint.

Accoutred in mail, armed with a sword, his fingers encased in leather fingerlets, Arjuna walks around that wonderful chariot in pradakshina; he bows to the Devas and then climbs up into the ratha like a righteous man does into the vimana that bears him into Swarga.

Seeing the celestial Gandiva, eldest of bows, created of old by Brahma, Arjuna feels a thrill of joy. Bowing to Agni, Arjuna the powerful picks up the awesome weapon and strings it forcibly. Anyone who hears the echoing sound of the Gandiva being strung trembles.

When he has the chariot and the bow, with the twin inexhaustible quivers, which well arrows ceaselessly, Kunti's son is glad and feels equal to helping Agni. Now Agni Pavaka gives Krishna a chakra, a fiery disc with a hole at its heart, and it would become Krishna's favourite weapon. When he has the chakra, Krishna becomes glad and feels that he, too, can help Agni.

Pavaka says to Krishna, 'With this chakra, Madhusudana, you can quell even enemies that are not human. Wielding this weapon, you will be greater than Manavas, Devas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Daityas and Nagas, and you will surely vanquish all these in battle.Madhava, if you cast this wheel at any enemy, it will slay him and then fly back into your hands.'

Varuna Deva gives Krishna a mace known as Kaumodaki, which would shatter any Daitya; and when hurled in battle, it would roar loud as thunder.

Joyful, Arjuna and Achyuta say to Pavaka, 'Mahatman, we now have the chariot and weapons with which we can do battle against the Devas and the Asuras combined. What then of just the Vajradhari, Indra, who wants to fight for his friend the Naga Takshaka?'

Arjuna added, 'Pavaka, when Krishna takes the field, chakra in hand, there is nothing in the three worlds that he cannot consume with it. With the Gandiva and these quivers, I, too, am prepared to conquer the trilokas. My

lord, now blaze forth as you please, encircle this forest with your flames. We will help you accomplish your desire.'

When Arjuna and Krishna speak thus to him, Agni stands forth in his most incendiary form, and is ready to devour the vana. With his seven great flames he encircles the Khandava and begins to burn it, rather as he does the worlds in his apocalyptic form at the end of the yugas. Bharatarishabha, erupting in gigantic flames, which roar like thunderheads, Agni makes every creature of the jungle quail.

Quickly, O Bharata, the forest ablaze looks even like golden, resplendent Meru, king of mountains, when the rays of the Sun fall upon his sides and summits."

CANTO 228

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Those two greatest among Maharathas ride to opposite extremities of the Khandava vana and, positioning themselves at either end, commence a huge slaughter of all the creatures that dwell in the forest, on every side. Wherever either sees any creature trying to escape Agni's conflagration, they flash towards them and cut them off.

Why, the two chariots might have been just one, and the two warriors in them a single person. As the forest burns, hundred of thousands of birds and beasts, giving vent to frightening cries, dash about in every direction. Some have a limb charred, others are scalded all over, skins steamed off by the heat, some run towards the forest's hem, while others just rush blindly from place to place in panic.

There are those that clasp their mates and children, their parents and siblings, serenely and in a surfeit of love, and die thus. Some beasts leap high into the air or scramble up trees but quickly fall spinning into the blazing element below. Birds try to escape by flying but the fire catches them inescapably and they fall onto the ground, feathers and wings burnt, eyes and feet frizzled, gasping, crying out.

All around, bird and beast die, quickly consumed. The lakes and pools in that forest soon begin to boil from the torrid heat, and the fish and tortoises in them perish. The burning bodies of the creatures of the vana look as if the very flames have assumed countless bestial shapes.

Birds flash up above the flames but these Arjuna brings down with unerring archery, carving their bodies in pieces in the air, and they fall into the maw of the fire, some of them screaming. The animals of the forest struck by his shafts also cry out or roar, while dying. The clamour they raise resembles that which is heard when the Ocean was churned, in elder days.

The towering flames reach into the sky, and the celestials are alarmed. The Swargavasis, the illustrious dwellers in heaven, go in a crowd to him of the hundred great sacrifices, the thousand-eyed, their king, that scorcher of Asuras.

The heaven-dwellers say to Indra, 'Lord of the Devas, why is Agni burning the creatures below? Has the time come for the world to end?'

Indra hears what the Devas say, he also sees what Agni is doing, and he who slew Vritrasura goes forth to save the Khandava vana. Indra Vasava, King of the Devas, fills the sky with banks and banks of thunderclouds, of every sort, and then lashes down awesome torrents of rain upon the burning forest. Hundreds of thousands of thunderheads pour down rain in streams thick as flagstaffs of chariots.

The searing heat evaporates those cascades in the air before they reach the forest's roof, or the flame-tips. Now Indra Namuchihara grows furious with Agni. An even greater mass of black cloud scuds into the sky at his command, and an even more copious and fierce rain flashes down on the burning forest.

Roaring, hissing, flames and rainshowers battle on high, and filled with smoke and rent by lightning streaks, that forest is terrible, dreadful to behold."

CANTO 229

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Arjuna, son of Pandu, summons his astras and, loosing them in a torrent at Indra's downpour, holds the rain aloft, at bay. Quick as thinking, unfathomable Arjuna covers all the Khandava vana ablaze with a mantle, a cupola of arrows, as the Moon does the sky in fog, and no forest creature can penetrate that dome of arrows to escape.

It transpires that, while the forest burns, the Naga King Takshaka is not in the Khandava vana at all, for he has gone to Kurukshetra. However, his mighty son Aswasena is in that jungle. Aswasena strives to escape Agni's conflagration, but Arjuna's dazzling archery prevents him.

His mother, daughter of a Sea-Naga, is desperate to save her son. She thinks that she will do this by swallowing him. She swallows his head first, then, continues swallowing his long body. As she does this, she rises up into the air and seeks to flee the fire. But Arjuna sees her, and cuts her head off with a razor-like arrow.

Indra is watching, and he wants to save his friend, the Naga's, son. Indra blows a sudden mighty gust of wind on the forest floor, from which Arjuna faints briefly. Aswasena escapes. Arjuna wakes from his swoon in fury and begins to truncate every creature that seeks to flee the forest, into two, three and, some, into several pieces.

Arjuna, Agni and Krishna curse the serpent who has escaped with trickery: 'You will never find fame!'

Arjuna thinks of how Indra made him swoon and, growing angry, covers the sky in a cloud of arrows, seeking battle with the thousand-eyed one. The King of the Devas sees Arjuna's fury and casts down fierce weapons of his own, also covering the firmament.

Raging, roaring winds, which make the Seas tremble, blow great masses of thunderheads into the akasa, and they are heavy with rain. The

cloudbanks vomit thunder and terrifying gashes of lightning.

Arjuna looses the Vayavyastra, weapon of Wind, at those clouds; it scatters them and renders the power of Indra impotent. All the rain that the clouds bear evaporates, and the lightning that plays in them vanishes. In a moment, dust and darkness clear, and a fine, cool breeze begins to blow, while the Sun resumes his normal appearance.

Agni, who drinks ghee, becomes delighted, and dripping with the fat of the numberless creatures he has devoured, erupts in all his flames again. He assumes different flame forms and his roaring fills the very universe.

Suddenly, Eagles of the race of Garuda, richly feathered, see that Arjuna and Krishna protect Agni, and they fly down from the outer firmament, wanting to savage the two heroes with their wings like thunder, and their claws and beaks like daggers and swords.

Countless Nagas, also, spitting the most virulent venom, flash at Arjuna, who cuts them in shreds with arrows dipped in the fire of his wrath. The birds also he slaughters, and Naga and Pakshi fall into the blaze below and are consumed.

Now there comes a host of Asuras, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Nagas, with terrific shouts and roars. Armed with uncanny devices that spew streams of deadly iron balls and pellets from their throats, catapults that hurl huge rocks, and fiery missiles, and propelled by their fury, these rush at Krishna and Arjuna.

They rain a storm of weapons over Arjuna, but he mocks them and strikes their heads from their necks with a dazzle of arrows. Krishna Parantapa massacres the Daityas and Danavas with his chakra. Asuras of mountainous stature and untold might Krishna's arrows pierce and his disc strikes deeply, and they are as still as little strays struck down by violent and mighty waves and stranded on a beach.

Finally, Indra, riding his white elephant, thunders at those shuras and, raising his Vajra aloft, his inexorable thunderbolt, prepares to cast it at them. The scourge of the Asuras cries to his Devas, 'These two are slain!'

Seeing the Vajra raised, all the Gods seize up their weapons. Rajan, Yama takes up his mace of death, Kubera his spiked cudgel, Varuna his legendary noose and the beautiful Varunastra. Skanda picks up his elegant and irresistible javelin and stands as motionless as Meru.

The Aswins stand with shining plant weapons in their hands. Dhatri stands with a bow and Jaya with a thick club. Tvashtri, the powerful, in

anger draws up a mountain by its roots, while Surya has a brilliant dart, and Mrityu his axe.

Aryaman stalks the forest with a dreadful spiked bludgeon, Mitra stands forth with a chakra sharp as razors. O King, Pusha, Bhaga and Savitri dash enraged at Krishna and Partha, with bows and curved blades in their hands. The Rudras, the Vasus, the mighty Maruts, the Viswedevas and the Sadhyas, all splendent with their own lustre, and many other sky-dwellers, too, all armed with various weapons, run at Krishna and Arjuna, highest among men, to strike them down.

During the battle that ensues, marvellous omens are seen all around, even like those that appear during the Pralaya, making many a creature faint in fright. But Arjuna and Krishna wait calmly, bows in hand, fearless and invincible; then they beleaguer the Deva host with astras like thunder and lightning, routing them repeatedly.

The aerial legion flees to Indra, while the Munis who watch the battle from the sky are full of wonder to see the celestial ones beaten back effortlessly by Krishna and Arjuna. Indra is also pleased to witness the prowess of those two.

He flies into the fray, lashing down a thick storm of stones over Arjuna, whose ambidextrous archery he wants to test. In a flurry of furious shafts, Arjuna shatters every stone. Perplexed, disbelieving, Indra of the hundred yagnas hurls down another gale of rocks, thicker than before. But his son pleases his father again by smashing this hail into dust, as well.

Growing angry, Indra plucks a great peak from Mandara, with its stands of lofty trees, and flings it down whistling at Arjuna, who dissects it in a thousand slivers with his lightlike, fire-tongued missiles. The riven fragments of the mountain peak look like the Sun and the Moon dislodged from their places and falling to the Earth. Those still great pieces fall with a mighty reverberation, crushing numberless creatures of the Khandava vana beneath them."

CANTO 230

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now the creatures of the Khandava vana, the Danavas, Rakshasas, Nagas, wolves, bears, other wild predators, elephants with rent temples, rut-juice flowing from them, tigers, lions with shaggy mane, deer, buffalo in hundreds, bird of every kind, and myriad other creatures fly in every direction from the falling stones and rocks.

The forest burns, and Krishna and Arjuna stand impassive and impassable with weapons in hand. Dreadful sounds fill that blazing jungle, and the fleeing creatures stand still, trembling. Looking at the towering flames and Krishna – both waiting to devour them they scream and roar in numberless different voices. The sky shakes at that frightful sound and with the raging of Agni as if with deep and portentous thunder.

Dark Krishna, Kesava Mahabaho casts his great and fierce chakra, burning with its own energy, at the denizens of the forest. It desiccates them, and they fall in pieces, Danavas and Rakshasas, too, into Agni's maw. Mangled by Krishna's disc, Asuras are painted with blood, smeared in their fat and look like clouds of dusk.

Bharata, the dark Vrishni flares through the vana as death, despatching Pisachas, Pakshis, Nagas and every other living thing, in thousands. The wheeling chakra that he casts at them again and again, returns each time into his hands, after claiming innumerable wild lives.

While he slays the Pisachas, Nagas and Rakshasas, the face of Krishna, soul of all that is created, is grim and terrible to look upon. None among the Devas gathered there can face Krishna or Arjuna in battle. When they realise that they cannot save the Khandava vana from burning, they withdraw, and, O King, Indra of a hundred sacrifices sees the immortals retreat and is filled with rarest joy; he applauds the two heroes of the Earth.

When his gods flee the battle, an asariri, a disembodied voice, deep as the sky, speaks to Indra, 'Your friend, the Naga King Takshaka, has not been killed, for he went to Kurukshetra before the fire began. Know, O

Indra, no one can vanquish Krishna and Arjuna in battle. They are Nara Narayana, those Gods of old whose fame is still told in Swarga. You know their strength and their valour. They are invincible; no one in the three worlds can vanquish these best of all the ancient Sages. They are worthy of being worshipped by all the Devas and Asuras, by the Yakshas, the Nagas, Rakshasas and Gandharvas, by Manavas, Kinnaras and Nagas.

So, O Indra, leave this place with your celestials, for Fate has ordained that the Khandava vana will be consumed today.'

Leaving anger and envy, the Deva king returns to Devaloka; seeing him go, the other gods and their host follow. Arjuna and Krishna let out a lion's roar, which rings through the forest. They celebrate their victory over Indra and his Devas.

Having scattered the legions of heaven like clouds by the wind, the two now help Agni unhindered; countless creatures of the Khandava vana they slay with storms of arrows. Cut off by Arjuna's dazzling archery, no creature escapes the burning forest. Let alone attack him, they dare not look at him, not the strongest and fiercest among them, for fear of his inexorable barbs.

Flitting here and there in his chariot, at times he pierces a hundred creatures with a single arrow, then, shoots a single one with a hundred shafts. Dying as if felled by Yama himself, the birds, beasts and the rest fall into Agni's blazing jaws. They flee to riverbanks, to hilly zones of the forest, to burning ghats, but nowhere do they find sanctuary from the flames or from the two warriors.

Prides of lions roar in anguish. Elephant, tiger, deer and wolf scream and howl. The fish in the Ganga and the Sea hear that clamour and are afraid; Vidyadhara tribes living in the Khandava vana tremble. Mahabaho, it is true indeed that none of them could bear to even look at dark Krishna or Arjuna, so terrible are they.

A few times, bands of Rakshasas, Danavas and tribes of Nagas rush at Krishna, and he promptly despatches them with his chakra. Beheaded and truncated by the blinding disc, their huge bodies fall into the flames raging everywhere. Gratified by the streams of melting flesh, fat and boiling blood they feed on, the flames rise unimaginably high, and they burn smokelessly.

His eyes copper fire, his tongue a massive flame, his jaws agape, the hair on his head all fire, Agni Hutasana drinks what for him is that nectarine

river of animal fat; he drinks because Arjuna and Krishna help him, and he is pleased indeed, he is delighted.

Suddenly, Krishna Madhusudana sees an Asura called Mayaa fleeing the wild palace of Takshaka, in the heart of the forest. Vayu is Agni's charioteer, and assuming a Form with jata on his head, roaring like thunder, the Fire God chases the Asura, wanting to devour him. Krishna sees Mayaasura and stands with his chakra raised, ready to kill him.

With Agni behind him and Krishna before him, Mayaa calls out, 'Arjuna, fly here and save me!'

Hearing his terrified cry, Arjuna calls back, 'Fear not!'

O Bharata, Arjuna's very voice gives life and heart to the Asura. As soon as Pritha's compassionate son speaks, telling Mayaa not to fear, Krishna of the Dasarhas no longer wants to kill the Asura, who is the brother of Namuchi. Agni, also, does not burn him anymore.

With Krishna and Arjuna guarding him against Indra, Agni Mahamatim, the Fire God of immense intellect, rages, burning the Khandava vana for fifteen days. When that forest burns down, only six that dwelt in it escape with their lives: Aswasena, Mayaa Danava and four birds calls Sarngakas."

CANTO 231

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, tell me, when that forest burned, why did Agni not consume the birds called Sarngakas? You have told us how Aswasena and Mayaa Danava escaped, but not yet about the Sarngakas. I am amazed these birds escaped, O Brahmana, tell me about them."

Vaisampayana said, "Slayer of all your enemies, I will tell you why Agni did not burn those birds when the Khandava vana burned. O King, there was a Maharishi calls Mandapala, who knew all the Shastras, who was devoted to austerity and asceticism, his vows stern and inviolable, among the best of all good men. He was a brahmacharin, who drew, like Rishis of yore, his semen virile up into his body, had perfect control of himself and his senses, and dedicated himself to a life of study and dharma.

Having crossed the Sea of tapasya, O Bharata, he left his body and went up into Pitrloka, the realm of the Manes. However, there, he did not receive the fruit of his punya.

He asked the celestials who sat around Yama, King of the Dead, 'Why do the realms which I thought I had attained by my penance remain sealed to me? Have I not done enough punya so that the lofty realms become mine? Swargavasis, heaven dwellers, tell me what I must do to gain the fruit of my devotions.'

The celestials replied, 'O Brahmana, karma causes men to be born in debt. There is no doubt that men are born to perform yagnas, to study the sacred Shastras, and to beget children. The debts of karma are paid by these. You are a learned Yogi of great tapasya, but you have no children.

The higher realms are sealed for you because you are childless. So beget children, and you will inherit countless realms of untold felicity! The Vedas tell that only a son rescues his father from the hell called Put. Brahmanottama, strive to have sons.'

Mandapala listened to this and thought about how he could have the most number of children in the shortest possible time. The Rishi realised that among all creatures birds of the air are the most fecund. He took the form of a Sarngaka and mated with a female bird of that species, whose name was Jarita. He fathered four sons on her, all knowers of the Veda.

Leaving the mother and her sons in that jungle, the Khandava, while the children were yet to hatch from their eggs, the Sage went to another mate calls Lapita, with whom he now ranged through the vana. Jarita grew anxious and sad, but she did not abandon her sons, the infant Rishis still inside their eggs.

Later, as the Rishi ranged through the forest with Lapita, he saw Agni come towards the Khandava vana, to devour it. The Brahmana Mandapala knew what the Fire God intended, and for the sake of his unfledged children propitiated the blazing Deva, that Lord of the Universe, of terrific tejas.

The Sage said to Agni, 'O Agni, you are the mouth of all the worlds. You are the bearer of the sacrificial ghee. You are the purifier of every creature, latent and unseen inside each one. The wise speak of you as being One, and then again as having triune forms and natures. They make their offering to you, conceiving of you as having eight mouths.

The great Rishis affirm that you created this universe, O Devourer of the havis, and that without you the universe would cease to exist in a day. By worshipping you, Brahmanas, with their wives and children, attain to the eternal realms that they have earned by their karma and punya on Earth.

O Agni, the knowing speak of you as being like thunderclouds in the sky full of lightning. None can resist your flames, but are consumed. Splendorous One, you created this Universe. The Vedas are your word. Every creature, moving and unmoving, depends on you. Water depends on you, as does the Universe.

All offerings of ghee, every ritual offering of food to the Pitrs, are founded in you. O Deva, you are the devourer, you are the creator, and you are as wise as Brihaspati. You are the twin Aswins; you are Surya; you are Soma; you are Vayu.'

Eulogised by Mandapala, Agni became pleased with that Rishi of measureless energy.

The Deva said to him, 'What good can I do for you?'

With folded hands, Mandapala said to the conveyor of the havis, 'When you burn the Khandava vana, spare my children!'

Illustrious Agni replied, ‘Tathastu! So be it.’

So it was, O Rajan, that he did not consume the infant Sarngaka birds, when he burnt down the Khandava vana.”

CANTO 232

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Agni blazed, licking up the Khandava, the little birds were terrified and, not seeing any escape, began to scream. Their helpless mother Jarita wept.

She cried, 'Ah, the terrible inferno, which lights up the universe and devours the forest, flares towards us. My children are newborn and have neither feet not feathers with which to escape, and they are the only salvation of our dead ancestors. The tallest trees are consumed like wisps of straw and, licking up everything in his path with his great tongue of flame, Agni spreads fear on every side.

Alas, neither my children nor I can escape. I cannot fly with them and my heart will not allow me to leave them either: which of my sons shall I leave and which shall I take with me? What is my dharma now? What do you say, my little ones, what do you think? Oh, I will cover you with my wings and we will perish together.

When your cruel father left me, he said, "Upon Jaritari, my eldest son, shall my clan depend. My second Sarisrikka will beget children to further our race. My third, Stambamitra will be a Sannyasi and my youngest Drona will become the greatest of all knowers of the Veda."

But now doom is upon us, my sons. Which of you shall I take with me? What is my true dharma? I cannot see any way by which we will escape the dreadful flames!'

And she wailed and lamented.

The infants spoke to their stricken mother, 'Mother, sacrifice your love for us and fly to a safe place. For even if we die here, you can still bear other children. However, if you also die, that will be the end of our race. Your dharma is towards our clan, so fly! Your clinging love for us can destroy all of us and our hope, as well. But if you save yourself, our father,

who is always anxious to attain the realms of heaven, can still have what he wishes for.'

Jarita said, 'There is a mouse's burrow in the ground near this tree. Go down into this hole at once and you will not need to fear the fire. Once you are inside, I will cover it with earth. I see no other way to save you from raging Agni. When the fire subsides, I will come back and uncover the hole again. You must do what I say if you are to save yourselves.'

The infant birds replied, 'We have no feathers and are just four balls of flesh. If we go into the hole, the mouse is sure to kill us. We, also, see no way to escape, so that our father's having begotten us might not be in vain, and our mother might also find salvation. If we go down the hole, the mouse will eat us; if we remain here, the sky-licking fire will consume us.

We prefer to die by fire rather than have the mouse eat us, for the first death is noble and endorsed by the Sages, while the second is vile.'"

CANTO 233

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Jarita listened to her sons and said, 'The little mouse came out from his hole and a hawk seized him in her talons and bore him away. You have nothing to fear in the hole.'

The young ones replied, 'We did not see the hawk take the mouse, besides there might be other mice to fear in the burrow. As for the fire, it might not come here at all, for we see the wind blowing away from this place, bearing the flames with it.

Inside the hole, we will surely die, while here there is some chance of escaping. Mother, it is better that we stay here. Your dharma is to escape, since if you live on you can have other children.'

Their mother said, 'Sons, I saw the great hawk swoop down and carry the mouse away. While he flew, I flew behind and blessed him for having taken the mouse from his hole.

I said, "King of hawks, you have taken our enemy the mouse away: may you live in Swarga with a golden body and without an enemy!"

Later, when he had eaten the mouse, I returned here, taking his leave. So, my children, enter the hole trustfully, you have nothing to fear. I saw the hawk bear the mouse away and eat him.'

But the young ones said again, 'Mother, we are not certain that the hawk took the mouse. We cannot enter this hole in the ground.'

Their mother said, 'I know for sure that the hawk ate the mouse. You have nothing to fear, sons; go down into the hole.'

The young ones said again, 'Mother, we do not say that you are lying to send us down into the hole. For no one can be held responsible for what they do when they are distraught. We have done nothing for you yet, why are you so keen to save us, at such cost to yourself? What are we to you?

You are still young and beautiful, and you will find your husband again. Go seek him out. He will beget more fine children on you. We will find

heavens of felicity if we die in the fire. However, if the fire does not consume us, you can return to claim us.'

The mother bird anxiously left her sons in the Khandava vana and flew away to safety. Agni rushed along, blazing ferociously, to where Mandapala's sons were. The little birds saw the flames approach, and now the eldest of them, Jaritari, began to speak so that Agni heard him."

CANTO 234

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Jaritari said, 'The wise person is aware of death; when death comes, he feels no pangs. The deluded soul, who is not heedful of death, succumbs to terror when death arrives and does not find salvation.'

The second brother, Sarisrikka, said, 'You are patient and wise; the time has come when our lives are in danger. There is no doubt that only one among many has wisdom and courage.'

The third brother, Stambamitra, said, 'The eldest brother is the protector; he will save us from danger. If he can do nothing, what can the younger ones achieve?'

The fourth and the youngest, Drona, said, 'Seven-mouthed and seven-tongued, the voracious Fire God flares towards us, ablaze and licking up everything in his path.'

Haying spoken thus to one another, Mandapala's sons now hymned Agni, with devotion. Listen, O King, to the praises they sang.

Jaritari said, 'O Agni, you are the soul of air! You are the body of the Earth's plants! O Fire, water is your parent, just as you are the parent of water! Resplendent one, your flames are like rays of the Sun, extending above, below, behind and on every side!'

Sarisrikka said, 'Smoke-bannered Deva, we do not see our mother and we do not know our father. Our feathers have not sprouted yet. You are our only refuge. O Agni, we are infants, protect us! O Agni, we are distraught, protect us with your auspicious and gentle form; protect us with your seven divine flames. We seek sanctuary in you.

O Agni, you are the only one who gives heat. Lord, only you lend heat to the rays of Surya. We are infant Rishis, O Fire, save us. Havyavaha, bearer of the sacrificial ghee, we beg you, turn away from this place and take another path.'

Stambamitra said, ‘O Agni, you are all things. This whole universe is established in you. You sustain every creature; you support the universe. You bear the havis, and you are the sacred havis.

The wise know you as being one and many. You created the three worlds, and when the time comes, you will destroy them, Havyavaha, swelling forth in tides of flame. You are the cause of the universe, and you are the essence into which the universe dissolves.’

Drona said, ‘Lord of the universe, growing stronger within the bodies of living beings, you digest the food that they eat. So, everything is founded in you. O Sukra, you from whose mouth the Vedas emerged, you assume the form of the Sun and, evaporating and absorbing the waters of the Earth and every other juice of life, you send them back as rain that makes all the living grow.

From you, come these green plants and trees, and these vines. From you, have come these lakes and pools, as well as the great and always blessed Ocean. Fierce-rayed, our bodies depend on Varuna for life, and we cannot bear your heat. Be our auspicious guardian, Agni, do not kill us!

Coppery-eyed Deva of the scarlet neck, who leave a black wake behind you, burn along some other path, and save us just as the Sea might a house built on his shore.’

When Drona, chanter of Brahman, spoke thus, Agni was pleased by what he said. The Fire God remembered the promise he had made to Mandapala, and said, ‘You are truly a Sage, Drona! For what you say is Brahman. I will do as you ask. Never fear, because Mandapala has asked me to spare his sons when I burn the vana. What he said and what you have just said carries great weight with me. Tell me what to do, Brahmanottama, for I am pleased indeed by your stuti. Be blest, Brahmana!’

Drona said, ‘O Sukra, look at these cats; they stalk us every day. Hutasana, devour them in your flames, all their kind.’

Agni did what the Sarngakas asked him to. Janamejaya, he swelled in tidal flames and consumed the Khandava vana.”

CANTO 235

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Kurusthama, the Rishi Mandapala was very anxious about his sons, although he had spoken to Agni to spare their lives.

He had no peace, and spoke thus to his second wife Lapita, 'Lapita, my children cannot walk or fly, how will they escape the fire as the wind fans its flames into an inferno? Their poor mother will be terrified and grief-stricken, when she finds that she can do nothing to save them. Ah, I can hear her lament in my mind.

Oh, how is my son Jaritari? How are Sarisrikka, Stambamitra, Drona, and how is their helpless mother?'

O Bharata, stung by jealousy, Lapita said to the sobbing Mandapala, 'You need not worry about your sons, since you say they are all Rishis endowed with great powers and energy. What do they have to fear from fire? Besides, you spoke to Agni in my presence, and did the illustrious one not promise to protect them?

Agni is one of the sovereigns of the universe; he would never lie. You are not really anxious for your sons. I know that it is only because of Jarita that you have no peace. I am sure that you have never loved me as you do her. Oh, you so easily watch me suffer, but cannot bear to think of her in pain, for she dwells in your heart.

Why don't you go to Jarita, for whom your heart grieves so? As for me, I will wander alone from now, as my punishment for having given myself to a lustful, wayward man.'

Mandapala replied, 'I am neither lustful nor wayward. I only roam the Earth to beget sons. Even those that I have sired are in mortal danger, and the evil man is he who casts away what he already has for the sake of what he might acquire. The world disregards and insults him. I must go to my

children, and you can do as you please. This blazing fire that licks up the greatest trees makes my heart quail and fills me with ominous thoughts.'

Meanwhile, after the fire had left the place where the little Sarngakas were, Jarita flew back to her children. She found all of them safe and well. Seeing their mother, they began to cry, and seeing them alive she wept as well – tears of joy. One by one, she hugged her sons in her wings.

Just then, O Bharata, the Rishi Mandapala arrived there. None of his sons showed any joy on seeing him. The Rishi spoke repeatedly to his sons and their mother, lovingly, but none of them made any reply.

Mandapala said, 'Which of these is my firstborn son, and who is second? Who is born third and which one is the youngest? I speak to you in sorrow, why don't you answer me? It is true that I did leave you all, but I was not happy where I went.'

Jarita said, 'What is it to you which of these is the eldest, or which second? What concern of yours is it who is third and who the youngest? Go to Lapita of the sweet smiles, lush in her youth, to whom you went, finding her better than me in all ways.'

Mandapala replied, 'For women, nothing shatters their happiness as when their husband marries a second wife, or when he takes a lover. Nothing inflames rage and anxiety in a woman as these do.

Even the gentle and chaste Arundhati, celebrated through the worlds, is intensely possessive of her husband, the great Vasishta, who is devoted to her happiness. Why, such is her jealousy that she once insulted that wisest of the Saptarishis, speaking harshly to him, and then she became a little star amidst the Seven Sages of the sky, at times bright and at others dim, like fire and smoke, and ominous.

I look only to you for children. Like Vasishta Muni, I never wronged you. Yet, you insult me even as Arundhati did Vasishta of old, out of your insane jealousy. Men ought never to trust women, not even their wives. Only when they become mothers, do women serve their husbands.'

Hearing what their father said, his sons came forward, one by one, to worship him, and he spoke kindly to them, reassuring them of his love."

CANTO 236

KHANDAVA-DAHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Mandapala said to his sons, ‘I spoke to Agni to protect you, and the blazing Deva gave me his word that he would not harm you. It was only because of that, and knowing your mother is virtuous, and also knowing the great tejas which is in you four, that I did not come earlier.

My sons, do not keep bitterness in your hearts towards me. You are all Rishis, and knowers of the Veda. Even great Agni knows you well.’

Having reassured them, the Brahmana Mandapala took his wife and sons, and leaving that charred forest, went away to another land.

This is the tale of how Agni blazed forth, and with the help of Krishna and Arjuna, devoured the Khandava vana, for the weal of the world. Having drunk many rivers of fat and marrow, Agni is pleased, and appears again before Arjuna.

Just then, Indra Purandara, surrounded by the Maruts, flies down from the sky and says to Partha and Kesava, ‘No Deva could do what you both have done. Ask me each for a boon that no man can otherwise have, for I am pleased with you.’

Arjuna asks Indra for all his weapons, his astras. Sakra of untold splendour says, ‘When illustrious Mahadeva becomes pleased with you, Pandava, I will give you all my weapons. Kurusthama, I will know when the time comes, and then for your stern tapasya you shall have all my astras of fire and of wind.’

Krishna asks that his friendship with Arjuna be eternal, and the king of the Devas grants that boon, and having given both those heroes what they asked, and speaking gently to Agni Hutasana, as well, Indra ascends into Swarga on high again, followed by the Maruts and the other celestials.

Gratified with his mighty feast, having burned the Khandava for fifteen days, with all its denizens, birds, beasts and the rest, Agni is becalmed: he

blazes no more. Having gorged abundantly on the flesh of all those creatures, the pleased Fire God says to Krishna and Arjuna, ‘Purushavyaghras, I am delighted with you. I bless you heroes that you will be able to travel wherever you wish.’

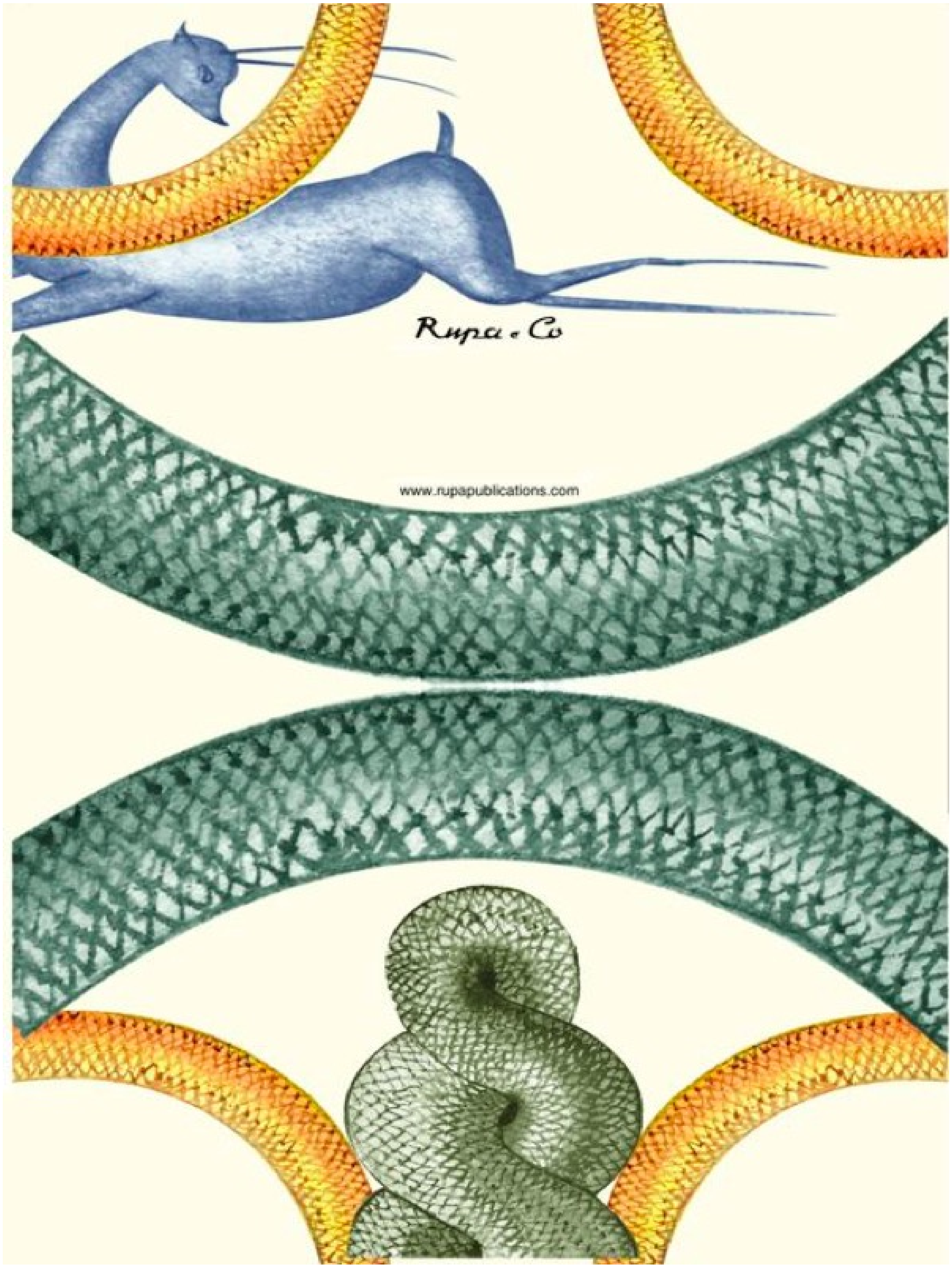
Agni now vanishes, leaving Krishna, Arjuna and Mayaa Danava. Those three wander along a little, then come to the banks of an enchanting river and sit beside it.”

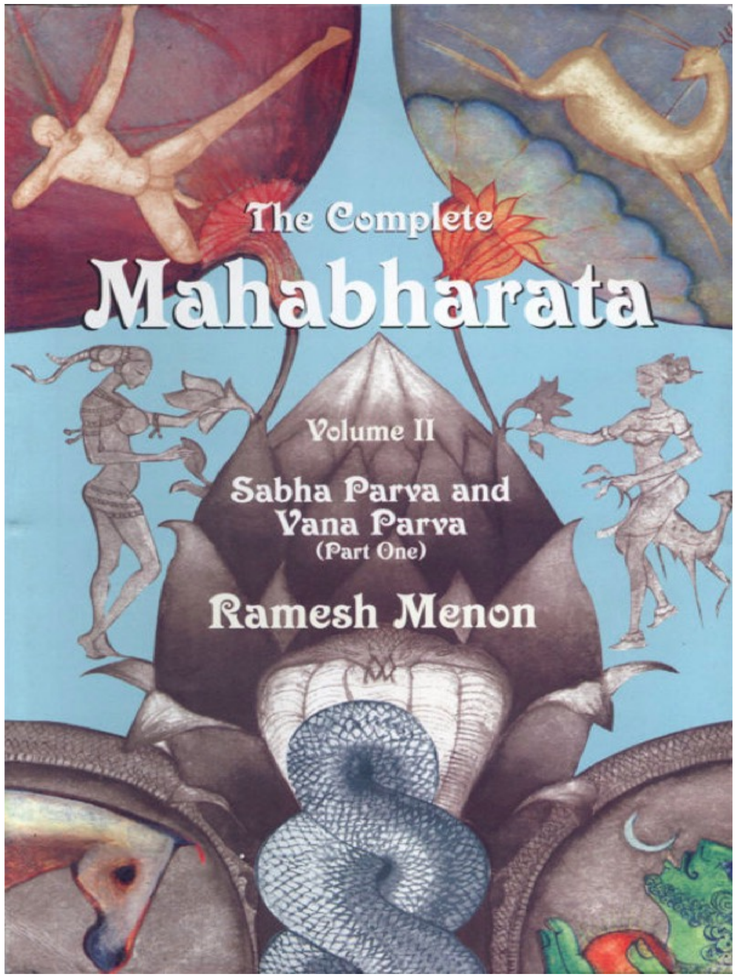
END OF ADI PARVA

Ramesh Menon was born in 1951 in New Delhi. He has also written modern renderings of the *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Srimad Bhagavadgita, Siva Purana, Devi Purana* and *Bhagavata Purana*.

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Sabha Parva and
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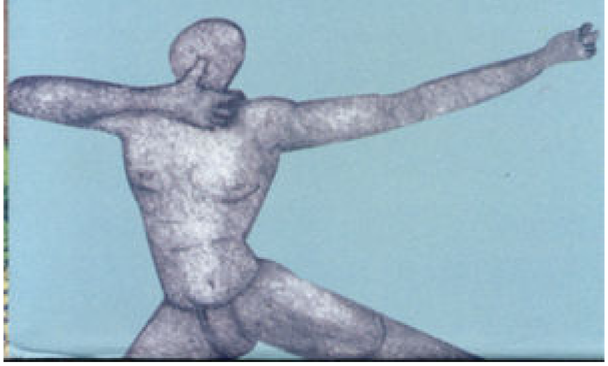
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Sabha Parva and Vana Parva (Part 1)

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RAMESH MENON

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Ramesh Menon asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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For Geetha Menon

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the Epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa & Co, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the Great Epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

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SABHA PARVA

CANTO 1

SABHAKRIYA PARVA

AUM I bow down to Narayana, and Nara, the most exalted Purusha, and also to the Devi Saraswati, and utter the word *Jaya*.

Vaisampayana said, "Then, in Vasudeva's presence, Mayaa Danava worships Arjuna and, hands folded, says repeatedly to him, and feelingly, 'Kaunteya, you have saved me from this Krishna in spate and from Agni Pavaka, who wanted to consume me. Say what I can do for you.'

Arjuna says, 'Great Asura, even by asking, you have already done everything. May you be blessed. Go wherever you please. Be kindly and well-disposed towards me, just as I am towards you!'

Mayaa says, 'Purusharishabha, what you say is worthy of you, exalted one. But Bhaarata, I am keen to do something for you, in joy. I am a great artist, a Viswakarman among the Danavas. Pandava, being so, I want to do something for you.'

Arjuna says, 'Sinless one, you think that I have saved you from death. Even if this is true, I cannot ask you to do anything for me. However, I do not want to refuse what you ask. Do something for Krishna; that will be enough to requite what I did for you."

Vaisampayana said, "Then, Bharatarishabha, urged by Mayaa, Krishna thinks for a moment about what he should ask Mayaa to do for him. Having reflected, Krishna, Lord of the Universe, Creator of everything, says to Mayaa, 'Build a palatial sabha, as you choose, O son of Diti, O best among all artists, for Yudhishtira Dharmaputra. Indeed, build such a palace that no one in this world of men will be able to imitate it even after the closest inspection, within and without. O Mayaa, build a mansion in which we might see a blend of Deva, Asura and Manava styles.'

Mayaa becomes exceedingly pleased, and readily agrees to build a magnificent palace for the Pandava, one truly like a palace of the Devas. Returning, telling Yudhishtira everything that has transpired, Krishna and Arjuna bring Mayaa to him. Yudhishtira receives Mayaa respectfully, offering him the honour he deserves. Mayaa receives that honour, graciously, and holds it in high regard.

O King of the Bhaaratavamsa, that great son of Diti narrates for the Pandavas the legend of the Danava Vrishaparva. Then, after he rests awhile, that greatest of artists, after deep thought and careful planning, sets about building a great palace for the illustrious Pandavas.

In accordance with the wishes of both Krishna and Pritha's son, the Danava of untold prowess, on an auspicious day, performs the propitiatory rituals of laying the foundation. He also pleases thousands of learned Brahmanas with sweetened milk and rice, and with rich gifts of many kinds, then measures out a plot of land, five thousand cubits square, enchanting and beautiful, and suitable for building an edifice which would withstand every season's exigencies."

CANTO 2

SABHAKRIYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "One day, when he had lived in Khandavaprastha for a while, happily, looked after with great love and affection by the Pandavas, Krishna, who is worthy of all worship, wants to see his father. He of the large eyes, who is due the worship of the universe, folds his hands to Yudhishtira and to Kunti, and lays his head at the feet of Kunti, who is his father's sister. So adored by Krishna, Pritha sniffs the top of his head and embraces him. Krishna, illustrious Hrishikesa, his eyes now filling, goes to his sister Subhadra, lovingly, and speaks to her – words true and excellent, succinct and apposite, and laden with goodness. The sweetly-spoken Subhadra, in turn, worships him repeatedly, her head bowed, and gives him many messages for her kinsfolk in her fathers home.

Bidding farewell to her, blessing her, now Vaarshaneya comes to Draupadi and Dhaumya. The Purushottama pays obeisance to Dhaumya and, comforting Panchali, takes leave of her to depart. Then, mighty, wise Krishna, with Arjuna beside him, goes to his cousins. Surrounded by the five brothers, he is as radiant as Indra among the Devas.

He who flies Garuda upon his banner now wants to perform the rituals undertaken before leaving on a journey and, purifying himself with a bath, puts on fine clothes and ornaments. The Yadavapungava, bull of the race of Yadu, worships the Devas and Brahmanas with garlands of flowers, mantras, prostrations, and with fine perfumes.

When these are done, he, that best of the good and the steadfast, actually thinks of setting out. Krishna now emerges from the inner apartment and, coming out to the outer apartments, he offers Brahmanas, worthy of worship, vessels of curd, fruit and aval, parched-grain, making them bless him copiously. He gives them rich gifts, and walks around them in pradakshina. Finally, climbing into his exceptional golden chariot, of blinding speed, which flies the flag of Tarkhya Garuda and is laden with his mace, discus, sword, his bow Saringa and other weapons, and is yoked to his horses Shaibya and Sugriva, the lotus-eyed one goes forth at a most auspicious moment, on a fine lunar day, during a propitious conjunction of the stars above.

Out of love, Yudhishtira climbs into that chariot after Krishna and, asking Daruka the sarathy to sit aside, takes the reins himself. Arjuna, also, of long arms, rides in that ratha; he walks around Krishna and fans him with a golden-handled, white, silken chamara whisk. Mighty Bhimasena, with the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, and all the priests and the people of the city, follow behind Krishna's chariot. Kesava Krishna glows like a great Guru being followed by his favourite sishyas.

Then, Govinda embraces Arjuna tightly, speaks to him, pays homage to Yudhishtira and Bhima, and embraces the twins. He is embraced in return by the three older Pandavas, while the twins salute him reverently. When they have gone half a yojana, Krishna, subduer of hostile cities, respectfully asks Yudhishtira not to follow him anymore. Knower of every nuance of karma, Govinda now humbly worships Yudhishtira and clasps his feet. Yudhishtira quickly raises him up and sniffs the top of his head with love.

When he has raised up the lotus-eyed Krishna, Yudhishthira Dharmaraja, son of Pandu, gives him permission to leave, saying, *Svasti!* Krishna bids them kind farewell, promising to return soon. With difficulty, he keeps them from following him any further on foot, and then sets out for his home, Dwaraka, with joy in his heart, even like Indra returning to Amaravati. From their intense love for him, the Pandavas stand gazing at Krishna's chariot for as long as they can see it; later their hearts follow him, unsatisfied, when he is out of sight. Finally, Pritha's sons, those bulls among men, minds still fixed on Krishna, turn back to their city, unwillingly.

Krishna swiftly reaches Dwaraka in his chariot, with the heroic Satyaki following him. Devaki's son, Sauri, with his charioteer Daruka, flies as swiftly as Garuda to Dwaraka.

Meanwhile, Yudhishthira, with his brothers and friends, re-enters his splendid capital. That tiger among men dismisses all his relatives, brothers and sons, and seeks to comfort himself in Draupadi's company. Krishna, received with worship by the greatest Yadavas, including Ugrasena, happily enters magnificent Dwaraka. He worships his father, who is old now, and his radiant and gracious mother. He salutes his brother Baladeva, and then the lotus-eyed one sits down. Finally, embracing Pradyumna, Shamba, Nishatha, Charudeshna, Gada, Aniruddha and Bhanu, his sons and grandsons, Krishna goes in to Rukmini's apartment."

CANTO 3

SABHAKRIYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Mayaa Danava says to Arjuna, best of warriors, 'With your leave I must go now, but I will return soon. Upon the northern peak of Kailasa, near the Mainaka Mountains, once while the Danavas performed a great sacrifice on the banks of the Bindusaras, lake of waterdrops, I collected a treasure of varied jewels and gemstones, past compare. This I stored in the palace of Vrishaparva, ever devoted to dharma. If that treasure still exists, Bhaarata, I will bring it back, and then begin building the magnificent sabha of the Pandavas, which I will embellish with every manner of rare, precious jewel, so it shall be celebrated the world over.

Also, Kurunandana, I believe there is a great and fierce mace which the Danava king kept beneath the surface of the Bindusaras after slaughtering his enemies with it. It is mighty and heavy, studded with golden knobs, capable of savaging armies, and equal to a hundred thousand other maces. As the Gandiva for you, this mace is a worthy weapon for Bhima. Also, in the lake is a powerful conch-shell, the reverberant Devadatta, which was once Varuna's. I want to bring all these for you.'

So saying, to Partha, the Asura goes from Khandavaprastha towards the north-east. North of Kailasa, amidst the mountains of Mainaka, is a massive peak of gems and jewels called Hiranyashringa. Next to that sparkling massif is the enchanting lake called Bindu. Upon the banks of the Bindu, long ago, King Bhagiratha sat in intense penance, for countless years, wanting to invoke the Devi Ganga; indeed, she is called Bhagirathi in the world, after that king.

There, upon the banks of that sacred lake, Indra, irradiant lord of all created things, Bhaaratottama, once performed a hundred mahayagnas. He erected for their beauty, and not because it was ordained, yupastambhas, sacrificial stakes, made entirely of gold and encrusted with precious jewels. When he finished the hundred sacrifices, Indra, Lord of Sachi, had what he wanted.

There, too, the fierce Siva Mahadeva, eternal Lord of every creature, dwelt, when he had created all the worlds, and is worshipped by thousands

of ganas. There, indeed, Nara and Narayana, Brahma and Yama and Sthanu, being the fifth, perform their profound sacrifices when a thousand yugas come to an end. There, to establish punya and dharma, Vasudeva devoutly performed his sacrifices which lasted countless years. Tens of thousands of stambhas, embellished with golden garlands and vedis, altars of shimmering splendour, Kesava set there.

Arriving in that place, Bhaarata, Mayaa retrieves the great sankha and the other crystalline and invaluable possessions of King Vrishaparva. The great Asura Mayaa takes Vrishaparva's entire hoard, guarded by Yakshas and Rakshasas, fetches it back to Khandavaprastha and there builds for the Pandavas a palace of incomparable loveliness, of unearthly craft, copiously encrusted with precious stones, which becomes renowned throughout the three worlds.

He gives Bhimasena that best of maces, and to Arjuna the exceptional conch, at whose sound all living creatures tremble. The palace which Mayaa builds has golden columns and is spread over full five thousand cubits of land. It shines for leagues around, so it seems to dim even the lustre of the Sun, and it is like the palace of Agni, Surya or Soma. Its radiance, which is a mixture of Heaven's light and this Earth's, is such that the edifice appears to be on fire.

Even like a bank of new clouds appearing in the sky, Mayaa's palace rises from the ground. The palace that Mayaa of untold genius built is fascinating; it is enchanting, built only with the rarest, most exquisite materials, with golden walls and arches, with the most beautiful paintings and hangings; why, it has been said that it excels the Sudharma of the race of Dasarhas, even the palace of Brahma himself.

Eight thousand Rakshasas, called Kinkaras, fierce, with powerful bodies, blessed with untold strength, red eyes, ears pointed like arrowheads, well-armed and who can fly through the air, guard the Mayaa sabha.

Inside the palace, Mayaa sets a lucid tank, in which he has lotuses, whose leaves are dark jewels and whose stalks are of clusters of bright gemstones, and other flowers with leaves of gold. Various waterbirds swim and frolic upon its water. Other resplendent lotuses adorn the tank, and golden fish and tortoises swim in it, and it is clear right to its bottom, where there is no trace of mud; its water is transparent like glass. A flight of crystal steps leads down to the water from its banks, which ripp'e in the gentle breezes that make the flowers quiver.

The banks of that tank are paved with slabs of priceless marble, set with pearls, and it is told that many a king who comes to the banks of the water mistakes it for solid ground and falls in.

Diverse lofty, great trees are planted all around the palace, verdant, their shade cool, and perennially in bloom, casting a spell of charm all around them. Mayaa creates artificial woods of scented trees, ever fragrant. Countless pools and tanks dot the great gardens, upon which chakravakas and karandavas swim. The breeze which wafts the fragrance of the lotuses that grow upon those waters, as well as of other flowers on land and tree, add to the joy of the Pandavas.

Mayaa builds the palatial sabha in fourteen months, and informs Yudhishtira that it is complete."

CANTO 4

SABHAKRIYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira, best among men, feeds ten thousand Brahmanas payasa of sweetened milk and rice, mixed with ghee; honey mixed with fruit and roots; and with pork and venison. He pleases those holy ones, who have come from various lands, far and near, with delicacies seasoned with seasamum, prepared with rare vegetables called jivanti, rice mixed with clarified butter, and many different meat preparations, indeed with countless dishes, and every manner of fine drink.

He gives them the most excellent robes and other garments, and fine garlands of flowers. The king gives them each a thousand cows, O Bhaarata, and the voices of the gratified Brahmanas can be heard saying, 'What an auspicious day is this!' so loudly, all together, that what they say seems to resound even in heaven.

Finally, having worshipped the Gods, with music and song, with many kinds of rare and wonderful perfumes and incense, the Kuru king enters the great sabha, where athletes, mimes, wrestlers, bards and panegyrists begin to perform, in turns, to please Dharma's illustrious son, with their skills and art. Thus, celebrating their entry into the unparalleled edifice, Yudhishtira and his brothers take their delight within like Indra himself in Swarga.

Upon fine seats within that sabha, great Rishis and kings from other countries sit with the Pandavas. Asita and Devala are there; Satya, Sarpamali and Mahasira; Arvavasu, Sumitra, Maitreya, Sunaka and Bali; Baka, Dalvya, Sthulasira, Krishna Dwaipayana, and Suka Sumanta, Jaimini, Paila, and we the disciples of Vyasa - Tittiri, Yajnavalkya, and Lomaharshana with his son; Apsuhomya, Dhaumya; Animandavya, and Kausika are present, as are Damoshnisha and Traivali, Parnada, and Barayanaka, Maunjayana, Vayubhaksha, Parasarya, and Sarika; Balivaka, Silivaka, Satyapala, and Kritasrama; Jatukarna, and Sikhavat, Alamba and Parijataka; the lofty Parvata, and the great Muni Markandeya; Pavitrapani, Savarna, Bhaluki, and Galava; Janghabandhu, Raibhya, Kopavega, and Bhrigu; Haribabhru, Kaundinya, Babhrumali, and Sanatana, Kakshivat, and Ashija, Nachiketa, Aushija, and Gautama; Painga, Varaha, Sunaka, and Sandilya of great tapasya and punya; Kukkura, Venujangha, Kalapa and

Katha - these learned and virtuous Sages, senses and minds completely controlled, and many others, as numerous as the above, all masters of the Vedas and Vedangas, knowers of the laws of dharma, pure, taintless in conduct, all attend upon Yudhishtira Dharmaputra and delight him with their sacred discourses.

So, too, many great Kshatriyas are present in the splendent Mayaa sabha - the illustrious and virtuous Munjaketu, Vivardhana, Sangramjit, Durmukha, the powerful Ugrasena; Kakshasena, great lord of the world, Kshemaka the invincible; Kamatha, the king of Kamboja, and the mighty Kampana who alone made the Yavanas to ever tremble, at mere mention of his name, even as the Vajradhari does the Asuras known as the Kalakeyas; Jatasura, and the king of the Madrakas, Kunti, Pulinda the king of the Kiratas, and the kings of Anga and Vanga, and Pandrya, and the king of Udhara, and Andhaka; Sumitra, and Shaibya Parantapa; Sumanas the king of the Kiratas, and Chanur king of the Yavanas, Devarata, Bhoja, and Bhimaratha, Srutayudha the king of Kalinga, Jayasena the king of Magadha; Sukarman, Chekitana, and Puru that scourge of his enemies; Ketumata, Vasudana, and Vaideha and Kritakshana; Sudharman, Aniruddha, Srutayu of vast strength; the invincible Anuparaja, the handsome Karmajit; Sisupala with his son, the king of Karusha; and the invincible princes of the Vrishni race, all as handsome as Devas - Ahuka, Viprithu, Gada, Sarana, Akrura, Kritavarman, Satyaka, the son of Sini; and Bhismaka, Ankriti, and the powerful Dyumatsena; those greatest of bowmen, the Kaikeyas; and Yagnasena of the Somaka race.

All these Kshatriyas of untold prowess and might, vastly wealthy and well-armed, as well as many others, wait upon Kunti's son Yudhishtira in that sabha, all of them keen to minister to his happiness.

Other great Kshatriya princes, who have put on deer-skin, and who learnt the astra shastra, the science of weapons under Arjuna, attend humbly on Yudhishtira. O Rajan, the princes of the house of Vrishni as well - Pradyumna and Samba, and Satyaki, Yuyudhana, Sudharman, Aniruddha and Saibya, best of men, and many other kings of the Earth, too, Lord of the World, wait upon Yudhishtira.

Dhananjaya's friend Tumburu the Gandharva, as well as Chitrasena, with his Gandharva ministers, and many other Gandharvas and Apsaras, all skilled at music, song and dance, as also Kinnaras, masters of music, sing unearthly songs, perfectly, in beautiful voices, playing on unworldly

instruments, for the pleasure of Yudhishtira, his brothers and the Rishis who grace that sabha.

Truly, sitting in that great court, all these mighty heroes, Purusharishabhas of stern vows, men of unwavering dharma, wait upon Yudhishtira, even as the gods in heaven do upon Brahma."

CANTO 5

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "While the splendid Pandavas sit in that sabha with the great Gandharvas, O Bhaarata, the Devarishi Narada arrives in that assembly, he who is a master of the Vedas and the Upanishads, he whom the Devas worship, he who knows the Itihasas and Puranas, why, who knows and is witness to all the Kalpas, who knows nyaya, logic, and the great and subtle truths of dharma, who knows exhaustively the six Angas.[1]

He is an unequalled master at reconciling apparently conflicting texts, and applying general principles to specific practical instances, as in interpreting contraries by reference to situational differences. Eloquent is Narada Muni, resolute, intelligent, and he has a powerful memory. He knows the science of morals and politics; he is profoundly learned, skilled at distinguishing inferior things from superior ones, at drawing unerring inference from evidence, competent to judge the correctness or fallaciousness of syllogisms consisting of five propositions.

Indeed, he can successfully debate with Brihaspati himself, with fine and decisive conclusions, accurately framed - about dharma, artha, kama and moksha; a Mahatman he is, and sees the entire universe, on every side, above and below and all around, even as if it is before his very eyes.

He is a master of both Sankhya and Yoga,[2] and he is always eager to humble both the Devas and the Asuras by stoking subtle dissention between them. He knows thoroughly the sciences of war and treaty, is a master at judging matters not within immediate ken, or obvious, as well as the six sciences of treaty, war, military campaigns, maintenance of posts against the enemy, and stratagems of ambuscades and reserves. Why, he is a perfect master of every branch of learning, fond of war and of music, would never shrink from any science or any deed; and possesses not just these but countless other accomplishments.

Having ranged many other worlds, Narada Muni arrives in Yudhishtira's sabha. And the Devarishi, his splendour incomparable, his tejas immeasurable, comes, O King, with Parijata, Raivata the brilliant, Saumya and Sumukha. Swifter than the wind does he arrive there, flying by Rishi patha, and is full of joy to see the Pandavas.

The Brahmana pays homage to Yudhishtira, by uttering blessings over him and wishing him success in every undertaking. Seeing the wise Narada, Yudhishtira, knower of every nuance of dharma, rises quickly from his throne, and his brothers as well. Bowing low, humbly, that king salutes the Muni, in delight, and offers him a lofty seat, with due ceremony. The Pandava king also offers him cows and arghya, honey and the other customary offerings. He adores Narada with gifts of gemstones and jewels, his heart full of joy. Receiving all this worship, appropriately, the Rishi is pleased.

When the Pandavas and the other Sages there have all worshipped him, Narada, who knows the Vedas perfectly, speaks thus to Yudhishtira about dharma, artha, kama and moksha.

Narada says, 'Is the wealth that you earn being spent righteously? Does your heart take pleasure in dharma? Do you also enjoy the pleasures of life? But does your mind sink under their weight? Lord of Men, do you continue the noble tradition of dharma and artha by which your sires lived and ruled the three kinds of subjects, the good, the middling and the evil? You must never wound dharma for the sake of artha, and never dharma and artha for the sake of kama, which so easily seduces.

Best of victorious men, always devoted to dharma, knower of the timeliness of all things, do you divide your time judiciously between dharma, artha, kama and the pursuit of moksha? Anagha, sinless, with the six gunas of kings,[3] do you attend to the seven ways which kings use to rule?[4] Do you, after carefully considering the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and your enemies, scrutinise the fourteen possessions of your foe - their country, forts, chariots, elephants, cavalry, foot-soldiers, the principal officials of state, the harem, store of food, their army's wealth, the religious beliefs of their soldiers, their accounts of state, their revenue, the wine-shops and other secret enemies?

Having examined, best of kings, your own resources and your enemy's, and having struck peace with him, then do you attend assiduously to the eight everyday occupations – agriculture, trade and the rest? I hope, Bharatarishabha, that your seven principal officers of state,[5] have not succumbed to the influence or blandishments of your enemies, or become idle and complacent because of their wealth? I trust they are all loyal and obedient to you?

I hope your secret counsels are never divulged by yourself or your ministers, or by your trusted spies who go disguised? I hope you are aware of what your friends and your enemies are engaged in? Do you strike peace and make war, each in its proper time? Are you neutral towards those who are neutral towards you? Kshatriya, have you made men like yourself, and old and sage, the restrained and continent, those who know what should and not be done, who are pure of blood and birth, and also devoted to you, your ministers?

Bhaarata, the victories of kings are attributed to sage counsel. Child, is your kingdom protected by ministers who know the Shastras, and who keep their counsel to you close? Are your enemies helpless to harm you? You have not, I hope, fallen victim to sleep? Do you wake up at the proper time? Knowing what yields artha, do you consider in the small hours what you should and should not do the next day?

I hope you neither take decisions by yourself nor consult with too many advisors. Do the secret decisions you take become known across the kingdom? Do you swiftly undertake such tasks, which are of great use and easy to accomplish? Are these measures never obstructed? You do not keep your farmers out of your sight? Do you achieve your purposes through agents who are experienced, incorruptible and trustworthy? Mighty King, I trust that the people only know about your undertakings that have already been accomplished, those that have been begun, and those that are partially completed, but nothing of those that are only being contemplated and have not been begun.

Have you appointed seasoned masters, men who can explain the roots of events, and who know dharma and every branch of knowledge, to instruct your princes and the commanders of your army? You must buy one learned man in place of a thousand fools. It is the learned man who provides comfort in times of distress.

Are your fortresses always stocked amply with gold, food, weapons, water, engines of war, arms and other tools, as with engineers and bowmen? Even one intelligent, brave minister, whose passions are under perfect control, and who has wisdom and judgement, can bring a king or the son of a king the highest prosperity. I ask you, do you have at least a single such minister?

Do you seek to know everything about the eighteen tirthas[6] of your enemy and the fifteen which are your own, through thirty and three spies,

all of whom who must not know one another? Parantapa, do you watch your enemies vigilantly, and without their knowledge?

Is the priest whom you worship humble, pure in blood, renowned, and without either envy or illiberality? Have you engaged a Brahmana of faultless conduct, intelligence, and guileless, as well as thorough in the laws, to perform your daily rituals before the sacred agni? Does he inform you at the proper time when a homa needs to be performed?

Is your astrologer skilled at reading physiognomy, interpreting omens, and competent to neutralise disturbances of nature? Have you engaged respectable servants to serve in respectable offices, indifferent ones in indifferent offices, and lowly ones in offices that are low? Have you appointed loyal, honest ministers, men born into bloodlines which are pure, superior and noble for generations?

You do not, surely, oppress your people with harsh and cruel punishments? Bharatarishabha, do your ministers rule the kingdom in accordance with your dictates? Do your ministers ever slight you like sacrificial priests slighting men who have fallen and can perform no more sacrifices, or like wives slighting husbands who are haughty and incontinent in their behaviour?

Is your Senapati confident, brave, intelligent, patient, of good conduct and noble birth, devoted to you, and able? Do you treat the chief commanders of your army with utmost consideration and regard? Are they men skilled in every kind of warfare, bold, well-behaved, and endowed with prowess? Do you give your soldiers their sanctioned rations and wages at the appointed time? You do not trouble them by withholding these? You do know that, when troops are plunged in misery by receiving irregular or insufficient wages and rations, they are driven to mutiny, which the wise regard as among the most dangerous harms in a kingdom?

Are all the main noblemen devoted to you, and ready to lay down their lives, cheerfully, in battle for you? I hope that you do not allow any one man, of unrestrained passions, to rule many aspects of military concern, pertaining to your army.

Do you have any excellent servants, especially accomplished and of exceptional ability, who are disgruntled about not receiving some extra remuneration from you, as well as some more regard? I hope that you reward men of learning, humility, and mastery over every branch of knowledge with gifts and honour appropriate to their merit?

Bharatarishabha, I trust that you support the wives and children of men who have laid down their lives for you?

Son of Pritha, do you cherish with a father's affection the enemy whom you have weakened or vanquished in battle, and the one who has sought refuge in you? Lord of the Earth, are you equal to all men? Can anyone approach you without fear, even as if you were their mother and father?

O Bull of the race of Bhaarata, do you march against your enemy, immediately, having thought well about the three kinds of forces,[7] when you hear he is weak? Subduer of all your enemies, do you go forth, when the right time comes, having carefully considered all the omens you see, the resolutions you have made, and that final victory depends upon the twelve mandalas?[8] Parantapa, do you give gems and jewels to the main officers of the enemy, as they deserve, without your enemy's knowledge?

Son of Pritha, do you seek to conquer your inflamed enemies, slaves to passion, only after having first conquered your own mind and mastered your own senses? Before actually going to war against your enemy, do you correctly use the four arts of conciliation - with gifts, by creating dissent, with coercion, and only then with force? O King, do you march against your enemy only after first strengthening your own kingdom? And once having set out against them, do you then exert yourself to the utmost to triumph? Having conquered them, do you then protect them with every care?

Does your army comprise the four kinds of forces — the regular soldiers, allies, the irregulars and the mercenaries? Is each of these furnished with the eight necessities for war - chariots, elephants, horses, officers, infantry, camp-followers, spies who have a thorough knowledge of the country, and ensigns led out against your enemies after being well trained by superior officers?

Parantapa, I hope you kill your enemies, Great King, without regard for their seasons of harvest or famine? Rajan, I hope your servants and agents, in your own kingdom and in those of your enemies, attend diligently to their duties and watch over one another.

O King, I hope you employ trusted servants to look after your food, the clothes you wear, and the perfumes you use. I hope your treasury, barns, stables, arsenals, and women's apartments are all protected by servants devoted to you, and always seeking your welfare. I trust that you first protect yourself from your domestic and public servants, and then from the

servants of your relatives; and then your servants from the servants of these others.

Do your servants ever speak to you, in the forenoon, about your extravagant spending on wine, sport, food and women? Are your expenses always covered by a fourth, a third or at least half of your income? Do you look after your relatives, superiors, merchants, the old and other dependants, and those in distress with gold and with food?

Do your clerks and accountants come to you during the mornings, every day, and inform you of your daily income and expenditure? Do you ever dismiss, for no fault, servants who are good at their work, popular and devoted to you? Bhaarata, do you employ superior, average and lowly men, after examining them thoroughly, in offices they deserve?

Rajan, do you employ men who are thievish, or susceptible to temptation, who are hostile to you, or minors? Do you oppress your kingdom with thieves, greedy men, minors or with women?

Are the agriculturists in your kingdom contented? Have you caused large tanks and lakes to be created at fair intervals, throughout your lands, so that your farmers are never entirely dependent on the rains from heaven? Are the farmers in your kingdom wanting in seed or in food? Do you give loans generously to the tillers of the land, taking from them just a fourth of their produce in excess of each hundred measure?

Child, are the four professions of agriculture, trade, cattle-rearing, and money-lending for interest conducted by honest men? For the happiness of your people depends on these. Rajan, do the five brave and wise men - those who watch over the city and the citadel, the merchants and the farmers, and those who punish criminals – always benefit your kingdom by working unitedly and closely with one another?

To protect your city, have your villages been made like towns, the hamlets and the outskirts of villages, like villages? Are all these entirely under your sway? If thieves and robbers sack a town, do your police hunt them through the flat and difficult parts of your kingdom?

Do you comfort the women in your kingdom and protect them? I hope that you never place any confidence in them, nor divulge any secret to them? O King, having heard of danger threatening, do you, after thinking deeply on it, still lie in your inner chambers enjoying every desirable object?

Having slept through the second and third yaamas of the night, do you lie awake during the fourth division of night, reflecting on dharma and artha? Pandava, do you rise from bed at the proper time, clothe yourself royally, show yourself to your people with ministers, who know which times are auspicious and which otherwise? Bane of all enemies, do men wearing red, armed with swords and adorned with ornaments stand beside you to guard your person?

Rajan, are you like Dharma Deva himself to those deserving chastisement, and to those that deserve worship, to those whom you love, as well as to those whom you do not care for? Son of Pritha, do you seek to cure yourself of bodily sickness with medicines and by fasting, and mental afflictions with the advice of the old and the wise? I trust that your personal physicians are well versed in the eight kinds of treatment and that all of them are attached and devoted to you.

Does it ever transpire, O King, that, from pride, folly or greed, you fail to decide between a plaintiff and a defendant who come to you? From covetousness or neglect, do you ever deprive your dependants of their welfare or pensions, those who have sought refuge in you from love or in trust?

Do the people who live in your realm, having been bought by your enemies and uniting against you, ever seek to oppose or raise dispute with you? Do you suppress your weaker enemies with stronger troops and wise counsel? Are all the main chieftains in your lands loyal to you? Are they ready to lay down their lives for you, at your command?

Do you worship Brahmanas and Rishis according to their proficiency at the various branches of learning? I say to you, such reverence is of the highest benefit to you, beyond any doubt. Have you faith in the dharma based on the three Vedas, which was practised by men who lived before you? Do you meticulously follow the precepts by which they lived?

Do you entertain accomplished Brahmanas in your home, with fine food, and give them rich gifts when these feasts conclude? Passions perfectly controlled, with undivided mind, do you strive to perform the Vajapeya and Pundarika yagnas, with their entire complement of rituals? Do you worship your relatives and superiors, the elderly, the Devas, Rishis, Brahmanas, and the lofty nyagrodhas which stand in villages and bless the people in so many ways?

Sinless one, do you cause anger or grief to anyone? Do priests who are able to bestow auspicious fruit upon you always stand at your side? Anagha, are all your purposes and practices such as I have described, which inexorably increase the span of your life and spread your fame, and also further the cause of dharma, artha and kama? He who conducts himself thus, never finds his kingdom in distress or afflicted, and that king subdues the whole world and enjoys great felicity.

Rajan, I hope that no man of good conduct, who is pure and respected, is ever ruined or has his life taken, on a false charge or through theft, by your ministers, either because they are ignorant of the Shastras or out of their greed? Purusharishabha, I trust that your ministers, from greed, never free a real thief, having caught him red-handed with his booty? O Bhaarata, I hope that your ministers can never be bought with bribes, and that they never decide unjustly in disputes between the rich and the poor?

Do you keep yourself free from the fourteen vices of kings – atheism, untruthfulness, anger, carelessness, procrastination, not visiting the wise, idleness, restlessness of mind, taking counsel with only one man, consulting men unacquainted with the craft of artha, abandoning a project decided upon, disclosure of secrets, not accomplishing beneficial projects, and acting without reflection? These ruin even the most well established sovereign.

Have your study of the Veda, your wealth, your knowledge of the Shastras, and your marriage proved fruitful?'

When the Rishi finishes, Yudhishtira asks, 'How, O Muni, do the Vedas, wealth, one's wife, and knowledge of the Shastras bear fruit?'

The Sage replies, "The Vedas bear fruit when he who has studied them performs the Agnihotra and other sacrifices. Wealth is said to bear fruit when he who has it enjoys it himself and also gives it away in charity. A wife proves fruitful when she is useful and when she bears children. Knowledge of the Shastras bears fruit when it results in humility and good behaviour.'

Having thus answered Yudhishtira, Mahamuni Narada asks that righteous king, 'Do your officers of government, who are paid from the taxes levied on the people, take only their just dues from merchants who come from distant lands to your kingdom, impelled by the desire to make profit? Are these Vaisyas, O King, treated with kindness in your capital and

kingdom? Are they able to bring their merchandise here without being cheated either by the buyers or the officials of your government?

O Monarch, do you always listen to the wise and righteous words of old men who know the profound doctrines of artha? Do you make the offerings of honey and clarified butter to Brahmanas, which make the harvest bounteous, swell the numbers of kine in the kingdom, yield an abundance of fruit and flowers, and increase virtue as well?

Do you always give the artists and artisans whom you engage, the materials they need and their wages, for not more than four months together? Do you inspect their work and praise them before good men, and also reward and honour them?

Bharatarishabha, do you live by the precepts and aphorisms of the Rishis, and particularly with regard to matters relating to elephants, horses and chariots? Are the sayings which relate to the science of arms, also those about the engines of war, so useful in towns and fortresses, studied in your court?

Sinless, do you know the arcane mantras and all about the poisons which can kill your enemies? Do you protect your kingdom from fear of fire, serpents and other feral creatures, from disease and rakshasas? Knowing every dharma as you do, do you care like a father for the blind, the dumb, the lame, the deformed, the friendless, and for ascetics who have no homes? Have you banished the six evils, O King - sleep, idleness, fear, anger, weakness of mind, and procrastination?'

The illustrious Kurupungava Yudhishtira listens to what that Brahmanottama says, then bows down and worships at Narada Muni's feet. Delighted by everything he hears, the king says to Narada of celestial form, 'I will do all that you say, for you have swelled my knowledge with your counsel.'

Indeed, Yudhishtira does as Narada asks him to and, in time, becomes sovereign of all the Earth with her girdle of seas.

Narada says, "The king who protects the four varnas - Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra - passes his days in this world happily and then attains the realm of Indra.'"

[1] Pronunciation, grammar, prosody, the explanation of basic philosophical terms, description of religious rites, and astronomy.

[2] Systems of philosophy.

[3] Eloquence, generosity, adroitness in dealing with enemies, memory, knowledge of dharma, and knowledge of politics.

[4] Sowing dissension, chastisement, conciliation, gifts, mantras, medicine and magic.

[5] The governor of the citadel, the commander of forces, the chief judge, the general in interior command, the chief priest, the chief physician, and the chief astrologer.

[6] Road; expedient; school of philosophy.

[7] Infantry, chariots and horse, and elephants.

[8] Reserves, ambuscades, payment given to the troops in advance, etc.

CANTO 6

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Narada Muni finishes speaking, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja worships him appropriately and then, commanded by the Sage, he begins to answer, briefly, the questions the Rishi has asked.

Yudhishthira says, 'Holy One, the laws which you have enumerated are true and proper. As for me, I do observe those laws as best I can. For sure the karma done by kings of yore did bear fruit, and was undertaken from the purest motives to achieve the best possible objects. Master, we certainly wish to tread the same righteous path as those kings, who, besides, were men of perfect self-control.'

Pandu's son, Yudhishtira of great glory, having reverently listened to Narada Muni, and having answered the Sage's question, now falls into a moment's thought. Then, sensing a fine chance, sitting beside the Rishi, the king asks Narada, who sits at his ease, and who can journey into any world at will, in that sabha of kings, 'With the speed of the mind, you range through numberless worlds created by Brahma of yore, seeing all things. Tell me, O Brahmana, have you ever seen, anywhere, a sabha to equal this one of mine, or any superior to it.'

Narada replies, smilingly, sweetly, 'Child, O King, I have never seen or even heard before of a sabha among men built of jewels and gemstones like this one of yours. However, I will describe to you the courts of Yama, King of the Dead, of Varuna of vast intellect, of Indra, King of the Devas, and also of Kubera who has his home on Kailasa. I will also describe to you Brahma's celestial sabha, which dispels all unease.

All these sabhas reflect both divine and human design, and use every form that exists in the universe. The Devas, the Pitrs, the Sadhyas, the Ganas, self-controlled Rishis offering sacrifices, tranquil Munis always at Vedic sacrifice, all offer worship to these sacred courts. All of them I will describe for you, Bharatarishabha, if you have a mind to listen.'

Mahatman Yudhishtira, his brothers and the great Brahmanas present all fold their hands to beg Narada to do so.

Yudhishtira says, 'Describe all the sabhas for us, for we surely wish to listen to you. O Brahmana, of what is each one made? How big is each

sabha, how long and how wide? Who attends upon the Pitamaha in his court, and who upon Indra, Lord of the Devas, and who upon Vivaswan's son Yama? Who waits upon Varuna and upon Kubera in their sabhas?

O Brahmarishi, tell us in detail, for all of us are agog to hear about them.'

Narada replies, 'Listen, O King, all of you, about these sabhas of heaven, one by one.'"

CANTO 7

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'Lustrous is the sabha of Indra, which he has Indra, got as the fruit of his punya. Splendid as the Sun, Sakra himself built his court. Indra's sabha can go anywhere at all, at his will; it is one hundred and fifty yojanas long, a hundred yojanas wide, and five yojanas high. It dispels the infirmities of age, grief, exhaustion and fear, and bestows great fortune. Fine and grand are its apartments, and beautiful the heavenly trees which surround it. Fine are its seats, and it is altogether delightful.

Son of Pritha, in that sabha upon a magnificent throne sits the Lord of the Devas with his wife Sachi of great beauty and fortune. He assumes a form which defies description, a crown upon his head, bright bracelets on his arms, wearing pure white robes, garlands with flowers of many colours, and sits there with Beauty, Fame and Glory beside him.

That illustrious Deva of a hundred sacrifices is waited upon in that sabha, O King, by the Maruts, who are all grihastas, the Siddhas, the Devarishis, the Sadhyas, the Devas, and by Marutas of shining skins, wearing golden garlands, with unearthly forms and shimmering ornaments. All these constantly attend upon Indra Parantapa.

Kaunteya, the celestial Sages, also, all pure-souled, washed of all sin, resplendent like Agni, tejasvins, free of any sorrow, free of anxiety's fever, all performers of the Soma yagna, wait upon and worship Indra.

Parasara and Parvata and Savarni and Galava; and Kankha, and the Muni Gaursiras, and Durvasa, and Krodhana and Swena and the Muni Dhirghatamas; and Pavitrapani, Savarni, Yagnavalkya and Bhaluki; and Udyalaka, Swetaketu and Tandya, and also Bhandayani; and Havishmat, and Garishta, and King Harischandra; and Hridya, Udarshanadilya, Parasarya and Krishibala; Vataskandha, Visakha, Vidhata and Kala; Karaladanta, Tvastri, and Vishwakarman, and Tumburu; and other Rishis, some born of women and others living on air, and others again living on fire - all these worship Indra, the Vajradhari, Lord of all the worlds.

And Sahadeva, and Sunitha, and Valmiki of great tapasya; and Samika of truthful speech, and Prachetas who always keeps his word, and Medhatithi, and Vamadeva, and Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu; and Maruta,

and Marichi, and Sthanu of vast tapasya; and Kakshivat, and Gautama, and Tarkhya, and also the Muni Vaishwanara; and the Muni Kalakavrikshiya, and Asravya, and also Hiranmaya, and Samvarta, and Devahavya, and Viswaksena of great tejas; and Kanva, and Katyayana, O King, and Gargya, and Kaushika - all dwell there, with the celestial waters and plants; and faith, and intelligence, and the Devi Saraswati; and artha, dharma and kama; and lightning, Pandava; and rain-bearing clouds, and the winds, and all the thunder of heaven; the eastern point, the twenty-seven fires which convey the sacrificial butter, Agni and Soma, and the agni of Indra, and Mitra, and Savitri, and Aryaman; Bhaga, Vishwa; the Sadhyas, Brihaspati the Guru, and also Sukra; and Vishwavasu and Chitrasena, and Sumanas; and also Taruna; the Yagnas; the gifts to Brahmanas, the planets, and the stars, O Bhaarata, and the mantras which are chanted during sacrifices - all these dwell there.

And, O King, many Apsaras and Gandharvas please the Lord of the Devas with various dances and music and songs; and with the performance of auspicious rites, and exhibitions of myriad feats of skill -they gratify Satakratu, the slayer of Bala and Vritra.

Besides these, many other Brahmanas and Rajarishis and Devarishis, all splendent as fire, adorned in bright garlands and precious ornaments, frequently visit and leave that sabha, riding in unearthly chariots of diverse kinds.

Brihaspati and Sukra are always present in Indra's sabha; and many other lustrous Rishis of stern vows, and Bhrigu and the Saptarishis, who are equal, O Rajan, to Brahma himself, come to and depart that sabha in vimanas as exquisite as the chariot of Soma, and themselves as brilliant as Soma himself.

This, O Mahabaho, is the sabha of Indra, of a hundred yagnas, which is called Pushkaramalini, which I have seen. Listen now to a description of Yama's sabha.'"

CANTO 8

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Narada says, 'Yudhisthira, now I will tell you about the court of Yama, son of Vivaswat, which was built by Viswakarman. Listen.

Shining like burnished gold, that sabha sprawls across more than a hundred yojanas. Splendid as the Sun, it yields one's every wish. It is neither too warm nor too cold, and it enchants the heart. No grief, no weakness of age, neither hunger nor thirst enter that sabha. Nothing inauspicious finds any place there, or even any ill feeling.

Every object of desire, human or divine, can be found in that mansion - every manner of thing of delight. Sweet, succulent, delicious, pure things to eat, to drink and suck upon, are there in profusion, Parantapa. The vanamalas in that sabha are of unearthly fragrance, and the trees which surround the palatial court yield any fruit one wishes for.

Both hot and cold water are to be found here, sweet and enjoyable. In that sabha, numerous Rajarishis, all most holy, and Brahmarishis of immaculate purity, O Child, happily attend upon and worship Vivaswat's son Yama.

Yayati is there, Nahusha, Puru, Mandhatri, Somaka, Nriga; Rajarishi Trasadasyu, Kritavirya, Srutasravas; Arishtanemi, Siddha, Kritavega, Kriti, Nimi, Pratardana, Sibi, Matsya, Prithulaksha, Brihadratha, Varta, Marutta, Kusika, Sankasya, Sankriti, Dhruva, Chaturaswa, Sadaswormi and Kartavirya; Bhaarata and Suratha, Sunitha, Nishatha, Nala, Divodasa, and Sumanas, Ambarisha, Bhagiratha; Vyaswa, Sadaswa, Vadyaswa, Badhraswa, Prithuvega, Prithusravas, Prishadaswa, Vasumanas, Kshupa, and Sumahabala, Vrishadgu, Rusadru, Vrishasena, Purukutsa, Dhwajin and Rathin; Arshtisena, Dilipa, and the high-souled Ushinara; Ausinari, Pundarika, Saryati, Sarabha, and Suchi; Anga, Rishta, Vena, Dushyanta, Srinjaya and Jaya; Bhangasuri, Sunitha, and Nishadha, and Vahinara; Karandhama, Balhika, Sudyumna, and the mighty Madhu; Aila and the mighty king of the Earth Marutta; Kapota, Trinaka, and Sahadeva, and Arjuna also; Vyaswa; Saswa and Krishaswa and King Sasabindu; Rama, the son of Dasaratha, and Lakshmana, and Pratarddana; Alarka, and

Kakshasena, Gaya, and Gauraswa; Jamadagnya's son Rama, Nabhaga, and Sagara; Bhuridyumna and Mahaswa, Prithaswa, and also Janaka; King Vainya, Varisena, Purujit, and Janamejaya; Brahmadatta, and Trigarta, and Uparichara also; Indradyumna, Bhimajanu, Gauraprishta, Nala, Gaya; Padma and Muchukunda, Bhuridyumna, Prasenajit; Aristanemi, Sudyumna, Prithulaswa, and Ashtaka also; a hundred kings of the Matsya race and hundred of the Nipa and a hundred of the Gaya races; a hundred kings all named Dhritarashtra; eighty kings named Janamejaya; a hundred sovereigns called Brahmadatta, and a hundred kings bearing the name Iri; more than two hundred Bhishmas, and also a hundred Bhimas; a hundred Prativindhyas, a hundred Nagas, a hundred Hayas, and a hundred Palasas, and a hundred called Kasa and Kusa; that king of kings Santanu, and your father Pandu, Usangava, Sataratha, Devaraja, Jayadratha; the most intelligent Rajarishi Vrishadarbha with his ministers; and a thousand other kings known by the name of Sasabindu, who have died, having performed many grand horse-sacrifices with munificent gifts to the Brahmanas - these holy Royal Sages of magnificent achievements and vast knowledge of the Shastras, O King, wait upon and worship the son of Vivaswat in that sabha.

And Agastya and Matanga, and Kala, and Mrityu, performers of sacrifices, the Siddhas, and many Yogins; the Pitrs,[1] as also others who have forms; the Kalachakra, wheel of time, and Agni, the burning conveyer of the sacrificial butter; all sinners among human beings, as also those that have died during the winter solstice; the helpers of Yama have been appointed to count the allotted days of everybody and everything; the Singsapa, Palasa, Kasa, and Kusa trees and plants, in their embodied forms - all these, Rajan, wait upon and worship the God of Justice in his sabha.

Many others, too, are present at the court of the king of the Pitrs. So numerous are they that I cannot tell you either all their names or their great deeds. This enchanting and vast sabha travels anywhere, at the will of its Lord. Viswakarman built it after a prolonged tapasya. And, O Bhaarata, brilliant with its own lustre, it stands beautiful, in all its glory.

Sannyasis of stern tapasya, grave vratas, of truthful speech, serene, pure and of sacred karma, their bodies radiant, wearing spotless robes, bracelets, garlands of flowers, golden earrings, and adorned by their own holy deeds as with the marks of their order constantly visit that sabha. Many bright Gandharvas and Apsaras fill every corner of the court with music and songs, with dance and with their unearthly laughter.

Fine perfumes, sweet sounds and garlands of celestial flowers make that an always supremely blest sabha. Hundreds of thousands of beings of dharma, of heavenly beauty and great wisdom, always attend upon and worship the illustrious Yama, Lord of the created, in that court.

Such, Rajan, is the sabha of the lustrous king of the manes. Now I will describe for you the sabha of Varuna, also called Pushkaramalini."

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[1] Of the kinds known as called Agniswattas, Fenapa, Ushampa, Swadhavat, and Varhishada.

CANTO 9

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Yudhishtira, the celestial sabha of Varuna is unequalled for its splendour. It is as large as Yama's hall, .A. its walls and arches all pure white. Viswakarman built it in the waters. Countless unworldly trees made of gemstones and jewels, yielding excellent flowers and fruit, surround it, as well as numerous fine plants laden with blooms, blue and yellow, black and grey, white and red. Within their bowers lakhs of birds of myriad species, beautiful and variegated, constantly sing their sweet songs.

Salubrious is the air in and around that sabha, neither cold nor hot. Varuna's enchanting palace, blemishlessly white, contains numberless chambers, all furnished with fine seats. Within sits Varuna, wearing celestial raiment, ornaments and jewellery, with his queen, daubed with heavenly perfumes and smeared with sandalwood paste of unearthly redolence.

The Adityas wait upon and worship the illustrious Varuna, Lord of Waters; and Vasuki and Takshaka, and the Naga Airavana; Krishna and

Lohita; Padma and Chitra of great tejas; the Nagas called Kambala and Aswatara; and Dhritarashtra and Balahaka; Manimat and Kundadhara; and Karkotaka and Dhananjaya; Panimat and the mighty Kundaka, O Lord of the Earth; and Prahlada and Mushikada, and Janamejaya - all with auspicious marks, mandalas, and hoods extended. These and many other great snakes, Yudhishtira, without fear of any kind, wait upon and adore the illustrious Varuna.

And, O King, Bali the son of Virochana, and Naraka, subduer of the whole Earth; Sanghraha and Viprachitti, and the Danavas called Kalakhanjas; and Suhanu and Durmukha and Sankha and Sumanas and also Sumati; and Ghatodara, and Mahaparswa, and Karthana and, also, Pitara and Viswarupa, Swarupa and Virupa; Mahasiras and Dasagriva, Bali, and Meghavasas and Dasavara; Tittiva and Vitabhuta, and Sanghrada, and Indratapana - these Daityas and Danavas, all wearing earrings, crowns and draped in garlands, wearing unworldly robes, all blessed with great boons and possessed of untold valour, and immortal, and all of fine conduct and

excellent vows, wait upon and worship the illustrious Varuna, the Deva whose weapon is the paasa, in that sabha.

And, O King, the four Oceans are there, the river Bhagirathi, the Kalindi, the Vidisa, the Vena, the swift-flowing Narmada; the Vipasa, the Satadu, the Chandrabhaga, the Saraswati; the Iravati, the Vitasta, the Sindhu, the Devanadi; the Godavari, the Krishnavena; and Kaveri, queen of rivers; the Kimpuna, the Visalya and the river Vaitarani, too; the Tritiya, the Jyeshtila, and the great Sona; the Charmanwati and the mighty Parnasa; the Sarayu, the Varavatya, and that river-queen, the Langali; the Karatoya, the Atreyi, the red Mahanada, the Laghanti, the Gomati, the Sandhya, and also the Tristrolasi - these and other rivers, all sacred and famed tirthas of pilgrimage, as well as other streams and holy waters, lakes and wells and springs, and tanks, large and small, all in their personified forms, O Bhaarata, wait upon and worship the Lord Varuna.

The cardinal points of the heavens, the Earth, and all the Mountains, as also every species of aquatic creature, all worship Varuna in his sabha. Numerous tribes of Gandharvas and Apsaras, given to music and song, wait upon Varuna, singing hymns of praise to him.

All the mountains which are known for being beautiful and jewel-rich, come, embodied, to that sabha and enjoy sweet converse with one another. Varuna's foremost minister, Sunabha, surrounded by his sons and grandsons, also attends upon his master, along with a sacred body of water called Go, personified. All these worship that Deva.

Bharatarishabha, this is the sabha of Varuna, which I have seen during my wandering. Listen now to a description of the Hall of Kubera.'"

CANTO 10

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'The splendid court of Kubera Vaisravana, O Rajan, is a hundred yojanas long and seventy yojanas wide. Vaisravana himself built this sabha, using his tapasya shakti. As brilliant as the peaks of Kailasa, this edifice eclipses the very Moon with its radiance. Supported by Guhyakas, that palace appears to be fixed to the sky. Of unearthly contrivance, it is exquisite, with lofty golden chambers, of all delights, scented with heavenly perfumes, and encrusted with priceless jewels past counting.

It resembles the summits of massed white clouds, and truly seems to float on air. Painted in celestial gold, it appears to be adorned with streaks of lightning. Within that sabha, upon a beautiful throne bright as the Sun, covered with cloths of heaven, furnished with a peerless footstool, sits the Lord Vaisravana, handsome and pleasant, wearing fine robes, priceless ornaments, sparkling earrings, and surrounded by his thousand wives.

Cool, delightful breezes, which murmur through forests of tall Mandaras, bear the scents of great jungles of jasmines and also the fragrance of the lotuses which float upon the river Alaka and those of the divine gardens of Nandana, and these always minister to the pleasure of the King of the Yakshas.

Here the Devas, with the Gandharvas, and various troupes of Apsaras, sing in chorus, Rajan, songs of heavenly sweetness. Misrakesi and Rambha, and Chitrasenaa, and Suchismita; and Charunetra, and Ghritachi and Menaka, and Punjikasthala; and Viswachi, Sahajanya, and Pramlocha and Urvasi and Ira, and Varga and Saurabheyi, and Samichi, and Budbuda, and Lata - these and a thousand other Apsaras, and Gandharvas, all masters and mistresses of music and dance, attend on Kubera, Lord of Treasures.

That sabha, always brimming with notes from divine instruments and voices, as with the sounds of many Gandharva and Apsara tribes dancing, is full of charm and joy. The Gandharvas called Kinnaras, others known as Naras, and Manibhadra, and Dhanada, and Swetabhadra and Guhyaka; Kaseraka, Gandakandu, and the mighty Pradyota; Kustumburu, Pisacha, Gajakarna, and Viskalaka, Varahakarna, Tamroshta, Falakaksha, and

Falodaka; Hansachuda, Sikhavarta, Hemanetra, Vibhishana, Pushpanana, Pingalaka, Sonitoda and Pravalaka; Vrikshavasyaniketa, and Chiravasas - these, O Bhaarata, and lakhs of other Yakshas always wait upon Kubera.

The Goddess Lakshmi ever remains there, also Kubera's son Nalakubara. I myself and many others like me, we go often to that Hall, as do many Brahmana Rishis and Devarishis. Numerous Rakshasas and Gandharvas, besides those I named, attend upon and worship, in that sabha, the illustrious Lord of all treasures.

O tiger among kings, the lustrous husband of Uma, Lord of created things, the three-eyed Mahadeva, wielder of the trident, the slayer of the Asura Bhaganetra, the mighty God of the fierce bow, surrounded by Ganasanghas, spirits in thousands, some dwarfish, some of fierce mien, some hunchbacked, some with blood-red eyes, some of frightful yells, some feeding upon fat and flesh, and some too terrible to look at, but all armed with diverse weapons and blessed with the speed of wind, along with the Devi Parvathi, who is always cheerful and who knows no tiredness, all come to the court of their dear friend Kubera, the Lord of Treasures.

Hundreds of Gandharva lords, with joyful hearts and wearing finery, and Viswavasu, and Haha and Huhu; and Tumburu and Parvarta, and Sailusha; and Chitrasena, musical genius, and also Chitraratha – these and countless other Gandharvas worship the Lord of Treasures.

Chakradharman, Lord of the Vidyadharas, with his followers, wait in that Hall, upon the Lord of Treasures; and Kinnaras, in their hundreds, and innumerable kings, Bhagadatta their lord; and Druma, Lord of the Kimpurushas; and Mahendra, Lord of the Rakshasas; and Gandhamadana accompanied by so very many Yakshas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas wait upon the Lord of Treasures.

Vibhishana of dharma, also, there worships his elder brother Kubera[1]. The Mountains Himavat, Pariyatra, Vindhya, Kailasa, Mandara, Malaya, Durdura, Mahendra, Gandhamadana, Indrakila, Sunabha, and the Sunrise and Sunset mountains - these and many other ranges, besides, all in their personified forms, with Meru standing before the rest, wait upon and worship the lambent Lord of Treasures.

The illustrious Nandiswara, and Mahakala, and many spirits with arrowy ears and sharp-pointed mouths, Kasta, Kutimukha, Danti, and Vijaya of great asceticism, with the mighty white bull of Siva roaring deep, all come

to that sabha. Besides these, many other Rakshasas and Pisachas worship Kubera in that Grand Hall.

Kubera, son of Pulastya, once performed tapasya and worshipped Siva in all the known ways of adoration. He then sat by the very side of the Devadeva, God of Gods, creator of the three worlds, Mahadeva surrounded by his ganas. One day, Bhava, the most high, made Kubera his friend and then on, O King, Siva always dwells in the sabha of his friend, the Lord of Treasures.

Those princes of all gemstones in the three worlds, Sankha and Padma, in their embodied forms, with all the jewels of the Earth, also personified, worship Kubera.

I have seen Kubera's sabha of fascination, which can cross the firmament, and it is, Rajan, as I have described. Now listen to what I say about the sabha of Brahma, the Grandsire.'"

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[1]Ganguli says Croesus!

CANTO 11

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada sas, 'Listen to me, Child, and I will tell you about I the sabha of the Pitamaha, the House which none can describe adequately.

In the Krita Yuga, of old, the exalted Deva Aditya once came down from heaven into the world of men. He had seen the sabha of Brahma Svayambhuva, and now joyfully ranged the face of the Earth, to see what he could here. Pandava, it was then that I met him and that God told me, Bharatarishabha, about the unearthly Hall of the Grands ire, which is immeasurable, subtle, and indescribable, in form and shape, and which enchants and delights the hearts of all who see it with its splendour.

Bharatarishabha, when I heard about the glories of that sabha, Rajan, I wanted to see it. I asked Aditya, "Exalted one, I want to see the sacred sabha of the Pitamaha. Lord of Light, tell me, through what tapasya, karma, mantras or yagnas can I look upon that wondrous court, which washes every sin away?"

Aditya, God of Day, Deva of a thousand rays, replied, "With your mind restrained in dhyana, keep the Brahmavrata of a thousand years."

I went to the bosom of the Himavat and began that great vow. When I finished, the exalted and sinless Surya Deva of terrific tejas, who knows no tiredness, took me with him to the sabha of Brahma. Rajan, it is impossible to describe that sabha in words, for, in a moment it assumes a new and different form, which language cannot capture.

Bhaarata, I cannot tell you how vast it is or what its shape is. I had never seen anything like it before. It brings joy to those within it, and it is neither hot nor cold. Hunger, thirst and every manner of unease vanish as soon as one enters that Hall.

It appears to be made of scintillating jewels of countless kinds. No columns seem to support it, and being eternal, it knows no decay. It is self-refulgent, and with its numberless splendid lights it excels the Moon, the Sun and the Fire in lustre. Situated in Swarga, it blazes forth, as if it were chiding the illuminer of the day.

In that sabha, the Supreme Deity, the Grandsire of all created things, who has made them all through his maya shakti, abides ever. And Daksha,

Prachetas, Pulaha, Marichi, Kashyapa the master, Bhrigu, Atri, and Vasishta and Gautama, and also Angiras, and Pulastya, Kratu, Prahlada, and Kardama, these Prajapatis, and Angirasa of the Atharvan Veda, the Balakhilyas, the Marichipas; Intelligence, Space, Knowledge, Air, Heat, Water, Earth, Sound, Touch, Form, Taste, Scent; Nature, and the Gunas of Nature, and the elemental and primal causes of the world – all dwell in that sabha beside the Lord Brahma.

And Agastya of great tejas, and Markandeya of great tapasya, and Jamadagni and Bharadwaja, and Samvarta, and Chyavana, and Durvasa the high, and the virtuous Rishyasringa, the illustrious Sanatkumara of great tapasya, master of all things regarding Yoga; Asita and Devala, and Jaigishavya who knows truth; Rishabha, Ajitasatru, and Mani of great vitality; and the science of healing with its eight branches - all in their personified forms, O Bhaarata; Soma with all the stars and the constellations; Aditya with all his rays; the Vayus; the Yagnas, the Declarations of intent in sacrifices, the vital principles - these luminous and vow-observing beings personified, and many others, too numerous to name, all attend upon Brahma in that sabha.

Wealth, Religion, Desire, Joy, Aversion, Asceticism and Tranquillity -all wait upon the Supreme Deity in that palace. The twenty tribes of the Gandharvas and Apsaras, as also their seven other tribes, all the Lokapalas, Sukra, Brihaspati, Budha, Angaraka, Sani, Rahu, and the other Planets; the Mantras, the secret Mantras of that Veda; the rites of Harimat and Vasumat; the Adityas with Indra, the two Agnis, Agnisoma and Indragni, the Marutas, Viswakarman, the Vasus, O Bhaarata; the Pitrs, and every sacrificial libation, the four Vedas, Rig, Sama, Yajuh, and Atharva; all the sciences and branches of learning; the Itihasas and all the minor branches of learning; the several Vedangas; the planets, the Sacrifices, the Soma, all the Devas; Savitri, who is Gayatri, the seven kinds of metre; Understanding, Patience, Memory, Wisdom, Intelligence, Fame, Forgiveness; the Hymns of the Sama Veda; the Science of all hymns, all the kinds of Verses and Songs; various Commentaries with arguments – all in personified forms, O King; and various Plays and Poems and Stories - these also, and countless others wait upon the Supreme Deity in that sabha.

Kshanas, Lavas, Muhurtas, Day, Night, Fortnights, Months, the six Seasons, O Bhaarata; Years, Yugas, the four kinds of Days and Nights, and that eternal, imperishable, undecaying, most excellent Kala Chakra, the

Wheel of Time, and also the Wheel of Dharma, Virtue - these always wait there, O Yudhishtira; and Aditi, Diti, Danu, Surasa, Vinata, Ira, Kalika, Surabhi, Devi, Sarama, Gautami and the goddesses Prabha and Kadru - these mothers of the celestials; and Rudrani, Sree, Lakshmi, Bhadra, Shashthi, the Earth, Ganga, Hri, Swaha, Kriti, the goddess Sura, Sachi Pushti, Arundhati, Samvritti, Asa, Niyati, Srishti, Rati - these and many other Devis wait upon the Creator of all.

The Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Marutas, Aswinas, the Viswadevas, Sadhyas, and the Pitrs blessed with the swiftness of the mind - these wait there upon the Grandsire. And, Bharatarishabha, know that there are seven classes of Pitrs, of which four have embodied forms and the remaining three dwell there without bodies or forms.

It is known that the illustrious Vairajas, Agniswattas and Garhapatyas, three classes of Pitrs, range in heaven. And those amongst the Pitrs that are called the Somapas, the Ekasringras, the Chaturvedas and the Kalas are ever worshipped amongst the four varnas of men. Gratified first with the Soma rasa, these later gratify Soma. All these tribes of Pitrs wait upon the Lord of Creation and joyfully worship the Supreme God of measureless tejas.

And Rakshasas, Pisachas, Danavas and Guhyakas; Nagas, Pakshis, and various beasts; and all the great beings, mobile and unmoving - all worship the Pitamaha. And Purandara, Lord of the Devas, and Varuna and Kubera and Yama, and Mahadeva with Uma, always go there. And, Rajadhiraja, Mahasena Kartikeya also adores the Grandsire there. Narayana himself, and the Devarishis, and the Rishis called Balakhilyas, and all beings born of female wombs and all those not womb-born, and whatever else there is in the three worlds, which moves and the immobile, I saw there, know, O King.

And eighty thousand celibate Rishis, their vital seed indrawn, and O Pandava, fifty thousand Rishis, with sons - I saw all these there. The dwellers in heaven go to that sabha look upon the Supreme God, when they like, and worshipping him by bowing their heads, return to their abodes.

King of men, the Grandsire of all created beings, the Soul of the Universe, the self-created Brahma of fathomless intellect and glory, equally merciful to all creatures, honours each as they deserve, and gratifies, with sweet speech and gifts of wealth and other things of enjoyment, the Devas, the Daityas, the Nagas, the Brahmanas, the Yakshas, the Pakshis, the

Kaleyas, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, and all the other lofty beings who come to him as his guests.

And that sabha of delight, O Child, always throngs with those who come and go. Brimming with every kind of tejas, worshipped by Brahmarishis, that celestial Hall blazes forth with the divine and graceful possessions of Brahma and is enchanting to look at. Tiger among kings, even as this sabha of yours is unrivalled in the world of men, so is the sabha of Brahma, which I have seen, peerless in all in all the worlds.

These sabhas I have seen, O Bhaarata, in the realm of the celestials. This sabha of yours is unquestionably the best in the world of men!'"

CANTO 12

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says Best among all the eloquent, from your description of the different sabhas, it seems that almost all .A. the kings of the Earth are to be found in the sabha of Yama. And, O Master, almost all the Nagas, the main Daityas, Rivers and Oceans are to be found in Varuna's sabha. So, too, the Yakshas, the Guhyakas, the Rakshasas, the Gandharvas and Apsaras and the God who has the Bull for his vahana are to be found in the sabha of the Lord of Treasures. You have said that in the sabha of the Grandsire, all the great Rishis, all the Devas, all the branches of learning are present. For the sabha of Sakra, you have named, O Muni, all the Devas, the Gandharvas, and various Rishis.

But, Mahamuni, you have named just a single king of the Earth as living in the sabha of the illustrious King of the Devas – the Rajarishi Harishchandra. What deed did that celebrated king do, or what great tapasya did he perform with what unwavering vratas, because of which he has become equal to Indra himself?

O Brahmana, how did you also meet my father, the noble Pandu, who now dwells in the realm of the Pitrs? Lofty one, of pure vratas, did he say anything to you? Ah, tell me everything; I am agog.'

Narada says, 'King of kings, I will tell you everything you want to know about Harishchandra, I will tell you of his matchless excellence. He was a powerful king, indeed, an emperor of all the kings of the Earth, and they obeyed him. Rajan, riding alone in a triumphal chariot, decked with gold, Harishchandra brought the whole world, with her seven dwipas, under his sway with the power of his arms.

Having subdued the entire Earth, with her mountains, forests and rivers, he prepared to perform the great Rajasuya yagna, the imperial sacrifice, and at his command all the kings of the world brought untold wealth to that sacrifice. All of them agreed to be distributors of food and gifts to the Brahmanas who were fed on the occasion.

During that sacrifice, King Harishchandra gave away to anyone that asked five times as much gold as they wanted. When the yagna was concluded, the king pleased the Brahmanas who came from many distant

countries with bounteous gifts and wealth of many kinds. Delighted with the feasts of food and other gifts, given to their heart's content, and with the heaps of jewels, they began to say, "King Harischandra is greater than any king, ever, both in fame and splendour."

Know, O Rajan, this was why Harishchandra shone more brightly than thousands of other kings. The mighty Harishchandra concluded his great sacrifice and was installed as sovereign emperor of the Earth, and he was radiant upon his throne. Bharatarishabha, every king who performs the Rajasuya yagna attains to the kingdom of Indra and passes his time in felicity in Indra's company.

Those kings, too, who give up their lives on the field of battle, without ever turning their backs on the fight, find Indra's halls and live in joy with him. Those, again, who quit their bodies after stern tapasya, attain the same realm and shine there for many an age.

King of the Kurus, O son of Kunti, seeing the good fortune of Harischandra and wondering at it, your father did tell me something.

Knowing that I was coming to this world of men, he bowed to me and said, "O Rishi, you must tell Yudhishtira that, because his brothers all obey him, he can conquer the whole world. Once he does this, let him perform a Rajasuya yagna. He is my son; if he performs that sacrifice, like Harischandra I might also soon attain to Indraloka, and there in his sabha pass countless years in uninterrupted bliss."

I replied to him, "O King, I will tell your son all this if I go to the world of men."

Purushavyaghra, I have now told you what your father said to me. Pandava, fulfil your father's wishes. If you perform that sacrifice, you will then be able, along with your dead ancestors, to enter the realm of the king of the Devas. It is said that many obstacles and fears attend the performance of this great sacrifice. A race of Rakshasas called Brahma Rakshasas, whose task it is to obstruct every sacrifice, will do everything in their power to stop a Rajasuya yagna, once it has begun.

When such a sacrifice is undertaken, there might be a war which could destroy the Kshatriyas and create an occasion for the destruction of the very world. Even a slight mischance during a Rajasuya yagna may bring the whole world to ruin. Reflect upon all this, O King of kings, and do what is good for you.

Be vigilant in protecting the four varnas among your subjects. Grow in prosperity and enjoy every felicity. Please Brahmanas with gifts of wealth. I have now answered in detail everything which you asked. With your leave now, I will go to Dwaravati, city of the Dasarhas.'

O Janamejaya, having spoken thus to the son of Pritha, Narada goes away, accompanied by the Rishis with whom he had come. When Narada has left King Yudhishtira and his brothers begin to think about that greatest of sacrifices which is called the Rajasuya yagna."

CANTO 13

LOKAPALA SABHAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After listening to Narada, Yudhishtira begins to sigh. O Bhaarata, plunged in thoughts of the Rajasuya, the king has no peace. Having heard about the glory of the illustrious kings of yore, knowing for certain now about attaining realms of grace through the performance of sacrifice and the resultant punya, and, especially, thinking of the Rajarishi Harischandra, who performed the great yagna, Yudhishtira wants to prepare to undertake a Rajasuya yagna.

Offering worship to his ministers and others in his sabha, and being worshipped by them in return, he initiates discussions about that sacrifice with them. After deep reflection, that King of kings, Bull among Kurus, turns his mind towards preparing for the Rajasuya. However, then, considering dharma, that prince of magnificent energy and prowess sets his heart again on discovering what would be good for all his people. For Yudhishtira, best of all good men, is unvaryingly kind to his subjects, and works for the weal of all, without distinctions.

Indeed, shaking off both anger and pride, Yudhishtira always says, 'Give each his due,' and the only words he likes to hear are, '*Blessed be Dharma! Blessed be Dharma!*

Thus Yudhishtira rules and is like a father to all his people; there is no one in his kingdom that bears any hostility towards him. Hence, he comes to be known as Ajatasatru - he without an enemy. The king cherishes everyone as belonging to his family, and Bhima rules justly over all. Arjuna, the perfectly ambidextrous bowman, protects the kingdom from outside enemies, while the wise Sahadeva administers justice impartially. Nakula shows great humility towards everyone, and this was his nature.

Because of all this the kingdom is free from disputes and fear of every kind; and the people attend to their svadharma. The rain is plentiful, and none can ask for any more; the kingdom's prosperity grows. Because of the dharma and virtue of the king money-lenders, makers of articles needed for sacrifices, cattle-breeders, farmers and traders: why, all and everything, grow in prosperity.

During the reign of Yudhishtira there is no extortion in the kingdom, no stringent realisation of arrears of rent, no fear of disease, of fire, or of death by poisoning and mantras. It is never heard during that time that criminals, thieves, cheats or royal favourites ever enjoy any liberties - with the king, or the people, or even amongst one another.

Kshatriyas, kings conquered during the 'six occasions' wait on the king, to see to his welfare and to worship him always, while Vaishyas of the different classes come to pay him the taxes on their occupations. Thus during the reign of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, his kingdom prospers. Why, the prosperity of the kingdom is swelled not only through these, but even by those who are addicted to voluptuousness and indulge in every luxury to their fill.

Yudhishtira, King of Kings, whose sway extends everywhere, is possessed of every accomplishment and treats all things with forbearance. Rajan, whichever countries that celebrated and splendid king conquers, their people, from Brahmanas to Sudras, become more attached to him than to their own fathers and mothers.

Now King Yudhishtira, most eloquent of men, calls together his ministers and his brothers and asks them repeatedly about the Rajasuya yagna.

All the ministers speak solemnly to the wise Yudhishtira, who wants to perform the imperial sacrifice, 'He who already owns a kingdom wishes to become an emperor through the yagna that confers all the attributes of Varuna on a king. O Prince of the Kurus, all your friends believe that you are worthy of becoming an emperor, indeed, that the time is ripe for you to perform the Rajasuya yagna.

Because of your possessions as a Kshatriya, we say the time has come for the performance of the sacrifice during which Rishis of austere vratas kindle six fires by chanting mantras from the Sama Veda. At the conclusion of the Rajasuya yagna, the sacrificer is installed as sovereign of the empire, and he is rewarded with the fruit of every other sacrifice, including the Agnihotra. For this, he is called the conqueror of all.

Mahabaho, you are more than capable of performing this yagna. All of us obey you, and very soon you will be able to undertake the Rajasuya. So, Maharajan, resolve to do it without further discussion.'

So say all his friends and ministers to the king, separately and together. Rajan, having heard these good, brave, agreeable and weighty words,

Yudhishtira Parantapa, in his mind, is inclined to acquiesce. Having heard what his friends and counsellors say, and also knowing his own strength, O Bhaarata, yet the king reflects repeatedly on the matter.

After this, Yudhishtira, intelligent and virtuous, wise in counsel, consults again with his brothers, with the illustrious Ritvijas around him, with his ministers, and with Dhaumya and Dwaipayana, and others.

Yudhishtira says, 'How will this desire of mine to perform the Rajasuya yagna, which is worthy of an emperor, become fruitful through merely the consequence of my faith and speech?'

O you with eyes like lotus petals, asked this by the king, they reply then to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, 'You well know the dictates of dharma,

O King, and so you are worthy of performing the awesome Rajasuya yagna.'

When the Ritvijas and the Rishis say these words to the king, his ministers and his brothers approve warmly of what they say. However, that most wise king, his mind perfectly controlled, wishing the weal of the world, yet again reflects on the matter and considers his own strength and his resources, all the circumstances of time and place, his income and expenditure. For, he knows that the wise never come to grief because they always act only after thorough deliberation.

Yudhishtira thinks that he should not begin the sacrifice only by his own resolve; carefully considering the gravity of the yagna, he thinks of Krishna, scourge of sinners, to be the best one to decide, because he knows that Krishna is the greatest of all persons, of measureless tejas, mighty-armed, un-born, yet born among men purely from his own will.

The Pandava thinks about Krishna's godlike deeds and decides that there is nothing unknown to him, nothing Krishna cannot achieve, nothing he cannot endure; and so concluding, Pritha's son Yudhishtira sends a messenger to that Master of all beings, sending through his man his blessings and greetings such as an older man does to one younger than himself.

Riding in a swift chariot, that messenger arrives in Dwaravati among the Yadavas and approaches Krishna. When Achyuta Krishna hears that Pritha's son wants to see him, he, too, becomes desirous of seeing his cousin. In his chariot drawn by fleet horses, flashing through many lands, Krishna, with Indrasena, arrives in Indraprastha.

Arriving in Indraprastha, Janardana comes directly to Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira receives Krishna with fatherly love, and Bhima also receives him likewise. Then Krishna comes in joy to greet his father's sister Kunti. When the twins have worshipped him, with reverence, he begins to speak in great delight with Arjuna, his friend, who is overjoyed to see him. When Krishna has rested awhile in a delightful apartment, and is refreshed, Yudhishtira comes to him at his leisure and tells him all about the Rajasuya yagna.

Yudhishtira says, 'I want to perform the Rajasuya, but that yagna cannot be undertaken just by my wishing to perform it. Krishna, you know everything about the royal sacrifice and what is needed for its performance. Only he can accomplish it in whom everything is possible, who is worshipped everywhere and who is the King of kings.

My friends and my ministers have come to me and said that I should undertake the yagna. But, Krishna, what you say about this will be my final guide. Some ministers do not see the true hazards of such an undertaking, out of their love; others from self-interest say only what is agreeable. Some, again, see what benefits them as being the course to follow. Thus, men give counsel of matters which await deciding.

But you, O Krishna, are above these motives. You are beyond both desire and anger. You must tell me what is truly most beneficial for the world.'"

CANTO 14

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA

"Krishna said, 'Maharajan, you are worthy and possess every quality needed to perform the Rajasuya yagna. You know everything, O Bhaarata, yet let me tell you something: those who now go in the world as Kshatriyas are inferior in every way to the Kshatriyas that Rama, the son of Jamadagnya, exterminated.

Mahipati, Lord of the Earth, Bharatarishabha, you know what kind of rule these Kshatriyas, guided by the laws and traditions handed down from generation to generation, have established amongst themselves, and how competent they are to perform the Rajasuya yagna.

Many royal lines, as well as other ordinary Kshatriyas, say that they are descendants of Aila and Ikshwaku. The descendants of Aila, O King, as also the kings of Ikshwaku's race are, know, each divided into a hundred separate dynasties. The descendants of Yayati and the Bhojas are great, both in extent and achievements. These last today are scattered all over the Earth, and all Kshatriyas worship the prosperity of these kings.

However, King Jarasandha has overwhelmed the power and prosperity enjoyed by their entire order and, overpowering them with his prowess, has set himself at the head of all these kings. Jarasandha enjoys sovereignty over the middle portion of the Earth, and he has resolved to create disunion amongst us.

Rajan, a king who is the paramount lord of all kings, and in whom alone the dominion of the world is vested, deserves to be called an emperor. Sisupala of Chedi, of great vitality, has placed himself under Jarasandha's protection and has become his Senapati, the Commander of all his forces. The mighty Baka, king of the Karushas, who can do battle using maya, waits upon Jarasandha as his sishya. Besides, two others, Hansa and Dimbhaka, of great tejas and atman, have sought shelter with the mighty Jarasandha.

There are others as well - Dantavakra, Karusa, Karava and Meghavahana, who serve Jarasandha. He, too, who wears upon his head the jewel known as the most wonderful on Earth, the king of the Yavanas, who has chastened Muru and Naraka, and whose power is unlimited, who rules

the west like another Varuna, whose name is Bhagadatta, who is an old friend of your father, has bowed his head before Jarasandha, both by what he says and by what he does. However, in his heart he is bound by love for you, since he regarded your father as his son.

O King, that Lord of the Earth whose dominions extend in the west and the south, your maternal uncle Purujit, that fearless perpetuator of the race of Kunti, that slayer of all enemies, is the one king who has regard for you only out of love.

Then, he whom I did not kill, the vile wretch of the Chedis, who displays himself to the world as a divine one, and whom the world has also come to regard as such, who from his witlessness always carries the emblems of the Avatara, that king of Vanga, Pundra and the Kiratas, who is known in this world as Paundraka, and who also calls himself Vasudeva, has also allied himself with Jarasandha.

Bhishmaka, the mighty lord of the Bhojas, friend of Indra, slayer of hostile Kshatriyas, Bhishmaka who governs a fourth part of the world, who with his knowledge conquered the Pandyas and the Kratha-Kausikas, whose brother, the brave Akriti, was like Jamdagni's son Rama, also serves Jarasandha, Master of Magadha. We are also Bhishmaka's relatives and so we do what is agreeable to him, but he does not respect us and always tries to do us harm. Rajan, he hardly seems aware of his own might or the honour of the great race to which he belongs; he is swayed just by Jarasandha's shining fame and has allied himself to the Magadhan.

Also, noble one, the eighteen tribes of Bhojas, fearing Jarasandha, have all fled west, as have the Surasenas, the Bhadrakas, the Bodhas, the Salwas, the Patachcharas, the Susthalas, the Sukuttas, and the Kulindas, along with the Kuntis. The king of the Salwayanas, his brothers and followers, the southern Panchalas and the eastern Kosalas have fled to the land of the Kuntis; so also the Matsyas and the Sannyastapadas, overcome by fear, leaving their dominions in the north, have fled south. Terrified by Jarasandha's power, the Panchalas fled in all directions.

Some time ago, the foolish Kamsa, who persecuted the Yadavas, married two of Jarasandha's daughters, Asti and Prapti, the sisters of his son, another Sahadeva. Strengthened by this alliance, the villainous Kamsa tyrannised his kinsmen and gained odium for himself. He also harried the old Bhoja kings, but they sought our help.

We gave Ahuka's beautiful daughter to be Akrura's wife, and then Balarama and I killed Kamsa and Sunamana, to do our relatives a service. However, even after the immediate cause of fear was removed, his father-in-law Jarasandha took up arms against us. We decided that if even we, the eighteen younger branches of the Yadava tribes, attacked our enemy concertedly with great weapons, we would still not be able to vanquish him, not in three hundred years.

Jarasandha had two friends who were like immortals and, in strength, the strongest among all men - they were called Hansa and Dimbhaka, both of whom no weapon could slay. With them for allies, the mighty Jarasandha, I believed, could not be killed even if the three worlds united against him. Most intelligent of men, this was not merely my opinion, but all the other kings also felt the same way.

However, there was another king, also called Hansa, and Balarama engaged him in battle and killed him after eighteen days of fight. Bhaarata, when Dimbhaka heard the people saying that Hansa was slain, he felt could not bear to live without his friend and killed himself by throwing himself into the Yamuna. Later, when his friend Hansa, scourge of hostile armies, returned and heard that Dimbhaka had killed himself, he ran straight to the Yamuna and took his life by throwing himself into her waters.

Then, O Bharatarishabha, Jarasandha heard that both Hansa and Dimbhaka were dead and he turned back home with a broken heart. When he retreated, we were delighted and lived joyfully and in peace in Mathura.

Until Jarasandha's daughter, the lovely, lotus-eyed widow of Hansa, stricken by the death of her husband, went lamenting to her father and repeatedly begged him, that monarch of Magadha, "Parantapa, bane of all your enemies, kill the killer of my husband."

Then, great King, we again remembered what we had concluded long ago, and in alarm we fled Mathura. We divided our great wealth among many, into small portions, so each could be easily carried, and we fled with our cousins and kinsfolk, in fear of Jarasandha. Having thought carefully, we fled west.

In the west is a delightful city called Kusasthah, ringed by the Raivata Mountains; in that city, O King, we began living. We rebuilt its fort and made it so strong that even the gods cannot breach it; and from inside even our women can hold off any enemy, why speak of the Yadava heroes, who know no fear? Yes, Parantapa, we now live in that city, and because the

great mountain is impregnable, the descendants of Madhu have become exceedingly glad, thinking that they have already passed beyond fearing Jarasandha.

Thus, though strong and powerful, we have been obliged to seek refuge in the Gomanta Mountains, which are three yojanas long, from fear of Jarasandha. In each yojana, we have established twenty-one outposts of armed soldiers; every yojana has a hundred gates, guarded by great Kshatriyas, all invincible, who belong to the younger strains of the Yadavas.

In our clan, O King, there are eighteen thousand brothers and cousins. Ahuka has a hundred sons, each like a god in strength. Charudeshna, his brother Chakradeva, Satyaki, myself, Rohini's son Baladeva, and my son Samba, who is my equal in battle - we seven, Rajan, are Atirathas. Besides, there are others, Rajan: Kritavarman, Anadhrishti, Samika, Samitinjaya, Kanka, Sanku and Kunti: these seven are Maharathas.

Maharathas, also, are the two sons of Andhaka-bhoja, as is the old king himself. Endowed with great prowess, all these are great Kshatriyas, each as mighty as Indra's thunderbolt. These Maharathas chose the middle country and now live among the Vrishnis. Bharatottama, only you are worthy of being an Emperor; it will become you to establish your empire over all the Kshatriyas.

However, in my judgement, you will not be able to perform the Rajasuya yagna as long as the powerful Jarasandha lives. As a lion keeps the carcasses of mighty elephants he has killed in his cave, Jarasandha has incarcerated many kings of the world inside his hill fortress. Parantapa, when they are a hundred in number he wants to sacrifice them to Umapati Siva, the illustrious Devadeva, whom he worships and who loves him for his fierce tapasya.

So it is that he has vanquished the kings of the Earth, and he now has the means to keep the vow he swore to sacrifice a hundred kings. He has made his city populous by conquering the kings and bringing them and their troops to his fortress, as his captives.

We, also, once fled Mathura to Dwaravati, from fear of Jarasandha. If, Maharajan, you want to perform this sacrifice, you must rescue the kings from Jarasandha and also bring about his death. Scion of the Kurus, otherwise you cannot undertake to perform a Rajasuya yagna: this is the only way you can succeed.

Rajan, this is my view; do, Sinless, as you see fit. The circumstances being what they are, reflect upon everything, consider all causes and effects, and then tell us what you think is proper to do.'"

CANTO 15

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishthira says, 'Being as intelligent as you are, you have said what no one else could; surely, no one but you can settle every doubt in this world. There are kings in every land, engaged in benefiting themselves, yet none amongst them has been able to become an emperor. Truly, the title is difficult of acquisition.

He who is aware of the strength and courage of others never praises himself. He alone is worthy of praise who conducts himself honourably while engaging his enemies. O Bearer of the dignity of the Vrishnis, even like the wide Earth is adorned with great many jewels, myriad and countless are the desires and propensities of man.

Even as experience can rarely be gained other than by journeying in lands far from one's home, so, too, salvation can never be gained other than by living by high principles, which are remote from one's desires and baser tendencies. I regard peace of mind as the highest goal here, for, from that alone comes true prosperity. In my view, if I undertake this sacrifice, I will never attain the highest goal.

O Janardana, blessed with vitality and wisdom, the Kshatriyas born into our race, also thought that some day one of them would become the greatest Kshatriya of all. But, noble one, we too were all touched by the fear of Jarasandha and, O Sinless, by his evil. Invincible one, the strength of your arms is my refuge. When you take fright at Jarasandha's power, how shall I dare think of myself as being stronger than him? Madhava, O Vrishni, I feel plunged in dejection to think that not you, or Balarama, not Bhimasena or Arjuna can kill Jarasandha.

But what shall I say, Krishna? You are my highest authority in all things.'

Hearing this, Bhima, skilled in speech, says, "That king who, being torpid, or weak and without resources, engages in battle with a strong enemy, perishes like an anthill. However, it is observed that even a weak king, with vigilance and the use of stratagem, can vanquish a strong enemy and gain the fruit of his every wish.

In Krishna there is stratagem; in me, there is strength; and in Arjuna, victory. So, like the three fires which accomplish a sacrifice, we shall devise

the death of the king of Magadha.'

Now Krishna says, 'One whose understanding is immature seeks the fruit of his desire, without looking to what might happen to him in the future. We observe that nobody forgives an enemy for his callowness, one who is self-serving! We have heard that, in the Krita Yuga, having subjugated the entire world, Yauvanaswin, through the abolition of all taxes, Bhagiratha, by his kindliness towards his subjects, Kartavirya, by the force of his asceticism, the Lord Bharata through his strength and valour, and Maruta by his prosperity — all these five became emperors.

But Yudhishthira, you, who wish for the imperial dignity deserve it not merely by one but by all these qualities: by victory, by the protection you give your people, by your virtue, your prosperity, and your policy. Know, O Bull of the Kurus, that Brihadratha's son Jarasandha is also, like you, one who wishes to and can become an emperor. A hundred dynasties of kings have not been able to subdue Jarasandha.

Surely, for his might he can be regarded an emperor. Kings who wear royal jewels make offerings of these to Jarasandha, but being evil since he was a child, he is not satisfied with their worship. He has become the most powerful king, yet he savagely attacks other kings who wear crowns upon their heads. There is no king from whom he does not take tribute, and so he has brought almost a hundred kings under his sway.

How, O son of Pritha, will any weak king dare confront him with hostile intentions? The kings whom he has locked up like so many animals in Siva's temple, to sacrifice them to that God, don't they experience abject misery? A Kshatriya who dies in battle is always honoured. So, why should we not combine to give battle to Jarasandha?

He has already taken eighty-six kings his captives; he needs only fourteen more to make them a hundred. As soon as he has them, he will perform his brutal sacrifice. He who impedes that savagery will surely win blazing fame, and he who vanquishes Jarasandha will become emperor of all the Kshatriyas.'"

CANTO 16

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Out of my selfish desire to perform the Rajasuya yagna, and relying on just blind courage, how can I in conscience send you, O Krishna, to Jarasandha? Bhima and Arjuna I think of as my very eyes, and you, Janardana as my heart. How will I live without my eyes and my heart?

Not Yama can conquer Jarasandha's awesome host in battle, his army endowed with dreadful valour, besides. What can you do against that force? I fear this will lead only to tragedy. I believe that we must not undertake this task. Listen, Krishna, to what I think. Janardana, desisting from this sacrifice seems to me to be best. Ah, today my heart is distressed; to me the Rajasuya appears hard to accomplish.'

Arjuna, who has received the Gandiva, best of bows, a pair of inexhaustible quivers, a chariot with Hanuman's banner, as also the great Mayaa sabha, now says to Yudhishtira, 'My lord, I have won a great bow, my quivers, astras, prowess, allies, dominions, fame and energy - all of which are difficult to gain, however one might wish for them.

Learned men always praise, in fine society, nobility of birth. But nothing is equal to might, and, O King, there is nothing I prefer to strength. He who is born into a race noted for its valour, but who himself has none, is hardly worthy of respect; while he who is born into an inferior race but is valiant, is superior to the first.

He, Rajan, is a Kshatriya in every way, who increases his fame and possessions by subjugating his enemies. He that is brave, even if he has no other merit, will conquer his enemies. However, he who has no courage, though he owns every other quality, can hardly achieve anything. Every other merit exists, latently, only beside valour.

A focus of attention, exertion and destiny are the three causes of victory. He that is valiant but acts rashly does not deserve success; this is why a powerful man is sometimes killed by his enemies. As meanness overtakes the weak, so does folly at times overtake the strong. So, a king who wants victory must avoid both these causes of ruin.

If we try to kill Jarasandha and rescue the kings incarcerated by him for a savage purpose, so that we might perform a Rajasuya yagna, there is nothing nobler that we could do. Equally, if we refrain from this task the world will forever think of us as being weak. We are surely capable, O King, so why should you think that we are not?

Those who become Munis, wishing to attain the peace of their souls, easily gain ochre robes. So, too, if we vanquish the enemy, we shall easily perform the Rajasuya yagna. We must, therefore, fight Jarasandha.'"

CANTO 17

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Arjuna has shown what the attitude should be of a prince born into the race of Bhaarata, especially a JL, ak- son of Kunti. We do not know when death will overtake us - by night, or by day; neither have we ever heard that we can become immortal by evading a battle. So, this is the dharma of men - to attack the enemy by principles laid down in the law. For this satisfies the heart.

With wise policy, any undertaking meets with success, unless destiny frustrates it. If two sides, both following precept, meet in battle, one must triumph for victory cannot belong to both. However, a battle influenced by bad policy, where one side is devoid of the renowned arts of war, must end in defeat or death. If, again, both sides are equal the outcome is in doubt. Yet both cannot win. When this is the case, why should we not confront the enemy, guided by wise policy, and destroy him as a river in spate uproots a tree?

If we disguise our own weaknesses while attacking those of the adversary, why should we not succeed? Surely the policy of wise men has always been never to engage in open warfare against the very powerful enemy at the head of his formidable forces. This is my view, as well. However, if we achieve our purpose by secretly entering the home of our foe and attacking just him, we shall not find disgrace.

That bull among men Jarasandha enjoys undimmed glory, indeed, even like him who is the atman in the heart of all the created. But I see his death. Wishing the welfare of our kinsmen, we will either kill him in a fight, or we will ascend into heaven being killed by him.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Krishna, who is this Jarasandha? What is the secret of his power and his energy, that even having touched you he has not been consumed like an insect by the touch of fire?'

Krishna says, 'Hear, O King, who Jarasandha is - what his tejas is, what his prowess; and also why I have spared him, despite his giving me repeated offence.

There was a mighty king called Brihadratha, Lord of the Magadhas. Invincible in battle, he had three Akshauhinis of men. Handsome he was

and blessed with great vitality; he owned wealth and prowess beyond measure; always, upon his body, he bore the marks of having been installed as a sacrificer at countless yagnas. He was like a second Indra. In splendour he was like Surya, in forgiveness like the Earth, in wrath like Yama and in wealth like Vaisravana.

Bharatottama, the whole Earth was mantled by his great qualities, inherited from a long line of ancestors, covered as by rays from the sun. Endowed with great tejas, that king married the twin daughters of the king of Kasi, both blessed lavishly with the wealth of beauty. That bull among men made a secret pact with his wives that he would love them equally and would never show any preference for either.

And, with his two precious wives, both of whom were perfectly suited to him, the lord of the Earth spent his days in great joy, even like a mighty king elephant with two cow-elephants, or like the ocean, embodied, with Ganga and Yamuna. Yet, though the king's youth passed thus in delight, he had no son to continue his line, although he performed countless auspicious rites, homas and yagnas to that end.

One day, Brihadratha heard that the lofty-souled Chandakausika, son of Kakshivat of the illustrious race of Gautama, had ceased his tapasya and had come on his wanderings to the king's city, and now sat in the shade of a mango tree. Taking his wives with him, the king went to that Muni and worshipped him with offerings of jewels and other valuable gifts, which pleased the Sage greatly.

That best of Rishis, always truthful, indeed devoted to the truth, said to Brihadratha, "King of kings, I am pleased with you. Ask me for a boon, O you of excellent vratas."

Brihadratha and his wives prostrated before the Rishi and, his voice tearful from his despair at having no son, the king said, "Holy one, I am about to leave my kingdom and go into the forest to sit in tapasya. Ah, I am a most unfortunate man that I have no son. So what will I do, O Maharishi, with a kingdom?"

Hearing this, the Muni restrained his senses and entered into deep dhyana, where he sat in the shade of the mango tree. Into the Sage's lap there fell a juicy mango, untouched by the beak of a parrot, or any bird. That best of Munis took the mango and, breathing some silent mantras over it, gave the fruit to the king, so he could have a peerless child.

The Mahamuni, of exceptional wisdom, said to Brihadratha, "Go back, O King, for your wish is fulfilled. Do not leave your kingdom and go into the forest."

In joy, Brihadratha worshipped the feet of the Sage and returned to his palace. He remembered his old promise to his wives that he would never make any difference between them and, Bharatarishabha, the king gave that mango to them both. His exquisite queens divided that fruit in two halves and ate it.

Because of the Muni's power, because he could never utter a lie, both queens became pregnant after eating the mango, and Brihadratha's joy knew no bounds. When their time came both queens gave birth: each to a divided child. Each half had one eye, one arm, one leg, half a stomach, half a face and half an anus.

The mothers looked at what they had brought forth and shivered in fear. In great sorrow, the mothers decided to abandon the stillborn halves of a child. Their two midwives carefully swaddled the two lifeless pieces and, leaving the palace in stealth through a back door at dead of night, left the parcels outside at a crossing of streets and hurried back.

Purushvyaghra, a while later, a Rakshasi called Jara, a cannibal who lived on human flesh and blood, found the two halves of the abandoned child and picked them up to take them outside the city. She put them together so she could carry them more easily, when, O Bull among men, there was a flash of light and the two halves were united into a magnificent, now breathing child!

Now her eyes wide with amazement, the Rakshasi found that she could not make off with the human child, whose body was as hard and powerful as the Vajra, the thunderbolt of adamant. That infant clenched his hands into fists, red as copper, thrust them into his mouth and began to roar as dreadfully as rain-charged thunderheads. Alarmed by the sound, the king and others living in his palace came out.

The dejected and grieving queens emerged, as well, their breasts suddenly welling with milk to have back their child. The Rakshasi saw the queens who wanted their child back, she saw the king who was desperate for a son, she felt the strength of the child in her arms, and she thought, "I live in the domain of this king who is so anxious to have a son, and it does not become me to kill the infant of such a great and good king."

The Rakshasi held the child in her arms even as clouds enfold the sun and, quickly assuming a human form, came before the king and said to him, "Brihadratha, this is your child; I give him to you; here, take him. He has been born through the virtue of your wives and the blessing of the great Brahmana. The midwives abandoned him in the night, but I have given him refuge."

Receiving their son, the lovely daughters of the king of Kasi soon drenched him in mother's milk. When the king knew everything that had happened he was full of joy, and he spoke to the Rakshasi, who had assumed the form of a human woman with a golden complexion.

"O you who have the complexion of a lotus' filament, who are you that returns my son to me? Auspicious one, to me you seem like a goddess ranging the Earth at your whim!'""

CANTO 18

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna continues, 'Hearing this, the Rakshasi answered, "May you be blessed, O King of kings! I am the Rakshasi Jara, who can take any form that I choose. I live contentedly in your realm and am revered by everyone: for I go from house to house, of men, and bring them fortune. The Svayambhuva Brahma created me of old, and I was called Grihadevi, the goddess of hearth and home.

I had celestial beauty, and I was sent to the world to destroy the Danavas. He who draws a likeness of me upon the walls of his house, a likeness full of youth and in the midst of children, shall indeed have prosperity in his home; otherwise, his household will suffer decay and ruin. O King, on a wall of your palace is a picture of me surrounded by children, which is worshipped daily with flowers and perfumes, with incense, offerings of food and other things of enjoyment.

Since I am so adored in your home, I think daily of doing you some great good in return. It happened, good king, that I saw the halves of your child born in two pieces. When I put them together, a living child was made. Great king, this transpired only because of your good fortune, and I was merely its instrument.

I can swallow Mount Meru if I choose; what then to say of this child? But you have gratified me with the worship, which you offer me in your home, and so I give you back your son."

With these words, Rajan, the Rakshasi vanished. Having received his son, Brihadratha returned to his palace, where he had all the rites of infancy performed. He ordered his people to observe an annual festival to honour the Rakshasi. Then, that king, who was as Brahma's equal, named his son Jarasandha - he who had been joined by Jara.

Jarasandha of Magadha grew in size and strength like a fire fed with libations of ghee. Growing, day by day, even like the moon waxing during the bright fortnight of the month, the child swelled his parents' joy.'"

CANTO 19

RAJASUYARAMBHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Some time later, the noble Maharishi Chandakausika came again to the land of the Magadhas. Joyful at his advent, King Brihadratha went out to welcome him, taking his ministers and priest and wives and son. O Bhaarata, he worshipped the Sage with padya and arghya, and then offered his entire kingdom to him, and also his son.

Receiving, graciously, the king's worship, and well pleased with it, that holy Rishi said to the sovereign of Magadaha, "I know everything that has happened with spiritual vision. But listen, O King of kings, to what this son of yours will become, and also what his beauty, excellence, strength and valour shall be.

Have no doubt that, blessed with fortune and growing in prowess, he will have all these. Just as other birds can never match the speed of Vinata's son Garuda, the other kings of the world will never be able to equal the tejas of your heroic son. All that stand in his way he will raze. Even as the force of a cataract makes no dent upon a mountain's breast of rock, weapons cast at him, even by the Devas, with cause him no injury or pain.

He will blaze forth over the heads of all that wear crowns. As the Sun dims the lustre of the stars, your prince will rob the glory of every other monarch. Even the mighty kings, who own great armies and countless chariots and beasts, will perish like moths in a flame when they confront your son.

This child will seize the burgeoning fortune of every other king, as the ocean receives the swollen waters of rivers during the monsoon. As the vast Earth bears all manner of thing, this child of inordinate strength will support the four varnas. Even as every creature born with a body depends on precious vayu, dear as their atman, to live, so will the kings of the world depend on your son.

This prince of Magadha, mightiest of all men in the world, will see with his human eyes the God of gods - Rudra, Hara destroyer of the Tripura.

Parantapa, with this, Chandkaushika dismissed King Brihadratha and turned back to his own ascetic pursuit. The lord of the Magadhas went back into his capital, and gathering all his friends and kinsfolk, installed

Jarasandha upon his throne. Very soon, King Brihadratha began to feel a sharp aversion for all worldly pleasures. When he had made Jarasandha king, he and his two wives went away into the forest and began living in an asrama.

Rajan, once his father took sannyasa, Jarasandha, through his matchless valour, brought many kings under his sway.

King Brihadratha lived for some years in the forest, in tapasya, before finally rising into Swarga with his wives. King Jarasandha had all the boons that Chandakausika foretold, and ruled his people like a father. Some years later, when I, Krishna, killed Kamsa, enmity arose between Jarasandha and me. O Bhaarata, from his city, Girivraja, the king of Magadha whirled a great mace ninety-nine times over his head and flung it at Mathura.

I lived in Mathura then. The beautiful mace, which Jarasandha hurled all the way from Girivraja, flew ninety-nine yojanas and landed near Mathura. Seeing it, the people rushed to me to tell me about the fall of the mace. The place where that mace fell, next to Mathura, is called Gadavasan.

Jarasandha had two staunch supporters, Hansa and Dimbhaka, both invincible to all weapons. They were masters of politics and dharma, and in counsel they were the most intelligent among all men. 1 have already told you all about that awesome pair. The two of them and Jarasandha, together, I believe, were more than a match for the three worlds. This was why the powerful Kukkura, Andhaka and Vrishni tribes, out of discretion, did not consider it wise to fight Jarasandha.'"

CANTO 20

JARASANDHA-VADHA PARVA

"Krishna says, 'Hansa and Dimbhaka have both fallen; Kamsa and all his followers have been slain. So, the time has come to kill Jarasandha. But he cannot be killed in battle even by the Devas and the Asuras, even if they combine. However, I think that he can be vanquished in single combat. In me there is policy; in Bhima is strength, and in Arjuna there is victory; so, as prelude to your performing the Rajasuya yagna, we will surely destroy the king of Magadha.

We three shall go to him, secretly, and he will certainly fight one of us. Because he is proud and fears ignominy he will choose to fight Bhima. And like Death himself, who kills a man swollen with pride, the long-armed and mighty Bhima will kill the king of Magadha.

If you know my heart, and if you have any faith in me, then give me Arjuna and Bhima, without delay.'

Yudhishtira sees how cheerfully Bhima and Arjuna stand beside him, and cries, Achyuta, O Achyuta Parantapa, do not say this to me! You are the lord of the Pandavas, and we depend only on you. What you say, Govinda, is always wisdom. You never walk at the head of those whom Fortune has abandoned. I, who am yours to command, consider Jarasandha already dead and the kings he holds captive already set free, and that I have already performed the Rajasuya.

Lord of the Universe, Purushottama, go forth vigilantly so that this mission is accomplished. I cannot live without you - like a man stricken by disease and deprived of dharma, artha and kama.

Arjuna cannot live without Sauri, nor can Krishna live without Partha; neither is there anything in this world which these two cannot conquer. Then, this handsome Bhima is the strongest man in the world. Of great renown, what is there that he cannot achieve with the two of you?

When well led, troops excel in war; an army without a leader is lifeless, say the wise. So, armies must always be led by commanders of experience. The wise channel water into low-lying lands; even fishermen cause water to leak out through holes in the tank. We, too, shall attempt to achieve our purpose under the leadership of this Krishna, who knows politics, whose

fame spreads through the world. Indeed, to succeed at any venture one should always set Krishna in the van, this Purushottama whose power consists of both wisdom and strategy, and who knows both methods and means.

So, to achieve our purpose, let Pritha's son Arjuna follow Krishna, best of the Yadavas, and let Bhima follow Arjuna. Through wise policy, good fortune and prowess, we will find success in this purpose which needs great valour.'

When Yudhishtira says this, Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima, all mighty tejasvins, set out for Magadha, their splendid bodies clothed in the garb of Snataka Brahmanas, and with the blessings and encouraging words of friends and kinsmen. Great is their splendour anyway; and their bodies, already like the Sun, the Moon and Fire, blaze brighter for being inflamed by wrath at the plight of the kings, their kin, imprisoned by Jarasandha.

The people see Krishna and Arjuna, neither of whom have ever been defeated in battle, with Bhima at their head, all three going forth to accomplish one mission, and they think of Jarasandha as being already dead. For the illustrious two are Masters, who direct everything that happens in all the worlds, as well as all things concerning the dharma, artha and kama of every creature.

Setting out from the land of the Kurus, they pass through Kurujangala and arrive at the charmed lake of lotuses. Crossing the hills of Kalakuta, they then passed over the Gandaki, the Sadanira, the Sarkaravarta and the other rivers, all of which spring from the same mountains. They then cross the lovely Sarayu and see the country of Eastern Kosala. Passing through that kingdom, they come to Mithila, then, crossing the Mala and Charamanwati, the three heroes ford the Ganga and the Sona, and continue eastwards.

Finally, those shuras, heroes of undimmed glory, arrive at Magadha at the heart of Kushamba. Coming to the hills of Goratha, they see below them the capital city of Magadha, always replete with cows, wealth, water and beautiful with the countless trees which grow there."

CANTO 21

JARASANDHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Look, Partha, at the great capital of Magadha in all its splendour. Rich are its flocks and herds, and inexhaustible its store of water. The finest mansions adorn its streets, free from all calamities and evil.

The five mountains Vaihara, Varaha, Vrishabha, Rishigiri, and the enchanting Chaitya, all with towering peaks, overgrown with great and lofty trees, intertwined and of cool shade: all these seem to protect this city of Girivraja together. The breasts of these hills are covered by delightful trees of Lodhra forests, fragrant, their branch ends profuse with flowers.

Here the lustrous Gautama, of stern vows, begot on Ausinari, the Sudra woman, Kakshivat and other sons of great renown. It only goes to reflect Gautama's mercy on human kings that the race sprung from him still lives under their mortal sway. Arjuna, it was here that, in elder days, the mighty sovereigns of Anga, Vanga and other lands came to the asrama of Gautama, and spent their days in joy.

Look, Partha, at these enchanting forests of Pippalas and lovely Lodhras, which surround the hermitage of Gautama Muni. Long ago, the Nagas Arbuda and Sakrapavain lived here, those Parantapas, as did the excellent Nagas Swastika and Mani. Manu himself had ordained that the land of the Magadhas would never feel the scourge of any drought; and Kaushika and Manimat also blessed this country.

Being master of this beautiful and impregnable city, Jarasandha, unlike other kings, is bent on fulfilling his vile purpose. But we will kill him, and crush his pride.'

With that, those mighty tejasvins, the Vrishni and the two Pandavas approach Girivraja, impregnable capital of Magadha, teeming with cheerful, well-fed people of all the four varnas: Girivraja of perennial festivities. Upon arriving at the city-gates, instead of entering peaceably, the cousins assault the sacred Chaityaka peak, which the race of Brihadratha as well as the people of Girivraja worship, and which gladdens the hearts of all Magadhans.

Once, Brihadratha killed the Rakshasa Rishabha upon that peak and made three great drums out of his hide, which he set up in Girivraja. Those drums, once struck, resound for a full month after! Krishna and the Pandavas tear down the peak of Chaityaka, the joy and pride of the Magadhas, and bring it down over those drums covered by the blooms of heaven, the drums which never stop reverberating. They, who have come to kill Jarasandha, it seems set their feet upon their enemy's head by what they do.

Having attacked that celebrated, ancient, immovable massif, always adored with perfumes and garlands, with awesome arms, breaking it down, the three heroes joyfully march into Girivraja. The Brahmanas inside the city see many evil omens, which they hasten to report to Jarasandha.

The chief priest makes the king mount an elephant and, blessed by lighted brands around him, Jarasandha of untold prowess, wanting to keep the evil omens signified at bay, enters into a yagna with every apposite vow; he fasts.

Meanwhile, Bhaarata, the brothers, unarmed, rather with their own bare arms their only weapons, enter the city disguised as Snataka

Brahmanas; they come seeking single combat with Jarasandha. They see how marvellously elegant are the shops, full of garlands and various delicacies to eat, indeed replete with everything that any man's heart could desire.

Looking at those affluent and excellent shops, the Purushottamas Krishna, Bhima and Dhananjaya walk along the public highway. Suddenly, they of untold strength begin to forcibly snatch the garlands that the flower-vendors have hung up for sale. Wearing colourful robes and earrings, putting on the garlands, the heroes walk into the abode of Jarasandha of lofty intellect, even like Himalayan lions eyeing cattle-folds.

Rajan, smeared with sandalwood paste, the arms of those Kshatriyas look like the trunks of Sala trees. The people of Magadha see those magnificent three, powerful as elephants, their necks thick as Sala trees, chests wide, and are wonderstruck. The Purusharishabhas pass through three crowded gates, where men throng, and in great heart and cheer approach Jarasandha, haughtily.

Jarasandha gets up in haste and receives them with padya, madhurpaka and other ingredients of arghya; he offers them gifts of kine, and shows them every reverence.

Says that great king to them, 'Be welcome!'

O Janamejaya, Partha and Bhima remain silent, while Krishna replies, 'King of kings, these two have sworn a vow of silence and they will not speak until midnight. After that hour, they will talk to you.'

Jarasandha houses his guests in the apartments of sacrifice and returns to his royal chambers. At the midnight hour, the king returns to his guests who wear the attire of Brahmanas. For, that invincible monarch keeps strictly his vow that, even if it be the midnight hour, he would grant audience to any Snataka Brahmanas who arrive in his court.

O Bhaarata, seeing the extraordinary attire of his guests, that best among kings is puzzled. Yet, he waits upon them patiently, respectfully, silently. Those Purusharishabhas, the three Parantapas, on the other hand, see Jarasandha and say, 'O King, may you attain moksha without any great effort!'

Tiger among kings, with that they fall silent, staring. Rajadhiraja, Jarasandha says to those Pandavas and the Yadava, all disguised as Brahmanas, 'Pray, be seated.'

Those Narapungavas sit themselves down, and they blaze with beauty like the three main priests of a great sacrifice.

Jarasandha, always devoted to truth, now softly censures his guests in disguise, saying, 'Well do I know that, throughout the world, Brahmanas who keep the Snataka vrata never deck their persons with garlands and fragrant paste, unseasonably.

So who are you, adorned with flowers, and your hands bearing the marks of the bowstring? Wearing coloured robes, wearing flowers and sandalwood paste, out of season, you tell me that you are Brahmanas although you have the bearing of Kshatriyas.

Tell me truly who you are. Truth embellishes even kings. Why, breaking the peak of the Chaityaka, have you come in here, disguised, and through an unlawful gate, without fear of my royal wrath? The Brahmanas tejas dwells in his speech; what you did is not suited to the varna to which you profess to belong.

Therefore, tell me what is your purpose? You have arrived here unlawfully; why do you disdain the worship that I offer you? What motive have you for coming here?'

Thus addressed by the king, Krishna Mahatman, that most eloquent one, replies calmly and gravely.

Krishna says, 'O King, know we are Snataka Brahmanas. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are all allowed to observe the Snataka vrata. Besides, this vow has numerous rules governing it, both general and particular. A Kshatriya who keeps this vow with special observances finds great prosperity. Therefore, we have decked ourselves in flowers.

Also, Kshatriyas sow their prowess not with words but deeds. That is why, O son of Brihadratha, a Kshatriya never speaks audaciously. Brahma has invested in the Kshatriya his own tejas, implanted it in the purpose of the warrior. If you wish to see it today, you shall.

This is the code of the Kshatriya: that the house of an enemy must be entered through the unlawful gate, and a friend's house through the proper one. Know, also, that having entered our enemy's house through the illegal gate to accomplish our purpose, we are sworn not to accept the worship offered us.'"

CANTO 22

JARASANDHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Jarasandha says, 'I do not remember having ever done you an I injury! Even after thinking carefully about it, I do not recall 1 what harm I ever did you. When I have never wounded you, Brahmanas, why do you think of me as your enemy? Answer me honestly, for that is the way of the righteous.

The mind feels pain at any harm done to one's artha or dharma. The Kshatriya who injures an innocent man's pleasure or morality, let him not be a great warrior otherwise, and a master of every aspect of dharma, he, beyond doubt, finds the fate of sinners and falls away from fortune and grace.

The ways of the Kshatriyas are the noblest among all men of dharma in the three worlds. Indeed, all who know dharma acclaim the code of the Kshatriya. I follow the laws of my varna and never harm any who live under my rule. So, by bringing this charge against me, it seems that you speak in error.'

Krishna says, 'Mahabaho, there is one in this world who is sovereign of a certain royal line, and who upholds the honour of his race. We have come against you at his command. You have brought many Kshatriyas of the world here to your city as your prisoners. How can you still think of yourself as a man of dharma after what you have done? Best of kings, how can one king sin thus against other righteous kings?

But you treat other kings savagely and seek to offer them as human sacrifice to the Lord Rudra! O Son of Brihadratha, the sin you have committed touches me, as well, for I am with dharma and I can protect dharma. Killing human beings as a sacrifice to the gods is unheard of. So why do you wish to offer the lives of a hundred kings to the Lord Sankara?

You are treating noble men, who belong to your own varna, like animals. You are a fool, Jarasandha, for who else would behave in this wise? One always finds the fruit of whatever one does, under whatever circumstances. Therefore, since we are sworn to protect and help all those in distress, we have come here, for the weal of our kind, to kill you and prevent the slaughter of the captive kings, our kinsmen.

You believe that there is no man among the Kshatriyas who can match you; you are gravely mistaken in this. Rajan, there is no Kshatriya born who would not, thinking of his noble ancestry and birth, gladly ascend into heaven, which has no like anywhere on earth, by dying in battle.

Know, Purusharishabha, that Kshatriyas fight battles like men performing yagnas, with Swarga as their goal, and thus quell the whole world. Studying the Vedas, performing tapasya and dying in battle are all deeds which lead to heaven. Finding Swarga through the first two might not be certain, but for those who die in battle heaven is assured.

Death in battle inexorably brings triumph to equal Indra's. Countless gains accrue from dying in battle. It is through battle that Indra of the thousand yagnas became who he is; it is why he vanquishes the Asuras and rules the three worlds. You are so full of hubris about the untold might of your Magadha host; open hostility against you must surely lead only to heaven.

Do not underestimate other men, for valour dwells in everyone. Rajan, there are many whose valour might well equal or even exceed your own. It is only because they are not as renowned as you that your valour is noted. We can bear your strength. So, I say to you, King of Magadha, do not act like a superior: you are in the presence of your peers.

Do not tempt fate and go, along with your children, your ministers and your legions into Yama's land. Dambhodhbhava, Kartavirya, Uttara and Brihadratha were kings who met death, with all their forces, because they underestimated their superiors.

We who have come to liberate the kings you hold as captives, know, are surely not Brahmanas. I am Hrisikesa, also called Sauri, and these two heroes among men are the sons of Pandu. Lord of Magadha, we challenge you - stand before us and fight. Either free all the kings or go to Yamaloka!'

Jarasandha says, 'I never make a captive of a king without vanquishing him in battle. Who have I held here whom I have not first defeated in war? Krishna, it has been told that this is the dharma which every Kshatriya must follow: to bring others under his sway by force of arms, and then to treat them as his slaves.

I have collected these kings in order to sacrifice them to God. How will I now free them out of fear today, especially after I have told you what Kshatriya dharma is? With troops against troops, arrayed in battle

formation, or alone against one of you, or alone against two or all three of you, simultaneously or separately, I am ready to fight!'

Saying this, and eager to have battle with those three warriors of dreadful achievements, Jarasandha has his son, another Sahadeva, installed upon his throne. Then, Bharatarishabha, on the brink of battle, that king remembers his two generals Kausika and Chitrasena. These two were once known through the world, reverentially, as Hansa and Dimbhaka.

And, Rajan, that tiger among men, the Lord Sauri, who is always devoted to the truth, that slayer of Madhu, Haladhara's[1] younger brother, Krishna greatest of men who have perfectly controlled their senses, remembering Brahma's command and knowing that the lord of Magadha is destined to be killed in single combat by Bhima, and not by any Yadava, does not wish to himself kill Jarasandha, most powerful of men blessed with strength, that hero endowed with the strength of a tiger, that Kshatriya of terrible valour."

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[1] Balarama's ploughshare weapon is the Halayudha, so he is Haladhara, bearer of the plough.

CANTO 23

JARASANDHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, that best of orators, Krishna of the Yadava clan, says to Jarasandha who is resolved to fight, 'Rajan, which of us three will you fight? Which of us should prepare for combat with you?'

The splendid king of Magadha says that he will do battle with Bhima. Now, his priest fetches the yellow pigment got from the cow, garlands of flowers and every other auspicious thing, as well as the best specifics for restoring consciousness and relieving pain, to Jarasandha, eager for combat.

A celebrated Brahmana performs initiatory rites for Jarasandha, with all blessings, and, thinking of the dharma of a Kshatriya, the king readies himself for battle. He takes off his crown, ties up his hair and rises like an ocean which would burst apart its continents.

That sovereign of dreadful prowess says to Bhima, 'I will fight you, for it is honourable to be vanquished by a superior man.'

With that, Jarasandha rushes at Bhima even as the Asura Bala of old did at the king of the Devas. Krishna invokes the gods on behalf of the mighty Bhimasena, his cousin. Having taken counsel with Krishna, Bhima also advances upon Jarasandha, keen for battle. Then the two Purushavyaghras, those Kshatriyas of untold prowess, their bare arms their only weapons, joyfully lock in combat, each one eager to quell the other.

Grasping each other's arms, locking legs, at times slapping armpits in self-exhortation, they make the arena where they face each other tremble. Often they lay hold of each other's necks and push and heave violently, this way and that; they press every limb against a limb of the adversary; they continue to slap their own armpits in exultation and defiance.

At times extending their arms, at others withdrawing them, now lifting them high, now dropping them low, they circle and seize each other. Neck thrust against neck, brow striking brow, roughly, they make sparks fly from armour and headpieces, like flashes of lightning.

Grasping each other with many holds with their arms, lashing out with kicks violent enough to reach their inmost marmas, they also strike each other's chests with clenched fists. Roaring like thunderheads, they fight as two maddened elephants might with their trunks. Incensed by each other's

blows, on they fight: hauling, pulling, dragging, ferociously, glaring like two angry lions.

Every limb of the other each one strikes, using arms, mighty legs; seizing one another by the waist, they fling each other far with awesome force. Accomplished wrestlers both, the two Kshatriyas pull and shove and clasp each other with violent force.

Then, those heroes perform the most difficult of all feats in wrestling: prishtabhanga, where they throw each other face down onto the ground and keep the fallen antagonist so for as long as possible. With their arms, they also perform the sampurna-murchcha and purna-kumbha.

At times, they wring each other's arms and other limbs as if these are vegetable fibres to be twisted into cords. At others, fists clenched, they strike thunderous blows upon other parts of their opponent's bodies than those at which they appear to aim.

So battle those heroes and the citizens, thousands of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, and even women and the old, O Purushvyaghra, come out and gather around to watch the titanic duel. Quickly, the crowd swells, until it is great, and a single solid mass of humanity, no space between body and body.

The sounds the wrestlers make, while slapping their arms, seizing each other's necks to throw one another down, grabbing each other's legs also to fling the adversary to the ground - all these are so loud that they resemble the roar of thunder or of cliffs breaking and falling.

Both of them are the greatest among the strong and delight greatly in this encounter. Keen to prevail, each watches alert to take advantage of the slightest lapse by the other. And, O King, the awesome Bhima and Jarasandha fight ferociously in those lists, at times driving the crowd back by waving their hands; they fight even like Indra and Vritra did of old.

Dragging forward, thrusting back, and with sudden twists flinging each other down, onto face or side, they wound each other savagely. At times, they strike with bent and vicious knees, while roaring at each other: stinging taunts and insults. They strike each other with fists, the blows descending like the weight of rocks. With bull-like shoulders, long arms, and both masters of wrestling, they strike each other with those arms that are like maces of iron.

On the first day of the lunar month of Kartika begins that duel between the two heroes, and the lustrous Kshatriyas battle on, never pausing, not to

eat; they battle on by night and day, until the thirteenth day of the Moon. However, on the night of the fourteenth day, the lord of Magadha calls a halt from fatigue.

And Krishna says bitingly to Bhima of terrible deeds, 'Kaunteya, an enemy who is tired must not be pressed, for if he is he might even die of exhaustion. So, Son of Kunti, you must not press this king while he is tired. Bhima, put forth only as much strength as he can now summon into his arms; fight him only with such strength as he has, Bull of the Bhaaratas.'

Bhima Parantapa understands at once what Krishna means, and he knows the time has come to kill Jarasandha. Bhima, strongest of all strong men, gathers himself, all his strength and valour, that prince of the Kurus, to bring down the hitherto unvanquished Jarasandha."

CANTO 24

JARASANDHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Deciding to kill Jarasandha, Bhima answers Krishna, 'Yaduvyaghra, O Krishna, I will not relent against this wretch among kings, who yet stands before me, strong enough and bent upon the fight; I will no show him mercy.'

Krishna, who wants to exhort that hero to kill Jarasandha swiftly, says, 'Bhima, today show some of the strength, which you have from your father Maruta Deva!'

Bhima Parantapa seizes Jarasandha, lifts him above his head and begins whirling that king round dizzily. Bharatarishabha, having whirled him round fully a hundred times, Bhima thrusts his knee into Jarasandha's spine and breaks his body in two. Killing the Magadhan thus, Vrikodara gives a dreadful roar, which mingles with Jarasandha's roars as his back snaps; at which there is a loud uproar which strikes fear into every creature's heart. The people of Magadha are speechless for fear, and many women even give birth prematurely.

Hearing those roars, the people think that either Himavat is crumbling or even the Earth herself is being rent asunder. Then, those scourges of all their enemies leave the lifeless body of Jarasandha at the palace gate, where he lies as one asleep, and they go out of the city. Krishna has Jarasandha's chariot, of the fine flagstaff, readied and makes Bhima and Arjuna ride in it. Together they go and set the imprisoned kings, their kinsmen, free.

Saved from certain death, those kings come to Krishna and offer him priceless gifts of jewels, every manner of gemstone. Having vanquished his enemy, Krishna, unscathed, bearing every kind of weapon, and accompanied by the kings he had freed, emerges from Girivraja riding in Jarasandha's unearthly chariot.

The ambidextrous Savyasachi, whom not all the kings of the world can contain, the extraordinarily handsome and inexorable Arjuna, with Bhima of untold strength, also comes out of the citadel of Magadha. Krishna drives the chariot in which the brothers ride, and it is splendid, for it is the very ratha in which, of old, Indra and Vishnu fought against the Asuras because of Brihaspati's wife Tara, and great blood was spilt.

Riding in that chariot, now Krishna comes out of the hill-fort. That ratha has the lustre of molten gold; it is lined with rows of tinkling, exquisite bells; and its wheels clatter as thunderclouds rumble; it is always triumphant, always vanquishes the enemy against which it is driven; it is the same chariot riding in which Indra slew ninety-nine great Asuras in the elder days.

The three Purushavyaghras are delighted to have that chariot. The people of Magadha see long-armed Krishna and the two brothers with him in the chariot and are wonderstruck. Bhaarata, that ratha is yoked to celestial steeds, which own the speed of the wind; and with Krishna driving it, it is indescribably beautiful.

Upon that best of all chariots is an uncanny flagstaff which stands without being physically or visibly attached: for it is a thing created with the art of heaven. It can be seen, glorious as a rainbow, from a yojana away. While emerging from Girivraja, Krishna thinks of Garuda; remembered by his master Garuda arrows down to him in a wink, and he is like a great tree of vast proportions standing in the heart of a village and being worshipped by all.

Garuda, of untold heaviness, who preys on snakes, sits upon that finest of chariots, alongside numberless open-mouthed and frightfully roaring creatures, upon its flagstaff. At which, that greatest of chariots is even more resplendent, so brilliant that it is impossible to be looked upon by any being: even as is the midday Sun of a thousand rays.

And, O King, that best of flagstaffs, of unearthly creation, is such that never would it strike any tree, and nor could any weapon ever pierce it, even though all men see it plain. Achyuta, tiger among men, riding with the two sons of Pandu in that divine chariot, whose wheels sound like spring clouds rumbling, emerges from Girivraja.

The ratha which Krishna drives had once been received by King Vasu from Vasava, and from Vasu by Brihadratha, and from him by Jarasandha in course of time. Coming out of Girivraja, he of the long arms, eyes like lotus petals and luminous fame stops on a level plain outside the city. Then, all the people rush there, O Rajan, with the Brahmanas at their head, hurrying there to worship him with every religious ritual.

The kings who have been freed adore Madhusudana, reverently, and eulogising him, say, 'O Long-armed, we were plunged in the deep mire of grief in this land of Jarasandha, and you have saved us. Devakinandana,

how extraordinary is this deed of yours, with Arjuna and Bhima to help you.

O Vishnu, we languished in the fell hill-fortress of Jarasandha; surely, it was only by our greatest good fortune that you rescued us, O Scion of the Yadavas, and swelled your fame by this deed. Purushavyaghra, we bow to you; your wish is our command. Say what you want us to do, and however difficult it might be, O Lord, we shall do it.'

When the kings speak thus to him, the Mahatman Hrishikesa reassures them and then says, 'Yudhishtira wishes to perform the Rajasuya yagna; that king who always walks the way of dharma, wants to acquire imperial dignity. I say to you, help him in his endeavour.'

Joyfully, those kings accept what Krishna says, crying, 'So be it!'

Saying this, those lords of the Earth give gifts of jewels to him of the Dasarha race. Moved by their kindness, Govinda takes but a portion of them.

Then, Jarasandha's son, the noble Sahadeva, accompanied by his kinsmen and main officers of state, and with his priest going before him, comes to that place. Bending low, offering lavish gifts of jewels and precious gems, he worships Krishna, god among men. Krishna gently reassures the weeping prince and accepts those priceless gifts. Joyfully, there and then, Krishna installs Sahadeva as king of Magadha.

Having been made king by the greatest of men and having gained Krishna's friendship, Jarasandha's mighty-armed and illustrious son is shown every kindness and respect by the two sons of Pritha; he re-renters his father's city. Laden with jewels, Krishna, the sons of Pandu with him and great fortune attending upon him, leaves the capital of Magadha.

And with the two Pandavas, Achyuta arrives in Indraprastha and, going to Yudhishtira, says in joy to that king, 'Rajottama, by good fortune Bhima has killed the mighty Jarasandha, and all the kings imprisoned in Girivraja have been freed. From good fortune, also, these two, Bhima and Dhananjaya, are well and have returned to their city, O Bhaarata, without injury.'

Yudhisthira worships Krishna, as he deserves, and embraces Bhima and Arjuna in joy. Ajatasatru, the king who has no enemy, has found victory because of his brothers and the death of Jarasandha, and he gives himself up to celebration in the company of all his brothers.

Pandu's eldest son, with his brothers, greets the kings who have come to Indraprastha, welcoming and honouring each according to his age. After the kings have been entertained duly, they depart immediately in fine chariots, with joyful hearts and the leave of Yudhishtira.

Thus does Janardana, tiger among men, of fathomless intellect, cause the death of his enemy Jarasandha at the hands of the Pandavas. O Bhaarata, having seen Jarasandha slain, that Parantapa, scourge of every foe, takes his leave of Yudhishtira and Pritha, Draupadi and Subhadra, Bhimasena and Arjuna, and the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva.

When he finally bids farewell to Dhananjaya, again, he sets out for his own city, Dwaraka, riding in that best of chariots, of unearthly craft, swift as the mind, given to him by Yudhishtira, the ratha which fills the ten points of the horizon with the rumble of its wheels.

O Bharatarishabha, just before Krishna goes forth, the Pandavas, with Yudhishtira at their head, walk around him in reverent pradakshina.

When Devaki's illustrious son leaves Indraprastha, after his magnificent triumph, and having dispelled the terror of the kings, that feat swells the renown of the Pandavas. Rajan, the sons of Pandu pass their days, always gladdening Draupadi's heart. And during that time, all that is just and in accordance with dharma, kama and artha are practised piously by Yudhishtira, while attending to his duty of protecting his people."

CANTO 25

DIGVIJAYA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Having acquired that highest of bows, the inexhaustible twin quivers, the chariot and flagstaff, as well as the great sabha, Arjuna says to Yudhishtira, A great bow, weapons, great energy, allies, territory, fame, a vast army - all these, which, O King, are difficult to gain, I have won.

I think that what we should now do is fill our treasury. Noblest of kings, I would like to make all the other kings of the world pay us tribute. I want to set out on an auspicious moment of a holy day of the Moon, when a favourable constellation is rising, to conquer the direction of the North, over which the Lord of Treasures, Kubera, reigns.'

When Yudhishtira Dharmaraja hears what Dhananjaya says, he replies in a grave and solemn tone, 'Bharatarishabha, make righteous Brahmanas chant blessings over you, to plunge your enemies in grief and to bring joy to your friends, then go forth. Partha, victory will surely be yours and your wishes will be fulfilled.'

When Yudhishtira has said this, Arjuna sets out in the unearthly chariot, which he got from Agni, and with a large host going with him.

Commanded by Yudhishtira lovingly, Bhimasena, also, as well as the twins set out, each at the head of a great army.

Arjuna, son of the chastiser of Paka, brings the North under his sway, the direction ruled by the Lord of Treasures. Bhimasena, with force, quells the East, while Sahadeva does the South, and Nakula, master of every weapon, conquers the West.

While his brothers are so engaged, the lofty Dharmaraja Yudhishtira remains in Khandavaprastha, enjoying great affluence, surrounded by friends and relatives."

CANTO 26

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "In the North, Arjuna comes to Pragjyotishapura where Bhagadatta rules, and tells the king what he intends and asks for his fealty.

Bhagadatta says, 'O you who have Kunti for your mother, as you are to me, so is Yudhishtira. I will do all that you ask. Tell me, what else shall I do for you?'

Dhananjaya replies to Bhagadatta, 'If you give your word to do all this, you have done what I wish.'

Having thus subdued the king of Pragjyotishapura, Dhananjaya of the long arms, Kunti's son, marches further north - the direction ruled by Kubera. That Purusharishabha, the Kaunteya, conquers the mountainous regions and their hems, as also the realms of the hills and foothills. Having subdued all the mountains and the kings who reign there, bringing them under his sway, he takes tribute from them all.

Winning their affection, allying himself to them, O King, he next rides against Brihanta, the king of Uluka, making this Bhumi tremble with the sound of his drums, the rumble of his chariot-wheels, and the trumpeting of the elephants in his train. However, Brihanta swiftly emerges from his city with his army that comprises four kinds of troops, and gives battle to Phalguna.

Fierce is the battle between the two, but Brihanta cannot bear the prowess of the Pandava. When that invincible king of the mountain realm realises that Kunti's son is irresistible, he yields and comes to Arjuna with great wealth. Arjuna takes his kingdom from Brihanta, but then, making peace with that king, marches with him at his side against Senabindu, whom he drives out of his kingdom without ado.

After this he quells Modapura, Vamadeva, Sudaman, Susankula, the Northern Ulukas, and all the kings of those countries and their peoples. Fettered by the command of Yudhishtira, O Rajan, Arjuna does not stir from the city of Senabindu, but only sends forth his legions to fetch those five realms under his sway.

Having arrived at Devaprastha, the capital of Senabindu, Arjuna stations himself there, along with his army consisting of four kinds of forces. Then, surrounded by the kings and the peoples he has subjugated, the Kshatriya marches against King Viswagaswa, that bull of the race of Puru. He defeats the bold mountain men, all great warriors, and the Pandava with his legions takes the city ruled by the Puru king.

Having vanquished the Puru king in battle, as also the robber tribes of the mountains, the Pandu brings under his sway the seven tribes known as Utsavasanketa.

The Kshatriyarishabha goes on to vanquish the heroic warriors of Kashmira, as well as the King Lohita and ten minor chieftains. Then, Rajan, the Trigartas, the Daravas, the Kokonadas, and many other Kshatriyas, together, advance against the Pandava.

The Kurunandana now takes the enchanting town of Abhisari and, later, defeats Rochamana who ruled in Uraga. Next, putting forth his great might, Indra's son Arjuna conquers the fine city of Singhapura, which is well guarded with every kind of weapon.

Arjuna leads his legions to fiercely attack the realms of Suhma and Sumala. Indra's son, of untold prowess, after pressing on direly, brings the Bahlikas, always so tameless, under his sway. Pandu's son Phalguna, with a small select force, vanquishes the Daradas and the Kambojas, and follows that by crushing the bandit tribes of the north-eastern frontier, and those that live in the forests.

Maharajan, Indra's son also subdues the allied tribes of the Lohas, the eastern Kambojas, and the northern Rishikas. The battle against the Rishikas is fierce in the extreme; why, the fight between Pritha's son and them is equal to that between the Devas and the Asuras, during which Brihaspati's wife Tara became the cause for so much slaughter.

Quelling the Rishikas, O King, on the field of battle, Arjuna takes from them as tribute eight horses which are the colour of the parrot's breast, and also other steeds of the hues of the peacock, born in northern climes, and endowed with great swiftness. Finally, having conquered all the Himalayas and the Nishkuta Mountains, that Purusharishabha, bull among men, arrives at the White Mountains, and camps upon its breast."

CANTO 27

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "That valiant Pandava, blessed with majestic force, crossed the White Mountains and subdues the land of the Kimpurushas, ruled by Durmaputra, after a great massacre of Kshatriyas, and brings the country under his control.

Having quelled that realm, Indra's son, with a calm mind, marches at the head of his legions to the country of Hataka, ruled by the Guhakas. He adopts a policy of conciliation with them and wins their alliance. In that realm, the Kuru prince sees the fine lake Manasa, and other sparkling water bodies, too, all sacred to Rishis.

Arriving at the Manasa sarovara, Arjuna conquers the lands ruled by the Gandharvas, which surround the Hataka territories. Here the conqueror takes, as tribute, countless superb horses called Tittiri, Kalmasha, and Manduka. At last, the son of the slayer of Paka comes to the country of North Harivarsha, and wants to conquer it. Thereupon, some formidable great-bodied frontier guardsmen come, with gallant hearts, to him.

They say, 'O son of Pritha, you can never conquer this land; if you seek your own good, go back from here. Any human who enters this country will die. We are pleased with you, Kshatriya; you have conquered enough and there is nothing here, Arjuna, for you to conquer.

The Northern Kurus live here, and there can be no war here. Even if you enter this land, you will see nothing; for there is nothing here which can be seen by human eyes. However, if you seek something else, anything, tell us, O Purushavyaghra, so that we can do your bidding.'

When they say this to him Arjuna replies, smiling, 'I seek that my brother Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, of great intellect, becomes emperor. If your land is shut to humans, I will not enter it. But pay some tribute to Yudhishtira.'

Hearing this from Arjuna, they give him many exquisite cloths and ornaments of unearthly make; silks of celestial texture and skins of unworldly origin.

So it is that tiger among men subjugates the realms of the North, fighting countless battles both against Kshatriyas and bandit tribes. Having

vanquished those chieftains, bringing them under his sway, he takes great wealth from them, gems and jewels past counting, the horses known as Tittiri and Kalmasha, as also those of the colour of the parrot's breast and those coloured like peacocks, all endowed with the speed of the wind.

Surrounded, O King, by a huge army comprising the four kinds of forces, the hero returns to Sakraprastha, and Partha offers all that untold wealth and the animals he has brought to Yudhishtira Dharmaputra. Then, at his king's command, the Kshatriya retires to a private apartment in the palace to rest."

CANTO 28

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, Bhimasena, also blessed with great tejas, marches east with Yudhishtiras leave. That Bharatavyaghra, of fathomless valour, always the bane of his enemies, goes with a vast host, with a full complement of elephants, horses and chariots; well-armed he goes forth, and he can crush any enemy kingdom.

Bhima comes first to the great land of the Panchalas, and begins to conciliate them with all the means at his disposal. Next, he effortlessly vanquishes the Gandakas and the Videhas.

The lofty one then subdues the Dasarnas. In the land of the Dasarnas, their King Sudharman fights a ferocious duel with bare hands against Bhimasena. Seeing how mighty Sudharman is, Bhima makes him the chief commander of all his legions.

Then, Bhima of terrible prowess marches east, making the very Earth tremble with the tread of the awesome host which follows him. Now that hero, who is the strongest of all strong men, defeats Rochamana, king of Aswamedha, who confronts him with his army. Having vanquished that king with feats of terrific ferocity, Kunti's son subdues the east.

The prince of the Kurus, blessed with great strength, enters the country of Pulinda in the south, and brings Sukumara and the king Sumitra under his sway. Next, O Janamejaya, that Bharatapungava, fettered by the command of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, rides against Sisupala of great vitality. Hearing what the Pandava intends, the king of Chedi comes out of his city, and that Parantapa receives Pritha's son with respect.

Having met, those bulls of the lines of Kuru and Chedi enquire after each other's welfare.

Then, O Rajan, the king of Chedi offers his kingdom to Bhima, and says smilingly, 'Anagha, sinless, what is your purpose?'

At which Bhima tells him about the intention of Yudhishtira. For thirty nights, O King, Bhima stays there being entertained by Sisupala. Then he sets out again from Chedi with his troops and chariots."

CANTO 29

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "That punisher of all enemies then vanquishes King Shrenimat of the Kumara country, and then Brihadbala, King of Kosala. Now, the Panadavottama, with deeds of exceptional ferocity vanquishes the virtuous and mighty King Dirghayagna of Ayodhya; he then subdues the country of Gopalakaksha, the northern Kosalas and also the king of the Mallas.

Arriving next at the foot of the Himalaya, he quickly brings all that land under his sway. Thus, that Bharatarishabha conquers myriad countries. Endowed with great energy, and the strongest of all strong men, the son of Pandu next subdues the country of Bhallata, as also the Mountain Shuktimanta beside Bhallata.

Then Bhima of long arms and terrible prowess defeats the unretreating Subahu, the king of Kasi, and brings him under complete sway; after which, with awesome prowess he overwhelms the great King Kratha who reigned in the region which lies around Suparsa; he defeats the Matsyas and the powerful Maladas, and conquers the country called Pasubhumi, which has neither fear nor oppression of any kind.

The long-armed Kshatriya conquers Madhahara, Mahidhara, and the Somadheyas, and turns towards the north. With terrific force, the mighty Kaunteya subdues the kingdom of Vatsabhumi, and the king of the Bhargas, as also the ruler of the Nishadas, and Manimat and countless other kings.

Effortlessly, swiftly, Bhima overcomes the southern Mallas and the Bhogavanta mountains. Next, just through policy and conciliation, the hero vanquishes the Sharmakas and the Varmakas. With some ease, he defeats that Lord of the Earth, Janaka king of the Videhas.

With strategy, the Kshatriya then subdues the Sakas and the barbarians who live in that part of the country. Sending forth expeditions from Videha, where he remains, Bhima conquers the seven kings of the Kiratas who live around Indrakila, Indra's mountain. He vanquishes the Suhmas and the Prasuhmas. With them at his side, Kunti's son marches against Magadha.

On his way, he subdues the kings Danda and Dandadhara; taking them with him, he marches on Girivraja. Peacefully, he brings Jarasandha's son

under his sway and takes tribute from him. Then, with the kings he has conquered going with him, Bhima marches against Kama, making the Earth tremble at the advance of his legions consisting of the four kinds of forces.

The Pandava faces Kama Parantapa and brings him under his power. O Bhaarata, having subdued Karna, he quells the powerful king of the mountain realms. Then, Pandu's son, with the strength of his arms, slays the king of Modagiri.

Next, the Pandava vanquishes those valiant and powerful Kshatriyas, Vasudeva king of Pundra and Mahaujah who rules in Kausika-kachcha, before attacking the king of Vanga. Defeating Samudrasena, the kings Chandrasena and Tamralipta, and also the sovereign of the Karvatas and the ruler of the Suhmas, as also the kings who live upon the sea-shore, that Bharatarishabha conquers all the Mlechcha tribes.

Having subjugated numerous kingdoms and countries, extracting tribute from them all, the son of Vayu advances towards Lohita. Now

Bhima makes all the Mlechcha kings who rule the marshlands of the coast pay him tribute, various kinds of wealth, sandalwood, aloe, fine clothes and gemstones, pearls and shawls, gold and silver, and priceless dark corals.

The Mlechcha kings shower untold wealth upon the son of Kunti, gold coins and precious stones counted in hundreds of millions, tens of crores.

Returning to Indraprastha, Bhimasena of dreadful prowess offers all those treasures to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja."

CANTO 30

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Sahadeva, also commanded affectionately by Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, marches towards the south, taking a great host with him. That great prince of the Kurus first routs the Surasenas, bringing the king of Matsya under his sway.

Then he crushes Dantavakra, powerful king of the Adhirajas and, taking tribute from him, reinstates him on his throne. The Kshatriya then brings Sukumara and, then, King Sumitra under his sway, before vanquishing the other Matsyas and the Patacharas.

Blessed with great intelligence, the Kuru warrior now swiftly overruns the country of the Nishadas and also the lofty hill Gosringa, after which he subdues King Srenimat. He then subdues the country called Nararashtra, and the Kshatriya marches against Kuntibhoja who, with utmost willingness, accepts the sway of the conquering hero.

Marching to the banks of the Charmanwati, the Kuru warrior meets the son of King Jambaka who has, because of an old enmity, been defeated before by Krishna Vasudeva. O Bhaarata, Jambaka's son gives battle to Sahadeva, who overpowers that prince and presses on south.

The great warrior vanquishes the Sekas and others, and exacts tribute from them, many kinds of wealth and jewels. Making the vanquished tribes his allies, the Kshatriya marches on the countries that lie on the banks of the Narmada. There he defeats the two valiant kings of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, who lead a teeming host, and the powerful son of the twin Devas takes great treasure from them.

After this, the Kshatriya comes to Bhojataka, and there, O King of unfading glory, is engaged in a fierce battle by the king of that city, which lasts two days. Madri's son vanquishes the invincible Bhismaka. He then overcomes the king of Kosala in battle, and the monarch of the lands which lie on the banks of the Vena, as also the Kantarakas and the kings of the eastern Kosalas.

Conquering both the Natakeyas and the Herambakas, quelling the kingdom of Marudha, he subdues Munjagrama by sheer strength. The

Pandava overwhelms the mighty kings the Narhinas and the Arbukas and the myriad forest kings of that region of the country.

Endowed with huge prowess, Sahadeva makes a subject of King Vatadhipa. Defeating the Pulindas, he marches on south. Nakula's younger brother fights the Pandya king for an entire day; having quelled him, he goes south again, that long-armed Kshatriya.

Now he sees the celebrated caves of Kishkindha and there fights seven days against the monkey-kings Mainda and Dwivida. Those magnificent Vanaras, though not bested in battle, nor tired, are, however, delighted with Sahadeva.

Joyfully, they say to the Kuru prince, 'Tiger among Pandu's sons, go now, taking whatever tribute you desire from us, and may the purpose of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, of great intelligence, be accomplished without obstacle.'

Taking precious gems and jewels from them, Sahadeva marches towards the city of Mahishmati, and there that Narapungava does battle with King Nila. Fierce and terrific is the encounter between the powerful Pandava, slayer of hostile heroes, and Nila. Exceedingly bloody it is, and with Agni Deva himself helping King Nila, Sahadeva's very life is in danger.

Suddenly, the chariots, horses, elephants, and soldiers in their coats of mail in Sahadeva's army all appear to be on fire. Seeing this, the Kuru prince becomes fearful, and O Janamejaya, he does not know what to do."

Janamejaya said, "Dvijottama, why did Agni Deva become inimical towards Sahadeva in battle when the Pandava was fighting to accomplish a yagna, which would gratify Agni himself?"

Vaisampayana said, "It is said, O Janamejaya, that while the Lord Agni lived in Mahishmati, he earned a reputation as a lover. King Nila had an exceptionally beautiful daughter. She always remained next to her father's sacrificial fire, stoking it vigorously, making it blaze up. Soon, King Nila's fire would not burn at all until it was fanned by the soft breath from that girl's lips.

It was told in Nila's palace and in the homes of all his subjects that Agni Deva wanted the exquisite princess for his bride. The girl accepted him, and one day, having assumed the form of a Brahmana, the Fire God was enjoying the princess when he was discovered by King Nila.

The king of dharma ordered the Brahmana be punished by law. At this, the lustrous deity flamed up in wrath; seeing which, the king was amazed

and bent his head down and set it on the ground. Bowing low, in a while, Nila gave his daughter to Agni come in the guise of a Brahmana. The Deva Vibhavasu Agni took the fair-browed daughter of Nila, and turned kindly towards the king.

Agni, the shining gratifier of all desires told the king to ask him for a boon. Nila begged that his legions never become panic-stricken in battle. From that time, any king who dares attack Nila's city is struck by fear by Agni Hutasana.

From that time, also, the girls of the city of Mahishmati became unacceptable to marry, to men from outside the city. Then, Agni gave them sexual liberty so the women could roam at will, none bound to any single man. Bharatarishabha, indeed, from that time kings of other lands avoid Mahishmati from fear of Agni.

Virtuous Sahadeva sees his troops stricken with fear and surrounded by flames, but stands unmoved as a mountain. Purifying himself, touching holy water, the hero speaks to Agni, the Deva who sanctifies all things:

'I bow to you, whose trail is always marked by smoke. All these exertions of mine are for you, O sanctifier of everything. You are the mouth of all the gods; you are the sacrifice embodied. You are called Pavaka because you sanctify all things, and you are Havyavahana because you convey the clarified butter which is poured into you to the other Devas.

The Vedas have come to be to minister to you and so you are called Jataveda. Being great among the gods, you are called Chitrabhanu, Suresa, Anala, Vibhavasu, Hutasana, Jvalana, Sikhi, Vaiswanara, Pingesa, Plavanga, Bhuritejasa. You are he from whom Kumara had his origin; you are holy; you are called Rudragarbha and Hiranyakrit.

O Agni, you give me energy; let Vayu grant me life; let the Earth grant me nurture and strength, and let Water bless me with prosperity. O Agni who are the first cause of the waters, you who are of immaculate purity, you for ministering to whom the Vedas have come to be, you who are the foremost of the Devas, who are their mouth - O purify me with your truth.

Rishis and Brahmanas, Devas and Asuras pour clarified butter every day into you during their sacrifices, according to law. Let the rays of truth, which you exude while you show yourself at these yagnas, purify me. Smoke-bannered as you are, having many names, O great purifier of all sins, born of Vayu and ever present in all creatures, O purify me through the rays of your truth.

I have cleansed myself, lofty one, and happily do I worship you. O Agni, grant me contentment and prosperity, knowledge and joy.'

He who pours ghee into Agni chanting these mantras shall always be blessed with prosperity; having his spirit under perfect control, he will also be purified of all his sins.

Sahadeva addresses Agni again, 'O bearer of the sacrificial libations, it does not become you to obstruct a sacrifice!'

Saying this, that Purushavyaghra, Madri's son, spreads some kusa grass on the ground at the head of his terrified legions and calmly sits down to face the approaching fire.

And Agni, too, like the ocean which never transgresses its continents, does not sweep over him. Instead, approaching Sahadeva quietly, Agni, Lord of Men, reassures that Kuru prince, 'O Kuru, arise; I was only testing you. I know your purpose entirely, as also that of the Dharmaputra. But, O Bharatottama, as long as this city is ruled by a descendant of the line of King Nila, I will protect it. However, O Pandava I will fulfil your hearts desire.'

Hearing this, Madri's son arises cheerfully and, folding his hands, bowing his head, worships the Fire God, sanctifier of all creatures. When Agni has vanished King Nila comes there and, at the command of that Deva, worships Sahadeva, tiger among men, master of battle, with proper ritual, and pays him tribute.

Having thus brought Nila under his sway, the victorious son of Madri goes further south. The long-armed Kshatriya subdues the king of Tripura, of measureless tejas. He turns his forces against the Paurava kingdom, and makes a subject of the king of the land. After vanquishing that king, the prince, with some effort, brings Akriti, the king of Saurashtra and preceptor of the Kausikas under his sway. While staying in the kingdom of Saurashtra, the good prince sends an ambassador' to King Rukmin, son of Bhishmaka, in the city of Bhojakata, who, wealthy and wise, is a friend of Indra himself.

Thinking of their relationship with Krishna, O Rajan, the king and his son gladly accept the sway of the Pandava. Taking jewels and wealth from King Rukmin, Sahadeva proceeds further south. Blessed with terrific tejas and awesome strength, he now reduces Shuparaka and Talakata, and the Dandakas also, to subjection.

The Kuru warrior subdues numberless kings of the Mleccha tribes, which live on the sea coast; and the Nishadas and the cannibals and even the Karnapravarnas, and also the tribes called the Kalamukhas who are a cross between humans and Rakshasas, and all the Kole Mountains; and also Surabhipatna, and the copper Island, and the Mountain Ramaka.

Having quelled King Timingila, the noble warrior conquers the wild tribe, the Keralas, who are men with one leg. Just through emissaries, the Pandava also conquers the town of Sanjayanti and the country of the Pakhandas and the Karahatakas, and makes them all pay tribute.

The Kshatriya also quells and exacts tribute from the Paundravas, the Dravidas, the Undrakeralas, the Andhras, the Talavanas, the Kalingas and the Ushtrakarnikas; he takes the enchanting city of Atavi, and also the cities of the Yavanas. And, O King of kings, arriving at the seashore, that Parantapa, Madri's most virtuous and brilliant son, slayer of all foes, confidently sends messengers to the illustrious Vibhishana, grandson of Pulastya. That sovereign willingly accepts the sway of the son of Pandu, because that sage and great-souled king thinks of it all as being providence.

He sends the Pandava a myriad of jewels, and sandalwood, many celestial ornaments, and reams of priceless apparel, as well as countless invaluable pearls. Taking all these, Sahadeva the intelligent returns to his own kingdom.

So it is, O King, that through conciliation and with battle, having subdued many kings and exacting tribute from them, Sahadeva comes home to Khandavaprastha. Giving all that wealth to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, O Janamajeya, that bull of the Bhaaratas, Sahadeva, considers his purpose as being successful and is glad."

CANTO 31

DIGVIJAYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "I will now tell you about the adventures and triumphs of Nakula, and how he, exalted one, conquers the direction which Vasudeva once subjugated. At the head of a great host, making the Earth tremble with the shouts and lion's roars of his warriors and the rumbling of their chariot wheels, Nakula, the intelligent, sets out west.

First, that Kshatriya attacks the mountain country of Rohitaka, delightful, prosperous, rich with cattle, every other kind of wealth and produce, and dear to the Lord Kartikeya. Fierce is that encounter between the Pandava and the Mattamayurakas of that country.

Next, the illustrious Nakula overcomes the entire desert and the rest of the realm of Sarishaka, land of plenty, as also Mahetta. A savage battle the hero has with Rajarishi Akrosa. Having overwhelmed the Dasarnas, the Sibis, the Trigartas, the Ambashtas, the Malavas, the five tribes of the Karpatas, and the twice born Madhyamakas and Vatadhanas, the Pandava leaves that country.

Going circuitously through their territory, that Narapungava quells the Utsava-tanketa tribes. The luminous Kshatriya quickly conquers the mighty Gramaniya who dwells on the shore of the sea; and the Sudras and the Abhiras that live on the banks of the Saraswati; and all the tribes that lived by fishing, and also those who dwell upon the mountains; and all of the country named after the five rivers; and the Amara mountains; and the land called Uttarajyotisha; and the city Divyakata, and the tribe called Dwarapala.

Through sheer force, the Pandava reduces the Ramatas, the Harahunas and numerous kings of the west. While there, O Bhaarata, Nakula sends messengers to Vasudeva, and Vasudeva, along with all the Yadavas, accepts his sway.

The mighty Nakula goes on to Sakala, city of the Madras, and persuades his uncle Salya to accept, out of love, the Pandava sway. And, Rajan, his uncle lavishly entertains that noble and deserving prince. Nakula, master of war, receives a great quantity of jewels and gems from Salya, and leaves his kingdom.

Then the son of Pandu reduces the ferocious Mlechchas of that sea coast, as also the wild tribes of the Pahlavas, the Barbaras, the Kiratas, the Yavanas and the Sakas. Having conquered many kings, making them all pay him tribute, Nakula, Kurusthama, laden with wealth, turns back the way he came, homewards.

O King, so vast is the treasure Nakula brings that ten thousand camels carry it upon their backs with difficulty. Arriving in Indraprastha, the valiant and blessed son of Madri offers up all those treasures to Yudhishtira.

Thus, O Rajan, Nakula subdues the countries of the west, the direction over which Varuna Deva rules, which once Vasudeva himself had conquered."

CANTO 32

RAJASUYIKA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Because of the protection given them by Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, his unwavering righteousness, and because he always keeps his enemies at bay, his subjects cleave to the swadharma of their respective varnas. His rule is virtuous, the taxes he levies fair and kind; the clouds bring as much rain to his kingdom as the people want and prosperous indeed are his cities, towns and villages.

Truly, because of his dharma all in his kingdom prosper, especially the herds, the farms with their fields, and trade. O Rajan, even thieves and cheats never lie amongst themselves, nor do men who are the king's favourites. There are no droughts, floods, plagues or fires, and no one dies before their time in those days of Yudhishtira of dharma.

Never for battle or from enmity do other kings come to Yudhishtira but only to serve him, offer him worship or tribute which puts no strain upon them. The capacious treasury of that king becomes so full of every manner of virtuously obtained wealth that it cannot be emptied in a hundred years.

When he knows the extent of his possessions, the son of Kunti sets his heart upon the celebration of a sacrifice. Friends and officials, individually and together, come to him and say, 'Mahatman, the time has come for your yagna. Let arrangements be made without delay.'

Whilst they speak thus, that omniscient and ancient one, that soul of the Vedas, the one described by the wise as being invincible, that foremost of all lasting existences in the universe, that origin of all things, as also that in which all things come to be dissolved, that Lord of the past, the future and the present, Kesava slayer of Kesi, the strength of the Vrishnis, dispeller of every fear, smiter of all enemies, having made Vasudeva senapati of the Yadava army, and bringing with him great treasures for Yudhishtira - Krishna, Hari, enters Khandava, city of cities, bringing with him a mighty host and filling the air with the thunder of his chariot wheels.

With the ocean of invaluable gemstones that he brings, Madhava Purashavyaghra swells the Pandavas already limitless wealth; he enhances the sorrows of the enemies of the Pandavas. Even as a land of darkness is

made joyful by the Sun, or a still place by a soft breeze, Krishna's presence gladdens the Bhaaratas city.

Welcoming him with delight, showing him every due reverence, Yudhishtira asks after his welfare. And when Krishna sits at his ease, the Pandava, bull among men, along with Dhaumya, Dwaipayana, the other sacrificial priests, with Bheema, Arjuna and the twins, speaks thus:

'O Krishna it is for you that I have brought the world under my sway. O Vrishni, it is through your grace that I have won vast wealth. O Devakinandana, O Madhava, I want to devote my wealth, by the law, to great Brahmanas and the bearer of the libations of the yagna.

And, O Dasarha, it becomes you, Mahabaho, to allow me to perform a sacrifice along with you and my brothers. So, O Govinda, if you permit my yagna, go and install yourself as the sacrifices and I will be washed of all sin. Otherwise, Mahatman, give me leave to become the sacrificer myself, together with these my younger brothers: for with your blessing 1 will surely enjoy the fruit of an immaculate sacrifice.'

When Yudhishtira says this, Krishna replies, 'Rajavyaghra, you deserve the imperial dignity. So, you be the sacrificer. If you perform the yagna and gain the fruit thereof, I will think that I have done so myself and been triumphant.

I always seek your fortune, so perform the yagna which is close to your heart. Engage me, as well, in some task, for I will obey your every command.'

Yudhishtira replies, 'Krishna, I am already successful that you have come here, happily, at my wish.'

At Krishna's command, Yudhishtira and his brothers begin to collect whatever they need for the Rajasuya yagna. That Parantapa, the eldest Pandava, says to Sahadeva, best of warriors and ministers, 'Let us lose no time in gathering everything that the Brahmans have asked for to perform this sacrifice, and all that Dhaumya might want, all the auspicious materials, one by one, in their proper order.

Let Indrasena, Visoka and Puru, with Arjuna for his charioteer, gather the food we need, if they agree. Let these Kurusthamas also collect all such things of fine taste and scent, which will delight the hearts of the Brahmanas.'

Immediately as Yudhishtira Dharmaputra speaks, Sahadeva, foremost of warriors, goes forth to accomplish his tasks and, having done so, comes and

informs the king. Now, O Rajan, Dwaipayana appoints pure and great Brahmanas, who are even like the Vedas embodied, to be sacrificial priests.

Satayavati's son himself becomes the Brahma of that yagna; Susama, bull of the race of Dhananjayas, becomes the chanter of the Sama hymns; Yagnavalkya, who is devoted always to Brahma, is the Adharyu, while Paila, son of Vasu and Dhaumya, becomes the Hotri.

Bharatarishabha, the sons of these Mahatmans, all masters of the Veda and the Vedangas, are the Hotragis.

Having chanted blessings and uttered the purpose of the yagna, they worship the large sacrificial arena, the yagnashala. At the Brahmanas' command, builders and artificers erect numerous edifices there, all capacious and perfumed like temples of the gods.

When all this has been done Yudhishtira, best of kings, commands his main advisor Sahadeva, 'Send forth messengers without delay to invite everyone to the sacrifice.'

Hearing this, Sahadeva dispatches the messengers, saying to them, 'Invite all the Brahmanas in the kingdom, all the Kshatriyas, who are landowners, all the Vaisya traders and merchants and every honourable Sudra, and bring them here yourselves.'

Thus commanded, and blessed with great speed, those messengers go abroad and invite everyone, as the Pandava told them, with no loss of time; and they all come accompanied by many friends and relatives, and strangers join them, as well.

Then, O Bhaarata, at the proper muhurta, the Brahmanas install Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, as the sacrificer at the Rajasuya. After the ceremony of installation, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, even like Dharma Deva himself in human frame, enters the yagnashala, surrounded by thousands of Brahmanas, his brothers, relatives, friends, counsellors, and by a large number of Kshatriya kings come from various countries, and by the officers of State.

Countless Brahmanas, skilled in all areas of gyana, versed in the Vedas and their many angas, begin pouring in from various countries. At the command of Yudhishtira, thousands of artisans create separate dwellings for those Brahmanas and their attendants, all well stocked with food, clothes and flowers and fruit of every season.

O King, having been duly worshipped, the Brahmanas start living in those dwellings, passing their time in spiritual and other converse, and

watching the performances of actors and dancers. Without let or pause, the commotion of their cheery eating and talking together is heard there. 'Give' and 'Eat' are the words heard most often, incessantly, every day. And, O Bhaarata, Yudhishtira gives thousands of cows, bedsteads, gold coins and nubile young women to those Brahmanas.

Thus, on Earth commences the sacrifice of that peerless Kshatriya, Pandus illustrious son, even like the yagna in Heaven of Sakra himself. Then, that Purusharishabha, Yudhishtira, sends Nakula, son of Pandu, to Hastinapura to fetch Bhishma and Drona, Dhritarashtra, Vidura, Kripa and those among his cousins who are affectionate towards him."

CANTO 33

RAJASUYIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The always victorious Nakula arrives in Hastinapura and formally invites Bhishma and Dhritarashtra. Invited with due ceremony, the Kuru elders, with the Acharya at their head, come with joyful hearts to that yagna with Brahmanas walking before them.

Also, Bharatarishabha, hearing of Raja Yudhishtiras sacrifice, hundreds of other Kshatriyas, all of them knowing the nature of this yagna, come joyfully from numerous countries, wanting to behold Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu, and his yagnashala; they come bringing priceless jewels with them, of many kinds.

And Dhritarashtra and Bhishma and Vidura of the lofty intellect; and all the Kaurava brothers with Duryodhana at their head; and Subala the king of Gandhara, and Sakuni endowed with great strength; and Achala, and Vrishaka, and Kama greatest of all rathikas, and Salya of awesome might and Bahlika the strong; and Somadatta, and Bhuri of the Kurus, and Bhurisravas and Sala; and Aswatthama, Kripa and Drona; and Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu; and Yaksasena with his sons, and Shalva, that lord of the world, and that Maharahika, King Bhagadatta of Pragjyotisha, and all Mlechcha tribes that dwell in the marshlands of the sea-shore; and many mountain kings, and King Brihadbala; and Vasudeva king of the Paundras, and the kings of Vanga and Kalinga; and Akarsa and Kuntala; and the kings of the Malavas and the Andhrakas; and the Dravidas and the Sinhalas and the king of Kashmira; and Raja Kuntibhoja of great tejas and King Gauravahana, and all the other heroic kings of Balhika; and Virata with his two sons, and Mavella endowed with great prowess; and many kings and princes ruling in various countries; and, O Bhaarata, King Sisupala blessed with terrific tejas and invincible in battle, accompanied by his son - all of these come to the sacrifice of the son of Pandu.

And Rama and Aniruddha and Kanka and Sahasarana; and Gada, Pradyumna, Samba, and Charudeshna of great energy; and Ulmuka and Nishata and the bold Angavaha; and innumerable other Vrishnis, all mighty Maharathikas, come there.

These and many other kings from the middle country come, O King, to that great Rajasuya yagna of the son of Pandu. Rajan, at the command of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, mansions are assigned to all those monarchs, full of every kind of viand, set among tanks and tall trees. Dharma's son worships all those illustrious sovereigns, as they deserve; revered by him, they retire, each to the mansions given to them.

Those edifices are lofty like the cliffs of Kailasa, beautiful, lavishly and elegantly furnished. They are surrounded by lofty, strong white walls; their windows are covered by fine mesh of gold, and their interiors adorned with strings of pearls; gradual and easy to climb are the flights of steps inside, and the floors are covered with costly carpets.

Everywhere inside those palatial homes, garlands of fresh flowers hang, and the rooms are perfumed with fine aloe. White as snow or the moon, they appear enchanting even from a yojana away. Wide and high are their gates and doors, wide enough to admit a crowd. The mansions are embellished with every kind of invaluable jewel, fashioned with precious metals, and they look like the peaks of Himavat.

When they have rested a while in those palaces, the kings emerge to see Yudhishtira surrounded by numerous Sadasyas, and his sacrificial priests; they see him performing sacrifices distinguished by the munificent gifts he makes to Brahmanas.

O King, the yagnashala where the Kshatriyas, Brahmanas and Maharishis sit is as handsome as Swarga athrong with Devas!"

CANTO 34

RAJASUYIKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, O King, Yudhishtira approaches and worships his Pitamaha and his Acharya, and he says to Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthama, Duryodhana and Vivimsati, All of you must help me with this sacrifice. All the treasures which you see here belong to you. Consult with one another and guide me as you decide.'

Having been made the sacrificer, Pandu's eldest son says this and then appoints each of them to worthy and suitable offices.

He gives Dussasana charge of food and other items of enjoyment. Aswatthama is asked to look after the Brahmanas. Sanjaya is appointed to offer worship to the kings. Bhishma and Drona, both endowed with great intelligence, are given overall charge to decide what should be done and what should not.

The king appoints Kripa to look after the diamonds, gold, pearls and gemstones, as also the distribution of gifts to Brahmanas. So, too, are other tigers among men given various offices and tasks to discharge with honour.

Balhika and Dhritarashtra and Somadatta and Jayadratha, fetched by Nakula, move about, enjoying themselves as lords of the sacrifice. Vidura, also called Kshatta, knower of every nuance of dharma, becomes the disburser. Duryodhana is the receiver of the tributes brought by other kings. Krishna, focus of the worlds, around whom every living being turns, who wishes for the best karmaphala, at his own wish engages in washing the feet of the Brahmanas.

No one who comes to see the yagnashala or Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, does so without bringing tribute of less than a thousand, in number, weight or measure. All honour Yudhishtira with bounteous gifts of jewels. Each Kshatriya king comes with gifts in the conceit that his particular contribution would enable the Pandava, Kuru king, to complete his sacrifice.

O King, beautiful and magnificent indeed is the yagnashala of Kunti's son, with the plethora of palaces built to last for ever, thronging with guardsmen and warriors. So lofty are these that their tops touch the vimanas of the gods who come to witness the yagna. Wondrous are the chariots of

the Devas, and wonderful the mansions created for the Brahmanas to stay in, which resemble those vimanas, and which are adorned with gems and filled with every kind of wealth.

Fine indeed are the crowds of kings who come here, all blessed with noble beauty and vast wealth. As if vying with Varuna himself in riches, Yudhishtira begins the sacrifice distinguished by six fires; he gives lavish gifts to Brahmanas. The king gratifies everyone with gifts of great value and, indeed, with every manner of object they can possibly desire.

An abundance of rice is served, as well as all other delicacies, then masses of jewels brought as tribute are distributed; that immense concourse consists only of those sated to surfeit. The Devas are worshipped at this yagna with the Ida, ghrita, homa and libations poured into the agni by the Maharishis, masters of mantras, their enunciation faultless.

Like the gods, the Brahmanas are also adored with sacrificial offerings, with food and wealth past calculation. The other varnas are also gratified at that yagna, and filled with joy."

CANTO 35

ARGHYAHARANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "On the last day of the sacrifice, when the king is to be sprinkled with holy water, the Brahmana Maharishis, who always deserve worship, enter the inner enclosure of the yagnashala all together. With Narada at their head, those lustrous Sages sit at their ease with the Rajarishis within the enclosure, and together they look like the Devas in Brahma's sabha, sitting with the Rishis of Heaven.

Endowed with boundless tejas, and at their ease now, those Rishis begin a host of discussions and arguments.

"This is so.'

"This is not so.'

"This is even so.'

"This cannot be otherwise.'

Thus, they speak animatedly among one another. Some of them, the skilled debaters, make the obviously weaker viewpoint seem stronger than the better one. Some, blessed with great intellects, fall upon the views urged by others like hawks darting at meat thrown up into the air, while those among them who are versed in the interpretations of religious treatises, and others of stern vratas, who know every commentary and glossary, engage themselves in sweet converse.

Rajan, that yagnashala, crowded with Devas, Brahmanas and Maharishis, is wonderful indeed, even like the wide sky studded with stars. O King, no Sudra approaches that yagnashala in Yudhishtiras palace, nor anyone who had not sworn severe vows.

Seeing the prosperity of Yudhishtira the fortunate, sprung from that sacrifice, Narada becomes exceedingly glad. Looking at that great assembly of Kshatriyas, the Muni Narada falls to thought. Purusharishabha, Narada recalls some words he heard of old in Brahma's Sabha, which prophesied the incarnation in amsa on Earth of every Deva. Knowing, Kurunandana, that this is a concourse of Devas born as men, Narada, in his heart, thinks about Hari, whose eyes are like lotus petals.

The Sage knows that the creator of all things, that highest of Gods, Narayana, who once ordered the Devas, 'Be you born on Bhumi and kill one

another before returning to Swarga,' that slayer of all the enemies of the Devas, that queller of all hostile towns has, in order to keep his own word, taken birth himself among the Kshatriyas.

Narada knows that the most holy and high Narayana, Lord of the Universe, having so commanded the Devas, has himself been born into the race of Yadava; that the greatest of all perpetuators of races has been born among the Andhaka Vrishnis on Bhumi and, graced by the highest fortune, now shines like the Moon herself among the stars.

Narada knows that Hari, Parantapa, whose might Indra and all the Devas always eulogise, is now living in the world in human form. Ah, Narada knows that the Svayambhu will himself remove from the Earth the great throng of Kshatriyas of such prowess.

Such is the vision of Narada, the omniscient, who knows Hari Narayana to be that Supreme Lord whom everybody worships with sacrifice. And Narada, blessed with vast intellect, best of all that know dharma, sits pondering this at the sacrifice of the wise Yudhishtira, and he is filled with awe.

Then, O King, Bhishma says to Yudhishtira, 'O Bhaarata, let arghya be offered to each of these kings, exactly as each one deserves. Yudhishtira, the master, the sacrificial priest, the relative, the Snataka, the friend and the king, it has been told, are the six who deserve arghya.

The Sages have said that when any of these six live in one's house for a year, he deserves to be worshipped with arghya. These kings have been with us for a while, hence, O King, let arghya be procured to be offered unto each of them. And let an arghya be given first of all to him among all present who is the foremost of them all.'

Hearing these words of Bhishma, Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha of the Kurus, tell me who you deem to be foremost among all these, to whom the first arghya should be offered.'

Then, O Bhaarata, Bhishma, son of Santanu, judges by his intellect that on Earth Krishna is foremost of all. He says, As is the Sun among all luminaries, so is this Krishna among us, because of his energy, his strength, his majesty. This our yagnashala is illumined by him and filled with joy by him, even as a sunless land is by the Sun, or a deathly still realm by a breath of breeze.'

Thus commanded by Bhishma, Sahadeva of great prowess offers the first arghya of most excellent ingredients to Krishna of the Vrishnis. Krishna,

too, receives it with grave propriety, by the law.

However, Sisupala cannot bear to see that worship being offered to Vasudeva. That mighty king of Chedi censures both Bhishma and Yudhishitra in the midst of that assembly."

CANTO 36

ARGHYAHARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sisupala says, 'O you of the House of Kuru, this Vrishni does not deserve royal worship, as if he were a king, in the midst of all these illustrious sovereigns. Pandava, it is not worthy of you to worship this lotus-eyed one like this; it is not becoming of the sons of Pandu.

Pandavas, you are children. You do not know what dharma is, for it is most subtle. This son of Ganga, this Bhishma, is also of small wit and transgresses dharma by giving you such counsel. O Bhishma, if one like you, virtuous and knowing dharma, behaves like this from self-interest, you surely deserve reprimand among the pious and the wise.

How does the Dasarha, who is not even a king, accept your arghya before all these kings, and how is it that you offer him this worship? O Bull of the race of Kuru, if you regard Krishna as being the eldest, here is Vasudeva, his father: how can his son be older than him?

Perhaps you think of Krishna as being your well-wisher, your supporter. But here is Drupada; how can Madhava deserve your worship before him? Or do you consider Krishna as being your Guru? But how can you worship the Vrishni first, when Drona is here?

Or, Kuru, do you regard Krishna as the Ritvija? How can you worship him first as such when old Dwaipayana is here? When this ancient Bhisma is present, the son of Santanu, foremost among men, he who cannot die except by his own wish, how, Rajan, have you offered Krishna arghya before him?

When the brave Aswatthama who knows all the angas of knowledge is here, why have you worshipped Krishna, O Kuru Raja? When that king of kings, Duryodhana Purushottama is here; when Kripa, Guru of the Bhaarata princes is here, how do you worship Krishna?

How, O Pandava, do you worship Krishna, while passing by Druma, Guru to the Kimpurushas? When the invincible Bhishmaka and King Pandya, who bears every auspicious sign upon his person, when Rukmi, best of kings, and Ekalavya and Salya, lord of the Madras, are here, how, O son of Pandu, have you offered Krishna the first worship?

Here, too, is Kama, always boasting of his strength among all the other kings, and who is endowed with immense prowess, who is the favourite disciple of the Brahmana Jamadagnya, the archer who vanquished everyone in battle by the strength of just his own arms. How, O Bhaarata, do you pass him over and offer Krishna first worship?

Madhusudana is neither a Ritvik, nor an Acharya, nor a king. That you adore him first, despite all these, could only be from some motive of gain. If, O Bhaarata, you always meant to offer the Purodasa to Krishna, why did you bring all these other kings here to be insulted?

We did not pay you tribute, illustrious Kaunteya, from fear, any desire for gain, or having been won over through conciliation. On the other hand, we paid you tribute because you wished to perform the Rajasuya yagna for the sake of dharma. But you have insulted us.

Rajan, it is only to insult us that you offered Krishna, who owns no insignia of royalty, the arghya in the midst of all these kings of the Earth. Surely, the renown you, Dharmaputra, have for your virtue is baseless, for who would offer such undeserved worship other than a man who has fallen away from dharma?

This Vrishni wretch treacherously killed the noble Jarasandha. Yudhishtira, you have abandoned dharma today; you have shown us baseness by offering Krishna the arghya.

If Kunti's helpless sons were afraid, disposed to baseness, should you, Madhava, not have enlightened them that you have no right or claim to this first worship? Janardana, why did you accept the arghya of which you are unworthy, even though it was offered you by these low-minded princes? But then you think highly of this worship of which you are not worthy: like a dog which laps up, by itself, some ghee it has chanced upon.

Krishna, in fact these Kurus have not insulted these assembled kings, but you. Indeed, as a wife is to an impotent man, a fine play to a blind man, so is this royal arghya to you who are not a king. We have seen what Yudhishtira is; what Bhishma is we have seen; and we have seen what this Krishna is. Yes, they have all been seen for what they really are.'

Saying this, Sisupala rises from his excellent seat and, accompanied by the rest of the kings, stalks out of the yagnashala."

CANTO 37

ARGHYAHARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira runs after Sisupala and speaks sweetly and conciliatingly to him:

'Lord of the Earth, what you have said hardly becomes you; it is needlessly cruel and sinful. Do not insult Bhishma, Rajan, by saying that he does not know what dharma is. Look, all these kings, who are older than you, approve of Krishna receiving the Purodasa. You, too, should bear it patiently, as they do. Lord of Chedi, Bhishma knows who Krishna really is. You do not know him as the Kuru patriarch does.'

Now Bhishma says, 'He who does not approve of the worship offered Krishna who is the eldest in the universe, deserves neither soft words nor conciliation. The greatest warrior among Kshatriyas is he who defeats his enemy in battle and then sets him free; he becomes a Guru to the one he frees. I do not see in this assembly even one king whom Krishna, son of the Satwatas, has not vanquished.

Krishna of untainted glory deserves to be worshipped not just by us; this mighty-armed one deserves the adoration of the three worlds. Numberless great Kshatriya warriors Krishna has quelled in battle. Why, all the universe is founded in this Vrishni. So it is that we worship Krishna before all the rest, all the eldest.

What you say does not become you, Sisupala, do not think like this. Rajan, I have waited upon many who are truly old in gyana. I have heard from all those men of wisdom about the countless transcendent and much honoured attributes of this Sauri.

How often I have listened to all the awesome deeds that Krishna of matchless intellect has performed since he was born. Also, O master of Chedi, it is not from caprice, neither thinking of our relationship to him or what gains he might bestow upon us, that we worship this Janardana, whom all the good on Earth worship and who is the source of the happiness of every creature.

We have offered the first arghya to him because of his fame, his heroism and his success. There is no one here, even of tender years, whom we have not considered before doing as we did. We have passed over many who are

famed for their dharma, before deciding that Krishna alone deserves this worship.

Among Brahmanas he who excels in knowledge, among Kshatriyas he who has boundless strength, among Vaisyas he who has the most possessions and wealth, and the eldest among the Sudras deserve worship. We worshipped Govinda because no one knows the Vedas and Vedangas as he does, and no one is as strong as him.

Who in the world of men is as distinguished as him? Liberality, cleverness, knowledge of the Vedas, bravery, modesty, achievement, intelligence, humility, beauty, firmness, contentment and prosperity — all abide eternally in Achyuta. Hence, O Kings, it behoves you to endorse the worship which we have offered Krishna of great accomplishments, who, as the Acharya, the Father, the Guru, deserves everyone's worship.

Hrishikesa is the Ritvik, the Guru, worthy of being approached to give him one's daughter in marriage; he is the Snataka, the lord, the friend: so have we worshipped Achyuta. Krishna is the origin of the universe and that into which the universe will dissolve. Truly, this entire universe of creatures mobile and unmoving has sprung just from Krishna.

He is the unmanifest primal cause, the Avyakta Prakriti, the creator, the eternal, and beyond the ken of all creatures. Therefore does he of unfading glory deserve the highest worship. The intellect, the seat of sensibility, the five elements — air, heat, water, ether, earth - and the four species of beings are all founded in Krishna. The Sun, the Moon, the Constellations, the Planets, all the principal directions and the intermediate directions are all established in Krishna.

As the Agnihotra is foremost among all Vedic sacrifices, as the Gayatri is foremost among mantras, as the King is the first among men, as the Ocean is foremost among all rivers, as the Moon is foremost among planets, the Sun foremost among luminaries, as Meru is foremost among mountains, as Garuda is foremost among all birds, so, as long as the upward, downward and sideways course of the universe lasts, Kesava is foremost in all the worlds, including the realm of the gods.

This Sisupala is just a boy, and so he does not know Krishna and goes about everywhere disparaging Krishna. This king of Chedi will never see dharma in that light in which one who wants to gain great punya will. Who among the old and the young, or among these illustrious lords of the Earth

does not regard Krishna as deserving worship, or does not worship Krishna?

If Sisupala considers this worship undeserved, he should do what he thinks is proper.'"

CANTO 38

ARGHYAHARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Saying this, the mighty Bhishma stops. Then Sahadeva answers Sisupala grimly, 'If there is any king amongst you who cannot bear to see Krishna, of dark hue, the slayer of Kesi, the possessor of immeasurable energy, whom I worship, I set my foot on the head of that king and all others like him!

I wait for a reply from you. And let those kings who own intelligence approve our worship of Krishna, who is the Acharya, the Father, the Guru, and deserves the arghya and the worship.'

When Sahadeva shows his foot none of those intelligent, wise, proud and mighty kings says anything. A shower of flowers falls on Sahadeva's head, and an asariri, an incorporeal voice, says, 'Excellent, excellent!'

Then Narada, who wears black deer-skin, who speaks of both the future and the dim past, dispeller of all doubts, who intimately knows all the worlds, says in the midst of numberless creatures, these words of the clearest import:

'Men who will not worship the lotus-eyed Krishna should be considered dead though they move, and they should never be spoken to on any occasion.'

Then that god among men, Sahadeva, who well knows the difference between a Brahmana and a Kshatriya, having worshipped those that deserved worship, completes the arghya ceremony.

But upon Krishna receiving the first worship, Sunitha Sisupala, Parantapa, his eyes red as copper with rage, says to those lords of men, 'Why do you sit thinking, still, when I am here to lead you all? Let us stand together in battle against the Vrishnis and the Pandavas!'

Thus stirring the kings, the Bull of the Chedis holds counsel with them how to obstruct the completion of the sacrifice. All the invited kings who had come for the yagna, now with Sisupala leading them, look angry and their faces become pale.

They all say, 'We must make certain that it is clear we have not acquiesced in Yudhishtira's sacrifice or to Krishna receiving the first arghya.'

Impelled by hubris and belief in their power, the kings, robbed of reason by anger, speak thus. Moved by arrogance, smarting under the insult offered them, the kings repeat this loudly. Though their friends seek to pacify them, their faces are suffused with rage, even like those of roaring lions driven away from their prey.

Krishna understands that the sea of kings, countless its waves of troops, is preparing for a terrific attack."

CANTO 39

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Seeing that great assembly of kings agitated with wrath, like the tremendous Ocean by the winds that blow during the Pralaya, the universal dissolution, Yudhishtira says to the aged Bhishma, most intelligent of men and grandsire of the Kurus, even like Puruhuta Indra, slayer of foes, of boundless energy, addressing Brihaspati, 'This vast sea of kings is stirred by wrath. Tell me, Pitama, what shall I do that my sacrifice is not obstructed and my people are not harmed?'

When Yudhishtira, knower of dharma, says this, Bhishma, the Kuru grandsire, replies, 'Fear not, Kuruvyaghra. Can the dog kill the lion? I know of a solution which is both peaceable and easy.

These lords of the earth are barking all together even as a pack of dogs does at a sleeping lion. My child, truly like dogs at the lion, these are barks in anger at the sleeping Vrishni lion.

Yes, Krishna now is like a lion that is asleep. Until he wakes, this lord of the Chedis, this bull among men, makes these kings seem like lions. My child, best of all kings, this Sisupala of little wit wants to carry these kings with him, through the very will of Him that is the soul of the universe, to Yama's realm.

Surely, O Bhaarata, Vishnu wants to take back into himself the life that dwells in Sisupala. Wisest of men, O Kaunteya, the intelligence of this evil king of the Chedis, as also of all these Kshatriyas, has become perverted. Why, all these kings' minds have become as perverse as that of the Chedi.

Yudhishtira, Krishna is the progenitor as also the destroyer of all created beings - of the four species which exist in the three worlds.'

O Bhaarata, when Sisupala hears Bhishma, he retorts roughly, rudely."

CANTO 40

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sisupala says, 'Old and infamous wretch of your race, are you not ashamed of trying to frighten these kings with these false terrors? You are the foremost of the Kurus, and living as you do in the third state, of celibacy, does it become you to give counsel like this, which is so far removed from dharma?

Like one boat tied to another, or the blind following the blind, are the Kurus who have you for their guide. More than once you have pained us by eulogising the deeds of this Krishna - the slaying of Putana and all the rest. You are arrogant and ignorant, always praising this Yadava; why does your tongue not split into a hundred parts?

How can you, who have such superior gyana, want to extol this cowboy, whom even men of little intelligence might berate? If in his childhood Krishna did kill a vulture, O Bhishma, what was so remarkable in that, or in his slaying later of Aswa and Vrishabha, both of whom were untutored in battle?

What is so wonderful in his bringing down a wooden cart with a kick? Bhishma, what is so remarkable in his holding Govardhana, which is like an anthill, aloft for a week?

"While he sported upon a mountain he ate a vast quantity of food" - listening to these words of yours, many have wondered. But, O you who knows dharma, is it not still more of a crime that Krishna killed the great one, Kamsa, whose food it was that he ate?

Ah base Kuru, you do not know dharma! Have you never heard from Sages who spoke to you the very things which I will now tell you? The wise and virtuous always teach the honest that weapons must never be made to use against women, cows and Brahmanas, nor against those whose food one has eaten, or whose shelter one has enjoyed.

Bhishma, it seems you have cast away all these teachings. Infamous Kuru, in your desire to praise Krishna you say to me that he is grand and has the highest knowledge and age, as if I know nothing at all. If at your word, O Bhishma, he who has killed a woman, Putana, must be worshipped, then what will become of this great teaching?

How can anyone like Krishna deserve such praise, Bhishma?

"This one is the foremost of all wise men; He is the Lord of the Universe".

Janardana listens to what you say and he believes it all to be true, while surely they are lies. The words of praise which a vabdhi, a chanter, sings, leave no impression upon him, however often he croons them. Every creature acts according to his nature, even like the bhulinga bird, which forever preaches against rashness and then picks shreds of meat from between the lion's teeth.

Your nature is low, Bhishma; it is mean, there is no doubt about it. So, too, it seems that the Pandavas, who consider Krishna as deserving of worship, who have you for their mentor, are also sinners by nature. Knowing dharma as you do, you have still fallen away from the way of the wise. And so, you are sinful.

Who, Bhishma, knowing himself to be virtuous and superior in knowledge, will do what you have done from motives of gain? If you know dharma's ways, if your mind is guided by dharma, then be you blessed. But then, why, Bhishma, did you carry the chaste Amba, who had already given her heart to another, forcibly from her swayamvara, if you are so full of virtue and wisdom?

Although you brought her forcibly, your honest and virtuous brother Vichitravirya did not marry her when he knew her condition. You boast of dharma, yet under your very eye, were sons not begotten upon your dead brother's wives by another; true, in accordance with dharma. Where, O Bhishma, is your own dharma?

I say that this great celibacy of yours, the brahmacharya that you observe either from foolishness or impotence, is in vain. O Bhishma of dharma, I do not see your wellbeing; you who preach virtue have never, as I see it, served the old, your ancestors.

Worship, charity, scriptural study, sacrifices distinguished by generous gifts to Brahmanas - all these together do not amount to a sixteenth part of the punya a man obtains by having a son. The punya acquired by fasts and vows beyond count are all fruitless to him who has no child. You are childless and old, and the dharma you preach is false.

Like the swan in the story, you will now die at the hands of your own kinsmen. Other men of knowledge have of old told this tale. I will now relate it in full for you to hear.

Of yore there lived a swan on the sea-coast. He always preached dharma to his feathered clan, while not following dharma in his life. *Practise dharma and abjure sin —* this was what all the other honest birds constantly heard him preach. And I have heard that the other birds that ranged the sea brought him food: for the sake of dharma.

O Bhishma, all those other sea-birds left their eggs with him and dived among the waves, and the sinful old swan would eat the eggs with which those other foolish avians trusted him. After a while, when the eggs decreased alarmingly, another wise bird became suspicious and one day actually saw what the old swan did.

Having witnessed the old swans crime, the other bird spoke in great sorrow to his fellow birds. Then, all the other birds also saw the old swan at his sin and they descended on the evil wretch and killed him.

Your conduct, Bhishma, is just like the old swan's, and these kings of the Earth might kill you in anger even as the other birds did the sinful old swan. Men who know the Puranas have an old saying about the swan, and, Bhaarata - *O you that support yourself on your wings, though your heart is driven by lust, yet you preach dharma. But this your sin of eating the eggs transgresses what you preach*."'

CANTO 41

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sisupala says, 'That mighty king, Jarasandha, who had no wish ever to fight Krishna, saying *He is a slave,* deserved my deepest esteem. Who can commend what Kesava, Bhima and Arjuna with him, did when they killed Jarasandha?

Entering through the unlawful gate, disguised as a Brahmana: thus Krishna spied on the might of King Jarasandha. And when that great sovereign first offered this wretch padya to wash his feet, only then did he confess to not being a Brahmana, apparently from motives of dharma.

When Jarasandha, O Kuru, asked Bhima and Arjuna to take padya it was Krishna who refused for them. If this fellow is Lord of the Universe, as this other fool says he is, why does he disclaim being a Brahmana?

Ah, I am so surprised that, while you lead the Pandavas astray from the path of the wise, they regard you as being honest. Or, perhaps, it is hardly surprising from those who have you, O Bhishma, womanish in nature, bent with age, for their main counsellor in all things.'

Hearing these, Sisupala's words, harsh both in import and sound, Bhimasena, mightiest of strong men, of terrific energy, becomes enraged. His eyes, large and expanded like lotus leaves, dilate still more; they grow red as copper. Upon his brow the assembled kings see three deep furrows, even like the Ganga of three paths upon the mountain of three peaks.

When Bhimasena begins to grind his teeth in rage the kings see that his face resembles that of Yama himself at the end of the Yuga, ready to devour every creature. Just as that furious Kshatriya is about to spring up, Bhishma Mahabaho catches hold of him even like Mahadeva seizing Mahasena, the divine Senapati.

O Bhaarata, Bhishma, Pitamaha of the Kurus, quickly pacifies the raging Bhima, with different kinds of gentle counsel. Bhima Parantapa cannot disobey Bhishma, even as the Ocean can never break his shores, not during the monsoon.

However, Rajan, even while Bhima rages, the bold Sisupala, depending just on his own manliness, does not tremble or grow afraid. Though Bhima

leaps up every second moment in fury, Sisupala does not bestow a thought on him, just as a lion pays no heed to a small animal which is angry.

Seeing the dreadful Bhima in such frenzy, the powerful king of Chedi says with a laugh, 'Let him go, O Bhishma. Let all these kings watch me burn him with my prowess like a moth in a fire!'

Hearing this from the Chedi king, Bhishma, Kurusthama, best of all wise men, speaks thus to Bhima."

CANTO 42

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma says, 'This Sisupala was born in the line of the kings of Chedi; he was born with three eyes and four arms. As soon as he was born he screamed, and brayed like a little donkey. His father and mother, and all his kinsfolk were terrified.

Seeing the extraordinary child and these ominous signs, his parents decided to abandon him, but then an asariri, a disembodied voice, spoke to the king, his wife, their ministers and their priest, who stood stricken with anxiety:

"O King, this son of yours will be both fortunate and of superior strength. You have nothing to fear from him; indeed cherish him, nurture him without fear. His time has not come and he will not die yet. Besides, the one who will kill him with a weapon has also been born."

When the mother heard this, she cried anxiously to the invisible being, "I bow with folded hands to him that spoke these words! Be he a lofty god or any other, let him tell me one more thing — I want to know who will be my son's killer."

The invisible one then said, "When this child is placed upon the lap of his killer to be, his superfluous arms will fall onto the ground like a pair of five-headed snakes and his third eye on his forehead will vanish tracelessly."

When the kings of the Earth heard about the child's three eyes and four arms and what the unseen being had said about him, they all went to Chedi to see the infant. Worshipping each one as he deserved, the king of Chedi gave his son to be placed upon the laps of each of those kings. Though that child was set upon the laps of a thousand kings, one after the other, yet what the asariri foretold did not come to pass.

Hearing about all this in Dwaravati, the mighty Yadava heroes Sankarshana and Janardana also went to the capital of the Chedis to see their father's sister - the Chedi queen was a daughter of the Yadavas. When they had greeted everyone present according to his rank, and the king and queen, too, and asked after their welfare, Rama and Krishna sat upon fine seats.

After those heroes had been worshipped, the queen, with great joy, herself brought her child and set him in Damodara Krishna's lap. As soon as the child was placed on his lap, his extra arms fell off and the third eye in his brow disappeared.

When the queen saw this, she anxiously begged Krishna for a boon. She cried, "Krishna, fear afflicts me and I want a boon from you! You reassure all who are afraid; you dispel their fears."

Krishna, scion of the Yadavas, said, "Revered one, fear not! You know dharma and you need have no fear of me. What boon shall I give you? What shall I do, Matuli, O my aunt? I will do what you ask, why, whether I can or not!"

The queen Srutakirti said, "Mighty, mighty Krishna, for my sake you must pardon every offence of my child Sisupala, O Yaduvyaghra. O Lord, this is the boon I ask of you."

Krishna said, "Aunt, even when he deserves to be killed, I will pardon a hundred offences of his, so do not grieve.'"

Bhishma continues, 'It is thus, O Bhima, that this wretched king, this evil-hearted Sisupala, haughty with the boon which Krishna granted his mother, dares summon you to battle.'"

CANTO 43

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma says, 'The will which moves the lord of Chedi to call you to fight, though he knows how strong you are, of strength which knows no exhaustion, that will is not his own but surely the purpose of Krishna himself, of Jagannatha. O Bhima, which king on Earth would dare abuse me as this wretch of his race, already in death's clasp, has done today?

There is no doubt that this mighty-armed one is an amsa of Hari's tejas, and I am certain that the Lord wants to take back unto himself that energy of his. That is why, O Kuruvyaghra, this tiger-like Chedi king, so vile his heart, roars as he does, caring nothing for all of us.'

The Chedi king hears what Bhishma says and can bear no more. In fury he responds, 'May our enemies, O Bhishma, be endowed with whatever prowess this Kesava has, whom you praise like a hymn chanter, rising repeatedly from your seat.

If, Bhishma, you find such delight in giving praise, then praise these kings, not Krishna. Praise this Darada, most excellent ruler of Balhika, who rent this very Earth as soon as he was born. Praise, O Bhishma, this Kama, king of Anga and Vanga, who is equal in strength to him of a thousand eyes; who draws a great bow; this mighty-armed one who wears celestial kundalas with which he was born, and this coat of mail splendid as the rising sun; who vanquished Jarasandha, Vasava's equal, at wrestling, almost mangling that king.

Bhishma, praise Drona and Aswatthama, father and son, mighty warriors, worthy of praise and the best of Brahmanas, either of whom, I am certain, if angered could destroy this Earth with all its mobile and unmoving beings. I do not see any Kshatriya who is the equal in battle of Drona or Aswatthama.

Why don't you want to praise them? You pass over Duryodhana, most mighty-armed king, unequalled in this whole sea-girt world, and King Jayadratha master of weapons, blessed with great prowess, and Druma, Guru of the Kimpurushas, renowned for his untold might, and old Kripa, Acharyar of the Bhaarata princes, also endowed with vast prowess: you ignore all these and praise Krishna?

You pass over that best of bowmen, Rukmin of blazing energy, and praise Kesava? You ignore Bhishmaka of prodigious might, and King Dantavakra, and Bhagadatta famed for his numberless sacrificial stakes, and Jayatsena king of the Magadha, and Virata and Drupada, and Sakuni and Brihadbala, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti; Pandya, Sweta, Uttama and Sankha of great prosperity, the proud Vrishasena, the powerful Ekalavya, and the great warrior Kalinga of abundant energy, and praise just Krishna?

And, Bhishma, if your mind is always inclined to sing the praises of others why do you not praise Salya and the other kings of the Earth? What can I do when it seems that you have not heard anything before from virtuous old men about teaching dharma? Have you never heard that both the reproach and glorification of either oneself or others are not practised by honourable men?

There is no one who approves of what you do, when you ceaselessly praise, with such adoration, and out of sheer ignorance, this Krishna so unworthy of praise. How do you, from your mere wish, establish the entire universe in the servant of the Bhojas, this cowherd?

O Bhaarata, this is not your true nature as a man, but more like that of the bhulinga bird, of whom I already spoke. On the far side of Himavat there lives a bird called bhulinga, who never utters a word of evil import. *Never do anything rash* — this is what she always cries, but never understanding that, she herself always acts rashly.

Having little intelligence, this birds pecks out the shreds of meat sticking between the lion's teeth, and at that always while the lion is eating. Assuredly, that bird lives at the lion's pleasure. O wretched Bhishma, O sinner, you always speak like that bird, just as surely as you are alive only at the pleasure of these kings.

Yet, there is no one like you to serve the worst interests of these same kings!' Hearing these harsh words from the king of Chedi, O Rajan, Bhishma says to him, 'Truly I am alive at the pleasure of these lords of the Earth, but I do not consider these kings as being even equal to a straw.'

No sooner does Bhishma say this than the kings become inflamed! The hairs on the bodies of some stand on end, and some begin to reproach Bhishma. Some, who wield large bows, cry, 'The wretched Bhishma is old but he is boastful and does not deserve our forgiveness. Kings, mad with anger as this patriarch is, it is just that we kill him like an animal. Let us together burn him in a fire of grass or straw!'

Bhishma hears this, and the Kuru grandsire, great his intelligence, says to those lords of the world, 'I see no end to our talk, for words can always be answered with more words. So, O lords of the Earth, listen to what I have to say, all of you. Whether you kill me like an animal or burn me in a fire of grass or straw, I set my foot on all your heads!

Here is Krishna, Govinda who knows no decay. We have worshipped him with the first arghya. Let him who wishes for a swift death call the dark Madhava, the Chakra-bearer, the Gadadhari, to a fight, and dying at his hands, enter into and become one with the being of this Devadeva, this God of gods.'"

CANTO 44

SISUPALA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of Bhishma, the Chedi king, endowed with great prowess, says to Krishna, 'Janardana, I challenge you! Come fight me and I will kill you and all these Pandavas, too. For, O Krishna, the sons of Pandu have dishonoured all these kings by worshipping you who are no king, and they also deserve to die.

Yes, I am convinced that these who have adored you, who are a slave, a wretch and no king, surely deserve death at my hands.'

Saying this, that tiger among kings stands there roaring in anger. After Sisupala has stopped ranting, Krishna speaks in the mildest voice to all the assembled kings and the Pandavas, 'O Kings, this evil one is the son of a daughter of the Satwatas, yet he is a terrible enemy to all of us Satwatas.

Although we never seek to harm him, he always seeks our ill. When this ruthless fellow heard that we had gone to Pragjyotishapura, though he is my father's sister's son, this villain came and burnt Dwaraka.

While King Bhoja sported upon the Raivataka hill, this vile Chedi attacked the attendants of that king, slew many and led many others away to .his city in chains.

His every motive sinful, this wretch stole my father's sacrificial horse, which had been loosed across the lands with an armed guard: so that he could obstruct my father's yagna.

This sinner ravished the wife of the pure Akrura, while she was on her way from Dwaraka to the Sauvira country. This injurer of his uncle disguised himself as the king of Karusha and ravished the chaste Bhadra, princess of Visala, whom Karusha was meant to marry.

Patiently have I borne all these sorrows for the sake of my father's sister. It is fortunate that today this has happened before all of you kings. You have all seen the hatred and enmity this Sisupala bears me. You also know everything that he has done to me behind my back.

For the arrogance he has shown me in the presence of you lords of the Earth, he deserves to be killed by me, and today I find myself ill able to forgive him. Wishing for a swift death this fool dared desire Rukmini for

himself. But like a Sudra failing to hear the Vedas being recited, he did not get her.'

Listening to Krishna, all the gathered kings begin to reprove the king of Chedi. But the mighty Sisupala laughs aloud and says, 'Krishna, are you not ashamed to say in this sabha, especially before all these kings, that I desired your wife Rukmini? Madhusudana, who other than you, calling himself a man, would declare in the midst of honourable men that his wife was intended for someone else?

Krishna, pardon me if you please, or do not. But angry or friendly, what can you do to me anyway?'

While Sisupala says this, Kirshna thinks of the Chakra which humbles the hubris of the Asuras. As soon as the discus appears in his hands, the eloquent and illustrious one says loudly, 'Lords of the Earth, hear why I have always forgiven this Sisupala in the past. It is because of the boon I gave his mother that I would pardon a hundred offences of his. This was the boon she asked me for and this was the boon that I granted her.

But today, O Kings, that number has become full, and now in your presence I will kill him.'

With that, and a growl, the Lord of the Yadus sloughs off Sisupala's head with the Chakra, and the mighty-armed king of Chedi falls like a cliff struck by thunder. Rajan, the gathered kings see a fierce light, pulsing, bright as the Sun in the sky, issue from the body of Sisupala. The spirit light worships Krishna of the lotus-leaf eyes, whom all the worlds worship, and melts into the Lord's body.

The kings are wonderstruck to see that light entering Krishna Purushottama. When Krishna kills the Chedi king the cloudless vacant sky pours down showers of rain; peals of thunder echo; the Earth herself trembles.

Some kings never say a word during those dreadful moments but merely sit gazing at Janardana; others rub their palms in fury with their forefingers; yet others are beside themselves with rage and bite their lips; while some in their hearts approve entirely of what Krishna does. Some are there who are moved by anger, while others turn pacifiers.

The great Rishis are profoundly pleased; they praise Krishna warmly before departing. Indeed, all the high-souled Brahmanas and many of the mighty Kshatriyas, too, who are there, are overjoyed to witness the prowess of the Vrishni. They eulogise him.

Yudhishtira now commands his brothers to perform the funeral rites for Sisupala, bold son of Damaghosha, without delay and with proper honour. The sons of Pandu obey the behest of their brother, and then Yudhishtira, along with all the others kings, makes Sisupala's son king of the Chedis.

Then, O Rajan, the yagna of the Kuru king of great tejas, Yudhishtira blessed with every kind of prosperity, becomes exceptionally beautiful and pleases all the young men there. Begun auspiciously, every obstacle removed, replete with an abundance of wealth and corn, with rice and every other kind of food, Kesava watches over the sacrifice.

In due course, Yudhishtira completes the yagna, while Janardana Mahabaho, the lofty Sauri, guards it until the end, armed with his bow the Saringa, his Chakra and Gada.

When the good Yudhishtira has had his ritual bath after the sacrifice, all the Kshatriyas come to him and say, "Through good fortune you have gained imperial dignity. O you of the race of Ajamida, you have spread the fame of your entire race.

King of kings, you have gained profound religious merit by what you have done. You have worshipped us all to our hearts' content, and we now say to you that we wish to return to our own kingdoms. It becomes you to give us leave.'

The just Yudhishtira hears what the kings say, worships each one as he deserves, then commands his brothers, All these kings came to us at their pleasure. These Parantapas now wish to return to their own kingdoms, and to bid me farewell. Be blessed, my brothers, escort them to the frontiers of our kingdom.'

Listening to their brother, the other Pandavas follow the kings, one after the other, as each deserves. Without delay, the powerful Dhrishtadyumna escorts King Virata; Dhananjaya follows the illustrious Maharatha Yagnasena; the mighty Bhimasena goes with Bhishma and Dhritarashtra; Sahadeva, master of battle, follows the brave Drona and his son; Nakula, O King, follows Subala and his son; the sons of Draupadi along with the son of Subhadra follow the mighty warriors-kings of the mountain countries.

Other Kshatriyarishabhas escort other Kshatriyas, while the Brahmanas in their thousands also depart, duly worshipped.

When all the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas have left, Krishna says to Yudhishtira, 'O son of the Kurus, with your leave, I, too, wish to return to

Dwaraka. Through great good fortune, you have performed the greatest of all sacrifices, the Rajasuya yagna!'

Yudhishtira replies, 'By your grace, Govinda, I have accomplished this. Because of your grace alone all the world of Kshatriyas is now under my sway, and all the kings came here with tribute.

Lord, without you my heart never feels any joy. So how can I, O Anagha, give you leave to go? Yet, I know that you must go home to Dwaraka.'

The great Hari, his fame worldwide, now goes with his cousin to his aunt Kunti, and says cheerfully, 'Matuli, your sons have performed the Rajasuya yagna and gained imperial dignity. Vast wealth they have obtained, and their endeavours have all been crowned with success. Be pleased with all this, and now, with your leave, I wish to return to Dwaraka.'

After this, Krishna bids farewell to Draupadi and Subhadra. Coming out of the inner apartments accompanied by Yudhishtira, he performs his ablutions and goes through the daily rites of worship, and then has the Brahmanas utter their blessings.

Now the mighty-armed Daruka arrives in a chariot of wondrous design, its body like clouds. Krishna Mahatman, his eyes like lotus leaves, looks at that Garuda-bannered chariot, walks around it in reverent pradakshina before climbing into it and setting out for Dwaraka.

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, blessed with prosperity, along with his brothers, follows the mighty Krishna on foot. Then Hari of the eyes like lotus leaves stops that best of rathas for a moment, and speaks to the son of Kunti.

'King of kings, cherish your subjects with indefatigable vigilance and patience. As the clouds are to all creatures, as the great tree of spreading boughs is to birds, as he of a thousand eyes is to the immortals, you be the refuge and support of your kin.'

With this, Krishna and Yudhishtira take leave of each other and return to their respective homes. Rajan, after the lord of the Satwatas has gone back to Dwaravati, only King Duryodhana, with King Subala's son Sakuni, bulls among men, continue staying in that unearthly sabha."

CANTO 45

DYUTA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "When that greatest of sacrifices, the Rajasuya, so difficult of accomplishment, was completed Vyasa, surrounded by his disciples, presents himself before Yudhishtira. Upon seeing him, Yudhishtira rises quickly from his throne, and surrounded by his brothers, worships his grandfather, the Rishi, with water to wash his feet and offers him a fine place to sit.

Having sat on a costly carpet inlaid with gold, the illustrious one says to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, 'Sit yourself down.'

When the king and his brothers sit, the illumined Vyasa, always truthful in speech, says, 'Son of Kunti, your fortune swells and you with it. You have gained empire, so difficult to acquire. And, O furtherer of the race of Kuru, the Kauravas have all prospered because of you.

O Chakravartin, I have been duly worshipped, and with your leave I now wish to go.'

Yudhishtira salutes the dark Rishi, his grandfather, touches his feet and says, 'Greatest of men, a doubt has arisen in my mind, hard to dispel. O Bull among the regenerate, none but you can remove it.

The illumined Narada said that, in consequence of the Rajasuya yagna, three kinds of omens, celestial, atmospheric and terrestrial, occurred. Grandsire, has the death of Sisupala caused evil fortune?'

The exalted son of Parasara, the island-born Vyasa of dark hue, says, 'For thirteen years, O King, those omens will bear momentous consequences, ending in the absolute destruction, Rajadhiraja, of all Kshatriya kind. At that time, with you as sole cause, O Bharatarishabha, all the Kshatriyas of the Earth shall be annihilated: because of the sins of Duryodhana and through the prowess of Bhima and Arjuna.

Towards the end of this night, in your dream you will see the blue-throated Bhava, annihilator of Tripura, always absorbed in dhyana, the Bull his emblem, drinking from a human skull, and fierce and terrible, Lord of all creatures, God of Gods, Umapati, called Hara and Sarva also, and Vrisha, armed with the trident and the bow Pinaka, and wearing tiger skin.

You will see Siva, tall and white as the Kailasa cliff, seated upon his Bull, gazing unwinkingly towards the south, the direction presided over by the king of the Pitrs. King of kings, this shall be your dream tonight. Do not grieve for dreaming such a dream, for no one can escape time.

Be you blessed! I now will go towards Kailasa. You must rule the Earth with vigilance and steadfastness, patiently bearing every privation!'

Saying this, the illustrious Krishna Dwaipayana, accompanied by his disciples, who always follows the dictates of the Vedas, goes away towards Kailasa. When his grandfather has gone, the king is gripped by anxiety and grief and thinks ceaselessly of what the Sage said.

He tells himself, 'Surely, what the Rishi foretold must come to pass. Who can keep Fate at bay by effort alone?'

Then Yudhishtira, endowed with great energy, says to his brothers, 'Tigers among men, you have heard what the Dwaipayana said to me. Having heard him, I have resolved that I must die, since I alone, otherwise, am ordained to be the cause of the death of all Kshatriya kind.

Ah, my precious brothers, if this is what time has in store for me what need is there for me to live?'

Hearing the king, Arjuna replies, 'Rajan, do not yield to this manic dejection, which destroys reason. Summon your courage and do what would truly be good for us all.'

Yudhishtira, resolute in truth, thinking all the while of what Vyasa Muni said, replies to his brothers, 'Be blessed and listen to the vow I swear from this day. For thirteen years, what ever be the purpose for which I must live, I will never speak a harsh word to you my brothers or to any king of the Earth.

Commanded by my kinsmen, I will observe dharma and exemplify my vratas. If I live thus, making no distinction between my own children and others, there cannot be any disagreement between me and anyone. Disputation causes war in this world. If I keep war at bay, always doing what is agreeable to everyone, infamy shall never be mine, O Purusharishabhas.'

The other Pandavas listen to what their brother says, and being ever engaged in doing his will, they approve. Having sworn this oath, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, together with his brothers, gratifies his priests as also the Gods with due ceremonies, in that sabha.

Bharatarishabha, when all the kings have gone Yudhishtira performs the customary rituals and then returns to his palace with his ministers. King of men, Duryodhana and Sakuni, son of Subala, continue to stay in the Mayaa sabha of fascination."

CANTO 46

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "That bull among men, Duryodhana, continues to live in the Mayaa Sabha. With Sakuni, the Kuru prince slowly examines the entire edifice, and sees many an unearthly design in it, which he has never seen in Hastinapura, the city named after the elephant.

One day, while walking through the mansion, Raja Duryodhana comes upon a crystal surface. Mistaking it for a pool of water, he draws up his clothes, only to find it is solid floor; he continues in some shame and sorrow.

Sometime after, mistaking a lake of crystalline water adorned with lotuses of crystal petals for solid ground, he falls into it with his clothes on, drawing peals of laughter from the mighty Bhima, as also from the servants of the palace.

At Yudhishtira's command, the servants quickly bring Duryodhana fine fresh clothes. Yet, seeing Duryodhana like that, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins all laugh out loud. Unused to being insulted, Duryodhana cannot bear that laughter. He hides his feelings and does not even look at them.

Yet again, he draws up his clothes to cross some dry ground which he once more mistakes for water and again they all laugh. Soon, Duryodhana mistakes a solid crystal door for being open space, walks straight into it and stands stunned, his head reeling. Then, he thinks an open door is shut and cautiously reaches out his hands to feel empty space, and tripping, falls down.

Coming to yet another door, which is ajar, but thinking it closed, he turns away from it. Finally, O King, having seen the staggering wealth of the Pandavas during the Rajasuya yagna, and having humiliated himself repeatedly inside the Mayaa Sabha, Duryodhana takes his leave of the Pandavas and returns to Hastinapura.

Dwelling darkly in his mind on everything that he has seen, which has made him burn with envy, and all that has happened to shame him, his heart turns to dire thoughts of sin even while riding home.

He has seen the Pandavas full of joy, with all the kings of the Earth paying them homage; he has seen young and old serving the sons of Pandu;

he has seen the splendour and prosperity of his illustrious cousins, and Duryodhana, son of Dhritarashtra, is pale with jealousy.

While riding home, his heart sorely afflicted, Duryodhana thinks of little other than the grand sabha, and the unmatched prosperity of the wise Yudhishtira. Dhritarashtra is so absorbed by these thoughts that he says not a word to Subalas son, even when Sakuni repeatedly addresses him.

Seeing him plunged in dejection, Sakuni asks, 'Duryodhana what afflicts you like this?'

Duryodhana replies, 'Uncle, seeing all the world under the sway of Yudhishtira from the power of the weapons of the mighty Arjuna, seeing the glory of the yagna of Pritha's son being equal to that of the sacrifice of Sakra himself, I am filled with flaming envy, burning me night and day, drying me up like a shallow tank in summer.

When Sisupala was killed by the lord of the Satwatas, there was no man to take the side of Sisupala. Consumed by the fire of the Pandava, they all forgave that crime; else, who could ever condone such a thing? Because of the power of the son of Pandu, Krishna got away with his heinous offence.

And so many kings brought myriad and untold wealth for Kunti's son: even like tribute-paying Vaisyas! Seeing Yudhishtira's fortune, his resplendent prosperity, my heart burns with envy, although this does not become me.'

Truly as if flames burn him, Duryodhana says again to the Gandhara king, 'I will cast myself into a fire, swallow poison or drown myself. I cannot live. Which man of vigour in the world can bear to see his enemies prosper, while he himself is destitute?

I who watch my enemy prosper am neither a woman, nor yet not a woman; neither am I a man, nor one who is not a man. Seeing the Pandavas' sovereignty over the Earth, their vast affluence, ah, watching that Rajasuya yagna of theirs, who is there in the world who would not be aggrieved?

By myself I can never hope to gain such empire or wealth, and I see no allies who would help me acquire them. This is why I think of killing myself. I see the unparalleled and serene prosperity of Kunti's son, and I know that Fate is supreme and all effort pointless.

Son of Subala, once I strove ceaselessly to effect his death. But he baffled all my attempts and look at him now bloomed fully like a lotus from a pool of water. Surely, Fate is supreme and effort in vain: behold, day by day, the sons of Dhritarashtra decay and the sons of Pritha wax.

Ah, my heart burns as if it were on fire to look at the fortune of the Pandavas, that sabha of theirs, to think of their servants laughing at me. O Uncle, know that I am grief-stricken and fit to burst with envy, and I will speak of it to Dhritarashtra.'"

CANTO 47

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sakuni says 'Duryodhana, you must not be jealous of Yudhishtira. Through their own good fortune the sons of Pandu are only enjoying what they deserve. Parantapa, O great King, with all the numberless plots you hatched to do away with them you could not. Providence saw the Purushavyaghras escape all your machinations.

They have Draupadi for their wife, and Drupada, his sons and Vasudeva Krishna of immense prowess are their allies, with whose help they can subdue the very world. They inherited their patrimony and have grown immeasurably through their own vitality.

Why should you be aggrieved at this? Gratifying Agni Hutasana, Dhananjaya has got the bow Gandiva, the pair of inexhaustible quivers and many celestial astras. With that peerless bow and the strength of his arms, as well, he brought all the kings of the world under his sway. Why should you grieve over this?

Arjuna Parantapa, Savyasachin, saved the Asura Mayaa form the forest fire and Mayaa built that grand sabha out of gratitude. Commanded by Mayaa, the grim Rakshasas, the Kinkaras, support the sabha. What is there in this to cause you grief?

You said, O King, that you have no allies. Bhaarata, this is not true. These brothers of yours are obedient to you. Drona of great prowess, who wields a great bow, his son Aswatthama, Radha's son Kama, the Maharatha Kripa Gautama, I with my brothers and King Saumadatti - these are your allies. Unite yourself with these, and conquer all the Earth.'

Duryodhana says, 'O King, if it pleases you, with your help and that of the other great warriors you mention, I will defeat the Pandavas. If I can subdue them now, the world will be mine and all her kings, and that sabha so replete with wealth.'

Sakuni replies, 'Dhananjaya and Krishna, Bhimasena and Yudhishtira, Nakula and Sahadeva, and Drupada with his sons - these cannot be vanquished in battle even by the Devas, such great warriors are they, wielding the greatest bows, masters of astras, and delighting in battle.

However, I know how Yudhishtira himself can be vanquished. Listen to me and do as I say.'

Duryodhana says, 'Uncle, tell me if there is any way by which I can quell Yudhishtira without endangering our friends and these other illustrious Kurus.'

Sakuni says, 'The son of Kunti loves dice-play although he does not know the art of the game. If that king is asked to play dice, he cannot refuse. I am a master of dice, why there is no one in the world to match me at rolling the dice, why, no one in the three worlds, O son of Kuru.

Therefore, ask him to play dice. With my skills at dice, I will win his kingdom and all his vast fortunes for you. Duryodhana, tell all this to your father the king. If he commands me, I will definitely win all of Yudhishtira's kingdom and possessions for you.'

Duryodhana says, 'Son of Subala, you tell all this yourself to Dhritarashtra, king of the Kurus. I will not be able to.'"

CANTO 48

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, impressed by the great Rajasuya yagna of Yudhishtira, and knowing Duryodhana's heart during their journey home from the Mayaa Sabha, and wanting to gratify the Kuru prince's desire, Sakuni, son of Subala, goes to Dhritarashtra, of great wisdom, and finding the blind king seated upon his throne, speaks these words to him.

'Know, Maharajan, Bharatarishabha, that Duryodhana has grown pale, emaciated, dejected and fallen prey to great anxiety. Why don't you, through due inquiry, discover the grief which is in the heart of your eldest son, the sorrow caused by the enemy?'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Duryodhana, what is the cause of your great sorrow, Kurunandana? If it is fit for me to hear, tell me the reason for your affliction. Sakuni here says that you have lost colour, become pale and thin, and fallen prey to anxiety. I do not know what the reason for this sorrow can be. All my vast wealth and power are yours to control. Your brothers and all our kinsmen never do anything disagreeable to you.

You wear the finest clothes; eat the best food, all the most excellent meats. The best horses carry you. So what is it that makes you pale and thin? Rich beds, beautiful damsels, mansions with the costliest furniture, every sport to delight you - all these are at your disposal, even as with the gods themselves. Proud one, O my son, why do you grieve as if you are destitute?'

Duryodhana says, 'I eat and dress myself like a wretch, and I spend my time burning with savage envy. He is indeed a man who cannot bear the fortune and pride of his enemy, and lives only after vanquishing his enemy and liberating his own subjects from the tyranny of his enemy.

Contentment and pride, O Bhaarata, destroy prosperity, and also those other two: compassion and fear. He that acts under the influence of these never achieves anything great.

Having seen Yudhishtira's prosperity, whatever I enjoy brings me no joy. So splendid is the prosperity of Kunti's son that what I have is as nothing before it. Knowing the affluence of my enemy and my own relative poverty, even though that affluence is not before me, yet I see it constantly. This is

why I am pale and lean, why the colour has drained from me and I am melancholy.

Yudhishtira supports eighty-eight thousand Snataka Brahmanas, giving thirty slave-girls to each one. Besides these, a thousand other Brahmanas eat daily at his palace: the best food on golden plates.

The king of Kamboja sent him innumerable skins, black, dark, and red, of the kadali deer, as also countless shawls of the softest texture, as tribute. Hundreds of thousands of she-elephants and thirty thousand she-camels wander within the palace: the kings of the Earth brought them all as tribute to the capital of the Pandavas.

Lord of the world, the kings also brought to this greatest of yagnas piles and piles of jewels and great gemstones for the son of Kunti. Never before did I see or even hear of such immense wealth as was brought to the sacrifice of the intelligent sons of Pandu.

Rajan, after seeing that treasure past imagining, which belongs to my enemy, I have no peace of mind. Hundreds of Brahmanas supported by the wealth which Yudhishtira gave them, and now owning great wealth of kine, waited with tribute of thirty crores of gold coins, but the dwarapalakas at his palace gates did not allow them to enter. Bringing with them the finest ghee in handsome kamanadalus made of gold, yet they could not gain admission into the palace.

The Ocean himself brought, in vessels of white copper, the nectar that is created within his waters, which is far superior to what flowers and plants produce for Sakra.

And at the end of the sacrifice, Vaasudeva bathed Pritha's son with sea water fetched in a thousand bejewelled jars of gold, which he poured over Yudhishtira from his own rarest conch shell.

Ah, seeing all this I became feverish with envy. Those golden urns had gone to the Eastern and the Southern Oceans upon the shoulders of men, and to the Western Ocean, O Bull among men. O Father, though none but birds only can go to the Northern realms, Arjuna went there and brought back untold wealth which he extracted as tribute.

Let me tell you about another wonderful thing which happened; listen to me. It was arranged that when a hundred thousand Brahmanas were fed, each day, conches would be blown in unison. O Bhaarata, I heard conches sounding there almost ceaselessly, and my hair stood on end to listen to their bass.

Maharajan, how can I describe how magnificent was that palatial compound, filled with countless kings come to witness the yagna, except to say that it was like a cloudless sky with stars? Each of the kings came to the sacrifice bringing untold and variegated wealth as tribute for the wise son of Pandu.

The kings who came, besides, became like Vaisyas, distributing food to the Brahmanas who were fed. The prosperity I saw of Yudhishtira was such that neither Indra himself, nor Yama or Varuna, nor Kubera, Lord of the Guhyakas, owns.

Oh, my father, my heart burns after seeing the awesome treasures of the son of Pandu, and I have no peace.'

When Duryodhana has spoken thus, Sakuni says, 'O you who have truth as your strength, listen to how you can have for yourself the unmatched prosperity which you saw with the son of Pandu.

O Bhaarata, I am a master of dice, the best player in the world. I know beforehand the success or failure of every throw of the dice, and when to wager and when to refrain. I have special, occult knowledge of the game. The son of Kunti is also fond of playing dice, but he has small skill at the game.

If you summon him either to battle or to a game, he will certainly accept. If he and I play dice I will beat him again and again, with sleight of hand, with subtle deception in my fingers.

I swear that I will win all his wealth and kingdom for you, Duryodhana, and you will enjoy everything the Pandava has.'

When Sakuni says this, without a moment's lapse, Duryodhana says to Dhritarashtra, 'Sakuni, master of dice, is ready to win all the fortune of the Pandavas at the game. You must give him leave to do this for me.'

Dhritarashtra replies, 'I always follow the advice of Kshatta, Vidura my minister of deep wisdom. Let me consult with him, and I will tell you what I decide about this matter. He has great foresight, and he will keep dharma squarely before him and tell us what is best for both parties, and what should be done.'

Duryodhana says, 'If you consult Kshatta he will persuade you to desist, and if you do not allow this, O King, I will surely kill myself. When I am dead, Rajan, you can be happy with your Vidura. You will enjoy the whole world, what need will you have of me?'

Dhritarashtra hears this dire threat from his son and, indeed, being in his own heart quite prepared to do what Duryodhana asks, calls a servitor and commands him, 'Let artisans be engaged immediately to build a capacious and beautiful palace of a thousand columns and a hundred doors. Fetch the finest masons, carpenters and joiners and encrust the edifice's walls with precious stones, all over.

Let it be grand and handsome; make it easy of access. When it is completed come and inform me.'

After King Dhritarashtra resolves to please his Duryodhana, he sends messengers to Vidura to summon him. For it is true that the king never takes a decision without first consulting Vidura. However, in this matter, although he well knows the evils of gambling, Dhritarashtra is drawn irresistibly to the plot.

However, as soon as the wise Vidura hears of it, he knows that the Kali Yuga is at hand. Seeing the gates to perdition about to open, Vidura rushes to Dhritarashtra. Bowing at his elder brother's feet, Vidura says, 'Great King, I cannot endorse this resolve of yours. It becomes you to act in a manner by which no dispute arises between your children caused by this gambling.'

Dhritarashtra replies, 'O Kshatta, if the gods are kind to us no dispute will ever arise between our children. So, auspicious or not, good or otherwise, let the friendly dice game be played, for beyond doubt this is what fate has ordained for us.

Besides, when I am present, and Drona, Bhishma and you, as well, no evil which even fate has decreed is likely to occur. So, take a chariot yoked to horses swift as the wind, so that you will reach Khandavaprastha even today and bring Yudhishtira back with you.

Vidura, this is my final decision. Say nothing to me, for I believe that supreme fate brings this upon us.'

Listening to Dhritarashtra, Vidura feels certain that his race is doomed. In great sorrow, he goes to Bhishma of profound wisdom."

CANTO 49

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

'Janamejaya says, "O best among all those who know the Veda, I how was that game of dice played? It was always fraught with I such evil and brought heartbreak to the cousins, and because of it my grandsires, the sons of Pandu, were plunged into grief.

Tell me which Kshatriyas were present in that sabha, and which of them approved of the gambling and which would have forbidden it. Anagha, Sinless, best among the twice-born, I want to hear you narrate all this in detail: that which indeed brought about the ruin of the very world.'"

Sauti says, 'Thus addressed by the king, the disciple of Vyasa, blessed with great tejas and a master of the entire Veda, related everything that had happened.

Vaisampayana said, "O Bharatottama, Maharajan, if you wish to hear it all, listen while I tell it to you in detail.

Having confirmed the opinion of Vidura, Ambikas son Dhritarashtra calls Duryodhana to him again, in private.

'Son of Gandhari, I say to you, do not have anything to do with this game of dice. Vidura does not speak well of it. He is wise beyond all common measure, and he would never counsel me against my best interest. I, too, think that what Vidura says is true and best for me. Do as I say, my son, for I am convinced that it is in your best interest also.

Vidura knows dharma, all its mysteries, even as the illustrious, learned and wise Brihaspati, the Devarishi who is Indra's preceptor, unfolded dharma to the king of the Devas. My son, I never fail to take Vidura's advice. Suyodhana, even as the wise Uddhava is revered among the Vrishnis, so is Vidura among the Kurus: as the most intelligent of us.

So, my son, have nothing to do with dice; for it is plain that gambling sows dissension, and discord is the ruin of the kingdom. Duryodhna, abandon this very thought of playing dice.

My child, you have received everything from us, which a father and mother should give their son. You have rank and you have possessions. You are learned and astute in every branch of gyana. You have been raised with

love in your father's house. You are the eldest among all your brothers; you live in your own kingdom: why are you unhappy?

Mahabaho, you eat such food and wear such clothes that common men cannot even dream of. Why, still, do you grieve? My son, O mighty-armed, yours is a great ancestral kingdom, brimming with people and with wealth, and you shine forth as gloriously as the king of the Devas in Swarga.

You have wisdom. Tell me what lies at the root of this despondency of yours, the terrible melancholy.'

Duryodhana replies, 'I am a wretch and a sinner, O King, for I can neither eat not clothe myself regally, having seen the prosperity of my enemy. Indeed, it has been said that the man who is not filled with envy at seeing the good fortune of his enemy is truly a wretch.

Exalted, the wealth and power which I have mean nothing to me, for I have seen the resplendent glory of Kuntis son and I am full of pain. Why, I say to you that I must be strong, indeed, that I continue to live when all the world is under the sway of Yudhishtira.

The Nipas, the Chitrakas, the Kukkuras, the Karaskaras, and the Lohajanghas all live like bondsmen in the Pandavas palace. Himavat, the Ocean, the rich realms upon the shores of the sea, the countless other lands which yield precious jewels and gems have all admitted that Yudhishtira's palace is superior to them in the treasures it houses.

Rajan, welcoming with honour me as the eldest among my brothers, Yudhishtira gave me charge of receiving the jewels which came as tribute. Bhaarata, nowhere have such treasures, without limit, been seen; my hands grew tired receiving that incalculable wealth. And when I was tired they who brought those treasures from distant lands would wait until I could resume my task.

Fetching jewels from the Bindusaras, the Asura architect Mayaa created a lake-like surface of crystal for the sons of Pandu. Looking at the artificial lotuses which adorned it, I mistook it, O King, for water. I drew up my clothes to cross it and seeing this Vrikodara laughed at me: surely, thinking that I have no jewels myself and that I had been deranged by the sight of the affluence of my enemy.

If I could, my father, I would immediately kill Bhima for that laughter. But if we try to kill Bhima now I have no doubt that we will meet the same fate as Sisupala did. Yet, that insult scathes me.

Then again, O King, I saw a similar looking water body, and now I felt certain that this was crystal again, solid ground. I stepped forward and fell into water. Bhima and Arjuna laughed mockingly, as did Draupadi and the other women of their palace. Ah, how that sears my heart.

My clothes were drenched, and at Yudhishtira's command his servants brought me fresh clothes. Even that humiliated me. Rajan listen to yet another blunder of mine. I tried to pass through what I was certain was an open door, but there was no passage beyond, and I struck my head painfully against strange stone and injured myself. Nakula and Sahadeva saw me from a distance and, full of apparent solicitude, came to lend me arms of support.

Smiling, Sahadeva said again and again to me, "Rajan, this is the door, come this way."

Bhimasena laughed aloud and said, "Dhritarashtraputra, the door is here."

Also, my lord, I had not even heard the names of many of the gemstones which I saw sparkling in that sabha. Ah, these are the reasons for the anguish which rends my heart.'"

CANTO 50

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Listen, O Bhaarata, to everything about I the most priceless treasures that I saw, brought to the Pandavas by the kings of the world. Oh, seeing that wealth of the enemy I lost my reason and hardly knew myself. Let me describe for you those treasures, both man-made and produce of the earth.

The Kamboja king gave countless skins of the rarest quality, shawls made of wool, of the soft fur of rodents and other burrowers, of silky hair of cats, all inlaid with golden threads. He gave three hundred Tittiri and Kalmasha horses, with snouts like parrots. Three hundred camels he gave and as many she-asses, all fattened with the olives and the pilusha.

Numberless Brahmanas, rearing cattle and performing lowly tasks for the illustrious Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, waited at the gates with three hundred millions worth of tribute, but they were denied admission into the palace.

Hundreds and hundreds of Brahmanas, wealthy in kine and living on lands which Yudhishtira had given them, came there with their beautiful golden kamandalus full of ghrita. Although they brought such tribute, they were refused admission into the palace.

The Sudra kings, who live along the sea-coast, brought lakhs of serving girls of the Karpasika country, all beautiful, slender-waisted, with luxuriant tresses, decked in golden ornaments. They also brought many skins of the ranku deer, worthy even for Brahmanas, as tribute to King Yudhishtira.

The Vairama, Parada, Abhira and Kitava tribes, who live on crops that depend on rain, water from rivers, as well as those born beside the sea, in woodlands, or countries beyond the Ocean, all waited at the gate, bringing goats, kine, asses, camels and vegetables, honey, blankets, jewels and gemstones of diverse kinds, but were refused entry.

That mighty Kshatriya king, Bhagadatta, the valiant sovereign of Pragjyotisha, the powerful monarch of the Mlechchas, at the head of a vast horde of Yavanas, waited at the gate, unable to enter, though bringing considerable tribute of horses of the best breed, swift as the wind. Bhagadatta was forced to leave the gates after making over a number of

swords with handles of the purest ivory and richly inlaid and adorned with diamonds and every kind of jewel.

Many strange tribesmen came from diverse realms: some had two eyes, some three and some with one eye on their foreheads; those called the Aushmikas came, Nishadas and Romakas, and some cannibals with just one leg. I say to you, my father, they all stood at the gates and were refused entry.

Their extraordinary rulers brought tribute of ten thousand varicoloured asses, with black necks, huge bodies, great speed, all very docile, these animals being famed the world over. All of them, indeed, were large and their colouring attractive, and they were all bred on the coast of Vankhu.

So many kings gave Yudhishtira much gold and silver, and giving thus they gained entry into the palace of the Pandava.

The one-legged tribesmen brought innumerable wild horses for him, some red as cochineal, some white, some rainbow-hued, some like evening clouds, and some of many colours besides all these. All these had the swiftness of the mind.

The kings also brought the purest gold for the son of Pandu, vast quantities of it. I also saw countless Chins and Sakas and Uddras and many barbarian tribesmen who live in forests, and many Vrishnis and Harahunas, and the dark tribes of the Himavat, and many Nipas and folk who live on the sea-coast, all waiting at the gates for leave to enter.

And the people of Balhika gave Yudhishtira ten thousand asses as tribute, all of goodly size and black necks, which could run a hundred yojanas in a day. These beasts were of myriad shapes, well-trained and famed the world over. Superbly built they were, their colours resonant and their skins velvet to the touch.

The Balhikas also gifted many, many woollen blankets woven in Chin, and skins of the ranku deer past counting, and clothes made from jute, and others made from the threads spun by insects. They also gave thousands of other garments, none cotton, but all the colour of the lotus, and all so smooth. They gave soft sheep-skins by the thousands.

Many sharp and great swords and scimitars, hatchets and fine-edged battle-axes fashioned in the western countries they gave. Having sent in rare perfumes, diverse glittering jewels and gems in thousands as tribute, they waited at the gates, being refused admission into the palace.

The Sakas and Tusharas and Kankas and Romasas and men with horns on their heads brought very many great elephants as tribute, and ten thousand horses, and hundreds and hundreds of millions of gold coins, and waited at the gates, being refused permission to enter.

The kings of the eastern countries brought uncountable costly carpets, and fine bedsteads, and armour of many colours adorned with jewels, gold and ivory, and weapons of different kinds, and chariots of different shapes, elegant and chased with gold, drawn by superbly trained horses of handsome make and adorned with gold, drawn by well-trained horses, tiger-skins upon their backs, and rich and varied cloths to caparison elephants, and again a myriad manner of jewels and gems, arrows long and short and many other weapons, and they received permission to enter the sacrificial palace of the illustrious Pandava!'"

CANTO 51

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Anagha, listen to me describe the vast mass I of wealth, the many kinds of tribute given to Yudhishtira by the kings of the Earth. They who live beside the River Sailoda, which flows between the Mountains Meru and Mandara, who enjoy the delightful shade of the groves of the kichaka bamboo, they who are called the Khashas, Ekasanas, Arhas, Pradaras, Dirghavenus, Paradas, Kulindas, Tanganas, and the other Tanganas brought as tribute mounds of gold sealed in great dranas, which are raised from under the earth by ants and are hence named after those creatures.

The mountain tribes of great strength brought tribute of countless soft chamara whisks, some black, others white as moonrays; sweet honey they brought, distilled from flowers which grow upon the Himavat, as well as from the mishali champaka; they brought masses of garlands of flowers from the lands of the northern Kurus, and diverse plants from the north, even from Kailasa, and waited with their heads bent at the gates of Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, and were refused permission to enter.

I also saw there numberless Kirata chieftains, armed with cruel weapons and always engaged in savage deeds, who eat fruit and root and wear skins and live on the northern slopes of the Himavat and upon the Udaya Mountain from behind which the Sun rises, and also in the realm of Karusha on the sea-coast and on both sides of the Lohitya Mountains.

My King, they brought as tribute load upon load of sandalwood, aloe, also black aloe, and heap upon heap of valuable skins and perfumes, and ten thousand serving-girls of their race, and many exotic animals and birds of remote countries, and so much gold of shining splendour, and the Kiratas waited at the gate, being refused permission to enter.

The Kairatas, the Daradas, the Darvas, the Suras, the Vaiyamakas, the Audumbaras, the Durvibhagas, the Kumaras, the Paradas along with the Bahlikas, the Kashmiras, the Ghorakas, the Hansakayanas, the Sibis, the Trigartas, the Yauddheyas, the ruler of the Madias and the Kaikeyas, the Ambashtas, the Kaukuras, the Tarkshyas, the Vastrapas along with the Palhavas, the Vashatalas, the Mauleyas along with the Kshudrakas, and the

Malavas, the Paundryas, the Saundikas, the Kukkuras, the Sakas, the Angas, the Vangas, the Punras, the Sanavatyas, and the Gayas, all good men and wellborn, divided into their respective clans, all proficient at arms, brought tribute to Yudhishtira, all of it countable in lakhs.

The Vangas, the Kalingas, the Magadhas, the Tamraliptas, the Supundrakas, the Dauvalikas, the Sagarakas, the Patrornas, the Saisavas, and innumerable Karnapravaranas, who presented themselves at the gate, were told by the gate-keepers, at the command of the king, that if they brought proper tribute and waited at the gates, they could possibly gain entrance.

Then the kings of those nations each gave a thousand elephants with tusks like the shafts of ploughs, adorned with golden girdles, covered with fine cloths and so resembling the lotus in complexion, while they were all dark as rocks and always in musth, captured from around the Kamyaka lake, and covered in armour, too. Of the highest breed were these, and exceptionally patient.

When they had made these gifts those kings were allowed to enter. Rajan, these and many others, hailing from diverse lands, and numberless other illustrious sovereigns brought jewels and gems to the sacrifice.

Chitraratha, king of Gandharvas, friend of Indra, gave four hundred horses blessed with the speed of the wind. The Gandharva Tumburu joyfully gave a hundred horses, the colour of the mango leaf and decked in gold.

O Kurusthama, the celebrated king of the Mlechcha tribe, the Sukaras, gave hundreds of the finest elephants; Virata, king of Matsya, gave two thousand elephants decked in gold, while King Vasudana of the Pansu kingdom gifted the son of Pandu with twenty-six elephants and two thousand horses, all decked in gold and endowed with speed and strength and in the full vigour of youth, as well as many other kinds of wealth.

Drupada Yagnasena gave the Pandavas fourteen thousand serving-girls and ten thousand serving-men with their wives for the sacrifice, hundreds of magnificent elephants, twenty-six chariots with elephants yoked, and also his entire kingdom.

To enhance the dignity of Arjuna, Vaasudeva of the Vrishnis gave fourteen thousand fine elephants. Surely, Krishna is the soul of Arjuna as Arjuna is the soul of Krishna, and whatever Arjuna asks Krishna is certain

to do. Why, Krishna will forsake Swarga for Arjuna, just as Arjuna will gladly give his life for Krishna.

The Chola and Pandya kings, though they brought numberless golden jars filled with fragrant sandalwood juice from the hills of Malaya, and heaps of sandal and aloe wood from the Dardura hills, and many gemstones of great brilliance and fine cloths chased with gold, did not gain entry into the palace.

The Sinhala king brought those best of sea-born jewels, the lapis lazuli, and heaps of pearls, also, and hundreds of coverlets for elephants, and uncountable dark-skinned men, the tails of whose eyes were red as copper, wearing bejewelled clothes, and waiting at the gates with these gifts.

Countless Brahmanas, and Kshatriyas who had been vanquished, and Vaisyas and serving Sudras, brought tribute to the son of Pandu out of love for Yudhishtira; even the Mlechchas, all of them came to Yudhishtira out of love and respect. All orders of men - good, indifferent and base, belonging to numberless races, coming from diverse lands -made Yudhishtira's city the focus of the world.

Seeing the kings of the world bring such fabulous and invaluable gifts to my enemies, I wished for death from anguish.

O King, I will now tell you about the servants of the Pandavas, for whom Yudhishtira Provides food, cooked and uncooked. There are a hundred thousand crores of mounted elephants and cavalry, and a hundred million chariots and foot soldiers past counting. In one place, raw provisions were being measured out; at another they were being cooked; at another the food was being distributed.

Everywhere, one heard the sounds of festivity. Among men of all the varnas, I did not see a single one in the palace of Yudhishtira who had not food and drink and rich ornaments.

Eighty-eight thousand Snataka Brahmanas, grihastas all, Yudhishtira supports, with thirty serving-girls given to each, and gratified by the king, these always pray with tranquil hearts for the destruction of his enemies. Ten thousand other ascetics, brahmacharins, their vital seed indrawn, eat daily from golden plates in Yudhishtira's palace.

Rajan, without eating herself, every day Draupadi Yagnaseni first sees to it that everyone else, why even the deformed and dwarfs, has eaten. O Bhaarata, only two peoples do not pay tribute to the son of Kunti: the

Panchalas because of their being related through marriage, and the Vrishnis in consequence of their friendship.'"

CANTO 52

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Duryodhana says, &Every king on Earth who is respected the world over, devoted to dharma, sworn to unflinching vratas, deeply learned and eloquent, who knows the Vedas and their Angas as well as all about yagnas, who is pious and modest, who is a dharmatma, who owns great fame, and who has been anointed with the majestic rites of coronation, waits upon and worships Yudhishtira.

Rajan, I saw thousands of wild cows, and as many white copper vessels into which to milk them, brought there by those kings of the world as sacrificial gifts for Yudhishtira to gift to the Brahmanas. For Yudhishtira's ceremonial bath at the conclusion of the sacrifice, a hundred kings rushed to purify themselves and fetched the finest urns full of holy water.

King Bahlika brought a chariot made of pure gold, while King Sudakshina with his hands yoked four white Kamboja horses to it, and the mighty Sunitha fitted the lower shaft and the king of Chedi, also with his own hands, fixed the flagstaff. The Dravida king stood with the Pandavas kavacha; the sovereign of Magadha held the garlands of flowers and the helmet; the great Kshatriya Vasudana stood by with a sixty year old elephant; the Matsya had the side-fittings of the chariot, all sheathed in gold; King Ekalavya of the Nishadas held the sandals for his feet; the king of Avanti fetched different kinds of water for the final ablution; King Chekitana held Yudhishtira's quiver; the king of Kasi, held his bow; Salya had his sword whose hilt and straps were adorned with gold.

Then, Dhaumya and Vyasa, of great tapasya, with Narada and Asita's son Devala performed the ceremony of sprinkling sacred water over the king. Joyfully sat the greatest Rishis where the sprinkling ceremony was performed. Other illustrious Munis, knowers of the Vedas, Jamadagni's son among them, approached Yudhishtira, the munificent giver of sacrificial gifts, chanting mantras all the while, even as the Saptarishis approach Indra in Devaloka.

Satyaki of untold prowess held the royal white parasol over the king's head. Dhananjaya and Bhima fanned him, while the twins held silken chamaras in their hands.

In a sling, the Ocean himself brought Varuna's great conch, which the heavenly artificer Viswakarman created with a thousand nishkas of gold, and which Prajapati gave to Indra in a previous Kalpa. It was with that conch that Krishna bathed Yudhishtira when the yagna was concluded, and seeing that, I swooned.

Men travel to the Eastern, the Western and also to the Southern Seas, but Father, only birds can ever go to the Northern one. But the Pandavas have extended their dominion even there, for I heard hundreds of conches, which had been brought from those waters, being sounded at that sacrifice, celebrant and auspicious.

While those exceptional conches blew all together, my hair stood on end, and the weaker kings there fell down from the reverberation. Seeing me turn pale and the other kings faint, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the Pandavas and Krishna - those eight, all mighty and handsome, laughed aloud.

Then, O Bhaarata, Arjuna Bibhatsu joyfully gave the main Brahmanas five hundred bullocks each, their horns plated with gold. Having completed the Rajasuya yagna, Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, gained such wealth and fortune, even like the great Harischandra: such prosperity that not Rantideva, Nabhaga, Yauvanaswa, not Manu, nor Vena's son King Prithu, not Bhagiratha, Yayati or Nahusha had seen its like.

And seeing this fortune of Pritha's son, equal to what Harischandra had, I do not see the least point in continuing to live! King of men, a yoke tied by a blind man comes loose. So it is with us: the younger ones are growing while the elder are diminishing. Seeing all this, O Lord of the Kurus, I can find no peace, not even after deep thought.

This is why, Rajan, I am plunged in grief and have become pale and wasted.'"

CANTO 53

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'You are my eldest son and also born to my first wife. My child, do not envy the Pandavas. The jealous man is always unhappy and suffers pangs even like those of death.

Bharatarishabha, Yudhishtira is not deceitful, he owns wealth equal to yours, his friends are your friends, and he feels no envy towards you. So why should you be envious of him? My son, you have as many friends and allies as Yudhishtira does. So, why, from folly, must you covet the wealth of your brother?

Do not be like this; abandon your envy. Do not grieve, O Bull of the Bhaaratas, if you wish for the honour attached to the performance of a sacrifice, let our priests arrange to perform the Saptatantu mahayagna for you, and then the kings of the Earth will happily and with respect bring you great wealth, jewels and ornaments.

My child, it is lowly to covet another's possessions. On the other hand, he who is content with what he has, and engages in his svadharma diligently, he is the happy man. Never attempting to gain what others own, persevering in one's own affairs and protecting what one has earned - these are the signs of true greatness.

He who is unmoved in calamity, skilled in his own work, always at work, vigilant and humble: he always finds prosperity. The Pandavas are like your very arms; do not seek to cut off those arms. No, nor create internal strife for the sake of your brothers' wealth.

Do not envy the sons of Pandu; you are as rich as they are. There is great sin in falling out with friends. They who are your grandsires are also theirs. Give charity during sacrifices, satisfy every desire which is dear to your heart, disport freely in the company of women, and be at peace, Duryodhana.'"

CANTO 54

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'He who has no intelligence himself but I has merely heard many things can hardly understand the true meaning of the scriptures, even like a spoon which does not know the taste of the soup it touches. You know everything, yet you confound me.

Like boats fastened, one to the other, you and I are bound to each other. Are you mindful of your own interests, or are you hostile towards me? Having you for their king, your sons and your allies are condemned to be destroyed, for you speak of having in the future what can be had even now!

The man who acts under the counsel of others, frequently trips and falls. Then how can his followers expect to tread the right path? Rajan, you have maturity and wisdom; you have heard the ancient truths, and you have restrained your senses. It does not become you to confound us who are eager to seek our own interest.

Brihaspati himself has said the ways of kings differ from those of commoners, and so kings must always vigilantly attend to their own interests. Finding success must be the only criterion which guides the way of the Kshatriya. So, what does it matter if the means are virtuous or sinful, what place for scruples in performing one's svadharma?

He who wants to snatch the blazing prosperity of his enemy, O Bharatarishabha, must tame all the directions, even as the sarathy does his horses with his whip. Those who wield weapons always say that a weapon is not merely a sharp instrument, but a means to vanquish an enemy, whether covertly or openly.

Who is an enemy and who a friend does not depend on one's size or strength. He who causes pain is an enemy to the one whom he hurts. Discontent is the root of prosperity; and so, O King, I want to be discontented.

The truly politic man is he who strives after property. None should be attached to property or wealth, for both these, once having been acquired and hoarded, can be plundered. This is the way of kings.

Sakra cut off Namuchi's head after pledging peace with him, and this was because he endorsed this eternal way with an enemy. Like a snake

swallowing frogs and other creatures which live in holes, the Earth swallows kings who are peaceful and Brahmanas who do not stir from their homes.

Rajan, merely by nature no one is anybody's enemy; only he who has common purposes as oneself is one's foe. He who is foolish enough to neglect an infected toenail has his vitals excoriated by a disease that he himself nurtured without treatment. If an enemy, however insignificant, is allowed to grow in might, he swallows one like termites at the roots of a tree, felling the tree itself.

O Bhaarata, O Ajamida, never acquiesce in your enemy's prosperity: this is a policy that the wise must always bear upon their heads even like a load. He who always desires and seeks his own prosperity grows among his kinsmen even as the body does, naturally, from the moment of its birth.

Prowess confers rapid growth. I covet the wealth of the Pandavas, but I have not yet made it my own. So, I doubt myself, my ability, and I am determined to lay my doubt at rest. I will either have what belongs to them or die in battle trying to have it.

When this is my state of mind, what do I care anymore for my life, as the Pandavas' fortunes swell daily while ours know no increase?'"

CANTO 55

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sakuni says, 'Best of men of victory, I will take this great wealth of Pandus son Yudhishtira from him, the sight of which aggrieves you so much, and give it to you. Therefore, O Rajan, let Kunti's son Yudhishtira be summoned here. By throwing dice a man of skill can vanquish an unskilled opponent, while remaining uninjured himself. O Bhaarata, know that wagering is my bow, the dice are my arrows, the marks on them is my bow-string, and the dice-board my chariot.'

Duryodhana says, 'Rajan, this Sakuni, master of dice, is ready to take the wealth of the Pandavas from them at a game. It becomes you to give him leave to do so.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I follow the advice of my wise brother Vidura. I will consult him and then tell you what to do.'

Duryodhana says, 'Vidura always has the welfare of the sons of Pandu at heart, while, O Kaurava, his feelings towards us are different. I have no doubt that he will turn your mind from what we propose. No man must let another man decide for him what he must do, for, O Kurusthama, two minds rarely agree upon any enterprise.

The fool who lives his life avoiding any fear wastes himself like an insect during the rains. Neither sickness nor death waits for prosperity to visit one of its own accord. So, as long as we have life and health, we must strive to accomplish our purpose.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'My son, I never see wisdom in seeking hostility of any kind with those who are powerful. Hostility changes the heart and is a weapon by itself, if not made of steel. O Prince, you think of as a great blessing what will bring dreadful war in its wake, while in fact what you wish to do is fraught with danger. If you set yourself on this course, it will inexorably fetch out keen swords and sharp arrows.'

Duryodhana replies, "The most ancient men invented the game of dice precisely because there is no bloodshed in it or any striking with weapons. So, listen to what Sakuni says, and quickly order the sabha to be built. The gambling will open the door of heaven, the way to great happiness for us.

Why, those who gamble for such stakes deserve the fortune which comes to them.

The Pandavas, who are now your superiors, will become your equals; so play dice with them, O King.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Your words do not find favour with me. Do as you please, ruler of men, but you will repent choosing this path, for a way of such adharma can never fetch enduring prosperity, only disaster.

Vidura, who has profound wisdom, who always lives in dharma, has already foreseen the calamity which will destroy Kshatriya kind itself, coming towards us brought by fate.'

Saying this, the weak-minded Dhritarashtra yields to Fate as being supreme and inexorable. Indeed, his reason taken from him by Fate, submitting to his son's wish, the king commands his men in stentorian tones, 'With every care, with no delay, immediately build a magnificent sabha. Call it the palace of crystal arches and a thousand columns; let it be adorned with gold and lapis lazuli; let it have a hundred gates, and be full two miles in length and width.'

At his command, thousands of brilliant artificers swiftly raise that edifice, and having built it, furnish it with every manner of exquisite artefact. When they finish, they come in joy to the king to inform him that the grand sabha is complete and that it is beautiful and lavish and adorned with everything that he might wish it to have: priceless jewels upon the walls, invaluable carpets in every hue, gold-chased, upon its floors.

Now Dhritarashtra, the learned, summons Vidura and says, 'Go to Khandavaprastha and fetch Yudhishtira here immediately. Let him come with his brothers to see my grand sabha of gemstones past counting, priceless beds and carpets. And let a friendly game of dice be played in our city.'"

CANTO 56

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Knowing that Fate is ineluctable and what his son's heart is set upon, Dhritarashtra does as I have said. However, the most intelligent Vidura does not approve of what his brother intends and says, 'My King, I do not like this command which you give me. Do not do this thing, for I fear it will end in the annihilation of our very race. Terrible dissension will result from this game of dice and lead inevitably to great tragedy.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'If Fate is not hostile to us, such a falling out will not grieve me. All the Universe moves at its Creator's will, and through Fate. It is not free. Therefore, Vidura, I command you, go to Yudhishtira and fetch Kunti's invincible son here quickly.'"

CANTO 57

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Against his will, ordered by Dhritarashtra, Vidura sets out, taking the finest, swiftest and strongest horses, steeds that are quiet and patient as well, for the home of Pandu's wise sons.

Vidura of lofiy intellect rides to Khandavaprastha and, arriving in Yudhishtira's city, enters it and goes straight towards the palace, being worshipped by many Brahmanas on the way. Coming to that palace, which is even like that sabha of Kubera himself, the virtuous Vidura approaches Yudhishtira Dharmaputra.

The illustrious Yudhishtira Ajamida, devoted to dharma, who is without an enemy in the world, reverently salutes Vidura, and asks after Dhritarashtra and his sons. Then Yudhishtira says, 'O Kshatta, your mind seems cheerless. Do you come here in peace and happiness? I hope Dhritarashtra's sons are obedient to their old father. I hope the people also are obedient to Dhritarashtra's rule?'

Vidura says, "The illustrious king and his sons are well and happy, and surrounded by his kinsmen, Dhritarashtra rules even like Indra. The king is happy with his sons, who are all obedient to him, and he has no grief.

That great sovereign is bent upon his own aggrandisement. The king of the Kurus commands me to enquire after your peace and prosperity, and he asks you to come to Hastinapura with your brothers to inspect the new palace he has built there and then say if it is equal to your own.

Coming to the city of elephants with your brothers, O son of Pritha, enjoy a friendly game of dice in the new sabha. The other Kurus have all arrived there already, and we shall be glad if you come at once. And there you will see the gamblers and cheats that the illustrious King Dhritarashtra has brought to his home.

It is for this, O Rajan, that I have come here. May you heed my king's command.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Kshatta, if we sit down to a game of dice, we might well quarrel amongst ourselves. Well knowing this, what man will agree to gamble? What do you think we should do? We all are obedient to your counsel.'

Vidura says. 'I know that gambling is a root of misery, and I strove to dissuade the king. However, he has sent me to you. Knowing Yudhishtira, keep this in mind and do what you think best.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Besides Dhritarashtra's sons what other gamblers are there, prepared to play, who cheat? Who are they, Vidura, whom we will have to contend with, wagering our wealth in hundreds and thousands?'

Vidura says, 'Sakuni, king of Gandhara, who is a master of dice, whose sleight of hand is legend and whose stakes are extreme; Vivimsati, King Chitrasena, Satyavrata, Purumitra and Jaya - these, Yudhishtira, are there.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Ah, it seems that some of the most crooked, skilled and wild gamblers are there! But by the will of its Maker, the universe is under Fate's control. It is not free.

Most learned Vidura, I do not wish to gamble at Dhritarashtra's command, for he always wants to benefit only his son. You are our master, O Vidura; you say what I should do. I am loath to gamble, and unless the vile Sakuni does not call me to the sabha I will not do so. However, if he challenges me, I will never decline, for I am so sworn, eternally.'

Having said this, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira orders preparations to be made immediately for his long journey. The next day, with his relatives and attendants, and also taking with him the women of his household, with Draupadi among them, he sets out for the capital of the Kurus.

Yudhishtira says, 'Fate deprives us of reason, like some brilliant body falling before our eyes, and man, as if bound with a cord, submits to providence,' and that Parantapa, chastiser of his enemies, goes forth with Kshatta, without even reflecting upon Dhritarashtra's cunning summons. With his brothers, that slayer of hostile heroes, the son of Pandu and Pritha, riding in the chariot given him by the king of Balhika, he goes forth.

He wears royal robes; he is, as it were, ablaze with regal splendour; Brahmanas walk before him, as Yudhishtira sets out from his city: summoned by Dhritarashtra and impelled by what Time has ordained.

Arriving in Hastinapura, he goes to Dhritarashtra's palace. He approaches Bhishma, Drona, Kama, Kripa, Drona's son, and embraces and is embraced by them all. The Mahabaho, endowed with immense prowess, comes to Somadatta, then to Duryodhana and Salya, and to the son of Subala, and also to those other kings who have arrived there before him.

The Pandava emperor approaches the bold Dussasana, then all his brothers, then Jayadratha, and then all the Kurus, one after another. Then,

surrounded by his brothers, the mighty-armed one enters the apartment of the wise Dhritarashtra. There Yudhishtira see the revered Gandhari, always obedient to her lord, and surrounded by her daughters-in-law, like Rohini by the nakshatras. Saluting Gandhari, being blessed by her in return, Pandu's great son sees his old uncle, that illustrious king whose wisdom is his eye. Dhritarashtra sniffs the top of his head, as also the heads of his brothers, the other Kuru princes, Bhimasena's first among them.

Rajan, all the Kuru Purushavyaghras are delighted to see the handsome Pandavas. Then, at the king's command, the sons of Pandu retire to the lavish chambers given to them, all furnished with jewels and gems.

When they are ensconced, the women of Dhritarashtra's household, Dussala leading them, visit the Pandavas. When the daughters-in-law of Dhritarashtra see the blazing, awesome beauty of Draupadi Yagnaseni, and her incomparable attire and ornaments, jealousy attacks them and they lose their cheer.

The Pandavas speak gently to those women. They go through their daily regimen of physical exercise and then perform their daily religious rites, their nitya karma. Finishing their devotions, they anoint their bodies with the most fragrant sandalwood paste, and the Brahmanas chant blessings over them for their good fortune.

They now partake of the finest delicacies prepared in the palace, then retire again to their apartments, where they are entertained with music by beautiful women and by other diversions. Happily those subduers of hostile cities pass that night, until they fall asleep.

At dawn, bards wake them with sweet music again; they rise from their beds and perform their morning rituals, before coming into the sabha, where they are greeted by those who have already gathered there for the gambling."

CANTO 58

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira leads his brothers into the sabha, where they approach the other kings present. Worshipping their elders who deserve to be worshipped, saluting the others as each deserves, by age, they seat themselves on fine thrones covered with costly cloths.

When they have sat, and also the other kings, Subala's son Sakuni says to Yudhishtira, 'Rajan, the sabha is full; we have all been waiting for you. Let the rules of play be decided upon and the dice be cast, Yudhishtira.'

Yudhishtira replies, 'Deceitful gambling is a sin; there is no Kshatriya prowess in it. There is surely no dharma in it. Why, then, do you favour gambling so? The wise never approve of the pride that gamblers take in cheating. Sakuni, do not vanquish us like a wretch, with deceit.'

Sakuni says, "The noble player, who knows the secrets of winning and losing, who is skilled enough to confound his adversaries' deceit, who indeed knows all the subtleties of gambling, he is the true player, and he endures everything which results from gaming. Son of Pritha, it is the stakes at dice, which might be lost or won, that could injure us, and this is why gambling is regarded as a sin. But let us play, O King. And do not fear, for let the stakes be fixed. Let us play now!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Devala, best of Munis, the son of Asita, who always teaches us all what deeds lead us to heaven, to hell, or to other realms, has declared that it is a sin to play dice with a gambler, for there is deceit in it. To have victory in open battle, with neither cunning nor stratagem: that is a noble sport. But gambling is not.

Honourable men never use the language of the Mlechchas, nor do they use deceit. War waged without crookedness and treachery is the way of the honest man. Sakuni, playing with cunning, do not take from us the wealth with which we seek to support Brahmanas. Even enemies must not be vanquished by wild stakes in a game of cheating. I have no wish either to earn wealth or to gain pleasure through vile means.

Besides, the way of the gambler, even if he does not cheat, is never lauded.'

Sakuni says, 'Yudhishtira, impelled by the desire for victory, which is not an honest motive, one Kshatriya confronts another. So, too, from a desire to prove superiority in learning, does one scholar face another in a debate. But these are hardly regarded as being adharma.

A skilled dice player confronts one who is less skilled than himself from the desire to vanquish him even as a superior warrior does one of lesser prowess, or a superior man of knowledge does an inferior. At dice too the strong confront the weak. So how is the dice player's motive any more or less dishonest?

The motive is the same: victory, and in any contention this is so. However, if you still regard dice as being more dishonest than other contests, or if you are afraid, then do not play.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I never retreat from a challenge, this is my dharma. Besides, O King, Fate is all powerful and we are all controlled by destiny. Whom shall I play against in this sabha? Who is here who can match my stakes? Let play begin.'

Duryodhana says, 'Rajan, I will stake every manner of jewel and gemstone, and gold. And this Sakuni, my uncle, will play for me.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I believe that it is unlawful for one man to play for another, and you also, learned cousin, will grant this. However, if you still wish it, let play begin."'

CANTO 59

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When play begins all the kings present, Dhritarashtra at their head, take their places in that sabha. O Bhaarata, Bhishma and Drona and Kripa and the Vidura Mahatman sit at the back with forlorn hearts.

The other kings, their necks like those of lions, endowed with mighty power, sit singly or in pairs upon lofty seats of wonderful make and hue. Rajan, that assembly is as splendid as Heaven with a conclave of the Devas of great fortune. And they all know the Vedas; they are valiant and radiant of countenance. And, O great King, the friendly match at dice then begins.

Yudhishtira says, 'Here is my stake: this string of invaluable pearls set in gold, and exquisite, which was once churned up from the Ocean of old. What is your stake with which you will match mine and play against me?'

Duryodhana says, 'I have many jewels and great wealth, but I am not vain because of them.' He tells Sakuni, 'Win these pearls, Uncle.'

Then Sakuni, master of the game, takes up the dice and, casting them perfectly, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'"

CANTO 60

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, 'You have won this wager unfairly, but do not preen Sakuni. Let us raise the stakes to thousands upon thousands. I have many beautiful jars in my treasury, each one full of a thousand nishkas; I have gold past exhausting, and silver and other precious metals. O King, I will wager all this wealth with you!'

Sakuni says to the eldest Pandava, Yudhishtira, whose glory can sustain no diminution, 'Look, I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'My sacred and triumphant royal chariot, which delights the heart and has borne us here, which is equal to a thousand chariots, which is perfectly wrought, covered with tiger-skin, which has immaculate wheels and flagstaffs, which is beautiful, decked with strings of little bells, whose sound clatters like the roar of thunderheads or the ocean, which is drawn by eight noble steeds renowned through the land, white as moonbeams, whose hooves no earthly creature can escape - this, O Rajan, is my next wager with you!'

Sakuni throws the dice, deceitfully, with sure sleight of hand and says to Yudhishtira, 'Lo, I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have a hundred thousand serving-girls, all young, and adorned with golden bracelets on their wrists and arms, with necklaces of nishkas around their necks, and other ornaments, wearing priceless garlands, rich robes, anointed with sandalwood paste, wearing jewels and golden ornaments, skilled in the sixty-four elegant arts, especially versed in singing and dancing, who wait upon and, at my command, serve the Devas, the Snataka Brahmanas, and kings: this wealth my next stake!'

Sakuni hears this, and ready with his crafty dice, rolls and says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have thousands of serving-men, skilled at waiting upon guests, always wearing silken robes, blessed with wisdom and intelligence, young but their senses restrained, and decked in golden earrings, who serve all my guests night and day with plates and dishes in hand. This wealth I wager!'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Son of Subala, I own one thousand elephants with golden girdles and other ornaments, with the mark of the lotus upon their temples, necks and other parts, adorned with golden garlands, with white tusks long and thick as plough-shafts, worthy of bearing kings on their backs, which can bear every dread sound of battle, their bodies huge, which can batter down the walls of enemy cities, their colour of freshly formed clouds, and each possessing eight cow-elephants.

This wealth I wager, O King.'

Subala's son Sakuni, rolling the dice, laughs, 'Yudhishtira, I have won your elephants!'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have as many chariots as elephants, all fitted with golden poles and fiagstaffs, trained horses and warriors who fight magnificently, each receiving a thousand coins as his monthly wage, whether he fights or not.

This wealth I wager, Rajan!'

When these words have been said, the vile Sakuni, sworn to enmity, rolls the ivory dice, and says to Yudhisthira, 'Ah, I win!'

Yudhishtira says, 'When Arjuna vanquished him in battle, Chitraratha joyfully gifted my brother who wields the Gandiva horses of the Tittiri, Kalmasha and Gandharva breeds, all decked in unearthly ornaments.

This wealth, Rajan, I wager.'

Sakuni, master cheat, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have ten thousand chariots and carriages yoked to the finest draught animals. I have sixty thousand broad-chested warriors, all valiant and heroic, handpicked from the rest of my forces, all fed on milk and fine rice.

This wealth, O King, is my stake.'

Sakuni, ready, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have four hundred nidhis, jewels of incomparable value, in caskets of copper and iron. Each one is worth five draunikas of the most pure and expensive leaf gold of the jatarupa variety.

This wealth, O King, shall be my wager.'

Sakuni, ready with his cunning dice, always cheating at the roll, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'"

CANTO 61

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "While the ruinous gambling is underway, Vidura, dispeller of doubts, says to Dhritarashtra, 'Great king of the race of Bhaarata, listen to what I have to say, though my words might not be agreeable to you even like bitter medicine to a man who is ill and dying.

When this evil-minded Duryodhana howled abysmally like a jackal soon after he was born, we knew that he would fetch destruction upon the race of Bhaarata. Rajan, know that he will be the cause of the death of all of you. A jackal lives in your house and he has the form of Duryodhana, but in your dotage you do not realise it, you do not know what the consequences of your folly will be.

Listen to what Sukra Kavi said. They who gather honey on mountains, take what they desire but do not notice that they are about to fall. Climbing perilous heights, distracted by their avid pursuit, they fall and die.

Like the honey gatherer, this Duryodhana, also, is maddened by this game of dice and is not mindful of the dire consequences that will visit him. Making enemies of these great Kshatriyas, he does not notice the certain fall to death which lies before him.

You well know, O King of much wisdom, that the Bhojas abandoned an unworthy son for the sake of their people. The Andhakas, the Yadavas, and the Bhojas, uniting, abandoned Kamsa. Later, when, at their very command, Krishna Parantapa killed Kamsa, all the men of those tribes became joyful for a full hundred years.

Even so, at your command, let Arjuna kill this Suyodhana. And let the Kurus rejoice at the death of this sinful wretch and pass their days in joy. In exchange for a crow, O great King, buy these peacocks: the Pandavas; in exchange for a jackal, buy these tigers.

For the sake of a family, one of its members can be sacrificed; for the sake of a village, a family may be sacrificed; for the sake of a province, a village may be sacrificed, and for the sake of one's own soul, the whole earth can be sacrificed.

This is what the omniscient Sukra himself, who knows the thoughts of ever creature, who is a terror to all his enemies, said to the great Asuras to

persuade them to abandon Jambha at the moment of his birth.

I have heard that once a king kept a flock of wild birds in his house because they vomited gold from their beaks, and later, killed them. O Parantapa, blinded by temptation and the lust for pleasure, for the sake of gold that king destroyed both his present and future gains.

Rajan, do not, like the king in the tale, persecute the Pandavas from your lust for wealth. For, this blind folly will make your repent sorely later, just like the one who killed the birds.

Like a flower-seller who, over long years, plucks countless flowers from the trees in his garden which he nurtures carefully, you also pluck flowers gently from the Pandavas, daily, O Bhaarata.

Do not burn them at their roots like a fiery wind which makes black char of all things. O King, do not go to the realm of Yama with your sons and all your soldiers, for who is there in this world who can defeat the sons of Pritha in battle? Why speak of the rest, can the king of the Devas himself contain them?'"

CANTO 62

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'Gambling is the root of dissension; it fetches deep rifts. Its consequences are dreadful. Yet, Duryodhana T creates terrible enmity for himself with what he is doing.

The descendants of Pratipa and Santanu, with all their valiant troops and their allies, the Bahlikas, will be destroyed for Duryodhana's sins. Duryodhana is drunk with avarice and he will force fortune and prosperity out of this kingdom, like an angry bull breaking its own horns.

The brave and learned man who ignores his own foresight and follows the bent of another's dark heart is plunged into dreadful calamity, rather as a man who goes out to sea in a boat guided by a child.

Duryodhana is gambling with the son of Pandu, and you are in raptures that he is winning. And it is such success, which begets war and ends in the death of men. This gambling which you have so cunningly abetted can only lead to dire disaster. Your heart is dark and sick, Rajan, and it is death that you court.

Yudhishtira is so closely related to you, and even if you do not foresee the extent of the damage which would be done, you are still an accomplice in it: it has your approval.

O listen, you sons of Santanu, you scions of Pratipa who now sit in the sabha of the Kauravas, to these words of wisdom. Do not walk into these dreadful flames which blaze forth, following this vile wretch Suyodhana.

When Ajatasatru, the son of Pandu, now intoxicated with dice, gives in to his anger, when Vrikodara and Arjuna and the twins do, who will be your refuge in that terrible hour?

Great King, you are already a mine of wealth yourself, and you can earn as much more as you want to by this gambling. What will you gain by taking the immense wealth of the Pandavas from them, when you can win over the sons of Pandu themselves, who will be far more valuable to you than all that they own?

We all know the mastery of Subala's son at dice, for this hill-king knows numberless ways to cheat at gambling. Let Sakuni go back to where he came from. O Bhaarata, do not seek enmity with Pandu's sons.

CANTO 63

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Ksharta, you are always praising our enemies, and disparaging the sons of Dhritarashtra. We know, O Vidura, of whom you are truly fond, for you never think of us as your own children.

A man wishes for the success of those that are dear to him and the defeat of those whom he does not love. His praise and blame are accordingly given. Your tongue and your mind betray your heart, yet the hostility which you show with your words is even greater than what is in your heart.

We have nurtured and cherished you like a serpent in our lap. Like a cat, you wish evil upon those that keep you. The wise have said that there is no graver sin than harming one's master. How is it, O Kshatta, that you do not fear this sin?

By vanquishing these enemies of ours, we have gained great advantage. Speak not harshly of us, and always be so willing to make peace with the enemy. A man becomes an enemy by speaking inexcusably of another, and this is how you have come to detest us, always.

Also, while praising an enemy one must never divulge the secrets of those that are one's own. But you willingly break this law. Why do you come in our way, O parasite? You say whatever you like. Do not insult us; we know your heart.

Go sit at the feet of the old and the sage and learn more wisdom. Maintain the great repute which you have won for yourself. Do not meddle in the affairs of other men. Do not imagine that you are our lord. Do not dare speak cruelly to us always, O Vidura, for we do not ask you what is good for us.

Stop now. Do not annoy those who have already borne too much from you. There is only one Lord, no second. He controls even the child that is in its mother's womb. I am ruled by Him. Like water, which always flows downwards, I am doing precisely what he wants me to.

He who breaks his head against a stone wall and he who feeds a serpent are moved by their own minds. He becomes an enemy who seeks to control others through force. When advice is offered in the spirit of friendship, the wise listen and tolerate it.

Who sets camphor alight does not even see its ashes, not if he runs to put it out. One should never shelter a man who is a friend to one's enemies, or a man who is always envious of his protector and whose mind is thus full of evil.

So, Vidura, go wherever you please. However well treated in her duties, an unchaste wife will abandon her husband.'

Vidura says to Dhritarashtra, 'O King, tell us, as an impartial witness, what you think of those who abandon their servants so for giving them counsel. Truly, the hearts of kings are fickle. They first give you protection then finally strike you down with a bludgeon.

Duryodhana, you think that you have a mature intellect, and, evil prince, you think that I am a child. But know that he is the child who first accepts a man for his friend and then finds fault with him. An evil-hearted man can never be brought to the path of dharma, just like an unchaste wife in the house of a wellborn husband.

Surely, being advised is as disagreeable to this Bharatarishbaha as a husband of sixty years is to a young woman. After this, O King, if you want to hear what is pleasing to you at all times, regardless of what you do, good or bad, go and ask women, idiots, cripples or similar folk to speak to you.

A sinful man speaking agreeable words is easy to find in this world, but the man who speaks the truth, whether it be pleasing or distasteful, and the man who listens to him are both rare indeed. A king's true ally is his man who will speak dharma to his master, regardless of whether what he says pleases him or no.

Great King, drink the drink called humility, which honest men imbibe and evil ones shun, which is like bitter medicine, pungent, burning, distasteful, revolting, on which you cannot get drunk. Drinking it, regain your sobriety.

I always wish Dhritarashtra and his sons prosperity and fame. Whatever now happens to you, I bow to you. Let the Brahmanas here wish me well. O Son of Kuru, this is the lesson that I teach with care: the wise should never anger snakes like cobras, which have venom in their very glances!'"

CANTO 64

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sakuni says, 'Yudhishtira, you have lost a lot of the wealth of the Pandavas. If you still own anything which you have not lost, Kaunteya, tell us what it is.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Son of Subala, I own untold wealth. Why do you speak to me of wealth, Sakuni? Wager lakhs and crores and crores of crores of crores and arabs, and arabs of arabs, and I will match your stake. I have as much.

With that wealth, King, I will play with you.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Son of Subala, I have uncountable cattle and horses, and milch cows with calves, and goats and sheep in the lands that extend from the Parnasa to the eastern bank of the Sindu.

With this wealth, O King, I will play.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won!'

Yudhishtira says, T have my city, my country, land, the wealth of all who live there other than the Brahmanas, and all those people themselves except the Brahmanas, who will remain with me.

With this wealth, O King, I will play with you.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, T have won!'

Yudhishtira says, 'King, these princes here, resplendent in their royal ornaments, earrings and nishkas are now my wealth. This wealth, Rajan, I will wager with you.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won them already. Play!'

Yudhishtira says, 'This Nakula, mighty-armed, his neck a lion's, his eyes red, youthful, I wager. Know him to be my wealth.'

Sakuni says, O Yudhishtira, Nakula is dear to you. He is already our subject. Who will you wager next?'

Saying this, Sakuni casts his dice, and says to Yudhishtira, 'We have won him!'

Yudhishtira says, "This Sahadeva administers justice. He has gained great renown through the world for his learning. He does not deserve to be my wager, yet with such a dear one I will play you, though I fervently wish that I did not!'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won him! O King, I have won both Madri's sons, so dear to you. It seems that Bhimasena and Dhananjaya are too dear for you to wager.'

Yudhishtira cries, 'Wretch! You want to make dissension among those that are one at heart? You ignore dharma, serpent.'

Sakuni says, 'He who is drunk falls into a pit and stays there unable to move. Yudhishtira, you are older than the Kauravas and have the highest accomplishments. O Bharatarishabha, I bow to you. You know, Yudhishtira, that while in the grip of the game, gamblers rave as they never do otherwise, awake or even in their dreams.'

Yudhishtira says, 'He who bears us like a boat across the sea of battle, he who always triumphs over enemies, this prince of mighty vigour, this greatest Kshatriya in the world: this Phalguna, who does not deserve this, I wager against you.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won! This greatest bowman, this son of Pandu who is perfectly ambidextrous in his archery I have won. Now, Pandava, stake your remaining wealth, your beloved brother Bhima.'

Yudhishtira says, 'King, however undeserving he is of becoming my wager, I will play against you with Bhimasena as my stake: this prince who is our leader, who is the mightiest warrior, who is even like the Vajradhari, the single enemy of the Danavas, himself, this high-souled one of leonine neck, his brows arched, his eyes looking askance, who brooks no insult ever, who has no equal on Earth for strength, who is the greatest among all mace-wielders, this grinder of his enemies.'

Sakuni, ready with his loaded dice, always cheating, says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won. Kaunteya, you have lost great wealth, horses, elephants and your brothers as well. Tell us if you have anything which you have not lost yet.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I alone, eldest of all my brothers and precious to them, remain unwon. If you win me, I will do whatever I must.'

Sakuni, ready with his dice, cheating, casts them and says to Yudhishtira, 'I have won. You have let yourself be won and that is a sin, for you still have wealth left to lose, O Rajan.'

Sakuni, master of dice, boasts to the kings gathered there of how he has won all the Pandavas. Subala's son then says to Yudhishtira, 'O King, there remains one possession dear to you, which is still unwon. Stake Krishnaa, princess of Panchala, and through her win yourself back!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Draupadi is neither too short nor tall, not lean or fat, and her tresses are blue and wavy. Her eyes are like the leaves of the autumn lotus, and she is fragrant, also, as the autumn lotus, and her beauty equal to Lakshmi who delights in the lotuses of autumn. Her form is as perfect as that of Sri herself, as is her grace.

She is a woman that any man would want for his wife, for the softness of her heart, the wealth of her beauty and her virtues. She owns every accomplishment; she is compassionate and sweetly-spoken; truly, she is a woman whom a man might want for his wife, for with her he could indeed have great dharma, artha and kama.

She goes to bed last of all and wakes first. She cares for everyone, down to the shepherds and cowherds. Ah, when her face is filmed with sweat she looks like the lotus or the jasmine. Her waist is as slender as a wasp's, her locks long and flowing, her lips red, and her body without so much as down: this is the Princess Panchali.

I wager this slender-waisted Draupadi to play against you, son of Subala!'

When Yudhishtira Dharmaputra says this, cries of 'Fie!' are heard from all the elders in that sabha. The entire conclave grows distraught, and the kings there yield to grief. Bhishma, Drona and Kripa are bathed in perspiration. Vidura holds his head between his hands and sits like one who has lost his reason. He sits face turned down, plunged in despair, sighing like a snake.

But Dhritarashtra is glad and asks repeatedly, 'Has the stake been won? Has the stake been won?' and he cannot hide his excitement.

Kama, Dussasana and some others laugh aloud, while tears flow down the faces of everyone else in the sabha.

And Subala's son, flushed with success, cries again and again, T have won! I have won your precious stake.'

He picks up the dice and flings them into the air in evil excitement."

CANTO 65

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Kshatta, go and fetch the Pandavas' most beloved wife Draupadi here. Let her sweep the chambers, force her to, and let the unfortunate woman live among our serving women.'

Vidura cries, 'Don't you know, O wretch, that with these words you are tying a noose around your neck? Don't you realise that you are hanging over the edge of a cliff? Being a deer yourself, dare you provoke so many tigers to anger? Snakes of deadly venom, stirred to fury, are upon your head! Vile Duryodhana, do not provoke them further lest you go straight to Yama's land.

I say that no slavery attaches to Krishnaa because Yudhishtira staked her after he lost himself and ceased to be his own master. Dhritarashtra's son wins treasure at dice even like the bamboo which fruits only when it is about to die. Intoxicated, he does not see in his final moments the enmity and terrors that this gambling brings.

No man should speak so viciously and pierce the hearts of others. No man should subdue his enemies through dice and other contemptible methods. No one should speak such harsh words, of which the Vedas disapprove and which wound others and lead one straight to hell. One speaks cruelly, and stung by his words, another burns day and night, for such words pierce the very heart. So, the wise man never lets fly these barbs from his lips, aiming them at anyone.

Once a goat swallowed a hook, and when the hook pierced it the hunter set the animal's head upon the ground and tore the hook out rending its throat fearfully. Duryodhana the Pandavas' wealth is a similar hook: do not swallow it and imperil yourself. Do not make enemies of them.

Pritha's sons never speak such savage words. Only base men, who are like dogs, use such speech, and towards all classes of men: vanaprasthas, grihasthas, sannyasins and muktas. Alas that Dhritarashtra's son does not know that dishonesty is one of the dreadful doors which leads into hell. Alas that so many of the Kurus, Dussasana among them, followed him eagerly down the path of adharma in this game of dice.

Gourds may sink and stones float, boats might also sink in water, always, but this foolish king, Dhritarashtra's son, will not listen to what I say, which might save him. I have no doubt that he will cause the destruction of the Kurus.

When friends and well-wishers speak words of wisdom and these go unheeded, and when, rather, only temptation waxes, devastation is bound to overtake all the heirs of Kuru.'"

CANTO 66

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Drunk with pride, Dhritarashtra's son hisses, 'Fie on you, Kshatta!' and his gaze moving to the Pratikamin in attendance, in the midst of all those revered elders, commands that man, 'Go Pratikamin, and fetch Draupadi here. You have no fear of the sons of the Pandavas. Vidura raves because he is afraid. Besides, he never wishes for our prosperity.'

The Pratikamin, a man of the Suta caste, hears the words of the king and hurries to the apartments of the Pandavas, and entering like a dog a lion's den, approaches the queen of the sons of Pandu.

He says, 'Yudhishtira became intoxicated with dice play, C) Draupadi, and Duryodhana has won you. So come now to Dhritarashtra's palace. I will take you there and put you to some menial task.'

Draupadi says, 'Pratikamin, what are you saying? Which Kshatriya will wager his wife at dice? Surely Yudhishtira was drunk with the play; could he find nothing else to stake?'

The Pratikamin says, 'When he had nothing else to stake, Pandu's son Ajatasatru staked you. He first wagered his brothers, then himself, and at last you, O Queen.'

Draupadi says, 'O Sutaputra, go and ask that gambler in the sabha if he lost himself first or me. After that come back here and I will go with you.'

The messenger returns to the court and repeats what Draupadi said for all to hear. He says to Yudhishtira, sitting among the kings, 'Draupadi asks you, "Whose lord were you when you lost me at dice? Did you lose yourself first or me?'"

But Yudhishtira sits like a man demented, one who has lost his reason, and makes no reply to the Suta, good or ill.

Then Duryodhana says, 'Let the Panchala princess come here and ask her question. Let all in this sabha listen to the exchange between Yudhishtira and her.'

Obedient to Duryodhana's command, though himself distrait, the messenger returns to the palace and says to Draupadi, 'Princess, they summon you to the sabha. It seems the end of the Kurus has drawn near.

When Duryodhana orders you to appear in the court how will that witless king save his fortunes?'

Draupadi says, 'The Great Ordainer of the world has decreed that joy and misery attend on both the wise and the witless, equally. Yet, it is told that dharma is the one highest thing in this life, which if cherished will surely bless us. Let the Kauravas not abandon dharma now.

Go back to the sabha and tell them what I have said about dharma. I am prepared to do what the wise elders of the court, men that know dharma well, tell me to.'

The Suta returns to the court and repeats Yagnaseni's words. But no one says anything; they all sit with their faces turned down for they know the lust and resolve of Dhritarashtra's son.

However, O Bharatarishabha, Yudhishtira sends his own trusted messenger to Draupadi, ordering her to appear, even if crying bitterly, before her father-in-law Dhritarashtra, though she wore but a single piece of cloth upon her body and her navel was exposed, for she has her period. That intelligent messenger, O Rajan, goes quickly to Draupadis chambers and gives her Yudhishtira's message.

Meanwhile, the stricken Pandavas cannot decide what they should do. Duryodhana, his heart bursting with joy, lets his eyes range over them, and says to the Suta, 'Pratikamin, fetch her here. Let the Kauravas answer her question to her face.'

Bound by his master's command, yet terrified of Draupadi's wrath, the Suta musters the courage to address the sabha again, 'What shall I say to Krishnaa?'

Duryodhana says, 'Dussasana, this son of my Suta, of little intelligence, fears Bhima. So, my brother, go yourself and bring Panchali here, by force if need be. Our enemies now depend on our will, they belong to us. What can they do to you?'

Dussasana rises, his eyes blood-red, stalks into the apartments of the Pandavas and says to Draupadi, 'Come, come, O Krishnaa, princess of Panchala, we have won you. O you whose eyes are as big as lotus leaves, you must now accept the Kurus for your new lords. You have been won fairly, come now to the sabha.'

Hearing him, Draupadi, trembling, jumps up in anguish, covers her face gone pale with her hands in distress and runs towards Dhritarashtra's antahpura, where the women of his household are. Roaring, Dussasana runs

after her and seizes that queen by her tresses, so long and blue and wavy. Alas! Those locks that had been sprinkled with holy water during the great Rajasuya, and sanctified with mantras, Dhritarashtra's feral son now seizes, forgetting the prowess of the Pandavas; by her hair he drags Krishnaa into the sabha, while she shakes like a banana plant during a storm.

Hauled along by him, she cries, 'Wretch, it degrades you to take me like this before the sabha! I have my period and I am wearing just a single cloth.'

But Dussasana drags Panchali mercilessly, while she prays in despair to Krishna and Jishnu, who are Nara Narayana upon the Earth.

He roars at her, 'Whether you have your period or not, whether you wear a single cloth or are naked, you have been won at dice and you will live among our serving women!'

Her hair in disarray, half her single cloth come loose, modest Panchali, dragged into the sabha, consumed by rage, protests weakly, 'In this sabha are great men, all equal to Indra, men who know all the Shastras, who devotedly perform yagnas, some of whom are truly my superiors and others who deserve to be revered as such. I cannot stay before them in this state.

Vile, cruel wretch, do not drag me like this! Do not uncover me so. My husbands will not forgive you, not if Indra and all the Devas be your allies. Dharma Deva's son is bound now by the dictates of dharma. But dharma is subtle, and only men who have great clearness of vision can know it.

I will not blame my lord with a word to say that he has broken dharma by an atom. O you have dragged me before these Kuru heroes when I am in my season, and this is surely a great sin. Yet no one here rebukes you. Surely, they are of the same mind as you.

O, truly, truly, the dharma of the Bhaaratas is lost! Truly, the dharma of the Kshatriya is gone! Else these Kurus in this sabha would never silently look on at this vile thing which you have done.

Oh, Drona and Bhishma have lost their tejas, and so also has the renowned Kshatta, and this king. Otherwise why do these greatest of Kuru elders look silently on this great crime?'

So does Krishnaa of the slender waist wail out her anguish in that sabha. She looks at her already angry lords with her teary eyes, and inflames them further with that glance of hers. They are not so distressed at having been robbed of their kingdom, their wealth, of their costliest jewels, as by that look from Krishnaa moved by modesty and rage.

Dussasana sees her gaze at her husbands and drags her more roughly still, crying 'Slave! Slave!' while he laughs aloud. Kama hears him and laughs loudly as well. And Subala's son Sakuni, Gandhara king, applauds Dussasana. But all else in that sabha, other than these three and Duryodhana are filled with sorrow at seeing Krishnaa dragged about coarsely in sight of everyone.

Bhishma says, 'Blessed one, dharma is subtle and I find myself unable to answer your question with any certitude, for though it is true that he who has lost himself owns nothing anymore, yet a wife is always at the disposal of her husband. Yudhishtira will renounce the whole world with all the wealth in it but he will never abandon dharma. The son of Pandu said, "I am lost" and so I cannot decide this thing. Sakuni has no equal among men at dice play, still Kunti's son played willingly against him. Yudhishtira himself does not think that Sakuni cheated. No, I cannot decide this matter.'

Draupadi says, 'My king was summoned to this sabha, and though he has no skill at dice, he was made to play against a masterly, base, deceitful and desperate gambler. How can you say that he played willingly? Acting in cohort, these wretched, sinful ones deprived Pandu's eldest son of his reason and then vanquished him. At first, he did not suspect their motives but now he has understood.

Here in this sabha are Kuru elders who are lords of both their sons and their daughters-in-law. Let them all think about what I say and then answer my question of dharma.'

Krishnaa sobs piteously, looking from time to time at her helpless husbands, while Dussasana says many cruel, vile things to her. Seeing her dragged thus into that sabha during her period, with her single cloth come loose, seeing her in that state which she little deserves, Bhima is stirred beyond endurance and, looking straight at Yudhishtira, gives way to fury.'"

CANTO 67

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhima says, 'Yudhishtira, gamblers keep many loose women in their homes, but even they do not wager their women, good or shameless, at gambling. Our enemies won all the wealth, all the precious things, which the king of Kasi gave us, jewels and animals, gold, coats of fine mail; they won all the excellent weapons which other kings of the world gave us; they won our kingdom, your brothers and yourself.

Not all this stirred my anger, for you are our lord. But this, the wagering of Draupadi, is a dreadful sin; our innocent wife does not deserve this. The Pandavas are her lords, yet just because of you these villainous Kauravas are tormenting her. For her sake, O King, my anger falls on you and I mean to burn those hands of yours which wagered Panchali. Sahadeva, bring me fire!'

Arjuna says quickly, 'Bhimasena, you have never spoken like this before! For sure these vile enemies have destroyed your high dharma. You must not fulfil the wishes of the enemy. Remain with dharma; do not cross our virtuous elder brother.

The enemy summoned the king, and remembering Kshatriya dharma, he played dice against his will. That can only add greatly to our honour and fame.'

Bhima relents and says, 'Dhananjaya, if you did not remind me that our brother acted in accordance with Kshatriya dharma, I would have taken his hands by force and burnt them in a fire.'

Seeing the Pandavas distraught and Panchali in anguish, Dhritarashtra's son Vikarna says, 'O Kings, answer Yagnaseni's question, for if we do not, all of us will surely go to hell. How is it that Bhishma and Dhritarashtra, the eldest of the Kurus, and also Mahatma Vidura do not say anything? Bharadwaja's son, Acharya to us all, and Kripa are here. Why do these Brahmanotti mas not answer the question?

And the other kings gathered here, from all parts of the land, give a reply to Draupadi, each according to his judgement and with no thought towards anger or gain. Kings, answer the question asked of you by Drupada's blessed daughter, declare which side each of you takes.'

Vikarna repeatedly appeals to those present in that sabha, but none of the kings says a word to answer him, good or ill. Vikarna begins to rub his hands together loudly and to sigh like a snake.

Finally, the prince says, 'You kings of the Earth, you Kauravas, you may or not answer Draupadi but I will say what I think is just. Purushottamas, it is said that hunting, drinking, gambling and over indulgence in women are the four vices of kings. The king who is addicted to these lives without dharma, and men do not take what such a king says or does seriously.

Urged on by deceitful gamblers, Pandu's son Yudhishtira was absorbed in one of these vices when he made Draupadi his stake. Besides, innocent Draupadi is also the common wife of all the sons of Pandu. Then, Yudhishtira had already lost himself when he wagered her. Finally, Sakuni persuaded him to wager the queen. Considering all these, I believe that Draupadi has not been won.'

The sabha roars its approval to hear what Vikarna says; all the kings praise him and censure Sakuni. But Kama jumps up in a froth, and waving his mighty arms, cries, 'Vikarna, it seems this sabha is full of contradictions! As for your anger, it is like fire kindled from a faggot, which consumes the faggot itself.

These great personages here have not said a word, though repeatedly asked by Krishnaa. They all regard Drupada's daughter to have been fairly won. You, O son of Dhritarashtra, are immature and bursting with outrage. You are just a boy but you speak in this sabha as if you were an old man. You do not know what dharma truly is, and like a fool you insist that Krishnaa who has been fairly won has not been won at all.

Dhaartarashtra, how do you say she is not won when the eldest Pandava staked all he owned in this sabha? Bharatarishabha, Draupadi is part of what Yudhishtira owns. So how do you say that what has been justly won has not been won at all? Yes, Sakuni asked for her to be wagered and the Pandava agreed. Then how do you say she was not won?

And if you think that her being fetched here wearing a single cloth is a crime, let me dispel your callowness. Kurunandana, the Gods have ordained only one husband for every woman, but Draupadi has many. It is certain that she is far from chaste. To bring her in this sabha wearing one cloth, or even to strip her naked here is no crime at all, for she is already such a woman.

Whatever wealth the Pandavas had - she herself and these sons of Pandu, too — have all been justly won by Sakuni.

Dussasana, this Vikarna who seems to speak like a wise man is only a boy. I say strip the Pandavas of their robes and strip Draupadi of her cloth, as well!'

Hearing this, O Bhaarata, the Pandavas take off their upper garments and throw them down. Then, O Rajan, Dussasana lays hold of Draupadi's cloth and begins to pull it away from her body roughly, before all the sabha.

Draupadi, in despair, thinks of Hari, and cries aloud, 'Govinda, you who dwell in Dwaraka, O Krishna, lover of the gopis! Kesava, don't you see how the Kauravas shame me? Lord, Lakshmipathe, Lord of Vraja, destroyer of sorrow, Janardana, save me from drowning in the Kaurava sea. Krishna, Krishna, Mahayogin, Soul of the Universe, Creator of all things, save me, I am in dire trouble and losing my mind here among these Kurus!'

Covering her face, still so stunningly beautiful, thinking of Krishna, of Hari, Lord of the three worlds, Draupadi's cries these words out to him. Krishna hears her and is moved.

At which, while Yagnaseni still wails out to him, as also to Vishnu and Hari and to Nara for protection, invisible Dharma Deva covers her in fine cloths of many colours. Each layer of cloth which Dussasana tears from her reveals another below it, as exquisite and lustrous. Quickly, hundreds and hundreds of robes of many hues lie piled on the floor.

A deep roar of many voices rises from the sabha, and all the kings begin to applaud the amazing spectacle, to applaud Draupadi and to censure Dussasana. Then Bhima, clenching his great fists, his lips quivering in anger, swears a terrible oath in the midst of all those kings, an oath in a loud and echoing voice.

Bhima cries, 'Hear me, you Kshatriyas of the world! Words that I will speak now have never been spoken by another man, nor will anyone in the future ever speak them. Lords of earth, if after what I say I do not do what I swear I will, let me find the realm of my dead ancestors.

I swear that I will tear this beast Dussasana's breast open with my hands and drink his blood. If I do not let me die!'

Hearing Bhima's dreadful oath, their hair stands on end and everyone in that sabha applauds him and curses Dussasana. Masses of bright coloured cloth, all dragged from Draupadi's body, are piled on the floor of the sabha, and finally, exhausted and defeated, Dussasana gives up and sits down in

shame, while again those gods among men gathered in that court cry 'Fie!' at him, to see the plight and disgrace of the sons of Pandu.

So loudly do those Kshatriyas roar that anybody who hears them trembles. Now every honest man in that sabha begins to say, 'Alas! The Kauravas still do not answer the question which Draupadi asked.'

Now they blame Dhritarashtra, all together, making a loud clamour. Then Vidura, master of dharma, waves his hands, silencing them, and says, 'O you who sit in this sabha, Draupadi sobs helplessly having asked her question. Yet you do not answer her and you betray virtue and dharma with your silence.

Like one being burnt by fire does a woman in distress seek the mercy of a conclave of righteous men. With truth and dharma does such an assembly quench that fire. The aggrieved woman asks the sabha what her rights are, according to dharma, and those in the sabha must answer, without prejudice or self-interest.

O Kings, Vikarna has answered Panchali, as he knows dharma, and you must also answer her. He who knows dharma and attends a sabha incurs the sin of lying if he fails to do so, just as he who replies falsely, or with prejudice, gains the same sin. The knowing tell the ancient tale of Prahlada and Angiras's son to illustrate this.

Long ago, there was a king of the Daityas called Prahlada. He had a son named Virochana. To marry a wife, Virochana quarrelled with Angiras' son Sudhanwan. Each staked his life, saying "I am superior to you!" for the sake of the woman, and they made Prahlada their arbiter to decide between them.

They said to him, "Which of us is superior? Answer this without falsehood."

Prahlada was afraid and looked at Sudhanwan, who, blazing in anger even like Yama's danda, said, "If you answer falsely or do not answer, your head will be split in a hundred pieces by Indra's thunderbolt!"

Trembling like a leaf of a fig tree, Prahlada went to Kasyapa of great tejas. The Daitya said to the Sage, "Most illustrious and exalted one, you know dharma entirely and you guide the Devas, the Brahmanas and the Asuras, too.

I find myself on the horns of a great dilemma regarding dharma. I ask you, what realms are found by one who does not answer a question or answers it falsely?"

Kasyapa replied, "He who knows but does not answer a question, from temptation, anger or fear, casts a thousand nooses of Varuna upon himself, just as he does who answers falsely. At the end of each year one paasa shall be loosened. So, he who knows should answer truthfully and not hide anything.

If virtue, struck by sin, comes to a sabha for help, it is the duty of everyone in that assembly to remove the barb, else they themselves shall be pierced by it. In a sabha where a truly censurable act is not rebuked, half the sin of that omission attaches to the head of the sabha, a fourth to the one who has sinned and another fourth to those who held their peace and did not speak out against the crime.

However, in a sabha where the sinner is reprimanded, the lord of the sabha is freed from all his sins and the others also incur none. Then, only the sinner finds sin for himself and pays alone for it.

Prahlada, they who answer falsely those who ask them about dharma, destroy the punya of seven generations before and after them.

The grief of one who loses all his wealth, one who loses a son, one who is in debt, one who is separated from his friends, that of a woman who has lost her husband, of one who loses his all through the king's demand, of a sterile woman, of one who is being eaten by a tiger, a woman who is one of two wives, and of one who is deprived of his wealth by false witnesses: all these the Devas have declared to be equal.

All these combined accrue to one who speaks falsely. A man becomes a witness by his having seen, heard, and understood a thing. So, a witness must always tell the truth. A witness who speaks truly never loses his punya or his worldly possessions."

Hearing Kasyapa, Prahlada told his son, "Sudhanwan is superior to you, just as his father Angiras is my superior. Sudhanwan's mother is also superior to your mother. So, O Virochana, this Sudhanwan is now the lord of your life."

Sudhanwan said, "Because you have kept dharma, unmoved by love for your child, I say let your son live for a hundred years.'"

Vidura continues, 'So, let all those in this sabha think carefully, deeply on what answer they should make to Draupadi's question.'

The other kings do not say a word. But Kama says loudly to Dussasana, 'Take this serving woman away into the antahpura.'

Dussasana begins to haul away the helpless and chaste Draupadi, who is trembling and crying piteously to her lords, the Pandavas."

CANTO 68

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi cries, 'Wait a little, O worst of men, evil-hearted Dussasana. I have something to do, a dharma which I have not yet done because I was hardly in my senses after this wretch dragged me from my chambers. I fold my hands and salute these venerable elders in the Kuru sabha. That I could not do this before cannot be my fault.'

Dussasana hauls her more savagely than before, and Draupadi falls to the ground and wails in that great sabha, 'Only once in my life, during my swayamvara, did such a gathering of kings ever see me, never before or after, until today when I have been dragged here. She whom even the winds and the Sun never saw before, even in her palace, is today exposed to the gaze of this host of men.

Alas, in my palace, the sons of Pandu could not suffer me to be touched even by the wind, and today they can stand my being seized by this dog. Alas, these Kauravas also suffer their daughter-in-law, who is unworthy of such treatment, to be tormented before them. Surely, it seems that the age has grown dark.

I am high-born and chaste. What can wound me more than being forced to come into this public court? Where is that dharma for which these kings were noted? We all know that the kings of old never brought their wives into their courts. Oh, that ancient custom has vanished from among the Kurus, or how has the wife of the Pandavas, the sister of Prihasta's son, she who is Krishna's sakhi, been dragged into this sabha?

O you Kauravas, I am the wife of Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, who hails from the same line as your king. Now tell me if I am your serving maid or not, and I will cheerfully accept your answer. This vile destroyer of the honour of the Kurus, hurts me sorely and, O Kauravas, I cannot bear it anymore.

You Kings, I want to hear your answer to my question: am I won or not? Whatever you say, I will accept your verdict.'

Bhishma answers her, 'Blessed child, I have already said that the course of dharma is subtle, and even the most enlightened in this world cannot always fathom it.

In this world, whatever a strong man calls dharma others accept as being so, even if the truth is very different. But what a weak man calls dharma is hardly regarded, even if it is indeed the highest virtue. What you ask is deep and grave, intricate and subtle, and I find myself unable to answer with any certainty.

However, there is no doubt that all the Kurus have become slaves to greed and folly, and our race shall very soon find its destruction. Blessed child, the family into which you have come as a daughter-in-law never abandons dharma, whatever calamities it faces. Panchali, you are plunged in grief, yet you also keep your eyes on dharma.

These elders here, Drona and the others, of mature years and knowers of dharma, sit with their heads bent down even like dead men, from whose bodies life has gone. I feel that Yudhishtira is the one best suited to answer your question. Let him say if you have been won or not.'"

CANTO 69

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "From fear of Duryodhana, the kings present in that sabha do not say a word, good or ill, although they see Draupadi crying piteously, like a female osprey, and hear her appealing to them repeatedly. Duryodhana sees those kings, their sons and grandsons all keeping quiet, and smiles.

He says to Draupadi, 'Yagnaseni, let your husbands Bhima of mighty strength, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva answer your question. Panchali, for your sake let them declare in the midst of these honourable men that Yudhishtira is not their lord, and let them thus make great Yudhishtira a common liar. If they do, you will be free from the bondage of slavery.

Let the illustrious son of Dharma, who always keeps dharma, who is like Indra himself, declare whether or not he is your lord. And at what he says, accept either the Pandavas or ourselves. Indeed, all the Kauravas in this sabha float upon the sea of your distress. They are kind and generous and, looking at your pitiable husbands, cannot answer your question.'

Everyone in that court applauds loudly, while surreptitiously making signs to one another through movements of their eyes and lips. Some cry, 'Oh!' and 'Alas!' The Kauravas hear what their brother says and are overjoyed, and the other kings look sidelong at Yudhishtira, waiting to hear what he will say. All are curious to hear what Arjuna, Pandu's son never defeated in battle will say, and Bhimasena, and the twins.

When the hum of many voices ceases, waving his mighty arms smeared with sandalwood paste, Bhima says, 'If this Mahatman Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, our eldest brother, had not been our lord, we would never have forgiven the Kurus. He is the lord of all our dharma and punya, the lord of our lives. If he regards himself as won, all of us have also been won. If this were not so, which creature whose feet touches this Earth and is mortal would escape me alive after touching Panchali's precious tresses?

Look at these arms of mine, like iron maces. Even he of a hundred sacrifices could not escape their clasp. Bound by the ties of dharma and bhakti owed to our eldest brother, and urged repeatedly by Arjuna to be silent, I restrain myself from doing terrible things. But if Yudhishtira

commanded me, I would kill these vile sons of Dhritarashtra, making blows do the work of swords, why, like a lion killing a herd of small animals.'

When Bhima says this, Bhishma, Drona and Vidura say to him, 'Forbear, O Bhima, for you can do anything.'"

CANTO 70

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says, 'Among all in this sabha, three - Bhishma, Vidura, and Drona - seem to be independent indeed, for they speak ill of their master, censure him and never wish for his prosperity.

Excellent Panchali, the slave, the son and the wife are always dependent. They cannot earn wealth, for whatever they earn belongs to their master. You are the wife of a slave, who cannot own anything. Go now to Dhritarashtra's antahpura and serve the king's relatives. That is now your proper place, for O Princess, all the sons of Dhritarashtra and not the sons of Pritha are now your masters.

Beautiful one, choose another husband for yourself, one who will not gamble you away to become a slave. It is known that women, especially slaves, are not to be censured if they freely choose husbands for themselves. So, you do so now.

Nakula has been won, as have Bhimasena, Yudhishtira, Sahadeva and Arjuna. And, Yagnaseni, you are now a slave, and your husbands who are also slaves cannot be your husbands anymore.

Ah, does Pritha's son think of life, prowess and manhood as being useless that he offers this daughter of Drupada, the king of Panchala, in the presence of this entire sabha, as a stake at dice?'

Bhima, a picture of misery, breathed hard, but obedient to his king and bound by dharma, he can only blaze at everything around with his eyes, and say, 'Rajan, I cannot even be angry at what this son of a Suta says, for we have truly become slaves. But Yudhishtira, could our enemies dare say this to me if you had not wagered Draupadi?'

Duryodhana says to Yudhishtira who is silent, as if he has lost his mind, 'O King, Bhima and Arjuna, and the twins also, are under your sway. You answer the question. Say if you think that Krishnaa has been won or not.'

Saying this to Kunti's son, and wanting to encourage Karna and taunt Bhima, Duryodhana suddenly bares his left thigh, his thigh like the stem of a plantain tree or the trunk of an elephant, his thigh graced with every auspicious sign and endowed with the strength of thunder, and shows it to Draupadi.

Bhima's red eyes bulge, and he says to Duryodhana in the midst of all those kings, words like arrows, 'Let not Bhima Vrikodara never attain the realms gained by his sires if he does not break that thigh of yours during the Great War!'

And sparks of fire come forth from Bhima's wrathful body, like those which fly from every crack in a tree on fire.

Vidura now says, addressing the entire sabha, 'You kings of Pratipa's race, behold the great danger which rises from Bhimasena. Know for certain that this great calamity that threatens to overtake the Bhaaratas has been sent by Destiny itself.

Dhritarashtra's sons have gambled, ignoring every tenet of dharma. Even now they insist that a queen of our royal house is their slave, and here will the good fortune of your kingdom end. Look, how they consult evilly among themselves. Kauravas, take into your hearts what I am saying. If you corrupt dharma here, this sabha will be ruined.

If Yudhishtira staked Yagnaseni before he lost himself, he would then certainly have been her master. However, if man who is himself lost and cannot own any possession wagers something, it is like wealth won or lost in a dream. Do not, all of you, listen to this Gandhara king and fall away from the indubitable truth.'

Duryodhana says, 'I am content to abide by what Bhima, Arjuna and the twins say. Let them declare that Yudhishtira is not their master, and Yagnaseni will be free from bondage.'

Arjuna says, "This illustrious Kaunteya, Yudhishtira Dharmatma, was certainly our master before he began to play. But when he had lost himself, let all the Kauravas judge whose master he could be after that.'

Just then, a jackal begins to howl dismally in the very homa-chamber of King Dhritarashtra's palace. Rajan, donkeys bray in response to the jackal's ululating howls. Then dreadful birds also join the cacophony from every side with their various screeches and cries.

Vidura, who knows all things, and Subala's daughter Gandhari, also, understand what those terrible sounds portended. Bhishma, Drona and the wise Gautama cry, '*Swashti! Swashti!*'[1] Gandhari and Vidura anxiously explain the wild omens to the king.

Dhritarashtra says, 'Evil-hearted Duryodhana, ruin has already come to us when you speak in such vile language to a wife of these Kururishabhas, especially to Draupadi herself.'

The wise Dhritarashtra, wanting to save his kin from disaster, begins to console Krishnaa. He says to her, 'Ask me for any boon you want, O Panchali. So chaste and devoted to virtue, you are the first among all my daughters-in-law.'

Draupadi says, 'O Bharatarishabha, if you will grant me a boon, I ask that the handsome Yudhishtira Dharmatma be freed from slavery, for let no thoughtless child call my son Prativindhya, of great tejas of mind, the son of a slave, for my prince is a superior boy and has been raised by kings.'

Dhritarashtra says to her, 'Auspicious Panchali, let it be as you want. Excellent princess, ask for another boon for my heart is inclined to grant you a second wish. You deserve more than one.'

Draupadi says, 'O Rajan, let Bhimasena, Dhananjaya and the twins have their liberty back, and their chariots and bows.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Blessed daughter, let it be as you wish. Ask me for a third boon, for just two boons do not sufficiently honour you. You are virtuous, the best of all my daughters-in-law.'

Draupadi says, 'Best of kings, most illustrious one, greed always fetches the loss of dharma. I do not deserve a third boon, and so I dare not ask for one. O King of kings, it is said that a Vaisya may ask one boon, a Kshatriya woman two boons, a Kshatriya man three, and a Brahmana a hundred.

Maharajan, now that my husbands are free from ignominious bondage, they can achieve their own prosperity through their dharma and deeds.'"

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[1]A blessing.

CANTO 71

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says caustically, 'Never have we heard of such a wonderful thing being accomplished by any woman famed through the world for her beauty. When both the sons of Pandu and Dhritarashtra's princes were stirred by anger, this Draupadi has become the Pandavas' salvation. The sons of Pandu were drowning in a sea of distress and Panchali became a boat to them and has brought them safely ashore.'

Hearing this in the midst of all the Kurus, the angry Bhimasena says desperately to Arjuna, 'Devala Maharishi has said that three lights live in every person, their children, their deeds and their knowledge, for from these three all creation springs.

When life comes to an end and the body decays and a man is cast off by his relatives, these three become useful. But the light in us has been dimmed by the humiliation of our wife. How, Arjuna, can a son born from this shamed queen ever be useful to us?'

Arjuna replies, 'Bhima, superior men never react to the harsh words with which inferior men might pierce them. Men who have earned honour for themselves, even if they can retaliate, forget the hostility shown them by their enemies and only treasure their good deeds.'

Bhima says, 'Yudhishtira, shall I kill all these enemies, even here in this sabha, or shall I tear them up by their life-roots outside the palace? Ah, what need have I for words or your command? I will kill them at once and then you will rule over the whole world, without a rival.'

Saying this Bhima and the twins, like lions in the midst of a herd of lesser beasts, glare angrily around them. However, Arjuna Swetakarma, he of white deeds, tries to pacify his older brother with appealing looks. But Bhima Mahabaho blazes again in wrath. Rajan, fire issues from Vrikodara's ears and nostrils with flames, sparks and smoke.

His brow is knit and furrowed, his face is terrible, and he is like Yama himself during the Pralaya. Then Yudhishtira puts his arms around Bhima and forbids him, saying 'Do not be like this. Be silent and peaceful.'

Having restrained red-eyed Bhima, Yudhishtira, with folded hands, approaches his uncle Dhritarashtra."

CANTO 72

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'O King, you are our master. Command us what we should do. O Bhaarata, we want to always remain obedient to you.'

Dhritarashtra replies, 'Be blessed, O Ajatasatru. Go in peace and safety. I command you to go and rule your own kingdom with your wealth. And, my child, I have another command for you which, I beg you, take to your heart. It is the plea of an old man and will provide nurture to you.

Yudhishtira, child, you know the subtle path of dharma. You own great wisdom, yet you are humble and you wait upon your elders. Where there is intelligence, there is forbearance; so, O Bhaarata, follow the counsels of peace.

The axe sinks into wood but not stone, and you will listen while Duryodhana will not. The best of men never remember the hostile actions of their enemies, they see only the good and not the evil even in those that harm them. And they never seek enmity or revenge.

Also, the good do good without expecting anything in return. Yudhishtira, only the worst men speak harshly during a quarrel; while mediocre men reply in kind when spoken to harshly. But the good and the wise never pay heed to or retort in kind to harshness.

The good know themselves and understand the feelings of others; hence, they think only of the goodness in other men not the darkness. You have always been honourable, never breaking the bounds of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. My son, forget Duryodhanas harshness.

Look at your mother Gandhari and at me, if you wish to remember only what is good. O Bhaarata, look at me, who am a father to you, and am old and blind, and still alive. It was only to see our friends and also to examine the strengths and weaknesses of my children that I allowed the game of dice.

Rajan, those among the Kurus who have you for their king and the wise Vidura, who knows every Shastra deeply, for their minister, surely have nothing to grieve over. In you is virtue, in Arjuna patience, in Bhimasena might, and in the twins, those best of men, is pure reverence for their elders.

Be you blessed, O Yudhishira! Return to Khandavaprastha, and let there be brotherly love between you and your cousins. Let your heart always be fixed on dharma.'

When his uncle speaks thus to him, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja then pays every homage and courtesy to his elders, and sets out for Khandavaprastha with his brothers. Their hearts glad now, and Draupadi with them, they climb into their chariots, which are all the colour of clouds, and ride towards the city called Indraprastha."

CANTO 73

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya says, "How did Dhritarashtra's sons feel when they learnt that, with Dhritarashtra's leave, the Pandavas had left Hastinapura with their kingdom, all their wealth and jewels returned to them?"

Vaisampayana says, "O King, when he learns that wise Dhritarashtra has given the Pandavas leave to return to their capital, Dussasana hurries to his brother. O Bharatarishabha, arriving in Duryodhana's presence, the stricken prince cries, 'Great Kshatriyas, the old man has thrown away what we won with so much trouble! He has given back everything to our enemies, all their kingdom and wealth.'

Duryodhana, Kama and Subala's son Sakuni, all of them ruled by hubris, come together in some haste, and privately, to Vichitravirya's son Dhritarashtra. They speak sweetly and artfully to him.

Duryodhana says, 'O King, have you not heard what Brihaspati the Devaguru said to Indra about mortals and politics? Parantapa, these were Guru's words: "Enemies who harm you by stratagem or by force must be killed."

If we used the Pandavas' wealth to please the kings of the earth and then fight the sons of Pandu, how could we lose? Ah, but if a man wraps angry poisonous serpents around his neck and back, how can he take them off? My father, in their chariots and armed, the angry sons of Pandu are like venomous snakes and they will certainly kill us.

Even now Arjuna rides in his chariot, wearing mail, his twin quivers strapped on, often picking up the Gandiva, while he breathes hard and casts blazing looks around him. Bhima rides in wrath, whirling his mace in his great hands. Nakula rides with his sword and his half-moon shield in his hands, and Sahadeva and Yudhishtira also have made clear what they mean to do.

Whipping their horses, they go like five winds in their chariots towards Khandavaprastha to muster their forces. They will never forgive us for humiliating them. Which of them will forget what we did to Draupadi?

Be you blest, my father, we must gamble again with the Pandavas, this time to send them into exile. Purusharishabha, only thus can we conquer

them again. The wager shall be that either we or they will live in the forest for twelve years wearing deerskin, and a further thirteenth year in some city, in ajnatavasa, undiscovered, unrecognised. Either we or they will live so.

Let us cast the dice immediately, let the sons of Pandu play against us once more. Bull of the race of Bhaarata, O King, this is our highest dharma and Sakuni is a master of the rolling dice. Even if the Pandavas survive their exile, during those thirteen years we will take deep root in the kingdom and, making many allies, collect a vast and invincible army, so if the sons of Pandu reappear we will vanquish them.

Let this plan recommend itself to you, O Parantapa.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Bring the Pandavas back even if they have gone a good way. Let them come back at once to cast the dice again.'

Drona, Somadatta and Balhika, Gautama, Vidura, the son of Drona, Dhritarashtra's great son by his Vaisya wife, and Bhurisravas, Bhishma and the mighty Vikarna all say, 'Let there be no more dice, let there be peace.'

But Dhritarashtra is partial to his sons. He ignores the counsel of his wise friends and kinsmen and summons the Pandavas back."

CANTO 74

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, now Gandhari, in great distress for her sons, says to Dhritarashtra, 'When Duryodhana was born the wise Vidura said, "It would be well for us to send this disgrace to our race to the next world. Look how he howls again and again like a jackal; it is certain that he will cause the destruction of the Kurus."

Take what Vidura said to heart, O King of the Kurus. O Bhaarata, do not drown, from your own fault, in a sea of calamities. My lord, do not listen to these evil and foolish princes. Do not become the instrument of the brutal end of this noble House.

Who can break an embankment once it has been built, or rekindle a forest fire which has been extinguished? O Bharatarishabha, who lives that will provoke the peaceful sons of Pritha?

Ajamida, you remember all things, but still let me remind you that no scripture can restrain those that have evil hearts from doing evil. An immature man will never do as one of mature years will. Let your sons follow you, and not the other way. Let death not take them from you for ever.

I say to you today, my husband, abandon this vile prince of mine, this evil Duryodhana. From fatherly love you could not do it before, but now you must, for the time is here when, if you do not, our very race will be annihiliated.

Do not err in this, my lord, let your mind be guided by counsels of peace, virtue and true policy, and be what it naturally is. The fortune won through evil means is quickly lost, while that acquired gently takes root and swells and goes down from generation to generation.'

The king replies to Gandhari who pointed out the path of dharma to him, 'If the destruction of our race has come, let it takes its course freely, for I cannot prevent it. Let my sons' wish be granted and the Pandavas return to play another game of dice.'"

CANTO 75

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "A royal messenger, sent by Dhritarashtra, rides like the wind to Pritha's Yudhishtira, who by then has come a good way from Hastinapura. The messenger says, 'Your uncle, who is like a father to you, says, "The sabha is ready, O Pandava, come and cast the dice!"'

Yudhishtira says, 'All creatures find fruit, good and ill, by the will of the Creator. They are inevitable, if I play or not. This is a summons to dice; it is, besides, the command of the old king. Although I know that it will prove ruinous to me, I cannot refuse.'

Although a golden living animal could not exist, Rama allowed himself to be tempted by a golden deer. Truly, minds of men over whom calamities hang, become unhinged. So, Yudhishtira returns to Hastinapura with his brothers. Knowing full well how Sakuni cheated, the son of Pritha comes back to sit at dice with him again.

Those mighty Kshatriyas enter that sabha once more, while their friends grieve for them. Compelled by fate, they sit down again to gamble and, indeed, to ruin themselves.

Sakuni says, 'The aged king has given you back all your wealth. That is well. But, Bharatarishabha, listen to me, here is a stake of great value: either defeated by you at dice, we will enter the forest, wearing deerskin, and live there for twelve years, and then spend a thirteenth in a place of men, undiscovered. And if we are discovered during the thirteenth year, we will spend another twelve years in exile. However, if you lose, you, along with Krishnaa, will spend twelve years in the vana and pass the thirteenth in a place of men, in ajnatavasa. If you are found during the thirteenth year, you will go back into exile for another twelve years.

When the thirteenth year is over each one will give his kingdom back to the other. Yudhishtira, for this stake, play with us, O Bhaarata. Cast the dice.'

The other noble ones in the sabha raise their arms up in alarm and cry anxiously, and feelingly, 'Alas, Duryodhana's friends do not warn him of his

great danger. Dhritarashtra, whether he understands the peril or not, it is your duty to tell him plainly.'

Yudhishtira hears this, but from a sense of shame and dharma, sits again to play dice. Though he is most intelligent and knows the consequences well, he begins to play, as if he knows that the end of the Kurus is near and it is ineluctable.

Yudhishtira says, 'Sakuni, how can a king like me, who always observes Kshatriya dharma, refuse to play when he has been summoned to dice? And so I will play with you.'

Sakuni replies, 'We have many horses and milch cows, an infinite number of goats and sheep, and elephants and treasuries and gold, and slaves both male and female. We staked all these before but now let this be our one stake: exile into the forest. If you beat us we will live in the vana for twelve years and the thirteenth in ajnatavasa. Purusharishabhas, with this determination, will we play.'

O Bhaarata, only once does he speak about the exile in the jungle. Yudhishtira accepts it and Sakuni takes up the dice. Casting them, he says to Pritha's son, 'I have won!'"

CANTO 72

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The vanquished Pandavas prepare for their exile in the forest. One after another, in order of age, they cast off their royal robes and clothe themselves in deerskin.

Seeing those Parantapas wearing deerskin, their kingdom taken from them and ready to go into exile, Dussasana cries, 'The absolute sovereignty of the illustrious King Duryodhana has begun. The sons of Pandu have been vanquished, and plunged into ruin.

We have achieved our goal, be it by the broad or the narrow way. Today, we have more wealth and kingdom than our enemies, and we have become worthy of the praise of men, while Pritha's sons are plunged in everlasting hell. For ever, they have lost their kingdom and their happiness.

Arrogant of their wealth, they once laughed derisively at Duryodhana. Now, beaten by us and their wealth lost, they must go into the vana and exile. Let them take off their armour, their resplendent robes of celestial make; let them put on deerskins, according to the stake of Sakuni, which they accepted.

These who always boasted that they had no equals in the world will now see themselves like grains of sesame without a kernel. Though in this new garb, Pandu's sons seem like wise and powerful men installed in a sacrifice, yet they do not look men entitled to perform yagnas.

When the wise Yagnasena of the Somakas gave his daughter Panchali to the Pandavas he made a great mistake, for these sons of Pritha are like eunuchs. Yagnaseni, what joy will you have in the forest seeing your husbands wearing deerskin and threadbare valkala, impoverished, all their wealth lost?

Choose a husband for yourself from this sabha. The Kurus here are all great and self-restrained, and all of them are vastly wealthy. Choose one of them for your lord, so that the calamity which has overtaken you does not drag you into wretchedness. The Pandavas are now like sesame seeds without a kernel, like stuffed animals, or grains of rice without a husk. When they have fallen, why should you wait on them anymore? Ah, vain is the labour which seeks to press the sesame without a kernel!'

So does Dussasana, the son of Dhritarashtra, speak viciously again in the hearing of the Pandavas. At which, Bhima suddenly rushes at him in fury, like a Himalayan lion at a jackal, and roars, 'Villain, do you rave like this as only sinners do? Dare you brag in this sabha of kings after your cause has been advanced by the cheating skill of Sakuni?

As you pierce our hearts with your words like arrows, I will remember these words and pierce your heart and shed your blood in battle. And I will also send to Yamaloka those who stand behind you today, from their anger or their greed, as your protectors. Yes, them and all their sons and kin!'

But Dussasana begins to dance rudely around Bhima, clad in deerskin, who is restrained by dharma from doing him any harm, crying, 'Cow! O you cow!'

Bhima fumes, 'Dare you, wretched Dussasana? Dare you preen and brag after winning our wealth by the basest means? I say to you that if this Vrikodara, son of Pritha, does not tear open your breast and drink your blood, may he never find heaven for himself.

I say to you all that, before a great host of Kshatriyas, I will kill all these sons of Dhritarashtra and quench my wrath!'

As the Pandavas leave the sabha, the joyful Duryodhana mimics Bhima's leonine gait with mincing steps.

Vrikodara turns to that king and says, 'Fool, you think to put me down with these vile tricks? I will kill you and all who follow you soon enough, and that will be my answer to your strutting.'

With that, controlling the great anger which surges in him, the mighty and proud Bhima turns to follow Yudhishtira from the Kaurava court again. Going, he says, 'I will kill Duryodhana, and Dhananjaya will slay Kama. Sahadeva will kill Sakuni the gambler.

And hear again, all of you in this sabha, the oath I swear, and the Gods will surely make my oath come true. If we ever meet the Kurus in battle, I will kill this dog Duryodhana with my mace, and laying him on the ground I will stamp on his head with my foot. As for this other evil one, so brave with his words, I will drink his blood like a lion!'

Arjuna says, 'Bhima, the resolutions of superior men are not known only by their words. On the fourteenth year from this day, these will see what happens.'

Bhima says, 'The earth will drink the blood of Duryodhana, Kama and the evil Sakuni, and Dussasana will be the fourth.'

Arjuna says, 'Bhima, as you have sworn, I will kill this malicious, envious, harsh-tongued and vain Kama. To please Bhima, Arjuna vows that he will kill Kama and all his followers with arrows in battle. Yes, and I will send to Yama's realm all the other foolish kings who dare face me in war.

The Mountains of Himavat might move from where they are, the Sun who makes the day might lose his lustre, the Moon his coolness, but I will keep my vow. All that I have sworn will happen if, on the fourteenth year from today, Duryodhana does not return our kingdom to us with proper respect.'

After Arjuna, Madri's handsome son Sahadeva, of great tejas, eager to kill Sakuni, waves his arms and, red-eyed and sighing like a snake, cries, 'O you disgrace of the Gandhara kings, those whom you think of as defeated are not really so. You have risked death by arrows in battle, and I will do as Bhima has sworn by killing you and all your followers in war.

So, if there is anything at all that you wish to do, do it before that day comes, for then I will kill you if you keep Kshatriya dharma and do not flee the field like a dog, O son of Subala!'

Now Nakula, handsomest of all men, says, T will kill all these sons of Dhritarashtra, who have dared insult Draupadi in this sabha. They have wished for death and are moved by Fate and the desire to please Duryodhana. I will remember what they have said today and they will find death at Yudhishtira's command. The Earth will be devoid of Dhritarashtra's sons.'

Having sworn these oaths, those Purushavyaghras, tigers among men, all blessed with long arms, approach King Dhritarashtra."

CANTO 77

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'I bid farewell to all the Bhaaratas, to my V Pitama, to King Somadatta, the great Bahlika, Drona, Kripa, all the other kings, Aswatthama, Vidura, Dhritarashtra, all the sons of Dhritarashtra, to Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and all the courtiers. I bid you all farewell, and returning, I will see you again.'

Overcome by shame, none of those men can make any reply to him. In their hearts, though, they pray for the welfare of that good and wise prince.

Vidura now says, 'Pritha is a princess by birth. It does not become her to go into the forest. She is old, delicate and used to luxury. She will live in my home. Know this, O sons of Pandu, and let safety always be yours.'

The Pandavas say, Anagha, sinless one, let it be as you say. You are our uncle and so even like our own father. We are all obedient to you, and you are, O learned one, our most revered elder. We must always obey you and, Mahatman, command us, what else shall we do?'

Vidura replies, 'Yudhishtira, in my opinion a man vanquished by foul means need feel no pain at his defeat. You know every law of dharma; Arjuna is ever victorious in battle; Bhimasena is the slayer of enemies; Nakula is the gatherer of wealth; Sahadeva is a great administrator; Dhaumya is the foremost of all who know the Vedas; and Draupadi knows both virtue and frugality well.

You are devoted to one another, feel delight in each other's company, enemies cannot divide you and you are contented. Who is there that will not envy you? O Bhaarata, this patient abstraction from the possession of the world will be of great benefit to you. No enemy, even if he were equal to Indra himself, will be able to withstand it.

Once, on the mountains of Himavat, beside Meru, Savarni taught you; in the town of Varanavata, Krishna Dwaipayana did; upon the cliff of Bhrigu, Rama; and on the banks of the Dhrishadwati, Siva himself. Maharishi Asita gave you instruction on the hills of Anjana; and you became a disciple of Bhrigu on the banks of the Kalmashi.

Narada and your priest Dhaumya will now become your Gurus. In the matter of the next world, never abandon these profound lessons you have

had from the Munis. O Pandava, your intelligence is greater than even that of Ila's son Pururavas; in might, you exceed all other kings, and in virtue, even the Rishis.

Therefore, resolve earnestly to win victory, which belongs to Indra; to control your wrath, which belongs to Yama; to give charity, which belongs to Kubera; and to restrain all passions, which belong to Varuna. O Bhaarata, from the Moon take the power to please; the power to sustain from Water; patience from the Earth; energy from the Sun; strength from the Wind, and affluence from the other elements.

May walfare and immunity from disease be yours; I hope to see you return. Yudhishtira, act righteously and duly in all seasons: those of distress, those of difficulty, indeed, in all things.

O Son of Kunti, go forth with our leave. O Bhaarata, my blessings be upon you. No one can say that you have sinned, and so we do earnestly want to see you return, crowned with success.'

Bowing low to Bhishma and Drona, Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu, of prowess incapable of being baffled, says, 'Tathastu, so be it!' and departs."

CANTO 78

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Draupadi is about to set out she goes to the illustrious Kunti and solicits her leave. She takes her leave of the other ladies of the household, all of them plunged in grief. Saluting and embracing every one of them, as each deserves, she asks them to permit her to go away.

Then, within the inner apartments of the Pandavas, a loud wail of grief arises. Kunti, in terrible distress to see Draupadi about to go, says, her voice choking, 'My child, do not grieve that this calamity has overtaken you. You know well the dharma of women, and your behaviour and conduct are as they should be. O my princess of sweet smiles, I need not teach you your duty towards your husbands.

You are chaste and accomplished, and your qualities have adorned the race of your birth, as also the House into which you have come through marriage. Ah, the Kauravas are fortunate that your wrath has not burnt them to ashes. My daughter, go safely, blessed by my prayers. Good women never allow their hearts to come unstrung at what is inevitable. Protected by dharma, which is superior to everything, you will soon find good fortune again.

While living in the vana, keep your eye on my child Sahadeva. See that his heart does not sink under the weight of this tragedy.'

Bathed in tears, still wearing her single cloth stained with her woman's blood, her hair in disarray, saying, 'Tathastu,' Draupadi leaves her mother-in-law. As she goes, sobbing, Pritha follows her in grief. Kunti does not go far, when she sees her sons, shorn of their ornaments and royal robes, clad in deerskin, and their heads bent down with shame. She sees them surrounded by rejoicing enemies and pitying friends.

Filled by a tide of mother's love, Kunti approaches her sons. Embracing them, tears in her eyes and voice, she says, 'You are virtuous and decorous; you own every noble quality, and you are respectful towards all. You are all high-minded and serve your elders, and you are also devoted to the Gods and the performance of yagnas. Ah, then why has such disaster overtaken you?

From where this sudden reversal of fortune? I do not see through whose villainy this sin has come over you. Alus, I gave birth to you, this must be my ill luck visited on your innocent lives, for you are all blessed with the finest virtues, great vitality and prowess, strength, fortitude and power.

Oh, how will you now live in penury in the pathless forest? If I knew that one day this would be your fate, I would never have left the mountains of Satasringa to come to Hastinapura when Pandu died.

Your father was a fortunate man, as I see now, and reaped every fruit of his asceticism. He was gifted with foresight, and he rose into Swarga without feeling any pain on his sons' account. Fortunate, too, was Madri, as I look at it today. She, also, it seems, knew what the future held and chose the high path of freedom from this life, and every blessing which comes with it. Ah, Madri looked on me as her support, and her heart and her love were always fixed upon me.

I curse my desire to live, which makes me suffer like this today. My children, all of you are exceptionally worthy and dear to me. I had you all after long suffering. Oh, I cannot leave you. I will also go with you!

Oh Panchali, why do you leave me? All that lives is sure to die. Has Brahma forgotten to ordain this Kunti's death? Perhaps it is so, and that is why life does not quit me.

Krishna! O you who dwell in Dwaraka, O Sankarshana's younger brother, where are you? Why don't you deliver me and these Purushottamas from such misery? They say that you, who are without beginning and without end, save those that think of you. Why is this being proved false?

These sons of mine have always cloven to virtue, nobility, honour and prowess. They do not deserve this suffering. Oh, show them mercy! When there are such elders in our race like Bhishma and Drona and Kripa, all of whom know dharma and the world well, how does this tragedy overtake us?

O Pandu, where are you? How do you countenance your good princes to be sent into exile, defeated at dice? Sahadeva, do not go! You are my dearest child, dearer to me, O Son of Madri, than my body. Do not forsake me. You must show me some kindness. Let dharma bind your brothers to go into the vana, but you stay with me, my child, and earn your punya through serving me.'

The Pandavas console their weeping mother and, also plunged in grief, set out for the forest. Though grief-stricken himself, Vidura consoles Kunti as best he can and slowly leads her back into his home.

The women of Dhritarashtra's household hear about all that happened, about Draupadi being dragged into the sabha, about the exile of the Pandavas, and they weep and blame the Kauravas openly. Then they sit sunk in gloom, many with their lotus-like faces buried in their fair hands.

Dhritarashtra begins to think of the danger, which his sons now face, and he has no peace of mind but is a prey to constant anxiety. Utterly distraught, he sends a messenger to Vidura, saying, 'Let Kshatta come to me without a moment's delay.'

Vidura comes immediately to Dhritarashtra's palace. As soon as he arrives, the king questions him about how the Pandavas left Hastinapura."

CANTO 79

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "As soon as Vidura of great foresight enters his presence, Ambika's son, the King Dhritarashtra, asks his brother nervously, 'How did Dharmaputra Yudhishtira leave? And how Bhima and Arjuna? And how Madri's twins? How, O Kshatta, did Dhaumya proceed? And the lustrous Draupadi? I want to hear everything, Vidura, tell me everything they did.'

Vidura replies, 'Kunti's son Yudhishtira went forth covering his face with a cloth. Bhima, O King, went staring at his own mighty arms. Arjuna threw pieces of earth around him as he followed Yudhishtira. Madri's son smeared his face darkly when he went, and Nakula, also, covered his handsome face with dirt, and he was full of sorrow.

The large-eyed and beautiful Krishnaa's hair was loose and dishevelled, and she covered her face as well, following the king, and she wept ceaselessly. Rajan, Dhaumya walked with kusa grass in his hands, and he chanted the ominous mantras from the Sama Veda which are for Yama, the God of Death.'

Dhritarashtra asks, 'Tell me, O Vidura, what does all this mean, the manner of the Pandavas' going forth?'

Vidura replies, 'Although your sons persecuted him, robbed him of his kingdom and wealth, the mind of Yudhishtira Dharmatma has not yet deviated from the way of dharma. O Bhaarata, Yudhishtira is always kindly towards your sons.

Though he has been deprived of his kingdom and possessions by vile means, and wrath fills his heart, he does not open his eyes. Thinking, "I will not burn the people by looking at them with angry eyes," Pandu's royal son went forth covering his face.

Let me tell you now why Bhima went forth as he did.

"I have no equal in the strength of my arms": this is what Bhima thought, as he repeatedly flexed his mighty arms. He is proud of his strength, Vrikodara, and he flexed and stretched them to show what he would like to do to his enemies with those arms.

And Kunti's son Arjuna Savyasachin, who is perfectly ambidextrous, followed Yudhishtira, scattering bits of earth which shall be as the arrows he will loose in battle. Bhaarata, he showed the ease with which he will despatch his arrows by what he did.

Sahadeva had darkened his face, thinking that none should recognise him on this dreadful day.

Exalted one, Nakula had smeared himself with dirt, for he thought, "I must not steal the heart of any woman who sees me". So handsome is he.

Draupadi wore one piece of stained cloth, with her hair loose and crying. She meant that the wives of those who had reduced her to this will lose their husbands, their sons and all their kinsmen when thirteen years have passed. And they shall enter Hastinapura, during their periods, smeared with blood, their hair loose and forced to offer tarpana to their dead.

O Bhaarata, the learned Dhaumya, his passions restrained, held the kusa grass in his hand, its blades pointing to the south-west, and walked before the sons of Pandu, singing the mantras of the Sama Veda, which belong to Yama.

What that Brahmana meant is that, when the Kurus are slain their priests will sing the Sama mantras for their dead as he was doing.

As for the people, they are grief-stricken and repeatedly they cried out, "Alas, alas, our lords are going away! Fie on the Kuru elders that, from base greed, they acted like foolish children by banishing the heirs of Pandu. Alas, we shall all be masterless without Pandu's eldest son.

What love can we ever have for the avaricious and evil Kurus?"

Thus, O King, did the sons of Kunti, of great tejas leave, showing by their manner and with signs the resolutions that are in their hearts. As those Purushottamas left Hastinapura, gashes of lightning crackled in a cloudless sky and the Earth herself trembled. Rahu came to devour the Sun, although it was not the day of the eclipse. Meteors fell, keeping the city to their right. Jackals, vultures, crows and other carnivorous beasts and birds shrieked and cried aloud from the temples of the Gods and from the tops of sacred trees and walls and from house-tops.

All these awful omens we saw, O King, portending the destruction of the Kurus as a result of your evil counsels.'

While Dhritarashtra and Vidura speak thus together in the Kaurava sabha, before the eyes of all appears Narada, best of Devarishis.

He says direly, 'Because of Duryodhana's sins, fourteen years from now the mighty Arjuna and Bhima will kill all the Kauravas.'

Saying this, that greatest of divine Sages, adorned with transcendent Vedic grace, rises straight into the air and vanishes.

Then, Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni think of Drona as their only hope and refuge and offer him the kingdom. Drona says to the envious and choleric Duryodhana, Dussasana, Kama and indeed all the Bhaaratas, 'The Brahmanas all say that the Pandavas are born of the Devas and they cannot be killed. Yet, since Dhritarashtra's sons and these kings seek my protection with reverence, I will protect them to the best of my power. Destiny is supreme, and I cannot abandon the Kauravas.

Beaten at dice, the sons of Pandu have gone into exile in the forest for twelve years. They will practise brahmacharya during these years, return in anger and take revenge on their enemies.

Once, I took his kingdom from Drupada, and he performed a yagna to have a son who would kill me. Helped by the Rishis Yaja and Upayaja, Drupada did have a son, Dhrishtadyumna, born from the sacrificial fire, and also a faultless daughter, Krishnaa. Dhrishtadyumna is now the brother-in-law of the Pandavas and dear to them. It is him that I fear.

No mortal woman bore him; he is resplendent, born with a bow and arrows and clad in armour. I am a mortal, and I do fear him. That Parantapa has taken the side of the Pandavas, and I will lose my life if I ever encounter him in battle.

O Kauravas, the world says, "Dhrishtadyumna is destined to kill Drona". What can be more painful to me? Because of you, Duryodhana, the dread time of war and death has almost come. You must prepare yourself for every exigency.

Do not think that you have achieved everything you wanted by sending the Pandavas into exile. This happiness will last just a moment, for as long as in winter a palm tree's shadow rests at its base. Perform every yagna that you can, Bhaarata, enjoy your life while you are still able and give generous charity. When thirteen years have passed great tragedy will overwhelm you.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Kshatta, the Acharya speaks the truth. Go and bring back the Pandavas. If they do not come back, let them go with our respect and affection. They are like my sons, let them be given weapons, chariots, footsoldiers and the means to enjoy every luxury in the wilderness.'"

CANTO 80

DYUTA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When, beaten at dice, the Pandavas leave for the forest Dhiratarashtra is overcome by anxiety. While he sits restless and sighing in sorrow, Sanjaya approaches him and says, 'Lord of the earth, you have gained the whole world with all its wealth, and you have sent Pandu's sons into exile. Why, O King, are you grieving now?'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Who are they that would not grieve who must face those Kshatriyarishabhas in battle? Fighting from their great chariots, with their allies around them!'

Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, this terrible enmity is because of what you did, and it will surely fetch the destruction of the world as we know it. Although Bhishma, Drona and Vidura forbade him, your evil, shameless Duryodhana sent his Suta messenger to bring the chaste Draupadi into court.

The gods first deprive the man of his reason, to whom they wish to send defeat and disgrace. Then, that man sees everything in strange light. When doom is near, evil appears as good to his mind corrupted by sin, and he clings firmly to it. Adharma appears to be dharma and dharma as adharma to the doomed man, and invariably he chooses to tread the path of sin, for it attracts him inexorably.

The time of doom does not arrive with a cudgel upraised to smash a man's head. No, the mark of impending doom is that it makes a man see good in evil, and evil in good.

The wretches have brought unthinkable nemesis upon us all by dragging the helpless Panchali into our sabha. Who but Duryodhana, cheating at dice, could even think of bringing chaste, beautiful and intelligent Draupadi, born from no woman's womb but from the sacred fire, she who knows dharma, and shaming her in this court?

In her period, wearing only a single cloth, when the lovely Krishnaa was dragged here she looked at the Pandavas. She saw them robbed of their kingdom, their wealth, even stripped of their robes; she saw them as slaves. Bound by dharma, they could do nothing to protect her, and before these assembled kings Duryodhana and Kama spoke vile, savage words to her, while she wept in grief and anger.

All this surely portends fearful consequences.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, the angry look of Drupada's daughter could consume the world. Will even a single son of mine escape death?

The wives of the Bhaaratas and Gandhari set up a great lament, wailing in grief to see the young, virtuous and beautiful Krishnaa dragged into our court. Even now, they and all my subjects weep every day.

Enraged by what was done to Draupadi, the Brahmanas, in a body, did not perform their Agnihotra that evening. The winds blew in awesome gusts even as they do at the time of the Pralaya, and there was a fearsome thunderstorm. Meteors fell from the sky, and Rahu swallowed the Sun unseasonably, terrifying the people.

Suddenly war-chariots took fire and their fiagstaffs fell down, foreboding evil to the Bhaaratas. Jackals began to howl frightfully from Duryodhana's sacred fire-chamber, and asses brayed in response from all directions. Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Somadatta and Mahatama Bahlika all left the sabha.

It was then that, at Vidura's advice, I said to Draupadi, "I will grant you boons, O Krishnaa, whatever you ask."

Panchali begged me to set the Pandavas free, and I did, commanding them to return to their capital in their chariots with their bows and arrows.

Vidura told me, "This will prove to be the end of the race of Bhaarata. This Panchali is the faultless Sri Lakshmi herself. She is divinely born and the wife of the sons of Pandu. The angry Pandavas will never forgive this insult to her, nor will the mighty Vrishni bowmen or the dauntless Panchala warriors suffer this.

With Krishna of invincible prowess to support him, Arjuna will assuredly return, surrounded by the Panchala host. Prodigious Bhimasenaa of unequalled strength will come back, whirling his mace like Yama himself with his cudgel. These kings will never be able to bear the force of Bhima's mace.

Therefore, Rajan, to me not hostility but peace for ever with the sons of Pandu seems the best course. The Pandavas have always been mightier than the Kauravas. You know that Bhima killed the great Jarasandha with his bare hands. O Bhartarishabha, make peace with the sons of Pandu.

Without any scruple or favour, unite the cousins. If you do that, you will surely find good fortune."

So Vidura said to me, speaking words of both dharma and artha. But, moved by love for my son, I did not listen to him!'"

So said Vaisampayana to Janamejaya.

End of Sabha Parva

VANA PARVA

(Part 1)

CANTO 1

ARANYAKA PARVA

AUM! I bow down to Narayana, and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and the Devi Saraswati, and utter the word Jaya!

Janamejaya said, "O Dvijottama, having been beaten at dice by Dhritarashtra's sons and their counsellors, incensed by those evil ones who so created a fierce enmity, having been spoken to so harshly, what did my ancestors, Pritha's sons, do?

Equal to Sakra in prowess, deprived suddenly of their wealth and plunged into misery, how did the Pandavas pass their days in the forest? Who followed them? How did those Mahatmas bear themselves, how did they sustain themselves and where did they live? Most illustrious Brahmanottama, how did those Kshatriyas pass twelve years in the vana, those Parantapas?

How did the princess, best among women, devoted to her husbands, so virtuous, always speaking the truth, and surely deserving no such trial, endure the exile? Tell me all this in detail, O Brahmana, for I want to hear the story of those heroes of abundant prowess and lustre. Ah, great is my curiosity."

Vaisampayana said, "Defeated at dice and incensed by Dhritarashtra's evil sons and their counsellors, Pritha's princes set out from Hastinapura through the Vardhamana gate of the city, bearing their weapons and accompanied by Draupadi; they go in a northerly direction. Indrasena and others, with their wives and servants, all together fourteen, follow them in swift chariots.

When the people hear of their leaving, they are grief-stricken and censure Bhishma and Vidura, Drona and Gautama. Gathering, they speak fearlessly to one another, 'Alas, our families, we ourselves, and our homes are all lost, when the malignant Duryodhana, supported by Sakuni, Kama and Dussasana, aspires to this kingdom.

Oh, our families, our customs, our virtue and prosperity, are all doomed, where this sinner, supported by wretches as sinful as him, aspires to the throne. And where can there be happiness, where these are gone?

Duryodhana bears malice towards all his superiors; he has left dharma, and fights with his own kin.

Covetous, vain and mean, his nature is cruel. The very Earth is doomed, when Duryodhana rules. So let us go with the kind and noble Pandavas, who are self-controlled, victorious over their enemies, who are humble, honourable, and devoted to dharma!'

The people follow the Pandavas, and with folded hands say to the sons of Kunti and Madri:

'Be you blest! Where are you going, leaving us in sorrow? Wherever you go, we will follow you. We are distraught to hear how ruthless enemies vanquished you with deceit. We are your loving subjects, your devoted friends who always serve and wish you well, and it does not become you to forsake us.

We do not want to be plunged into ruin, living under the rule of the Kuru king. Purusharishabhas, listen while we describe the punya and paapa which accrue from associating with the good and the evil. As cloth, water, the ground, and sesame seeds are perfumed by contact with flowers, so are the qualities of men always produced through their associations.

Associating with fools creates illusions which entangle the mind, just as keeping company with good men, daily, leads to the practice of virtue. "They who wish for moksha must associate with the wise, the old, the honest and the pure - ascetic men. They must serve such men, for the knowledge, the birth and the deeds of such men are all pure, and associating with them is superior even to studying the scriptures.

Though we have no religious merit ourselves, we will find punya if we keep the company of the good, just as we will find sin by serving sinners. The very sight and touch of the dishonest, conversation with them and their company, all cause diminution of dharma, and such men never find purity of mind.

Associating with the base impairs the understanding, and with the mediocre makes the mind mediocre, while communion with the good exalts the heart. All the attributes which are spoken of as sources of dharma, artha and kama, and which men esteem and which the Vedas extol, dwell in you, individually and jointly.

So, for our own welfare, we want to live amongst you, who possess those qualities!'

Yudhishtira says, 'We are blessed that the people, led by the Brahmanas, moved by kindness and love, credit us with merits which we do not have. But my brothers and I ask all of you to do just one thing, and you must not do otherwise, because of your affection or your pity for us.

Our grandfather Bhishma, King Dhritarashtra, Vidura, my mother and most of my well-wishers are all in Hastinapura. So, if you seek our welfare, unite together, and care for them, for they are plunged in sorrow.

Grieved by our leaving, you have come far! Go back, and let your hearts be directed with tenderness towards the relatives I entrust to you as pledges. This is the one thing upon which my heart is set, and by doing this you will do me great service and give me much satisfaction.'

When Yudhishtira Dharmatma says this the people set up a loud lament, crying, 'Alas, O king!'

Sorrowing deeply when they think of the virtues of Pritha's son, reluctantly they take leave of the Pandavas and turn back towards the city.

When the people followed them no longer, the Pandavas climb into their chariots, and riding, reach the mighty banyan tree called Pramana on the banks of the Ganga. It is dusk and Pandu's heroic sons purify themselves, touching the river's holy water, and pass the night in that place. They spend that night, only drinking water.

Some Brahmanas, both those that kept the sacred fire and those who did not, with their disciples and kin, have followed the Pandavas out of love; they, too, spend the night there with them. Surrounded by those Brahmavadis, the king shines resplendent in their midst.

And that evening, at once beautiful and terrible, those Brahmanas, having lit their sacred fires, begin to chant the Vedas and they speak among themselves. Those Brahmanottamas with swan-sweet voices spend the night comforting that best of the Kurus, the king."

CANTO 2

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When night passes and day breaks, the mendicant Brahmanas stand before the Pandavas of lofty deeds, who are about to enter the forest.

King Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, says to them, 'We have been robbed of our kingdom and wealth, robbed of everything, and we are about to enter the deep vana in sorrow. We will eat fruit and roots, and what the hunt fetches. The forest is full of danger, abounding in snakes and beasts of prey.

You will suffer privation and misery there. The sufferings of Brahmanas can overpower even the gods. That they will overwhelm me is certain. Therefore, O Brahmanas, turn back, go wherever you will.'

The Brahmanas reply, 'O King, our path is yours. We are your devotees, you who practise true dharma; do not forsake us. The very gods are compassionate to their worshippers, especially Brahmanas of self-restraint!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Regenerate ones, I am also devoted to Brahmanas. But destitution has overtaken me, and I am confused. My brothers who will gather fruit and roots and hunt deer are stupefied with the shock of losing our kingdom and the grief of Draupadi. I cannot employ them in painful or demanding tasks.'

The Brahmanas say, 'Dharmaraja, have no care about supporting us. We will follow you, providing for our own food. Through our dhyana and our prayers we will care for you, and cheer you and ourselves with pleasant conversation.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Indeed nothing pleases me more than the company of good Brahmanas. Yet, in my fall I see myself as deserving reproach. How then will I bear to look at all of you feeding yourselves, while you follow me out of your love? Ah, I curse Dhritarashtra's evil sons!'

Sobbing, the king sits upon the ground. Then a learned Brahmana, Saunaka versed in the knowledge of the Atman and skilled in Sankhya yoga, says to him, 'Day after day, causes of grief in thousands, and causes of fear in hundreds overwhelm the ignorant, but not the wise. Surely, sensible men like you never allow themselves to be deluded by actions

which are contrary to true knowledge, which are fraught with every kind of evil, and which destroy moksha.

In you there dwells the understanding furnished with the eight attributes, the gyana which comes from studying the Sruti[1] and the Shastras, which knowledge provides against all evils. And men like you are never confounded, not upon finding themselves impoverished or at the affliction of their friends, either through mental or bodily unease.

Listen, and I will repeat the slokas told of old by Janaka, which deal with the subject of controlling the self. This world is afflicted with both bodily and mental suffering. Hear now the means of allaying the twin torments, both in brief and in some detail.

Disease, contact with things of pain, toil and being deprived of objects of desire cause bodily suffering. Disease is allayed with medicines, ailments of the mind through yoga and meditation. Good physicians first seek to allay the mental sufferings of their patients with pleasant conversation and offering them desirable objects.

Even as a hot iron rod immersed into a jar heats the water inside, even so mental grief brings bodily agony; and as water quenches fire, so does true knowledge allay mental disquiet. When the mind finds ease, the body finds ease also.

Affection seems to be the root of all sorrow; affection makes every creature miserable and brings on every kind of woe. Affection is the root of misery and of all fear, of joy and grief of every kind, of pain. From affection spring all motives to action, and the love of worldly goods. Both these are sources of evil, though the first is worse than the second.

As a spark fire lit in the hollow of a tree consumes the tree to its very roots, even so affection, be it ever so little, destroys both dharma and artha. A man who has merely withdrawn from worldly life cannot be said to have renounced the world. However, he who, while in active contact with the world, clearly sees its flaws, may be said to have truly renounced the world. Freed from every evil passion, his soul dependent on nothing, such a man has indeed relinquished the world.

No one should seek to attach his affections either on friends or the wealth he has earned. So, also, must attachment and affection for one's own person be extinguished through knowledge. Like the lotus-leaf, which is never wetted by water, are the souls of men who can distinguish between the ephemeral and the everlasting.

Men devoted to the pursuit of the eternal, who know the scriptures and are purified by knowledge, can never be moved by affection. The man influenced by affection is tortured by desire; from the desire that springs up in his heart, his thirst for worldly possessions increases. This thirst is sinful and is the source of all anxiety. This terrible thirst, fraught with evil, leads men to sin.

Those who can renounce this thirst, never the wicked, find the happiness which does not decay with the decay of the body, which is truly the fatal disease. That joy has neither beginning nor end.

Abiding in the heart, desire destroys creatures, like an incorporeal fire. As a faggot of wood is consumed by the fire that it feeds, even so an impure man finds death from the covetousness born in his heart. As all living creatures always have a dread of death, wealthy men live in constant dread of the king and the thief, of water and fire and even of their relatives.

A morsel of meat, if in the air, can be devoured by birds; if on the ground, by beasts of prey; if in water, by fish: even so a man of wealth is exposed to danger wherever he is. To many the wealth they own is their bane, and he who sees happiness in wealth and becomes wedded to it, never knows true happiness.

So, the accession of wealth is seen as what increases covetousness and folly; wealth alone is the root of niggardliness and boastfulness, pride, anxiety and fear. These are the miseries of men that the wise see in owning riches. Men undergo infinite miseries in the acquisition and the retention of wealth. Its expenditure is also fraught with grief. Why, sometimes life itself is lost for the sake of wealth.

Loss of wealth brings misery, and even those whom a man nurtured with his wealth become enemies for the sake of that wealth. When owning wealth is ridden with such sorrow, one should not mind its loss.

Only the ignorant are discontented; the wise are always content. The thirst for wealth can never be slaked. Contentment is the highest happiness; so it is that the wise regard contentment as the highest goal worth striving for.

The wise know the evanescence of youth and beauty, of life and treasure, of prosperity and the company of loved ones, and never covet these. A man must refrain from acquiring overmuch wealth, for none who is rich is free from trouble; this is why the virtuous laud those who are free from the desire for wealth.

And for those that pursue wealth for dharma, it is better for them to desist, since, surely, it is better not to touch dirt at all than to wash it off after having been besmirched by it. Yudhishtira, do not covet anything, and if you seek dharma, free yourself from the desire for possessions.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Dvija, my desire for wealth is not for enjoying it, but only to support you Brahmanas. I am not driven by greed. Why, O Brahmana, do I lead the life of a grihasta, if I cannot cherish and support those who follow me? All creatures divide the food they procure amongst those that depend on them.

A grihasta should share his food with yatis and brahmacharins who have renounced cooking for themselves. The houses of good men must never want for grass, beds, food, water and, fifthly, sweet words. For the standing a seat of grass, for the weary a bed, water for the thirsty, and food for the hungry.

Kind looks, a cheerful heart and sweet words are always due to a guest. Rising, the host must go up to welcome a guest, offer him a seat, and worship him. This is Sanatana Dharma. They who do not perform the Agnihotra,[2] do not care for their cows and bulls, cherish their kinsmen, guests, friends, sons, wives and servants, are consumed by sin for their neglect.

None should cook food just for himself; none should slay an animal without dedicating it to the gods, the manes, and guests. Nor should one eat food which has not been duly offered to the Devas and the Pitrs. One must set food on the earth, morning and evening, for dogs and Chandalas, scatter grain for birds, and then perform the Viswadeva sacrifice.[3]

He who eats the vighasa, what has first been offered during a sacrifice to the gods and the manes, eats ambrosia; what remains after feeding a guest is vighasa and equal to amrita. Feeding a guest is equal to a sacrifice, and the pleasant looks the host casts upon the guest, the attention he pays him, the sweet words in which he addresses him, the respect he pays by following him, and the food and drink which he serves him are the five dakshinas of that sacrifice.[4]

He who gives food, unstintingly, to a tired wayfarer whom he has never seen before, finds great punya.

The grihasta who follows these practices, I have heard, gains great religious merit. O Brahmana, what do you say about this?'

Saunaka says, 'Alas, this world is full of contradictions! He who blames the good pleases the evil. Moved by ignorance and passion, and being slaves to their senses, even fools perform many acts of apparent punya, but only to gratify their appetites in the after-life!

With eyes open, their seducing senses lead these men astray, rather like a charioteer who has fallen, by having restive and wicked horses. When any of the six senses finds its particular object, desire springs up in the heart to enjoy that particular object. When the heart begins to enjoy the object of a sense, it entertains a wish, which then spawns a resolve.

Finally, pierced by the shafts of the objects of enjoyment set loose by the desire which constitutes the seed of the resolve, like an insect falling into a flame from its love of light, the man falls into the fire of temptation. Thereon, blinded by sensual pleasure which he seeks without stint, steeped in dark ignorance and folly, which he mistakes for joy, he does not know himself.

Like a wheel which incessantly turns, every creature, from avidya, karma and kama, falls into various states in this world, wandering from one birth to another, and ranges the entire range of existences from Brahma to the point of a blade of grass, now in water, now on land, and again in the air!

This is the careen of those who are without knowledge. Listen now to the course of the wise, they who are intent on dharma, artha, and who wish for moksha. The Vedas enjoin that we act but renounce action's fruit. You must perform karma, but without ahamkara, ego.

The performance of sacrifices, study of the Vedas, gifts, penance, truth in both speech and act, forgiveness, subduing the senses, and renunciation of desire - these have been declared to be the eight cardinal duties which make up the true path.

Of these, the four first pave the way to the world of the Pitrs, and these must be practised without abhimana, pride. The last four are observed by the pious, to attain the heaven of the Devas. The pure in spirit must always follow these eight paths. Those who wish to subdue the world for moksha, must engage in karma, entirely renouncing motives, subduing their senses, unswervingly observing some vratas, devotedly serving their Gurus, austerely regulating their food, diligently studying the Vedas, relinquishing action as mean and restraining their hearts.

By renouncing desire and aversion, have the gods attained prosperity. Through the wealth of Yoga, the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Adityas, the Vasus, and the Aswin twins rule other creatures. Therefore, Kaunteya, like them, O Bhaarata, you also refrain from karma with motive; strive towards attaining Yoga through austerities.

Already, you have paid your debts to your ancestors, both male and female; you have successfully performed yagnas and good karma; now in order to serve the Brahmanas, strive to attain success in tapasya. For those who find success at penance can do whatever they like. So, through tapasya gain whatever you wish. "

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[1] The Vedas.

[2] A form of sacrifice which consists of pouring oblations of clarified butter accompanied by prayers into a blazing fire. It is obligatory for Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, except those that take certain vows of great austerity.

[3] The Viswadeva sacrifice is the offering of food to all creatures of the Earth.

[4] A gift. It may be of various kinds. The fees paid to Brahmanas assisting at sacrifices and religious rites, such as offering oblations to the dead, are dakshinas; as also gifts to Brahmanas on other occasions particularly when they are fed, it being to this day the custom never to fete a Brahmana without paying him a pecuniary fee. There can be no sacrifice, no religious rite, without dakshina.

CANTO 3

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Thus addressed by Saunaka, Yudhishtira approaches his priest, and in the presence of his brothers says, 'The Brahmanas versed in the Vedas mean to follow me into the forest. I am beset by misfortune and cannot support them. I cannot abandon them either, but I have no power to offer them sustenance. Holy One, tell me what I should do.'

Dhaumya uses his yogic powers to reflect a moment, then that Dvijottama says to Yudhishtira, 'Once, long ago, all living creatures were sorely afflicted by hunger, and Savita the Sun took pity upon them, even like a father. First, he went north and drew up water through his rays; returning south, he remained above the world, with his heat indrawn.

While the Sun remained thus poised, the Moon made the vapour within the solar orb into clouds, poured them down as rain and created plants. Thus, it is the Sun himself who, drenched by the Moon's influence, is transformed, upon the sprouting of seeds, into holy nutriments furnished with the six tastes. And these constitute the food of all creatures upon the Earth.

So, the food which supports the lives of creatures is infused with solar energy, and hence the Sun is the father of all creatures. Yudhishtira, you must also seek refuge in Surya.

Many illustrious and high-born kings, of mighty deeds, delivered their people through tapasya. The great Kartavirya, Vainya and Nahusha, all, saved their people from calamities by practising dhyana after swearing stern vratas. Virtuous Bhaarata, you also purify yourself with dhyana and vigorously support the Brahmanas.'"

Janamejaya said, "How did that Bull among the Kurus, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, adore the lustrous Sun for the sake of the Brahmanas?"

Vaisampayana said, "Listen carefully, O King, purify yourself and withdraw your mind from every other thought. King of kings, appoint an hour for it and I will tell you everything in detail.

Listen to the one hundred and eight names of the Sun as Dhaumya disclosed them of old to Pritha's son, the Mahatman.

Dhaumya spoke these names, 'Surya, Aryaman, Bhaga, Twastri, Pusha, Arka, Savitri, Ravi, Gabhastimat, Aja, Kala, Mrityu, Dhatri, Prabhakara, Prithivi, Apa, Teja, Kha, Vayu, Parayana, Soma, Brihaspati, Sukra, Budha, Angaraka, Indra, Vivaswat, Diptanshu, Suchi, Sauri, Sanaischara, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Skanda, Vaisravana, Yama, Vaidyuta, Jatharagni, Agni, Aindhna, Tejasampati, Dharmadhwaja, Vedakarta, Vedanga, Vedavahana, Krita, Treta, Dwapara, Kali, full of every impurity, Kala, Kashta, Muhurta, Kshapa, Yama, and Kshana; Samvatsarakara, Aswattha, Kalachakra, Vibhavasu, Purusha, Saswata, Yogin, Vyaktavyakta, Sanatana, Kaladhyaksha, Prajadhyaksha, Viswakarma, Tamounda, Varuna, Sagara, Ansu, Jimuta, Jivana, Arihan, Bhutasraya, Bhutapati, Srastri, Samvartaka, Vahni, Sarvasyadi, Alolupa, Ananta, Kapila, Bhanu, Kamada, Sarvatomukha, Jaya, Visala, Varada, Manas, Suparna, Bhutadi, Sighraga, Prandharaka, Dhanvantari, Dhumaketu, Adideva, Aditisuta, Dwadasatman, Aravindaksha, Pita, Mata, Pitamaha, Swargadwara, Prajadwara, Mokshadwara, Trivishtapa, Dehakarta, Prasantatman, Viswatman, Viswatomukha, Characharatman, Sukhsmatman, the merciful Maitreya.[1]

These are the hundred and eight names of Surya of measureless energy, as told by the Swayambhuva.

For prosperity I bow down to you, O Bhaskara, who blaze like gold or fire, who is worshipped by the Devas, the Pitrs and the Yakshas, who is adored by Asuras, Nisacharas, and Siddhas.

He who with fixed attention recites this hymn at sunrise, gains a wife and children, riches and the remembrance of his former life; by reciting this hymn a person attains patience and memory. Concentrating his mind, let a man recite this hymn, for he shall become proof against grief, forest-fire and ocean; and every object of desire shall be his.'

Hearing this from Dhaumya, Yudhishtira absorbs himself in dhyana, so he can support the Brahmanas. Worshipping the maker of day with flowers and other offerings, the king performs his ablutions. Standing in the river, he turns his face towards the god of day. Touching the water of the Ganga, the virtuous Yudhishtira, his senses perfectly controlled, the air his only sustenance, stands there, his soul rapt, his breath regulated in pranayama. Having purified himself and restrained his speech, he begins to sing the hymn of praise to the Sun.

Yudhishtira says, 'You are, O Surya, the eye of the universe. You are the soul of all corporeal existences. You are the origin of all things. You are the

embodiment of the deeds of all religious men. You are the refuge of the Sankhyas and the support of the Yogins.

You are a door without bolts. You are the sanctuary of those who seek moksha. You sustain and light the world, sanctify and support it out of pure compassion. Appearing before you, Brahmanas versed in the Vedas worship you with hymns from the Vedas.

The Rishis adore you. Wanting boons from you, the Siddhas, the Charanas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Guhyakas and the Nagas follow your chariot coursing through the sky. The thirty-three Devas, with Upendra and Mahendra, and the order of Vaimanikas, have attained success by worshipping you.

By offering you garlands of the celestial mandaras, the best of the Vidyadharas have had all their wishes fulfilled. The Guhyas and the seven orders of the Pitrs—both divine and human—became superior only by adoring you. lhe Vasus, the Marutas, the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Marichipas, the Balakhilyas, and the Siddhas became pre-eminent by bowing down to you.

I know there is nothing in all the seven worlds, including that of Brahma, which is beyond you. There are other beings both great and endowed with tejas; but none of them has your lustre and energy. All light is in you, indeed, you are the lord of all light.

In you are the five elements and all intelligence, knowledge, asceticism and the ascetic qualities. The Chakra with which the wielder of the Saranga humbles the pride of Asuras, the disc with the beautiful nave, was forged by Viswakarman from your tejas.

In summer, through your rays, you draw moisture from all corporeal beings, from plants and fluid things, and pour it down during the monsoon. Your rays warm and scorch, and, becoming clouds, roar and flash with lightning and pour down showers when each season comes. Not fire, shelter, or woollen cloths give greater comfort against the cold than your rays.

With your rays you illumine all the Earth, with her thirteen Dwipas. You alone engage yourself constantly in the welfare of the three worlds. If you do not rise, the universe becomes blind and the wise cannot strive to attain dharma, artha and kama. Through your grace the three varnas, the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas, perform their various duties and sacrifices.

Those who fathom time say that you are the beginning and the end of a day of Brahma, which lasts a full thousand Yugas. You are the lord of Manus and the sons of the Manus, of the Universe and of man, of the Manvantaras, and their lords.

When the time of Pralaya comes, the fire Samvartaka, born of your wrath, consumes the three worlds and exists alone. Born of your rays, clouds of many hues, along with Airavata and the Vajra, bring the appointed deluges, and dividing yourself into twelve parts, becoming as many Suns, you drink up the ocean once more with your rays.

You are called Indra, you are Vishnu, you are Brahma, you are Prajapati. You are fire and you are the subtle mind. You are the Lord and the eternal Brahman. You are Hansa, you are Savitri; you are Bhanu, Ansumalin, and Vrishakapi. You are Vivaswan, Mihira, Pusha, Mitra, and Dharma. You are thousand-rayed; you are Aditya, Tapana, and the lord of rays.

You are Martanda, Arka, Ravi, Surya, Saranya and the maker of day. You are Divakara, Saptasaspti, Dhamakesin and Virochana. They say you are swift as light and the destroyer of darkness, the owner of golden steeds.

He who reverentially adores you on the sixth or the seventh lunar day, humbly and with tranquillity of mind, finds the grace of Lakshmi. They that single-mindedly worship you are delivered from all dangers, agonies and afflictions. They who hold that you are everywhere, being the soul of all things, live long, are freed from sin and are immune to all disease.

O Lord of all food, it becomes you to grant abundant food to me, for I wish to feed my atithis, my guests, with every reverence.

I bow also to all your followers, who have taken refuge at your feet—Matara, Aruna, Danda, Asani, Kshubha and the others. And I bow to the celestial mothers of all creatures: Kshubha, Maitri and the rest.

O let them deliver me, their supplicant!'

Thus, O Maharajan, Yudhishtira adores the Sun, purifier of the world. Pleased with the hymn, the maker of day, self-luminous, and blazing like fire shows himself to the son of Pandu.

Vivaswan says, 'You will have everything that you want. I will provide you with food for five and seven years. O King, take this copper vessel from me, and as long as Panchali holds this vessel, without partaking of its contents, or fruit, roots, and meat and vegetables cooked in your kitchen, these four kinds of food shall well inexhaustibly from it from today.

On the fourteenth year from this, you will regain your kingdom.'

Saying this, the Deva vanishes. He who wants a boon and recites this hymn with his mind absorbed in dhyana, will have whatever he wishes for from the Sun, however difficult of acquisition what he asks for might be.

And the one who hears or chants this stotra, day after day, wanting a son, he or she gets one; and if riches, gets those; and if learning, acquires that too. And the man or woman who chants this hymn every day, during the two sandhyas, is delivered from all danger and bonds.

Brahma himself taught this hymn to the illustrious Sakra; Narada had it from Sakra, and Dhaumya from Narada. Dhaumya gave it to Yudhishtira, and the Pandava got whatever he wished for. Through this hymn a man can always be victorious at war and acquire immense wealth, too. It leads the one who recites it from all sins, to the realm of the Sun.

With the Sun's boon - the copper vessel - Yudhishtira comes out of the water, clasps Dhaumya's feet and embraces his brothers. Going into their kitchen with Panchali, then, Pandu's son begins to cook the day's food. That food, though minuscule in quantity, clean and furnished with the four tastes, increases and becomes inexhaustible.

With it, Yudhishtira begins to feed the Brahmanas; and when they have eaten, he feeds his brothers and eats what remains himself, the portion called vighasa. After Yudhishtira has eaten, Prihasta's daughter Draupadi eats what remains. And when she has eaten, the food for that day is exhausted and the copper vessel empty.

Thus, with his boon from the maker of day, the son of Pandu, himself as splendid as that Deva, begins to feed his Brahmanas the finest fare.

Obedient to their priest, Pritha's sons, on auspicious lunar days, constellations and conjunctions, perform sacrifices according to the ordinance, the scriptures, and the mantras. After the sacrifices, the Pandavas, blessed by the auspicious rites which Dhaumya performs, and accompanied by him, and surrounded also by the Brahmanas, set out for the Kamyaka vana."

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[1] Not exactly 108 names in the KMG text!

CANTO 4

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After the Pandavas have entered the forest, Ambika's son Dhritarashtra, whose knowledge was his eye,[1] grows exceedingly sorrowful. Sitting at his ease, the king says to the virtuous Vidura of profound intelligence, 'Your understanding is as clear as Bhargava's. You know all the nuances of dharma, and you look at all the Kauravas equally.

Tell me what is right for them and for me, as well. Vidura, things having this course, what should we do now? How can I secure the goodwill of the people so that they do not uproot us? Tell us all, for you know every excellent expedient.'

Vidura says, 'My King, artha, kama and moksha are all founded in dharma, and the Sages say that a kingdom also stands if it is based on dharma. So, Rajan, cherish your son and Pandu's son equally, in dharma.

Evil souls, with Subala's son Sakuni leading them, subverted that dharma when your son called the righteous Yudhishtira here and vanquished him at dice. I see one expiation for this base act, by which your son can be freed from his sin and win back his place among good men. Give back to the Pandavas what you first returned to them; give Indraprastha back to them. For, a king's highest dharma is that he must remain content with his own possessions and never covet another's. Thus your honour will remain and nor will dissension arise in your family, and nor any sin attach to you. Your first duty now is to disgrace Sakuni and to satisfy the Pandavas. If you want to restore your sons to the good fortune that they have lost, do this immediately.

If you do not, the Kurus will surely be destroyed because neither Bhimasena nor Arjuna, if angry, will leave any of their foes unslain. What is there in this world that they cannot attain, who have Savyasachin among their warriors, the Gandiva, most potent of weapons his bow, and also the inexorable Bhimasena?

Once, as soon as your son was born, I said to you, Abandon this inauspicious child, for in that lies the good of your clan. But you did not do

as I said then. Now, also, I am showing you the way to your salvation. If you do as I say, you will not have to repent later.

If your son agrees to rule jointly with the sons of Pandu, and in peace, you will pass your days in joy. If he will not, forsake Duryodhana for the sake of your own happiness. Cast him aside and crown Yudhishtira Ajatasatru, who is free from passion, king of all the Kurus, and let him rule the Earth with dharma. And then all the kings of the world will quickly pay homage to us, even like Vaisyas. Let Duryodhana, Sakuni and Kama wait upon the Pandavas; let Dussasana, in the open sabha, ask Bhimasena's forgiveness and the forgiveness of Draupadi also; and pacify Yudhishtira by setting him upon the throne with every show of respect.

You have asked me, and what other counsel can I give you? By doing this, O King, you will do what is right, and keep dharma.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You said the same thing in this sabha, Vidura, but what you say is only beneficial to the Pandavas, not to me. My heart does not like what you say.

How have you decided all this in your mind? You speak only for the good of the Pandavas and I see that you are not friendly towards me. How can I abandon my son for the sake of the sons of Pandu? Doubtless they, too, are my sons, but Duryodhana has sprung from my body. Who, speaking impartially, will ever advise me to renounce my own body for the sake of another's?

Vidura, though I hold you in high esteem, everything that you say is crooked. Stay here or go as you please. However much he might humour and please her, an unchaste wife will always forsake her husband!'

Saying this, Dhritarashtra rises abruptly and goes into his antahpura.

Vidura says, "This race is doomed', and he goes away to where the sons of Pritha are.'"

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[1] Being blind, Dhritarashtra is described as *Pragnachakshu,* having knowledge for his eye. It may also mean, 'Of the prophetic eye'.

CANTO 5

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Wanting to live in the forest, those bulls of the race of Bhaarata, the Pandavas, with their followers, set out from the banks of the Ganga and journey to the field of Kurukshetra. Performing their ablutions in the Saraswati, the Drisadwati and the Yamuna, they go from one forest to another, travelling in a westerly direction.

Finally, they see the Kamyaka vana before them, favourite haunt of Munis, looming beside a level and wild plain on the banks of the Saraswati. In that forest, abounding in birds and deer, those heroes begin to dwell, entertained and comforted by the Munis. Always yearning to see the Pandavas, Vidura rides in a single chariot to the Kamyaka aranya, abundant with all things good and auspicious.

Arriving in the Kamyaka in his chariot drawn by swift steeds, he sees Yudhishtira Dharmatma, sitting with Draupadi in a secluded spot, surrounded by his brothers and the Brahmanas. Seeing Vidura approach from a distance with swift steps, the king says to his brother Bhimasena, 'With what message does Kshatta come to us now? Does he come sent by Sakuni to invite us to another game of dice? Does the vile Sakuni intend to win back our weapons by gambling?

O Bhima, I cannot refuse anyone who asks me for anything. And if we lose the Gandiva at dice, how will we regain our kingdom?'

The Pandavas rise to welcome Vidura, and he, descendant of Ajamida, sits down among them and makes the customary enquiries after their welfare. When Vidura has rested awhile, those bulls among men ask him the reason for his coming, and he tells them in detail everything that transpired with Ambika's son Dhritarashtra.

Vidura says, Ajatasatru, Dhritarashtra called me, his dependant, to him and honouring me duly, said, "Things have taken their course, Vidura. Now tell me what I should do which will benefit both the Pandavas and myself."

I told him what was dharma and also good for both yourselves and him. But Dhritarashtra did not relish what I said to him, and I could not see what other counsel to offer.

What I advised, O Pandavas, was truly beneficial, but Ambika's son would not listen to me. My words failed to please him, even as good medicine does not recommend itself to one that is ill. And, O Yudhishtira, as an unchaste wife in the family of a man of pure descent cannot be brought back to the path of virtue, so did I fail to bring Dhritarashtra back to dharma.

Indeed, as a young woman does not like a husband of three score years, even so Dhritarashtra did not like what I said. Surely, doom will overtake the Kuru race; surely Dhritarashtra will never find good fortune. For, as water dropped on a lotus-leaf does not remain there, my counsels will have no effect upon my brother.

The incensed Dhritarashtra told me, O Bhaarata, "Go where you like! I will never again seek your help in ruling the earth or my capital."

Best of kings, forsaken by Dhritarashtra, I have come to you. What I said in the open court, I will now repeat. Listen, and bear my words in mind:

The wise man who bears all the gross wrongs heaped upon him by his enemies, who patiently bides his time, and multiplies his resources even as men turn a small fire into a large one by degrees, will rule the whole world. He who shares his substance with his followers in prosperity will find in them sharers of his adversity. This is the best means of securing followers, and he who has followers wins the sovereignty of the world.

O Pandava, divide your prosperity with your followers, be honest with them, and speak to them agreeably. Share your food with them, and never boast in their presence. Such conduct increases the prosperity of kings!'

Yudhishtira says, 'You have such a lofty intelligence, undisturbed by passion, and I will do as you say. Whatever else you advise, in time and place, I will follow carefully and entirely.'"

CANTO 6

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O King, after Vidura leaves Hastinapura and goes to the Pandavas, Dhritarashtra repents. Thinking of Vidura's great intelligence in matters of both war and peace, and also of the rise of the Pandavas in the future, Dhritarashtra, grieving for Vidura, comes to the door of the great sabha and falls senseless in the presence of the waiting kings.

Regaining consciousness, the king rises from the ground and says to Sanjaya standing by, 'My brother is even like Dharma Deva himself. I think of him today and my heart burns in grief. Go Sanjaya, fetch my brother to me, my Vidura master of dharma.'

And the king weeps. Scalded by remorse, overwhelmed with sorrow to think of Vidura, Dhritarashtra, full of brotherly love, says again, 'Sanjaya, go and find out if my brother, whom I so cruelly cast out in my anger, is still alive! He is wise, immeasurably intelligent, and he has never been guilty of the slightest transgression; yet it is him that I have wronged so grievously.

Seek him, wise Sanjaya, and bring him back here. Otherwise, I will kill myself!'

Sanjaya hears the king and approves heartily. Saying, 'Tathastu!' he sets out for the Kamyaka forest. Arriving swiftly in the vana where the Pandavas dwell, Sanjaya sees Yudhishtira clad in deerskin, sitting with Vidura, in the midst of thousands of Brahmanas - Yudhishtira guarded by his brothers, even like Purandara amongst the celestials!

Approaching Yudhishtira, Sanjaya duly worships him and is received with respect by Bhima and Arjuna and the twins. Yudhishtira makes the customary inquiries after his welfare. When he has been seated at his ease, Sanjaya discloses the reason for his visit, 'O Kshatta, Ambika's son Dhritarashtra remembers you, he grieves terribly for you! Return to him immediately, and restore the king's spirits.

O best of men, I say that, with the leave of the Kuru princes, these Purushottamas, it becomes you to return to that lion among kings, your brother, at his command.'

The wise Vidura, always loving towards his kin, hears what Sanjaya says, and with Yudhishtira's leave, he goes back to the city named for the elephant. He comes into the king's presence and Ambika's son, Dhritarashtra of bright tejas, says to him, Ah Vidura, it is my great fortune that you, sinless one, knower of dharma, have come back, thinking of me! Bharatarishabha, while you were away I could not sleep by day or night, like one who had been lost in the world.'

The king takes his brother onto his lap and sniffs the top of his head in love, saying, 'Forgive me, Anagha, sinless one, for what I said to you!'

Vidura says, 'My King, I have already forgiven you. You are my superior, worthy of the highest reverence. Here I am, and I came back eager to see you. Purusharishabha, all men of dharma are naturally partial towards those in distress and this is hardly because of any deliberation. Your sons are as dear to me as the sons of Pandu, but the Pandavas are in trouble and that is why my heart goes out to them.'

Thus conciliating each other, the two illustrious brothers, Vidura and Dhritarashtra, feel happy.'"

CANTO 7

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing that Vidura had returned, and that the king had consoled him, Dhritarashtra's evil son burns with grief. His mind clouded with ignorance, he summons Sakuni, Kama and Dussasana, and says to them, 'The learned Vidura, the minister of the wise Dhritarashtra, has returned! He is partial to the Pandavas, and always seeks to favour them.

I hope he does not persuade the king to bring them back. If ever I see Pritha's sons return to this city, I will starve myself to death, take poison, hang myself, immolate myself or kill myself with my own weapons. But I can never see the sons of Pandu prosper again!'

Sakuni says, 'Lord of the earth, what folly takes hold of you? The Pandavas have gone into the forest, having sworn an oath not to return for thirteen years, so what you fear will never happen. Bharatarishabha, the Pandavas always keep dharma and their word. Even if your father calls them back they will not return.

Yet, if they do, perchance, come back at the king's command, breaking their vow, we must remain calm, keep our own counsel, and be seemingly obedient to the king's wishes, while we watch the sons of Pandu carefully.'

Dussasana says, 'I agree with you, O most intelligent uncle. You always speak words of wisdom which recommend themselves to me!'

Karna says, 'Duryodhana, all of us seek to do your will, O King, and I see that we are unanimous in this thing. The self-controlled sons of Pandu will not return during their time of their exile, and thereby break their solemn word. But if they do, from foolishness, I say beat them again at another game of dice!'

But Duryodhana is cheerless and turns his face away from his confederates. Kama marks this, expands his beautiful eyes, gesticulates angrily, and says vehemently, haughtily, to Duryodhana, Dussasana and Subala's son, 'Kshatriyas, know my mind! We are all servants of Duryodhana, and wait upon him with folded hands. We must always do what pleases him, yet we are not always able to please him promptly because of his father Dhritarashtra.

I say let us put on our armour, take our weapons, mount our chariots and ride at once to kill the Pandavas in the forest. When Pandu's sons have been silenced and sent on the unknown journey, both Dhritarashtra and we will find peace. As long as they are in distress, as long as they are plunged in sorrow, as long as they are without help, we are a match for them. This is my mind!'

They loudly applaud what the Sutaputra says, and finally cry all together, 'Yes, let us do what you say!'

Each of them mounts his chariot, and confident of success, rush forth in a body to kill the sons of Pandu. However, Krishna-Dwaipayana, of pure soul, divines their intention, appears before them and sternly commands them to desist. Sending them back, the holy one, worshipped by all the worlds, quickly appears before the king, whose sight is his knowledge, sitting upon his throne.

The Maharishi Vyasa speaks thus to that sovereign."

CANTO 8

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vyasa says, 'Dhritarashtra, listen to what I have to say, for I will tell you what is good for all the Kauravas.

Mahabaho, I am not pleased that, deceitfully beaten at dice by Duryodhana and the others, the Pandavas have gone into exile. O Bhaarata, at the end of thirteen years, recollecting all their travail, they may well shower astras of death, even like virulent poison, upon the Kauravas.

Why does your sinful son, always inflamed by anger, seek to kill the sons of Pandu for the sake of their kingdom? Let the fool be restrained; let your son remain quiet. If he tries to kill the Pandavas in exile, he will only lose his own life.

You are as honest as the wise Vidura, Bhishma, or I, as Kripa or Drona. O you of profound wisdom, dissension within one's family is forbidden, sinful and reprehensible. O King, you must refrain from such folly.

Bhaarata, Duryodhana looks upon the Pandavas with such envy that great harm will come of it, if you do not interfere. Otherwise, let this evil son of yours go, alone and unaccompanied, to the forest and live with the sons of Pandu. For then, if the Pandavas, from association, begin to feel attachment for Duryodhana, then good fortune may be yours.

Ah, but this cannot be, for it is said that a man's congenital nature does not leave him, not until his death. But what do Bhishma and Drona and Vidura think? What do you think?

You must do what is beneficial while there is time, or all your purposes will remain unrealised.'"

CANTO 9

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Holy one, I did not favour the gambling, I but, O Muni, I believe that fate made me consent to it. Neither Bhishma nor Drona, Vidura nor Gandhari, liked the game of dice. No doubt, it was folly. And, illustrious one, you who delight in keeping vratas, I know this is folly, yet I am ruled by fatherly love and I am unable to cast off my senseless son Duryodhana.'

Vyasa says, 'Son of Vichitravirya, what you say is true! I well know that a son is the best of all things and there is nothing as good as a son. Taught by Surabhi's tears, Indra learnt that a son surpasses every other possession, however valuable, in worth.

Rajan, let me tell you that best of stories, which deals with a conversation between Indra and Surabhi. In elder days, Surabhi, the mother of cows, was once crying in Devaloka. Indra felt compassion for her, and asked her, "Auspicious one, why are you crying? Is everything well with the Devas? Has any misfortune, ever so little, befallen the world of the Manavas or Nagas?"

Surabhi replied, "No evil which I perceive has befallen you. But I am aggrieved because of my son, and that is why I weep! Look, O Lord of the Devas, where yonder cruel farmer belabours my weak son with a wooden stick, and oppresses him with a plough, so my son is in agony and falls onto the ground.

At this sight, O Devendra, pity fills me and my mind is agitated. The stronger of the pair bears his burden easily, but the weaker, O Vasava, is lean, a mass of skin and bones, with veins and arteries showing. He bears his load with great hardship and it is for him that I grieve.

Look where lashes of the whip mark his hide and he staggers. It is for him I am grief-stricken and these tears flow from my eyes."

Sakra said, "Fair one, when thousands of your sons are daily oppressed, why do you grieve for one?"

Surabhi replied, "Although I have a thousand offspring, my affections flow equally towards them all! But, O Indra, I feel great love and pity for one who is weak and innocent."'

Vyasa continues, 'Indra was greatly surprised to hear these words of Surabhi; he became convinced that a son is dearer than one's life. The illustrious chastiser of Paka suddenly poured a heavy rain and obstructed the farmer's work. As Surabhi said, your affections, O King, flow equally towards all your sons. Let them be greater towards those that are weak!

As my son Pandu is to me, so are you, my child, and so also Vidura of profound wisdom. I say all this to you out of my love. Bhaarata, you have a hundred and one sons, but Pandu has only five. And they are in a sad plight and pass their days in sorrow.

How can they save their lives, how will they thrive - such thoughts about Pritha's sons constantly agitate my soul. King of the earth, if you want all the Kauravas to live, let your son Duryodhana make peace with the Pandavas! "

CANTO 10

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Muni of profound wisdom, it is even I as you say. I know it well as do all these kings. Indeed, what you consider beneficial for the Kurus was pointed out to me by Vidura, Bhishma and Drona. And, if I deserve your favour, and if you bear kindness for the Kurus, I beg you speak to my sinful son Duryodhana.'

Vyasa says, 'The holy Rishi Maitreya comes here, after visiting the Pandavas. This mighty Rishi will admonish your son for the weal of this race. Kauravya, what he says must be followed implicitly, for if it is not, the Sage will curse your son in anger.'

Saying this, Vyasa leaves and Maitreya makes his appearance. Dhritarashtra and his son receive that travel-worn lord of Munis reverentially, with offerings of arghya and other rituals.

Ambika's son Dhritarashtra says respectfully to the Sage, 'Holy one, has your journey from Kurujangala been a pleasant one? Are those heroes, the five Pandavas, living happily there? Do those bulls of the Kuru race intend to serve their exile in full? Will the brotherly affection of the Kauravas be impaired?'

Maitreya says, 'Setting out on a pilgrimage to the different tirthas, I arrived at Kurujangala, and there, to my surprise, I saw Yudhishtira Dharmaputra in the Kamyaka vana. Many other Munis had come there to see Yudhishtira, living in an ascetic asrama, clad in deer-skin and wearing matted jata.

There, King of kings, I heard of the grave sin which your sons committed, and the disaster and danger they have brought upon themselves through the game of dice. So, I have come to you for the good of the Kauravas, because my affection for you is great and I am pleased with you.

O King, it is not fit that your princes should fall out amongst one another for any cause, while Bhishma and you are alive. You, Rajan, are the stake to which all these bulls are tied, and you have the power to reward and to punish. Why do you ignore this great evil that is about to overtake all of you?

The Rishis do not think well of you for the crimes that were committed in your court, sins which are like the deeds of vile chandalas!'

Then, turning to the choleric Duryodhana, the lustrous Rishi Maitreya says softly to him, 'Duryodhana Mahabaho, most eloquent of men, illustrious one, pay heed to what I say, for I speak for your good. Do not seek enmity with the Pandavas!

Purusharishabha, think of your own weal, as also the good of the Pandavas, of all the Kurus, and of the world. All those tigers among men are Kshatriyas of invincible prowess in war, strong each one as ten thousand elephants, their bodies hard as the adamantine Vajra, who never swerve from their vows, and who are proud of their manliness!

They have killed Rakshasas who could assume any form at will, demons like Hidimba and Kirmira. When the noble sons of Pandu went forth from here, the fierce Rakshasa Kirmira stood in their way at night like a hill. As a tiger kills a little deer, Bhima, strongest of all the strong, always delighting in battle, killed that monster.

Do not forget how Bhima killed the mighty Jarasandha, who was himself as strong as ten thousand elephants. The Pandavas are related to Krishna; Drupada's sons are their brothers-in-law; who among mortals will dare face Pandu's sons in battle?

O Bull of the Bhaaratas, let there be peace between you and the Pandavas. Do not yield to envy and anger, listen to what I say.'

Even as Maitreya admonishes him, Duryodhana slaps his own thigh which is like the trunk of an elephant, and, smiling insolently, scratches the ground with his foot, as if he cares nothing for what the Sage says. The vile prince does not say a word but looks down, away from the Rishi.

Rajan, when Maitreya sees Duryodhana slighting him, he becomes angry. As if urged by fate, that best of Munis decides to curse Duryodhana. His eyes red, Maitreya touches holy water and curses Dhritarashtra's evil son.

'You dare slight me, and pay no mind to what I say? You will swiftly reap the fruit of your insolence! During the Great War which will spring from your sins, the mighty Bhima will smash that thigh of yours with a stroke of his mace!'

When the Muni curses Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra hastily tries to placate the Sage, so that his curse does not come true.

Maitreya says, 'If your son makes peace with the Pandavas, my curse will not take effect. Otherwise it must be as I have said!'

Wanting to gauge the strength of Bhima, that foremost of kings, Duryodhana's father asks, 'How did Bhima kill Kirmira?'

Maitreya says, 'I will say no more to you, for your son disregards my words. When I have left, Vidura will tell you everything.'

Saying this, Maitreya leaves and returns to where he had come from. Duryodhana is shaken to hear about the slaying of Kirmira and he also leaves the sabha."

CANTO 11

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Kshatta, I want to hear about the I death of Kirmira. Tell me about the encounter between Bhima and the Rakshasa.'

Vidura says, 'Listen, then, to the tale of that feat of Bhimasena of superhuman achievements. I heard it often during my stay with the Pandavas.

Beaten at dice the Pandavas went from here, and, after journeying for three days and nights, they arrived in the forest known as Kamyaka. Rajan, after the midnight hour, when nature sleeps, terrible man-eating Rakshasas range that vana, and no ascetic, cowherd or other forester dares go near the Kamyaka aranya for fear of the fiends.

At that very hour, as the Pandavas entered that jungle, a fearsome Rakshasa, a lit brand in his hand and his eyes aflame, appeared in their path. His face terrible, his arms outstretched, he stood barring their way. Eight fangs bared on his face, his eyes coppery, his hair like flames standing erect, he seemed like a great cloud mass reflecting the Sun's rays, or streaked with lightning gashes with flights of cranes below them.

With frightful yells and roaring like a mass of thunderheads charged with rain, the monster began to the use the maya which is typical of his kind. Crying out in fear, birds and other little creatures dropped senseless or dead when they heard that terrible roar. Deer, leopard, bison and bear fled in every direction, so it seemed the whole forest was in motion.

Swayed by the wind raised by the Rakshasa's great sighs, creepers growing leagues away seemed to fling their arms of auburn leaves around the trees and embrace them. At that moment, a violent wind began to blow, and the sky was dark with dust covering it. Even like grief, the worst enemy of the five senses, that unknown enemy appeared before the five Pandavas.

Seeing from a distance the sons of Pandu clad in black deer-skins, the Rakshasa blocked their path through the forest even like the Mainaka Mountain. The lotus-eyed Krishnaa looked at him and shut her eyes in fright. Standing among the five Pandavas, she whose tresses had been

dishevelled by the hand of Dussasana looked like stream chafing among five hills.

Even as the five senses cling to their objects of desire, the sons of Pandu supported the shaking Draupadi. Dhaumya of great tejas dispelled the wild illusions created by the Rakshasa's maya; he chanted powerful mantras to kill the devil.

Seeing his illusion dispelled, the mighty Kirmira, who could assume any form he chose, dilated his eyes in wrath and seemed like Death himself.

Yudhishtira said to him, "Who are you, and whose son? Tell us what we can do for you."

The Rakshasa replied, "I am the brother of Baka, I am the renowned Kirmira. I live at my ease in this empty Kamyaka vana, and daily I eat by killing men in fight. Who are you that have come to me as my food? I will crush you all and feast on your flesh."

Yudhishtira announced his own name and lineage, saying, "I am Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu, of whom you might have heard. Losing my kingdom, I have come with my brothers Bhimasena, Arjuna and the others into this dread jungle, your domain, intending to spend my exile here.'"

Vidura continues, 'Kirmira said to Yudhishtira, "Ah, great fortune! Today fate has accomplished my long-cherished desire. With weapons raised, I have ranged the world with the single purpose of killing Bhima. But I did not find him.

But today, it is my great good fortune that my brother's killer, whom I have sought so long, has appeared before me. Bhima, disguised as a Brahmana, slew my brother Baka in the Vetrakiya forest through some sorcery. He has no real strength!

This evil one is he who also once slew my precious friend Hidimba, and ravished his sister. And the fool has now come into this deep forest of mine, when the night is half spent, even at the time when our kind is abroad. Tonight, at last, I will have vengeance on him, and gratify Baka with his blood in plenty.

By killing this enemy of the Rakshasas, tonight I will free myself from the debt I owe my friend and my brother, and thereby find supreme happiness. Baka once let Bhimasena escape, but tonight, O Yudhishtira, I will devour him in your sight. Even as Agastya ate and digested the mighty Asura Vatapi, will I this Bhima!"

Yudhishtira said angrily, "You cannot!"

Bhima tore up a tree ten vyamas long, and stripped it of its leaves. In a flash, Arjuna strung the Gandiva, powerful as a thunderbolt. O Bhaarata, Bhima stopped Arjuna and strode towards the Rakshasa, who still roared like thunderclouds, crying, "Stop! Stop!"

Bhima tightened his waistcloth, rubbed his hands together, bit his lower lip, and tree in hand rushed at the demon. Even like Indra casting his Vajra, Bhima crashed that tree, which was like Yama's danda, down on the fiend's head. The Rakshasa was unmoved by the blow, and hurled his flaming brand at Bhima like a streak of lightning.

But the Kshatriya deftly struck it with his left foot and the burning thing flew back at Kirmira. Now Kirmira drew up a tree and rushed into the fray like Yama himself with his mace. Quickly, the forest around them was denuded of trees and looked like the place where once, ages by, the Vanara brothers Vali and Sugriva fought for possession of a woman.

Striking the adversaries' heads, the trees broke into slivers, and were like lotus stalks flung at the temples of mating elephants. All around, numberless trees lay strewn like so many crushed reeds. However, the duel between that greatest of Rakshasas and Bhima did not last long, O Bharatarishabha.

The raging Kirmira snatched up a great rock from the ground and flung it squarely at Bhima standing before him, but the Pandava did not flinch. Then, like Rahu flying to devour the Sun, the Rakshasa, arms outstretched, flew at Bhima and they locked together, grappling and pulling and dragging, like two infuriated bulls; or like two mighty tigers, fighting tooth and claw - the encounter between them waxed fierce and hard.

Bhima thought of the humiliation by Duryodhana, he thought of Draupadi watching him, and Vrikodara found the true strength of his arms, strength which swelled in tide. Bhima seized the Rakshasa by his arms, as one elephant in rut seizes another. The powerful Rakshasa also clasped his antagonist, but Bhimasena, strongest of all strong men, flung the monster down violently.

The sounds that the interlocked fingers of the two made echoed like splitting bamboos. Bhima hurled the Rakshasa down, seized him by the waist, and began to whirl him around, like some ferocious hurricane shakes a tree. The Rakshasa was tired, he felt faint; yet, trembling all over, he still pressed the Pandava with all his strength.

Seeing that Kirmira was tiring, Vrikodara twined his great arms around him, even as one binds an animal with rope. The monster began to roar frightfully, like some dissonant trumpet. Bhima whirled him round until the Rakshasa seemed to lose consciousness and then threw him on the ground, where his body shook in convulsions. Bhima swiftly seized him again and killed him like an animal. He planted his great knee on Kirmira's belly and wrung his neck. As the fiend's eyelids closed, Bhima hauled his bruised body savagely across the earth roaring, "Sinful wretch, you will not have to wipe your tears for Hidimba and Baka because you are also bound for Yama's halls!"

Bhima saw the Rakshasa naked, his ornaments torn from his great body; he saw that Kirmira was dead and left him there. When the Rakshasa of the hue of clouds died, Yudhishtira embraced Bhima and praised him joyfully.'

Vidura says, 'So it was, O lord of men, that at Yudhishtira's command, Bhima killed Kirmira the Rakshasa.

Having rid the jungle of its menace, the Pandavas entered the now peaceful vana, and comforting the frightened Draupadi, began living there. In some joy, the Bharatarishabhas often praised Bhima's magnificent deed.

When I passed through the Kamyaka vana, I saw Kirmira's huge corpse lying there, and when I reached the Pandavas' asrama I heard about Bhima's prowess and how he killed the Rakshasa from the Brahmans who live there with the sons of Pandu.'

Dhritarashtra hears about the slaying of Kirmira, he sighs and plunges into deeper gloom."

CANTO 12

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing that the Pandavas have been banished, the Bhojas, the Vrishnis, and the Andhakas come to those heroes living in sorrow in the great forest. The Panchalas, Dhrishtaketu the king of Chedi, and those celebrated and powerful brothers, the Kaikeyas, their hearts fired by anger, come to the forest to see the sons of Pritha.

They reproach the sons of Dhritarashtra, and say, 'What shall we do?'

With Vasudeva Krishna at their head, those Kshatriyarishabhas sit around Yudhishtira.

Krishna reverently salutes that Kurusthama and says in some rage, 'The Earth shall drink the blood of Duryodhana and Kama, of Dussasana and the vile Sakuni! We will kill all these and all who are their allies and follow them and set Dharmaraja Yudhishtira upon the throne of Hastinapura. The evil deserve killing - this is Sanatana Dharma.'"

Seeing Krishna wrathful, why, even bent upon consuming all created things, Arjuna attempts to pacify him by reciting the Lord's own great feats of his past lives, what He, Vishnu of fathomless wisdom, immeasurable one, eternal one, Soul of all things, his tejas infinite, the Lord of Prajapati himself, final sovereign of all the worlds had done in lives and ages gone by.

Arjuna says, 'In olden days, you, O Krishna, wandered upon the Gandhamadana Mountains for ten thousand years as a Muni, whose home was wherever he found himself at dusk. Living on just water, Krishna, you also lived beside the Pushkara Lake for another eleven thousand years!

Madhusudana, your arms upraised and standing on one leg, you passed a hundred years on the high hills of Badari, imbibing just air! Your body bare, emaciated, a mass of veins, you lived on the banks of the Saraswati, engaged in a yagna which lasted twelve years.

And, Krishna of boundless tejas, keeping a vrata you stood upon one leg for a thousand years of the Devas, on the plains of Prabhasa which virtuous men visit in pilgrimage.

Vyasa has told me that you are the cause of the creation and its course. O Kesava, as the Lord of Kshetra,[1] you are the mover of all minds, and the

beginning and end of all things. Ail tapasya rests in you, and you are also the embodiment of all sacrifices, and the eternal one.

Killing Narakasura, son of Bhumi, your first begotten, you took his earrings and performed the first aswamedha, offering the Asura as the sacrificial horse. Lokarishabha, O Bull of all the worlds, with that Yagna you triumphed over all things.

Killing all the Daityas and Danavas mustered in battle, you gave Sachi's Lord Indra sovereignty over the universe, and you have now, O Mahabaho, been born into this world of men.

Parantapa, who once floated upon the primal waters, you later became Hari, Brahma, Surya, Dharma, Dhatri, Yama, Anala, Vasu, Vaisravana,Rudra, Kala, Akasa, Bhumi and the ten directions. Un-born yourself, you are the lord of all the moving and unmoving universe, O First of all existences.

Slayer of Madhu, O you of boundless energy, in the forest of Chitraratha, Krishna, you worshipped the God of gods with your yagnas. Janardana, at each sacrifice you offered gold, in measures of hundreds of thousands.

Yadava, being born as Aditi's son, you became Indra's younger brother. Parantapa, even a child, you traversed with just three strides Swarga, Bhumi and Patala. When you were thus transformed, you entered into the body of the Sun and paled his splendour with your light.

Highest, during a thousand incarnations you slew Asuras past count. You killed the Mauravas and the Paashas, Nisunda and Naraka, and the road to Pragjyotishapura was safe again. You killed Ahvriti at Jaruthi; Kratha and Sisupala and his followers, Jarasandha, Saibya and Satadhanwan!

Riding your chariot, roaring like thunderheads and brilliant as the Sun, you took Bhojas daughter Rukmini for your wife, vanquishing her brother Rukmi in battle. In anger, you slew Indradyumna and the Yavana called Kaseruman. You killed Salva, the lord of Saubha, and destroyed his city.

All these you killed in battle; let me tell of others you despatched. At Iravati, you slew King Bhoja equal to Kartavirya in battle; and both Gopati and Talaketu you killed! Janardana, you have taken for yourself sacred Dwaraka, of measureless wealth and which the Rishis all adore, and finally you will submerge Dwaravati in the Sea!

Madhusudana, how can any crookedness dwell in you, when, Dasarha, you have no anger, envy, untruth or cruelty? O You without decay, all the Rishis come to you, seated in glory upon sacrificial ground, and seek your

protection. You alone remain at the end of the Yuga, contracting all things and withdrawing this universe into yourself, Parantapa!

O Vrishni, at the beginning of the Yuga, Brahma himself sprang from your lotus-like navel, Brahma lord of all mobile and immobile things, to whom this entire universe belongs.

When the dreadful Danavas, Madhu and Kaitabha, were bent on killing you, you were infuriated and from your forehead, O Hari, sprang Sambhu, Trilochana. Thus these two greatest of Gods issued from your body, to do your work. Narada told me this.

Narayana, in the Chaitraratha vana, you performed a multitude of yagnas, marked by a plenitude of gifts. Lord, you with eyes like lotus leaves, what you have done while still a mere boy, along with Baladeva, no one else has ever done, nor will in the future.

Why, you went and stayed on Kailasa with some Brahmanas!'

Saying all this to Krishna, Arjuna who was Krishna's soul, falls quiet.

Janardana says to him, 'You are mine as I am yours, and he who hates you hates me as well, as he that follows you follows me, too. Irrepressible one, you are Nara and I, Narayana; we are those two Rishis born into the world of men for a great purpose. Partha, you are of me, and I of you. Bharatarishabha, who can fathom any difference which exists between us?'

When the illustrious Kesava says as much in that conclave of valiant kings, all excited with anger, Panchali, along with Dhrishtadyumna and her other heroic brothers, approaches him of eyes like lotus leaves, seated with his cousins, and, wanting his protection speaks angrily to that Sanctuary of all beings.

'Asita and Devala have said that in the creation of all things, you are the only Prajapati, Creator of all the worlds. Irrepressible one, Jamadagnya says that you are Vishnu, O Madhusudana, and that you embody the sacrifice, the sacrificer and He for whom the sacrifice is performed.

Purushottama, the Rishis say that you are Forgiveness and Truth. Kasyapa has said you are Sacrifice sprung from Truth. Exalted one, Narada calls you the God of the Sadhyas, and of the Sivas, the only final Creator and the Lord of all things.

Purushavyaghra, you sport repeatedly with all the Gods, including Brahma, Sankara and Sakra even as children play with their toys. Loftiest, your head covers Swarga, your feet Bhumi, and all these worlds are as your womb, O Eternal!

For Rishis sanctified by the Vedas and by tapasya, their souls purified through penance, who are contented with visions of the soul, you are the best of all things. Purushottama, you are the refuge of Rajarishis of dharma who never turn their backs on the field of battle, men possessed of every accomplishment.

You are the Lord of all, you are Omnipresent, you are the Soul of all things, and you are the active power pervading everything. The rulers of all the worlds, the worlds themselves, the stellar conjunctions, the ten points of the horizon, the firmament, the Moon and the Sun are all founded in you.

Mahabaho, the dharma of mortal creatures and the immortality of the universe are established in you. You are the Supreme Lord of all creatures, celestial or human.

And so, O Madhusudana, impelled by the love you bear for me, will I tell you of my sorrows! Krishna, how could I, the wife of Pritha's sons, the sister of Dhrishtadyumna, and your sakhi, your friend, be dragged into the Kuru sabha as I was? Ah, du.ing my period, bleeding, wearing just a single cloth, trembling and weeping, I was dragged into the court of the Kurus.

Seeing me, stained with blood in the presence of those kings in the sabha, the vicious sons of Dhritarashtra laughed at me. While the Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Vrishnis lived, Dhritarashtra's sons dared say they wanted me to be their slave.

By law, Krishna, I am both Dhritarashtra and Bhishma's daughter-in-law, yet they wanted to forcibly make me a slave. I accuse the Pandavas, who are the greatest warriors in the world, because they watched their wife being treated so savagely and did not stir.

Fie on the might of Bhimasena, fie on Arjuna and his Gandiva, for both, O Janardana, suffered me to be shamed by small men. Men of dharma, regardless of however weak they might be, have always protected their wives. By protecting his wife a man protects his children, and that is to protect oneself.

A man begets himself upon his wife, as his children, and that is why she is called Jaya. A wife also must protect her lord, remembering that he takes birth in her womb. The Pandavas never forsake anyone who seeks their protection, yet they forsook me when I turned to them in my dire need.

Through my five husbands five sons of exceptional tejas I have borne: Prativindhya by Yudhishtira, Sutasoma by Vrikodara, Srutakirti by Arjuna, Satanika by Nakula and Srutakarman by the youngest - all of them

dauntless, invincible. For their sake, Janardana, my husbands should have protected me!

My sons are all mighty Kshatriyas, even like your own Pradyumna. My husbands are the greatest archers, and no enemy can defeat them in battle. Why do they bear what Dhritarashtra's sons made me endure, those princes of such negligible prowess?

Deprived of their kingdom through deception, the Pandavas were made bondsmen and I was dragged to the sabha while in my season, and wearing just one cloth!

Fie on the Gandiva, which none else can string save Arjuna, Bhima and you. Fie on the strength of Bhima, and fie on the prowess of Arjuna, because, Krishna, after what he dared do Duryodhana has drawn breath even for a moment!

He once drove the guileless Pandavas and their mother from the kingdom, while my lords were boys, students still, and young brahmacharins. That sinner mixed poison into Bhima's food, but Bhima ate the poison with the food and came to no harm, for his days in the world had not ended.

Krishna, Duryodhana bound the unconscious Bhima hand and foot and, below the house at Pramana, rolled him into the Ganga. But Bhima Mahabaho awoke, tore off his bonds and rose from the river. Duryodhana was responsible for black cobras biting Bhima all over his body, but this Parantapa did not die. Waking, Kunti's son killed all the snakes with his left hand, and he also killed Duryodhana's favourite sarathy, who was the agent for the dastardly crime.

Again, while the Pandavas slept at Varanavata with their mother, Duryodhana had that house set on fire, intending to immolate them inside. Who else could do such an evil thing? Kunti, surrounded by flames, cried out in terror to her sons, "Ah, I am undone! How will we escape? Alas, my children and I will die today."

Then Bhima Mahabaho, mighty as the wind, comforted his mother and his brothers, "I will leap into the air even like Vinata's son Garuda, king of birds. We have no fear from this fire."

Taking up his mother onto his left side, Yudhishtira on his right, the twins on each shoulder, and Arjuna on his back, the mighty Vrikodara cleared the towering flames with one leap. Setting out that night, they came

to the Hidimba vana, and while Kunti and her sons slept the Rakshasi Hidimbi approached them.

She looked at Bhima and desired him. She took Bhima's feet onto her lap and began to press them with soft hands. Bhima tejasvin awoke and asked her, "Faultless featured, what do you want?"

The Rakshasi, who was beautiful, and could also assume any form she chose, replied to the Mahatman Bhima, "Fly from this place. My mighty brother will come to kill you. Do not tarry, fly!"

Bhima said haughtily, "I do not fear him. If he comes here, I will slay him."

Hearing this conversation, her brother Hidimba, vilest of Rakshasas, arrived there. He was terrible to behold, and came roaring. The Rakshasa said, "Hidimbi, who are you talking to? Bring him to me, let me eat him. Quickly, Hidimbi, do not delay."

But moved by compassion, the Rakshasi, whose heart was pure, made no reply. Then the monster, man-eater, rushed roaring at Bhima. He seized Bhima's hand and clenching his own hand into a fist as hard as Indra's thunderbolt, struck Bhima a blow like lightning.

Vrikodara flew into a rage, and a fearful fight erupted between Bhimasena and Hidimba. Both were skilled in the use of weapons, and their duel was even like the one between Indra and Vritra, of old.

Sinless Krishna, Bhima toyed with the mighty Rakshasa, wearing him down, and when Hidimba was exhausted Bhima Mahabaho killed him. Then, setting Hidimbi before them, Bhima, his brothers and Kunti Devi left that forest. Later, Hidimbi would give birth by Bhima to Ghatotkacha.

After that, surrounded by Brahmanas, these Parantapas went towards Ekachakra with their mother. Meanwhile, Vyasa met them and became their counsellor. At Ekachakra, the Pandavas of stern vratas killed another mighty Rakshasa called Baka, as savage as Hidimba.

When he had killed Baka, Bhima went with his brothers to the capital of Drupada. And there, O Krishna, even as you won Bhishmaka's daughter Rukmini, Arjuna Savyasachin won me! Arjuna won me during my swayamvara, first performing an incredibly difficult feat of archery and then defeating all the other kings gathered there.

O Krishna, innumerable griefs afflict me now and we live here, with Dhaumya for our priest and guide, but separated from our beloved Kunti. Why do these, who are gifted with such strength, who have the prowess of

lions, sit here indifferent, doing nothing, after they have seen me humiliated by vile and despicable enemies?

Am I born to suffer such searing indignity at the hands of base sinners, men of little strength beside? Am I to burn endlessly with grief? I was born into a great race, and came into this world in an extraordinary manner. Besides, I am the beloved wife of the Pandavas, and the daughter-in-law of the illustrious Pandu.

I, who am called the best of women, I who am devoted to my husbands, even I, O Krishna, was seized by my hair, and in the sight of the Pandavas, each of whom is like an Indra!'

Draupadi hides her face in her soft hands like lotus buds and sobs. Her tears flow down and wash her deep, full and graceful breasts, which bear every auspicious mark.

Wiping her eyes, sighing frequently, her voice choked, she says, 'No, I have no sons, husbands, friends, brothers or father, I have no one! I do not even have you, Krishna, for all of you see me having been savaged by vile men and you sit here and do nothing.

How will my grief at Kama's ridicule ever be assuaged? Krishna, I say to you that I deserve your protection always: because of our being related, because of your respect for me, because of our friendship and because you are the Lord!'

In that gathering of Kshatriyas in the forest, Krishna says to the weeping Panchali, 'Beautiful One, the wives of those who have angered you will weep even as you do, seeing their husbands lying dead on the ground, covered in blood and pierced by Arjuna's arrows.

Do not cry, for I will do everything in my power to help the sons of Pandu. I swear to you that you will again be a queen of kings. The Heavens may fall, or Himavat split open, the Earth might be rent, or the waters of the Ocean dry up, but my words shall never prove to be in vain!'

Draupadi listens to what Krishna says and looks sidelong at Arjuna. Mighty king, Arjuna says to her, 'You with the lovely copper eyes, do not grieve, it will be even as Krishna has said! Beautiful Panchali, it can never be otherwise.'

Dhrishtadyumna says, 'I will kill Drona, Sikhandin will kill the Pitama, Bhimasena will kill Duryodhana, and Dhananjaya will kill Karna. My sister, with Balarama and Krishna on our side, even Indra himself could not vanquish us in battle, then what are these sons of Dhritarashtra?'

Now, all the Kshatriyas there turn to Krishna, who then speaks to them."

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[1] Nilakantha explains *kshetra* as including Mahabhuta, consciousness, intellect, the unmanifest (primordial elements), the ten senses, the five objects of the senses, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, the combinations of elements, and chaitanya.

CANTO 13

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Yudhishtira, lord of the earth, if I had been in Dwaraka, this evil would not have befallen you. Irrepressible one, I would have come to the game of dice, even if Ambika's sons had not asked me, or the other Kauravas. I would have called upon Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Bahlika to help me, and prevented the game from being played.

Noble one, for your sake I would have said to Dhritarashtra, "Best of kings, let your sons have nothing to do with dice!" Yes, 1 would have spoken at length on all the evils of gambling, through which once Virasena's son lost his kingdom and through which you have now fallen into such distress.

Rajan, unthought-of evils befall a man from playing dice. I would have told how a man plays in compulsion, even if he wishes to stop. Women, dice, hunting and drinking, to which men become addicted from temptation, are regarded as the four evils that deprive a man of his prosperity. Those who know the Shastras say that evil attends upon all these.

Those who are addicted to dice also know all its evils. Mahabaho, appearing before the son of Ambika, I would have told him that through dice men lose all their possessions in a day and exchange harsh words. I would have named innumerable other ills which attend on dice.

If Dhritarashtra had accepted what I said, both the weal of the Kurus and dharma itself would have been secured. If he had rejected my gentle counsel, offered like a specific, then, Bharatasreshta, I would have compelled him with force. If those who sit in his sabha, professing to be his friends but who are actually his enemies, had supported him, I would have slain them all, along with the gamblers.

Kauravya, it is because I was away from Anarta[1] then that you played dice and have fallen into woe. Kurusthama, when I returned to Dwaraka, Yuyudhana told me about the disaster. As soon as I heard, my heart pierced by grief, I came here to you.

Alas, Pandava, such dire distress has overtaken you and I see you brothers and you plunged in misfortune.'"

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[1] Krishna's country, of which Dwaraka is the capital.

CANTO 14

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Krishna, where were you, away from Dwaraka? What did you do while you were away?'

Krishna says, 'Bharatarishabha, I went forth to raze the city of Salva. Best of the Kurus, listen to why I did this.

At your Rajasuya yagna, I slew Damaghosha's son Sisupala, mighty-armed and of great energy, because that evil one could not bear to see me being given the purodasa.

Hearing that Sisupala was slain, Salva, burning with anger, went to Dwaraka while I was away in Indraprastha with you. Arriving in a chariot made of precious metals, the Saubha, he engaged the young Vrishni princes, bulls of our line. Without mercy he slaughtered many young Vrishni heroes, and devastated all the gardens of our city.

Mahabaho, he roared, "Where is Krishna, that wretch of the Vrishni race, Vasudeva's evil son? I mean to humble his pride in battle. Tell me, O Anartas, where he is. I will go and kill him who slew Kamsa and Kesin, and then return.

By my weapons I swear I will not return without slaying him!"

Roaring again and again, "Where is he? Where is he?" the lord of the Saubha dashed here and there, wanting battle with me. Salva also raged, "He has dared kill Sisupala, and I will send him to Yama's halls today! I must kill Janardana for he slew my brother who was just a boy of tender years, and not on a field of battle, but while my brother was unprepared!"

Raging and howling thus, abusing me vilely, he flew up into the sky in his magical chariot, the Saubha which could fly anywhere at his very will. I returned to Dwaraka and heard what the evil king of Martika had said about me. I grew angry, O King, and considering his attack on Anarta, his abuse of me and his intolerable arrogance, I decided to kill him.

I set out from Dwaravati to slay the lord of the Saubha. I looked for him and found him on an island in the sea. I blew on my Panchajanya, challenging Salva to battle. However, at that moment, a host of Danavas attacked me and I slew them all.

Mahabaho, it was because of this that I could not come to you then. As soon as I heard about the game of dice at Hastinapura, I have come to see you and comfort you in your distress."'

CANTO 15

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Krishna, tell us in detail about the death of V the lord of the Saubha. You have whetted my curiosity!' Krishna says, 'When Salva heard that I had killed Sisupala, he came to Dwaravati, and with his army besieged that city from above and around. Keeping himself in the sky, he began his assault with a heavy shower of weapons of every kind.

Bharatarishabha, Dwaraka was fortified on all sides with pennons, arches, soldiers, walls, turrets, miners; her streets were barricaded with spikes; she had towers, storehouses full of provisions, engines for hurling burning brands and other fiery missiles, and vats of scalding oil and water; there were skins for carrying water to drink; trumpets, tabors we had, drums by thousands, lances and pitchforks, sataghnis, halayudhas, rockets, balls of stone, battle-axes, iron shields, and other engines for flinging iron balls, bullets and steaming fluids.

Many chariots defended Dwaraka, Kuruvyaghra, with maharathas like Gada, Samba, Uddhava and other great heroes, all nobly born, tried in battle, and who could resist any enemy. All these positioned themselves at their commanding posts, with horsemen and standard-bearers, and began to defend the city.

Ugrasena, Uddhava and others ordered that no one should drink throughout the city, to prevent any folly or carelessness. Knowing that Salva would destroy them if they were in the least careless, all the Vrishnis and Andhakas remained sober and watchful.

The soldiers made all the mimes, singers and dancers of Anarta leave Dwaraka, and they sank the bridges leading to the Sea city; boats were forbidden to ply, and long spikes raised upright in the moats which ring Dwaravati. The land around the city, for two yojanas, is always dug up, in pits and holes, in which explosives are hidden.

Anagha, our city-fortress is naturally protected, and well-defended and stocked with all kinds of weapons. Because of all this, Dwaraka was well prepared to counter any attack; why, she resembled Indra's own Amaravati. When Salva came, no one could enter or leave the city of the Vrishnis and Andhakas without giving a pre-arranged secret signal.

All the streets of the town and the open spaces, too, were filled with numberless elephants and horses. Mahabaho, all our soldiers were paid handsomely and given plentiful rations, weapons and clothes. All of them were paid in gold; all of them were in some way obliged to us, and all were of tried valour.

Yudhishtira of eyes like lotus-leaves, so, comprehensively, did Ugrasena defend Dwaraka!'"

CANTO 16

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna. continues, 'King of kings, Salva, master of the Saubha, great chariot and city of the air, came towards our city with an immense force of infantry, cavalry and elephants. His army, led by four other kings of great power, occupied a level ground commanding a plentiful water-supply.

Apart from cemeteries, temples dedicated to the gods, sacred groves of trees, and grounds covered by ant-hills, that host occupied every other place around Dwaraka. Divisions of that army barred all the roads into our city, and the secret entrances also were all blocked by the enemy.

O Kauravya, even like Garuda, Salva flew towards Dwaraka, with his host bearing all kinds of arms, skilled at all weapons, a dense array of chariots, elephants and cavalry, flying a sea of banners - well-paid and well-fed warriors, of great strength, bearing every mark of heroism, riding those wonderful chariots, armed with magnificent bows.

The young Vrishni princes saw Salvas army and sallied forth from our gates to face it. Charudeshna, Samba, the mighty Pradyumna, all put on mail, mounted their chariots, and decked with ornaments, their colours flying, rode to fight Salvas teeming legions.

Fiercely, Samba attacked Kshemavriddhi, the Senapati of Salva's forces, and struck his chief counsellor too with gusts of arrows. Why, Jambavati's son showered arrows upon the enemy in a river even as Indra does the rain. Kshemavriddhi stood unmoved as Himavan in that deadly storm.

Using maya, Kshemavriddhi discharged an even mightier tide of shafts at Samba. Samba dispelled the sorcery with his own maya and loosed a thousand arrows at his adversary's chariot. Now, pierced by Samba's barbs, overwhelmed, Kshemavriddhi fled in his fleet chariot.

When Salva's evil general left the field, a mighty Daitya called Vegavat rushed at my son. Samba stood his ground calmly. Kaunteya, Samba whirled a flashing mace and cast it at Vegavat, who fell on the ground like a mighty, faded patriarch of the forest whose roots have rotted away.

Upon the death of that ferocious Asura, Samba was at the enemy, spilling blood all around.

Another renowned Danava, Vivindhya, mighty warrior wielding a menacing bow, faced Charudeshna. And, O monarch, the encounter between Charudeshna and Vivindhya was as fierce as the one in olden days between Vritra and Vasava.

In fury, roaring like two great lions, they struck each other with arrows. Rukmini's son fitted a mighty astra, splendid as fire and the sun, to his bowstring; he chanted mantras over it and it could raze every enemy. Yudhishtira, my son loosed that weapon at Vivindhya, and the Danava fell dead.

Seeing Vivindhya slain, and his entire army wavering, Salva advanced again in his beautiful chariot, which could go anywhere. Mahabaho, seeing Salva in his chariot the fighters of Dwaraka trembled and began to retreat.

Then Pradyumna sallied forth, crying to the Anartas, "Do not fear! Watch me, I will drive back Salva in his chariot. Yadavas, today my astras will be like serpents and consume this entire host of the lord of the Saubha. I will kill Salva today and smash his fine Saubha."

Pandava, when Pradyumna spoke to them, fear left the Yadavas and they stayed to fight.'"

CANTO 17

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna continued, 'Bharatarishabha, Pradyumna climbed into his golden chariot, drawn by the finest steeds covered in mail. Over it flew a standard bearing a Makara, a fierce crocodile with jaws agape and dreadful as Yama. His horses more flying than running on the ground, he charged the enemy.

Pradyumna bore quiver and sword, his fingers were encased in leather, and switching his bow, brilliant as lightning, from hand to hand, he twanged its string resoundingly, laughing in the enemy's face, spreading panic through their ranks.

He slew them all around him, contemptuously, and no one could mark any interval between the shafts he loosed. No colour rose into his face, his limbs did not so much as quiver; only his leonine roars rang across the field, while the sea monster's image on his golden flagstaff struck terror in his enemies' hearts.

Pradyumna, destroyer of his enemies, flew at Salva, himself eager for an encounter. But Salva could not bear Pradyumna's assault; he leapt down from his beautiful chariot of untold speed. Ihose watching, the people, saw the duel between Salva and the Vrishni hero which was even like that between Bali and Vasava, of old.

Kshatriya, Salva, mighty and lustrous, climbed back into his chariot and beset Pradyumna with a storm of arrows. Pradyumna fought back, briefly overwhelming Salva, who now shot arrows of blazing fire at my son. But Pradyumna easily parried that burning shower. Salva rained more shafts afire over him.

Best of kings, wounded by Salvas arrows, Pradyumna loosed an astra which could pierce the entrails of any enemy. That winged shaft pierced Salva's armour and entered his heart, at which he fell in a swoon. Seeing their lord fall, the Danava chieftains all fled the field.

Lord of the earth, cries of Oh! and Alas! arose from Salva's army. But Salva regained his senses, jumped up and suddenly loosed a clutch of savage barbs at Pradyumna. Pierced about his throat, Pradyumna staggered in his ratha. Wounding Rukmini's son, Salva roared like a lion, filling the

world with that great sound. O Bhaarata, when my son fell senseless, Salva did not lose a moment but shot him with more deadly arrows. Pierced by numberless arrows, Pradyumna became motionless on the field of battle.'"

CANTO 18

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna continues, 'Seeing Pradyumna felled by Salva, the Vrishnis all grew disheartened and stricken. Their fighters broke into loud cries of *Oh* and *Alas!* while joy swept through the enemy ranks. Daruka's son, his sarathy, bore him swiftly from the field.

The chariot had not gone far when Pradyumna regained his senses, picked up his bow and said to his charioteer, "Sutaputra, what have you done? Why do you leave the battlefield? This is not the custom of the Vrishni heroes in battle!

Were you confounded by the sight of Salva? Or frightened by our duel? Tell me truly, I must know your mind."

The charioteer answered, "O son of Janardana, I am not confounded or afraid. On the other hand, I saw that it was difficult for you to vanquish Salva, and so I left the field. The wretch is stronger than you, and besides a sarathy must protect his warriors, especially when his Kshatriya faints.

Long-lived, I must always protect you even as you must always watch over me. Besides, you are alone while the Danavas are legion. I felt, O Rukminiputra, that you are not equal to them in this fight and began to leave the field.'"

Krishna continued, 'When the charioteer said this, he who bears the Makara on his banner, retorted, "Turn the chariot around! O son of Daruka, never do this again, never flee the field, not while I am alive. No son of the House of Vrishni ever forsakes battle or kills an enemy fallen at his feet, crying I am yours! No Vrishni ever kills a woman, a boy, an old man, or a warrior in distress, who has lost his chariot or has had his weapons broken.

You are born a Suta and are well trained in your craft. O son of Daruka, you know the customs of the Vrishnis in battle. Never again fly from the field as you have done today. What will the irrepressible Krishna say to me when he hears that I left the field in bewilderment or that I was struck in the back, as I fled from battle?

What will Krishna's elder, the mighty-armed Baladeva, wearing blue and drunk on wine, say when he returns? What, O Suta, will that lion among

men, Sini's grandson Satyaki, that great warrior, say when he hears I abandoned the fight?

Sarathy, what will the ever-victorious Samba, the invincible Charudeshna, Durdarsha, Gada, and Sarana, and Akrura of mighty arms say to me? What will the wives of the Vrishni heroes say to one another of me, who have so far been considered brave of noble conduct, honourable and manly?

They will even say, This Pradyumna is a coward who leaves the battle and comes here. Fie on him! They will never say, Well done! Ridicule, O Suta, is worse than death to someone like me. So never again leave the field of battle!

Leaving Dwaraka in my charge, Krishna has gone to the yagna of the Bhaarata lion. I cannot be a bystander now. Suta, when the brave Kritavarman was sallying out to face Salva, I stopped him, saying, You stay, I will fight Salva. And to honour me, Hridika's son desisted. If I leave the field of battle, what will I say to that mighty warrior when I meet him?

When Krishna, wielder of the sankha, chakra and gada, returns, what will I tell him of the eyes like lotus leaves? Satyaki, Baladeva and all the other Vrishnis and Andhakas always boast about me. What will I say to them?

Having left the field of battle and with wounds of arrows on my back, as you bore me away, I will not be able to live! O son of Daruka, turn the chariot around at once, and never flee again during battle, for I do not consider the life worth living which was gained by fleeing the field like a coward.

Sutaputra, have you ever seen me fly in fear from an enemy? It does not become you to leave the battle while my desire to fight on remains unquenched. Hurry, turn back!'"

CANTO 19

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUE

"Krishna continues, 'His charioteer replied hastily to Pradyumna, in sweet tones, "O son of Rukmini, I am not afraid to guide your horses on the field, and I know well the customs of the Vrishnis in war. But, O long-lived, the sarathy is taught that his warrior s life is always to be safeguarded by his charioteer.

You were sorely wounded by Salva's arrows, you fell unconscious, O Kshatriya. Only then did I leave the field. But, O lord of the Satwatas, now that you have regained consciousness, watch my skill in driving your horses! Daruka is my father and he has taught me chariotry. Watch me pierce Salva's army, O Hero!"

Saying this, that sarathy snapped his reins and turned back to the field of battle. Struck by his whip, deftly manoeuvred, those fine steeds seemed to fly through the air; beautifully they ran, in circles, now to the left then to the right, in even paths, then uneven. Truly, so light, so deft was the artistry of Daruka's son, his horses blazed along, and it seemed their hooves did not touch the ground, it seemed they read the sarathy's very thoughts.

So effortlessly and swiftly did that chariot dart through and wheel around Salvas force that they who watched were wonderstruck. Salva could not bear this and shot three arrows at Pradyumna's charioteer. But he sped on to the right, taking no notice of the shafts which pierced him.

Salva again loosed a shower of every kind of missile at Pradyumna. But that Parantapa, Rukmini's son, smiled, and with breathtaking lightness of hand cut them all down in flight. Salva used maya now and attacked Pradyumna more savagely still. Using the Brahmastra, Pradyumna again stopped those fell and powerful weapons, all the while shooting a stream of winged arrows at Salva.

And delighting in blood, these shafts truncated Salvas missiles, and flashed on to pierce his head, breast and his face. Salva fell senseless, and Pradyumna aimed another arrow at him, one which could kill any enemy.

Seeing that great astra, which all the Dasarhas worship, burning like fire and deadly as a serpent, fitted to Pradyumna's bowstring, the air was filled with cries of Oh! and Alas!

Now, the Devas, led by Indra and the Lord of treasures, Kubera, sent Narada down, and Vayu, the Wind God, whose speed is that of the mind. Coming to Pradyumna, they gave him this message: "Kshatriya, you must not kill Salva. Do not draw your astra, for you cannot kill him.

There is no man whom that arrow will not kill, but, Mahabaho, Brahma has ordained his death at the hands of Devaki's son Krishna. Do not let what Brahma has ordained be proved false."

Happily, Pradyumna withdrew that best of astras and thrust it back into his quiver. Then, best of kings, wounded sorely by Pradyumna's arrows, the mighty Salva rose, disheartened, and sped away. Afflicted by the Vrishnis, Salva mounted his magical chariot and, leaving Dwaraka, flashed away into the sky."

CANTO 20

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna said, 'When Salva had left Dwaravati, I returned to it, O King, upon the completion of your great Rajasuya yagna. On my arrival, I found Dwaraka shorn of its splendour, and there were no sounds of Vedic chanting or sacrificial offering.

All the lovely young women wore no ornaments, and the gardens were desolated, no longer beautiful. Alarmed, I asked Hridika's son, "Why are the men and women of the city woebegone, O tiger among men?"

Kritavarman then told me in detail about Salva's invasion of Dwaraka, and also how he fled. Bharatottama, I decided to kill Salva. Cheerfully, I said to King Ahuka and Anakadundubhi, and the other great Vrishni heroes, 'Yadavarishabhas, stay in the city, taking every care, for I now go forth to kill Salva and I will not return to Dwaravati until I have.

I will come to you again when I have destroyed both Salva and his precious Saubha. Now strike up the sharp, middle and flat notes of the Dundubhi, which so terrifies our enemies!"

O Bharatarishabha, those Kshatriyas cried joyfully to me, "Go and slay the enemy!"

Taking their blessings and having the Brahmanas chant auspicious mantras, while I bowed down to those Dvijottamas, and to Siva also, I set out in my chariot, yoked to my great steeds Saibya and Sugriva, filling all the world with the clatter of my wheels and blowing on the Panchajanya, best of all sankhas!

I set out accompanied by my redoubtable and ever victorious army, consisting of the four kinds of forces and steadfast in battle. Passing over many countries, mountains crowned with trees, and water bodies, lakes, rivers and streams, I arrived at last in the country of Matrikavata.

There, Purushavyaghra, I heard that Salva flew in his aerial chariot, which was also his township, his city, near the sea and I pursued him there. Parantapa, I found him right in the midst of the billowing, heaving waves. Seeing me from a distance, Yudhishtira, that evil one challenged me repeatedly to fight. I loosed many arrows at him, great missiles, but they did not penetrate his Saubha.

I grew angry, and the evil, powerful son of a Daitya began to shoot thousands of arrows at me in a torrent. He covered my warriors, my sarathy and my horses with arrows, but we fought on.

Salva's legions loosed more arrows, again in thousands, over me. They mantled my ratha, my horses and Daruka with astras which could pierce one's very entrails. Then, I could no longer see my chariot, horses or even Daruka; my army and I were both shrouded in arrows.

Kaunteya, I chanted mantras to summon astras, and loosed tens of thousands of them at the enemy. But the Saubha was far away, two yojanas, and my warriors could not see it. They could only stand below on the battlefield and, like spectators in an arena, cheer me with lions' roars and loud handclapping.

My tinted arrows, meanwhile, pierced Danava bodies like fierce insects, and there arose cries from within the Saubha of those who died by them, and fell into the sea below. Arm and necks cut off, Danavas looking like dismembered kabandhas fell, roaring horribly. Carnivores of the deep devoured them hungrily.

I blew an echoing blast on the Panchajanya, which once rose from those waters, and which is as graceful as a lotus-stalk, and white as milk, the kunda flower, the moon, or as silver. Seeing his soldiers die, Salva began to fight using maya, illusion.

He cast a tirade of maces, ploughshares, winged darts and lances, javelins, battle-axes, daggers, arrows blazing like thunderbolts, nooses, swords, bullets from barrels, other strange shafts, and missiles. I allowed them to fly towards me, then dispelled the sorcery of which they were made.

Salva now cast mountain peaks of maya at me. Then he created uncanny weather changes - darkness and light, alternately, the day was now fair, and now gloomy, now hot, and now cold. He caused a fierce shower of live coals, hot ash and arrows to pour down over me.

With these illusions, he duelled with me; and I dispelled all his maya with my own power, and also continued to loose thousands of shafts at the Saubha. Suddenly, the dome of heaven blazed as with a hundred suns and with a hundred moons, too, and millions of stars; and no one could tell if this was day or night; no one could distinguish the points of the horizon.

Perplexed myself, I fitted the Pragnastra to my bowstring. That weapon blew away Salva's sorcery in the sky even as the wind does wisps of cotton

wool. Now we had light again, and we fought fiercely once more, so those who watched had their hair stand on end.'"

CANTO 21

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Tiger among men, Salva flew high into the sky again and cast down blazing sataghnis, and mighty maces, and flaming lances, and thick cudgels. I shot them all down as they flew at me, and the sky echoed.

Salva covered Daruka, my horses and ratha with hundreds of straight, deadly shafts. Daruka seemed about to faint and said to me, "Ah Krishna, I am sorely wounded. I have not left the field only because it is my dharma to stay. But my limbs turn weak and I cannot continue."

Hearing his piteous voice, I looked at him and saw he was wounded by countless arrows. There was no place on his chest, his head, his arms or the rest of his body from which fell arrows did not protrude. Blood flowed profusely from his wounds, and he looked like a mountain of red chalk after heavy rain.

Mahabaho, seeing Daruka wounded, I tried to embolden him and make him cheerful.

Just then, a man from Dwaraka came running to my chariot with a message from Ahuka. He seemed to be one of Ahuka's followers, and said in a voice choking with sorrow, "Ahuka, the lord of Dwaraka, sends you this message. Krishna, listen to what your father's friend says. O Vrishni, irrepressible one, while you were away today, Salva came to Dwaraka, seized your father Vasudeva by main force and killed him. No need for you to fight anymore. Cease, Janardana, you must return to Dwaraka now; to defend her is your only dharma."

My heart grew heavy, and I could not decide what to do. Inwardly I blamed Satyaki, Baladeva, and the mighty Pradyumna, for when I left to attack Salva I had given them charge of protecting Dwaraka and Vasudeva.

In grief I asked myself, "Does the mighty-armed Baladeva live, and Satyaki, and Rukmini's son and Charudeshna of great prowess, and Samba and the others? For, if they did, even Indra himself could not kill Vasudeva. Ah, if Vasudeva is dead, surely all these others and Balarama, too, must also be dead."

Yudhishtira, I was overwhelmed by grief, and in that condition I encountered Salva again. And now I saw Vasudeva himself falling from the Saubha! Oh, my father seemed like Yayati falling down to the earth when he lost his punya; I saw my father fall like a luminary whose punya was exhausted, his clothes in disarray, his helmet loose and his hair flowing free and wild, and I swooned away.

The bow Saranga dropped from my hand and I had to sit down abruptly in my chariot. My legions saw me thus, and their cries rent the air. Ah, my father fell like a dead bird, and Salva's soldiers on the ground hewed savagely at him with sword and axe.

At this my heart shook violently and I regained consciousness. O Kshatriya, nowhere did I see my father or Salva or his Saubha made of precious metals. I knew that it had all just been maya, the enemy's illusion, and recovering quickly, I began to loose my arrows again, in hundreds.'"

CANTO 22

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna continues, 'Seizing up my beautiful bow, I began to decapitate the Danavas who rode in the Saubha. My Saranga streamed arrows formed like serpents, of intense energy and which could fly up to great heights.

Then, I did not see the Saubha anymore, for it had vanished through maya. I was filled with wonder. However, the frightful Danava host set up a loud and joyful howling. I fitted an astra to my bowstring, a missile which would bury itself in an invisible enemy if only his voice was audible. Immediately, their shouting stopped. However, those who had howled were already slain by my arrows blazing like the sun.

When the shouts and yells stopped in one place, they broke out in another, and there too I loosed my arrows. Bhaarata, the Asuras roared from the ten directions, as well as from above and below, and all those who did roar I slew: those that were in the sky and invisible, all with arrows of diverse forms, and astras summoned with mantras.

Suddenly, the Saubha reappeared, of all places at Pragjyotishapura, dazzling my eyes. The monstrous Danavas showered a lashing rain of great rocks over me, covering me entirely, even like some vast anthill. Mighty crags covered my horses, my charioteer and flagstaffs, and I could not be seen anymore.

The Vrishni army panicked and fled in every direction. Seeing me covered over with the massive stones, heaven and earth resounded with shocked cries; all my kinsmen and comrades began to weep and wail aloud, while grief tore at their hearts.

My enemies were delighted, so I heard after I had defeated the enemy! Then, I wielded the Vajra, Indra's thunderbolt, which can rive the hardest stone, and smashed the mountain of rocks. However, my horses could hardly bear the weight of the rocks, and seemed on the point of death. They trembled.

When my warriors saw me again they rejoiced as men do when the Sun breaks out from behind dark clouds, dispelling darkness. Seeing my horses almost at last gasp, sorely wounded by the mass of stones, my sarathy

Daruka said to me, "O Vrishni, look where Salva sits in his Saubha. Kill him, Krishna! Abandon your mercy and mildness, Mahabaho, do not let him live.

Parantapa, you must do everything in your power to kill your inveterate enemies. A strong man should not disregard even a weak enemy who is under his foot, then what to say of someone like Salva, who dares us to fight? Tiger among men, Lord, exert yourself and kill him!

Do not delay any longer, this one cannot be vanquished with milder methods. And surely, he that is fighting you so savagely, he who has devastated Dwaraka, cannot be your friend!"

Kaunteya, listening to Daruka and knowing that what he said was true, I turned my attention back to the battle, now meaning to kill Salva and destroy his Saubha.

I said to Daruka, "Stay here a moment!", and I summoned my favourite weapon, of fire, chakra of blazing energy, irresistible and splendid disc. I cried to that great wheel, "Consume the Saubha and all the enemies inside it!"

In anger, chanting mantras of power, I loosed the inexorable Sudarsana Chakra, which makes ashes of Yakshas, Rakshasas, Danavas and kings born into fell tribes, the disc sharp as a razor, stainless, which is even like Yama the destroyer, and incomparable.

Spuming up into the sky, it seemed like another Sun of the blinding fulgurance with which the yuga ends. Flashing at the airborne township, the marvellous Saubha, whose glory vanished in a moment, the Chakra scythed right through it, even as a saw divides a tree.

Cut in two by the Sudarsana, the Saubha fell like the city of Tripura cloven by the shafts of Maheswara. When the Saubha fell, the Chakra flew back into my hands. I cast it again, crying, "Go now to Salva!"

Salva was about to hurl a sorcerer's mace at me, when the Sudarsana struck him, cut him in half and set him ablaze. When that fierce and valiant Danava died, Asura women lamented everywhere, and were led away sobbing.

I brought my chariot before the townlike vimana Saubha and joyfully blew my conch, gladdening the hearts of my friends. Seeing their city, lofty as the peak of Meru, with its palaces and gateways ruined, and all ablaze, the Danavas fled in fear. Having thus destroyed the Saubha and slain Salva, I returned to the Anartas and my kin and friends were delighted.

Rajan, this is why I could not come to Hastinapura. If I had come, Suyodhana would not be alive nor would the game of dice have been played. What can I do now? It is hard to confine the waters after a dam is breached! "

Vaisampayana continued, "Having addressed the Kaurava thus, Krishna Purushottama, Mahabaho, Madhusudana, owner of all grace, salutes the Pandavas, and prepares to depart.

Reverently, he salutes Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, and in return the king and Bhima, also, sniff the crown of his head affectionately. Arjuna embraces Krishna, and the twins salute him with reverence. Dhaumya duly honours Krishna, and Draupadi, in tears, worships him.

Making Subhadra and Abhimanyu climb into his golden chariot, Krishna mounts it himself. After consoling Yudhishtira, Krishna sets out for Dwaraka in his ratha resplendent as the Sun, chariot to which the horses Saibya and Sugriva are yoked.

After the Dasarha has left, Dhrishtadyumna also sets out for his own city, taking Draupadi's sons with him. Bidding farewell to the Pandavas, Dhrishtaketu, king of Chedi, sets out for his beautiful city Suktimati, taking his sister with him. The Kaikeyas, too, with leave from Yudhishtira of immeasurable tejas, reverentially salute all the Pandavas, and depart.

But the Brahmanas, the Vaisyas and the other people of Yudhishtira's kingdom will not leave the Pandavas, though asked repeatedly to do so. Best of kings, extraordinary is the multitude that surrounds those Mahatmans in the Kamyaka vana.

Yudhishtira honours those high-minded Brahmanas, then commands his men, 'Prepare my chariot!'"

CANTO 23

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "After Krishna leaves, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, and the twins, each of them as magnificent as Siva, with Draupadi and their priest, climb into fine chariots yoked to pedigreed horses, and drive into the jungle together.

As they go, they distribute nishkas of gold, clothes and cows to Brahmanas versed in siksha, akshara and mantras, and twenty attendants follow them, all carrying bows, more gleaming weapons, astras and other engines of war. With the princess's clothes and ornaments, her maids and her sakhis, Indrasena follows speedily in another chariot.

Approaching the best of Kurus, the noble-minded citizens walk around him. The principal Brahmanas of Kurujangala cheerfully salute him, and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira and his brothers salute them back in joy. The illustrious king stops there a while, looking at the concourse of the inhabitants of Kurujangala.

Yudhishtira feels for them as a father for his sons, and they also feel for him what sons feel for their father. Coming up to the great Kuru, they stand around him.

Taken with shyness, tears in their eyes, they all exclaim, "Alas, O Lord! O Dharma!" And they say, "You are the lord of the Kurus, our king, and we are your subjects. Where are you going, O king of dharma, leaving all these your people, like a father leaving his sons?

Fie on the cruel son of Dhritarashtra! Fie on the evil-minded son of Subala! Fie on Karna! For, O best of kings, who are steadfast in dharma, these wretches always wish you ill.

Having established the unrivalled city of Indraprastha, splendid as Kailasa itself, where do you go leaving it? O illustrious and just king, O Dharmaptura, where do you go, leaving the peerless Mayaa Sabha, as resplendent as the palace of the Devas, which is even like some divine illusion, always guarded by the gods?"

Arjuna, who knows the ways of dharma, artha and kama, says to them in a loud voice, "By living in the forest, the king means to take away the honour of his enemies. O you with these Brahamans at your head, who

know dharma and artha, ask them privately what they believe will fetch us supreme felicity."

When the Brahmanas and the other varnas hear what Arjuna says, they salute Yudhishtira, that best of men. Walking reverently around the king—Bhima, Arjuna, Yagnaseni, and the twins—and commanded by Yudhishtira, they return to their homes in the kingdom with heavy hearts."

CANTO 24

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After they have gone, Yudhishtira says to his brothers, 'We must live in the forest for twelve years. So, search this mighty vana for some spot which abounds in birds, deer, flowers and fruit, a place that is beautiful, auspicious, and also where Sages dwell, so we might live there pleasantly all those years.'

Arjuna says to his elder brother, as reverently as to a Guru, 'You have worshipfully served all the great and old Rishis, and there is nothing in the world of men that you do not know. Bharatarishabha, with the utmost respect, you have waited upon great Brahmanas, Dwaipayana and others, and Narada of great punya, who with their senses perfectly controlled, journey freely from the gates of this world to those of the realms of the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Apsaras, and even to Brahmaloka.

Beyond doubt, you know the mind of the Maharishis, as well as their power. You also know, O King, what is best for us. We will live wherever you say. Here in this forest called Dwaitavana is a lake full of holy water, enchanting to look at, with its profusion of flowers and every kind of bird.

Rajan, if this place pleases you, shall we remain there for twelve years? Or are you of a different mind?"

Yudhishtira replies, "Partha, what you say recommends itself to me. Let us go the famed, great and sacred Dwaitavana."

Pandu's son goes towards the sacred lake known as Dwaitavana. Yudhishtira is surrounded by many Brahmanas, some of whom sacrifice with fire and some without it; some are devoted to the study of the Vedas, living on alms and they are Vanaprasthas, forest-dwellers. The king is also surrounded by hundreds of Mahatmans, of stern vows, their tapasya crowned with success.

Those Bharatarishabhas, the Pandavs, and their Brahmanas, enter the sacred and enchanting vana of Dwaita. At summer's end, Yudhishtira sees the great jungle full of salas, palms, mango trees, madhukas, nipas, kadambas, sarjas, arjunas and karnikaras, many of them covered with flowers.

Flocks of peacocks, datyuhas, chakoras, varhins and kokilas sit on the tops of the tallest trees, pouring down mellifluous songs. Mighty herds of gigantic elephants, big as hills, he sees, with the juice of rut trickling down their temples, accompanied by herds of cow-elephants.

Approaching the beautiful Saraswati, the king sees many Sannyasins, and other ascetics, within that vana, all wearing valkala, with matted jata upon their heads.

Alighting from his chariot, Yudhishtira enters the forest even like Indra entering Devaloka. Hosts of Charanas and Siddhas, wanting to see that king of dharma, come towards him. Quickly, the dwellers of the Dwaita throng around that lion among kings, of the great intellect.

Saluting all the Siddhas, and saluted by them in return as a king or a god should be, that best of men walks into the forest with folded hands, along with those Dvijottamas. Yudhishtira sits down in the midst of those good ascetics, at the foot of a magnificent tree, adorned with flowers, even as his father Pandu had once.

All of them tired, Bhima, Dhananjaya, the twins, Panchali and their followers, leave their chariots and sit around their king. And that mighty tree, bent with the weight of thick creepers, with those five illustrious bowmen sitting beneath it, looks like a mountain with five noble elephants resting upon its side."

CANTO 25

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "In their distress, the exiled princes find a pleasant place to live in the vana. And there in that jungle of plentiful Sala trees, forest washed by the Saraswati, they who are like five Indras begin to besport themselves.

The king devotes himself to befriending, serving and pleasing all the Yatis, Munis and the main Brahmanas in that forest, with offerings of fine fruit and roots. Dhaumya, their priest of tremendous tejas, and like a father to the princes, begins to perform the sacrificial rites of Ishti and Paitreya for the Pandavas in that great forest.

One day, the ancient Rishi Markandeya, of intense and abundant tejas, arrives as a guest in the Pandavas' asrama. Yudhishtira pays devout homage to the great Muni, revered by the devas, by Rishis and by men, and who is as splendid as blazing fire.

Seeing Draupadi, Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna living amongst ascetics of the vana, the lustrous and all-knowing Sage smiles. Yudhishtira asks, 'Muni, all these hermits feel sad to see us here in the wilderness, but you smile as if in joy. Why is it that you alone seem pleased?'

Markandeya replies, 'My child, I too feel sad and do not smile in any joy, nor do I feel any satisfaction to see you here. But seeing you today I am reminded of Dasaratha's son Rama, who lived in the forest at his father's command.

Son of Pritha, I saw him in those olden days, ranging through the jungle, his bow in his hand and Lakshmana beside him. I saw him on the hill of Rishyamooka. Rama was like Indra, the lord of Yama himself, and the slayer of Namuchi. Yet, that sinless one had to live in the forest at his father's command, and he accepted that as his dharma.

Yes, Rama was Sakra's equal in prowess; he was invincible in battle. Yet, abandoning all luxury and pleasure he went to live in the vana. So no one should sin, or leave dharma thinking *I am mighty!*

The king Nabhaga, Bhagiratha and others, too, subdued the Earth bounded by seas, only through dharma, and finally gained the realms beyond. Child, no one should leave dharma, thinking *I am mighty!*

Noblest of men, the virtuous and honest king of Kasi and Karusha was called a mad dog for relinquishing his kingdom and his wealth. No one should sin, saying *I am mighty!*

Best of men, O son of Pritha, the Saptarishis blaze in the sky for having followed the eternal dharma which the Creator has laid down in the Vedas. Ah, no one should leave dharma, thinking *I am mighty!*

Behold, O King, mighty elephants, tusked and great as mountain cliffs do not transgress the laws of the Creator. So, too, no man should break dharma thinking *Might is mine!* Best of kings, look how every creature and species follows its own nature and law, as created by God. Surely, no one should break dharma saying *Might is mine!*

Prithaputra, in truth, in virtue, in righteous conduct and in humility you have surpassed all creatures, and your fame and brilliance are as those of Agni or Surya. You are steadfast in keeping your word, and when you have passed your painful exile in the forest you will take back your lambent fortune from the Kauravas, through your own might!'

Saying this much to Yudhishtira, who sits among his friends and the ascetics of the forest, the Maharishi Markandeya salutes Dhaumya and the Pandavas and walks away towards the north."

CANTO 26

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "While the Pandavas live in the forest, the Dwaitavana teems with Brahmanas. The lake always resounds with Vedic chanting, and is like a second holy Brahmaloka, as the very air thrills to the sounds of the Yajus, the Riks, the Samas, and other incantations. These chants mingle with the twanging of the bowstrings of the sons of Pandu, creating a union of Brahmana and Kshatriya customs, noble and beautiful.

One evening, the Rishi Baka of the Dalbhya clan says to Yudhishtira who sits among the Brahmanas, 'Look, lord of the Kurus, it is the time of the homa and the sacred fires have been lit. All these Brahmanas of stern vows sanctify this place with their rituals.

The descendants of Bhrigu and Angiras, along with those of Vasishta and Kasyapa, the illustrious sons of Agastya, the offspring of Atri, indeed all the foremost Brahmanas of the world are here with you! Listen, O Kaunteya, you and your brothers, to what I have to say to you.

As fire helped by the wind consumes a forest, so will Brahmana tejas combining with Kshatriya might consume all enemies. My child, he who wants to subdue this world and the next must never be without Brahmanas beside him. A king vanquishes his enemies only when he has for his priest a Brahmana who knows dharma, worldly affairs, and is free from passion and folly.

King Bali, who loved his subjects, performed his dharma, which led to moksha, knowing of no other means to achieve his ends other than the Brahmanas. For this alone all the wishes of Virochana's son, the Asura, were always gratified, and his wealth was inexhaustible.

He gained the whole world with the help of Brahmanas, and found destruction when he wronged them. This Earth, with her treasures, never for long adores as her lord a Kshatriya who lives without a Brahmana. The same sea-girt Bhumi, however, bows to him who is ruled by a Brahmana and taught his dharma by a Brahmana. Like an elephant in battle without his mahout, a Kshatriya destitute of Brahmanas dwindles in power.

The Brahmanas vision is without compare, and the Kshatriyas might is also unparalleled. When these combine, the whole world joyfully yields to the twain. As fire becomes stronger blown by the wind, and consumes straw and wood, so do kings with Brahmanas consume all foes.

To gain what he has not, and to increase what he has, a Kshatriya should take the counsel of Brahmanas. Therefore, O son of Kunti, you also keep a Brahmana of repute with you, one who knows the Vedas, a man of wisdom and experience. Yudhishtira, you have always had the highest regard for Brahmanas. It is because of this that your fame is great and blazes through the three worlds.'

All the Brahmanas there are delighted to hear Baka of the Dalbhya clan praise Yudhishtira and they, in turn, worship Baka. Dwaipayana, Narada, Jamadagnya and Prithusravas; Indradyumna and Bhaluki and Kritachetas and Sahasrapat; and Karnasravas and Munja and Lavanaswa and Kasyapa; and Harita and Sthunakarna and Agnivesya and Saunaka; and Kritavak and Suvaka, Brihadaswa and Vibhavasu; and Urdhvaretas and Vrishamitra and Suhotra and Hotravahana - these and many other Brahmanas, too, then adore Yudhishtira even like Rishis adoring Purandara in heaven!"

CANTO 27

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Exiled to the forest, one evening as they sit together, in some sorrow, the sons of Pritha and Draupadi speak to one another.

Beautiful, knowing, beloved of her lords and devoted to them, Panchali says to Yudhishtira, 'Ah, when Dhritarashtra's cruel, sinful son could send us into the vana wearing deerskin, surely the evil one feels no twinge of remorse. His heart is made of iron, that he could speak to you, his elder brother, as harshly as he did.

No, causing you, who deserve every happiness, such distress, the evil one rejoices with his friends. O Bhaarata, when you were sent into exile only four men did not shed a tear: Duryodhana, Kama, the vile Sakuni and the beast Dussasana. All the other Kurus grieved and they wept.

Seeing this harsh bed on which you sleep, I think of what you had before and I grieve for you, O King who were raised in every luxury and do not deserve the least hardship. I think of the jewelled ivory throne in your court, and now I see you on this seat of kusa grass, and grief devours me.

Rajan, I saw you surrounded by kings in your sabha. What peace can my heart know seeing you like this today? I have seen your body anointed with sandalwood paste, and now I see you smeared with dust and mud. I saw you clad in royal silken robes, and now I see you wearing rags.

Once, the purest, finest food was carried from your palace in golden plates to thousands of Brahmanas, and you fed delicacies to ascetics, both homeless and grihastas. You lived in your palace once and worshipped the Brahmanas of the earth, satisfying their every wish.

Yudhishtira, what peace can my heart now have, seeing all this? These brothers of yours, young and wearing the costliest ornaments, were once clad in the most expensive clothes and fed by the greatest cooks. Alas, I see them all now, none deserving sorrow, living in the wild, upon what the wilderness yields.

O King, my heart knows no peace! Thinking of this Bhimasena living in sorrow in the vana, does your anger not blaze up? Why are you not wrathful seeing Bhima, who always did everything for us all, now plunged in grief,

though it is every happiness that he deserves? Why does your fury not blaze seeing Bhima, who once lived amidst every luxury, with countless chariots and wearing the most superior clothes, like this today, in this jungle?

This noble one is ready to kill all the Kurus, but he contains his rage and his grief to keep your solemn word.

Arjuna, O Rajan, has but two hands, but he is equal to Kartaviryarjuna of a thousand arms in his prodigious archery. To his enemies, he is even like Yama himself. Was it not through his prowess that all the kings of the Earth waited upon the Brahmanas at your Rajasuya yagna?

How is it that seeing Arjuna, tiger among men, whom both men and the gods worship, in this wretchedness, you anger does not blaze up? I grieve, O Bhaarata, that you are not wrathful at seeing this son of Pritha in exile - Arjuna who deserves no such misery, who had been raised in the lap of every luxury.

Why are you not furious, seeing Arjuna in exile, Arjuna who in a single chariot vanquished the Devas, the Manavas and the Nagas, all? Why are you not furious seeing Arjuna in exile, Arjuna who was honoured with offerings of chariots, horses and elephants, who forcibly took from the kings of the Earth their treasures, who is the conqueror of all foes, who in one moment can loose five hundred arrows? Why are you not furious seeing Nakula in exile, Nakula so fair, able-bodied and young, who is foremost among swordsmen? How can you pardon your enemy, O Yudhishtira, seeing Madri's son, the handsome and brave Sahadeva, in exile? Why are you not furious seeing both Nakula and Sahadeva overwhelmed by grief, though so undeserving of it?

How can you pardon your enemy while seeing me in exile, I who am Drupada's daughter, Dhrishtadyumna's sister, illustrious Pandu's daughter-in-law and the devoted wife of the Pandavas? Truly, O Bhaarata, you are incapable of anger, for how else is it that you are not moved seeing your brothers' distress and mine? It is said that there is no Kshatriya in the world who is free of anger, that the Kshatriya who does not find his anger when the need arises is forever disrespected by all creatures.

O King, you should not forgive your enemies. With your power, you can defeat them all. Know also that the Kshatriya who does not forgive when the time for forgiveness comes is cursed by every creature and meets with destruction both in this world and the next.'"

CANTO 28

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi continues, 'Once, Vali, son of Virochana, questioned his grandfather Prahlada, the chief of the Asuras and the Danavas, possessed of great wisdom and versed in the subtleties of dharma, saying, "Sire, is forgiveness greater, or strength and anger? I am unsure, Pitama, enlighten me! Tell me, since you know dharma so well, which is better? I will do whatever you command."

Prahlada said, "Know this truth with certainty - neither anger nor forgiveness is invariably greater! He that forgives suffers many ills. Servants and strangers and enemies disrespect him. No creature bows down to him. So it is that the learned do not approve constant forgiveness.

The servants of an ever-forgiving person will seek to deprive him of his wealth and belongings. They do not give others the things that they are directed to by their master, nor do they give their master the respect that is his due. Dishonour is worse than death. My child, sons, servants, attendants, and even strangers speak harshly to the man who always forgives.

Disregarding this man, people even desire his wife, and his wife also behaves as she pleases. Servants who are not punished by their master acquire all sorts of vices, and some even injure such a master. These and many other ills afflict the ever forgiving.

Listen now, O son of Virochana, to the troubles of those that never forgive. The man of wrath who, surrounded by darkness, uses his strength to constantly inflict punishment on others, whether deserved or not, is separated from his friends. Such a man is hated by both relatives and strangers. Such a man, because he insults others, loses his wealth and reaps disregard, sorrow, hatred, bewilderment and enemies.

Because of his ire, the man of wrath listens to harsh words, is parted from his friends, relatives, prosperity and his very life. He who uses his strength against both his friend and his foe, is an object of alarm to the world, as a snake who has taken shelter in a house is to its residents. What prosperity can he have who alarms the world? People will hurt him whenever they have an opportunity.

So, men should never use strength in excess, nor forgiveness on all occasions. One should use might and show forgiveness when appropriate. He who forgives at the proper time and is angry at the proper time finds happiness both in this world and the next.

I will now tell you in detail about the occasions prescribed by the Sages for forgiveness, which everyone should observe. Listen carefully. If someone who has once done you a service wrongs you, even grievously, he must be forgiven in remembrance of the old service. Those who offend because they are ignorant or callow should be forgiven because not all men are learned or wise.

However, those who wrong you knowingly, even if their offence be trivial and they plead ignorance, must be punished. Such false, crooked men should never be pardoned. Although every man's first offence should be forgiven, the second you must punish, even if it is trivial.

But if a man offends you unwittingly, and his plea of ignorance is found to be true after a judicious and thorough enquiry, he should be pardoned. Humility will vanquish might; humility will also vanquish weakness; there is nothing which humility cannot accomplish. Truly, humility is fiercer than it seems!

One must act in accordance with place and time, taking note of his own strength or weakness. No undertaking which does not take place and time into account can succeed; always wait upon place and time. Sometimes, offenders should be forgiven from fear of the people. These have been declared to be times for forgiveness, while on other occasions force should be put forth against offenders."'

"Draupadi continues, 'O King, I believe that this is the time to use your strength and force. Dhritarashtra's greedy sons always seek to harm us, and this is no time to forgive them but to use your power against them.

The ever humble and forgiving person is disregarded; while those that are always fierce and persecute others are despised. But he is indeed a king, who takes recourse to both, each at their proper time.'"

CANTO 29

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Anger is the slayer of men and is again V their prosperor. Wise one, know that anger is the root of all prosperity and all adversity. Beautiful one, he who restrains his anger prospers, while he who gives in always to his rage reaps adversity.

In this world, anger is the cause of the destruction of every being; then how can one like me indulge my anger, when it can destroy the very world. The angry man commits sin. The angry man kills even his Gurus. The angry man insults even his elders with harsh words.

The man who is angry cannot distinguish between what he should and should not say. There is nothing that an angry man will not do, no vile word that an angry man will not utter. In anger a man might kill someone who does not deserve killing, and he might worship another who deserves to die.

The angry man might even send his own soul to the land of Yama. Seeing all this clearly, the wise control their anger, wishing for great prosperity both in this world and the next. This is why serene souls banish anger, then how can I indulge in wrath?

Draupadi, I reflect on this, and do not allow my anger to be excited. He who does not respond to an angry man saves himself and others from great fear. Indeed, he can be regarded as the physician of both himself and the angry man.

If a weak man is persecuted by men who are stronger than himself, and foolishly turns his anger on them, he causes his own downfall. Such a one who deliberately throws away his life gains no realms of felicity in the hereafter. So, Draupadi, a weak man should always suppress his anger. And the wise man who, even though wronged, does not allow his anger to be roused, passing over his persecutor in indifference, enjoys great happiness in the next world.

This is why it has been said that, be he strong or weak, the wise man forgives his enemy. Panchali, this is why the good applaud those who have conquered their wrath. Sage men believe that the honest and forgiving man is always victorious.

Truth is ever more beneficial than falsehood, and gentleness than cruelty. Then how can one like me show anger even to kill Duryodhana, when anger has so many faults, anger which men of dharma banish from their souls? The wise surely regard those who only outwardly show anger as being men of character. Men of learning and true insight call him who can control his provoked anger, through his wisdom, a man of character.

O you of the fair hips, the angry man does not see things in their true light. He does not see his way or respect anyone. The angry man kills even those that do not deserve killing. The man of wrath kills even his preceptors. So, the man of character must always banish wrath to a distance.

The man who is overwhelmed by anger does not easily acquire generosity, dignity, courage, skill, and the other qualities which belong with true character. By forsaking anger a man can show his strength and energy at the proper time, while this is very difficult for the angry man to do.

Fools regard anger as being equivalent to strength, but wrath has been given to man for the destruction of the world. So, the man who wishes to live in dharma must always forsake anger. For sure, those who abandon the virtues of their svadharma indulge anger.

Faultless one, if fools, their minds full of darkness, trangresss dharma in every way, should I be like them and do the same? If there were none among men equal to the Earth in forgiveness, there would be no peace in the world, but ceaseless strife caused by wrath.

If the injured return their injuries, if one chastised by his superior were to chastise his superior in return, the consequence would be the destruction of every creature, and sin would prevail throughout the world.

If the man who is spoken harshly to speaks back savagely in turn, if fathers kill sons and sons their fathers, if husbands kill wives, and wives husbands, Draupadi, how can there be any births into such a world where anger held such sway? For, lovely one, know that men are born because there is peace.

Panchali, if kings yield to wrath, their subjects quickly find death. The consequence of anger is distress and destruction for the people. It is because there are men who are as forgiving as the Earth that all beings live and prosper. One should forgive every injury, for every species and race continues because man is forgiving.

Truly, the wise and excellent man, who has conquered his anger, is he who forgives even when he is insulted, persecuted and infuriated by a

strong enemy. The man of power who controls his anger enjoys countless everlasting realms, while the angry man is known to be a fool and finds destruction both in this and the other world.

O Krishnaa, the illustrious and forgiving sang this of men who are always forgiving:

"Forgiveness is virtue; forgiveness is sacrifice; forgiveness is the Vedas, forgiveness is the Sruti. He who knows this can forgive anything. Forgiveness is Brahman; forgiveness is truth; forgiveness is punya; forgiveness protects the punya of the future; forgiveness is sannyasa; forgiveness is holiness; and by forgiveness the universe is held together.

Men of forgiveness attain the realms gained by those who perform great tapasya, or those who are masters of the Vedas, or those that have great ascetic merit. Those who perform Vedic yagnas, as also those who perform other sacred karma obtain lesser realms, while men of forgiveness find the adored realms which are in Brahmaloka. Forgiveness is the might of the mighty; forgiveness is sacrifice; forgiveness is quiet of mind."

How, Krishnaa, can someone like me abandon forgiveness, in which Brahman, truth, wisdom and the worlds are founded? Kasyapa said, "The man of wisdom should always forgive, for when he is capable of forgiving everything, he attains Brahman.

This world belongs to those that are forgiving; the other world is also theirs. The forgiving find honour here, and a state of blessedness hereafter. Men who subdue even their anger through forgiveness gain the loftiest realms. So has it been said that forgiveness is the highest virtue."

So did Kasyapa sing of those who are ever forgiving. Panchali, having heard what he said, content yourself. Do not give way to your anger!

Our Pitama, Santanu's son Bhishma, will worship peace; Krishna, the son of Devaki, will worship peace; Acharya Drona and Vidura will both speak of peace; Kripa and Sanjaya also will preach peace; and Somadatta and Yuyutsu and Drona's son and our grandsire Vyasa, every one of them always speaks of peace.

Urged constantly by these towards peace, I believe that Dhritarashtra will return our kingdom to us. However, if he yields to temptation, he will meet with destruction. Panchali, a crisis has entered the history of the Bhaaratas to plunge them into doom. For some time now, I have been convinced of this.

Suyodhana does not deserve the kingdom, and that is why he has not discovered forgiveness; I, however, do, and for that, forgiveness has possessed me. Forgiveness and gentleness are the qualities of the reposed man. They represent eternal virtue, and I will embrace these gunas.'"

CANTO 30

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi says, 'I bow down to Dhatri and Vidhatri who have so clouded your good sense! You think differently from your sires and grandsires about the burden you bear.

Influenced by karma, men find themselves in various circumstances of life. Karma produces inevitable consequences; we wish for emancipation from mere folly.

It seems that man can never attain prosperity in this world through virtue, gentleness, forgiveness, honesty and fear of censure. If this were not so, O Bhaarata, this intolerable calamity would never have overtaken you, who are so undeserving of it, and your brothers of great tejas.

Neither in your days of prosperity nor in these of adversity, O Bhaarata, have you held anything as dear as dharma, which you hold even dearer than life. The Brahmanas, your elders, even the Devas know that your kingdom and your life are for dharma alone.

You will abandon Bhimasena, Arjuna, these twin sons of Madri and me, but you cannot leave dharma. I have heard that the king protects dharma, and dharma protects him in return. But I do not see that dharma protects you.

Like his shadow pursues a man, your heart, O Purushavyaghra, single-mindedly always seeks dharma. Never have you disregarded your equals, your inferiors or superiors. Even gaining the whole world, pride never touched you.

O son of Pritha, you always adore the Brahmanas, the Devas and the Pitrs, with swadhas, and other forms of worship. Kaunteya, you gratify Brahmanas by fulfilling their every wish. Yatis, Sannyasins and Grihastas have always been fed in your house from plates of gold, and I served their food.

You always give gold and food to Vanaprasthas. Why, there was nothing in your house which you would not give away to Brahmanas. During the Viswadeva sacrifice, conducted for your peace, in your palace, the consecrated offerings were always first given to sadasyas and every other living being, while you contented yourself with whatever was leftover.

Ishti Pasubandhas, sacrifices for obtaining fruition of desires, the religious rites of domesticity, Paka sacrifices, and sacrifices of other kinds were constantly performed in your royal house.

Even in this great forest so solitary and haunted by robbers, living in exile, divested of your kingdom, your dharma has sustained no diminution. You performed the Aswamedha, the Rajasuya, the Pundarika, and Gosava, the grandest yagnas which demand prodigious gifts and charity.

Rajan, yet during the dire game of dice, perversity moved you to wager me as a stake? You lost your kingdom, your wealth, your weapons, your brothers, and me! You are simple, gentle, liberal, modest and truthful; how, Rajan, could your mind be attracted to the vice of gambling?

Ah, grief overwhelms my heart and I am losing my mind to see this distress of yours, this calamity. Surely, it is true that men are subject to the will of God and never to their own wishes. The Supreme Lord and Ordainer of all things ordains every joy and sorrow, all the happiness and misery of all creatures, even before they are born, in accordance with their karma which is like a seed destined to sprout into this tree of life.

O Kshatriya, God moves men as a puppeteer does his wooden puppets with his wires. Even as akasa covers everything, God pervades every creature, and ordains its weal or woe. As a bird tied with a string, every creature depends on God. Everyone is subject to God and none else. No one can decide his own fate.

Like a pearl on its string, or a bull held by the rope through its nose, or a tree fallen from the bank into the river, every creature follows God's command because they are imbued with His Spirit and because they are established in Him.

Dependent on the Universal Soul, man cannot pass a moment independently. Enveloped in darkness, creatures are not masters of their own joy or sorrow. They go to heaven or hell urged by God Himself.

Like light straws fly on strong winds, all creatures, O Bhaarata, fly on God's will. And God pervades all creatures, engaged in deeds right and wrong; He moves in the universe, but none can say This is God.

This body is only the means through which God causes every creature to reap fruits of karma, good and bad. Ah, look at God's maya which confounds men and makes them kill their fellows.

Truth-knowing Munis see these bodies differently, as rays of the Sun, which is the Lord, while ordinary men see the things of the Earth otherwise.

God creates them all, each one uniquely born and destroyed. O Yudhishtira, Brahma the Pitamaha spreads his maya and kills his creatures through the agency of other creatures, even as one might split a piece of wood with another, crack a stone with another stone or break a piece of iron with an iron rod.

Lord sports with his creatures, creating and destroying them at his pleasure, like a child with his toy. O King, it does not seem to me that God treats his creatures as a father or a mother does their children. Rather, like a vicious man, he seems to treat them with anger, maliciously.

Ah, I am deeply troubled seeing good, superior men persecuted, while sinners thrive and are happy I cannot think or speak well of the Great Ordainer seeing your distress and Suyodhana's prosperity. How can God suffer such iniquity?

What does He gain by allowing Duryodhana, who breaks every sacred law, who is greedy and crooked, who grievously harms dharma, to prosper? If a deed done pursues the doer and none else, then certainly it is God himself who is stained with the sin of every act. If however, the sin of an action does not attach to the doer, then might and not God is the true cause of whatever happens, and I grieve for those who are weak and have no prowess!'"

CANTO 31

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'You speak beautifully, Yagnaseni, your words smooth, your phrases delightful. I have listened carefully to what you say, but you speak the language of atheism. Princess, I never do anything for the fruits of what I do. I give because it is my duty to give; I sacrifice because it is my duty to sacrifice. Krishnaa, I do to the best of my ability whatever a grihasta should do, regardless of whether what I do benefits me or not.

Round-hipped one, I act virtuously not from the desire to reap the fruits of virtue, but so that I do not break the ordinances of the Veda, and also with an eye on the conduct of the good and wise. Krishnaa, my heart is drawn naturally towards virtue.

The man who wishes to reap the fruit of virtue is a trader in virtue. His nature is base, and he can never be counted among the virtuous; nor does he ever gain the fruit of his actions.

The man of sinful heart, who does a virtuous thing, but doubts dharma in his mind - he, too, does not obtain the fruits of his deed, because of his scepticism. I speak to you by the authority of the Vedas, which constitute the highest proof in these matters - you must never doubt dharma.

The man who doubts dharma is destined to be born into bestial species. The man of weak understanding who doubts religion, virtue or the words of the Rishis, is excluded from the realms of immortality and bliss, even as are Sudras from the Vedas!

Intelligent one, if a young child born into a noble race studies the Vedas and conducts himself virtuously, great Rajarishis regard him as a mature Sage, notwithstanding his years. But the sinner that doubts dharma and transgresses the scriptures, is regarded as even lower than Sudras and robbers.

With your own eyes, you have seen the Maharishi Markandeya of immeasurable soul come to us. Through dharma alone did he acquire immortality in his very body.

Vyasa, Vasishta, Maitreya, Narada, Lomasa, Suka and other Rishis have all been purified through dharma alone. You see them with your own eyes

as having the power of divine asceticism, able to curse or bless, and superior to the Devas themselves.

Anagha, sinless one, all these, equal to the Devas, look at what is written in the Vedas and describe virtue as the foremost dharma. Sweet Queen, so it does not become you to either doubt or censure God, or to act rashly.

The fool that doubts religion and disregards virtue, being proud of his own reasoning, does not regard other great reasons, and thinks of the Rishis, who see into past, present and the future, as being madmen.

The fool regards only the external world as being capable of gratifying his senses, and is blind to everything else. He who doubts religion finds no expiation. The miserable one is full of anxiety and gains no realms of bliss hereafter. A heretic, a slanderer of the Veda, a sinner moved by lust and greed, he goes to hell.

On the other hand, he who always cherishes dharma with faith finds eternal bliss in the other world; while the fool who not does keep dharma, disregarding all the proofs which the Rishis offer, does not prosper in any life. Have no doubt, lovely one, that he who pays no heed to what the Rishis say, and to their lives as living proof, he finds no joy in this world or the next.

Draupadi, do not doubt the ancient dharma which good men live by, the religion framed by Sages of universal knowledge, who can see all things. Dharma is the only raft for those who want to find heaven, even as a ship is to merchants who want to cross the sea.

Faultless one, if the dharma by which men of dharma live were fruitless, all the universe would be shrouded in infamous darkness. No one would then pursue moksha; no one would seek to acquire knowledge or even wealth, but men would live like beasts. If sannyasa, the austerities of brahmacharya, sacrifices, study of the Vedas, charity, honesty were all fruitless, men would not have practised dharma and virtue, generation after generation.

If all karma was fruitless, dreadful chaos would prevail. Think, why do Rishis and Devas and Gandharvas and Rakshasas, all of whom are not human, treasure dharma with such love? Knowing for certain that God rewards the practise of dharma, they all observe dharma. Dharma, Panchali, is eternal prosperity.

While we see the fruit of both gyana and tapasya, dharma and adharma, virtue and sin, cannot be without their fruit. Krishnaa, just think of the

circumstances of your own birth, as you have heard of it, and the birth of the mighty Dhrishtadyumna. O you of the sweet smiles, what better proof of the value of dharma?

They that have their minds under control reap the fruit of their actions, and are content with little. The ignorant are not content with what they receive here, however much it might be, because they have no joy born of virtue to inherit in the hereafter.

When dharma and adharma appear to prove fruitless, and the very origin of all karma - why, my beautiful one, these are mysterious even to the gods. Not everyone knows these things, certainly not ordinary men. The Devas preserve the mystery, for the maya which obscures what the gods do is inscrutable.

Those regenerate ones who have destroyed all desire, who have founded their aspirations on vratas, sannyasa and tapasya, who have burnt up all their sins, and in whose minds and hearts quietness, peace and holiness dwell - they understand all these.

So, though you might not see the fruits of dharma, you must never doubt dharma or the gods. You must perform sacrifices with a will, and practise charity without insolence. All karma in this world has its fruit, and dharma is eternal. Brahma himself told this to his sons, as Kasyapa has said. So, let your doubts be dispelled like mist, Draupadi. Reflecting on all this; let your scepticism give way to faith.

Do not slander God, who is the lord of all creatures. Learn how to know him. Bow down to him. Do not let your mind be sad, and never disregard the Supreme Being through whose grace mortal men, with piety, find immortality!'"

CANTO 32

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi says, 'Son of Pritha, I never disregard or slander dharma. Why would I disregard God, the lord of all creatures? O Bhaarata, I am griefstricken and ranting. Yet, I will lament again, and you must listen to me.

O Parantapa, every conscious creature must certainly perform karma in this world. Only the immobile, not other beings, may live without doing. Immediately after its birth the calf sucks its mother's teat. Why, men feel pain when fell mantras are chanted using their statues.

So, O Yudhishtira, it seems that beings derive the character of their lives from their karma of past births. Among the mobile, man differs from the rest in that he aspires to affect the course of his life in this and the other world through his deeds.

All creatures visibly reap the fruit of their karma of past lives. Indeed, all creatures exist because of past karma, even Brahma, the Creator and the Ordainer of the Universe, even as a crane lives, untaught, in water. If a creature does nothing, it cannot live; all beings must act.

You must also act, and not incur censure by abandoning karma. Cover yourself with deeds, as with armour. Among a thousand men, there is perhaps one who truly knows the worth of karma, of action. One must act to protect oneself, and to increase one's wealth, for if a man only spends without earning, even if he owns a hoard as great as Himavan, it will quickly be exhausted.

But for karma, doing, all the creatures of this world would have become extinct. If karma bore no fruit, the created would never have multiplied. We see that at times men perform karma even though it bears no fruit, for without doing, life's course itself would be impossible.

Those in this world who believe in destiny, and those again who believe in chance, are both the worst among men. Only those that believe in the efficacy of karma are laudable. He who does nothing, believing just in destiny is soon destroyed, even like an unburnt earthen pot in water. Also, he that believes in chance and sits idle though he can act, does not live long, for his life is one of weakness and helplessness.

If a man gains wealth without effort, it is told that he does so by chance; if he acquires fortune through religious rites, it is deemed providential. But the fruit gained through his own actions is proof of his ability.

Best of men, wealth gained through chance is called spontaneous acquisition; wealth thus gained is through the karma of a previous life. God dispenses the fruit of the karma of past lives to men in this world -good and bad.

This body is only the instrument in God's hands for the performance of karma; inert of itself, it does what God urges it to. Kaunteya, it is the Supreme Lord of all who makes every creature do what it does. The creatures themselves are inert.

O Kshatriya, deciding upon some purpose in his mind, man accomplishes it, working with his intelligence. Thus we say that man himself is the cause of what he does. Purusharishabha, it is impossible to count the deeds of men, for mansions and cities are the result of man's deeds.

Intelligent men know that oil may be had from sesame, curds from milk, and that food can be cooked by igniting fuel. They also know the means for accomplishing all these; and knowing them, they use the required appliances to accomplish them. Through what they do, men support their lives.

If a skilled workman does something, it is well executed; and the opposite happens if a thing is done by an unskilful hand. In karma, if a man was not himself his own karma's doer and cause, then no sacrifice would bear any fruit for him, and nor would anyone be a Guru or a sishya.

It is because a man himself is the cause of his work that he is applauded when he achieves success; and he is censured when he fails. If this were not so, how would praise and blame be justified?

Some say that everything is the result of Providence; others, that this is not so, but that everything is the result of the karma, good and bad, of past lives. Chance fetches possessions, as also does destiny; some things are gained through exertion; there is no fourth cause — so say those who know the truth, men of gyana.

However, if God himself did not dispense good and bad fruit, then there would be no misery among the created. If the effects of past karma are a myth, then a man would achieve everything for which he strives. So, those who believe that chance, destiny and effort are the only causes of success,

and who deny the effects of karma from past lives, are dull, why, inert as the body itself.

Yet, a man must act; Manu himself has said so. He who does not act, surely succumbs, O Yudhishtira. While the man of action usually finds success in this world, the idle never succeed. If success becomes impossible, one seeks to remove the obstacles on one's path to it.

Rajan, if a man works, his debts of karma are paid, whether he succeeds or not. Adversity overtakes the idle man, while the active, skilful one will certainly prosper. Intelligent men, who engage confidently in karma, regard others as being faithless and failures. They think of the confident and the faithful as being men of success.

Misery has found us now, but if you act against it, it will surely be removed. If you fail, it will prove that Bhima, Arjuna and the twins cannot take the kingdom back. But since the efforts of most men meet with success, it is likely that we shall also have what we strive for.

How can anyone predict whether we shall win or lose? Only if you act will you know what fruit your action will bring. The tiller tills the soil with his plough and sows seeds. He then sits quiet, for only the clouds can bring the rain which will make his seeds grow into plants. If the clouds do not favour him, he is absolved from blame.

He says to himself, "I have done what others do. If despite this I have failed, the fault is not mine," and he does not reproach himself.

O Bhaarata, no one should despair saying, "Oh, I am doing what I should yet success is not mine!"

For there are two other causes, besides exertion, for success. One should never despair about the success or failure of any undertaking because both depend upon the concatenation of many circumstances. If one important element is wanting, success does not come immediately, sometimes not at all. But without exertion there can never be any success.

Nor is there anything to applaud in abstaining from action. The intelligent put forth all their might, bringing together time, place, means and auspicious rites to acquire prosperity. With care and vigilance a man must set himself to his task, his main strength being his prowess. In the union of qualities needed to succeed in any undertaking prowess, ability, seems to be the main.

When the intelligent man sees that his enemy is superior to himself in many ways, he should seek success through conciliation. But he must wish

his enemy ill and seek his banishment. Why speak of mortal men, even if his enemy were the ocean or the mountains, these motives should guide him.

A man who seeks to strike at his enemy's weaknesses discharges his dharma to himself and his own. No man should ever disparage himself, for he who does, never finds great prosperity. O Bhaarata, only through such endeavour can success be found in this world. Indeed, success in the world depends on acting when the time and circumstances are ripe.

My father used to keep a learned Brahmana with him. Bharatarishabha, he said all this to my father. My brothers first heard these tenets of dharma, uttered by Brihaspati himself. It was from them that I heard these, later, in my father's house. Yudhishtira, whenever I had time, I would go and sit on my father's lap, and that knowing Brahmana would recite these truths to me, sweetly consoling me by what he said!'"

CANTO 33

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Bhimasena listens to Draupadi, and sighing in anger, approaches the king and says to him, 'Walk, O Rajan, on the ancient path trodden by great kings who went before you! What do we gain by living in an asrama of Sannyasins, deprived of our own dharma, kama and artha?

Duryodhana took our kingdom not by dharma, nor by might, but through a game of dice at which he cheated. Like a weak, offal-eating jackal snatching their prey from mighty lions, he has taken our kingdom from us. Why, Rajan, just for the trite merit of keeping your given word, do you suffer such distress, abandoning our wealth, the source of both dharma and kama?

He who wields the Gandiva protected our kingdom, and not Indra himself could take it by force; yet taken it was, because of your carelessness. Because of you our kingdom was taken like some fruit from a man who has no arms, or cattle from one who has no legs.

You are faithful in dharma. To please you, Bhaarata, we allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed by such a calamity. It is because we are obedient to you that today we rend the hearts of our friends and gratify our enemies.

Ah, how it grieves me that, just to obey you, we did not kill Dhritarashtra's son even then. This is your home in the forest, where you live like a wild animal. Only a weak man would bear this, surely no strong one would ever lead such a life.

Not Krishna, Arjuna, Abhimanyu, the Srinjayas, Madri's sons or I myself, approve of this life you have chosen. Bound by your vows, you always cry Dharma! Dharma! Has despair deprived you of your manliness? Only cowards, who cannot win back their lost wealth, cherish despair - vain despair which destroys one's purposes.

You have ability and eyes; you see that manliness dwells in us. But you have accepted a life of peace, and feel no distress. The Dhartarashtras think of us, who are in truth forgiving, as being weak, inept. This hurts me more than dying in battle.

Even if we all die in fair fight, without showing our backs to our enemies, that would be better than this shameful exile, for then we would find realms of bliss in the next world. Or if we slay them and gain the whole world, that would be wealth well won, and worth the attempt.

We always keep Kshatriya dharma; we always seek grand achievements; we always avenge injustice; it is our bounden duty to win our kingdom back with battle. Then our fame would mantle the world, not our shame.

Rajan, the dharma which torments oneself and one's near and dear ones is no dharma at all; rather, it is evil, fetching calamities. Sometimes, dharma becomes the weakness of a man; and though such a man might always cleave to dharma, yet both dharma and artha forsake him even like pleasure and pain forsaking a dead man.

He who clings to dharma for dharma's sake always suffers. He can hardly be called a wise man, for he does not know the very ends of dharma, like a blind man who cannot see the light of the Sun. He who uses his wealth only for himself does not understand the meaning or purpose of artha. He is really like a servant who tends cows in a forest.

Again, he who hankers only after artha, ignoring dharma and kama deserves censure and killing. He who pursues only pleasure, without seeking dharma and artha, quickly loses his friends and also his virtue and wealth. Without dharma and artha, only indulging indiscriminately in kama, a man exhausts his pleasures and finds death, like a fish when the water in which it lives runs dry.

For these reasons, the wise always cherish both dharma and artha, because a union of these is essential to pleasure, even as fuel is to fire. The root of kama is dharma, and dharma, too, is not apart from pleasure. The two depend on each other as the ocean and the clouds, the ocean causing the clouds and the clouds filling the ocean.

Pleasure, kama, is the joy that one feels from contact with the objects of the senses or from the possession of wealth. It exists in the mind, having no corporeal existence which one can see.

He who desires wealth, first seeks a large share of dharma to have his desire fulfilled. He who wishes for kama, first seeks artha, wealth. But pleasure, in its turn, yields nothing. One pleasure cannot lead to another, being its own fruit - as ashes may be had from wood, but nothing from those ashes in their turn.

As a fowler kills the birds we see, so does sin slay the creatures of the world. So, he who is misled by pleasure or covetousness, and does not see the true nature of dharma becomes wretched both here and hereafter, and deserves killing.

Rajan, you know that pleasure is to be had from possessing the various objects of enjoyment. You also know well the changes these objects of desire and enjoyment undergo. At their loss or disappearance, occasioned by decrepitude or death, there arises distress. That distress has now overtaken us.

The joy which comes from the five senses, the intellect and the heart, all being directed to the objects proper to each, is called kama, pleasure. I believe that pleasure is one of the best fruits of our karma, our actions.

So one must respect dharma, artha and kama, one after the other. One should not devote oneself just to dharma, or think of wealth as the highest object of one's wishes, nor pleasure; one should always pursue all three.

The Shastras ordain that one should seek dharma in the morning, artha at noon, and kama in the evening. The scriptures also say that one should seek pleasure in the first part of life, wealth in the second, and virtue in the last. And the wise pursue all three, dividing their time equally.

Kurunandana, you must think carfeully whether these three should be independent or interwoven, for those that seek happiness. Then you must unhesitatingly act either to acquire them, or abandon them all. For he who lives wavering in doubt between two paths, leads a wretched life.

The world knows that you always live by dharma. Knowing this, still your friends tell you to act. Charity, sacrifice, respect for the wise, study of the Vedas, and honesty - these constitute the highest dharma, and are efficacious both here and hereafter. Yet, these virtues cannot be attained by one who has no wealth, not, O Purushavyaghra, if his other accomplishments are infinite.

All the universe depends upon dharma; there is nothing higher than virtue. And he who has great wealth can attain to virtue. Wealth cannot be earned by leading a mendicant life, nor by a life of feebleness. Wealth can be earned by using intelligence, directed by dharma.

For you, begging alms, which is allowed Brahmanas, is forbidden. So strive to acquire wealth by exerting your might and energy. Neither mendicancy nor the life of a Sudra is proper for you. Might and energy

constitute the special dharma of the Kshatriya. So, adopt your swadharma and kill your enemies.

Destroy the power of Dhritarashtra's sons, with my prowess and Arjuna's. The learned and the wise say that sovereignty is virtue. So acquire sovereignty, for it does not become you to live in this wretched condition. Awake, O King, and understand the Sanatana Dharma. By birth you belong to a varna whose deeds are violent and cause pain to men.

Cherish your subjects and reap the fruit thereof; for that you can never be reproached. This is the dharma ordained by God himself for the Kshatriya! If you fall away from it, you will make yourself ridiculous. There is no praise for leaving the path of one's swadharma. Therefore, set your heart where it ought to be, in concord with the varna to which you belong, cast away this course of feebleness, summon your energy, and bear your burden manfully, as you should.

No king ever gained sovereignty of the earth, prosperity or affluence through dharma alone. As a fowler snares small game by offering them food, so does an intelligent man acquire a kingdom by offering bribes to base and greedy enemies. The Asuras, though elder to the Devas and more powerful and wealthy, were vanquished through stratagem by the gods.

Everything belongs to the mighty. Mahabaho, kill your enemies who used vile strategy to vanquish us. No one can equal Arjuna at wielding a bow in battle; none is my equal with a mace. Depending on their own prowess, strong men fight battles; they care little for the numbers ranged against them, or on information gleaned from spies.

O Pandava, exert your might. Might is the only root of wealth; whatever else is said to be its root is not really so. As in winter the shade of a tree counts for nothing, so also without might everything else becomes fruitless. A man who wants to increase his wealth should spend it, O Kaunteya, in the manner of scattering seeds on the ground.

Have no doubt about this. However, unless the returns from what you spend are not more than or at least equal to what you spend, you must not invest your wealth. For the man who spends wealth unreasonably is like the donkey scratching itself - pleasurable at first but painful afterwards.

So, too, the man who scatters a little of his seeds of dharma to gain greater dharma is considered wise. Have no doubt, it is as I say.

The wise man alienates his enemies' friends by scattering seeds of wealth; once the enemy's friends abandon him, the intelligent man brings

him to subjection. Even the strong engage in battle depending on their courage. Without courage, neither ceaseless efforts nor the arts of conciliation can always win a kingdom.

Sometimes weak men, uniting in great numbers, kill even a powerful enemy, like bees killing a honey-gatherer through the sheer power of numbers. Yudhishtira, adopt the ways of the Sun - who nurtures as well as kills through his rays - to protect our kingdom and the people, as our ancestors did; Rajan, I have heard that this is a sannyasa which even the Veda speaks about.

A Kshatriya cannot acquire the realms of blessedness through asceticism as he can by honourable battle, regardless of whether he wins or loses. Seeing you in this condition, the world has concluded that light may well forsake the Sun and the Moon; good men come and go from here, singly or in groups, and all of them praise you and blame our enemies.

Moreover, the Kurus and the Brahmanas, together, always speak of your absolute truthfulness, how you have never told a lie, from ignorance, from meanness, from greed, or from fear.

Whatever sins a king commits to gain kingdom he later consumes them through sacrifices distinguished by bountiful charity. Like the Moon emerging from behind clouds, a king is purified from all sins by gifting villages to Brahmanas, and cows by thousands.

Almost all the people of the country, young or old, praise you, Yudhishtira. They also say that sovereignty vested in Duryodhana is as milk in a bag of dog-hide, as the Vedas in a Sudra, as truth in a robber, as strength in a woman. Even women and children say this repeatedly, as if it were a lesson they seek to commit to memory.

Parantapa, you have not fallen by yourself; all of us are also lost with you. So, climb into your chariot laden with every weapon, make superior Brahmanas utter benedictions over you, and fly, this very day, at Hastinapura, so that you can give the spoils of victory to your Brahmanas.

Surrounded by your brothers who are great archers, and by other Kshatriya heroes who are like snakes of virulent poison, set out even like

Vritra's slayer surrounded by the Marutas. Kaunteya, you are powerful; decimate your weakling enemies, crush them like Indra did the Asuras; and snatch the prosperity he enjoys from Dhritarashtra's son.

There is no mortal who can even bear the touch of the vulture-feathered arrows, like vicious serpents, loosed from the Gandiva. Bhaarata, there is no

warrior, no horse or elephant which can withstand the blows of my mace when I am enraged in battle.

With the Srinjayas, the Kaikeyas, and the Vrishni Bull fighting for us, why should we fail to wrest the kingdom from the enemy? How will we not take back the Earth, with our allies, if only we put forth our might?'"

CANTO 34

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira is silent for a few moments after listening to Bhimasena; he gathers his patience. Then he says, 'Bhaarata, all this is no doubt true. I cannot reproach you for savaging me with your arrow-like words, This disaster has overtaken you solely through my fault. I cast the dice wanting to take Dhritarashtra's son's kingdom from him. But Subala's son, that expert gambler, played against me on Suyodhana's behalf.

Sakuni is from the hill country, and is exceptionally artful, while I am innocent of any artifice; and he routed me in the presence of all the sabha. Bhimasena, this is why distress and calamity have overtaken us.

I saw how the dice rolled invariably, odds and evens, as Sakuni wished. I could have controlled myself, and stopped playing. But anger drives away a man's patience. Child, when the mind is influenced by arrogance or vanity, it cannot be restrained. I do not reprimand you for what you say to me, or for the harsh words you use.

I believe that what has happened to us is fate, and pre-ordained. When for his greed for our kingdom, Dhritarashtra's son Duryodhana made slaves of us at first; then, O Bhima, it was Draupadi who rescued us. When we were summoned again to the sabha to play dice again, you know, as Arjuna does, what Dhritarashtra's son told me, before all the Bhaaratas, what stakes we would play for.

He said, "Ajatasatru, if you lose, you and all your brothers must live in the forest of your choice for twelve years, then spend a thirteenth year in ajnatavasa. If my spies discover you in the final year, you must live another twelve years in the vana and yet another in ajnatavasa, without being discovered.

Think about this and pledge yourself to it. As for me, I, Duryodhana, swear solemnly in this august sabha that if my agents cannot find you during the thirteenth year, this kingdom of the five rivers shall once again become yours.

And if we lose the game of dice, instead, we will abandon all our wealth and pass the same years in the wilderness, the same rules applying to us."

I replied to him, in the midst of all the Kurus, "So be it!"

The wretched game began; we were beaten and have been exiled. This is why we range in misery and discomfort through these forests. But Suyodhana was not satisfied and, giving himself up to anger, made the Kurus and everyone one else whose allegiance he enjoys express joy at our misfortune.

Having entered into such an agreement in the presence of good men, who dares break his word for the sake of a kingdom on Earth? I think, for an honourable man, death is preferable to gaining a kingdom after breaking one's word.

During the game of dice you wanted to burn my hands, but Arjuna stopped you and you only wrung your own hands. If you had done what you wanted, would this tragedy have overtaken us? You well knew your prowess, Bhimasena, then why did you not object to the second game of dice?

Now it is too late and we are plunged in distress by the word we gave; what use is it for you to berate me now? Bhima, my greatest grief lies in the fact that we saw Draupadi shamed and could do nothing to stop her humiliation. My heart burns as if I have drunk poison.

But having given my word in the midst of the Kuru heroes, I cannot break it now. Bhima, wait for better days to return to us, like the scatterer of seeds waiting for the harvest. When he who has been done an injury succeeds in avenging himself when his enemy's designs have borne flowers and fruit, that man accomplishes a great thing through his prowess. That brave man earns undying fame; he finds immense fortune and prosperity. His enemies bow down to him, and his friends gather round him, like the Devas do around Indra for protection.

But Bhima, know that I will never break my word. I consider dharma as being superior to life itself, I think of it as a divine condition. Kingdom, sons, fame, wealth - all these together do not equal even a sixteenth part of truth.'"

CANTO 35

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhima says, 'O King, being insubstantial as froth, impermanent as a fruit falling from a tree, dependent on time, mortal, you have given your word on a matter of time, which is infinite, immeasurable, quick as an arrow, or flowing like a stream, carrying all before it as Death. How can you consider time to which you are subject to be available for you to keep your word?

Kaunteya, how can a mortal man whose life is shortened with each moment, even as some collyrium is reduced each time a grain of it is taken up by a needle, wait for the future? Only an immortal, or he who knows how long he will live, who knows the future as if it were before his eyes, can wait for time, for an exact period of time to arrive.

If we wait thirteen years we will be thirteen years closer to death, which takes us all. We must strive to recover our kingdom before we die. He who does not achieve fame by punishing his enemy is an unclean thing. He is a useless burden upon the Earth, like a castrated bull, and he dies ingloriously. He who has no strength and courage, who does not chastise his enemy, lives in vain; I think of such a man as lowborn.

Your hand can rain gold; your fame can cover the whole world. So kill your enemies in battle and enjoy the wealth won through the might of your arms. Parantapa, if a man kills his enemy who has done him injury and goes that same day to hell, hell turns into heaven for him.

The pain I feel from having to suppress my anger is worse than burning fire; I cannot sleep for it, day or night. This Partha, this Arjuna, is the greatest archer; he, also, surely burns with grief although he lives here like a lion in his den. Like some mighty tusker, he who wants to kill every other bowman in the world single-handedly, represses his wrath.

Nakula, Sahadeva are all silent, to please you; as are all our friends, including the Srinjayas. Only I and Prativindhya's mother burn so much that we speak to you in grief. The rest agree with everything that I say to you, for they are all plunged in sorrow and eagerly wish for battle.

What more wretched catastrophe can overtake us than that our kingdom should be taken from us by weak and contemptible enemies, and enjoyed by

them? You have a weak nature and you feel ashamed to violate your given pledge. But no one lauds you for suffering like this out of your kindliness.

Rajan, your mind does not seem to see the truth - like that of a highborn but foolish man, who commits the hymns of the Veda to memory but does not understand their meaning.

You are kind, like a Brahmana; how have you been born a Kshatriya? Kshatriyas have devious hearts. You have heard the dharma of kings, as taught by Manu, full of crookedness, unfairness and everything opposed to peace and virtue. Then why do you forgive Dhritarashtra's sons?

You have intelligence, prowess, learning and are nobly born. Why are you like a great snake which cannot move? Kaunteya, whoever wishes to hide us will be like one trying to conceal the mountains of Himavat with a handful of grass.

All the world knows you, O son of Pritha; you will no more be able to live undiscovered than the Sun can course through the sky unseen. Like a great tree in a well-watered land, with spreading branches and flowers and leaves, or like Indra's elephant - how will Arjuna live unknown?

How, also, will these children, Nakula and Sahadeva, who are like a pair of young lions, both live undiscovered? How will Drupada's daughter Krishnaa, our princess and mother of heroes, of great virtue and famed throughout the world, live unnoticed?

All the world knows me, as well, from my boyhood; I do not see how I can live unknown anymore than the mountains of Meru can seek concealment.

Then, we expelled many kings from their kingdom; these Kshatriyas will all become the evil Duryodhana's followers and allies, for we robbed them of their wealth and drove them into exile. How will they ever be our friends?

They will join Dhritarashtra and wish to do us harm. They will certainly send countless spies to seek us out. If these find us, great danger will come to us. We have already spent thirteen months in these forests. Rajan, consider them to be thirteen years, for the wise have said that a month is a substitute for a year even as a pot-herb is for Soma.

Otherwise, Rajan, free yourself from the fetter of your pledge by offering savoury food to a quiet bull which bears sacred burdens. Thus, decide to kill your enemies - for the Kshatriya has no higher dharma than battle!'"

CANTO 36

ARANYAKA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Listening to Bhima, Yudhishtira Purushavyaghra, Parantapa, begins to sigh, and to reflect silently.

Within himself, he thinks, 'I have heard the dharma of kings recited, and also the dharmas of the other varnas. Only he who always keeps these tenets before his eyes can regulate his conduct both in the present and the future.

I know the true way of dharma, so difficult to know; then how can I use force to try to grind it down, even like trying to crush Meru?'

Thinking thus for a moment, deciding what he should do, he replies firmly to Bhima, without allowing his brother to say another word.

Yudhishtira says, 'Mahabaho, what you say is true, but, my eloquent brother, listen once more to me. Bhima, whatever sin one seeks to commit, rashly, depending purely on one's strength and courage, invariably ends up as a source of failure and pain; while whatever is begun with deliberation, with well-directed prowess, after much thought, inevitably succeeds - the gods themselves favour such designs.

Bhima, you are proud of your strength, and restless, but listen to what I think of what you think we should do immediately. Bhurisravas, Sala, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, the mighty son of Drona, Dhritarashtra's powerful, invincible sons are all great warriors and even now prepare for battle against us.

The kings and chieftains of the Earth, also, whom we have injured, are all on the side of the Kauravas, bound to them by ties of affection. O Bhaarata, they seek Duryodhana's good, not ours. With full treasuries and allied to great forces, they will all surely give their all in battle.

Also, Duryodhana has given much largesse, wealth and every luxury, to the warriors of the Kuru army, their sons and relatives. He honours those heroes and holds them in high regard. I am certain that they will give their lives for him in battle.

Although Bhishma, Drona, and the illustrious Kripa love us as much as we do them, I am also certain they, too, will sacrifice their very lives, than which there is nothing dearer, in return for the royal favours they enjoy in

Hastinapura. All of them are masters of the devastras, and devoted to dharma. Why, I believe even the Devas led by Vasava himself cannot vanquish these three.

Then they have Kama with them, the impetuous, always angry Kama, master of astras, invincible, he who wears impentrable armour.

Without first killing all these awesome warriors, Bhima, how will you kill Duryodhana? Ah, Vrikodara, I cannot sleep when I think of the swiftness of the Sutaputra's hand; to me he is the greatest of all archers!'

Bhima hears what Yudhishtira says and, slightly taken aback, falls silent.

While the Pandavas speak thus among themselves, Satyavati's son, the Maharishi Vyasa arrives there. The sons of Pandu receive him with due worship.

Then Vyasa, most eloquent among all speakers, says to Yudhishtira, 'Yudhishtira Mahabaho, with spiritual vision I saw what was passing through your heart, and I have come to you, Purusharishabha.

I will dispel this fear in your heart of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Drona's son, Duryodhana, and Dussasana. I will dissolve your fear through a secret enjoined in the Veda. Parantapa, hear it from me, acquire it patiently, and having done so, O King, quell this fever of yours quickly.'

Parasara's son, the Muni, takes Yudhishtira apart and speaks words of deep import to him.

Vyasa says, 'Best of the Bhaaratas, when the time of your fortune arrives, Arjuna will kill all your enemies in battle. Now learn this arcane Pratismriti from me, for you are worthy and capable of receiving it. You must then teach it to Arjuna, and with it he will be able to accomplish what needs to be done.

Pandava, let Arjuna go to Mahendra and Rudra, and to Varuna, and Kubera, and to Yama, and from them receive their astras. For his asceticism and prowess, he is fit to look upon the gods. Why, this Arjuna is in truth a Rishi of immense tejas, he is Narayana's friend Nara, the ancient, a god himself, invincible, always attended on by success, knowing no decay.

He will perform mighty deeds, once he receives their weapons from Indra, Rudra and the Lokapalas.

Also, think of leaving here and going to another forest in which to live. It is hardly pleasant to live in one place for too long a time. In your case, it might also cause the hermits here some anxiety. And as you maintain so

many Brahmanas, knowers of the Vedas and their angas, for you to live here too long might deplete the forest of its deer, and its creepers and plants.'

Now, Yudhishtira purifies himself, and Vyasa, of great wisdom, who knows the mysteries of the world, teaches him the Pratismriti, best of hermetic mantras. Then, quickly bidding farewell to Kunti's son, Vyasa vanishes before his eyes.

Having received the Pratismriti, the virtuous Yudhishtira treasures it carefully in his mind and always chants it at the proper times. Glad of Vyasa's advice, the son of Kunti now leaves the Dwaitavana and goes to the Kamyaka forest on the banks of the Saraswati.

Rajan, numberless ascetic Brahmanas follow him as Rishis do Indra. Arriving in the Kamyaka, those illustrious Bharatarishabhas begin living in that vana, along with their friends and attendants. Listening all the while to the Vedas being chanted, devoting themselves to the practice of archery, those mighty Kshatriyas live in that forest for some length of time.

Every day, armed with pure arrows, they go deep into the jungle in seach of deer. And they dutifully perform all the rites in honour of the Pitrs, the Devas and the Brahmanas."

CANTO 37

ARJUNABHIGAMANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "After some time, Yudhishtira rememebers the command of Muni Vyasa and calls Arjuna, bull among men, possessed of great wisdom, to him privately.

Taking Arjuna's hands, with a smile, Yudhishtira appears lost in thought for a moment, before saying gently to Arjuna, 'Bhaarata, all of the astra shastra, the sciene of warfare, dwells in Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Aswatthama. They are masters of every sort of Brahmastra, Devastra, Manavastra and Vayavyastra, as well as the means to loose and repel them.

Dhritarashtra's son conciliates, honours and pleases all of them; he treats them all as a sishya his gurus. Why, Duryodhana treats all his warriors with great affection; all his allied chieftains he honours and gratifies, and in turn they seek his weal. They will not fail to put forth their might on his behalf.

Besides, remember, the whole world, all its cities, towns and villages, all its seas, forests and mountains, are now under Duryodhana's sway. Arjuna, you are our only refuge and a great burden rests on you. Parantapa, I want you to do something for me now.

Vyasa Muni taught me a secret science. If you use it, the very universe will lie revealed before you. Child, receive that Pratismriti from me, and through it, in due course, find the grace of the gods. Bharatarishabha, first you must devote yourself to a fierce tapasya.

Taking your bow and your sword, wearing mail, keeping stern vows, travel north without giving way to anybody. Arjuna, Indra has all the Devastras because, when they feared Vritrasura, the other gods all invested their might in Sakra. Indra has all the weapons of heaven; go to him and he will give them to you.

Take your bow, and set out even today to see Indra Purandara.'

Yudhishtira Dharmatma teaches Arjuna the Pratismriti, with all the proper rituals. Having communicated the secret gyana to his heroic younger brother, restrained in speech, action and mind, Yudhishtira commands him to go forth. Arjuna takes up the Gandiva and his inexhaustible twin quivers, puts on his kavacha, and his finger guards made of the skin of the iguana.

Pouring oblations into a sacred fire and giving gifts to the Brahmanas and having them utter blessings over him, Arjuna sets out from the Kamyaka vana to find Indra. As he goes, bow in hand, that Kshatriya heaves a sigh and casts a look heavenwards so that he might kill Dhritarashtra's sons.

Seeing Kunti's son, armed and about to go forth, Siddhas and invisible spirits say to him, 'Kaunteya, may you get what your hearts desires.'

The Brahmanas also bless him, 'Achieve your purpose, let victory truly be yours!'

And seeing heroic Arjuna, his thighs like trunks of Sala trees, about to set out, and taking with him the hearts of all, Draupadi says fervently, 'Mahabaho, let everything that Kunti wished for when you were born, and everything that you wish for be yours, Dhananjaya!

Let none among us ever be born again into Kshatriya kind. I always bow down to Brahmanas, who live through mendicancy.

Ah, my great sorrow is that, seeing me in the sabha of Kshatriyas, the wretched Duryodhana called me a cow! Many other savage things he said to me in that assembly of princes, and they are raw wounds. But the grief and pain that I experience at parting from you makes all those insults seem as nothing.

Surely, while you are gone your brothers will spend their days recounting your deeds. Certainly, in your absence, your brothers will while away their waking hours in recalling your heroic deeds, over and over. But Arjuna, if you stay away for long, we will have no pleasure or any joy in our lives. Why, our very lives will become despicable.

Partha, our weal and woe, life and death, our kingdom and prosperity all depend on you. Bhaarata, I bless you, let success be yours! Sinless one, you will accomplish your mission even against the most powerful enemies. Mahabaho, go swiftly and win success. Let no danger be yours.

I bow to Dhatri and Vidhatri! I bless you, let prosperity be yours.

Dhananjaya, let Hri, Sri, Kirti, Dhriti, Pushti, Uma, Lakshmi and Saraswati, all protect you on your way, for you always worship your elder brother and always obey his commands.

I pray to the Vasus, the Rudras and Adityas, the Marutas, the Viswadevas, and the Sadhyas, for your welfare. O Bhaarata, be safe from all evil spirits of earth, sky and heaven, and from all evil spirits in general!'

Crying out these blessings, Yagnasena's daughter Krishnaa stops. Arjuna walks in pradakshina around his brothers, and around Dhaumya, and again taking up his beautiful bow, sets out.

Every creature moves hastily out of the path which the Pandava takes, on his way to meet Indra. Many mountains, homes to countless sannyasis, the bane of his enemies passes over and arrives at the sacred Himavat, resort of the Devas. The Mahatman reaches the holy mountain in a single day, for like the wind he is gifted with the mind's very speed due to his asceticism and the Pratismriti he received from his brother.

Having crossed Himavat, as also Gandhamadana, he passes through diverse uneven and dangerous places, walking night and day without fatigue. And reaching Indrakila, Dhananjaya halts, for he hears a voice in the sky, saying, 'Stop!'

The Pandava looks around him and Arjuna Savyasachin sees a hermit sitting under a tree, an ascetic quite ablaze with Brahmic lustre, his skin tawny, his hair matted into jata, an emaciated sannyasi.

Seeing Arjuna, the ascetic says to him, 'Who are you, child, come here with a bow and arrows, wearing kavacha, a sword, and obviously a Kshatriya? There is no need of weapons here. This is the abode of peaceful Brahmanas devoted to tapasya, who have no anger or pleasure.

There is no use for your bow here, for here there is no dispute of any kind. Child, throw away that bow of yours. You have found grace by coming here, Kshatriya, for truly no man is your equal in energy and prowess.'

Smiling, that Brahmana says this repeatedly to Arjuna. But Arjuna, set firmly on his course, is unmoved.

Then, smiling even more, the Brahmana says, 'Parantapa, be you blest! I am Indra, ask for the boon you want.'

Arjuna bends his head, folds his hands, and replies to him of a thousand eyes, 'Illustrious, give me all your astras, that is the boon I want.'

The king of the Devas, still smiling, says, 'Dhananjaya, when you have come to this blessed place what need have you of astras? You have already found beatitude. Ask me for any realms of bliss that you want.'

Arjuna replies to the thousand-eyed Sakra, 'I want no realms of bliss, nor even to become a god, then why speak of joy? Lord of the Devas, I do not wish for the prosperity of even all the gods.

For if I leave my brothers in the forest, and not avenge myself on our enemies, I will earn infamy forever throughout the world, through all the ages.'

Now, the slayer of Vritra, whom the worlds worship, says gently to the Pandava, 'Child, I will give you all the devastras when you can see the three-eyed Trisulin, Siva, Lord of all creatures. So, seek a vision of Mahadeva, greatest of Gods, because it is only after you have seen him, Kaunteya, that you will have everything you wish for.'

Saying this to Phalguna, Indra vanishes and Arjuna sets himself to tapasya, staying in that very place."

CANTO 38

KAIRATA PARVA

Janemejaya said, "Illustrious one, tell me every detail of how the taintless Arjuna acquired the devastras. Tell me how Arjuna, Purushavyaghra, the mighty-armed, entered that solitary forest without fear. Also, Best among those who know the Veda, what did he do whilst he lived in that forest?

How did he gratify Siva Sthanu and Indra, as well? Dvijottama, bless me by telling me all this. You are omniscient; you know all about the gods and about men. O Brahmana, I have heard that the battle that look place of old between Arjuna and Bhava was most extraordinary and without parallel.

I have heard it makes one's hair stand on end to listen to it. Even the hearts of those lions among men—the valiant sons of Pritha—trembled to hear about it, in wonder, joy, and a sense of their own inferiority.

O tell me everything else that Arjuna did. I do not see even the most trivial thing about Jishnu which is censurable. So, narrate in full the legend of that Kshatriya, that hero."

Vaisampayana said, "Tiger among Kurus, I will narrate the story of that peerless Kshatriya to you, a tale excellent, extensive and unrivalled. Sinless one, hear in detail about Arjuna's meeting with the three-eyed God of gods, and his contact with the illustrious God's person!

At Yudhishtira's command, Dhananjaya of immeasurable prowess sets out from the Kamyaka to see Sakra, lord of the Devas; and Sankara, the God of gods. Arjuna Mahabaho sets out armed with his unearthly bow, his golden-hafted sword; north he goes towards the summit of the Himavat.

Rajan, the best of all warriors in the three worlds, Indra's son, firmly committed to his mission, calms his mind and losing no time devotes himself to fervid tapasya. All alone, he enters that terrible forest full of thorny plants and trees, dense with flowers and fruit of every kind, swarming with wild animals and birds of many species, a vana where Siddhas and Charanas went.

When Arjuna enters that forest, where no human being goes, heaven resounds with conches and drumrolls, and a rain of flowers falls upon the earth, while clouds spread across the sky darkening the earth below. Passing through the dense jungles at the foot of the great mountains, Arjuna soon

reaches the breast of the Himavat; staying there for some time at penance, he shines forth with his dhyana.

He sees great trees, their branches alive with the songs of countless birds. He sees rivers flowing like fluid lapis lazuli, their currents broken by fierce eddies here and there, and echoing with the calls of swan, duck and crane. The banks of those rivers echo with the mellifluous songs of the male kokila and the cries of peacocks.

Seeing those sacred rivers, their waters, pure and sweet, their banks enchanting, the mighty warrior is filled with delight. Arjuna of fierce energy and high soul then performs a stern tapasya in that charmed place.

Wearing valkala and a black deerskin, he holds a stick in his hand and eats only dry leaves fallen onto the ground. The first month, he also eats some fruit once every three nights; the second month he eats fruit once every six nights; and the third month, only once a fortnight.

When the fourth month comes, that Bharatottama, Pandu's mightiest son, does not eat at all but subsists on just the air he breathes. His arms raised up, standing on tiptoe, he continues his penance. Because he bathes frequently, his hair assumes the sheen of lightning, or of the lotus.

Now all the great Rishis go together to the God of the Pinaka, Siva, to inform him of Arjunas tapasya.

Bowing to the God of gods, they say, 'Pritha's son, of great tejas, performs the most difficult penance upon the breast of the Himavat. Heated by his tapasya, the Earth issues smoke all around, O Devadeva. We do not know what his tapasya is for, but he causes us distress. You must make him stop, Lord!'

Pasupati, Umapati, Siva listens to those Munis of perfect self-restraint, and says, 'It does not become you to grieve over Phalguna's tapasya. Return, all of you, to where you came from; go in peace. I know the desire that is in Arjuna's heart. He does not want heaven, wealth or a long life. I will give him, even today, everything he wishes for!'

The Rishis of truth hear what Mahadeva says and go back to their respective asramas and dwellings."

CANTO 39

KAIRATA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the illustrious Munis have left, Siva, who cleanses all sins, the lustrous Hara, assumes the form of a Kirata, a huntsman as resplendent as a golden tree, with a great and stalwart form like a second Meru, and taking up a handsome bow and arrows resembling snakes of virulent poison, and looking like an embodiment of fire, comes quickly down onto the breast of Himavat.

The beautiful Lord comes with Uma in the guise of a Kirata woman, and also with a motley swarm of merry spirits, his ganas, of various forms and attire, and thousands of women also in the form and garb of Kiratas.

Rajan, all that forest suddenly blazes up in splendour, at the arrival of Siva and his company; soon enough, a solemn stillness pervades the place. The sounds of springs, and rivers and birds all suddenly cease.

As Mahadeva approaches Pritha's irreproachable son, he sees an extraordinary thing – the Danava Muka, taking the form of an enormous boar, has come to kill Arjuna. Seeing the demon, Arjuna picks up the Gandiva and some arrows like serpents.

Stringing his bow and filling the air with its twang, he says to the boar, 'I have come here but done you no harm. But you want to kill me, so I will send you to Yama.'

Seeing Phalguna about to kill the boar, Siva disguised as the Kirata suddenly says, 'Stop! I aimed first at the beast the colour of the Indrakila mountain.'

Ignoring him, Arjuna shoots the boar; at the same moment the splendid Kirata also lets fly an arrow like fire at the boar. Both shafts strike Muka's massive body, hard as adamant, at the same instant.

The two astras strike Muka with a sound like Indra's Vajra and the thunder of clouds falling together upon a mountain. Each astra emits countless arrows like snakes with mouths ablaze, and Muka dies, and assumes again his dreadful Rakshasa form in death.

Arjuna now sees the Kirata before him, the mountain hunter whose form blazes like a God's, surrounded by many women. His heart strangely joyful, Kunti's son says smilingly, 'Who are you that wander in this solitary forest,

surrounded by women? O you of the splendour of gold, are you not afraid of this terrible forest?

Why did you shoot the boar? This Rakshasa came here to kill me and I aimed at him first. You will not escape with your life. You have flouted the law of the hunt, and so, O Kirata, I will take your life.'

The Kirata says to the Pandava, softly, 'Kshatriya do not fear for me in this forest, which is our home. But why are you here amidst its danger? Yogi, we live here amongst all the wild creatures, but why are you, who are delicate, raised in luxury, and splendid as agni, here in this lonely place?'

Arjuna says, 'Depending on this Gandiva and arrows which are like fire, I live here like a second Indra. You saw how I despatched the monstrous Rakshasa who came as a boar.'

The Kirata replies, 'I shot the Rakshasa first. I killed him and sent him to Yama. It was my arrow which slew him. You are arrogant of your strength, and blame others for your own faults. Wretch, you are the guilty one and shall not escape with your life today.

Come, I will loose my arrows at you. You do the same!'

Arjuna becomes angry and attacks the Kirata with fierce arrows. However, the Kirata cheerfully receives those deadly shafts upon his breast, saying all the while, 'Wretch, come shoot your most terrible astras at me, shafts which can consume a man's very entrails!'

Arjuna looses a rain of missiles at him. Now the Kirata also shoots back fiercely at Arjuna, storms of barbs, each one like a virulent serpent. Arjuna looses a perfect volley which falls out of the sky over the huntsman, who stands unmoved, unharmed, like some invincible mountain.

Seeing this, Arjuna is full of awe and thinks, 'Wonderful! Wonderful! Ah, a delicate-limbed mountaineer who lives on the heights of Himavat calmly bears arrows shot from the Gandiva. Who is he? Is he Rudra himself, or some other Deva, or a Yaksha, or an Asura?

The Devas do sometimes come down to the summits of Himavat, but only he that wields the Pinaka can stand a thousand arrows shot from the Gandiva. Let him be a Deva or a Yaksha; unless he is Rudra himself, I will send him to Yamaloka!'

Arjuna looses hundreds of arrows, resplendent as sunrays. The lustrous Creator of the worlds, the Trisulin, calmly bears those shafts as a mountain might a shower of stones. Suddenly, Arjuna finds he has no arrows left! In

some alarm, now, he thinks of Agni who gave him his inexhaustible quivers when the Khandava vana burned.

Arjuna thinks, 'My arrows are exhausted. Now what shall I shoot from my bow? Who is this who consumes all my astras? But I will kill him with the tip of my bow, as elephants are killed with spears, and send him to land of the mace-wielding Yama!'

Arjuna rushes at the Kirata, and strikes him some thunderous blows with the Gandiva, at which the mountaineer deftly snatches the divine bow out of the Pandavas hands. Arjuna draws his sword and with all his might, wanting to end this duel, brings it down squarely on the Kirata's head. That blade cuts the hardest rocks like pats of butter, but that best of swords shatters into bits when it touches the Kirata's crown.

The desperate Arjuna now attacks the Kirata with trees and stones; the mountain huntsman bears these rough weapons as calmly as he had arrows, bow and sword. Frothing at the mouth, Arjuna strikes the Kirata some dreadful blows with his fists, blows like thunderclaps. Now the Kirata strikes Phalguna back, and the sounds they make are truly fearsome.

That battery of blows exchanged, which resembles the fight of old between Vritra and Vasava, lasts only moments. The mighty Jishnu clasps the Kirata to him and presses him hard with powerful arms, while the huntsman presses back, so their bodies burn like charcoals in fire, and smoke.

Abruptly, Mahadeva strikes the already beaten Pandava and makes him unconscious, and the bruised and battered Arjuna falls down as one dead. However, he regains consciousness, and rising, his body covered in blood, he is filled with despair.

He prostrates in his mind before Siva, and fashioning an earthen linga of that God, he worships it with a vanamala, a wildflower garland. But he sees the garland he offered the linga of clay decking the crown of the Kirata! Joy surges through the Pandava and he prostrates at the feet of the Kirata. Siva becomes pleased with Arjuna.

Seeing the wonder of Pandu's son, seeing his body emaciated by long austerities, Rudra says to him in a voice deep as rumbling clouds, 'Phalguna, I am pleased with you, for what you just did is without parallel. No Kshatriya is your equal in courage, and patience; and, sinless, why your strength and valour are almost equal to mine!

Mahabaho, I am pleased with you. Behold me, O Bharatarishabha! I will give you sight to see my true form. You were a Rishi before. You will vanquish all your enemies, even those that dwell in heaven. Since I am pleased with you, I will give you an inexorable astra, my own astra. You shall have it soon.'

Then Arjuna sees Siva, God of ineffable splendour in his true form — Mahadeva, who wields the Pinaka, who dwells on Kailasa, with Uma at his side. Falling onto his kness, bowing his head, that conqueror of hostile cities, Pritha's son worships the Lord Hara.

Arjuna says, 'O Kapardin, O Devadeva, O You who put out Bhaga's eyes, Nilakanta, O You with matted jata, I know you are the Cause of all causes, O Three-eyed, O Lord of all!

You are the sanctuary of all the gods; this universe has sprung from you! Not the three worlds of Devas, Asuras and Manavas together can vanquish you. You are Siva in the form of Vishnu and Vishnu as Siva.

Of old, you razed Daksha's great yagna. O Hari, O Rudra, I bow to you! You have a third eye on your brow. O Sarva, who shower the objects of desire, O Trisulin, O Pinakin, O Surya, O You of the pure body, O Creator of all, I bow to you!

Lord of all creatures, I crave your grace with my worship. You are the Lord of the Ganas, the Source of every blessing in the universe, the Cause of the causes of the universe. You are beyond the greatest Purusha, you are the highest, you are the subtlest, O Hara!

Lustrous Sankara, I beg you to forgive my offence. I came to this great mountain, so dear to you, home of Yogis, to have a vision of you, whom all the worlds worship.

Lord, I worship you to have your grace. Rashly and in ignorance did I dare to fight you. O Sankara, I seek your protection, forgive me for what I did!'

Mighty Siva, whose emblem is the Bull, takes Arjuna's handsome hands into his own, and says smilingly to him, 'I have already forgiven you!'

Brilliant Hara clasps Arjuna lovingly in his arms and consoles him again."

CANTO 40

KAIRATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Mahadeva says, 'You were Narayana's friend Nara in your past life. You sat in fierce tapasya in Badarikasrama for many thousands of years. In you dwells great might, even as it does in Vishnu, that Purushottama. You both, through your might, are the holders of the universe.

During Indra's coronation, with your great bow whose twanging is like the roar of thunderheads, you and Krishna, as well, chastened the Danavas. The Gandiva is that bow, O Partha, it belongs in your hands. I took it from you with my maya, and your twin quivers shall again be inexhaustible!

Partha, Kurunandana, the bruises will leave your body, and it shall be free forever from pain and disease. Your prowess shall be invincible. I am pleased with you, ask me, best among all men, for the boon you want.

Parantapa, you who worships me, not in heaven is there anyone who is your equal, nor any Kshatriya who is your superior.'

Arjuna says, 'Illustrious Vrishabhdhvaja, if you would grant my wish, Lord, give me your own Pasupatastra of dreadful power, which destroys all the universe at the end of the Yuga; that weapon through which, Devadeva, with your grace, I can be victorious over Karna the vile-tongued, Bhishma, Kripa and Drona; with which I can kill Danavas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Gandharvas and Nagas; the astra which when loosed with the proper mantras emits thousands of arrows, fierce maces, narachas like serpents.

O Destroyer of the eyes of Bhaga, this is my first wish so that I can prevail over our powerful enemies.'

Siva replies, 'Mighty one, I will give you my favourite astra, the Pasupata. Pandava, you are capable of bearing, loosing and withdrawing it. Not Indra, Yama, Kubera king of the Yakshas, Varuna, or Vayu know it – then how could man know anything of it?

But, Partha, this astra must not be loosed without adequate cause, because if it is loose against an enemy of small might it can consume the very universe. In the three worlds, with all their mobile and immobile creatures, there is no one whom this astra cannot consume. You can cast it with your mind, your eye, through words and with your bow.'

Arjuna now purifies himself, comes to the Lord of the universe and says with rapt attention, 'Instruct me!'

Mahadeva gives that best of Pandu's sons the knowledge of that weapon, which looks like an embodiment of Yama, together with all the mysteries about loosing and withdrawing it. Now that astra begins to wait upon Arjuna as it does on Sankara. Gladly, too, does Arjuna receive it.

At that moment all the Earth trembles – its mountains, forests, trees, seas, villages, towns, cities, mines. Thousands of conches, drums and horns resound. Whirlwinds and hurricanes sweep land and sea.

The Devas and the Danavas see that terrible weapon stay beside Arjuna of measureless tejas, in its embodied form. Whatever evil there had been in the body of Phalguna is all dispelled by the touch of the three-eyed God.

Three-eyed Siva commands Arjuna, 'Go into Swarga!'

Bending his head, Arjuna worships the God, then gazes at him with folded hands. The Lord of all who dwells in heaven, He who dwells upon mountains, Uma's lord, the Mahayogin whose passions are under perfect control, the source of all blessings, gives Arjuna, best of men, back the Gandiva, bane of Danavas and Pisachas.

As Arjuna watches, Siva, Uma beside him, ascends into the sky, vanishing from that blessed mountain with snowy tablelands, valleys and caves, favourite haunt of sky-ranging Maharishis."

CANTO 41

KAIRATA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Siva, whose emblem is the Bull, who wields the Pinaka, vanishes from Arjuna's sight even as the Sun sets on the world.

Arjuna Parantapa is full of awe. He exults, Ah, I have seen the God of gods. Fortunate indeed am I, and greatly favoured, for I have both seen and touched with my hands the three-eyed Hara, in his boon-giving form.

I will win success. I am already great. My enemies have already been vanquished by me. My purposes have already been achieved!'

As he stands thinking all this, suddenly Varuna, Lord of waters, appears before Arjuna, handsome and splendid beyond belief and of the hue of lapis lazuli, surrounded by all manner of aquatic beings, and filling all the points of the horizon with blazing effulgence.

Varuna Deva, lord of all creatures of water, comes with the Rivers—male and female—and Nagas, and Daityas and Sadhyas and lesser deities.

Then Kubera, whose body is like the purest gold, arrives in his splendent vimana, numerous Yakshas coming with him. The most beautiful Lord of treasures, also illumining the sky with his lustre, comes to see Arjuna.

Yama himself, also magnificently beautiful, mighty destroyer of all the worlds, comes to that place, and with him those lords of creation, the Pitrs, both embodied and disembodied. Yama of inconceivable soul, dispenser of justice, destroyer of all enemies, the son of Surya, also flies here in his vimana, mace in hand, lighting up the three worlds, and the realms of the Guhyakas, the Gandharvas and the Nagas even like a second Sun, rising at Yuganta.

Arriving there, upon three refulgent summits of the great mountain, those Lokapalas see Arjuna at his tapasya.

Next moment, the blindingly bright Indra also arrives, with his queen Sachi, upon his mount Airavata, and with all the Devas around him. With the sovereign white parasol unfurled over his head, he looks like the full moon among fleecy clouds.

Eulogised by Gandharvas, and Rishis endowed with a wealth of tapasya, the king of the Devas alights upon a peak of that mountain, like another

Sun.

Now Yama of fathomless intelligence, who knows the depths of dharma, says from his peak in a cloud-deep voice, these auspicious words, Arjuna, look, we the Lokapalas have come here! We will grant you spiritual vision, for you deserve to behold us.

In a past life you were the Rishi Nara of immeasurable soul, of plumbless might. Child, at Brahma's command, you have been born among men. Anagha, sinless, you will vanquish that most righteous grandsire of the Kurus in war, Bhishma of tameless energy, born of the Vasus.

You will also defeat all the ferocious Kshatriyas commanded by the son of Bharadwaja. Besides, you will quell all the terrible Danavas who have incarnated as men, as well as the Danavas on high called the Nivatakavachas.

Dhananjaya, Kurunandana, you will also kill the mighty Karna, who is an amsa of my father Surya, his tejas celebrated throughout the worlds. Kaunteya, Parantapa, you will also kill all the amsavataras of the Danavas and Rakshasas who have been born into the world as men; and slain by you, these will attain the realms they have earned through their karma.

And, O Phalguna, the legend and fame of your achievements will last for ever in the world, for you have pleased Siva himself with your prowess. With Krishna, you will lighten the burden of the Earth.

Here, take this mace, this inexorable danda of mine. With this weapon you will accomplish great things.'

Pritha's son receives that weapon from Yama, and the secret mantras for casting and withdrawing it.

Now Varuna, Lord of all water beings, blue as seas, says from a peak on which he has perched towards the west, 'Son of Pritha, you are the greatest Kshatriya, and you engage in Kshatriya dharma.

Look at me, O you with the large coppery eyes! I am Varuna, the lord of waters. No one can resist my fluid pasas, my weapons that are deadly nooses. Kaunteya, receive these Varunastras and the secrets of casting and withdrawing them. During the Devasura yuddha of old, which began because of Brihaspati's wife Tara, these pasas seized and bound thousands of mighty Daityas.

Here, take them from me. With these in your hands, even if Yama himself is your adversary, he will not escape you. When you range over the

field of war with my pasas, be certain that the land will become destitute of Kshatriyas.'

When Varuna and Yama have given Arjuna their weapons, Kubera, lord of treasures, who dwells on the heights of Kailasa, says, 'O mighty and wise Pandava, I am also pleased with you, and this meeting with you gives me as much pleasure as a meeting with Krishna.

Savyasachin, Mahabaho, once you were a Deva, eternal and immortal. On ancient Kailasa, you performed tapasya with the rest of us. Best of men, I grant you celestial vision. Mighty-armed, you will vanquish even invincible Daityas and Danavas.

Here, take from me, also, a great weapon with which you will consume the legions of Dhritarashtra. Take then this favourite weapon of mine, the Antardhana of awesome energy, power and splendour. It will make your enemies sleep.

When the illustrious Sankara razed Tripura, he loosed this astra and consumed countless great Asuras. Magnificent Arjuna, as dignified as Meru, you are capable of wielding this weapon.'

Arjuna the Kuru prince duly receives that celestial weapon from Kubera.

Now the king of the Devas himself, great Indra, speaks to Pritha's son sweetly, in a voice deep as thunderheads rumbling or a battery of great bass drums. 'Kaunteya, Mahabaho, you are an ancient God. Already, you have achieved the highest success, and acquired the status of a Deva. But, O Parantapa, scourge of your enemies, you have yet to accomplish a mission for the Devas.

You must ascend into Devaloka. So, prepare yourself, splendid Kshatriya! My own chariot, with Matali its sarathy, will soon fly down to the earth. I will bring you to Devaloka in it, and there give you all my Devastras.'

Arjuna is wonderstruck to see the four Lokapalas together upon the summits of Himavat. He worships them with japa, water, and fruit. The Devas return his worship, then vanish, going back to their abodes.

Arjuna, Bull among men, is full of joy to have received the astras of Varuna, Yama and Kubera. He considers himself one whose tapasya has been fulfilled and crowned with success."

CANTO 42

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "After the Lokapalas leave, Arjuna Parantapa begins to think of the chariot of Indra. Even as he does, that vimana of tremendous resplendence, Matali its sarathy, comes, dividing the clouds and illumining the sky, and filling all the firmament with a roar deeper than those of massed thunderclouds. Across its form are gleaming swords, astras with dreadful forms, maces too frightful to be described, winged arrows of unearthly splendour, streaks of dazzling lightning, thunderbolts, whirling propellors and jets, all creating that deafening sound.

Also in that chariot are fierce and immense Nagas with flaming mouths, with precious gemstones on their hoods white as fleecy clouds. Tens of thousands of golden coloured horses, swift as the wind, draw that chariot. Endowed with maya, so swift is that chariot that the eye can hardly mark its flight.

Arjuna sees the flagstaff Vaijayanta, effulgent, of the hue of the emerald or the deep blue lotus, decked with golden ornaments and straight as a bamboo stalk. Seeing a charioteer wearing gold sitting in that ratha, the mighty Partha knows this is a chariot of the Devas.

As he stands thinking about this, the sarathy Matali descends from the ratha, and bending down, says, 'Most fortunate son of Sakra! Sakra himself wishes to see you. Come now, Indra has sent this chariot.

Your father, the God of a hundred yagnas, king of the Devas, said to me, "Fetch Kunti's son here, and let the Devas see him."

Sakra himself, surrounded by the Devas, Devarishis, Gandharvas and Apsaras, waits to see you. At the command of the chastiser of Paka, therefore, come with me to Devaloka. You will return after receiving the astras of Indra.'

Arjuna replies, 'O Matali, lose no time but mount your wondrous ratha, which cannot be attained even after hundreds of Rajasuya and Aswamedha yagnas. Not kings of great wealth who performed Mahayagnas distinguished by vast gifts to Brahmanas, why, not the Devas and Danavas do not ride in this vimana.

He who does not have the wealth of tapasya cannot see or even touch this chariot, far less ride in it. Blessed Matali, after you have climbed into it and the horses have become still, I will follow you like a virtuous man stepping onto the high path of dharma.'

Indra's sarathy climbs back into the marvellous ratha and makes his horses still. His heart full of joy, Arjuna purifies himself with a bath in the Ganga; Kunti's son silently says his daily prayers and makes water offerings, tarpana, to his Pitrs.

Finally, he prays to Mandara, that king of mountains, 'O you who are the sanctuary of holy, heaven-seeking Sages, it is through your grace, O Mountain, that Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas attain Swarga, and then, their anxieties gone, sport with the gods.

O King of mountains, you are the refuge of Munis, and bear many most sacred tirthas upon your breast. Happily have I dwelt upon your heights. I leave you now, bidding you farewell. How long my eyes have dwelt on your tablelands and bowers, your sparkling springs and brooks, and your sacred shrines.

I have eaten the delicious fruit which grow upon your trees, and slaked my thrist with the scented, nectarine water of your streams, sweet as amrita. O Mandara, as a child sleeps happily on the lap of his father, so have I, King of mountains, dwelt and slept upon you, in woods that ring with the songs of Apsaras and the chanting of the Vedas.

O Mountain, every day I have spent upon you I have spent in joy!'

Thus bidding farewell to the mountain, Arjuna, slayer of foes, bright as the Sun himself, climbs into the celestial chariot. Joyfully, then, he courses through the sky in that divine and extraordinary vimana, brilliant as a star.

Once he has vanished from the sight of mortals of the Earth, Arjuna sees thousands of sky ships of extraordinary beauty. And in that realm, there is no Sun, Moon or Fire to give light, but it is lustrous of itself, lit by tapasya! The Pandava sees that the stars, which appear like minuscule lamps from the Earth are in fact great and huge, of exceptional beauty and brilliance.

There he sees Rajarishis, in hundreds upon hundreds, whose lives had been crowned by ascetic success; he sees them ablaze, and also heroes who had given their lives in battle; and men who had gained Swarga through tapasya.

And there are also Gandharvas, illustrious as suns, thousands and thousands of them, as also Guhyakas, Rishis and numerous tribes of

Apsaras. Arjuna is wonderstruck, exhilarated, seeing these self-luminous realms and beings, and asks Matali about them.

And Matali answers gladly, "These, O son of Pritha, are virtuous beings stationed in their places. It is these whom you have seen, great one, as stars from the Earth.'

Now Arjuna sees the gates to Indra's own realm, and standing there, the magnificent, always triumphant elephant Airavata, four-tusked, and resembling the Mountain Kailasa with its peaks. Coursing along that path of the Siddhas, that best of the Kurus, that son of Pandu, sits in beauty even like Mandhata, greatest of the kings of old.

He of the eyes like lotus leaves passes through that realm set apart for kings of dharma. Thus flying through many regions of Swarga, Arjuna of great renown finally sees Amaravati, the city of Indra."

CANTO 43

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Indra's city, resort of Siddhas and Charanas, is beautiful past describing. Flowers of every season adorn it, and sacred trees of all kinds. Arjuna sees the divine garden Nandana, favourite haunt of Apsaras. Fanned by fragrant breezes charged with the scents of unearthly flowers, the trees of that garden and their lord of celestial blossoms seem to welcome him among them.

This is a realm that none can see who has not performed tapasya or poured libations on sacred fire. Only the virtuous ever come here, and none that ever turn their backs on the field of battle. None who have not performed sacrifices, kept stern vows, or who are not knowers of the Veda, or who have not bathed in sacred waters, or who are not distinguished for sacrifices and gifts can ever see this realm.

None can ever see this place who ever disturbed a yagna, or who are base, or who drink intoxicating liquor, or who violate their Guru's bed, or who eat unsanctified meat, or who are evil can ever come to the enchanted Nandana.

Having seen those celestial gardens full of soft divine music, the strong-armed son of Pandu enters Indra's city. He sees vimanas here, in thousands, which can fly anywhere at all at will, each kept in its place; he also sees tens of thousands of more such craft flying in every dircetion.

Fanned by flower-scented breezes, Apsaras and Gandharvas sing the Pandavas praises. Along with the Siddhas and Maharishis, the Devas joyfully welcome Pritha's son of white deeds, pouring blessings over him, while divine music plays.

Arjuna hears conches and drums, and eulogised all round, at Indra's behest, the Pandava goes to the great starry way known as Suravithi, where he meets with the Sadhyas, the Viswas, the Marutas, the twin Aswins, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Brahmarishis of great splendour, and numerous Rajarishis with Dilipa at their head, and Tumburu and Narada, and that pair of master Gandharvas known as Haha and Huhu.

Having met and duly worshipped all these, the Kuru prince finally sees before him the king of the Devas, Indra of a hundred yagnas. Arjuna alights

from the chariot and approaches the Deva king—his father—the chastiser of Paka.

A great and beautiful white parasol, with a golden staff, is unfurled over Devendra's head; he is fanned by a chamara whisk scented with the perfumes of heaven. Many Gandharvas, led by Viswavasu and others, hymn Indra, as do bards and singers, while the loftiest Brahmanas chant Rik and Yajur mantras.

Kunti's son approaches Indra and bends his head down to the ground before him. Whereupon, Indra embraces him with round, mighty arms. Taking Arjuna's hand, Sakra makes him sit beside him on a part of his own throne, that sacred throne which the Devas and Rishis worship.

Indra, Parantapa, sniffs the top of his son's head in affection, and even took him onto his lap. Sitting on Sakra's throne, at the command of that God of a thousand eyes, Pritha's son of immeasurable tejas begins to blaze in splendour, like a second Indra.

Moved again by love, Indra, slayer of Vritra, comforts Arjuna, touching his handsome face with his scented, beautiful hands. Repeatedly patting and stroking with his hands, which bear the sign of the thunderbolt, Arjuna's mighty arms, which are like two golden columns, hardened by years of a bowstring being drawn across them, Indra and his son appear like the Sun and the Moon illumining the beauty of that divine sabha, as they do the sky on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight.

A band of Gandharvas headed by Tumburu, masters of music both sacred and profane, sing many rapturously melodious songs. Ghritachi and Menaka and Rambha and Purvachitti and Swayamprabha and Urvasi and Misrakesi and Dandagauri and Varuthini and Gopali and Sahajanya and Kumbhayoni and Prajagara and Chitrasena and Chitralekha and Saha and Madhuraswara – these and thousands of others, all with eyes like lotus leaves, who engage in seducing the hearts of men at tapasya, dance there.

Slim are their waists and ample and fair their hips, as they dance, their bodies twisting sinuously, with astonishing suppleness and agility, and deep bosoms shaking, casting their alluring glances around, and otherwise enticing those that watch them."

CANTO 44

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Knowing Indra's wishes, the Devas and the Gandharvas procure a most excellent arghya and worship the son of Pritha. Giving him water to wash his feet and his face, they bring the Kshatriya into Indra's palace.

Thus worshipped, Jishnu begins to live in his father's home, and while he is there, he acquires the Devastras, and the secrets of loosing and withdrawing them. From Sakra's hands he receives Indra's favourite weapon, the inexorable Vajra, and other astras too, all awesome – heaven's very gashes of lightning, vari-coloured as clouds and dancing peacocks' fans.

When he has all these astras, Arjuna remembers his brothers and misses them. However, at Indra's command he spends full five years in Devaloka, ensconced amidst every comfort and luxury.

After some time, Indra says to him, "Kaunteya, learn music and dancing from Chitrasena. Learn the instrumental music of the gods, which does not exist in the world of men, for, O son of Kunti, it will benefit you."

And Purandara gives Chitrasena as a friend to Arjuna, who lives happily and in peace with that Gandharva. All the while, Chitrasena teaches Arjuna music, both singing and the instruments; he teaches him dancing.

However, Arjuna is restless and has no peace, because thoughts of Subala's son Sakuni, the game of dice, angry thoughts of Dussasana and of killing him, roil the Pandava. But his friendship with Chitrasena ripens and he does learn the unrivalled dance and music of the Gandharvas.

Finally, even after having learned all the various forms of song and instruments, and dance as well, that Parantapa still finds no peace of mind, thinking constantly of his brothers and his mother Kunti."

CANTO 45

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "One day, knowing that Arjuna's glances turn repeatedly to the Apsara Urvasi, Indra calls Chitrasena to him privately and says, 'King of Gandharvas, go as my messenger to that best of Apsaras, Urvasi, and let her wait upon my son Arjuna, tiger among men.

Tell her that I said, "Even as I have caused Arjuna to learn the secrets of all the astras, as well as all the arts, worshipped by everyone, so should you make him conversant with the arts of disporting himself in feminine company!'"

Chitrasena goes at once to Urvasi, most beautiful among Apsaras. She honours and delights him with her welcome and the worship she offers him.

When he sits at his ease, he says to Urvasi, who sits relaxed in his company, 'O You of the fair hips, know that I come here at the word of the only Lord of Swarga, who asks a favour of you.

You do know Arjuna, who is known among the gods and men for his many natural virtues, for his grace, his conduct, the beauty of his person, his vows and self-control; who is noted for might and prowess, and respected by the virtuous, and quick-witted; who is endowed with genius and splendid energy, is of a forgiving temper and without malice of any kind; who has studied the four Vedas with their angas, the Upanishads, and the Puranas, also; who is blessed with devotion to his preceptors and with an intellect possessed of the eight attributes; who by his abstinence, ability, origins and age, is by himself capable of protecting Devaloka like Maghavat himself; who is never boastful; who shows proper respect to all; who sees the minutest things as clearly as if those were gross and large; who is sweet-spoken; who showers diverse kinds of food and drink on his friends and dependants; who is truthful, worshipped by all, eloquent, handsome, and without pride; who is kind to those devoted to him, and universally pleasing and dear; who is firm in keeping his promises; who is equal even to Mahendra and Varuna for owning every worthwhile quality and attribute.

Know, Urvasi, that Kshatriya is to taste the joys of heaven! Commanded by Indra, let him today find your favours. Do this, O sweet one, for Dhananjaya is inclined towards you, he desires you.'

Urvasi of faultless features smiles; her heart glad to hear the Gandharvas words, she says, 'I would bestow my favours on anyone who owns such qualities. Then why should I not choose Arjuna for a lover? Indeed, at Indra's command, for the sake of my friendship with you, and stirred by Arjuna's numerous virtues, I am already under the spell of the god of love.

O Chitrasena, go where you will now, and I will go to Arjuna.'

CANTO 46

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Having thus sent away the Gandharva, who has succeeded in his mission, Urvasi of the luminous smiles, moved by the desire of possessing Arjuna, bathes luxuriantly. She decks herself in wonderful ornaments and garlands of heaven's fragrances. Inflamed by the god of love, her heart pierced through by Kama's flowery shafts to think of Arjuna's beauty, her mind entirely absorbed in thoughts of him, she already makes love to him in her imagination, on a wide and fine bed covered with celestial linen.

When twilight deepens and the moon rises, that Apsara of the high hips sets out for Arjuna's palace. In that mood and her soft long tresses adorned with flowers, she is exquisite, absolutely graceful. The movements of her eyebrows, her soft accents are full of enchantment. Her own face like a full glowing moon, she goes forth as if challenging the moon for beauty.

As she goes, her deep, finely pointed breasts, smeared with unworldly unguents and sandalwood paste, covered by a golden chain, begin to tremble. So heavy are they that with each step she takes she seems to bend forward slightly at her lovely waist with three folds.

Faultless are her loins, ah, elegant abode of Kama Deva; her hips are fair, round and wide at their base. Wearing the sheerest clothes, decked in golden ornaments, she could shake the sainthood of any yogi.

Fine are her ankles, flat the soles of her feet, straight her toes the hue of burnished copper, and dorsum high and curved like the back of the tortoise; she wears anklets with little bells tinkling.

She has drunk some wine, she is flushed with desire; soft anticipation and delight course through her; she sways slightly from all these and is more beautiful than ever. And though Devaloka abounds in wonders of every kind, when Urvasi goes to Arjuna as she does, the Siddhas and Charanas and Gandharvas think that she is the most beautiful thing on which they ever laid eyes.

Dressed exquisitely in a fine, cloud-coloured garment, she is surely as lambent as a digit of the moon in the sky with fleecy clouds across his face.

Swiftly as the wind or the mind goes she of the luminous smiles, and soon arrives at Arjuna the Pandavas mansion.

Purushottama, at the gates Urvasi sends word in through the dwarapalaka, and quickly she is inside the splendid and elegant palace. O Rajan, when Arjuna sees her in his palace at night he feels anxiety grip him, but then he comes forward to welcome her respectfully. However, when he sees her as she is, the Pandava shuts his eyes out of modesty.

Saluting her, he offers the Apsara worship that is given to an elder, a superior.

Arjuna says, 'O best of the Apsaras, I bend my head down before you. Command me, for I am your servant.'

Hearing this, and his reverential tone, Urvasi is distraught. She tells Arjuna how Chitrasena the Gandharva came to see her, and of their meeting.

She says, 'Best of men, I will tell you everything which passed between Chitrasena and me, and why I have come here.

Arjuna, because of your coming to this realm, Mahendra called together a large and charming sabha, where celestial festivities were held. The Rudras, the Adityas, the Aswins and the Vasus came to that gathering, as did a number of Devarishis, Rajarishis, Siddhas, Charanas, Yakshas and great Nagas.

O large eyes, when the members of that gathering, all splendid as fire, the Sun or the Moon, all sat according to rank, honour, and prowess, O son of Sakra, the Gandharvas began to play on their vinas and sing songs of divine enchantment. And, Kurupravira, the main Apsaras also began to dance.

Then, O son of Pritha, you looked at me, gazed at me, why, stared only at me. When that assembly of the celestials broke, at your father's command, the gods went away to their respective abodes. The Apsaras also went away to their homes, and the others also, O Parantapa, with your father's leave.

It was then Sakra sent Chitrasena to me, and arriving in my home, O you of the eyes like lotus leaves, he said to me, "Fairest, the king of the Devas has sent me to you. Do something which would please Mahendra, and me, and yourself as well.

O fair hipped, go and please Arjuna, who is as brave in battle as Sakra himself, and is always magnanimous and great-hearted."

Even these, Partha, were his words to me. So, Anagha, commanded by Chitrasena and by your father I have come to serve you, Parantapa. My heart has been attracted by your virtues, and I am already under the influence of the god of love.

Kshatriya, this is also my own fervent wish, and I have cherished it since I first saw you.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Listening to this, Arjuna is overcome by bashfulness. He stops his ears with his hands, and says, 'Devi, I curse my hearing that you speak to me like this! For, O beautiful one, I think of you as the wife of an elder. Auspicious one, you are even like Kunti to me, or Indra's queen Sachi.

This is the only way I have always thought of you, and that is why I gazed at you and no one else, most blessed one. I have my particular reason for this and I will tell you what it is, O you of luminous smiles.

I stared at you in Indra's sabha, my eyes wide with delight, thinking, "This most exquisite woman is the mother of the race of Kuru!" O Apsara, it does not become you to have other feelings for me, because you are superior to all my superiors – you are the mother of my race!'

Urvasi says, 'O son of Indra, we Apsaras are free and bound to no one; we choose whom we will. You must not think of me as your elder or suprior. The sons and grandsons of Puru's race who came here through their punya have all sported freely with us, without incurring any sin.

So, relent, Kshatriya, it does not become you to send me away. I am afire with desire for you. I am devoted to you. Accept me, take me if you would properly adore me.'

Arjuna replies, 'Listen to me, O you of fautless, perfect features. I speak truly, and let the four directions and the gods hear me as well. Sinless one, as Kunti, Madri or Sachi is to me, so are you, the mother of my race, an object of reverence to me. Return, O fairest, I bend my head down to you and prostrate at your feet. You deserve my worship as a son, and I your love as a mother.'

Hearing this, Urvasi is beside herself with rage. Trembling with it, knitting her brows, she curses Arjuna, 'Since you spurn a woman come to your palace at your father's command and of her own will, a woman, besides, who is pierced by the shafts of Kama, O Partha, you will spend your time among women as a dancer, your manhood gone and scorned as a eunuch!'

With this curse, her lips still pale and quivering, her breasts still heaving in wrath, Urvasi walks out of Arjuna's palace and returns home. Arjuna, Parantapa, desparate, immediately seeks out Chitrasena, and finding him, tells him everything that passed between Urvasi and himself in the night, anguishing repeatedly over the Apsaras curse.

Chitrasena goes to Sakra and tells him everything. Indra calls Arjuna to him privately, and consoles him.

Indra says gently, 'O greatest of all men, today Pritha has truly become a blessed mother for having you as her son. Mahabaho, you have excelled even the Rishis in your self-control.

Do not fear, the curse of Urvasi will benefit you, it will prove a blessing. Anagha, back on Earth you must spend the thirteenth year of your exile in ajnatavasa, unrecognised, undiscovered. That is when you will suffer the curse of Urvasi, and when you have spent one year exactly as a eunuch and a dancer, you will have your manhood back.'

When Indra says this to him, great relief and delight wash over Arjuna; he no longer anguishes over the curse. Pandu's son Dhananjaya spends his time pleasantly in Devaloka in the company of the celebrated Gandharva Chitrasena.'

The desires of the man that listens to this story of Arjuna never turn towards blind lust. The best men who listen to this tale of the awesome purity of Phalguna, son of the lord of the Devas, become devoid of pride, arrogance, anger and every other fault, and ascending into Swarga, sport there in bliss."

CANTO 47

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "One day, during his wanderings, the great Rishi Lomasa comes to Indra's abode, wanting to meet the king of the Devas. The Mahamuni approaches the Lord of the gods and bows reverentially to him. He sees Pandu's son occupying half of Vasava's throne.

Having been worshipped by the Devarishis, that Dvijottama, invited by Indra, sits in a most excellent seat. He wonders how Arjuna, who was a Kshatriya, has attained to the throne of Sakra himself. What great deeds of punya has he performed, what lofty realms has he conquered, that he sits upon the throne which the gods themselves worship?

As these thoughts engage the Rishi, Sakra, slayer of Vritra, reads the Muni's heart. With a smile, Indra says to Lomasa, 'Brahmarishi, I see what you are thinking – this one is no mortal though he has been born among men. Mahamuni, this mighty-armed Kshatriya is my own son born to Kunti.

He has come here to acquire astras, for a great purpose. Alas! Don't you recognise him as an ancient Rishi of the highest punya? Listen to me, O Brahamana, I will tell you who he is and why he has come to me.

Know, those magnificent Rishis of antiquity, Nara and Narayana, are none other than Dhananjaya and Hrishikesa. Nara and Narayana, celebrated throughout the three worlds, have been born on Earth for the sake of dharma.

That sacred asrama, which even Devas and Maharishis never see, which is known through the world as Badari, which nestles by the source of the Ganga, which is worshipped by the Siddhas and the Charanas, was the hermitage, O Lomasa, of Vishnu and Jishnu.

Brahmarishi, at my wish, the two Sages of blazing splendour have been born into the world of men, and endowed with awesome tejas, they will lighten the burden of Bhumi Devi.

Besides this, the Asuras known as Nivatakavachas, arrogant of the boon they have, are constantly engaged in doing us harm. They boast of their power, and are even now plotting to destroy the Devas, for with their boon they no longer fear us. They are fierce and mighty Danavas, who live in the Pataias, and not all the Devas together can withstand their might.

The blessed Vishnu, slayer of Madhu, Kapila who made ashes of the sons of Sagara with just his look when they attacked him roaring in the bowels of the Earth, can indeed quell the Nivatakavachas. Either Hari or Partha, or both, can slay those Asuras.

Just as he subdued the Nagas in the great lake, the lustrous Hari can surely consume the Nivatakavachas and all their followers, with just his look. But the task is too insignificant for Madhusudana himself, for being the awesome mass of energy which he is, if incensed, his wrath might consume the very universe.

This Arjuna can also kill our enemies, and having killed them he will return to the world of men. Now you must go to the Earth, for my sake. You will find the brave Yudhishtira living in the Kamyaka vana. For me, you must tell Yudhishtira of unbaffled prowess in battle that he should not be anxious about Arjuna, because this hero will return as a great master of astras, for without being a complete and perfect master he will not be able to face Bhishma, Drona and the others in battle.

You must also tell Yudhishtira that the mighty Arjuna has not only acquired the devastras, he has also mastered the arts of celestial music, both singing and of instruments, and dancing as well.

You will also tell Yudhishtira that, taking all his brothers with him, and yourself, O Muni, he should set out on a pilgrimage and visit all the sacred tirthas of the holy land. Bathing in the various sacred waters, he will be washed of all his sins, and the fever in his heart will abate. Then, he will be able to enjoy his kingdom, in the knowledge that his sins are gone.

Dvijottama, you must protect Yudhishtira during his wandering over the Earth. Fierce Rakshasas live in mountain fastnesses and rugged plains. Protect the king from those eaters of men.'

When Mahendra has said this much to Lomasa, Arjuna also speaks reverently to that Rishi. 'O, always bless and protect the son of Pandu, and with your protection, Maharishi, the king will undertake his tirtha yatra and give charity to Brahmanas across the land.'

The mighty Sage Lomasa says to them both, 'So be it,' and sets out for the Earth and the Kamyaka aranya. Arriving in that jungle, he sees that Parantapa, Kunti's son Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, surrounded by Rishis and his younger brothers."

CANTO 48

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "Surely, the feats of Partha of measureless energy were certainly marvellous. O Brahmana, what did Dhritarashtra of great wisdom say, when he heard about these?"

Vaisampayana said, "When Ambika's son Dhritarashtra hears about Arjuna's arrival and stay in Indra's realm from Dwaipayana, first among Rishis, he says to Sanjaya, "O Sarathy, do you know everything about what Arjuna did, from beginning to end, all that I have just heard?

Sanjaya, my wretched, sinful son even now pursues the most base and vulgar policy. Ah, his soul is evil and he will surely unpeople this very Earth. The illustrious man, who speaks the truth even when he speaks in jest, and who has Arjuna to fight for him, is certain to win the three worlds.

Who that is even beyond the influence of death and decay will be able to stay before Arjuna, when he looses his barbed arrows whetted on stone? My wretched sons, who must fight the invincible Pandavas are all doomed. I think about it night and day but do not see the warrior amongst us who can withstand the wielder of the Gandiva.

If Drona, Karna or even Bhishma advance against him in battle, a great calamity is likely to befall the Earth. Even then, I do not see the way to our victory. Kama is kind and forgiving. Acharya Drona is old, and besides he is Arjuna's teacher.

But Arjuna is wrathful, strong, proud, and of firm and steady prowess. All these warriors are invincible and a terrible battle will take place between them. All of them are heroes skilled in weapons and of great repute. They would not wish for the sovereignty of the world, if it was to be bought by defeat. Indeed, peace will be restored only after the death either of these or of Phalguna.

But there is no one who can kill Phalguna, no one who can vanquish him. Oh, now I am the object of his anger; how will that rage be quenched? Equal to the king of the Devas, that Kshatriya gratified Agni at Khandava; he subdued all the monarchs of the Earth during the occasion of the great Rajasuya.

O Sanjaya, the thunderbolt falling on the mountain top leaves a portion unconsumed; but, child, the shafts shot by Kiriti leave no rack behind. As the rays of the Sun heat this mobile and immobile universe, so will Arjuna's shafts scorch my sons. It seems to me that the legions of the Bhaaratas, terrified by the clatter of Arjuna's chariot wheels, are already broken through on all sides.

Vidhatri has created Arjuna as an all-consuming Destroyer. He stays in battle as an enemy, spewing swarms of arrows. Who will defeat him?'"

CANTO 49

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'All that you say about Duryodhana is entirely true. Nothing that you have said is untrue, O Lord of the Earth.

The sight of their pure wife Krishnaa dragged into the sabha has filled the Pandavas with rage. They have been so incensed to hear the cruel words of Dussasana and Karna that they will never forgive the Kurus.

I have heard how Arjuna pleased the God of Gods in battle with his bow – Sthanu of eleven forms. Wanting to test Phalguna, the illustrious Kapardin assumed the guise of a Kirata and fought him.

And there it was that the Lokapalas revealed themselves to that Kururishabha, and gave him their weapons. What other man on earth, except Phalguna, would strive to see these gods in their own forms? Rajan, who will weaken Arjuna in battle, when the eight-formed Maheswara could not do so?

By coarsely dragging Draupadi into this sabha and shaming her, and enraging the Pandavas, your sons have brought this terrifying calamity upon themselves. When Bhima saw Duryodhana bare both his thighs to Panchali, with quivering lips Vrikodara said, "Wretch! I will smash those thighs of yours with my mace when thirteen years have passed."

All the sons of Pandu are the greatest warriors; all of them have immeasurable energy; all of them are masters of every kind of weapon; not the gods can vanquish them. Incensed at the insult to their wife, Pritha's sons will kill all your sons in battle.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sarathy, what mischief Karna did by speaking savage words to the sons of Pandu! Was not enough enmity provoked by bringing Krishnaa into the sabha?

How can my evil sons live, whose eldest brother and preceptor does not walk the way of dharma? Seeing me blind, Sanjaya, and incapable of exerting myself actively, my son believes me to be a fool, and does not listen to what I say. The wretches who are his counsellors, Kama, Sakuni and the others, always pander to his vices, because he does not see light.

Arjuna's arrows, even if he shoots them lightly, can consume all my princes; what then when he looses them in anger? Why, arrows shot by

Arjuna's mighty arms, from his great bow, with mantras spoken over them, can turn themselves into astras which can punish the Devas themselves.

He who has for his counsellor, protector and friend that scourge of sinners, the lord of the three worlds, Hari himself, encounters nothing that he cannot conquer. O Sanjaya, we have heard that the Lord Siva himself clasped Arjuna in his arms.

All the world knows what Phalguna did, with Krishna beside him, to help Agni in the Khandava vana. So, when Bhima, Partha and Vaasudeva of the Satwatas are enraged, surely my sons, with their allies and the Subalas are no match for them in battle.'"

CANTO 50

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "O Muni, surely, after sending Pandu's heroic sons into exile, these lamentations of Dhritarashtra were perfectly futile. Why did the king allow his foolish son Duryodhana to incense the mighty Pandavas?

O Brahmana, tell us now what did the sons of Pritha eat while they lived in the forest? Was it produce of the wilderness or of cultivation?"

Vaisampayana said, "Those bulls among men gather fruit and roots and also hunt deer with purified arrows. They first dedicate a portion of the food to the Brahmanas, and then eat the rest themselves.

For, O King, while those heroes with great bows live in the forest, Brahmanas of both classes follow them, those that worship with fire and those that do not. Ten thousand illustrious Snataka Brahmanas, all knowers of the means to moksha, Yudhishtira supports in the vana.

Killing Rurus and the black deer with arrows, as well as other clean animals of the wild, fit for eating, he gives them to those Brahmanas. None who stays with Yudhishtira looks pale or ill, or is lean or weak, or melancholy or afraid. Yudhishtira, lord of the Kurus, looks after his brothers as if they are his sons, and his other kinsmen as if they are his brothers.

The chaste Draupadi feeds the Brahmanas and her husbands, even as if she is their mother, and only after they have eaten, does she herself eat.

Daily, bows in hand, the king himself goes east, Bhima to the south, and the twins west and north, and kill deer for meat. Thus do the Pandavas spend five years in the Kamyaka vana, in some anxiety at the absence of Arjuna, and engage all the while in study, prayers and sacrifices."

CANTO 51

INDRALOKABHIGAMANA PRAVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Ambika's son, Dhritarashtra Purusharishabha listens to this account of how the Pandavas live in exile, and is filled with grief and dread. Overwhelmed by dejection, sighing heavily and sweating, that king says to Sanjaya, 'Sarathy, I have not a moment's peace, day or night, thinking of my son's terrible conduct during the gambling, and also thinking of the heroism, the patience, the high intelligence, the unbearable prowess, and the extraordinary love for one another of the sons of Pandu.

Among the Pandavas, the lustrous Nakula and Sahadeva, born of Devas and as splendid as the king of the Devas himself, are invincible in battle. They wield their weapons powerfully, loose their arrows over great distances, are resolute in battle, of remarkable lightness of hand, of quenchless wrath, possessed of great steadiness, and blessed with terrific energy. They have the strength of lions and are as inexorable as the Aswins themselves.

When they take the field with Bhima and Arjuna before them, I see, Sanjaya, that my soldiers will all be slain without a remnant. Those mighty warriors, all Devas' sons, unrivalled in battle by anybody, filled with anger at the memory of Draupadi's humiliation, will show no mercy.

The awesome Vrishni warriors, also, the Panchalas of tameless tejas, and the sons of Pritha, led by Krishna of unbaffled prowess, will raze my legions. All the warriors on my side together cannot bear the might of just the Vrishnis, for Balarama and Krishna command them.

Then, Bhima of dreadful prowess, his iron mace raised, he who can kill any Kshatriya, will prowl among my soldiers like Death himself. High above the din of the field, the twang of the Gandiva will resound, loud as heaven's thunder. No king who is with us can withstand the force of Bhima's mace and the mere sound of the Gandiva's bowstring.

And then, Sanjaya, obedient as I have been to the voice of Duryodhana, I will have to recall all the rejected counsels of those who were truly my friends and well-wishers, counsels which I should have attended to more timely.'

Sanjaya says, 'This was your grievous mistake, O King, that although you could have stopped your son from doing what he did, you did not, out of your love for him.

Hearing that the Pandavas had been defeated at dice, Krishna of unfading glory went to the Kamyaka vana and consoled them there. Draupadi's sons, too, led by Dhrishtadyumna arrived in that vana, as did Virata, Dhrishtaketu and the mighty Kekayas.

Through our spies, I learnt everything those Kshatriyas said there, when they saw the Pandavas after they were beaten at dice. I have told you everything I know. When Krishna met the Pandavas, they asked him to be Arjuna's charioteer in battle. Hari replied, "So be it."

Seeing Pritha's sons clad in deer-skins, Krishna was full of rage, and said to Yudhishtira, "During the Rajasuya yagna, in Indraprastha, I saw the prosperity you sons of Pritha had, which no other king of the world could acquire. I saw all the other kings, even those of the Vangas, Angas, Paundras, Odras, Cholas, Dravidas and Andhakas subservient to you at the great sacrifice, as were the chieftains of many islands and countries on the sea-board as also of frontier kingdoms, including the rulers of the Sinhalas, the barbarous Mlecchas, the natives of Lanka, and all the kings of the West, by hundreds, and the kings of the Pahlavas and the Daradas, and the many tribes of the Kiratas, Yavanas and Sakas; and the Harahunas and Chinas; the Tusharas and the Saindhavas and the Jagudas; and the Ramatas and the Mundas and the inhabitants of the kingdom of women; and the Tanganas and the Kekayas and the Malavas and the inhabitants of Kasmira – all officiated as your vassals at the Rajasuya yagna, obedient to your summons, afraid of your prowess.

O King, I will restore that prosperity to you, which is so unstable now and waits upon the enemy! I will take your enemies' lives from them. Lord of the Kurus, with Rama and Bhima and Arjuna and the twins and Akrura and Gada and Samba and Pradyumna and Ahuka and the heroic Dhrishtadyumna and the son of Sisupala, I will kill Duryodhana and Kama and Dussasana and Subala's son and any others who face us in battle, in a single day!

And, O Bhaarata, you will rule from Hastinapura, with your brothers; taking from Dhritarashtra's sons and their allies the prosperity they are enjoying, you will rule this Earth."

Rajan, these were Krishna's words to Yudhishtira. When Krishna had finished, Yudhishtira spoke to him in that conclave of heroes, within hearing of all those valiant Kshatriyas led by Dhrishtadyumna, saying, "O Janardana, I accept what you say as truth. But, Mahabaho, kill my enemies and all that follow them when thirteen years have passed. Kesava, promise me this much, because I gave my word in the presence of the king that I would spend thirteen years in exile, in the wilderness."

Consenting to these words of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, his counsellors led by Dhrishtadyumna and the others pacified the furious Krishnaa with sweet words. Within Krishna's hearing, they said to Draupadi, "Because of your anger, Duryodhana will lose his life. We swear it, most beautiful one, so grieve no more.

Panchali, those that mocked you will reap the fruit of what they dared do. Beasts of prey and birds of carrion shall eat their flesh, and thus mock them. Jackals and vultures will drink their blood. And, Panchali, you will see the corpses of the wretches who dared drag you into the sabha lying on the ground, being dragged about and devoured by wild carnivores.

They also that gave you pain and ignored you will lie headless upon the Earth and the Earth herself will drink their blood."

Those bulls of the Bhaaratas said all this and more in that place, O King – all of them endowed with boundless prowess and valour, all of them marked with the scars of battle. At the end of thirteen years, those mighty Kshatriyas, chosen by Yudhishtira, led by Krishna, will come to the field of battle.

Rama and Krishna, Dhananjaya and Pradyumna, Samba and Yuyudhana, Bhima and the sons of Madri, the Kekaya and the Panchala princes, with their Matsya kinsmen – all these, illustrious, celebrated and invincible heroes, with their allies and their troops, will come. Who is there, who wishes to live, that will encounter these in battle, these like angry lions with manes erect?'

Dhritarashtra says, 'What Vidura told me during the game of dice is about to be realised. He said, "O King, if you try to vanquish the Pandavas at dice, it will end in great bloodshed, a war which will destroy all the Kurus." It is true what he said, a terrible war will be fought as soon as the thirteen years of the Pandavas' exile is over.'

CANTO 52

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "What did Yudhishtira and the other Pandavas do when Arjuna went into Indra's realm to acquire the astras?" Vaisampayana said, "When Partha goes to Devaloka, those other ratarishabhas continue to live in the Kamyaka, with Draupadi. One day, those best of men, full of sorrow, sit with Panchali upon a clean and solitary rock; they grieve for Arjuna, they weep for him, all of them equally afflicted by his absence.

Full of anguish at both Arjuna being away and at losing their kingdom, the mighty Bhima says to Yudhishtira, At your command, great King, Arjuna, on whom our lives depend, as well as those of our son, and the Panchalas, and Satyaki and Krishna, has gone away.

What can be sadder than this, that Fe has gone bearing so much grief in his heart? Depending upon the might of his arms, think of our enemies as being already dead and the whole world as belonging to us again.

Why, it was for his sake that I restrained myself from despatching all the Dhartarashtras and the Saubalas, there in that sabha. We are mighty, we have Krishna's support, yet we must perforce suppress the wrath which has been kindled in our hearts because you are the root of that anger.

With Krishna's help, slaying our enemies we can even today rule the world, conquering it through the might of our arms. Manliness we possess, yet we are overwhelmed by calamity, because of your vice of gambling, while the foolish sons of Dhritarashtra grow stronger every day with the tribute they receive from other kings.

Great King, you should keep Kshatriya dharma in your sight. It is not the dharma of a Kshatriya to live in the forest; the first dharma of a Kshatriya is to rule. You know Kshatriya dharma, so do not leave the path of your duty.

Turn away from the forest and let us summon Partha and Krishna, and kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, even before twelve years are over. Illustrious king of kings, even if the Dhartarashtras are surrounded by soldiers in battle array, I will send them to the next world with just my own strength.

I will kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra, along with the Saubalas, Duryodhana, Karna, and anyone else who fights me. After I have killed all our enemies, you can return to the vana, and so no sin will attach to you.

And Parantapa, even if any sin does cling to you, we will wash it away through great yagnas and find a lofty heaven for ourselves.

Yes, we might have such a consummation if our king is not unwise or procrastinating. But you are too virtuous, and the deceitful must be destroyed with deceit. O Bhaarata, there is no sin in killing the deceitful with deceit. Also, those who know dharma all say, great Kshatriya, that one day and one night are equal to a full year.

The Veda also frequently declares that a day passed in keeping difficult vratas equals a year. Glorious brother, if the Vedas are an authority for you, think of the time we have spent in the wilderness as being equal to thirteen years, more.

Parantapa, this is the time to kill Duryodhana and his followers, otherwise he will soon bring the whole world under his sway. Ah Yudhishtira, all this is the result of your addiction to gambling.

Already we live in grave peril because of your word given – to go undiscovered during the thirteenth year. I can think of no land where the evil Suyodhana's spies will not track us down. Once we are found, the evil one will send us into exile for another thirteen years.

Or if, perchance, we pass the ajnatavasa undiscovered, the sinner will challenge you to play dice again, and once more you will lose everything. You are no dice-player, and once you sit down to play you will lose control of yourself again, and yet again you will find exile for yourself.

If you do not want to ruin all our lives, follow what the Veda says — that the deceitful must be killed with deceit. If you only command me, I will go straightaway to Hastinapura, and as fire falling upon a heap of dry grass consumes it, I will put forth my strength and kill Duryodhana. It becomes you, my lord, to give me leave.'

Thus addressed by Bhima, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira sniffs the top of his brother's head affectionately, and pacifying him, says, 'Mahabaho, beyond doubt, along with Arjuna who wields the Gandiva, you will kill Suyodhana, when thirteen years have passed.

But, O son of Pritha, as for your assertion that the time is complete, I will not dare tell a lie, for falsehood is not in me. Kaunteya, you must kill the evil and powerful Duryodhana, and his confederates, but without using deceit.'

While Yudhishthira is speaking to Bhima, the great and illustrious Rishi Brihadaswa appears before them. Seeing the virtuous Sage, the king

worships him with the offering of madhuparka. When the Muni is seated and refreshed, the mighty Yudhishtira sits at his feet, and looking up at Brihadaswa, speaks to him in a piteous tone.

'Holy one, challenged by cunning gamblers skilled at dice, I have lost all my wealth and kingdom at gambling. I am no adept at dice, and am unacquainted with deceit. Sinful men vanquished me at dice, by cheating. 'They even brought my wife, dearer to me than life, into the public sabha.

Defeating me a second time, they have sent me into exile in this great forest, clad in deer-skin, and I live here with my heart heavy, full of grief. The harsh and cruel words they pierced me with, and what my friends and kin later said about the game of dice are all fresh in my memory.

Thinking of these, I cannot sleep at nights but lie awake in anxiety. I am also without Arjuna, upon whom all our lives depend, and that is like being dead. Oh, when will I see the sweet-spoken and large-hearted Bibhatsu, so full of kindness and vitality, return to us, having acquired all the astras?

Is there a king on this Earth who is more unfortunate than me? Have you ever seen or heard of one? To my mind, there is no man more wretched than I am.'

Brihadaswa says, 'Great king, O Pandava, you say that there is no man more miserable than you are. Sinless monarch, if you will listen, I will tell you the tale of a king more wretched than yourself.

Yudhishtira says to the Rishi, 'Illustrious one, tell me, I want to hear the story of the king who fell into such misery.'

Brihadaswa says, 'O King who has never fallen, listen attentively, with your brothers. I will narrate the story of a Kshatriya more miserable than yourself. There was a celebrated king among the Nishadhas, named Virasena. He had a son called Nala, versed in ways of dharma and artha. I have heard that Nala was vanquished through deceit by his brother Pushkara, and overtaken by calamity, lived in the forest with his wife.

While he lived in the vana, he had neither servants nor chariots, neither brothers nor friends with him. But you are surrounded by your heroic brothers, who are like Devas, and also by magnificent Brahmanas who are like Brahma himself. Therefore, it does not become you to complain.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I am anxious to hear in detail, O foremost of eloquent men, the tale of Nala. You must tell me his story.'

CANTO 53

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'There was a king named Nala, the son of Virasena. He was strong, and handsome, a master of horses, and possessed of every accomplishment. A king of kings, he was even like the lord of the Devas. Exalted above all others, he resembled the Sun in glory.

And he was the king of the Nishadhas, intent on the welfare of Brahmanas, versed in the Vedas, and possessed of heroism. He always told the truth, he was master of a mighty army, and he was fond of dice. Men and women loved him; he was a great soul, his passions subdued. He was the greatest bowman, protector of his people, and like Manu himself.

And among the Vidarbhas, there was another king like him called Bhima, of terrible prowess, heroic, kindly towards his subjects and possessed of every virtue. However, he had no children. Single-mindedly, he did his best to have a child.

O Bhaarata, one day a Brahmarishi named Damana came to Bhima. Desperate to have children, Bhima, versed in dharma, and his queen received the lustrous Rishi with every reverence. Well pleased, Damana granted the king and his consort a boon in the form of a jewel of a daughter, and also three sons of lofty soul and great fame.

These were named Damayanti, Dama, Danta, and Damana after the Sage. The three sons were accomplished in every way; they were fierce to behold and fierce in prowess. The slender-waisted Damayanti became celebrated the world over for her beauty and radiance, her good nature, her grace and fortune. Upon her coming of age, hundreds of sakhis and female slaves, all decked in precious ornaments, waited upon her as if she were Sachi herself, while Bhima's daughter shone amongst them like the luminous lightning of the clouds.

Damayanti of large eyes was as beautiful as Sri; not among the Devas, the Yakshas or among men had such beauty ever been seen or heard of before. She filled even the Devas' hearts with joy.

So also, Nala was peerless in the three worlds, for he was as handsome as Kandarpa himself. Admiring heralds sang Nala's praises before Damayanati and Damayanati's praises before the king of the Nishadhas.

Hearing over and over about each other's virtues the two conceived an attachment towards each other, though neither had seen the other.

That affection grew, and then Nala could not contain the love which was in his heart. He began to pass much of his time alone, in the wooded gardens which adjoined his royal apartments in his palace. There he saw a flock of golden-winged swans, wandering among the trees, and one he caught in his hands.

The sky ranging avian said to Nala, "I do not deserve to be killed by you, O King. Let me do something for you instead – lord of the Nishadas, I will speak to Damayanti about you in such a way that she will never want any other man for her husband."

The king let the swan go, and the flock rose in flight and winged its way to the land of the Vidarbhas. Arriving, the birds alighted before Damayanti and her sakhis, and seeing the extraordinary swans, she was full of delight and, along with her maids, tried to catch the sky-coursers.

The swans fled in all directions pursued by that bevy of beautiful young women, while each maiden ran after one bird. The one that Damayanti chased led her to a secluded place, and then spoke to her in human speech.

"Damayanti, there is a king of the Nishadhas called Nala. He is equal to the Aswins in beauty, and has no remote peer among men. Indeed, he is as handsome as Kama Deva. Fair one, slender-waisted one, if you become his wife, your own beauty and your life will become fruitful.

We have seen Devas and Gandharvas, Nagas and Rakshasas, and the best among men, but never have we seen anyone like Nala. You, also, are an incomparable jewel among women, even as Nala is among men. Happy is a union between the best and the best!"

Damayanti said to the swan, "Go and say the same thing to Nala!"

The swan replied, "So be it," and flew back to the land of the Nishadhas, and told Nala everything.'

CANTO 54

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'O Bhaarata, after hearing what the swan said about Nala, Damayanti lost all peace of mind. Sighing repeatedly to think of him, she became full of anxiety and melancholy, she was pale and grew lean. Kama, god of love, seized her heart; she grew paler by the day, and her gaze turned skywards; her mood always abstracted, she seemed to be quite deranged.

She lost all her taste for fine beds and seats, and every object of enjoyment. Night and day, she would not lie down, but always wept, with soft and loud exclamations of despair.

Seeing her like that, her sakhis went and hinted about her condition to her father, the king of the Vidarbhas. King Bhima realised that Damayanti's condition was serious and he asked himself, "Why does my daughter seem to be so ill now?"

Reflecting by himself, the king thought that his daughter had attained puberty and decided that he should hold a swayamvara for Damayanti. That monarch invited all the lords of the Earth, saying, "Kshatriyas, know that Damayanti's swayamvara is at hand!"

When they heard this, all the kings came to Bhima, filling earth and sky with the clatter of their chariot wheels, the trumpeting of their elephants, and the whinnying of their horses, and bringing their magnificent legions decked in ornaments and beautiful garlands. The mighty-armed Bhima paid due homage to those illustrious sovereigns, and honoured by him, they began living in his city.

At this time, those best of Devarishis, Narada and Parvata, both of untold splendour, wisdom and stern vows, arrived during their wanderings in Indra's realm and entered the palace of the Deva king, where they were received with reverence. Indra Maghavat worshipped the two, and asked after their welfare and peace.

Narada said, "Divine one, peace attends on us in every way, and, O Maghavat, peace attends also upon the kings of the whole world."

Indra, slayer of Vritra, said, "Those righteous kings of the Earth who fight leaving all desire to live, and who die by weapons when their time

comes, never fleeing the field of battle – theirs is this Swarga, everlasting for them and granting all desires, even as it is for me.

Where are those Kshatriya heroes? I do not see those kings coming here to me. Where are my favourite guests?"

Narada replied, "O Maghavat, I will tell you why you do not see those Kshatriyas now. The king of the Vidarbhas has a daughter, the renowned Damayanti. In beauty she excels all the women of the Earth. O Sakra, her swayamvara is to take place shortly and every king and prince from every direction and land is going to that swayamvara.

All the lords of the Earth desire that pearl of the Earth for themselves, O slayer of Bala and Vritra."

While they sat talking together, those greatest of the Devas, the Lokapalas, and Agni with them, appeared before the lord of the celestials, and they all heard what Narada said, which was of grave import. As soon as they heard him, they exclaimed in excitement, "We will also go there!"

Mounting their various vahanas and vimanas, taking their attendants with them, the gods set out for the land of the Vidarbhas where all the Kshatriyas of the world had gone.

Kaunteya, meanwhile, Nala also heard of the swayamvara and set out for it, his heart full of joy and love for Damayanti. On his way, the goas saw Nala, as handsome as Kama Deva. Seeing him splendid as the Sun, the Lokapalas were astonished at his wealth of beauty.

Leaving their chariots in the sky, the gods flew down to Nala, king of the Nishadhas, and said to him, "Greatest of the Nishadha kings, O Nala, you are devoted to dharma. You must help us. Best of men, be you our messenger.'"

CANTO 55

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa continues, 'O Bhaarata, Nala pledged his word to the gods saying, "I will do what you ask."

Then, approaching them with folded hands, he asked, "Who are you? And who is he that wants me to be his messenger? And what must I do for you? Tell me!"

Maghavat said, "We are the Devas come here for Damayanti's sake. I am Indra; this one is Agni; this the Lord of waters, and this, O King, is even Yama, destroyer of the bodies of men.

You must inform Damayanti of our coming, saying, "The Guardians of the world, great Indra and the others, are coming to your swayamvara. The Devas Sakra and Agni and Varuna and Yama want to have you for their wife, so choose one of them for your lord.'"

Nala said with joined hands, "I too have come here for the same reason. It does not become you to send me on this errand. How can a man who is himself smitten by love bring the suit of another to the woman that he loves? So, spare me, O Devas!"

But the gods said, "King of the Nishadhas, having sworn that you will do what we ask, will you now break your word? Tell us quickly, O Nala!"

The Nishadha king said, "Those palaces are well guarded, how can I hope to enter them?"

Indra replied, "You will be able to enter."

Saying, "So be it," Nala went to Damayanti's palace. Arriving there, he saw, surrounded by her sakhis, the daughter of the king of Vidarbha ablaze with beauty, her form of exquisite symmetry, her limbs so delicate, her waist slender, and her eyes lage and lovely. And she seemed to rebuke the light of the moon with her own luminosity.

As he gazed upon that young woman of the sweet smiles, Nala's love grew, but wanting to keep his dharma, he suppressed his passion. And when they saw the Naishadha, all those finest among women were overpowered by his radiance and rose to their feet in amazement. Full of wonder, they praised Nala in joy, silently in their minds.

"Oh, what beauty, what gentleness belongs to this Mahatman! Who is he? Is he some Deva or Yaksha or Gandharva?"

Quite confounded by Nala's splendour, and full of bashfulness, those best among women did not speak to him at all. But, although stricken by amazement herself, Damayanti spoke smilingly to Nala, who also gently smiled at her.

"What are you, O you of faultless features, who have come here awakening my love? O Sinless, O Hero of celestial form, I am anxious to know who you are, and why you have come here. And how have you come undiscovered into my apartments, when the king's mandates are stern?"

Nala replied, "Beautiful one, my name is Nala, and I come here as a messenger of the gods. The Devas Sakra, Agni, Varuna and Yama want you, lovely one, choose one of them for your lord. It is through their power that I have entered here unobserved, and unobstructed. Gentle one, the gods have sent me here on this mission. I have given you their message, most fortunate one, now do as you please.'"

CANTO 56

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Damayanti bowed to the Devas, then said to Nala with a smile, "O King, love me with proper regard, and command me what I should do for you. I myself and everything precious which I own are yours. Magnificent one, grant me your love in complete trust, for what the swan said burns in my heart.

Kshatriya, it is for your sake that I called this swayamvara, and for your sake I, who adore you, will take my life with poison, immolate myself in fire, drown or hang myself."

Nala replied, "When the Lokapalas ask for you, you would choose a man? Turn your heart to those great gods, I am not equal to the dust on their feet. If a mortal displeases the gods he certainly finds death. Save me, O you of faultless limbs! Choose the all-excelling Devas. By accepting the gods, enjoy wearing incomparable garments, unearthly garlands of myriad hues, and divine ornaments.

What woman would not choose Hutasana for her lord, he who devours the Earth? What woman would not choose Yama for her lord, from dread of whose danda all creatures tread the way of dharma? What woman would not choose for her lord the virtuous and high-souled Mahendra, the king of the Devas, the scourge of Daityas and Danavas? Or, if you choose Varuna in your heart among the Lokapalas, do so without hesitation.

Lovely one, I beg you, accept my friendly advice!"

Her eyes by now swimming with tears, Damayanti said to Nala, "Lord of the earth, bowing to all the gods, I choose you for my husband. Truly do I tell you this."

The king, who had come as the messenger of the gods, replied to the trembling Damayanti standing before him folded hands, "Sweet one, do as you please. Having pledged my word to the very Devas, how can I dare seek my own interest? If seeking my own interest coincides with dharma, I will seek it, and beautiful one you must also do the same."

Her voice choked with tears, Damayanti of luminous smiles said slowly to Nala, "Lord of men, I see a blameless way, by which no sin whatever will attach to you. Best among men, come to the swayamvara with all the Devas

led by Indra. There, O Kshatriya, in the presence of the Lokapalas I will, tiger among men, choose you, and then no blame will be yours."

Having heard this from Damayanti, Nala returned to where the Devas were. Seeing him, the gods asked him eagerly about what had happened.

"Kshatriya, have you seen Damayanti of the sweet smiles? What did she say to us? Sinless king, tell us all."

Nala replied, "At your command I entered Damayanti's palace of lofty portals, guraded by veteran guardsmen with wands in their hands. By your power, no one saw me as I went in, other than the princess. I saw her hand-maidens, and they also saw me. Most exalted Devas, they saw me and were filled with wonder.

And even as I pressed your suit to her, O you best among gods, that beautiful princess said she had her heart set on me and chose me for her husband. She said to me, 'Purushavyaghra, let the Devas come with you to the swayamvara, and in their presence I will choose you for my lord. At this, Mahabaho, no blame will attach to you.'

O Devas, this is all that transpired, and now everything depends upon you."

CANTO 57

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa continues, 'At the sacred hour of the holy lunar day of the auspicious season, King Bhima summoned the kings to the Swayamvara. All the lords of the Earth came with alacrity to his city, all of them keen to have Damayanti. The Kshatriyas entered the great hall decorated with golden pillars and a lofty portal arch, like mighty lions entering the mountain wilds.

Wearing fragrant garlands and polished earrings hung with jewels, the kings and princes sat down on the fine seats provided. And that sacred assembly of kings, graced by those tigers among men, resembled the Bhogavati swarming with Nagas, or a mountain cave with tigers.

They were mighty, resembling iron maces, and well-shaped, and graceful, and looked like five-headed snakes. With lustrous locks, fine noses, eyes and brows, the faces of the kings shone like the stars in the sky.

And when the muhurta arrived, the exquisite Damayanti entered that great hall, dazzling the Kshatriyas, stealing their gazes and hearts. The gazes of those illustrious kings were riveted to those parts of her person where they had chanced to fall first, and never moved.

O Bhaarata, when the names of the monarchs were proclaimed, Bhima's daughter saw five men all identical in appearance. Seeing them sitting there, no difference whatever between the five, doubt filled her mind for she could not tell which one was Nala. All five looked exactly the same and all of them seemed to be the king of the Nishadhas.

Anxiety sweeping through her, the princess thought, "How will I know which are the Devas and which my love?"

Grief had its way with her. She thought of the signs and marks attributed to each of the Devas but saw none of these upon the five who sat before her. Long she thought, and hard, and then decided to seek the help of the Lokapalas themselves.

She folded her hands, and bowing down to them, mind and body, the trembling Damayanti said piteously, "Since I heard what the swan said, I chose the king of the Nishadhas as my lord. For the sake of dharma, and as I have never swerved from my love in my heart or speech — for that truth,

let the Devas themselves reveal him to me. The gods have decided that Nala will be my lord; for that truth, let them show him to me.

Since I have taken this vow to pay homage to Nala, for that truth let the gods reveal him to me. O, let the exalted Guardians of the worlds assume their own forms, so that I may know the good king."

When the Lokapalas saw how firm her resolve was, how fervent her love for Nala, how pure her heart, the gods reassumed their natural forms which they had hidden. She saw the awesome ones, skins untouched by human sweat, eyes winkless, garlands unfading, no speck of dust upon them, feet never touching the ground. Nala Naishadha stood revealed mortal, his garlands fading, himself stained with dust and sweat, feet resting on the ground, and his eyes blinking from time to time.

O Bhaarata, when she saw which of the five were the gods and which Nala, Bhima's chaste daughter chose Nala for her lord. Bashfully, she seized the hem of his robes and draped a bright and graceful garland of flowers around his neck. A great outcry of regret arose from the other Kshatriyas, while the Devas and Rishis cried out in wonder and approval.

O Kauravya, the royal son of Virasena, Nala, his heart filled with joy, said to the beautiful Damayanti, "You have chosen a mortal while you could have had a god. From this day you shall have a husband obedient to your every wish and command. And, O you of sweet smiles, I swear that as long as there is life in this body, I will be yours and yours alone."

Damayanti, also, with folded hands, paid homage to Nala in similar words. Seeing Agni and the other Devas, the happy couple sought their protection, in their minds. When the daughter of Bhima had chosen Naishadha for her husband, the Lokapalas, of blinding effulgence, their hearts pleased, bestowed eight boons on Nala.

Sakra, the lord of Sachi, blessed Nala with the boon that he would be able to see his Deity during sacrifices and that he would attain blessed realms after this life; Agni Hutasana blessed him with the boon of his own presence whenever Naishadha wished, and realms, also, bright as himself; Yama granted him subtle taste in food as well as pre-eminence in dharma; and Varuna, the lord of waters, granted Nala his own presence whenever the Naishadha desired, and also garlands of heavenly fragrance. Thus, each Lokapala blessed Nala with two boons each, and having blessed him the gods returned to Swarga.

Having witnessed, with wonder and delight, Damayanti's choosing of Nala, the kings of the world also returned to their kingdoms. When they had gone, Bhima, well pleased, celebrated the wedding of Nala and Damayanti. Nala remained in the Vidarbha city for some while, to please Bhima, and then returned to his own home.

Having married that pearl of a woman, Nala now passed his days in joy with Damayanti, even as Indra does with Sachi. Like the Sun in glory, that king ruled with dharma and his people were all satisfied and happy. Like Nahusha's son Yayati, the brilliant Nala performed the Aswamedha yagna and many other great sacrifices, and gave abundant gifts to Brahmanas.

Truly like a Deva, Nala dallied with Damayanti in romantic woods and charmed groves, and he begot on his lovely wife a son named Indrasena, and a daughter named Indraseni. Thus, performing countless sacrifices, and making love with Damayanti, Nala ruled the world, and it was a time of grace and plenitude.'

CANTO 58

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'When the blazing guardians of the worlds were returning to their homes after the swayamvara, they saw Dwapara and Kali approaching them. Seeing Kali, Sakra said, "O Kali, say where you are going with Dwapara."

Kali replied, "Sakra, I am going to Damayanti's swayamvara, and I will have her for my wife, for my heart is fixed upon that young woman."

Hearing this, Indra said with a smile, "That swayamvara is already over, and she has chosen Nala for her husband."

Kali, vilest of the celestials, was filled with wrath, and said to the gods, "Since she dared chose a mortal when the Devas were present, she must suffer a heavy consequence."

The Devas replied, "It is with our sanction that Damayanti chose Nala. What young woman would not choose Nala, who is blessed with every virtue? He knows his dharma, always conducts himself with rectitude, he has studied the four Vedas together with the Puranas that are regarded as the fifth. He harms no living creature, speaks only the truth, keeps his vows faithfully, and worships the gods with sacrifices in his house.

In that tiger among men, that king who is like a Lokapala, dwell truth, forbearance, knowledge, asceticism, purity, self-control and perfect tranquillity of spirit. O Kali, the fool that wants to curse Nala, who has such character, curses only himself and destroys himself by what he does. Kali, he who seeks to curse Nala of such immaculate virtue sinks into the wide, bottomless pit of hell, rife with torments."

Saying this to Kali and Dwapara, the Devas went to their heavens. And when the gods had gone, Kali said to Dwapara, "Dwapara, I cannot contain my anger. I will possess Nala, deprive him of his kingdom, and he shall not sport anymore with Bhima's daughter. Enter into the gambling dice; you must help me."

CANTO 59

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Having made this compact with Dwapara, Kali came to the city of the king of the Nishadhas. Always watching for an opening, the slightest lapse from Nala, he continued to dwell in the country of the Nishadhas for a long lime. In the twelfth year, Kali saw his chance.

One day, after answering the call of nature, Naishadha touched water and said his twilight prayers, but without having washed his feet. Through this ritual lapse, Kali entered into him, and having possessed Nala, he appeared before Nala’s brother Pushkara, and said to him, "Come and play dice with Nala. I will help you and you will certainly win. Defeat Nala and, winning his kingdom, rule the Nishadhas!"

Exhorted by Kali, Pushkara went to Nala; and Dwapara also came to Pushkara and became the main dice called vrisha. Appearing before the warlike Nala, that slayer of hostile heroes, Pushkara repeatedly said, "Let us play dice together."

Thus challenged in the presence of Damayanti, the lofty-minded Naishadha could not refuse for long. He fixed a time for the game.

Possessed as he was by Kali, Nala began to lose all his stakes — in gold, silver, chariots with their teams of horses, costly garments. And maddened by the dice, none amongst his friends could make him stop playing.

O Bhaarata, the citizens in a body, with the chief councillors, came to see the king and make him stop. The charioteer came to Damayanti and said, "O Queen, the people and the officers of the state are waiting at the gate. You must tell the king that they cannot bear the calamity which has overtaken him."

Overwhelmed by grief, almost mad from it, Bhima's daughter spoke in a choked voice to Nala, "Rajan, the loyal people and the councillors are at the gates, waiting to see you. You must grant them audience."

But possessed by Kali, the king did not reply to his desperate wife. At this, the people and the officials returned to their homes, in shame and sorrowing, saying among themselves, "He does not live!"

Yudhishtira, for many months Nala and Pushkara gambled, and the viruous Nala always lost.'

CANTO 60

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Bhima's daughter, the calm Damayanti, saw her husband maddened by the dice, and she was full of alarm; she saw how ciritical the situation was, for he had lost almost everything. She said to her nurse and maid-servant Brihatsena, "Go and summon the councillors in the name of Nala, and tell them also what wealth has been lost and what remains."

The councillors heard Nala's summons and said, "This is fortunate for us". They came to the king, along with all the people, for the second time. Damayanti informed Nala of their coming, but he ignored her and she returned in shame to her apartments.

Hearing that the dice rolled constantly against Nala, and that he had lost everything, she said again to her nurse, "Brihatsena, go again in Nala's name and fetch the charioteer Varshneya. For this is a crisis."

Brihatsena had Varshneya summoned by trusted servants, and the blameless Damayanti said softly to the sarathy, "You know how good the king has always been to you. He is in trouble now, and you must help him. The more the king loses to Pushkara, the more ardently he wants to play on. The dice fall obedient to Pushkara, and roll against Nala.

He is so possessed by the game that he does not listen to his friends and family, not even to me. O Sarathy, I seek your protection; my heart is weak within me and I fear the king will come to grief. I beg you, yoke Nala's favourite horses, swift as the mind, and take these twins, my son and daughter, in the royal chariot to Kundina. Leave them there with my kin, Sarathy, and then do as you will – either remain there yourself or go anywhere else that you please."

Nala's charioteer reported what Damayanti said to the chief officers of the king. With their assent, he then set out for Vidarbha, taking the children in his ratha. Leaving the boy Indrasena and the girl Indraseni, and also that best of chariots and those finest of horses with Bhima, and his heart full of sorrow for Nala, Varshneya the sarathy wandered here and there for some time, then arrived in Ayodhya and entered the service of King Rituparna, as his charioteer.'

CANTO 61

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'After Varshneya left, Pushkara won Nala's kingdom and what remained of his wealth. Then, laughing, he said to Nala, "Let us play on! But what will you stake now? You have lost everything you own except Damayanati. I am prepared to accept her as a wager, if you will put her up."

Nala listened to Pushkara and felt his heart would burst in anger, but he did not say a word. Only gazing at his adversary in anguish, Nala stripped all the precious ornaments from every part of his body. Wearing just a single piece of cloth, his body uncovered, all his wealth lost, having brought great grief to all his friends, the king set out from his city. Damayanti, also clad in one piece of cloth, followed him. Coming to the outskirts of the city, Nala stayed there for three nights with his wife. But Pushkara had it proclaimed that anyone who gave shelter to Nala or paid him the least attention would be put to death. No citizen, O Yudhishtira, dared show Nala any regard or hospitality.

Nala passed three nights upon the city's hem, living just on water. Roiled by hunger, the king went in search of fruit and roots, Damayanti following him. After many days, in agony from starving, Nala saw some birds of golden plumage and the mighty lord of the Nishadhas thought, "These will be my banquet today and also my wealth."

He covered them with the single cloth which he wore, but in a flash the birds rose up into the sky with that last garment. They looked down at Nala, now standing naked and stricken, his face turned down in shame, and those rangers of the sky said to him, "O you of small sense, we are the dice with which you played. We came here to take away your cloth, for we wanted to see you go naked from here!"

Nala now said to Damayanti, "They whose anger took my kingdom from me, they who have ravaged me with hunger, they who keep me from finding food, who kept the Nishadhas from offering me any hospitality have now come as birds and taken away my last cloth.

Ah, I have plunged into disaster, and my mind and senses reel with grief. I am your lord still, so listen to what I say and do as I ask; it is for your own

good. These many roads lead to the southern country, passing by the city of Avanti and the Rikshavat Mountains. This is the mighty Vindhya; yonder, the river Payasvini runs seawards, and there are the asramas of the Rishis, where many roots and fruit grow.

This road leads to the country of the Vidarbhas, and beyond that is the land of the Kosalas. Beyond these roads, to the south, is the Dravida country. Leave me and go there."

Over and over, the almost deranged Nala repeated these words to Damayanti. At which, in grief, her voice full of tears, Damayanti said piteously to the Naishadha, "O King, my heart trembles and my limbs turn weak to think of your purpose. How can I go, leaving you alone in this forest, having lost your kingdom and wealth, naked, worn with hunger and exhausted?

When you think of your old felicity in this deep vana and grieve, I will soothe your sorrow, great king. All the physicians say that in every sorrow there is no physic equal to a wife. It is the truth, O Nala, that I speak."

Nala replied, "Slender-waisted Damayanti, it is even as you say. To a man in distress, there is no friend or medicine that is equal to his wife. But I do not seek to renounce you, so why are you in dread? Faultless one, I can forsake myself but you I can never leave."

Damayanti said, "Mighty King, if you do not intend to forsake me, then why do you point out the way to the country of the Vidarbhas? I know, my lord, that you would not desert me. But, Lord of the Earth, your mind is sorely disturbed and you might desert me. Best of men, repeatedly you point out the road which leads out of here, and you swell my sorrow, O godlike.

If you intend that I go to the country of my kin, then let us both go the land of the Vidarbhas. The king of the Vidarbhas will receive you with honour, and you will live happily in our home.'"

CANTO 62

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Nala said, "Surely, your father's kingdom is as my own. But I will not go there in this condition. Once I appeared there in glory, increasing your joy. How can I go there now in misery, augmenting your grief?"

Saying this again and again to Damayanti, King Nala, wrapped in half a garment now, comforted his wife. Both of them sharing her single cloth, weary with hunger and thirst, they wandered on weakly, and at last came to a wayside shelter for travellers, a meagre shed.

Arriving there, the king of the Nishadhas sat down on the bare earth with the princess of Vidarbha. Sharing the same piece of cloth, dirty and haggard, stained with dust, exhausted, they fell on the ground. Plunged so abruptly in distress, the delicate and innocent Damayanti, every mark of fortune upon her body, fell into a deep slumber.

But Nala, his heart and mind distraught, could not sleep as he used to. He thought about losing his kingdom, the desertion by his friends, and his distress in the wilds.

He thought to himself, "To what avail my living on? Is death better for me now? But can I desert my wife, who is so devoted to me and suffers this hardship for my sake? But if I leave her, she might find her way to her relatives.

She is absolutely loyal and if she stays with me distress can be her only lot; while, if I leave her, she might find fortune and even happiness again someday."

Reflecting upon this repeatedly, he concluded that he should leave Damayanti. He also thought, "She has lofty fame, auspicious fortune; she is devoted to me, her husband, and no one will harm her on her way, such is her tejas."

It was the evil Kali influencing his mind to desert Damayanti. Nala then thought that they were sharing her single cloth, and he wanted to cut half of it away for himself. He thought, "How shall I divide this garment, so that my beloved does not awaken?"

Thinking of this, he paced that shelter and, O Bhaarata, he found a handsome sword lying nearby, unsheathed. That Parantapa used the blade to shear away one half of the cloth, then throwing the weapon aside, he left the daughter of Vidharbha asleep and walked away.

But his heart failed him, and he returned to the shelter, and seeing Damayanti again, burst into tears. He said, "Alas! My beloved, whom not the Wind or the Sun has seen before, lies forsaken and wretched on bare ground, wearing a single cloth. Ah, what will she of the luminous smiles do when she awakens alone? How will Bhima's beautiful daughter find her way through this forest full of wild animals and snakes?

O blessed one, may the Adityas and the Vasus, and the twin Aswins together with the Marutas protect you, your virtue being your best guard."

Saying this softly to his wife, whose beauty was unmatched in the world, Nala, deranged by Kali, tried to leave again. He came back again and again, helplessly, hauled away by Kali but pulled back by love; and it seemed as if the heart of the wretched king was torn in two, and like a swing, he kept going out from the shelter and coming back into it.

At length, after lamenting long and piteously, Nala, entirely stupefied by Kali, went away, forsaking his sleeping wife. Bereft of reason through Kali's touch, the king left in sorrow leaving Damayanti alone in that solitary forest.'

CANTO 63

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'O King, some time after Nala had left, the exquisite and timorous Damayanti awoke in that lonely forest. Not finding her lord Naishadha, she screamed in fright, "My husband, have you abandoned me? I am lost, undone, oh, I am terrified in this dreadful jungle. Illustrious Kshatriya, you are always truthful and you know dharma well. Then how have you deserted me while I slept in this wilderness? Oh, why have you left your wife, who is devoted to you, who has never wronged you, even when everyone else has abandoned you?

King of men, you said in the presence of the Lokapalas that you would always be true to me. Purusharishabha, it is only because mortals die when their time comes that I am alive for even a moment after you have left me.

Ah, Bull among men, enough of this joke! Irrepressible one, I am terribly afraid. Lord, show yourself to me. I see you! I see you hiding in the bushes, why don't you answer me? You are being cruel, Nala, that you see me in this plight but do not come to comfort me.

I do not grieve for myself, nor anything else. I only grieve to think how you will pass your days alone. In the evening, savaged by hunger, thirst and tiredness under the trees, how will you live without seeing me, without having my comfort?"

The anguished Damayanti began to dash here and there, sobbing and wailing. Now the helpless princess would spring up, then sink down to the ground again; now she shrank in terror, and then she wept aloud. Sighing, burning with grief, Bhima's daughter sobbed, "He through whose curse Nala suffers this grief will suffer torment worse than ours! May the evil one who has reduced the sinless Nala to this lead a life of greater misery than ours, bearing greater ills."

So lamenting, the crowned queen of Nala began to seek her husband in that forest, which teemed with predators. Crying bitterly, the daughter of Bhima wandered dementedly, like a madwoman, exclaiming, "Alas! O King!"

As she wailed loudly like a female osprey, and grieved unceasingly and lamented piteously, she came near a gigantic serpent. The huge and hungry

snake suddenly seized Bhima's daughter, who had come within its striking range. Folded in serpent's coils, in pain, she still wept not for herself but for her Naishadha.

She cried, "O Nala, why don't you rush to me now that this snake has seized me in this wild place? Naishadha, how will you bear it when you think of me? O lord, why have you gone away, abandoning me in this jungle? When you are freed from your curse and regain your mind and your wealth, what will you do when you remember me?

Sinless one, who will comfort you when you are tired, hungry and feel faint, O tiger among kings?"

As she cried all this aloud, a hunter ranging through the deep vana heard her and ran to the place. Seeing the doe-eyed beauty in the coils of the snake, he cut off the serpent's head and freed Damayanti. He sprinkled water over her, fed and consoled her, O Bhaarata.

Then the vetala asked her, "Who are you, O gazelle-eyed, and why have you come into the jungle? Beautiful one, how did you fall into this extreme misery?"

Damayanti told him everything. Looking at her wearing half a cloth, her breasts deep and her hips round, her limbs flawless and delicate, her face like the full moon, her long lashes curved, her speech as sweet as honey, the hunter became inflamed. In the grip of Kama Deva, he began to console her in a soft voice, with smooth words.

The chaste Damayanti immediately understood his intentions; she blazed up in anger. The wild fellow, in the grip of lust, also grew angry and tried to force himself on her who was fierce as a flame. Already stricken past endurance, Damayanti cursed him in fury, "I have never even thought of another man other than Naishadha, so let this wretch who subsists on the hunt fall dead!"

As soon as she said this, the hunter fell lifeless on the ground, like a tree consumed by fire.'

CANTO 64

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa continues, 'Having killed the hunter, Damayanti of eyes like lotus leaves walked on through that fearful and solitary forest, which rang with the chirping of crickets. The vana abounded with lion, leopard, ruru, tiger, bison, bear and deer. It swarmed with birds of various species, and was, besides, infested by bandits and mlechcha tribes.

Sala trees grew there, bamboo, Dhavas and Aswatthas, Tindukas and Ingudas, Kinsukas and Arjunas, Arishtas, Sanchanas, Nimbas and Tinisas, Syandana, Salmalas and Jambus, and mango trees, and Lodhras, and Khadiras, and the cane, and Padyakas, and Amalakas, and Plakshas, and Kadambas, and Udumvaras and Badaris, and Bilvas, and banyans, and Priyalas, and palms, and date-trees, Haritakas and Vibhitakas.

The princess of Vidarbha saw many mountains with lodes of precious minerals of diverse kinds, and groves resounding with the music of winged choirs, and many glades of great beauty, and many rivers and lakes and tanks and all manner of birds and beasts. She saw numberless Nagas and Pisachas and Rakshasas of grim visage, and pools and rillets and hillocks, and brooks and fountains of wonder.

Herds of bison Damayanti saw, sounders of boar and solitary bears and snakes in that pristine wilderness. Safe in her virtue, glory, good fortune and patience, Damayanti wandered through those forests alone, in search of Nala. Bhima's royal daughter was not frightened by anything—feral creature or sight—in the fearsome vana; she only grieved at being apart from Nala.

O King, she sat down upon a flat stone, full of sorrow, her every limb trembling, and she lamented, "O King of the Nishadhas, you with the mighty arms and broad chest, where have you gone, leaving me in this lone forest? O Kshatriya, you performed the Aswamedha and other sacrifices, gave profuse gifts, then why have you betrayed me, Purushavyaghra?

Best of men, O you of great splendour, O auspicious one, don't you remember what you swore to me, Rajarishabha? Remember what the swan said to both of us! Tiger among men, all the four Vedas together, with the

Angas and the Upangas, mastered, are only equal to a single truth spoken and honoured. So, Parantapa, honour the oath you swore to me.

Alas, O Kshatriya! O Nala! Sinless one, being yours, I am about to die alone in this dreadful forest. Oh! Why don't you answer me? This terrible lord of the forest, of grim face and gaping jaws, and famished with hunger, fills me with fear. Should you not deliver me?

You would always say, 'Other than you there is no one that I love.

O blessed king, keep your word to me now. Nala, why don't you come back to your wife, who is demented with grief, and wailing here, she that you love and who loves you in return? Lord of the earth, O large-eyed, honoured one, bane of your enemies, don't you see me here, emaciated, distraught and pale, wearing a half piece of cloth, alone, crying, desolate, and like a solitary doe separated from the herd?

Nala, it is I, Damayanti, devoted to you, who, alone in this great forest, that speaks to you. Why don't you reply? Oh, I do not see you today upon this mountain, lord of men, you of noble birth and character, your every limb so full of grace! Whom shall I ask in this terrible forest, full of lions and tigers, O King of the Nishadhas, foremost of men, enhancer of my sorrows, if you are lying down, sitting or standing nearby, or gone?

Griefstricken as I am, whom shall I ask, 'Have you seen Nala in this jungle? Do you know where the noble and handsome Nala, scourge of his enemies, has gone?'

From whom shall I hear the sweet words, 'The royal Nala is here!'

Look, here comes the king of the jungle, the lordly tiger, his cheeks high and four fangs showing. I will accost even him fearlessly, and say, 'You are the lord of all beasts, and king of this vana. I am Damayanti, daughter of the king of the Vidarbhas, and the wife of Nala, Parantapa, king of the Nishadhas. I am distrait and griefstricken, seeking my husband alone in this forest. King of beasts, comfort me with news of Nala, if you can, or best of animals, free me from my misery by devouring me.'

Alas, he stalks away without responding.

Look! This king of mountains, this lofty and sacred hill crested with countless peaks hears my piteous appeal and seems to loll towards the sea. Let me, then, ask the mountain king for tidings of my Nala, this lord of mountains with so many heaven-kissing and many-hued and beautiful peaks, abounding in precious ores, decked with gemstones of diverse kinds, and rising like a banner over this great forest, the mountain upon whom

lions and tigers and elephants and boars and bears and stags roam, the mountain which echoes with the songs of birds of every kind, mountain adorned with Kinsukas and Asokas and Bakulas and Punnagas, with blossoming Karnikaras, and Dhavas and Plakshas, and with streams teeming with waterfowl of every kind.

O sacred one! O best of mountains! O you wondrous spectacle! O celebrated massif! O refuge of the distressed! O most auspicious one! I bow to you, O pillar of the earth! Approaching, I bow to you.

Know me for a king's daughter, and a king's daughter-in-law, and a king's wife. I am Damayanti, daughter of Bhima, mighty warrior king of the Vidarbhas, protector of the four varnas. That best of kings performed the Rajasuya and Aswamedha yagnas, with bountiful gifts to Brahmanas. Bhima of the beautiful and large eyes, distinguished for his devotion to the Vedas, of blemishless character, always truthful, devoid of guile, gentle, powerful, lord of immense wealth, versed in dharma, and pure, has vanquished all his enemies and protects all the people of Vidarbha. Holy Mountain, I am that Bhima's daughter, come to you in direst straits.

That best of men, the renowned king of the Nishadhas, Virasena of towering fame, was my father-in-law. His heroic and beautiful son, of invincible prowess, who rules well the kingdom he inherited from his father, is called Nala. Know, O Mountain, that I am the wife of that golden-complexioned slayer of foes, devoted to Brahmanas, versed in the Vedas, gifted with eloquence, that righteous and Soma-drinking and fire-adoring king, who performed great sacrifices and is both liberal and warlike, who punishes evil men – I am his innocent queen who stands before you.

Having lost all that we owned and also my husband now, I have no one to protect me anymore, and I have come before you in deep distress. I have come seeking my husband. O foremost of mountains, with your hundreds of peaks towering into the sky, have you seen Nala in this fearful jungle? Have you seen my husband, that king of the Nishadhas, the lustrous Nala with the tread of a mighty elephant, blessed with great intelligence, long-armed, and of fiery tejas, possessed of prowess and patience and courage and high fame?

Ah, best of mountains, you see me lamenting alone, overwhelmed by sorrow, then why don't you comfort me with your voice, as your own daughter in distress?

O mighty Kshatriya, O warrior of truth and prowess, O you who know every particular of dharma, O lord of the earth – if you are in this forest, O King, show yourself to me. Ah, when will I hear the voice of Nala again, gentle, and deep as that of the clouds, that voice sweet as amrita, of my illustrious king calling me Vidarbhas daughter, in accents clear, rich and holy, and musical as the chanting of the Vedas, and soothing all my sorrows? Nala, I am frightened. Virtuous one, comfort me."

Having said all this to that greatest of mountains, Damayanti walked towards the north, and having gone three days and nights, she came to an incomparable tapovana of Rishis, as beautiful as a grove in heaven. She saw great Sages that adorned that asrama— Valmiki, Bhrigu and Atri—all holy men, at stern tapasya, their senses and minds restrained, some living on water, some on air, and some on fallen leaves, passions in check, eminently blessed, clad in barks of trees and deer-skins, seeking the way to salvation.

Damayanti's spirits revived seeing that charmed hermitage of Munis, where herds of deer grazed and monkeys frolicked in the trees. That best of women, her eyes large and black, her brows graceful, her tresses long, her hips wide, her bosom deep, her face perfect, her teeth like pearls, her form lustrous and noble, entered the hermitage. She saluted those ascetics, grown old practising their austerities, and stood humbly before them.

They said to her, "Welcome! Sit down and tell us what we can do for you."

Damayanti said, "Sinless and most blessed Munis, is all well with your tapasya, your sacrificial fire, religious observances, and your svadharma? And is all well with the beasts and birds of this asrama?"

They answered, "Beautiful, illustrious woman, prosperity attends us in every way. But O you of faultless limbs, tell us who you are, and what you seek. Seeing your lovely form and your bright splendour, we are amazed. Do not grieve. Blameless, blessed one, tell us, are you the Devi of this forest, or of this mountain, or of this river?"

Damayanti replied, "Brahmanas, I am not the goddess of this forest, or of this mountain, or of this stream. O Rishis of ascetic wealth, I am a human woman. I will tell you about my life in detail. I beg you, listen to me.

There is a king called Bhima, the mighty ruler of the Vidarbhas, and O Dvijottamas, I am his daughter. Nala, wise ruler of the Nishadhas, heroic, of great renown, always victorious in battle, and learned, is my husband, the large-eyed Nala, his face like the full moon, who always worships the gods,

who is devoted to Brahmanas, guardian of the line of the Nishadhas, of mighty energy, of great strength, truthful, conversant with dharma, wise, unwavering in keeping his word, crusher of his foes, devout, graceful, conqueror of hostile towns, foremost of kings, equal in splendour to the king of the Devas.

He performs great sacrifices, knows the Vedas well, and their Angas, destroys his enemies in battle, is as splendid as the Sun and the Moon. That king devoted to truth and dharma was summoned to play dice by some deceitful and evil ones, skilled at gambling, and he had his kingdom and his wealth taken from him.

Munis, I am the wife of that Rajarishabha, and my name is Damayanti. My lord has gone missing and I am desperate to find him. I am wandering through forests and among mountains, lakes, rivers and tanks, in sorrow, in search of my husband – Nala, skilled in battle, high-souled, and a master of weapons.

O Rishis, has Nala, lord of the Nishadhas, come to this beautiful asrama of yours? It is for him, O Brahmanas, that I have come to this forest full of terror, haunted by tigers and other beasts. If I do not see King Nala in a few days, I will seek my weal by leaving this body. Of what use is my life without that bull among men? How will I live tormented by grief at being without him?"

The Rishis said to the forlorn Damayanti, "Blessed and beautiful child, with our mystic powers, we see that the future holds joy for you and that you will soon find Nala. O daughter of Bhima, you will see the lord of the Nishadhas, slayer of his enemies, foremost of the virtuous, freed from distress. You will see the king, your husband, freed from all sin, wearing precious jewels, again ruling his own city, punishing his enemies, striking terror into their hearts, and gladdening the hearts of friends, while all success and every blessing crown him."

When they had said this to the princess, Nala's beloved queen, those Sages and all that asrama vanished before her eyes! Damayanti of faultless limbs stood wonderstruck. She asked herself, "Was it a dream that I saw? Ah, what a marvel! Where are all those Brahmanas? Where is that asrama? Where is that sparkling river of sacred water, on which so many kinds of waterbirds swam? Where are those enchanted trees laden with flowers and fruit?"

After wandering for some time, Damayanti was melancholy again and the colour drained from her face from grief for Nala. She went to another part of the forest and saw a great asoka tree. Going up to that first of trees, blossom-laden and full of leaves, resounding with birdsong in its branches, Damayanti, with tears in her eyes and her voice choking, said, "Oh, this graceful tree in the heart of the forest, decked in flowers, is so beautiful, like some charming king of hills. O beautiful Asoka, quickly set me free from sorrow!

Have you seen King Nala, Parantapa, the beloved husband of Damayanti? Have you seen my precious husband, the king of the Nishadhas, clad in half a piece of cloth, his skin delicate, hero plunged in woe who came into this wilderness? O Asoka, free me from my grief! Vindicate your name, for Asoka means destroyer of grief."

Thrice she walked around that tree, then entered an even denser part of the jungle. Wandering in quest of her lord, Bhima's daughter saw many unusual, majestic trees, lovely rills, towering mountains, and beasts and birds, and caves, and cliffs, many rivers of wonderful beauty.

As she went, she came upon a wide path where, in some amazement, she saw a mighty group of merchants, with their horses and elephants, on the banks of a river full of clear and cool water, and lovely to behold, and wide, the banks overgrown with bamboo clumps, echoing with the cries of cranes and ospreys and chakravakas, the river itself full of tortoises, crocodiles and fish, and studded with innumerable islets.

As soon as she saw that caravan, Damayanti, dishevelled, lean, her hair tangled and filthy, wearing half a cloth, went towards the merchants like some madwoman, that lovely queen. Seeing her some of the Vaisyas fled in fear, some grew anxious, while some cried out, and others laughed at her, and yet others despised the very sight of her.

However, some felt pity, O Bhaarata, and asked her, "Blessed one, who are you, and whose? What do you seek in this forest? We are frightened of you, tell us truly are you human or the Devi of this jungle, or this mountain, or of the points of the sky? We seek your protection. Are you a Yakshi or a Rakshasi, or a Devastri? Anyway, bless us, O you of faultless features, and protect us so our caravan passes through this place safely, with ourselves and our goods secure."

Damayanti said, "O leader of the caravan, merchants, youths, old men, children, I am a human woman. I am the daughter of a king, the daughter

in-law of a king, and the consort, also, of a king, eager for the sight of my lord. The king of the Vidarbhas is my father; my husband Nala is the lord of the Nishadhas, and even now I am looking for him.

If you have seen my beloved Nala, tiger among men, razer of hostile armies, tell me quickly!"

At which the leader of that great caravan, Suchi, said to Damayanti of faultless limbs, "Blessed one, you of sweet smiles, I am a Vaisya and the leader of this caravan. Lovely lady, I have not seen any man called Nala. In this great forest, where no men live, there are only elephants, leopards, bison, tigers, bears and other beasts. Other than you I have met no human in this vana, may Manibhadra, king of the Yakshas, help us now!"

She asked, "Tell me where this caravan is bound."

The leader of the band said, "O daughter of a great king, we are bound for the city of Subahu, the honest sovereign of the Chedis, to make some profit from our goods. "

CANTO 65

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa said, 'Damayanti went with that caravan, and she was anxious to see her Nala. After travelling for many days, the merchants saw a large lake fragrant with lotuses in the midst of that dense and terrible forest. Its banks adorned with velvet grasses, with plenty of wood to burn as fuel, and with flowers and fruit, it was a charmed place indeed.

The shimmering water abounded with birds of many kinds; it was cool, clear and sweet, and captivated the heart. Worn with their long journey, the merchants of the caravan decided to halt there and spread themselves through the fine woods surrounding the lake. It was dusk.

At midnight, when all was still and quiet, when the tired caravan had fallen asleep, a herd of wild elephants, the juice of rut flowing down their temples, and going to drink from a mountain stream, saw the caravan of sleeping Vaisyas, and also the many tame elephants which went with the merchants. Seeing the domesticated elephants, the wild herd, maddened by musth, rushed at them, meaning to kill them; they came like great boulders loosed down a mountain slope.

The charging wild elephants found their way to the lake of lotuses and the elephants of the caravan barred by sleeping merchants and they trampled the Vaisyas. Many died, while others awoke and fled screaming in all directions, into the deeper forest. Some were gored to death, others scooped up in massive trunks and dashed on the ground, while more were crushed under massive feet.

The wild elephants killed many camels and horses, as well, while in panic the fleeing merchants with weapons drawn even killed one another in the dark. Some fell on the ground, others scrambled up trees, while yet others jumped down into deep pits. O King, great losses that caravan suffered when the wild herd attacked it.

An uproar broke out, for precious jewels the Vaisyas were carrying scattered on the ground.

"Save us!" they screamed.

"Pick up the jewels!"

"Leave them. What do the jewels matter when our lives are in danger?"

"Fly!"

"Where to fly?"

And they dashed about blindly in complete terror. Damayanti awoke in fear, while the slaughter held sway around her; she awoke trembling and panting.

Finally, the elephants lumbered away and those merchants who had escaped with their lives met together, and they asked "What have we done that this disaster has overtaken us?"

"Surely, we did not worship the Manibhadras, and the exalted and graceful Vaisravana, the king of the Yakshas."

"Perhaps, we have not worshipped the gods who fetch calamities, or perhaps we did not pay them the first homage. Maybe, this evil follows the birds we saw on our way."

"Our stars are not unpropitious. From what other cause, then, has disaster come?"

Some, who had lost their wealth and relatives, and were distraught, cried, "This mad looking woman came among us and she was strange and hardly human. Surely she has brought this on us. She must be a Rakshasi, a Yakshi or as Pisachi! Beyond doubt, this evil is her doing.

"If we see that evil creature again, we will kill her!"

Damayanti heard what they said and fled into the forest. She said desperately to herself, "Alas! Fierce and great is the wrath of God upon me. Peace does not follow my paths. What have I done to deserve this? I do not remember that I ever harmed anyone in the least, in thought, word or deed. Then why such terrible consequences?

Surely, some great sins from a past life are being visited on me that my husband has lost his kingdom, and his own kinsmen turned against him and vanquished him. I have been separated from my son and daughter, and my lord, and find myself alone in this dreadful jungle full of savage beasts."

O King, the next day, what remained of the once mighty caravan of merchants left that place, loudly lamenting their lost wealth and their dead brothers, fathers, sons and friends.

And the princess of Vidarbha also lamented, "Ah, what have I done? Surely, it is my misfortune which has devastated the company of men with whom I took refuge. Now, surely, I will have to suffer for a long time. I have heard wise old men say that no one dies before their time; surely, that is why the elephants did not trample me while I slept.

Everything which has happened to me is only because of something I did in a past life, for not even as a child did I commit any such sin in thought, word, or deed, which could bring such tragedy as this one as its consequence. Oh, I do believe that I have been parted from my Nala because I chose him over the all-powerful Lokapalas who came to my swayamvara. It is their power which has brought calamity into my life."

Thus grieving, pale as the autumn moon, Damayanti now attached herself to the Brahmanas, knowers of the Vedas, who had survived the night's massacre. Travelling briskly, towards evening she came to the mighty city of Subahu, king of the Chedis. Wearing half a garment, she entered that magnificent city.

The citizens saw her, full of fear, lean, melancholy, her hair dishevelled and soiled with dirt, and altogether like a madwoman. In curiosity, the boys of that city began following her. Surrounded by them, she came to the palace of the king.

The queen-mother saw her from a terrace, surrounded by the crowd of youths. She said to her nursemaid, "Go and bring that woman to me. She is forlorn and the crowd troubles her. She is in distress and in need of succour. I find her beauty such that it illumines my house. Though she looks like a madwoman, with her large eyes, the fair one is as lovely as the Devi Sri herself."

The woman went out and, dispersing the crowd, brought Damayanti to that fine terrace. O King, wonderstruck, that nursemaid asked Damayanti, "You are plunged in misfortune, yet you are so very beautiful. You shine like lightning in the clouds. Tell me who you are, and whose. Your lustre is celestial; surely you are not merely human. You wear no ornaments, and although you are helpless, you are unmoved by the coarseness of these men."

Damayanti said, "I am a human woman, devoted to my husband. I am a serving woman from good stock. I live wherever I like, eating fruit and roots, and without a companion, and sleep where night overtakes me. My husband is a man of countless virtues and was always devoted to me. I was also deeply attached to him, following him like his shadow.

Once he became involved in a desperate game of dice. Beaten, losing everything, he came into the wilderness. I came with him into the forest, comforting that hero clad in a single piece of cloth, who was demented by

his sudden adversity. Afflicted by hunger, thirst and grief, he was forced to relinquish even his last cloth.

Naked and deranged as he was, I still followed him, myself in a single garment. For nights together, I did not sleep. Many days passed, until, once while I slept, he cut away one half of my garment and abandoned me, who had done him no wrong.

I am seeking my husband but cannot find him, who has the complexion of the filaments of a lotus. Without seeing him who delights my heart, my beloved lord who owns my heart, for he is like a Deva to look at, I am consumed by grief by night and day."

Now the queen-mother herself said to the tearful Damayanti, "Blessed one, you stay with me. I am well pleased with you. Lovely one, my men will search for your husband, or he might come here on his wanderings. Remain here with me and you will have your lost lord back."

Damayanti replied, "Mother of heroes, I can only stay with you on some conditions. I will not eat the leavings of any food, nor will I wash anyone's feet, nor must I have to speak to any other man. If anyone tries to make me his wife or mistress, he must submit to my punishment; more, if he solicits me repeatedly, he must be punished with death.

This is the vow I have sworn. I also want to speak to the Brahmanas who will go forth to seek out my husband. If you can do all this for me, I will certainly live with you. But if you cannot, I also cannot remain here with you."

The queen-mother answered her gladly, "I will do all this. I approve of the vow you have taken."

O Bhaarata, the queen-mother now said to her daughter Sunanda, "Sunanda, take this woman who is like a goddess to be your Sairandhri. She is the same age as you are, let her be your companion, and enjoy her company."

Sunanda cheerfully accepted Damayanti and led her to her own apartments, along with her sakhis. Treated with respect, Damayanti was satisfied and she lived there without any anxiety, for all her wishes were met.'

CANTO 66

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Rajan, after deserting Damayanti, Nala saw a mighty conflagration that raged in that dense forest. From the great fire, he heard some creature crying repeatedly to him, "O righteous Nala, come here!"

Answering, "Fear not!" he ran into the fire and saw a mighty Naga king in coils. Trembling, with folded hands, the Naga said to Nala, "O King, I am a snake and Karkotaka is my name. I once deceived the Maharishi Narada and he cursed me in anger: 'Stay here immobile as if graven of stone, until one Nala takes you out from this place. And at the very place to which he bears you, you will be free from my curse.

For that curse, I canot move. I will tell you how to save me, and I will be your friend. There is no Naga to equal me, but I will be light in your hands. Pick me up, Nala, and hurry from here!"

Saying this that prince of snakes became as small as a man's thumb. Picking him up, Nala took him out of the forest fire. Coming to an open glade, Nala meant to set the Naga down, when Karkotaka said again to him, "King of the Nishadhas, go on a little further, a few steps more. Mahabaho, I will do you great good."

As Nala walked on, the snake bit him at the tenth step. As soon as he was bitten, Nala found himself transformed; he saw the snake also resume his own massive form.

Karkotaka comforted Nala, "I have taken your beauty from you so that people will not recognise you. And, Nala, he who has deceived you and plunged you in despair will continue to dwell inside you, but now tortured by my venom. As long as he does not leave you, he will be in agony in your body, its every limb filled with my venom. O King, I have saved you from the one who has destroyed you out of anger and hatred, though you are perfectly innocent and undeserving of wrong.

Also, tiger among men, from now through my grace you will feel no fear from any fanged creature, from other enemies as well as Brahmanas who know the Vedas. Nor will you feel any pain from my poison. Kshatriya, you will always be victorious in battle.

Lord of Nishadhas, go to the wondrous city of Ayodhya even today and present yourself before King Rituparna, who is a master of gambling, and say to him, 'I am Bahuka, a charioteer.' In return for your knowledge of horses, he will teach you the skills of dice. He is of the line of Ikshvaku, and prosperous; he will be your friend.

When you are an adept at dice you will have your fortune back. You will find your wife and children and have your kingdom again. I say this to you in truth, so do not let sorrow cloud your mind.

Lord of men, when you want to have back your own form, think of me and put on this garment."

That Naga gave Nala two pieces of celestial cloth, and the king of snakes vanished.'

CANTO 67

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'After the snake disappeared, Nala made his way towards Ayodhya and entered Rituparna's city on the tenth day.

He went to the king and said, "My name is Bahuka. There is no one in this world to equal me in tending to horses. My counsel is also valued in all difficult problems, and I have many other skills besides. I am also a most excellent cook. Why, for you I will excel at every art which exists in this world, and accomplish everything difficult. O Rituparna, keep me in your palace."

Rituparna replied warmly, "Bahuka, stay with me! May fortune befall you, for I believe what you say. I have always particularly wanted to be driven fast; I leave it to you to make my horses swift. I give you charge of my stables, and I will pay you ten thousand coins for that.

Varshneya and Jivala will always be under your direction, and you will spend your time pleasantly with them. So, Bahuka, do stay with me!"

Nala began to live in Rituparna's city, and was treated with respect, while Varshneya and Jivala were his companions. Living there, he thought of Damayanti and every morning and evening he would sing aloud to himself, even like a sloka, "Where is that helpless one, afflicted by hunger and thirst, worn with toil, thinking of that wretch. Ah, on whom does she now wait?"

Once as the king was chanting this in the night, Jivala asked him, "Bahuka, for whom do you so lament daily? I am curious. O you who are blessed with a long life, whose wife is she for whom you so grieve?"

Nala replied, "There is a certain foolish man who had a wife known to all. However, the wretch proved false in his vows to her. He was separated from her and wandered the earth, tormented by sorrow, without rest by day or night. At nights, he remembers her, and he sings this verse. Having wandered over all the world, he has finally found a refuge, and undeserving of the suffering which has overtaken him, he passes his days thinking of his wife.

When calamity overtook this man, his wife followed him into the jungle. Deserted by him of small virtue, her very life is in danger. Alone, with no

knowledge of the ways of the world, ill able to bear grief, faint with hunger and thirst, she can hardly protect herself. And, O friend, that man of small sense and little fortune has abandoned her in that terrible forest, teeming with predators."

Thus always remembering Damayanti, Nala, king of the Nishadhas, continued to live, unknown, in the palace of Rituparna of Ayodhya.'"

CANTO 68

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Brihadaswa says, "After Nala lost his kingdom and became a bondsman, while Damayanti entered the service of a queen-mother, Bhima wanted to see Nala and he sent out Brahmanas to search for him. Giving them profuse wealth, Bhima said, "Seek out Nala and also Damayanti. He who finds the Naishadha and my daughter, and brings them to me, shall have a thousand cows from me, and fields and a village as big as a town. Even if he does not fetch Damayanti and Nala here, he that discovers where they are will have wealth equal to a thousand cows."

The Brahmanas happily went forth in every direction, combing cities and provinces. But nowhere did they find Nala or his queen, until, at last a Brahmana called Sudeva came to the city of the Chedis, and there, during the time of the king's prayers, saw Damayanti in the king's palace, sitting with Sunanda. Lean and soiled as she was, her incomparable beauty glowed like fire hidden in curls of smoke, and he felt certain she was the princess of Vidarbha.

Sudeva said to himself, "I am blessed, that my eyes behold the princess who is like Sri herself, delighting the worlds! Her face is like the full moon; she is in the fullness of her youth, her breasts round and high, illumining this place with her lustre like moonrays, her eyes like lotus petals, fascinating as Kama's Rati herself, although, alas, she seems like a lotus stalk transplanted by ill fortune from the Vidarbha lake, and covered with mire in the process.

Grieving for her husband, she looks like the paurnima night when Rahu swallows the Moon, or like a river which has run dry. Ah, she is like a lake of lotuses, whose blooms have been ravaged by the trunks of elephants, a lake whose birds are terrified by the rampaging herd. Surely, this delicate girl of exquisite limbs, who deserves to dwell in a jewelled palace is indeed like a lotus uprooted and scorched by the sun.

She is beautiful past compare, she is generous; she should wear ornaments but has none, and is like the moon covered by black clouds. Deprived of every comfort and luxury, torn away from her friends, she is in distress, supported only by the hope of seeing her lord, for truly her

husband is the best ornament of a woman, even if she has no other. Without her husband beside her, this lady, though beautiful, does not shine forth as she should.

As for Nala, how does he remain alive separated from such a wife? Why, I look at her, black-haired, her eyes like lotus leaves, unhappy though she deserves to be joyful, and even my heart is pained. When will this girl, graced by every auspicious mark and devoted to her husband, cross this ocean of woe, and be with her lord again, even like Rohini regaining the Moon?

For sure, when Nala finds her again, he will experience the delight of a king regaining his lost kingdom. He is her equal in nature, in age and lineage; Nala deserves Damayanti and this black-eyed beauty deserves the Naishadha. I see how she pines for him, and I should comfort the queen of that hero of immeasurable prowess, energy and might. Let me console this distraught girl, her face like the full moon, and suffering as she never has before, and always thinking only of her husband."

The Brahmana Sudeva approached Damayanti, and said, "Princess of Vidarbha, I am Sudeva the Brahmana, your brother's dear friend. I have come here seeking you at the behest of King Bhima. Your father is well, and also your mother, and your brothers. Your son and daughter, blessed with length of days, live in peace. However, your kinsfolk, though living are almost as dead on your account, and hundreds of Brahmanas range the world in search of you."

Damayanti recognised Sudeva, and asked about all her family, one after the other. O King, then, overwhelmed, the princess began to sob bitterly at unexpectedly seeing that best of Brahmanas, her brother's friend. Sunanda saw Damayanti crying, and speaking privately to Sudeva, and went in some distress to her mother and said, "Sairandhri is sobbing in the presence of a Brahmana. Come and see."

The mother of the king of the Chedis came out of the inner apartments of the palace, to where Damayanti was with the Brahmana. Calling Sudeva, the queen-mother asked him, "Whose wife is this fair one, and whose daughter? How has she of beautiful eyes lost the company of her relatives and of her husband as well? How do you know her? Tell me all this in detail, about this girl of unearthly beauty."

Then, O Bhaarata, Sudeva, that best of Brahmanas, sat at his ease and began to tell the story of Damayanti.'

CANTO 69

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sudeva said, "There is a virtuous and illustrious king of the Vidarbhas called Bhima. This young woman is his daughter Damayanti. She is also the wife of the wise and righteous Nala, king of the Nishadhas, the son of Virasena. Defeated at dice by his brother, and deprived of his kingdom, that king, taking Damayanti with him, left his city.

We have been ranging the earth in search of Damayanti, and at last we have found her in the palace of your son. No woman exists who can rival her beauty. From her infancy she has had a fine birthmark between her eye-brows, a mark like a lotus. It now seems to have all but vanished, for her face is covered by dust, even as clouds hide the moon. Put there by Brahma himself, to be a mark of fortune and wealth, that lotus is still faintly visible, like the cloud-covered crescent moon of the first day of the bright fortnight.

And though her body, too, is covered with dirt, her beauty has not disappeared. Though she is careless of her person, her beauty still shines through like gold. Ah, by her birthmark and her mole I have recognised her, even as one discovers a covered fire by its heat!"

O King, hearing what Sudeva said, Sunanda washed away the dust that covered the mark between Damayanti's eye-brows, whereupon it became clear like the moon appearing from behind clouds. When they saw the lotus mark, Sunanda and the queen-mother began to cry; they embraced Damayanti and stood silent for a time.

Still shedding tears, the queen-mother said gently, "Through this mark I know that you are my sister's daughter! Lovely one, your mother and I are both daughters of the high-souled Sudaman, king of the Dasarnas. She was given to King Bhima, and I to Virabahu. I witnessed your birth in our father's palace in the kingdom of the Dasarnas. My beautiful child, my house is as your own father's house to you; all my wealth, Damayanti, is yours as much as mine."

At this, Damayanti, her heart glad, bowed down to her mother's sister and said, "Even before you knew me, you took me in and cared for me. I have already been happy in your house, and now I am sure I will be still

happier. But, mother, I have long been an exile and so, I beg you, give me leave to go.

My son and daughter live in my father's palace. Deprived of both their father and mother, they must pass their time in great sorrow. If you want to please me, give me an escort even now and let me go to the Vidarbhas."

Rajan, Damayanti's aunt agreed happily, "So be it."

And with her son's permission, she sent Damayanti in a handsome palanquin, carried by sturdy servitors, protected by a large escort and provided with food and drink and the finest garments. Soon enough, she reached the country of the Vidarbhas, where all her family received her in great joy, while she worhipped the Gods and Brahmanas and gave thanks at seeing her relatives, her children, both her parents, and all her old sakhis well.

King Bhima gave Sudeva a thousand cows and much wealth and a whole village.

Having slept the night in her father's palace, and having recovered somewhat from her exhaustion, Damayanti said to her mother, "O mother, if you want me to live, you must find Nala and bring him to me."

At which, the queen, her mother, began to cry but could give her daughter no reply. Seeing her like that all the women of the harem began to lament and weep loudly. Then the queen went to the mighty Bhima and said, "Your daughter Damayanti grieves heartbroken for Nala. She told me so herself. Let all your men do their utmost to find the Naishadha."

Bhima sent his Brahmanas in all directions, saying, "Do everything you can to find Nala!"

Before going forth, those Brahmanas came to Damayanti and told her of their mission. Bhima's daughter said to them, "Go and cry out in every realm, 'Beloved gambler, where have you gone cutting away half my garment, and abandoning your devoted wife while she slept in the jungle? That girl waits for you, consumed by grief. Relent, O King, O Kshatriya, and answer her, for she weeps incessantly for you!'

Say all this and more so that he is moved by pity. Say, 'Helped by the wind, fire consumed the forest. A husband must always protect and provide for his wife. Why then, good as you are and acquainted with every duty, have you neglected to do both? You have fame, wisdom, lineage, and kindness; why have you been unkind?

I fear that all this is because of my good fortune being lost! O tiger among men, take pity on me, O bull among men! You always said to me that kindness is the highest virtue, why are you not kind now?'

If anyone answers you when you say all this, find out who he is and where he lives. Dvijottamas, come and tell me what that man says who answers you. You must be careful that no one knows that the words you speak are at my behest, nor that you will come back to me. You must discover everything about him who answers you – if he is rich or poor, powerful or powerless, everything about him."

With these instructions from Damayanti, the Brahmanas set out in all directions in search of Nala overtaken by misfortune. They looked for him in kingdoms, cities and villages, in Rishis' asramas and cowherd settlements. Wherever they went they repeated aloud what Damayanti had told them to say.

CANTO 70

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'After a long time, a Brahmana named Parnada returned to the city of the Vidarbhas, and said to the daughter of Bhima, "Damayanti, seeking Nala, king of Nishadhas, I went to the city of Ayodhya, and appeared before the son of Bhangasura, where I repeated your words in the presence of the blessed Rituparna. However, neither that king of men nor any of his courtiers said anything in reply, although I uttered them over and over.

Then, after I had been dismissed by the king, a man in Rituparna's service, a certain Bahuka, accosted me. Bahuka is that king's charioteer, of unseemly appearance and short arms. He is skilled at driving chariots and riding horses very fast, and is also a master cook.

I found that he sighed often, and wept, as he asked about my welfare. Then he said, Although they might fall into great distress, chaste women protect themselves and so secure heaven. Although their lords might abandon them, yet they do not become angry, for women that are chaste lead their lives encased in the armour of virtue. It becomes her not to be angry since he that abandoned her was overcome by calamity, and deprived of everything.

A beautiful and virtuous woman should not be angry with one whom birds deprived of his single cloth, while he went looking for food, with one who, besides, is being consumed by grief. Regardless of whether she is treated well or ill, a chaste wife should never succumb to anger, seeing her husband in such a plight, having lost his kingdom, destitute of prosperity, ravaged by hunger and overwhelmed by disaster.'

After hearing what he said, I returned quickly to you, and now I have told you what transpired. Tell your father the king about it and then do as you see fit."

Tears in her eyes, Damayanti went to her mother and spoke to her in private, "Mother, you must not under any circumstances tell my father King Bhima of what I intend. In your presence, I will send Sudeva, that best of Brahmanas, to Ayodhya immediately, to fetch Nala here just as he did me."

When Parnada had refreshed himself and recovered from his tiredness, the princess of Vidarbha worshipped him with profuse wealth. She also said, "When Nala comes here, O Brahmana, I will give you abundant wealth again, for you have done me a great service by which I hope to see my lord again quickly."

That high-minded Brahmana uttered blessings over her, auspicious mantras, and went home, regarding his mission as accomplished. When he had left, Damayanti, still in the clutches of grief, called Sudeva and, in her mother's presence, said to him, "O Sudeva, go to the city of Ayodhya, straight as a bird, and say there to King Rituparna, 'Bhima's daughter Damayanti will hold another swayamvara. All the kings and princes are going to it. Calculating the time, I find that the ceremony will take place tomorrow. O Parantapa, if it is possible for you, go there without delay.

Tomorrow, after the Sun rises, she will choose a second husband, since she does not know whether King Nala still lives or not.'"

Sudeva went to Ayodhya and declared what Damayanti had told him to King Rituparna.'

CANTO 71

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa continues, 'When he heard what Sudeva said, King Rituparna called Bahuka and said gently to him, "O Bahuka, you are a master of horses. I want you to take me to Damayanti's Swayamvara in a single day."

When he heard this, Nala thought his heart would burst with grief that seared his very entrails.

He thought to himself, "Perhaps Damayanti is deranged by sorrow that she is doing this; or, perhaps, she has conceived this wonderful plan for my sake? Alas, I senselessly abandoned the innocent princess of Vidarbha and this is a cruel thing that she plans. The world knows that the nature of women is fickle. Besides, I have wronged her grievously, and she might well be doing this because she has no love for me anymore.

But then, how will the slender-waisted one do this thing when she is the mother of my children? The only way to discover the truth is by going there, and I will go, to accomplish both Rituparna's purpose and my own."

Bahuka folded his hands to Rituparna and, though his heart was full of sadness, said, "Purushavyaghra, I will take you to the city of the Vidarbhas in a single day!"

At the command of Bhangasura's son, Nala went to the stables to choose his horses. Rituparna called repeatedly to him to hurry, and after some scrutiny and carfeul deliberation. Bahuka chose some lean steeds, of high pedigree, docile, strong and which could go a great distance. They had wide nostrils, outthrust cheeks, no inauspicious marks, or ten curls which are considered unfortunate; they were all born in the land of Sindhu and were fleet as the wind.

But when Rituparna saw those horses, he cired, "What are you doing? This is no time for jesting. How can such weak horses bear us to the Vidarbha city in a day?"

Bahuka replied, "Each of these horses has one curl on his forehead, two on his temples, four on his sides, four on his chest, and one on his back. Have no doubt they will go to the country of the Vidarbhas. If, O King, you want to choose some others, point them out and I will yoke them for you."

Rituparna replied, "Bahuka, you know about horses and are a master of driving them. Quickly yoke the ones you think best."

Nala yoked the four fine steeds he had chosen to the king's chariot. Rituparna climbed into the chariot and at once all the horses fell down on their knees! Then, O King, Nala began to soothe those beasts endowed with speed and energy. He lifted them again to their feet by their reins and made the charioteer Varshneya sit beside him at the chariot head; Nala prepared to ride at great speed.

Now, urged by Bahuka, those horses rose into the sky! The king of Ayodhya and his sarathy were dumbstruck; they went at the speed of the wind.

The astonished Varshneya thought, "Is this Matali, the charioteer of Deva king? For the magnificent Bahuka's skills are no less than his. Or, has Salihotra taken human shape? Or is this King Nala who has come here? Or it may be that this Bahuka knows whatever Nala does about horses.

Bahuka and Nala are of the same age; yet, this might not be Nala, only someone who knows as much about horses as he does. However, when misfortune strikes them, the most illustrious men walk this earth in disguise, as ordained by the scriptures. True, he is ugly, but then Nala might even have changed his features. Bahuka and Nala are of similar age, but they are unlike in appearance.

Yet, Bahuka is as accomplished, in every way, as Nala and I feel certain that he is indeed the Naishadha."

Thus, long thought Varshneya, who was once Nala's own sarathy. King Rituparna delighted in the marvellous skills of Bahuka. He looked at how Bahuka held his reins and how he made his horses fly and he was full of joy.'

CANTO 72

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Like a bird coursing through the sky, Nala crossed rivers and mountains, forests and lakes. Suddenly, Rituparna's upper garment peeled away from his body and fell to the earth below.

Rituparna said to Nala, "I must have my royal garment back. Restrain your steeds, most intelligent one, and let Varshneya bring my cloth back."

Nala replied, "The cloth has fallen far down, and we have come a yojana since. We cannot recover it now."

When Nala said this to him, Rituparna saw a Vibhitaka tree laden with fruit, in a forest. The king said quickly to Bahuka, "Sarathy, observe my extraordinary skill at counting. There is no one who is a master of every art or science. Knowledge in its entirety is not found in any one person. O Bahuka, the leaves and fruit of this tree which are lying on the ground exceed those that are still upon it by one hundred and one. The two branches of the tree have fifty million leaves, and two thousand and ninety-five fruit. Examine the two branches and all their boughs."

Bahuka stopped his chariot and said to the king, "Parantapa, you take credit for yourself in a matter that is beyond my perception. But, O King, I will cut down the Vibhitaka and count the leaves and fruit. Let Varshneya hold the reins of the horses for a while."

The king replied, "We have no time to lose."

But Bahuka replied humbly, "Stay awhile, otherwise make Varshneya your charioteer. The road lies straight and even."

Rituparna said, "Bahuka, you are the only charioteer, there is no other in this world like you. I place myself in your hands, only you can take me to the Vidarbhas. If you make me see the Sun rise in the land of the Vidarbhas, I will give you anything you wish for."

Bahuka said, "Let me count the leaves and fruit of the Vibhitaka and then I will take you to the Vidarbha country."

Reluctantly the king said, "Count, and upon counting the leaves and fruits of a portion of this branch, you will be satisfied with what I said."

Bahuka quickly got down from the chariot and felled the tree. He was amazed to find the fruit to be exactly as many as the king had said. He said

to Rituparna, "This power of yours is extraordinary. O King, I want to learn this art from you."

Wanting to ride on swiftly, the king said, "Know that apart from the art of reckoning, I am also a master of dice."

And Bahuka said to him, "Bull among men, teach me that art and in return receive my knowledge of horses and kine."

Knowing that he depended on Bahuka's goodwill to arrive in the Vidarbha land, and also tempted by the horse-lore that his charioteer possessed, Rituparna said, "So be it. Receive the art of dice from me, O Bahuka, and let the equine science remain with you in trust."

Rituparna imparted that art to Nala, and immediately Kali came out of his body incessantly vomiting the virulent poison of Karkotaka. As soon as he left Nala, the fire of that curse left Kali.

Nala, who had been possessed and tormented for so long, wanted to curse Kali, when terrified and trembling, Kali said with folded hands, "Control your anger, O King! I will make you lustrous. When you abandoned her, Indrasena's mother cursed me and, ever since, I have lived in your body in torment. Unconquered one, miserable and scalded night and day by the venom of the snake prince, I lived inside you.

I seek your protection. If you do not curse me, who am frightened and seek refuge in you, then anyone who attentively recites your story will never have to fear me."

Nala controlled his wrath, and Kali swiftly entered into the Vibhitaka tree. All the while that Kali spoke with Nala, he remained invisible to the others. Delivered from his travail, and having counted the fruits of that tree, Naishadha, filled with great joy and of terrific energy, climbed back into the chariot and urged his fleet horses on.

From that hour, the Vibhitaka tree fell into disrepute because of the touch of Kali.

Nala's horses flew up again into the air even like winged creatures, and he drove them in the direction of the Vidarbha country. When he had gone far, Kali crept out of the tree and returned to his own abode.

O King, when Kali left Nala, that lord of the earth was free again from calamity, though he did not yet assume his natural form.'

CANTO 73

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Rituparna arrived that same evening at the gates of the city of the Vidarbhas; the people brought news of his coming to King Bhima. And at the invitation of Bhima, the king of Ayodhya entered the city of Kundina, filling the ten cardinal points with the sound of his chariot wheels.

The horses of Nala who were in that city heard that sound and were as delighted as they used to become in the presence of Nala himself. Damayanti also heard the sound of that chariot driven by Nala, like the deep roar of clouds during the monsoon. Bhima and Nala's horses inside Bhima's city felt they were hearing the chariot wheels of Nala himself, as of old.

Like the horses, the peacocks on the terraces and the elephants in their stables heard the rumble of Rituparna's chariot, like that of thunderheads, and they all began to cry out and trumpet, full of joy such as they experience when they hear the actual roar of clouds.

Damayanti said, "The rumble of this chariot fills all the world and gladdens my heart, so it must be Nala. If I do not see Nala, his face bright as the moon, the Kshatriya of countless virtues, I will surely die. If today I am not clasped in that hero's arms, his thrilling embrace, I shall cease to be.

If Naishadha, whose voice is as deep as that of the clouds, does not come to me today, I will walk into a pyre of golden brilliance. If that best of kings, strong as a lion, mighty as a bull elephant in musth, does not appear before me, I will not live anymore. I do not remember a single untruth in him, or a single wrong done by him to anyone. He has never told a lie even in jest.

Ah, my Nala is noble, forgiving, heroic, magnificent, superior to all other kings, faithful to his marriage vow and like a eunuch to other females. Night and day my heart is full of him, and if I do not see him quickly, my heart will burst."

So she spoke to herself, as one devoid of sense, and climbed up to her terrace to catch a glimpse of the righteous Nala. In the central courtyard of the main palace she saw Rituparna in the chariot with Varshneya and

Bahuka. Varshneya and Bahuka climbed down from that fine ratha and unyoked the horses, then left the chariot itself in a proper place.

Rituparna climbed down and presented himself before King Bhima of terrible prowess. Bhima received him with great respect, for without a due occasion, a great man cannot be received as a guest. Honoured by Bhima, Rituparna looked around him again and again, but saw no sign of any swayamvara.

O Bhaarata, the Vidarbha king approached Rituparna, and said, "Welcome! What is the occasion for this visit of yours?"

Bhima asked this without knowing that Rituparna had come to obtain the hand of his daughter. Rituparna saw that there were no other kings or princes here; nor did he hear anything of the swaymvara; nor did he see any concourse of Brahmanas.

The most intelligent Kosala king thought for a while, then said, "I have come here to pay my respects to you."

Bhima was astonished and tried to fathom why Rituparna had come a hundred yojanas. He thought, "It is unlikely that he has passed through so many kingdoms and by countless kings just to pay his respects to me. But I will learn the truth by and by."

Bhima said to Rituparna summarily, "Rest now, you are tired."

Honoured thus by the pleased Bhima, King Rituparna, his heart glad, went to his appointed quarters, followed by the servants of the royal household.

When Rituparna had gone with Varshneya, Bahuka took the chariot to the stables. He freed his horses there, rubbed them down, soothed them with his own hands, and sat down at one end of the ratha.

Meanwhile, having seen the royal son of Bhangasura, and Varshneya of the Suta race, and also Bahuka as a Suta, Damayanti was forlorn and asked herself, "Whose is this chariot-rumble? It was as loud as Nala's, but I do not see the lord of the Nishadhas.

Varshneya has learnt the art from Nala, and that is why this chariot rumbled as Nala's did. Or is Rituparna as skilled as Nala so the sound of his chariot wheels is as that of Nala's?"

Thinking all this, that blessed and beautiful woman sent a female messenger in search of the Naishada.'

CANTO 74

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Damayanti said, "O Kesini, go and find out who that ugly and I short-armed sarathy is, sitting beside the chariot. Faultless one, approach him cautiously, with sweet words, showing him courtesy and discover everything about him. Ah, from what my mind feels and the joy in my heart, I fear that he is King Nala.

Kesini, after asking about his welfare, say the words of Parnada to him and, my beautiful one, listen carefully to his reply."

While Damayanti watched from the terrace, Kesini softly approached Bahuka and said, "Best of men, you are welcome here. I wish you happiness. O bull among men, now listen to what Damayanti says. When did you all set out, and with what object have you come here? Tell us truly, for the princess of Vidarbha wishes to know."

Bahuka replied, "The king of Kosala heard from a Brahmana that Damayanti will hold a second swayamvara, and Rituparna flew here in this chariot yoked to horses swift as the wind, steeds which could fly a hundred yojanas. I am his sarathy."

Kesini then asked, "Who is the third among you, whose son? And whose son are you, and how have you become a charioteer?"

Bahuka replied, "The third one was the charioteer of Nala, and his name is Varshneya. Beautful one, after Nala left his kingdom, Varshneya came to the son of Bhangasura. I am skilled in horse-lore, and so I have been made charioteer. Indeed, King Rituparna himself chose me as his charioteer and cook."

Kesini said, "Perhaps Varshneya knows where King Nala has gone, and, O Bahuka, he may also have spoken to you about his master."

Bahuka said, "Varshneya brought the children of Nala here and then left. He does not know where Naishadha is, nor does anybody else know Nala's whereabouts, for the king wanders over the world in disguise and despoiled of his natural beauty. Only Nala knows who Nala is, for he does not seem like himself anymore, not in the least particular."

Kesini said, "The Brahmana who went to Ayodhya repeated these words suitable to female lips, 'O beloved gambler, where have you gone tearing

off half my piece of cloth, and abandoning me, your devoted wife, asleep in the woods? Your wife waits for you in half a garment still, burning with grief day and night.

'O Kshatriya, relent towards her that weeps ceaselessly for you and give her a reply. Illustrious one, send her a soothing message, for she hungers for your words.'

When you heard what the Brahmana said in Ayodhya, you made a reply. The princess of Vidarbha wants to hear again the words you then spoke."

Hearing Kesini, Nala's heart ached and his eyes filled with tears. Steadying his voice that choked, restraining his grief, that king repeated what he had said to the Brahmana, "Though overtaken by calamity, chaste women still protect themselves, and thereby secure heaven. Even when deserted by their lords, chaste women never become angry, but continue to live sheathed in virtue's mail. Deserted by one fallen into calamity; bereft of sense, and deprived of bliss, it still does not become her to grow angry.

A virtuous woman must not be angry with one that had his garment taken by birds, as he strove to find food, one who, besides, burns in misery. The chaste woman would never be angry, after seeing her husband in that plight, despoiled of his kingdom, bereft of prosperity, oppressed by hunger, and overwhelmed by catastrophe."

Nala could not contain his grief anymore and began to cry. Kesini went back to Damayanti, and told her everything, also about the outburst of sorrow.

CANTO 75

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Damayanti heard everything and sorrow overwhelmed her, too. She suspected the man beside the chariot was Nala.

She said, "O Kesini, go again and study Bahuka; staying silent beside him, mark his conduct. Lovely one, whenever he does anything skilful, mark it well, how he does it. And, Kesini, whenever he asks for water or fire, be in no hurry to give it to him. Study him carefully and come and tell me how he is and what he does, all that is human and also whatever is superhuman. Everything."

Kesini went to Bahuka and having observed him, that master of horses, with great care, she returned to Damayanti. She told Damayanti all that had happened, everything both human and superhuman that she had seen in Bahuka.

Kesini said, "Damayanti, I have never seen or even heard of a person of such control over the elements. Whenever he comes to a low passage, he never stoops down, but seeing him, the passage itself grows in height so that he may pass through it easily. At his approach, impassable narrow openings open wide.

King Bhima sent diverse kinds of meals, of various meats, for Rituparna's food. Many vessels have been set down there for washing the meat. As Bahuka looked at them, the vessels were full of water. Having; washed the meat, he set himself to cook. He took up a handful of grass and held it in the sun, and fire blazed up all on a sudden.

I saw this marvel and came here amazed. Further, I witnessed other great wonders in him. Most beautiful one, he put his hand into the fire and was not burnt. And at his will, falling water flows in a stream.

Another still greater wonder I saw. He took some flowers and kneaded them slowly with his hands; they were not crushed but became brighter and more fragrant.

All these I saw and hurried back to you."

Damayanti heard all this and knew this was Nala and felt she already had him back. Suspecting that Bahuka was her husband, tears in her eyes,

she said to Kesini softly, "My beautiful one, go out again and, without Bahuka knowing, fetch some meat that he has cooked."

Always eager to please Damayanti, Kesini went to where Bahuka was, and without him noticing, took some hot meat which he had prepared and took it back to Damayanti, who immediately tasted it. Having eaten meat cooked by Nala before, she felt even surer that Bahuka was her husband, and wept.

O Bhaarata, overwhelmed by grief, she then washed her face and sent her two children with Kesini, to Bahuka. Recognising Indrasena and her brother, he ran to them, embraced the children and took them onto his lap even as if they were children of the Devas. Shaken by deep sorrow, he wept aloud.

Naishadha then suddenly put them down and said to Kesini, "Fair maiden, these twins are so like my own children that seeing them suddenly made me cry. If you come often to me like this, people may think evil thoughts, for we are guests from another land. Therefore, blessed one, go at your ease.'"

CANTO 76

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Seeing the agitation of the virtuous and wise Nala, Kesini went back to Damayanti and told her everything.

Sorrowing, eager to see Nala, Damayanti sent Kesini now to her mother, with this message: "I suspect that Bahuka is Nala and I have tested him in various ways. The only doubt which remains with me is his appearance, and I mean to examine him myself. Mother, either let him into the palace, or give me leave to go to him. Arrange this either with the knowledge of my father or without."

Her mother told Bhima of Damayanti's intention and he gave his consent. Bharatarishabha, with both her parents' consent, Damayanti had Nala fetched to her apartments. When he saw her, suddenly before him, Nala was overwhelmed and he sobbed and tears streamed down his face. Damayanti, best among women, saw him like that and she was also griefstricken.

O King, wearing a strip of red cloth and her hair matted in jata, covered with dust and dirt, Damayanti said, "O Bahuka, have you ever seen a man that knows dharma abandoning his sleeping wife in the heart of a jungle? Who but the virtuous Nala could desert his exhausted wife in the vana?

Of what offence was I guilty in his eyes, that my lord since my early youth should leave me like that and go away while I slept? Why did he whom I chose over the Devas abandon his devoted and always loving wife, and the mother of his children besides?

Before the sacred fire, and in presence of the gods, he took my hand, vowing, '*I will be yours*.' Oh, Parantapa, what happeed to that vow when he left me?'

As she spoke, tears flowed down her face. Nala also shed tears, black as of those of the gazelle with extremities of red.

He said, "Soft, gentle one, neither losing the kingdom nor abandoning you was my doing, but both were because of Kali. Best of chaste women, you cursed Kali in the forest and he possessed me, and began dwelling in my body. Burning with your curse, he lived in me like fire within fire.

Through vratas and tapasya, blessed one, I have vanquished that wretch so that our grief might end. The sinful spirit has left me and that is how I have come here. I have come here only for you and nothing else.

But, gentle one, will any other woman forsake her loving, devoted husband and seek a second lord as you have? At the command of the king, messengers are ranging this earth, crying, '*Bhima's daughter will choose a second husband worthy of her.*'

Immediately on hearing this, the son of Bhangasura has arrived here."

When she heard Nala lament thus, Damayanti, frightened and trembling, said with folded hands, "It does not become you, blessed one, to suspect any fault in me. King of the Nishadhas, I ignored the Devas themselves and chose you as my husband. It was to bring you here that the Brahmanas went forth in all directions, to every horizon, singing my words, as ballads.

Rajan, at last a learned Brahmana called Parnada found you in Kosala, in the palace of Rituparna. When you answered the message he carried, O Naishadha, I devised this plan to get you back.

Lord of the earth, there is no one in the world who can cover a hundred yojanas in a day with horses. O King, touching your feet, I can swear that I have never sinned, not even in thought.

May the all-witnessing Air that courses through this world take my life, if I have sinned. May the Sun that courses through the sky take my life, if I have sinned. May the Moon, that dwells within every creature as a witness, take my life, if I have sinned.

May these three Gods who sustain the three worlds in their entirety, declare that I speak the truth, or let them forsake me today."

The Wind-god said from the sky, "O Nala, I tell you truly, she has done no wrong. O King, Damayanti has protected your family honour, she has enhanced it. Of this we are the witnesses, as we have been her protectors for these three years. It is for your sake alone that she devised this unrivalled scheme, for, other than you, none on earth can travel a hundred yojanas in a single day.

O Naishadha, you have found Bhima's daughter, and she has found you. You have no cause to be suspicious but be united with your wife."

When the Wind-god had spoken, flowers fell from the sky and drums of heaven sounded and auspicious breezes blew. Seeing those wonders, Nala Parantapa cast away all his doubts about Damayanti. He remembered the serpent king, put on the pure garment and regained his native form.

Seeing him back to himself, Bhima's daughter of faultless limbs embraced him and wept. Nala also clasped her, his devoted wife, and his children, and knew great joy. Burying her face in his chest, the lovely doe-eyed Damayanti began to sigh heavily, remembering her griefs. Overwhelmed, that tiger among men stood for some time, clasping the dust-covered Damayanti of sweet smiles.

Rajan, the queen-mother joyfully told Bhima everything that had passed between Nala and Damayanti. That mighty monarch said, "Let Nala pass this day in peace. I will see him tomorrow, after his bath and prayers, with Damayanti by his side."

Pleasantly the couple passed that night, also telling each other all about what had chanced with them in the forest. So, their hearts full of joy, Nala and the princess of Vidarbha passed their days in the palace of King Bhima, intent upon making each other happy.

It was four years after losing his kingdom that Nala was reunited with his wife and, all his desires gratified, once more experienced the highest bliss. Damayanti rejoiced at having recovered her lord even as fields of tender plants on receiving a shower of fine rain. Having Nala back, Bhima's daughter blazed forth in beauty, her weariness gone, her anxieties dispelled and welling over with joy, even like a night that is lit by the bright disc of the full moon!'"

CANTO 77

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Brihadaswa says, 'Having passed that night, Nala, wearing royal ornaments and with a radiant Damayanti by his side, presented himself before the king. Nala saluted his father-in-law with becoming humility; after him, the fair Damayanti paid her respects to her father.

With untold joy, the noble Bhima received him as a son, and honoured him duly with his devoted wife, and comforted them. Accepting the homage paid to him, Nala in return offered Bhima his services, as became him.

When the people saw Nala, they were overjoyed; an uproar of delight arose in the city. The citizens decorated the city with flags and standards and garlands of flowers; the streets were watered and decked in garlands. The people piled flowers at their gates, and all the shrines and temples were adorned with flowers.

Rituparna heard that Bahuka was united with Damayanti, and he was glad. He called Nala and begged his forgiveness. The intelligent Nala also asked Rituparna's forgiveness, for diverse reasons. After being honoured by Nala, Rituparna said to the Naishada, "Through good fortune you have been re-united with your own wife and you have found happiness. O Naishadha, while you lived in my house I hope I did not wrong you in any way, O lord of the earth! If I did knowingly do you any wrong, forgive me!"

Nala replied, "O King, you have never done me the slightest injury, and even if you did, you did not rouse my anger because you deserve to be forgiven. You were my friend and also, ruler of men, you are related to me. Now on, I will find greater delight in you because I lived so happily in your house, all my desires satisfied, indeed, more happily than in my own home.

This Aswa shastra, knowledge of horses, is something I have. If you wish, I will give it to you."

Saying this, Naishadha gave Rituparna that secret science and the latter took it with the ordained rites. Bhangasura's son thus received the mysteries of horses and taught Nala those of dice play; then, taking another charioteer, he returned to his own city.

Rajan, after Rituparna had gone, Nala did not stay long in the city of Kundina.'

CANTO 78

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Kaunteya, Nala lived in Bhima's city for a month, then, with Bhima's leave, he set out from Kundina taking just a few men with him. With a single white chariot, sixteen elephants, fifty horses, and six hundred footsoldiers, that illustrious king swiftly entered the Nishadha kingdom, his anger swollen and making the earth tremble.

Virasena's mighty son went to his brother Pushkara and said to him, "Let us play again, for I have earned vast wealth. Let Damayanti and everything else that I own be my stake, Pushkara, and let the kingdom be yours.

Let the play begin; I am determined. Let us stake everthing that we own along with our lives. Having won another's wealth or kingdom, it is high dharma to wager it again when the owner demands.

If you do not care to play with dice, let us contend with weapons instead. O King, let one of us, either you or I, find peace through single combat. The Rishis have all said that a lost ancestral kingdom must be recovered under all circumstances and by any means.

Pushkara, choose one of the two – gambling with dice or bending the bow in battle!"

The arrogant Pushkara answered laughingly, "Naishadha, it is good fortune that you have earned wealth enough to gamble, good fortune also that Damayanti's ill-luck has at last come to an end. O King, it is good fortune that you are still alive with your wife, Mahabaho.

I will win all your newfound wealth, and your Damayanti will wait upon me as an Apsara does upon Indra in heaven. O Naishadha, I think of you every day and have been waiting for you, for I find no pleasure in gambling with anyone not related to me by blood.

Today, I will win the exquisite Damayanti of faultless features and consider myself fortunate indeed, for she has always dwelt in my heart!"

Nala's eyes turned red with anger and he wanted to cut off Pushkara's head. However, instead, he said with a smile, "Let us play. You have vanquished me and you can say what you like. But come, let us play."

The game began between Pushkara and Nala, and in a single throw Nala won back everything that he had lost, along with the life of his brother,

which had also been wagered.

Smiling, Nala said to Pushkara, "This whole kingdom is now mine, and, worst of men, you cannot even dare look at the princess of Vidarbha now. Fool, you and all your family shall now be her slaves.

But, though you did not know it, whatever you did was never your own doing, but Kali did it all. So, I shall not impute another's crime to you. Live happily, as you choose, I spare your life.

I also grant you your share in the kingdom and its wealth. Kshatriya, have no doubt that my affection for you is as before, undiminished, as is my brotherly love. You are my brother, Pushkara, live in peace and joy for a hundred years!"

Nala embraced Pushkara repeatedly and gave him leave to return to his own city. And Pushkara saluted his brother of dharma and said to him with folded hands, "O King who grant me both life and refuge, let your fame be immortal and may you live happily for ten thousand years!"

Entertained by the king, Pushkara lived there for a month and then went home to his own city, taking his kindred with him, as well as many obedient servants and a large force of soldiers; his heart was full of joy and that bull among men blazed forth in splendour like a second Surya.

Thus establishing Pushkara, giving him wealth and freeing him from his debt, Nala entered his own magnficent palace. The king of the Nishadhas now comforted his people; citizens and people from the countryside were awash with joy. Led by the officers of state, the people said with folded hands, "O King, throughout the city and the rest of the country your people rejoice today that we have our sovereign back, even like the Devas their Lord of a hundred yagnas!'"

CANTO 79

NALOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Brihadaswa says, 'Fear of every kind left the city; it welled with joy. Nala took a large force with him and fetched Damayanti from her father's home. Bhima of awesome prowess, slayer of enemies, of immeasurable soul, sent his daughter back after honouring her duly.

When the princess of Vidarbha arrived, with her son and daughter, King Nala began to pass his days in delight even like the king of the Devas in the gardens of Nandana. Having regained his kingdom and shining forth among the kings of Jambu Dwipa, Nala ruled again. Numerous sacrifices he performed, with abundant gifts to Brahmanas.

Maharajan, Yudhishtira, you also will soon blaze forth in glory with your brothers and your kin. For, O best of men, it was through dice that great Nala and his wife fell into distress. Lord of the earth, Nala suffered direly, and all alone, before he recovered his prosperity, while you, Pandava, your heart set on dharma, sport in joy in this great forest, not alone but with your brothers and Krishnaa.

You keep the company of blessed Brahmanas who know the Vedas and their angas – you have small cause for sorrow. Besides, this itihasa of the Naga Karkotaka, of Damayanti, of Nala and of that Rajarishi Rituparna destroys evil. This tale of unfading glory banishes the influence of Kali, and it comforts those like you who listen to it.

Reflect upon the uncertainty of all human endeavour; it does not become you to exult or grieve at prosperity or adversity. Having listened to this tale, be comforted, O King, and do not yield to sorrow. A great king like you should not succumb to calamity.

Men of self-possession reflect upon the caprice of destiny and the futility of labour, and they never allow themselves to be dejected. Adversity will never lay its hand upon those who repeat the noble history of Nala, as well as those who listen to it.

He that listens to this old and excellent itihasa has his purposes crowned with success and, without doubt, finds fame, besides sons, grandsons, a high position among men, wealth and animals, health and happiness.

Also, Rajan, let me dispel forever the fear you keep in your heart that someone might summon you to another game of dice. Invincible Yudhishtira, I know the science of dice-play in its entirety. I am pleased with you, Kaunteya, take the arcane science from me.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Gladly, then, Yudhishtira says to Brihadaswa, 'Illustrious one, I want to learn the science of dice play from you.'

The Rishi imparts that art to the high-souled son of Pandu, and having done so, the great Sage leaves for the sacred waters of Hayasirsha for his ablutions.

After Brihadaswa has gone, some Brahmanas and asetics, who come to him from various parts, from holy tirthas of pilgrimage, from mountains and forests, tell Yudhishtira Dridavrata that Arjuna of lofty intelligence, Savyasachin, still sits in the most austere tapasya, living only upon air.

Yudhishtira hears that Arjuna performs penance so fierce that none else has done before him. His mind controlled, his vows unfaltering, sworn to perfect mowna, Pritha's son Dhananjaya, through his tapasya, blazes forth like Dharma Deva himself in his embodied form.

O King, the Pandava hears that his precious brother sits in such a terrible penance in the great jungle, and grieves for him. His heart burning with sorrow, the eldest son of Pandu seeks consolation in that deep vana from the Brahmanas there, men of diverse and profound knowledge."

CANTO 80

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "Holy one, after my great-grandfather Partha left the forest of Kamyaka, what did the sons of Pandu do? It seems to me that mighty ambidextrous bowman, vanquisher of armies, was their refuge, as Vishnu of the Devas. How did my heroic grandsires pass their time in the forest, without the company of that hero who was like Indra himself in prowess, and who never turned his back in battle?"

Vaisampayana said, "After Arjuna of unbaffled prowess leaves Kamyaka, the sons of Pandu, child, are filled with sorrow. The cheerless Pandavas are like pearls unstrung from their string, or birds shorn of their wings. Without that Kshatriya of the white horses, that forest is like the Chaitraratha vana without Kubera.

O Janamejaya, those Purushavyaghras continue to live in that forest, in sorrow. Those mighty Kshatriyas kill many kinds of sacrificial animals for their Brahmanas, with arrows purified with mantras. Daily they hunt those wild beasts and offer them to the Brahmanas after sanctifying them.

O King, those bulls among men continue to live in that vana, their hearts empty of all cheer after Dhananjaya's departure. Panchali, in particular, misses her third husband.

She says to the anxious Yudhishtira, 'Without Arjuna, who with two arms rivals the thousand-armed Arjuna of old, this forest has not beauty in my eyes. Without him, whenever I look, this earth seems forlorn. Even this vana with its blossoming trees and so full of marvels, holds no delight as it did before, without Arjuna.

Without him who is like a mass of blue clouds, who has the prowess of an infuriated elephant, and whose eyes are like the leaves of the lotus, ah, this Kamyaka does not seem beautiful in the least. I think of Savyasachin, the twang of whose bow is like thunder, and all that I feel is sorrow, O King!'

Hearing her, Bhimasena says, 'Blessed one of the slender waist, your words are like nectar to me. Without him, whose mighty arms adorned with golden bracelets, like a pair of five-headed snakes, are long and powerful as iron maces, round and marked by the abrasions of bowstrings, whose hands

wield a bow and a sword and other weapons, without that tiger among men the sky itself seems to be without the sun.

Without that mighty-armed one, relying on whom the Panchalas and the Kauravas fear not the hosts of the Devas themselves, without that lustrous Kshatriya relying on whose arms we consider all our enemies already dead and the earth conquered, without our Phalguna I find no moment's peace in this Kamyaka vana.

Wherever I turn my gaze, the ten directions also seem to be empty!'

When Bhima finishes, Nakula, his voice choking with tears, says, 'What pleasure can we find here without him of whose extraordinary deeds on the field of battle even the gods speak, that greatest of warriors? Without him, who went north and vanquished hundreds of great Gandharva chieftains, and who having taken numberless magnificent horses of the Tittiri and Kalmasha breeds, all endowed with the speed of the wind, and gifted them in love to his brother, the king, during the Rajasuya Yagna; without that beloved and luminous warrior, that terrible bowman born after Bhima, without that Kshatriya equal to a god, I have no wish to remain any longer in this Kamyaka aranya.'

After Nakula's lamentations, Sahadeva says, 'He vanquished mighty warriors in battle, won wealth and virgins and brought them unto the king on the occasion of the great Rajasuya. That immeasurably splendid Kshatriya singe-handedly vanquished all the Yadavas assembled together, and then took Subhadra for himself with Krishna's consent. He invaded Drupada's kingdom and gave Acharya Drona his dakshina. Ah, seeing his bed of grass empty in this asrama, my heart is breaking.

Bhaarata, Parantapa, I would prefer to leave this forest, for without Arjuna, there can be no trace of joy here.'"

CANTO 81

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira's dejection deepens on hearing what his brothers and Panchali say, all of them distraught over the absence of Arjuna. Just then he sees the Devarishi Narada, ablaze with Brahmic beauty, like a fire flaming up at being fed sacrificial libations. Seeing Narada come, Raja Yudhishtira and his brothers stand up and duly worship the illustrious one. Himself blessed with great tejas, the handsome king of the Kurus shines forth like the God of a hundred sacrifices surrounded by the Devas. In obedience to the dictates of dharma, Yagnaseni follows her lords, the sons of Pritha, like Savitri follows the Vedas, or the rays of the Sun the peak of Meru.

Accepting their worship, Narada comforts Dharma's son. The Rishi says to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, 'Tell me, O foremost of virtuous men, what it is you want and what I can do for you.'

Yudhishtira and his borthers bow reverently to Narada, whom the Devas worship, and Dharma's son, with folded hands, says, 'Lord, most blessed one, whom all the worlds worship, when you are pleased with me, I regard all my wishes as already fulfilled. If, O Sinless, my brothers and I deserve your favour, I beg you, answer the question, the doubt, even, which is in my mind, O best of Munis. Tell me in detail what punya belongs to the man who travels the earth to visit the sacred waters and the shrines that are upon her.'

Narada says, 'O King, listen carefully to what the intelligent Bhishma heard from Pulastya. Once, that best of men, Bhishma, while keeping the Pitriya vrata, lived in the company of Munis in the auspicious and sacred tapovana near the source of the Ganga, where Devarishis, Gandharvas and the Devas themselves come.

Living there, the splendid Bhishma gratified the Pitrs, the Devas and the Rishis with oblations, according to the rites inculcated in the scriptures. One day, while he sat doing silent japa, he saw Pulastya, best of Rishis, altogether marvellous in appearance. Seeing that austere Sage, blazing with beauty, Bhishma was filled with great delight and wonder. O Bhaarata, Bhishma worshipped the blessed Rishi according to the rites of the Veda.

Purifying himself and with rapt attention, he approached that best of Brahmarishis, with the Arghya on his head. And uttering his name aloud, he said, "O you of excellent vows, be blessed! I am Bhishma, your slave. At the sight of you, I am set free from all my sins."

Saying this, Bhishma stood in silence and with joined hands. Seeing Bhishma, that greatest of the Kurus, reduced and emaciated by the observance of vows and the study of the Vedas, the Muni was filled with joy.'

CANTO 82

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

'Pulastya said, "O you of excellent vows, I am very pleased with your humility, your self-control, and your truth, blessed one, knower of dharma. Sinless one, it is the punya which you have acquired through your devotions to your ancestors that has pleased me and, O child, given you sight of my person.

Bhishma, my sight penetrates all things. Tell me what I can do for you. Anagha, Kurusthama, I will give you whatever you ask for."

Bhishma said, "O most blessed one, when you, whom the three worlds worship are pleased with me and I have seen you with my eyes, I think of myself as being already crowned with success. Yet, if I have deserved your favour, most virtuous and holy one, allow me to tell you some religious doubts I have in regard to the tirthas, and dispel them for me.

Tell me in detail about the tirthas. O you who are like a Deva, what is the punya of a man who goes round the earth visiting the sacred tirthas and shrines? O answer me this with certainty."

Pulastya said, "O son, listen with attention, I will tell you about the punya which is attached to the tirthas and which is the refuge of the Rishis. He whose hands and feet and mind and knowledge and asceticism and deeds are under wholesome control, enjoys the fruit of the tirthas. He who has ceased to accept gifts, he that is contented, he that is free from pride enjoys the fruits of the tirthas. He that is without sin, he that acts without desire, he that eats light, he that has his senses under control, he that is free from every sin, enjoys the fruits of tirthas.

O King, he that is free from anger, he who cleaves to truth, he that is firm in his vows, he that regards all creatures as his own self, enjoys the fruit of the tirthas. In the Vedas, the Rishis have declared in due order the sacrifices and also their fruits, here and hereafter truly. O lord of the earth, those yagnas cannot be accomplished by him that is poor, for those sacrifices require diverse materials and offerings in large measures. These, therefore, can be performed by kings or sometimes by other men of prosperity and wealth.

However, O lord of men, best of warriors, let me now declare to you that rite which men without wealth, without allies, singly, without wife and children, and destitute of means, can accomplish, whose punya is equal to the sacred fruit of sacrifices. O Bharatottama, visiting the sacred tirthas, which constitute one of the high mysteries of the Rishis, is superior even to sacrifices.

He is a poor man who goes to a tirtha without fasting for three nights, without giving gold as alms, without distributing kine. Why, not by the performance of the Agnishtoma and other sacrifices distinguished by large gifts, does a man acquire the punya which visiting a tirtha confers.

In the world of men, there is that tirtha of the God of gods, celebrated throughout the three worlds by the name Pushkara. One that journeys there becomes equal to Brahma. O noble son of the Kurus, during the three sandhyas – dawn, noon and dusk – there is the presence of a hundred thousand million of tirthas in Pushkara. The Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Maruts, the Gandharvas, and the Apsaras are always present in Pushkara. It was there, O King, that the Devas, the Daityas and Brahmarishis performed tapasya and gained vast punya, and attained godhood.

Men of self-control are purified of their sins by merely thinking of Pushkara, and find high regard in heaven. Rajan, the illustrious Pitamaha, who has the Lotus for his throne, once dwelt with great joy in this tirtha. Having of old acquired great punya, it was in Pushkara that the Devas and the Rishis found moksha.

The wise say that one who is devoted to the worship of the Devas and the Pitrs, and bathes in this tirtha, gains punya which is equal to ten times that of the Aswamedha Yagna. Having gone to the forest of Pushkara, he that feeds even one Brahmana becomes happy here and hereafter, O Bhishma, for that single act. He who lives on vegetables, roots and fruits, may, with pious regard and without disrespect, give even such fare to a Brahmana, and he will gain the punya of a horse-sacrifice.

Illustrious Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas or Sudras that bathe in Pushkara are set free from rebirth. In particular, that man who visits Pushkara on the full moon of the month of Kartika acquires everlasting regions in Brahmaloka. O Bhaarata, he who remembers Pushkara with folded hands, morning and evening, as good as bathes in every tirtha.

Man or woman, one's every sin since being born is destroyed as soon as one bathes in Pushkara. As Madhusudana, the slayer of Madhu, is the first among all the gods, so is Pushkara, the foremost of all tirthas. He who lives a pure life, regulated by vratas, for twelve years in Pushkara gains the merit of all the sacrifices, and goes to the abode of Brahma. The punya of one who performs the Agnihotra for full one hundred years is equal to that of him who spends the single month of Kartika in Pushkara.

There are three white hillocks and three springs known from the remotest times which, we do not know why, go by the name of Pushkara. It is difficult to go to Pushkara; it is difficult to do tapasya at Pushkara; it is difficult to give alms in Pushkara; and it is difficult to live in Pushkara.

Having stayed twelve nights at Pushkara, with regulated diet, and vows, and having walked in pradakshina around the place, one should then go to Jambumarga. He that travels to Jambumarga, where the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitrs go, acquires the punya of the Aswamedha and the fruition of all his wishes. The man who remains there for five nights has his soul cleansed from all sins. He never sinks into hell, but acquires lofty success.

Leaving Jambumarga, one should journey to Tandulikasrama. He who visits this tirtha never devolves into Naraka but rises into Brahmaloka. He that goes to the lake of Agastya and, fasting for three nights, worships the Pitrs and the Devas, acquires the merits of the Agnishtoma. He who subsists there on fruit or plants gains the condition known as Kaumara, lasting youth.

Next, the pilgrim should take himself to the beautiful asrama of Kanva, which is worshipped by the whole world. That sacred forest has existed, Bharatarishabha, from the most ancient times. As soon as a man enters it, he is freed from all his sins. He who controls what he eats and observes vratas, while worshipping the ancestors and god there, obtains the fruit of a sacrifice which can bestow all desires.

Having circumambulated this asrama, the pilgrim must then go to the place where Yayati fell from heaven. He who comes to this place gains the merit of a horse-sacrifice.

Next, one must journey to Mahakala, with senses; bathing there in the tirtha called Koti, one gains the punya of another Aswamedha. Next, a virtuous man should go to the tirtha of Sthanu, the husband of Uma, the sacred place known through the three worlds as Bhadravata. The man who visits Bhadravata has a vision of Isana and gains the punya of making a gift

of a thousand holy cows. Through the grace of Mahadeva, he acquires the state of Ganapatya, blessed with peace, prosperity and great auspiciousness.

He that then comes to the Narmada, the river celebrated throughout the three worlds, and offers oblations of water to the manes and the gods, acquires the punya of an Aswamedha.

He who keeps bramacharya and goes into the Southern Ocean, his senses subdued, gains the fruit of the Agnishtoma yagna and ascends into Swarga.

Food and senses controlled, he who journeys to Charmanwati, also gains the merit of the Agnishtoma, at the command of Rantideva. One must next go, O virtuous lord of Kshtariyas, to Arbuda, the son of Himavat, where there was a hole right through the earth in days of yore. Here there is the asrama of Vasistha, renowned through the three worlds. Spending one night here, one gains the punya of giving a gift of a thousand cows.

Kshatriyavyaghra, the brahmacharin who bathes in the tirtha called Pinga obtains the merit of having made a gift of a thousand Kapila cows. One must go next, O King, to that excellent tirtha called Prabhasa. There Agni Hutasana is always present in his own person. He, the friend of Pavana, O hero, is the mouth of all the gods. The man who, with his souls subdued and sanctified, bathes at that tirtha finds punya greater than even that of the Agnishtoma or Atiratra sacrifices.

Journeying next to the place where the Saraswati mingles with the sea, one obtains the fruit of the gift of a thousand kine and heaven also besides, O Bharatarishabha, blazing forth for all time like Agni himself. His mind and heart subdued, he who bathes in the tirtha of the King of waters, and offers oblations of water to the manes and the gods, remaining there for three nights, blazes forth like the Moon, and also gets the punya of the Aswamedha.

The pilgrim must continue, Bharatasreshta, to the tirtha known as Varadana, where Durvasa gave Vishnu a boon. A man by bathing in Varadana obtains the fruit of a thousand kine. Next, he should procceds to Dwaravati, where by bathing in Pindaraka he can gain an abundant gift of gold. Blessed one, wonderful to tell, to this day in that tirtha, coins with the mark of the lotus, and lotuses also with the mark of the trident, are seen, O Kshatriyavijaya! Bull among men, the presence of Mahadeva is there.

Then, O Bhaarata, arriving at the place where the Sindhu flows into the sea, one should with subdued soul, bathe in that tirtha of Varuna. Bathing there and giving oblations of water to the Pitrs, the Rishis, and the Devas

one acquires the realm of Varuna, and blazes forth in effulgence. Men of wisdom say that by worshipping the God known as Shankukarneswara a man acquires ten times the merit of the horse-sacrifice.

Bharatarishabha, having walked round that tirtha, one should go on to Drimi, another tirtha celebrated throughout the three worlds. This tirtha cleanses from every sin, and it is here that the gods, including Brahma, worship Maheswara. Having bathed there and worshipped Rudra, surrounded by the other gods, one is freed from all sins since birth. It was there, O best of men, that Drimi was adored by the Devas. Bathing there, Purushottama, one surely gains the fruit of the horse-sacrifice, for O you of great intelligence, after killing the Daityas and Danavas, Vishnu the creator of the universe went there to purify himself.

Virtuous, the pilgrim goes next to Vasudhara adored by all. The moment one arrives at that tirtha, one acquires the fruit of the horse-sacrifice. Kurusthama, by bathing there with subdued soul and rapt attention, and giving oblations of water to the Devas and Pitrs, one ascends into Vishnuloka and is adored there.

In that tirtha, O Bharatarishabha, there is a lake of the Vasus. By bathing there and drinking its water, a man becomes honoured by the Vasus.

There is a famed tirtha of the name Sindhuttama, which destroys every sin. By bathing there, one gains gold in plenitude. By going in a state of purity to Bhadratunga, one gains Brahmaloka and a condition of great blessedness.

Then there is the tirtha of the Kumarika of Indra, much resorted to by the Siddhas. O best of men, bathing there, a pilgrim obtains Indraloka. In Kumarika there is another tirtha called Renuka, which also the Siddhas go to. A Brahmana who bathes there becomes as lustrous as the Moon.

Journeying next, senses subdued and food regulated, to the tirtha called the Panchananda, one obtains the fruit of the five sacrifices that have been mentioned one after another in the scriptures. Then one should go to the excellent realm of Bhima. Best of the Bhaaratas, bathing in the tirtha there, which is called Yoni, a man, in his next birth, becomes the son of a goddess, wearing earrings adorned with pearls, and also gains the punya of making a gift of a hundred thousand cows.

Going next to Srikunda, celebrated through the three worlds, and worshipping the Pitamaha, one obtains the fruit of the gift of a thousand kine. After this, one should go to the excellent tirtha called Vimala, where

to this day fish of golden and silver hues can be seen. Bathing there, one quickly acquires the region of Vasava, where one's soul being cleansed of every sin, one attains a high state of blessedness.

O Bhaarata, going next to Vitasta and offering oblations of water to the manes and the gods, a man is purified of all his sins, gains the fruit of the Vajapeya sacrifice and a high state of blessedness. That sin-destroying tirtha known as Vitasta is in the country of the Kasmiras and is the abode of the Naga Takshaka.

One should next travel to Badava famed throughout the three worlds. Bathing there with due rites in the evening, one should offer rice boiled in butter and milk, according to the best of his might, to the deity of seven flames. Men of wisdom say that a gift made here in honour of the Pitrs, becomes inexhaustible.

The Rishis, the Pitrs, the Devas, the Gandharvas, several tribes of Apsaras, the Guhyakas, the Kinnaras, the Yakshas, the Siddhas, the Vidhyadharas, the Rakshasas, Daityas, Rudras, and Brahma himself, with their senses subdued, performed tapasya for a thousand years at Badava in order to move Vishnu to grace.

They cooked rice in milk and butter and gratified Kesava with oblations, each offered with seven Riks at which, the gratified Kesava conferred on them the eight-fold attributes called Aiswarya and other objects that they desired. Having bestowed these, that God disappeared from their sight like lightning in the clouds. And it is for this, O Bhaarata, that that tirtha became known as Saptacharu, and if one offers Charu there to the seven flamed god, one obtains punya superior to that of the gift of a hundred thousand cows, to that of a hundred Rajasuya sacrifices, as also of a hundred Aswamedhas.

Leaving Badava, the pilgrim travels to Raudrapada, and seeing Mahadeva there, obtains the merit of the Aswamedha. Then, soul subdued, observing brahmacharya, he goes to Manimata, and staying there for one night, acquires the merit of the Agnishtoma.

One should then go to Devika celebrated throughout the world. It was there, O Bharatarishabha, that, as I have heard, the Brahmanas first sprang into existence. This is also the realm of the Trisulin, a place famed everywhere. Having bathed in Devika and worshipped Maheswara by offering him, to the best of one's means, rice boiled in milk and butter, a man obtains the merit of a sacrifice that can fulfil every desire.

There also is another tirtha of Rudra's, Kamakhya, which is much resorted to by the gods. Bathing there, a man swiftly finds success. By touching the waters of Yajana, Brahmavaluka, and Pushpamba, one becomes free from sorrow in the afterlife. The learned have said that the sacred tirtha of Devika, resort of the Devas and the Rishis, is five Yojanas in length and half a Yojana in breadth.

The pilgrim next, in due order, journeys to Dirghasatra. There the gods with Brahma at their head, the Siddhas, and the greatest Rishis, with regulated vows and the chanting and acceptance of the initiatory pledge, perform the long-extending sacrifice. By going only to Dirghasatra, O Parantapa, one gains punya which is superior to that of the Rajasuya or the Aswamedha.

Senses restrained, diet controlled, one should next go to Vinasana, where the Saraswati disappearing on the breast of Meru, reappears at Chamasa, Shivodbheda and Nagodbheda. Bathing in Chamasodbheda, one gets the punya of the Agnishtoma sacrifice. Bathing in Shivodbheda, one acquires the merit of the gift of a thousand kine. And bathing in Nagodbheda, one gains the realm of the Nagas.

One should go on to the well-nigh inaccessible tirtha of Shasayana, where the cranes, O Bhaarata, disappearing in the forms of sasas, reappear every year in the month of Kartika, and bathe in the Sarsawati. Bathing there, Naravyaghra, one shines forth like the Moon, and gains the merit of the gift of a thousand kine.

Next the pilgrim must go to Kumarakoti, with subdued senses, and bathing there, worship the gods and the manes. By doing this, he gains the punya of the gift of ten thousand kine, and raises all his ancestors into higher realms.

After this, virtuous one, proceed with subdued soul to Rudrakoti, where in olden days ten million Munis gathered. Filled with great joy at the prospect of beholding Mahadeva, the Rishis each cried, 'I will be the first to see the God!' And, in order to prevent disputes amongst those Rishis, the Lord of Yoga multiplied himself into ten million forms and appeared simultaneously before every Sage, so every one cried, 'I have seen Him first!'

Gratified with the deep devotion of those self-controlled Munis, Mahadeva granted them a boon, saying, '*From this day your dharma shall*

grow' O tiger among men, he that bathes, with a pure mind, in Rudrakoti obtains the merit of the horse-sacrifice and delivers his ancestors.

One should next go to that most sacred and famed confluence where the Saraswati enters the sea. There, the Devas with Brahma at their head, and Rishis with a wealth of asceticism, repair to adore Kesava, on the fourteenth day of the lighted fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Bathing there, O tiger among men, one obtains the merit of giving away an abundance of gold; and his soul cleansed from every sin, he ascends into Brahmaloka. It is here, O Kshatriya, that the Rishis have performed numberless yagnas. A pilgrimage to this place confers the punya of giving away a thousand holy cows."

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TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Pulastya said, "One should next travel to the adored Kurukshetra, the sight of which can free any creature at all from all sins. Why, a man who says 'I will live in Kurukshetra, constantly, is set free from his sins. The very dust of Kurukshetra, blown by the wind, leads a sinful man to a blessed course in life and the afterlife.

They that dwell in Kurukshetra, which lies to the south of the Saraswati and to the north of the Drishadwati, are said to dwell in heaven. O greatest of Kshatriyas, one should remain there for a month. There, lord of earth, the gods with Brahma at their head, the Rishis, the Siddhas, the Charanas, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the Yakshas and the Nagas, come often, O Bhaarata, to the most holy Brahmakshetra.

The sins of one who merely wishes fervently to visit Kurukshetra are all destroyed, and he finally goes into the world of Brahma. Kurunandana, by visiting Kurukshetra in a pious frame of mind, one obtains the fruit of the Rajasuya and Aswamedha Yagnas.

Next, the tirthayatri salutes the Yaksha Mankanaka, Kubera's mighty dwarapalaka, and gains the punya of giving away a thousand holy cows.

After this, one should repair to the excellent realm of Vishnu, where Hari is always present. Bathing there and bowing down to Hari, the Creator of the three worlds, one obtains the fruit of the Aswamedha and goes to the abode of Vishnu. One should next go to Pariplava, that tirtha celebrated across the three worlds, and bathing there, O Bhaarata, one finds punya that is greater than that of the Agnishtoma and the Atiratra sacrifices.

Journeying next to the tirtha called Prithivi, one gets the fruit of a gift of a thousand kine. The pilgrim should next travel to Shalukini and bathing there in the Dasaswamedha one gains the punya the merit of ten horse-sacrifices. Going on to Sarpadevi, most excellent tirtha of the Nagas, one acquires the merit of the Agnishtoma Yagna and attains to the realm of the Nagas.

After this, the pilgrim goes on to Tarantuka, the gate-keeper, and staying there for one night he gains the merit of giving away a thousand sacred cows. On he goes, with subdued senses and his food regulated, to

Panchananda and bathing in the tirtha there, called Koti, one gains the fruit of the horse-sacrifice.

Proceeding to the tirtha of the twin Aswins, he gets great personal beauty. Virtuous one, one should next go to the fine tirtha called Varaha, where Vishnu once stood in the form of a boar. Bathing there, O best of men, one gains the merit of the horse-sacrifice.

One should next repair to the tirtha called Soma in Jayanti. Bathing there one acquires the merit of the Rajasuya sacrifice. By bathing in Ekahamsa, a man obtains the punya of giving away a thousand cows. A pilgrim who goes to Kritasaucha gains the lotus-eyed Lord Vishnu and perfect purity of soul.

After this, he should go on to Munjavata, a place sacred to the illuminous Sthanu. Remaining there without eating for one night, he acquires the condition of Ganapatya. Then there is the celebrated tirtha Yakshini, bathing at which a man attains the fruition of all his desires. Bharatarishabha, that tirtha is regarded as the gateway of Kurukshetra. His mind absorbed in dhyana, the pilgrim should walk around it. Equal to the Pushkaras, it was created by the high-souled Rama, the son of Jamadagni. Bathing there and worshipping the ancestors and the gods, one gains the punya of the horse-sacrifice and becomes successful in everything.

Next, the rapt pilgrim goes on the Ramahrada. There, as we have heard, the heroic Rama of resplendent energy exterminated the Kshatriyas with his might, dug five lakes and filled them, O tiger among men, with the blood of his victims. And having filled those lakes with Kshatriya blood, Rama offered oblations of blood to his sires and grandsires.

Gratified, those Rishis then addressed Rama, 'O Rama, Rama, O you of great good fortune, we are pleased with you, O you of the Bhrigu race, for this your regard for the Pitrs, and for your prowess, O exalted one! Be blessed, and ask for the boons of your choice. What is it that you want, O you of great splendour?'

Rama folded his hands to the manes in the sky, and said, 'If you are pleased with me and I deserve your favour, O Pitrs, let me have the joy of doing tapasya again. Let me also, through your power, be freed from the sin of wrath I have committed of exterminating the Kshatriya race. Also let these my lakes become tirthas celebrated the world over.'

Gratified, joyful to hear him, the Pitrs answered him, 'Let your tapasya increase because of the regard for the Pitrs. You have exterminated the

Kshatriyas in wrath. You are already free from that sin for they perished from their own crimes. Have no doubt, these lakes of yours shall become tirthas. And if anyone bathed in these lakes, offering tarpana to the manes, they will grant him his desire in this world, however difficult it might be, and also eternal bliss.'

Having granted him these boons, the Pitrs joyfully saluted Rama of the Bhrigus and vanished. It was thus that the lakes of the illustrious Rama became sacred.

Keeping Brahmacharya and observing sacred vows, one should bathe in the lakes of Rama. Bathing there and worshipping Rama, one obtains the merit of a gift of gold in abundance.

The pilgrim next takes himself, O Kurunandana, to Vamsamulaka, and by bathing there uplifts and exalts all his race. Going after this to the tirtha Kayasodhana, and bathing there, he purifies his body, and ascends to the realm of unrivalled grace.

He next repairs to that tirtha, celebrated across the three worlds, called Lokodwara, where once Vishnu of great prowess created the worlds. Arriving at that tirtha, which is adored by the three worlds, and bathing there one earns many lofty worlds for oneself.

Mind subdued, he goes next to the tirtha known as Sri; bathing there, worshipping the gods and manes, he acquires great felicity. Sworn to Brahmacharya, absorbed in dhyana, he should next take himself to Kapila tirtha. Bathing there and worshipping one's own ancestors and the Devas, a man earns the fruit of the gift of a thousand Kapila cows.

Repairing next to the tirtha called Surya and bathing there, heart quietened and worshipping the Pitrs and the Devas, fasting all the while, he gains the punya of the Agnishtoma sacrifice and goes finally to the Suryaloka, realm of the Sun.

The pilgrim travels next to Gobhavana and bathing there obtains the merit of the gift of a thousand kine. O son of the Kurus, he next journeys to the tirtha called Shankhini and bathing in the Devi-tirtha that is there, gains awesome prowess.

O Kshatriya, he should go next then to the tirtha called Tarandaka situated in the Saraswati and belonging to the lustrous chief of the Yakshas who is one of the gate-keepers of Kubera. Bathing there, he gains the punya of the Agnishtoma Yagna.

Virtuous Kuru, one should next go to the tirtha called Brahmavarta. Bathing in Brahmavarta, one ascends to the abode of Brahma. After this, he seeks the sacred tirtha Sutirtha. Here, the Pitrs are ever-present along with the Devas. One should bathe here and worship the manes and the gods. By so doing, one acquires the punya of the horse-sacrifice and goes into the realm of the Pitrs. This is why the Sutirtha in Ambumati is regarded as being so auspicious.

And, Bharatottama, bathing in the Kasiswara tirtha, a man is set free from every disease and is adored in Brahmaloka. There, in that tirtha, is another called Matri; one who bathes in the Matri tirtha has many children and finds great fortune.

The pilgrim next goes, in self-restraint, to the tirtha called Sitavana, whose punya has been observed to be rare and such as hardly any other owns. He who merely goes there becomes holy. O Bhaarata, by offering his hair in that tirtha, the pilgrim acquires great sanctity. In that tirtha, is another called Swavillomapaha, where, O tiger among men, learned Brahmanas go to obtain profound satisfaction by bathing in its waters. Offering their hair in this tirtha, too, good Brahmanas acquire holiness through pranayama and attain a lofty spiritual state.

In that tirtha is also another called Dasaswamedhika, by bathing in which too an exalted spiritual condition can be attained.

One should next proceed to the famed tirtha called Manusha where, once, a herd of black antelope wounded by a hunter's arrows, plunged into its waters, and they were transformed into human beings. Bathing in that tirtha, while observing continence and with one's mind focused in dhyana, a man is freed from all his sins and is worshipped in heaven.

A krosa to the east of Manusha is the renowned river Apaga that the Siddhas resort to. The man who offers syamaka grain here, in honour of the gods and the manes acquires great religious merit; if one Brahmana is fed here, it is equal to feeding ten million Brahmanas. Having bathed in that tirtha and worshipped the Devas and the Pitrs, and staying there for one night, a man gains the merit of the Agnishtoma.

Then, O Bhaarata, the pilgrim should go to that auspicious tirtha of Brahma, known as Brahmodumbara. Bathing in the tank of the seven Rishis which is there, O bull among men, with his diet and mind restrained, as also in the tirtha Kedara of the great-souled Kapila, and beholding Brahma who

is there, the pilgrim's soul is purified of every sin and he goes to the abode of Brahma.

Also, by burning his sins through performing tapasya at the almost inaccessible Kedara tirtha of Kapila, he acquires the siddhi of being able to vanish at will.

The pilgrim continues his journey and goes to the renowned tirtha called Saraka, and seeing Mahadeva there on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight, he gets everything he might wish for and also goes to heaven. O son of the Kuru race, in Saraka and Rudrakoti and in the well and the lakes that are there, thirty million tirthas are present.

In that place is another tirtha called Ilaspada. After bathing there and worshipping the gods and the ancestors, one will never sink into hell but gain the merit of the Vajapeya Yagna.

Repairing next to Kindana and Kinjapya, the pilgrim gains the punya of giving away boundless charity as also an infinite recitation of prayers. Once he journeys to the Kalasi tirtha, and bathing there devoutly, his senses under control, he gains the fruit of the Agnishtoma.

To the east of Saraka, is an auspicious tirtha, Ambajanma, of the Mahatman Narada. He that bathes there, O Bhaarata, finds, after dying, many unrivalled realms of glory, at the command of Narada Muni.

Next, on the tenth day of the lighted fortnight, the pilgrim should go to the tirtha called Pundarika. Bathing there, he gains the merit of the Pundarika Yagna. After this, he must go to the tirtha called Trivishtapa, famed through the three worlds. In that tirtha flows the sin-destroying river Vaitarani. Bathing there and adoring the god known by the mark of the bull who holds the trident in his hand, the pilgrim's soul is washed of every sin and he attains to the highest state.

Then, he proceeds to the excellent Phalakivana. In this holiest tirtha the Devas performed a tapasya of many thousand years. One should then go on to the Dhrishadwati. Bathing there and worshipping the gods, one obtains, O Bhaarata, punya which is superior to that of both the Agnishtoma and the Atiratra sacrifices.

Bathing in that Sarvadeva tirtha, a man acquires the punya of giving away a thousand cows. Bathing next in the Panikhata tirtha and worshipping all the gods, a man finds punya superior to that of both the Agnishtoma and the Atiratra sacrifices, besides acquiring that of the Rajasuya Yagna; and finally, he attains the realm of the highest Rishis.

Dharmatma, after this, one must visit the Misraka tirtha. There, O tiger among kings, as I have heard, the great-souled Vyasa, for the sake of the Brahmanas, has mingled all the tirthas. He, therefore, that bathes in Misraka bathes in all the tirthas.

Mind and senses restrained, the yatri goes next to the tirtha Vyasavana. Bathing in the sacred waters of Manojava there, he gains the punya of the gift of a thousand cows. He goes on to the Devitirtha which is in Madhuvati; whoever bathes here and worships the manes and the gods receives the spiritual merit of a gift of a thousand cows, through the grace of the Goddess.

He who then bathes at the confluence of the Kausiki and the Dhrishadwati is freed from all his sins. He proceeds to Vyasasthali where Vyasa of great intelligence, burning with grief for his son, had resolved to cast off his body but was put in good heart again by the gods. Here the pilgrim gains the merit of the making a gift of a thousand kine.

Journeying on to the sacred well called Kindatta, he who casts a measure of sesame into it is freed from all his debts and finds success. Bathing in the tirtha called Vedi, one obtains the merit of making a gift of a thousand cows. There are two other celebrated tirthas called Ahas and Sudina. Bathing there, Purushavyaghra, one goes to the realm of the Sun.

The pilgrim continues to the tirtha called Mrigadhuma that is celebrated throughout the three worlds. Here he bathes in the Ganga, worships Mahadeva, and gains the punya of the Aswamedha Yagna. Bathing next in the Devitirtha there he obtains the merit of the gift of a thousand sacred cows.

He goes on to Vamanaka, also celebrated across the three worlds. Bathing there in Vishnupada and worshipping Vamana, his soul is purified from every sin, and he goes to the abode of Vishnu.

Bathing next in Kulampuna, one sanctifies one's race. Going after this to the Pavana-hrada, that great tirtha of the Marutas, and bathing there, O tiger among men, one becomes adored in the realm of the Wind-god. Bathing in the Amara-hrada and worshipping Indra with devotion, the pilgrim becomes adored in Devaloka and he will sit in a scintillating vimana and course through the sky in the company of the immortals.

Best of great men, bathing next with due rites in the tirtha called Sali surya, of Salihotra, he acquires the punya of the gift of a thousand kine.

Bhaaratottama, there is another tirtha called Srikunja in the Saraswati. Bathing there, one gains the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice.

The pilgrim goes next to Naimishakunja. In days of yore, the Rishis who performed tapasya in the Naimisha vana took the vows of pilgrimage and went to Kurukshetra. There, on the banks of the Saraswati a tapovana was created, which served as a resting place for them and which pleased them greatly. Bathing in the Saraswati in that sacred grove, one obtains the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice.

O Virtuous, one should go after this to the excellent Kanya tirtha. Bathing there one obtains the merit of the gift of a thousand kine. Then, on to the tirtha of Brahma. Bathing here, a person of the inferior varnas becomes a Brahmana, and if he is already a Brahmana, his soul is purified of every sin, and he attains moksha.

After this, the pilgrim journeys to the auspicious Soma tirtha, bathing at which place, he gains the world of Soma. The yatri now proceeds to the tirtha called Saptasaraswata, where the renowned Rishi Mankanaka found ascetic success. As I have heard, in olden days, Mankanaka cut his hand with a pointed blade of Kusa grass, upon which, from his wound flowed not blood but vegetable sap. Seeing this, his eyes wide with wonder, the Sage began to dance. And as the Rishi danced, all the mobile and immobile creatures, overwhelmed by his power, began to dance with him.

Then, the Devas with Brahma at their head, and Rishis of vast tapasya said to Mahadeva, 'Lord, you must stop the Sage from dancing.'

His heart full of joy, Siva went to the dancing Rishi and said, 'Maharishi, most virtuous one, why do you dance? O bull among Munis, what can be the reason for this great joy?'

The Rishi answered, 'O best of Brahmanas, I am an ascetic who treads the path of dharma. Do you not see that vegetable sap flows from the wound in my hand? This fills me with great joy and I dance.'

To the Rishi blinded by emotion, the God laughingly said, 'O Brahmana, I do not wonder at this. Look at me!'

Mahadeva made a cut on his own thumb with the nail of his forefinger, and lo, from the wound there came ashes white as snow. Seeing this, the Muni became ashamed and fell at Siva's feet, and believing that there was nothing better and greater than the God Rudra, he began to hymn him: 'O Trisulin, you are the refuge of the Devas and the Asuras, of, indeed, the universe. You have created the three worlds with all their beings, mobile

and unmoving. It is you again that swallow everything at the end of the Yuga. Not the gods themselves can know you, far less me. O sinless one, the Devas with Brahma at their head are all revealed in you. You are all, the Creator himself and the Ordainer of the worlds. It is by your grace that all the gods sport without anxiety or fear.

Devadeva, God of gods, grant me your grace, so that my tapasya may not diminish.'

The God replied, 'Brahmana, let your tapasya increase a thousandfold through my grace. Great Muni, I will dwell with you in this your asrama. Those who bathe here in Saptasaraswata, and worship me, will attain everything here and hereafter. And without doubt they shall all attain finally to the realm of Saraswata.'

With that, Mahadeva vanished.

After visiting Saraswata, one should travel on to Ausanasa, also famed throughout the three worlds. There, Bhaarata, the gods with Brahma before them, and Rishis endowed with the wealth of asceticism, and the illustrious Kartikeya, are always present during the two twilights and midday, impelled by the desire to do good to Bhargava.

In that tirtha is another called Kapalamochana, which cleanses one from every sin. O tiger among men, bathing there the taint of all one's sins vanish.

The pilgrim should then proceed to the tirtha called Agni. Bathing there, Purusharishabha, one obtains the worlds of Agni and exalts his very vamsa. There in that tirtha is another, O lord of the Bhaaratas, that belongs to Viswamitra. Bathing there, best of men, one gains the status of a true Brahmana.

Purushavyaghra, the pilgrim, his body pure and his mind subdued, goes on to Brahmayoni, and bathing there at the abode of Brahma, he sanctifies his race for seven generations before and after.

Next, he travels to another tirtha renowned through the worlds, Prithudaka, which belongs to Kartikeya. He bathes there, worshipping the Devas and the Pitrs. Whatever evil any man or woman has committed, knowingly or otherwise, is destroyed by a bath in that sacred tirtha, which also confers the punya of an Aswamedha and Swarga, as well. The learned say that Kurukshetra is holy; holier than Kurukshetra is the Saraswati; holier than the Saraswati are all the tirthas together, and that holier than all the tirthas together is Prithudaka.

He who casts off his body at Prithudaka, while chanting holy mantras, becomes an immortal. Sanatkumara and the high-souled Vyasa have sung, and it is in the Vedas also, that one should indeed go to Prithudaka, with soul subdued. O son of the Kurus, there is no tirtha which is superior to Prithudaka. Without doubt, that tirtha is purifying, holy and sin-destroying. The most sinful man who bathes in Prithudaka goes to heaven.

O best of the Bhaaratas, in that tirtha is another called Madhustrava; bathing there, one acquires the merit of giving away a thousand cows.

After this, the pilgrim must proceed to the calebrated and sacred tirtha where the Saraswati unites with the Aruna. Bathing there, after fasting for three nights, one is cleansed of even the sin of killing a Brahmana, and obtains punya that is superior to that of either the Agnishtoma or Atiratra sacrifice, and redeems his race to the seventh generation, up and down.

In that tritha is another called Ardhakila. From compassion for the Brahmanas, Darbhi created that tirtha in days of old. Without doubt, by vows, by investiture of the sacred thread, by fasts, by rites and by mantras, one becomes a Brahmana. However, Bharatarishabha, wise men of old have observed that even a man who is without ritual and mantras becomes learned and blessed with the punya of vratas – merely by bathing at Ardhakila.

Darbhi also brought the four oceans there. Best of men, he that bathes there never meets distress again and also gains the punya of giving away four thousand cows.

The tirtha-yatri goes on to Satasahastraka, next to which is another sacred tirtha also called Sahasraka. Both are renowned, and bathing in them, one obtains the merit of giving away a thousand kine. Fasts and gifts here multiply a thousandfold.

Then, on he must go the wonderful tirtha Renuka, bathe there and worship the Pitrs and the Devas. By this, cleansed of every sin, he receives the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice. Bathing next in the tirtha called Vimochana, with passions and senses under control, he is cleansed from all the sins which accrue from accepting gifts.

Senses controlled and observing Bramacharya, he must then go to the forest of Panchavati. A sojourn there brings great virtue and he becomes adored in all the realms of the good and godly.

After this, one should travel to the tirtha of Varuna called Taijasa, blazing with its own effulgence. In that tirtha the lord of Yoga, Sthanu

himself dwells, the bull his mount. He that stays there finds success by worshipping the God of gods. It was here that the Devas, with Brahma at their head, and Rishis endowed with the wealth of asceticism, installed Guha as the Senapati of the celestials.

To the east of that tirtha is another, which is called Kuru tirtha. With senses controlled and keeping brahmacharya, he that bathes in Kuru tirtha is cleansed of all his sins and gains Brahmaloka.

He must go next to Swargadwara. Staying there, the pilgrim finds the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice and goes to the abode of Brahma.

After this, he must take himself to the the tirtha called Anaraha. Bathing there, he will never meet again with distress, for there Brahma himself and the other gods with Narayana at their head are always present, O tiger among men. O royal son of the race of Kuru, the wife of Rudra is also present there. Beholding the Goddess, one never meets with any sorrow thereafter. In that tirtha is also an image of Visweswara, the lord of Uma; seeing the God of gods there, one is cleansed of all one's sins. Also, seeing the idol of Narayana, from whose navel the Lotus sprang, the tirthayatri blazes forth, O Parantapa, and goes to the abode of Vishnu.

Bull among men, he that bathes in the tirtha of all the gods is redeemed from all his sins and shines like the Moon.

The pilgrim goes next to Swastipura. By walking in pradakshina around that place, one gains the punya of giving away a thousand holy cows. Arriving next at the tirtha called Pavana, one should offer oblations to the Pitrs and the Devas; with this, he gets, O Bhaarata, the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice.

Near Pavana is Ganga-hrada, and another tirtha, O Bhaarata, called Kupa. Thirty million tirthas are present in that Kupa. Bathing there, a person finds heaven. Bathing also in the Ganga-hrada and adoring Maheswara, one finds the condition of Ganapatya and redeems his race.

One should next travel to Sthanuvata, celebrated all over the three worlds. Bathing there, also, one finds heaven. The pilgrim goes on to Badaripachana, the asrama of Vasishtha. Having fasted there for three nights, one should eat the badari fruit. He that lives on badari for twelve years, and he that fasts at that tirtha for three nights acquires punya which is eternal.

Journeying then at Indramarga, and fasting there for a day and night, the pilgrim becomes adored in the realm of Indra. Going on to the Ekaratra

tirtha, he who spends a single night there, with vratas and with perfect truth, becomes adored in Brahmaloka. One should next go to the asrama of Aditya, that lustrous god who is a mass of effulgence. Bathing in that tirtha famed through three worlds, and worshipping the god of light, one goes to the realm of Aditya and saves his own race.

The pilgrim then goes on to bathe in the Soma tirtha and without any doubt finds the realm of Soma for himself.

Next, he must visit the most sacred tirtha of the illustrious Dadhicha, that sanctifying tirtha which is celebrated all over the world. It was here that Angiras of the Saraswatas, that ocean of tapasya, was born. Bathing in that tirtha, one gains the punya of the Aswamedha, and without doubt, also the realm of Saraswati.

With senses subdued observing brahmacharya, the pilgrim goes on Kanyasrama. Staying there for three nights, with subdued senses and a regulated diet, he acquires a hundred Apsaras, and also goes to Brahma's realm.

O Virtuous, he continues his yatra, now to the tirtha called Sannihati. Living there, the gods with Brahma at their head, and Rishis endowed with the wealth of asceticism earn great punya. Bathing in the Saraswati during a solar eclipse, one gains the merit of a hundred Aswamedhas, and any sacrifice that one might perform there produces merit that is eternal. Whatever tirthas exist on earth or in the firmament, all the rivers, lakes, pools, springs, tanks large and small, and places sacred to particular gods all come, O tiger among men, month after month, and mingle with Sannihati! It is because all the other tirthas are united together here, that this tirtha is so named. Bathing here and drinking of its water, one becomes adored in heaven.

Listen to the punya acquired by a mortal who performs a Sraddha there on the day of the new moon during a solar eclipse, after bathing in this tirtha. He gains the punya of one who assiduously and thoroughly performs a thousand Aswamedhas. Whatever sins a man or woman commits are, beyond doubt, all destroyed as soon as one bathes in that tirtha. Bathing here one also ascends to the abode of Brahma in the lotus-coloured vimana.

Bathing next in Koti-tirtha, after having worshipped the Yaksha dwarapalaka Machakruka, one gains the merit of giving away a bounty of gold.

Best of the Bhaaratas, near this is a tirtha called Ganga-hrada. Mind subdued, keeping brahmacharya, and bathing here, a pilgrim acquires punya which is greater than that of the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha Yagnas.

The Naimisha tirtha confers its fruit on earth; Pushkara confers punya in the realms of the firmament; Kurukshetra, however, confers felicity in all the three worlds. Even the dust of Kurukshetra, carried by the wind, leads sinful men to a highly blessed state. They that live in Kurukshetra, which lies to the north of the Drishadwati and to the south of the Saraswati, really reside in heaven.

'I will go to Kurukshetra. I will dwell in Kurukshetra,' he that utters these words even once, becomes cleansed of all sin. Sacred Kurukshetra, worshipped by Brahmarishis, is regarded as the Vedi, the sacrificial altar of the Devas. Mortals that dwell there have nothing to grieve for at any time. That which lies between Tarantuka and Arantuka and the lakes of Rama and Machakruka is Kurukshetra. It is also called Samanta-panchaka and is said to be the northern sacrificial altar of the Grandsire."

CANTO 84

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Pulastya said, "Then, O great Kshatriya, one should journey on to the excellent tirtha of Dharma, where the illustrious god of justice once performed an austere tapasya. And it is for this that he made the place a sacred tirtha which would be known after his own name. Bathing there, a virtuous man with his mind concentrated in dhyana certainly sanctifies his family to the seventh generation.

Next, the pilgrim goes to the wonderful Jnanapavana. Staying there, he acquires the merit of the Agnishtoma, and goes to Muniloka, the realm of the Munis.

Then, he must travel to the Saugandhika-vana. There the Devas dwell, with Brahma at their head, Rishis with a wealth of asceticism, the Siddhas, the Charanas, the Gandharvas, the Kinnaras and the Nagas. As soon as he enters these woods, he is cleansed of all his sins.

After this, he goes on to visit the stream of the Devi Saraswati, known here as the Devi Plaksha. There he must bathe in the water issuing from an anthill, worship the manes and the gods, thereby gaining the punya of the Aswamedha. At a distance of six throws of a heavy stick from the anthill, there is a rare tirtha called Isanadhyushita. The Puranas say, Purushavyaghra, that bathing here a man obtains the merit of giving away a thousand Kapila cows, and also of the Aswamedha Yagna.

Journeying next to Sugandha and Satakumbha and Pancha-yagna, a man becomes adored in heaven. He must visit another tirtha there called Trisulakhata, bathe and set himself to worship the Pitrs and the Devas. Doing so, without doubt, he finds, after his death, the condition of Ganapatya.

The pilgrim travels on to the glorious tirtha of the Devi known through the three worlds as Sakambhari. There, for a thousand celestial years, she of the fervent vow, had subsisted, month after month, only upon herbs. Drawn by their reverence for the Goddess, many Rishis of great tapasya came there, O Bhaarata, and she entertained them with herbs; it is for this that they named her Sakambhari. Bhaarata, the man who comes to Sakambhari, observing brahmacharya and rapt in dhyana, and passes three nights there in

purity, eating only herbs, obtains, at the will of the Goddess, the punya of one who lives on just herbs for twelve years.

From there he goes on to the tirtha called Suvarna, famed through the three worlds, where in days of old Vishnu paid his adorations to Rudra for his grace, and obtained many boons difficult of acquisition even by the gods. And, O Bhaarata, the gratified destroyer of Tripura said, 'Krishna, you will be much beloved in the world, and the foremost of everything in the universe.' Worshipping the God having the bull for his mark, in that place, the tirthayatri gains the punya of the Aswamedha and also the state of Ganapatya.

After this, he goes on to the tirtha of Dhumavati. Fasting there for three nights, he has his every wish fulfilled. In the southern part of this tirtha of the Goddess, there is another tirtha called Rathavarta. With a devout heart and senses controlled one should visit this sacred place, and, through the grace of Mahadeva, attain a lofty condition of grace.

After circumambulating this tirtha, Bharatarishabha, the pilgrim continues his pilgrimage going to the tirtha named Dhara, which, O you of great wisdom, washes away every sin. Bathing there, tiger among men, a man is freed from every sorrow.

Bowing to the Great Mountain Himavat, the pilgrim now takes himself to the source of the Ganga, which is beyond doubt the very gateway to heaven. There, his mind fixed in dhyana, he bathes in the tirtha called Koti, thereby gaining the punya of the Pundarika sacrifice; and he delivers all his race. Spending one night there, one acquires the merit of giving away a thousand cows.

By offering oblations of water to the gods and the manes at Saptaganga, Triganga and Sakravarta, all of which are here, one becomes adored in the realms of the virtuous.

Bathing next at Kanakhala, and fasting there for three nights, a man reaps the punya of the horse-sacrifice and goes to heaven.

After this, O lord of men, the pilgrim should repair to Kapilavata. Fasting for one night there, he acquires the merit of giving away a thousand cows. This tirtha of the illustrious Kapila, king of the Nagas, is celebrated, O best of Kurus, over all the worlds. Bathing at the Nagatirtha, one gains the merit of giving away a thousand Kapila kine.

After this the pilgrim journeys to the most excellent tirtha of Santanu, called Lalitaka. Bathing there, one never sinks into distress thereafter. The

man who bathes at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna obtains the punya of ten horse-sacrifices, and also redeems his race.

Next, the pilgrim should go to Sugandha, celebrated over the world. Here, cleansed of every sin, he becomes adored in the abode of Brahma. Then, on to Rudravarta, where bathing, one ascends to heaven. Bathing at the confluence of the Ganga and the Saraswati, a man finds the merit of the Aswamedha and also heaven.

Going on to Bhadrakarneswara and worshipping the gods, the pilgrim ensures that he will never be in distress again and will be loved in heaven. Then, lord of men, he goes to the Kubjamraka tirtha, and gains the merit of giving away a thousand cows, and swarga also.

From there he journeys to the Arundhativata, observing brahmacharya and his mind fixed in dhyana. Bathing there in Samudraka and fasting for three nights, he acquires the punya of the Aswamedha, that of giving away a thousand cows, and also redeems his entire clan.

One should next go to Brahmavarta, soul concentrated and locked in brahmacharya vratas. By this, one obtains the merit of the horse-sacrifice, and goes to the world of Soma.

The man who goes on to the Yamuna-prabhava, the source of the Yamuna, and bathes there, finds the punya of the Aswamedha and is worshipped in swarga. Arriving after this at Darbisankramana, a tirtha worshipped in the three worlds, a person acquires the merit of the horse-sacrifice and finds paradise.

Repairing next to Sindhu-prabhava, he source of the Sindhu, which is worshipped by Siddhas and Gandharvas, and staying there for five nights, one obtains the merit of giving away an abundance of gold. Going next to the almost inaccessible Vedi tirtha, the pilgrim finds the punya of the Aswamedha and ascends into swargaloka.

Then, O Bhaarata, one should travel to Rishikulya and Vasishtha. By visiting the latter, all varnas attain to Brahmanahood. Bathing at Rishikulya, while living a month eating just herbs, and worshipping the gods and manes, one is cleansed of all one's sins, and obtains the realm of the Rishis. Going next to Bhrigutunga, a pilgrim acquires the merit of the horse-sacrifice.

Going on to Virapramoksha, one is freed from every sin. Travelling then to the tirtha of Krittika and Magha, one, O Bhaarata, gains punya superior to that of the Agnishtoma and Atiratra sacrifices. The man who goes to the

most excellent tirtha called Vidya and bathes there in the evening, becomes a master of every kind of knowledge.

Next, the pilgrim must stay for one night at Mahasrama, capable of destroying every sin; and eat only a single meal. By this, he gains many auspicious realms, and delivers ten preceding and ten succeeding generations of his vamsa.

Dwelling next for a month in Mahalaya, and fasting there for three nights, one's soul is purged of all sin, and one acquires the punya of giving away gold in abundance. Proceeding to Vetasika, worshipped by the Grandsire, the tirtha-yatri obtains the merit of the Aswamedha and the state of Usanas.

He goes on to the tirtha Sundarika, worshipped by the Siddhas, and obtains radiant personal beauty, as witnessed by the ancients. Proceeding to Brahmani, with subdued senses and observing the brahmacharya vrata, a person rises into Brahmaloka in a lotus-hued chariot.

The yatri journeys next to the sacred Naimisha, worshipped by the Siddhas, where Brahma dwells with the Devas. Just the intention of visiting Naimisha, destroys half one's sins; by entering it, one is cleansed of all one's sins. The pilgrim of subdued senses should stay in Naimisha for a month; for, O Bhaarata, all the tirthas of the earth are present in Naimisha. Bathing there, with restrained senses and regulated fare, one obtains the merit of the cow-sacrifice, and also sanctifies his race for seven generations, before and after himself. The wise have always said that he who renounces his life at Naimisha by fasting, enjoys bliss in the heavenly regions, for Naimisha is ever sacred and most holy.

Travelling next to Gangodbheda and fasting there for three nights, a man obtains the merit of the Vajapeya sacrifice, and becomes like Brahma himself. Journeying to the Saraswati, one should offer oblations to the Devas and the Pitrs; with this, the pilgrim will surely enjoy bliss in the regions called Saraswata.

After, he wends his way to Bahuda, with soul subdued and keeping the brahmacharya vrata. Staying there for one night, one becomes beloved in heaven, and also gains the punya of the Devasatra sacrifice. On then he must go to Kshiravati, frequented by the most holy men. By worshipping the gods and the manes there, he acquires the punya of the Vajapeya.

Travelling next to Vimalasoka, mind subdued and keeping brahmacharya, and remaining there for one night, one is adored in heaven.

After this, he must go the exalted Gopratara in the Sarayu, where Sri Rama, with all his attendants and animals, abandoned his body, and ascended to heaven through the power of this tirtha. Bathing in that tirtha, O Bhaarata, through Rama's grace and by virtue of his own karma, one is washed of one's every sin and becomes adored in heaven.

Going next, O son of the Kurus, to the Rama-tirtha on the Gomati, and bathing there, one gains the merit of the Aswamedha, and also sanctifies his race. There, Bharatarishabha, is another tirtha called Satasahastrika. Bathing in it, with senses restrained and fasting, a person reaps the merit of giving away a thousand sacred cows.

Now he should go to the unrivalled tirtha called Bhartristhana, where he finds the merit of the Aswamedha. Bathing next in the tirtha called Koti, and worshipping Kartikeya, a man reaps the punya of giving away a thousand kine, and acquires great energy.

Going next to Varanasi, and worshipping the God having the bull for his mark, after a bath in the Kapilahrada, the pilgrim obtains the merit of the Rajasuya Yagna.

Journeying then to Avimukta, and seeing there the God of gods, he is instantly cleansed of even the sin of killing a Brahmana. By giving up one's life there, one attains moksha.

Arriving next at the rare tirtha Markandeya, celebrated over the world and situated on the Ganga, a person obtains the merit of Agnishtoma sacrifice, and delivers his race. On next to Gaya, with subdued senses and observing brahmacharya, one obtains the punya of the horse-sacrifice and also redeems his race. In that tirtha is the Akshaya-vata, celebrated throughout the three worlds. Whatever is offered here to the Pitrs is said to become inexhaustible. Bathing there in the Mahanadi, and offering oblations to the gods and the manes, a man acquires eternal regions, and also saves his race.

Then the pilgrim travels to Brahmasara in the forest of Dharma, and passing one night there, he attains Brahmaloka. In that lake, Brahma raised a sacrificial pillar; by walking round this stamba, a man acquires the punya of the Vajapeya sacrifice.

After this, mighty Kshatriya, the tirtha-yatri should go to Denuka, famed the world over. Staying there for one night and giving away sesame and cows, one's soul is cleansed of every sin, and one ascends into the world of Soma. Here, of yore, the cow Kapila ranged over the mountains, with her

calf. O Bhaarata, her great hoof-prints and her young ones can be seen in that place even today. By bathing in those hoof-prints, whatever sin a man may have incurred is washed away.

Then should one go to Gridhravata, consecrated to the trident-bearing God. Approaching the Deity having the bull for his mark, the pilgrim should rub himself with ashes. If a Brahmana, he gains the merit of observing the twelve-year vow and if he belongs to any of the other varnas, he is freed from all his sins.

After this, on to the Udyanta mountains, which resound with great and mysterious songs. There, Bharatarishabha, you can still see the the footprints of Savitri. The Brahmana of rigid vows who says his morning, noon and evening prayers here, for a day, finds the punya of performing that service for twelve years.

The famous Yonidwara is in this place; going there one is set free from the pain of rebirth. The person who stays at Gaya during both the dark and lighted fortnights, certainly sanctifies his own kula, up and down, to the seventh generation. One should wish for many sons so that at least one of them might go to Gaya, or celebrate the horse-sacrifice, or offer a Nila bull.

Then, the pilgrim should proceed to Phalgu, where he acquires the punya of the Aswamedha, and finds great success. After this, the pilgrim, his mind quietened, should travel to Dharmaprastha. There, O foremost of Kshatriya, Dharma dwells for ever. Drinking of the water of a well, which is there, and purifying one's self with a bath, he who offers oblations to the Devas and the Pitrs is cleansed of all his sins and ascends into swarga.

In that tirtha is the hermitage of the great Rishi Matanga of the perfectly restrained soul. By entering that beautiful asrama, which can soothe fatigue and sorrow, one earns the merit of the Gavamayana sacrifice, and by touching the image of Dharma, which is there, one obtains the fruit of the horse-sacrifice.

One should next go, O Kshatriya, to the excellent Brahmasthana. Approaching Brahma, that bull among male beings, who is present there, one acquires the merit of the Rajasuya and Aswamedha Yagnas.

The pilgrim should then repair to Rajagriha. Bathing there, one lives as happily as the Rishi Kakshivan. Purifying himself, the pilgrim should partake here of the offerings daily made to the Yakshini. By this, one is freed even from the sin of killing a Brahmana, through the Yakshini's grace.

Going on to Maninaga, one finds the punya of giving away a thousand kine. O Bhaarata, he that eats anything at all offered at the tirtha of Maninaga, becomes immune to the venom of the most deadly serpents. Staying there for one night, one is cleansed of one's sins.

Then should the pilgrim continue to the favourite forest of the Brahmarshi Gautama. There, bathing in the lake of Ahalya, he attains to an exalted slate. After this, seeing the image of Sri, he acquires great prosperity. There in that tirtha is a well famed through the trilokas. Bathing in it, one acquires the merit of the Aswamedha. Here is also a well sacred to the Rajarishi Janaka, a well that the gods worship. Bathing in this well, one rises into Vishnuloka.

Then should one repair to Vinasana that destroys every sin. By going there, one acquires the punya of a Vajapeya sacrifice, and also gains Somaloka. Travelling next to Gandaki, which is created by the waters of every tirtha, a person acquires the merit of the Vajapeya, and ascends into Suryaloka.

The pilgrim journeys next to the Visala, river celebrated across the three worlds, and gains the merit of the Agnishtoma and also rises into Swarga. After this, virtuous one, he goes to the tapovana of Rishis called Adhivanga, and finds great happiness amongst the Guhyakas.

Continuing to the river Kampana, visited by the Siddhas, one obtains the merit of the Pundarika sacrifice, and also ascends into heaven. Arriving then, O lord of earth, at the stream called Maheswari, one acquires the punya of the horse-sacrifice and also redeems his own race.

Journeying after this to the realm of the Devas, the pilgrim earns freedom from misfortune and also the merit of the horse-sacrifice. Next, he must go to Somapada, with subdued soul and keeping brahmacharya. Bathing in Maheswarapada there, one reaps the merit of the Aswamedha. In that tirtha, O Bharatarishabha, it is well known that ten millions of tirthas exist together.

Once a fiendish Asura, in the shape of a tortoise, attempted to carry it away, but the mighty Vishnu recovered it from him. There in that tirtha one should perform ablutions, for by doing this one acquires the punya of the Pundarika sacrifice and ascends into Vishnuloka besides.

Then, O best of kings, one should proceed to the Narayana tirtha, where, O Bhaarata, Narayana is always present and dwells for ever. The Devas with Brahma at their head, Rishis endowed with the wealth of asceticism,

the Adityas, the Vasus, and the Rudras, all adore Janardana in that tirtha, and Vishnu of wonderful deeds has come to be known as Salagrama. Approaching eternal Vishnu, Lord of the three worlds, giver of boons, one gains the merit of the horse-sacrifice, and goes to Vishnuloka.

In that place is a sacred well, capable of destroying every sin; the four seas are ever present in that well. He that bathes in it will be free from misfortune. Beholding the image of the boon-giving, eternal, and fierce Mahadeva who is also there, the pilgrim glows like the moon emerging from behind a cloud.

Bathing then in Jatismara, with a pure mind and subdued senses, one acquires, without doubt, the recollections of his past life. Going on to Maheswarapura, and worshipping the God having the bull for his mark, fasting the while, one gets the fruition of all one's desires.

Journeying, after this, to Vamana, which destroys every sin, and beholding the Lord Hari, the pilgrim is set free from all misfortune. He goes on to the asrama of Kusika that can remove every sin. Going then to the river Kausika, which cleanses even great sins, mahapaapas, one should bathe in it. By this one obtains the merit of the Rajasuya Yagna.

Next, best of Kshatriyas, he should go to the sacred Champaka forest. By spending one night there, he will acquire the merit of giving away a thousand cows. Arriving next at Jyeshtila, tirtha of rare worth, and passing one night there, one reaps the fruit of the gift of a thousand cows. Seeing the image of Visweswara of great splendour there, with his consort the Devi, a person obtains, O bull among men, the world of Mitra-Varuna. By fasting there for three nights, a man acquires the merit of the Agnishtoma.

By visiting Kanya-samvedya, with senses restrained and fasting, the pilgrim gains the region of Manu, the lord of creation. Rishis of stern vows have said that he that gives away rice or makes any gift at the tirtha called Kanya, renders such a gift eternal.

Arriving next at Nischira, celebrated through the three worlds, he gains the merit of the horse-sacrifice and goes to Vishnuloka. Those that give daana at the confluence of Nischira, ascend into blessed Brahmaloka. In that tirtha is the asrama of Vasishtha, known in the three lokas; bathing there, one obtains the merit of the Vajapeya.

Going on to Devakuta, to which Devarishis resort, one acquires the punya of the Aswamedha, and also delivers his vamsa. After this, the tirtha-yatri should go to the lake of the Muni Kausika, where Kausika's son,

Viswamitra, found grace. Bathing there, a man acquires the merit of the Vajapeya. O Kshatriya, at Kausika, the pilgrim should spend one month and reap the punya of an Aswamedha Yagna.

He that lives in that best of tirthas, Maha-hrada, enjoys immunity from misfortune, and also gains the merit of giving away gold in abundance. Next, seeing Kartikeya who dwells at Virasrama a man surely reaps the fruit of the horse-sacrifice. Proceeding to Agnidhara, celebrated across the three worlds, and after a bath there, beholding the eternal and boon-giving Vishnu, that God of gods, the pilgrim acquires the punya of the Agnishtoma.

Journeying on to the pool of Brahma, near the mountains with peaks of snow, and bathing in it, a man gets the merit of the Agnishtoma. Falling from the Grandsire's pool, is that world-sanctifying stream, celebrated through the three worlds, called Kumara-Dhara. Bathing there, one has all his purposes fulfilled. Fasting in that tirtha for three days, one is cleansed even of the sin of slaying a Brahmana.

The pilgrim should go on the peak of the great Goddess Gauri, also renowned across the three worlds. Climbing it, O best of men, one should approach Stana-Kunda. By touching the waters of Stana-Kunda, a person gains the merit of the Vajapeya sacrifice. Bathing in that and worshipping the Devas and Pitrs, one acquires the merit of the horse-sacrifice and also rises into Indraloka.

Arriving next at the well of Tamraruna, frequented by the gods, one acquires, O lord of men, the merit which attaches to human sacrifice. Bathing next at the confluence of the Kalika with the Kausiki and the Aruna, and fasting there for three nights, a man of learning is cleansed of all his sins.

Going on to the Urvasi tirtha, and then to Somasrama, a wise man, by bathing next at Kumbhakarnasrama, becomes loved through the world. The ancients knew that by touching the waters of Kokamukha, while observing steady vows and bramacharya, a man revives the memory of his former life.

The pilgrim goes quickly next to the river Nanda, where a regenerate man becomes free from all his sins and, soul controlled, rises into Indraloka. Then, on he goes to the island called Rishabha, where cranes die, and bathing in the Saraswati he blazes forth in heaven.

Continuing to the tirtha Auddalaka, frequented by Munis, and bathing there, one is cleansed of all one's sins. Repairing next to the sacred tirtha

Dharma, where Brahmarishis come, one acquires the merit of the Vajapeya and becomes respected in Swargaloka.

Proceeding to Champa and bathing in the Bhagirathi, he who goes to Dandaparna, finds the punya of giving away a thousand kine. After this, he must go on to sacred Lalitika, graced by the presence of the virtuous. By this the tirtha-yatri acquires the merit of the Rajasuya sacrifice and is regarded in heaven."

CANTO 85

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Pulastya said, "Arriving next at the excellent Samvedya tirtha in the evening, and touching its waters, the pilgrim surely gains knowldge and wisdom. Created a tirtha in days of old by Rama's power, at Lauhitya one obtains the merit of giving away a bounty of gold.

Then, on to the river Karatoya; and fasting there for three nights, a man acquires the merit of the horse-sacrifice.

This is the injunction of the Creator himself. It has been said by the wisest, O Kshatriya, that if a person goes to the place where the Ganga mingles with the sea, he reaps merit which is ten times that of the Aswamedha Yagna. Crossing over to the opposite bank of the Ganga, he that bathes there, having spent three nights in the place, is cleansed of all his sins.

The pilgrim must next go to the Vaitarani capable of destroying every sin. Arriving after this at the tirtha named Viraja he like the moon, and sanctifying his vamsa, rescues it and is himself purified of all his sins. He that bathes in Viraja further reaps the punya of giving away a thousand cows.

Living in purity at the confluence of the Sona and the Jyotirathi, and offering oblations of water to the gods and the manes, a man reaps the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice. Touching the waters of the Vamsagulma, constituting the sources of both the Sona and the Narmada, one obtains the punya of the Aswamedha.

Travelling on to the tirtha called Rishabha in Kosala, O lord of men, and fasting there for three nights, one earns the merit of the Vajapeya sacrifice, and of the gift of a thousand kine, and also delivers his race. Arriving at Kosala, a man should bathe in the tirtha named Kala, and by this he surely obtains the merit of giving away one and ten sacred bulls.

By bathing in Pushpavati and fasting there for three nights, one sanctifies one's own race, besides earning the merit of the gift of a thousand cows. O foremost of the Bhaaratas, by bathing in the tirtha called Badarika, one obtains long life, and also goes to heaven.

Arriving next at Champa, and bathing in the Bhagirathi, and seeing Danda one earns the punya of giving away a thousand kine. Then the pilgrim should go to the sacred Lapetika, graced by the presence of the pious; there he reaps the punya of the Vajapeya and also becomes regarded by the gods.

Proceeding next to the mountain Mahendra, where Jamadagnya lived, and bathing in Rama's tirtha, a person acquires the fruits of a horse-sacrifice. Here is Matanga's tirtha, Kedara, O son of the Kurus; bathing in it, a man gains the merit of giving away a thousand kine.

Going on to the mountain Sri, he who touches the waters of the stream there, worshipping the God who has the bull for his mark, obtains the merit of the horse-sacrifice. On the mountain Sri the effulgent Mahadeva dwells in joy with the Goddess, as also does Brahma with the other gods. By bathing in the lake of Beva, with purity and mind restrained, one gets the merit of the horse-sacrifice, and also attains the highest success.

Proceeding next to the mountain Rishabha in Pandya, worshipped by the gods, he finds the merit of the Vajapeya and rejoices in heaven. After this, he must go to the river Kaveri, frequented by Apsaras. Bathing there, he gains the merit of giving away a thousand cows.

After this he must touch the waters of the tirtha called Kanya on the shores of the sea, and be cleansed of every sin.

Going next to Gokarna, celebrated across the three worlds, which is situated in the midst of the deep, and is reverenced by all the lokas, and where the gods headed by Brahma, and Rishis endowed with the wealth of asceticism, and Bhutas and Yakshas and Pisachas, and Kinnaras and the great Nagas, and Siddhas and Charanas and Gandharvas, and men and Pannagas, and Rivers, Seas and Mountains worship the lord of Uma, one should worship Isana, fasting there for three nights. By this, one acquires the merit of the horse-sacrifice, and the state of Ganapatya. By staying there for twelve nights, one's soul is cleansed of all sin.

One should go to the tirtha known as Gayatri, renowned across the worlds. Staying there for three nights, one acquires the punya of giving away a thousand cows. A strange phenomenon is seen to occur there, O lord of men. If a Brahmana, whether born of a Brahmani or any other woman, recites the Gayatri there, the recitation becomes rhythmic and musical, while, O Kshatriya, one who is not a Brahmana cannot chant it adequately at all.

Going next to the well nigh inaccessible tank of the Brahmana Rishi Samvarta, one acquires personal beauty and prosperity. Repairing next to Vena, he that offers oblations of water to the gods and the manes, gains a chariot drawn by peacocks and cranes.

Going next to the Godavari, ever frequented by the Siddhas, one earns the merit of the cow-sacrifice, and goes to the wondrous realm of Vasuki. Bathing next at the confluence of the Vena, one obtains the punya of the Vajapeya sacrifice.

Bathing next at the confluence of Varada, one acquires the punya of giving away a thousand kine. Arriving next at Brahmasthana, he that stays there for three nights acquires the merit of giving away a thousand kine, and also ascends into swarga.

Coming next to Kusaplavana, with a subdued mind and keeping brahmacharya, and staying there for three nights, he that bathes in that tirtha obtains the merit of the Aswamedha. Bathing next at the romantic Deva-hrada, fed by the waters of the Krishna-Vena, and also in the Jatismara-hrada, one regains the memory of one's former life. It was here that Indra celebrated a hundred sacrifices and ascended to heaven. By visiting only this tirtha, one acquires the punya of the Agnishtoma.

Bathing next in the Sarvadeva-hrada, the pilgrim obtains the merit of giving away a thousand sacred cows.

Going on to the most holy tank Payoshni, best of waters, he that offers oblations of water to the gods and the manes acquires the merit of the gift of a thousand kine. Arriving next at the sacred forest of Dandaka, a person should bathe in the waters there, and immediately gain the punya of giving away a thousand cows.

Journeying next to the asrama of Sarabhanga and that of the illustrious Suka, one acquires immunity from all misfortune, besides sanctifying his race. Then should one travel to Surparaka, where Jamadagni's son lived of old. Bathing in that tirtha of Rama, one acquires the merit of giving away gold in abundance.

Bathing next in the Saptagodavara, with senses subdued and food regulated, one earns great merit, and also goes to Devaloka.

Going on to Devahrada, a man gains the merit of the Devasatra sacrifice. After this, the pilgrim should journey to the forest of Tungaka, in self-restraint and keeping bramacharya. It was here that, in olden days, the Muni Saraswata taught the Vedas to other ascetics. When the Vedas had been lost,

in consequence of the Munis having forgotten them, Angirasa's son, seated at his ease upon the upper garments of the other Munis, duly spread out, pronounced the sacred syllable AUM, and at this the Sages again remembered all that they had learnt before.

It was there that the Rishis and the Devas Varuna, Agni, Prajapati, Narayana who is also called Hari, Mahadeva and the lustrous Pitamaha of great splendour, appointed the resplendent Bhrigu to officiate at a sacrifice. Gratifying Agni with libations of ghee, poured according to the law of ritual, the illustrious Bhrigu performed the Agnidhana sacrifice for all those Rishis, after which both they and the gods went away to their respective homes, one after another.

One who enters the forest of Tungaka, man or woman, is cleansed of every sin. In that tirtha, O Kshatriya, one should remain for a month, with senses and food controlled; by this, one ascends into Brahmaloka, and also delivers one's race. Arriving next at Medhavika, one should offer oblations of water to the gods and the manes, and so acquire the merit of the Agnishtoma sacrifice, and also memory and intellect.

In that tirtha is the mountain famed the world over, called Kalanjara. Bathing in the unwordly lake that is there, one acquires the merit of giving away a thousand kine. He who, after a bath, offers oblations on the Kalanjara mountain is, without doubt, regarded in heaven.

Going on to the river Mandakini, which can destroy every sin, and which flows on that best of mountains, Chitrakuta, he that bathes there and worships the gods and the manes, receives the punya of the horse-sacrifice and attains to an exalted state.

After this, virtuous one, the pilgrim should visit the excellent tirtha Bhartristhana, where Kartikeya, Senapati of the Devas, is ever present; by going to just this tirtha a man finds success.

Bathing next at the tirtha called Koti, he earns the merit of giving away a thousand cows. Having walked around Koti, he must go on to Jyeshtasthana. Looking at the image of Mahadeva there, the tirtha-yatri shines like the moon. There is a renowned well in that place, Bharatarishabha, in which are the four seas. He that bathes there, and with mind subdued, worships the gods and the ancestors, is cleansed of all his sins and attains to an exalted state.

Then, one should journey to the great Sringaverapura, where once Dasaratha's son Rama crossed the Ganga. Bathing in that tirtha, Mahabaho,

one is exorcised of all one's sins. Bathing with subdued senses in the Ganga, while observing brahmacharya, one is washed of every sin, and also receives the punya of the Vajapeya.

After this, the pilgrim goes on to Mayuravata, consecrated to Mahadeva of awesome intelligence. Seeing the image of the God there, bowing down to him and walking around the place in pradakshina, one acquires the condition of Ganapatya. Bathing in Ganga at that tirtha, all one's sins are washed away.

Then, O Kshatriya, one should go on to Prayaga, whose praises have been sung by Rishis and where the gods dwell with Brahma at their head, the cardinal directions with their presiding deities, the Lokapalas, the Siddhas, the Pitrs adored by the worlds, the Maharishis – Sanatkumara and others, stainless Brahmarshis — Angiras and others, the Nagas, the Suparnas, the Siddhas, the Rivers, the Seas, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, and the Lord Hari with Prajapati.

In that tirtha are three fiery caverns between which the Ganga, that foremost of tirthas, rushes. There in that place the world-purifying daughter of the Sun, Yamuna, celebrated across the three worlds, unites with the Ganga. The country between the Ganga and the Yamuna is regarded as the yoni, mons veneris, of the world, and Prayaga as the foremost point of that.

The tirthas Prayaga, Pratishtana, Kambala, Aswatara and Bhogavati are the sacrificial altars of the Creator. In those places, O Kshatriyottama, the Vedas and the Yagnas, in embodied forms, and the Rishis blessed with the wealth of asceticism, adore Brahma, and there the gods and kings of the world also celebrate their sacrifices. The learned however, say that of all these tirthas Prayaga is the most sacred, in fact, the foremost of all tirthas in the three worlds.

By going to that tirtha, by singing its praises, or by taking a little earth from it, one is purified of every sin. He who bathes in that confluence, celebrated the world over, acquires all the punya of the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha Yagnas. The gods themselves worship this tirtha.

If a man gives ever so little here, it increases, O Bhaarata, a thousandfold. Child, do not let the texts of the Veda, nor the opinions of men turn your mind from the desire to die at Prayaga. O son of the Kurus, the wise say that six hundred million and ten thousand tirthas exist at Prayaga. Bathing in the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, one obtains the

merit that attaches to the four kinds of knowledge and the merits also of those that are founded in the truth.

At Prayaga is the excellent tirtha of Vasuki, called Bhogavati. He that bathes in it, obtains the merit of the Aswamedha. There in the Ganga is also the tirtha famed throughout the three worlds, called Hamsaprapatana, which confers the merit of ten Aswamedhas.

O Kurunandana, wherever a person bathes in the Ganga, he earns merit equal to that of a visit to Kurukshetra. An exception, however, is made in regard of Kanakhala, while the punya attaching to Prayaga is the greatest. Having committed a hundred sins, he that bathes in the Ganga, has all his sins washed away by the waters, even as fuel is consumed by fire.

It has been said that in the Satya-yuga all the tirthas were sacred; in the Treta, Pushkara alone was holy; in Dwapara, Kurukshetra; and in the Kali-yuga, the Ganga alone is sacred. In Pushkara, one should practise austerities; in Mahalaya, one should perform charity; in the Malaya mountains, one should ascend the funeral pyre; and in Bhrigutunga, one should renounce one's body by forgoing food.

Bathing in Pushkara, in Kurukshetra, in the Ganga and in the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, one sanctifies seven generations of one's vamsa up and down. He that recites the name of the Ganga is purified; he that sees her, receives prosperity; while he that bathes in her and drinks of her waters sanctifies seven generations of his race, above and below himself.

As long as one's bones lie touching the waters of the Ganga, so long does one live regarded in swarga, even as one lives in heaven in consequence of the merit he earns by pious pilgrimages to all the sacred tirthas and other holy places. There is no tirtha like the Ganga, there is no god like Kesava, and there are none superior to Brahmanas – this has been said even by Brahma, the Grandsire.

The land through which the Ganga flows must be regarded as a sacred asrama, and any place on the banks of the Ganga should be regarded as one favourable to the attainment of ascetic success.

One should narrate this description of the tirthas only to the regenerate, to those that are pious, to one's son and friends and disciples and dependants. This narrative, without a rival, is blessed and holy and leads to heaven. Sacred, enlivening and sanctifying, it bestows merit and high worth. Destructive of every sin, it is a mystery that the great Rishis cherish

with care. By reciting it in the midst of Brahmanas, one is cleansed of every sin, and ascends to paradise.

Truly, this description of the tirthas is auspicious and heaven-giving and sacred indeed; ever blessed as it is, it destroys one's enemies; foremost of all accounts, it sharpens the intellect. By reading this narrative the sonless obtains sons, the destitute obtains riches, the Kshatriya conquers the whole world, the Vaisya comes by great wealth, the Sudra has all his desires fulfilled, and the Brahmana crosses the ocean of samsara.

Purifying himself, he that listens daily to the merits of the different tirthas, recollects the incidents of many previous births and rejoices in swargaloka. Of the tirthas that have been named here, some are easily accessible, while others are difficult of access. But he who is inspired with the desire of beholding all the tirthas, should visit them even in imagination.

Wanting to obtain punya, the Vasus, the Sadhyas, the Adityas, the Maruts, the Aswins, and the Rishis equal to the Devas, all bathed in these tirthas. O Kuru, observe the vows I have explained, and with subdued senses, visit these tirthas, increasing your punya. Because of their pure senses, their belief in God, and their knowledge of the Vedas, pious men are able to visit these holy tirthas.

O Kauravya, he who does not observe vows, he whose mind is not conrolled, he that is impure, he that is a thief, and he that is of crooked mind, does not bathe in any tirthas. You always keep dharma, and are of pure character. By your virtue, you have always gratified your father, your grand-father, and great-grand-fathers, and the gods with Brahma at their head, and the Rishis also.

O Bhishma, who resembles Vasava, you will attain to the world of the Vasus, and also find eternal fame on earth!'"

"Narada continues, 'With this, the illustrious Rishi Pulastya, well-pleased, bid Bhishma farewell and vanished before his eyes. And Bhishma, O tiger among men, well knowing the import of the Shastras, wandered over the world at the behest of Pulastya. Bhishma ended his great pilgrimage to all these tirthas, which destroy every sin, at Prayaga.

The man that ranges the earth in accordance with these injunctions, obtains the highest fruit of a hundred horse-sacrifices and earns salvation thereafter. O son of Pritha, you will acquire punya consisting of the eight attributes, even as Bhishma, foremost of the Kurus, did of yore. And since you will lead these ascetics to those tirthas, your merit will be much greater.

These tirthas are infested by Rakshasas, and no one but you, O Kauravya, can go to them. He who rises early and recites this narrative by the Devarishis on the subject of the tirthas becomes free from all sins. Those best of Rishis, Valmiki, and Kasyapa, and Atreya, and Kundajatara, and Viswamitra, and Gautama, and Asita, and Devala, and Markandeya, and Galava, and Bharadwaja, and Vasishtha, and the Muni Uddalaka, and Saunaka with his son, and Vyasa, best of Sages, and Durvasas, foremost of Munis, and Jabali of great austerities – all these lustrous Rishis, endowed with the wealth of tapasya, are waiting for you. Mighty king, meet with these by undertaking a tirtha-yatra to all the tirthas.

A great Rishi of immeasurable tejas, Lomasa, will come to you. Follow him, and me, and visit the tirthas one by one. By this, you will acquire great fame, even like King Mahabhisha! O tiger among kings, even as the virtuous Yayati and King Pururava, you blaze forth with your own virtue. Like King Bhagiratha and the illustrious Rama, you shine among kings even as the Sun himself. And you are, Maharajan, celebrated in the world even as Manu or Ikshvaku, or the famed Puru or Vainya!

As in days of yore, the slayer of Vritra, after burning all his enemies, ruled the three worlds, his mind freed from anxiety, so will you rule your people, after killing all your enemies. And, O you of eyes like lotus leaves, having conquered the earth according to the customs of your varna, you will have renown by your dharma, fame even like Kartaviryarjuna.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "O great King Janamejaya, having comforted and advised the monarch thus, the illustrious Rishi Narada bids him farewell and vanishes before Yudhishtira's eyes. And the virtuous Yudhishtira, reflecting upon what Narada Muni said, begins to describe to his Brahmanas and Rishis the great spiritual merit attaching to the tirthas."

CANTO 86

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Having ascertained the opinion of his brothers, and of the intelligent Narada, Yudhishtira says to Dhaumya, who was even like the Pitamaha himself, 'I have sent Purushavyaghra Jishnu away to acquire the Devastras. Arjuna, whose prowess can never be baffled, whose arms are long and his intelligence immeasurable — that hero of immense ability and a master of weapons, who is like the peerless Vasudeva himself, is devoted to me.

O Brahmana, I know both Krishna and Arjuna, those destroyers of enemies, endowed with untold prowess, even as the puissant Vyasa knows them. I know Vasudeva and Dhananjaya to be none else than Vishnu himself, possessed of the six gunas. And this is what Narada also knows, for he has always spoken so to me. I also know the two to be the Rishis Nara and Narayana.

I have sent Arjuna on this mission, knowing that he will accomplish it. Not inferior to Indra and entirely capable, I have sent that son of a god to meet the king of the Devas and to receive astras from him.

Bhishma and Drona are Atirathas. Kripa and the son of Drona are invincible; Dhritarashtra's son has made these mighty warriors the commanders of his army. All of them are versed in the Vedas, they are heroic, and possess of the knowledge of every weapon. Endowed with great strength, they always want to face Arjuna in battle.

And the Sutaputra Kana is also a mighty warrior, a master of celestial astras. As far as the swiftness of his missiles is concerned, he owns the strength of Vayu. Himself a fire, his arrows are like great tongues of flame; the sound his left hand cased in leather makes, when he looses these shafts, are like those flames crackling. The dust of the battlefield is the smoke of the fire. Spurred on by the son of Dhritarashtra, even as the wind urges agni, Kama is like the all-consuming apocalypse at the end of the Yuga, which Death himself sends. He will consume my troops like straw.

Only that awesome thunderhead called Arjuna, helped along by Krishna like a powerful wind, with devastras its fierce lightning, the white steeds the rows of white cranes coursing below it, and the unbearable Gandiva the

rainbow ahead, can extinguish the conflagration that is Kama with arrowy showers loosed with unflagging consistency.

I have no doubt that that conqueror of hostile cities, Bibhatsu, will acquire all the celestial astras, with their awesome might and energy, from Indra himself. I believe that Arjuna by himself is equal to all the great heroes that oppose us; otherwise, we could never hope to vanquish them.

We shall see Arjuna, Parantapa, entirely armed with devastras, for once he undertakes a task he never droops under its weight.

However, without him here in the Kamyaka, Draupadi and we can find no peace. So, tell us of some other vana, which is sacred and full of delight, where game and fruit abound, where pious Munis live in tapasya, and where we can pass our days waiting as eagerly for mighty Arjuna as the Chataka birds do the gathering of rainclouds. Tell us of some asramas; tell us where we can find lakes and streams and beautiful mountains.

O Brahmana, I cannot stay on in this Kamyaka without Arjuna. All of us want to leave and go elsewhere.'"

CANTO 87

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Seeing the Pandavas so anxious and dejected, Dhaumya, who resembles Brihaspati, comforts them, 'Bharatarishabha, sinless one, listen to me and I will tell you about some holy asramas and lands and tirthas and mountains of which the great Brahmanas approve. Listen to me, yourself, your brothers and Drupada's daughter, and you will find relief from your sorrow. Son of Pandu, by merely hearing of these places, you will acquire punya; by visiting them, you will gain merit a hundred times greater, O best of men!

First, O King, I will, as far as I recall, speak of the beautiful eastern country, much adored by Rajarishis. In that direction, O Bhaarata lies a place called Naimisha which is regarded by the Devas. There, in that land, are several tirthas belonging to the gods. There, too, flows the sacred and beautiful Gomati, worshipped by Devarishis; and there, as well, stands the sacrificial stake of Surya.

In that quarter is also that best of hills, Gaya, and much regarded by royal Sages. On that hill, is the auspicious lake called Brahmasara, which is adored by celestial Rishis. The ancients say that one should wish for many sons, so that at least one among them might visit Gaya, perform the Aswamedha or give away a Nila bull, and thereby deliver ten generations of his clan, up and down.

There, O Yudhishtira, is a great river and a particularly auspicious spot called Gayasira. In Gayasira is a nyagrodha, a banyan tree, which the Brahmanas call the Eternal banyan: for, food that is offered there to the Pitrs becomes eternal, O Mahatman! The great river that flows by the tree is known by the name of Phalgu, and its waters are most sacred.

Bharatarishabha, in that place is also the Kausiki, whose basin abounds in various fruit and roots, and where Viswamitra, his wealth his tapasya, acquired Brahmanahood.

Towards that direction also is the Ganga, on whose banks Bhagiratha performed many sacrifices with profuse gifts to Brahmanas.

They say that in the country of Panchala there is a forest called Utpala, where Viswamitra of Kausika's race performed sacrifices with his son, and

where, seeing the relics of Viswamitra's superhuman power, Rama, the son of Jamadagni, recited the praises of his ancestry. At Kamyaka, Kausika's son once quaffed the Soma rasa with Indra. Then, abandoning the Kshatriya varna, he said, "I am a Brahmana!"

In that quarter, O hero, is the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, which is celebrated the world over. Holy and sin-destroying, that tirtha is much reverenced by the Rishis. It is here that the soul of all things, Brahma the Grandsire, in olden days, performed his sacrifice; and it is for this, O lord of the Bhaaratas, that the place has come to be called Prayaga.

In this direction, O foremost among kings, lies the beautiful asrama of Agastya, and the forest called Tapasa, which many Rishis adorn. And there also is the great tirtha called Hiranyabindu on the Kalanjara hills, and that best of mountains called Agastya, which is sacred and auspicious.

In that quarter, O scion of the Kurus, is the mountain called Mahendra, sacred to the illustrious Rama of the Bhrigus. There, Kaunteya, the Grandsire performed sacrifices of yore. There, O Yudhishtira, the sacred Bhagiratha enters a lake and there also, O King, is that holy river, the punya-giving Brahmasara, on whose banks live men whose sins have been washed away, whose very sight bestows great grace.

In that direction, also, lies the high-souled Matanga's fine asrama, Kedara, which is holy and auspicious and renowned through the world. There is also the mountain called Kundoda, so delightful and abounding in fruit and roots and waters, where Nala, king of the Nishadhas, slaked his thirst and rested a while.

In that quarter, also, is the delighltful Deva-vana, graced by ascetics; there, too, are the rivers Bahuda and Nanda on the mountain's crest. Mighty king, I have described to you all the tirthas and other sacred places in the eastern quarter.

Hear now of the tirthas, and rivers and mountains and holy places in the other three quarters.'"

CANTO 88

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhaumya continues, 'Listen, O Bhaarata, and I will now I tell you about the holy tirthas of the south. In that quarter flows the sacred and auspicious Godavari, full of crystalline water, abounding in tapovanas and frequented by ascetics.

In the south also are the rivers Vena and Bhimarathi, both of which destroy sin and fear, and their banks abounding in birds and deer, and graced with the hermitages of Munis. In that part, too, O Bharatarishabha, is the tirtha of the Rajarishi Nriga – the river Payoshni, enchanting and brimfull of water and visited by Brahmanas. There the lustrous Markandeya, of lofty ascetic merit sang the praises, in verse, of King Nriga's line.

We have heard what happened to King Nriga while performing a yagna at the auspicious Varaha tirtha on the Payoshni. Indra became intoxicated by drinking the Soma rasa during the sacrifice, and the Brahmanas, with the gifts they received. The water of the Payoshni, taken up in a vessel or flowing along the ground, or as spray blown by the wind, can cleanse a person from whatever sins he may commit until the the day of his death.

Higher than heaven itself, and pure, and created and given by the Trisulin, in that tirtha is an image of Mahadeva, seeing which a mortal attains to Sivaloka. Placing on a scale Ganga and the other rivers with their waters on one side, and on the other the Payoshni, in my opinion the latter would outweigh all the other tirthas in terms of punya.

Then, O Bharatottama, upon the mountain called Varuna-strotasa is the auspicious vana Mathara, with its plenitude of fruit and roots, and containing a sacrificial stake. In the land north of the Praveni, and around the holy asrama of Kanva, are many tapovanas of Rishis.

And, O child, in the tirtha called Surparaka are two sacrificial platforms of the illustrious Jamadagni, known as Pashana and Punaschandra. And, O son of Kunti, in that place is the tirtha Asoka, also with an abundance of hermits' tapovanas.

And, O Yudhishtira, in the country of the Pandyas are the tirthas named Agastya and Varuna. Bull among men, there, amongst the Pandyas, is the

tirtha called the Kumaris.

Listen, O son of Kunti, I will now describe Tamraparni. In that asrama, the Devas, impelled by the desire of obtaining salvation, performed tapasya. In that country, also, is the lake of Gokarna, celebrated across the three worlds, which is full of cool, pure water, and which is auspicious, and can bestow great punya. That lake is extremely difficult of access to men of unpurified hearts and souls.

Near that tirtha is the asrama of Agastya's disciple, the mountain Devasabha, which abounds in trees and grass, and fruit and roots. And there also is the Vaidurya mountain, delightful, replete with gemstones and which bestows great spiritual merit. There on that mountain is the hermitage of Agastya, rich with fruit and roots and water.

Lord of men, I will now describe the tirthas, asramas, and holy rivers and lakes that belong to the Surashtra country. O Yudhishtira, the Brahmanas say that on the sea-coast is the Chamasodbheda, and also Prabhasa, that tirtha which is highly regarded by the gods. There also is the tirtha called Pindaraka, frequented by ascetics and which can bestow great punya.

In that region is a mighty hill named Ujjayanta, which is conducive to quick success, about which Devarishi Narada of great intelligence has composed an ancient sloka. By performing tapasya on the sacred hill of Ujjayanta in Surashtra, which abounds in birds and animals, a person becomes honoured in heaven.

Dwaravati is also in this region, producing great merit, where Madhusudana dwells, who is the Ancient One, in embodied form, and the Sanatana Dharma. Brahmanas versed in the Vedas, and men who know the Atma Vidya say that the illustrious Krishna is eternal Virtue. Govinda is said to be the purest of all pure things, the most righteous of the righteous and the most auspicious of the auspicious.

In all the three worlds, He of eyes like lotus-leaves is the God of gods, and is eternal. He is the pure soul and the Life of life, the Supreme Brahman and the lord of all. That slayer of Madhu, Hari of inconceivable soul, dwells in Dwaravati!'

CANTO 89

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhaumya continues, 'O Bhaarata, I will describe to you the holy tirthas, which lie in the west, in the land of the Anartas. There, in a westward course the sacred river Narmada flows, graced by priyangu and mango trees, and garlanded with thickets of bamboo. All the tirthas and rivers and woods and foremost of mountains that are in the three worlds, all the gods with the Grandsire, along with the Siddhas, the Rishis and the Charanas, Kurusthama, always come to bathe in the sacred waters of the Narmada.

And I have heard that the holy asrama of the Muni Visravas once stood there, and that there was born the Lord of treasures, Kubera, who has men for his vahanas. There also is that best of hills, the auspicious Vaidurya peak with abundant trees that are evergreen and always graced with flowers and fruit. Lord of the earth, on the top of that mountain is a tank laden with full-blown lotus, to which the Devas and the Gandharvas come. Many are the wonders, O mighty King, that can be seen on that holy mountain, which is like swarga itself and which is visited by celestial Rishis.

There, O subduer of hostile cities, is the sacred river called Viswamitra, which belongs to the Rajarishi of that name and which teems, O Rajan, with tirthas. It was on the banks of this river that Yayati, the son of Nahusha, fell from heaven among the virtuous, and also obtained once more the eternal regions of the righteous.

In this region also are the famed lake called Punya, the mountain called Mainaka, and that other mountain Asita, rich with fruit and roots. And here also is the hermitage of Kakshasena, and O Yudhishtira, the asrama of Chyavana, also, which is famed in every country, O son of Pandu. In that place, O noble one, men attain to moksha without performing severe austerities.

Here, also, Maharajan, is the land called Jambumarga, inhabited by birds and deer, where Sages of self-restraint dwell, O foremost of those that have subdued their senses.

Next, lie the exceedingly sacred Ketumala and Medhya, always graced by Munis, and, O lord of earth, Gangadwara, and the renowned vana of Saindhava, most holy, where the regenerate ones dwell. Here also is the

celebrated lake of Brahma, called Pushkara, the favourite abode of the Vaikanasas, and Siddhas and Rishis.

Moved by the desire of having its protection, the Creator sang this verse at Pushkara, O lord of the Kurus and most virtuous of men – If a man of pure soul ever imagines a pilgrimage to the Pushkara, he is purged of all his sins and rejoices in swarga!'

CANTO 90

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhaumya continues, 'O tiger among kings, I will now describe the tirthas and sacred places that lie in the north. Do you, O exalted one, listen to me attentively. By hearing this narration, O Kshatriya, one acquires a reverential frame of mind, which is conducive to great good.

In those parts, flows the most sacred Saraswati, abounding in tirthas and her banks easy of descent. There, also, O son of Pandu, is the impetuous ocean-going Yamuna, and the tirtha called Plakshavatarana, which bestows high merit and prosperity. It was there that the Brahmanas bathed after having performed the Saraswata Yagna.

Sinless one, in the famed celestial tirtha called Agni-siras, which generates great punya, the King Sahadeva once performed a sacrifice, after measuring out the sacrificial ground by a throw of the Samya. It is for this reason, Yudhishtira, that Indra sang the praises of Sahadeva in verses, which are still current in this world, and recited by the Dvijas – *On the Yamuna Sahadeva worshipped the sacrificial fire, with gifts in a hundred thousands to Brahmanas*.

There, too, the illustrious king, the imperial Bharata, performed thirty-five horse-sacrifices.

O child, I have heard that Sarabhanga once used to fully gratify the desires of the Brahmanas. In this region is his celebrated asrama, which produces great merit. In that land also, O son of Pritha, is the river Saraswati, which is ever worshipped by the gods, where, in elder days, the Balakhilyas, O great king, performed sacrifices.

In the northern region, also, O Yudhishtira, is the renowned river Drishadwati, which bestows great punya. Then, O chief of men, are Nyagrodhakhya, and Panchalya, and Punyaka and Dalbhyaghosha, and Dalbhya, which are, O son of Kunti, the sacred resort in this world of illustrious Anantayasas of excellent vows and great energy, and which are celebrated over the three worlds.

Here, too, O lord of men, the illustrious Etavarna and Avavarana, versed in the Vedas, learned in Vedic lore, and proficient in the knowlegde of Vedic rites, performed sacrifices of great merit, O king of the Bhaaratas.

Here in the north, is also Visakhayupa to which, in days of yore, came the Devas with Varuna and Indra, and performed tapasya. And that is why the place is so eminently auspicious.

Here, also, is Palasaka, where the great and lustrous and most blessed Rishi Jamadagni performed sacrifices, and all the great rivers, in their embodied forms, each bringing their own holy waters, stood surrounding that best of sages. And there also, O king, Viswavasu, Agni himself, at seeing that Mahatmans initiation, sang this sloka – *The rivers, coming to the illustrious Jamadagni, who was sacrificing to the gods, gratified the Brahmanas with offerings of honey.*

O Yudhishtira, the place where Ganga rushes past, cleaving that king of mountains, which is frequented by Gandharvas and Yakshas and Rakshasas and Apsaras, and inhabited by hunters, and Kinnaras, is called Gangadwara. Sanatkumara regards that place visited by Brahmarshis, as also the tirtha Kanakhala that is near it, as being sacred.

There, as well, is the mountain named Puru to which great Rishis come, and where Pururavas was born, and Bhrigu performed tapasya, for which that asrama has become known as Bhrigutunga.

Near that peak is the sacred and extensive Badari, most auspicious asrama, famed over the three worlds, of Him, O Bharatarishabha, who is the Present, the Past and the Future, who is called Narayana and Lord Vishnu, who is eternal and the best of purushas, and who is pre-eminently illustrious.

Near Badari, the cool current of Ganga was once warm, and her banks there were covered with golden sands. There the Devas and Rishis of high fortune and great effulgence, approach the divine Lord Narayana, always, and worship him. All the universe, with all its tirthas and other holy places, is there where the divine and eternal Narayana, the Supreme soul, dwells, for he is Punya, he is the Parabrahman; he is the tirtha, he is the asrama; he is the First, he is the foremost of gods, and he is the great Lord of all creatures. He is eternal, he is the great Creator, and he is the highest state of blessedness.

Learned men, versed in the scriptures, attain to great happiness by knowing him.

In that place are the Devarishis, the Siddhas, and, indeed, all the Rishis, where the slayer of Madhu dwells, that primeval Deity and mighty Yogin. Let no doubt enter your heart that this place is the first of all holy places.

These, O lord of the earth, are the tirthas and other sacred places in the world. These are all visited by the Vasus, the Sadhyas, the Adityas, the Marutas, the Aswins and the illustrious Rishis who resemble the celestials themselves. By journeying, O son of Kunti, to those places, with your Brahmanas and ascetics, and with your blessed brothers, you will be set free from fear!' says Dhaumya."

CANTO 91

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "O son of the Kurus, even as Dhaumya speaks, Rishi Lomasa of great tejas arrives there; and Yudhishtira, with his followers and his Brahmanas sits around that most righteous Sage, even as the celestials in heaven do around Indra. And having received him with reverence, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira enquires after the reason of his arrival, and the object of his wanderings.

Well-pleased with his welcome, the illustrious Muni replies in sweet words which delight the Pandavas, 'Travelling at will, O Kaunteya, over all the realms, I came to Indra's abode and saw the lord of the Devas there. There, I saw your heroic brother, who can wield the bow with both hands, seated on the same throne with Sakra. Seeing Partha in the lofty place, I was greatly astonished, O tiger among men.

Indra then said to me, "Go, Lomasa, to the sons of Pandu." At his behest, as also that of the noble Arjuna, I have come swiftly here to you, wanting to see you and your younger brothers. Child, I will relate something that will please you greatly, O son of Pandu. Listen to it, O king, with Krishnaa and the Rishis that are with you.

Bharatarishabha, Partha has got that peerless weapon from Rudra for which you sent him on his journey. That fierce astra, the Brahmasira, which arose after the Amrita, and which Rudra once gained through stern tapasya. Arjuna now has that astra, along with the mantras to loose and withdraw it, and the rites for expiation and revival.

Yudhishtira, Arjuna of immeasurable prowess has also acquired Vajras and Dandas and other celestial weapons from Yama and Kubera and Varuna and Indra. He has also music, both vocal and instrumental, thoroughly, and dancing and the art of the proper recitation of the Sama, from Vishwavasu's son. And having thus acquired weapons and mastered the Gandharva Veda, your third brother lives happily in Devaloka.

Listen now Yudhishtira to the message of Indra. He commanded me, "You will go to the world of men. O best of Brahmanas, tell Yudhishtira that I said, 'Your brother Arjuna will soon return to you, having acquired the astras and also having accomplished a great deed for the Devas, which they

themselves cannot accomplish. Meanwhile, devote yourself to sannyasa, along with your brothers. There is nothing superior to asceticism, and it is through sannyasa that a person achieves great results.

And, O Bharatarishabha, I well know that Kama is endowed with great ardour and energy and strength and prowess, all incapable of being baffled. Well do I know that, skilled in fierce battle, he has no rival in war; that he is a mighty bowman, a hero who is a master of great weapons and cased in the best mail. Well do I know that that lofiy son of Aditya resembles Siva's son Kartikeya himself.

I also well know the awesome natural prowess of the broad-shouldered Arjuna. In battle, Kama is not even a sixteenth part of Pritha's son. And as for the fear of Kama which is in your heart, O Parantapa, I will dispel that when Savyasachin leaves Devaloka.

As for your intention, Kshatriya, to set out on a pilgrimage to the tirthas, Maharishi Lomasa will speak to you about that. And whatever that regenerate Sage says to you about the great merits of sannyasa and the tirthas, you must receive with respect and not otherwise,' said the Lord Indra," Lomasa says.

CANTO 92

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa continues, "Listen now, O Yudhishtira, to what Dhananjaya said – 'Cause my brother Yudhishtira to attend to the practice of dharma, which leads to prosperity. Blessed with the wealth of asceticism, you are conversant with the highest dharma, with ascetic austerities of every kind, with the eternal duties of kings blessed with prosperity, and the high and sanctifying merit that men obtain from the tirthas. Persuade my brothers, the sons of Pandu, to acquire the punya attaching to the tirthas. With all your soul persuade the king to visit the tirthas and to give away kine.'

This is what Arjuna said to me. Indeed he also said, 'Protected by you, let Yudhishtira visit all the tirthas. You must also protect him from Rakshasas, watch over him in inaccessible regions and upon rugged mountain breasts. And as Dadhichi protected Indra, and Angiras protected the Sun, so must you, O Dvijottama, protect the sons of Kunti from demons. Along the way are many Rakshasas, big as mountain-cliffs, but with your protection, these will not be able to approach the sons of Kunti.'

Obeying the command of Indra and the request of Arjuna, and also safeguarding you from all danger, I will come with you on your pilgrimage. I have visited the tirthas twice before, O Kuru, and with you I will go to them a third time.

O Yudhishtira, Manu and other Rajarishis of great deeds journeyed to the tirthas. Indeed, a tirtha-yatra can dispel all fear. They that are crooked-minded, who do not have their minds under control, who are ignorant and perverse, do not, O Kauravya, bathe in tirthas. But you are ever virtuous and conversant with dharma and firm in keeping your promises. You will certainly free yourself from samsara, for, O Pandava, you are even like King Bhagiratha, or Gaya, or Yayati, or any one, O son of Kunti, that is like them."

Yudhishtira replies, 'I am so overwhelmed with delight, O Brahmana, that I cannot find words to answer you. Who can be more fortunate than he who is remembered even by the lord of the Devas? Who can be more fortunate than he who has been favoured with your company, who has Dhananjaya for a brother, and who is thought of by Vasava himself?

As for what you say, illustrious one, about a tirtha yatra, my mind had already been made up at what Dhaumya said to me. O Brahmana, I will set out at whatever hour you may be pleased to appoint, on the pilgrimage. This is my firm resolve!'

Lomasa then says to Yudhishtira, who has made up his mind to go on the yatra, 'O mighty king, be light in your retinue, for so you will travel more easily.'

Yudhishtira then says, 'Let those mendicants and Brahmanas and Yogis that cannot bear hunger and thirst, the fatigues of travel and toil, and the severity of winter, desist from coming with us. Let those Brahmanas also not come that live on sweetmeats, and they also that desire cooked food that is sucked or drunk, as well as meat. And let those also remain behind that are dependent on cooks.

Let those citizens that have followed me from loyalty, and whom I have hitherto suppported, go back to King Dhritarashtra. He will give them succour and allowances. If, however, that king refuses to grant them proper allowances, the king of the Panchalas will, for my satisfaction and welfare, surely maintain them.'

And now, though stricken with grief, the citizens and the prinicipal Brahmanas and Yatis set out for Hastinapura, and out of affection for Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, the royal son of Ambika receives them properly, and gratifies them with proper allowances.

And the royal son of Kunti, with only a small band of Brahmanas, stays for three nights in Kamyaka, consoled by Lomasa."

CANTO 93

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Brahmanas, who have been living with him in the forest, see the son of Kunti about to set out on his tirtha yatra, approach him, O King, and say, 'You are about to set out on your journey to the sacred tirthas, along with your brothers and the Rishi Lomasa. O King, O son of Pandu, take us with you, for without you we will never be able to visit them at any time. Surrounded by dangers and difficult of access, they are infested by beasts of prey.

Those tirthas, O lord of men, are inaccessible to small bands of men. Greatest among bowmen, your brothers are always valiant; and with your protection, we also wish to visit the sacred places. Help us also, O lord of the earth, to acquire the punya of the tirthas. Protected by your valour, let us, as well, be cleansed of all our sins by visiting the sacred fords and bathing in their waters.

Bathing in the tirthas, O Bhaarata, you will certainly gain the realms so difficult of acquisition, which only Kartavirya and Ashtaka, the Rajarishi Lomapada and the imperial and heroic Bharata earned for themselves. Rajan, we want to behold Prabhasa and the other tirthas, Mahendra and the other mountains, Ganga and the other rivers, and Plaksha and the other giant trees.

If, O lord of men, you have any regard for Brahmanas, do our bidding; you will surely gain prosperity from this. Mahabaho, the tirthas swarm with Rakshasas that ever obstruct ascetic penances. It falls to you to protect us from them. Watched over by Lomasa and taking us with you, go to all the tirthas of which Dhaumya and the wise Narada spoke, as also to all those of which the celestial Lomasa, blessed with great ascetic wealth, told; and by this, be cleansed of all your sins.'

Thus addressed respectfully by them, the king, that bull amongst the sons of Pandu, surrounded by his heroic brothers led by Bhima, with tears of joy in his eyes, says to all those ascetics, 'Let it be so.'

So, at Lomasa's behest and Dhaumya's urging, that best of the Pandavas, his soul perfectly restrained, resolves to set out, along with his brothers and Draupadi of faultless features. Just then, the blessed Vyasa, as also Parvata

and Narada, all of lofty wisdom, come to Kamyaka to meet the son of Pandu. Seeing them, Yudhishtira worships them with proper rites.

Thus worshipped by the king, those blessed ones say, 'O Yudhishtira, O Bhima, and you twins, banish all evil thoughts from your minds. Purify your hearts and then set out for the tirthas. The Brahmanas have said that the observance of regulations for the body are called earthly vows, while efforts to purify the heart, so that it may be free from evil thoughts, are called spiritual vows.

O King, the mind that is free from all evil thoughts is most pure. Purifying yourselves, therefore, harbouring only friendly feelings for all, go and see the tirthas. Observing earthly vows with your bodies and purifying your minds through spiritual vows, obtain all the fruit, as told to you, of pilgrimages.'

Saying, 'So be it,' the Pandavas, with Krishnaa, have those celestial and human Rishis perform the customary propitiatory rituals. And having worshipped the feet of Lomasa and Dwaipayana and Narada and the divine Rishi Parvata, and accompanied by Dhaumya as also the ascetics that had been living with them in the forest, the Pandavas set out on the day following the full moon of Agrahayana in which the constellation Pushya is ascending.

Dressed in bark and hides, and with matted locks on their heads, they are all cased in impenetrable mail and armed with swords. And, O Janamejaya, the heroic sons of Pandu, with quivers and arrows and swaords and other weapons, and accompanied by Indrasena and other attendants, with fourteen and one chariots, a number of cooks and servants of other classes, set out with their faces turned towards the east!

CANTO 94

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'O best of Devarishis, I do not think that I am without merit. Yet I am afflicted with so much sorrow that there never was a king like me. I think, however, that my enemies have no good in them, nor even any dharma. Then why, O Lomasa, do they prosper in this world?"

Lomasa says, 'Do not grieve, O son of Pritha, that sinful men often do prosper as a consequence of the sins they commit. A man may be seen to prosper by his sins, obtain good therefrom and vanquish his enemies. However, destruction overtakes him to his very roots.

O King, I have seen many Daityas and Danavas prosper through sin but I have also seen doom overtake them. O exalted one, I have seen all this in the Krita Yuga.

The Devas practised dharma, while the Asuras abandoned it. The gods visited the tirthas, while the demons did not. And at first the sinful Asuras were possessed by pride; pride begot vanity and vanity begot wrath. And from wrath there arose every kind of evil propensity, and from these sprang shamelessness. And in consequence of shamelessness, good conduct disappeared from amongst them; and because they had become shameless and devoid of virtue and good conduct and virtuous vratas, forgiveness and prosperity and morality forsook them in no time.

And then, O King, prosperity sought the Devas, while adversity found the Asuras; and when the Daityas and the Danavas, deprived of good sense by pride, were possessed by adversity, Kali also sought to possess them. And overwhelmed by pride, and destitute of rites and sacrifices, and devoid of reason and feeling, and their hearts full of vanity, destruction soon overtook them. Covered with infamy, the Daityas were quickly exterminated.

However, the Devas, who were virtuous in their practices, going to the seas, the rivers, the lakes and the holy spots, cleansed themselves of all sins, O son of Pandu, through ascetic penances and sacrifices and gifts and blessings, and found prosperity. And because the gods always performed

sacrifices and holy deeds abandoning every practice that was evil, and visited the tirthas, they acquired great good fortune.

Be guided by this, O King; and you also, with your brothers, bathe in the tirthas, for then you will regain prosperity once more. This is the eternal road. As King Nriga and Sibi and Ausinara and Bhagiratha and Vasumanas and Gaya and Puru and Pururavas performed tapasya and, visiting the tirthas, touched sacred waters and saw illustrious Rishis, gained fame and sanctity and merit and wealth, so will you find fortune that is great. And as Ikshvaku with his sons, friends and followers, as Muchukunda and Mandhatri and King Marutta, as the Devas, through the power of asceticism and the Devarishis also, all gained fame, so will you also find great celebrity. The son of Dhritarashtra, on the other hand, enslaved by sin and ignorance, will, without doubt, soon be destroyed like the Daityas.'"

CANTO 95

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The heroic sons of Pandu, accompanied by their followers, travelling from place to place, at last arrive at Naimisha. O King, reaching the Gomati, the Pandavas bathe in the sacred tirtha of that river, and having performed their ablutions there, they give away, O Bhaarata, both kine and wealth. Repeatedly offering oblations of water to the Devas, the Pitrs, and the Brahmanas, in the tirthas called Kanya, Aswa, and Gaya, and staying in Kalakoti and the Vishaprastha hills, the Pandavas then come to Bahuda and perform their ablutions in that stream.

Going next, O lord of earth, to the sacrificial realm of the gods known as Prayaga, they bathe at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna and living there, perform tapasya of great merit. And bathing in that tirtha, the Pandavas, of firm vratas, cleanse themselves of every sin.

The sons of Pandu, accompanied by those Brahmanas, travel next to the tirtha called Vedi, sacred to the Creator and adored by ascetics. Staying there for some time and gratifying the Brahmanas with the fruit and roots of the wilderness and with ghee, those Kshatriyas begin to perform tapasya of deep punya.

They next journey to Mahidhara consecrated by the great Rajarishi Gaya of unrivalled splendour. In that land is the mountain called Gayasira, as well as the enchanting river Mahanadi, her fine banks graced by thickets of bamboo. On that divine mountain of holy peaks is another tirtha, the Brahmsaras, adored by Rishis. On the banks of that lake, of old, Dharma Deva, eternal god of justice himself dwelt, and it was there that the illustrious Rishi Agastya went to see that deity.

From that lake, all those sacred rivers arise, and in that tirtha, Mahadeva, wielder of the Pinaka, is present for ever.

Arriving there, the Pandavas keep the vrata called Chaturmasya, observing all the rites of the great sacrifice called Rishiyagna. There that mighty tree called the Eternal Banyan stands; any sacrifice performed there produces merit that is eternal. In that sacrificial dais of the gods producing eternal punya, the Pandavas begin to fast with concentrated souls. And there, Brahmanas, by hundreds, endowed with the wealth of tapasya, come

to them; these Brahmanas also all perform the Chaturmasya sacrifice according to the rites prescribed by the Rishis.

In that tirtha, those Brahmanas old in knowledge and ascetic merit and masters of the Vedas, become the court of the lustrous sons of Pandu, and they discourse upon various subject of sacred import. And it was in that place that the wise and holy Shamata, who leads a life of celibacy, speaks to them, O King, of Gaya, the son of Amurtaraya.

Shamata says, 'Gaya, the son of Amurttaraya, was one of the greatest of all Rajarishis. Listen to me, O Bhaarata, I will tell of his deeds of dharma. It was here, O King, that Gaya performed many sacrifices distinguished by the vast quantities of food he distributed and the profuse gifts he gave. Those yagnas had hundres of thousands of hills of cooked rice, lakes of clarified butter and rivers of curds, in many hundreds, and streams of rich curries, in thousands.

Day after day, these were prepared and given to all comers, while, over and above this, Brahmanas and others, received more food that was clean and pure. During the conclusion of every sacrifice, when gifts were dedicated to the Brahmanas, the chanting of the Vedas reached the heavens. And so loud, indeed, was the sound of the Vedic mantras that nothing else, O Bhaarata, could be heard, for these sacred sounds filled the earth, the points of the horizon, the sky and heaven itself.

Such were the wonders that people observed on those occasions. Gratified with the excellent food and drink that the illustrious Gaya provided, men, O Bharatarishabha, went about singing these verses:

At Gaya's great sacrifice, who is there today, amongst creatures, that still wants to eat anymore? There are yet twenty-five mountains of food there after everyone has been fed! What Rajarishi Gaya of untold splendour has achieved in his sacrifice has never been achieved by men before, nor will be by any in the future. The gods have been so surfeited by Gaya with ghrita that they are unable to take anything that anybody else offers. As sand grains on earth, as stars in the firmament, as raindrops showered by clouds cannot ever be counted by anyone, so, too, can no one count the gifts given during Gaya's sacrifice!

O son of the Kurus, many times did King Gaya perform such yagnas here, by the side of this Brahmasaras!"

CANTO 96

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After this, the royal son of Kunti, who always gave profusely to Brahmanas, goes to the asrama of Agastya and takes up his abode in Durjaya. It is here that that best of speakers, King Yudhishtira asks Lomasa why Agastya slew Vatapi in this place. And the king also enquires after the extent of that man-killing Daityas prowess, and the reason, also, why the illustrious Agastya's wrath was stirred against that Asura.

So questioned, Lomasa says, 'O son of the Kurus, there was in the city called Manimati, in days of yore, a Daitya named Ilvala, whose younger brother was Vatapi. One day that son of Diti said to a Brahmana endowed with tapasyashakti, "Holy one, grant me a son equal unto Indra."

The Brahmana, however, did not grant the Asura a son like Indra. At this, the Asura was inflamed with wrath, and from that day, O king, the Asura Ilvala became a killer of Brahmanas. And blessed with the power of maya, the angry Asura would transform his brother into a ram. And Vatapi, who could also assume any form at will, would assume the shape of a ram; and the flesh of that ram, after being properly cooked, was offered to Brahmanas as food. And after they ate, they were killed, for whoever Ilvala summoned with his voice would come back to Ilvala, re-embodied, even if he had gone to the land of Yama, and show himself to Ilvala.

So, tranforming Vatapi into a ram and cooking his flesh and feeding Brahmanas therewith, he would summon Vatapi. And the mighty Asura Vatapi, that enemy of Brahmanas, endowed with great strength and the power of illusion, upon hearing, the loud voice of Ilvala calling, would tear open the belly of the Brahmana and come out chortling! So it was that the evil Daitya Ilvala, having fed unsuspecting Brahmanas, frequently took their lives.

Meanwhile, the illustrious Agastya saw his departed ancestors hanging in a pit with their heads downwards. He asked them, "What is the matter with you?"

Those Brahmavadins replied, "We are your manes, and it is to have offspring that we hang in this pit. Agastya, if you can beget a good son, we

can be saved from this hell and you will also find the blessed state of having a child."

Blessed with great energy and observant of truth and dharma, Agastya replied, "O Pitrs, I will accomplish your desire. Let this anxiety of yours be dispelled."

And the lustrous Rishi then began to think of perpetuating his race. But he did not see a wife worthy of him, from whom he himself could take birth in the form of a son. Then he took every part considered most beautiful from many who possessed these individually, and created an exquisite woman.

That Muni, endowed with great tapasyashakti, gave that girl created for himeslf to the king of the Vidharbhas who was then performing tapasya to have children. Through Agastya's power, the lovely girl he had created was born into Vidarbhas royal line and, beautiful as effulgent lightning, she grew day by day. And as soon as that lord of earth—the king of the Vidarbhas—saw her ushered into life, he joyfully gave the news, O Bhaarata, to the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas blessed the girl and they named her Lopamudra.

Possessed of great beauty, she began to grow as quickly as a lotus in the water or the flame of a fire. And when she attained puberty, a hundred virgins decked in ornaments and a hundred maids waited in obedience upon her; she shone in their midst, brilliant as she was, like Rohini in the firmament amidst an inferior multitude of stars. And possessed as she was of good conduct and excellent manners, none dared ask for her hand even when she attained puberty, through fear of her father, the king of the Vidharbhas.

Lopamudra, devoted to truth, surpassing even the Apsaras in beauty, gratified her father and relatives with her deportment. Seeing his daughter turn into a young woman, her father began to think, "To whom should I give this daughter of mine?'"

CANTO 97

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa continues, 'When Agastya thought that that girl was competent for domesticity, he approached the king of the Vidharbhas, and said, "I ask you, O king, to give me your daughter Lopamudra."

The king swooned; yet, though unwilling to give the Muni his daughter, he dared not refuse. Going to his queen, he said, "This Rishi has great power. If angered, he may consume me with the fire of his curse. O you of the sweet face, tell me what you wish."

His queen did not say a word. Lopamudra saw them both distraught and came to them. She said, "O king, do not grieve on my account. Give me away to Agastya, and, O father, save yourself."

So, the king gave Lopamudra to the illustrious Agastya with due rites. When she was his wife, Agastya said to Lopamudra, "Cast away these costly robes and ornaments."

At the word of her lord, that large-eyed young woman, of thighs tapering as the stem of the plantain tree, put aside her fine and costly robes, and she dressed herself in rags and tree-bark and deer-skin, and became her husband's equal in vrata and karma.

Going then to Gangadwara that best of Rishis began to practise the severest penances along with his dutiful and helpful wife. Lopamudra, herself well pleased, began to serve her lord from the deep respect that she bore him. The lofty Agastya also began to show great love for his wife.

After a considerable time, O king, the Rishi one day saw Lopamudra, blazing in ascetic splendour, emerge from the stream after the bath, in her season. And pleased with the girl, for her services, her purity, and self control, as also with her grace and beauty, he called her to him for marital intercourse.

However, the girl, folding her hands, said bashfully but lovingly to the Rishi, "The husband, without doubt, weds the wife for offspring. But, O Muni, I beg you show me the same love which I bear for you. O Dvija, it becomes you to approach me on a bed like the one I had in the palace of my father. I also want you to be decked in garlands of flowers and other

ornaments, and that I should come to you adorned in the celestial ornaments that I like.

Otherwise, I cannot come to you, dressed in these rags dyed in red. Nor, O regenerate Rishi, is it sinful to wear ornaments on such an occasion."

Agastya replied, "O blessed girl, you of the slender waist, I do not have wealth like what your father has, Lopamudra!"

She said, "You who have the wealth of tapasya can certainly fetch anything that exists in the world of men, in a moment, by your power."

Agastya said, "It is even as you say, but that would exhaust my punya. O bid me do what may not make me lose my ascetic merit."

Lopamudra then said, "O Muni, my season will not last long, but I do not wish to come to you otherwise, nor do I wish to diminsh your punya in any way. You must do as I wish, without injuring your virtue."

Agastya then said, "O blessed one, if this is your resolve, upon which you have set your heart, I will go out in quest of wealth. Meanwhile, you stay here, as it pleases you.'"

CANTO 98

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa continues, 'Agastya went to King Srutarvan who was regarded as richer than other kings, to beg for wealth. And that monarch, learning of the arrival of the pot-born Rishi on the frontiers of his kingdoms, went out with his ministers and received the holy one reverentially. The king duly offered the Sage arghya, submissively and with folded hands and then enquired after the reason for the Rishi's coming.

And Agastya answered, "Lord of the earth, know that I have come to you for wealth. Give me what you can afford and without doing injury to anyone."

The king, then, told the Rishi how his income and his expenditure were equal, adding, "Learned one, take from my possessions the wealth you please."

Seeing however that the king's income and what he spent were equal, the Sage thought that if he took anything, he would deprive someone by what he did. So, taking Srutarvan with him, the Rishi went to Bhadhnaswa, who, hearing of their arrival on his frontiers, went forth to receive them. Bhadhnaswa also offered them the arghya and padya, water to wash their feet. Then, with their leave, he asked after the reason for their coming.

Agastya said, "Lord of the earth, know that we have come to you for wealth. Give us what you can, while doing no injury to any of your subjects."

That king informed them of how his income and his expenditure, also, were equal, and said, "Knowing this, take whatever you want."

The Rishi, who saw all things with equal eyes, thought that if he took anything under the circumstances, what he did would injure all creatures. Agastya and Srutarvan, with King Bhadhnaswa then went to Purokutsa's son, Trasadasyu, of enormous wealth. The high-souled Trasadasyu learnt of their arrival on the border of kingdom, went out and received them with reverence. And that best of kings, in Ikshvaku's line, having worshipped all of them duly, asked why they had come.

And Agastya said, "Lord of earth, know that we have all come to you for wealth. Give us what you can, while doing no creature any harm."

That monarch then, also, told them how his income and his expenses were equal, and added, "Knowing this, take what you wish."

However, seeing how that king's expenses were equal to his income, the Rishi, who saw all things with equal eyes, thought that if he took anything, he would harm all creatures.

Now, Rajan, those kings looked at one another, and together said to the Rishi, "O Brahmana, there is a Danava called Ilvala, who of all beings on earth has the most wealth. Let us go together to him today and beg wealth of him."

This suggestion, O king, of begging wealth of Ilvala appeared to them to be proper; and all of them went together to Ilvala.'

CANTO 99

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'When Ilvala learnt that those kings along with the Maharishi had arrived on the confines of his domain, he went out with his ministers and worshipped them duly. And that prince of Asuras received them hospitably, entertaining them, O son of the Kuru race, with well cooked meat, which was that of his brother Vatapi, transformed into a ram.

When those Rajarishis saw the mighty Asura Vatapi, who had changed into a ram, thus cooked for them, they became disconsolate and were almost senseless with grief and fear.

But Agastya , best of Rishis, said to those royal sages, "Do not worry, I will eat the Asura."

And the mighty Rishi sat himself down on an excellent chair, and the prince of Asuras, Ilvala, began to serve the food, smiling. Agastya ate up all of the meat of the ram which Vatapi had turned into. When the meal was over, Ilvala began to call out to his brother. But only a great belch of air issued from the belly of Agastya, with a sound, O child, as loud as the rumbling of clouds.

Repeatedly, Ilvala called, "Come out, O Vatapi!"

Then that best of Munis, Agastya, burst out laughing, and said, "How can he come out, I have digested him?"

Ilvala was stricken, and folding his hands, along with his ministers, said, "What have you come here for? What can I do for you?"

Smiling, Agastya replied, "We know, O Asura, that you have great power and great wealth, as well. I have great need of wealth and these kings cannot give it to me, being needy themselves. Give us what you can, without depriving anyone."

Ilvala saluted the Rishi and said, "Say what I should give, and I will."

Agastya said, "O great Asura, give each of these kings ten thousand cows and as many gold coins; and to me give twice as much, as well as a golden chariot and a pair of horses fleet as thought. Why, if you look even now you will find that your chariot has become made of gold."

At which, O son of Kunti, Ilvala made enquiries and learnt that the car he intended to give away was really a golden one. His heart sad, the Daitya

then gave away much wealth and that ratha, to which two steeds called Virava and Surava were yoked. Those steeds, O Bhaarata, took the kings and Agastya and all that wealth to the Sage's asrama, in the twinkling of an eye. Taking Agastya's leave, the Rajarishis went away to their respective cities.

Agastya, using the wealth of the Asura, did all that Lopamudra wanted. And Lopamudra said, "Most illustrious one, you have given me everything I wanted. Now beget a son on me, a child of immense tejas."

And Agastya replied, "Blessed and beautiful one, you have pleased me greatly with your conduct. Listen now to what I have to say with regard to your offspring. Would you have a thousand sons, or a hundred sons each equal to ten, or ten sons equal each to a hundred, or only one son who may vanquish a thousand?"

Lopamudra answered, "Let me have one son equal to a thousand! One good and wise son is preferable to many evil ones."

Saying, "So be it," that pious Muni took his chaste wife to himself, and after she had conceived, he retired into the forest. After Agastya Muni had gone away, the foetus grew inside Lopamudra for seven years. At the end of seven years, from her womb there issued the wise and learned Dridasyu, blazing, O Bhaarata, in his own splendour. He came forth auspiciously, as if chanting the Vedas, with the Upanishads and the Angas.

Endowed with great energy while yet a child, he would carry loads of sacrificial fuel into his father's asrama, and so he was called Idhmavaha – the bearer of sacrificial wood.

When Agastya saw his son, with such virtue, he was greatly pleased. So it was, O Bhaarata, that Agastya begot a splendid son, as a result of which his ancestors, O king, gained the realms they desired. And it is from that line that this place has become known in the world as Agastyasrama.

Indeed, Rajan, this is the asrama of great beauty, of the Rishi Agastya who consumed Vatapi of the race of Prahlada. The sacred Bhagirathi, adored by Devas and Gandharvas, gently flows by this hermitage like a breeze-shaken pennon in the sky. Yonder also she flows over craggy crests, descending lower and lower, and looks like an affrighted she-snake lying along the hilly slopes. Issuing out of the matted locks of Mahadeva, she passes along through the southern country nurturing it like a mother; and ultimately flows into the ocean as if she were his favourite bride.

Bathe as you like in this sacred river, you son of Pandu! And behold there, O Yudhishtira, the tirtha of Bhrigu that is celebrated throughout the three worlds and adored, O King, by Maharishis. Bathing there, Rama, of Bhrigu's race, regained his might, which had been taken from him by Dasaratha's son. Bathing here, O son of Pandu, with your brothers and Krishnaa, you will certainly regain that power of yours, which has been taken by Duryodhana, even as Parasurama regained his, which Dasaratha's son took from him during their hostile encounter.'

At this, Yudhishtira bathes there with his brothers and Krishnaa, and offers oblations of water, O Bhaarata, to the Devas and the Pitrs. And, O bull among men, after Yudhishtira has bathed in that tirtha, his body blazes forth in brighter effulgence, and he becomes invincible to all his enemies.

The Pandava asks Lomasa, 'Illustrious one, why were Rama's energy and might taken away? And how did he regain them? Mahatman, I beg you, tell me everything.'

Lomasa says, 'Listen, O king, to the tale of Dasaratha's son Rama and Rama of Bhrigu's line, of great intelligence. To kill Ravana, Vishnu incarnated himself as the son of Dasaratha. We saw Dasaratha's son in Ayodhya after he was born. It was then that Rama of Bhrigu's line, the son of Richika by Renuka, heard of Dasaratha's son Rama, of immaculate purity, and impelled by curiosity, he went to Ayodhya, taking with him the divine bow which had been the scourge of the Kshatriyas, to test the prowess of Dasaratha's son.

Hearing that Rama of Bhrigu's race had arrived at the borders of his dominion, Dasaratha sent his own son Rama to receive the great one with reverence. Seeing Dasaratha's son approach and stand before him with his weapons, Rama of Bhrigu's line said challengingly, sneeringly, to him, "O king, O lofty one, if you can, with all your might, string this bow, which in my hands became the instrument of the destruction of the race of Kshatriyas."

Dasaratha's son answered, "Illustrious one, it does not behove you to insult me like this. I do not lack the virtues of the Kshatriya varna, and the descendants of Ikshvaku, in particular, never boast of their prowess."

Rama of Bhrigu's line replied, "Be done with clever talk and take the bow!"

At this, Rama the son of Dasaratha, angered, took that celestial bow from the hands of Rama of Bhrigu's, that weapon which had killed the

greatest Kshatriyas. And, O Bhaarata, the mighty prince smilingly strung that bow, effortlessly, and with its twang loud as thunder, terrified all creatures.

Dasaratha's son Rama said to Parasurama Bhargava, "Here, I have strung this bow. What else, O Brahmana, shall I do for you?"

Jamadagni's son Rama handed Dasaratha's Rama a heavenly arrow, and said, "Fit this to the bow-string and draw it to your ear, O Kshatriya!"

Dasaratha's son blazed up in wrath and said, "I have listened to whatever you said and even forgiven you; O Bhargava, you are full of vanity. Through Brahma's grace you have got prowess superior to that of the Kshatriyas, and it is for this that you insult me. But behold me now in my pristine form – I give you sight."

Then Rama, the Bhargava, saw in the body of Dasaratha's son the Adityas with the Vasus, the Rudras, the Sadhyas with the Marutas, the Pitrs, Hutasana, the stellar constellations and the planets, the Gandharvas, the Rakshasas, the Yakshas, the Rivers, the tirthas, those eternal Brahmarishis called the Balakhilyas, the Devarishis, the Seas and Mountains, the Vedas with the Upanishads and Vashats and the Yagnas, the Samans in their living form, the Science of weapons, O Bhaarata, and the Clouds with rain and lightning, O Yudhishtira!

And lustrous Vishnu then loosed that arrow, and the earth was filled with sounds of thunder, and burning meteors began to flash through the sky; and showers of dust and rain fell upon the earth; and whirlwinds and frightful reverberations convulsed everything, and the earth herself began to quake.

And shot by the hand of Rama, that shaft, confounding the other Rama, came back blazing into Rama's hands. Bhargava, who had fainted, regaining consciousness, now bowed to Rama -that manifestation of Vishnu's power. Then, commanded by Vishnu, he went away to the mountains of Mahendra, and then onwards that great ascetic began to live there, in terror and shame.

When a year passed, the Pitrs, seeing Rama there, bereft of all vitality, his pride quelled, and sunk in affliction, said to him, "O son, having approached Vishnu, you did not behave properly towards him. He deserves worship for ever and reverence in the three worlds. Go, O child, to the sacred river Vadhusara. Bathing in all the tirthas of that stream, you will regain your vigour. There in that river is the tirtha Diptoda where your grandsire Bhrigu, O Rama, performed great tapasya in the Krita Yuga."

Rama, O son of Kunti, did as the Pitrs asked, and at this tirtha, he regained the powers he had lost. This, O Pandava, was what befell the great Rama in days of yore, after he met Vishnu incarnate as Dasarathas son.'

CANTO 100

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, 'Dvijottama, I want to listen again in detail to the achievements of Agastya Rishi, of awesome glory.'

Lomasa says, 'Listen then, O king, to the excellent and wonderful and extraordinary story of Agastya, as also about the prowess of that Rishi of immeasurable tejas.

In the Krita Yuga there were some tribes of fierce Danavas that were invincible in battle, and they were called the Kalakeyas and possessed dreadful prowess. Banding together under Vritra and arming themselves with diverse weapons they hunted the Devas with Indra at their head, in all directions.

The gods decided that Vritra must be killed, and went with Indra to Brahma. Seeing them standing before him with folded hands, Parameshti addressed them all, saying, "I know everything, O Devas, and why you have come. I will tell you how you can kill Vritra.

There is a high-souled and great Rishi called Dadhicha. Go, all together, and seek a boon from him. He will become pleased, and that virtuous Rishi will grant you the boon. If you want victory, go and say to him: *For the good of the three worlds, give us your bones*.

Renouncing his body, he will give you his bones. With these bones of his, make a fierce and powerful weapon, which will be called Vajra, with six sides, and a terrible roar, and capable of destroying even the most powerful enemies. With that weapon, Indra of a hundred sacrifices shall kill Vritra.

This is all I have to say; see you do as I have told you, quickly."

Taking his leave, the gods came away, and with Narayana at their head went to Dadhicha's asrama, which stood on the banks of the Saraswati, in an entwinement of many diverse trees and vines. The hermitage resounded with the hum of bees as if they were reciting Samans; it echoed with the melodious songs of the male kokila and the chakora. Bison and boar and deer and chamaras wandered there at their pleasure, free from the fear of tigers in this holy place; and tuskers with the juice of rut trickling down

from rent temples, plunged in the stream, sported with she-elephants and made all the place resound with their trumpeting.

The place also echoed with the roars of lions and tigers, while at times those grisly monarchs of the forest could be seen lying stretched in caves and glens, adorning them with their presence. Such was the asrama of Dadhicha, like a bit of heaven, which the gods entered. And there they saw Dadhicha looking like the Sun in splendour and ablaze with grace like the Grandsire himself.

The Devas prostrated at the feet the Rishi, and bowing low before him, begged the boon that Brahma had told them to.

Well pleased, Dadhicha said to those greatest of gods, "Devas I will do anything for your good, even give up this body of mine."

Saying this, that greatest of men, his soul under perfect restraint, suddenly renounced his life. The gods then took the bones of the deceased Rishi as they had been directed to. Glad at heart, the Devas went to Tvashtri, the celestial Artificer, and told him about the way in which they could defeat the Asuras.

Tvashtri was filled with joy, and, with great attention and care, he fashioned the awesome weapon called the Vajra. And having made it, he said happily to Indra, "Great One, make ashes of the terrible enemy with this ayudha; and having slain him, rule all the domains of swarga in joy, with all who follow you."

Purandara took the Vajra from Tvashtri's hand, joyfully and with proper reverence.'

CANTO 101

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Armed with the Vajra, and with the mighty Deva host behind him, Indra confronted Vritra, who was then ruling all of Swarga and Bhumi, heaven and earth. Kalakeyas, of immense bodies, guarded Vritra on every side, with upraised weapons and resembling great mountains with towering peaks.

The battle between the Devas and the Danavas lasted for a short while and was, O lord of the Bhaaratas, terrific in the extreme, appalling the three worlds. Thunderous was the clash of swords and scimitars, wielded by heroic hands. Heads that had been severed fell down from the sky onto the earth like fruits of the palmyra falling onto the ground, when loosened from their stalks.

Armed with iron-mounted bludgeons and cased in golden mail, the Kalakeyas ran against the gods, like moving mountains afire. And unable to stand the shock of that ferocious and haughty host, the Devas broke ranks and fled in fear. Purandara of a thousand eyes saw his gods flying in terror and Vritra growing in boldness, and Indra was dejected.

Now, terrified himself by the Kalakeyas, Indra, king of the Devas, sought refuge with Narayana, the Supreme One. Seeing Indra so distraught, eternal Vishnu infused the Deva with a part of his own infinite prowess; and when the Devas saw that Vishnu now protected Sakra, each of them also transferred a portion of his prowess to Indra.

The taintless Brahmarishis also imparted their mystic energies to the lord of the celestials. Indra was mightier than ever, and when Vritra learnt that the Deva king was infused with powers of others, he sent forth some terrific roars. At these, the earth, the directions, the firmament, heaven, and the mountains, all began to tremble.

Hearing this awful sound, Indra was filled with fear and, wanting to kill the Asura quickly, cast, O king, the mighty Vajra at the Demon. Struck by Indra's Vajra, the great Asura, decked in gold and garlands fell headlong, like the great mountain Mandara hurled of old by Vishnu's hands; and although the prince of Daityas was slain, yet Indra ran in panic from the field, and took shelter in a lake, thinking the Vajra had not killed Vritra.

However, the Devas and the Maharishis were filled with joy, and all of them began to joyously sing Indra's praises. Mustering their forces again, the gods began to slaughter the demons, now dispirited at the death of their leader. The Danavas fled into the depths of the sea; and having entered the fathomless deep teeming with fish and crocodiles, the Asuras assembled together and arrogantly began to conspire to destroy the three worlds.

Those among them that were deemed wise suggested different courses of action, each according to his judgment. In course of time, however, the dreadful resolution those sons of Diti arrived at was that they should, first of all, compass the destruction of all men of knowledge and ascetic virtue: for, the worlds are all supported by tapasya.

Therefore, they said, "Lose no time in wiping out dhyana and yagnas. Kill all those on earth who have ascetic virtues, those who know the ways of karma and dharma, and especially those that have knowledge of Brahman; for when these are dead, the very universe will be destroyed."

Arriving at this decision to destroy the universe, the Danavas were pleased. They made the ocean—that realm of Varuna—with waves high as hills, their fortress, from which to make their attacks.'

CANTO 102

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'The Kalakeyas began to put their plan to destroy the universe in motion. During the darkness of night, the angry Daityas would issue from the Sea and devour all the Munis they found in wooded asramas and other sacred places.

In Vasishta's asrama, the evil ones ate a hundred and eighty Brahmanas, besides nine other ascetics. Going on to Chyavana's hermitage, home to many Brahmacharis, they devoured another hundred Brahmanas who lived on just fruit and roots.

While these depredations continued through the nights, they returned to safety under the sea by day. In Bharadwaja's asrama, they killed a score of Brahmanas of subdued souls, Brahmacharis who lived just on air and water. So, the Kalakeyas, intoxicated with power and their lives nearly run out, invaded every Rishis asrama, one by one, during the hours of darknes, and slaughtered numberless holy Brahmanas.

And, O best of men, though they continued with these savage attacks, killing so many Sages in their asramas, no one could find them, or where they hid. Every morning dead bodies of fragile Munis were found, many of them without flesh and without blood, without marrow, without entrails, and with limbs torn from one another; here and there, bones were heaped like conch shells.

And the earth was strewn with the contents of broken sacrificial urns and shattered ladles for pouring libations of clarified butter and with the ruins of sacred fires once kept burning with care by the ascetics.

And the universe, afflicted with terror of the Kalakeyas, and without the Vedas being chanted or vashats or sacrificial festivals or religious rites, was dreary and without any joy. O king, when men began to perish in this way, the survivors, taken with fear, fled for their lives in all directions; some fled to caverns and some hid behind mountain-streams and springs, while others just died of fight.

But some that were brave and mighty bowmen, spiritedly, cheerfully, went out and took great pains to track the Danavas to their lair; however,

they did not find them because the demons hid beneath the sea. The valiant bowmen returned to their homes, at least satisfied that they had searched.

And, O lord of men, while the universe was being ruined, and when sacrificial festivals and religious rites had all ceased, the gods became deeply perturbed. Gathering together around Indra, they held council; and then going to the exalted and un-born Narayana—that unvanquished God of Vaikunta—the celestials sought his protection.

Bowing to Madhusudana, the Devas said, "O Lord, you are the creator, the protector, and the destroyer of ourselves, as well as of the universe. It is you who have created this universe with its mobile and immobile creatures. O lotus-eyed one, in days of old, you took the form of the Varaha and raised the sunken earth out of the Sea, to benefit all beings.

Purushottama, you assumed the form of the Narasimha, and, in ancient times, killed the mighty Asura Hiranyakasipu; taking the form of the Vamana, you subdued the invincible Bali, and thrust him down into Patala. Lord, it was you who killed the evil Jambha, who was a matchless bowman and who always desecrated and obstructed sacrifices.

Achievements like these, beyond count, belong to you. O slayer of Madhu, we are taken with terror and have only you for our refuge. Devadeva, protect the worlds, the gods, and Sakra also, from this terrible fear."

CANTO 103

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

The Devas said, "Through your grace everything is born and the four kind of beings increase. And being created, they worship the swargavasis with offerings made to the gods and the manes of departed fathers.

So, protected by you and free from troubles, they live depending on one another, and increase. Now this peril has befallen the people. We do not know who is killing the Brahmanas during the night. But if the Brahmanas are destroyed, the earth itself will cease to exist, and if the earth comes to an end, heaven also will cease to exist.

Mahabaho, O lord of the universe, we beg you to save all the worlds!"

Vishnu said, "Devas, I know the reason why these Brahmanas die; I will tell of it, listen to me with calm minds. There exists a savage and ferocious host of demons called Kalakeyas. Led by Vritra, these were devastating the very universe.

When the thousand-eyed Indra slew Vritra, to save their lives these Kalakeyas submerged themselves in Vaurna's domain, the ocean. Making the ocean deeps, which abound with sharks and crocodiles, their refuge, they come out at nights, and kill the holy sages, with a view to ending the worlds.

But they cannot be killed, since they have made the sea deeps their sanctuary. Think of some way to dry up the ocean, and I say to you -who but Agastya can achieve this thing? Without drying up the sea, you have no way to attack these Asuras.'

The gods listened to Vishnu, then sought leave from Brahma, who lives in the best of all lokas, and then went to the hermitage of Agastya. They saw the high-souled Agastya, the son of Varuna, of resplendent mien, waited upon by sages, even as Brahma is by gods.

Approaching that son of Mitra and Varuna in his asrama, that magnanimous and unswerving one, who looked like an embodiment of pious karma heaped together, they glorified him by reciting his deeds.

The deities said, "You were once the refuge of the gods when Nahusha oppressed them. Thorn of the world that he was, he was cast down from his

throne in swarga – from the very celestial realms.

Vindhya, foremost of mountains, suddenly began to increase his height, due to an angry competition with the Sun, but you commanded him to stop and he could not refuse you and stopped growing.

And when darkness covered the world, the created were all threatened by death, but having gained you for a protector, they found utmost security. Whenever peril besets us, you are always our refuge; this is why we have come to ask a boon from you, and we know that you always grant any boon for which you are asked.'"

CANTO 104

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, 'O Maharishi, I am eager to know in detail how Vindhya became so incensed that he began to grow.'

Lomasa says, 'Between his rising and setting, the Sun used to revolve around that monarch of mountains – the great Meru of golden lustre. Seeing this, the Mountain Vindhya said to Surya, "As you go every day round Meru and honour him with your pradakshinas, do the same to me, O maker of light!"

The Sun replied to the great mountain, "I do not honour Meru by my own will. Those who have made this universe have assigned my path to me."

Wrathful in a moment, the Vindhya mountain suddenly began to increase his size, for, O Parantapa, he wanted to obstruct the paths of the Sun and the Moon. All the Devas assembled and came to Vindhya, that mighty king of mountains, and tried to dissuade him from this. But he paid no heed to their entreaties.

Then the gods went to the Sage in his asrama, at his tapasaya, the very best and most powerful of those who are devoted to dharma, and told Agastya Muni what had happened.

The Devas said, "This king of hills, Vindhya, has yielded to anger and stops the paths of the Sun and the Moon, and also the course of the stars. O best of Brahmanas! O most gifted one! None but you can make him desist; we beg you, make him stop."

Hearing what the Devas said, the Brahmana came to the mountain; and, with his wife, he said to the Vindhya, "O best of mountains, give me a path, for I need to go south for a purpose of mine. Until my return, wait for me; and when I have come back grow on as much as you please!"

Parantapa, having made this compact with Vindhya, Varuna's son has not, until today, returned from the southern region. So it is that, by Agastya's power, the Vindhya has not grown any further.

Now, O king, listen to how the Devas killed the Kalakeyas, after getting their boon from Agastya Muni.

Having heard what the gods said, Agastya, the son of Mitra and Varuna, said, "Why have you come here? What boon do you want from me?

The Devas replied, "O Magnanimous, we beg you to drink up the ocean and drain it, for then we shall be able to kill the Kalakeyas, and all their allies."

The Sage said, "So be it. I will do what you wish, and that will bring great happiness to all men."

Saying this, O virtuous one, Agastya went to the ocean, lord of rivers, and with him went Rishis of great tapasya, and the Devas as well. And Manavas and Nagas, Gandharvas, Yakshas and Kinnaras followed the awesome Sages, wanting to witness the event of wonder.

Together they came to the sea, which roared, dancing with its waves, leaping in the wind, and laughing with masses of froth, and gushing into caves on the shore, the ocean thronging with all kinds of sharks, and flocks of diverse birds above and upon his waters.

The Devas, along with Agastya and the Gandharvas and huge Nagas and most gifted Munis, approached the immense waters.'

CANTO 105

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Varuna's son, that blessed saint spoke to the assembled gods, and the sages, "I am going to drink up the ocean, abode of the god of waters. You be ready with whatever preparations you need to make."

With these few words, the unswerving son of Mitra and Varuna, now full of wrath, began to drink up the sea, while all the worlds watched. Indra and the Devas were awestruck and began to give praise to mighty Agastya:

"O you are our protector, and Providence itself for men, why, the very creator of the worlds. By your grace, possibly, the universe with its gods might be saved."

Glorified by the Devas, while the musical instruments of Gandharvas played all around, and while celestial blossoms were showered upon him, the great Agastya drained the vast ocean and it was dry!

Seeing the ocean rendered devoid of water, the host of gods rejoiced; taking up diverse weapons of celestial forge, they fell to slaughtering the demons. Assailed by the Devas of untold strength and speed, who came roaring at them, the Asuras could not stand before the heaven dwellers, O Bhaarata! Only for a moment, did the demons last before the onslaught of the gods, and return battle.

Moreover, the evil ones had already been consumed by the tapasya shakti of the greatest Rishis; the Devas quickly massacred the Kalakeyas. Decked with brooches of gold, wearing ear-rings and armlets, the demons, when slain, looked beautiful indeed, like palasa trees in full crimson bloom.

Then, O best of men, a few of the Kalakeyas who remained alive rent the goddess Earth, and took refuge at the bottom of the Pataias.

When they saw that the demons were slain, the gods gave praise to the mighty sage:

"O Mahabaho, through your grace, all men have found a great blessing, and the ruthless Kalakeyas have been killed by your power, O creator of beings! Now, mighty-armed, fill the ocean again, give up once more the waters that you drained."

The blessed and mighty Muni replied, "I have digested that water, so if you wish to fill the ocean again, you must think of some other expedient."

Great king, the assembled gods were struck with both wonder and sadness. Now, after bowing to the Maharishi and saying farewell to one another, they all went away to their respective homes.

The Devas, with Vishnu, came to Brahma; they consulted again now about how to fill the empty sea. They stood with folded hands, and forlorn.'

CANTO 106

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Brahma Pitamaha said, "Go, O Devas, where your pleasure may lead you, or your desire takes you! It will take a long course of time for the ocean to resume its original state; the occasion will be furnished by the ancestors of the great king Bhagiratha."

Hearing what the Pitamaha said, all those main gods went to their homes, and would bide their time until the day when the ocean was filled again.'

Yudhishtira says, 'What was that occasion, O Muni? And how did Bhagiratha's ancestors furnish it? And how was the ocean filled again through Bhagiratha's efforts? O Sage, who deem your tapasya as your only treasure, O Brahmana, I want to hear the achievements of that king, in detail, from you.'

Thus addressed by the magnanimous and virtuous king, Lomasa, best of Brahmanas, narrates the achievements of the high-souled king, Sagara.

Lomasa says, 'Into the clan of the Ikshvakus, was born a ruler of the earth named Sagara, endowed with beauty and strength. And that king was sonless, O Bhaarata! He brought havoc through the tribes of the Haihayas and the Talajanghas, all of Kshatriya kind under his rule, and then reigned over his own kingdom.

And, O most praiseworthy of the scions of Bhaarata, O chief of the Bhaarata race, Sagara had two wives, proud of their beauty and of their youth – one a princess of the Vidarbhas, and the other of the royal line of Sibi.

Best of kings, Sagara and his wives went to Mount Kailasa, and sat in severe tapasya in order to have a son. Practising rigid penance, and locked in Yoga, Sagara had a vision of three-eyed Siva, who made ashes of the Tripura, who is the Eternal One, the bestower of blessings to all beings, the Great Sovereign, who wields the bow Pinaka, with the Trisula in his hand, in whom infinite peace resides, the lord of all those that are fierce, who can assume any form; and who is the Lord of the Goddess Uma.

Mahabaho, as soon as Sagara saw that God, the giver of boons, he and his two queens fell at Siva's feet, and offered him a prayer to have a son.

Well pleased, Siva said to that most just king and his wives, "Lord of men, considering the moment at which you have offered your prayer to me, sixty thousand sons, valiant and exceedingly proud, will be born in one of your two wives. But they will all perish together.

In the other wife, a single brave son will be born, who will perpetuate your race."

Having said this to him, the God Rudra vanished, and king Sagara came home with his queens, all of them delighted with what had transpired. And, O best of men, there, the two lotus-eyed queens—the princess of Vidarbha and the princess of Sibi— soon became pregnant.

When her time came, the princess of Vidarbha brought forth something shaped like a gourd while the princess of Sibi gave birth to a boy as beautiful as a god. Sagara decided to throw away the gourd, when he heard an asariri speak gravely from the sky, "O King, do not be hasty, you must not become guilty of abandoning your sons! Take the seeds out from the gourd and let them be preserved with care in steaming vessels partly filled with ghrita. Then thou will get, O scion of Bharata's race, sixty thousand sons.

King of men, Mahadeva Siva has decreed that your sons are to be born in this fashion, so do not turn your mind away from what must be."'

CANTO 107

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Most righteous king, when he heard the voice speak from the sky, he believed what it said and did as it asked. Sagara took each seed from the gourd, separately, and immersed it in a vat of ghee. Intent on the survival of his sons, he provided a nurse for every receptacle.

Then, after a long time, there arose sixty thousand immeasurably strong and powerful sons from those vessels of ghee, sons born to the Rajarishi Sagara through Siva's grace.

And they were terrible and their deeds were ruthless. They could fly and range through the sky, and being as many as they were, they were unafraid of anyone, including the gods. They would chase even the Devas, the Gandharvas, and the Rakshasas and all the born, for they were mighty and addicted to fighting.

Harassed by the dull-headed sons of Sagara, all men and the gods with them went to Brahma, as their refuge.

The Grandsire of all beings said to them, "Go your way, Devas, and take these mortal men with you, for very soon the sons of Sagara will find death for all their sins, and a terrible end will they find."

The Devas and the Manavas bade farewell to the Pitamaha, and went back to where they had come from. Then, O Bhaarata, when many days had passed, the mighty king Sagara took the consecration for performing the rites of a horse-sacrifice, an Aswamedha yagna.

Protected by his ferocious sons, the king's sacrificial horse ranged across the earth; when it reached the sea, waterless and frightful to behold, although the horse was guarded with great care it suddenly vanished from where it stood.

Sagara's sons thought that fine steed had been stolen; they returned to their father and told him how it had disappeared.

He said to them, "Go and look for the horse in all the cardinal points."

Great king, at their father's command, his sons began their quest for the horse in all the cardinal points and throughout the surface of the earth. But even all together, those sixty thousand could not find the horse, nor the one who had stolen it.

Returning home, they stood with folded hands before their father, and said, "O Protector of men! O ruler of the earth! O king! At your command, we combed all this world, with all its hills and its forests, with its seas, and its woods, and its islands, with its rivulets and rivers and caves. But we did not find either the horse, or the thief who stole it."

Sagara was insensate with anger, and stirred by destiny, too, he said to them in wrath, "Go again and seek the horse and never return until you find it!"

Again obedient to their father's command, his sons, those awesome Kshatriyas, once more searched the earth and they found a cleft upon her surface, upon the dried up sea-bed. The sons of Sagara began to excavate it.

Exerting themselves to the utmost, with spades and pickaxes they dug the bed of the sea. At their violent excavation, Varuna's abode writhed in agony, and Asuras, Nagas, Rakshasas and all living beings began to cry out in distress, while Sagara's sixty thousand sons slaughtered them.

Hundreds of thousands of living creatures could be seen with severed heads and trunks and with their skins and bones and joints rent asunder and broken.

They went on digging up the ocean, abode of Varuna, and a vast amount of time went by but they still did not find the horse. Then, lord of earth, towards the north-eastern region of the sea, the incensed sons of Sagara dug down as far as Patala, and there they saw the animal, roaming about as it pleased.

And they saw the magnificent Kapila, looking like a perfect mass of splendour. Seeing him shining even as fire does with flames and seeing the horse, as well, they became flushed with joy. Having been sent by fate, and after their fervid exertions, they paid Kapila Muni no heed but ran forward to seize the horse.

Maharajan, Kapila, most righteous of Munis, whom the great sages name Kapila Vasudeva, assumed a fiery look, and the mighty ones loosed flames at Sagara's sons, and burnt them to ashes.

Narada, of vast tapasya, saw Sagara's sons reduced to ashes and he came to that king and told him what had happened. When Sagara heard the terrible news from the Rishi's lips, he was plunged in grief for an hour, until he recalled what Siva had said.

Sending for his grandson Ansuman, the son of Asamanjas, he said, "Because of me, my sixty thousand sons of measureless strength

encountered Kapila's wrath and have met their death. My pure child, taintless Ansuman, I have also forsaken your father for the sake of my Rajadharma and for the weal of my people."

Yudhishtira says, 'O Muni, whose only wealth is your tapasya, tell me why Sagara, foremost of kings, abandoned his own son, endowed with valour – something so diffcult for other men to do.'

Lomasa says, A son was born to Sagara, by the princess of Sibi, and he was called Asamanjas. The prince would seize the weaker children of the townspeople and throw them into the river. Outraged, and stricken by grief and fear, the townsmen met together, and came, hands folded before Sagara, and implored him, "Great king, you protect us from invasions by hostile enemies. Now you must protect us from the peril of Asamanjas."

Hearing the fearful news of his son's doings, the king fell sad and silent for almost an hour, and then he said to his ministers, "Let my son Asamanjas be driven out of our city from this day. If you wish to please me, do it quickly!"

And, O King, the ministers did what he asked without delay. So did the great Sagara banish his son for the welfare of his people. Now listen in full to what Sagara said to his grandson Ansuman of the powerful bow.

Sagara said, "O my child, my heart is broken from having banished your father and now from having sent your uncles to their deaths. Besides, I have not recovered the horse for my sacrifice.

My grandson, grief tears at me and my mind is confounded that I cannot complete my Aswamedha yagna. Your must fetch the horse back and deliver me from hell."

Ansuman went with sorrow to the place where the earth had been excavated; he went down by the same tunnel beneath the dry sea bed, and saw the illustrious Kapila and the horse. Seeing the ancient Sage, most righteous of his kind, who looked like a mass of light, the prince bowed touching his head to the ground, and told the Rishi why he had come.

Maharajan, Kapila was pleased with Ansuman, and told him to ask for a boon. Ansuman first asked to have the horse back for the sacrifice, and then he prayed for the purification of his uncles.

The mighty Kapila said, "I will grant you all that you desire, stainless prince. May good fortune be with you! In you I see forbearance, truth, and righteousness. By you Sagara shall have his wishes fulfilled; you are truly a

grandson to your sire. Through your goodness, the sons of Sagara will find redemption and heaven.

Your son's son will find Mahadeva Siva's grace so your ancestors might be purified of their sin. He will perform a great tapasya that will bring the river of three streams down into this world – the Ganga, O lord of men!

May good fortune be yours! Here, take this sacrificial horse with you and complete the Aswamedha yagna of the great Sagara."

Ansuman took the horse with him, and returned to mighty king Sagara's yagnashala. He prostrated at the feet of the high-souled Sagara, who sniffed the top of his head lovingly; Ansuman told him everything, all that he had seen and heard, and all about the death of Sagara's sons. He also announced that he had brought back the horse.

When Sagara heard all this, he no longer grieved on account of his dead sons. He praised and honoured Ansuman, and completed his sacrifice. When this was done, all the Devas greeted him with honour, and Sagara made the sea, where Varuna dwells, his son.

The lotus-eyed Sagara ruled his kingdom for a great length of time, and then he set his grandson Ansuman upon his throne, laden with responsibility, and ascended into Swarga.

Like his grandsire, the virtuous Ansuman ruled over the world with dharma, as far as the edge of the sea, following in the footsteps of his father's father. His son was named Dilipa, versed in virtue. Finally, Ansuman gave his throne to Dilipa and he also left this world.

When Dilipa learnt of the awful fate that had overtaken his forefathers, he grieved and thought of the means to redeem their souls. That king of men did his utmost to bring the Ganga down into the world, but he did not succeed.

A son was born to him, and known by the name of Bhagiratha, who was beautiful, and devoted to a virtuous life, and truthful, and free from all malice. Dilipa made his son the king, and took to vanaprastha himself. And, O best of all the scions of Bhaarata's race, Dilipa devoted himself to a long tapasya, at the end of which he, too, rose from the forest into heaven.'

CANTO 108

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Bhagiratha, of the mighty bow, Maharatha, lord of all he surveyed, became the delight of the eyes and the soul of the world. He, the Mahabaho, learnt how his ancestors had met an awful end from Kapila, and how they had been unable to attain the realm of the gods.

With a sorrowful heart, he made over his kingly duties to his minister, and, O lord of men, he went to the Himalayas, mountains of snow, to sit in tapasya, and by leading the most austere life, to gain the favour of the Devi Ganga.

He saw Himavana, adorned with peaks of diverse forms, full of bright minerals, strewn on all sides with raindrops from clouds resting upon the breeze; beautiful with rivers and groves and rocky spurs, looking like so many palaces in a city, attended upon by lions and tigers that had hidden themselves in its caves; and also inhabited by birds of myriad species, uttering diverse sounds – bhringarajas, and ganders, and datyuhas, and water-cocks, and peacocks and birds with a hundred feathers, and jivanjivakas, and blackbirds, and chakoras with black-cornered eyes, and the koyals that love their young.

He saw the mountain abounding in lotus plants that grew in enchanted lakes. And kraunchas, cranes, rendered it charming with their sounds; and Kinnaras and Apsaras sat upon its stone slabs.

And the Diggajas, the elephants of the cardinal points, had marked the trees growing there with their tusks; and Vidyadharas frequented the mountain, which was replete with treasures of jewels, as it was infested by serpents with glowing tongues and virulent venom.

In places the mountain seemed to be made of gold, while in others it was silver, and yet other peaks were like massifs of kohl. So was the snowy mountain where the king now found himself.

There, that best of men sat in a fierce tapasya. For one thousand years, he sustained himself on just water, fruit and roots. When a thousand years of the Devas passed, the great Devi, the divine river Ganga, manifested herself before him, embodied and shimmering.

Ganga said, "Great king, what do you want from me? What boon must I bestow upon you? I will do what you ask."

Bhagiratha replied to Himalaya's daughter, "Grantress of boons, O great River, when my father's fathers went in search of their sire's sacrificial horse, Kapila sent them to the land of Yama; in an instant, those sixty thousand perished.

Since then, there has been no place for them in Swarga. O great river, as long as you do not wet their ashes with your water, they will not find moksha. Blessed Devi, I beg you, redeem my ancestors, Sagara's sons, lead them into heaven. I am here to beg you to save their souls."

Ganga, the goddess whom the worlds worship, was pleased to hear what Bhagiratha said, and she said to him, "Great King, I am prepared to do what you ask. But when I descend from the sky to the earth, the force of my fall will be impossible to bear.

Protector of men, in the three worlds none but Siva, greatest of Gods, the Lord Nilakanta whose throat is sable blue, can break my falling into the world.

Mahabaho, with tapasya gain the grace of the Lord Siva, river of boons. He will bear my descent upon his head; he will fulfil your desire, and save your sires, O King."

Maharaja Bhagiratha went to Mount Kailasa and undertook another great penace, and after a long tapasya, he gained the grace of Lord Siva, worker of blessings. Protector of men, that king secured from Mahadeva a boon that the Ganga might fall safely upon his head, and flow into the world.'

CANTO 109

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa sayas, 'The blessed Siva listened to Bhagiratha's petition, and, also, in order to fulfil the wishes of the dwellers in Swarga, said, "Tathastu! So be it, O guardian of men, O Mighty-armed. For your sake I will contain the descent of the pure and blessed and divine river of heaven, O King!"

Saying this, The Lord came to the snowy mountain, surrounded by his ganas, of awful mien, who bore uplifted weapons of diverse forms. Standing there, he said to Bhagiratha, most praiseworthy of men, Mahabaho, you pray to the river who is the daughter of the king of mountains. I will contain her when she falls down from Swarga."

Reassured by Siva, Bhagiratha made obeisance with utmost devotion, and directed his thoughts again towards Ganga. Seeing that Mahadeva stood to receive her fall, Ganga flashed down suddenly in a pure and crystal torrent from the sky, and the Devas, the Maharishis, the Gandharvas, the Nagas, and the Yakshas, assembled there as witnesses.

Down from the sky came the snow mountain, Himavan's daughter; her whirpools raged and she teemed with fish and sharks. O King, directing her course towards the sea, she separated herself into three streams; and her water was strewn with piles of froth, which seemed like so many rows of white ganders.

Sinuous and twisting, at times, at others stumbling, as it were; covered in foam as with a robe; she came down like a woman drunk. Elsewhere, by virtue of the roar of her waters, she gave vent to loud sounds.

Thus assuming many different aspects, when she fell from the sky, she reached the surface of the earth, and said to Bhagiratha, "Great King, show me the path I must take! Lord of the earth, for your sake I have come down into the world."

Bhagiratha made a course towards where the dead sons of mighty Sagara lay, so that the sacred waters might drench their ashes. Having borne and contained the fall of Ganga, Siva, saluted by all men, went back to Kailasa, best of mountains, accompanied by the Devas.

With Ganga following him, Bhagiratha reached the sea; and the sea, the abode of Varuna, was quickly filled! The king adopted Ganga as his own daughter, and at that spot offered libations of water, tarpana, to the manes of his ancestors; thus was his heart's wish fulfilled.

At your asking me, I have narrated the whole story of how Ganga, running in three streams, was brought down to the earth to fill the sea; how the mighty Sage drained the sea for a particular reason, and how Vatapi, slayer of Brahmanas, was destroyed by Agastya.'"

CANTO 110

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O lord of the Bhaaratas, next the son of Kunti goes leisurely to the two rivers Nanda and Aparananda, which have the virtue of destroying the dread of sin. Reaching a great mountain Hemakuta, he sees many strange and inconceivable sights there. When their party merely speak among themselves, clouds rumble into the sky and a thousand volleys of stones fall, so they cannot climb the mountain.

Here the winds blow incessantly, and the heavens forever lash down rain; they also hear the chanting of the Veda, yet they see nobody. In the evening and in the morning they see the blessed fire that carries offerings to the gods, and there sharp insects sting them to interrupt their tapasya.

An unaccountable sadness overtakes the soul, and men fall sick. Seeing all these uncanny phenomena, Yudhishtira asks Lomasa what they are and what causes them.

Lomasa says, "Parantapa, Rajan, I will tell you about this as we heard it of old; listen carefully to what I say.

Upon this peak of Rishabha, there was once a Rishi of that name, who lived for hundreds of years. He was devoted to penance and was also wrathful. When some men came and spoke to him, interrupting his dhyana, he said in anger to the mountain, "If any man speaks in this place, cast stones at him and summon the winds to prevent him from making any sound."

This was what the sage said; and so, in this place, as soon as a man utters any words, he is forbidden by a roaring cloud. Rajan, in anger he also forbade other deeds in this place, that Maharishi.

Yudhishtira, tradition has it that, when of old, the Devas came to the Nanda, suddenly a number of men arrived there to look at the gods. However, the Devas, at whose head Indra stood, did not want to be seen; and so they rendered this place inaccessible, by raising obstructions in the form of mountains. From that day, O Kaunteya, men could not cast their eyes, at any time, upon what looked like this mountain, far less climb it.

No one who has not led an austere life can see this mountain, or ascend it.

Therefore, O son of Kunti, keep your tongue under control. Here, at that time, all those gods performed the most sacred yagnas. O Bhaarata, even to this day the marks of those sacrifices can be seen. This grass here has the form of the sacred kusa grass; the ground here seems to be covered by the sacred grass; and, O lord of men, so many of these trees here look as if they are ideal for tying up yagnapasus.

O Bhaarata, the Devas and the Rishis still dwell here and one can see their sacred agni burning in the morning and in the evening. If one bathes here, one's sins are immediately destroyed, Kaunteya! So, best of the Kurus, you and your younger brothers, perform your ablutions here.

Having bathed in the Nanda, you must journey to river Kausiki, to the place where Viswamitra performed his great tapasya."

Yudhishtira, and all that are with him, bathe in that river, and then go on to the Kausiki, crystalline, her waters cool and delightful.

Lomasa says, "This is the pure and divine Kausiki. Lord of the Bhaaratas, here is the enchanting asrama of Viswamitra; and there is the hermitage of the mighty-souled Kasyapa, whose son was Rishyasringa, devoted to tapasya, his passions under control. Through the rigours of his penance he forced Indra to pour down his rain during a drought, for the Deva, slayer of Bala and Vritra, was in dread of Rishyasringa's penance.

That powerful son of Kasyapa was born of a hind. He worked a great marvel in the kingdom of Lomapada; and when the rains brought forth crops in his lands, Lomapada gave his daughter Shanta in marriage to Rishyasringa, even as the Sun gave away his daughter Savitri."

Yudhishtira says, "How was Kasyapa's son, Rishyasringa, born of a hind? And how was he endowed with such holiness, being the offspring of a sinful sexual union? Why did Indra fear this Rishi, so he poured down his rain during a time of drought?

Tell us about the beauty of the princess Shanta, pure in life, she who captivated his heart when he had turned himself into a stag? And since the Rajarishi Lomapada was as virtuous as he is known to have been, why was it that over his lands, Indra, scourge of Paka, withheld rain?

Most holy one, I beg you, relate all this to me in detail, exactly as it happened, for I want to know everything about Rishyasringa's life."

Lomasa says, 'Listen to how Rishyasringa, of dreaded name, was born as the son of Kasyapa Muni's son Vibhandaka, a Brahmana Rishi who had evolved through tapasya, of unfailing seed, who was learned and bright like

the Lord of beings. And the father was honoured, and the son was possessed of a mighty spirit, and, though a boy, he was respected by old men.

Vibhandaka went to a great lake and devoted himself to the practice of austerities. He who was like a Deva performed a long penance. One day, while he was washing his mouth in the water, he saw the Apsara Urvasi, at which he ejaculated his seed.

Rajan, a hind was drinking from the lake and she lapped up his seed, floating on the water, and at once she became pregnant. That hind was, in fact, a Devaputri, and Brahma had once told her, "You will be a hind; and while you have that form, you will give birth to a Rishi; then you will be free."

As fate would have it, and as the word of the Creator can never prove untrue, that female deer bore Vibhandaka's son, a mighty sage, Rishyasringa.

Rishyasringa, devoted to tapasya, always passed his days in the forest, and there was a horn on his head and for this he came to be known as Rishyasringa. Apart from his father, he had never seen any other man; and so, his life was entirely absorbed in brahmacharya.

During this same time, there was a king of the land of Anga known as Lomapada, who was a friend of Dasaratha. We have heard that, from his love of pleasure, he had been guilty of telling a lie to a Brahmana; and for that Lomapada was shunned by all men of the priestly varna, and he had no priest to perform his religious rites.

And Indra of a thousand eyes abruptly withdrew the rains from his kingdom and his people suffered. He asked a number of Brahmanas, devoted to austerities, of cultivated minds, "How will the heavens send us rain? Think of some expedient."

Each of them gave their view, and among them, the best, said to the king, "King of kings, the Brahmanas are angry with you, so you must do something to appease them. Send for Rishyasringa, the Muni's son, who lives in the forest and knows nothing of women, who is the epitome of simplicity.

O King, if he whose tapasya is so great, shows himself in your kingdom, I have no doubt that the rain will also come."

Lomapada made atonement for his sins, and he went away. When the Brahmanas had been pacified, he returned and his people were glad. The king of Anga convened a meeting of his ministers, men who were expert at

giving counsel, and he sought their counsel to devise a plan to fetch Rishyasringa into his lands.

Finally, with the advice of those men versed in all branches of knowledge, very proficient in worldly matters, he settled on a plan. He sent for a number of courtesans, women of the town, all clever.

When they came, Lomapada said to them, "Lovely ones, you must find a way to entice Rishyasringa into my kingdom."

Those women, on the one hand afraid of the king's wrath and on the other dreading a curse from the Rishi, were alarmed and declared the business to be beyond their power.

However, one among them, a seasoned and forward woman, said to the king, "Maharajan, I will try to fetch him whose wealth consists solely of tapasya, into your lands. However, there are some things I will need to put my plan into action. If you can give me these, I might be able to bring Rishyasringa here."

The king gave an order that all that she might ask for should be procured. He also gave her a good deal of wealth and jewels of various kinds. Then, Lord of the earth, taking a number of young and beautiful women with her, she went to the forest.

CANTO 111

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'O Bhaarata, she prepared a floating hermitage, both because the king had ordered so, and also because it exactly accorded with her plan. Delightful it was, the floating asrama, with artificial trees adorned with various flowers and fruit, with diverse shrubs and creepers, and it provided delicious fruit. It truly looked as if it had been created by magic.

She moored this great craft very near the hermitage of Kasyapa's grandson, then sent emissaries to survey the places that that Rishi habitually frequented. Then she saw her opportunity, and sent forth her daughter, also a courtesan and of smart sense. That clever woman went to the vicinity of the Rishis's hermitage, and she saw Rishyasringa.

Approaching him, she said, "Muni, I hope that all is well with you and the other tapasvins. I trust that you have a plentiful store of fruit and roots and that you take delight in this hermitage.

I have come to visit you, and I hope the tapasya of the Rishis waxes, daily. I trust your father's spirit has not slackened and that he is well pleased with you. O Rishyasringa, I hope that you pursue the studies that are appropriate for you!"

Rishyasringa said, "You shine with lustre, as if you were made of light; and I say you are worthy of worship. I will give you padya to wash you feet and such fruit and roots that you might like, for this is what my dharma says.

This darbhasana is made of kusa grass and covered with a black deerskin to make it comfotable. Sit upon it, O Brahmana who resembles a Deva, and tell me where is your asrama. And what is this vrata called, which you now seem to be observing?"

The courtesan said, "O son of Kasyapa, my asrama is on the other side of yonder hill; it covers three yojanas and is full of delight. There, it is my faith not to receive obeisance or to touch water to wash my feet. I am not worthy of being worshipped by men like you, rather I must make my obeisance to you.

O Brahmana, this is the vrata that I must observe – to clasp you in my arms!"

Rishyasringa said, "Let me give you ripe fruits, gallnuts, myrobalans, karushas, ingudas from sandy soil, and figs. Be pleased to taste them and find some pleasure."

She, however, flung aside all those pure things he offered and instead gave him unclean things to eat, but deliciously prepared and fine to look at; and the innocent Rishyasringa found them most agreeable.

She gave him the most fragrant garlands, exquisite and shimmering garments to wear, and fine drink; they talked and laughed and played together. In his sight she played with a ball, sinuously, and seemed like a creeping plant broken in two, her lissom body.

Repeatedly she touched his body with her own, and clasped him in her arms. She took flowering twigs from sala, asoka and tilaka trees. Drunk, assuming a bashful look, she continued tempting Rishyasringa; and when she saw that she had touched his heart, she pressed his body with her own, again and again, and with sidelong, seductive glances, slowly wandered away, saying that she was going to make offerings to the fire.

When she left him, Rishyasringa was frantic with desire, and could think of nothing else but her. His mind turned constantly to her and felt empty. He began to sigh and seemed to be in great distress.

At that moment, Kasyapa's son Vibhandaka, whose eyes were tawny like a lion's, whose body was covered with hair down to the tips of his nails, who was devoted to Brahmana dharma, whose life was pure and spent in dhyana, came and saw his son sitting alone, pensive and sad, obviously distraught, and sighing again and again with upturned eyes.

Vibhandaka said to Rishyasringa, "My child, why are you not chopping firewood for the agni. I hope that you have offered havis, the burnt offering, today? I hope you have polished the sacrificial ladles and spoons and brought the calf to the milch cow whose milk gives us all we need to make our sacrificial offerings to the fire?

Surely, you are not yourself, my son. You are pensive, why, you seem to be terribly disturbed. Why are you so sad today? Who has come here this day?"

CANTO 112

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Rishyasringa said, "A Brahmachari with a mass of jata on his head came here today. He was neither short nor tall. He had a spirited look, a golden complexion, and eyes large as lotuses; and he was shining and graceful as a god.

Rich was his beauty, alight like the sun; and he was exceedingly fair, ah his eyes graceful and black. His twisted hair was blue-black and neat and long and fragrant and tied up with strings of gold. A beautiful ornament glittered at his throat, like lightning in the sky.

And under the throat he had two balls of flesh without a single hair upon them, and oh an exceedingly beautiful form, with such a slender waist and a deep navel; and the skin upon his chest was smooth. A golden string shone from under his cloth, just like this waist-string of mine.

There was something on his feet of a wonderful shape which gave forth a lovely tinkling. His wrists, likewise, bore a pair of ornaments that made a similar sound and looked just like these prayer beads. And when he walked, his ornaments sounded like delighted ganders upon a sheet of water.

He wore garments of wonderful make upon his person; these clothes I wear are by no means beautiful like those. His face was was also so wonderful to behold; and his voice was modulated to gladden the heart, just as his speech was as sweet as the song of the koyal; while I listened to him, I felt stirred in my inmost heart.

As a forest in spring is most graceful when swept by a breeze, even so, my father, that fragrant sage is most beautiful when the air fans him. His mass of hair is neatly tied and is slick againt his head and brow, divided evenly by a parting.

His eyes seemed to be covered with chakravaka birds of exceptionally beautiful forms. In his right hand he held a wonderful round fruit, which falls to the ground and again leaps up to the sky, in the strangest way; and he beats it and turns himself round and whirls: like a tree moved by the breeze.

When I looked at him, O father, he seemed to be a son of the Devas, and my joy was extreme, and my pleasure unbounded. He clasped my body,

seized my matted hair, and bent me down, and mingling his mouth with my own, uttered a delightful sound I have never heard.

He does not care for padya or the fruit I offered him, and said to me that this was his vrata. But he gave me many fruit, and these we have do not match those nearly for taste. They have no rind nor any stone within them, like these.

That noble-formed one gave me water of such flavour that I have never drunk before; it was exquisite and having drunk it, I felt uncanny pleasure; why, the ground seemed to move under my feet.

These redolent garlands, entwined with silken threads, belong to him. And he, bright with fervent piety, scattered these garlands here, then went back to his own asrama. His going has saddened my heart; and my body seems to burn all over.

My desire is to go to him as soon as I can, and to have him walk about here every day. O father, let me go to him this very moment. Ah, what tapasya does he practise? As he, that pious one, is performing tapasya, I want to go and live with him, and share his penances. My heart yearns for his unusual mode of practising austerities; my soul will be in torment if I cannot see him."

CANTO 113

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vibhandaka said, "My child, these are Rakshasas, who walk about in wonderful forms. Their strength is unrivalled and their beauty great, and they always strive to obstruct the practice of true austerities. They assume lovely forms and try to seduce by various means.

Those fierce beings hurled the Rishis, the dwellers in the forest, down from blessed regions won through their piety. And the Muni who has control over his soul, and who wants to gain the realms where the righteous go, must have nothing to do with them.

They are vile creatures, who obstruct tapasya and delight in that, and a Rishi should never look at them.

O my son, those were drinks unworthy to be drunk; they were spirits that sinners consume. And these garlands, bright and fragrant and of many hues, are not intended for sannyasis."

Having thus forbidden his son, saying that those were evil demons, Vibhandaka went in quest of her. When, after a three days' search he could not find her, he returned to his asrama.

In the meanwhile, when Rishyasrinuga went out to gather fruit, the courtesan returned to tempt him.

And as soon as Rishyasringa saw her, he was ecstatic and ran to her, crying, "Let us go to your asrama before my father returns!"

Rajan, those courtesans made Rishyasringa board their floating hermitage. As soon as he was aboard, they unmoored the vessel and cast off. With a myriad of pleasures they kept him engaged and delighted, until they arrived in the kingdom of Anga.

Then, leaving the floating vessel, of dazzling white, upon the water, they fetched the innocent Rishi, Vibhandaka's son, to the king Lomapada, who kept him in his antahpura, among his women. Suddenly, the heavens opened and it poured over the kingdom, why, the very world seemed to become flooded with water.

His fervent wish fulfilled, Lomapada bestowed his daughter Shanta on Rishyasringa in marriage.

With a view to appease the wrath of his father, he ordered kine to be placed, and fields to be ploughed, by the road that Vibhandaka would take to come to his son. He also set stout cowherds along the route, with a plenitude of cattle, and ordered them:

"When the Maharishi Vibhandaka asks you about his son, you must fold your hands and say to him that all these cattle, all these fields belong to his son, and that you yourselves are his slaves, ready to obey his every wish."

Now, having gathered roots and fruit, the Rishi Vibhandaka, whose temper was fierce, returned to his hermitage, and looked for his son; not finding him, he became fiercely angry. He was beside himself with fury and he suspected king Lomapadas hand in what had befallen Rishyasringa.

He set out for the city of Champa, having made up his mind to burn the king, his city, and his whole kingdom. On the way, he was tired and hungry, when he reached the cleverly placed and opulent cowherd settlements, rich with cattle. He felt honoured at the way in which the cowherds welcomed and feted him; and he spent that night in a manner befitting a king.

Having partaken of their great hospitality, he asked them, "To whom, O cowherds, do you belong?"

They surrounded him and said, "All this wealth has been provided for your son."

Vibhandaka continued his journey, and along his way he was similarly honoured, frequently. Finally, arriving, he saw Rishyasringa, his son, who looked like the god Indra in heaven. He also saw his daughter-in-law, shanta, looking like lightning springing from a cloud. Having seen everything provided for Rishyasringa, as well as the exquisite princess shanta, Vibhandaka was appeased.

Rajan, he expressed his satisfaction with Lomapada. The Maharishi, whose powers rivalled those of Surya and Agni, said to Rishyasringa, "As soon as a son is born to you, and having done all that this king wants from you, you must return immediately to the forest."

Rishyasringa did exactly as his father said, and he returned to Vibhandaka's asrama. Rajan, shanta obediently waited upon him, as in the firmament Rohini waits upon the Moon, or as the fortunate Arundhati waits upon Vasishta, or as Lopamudra waits upon Agastya. Just as Damayanti was an obedient wife to Nala, or as Sachi is to the god who wields the thunderbolt, or as Indrasena, Narayana's daughter, was always obedient to

Mudgala, so did shanta wait lovingly upon Rishyasringa, while he lived in the forest.

This is the holy hermitage that was Rishyasringa's; ennobling the great lake here, it bears sacred fame. Perform your ablutions here and have your desire fulfilled. And having purified thyself, direct your course towards other holy tirthas.'"

CANTO 114

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, O Janamejaya, the son of Pandu sets out from the river Kausiki and journeys in succession to all the sacred shrines; and he comes to the sea where the river Ganga flows into it. There, at the nave of five hundred rivers, he performs the holy ceremony of an ablution.

Then, O ruler of the earth, accompanied by his brothers, the valiant Kshatriya goes along the shore towards the land where the Kalinga tribes dwell.

Lomasa says, 'This is the land, Kaunteya, where the Kalinga tribes live. The river Vaitarani passes through it, upon the banks of which river Dharma Deva performed a tapasya, having first placed himself under the protection of the celestials.

This is the northern bank, with its charmed mountain, inhabited by Rishis, ideal for the performance of religious rites, and frequented by Brahmanas. This place rivals the path by which a virtuous man, fit for heaven, repairs to Devaloka. Here, in days of yore, other sages worshipped the Gods with austerities.

It was here, O King, that the Lord Rudra seized the sacrificial beast and cried, "This is my share!" Bharatottama, when Siva carried away the yagnapasu, the Devas said to him, "Do not covet the property of others, flouting the laws of dharma."

They eulogised the Lord Rudra, and pleased him with the offering of a sacrifice, and honoured him duly. Thereupon he gave up the beast, and left by the path trodden by the gods.

Hear what happened to Rudra, O Yudhishtira! Influenced by their dread of him, the Devas forevermore set apart the best of all shares of their offerings, what was fresh and not stale for him.

Whoever performs ablutions at this spot, while reciting this ancient story, will see, with his mortal eyes, the path that leads to Devaloka.'

All the sons of Pandu and the daughter of Drupada—all of whom were the favoured by fate—descend to the river Vaitarani, and offer libations in the names of their fathers.

Yudhishtira says, 'O Lomasa, how great must be the force of a pious deed! Having bathed here, I feel as if I am no more in the world of men! Maharishi, I see all the worlds! And I hear the holy Munis of the forest chanting the Veda.'

Lomasa says, 'Yudhishtira, the place from where the chanting comes is three hundred thousand yojanas from here. Lord of men, be quiet and utter no word. This is the divine forest of the Swayambhuva, which has now come to our view. There Viswakarma, whose name is dreaded, performed a yagna.

During that mighty sacrifice, the Self-existent One made a gift of this entire earth, with all its hilly and forest tracts, to Kasyapa, by way of dakshina, for serving as a priest. As soon as Bhumi Devi was given away, she became sad, and spoke in anger to that great lord, the ruler of the worlds.

"O Mahadeva, it is unworthy of you to give me away to an ordinary mortal, and this daana of yours will come to nothing. For I mean to plunge down into the bottom of Patala!"

When the blessed Rishi Kasyapa saw the goddess Earth despondent and angry, he performed a propitiatory ritual to appease her. Pandava, Bhumi Devi was pleased with his worship and she rose again from within the waters, and showed herself in the form of a sacred altar.

This, O king, is the place which distinctly manifests the form of a vedi. Walk over it, and you will gain valour and strength. Rajan, this is the very altar which reaches as far as the sea, and rests itself upon its bosom.

May good fortune be yours; climb here and by yourself walk out into the sea, while I perform the ritual for averting all evil from you. For, as soon as it receives a mortal's touch, this vedi at once enters into the sea.

Salutation to the God who protects the universe! Salutation to You that are beyond the universe! O Lord of gods, vouchsafe your presence in this sea.

Pandava, you must swiftly climb the vedi, while chanting this mantra: "The god of fire, and the sun, and the organ of generation, and water, and goddess and the seed of Vishnu, and the navel of nectar. The god of fire is the organ that generated the ocean; the earth is your body; Vishnu deposited the seed that caused your being and you are the navel of nectar!"

Chant these words aloud, Pandava, and plunge into the sea even as you do so. Otherwise, O best of Kunti's son, this lord of waters of divine birth,

this most auspicious of all waters of the earth, must not be touched, not even with the tip of a blade of sacred grass.'

When the ritual for averting evil has been completed, Yudhishtira enters the sea, and having done everything that the Rishi had asked of him, repairs to the foothill of the Mahendra mountain, and spends the night in that place."

CANTO 115

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The king of the earth spends a single night there, and, with his brothers, pays the highest homage to the Rishis. And Lomasa acquaints him with the names of all of them – the Bhrigus, the Angiras, the Vasishtas, and the Kasyapas.

And the Rajarishi visits them all and makes obeisance to them, with folded hands.

And then he asks the valiant Akritavrana, who is a follower of Parasurama, 'When will the worshipful Parasurama show himself to the Rishis here? I, too, wish to have a darshana of the Bhargava.'

Akritavrana says, 'Rama already knows about your coming here, for his soul spontaneously knows all things. He is in every way well-pleased with you, and he will show himself readily to you.

The Rishis who perform tapasya here are allowed to see him on the fourteenth and the eighth day of the lunar month. When this night ends, tomorrow, the fourteenth day of this moon will begin; and you shall see him, clad in a sable deerskin, and wearing his hair in a mass of jata.'

Yudhishtira says, 'You have long been a follower of the mighty Rama, Jamadagni's son; you must have been an eye-witness to all his awesome deeds of yore.

I beg you, tell me how Rama vanquished all the Kshatriyas on the field of battle, and tell me also what the original cause of the conflict was.'

Akritavrana says, 'Bhaarata, gladly, I will narrate that great tale to you, the legend of the the godlike deeds of Rama, the son of Jamadagni, who belongs to the race of Bhrigu.

I will also relate the achievements of the great king of the Haihaya tribe; his name was Arjuna, and Parasurama killed him. He, O Pandava, was endowed with a thousand arms; and through the grace of Dattatreya he also had a golden, heavenly vimana.

His sway extended over all the worlds, and his vimana could go anywhere at his very thought. Become invincible with the boon, he went everywhere in that vimana, and rode rough over the Devas, Yakshas and Rishis, wherever he pleased; he tyrannised all the created.

Finally, the Devas and the Rishis of austere tapasya went together to Vishnu, slayer of demons, God of gods, of inexorable prowess, and said to him, "Blessed and revered Lord, if creation is to be saved, you must kill Kartaviryarjuna."

The mighty king of the Haihayas, riding his vimana, rudely affronted Indra, while that Deva was alone with his queen Sachi. At this, O Bhaarata, the Lord Vishnu consulted with Indra with a view to killing Kartavirya's son Arjuna.

Indra told Vishnu all about Arjuna's depredations and sins, and the God whom the worlds worship went to the enchanted Badari forest, which was his own chosen tapovana.

At this very time, there lived on the earth a mighty sovereign, monarch in the land of Kanyakubja, a king with a vast army. His name was Gadhi and his fame resounded through the world. He, however, retired into the forest, becoming a vanaprastha.

While he lived in the vana, a daughter was born to him, as beautiful as an Apsara was she. And Richika, the son of Bhrigu, asked for her to be his wife.

Gadhi said to that Brahmana, who led a most austere life, "We have a family custom in our race, founded by our most ancient ancestors -know, O Brahmanottama, that he who wishes to marry a princess of our clan must offer a dowry of a thousand fleet horses, whose colour must be brown and every one of which must have a single sable ear.

But, son of Bhrigu, a reverend Muni like you cannot be asked to make the same offering, neither can I refuse to give my daughter to an exalted and holy one like you."

Richika said, "I will give you a thousand fleet steeds, brown in hue and each one with a single black ear; give me your daughter."

Richaka went to Varuna and said, "Give me a thousand swift horses, brown in colour, and each with one black ear. I want them as the dowry for my marriage."

Varuna gave him a thousand steeds. These steeds had issued out of the river Ganga; and so the place has been named Aswatirtha.

In the city of Kanyakubja, the daughter of Gadhi, the princess Satyavati was given in marriage; and the gods themselves were in the bride's party. Thus, Richaka, best of Brahmanas, procured a thousand horses, and saw the

dwellers of heaven and won a wife. And he enjoyed the girl of the slender waist, and gratified all the desire that he ever had.

When the marriage had been celebrated, O king, his father Bhrigu came on a visit to see him and his wife; and he was glad to see his son. The husband and wife together paid their respects to him, who was worshipped by all the gods. Bhrigu sat, and they stood near him with folded hands, waiting to do his bidding.

Maharishi Bhrigu, glad at heart, said to his daughter-in-law, "Lovely child, ask me for a boon, I will give you anything you want."

And she asked that a son might be born to both herself and her mother. And he granted her wish.

Bhrigu said, "During the days that your season lasts, you and your mother must bathe, observing the vrata to bear a son. Then you must both separately embrace two different trees – she a peepal tree, and you a fig tree.

Dutiful child, here are two pots of payasa, rice and milk, which I have prepared with great care. I have combed the universe to find the medicaments that I have blended into this payasa. With great care must you both drink this."

Saying this, he vanished. However, the two women interchanged not only the vessels of payasa that he gave them but also the trees that they embraced. After many days, the Sage appeared again, and he already knew, through his mystic vision, what had happened.

The mighty Bhrigu said to Satyavati, his daughter-in-law, "Dharmaputri, you ate the wrong pot of payasa and you embraced the wrong tree. It was your mother who deluded you. You will have a son who, though born a Brahmana, will have the character and nature of a Kshatriya. Your mother will have a Kshatriya son who will live the life of a Brahmana, and great shall be his power and he will walk the path trodden by the righteous."

She begged repeatedly, "O let my son not be so but my grandson!"

And, O Pandava, Bhrigu replied, "Tathastu, so be it!" and he was pleased to grant her wish.

On the expected day, she gave birth to a son, who was called Jamadagni, endowed with both splendour and grace. As he grew in years and in strength, he excelled all the other Sages in his knowledge of the Vaidik lore. Bhaarata, he rivalled the Sun in lustre and the entire astra shastra, the

martial science, and the fourfold Devastra gyana came to him spontaneously, with no instruction.'

CANTO 116

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Akritavrana says, 'Jamadagni devoted himself to the study of the Veda and the practice of tapasya, and became famous for his .great austerities. He pursued a deep and systematic course of study and gained mastery over the entire Veda.

Then, O king, he went to Prasenajit and sought the hand of Renuka in marriage. That king happily gave the Sage his daughter, and having got Renuka for his wife, the Bhrigunandana, delight of Bhrigu's race, began living with her in his asrama; now, he performed tapasya and she helped and looked after him.

Four boys were born to her, Rama the fifth. Although the youngest, he was superior to all his brothers.

One day, when her sons had gone into the forest to gather fruit, the pure and austere Renuka went to bathe in the river. While bathing, she happened to see the king of Martikavataka, who was known as Chitraratha. This Kshatriya, wearing a lotus wreath upon his chest, was sporting with his wives in the water.

Seeing his magnificent form, Renuka was touched by desire that she could not contain, and she sinned in thought in the very river and was polluted. She returned to the hermitage, trembling in her heart. Her husband instantly saw the condition she was in, and seeing that the lustre of chastity had abandoned his wife, he cried out in anguish and anger.

At that very moment, the eldest of Jamadagni's sons, Rumanvan arrived there; and then, Sushena, and then, Vasu, and Viswavasu also. One by one, the Maharishi ordered them to kill their mother. However, they could not find the heart to do so; they stood silent. He cursed them in anger, and they lost their reason, and became like senseless things, dull as inanimate objects, and in conduct like beasts and birds.

Now, Rama arrived in the asrama, last of all. The mighty-armed Jamadagni, of great austerities, said to him, "Kill this evil mother of yours, without compunction, O my son."

Rama immediately took up an axe and cut off his mother's head. The wrath of Mahatama Jamadagni was appeased; and well-pleased, he said,

"My child, knower of dharma, you have done this most difficult thing at my bidding. Ask me for whatever your heart wishes for and I will give you everything you want."

At which, Rama asked that his mother be restored to life, and that he himself not be haunted by the remembrance of his savage deed and that he might not be affected by any sin, and that his brothers might recover their former condition, and that he might be unrivalled on the field of battle, and have a long life.

Bhaarata, Jamadagni of awesome tapasya granted all those wishes of Rama.

Then, one day, when the Sage's sons had all gone out again, the valiant son of Kartavirya, the lord of the country near the shore of the sea, came to Jamadagni's hermitage. The Sage's wife received him hospitably. However, intoxicated with a Kshatriya warrior's pride, he was; not pleased with the reception given to him, and forcibly seized and carried off the foremost among the cows whose milk supplied the sacral butter, heedless of its loud lowing.

He wantonly tore down the great trees of the forest. When Rama came home, his father told him all that had happened. When Rama saw how the cow lowed for its calf, anger arose in his heart and he rushed towards Kartavirya's son, whose last moments had drawn near.

Then Bhargava, scourge of the Kshatriyas, put forth his valour on the field of battle, and with flat-tipped, sharp arrows loosed from a beautiful bow, cut away Kartaviryarjuna's thousand arms, which were as massive as great door bolts. Touched by the hand of death, Kartavirya's son died at Rama's hands.

Their wrath stirred against Rama, Arjuna's kinsmen rushed at Jamadagni in his hermitage, while Rama was still away. They slew him there; for although his strength was great, he was at tapasya and would not fight. Helplessly, repeatedly, he cried out Rama's name in a piteous voice.

And, O Yudhishtira, the sons of Kartavirya shot Jamadagni dead with their arrows, and left the asrama. When they had gone, and when Jamadagni had breathed his last, Rama Bhrigunandana returned to the hermitage, bearing fuel for the sacred agni in his arms, and saw his father lying slain. He was stricken and railed against the grievous fate that had caused this tragedy.'

CANTO 117

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Rama cried, "The blame is mine, O father, that the wretched sons of Kartavirya have shot you dead with arrows, like a stag in the woods. O father, you were always virtuous and never swerved from the path of dharma, nor harmed any living creature. How did Fate bring you such a vile death?

What an awful sin they have committed, who have killed you with hundreds of arrows, although you were an old man and performing tapasya and would not fight them! With what face will those shameless ones speak of this deed of theirs to their friends and servants? That they have murdered an unassisted and unresisting holy man?"

O King, thus Rama of great penance wailed, piteously, and then, at last, performed the obsequies for his dead sire. Rama, conqueror of hostile cities, cremated his father on a pyre, and vowed, O scion of Bharata, to annihilate the very race of Kshatriyas.

Of awesome strength, with the valour of a great warrior, and comparable to the god of death himself, he took up his weapon in wrath, went forth and singlehandedly put Kartavirya's sons to death. In three encounters, he struck down all the Kshatriya followers of Kartavirya's sons.

And seven times, that powerful one exterminated the warrior tribes of the earth. In the land called Samanta-panchaka, he made five lakes of their blood.

There the mightiest scion of Bhrigu's race offered tarpana to his ancestors, and Richika appeared to him in a visible form, and spoke words of counsel to him; after this, Jamadagni's son performed a mighty sacrifice and gratified the king of the Devas, and gifted the Earth to the ministering priests.

Lord of men, he raised a golden altar there, ten vyamas in breadth and nine in height, and gifted that vedi to the great Kasyapa. At Kasyapa's bidding, the Brahmanas divided the altar into a number of shares, and so they became known as as the Khandavayanas, the share takers.

The exterminator of the Kshatriyas bestowed the earth upon Mahatma Kasyapa, then engaged himself in an atikatora tapasya. He now dwells upon

this Mahendra, monarch of hills.

So it was that there were hostilities between Rama and all the Kshatriyas of the world; and killing them, Rama conquered all the earth,' says Akritavrana.

Then on the fourteenth day of the moon, at the appointed hour, the mighty-souled Rama shows himself to those Brahmanas and also to the virtuous Yudhishtira and his younger brothers. And, O king of kings, the Pandavas worship Rama, and also all the other Dvijas. After worshipping Jamadagni's son and receiving words of praise from him, at Parasurama's behest, Yudhishtira spends the night on the Mahendra Parvata, and then sets out on his journey towards the southern lands."

CANTO 118

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The great king pursues his journey, and at different places on the sea shore he visits all the auspicious tirthas to which Brahmanas went. And O son of Parikshit, Yudhishtira bathes in them all, and his brothers with him.

Later, they come to a sacred river, holiest of them. There, also, the king performs his ablutions and offers libations to his ancestors and the gods, and distributes riches to the leaders of the dvijas.

Next he comes to the Godavari, river that falls direcdy into the sea. There he is freed from his sins. He reaches the sea in the Dravida land, and visits the holy tirtha bearing Agastyas name, which is exceedingly sacred and exceptionally pure. The valiant king visits the feminine tirthas, of the crocodiles who were Apsaras; here he listens to the story of Arjuna's feat, which no other mortal man could have performed.

Here, the Pandava is praised by the highest men among all Brahmanas, and Yudhishtira experiences the greatest delight. And, O Lokarakshaka, along with Krishnaa, Pandu's son bathes in those tirthas, and lauding Arjuna's valour, spends some delightful time there.

Yudhishtira gives away thousands of cows at those tirthas on the coast of the sea; and with his brothers tells, with pleasure, of how Arjuna had made a gift of kine here. Rajan, one after another, they visit those holy places, both on the coast and many other sacred spots, as well, fulfiling their hearts' desire, until they come to that holiest tirtha known as Surparaka.

Crossing over a stretch of the sea coast, they arrive at a forest celebrated over the world. Here the Devas had performed tapasya in the elder days, and so had the great Rajarishis of dharma undertaken yagnas. Here, Yudhishtira, of long and mighty arms, sees the celebrated altar of Richaka's son, who had been the greatest of archers.

And the vedi is surrounded by hosts of ascetics, altar fit to be worshipped by men of dharma. The king sees the holy, and beautiful, and delightful shrines of all the Devas and of the Vasus, and of the Maruts and of the Aswin twins, the celestial physicians, and of Yama, son of Surya, and of Kubera, the lord of riches, and of Indra, and of Vishnu, and of Brahma

and of Siva, and of Soma the Moon, and of Surya, author of day, and of Varuna, lord of waters, and of the host of Sadhyas, and of the Pitrs, and of Rudra together with all his ganas, and of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and of the host of Siddhas, and of many other immortal holy gods besides.

In all those shrines the king observes various vratas, and gives away countless gemstones. He bathes in all the tirthas, then returns to Surparaka, from where, with his brothers, he crosses to Prabhasa, whose fame great Brahmanas have spread throughout the world.

There Yudhishtira, of the large reddish eyes, bathes with his brothers and offers libations to the Pitrs and the Devas, as do Krishnaa and all the Brahmanas travelling with them, and Lomasa as well. For twelve days he subsists upon air and water, and performs ablutions during those days and their nights, surrounding himself with kindled fires.

Thus that greatest of all virtuous men engages himself in asceticism, while word reaches Balarama and Krishna in Dwaraka of Yudhishtira's severe penance, and those two lords of all the Vrishnis, bring a large complement of soldiers with them, and come to meet the Pandava of the race of Ajamidha.

When the Vrishnis see the sons of Pandu lying upon the ground, their bodies covered in dirt, when they see the daughter of Drupada in a piteous condition, their grief is great and they cannot stop themselves from breaking out into loud lamentation.

Now the king, whose courage is such that no misfortune can ever prevail over his heart, rises and lovingly meets Rama and Krishna and Krishna's son Samba, and the grandson of Sini and other Vrishnis, and pays his respects to them, suitably. In return, they also honour him and all the sons of Pritha, who in turn honour them.

And they seat themselves around Yudhishtira, as the Devas sit around Indra, O king! He describes the machinations of his enemies to them, and how he has spent his years in the forest, and how Arjuna has gone to Indra's realm to acquire the Devastras; he is joyful in their company and relates all this with a light and glad heart.

And they are happy to learn all this news from him; but when they see the Pandavas so emaciated, the majestic and kindly Vrishnis cannot stanch their tears, gushing from their eyes for the anguish they feel."

CANTO 119

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "O you of ascetic wealth, when the sons of Pandu and the Vrishnis reach holy Prabhasa, what do they do and whatconversation do they have between them? For all of them were such Mahatmans, and held each other in high esteem."

Vaisampayana said, "When the Vrishnis arrive in holy Prabhasa, the sacred landing on the coast of the sea, they surround the sons of Pandu and wait upon them.

Then, Balarama, whose complexion is as fair as the milk of the cow, the kunda flower, the moon, silver and the lotus root, Balarama who wears a vanamala and whose weapon is the ploughshare, speaks to the lotus-eyed Panchali, 'Krishnaa, I do not see that the practice of dharma leads to any good or that sin fetches evil upon the sinners, for I see the godly Yudhishtira in this miserable condition, with matted hair, a vanaprastha, and wearing valkala; while Duryodhana rules the earth, and the ground does not open to swallow him.

It would seem that a life of viciousness is more rewarding than a virtuous one. All ordinary men wonder that the sinner Duryodhana flourishes while the righteous Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, who cleaves to justice, is always honest and liberal has been robbed of his throne.

Why, this son of Pritha would give up his kingdom and his pleasure but would not swerve from the path of dharma. How do Bhishma and Kripa and the Brahmana Drona and the old king Dhritarashtra live happily after banishing the sons of Pandu into exile? Ah, fie on the sinful lords of Bharata's race!

What will Dhritarashtra say to the Pitrs of his noble line when the wretch meets them in the next world? He has cast his sinless sons from their throne; how can he ever claim that he is not guilty of the worst crime?

At this time he does not see with his mind's eye that he has acted blindly, and truly gone blind in the sight of the kings of the earth. It is because he has banished Kunti's son from his kingdom! I have no doubt that, when he with his sons perpetrated this inhuman act, Vichitravirya's son saw the dread smasana where bodies are burnt with flowering trees of a golden hue.

Surely, when these stooped towards him, the evil dead with great crimson, staring eyes, he must have heeded their vicious counsel, since he so fearlessly sent Yudhishtira to the forest, even while this son of Pandu had all his weapons with him and his brothers, as well.

This Bhima here, whose voracious appetite is like that of a wolf, can decimate a formidable army just with the strength of his arms and bearing no weapon. The forces on the battlefield were unmanned just to hear his war-cry. And now this mighty one suffers from hunger and thirst, and is emaciated with toilsome journeys.

But when he takes up his arrows and other weapons, and meets his enemies on the field, he will remember the suffering of his wretched forest-life, and kill them to the last man – of this I have no doubt.

Throughout the whole world no one can boast of strength and prowess equal to his. Alas, his great body is denuded by the cold, and heat and the winds. But when he stands up to fight, he will not spare a single enemy.

This mighty Kshatriya is inexorable when he rides a chariot — this Vrikodara single-handedly conquered all the rulers of the east, together with ther armies; and he returned from those wars uninjured. And that same Bhima, clad miserably in the bark of trees, now leads a sorry life in the vana.

This powerful Sahadeva vanquished all the kings of the south; those lords of men who amassed on the sea coast – look at him now in tapasavesham, an anchorite's garb. Valiant Nakula singe-handedly vanquished the kings of the west; and he now roams the jungles, subsisting on fruit and roots, with a matted mass of jata on the head, and his body covered with dirt.

This daughter of a king who is a maharatha, rose from the flames during a sacrifice. She has always known a life of luxury and happiness; how does she now endure this sorry existence in a forest?

And the son of the god of virtue—dharma which stands at the head of the three purusharthas—and the son of the wind god and the son of the lord of the Devas, and these two sons of the Aswini Kumaras – how do they live in the forest deprived of all comforts?

When Dharmaputra was beaten at dice, and when he, his wife, his brothers and his followers were all driven into exile, and Duryodhana began to flourish, why did the very earth not perish with all her mountains?"

CANTO 120

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Satyaki says, "Rama, this is not the time to lament. Although Yudhishtira does not say a single word, we must do what the time and occasion demand. Those who have others to look after their welfare do not need to undertake anything themselves; others do their work, as Saibya and the rest did for Yayati.

So, too, Rama, those who have friends, patrons who, of their own accord, fight their causes meet with no trials, as if they are helpless. How is it that when the sons of Pritha have Balarama and Krishna for friends and patrons, as well as Samba and Pradyumna and myself—we who can protect the three worlds—how is it then that Yudhishtira lives in the forest with his brothers?

Even today our army of Dasarhas, fully armed and wearing chequered mail, should march on Hastinapura, and the Vrishnis should send Dhritarashtra's sons and their allies to Yamaloka. If roused, Krishna by himself, Krishna who wields the bow made of horn, could subdue all the world. Krishna, I ask you to kill Dhritarashtra's son, with all his men, even as Indra did Vritra.

Pritha's son Arjuna is my brother, and my friend, and my guru; he is like another Krishna. It is for this that men wish for a worthy son, and that a guru seeks a pupil who would never contradict him. It is for this that the time has come for that best of all tasks, difficult to perform.

I will baffle Duryodhana's volleys of weapons with my archery. I will overpower them all on the field of battle. In my wrath, I will strike him down with my fine shafts that are no less than snakes, poison and fire. And with the keen edge of my sword, I will cut his head from his trunk, on the battlefield.

After this, I will kill his followers, and annihilate all of Kuru's race. O son of Rohini, let the followers of Bhima look at me with joy in their hearts, when I wield my weapons on the field of war, when I slay all their best warriors, just as fire consumes the worlds like bales of straw, when time ends.

Kripa and Drona and Vikarna and Karna will not stand against Pradyumna's fierce arrows. And I know the power of Arjuna's son – he is like the son of Krishna in battle. Let Samba punish Dusasana; let him kill Dusasana and his charioteer and destroy his ratha, for on the field of battle Jamabavati's son is irresistible and nothing can withstand him. Why, when he was a mere boy he routed the Asura Sambaras army; he slew Asvachakra, whose thighs were like pillars, and whose muscular arms were of great length.

Who can even approach Samba's chariot? Even as all mortals that are born do not escape death, so, too, whoever meets Samba on the battlefield will die.

As for Krishna, he will burn up the enemy troops with his astras of fire; he will kill the maharathas Bhishma and Drona, and Somadatta surrounded by all his sons. Who or what is there in all the world, including the gods, that Krishna cannot vanquish in battle when he takes up arms?

Then let Aniruddha also take up his bow and sword, and let him cover the earth with Dhritarashtra's sons, their heads hewn from their trunks, even as a sacrificial vedi is strewn with blades of kusa grass.

And Gada and Ulmuka, and Bahuka and Bhanu and Nitha and the young Nishatha, so valiant in battle, and Sarana, and Charudeshna, inexorable in war – let them all perform feats that befit their race.

Let the united army of the Satwatas and Suras, together with the best warriors of the Vrishnis, the Bhojas, and the Andhakas slay the sons of Dhritarashtra upon the field of war, and swell their great fame throughout the world.

Then let Abhimanyu rule the world as long as this best of virtuous men, Yudhishtira, is away fulfilling the vow that he swore during the game of dice. After that time expires, he will rule the world again, unchallenged, for we would have slain all his enemies already. No son of Dhritarashtra will remain on earth, neither the Sutaputra.

This is the vital mission before us, which we must accomplish without delay."

Krishna says, "O scion of the race of Madhu, what you say is true and we accept and honour your words, always valiant one! But this bull of the Kurus would never accept sovereignty of the earth, unless it were won by the prowess of his own arms. Neither for the sake of pleasure, nor from fear, nor from greed would Yudhishtira ever renounce Kshatriya dharma; and nor

would these two heroes, the maharathas Bhima and Arjuna; nor the twins, and neither Drupada's daughter Krishnaa.

Vrikodara and Dhananjaya have no equals or rivals in battle throughout the word. And why will this king not rule the whole world when he has Madri's twin sons to fight for him?

The noble king of Panchala, together with the Kekaya king, and we ourselves shall put forth our might, and at that time the enemies of Yudhisthira shall be annihilated."

Yudhishtira says, "It is not strange that you should say this, Satyaki! However, to me dharma must be the first consideration, above that of sovereign power.

But only Krishna knows what I am, just as I alone know who he truly is. Scion of Madhu, most valiant of Sini's race, when Krishna knows that the time for war has come, he, Kesava of the beautiful hair, will also help vanquish Suyodhana.

But today let the Dasarha heroes go back; they are my patrons and the greatest of all men, who have visited me here. O you of immeasurable strength, never fall away from the path of dharma, and I will see you again and that shall be a joyful occasion."

Then, after exchanging mutual greetings and paying obeisance to their elders, and having embraced the youthful, the Yadavas and the Pandavas part. The Yadus return to their home, and the Pandavas continue their tirthayatra.

Leaving Krishna, Yudhishtira, accompanied by his brothers and servants, and also by Lomasa, goes to the sacred river Payoshni, with its fine landing-ford that had been built by the king of Vidarbha. The Pandavas begin living on the banks of the Payoshni, whose waters are mixed with Soma rasa.

There, Yudhishtira is greeted with praise and affection by very many Brahmanas, who are delighted to see him in that place.

CANTO 121

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, "Rajan, King Nriga performed a sacrifice here, he gratified Indra Purandara with the offering of Soma rasa. Indra was refreshed and very pleased. Here, Indra and the Devas and the protectors of all born beings celebrated Mahayagnas of diverse kinds, and gave abundant wealth to the ministering priests.

Here King Amurtarayasa, lord of the earth, gratified Indra Vajradhari, also with Soma rasa, when that king performed seven aswamedha yagnas. All things which in other sacrifices are made of wood and earth, were made of gold at those seven horse sacrifices.

And he himself fashioned for all the rites seven sets of stakes, the rings for the sacrificial stambas, the pots, the ladles, utensils, and spoons. On top of each sacrificial stake, seven rings were fastened, and, O Yudhishtira, Indra and the Devas themselves erected the stakes of shining gold which had been prepared for that king's sacred rites.

In all the magnificent yagnas of Gaya, protector of the earth, he delighted Indra by giving him Soma rasa to drink, and the ministering priests were gratified with the untold wealth the king gave them. As no one can count the sand-grains of the earth, or the stars in the sky, or rain-drops when it rains, so, too, the wealth Gaya gave away was beyond calculation, it was past anything given before, even during the seven aswamedhas.

And Viswakarman created golden images of Saraswati, Goddess of speech, and Gaya gave these away to the Brahmanas who attended his sacrifice, coming from all the directions and cardinal points.

Lord of men, when King Gaya, Mahatman, performed his sacrifices, he erected sacrificial mounds at so many different places that but little space was left upon the surface of the earth. Bhaarata, through this Mahayagna, Gaya attained Devaloka, Indra's realm.

Whoever bathes in the river Payoshni goes to the realms which Gaya attained, so, Rajadhiraja, prince of dharma, you and your brothers must bathe in this river; and, O protector of the earth, you will be freed from all sin.'

Purushottama, Yudhishtira and his brothers perform ablutions in the river Payoshni, after which they journey on to the hill of sapphires and the great river Narmada, where Lomasa names all the sacred tirthas for the Pandava and all the holy shrines of the Devas, as they visit each of these, one after the other, at their leisure.

At each of them, Brahmanas by thousands receive gifts from Yudhishtira.

Lomasa says, 'Kaunteya, he who visits the Vaidurya Parvata, the sapphire mountain, and immerses his body in the river Narmada, attains the lokas of the Devas and the Rajarishis. This is the cusp of the Dwapara and the Kali yugas; this is the time when a man rids himself of all his sins.

This is where Saryati performed sacrificial rites, at which Indra appeared and drank Soma rasa, along with the Aswini Kumaras. And here Bhrigu's son of great tapasya became angry with Mahendra, and the mighty Chyavana paralysed Indra, and gained the princess Sukanya for his wife.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How did Chyavana paralyse the Deva of the six gunas, the scourge of Paka? Why did the Maharishi become angry with Indra? And how, O Brahmana, did Chyavana enable the Aswini Kumaras to drink the Soma rasa? I beg you, tell me about all this exactly as it happened.'

CANTO 122

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, "A son was born to the Maharishi Bhrigu, and he was called Chyavana. He was respelendent and sat in tapasya on the banks of the lake you see there. Pandava, Chyavana of great tejas sat in the posture called Vira; he sat quiet and still as a post, for a very long time, in the same place.

An anthill covered him, and creepers the hillock. Swarms of ants enveloped him, and he looked just like a mound of earth, but he continued his tapasya, lost to the world.

When a long time passed, King Saryati came to this fine lake for his amusement. With him, came four thousand women, his wives all, O Bhaarata! Also with him came his only daughter, Sukanya of the beautiful brows.

She wore jewels fit for the Apsaras, was surrounded by her sakhis, and while wandering here, came to the anthill inside which Bhrigu's son sat in dhyana. She looked around her, enchanted by the beauty of the place, the grand and lofty trees.

Ah, she was exquisite and in the prime of her youth. She was playful and began to break the twigs of the forest trees bearing blossoms. Bhrigu's son of awesome intelligence saw her roaming about bright like a streak of lightning, now having left her maids behind, and wearing just a single cloth and her ornaments.

The Muni was stricken with desire, and he called out to her in a low voice, but she did not hear him. Then she saw his eyes shining through the anthill, and not knowing what they were, and becoming curious, she pierced those eyes with a twig of thorns. From that searing pain of being blinded Chyavana in anger cursed Saryati and his party -freezing their bowels! Unable to answer the calls of nature, the men suffered direly.

Seeing their agony, the knowing king asked, "Who has offended the illustrious son of Bhrigu? He is old and always at tapasya, and he is wrathful. Tell me quickly if you know who has wronged him."

His soldiers replied, "We do not know who has wronged the Rishi. We ask you to inquire into this thing."

At which, using both menace and conciliation, Saryati asked his advisors and friends about what had happened, but they did not know anything either.

When Sukanya saw the distress of the army and her father aggrieved, she said, "Roving in the forest, I lighted upon this anthill and saw something shining inside it. Taking it for glowworms, I pierced the anthill with thorns."

Saryati immediately came to the anthill, and there he saw Bhrigu's son, old both in years and tapasya. With folded hands, the lord of the earth begged the Sage, "My daughter did this atrocious thing in ignorance and youth, it becomes you to forgive her."

Bhrigu's son Chyavana said, "Full of pride, she pierced my eyes. O King, I will forgive you only on one condition – that you give me your beautiful, ignorant and arrogant daughter for my wife."

Saryati never paused but bestowed Sukanya on Mahatama Chyavana. Now the holy one was pleased with the king and withdrew his curse. Having won the Rishi's grace, the king went home to his city, with his troops.

Having become the Muni's wife, the lovely Sukanya quickly proved herself to be dutiful – in tending to his needs, in keeping vows and practising austerities herself, in observing dharma. She was graceful, guileless and she worshipped her husband Chyanava, she looked after his guests, whenever they came, and she kept the sacred fire burning."

CANTO 123

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, "One day the Aswin twins saw Sukanya, when she had just finished bathing and she was naked. They approached her, who was as beautiful as the daughter of the king of the Devas, and they said, 'You of the shapely thighs, whose daughter are you? And what are you doing in this forest? Auspicious, most graceful one, tell us who you ae."

She replied shyly, "I am Saryati's daughter, and Chyavana's wife."

At which, the Aswins smiled, "Why, most fortunate one, has your father given you to a man who is near death? Ah, timid girl, you shine like lightning in this jungle. Why, not in Devaloka have we seen the likes of you. Even wearing no ornament and neither any costly garment, you light up this vana!

Still, faultless limbs, you cannot be as beautiful here as you would decked in every ornament and wearing gorgeous apparel. Why, exquisite one, do you serve a decrepit old husband, who is incapable of satisfying you or even maintaing you, O luminous smiles? Divine beauty, leave Chyavana and take one of us for your husband. You must not lay waste your youth."

Sukanya replied, "I am devoted to my husband, do not think for a moment that I would betray him."

They said to her, we are the Aswins, the legendary physicians of heaven. We will make your lord as young and handsome as ourselves, but then you must choose one among us to be your lord. Swear you will do this and having sworn go and fetch your husband here."

Rajan, Sukanya went and told Bhrigu's son what the Aswin Kumaras proposed. Chyavana Muni said to her, "Do as they ask."

She went back with him to the Aswins and said, "Do what you said."

They said, "Let your husband enter into this lake."

Chyavana, who wanted beauty and youth, quickly walked into the water. The twin Aswins also, O king, sank into the sheet of water. Next moment, all three emerged with surpassingly beautiful forms, and young, and wearing burnished earrings. But all three looked exactly alike, indistinguishable from one another.

They said to Sukanya, "Fortunate one, choose one of us to be your lord, whichever of us takes your fancy."

Finding all three of them identical, she deliberated; and at last her heart discovered who her husband was, and she chose him for her lord.

Having become young and radiantly handsome, and his wife having chosen him, as well, Chyavana of geat tejas was pleased and said to the Aswini Kumaras, those nose-born twins, "You have given me youth and beauty, and I will make you drink Soma rasa in the very presence of Indra. This I solemnly swear."

The Aswins were delighted and flew up into Devaloka. Chyavana and Sukanya passed their days in fine joy, even like a Deva and his wife.'

CANTO 124

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Now the news came to Saryati that Chyavana had been turned into a youth. Well pleased, he went with his troops to the hermitage of the son of Bhrigu. And he saw Chyavana and Sukanya, like Devas' children, and his joy and that of his wife were as great as if the king had conquered the whole world.

The Sage received the king and queen with honour. Saryati sat next to the Rishi, and entered into a happy and auspicious conversation with him.

Bhrigu's son said, "O King, perform a yagna at which I shall be the priest. Procure everything that we need for the sacrifice."

At which, Saryati was overjoyed and expressed whole-hearted approval. On an auspicious day, Saryati ordered a most excellent sacrificial shrine to be erected, provided with all that was needed for the yagna.

Chyavana, the son of Bhrigu, was the king's priest; and listen to the wonderful events which unfolded there. Chyavana took up some Soma rasa to offer it to the Aswini Kumaras, who are physicians to the Devas.

Even as the Rishi was doing this, Indra declared, "These Aswins have no right to receive an offering of the Soma rasa. They are the physicians to the Devas in heaven — their vocation does not permit them to drink the Soma."

Chyavana said, "These two are of mighty enterprise, possessed of mighty souls, and endowed with uncommon beauty and grace. Besides, Indra, they have given me eternal beauty, even as of a Deva. Why should you and the other Devas have a right to drink the Soma juice, and not they?

Lord of the Devas, Puranadara, know that the Aswins are also Devas!"

At this, Indra said, "These two practise the healing arts, they are but servants; assuming different forms at their pleasure they roam the world of mortal beings. How can they justly claim the juice of the Soma?"

Indra spoke these words again and again, but setting him at naught, Bhrigu's son still took up the offering he meant to make. As he was about to offer a sizeable portion of Soma rasa to the Aswins, Indra said, "If you offer the Soma to the Awins, I will burn you with my thunderbolt!"

But Chyavana only gave Indra a smile and took a a goodly portion of Soma rasa to offer it to the Aswins. Indra began to cast the dreadful Vajra as

the Sage, but found his arm frozen by Bhrigu's son.

Chyavana continued to chant mantras and made his offerings into the sacred fire. Through the Rishi's tapasakti, an evil spirit, an immense and mighty demon called Mada sprang forth from the flames. So great was he that neither the Devas nor the Asuras could measure his body.

His mouth was terrifying, chasmal, with rows of razor sharp teeth; one of his jaws rested on earth while the other stretched up into heaven. Four fangs he had, each a hundred yojanas, while his other teeth were ten yojanas each and like the towers of a palace, all pointed and sharp as spears.

The demon's arms were like hills, both of equal bulk, stretching ten thousand yojanas each. His two eyes resembled the sun and the moon; and the fire of his face rivalled the conflagration at the dissolution of the universe.

He licked his lips with his tongue like a gash of lightning, without pause; his maw gaped wide, his gaze was frightful, and it seemed that he meant to swallow the every earth.

This demon rushed at Indra of a thousand yagnas, and he meant to devour that Deva. The world rang with the terrifying roars of the Asura."

CANTO 125

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, "When Indra saw the Asura Mada, looking like Yama himself, rushing at him, jaws agape, certainly meaning to devour Lhim, whle the Deva's arms remained frozen, that god could only lick the corners of his mouth in terror.

Frightened past endurance, Indra cried to Chyavana, "O Bhargava,

O Brahmana, I swear to you in the name of truth itself that from today the Aswini Kumaras shall partake of the Soma rasa! Be merciful to me, for I can never forswear myself.

May your yagna be fruitful; these Aswins shall drink Soma rasa from now because you, most holy one, have entitled them to it. O Bhargava, I did all this to spread the renown of your powers, my purpose being to provide an occasion for their display. My other object was to spread the fame of Sukanya's father Saryati.

So be merciful to me."

Mahatama Chyavana's wrath was quickly appeased and he freed Indra from the spell that held the Deva frozen. As for the Asura Mada, whose name means intoxication, the Rishi divided the demon and put his spirit into drink, into women, into gambling, into field sport.

Having lessened Mada, Chyavana now gratified Indra with a draught of Soma and helped Saryati worship the entire host of Devas, and now the Aswins with them, equally, thereby truly covering the earth with the fame of that king. His yagna complete, Bhrigu's son, best among those blessed with speech, passed his days happily in the forest, in the company of Sukanya, his loving wife.

This is his lake, shining before you, O Yudhishtira, and echoing with the voices of birds. Here you and your brothers must offer tarpana to your Pitrs and to the Devas.

Sovereign of the earth, scion of Bharata, you must go to Sikataksha, as well, then to the Saindhava vana, where you will find a number of small rivers and lakes. You must touch the waters of all these, while chanting mantras to Lord Siva; and so you will find success in every endeavour of yours.

For this is the conjunction of two yugas, the Dwapara and the Kali. It is a time, O Kaunteya, in which a man's every sin can be destroyed.

Perform ablutions here, for this place can take all his sins from a man. And yonder is the Archika hill, where men of evolved souls live; fruit of all seasons grow here perennially and the streams run always full.

Why, this is a place fit for the Devas and indeed they have erected various holy images of diverse forms, which you see. Look, Yudhishtira, here the gods built the bathing tank of the Moon.

Rishis dwell here on every side, in the forest, as do the Balakhilyas and the Pavakas, who live just on air. Here are three peaks and three springs; you can walk around them in pradakshina, one by one; then you may bathe at your leisure.

Santanu, and Sunaka, the sovereign of men, and both Nara and Narayana attained everlasting realms from this place. Here the gods constantly come, as also the manes, together with the greatest sages.

All of them have performed tapasya upon this Archika Parvata. Sacrifice to them, Yudhishtira; here the Devas and the Rishis eat payasa.

And here is the Yamuna, her spring exhaustless; here Krishna sat in tapasya. O Pandava, you who drag the dead bodies of your enemies across the ground, the twins, Bhimasena, Panchali and all of us will come with you to the river.

Lord of men, this is the holy spring that belongs to Indra. Here Varuna Deva also rose up, and here they sat with faith, in dhyana. This sacred hill welcomes kindly and honest folk. This is Yamuna of renown, frequented by hosts of mighty sages, and the setting for diverse religious rituals; she is most holy and destroys the fear of sin.

Here Mandhata himself, of the mighty bow, performed yagnas to the gods; and so did Somaka, the son of Sahadeva, and a most munificent giver of gifts."

CANTO 126

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, "Great Brahmana, how was that tiger among kings, Mandhata, Yuvanaswa's son, born, that best of monarchs, celebrated across the three worlds? And how did he of unmeasured lustre attain the very pinnacle of regal power, since all the three worlds were as much under his subjection as they are under that of Vishnu of mighty soul?

I am eager to hear all about the life and achievements of that Rajarishi. I would also like to hear how he was named Mandhata, he whose lustre rivalled that of Indra himself. Tell me also how he was born, for you are a master of narration."

Lomasa says, "Listen attentively, Rajan, to how the name of Mandhata, of the great soul, came to be celebrated throughout all the worlds. Yuvanaswa, ruler of the earth, was born into Ikshvaku's race. That protector of the world performed many sacrifices, noted for their magnificent gifts.

A thousand times, that most virtuous of men performed the Aswamedha yagna. He also performed other sacrifices of the highest order, wherein he gave abundant daana. But that saintly king had no son; and he of mighty soul and rigid vows made over the duties of the state to his ministers, and went away to dwell in the forest.

There, he undertook a stern tapasya during which, once, he kept a fast. Pangs of hunger tormented him and his very soul seemed parched with thirst. In this state, he came to the asrama of Bhrigu. That same night, king of kings, the Maharishi who was the joy of Bhrigu's race had overseen a sacrifice devoted to a son being born to Saudyumni.

In the place where the rituals had been performed stood a great urn filled with holy water, consecrated with mantras; and that water was imbued with the virtue that when Saudyumni's wife drank it she would give birth to a godlike son. Those great Sages had left the blessed water on the altar and had gone to sleep, for they were exhausted after the nightlong ritual.

As Yuvanaswa passed by them, his mouth was dry, and he was in the grip of an agony of thirst; ah, he was desperate for a drink of water. The king entered that hermitage and asked for water, but his voice was feeble

with weakness, and coming from an arid throat the sound he made was like the inarticulate cry of a bird. Nobody heard him.

Then the king saw the jar full of water and he ran to it, and drank deeply, thirstily, emptying the vessel. The water was cool and appeased his thirst. Then, the Rishis there awoke and found that the jar of water had been disturbed from its place and it was empty.

They gathered together and asked who had drunk the water, at which Yuvanaswa confessed that it had been he. The revered son of Bhrigu said to him, 'It was not right. This water was infused with an occult siddhi and had been placed there so that a son could be born to you. I invested the water with the power of my tapasya.

Mighty Rajarishi, you would have had a son of great strength and valour, why a prince who could have despatched even Indra to Yamaloka. So much power had I infused into this water, and now look what you have done.

It is impossible to undo what has been done, and surely what you did was fate's own fiat. Great king, you were thirsty and you drank the water consecrated by my mantras of power and blessed with the punya of my tapasya; there is only one course ahead – you must bring forth the splendid child I have described from your own body!

We will perform a sacrifice to that end, of wonderful effect, and brave as you are, you will bring forth a son as great as Indra. Nor will you experience any pain of labour.'

When a hundred years passed, a son brilliant as Surya burst out from the king's left side, and he was mighty indeed; and neither did Yuvanaswa die, which was also strange.

Indra came to visit the child and the Devas asked great Indra, 'What will this boy suck to feed?'

Indra put his own forefinger into the child's mouth and the Vajradhari said, 'Mandhata – me he shall suckle on.'

The dwellers of heaven and Indra as well named the boy Mandhata. He tasted Indra's forefinger and grew instantly to be thirteen yojanas, and he was incomparably powerful. Rajan, the prince acquired all sacred knowledge, all the Shastras, along with the holy science of arms, just through the power of his thought and intuition, unassisted.

That same day, the renowned bow Ajagava and a host of arrows made of horn, an impenetrable coat of armour, all these came magically into his possession! Indra himself set Mandhata on the throne and that king

conquered the three worlds, always with dharma, even as Vishnu did with his three strides.

Mandhata's chariot was inexorable on its course through the world; and the greatest jewels came of their own accord into that Rajarishi's keep.

Lord of the earth, this is Mandhata's land; it abounds in wealth. Here he performed a number of diverse yagnas, during which vast bounties were given to the officiating priests.

Mandhata of immense power and measureless lustre erected sacred shrines, performed countless deeds of untold piety, and he attained the honour of sitting by Indra's side.

That wise king of dharma sent forth his command and just by its virtue conquered the earth, together with the sea—source of gems—and all the cities of the world. The yagnashalas that he made covered the very face of Bhumi, on all sides.

That great sovereign gave ten thousand padmas of cows to Brahmanas. Once, there came a drought of twelve years and Mandhata made it rain over the parched earth, while Indra could not prevent it but only stared.

Mandhata slew the powerful Gandhara king, born into the House of the Moon, who was dreadful like a thundercloud full of lightning and who wounded Mandhata sore with arrows.

Rajan, he led a virtuous and austere life and with his untold might protected the worlds from all evil, and nurtured the four varnas equally. This is where, lustrous like the Sun, he sacrificed to God. Look at the place – here it is, in the very midst of the field of the Kurus, holiest of holies!

Master of the world, I have told you how Mandhata was born, extraordinarily, and also about his magnificent life."

Yudhishtira immediately asks Lomasa fresh questions, now about Somaka.

CANTO 127

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, "O best of masters, how strong and powerful was King Somaka? I want to hear a detailed account of his might and his deeds."

Lomasa says, "Yudhishtira, Somaka was a most virtuous king. He had a hundred wives, all chaste and noble, but he did not have a son by any of them, for a long, long time.

Then one day, when he had become old, a son was born to him, and called Jantu. All day long, the prince's hundred mothers would sit around their child, every one giving him whatever he wanted or whetever they thought would please him.

One day, an ant stung the boy on his leg and he screamed. His mothers were so distressed that they stood around him and set up a chorus of cries of their own – a tumult of shrieks.

That great outcry reached the ears of the king, where he sat in his court among his ministers, with his family priest at his side. He sent forth to discover what had caused the agitation. A royal guard brought him the news of how his son had been bitten by an ant.

Somaka rose and, with his ministers, hurried to the antahpura, and there he tenderly comforted his child, Parantapa.

When the prince grew quiet, the king came out from his harem and sat again in his sabha with his family priest and his council of ministers.

Somaka said sombrely, 'Fie on having a single son! I had rather been a sonless man, for if one thinks of how vulnerable to sickness all men are, to have just one son is only a trouble and a heartache.

O Brahmana, I married a hundred wives so that I might have many sons. But they gave me none, until at last this single boy was born, this prince Jantu.

What grief can be greater than this? Dvijottama, I have grown old and so have my wives; yet, this child is like our very prana, our life-breath. But, tell me now, is there any yagna, performing which one can get a hundred sons? Tell me if the sacrifice is great or small, easy to perform or difficult.'

The family priest, the kulaguru, said, "There is indeed a yagna by which a man may get a hundred sons. If you can perform it, O Somaka, I will

explain it to you.'

Somaka said, 'Whether it be a good or an evil rite, take it that I have already performed the yagna for a hundred sons. Explain it to me.'

The Brahmana said, 'I will begin a yagna and at it you must sacrifice your son Jantu. Then, very soon, you will have a hundred splendid sons. When Jantu's fat is offered into the fire to the gods, the queens must inhale the smoke of the burning flesh and they will bring forth a hundred radiant princes, brave and powerful. Why, and Jantu himself will be born again, of himself, svaymbhuva, and upon his back there will be a golden mark.'

CANTO 128

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Somaka said, 'Brahmana, do whatever you must. I want to have many sons and I will do as you say.'

The priest commenced the sacrifice at which Jantu was to be the offering. But the hundred wailing mothers snatched at their son and tried to save him.

'Ah, we are lost!' they cried, and held the boy's right arms, but the priest snatched him back, while the queens screamed like female ospreys. The Brahmana killed Jantu and offered his flesh as havis, the burnt offering into the sacred agni.

Kurunandana, while the prince's fat burned, the agonised mothers whiffed its smell and fell in a swoon all together. At once, all those women became pregnant, and when ten months passed they delivered a hundred sons to Somaka.

Lord of the earth, Jantu was also born again, to his own mother, and he was the eldest of the hundred princes and the most beloved of all his mothers; not so their own sons. And upon his back there was the mark of gold, and of those hundred sons he was the superior one.

Somaka's kulaguru left this world after a time, and so did that king. After they died, Somaka saw his priest being tortured with fire in a dreadful hell.

Somaka asked him, 'Why are you being roasted in this naraka?

In searing pain, the priest gasped, 'This is my punishment for performing that sacrifice for you.'

Rajarishi Somaka said to Dharmaraja, who punishes dead sinners, 'Lord, free my priest. I am to blame for the torment he suffers; burn me in the fire instead.'

Dharmaraja replied, 'No one can suffer for another's sins or enjoy the fruit of anyone else's good deeds. Look, here is the fruit of all the punya you have done.'

Somaka said, 'Without this, I have no wish to go to the blessed realms. I want to remain with this man, either in heaven or here in hell, for I have done what he has and we should share an identical fate.'

Dharmaraja said, 'O King, if this is what you want, then taste the fruit of his sin for the same time that he does. After that you will find the realms of heaven.'

That lotus-eyed king did exactly that, and when his sins were paid for he and his kulaguru were set free together. Fond as Somaka was of his priest, he shared all the fruit of his punya, his great good deeds, with the Brahmana.

This is his enchanting asrama, which is so lovely before your eyes. Anyone who spends six nights here, with his passions controlled, will attain the blessed realms of heaven. King of kings, let us rid ourselves of all excitations, and spend six nights in this sacred place!'

CANTO 129

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'O King, in this place Narayana himself performed a sacrifice of old, the yagna called Ishtikrita, which lasted a thousand years.

Nabhaga's son Ambarisha sacrificed near the Yamuna river; and he gave away ten padmas of gold coins to the attendant priests; and he attained the final felicity through sacrifices and austerities.

Kaunteya, this is the place Nahusha's son, Yayati, lord of all the world, man of dharma, his power measureless, performed his sacrifice. He was as mighty as Indra and performed his yagna here. Look how the ground is strewn with fire pits of diverse kinds, and how the earth seems to subside here under the weight of Yayati's pieties.

Look, here is the Sami tree, which has just one leaf, and look at this sparkling lake. Why, behold all these lakes of Parasurama, and the asrama of Narayana. Rajan, here is the path that Richaka's son of untold tejas trod, who ranged over the world, and practised rites of yoga in the river Raupya.

Kurunandana, listen to what a Pisachi, who wore pestles for her ornaments, said to a Brahmana woman, as I once sat here chanting the timeless lineages.

Having eaten curd in Yugandhara, and stayed in Achutasthala, and also bathed in Bhutalaya, you must remain here with your brothers. Having passed one night here, if you stay another, what happens during the night will be very different from the events of the day, O most righteous of Bharata's race.

We will spend tonight here; this is the threshold of Kurukshetra, field of the Kurus. In this very place did Nahusha's son Yayati perform a yagna and gave gifts of a bounty of gemstones. Indra was pleased with those sacred rites.

This is a most auspicious tirtha along the Yamuna, called Plakshava-tarana, the descent of the banyan tree. Evolved men call it the entrance to Swarga. Here the greatest Rishis performed the sacrificial rites of the Saraswata king, using the sacrificial stake for their pestle, and when the sacrifice ended they performed their ablutions in the river.

Rajan, King Bharata undertook his sacrifice here, sending forth the sacrificial horse for his Aswamedha yagna, the animal which would be sacrificed. Through dharma that king won sovereignty over the earth by righteousness. The horses that he sent forth, many times, were mottled with black.

Purushvyaghra, it was here that Samvarta, greatest among Rishis, helped Marutta perform his renowned yagnas.

Bathing in this tirtha one can see into all the worlds, and is purified of all one's sins. Therefore, you, too, must bathe here, Yudhishtira.'

Yudhishtira, best of Pandu's sons, bathes there with his brothers while the mighty Munis chant his praises.

Yudhishtira says to Lomasa, 'O Rishi whose power is dharma, bathing here I see all the worlds! Ah, from here I see Arjuna, who rides the white charger!'

Lomasa says, 'Mahabaho, the greatest Rishis see all realms even so! This is holy Saraswati, thronged by those that regard her as their sole refuge. You have bathed here and you shall be free of all your sins.

Kaunteya, the Devarishis performed sacrifices for the Saswata king here, as did the Rishis and Rajarishis. This is the Vedi of Brahma Prajapati, extending five yojanas on every side. And this is the field of the magnificent Kurus, who always undertake great yagnas.'

CANTO 130

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Bhaarata, if any of the mortals breathes their last here, they find Swarga. Thousands upon thousands of men come to this place to die. Daksha pronounced a blessing on this place, while he performed his yagna here, saying, "Whoever dies in this place will win a place in Swarga."

Look at this beautful and sacred Saraswati full of crystalline water; and here, lord of men, is Vinasana, where the Saraswati disappeared. Here is the gate of the kingdom of the Nishadas and it is from hatred for them that the Saraswati entered into the earth, so that the Nishadas might not see her.

Here, too, is the sacred land of Chamasodbheda, where the Saraswati became visible to them again. And here she is joined by other sacred rivers flowing seawards. Parantapa, here is the sacred Sindhu — where Lopamudra accepted the Maharishi Agastya for her lord; and, you of sunlike lustre, here is the holy tirtha Prabhasa, which Indra favours and which removes all sins.

Yonder is Vishnupada, and here is the sacred river Vipasa. Grieftsricken at the death of his sons, Maharishi Vasistha bound himsef hand and foot and cast himself into this river. But he rose out of the waters and was unfettered.

Look, O king, with your brothers, at the sacred land of Kasmira, frequented by holy sages. Here, O scion of Bharata, is the place where Agni Deva and Maharishi Kasyapa conferred; and also Nahusha's son and the sages of the north.

Yonder, Kshatriya, is the gateway to the Manasa-sarovara, where Sri Rama opened a gap in the mountain with his astra. And there is the renowned realm of Vatikhashanda, which, although adjacent to the gate of Videha, lies to its north.

There is something else very remarkable about this place- that on the waning of every yuga, the Lord Siva, who can assume any form at will, can be seen here with Uma and his ganas.

In the holy lake, also, those wanting the weal of their familes worship Siva Pinakin with sacrifices during the month of Chaitra. Devoted folk, their passions restrained, who bathe in the Manasa-sarovara are freed from their sins, and attain the holy realms.

And here is the tirtha called Ujjanaka, where the Maharishi Vasistha, his wife Arundhati and also the Muni Yavakri found peace.

Yonder is the lake Kusava, where the lotuses called Kusesaya grow; and here also is the sacred hermitage of Rukmini, where she attained mukti, after conquering that evil passion, anger.

I think, O prince, that you have heard something about that mountain of meditation, Bhrigutunga; look, that is the lofty peak. And there is Vitasta, the sacred stream that absolves men from all sins; its water is cool and limpid, and used mainly by the great sages.

Kshatriya, behold the holy rivers Jala and Upajala, on either side of the Yamuna. By performing a sacrifice here, king Usinara surpassed Indra himself in greatness; wanting to test Usinaras merit and also wanting to bestow boons on him, Indra and Agni came to his yagnashala.

Indra took the form of a hawk, and Agni that of a pigeon, and they flew to the king. In apparent fear of the hawk, the pigeon fell upon the king's thigh, seeking his protection.'

CANTO 131

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"The hawk said, "The kings of the earth all say that you are a righteous sovereign. Why, O Kshatriya, have you stooped to this adharma? I am afflicted with hunger, do not keep me from my prey which God has given me to be my food. You think that you serve dharma by this, while, in fact, you forsake it."

The king said, "Best of avians, this pigeon is terrified of you and for its life. It has flown to me to escape you, and to beg for its life. How do you not see that my highest dharma is to give it my protection?

It trembles in fear and I would surely find sin if I abandon it. He that slays a Brahmana, he that slaughters a cow—the common mother of all the worlds—and he that forsakes one seeking protection are equally sinful."

The hawk replied, "O King, all beings live through food, which nourishes and sustains them. A man can live long even after relinquishing what is dearest to him, but he cannot live without food.

If you deprive me of my food, my life will leave this body and find realms where such troubles are unknown. But at my death, pious king, my mate and children will also surely perish, and by protecting this single pigeon, you will take many lives.

The virtue that stands in the way of another virtue is certainly no virtue at all, but in reality is sin. O King, whose prowess consists of truth, only the dharma which does not conflict with a greater dharma is worthy of being called dharma. Compare the conflicting costs in lives; you should not do what you mean to. Take the course of the lesser evil."

The king said, "O best of birds, you speak words fraught with wisdom, and I suspect that you are Suparna, monarch of birds. I have no hesitation in declaring that you are fully conversant with the ways of dharma. You disclose wonders about dharma so that I must believe there is nothing that you do not know about it.

So, then, how can you say that abandoning a creature that seeks my protection is dharma? Sky ranger, you are in quest of food; surely, you can assuage your hunger with some other food, more copious than this pigeon. I

am willing to procure any kind of food for you, which is even more to your taste, even if it be an ox, or a boar, or a deer, or a buffalo."

There hawk said, "Great king, I have have no wish to eat a boar or an ox or any other animal; they are not my natural prey. So, O bull among Kshatriyas, give me this pigeon that heaven has ordained to be my meal today, for, that hawks will eat pigeons is the law of nature. Do not cling to a plantain tree for support, O king; it is not strong enough to support you."

The king said, " Sky rover, I will give you this rich kingdom of my race, or anything else you want; anything other than this pigeon, which has flown to me for my protection. Ah, tell me what I should do to save this bird because I do not mean to give him to you under any circumstance."

The hawk said, "Rajan, if you have such love for this pigeon, then cut off some of your own flesh and weigh it upon a scale until it equals the pigeon's weight. And when it does, give me that flesh and I will be satisfied."

The king said, "I will do so gladly and consider this a favour to me.

The Rajarishi Usinara cut off some of his flesh and weighed it in a balance against the pigeon. He found the pigeon heavier and cut off another piece of his flesh, and still the bird weighed more. Portion after portion of his flesh he cut and added but the scale remained tilted on the side of the bird.

At last there was no flesh left upon Usinaras body and he mounted the scale himself.

Now the hawk said, "King of dharma, I am Indra and the pigeon is Agni, who bears the havis to the gods. We came to your yagnashala to test your merit. You cut all the flesh from your body and your glory shall be resplendent, and will surpass that of all others in the world.

As long as men speak of you, your glory will endure and you will dwell in Swarga, in the holiest realms."

Saying this to the king, Indra flew up into Devaloka. And, after having filled heaven and earth with the punya of his great and pious deeds, Usinara also ascended into heaven in a radiant form.

Look, O King, at the asrama of that noblest-hearted sovereign. Here the Devas and Maharishis come, along with the purest Brahmanas.'

CANTO 132

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'And look here, lord of men, at the holy asrama of Uddalaka's son Swetaketu, whose fame as an expert in the sacred mantras is spread across earth. Coconut trees grace this hermitage. Here Swetaketu saw the Goddess Saraswati in her human shape, and said to her, "Bless me with the gift of speech!"

In that yuga, Swetaketu, the son of Uddalaka, and Ashtavakra, the son of Kahoda, who were uncle and nephew, were the greatest masters of the sacred lore. Those two Brahmanas, of matchless tejas, went to King Janaka's yagnasala and bested Vandin in a debate.

Kaunteya, you and your brothers worship the holy asrama of him whose grandson was Ashtavakra, who, even as a child, drowned Vandin in a river, after having vanquished him in a metaphysical debate.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Lomasa, all about the power of this man, who vanquished Vandin. Why was he born as Ashtavakra, crooked in eight parts of his body?'

Lomasa says, 'The Rishi Uddalaka had a disciple named Kahoda, of subdued passions, and entirely devoted to the service of his guru, who had studied long. The Brahmana had served his master for many years, and recognising his service, his preceptor gave him his own daughter, Sujata, in marriage, as well as a mastery over the Shastras.

And she conceived a child, radiant as fire.

One night, while his father was reading the scriptures aloud, the child spoke from his mother's womb, "Father, you have been reading all night but it seems to me that not everything you recite is correct. Through your study, I have become versed in the Shastras and the Vedas, and their Angas. I say to you that what comes from your mouth is inaccurate."

Insulted in the presence of his disciples, the Maharishi cursed the child in the womb in anger, "Because you speak even from the womb, you shall be crooked in eight parts of your body!"

The child was born crooked, and he was known as Ashtavakra. Now, he had an uncle named Swetaketu who was the same age as himself.

Anxious about the child growing in her, one day Sujata said to her impoverished husband, "Maharishi, the tenth month of my pregnancy is near. You have nothing to sustain us once our child is born."

Kahoda Muni went to King Janaka for wealth. In that Rajarishi's court, Vandin, master of dialectics, defeated Kahoda in a debate and drowned him in a river. Hearing of this, Uddalaka said to his daughter Sujata, "You must keep this secret from Ashtavakra."

She did so, and when Ashtavakra was born, he heard nothing about the matter; and he regarded Uddalaka as his father and Swetaketu as his brother. One day, when Ashtavakra was in his twelfth year, Swetaketu saw him sitting in Uddalaka's lap and pulled him roughly down.

Ashtavakra began to cry and Swetaketu said, "It isn't your father's lap!"

Ashtavakra was devastated. He went home and asked his mother, "Where is my father?"

Sujata was stricken by his question and she was also afraid that he might curse her; she told him what had happened.

At night Ashtavakra said to his uncle Swetaketu, "Let us go to the sacrifice of King Janaka, where we might see many wonderful things. We will listen to the debate between the Brahmanas and partake of excellent food. Our knowledge will increase. The recitation of the sacred Vedas is sweet to hear and is fraught with blessings."

Uncle and nephew went to Janaka's splendid sacrifice. Upon being turned away from the entrance to the yagnasala, Ashtavakra spoke to the great king inside.'

CANTO 133

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

'Ashtavakra said, "Where no Brahmana is encountered, the right of way belongs to the blind, the deaf, the women, carriers of burden, and the king. But when a Brahmana is on the way, the path belongs to him alone.'

King Janaka said, "I give you the right to enter; go in by whichever entrance you choose. No fire, be it ever so small, is to be slighted. Even Indra bows to the Brahmanas."

Ashtavakra said, "Ruler of men, we have come to witness your sacrifice and our curiosity is greát. Besides we have come here as guests, sadasyas; we want your permission to enter. And, O son of Indradyumna, we have come to meet King Janaka and to speak to him. But your gatekeeper obstructs us and for this our anger burns us like fever."

The gatekeeper said, "We carry out the orders of Vandin. Listen to what I have to say. Boys are not allowed to enter here, only learned old Brahmanas."

Ashtavakra said. "If this is the condition, dwarapalaka, that the door is open only to those that are old, then we have a right to enter. We are old and we have observed sacred vratas and possess energy which comes from the Vedas. We have served our elders and subdued our passions, and have mastered the scriptures.

It is said that even boys are not to be slighted, for a fire, small though it be, burns on being touched."

The gatekeeper replied, "Young Brahmana, I consider you a boy. But if you are a gyani, then recite, if you know it, the mantra that demonstrates the existence of the Supreme Being, the hymn adored by the Devarishis, which, although composed of one letter, is yet multifarious. Make no vain boast, learned men are really very rare."

Ashtavakra said, "True growth cannot be inferred from the mere development of the body, even as the growth of the knots of the Salmali tree cannot signify its age. That tree is full-grown, which although slender and short, bears fruits, while the tree, however large, which does not bear fruit, is not mature."

The gatekeeper said, "Boys receive instruction from the old and in time they also grow old. Knowledge certainly cannot be attained in a short time. Why, then, being a child, do you talk like an old man?"

Ashtavakra said, "One is not old because his head is grey. But the gods regard him as old who, although a child in years, is yet possessed of knowledge. The sages have not laid down that a man's merit consists in years, or grey hair, or wealth, or friends. To us, he is great who is versed in the Vedas.

I have come here, O gatekeeper, to see Vandin in the sabha. Go and inform King Janaka, who has a garland of lotuses around his neck that I am here. Today you will see me enter into dispute with all the learned men, and defeat Vandin in a debate. And when the rest have been silenced, the Brahmanas of mature learning and the king also, with his principal priests, shall bear witness to the superior or the inferior quality of my attainments."

The dwarapalaka said, "You are just ten; how can you hope to enter this yagnasala? Only great scholars can go in here. But I will try to let you in, and you yourself also try."

Then Ashtavakra said to the king, "O Janaka, best of your race, you are the greatest sovereign and all power reposes in you. In times of old, King Yayati was the celebrator of sacrifices, and in this yuga you.

We have heard that the learned Vandin bests the most expert debators and then has your loyal servats drown them. Hearing this, I have come to these Brahmanas, to expound the doctrine of the unity of the Brahman.

Where is Vandin? Tell me so that I can face him, and eclipse him even as the sun does the stars."

Janaka said, "Brahmana, you hope to defeat Vandin without knowing his power of speech. None who knows his powers will dare say what you do. The greatsest masters of the Veda have faced and been vanquished by him; you only say what you do because you do not know how mighty he is.

So many Brahmanas have wilted before him even as the stars before the sun. Countless scholars, arrogant of their learning, merely saw Vandin and lost all their pride. They left my sabha, shamed, without uttering a word."

Ashtavakra said, "Vandin has never debated against a man like me; only so does he look upon himself as a lion, and goes about roaring like one. But meeting me today he will fall dead, even like a cart whose wheels have come loose on a highway."

The king said, "Only he is a truly learned man who understands the significance of the thing that has thirty divisions, twelve parts, twenty-four joints, and three hundred and sixty spokes."

Ashtavakra said, "May that ever-moving wheel that has twenty-four joints, six naves, twelve peripheries, and sixty spokes protect you!"[1]

The king said, "Who amongst the gods bears those two which go together like two mares yoked to a chariot, and sweep like one hawk, and to what also do they give birth?"

Ashtavakra said, "May God, O king, forfend the presence of these two[2] in your house; yes, even in the house of your enemies. He who appears, having the wind for his charioteer,[3] begets them, and they also produce him."

Thereupon the king said, "What does not close its eyes even while sleeping; what is it that does not move, even when born; what is it that has no heart; and what increases even in its own speed?"

Ashtavakra said, "It is a fish[4] that does not shut its eye-lids while sleeping; and it is an a egg[5] that does not move when born; it is stone[6]that hath no heart; and it is a river[7] that increases in its own speed."

The king said, "It seems, O Tejasvin, that you are no human being. I do not consider you a boy, but a matured man; there is no other man who can compare with you in the art of speech. I therefore give you admittance. There is Vandin." '

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[1] This wheel is the wheel of Time—i.e., measured according to the solar, lunar and astral revolutions. The significance of Ashtavakra's reply is: May the meritorious deeds performed at proper times during the revolution of this wheel of Time protect you.

[2] Thunder and lightning or misery and death.

[3] The male being that is ever conscious.

[4] Cloud or the mind.

[5] The mundane egg.

[6] The soul that has renounced connection with the body.

[7] The heart of a *Yogi*.

CANTO 134

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

'Ashtavakra said, "O king, O leader of fierce legions, in this assembly of monarchs of unrivalled power who have met together, I cannot recognise Vandin, master of the controversialists. But I am searching for him, even as one does for a swan on a vast expanse of water.

O Vandin, you regard yourself as the foremost of debators; yet, when you debate against me you will hardly flow like the current of a river. I am like a fire in full flame. Be silent before me, Vandin! Do not awaken a sleeping tiger. Know that you will not escape unstung, after trampling on the head of a venomous snake licking the corners of its mouth with its tongue. That weak man who, in pride of strength, attempts to strike a blow at a mountain, only gets his hands and nails broken, but no wound is left on the mountain itself.

As the other mountains are inferior to the Mainaka, and as calves are inferior to the ox, so are all other kings of the earth inferior to the lord of Mithila. And as Indra is the foremost of Devas, and as the Ganga is the best of rivers, so you alone are, O king, the greatest of monarchs. O king, have Vandin brought into my presence."

O Yudhishtira, when Vandin stood forth, Ashtavakra thundered at him in wrath, "You answer my questions, and I will answer yours!"

Vandin said, "Only one fire blazes forth in various shapes; only one sun illumines this whole world; only one hero, Indra, the lord of the Devas, destroys all enemies; and only one Yama is the sole lord of the Pitrs."[1]

Ashtavakra said, "The two friends, Indra and Agni, ever move together; the two Devarishis are Narada and Parvata; the twins are the Aswini kumaras; two is the number of the wheels of a chariot; and it is as a couple that husband and wife live together, as ordained by God."[2]

Vandin said, "Three kinds of born beings are produced by acts; the three Vedas together perform the Vajapeya; at three different times, the Adhwaryas commence sacrificial rites; three is the number of worlds; and three also are the divine lights."[3]

Ashtavakra said, "Four are the Asramas of the Brahmanas; the four varnas perform sacrifices; four are the cardinal points; four is the number of letters; and four also, as is ever known, are the legs of a cow."[4]

Vandin said, "Five is the number of fires; five are the feet of the metre called Punki; five are the sacrifices; five locks, it is said in the Vedas, are on the heads of the Apsaras; and five sacred rivers are known in the world."[5]

Ashtavakra said, "Some assert that six cows are given while first lighting the sacred fire; six are the seasons belonging to the wheel of time; six is the number of the senses; six stars constitute the constellation Kirtika; and six, it is found in all the Vedas, is the number of the Sadyaska sacrifice."[6]

Vandin said, "Seven is the number of the domesticated animals; seven are the wild animals; seven metres are used in completing a sacrifice; seven are the Rishis; there are seven forms of paying homage in the world; and seven, it is known, are the strings of the Vina."

Ashtavakra said, "Eight are the bags containing a hundred fold; eight are the legs of the Sarabha, which preys upon lions; eight Vasus, as we hear, are amongst the Devas; and eight are the angles of the yupastamba in all sacrificial rites."[7]

Vandin said, "Nine is the number of the mantras used in kindling the fire in sacrifices to the Pitrs; nine are the appointed functions in the processes of creation; nine letters compose the foot of the metre, Brihati; and nine is also always the number of the figures in calculation."[8]

Ashtavakra said, "Ten are the cardinal points, entering into the cognition of men in this world; ten times hundred make up a thousand; ten is the number of months of a woman's gestation; and ten are the teachers of true knowledge, and ten, the haters thereof, and ten again are those capable of learning it."[9]

Vandin said, "Eleven are the objects that beings can enjoy; eleven is the number of the yupas; eleven are the changes of the natural state of those that have life; and eleven are the Rudras among the gods in heaven."[10]

Ashtavakra said, "Twelve months compose the year; of twelve consists a foot of the metre Jagati; twelve are the minor sacrifices; and twelve, according to the learned, is the number of the Adityas."[11]

Vandin said, "Unaffected by happiness and misery, the Paramatman does exist, but His existence is not susceptible of being proved, nor can the ignorant ever perceive Him. Men attain that condition through these twelve

- virtue, truth, self-restraint, penance, good-will, modesty, forgiveness, freedom from envy, sacrifice, charity, concentration and control over the senses.

The thirteenth lunar day is considered the most auspicious; thirteen islands exist on earth."[12]Saying this much, Vandin stopped; he could not go on. Ashtavakra completed the sloka, "Thirteen sacrifices are presided over by Kesi; and thirteen are devoured by Atichhandas, the longer metres, of the Veda."[13]

And seeing Ashtavakra speaking and the Suta's son silent and pensive, and with his head hung down, the assembly broke into a loud uproar. Delighted, the Brahmanas at king Janaka's splendid sacrifice rose as a man, and, with folded hands, paid Ashtavakra homage."

Ashtavakra said, "Before today, this man would best all Brahmanas in debate and cast them into water. Let Vandin meet the same fate today. Seize him and drown him in water!"

Vandin said, "O Janaka, I am the son of King Varuna. Simultaneously with your sacrifice, there also began another twelve years' yagna. It was to that sacrifice that I despatched the principal Brahmanas; they have gone to witness Varuna's sacrifice.

Look! There they are returning. I pay homage to the worshipful Ashtavakra, by whose grace today I shall join him who begot me."

Ashtavakra said, "Defeating the Brahmanas either with straight debate or sophistry, Vandin had cast them into the waters of the sea. That Vedic truth which he had suppressed by false arguments I rescued by dint of my intellect today.

Now let honest men judge. As Agni, who knows the character of both the good and the bad, leaves the bodies of those whose designs are honest, untouched by his heat, and is thus partial to them, so, too, good men judge the assertions of boys, and are favourably disposed towards them.

O Janaka, you listen to me as if you have been stupefied by eating the fruit of the Sleshmataki tree; as if flattery has robbed you of your good sense; and this seems why, although my words pierce as hooks do an elephant, you do not heed them."

Janaka said, "Listening to you, I find your words extraordinary, more than merely human. Your form is also superhuman. You have vanquished Vandin in debate and I put him at your disposal."

Ashtavakra said, "O king, Vandin remaining alive will serve no purpose of mine. If Varuna really is his father, let Vandin be drowned in the sea."

Vandin said, "I am King Varuna's son. I have no fear of being drowned. Even at this moment, Ashtavakra shall see his long-lost sire, Kahoda."

Then all the dead Brahmanas appeared before Janaka, after having been duly worshipped by the magnanimous Varuna.

Kahoda said, "It is for this, O Janaka, that men pray for sons, by performing deeds of punya. That in which I failed has been achieved by my son. Weak persons may have sons endowed with strength; fools can have intelligent sons; and the illiterate may have learned sons."

Vandin said, "It is with your sharpened axe, O monarch, that even Yama severs the heads of foes. May prosperity attend upon you! In this sacrifice of King Janaka, the principal hymns of the Uktha rites are being chanted, and the Soma rasa is also being amply quaffed. And the gods themselves come to accept their sacred shares of the sacrifice, with joyful hearts."

When the dead Brahmanas rose up, their splendour enhanced, Vandin took his leave of King Janaka and entered into the waters of the sea.

Then Ashtavakra worshipped his father, and he himself was worshipped by the Brahmanas. And thus having defeated the Suta's son, Ashtavakra returned to his own fine hermitage, and his uncle with him.

Then, in the presence of his mother, his father said to him, "Hurry, son, and enter this river, Samanga."

Ashtavakra did so, and as he submerged himself beneath the water all his crooked limbs were instantly made straight. And from that day

that river is called Samanga and she became invested with the virtue of purifying. He that bathes in her is set free from his sins.

Therefore, O Yudhishtira, do you, with your brothers and wife, enter the river and perform your ablutions in her. Kaunteya, scion of the race of Ajamidha, we will remain here with the Brahmanas, and you will perform other deeds of punya with me, for you are bent upon doing good.'

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[1] Ashtavakra comes to Janaka's sacrifice with the object of proving the unity of the Supreme Being. Vandin avails himself of various System of Philosophy to combat his opponent. The iterative form of

the dialogue is unique in being that of enigmas, and the latent meaning is in a queer way hidden under the appearance of puerile and heterogeneous combinations of things.

Vandin opens the debate by saying that as the number of each of these is one, so one only intellect is the lord, leader and guide of the senses.

2 There is a Vedic revelation that two birds live together on a tree as friends—one of these eats the fruits and the other looks at the former. From this it is manifest that these two are the lords, leaders and guides of the senses. That there is a second faculty besides the intellect is also proved by the fact that in sleep when the intellect is inactive that faculty continues in action, for if it were not so we could not remember having slept, nor connect the state after awaking with that preceding sleep. Accordingly by citing the number two Ashtavakra asserts that besides intellect there is another faculty—conciousness, and that these two are jointly the lords, leaders and guides of the senses and that they act together as Indra and Agni, etc.

3 By citing the number three Vandin means to say that as it is deeds that produce the three kinds of born beings, etc., so deeds are supreme and that everything else be it intellect alone, or intellect and conciousness together is subservient to Karma.

4 Ashtavakra here advances the thesis that even if Karma be supreme, still when the Fourth or Supreme Being (Turiya) becomes manifest to the soul, it stands in no further need to act or perform any karma.

5 By bringing in the quinquennial series, Vandin wants to assert that the five senses are competent to cognise their respective objects and that besides these senses and their objects there is neither any other sense to perceive nor any other object of perception. He also cites the authority of the Veda according to which the Apsaras (or consciousnesses) have five locks on their heads—i.e., five objects of perception.

6 Vandin admits the existence of the six senses but says that the soul experiences happiness and misery through those as well as through the intellect.

7 Ashtavakra advances an eighth element, namely, the knowledge of these.

8 Each of the three qualities (existence, foulness and ignorance) of prakriti (the passive or material cause of the world) mixing with each of the three corresponding qualities of pradhana (the active or spiritual cause of the world) in various proportions produces the mundane order of things. Thus is proved the eternity of prakriti or nature and so, also, established the doctrine of duality.

9 Prakriti does not really create. It is the Supreme Being who through the medium of illusion in contact with the ten organs (the five locomotive organs and the five organs of sense) makes manifest the System of things. Prakriti therefore has no real existence—her existence is only apparent in the real existence of the soul.

10 Yupas (stakes) mean here, feelings, etc., which keep men bound to the world. Rudras are those who makes others cry.

11 Vandin means to say that the soul is not essentially free from the fetters of happiness and misery arising from the eleven objects of perception. In this world all men are subject to happiness and misery. We also hear that there are Rudras in heaven.

12 According to some, endeavours to attain emancipation can be successful not in this world but in the world of Brahma. Others say that to that end a special yoga is necessary. By bringing forward the objects numbering thirteen, Vandin advances the opinion that, virtue, etc., are not sufficient to attain moksha but that a suitable time and place are also essential.

13 Ashtavakra concludes by citing the same number thirteen. The soul, which is essentially unaffected, becomes subject to happiness and misery through the thirteen: the ten organs of locomotion and sense, and intellect, mind and egoism. But Atichhanadas, i.e., those that have

surmounted ignorance, namely, the twelve, virtue, etc., destroy those thirteen and that is emancipation.

CANTO 135

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Here, of yore this Samanga was called Madhuvila, and yonder is Kardamila, the bathing place of Bharata. When misery struck Sachi's lord, after he killed Vritra, Indra bathed in this Samanga and was freed from his sin.

Here, Purusharishabha, is where the Mainaka mountain sank his roots into the earth, and so it is called Vinasana.

Once, it was here that Aditi cooked her offering of sacred food to the Brahman, so that she might have sons. Climb this lofty hill, O you bulls among men, and put an end to your inglorious, unreliable sorrow.

Here before you, O king, is the Kanakhala mountain range, a favourite resort of sages. Yonder is the mighty Ganga. In ancient times, the Rishi Sanatkumara found mukti by performing ablutions here in this river.

You will also be freed from all your sins, son of Kunti, if you and your brothers touch the waters of this lake called Punya, and this mountain Bhrigutunga and also the waters of these two rivers, called Ushniganga.

Look, here is the asrama of the Rishi Sthulasiras; here renounce your anger and sense of self-importance. And there, Pandava, is Raibhya's beautiful asrama, where Bharadwajas son, Yavakrita, profound in Vedic lore, perished.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How did the mighty Yavakrita, son of Bharadwaja, acquire profundity in the Vedas? And how also did he perish? I am eager to hear all this, just as it happened. I find great delight in listening to the deeds of such godlike men.'

Lomasa says, 'Bharadwaja and Raibhya were two friends. And they lived here, ever taking the greatest pleasure in each other's company. Raibhya had two sons, named Arvavasu and Paravasu, while Bharadwaja had an only son, named Yavakrita. Raibhya and his two sons were versed in the Vedas, while Bharadwaja practised tapasya. But, O Bhaarata, from their boyhood, the friendship that existed between these two was unequalled.

Sinless, the highspirited Yavakrita found that brahmanas slighted his father, who practised asceticism, while they revered Raibhya and his sons; Yavakrita was overwhelmed with sorrow, and became sorely aggrieved. He

embarked upon severe austerities, in order to obtain knowledge of the Vedas.

He exposed his body to fire. He made Indra anxious with his terrific penance.

Indra went to him and said, "Why, O sage, do you sit in such a dreadful tapasya?"

Yavakrita said, "O you whom the Devas adore, I sit in penance to gain such gyana of the Vedas as no Brahmana has ever had before. O conqueror of Paka, my tapasya is to have the Vedas manifest themselves in me; why, I mean to acquire every manner of knowledge through my tapasya.

Lord, learnt through gurus, the Vedas take a long time to be known. I perfom my austerities to have them in a short while."

Indra said, "Brahmana, the path you tread is not the proper way. Why do you want to destroy yourself? Go and learn from the lips of a preceptor."

Saying this, Sakra went away and Yavakrita of immeasurable energy fell once more to his tapasya. O king, I have heard that by continuing his stern penance he greatly agitated Indra, who came again to that Maharishi and forbade him, saying, "You strive so that the Veda manifests both in yourself and in your father; but your exertions can never be fruitful, nor is this tapasya of yours well-advised."

Yavakrita said, "Lord of the Devas, if you do not give me what I want, I will perform even more stringent tapasya. Indra, if you do not grant me what I want, I will cut off my limbs and offer them as a sacrifice into a blazing fire."

Indra realised how determined the sage was and decided to use some guile to dissuade him. Indra assumed the guise of an ascetic Brahmana, hundreds of years old, and infirm, and suffering from consumption. And he fell to throwing up a dam with sand, at the very place along the Bhagirathi to which Yavakrita used to come to bathe.

Unceasingly, Sakra began to fill the Ganga with sand, and he attracted Yavakrita's attention. When that bull among the sages saw Indra earnestly building his dam, he broke into laughter, and said, 'What are you doing, O Brahmana, and what is your object? Why do you undertake this mighty endeavour for no good reason?"

Indra said, "My child, I am trying to dam the Ganga so that there may be a commodious passage across the water. People experience considerable difficulty in crossing and recrossing the river by boat."

Yavakrita said, "O you of ascetic wealth, you cannot dam this mighty current. O Brahmana, desist from what is impracticable, and take up something that you can achieve."

Indra said, "Rishi, I have imposed this weighty task upon myself just as you have undertaken your tapasya, which can never be fruitful, in order to know the Vedas."

Yavakrita said, "If, Lord of the Devas, my penance is doomed to fail, be pleased to grant me something that I can achieve. Bless me with boons by which I can excel other men."

Indra said, "The Vedas will be manifest in you, and in your father as well; and all your other desires will also be fulfilled. Return home, Yavakrita."

Having thus got the object of his desire, Yavakrita came to his father and said, "Father, the Vedas will be manifest in you as well as myself, and I have obtained boons whereby we shall excel against all men."

Bharadwaja said, "O my son, because you have obtained the objects of your desire, you will become proud. And when you are puffed up with pride and have also become uncharitable, destruction will soon overtake you.

There is a tale that the gods themselves tell. In ancient times, there lived a sage named Baladhi, possessed of great energy. And in grief over the death of a child, he practised the severest penance to have a child that would be immortal; and he got a son even as he desired. But though they were favourably disposed towards him, the gods did not yet make his son immortal.

They said, 'No mortal can be deathless, without some condition by which he can die.'

Baladhi said, 'O Devas, these mountains have always existed and are invincible; let their destruction be the condition of my son's death.'

Baladhi's son was called Medhavi, and he was highly irascible. When he learnt of the only way in which he could die, he grew haughty and began to insult the sages of the earth. And he ranged over the world, doing mischief to the Munis.

One day, he met the Maharishi Dhanushaksha of immense tejas and the arrogant Medhavi insulted him. The Rishi cursed him, 'Be you ashes!'

But Medhavi was not reduced to ashes. Then Dhanushaksha had a vast herd of buffaloes shatter the mountain, which stood as the condition of Medhavi's immortality. The young man instantly died.

Taking his son's corpse in his arms, Medhavi's father began to bewail his fate. Now listen, my child, to what the Rishis, who were masters of the Vedas, chanted when they found the sage mourning: *Never can a mortal overcome what Fate ordains. Lo! Dhanushaksha shattered even the mountain with a herd of buffaloes.*

So do young ascetics, who are puffed up with the pride of the boons they have received, swiftly perish. You do not want to be one of them.

This Raibhya, O my son, is possessed of great tejas, and his two sons are like him. Therefore, be vigilant - never approach him. My child, Raibhya is a Maharishi of short temper; if angered, he can do you harm.

Yavakrita said, "I will do as you say. Do not be anxious, father, for Raibhya deserves my reverence even as you do.'

Yet, after placating his father with sweet words, Yavakrita, fearing nothing and nobody, began to take his delight in wantonly offending other munis.'"

CANTO 136

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'One day in the month of Chaitra, while wandering fearlessly, Yavakrita approached the asrama of Raibhya. In that beautiful hermitage, adorned with trees rich with flowers, he saw the daughter-in-law of Raibhya, sauntering about like a Kinnara woman.

Smitten by swift passion, deprived of his good sense, Yavakrita said shamelessly to the bashful young woman, "Be mine!"

At which, knowing his nature, and afraid of a curse, and also thinking of Raibhya's power, she said to him, "I will, wait for me here", promising him everything and, tying him up with vines, sweetly, she went back into her dwelling.

When Raibhya returned to his asrama, he found his daughter-in-law, Paravasu's wife, in tears. Consoling her with soft words, he asked what was the cause of her grief.

Thereupon, the beautiful girl told him what Yavakrita had said to her, and also how she had adroitly kept him at bay.

Raibhya's mind flared up in wrath. He tore off a matted lock of his jata, and with holy mantras offered it to the sacred fire. At this, a woman who resembled his daughter-in-law in every particular, sprang out of the flames.

The Rishi plucked out another dreadlock from his head, and again offered it to the fire. Now a terrible demon leapt forth from the flames, his eyes fiery.

The two said to Raibhya, "What shall we do?"

The angry sage said to them, "Go and kill Yavakrita."

They said, "We shall!" and flew to do as he bid them.

Using her charms, the lovely woman spirit took Yavakrita's sacred water-pot from him. Then, spear upraised, the demon flew at Yavakrita, when he had been deprived of his water-pot and rendered unclean.

Yavakrita jumped up and fled towards a tank. He found it empty of water and flew towards all the rivers, but found them dry too. Threatened repeatedly by the Rakshasa with his spear, the terrified Yavakrita tried to enter his father's Agnihotrasala. But there a blind Sudra seized and prevented him.

Now the demon cast his spear at Yavakrita and struck him through the heart, and Yavakrita fell dead. After killing Yavakrita, the Rakshasa went back to Raibhya, and with the permission of that sage, began to live with the female spirit.'

CANTO 137

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Kaunteya, Bharadwaja returned to his hermitage after performing the nitya karma of the day and having collected wood for the sacred fire of sacrifice. But since his son had been slain, the sacrificial flames that came to welcome him every day, did not come forth to greet the Rishi.

Seeing this change in the Agnihotra, the Mahamuni asked the blind Sudra, "Why, O Sudra, do the fires not rejoice at sight of me? You, also, do not welcome me gladly, as you usually do.

Is all well in my asrama? I hope my son of little sense did not go to Raibhya. Answer me quickly, Sudra, my heart misgives me."

The Sudra said, "Your foolish son did go to the Rishi Raibhya, and that is why he lies dead on the ground, slain by a mighty demon. Attacked by the Rakshasa holding a spear, he tried to force his way into this room, and I barred his way.

Then, wanting holy water while he was unclean and stood hopeless, he was slain by the Rakshasa."

Bharadwaja, griefstricken, took his dead son in his arms and began to lament. He cried, "O my son, you did tapasya for the weal of all Brahmanas, so that the Vedas, which had not been studied by any Brahmana at all, might become manifest in you.

You were always kindly and reverent towards any Brahmana, why towards all creatures.* But, alas, you did lapse into arrogance and rudeness. O my son, I warned you never to go to Raibhya's arama, but even there you went like Yama himself.

Evil is that man, who, knowing that I am an old man, and also that Yavakrita was my only son, gave way to wrath and killed my child. My son, without you, the most precious thing in the world, I will give up my life as well.

Yes, in grief at the death of my child I renounce my life; but this I say, that Raibhya's eldest son will soon kill him, although he be innocent.

Blessed are those to whom children have never been born, for they lead a happpy life, without having to experience this dreadful grief. Who in this

world can be more vile than they, who made senseless with sorrow at the death of a child, curse even their dearest friend? Finding my son dead I cursed my dearest friend.

Ah, which other man in this world has ever suffered such misfortune!"

After lamenting long, Bharadwaja cremated his son and then consigned himself to a full-blazing fire.'

CANTO 138

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'At this very time, the mighty king Brihadyumna, of great fortune, who was the Yajamana of Raibhya, began a sacrifice. The two sons of Raibhya, Arvavasu and Paravasu, were engaged by that wise sovereign to assist him in the performance of the yagna.

Kaunteya, with their father's leave, the two went to the sacrifice, while Raibhya remained in their asrama, with Paravasu's wife. One day, wanting to see his wife, Paravasu returned home alone. He met his father in the vana, wrapped in the skin of a black antelope. The night was far advanced and dark; Paravasu, blinded by drowsiness in that deep forest, mistook his father for a wild stag, and fearing for his own safety, killed his father.

Then, after performing the funeral rites for his father, he returned to the sacrifice and said to his brother, "You will never be able to perform this task unassisted. And I have killed our father, mistaking him for a deer. My brother, keep a vrata of expiation for the sin of killing a Brahmana, and I, O Muni, shall complete the yagna by myself."

Arvavasu said, "Do then fulfil this sacrifice of the gifted Brihadyumna; and for you, bringing my senses under perfect control, I will observe the vow to expiate the sin of a Brahmahatya."

Having kept the vrata for that sin, the Muni Arvavasu came back to the sacrifice. Seeing his brother, Paravasu, in a voice choked with malice, cried to Brihadyumna, "O king, see that this slayer of a Brahmana does not enter your yagna, or even look upon it. Even by a glance, the killer of a Brahmana can harm you immeasurably.'

The king ordered his attendants to turn Arvavasu out. As they drove him out the king's men repeatedly cursed Arvavasu, crying, "Brahmana killer!"

More than once Arvavasu protested, "It is not I that have killed a Brahmana!"

He said he had not kept the vrata for his own sake, but to free his brother from the sin that Paravasu had committed.

Having said this in anger, and being reprimanded by the attendants, the Brahmana sage of austere penance retired silently into the forest. There he sat in fierce tapasya, worshipping the Sun. The Surya mantra was revealed

to him, and then Agni Deva, immortal god who has the first share of the havis from any yagna, appeared, embodied, to the Rishi.

The Devas were well pleased with Arvavasu for what he had done; they had him made chief priest at Brihadyumna's sacrifice, and Paravasu dismissed from it.

Agni and the other celestials bestowed boons on Arvavasu, without his asking. He prayed that his father might be restored to life. He prayed that his brother might be absolved from his sin; that his father might have no recollection of his having been slain; that Bharadwaja and Yavakrita might both be restored to life; and that the solar revelation would find celebrity on earth.

The god said, "Tathastu, so be it," and conferred other boons on him also. Yudhishtira, all those who had died were restored to life.

Yavakrita now said to Agni and the other deities, "I gained knowledge of all the Vedas, and also performed tapasya. How, then, did Raibhya manage to kill me as he did, O best of the gods?"

The Devas said, "Yavakrita, never again do what you did. You could be killed because you acquired the Vedas without studying them and without learning from a guru. But Raibhya bore many trials, he satisfied his preceptor with his conduct, and gained the Vedas through great exertion and in a long time."

Having said this to Yavakrita, and having given life back to the dead, the Devas with Indra at their head ascended into heaven.

Look, Yudhishtira, here is the sacred asrama of that sage, with trees that bear flowers and fruit in all seasons. O tiger among kings, by staying here for a while you will be exorcised of all your sins.'

CANTO 139

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'O Bhaarata, O king, now you have crossed the mountains Usirabija, Mainaka and Sweta, as well as the Kala hills, and look, O son of Kunti, O Bharatarishabha, here before you flow the seven Gangas!

This is a most pure and holy place. Here Agni blazes forth without pause. No son of Manu can see this wonder. So, Pandava, concentrate your mind in dhyana so that you can behold all these tirthas.

Now you will see the playground of the gods, marked with their footprints. Since we have passed the mountain Kala, we will now cilmb Mandara, the white mountain, inhabited by the Yakshas, by Manibhadra, and Kubera, lord of the Yakshas.

Rajan, here eighty thousand fleet Gandharvas, and four times as many Kimpurushas and Yakshas of various shapes and forms, holding various weapons, attend upon Manibhadra, king of the Yakshas. Great indeed is their power in this realm, and their swiftness is like the very wind.

Why, they can unseat Indra himself from his throne. Protected by them, and also watched over by the Rakshasas, these mountains are inaccessible. Therefore, son of Pritha, fix your mind in dhyana for, besides these, Kubera dwells here with his ministers and his Rakshasa kindred. We will have to encounter them, so muster your energies.

O king, the mountain Kailasa is six yojanas high; upon it grows a gigantic nyagrodha tree. Kaunteya, numberless Devas and Yakshas and Rakshasas and Kinnaras and Nagas and Suparnas and Gandharvas pass this way, going towards Kubera's palace. With my protection, as well as the might of Bhimasena, and also the virtue of your own asceticism and self-command, today you must mingle with them.

May Lord Varuna and Yama, conqueror of battles, and Ganga, and Yamuna, and this mountain, and the Maruts and the twin Aswins, and all rivers and lakes, vouchsafe your safety. And, O effulgent one, may you be safe from all the Devas and the Asuras, and the Vasus.

Devi Ganga, I hear your roar from this golden mountain, sacred to Indra. O Goddess of high fortune, in these mountains, protect this king, worshipped by all of the race of Ajamidha. O daughter of Himalaya, this

king is about to enter into this realm; do you confer your protection upon him.'

Having invoked the protection of the river, Lomasa says to Yudhishtira, 'Be careful.'

Yudhishtira says to his brothers, 'I have never seen Lomasa so anxious, so watch carefully over Krishnaa, and do not be careless. Lomasa knows this place is surely difficult of access. Therefore, observe utmost purity here.'

He now says particularly to his brother Bhima, of vast prowess, 'Bhimasena, watch intently over Draupadi. Whether Arjuna be near or away, in times of danger she always seeks only your protection.'

Then Yudhishtira goes to Nakula and Sahadeva, and after lovingly sniffing the tops of their heads, and embracing them, he says with tears in his eyes, 'Do not be afraid, yet go cautiously in this place.'

CANTO 140

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, 'Vrikodara, there are mighty and powerful invisible spirits in this place. We shall, however, pass safely through it with the punya of tapasya and Agnihotra sacrifices. So, Kaunteya, restrain your hunger and thirst by collecting your energies, and also, O Bhima, keep both your strength and your wits at the ready.

You heard what Rishi Lomasa said about Mount Kailasa; so think how Krishnaa will pass this place. Or, mighty Bhima of the large eyes, return from here, taking Sahadeva with you, and all our charioteers, cooks, servants, chariots, horses, and our Brahmanas worn out with travel; while Nakula and I, together with Muni Lomasa of great tapasya go on, subsisting on the lightest fare and observing vows.

You await my return at the source of the Ganga, protecting Draupadi till I come back.'

Bhima replies, 'Bhaarata, although this blessed princess has been sorely afflicted by toil and sorrow, yet she travels on easily in the hope of seeing Arjuna of the white steeds. Your grief also is great at not seeing the noble Arjuna, who never flees a battle.

It goes without sayng that your sorrow will only increase if you do not see me, Sahadeva and Krishnaa, as well.

It is best that the Brahmanas turn back, with our servants, charioteers, cooks, and whoever else you command. I will never leave you in these wild and inaccessible mountain realms, infested by Rakshasas.

And, O tiger among men, this princess of great fortune, always devoted to her lords, does not want to turn back without you. Sahadeva is ever devoted to you; he too will never turn back, I know him well.

Rajan, we are all eager to see Arjuna, and so we will all go on together. If we cannot pass over this mountain in our chariots, because it abounds in defiles, we will go on foot. Do not worry, O King, I will carry Panchali wherever she cannot walk.

This is what I have deceided, so do not be anxious or distracted. Over impassable places, I will also carry our tender-bodied heroes, the twins, the delight of their mother, wherever they cannot walk."

Yudhishtira says, 'May your strength increase, O Bhima, for what you say, that you will carry the illustrious Panchali and these twins. Bless you! No man is as brave as you are. May your strength, fame, merit and reputation increase! O long-armed one, since you offer to carry Krishnaa and the twins, exhaustion and defeat will never be yours.'

Now the enchanting Krishnaa says with a smile, 'O Bhaarata, I will be able to go, so do not be anxious on my account.'

Lomasa says, 'Access to the Mountain Gandhamadana can only be gained through asceticism. So, Kaunteya, we must all do tapasya; and then, O King, Nakula, Sahadeva, Bhimasena, you and I will all see Arjuna Swetavahana.'

Thus speaking together, journeying on, they see with delight the great domains of Subahu, situated on the Himalayas, abounding in horses and elephants, densely inhabited by the Kiratas and the Tanganas, crowded by hundreds of Pulindas, frequented by the Devas, and rife with wonders.

King Subahu, the lord of the Pulindas, receives them joyfully at the frontier of his realms, paying them proper respect. Being received with honour, and dwelling in comfort in that place, they set out for the Himalaya, when the sun shines brightly in the sky.

They entrust the care of all their servants—Indrasena and the others, and the cooks and the stewards, and Draupadi's accoutrements, and everything else those Maharathas, the mighty scions of the Kurus, and Krishnaa with them, go forth from that land, cautiously, all of them glad at heart at the prospect of seeing Arjuna.

Yudhishtira says, 'Bhimasena, Panchali, and you twins, listen to me. The karma done in previous births does not perish, but surely produces its fruit, sooner or later. Look how even we have become rangers of the wilderness!

Exhausted and distressed as we are, we have to support one another, and pass through well-nigh impassable places, so that we might see Arjuna. Kshatriya, I do not see Dhananjaya beside me and this burns me even as fire does a heap of cotton.

I live in the forest with my younger brothers, anxious to see Arjuna again. This thought, as also the memory of the grave insult to Yagnaseni, consumes me.

O Vrikodara, I do not see the invincible Partha of the great bow and incomparable energy, who is younger than you and older than Nakula. For this, Bhima, I am miserable.

Just to see my Arjuna again, I have been wandering to various tirthas for five years, passing through charmed jungles, passing lovely lakes; yet I do not see him. For this, Vrikodara, I am miserable.

I do not see the long-armed Gudakesa, of the dark blue skin, and the lion's gait. For this, Vrikodara, I am miserable. I do not see that Kurusthama, master of weapons, most skilful in battle, and matchless among bowmen. For this, Vrikodara, I am miserable.

I am distraught because I do not see Pritha's son Dhananjaya, born under the nakshatra Phalguni, who goes amongst his enemies even like Yama during the Pralaya; Partha who has the prowess of an elephant in musth, with the juice of rut trickling down its temples; Arjuna of the leonine shoulders; not inferior to Sakra himself in strength and energy; elder in years to the twins; of white steeds; unrivalled in heroism; invincible; and wielding an awesome bow. For this, O Vrikodara, I am miserable.

And he is always of a forgiving temper, even when insulted by the meanest man; and he confers benefit and protection to the righteous; but to a perfidious one who tries to do him harm with treachery, Dhananjaya is like virulent poison, be not the one Sakra himself.

And the mighty Vibhatsu of immeasurable soul and strength shows mercy and extends protection even to a foe, when fallen. He is the refuge of us all and he crushes his enemies in battle. He owns the power to garner any treasure whatever, and he ministers to our happiness.

It was through his prowess that I owned measureless precious jewels of myriad kinds, which now Suyodhana has usurped. It was through his might, O Kshatriya, that I owned the palatial Mayaa Sabha, embellished with every manner of gemstone, and celebrated throughout the three worlds.

Pandava, in prowess Phalguni is like Krishna, and in battle he is invincible and unrivalled, even like Kartavirya. Alas, I do not see him, Bhima, Arjuna who in might is like Krishna and Balarama!

In strength of arms and spirit, he is like Purandara himself; in swiftness, he is like the wind; in grace, like the moon, and in wrath he is like eternal Yama.

Mahabaho, to see that warlike Purushavyaghra, tiger among men, we will go to Gandhamadana, where the hermitage of Nara and Narayana is, beneath the celebrated nyagrodha tree, the asrama inhabited by Yakshas.

We will see that best of mountains, and by doing stern tapasya, we shall walk to Kubera's beautiful lake guarded by Rakshasas. That place cannot be

reached by chariots or carts, Vrikodara, and neither can cruel, greedy or choleric men ever go there, Bhaarata.

Bhima, in order to see Arjuna, there shall we journey, in a company, with Brahmanas of strict vows, girding on our swords, and wielding our bows. Only those who are impure meet with flies, mosquitoes, tigers, lions, and reptiles, but never the pure.

Therefore, controlling our diet, and restraining our senses, we shall go to the Gandhamadana, to see Arjuna Dhananjaya.'

CANTO 141

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Lomasa says, 'Pandavas, you have seen many a mountain, and river and town and forest and beautiful tirtha; you have touched their sacral waters with your hands.

Now this way leads to the devine Mount Mandara; therefore be you attentive and composed. You will now climb to the dwelling place of Devas and Devarishis of great punya. Here, O King, there flows the mighty and lovely river Alakananda, of holy water adored by hosts of celestial ones and sages, and we will trace its source to the great nyagrodha tree.

High-souled Vaihayasas, Balakhilyas and Gandharvas of mighty spirits frequent this holiest asrama. Those unmatched singers of the Sama hymns, the Rishis Marichi, Pulaha, Bhrigu and Angiras chanted them here.

Here the king of the Devas performs his nitya puja, along with the Maruts; and the Sadhyas and the Aswins attend on him. The Sun, the Moon and all the luminaries with the planets come to this river, alternately by day and by night.

Most fortunate king, Mahadeva, protector of the world, the Bull his emblem, received the descent of the Ganga from the sky here, where now her source is.

My children, approach this Goddess of the six attributes and bow down before her with your minds concentrated in dhyana.'

Having listened to the Maharishi Lomasa, the sons of Pandu reverentially worship the Ganga, who flows through the firmament. And after having adored her, the pious Pandavas resume their journey, accompanied by the sages.

And in a while, those best of men behold at a distance a white massif of vast proportions, even like Meru, and stretching on all sides.

Knowing the question in the hearts of Pandu's sons, Lomasa master of speech, says, 'Listen, O sons of Pandu! Purushottamas, what you see before you, vast as a mountain and beautiful as the cliffs of Kailasa, is a mound of the bones of the mighty Daitya Naraka. Being heaped, they resemble a mountain!

The Daitya was slain by that Paramatman, the eternal Lord Vishnu, to help Indra, king of the Devas.

Wanting to usurp Indra's position, Narakasura, of the mighty mind, acquired knowledge of the Vedas and performed a dread tapasya, which lasted ten thousand years. And through this penance, as also by the force and might of his arms he became invincible and forever harassed Indra.

Anagha, Sinless, knowing the might of the Demon and his great penance, Indra became agitated and fear overwhelmed him. In his heart he thought fervently of Vishnu, the eternal One. At which, the gracious Lord of the universe, who is present everywhere, appeared and stood before Indra.

The Devas and Rishis began to sing hymns to Narayana, and to propitiate him with prayers. In his presence even Agni of the six attributes and of blazing beauty was overpowered by his effulgence, and was shorn of radiance.

Seeing Mahavishnu before him, the king of the Devas, the Vajradhari bowed his head low and told Narayana what the source of his fear was.

Vishnu said, "I know, O Sakra, that your fear is from Naraka, lord of the Daityas. He aims for your throne through his tapasya. And so, to please you, I will sever his soul from his body, despite his great tapasya. King of the Devas, wait a moment."

Vishnu then struck Naraka with a blow of his hand; the Asura fell to the ground even like the lord of mountains struck by cosmic thunder. So he died, and his bones gathered in this place.

Another miracle of Vishnu's is also manifest here. Once, when all the Earth was lost, having sunk into Patala, Narayana assumed the form of the Varaha, a Boar with a single tusk, and raised her up.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Worshipful one, tell me in detail how Vishnu, Devadeva, raised up the Earth which had sunk a hundred yojanas. How was Bhumi Devi, of lofty fortune, support of all created things, who dispenses blessings and brings forth all manner of grain, rendered stable?

Through whose power had she sunk a hundred yojanas? And how did the Paramatman come to rescue her with this great exploit? Dvijottama, you certainly know all about what transpired and I want to hear it all from you.'

Lomasa says, 'Yudhishtira, listen to that tale at length.

My child, in ancient days, there came a time of dread in the Krita Yuga, when the eternal and primeval Deity assumed the dharma of Yama; and

when the God of gods began to do the work of Yama, not a creature died, while the births were as usual.

Birds and beasts and kine, and sheep, and deer and all kinds of carnivores multiplied, Parantapa, and the race of humans also swelled in tide, in millions.

My son, when the population multiplied to a frightening extent, the Earth, oppressed with her intolerable burden, sank a hundred yojanas. Agony lanced through all her limbs, and barely conscious from the vast pressure upon her, Bhumi Devi in great distress sought the protection of the Lord Narayana, the foremost of the gods.

The Earth said, "It is through your grace, O possessor of the six attributes, that I was able to remain so long in my position. But now I have been overcome with burden which I cannot sustain any longer.

Most adorable One, relieve me of my burden. I seek your protection, Lord, give me your favour."

Hearing her, the eternal Lord, possessor of the six attributes, Vishnu, said calmly, his words distinct in their every syllable, "Do not fear, O afflicted Bhumi devi, bearer of all treasures. I will relieve you of your burden."

Thus consoling Bhumi, who has the mountains for her earrings, and then sending her away, Vishnu suddenly turned into a refulgent boar with one tusk. Striking terror with his glowing red eyes and his blazing lustre smoking, fuming, he began to grow amazingly.

Kshatriya, then bearing the Earth upon his single radiant tusk, that Being who pervades the Vedas raised her up a hundred yojanas. And while she was being so raised, there was a terrific agitation and all the Devas, and all the Rishis of great tapasya became distraught.

Heaven, and the sky, and the earth, as well, were filled with exclamations of alarm and neither the gods nor men could find any peace. Then countless celestials and sages went to Brahma, who sat blazing with his own lustre.

Approaching Brahma, the lord of every celestial, and the witness of the deeds of all beings, they said to him with folded hands, "Devadeva, all the created are agitated and every being, mobile and immobile, are distraught.

Lord of the Devas, even the oceans are fraught and this whole world has sunk a hundred yojanas. What is the cause of this ferment in the universe? We are bewildered and dismayed; we beg you tell us what is happening."

Brahma replied, "Devas, do not be afraid of the Asuras, in any matter or place. Listen, O celestials, to the reason for all this commotion. The illustrious One, who is omnipresent, eternal and the never-pershiing Soul is responsible for this agitation.

The Paramatman Vishnu has raised up Bhumi, who was submerged a hundred yojanas; the great disturbance is in consequence of the Earth being lifted up. Know this and dispel your doubts."

The Devas said, "Where is that Being who joyfully raises up the Earth? O you who possess the six attributes, tell us where this is happening, so we might go to that place."

Brahma said, "Go, and may good befall you! You will find him resting in the gardens of Nandana. Look, there is the glorious and worshipful Garuda.

After having raised up the Earth, the God from whom the world became manifest, flames forth in the shape of a boar, even like the all-consuming apocalypse during the pralaya. Upon his breast the Srivatsa shines. Go and behold that Being who knows no decay."

Setting Brahma, the Grandsire, at their head the Devas came to that infinite Soul, and having sung his praises, bade him farewell, and went back to where they had come from,' says Lomasa.

Having heard this story, all the Pandavas go with all haste towards the place to which Lomasa pointed."

CANTO 142

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O King, those foremost of bowmen, of immeasurable prowess, holding bows strung tightly, carrying quivers brimful of arrows, wearing fingerlets made of iguana-skin, and their swords at their sides, go, with Panchali, towards the Gandhamadana, also taking with them the best of their Brahmanas.

On their way, they see lakes and rivers and mountains and forests, and trees of wide-spreading shade upon mountain summits; and places abounding in trees bearing flowers and fruit in all seasons, and frequented by Devas and Rishis.

Restraining their senses within the inner self, subsisting on fruit and roots, the heroes pass through rugged realms, craggy and difficult of passage, seeing diverse and numerous birds and beasts as they go.

Thus those high-souled ones enter the mountain of Rishis, Siddhas and Devas, of Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Apsaras. And, O lord of men, as those mighty Kshatriyas first set foot upon Gandhamadana, a violent wind blows there, bringing a torrent of rain with it. Great clouds of dust, bearing dry leaves, rise up, and all on a sudden cover earth, air and the firmament.

When the heavens are obscured by dust nothing can be seen, and neither can the Pandavas speak to one another. Eyes full of darkness and stung by the wind that carries rock particles, they cannot see one another.

Trees split open, cracking in the gale; towering trees crash down to the ground with force of the wind.

Dismayed by the storm, they think, 'Are the heavens falling down or is this mountain and the very earth cracking open?'

Terrified by the storm, they grope in the pitch darkness with arms outstretched, and shelter under trees, inside large anthills, and in caves.

Holding his bow and supporting Krishnaa, the mighty Bhimasena stands under a tree; Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, with Dhaumya, scurries into some heavy woods; Sahedeva, carrying the sacred fire, takes shelter under a huge rock. Nakula, with Lomasa and the other Brahmanas of great tapasya stand trembling, each one under a tree.

Then when the wind abates and the dust subsides, the sky opens and down comes a cascade of rain. The heavens shake with shocking batteries of thunder, each like Indra's Vajra being cast; and quick-flashing lightning begins to play vividly through the clouds. Without pause it rains, and everything is a solid sheet of water, until rivers of hurtling water rush all around, foam-crested and turbid with mud. These roaring cataracts uproot the greatest trees and plunge them down the mountain like twigs.

As suddenly as it began, the storm ceases, and when the wind is still and the air is clear, each of them comes out cautiously from their places of hiding, and they met together again.

Again, those Kshatriyas and their party set foot upon Mount Gandhamadana."

CANTO 143

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the noble sons of Pandu have gone a mere two yojanas, Draupadi, unaccustomed to walking for long, cannot go on. She is weary, Panchala's most delicate daughter, and faint, and the storm has also terrified her.

The black-eyed Krishnaa supports herself with her graceful arms on her thighs, clenched together, for just a moment, before she collapses trembling onto the ground. Seeing her fall like a severed vine, Nakula runs forward and holds her.

The distrait Nakula cries, 'O King, Panchali has fallen down from tiredness. Tend to her, O Bhaarata. She deserves no such misery and has borne long hardship; she is exhausted from our journey. Comfort her, O mighty king.'

Hearing Nakula, Yudhishtira, and Bhima and Sahadeva, as well, rush to Panchali in alarm. They see her pale and drained, and, taking her onto his lap, Yudhishtira laments, 'Ah, accustomed to ease, used to sleeping in luxurious chambers, on beds spread over with fine sheets, how does this beautiful one lie on rough, bare ground now?

Alas! Only because of me, the soft feet and the lotus-like face of she who deserves all the finest things in life are callused pale. O what have I done!

Fool that I am, being addicted to dice, I have been wandering in forests full of wild beasts, taking Krishnaa with me. Her father King Drupada gave this doe-eyed one to me, trusting that his blessed child would be happy by having the Pandavas for her husbands. But because I am a wretch, today she lies on the rough earth, exhausted with every hardship, sorrow and wearying travel.'

As Yudhishtira Dharmaraja laments, Dhaumya and all the other principal Brahmanas come to him, and begin to console him and to honour him with their blessings.

They recite mantras to keep Rakshasas away and also perform some holy rites to restore Panchali's health and spirits. At this, and also at being

stroked soothingly by her husbands' palms, as well as by a cool, moist breeze, she slowly recovers consciousness.

The sons of Pritha now lay her down upon a deerskin, and make her rest. Taking her red-soled feet, bearing auspicious marks, the twins begin to press them gently with their hands scarred by bowstrings. Yudhishtira, foremost of the Kurus, also comforts her.

Dharmaraja says to Bhima, 'Bhima, before us lie so many rough and rugged mountains, full of ice and snow, inaccessible. How, long-armed one, will Krishnaa pass over these?'

Bhima says, 'Rajan, I will carry you, our princess, and these Purusharishabhas the twins; so do not be anxious. Or, Anagha, at your command, with your leave, Hidimba's son, the mighty Ghatotkacha, who is as strong as I am and can fly through the sky, will carry us all to our destination.'

With Yudhishtira's permission, Bhima thinks of his Rakshasa son; and in an instant, the pious Ghatotkacha appears, salutes the Pandavas and the Brahmanas, and stands before them with folded hands. And they also caress him of the mighty arms.

Ghatotkacha says to his father, Bhimasena of dreadful prowess, 'You thought of me and I came at once to serve you. Command me, O long-armed, and I will do whatever you wish.'

Hearing this, Bhimasena hugs the Rakshasa to his breast.

CANTO 144

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Yudhishtira says, 'Bhima, let this mighty and heroic Rakshasa lord, your son, devoted to us, truthful and conversant with dharma, carry his mother Draupadi without delay. Owner of dreadful prowess, depending on the strength of your arms, I will reach the Gandhamadana unhurt, with Panchala's daughter.'

Hearing his brother, that Purushavyaghra Bhimasena commands his son Ghatotkacha Parantapa, 'Invincible son of Hidimba, this mother of yours is exhausted. You are strong and can go wherever you wish. So, sky-ranger, do you carry her.

May good fortune attend upon you! Carry her on your shoulders, and go with us, flying not too high so that she is not frightened.'

Ghatotkacha says, 'Single-handed, I can bear Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and Dhaumya, and Krishnaa, and the twins. Then what wonder that today I will carry them, where there are others to help me? And, O sinless one, hundreds of other valiant Rakshasas, all of whom can fly, and assume any shape they wish, will together carry you all, and all the Brahmanas.'

Saying this, Ghatotkacha picks up Krishnaa, and the other Rakshasas, the Pandavas, while by virtue of his inherent power, Lomasa of incomparable effulgence courses along the path of the Siddhas, even like a second Sun. And at the command of the lord of the Rakshasas, the other Rakshasas of terrific strength bear all the other Brahmanas.

Flying above enchanted forests, they fly towards the gigantic Nyagrodha tree. Going at great speed, borne by the Rakshasas, the Kshatriyas pass over long distances as if over a few steps.

On their way they see below them lands crowded with Mlechha tribes, rich with mines of diverse gems. They see hills glittering with precious metals, where Vidyadharas throng, and Vanaras and Kinnaras and Kimpurushas and Gandharvas, and full of peacocks, and chamaras, and monkeys, and rurus, and bears, and gavayas, and bison, latticed with networks of rillets, full of countless species of bird and beast, handsome with lordly elephants, the birds all full of rapture in their trees.

Passing over many lands and kingdoms, including that of the Uttarakurus, they see that foremost of mountains, the Kailasa, replete with all wonders, and beside it, they behold the hermitage of Nara and Narayana, with unearthly trees hearing flowers and fruit in all seasons.

They also see the exquisite and mighty Nyagrodha, of the round trunk, fresh and so alive, its shade wide and deep, its foliage thick, soft and sleek; full of health; its boughs enormous and wide-spreading and of incomparable lustre; and bearing full, delicious and holy fruit, dripping nectar.

And this celestial tree is visited by hosts of mighty sages, and its branches teem with birds maddened by spirits; it grows in a grove where no mosquito or fly comes, a spot abundant with fruit, roots and sprakling water, covered in velvet green grasses, where Devas and Gandharvas come.

Its trunk is smooth, cool, its bark delicate and lovely. Reaching that ancestral tree, along with the Brahmanarishabhas, those mahatmans alight from the shoulders of the Rakshasas, and they see the charmed, most holy asrama of Nara-Narayana, where no sorrow comes, nor the rays of the Sun; where no hunger, thirst, heat or cold venture; where all grief melts away; where hosts of Maharishis throng; which hermitage is adorned by the grace of the Vedas, Saman, Rik, and Yajus; asrama inaccessible to men who have no devotion; asrama beautiful with offerings, and homas; and most sacred; and well-swept and fragrant; and shining all around with offerings of celestial blossoms; and spread over with altars of sacrificial fire, and holy women and water-pots and urns of holy waters and baskets, this refuge of all beings; and echoing with the chanting of the Vedas; and heavenly and most worthy of being dwelt in; where all tiredness disappears; and splendent and full of incomprehensible grace; and majestic, divine.

The Maharishis who live in that asrama subsist on fruit and roots, their senses perfectly restrained; they wear black deer-skins; they are effulgent like the Sun and Agni; their souls have been made great through tapasya and they are intent on mukti, while they lead the lives of Vanaprasthas, in communion with the Paramatman; and constantly the sound of Vedic hymns fill that place.

Then, having purified himself, and restraining his senses, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira of great tejas, together with his brothers, approaches those Rishis. And knowing him, for they are all blessed with supernatural knowledge, all the great sages receive him joyfully.

And those Munis, chanters of the Veda, themselves like fire, bless Yudhishtira; they give him holy water and flowers and roots. And Yudhishtira Dharmaraja receives these with reverence and joy.

Now, O sinless one, Pandu's son, along with Krishnaa and his brothers, and thousands of Brahmanas versed in the Vedas and the Vendangas, enters that most sacred asrama, which is like the abode of Sukra himself, and which pleases the mind with scents of heaven, which resembles heaven itself, so beautiful is it.

There Yudhishtira sees the hermitage of Nara and Narayana, made enchanting by the Bhagirathi and worshipped by the Devas and the Devarishis. Seeing that hermitage where Brahmarshis dwell, where fruits dripping ambrosia grow all around, the Pandavas are filled with rare delight.

Having reached that place, those high-souled Kshatriyas begin living with the Brahmanas. There they see the holy lake Vinda, and the mountain Mainaka, of golden summits, where so many species of birds live, and those magnanimous ones live there happily.

The sons of Pandu and Krishnaa delight in ranging through charmed woods and forests, bright with flowers of every season; exquisite on every side with trees bearing full-blown blossoms, and bending with the weight of fruits, and with countless male kokilas among their glossy leaves; and growing thickly and their shade cool and lovely to behold.

They delight in coming upon diverse lakes of limpid water, shimmering with lotuses and lilies. And there, O lord, the balmy mountain breeze blows, bearing the purest fragrances, gladdening their hearts.

And hard by the gigantic nyagrodha, the mighty sons of Kunti see the Bhagirathi falling down, crystalline, cool, bearing fresh lotuses, softly over a gentle descent of steps made of ruby and coral, and graced on both sides with celestial trees and her waters strewn with celestial flowers, and enchanting the mind and heart.

In that place, frequented by Deva and Rishi, and so hard of access, they make themselves pure and offer oblations to the manes, the gods and the great sages in the sacred waters of the Bhagirathi.

Thus those bulls among men, the heroic Kurupraviravas, begin to dwell there with the Brahmanas, making their offerings and practising dhyana. The Purushavyaghras feel particularly joyful to watch the various amusements of Draupadi."

CANTO 145

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "There, in purity, those tigers among men remain for six nights, waiting to see Arjuna. One day, a gust of wind blows from the north-east bringing a heavenly lotus of a thousand petals, effulgent as the Sun. Panchali sees that bloom of unearthly fragrance, brought by the wind and left on the ground; she picks it up and is enraptured.

She cries to Bhimasena, 'Look, Bhima, this unearthly flower has the quintessential source of all redolence within it! Parantapa, it makes my heart soar in joy.

I will give this bloom to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, so you must fetch some more for me, so that I can take them to our asrama in the Kamyaka. If, O Pandava, you do love me, bring me many, many of these wondrous flowers.'

Saying this, that chaste queen of the beautiful glances approaches Yudhishtira with the flower. Bhima Purusharishabha, mightiest of all men, sets out to satisfy her wish; intent upon bringing her the flowers, he goes swiftly, facing the wind, in the direction from which the flower had come. With his bow and mace inlaid with gold, with his arrows like venomous serpents, he goes forth like an angry lion or an elephant in rut; and all creatures on his way gaze at him with the powerful bow and arrows.

He felt no exhaustion, no languor, no fear or confusion, as that son of Vayu and Pritha. Up the peak he climbs, with the strength of his arms, to please Draupadi. That slayer of his foes ranges that finest mountain covered with trees and creepers, its ground black rock; and frequented by Kinnaras; and with all manner of mineral, plant, beast, and birds of various hues; and appearing like an upraised arm of the Earth adorned with an entire set of ornaments.

His eyes fixed on the slopes of Gandhamadana, fragrant mountain, various thoughts swirling through his mind, his ears thrilling with the sweet songs of male kokilas and the ubiqitous hum black bees, and his eyes enchanted by the vivid colours of the profusion of flowers of all seasons, he of unmatched prowess goes along even like an elephant in musth ranging mad through a forest.

And fanned by the fresh breeze of the Gandhamadana, bearing the scents of myriad blossoms and cooling like a father's touch, Bhima goes along sniffing the bright and perfumed air. The hairs on his body stand on end with delight, as he surveys all of that mountain for the flowers for which he has come, Gandhmadana home to Yakshas and Gandharvas and Devas and Brahmarshis.

Brushed by the leaves of Saptachchada tree, besmeared with fresh red, black and white minerals, he looks as if decorated with lines of holy unguenta drawn by uncanny fingers. With clouds stretching away at its sides, the mountain seems as if it were dancing with outspread wings; with its spring and streams flowing and sparkling, it seems to be decked with necklaces of pearls.

Upon its slopes are romantic caves and groves and waterfalls; brilliant peacocks dance to the chiming of the anklets and bangles of Apsaras; the mountain's jagged surfaces have been worn smooth by the tusks of the Diggajas; with the rivers cascading down, Gandhamadana looks as if its clothes are being loosened.

Cheerfully, playfully, that graceful son of the wind-god hies on, forcing his way through countless intertwined creepers. Great stags gaze curiously at him, with lush grass in their mouths; never having known fear before, they do not flee.

Determined to fulfil the wish of his love, Pandu's mighty and youthful son, stalwart and of splendour like that of gold, his body strong as a lion's, crashing along like a maddened elephant, and with the force of an elephant in rut, and his eyes coppery like those of a musth-stirred elephant, and able to stop the charge of a maddened elephant, ranges the enchanting Gandhamadana with his beautiful and extraordinary eyes upraised - presenting a most novel and unusual spectacle.

The wives of Yakshas and Gandharvas sitting invisible beside their lords, stare at him, turning their faces as he storms past. Intent upon gratifying Draupadi exiled into the forest, as he traverses wondrous Gandhamada, Bhima remembers all the grief and pain that Duryodhana has inflicted upon them.

Bhima thinks, 'What will Yudhishtira do now, with Arjuna not returned from Devaloka and with me here looking for Draupadi's flowers? Surely, out of love and uncertainty about their prowess he will not send Nakula and Sahadeva to look for us. Ah, how can I find these flowers quickly?'

Worried, his mind and eyes fixed to the mountains lovely slopes, that tiger among men goes along as swiftly as the lord of birds, as the wind, with Draupadi's wish his provender, making the earth tremble with his tread, he goes like the wind, even like a hurricane at the equinox; and frightening herds of elephants and prides of lions and lone tigers, and deer; and uprooting and smashing great trees and tearing up plants and creepers, he goes like some wild tusker, climbing higher and higher towards the summit of a mountain, and now roaring fiercely even like a cloud full of thunder.

Awakened by Bhima's dreadful roaring, tigers come out of their dens, while other rangers of the forest hide. The coursers of the skies spring up from their perches and wheel into the air. Deer herds run away in panic; mighty lions awake from their slumber and forsake their caves. Huge bison stand and stare. Terrified elephants, along with their mates, flee that forest and lumber away to more open spaces below.

And the boars and the deer and the lions and the bison and the tigers and the jackals and the gavayas of the forest wood all together set up a dismal outcry of fear; and geese, and gallinules and ducks and karandavas and piavas and parrots and kokilas and herons all fly frantically in every direction.

Some haughty elephants, goaded by their mates, as also some enraged lions fly at Bhimasena, but in their hearts they are afraid and they rush at him spraying urine and dung, and trumpeting and roaring only to embolden themselves.

The wind-god's lustrous and graceful son, the mighty Pandava, promptly begins to kill them all, why he hefts one elephant and swinging it through the air kills another with it; he does the same with some lions; while others he despatches with mere slaps!

At being struck by Bhima, all the elephants, lions, tigers and leopards that come yelp and scream in terror, and discharge more dung and urine. Quickly, he kills them all, those that do not flee, and the majestic and awesomely strong son of Pandu enters the jungle, now roaring and shouting aloud himself, making the forest echo.

Then that long-armed one sees upon the slopes of the Gandhamadana a beautiful and extraordinary grove of plantain trees, spreading over some yojanas. Like some crazed lion, he rushes towards it trampling countless plants on his way. That strongest of men begins to tear up the plaintain trees, each as tall as many palmyras, and flings them all around him like so

many blades of grass. All the while his shouts and yells resound through the forest.

Forging on, he encounters countless beasts of gigantic size, and stags, and monkeys, and lions, and bison, and great fish in the streams; with the cries of these, and the roars of Bhima, even animals and birds in the remotest parts of the jungle all tremble and cry out.

At their cries, a great flock of waterfowl suddenly rise up into the sky on wet wings. Seeing these, that bull of the Bhaaratas now goes towards them, and he sees a great and lovely lake, rippled by soft breezes, fanned by the golden leaves of the plantain tree which grew upon its banks.

Immediately plunging into the water, abounding in lotuses and lilies, Bhima begins to sport lustily just like an elephant in rut. Having thus pleased himself for a long while, the bright one climbs out again, to make his way deeper into the thick jungle.

Filling his great lungs he blows a thunderous blast on his conch; striking his arms with his hands, the mighty Bhima makes all the points of heaven reverberate. Filled by the sounds of the shell, and by the shouts of Bhimasena, and also with the reports of his striking his own arms, the caves of the mountain seem as if they are roaring.

Hearing him smite his arms like thunderclaps, the lions asleep inside those caves howl like terrified cats. Frightened by the lions, the elephants of this deeper forest set up an awful trumpeting, which also echoes upon the mountain.

Hearing those sounds, and also knowing that this was Bhimasena his brother, the Vanara Hanuman, greatest of monkeys, wanting to meet and to bless Bhima, lays himself across the Pandavas path. Not wanting Bhima to go on, Hanuman lies squarely across the narrow way, flanked by plantain trees, obstructing it to keep Bhima safe.

So that Bhima does not face curse or defeat by entering the plantain forest, Hanuman lays his huge body down; he begins to yawn, and lashes the earth with his great tail first, raising it even like a stambha raised to Indra, and that sound is thunder. All around, the maintain caves echo those great reports, like a cow lowing.

As the tail lashes and the mountain quakes, it also begins to crumble on every side; the reverberations drown the trumpeting of frightened elephants and spread across every slope of Gandhamadana.

Bhima hears the sounds and the fine hairs on his body stand on end; he begins to range through that plantain wood in search of the source of the crashes. Upon a raised rocky base, he sees Hanuman, whose body is as brilliant as a streak of lightning and difficult to even look at; his fur is coppery, like the lightning-flash; the whiplashes of his tail are like lightning; the Vanara's waist seems slender for his shoulders are so vast; his neck his thick and short.

Long hairs cover his tail, which is a little bent at the end, and raised like some flag. Bhima sees Hanuman's coppery face, and his tongue between small lips, his ears red, his eyes bright and brisk, and his white sharp teeth.

Hanuman's head glows like the full moon ashine; his mane is tousled wild around it, like a pile of asoka flowers. Amidst the golden plantain trees, that refulgent one lies like some blazing fire, his body radiant, at times looking around him with eyes red as if with wine.

The most intelligent Bhima sees that mighty Vanara chieftain lying like the Himalaya, obstructing the path of heaven. Seeing him alone in that mighty forest, the dauntless Bhima approaches him with rapid strides, and gives a loud shout like thunder.

Birds and beasts are alarmed by that shout and scatter, but the great Hanuman only half opens his eyes, and looks at Bhima with disregard, through his eyes red as if with intoxication.

Then, with a smile, Hanuman says, "I was sleeping sweetly. Why have you awakened me? You have reason, surely, and you must show kindness to all creatures. We belong to the animals and are ignorant of dharma, but possessing reason, men show kindness towards creatures. Then why does a reasonable man like you do things which contaminate body, speech and heart, alike, and destroy virtue?

You do not know what dharma is and neither have you taken the counsel of the wise. Is it that from ignorance, and childishness, that you kill the animals?

Say, who are you, and for what have you come to this forest devoid of humans? And, O foremost of men, tell me also, where you are going today. You cannot go any further, for the hills ahead are inaccessible.

Shura, save the passage gained through tapasya there is no path to that place. This is the path of the celestials; mortals can never go this way. Out of kindness, O hero, I dissuade you. Listen to me, you cannot go on from this place, so desist.

Lord of men, you are welcome here in every way; so rest here and partake of fruits and roots, sweet as amrita and do not go on and have yourself killed for no reason.'

CANTO 146

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Parantapa, hearing what the wise Vanara says, Bhima asks, 'Who are you? And why have you assumed the form of a monkey? It is a Kshatriya—one of the varna next to the Brahmanas—that asks you; and he belongs to the Kuruvamsa and the House of the Moon, and was borne by Kunti in her womb, and is one of the sons of Pandu, and is the offspring of Vayu, and is known by the name of Bhimasena.

Hanuman smiles to listen to the Kurupravira; that Vayuputra says to the other Vayuputra, his brother Bhimasena, 'I am a Vanara, and I will not allow you the passage that you desire. It is best that you return; do not go on to meet your death.'

Bhimasena replies, 'O Vanara, arise and let me pass; do not come to grief at my hands.'

Hanuman says, 'I have not the strength to arise; I am ill and suffering. If you must go on, step over me and do so.'

Bhima says, 'The Nirguna Paramatman pervades every body. I cannot disrespect Him that is knowable only by gyana. So, I will not step over you. If I had not known Him from whom all creatures manifest, I would have leapt over you and even the mountain, even as Hanuman once leapt across the ocean.'

At which, Hanuman says, 'Who is this Hanuman, who leapt across the ocean? Best of men, tell me about him if you can.'

Bhima replies, 'He is even my brother, excellent with every perfection, and endowed with intelligence and strength of both mind and body. He is the most illustrious lord of monkeys, renowed in the Ramayana; and for Rama's queen, that lord of the Vanaras crossed the ocean of over a hundred yojanas with a single leap.

That mighty one is my brother. I am his equal in energy, strength, and prowess, and also in battle. And I can chasten you, monkey; so get up. Either give me passage or witness my might today. If you do not listen to me, I will send you to halls of Yama.'

Realising that Bhima is intoxicated with his own strength, and full of pride of the might of his arms, Hanuman chides him in his heart, and says,

'Relent, sinless one. I am so old and weary that I do not have the strength to get up. Take pity on me; move my tail aside and pass.'

Bhima, proud and by now angry, believes Hanuman and thinks, I will seize the weakling monkey by his tail and send him to Yamaloka!'

With a mocking smile, he takes hold of the tail with his left hand; but he cannot move that monkey's tail. Bhima seizes the tail, straight and stiff like a stambha erected for Indra, with both hands; he still cannot shift it at all.

Quickly, the Panadava's brows are knit, his face wrinkled with effort, his eyes roll in their sockets, but he cannot budge the Vanara's tail.

Defeated, Bhimasena returns to the old monkey's side, and stands crestfallen and ashamed. Folding his hands, bowing low, Bhima says in a faltering voice, 'Relent, O Vanarottama, forgive me for the harsh words I spoke to you! Are you a Siddha, a Deva, a Gandharva, or a Guhyaka? I ask you out of curiosity. If it is not a secret and if I may hear it, tell me who you are that have assumed the shape of monkey, O long-armed. I ask you even as a disciple his master, and I, O Anagha, seek your protection!'

Hanuman says, 'O Parantapa, I will satisfy your curiosity fully, and tell you all that you want to know. Listen, O son of Pandu!

Lotus-eyed one, I was begotten by Vayu Deva, life of the world, upon the wife of Kesari. I am a Vanara and my name is Hanuman. All the greatest monkey-kings, and monkey-chieftains once used to wait upon Surya's son Sugriva and Indra's son Vali. Scourge of your enemies, Sugriva and I were friends even as the wind and fire.

Driven out from their kingdom by his brother Vali, Sugriva lived for a long time on Rishyamukha, and I with him. And the mighty son of Dasaratha, the heroic Rama, who is Vishnu's own self in human form, was born into the world.

His great bow in his hand, and his wife and his brother with him, Rama, greatest among archers, began to dwell in the Dandaka vana, to preserve his father's dharma.

From Janasthana, in that forest, the awesome Rakshasa King, the evil Ravana carried Rama's queen away, deceiving, O sinless one, that Purushottama through the agency of a demon, Maricha, who assumed the form of a golden deer marked with gem-like spots.'

CANTO 147

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Hanuman continues, 'After his wife was carried away, Rama, scion of the Raghuvamsa, with his brother Lakshmana, searched for his queen on that mountain, and there met Sugriva, lord of the Vanaras. He made a pact of friendship with the noble Sugriva; Rama slew Vali and installed Sugriva as king of the Vanaras.

Having the kingdom, Sugriva sent forth his monkeys, hundreds and thousands of them, in search of Sita. I, too, with numberless monkeys, set out towards the south in quest of Sita, O Mahabaho.

On our quest, a mighty vulture called Sampati informed us that Sita was in the palace of Ravana. Then, to serve Rama, I leapt across the ocean of a hundred yojanas, the abode of sharks and crocodiles.

In Lanka, I saw in Ravana's palace the daughter of king Janaka, Sita, like the daughter of a Deva. I spoke with Vaidehi, Rama's beloved, and then I burnt Lanka with its towers and ramparts and lofty gates, and proclaimed my name there, and then I returned to Bharatavarsha.

I told Rama everything, and that lotus-eyed immediately set out to rescue his wife. He created a bridge across the ocean for his army of monkeys and we crossed over it. In Lanka, Rama slew the Rakshasas in battle; he killed Ravana, oppressor of the worlds, and all his demons. Having slain the king of the Rakshasas, his brother, his sons and other kin, Rama crowned the pious and kindly Rakshasa lord Vibhishana as king.

Rama recovered his wife, even like the lost Vaidik revelation. Then Raghu's scion and his devoted Sita returned to Ayodhya, inaccessible to enemies; and that lord of men was crowned and began to rule from there.

Then, I asked a boon of the lotus-eyed Rama, saying, "Parantapa, Rama, let me live for as long as the story of your deeds is told in the world!"

Rama said, "So be it."

Bhima, through the grace of Sita, also, in this place I have everything I need or want, every rare luxury, as do all that dwell in this place. Rama reigned for ten thousand and ten hundred years; and then he ascended to his own abode. Ever since, Apsaras and Gandharvas delight me here, singing the pure and mighty deeds of that hero.

Sinless one, Kurunandana, this path is impassable to mortals. For this, O Bhaarata, and also to ensure that noone vanquishes you, or curses you, have I obstructed your passage to this path that the immortals tread. For the celestials, this is one of the paths to heaven; mortals cannot pass this way.

But the lake in search of which you have come lies in that direction.'"

CANTO 148

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The powerful Bhimasena Mahabaho bows lovingly, and with a cheerful heart, to his brother Hanuman, the Vanara lord, and says in the mildest voice, 'Noone is more fortunate than I am, now that I have seen my elder brother! Fortune has been so kind to me, and I cannot express my delight.

But now I have a wish that I pray you will fulfil. Shura, I want to see that incomparable form you had when you leapt across the ocean full of sharks and crocodiles, ocean of a hundred yojanas. If you show me that form I will be satisfied, I will believe everything that you have said.'

The mighty Vanara replies with a smile, 'No one today can see that form of mine, not you or anyone else. In that yuga, all things were different, not as they are today, dwindled.

In the Krita yuga, the state of things was one; and in the Treta, another; and in the Dwapara, still another. Diminution is sweeping through this age; and I do not have that form now. Why, the earth, rivers, plants, and rocks, and Siddhas, Devas and Devarishis conform to Time, according to the yugas.

Therefore, do not wish to see my old form, O Kurupravira. I am bound by the nature of this age; time is irresistible.'

Bhimasena says, 'Tell me about the duration of the different yugas, and of the varied manners and customs and of dharma, kama and artha, and of karma, of tejas, and of life and death in the different yugas.'

Hanuman says, 'Child, that yuga is called Krita when the one eternal religion existed, the Sanatana Dharma. In that best of yugas, everyone owned spiritual perfection and, therefore, there was no need for religious deed or rituals. Dharma knew no deterioration, and neither did anyone die. For this, that yuga is called Krita, the perfect.

But in time the Krita yuga has come to be considered as an inferior one. In the Krita, there were neither Devas nor Asuras, nor Gandharvas, nor Yakshas, nor Rakshasas, nor Nagas.

There was no commerce, no buying and selling. And the Sama, the Rik, and the Yajus did not exist. And there was no manual labour. All the

necessaries of life were obtained merely by being thought of, and the only punya lay in renouncing the world.

During that yuga, there was neither disease nor decay of the senses. There was neither malice nor pride, nor hypocrisy, nor discord, nor ill-will, nor cunning, nor fear, nor misery, nor envy, nor covetousness.

And for this, that prime refuge of Yogis, the Supreme Brahman, was attainable to all. Narayana, wearing a white complexion, was the soul of all creatures. In the Krita Yuga, the distinctive characteristics of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras were natural and these always adhered to their respective dharmas.

Brahman was the sole refuge, and their manners and customs were naturally adapted to the attainment of Brahman; and the objects of their knowledge was the sole Brahman, and all their karma also had reference to Brahman. In this way, all the varnas attained punya.

One uniform Soul was the object of their meditation; and there was only one mantra, the Pranava, AUM, and there was one law. And although they had different natures, all of them followed a single Veda; and they had one dharma, one religion.

And according to the divisions of time, they lived the four asramas, without any desires, and so they attained moksha. The dharma which comprises of identifying the Atman with the Brahman is the sign of the Krita Yuga.

In the Krita Yuga, the dharma of the four varnas is universal, entire; thus the Krita Yuga is devoid of the three gunas.

Now listen to the character of the Treta Yuga. In this age, sacrifices are introduced, and dharma decreases by a fourth part. And Narayana, who is the Soul of all creatures, assumes a red colour. And men practise truth, and devote themselves to religion and religious rites; sacrifices and various religious observances come into existence.

In the Treta Yuga, people begin to devise means for the attainment of objects, for possession; and they attain it through karma and dana. However, they never deviate from dharma, and they are devoted to asceticism and to the giving of gifts.

The four varnas adhere to their respective swadharmas, and perform rituals. Such are the men of the Treta Yuga.

In the Dwapara Yuga, the Sanatana Dharma decreases by one half. Now Narayana wears yellow; and the Veda becomes divided into four parts. Now

some men retain the knowledge of the four Vedas, and some of three Vedas, and some of one Veda, while others do not even know even the Riks.

Upon the Shastras becoming so divided, karma multiplies. And largely influenced by passion, men still engage in tapasya and dana. But from their incapacity to study the entire Veda, it becomes divided into several parts; and in consequence of the intellect having decreased, few are established in truth.

And when people fall away from the truth, they become subject to myriad diseases; and then lust and natural calamities ensue. Afflicted by these, some men perform penance, while others celebrate sacrifices, yagnas, wishing to enjoy the good things of life, or to attain heaven.

Upon the coming of the Dwapara Yuga, men become degenerate, in consequence of their impiety.

O son of Kunti, in the Kali Yuga only a quarter of dharma survives. And in the beginning of this iron age, Narayana wears a black hue. And the Vedas and the Shastras, and dharma, and yagans, and every religious observance, all these fall into disuse.

Then Iti'[1] reigns, and disease, and lassitude, and anger and deformities, and natural calamities, and anguish, and fear of scarcity. As the yugas wane, dharma dwindles, and all creatures degenerate. As creatures degenerate, their natures deteriorate.

The religious rites performed at the waning of the yugas produce contrary effects. And even those that live for several yugas conform to these changes.

Parantapa, as for curiosity to know me, I say this —why should a wise person be eager to know a superfluous thing? O long-armed, I have told you in full what you asked me regarding the nature of the different yugas.

May good fortune befall you! Now return from where you came.'

———————————

[1]Iti: six pernicious things for crops: excessive rain, drought, vermin, locusts, birds, and a neighbouring hostile king.

CANTO 149

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Bhimasena says, 'I will not leave without seeing your olden form. If I have found favour with you, show me your pristine self.'

With a smile, the Vanara shows Bhima the form in which he, Hanuman, once leapt across the sea. Wanting to gratify his brother, Hanuman assumes a gigantic body of immeasurable effulgence; the Vanara stands there, covering all the plantain grove, and as lofty as the Vindhya.

Great as a mountain, with coppery eyes and sharp teeth, and a face marked by a dreadful frown, Hanuman stands covering all that grove and lashing his long tail. Bhima sees that gigantic form of his brother, and his hair stands on end in wonder.

Seeing the great monkey ablaze like the Sun, like golden Meru, splendent as the sky, Bhima cannot look upon him and shuts his eyes.

Smiling again, Hanuman says to his brother, 'Anagha, you are able to see my form to this extent. But I can grow on for as long as I wish. Bhima, amidst enemies, my size increases through its own tejas.'

Seeing that wondrous and dreadful body of Hanuman, like the Vindhya mountain, Bhima Vayuputra is bewildered.

Folding his hands, the Pandava says to Hanuman, 'Lord, I have seen the immense dimensions of your body. Awesome one, I beg you make yourself small again, for I cannot look at you, like the sun risen, of measureless power, irrepressible, and resembling the Mountain Mainaka.

O Hero, great is the wonder in my heart today that with you by his side Rama himself needed to encounter Ravana. With your might, you could have annihilated Lanka and all its warriors in an instant, all its horses, elephants and chariots.

Surely, O Vayuputra, there is nothing that you cannot achieve; and in battle, I am certain that Ravana, together with all his Rakshasas, was no match for you, by yourself.'

Hanuman replies in affectionate words, solemnly spoken, 'Mahabaho, O Bhaarata, it is as you say; Bhimasena, that worst of Rakshasas was no match for me. But if I had slain Ravana—that thorn of the worlds—the

glory of Raghu's son would have been obscured; and it is for this that I left him alive.

By killing that lord of the Rakshasas and his demons, and bringing back Sita unto his own city, Rama established his fame among men.

Now, O wise one, since you are intent on the welfare of your brothers, and protected by Vayu, travel on a fortunate and auspicious path. Kurusthama, this path will lead you to the Saugandhika forest.

You will see Kubera's gardens, guarded by Yakshas and Rakshasas. Do not pluck the flowers there, for the gods deserve reverence, especially from mortals. Only if they are worshipped with offerings, and homas, and salutations, and the recitation of mantras, do the Devas confer their favour upon men.

So, do not, my child, be rash; do not deviate from your svadharma. Be faithful to your duty, understanding what the highest dharma is. Without knowing your duty and serving the old, even great ones like Brihaspati cannot understand artha and dharma.

One should ascertain with discrimination that circumstance in which vice goes under the name of virtue, and virtue under the name of vice — circumstances in which men who are without intelligence become perplexed.

From religious observances merit ensues; and in merit are the Vedas founded; and from the Vedas, sacrifices come into being; and through sacrifice the gods are established. The Devas are maintained by yagnas prescribed by the Vedas and the Shastras; while men maintain themselves by following the ordinances of Brihaspati and Sukra; and also by these avocations, by which the world is maintained — serving for wages; receiving taxes; merchandise; agriculture and tending kine and sheep.

The world subsists through profession. The study of the three Vedas and agriculture and trade and government constitutes, say the Rishis, the professions of the twice-born; and each varna maintains itself by following the profession prescribed for it. And when these callings are properly pursued, the world itself is maintained with ease.

However, if the people do not lead righteous lives, the world becomes lawless, in consequence of the lack of Vedic merit and government. If the people do not follow their prescribed vocations, they perish; but by regularly following the three professions, they bring about dharma.

The dharma of Brahmanas consists in the knowledge of the soul; and the hue of only that varna is universally the same. The celebration of sacrifices, and study and bestowal of gifts are well-known to be the three duties common to all the orders.

Officiating at sacrifices, teaching and the acceptance of gifts are the duties of a Brahmana. To rule is the dharma of the Kshatriya; and to tend cattle, that of the Vaisya; while to serve the twice-born varnas is said to be the duty of the Sudra.

The Sudras cannot beg alms, or perform homas, or keep vratas; and they must dwell in the homes of their masters.

Your vocation, O son of Kunti, is that of the Kshatriya, which is to protect. Perform your svadharma, with humility and restraining your senses. That king alone can rule who takes the counsel of experienced men, and is helped by honest, intelligent and learned ministers; a king who is addicted to vices meets with defeat.

Only when the king justly punishes and confers favours is order secure in the world. Therefore, it is needful to ascertain, through spies, the nature of a hostile country, its fortified places and the allied forces of the enemy, and their prosperity and decay and the way in which they retain the adhesion of the powers they have drawn to their side.

Spies are among the important instruments of the king; and tact, diplomacy, prowess, chastisement, favour and cleverness lead to success. And success is to be attained through these, either in separation, or combined - namely, conciliation, gifts, sowing dissensions, chastisement, and might.

And, O Bhaarata, politics has for its root diplomacy; and diplomacy is also the main qualification of spies. Politics, if well judged, confers success. Therefore, in matters of polity the counsel of Brahmanas should be taken.

In secret affairs, these should not be consulted - namely, a woman, a fool, a boy, a covetous person, a mean-minded individual, and one that betrays signs of insanity. Wise men only should be consulted, and affairs are to be despatched through officers that are able.

Policy must be executed through persons that are friendly; but fools should be excluded from all affairs. In matters religious, pious men; and in matters of gain, wise men; and in guarding families, eunuchs; and in all crooked affairs, crooked men must be employed. The dharma or adharma of

the resolve of an enemy, as also his strength or weakness, must be gauged through one's own as well as hostile spies.

Favour should be shown to honest persons who have prudently sought protection; but lawless and disobedient individuals should be punished. And when the king justly punishes and shows favour, the dignity of the law is well maintained, O son of Pritha.

These are the hard duties of kings, difficult to comprehened. Observe them with equanimity, even as they are prescribed for your Kshatriya varna.

Therefore, heroic Kaunteya, let your meeting with me not be fruitless. As my brother, ask me for a boon. If you wish, I can go to Varanavrata, even now, and kill all Dhritarashtra's insignificant sons. Or if you like I can raze that entire city with rocks; I can bind Duryodhana and bring him before you today, mighty one.'

Listening to that Mahatman, Bhima replies happily, 'Vanarottama, I will think that you have already done all this! May every good fortune befall you, Mahabaho. But what I ask of you is this - be well pleased with me. Mighty one, upon your having become our protector, the Pandavas have found help. Even through your prowess, we will conquer all our enemies.'

Hanuman says to Bhimasena, 'From brotherly love, I will do good to you by diving into the army of your enemies armed with arrows and spears. And, O Kshatriya, when you roar like a lion, I will lend force to your roars.

I will set myself on the flagstaff of Arjuna's chariot and give fierce yells that will terrifry your enemies, so that you can kill them easily.'

Saying this to the Pandava, and also pointing the way ahead, Hanuman vanishes before Bhima's eyes."

CANTO 151

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When that greatest of Vanaras has gone, Bhima treads the path across the mighty Gandhamadana. And as he goes along, he thinks of Hanuman's vast body and splendour unrivalled on earth, and also of the greatness and dignity of Dasaratha's son Rama.

Going on in quest of the place of the saugandhikas, Bhima sees enchanting forests, groves, rivers, and lakes whose banks are graced with trees, blossom-laden, and woods of countless flowers and colours.

Bhaarata, he sees herds of wild elephants smeared with mud, resembling massed thunderheads. Graceful Bhima lopes ahead with speed, seeing among the trees around him deer of quick glances, with their mates, and long tufts of grass in their mouths.

Fearless because of his strength, as if invited by the breeze-shaken trees of the forest always fragrant with flowers, bearing delicate coppery twigs, Bhimasena plunges into mountain realms inhabited by bison, bear and leopard.

And on his way, he passes lotus-lakes over which maddened black bees swarm; on those waters it seemed as if the lotus buds were hands reverently folded to him. His provender for his journey is what Draupadi said, and Bhima speeds on, his mind and his gaze fixed upon the slopes of the mountain abloom.

When the Sun passes his zenith, Bhima sees a mighty river in the deer-filled jungle, a river full of fresh golden lotuses, a river crowded with hamsa and karandava, and graced with chakravakas, river which looks like a garland of fresh lotuses put on by the mountain.

In this river, that mighty Kshatriya found banks after banks of Saugandhika lotuses, brilliant as the rising Sun, and absolutely delightful. Seeing the flowers Bhima thinks that he has attained his objective, and in his heart he thinks of Panchali and presents himself before her in his thought, his beloved Krishnaa worn out by their exile."

CANTO 152

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "In that place, Bheema sees, near the Kailasa massif, that beautiful lotus lake surrounded by lovely woods, and guarded by Rakshasas. He sees that it is fed by waterfalls next to the abode of Kubera. Great flowering trees shade its banks, and green water-lily pads cover its surface.

This unearthly lake is filled with golden lotuses, and swarms with diverse birds; its shallows are crystalline, with no mud at all. This lake is a wonder of the world, health-giving and enchanting. Kunti's son sees that the ambrosial water is cool, lucid, bright and fresh; the Pandava drinks thirstily, profusely, from it.

The lake is covered over with celestial Saugandhika lotuses, and other golden lotuses with stalks of sapphire. Swayed by swans and karandavas brushing past them, the lotuses scatter fresh glimmering pollen.

This lake is where the great-souled Kubera, king of the Yakshas, comes to sport; the Gandharvas, the Apsaras and the Devas hold it in high regard; Devarishis, Yakshas, Kimpurushas, Rakshasas and Kinnaras frequent it. And it is well-protected indeed by Kubera.

Feverish delight sweeps over Bhima as soon as he lays eyes on those waters. Thousands of Rakshasas called Krodhavasas, armed with every kind of weapon, guard that lake, by the command of their lord Kubera.

Bhima of awesome prowess, wearing deerskin, golden armlets, his sword strapped to his side, plunges fearlessly ahead to gather the Saugandhikas.

The Rakshasas see him and shout to one another, 'Let us ask why this man has come here, wearing deerskin and carrying weapons!'

They approach the lustrous Vrikodara of mighty arms and ask, 'Who are you? Answer us! We see you wearing a hermit's garb yet bearing weapons. Intelligent one, tell us why you have come here.'

CANTO 153

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Bhima says, I am the son of Pandu, and next by birth to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and my name is Bhimasena. Rakshasas, I came with my brothers to the Nyagrodha which is called Visala. There, Panchali saw a most excellent Saugandhika, which, of a certainty, was borne thence by the wind from this lake. She wishes to have the flowers in some abundance. Know, Rakshasas, that I have come to fulfil the wish of my wife of faultless features; I have come here to gather flowers for her.'

At which, the Rakshasas say, 'Purushottama, this place is dear to Kubera; he comes to sport here. Mortal men cannot enjoy this place. Vrikodara, the Devarishis and the Devas ask Kubera's leave before they drink this water or swim in it. Pandava, the Gandharvas and the Apsaras also come to please themselves in this lake.

The wicked man who, disregarding the lord of treasures, seeks to enjoy himself here surely meets his death. With no regard for Kubera you seek to take away the Saugandhikas from here by force. How then do you claim to be the brother of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja?

First, seek the permission of the lord of Yakshas, only then drink and pluck the lotuses. If you do not do this, you will not be able to have even a single Saugandhika.'

Bhimasena says, 'Rakshasas, I do not see the lord of wealth here. And even if I did see that Lokapala I would not beg him, for Kshatriyas never beg. This is the eternal dharma, and I have no intention of abandoning Kshatriya dharma.

Moreover, this lotus lake has been formed from the waterfalls of the mountain; it has not been excavated in the palace of Kubera. And so, it belongs as much to every creature as it does to Kubera Vaisravana. Who goes to beg another for such a thing?'

With this, the impatient Bhima wades into the lotus lake.

The Rakshasas, forbid him, crying, 'Desist!' and abuse him roundly from every side. Bhima ignores them, and continues wading into the water.

Their eyes rolling in anger, they arms upraised, they rush at him, roaring variously, 'Seize him! Bind him! Hew him! We will cook this Bhima and eat

him!'

Bhima raises his great mace, inlaid with golden plates and like the mace of Yama himself, and turning back to face them, roars, 'Stay!'

Brandishing lances and axes, and other weapons, they run at him. The dreadful Krodhavasas surround Bhima. But he is Kunti's son begotten by Vayu, and he is mighty beyond reckoning and heroic, the slayer of his foes, and always devoted to dharma and satya, no one can vanquish him.

Swiftly, the great Bhima crushes those Rakshasas, beginning with their leader, breaking their arms, killing more than a hundred on the banks of that lake. When they see how strong he is, and that they cannot resist him, the rest of those powerful Rakshasas run in all directions, in bands, so many of them pierced and bleeding.

They fly through the air towards Mount Kailasa. Having beaten his enemy, even as Indra did the armies of the Daityas and Danavas, Bhima plunges into the lake again and begins to gather the golden lotuses as he pleases.

And as he drinks the waters, like nectar, his energy and strength surge back, and he falls to plucking and gathering the fragrant Saugandhikas.

Meanwhile, the Krodhavasas, driven away and terrified by Bhima's onslaught, flee to Kubera, Lord of treasures, and tell him everything that transpired at the lake and especially about Bhima's might.

The Deva smiles, then says, 'I already know what you have told me. Let Bhima take as many lotuses as he likes for Krishnaa.'

Those Rakshasas return to the Pandava and see him alone, enjoying himself in the lake of lotuses."

CANTO 154

TIRTHA-YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Bhima gathers the rare, unearthly and fresh flowers as he pleases, in abundance.

Now a high and violent wind begins to blow, blowing up sand and earth, and portending battle. Ominous meteors fall from the sky, and thunder echoes everywhere. Enveloped in darkness, the Sun grows pale, his rays being obscured.

At Bhima displaying his prowess, dreadful explosions ring through the sky; the earth trembles, and dust falls in showers. The cardinal points of the heavens grow red, and beasts and birds begin to cry out in shrill tones.

All things are enfolded in darkness, and indistinguishable; other evil omens appear there. Yudhishtira Dharmaputra sees the strange phenomena, and says, 'Someone means to attack us. Arm yourselves Pandavas, and may good fortune befall you! From what I see, I believe that the time has come for us to show our strength.'

The king looks around and does not see Bhima. He turns to Panchali and the twins, 'Panchali, has Bhima gone to perform some great feat, or has he done so already? These omens surely portend some grave danger; they foretell a great battle.'

To allay his anxiety, Krishnaa of the sweet smile says, 'Rajan, I showed the Saugandhika which the wind blew here to Bhima. I said to him that if he could find more for me he should bring back as many as he could. Pandava, he must have gone looking for the golden lotuses for my sake. He must have gone north-east.'

Hearing her, Yudhishtira says to the twins, 'Let us follow Vrikodara's path. Let the Rakshasas carry those Brahmanas who are tired and weak. Ghatotkacha, you carry Krishnaa.

I am convinced that Bhima has gone into the jungle, for it is long since he has been gone. He travels as swiftly as the wind, or as Vinata's son, and he will even leap into the sky and alight at his will. Rakshasas, we will follow him through your prowess. He will not do any wrong to the Siddhas in the forest, who are versed in the Vedas.'

Saying, 'So be it,' Hidimba's son and the other Rakshasas, who know the lotus lake of Kubera, set out cheerfully with Lomasa, carrying the Pandavas, and many of the Brahmanas.

Soon arriving at the lake, they see it covered with Saugandhika and other lotuses and surrounded by ethereal woods. On its shores they see the noble and fierce Bhima, as also the slaughtered Yakshas of large eyes, with their bodies, arms and thighs smashed, and their heads crushed.

Upon seeing Bhima standing there like an angry lion, his eyes staring, biting his lip, his mace upraised in both hands, even like Yama at the Mahapralaya, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja runs to his brother and embraces him repeatedly.

Gently Yudhishtira says, 'Kaunteya, what have you done? Ah, may good fortune be with you, but if you love me and wish my welfare never again be so rash, nor offend the Devas!'

Now those godlike ones all begin to sport in those waters and to pluck the Saugandhikas as they please. Suddenly, the immense guardians of the gardens, with rocks for their weapons, arrive there.

Seeing Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, Maharishi Lomasa, Nakula, Sahadeva and the other great Brahmanas, those guardian Rakshasas bow down low in humility.

Yudhishtira pacifies them, and they are gratified. Thus, with Kubera's knowledge, for a short time, those Kurusthamas dwell there in those gardens upon the slopes of the Gandhamadana, waiting for Arjuna," said Vaisampayana to Raja Janamejaya.

End of Vana Parva (Part 1)

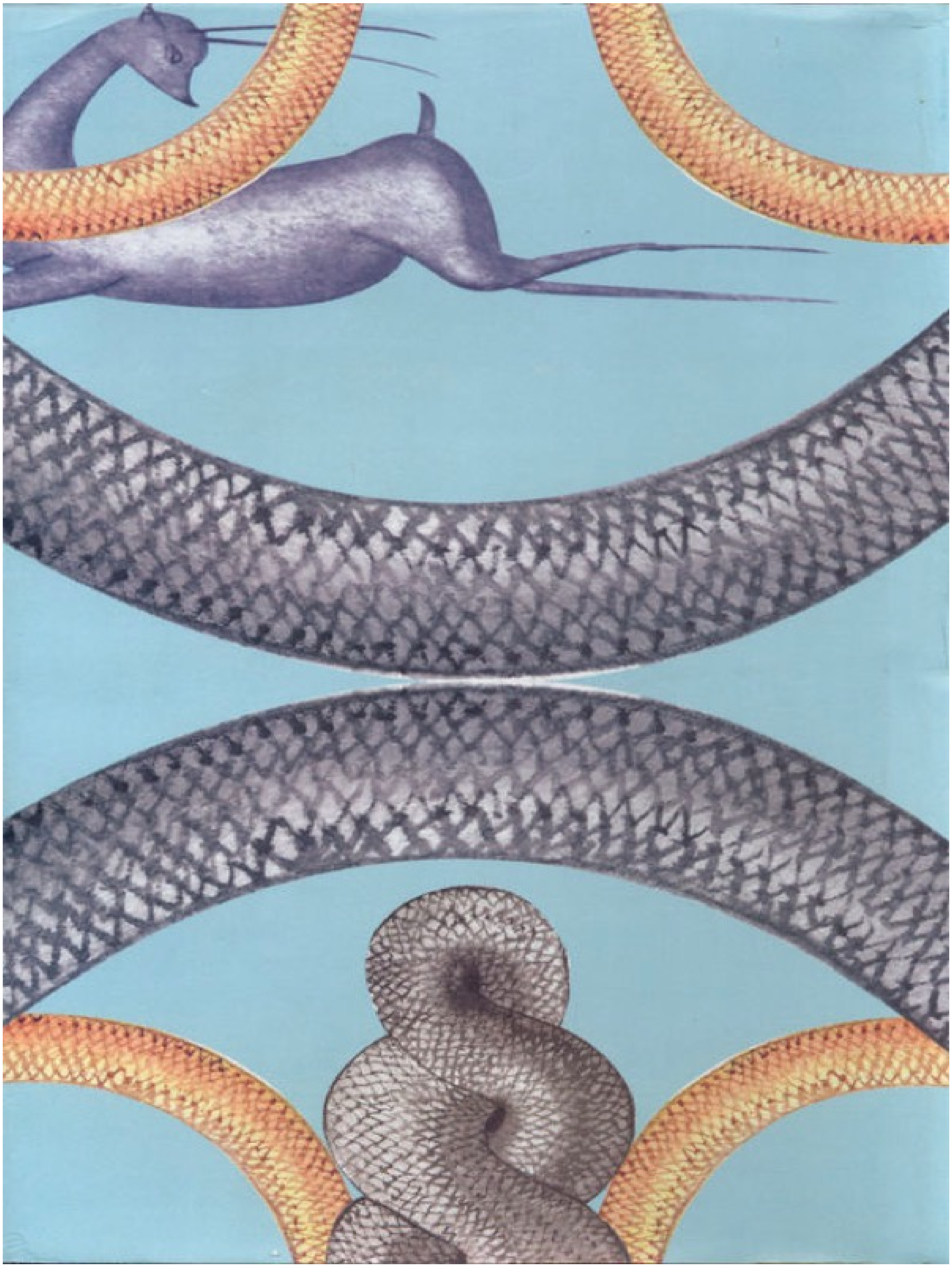
Ramesh Menon was born in 1951 in New Delhi. He has also written modern renderings of the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Srimad Bhagavadgita, Siva Purana, Devi Purana and Bhagavata Purana.

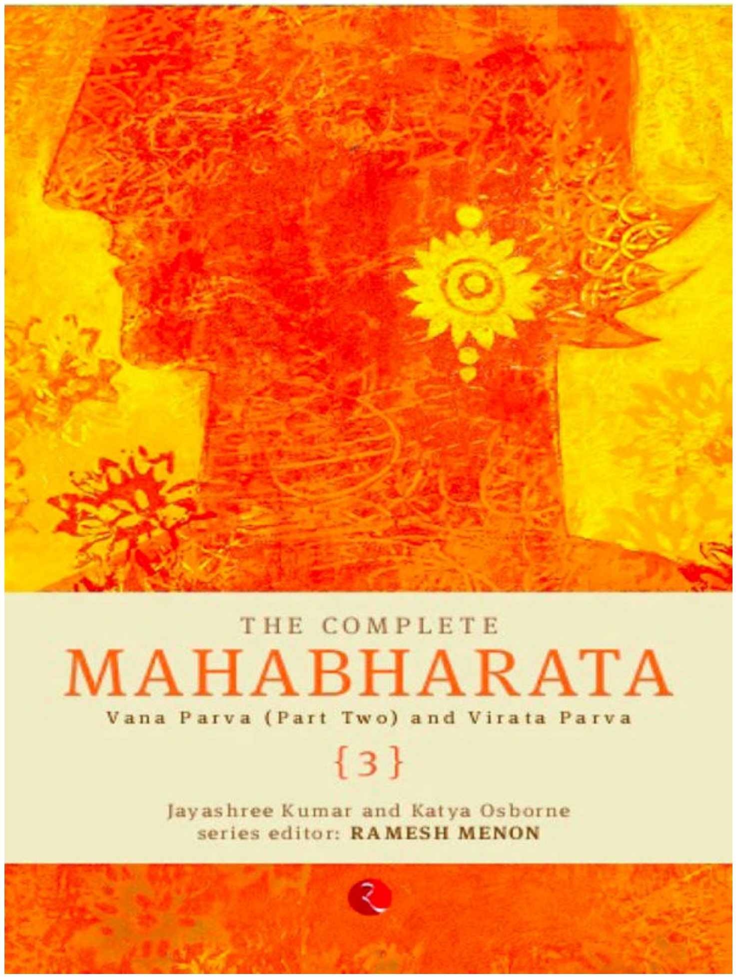
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Jayashree Kumar and Katya Osborne
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Volume 3

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For Kumar, my husband and best friend

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Virata Parva

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the Epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa Publications India, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the Great Epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is

very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ramesh Menon: he offered me this work; he believed in me even when I did not. Thank you.

Katya Douglas: my friend and first editor; she taught me how to appreciate the beauty and precision of the English language, that less is often more, all this with kindness and generosity. Thank you.

My mother Kausalya: her long discussions with my grandmother and aunt about the Mahabharata and its characters, as if they were familiar people they knew personally, gave me valuable insights into the meaning of honour, integrity and honesty; her joy in what I was doing encouraged me.

My aunt Radha: she shares my sense of devotion to the spirit of the epic and faith in its essence, The Bhagavad Gita; she shared with me her knowledge, gained from years of reading and re-reading this wonderful work; we had some wonderful discussions.

My son Govind: he made none of the demands that a mother expects of a son living on his own in a foreign country, but provided me with a haven in which I did some of my best writing.

My daughter Anuradha: she upheld me and encouraged me, especially at times when I despaired of being able to continue; made molehills of mountains, as is her wont, and made the impossible seem within reach.

My friends in Kodai, particularly Lathika, Zai, Aruna, Minoo, Shezarin, Saku, Radha, Khokon, Shewli, Philippe and Tiku: their broad shoulders, that I often leaned on, their encouragement and their unconditional friendship meant a lot to me whilst I worked on this volume.

VANA PARVA
(PART 2)

CANTO 155

TIRTHAYATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "In Gandhamadana, Yudhishtira says to Krishnaa, his brother Bhima and the Brahmanas, 'We have seen a succession of sacred tirthas and enchanting forests, which until now only the Devas and Devarishis have visited; and where Brahmanas have worshipped. We performed pujas with our Brahmanas in many hallowed places and heard them tell of the lives of great sages. In various tirthas, we performed ablutions with the Brahmanas and heard them narrate many tales of ancient Rishis and Rajarishis. We worshipped the Devas with water and flowers, and the Pitrs with whatever fruit and roots we could find. With the exalted ones, we performed ritual purification in the holy mountains, in the lakes and in the sacred ocean. We bathed in the Ila, in the Saraswati and in the Sindhu, in the Yamuna and in the Narmada, and in various other tirthas. As we passed the source of the Ganga, we saw splendid mountains and the Himalayas, inhabited by myriad species of birds, and also the yellow-flowered badari tree Visala, where Nara and Narayana have their asrama. And finally, we have set our eyes on this unearthly lake that is worshipped by the Siddhas, the Devas and the Munis. In fact, we have seen one by one all the most famed tirthas with the illustrious Lomasa.

Now, Bhima, how will we come to the sacred home of Vaisravana, where the Siddhas live? Think of how you will take us there.'

When the king says this, an asariri, a heavenly voice, speaks, saying, 'You will not be able to go to that inaccessible place. Return from this land

of Kubera to the place from which you came to Badari—Nara and Narayana's asrama. From there, Kaunteya, go to the hermitage of Vrishaparva, abundant in flowers and fruit, where Siddhas and Charanas dwell. Once you have passed that, go to the asrama of Arshtisena. From there you will be able to see the home of Kubera.'

As this voice speaks, the breeze freshens—cool, redolent with joy and an unearthly fragrance. Flowers rain from the sky at the sound of the celestial voice, and all are amazed, especially the Rishis and the Brahmanas.

The Brahmana Dhaumya says, 'We must do as the voice tells us.'

Yudhishtira returns to the asrama of Nara and Narayana and lives there in contentment, surrounded by Bhimasena, his other brothers, Panchali and the Brahmanas."

CANTO 156

JATASURA VADHA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, "There in the mountains, the Pandavas and their Brahmanas live in contented expectation of Arjuna's return. All the Rakshasas have left with Bhima's son when, one day while Bhimasena is away, a Rakshasa suddenly carries off Yudhishtira, the twins and Krishnaa. This demon has been living amongst the Pandavas in the guise of a high Brahmana, claiming that he is an experienced advisor and well-versed in the Shastras. He wants the bows, quivers, the other weapons and belongings of the Pandavas, and has been waiting for an opportunity to abduct Draupadi. He is the evil Jatasura.

Yudhishtira encouraged him, little knowing that he is like a fire hiding under ashes. And one day when Bhima is out hunting, and seeing that Ghatotkacha and his followers have gone and that those great Rishis of austere tapasya—Lomasa and the others—have gone to bathe and collect flowers for worship, the Rakshasa reveals a monstrous form. He gathers all the weapons of the Pandavas, seizes Draupadi and the three Pandavas, and flees.

Somehow, Sahadeva manages to struggle free and wrenches the sword named Kausika from the Rakshasa. He calls out, running in the direction in which his mighty brother Bhima went.

While being carried off, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja says to the Rakshasa, 'Foolish one, you have lost all the punya you earned. You do not respect dharma. Whether human or of a lower species, everyone is mindful of

dharma, particularly Rakshasas because they know virtue better than others. You ought to live by dharma.

O Rakshasa, the Devas, the Pitrs, the Siddhas, the Rishis, the Gandharvas, the animals and even the worms and ants depend for their lives on men; and you do, too. If the human race prospers, your race will, also; if humans suffer, so will you, and even the Devas. The gods thrive on the offerings we make. Rakshasa, we are the guardians, rulers and guides of kingdoms. If kingdoms are unprotected, how can prosperity and happiness exist?

Unless a king offends him, a Rakshasa should not harm one. Cannibal, we have committed no sin. We live on vighasa, the leftovers from oblations, and serve the gods and others as best we can; we are always respectful of our superiors and Brahmanas. A friend, a confidant, he whose food one has shared, and he who has given one shelter, these should never be injured. You have lived happily with us, been duly honoured and, evil one, shared our food. How can you abduct us?

What you are doing is sinful; your maturity in years has given you so little wisdom, and your nature is so evil that you deserve to die; and die you shall today. You are a sinner, so give us back our weapons and fight us; and bear Draupadi away if you win. However, if you are fool enough to do this vile thing without a fair fight, you will reap only curses and infamy. Rakshasa, abducting this woman is like shaking the pot to drink the last drop of poison in it.'

Yudhishtira makes his body heavy, weighing the Rakshasa down, and slowing his pace. To Draupadi and Nakula, and to Sahadeva, who has turned back, Yudhishtira says, 'Do not be afraid of the demon. The son of the Wind is near, and he will be here shortly and the evil one will die.'

Staring at the Rakshasa, Sahadeva says, 'There is nothing more honourable for a Kshatriya than to fall in fight or to defeat an enemy. Parantapa, we will fight; and either this Rakshasa will kill us or we shall kill him. This is the place and the time, Rajan. You of limitless prowess, the time has come for us to display our Kshatriya dharma. We shall either find Swarga through victory, or death in defeat.

This I swear—if the Rakshasa is still alive at sunset, I will not call myself a Kshatriya anymore. Rakshasa, I am Pandu's son Sahadeva. Kill me before you abduct our queen, or be killed and lie dead.'

Madri's son Sahadeva is still speaking when Bhima appears with a mace in his hand, like Vasava himself with his thunderbolt. He sees his two brothers and, on the shoulders of the demon, chaste Draupadi. He hears Sahadeva challenge the Rakshasa, and Jatasura hesitates, perplexed. Bhima sees his brothers and Draupadi in the demon's clutches and wrath surges in him.

He says to the Rakshasa, 'I already knew that you were an evil one when I saw how you looked at our weapons. But I did not kill you because you were no threat to me. You appeared to be a Brahmana, and you said nothing harsh to us. Indeed, you seemed to like pleasing us, and did us no wrong. Furthermore, you were our guest. How could I kill you, who were in the guise of a Brahmana and innocent of offence? He who kills one like this, even while knowing he is a Rakshasa, falls into hell. Besides, no one dies before their time comes.

And for you it has come today—wondrous fate made you think of abducting Krishnaa, and you have taken death's bait. Hoping to live now is as futile for you as for a fish whose mouth is already hooked. You will not go where you intended but to the place where Baka and Hidimba have gone.'

Listening to Bhima, the Rakshasa sets the other Pandavas and Draupadi down and, compelled by inexorable fate, prepares to fight. His lips quiver in anger as he says to Bhima, 'Wretched Bhima, I slowed down for you. Today I will offer your blood to all the Rakshasas you have killed.'

Bhima's rage erupts and, like Yama at the time of the pralaya, wetting the corners of his mouth and staring at Jatasura as he strikes his own arms with his fists in challenge, he rushes at the Rakshasa, who also runs at him, yawning wide his fanged maw, even as Mahabali once flew at Indra.

A dreadful battle begins, and when Madri's twins rush forward in fury, Vrikodara forbids them with a smile, 'Watch me! I swear by my brothers, myself, my punya, and my sacrifices, that I will kill this devil.'

The two grasp each other's arms. Unforgiving, the battle between the enraged Bhima and the red-eyed Rakshasa is like that between a Deva and an Asura. They uproot trees and strike each other with them, roaring like two cloud masses clashing against each other. Both are magnificently strong and charge at each other ferociously, breaking tree after tree over their thighs. The duel continues relentlessly, like the long-ago one between Vali

and Sugriva who fought over a woman. They pound each other with massive boles, roaring all the while.

O Bhaarata, when all the trees in that place have been uprooted and smashed to pulp, the two of unbridled strength take up rocks and continue to fight. They are like a mountain and a mighty mass of clouds. Fiery is their wrath, as they cast rocks that resemble brutal thunderbolts. They head-butt each other and seize each other's arms, like two elephants, each raining thunderous blows on the other. They gnash their teeth, like thunder crackling.

Then, with his clenched fist like a five-headed snake, Bhima delivers a mighty blow to the Rakshasa's neck, and Jatasura's knees turn weak. Bhimasena seizes his exhausted adversary.

The godlike son of Pandu lifts him high and smashes him onto the ground, breaking all his limbs. He strikes the Rakshasa's body with his elbow and wrenches his head off, with its bloodied, bitten lips and rolling eyes, like a fruit from its stem. Beheaded by Bhima Mahabaho, Jatasura dies, spouting gore from his open neck.

Bhima presents himself before Yudhishtira, and all those best of Brahmanas begin to praise him, even as the Maruts eulogised Vasava."

CANTO 157

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, “After the Rakshasa’s death, Yudhishtira returns to the hermitage of Narayana and lives there. One day, thinking of his brother Arjuna, Yudhishtira calls all his brothers and Draupadi together and says, ‘We have passed these four years peacefully, wandering in these woods. Bibhatsu has said that in the fifth year he would come to that king of mountains, Sweta, always festive with blossoming plants, singing kokilas and humming black bees, peacocks and chatakas, and inhabited by tigers, boars and buffaloes, gavayas, deer and other wild animals. This sacred mountain is lovely with lotuses of a thousand and one hundred petals, bright with lilies blooming and blue lotuses, and frequented by Devas and Asuras.

In eager anticipation of meeting our brother, we, too, have decided to go there. Partha of matchless strength said to me, “I will stay abroad for five years and hone my skills at arms.” It will be in a place resembling Devaloka that we will see the wielder of the Gandiva, when he returns with the Devastras.’

The Pandava summons the Brahmanas, and the sons of Pritha walk around these ascetics of unflinching austerity, in pradakshina. They tell them their plan to meet Arjuna, to which the Brahmanas give their approval, saying ‘You will prosper. Bhaaratottama, your troubled time will have a happy ending. You will overcome your difficulties and regain the Earth, and rule over her with Kshatriya dharma as your sceptre.’

Bowing to the ascetics, Yudhishtira, scourge of his enemies, sets out with his brothers and the Brahmanas, followed by Ghatotkacha and his Rakshasas, and protected by Rishi Lomasa. With his brothers, Yudhishtira of the dazzling tejas and austere vratas goes on foot wherever he can, and the Rakshasas carry him where he cannot.

The king overcomes every obstacle and travels north, where lions, tigers and elephants roam; on the way, they see Mainaka parvata, the foothills of Mount Gandhamadana, and Sweta, rocky massif. They also see crystal rivulets as they climb to the higher reaches of the mountains, and on the seventeenth day they reach the holy Himalayas.

Rajan, not far from Gandhamadana, on the sacred slopes of Himavan, covered with trees and creepers, Pandu's son sees the holy asrama of Vrishaparva, surrounded by flowering trees that grow near waterfalls. And when those Parantapas have rested and recovered from their tiredness, they go to the Rajarishi Vrishaparva, and greet him. The royal sage receives them as lovingly as if they are his own sons.

Those Kshatriyas spend seven nights here, and are treated with respect and affection. On the eighth day, they take the exalted Vrishaparva's leave to resume their journey. One by one, they introduce all the Brahmanas, who had stayed as friends under his protection in the hermitage. The sons of Pandu entrust all their belongings to Vrishaparva—their sacrificial vessels, their ornaments and jewels. The wise and devout sage, well versed in dharma, and a trikalagyani who sees the future as clearly as he sees the past and the present, advises the Pandavas and the Brahmanas as he would his own sons.

Those heroes set out towards the north. Vrishparva goes a short distance with them, giving the Brahmanas detailed directions of the route they must take; he entrusts the Pandavas into their care and blesses them all before he turns back to his asrama.

Then Yudhishtira of endless might and his brothers set off along the mountain path alive with all kinds of animals. After four days of traversing slopes dense with trees, the sons of Pandu, like a cloud mass, reach the Sweta mountain that flows with countless streams and rich with an abundance of gold and gems.

They follow the route Vrishaparva showed them and pass all the landmarks he mentioned, one after the other. On the way, they see mountains, they cross inaccessible peaks and impregnable caves.

In a group they walk—Dhaumya, Krishnaa, Lomasa and the sons of Pritha—strangely tireless, and finally arrive at the sacred mountain which echoes with the cries of birds and animals. Trees and creepers cover the ground, monkeys are everywhere; enchanting lakes are covered over with lotuses; marshes appear here and there; and the forests are vast.

Thus, their hair standing on end, the Pandavas see Mount Gandhamadana, the home of Kimpurushas, where the Siddhas and Charanas visit, where Vidyadharis and Kinnaras wander, where herds of elephants roam freely, where lions and tigers and wild beasts throng, where the roars of sarabhas fill the air. They enter the denseness of Gandhamadana, as if it were the inviting Nandana grove that delights the soul.

As the Kshatriyas, Draupadi and the Brahmanas enter, they hear bird-song, indescribably sweet and graceful notes, broken only by the sound of animals at play. They see trees heavy with fruit and bent by their weight, and bright with flowers—mango, hog-plum, bhavya and pomegranate; citron, jack, lakucha and plantain; water reed; parvatam, champaka and the lovely kadamba; bilva, wood-apple, rose-apple and kasmari; jujube, fig and cluster fig; banyan, aswattha, kshirika and bhalla; ataka, amalaka and bibhitaka; inguda and karamarda and giant-fruited tinduka; and countless, nameless others clustered with sweet, nectarine fruit, on the slopes of Gandhamadana.

Besides fruit trees, they see champakas, asokas, ketakas and bakulas; punnagas and saptaparnas; karnikaras and petals; beautiful kutajas and mandaras; and lotuses; and parijatas; kovidaras and devadarudras; salas, palmyra palms, tamalas and pippalas; salmalis and kinsukas; sinsapas and saralas. And on these trees live chakoras, woodpeckers, chatakas and various other birds, singing sweetly to please the green world.

They see lakes with water-birds flying overhead, surrounded by kumudas, pundarikas, kokanadas and utpalas; and kalharas and kamalas, and crowded on all sides with mandrakes and red geese; ospreys and gulls; karandavas and plavas; swans; and cranes and cormorants and other aquatic birds.

Those Naravyaghras, tigers among men, see these lakes adorned with endless banks of lotuses, and ringing with the sweet hum of happy bees intoxicated on their nectar and reddened with the pollen falling from lotus cups. In the groves they see peacocks with their hens, driven mad with

monsoon lust by the trumpeting of the clouds; and drowsy with desire, dancing with tails spread in iridescent glory, and crying in plaintive, melodious voices. Some of the peacocks sport with their mates on kutaja trees covered by creepers; some sit on the branches, spreading the gorgeous fans that make the trees look as if they are wearing jewelled crowns.

In the glades they see graceful sindhuvaras looking like Kama's arrows. And on the peaks of the mountain they see karnikara trees in bloom, heavy with their yellow flowers that look like golden eardrops. And in the forest they see flowering kurubakas with their cupid's-dart blossoms that strike feverish desire and restlessness into a man. And they see tilakas that look like the sacred mark painted on the forehead of the forest. They see mango trees with their lacy blossoms, and humming black bees hovering over them, and infusing desire.

On the mountain slopes are diverse flowering trees, wild bouquets of blossoms—some golden, some flame orange, some red, some brown and some still blue-green like lapis lazuli. There are rows and rows of sala and tamala, patala and bakula trees—garlands adorning the peaks. They see on the slopes of the mountain so many lotus-laden lakes, transparent like crystal, swans gliding on them, their waters echoing with the cries of cranes, and sensuous to the touch.

Everywhere are delicately fragrant flowers, luscious fruit, romantic pools and rivers and captivating trees; and the Pandavas' eyes widen in wonder at the sights they see as they penetrate into the fastness. As they go, breezes fan them, perfumed by kamalas and utpalas, and kalharas and pundarikas.

A deeply moved Yudhishtira says in some rapture to Bhima, 'Ah, Bhima, beautiful indeed is this forest of the Gandhamadana. Look at these celestial trees and creepers, decked with foliage and fruit; and every tree bears flowers. On this Gandhamadana the leaves and fruit of all the trees are so bright and glossy. And look! See how these lakes, filled with lotuses unfurled and ringing with the hum of black bees, are churned by elephants with their mates. Look at that lake ringed by rows of lotuses, like a second Sri wearing garlands. Bhima, this is such a forest, rich with the heady scent of flowers and the buzzing of black bees. Behold, all around you, the playground of the Devas!

By coming here, we have attained an extra-human condition, and been blessed. Son of Pritha, look how exquisitely flowery creepers embrace the

mighy trees. Listen, Bhima, to the notes of the peacocks calling to their hens on the mountain slopes. Watch the birds—chakoras, satapatras, lust-maddened kokilas, and parrots—alight gracefully on branches, where, among the twigs are myriad jivajivakas of scarlet, yellow and red, looking at one another; and the cranes in the green and reddish grass and beside the waterfalls. Bhringarajas, upachakras, and herons pour forth their notes to charm all creatures.

And look! With their mates, four-tusked elephants, pale as cream lotuses, agitate that lake of the colour of lapis. See how torrents as high as several palmyra palms placed one upon another cascade from the cliffs. Ah, brilliant silvery minerals, shining like the Sun, and like autumnal clouds, adorn this incomparable mountain. In some places, the minerals are as black as kohl, in some they are like burnished gold, in others pale yellow, and in some vermilion.

I see caves of red arsenic that look like dark, evening clouds, in some places the caves of red chalk are the colour of the hare. There are places where the minerals are like white and grey clouds; and in others, they are radiant as the rising Sun.

My brother, it is all exactly as Vrishaparva said: Gandharvas and Kimpurushas, with their lovers, are visible on the peaks. And listen, Bhima! Hear the songs in myriad ragas and Vedic hymns that all creatures delight in. Look at heaven's river, the sacred and graceful Mahaganga, with swans upon her, and visited by Rishis and Kinnaras. O Slayer of your foes, behold this mountain with its mines, rivers, forests, beasts, Nagas of different shapes and a hundred heads, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and Apsaras.'

The valiant Parantapas, who have attained a spiritually elevated state, Draupadi and the peerless Brahmanas are enraptured, and cannot have their fill of looking at that greatest of mountains.

Soon they come to the hermitage of the royal sage Arshtisena, and they approach the skeletal form of this bare-bodied Rishi of great tapasya."

CANTO 158

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "On entering the presence of the venerable one whose sins have been expiated by his penance, Yudhishtira announces himself and joyfully greets the sage, bowing his head in reverence. Krishnaa, Bhima and the twins do the same, and they all stand around the Rajarishi. The priest of the Pandavas, the virtuous Dhaumya, also approaches the sage who, with his all-seeing mind, already knows that it is the Pandavas who stand before him.

This sage of lofty vows invites them to be seated and receives the king of the Kurus with due respect. After Yudhishtira enquires about his well-being, and the brothers are seated, the Muni says, 'Do your minds turn away from dharma, or are you inclined towards virtue? Kaunteya, has your devotion to your parents decreased? Do you honour all your superiors, the aged and those who know the Vedas? And, O Son of Pritha, do you lean towards sinful deeds? Do you, best of the Kurus, perform spiritually beneficial karma and avoid evil? Are you conceited? Do you gratify the pious and honour them? And even while living in the forests, did you cling to dharma?

Yudhishtira, does Dhaumya ever grieve at how you treat him? Do you follow the customs of your ancestors, in charity and religious rites, in asceticism, purity, truthfulness and forgiveness? And do you follow in the footsteps of the Rajarishis of old? On the birth of a son in their lineage, the Pitrs in their regions, laugh and cry at the same time, thinking *Will the sins*

of this son of our house harm us, or will his righteous deeds augment our welfare?

He that pays homage to his father, his mother, his Guru, Agni and, fifthly, the Atman, conquers both this world and the next.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Worshipful one, the duties you speak of are exemplary and, to the best of my knowledge, I can say that I do discharge them properly.'

Arshtisena says, 'During the parvas, full moons, sages subsisting on air and water come unto this best of mountains, flying through the sky. And on the summit of the mountain one sees amorous Kimpurushas and their lovers, entwined, as well as Gandharvas and Apsaras clothed in white silk, and Vidyadharas wearing garlands, and mighty Nagas, and Suparnas, and Uragas, and other wondrous beings.

And there on the summits, one hears the sounds of kettle-drums, tabors, conch-shells and mridangas. Bhaaratottama, you will hear these from here; do not be tempted to climb all the way there. In fact, it is impossible to go any further. That place is the playground of the Devas and mortals do not have access to it. Bhaarata, there all creatures are hostile to mortals, and guardian Rakshasas punish humans that are presumptuous enough to venture into that place. Beyond the summit of Kailasa is the path of the Devarishis, the celestial sages. If anyone is impudent enough to go beyond this, the Rakshasas will kill him with savage weapons.

There, my child, during the parvas, one can see Vaisravana, who is always borne on the shoulders of Yakshas and Guhyakas, in all his pomp and grandeur, surrounded by Apsaras. And when that lord of all the Rakshasas is seated on the summit, all creatures see him as the rising Sun, O Best of Bhaaratas. That peak is the home of the Devas, the Danavas, the Siddhas, and of Kubera. During the parvas, full moons, the sweet notes of Tumburu, as he entertains Kubera, the lord of treasures, are heard all over Gandhamadana.

Child, Yudhishtira, here, when the moon is full, all creatures see and hear marvels such as these. Pandavas, stay here until you meet Arjuna. Eat luscious fruits and the food of the Munis. Child, having come here, do not show any restlessness. Live here at ease, amusing yourself in any way you choose. Eventually, having first conquered it by the strength of your arms, you will rule the Earth.' "

CANTO 159

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "How long did my great-grandfathers live on the Gandhamadana mountain? What did those splendid Kshatriyas do? What did they eat while they lived there? O excellent Vaisampayana, tell me about these things. Describe Bhimasena's valour and what that Mahabaho did upon the Himalaya mountain. Surely, Brahmanottama, he did not fight with the Yakshas again. Did my grandfathers meet Vaisravana? As Arshtisena said, the lord of wealth must have gone there. Great tapasvin, I want to hear all the details, for I have not had my fill, hearing of their exploits."

Vaisampayana continued, "When the Pandavas hear Arshtisena's peerless advice, they do as he says. They live on Mount Himavan, eating the same food that the Munis do—delicious fruit, various kinds of pure honey and the flesh of deer killed with venomless arrows. In this way they pass the fifth year, listening to sacred legends that Rishi Lomasa narrates. Rajan, Ghatotkacha has already left with the other Rakshasas, saying, 'I will return when you need me again.'

The princes pass many months in the asrama and see many wondrous sights.

One day, as the Pandavas are amusing themselves, some devout and stern ascetics and blessed Charanas of pure souls come to see them. Yudhishtira speaks with them of things lofty and spiritual. A few days pass in this way, when Garuda suddenly seizes a mighty Naga living in the lake

in his talons and bears it away. The mountain trembles, and gigantic trees snap in the gale raised by Suparna's awesome wings. The Pandavas and all the creatures there witness the wonder that takes place.

From the crest of that mountain the wind blows in all kinds of fragrant and lovely flowers, and the Pandavas and Krishnaa, with their companions, see some other-worldly five-coloured blossoms.

Krishnaa says to Bhima, as he sits relaxed, 'Best of the Bhaaratas, all the creatures on this mountain see these five-hued flowers, carried by the wind raised by Suparna, raining into the river Aswaratha. In the Khandava vana, your brother Arjuna thwarted Gandharvas and Nagas and Vasava himself and killed fierce Rakshasas, and obtained the Gandiva. You, too, have unquenchable strength and the might of your arms is as irrepressible as Sakra's.

O Bhimasena, terrify all the Rakshasas with the might of your arms, so that they leave the mountain and flee to the ten cardinal points. Only then will we all be free from fear and see the sacred summit of this best of mountains, adorned with the flowers of five hues. O Bhima, I have long cherished the thought of seeing the summit, protected by the might of your arms.'

Like a mettlesome bull wounded, Bhima is stung by what she says; he cannot bear it. And that Pandava who has the gait of a lion, who is graceful and generous, who blazes in golden splendour, who is intelligent and strong, proud, sensitive and heroic, who has red eyes and broad shoulders, who is gifted with the strength of an elephant in musth, who has leonine teeth and a heavy neck, who is tall as a young sala tree, who is honourable, who is handsome in every limb, whose neck has whorls like a shell, whose arms are inexorable, takes up his bow inlaid with gold and his sword. He who has never known fear charges towards the cliff.

All the mountain creatures see him with his bow and arrows, rushing at them like a lion, like a maddened elephant. To Draupadi's delight, Bhima, mace in hand, runs towards that monarch of mountains. Neither exhaustion nor fatigue, nor lethargy, nor the ill-will of others affects the son of Pritha and Vayu as he goes.

He arrives at a rugged pass through which only one person can go. By this narrow way, the irresistible Bhima climbs to the top of the mountain, as high as countless palmyra palms set one on top of the other, and makes Kinnaras, Nagas, Munis, Gandharvas and Rakshasas joyful.

From that summit he sees the home of Vaisravana adorned with gold, and other crystal palaces encircled by golden walls inlaid with radiant gems. So many gardens surround this place taller than a mountain peak, splendid with ramparts and towers, gates and gateways, and row upon row of fluttering flags. Graceful maidens dance while the pennants wave in the breeze.

He leans against his bow and he gazes with wonder at the city of Kubera Vaisravana, lord of treasures. A fine breeze blows gladness into the hearts of all the creatures, wafting sweet perfumes everywhere. Unearthly trees of many colours echo with mellifluous birdsong as the Pandava surveys the palace of the lord of the Rakshasas, which is scattered with piles of gemstones and where many-hued garlands hang in profusion. There stands Bhima Mahabaho, his mind empty of mundane thoughts, steadfast as a rock, with his mace, sword and bow.

Then he blows his conch-shell, making the hair on the bodies of his enemies stand on end; he twangs his bow-string and slaps his arms with his hands, striking terror into the hearts of one and all. Following the direction of the tremendous sounds, the hairs on their bodies standing on end, the infuriated Yakshas and Rakshasas rush at the Pandava. The maces and clubs, swords, spears, javelins and axes in the hands of the Yakshas and Rakshasas blaze and, O Bhaarata, the battle between the Rakshasas and Bhima erupts.

Bhima uses his arrows to cut off the darts, javelins and axes hurled at him by the Rakshasas, who are great mayavis, illusionists. Bhima pierces the bodies of the screaming Rakshasas—those that fly in the sky and the ones that stand on the Earth. Blood sprays from the bodies of Rakshasas and Yakshas and soaks mighty Bhima. Their limbs and hands are struck cleanly off by Bhima's driving weapons.

All the creatures there see the regal Pandava surrounded by the Rakshasas like the Sun darkened by clouds. And just as the Sun sheds his rays over all the Earth, Bhima Mahabaho, of untold prowess, sends his arrows in all directions, decimating his enemies. The Rakshasas still roar menacingly, but Bhima prevails. The terrified Yakshas, their bodies mangled, utter horrible cries and, in sheer dread, fling down their weapons and flee southwards, leaving behind maces, spears, swords, clubs and axes.

Eventually, there is only one warrior left of the Rakshasas—mighty-chested, mighty-armed Maniman, friend of Kubera, his weapons in his

hands. He is majestic as he calls out to the fleeing armies, 'When you come before Vaisravana, what will you say to the lord of wealth, when he asks how so many of his warriors were defeated by a single mortal?'

And, truly like an angry elephant, he charges the Pandava, attacking him with all his weapons. Bhimasena stabs his sides with three arrows, and Maniman casts his mace at the human like a thunderbolt. Bhima catches that baleful mace and throws it into the sky. It looks like a shield of lightning and deflects the searing salvo of arrows with which Maniman showers him. The Rakshasa launches an iron club with a golden arrowhead at its tip. It spews flames and roars as it pierces Bhima's arm, felling him.

Wounded sore, Kunti's son takes up his own mace, his eyes now rolling in his head from rage. Taking up his gold-inlaid mace, which terrorises his enemies and crushes them, Bhima flings it surely at Maniman, who cries out in pain at being struck. Roaring, Maniman draws a fiery astra and looses it at Bhima. But Bhima breaks the shaft with a swing of his mace, and that Pandava, best of all mace-fighters, rushes at the Rakshasa, as intent on killing him as Garuda swooping down on a snake.

Then, suddenly, Bhima springs into the sky. He brandishes his mace and, with a reverberant shout hurls it down on his enemy. Like a thunderbolt cast by Indra, the mace flashes; it strikes the Rakshasa squarely on his head, so it bursts apart, and Maniman falls dead. All the others see how Bhima kills the Rakshasa, as a lion does a bull. The other Rakshasas still left alive see their leader slain and run towards the east crying out in fear."

CANTO 160

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Below, Yudhishtira, Madri's twins, Dhaumya, Krishnaa, all the Brahmanas and other friends of the Pandavas hear the caves around them echo with awful sounds; they do not see Bhima anywhere and are worried. Leaving Draupadi in the charge of Arshtisena, the maharathas climb the mountain, carrying their weapons.

On reaching the summit, they see Bhima and, all around, the great Rakshasas whom he has felled lying unconscious. Holding his mace and sword and bow, Bhima Mahabaho looks like Indra after he razed the Danava hosts. In exultation, the other Pandavas run to embrace Bhima and then sit on the mountain-top, making the peak look like swarga graced by the Lokapalas.

Yudhishtira sees the abode of Kubera; he sees the slain Rakshasas on the ground, and he says to his brother, 'Either rashness or ignorance has made you commit this sin. Kshatriya, this indiscriminate slaughter is uncharacteristic of you, especially since you now lead the life of a sannyasi. The wise, who know about dharma, say that one must never do anything to provoke the displeasure of a king. But you have, O Bhimasena, you have perpetrated a deed that will offend even the gods. The man who turns to sin, ignoring artha and dharma, reaps the harvest of his wrongdoing. If you love me, never do such a thing again.'

Saying this to his brother, the virtuous Yudhishtira, of the ineffable tejas and unshakeable resolve, well-versed in every detail of artha, sinks into

thoughtful reflection.

In the meanwhile, the Rakshasas who survived Bhima's assault have fled to the abode of Kubera, and these swift beings quickly reach Vaisravana's palace, crying in distress, and trembling still in fear of Bhima.

Bereft of their weapons, exhausted, their armour streaked with blood and hair dishevelled, they say to Kubera, 'Lord, all your best Rakshasas have been killed, though they fought with maces, clubs and swords, and with lances and barbed arrows. O lord of treasures, a mere human scaled the mountain, and single-handedly massacred all your Rakshasas of the Krodhavasa clan. And, Lord, all the best of your Yakshas and other Rakshasas are also dead. Only we few escaped, while even your friend Maniman was slain. A mere mortal did all this, O Kubera. Now do what you think is right.'

The lord of all the Yakshas and Rakshasas hears this and his eyes redden. The enraged Kubera says, 'Yoke my horses!'

At once, his attendants yoke the horses adorned with golden ornaments to a chariot big as a hill and the colour of dark clouds. Yoked to the chariot, his superb steeds, each endowed with every noble quality and the auspicious ten curls of hair, of incredible strength and speed, decked with various gems and looking splendid, impatient to be off and fly like the wind, begin to neigh to each other as if they are already victorious.

And the king of the Yakshas rides forth, to the singing of his praises by Devas and Gandharvas.

A thousand foremost Yakshas of huge bodies, red eyes and golden lustre, gifted with enormous strength, strap on their swords and follow their lord Kubera. So swift is the flight of those horses that when they arrive at Gandhamadana it appears as if they have hauled the sky back with their speed.

The hair on the bodies of the Pandavas stands on end when they see the lord of wealth's horses and then the graceful and lustrous Kubera surrounded by the Yaksha host.

Kubera sees the sons of Pandu, maharathas armed with bows and swords, and he, too, is delighted, eager to fulfil the task at hand. The Yakshas, swift as the fastest birds, alight on the summit of the mountain and stand before the Pandavas, with their Lord at their head.

Then, O Bhaarata, because their master is pleased to see the Pandavas, the Yakshas and the Gandharvas stand there calmly. Knowing themselves to

be transgressors, the noble Pandavas bow their heads and stand surrounding Kubera with folded hands.

The lord of treasures sits on the remarkable vimana, the elegant Pushpaka, made by Viswakarman and colourfully painted. Thousands of Yakshas and Rakshasas—some with gigantic bodies, some with pointed ears—hundreds of Gandharvas and hosts of Apsaras sit around him, like the Devas surrounding Indra, performer of a hundred sacrifices.

Kubera wears a golden garland around his neck, and has his paasa—his divine noose, his sword and his bow in his hands. Bhima stands gazing at the Lokapala and the sight of the god removes all the pain of the wounds the Rakshasas inflicted on him.

He, who is carried on the shoulders of Yakshas, sees Bhima's naturally warlike stance and his battle-ready weapons, and says to Yudhishtira, 'Kaunteya, all creatures know you as one who wants their welfare. You may live on this summit with your brothers, without any fear. O Pandava, do not be angry with Bhima. These Yakshas and Rakshasas were destined to die; your brother was merely the instrument of their death. There is no need to be ashamed of his impetuousness. The slaying of the Rakshasas was foretold by the gods. I am not angry with Bhimasena. In fact, I am rather pleased with him, Bhaaratottama. What Bhima did has made me happy!'

Now Kubera addresses Bhimasena, 'Child, best of the Kurus, I do not mind what you have done. Since you did it to please Krishnaa and because you depended only on your own strength, even though you disregarded the Devas and me, as well, when you did this reckless thing, I am pleased with you. Vrikodara, today you have freed me from an old curse. The Maharishi Agastya once cursed me in anger for an offence of mine; by what you did, you have liberated me. Pandava, my disgrace at a mortal's hands has long been destined. No offence attaches to you in any way.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Divine one, why were you cursed by the exalted Agastya? I am surprised that you were not consumed in an instant, along with your armies and companions, by the Muni's wrath.'

Kubera says, 'At Kusavati, O King, once a conclave of the Devas was held. I was on my way there with three hundred fierce Mahapadma Yakshas, all carrying various weapons, when we came upon that best of Rishis, Agastya Muni, engaged in severe tapasya on the banks of the Yamuna, where birds sing and trees are full of flowers. We saw him, a mass of blinding light, where he sat facing the Sun with his arms upraised. Out of

foolishness, ignorance and arrogance, my friend, the elegant Rakshasa lord Maniman spat on the head of the Maharishi.

The sage's anger blazed up as if to consume the Earth, and he said to me, "Lord of treasures, your friend has insulted me in your presence. So, he, together with your forces, will meet their deaths at the hands of a mortal. And, evil one, you will grieve when they die, but shall be absolved from this curse when you come face to face with that same mortal. However, this curse will not affect the descendants of those of your people who are obedient to you."

This is how I was cursed by the Maharishi, and now, O great king, your brother Bhima has freed me.' "

CANTO 161

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"The lord of treasures says, 'Yudhishtira, five qualities lead to success—patience, ability, awareness of the right time and the right place, and resolve. O Bhaarata, in the Krita Yuga, men were steadfast and skilled in their respective occupations, and they knew the laws that dictated the wielding of power. And, foremost of Kshatriyas, only a king who is blessed with patience, who understands the importance of place and time, and who is well-acquainted with the laws of dharma, can rule the world for any length of time. In any transaction, he who conducts himself with dharma acquires fame in this world and a lofty place in the next. By having displayed his prowess at the proper place and time, Sakra, with the Vasus, gained sovereignty in Swarga.

He whose vision is clouded by anger and cannot see his coming fall, he who is addicted to sin because of his evil nature, and he who does not know the appropriateness of the time and place for action will meet with destruction both in this world and the next. All the efforts of such a stupid man are futile, because he does not know the when and where of his actions, and he will not escape doom in this world and the next.

Evil and deceitful men, who commit rash deeds, aiming to gain mastery over everything, are actually committing a sin. Bhimasena is fearless, ignorant of his dharma, haughty, immature and impetuous. You must check him.

Return to the asrama of the pious Arshtisena and stay there during the dark fortnight, free of anxiety. Lord of men, at my command, all the Gandharvas living in Alaka, as well as those living on this mountain, will protect you and these good Brahmanas.

Rajan, upbraid Vrikodara for the rashness that led him here. Now on, O King, beings living in the forest will come to you; they will wait upon you and always watch over all of you. My servants will procure delicious meats and drinks for you. Yudhishtira, my son, just as you were born of a Deva, Arjuna was, too, entitling him to the protection of Indra. So, also, is Vrikodara protected by Vayu and the powerful twins by the Aswins. In the same way, now you are all entitled to my protection.

Phalguna, next in line to Bhimasena, and versed in artha and dharma, is well in Devaloka. Dhanajaya was born with all the perfect attributes that are recognised in the world as leading to Swarga. Self-restraint, generosity, strength, intelligence, modesty, fortitude and boundless energy are all found in this one man of the fathomless soul. Jishnu never commits any dishonourable act, even through ignorance. No one can ever say that Partha has uttered a lie.

And now, Bhaarata, honoured by the Devas, the Pitrs and the Gandharvas, that enhancer of Kuru glory is learning the Astra Shastra, the science of weapons, in Sakra's abode. Santanu, who ruled so justly over all the rulers of the Earth, that boundlessly powerful and wise king, your father's grandfather, dwells in Swargaloka and he is extremely gratified in Arjuna, wielder of the Gandiva and the best of his clan.

Living in Indra's celestial abode, your grandsire Santanu, emperor of the unflinching vratas, who worshipped the Devas, the Pitrs and the Brahmanas on the banks of the Yamuna by performing seven Aswamedha yagnas, who has attained Swarga, asks after your welfare.'

The Pandavas are happy to hear Kubera. Bhima lowers his club and mace, his sword and bow, and he bows down low before Kubera. Seeing Bhima prostrate before him, the lord of treasures says, 'May you be the destroyer of the pride of your foes, and the enhancer of the delight of your friends.

Parantapas, live in our beautiful country. The Yakshas will bring you everything you need. Arjuna will return soon, after mastering the Astra Shastra. Indra Maghavat will bid him farewell and Dhananjaya will join you.'

After speaking to Yudhishtira, the lord of the Guhyakas vanishes from the mountain-top. Thousands of Yakshas and Rakshasas follow him in chariots spread with decorated cushions and ornamented with jewels. As the swift horses fly towards Kubera's abode, they are like flocks of birds coursing across the sky. Indeed, these horses are so swift that it seems as if they suck the sky and swallow it as they go.

At Kubera's command, the corpses of the slain Rakshasas are removed from the summit of the mountain. The curse of Maharishi Agastya has ended and, having died in battle, the Rakshasas are freed. The Pandavas remain there for many nights, honoured by the liberated Rakshasas."

CANTO 162

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “O Parantapa, at sunrise Dhaumya finishes his daily devotions and comes to the Pandavas with Arshtisena. The sons of Pandu touch the feet of Dhaumya and Arshtisena, and pay homage to all the Brahmanas.

Then, facing the east, Dhaumya takes Yudhishtira’s right hand in his and says, ‘O Great King, Mandara, the king of mountains, is vast and spans the earth right down to the ocean. Indra and Vaisravana protect this place graced with airy woods, forests and mountains. My child, the wisest sages, who know all about dharma, say that this realm is the abode of Indra and Vaisravana. Dvijas versed in varna dharma, Siddhas, Sadhyas and the Devas worship the Sun as he rises from here. Righteous Yama, lord of all living beings, presides over that southern region where the souls of departed beings go.

And this is Samyamanam, the abode of the lord of departed spirits, sacred and wonderful to behold, and crowned with bliss. The all-knowing ones have named this monarch of mountains Asta, and Surya arrives here, always abiding by the truth. Lord Varuna, dwelling here on this king of mountains as well as in the ocean, protects all living beings.

O blessed one, lighting up the northern point is the mighty mountain Mahameru, auspicious and the refuge of those who have attained the Brahman. That is where Brahma holds court, and from where Prajapati created all moving and immobile things of the Earth. Meru is the blissful

abode of the seven mind-born sons of Brahma, of whom Daksha is the seventh. Child, it is here that the seven divine Rishis, the Saptarishis with Vasishta at their head, rise and set. Look at the matchless, radiant summit of Meru, where the Pitamaha Brahma sits with the celestials absorbed in the bliss of self-knowledge.

Next to Brahma's dwelling, you can see the home of Narayana, from whom all creation originated, and who has neither beginning nor end. Rajan, that holy place is so concentrated with divine energy that even the gods cannot look at it. By its very nature the abode of Vishnu Mahatman is full of splendour more brilliant than the Sun or Fire, and no one can look at it, not even the Devas or the Danavas. This place lies resplendent, to the east of the Meru, and it is here that the Lord of all creatures, the self-created Creator of the universe, in whom everything is manifested, dwells in a state of illumined grace.

Neither Maharishis nor Brahmarishis have access to this place, only Yatis do. Son of Pandu, in his presence here, the bodies of light cannot shine, because He alone, who is beyond understanding, shines in supreme transcendent lustre.

Here, by virtue of their tapasya and purified by their piety, the Yatis are able to approach Narayana Hari. And, O Bhaarata, once they reach this place and attain the eternal God of Gods, Hari the Self-creator, these spiritual beings, who are free from ignorance and pride, and who have attained perfection through yoga, never return to the mortal world.

Yudhishtira, this place is without a beginning, it does not decay, nor does it end, for it is the very being of Vishnu Narayana. And, O sinless son of the Kurus, the Sun and the Moon circumambulate Meru everyday in pradakshina, in opposite directions. The other planets and bodies of light also travel around this king of mountains.

The Sun God, who dispels darkness, revolves around Sumeru, obscuring other light-giving bodies. The maker of day sets and passes the evening, then takes a northerly course. Always mindful of the welfare of all beings, he turns eastwards again as he nears Meru.

In the same way, the divine Moon goes round this mountain, with the stars, and accurately divides the month into several cantos, marked by his arrival at each parva, each full moon. Unerringly does he circumambulate the mighty Meru and, nourishing all creatures, the Moon returns to Mandara.

The divine Surya Deva, the destroyer of darkness, also moves unfettered on his path, giving life to the universe. When he takes to the south with the intention of causing the rain to fall, winter ensues. And then, when he turns back towards the north, his rays draw out the energy from all beings, mobile and rooted. He makes men perspire, making them tired, lethargic and drowsy. All living things feel drowsy at this time. From here, moving through the mysterious sky, the sacred Sun brings rain and revives the Earth. Having nourished all beings with soothing showers, warmth and winds, majestic Surya begins his course all over again. Kaunteya, with his movements, the Sun unerringly turns the Kaalachakra, wheel of time, with mastery over all created things. His course is unceasing; he never stops to rest, O Pandava. He takes away energy and gives it back again and, dividing time into day and night, kaala and kastha, that Lord, the Sun, gives life and motion to all creation.' ”

CANTO 163

YAKSHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The noble Pandavas live on this peerless mountain, engaging in the most stringent vratas, enchanted by the place, and diverting their minds while they wait impatiently to see Arjuna again. Many Gandharvas and Maharishis visit these indefatigable ones, of the pure hearts, of immense prowess: embodiments of truth and courage.

Those maharathas are delighted with this wonderful place so full of flowering trees, as pleased as the Marutas were when they arrived in Swarga. In great joy they live on these blossom-rich, colourful slopes that resonate with the cries of peacocks and cranes.

On this peerless mountain, they see lotus-heavy lakes, their shores thick with trees, and haunted at night by karandavas and swans. His luxuriant leisure-grounds, glimmering with gems of many kinds, are enchanting enough to captivate Lord Kubera himslf, and, roaming at will here, the tapasvin Pandavas cannot fathom the awesome significance of the summit, with gigantic trees growing under fleeting clouds.

Here, O Kshatriya, due to its innate magnificence and the brilliance of its plants and trees, there is no difference between night and day. The Sun does not leave this place; he sheds his rays of immeasurable energy over everything, nurturing it all. Because they live on this mountain, where Surya Deva always shines to nourish all things, moving and still, those Kshatriyas see the Sun rise and set in the same place. The Pandavas are inspired by the rising and setting points of the ever-beaming Surya and their

locations on the mountain, and the way the Sun's rays fill every little crevice as well as the expansive cardinal points, and all that lies between.

They await their brother, the supreme archer devoted to truth; they chant the Vedas, faithfully perform their nitya karma, and fulfil their holy vratas.

They say, 'Let us all be made joyful by our reunion with the mighty Arjuna!' and become absorbed in yoga. Although they are in charmed forests, every day seems like a year to them, so intensely do they think of him. From the moment when, with Dhaumya's leave, virtuous Jishnu matted his hair and left them to live in the forests, they have known no joy. With thoughts of him filling their minds, how could they know happiness even in this most blessed place?

They were overwhelmed by grief from the moment when, at Yudhishtira's command, Jishnu of the gait of an elephant left for the Kamyaka vana. O Bhaarata, it is with difficulty that the sons of Pandu pass the month on the mountain, thinking constantly of Arjuna Swetavahana, who has gone to Vasava's palace to master the art of weaponry.

Arjuna has now lived five years in the abode of thousand-eyed Indra, and has obtained astras from all the Devas—Agni, Varuna, Soma, Vayu, Vishnu, Indra, Pasupati, Brahma, Parameshti, Prajapati, Yama, Dhata, Savita, Tvashta, and Vaisravana. He bows to Indra of the hundred sacrifices and takes leave of him to come to Gandhamadana."

CANTO 164

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, "One day, as those mighty Kshatriyas are thinking of Arjuna, they see Indra's chariot, yoked to horses as bright as lightning, suddenly arrive. Matali drives this vimana that lights up the sky like a great flame, like a meteor flashing down through the clouds. Wearing heaven's garlands and sparkling ornaments, Arjuna Kiriti sits in it. Dhananjaya, equal in prowess to Indra, alights from the chariot, and blazes in beauty.

Wearing his crown, Arjuna bows down at the feet of Dhaumya and then at the feet of Ajatasatru; he touches Vrikodara's feet in respect, while the twins bow to him. He greets Krishnaa, beside herself with joy, and then he stands humbly before his elder brother. Great is the delight of the brothers on being re-united with the resplendent Arjuna. He, too, rejoices at meeting them and praises the king.

The sons of Pritha walk around that chariot, from which the slayer of Namuchi annihilated seven divisions of Diti's progeny, in pradakshina, and honour Matali as if he is Indra himself. Yudhishtira enquires about the well-being of all the Devas; Matali greets him and, having spoken words of advice to them, as a father to sons, he climbs back into the supreme vimana and flies back to the Lord of the Devas.

After Matali has left, Indra's son, first among all Kshatriyas, the noble destroyer of all foes, gives Krishnaa, the mother of Sutasoma, unearthly precious gems and jewellery, that Indra has sent, and which dazzle like the

Sun. Then, sitting in the midst of those best of Kurus and Brahmanas, he recounts all that has happened, and he is as bright as Fire or the Sun.

He says, 'I acquired astras from Sakra, Vayu, and Siva himself; and all the Devas were pleased with my humility and concentration.' He tells them of his stay in Devaloka, and that night Kiriti of the unblemished deeds sleeps contentedly with the sons of Madri."

CANTO 165

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “When day breaks, Dhananjaya and his brothers pay homage to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. As they do, O Bhaarata, they hear resonant music from the sky, the rumbling of chariot-wheels and the ringing of bells. All the wild beasts and birds echo a chorus in their own voices. Hosts of Gandharvas and Apsaras appear in their vimanas from all around and follow Indra, king of the Devas, in procession. That Lord of all celestials, Purandara, flies down in his chariot decorated with gold and yoked to incandescent horses, landing near the sons of Pritha. He of the thousand eyes descends from his vimana, and as soon as Yudhishtira sees the exalted one, with his brothers he comes before the king of the immortals.

Magnanimous Yudhishtira worships Indra of the immeasurable soul with ceremony that befits his pre-eminence. Then mighty Arjuna bows to Purandara and stands humbly before him, like a servant. Seeing the pure Dhananjaya of lofty punya, with his matted hair, stand in humility before the Lord of gods, Yudhishtira of fearsome tejas sniffs the top of his brother’s head in affection. He is overjoyed to see Phalguna like this, and feels utterly glad as he worships Indra.

The Lord of the Devas says to Yudhishtira, ‘You shall rule the earth, O Pandava; I bless you with prosperity. Return to Kamyaka Vana, O son of

Kunti. The learned man who leads a life of brahmacharya for a year, with his senses under control and observing vratas, and keeping in mind this meeting with me, will live in unalloyed happiness for a hundred years, with no anxieties.' "

CANTO 166

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “When Sakra has gone back to his own dominion, Bibhatsu, with his brothers and Krishnaa, pays obeisance to Yudhishtira, son of Dharma Deva, who lovingly sniffs the top of Arjuna’s head.

Yudhishtira’s voice chokes with emotion as he says to Arjuna, ‘Oh, how did you spend your time in Indraloka? How did you acquire the weapons, and what did you do to please the Lord of the Devas? Pandava, have you now gained a thorough knowledge of the astras? Did Indra and Rudra give them to you gladly?

How did you see the divine Siva, the Pinakin? How did you get the Devastras? How did you worship them? What service did you perform for that worshipful one of a hundred sacrifices, that he said to you, *You have gratified me*?

O radiant one, I want to hear about all this, as well as how you pleased Mahadeva and Indra. Tell me, also, about the service you rendered to the wielder of the thunderbolt. Dhananjaya, tell me everything.’

Arjuna says, ‘Mighty king, listen to how I saw him of a hundred sacrifices and the divine Sankara too. O Parantapa, I acquired the Astra Shastra that you instructed me to learn when I went into the forest to

perform tapasya. From Kamyaka I went to the Bhrigutunga and spent one night there.

While I sat in dhyana the next day, I saw a Brahmana, who asked me, "Son of Kunti, where will you go?" I told him everything that had happened and he was pleased with me. He praised me and said, "Bhaarata, perform your tapasya, and soon you will see the king of the Devas."

I climbed to the top of Mount Saisiram in the Himalaya, where I began my austerities. For the first month I ate fruit and roots; the second month, I took only water; during the third, I fasted; and the fourth month, I stood with upraised arms. I am amazed that I did not lose any strength.

Rajan, at the end of the first day of the fifth month, there appeared before me a being in the form of a boar, digging the earth with his tusks, stamping his feet and rubbing his belly on the ground, and running here and there in a frightful way. Following him came a hunter, a Vetala with bow and arrows and a sword, and he was surrounded by dark and beautiful women, and the one at his side was especially so.

I took up my bow and my two inexhaustible quivers; and I shot that terrible boar. Simultaneously, that hunter raised his bow and struck the beast even more forcefully, making my heart tremble.

Rajan, he said to me, "Why have you broken the laws of hunting by shooting a beast that was my quarry? I will crush your pride with my arrows."

That great black Vetala rushed at me with his bow stretched. He covered me completely with his arrows, even as a cloud does a mountain with rain; and I enveloped him with a shower of my own shafts. I recited mantras and shot flame-tipped barbs, piercing him as Indra would cleave a mountain with his Vajra.

The Vetala multiplied his body a hundred times, and a thousand times, but I pierced them all with arrows. Then, again, all those forms merged into one, O Bhaarata, and at once, I struck it. He began changing shapes—now, a small body with a huge head, and now a huge body with a small head. Finally, he took his original form and came at me ready to fight.

Invoking the potent Vayavyastra, weapon of the Wind God, I affixed it to my bowstring. Amazingly, even this weapon had no effect on him. With more vigour, I covered that hunter with a profusion of mighty astras. I inundated him with the weapons of Sthunakarna, Varuna, Salabha and Asmavarsha. But, Rajan, he swallowed them all.

When all those had been consumed, I loosed the Brahmastra at him. Arrows of light and flames piled over him, he began to expand. The world was in the grip of that weapon and all the points of the compass were lit up by its brilliance; but that hunter frustrated even the Brahmastra. O Rajan, when Brahma's weapon was quelled, I became afraid.

I took up my bow and my two inexhaustible quivers and shot at him again, but he devoured all those arrows as well. And when he had subdued all my weapons, he and I wrestled. We fought with blows, but I could not defeat him and fell bewildered and senseless on the ground.

That wonderful Vetala laughed delightedly and vanished before my eyes, together with the woman; and my Gandiva and two quivers also disappeared.

Now, that godlike hunter assumed another form, unearthly and wearing shining raiment. He renounced the form of a hunter, that Devadeva, and took his own divine Form, and that God stood there, with his Goddess beside him. The Divine One—whose emblem is the Bull, who wields the Pinaka, who wears coiled serpents for his ornaments, and who can assume any form—appeared before me with Uma. Parantapa, he came towards me while I was preparing to fight on, and the bearer of the trident, Trisulin, said, "I am so pleased with you!"

The Divine One held up my bow and my pair of ever-filled quivers and returned them to me, saying, "Ask for a boon, O son of Kunti. I am delighted with you. Tell me, what shall I do for you? Kshatriya, tell me your wish and I will grant it. Other than immortality, I can give you anything your heart desires."

I was intent on having the astras, so, I bowed down to Siva and said, "O Divine One, if you are pleased with me, grant me this—I wish to acquire mastery of all the weapons that the gods command, the Devastras."

Lord Tryambaka of the three eyes said, "So it shall be. Pandava, my own weapon, Raudra, will always await your call." Now Mahadeva gave me the greatest of all astras, his own Pasupata, and having bestowed it, said, "This must never be used against mortals, for if it is loosed at one of small strength it will consume the very universe. It should be used only in a desperate predicament, when all your other weapons have failed you. Only then may you use my Pasupatastra."

When he that uses the insignia of the Bull had been gratified, there appeared at my side the Devastra of the irresistible power, which can

consume all other weapons, kill any truly mighty enemy and raze hostile armies; it is without equal, and even the Devas, Danavas and Rakshasas cannot withstand it.

At Siva's command, I sat down there and, even as I gazed at him, in adoration, the God vanished.' "

CANTO 167

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'Bhaarata, by the grace of Devadeva, God of gods, the Paramatman Siva, I spent the night in that place; and when day broke and I had finished my morning rituals, I saw the Brahmana whom I had seen before. I told him everything that had happened, about my meeting with Mahadeva.

This pleased him, and he said, "Since you have seen the great God, which no one else can do, you will soon meet Vaivaswata and the other Lokapalas, and the Lord of the Devas, too; and Indra will also grant you astras."

He said this, O King, he embraced me again and again, and that radiant Brahmana went away. Parantapa, that evening, a pure breeze began to blow and seemed to renew the Earth. Near where I was, at the foothills of the Himalaya, all at once fragrant, lovely flowers began to bloom. All around me I could hear an enchanting chorus of hymns being sung in praise of Indra. Hosts of Apsaras and Gandharvas sang to that Lord of celestial hosts. The Maruts and the followers of Mahendra, and other Swargavasis, heaven-dwellers, came in their divine vimanas.

Soon after, Indra Marutvan, accompanied by Sachi and all the immortals appeared in chariots yoked with elegantly caparisoned horses.

He that is carried on the shoulders of men manifested himself in front of me. I saw Yama seated in the south and Varuna and the Lord of the Devas in their respective places.

They greeted me and said, “Savyasachi, look at us seated here. You have been granted this vision of the Lokapalas so that you can perform a task for us. Now receive our astras.”

Lord, I bowed to those foremost of the Devas in reverence and took those divine weapons, upon which they accepted me as one of them. Then, the gods went back to the place from which they had come.

The Lord of the immortals, the divine Maghavat, ascended his glorious chariot and left, saying, “Phalguna, you must visit Devaloka. Even before your arrival I knew that you would come here. I manifested myself to you, O best of the Bhaaratas; and because you have purified yourself with ablutions in many holy tirthas and strengthened yourself with unflinching austerities, you will gain admittance to Devaloka. You will have to practise severe penance again, for you will have to stay there for a time as a mortal. I have told Matali to bring you to our world. All the Devas and great Rishis have already granted you recognition.”

I said, “Divine one, look kindly on me. I wish to learn the Astra Shastra, and beseech you to be my Guru.”

Indra replied, “My child, you will achieve terrible feats with the Astra Shastra, but I will fulfil your desire to acquire this knowledge.”

To this I said, “O Lord, I will never use the Devastras against mortals except when all my other weapons have been repulsed. Therefore, King of gods, grant me the Devastras so that I may attain the realms reserved for Kshatriyas.”

Indra said, “Dhananjaya, it is to test you that I said these words to you. You are my son, and your reply becomes you. Go now, Bhaarata, to my abode and learn all the weapons of Vayu, Agni, the Vasus, Varuna, the Maruts, the Siddhas, Brahma, the Gandharvas, the Uragas, the Rakshasas, Vishnu and the Nairitras. Learn to use all the astras that are mine, as well, O perpetuator of the house of Kuru.”

Saying this, Sakra vanished from where he had stood. Then, Rajan, I saw the fabled and sacred chariot of heaven arrive, drawn by unearthly horses and driven by Matali.

When the Lokapalas had gone, Matali said to me. “O splendid one, the king of the Devas wants to see you. Mighty-armed, achieve supreme

competence before you perform your task. Come and see the realms that can only be attained through dharma; enter heaven in your human body. Bhaarata, the thousand-eyed Lord of the celestials wishes to see you."

I took my leave of the Himalaya by walking around the mountain in pradakshina and climbed into the magnificent chariot. The generous Matali, expert sarathy, drove these steeds gifted with the speed of thought or the wind.

When the chariot began to move he saw that I sat steadily and, looking at me in wonder, said, "I find it wonderfully strange that, although seated in this divine vimana, you have not stirred even a little. Bhaaratottama, I have seen that, at the first pull of my horses, the Lord of the Devas sways where he sits. But you have sat unshaken all the while. In this, you are greater than Sakra himself."

Matali soared into the sky and showed me the realms of the Devas and their palaces. The horse-driven chariot flew up, and the celestials and the sages of heaven worshipped it. Manavottama, I saw whole worlds moving anywhere at will; I saw the grandeur of the tejasvins—the Gandharvas, Apsaras and the Devarishis. Sakra's sarathy Matali showed me the Nandana and other magical gardens and groves of the gods.

Then, I beheld Indra's city, Amaravati, adorned with jewels and shining kalpa-vrikshas, trees that bear any sort of fruit that one desires. There the Sun is not hot; no one is affected by heat, cold or fatigue, Rajan. The gods feel neither sorrow nor dispiritedness, nor weakness, nor apathy, Parantapa. Those who live in that place have neither anger nor greed; all are perfectly contented.

There, the leaves on the trees are always green, the branches laden with flowers and fruit; the fragrance of lotuses pervades the numerous lakes. There the breeze is cool and delicious, fragrant and pure, and invigorating. The ground is strewn with all kinds of jewels and with divine blossoms. There countless exotic beasts and birds live, none of our world.

I saw the Vasus, the Rudras, the Sadhyas with the Maruts, the Adityas and the two Aswins, and I worshipped them. And they gave me their blessings, granting me strength and prowess, energy and fame, skill at arms and victory in battle.

Then, I entered that fabled city, so loved by Gandharvas and Devas, and with joined hands I stood before the thousand-eyed Lord of the gods. Sakra,

ever generous, offered me half his throne; and Vasava put his hand on me in affection.

Thus, Bhaarata, with the intention of acquiring astras and learning to master them, I began to live in Indraloka, in the company of Devas and Gandharvas of bountiful souls. Viswavasa's son Chitrasena became my friend, and he imparted the entire body of Gandharva gyana to me. I lived happily in Sakra's home, well cared for, having all my desires gratified, learning about the astras, listening to divine songs and music, and watching the most alluring Apsaras dance.

Without neglecting to study the arts, which I did carefully, I devoted my attention to the acquisition of arms. And that Lord of a thousand eyes was pleased with my sense of purpose. Living in Devaloka, O king, thus did I pass my time.

When I had mastered the Devastras and gained the confidence of Indra, whose mount is Uchchaisravas, one day he said, "Now even the gods themselves cannot conquer you, let alone the mortals of the Earth. You have become irrepressible in strength and invincible in battle."

The hair on my body stood on end as Indra continued, "O Kshatriya, you have no equal in battle. You are ever-vigilant, dexterous, truthful, and have your senses under perfect control. You are the protector of Brahmanas; you are a master of weapons, and warlike. Partha, you have obtained the fifteen great Devastras, as well as the five ways of using them. You now stand alone and without any peer. You have perfected the skill of releasing these weapons and their withdrawal.

You have perfected the Prayaschitta, the revival of harmless beings killed by these weapons, and also how to revive the astras themselves if they are rendered ineffective. Now, Parantapa, the time has come for paying the Gurudakshina. Promise to pay it and I will tell you what you have to do."

Rajan, I said to the king of the Devas, "If it is in my power to do what you ask, consider it already done."

At my words, Indra smiled and said, "There is nothing in the three worlds that is beyond your power. My enemies, the Danavas called the Nivatakavachas, live in the depths of the ocean. There are thirty million of them; they are dishonourable, all identical to look at and equally strong and splendid. Destroy them there, Kaunteya, and that will be your Gurudakshina to me."

Saying this, he gave me his resplendent vimana, with Matali driving it, and cushioned with down as soft and lustrous as peacock-feathers. He set this exquisite kirita, this crown, on my head and gave me glittering ornaments like his own for my body. He gifted me an impenetrable armour—the best of its kind and comfortable to wear. Then, he strung the Gandiva with this everlasting bowstring.

I set out in that marvellous chariot from which, in days gone by, the king of the Devas defeated Bali, the son of Virochana. O ruler of men, startled by the rumbling of the ratha, all the celestial ones came out, thinking that I was the Deva king. Seeing me, they asked, "O Phalguna, what are you going to do?"

I told them everything, adding, "I will go into battle. Auspicious ones, I am going forth to kill the Nivatakavachas. Give me your blessings."

They began to praise me in the same way that they eulogised Purandara. They said, "Riding this chariot, Maghavat conquered in battle Sambara, and Namuchi, and Bala, and Vritra, and Prahlada, and Naraka. From this vimana, Maghavat has vanquished thousands of millions of Daityas. O Kaunteya, riding in this chariot even as Indra did long ago, you, too, shall conquer the Nivatakavachas in battle.

Here is the best of all conches; Sakra used it to conquer the worlds, and blowing on it you will also triumph."

Saying this, the gods offered me this shell, the Devadatta, born in the deep; and I took it for the sake of victory. The gods began to extol me then, and impatient for battle, armed with my conch, my armour, my bow and arrows, I flew towards the sinister home of the demonic Nivatakavachas.' "

CANTO 168

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna continues, 'I passed all the places that the Maharishis had spoken highly of and, at last, saw the ocean of Devaloka—the inexhaustible Lord of waters. I saw upon it swelling waves that looked like mountains of water, crashing against each other and then rolling away. I saw thousands of ships filled with gemstones. I saw those great, fabulous fish, timingilas, and tortoises that looked like submerged stone hills. And everywhere in the water were thousands of shells, like stars in a lightly clouded night sky. Thousands upon thousands of jewels floated in clusters and a violent wind whirled them about. O, this was rare and wonderful to see.

As I looked upon the marvellous ocean of the mighty tides, I saw the city of the Danavas, not too far away. Matali, expert sarathy, guided the chariot, and it submerged, and all its embellishments smoothly slid under water. But he sat firmly in his seat and drove the craft with force, frightening all who heard its rumble.

The Danavas heard that sound like clouds rumbling in the sky, and, thinking I was the Lord of the gods, were panic-stricken. They all stood with their bows and arrows, javelins and axes, maces and clubs, terrified. Quickly making arrangements for the defence of their city, the alarmed Danavas clanged shut the gates, hiding everything inside.

I took up my conch, Devadatta of the deafening roars, and blew gleefully on it many times. That sound filled the sky and rang everywhere. Even the mightiest beings were terrified and hid. And then, O Bhaarata, all the Daityas, the children of Diti, the Nivatakavachas shining with ornaments, appeared in their thousands, wearing all kinds of armour, with myriad weapons in their hands.

They had iron javelins, maces and clubs, hatchets, sabres and discs, sataghnis and bhusundis, and colourfully streaked and bejewelled swords. After thinking a moment about which way to go, Matali steered the vimana on to level ground.

O best of the Bhaaratas, the horses were so swift that everything we passed went by in a blur; I could see nothing, and I found this strange. Then the Danavas began to play thousands of oddly-shaped musical instruments, making a discordant, nerve-wracking cacophony. At the awful noise, thousands of enormous fish, that were like hills, streaked away. The stupendous force of demons flew at me, loosing hundreds of thousands of arrows.

O Bhaarata, a savage battle followed between the Danavas and me; I was ready to annihilate the Nivatakavachas. Devarishis, Danavarishis, Brahmarishis and Siddhas came to witness the contention. Eager for my victory, the Munis praised me with the same sweet speeches they had used for Indra in the war of old fought over Tara.' "

CANTO 169

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna continues, 'Bhaarata, the Nivatakavachas, armed to their teeth, rushed ferociously at me. They blocked the path of the chariot and, roaring loudly, surrounded the chariot and covered me with their arrows. Other demons flung darts and hatchets, spears and axes at me. My chariot was enveloped in a blizzard of arrows, maces and clubs. Some truly dreadful-looking Nivatakavachas, armed with bows and heavy arrows, ran at me. I shot ten swift, sure shafts from my Gandiva into each of them, driving them back with those stone-sharpened darts.

My horses, in the skilful hands of Matali, moved like the wind, with incredible agility and speed, trampling the sons of Danu and Diti everywhere. Although thousands of horses were yoked to my ratha, Matali's masterly chariotry made it seem they were only a few, so smoothly did our chariot fly. Hundreds of Danavas fell dead by being trampled under the horses' hooves, by being run over by the chariot wheels, and by my blistering arrows. There were others who, though dead, lay in their chariots with their weapons still strapped on; and their charioteers slain, the horses dragged the chariots chaotically here and there.

Now the greatest Danava warriors came to fight, using sorcerous weapons to cover all sides and directions, and I was hard-pressed. I saw Matali's incredible prowess then, as he steered his fiery steeds, breaking

through the net of demon arrows with such ease. Heartened, I killed hundreds of thousands of Danavas with my astras. Parantapa, seeing me range the field and putting forth all my prowess, Sakra's charioteer was pleased.

Some Nivatakavachas were crushed to death by the horses and chariot, some gave up the fight, but others battled on, shooting storms of arrows. I began to kill them with the hundreds of thousands of weapons I could command with mantras of the Brahmastra. Harried by me, enraged, those Asuras attacked me with a torrent of clubs, arrows and swords.

Then, Bhaarata, I invoked Indra's favourite weapon, supreme astra of breathtaking urjas, and loosed it at the attacking Tomara horde, and desiccated the swords and tridents they hurled. When I had destroyed their weapons, I pierced each of them with ten arrows.

Arrows flew from the Gandiva like rows of black bees; and Matali was jubilant. The Danavas showered me with dark shafts, but I deflected them. The Nivatakavachas smothered me in a fog of arrows, and I contained them again with superior astras, swift and fiery, which could baffle other astras; and I killed thousands of demons more. Blood flowed from their torn bodies, like a monsoon waterfall down a mountain slope. My arrows struck them like Indra's thunderbolt, and inflamed them. Their wounds bled copiously; the power of their weapons was diminished; and the Nivatakavachas began to use maya to fight me.' "

CANTO 170

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'A sudden shower of rocks big as trees rained down on me, but I blasted those boulders with a volley from Mahendra's weapon, almost equal to his Vajra. When the rocks had been powdered, a fire sprang up, and the dust fell like sparks.

A cataract of water now fell, each stream of it as thick as an axle-rod; its massive torrents filled the sky in all the directions. Confusion gripped me at the downpour and the howling of the wind and the roaring of the Daityas. The water fell without pause, filling all the space between earth and sky, and for a moment I stood rooted.

Recovering quickly, I discharged another Devastra I had received from Indra, the Visoshana of fire, and all the water was instantly vapourised. O Bhaarata, when the rocks had been pulverised and the water dried up, the Danavas created illusions of fire and wind. I used a weapon of water to put out the flames, and one that made a wall of stone to shield me from the wind.

Now the Nivatakavachas besieged me with a myriad weapons, of stone, water, fire and wind all together. All around, a thick, gloomy darkness spread and, enveloped in that black night of the world, our horses reared, whinnying in terror; Matali fell from his place, and the golden horsewhip from his hands.

He cried, “Where are you? Where are you?” and dread gripped me as well to see him panic.

Then, he said to me, “Partha, the Devas and Danavas once fought a mighty war over the amrita, and I witnessed that battle. Again, when Sambara was killed, there was a dreadful war; then, too, I was charioteer to the king of the Devas. I was Indra’s sarathy when Vritrasura was killed. I also saw the savage encounters with Virochana’s son Bali, Prahlada and the rest. Oh, I saw all those fearful battles, Pandava, but never before did I lose my senses. Pitamaha Brahma must have ordained the destruction of the universe, for I can see no other purpose for this battle of battles.”

When I heard Matali, I made a great effort to calm myself and thought of how I would dispel the illusions that beset us. I said to the frightened charioteer, “Look at the strength of my arms, the power of my astras and of my Gandiva. I will use magical weapons to dispel this turgid darkness and the other sorceries of the Danavas. Fear not, sarathy; calm yourself.”

Fighting for the Devas, I made an illusion that could stupefy all beings. This dispelled the Danavas’ maya, but some of their most powerful demons attacked me with fresh spells, of different kinds. The world seemed to disappear and appear in flashes; it seemed to be swallowed by darkness, or submerged in water. When the world became visible again, Matali sat in his seat in the chariot with the reins of the horses in his hand, and he began to range across the field, like lightning, making everyone’s hair stand on end. The ferocious Nivatakavachas still assailed me but, seizing every opportunity I found, I sent them, one by one, to Yamaloka.

In the midst of the battle that raged, suddenly the Danavas vanished, cloaked in maya.’ ”

CANTO 171

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna continues, 'Now the Daityas fought unseen, their weapons unseen, while I battled on with weapons in plain sight. Wherever I sensed they were, I sloughed off Asura heads with arrows from the Gandiva. The Nivatakavachas withdrew their maya, and fled into their city.

When the Daityas fled and the world was visible again, I saw that the dead numbered many hundreds of thousands. Near the slain demons lay their splintered weapons, ornaments, armour and severed limbs. The field was so crowded with bodies that our horses could not move freely, and they took to the sky.

Some Nivatakavachas were still hidden from view, and these filled the sky with rock masses. Bhaarata, other Danavas burrowed underground and seized our horses' legs and chariot-wheels. From above and below, they cast down a barrage of rocks on the horses and attacked me and my chariot. The rocks that lay around us and those that continued to fall hemmed me in as if sealing me into a mountain cave.

Matali saw me oppressed by the rocks that fell and his horses being crushed under their weight. He saw that I was afraid and said, "Arjuna, do not be frightened. Loose the Vajra, Purushottama."

I invoked Indra's favourite weapon, the inexorable thousand-jointed thunderbolt. Saying its mantra over the Gandiva, I aimed at the battery of

falling crags and loosed iron arrows that bore the Vajra. As they issued from that astra, the iron shafts turned into individual thunderbolts. They pierced the demons' sorcery and struck the Nivatakavachas. From the sky, Danavas big as cliffs fell to the earth, cloven by the fervid power of the Vajra. The thunderbolts blasted the Danavas who had dragged our horses into the entrails of the earth, and despatched them to Yama.

All that place was covered with the mountainous bodies of Nivatakavachas—the dead, the wounded and the unconscious lay there like scattered crags.

Strangely, neither I, nor the horses and chariot, nor Matali were in the least injured. Matali smiled and said, "Not even in the Devas, Arjuna, have I seen prowess such as yours."

When the demon hosts had been destroyed, their women began to wail in their city, like cranes in autumn. Matali and I entered that city, terrifying the Nivatakavacha wives with the rumble of our chariot. The women fled in crowds when they saw our ten thousand horses, lustrous as peacocks, and the dazzling chariot, bright as the Sun. The women's ornaments, falling as they ran, made a sound like that of rocks tumbling down a mountain. The panic-stricken wives of the Daityas fled into their golden palaces that were adorned with countless jewels.

Seeing that incomparable city, even grander than the city of the gods, I asked Matali, "Why do the Devas not live in a place like this? This city seems to be superior to Purandara's Amaravati."

Matali replied, "In days gone by, O Partha, this was the city of our Lord of the Devas. Later, the gods were driven from here by the Nivatakavachas. The Nivatakavachas performed the most stringent tapasya and, when they had pleased Brahma, they asked him for a boon—that they might live here, invincible to the Devas.

Then Sakra addressed Brahma saying, *O Lord, do what you consider proper, but keep our welfare in mind*. Then, O Bhaarata, the Lord commanded Indra, saying, *O slayer of foes, using another body, you will become the nemesis of the Danavas*. It was to make this possible that Sakra gave you all the astras. The gods could not themselves slay the demons that you have today. The time had come for you to kill them, and you have done so. Foremost of men, Mahendra gave you these supremely potent Devastras so that you could annihilate the Nivatakavachas."

After killing the Danavas and subduing their city, I returned to Amaravati with Matali.' "

CANTO 172

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'On my way back, I saw an unearthly city, moving at will, radiant like Fire, or the Sun. In this city were trees made of gems, and sweet-voiced birds of many colours. It had four gates, many gateways and towers, and in that impregnable city lived Paulomas and Kalakanjas. It was exquisitely wrought from all manner of jewels, and was ethereal and wonderful to look at. The trees of jewels bore flowers and fruit; extraordinary celestial birds sang from their branches. Blithe Asuras wandered its streets and gardens, wearing garlands and carrying double-edged swords, bows, arrows, maces and clubs.

Rajan, on seeing that city of Daityas, I asked Matali, "What is this place that looks so marvellous?"

Matali replied, "Once, long ago, a Daitya's daughter named Puloma, and Kalaka, a mighty female of the Asura race, preformed tapasya for a thousand celestial years. At the end of their penance, Brahma, the self-created one, conferred boons on them—that their children would never suffer misfortune; that they cannot be slain, even by the Devas, the Rakshasas and the Pannagas; and that they be given a radiant and incomparable aerial city, furnished with all kinds of gemstones, and impregnable by the Devas, the Maharishis, the Yakshas, the Gandharvas, the Pannagas, the Asuras and the Rakshasas.

Bhaaratottama, this is that flying city, devoid of Devas, which was created by Brahma himself for the descendants of Kalaka—the Kalakeyas.

The city has everything one could ever want, and no illness or grief enters here. It is filled with all things desirable, and disease and suffering are unknown. This celebrated city is called Hiranyapura, peopled by the Paulomas and the Kalakanjas, guarded by those mighty Asuras. And, O King, since they cannot be killed by the Devas, they live happily, free from anxiety and having all their desires fulfilled.

But Brahma has ordained their destruction by a mortal. O Partha, it is you who must use the Vajra and destroy the very race of Kalakanjas."

O lord of men, having found out that they could not be touched by the Devas and the Asuras, I cheerfully said to Matali, "Fly into that city. I will obliterate them that hate the king of the gods. I consider it my dharma to kill any enemy of the Devas."

Matali took me near Hiranyapura in the heavenly horse-driven chariot. Seeing me, those sons of Diti, wearing diverse kinds of clothes, ornaments and armour, charged at me in their chariots. They attacked me with arrows, clubs and double-edged swords, with prowess that defies description.

Rajan, using my knowledge of the Astra Shastra, I resisted the great volley of weapons with a wild shower of arrows, and all the Danavas, attacking me from every side, were bemused. Confounded, they began to attack one another. I struck off hundreds of heads with flaming arrows.

The sons of Diti fled into their city and, with their magical powers, flew high into the sky. I barred their way with a vast web of arrows. However, the Danavas stood firm in their city, which flew wherever they willed, radiant as the Sun. The city plunged down to Earth; it took off again; it flew in an arc; it went underwater.

Parantapa, I never paused my attack on that incredible city that was like Amaravati to behold. I stormed Hiranyapura, and all the Daityas in it, with legion Devastras. Broken by my volleys, the city of the Asuras fell to the earth. Grievously wounded by my weapons of the speed and the sound of thunder, demons wandered about in a daze, without will of their own, as if moved only by destiny.

Matali flew our chariot of solar effulgence into the sky, and then down to land on earth. O Bhaarata, surrounding me were sixty thousand war chariots, with enraged Daityas in them, eager for battle with me, but I killed them all with vulture-feathered arrows. Confident that a mortal could hardly

vanquish them, their attack swelled in a surging tide. I loosed the Devastras, one by one. But those Maharathas restrained each one, and on the field I saw hundreds and thousands of mighty demons moving about in their chariots in diverse manoeuvres. They were splendid with the sheer variety of their armour, their ornaments and their flags; they were a delight to the eyes.

Set upon by the innumerable warriors, heavily armed and skilled in battle, I was overwhelmed and fear gripped me. I invoked Rudra, the supreme God and, saying, *May welfare attend on all beings*, I chanted the mantra for the Raudrastra, scourge of all enemies.

At once, I saw a being with three heads, nine eyes, three faces, and six arms. His hair blazed like Fire or the Sun and, O Parantapa, on his body he wore huge snakes darting out their tongues. Seeing Rudra the Eternal before me, my fear melted away and I set his weapon on the Gandiva, bowed to the three-eyed One of the measureless tejas and released it, willing it to consume the Danavas.

Lord of men, as soon as it was loosed, a multitude of forms were manifested—deer, lions, tigers and bears; buffaloes, snakes and cows; and sarabhas; and elephants, apes, bulls and boars; cats and dogs; ghosts; all the Bhurundas; vultures and Garudas, Chamaras and leopards; mountains and seas; Devas, Rishis and Gandharvas; Pisachas and Yakshas; Asuras, Guhyakas and Nairitras; elephant-mouthed sharks; owls; creatures with the forms of fish and horses, other macabre beings bearing swords and other weapons; and Rakshasas brandishing maces and clubs.

When that weapon was loosed, the whole universe appeared, filled with all these and other beings. These multifarious beings—some had pieces of flesh, fat, bones and marrow sticking to them, others had three heads, or four tusks, or four mouths, or four arms—attacked the Danavas again and again, and held them at bay.

Then, my brother, in a single moment I slew all those Danavas with a swarm of arrows imbued with the hardness of rocks, flaming like Agni or Surya, and lethal as thunderbolts. I saw the Danavas, brought down by the Gandiva, fall from the sky, and bowed once more to the Supreme God, destroyer of the Asuras of Tripura.

The celestial sarathy Matali was delighted to see those Daityas, adorned with ethereal ornaments, annihilated by the Raudrastra. Having witnessed

my feat, which even the celestials could not accomplish, Sakra's charioteer paid me homage.

With joined hands, he said, "The gods could not have done what you have today. Indeed, not even the king of Devas himself could have accomplished this. Hiranyapura was invincible, it could not be touched by the Devas or Asuras, but you have destroyed it with your strength and the power of your tapasya, O Kshatriya."

When that ethereal city had been ruined and its demons slain, their wives came streaming out, their hair dishevelled, and keening loudly, like kurari birds. They wailed in grief for the loss of their sons, brothers and fathers; they fell on the ground, crying hoarsely. They beat their breasts for having been widowed, and their garlands and jewellery fell from them.

The golden city of the Danavas, which once looked like a Gandharva city, resounded with lamentation and was denuded of beauty, like a lake without elephants, or a forest stripped of trees. Deprived of its masters, it lost its lustre, and it disintegrated, as if it had been made of clouds.

My task accomplished, Matali took me back to Amaravati, the deathless abode of Indra. Having vanquished and killed the Nivatakavachas, and destroyed Hiranyapura and its Kalakeyas, I came and stood, my head bowed, before Indra. Matali described to him all that I had done, in detail. It was with great delight that the Maruts heard about the destruction of Hiranyapura, the undoing of the illusions and the slaughter of the Nivatakavachas in battle.

Thousand-eyed Purandara was pleased no end, and cried, *Well done!* and Indra and the Devas applauded, even cheered me for a long time.

Indra said, "You have achieved a feat that neither the Devas nor the Asuras could. O Partha, by slaying my enemies, you have paid my Gurudakshina. Therefore, Dhananjaya, I grant that in battle you will always stay calm and discharge your weapons unerringly, and you will be irresistible to Devas, Danavas, Rakshasas, Yakshas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Pakshis and Nagas.

Through the might of your arms, Kunti's son Yudhishtira will conquer the Earth and rule it," ' says Arjuna."

CANTO 173

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna continues, 'As I stood there, my wounds still bleeding, Indra, king of the Devas, acknowledged me as his own, and said, "Arjuna, all the Devastras are with you, and no man on earth will be able to overpower you. My son, when you are on the battlefield, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Sakuni, together with all the other Kshatriyas, will not be equal even to a sixteenth part of what you are."

The lord Maghavat gave me this golden garland and this conch-shell, Devadatta of the mighty roars, and also his unearthly, impenetrable mail. With his own hands, he set this crown on my head. Sakra presented me with these heavenly garments and with rare ornaments of unearthly craft. Thus was I honoured, Rajan, and I lived joyfully in Indra's sacred abode with the children of the Gandharvas. Sakra was pleased, as were the Devas. One day he said to me, "O Arjuna, your brothers pine for you; the time has come for you to leave."

O king, this is how I spent my five years in Devaloka, thinking all the while of the troubles that we now endure because of the gambling. Here I am now, come to the foothills of the Gandhamadana and united again with my brothers.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Dhananjaya, we are fortunate that you have acquired the astras and that you have worshipped the king of the Devas. Parantapa, it

bodes well that the Lord Sthanu and his Goddess appeared before you and that you gratified them in battle. You are fortunate to have met the Lokapalas. Partha, we are lucky to have prospered and that you have come back to us. Today I feel elated, as if Dhritarashtra's sons have already been quelled and the Earth, with all her cities, has already become ours.

Bhaarata, I am curious to see these Devastras with which you killed the Nivatakavachas.'

Arjuna says, 'Tomorrow morning, you will see all the divine weapons with which I slew the fierce Nivatakavachas.'

Having thus related all that transpired before his return, Dhananjaya passes the night with his brothers."

CANTO 174

NIVATAKAVACHA YUDDHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "When day breaks, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira rises and, together with his brothers, performs the dawn rituals, then says to Arjuna, the joy of his mother, 'Kaunteya, show me the weapons with which you slew the Danavas.'

Arjuna observes all the proper rites of purification and then displays the Devastras that the gods gave him. Dhananjaya has the Earth for his chariot, the mountain for its central pole, the base of the mountain for its axle and the clump of elephant-bamboo for its socket-pole. He is resplendent in his unearthly armour as he takes up the Gandiva and Devadatta, and invokes the astras, one by one.

As each weapon is set on the bow, the Earth trembles under the weight of Arjuna's feet; trees shudder; rivers and the immense ocean churn; rocks burst apart; the Sun stops shining; fires stop burning; Brahmanas stop reciting the Vedas; and the very air is hushed.

O Janamejaya, the creatures that live under the earth's crust rise to the surface and surround the Pandava, their faces contorted and their hands folded, quivering in fear. The astras scorch them and they pray to Arjuna to spare their lives. The Brahmarishis, the Siddhas and the Maharishis, indeed, all mobile beings arrive there. The foremost Devarishis, the Devas, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas and the Gandharvas; the Garutmats and other

beings of the air also appear. The Pitamaha, the Lokapalas and the divine Mahadeva come with their retinues. Then, O great king, Vayu, the Wind God, comes bearing unearthly flowers and strews them over the Pandava. The Gandharvas sing and Apsaras dance.

Then, Narada arrives and addresses Partha in gentle words, saying, 'O Arjuna, do not loose the Devastras. They should never be released without a proper target; and even when there is one, they should not be used unless every other weapon has failed you. O son of the Kurus, to discharge these astras without legitimate cause is fraught with great evil. Dhananjaya, keeping these weapons as you have been instructed will add to your strength and happiness; but if they are not properly revered, they will become the instruments of the destruction of the three worlds. So, Pandava, never do this again. Yudhishtira, you will see these astras when Partha uses them in battle to raze his adversaries.'

Having stopped Partha from what he was about to do, the immortals and the others who came there go their separate ways. The Pandavas and Krishnaa continue to live in that same forest, in joy and contentment."

CANTO 175

AJAGARA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "When that best among Kshatriyas returned from Indraloka, after having mastered the Devastras, how did the sons of Pritha spend their time?"

Vaisampayana said, "Peerless among men and equal to Indra, those Kshatriyas enjoy the pleasure gardens of the lord of treasures, spread over the woods on that incomparable mountain. Kiriti, best among men, wanders through charming glades, full of trees of all kinds, but with his bow in hand and his mind always on the war ahead.

With Vaisravana's generosity and favour, the princes live in that beautiful place, their minds detached from material pleasures. Rather, they enjoy the simple peace of their lives. Having Arjuna back with them makes the time pass quickly; four years seem like one night. For the Pandavas, ten years—these four years and the previous six—drift smoothly by.

One day, at the end of ten years of exile, the impetuous Bhima, son of Vayu, sits with Jishnu and the godlike twins before Yudhishtira, and in pleasing, earnest words says to him, 'It is only to keep your word that we do not leave the forest to kill Suyodhana and his followers. He has deprived us of our happiness.

This is the eleventh year of our exile in the wilderness; it will be easy to go undiscovered by that evil man. Led by you, we have wandered through these jungles, giving no thought to our condition, and free from anxiety. Suyodhana will not believe that we have left this place for a distant land.

Once we have lived there for a year, we can avenge ourselves on that evil one and his followers. We will easily kill that most malignant of men, and reclaim our kingdom.

O Dharmaraja, you must now return to the world below. If we stay on in this heavenly place, we will forget our sorrows, and your fame will wither away like a wilting flower's fragrance and disappear. By gaining the kingdom of the Kuru sires, you will attain glory and perform many yagnas. What Kubera has given you here you can have on your own, Purushottama, and at any time.

Now, O Bhaarata, it is time to concentrate on punishing the enemies who wronged us grossly. Rajan, the wielder of the thunderbolt himself cannot withstand your power. Arjuna has only universal welfare at heart. He has Krishna, whose emblem is Suparna, for his friend, and Sini's grandson Satyaki as well. Arjuna feels no pain, ever, not even in battle against the Devas. He has no equal in strength, and neither do I.

O Yudhishtira, I am as devoted to your good as Krishna and the Yadavas. And the heroic twins are masters of war. When we meet the enemy, we will extinguish him and ensure your return to wealth and prosperity.'

When he hears the course of action they prefer, the bountiful and peerless son of Dharma, who knows all about dharma and artha, whose prowess is limitless, walks around Vaisravana in reverent pradakshina. Dharmaraja Yudhishtira bids farewell to the palaces, rivers, lakes and all the Rakshasas; and he faces the path they took to come here.

Yudhishtira Mahatman looks at the supreme mountain and says, 'O lord of mountains, grant that I, together with my friends, see you again after I have killed my enemies and regained my kingdom; grant that I perform tapasya here with my senses controlled.'

With his brothers and the Brahmanas, the king of the Kurus will return by the same path that brought them to the holy mountain; and Ghatotkacha and his companions will carry them over the mountain's cascades. As they are about to begin their journey, Rishi Lomasa advises them, as a father would his sons, and he departs for Devaloka. Arshtisena, too, gives them wise counsel, and the sons of Pritha begin their journey, and they see many sacred tirthas, asramas and great lakes on the way."

CANTO 176

AJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When they leave their home in the mountain of a thousand waterfalls, and birds, and eight-legged elephants, and Kubera's supernatural attendants, sadness goes with those best of the Bhaaratas. When they have gone some distance, they see Kubera's favourite mountain, Kailasa, like a great white cloud in the sky; and their hearts surge with elation.

Armed with swords and bows, they continue on their way, and they see hills and narrow gorges, dens of lions and craggy pathways, more waterfalls and the plains below. They see other great forests where deer, birds and elephants throng in great numbers. They come upon blithe woods, turquoise rivers, lakes and mountain caverns, which often become their home during the day as well as at night.

After living in all kinds of inhospitable places and crossing Kailasa of the untold majesty, they reach the asrama of Rajarishi Vrishaparva. He receives them warmly and, shedding their fatigue, they tell him the story of their sojourn in the mountains. They stay only one night in this sacred hermitage, which Maharishis and Devas visit, then travel on to the great badari tree Visala.

Here, at Badarikasrama where Narayana dwells, they remain happily for a time, within sight of Kubera's lake that Devas and Siddhas frequent. Just as blemishless Brahmana Rishis attain bliss on reaching the gardens of Nandana, so do the Pandavas shed all grief when they see that lake. The

Kshatriyas spend a happy month in Badari, and then resume their journey towards the dominions of Subahu, king of the Kiratas, still treading the path by which they came. They have to cross the difficult terrain of the Himalayas, the countries of Pina, Tushara, Darada, pass through all the provinces of Kulinda, rich in treasures, before they reach Subahu's capital.

Subahu is excited when he hears of their arrival and comes out to meet them. Yudhishtira greets him, and here the Pandavas are joined by all their charioteers led by Visaka, their attendants, Indrasena and the others, their personal servitors and kitchen servants. The company breaks journey here for a night.

Then, giving Ghatotkacha and his followers leave to go, they take their chariots and sarathys and head towards the king of mountains, near the Yamuna River. The range of Himavan abounds in waterfalls, silvery against grey slopes and snow-covered summits. The Pandavas find their way to the great forest of Visakhayupa, which is like the forest of Chitraratha. Here, where wild boars and a variety of deer and birds live, they decide to make their home.

Hunting for their food, the sons of Pritha peacefully live in this forest for one year.

In a cavern of the mountain, Vrikodara's heart fills with grief and he panics, when he comes upon a massive, fierce-looking snake, obviously starving and looking like death itself. Yudhishtira, most virtuous of men, of boundless strength, frees Bhima from the coils of the mighty serpent that holds him fast, when he goes near it.

And so the twelfth year of their sojourn in the forests begins. The scions of the Kuru, blazing in splendour, engaging in the most rigid tapasya, devoted to their daily practice of archery, leave that forest—that is like the Chaitra—and go to the edges of the desert, and from there to the river Saraswati, on whose banks they want to live awhile.

From the Saraswati, they go to the lake in the Dwaita vana. The inhabitants of the Dwaita vana are all ascetics of various religious orders, who practise self-restraint, sitting in deep dhyana and, being toothless, subsist on food ground with stone. On the arrival of the Pandavas, these sadhus bring grass mats and water-pots, and come forward to greet them.

On the banks of nearby golden Saraswati grow myriad trees—the holy pipal, the rudraksha, the rohitaka, the plaksha, the badari, the khadira, the sirisha, the bilva, the inguda, the karira, the pilu and the sami. Wandering

contentedly about in the vicinity of the Saraswati, a home of the Devas and the favourite resort of Yakshas, Gandharvas and Maharishis, the princes are at some peace."

CANTO 177

AJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "How is it, wise one, that Bhima of the mighty prowess, who was strong as ten thousand elephants, was stricken with panic at the sight of that snake? You have described how he was horrified and alarmed, this man who slew hundreds of Yakshas and Rakshasas by the lotus-filled lakes of Kubera's forests, and who, in arrogant defiance, dared Kubera to fight him? I am curious and want to hear about this."

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, in Vrishaparva's hermitage, those fearful warriors live amidst enchanting glades. Roaming about carefree, bow and sword in hand, Vrikodara comes upon an emerald forest, frequented by Devas and Gandharvas. He sees secret places upon the Himalaya, frequented by Devarishis and Siddhas, and inhabited by Apsaras.

These echo with the sweet warbling of birds—the chakora, the chakravaka, the jivajivaka, the kokila and the bhringaraja—and are lush with shady trees clothed in snow-soft leaves, which bear perennial fruits and flowers. He sees mountain streams whose waters glisten like lapis lazuli, with ten thousand perfectly white ducks and swans upon them, and surrounded by forests of deodar trees that seem to form a net to trap the clouds. He sees other trees—tunga and kaliyaka, interspersed with yellow sandalwood trees. Measurelessly strong, he ranges these uninhabited forests in pursuit of game, shooting animals with purified arrows.

Mighty Bhimasena, strong as a hundred elephants, kills huge wild boar with his bare hands. Blessed with dreadful strength, like some lion or tiger,

he who can fight a hundred at once kills antelope and boar and bison and many elephants whose strength is as his own. He uproots trees and breaks them, filling the forests with noise. Ever youthful, proud and fearless, Bhimasena happily rampages through the woods, bellowing his war-cry, striking his arms and clapping his hands. Fierce lions and great tuskers flee in terror at the sound of this boldest of men fearlessly prowling their home in search of game. He penetrates into the depths of the vast forest and terrifies all the animals with his shouts.

Snakes slither into caves for shelter. The godlike Bhimasena sees an enormous Naga coiled in a cave, its gigantic body filling it entirely, so big that it makes one's hair stand on end. Its colossal body is like a yellow and speckled hill; its cave-like mouth is red and has four fangs; its eyes bulge and its forked tongue darts in and out, licking the corners of its mouth. Looking like Yama, it strikes terror into all living creatures, as it hisses at any intruder.

Seeing him approach, in a flash the infuriated snake seizes Bhimasena in its coils. This serpent has a boon, which makes Bhimasena lose consciousness in its clasp. Although Bhima is supremely strong, the Naga overpowers him and he trembles feebly in its gargantuan coils. His shoulders are like a lion's, his strength is that of ten thousand elephants, but Mahabaho Bhima is overpowered by the snake with the boon and, seized by it, all his strength drains from him. He struggles desperately to extricate himself, but cannot."

CANTO 178

AJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Bhima says to the prodigious snake, 'O Naga, tell me who you are. O foremost of reptiles, what are you going to do with me? I am Bhima, the son of Pandu, and next by birth to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. I am as strong as ten thousand elephants; how have you overpowered me? I have killed innumerable lions, tigers, bison and elephants; mighty Rakshasas, Pisachas and Nagas cannot withstand the force of my arms. Do you have magical powers, or have you been given a boon, that although I put forth all my strength, you still hold me helpless? Ah, the strength of men is nothing, for, O serpent, you have proved it so.'

When Bhima says this, the snake, which has coiled its body around him and has him at its mercy, releases just his arms and says, 'It is my lucky day that the gods offer you to me as food to appease my hunger after a very long time. Life is dear to all the living; so I will tell you how I came to have this snake's form. Hear, O strongest of men, how I fell into this plight from the wrath of the Maharishis. I want to be rid of the curse, so I will tell you all about it.

You must surely have heard of the Rajarishi Nahusha. He was the son of Ayu, and an ancestor of yours. I am that very man. And today I am a sarpa because Agastya Muni cursed me for, in my hubris, I once insulted the Brahmanas of heaven.

You are my descendant and a joy to see, and I ought not to kill you. Still, I will eat you today. You are fated to die. No creature that comes

within my reach at this time of day, be it a bison or an elephant, escapes. It is no Naga that has taken you; I have this form only because of the Rishi's curse.

As I changed form and slid from Sakra's throne, on which I once sat, I said to the worshipful Agastya, "Free me from this curse!"

The compassionate Maharishi said to me, "O king, you will be free after a long time has passed."

I fell down to the Earth as a snake, but I did not lose the memory of my former life. This happened a very long time ago, indeed, but I remember everything that was said.

The Rishi said, "A man who has realised the relationship of his Atman to the Brahman, and who can correctly answer the questions you put to him, will deliver you from my curse. Taken by you, even creatures that are stronger than you will immediately lose their strength."

I heard these words of that kindly sage, who felt affection for me, and immediately, all the Brahmanas vanished.

Having become a serpent, I have lived in hell for an age, waiting for the time of my release to come.'

Bhimasena says to the snake, 'I am not angry, mighty Sarpa, nor do I blame myself. Men are not always in control of their own lives; at times, they have the power to bring about joy or sorrow, and at others, not. There is no point fretting over this. Who can divert destiny, even by the greatest effort? Karma is supreme, and effort is useless. Struck by fate, I lost the might of my arms today.

Look at me; for no apparent reason I have become helpless. However, I am not as sorry for myself that I will die as for my brothers who have been deprived of their kingdom and exiled into the forest.

The Himalaya is inaccessible and crawls with Yakshas and Rakshasas. My brothers will be distracted from their purpose by their search for me. If they know that I am dead, they will give up all their efforts, for, although they are determined, in my desire to regain our kingdom, it is I who keep their resolve alive by my insistent urging.

It may be that Arjuna alone will not grieve for me, because he is intelligent, a great master of astras and cannot be vanquished by Devas, Rakshasas or Gandharvas. By himself, that Mahabaho can defeat even a Deva in battle.

What can I say of the deceitful gambler, the haughty and foolish son of Dhritarashtra, the most detested of all men? I grieve for my poor mother, who loves her sons, who is always eager that we should rise above our enemies in fame. O Naga, all the hope that my sorrowing mother vested in me will be dashed if you devour me.

My twin brothers, the manly Nakula and Sahadeva, follow me, their elder brother, and rely on the strength of my arms for their protection. If I die, they will be grief-stricken and lose their will to fight. This is what I think.'

Such is Vrikodara's heartfelt lament; caught in the coils of Nahusha the snake, all his strength is sapped from his body.

In the meanwhile, Yudhishtira sees sinister omens and is alarmed. The cardinal points blaze, weird jackals come to the hermitage and howl. Horribly deformed vartikas, with one wing, one eye and one leg, face the Sun and vomit blood. Dry winds blow and whip up stony eddies.

In the east, all the beasts and birds begin to cry out; behind him black crows caw, *Go! Go!* Yudhishtira's right arm, his chest and left leg twitch. His left eye tics in spasms, auguring some great evil.

O Bhaarata, sensing some calamity, Yudhishtira asks Draupadi where Bhima is. She replies that he has been gone for some time. Dharmaraja tells Arjuna to watch over Draupadi, he tells Nakula and Sahadeva to protect the Brahmanas, and sets out with Dhaumya. They leave the asrama and, following Bhima's wild, brash trail, look for him in the dense forest.

Going east, they come across the dead bodies of bull-elephants, leaders of their herds, and see Bhima's footprints on the ground. They see the carcasses of thousands of deer and hundreds of lions, and they know they are on Bhima's trail. They see trees uprooted by him on his heedless way in pursuit of deer.

The trail leads them to a desolate spot. Dry winds blow; the plants are all leafless and thorny; the air is salty; there is no water anywhere; stones, tree-stumps and scrub cover the rough, uneven ground; and a sharp sense of danger invades them. And here, in a mountain cave, Yudhishtira sees his younger brother, held fast by that most powerful of snakes."

CANTO 179

AJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, “Yudhishtira finds his beloved Bhima in the coils of the serpent and says, ‘O Son of Kunti, how did this happen? Who is this remarkable Naga, whose body is like a mountain?’

Bhimasena says, ‘My brother, this mighty serpent has caught me for his food. He is the Rajarishi Nahusha cursed to be a Naga.’

Yudhishtira says to the snake, ‘Chiranjeevi, long-lived, free my brother of the immeasurable strength. We will give you some other food to satisfy your hunger.’

The serpent says, ‘This prince came to me of his own accord and provided me with my meal. Go away. You should not stay for, if you do, you will be my meal tomorrow. Mahabaho, this has been ordained—he who comes to where I live becomes my food. You are in my dwelling. I have waited a long time for the meal that is your younger brother. I will not let him go, and I do not fancy any other food.’

Yudhishtira responds, ‘O Sarpa, tell me truly who you are—a Deva, an Asura, an Uraga? I, Yudhishtira, ask this. Why have you taken Bhimasena? What object or knowledge will satisfy you? And what food shall I get you, O Snake? How can I secure my brother’s release?’

The serpent says, ‘O sinless, I am king Nahusha, your ancestor and the son of Ayu, in the fifth generation of descent from Soma, the Moon. By virtue of my tapasya, my yagnas, my spiritual discipline and steadfastness, I

earned dominion over the three worlds. But with this authority came arrogance.

I engaged thousands of Brahmanas as my throne-bearers and, intoxicated by power, I insulted them by kicking them with my feet and crying *sarpa, sarpa*! *Hurry, hurry!* When my foot touched him, Agastya Muni cursed me, *You be a sarpa!* and I fell down to the Earth in this form in which you find me.

Even now, I cannot forget my past life. This evening, Agastya's goodwill brought your brother to me for my meal. I have no wish to set him free, and I do not want to eat anything else. However, if you answer my questions, I will let Vrikodara go.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Serpent, ask whatever you like. I will try to please you with my answers. You have the knowledge of the truly learned. Therefore, Nagaraja, king of snakes, ask and I will answer.'

The serpent says, 'O Yudhishtira, tell me, who is a Brahmana and what knowledge should he have? You speak so eloquently and I can tell that you are highly intelligent. Tell me, who is a Brahmana and what is the final object of all knowledge?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Foremost of serpents, the wise say that he in whom we see truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, benevolence, observance of his svadharma and mercy is a Brahmana. The object of knowledge is the Supreme Brahman, the state devoid of joy and sorrow, attaining which frees man from misery.'

The Naga says, 'Yudhishtira, even in a Sudra we find truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, benevolence, devoutness, kindness and knowledge of the Veda that regulates the four varnas and provides guidance in religious matters. As for what ought to be known, which you say is a state of no pain or pleasure, it does not exist.'

Yudhishtira says, 'The Sudra who has these qualities is not a Sudra, and the Brahmana who lacks these is not a Brahmana. Sudras and Brahmanas are not classified by birth alone. The wise say that anyone who has these qualities is a Brahmana, and one who does not is a Sudra, even if he is born a Brahmana. Your assertion that all things that exist must feel either misery or happiness, because without both there is nothing, is erroneous. This is only how it seems. Think of this—cold is the absence of heat; and heat is the absence of cold. Therefore, can there not be a state in which both are absent, and a similar state for joy and grief?'

The serpent says, ‘O king, if a man is recognised as a Brahmana because he possesses these characteristics, caste distinctions become relevant only in relation to these qualities.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Mighty and most intelligent serpent, in human society it is difficult to ascertain a person’s caste because of promiscuousness among the four varnas. This is my opinion. Men of all castes have children by women of all castes. Four aspects of life that all people have in common are language, sexual intercourse, birth and death. Even Rishis have testified to the difficulty of distinguishing caste, by using this sentence at beginning of every sacrifice—‘Whatever caste you may belong to, we celebrate this sacrifice.’ The learned have asserted that character is the only essential requisite for caste distinctions.

The birth ceremony of a male child is performed before the cutting of the umbilical cord. The mother acts as Savitri and the father officiates as priest. The child is considered a Sudra until he is initiated in the Vedas. Because of doubts that have arisen on this point, O prince of serpents, Swayambhuva Manu declared that the mixed castes are better than the upper castes that do not live according to dharma even after undergoing the rituals of purification. Any man who lives by the laws of dharma, I have always considered a Brahmana.’

The serpent replies, ‘O Yudhishtira, you do indeed know what needs to be known and, after having heard you speak, how can I eat your brother Vrikodara?’ ”

CANTO 180

AJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'In this world, you are most learned in the Vedas and Vedangas; tell me what one should do to attain moksha.'

The serpent replies, 'O scion of the Bhaaratas, I believe that the man who gives alms to deserving people, the man that speaks kindly, the man that tells the truth and the man that abstains from doing injury to any creature attains salvation.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'Which, O Naga, is the higher of the two—truth or charity? Tell me also, which is more important—kindness or the avoidance of doing harm.'

The snake replies, 'The relative merits of the qualities of truth and benevolence, kind words and abstention from harmful behaviour are measured by their results. Truth is sometimes more praiseworthy than some acts of charity; some daana is more laudable than speaking the truth. Similarly, abstaining from causing injury can be more, or less, important than kind speech. It all depends on the effect your actions have.

Ask me anything more you want, and I will clear your doubts.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Naga, how to understand the soul's transition to Swarga, about its enjoyment of the rewards it has gained and how it perceives through the senses.'

The snake replies, 'By dint of his own karma, a soul takes birth in one of three conditions—as an animal, as a human, or as a heavenly being. Man leaves his human life and attains Swarga by being diligent and

hardworking, by not harming any creature, by being charitable and virtuous. Through the opposite conduct, Rajan, people are reborn as baser humans or as animals. This is particularly true of one who is ruled by anger, lust, greed and malice. This person leaves his human life and is reborn as an animal. Animals can be transformed into the human state, too. The cow, the horse and other beasts have been seen to attain even the divine condition.

My son, living beings transmigrate from one state to the other because of their actions, but the wise man's soul rests permanently in the indestructible Brahman. The embodied spirit, bound by destiny, and reaping the fruits of its karma, undergoes birth after birth; but he that is distanced from his own actions is conscious of the destiny of all beings.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'O Snake, tell me truly and clearly how the spirit that is detached from the body recognises sound, touch, shape, smell and taste. Does one perceive sensations simultaneously? Best of snakes, answer my questions.'

The snake replies, 'The spirit, called Atman, taking existence within a physical body and, manifesting itself in the sense organs, enjoys the perceptions of all objects. Bharatarishabha, the senses, the mind and the intellect, which help the Atman in perception, are called karanas. The eternal spirit leaves its proper place and, assisted by the mind and acting through the senses, perceives all objects with sensory properties. The mind of living creatures is the cause of all perception and, therefore, it cannot recognise more than one thing at a time. This spirit, which resides in the space between the eyebrows, directs the high and low intellect to different objects. The knowledge that Yogis gain from constant use of the higher intellect causes them to finally perceive the Atman.

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me the distinguishing characteristics of the mind and the intellect. Gaining this knowledge is the chief aim of those who meditate on Brahman, the Supreme Spirit.'

The snake replies, 'Through improper understanding, the Soul becomes subservient to the intellect, which, though inferior to the Soul, directs and controls it. The intellect is moved by perception, but the Soul is independent and exists by itself. The intellect does not cause sensation, such as pain or pleasure, the mind does. This, my son, is the difference between the mind and the intellect. You, too, are learned in this; what is your opinion?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Most intelligent one, you have a superior intellect and know all there is to be known. Why do you ask me this question? You are all-knowing; you have performed wonderful deeds; and you have lived in Swarga. How could illusion overpower you? I wonder greatly at this.'

The snake replies, 'Prosperity intoxicates even wise and valiant men. Those who indulge in luxurious lives lose their intellect. I, too, Yudhishtira, was drunk and infatuated with prosperity, and fell from my height.

Having recovered my reason, I speak to you in this manner. O Victorious, you have done me a favour. Conversing with one as virtuous as you has lifted my painful curse.

In the days of old, when I used to live in heaven and ride in a celestial chariot, I was swollen with pride and, unthinkingly, I would accept tribute from Brahmarishis, Devas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Pannagas and all who lived in the three worlds. Lord of Earth, such was the spell of my eyes that I instantly destroyed the power of any creature on which I fixed them.

I had thousands of Brahmarishis draw my carriage, and this sin caused my fall. One day Agastya Muni was drawing my carriage when my feet touched his body. He cursed me in anger, saying, "You will be ruined. You will become a snake."

At once, I lost my glory and fell from the chariot, watching myself turn into a snake as I fell. I implored the Brahmana, "I beg you, remove this curse, O divine one. Forgive my foolishness."

Moved by pity as he watched me hurtling down from heaven, he said, "The virtuous king Yudhishtira will release you from my curse. O Nahusha, when you rid yourself of the sin of pride, you will attain redemption."

I was wonderstruck to see the power of his tapasya. That is why I have asked you these questions about the Brahman and Brahmanas, about truth and charity, about self-restraint and penance, about not doing injury to any creature and adhering to dharma. Rajan, it is these qualities, and not the race or family into which he is born, by which a man may attain mukti. May your brother, the mighty Bhimasena, enjoy good fortune; may you be happy, O Dharmaraja. I must leave you now and return to Swarga.'

With these words, king Nahusha sheds his serpentine form and, assuming his celestial one, ascends into heaven. Dharmatma Yudhishtira returns to his asrama with Dhaumya and Bhima, and there he narrates all that has transpired to the Brahmanas, his brothers and Draupadi. They are

ashamed when they hear how Bhima behaved. The Brahmanas, with the welfare of the Pandavas in mind, admonish Bhima for his foolhardiness and tell him never to be so rash.

The Pandavas are elated that Bhima has been saved from danger, and they continue to live there happily.”

CANTO 181

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "While they live in that place, the monsoon sets in. It cools the air, bringing delight to all the living. Dark clouds rumble and cover the skies entirely, forming an opaque cupola; they pour down rain day and night. The light of the Sun is replaced by the stainless lustre of lightning. The Earth turns fecund and mellow—lush grass grows, insects multiply and abound joyfully, and the world is washed clean and spread over with serenity. Water covers the ground, so that the tallest trees and entire hills are submerged and indistinguishable.

At summer's end, swollen rivers augment the beauty of the forest, looking like snakes as they hiss and turn along their courses. Boars, stags and birds are drenched in the rain and chortle in delight, from within the vana. Chatakas, peacocks, kokilas and frogs are all athrob with excitement.

The Pandavas enjoy the monsoon, in its seething richness, and the sound of thunder above and the lashing rain below, while they live on the higher reaches of the mountain.

Autumn sets in—its floor coverd over with thick new grass, the forest teems with swans, ducks, geese and cranes; rivers flow lucid again and the stars shine brightly in the sky. This is a blissful season for the sons of Pandu, crowded as it is with bright and feral birds and beasts. They revel in the clear night air, cooled by clouds, and the sky adorned by glowing planets, stars and the radiant moon. They see cool rivers and ponds ornamented with lilies and white lotuses.

They roam the river Saraswati's majestic banks, thick with bamboo, and dotted with sacral pools; and great is their exhilaration. Those Kshatriyas are especially glad to gaze at the golden Saraswati, brimming with limpid water, and they spend the holy night of Karthika Poornima beside her. The sons of Pandu spend that auspicious day with pure and benevolent Rishis devoted to tapasya and, as soon as the dark fortnight sets in immediately after, they enter the Kamyaka vana, with their charioteers, cooks and the rest of their entourage."

CANTO 182

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Scion of Kuru, on arriving at the Kamyaka vana, the Rishi of that jungle warmly receives them, and there they live with Krishnaa. While the Pandavas dwell in safety here, many Brahmanas come to visit them.

One of them says, 'Arjuna's beloved friend, Krishna of the lofty intellect, mighty arms and perfect self-control, the Saurin, will come to this asrama. Hari knows that you have arrived here; he always wishes for your welfare and longs to see you. Markandeya, who has lived many ages, who is devoted to profound study and tapasya, will also come to you.'

No sooner are the words spoken than they see Krishna coming towards them in a chariot yoked with the horses Saibya and Sugriva. With Satyabhama beside him, Devaki's dark blue son is like Indra with Pulaman's daughter Sachi, as he comes to visit the Pandavas of dharma.

The omniscient Krishna alights from his ratha and prostrates before Yudhishtira, and then before Bhimasena. He pays his respects to Dhaumya, and the twins prostrate before him. He embraces Arjuna of the curly hair; and speaks comfortingly to Drupada's daughter. Again and again does Krishna, son of the Dasarhas, the slayer of his foes, clasp Arjuna in his arms; it is so long since he has seen his precious friend. Satyabhama embraces Draupadi. The sons of Pandu, with their wife and priests, worship

Krishna, of the eyes like the white lotus, and crowd around him in adoration.

Krishna glows at being re-united with Pritha's son Arjuna, Dhananjaya the winner of wealth; the terror of Asuras acquires the radiant beauty of Siva, the magnanimous Lord of all creatures, when Mahadeva is united with his son Kartikeya. Arjuna Kiriti tells Krishna all that has transpired in the jungle, and asks after Subhadra and Abhimanyu. After he pays due reverence to Yudhishtira and the Brahmanas, Krishna sits down and praises Yudhishtira.

He says, 'O King, dharma is superior to conquering kingdoms, because it is acquired through tapasya. By your adherence to the truth, and with your honesty, you have conquered this world and the next. Through study and faultlessly performing your svadharma, you have mastered the Astra Shastra. You have gained wealth in accordance to the dictates of Kshatriya dharma, and correctly performed the ancient yagnas. You are not addicted to sensual pleasures, nor do you act, Purushottama, from selfish motives. You do not swerve from the path of dharma out of greed for wealth. You are aptly called Dharmaraja, the righteous king.

Even though you have won wealth and kingdoms, you find your greatest joy in charity, truth, penance, forbearance, meditation and patience. When Krishnaa was humiliated in the Kuru sabha, in a shocking and shameful manner, who but you could have silently borne it? You will soon rule justly over men, and all your desires will be fulfilled. We are here and ready to punish the Kurus, as soon as your obligation to them is completed.'

Krishna says to Dhaumya, Bhima, Yudhishtira, the twins and Krishnaa, 'You are all blessed with good fortune to have Arjuna Kiriti, the crowned, back with you after he has mastered the Astra Shastra in Devaloka.'

Krishna now turns to Yagnaseni, 'How fortunate that you are united again with Dhananjaya! Krishnaa, you have the most excellent sons. They are diligent sishyas; they are well-behaved and emulate the conduct of their virtuous friends. Although your father and brothers offered them their kingdom to tempt them to stay with them there, they declined and preferred, instead, to live with us in Anarta, where, in the city of the Vrishnis, they study the Astra Shastra and live happily amongst our people. Subhadra guides them in the same way that you or Kunti would, perhaps with even more love and care.

Rukmini's son Pradyumna, master to Aniruddha, Abhimanyu, Sunitha and Bhanu, is your sons' guru as well. As a good preceptor would, he gives these valiant young lions lessons in the use of maces and swords, in astras, in charioteering and riding horses. Pradyumna is delighted that his training manifests itself in the brave deeds that your sons and Abhimanyu perform. And when your sons go forth in pursuit of sport, chariots, horses and elephants form their retinue.'

Krishna says to Yudhishtira, 'The fighting men of the Dasarha clan, the Kukuras and the Andhakas are at your command, to do whatever you wish. Lord of men, the army of the Madhus, whose bows are as powerful as the wind, led by Balarama, whose weapon is the halayudha, the plough, is eminently prepared for battle. O Pandava, its cavalry and infantry, horses, chariots and elephants are ready to do your bidding. Drive Dhritarashtra's son Duryodhana, the vilest of sinful men, his followers and friends down to the path of the lord Yama, son of the Earth. You, Rajan, can keep the vow you swore in the sabha, but let the city be prepared for your triumphant return when the Dasarha forces have razed your enemies.

Live wherever you please, visit all the places you want to see, be rid of your grief and wash away your sins; you will go to Hastinapura, and rule from there.'

The noble king listens attentively to Krishna and, after some deliberation, folds his hands in reverence and says 'O Kesava, you are the refuge of the sons of Pandu; in you we have our protector. When the time comes, I am certain that you will do as you have said, and even more. We have spent twelve desolate years in the forest, without breaking our oath. We have yet to complete the thirteenth year, of ajnatavasa, and now we place ourselves under your protection, as is right for those who are your friends.

The sons of Pandu and Pritha do not swerve from the path of dharma. We are charitable and pious, and we lay ourselves and our people, our wives and our friends at your feet.'

Bhaarata, while Krishna of the Vrishnis and the pure-hearted Yudhishtira talk, the venerable Rishi Markandeya arrives in their midst. He is many thousands of years old, and has spent his life in the practice of dharma and tapasya. His age is not visible on him and he is immortal. He radiates the beauty of grace, goodness and benevolence, which make him look like a young man of some twenty-five years. When the aged, ageless

Markandeya, who has seen thousands of yugas, arrives, all the Brahmanas pay him deep homage, as do Krishna and Pandu's sons.

Having been duly honoured, the Muni sits down, and Krishna says to him, 'The sons of Pandu, these Brahmanas, Draupadi, Satyabhama and I are all anxious to listen to you speak, O Markandeya! Tell us the holy stories of ancient times and the abiding laws of dharma which guide kings, women and sages.'

When they had all taken their seats, Devarishi Narada arrives there. The noble Kshatriyas receive him, washing his feet and offering him arghya. The godlike Narada realises that Markandeya is about to speak and shows his eagerness to do the same.

Immortal Krishna, who knows when the time is ripe for all things, says, 'O Brahmarishi, tell us what you were about to say to the Pandavas.'

Markandeya replies, 'Be patient and I will tell you many things.'

And Pandu's sons and the Dvijas wait silently, watching the Rishi who is as bright as the Sun at noon."

Vaisampayana continued, "Pandu's eldest son realises that the great Markandeya is willing to speak, and begins to put questions to him.

Yudhishtira says, 'You, who are venerable in age, know of the legendary deeds of Devas and Asuras, those of exalted sages and kings. You are worthy of worship, and long have we yearned to see you. We also have with us Devakinandana Krishna. I look at myself, bereft of happiness from no fault of mine; I think of Dhritarashtra's evil sons revelling in my misery; and it strikes me that man is the doer of all things, good or bad, and it is man who reaps the fruit of his actions. I wonder, then, how God becomes an agent.

Brahmanasreshta, how does a man's karma affect him? Is it in this world, or in some future existence? O Dvijottama, how is man connected to his good and evil actions? Is it after death, or in this life? Is what we experience in this lifetime the result of our deeds of this same life? Or will the acts of this life bear fruit in lifetimes to come? Where do the actions of one who is dead find their resting place?'

Markandeya answers, 'Purushottama, this is a worthy question. You know all there is to know; and you ask me this question for the sake of edifying some others who are here. Listen attentively and I will explain how a man experiences pleasure and pain in this lifetime and in those to come.

Prajapati, the Lord of all created beings, first created himself, and then, for all embodied beings, created bodies which were blemishless and virtuous. The men of ancient times had all their desires fulfilled, were given to noble deeds, and were truthful, godly and pure. All were equal to the Devas; they could rise to the heavens and come down again, and go wherever they wanted to, at their pleasure.

They had control over life and death; they had but few sufferings and no fear; their wishes were always fulfilled and they lived trouble-free lives. They could visit the Devas and the Rishis; they were versed in all the religious rites and laws; they were self-disciplined and free from envy. They lived many thousand years and had many thousand sons.

In time, they were restricted to walking only on the surface of the Earth and, overpowered by lust and anger, began to employ lies and deceit to garner what they desired. Greed, envy and ignorance overwhelmed them. Because of their evil deeds, when these men died they went to Naraka, to hell. Again and again, they suffered birth and lived miserable lives in this world.

Their desires remained unfulfilled, their aims unaccomplished, and their knowledge was useless to them. Their minds were clouded by tamas; they were full of fear; and they became the instruments of suffering. Their lives were a series of evil deeds; they were born into despicable families; their minds and bodies were diseased and in a constant state of terror. They did not live long and, during their short lives, paid the price for their sins. They coveted all they saw; and they became Godless and cynical, Kaunteya.

The fate of every being after death is determined by what he does in this world. You have asked me where the repository of the karma of the wise and ignorant is, and where they enjoy the fruit of their good and evil deeds. Listen to the laws that govern this matter.

Man accumulates a great store of good and evil karma in his subtle body, his sukshma sarira created by God. When he dies he leaves his sthula sarira, his gross flesh, and is immediately born again into another order of beings. He is never without a body, not for a single moment. Into this new life, his karma follows him like a shadow, inexorably, making him happy or miserable.

The wise man with spiritual insight knows that all beings are tied by the Destroyer to an unchangeable destiny and that they cannot escape the

consequences of their good or evil karma. This, O Yudhishtira, is the fate of all creatures that are steeped in spiritual ignorance.

I will tell you now of the perfection attained by men of spiritual awareness. Such men have great tapasyashakti; they know about all things sacred and are deeply liberal. They are unswerving in their religious duties and devoted to the truth. They honour their Gurus and elders with reverence; they practice yoga; they are forgiving, have their passions and minds under firm control, and are men of extraordinary lustre, piety and energy. In short, they are endowed with all the virtues. They have conquered their passions and subdued their minds; by practising yoga they are freed from disease, fear and sorrow; and their hearts are at peace.

While they are being born, be it premature or in full term, and while they are still in the womb, they see, with the inner spiritual eye, the relationship of the soul to Brahman, the Supreme Spirit. Those high-minded Rishis who were gifted with intuitive knowledge passed through the world of men and returned to Devaloka, home of the gods. O King, it is by destiny or by their actions that men attain joy or sorrow. Do not think otherwise. Yudhishtira, I consider this the highest truth.

Some attain happiness in this world, but not in the next; others do so in the next, but not in this one. Some attain happiness in this as well as in the next world, and others neither here nor in the next world. Those that have vast wealth glitter in their rich ornaments. O slayer of mighty enemies, these are addicted to pleasures of the flesh; they enjoy happiness only in this world but not in the next.

Those who meditate and study the Vedas, who are firm in their asceticism, who use all their energies in the performance of their duties, who have their senses under perfect control, who refrain from killing animals, those men, O Parantapa, attain bliss in the next world but not in this one!

Those who first live a chaste life, then virtuously acquire wealth in due time, and then marry and perform sacrifices find felicity both in this and the next world. However, foolish men who do not acquire gyana, who do not practice dhyana or daana, who do not marry and have children and who do not enjoy the joys this world has to offer, do not attain joy either in this or the next world.

All of you have great knowledge, awesome prowess and celestial energy. You have come from the other world and taken birth in this one to

fulfil the purpose of the gods, to exterminate evil. You, who are so valiant, who practice stern tapasya and exercises of self-control, who observe dharma, who are tireless, who have pleased the Devas, the Pitrs and the Maharishis by performing great deeds, will eventually attain rapture in Swarga by virtue of your own actions.

O jewel of the Kurus, do not let your sufferings create any doubt about this in your heart; your afflictions are for your own good.' "

CANTO 183

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The Pandavas say to Markandeya Mahatman, 'We are eager to hear of the greatness of the Brahmanas. Tell us of it, O Mahamuni!'

Markandeya replies, 'A strong, handsome young prince of the Haihaya clan, a conqueror of hostile cities, once went hunting. While roaming in a wilderness of great trees and thickets of tall grass he saw, not far from him, a Muni wearing black antelope skin and, mistaking him for a deer, killed him. When he realised what he had done, he was paralysed with horror and grief. He went to the Haihaya elders and this lotus-eyed prince told them what had happened.

Child, when they heard his story and saw the body of the sage who had subsisted on fruit and roots, they were distraught. They all set out, enquiring everywhere they went, whose son the Muni might be. They reached the asrama of Arishtanemi, son of Kasyapa. They reverently greeted the great sage, who sat in resolute tapasya, and remained standing while he received them formally.

The Haihaya elders said to the illustrious Muni, "By a freak of fate, we are no longer worthy of your welcome, because we have killed a Brahmana!"

The illumined Rishi said to them, “How did you happen to kill a Brahmana? Tell me where he is, and you will see the power of my tapasya!”

The Haihayas related everything to him, exactly as it had occurred. They went back but did not find the body of the dead Rishi where they had left it. They scoured the place, without success, and, ashamed and dazed, returned to the Muni.

The son of Kasyapa said to them, “O Ksatriyas, could this be the Brahmana that you killed? This Brahmana, who has acquired great power from his tapasya, is my son.”

When they saw the Brahmana, they were astonished, and said, “This is incredible! How has one who was dead come to life again? Is it the power of his tapasya that has revived him? We are agog to hear this, O Rishi, if it can be explained.”

The Rishi replied, “Death has no power over us. I will explain why this is so. We perform our sacred dharma and so we have no fear of death; we speak well of Brahmanas and never think ill of them and so death holds no terror for us. We entertain our guests with food and drink, make sure our dependants eat well and we, finally, eat what is left. Therefore, we are not afraid of death. We lead strict and peaceful lives, we are charitable and tolerant, we visit holy shrines and live in sacred places; thus, we have no fear of death. We live amongst people of great spirituality and so death holds no dread for us. This is only a brief explanation. Now return to your home, without vanity and fear of sin.”

Saying *Tathaastu, so be it*, and saluting the great Muni, the princes returned to their country, Bhaaratottama.’ ”

CANTO 184

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'I will tell you more about the glory of the Brahmanas! The Rajarishi Vainya was once performing an Aswamedha yagna, when Atri decided to go to him for alms. However, later, Atri of shining tejas renounced his desire for wealth and wanted to live in the forest.

He called his wife and sons together and said to them, "We will attain perfect tranquillity and fulfilment if we live in the forest. I hope you will agree to live like that and earn spiritual merit."

His wife, a woman of dharma, said to him, "Go to Rajarishi Vainya and beg him for wealth. The royal sage is performing the Aswamedha yagna, and will give you what you ask. Once you have the wealth, you can distribute it amongst your sons and those who serve you and then go wherever you please. Men who are wise in matters of religion say that this is the highest dharma."

Atri replied, "Virtuous one, the exalted Gautama has told me that Vainya is a pious man, devoted to Truth, but there are Brahmanas in his asrama who are jealous of me. So I had better not go to Vainya. If, while I am there, I speak pious words that promote spiritual liberation, they will contradict me with arguments that have no substance or goodness. Yet, I see

the wisdom of what you say, and I will go to Vainya; he will give me cattle and riches."

Atri of great punya went straight to Vainya's sacrifice and, reaching the yagnasala, he paid obeisance to the king, praised him with eulogies and said, "Blessings be upon you, O king! You are the best of the rulers of the Earth. Sages admire you; there is no one who knows as much about dharma as you."

Rishi Gautama, lustrous tapasvin, indignantly responded, "Atri, you seem to have lost your reason. In this world, Mahendra alone is the foremost of all sovereigns!"

Atri said to Gautama, "Just as Indra, the lord of all creatures, controls our destinies, so does this king! It is you whose mind has been clouded by ignorance."

Gautama replied, 'I know that I am right and that you are mistaken. You flatter the king in the presence of his courtiers only to please him. You have no idea what the highest dharma is, nor do you feel the need for it. Despite your great age you are like an ignorant child."

While these two were arguing before the Munis who were conducting the yagna, Vainya asked, "Why do they speak so fiercely?"

Kasyapa, irradiant in his piety and learned in all things religious, approached the disputants and asked them what the problem was. Gautama addressed that assembly of great Munis, "Listen, O Dvijottamas, to the point of dispute between us. Atri says that Vainya is the ruler of our destinies, and I doubt this greatly."

The sages went to Sanatkumara, who was a master of dharma, to clear their doubt. This sage, of fathomless spirit, heard about the dispute and, in words laden with significance, said to those sages, "The power of a Brahmana combined with that of a Kshatriya is as potent as the fire fanned by wind, which burns down forests; it can consume all enemies. Like Indra, the king is the giver of laws and the protector of his subjects; like Sukra, he establishes the code of dharma; like Brihaspati, he is a counsellor. Therefore, he is indeed the ruler of men's destinies.

Is there a man who thinks he is above worshipping Prajapati—Creator of all beings; or Virata—royal emperor; or Kshatriya—lord and protector of the Earth, ruler of men?

Because he is the law-giver the king is the guardian of the order of the varnas. He is the upholder of honour in battle and the keeper of peace; he is

the ever-vigilant, the contented, the sovereign, the guide to spiritual bliss, the easily victorious, Vishnu-like, and of effective anger. He is the winner of wars and the embodiment of devotion to sanatana dharma. The Rishis entrusted Kshatriyas with temporal power because they were afraid of committing sin.

Even as the Sun destroys evil in heaven, the king burns sin on this earth. The king's greatness is confirmed by the Shastras, and I must rule in favour of those that give praise to the king."

Greatly pleased, Vainya said to Atri, who had praised him, "O illumined sage, you have declared me the greatest and most excellent of men, and compared me to the gods. I will give you vast and varied wealth, for to me you seem all-knowing. I will give you, O well-clad and well-adorned one, a hundred million gold coins and ten bharas of gold."

Thus feted, Atri of the stern tapasya and vast spiritual power humbly accepted all the gifts and returned home. He gave the wealth to his sons and went carefree to the forest to live the life of a sannyasi.' "

CANTO 185

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'O conqueror of hostile cities, listen to what Saraswati said when the illumined Tarkshya asked her about how a man may acquire punya through his actions.

Tarkshya asked, "Great Devi, what is the best thing for a man to do, and how must he do so, that he may live a virtuous life? Tell me, most beautiful one, so that I can live by your advice and not fall from the high path of truth. When and how must one offer oblations to the sacred fire, and when must one worship so that dharma remains intact? Tell me this, so that I can live in this world, free of passion, craving and desire."

Saraswati saw that Tarkshya was sincere, and also intelligent.

She said to him, "He who devotes himself to studying the Vedas and, while in a state of purity and equanimity, sees the Brahman, attains the supreme bliss of the immortals and attains Swarga. There, he sees that great and sacred lakes abound, full of fish, flowers and golden lilies. They are like shrines and to look at them suffices to remove all grief. Holy men live in peace on their shores, worshipped by golden-skinned Apsaras.

He who gifts cows to Brahmanas attains the highest spiritual state; by giving bullocks he reaches the solar regions; by giving clothes he goes to the lunar world; and by giving gold he attains the world of the immortals.

He who gifts a beautiful cow with a fine calf, and plentiful in milk, and which will not run away, will live in celestial realms for as many years as there are hairs on the body of that animal.

He who gives a strong, powerful, young bullock that can pull a plough and carry heavy burdens reaches the realms attained by men who give ten cows. When a man bestows a well-caparisoned kapila cow with a bronze milk-pail, along with gold, he will find that the cow will return to him, because she is the giver of boons.

He who gives away cows reaps the rich harvest of his daana, which is measured by the hairs on the body of the animal. He also saves his sons, grandsons and his descendants for seven generations from damnation. He who gives a Brahmana sesame seeds formed in the shape of a cow with golden horns, with a bronze milk-pail, and gold as well, easily attains the realm of the Vasus.

Through his own actions a man descends into the dark, lower regions, infested by the evil spirits of his own passions, and lives in turmoil like a ship tossed by a storm on the high seas; but the gift of cows to Brahmanas saves him in the next world. He who gives his daughter in marriage to a Brahmana, in Brahma vivaha, who bestows land on Brahmanas, and who gives other gifts, goes to the world of Purandara. O Tarkshya, the virtuous man who offers oblations to the sacred fire for seven years, without remit, sanctifies seven generations above and below him by what he does."

Tarkshya said, "Lovely Devi, tell me about the laws for keeping the sacred fire lit, as dictated by the Vedas. I want to learn those timeless laws from you."

And the Mahadevi Saraswati expatiated on those laws from the Vedas, in detail.' "

CANTO 186

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira asks the Brahmana Markandeya, 'Will you now tell us the story of Vaivaswata Manu?'

Markandeya replies, 'Rajan, there was a great Rishi named Manu. He was the son of Vivaswan and was equal to Brahma in glory. He was stronger, more powerful, wealthier and more spiritually disciplined than his father and grandfather. Manu performed the most stringent tapasya in the forest of badari trees known as Visala. There, with head bowed down, and unblinking eyes, he sat in unflinching penance for ten thousand years.

One day, while he was at tapasya, wearing wet clothes and matted hair, a fish swam up to the banks of the river Chirini and spoke to him. It said, 'Rajarishi, I am a helpless little fish and afraid of the larger fish. Would you be my protector, great and pious sage, since big fish devour smaller ones? Will you save me from drowning in this river of terrors? I will repay you for your help."

Vaivaswata Manu was overcome by pity and he took the fish out of the water with his hands and put it into a clay water-pot. The fish's body glistened as if it was the reflection of the moon he had taken from the river. Manu reared it lovingly as if it was a child, and that fish grew apace. After a time, it became so big that the water-pot could not contain it.

It spoke to Manu again, "O Rajarishi, please me find a bigger home."

Manu took it out of the clay pot and put it into a large tank. There, too, the fish continued to grow rapidly. Although the tank was two yojanas long and one yojana wide, soon there was no room in it for the fish to swim and frolic.

It saw Manu and spoke to him once more. It said, "Holy and adored father, take me to the Ganga, the favourite wife of Sagara the Ocean, or take me elsewhere, as you like. O Anagha, because of you I have grown so much, and I will gladly go wherever you take me."

Manu took the fish to the Ganga and slipped it into the river. There, O desiccator of your enemies, the fish grew again and, after a very short time, said to Manu, "Lord, my body is so big that I find the Ganga restricts me. I beg you, take me to the sea!"

Son of Pritha, Manu took it out of the Ganga and had it borne to the sea. Despite its great size, Manu moved it easily, and its touch and smell were pleasant to him. When Manu cast it into the sea, it said to him, with a smile, "Revered one, you have protected me with such love; listen while I tell you what you should do in the future. O most blessed one, a Pralaya is at hand, the dissolution of the world is near. What I am going to tell you is for your weal.

Mobile and motionless creation faces doom. You must build a strong, vast ship and tie a long rope to it. O Mahamuni, you and the Saptarishis must take all the seeds that the Brahmanas of antiquity listed, preserve them separately and carefully in this boat. In it, you must all wait for me and I will appear to you as a horned creature. That is how you will know me. I leave you now. Do as I tell you because, without my help, you cannot save yourself from the Pralaya."

Manu said to the fish, "I will do as you say, great one."

They both went their separate ways. Manu procured all the different seeds, as the fish said, and set sail in a most excellent ship on the billowing sea. He thought of the fish. Knowing his thought, the fish appeared before him, with horns on its head. Purushavyaghra, Manu saw the horned fish rising from the ocean like a sculpted mountain and he lowered a noose around its head. Yoked to the ship, the fish easly towed the craft through the salt waters and took them across the roaring, heaving sea.

O Parantapa, tossed by the tempestuous ocean, the vessel reeled like a drunken tramp. There was no land to be seen anywhere. There was only water; it covered the sky and heaven too. And, O bull of the Bhaaratas,

when the world was inundated, none but Manu, the seven Rishis and the fish were visible.

Rajan, the fish untiringly pulled the ship through the flood for countless years and then it towed the vessel towards the highest peak of the Himavat and told the Rishis to tie it to the summit. Obedient to the fish, they moored the ship on the peak of the mountain. That peak, Kaunteya, is still called Naubandhanam, or harbour.

The fish addressed the Rishis, “I am Brahman, the Lord of all creation; there is none greater than I. Assuming the form of a matsya, I have saved you from the Pralaya. Manu will create all beings again—Devas, Asuras and Manavas; and all the animate and inanimate things of the universe. He will find the power to do this through tapasya, and my blessing will protect him. Maya will assail him but I will protect him from it.” So saying, the fish vanished.

Vaivaswata Manu felt the urge to create the world. During this act of creation, illusion affected him but he overcame it with his tapasyashakti and resumed his task of creating all the beings of the world, in their proper order.

This legend that I have just told you, which destroys sin, is the legend of the Fish, the Matsya Avatara. The man who listens every day to this primeval tale of Manu attains happiness and everything he wants, and then Swarga.’ ”

CANTO 187

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira humbly asks the illustrious Markandeya, 'Mahamuni, you have seen many thousands of yugas. Best of Mahatmas, there is no one in this world who has lived as long as you, other than Brahma of the fathomless mind, who lives in the holiest of realms.

Only you, O Brahmana, will worship Brahma at the time of the dissolution of the universe, when this earth is without a sky and without Devas and Danavas. And when that Pralaya ends and Narayana awakes, you alone, O enlightened one, will see Brahma re-create the four orders of beings after filling the void with air and restricting the endless waters with shores.

You, Brahmanottama, have worshipped Brahma in his body, your soul rapt in dhyana, and have been lost in him. You have often been witness to the primeval acts of creation; you have surpassed the Prajapatis in the depth of your tapasya; in the next world, you are revered as one who is nearest to Narayana.

Long ago, you beheld Mahavishnu, not with your bodily eyes but in a pure state of the Spirit, with your blemishless, lotus-like heart—the only way in which the manifold Vishnu of universal knowledge can be seen!

This is why, most learned Rishi, God's grace is upon you, and neither Death the universal destroyer nor old age, the cause of bodily decay, has

any power over you.

When neither the Sun nor the Moon, nor Fire, nor Earth, nor Air, nor Sky remains; when the world, on the brink of extinction, is one vast ocean, Ekarnava; when the Devas and Asuras and the great Nagas are gone; and when Brahma of the fathomless mind, Lord of all creatures, sleeps in a lotus, you alone will remain to worship him.

Brahmanottama, you have seen all that has happened before. You alone have seen many things with your mind's eye. Indeed, there is nothing you do not know, and I want to hear you explain why all things happen as they do.'

Markandeya replies, 'I am happy to tell you what you want to know. First, I must worship the Svayambhuva, the self-existent, primordial Being, who is undecaying, indestructible and inconceivable, and who is saguna and nirguna, both possessed of and without attributes.

Janardana, who wears golden raiment, this Pitambara, is the creator and mover of all things; he is within and outside all things, and he is the Lord of all. He is also called the Great, the Incomprehensible, the Wonderful and the Immaculate. He has no beginning or end; he pervades all the world; he is constant, unchangeable and ageless. He is the creator of all, but is himself Un-created; he is the source of all power. His knowledge is greater than that of all the gods together.

O best of kings and men, after the dissolution of the universe, all this wonderful creation again comes to life. The Krita yuga comes first, and lasts for four thousand years of the Devas, including four hundred years of rising and setting. The Treta yuga is next and lasts three thousand years of the gods, three hundred being its rising and setting. Next is the Dwapara yuga, which is for two thousand years; its rising and setting take two hundred years. The next is the Kali yuga, which is one thousand years long, and its rising and setting take one hundred years. After the Kali yuga is over, the Krita yuga dawns again.

A yugachakra consists of twelve thousand years of the Devas. One thousand such cycles constitute one day of Brahma. Naravyaghra, when the universe is withdrawn into its home, which is the body of Brahma, that withdrawal of all things is called Pralaya, the dissolution.

In the last and short Kali yuga, men become addicted to lying; yagnas, gifts and vratas are performed by representatives rather than by the ones who should be performing them. Brahmanas do work meant for Sudras, and

Sudras begin earning wealth. Kshatriyas conduct religious rites in the Kali yuga, while Brahmanas abandon the performance of yagnas and Vedic study; they give up their deer-skin, their staffs and begin eating meat. In the Kali yuga, Brahmanas neglect their japa and dhyana, and Sudras undertake to do them. Everything is lopsided in the world order, and this foreshadows the apocalypse.

O lord of men, in that time, Mlechcha kings rule over the earth! Those sinful monarchs reign using false precepts. The Andhras, the Sakas, the Pulindas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Bahlikas and the Abhiras become bold sovereigns of the earth. This is the state of the world by the end of the Kali yuga!

Not a single Brahmana adheres to his dharma; the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas also follow practices contrary to their svadharma. Men have short lives, are weak, with little srength and small bodies, and are dishonest in the extreme.

Human population dwindles, great tracts of the Earth become deserts, and wild animals and beasts of prey roam everywhere. During this age, the recitation of the Vedas is futile; Sudras address Brahmanas with a disrespectful "Bho", while the Brahmanas speak to the Sudras with respect. At the end of the yuga, animals increase in vast numbers, perfumes do not please the senses, and food lacks all taste.

Rajan, women have many children at each birth, and these are physically small, coarse and ill-behaved. Men and women use their mouths for sexual intercourse, famines ravage the country, women of vile character haunt the roads, and all women are immodest and disobedient to their men.

In this Kali yuga cows give little milk; trees swarm with crows and do not produce full yields of flowers and fruit. Dvijas tainted with the sin of killing Brahmanas accept gifts from dishonourable kings. These Brahmanas are greedy and ignorant and, wearing religious symbols, harass and threaten the people while begging for alms.

Grihastas, householders, find the burden of taxes impossible to bear, and resort to deception, and the basest Brahmanas don the garb of ascetics, let their nails and hair grow long, but earn riches by trade. Narapumgava, from their lust for wealth, so many Brahmanas become false Sannyasis.

At this time, men behave in ways that go against their svadharma. They become addicted to intoxicating drinks and violate the beds of even their gurus. Their desires are worldly, and they avidly pursue sensual pleasures.

Hermitages are full of sinful, insolent men who advocate a life of dependence.

Indra does not send down rain in its season, and seeds that are sown do not sprout, O Bhaarata. Men of unholy thoughts and deeds take pleasure in indulging envy and malice. And, Anagha, all the earth is a hotbed of sin.

In the Kali yuga, the virtuous do not live long, and the Earth is amost entirely bereft of dharma. Dishonest merchants and traders sell large quantities of goods, using false scales and measures. The good do not prosper; only the sinful succeed. Dharma has no value, while sin waxes day by day. Men that are devoted to truth and virtue become poor and die young; those that lead immoral lives prosper and live long.

Sin is seen everywhere, even in public places. Men use only evil means to achieve their ends. Even small fortunes intoxicate them with pride. O king, many appropriate wealth that has been left with them for safe-keeping, and then deny that it was given to them at all.

Wild animals and birds of carrion live in public places and in temples. Girls of seven and eight years of age conceive, and boys of ten or twelve years become fathers. By the age of sixteen, men begin to age and soon die. Living such short lives, boys act like old men, indeed bearing all their characteristics. Women become immoral; they deceive even the best of husbands and have sexual relations with servants, slaves and even animals. Even the wives of Kshatriyas form friendships with other men and have liaisons with them while their husbands still live.

Towards the end of the thousands of years that make up the four yugas, and when the lives of men have become short, a drought comes that lasts for many years. Men and creatures of little strength and vitality die of hunger, in their millions.

And then, lord of men, seven blazing Suns appear in the sky and suck up all the waters of the Earth—from the rivers and seas. All things made of wood or grass—wet and dry—are reduced to ashes.

Fanned by high winds, the fire called Samvartaka flares up on an Earth already dried by the seven Suns. In moments, Samvartaka rages through the Earth and deep into it, terrorising the Devas, the Danavas and the Yakshas. In a flash, the fire destroys everything upon and below the Earth's surface.

Samvartaka, fanned by ill winds, consumes this world, all the hundreds and thousands of yojanas. Lordly in its power, and blazing in brilliance, it

consumes the universe—all the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, Yakshas, Nagas and Rakshasas.

Cloud masses like herds of elephants decked with garlands of lightning fill the sky, and they are wonderful to see. Some are the hue of the blue lotus, some pale like the water-lily, others resemble lotus stamens, yet others are purple, or turmeric yellow, or crow's-egg blue. Some are bright as lotus petals, and some red as vermillion. Some look like the skylines of palaces and cities, some like herds of elephants; some are shaped like lizards, or crocodiles, or sharks. And, O King, these clouds are terrifying to behold and, streaked with lightning, roar frightfully.

These rain-charged masses quickly cover all the sky and flood the Earth—her mountains, forests and mines—with water. Impelled by the Supreme Lord, the clouds inundate the entire surface of Bhumi with great downpours and douse the raging fire.

The clouds bring rain without let for twelve years, flooding the Earth. And then, Bhaarata, the Ocean breaks his shores, flashing over the continents; the mountains shatter into fragments and the Earth sinks under the Deluge.

A sudden mighty wind springs up, and the clouds scud swiftly across the sky and disappear. The Self-created Lord, the origin of everything, whose home is the Lotus, swallows that frightful wind and now falls into sleep, O Bhaarata!

When the universe becomes one vast expanse of water, when all mobile and motionless creatures have been destroyed, when the Devas and the Asuras cease to be, when the Yakshas and the Rakshasas are no more, when man is gone, when trees and beasts of prey have disappeared, when the firmament itself has ceased to exist, I alone, O Lord of the Earth, wander in affliction. And wandering over that dreadful expanse of water, my heart is sore from not being able to see another living being.

I roam without stopping, for a long, long time, and become exhausted, but find no resting place. Then, in that single unending expanse of waters, I see a vast and spreading banyan tree, and a boy sitting on a cot overlaid with celestial bedclothes and attached to a long branch of the tree. His face, great king, is as fair as the lily, as radiant as the moon, and his eyes are as large as petals of a fully-opened lotus blossom!

My heart fills with wonder at this sight, Rajan, and I ask myself, *How does this boy sit here when the world has been destroyed?* Although I know

all there is to know about the past, the present and the future, I still cannot understand this, even with deep meditation.

The boy glows with the lustre of the atasi flower and bears the hallowed mark of the Srivatsa. He seems to embody the Devi Lakshmi. That boy with the Srivatsa, of the lotus-petal eyes and dazzling radiance speaks to me with sweet words.

He says, “Sire, I know that you are tired and need to rest. O Markandeya of Bhrigu’s race, rest here as long as you wish. Best of Munis, enter into me and rest there. I have assigned my body to be your home, for I am pleased with you.”

When the boy speaks, I feel a complete disregard for my life as a man. The boy opens his mouth and, powerless to stop myself, I enter into it.

I enter the boy’s belly and see the Earth there, all her cities and kingdoms. And, Purushottama, while wandering through the belly of that exalted One, I see the rivers Ganga, Satudru, Sita, Yamuna and Kausiki; the Charmanwati, Vetravati, Chandrabhaga, Saraswati, Sindhu and Vipasa; the Godavari, Vaswokasara, Nalini, Narmada and Tamra, the beautiful and sacred Vena, the Suvena, the Krishnavena, the Irama and the Mahanadi; the Vitasti, the great Kaveri, the Visalya and the Kimpuna I see.

I see all these and many other rivers that flow across the Earth. And, Parantapa, I also see the Ocean, home of all waters, with its crocodiles and sharks and its precious gems. I see the Sky, too, adorned with Sun and Moon, and it blazes with the brilliance of fiery Surya.

And I see Bhumi as well, graced with woods and forests. I see many Brahmanas busy with their yagnas, Kshatriyas fulfilling their responsibilities to the other castes, Vaisyas farming, and Sudras devoted to the service of the higher varnas.

Rajan, while wandering through the belly of the boy, that Mahatman, I also see the mountains Himavat, Hemakunta, Nishada and silver-rich Sweta. I see the mountains Gandhamadana, Mandara and the massive Nila; golden Meru and Mahendra and the excellent Vindhyas; Malaya and Pariyatra. These and many other mountains, all bejewelled, do I see within the boy’s stomach.

While wandering through his belly, I see lions, tigers, boars and, indeed, all the Earth’s other animals. Naravyaghra, as I roam I see the whole pantheon of Devas, with their king Sakra; I see the Sadhyas, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Guhyakas, the Pitrs, the Uragas and the Pannagas, all the

Garutmats of the air, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the Yakshas, the Rishis, the hordes of Daityas and Danavas, and the Nagas. I see the sons of Simhika and all the other enemies of the gods; I see everything that exists on Bhumi, mobile and immobile.

I eat fruits and live inside the boy's body for many centuries, but despite wandering over the entire universe inside it, I cannot see how far it extends. When I fail to measure the limits of that sacred body, I prayerfully invoke the boon-bestowing Paramatman and bow to his preeminence. No sooner have I done this than I am shot out of his mouth by a gust of wind.

And, Rajan, I find myself outside once more, looking at the branch of the same banyan tree, at the same being, the boy of blinding tejas and with the sacred mark of the Srivatsa, who has swallowed the universe. And that boy of blinding radiance, clad in fulvid robes, enthralls me with what he smilingly says.

"Markandeya, best of Munis, wandering inside my body has exhausted you, but still, I will speak to you."

At the very moment that he says this to me, I acquire a new sight, which enables me to realise that I have gained true knowledge and been freed from illusion. And, having witnessed the inexhaustible power of that Being of energy beyond measure, I worship his hallowed, beautiful feet—their soles bright as burnished copper, their reddish toes—by placing them carefully on my head and joining my palms together in humility. Then I look up at him with utmost reverence, that Divine Being who is the soul of all things and whose eyes are like lotus petals.

With hands still folded, I address him, "O Divine One, I wish to know you and this wondrous illusion. I saw the entire universe in your belly. The Devas, the Danavas, the Rakshasas, the Yakshas, the Gandharvas and the Nagas, indeed the whole universe of mobile and immobile creation, are all within your body! Although I travelled all through your body at great speed, by your grace, I have not forgotten anything I saw. And, Great Lord, I have come out of your body because you willed it, not because I wanted to.

O lotus-leaf eyed, I want to know about you, who are perfect! Why do you sit here in the form of a boy after having swallowed the universe? You must explain it to me. Why, O Anagha, is all the universe inside you? How long will you stay here? Lord of gods, my curiosity is not improper for a Brahmana, and I would so like to hear all this from you, in detail and

exactly as it happens. What I have seen is wonderful and incomprehensible!'

The Devadeva, of the refulgent splendour and ineffable beauty, that most eloquent among of all speakers, pacified me with these words.' "

CANTO 188

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'The hallowed being said, "O Brahmana, even the gods do not really know me! However, since I am pleased with you, I will tell you how I created the universe. Regenerate Rishi, not only are you devoted to your ancestors, you have also sought my protection. You have, besides, seen me with your eyes, and your punya is great.

In time before memory, I gave the waters the name Naara; and because the waters have ever been my ayana, or home, I am called Narayana. Brahmanottama, I am Narayana, the source of all things, the eternal, unchangeable One. I am the creator of all things, as well as the destroyer of all.

I am Vishnu, I am Brahma and I am Sakra the king of the Devas. I am Vaisravana, and I am Yama the lord of the dead. I am Siva, I am Soma, and I am Kasyapa the lord of the created. I am Dhatri, and also Vidhatri, and I am Yagna embodied.

Fire is my mouth, the Earth my feet, and the Sun and the Moon are my eyes; Heaven is the crown of my head, the Sky and the Cardinal Points are my ears; the Waters are born of my sweat. Space is my body, and Air is my mind.

I have performed many hundreds of yagnas at which I have given bountiful gifts. I am always present at the sacrifices of the gods; and all those who perform Vedic sacrifices make their offerings to me. On Earth, it is me that the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas worship at the yagnas they perform to attain Swarga, heavenly bliss.

Assuming the form of Sesha, I hold upon my head this Earth bounded by the four seas and adorned by Meru and Mandara. O Dvija, long ago I took the form of a Boar and raised this Bhumi that had sunk in the water. It is I who, becoming the fire that spews out of the horse's mouth, drain the waters of the ocean and create them again.

It is from my vitality that Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras sprang from my mouth, my arms, my thighs and my feet. It is from me that the Rig, the Sama, the Yajur, and the Atharva Vedas arose, and it is into me that they all merge when the time comes.

Brahmanas devoted to sannyasa, who value peace as the highest attribute, who have their souls under complete control, who yearn for knowledge, who have shed lust, anger and envy, who are detached from the material things of the earth, whose sins have been washed away, who are gentle and virtuous, who have no pride and who truly know the Self, they worship me with profound dhyana.

Named Samvartaka, I am the Flame, the Fire, the Wind and the Sun. Dvijottama, what you see and know as stars in the sky are the pores of my skin. The gem-rich Ocean and the four Cardinal Points are my robes, my bed, and my home. I have distributed them over the Earth in order to serve the purposes of the gods.

Manavottama, lust, anger, joy, fear and confusion, which cloud the intellect, are all different forms of me. I reward men for practising satya, daana, tapasya, shanti and ahimsa towards all creatures, and for other benign deeds. Men wander within my body, under my control, their senses overwhelmed by me. They move not by their will but by mine.

Brahmanas who have thoroughly studied the Vedas, who have tranquil minds, and who have subdued their anger earn great rewards through their numerous sacrifices. These rewards, however, are unattainable by evil men who are overtaken by covetousness, men with dark souls, unblessed and impure.

Know, therefore, Brahmana, that the benefits obtained by men who have disciplined their souls bear great merit, and they are out of the reach of the

ignorant and the foolish.

At the times in human history when dharma and truth wane and sin and adharma rise, I incarnate myself in new forms. O Muni, when fierce and malicious Daityas and Rakshasas, who cannot be slain by even the Devas, are born on Earth I am born in human form into the families of virtuous men and restore dharma by exterminating evil.

Powered by my own maya, I create Devas and Manavas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas, and all unmoving things, and then destroy them all at the appropriate time. For the preservation of righteousness and honour I assume a human form, and keep that form until the time for deeds comes, when I assume my incomprehensible, inconceivable Viswarupa.

In the Krita yuga I am white, in the Treta yuga I am golden-yellow, in the Dwapara I am red and in the Kali yuga I become dark in hue. In the Kali yuga, evil is four times as powerful as goodness. At the end of the yuga I assume the form of Death and destroy the three worlds, with all their moving and motionless things. With three steps I cover the entire universe.

I am the essence of the Universe; I am the source of all happiness; I am the humbler of pride; I am omnipresent; I am infinite; I am lord of the senses; and great is my power. O Brahmana, it is I that set the Kaalachakra, the wheel of time, in motion. Foremost of Rishis, I am formless; I am the Destroyer; and I am the impetus of any effort in all my creatures.

My spirit infuses all beings, but none know me. It is me that the pious and the devout worship in all the worlds.

Sinless one, whatever pain you felt while inside my belly was for your future happiness and good fortune. Whatever mobile and immobile objects you have seen in the world, all that was ordained by my Soul, which is the well-spring of all existence.

The progenitor of all creatures is half my body. I am called Narayana, and I am bearer of the conch-shell, the discus and the mace. Great Rishi, for a period equal to a thousand yugas, I, the universal Soul, sleep, drawing all creatures into that same nidra. I remain here through all time in the form of a boy, though I am the most ancient One, until Brahma awakes.

I am pleased with you and I, who am Brahman, have granted boons to you who are worshipped by revered sages. You were struck by melancholy when you saw the vast expanse of water and realised that all mobile and immobile beings had been destroyed. I knew this, and I showed you the universe within my body.

And while you were inside my body beholding all creation, you were filled with a wonder that stabbed your senses. O Rishi, that is why I expelled you through my breath.

I have now told you about the Soul which cannot be fathomed, even by the Devas and the Asuras. And as long as that glorious tapasvin, holy Brahma, remains asleep, you can live here in peace and bliss. When that ancestor of all creatures awakens, I will then create all creatures with physical bodies, the Sky, Earth, Light, Air, Water and, indeed, everything else that you may see!"

My son, with these words, that wonderful, hallowed Being vanished from my sight, and I then saw this varied and wondrous universe begin to take birth. O best of the Bhaaratas, most virtuous among men, I witnessed this wonder at the end of the yuga.

The Deity, of the eyes as large as lotus leaves, whom I saw so long ago, is this tiger among men, this Janardana who has become your kinsman. It is because of the boon he granted me that I remember everything clearly, and also why my life is so long and death under my control.

That ancient and supreme Lord Hari of mysterious soul has been born as Krishna of the Vrishnis. This Mahabaho seems to sport playfully in this world. He is Dhatri and Vidhatri, the destroyer of the eternal, the bearer of the Srivatsa mark on his breast, the Lord of the lord of all creatures, the highest of the high, also called Govinda! Seeing him, this greatest of all gods, this ever-victorious one clad in yellow robes, this lord of the Vrishnis, my memory returns to me.

Krishna is the father and mother of all creatures. O bulls of the race of Kuru, seek refuge in him, the Protector!'

The sons of Pritha, the twins and Draupadi bow deeply to Krishna; and that tiger among men speaks words of great sweetness to them."

CANTO 189

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira repeats his question to Markandeya about how the Earth will be ruled.

He says, 'Most eloquent of all speakers, O Muni of Bhrigu's race, amazing indeed is what you have told us about the destruction and re-creation of all things at the end of the yugas. Now I am eager to know what will happen in the next age, the Kali yuga.

When dharma no longer exists, what will remain? What will men be capable of in that yuga? What will people eat? How will they entertain themselves? What will man's longevity be at the end of the yuga? And how long will the yuga last, after which another Krita yuga dawns?

Tell me as much as you can, O Muni; what you say is so fascinating.'

That best of sages begins his discourse again, much to the delight of the tiger of the Vrishnis, and of the sons of Pandu as well. Markandeya says, 'Listen, Rajan, and I will tell you all that I saw and heard; Yudhishtira, listen to everything that, by the grace of God, I gained intuitive knowledge of. Listen while I tell you the way the world will be during the Kali yuga.

The Krita yuga was free from deceit, guile, avarice and acquisitiveness; dharma was a bull with four strong legs, and it walked among men. In the Treta yuga, sin deprived the bull of dharma of one of its legs. In the Dwapara yuga, evil and goodness reigned equally, and dharma was left to

limp on two legs. In the dark age, the Kali yuga, dharma is made of three parts of evil and one part of goodness, and exists thus amongst men. Dharma now depends on man as it cannot support itself on its one remaining leg.

Man's lifespan, his energy, his intellect and his strength dwindle with each yuga. Pandava, in the Kali yuga, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras will make a hollow show of being virtuous, only to deceive the world. Men with false reputations of being learned will constrict and hide the truth.

The shortened lifespan of man will prevent him from gaining true knowledge; and because he has little gyana, he will lack wisdom. Covetousness and greed will overwhelm him. Under the sway of avarice, wrath, lust and ignorance, men will hate and want to kill each other.

With their virtue reduced, and without austerity and truth, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas will be like Sudras. Men of the lowest varnas will rise to displace those higher-born than themselves, who then sink to the bottom of the social order. Yudhishtira, this will be the state of the world at the end of the yuga.

Flax will be the best material for clothing, and koradusaka, wheat, the best grain. In the Kali yuga man's only friend will be his wife. The people will live on fish and the milk of goats and sheep, for cows will be extinct. Towards the end of the yuga, even those who observe religious rituals and vows will only do so to gain material wealth.

Animosity will prevail between men and they will be filled with murderous intent towards one another. Without yoga, communion, men will become atheists and thieves. The land will lose its fertility and, in desperation, men will dig the banks of streams with spades and sow seeds there. But even those places will prove barren for them.

Even devout men who perform ceremonial rites to honour the Pitrs and the Devas will become avaricious and take what belongs to others. The father will enjoy what belongs to the son; and the son, what belongs to the father. Men will take pleasure from things forbidden by the scriptures. Brahmanas will speak contemptuously of the Vedas and will not keep any vratas; their understanding will be clouded by disputation and dialectical sophistry, and they will no longer perform yagnas or homas. Deceived by false teachings, they will be attracted to all things base and low.

Men will till low-lands for cultivation and use cows and yearling calves as beasts of burden and to draw the plough. Sons will kill fathers, and fathers their sons, with impunity. They will revel in these killings, which will frequently become the means of assuaging anxiety.

The whole world will be filled with the coarse ways of the Mlechchas, their ideas, laws and rituals. Yagnas will no more be performed, and joy will disappear. Men will steal from the weak, friendless and helpless, as well as from the wise. Evil men will give gifts with contempt, which the people of the Kali yuga will readily accept, reduced as they are in gyana and tejas, and prone to greed, folly and sin. The kings of the earth, their hearts in thrall to sin, ignorant while boasting of wisdom, will constantly challenge one another from naked bloodlust.

At the end of the Kali yuga, Kshatriyas will become as thorns of the Earth. They will be filled with greed and puffed up with pride and vanity. Unable and unwilling to protect their subjects, they will revel in inflicting savage punishments on them. The Kshatriyas of this age will repeatedly attack the good and the honest and, pitiless even in the face of their grief-stricken cries, they will forcibly seize their wives and their wealth.

No one will ask for or give a girl's hand in marriage, but girls will choose their own husbands, when the end of the yuga comes. And the kings of the earth, their souls steeped in ignorance, and their hearts in discontent, will rob their subjects in every way they can.

The whole world will be reduced to the level of the Mlechcha. When the end of the yuga comes, the right hand will deceive the left, and the left, the right. Vile men pretending to be learned will abbreviate Truth; the old will exhibit youthful folly, and the young will not respect age. Cowards will be known as brave men, and the courageous will be cast down as cowards.

Towards the end of the yuga men will stop trusting one another; the greedy world will live on one kind of food; sin will increase and prosper, while dharma will fade away; Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas will disappear, leaving no trace of their castes; all men will become members of one common order, without distinction; fathers will not forgive sons the least folly, and sons will not forgive their fathers.

As the end draws near, wives will not wait upon and serve their husbands; men will want to live in countries where wheat and barley form the staple food; both men and women will become entirely licentious and intolerant.

O Yudhishtira, all the world will be a Mlechcha universe. Men will no longer please the gods by offerings of sraddhas; no one will listen to the words of another because none will see another as his Guru. Ruler of men, intellectual darkness will envelop the Earth; sixteen years will be man's span on earth, after which he will die. Five- and six-year old girls will give birth, and boys of seven and eight will be fathers. Tiger among kings, when the end of the yuga comes, wives will never be content with their husbands, nor husbands with their wives.

Men will possess little; they will wear the marks of religion outwardly, while their hearts are full of darkness; envy and malice will fill the world; men will not give each other anything. Drought and famine will stalk the land; lustful men and wanton women will wander the streets; and wives will abhor their husbands.

All the people will adopt the ways of the Mlechchas—they will become omnivorous without distinction; their actions will be infused with cruelty—when the end of the Kali yuga comes.

Bhaaratottama, urged by avarice, men will be deceitful in trade and commerce. Without any knowledge of the laws that govern rituals, men will perform ceremonial rites and then behave in any way they please. When the end of the yuga comes, the dispositions of men will be such that they will tend naturally towards cruelty; they will speak ill of one another; and they will fell trees and despoil gardens without a thought. Men will be constantly anxious about their livelihood.

O King, greed will rule all of mankind and make men kill even Brahmanas in order to have their possessions. The twice-born varnas, oppressed by the Sudras, will wander in fear over the face of the earth, unprotected and crying *Oh!* and *Alas!* When men begin to kill one another, when they become utterly evil and violent, when they have no regard for animal life, then the yuga's end nears.

The best of high-born men will cry like crows and fly in terror when set upon by robbers, and seek refuge beside rivers and on mountains and in other inaccessible places. The first among the twice-born will, Bhumipala, lose his fortitude and become a servant of Sudras, in those terrible times.

Sudras will interpret the scriptures, while Brahmanas wait upon them and accept their duties as guided by these base interpretations. The low will become the high, and everything will be the opposite of what should be.

Men will renounce the gods and will worship bones and other occult relics in secret, inside their homes. At the end of the yuga, Sudras will not wait on Brahmanas. In the asramas of great Rishis, in the gurukulas of Brahmanas, in places sacred to the gods, in sacrificial compounds and in holy tanks, the Earth will be disfigured with tombs, with pillars containing skeletal relics, rather than graced with temples dedicated to the Devas.

All this will come to be at the end of the yuga, and they are the signs that the yuga draws to a close.

When all men become vicious, destitute of virtue, carnivorous and addicted to intoxicating drinks, the yuga comes to an end. O Monarch, when flowers form within other flowers, and fruit within other fruit, then will the yuga come to an end. The clouds will pour rain out of season as the end of the yuga approaches.

The ceremonial rites of passage will not follow one after the other in the proper order; Sudras will take up arms against Brahmanas as the end of the yuga draws near.

The Earth will be full of Mlechchas, and Brahmanas will flee in all directions to escape having to pay inordinate taxes. All men will conduct themselves uniformly; and the people will flee into woods and forests, to escape from the work assigned to them, and subsist on fruit and roots.

The world will be so diseased that honourable conduct will not be seen anywhere. Sishyas will not value the teachings of their Acharyas, and even try to harm them. And men will take no notice of true teachers, all of these by now impoverished. Friends and relatives and kinsmen will offer false friendship for the sake of the person's wealth. When the end of the yuga comes, everybody will be direly needy.

All the points of the horizon will be ablaze, the stars and constellations will no longer shine, and the planets and all their movements will turn inauspicious. Wild winds will blow chaotically, at all times, and countless meteors will flash across the sky, foreboding the darkest evil.

Seven suns will appear in the sky. Bedlam and anarchy will be everywhere, and fires will abound. And the Sun will be in eclipse from dawn to dusk, in an unnatural, perennial night. And the god of the thousand eyes will lash down unseasonable rains.

When the end of the Kali yuga comes, crops will be sparse. Women will speak sharply; they will be hard-hearted, prone to weeping, and they will disobey their husbands in all things. And at the end of the yuga, sons will

kill their fathers and mothers; women, living uncontrolled lives, will kill their husbands and sons. And, O King, at the end of the yuga, Rahu will swallow the Sun, causing eerie and untimely eclipses.

Fires will burn all around. Unable to find food, drink or shelter, even when they ask for these, wayfarers will lay themselves down in resignation, on roadsides, and ask for nothing anymore.

When the end of the yuga comes, crows, snakes, vultures, kites and other animals and birds of prey and carrion will utter frightful cries. When the end of the yuga comes, men will shun their friends, relatives and followers. Men will leave the towns and cities where they live and work, and go in search of new ones. And the people will wander over the Earth, calling out heartrendingly to their loved ones whom they have lost.

When those terrible times are finally over, creation will begin anew. Men will be created again and divided into the four varnas, beginning with the Brahmanas. And, to make men prosper, Providence will smile on them. When the Sun, the Moon and Brihaspati enter the same sign of the zodiac, with the nakshatra Pushyami, the Krita yuga will begin again.

Once more, the clouds release their waters in proper season, and the stars and their movements become auspicious. The planets revolve in their true orbits, and turn gentle and benign. There will be prosperity and plenitude, health and peace everywhere.

In time, a Brahmana named Kalki will be born. He will worship and glorify Vishnu, and have untold energy, great intelligence and mighty prowess. He will be born in the town of Sambhala, into a devout Brahmana family. Chariots and weapons, warriors and arms, and coats of mail shall be available to him as soon as he thinks of them.

By dint of his dharma, he will be a king of kings and ever-victorious. He will restore peace and order to a world thronging with fell creatures and plunged in chaos. Kalki of dazzling tejas will first destroy all things—he will be the universal Destroyer, and only then will he inaugurate a new yuga.

Surrounded by Brahmanas, he will seek out and kill all evil men and women, wherever they may try to hide.' ”

CANTO 190

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Having annihilated thieves and bandits, Kalki will, at a great horse-sacrifice, make a gift of the Earth to the Brahmanas and, having established again the sanatana dharma ordained by the Self-Created One, illustrious Kalki, of the sacred deeds, will retire into a mystic forest.

The people of this world will emulate whatever he does and, when the Brahmanas have finally rid the Earth of criminals and sinners, prosperity will sprout everywhere. The countries of the Earth will be subjugated one after the other, and then, that tiger among Brahmanas, Kalki, will shed his deer-skins, lances and tridents, and roam the world, adored wherever he goes by the greatest sages, showing his reverence for them, while doing away with sinners of every kind. Kalki will kill the evil ones amid piteous cries like *Oh, father! Oh, mother! Oh, son!*

Bhaarata, when sin has been rooted out and dharma re-established at the beginning of the Krita yuga, men will begin to observe true religious rites once more. In the second Krita yuga that sets in, lush gardens, ponds, large tanks, temples, yagnasalas and centres of teaching devoted to the study of Brahmanical lore, will reappear and flourish, everywhere.

Ceremonial rituals and sacrifices will be performed. Brahmanas will return to the ways of goodness and honesty, and the Dvijas—the three

twice-born varnas—will once again devote themselves to austerities and become true Munis. The asramas of Rishis, hitherto filled with vile men, will become homes to men devoted to truth. All the people will begin to live honourable lives in perfect dharma.

All seeds sown in the ground will sprout and every kind of crop will grow all year round. Men will be charitable and observe stern vratas; and the Brahmanas, devoting their lives to meditation and sacrifice, will be pure-hearted and always happy.

The sovereigns of the earth will rule their kingdoms with dharma. In the Krita yuga, Brahmanas will adhere to their six-fold duties—to study, teach, perform sacrifices, officiate at sacrifices performed by others, and to give and receive charity; Kshatriyas will devote themselves to acquiring strength and performing feats of prowess; Vaisyas will till the land and engage in honest trade, and Sudras will occupy themselves in serving the other three castes.

These, O Yudhishtira, are the ways of the Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali yugas. I have now told you everything about the yugas. I have also told you, O Son of Pandu, the span of each of them. So, you know all that I do, pertaining to the past and the future, as narrated by Vayu Deva in his Purana, which is revered by the wisest sages. My immortality has allowed me to see, many times, the birth, life and death of the world; and all that I have seen and know I have shared with you.

Now, glorious one, with your brothers, listen to something else I have to say, to clear any doubts you may have about dharma. You should always focus your soul on virtue because, Rajan, a man of high principles attains bliss in his lifetime and after.

Anagha, listen also to these other propitious words—never humiliate a Brahmana, for an angry Brahmana can destroy the three worlds with a curse.'

Hearing Markandeya's words, the king of the Kurus, Yudhishtira of the great intellect and radiant lustre, says to the illumined sage, 'O Muni, by what code should I live if I want to protect my subjects? And how should I conduct myself so that I do not stray from the dharma of a Kshatriya?'

Markandeya says, 'Be merciful to all creatures and devote yourself to their welfare. Love all creatures and scorn none. Speak only the truth, be humble, keep your senses under control and always concern yourself with the protection of your people.

Be ethical, abjure sin, and worship your ancestors and the gods. If you have been guilty of wrongdoing from ignorance or carelessness, give charity to wash away your sins. Renounce arrogance and vanity; clasp humility and goodness to you. Gain control over all the Earth; rejoice and be happy. This is the virtuous life.

What I have told you was true in the past and holds good for the future. There is nothing of the past or the future that you do not know. Therefore, child, do not let your hardships shake you. The wise are never crushed by time's trials and persecutions. Mahabaho, even the Swargavasis, the heaven-dwellers, are not impervious to time. Kaala afflicts all the created.

Sinless, do not doubt the truth of what I have told you; if you let doubt enter your heart, your high-mindedness will be diminished. Bharatarishabha, you are born into the illustrious family of the Kurus and should do as I have told you, in thought, word and deed.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Brahmanasreshta, I will do as you command and live by the wisdom that you have given me, in words so pleasing to hear. Dvijottama, of avarice and lust I have none, and no fear, pride or vanity. Lord, I shall keep dharma close and do whatever you have told me to.'

Having listened to the enlightened Markandeya, the Pandavas and Krishna, wielder of the bow Saranga, all those bulls among Brahmanas, and the others that are there, are filled with joy. Having heard hallowed words of great antiquity from the Muni, they are full of wonder."

CANTO 191

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "O Vaisampayana, mighty pauranika, I beg you, relate in full the greatness of Brahmanas, just as Markandeya told it to Pandu's sons."

Vaisampayana said, "The eldest son of Pandu asks Markandeya, 'Tell us more of the greatness of Brahmanas.'

Markandeya says, 'Listen, O King, to how the Brahmanas conducted themselves in ancient times.

In Ayodhya, there was once a king of the Ikshvaku dynasty named Parikshit. One day, Parikshit went hunting and was in pursuit of a deer, which led him deep into the forest, far from human habitation. Tired by the long ride, hungry and thirsty, he saw a pool in the dark, dense jungle in which he found himself. He led his horse to it and refreshed himself and his mount. Then, he laid some lotus fibres and stems on the ground by the side of the pool and sat down on them.

While he rested there, he heard melodious strains of music and wondered where the music came from and who sang, as he had not seen any evidence of people near the pool. The king then saw a most beautiful maiden, gathering flowers and singing.

She came before him, and he asked her, 'Blessed one, who are you, and to whom do you belong?

She replied, ‘I am a kanya.’

And the king said, ‘Will you be mine?’

The maiden answered, ‘I will agree only if you promise me one thing.’

The king asked what it was, and the girl said, ‘Promise me that you will never make me cast my eyes on water.’

The king agreed, saying, ‘So it shall be,’ and he married her and knew her with profound rapture. Later, as he sat quietly with her, his soldiers arrived in that place and, seeing their king, stood surrounding him. The king was happy to see his men and, escorted by them, he rode home with his new bride in a grand chariot.

On arriving at his capital, he secluded himself with her, completely obsessed. Even those closest to the king could not get an audience with him, or speak to him. His chief minister asked the women who attended on the royal couple, “What goes on here?”

And the women replied, “The queen is a devi of unparalleled beauty. The king married her with a promise that she would never look at water, and he is joyful with her.”

On hearing this, the minister had a forest created, full of trees with a profusion of flowers and fruits, and on one side of it, in a secluded place, he had a large pond dug and filled with water as sweet as nectar. He had the pool covered with a net of pearls.

One day he managed to see the king privately, and said to him, “There is a fine vana with no water in it. Enjoy yourself there.”

The king took him at his word and went into the forest with his adored wife, and they sported together in that delightful place. Tired and spent with lovemaking, hungry and thirsty, the king went into an arbour of fragrant Madhavi creepers that he saw nearby.

Entering that bower with his beloved, he saw a pond full of water that was transparent and bright as nectar. The king sat on its bank with her and encouraged her to bathe in that lovely pool. At his word, she plunged into the water, but then she did not surface again. The frantic king dove in and sought her under the water, but he found no trace of her.

He ordered the waters of the tank drained and, at the bottom, sitting at the lip of a hole in the ground, was a frog. The king was furious when he saw the frog, and issued a dreadful edict againt their species.

“Let every frog in my kingdom be killed! Anyone who wants an audience with me must come with a tribute of dead frogs.”

When frogs began to be killed everywhere, the terrified creatures told their king what had happened. The king of the frogs assumed the appearance of a sadhu and came to Parikshit of Ayodhya.

He said, “O King, do not let anger rule you; instead, be inclined to grace. It is not right that you kill innocent frogs.”

The king of the frogs, in sadhu’s guise, chanted in a low voice: “Unfadingly glorious, slay not the frogs; pacify your wrath; the artha and punya of ignorant souls will diminish. Swear you will renounce your wrath against frogs. Why do you sin? Slaying these creatures serves no purpose.”

King Parikshit, who was broken-hearted because of the vanishment of his wife, whom he had loved so dearly, answered the frog king, “I will not forgive the frogs. I will kill them. The wretched frogs swallowed my wife, and all frogs deserve death at my hand. Do not intercede on their behalf, learned one.”

Hearing Parikshit’s words, the king of the frogs said in a voice filled with pain, “Be gracious, O King. I am Ayu, the king of the frogs. Your wife was my daughter, Susobhana. What she did to you was not dharma. She has deceived many kings in the same way.”

The king said to him, “I desire her. Give her to me.”

The king of the frogs then bestowed his daughter on Parikshit with the injunction that she wait upon and serve him. He said angrily to her, “You have deceived many kings, and because of your sin your children will disgrace themselves by being disrespectful to Brahmanas.”

Regaining her, Parikshit was so overwhelmed by infatuation that he felt as if he had conquered the three worlds. He bowed down to the king of the frogs and worshipped him. Crying for joy, he said, “Truly, have I been blessed.”

The king of the frogs bid his daughter farewell and returned to where he had come from. Time went by and king Parikshit and his queen had three sons, whom they named Sala, Dala and Bala. In due course, the king installed the eldest of them on the throne and, setting his heart on tapasya, retired into the forest.

One day when Sala was out hunting he saw a deer and pursued it in his chariot. The king urged his sarathy to go faster, but the charioteer said to his king, “It is pointless chasing the deer; you cannot catch it. If your chariot had been drawn by horses of the Vami breed, you could have overtaken it.”

The young king said, “On pain of death, tell me all about Vami horses.”

The charioteer became alarmed. He was afraid of the king but on the other hand he was more frightened of Vamadeva's curse and would not tell the king anything. The king lifted his sword and said to him, "Tell me now, or I will kill you."

Fear overcame him, and the sarathy said, "The Vami horses belong to Vamadeva; they are swift as the mind."

Immediately, the king ordered him to take him to Vamadeva's asrama, and when they arrived there, he said to the Rishi, "Holy one, I am in pursuit of a deer that I wounded. You must help me catch up with it by giving me a pair of Vami horses."

The Rishi replied, "I will give you my pair of Vami horses but, when you have achieved your purpose, you must return my horses to me."

The king took those horses and, taking his leave of the Rishi, pursued the deer in his chariot now drawn by Vami steeds. After he left the hermitage he said to his charioteer, "Brahmanas do not deserve to possess such horses. We need not return these two to Vamadeva."

He now easily overtook the deer, slew it and, returning to his capital, stabled those horses in his palace.

Meanwhile, the Rishi reflected, "The prince is young. Having obtained the two excellent steeds, he rides them happily and will not return them to me. What a pity."

After a month elapsed, he said to one of his disciples, "Go, Atreya, and say to the king that if he has finished with the Vami steeds he should return them to me."

Atreya went to the king and spoke to him as he had been instructed; and the king replied, "These horses, jewels of great value, deserve to be owned by a Kshatriya, and not a Brahmana. What need do Brahmanas have of horses? Return in peace."

Atreya went back and told his Acharya what had happened, and Vamadeva was enraged. He went himself to the king and demanded that his horses be returned to him.

The king refused, and the Rishi Vamadeva said, "Bhumipala, give me back my Vami horses. You have used them to accomplish a task which was otherwise impossible for you. O Kshatriya, do not break both Brahmana and Kshatriya dharma and invite death to yourself by Varuna's curse."

The king answered, "Vamadeva, this pair of excellent and docile bulls are suitable animals for a Brahmana like you. O Rishi, you are great indeed.

Take them; you can ride them to any place you choose. What need do you have of horses when the Vedas themselves would carry a saintly man like you."

Vamadeva said, "O king, the Vedas do, indeed, carry ones like us, but that is in the hereafter. In this world, animals like my Vami horses carry me, men like me, and others as well."

The king said, "Let four donkeys carry you, or four mules of the best kind, or even four horses that are as swift as the wind. Take any of these. These Vami horses, however, deserve to be owned by a Kshatriya. Accept that these are not for you."

Vamadeva said, "O king, stern vows have been ordained for Brahmanas. This I swear, that if I have lived in their observance, four dreadful Rakshasas, their bodies like iron, will hunt and kill you, and bear you on their lances, after cutting your body into four parts."

The king said, "Vamadeva, these soldiers of mine, armed with bright spears, know that you are a Brahmana who wants to take a king's life. They will bring you and your disciples to your knees before me."

Vamadeva said, "O king, when you received my horses you swore you would return them. You must give them back to me to save your life."

The king said, "Hunting deer is not an occupation fit for Brahmanas, but I will not punish you for straying from your svadharma. From this day, by obeying all your commands, I will, O Brahmana, attain bliss in Swarga. But the Vami horses remain with me."

Vamadeva said, "A Brahmana cannot be punished in thought, word or deed. The man who learns that a Brahmana has strayed from his dharma does not achieve a lofty position in this world. But now meet your death."

When Vamadeva said this, Rajan, four Rakshasas of horrible appearance, with lances in their hands, set upon the king, to kill him.

The king cried out, "O Brahmana, even if all the descendants of the Ikshvakus, my brother Dala, and all these Vaisyas tell me to, I will not yield the Vami steeds to you, for then these men will be stripped of their dharma."

Even as these words came out of his mouth, the Rakshasas killed king Sala, and the lord of the Earth lay on the ground. The Ikshvakus installed Dala on the throne.

The Brahmana Vamadeva went to the court of the Ikshvakus and addressed the new monarch, "O king, all the sacred books declare that men

should give freely to Brahmanas. If you fear sin, give me the Vami horses without delay."

Angrily did the king hear these words of Vamadeva's, and he said to his charioteer, "Bring me an arrow from my quiver, one which is beautiful to look at and tipped with poison. Let it strike Vamadeva and let him fall down in agony and be torn apart by our dogs."

Vamadeva responded, "I know that you have a ten-year-old son named Senajita, by your queen. My word can command your arrow to kill the boy!" '

Markandeya continues, 'Rajan, the fierce arrow that the king shot flew to the inner apartments of the palace and killed the prince playing there.

When Dala heard of this, he said, "People of the Ikshvaku race, I will deliver you by killing this Brahmana and grinding him into the Earth. Bring me another arrow of blazing energy. Lords of the world, witness my might."

Vamadeva said, "This venomous arrow that you aim at me will not fly a true path; why, you will not be able to release it from your bow."

Now the king confessed, "O Ikshvakus, I find I cannot loose the arrow I have in my hand, and I have failed to kill this Brahmana. Let Vamadeva live and be blessed with a long life."

Vamadeva said, "You may expiate your sin of trying to take the life of a Brahmana by touching your queen with this arrow."

King Dala did as he was told, and the queen then said to the Rishi, "O Vamadeva, give me leave to teach this ignorant and foolish husband of mine daily, and give him wisdom. O Dvija, let me always wait upon and serve Brahmanas and thus acquire sacred realms after I die."

Hearing the queen, Vamadeva said, "Beautiful-eyed one, you have saved this royal race. Ask me for an exceptional boon, for I will grant whatever you ask for. Faultless one, rule over your clan and this great kingdom of the Ikshvakus!"

The queen said, "O lambent one, free my husband from his sin, and direct your mind to the well-being of his son and kinsmen. This is the boon I ask, Brahmanottama."

The Muni said, "*Tathaastu*, *so be it*."

King Dala was extremely glad and, bowing in reverence, gave the Muni his Vami steeds,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 192

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Rishis, the Brahmanas and Yudhishtira then ask Markandeya, 'How did the Rishi Baka have such a long life?'

Markandeya says, 'The Rajarishi Baka is a great tapasvin and was, indeed, blessed with long life; but do not ask why.'

Hearing this, O Bhaarata, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and his brothers say to Markandeya, 'We have heard that Baka, as well as Dalbhya, both illumined souls, are immortal and that they, who are universally revered, are dear to the king of the Devas. We would like to hear about the meeting of Baka and Indra, the story that is, at once, sad and happy. Tell it to us in brief.'

Markandeya says, 'When the great war between the Devas and the Asuras was over, Indra became sovereign of the three worlds. The clouds brought plentiful rain and the people on Earth enjoyed rich harvests; they became contented and lived virtuous, peaceful lives.

Everyone lived according to their svadharma, at peace with each other and the world; and seeing serenity prevail, Indra, slayer of Bala, was filled with joy.

Seated on his elephant Airavata, he of the hundred sacrifices surveyed his subjects. He looked at the Rishis' asramas, at the sacred rivers, at prosperous towns and villages, at the plenitude of the countryside. He saw

kings, living by dharma, ruling justly over their subjects. He looked at tanks and reservoirs, wells, lakes and ponds full of water, beside which devout Brahmanas lived, keeping excellent vratas.

And Indra came down to the felicitous Earth, Rajan, and went to a blessed asrama set in a charming grove on the eastern shore. There, in that asrama, where many animals and birds lived, and trees grew in profusion, Indra saw Baka. Overjoyed to see Indra, Baka received him worshipfully—he washed his feet with water, offered him arghya, spread a carpet for him to sit on and served him fruit and roots to eat.

When he was comfortably seated, the divine ruler of the immortals asked Baka, 'Sinless Muni, you have lived for a hundred years. Tell me, O Brahmana, what are the sorrows of those that are immortal?'

Baka answered, saying, "Living with those one dislikes, separation from loved ones and good men, living amongst the wicked—these are the evils that the immortals have to bear. Among the worst sorrows they have to endure is the death of sons, wives, relatives and friends; and the pain of dependence on others. In my opinion, there is nothing more pitiful than a poor man being insulted by a rich one.

Other iniquities that the immortals have to witness are the acquisition of high status by those that do not have or deserve it; the loss of it by those that do; disharmony and discord; how the wealthy gain all that they want despite not having honour—those that live forever have to see all this, O Lord of the hundred yagnas.

What can be sadder than the calamities and reverses experienced by Devas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Manavas, Nagas and Rakshasas? Those of noble birth suffer by becoming subjects of the low-born, the poor are humiliated by the rich—these are distressing conditions.

The world is replete with such injustices. The foolish and the ignorant are cheerful and glad while the learned and the wise endure misery. There is so much sorrow and pain, and the deathless have to see it all and they suffer."

Indra said, "Blessed one, tell me, what are the joys that the immortals enjoy, which are also enjoyed by the gods?"

Baka answered, "There is none happier than the man who cooks, even a scanty meal, in the eighth or twelfth hour of the day, and the man who has no evil friends. True happiness belongs to one who does not eat too much,

or voraciously, the man who cooks even a few meagre vegetables and fruit that he has earned through his own effort and prepared in his own house.

Such a man is worthy of respect. A man who eats food in another's house, given to him in contempt, does a despicable thing, even if the fare is rich. That is why the wise never touch the food of men that eat in another's house, like dogs or Rakshasas.

There is no better thing than for a good Brahmana to eat what remains after feeding his guests and servants and offering food to his ancestors. No food is sweeter or more sacred. There is nothing more delicious or more sacred than food of which the first serving is given to a guest. Every mouthful of rice that the Brahmana eats after having served his guest is as blessed as giving away one hundred cows, and will wash away whatever sins he committed in his youth. If a Brahmana sprinkles water over the one who serves him such food, that person is cleansed of his sins."

After speaking of these and other matters with Baka, the Lord of the Devas returns to Indraloka.' "

CANTO 193

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The sons of Pandu say to Markandeya, 'You have told us of the greatness of Brahmanas. Now we want to hear of the glory of the royal caste, the Kshatriyas.'

Maharishi Markandeya says to them, 'Listen while I tell you of the eminence of the Kshatriyas.

A king named Suhotra, of the Kuru clan, went on a journey to visit the great Rishis. As he was returning, he came upon king Sibi, the son of Usinara, riding in his chariot. As they approached one other, each greeted the other in a way he thought most fitting; but neither would give way to the other's chariot as each considered himself the other's equal.

At this moment, the Devarishi Narada appeared there and, seeing them, demanded, "Why are you both blocking each other's way?"

The kings said to Narada, "Holy One, do not ask. The sages of old have declared that the one who is superior or more able should have right of way. We are equal to each other in every respect and neither of us can be judged to be superior to the other."

Hearing this, Narada recited three slokas—"O Kurunandana, the arrogant man treats everyone, even humble folk, with cruelty; one who is humble behaves with modesty and candour to all, even to those who are unprincipled. He who is honest behaves honestly, even towards the

dishonest; why then would he not behave honestly with those who have integrity? The honest man thinks of any service done to him as being a hundredfold. Is this not how the gods are?

It is the royal son of Usinara who is a better man than you. One should win over the mean-minded with charity, the untruthful with truth, the wicked with forgiveness, and the dishonest with honesty.

You are both large-hearted. Keeping these slokas in mind, one of you must give way to the other."

Narada fell silent and, hearing what the Rishi said, the king of the Kurus walked around Sibi in pradakshina, praised his many achievements and allowed him to pass. Then he went on in his way. Narada uses this story to illustrate the greatness of the Kshatriyas.' "

CANTO 194

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Listen now to another story. One day, as king Yayati, the son of Nahusha, was sitting on his throne, surrounded by his people, there came to him a Brahmana begging for alms on behalf of his guru.

He approached the king and said, "O king, because of my vow to him, I beg for alms for my guru."

The king said, "Holy one, tell me what your vow is."

The man said, "O king, in this world, men are contemptuous of one who begs them for alms. With what feelings will you give me what I ask for, on which I have set my heart?"

The king replied, "Once I give something away, I never boast of it. I do not entertain requests for things I cannot give, but I do hear requests for those that I can; and giving them makes me glad. I will give you a thousand cows. The Brahmana that asks me for a gift is always dear to me. I am never angry with the man who begs alms of me and I am never sorry for having given away anything!"

And the Brahmana then got one thousand cows from the king and went away.' "

CANTO 195

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Pandavas address the Rishi once more and say, 'Tell us more about the honour of the Kshatriyas!'

And Markandeya says, 'There were two kings, named Vrishadarbha and Seduka, and both of them were learned in dharma and in the Astra Shastra, and the ways of attack and defence. Seduka knew that Vrishadarbha had sworn a silent vow in his childhood, to give no metal to Brahmanas other than gold and silver.

One day, a Brahmana who had completed his Vedic studies came to Seduka and, blessing him, begged him for alms for his guru, saying, "Give me a thousand horses."

Seduka said to him, "I cannot give your guru what you ask. Go to Raja Vrishadarbha, O Brahmana. He is a virtuous king. If you ask him, he will give you a thousand horses, for that is his vow."

The Brahmana went to Vrishadarbha and begged him for a thousand horses. The king responded by striking the Brahmana with a whip, at which the Brahmana said, "Why do you attack an innocent man?"

The Brahmana was on the point of cursing him, when the king said, "O Brahmana, do you curse the man who does not give you what you ask for? Is this the dharma of a Brahmana?"

And the Brahmana said, “Rajadhiraja, king of kings, I came to beg from you because Seduka sent me here.”

The king said, “I will give you whatever tribute I receive today. How can I send away empty-handed the man I have whipped?”

And the king gave that Brahmana all the proceeds of the day, which was more than the value of a thousand horses.’ ”

CANTO 196

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'One day the gods decided to come down to Earth and test the dharma of king Sibi, the son of Usinara. Agni and Indra descended to Bhumi, and Agni took the form of a pigeon flying away from Indra, who pursued him as a hawk. And the pigeon fell into King Sibi's lap while he sat on his throne.

The Rajapurohita, the royal priest, said to the king, "This pigeon is afraid of the hawk and has come to you for refuge. Wise men say that a pigeon falling on one's lap is a bad omen and forewarns of some grave danger. You are a king and understand signs; so, give the pigeon to the hawk in charity and save yourself from the danger indicated."

The pigeon spoke to the king, "I am afraid of the hawk and have come to you to save my life. I am, actually, a Muni; I have taken the form of a pigeon and come to you for protection. You hold my life in your hands.

I am learned in the Vedas, I am a brahmachari with self-control, and a tapasvin. Further, I have never spoken disrespectfully to my guru, and I possess every quality of the pure-hearted. I chant the Vedas; I know the poetic form and metre of all their verses; I am letter-perfect in the Vedas. And I am not a pigeon.

Oh, do not give me up to the hawk. Giving up a learned and chaste Brahmana never makes a good gift."

Now the hawk addressed the king, and said, “Creatures are not always born on the Earth in the same form. In some former life you may have been a child of this pigeon. It is not proper for you, O king, to interfere with my procuring food by protecting the pigeon, even though he might have been your father.”

The king said, “Has any one ever heard birds speak the pure language of men? Hearing what the pigeon and hawk had to say, how can we tell what is the right thing to do? He that surrenders a frightened creature, which seeks his protection from its enemy, does not get protection when he himself needs it. Indeed, the clouds do not send rain for him; the seeds he sows do not sprout for him.

He that gives up an afflicted creature seeking protection from its enemies will see his children die in their infancy. The ancestors of such a man will never attain bliss in heaven. The gods do not accept the libations of ghee that such a man pours into the sacred fire. He that gives up a frightened creature which has come to him for refuge from its enemies is struck by a thunderbolt cast by the gods, with Indra at their head.

The food he eats is unclean and he, of the small soul, falls from grace. O hawk, let the people of the Sibi clan place before you a bull cooked with rice, in place of this pigeon. And let them carry an abundance of meat to your home, wherever you live.”

The hawk said, “O king, I do not ask for a bull or for any other meat, nor do I ask for anything more than this pigeon, which the gods have given me. The pigeon’s death has been ordained and it is my meal for today. So, O Rajan, give it to me.”

The king replied, “My men will bring a live bull to your home. Consider the bull the ransom for this terrified bird, and I will myself supervise its being fetched to your dwelling. Don’t kill the pigeon. I will surrender my own life before the pigeon’s.

Do you not see how like a sacrifice dabbed with Soma juice this pigeon looks? Blessed one, do not be obstinate. I can in no way give the pigeon to you.

Command me to do something else that pleases you and satisfies you, something which I am able to do, of which the men of the Sibi clan will be proud and praise me for. I promise to do what you ask.”

The hawk said, “Rajan, if you give me flesh cut from your right thigh, that is equal to the weight of the pigeon, you can save him. This would

please me and be praiseworthy.”

The king agreed to this and, cutting a piece of flesh from his right thigh, weighed it against the pigeon. But the pigeon was heavier. The king carved out another piece of his flesh, but still the pigeon was heavier. Then the king cut pieces of flesh from all parts of his body and placed them on the scale, but the pigeon continued to weigh more than all of them. Finally, the king, cheerfully and without a trace of regret, climbed bodily onto the scales, and the hawk vanished from there, exclaiming, *Saved!*

The king said to the pigeon, “O pigeon, tell us who the hawk is. No one other than the Lord of the universe could do as he did. Exalted one, answer me.”

The pigeon said, “I am the smoke-bannered Agni, also called Vaiswanara. The hawk is Sachi’s lord, the wielder of the thunderbolt. Son of Suratha, you are a bull among men. We came to test you. These pieces of flesh, Rajan, that you have cut from your body with your sword to save my life, have made deep wounds. I will sanctify them; your scars will be the colour of gold and fragrant. You will earn great fame and the gods will honour you.

Long will you reign over your subjects, and you will father a son who will be called Kapotaroma. O King, this child will be born from your body, and you will see him become the best of the Surathas, a prince who will blaze with fame, valour and beauty,” says Markandeya.’

CANTO 197

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The son of Pandu addresses Markandeya once again, saying, 'Tell us more about the greatness of the royal caste of kings.'

And Markandeya says, 'King Ashtaka, descendant of Viswamitra, conducted an Aswamedha yagna, which many kings attended, including his brothers, Pratardana and Vasumanas, and Usinara's son Sibi. After the sacrifice was completed Ashtaka was travelling in his chariot with his brothers when they met Narada coming towards them. They greeted the Devarishi and said to him, "Come; ride on our chariot with us."

Narada agreed, saying, *Tathaastu*, and climbed into the chariot. After paying their respects to Narada, one of the kings said to him, "O Illustrious, I want to ask you something."

The Rishi gave him permission and that king said, "All four of us are blessed with long lives and every virtue. We shall, therefore, go to heaven and live there for a long time. Which of us will be the first to fall?"

The Rishi Narada said, "Ashtaka will be the first to come down."

And the king who had asked the question said, "For what reason?"

And the Rishi answered, "I lived for a few days in Ashtaka's palace. One day, he took me out of the city in his chariot and, there, I saw thousands of cows, all of different colours. I asked him whose they were

and he told me that they were cattle he had given away, thus praising himself. It is because of his answer that he will have to come down from Swarga."

One of the kings, again, asked Narada, "Of the three of us who remain in heaven, who will be the first to fall to Bhumi?"

And the Rishi answered, "Pratardana".

When asked why, the Rishi related this incident. He said, "I lived for some days in Pratardana's household. One day, when I was riding with him in his chariot, a Brahmana stopped him and asked for a horse. Pratardana said he would give him one when he returned home, and the Brahmana urged him to do it soon. Because the Brahmana was impatient, the king gave him the horse that was yoked to the right wheel of the chariot.

We met another Brahmana who, also, wanted a horse. The king said the same thing to him and, in response to the Brahmana's impatience, gave him the horse that was yoked to his chariot's left wheel. The king continued on his way and soon came upon a third Brahmana, who asked him for a horse. The king gave him one more of his horses, and we proceeded on our journey. We met a fourth Brahmana who asked for a horse, and the king gave him the one that was yoked to front left of his chariot. A fifth Brahmana came to the king as we rode along and asked for a horse. This time, the king said he would give him one as soon as he returned home. But, because the Brahmana urged him to do this soon, the king gave him the last horse, unyoking it, and leaving the chariot horseless. The king picked up the yoke of his chariot himself and began to pull it along.

As he pulled his chariot, he said, "Now I have nothing to give Brahmanas." The king had, no doubt, given all his horses away, but his charity was diminished somewhat by his less than wholehearted attitude. Therefore, he is the next to come down from heaven.

Of the two kings who would remain in heaven, one asked, "Which of the two of us will fall first from heaven?"

Narada said, "Vasumanas," and when the king asked for the reason, narrated another incident. He said, "In course of my roving, I arrived at the home of Vasumanas, at the time when the Brahmanas were performing the ceremony of Swativachana on a flower chariot. I came, unseen, into the king's presence and, after the Brahmanas had completed the ceremony, made myself visible. When I praised the chariot, the king said to me, *Holy one, you have admired this chariot, so let it be yours.*

Sometime later, when I needed another chariot, I went once more to Vasumanas. Again, the king gave me the chariot I admired. I went to the king a third time and admired one of his chariots. This time the king showed the chariot to his Brahmanas and, looking at me, said, *Sublime Sage, you have been generous in your praise*, but did not give me the chariot. For this he will fall down from heaven."

One of them said, "One of us will go with you to heaven. Of the two of us, who will come down to earth, and who will continue to dwell in Swarga?"

Narada answered, saying, "Sibi will be the one who stays in heaven, and I the one who falls." When asked the reason for this, Narada said, "I am not the equal of Sibi. Hear why I say this. One day a Brahmana came to Sibi and said, *O Sibi, I come to you for food*.

Sibi responded, *Tell me what to do; I am yours to command*.

The Brahmana answered, *Kill your son, named Brihadgarbha, and cook him for my meal*.

I waited to see what would happen. Sibi killed his son and cooked his flesh, then, putting the food into a serving dish, carried it on his head and went in search of the Brahmana. While he was looking for him, someone told him that the Brahmana he was searching for had gone to the city and, in a frenzy of rage, was setting fire to his house, to his treasury and arsenal, to the women's apartments and to the elephants' and horses' stables. Sibi heard all this, calmly.

He went into his city, found the Brahmana and said to him, *Holy one, the food is ready*. The Brahmana became speechless with surprise and lowered his gaze in discomfiture. Sibi, trying to please the Brahmana, said, *Holy one, here, eat this*.

The Brahmana glanced at Sibi and said, *Eat it yourself*. Promptly, Sibi took the serving dish from atop his head and was about to eat, when the Brahmana caught hold of his hand and said, *You have conquered anger. There is nothing that you will not give a Brahmana*.

Saying this, that Brahmana worshipped Sibi, and when Sibi looked up he saw his son standing before him like a divine child, decked in ornaments, and a heavenly fragrance emanating from his body. Finally, the Brahmana revealed his true self; he was none other than Vidhata, who had come in that guise to try the king.

When Vidhata had left, the king's ministers said to Sibi, *When you know everything, why did you do all this?*

And Sibi answered, *It was not for fame, wealth or from the desire to acquire material enjoyment that I did all this. What I did is not sinful, therefore I did it. The path taken by the righteous is praiseworthy, and I have always leaned towards the virtuous course of action*. '" Narada said.

I know this instance of Sibi's goodness, and I have narrated it,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 198

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The Pandavas and the Rishis then ask Markandeya, 'Is there anybody blessed with longer life than you?'

And Markandeya answers them, 'There was a Rajarishi named Indradyumna, whose virtue had diminished. He fell from heaven, crying, "All that I have achieved is for nothing."

He came to me and asked, "Do you recognise me?"

I said, "From our anxiety to acquire religious merit, we do not have permanent homes. We stay for only one night in any village or town. People like us, therefore, cannot possibly know who you are. The fasts and vows we observe make us physically weak and unable to follow any worldly pursuits."

He then asked me, "Is there anyone who has a longer life than you?"

I answered him, "On Himavat Mountain there lived an owl by the name of Pravarakarna. He is older than me; he may know you. The place on Himavat where he lives is very far from here."

At this, Indradyumna became a horse and carried me to where that owl lived. And the king asked the owl, "Do you know me?"

The owl reflected for a moment and then said to the king, "No, I do not know you."

Indradyumna asked the owl, "Is there anyone who is older than you?"

And the owl answered, “There is a lake called Indradyumna, in which there lives a crane named Nadijangha. He is older than me. Ask him.”

King Indradyumna took me and the owl to that lake where the crane Nadijangha lived, and we asked, “Do you know Raja Indradyumna?”

The crane thought for a while and then said, “I do not know king Indradyumna.”

We asked the crane, “Is there anyone who is older than you?”

And he answered, “There lives, in this very lake, a tortoise named Akupara. He is older than me. He may know something of this king. Ask Akupara.”

The crane spoke to the tortoise and said, “We want to ask you something. Please come to where we are.”

Obligingly, the tortoise came out of the lake to the bank where we were, and we asked him, “Do you know this king Indradyumna?”

The tortoise reflected for a moment. His heart was moved and his eyes filled with tears; he trembled all over with powerful emotion and nearly lost consciousness. He joined his hands and said, “Do I not know this king! He has planted the sacrificial stake a thousand times for kindling the sacrificial fire. It is the cows that this king gave to Brahmanas that were used to excavate this lake. I have lived here ever since.”

No sooner had the tortoise said this, than a chariot flew down from heaven and a voice spoke from the skies to Indradyumna, “Come! Take your rightful place in heaven. Great are your achievements. Come joyfully to your place in Swarga.”

Listen to these slokas—Reports of virtuous actions spread over the earth and reach heaven. The doer of these actions stays in heaven for as long as these reports last. The man whose evil deeds are talked about will descend to the lowest regions and live there for as long as this talk goes on. Therefore, a man who wants to go to Swarga should be honourable and ethical. He should shun evil and seek refuge in goodness.

Hearing these words, the king said, “Let the chariot remain here and take these old people back to where they came from.” Then, he took the owl and me back to our homes and returned to his own place.

Because I have lived for so long, I saw all this,’ says Markandeya.

Markandeya tells these stories to the Pandavas and, when he has finished, they say to him, ‘Blessings be upon you. You did the right thing to

make Indradyumna regain his rightful place in Swargaloka, from which he had fallen.'

Markandeya says, 'Similarly, Devaki's son Krishna raised the Rajarishi Nriga, who had sunk into Naraka, and restored him to Swarga.' "

CANTO 199

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira hears the illustrious Markandeya's story of how the Rajarishi Indradyumna regained his place in heaven, and he asks the Muni, 'Mahamuni, how should a man practise charity in order to gain admission into Indraloka? Is it by practising charity while leading a domestic life, in boyhood, in youth, or in old age that he goes to Indraloka? O, tell me what each is worth.'

Markandeya says, 'There are four kinds of life that are useless. So too, there are sixteen kinds of charity that are futile. These men live in vain—he who has no son; he who is corrupt; he who lives on food made by others; he who cooks but does not give first to the Devas, Pitrs and Sadasyas.

The first two kinds of gifts that are worthless are these—those given to a sinful person; and those which have been earned wrongfully. The gift to an adharmic Brahmana, to a thief, to a teacher who is false—these gifts are worthless, too. Also worthless are gifts to a liar, to a sinner, to an ingrate, to one who officiates at sacrifices performed by all classes of people in a village, to one who teaches the Vedas for a fee, to a Brahmana who cooks for a Sudra and to a Brahmana who does not follow the svadharma of a Brahmana. The gift given to one who has married a girl after she has attained puberty, to a female, to one who plays with snakes and to one who

is employed in a menial job, is also in vain. These sixteen kinds of charity earn the giver no punya.

The distressed man who gives from fear or anger enjoys the merit of such gifts while he is in the womb of his mother. The man who makes gifts to Brahmanas, under circumstances other than those listed earlier, enjoys the fruit of his charity in old age. Therefore, O king, the man who wishes to pave his way to heaven should, under all circumstances, give everything he wants to give away to Brahmanas.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How do Brahmanas, accepting gifts from people of all four castes, save others as well as themselves?'

Markandeya says, 'They do this by japa, mantras, homa and the study of the Vedas. With these as tools, the Brahmanas construct a Vedic boat in which they rescue others and themselves from the sea of samsara. The gods are pleased with the man who gratifies the Brahmanas, and a man may attain Swarga at the command of a Brahmana.

You will, Rajan, certainly gain the place of everlasting bliss by virtue of your worship of the Pitrs and Devas, and by your reverence for Brahmanas, even though your body may be filled with contagious phlegm, and be dull and lethargic!

He who wants to be virtuous and find Swarga should worship Brahmanas. He should feed Brahmanas with care during sraddhas. On such occasions, he should exclude those that are cursed or have lapsed in dharmic ways; who are very fair or very dark; have dirty nails; are lepers; are deceitful; have been born illegitimately to widows or married women; and who live as mercenaries.

An impure sraddha consumes the performer like fire consuming fuel. If blind, deaf or dumb people are to be employed at sraddhas, care should be taken to employ them along with Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas.

Yudhishtira, listen now while I tell you who the deserving recipients of your gifts are. He that knows all the Vedas should give only to a Brahmana who has merited the ability to save himself and the giver, for only such a man can be thought of as truly able. Son of Pritha, the attentive care of Sadasyas gratifies the sacred fire more than does the pouring of ghee or offering of flowers and sandalwood paste. Therefore, strive to look after your guests. Rajan, they that give guests water to wash their feet, butter to rub on their tired legs, light during the night, food and shelter, do not have to face Yama.

The removal, after worship, of flowers offered to the gods; the removal of the remnants of a Brahmana's feast; waiting upon a Brahmana with scented pastes; and the massaging of a Brahmana's limbs are each more deserving of merit than the gift of cows.

The gift of a Kapila cow saves the giver from sin. So, foremost among kings, one should gift a Kapila cow decked with ornaments to Brahmanas. Bhaarata, these are the kinds of people one should give to—a person of good lineage who has knowledge of the Vedas; the poor; a grihasta, a householder burdened with the care of a wife and children; a person that worships the sacred fire every day; and a person who has not done you any service. You should always give to such people, not to them that have wealth, for there is no point in it, Bhaaratottama.

One cow must be given to one Brahmana, and not to be shared by many because, if this shared cow is sold, the giver's family will suffer for three generations. Such a gift would definitely not save the giver or the recipient.

Giving eighty ratis of pure gold is as beneficial as giving a hundred pieces of gold, into eternity. He that gives away a strong bull capable of drawing the plough is rescued from all difficulties and finally goes to Swarga. He that gives away land to a learned Brahmana has all his desires fulfilled.

That man who, when asked by an exhausted traveller with tired legs and dusty feet, tells him the name of a person who will feed him, gains as much merit as the giver of food himself. Therefore, give food, rather than any other gift. There is no better gift than food. The man, who, according to his means, gives well-cooked and clean food to Brahmanas, earns the companionship of Prajapati Brahma.

There is nothing superior to food. Thus, food is seen as the first and best of all things to give away. It has been said that food is Brahma. Prajapati is regarded as the year; and the year is yagna. Everything begins with sacrifice, for it is from sacrifice that all creatures, animate and inanimate, are created. That is why food is the foremost of all things.

They who give lakes, tanks, wells, shelter and food; they who speak sweetly to everyone will not hear Yama's accusing voice. Bhumi Devi, the Earth, is pleased with him who gives wealth, earned by his labour, and rice to pious Brahmanas; and She showers him with wealth. The giver of food walks first, next the speaker of truth, and next the one who does not beg, although all three go to the same place.'

Hearing all this, Yudhishtira and his brothers are curious and ask the high-souled Markandeya, 'Great Muni, how far is Yamaloka from Bhumi? How large is it? How do men escape going there? O, tell us all this.'

Markandeya says, 'O king, most virtuous of men, your question is related to a great mystery. It is sacred and treasured by the Rishis. As it has to do with dharma, I will tell you about it.

The distance of Yama's world from the world of men is eighty-six thousand yojanas. The way is over waterless space, and is terrible to behold. Nowhere on that road is there the shade of a tree, any water, or any resting-place for the weary traveller. Men, women and all beings that live on Earth are forcibly led along this way by Yama's messengers, his dutas.

Yama's servitors and they that have given horses and other means of transport to Brahmanas ride on horseback and on chariots. They that have given parasols have parasols to protect them from the sun's rays as they walk to Yamaloka. They that have given food walk without hunger, while they that have not go hungry. They that have given clothes go clothed, while they that have not go naked. They that have given gold go cheerfully, decked in ornaments; they that have given land proceed with all their needs gratified; and they that have given grain go along the way without any wants.

They that have given houses go on chariots; those men that have given something to drink go cheerfully, unaffected by thirst; and they that have given lights go happily, the way lit before them. They that have given cows go in good cheer, freed from all their sins; they that have fasted for a month go on a craft drawn by swans; and they that have fasted for six nights, ride on blithe chariots drawn by peacocks. And, Pandava, he that has fasted three days, on only one meal, goes to a realm free from disease and anxiety.

Water possesses the uncanny quality of creating happiness in Yamaloka, and they that give water on earth find themselves by a river there, named Pushpodaka. These people drink cool, ambrosial draughts from that stream, while they that are evil only have recourse to flowing pus. That river serves all purposes. Therefore, Rajan, show due reverence to the Brahmanas that are with you.

His legs fatigued by the distance he has walked, his body covered in the dust of the highway, the wayfarer asks for the name of the man who will give him food and goes expectantly to his house. Attend to him reverently because he is a guest and a Brahmana. Indra and the Devas walk behind

him and, if he is cared for, they are pleased. If he is not, the celestials and their Lord are unhappy. Therefore, O best of kings, worship these Brahmanas.

I have spoken on a hundred subjects. What else do you want to hear from me?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Mahamuni, you know all there is to know about dharma and punya. I do not want to stop listening to you speak of them.'

Markandeya says, 'Rajan, I will now tell of another sacred subject of eternal interest, which is capable of washing away all sins. Listen attentively to me.

Bhaaratottama, merit equal to that of giving away a Kapila cow in the tirtha called Jyeshtha-Pushkara accrues from washing the feet of Brahmanas. As long as the earth is wet with water in which a Brahmana's feet have been washed, so long do the Pitrs drink water out of lotus-leaf cups.

If a guest is welcomed, the deities of fire become glad; and if he is offered a seat, it is the god of the hundred sacrifices who is gratified. If a guest's feet are washed, it is the Pitrs who are delighted; and if he is fed, it is Prajapati who is pleased.

One should whole-heartedly give away a cow while she is giving birth, when the feet and head of her calf are visible, and before her delivery is complete. A cow with her calf in the air, in the course of falling from the womb to the earth, is equal to the Bhumi Devi herself. The man who gives away such a cow reaps the benefit of giving away the Earth. And he is adored in Swarga for as many thousands of yugas as there are hairs on the bodies of the cow and her young one together.

Bhaarata, the man who, having accepted a gift, gives it away immediately to a good and honest person, gains great merit. Indeed, he reaps the benefit of giving away all the earth with her oceans and seas, caves and mountains, forests and woods.

A Brahmana who eats in silence, keeping his hands between his knees, gains the ability to save others. A Brahmana who abstains from drink and is regarded as faultless, and who reads the Samhitas everyday, also gains this ability. Butter and food given to a Brahmana who is learned in the Vedas are as beneficial as when they were poured into fire.

A Brahmana's weapon is anger, not arms made of iron. A Brahmana can kill a man with his anger as effectively as Indra slays Asuras with his

Vajra.'

Markandeya's discourse on the twin themes of punya and dharma is finished, and the Munis of the Naimisha vana are filled with joy on having heard it. They are freed from grief and anger by listening to it, and also purged of their sins and liberated from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Yudhishtira asks, 'What does a Brahmana have to do to become, and remain, pure? I want to hear about this from you, most virtuous one.'

Markandeya answers, 'There are three kinds of purity—purity of speech, purity of action and purity achieved through the use of water. The man who practises all three surely attains Swarga.

Brahmanas who adore the goddess Sandhya in the morning and evening, and meditatively recite the sacred mantra of Gayatri, who is the mother of the Vedas, are sanctified by her and freed from all their sins. Even if they accept the very Earth and her oceans as gifts, they do not suffer the least unhappiness. Inauspicious conjunctions of the Sun and other planets become favourable, and auspicious conjunctions become even more propitious to such Brahmanas, because of their conduct.

Fearsome Rakshasas, gigantic and savage, that subsist on the flesh of animals, are unable to defeat the Brahmanas who practise these purifications. These Brahmanas are like blazing fires. They do not acquire the blemishes of teaching, of officiating at sacrifices, and of accepting gifts from others.

Whether a Brahmana knows the Vedas or is ignorant of them, whether his soul is pure or tainted, you should never insult him, for Brahmanas are like fire. Just as the fire that burns on a funeral pyre is not considered impure despite its function, so too is the Brahmana considered pure even if he is ignorant. He is great and godlike.

Cities that are adorned with numerous walls, gates and palaces are bereft of beauty if they have no Brahmanas in them. O king, only a city where Brahmanas, accomplished in the Vedas, duly observing their dharmic duties, and possessing learning and tapasya-shakti reside, is really a city. Son of Pritha, any place where learned Brahmanas live, be it a forest or pasture, is a city. Why, that place becomes a tirtha.

By going to a king who offers protection and to a Brahmana of ascetic merit, and by offering worship to both, a man instantly gets rid of his sins. Wise and learned men have said that bathing in the sacred tirthas, reciting the names of the great Rishis, and talking with good and pure-hearted

people, are all acts worthy of praise. They that are virtuous and honest consider themselves sanctified by the holiness of companionship of others like themselves, satsangha, and by the holy water of pure and godly conversation.

The carrying of three staffs, the vow of silence, matted hair, the shaving of the head, the wearing of bark and deerskin, the practice of vows and ablutions, the worship of fire, living in the forest, the emaciation of the body—all these are useless if the heart is not pure. The indulgence of the six senses is easy if purity is its aim. Abstinence, however, which is difficult anyway, is even more so without purity of aim. Rajan, among the six senses the mind is the most dangerous!

True tapasya is purity of heart and soul, thought, word and action, rather than fasting and penances that result in a wasted body. He who has no compassion for relatives cannot be freed from sin even if his body is pure. His hard-heartedness is the enemy of his asceticism.

I say again, asceticism is not mere abstinence from worldly pleasures. He that is always pure and decked with virtue, he that practises kindness all his life, is a Muni even though he may lead a domestic life. Such a man is purged of all his sins. Fasts and other penances cannot destroy the effect of sin, however much they may weaken and dry up the body.

The man whose heart is without piety suffers torture by undergoing penances in ignorance of their meaning. He is never freed from sin by such hollow acts of reparation. The fire he worships does not consume his sins. It is only piety and virtue that give men access to the hallowed regions, and make fasts and vows effective.

Subsistence on fruit and roots, the vow of silence, living on mere air, tonsuring the head, giving up a fixed home, wearing matted locks, sleeping out in the open, daily fasts, the worship of fire, immersion in water and lying on bare ground—these by themselves cannot produce results. Only they that have true piety succeed, through knowledge and their actions, in conquering disease, decrepitude and death, and acquire spiritual elevation.

Just as seeds that have been scorched by fire do not sprout, so discomforts that have been burnt by knowledge cannot affect the soul. The body is like a block of wood and, when destitute of a soul, is as impermanent as foam in the ocean.

The man who catches a glimpse of the universality of his own soul by reciting one or even half a line of the Vedas needs nothing more. Some

succeed in identifying themselves with Brahman, the Supreme Soul, from just two letters, and some from hundreds and thousands of verses. The knowledge of one's identity with the Parabrahman is the route to salvation.

Men of ancient times, who were distinguished for their knowledge, have said that a man who is plagued by doubt can never attain bliss, in this world or the next. The belief of oneness with Brahman is the way to mukti. He that knows the true meaning of the Vedas and understands their true purpose fears mere Vedic ritual, like a man at the sight of a forest fire.

Give up dry debate, take up the study of sacred knowledge by way of Sruti—recitations of sacred sounds, and Smriti—reading sacred texts; use your intellect, and seek knowledge of the eternal Brahman. One's search becomes futile from lack of means. Therefore, one should carefully strive to obtain that knowledge with the help of the Vedas. The Vedas are Brahman—they are His body; they are the Truth. The soul that is restricted by its bodily confines cannot know Him in whom all the Vedas merge; He can only be known by the pure intellect.

The existence of the gods as taught in the Vedas, the power of action and physical prowess are distinct in every yuga. One can gain freedom from these by purifying the senses. So, the suspension of sensory function is true fasting. One may attain Swarga through asceticism, one may obtain objects of enjoyment by the practice of charity and one may purge himself of his sins by bathing in hallowed tirthas, but it is knowledge alone that can confer complete emancipation.'

When Markandeya has said this, Yudhishtira of great renown says, 'O illustrious one, I want to hear about the laws that govern charity, which make it meritorious.'

Markandeya says, 'Yudhishtira, I highly regard the laws of charity that you wish to hear from me. Listen now to their mysteries, as expounded in the Sruti and the Smritis.

A man who performs a sraddha in the place called Gajachaya, at a spot fanned by the leaves of the aswattha tree, enjoys its rewards, Yudhishtira, for a hundred thousand kalpas. He that establishes a dharmasala and appoints a person to look after all who come there is crowned with the benefits of all the sacrifices. He that gives away a horse at a tirtha where the current of the stream runs in the opposite direction to the river's course gains unending merit.

The guest that comes to one's house for food is none other than Indra himself. If he is entertained with food, Indra bestows an excellent and inexhaustible reward. Just as boats take men safely across the water, the givers I have spoken of are saved from retribution for their sins. What is given to Brahmanas produces, like a gift of curds, endless punya.

A gift given on particular phases of the Moon's orbit results in twice the reward as on other days; given in a certain season it is ten times as powerful; and in a particular year its value is increased a hundredfold. The rewards earned by a gift made on the last day of the last month of the year never expire. The gift made on the days of the Sun's solstice, one made on the last day of the Sun's path through the constellations of Thula, Mesha, Mithuna, Kanya and Meena[1], and the gift made during eclipses of the Moon and the Sun reap limitless merit.

Learned men say that gifts given during the seasons produce merit that is multiplied ten times, a hundred times if made during the cusp of the seasons, and a thousand times if made when Rahu appears in the sky, and greater than at any other time. The gift made on the last day of the Sun's course through Thula and Mesha produces merit that never decreases.

Rajan, one cannot enjoy owning land unless one gives away land, and one cannot enjoy travelling in chariots and other vehicles unless one gives these away. A person is reborn with the enjoyment of the goals he had in mind at the time he gave a gift to a Brahmana.

Gold has sprung from Fire, the Earth from Vishnu and the cow from the Sun. So, he that gives away gold, land and cows reaches the abodes of Agni, Vishnu and Surya Deva. Nothing is as eternal as the act of giving a gift. What can be more auspicious, in all the three worlds? That is why, O king, those of fathomless intelligence say that there is nothing nobler or greater in the three Lokas as a gift.' "

1. Libra, Aries, Gemini, Virgo and Pisces.

CANTO 200

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Glorious king, Yudhishtira hears from Markandeya the story of how Indradyumna attains heaven and asks that magnificent, blemishless Muni, 'Virtuous one, you know the entire pantheon of the Devas, the Danavas and the Rakshasas. You can trace the genealogies of kings and Rishis. Brahmanottama, there is nothing in this world that you do not know! You also know, Mahamuni, many delightful stories about Manavas, Nagas and Rakshasas; about Devas, Gandharvas and Yakshas; and about Kinnaras and Apsaras. I long to hear these from you.

Why did Kuvalaswa, the unvanquished king of the Ikshvakus change his name to Dhundhumara? Best of the descendants of Bhrigu, I want to know in detail how and why the intelligent Kuvalaswa changed his name.'

The Maharishi Markandeya begins the tale of Dhundhumara.

Markandeya says, 'Yudhishtira, listen and I will tell you everything you wish to know. The story of Dhundhumara is a moral one, so listen to how king Kuvalaswa of the Ikshvaku dynasty came to be known as Dhundhumara.

Bhaarata, there was a well-known Rishi named Utanka, whose asrama was set in a charming wilderness. Rishi Utanka performed a most severe tapasya, and for countless years, with the aim of obtaining the favour of Vishnu. Pleased with his tapasya the illustrious Lord Vishnu appeared

before Utanka. Beholding the Deity, the Rishi in all humility began to glorify Him with hymns of adoration.

He said, “O Effulgent Lord, you have made all creatures - the Devas, Asuras and Manavas, all things mobile or immobile, even Brahma himself, the Vedas and all things that can be known. The Sky is your head, O Lord, the Sun and the Moon are your eyes. You who know no decay, the Winds are your breath and Fire your energy. The directions of the horizon are your arms and the great Ocean your belly. The hills and mountains are your thighs and the Air your hips, Madhusudana. The Earth makes up your feet, and plants the hair on your body.

O Lord, Indra, Soma, Agni and Varuna, indeed all the Devas, Asuras and great Nagas humbly wait upon you and sing hymns in adoration of you. Lord of the Universe, you pervade all creation. The great Rishis of immense tejas, endlessly plunged in dhyana, always worship you. When you are gratified the Universe is at peace; when you are angry terror grips every soul. You are the dispeller of fear.

You are the one, supreme Purusha. You are the cause of happiness of gods and men. O Lord, you covered the three Lokas with three strides. It was you that destroyed the Asuras when they were at the height of their power; it is your prowess that brought peace and joy to the Devas; it was your anger that destroyed hundreds of great Daitya lords. You are the Maker and Destroyer of the world’s creatures. It is by worshiping you that the gods attain felicity.”

Thus, Yudhishtira, the high-souled Utanka praised the Lord of the senses. And Vishnu said to Utanka, “I am pleased with you. Ask for a boon.”

Utanka said, “Seeing you before me is the greatest boon, Hari, Eternal Being, Lord of the Universe.”

Vishnu said, “I am happy with your lack of desires and with your devotion, Manavottama, best of men. But, Brahmana, you must let me give you some boon.”

When Lord Vishnu insisted, Utanka said with folded hands, “O illustrious, lotus-leaf eyed Lord, if you are pleased with me, then let my heart always dwell on virtue, truth and contentment. And let my heart always turn to you in bhakti.”

Hearing Utanka’s words, Vishnu said, “Brahmana, by my grace, I grant all you have asked for. I also bestow on you yogic power, with which you

shall achieve a great thing for the Devas as well as for all the inhabitants of Triloka. Even as I speak, a great Asura named Dhundhu is performing a tapasya of fierce austerity with the object of destroying the three worlds.

Let me tell you who will kill that Asura. A king of invincible energy and prowess will be born into the Ikshvaku line, and he will be known by the name of Brihadaswa. He will have a son named Kuvalaswa, who will be endowed with great piety, self-control and fame. This best of kings will be blessed with yogic power that springs from me and, commanded by you, O Rishi, that king will be the slayer of the Asura Dhundhu."

Having spoken to the Brahmana, Vishnu vanished.' "

CANTO 201

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'O king, after the death of this king of the Ikshvakus, a king of great dharma named Sasada ascended the throne of Ayodhya and ruled the earth. Sasada's son was the powerful Kakutstha, and Kakutstha's son was Anenasa. Anenasa had a son named Prithu, whose son was Viswagaswa, and from Viswagaswa was born Adri.

Adri's son was Yuvanaswa, Sravastha was born to Yuvanaswa and it was he who built the city of Sravasthi. Sravastha had a son named Brihadaswa to whom Kuvalaswa was born. Kuvalaswa had twenty-one thousand sons and all these sons were fierce and powerful, and mastered every skill.

Kuvalaswa himself excelled his father in every way and, when the time came, his father Brihadaswa installed the brave and exemplary prince on the throne. Having handed over the throne to his son, king Brihadaswa retired to a life of sannyasa in the forest.'

Markandeya continues, 'When Rajarishi Brihadaswa was preparing to retire into the vana, Utanka heard of it, and the sage of the dazzling tejas and immeasurable soul came to see Brihadaswa, that best of Kshatriyas. Rishi Utanka tried to persuade him to refrain from taking sannyasa.

Utanka said, "O king, it is your dharma to protect your people. Free us from our anxieties by being our protector. Because you are a great soul, the

Earth will be safe under your guardianship. It is not right for you to take up sannyasa in the forest. Great merit attaches to the karma of protecting the people of this world, punya which you cannot have by living as a sannyasin. Turn your heart away from this course.

Brihadaswa, the merit that the Rajarishis of old acquired was incomparable. The king should always protect his subjects, and it is what you should do. Bhumipala, I cannot perform my tapasya in peace these days. Near my asrama there is a desert named Ujjalaka, which is flat and arid and many yojanas in length and width. In it dwells Dhundhu, a Danava chieftain, the son of Madhu and Kaitabha.

He is savage and powerful, and lives under the ground. You must first kill him before taking to sannyasa.

The Asura is quiet now because he is engaged in the most fierce tapasya; his aim is to rule over the Devas as well as the three worlds. Because of a boon granted to him by the Pitamaha, the Grandsire of all creatures, Dhundhu cannot be slain by Daityas, Rakshasas or Gandharvas. Kill him, Rajan, and be blessed; set your heart firmly on this deed. By killing the Asura you will achieve unequalled greatness and enjoy undying fame.

When, at the end of every year, that malignant Asura, who lies covered with sand, wakes up and begins to breathe, all the Earth with her mountains, forests and woods begins to tremble. His breath blows up clouds of sand and shrouds the Sun; for seven days without let does Bhumi Devi quake; sparks and tongues of smoky flame are everywhere. O king, I have no peace in my asrama. Kill Dhundhu for the good of the world. When that Asura dies the three Lokas will have peace and joy again.

I believe that you have the power to kill this Asura. Vishnu will infuse you with his energy, for long ago Vishnu swore that the king who killed this great Demon would have Narayana's own strength to use. Rajan, imbued with Vishnu's inexorable might, slay the savage Daitya. Dhundhu is so powerful that no one who has any less prowess than the Lord's own, can destroy him, even if he were to try for a hundred years," ' says Markandeya."

CANTO 202

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Kurusthama, at Utanka's words, that unvanquished royal sage joined his palms and said to him, "Your visit will not be in vain. Holy one, this is my son Kuvalaswa, who is strong and steadfast. His prowess is unsurpassed on earth. He will undoubtedly accomplish what you ask, with the help of his heroic sons whose arms are like iron maces. Give me leave to go to sannyasa, Brahmana, for I have given up my weapons."

The Muni replied, saying, "*Tathaastu, so be it.*"

Rajarishi Brihadaswa commanded his son to fulfil Utanka's plea and, saying *Do what needs to be done,* he retired to the forest.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Holy one, who was this powerful Daitya? Whose son and whose grandson was he? I have not heard of this mighty Daitya before. I want to know everything, and in detail, O illumined Sage.'

Markandeya says, 'Then listen to everything just as it happened, O ruler of men!

When the world became one immense expanse of water and all the mobile and immobile creatures were destroyed, when all creation ended, Vishnu the Eternal, the Ever-lustrous, the Source of the universe, He whom sages have named the Supreme Lord of the Universe, that sacred Being, lay in Yoganidra, yogic sleep, upon the coils of the Naga Sesha. Vishnu of the

infinite tejas, that blessed and holy Hari, who knows no decay, lay on coils that encircled the Earth and, as the Deity lay asleep on his serpentine bed, a lotus of shimmering beauty, radiant as the Sun, sprang from his navel.

And from that sublime lotus emerged Pitamaha Brahma, the Lord of the worlds, the embodiment of the four Vedas, four-formed and four-faced, invincible by his own energy, mighty of strength and prowess. Lord Hari of the wondrous body, lustrous, adorned with a crown and the Kaustubha jewel and clad in fulvid silk, lay with his body stretched across many yojanas on the superlative snake bed, protected by the hood of the snake that extended wide and far, O king, ablaze with beauty, illustrious as a thousand massed Suns.

When he had been in repose for some time, two mighty Danavas named Madhu and Kaitabha saw him and, seeing Hari in that posture, and seeing lotus-leaf-eyed Brahma sitting on the lotus, Madhu and Kaitabha were excited. Brahma became terrified at their boisterousness and trembled on his seat. The stalk of the lotus on which he sat began to quiver, waking the sleeping Kesava.

Awakened from his slumber, Govinda saw those awesome Danavas and said to them, "Welcome, mighty ones. I am pleased with you, and I will grant you excellent boons!"

Rajan, the proud and mighty Danavas laughingly replied to Hrishikesa, "You may ask boons of us, O Divine! Supreme God, we would like to grant you a boon. In fact we will indeed grant a boon. Therefore, ask us for anything that comes to your mind."

Hari said, "Valiant ones, I will accept a boon from you. There is something I want. Both of you have ineffable tejas. There is no man to equal either of you. Submit yourselves to be killed by me—that is the boon I ask for the good of the world."

At this, Madhu and Kaitabha said, "We have never before told a lie, even in jest, let alone seriously. Purushottama, we have always been steadfast in the path of truth and morality. In strength, in physique, in beauty, in virtue, in asceticism, in charity, in conduct, in goodness and in self-control we have no equal. Kesava, we face grave danger; accomplish what you have said.

No one can prevail over destiny but, Lord, there is one thing that we ask you to do. Best and first of all Gods, you must kill us at a place that is absolutely uncovered; and O Lotus-eyed, we also wish to be born as your

sons. This is the boon that we ask, O Devadeva! Do not break the promise you first made to us."

The Divine One replied, "I will do as you ask. Everything will be as you wish." '

Markandeya continues, 'Govinda searched in his mind for a suitable place, but he could not think of any uncovered space. Failing to discover an absolutely open place, he noticed that his thighs were uncovered and cut off Madhu and Kaitabha's heads on them with his Sudarshana Chakra.' "

CANTO 203

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Dhundhu was the son of Madhu and Kaitabha. He was a Demon of immense energy and prowess, and he performed austere tapasya. He stood on one leg and reduced his body to a mass of only veins and arteries, and Brahma, gratified with him, gave him a boon. The boon he asked of Prajapati was that no one would be able to kill him, not the Devas, the Danavas, the Rakshasas, the Nagas or the Gandharvas.

The Pitamaha granted him his wish and the Danava went his way, after reverently worshipping Brahma by placing the God's feet on his head. With this boon in hand, Dhundhu hurried to Vishnu, thinking of how Vishnu had killed his father. Wrathfully, he began wreaking havoc, first conquering the Gandharvas and then the Devas with Vishnu at their head. Finally, O bull of the Bhaaratas, that black-souled Asura arrived at the Ujjalaka desert and began to violate Utanka's asrama.

The fierce Dhundhu, son of Madhu and Kaitabha, lay in his cave under the sands in dread tapasya with the object of destroying the three worlds. It was during this time that the Rajarishi Kuvalaswa set out for that asrama with his troops, accompanied by all his sons and by the Brahmana Utanka.

When Kuvalaswa embarked on his campaign with his twenty-one thousand sons, Lord Vishnu filled him with his own energy, at the command

of Utanka and impelled by the desire to render a service to the three worlds. As Kuvalaswa proceeded, a loud voice spoke from the sky, repeatedly saying, “Blessed and unslayable, you will become the destroyer of Dhundhu today.”

The gods showered divine flowers on him; and the celestial drums began to sound reverberantly, although none played upon them; and during the march, cool breezes began to blow; and the king of the gods sent down gentle rain to moisten the dust on the roads; and, Yudhishtira, the chariots of the celestial ones hovered high over Dhundhu’s subterranean cavern of tapasya.

The Devas, Gandharvas and great Rishis, urged by curiosity, came there to watch the encounter between Dhundhu and Kuvalaswa. Kuvalaswa, bristling with Narayana’s urjas, and his sons with him, soon surrounded the desert and ordered that it be excavated. After seven days of digging in the sand, the king’s sons unearthed the mighty Asura Dhundhu, whose massive body lay nestled, radiant with his own energy, like the Sun himself. He covered the entire western quarter of the desert as he lay.

Kuvalaswa’s sons encircled him and attacked him with arrows and maces, with short, heavy clubs and axes, with iron spikes and darts and with glistening, keen-edged swords. The towering Danava rose in rage from his supine position and began to swallow all the weapons that were hurled at him, and then spat flames from his mouth, flames like those of the fire called Samvartaka that burns at the end of the yuga. The Asura consumed all the king’s sons in his flames, even like the Lord Kapila burnt the sons of king Sagara long ago.

In a mere moment, the furious Asura engulfed the three worlds with the flames that shot out of his mouth in endless tongues.

Bhaaratottama, when all those sons of Kuvalaswa were consumed by the Asura’s angry fire, the king, filled with divine power, approached the Danava, who confronted him, like mighty Kumbhakarna on waking from his slumber.

From the body of the king a jet of water gushed, which quickly extinguished the flames loosed by the Asura. The royal Kuvalaswa, filled with yogic power, slew the Demon with the Brahmastra, which is invoked to relieve Triloka of its fears. Once Rajarishi Kuvalaswa had killed the immense Asura, that foe of the Devas and slayer of all his enemies, with the exceptional weapon, he became like a second king of the three worlds. And

from then on the noble Kuvalaswa came to be known by the name of Dhundhumara for having slain Asura Dhundhu, and came to be regarded as being invincible in battle.

The Devas and the Rishis who had come to witness the encounter were so delighted with him that they said to him, “Ask us for a boon.”

The king bowed to them and, filled with joy, said with hands joined in reverence, “Let me always be able to give wealth to devout Brahmanas. Let me be invincible to all my enemies. Let Vishnu always be my friend. Let me love all creatures. Let my heart always turn towards dharma, and let me live in Swarga forever.”

The Devas, the Rishis and the Brahmana Utanka were extremely pleased and said, “It shall be as you wish.” O king, they bestowed many other blessings on him, and the Devas and Maharishis went away to their respective abodes.

Yudhishtira, after the slaughter of his sons, king Kuvalaswa had only three sons left, and they were called Dridaswa, Kapilaswa and Chandraswa. It is from them, Rajan, that the illustrious line of Ikshvaku kings, all of immeasurable prowess, has sprung.

This was how the great Daitya Dhundhu, the son of Madhu and Kaitabha, was killed by Kuvalaswa, and this was why that king came to be known as Dhundhumara.

I have now told you all that you asked—about the One whose deeds made the story of Dhundhu’s death famous. He that listens to this sacred narrative of Vishnu’s glory becomes virtuous and is blessed with children. By listening to this story on particular days of the month, one is blessed with longevity and prosperity, and is freed from all anxiety and fear of disease.’ ”

CANTO 204

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira then asks the illustrious Markandeya a difficult question about dharma.

He asks, 'Holy one, I want to hear about the high and excellent virtue of women. I want you to tell me, Brahmana, about the subtle truths of dharma. By divine ordinance, the Sun, Moon, Wind, Earth, Fire, one's father and mother, and one's guru appear to us as living embodiments of God. All these are worthy of our reverence. So, too, is the woman who faithfully adores one lord. The worship that chaste wives offer to their husbands seems to be fraught with great difficulty.

Worshipful one, speak to us of the virtue of chaste wives, who have their senses and hearts under perfect control and look on their husbands as gods. This cannot be easy to do. The worship that sons offer to their parents and that wives offer to their husbands seems difficult. I do not think there is anything more formidable than the stern virtue of chaste women. Brahmana, the dharma that good women discharge with care and the conduct of good sons towards their parents must be the hardest to observe.

A woman who is devoted to only one lord, a woman who always speaks the truth, a woman who carries a child in her womb for a full ten month term - there can be no conduct more arduous, O Brahmana, than hers.

Women give birth to their children at great risk to themselves and with intense pain, and then raise them with great love.

Even persons who invoke hatred in others because of their cruelty do succeed in accomplishing their svadharma, which, in my opinion, is a difficult thing. Dvija, tell me the true duties of Kshatriyas. It is not easy for high-souled men to acquire virtue when their dharma obliges them to perform inhuman acts. Holy one, you have the knowledge to answer all questions; and I wish to hear you speak on these subjects. Best of Bhrigu's clan, you of the lofty vows, I wait respectfully to listen to what you say.'

Markandeya says, 'Bhaaratottama, I will tell you all this, however complex the answers to your questions may be. Listen well.

Some regard the mother as the superior parent, some the father. It is the mother that gives birth to and rears the child, which is more demanding than the father's role. Fathers wish for children by observing vratas and by tapasya, by worshipping the gods, by the reverence shown to them, by bearing cold and heat, by mantras and by other means.

When they have children, after these painful observances, they, too, O Kshatriya, are always anxious about their sons' futures. Bhaarata, both parents desire fame, success, prosperity, progeny and virtuousness for their sons. The good son is he who realises these hopes of his parents. Great king, that son with whom his father and mother are gratified achieves eternal fame and everlasting virtue in this world and the next.

When it comes to women, neither yagnas, nor sraddhas, nor vratas are of any use. The only way they can attain the bliss of Swarga is by serving their husbands. Yudhishtira, bear this in mind while I tell you about the chaste woman's dharma.' "

CANTO 205

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'There was, Bhaarata, a pious ascetic named Kausika, who had great tapasyashakti and who was devoted to the study of the Vedas. He was an excellent Brahmana, and studied all the Vedas with the Angas and the Upanishads. One day as he sat reciting the Vedas at the foot of a tree, a female crane that was on that tree sullied him with her droppings. He looked at the crane in anger, and this was enough to make the crane fall dead to the ground.

Seeing the fallen krauncha under the tree, the Brahmana was moved to pity and began to lament the dead crane saying, "Alas, urged by anger and malice, I have done a sinful thing!"

Having repeated this lament many times, that learned Brahmana went to a village to beg for alms. Bharatarishabha, in course of making his rounds of the houses of noble families, the Brahmana entered one such house that he knew. As he entered the house he said, *Give*, and a woman from inside answered, *Wait*.

Bhaaratottama, while the housewife was cleaning the vessel from which alms are given, her husband suddenly came home and he was very hungry. The chaste housewife saw her husband and, ignoring the Brahmana, gave her lord water to wash his feet and face, and a seat. After that the black-

eyed lady served him savoury food and drink, and humbly stood beside him in ready attendance.

Yudhishtira, that woman was an obedient and chaste wife. She always ate the leftovers from her husband's plate, she was ever respectful of her lord's wishes and commands, and she was devoted in her love for him. Her conduct was always pious; she was skilful in all domestic duties, attentive to all her relatives and always did what was pleasing and beneficial to her husband. She was devout in the daily puja and heedfully saw to the wants of guests and servants, as well as of her mother-in-law and father-in-law.

While this woman of the lovely eyes was busy waiting on her husband, she noticed the Brahmana waiting for alms and remorsefully remembered that she had asked him to wait. This lady, who was well known for her chasteness, took something to give the Brahmana and went out to where he stood.

When she came before him the Brahmana said, "Best of women, blessed one, I am surprised at your behaviour. Having asked me to wait you did not dismiss me, but kept me waiting!"

Lord of men, seeing the Brahmana blazing in anger, the chaste woman tried to pacify him. She said, "O Learned one, it is proper for you to forgive me. My husband is my supreme god. He came home hungry and tired, and I was serving him."

Hearing this, the Brahmana said, "You do not seem to consider that Brahmanas deserve more respect. Do you dare to exalt your husband above them? Are you so involved in your life as a wife that you disregard Brahmanas? Indra himself bows down to them, let alone humans on Earth. Proud woman, do you not know this? Have you never heard that Brahmanas are like fire and can consume all the earth?"

The woman answered, "I am no she-crane, O Rishi! You that are endowed with the wealth of tapasya, cast off your anger. Enraged as you are, what can you do to me with your angry looks? I do not disrespect Brahmanas; blessed with great souls, they are like gods. O Sinless, if I have been remiss, you must forgive me.

I know the mental energy and pride of wise Brahmanas: their anger made the waters of the ocean salty and undrinkable. I know also the power of Munis whose souls are under complete control: they are aflame with tapasyashakti. The fire of their wrath has still not been extinguished in the forest of Dandaka.

It was because of his disrespect towards Brahmanas that the great Asura, the evil Vatapi, was eaten by Agastya. I have heard that the powers earned by high-souled Brahmanas are great indeed, but, O Brahmana, they are as great in forgiveness as they are in anger. Therefore, O Anagha, it is proper that you forgive me my offence.

I favour the punya that serving my husband, whom I consider the highest god, gives me, and what you see is my worship of him and the virtue that accrues from it. I know that you have scorched a she-crane with your anger; Dvijottama, best of the twice-born, a man's greatest enemy is his anger.

The gods only consider a Brahmana the man who has shed his anger and passion, who always speaks the truth, who always pleases his teacher and who, though wounded by another, never retaliates. The gods consider a Brahmana the man who has his senses under control, who is virtuous, pure and devoted to the study of the Vedas, and who has mastered anger and lust.

The gods consider a Brahmana the man who knows dharma and is rich in tejas of mind, who is devout, who looks upon all as his equals, who studies and teaches others, who performs sacrifices himself and officiates at the sacrifices of others, and who gives as much charity as his means allow. The gods consider a bull among the Dvijas, a Brahmana who practices brahmacharya, who has liberated his soul, who is devoted to the study of the Vedas and who always begins his studies with a recitation of the ideals of Brahmanas. The hearts of such men only ever find joy in truth, but never in falsehood.

O Dvijottama, they say that the study of the Vedas, tranquillity of soul, simplicity of living and repression of passion are the eternal duties of the Brahmana. Those that know about dharma have said that truth and honesty are the highest virtues, and that they are not easy to comprehend. Virtue is eternal and is difficult to attain, but whatever kind it is, it is based on truth. The ancients have declared that dharma, because it depends on Sruti, is of many kinds and too subtle to understand. Holy one, you are virtuous, pure and devoted to Vedic study. I think, however, that you do not know the real essence of dharma.

Go to the city of Mithila, where a virtuous butcher lives, and ask him if indeed you really understand true goodness. This butcher is truthful and devoted to the service of his parents, and has his senses under complete control. He will tell you about dharma. Go there if you like, O faultless one.

Forgive me if what I have said is distasteful, for those who are earnest about acquiring dharma must never injure women."

The Brahmana replied, "I am pleased with you; blessings be upon you. My anger is gone, beautiful one. Your censure serves me well. I will go now and do what is good for me." '

Markandeya continues, 'Dismissed by her, Kausika, that best of Brahmanas, left her house and, berating himself, returned home.' "

CANTO 206

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Reflecting upon that wonderful discourse of the woman, Kausika began to reproach himself and, meditating on the subtleties of dharma, felt guilty.

He said to himself, "I should respectfully accept what the good woman said and go to Mithila. I am certain that there lives in that city the butcher who has his soul under control and has fathomed the mysteries of dharma. I will go there this very day and ask that great tapasvin about virtue."

He was convinced by the chaste woman's words because she knew about the she-crane, and because of the import of her words. So, Kausika set out for Mithila, humbly contemplating all that she had said, and filled with curiosity. On the way he passed through forests, villages and towns, and at last, reached Mithila, which was ruled by Janaka.

He saw the magnificent city adorned with the flags of various clans and it echoed with the sounds of yagnas and festivities. There were splendid gateways and palaces, many marvellous buildings, and it was protected by walls on all sides.

The city was full of chariots on its many well laid roads and streets, which were lined with a variety of shops. Warriors, horses and elephants shared the roads with the chariots, and everywhere healthy, happy people

thronged the streets in festive mood. And there the Brahmana saw many other things.

He enquired about the virtuous butcher and two Brahmanas directed him to his house. He went there and the Brahmana saw the shaunika in his yard, selling venison and buffalo meat. Because there was such a crowd of people waiting to be served, Kausika waited at a distance, but the meat vendor, realising that the Brahmana had come to see him, rose from his seat and went to where the Brahmana stood.

He said, "Salutations, holy one! Welcome, O best of Brahmanas! I am the butcher. Blessings be upon you. Tell me what I can do for you. I know that the good lady told you to come to Mithila, and also why you have come."

The Brahmana was surprised at these words and thought, "O this is the second wonder that I see!"

The butcher said to the Brahmana, "You are standing in a place that is scarcely proper for you, Anagha. Come, let us go to my house." '

Markandeya continues, 'Saying *Tathaastu, so be it,* the Brahmana gladly walked ahead as the butcher led him to his home. Entering his pleasant house, the butcher reverently offered his guest a seat and gave him water to wash his feet and face, which the Brahmana accepted and then sat at ease.

He said to the butcher, "Your profession does not seem fitting for you. I feel sad that you practise such a cruel trade."

The butcher said, "This is the profession of my family, which I have inherited from my father and grandfather. Dvija, do not grieve; I am only living by the dharma of my birth. By discharging the duties preordained for me by the Creator, I serve my superiors and the elders. Brahmanottama, I always speak the truth, I never envy others and I give to the best of my ability. I live upon what remains after serving the gods, my guests and my dependants; I never speak ill of any creature, big or small. Best of Brahmanas, the actions of your former life always follow you into subsequent lives. In this world there are three main professions—agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade. In the other world the three Vedas, knowledge and morality are important. Service to the three superior castes is assigned to the Sudra, agriculture to the Vaisya, battle to the Kshatriyas, and the practice of brahmacharya, celibacy, asceticism, recitation of mantras and truthfulness to the Brahmanas.

The king should rule justly over his subjects who adhere to their proper duties, and should return those that have fallen from their dharma to it. The king must inspire fear, as he is the lord of his people. He checks his subjects who neglect their dharma, just as he would stop a deer with his arrows.

O Rishi, Janaka is such a king; there is not one subject of his who does not live according to the dharma of his birth. Best of Brahmanas, here all four orders rigidly adhere to their respective duties. King Janaka punishes evil, even if the criminal is his own son, but he never inflicts pain on the virtuous. He uses reliable and good scouts and keeps an impartial eye on all. Prosperity, dominion and the power to punish rest with Kshatriyas. A king who is virtuous craves prosperity. The king is the protector of the four varnas.

As for me, O Brahmana, I always sell pork and buffalo meat without slaughtering the animals myself. I sell the meat of animals that have been killed by others. I never eat meat myself; I never go to my wife except in her season; I always fast during the day and eat at night. Even though the actions expected of a man by his dharma are cruel, the man can be good. A man can be virtuous, although he may be a slayer of animals by profession.

Virtue diminishes and evil prospers because of the sinful deeds of the king; his subjects become corrupt, and they decline. It is then, O Brahmana, that ugly monsters and dwarves, hunch-backed and huge-headed people, men that are blind or deaf, those that are cross-eyed or impotent are born.

It is because of the sins of the king that his subjects suffer. But our king Janaka virtuously watches over his subjects and is always compassionate. On their part, his people always keep to their svadharma. As for me, I try to please everyone, regardless of whether they speak well of me or not. The king that lives in accordance to his dharma, who is always righteous and honest, who has his soul under control and who is always prepared and earnest need not depend on anyone for support.

There are certain attributes that find their place only in a man who desires worldly detachment: giving of food to the extent that one can afford, endurance of heat and cold, steadfastness in virtue and compassion for all creatures. One should avoid telling lies and should do good deeds without being asked.

One should never allow lust, anger or malice to get the better of virtue; one should never give in to extremes of joy and sorrow in good times and bad; one should never feel depressed or abandon the path of righteousness

when overtaken by poverty. One must never repeat a wrong; one should always turn to conduct that benefits others; one should never repay wrong with wrong, but behave honestly with those that have wronged him.

The wretch, who leans towards sin, destroys himself. By doing wrong, one only imitates those that are evil, who abandon dharma and mock the good and the pure in the belief that there is no goodness, and who, therefore, will surely be destroyed. The sinful man bloats like a leather bag puffed up with wind.

The thoughts of these vain and stupid ones are feeble and worthless. The inner soul recognises his foolishness as easily as sunlight reveals everything. The fool does not shine merely because he praises himself; the learned man, however, even if he is not good-looking, shines by not speaking ill of others and well of himself. However, there is no person in this world who has all these attributes.

Repentance washes away the sin of the wrong-doer. The determination never to repeat the sin saves him from future sin as surely as the methods prescribed by the scriptures. This is the Sruti of virtue—the sacred, recited strictures. The good man who commits a sin unknowingly can destroy the sin, for his virtue cleanses him of the sin committed in ignorance.

After committing a sin, a man should no longer consider himself a man. Man cannot conceal his sins: the gods and the man's conscience see what he does. The person, who, with piety and without hatred, conceals the errors of honest and wise men, as he would hide the holes in his clothes, finds salvation.

If a man seeks redemption after having committed a sin, he is purged of all his sins; he looks bright, like the moon emerging from behind clouds. A man who truly wants redemption is washed of all his sins, and, renewed, shines again like the rising sun dispelling the darkness of the night.

O Dvijottama, it is temptation that is the basis of sin. Men that are ignorant commit sin by giving in to temptation. Sinful men generally put on a cloak of virtue, like a well whose mouth is hidden by grass. Outwardly they seem to be self-controlled and devout; they preach virtue which, coming from them, is meaningless. In fact, they are anything but virtuous."
'

Markandeya continues, 'At the butcher's words, that wise Brahmana asked, "How will I recognise true dharma? You are blessed, and I want to hear this from you, best of virtuous men. Tell me what you know."

The butcher replied, “Five sacred ingredients make up dharma: yagna—sacrifice, daana—charity, tapasya—asceticism, the Vedas, and satyam—truth. Having quelled lust and anger, pride, avarice and crookedness, they that delight in dharma for dharma’s sake are the truly virtuous and praiseworthy. Those who perform sacrifices and study the Vedas have no other way of life other than dharma. They follow only righteousness, and this is the second attribute of the virtuous.

Waiting upon superiors, truth, freedom from anger, and charity—these four, O Brahmana, are integral to dharma. The only way a person can lead a righteous life is by practising these four. The essence of the Vedas is Truth; the essence of Truth is self-control; and the essence of self-control is abstention from worldly pleasures. One sees all these in the conduct of a good man.

They that follow fools who mock men’s virtue walk a sinful path and are dragged down to perdition. They that are virtuous and conscientiously observe vratas, who are devoted to the Srutis, who abstain from worldly pleasures, who tread in virtue’s path and follow the true dharma; they that are obedient to their gurus, and who contemplate the meaning of the scriptures with patience and concentration, are the truly virtuous. Brahmana, these qualities guide their intellect.

Avoid atheists and men that live on the edge; stay away from wicked and sinful men; rather, acquire knowledge and revere good men. Lust and temptation are like sharks in the river of life, whose waters are the five senses. Cross to the other side of this river in the boat of patience, avoiding the shoals of rebirth into this world.

The supreme dharma, consisting of the exercise of the higher intellect and dhyana, when gradually added to virtuous conduct, becomes revealed in beauty, like coloured dye on white fabric. Truthfulness and non-violence are benign qualities. Of these, non-violence is a cardinal virtue, and based in Truth. The mind works effectively when the foundation of its activity is Truth, the noblest value. Pure conduct is the characteristic of all good men; they that are distinguished for saintliness are men of dharma.

All creatures set principles for themselves based on their inherent nature. The sinful man, who has no control over himself, acquires lust, anger and other vices. It is an immortal truth that virtuous actions are those that are founded on justice; also, sages have declared that all deviant conduct is sin.

Those who are not swayed by anger, pride, haughtiness and envy, and those who are quiet and straightforward, are naturally virtuous in conduct. Those who are diligent in performing the rites prescribed in the three Vedas, who are wise and of pure and good conduct; those who exercise self-restraint and are attentive to the needs of their superiors, are men of dharma.

The ways of great men like these are difficult to emulate. Their sins are washed away by the sanctity of their actions. This piety is wonderful; it is ancient, immutable and eternal; and wise men who lead lives of dharma attain Swarga. Men who believe in God, who have no false pride, who are well-versed in the scriptures, and who respect Dvijas, the twice-born, find heaven for themselves.

Among holy men, dharma is threefold—the supreme dharma that the Vedas teach; the dharma that the Dharmashastras preach; and good conduct. Good karma is the acquisition of knowledge, making pilgrimages to sacred tirthas, truthfulness, forbearance, purity and honesty.

Virtuous men are always kind to all creatures and hold Brahmanas dear; they practise ahimsa by abstaining from doing injury to any creature; and they are always polite. Wise men who know the consequences of their good and evil karma are held in high esteem by the sages. Those who are just and good-natured, and blessed with virtue, who wish all creatures well, who walk steadily on the path of righteousness, conquer Swargaloka.

Godly people praise those who are charitable, unselfish and of unblemished character, who help the distressed, who are learned and respected, who practise stern tapasya, and who are kind to all creatures.

The generous man earns prosperity in this world and bliss in the next; so does the man who, when asked by good men, gives as much as he can, even depriving his family and dependants. Good men act in this way, thinking about dharma and their own welfare, and knowing the ways of the world; and their goodness grows, endlessly.

The good, who are wedded to Truth, who try not to injure any creature, who are honourable, who avoid evil, who are humble, modest and self-restrained; they who are accepting of destiny, wise, free from malice and lust: these are the witnesses of the world.

These three conditions are said to be the perfect way of dharma: a man must not wrong another, he must bestow alms, and he must always be truthful. High-souled men of honourable convictions and righteous conduct,

who are kind to all and full of compassion, leave this world with contentment.

Freedom from malice, patience, peace of mind, contentment, pleasant speech, renunciation of desire and anger, conduct and actions disciplined by the dictates of the scriptures, make for pure goodness. Those who are steady in virtue follow these ways and, having reached the pinnacle of knowledge, and having learnt how to distinguish good from bad, escape putting their souls in grave danger.

O Great Brahmana, I have told you about dharma, as I know it and as I have heard," said the butcher,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 207

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Yudhishtira, the pious butcher then said to the Brahmana, "My actions are cruel but, Brahmana, destiny is powerful and it is difficult to evade the consequences of your past actions. This is karmic evil arising out of sins I committed in a previous life. O Brahmana, I am always punctilious in avoiding evil.

God takes away life; the executioner is merely an instrument; and we, too, are karmic agents. The animals whose meat I sell also acquire karma, because they give pleasure to gods, guests and servants when they are served as well-prepared dishes, thereby propitiating the spirits of their ancestors.

It is said authoritatively that herbs and vegetables, deer, birds and wild animals are the food of all creatures. King Sibi, the son of Usinara, of great forbearance, reached heaven, which is not easy, by giving away his own flesh.

In olden times, two thousand cows and two thousand other animals were slaughtered every day in King Rantideva's kitchen, and he acquired unrivalled fame by distributing food with meat, daily. Animals have to be sacrificed for the performance of the quarterly rites. The saying that the sacred fire is fond of animal flesh has come down to us from ages past. At yagnas, animals are invariably killed by Brahmanas, and these animals,

purged of sin by the chanting of mantras, find Swarga. O Dvija, if the sacred fire had not been so fond of animal flesh in ancient times, meat could not have become a part of our diet.

As regards meat, this rule has been laid down by sages: whoever partakes of animal food after having first offered it respectfully to the Devas and the Pitrs, is not polluted by what he does, and such a man is not considered to have partaken of the meat in the same way that a brahmacharin who has intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period is nevertheless considered to be a good Brahmana. This law has been declared after deliberations on its propriety, Dvijottama.

King Sudasa, when suffering from a curse, often used to prey upon men; what is your opinion of this? And, good Brahmana, I know that my life is a consequence of my own karma, and I obtain my livelihood from this profession. To forsake one's inherent occupation is considered a sin; whereas pursuing one's svadharma is, definitely, meritorious.

The karma of a former life is inescapable, and in determining the consequences of one's karma, the Creator has maintained this law. A person living out the results of his evil karma must always think about how he can atone and extricate himself from doom. The karma that follows evil can be expiated in many ways. Accordingly, Brahmanasreshta, I am charitable, truthful, and assiduously do I serve my superiors; I am respectful and devoted to Brahmanas, and do not indulge in pride or idle gossip.

Farming is considered a praiseworthy occupation, but it is well-known that even there, great harm is done to animal life because, in the process of ploughing the earth, numberless small creatures living underground are killed. Do you not agree? O Brahmana, vrihi and other types of rice are all living organisms. What is your opinion?

Men hunt wild animals, kill them and eat their meat; they cut down trees and herbs; but, Brahmana, there are countless living things in trees, in fruits and in water. Do you not think so?

All creation, Dvija, is full of animal life, sustaining itself with food derived from living organisms. Have you not noticed that fish prey upon fish, that animals prey upon other species, and that other species eat their own kind? While walking, men trample and kill uncountable living creatures. Even wise and enlightened men destroy life in various ways, while sleeping or resting. What do you say to this? The earth and the air

swarm with living creatures, which are unknowingly killed by men. Is this not so?

The injunction that people should not harm any creature was ordained long ago by men who were ignorant of the true facts. Brahmana, there is not a man on the face of this earth who is innocent of injuring living creatures. I have thought deeply about this and have come to this conclusion. Even the Rishi, good Brahmana, whose vow is to do no harm to any creature, inflicts injury on animal life, except that the harm is less.

Kshatriyas of great qualities defiantly do evil, of which they are not ashamed. Good men acting in an exemplary way are not praised by other good men; nor are bad men acting in evil ways praised by their evil peers; friends are not pleasant to friends, despite their noble qualities; and foolish pedants denigrate the virtues of their teachers. This reversal of the natural order of things, O excellent Brahmana, is common. What do you think about all this?

There is much that one can say about the integrity or vileness of our actions. All said and done, whoever adheres to his dharma surely acquires renown," says Markandeya.' "

CANTO 208

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'O Yudhishtira, the good and compassionate butcher then said to the Brahmana, "Our elders have handed down to us, by word of mouth, the wisdom of the Sruti, which says that the ways of dharma are subtle, diverse and infinite.

When life is at stake and in the matter of marriage, one is permitted to tell an untruth. Untruth sometimes leads to the triumph of truth but, conversely, truth can also maintain lies. Whichever is most conducive to the good of all creatures is considered the truth. Dharma is thus perverted; mark its subtle ways.

Man's actions are either good or bad, and he surely reaps their fruits. The ignorant man, having reached a miserable state, abuses the gods, not knowing that his condition is the consequence of his own evil karma. The foolish, the scheming and the fickle, good Brahmana, always attain the opposite of happiness; they find misery. Neither learning nor morals, nor personal exertion can save them. If the fruits of our efforts were not dependent on anything else, people would gain the object of their desire merely by striving for it.

Able, intelligent and diligent persons are frustrated in their efforts and do not obtain the fruits of their actions. On the other hand, those who live by deception, and who harm others, thrive. There are some who achieve

prosperity without trying too hard; and there are others, who, even with the utmost effort, are unable to achieve their ends.

Misers worship the gods and practise severe austerities with the object of having sons, and those healthy sons, born in full term, turn out to be a disgrace to their family; whereas others born under the same circumstances live decent and comfortable lives, enjoying the wealth passed down to them by their ancestors.

The diseases that a man suffers from are undoubtedly the result of his own karma, which traps him, like a small deer in a hunter's hands; and he suffers agony. And, O Brahmana, just as a hunter cuts off the flight of his quarry, skilful physicians check the progress of the disease with their medicines.

The most devout and knowledgeable men say that those who have the wherewithal to enjoy the good things that life has to offer are prevented from doing so because of chronic bowel disorders; they say that many that are strong and powerful suffer and have great difficulty earning a livelihood; they say that every man is helpless, overcome by sorrow and illusion, and repeatedly tossed about and dragged under by the powerful current of his own actions, his karma.

If there were absolute freedom of action, no creature would die, none would decay, none would have to await his doom, and every man would attain the object of his desire. Everyone wants to outdistance his neighbours in the race of life, and men strive to the utmost of their power to this end; but the result is unpredictable.

Many are born under the influence of the same star and the same astrological concatenations; but there is great diversity in the maturity of their actions. Dvijottama, no person can be the dispenser of his own lot. The actions done in a previous existence bear fruit in our present life. The soul is eternal and everlasting, but the physical body is impermanent and is destroyed in this world. So, when life is extinguished it is only the body that is destroyed; the soul, bonded to its actions, lives on to take birth in another body."

The Brahmana replied, "O learned one, you have grasped the mysteries of karma, and are expert at discourse. I want to know how the soul becomes immortal."

The butcher replied, "The spirit does not die, it only rehouses itself. Those who foolishly say that all creatures die are mistaken. The soul fits

itself to another frame, and its change of home is called death. In the world of men, no man lives the consequences of another man's karma; he reaps the consequences of what he does.

The consequences of actions, once done, cannot be avoided. The virtuous become endowed with great virtues, and sinful men become the perpetrators of evil deeds. Men's karma follows them and influences the conditions of their rebirth."

The Brahmana asked, "Why does the spirit take its birth, and how does it become sinful or virtuous? And how, excellent one, does it come to belong to a sinful or virtuous man?"

The butcher replied, "This mystery has to do with procreation. I shall briefly describe to you, Brahmanottama, how the soul is born again with its accumulated load of karma, the righteous soul in the virtuous and the evil soul in the sinful. Through the performance of virtuous actions it reaches the state of the celestials, and by a combination of good and evil it acquires the human condition; by indulging in sensual and base ways it is born into the lower species of animals; and by outright sin it goes to naraka, to hell.

Afflicted with the miseries of birth, death and old age, man is fated to rot from the consequences of his own actions. Passing through thousands of births, and through naraka, our spirits wander, bound by ropes of their own karma.

Animate beings become miserable in the next world because of their own actions, and as a result of those miseries, they assume lower births and go on to accumulate new karma. They suffer again, like sickly men eating unwholesome food; and although they are thus afflicted, they think they are happy and at ease, and consequently their fetters remain in place and more fresh karma builds. Suffering from all kinds of grief, they spin about dizzily in this world like a loose wheel.

If they shrug off their bonds and purify themselves by their actions, and if they practise penance and tapasya, then, O Brahmanottama, they attain mukti. By casting off their karmic fetters and through purifying deeds, men reach that blissful state where misery is unknown. The sinful man, who is addicted to vice, never stops being iniquitous. So, must we strive to do what is good and desist from doing what is wrong.

The person who, with whole-hearted gratitude and free from malice, strives to do good attains the four purusharthas: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Those who are purified of sins, wise, forbearing, steadfast in

dharma and self-restrained enjoy uninterrupted well-being in this world and the next. Man must live by the standards of the good and emulate the righteous: there are many learned and virtuous men who are versed in the Shastras. It is man's dharma to follow his own inherent vocation, his svadharma, which prevents confusion.

The wise man delights in virtue and lives by righteousness. Brahmanottama, such a man, with his acquired wealth of righteousness, waters the root of the particular plant of dharma in which he finds the most virtue. Thus does the godly man calm and still his mind. He is pleased with his friends in this world and also attains happiness in the next. Virtuous persons, excellent one, acquire authority and enjoy the pleasures of beauty, flavour, sound and touch as they wish. These are the rewards of dharma.

However, excellent Brahmana, the enlightened man is not satisfied with reaping the fruits of righteousness. Not content with that, and with the light of spiritual wisdom that resides in him, he becomes indifferent to pain and pleasure; and he is unaffected by evil. He chooses to give up worldly pursuits, but he does not forsake dharma.

Realising that everything in the world is transient, he attempts to renounce it all. He does not rely on chance, but designs the means of attaining his salvation. So, renouncing all worldly pleasures and avoiding sin, he becomes pure and, at last, attains moksha.

Spiritual wisdom is the main requirement for man to attain salvation, and surrender and patience are its roots. By this means he achieves all that he desires. By subduing the senses and by a life of truthfulness and fortitude, he attains, O Brahmana, the supreme state of Brahman."

The Brahmana asked, "O most devout of men, what are these senses you speak of, and how are they subdued? What does one gain by subduing the senses, and how does one get the benefits of it? I want to know about these things," ' says Markandeya."

CANTO 209

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Hear, O Yudhishtira, what the virtuous butcher said when the Brahmana questioned him.

He said, "Men begin by bending their minds to the acquisition of knowledge. Once that end is met, they work on great tasks and then indulge their desires and the pleasures of the senses—beauty, taste, and so on. Dharma, artha and kama.

Attachment follows, then envy, then avarice, and the light of spirituality is extinguished. When men are influenced by avarice, and overcome by envy and attachment, dharma no longer guides their minds, and their lives become a mockery of virtue. Practising dharma with hypocrisy, they are content to acquire wealth dishonourably and, with this ill-gotten wealth, their minds become enamoured of evil ways, and they are filled with a desire to sin. And, good Brahmana, when their friends and wise men try to dissuade them, they answer with sophistry, neither sound nor convincing.

Their addiction to evil makes them sin in thought, word and deed, and kills all their good qualities, and these evil men cultivate other evil ones as friends. They suffer misery in this world as well as in the next. This is the sinful man's nature.

Now hear about the man of virtue. He discerns evil with spiritual insight, and is able to discriminate between joy and grief; he is respectfully

attentive to men of wisdom and from practising virtue, his soul leans towards dharma."

The Brahmana said, "You have explained dharma to me in a way that no one else could. Your spiritual power is great; you seem to be a great sage."

The butcher replied, "We worship the great Brahmanas with the same honour that we give our ancestors, and we always propitiate them, before anyone else, with offerings of food. In this world, wise men put their hearts into doing what pleases them. I will now describe to you what pleases them. But first I will bow in reverence to Brahmanas as a varna. Learn the Brahmana dharma from me.

This whole Universe is unconquerable in its totality and is made of the panchamahabhutas, the five great elements; it is Brahman, and there is nothing higher. The Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Sky are the mahabhutas; and form, odour, sound, touch and taste are their characteristic properties. These properties, too, have their own properties.

Three qualities characterise each property and, of them, consciousness, also called the mind, is the most important. In seventh place is intelligence and after that comes egoism; then come the five senses, then the soul, then the moral gunas—sattva, rajas and tamas. These seventeen are the abstract, or incomprehensible, qualities.

Now that I have described all this to you, is there anything else you want to know?" said the vendor of meat.' "

CANTO 210

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'O Bhaarata, the Brahmana, who found the meat-seller's discourse so pleasing, said, "Devout one, you said that there are five great elements; do describe fully all the lakshanas or properties of any one of the five."

The butcher replied, "Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Sky all have properties that overlap each other. I will describe them to you. Earth, O Brahmana, has five qualities; Water has four, Fire three and Air and Sky together have three. Sound, touch, shape, smell and taste are the five lakshanas of Earth; sound, touch, shape and taste belong to Water; sound, touch and shape are the three properties of Fire; Air has two properties—sound and touch; and sound alone is the Sky's.

O Brahmana, these fifteen properties that are inherent in the five elements exist in everything of which this Universe is made. They are not opposed to one another, but co-exist in combinations. When the Universe is cast into chaos, then every physical being, in its proper time, assumes a new physical body. Each of these bodily receptacles come to life and die in their due order.

There are five elementary substances of which all the mobile and immobile world is composed. Whatever the senses can perceive is called vyakta, knowable or comprehensible, and whatever is beyond the reach of

the senses and can only be perceived by the imagination is known as avyakta.

When a person sets out on the quest for Atma gyana, knowledge of the Self, after having subdued the senses, which have their own roles to play in relation to the external world, then he sees his own soul pervading the Universe, and the Universe reflected in himself. The man who is bound to his previous karma, though learned in the highest spiritual wisdom, can only know his soul's objective existence; but he whose soul is unaffected by the conditions around him is never subject to sorrow, because his soul has absorbed the spirit of Brahman.

When a man has overcome the influence of illusion, his human virtues, consisting of the essence of spiritual wisdom, turn to spiritual enlightenment, which illumines the minds of all beings. The omnipotent Spirit regards such a man as one who is without beginning or end, who is self-existent, unchangeable, without material form, and incomparable.

This, O Brahmana, is the result of self-discipline; and this self-discipline can only be acquired by subduing the senses. It cannot be otherwise, because heaven and hell are both dependent on our senses. When subdued they lead to Swarga; when indulged in they lead to ruin. This subjugation of the senses is the highest path to spiritual enlightenment.

Our senses are at the root of our spiritual advancement as well as of our spiritual downfall. By indulging them, a man becomes addicted to vice, and by subduing them, he attains salvation. The self-restrained person who acquires mastery over the six senses is never tainted with sin, and evil has no power over him.

Man's physical body has been compared to a chariot, his soul to a charioteer and his senses to horses. A dexterous man drives about without confusion, like a confident charioteer with well-broken horses. That man who knows how to wield the reins of spirited horses—the six senses inherent in our nature—is an excellent charioteer.

When our senses become uncontrollable, like swift horses given their heads on the open road, we must patiently rein them in for, with patience, we can bring them under control. When a man's mind is overpowered by any one of the senses, running wild, he loses his reason and becomes like a ship tossed by storms on the high seas.

Men allow illusion to deceive them, with the hope of reaping the fruit of those six senses. The effects of these six are studied by men of spiritual

insight, and they are the ones who reap the rewards of their clear perception," said the meat vendor.' "

CANTO 211

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continued, 'Bhaarata, the Brahmana listened attentively to the meat-seller's discourse and asked him, "Describe the qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas to me."

The butcher replied, "I will describe each of their characteristics separately. Listen.

Tamas is characterised by spiritual delusion; rajas incites men to action; sattva is of great splendour and the greatest of the three.

He who is spiritually ignorant, foolish and a dreamer, who is idle, apathetic and swayed by anger and arrogance, is under the influence of tamas. The man who speaks pleasantly, who is thoughtful and free from envy, and who is industrious because he wishes to benefit from his hard work, and who is compassionate, is influenced by rajas. He who is resolute and patient, who has no anger, who is free from malice, and who is wise and forbearing, who does not work out of a desire to benefit from his work, is said to be under the influence of sattva.

When a sattvic man allows himself to be influenced by worldliness he is unhappy; but he shuns it when he realises its significance. Then, he begins to feel indifferent to worldly matters; his pride decreases, and righteousness increases; and he reconciles the values that are in conflict within him. Conscious self-restraint becomes unnecessary. A man may be born a Sudra,

but if he has sattva, he can attain the level of a Vaisya or of a Kshatriya; and if he is steadfast in dharma, he can become equal to a Brahmana.

I have described the gunas to you; is there anything else you wish to know?" said the meat vendor.'

CANTO 212

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

'The Brahmana asked, "How does Fire, the vital force, combine with Earth, matter, to become the physical body which houses living spirits? And how does prana, the life-force, give the parts of the body in which it resides impetus to act?"

The butcher replied, "Prana, the vital spirit, manifesting itself in the seat of consciousness, sparks the body into action. It is the soul, which is present in both, that acts. The past, the present and the future are inseparable from the soul, and it is the highest aspect of any being. It is the essence of the Supreme Spirit, and we adore it. It is the life-giving principle of all creatures, and it is the eternal spirit—Purusha. It is splendid.

It is the intelligence and the ego; it is the seat of all elements. It is sustained by that subtle life-force, prana, while it inhabits a corporeal frame, in all its internal and external interactions with mind or matter.

Each being, however, goes its own way by the action of another subtle force called samana. Samana transforms itself into apana, or air, and, supported by the top of the stomach, carries the body's waste to the kidneys and intestines.

This same force is present in the three elements—effort, exertion and power—and men learned in science have named it udana. When it manifests itself at the energy centres of the human system it is known as

vyana. Vyana disperses heat into the tissues and muscles of the body to transform food and fluids into energy. Vyana combines with prana and the other forces to produce heat, the body's internal energy, which causes digestion.

The energy produced by the combination of prana and apana reacts within samana and udana to generate the physical growth of the body that consists of the seven substances—bones, muscles and the rest.

Apana is that portion of its seat extending as far as the rectum; from there, arteries spread in the five forces, of which prana is one. Heat acts on prana, which strikes the extremity of the apana region and recoils, to react on the heat.

Above the navel is the region of undigested food and below it the area of digestion. Prana and all the other forces of the body are seated in the navel. The arteries coming from the heart run upwards, downwards and obliquely, carrying the essence of our food. The arteries are controlled by the ten pranic forces.

Yogis, who have overcome every obstacle, and who view all things objectively and impartially, whose souls are in their intellect, find the Supreme Spirit.

Prana and apana are present in beings. The soul or atman is clothed in corporeal disguise, and is present in the eleven elemental physical aspects of life forms. Although eternal and undying, its normal state is altered by its habitat, just as fire burns in a fireplace, constant, yet taking the shape of its container.

The soul, which is divine, is related to the body in which it lives in the same way as a drop of water that rolls on the sleek surface of a lotus leaf.

Sattva, rajas and tamas are the attributes of all life; life is the attribute of the soul; and the soul is an attribute of the Supreme Brahman. This living principle, which is active in itself and induces activity in its attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas, is anchored in inert matter. It is that Brahman by which the seven worlds are incited to action and is called the most high by men of spiritual insight.

In all these elements, the eternal spirit does not show itself, but can be known by those who are learned in Atma gyana, who have extraordinary vision. A pure-minded man, by purifying his heart, can destroy the good and evil karmic effects of his actions and attain eternal bliss by the enlightenment of his inner spirit. That state of peace is compared to the

sound sleep of an innocent, happy person, or the steady light of a lamp trimmed by a skilful hand.

A pure man, living on a frugal diet, perceives the Supreme Spirit in his own soul, and by meditating in the evening and the small hours of the night, he sees the Nirguna Paramatman, the Supreme Spirit, by the light of his heart, shining like a bright lamp, and so he attains moksha.

Greed and anger must somehow be subdued, because self-restraint is the most sacred virtue that a man can practise. It is considered the means by which a man can cross the sea of misery. A man must protect his righteousness from being swallowed by the evil consequences of anger; he must safeguard his virtues from his pride; he must protect his learning from vanity, and his own spirit from illusion.

Liberality is the best of virtues, and forbearance is the most powerful; the knowledge of our inner spiritual nature is the best of all knowledge, and truthfulness the best of all religious duties. Speaking the truth is good and so is the knowledge of truth, but the greatest good of all creatures is brought about by what we know as the Highest Truth.

He whose actions are not performed for the sake of reward or blessing, he who has sacrificed everything to achieve renunciation—this man is a real Sannyasin and is truly wise. No one can teach a man to commune with Brahman, not even his spiritual Guru. To solve the eternal mystery the Guru can only set us on the path, which is to renounce the material world through yoga.

We must not harm any creature and must live in peace and friendship with all. In our present existence, we must not avenge ourselves on any creature. Self-denial, peace of mind, renunciation of hope, and equanimity are the ways by which enlightenment can be reached. The knowledge of the Self is the highest knowledge.

In this world as well as hereafter, a man must fulfil his dharma by renouncing all worldly desires and developing an attitude of stoicism and detachment, by which suffering is stilled.

The Muni who wants to have Moksha, salvation, which is so difficult to attain, must observe constant austerities, patience and self-restraint; he must give up attachment, which binds him to people and material things. These practices are the attributes of the Brahman. The gunas that we are conscious of reduce themselves to agunas, non-attributes, in Him, the Supreme Spirit.

He is not bound by anything, and is seen only by the development of spiritual vision. As soon as the illusion caused by ignorance is dispelled, supreme unalloyed joy is attained. By giving up the objects of pleasure and pain, and by severing the bonds to the things of this earth, a man may attain Brahman, and Moksha.

Brahmanottama, I have explained this to you in brief, as I have heard it. What else do you wish to know?" said the meat-seller.' "

CANTO 213

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Yudhishtira, when the Brahmana heard the explanation of this subtle mystery of Mukti he was overjoyed, and he said to the butcher, "All that you have explained is sound, and it seems to me that there is nothing you do not know about the mysteries of true religion."

The butcher replied, "Good and great Brahmana, you will see for yourself the truth of all that I have told you, because of which I have attained this blissful state. Come into the inner apartment of my home; you should meet my parents."

The Brahmana went in and saw a fine, beautiful mansion. It was a magnificent house divided into four suites of rooms. The Devas had admired this house and indeed it looked like one of their own palaces. It was furnished with fine chairs and beds, and sweet perfumes hung in the air. The meat-seller's parents, clad in white robes, had finished their meal and were seated at ease. The butcher prostrated himself before them and touched his head to their feet.

His elderly parents said to him, "Rise, O pious one; may dharma shield you. We are always pleased with your goodness; may you be blessed with a long life, knowledge and keen intelligence; may all your desires be fulfilled.

You are a good and dutiful son, and you look after us so well. Indeed, you do not worship any god as you do us.

By constantly controlling yourself, you have gained the discipline and power of a Brahmana. Your ancestors are gratified by your self-restraint and by the way you worship us. In thought, word and action, your attention to us never flags and it seems that you never have any thought in your mind except how to please us. Son, you work as hard to please us as Rama, the son of Jamadagni, did to please his old parents, even more."

Then the butcher introduced the Brahmana to his parents, and they received him with the customary salutation of welcome. The Brahmana, accepting their welcome humbly, enquired if they, their children and servants were in good health, and happy.

The aged couple replied, "O Brahmana, we are all well. Were you able to reach this place without much difficulty?"

The Brahmana replied that he had. Now the meat vendor said to the Brahmana, "Worshipful one, my parents are the idols that I worship; whatever is due to the gods, I do for them. Just as men worship the thirty-three Devas with Indra at their head, I worship my aged parents. Just as Brahmanas strive to procure offerings to make to their gods, I work diligently to make offerings to these two deities of mine.

My father and my mother, O Brahmana, are my supreme gods, and I want to please them always, with offerings of flowers, fruit and jewels. To me they are like the three sacred Agnis that learned men speak of, like the Yagnas, or the four Vedas.

My five pranas, my wife, children and friends are all dedicated to their service. With my wife and children, I always attend on them. Brahmanottama, with my own hands I assist in their bathing; I wash their feet and give them food; and I speak to them only of pleasant matters and never what is unpleasant. I consider pleasing them to be my highest dharma, even if what that entails might not be justifiable. And I am always diligent in serving them.

One's parents, the sacred fire, the soul and the spiritual Guru—these five, good Brahmana, are worthy of the highest reverence by a person who seeks prosperity. By serving them properly, one acquires the punya of perpetually keeping the sacred fire burning. It is the eternal duty of all grihastas," said the vendor of meat.'

CANTO 214

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Having introduced his parents to the Brahmana as his highest gurus, the butcher said, "Now you see the power of my dharma, which has enhanced my inner spiritual vision. It is for this purpose that the lady, who is self-restrained, truthful and devoted to her husband, told you to come to Mithila to meet the butcher who would explain the mysteries of religion to you."

The Brahmana said, "Pious one, so steadfast in fulfilling your dharma, I remember what that chaste devi said, and I am convinced that you are truly endowed with every fine quality."

The butcher replied, "I have no doubt that the good woman explained all this to you. Now listen to me and I will tell you what will benefit you.

Brahmana of impeachable character, you have wronged your father and mother by leaving home without their permission, in order to study the Vedas. You have not acted properly in this matter, because your sannyasin parents are old and have been blinded by their grief at losing you. Return home to console them, and may this always stand you in good stead. You have a noble mind and great tapasyashakti, and you are devout; but these qualities have not benefitted you. Go back immediately and comfort your parents.

Take my advice seriously, because what I say is for your weal. Brahmana, go home today."

The Brahmana said, "Surely, you speak the truth. May you prosper, pious one; I am pleased with you."

The butcher said, "Brahmana, your perseverance in the practice of the divine and ancient sanatana dharma, which even the pure-minded find so difficult to attain, makes you seem like a god. Return to your parents' side and waste no time in adoring them. I do not know of any higher dharma than this."

The Brahmana said, "It is my singular good fortune that has brought me here, and I am lucky to have met you. It is very difficult to find, in our midst, one who can explain the mysteries of dharma; there is hardly even one man in a thousand who is so knowledgeable about dharma.

I am glad, O great one, to have your friendship. May you prosper. You have pulled me back from the brink of hell. I know this is my destiny because of the manner in which you came into my life.

You have saved me just as his grandsons saved the fallen king Yayati. I will follow your advice and honour my father and mother. I know you are pure-hearted because no man whose heart is sullied could unravel these subtle intricacies of dharma. It is difficult indeed for a Sudra to understand these profound and complex concepts; and this puzzles me. You must have been born a Sudra because of your past karma. Most generous one, I am eager to know the truth about this. Tell me about it, as you see fit."

The butcher replied, "Good Brahmana, I revere Brahmanas. Listen, sinless one, to the story of my previous life. In my last life, I was a Brahmana, well-read in the Vedas, and an accomplished student of the Vedangas. It is my own fault that I have been degraded to my present condition.

A king, a skilled archer who was accomplished in dhanurveda, the science of archery, was my friend; and from being his companion, O Brahmana, I, too became a good archer. One day, the king, with his ministers and best warriors, went hunting. He killed a large number of deer near a hermitage.

I, too, good Brahmana, shot a swift, fierce arrow, which wounded a Rishi while his head was bent in prayer. He fell down on the ground, screaming, and he cried, 'I have done no harm to anyone. What sinful man has done this to me?'

My lord, I assumed I had shot a deer and went up, only to find the Rishi, his body pierced by my arrow. I was dismayed by the evil thing I had done, and said to that sage of great punya, who lay wailing on the ground, 'I did this unwittingly, O Rishi. You must forgive me my sin.'

But, O Brahmana, the Rishi said to me, 'You will be born as a cruel butcher in the Sudra caste,' " said the meat-seller.'

CANTO 215

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

'The butcher continued, "Cursed by the Muni, I tried to pacify him, 'Forgive me, O Muni, I did not do this on purpose. Worshipful one, do not be angry.'

The Rishi replied, 'I cannot withdraw the curse I have pronounced, but out of compassion for you I will do you a favour. Though born in the Sudra varna, you will be a pious man and worship your parents. And, by worshipping them, you will attain great punya. You will remember your past life, and you will go to Swargaloka. When you have been redeemed from this curse, you will become a Brahmana once more.'

Manavottama, thus did the powerful Rishi curse me and thus did I atone for my sin and placate him.

Then, excellent Brahmana, I drew out the arrow from his body and took him into the asrama; he was alive and he recovered. This is what happened to me long ago, in my last life, and I have told you how I will find heaven in the hereafter."

The Brahmana said, "O knowing one, do not grieve, for all men are subject to joy and sorrow. It is in keeping with your dharma that you slaughter animals and sell their meat, but you are always devoted to the path of virtue and learned in the mysterious ways of the world. What you do is your duty, and the taint of evil karma will not attach to you. After a short

time, you will regain your Brahmanic status. In fact, I consider you a Brahmana even now. I have no doubt about this.

The Brahmana who is vain and haughty, who is addicted to vice and wedded to evil, shameful practices, is like a Sudra. On the other hand, a Sudra who wears virtue, self-restraint and truth like ornaments is like a Brahmana. A man becomes a Brahmana by dint of his character; and by his own evil karma, a man invites doom. I believe that your sin has now been wiped away. You must not grieve, for men like you, who are so good, and learned in the subtleties of philosophy and the ways of the world, can have no cause for grief."

The butcher replied, "Physical illnesses should be cured with medicines, and mental ones with spiritual wisdom. This is the power of knowledge. Knowing this, wise men should not behave like callow boys. Only men of little intelligence are overpowered by grief when something unpleasant happens to them, or when something desirable does not.

All beings are subject to feelings of grief or joy; it is not unique to any single species of creature or class of men. Knowing that this is so, people quickly change their ways; and if they recognise it early, they can cure themselves of it altogether.

Men who worry about this make themselves unhappy. Wise men, whose knowledge has made them contented, and who are indifferent to sorrow and joy alike, are truly happy. The wise are always contented and the foolish always discontented. There is no end to discontentment; contentment is the highest form of happiness. People who have found the perfect path do not grieve; they are aware of the final destiny of all creatures.

One must not give way to discontent. It is a noxious poison: it kills those who have not developed their intellect, like a snake kills a child. The man who lacks wisdom, and who is confused when he finds himself in a situation where he has to exercise his intellect, is hardly a man.

All our actions have their consequences. The man who lives a life of passive indifference to what happens around him achieves nothing. Instead of merely grumbling, one must try to find the way to gain freedom form spiritual bondage; and when the means to salvation are found, he must free himself from his dependence on the senses.

The man who has attained a high state of spiritual knowledge is always conscious of the impermanence of all phenomena. He keeps the final destruction of everything in mind and never grieves. I, too, O sage one, do

not grieve; I am biding my time while I live out this present life. Purushottama, that is why I am not plagued by uncertainty."

The Brahmana said, "You are wise and evolved; great is your intellect. You, who know the sacred scriptures, are content with your spiritual wisdom. I can see no faults in you. Farewell, O best of the pious; may you prosper; may righteousness be your armour; and may you be constant in dharma." '

Markandeya continues, 'The butcher said to the Brahmana, "*Tathaastu, so be it*."

The Brahmana walked around the meat-seller in pradakshina and left. The Brahmana went back home and was conscientious in his attention to his elderly parents.

This story I have told you, and which you wanted to hear, Yudhishtira my son, is replete with wisdom: the virtues of women's devotion to their husbands and of filial worship.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Mahamuni, you have narrated this wonderful story and, listening to you made the hours pass as if they were a mere moment. But, I am not yet satiated with listening to your discourse.' "

CANTO 216

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The noble Yudhishtira listens to this superb religious discourse, and he says to Rishi Markandeya, 'Why did Agni Deva, the Fire God, hide himself in water, and why did the splendid Angirasa become Agni to convey the oblations when Agni had disappeared into the water? Fire is one, but it seems to divide itself and become many. Worshipful one, I want to know about this and other things, as well.

How was Kumara born? How did he come to be known as the son of Agni? How was he born to Rudra, Ganga and Krittika? Holy Bhrigunandana, I am eager to learn how these things happened. Great Muni, I am curious about all this.'

Markandeya replies, 'There is an ancient tale told, about how Agni Deva, the conveyor of oblations, went in a temper to the forest in order to perform a penance. Angirasa transformed himself into Agni and freed the world from darkness and anguish with his warmth.

Long, long ago, Mahabaho, the great Angirasa performed a wonderful tapasya in his asrama. He was more splendid than the bearer of oblations, Agni Deva, and lit up the Universe. Agni was performing a penance at the same time and was annoyed by Angirasa's brilliance. Depressed and not knowing what to do, that god thought to himself, "Brahma has created

another Agni for the world. Because I have been at tapasya, my services as the Deity of fire have been dispensed with."

He thought about how he could re-establish himself as the god of fire. He saw the great Muni Angirasa warming the whole Universe, as fire does, and approached him slowly and fearfully.

Angirasa said to him, "Re-establish yourself quickly as the life-giving fire of the Universe. Everyone in Triloka knows that you were created by Brahma to dispel the primeval darkness. O Destroyer of darkness, occupy your proper place."

Agni replied, "My reputation is tarnished now, and you have become the Fire God. People will know you, and not me, as Agni. I have relinquished my status of being Fire God. You be the primeval fire, and I shall officiate as the second, or Prajapatyaka Agni."

Angirasa said, "You must re-instate yourself as the God of fire and the Destroyer of darkness, and resume your duty of ensuring that the people have a clear path to Swarga. Lord, make me have your first child." '

Markandeya continues, 'Hearing Angirasa's words, Agni complied and Angirasa had a son named Brihaspati. The Devas knew that he was Angirasa's first son, born of Agni, and, O Bhaarata, they came to probe the mystery; and they accepted Angirasa's explanation of how this had happened.

Now I will name and describe all the different types of fire, as the Brahmanas know them, and their uses.' "

CANTO 217

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, "O gem of the Kurus, Angirasa was the third son of Brahma and he had a wife named Subha. Hear about the children he had by her. Rajan, his son Brihaspati's fame was legend; he was generous and powerful. His intelligence and learning were profound, and he had a great reputation as a counsellor.

Angirasa's eldest daughter was Bhanumati; she was the most beautiful of all his children. His second daughter was called Raga, so named because she was loved by all creatures. Sinivali was his third daughter; her body was so slender that she was visible from certain angles and invisible from others; and for this reason she was compared to Rudra's daughter. Archishmati was his fourth daughter, and she was so named because of her radiance. His fifth daughter was Havishmati, so named because she accepted havis, oblations. The sixth daughter of Angirasa was called Mahishmati, and she was very devout. The intelligent Mahamati was his seventh daughter; she is always present at sacrifices of great grandeur. This revered daughter of Angirasa, who is known to be without rival, and about whom people utter the words *kuhu kuhu*, is also known as Kuhu Kuhu.' "

CANTO 218

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Brihaspati had a wife named Tara, who was from the Moon. She had six of his sons, born of six different fires, and one daughter.

Brihaspati's son Sanju was a great tapasvin; he is the fire in whose honour ghee is offered at the Paurnamasya yagna and other sacrifices. At the Chaturmasya yagna and Aswamedha yagna, animals are offered in his honour, and we know him by the way he manifests himself in multiple flames. Sanju's wife was called Satya; she was of matchless beauty and was born from Dharma, to embody truth. Sanju's son was the whole, blazing fire, and he had three deeply religious daughters.

The fire which is honoured with the first oblations at all sacrifices is his first son, named Bharadwaja. Sanju's second son is called Bharata, in whose honour ghee is offered with the sacrificial ladle, the sruk, at all the full-moon—Paurnamasya—sacrifices. Beside these, there were other sons of whom Bharata was the eldest; and he had a daughter called Bharati.

Bharata is the son of Prajapati Bharata Agni. And, Bhaaratottama, because of the honour accorded to him, he is also called "Great".

Vira is Bharadwaja's wife; and her son is also named Vira. The Brahmanas say that he is worshipped with the same hymns as Soma is, and with offerings of ghee. Joined with Soma during the second round of ghee

oblation, he is also called Rathaprabhu, Rathadhwana and Kumbhareta. He had a son named Siddhi by his wife Sarayu, who outshone the Sun in splendour. As the presiding deity of the fire sacrifice, he is always named in the hymns of praise to Fire.

The fire named Nischayavana only praises the Earth; his good name, splendour and prosperity never wane. The sinless fire, named Satya, blazing with pure energy, is Nischayavana's son. He is free from all impurities and is not defiled by sin; he is the regulator of time. This fire has another name, Nishkriti, because he brought about the Nishkriti, redemption, of all creatures. When properly worshipped, he guarantees good fortune. His son is Swana, the generator of all diseases; he inflicts intense suffering, making his victims cry out aloud. He lives in the intelligence of the Universe.

Brihaspati's third son is called Viswajit by men of spiritual wisdom. The fire that manifests as the internal heat of the body, which digests the food of all creatures, is the fourth son of Brihaspati, known throughout all the worlds, O Bhaarata, as Viswabhug. He is self-restrained, of great dharma, and a brahmacharin; Brahmanas worship him at the Paka yagna. The sacred river Gomati is Viswabhug's wife, and all pious men perform their sacred rites on her banks.

That apocalyptic water-drinking sea fire called Badava is Brihaspati's fifth son. This Brahmic agni has a tendency to move upwards and is, therefore, called Urdhvabhaga. Its home is the vital air, the life force called Prana. The sixth son is Svishtakrit; through him oblations became svishta, or properly offered. The udagdhara oblation is always made in his honour. The fire called Manyuti becomes enraged when the Earth's beings become peaceful.

The inexorable and most volatile fire is Brihaspati's daughter, and is known as Swaha; she is present in all matter. Swaha had three sons by the three gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. By Sattva she had a son whose beauty had no equal in Devaloka. The gods named him Kama Agni. By Rajas she had a son named Amogha, the invincible fire, the destroyer of his enemies in battle. He is sure of victory, and so, he curbs his anger. He is armed with a bow and sits adorned with flower garlands on a chariot.

By Tamas also Swaha had a son, the great Uktha, the means to salvation, who is praised by the three Ukthas. He is the originator of the sacred words of the Veda, and is, therefore, Samaswasam, or the means to Moksha,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 219

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Uktha performed a severe penance lasting for many years, with the aim of having a son as pious as a Brahmana. He invoked, with Vyahriti hymns, the five sacred fires—Kasyapa, Vasistha, Prana, Angirasa's son Chyavana, and Shuvarchaka.

The flames emitted a form of bright and vivacious energy in five different colours. The head of this form was the colour of a raging fire; its arms dazzled like the Sun; its skin and eyes were tawny gold; and its feet were black, O Bhaarata. The five who were invoked were of great tapasyashakti and gave the form its five colours, and that is why the celestial being that emerged from the fire is described as being one with these five. This being, Tapa, is the progenitor of the five tribes.

The penance continued for ten thousand years and an awesome, dreadful fire blazed forth, that was born of the Pitrs in order to begin the work of creation. From his head and mouth he created day and night—Brihad and Rathantara—who are the thieves of life. He created Siva from his navel, Indra from his strength, Vayu and Agni from his soul, and from his two arms the hymns Udatta and Anudatta. He produced the mind, and the five senses, and everything else as well.

Next, he created the five sons of the Pitrs: Pranidhi was the son of Brihadratha, who was Kasyapa's son. Bhanu was the grandson of

Chyavana; Saubhara was Suvarchaka's son; and Anudatta was the son of Prana. He is said to have created these twenty-five beings.

Tapa created fifteen other gods who obstruct sacrifices. They are Subhima, Atibhima, Bhima, Bhimabala and Abala, Sumitra, Mitravanta, Mitragna, Mitravardhana, Mitradharma and Surapravira, Vira and Suresha, Suvarchasa and Surahantara. These are divided into three classes of five each and, living in this world, they destroy the sacrifices of the Devas in Devaloka. They frustrate their goals and spoil their oblations of ghee. They do this only to spite the sacred fires that convey these offerings to the gods.

If the officiating priests are watchful, they place oblations in honour of these despoilers outside the sacrificial altar, and this prevents them from entering the place where the sacred fire is lit. They convey the oblations on wings. When appeased with hymns, they do not spoil the sacrificial rites.

Brihadukta, one of Tapa's sons, belongs to the Earth. He is worshipped here in this world by pious men performing Agnihotra sacrifices. Another son, Rathantara, accepts oblations on behalf of Mitravinda. The renowned Tapa was very happy with his sons.' "

CANTO 220

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'The fire named Bharata was governed by strict laws of tapasya. He is also called Pushtimati because, when he is propitiated satisfactorily, he guarantees Pushti, prosperity. He is called Bharata because he nurtures all creatures.

The other fire is named Siva because he is devoted to the worship of Shakti, the feminine energy of the forces of Nature; and because he always alleviates the sorrows of all creatures that are troubled, he is called Siva, the giver of weal.

When Tapa had acquired great ascetic wealth by his tapasya, he had an intellectually brilliant son named Purandara, to inherit this wealth. He had another son named Ushma, who is the fire that is present in matter when it vaporises. A third son was Manu, who officiated as Prajapati. Brahmanas who are learned in the Vedas speak of the exploits of his sons, the fires Sambhu and the effulgent Avasathya.

Thus did Tapa give birth to five Urjaskara agnis, all bright as gold, that take the Soma rasa during sacrifices.

The great Sun God, when tired after his day's labours, is the fire known as Prasanta. He created the Asuras and other terrible creatures. Angirasa created Prajapati Bhanu, one of Tapa's sons. Brahmanas learned in the Vedas refer to this son as Brihadbhanu, the great Bhanu. Bhanu married

Supraja, the daughter of Surya Deva. She and Brihadbhanu gave birth to six sons. Let me describe their children for you.

There is the fire who gives strength to the weak, and he is called Balada, the giver of strength. He is the first son of Bhanu. Then there is the fire that looks dreadful when the world is in a state of tranquillity. He is called Manjuman, and he is the second son of Bhanu. Next is the fire in whose honour oblations of ghee are poured during the Darsa and Paurnamasya yagnas, who is known to the people of the world as Vishnu. He is the third of Bhanu's sons, and he has two names, Angirasa and Dhritiman.

Then there is the fire to whom, with Indra, the Agrayana oblation is given. He is named Agrayana, and he is Bhanu's fourth son. The fifth son of Bhanu is Agraha, from whom the daily oblations made for the performance of the Chaturmasya yagna are taken. And Stubha is the sixth son of Bhanu.

Nisa was another wife of Manu's, and she, too, is named Bhanu. She had one daughter, two Agnishomas, and also five other agnis, fire gods. The effulgent Fire God who is honoured with the first offerings, along with Indra, god of the clouds, is Vaiswanara. The second son of Manu and Bhanu is the agni called Viswapati, the lord of all the worlds. The daughter of Manu is called Svishtakrit, because one earns great punya by offering oblations to her. Rohini is her other name, and though she was the daughter of Hiranyakasipu, she became his wife because of her evil deeds. She is, however, one of the Prajapatis.

And that other fire which inhabits the life-breaths of all creatures, and which gives them life, is called Sannihita. He makes our senses recognise sound and shape. Then comes the divine spirit, whose path is stained with black and white marks, who fans fire, and who, though sinless, is responsible for evil karma. The wise regard him, the fire Kapila, as a great Rishi. Kapila is the propounder of the system of Yoga called Sankhya.

The fire through which the elemental spirits always receive Agra, or offerings, which people make at the performance of all special rites, is called Agrani.

There are the bright fires, known the world over, which were created for the rectification of the Agnihotra rites when they were marred by any defects. If fires overlap because of the wind, they must be set right by performing Ashtakapala puja in honour of the fire Suchi.

If the southern fire comes in contact with the two other fires, then the rectifying Ashtakapala rites must be performed in honour of the agni Viti. If

the fires called Nivesa, burning in its allotted place, comes into contact with the fire called Devagni, then the Ashtakapala rites must be performed in honour of the fire Suchi.

If the constant fire is touched by a woman during her menstrual period, then the Ashtakapala rites must be performed in honour of the agni called Vasuman. If, during the performance of Agnihotra pujas, anyone speaks of the death of any creature, or if an animal dies, the rites can be purified by means of the Ashtakapala rites in honour of the Surabhiman agni.

The Brahmana who, because he is ill, is unable to offer oblations to the sacred fire for three nights, must make amends by performing the Ashtakapala rites in honour of the northern fire. He who has performed the Darsa and the Paurnamasya rites must make any necessary rectifications with the performance of the Ashtakapala rites in honour of the Patikrit fire.

If the fire of a birthing room comes in contact with the undying sacred fire, it must be purified by performing Ashtakapala rites in honour of the Agniman agni,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 221

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Mudita was the favourite wife of the fire Saha. She used to live in water. And Saha, who was the lord of earth and sky, had a son, the sacred fire named Adbhuta, with her. Learned Brahmanas believe that this fire is the ruler and inner soul of all creatures. He is worthy of worship, resplendent, and the lord of all the mahabhutas, the elements. And this fire, also called Grihapati, is worshipped at all sacrifices and is the instrument by which all oblations made in this world are conveyed to the gods.

This son of Saha, Adbhuta, the great fire, is the soul of the waters; he is the prince and ruler of the sky and the lord of everything great. His son, the Bharatagni, consumes the dead bodies of all creatures. His first offering, Kratu, is known as Niyata at the performance of the Agnishtoma yagna. That mighty elemental fire, Saha, is always missed by the Devas because when he sees Niyata approaching him he hides in the sea from fear of contamination.

On one occasion, the Devas searched for him everywhere but could not find him.

The fire saw Atharva and said to him, "Valiant being, perform the oblations for the Devas. I am disabled and weak. Take the form of the red-eyed fire and do me this favour!"

Having made this request of Atharvan, the fire went away to hide. But the fish revealed his hiding place and the furious fire cursed them in anger, saying, "You shall be the food of all creatures in various ways."

Then that fire, Saha, the conveyor of oblations, spoke to Atharva again and made the same request. The Devas pleaded with him, but he refused to bring them their havis. He lost consciousness and died.

Leaving his material body, he entered the bowels of the earth, and wherever he met the earth, he created different metals. Energy emanated from him: earthly perfumes were created from his pus; the deodar, the cedar, sprang from his bones; glass emerged from his phlegm; the emerald came from his bile, and iron from his liver. Ever since, the Earth has been enriched with these three substances, wood, stone and metal. The clouds were made from his nails, and corals from his veins. And various other metals were produced from his body, O king.

After shedding his physical body, he remained absorbed in dhyana. When Bhrigu and Angirasa performed their penance, they succeeded in waking him and, gratified by their tapasya, he burned with intensity. But as soon as he saw Rishi Atharva, he dove into his watery hideout again.

At this extinguishing of the fire, the whole world was frightened, and sought the protection of Atharva. The Devas and other beings began to worship him. Atharva searched the sea while those anxious beings looked on in eager anticipation. He found the fire and began the work of creation. This is the story of how the fire was destroyed and then called back to life by the venerable Atharva. Now he carries the offerings of all creatures; and, living in the sea and always on the move, produced the various fires mentioned in the Vedas.

The mothers of the fires are the rivers: Sindhu, and the five rivers; Devika and Saraswati; Ganga, Satakumbha, Sarayu, and Gandaki; Charmanwati, Mahi, Medha and Medhatithi; the three, Tamravati, Vetravati, and Kausiki; Tamasa, Narmada and Godavari; Vena, Upavena, Bhima and Vadava, O Bhaarata; Bharati, Suprayoga, Kaveri and Murmura; Tungavena, Krishnavena, Kapila and Sona: these rivers are said to be the mothers of the fires.

The Adbhuta agni had a wife called Priya, and Vibhu was the eldest of his sons by her.

There are as many kinds of Soma yagnas as the number of fires. All this race of fires, first born of the spirit of Brahma, also sprang from Atri. Atri

conceived them as his sons, in his own mind, out of a desire to enhance creation. By this act, the agnis emerged from his Brahmic body.

I have told you the story of the origin of these fires. They are great, glorious and unrivalled in power; they are the dispellers of darkness. The powers of these fires are equal to that of the Adbhuta, as the Vedas tell us, because all these fires are one and the same. The adored and exalted being, the first Agni, must be thought of as the unity of all fires because, like the Jyotishtoma yagna, he issued from Angirasa's body in myriad forms.

This, that I have narrated to you, is the history of the great race of Agni who, when worshipped with various hymns, carries the offerings of all creatures to the gods.' "

CANTO 222

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Sinless scion of the Kurus, I have given you a detailed history of the many branches of the Agni clan, and I will now tell you the story of the birth of Kartikeya of the great intelligence. I will tell you about that wonderful and illustrious tejasvin, the son of the Adbhuta agni, born to the wives of the Brahmarishis.

In ancient times, the Devas and Asuras were always at war, and the terrible demons always defeated the gods. Indra saw how the Asuras decimated his armies and made up his mind to identify a leader for the armies of Devaloka.

He thought to himself, "I must find a powerful one who can rally and lead Swarga's army that has been devastated by the Danavas."

He went to the Manasa mountains and was absorbed in thought when he heard the heartrending cries of a woman, who said, "May someone come and save me by finding me a husband, or let him be my husband himself."

Purandara said to her, "Have no fear, devi," and, at once, he saw a Kesin, an Asura, wearing a crown and holding a mace in his hand, standing by her, and her hand in his rough grip. And he looked like a distant hill clad in metallic armour.

Indra addressed the Asura, saying, "Why do you behave so insolently towards this lady? Be aware that I am the god who wields the thunderbolt.

Desist from doing her any violence."

Kesin replied, "You leave her alone, Sakra; I want her for myself. Do you really think, O Slayer of Paka, that you will return home alive today?"

And he hurled his mace at Indra. Vasava dissected it in flight with his thunderbolt. Kesin, furious, flung a huge rock at him, which he of the hundred sacrifices shattered with his Vajra. A large piece of the rock fell on Kesin and, grievously injured, he fled, leaving the woman.

When the Asura had gone Indra said to the woman, "Who are you, and whose wife are you, beautiful one? What brings you here?"

CANTO 223

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

The woman replied, "I am a daughter of Prajapati Brahma, Lord of all creatures, and my name is Devasena. My sister Daityasena has been ravished by Kesin. We sisters would both take our father's permission and come regularly, with our sakhis, to these Manasa mountains.

The Asura Kesin used to court us every day. My sister Daityasena succumbed to him, but I did not. He took her away, but you have rescued me with your might. And now, Lord of Devas, I want you to find an invincible husband for me."

Indra replied, "You are my cousin—your mother and my mother Dakshayani are sisters. Tell me about your strengths."

The woman replied, "Mahabaho, I am Abala, weak, and so my husband must be powerful. The strength of my father's boons will ensure that Devas and Asuras will respect him."

Indra said, "Faultless creature, tell me, what sort of power do you want your husband to have?"

The devi said, "My husband must be a manly and celebrated one, who is devoted to Brahma, and who is able to conquer all the Devas, Asuras, Yakshas, Kinnaras, Uragas, Rakshasas and evil Daityas, and subdue all the worlds with you." '

Markandeya continues, 'Indra was troubled when he heard this, and he thought, "There is no one who fits this description, to be this woman's husband."

Just then Indra, resplendent as the Sun, saw Surya Deva rising on the Udaya mountain and radiant Soma Deva merging into him. It was the day of the new moon, and the inauspicious moment of Raudra. He of the hundred sacrifices, Satakratu, saw the Asuras and Devas battling for dominance on the Udaya Mountain.

He noticed that the dawn was tinged with red clouds, and saw that Varuna's oceanic abode had turned the hue of blood. He saw Agni entering the orb of the Sun, conveying the oblations that Bhrigu, Angirasa and others had offered, to the accompaniment of hymns.

He also saw the twenty-four parvas, the hours adorning Surya Deva, and the fearsome Soma also present in the Sun.

Sakra looked at the awesome union of the Sun and the Moon and he thought, "This terrible conjunction of Soma and Surya forebodes a fearful battle tomorrow. The river Sindhu flows with fresh blood, and red-faced jackals drink her waters and howl to the Sun.

This conjunction of Sun, Moon and Agni is as dreadful and powerful as it is wondrous. If Soma gives birth to a son now, that child can become a suitable husband for this woman. Agni has a lineage similar to Soma's, and he, too, is a Deva. If these two have a son together, that boy can surely become this woman's husband."

Thinking thus, Indra took Devasena with him and went to Brahma. He greeted the Pitamaha and said to him, "Find an illustrious warrior to be this woman's husband."

Brahma replied, "Danavasudana, slayer of Danavas, it shall be as you wish. The children born of such a marriage will be mighty and ever-victorious. Her husband will be joint leader of your forces with you."

Indra and Devasena bowed to Brahma and went, then, to where those great Brahmanas, the powerful Devarishis, Vasistha and the others, lived. Other Devas followed Indra to the Rishis' asramas, where they were conducting their yagnas, to have a share of the Soma rasa that would be offered. Those exalted Maharishis performed the yagna with towering fires and offered the burnt offerings to the gods.

They invoked Adbhuta, the agni that carries the havis, with mantras. That great fire emerged from the Sun and silently appeared at the yagna.

Bhaaratottama, Adbhuta entered the sacrificial flames that the Rishis had lit, and into which they had poured various offerings to the chanting of hymns, and he took these offerings to the Swargavasis, the dwellers of heaven.

On his return, he saw the wives of those Devarishis sleeping peacefully on their beds. These finest of women had skins that shone like altars of gold, and the blemishless radiance of moonbeams. They sparkled like fiery stars. Adbhuta looked at the wives of the illustrious Brahmanas with lustful eyes; his mind became agitated, and their beauty stabbed him with desire.

Considering it improper for him to be in such turmoil, he quieted his heart, saying to himself, "The wives of these great Brahmanas are chaste and faithful, and beyond the reach of other men's desires. I long to possess them, but since I cannot look at them in this way or touch them, I will become their household fire, Grihapatya and gratify myself by being able to see them every day." '

Markandeya continues, 'Adbhuta transformed himself into a household fire, and was glad indeed, seeing those gold-complexioned women and touching them with his flames. In thrall to their beauty, he lived there for a long time, filled with intense love for them and giving them his heart. Eventually, unable to win the hearts of those Brahmanastris, his own heart tortured by love, he made his way to a forest with the intention of killing himself.

Just before this, Swaha, the daughter of Daksha, had lost her heart to him, and she waited to catch him in a weak moment. She could not find any chink in the cool and apparently passionless Agni.

But now that the god had gone into the forest, tormented by pangs of love, she thought, "I am in an anguish of love; I will assume the guise of the wives of the Saptarishis and, in that guise, go to the Fire God who is so smitten with their charms. He will be gratified, and my desire, too, will be slaked," ' says Markandeya."

CANTO 224

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Lord of Men, the beautiful Sivaa was the wife of Angirasa, one of the Saptarishis, and she had a virtuous, unblemished character.

Swaha disguised herself as Sivaa and went to Agni and said, "O Agni, I am tortured with love for you. You must satisfy my passion. If you do not, I will kill myself. I am Sivaa, the wife of Angirasa, and I have come here on the advice of the wives of the other Rishis, who have sent me to you after much thought."

Agni replied, "How did you know that I was suffering with love, and how could the others, the beloved wives of the seven Rishis, know this?"

Swaha replied, "You are a favourite with us, but we are in awe of you. The other wives guessed what was in your heart and sent me to you. I have come here to satisfy my desire. Make me happy quickly; my sisters-in-law are waiting for me to return." '

Markandeya continues, 'Filled with delight, Agni and the disguised Swaha made rapturous love together. While having intercourse, she caught and held some of his seed in her hand. To avoid bringing disgrace to the Brahmana women and Agni if she was seen in that disguise while she walked back through the forest, she turned herself into a bird and flew through the forest.

She came to Sweta, the White Mountain. Here the land was covered with grass, shrubs, plants and trees, and the mountain was guarded by strange seven-headed, venomous serpents. There were Rakshasas, male and female Pisachas, dreadful spirits and all kinds of birds and animals. Swaha quickly climbed a peak and dropped Agni's seed into a golden lake.

After this, she took the form of each of the wives of the illustrious Saptarishis, one by one, and had intercourse with Agni. The only one she could not disguise herself as was Arundhati, whose devotion to her husband, Vasistha, protected her. O Kurusthama, on days of the new moon, the Devi Swaha cast Agni's semen six times into the golden lake, and a boy child of great prowess was born from it. Because the Rishis considered him as "cast off", this baby was named Skanda.

The child had six faces, twelve ears, eyes, hands and feet, one neck and one stomach. On the second day after the semen was thrown into the water, it took the form of a baby; he grew into a boy on the third; and Skanda's limbs developed on the fourth day. Red clouds flashed with lightning over the lake and the boy shone like the Sun rising in the midst of a mass of red clouds.

He grasped the wonderful, immense bow that Siva, Destroyer of the Tripura, used to destroy the enemies of the Devas, and that mighty being uttered such a terrible roar that the three worlds, with their animate and inanimate beings, were struck with terror.

The great Nagas, Chitra and Airavata, heard the sound that was like the thundering of massed thunderheads, and trembled with fear. Seeing how distraught they were, the radiant, sun-like boy held them in two of his hands. In one hand he held a spear and in another a sturdy, red-crested rooster, and with these the mighty-armed son of Agni romped noisily.

Holding a beautiful conch in two of his hands, that mighty one blew on it, terrorising even the most powerful creatures. He swatted the air with two hands and played on the hilltop, and Mahasena of unmatched prowess looked as if he was about to devour the three worlds. He shone like Surya Deva at his zenith in the sky.

This wonderful, incomparably strong being sat on the top of the mountain and, with each of his many faces pointing in different directions, roared again and again. All kinds of creatures heard those roars and fell to the ground in fear and, terrified, they begged for protection. All those of

different castes, who asked this great god for refuge, and who followed him, became Brahmanas.

The God rose from his seat and reassured all of them; then, he drew his bow and shot his arrows in the direction of the White Mountain. The arrows split Krauncha Hill, the son of Himavat, in two, making the swans and vultures that lived there fly away to the Sumeru Mountains.

Sorely wounded, the Krauncha fell, groaning fearfully in agony. Seeing him fall, the other hills began to scream, and that mighty being of unrivalled prowess heard the groans of the wounded hills but was unmoved. Instead, he lifted his mace and, with a war cry, hurled the lustrous weapon at the White Mountain and cleaved one of its peaks.

The Sweta, pierced by him, became frightened and, with other mountains, uprooted himself from the earth and fled. The wounded earth gaped, bereft of her ornaments and, in her distress, went to Skanda, who granted that the mountains may return without fear.

Once more Bhumi Devi shone in splendour, and the mountains bowed to Skanda and returned to take their old places. Since then, all creatures celebrate the worship of Skanda on the fifth day of the lunar month.' "

CANTO 225

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'When great Skanda was born all kinds of strange phenomena were seen. There was an uncanny reversal in nature: of male and female, of heat and cold, and of other pairs of opposites. The Planets, the Cardinal Points and the Sky shone with light, and the Earth began to rumble. The Rishis, always working for the world's welfare, saw these signs and were worried. Anxiously, they began to restore equilibrium.

Those who lived in the Chitraratha vana were convinced that the unnatural conditions were the consequence of Agni's intercourse with the six wives of the Saptarishis. Others, who had seen the goddess as a bird, said that the evils were the work of the bird. No one imagined that Swaha was the author of that mischief.

Swaha heard that the child was hers, and she went to Skanda and told him that she was his mother. The seven Rishis heard that a son of great power had been born to them, and they abandoned their wives, except the adored Arundhati, because all the forest-dwellers said that these six women had been instrumental in the birth of the child.

O king, Swaha protested that this was not so, and tried, repeatedly, to convince the seven Rishis that the child was hers and not their wives'.

Earlier, when the seven Rishis had concluded their yagnas, the great sage Viswamitra had followed the god of fire, unknown to him, and had seen how he had been roiled by lust. So, he knew everything, just as it had happened, and he was the first to seek the protection of Skanda Mahasena.

He offered divine prayers to Mahasena and performed all the thirteen rites of passage, such as the Jatakarma, for him. For the good of the world he proclaimed the virtues of the six-headed Skanda and performed ceremonies in honour of the rooster, the Devi Shakti and Skanda's first followers. For this reason, Viswamitra became a great favourite of the divine youth.

Viswamitra told the seven Rishis how Swaha had transformed herself and declared the innocence of their wives; nonetheless, the Rishis abandoned their spouses unconditionally.'

Markandeya continues, 'The Devas heard of Skanda's might and said to Vasava, "O Sakra, Skanda's prowess is unbearable; you must kill him immediately. If you do not, he will conquer the three worlds and us; he will overpower you and make himself king of the Devas."

Sakra said to them, "This child is endowed with unmatched prowess; he can defeat the Creator himself in battle. I dare not fight him."

The Devas said, "You are cowardly, Sakra! Let the Mothers of the Universe go to Skanda. They can summon endless shakti at will. Let them kill this terrible child."

The mothers agreed and left; but when they saw the incomparable boy, they were disheartened. Convinced that he was invincible, they asked for his protection, "Mighty One, become our son. We love you and want to suckle you. See how the milk flows from our breasts."

Hearing this, Mahasena Skanda wanted to feed at their breasts and, receiving them with respect, drank. Then, he saw his father Agni coming towards him. Along with his mothers, Skanda honoured him who is the doer of all that is good; and Agni Deva and the mothers remained by their son's side to look after him.

The devi who, amongst the Matrikas, was born of Anger, watched over Skanda with a spear in her hand, just as a mother would guard her own child. And that moody, red-hued daughter of the Sea, who lived on blood, hugged Mahasena to her breast and nursed him, tenderly as a mother would.

Agni transformed himself into a goat-faced teacher of the Vedas and, followed by many children, delighted his son with marvellous toys, in their

mountain home,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 226

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'The Planets with their satellites, the Rishis and the Matrikas, Agni and numerous other brilliant courtiers, and many other fearsome looking Swargavasis waited on Mahasena, along with his mothers. Indra, Lord of the gods wanted to vanquish Skanda. But, being unsure of victory, he mounted his elephant Airavata and, accompanied by the other Devas, he advanced cautiously towards Skanda.

The mighty Indra, followed by all the Devas, and armed with his Vajra, wanted to kill Mahasena. He marched with the splendid celestial army, flying a variety of standards and sounding a shrill war cry. The warriors wore armour of different kinds; they were armed with bows and rode many different mounts.

When Mahasena saw the gloriously decked Sakra, wearing his best raiment, coming to kill him, he went forward to meet the king of the Devas. O Kaunteya, the mighty Vasava shouted to exhort his warriors. He now rode swiftly with his forces, death to Agni's son on his mind; all this to the praises of the Tridasas and the great Rishis.

At last, he reached the home of Kartikeya, and he and the other gods shouted out to him. In response Guha roared deeply like the roaring of the

sea. On hearing that sound, the Deva army became agitated, like a churning ocean, and stood stunned and rooted.

The son of the Fire God saw the Devas coming to kill him and was filled with rage. He breathed flames from his mouth onto the celestial legions, leaving them writhing on the ground. Their heads, their bodies, their arms and the animals they rode were all consumed by that fiery breath, flaring briefly like stars removed from their proper places. The gods abandoned Indra and took refuge with Skanda, instead, and peace was restored.

Forsaken by his Devas, Sakra hurled his thunderbolt at Skanda. It pierced him in his right side, Rajan, and passed through his body. From where the Vajra struck, there sprang from Skanda's body another being—a youth with a club in his hand, and adorned with a divine amulet.

Because he was born from the piercing of the thunderbolt, he was named Visakha. When Indra saw that another being, as fierce as the God of Fire, had been created, he was afraid and, with his hands joined together in worship, asked Skanda for refuge. Skanda told him to cast off his fear, and all the gods were joyful.' "

CANTO 227

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Now hear about those macabre and grotesque followers of Skanda. Skanda gave birth to a number of male progeny when Indra's thunderbolt struck him, horrific creatures that spirit away little children, whether born, or still in their mother's womb. Skanda had a great many incredibly strong daughters, too. These children adopted Visakha as their father.

The agile, goat-faced Bhadrasakha was surrounded by all his sons and daughters, whom he protected carefully, along with their mothers. It is this quality of his that earned Skanda the name Kumarapitra, or father of children. Those who want to have a son worship Rudra, in his form of Agni, and Uma, in her form of Swaha. This ensures the birth of a son to them.

The daughters, who were born to Tapa, also named Hutasana, went to Skanda, who asked what he could do for them.

Those girls replied, "Bless us so that we may become good and respected mothers of the world."

The generous one replied, "*Tathaastu, so be it*," and repeatedly said, "You shall be divided into Sivas and Asivas, good and evil."

The mothers left after establishing Skanda as their son. They were seven mothers—Kaki, Halima, Malini, Brihata, Arya, Palala and Vaimitra—who gave birth to Sisu through Skanda's blessings. Sisu was red-eyed, fearful

looking and volatile. He is known as the eighth hero born of the mothers of Skanda, but he is sometimes considered the ninth when the Goat-faced is counted as one.

Skanda's sixth face was that of a goat. That face, O king, is in the middle of the six, and his mother looks at it constantly. That head, by which Bhadrasakha created divine energy, is meant to be the best of all his heads. Rajan, these great and wonderful events occurred on the fifth day of the bright half of the lunar month and, on the sixth, a fierce and terrific battle was fought in the same place.'[2]

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[2]There are many stories about the birth of Skanda. One of the most popular is that he was born to kill Tarakasura, who had a boon that only a son born to Siva (who has lost Sati and not yet married Parvati) could kill him. So the Devas persuade Sati to be born as Himavan's daughter.

CANTO 228

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Skanda was adorned with a golden amulet and wreath; his forelock and crown were of gold; his eyes were golden-hued; his teeth were sharp; and he wore a red garment. He was handsome and cut the most splendid figure. Endowed with all the noblest qualities, he was the favourite of the three worlds. He granted boons to anyone who asked; he was brave, youthful, and wore bright earrings.

One day, when he was resting, the goddess of wealth, Sri, looking like a lotus and taking a human form, came to him and gave herself to him. On possessing the Devi, the slender Skanda glowed with the beauty of the full moon.

Exalted Brahmanas worshipped him, and Maharishis said, "O you born of the golden seed, may you prosper, and may you be the instrument of the welfare of the Universe. Devottama, best of gods, although you were born only six days ago, the Universe has already come under your dominion, and you have removed its fear. Therefore, you have become the Indra of the three worlds, and they have no cause to be afraid anymore."

Skanda replied, "Mighty Tapasvins, what does Indra do with the three worlds? How does the king of the Devas constantly protect all the other gods?"

The Rishis replied, "Indra is the giver of strength, power, children and happiness to all creatures and, when propitiated, bestows his devotees with all they wish for. He destroys the wicked and fulfils the desires of the righteous; the slayer of Bala allots their svadharma to all creatures; he acts as Sun and Moon in places where they are absent; and when the occasion demands it, he even assumes the roles of Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. These are Indra's tasks, and great are his capabilities. You, too, are mighty. Therefore, Sreshta, great one, become our Indra."

Sakra said to Skanda, "Mighty one, make us glad by becoming our king. You are worthy of that honour and we will anoint you today."

Skanda replied, "You must continue to rule over the three worlds with equanimity and with your heart set on conquest. I will remain your humble servant; I do not want sovereignty."

Sakra replied, "Your prowess is unrivalled; O heroic one, defeat the enemies of the Devas. People are wonderstruck by your strength, especially since you vanquished me and stripped me of my power. If I were to be Indra now, I will not command the respect of all creatures, and they would split their loyalties between us and causing dissent. When they have formed themselves into two factions, they will have war between them. And in that war, you would undoubtedly defeat me easily and become the Lord of all worlds."

Skanda said, "Sakra, you are my lord, as well as Lord of the three worlds. May you prosper. Command me and I will obey."

Indra replied, "At your behest, I will continue as Indra. If your purpose is true and what you said is in earnest, I will tell you how you can fulfil your wish to serve me. Mighty one, be the Senapati of the armies of Devaloka."

Skanda replied, "Install me as Senapati, for the demolition of the Danavas, the welfare of the Devas, and for the well-being of Brahmanas and sacred cows." '

Markandeya continues, 'Skanda was anointed by Indra and all the other Devas; the Maharishis honoured him, and he looked splendid. The golden parasol that was held over his head looked like a halo of fire. The lustrous Indra, the conqueror of the three worlds, fastened the celestial garland of gold, created by Viswakarman, around his neck.

Conqueror of your enemies, Mahadeva Vrishadhwaja—the one with the emblem of the Bull—arrived with his consort, Parvati, and honoured

Skanda with a jubilant heart.

The Fire God is also called Rudra, and, therefore, Skanda is called the son of Rudra. The White Mountain was formed from Rudra's semen, and the sexual indulgences of the Fire God with the Krittikas took place on that same Sweta parvata; all the dwellers of heaven saw Rudra heaping honours on Skanda. For these reasons he was known as the son of Rudra.

The child Skanda was born by Rudra entering into the being of the Fire God, and this is also why Skanda is known as the son of Rudra. And, Bhaarata, because Skanda was born of the union between Rudra and Swaha and the six wives of the seven Rishis, he is known as the son of Rudra.

This son of Agni was clad in red cloth and looked resplendent, like the Sun emerging from behind a mass of red clouds. The Fire God assigned the red rooster as his mascot, and perched on the top of his chariot, it blazed like the fire of the Pralaya. His vanguard was the embodiment of the power that is invested in the Devas to give them victory, which is the impetus of all creatures, and which is their glory, their support and their refuge.

A mysterious enchantment entered into his very being, whose prowess is manifested in battle. Beauty, righteousness, strength, vigour, might, radiance, truthfulness, rectitude, devotion to Brahmanas, freedom from illusion, absence of perplexity, protection of his followers, destruction of his foes, and care of all creatures—these, great lord of men, are the intrinsic qualities of Skanda.

Anointed by all the gods, he looked pleased and contented; grandly attired, he was as beautiful as the radiant full moon. The sacred incantation of Vedic hymns, the music of the celestial musicians and the songs of the Devas and Gandharvas filled the air.

The son of Agni, surrounded by Apsaras, many joyful Pisachas and hosts of gods, shone in splendour. Mahasena, anointed as Senapati of the Devas, looked like the Sun rising to extinguish darkness. The forces of Swarga, looking upon him as their leader, surrounded him in their thousands. All creatures followed him in adulation, eager to obey his commands, praising and worshipping him, and he responded with encouraging words.

The performer of a thousand sacrifices then remembered Devasena, whom he had rescued earlier and, considering Skanda as destined by Brahma himself to be the husband of this devi, summoned her to come there, wearing her best ornaments. Indra said to Skanda, "Best of Gods,

even before you were born, Brahma ordained that this devi was to be your bride. Accept her lotus-like right hand with the invocation of the marriage mantras."

Accordingly Skanda married Devasena, and the learned Brihaspati performed the necessary prayers and oblations. She, who is named Shashti, Lakshmi, Asha, Sukhaprada, Sinivali, Kuhu, Sadvritti and Aparajita, is Devasena, the wife of Skanda. Then Skanda was united with Devasena by the indissoluble bonds of matrimony, and the goddess of prosperity faithfully served him, embodied in her own form.

Because Skanda's anointing occured on the fifth day of the moon, that day is called Sripanchami, the auspicious fifth day, and because he obtained his goal on the sixth day, that lunar day is considered to be entirely auspicious.' "

CANTO 229

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'The six wives of the Saptarishis went to Skanda's abode as soon as they heard about his good fortune and that he had been made General of the celestial armies. These virtuous women of great punya had been disowned by the Rishis and they lost no time in calling on Mahasena, the Senapati of the divine forces.

They said to him, "Son, we have been unjustly cast out by our godlike husbands. Some persons spread the rumour that we had given birth to you and, believing this, they were angry and banished us from our rightful places. Now you must redeem us from our disgrace. We want to adopt you as our son and secure eternal bliss. You must do this for us."

Skanda replied, "Good Devis of unblemished character, I hereby declare that you are my mothers. I am your son and you shall attain all that you desire." '

Markandeya continues, 'Sakra indicated that he wanted to say something to Skanda and, when Skanda asked what it was, Vasava said, "Devi Abhijit, the younger sister of Rohini, was jealous of her elder sister and has gone into the forest to perform tapasya. I cannot find a substitute for my fallen star.

Skanda, ask Brahma about how we can fill the empty space created by the absence of this nakshatra. Brahma created Dhanishta and the other

asterisms, and Rohini used to be one of them, making their number complete."

Accordingly, Skanda sent Krittika to a place in the heavens, and there she shines with Agni's grace as if she has seven faces.

Vinata said to Skanda, "To me you are the son who performs the funeral rites. I want to live with you always, my son."

Skanda replied, "*So be it*. I honour you as my mother. Guide me with a mother's love and, honoured by your daughter-in-law, you shall always live with me." '

Markandeya continues, 'The great Matrikas said to Skanda, "Learned men have described us as the mothers of all creatures. However, what we want really is to be your mothers. Do us the honour of accepting us."

Skanda replied, "You are all mothers to me, and I am your son. Tell me what I can do to please you."

The Matrikas said, "In days of old, the Devis Brahmi, Maheswari and others were appointed as universal mothers. Sreshta, we want them to be removed from that position and for us to have their places; we want to be worshipped in their stead by the world. Restore those children of ours that they made you deprive us of."

Skanda said, "I cannot take back what I have given away, but I can give you other children, if you wish."

The mothers said, "We want to live with you and we want to be able to assume different shapes and to devour the children of those mothers as well as their guardians. Grant us this."

Skanda said, "I can grant you progeny, but I am pained by what you ask. May you be prosperous! I honour you, Devis, and promise to protect your children. I leave them in your care.

The mothers declared, "We shall protect them, Skanda, as you want. May you prosper! Still, we want to live with you, always, mighty one."

Skanda said, "Until human children are sixteen years old, you shall be able to afflict them in your various forms. I hereby confer on you a fierce and inexhaustible energy, with which you shall live happily, worshipped by all."

And from Skanda's body emerged a powerful, fiery being whose purpose was to devour the children of mortals. This being fell on the ground, unconscious and hungry. Skanda gave the evil force a horrific form, known by Brahmanottamas as Skandapasmara.

Vinata takes the form known as Sakuni Graha, or evil spirit. She, who the learned Brahmanas know as Putana Rakshasi, is the evil force Putana. The fierce and hideous Rakshasa is the pisacha form, Sita Putana. That terrible spirit causes abortions in women. Aditi takes the form known as Revati, and her evil spirit is called Raivata; she is a dreadful Graha that afflicts children. Diti, the mother of the Daityas, is the form called Mukhamandika; and this terrible creature is partial to the flesh of little children.

O Kuru, male and female children, who are said to have been fathered by Skanda, are spirits of evil, and they kill the foetus in the womb. They, the Kumaras, are the husbands of these devis, and children are caught unawares by these evil spirits. Rajan, the wise say that Surabhi, the cow mother, has the evil spirit Sakuni as her rider; and the two of them together devour children on this Earth. Sarama, the dog mother, habitually kills human beings while they are still in the womb.

She who is the tree mother, who lives in a Karanja tree, grants boons; she has a pleasant face and is always kind to all creatures. They that want to have children bow down to her.

These eighteen evil spirits are fond of meat and wine, and haunt birthing rooms for ten days. Kadru introduces herself in a sukshma rupa into the body of a pregnant woman and there she destroys the foetus and makes the mother give birth to a Naga instead. The mother of the Gandharvas takes away the foetus, and that is how women have abortions.

The mother of the Apsaras removes the foetus from the womb, and such conceptions are said to be still-born.

The daughter of the goddess of blood is said to have nursed Skanda, and she is worshipped as Lohitayani, on kadamba trees. The role of this goddess, Arya, is the same for women as Rudra's is for men. She is the mother of all children and is especially worshipped for their well-being.

These that I have described are the evil spirits presiding over the destinies of young children and, until children reach their sixteenth year, these spirits wield their dark powers, but after that their influence works for the good.

All the male and female spirits that I have described are always counted as the spirits of Skanda. One propitiates them with burnt offerings, ablutions, salves, and sacrifices and other offerings, and by worshipping

Skanda. O king, when one reverently honours and worships them they bestow on men whatever is good for them, as well as courage and long life.

I bow now to Maheswara, before I describe the nature of those spirits that affect the destinies of men after they are sixteen years old.

The man who sees gods, whether while asleep or awake, loses his sanity, and the spirit who is responsible for these hallucinations is called the Deva bhuta. When a person sees his dead ancestors while he is seated at ease, or lying in his bed, he loses his mind, and the spirit which causes this illusion is called the ancestral or Pitr bhuta.

The man who shows disrespect to the Siddhas, and who is cursed by them in return, soon goes mad; the evil force which makes this happen is called the Siddha bhuta. The spirit which makes a man smell a sweet scent and recognise various tastes is a tortured spirit called the Rakshasa bhuta.

And that spirit, which gives Gandharvas, the minstrels of heaven, the ability to insinuate themselves into the bodies of human beings, is called the Gandharva bhuta. The evil spirit, in the form of a Pisacha that torments men is called the Paisacha bhuta. The Yaksha spirit, that accidentally enters a human being, making him lose his mind, is known as the Yaksha bhuta.

The man, who loses his senses on account of a demoralising addiction to vices, becomes quickly insane, and his illness must be remedied according to methods prescribed in the Shastras. Men also turn mad from confusion, from irrational fear and from having seen ghastly sights. The cure for them lies in quieting their minds.

There are three classes of spirits: some are playful, some are greedy and some sensual. Until men attain the age of seventy, these evil spirits have the power to plague them, and after that, fever is the only evil spirit that afflicts them. These evil spirits always avoid those who have subdued their senses, who are self-restrained, who have good habits, who are god-fearing, and who are free from sloth and the touch of evil.

I have now described to you the evil spirits that mould the destinies of men. Rajan, you who are ever devoted to Maheswara, are immune to them.'
”

CANTO 230

MARKANDEYA SAMASYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'When Skanda had bestowed these powers, Swaha appeared to him and said, "You are my natural son and I want you to grant me great happiness."

Skanda replied, "What kind of happiness do you wish to enjoy?"

Swaha said, "I am Daksha's favourite daughter Swaha. From the time I was young, I have been in love with Hutasana, the Fire God, but, my son, he does not know of my feelings. I want to live with him as his wife, forever."

Skanda said, "From this day, Devi, all offerings that good men, who adhere to the path of dharma, make to the Devas or the Pitrs to the accompaniment of purifying mantras chanted by Brahmanas will be made jointly to Agni and Swaha. In this way, Devi, you always live with Agni Hutasana." '

Markandeya continues, 'Swaha was immensely pleased with the boon that Skanda had given her, and with her husband Pavaka, the Fire God, she worshipped Skanda in return.

Then Brahma, the Lord of all creatures, said to Mahasena, "Go and visit your father Mahadeva, the conqueror of Tripura. Rudra, Agni, Uma and Swaha have worked together for the welfare of all creatures and made you invincible. The hiranyaretas of Rudra, the highest, cast into Uma's yoni,

was cast back onto this hill, and the twins, Minjika and Minjika came into being. A portion of it fell into the Sea of blood, another fell into the rays of the Sun, another fell upon the Earth, and thus it was distributed in five portions. These fierce-looking followers of yours, who live on the flesh of animals, were born from that golden semen."

Saying, "It shall be done", Mahasena worshipped his father Siva with a son's affection.'

Markandeya continues, 'Men who want to acquire wealth and those who wish to alleviate illness should worship these five kinds of spirits, born from Mahadeva, with offerings of the sunflower. Those that desire the well-being of their children should worship the twins, Minjika and Minjika, also fathered by Rudra; and those who want children born to them must always worship the female spirits that live in trees, eating human flesh. All Pisachas are divided into innumerable types.

And now, O king, listen and I will tell you how the banners and bells of Skanda came into being. Indra's elephant Airavata had two bells, both named Vaijayanti. The clever Sakra had them brought to him, and personally gave them to Guha. Visakha took one of those bells and Skanda Kartikeya the other. Both standards, Kartikeya's and Visakha's, were red. Mahasena was pleased with what the gods had given him. Surrounded by hosts of Devas and Pisachas, and seated on the Golden Mountain, he was radiant in the splendour of his prosperity.

The mountain was covered with lush forests and, like Mandara with its abundance of caves, shone in the rays of the Sun. This mountain's lustrous beauty was enhanced by Mahasena's presence. The White Mountain, Sweta, was adorned with vast woodlands and covered with blossoming santanaka trees, forests of karavira, parijata, papa, asoka and kadamba trees. Herds of unworldly deer roamed its hillsides, and flocks of celestial birds flew overhead. The rumble of clouds sounded like musical instruments, like the soft murmur of the sea, and to this the Gandharvas and Apsaras danced. A joyous sound of merriment rose from the creatures there.

The whole world, with Indra himself, seemed to have moved to the White Mountain. Everyone was satisfied and none tired of looking at Skanda.'

Markandeya continues, 'After installing the lambent son of Agni as the leader of heaven's army, joyous Siva, shining like the Sun, rode with Parvati on his chariot and went to Bhadravata. Kala was his charioteer and

thousands of lions drew it. They flew swiftly through akasa, as if they would devour the sky. Striking terror into the hearts of all the animate beings of the worlds they passed, the maned beasts growled ferociously. Mahadeva, Lord of all creatures, sat in that chariot with Uma, like a flare of lightning flashing in a mass of clouds arched over by the rainbow, the Indradhanush.

Before him went the venerable Lord of wealth, riding on the backs of his human bearers, with his attendant Guhyakas riding in his exquisite vimana, the Pushpaka. Bringing up the rear was Sakra, the granter of boons, on his elephant Airavata, accompanied by the Devas and marching at the head of his celestial army. On Mahadeva's right flank was the great Yaksha, Amogha, with his attendants, the Jambhaka Yakshas, and accompanied by Rakshasas wearing flower garlands. Also on the right flank were many Devas of wonderful battle prowess, along with the Vasus and the Rudras.

Beside him marched the terrible Yama, with his companion, Mrityu, death, followed by hundreds of dreadful diseases. Behind Mahadeva, the sharp-pointed, adorned Vijaya, Siva's trisula, was borne; and Varuna, Lord of the waters, marched slowly alongside the Vijaya, carrying his own weapon, the Paasa, and surrounded by his aquatic subjects. Immediately to the rear of the trident, Rudra's other weapon, the Pattisa, was carried, guarded by maces, marvellous cudgels and other weapons. Following the Pattisa was Rudra's brilliant parasol and his Kamandalu with their attendant Maharishis, and with Bhrigu, Angirasa and others. Behind all these rode Rudra in his white chariot, providing heartening cheer with a display of his powers.

In his train were the rivers, lakes and seas; Apsaras, Rishis, Devas, Gandharvas and Nagas; the stars and planets; the children of the gods; and many women. The women scattered flowers around them as they walked; and the clouds bowed in obeisance to Mahadeva, who was armed with his bow, the Pinaka. Some of the clouds held a white parasol over his head; and Agni and Vayu waved feathery chamaras.

Mahadeva, the God with the Bull for his emblem, was followed by the glorious Indra, accompanied by the Rajarishis singing his praises. Gauri, Vidya, Gandhari, Kesini, Mitra and Savitri made up Parvati's train, along with all the Vidyas—the deities of all the branches of knowledge. Advancing ahead of the whole formation was the standard-bearer, the

Rakshasa spirit that delivers, to all the different aksauhinis, commands that Indra and the other Devas implicitly obey.

And skipping merrily, in and out and through the procession, was that best of Rakshasas, Pingala, who is Rudra's friend, always busy in smasanas, crematoria, and charming to everyone.

Good deeds are the offerings with which mortals worship Rudra, who is also called Siva. He is the omnipotent Deity, the wielder of the bow Pinaka; he is worshipped in his many forms; he is Maheswara.

Mahasena, the son of Krittika, the Senapati of the Deva army, who reveres Brahmanas, followed the Lord of gods, surrounded by the deva legions. Mahadeva said to Mahasena, gravely, "Command the seventh aksauhini of the army with careful attention."

Skanda replied, "My lord, I will command the seventh legion. Is there anything else you would have me do?"

Rudra said, "You will always find me in the field of war. You will gain great punya by looking up to me and serving me with devotion."

Then Maheswara embraced him and gave him leave to go. Rajan, after Skanda left, the Devas were shaken by many fell omens. The sky and its stars blazed with fire, and all the Universe was plunged in chaos. The Earth quaked and rumbled, and darkness covered the whole world. Seeing these terrible phenomena, Sankara, the blessed Uma, the Devas and the great Maharishis were distressed.

While they were bewildered, there appeared before them a savage host of mighty Danavas, armed with a myriad of weapons and looking like a mass of thunderheads and hills. Those Demons could not be counted and spoke legion languages. They moved purposefully to where Sankara stood with the Devas, and into the ranks of the army of Swarga they shot flights of arrows in all directions, masses of rock, maces, sataghnis, prasas and parighas.

The onslaught threw heaven's army into disarray and their ranks wavered. The Danavas fetched havoc by hewing down soldiers, horses, elephants, chariots and weapons. The disheartened troops of the gods seemed as if they were about to turn their backs upon the enemy. Vast numbers of them fell, slain by the Asuras, like large trees burnt down in a forest fire. The Swargavasis fell with their heads separated from their bodies. There was no one to lead them in that fearful battle, and they were mown down by the enemy.

Indra, the slayer of Bala, saw his forces besieged and tried to rally them. He said, “Do not be afraid, O Heroes. May success reward your efforts! Take up your weapons and keep your courage. You will not face any further misfortune. Crush these evil ones. Come, let us attack the Danavas together and may we find success!”

The dwellers of heaven were reassured and, under Indra’s lead, rushed against the Danavas. Thirty-three thousand gods, all the powerful Maruts and Sadhyas, and all the Vasus returned to battle. They loosed arrows that drew blood from the Daityas, their horses and their elephants. The sharp shafts penetrated their bodies and fell on the ground, looking like snakes dropping down the hillside. Pierced by those arrows, the Daityas fell on all sides, and they looked like many small banks of clouds. The Danava host was panic-stricken at the charge of the Devas; they withered before that attack.

Their weapons still at the ready, the gods gave loud vent to their exhilaration; and the heavenly bands struck up joyful music.

The encounter took a dreadful toll on both sides. The battlefield was covered over with blood and strewn with the bodies of Devas and Asuras. The victory of the Devas was short-lived, because the Danavas rallied and flew back into battle, bringing bloody havoc to the forces of Devaloka. This time, the Asuras beat their drums, blew ringing blasts on their bugles and roared their nerve-shattering war cry: *Boomba! Boomba!*

Now a mighty demon, the greatest of them, seized a great crag in his hands and rushed out of that dreadful Daitya army, looking like the Sun flaring out from behind dark clouds. The Devas saw that he was about to hurl that enormous rock at them and fled. The Danava, Mahisha, pursued them and flung the crag at them. Lord of the world, ten thousand warriors of the Deva army were crushed under that immense stone. So Mahisha struck terror into the hearts of the Devas and, with his Danavas, he fell upon them like a lion at a herd of deer.

When Indra and the other gods saw Mahishasura leading the charge against them they abandoned their banners and their weapons and fled. Mahisha, full of wrath swiftly caught up with Rudra’s chariot and seized its central pole with both his hands.

When he had seized Rudra’s chariot, the Earth began to groan and the great Rishis fell unconscious. Massive Daityas, like thunderheads, became boisterous with joy, thinking that victory was theirs. Although Rudra,

highest of the high, was in that plight, he did not think it worthwhile to kill Mahisha, for he remembered that Skanda would deal that deathblow.

Meantime, the fiery Mahisha, contemplating his prize of Rudra's chariot with satisfaction, sounded his war-cry, terrorising the Devas but filling the Daityas with joy.

The Devas were in this plight when the mighty Mahasena, burning with anger, and ablaze with Sun-like splendour, came to battle. He wore fiery red and was bedecked with a wreath of red flowers. Encased in golden armour, he rode in a golden chariot, bright as the Sun and drawn by glossy chestnut horses. At the sight of him, the Daityas army grew instantly dispirited.

Skanda discharged one blinding shakti at Mahisha, which beheaded the Demon, and he fell dead. His massive head, as big as a small hill, fell to the earth and, extending sixteen yojanas in length, barred the entrance to the country of the Northern Kurus. Now, however, people of that country pass easily by that way, for flesh and gristle have long since turned to bones, and Earth has covered them.

The Devas and the Danavas saw Skanda hurl his shakti again and again on the field of battle, and it returned to his hands after killing thousands of the enemy's forces. The wise Mahasena's arrows brought down numbers of Danavas beyond count, and they were seized by panic. Skanda's followers killed them, then drank their blood and ate their flesh. Joyfully, they exterminated the Danavas in a short time, just as quickly as the sunrise does darkness, or as a great fire consumes a forest, or as the wind drives away clouds.

Thus did the illustrious Skanda slaughter all his enemies. The Devas eulogised him and he, in turn, paid his respects to Siva Maheswara. And Krittika's son shone in glory, like Surya Deva at his zenith.

When Skanda had completely annihilated the enemy and when Maheswara had left the battlefield, Purandara embraced Mahasena and said to him, "You have slain Mahisha, who was made invincible by the grace of Brahma. First of warriors, to him the Devas were as easy to mow down as blades of grass. Mahabaho, you have removed a thorn from the flesh of the gods.

You have killed hundreds of Danavas, all equal in valour to Mahisha, all hostile to us and who always harassed us. And your followers have devoured hundreds of them. You are, O mighty one, invincible in battle, even like Uma's lord; this victory will be celebrated as your first

achievement. Your fame will last forever in the three worlds; all the Devas will pledge their fealty to you.”

Saying this to Mahasena, the husband of Sachi left, accompanied by his Devas, and with the leave of Siva, the three-eyed Devadeva. Rudra returned to Bhadravata and all the celestial ones to their respective homes.

Rudra addressed the gods, saying, “You must give your allegiance to Skanda just as you do to me.”

The son of Pavaka the Fire God slaughtered the Danavas and conquered the three worlds in a single day; and the greatest Rishis worship him. The Brahmana who reads this story of Skanda’s birth gains untold prosperity in this world and the companionship of Skanda in the next,’ says Markandeya.

Yudhishtira says, ‘O most venerable Brahmana, I want to know the different names of this loftiest of gods, by which he is celebrated through the three worlds.’ ”

Vaisampayana continued, “Thus addressed by the Pandava in that conclave of Rishis, the worshipful Markandeya of great tapasyashakti responds by listing the sacred names of Kartikeya.

He says, ‘Agneya, son of Agni; Skanda, the cast off; Diptakirti, of blazing fame; Anamaya, always healthy; Mayuraketu, the one with the peacock banner; Dharmatma, the one with the noble soul; Bhutesa, Lord of all beings; Mahishardana, slayer of Mahisha; Kamajit, one who has conquered desire; Kamada, fulfiller of desires; Kanta, the handsome one; Satyavak, speaker of truth; Bhuvaneswara, Lord of the jungle of the world; Sisu, child; Sighra, the swift; Suchi, the pure; Chanda, the fiery; Diptavarna, the bright-complexioned; Subhanana, the beautiful; Amogha, who cannot be baffled; Anagha, sinless; Rudra, the terrible; Priya, the loved; Chandranana, of the face like the moon; Diptasakti, wielder of the burning shakti; Prasantatma, tranquil-souled; Bhadrakrit, doer of good; Kutamohana, holder of even the wicked; Shashthipriya, the favourite of Shashthi; Pavitra, holy; Matrvatsala, one who adores his mother; Kanyabharta, protector of virgins; Vibhakta, diffused over the universe; Swaheya, son of Swaha; Revatisuta, child of Revati; Prabhu, the Lord; Neta, the leader; Visakha, raised by Visakha; Naigameya, born of the Veda; Suduschara, difficult to propitiate; Suvrata, of excellent vows; Lalita, the beautiful; Balakridanakapriya, fond of toys; Khachari, ranger of the skies; Brahmacharin, chaste; Shura, the hero; Saravanodbhava, born in a clump of reeds; Viswamitrapriya, the favourite of Viswamitra; Devasenapriya, the

lover of Devasena; Vasudevapriya, beloved of Vasudeva; and Priyakrit, doer of pleasing deeds.

These are the divine names of Kartikeya. Whoever repeats them will secure fame, wealth and salvation.'

Markandeya continues, 'Valiant son of the Kurus, listen to me sing the other names of the mighty, six-faced, valiant Guha, who has no rival, whom Devas and Rishis venerate. Listen well to my stuti.

O devoted to Brahman, born from Brahman, learned in the mysteries of Brahman, Brahmesaya, foremost of those in whom Brahman resides, fond of Brahman, austere like the Brahmanas, knowledgeable in the great mystery of Brahma, leader of Brahmanas! You are Swaha; you are Swadha; you are the holiest of the holy. O invoked in mantras, celebrated as the six-flamed Fire.

You are the year, the six seasons, the months, the fornights, the solar declinations and the cardinal points of space. O Lotus-eyed, O Lotus-faced, O thousand-faced, thousand-armed, Ruler of the Universe, great oblation, life-giving soul of the Devas and Asuras, mighty Leader of armies; Prachanda—furious, Lord, master and conqueror of your enemies; Sahasrabhutva—of many forms; Sahasratushti—content a thousand-fold; Sahasrabhuk—devourer of everything; and Sahasrapad—thousand-legged.

You are the very Earth; you are the one of infinite forms, of one thousand heads and of awesome strength. You can appear, at will, as Ganga's son, as Swaha, as Mahi, or as Krittika. O Six-faced God, your playmate and mount is the rooster; you can assume different forms at will.

You are Daksha, Soma, Maruta, Dharma, Vayu, the prince of mountains, and Indra, for all time. O most eternal of all the eternal ones, O Lord of all lords, you are the mainspring of Truth, the destroyer of Diti's progeny, and the great conqueror of the enemies of the gods; you are the personification of dharma; you are, at once, vast and minute; you know the highest and the lowest of virtuous actions; the mysteries of Brahma reside in you.

O first among Gods, O exalted Lord of the Universe, your tejas pervades creation.

With this prayer, made as best I can, I salute you of the twelve eyes and many hands. All the rest of your attributes defy the scope of my intellect.'

The Brahmana who reads this story of Skanda's birth, or narrates it to Brahmanas, or hears it being told by twice-born men, gains wealth, long

life, fame, children, victory, prosperity, contentment and the companionship of Skanda,' says Markandeya," said Vaisampayana.

CANTO 231

DRAUPADI SATYABHAMA SAMVADA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, "When the Brahmanas and the noble sons of Pandu are seated, Draupadi and Satyabhama enter the hermitage. Their hearts filled with rare bliss, the two princesses laugh merrily and sit together at their ease. Rajan, these devis, who always speak sweetly to each other, are meeting after a long time and begin to exchange many heroic and delightful tales of the Kurus and the Yadus.

The slender-waisted Satyabhama, favourite wife of Krishna, and daughter of Satrajit, speaks privately to Draupadi and says, 'Daughter of Drupada, how do you manage to rule the sons of Pandu, the strong and handsome Kshatriyas who are like lords of the Earth? Lovely one, how are they so obedient to you and never angry with you? Pandu's sons are always submissive to you and ever eager to do your bidding. Tell me how this is so.

Do you practise vratas, or tapasya; do you chant mantras or take secret herbs during your menstrual period; is there something that you do; or is it the effect of your youthfulness? Do you chant hermetic incantations and bewitchments, or perform special homas, or use medicated salves and potions? Tell me, princess of Panchala, what auspicious means I can use to make Krishna ever obedient to me?'

Chaste Draupadi says to the illustrious Satyabhama, 'You asked me, Satyabhama, about the means that base women use. How can I tell you what these are? It is not fitting, devi, to answer these questions or for you to doubt me, because you are intelligent and Krishna's favourite wife. The

husband who discovers that his wife uses incantations and intoxicating physics begins to be in dread of her, as if she were a serpent hiding in his bedchamber. How can a man who is beset with fear have peace, and how can one who has no peace have happiness? A wife can never ensure her husband's obedience by chanting mantras.

We hear of painful diseases being transmitted by our enemies. Indeed, they that want to kill others send poison disguised as gifts, so that the man who imbibes the drug so sent, by tongue or skin, soon dies. Women have been known to cause the body to bloat through the retention of fluids, leprosy, anaemia, impotence, insanity, blindness and deafness in men by administering drugs to them. These evil and sinful women sometimes disable their husbands for good. The wife should never do the least injury to her lord.

But listen now to the way I conduct myself with the great-souled sons of Pandu. I set aside vanity and, controlling desire and anger, I serve them with devotion. I control my envy and, with deep, heartfelt love, and without feeling that the duties I perform are degrading in any way, I wait upon them. I never say anything that is evil or false, I am careful never to sit or look or walk with impropriety; I am always careful never to let my eyes reveal what is in my heart. This is how I serve Pandu's sons, my Kshatriya husbands who are like the Sun or Fire; they are radiant as the Moon, and they are endowed with fierce energy and prowess and can kill their enemies with a mere look.

My heart does not turn towards any other, be he Deva, Manava or Gandharva; whether he is young or decked with ornaments, wealthy or handsome. I never bathe or eat or sleep before my husbands have, in fact, not until after our attendants have done so. Wherever they may be returning from, be it field, forest or town, I quickly get up and greet my husband with water to wash and a seat to rest on.

I always keep the house and all the things in it, and the food, tidy and clean. I am careful in preparing the rice and serve them food at the proper time. I never use angry words or sulk, and I never imitate women that are wicked. Setting aside sloth, I always do what pleases them. I never laugh falsely, but only at something genuinely amusing, and I never loiter by the gate. I never stay long in the bathing room or in the gardens attached to the house. I always refrain from laughing too loudly; I never indulge in uncontrolled passion; I avoid everything that may offend.

Satyabhama, I am in constant attendance on my lords. I am never happy when apart from them. When my husband leaves home to see a relative, I renounce flowers and perfumes and keep vratas. Whatever my husband does not drink or eat, or enjoy, I do not either. Beautiful princess decked in ornaments, guided constantly by the instruction imparted to me by my elders, I devotedly seek the welfare of my lords.

My mother-in-law Kunti told me of my duties with regard to many aspects of married life: with regard to relatives, alms-giving, offering worship to the gods, oblations to the diseased, boiling food in pots on auspicious days to offer to ancestors and guests. She taught me about reverence and service to those that deserve our attention. These and all else that I know about, I observe and practice conscientiously, day and night. Fixing my heart on humility and the lawful path of dharma, I serve my gentle, truthful and virtuous husbands, thinking of them as snakes that can flare up in anger at the least provocation.

The wife's virtue is based on her devotion to her husband. The husband is the wife's god and her refuge. Indeed, there is no other refuge for her. Under these circumstances, how could a wife hurt her lord, even in the smallest way?

I never act against the wishes of my husband, in sleeping or eating or in the way I adorn myself; I am always guided by them and never speak ill of my mother-in-law. Blessed one, my husbands have become obedient to me because of my diligence, my alertness, and because of the humility with which I serve my betters.

Every day, I myself serve Kunti, revered and truthful mother of these Kshatriyas, with food and drink, and fetch her clothes for her and help her dress. Never do I indulge in my own preferences over hers in food or in dress; never do I reprove that princess who is as forgiving as the Earth herself.

Yudhishtira used to feed eight thousand Brahmanas every day in the palace, on golden plates. He used to care for eighty thousand Snataka Brahmanas leading the lives of grihastas, with thirty serving-maids assigned to each. Besides these, he used to send sattvic food, in plates of gold, to ten thousand celibate Yatis. I would worship all these Brahmanas who recited the Vedas, with food, drink and clothing, taken from our stores after dedicating a portion to the Viswadeva.

The illustrious son of Kunti had a hundred thousand finely attired personal serving-maids, wearing lambent bracelets and golden necklaces, colourful garlands and a profusion of resonant jewellery, and anointed with sandalwood paste. The gold-bedecked maids were all skilled in singing and dancing. I knew their names and recognised them all; I knew who they were and what their duties were. Kunti's most inelligent and brilliant son also had a hundred thousand maid servants to take care of feeding his guests, with plates of gold in their hands.

While Yudhishtira lived in Indraprastha a hundred thousand horses and as many elephants would follow him in his entourage. These were the possessions of Yudhishtira when he ruled the world.

It was I, princess, who regulated their number and framed the rules by which they lived. I listened to any complaints about them. I knew everything that the maid-servants of the palace did or did not do, and about the other servitors, including the royal cowherds and shepherds. Blessed and noble one, I alone kept the accounts of the king's income and expenditure and the sum of his wealth. Those bulls among the Bhaaratas gave me the responsibility of looking after all their dependants, who paid me their respects.

This burden, which was heavy and could not be borne by someone with an evil heart, I shouldered day and night, sacrificing my own ease and remaining lovingly devoted to my husbands all the while. And while my husbands were engaged in the pursuit of dharma, I managed their treasury that was as inexhaustible as Varuna's ever-brimming ocean.

Often knowing hunger and thirst, all day and night I would serve the Kuru princes, and I knew no difference between night and day. I was the first to awake and the last to sleep. This, O Satyabhama, is the charm I used to make my husbands obedient to me. This is what I know. Never have I resorted to the spells or intoxicants of wicked women, nor do I ever wish to use them.'

Quickly contrite now, Satyabhama says, 'O Panchali, among friends, light-hearted conversations happen naturally and without forethought. Yet, I am to blame. Yagnaseni, forgive me!' "

CANTO 232

DRAUPADI SATYABHAMA SAMVADA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi says, 'I will teach you how to capture your husband's heart without deceit. Beloved friend, if you do as I say, you will draw your lord away from other women.

In all the worlds, including Devaloka, there is no god equal to one's husband. When he is pleased with you he will grant you all your wishes, but when he is angry you will lose them all. It is the husband that gives the wife her children, and he gives her the things that she enjoys. He gives soft beds and comfortable chairs, clothes and garlands, perfumes, great fame, and heaven itself in the hereafter.

As a wife, it is not easy to find happiness. Indeed, the chaste woman always gains happiness through hardship. Always adore Krishna by offering him your friendship and love, and by cheerfully accepting physical hardship. Make him sit comfortably in a well-wrought seat, bring him the best garlands and perfumes, serve him promptly, and by this he will devote himself to you, realising that you love him truly.

As soon as you hear your lord's voice at the gate, rise from your chair and stand in readiness in your chamber; and as soon as you see him enter, worship him by leading him to a soft chair and fetching him water to wash his feet. Even when he commands a maidservant to do something, get up

and do it yourself. Let Krishna understand your mind and know that you love him with all your heart.

Satyabhama, do not talk to others of anything your lord says to you, even if it is nothing that needs to be kept secret, for if any of the other wives were to speak of it to him, he might become annoyed with you. Do whatever is in your power to make those he loves happy, and always work for his benefit. Take care to stay away from those who oppose him, who want to hurt him and from deceitful persons in general.

Remain composed and alert at all times, without showing any emotion, in the presence of men. Mask your feelings with silence; do not stay alone, or have private conversations with any man, not even your sons Pradyumna and Samba. You should cultivate friendships only with women that are of noble birth and pure hearts, who are devoted to their lords; shun women that are bad-tempered, addicted to wine, gluttonous, who are prone to stealing, or wicked and fickle.

Such conduct is reputable and augurs prosperity. It can allay hostility, and it leads to Swarga. So, deck yourself in garlands and ornaments, rub unguents and perfumes on your body, and worship your husband.' "

CANTO 233

DRAUPADI SATYABHAMA SAMVADA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "By this time, having spoken of many pleasant matters with the noble Pandavas and the Brahmanas with Markandeya at their head, and having bid them farewell, Krishna mounts his chariot and calls for Satyabhama.

Satyabhama embraces Draupadi lovingly and says to her, 'Krishnaa, let there be no anxiety or grief for you! You have no reason to spend sleepless nights, because you will surely regain the Earth that your godlike husbands will subdue. O black-eyed one, women who have your character and the auspicious marks that you do, can never suffer misfortune for long. I have heard it said that you and your husbands will surely enjoy this Earth, in peace and freed from all troubles!

Draupadi, you will see Yudhishtira ruling the world after he has slain the sons of Dhritarashtra and avenged their cowardly deeds. You will soon see those Kuru wives, who laughed shamelessly at you when you were going into exile, reduced to helpless despair. Be aware, Krishnaa, that all those that hurt you in any way while you were in that miserable condition have already died.

Your valiant sons, Yudhishtira's Prativindhya, Bhima's Sutasoma, Arjuna's Srutakarma, Nakula's Satanika and Sahadeva's Srutasena are well and have become skilled warriors. Like Abhimanyu they all live happily in

delightful Dwaravati. Subhadra cares for them with all her heart and rejoices in them even as you do. She grieves when they are sad and she is joyful when they are. Pradyumna's mother, too, loves them dearly.

Krishna and his son Bhanu, and all the others, watch over them with special affection. My mother-in-law Devaki does not spare any effort in feeding and clothing them; the Andhakas and Vrishnis, including Rama and others, have great fondness for them. Lovely one, all these love your sons as much as they love Pradyumna.'

Having spoken thus, with warm sincerity, Satyabhama makes her way to Krishna's chariot. She first walks around the Queen of the Pandavas in pradakshina and then climbs into the wonderful ratha. The greatest of the Yadavas comforts Draupadi with a smile and, bidding the Pandavas to return to their house, sets out for his own city, in his chariot yoked to swift horses."

CANTO 234

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "After they reached the lake in Dwaita vana, how do those best of men, Pritha's sons, pass their days in that forest, exposed to the inclement winter and summer, and to the Wind and the Sun, O Brahmana?"

Vaisampayana said, "When the sons of Pandu arrive at that lake, they choose a place to set up their dwelling far from human habitation. They explore the delightful woods, pristine mountains and picturesque river valleys. Once they have established their dwelling, many venerable Rishis, learned in Vedic lore, visit them regularly. Those Purushottamas always receive these Rishis with the utmost reverence.

One day, there comes to the home of the Kaurava princes a certain Brahmana who is known for his eloquence. He converses with the Pandavas for a while, and then, leaves them and goes to the court of the Dhritarashtra, son of Vichitravirya. The old king of the Kurus receives him with respect, and when the Brahmana is seated, asks him about the sons of Dharma, Vayu and Indra, and about the twins, sons of the Aswins.

The Brahmana tells him of their pitiful state, emaciated from their hardships and by the wind and Sun. The Brahmana also tells the king about Krishnaa, how intense her suffering is, and says that she is bereft of protection although she has those splendid Kshatriyas for husbands.

When he hears what the Brahmana says Dhritarashtra's soul contracts in grief at the thought of those royal princes drowning in a river of sorrow.

Trembling and sighing, he calms himself with great effort, and remembers that he himself is responsible for their plight.

Dhritarashstra says, 'O, how does Yudhishtira, the eldest of our sons, who is truthful and pious, who is righteous in all that he does, Ajatasatru who has not a single enemy, who is accustomed to sleeping on beds made of soft Ranku skins, sleep now on bare ground? O, he who used to be woken every morning by the melodious sound of sutas and magadhas singing his praises, that prince of the Kurus who is like Indra himself: he now rises from his rough bed, woken in the small hours by the harsh-throated birds of night.

How does Vrikodara, reduced by exposure to the elements, and full of rage, sleep on the floor in the presence of the princess of Panchala? He should not suffer so. Perhaps, the intelligent Arjuna does not sleep at night although he is one who can bear any pain, and who, though obedient to Yudhishtira, is pierced to the core by the memory of his elder brother's mistakes. I am certain that, seeing the twins and Krishnaa and Yudhishtira and Bhima plunged in misery, Arjuna sighs deeply, like a fierce serpent, and that his anger keeps him awake through the night.

The twins, too, who are like a pair of gods, and who deserve great happiness, are plunged in woe and pass their nights in restless wakefulness, only prevented by dharma and satya from avenging the wrongs done to them. The mighty son of Vayu, who is equal to his father in strength, no doubt sighs like a serpent as well, and restrains his fury, held fast by his elder brother with bonds of truth. The mightiest of warriors in battle, he now lies quietly on the ground, though fury roils his tameless heart. Burning to kill my children, he bides his time.

The cruel words that Dussasana spoke after Yudhishtira was deceitfully beaten at dice have sunk deep into Vrikodara's heart and consume him, as a bundle of straw set alight engulfs a faggot of dry wood.

Dharmaputra never acts sinfully, and Dhananjaya always obeys him; but Bhima's wrath, stoked by his life in exile, flares up like flames fanned by the wind. That Kshatriya wrings his hands and breathes hot, fierce breath, as if to consume my sons and grandsons with them.

When they are angry, Arjuna and Vrikodara are like Yama and Kaala. They loose their swift arrows like so many thunderbolts, in all directions and raze their enemies in battle. Sadly, when Duryodhana, Sakuni, the Suta's son and evil Dussasana robbed the Pandavas of their kingdom by

cheating at dice, they saw only the honey on the tree and not the terrible ruin what they did would inexorably bring.

Man knows that his actions, good and evil, will bear their different fruit, but he is sometimes confouded by fate. How, then, can man, find salvation? Even if the earth is well tilled and the seed sown in it, and even if Indra sends his showers at the right time, the crop may still not grow. This is what we often hear. How could this saying be true unless, as I have come to realise, Destiny is the ultimate master?

The gambler Sakuni cheated the son of Pandu, who is always honest; and out of blind affection for my sinful sons, I, too, was guilty of vile deceit. It is for this that the Kurus now face their hour of nemesis. Or, perhaps, the inevitable must come to pass, for it is fated and more myterious than we can know. The wind blows, whether made to or not; the woman that conceives will have a child; darkness will be dispelled at dawn; and daylight vanishes at dusk!

When the time comes, whatever material wealth we earn, whether it is spent or saved, brings us misery. Why, then, are men so anxious to garner wealth? If what we acquire is the result of fate, do we need to safeguard it from being divided, or from being frittered away, or from being spent all at once? If left unprotected, it may dwindle into a hundred portions. But whatever the nature of our possessions, our actions in the world are never lost.

Think of the power of Arjuna, who went to Indraloka from the forest. Having mastered the four kinds of Devastras, he has come back into this world. What man is there who, having gone to Indra's world in his human form, wishes to come back? He has returned because he sees that the destruction of the Kurus is imminent. Destiny's instrument is Arjuna, the ambidextrous archer. His bow is the Gandiva, which has no equal, besides which he now has other unearthly weapons. Who is there that can withstand the might of these three?'

After listening to the king, Subala's son goes to Duryodhana, who is sitting with Karna, and tells them all that he has heard. And even the heedless Duryodhana is filled with grief."

CANTO 235

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After hearing what Dhritarashtra says, Sakuni waits for his opportunity and, advised and abetted by Karna, speaks to Duryodhana.

He says, "You have, with your power, sent the heroic Pandavas into exile. Bhaarata, you rule this earth unchallenged, just as the slayer of Sambara rules Devaloka. The kings of the East, the South and the West pay tribute to you. Prosperity once paid court to Pandu's sons, but now she is the vassal of you and your brothers. My king, not so long ago, with heavy hearts we saw Prosperity sitting beside Yudhishtira in Indraprastha, but today she is yours. You have snatched her away from Yudhishtira by dint of your intelligence. All the kings of the earth are now your subjects and at your command, even as they were previously Yudhishtira's and waited on his word.

Boundless Bhumi Devi, girdled by her seas, adorned by her mountains and forests, her towns, cities and mines, and decked with woodlands and hills, is now yours!

Brahmanas adore you; kings worship you; and you blaze, Rajan, with the splendour of your prowess, like the Sun among the Devas. Surrounded by the Kurus, like Yama by the Rudras, or like Vasava by the Maruts, you shine, like the radiant Moon among the stars. Suyodhana, let us go and look at the sons of Pandu, who never obeyed anyone's commands and who never owed you subjection, who are now divested of their prosperity.

We have heard that the Pandavas are living on the shore of the lake in Dwaita vana, with many Brahmanas; the wilderness is their home. Go there, vested in great fortune, and scorch the sons of Pandu with the brilliance of your glory, just as the Sun burns everything with his hot rays. Enjoy the sight of yourself as a king and of them stripped of their sovereignty; of yourself in opulence and of them divested of it; of yourself with wealth and of them in poverty. Let Pandu's sons see you, looking like Yayati, the son of Nahusha, accompanied by a multitude of followers and enjoying great bliss.

O king, true prosperity is that which both friends and foes see. What jubilation can be more complete than that which a man enjoys when he himself is prosperous while his enemies are plunged in adversity? It is like the man, who from his position on the mountain-top, looks down on the man that grovels on the plain below. Tiger among kings, the exhilaration that a man derives from seeing his enemies in grief is greater than what he does from acquiring wealth or dominion.

How euphoric is he who looks upon Dhananjaya wearing tree-bark and deer-skin, while he himself is cloaked in robes of richness. Let your wife, grandly attired, go and see the woeful Krishnaa clad in bark, and add to Draupadi's sorrow. Let Drupada's impoverished daughter be filled with regret, seeing your wife decked in priceless ornaments, grief far greater than what she felt in the sabha when Dussasana dragged her there.'

Having spoken thus to Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni both fall silent, O Janamejaya, their counsel ended."

CANTO 236

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana is delighted with what Karna says. But quickly, he becomes melancholy again and says, 'O Karna, I have been thinking about what you said, but I will not be allowed to go where the Pandavas live. Dhritarashtra grieves for those Kshatriyas. Indeed, he thinks the sons of Pandu have become more powerful than before because of their austere lives and their tapasya. Even if the king understands my motives, he will think of future consequences, and never grant me leave. He will know that we have no other business in that forest than the humiliation of the exiled Pandavas.

You know what Kshatta Vidura said to me, to you and to Subala's son Sakuni during the game of dice. Bearing his words in mind, as well as the lamentations that he and others indulged in then, I am doubtful about whether or not to go and ask the king. I shall most certainly be gratified to see Bhima and Phalguna living in misery with Krishnaa in the jungle. The joy that I will feel in gaining sovereignty of the whole world is nothing compared to the rapture that will be mine on seeing Pandu's sons wearing tree-bark and deer-skin. Is there a greater joy than will be mine, Karna, on seeing Draupadi in the wilderness, dressed in rags?

Only when Yudhishtira and Bhima see how I am graced with vast wealth, will my life's ambition be fulfilled. Yet, I do not see a way in which I can convince the king to let me go to the forest.

You, Subala's son and Dussasana must devise a clever plan by which we can go. I, too, will decide today, whether or not I should go, and see the king tomorrow. When I am sitting with Kurusattama Bhishma, it is then that you and Sakuni must propose the plan you have concocted. I will listen to what the king and Bhishma have to say and settle the matter by pleading with our grandfather for permission.'

Saying S*o be it*, they all go away to their respective mansions.

In the morning, Karna comes to Duryodhana and, with a smile, says to him, 'I have a plan. Listen to it, O lord of men. Our herds of cattle are in the woods that fringe Dwaita vana. I am sure that we can go there under the pretext of inspecting the herds, for it is fitting for kings to go frequently to their cattle stations. If you give this as a reason, your father will surely give you leave to go.'

Sakuni says to them, 'This is the simple, cunning plan that I, too, had in mind. The king will definitely give his approval for our visit to Dwaita vana. Our herds all wait there, expecting you. We will surely be able to go to the cattle station, on the pretext of inspecting our herds and counting their numbers.'

The three men laugh in glee and clasp each others' hands. Having decided on this plan, they go to meet the king of the Kurus."

CANTO 237

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Janamejaya, as planned, they go to see king Dhritarashtra, and when they are in his presence they ask solicitously about his welfare. In return, he asks after theirs. The three connivers have enlisted the services of a cowherd named Samagna to help them and, as instructed, Samagna approaches the king and tells him about the cattle, and that they need to be counted.

At this point, Karna and Sakuni say to Dhritarashtra, ‘O Kaurava, our herds are kept in a most pleasant place. This is the time for branding the calves; it is also an excellent time for the prince to go hunting. You must give him leave to go.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘A deer hunt and an inspection of our cattle are excellent ideas, my child; it is not wise to trust the herdsmen completely. But we have heard that those Purushavyaghras, the Pandavas, now live in the vicinity of our herds. I think it is best that you do not go on your own.

The Pandavas live in the forest because they were defeated deceitfully at dice, and they suffer greatly. Karna, they are mighty warriors and they have devoted themselves to severe tapasya. Yudhishtira will not allow his anger to flare, but Bhimasena is naturally volatile and Yagnaseni is fire personified. You are proud and foolhardy, and are bound to offend them. She will burn you with the power of her tapasyashakti, and make ashes of even armed Kshatriyas.

I am also of the opinion that injuring them using a large force of warriors is sinful, besides I do not think you will succeed. Arjuna has returned to join them in the forest. Even before he had acquired mastery of the divine Astra Shastra, he subdued the earth. Mighty Kshatriya that he is, and now a master of the Devastras, will he not slay you all?

Even if, in obedience to my words, you conduct yourselves carefully while you are there, you will have no peace of mind because you will be constantly watchful. Or, some soldier of yours may, even unwittingly, do some harm to Yudhishtira, for which you will be held responsible.

No, let some of our trusted men go for the inspection and see to the branding of the calves. Bhaarata, you must not go there yourself.'

Sakuni says, 'Pandu's eldest son is well-versed in dharma. He made a pledge, which our entire sabha witnessed, that he would live for twelve years in the forest; and the other sons of Pandu are obedient to Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira will never be angry with us. We want, very much, to go hunting and we will use that opportunity to supervise the counting of our cattle.

We have no intention of seeing the Pandavas. We will be careful not to go near their dwelling; there will be no misdemeanour on our part.'

Now Dhritarashtra gives his consent, albeit unwillingly, for Duryodhana and his companions to go to the forest. Permission gained, the son of Gandhari sets out, accompanied by Karna and a large army. Also with him are Dussasana, many of his other brothers, Subala's son, the clever Sakuni, and thousands of princesses.

And as this prince of the mighty arms sets out for Dwaita vana, the citizens of Hastinapura, accompanied by their wives, follow him. Eight thousand chariots, thirty thousand elephants, nine thousand horses and many thousands of foot-soldiers are in his train, as well as moving shops and pavilions, traders, bards and hundreds of thousands of trained hunters.

As Duryodhana begins his journey followed by this massive entourage the uproar they make resembles the roaring of stormy monsoon winds. When they reach the forest, Duryodhana, with his followers, his chariots and laden carts, makes camp four miles from the lake in Dwaita vana."

CANTO 238

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana passes through different parts of that forest and finally arrives at the cattle station and settles his troops there. His attendants select a familiar and pleasant wood that has plentiful water and is lush with trees, a place convenient for constructing living quarters for the king. Not too far from the royal residence, they also erect separate dwellings for Karna, Sakuni and the king's brothers.

The king sees his cattle, hundreds and thousands of them; he examines their legs and their identifying marks, and supervises their counting. He supervises the branding of the calves and makes a note of those animals that need to be broken in; and he counts those cows whose calves have not yet been weaned.

Once he has marked and counted every calf less than three years old, the Kuru prince, surrounded by the cowherds, begins to amuse himself in the forest. His people and his soldiers enjoy themselves, even like the Devas, doing as they please. The herdsmen, who are skilled in singing, dancing and playing instruments, and young maidens decked in ornaments pander to the pleasures of Dhritarashtra's son, who, surrounded by the women of the royal household, cheerfully distributes wealth, food and drink amongst those who minister to him.

The king and his followers hunt and kill hyena, bison, deer, ox, bear and wild boar. The king shoots thousands of those animals in the deep forest, and he snares deer in the more light woods. Bhaarata, drinking milk and

enjoying all kinds of delicious food, and travelling through many charming groves and woods swarming with bees drunk on the honey of flowers and echoing with the cries of the peacock, Duryodhana eventually reaches the sacred lake of Dwaita vana.

The place where the king arrives is full of bees inebriated with pushpamrita, flower nectar, and resounds with the sweet notes of the blue jay; the glade is shaded by saptacchadas and punnagas and bakulas. The King, mantled in his bounty, enters that place looking like Indra, the wielder of the Vajra and king of the Devas.

O Kurusattama, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, of the mighty intellect, is at the time living close to that lake and is, with his wife Draupadi, celebrating the daily sacrifice called Rajarishi in accordance with the precepts laid down for Devas and forest dwellers.

Duryodhana arrives near this very spot and commands his men, 'Build pleasure palaces here without delay.'

The king's loyal servants say *Tathaastu* and come to the lake's shore to build the edifices that the king wants. As these hand-picked soldiers reach the shore of the lake and are about to enter the forest, a number of Gandharvas, led by their lord, appear before them and bar their way.

Rajan, the Gandharva with his followers has already come here from Kubera's kingdom; and, accompanied by the several tribes of Apsaras and by the sons of the Devas, he has come for his own entertainment. He has occupied the vana and closed it to all others.

The attendants of the Kuru king, finding that the Gandharva king has barred entry to the lake, go back to Duryodhana. Haughty Duryodhana hears what they say and despatches a troop of his best warriors, difficult to defeat, and commands them to drive the Gandharvas away.

These warriors, who form the vanguard of the Kuru army, come to the lake and say to the Gandharvas, 'The mighty king Duryodhana, son of Dhritarashtra, is coming here. Make way for him.'

The Gandharvas laugh in their faces and reply roughly, 'Your evil king must have lost his mind. Why else would he command Swargavasis, as if we were his servants? How foolish of you to rush here at his word to meet your deaths; you are impetuous fools to dare to bring us his message. Return at once to the king of the Kurus, or else go even now to Yamaloka.'

Frightened by the majesty and brilliance of the Gandharvas, that force flees back to where Dhritarashtra's son Duryodhana waits impatiently."

CANTO 239

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Rajan, those soldiers return to Duryodhana and tell him what the Gandharvas said. Dhritarashtra’s powerful son is furious.

He growls, ‘Even if they have come to sport with all the Devas and with him of the hundred sacrifices, kill the impudent Gandharvas.’

Dhritarashtra’s sons and the commanders of his army—mighty warriors all—and thousands of foot-soldiers arm for battle. They fill the air in the ten directions with loud roars and, rushing at the Gandharvas who guard the entrance, enter the vana. Even as the Kuru soldiers step into the forest, the fallen guards are replaced by other Gandharvas, who appear as if by magic and forbid them to advance.

Although the Gandharvas speak politely, the Kuru soldiers disregard them and begin to make their way into that deep vana.

When the sky-rangers find that Dhritarashtra’s warriors and their king cannot be stopped by words they go to their king Chitrasena and tell him what has happened. In rage, Chitrasena commands his followers, ‘Punish these wretches!’

The Gandharvas take up their weapons and charge Dhritarashtra’s troops. Seeing the celestial elves rushing towards them, weapons raised, the Kuru warriors flee in all directions, even as Duryodhana looks on. Only Karna remains, undeterred, while all the others turn their backs on the enemy and fly from the field.

Karna stops the Gandharva force with a perfect storm of arrows. With amazing lightness of hand, the Sutaputra strikes hundreds of Gandharvas with kshurapra arrows, bhallas and weapons made of bone and iron. In no time, mighty Karna makes the heads of many Gandharvas roll, and Chitrasena's forces begin to scream in anguish, in their musical voices.

They are slaughtered in great numbers by Karna of the great intellect, but the Gandharvas return in hundreds of thousands. Swarms of Chitrasena's warriors, rushing headlong into battle, soon cover the field, and the Earth itself seems to be filled by the unearthly host.

Then, led by Karna, prince Duryodhana, Sakuni, Dussasana, Vikarna and the other sons of Dhritarashtra, riding chariots, the clamour of whose wheels is like the raucous cries of Garuda, attack the elves and begin to raze the Gandharva host. Eagerly behind Karna, these princes assault the Gandharva army with a great force of chariots and cavalry.

Now all the Gandharva forces come to the fight against the Kauravas, and the encounter that takes place between the opposing armies is so fierce that it makes one's hair stand on end.

At last, afflicted by the arrows of the Kuru army, the Gandharvas appear to be exhausted, and seeing how spent the enemy is, the Kauravas send up a loud cheer.

Chitrasena sees his host yielding to fear, and angrily leaps up, determined to annihilate the Kuru army. Using his sublime mastery at arms and his powers of maya, he continues the battle. The Kaurava warriors are bewildered by the illusions that Chitrasena invokes, which, Bhaarata, makes them believe that they are being attacked by ten Gandharvas each.

The Kuru host is struck by panic, and all those who want to live, run from the field. While the entire Kaurava army breaks up and flees, Karna, son of Surya Deva, stands resolute, as immovable as a hill.

Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni also fight the Gandharvas, although every one of them has been sorely wounded. The Gandharvas rush in one massed force of hundreds of thousands against Karna, bent on killing him.

They surround the Sutaputra and assail him with swords, battle-axes and spears. Some dissever the yoke of his chariot, some bring down his flagstaff, some his ratha's shaft, some cut down his horses and some strike his sarathy.

Some fell his regal parasol, some pulverise the wooden fender around his chariot, and some its joints. Thousands of Gandharvas attack his ratha in

unison and smash it into little pieces. With his sword and shield, Karna leaps out of that ruined ratha, mounts Vikarna's chariot and lashes the horses away to save himself."

CANTO 240

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O king, when the Gandharvas succeed in chasing great Karna from field, the Kuru army scatters in panic, in the very sight of Dhritarashtra's son. Although he sees his troops fleeing the battle, their backs to the enemy, Duryodhana stands his ground. He sees the mighty Gandharva warriors rushing towards him and showers them with a deluge of arrows. But the Gandharvas unconcernedly brush off his shafts and surround his chariot.

With their own arrows, they chop its yoke into pieces; they shatter the shaft, the fenders, the flagstaff, the triple bamboo poles and the axle of his ratha; and they kill his charioteer and horses.

Chitrasena sees Duryodhana flung from his ruined chariot onto the ground. The Gandharva king rushes at him and seizes him with such violence as if to wring life out of him. The Kuru king taken, the Gandharvas surround Dussasana and capture him. Some Gandharvas seize Vivimsati, some take Vinda and Anuvinda, while others take all the Kuru princesses and women of the royal household.

Duryodhana's personal guard quickly joins the men who have already fled the battle, and together they hasten to the Pandavas, who are living nearby. After Duryodhana's capture by the Gandharvas, his men who are left alive place the Kuru chariots, mobile shops, pavilions, carriages and draught animals under the protection of the Pandavas.

The Kaurava soldiers sob, ‘The handsome, mighty-armed son of Dhritarashtra has been taken captive by the Gandharvas. The Gandharvas are hauling away Dussasana, Durvisha, Durmukha and Durjaya in chains, and taking all the royal Kuru women as well. O sons of Pritha, rescue them!’

Wailing, Duryodhana’s attendants go to Yudhishtira and beg him to save their king.

Bhima says to Duryodhana’s men, who are bowed with grief, ‘The Gandharvas have done our work for us. They have done what we should have done. The Kurus came here with some other vile purpose in mind but have been thwarted by circumstances they did not foresee. This is the result of the evil intention of a deceitful king.

It is said that the enemy of a powerless man is overthrown by others. The Gandharvas have, in an extraordinary way, illustrated the truth of this adage before our eyes. It appears that someone in this world still wants our welfare, and has assumed that pleasant responsibility, though we sit doing nothing.

The wretch came here to gloat over us—he wallowing in prosperity, and we sunk in poverty and emaciated by our austere life and the harsh elements. Those who behave like the evil-souled and wretched Kaurava are now witness to his disgrace. And he who persuaded Duryodhana to come also sinned. I say to you, it is not the sons of Kunti who are evil or sinful.’

Yudhishtira says sharply to Bhima, ‘This is not the time for such cruel words.’ ”

CANTO 241

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says to his wild brother, 'Child, why do you speak so harshly to the frightened Kurus, who are now in adversity and who have come to us for protection? Vrikodara, dissent and dispute often happen between blood relatives; hostilities such as these do go on, but the honour of the family must never suffer.

If a stranger insults the honour of a family, good men do not tolerate it. The king of the Gandharvas knows that we have been living here for some time. Yet, he chooses to ignore us and does something that we abhor. My brother, Duryodhana's capture and the insult to the women of our house by a stranger have tarnished our family honour.

Tigers among men, rise and arm yourselves without delay, we must rescue our kin, who ask for our protection, and protect the honour of our kula. Purushavyaghra, Arjuna, the twins and you, all valiant and undefeated, must free Duryodhana who has been taken prisoner.

These grand chariots, equipped with golden flagpoles and with weapons of all kinds that belong to Dhritarashtra's sons are here. Take them, and use Indrasena and the other skilled sarathys to drive them; use all your might to quell the Gandharvas and rescue Duryodhana.

Even an ordinary Kshatriya would do his utmost to protect one who comes to him for refuge; Vrikodara, from you I can expect no less. Who amongst us is so ignoble as to ignore the plea of even our enemy when we find him begging for help with joined hands? The bestowal of a boon,

sovereignty and the birth of a son are sources of great joy. But, Pandavas, rescuing an enemy from peril is equal to all three put together.

What can be a source of greater joy to you than Duryodhana, plunged in distress, depending on your prowess for his life? Vrikodara, if the tapasya that I am now engaged in had been complete, I would have rushed to help him myself. Do your very best, O Bhaarata, to rescue Duryodhana by placating the Gandharvas. If, however, the king of the Gandharvas spurns your efforts at conciliation, then you must free Suyodhana by means of a small fight. If the lord of the Gandharvas does not release the Kurus even then, you must rescue them by crushing the enemy by any means at your disposal.

Bhima, I cannot say anymore, for my tapasya has begun and has not ended yet.' "

Hearing Ajatasatru, out of reverence for his elder brother, Arjuna instantly swears to liberate the Kauravas. He says, 'If the Gandharvas do not free the sons of Dhritarashtra peacefully, the Earth will drink the blood of their king today!'

When the Kauravas hear Arjuna, they regain their composure."

CANTO 242

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Listening to Yudhishtira, those bulls among men, led by Bhimasena, arise, their faces beaming. Those mighty warriors put on impenetrable armour inlaid with gold, and arm themselves with unearthly weapons of all kinds. The Pandavas mount the Kaurava chariots with their flagstaffs, and with their bows and arrows they blaze in fiery splendour.

Riding those chariots drawn by the swiftest steeds, those tigers among warriors ride forth. Seeing the Pandavas riding to rescue Duryodhana, the Kuru army lets out a great cheer.

Soon, the Gandharvas, the sky-rangers flushed with victory, see the sons of Pandu coming after them fearlessly through the forest. The Gandharvas see the four sons of Pandu riding to battle on their chariots, and they turn back to face the Kshatriyas. The residents of Gandhamadana see the Pandavas like the radiant Lokapalas, guardians of the world, inflamed and eager for a fight.

O Bhaarata, in obedience to the wise Yudhishtira's command, the first encounter is a mere skirmish. Arjuna Parantapa realises that it has not succeeded. He says to the Gandharvas in a conciliatory tone, 'Release my brother Suyodhana.'

The Gandharvas laugh aloud and reply, 'Young man, there is only one lord whose orders we obey, and under his rule we pass our days happily. Bhaarata, we do only what he says, and none can command us except him.'

Arjuna says to them, ‘Contact with other men’s wives and a fight with mortal men are reprehensible in a king of Gandharvas. Release the mighty sons of Dhritarashtra. Set the women free as well, as Yudhishtira Dharmaraja commands. If you Gandharvas do not release the sons of Dhritarashtra peacefully, I will use all my prowess to rescue Suyodhana and his people.’

With that the ambidextrous Arjuna unleashes a shower of arrows on the Gandharvas. The Gandharvas respond with an equal torrent of shafts, and the Pandavas retaliate in return.

Bhaarata, fierce is the battle that rages between the agile and effervescent Gandharvas and the now impetuous sons of Pandu.”

CANTO 243

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Decked in golden garlands, and masters of the astra of heaven, the Gandharvas blaze their arrows at the Pandavas from every side. Since the sons of Pandu number only four and the Gandharvas are thousands, the battle that ensues is extraordinary. The Gandharvas try to shatter the chariots of the four Pandavas as they did the Kauravas'. But these tigers among men easily resist the hosts of elves who rush at them.

Those formidable rangers of skies are arrested on all sides and cannot come near the Pandavas.

Arjuna, provoked, prepares to loose his Devastras at the enraged and frustrated Gandharvas. His Agneyastra sends a hundred thousand Gandharvas to Yamaloka. Bhima, foremost of all warriors in battle, kills hundreds of elves with razorlike arrows. And the powerful sons of Madri, battling with scarcely credible energy, encounter hundreds of Gandharvas, O king, and kill them all.

As the Gandharvas are razed by the Pandavas with divine astras, they fly up into the sky, taking the sons of Dhritarashtra with them. But seeing them go, Arjuna shrouds them with a net of magic arrows, trapping them like birds in a cage. In fury, they cast maces, spears and swords down at Arjuna, but he, the master of astras, easily repels the attack; Dhananjaya retaliates, mangling Gandharva limbs with his crescent-tipped barbs.

Heads, legs and arms begin to fall from the sky in a cascade, and the sight strikes the enemy with panic. The Gandharvas now rain a downpour of shafts on Arjuna, who stands on the ground. That Kshatriya stills the elven shower of arrows with his own, also gravely wounding the Gandharvas.

Arjuna summons all his famed astras: Sthunakarna, Indrajala, Saura, Agneya and Saumya. The Gandharvas are consumed by the fiery weapons of Kunti's son and suffer great losses even as the sons of Diti did when they were torched by Sakra's thunderbolt. When they attack Arjuna from above, his thick mesh of arrows contains theirs; when they attack him from all sides on the ground, his crescent-tipped arrows hold theirs off.

Chitrasena sees that the Gandharvas are terrified by Kunti's son and, Bhaarata, rushes at Dhananjaya with his mace.

As the king of the Gandharvas hurtles down on Arjuna from above, mace in hand, Arjuna splits that mace into seven pieces with his immaculate archery. Chitrasena resorts to maya and continues the fight, now invisible to the Pandava. Arjuna uses many a Devastra to repel all the unworldly weapons that the Gandharva casts at him and, when Chitrasena, mantled in maya, now appearing, now disappearing, sees that the son of Kunti still confounds him, the Gandharva vanishes entirely.

Seeing the lord of the Gandharvas vanish, Arjuna, chanting the proper mantras, invokes an astra to rend Chitrasena's cloak of invisibility. Dhananjaya of the many forms, full of rage, fetches the Gandharva lord back into plain sight with the weapon Sabdaveda.

Assailed by the illustrious Arjuna, his beloved friend Chitrasena reveals himself and says, 'Behold, it is your friend who fights you!'

Arjuna sees that Chitrasena is tired and withdraws his astras. Seeing this, the other Pandavas hold their wind-swift horses and check their weapons, and put away their bows.

Chitrasena, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins sit on their chariots and solicitously enquire about one another's welfare."

CANTO 244

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Arjuna smiles and says to Chitrasena who now stands in the midst of his Gandharva host, 'My friend, what do you achieve by punishing the Kauravas? Why do you chastise Suyodhana and his wives?'

Chitrasena replies, 'Dhananjaya, long before I arrived here, I knew why the evil Duryodhana and the wretched Karna were coming here. They knew that you are exiles in the forest and that you suffer, as if you had no one to protect you. These vile men wanted to enjoy the sight of your adversity while they themselves are flush with prosperity. They came here to mock you and the chaste Draupadi.

The Lord Indra divined their purpose, too, and he said to me, "Go and bring Duryodhana to me in chains, along with his confederates. Always protect Dhananjaya and his brothers in battle, for Arjuna is your dear friend and disciple."

At the behest of the king of the Devas I came here at once. I have the unscrupulous prince in chains, and I will take this sinner now to Devaloka, to Devendra.'

Arjuna says, 'O Chitrasena, if you want to please me, set Suyodhana free, for this is the wish of my brother Yudhishtira Dharmaraja.'

Chitrasena says, 'This sinner is always full of vanity. He does not deserve to be released. Arjuna, he has deceived and wronged both

Yudhishtira and Krishnaa. The Dharmaraja does not know why this wretch came here. Let the king do as he likes, but only after he knows everything.'

All of them go to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and tell him about Duryodhana. Ajatasatru hears everything that the Gandharvas say and asks them to set the Kauravas free.

He says, 'How fortunate we are that you did not kill the son of Dhritarashtra and all his advisors and kin, though, with your powers you could easily have done so. O Gandharvas, you have done me a great kindness; you will restore the honour of my clan by releasing this evil man.

I am happy to see you. Command me; tell me what I can do for you. You can return to your home on high once you have what you wish.'

The Gandharvas are pleased with what the wise Pandava says and Chitrasena leads his Gandharvas and Apsaras home. The Lord of the Devas comes there and revives the Gandharvas that the Kauravas killed in battle by sprinkling divine amrita over them.

The Pandavas are gratified that they have freed their cousins, their other relatives and the women of the royal household. Those awesome Kshatriyas glow in splendour, like fires blazing in a yagnasala, as the Kurus, their wives and sons pay homage to them.

Yudhishtira then addresses Duryodhana in the midst of his brothers, saying affectionately, 'Child, never do such an imprudent thing again. Bhaarata, a rash man never achieves happiness. Kurunandana, may you and your brothers be blessed! Go back to your capital whenever you wish, without sorrow or despair.'

When the son of Pandu gives him leave to go, Duryodhana salutes Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and, his heart torn with shame, sets out woodenly for Hastinapura, like one whose very life has left him. After the Kaurava prince has gone, the Brahmanas adulate the noble Yudhishtira and his heroic brothers, even like the Devas worship Sakra; and surrounded by those Brahmanas rich in tapasyashakti, Yudhishtira passes his days contentedly in Dwaita vana."

CANTO 245

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "After his defeat and capture by the Gandharvas, and his rescue by the illustrious sons of Pandu, it seems to me that the entry into Hastinapura of the proud, evil, vicious, insolent Duryodhana, who so enjoyed insulting the Pandavas and bragging about his own superiority, must have been difficult. Describe it to me in detail, O Vaisampayana. How did that prince enter his city, overwhelmed as he was with shame and unmanned by grief?"

Vaisampayana said, "Dismissed by Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, Dhritarashtra's son Suyodhana bends his head in shame and, tormented by shame and melancholy, sets out slowly. He rides towards his city, accompanied by his four forces, his heart ruptured by sorrow and his mind filled with the memory of his defeat.

Along the way, in a place lush with grass and plentiful water, the king makes camp, with his elephants, horses, foot-soldiers and chariots.

Duryodhana is seated on a raised bedstead that is as magnificent as a burning fire, looking like the eclipsed moon, when, towards the small hours of the morning, Karna arrives there and says to him, 'Son of Gandhari, it is fortunate indeed that you are alive, and fortunate, too, that we meet again. It is by great fortune that you vanquished the Gandharvas, who can assume any form at will. And, Kurunandana, it is by good fortune alone that I see that your mighty brothers have vanquished their foes and emerged victorious.

As for myself, assailed by the Gandharvas, I fled before your very eyes and could not rally our terrified forces. My body mangled by enemy arrows, I sought safety. Bhaarata, I marvel at seeing all of you emerge safe and sound, with your wives, troops and chariots, out of that superhuman encounter.

No other man in this world could do what you, O king, with your brothers, have achieved in battle today.'

But Duryodhana replies to the king of the Angas in a voice choked with tears."

CANTO 246

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'O Radheya, you do not know what happened and so I am not upset by what you say. You think that it is with my prowess that I killed the hostile Gandharvas. Mahabaho, my brothers and I did indeed engage in a long battle with the sky-rangers. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. But when the Gandharvas took to the air with their magical powers and began to fight us from there, our contention became unequal. We were defeated and taken captive.

The Gandharvas took us, snared like animals in a net and in agony; they carried away our troops, our chariots, our wives and our children through the skies. It was then that some of our bold men went in despair to the sons of Pandu, those Kshatriyas that never refuse help to those that ask for it.

They said to the Pandavas, "Duryodhana, the son of Dhritarashtra, with his younger brothers, his friends and wives, has been captured and is being borne away through the sky by Gandharvas. Blessings be upon you! Liberate the king and the women of the royal household. Do not allow the royal ladies to be insulted."

When they said this, Pandu's eldest son, that virtuous soul, pacified his brothers and commanded them to free us. Those four bulls among men overtook the Gandharvas and asked them gently to release us, although they could have easily secured our freedom with their prodigious strength.

Though addressed in conciliatory words, the Gandharvas refused to release us. Then Arjuna, Bhima and the twins shot arrows at the sky-

rangers, who abandoned the fight and fled through the sky, gleefully dragging us behind them in our stricken state. Immediately, we saw Dhananjaya spread a net of arrows all around and, at the same time, loose his Devastras at the enemy. Seeing all the horizon covered by Arjuna's arrowy net, Arjuna's friend, the Gandharva king, revealed himself.

Chitrasena and Arjuna embraced each other and enquired after each other's welfare. The other sons of Pandu also embraced the lord of the Gandharvas and were embraced by him in return, and warm and courteous civilities passed between them as well. The Gandharvas threw down their weapons and armour and mingled in friendship with the Pandavas. And Chitrasena and Dhananjaya lovingly worshipped each other.' "

CANTO 247

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Arjuna smilingly said to Chitrasena, "Best of Gandharvas, you must release my brothers. They will not be humiliated as long as the sons of Pandu live."

O Karna, the lord of the Gandharvas then disclosed our reason for having gone there: that we went there to feast our eyes on the plight of the Pandavas and their wife.

When the Gandharva exposed us, I was so ashamed that I wished the earth would open and swallow me. The Gandharvas and the Pandavas went to Yudhishtira and, after telling him why we had gone there, handed us over to him. What greater sorrow could be mine than that I should be offered as a tribute to Yudhishtira in the very sight of the women of our household, bound in chains and miserable, a prisoner of my enemies. They that I have always maligned and tormented, to whom I have always been an enemy, released me and, wretch that I am, I owe them my life. It would have been far better to have died in battle than for my life to have been spared in this way. If the Gandharvas had killed me, my fame would have spread across the Earth and I would have attained eternal bliss in Indraloka.

Listen, O Manavarishabhas, to what I intend to do next. I will remain here, not eating, while you return home. Let all my brothers also go to Hastinapura; let all our friends, including Karna, and all our relatives led now by Dussasana return to the city of the elephant.

My enemies have shamed me, and I will not go to Hastinapura. I, who stripped my adversaries of honour, who always enhanced the esteem of my friends, have now become a source of shame to my own and one of joy to my enemies.

What will I say to the king if I go to Hastinapura? What will Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Drona's son, Vidura, Sanjaya, Bahuka, Somadatta and other revered elders say to me? What will the elders of the other varnas and the prominent men of independent professions say to me, and how will I answer them?

Until now, I have stood over the heads of my enemies and planted my feet on their breasts, but now I have fallen. How can I ever face or speak to them? Insolent men who become prosperous and gain knowledge and affluence are rarely blessed for long, even like me who was puffed up with vanity. Alas, folly led me to a vile path, and because of my foolishness, I have sunk to these depths.

And so, I will starve myself to death for my life has become unbearable. What man wants to drag out his days after he has been saved by his enemy? Proud as I am, my enemy stripped me of my dignity and laughed at me. The Pandavas have seen me plunged in wretchedness.'

Now Duryodhana turns to Dussasana, 'O Dussasana, listen to me. Bhaarata, be king in my place. Rule the earth, protected by Karna and Subala's son. Just as Indra looks after the Maruts, take care of your brothers in such a way that they will rest their faith and confidence in you. Let our friends and relatives depend on you, like the gods depend on him of the hundred yagnas.

Always bestow wealth on Brahmanas, promptly, and always be the refuge of your friends and family. As Vishnu looks after the Devas, you must look after all your relatives. You must always cherish your gurus. Go, rule the earth; gladden your friends and chastise your foes.'

And embracing Dussasana, Duryodhana says, 'Go!'

Dussasana is overwhelmed by sorrow when he hears this; his voice choked and with hands joined prayerfully, he bows his head and says to his elder brother, 'Relent.'

His heart so heavy, he falls on the ground; in searing grief, that tiger among men sheds tears on his brother's feet and says, 'Never! This will never be. The Earth may split, the vault of the Sky may shatter, the Sun may cast off his splendour, the Moon abandon his coolness, the Wind forsake his

speed, Himavat may move from his place, the waters of the Ocean may dry up and Fire renounce his heat; but I, O king, will not rule the earth without you.'

Repeatedly saying, 'Relent, Rajan, you alone shall be king of our race for a hundred years', Dussasana weeps at the feet of his elder brother, whom he adores, O Bhaarata.

Seeing Dussasana and Duryodhana sobbing, Karna says to them, 'O Kuru princes, why do you give in to sorrow like children, like ordinary men? Crying can never ease a man's grief; what do you gain by giving way to sorrow? Summon patience; do not give your enemies cause to be joyful.

Suyodhana, the Pandavas only did their duty by freeing you. The subjects of a king must always do what is pleasing to the king. The Pandavas are living happily in your kingdom and under your protection. It is not fitting for you to indulge your anguish, like any common man. Look, how despondent your brothers are to hear that you want to put an end to your life. May you be blessed! Arise! Return to your city and console your brothers.'

CANTO 248

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says, 'O king, your conduct is immature. Kshatriya, what is so surprising in the Pandavas saving you when you were defeated by the enemy? Those that live in the dominions of a king, especially those who are warriors, must always do what is good for the king, whether their monarch knows them or not.

Often, Kshatriyas who raze the ranks of an enemy are finally vanquished by them, and are then rescued by their own troops. Warriors living in a king's realm should always unite and do their utmost for their king.

If the Pandavas, who live in your kingdom, freed you, why should you grieve? Indeed, that the Pandavas did not follow you when you went into battle is unforgivable. They live under your authority and have become your slaves. They are honour-bound to help you, who are brave and strong and never turn away from the field of battle.

You now own the Pandavas' wealth. They are still alive; they have not resolved to fast to their deaths!

Rise up, my king. It is not fitting for you to indulge in such despair for long. It is the bounden duty of everyone in the kingdom to do what is in the king's best interest. Where is the cause for distress in what happened?

If you do not do as I say, I will remain here by your side, worshipping your feet. Purusharishabha, I have no wish to live without you. If you

decide to kill yourself by fasting, you will only become the laughing-stock of other kings.’

Even after hearing what Karna says, Duryodhana remains unmoved and does not stir from where he sits.”

CANTO 249

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Normally incapable of tolerating an insult, Duryodhana sits resolutely determined to fast to death, and seeing this, Subala’s son Sakuni consoles him.

Sakuni says, ‘Scion of the Kurus, you heard what Karna said. He speaks wisely. Why would you so foolishly throw away the enormous wealth I won for you by giving up your life today, Rajan, through this silliness?

It seems to me that you have never paid heed to what wise old men say. He who cannot control sudden occurrences of joy or sorrow is lost even though he may have prospered, even like an unfired earthen vessel filled with water. Subjects seldom respect the king who is destitute of courage, who has no spark of manliness, who is the slave of procrastination, who is indiscreet, or who is addicted to sensual pleasures.

With all the good fortune you enjoy, where does this unreasonable grief of yours spring from? Do not negate this graciousness of Pritha’s sons by indulging your grief. Why do you grieve, and reward the Pandavas, when you should be joyful? Ah, your behaviour is inconsistent. Be cheerful; do not throw your life away; instead, remember with a grateful heart the favour they have done you.

Return their kingdom to Pritha’s sons, and thereby win honour and fame. In that way, you can show your gratitude. Establish brotherly relations with the Pandavas, in friendship, and give them back their father’s kingdom. Then you will be happy!’

Hearing what Sakuni says, and seeing the valiant Dussasana lying prostrate before him, and overcome by fraternal love, the king raises Dussasana up and, clasping him in his mighty arms, sniffs his head in affection. Karna and Saubala's words move Duryodhana to shame, and utter dejection grips his soul.

Sorrowfully, he responds to his friends, 'I have no more need of virtue, wealth, friendship, affluence, sovereignty or pleasure. Do not try to move me; leave me, all of you. I am firmly resolved to fast to my death. Return to Hastina and pay your respects to our elders.'

They reply to that grinder of his foes, 'Whatever course you take, we shall, too, Bhaarata. How can we enter the city without you?'

Whatever his friends and advisors say to him, the king does not waver in his determination. Dhritarashtra's son spreads kusa grass on the ground, purifies himself with water and sits down. He casts away his royal robes, covers himself in rags and grass, and vows to observe Atikatora, the most difficult tapasya. Falling silent, that tiger among kings, his mind focused on Swarga, begins to pray, shutting out the outside world.

Meanwhile, the fierce Daityas and Danavas, whom the Devas defeated long ago, and who live in Patala, the nether realms, find out about Duryodhana's vow and, knowing that if he dies they will be immeasurably weakened, begin a yagna with fire, to fetch Duryodhana into their presence.

Demons, masters of dark mantras, using the methods declared by Brihaspati and Usanas, conduct rites prescribed in the Atharva Veda and the Upanishads. Brahmana Asuras of rigid vows, versed in the Vedas and their many branches, prayerfully pour libations of ghee and milk into the fire whilst chanting mantras. After those rituals have been completed, O king, a macabre and dreadful female spirit, with a yawning maw, rises from the sacrificial fire and asks to be commanded.

The Daityas command her, 'Bring the royal son of Dhritarashtra here from where he keeps a fast to end his life.' She vanishes, saying, *So be it*.

She goes in an instant to where Suyodhana sits, picks the king up bodily and carries him back to Patala, to the great Danavas. The Danavas see the king, who is brought into their midst in the night, and together they address Duryodhana with flattery, their hearts full of hope and their eyes wide with delight."

CANTO 250

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

"The Danavas say, 'O Suyodhana, great king, perpetuator of the Bhaaratas, you are living in the company of heroic and illustrious men. Why have you sworn this harsh vow of fasting to the death? The man that commits suicide sinks into hell and everyone speaks ill of him. Intelligent men like you never commit such sins, which are contrary to their own interests and that strike at the very root of their purpose. Set aside your resolve: it is against dharma, destroys profit, happiness, fame, prowess and energy, and enhances the joy of your enemies.

Rajan, realise the truth of the divine origin of your soul and your body; summon patience to your aid.

Long ago, Maheswara gave you to us as a reward for our tapasya. Anagha, your upper body is composed entirely of thunder, Vajra, and is invulnerable to any weapon. The lower part of your body, which can captivate a woman's heart by its physical beauty, was made of flowers by Mahadeva's wife, the Devi herself. Best of kings, your body is the creation of Maheswara and his consort. Purushavyaghra, you are not of human origin, but celestial.

Other brave Kshatriyas of mighty energy, headed by Bhagadatta, all of whom have knowledge of Devastras, will kill your enemies. Let this grief of yours end now. You have no need to be afraid. There are countless heroic Danavas who have been born into the world with the sole purpose of helping you.

Other Asuras will insinuate themselves into the atmas of Bhishma, Drona, Karna and the rest. Possessed by them, these heroes will shed their dharma and fight your enemies. When the Danavas enter their hearts and possess them completely they will cast aside their compassion and, becoming savage and cruel, these warriors will strike down everybody who stands against them, not even sparing sons, brothers, fathers, friends, disciples, relatives, nor even children and old men. As destined by Brahma, ignorance and rage will drive these tigers among men. Their hearts steeped in sin, they will, O Kurusattama, depopulate the earth with all kinds of weapons, with manly prowess and strength, all the while boasting to their victims, *You will not escape me with your life*.

These are the men that the Pandavas, who are just five, will face. Vested with uncanny strength and favoured by Destiny, the Danavas will entirely destroy the sons of Pandu. Rajan, many Daityas and Rakshasas have been born as Kshatriyas, and they, too, will fight your enemies, with arrows, maces, swords, spears and astras as well.

As for the fear that rests in your heart because of Arjuna, we have already decided how to kill him. The atma of the slain Narakasura has assumed the form of Karna. In this form, he will remember his ancient hatred and he will kill both Krishna and Arjuna. This Maharatha and best of all warriors, who is proud of his ability, will vanquish Arjuna and all your enemies in battle.

Knowing all this and wanting to save Arjuna, Indra, the wielder of the Vajra, will disguise himself as a Brahmana and take from him Karna's kavacha and kundala, the golden armour and earrings that make Karna invincible.

Also, to this end we have sent hundreds of thousands of Daityas and Rakshasas into the world. They shall be known as Samsaptakas, and these inexorable warriors will slay the heroic Arjuna.

Therefore, Rajan, grieve not. You will rule the earth without a rival. Do not yield to despondency; it does not suit you. If you die, all our kind will be weakened. Come, Kshatriya, do not even think of anything other that annihilating your enemies. You are our refuge, in the same way that the Pandavas are the refuge of the Devas.'

The Daityas embrace that best of kings, and the Danavarishabhas, bulls among Danavas, cheer that irrepressible hero as if he is a son. Bhaarata,

they steady his mind with soft words of deep enchantment and then allow him to leave, saying, 'Go and be victorious!'

The female spirit bears Duryodhana back to the place where he sat. She sets the Kshatriya down and pays him homage. Then she vanishes.

Bhaarata, when she has gone, Duryodhana reflects on all that has happened, as if it were a dream. He says within himself, 'I shall defeat the Pandavas in battle,' and convinced that Karna and the Samsaptaka legions will kill Arjuna, Dhritarashtra's evil son becomes strong with hope.

At this very hour, Karna is possessed by the soul of Narakasura and his heart hardens further in determination to kill Arjuna. The Samsaptakas, their souls taken by the Daityas, and under the control of fell influences, also become intent on slaying Phalguna. Bhishma, Drona and Kripa, they too possessed by the Danavas, lose their fondness for the Pandavas. And Suyodhana does not reveal what he now knows to anyone.

When the night has passed Suryaputra Karna says Duryodhana, with his palms folded in respect, 'A dead man never conquered his enemies. It is only alive that he achieves anything. Of what use is a dead man? O Kaurava, where is his victory? I say to you, this is no time for grief, or fear, or death.'

He embraces his beloved friend, 'Arise, O king! Why do you lie down? Why do you grieve, Parantapa? Having afflicted your adversaries with your strength, why do you wish for death? Does fear grip you at the sight of Arjuna? I promise you this: I will slay Dhananjaya in battle. Lord of men, I swear by my sacred bow that before the thirteen years are over, I will bring the sons of Pritha to their knees before you.'

When he hears what Karna says, he remembers the words of the Daityas, as well as the pleas of his brothers, and Suyodhana rises. The Demons' words have given this Purushavyaghra strength of resolve. He arrays his army, of vast numbers of horses, elephants, chariots and foot-soldiers. With great, royal white parasols, flags and white chamara whisks, with chariots, elephants and foot-soldiers, that army moves like the majestic Ganga, looking as glorious as the sky after the monsoon, when the clouds have dispersed and autumn has signalled its arrival.

Rajadhiraja, king of kings, Brahmanas bless Suyodhana to be victorious and sing his praises. Dhritarashtra's son leads his army, receiving the honour of uncountable hands joined in homage to him, flaming in splendour and flanked by Karna and that gambler Sakuni. All his brothers with

Dussasana at their head, and Bhurisrava, and Somadatta, and the dauntless king Bahlika follow that lion among kings as he marches with a multitude of chariots, horses and the strongest, most massive elephants. Best of kings, shortly the Kauravas enter Hastinapura."

CANTO 251

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "What did sons of Dhritarashtra, those best of men, superb archers, do while the Pandavas lived in the forest? And how did Karna, Sakuni, Bhishma, Drona and Kripa occupy themselves during that time? Tell me all this."

Vaisampayana said, "O Maharajan, after the Pandavas have freed him, Suyodhana goes to Hastinapura, where Bhishma says to him in the Kuru sabha, 'Child, I told you when you were determined to go to the forest that I was not happy with your plan. You went anyway and you were taken captive by the Gandharvas and then rescued by the honourable Pandavas. Still, you are not ashamed.

O son of Gandhari, you saw how the Suta's son panicked and fled from the Gandharvas with your army. In your distress, you saw for yourself the prowess of the noble Pandavas, and also that of Karna, the sinful Sutaputra. Karna cannot measure up to a quarter of even one Pandava, be it in the Astra Shastra, in courage, or in dharma. For the weal of this house of Kuru, it is best you make peace with the Pandavas.'

Dhritarashtra's son laughs impudently at Bhishma and abruptly walks out with Sakuni. His brothers, mighty bowmen all, with Karna and Dussasana at their head follow Duryodhana, not knowing where he goes. Pitamaha Bhishma, the grandsire of the Kurus, hangs his head and retires sadly to his apartments.

After Bhishma has left, Dhritarashtra's son returns to the sabha and consults his advisors. He says, 'What is the best course for me to adopt? Is there something else I should do? Let us discuss how we can achieve what is best for us.'

Karna says, 'Duryodhana, take to heart what I am going to say. Bhishma always blames us and praises the Pandavas because he dislikes you. He hates me as well; he always insults me in your presence. I will never forget what Bhishma said to you, when he extolled the Pandavas and berated you, Parantapa. My king, give me command of your men, your armies and your chariots, and I will conquer the Earth with her mountains, woods and forests. It took four powerful Pandavas to subdue Bhumi, but I will do it single-handedly.

Let that dreg of the Kuru race, the evil-minded Bhishma, who reproves the innocent and praises the undeserving, witness my might and feel ashamed of himself. O Rajan, only command me; and victory will surely be yours. This I swear to you by my bow.'

Listening to Karna, Duryodhana is delighted and says to him, 'I am blessed with the wealth of your friendship! You are endowed with unrivalled strength and devoted to me. My life has borne fruit today. Go, O valiant one, and vanquish all my enemies as you intend. May good fortune follow you! Command me; what shall I do for you?'

Karna loses no time in gathering all that he needs for his expedition. Then, on a good day of the lunar calendar, at an opportune moment, and under the influence of a nakshatra presided over by an auspicious deity, he sets out. The Dvijas honour him, the Brahmanas pour auspicious and holy water over him in blessing, and all who are gathered sing his praises as he goes forward, filling the three worlds, its mobile and immovable beings, with the rumble of his chariot wheels."

CANTO 252

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "With a teeming army, Karna besieges Drupada's beautiful city. After a hard-fought battle, Karna quells Drupada, makes him surrender his gold, silver and jewels, and also makes him pay a tribute to Duryodhana. Once he has defeated Drupada, he goes on to subdue the vassal kings and extracts tribute from them as well.

He turns northwards and brings those kings under his sway. After defeating the unvanquished Bhagadatta, Radheya Karna climbs to the top of the colossal Himavat, crushing all whom he encounters on the way. He conquers all the kings living on the Himavat Mountain and makes them all pay him rich tributes.

Descending from the mountain and moving to the east, he subdues the Angas, and the Vangas, the Kalingas and the Shundikas, the Magadhas and the Karkakhandas, Avasiras, Yodhyas and the Ahikshatras. Having conquered all the east, Karna goes on to subdue Vatsabhumi, Kevala, Mrittikavati and Mohana; and Pattana, Tripura and Kosala, and forces tribute from them, as well.

He turns his attention to the south, where he vanquishes the Maharathas of those kingdoms. There, the Sutaputra encounters Rukmi.

After a dreadful battle, Rukmi says to Karna, 'Rajendra, foremost of kings, I am impressed by your strength. I will do you no wrong; I have only fulfilled Kshatriya dharma. I will gladly give you as many gold coins as you wish.'

Karna proceeds, then, to the Pandya kingdom and to the Mountain Sri. Defeating king Nila of Kerala, Venudari's son and other mighty kings of the southern kingdoms, he extracts tribute from all of them. The Sutaputra goes on to crush Sisupala's son, and brings all the neighbouring rulers under his dominion.

Bharatarishabha, he subjugates the Avantis and makes peace with them; he defeats the Vrishnis and conquers the west. He goes to the sea kingdoms of Varuna and makes the Yavana and Barbara kings pay him tribute.

Thus, the peerless Karna conquers all the kingdoms of the north, south, east and west. That hero single-handedly subdues all the Mlechcha nations, the mountain kingdoms, the Bhadras, the Rohitakas, the Agreyas and the Malavas. He defeats the mightiest chariot-warriors and the Sasakas and the Yavanas.

Having conquered the whole world, this Maharatha, Purushavyaghra Karna returns to Hastinapura.

Dhritarashtra's son, with his father and his brothers and friends, comes out of his gates and greets Karna; and he pays homage to the warrior crowned with victory. The king proclaims his feats and says, 'You have given me what no one else has, not even Bhishma, Drona, Kripa or Bahlika. May God bless you!

What need is there for lengthy speeches, when in you, Karna, Janeswara, god among men, I have my refuge? Mahabaho, Narapumgava, neither all the Pandavas nor any of the other prosperous kings measures up to a sixteenth of you. Karna, look on Dhritarashtra and the illustrious Gandhari as the Vajradhari does upon Aditi.'

A great uproar rises in the city of Hastinapura; a great clamour and cries of both *Oh!* and *Alas!* fill the air. Some of the kings praise Karna, while others censure him, and some say nothing.

In such short time, Karna has conquered the Earth, replete with her mountains, forests and skies, her oceans and islands, her fields, highlands and lowlands, and her cities. Lord of Earth, he has brought kings under his control and garnered endless wealth. Thus does the Suta's son present himself to the king and, entering the palace, the hero stands before Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. Karna, learned in dharma, takes Dhritarashtra's feet in his hands, as a son would; and Dhritarashtra embraces him affectionately before allowing him to leave.

From then on, Rajan, king Duryodhana and Subala’s son Sakuni consider that Pritha’s sons have already been defeated and slain by Karna.”

CANTO 253

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Lord of men, the Suta's son, slayer of hostile Kshatriyas, says to Duryodhana, 'Suyodhana, keep the words that I now say to you close to your heart, because, Parantapa, after having heard me, you must do as I say. I have rid the Earth of your enemies. Now rule her as Sakra does Devaloka after destroying his enemies.'

The king replies, 'Nothing is unattainable to him who has you at his side, to whom you are devoted and whose welfare you have at heart. I have a plan which I want you to hear. Listen.

Ever since I saw the Pandavas performing the wonderful Rajasuya yagna, I have wanted to celebrate that very yagna. You must make this wish come true.'

Karna says to the king, 'Now that you have conquered all the rulers of the Earth, you may summon the chief Brahmanas and, procuring whatever you need for the sacrifice, undertake it in glory, O Best of Kurus. Let the Ritwiks celebrate the Rajasuya yagna in accordance with the rules laid down in the Vedas. Begin your great yagna, Bharatarishabha; let it be grand, abounding in meat and drink, and indeed an abundance of all things rare and desirable.'

Duryodhana summons the priest and says to him, 'I want you to celebrate that greatest of sacrifices, the Rajasuya yagna, with abundant gifts.'

The Brahmanottama says to the king, 'Lord of the Kauravas, as long as Yudhishtira lives, this sacrifice cannot be performed in your clan. Furthermore, your father, too, is still living. Rajottama, you cannot undertake this yagna.

There is another great sacrifice that is similar, even equal to the Rajasuya. Perform that yagna, Rajan. Listen to me.

All the rulers of the Earth who have become your vassals will pay you tribute in gold, in various degrees of purity. Use that gold to make the sacrificial plough and, Bhaarata, plough the site for the yagnashala with it. There, with the proper rituals, and undisturbed, begin your sacrifice, Rajadhiraja. Sanctify it with mantras and serve all manner of delicious food in plenty.

This sacrifice, worthy of the most virtuous men, is called the Vaishnava. No one other than the ancient Vishnu himself has ever performed it before. This wondrous sacrifice compares with the Rajasuya. Moreover, it will prove most beneficial to you. You can celebrate it without any obstacles, and your desire will be fulfilled.'

When the Brahmanas say this, Dhritarashtra's son says to Karna, his brothers and Sakuni says, 'I like what the Brahmana says. Tell me if you also approve.'

They all say, '*Tathaastu, so be it*'.

Duryodhana appoints his people, one by one, to various tasks; he arranges for artisans to make the sacrificial plough; and all that needs to be done is gradually accomplished."

CANTO 254

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "All the sculptors, the chief advisors and the wise Vidura approach Dhritarashtra's son and say to him, 'The preparations for the great sacrifice are complete; the time is right, Bhaarata. The precious golden plough is ready.'

Duryodhana commands the commencement of that mahayagna. The Vaishnava yagna begins, sanctified by mantras, and with an abundance of food being served. The son of Gandhari is initiated as the sacrificer; and Vidura, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Gandhari are happy indeed. Duryodhana sends swift messengers to invite Kshatriyas and Brahmanas from across Bharatavarsha and they go forth on fleet chariots with the king's invitation.

Then, to one of the messengers about to set out, Dussasana says, 'Go to Dwaita vana and invite the Brahmanas and the black-hearted Pandavas.'

That man comes to the hermitage beside the lake and, bowing to the Pandavas, says, 'Having acquired immense wealth through his prowess, the Kuru prince Duryodhana is performing a yagna. Kings and Brahmanas from all over the holy land will attend his great sacrifice. The noble Duryodhana has sent me to invite you. You must come to his Vaishnava mahayagna.'

Having heard the messenger out, that tiger among kings, Yudhishtira, says, 'It is fortunate that Suyodhana, the enhancer of his ancestors' glory, is performing this best of sacrifices. We would surely have come but we are bound by our vow for thirteen years.'

Bhima adds, 'Yudhishtira Dharmaraja will go there only when he can cast Duryodhana into the sacred fire that is kindled by weapons. Go and tell Suyodhana that when the thirteenth year is complete, that lord of men, the son of Pandu, will pour his anger as a libation over the sons of Dhritarashtra at the yagna of war. I will also come to that sacrifice in blood."

The other Pandavas, Rajan, say nothing unpleasant and, on his return, the messenger reports everything to Dhritarashtra's son.

Many lords of men, kings of countless countries and great and pure Brahmanas come to Dhritarashtra's city. All of them are pleased with the reception they receive in Hastinapura, with due ceremony. Dhritarashtra is surrounded by all the Kauravas and is at the pinnacle of his joy.

He says to Vidura, 'Kshatta, make haste and serve everyone who has come with food and delicacies, to their heart's content.'

The learned, honourable Vidura cheerfully entertains all the different people from various ranks in society with meat, rice and drink, after welcoming them with fragrant garlands and a variety of clothing. Opulent pavilions have already been raised to accommodate them. Duryodhana entertains thousands of his Sadasyas and Brahmanas and gives them all kinds of rich gifts, before he takes his leave of them and enters Hastinapura, surrounded by his brothers, and with Karna and Sakuni."

CANTO 255

GHOSHA YATRA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana enters his city to the sound of eulogies being sung to his endless strength, his might as an archer and his fame as the greatest of kings. The citizens fling fried paddy over him, sprinkle him with sandalwood paste, and say, 'O king, it is by good fortune that you completed your sacrifice without facing any obstacles.'

Some that are bolder, more reckless and caring little for the consequences, say, 'Your sacrifice cannot be compared with Yudhishtira's; indeed, it does not measure up to a sixteenth part of that Rajasuya.'

His friends, however, say, 'Your yagna has surpassed all others. Yayati, Nahusha, Mandhata and Bharata, all performed this very yagna; they were purified and have all found Swarga.'

Hearing his friends' pleasing words, the king happily enters the city and goes to his palace, Bharatarishabha. There he worships the feet of his father and mother, and of others, like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and the wise Vidura. In turn, his younger brothers pay their reverences to him, and that giver of joy to his bothers sits on his throne, surrounded by them.

Karna stands and says, 'With good fortune, Bhaaratottama, you have completed your great yagna. I will honour you once again, as I do today, when you have killed Pritha's sons in battle and have performed the Rajasuya yagna.'

Dhritarashtra's mighty son replies, 'Well said, O Purushottama! When I have killed the lowly Pandavas, and when I celebrate the Rajasuya yagna,

you shall, indeed, O Hero, honour me again.'

Saying this, the Kaurava embraces Karna and begins to dream about performing the Rajasuya, best of all yagnas. He declares to the assembled Kurus, 'Kauravas, when I have slain all the Pandavas, I shall celebrate that foremost of yagnas, the Rajasuya!'

Now Karna says to him, 'I vow, O most majestic of kings, that until I have killed Arjuna I will allow no one to wash my feet, nor will I eat meat. I will observe the Asura vrata: I swear that I will never refuse anything to anyone who asks.'

When Karna makes his vow to kill Arjuna in battle, those Maharathas and virile bowmen, the sons of Dhritarashtra, set up a loud cheer, almost as if that the Pandavas have already been killed. The magnificent Duryodhana leaves the others and goes to his apartment, like the Lord Kubera entering the garden of Chitraratha. Bhaarata, all the rest also return to their apartments.

Meanwhile, the Pandavas are distressed by what the messenger said. Then, some spies come and tell them of Karna's vow to kill Arjuna, and Yudhishtira is deeply troubled. Thinking of Karna of the impenetrable mail and of his superb prowess, he knows no peace. The Dharmaraja is full of anxiety and makes up his mind to leave Dwaita vana, emerald forest that teems with game and other creatures of the wild.

Meanwhile, Dhritarashtra's royal son rules the world with his brothers, and with Bhishma, Drona and Kripa, all with the support of Karna crowned in martial glory. Duryodhana bends his mind to the welfare of the kings of the earth. He worships Brahmanas by celebrating sacrifices and giving bountiful gifts; and occupies himself with promoting his brothers' welfare, in the firm conviction that the best use of wealth, its true joy, lies in sharing it."

CANTO 256

MRIGASWAPNODBHAVA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "After saving Duryodhana's life, what did Pandu's mighty sons do in the forest? Tell me about them."

Vaisampayana said, "Once, as Yudhishtira lies asleep at night in the Dwaita vana, some deer, their voices choked with tears, appear in his dream. Their bodies tremble as they stand before him with their forelegs reverently folded.

Yudhishtira says to them, 'What do you want to say? Who are you? Tell me what you want.'

Those deer, which are the ones that remained after the herd had been slaughtered, reply, 'O Bhaarata, we are the deer left alive after the rest of our herd was killed. Soon, we will all be dead. We want you to move to another part of the forest. Great king, all your brothers are Kshatriyas, and skilled archers. They have thinned the ranks of our herd of forest-dwellers. The few remaining of us are left like seed, mighty one. By your grace and favour we can increase again.'

Seeing these deer, which remain like seed stock after a crop has been harvested, shaking in fear, Yudhishtira is grief-stricken. Always mindful of the welfare of all creatures, the king says to them, 'I will do as you say,' and wakes from his dream.

Moved to pity, he says to his brothers, 'The deer that remain alive after our slaughter of their herd came to me in my dream and told me that the few who remained were like the seed of a new herd. They blessed me and

begged me to be compassionate to them. What they say is true. We ought to take pity on the animals of the forest. We have been feeding on them for a year and eight months.

Let us move to the charming Kamyaka vana, that most beautiful forest at the head of the desert near the lake Trinabindu. It has plenty of game and we can live there for the remainder of our exile, until we go into ajnatavasa for its final year.'

The Pandavas gather their spare belongings and, accompanied by the Brahmanas and all the others who live with them, with Indrasena and their other retainers following behind, they move the very next day. They go along roads where excellent corn and clear water are available to travellers, and at length see the sacred asrama of Kamyaka, steeped in the aura of tapasya. Surrounded by their excellent Brahmanas, the sons of Pandu enter the Kamyaka vana, much as pious men enter Swarga."

CANTO 257

VRIHIDRAUNIKA PARVA

Vaisampayana continued, “The noble Pandavas live in the forests for eleven years, in poverty, Bharatarishabha. Although they deserve happiness, they pass their days in some misery, brooding on the circumstances that have overtaken them, and living on fruit and roots.

Rajarishi Yudhishtira thinks about the suffering his brothers endure, and remembering that all this is a result of his gambling, he cannot sleep. He feels as if his heart has been pierced with a lance. He remembers the harsh words of the Suta’s son, and repressing the venom of his wrath, he passes his time, outwardly calm, but in anguish all the time.

Arjuna, the twins, Draupadi and that strongest of all men, Bhima, are wracked with heartache when they look at Yudhishtira. Knowing that only a short time remains of their exile, and sustained by rage and hope, those bulls among men submit their bodies to the most rigorous and exacting discipline.

Some time elapses, and one day the great tapasvin, Satyavati’s son Vyasa, comes to the Pandavas. Seeing him approach, Yudhishtira goes to receive the Mahamuni reverentially. He bows down to Vyasa, pleasing him; and after the Rishi is seated, the self-retrained Yudhishtira sits down, waiting for the sage to speak. At the sight of his grandson emaciated and living on the wild produce of the forest, the Maharishi is moved to pity.

His voice choking, he says, ‘Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, those who do not perform rigorous tapasya do not attain happiness. Joy and sorrow come in

turns; no man enjoys uninterrupted happiness. A wise man, knowing that life has its ups and downs, neither overly celebrates nor grieves. When happiness comes one should enjoy it and when misfortune comes, one should endure it, in much the same way as the farmer lives by the seasons.

Nothing is superior to tapasya; with tapasya one gains great rewards. Bhaarata, there is nothing that asceticism cannot achieve. Truth, sincerity, freedom from anger, justice, self-control, restraint of the mind, avoidance of malice, innocence, sanctity, and subduing of the senses: these purify a man whose deeds are pure.

Foolish ones addicted to vice and bestial ways merit birth as animals in the next life, and they are never happy. The fruit of what one does in this world is reaped in the next. Even so, one must discipline oneself by performing tapasya and keeping vratas.

Cheerfully and without ulterior motives, a man must give gifts that he can afford, after humbly paying his respects to the recipient. The man who always tells the truth gains a trouble free life; the man who has no anger attains sincerity; and one who is free from malice acquires supreme contentment.

The man who has subdued his senses and controls his mind never knows tribulation, nor does he feel envy or sorrow at another's prosperity. The man who gives everyone his due, and who bestows boons, attains felicity and possesses every object of enjoyment; the man free from envy reaps the reward of perfect health.

He who gives honour to one to whom it is due attains birth in an illustrious house; and he who has subdued his senses never sees misfortune. The man whose mind is inclined to good, after paying his debt to nature, is born again with a righteous mind.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O mighty Sage, which has greater benefits in the next world - giving gifts or performing tapasya? And which is more difficult?

Vyasa says, 'Child, there is nothing harder than giving charity. Men thirst for wealth, which is not easy to earn. Magnanimous one, brave men renounce comfort and go deep into the sea or the forest in order to acquire wealth. Some take to farming and cattle-rearing, and some become the servants of others. It is difficult to part with wealth that is obtained with such difficulty. Since nothing is harder to practise than charity; I think that bestowing a boon is superior to everything.

Especially bear in mind that hard-earned wealth should, in the proper time and place, be given away to pious men; but that the giving away of ill-gotten riches can never liberate the giver from the evil of rebirth.

It has been said, Yudhishtira, that by giving even a small gift in a spirit of pure-mindedness to a deserving person a man gains inexhaustible rewards in the next world. There is a story in this connection, about how Mudgala was rewarded for having given a bucket of vrihi, corn.' "

CANTO 258

VRIHIDRAUNIKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Why did that Brahmana give away a drona of vrihi? To whom and how did he give it? Tell me all this. I think of the life of a virtuous man as being worthwhile, whose conduct pleases Him of the six attributes who sees and knows everything.'

Vyasa says, 'Rajan, there lived in Kurukshetra a man of dharma named Mudgala. He was truthful, free from malice and had subdued his senses. He lived by the dictates of sila and unchha. Although he lived a life of pigeon-like frugality, that Mahatapasvin entertained his guests, celebrated the sacrifice called Ishtikrita and performed other rituals.

This sage, his wife and son ate during one fortnight and spent the next fortnight collecting a drona of corn, like a pigeon would. This innocent and guileless Rishi celebrated the Darsa and Paurnamasya yagnas and passed his days by taking the food that remained after the Devas and his guests had eaten.

On auspicious lunar days, Trilokapati Indra, accompanied by the celestials, would partake of the food offered at this sage's yagnas. And so, great king, this man lived the life of a Muni and cheerfully entertained his guests on such days. As that pure man happily gave away his food, what remained of the drona of corn increased with the arrival of each new guest!

By dint of the purity of soul with which Mudgala gave food, it increased so much that he fed hundreds of learned Brahmanas with it.

O king, it came to pass that Durvasa Muni heard of the virtuous, vrata-observing Mudgala. The half-naked sage, looking like a madman in his sparse, ragged clothing, his head hairless, came to Mudgala's kutila, Pandava, muttering all kinds of insults.

The Muni said rudely to the Brahmana, "Best of Brahmanas, I have come here in search of food!"

Mudgala said to the sage, "Welcome!" and offered the hunger-crazed ascetic water to wash his mouth and feet and, accustomed as he was to feeding his guests, placed excellent food before Durvasa.

The hungry Rishi frantically ate the food. Mudgala then gave him more and, having again eaten it all, Durvasa smeared his body with the unclean scraps and went away as abruptly as he had come.

He came again, in the same way, during the next season, and again ate all the food that Mudgala gave him. After Durvasa left, Mudgala, without having eaten anything himself, gathered corn, as prescribed by the unchcha vrata. Hunger did not shake his equanimity, nor did anger or guile; nor did a sense of degradation or agitation enter into the heart of that Brahmanottama who, with his son and wife, led the unchha way of life.

Durvasa appeared six times at Mudgala's asrama. Never was he able to detect even the slightest distress in Mudgala's heart; instead, he saw only joy.

Extremely pleased, the Muni said to Mudgala "There is not another being on earth as pure-hearted and charitable as you. Pangs of hunger drive away dharma and rob men of patience. The tongue, which loves delicacies, lures men towards them. Life is sustained by food and the mind is fickle and hard to control.

Dhyana consists of concentrating the mind and the senses. To renounce in a pure spirit something painfully earned is difficult indeed. Yet, pious one, you have achieved this.

In your company we feel grateful and happy. You possess self-restraint, fortitude, justice, control of body and mind, mercy and virtue. By what you have done, you have conquered all the worlds and gained admission into realms of beatitude. Even the Swargavasis proclaim the greatness of your daana. Most holy one, you will go to heaven in your own body."

Whilst the Muni Durvasa was speaking, a Devaduta appeared before Mudgala on a vimana yoked with swans and cranes, hung with a network of

bells, scented with an unearthly fragrance and colourfully painted; and it had the power of going anywhere at will.

The divine messenger said to the Brahmana, “O Rishi, climb onto this chariot; you have earned the right by your deeds. You have attained the reward of your tapasya.”

The sage said, “Devaduta, please describe to me the attributes of those who live in Swarga. What are their austerities, and to what end do they practice them? What constitutes happiness in heaven? What sorrows are there? High-born men have declared that one has friendship with the pious by merely walking seven paces with them. Lord, I ask you these things in the spirit of that friendship. Tell me the truth, without hesitation. And tell me what is good for me. After I hear what you say, I will decide what to do,” ’ says Vyasa.”

CANTO 259

VRIHIDRAUNIKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vyasa continues, 'The messenger of the gods said, "Maha Muni, you are a simple man. Having been offered heavenly bliss, which brings great honour, you still deliberate like a person of little wisdom. The realms known as Swarga exist above. They tower high and have excellent paths that the chariots of the Devas traverse. Atheists, dishonest people, those that have not practised tapasya and those that have not performed great yagnas cannot go there. Only men of pure souls and subdued minds, who have their bodies and senses under control, who are free from malice, who are intent on the practice of charity, heroes and men with battle scars who have, with subdued minds and senses, performed the most worthy rites, attain these realms, O Brahmana, which are gained only by dharmic deeds, and where only the pious live.

Mudgala, in Swarga are myriads of exotic, resplendent worlds that bestow everything one can want, what the celestial beings—the Devas, the Sadhyas, the Viswas, the Maharishis, Yama, the Dharmas, the Gandharvas and the Apsaras—have. There is that monarch of mountains, golden Meru, extending over thirty-three thousand yojanas.

Mudgala, there are the sacred gardens of the Devas, Nandana the best of them, where the deserving enjoy themselves.

There is no hunger, no thirst, no weariness, no fear, or anything unpleasant or inauspicious in Swargaloka. Delightful perfumes pervade, delicious breezes waft and captivating sounds are everywhere, enchanting

the heart. There is no grief, no old age, no effort and no regret. One attains this world as a reward for one's actions. People go there by virtue of their good deeds.

Everyone who lives there shines in splendour, and this, too, is because of their own karma, not because of anything their fathers or mothers have done. Here, there is neither sweat, nor any excrement nor urine, O Muni. There is no dust to soil one's garments; garlands, redolent with divine fragrance, never fade; and all their vimanas are like this one that I have brought.

Mighty sage, devoid of envy, grief, fatigue, ignorance and malice, men who have reached heaven live there in perfect happiness.

O bull among Munis, above this realm are others with superior celestial qualities. Of these, the beautiful and glorious realms of Brahma are the best. Brahmana, that is where Rishis go, who have been sanctified by the most meritorious deeds.

Beings named Ribhus live there; they are the gods of the gods. Their realms are supremely blessed and adored even by the Devas. These beings shine with their own lustre and bestow every object of desire. They do not suffer from the pangs that women might cause; they do not possess material wealth; and they are free from guile. Unlike the Devas, the Ribhus do not live on havis or amrita, yet their forms are so divine that they cannot be perceived by the senses.

These eternal gods of the Devas have no desire for happiness for happiness' sake, nor do they change at the completion of a revolution of a Kalpa. Indeed, they suffer no changes of age or decay. They feel neither happiness nor sorrow. Then how could they be affected by anger or hatred? Mudgala, the gods covet their state of supreme, blissful freedom, Moksha, that beings who have desires can never achieve.

There are thirty-three Ribhus. To their realms wise men go, after having observed the most excellent vratas or given charity according to the laws of dharma. You have succeeded in acquiring this state by your acts of charity; enjoy the glory of your merit.

Such, O Brahmana, is the bliss of Swarga, with all its worlds. I have described the blessings of heaven. Now let me tell you some of its drawbacks. While living in Swarga and enjoying the fruits of his good deeds, a man cannot perform more actions with a view to increasing his punya. He must first enjoy all the benefits that he has already accrued, until

they are exhausted. The great shortcoming of Devaloka is that once a man's punya has run out, he will fall from there.

The fall of a person whose mind is soaked in bliss has to be counted as the greatest defect of Swarga. The discontent and sadness that result from a life less blissful than one has lived in the bright and blessed kingdom will be hard to bear. Those who are about to descend from Swarga have stunned minds and agitated emotions. As the garlands they wear are about to fade, fear begins to invade their hearts. These are terrible experiences, Mudgala, and extend even to Brahmaloka.

In Swarga, men who have earned their places there are godlike; their virtues cannot be counted. O Muni, yet when their punya karma is exhausted, they are born again as human beings. And in that form, they can acquire much fortune and happiness. However, if they are unable to acquire knowledge here, they devolve to bestial states.

The consequences of karma done in this world are felt in the next. This world has been ordained to be one of deeds; the other is one of fruit. Mudgala, I have described everything to you. Now, if it pleases you, we must go quickly." '

Vyasa continues, 'Mudgala began to think about everything the Devaduta had said. After some thought that best of Munis said to the divine messenger, "O Devaduta, I bow to you. Venerable one, depart in peace. I do not want to have anything to do with Swarga, which has great bliss from which one must inevitably fall. Those that enjoy heaven are doomed to suffer the deprivation of its joys.

I do not desire Swarga. I will strive for that enduring realm where you do not have to lament, or be troubled or agitated ever again, when you are there. You have told me of the great defect of Swarga. Now describe to me a realm that has none."

To that the divine messenger said, "Above the abode of Brahma, there is the supreme seat of Vishnu, pure, eternal and luminous, known as Parabrahman. It is not possible for those attached to material things to go there; nor can those who are arrogant, greedy and ignorant, or those who feel anger or envy. This place is only for those that are free from attachment, pride and conflicting emotions; those that have restrained their senses; and for those given to dhyana and yoga."

Hearing this, the Muni bade farewell to the Devaduta, and that sage continued living by the unchha code and, in time became perfectly content.

Praise and disapproval became equal to him; a brick, a stone and gold were equal in his eyes. With pure Gyana yoga, the Brahmana began to meditate, setting his soul on the path to Brahman. He gained the power of knowledge and understanding and did attain that supreme state of emancipation, Moksha, which is eternal.

Therefore, son of Kunti, you must not grieve. By your stern tapasya you will regain your flourishing kingdom. Sorrow and joy revolve around a man, like the points on a wheel turning on its axle. When the thirteenth year of your exile has ended, you will get back the kingdom that was yours, and your father's and grandfather's before that. So, cool the fever of your heart.'

Saying this to Yudhishtira, the Muni Vyasa returns to his asrama and to his relentless tapasya."

CANTO 260

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "While the Pandavas live in the forest, enjoying the company of the Munis, sharing the ambrosial food they got from the Sun's platter and various kinds of venison with the Brahmanas and others who came to them for food all day until it was time for Krishnaa's meal, what did Duryodhana and his sinful brothers, advised by Dussasana, Karna and Sakuni, have to do with them? Worshipful one, tell me about this."

Vaisampayana said, "Great king, when Duryodhana hears that the Pandavas are living as happily in the vana as in a city, he, Karna, Dussasana and the others long to do them harm. While those malignant men hatch evil schemes, the celebrated Durvasa arrives in Hastinapura with ten thousand sishyas. Duryodhana and his brothers welcome the choleric sage with great humility, self-abasement and gentleness, and Duryodhana personally waits upon the Rishi, as a servant would. The illustrious Muni stays there for a few days and, fearing his curses, Duryodhana attends on him day and night.

At times, Durvasa says, 'I am hungry, O king; give me food at once.' At others, he goes for a bath, returns late, says, 'I do not want to eat anything today; I am not hungry,' and vanishes. Sometimes he appears suddenly and asks for food. At others, he wakes at midnight and demands fresh food to be prepared at that hour; then he complains about it and does not touch it. In this way, he tries the prince and, finding that Duryodhana does not get angry or annoyed, he turns kindly towards him.

Then, Bhaarata, the intractable Durvasa says to Duryodhana, ‘I have the power to grant you boons. Ask me for whatever is closest to your heart. May you be blessed! I am pleased with you, and I will give you anything I can, as long as I don’t break dharma.’

Hearing the great ascetic, Suyodhana’s spirit fills with new vigour. Karna, Dussasana and he have already decided what boon he should ask for if the Muni is sufficiently pleased to grant him one.

The evil prince says to Durvasa, ‘Yudhishtira is the eldest and the best of our clan. That dharmatma now lives in the forest with his brothers. You must go there with your disciples, as a guest, as you came here to us. The favour I ask is that you arrive when their lovely wife, the famed Panchali, lies down to rest after having served the Brahmanas and her husbands, and after she has eaten her own meal.’

The Rishi replies, ‘I will do as you wish,’ and goes away in much the same way as he came.

Suyodhana thinks that he has achieved what he wanted; and happily he clasps Karna’s hand.

Karna, too, is pleased and says to the king, who is with his brothers, ‘By singular good fortune, you have got all that you wanted. It is fortunate, too, that your enemies, struggling to stay afloat on a sea of danger, have to face the fire of Durvasa’s anger. They have fallen into a dark abyss.’

Rajan, Duryodhana and others return to their respective homes, full of vile delight.”

CANTO 261

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "One day, having made sure that the Pandavas are all lounging relaxed and that Krishnaa is resting after her meal, the Maharishi Durvasa, with ten thousand sishyas, arrives in that forest and the Pandavas' asrama. The noble Yudhishtira sees that a guest has come and goes with his brothers to receive him. Joining his hands together in worship and offering the sage a comfortable seat, he welcomes him respectfully.

The king says to the sage, 'Venerable one, perform your nitya karma and come back soon, while we prepare a meal for you.'

With his disciples, the Muni goes to bathe in the nearby river, wondering how the king will be able to provide food for them all. Meanwhile, Rajan, the lovely Draupadi, ever devoted to her husbands, is stricken by fear; she has eaten and does not know how she will feed the Munis. She knows that there is no earthly way in which she can provide Durvasa and his sishyas with a feast, and she prays in her mind to Krishna, the slayer of Kamsa. The princess says, '*Krishna, Krishna, Mahabaho, Devakinandana, whose power is inexhaustible; Vasudeva, Lord of the Universe, who wipes away the tribulations of those that worship you; you are the soul, the creator and the destroyer of the Universe. O Lord, you are eternal; you are the saviour of the afflicted.*

You are the preserver of the Universe and of all created beings; you are the guardian of cows. You are the highest of the high, and the wellspring of the mind's activities—akuti and chitti. O supreme and infinite One, giver of

all good, you are the refuge of the helpless. Primordial Being, you cannot be perceived by the soul, the mind, or in any other way. You are the ruler of all and the Lord of all. I seek your protection.

Mahaprabhu, you are always compassionate to those that take refuge in you. Be kind to me, take care of me. You, of the complexion as dark as the leaves of the blue lotus, and of eyes as red as the corolla of the lily; Pitambara, clad in yellow, adorned with the bright jewel Kaustubha—you are the beginning and the end of creation, and the sanctuary of all.

You are the supreme light and essence of the Universe. Your face is turned in all directions at once. You are called the supreme seed and the storehouse of all treasures. With your grace, O Devadeva, all evils lose their terror. You protected me before from Dussasana; save me now from this terror.'

Thus adored by Panchali, Krishna of the mysterious ways, who is always kind to his bhaktas, leaves Rukmini's side, and instantly appears before the Pandavas' queen. Draupadi gasps, bows down to him in great joy and tells him about the arrival of Durvasa.

Krishna says to her, 'I am very hungry. Give me some food, and then carry on with your chores.'

Draupadi replies, 'The vessel that Surya Deva gave me remains full until I finish my meal. But I have already eaten, and it is empty now.'

The lotus-eyed Avatara says to her, 'Krishnaa, I am starving. Bring the Sun's vessel and show it to me.'

Krishnaa doubtfully brings the vessel to him, and he sees in it a shred of rice and vegetable, stuck to the rim. He swallows that morsel and says to her, 'May the Lord Hari, the soul of the Universe, that God that shares in every sacrifice, be satiated with this!'

Krishna, remover of misery, turns to Bhimasena, 'Hurry, call the sages to dinner.'

Rajan, Bhimasena sets out for the cool, transparent river where Durvasa and the others have gone to perform their ablutions. These ascetics have entered the river and, as they scrub their bodies, they suddenly find that their stomachs feel full to bursting. Coming out of the lucid water, they look at one another. They turn to Durvasa and say, 'We have come here for our baths, having told the king to prepare a meal for us. But, O Dvijottama, we

cannot eat a thing now because our bellies are full. The feast that has been prepared will go waste. What shall we do?'

Durvasa says, 'By arriving unannounced and making him prepare food that will be not be eaten, we have done a great wrong to Rajarishi Yudhishtira. The Pandavas might well burn us with the fire from their eyes. I know that Yudhishtira has immense tapasyashakti. Brahmanas, I am afraid of men that are devoted to Hari. The noble Pandavas all devout men, learned, warlike, diligent in tapasya and every religious observance, all of them devoted to Vasudeva. They follow dharma punctiliously. If provoked, they can consume us with their anger, as fire would a bale of cotton. My sishyas, you must all flee from here without returning to their asrama.'

The disciples waste no time but run in all directions, and Durvasa with them.

Not finding the sages in the river, Bhima searches for them everywhere, at all the landings. He discovers from other ascetics in the forest that they have fled, and he goes back and informs Yudhishtira. The Pandavas, of the subdued senses, continue to wait for a while, expecting the sages to return.

Then, Yudhishtira says, 'The Rishis will trick us by coming in the middle of the night. What is our way out of this plight fate has landed us in?'

While they are absorbed in such dismal thoughts and sighing frequently with long, deep breaths, Krishna suddenly appears before them and says with a smile, 'Sons of Pritha, Draupadi knew of the danger you were in from the possible wrath of the Rishi and called me in her mind. So, here I am, speedily arrived.

Now you have no need to fear Rishi Durvasa. Afraid of your ascetic powers, he made himself scarce some time ago. Good men never suffer. I beg your leave to let me return home. May you always prosper!'

His words reassure Pritha's sons and Draupadi, and their fever of anxiety leaves them. They say to him, 'Just as people who are drowning in the ocean reach the safety of the shore in a ship, we have, Lord Govinda, escaped from our danger through you. Go in peace, and may prosperity be yours.'

Krishna goes back to Dwaraka, and the Pandavas, wandering from forest to forest, pass their days happily with Draupadi. Rajan, this is the story you asked me to tell you, and this is how the evil plot of Dhritarashtra's son fails."

CANTO 262

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Those great Kuru warriors wander about and hunt, like Devas, in the deer-rich forest of Kamyaka, gratified by the sights of deep and vast wilderness and broad swathes of woodland resonant with flowers in bloom. The sons of Pandu, each like an Indra, and each the terror of his enemies, remain in that vana for some time.

One day, when they go out in search of game, they leave Draupadi alone in the asrama, with the permission of Maharishi Trinabindu, resplendent with tapasyashakti, and of their spiritual mentor Dhaumya.

At this very time, the king of Sindhu, the son of Vriddhakshatra is on his way to the kingdom of Salva, to be married. He wears his best princely attire and is accompanied by many princes. He stops in the Kamyaka vana, and in that secluded hermitage, comes upon the beautiful Draupadi, standing at the threshold of the Pandavas' asrama.

She is splendid in her beauty and seems to light up the woodland with lustre, as lightning illuminates dark clouds. Those who see her ask themselves, 'Is this an Apsara, or a daughter of the Devas, or some other divine spirit?' and gaze at her perfect and faultless beauty, their hands joined in stunned reverence.

Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu, is struck through by her beauty, and lust ingites in his mind. Inflamed with desire, he says to the prince Kotika, 'Whose is this perfect woman? Is she human? I have no need of my marriage if I can have this lovely creature. I will take her back home with

me. O, find out who she is and where she comes from, and also why this exquisite, most delicate one is in this forest.

Will this ornament of womankind, this beauty with the slender waist, who has lovely teeth and big eyes, take me for her lord? I will think of my life as being complete in every way if I win the hand of this devi. Go, Kotika, and ask who her husband is.'

Kotika, wearing one kundala, jumps down from his chariot and goes up to Panchali, just as a jackal approaches a tigress, and speaks to her."

CANTO 263

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kotika says, 'Most beautiful one, who are you, standing alone in this hermitage, leaning against a kadamba tree and holding onto one of its branches, and blazing like a night fire fanned by the wind? O incomparable one, how is it that you are not afraid to be in the forest?

Surely, you are a Devi, a Yakshi, a Danavi, an Apsara or the wife of a Daitya, a daughter of the Naga king or a Rakshasi, the wife of Varuna or Yama or Soma or Kubera. You must have taken human form to wander in these forests. Or, have you come from the heavenly palace of Dhatri, Vidhatri, Savitri, Vibhu or Sakra?

You do not ask us who we are, nor do we know who protects you here. Respectfully we ask you, devi, who is your father, and tell us the names of your husband, your clan and your family. Tell us also what you are doing here.

I am king Suratha's son and my name is Kotika. That man, with eyes as large as lotus petals, sitting on the golden chariot, and looking like sacrificial fire on an altar, is the warrior Kshemankara, king of Trigarta. The man who stands behind him and gazes at you is the famous son of the king of Kulinda. He is armed with a mighty bow, has large eyes and is adorned with flower garlands. He always lives in the mountains. The dark and handsome young man, the scourge of his enemies, standing at the edge of that tank, is the son of Subala of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

And if, devi, you have ever heard the name of Jayadratha, king of Sauviras, he is here, leading six thousand chariots, horses, elephants and footsoldiers, and followed by twelve Sauvira princes as his standard-bearers, whose names are Angaraka, Kunjara, Guptaka, Satrunjaya, Sanjaya, Supravriddha, Bhayankara, Bhramara, Ravi, Sura, Pratapa and Kuhana. They are all mounted on chariots drawn by chestnut steeds, and all of them blaze in splendour, like sacrificial fires.

The brothers of the king, the mighty Balahaka, Anika, Vidarana and others, are among his followers. These noble youths are the flowers of the Sauvira chivalry. The king travels among his friends, like Indra surrounded by the Maruts.

O you of the beautiful hair, who was unknowing of this, tell us whose wife and daughter you are.' "

CANTO 264

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Thus addressed by that ornament of Sibi’s race, the princess Panchali looked at him gently and, letting go of the kadamba branch and arranging her apparel, says, ‘I am aware, O prince, that it is not proper for one like me to speak to you, but there is no other man or woman here just now to convey my words. I will speak, respected one, but understand that I am aware that, being alone, I do remember the proper way for a woman to conduct herself and that I should not talk to you.

Prince of the Sibis, I know now that you are Suratha’s son Kotika. So, I will tell you of my lineage and my kin. I am the daughter of king Drupada, and my name is Krishnaa. I have five men for my husbands, of whom you might have heard while they were living at Khandavaprastha. Those Manavottamas are Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Arjuna and the two sons of Madri.

They have left me here and gone hunting, each in a different direction. The king has gone to the east, Bhimasena south, Arjuna to the west and Nakula and Sahadeva towards the north.

Dismiss your carriages; wait here until they come back so that they can welcome you properly. Yudhishtira Dharmaputra likes having guests and will be happy to see you.’

And Draupadi, of the face as radiant as the moon, goes into her kutila, thinking fondly of her husband’s hospitable nature.”

CANTO 265

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Bhaarata, Kotika tells the other waiting princes of his conversation with Krishnaa.

Jayadratha hears this and says to the Sibi hero, 'I have only heard what she said and already my heart is full of love for this jewel among women. Why have you returned without carrying out your mission? Mahabaho, now that I have seen her, other women seem like monkeys. She has captured my heart. Tell me, Saibya, is this woman a human being?'

Kotika replies, 'She is the famed princess Krishnaa, the daughter of Drupada, and the celebrated wife of the five sons of Pandu. She is the greatly respected, beloved and chaste wife of Kunti's sons. Take her away with you to Sauvira.'

The evil Jayadratha, king of Sindhu, Sauvira and other lands, needs no further encouragement, and saying, 'I must see Draupadi,' enters the asrama with six of his men, like a wolf going into a lion's den.

He says to Krishnaa, 'Greetings, devi. Are your husbands well, whose well-being you always wish for?'

Draupadi replies, 'Kaunteya Yudhishtira of the Kurus, his brothers, I, and all those you ask about, are well. Is all well with your kingdom, your treasury and your army? Do you, as king, rule justly over Saibya, Sibi, Sindhu and your other dominions? O Kshatriya, accept this water to wash your feet, and this seat. Accept these fifty animals for your entourage's breakfast. In addition, Kuntiputra Yudhishtira will give you tusked deer,

nanku deer, doe and antelope, sarabhas and rabbits, rurus, bear, sambara and gayal. He will give you wild boar, buffalo and other four-legged animals as well.'

Jayadratha says, 'All is well with me. Your offer of food is as good as having eaten it already. Come! Ride in my chariot and be perfectly happy. It is not fitting that you should still bear any love for the miserable sons of Pritha. They live in the jungle; they are powerless and impotent; they have lost their kingdom; and they are at the lowest ebb of their lives.

A sensible woman does not attach herself to an impoverished, destitute husband. She should follow her lord when he is prosperous but leave him in adversity. The sons of Pandu have lost their prosperity for ever. There is no need for you to share their hardships.

O you of the flaring hips, leave Pandu's sons; be my wife and share the kingdoms of Sindhu and Sauvira with me.'

Hearing the king of Sindhu, Krishnaa turns away, her eyes troubled. Contemptuously ignoring his lustful offer, she of the slender waist rebukes the king of Sindhu. 'Do not dare to speak to me like that again. Are you not ashamed? Be careful.'

And Krishnaa of the blemishless character, anxiously awaiting her husbands' return, begins to speak at length in order to keep Jayadratha at bay."

CANTO 266

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Drupadi's lovely face is flushed in anger. Her eyes are inflamed and her brows contract in fury as she speaks to the lord of Sauvira.

She says, 'Are you not ashamed, fool, to speak so insultingly of those Kshatriyas, each of whom is like Indra himself, who are all true to their dharma, and who never waver in battle even if it be against hosts of Yakshas and Rakshasas? O Sauvira, good men never speak ill of the learned, who are devoted to austerities and blessed with wisdom, regardless of whether they live in forest huts or in great palaces, but only sinful wretches like you.

I do not think there is anyone among the Kshatriyas here who can save you from falling into the pit you dig for yourself under your very feet. You have as much hope of vanquishing Yudhishtira Dharmaraja as of separating from his herd a mammoth leader of elephants in the Himalayas, the juice of musth trickling from his temples, with a stick in your hand. Childish folly prods you to awaken a mighty sleeping lion to pluck the whiskers from his face.

You will run when you see Bhimasena in a rage. Courting a fight with the furious Jishnu will be like kicking a powerful, ferocious lion asleep in a mountain cave and waking him. Contention with the two superb youths, the youngest Pandavas, is the act of the fool who knowingly stamps on the tails of two venomous black, fork-tongued cobras. The bamboo, the reed and the

plantain bear fruit once and die. The crab, too, conceives young ones whose birth destroys her. So do you dare try to lay your hands on me, whom these great Kshatriyas protect.'

Jayadratha says, 'I know all this, Krishnaa, and I am aware of the prowess of those princes, but you cannot frighten me with your threats. We, too, are born into the seventeen noble clans and are endowed with the six royal qualities. In fact, we look down on the Pandavas as our inferiors! So, Draupadi, do not waste time, but ride this elephant or this chariot; mere words cannot stop us from taking you. Talk less boastfully and throw yourself at the mercy of the king of the Sauviras.'

Draupadi says, 'Why does the king of the Sauviras not take my power seriously? I do will not demean myself before you, out of fear. Even Indra himself cannot abduct her who is protected by Krishna and Arjuna, who would follow her together in the same chariot. What more can I say of a mere man's chances!

When Arjuna Kiriti cleaves your legions in his chariot, he will strike terror into every heart and consume everything around him like fire burning a stack of dry grass in summer. The warlike Andhaka and Vrishni princes, with Janardana at their head, and the mighty Kaikeya bowmen will follow me tirelessly. Dhananjaya's fearsome arrows, shot from the Gandiva and propelled by his powerful arms, will fly at you, roaring like thunder.

When you face Arjuna shooting dense locust-swarms of arrows from his Gandiva, you will repent this folly of yours. Imagine how you will feel when, armed with the Gandiva and blowing his conch, his gloved hands making his bowstring thrum, he pierces your breast again and again with his arrows. When Bhima rushes at you with his mace, and the two sons of Madri range in all directions, spewing the venom of their wrath, you will feel pangs of untold regret for daring to accost me like this.

I vow by my faithfulness to my husbands that I will have the pleasure of seeing Pritha's sons crush you in battle and drag you along the ground. Cruel as you are, you cannot frighten me by forcefully seizing me, because those Kuru warriors will bring me back to the Kamyaka vana as soon as they see me.'

Then the devi of the large eyes, realising that they are about to seize her, cries, 'Do not sully me with your touch!' In panic, she calls out to Dhaumya.

Darting forward, Jayadratha seizes her upper garment, but she pushes him away violently, so that sinner falls to the ground, like a tree severed from its roots. But he takes hold of her once again, while she pants in fear. Even as she clings to Dhaumya's feet, Jayadratha drags Krishnaa on to his chariot.

Dhaumya says, 'Jayadratha, take heed of the ancient dharma of the Kshatriya. You cannot carry her off without first defeating her husbands in battle. You will reap the painful fruit of your despicable deed when you meet the sons of Pandu with Yudhishtira Dharmaraja at their head.'

Dhaumya says this and, entering into the massed ranks of Jayadratha's footsoldiers, follows the princess as she is borne away by her abductor."

CANTO 267

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, having gone in separate directions, and each having killed many deer, bear and buffalo, the Pandavas meet in that same mighty forest, crowded with deer, which suddenly echoes with the ominous calls of birds and the cries of other wild creatures, as if some great danger threatens.

Yudhishtira says to his brothers, 'These birds that fly into the sunlight shriek harshly and the other wild beasts seem agitated. I feel certain that there are hostile intruders in the jungle. We must not waste a moment but find them. We have enough game.

My heart clenches in fear and my soul wants to fly out of my body. The Kamyaka vana seems strangely bereft, almost like the lake which Garuda rid of the snake that lived in it, like a pot that thirsty men have drained of water, like a kingdom that has lost its king and prosperity.'

Those Kshatriyas ride towards their asrama in their chariots drawn by hurricane-swift Saindharva horses. As they fly back they see a jackal howling hideously to their left.

Yudhishtira looks intently at it and says to Bhima and Dhananjaya, 'This jackal belongs to a lowly species. It is an evil omen that it is on our left, and howling. Ah, the Kaurava sinners are surely here and bent on doing us some great harm.'

The sons of Pandu enter the grove where their asrama is situated. Here they find their beloved's maid Dhatreyika sobbing piteously.

Indrasena leaps down from the chariot and anxiously questions her, 'Why are you lying on the groung and crying? Why is your face so sad and pale? I pray that no evil has befallen princess Draupadi, who is the very soul of the Pandavas? Dharmaputra is so distraught that if the princess has entered the bowels of the earth or flown into heaven, or dived to the bottom of the ocean, he and his brothers will follow her there.

What fool would dare abduct that priceless jewel of these Parantapas, to whom her life is as dear as their own? Who would think of carrying away this princess who has such awesome protectors, and who is like an embodiment of the Pandavas' hearts? The breast of the man that has done this will be pierced by dreadful arrows today.

Do not weep for her, timid girl; Krishnaa will return this very day, and the sons of Pritha will again be united with Yagnaseni after killing their enemies!'

Dhatreyika wipes her face and says to the sarathy Indrasena, 'With no regard for the five Indra-like sons of Pandu, Jayadratha has carried Krishnaa away. The traces of his tracks have not yet been covered over, because the tree branches he broke on his wild way have not yet dried. Turn your chariots around and follow her; the princess cannot have gone far.

O Kshatriyas mighty as Indra, arm yourselves with your glorious bows, take up your quivers and hurry after her, before, overpowered by threats or violence and losing heart and courage, she gives herself up to an undeserving sinner as wastefully as sanctified libations poured onto a pile of ashes.

O, see that the ghee is not poured into paddy husks that will not catch; see that the vanamala is not cast away in a cemetery. O, take care that the Soma rasa of a yagna is not licked up by a dog through the carelessness of the officiating priests; let not the lily be recklessly torn up by a jackal searching for its prey in the thick forest. O, let no man, like a dog licking the ghee in the sacrificial pot, touch with his lips the perfect face of your wife, who is as lovely as moonbeams. Oh, go swiftly after her and do not let time steal a march on you!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Go away, woman; control your tongue. Do not speak thus before us. King or prince, whoever he is, drunk with power, will come to grief.'

And they go forth, following the trail pointed out to them, frequently giving vent to deep sighs that sound like the hissing of snakes, and

twanging the strings of their great bows. In time, they see a cloud of dust that the horses of Jayadratha's army raise; and they see Dhaumya in the midst of the abductor's footsoldiers, crying out to Bhima to ride more swiftly.

The exhilarated Pandavas tell Dhaumya to take heart and return to the asrama. They charge the enemy in fury, like hawks swooping down on their prey. And they, who are like Indra himself, are filled with rage at the insult to Draupadi, and the sight of Jayadratha sitting smugly in his chariot with their beloved queen fans the flames of their fury.

And those mighty bowmen—Bhima, Dhananjaya, the twins and the king—roar at Jayadratha to stop; the enemy legions are panic-stricken."

CANTO 268

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Enraged at the sight of Bhimasena and Arjuna, the enemy Kshatriyas roar aloud in the forest. The evil Jayadratha sees the flags of those bulls of the Kurus and says to Yagnaseni, 'Krishnaa, I believe these five great warriors that come towards us are your husbands. You know the sons of Pandu well, so, O you of the lovely tresses, describe them one by one and point out which one rides each chariot.

Draupadi replies, 'Having done me such violence that is sure to shorten your life, of what use is it to you now to know who is who? Foolish man, my husbands have come, and none of you will be left alive. But since you are about to die, I will tell you about them. I see Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and his younger brothers and I am not afraid any longer.

That warrior, on whose flagstaff are two beautiful and melodious mridangams called Nanda and Upananda, that sound constantly, is one who knows his svadharma well. God and successful men always walk in his footsteps. With golden skin, a prominent nose and large eyes, that slim man is my husband Yudhishtira, the son of Dharma. He is the best of the Kurus, and grants life to the enemy who surrenders. So, foolish one, throw down your weapons, fold your hands to him and surrender yourself into his protection.

That other man you see, long-armed and as tall as a full-grown sala tree, who sits on his chariot, biting his lips and frowning, is my husband Vrikodara. Steeds of the noblest pedigree, powerfully built and well-trained,

draw his chariot. His feats are superhuman, and he is known as Bhima. Anyone who offends him does not live. He never forgets an enemy and, on some pretext, he will exact bloody vengeance, and remain dissatisfied even after.

That greatest of bowmen you see there, of great intelligence and fame, who has his senses under complete control, who worships his elder brother Yudhishtira, and is his disciple, is my husband Arjuna. He never forsakes dharma, not from lust, not from fear or anger. He is never cruel. His energy is like fire, and he can withstand every enemy. That parantapa is also Kunti's son.

The youth you see, who is versed in every aspect of dharma and artha, who dispels the fear of the frightened, who is wise, and who is the most handsome of all men on earth, is utterly devoted to his brothers. Dearer to them than their own lives, the other sons of Pandu protect him. He is my husband Nakula. This intelligent and wise man, whose twin is Sahadeva, is dexterous with his sword, and you, foolish one, will see his skills in battle. He will be among you like Indra among the Daityas.

And that fifth Kshatriya, a master of the Astra Shastra, also brilliant and wise, always intent on pleasing Yudhishtira Dharmaputra in all that he does, the youngest of the Pandavas and their favourite, is my husband Sahadeva. Heroic, brilliant, sagacious and quick-tempered, there is not another man as intelligent or as eloquent as he is. He is dearer to Kunti than her own soul; he is always conscious of Kshatriya dharma; and he would sooner jump into a fire or sacrifice his own life than say or do anything that is dishonourable or sinful.

When the sons of Pandu have killed your warriors in battle, you will see your army in the same plight as a ship laden with a cargo of jewels wrecked at sea by a whale. You have acted rashly with little regard for the prowess of the Pandavas. If you escape from them alive, you will indeed have been blessed.'

The five sons of Pritha, each like Indra, are filled with rage. Sparing the panic-stricken infantry who beg them for mercy, they charge the charioteers, attacking them from all sides and darkening the air with barrages of arrows."

CANTO 269

DRAUPADI HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The king of Sindhu issues commands to the princes who are with him, crying *Halt! Strike!* and so on. When they see Bhima, Arjuna and the twins with Yudhishtira, the soldiers send up a loud clamour on the field of battle, and the Sibi, Sauvira and Sindhu warriors quail at the sight of these Kshatriyas who look like ferocious tigers.

Armed with a mace made entirely of Saikya iron and embossed with gold, Bhimasena rushes towards the doomed Sindhu king. But Kotikasya deftly surrounds Vrikodara with a formation of Maharathas, effectively separating him from his quarry. Bhima is assailed with countless spears, clubs and arrows but he does not waver for a moment. Instead, with his mace, he kills an elephant, its mahout and fourteen foot-soldiers in front of Jayadratha's chariot.

Arjuna, too, eager to capture the Sauvira king, slays five hundred bold Maharathas from the mountains, the vanguard of the army, fighting in the front. Yudhishtira kills a hundred of the best Sauvira fighters, in the twinkling of an eye. Nakula, sword in hand, leaps down from his chariot and, like a tiller sowing seeds, scatters heads of the soldiers in the rear. From his chariot, Sahadeva brings down so many elephant-mounted warriors with his iron shafts, and they drop from their lofty seats like birds from the trees.

Bow in hand, the king of the Trigartas leaps down from his great chariot and kills Yudhishtira's four horses with his mace. But seeing the enemy closing in and fighting on foot, the Dharmaraja pierces his chest with a crescent-tipped arrow, so that he vomits blood and falls at his feet, like an uprooted tree. Yudhishtira, his horses slain, takes this opportunity to leave his chariot and climb with Indrasena into Sahadeva's.

Kshemankara and Mahamukha attack Nakula from both sides, like two great clouds, with telling showers of the sharpest arrows, but the son of Madri swiftly kills both. Suratha, king of the Trigartas, an expert in fighting from an elephant's back, lumbers upto Nakula's chariot and makes his elephant seize it with is trunk and drag it about here and there. A little daunted by this, Suratha jumps off his ratha, and then, sword and shield in his hands, stands immovable as a mountain.

Suratha wants to kill Nakula immediately, and he prods his mammoth, excited elephant towards him. When the great beast is near enough, Nakula severs its head, trunk and tusks from its body, and the mail-clad elephant gives a dreadful wail and falls, crushing its riders to crimson pulp. Madri's son quickly climbs into Bhima's chariot and has some respite.

Bhima sees Kotikasya rush into the fray and cuts off his sarathy's head with a horseshoe-shaped arrow, so swiftly that the prince does not even realise his charioteer has been killed, and his driverless horses careen chaotically across the field. Seeing the driverless prince retreating, Bhima storms up to him and kills him with a feathered arrow.

Dhananjaya uses razor-sharp, crescent-tipped arrows and cuts off the heads of all the twelve Sauvira heroes; Maharatha Arjuna kills the Ikshvaku leaders and great numbers of Sibis, Trigartas and Saindhavas. He fells banner-bearing elephants and flag-adorned chariots. Heads and headless bodies lie on the field, covering it entirely. Dogs, herons, ravens, crows, falcons, vultures and jackals feast on the flesh and blood of the dead.

When Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, sees his soldiers all slain, he is terrified, and eager to be rid of Krishnaa and flee. In the general bedlam, the wretched man quickly leaves Draupadi and runs for his life, following the same forest path by which he came.

Yudhishtira sees Draupadi walking with Dhaumya before her, and lifts her onto the chariot of Madri's valiant son Sahadeva.

A great slaughter follows Jayadratha's unseemly flight. As they run away, Bhima mows down all Jayadratha's men with iron shafts, calling out

their names as he strikes them down, one by one.

Arjuna sees that Jayadratha has fled and asks his wild brother to refrain from killing the rest of the Saindhava army. He says, 'Jayadratha is to blame for all this, and he does not seem to be here anymore. It is him you must seek out and I will pray for your success. What is the point of slaughtering his soldiers? Why are you bent on this useless bloodshed?'

Admonished by the wise Arjuna, Bhima turns to Yudhishtira and says, 'We have killed a great many enemy warriors, and the rest run. My brother, take Draupadi, the twins and Dhaumya with you, and comfort the princess when you return to the asrama. I will hunt down the witless Jayadratha, even if he hides in Patala, or is protected by Indra himself.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Mahabaho, even if the king of Sindhu is evil, for the sake of our sister Dussala, his wife, and the pious Gandhari you must not kill him.'

Draupadi becomes very agitated when she hears this, and bashfully, but in anger, says to her two husbands, Bhima and Arjuna, 'If you want to do what pleases me, you must kill that despicable man. The enemy who abducts a wife or takes a kingdom should never be forgiven in battle, even if they beg for mercy.'

Bhima and Arjuna, admonished, fly in search of the Saindhava king, and Yudhishtira takes Krishnaa and Dhaumya back to the asrama. On entering the hermitage, he finds it covered with darbhasanas for sadhus, and crowded with their disciples. Markandeya and other Brahmanas grace the asrama, and the Brahmanas are lamenting what has befallen Draupadi when the ineffably wise Yudhishtira and his brothers arrive.

Great is the joy of all who are there for the Saindhavas and the Sauviras have been vanquished, and Panchali rescued. The king sits among the sages, while Krishnaa goes into their kutila with the twin brothers.

Meanwhile, Bhima and Arjuna see Jayadratha fleeing some two krosas ahead of them and urge their horses to greater speed. Effortlessly, Arjuna shoots down Jayadratha's horses from that distance with astras which weave their way through intervening trees and surely find their target.

Bhima and Arjuna rush on towards the terrified king of Sindhu, who finds himself alone and bewildered, and also gripped by sorrow to see his horses killed before his eyes. Seeing Arjuna's unearthly archery, Jayadratha decides to run, and takes the same track that brought him through the forest. Phalguna overtakes the petrified Saindhava king and says, 'What a petty

man you are! How did you dare abduct a queen? Turn around, Kshatriya; it is not right that you flee. How can you run like this, leaving your men to face the enemy?’

The king of Sindhu does not look back at all. Bhima impatiently overtakes him, but the compassionate Arjuna begs him not to kill the black-hearted fellow.”

CANTO 270

JAYADRATHA VIMOKSHANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Jayadratha still runs headlong from the terrible brothers who come at him with weapons raised and ready to strike. The furious Bhimasena jumps down from his chariot and runs after him. He seizes him by his hair and, hefting him aloft, slams him down on the ground. He holds the prince's head and rains blows on him, until Jayadratha faints.

When the Saindhava recovers consciousness, he groans aloud and attempts to get up, but Bhima Mahabaho kicks his head, felling him. He kneels squarely on Jayadratha's chest and rains dreaful blows on his face, and that prince faints again.

Arjuna now intervenes and persuades the enraged Bhimasena to stop punishing Jayadratha anymore; he reminds his brother of what Yudhishtira has said about their sister Dussala.

Bhima says, 'This wretch has done great injury to the blameless Krishnaa. He deserves to die! Ah, but I am helpless because our brother overflows with mercy and you, too, from a misplaced sense of dharma, constantly stop me from having a Kshatriya's just revenge.'

With his crescented arrow, Vrikodara shaves Jayadratha's head, leaving five symbolic tufts of hair. Silently Jayadratha submits to this and Bhima says to him, 'If you want to live, listen to me, fool, and I will tell you how you can save your worthless life. In public meetings and in open sabhas you

must declare for all to hear, *I am the slave of the Pandavas*! On this condition, I spare your life. This is the dharma of victory in battle.'

Jayadratha, in a swoon, trembling, and covered in dust, says meekly to that ferocious one, 'So be it.'

Arjuna and Vrikodara bind him with rope and bundle him into their chariot. Bhima mounts the chariot and, with Arjuna, rides to the asrama. He comes to Yudhishtira and shoves Jayadratha down to the ground before his elder brother.

The Dharmaraja smilingly tells him to set the Sindhu prince free, and Bhima says to the king, 'Tell Draupadi that this dog is now the slave of the Pandavas.'

His brother says affectionately, 'If you have any regard for me, you will set this man free.'

And now Draupadi, too, urges Bhima to do so. She says, 'Let him go. He has become the king's slave and you have disfigured him by shaving his head and leaving five tufts of hair on it.'

Now at liberty, Jayadratha approaches Yudhishtira and bows low to him. He bows to all the Munis. Seeing the abject Jayadratha, so weak that Arjuna has to support him, the compassionate Yudhishtira says, 'I release you; you are a free man now. Go, and be careful never to commit such folly again. It is shameful that you meant to take a woman by force; no man less vile would think of such a thing.'

Yudhishtira looks with some pity at the Sindhu king and says, 'May your heart grow in dharma, so that such a base thought never enters it again. Go in peace now with your charioteers, cavalry and footsoldiers.'

O Bhaarata, when Yudhishtira says this, Jayadratha is overcome with shame and, bending his head, he silently and sadly makes his way to Gangadvaram, the place from where the Ganga comes down to the plains. He implores Trilochana, Uma's consort, for protection and does severe penance. Siva, the three-eyed One, is so pleased with Jayadratha's tapasya that he comes down to the Earth to accept his offering of penance and tells him to ask for a boon.

Listen, Rajan, to the boon that Jayadratha asks Mahadeva for. The Saindhava says, 'Grant that I am able to defeat all the five sons of Pandu, mounted on their chariots, in battle!'

Lord Siva tells him this is not possible. 'None can slay or conquer them in battle. However, except for Arjuna, I grant that you will be able to

contain them, but only once, on the battlefield. Arjuna is Nara, and Vishnu's own Avatara. He performed an impossibly austere tapasya in the Badari vana, and Lord Narayana supports him, so that even the Devas cannot defeat him. I myself have given him the divine astra called Pasupata. The Lokapalas have given him the Vajra and other Devastras.

Vishnu Devadeva, Hyanantatma the Infinite Spirit, Suraguru Prabhu the Lord Preceptor of all the Devas, Pradhana Purusha the Supreme Being without attributes, Viswatma the Soul of the Universe, Viswamurtiman is embodied in all creation. At the end of a great cycle of time, he assumed the form of the all-consuming Fire and devoured the Universe, with its mountains and seas, islands, hills, woods and forests. After he destroyed the subterranean Naga world as well, huge, many-hued clouds, clashing and flashing with thunder and lightning, spread over the sky and poured water in torrents as thick as chariot axles, filling space and dousing the raging apocalypse.

This happened at the end of four thousand yugas, when the Earth was flooded with water and had become one vast sea, the ekarnava. All was hushed: mobile creatures were dead; the Sun, the Moon and the winds were all gone; and the Akhanda was without stars and planets. It was then that the Paramatman Narayana, unperceivable by the senses, Sahastraksha Sahastrapata—thousand-headed and thousand-limbed—wanted to rest. The serpent Sesha, awesome with his thousand hoods and shining with the splendour of ten thousand suns; white as the Kunda flower, or the Moon, or pearls, or the white lotus, or milk or the fibres of a lotus stalk, served as his couch. That adorable and omnipotent God slept on lap of the fathomless Ocean, enveloping all space with the blackness of night.

When, finally, the urge to create stirred in him he awoke and found the Universe empty. There is, in this connection, a sloka that describes and explains the word Narayana: *Nara created water and it formed his body, therefore, it is called Nara. It was his Ayana, or resting place, and, therefore he is known as Narayana*. As soon as that Eternal Being began to meditate in order to create the Universe again, a lotus sprang spontaneously from his navel, and the four-faced Brahma emerged from that lotus. Brahma Lokapitamaha, the ancestor of all creatures, sat on that flower and, finding that all the Universe was a void, created in his own likeness, and from his mind, the nine great Rishis—Marichi and others.

These nine also became creators and brought Yakshas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, reptiles, men and all mobile and immobile creatures into being.

Brahman, the Supreme Spirit, exists in three states: in the form of Brahma he is the Creator; as Vishnu he is the Preserver; and as Siva he is the Destroyer of the Universe.

O king of Sindhu, have you not heard of the wondrous achievements of Vishnu, which the Munis and the Brahmanas who know the Vedas describe?

When the world was reduced to one vast Sea with only the heavens above, the Lord, like a firefly on a monsoon night, searching hither and thither for a patch of stable ground from where he could begin the act of creation, decided to raise the submerged Earth out of the water for his purpose. He wondered what shape he should take to rescue Bhumi Devi from the flood and, after some contemplation, he chose the form of a wild boar, sporting in the water. He assumed the shape of a sacrificial boar, radiant and aglow with intuitive knowledge of the Vedas. The Varaha was ten yojanas long; it had sharp tusks and was cloud dark. Its body was as massive as a mountain and, roaring like tumultuous rain-clouds clashing, it dove deep and lifted up the Earth with one of its tusks and set Bhumi back in her proper place.

At another time, the Mahatman assumed the marvellous form of a half-man, half-lion—Narasimha, the Manticore. Joining his hands together in supplication, he went to the court of the king of the Daityas. That progenitor of the Daityas, the son of Diti, was the enemy of the Devas, and flared up in rage when he saw this peculiar beast. Eyes inflamed, adorned with garlands and looking like a mass of black thunderheads, this warlike son of Diti, Hiranyakasipu took up his trident and, roaring like thunderclouds, rushed at the Manticore. The Narasimha leapt into the air and tore the Daitya apart with his claws.

Having slain the Daitya king for the sake of the well-being of all creatures, the radiant, lotus-eyed Lord of great effulgence, was born again from the womb of Aditi as the son of Kasyapa.

At the end of a thousand years she delivered him, a Being of superhuman conception, short, dark-skinned, and bright eyed. He held a Rishi's staff and kamandalu in his hands, and the mystic birthmark of Srivatsa, shaped like a curl of hair, on his chest. He had tangeld locks of jata

and wore the sacrificial thread across his chest; he was strongly built and handsome, and shone with lustre.

Arriving at the yagnasala of Bali, king of the Danavas, Vamana the dwarf entered the assembly with the help of Brihaspati.

Bali was pleased to see him and said, “I am happy to see you, O Brahmana. What can I do for you?”

The dwarf replied with a smile, “Lord of Danavas, give me land to cover three paces of my legs,” and Bali consented happily to give the Brahmana what he wanted.

As he was measuring the three paces, Hari the dwarf assumed his Viswarupa, and with just three steps, covered the Earth; and then immortal Vishnu gifted it to Indra.

What I have just told you is the famous story of the Vamana Avatara, the incarnation of the dwarf. From him all the gods were created, and from this incarnation onwards, the world is said to be Vaishnava, or pervaded by Vishnu. Vishnu has now been born into the world again, in the race of the Yadavas, to destroy evil and preserve dharma. In this Avatara he is called Krishna.

Saindhava, these are the achievements of the Brahman, whom all the worlds worship and whom the learned describe as without beginning or end, as un-born and divine. They call him Yamahurajitam – the unconquerable; Sankachakragadhadharam—who holds the conch-shell, discus and mace in his hands; Srivatsadharinam Devam – the Lord who is marked with the mystic Srivatsa; Pitakausheyavasasam – attired in yellow silk, and who is the best of all who are skilled in the Astra Shastra.

It is this same Krishna who protects Arjuna. That glorious and lotus-eyed One of infinite power, that slayer of hostile heroes, rides in Partha’s chariot and defends him. Thus, Arjuna is invincible. The gods cannot resist him, to say nothing of a mere mortal being able to vanquish Partha in battle.

Therefore, O king, Arjuna you must leave well alone. You shall, however, be able to quell, for a single day only, the rest of Yudhishtira’s forces, as well as your enemies, the other four sons of Pandu!’

Having spoken thus to Jayadratha, the Divine Hara, Sarvapaapa Haro Hara—the destroyer of all sins, Umapati—the consort of Uma, Pasupati—the Lord of wild beasts, Yagnaha—the despoiler of Daksha’s sacrifice, Tripurardana—He who destroyed the Tripura, He that plucked out the eyes of Bhaga, He who is surrounded by his dwarfish, hunchbacked and dreadful

entourage of ganas that have frightful eyes and ears and uplifted arms – Siva vanishes from that place, O Narashardula, with his beloved Uma.

Jayadratha returns home and the sons of Pandu continue to live in the Kamyaka vana."

CANTO 271

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA

Janamejaya asked, "What did those Naravyaghras, the Pandavas, do after the trial of Draupadi's abduction?"

Vaisampayana said, "After he has defeated Jayadratha and rescued Krishnaa, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira sits down with that Brahmanottama Markandeya. Hearing the words of sympathy that all the Rishis express, Yudhishtira says to Markandeya, 'Worshipful one, you are known amongst the gods and the ascetics to have the fullest knowledge of the past and the future. I have a doubt that I would like you to clear.

This devi is the daughter of Drupada; she was born from the sacrificial fire and not from a woman's womb; she is highly blessed and is the daughter-in-law of the illustrious Pandu. I know that all creatures are subject to the influences of kaala and kalpa—time and destiny—that were established by Brahman, and to the karma of one's actions. If this is true, how could such misfortune afflict this wife of ours who is so faithful and pure, even like an honest man being falsely accused of theft?

Draupadi has never committed any sin. Indeed, she has never done anything that is not praiseworthy; she has treated Brahmanas with the utmost dharma. Yet, Jayadratha carried her away by force; and as a consequence, he and his allies were defeated in battle, and he had his head shaved.

No doubt, we slaughtered the Sindhu troops and rescued her, but we are tainted by the disgrace of our wife being abducted because of our

carelessness. This life in the wilderness is full of sorrow. We live by hunting and we are forced to kill the animals with whom we share the vana as a home. This exile that we suffer is because of deceitful kinsmen. Is there anyone who is more unfortunate than I am? Have you ever seen or heard of such a man?' "

CANTO 272

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Bharatarishabha, even Rama suffered unequalled torment because of the evil Rakshasa king Ravana, who used maya and, overpowering the vulture Jatayu, forcibly carried away Rama's wife Sita from their asrama in the forest. With Sugriva's help, Rama brought her back by building a bridge across the sea and burning down Lanka with his fiery arrows.'

Yudhishtira says, 'In what dynasty was Rama born, and how great was he? Whose son was Ravana, and what quarrel did he have with Rama? O Illustrious, tell me all this in detail, for I long to hear the story of Rama of the great deeds.'

Markandeya says, 'Listen, prince of the Bhaaratas, to this ancient Itihasa, exactly as it happened. I will tell you about the suffering that Rama and his wife endured.

There was a great king named Aja in the Ikshvaku dynasty. He had a son named Dasaratha, who was devoted to the study of the Vedas and was pure of heart and mind. Dasaratha had four sons, who were knowledgeable about dharma and artha; they were Rama, Lakshmana, Satrughna, and the mighty Bharata. Rama's mother was Kausalya, Bharata's was Kaikeyi, and those twin scourges of their enemies, Lakshmana and Satrughna, were the sons of Sumitra.

Janaka was the king of Videha, and Sita was his daughter. Tvashta himself created Sita with the intention of making her the beloved wife of

Rama. This was the lineage of Rama and Sita; and now listen to how Ravana was born.

That Lord of all creatures and the Creator of the Universe—Sarvalokanam Prabhu Swayambhu Prajapati, that Rishi-like Deva, was the grandfather of Ravana. He had a beloved son named Pulastya who, in turn, had a mighty son called Vaisravana, who was born of a cow. But Vaisravana left his father and went to live with his grandfather. Rajan, his furious father created another exactly like himself to take revenge on his son Vaisravana, and he called this one Visrava.

Pleased with his grandson Vaisravana, the Pitamaha Brahma gave him these gifts: immortality, the ownership of all the wealth in the Universe, the guardianship of one of the cardinal points, the friendship of Isana Siva, and a son named Nalakubara. He gave him Lanka for his capital, which was guarded by legion Rakshasas; a chariot called Pushpaka that could go everywhere, at the will of he who sat in it; and kingship over the Yakshas, and sovereignty over other kings.' "

CANTO 273

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'The Muni named Visrava, replicated in a moment of rage from the soul of Pulastya, began to look at Vaisravana with great anger. But Kubera Vaisravana, king of the Rakshasas, knew that his father was angry with him and always tried to please him.

Bhaaratottama, that Rajarajan who lived in Lanka sent three Rakshasa women, borne on men's shoulders, to wait on his father. Their names were Pushpotkata, Raka and Malini; they were accomplished singers and dancers, and attentive to that Mahataman Rishi. Those slender Rakshasis vied with one another in making the Rishi happy, and that worshipful being was pleased with them. He granted them boons, and to every one of them he gave princely sons according to their wishes.

Pushpotkata had two sons, both most magnificent Rakshasas and unequalled in prowess. They were Kumbhakarna and Dasagriva Ravana. Malini had a son named Vibhishana, and Raka had twin children named Khara and Surpanakha. Vibhishana was the most handsome of them all. He was pious and conscientiously performed every religious rite.

The first of Rakshasas, Dasagriva the ten-headed, the eldest, was devout, vivacious and strong beyond belief. Kumbhakarna was the most powerful in battle, for he was a fierce and terrible warrior and a master of maya. Khara was a skilled archer; he hated Brahmanas and lived on human flesh. And the fierce Surpanakha was a constant bane to tapasvins in the vana.

And learned in the Vedas and diligent in ceremonial rites, all these lived with their father on the Gandhamadana mountain. There they saw Vaisravana, owner of great wealth, always borne on men's shoulders, with their father. Gripped by envy, they decided to perform the most severe tapasya to please Brahma.

Dasagriva, subsisting on air alone and surrounded by the five sacred fires, meditated while standing on one leg for a thousand years. Kumbhakarna performed his tapasya with bowed head and hardly ate at all. The wise and magnanimous Vibhishana, undertaking fasts and subsisting only on dry leaves, also sat in dhyana and practised severe tapasya for a long time. Khara and Surpanakha cheerfully protected and attended on them while these others were at their penance.

At the end of a thousand years, the invincible Dasagriva cut off nine of his heads and offered them to Agni. Brahma, Lord of the Universe, was pleased and, appearing to the Rakshasa tapasvins, told them to stop their tapasya and promised to grant boons to each of them.

Brahma said, "I am pleased with you, my children. Stop your tapasya and ask me for boons. I will give you anything you ask for, except immortality. Ravana, your heads, which you offered to me in the great fire, will adorn your body as before, in whatever way you like. Your body will not be disfigured; you will be able to assume any form at will, and conquer your enemies in battle. This is my promise."

Ravana said, "May I never be defeated by a Gandharva, a Deva, a Kinnara, an Asura, a Yaksha, a Rakshasa, a Naga or any other creature!"

Brahma said, "You will never have cause to fear any of those you have named, except man. May good fortune attend you! This is my command."

Ten-headed Ravana was jubilant, for, being an eater of men, he dismissed humans as being of no consequence. The Pitamaha spoke to Kumbhakarna in the same way, and being dull-witted, Kumbhakarna asked for the boon of long sleep, which Brahma granted. Then Brahma addressed Vibhishana and told him to ask for any boon he wanted, as he was pleased with him.

Vibhishana replied, "Lord, grant that even when I am in grave danger, I never swerve from the path of dharma and, that being ignorant, I may be enlightened by the light of divine knowledge!"

Brahma replied, "Parantapa, although you are born a Rakshasa, your soul does not lean towards adharma. And so, I grant you immortality."

Markandeya continues, ‘Having obtained his boon, the ten-headed Rakshasa defeated his half-brother Kubera Vaisravana in battle and wrested the kingdom of Lanka from him. The noble Kubera left Lanka and, followed by his Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Kinnaras, went to live on the Gandhamadana mountain.

Ravana forcibly took the Pushpaka vimana from him, and for this, Kubera cursed him, saying, “This chariot shall never carry you; it will bear the man who will kill you in battle. And because you have insulted me, your elder brother, you will soon die!”

Rajan, the devout and splendid Vibhishana, who always walked the path of dharma, followed Kubera. That divine Lord of wealth was pleased with his younger brother and gave him command of the Yaksha and Rakshasa armies.

In the meantime, the mighty and man-eating Rakshasas and Pisachas came together and made Dasagriva their king. He could take any form at will and his powers were terrifying. Able to fly through the air, he attacked the Devas and the Daityas and took their most valuable possessions from them. Because he terrified all creatures, he was called Ravana; and with the power to muster as much strength as he wanted, without limit, he struck terror into the hearts of the Devas,’ says Markandeya.”

CANTO 274

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'When terror gripped the worlds, the Brahmarishis, the Siddhas and the Devarishis, with Havyavaha as their spokesman, asked Brahma for protection.

Agni said, "Dasagriva, the powerful son of Visrava, cannot be killed because of your boon. Endowed with limitless strength, he oppresses the earth's creatures. Protect us, Bhagavan. We have no other refuge but you."

Brahma said, "Vibhavasu, neither the Devas nor the Asuras can conquer him in battle. I have already ordained the means of his death, and that is imminent. At my command, the four-headed Deva has already incarnated for this. Vishnu Mahatman will accomplish what you want."

The Pitamaha said to Sakra, "You and all the Devas must be born on Earth in amsa as sons born of monkeys and bears: heroic, powerful beings who can take any form at will, who will be Vishnu's allies."

At his word, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Danavas quickly assembled to decide how they should each be born on Earth. Brahma commanded a Gandharvi named Dundubhi to go to the Earth and accomplish his task. Dundubhi was born in the world of men as the hunchbacked Manthara. All the chief Devas, including Sakra and others, sired children on the wives of the best of vanaras and reekshas. And these sons equalled their fathers in strength and glory.

They could split mountain peaks, and their weapons were rocks and sala and tala trees. They were wonderfully strong and their bodies were hard as

diamonds; they were accomplished in battle and could call on unlimited energy whenever they wished. They were each equal to a thousand elephants in might, and they were as swift as the wind. Some of them lived anywhere, while others lived in forests.

Having contrived all this, Brahma Prajapati instructed Manthara about what she must do. Manthara of the mind quick as lightning understood immediately and, from then on, went here and there, busying herself with creating and fanning quarrels,' says Markandeya."

CANTO 275

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'O luminous one, you have told me about the birth of Rama and the others in detail. I want to know the reason for Rama's exile. Brahmana, tell me why the sons of Dasaratha, the brothers Rama and Lakshmana, went to the forest with the renowned Maithili, princess of Mithila.'

Markandeya says, 'The pious king Dasaratha, who was always attentive to the needs of his elders, and devout in performing religious kriyas, was joyful when his sons were born. They grew up, strong and learned in the Vedas and their mysteries, and in the Astra Shastra. After they had completed their Brahmacharya vows, the princes were married; and Dasaratha's cup of joy overflowed.

The intelligent Rama, the eldest son, became his father's favourite, and delighted the people with his charming nature. Then, Bhaarata, the wise king thought that he was getting old, and consulted his ministers and his kulaguru Vasishta about installing Rama as Yuvaraja of the kingdom. All those devoted men agreed that the time was ripe for this. Dasaratha looked at his splendid son Rama, the enhancer of Kausalya's joy, of the red eyes and sinewy arms, of the gait like an elephant's, of the long arms and curly black hair, who was courageous and glowed in splendour, and equal to Indra himself in battle, who was versed in the Shastras, as wise as Brihaspati, and a master of all the arts and sciences. Everybody loved him.

Rama's senses were under complete control, and even his enemies felt happy to see him. He was the terror of the unrighteous and protector of the good. With a sparkling mind, he was irresistible; he was ever-victorious and undefeated. O Kurunandana, Dasaratha looked at his son who flooded Kausalya with joy, and was gratified.

Thinking about Rama's qualities, the mighty king said to the Purohita, "Blessed Brahmana, tonight the Pushya nakshatra will rise in a most auspicious conjunction. Have preparations made for the coronation and call Rama. This auspicious time lasts until tomorrow. My ministers and I will invest Rama as Yuvaraja of all my subjects."

Manthara, Queen Kaikeyi's maid, heard the king, went to her mistress and slyly said to her, "Kaikeyi, today the king has made a proclamation that does not augur well for you. Unlucky one, it is better that you are bitten by an angry and fiercely venomous snake. But Kausalya is fortunate, for it is her son who is to become Yuvaraja. Where is good fortune when your own son does not inherit the kingdom?"

The slender-waisted Kaikeyi put on all her ornaments and sought out her husband in private. Lovingly and with alluring smiles she said to him, "Rajan, you are always true to your word. You swore, once, to give me something I desired. I ask you to keep that oath now and save yourself from the sin of breaking your sacred word."

The king said, "I will give you what you ask for. Ask for anything you like. What man, undeserving though he may be of death, shall I kill today? What man that deserves to die shall I set free? Who shall I give wealth, whose wealth shall I confiscate? Whatever wealth there is in this world, except that which belongs to Brahmanas, is mine. I am the king of kings and the protector of the four varnas. Tell me quickly, blessed devi, what does your heart desire?"

Kaikeyi heard the king and knew that she had bound him to his pledge, and that her power over him was strong. She said, "I want Bharata be made Yuvaraja, and Rama to be sent into exile for fourteen years in the Dandaka aranya, wearing matted jata on his head and clad in rags and deerskin."

Bhaaratottama, the king heard her words like daggers and was speechless with grief. But learning of his father's pledge and Kaikeyi's demand, the noble Rama went into the jungle so that his father's dharma was preserved. His wife Sita, the princess of Videha and daughter of Janaka, and Lakshmana, that best of archers, followed Rama into the forest.

After Rama left, king Dasaratha died, as was destined. Queen Kaikeyi called her own son Bharata to her and said, “Dasaratha has departed for Swarga, and both Rama and Lakshmana are in the forest. Take this vast kingdom that has no rivals to disturb its peace.”

But noble Bharata cried, “You have done an evil thing by killing your husband and having Rama sent into exile. From lust for wealth and power, mother, O accursed woman, you have piled sin on my head.”

And the prince wept bitterly. He proved his innocence before all the subjects of the kingdom and set out after Rama, to bring him back. With Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi in chariots going before his retinue, and with a heavy heart, he set out with his brother Satrughna.

Accompanying him were the Rishis Vasishtha, Vamadeva and thousands of other Brahmanas, and the people of the cities and the provinces, all wanting to bring Rama back.

On the Chitrakuta mountain, Bharata saw Rama and Lakshmana, dressed like sadhus, with bows in hand. Rama, however, was determined to keep his father’s word and dismissed Bharata. Bharata returned and ruled from Nandigrama, keeping his brother’s wooden sandals in front of him always. Rama was afraid that the people of Ayodhya would come again to Chitrakuta, and made his way through the dense vana to the asrama of Rishi Sarabhanga.

There he paid homage to Sarabhanga and, entering the forest of Dandaka, set up his dwelling on the banks of the Godavari. While he lived there, through the wiles of Surpanakha, Rama was forced to fight Khara, who lived in nearby Janasthana. That righteous son of the Raghuvamsa killed fourteen thousand Rakshasas in order to protect the Rishis at their tapasya, whom the demons preyed on and ate.

By killing mighty Rakshasas like Khara and Dushana, the wise Rama restored the peace of that sacred forest.

After these Rakshasas had been slain, Surpanakha, her nose and lips mutilated by Laksmana, flew to Lanka, to her brother Ravana. When the Rakshasa woman, demented with grief, and dried blood staining her face, saw Ravana she fell at his feet. He was overpowered by anger at seeing how horribly she had been disfigured and, grinding his teeth, sprang up from his throne.

He dismissed his ministers, and when they were alone he asked his sister, “Who has done this to you, forgetting that you are my sister? Who is

he that calls my vengeance and his death so ardently to him? Who is he that sleeps happily with a fire lit so near his head? Who is he that steps on a vicious serpent? Who is he that stands with his hand thrust into the mouth of a lion?"

Flames of fury burst from his body, as a night fire spews out of the hollows in a dry tree.

His sister told him about Rama's prowess and about the defeat of the Rakshasas with Khara and Dushana at their head. Impelled by destiny and the slaughter of his kinsmen, Ravana thought of using Maricha to kill Rama. He resolved on the course he would follow and arranged for Lanka to be ruled by his ministers while he was away.

After consoling Surpanakha as best as he could, he set out on a journey across the sky. He crossed the Trikuta and the Kala mountains and saw the vast ocean of unplumbed waters—the home of makaras.

Crossing the ocean, ten-headed Ravana reached Gokarna, the favoured place of the illustrious Deva armed with the Trisula. And there Ravana met his old friend Maricha who, out of fear of Rama, had become a sannyasin.'

CANTO 276

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Markandeya says, 'Maricha received Ravana with a respectful welcome and offered him fruit and roots.

When Ravana was seated and at ease, the eloquent Maricha sat beside him and said to Ravana, "Your skin looks unnaturally pale. Is all well in your kingdom, O king of Rakshasas? What brings you here? Are your subjects as loyal to you as ever? Whatever it is that has brought you here, consider it already done, even if it be difficult to accomplish."

Ravana, his heart in turmoil from anger and humiliation, told him about what Rama had done and that he, Ravana, wanted the prince dead.

An alarmed Maricha said, "You must not provoke Rama; I know his prowess. No one can withstand his arrows. That great one is the reason for my taking sannyasa. What evil creature has instigated you to follow a course that will surely bring ruin upon you?"

Ravana replied simply, "If you do not do as I say, you will die."

Maricha thought within himself, "Since death is inevitable, I will do as he says, because it is better to die at the hands of Rama, who is superior." And he says to Ravana, "I will do whatever I can to help you."

Dasagriva Ravana said to him, "Take the shape of a deer with golden skin and antlers of gold, and go and enchant Sita. When she sees you she will send Rama to hunt you, and then she will be mine to carry away. Losing his wife, the villainous Rama will die of grief. This is what you must do to help me."

Maricha performed his own funeral rites in anticipation of his death and unhappily followed Ravana. They reached Rama's asrama and both did as planned. Ravana took the guise of a sadhu, with a shaven head and carrying a kamandalu and a three-pronged staff.

Maricha took the form of a golden deer. He appeared before Sita and, spurred by her own destiny, she sent Rama after the deer.

Eager to please her, Rama took up his bow, left Lakshmana to protect Sita, and set off in pursuit of the deer. Armed with bow and arrows and his sword, his fingers cased in lizard-skin gloves, Rama went after that deer, even as Rudra followed the astral deer as told in the Purana.

Ravana lured Rama a great distance away by appearing and disappearing from sight, and leading him on. Finally, when Rama realised that the deer was a Rakshasa, the illustrious scion of Raghu shot the golden creature with an unerring arrow. Struck with Rama's arrow, the Rakshasa Maricha cried out in agony, pefectly mimicking Rama's voice and calling out to Sita and Lakshmana. Vaidehi heard the cry and told Lakshmana to hurry to the spot from where the cry came.

Lakshmana said, "Gentle princess, have no fear. Who can harm Rama? O Sita of the sweet smiles, you will see your husband Rama return any moment now."

When Lakshmana said this, the chaste, naturally timid Sita was suspicious of the innocent Lakshmana's motives and began to cry.

She, who was devoted and faithful to her husband, scolded Lakshmana, "Foolish one, what you secretly yearn for can never be yours. I would rather kill myself with a weapon or throw myself from the top of a hill or walk into a blazing fire than forsake my Rama and live with a sorry wretch like you, like a tigress with a jackal."

The good-natured Lakshmana, who was devoted to his brother, covered his ears in anguish and set off on the path that Rama had taken, without a single look at that devi with lips as soft and red as the bimba fruit.

Now Ravana, wearing a gentle guise that hid the great evil that he was, like ashes covering a smouldering fire, came to the asrama. He came in the form of a hermit to carry away that princess of the blemishless character. Sita saw him and welcomed him with fruit and roots, and offered him a seat. Ignoring these that tiger among Rakshasas showed his own form.

He said, "O Sita, I am Ravana, king of all Rakshasas. My peerless city, Lanka, lies across the great ocean. There, among lovely women, you will

live with me and be radiantly happy. O you with the beautiful lips, leave your ascetic Rama and be my wife!"

Janaka's daughter shut her ears and cried, "O do not speak like this. The vault of heaven with all its stars may fall down, the earth may shatter into fragments, fire may change its nature and become cold, but I could never leave Raghunandana. How can a she-elephant who has lived with the mighty leader of a herd, with rent temples, forsake him and live with a pig? Having once tasted the sweet wine prepared from honey or flowers, how can a woman relish coarse arrack made from rice?"

Saying this, she went inside her hut, her lips quivering and her arms trembling with rage. Ravana followed her inside and he seized her by her hair, took her in his arms and flew into the air with her.

A great and noble vulture, Jatayu, who lived on a mountain peak, saw that helpless devi in the Demon's grasp and heard her wailing out to Rama in anguish as she was carried away by Ravana.' "

CANTO 277

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Jatayu, heroic king of the vultures, whose brother was Sampati and whose father was Arjuna, was a friend of Dasaratha's. Seeing his friend's daughter-in-law on Ravana's lap, that sky-ranger attacked the Rakshasa in fury.

He cried, "Leave the princess of Mithila! Rakshasa, how can you ravish her when I am alive? If you do not release my daughter, you shall not escape from me with your life."

And Jatayu began to tear at the king of the Rakshasas with his talons. He lacerated Ravana with a hundred wounds by striking him with his wings and beak. Blood flowed from Ravana's body, as freely as water from a mountain spring. Attacked by this vulture who fought for Rama's sake, Ravana drew his sword and hacked away Jatayu's two wings and, as the immense avian fell to the earth below, the Rakshasa soared into the air, shooting out above the clouds with Sita in his grasp.

As they flew, whenever Vaidehi saw an asrama of Rishis, a lake, a river, or a tank, she threw down one of her ornaments. She saw five great monkeys on a mountain-top, and that intelligent princess threw down a piece of shimmering cloth torn from her garment. That strip of yellow cloth fell, fluttering through the air and flashing like lightning from the clouds, amongst those five foremost of vanaras.

With dazzling speed, the Rakshasa flew a long way through the sky like a great swift bird, and soon he saw his enchanting city of the many gates,

which was enclosed on all sides by lofty walls, and built by Viswakrit himself. And the king of the Rakshasas entered Lanka, with Sita.

Whilst Sita was being abducted, Rama was walking back to the asrama after killing the deer, when he met his brother Lakshmana. Rama scolded him, “How could you leave Vaidehi alone in this Rakshasa-infested forest?”

He realised that he had been purposefully lured away a great distance by the deer, which was a Rakshasa in disguise, and his heart misgave him sharply when he saw his brother and knew that Sita was alone.

Rama breathed, “Ah Lakshmana, is the princess of Videha still alive? I fear I shall never see her again.”

Lakshmana told him everything that Sita had said, especially the harsh words with which she had rebuked him. His heart on fire, Rama and Lakshmana ran back towards the asrama. On the way they saw the vulture, big as a hill, lying on the ground in the throes of death. Suspecting that he was a Rakshasa, Rama and Lakshmana rushed at him, drawing their bows into circles.

The mighty vulture, however, addressed them, “Be blessed! I am Jatayu, king of vultures, and a friend of Dasaratha.”

Rama and his brother lowered their great bows and wondered who it was that spoke their father’s name in the wilderness. They saw that the speaker was the vulture, who had lost his wings and how blood spouted from his wounds. That hulking bird told them how Ravana had seized Sita and how the Rakshasa had cut off his wings.

Rama asked Jatayu which way Ravana had taken, and the vulture indicated the direction with his grandly crested head, and then Jatayu was dead.

Rama understood that Ravana had gone south. Rama paid his respects to his father’s friend and performed his funeral rites. Then those Parantapas, Rama and Lakshmana, filled with grief, took a southern course through the Dandaka aranya.

On their way they saw many uninhabited asramas, with kusa grass cushions scattered about, and leaf umbrellas and broken water-pots, and overrun by jackals. In the depths of that forest Rama and Saumitra saw herds of deer roaming at will. They heard the terrible voices of many predators and other fell beings, and they sounded like a roaring fire devouring the forest.

Shortly, they saw a hideous, headless Rakshasa, dark as rain-clouds and big as a mountain, his shoulders broad as a sala tree, and his arms long and massive. On the creature's chest was a pair of staring eyes, and his mouth was on his bloated belly.

In a trice the headless Rakshasa seized Lakshmana in a giant hand, holding him helpless and, O Bhaarata, the son of Sumitra was confounded. His eyes on Rama, the headless Rakshasa began to slowly draw Lakshmana towards the yawning maw on his belly.

Lakshmana said to Rama in dismay, "Look at my fate! I cannot bear it: your losing your kingdom, the death of our father, then the abduction of Sita and now this. O, I am sure I will not see you return with Vaidehi to Kosala and sitting on our ancestral throne as sovereign of the Earth. Only the very fortunate will see your face, radiant as the moon emerging from behind clouds, after your ritual coronation bath and sanctification with kusa grass, fried paddy and black peas."

The sensitive Lakshmana gave vent to his anguish and lamented in this way for a time.

However, Rama, always unperturbed in the face of danger, said, "Narapumgava, do not give way to grief. What is this creature, when I am here? You cut off his right arm and I will his left."

Even as he spoke, Rama hewed off the Rakshasa's left arm with his sword, as if it was a stalk of corn. The mighty Saumitra did the same to the Rakshasa's right arm, and then struck him time and again in his belly, blows like thunder, and the headless monster fell dead, making the ground shake.

Then, as if in a dream, the brothers saw a divine being rising from the dead Rakshasa's body and hovering in the air, shimmering like the Sun in the sky.

The eloquent Rama asked him, "Who are you? Tell me, what miracle is this? How can such a thing happen? I am struck with wonder!"

That being said, "O Kshatriya, I am a Gandharva and my name is Viswavasu. A Brahmana cursed me and I became a Rakshasa both in appearance and nature. Rama, Sita has been taken by king Ravana of Lanka. Go to Sugriva; he will be your friend. His lives on the mountain peak of Rishyamuka, by lake Pampa of the sacred water, where cranes flock. Sugriva, the brother of the Vanara king Vali, adorned with a golden garland, lives there with four of his counsellors. Go to him and tell him the reason for your grief; he is in a similar plight and will help you. That is all I

can say. You will surely see Janaki, because the king of the Vanaras knows Ravana and the others."

With these words, the radiant, divine being vanished, leaving Rama and Lakshmana marvelling at what had happened.' "

CANTO 278

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'In a torment of grief at Sita's abduction, Rama hurried to Pampa, which was only a short distance away. The lake was lush with lotuses of different kinds, and cool, fragrant breezes fanned the woodland air. Rama remembered his wife, O king, and was suddenly overwhelmed by utter sadness, and he wept.

Lakshmana said to him, "You, who are always respectful to those that deserve it, you should not have to suffer such anguish. Suffering should stay away from you, like illness does from the man who leads a disciplined life. You have found out about Ravana and Vaidehi. Rescue her now, using your intelligence and might.

Let us approach Vanarottama Sugriva, who is on the mountain peak. Be strong and cheerful; I, your disciple, slave and friend, am here."

Rama regained his composure at what his brother said, and turned his mind to what he needed to do. The brothers Rama and Lakshmana bathed in the waters of Lake Pampa and offered oblations to their ancestors; then they set out for Rishyamuka. On arriving there, they saw on the summit of the mountain, whose slopes were adorned with bounties of trees, fruits and roots, five monkeys.

Seeing them approach, Sugriva sent his advisor, the wise Hanuman, large like Himavat, to receive them. The brothers exchanged greetings with Hanuman, who then took them to Sugriva. Rajan, Rama immediately struck up a friendship with the good Vanara. When Rama told Sugriva about Sita,

Sugriva showed him the piece of cloth that she had dropped while Ravana was carrying her away.

Rama received this token of faith from Sugriva and installed him as king of all the monkeys on Earth. Rama also vowed to kill Vali. With this compact, and with utmost confidence in each other, they made their way to Kishkindha, to do battle with Vali. Sugriva announced his arrival in Kishkindha with a roar as thunderous as the sound of a towering waterfall.

Vali could not abide this challenge, and was about to rush out, when his wife Tara stood in his way. Wise Tara pleaded, "From the sound of Sugriva's confident roars, I feel sure that he has found a great ally. Do not go out, my lord."

The Vanara king, the eloquent Vali, wearing a golden garland, said to Tara of the face as bright as the moon, "You recognise the voice and language of every creature from afar. Listen carefully and tell me who helps this brother of mine, brother in name only."

Tara said, "Listen, O Kapiswara, and I will tell you. Dasaratha's son Rama, greatest of arhcers, mightiest of Kshatriyas, whose wife has been abducted, has made a pact of friendship with Sugriva. Rama's brother, the intelligent Lakshmana, also mighty-armed, the unvanquished son of Sumitra, stands beside him to ensure Sugriva's success. Mainda, Dwivida, Hanuman the son of Pavana, and Jambavan the king of bears are Sugriva's ministers; they, too, stand by his side. All these illustrious ones are blessed with vast strength and intellect, and they all want you dead. So do not venture out, my lord."

But the king of the monkeys ignored her advice. He suspected that she had lost her heart to Sugriva, and was filled with raging envy. He upbraided her harshly and came out of his palatial cave to face Sugriva, who stood on the slope of the Malyavat mountain.

Vali said to Sugriva, "Often have I defeated you and, because life is so precious to you and because we are brothers, I have spared you each time. What makes you wish for death again?"

Sugriva answered Vali in such a way as to inform Rama of all that had transpired between him and his brother. He said gravely, "You have robbed me of my wife and my kingdom. What need have I of life? I have come to you in search of death."

The Vanara brothers spat venom with vicious words, then flew at each other in wrath. Fighting with sala and tala trees, and stones, they struck

each other down; they leapt high into the air; they struck with their fists; they raked each other with nails and bit with long sharp fangs. Covered in blood, the two heroes shone like a pair of red-blossomed kinsuka trees.

As they fought, they looked identical and no one could tell them apart. Now Hanuman draped an elephant-flower mala around Sugriva's neck, and that Vanara shone with it, like the Malaya mountain with its circlet of clouds.

Rama could now identify Sugriva by the gajapushpi garland. He raised his best of bows, and aimed his arrow at Vali. The twang of Rama's bow was deafening as his arrow pierced Vali's breast. Vali trembled in fear and, his heart pierced, began to vomit blood. He saw Rama standing before him, Lakshmana at his side. He chastised that prince, for having taken his life without just cause, and fell dead to the ground. And Tara saw him lying on the bare earth, her lord who was as radiant as the Sun.

After Vali was killed, Sugriva regained possession of Kishkindha, and along with it, also of the widowed Tara, of the face as lovely as the moon. Rama of the sparkling intellect lived on the lush Malyavat hill for four months, with Sugriva in worshipful attendance.

Meanwhile, the lust-driven Ravana reached Lanka and ensconced Sita in an asrama-like arbour, in a wood of asoka trees as lovely as the Nandana vana. Sita put on valkala and passed her days in distress, living on fruit and roots, practising tapasya and keeping vratas, and wasting away day by day, pining for her Rama.

The king of the Rakshasas appointed some Rakshasa women armed with bearded spears and swords, lances and battle-axes, maces and flaming brands, to guard her. Some of these had two eyes and some three; some had eyes on their foreheads; some had long tongues lolling down to their throats, and some had none. Some had three breasts and some only one leg; some had three matted braids on their heads; some had only one eye. There were those who had blazing eyes and hair as stiff as the camel's; and they all stood watchfully, surrounding Sita night and day.

And those fearsome Pisacha women with dreadful voices always spoke savagely to her. "Let us eat her, a dainty morsel she will make; let us mangle her and tear her into little pieces. This woman has no regard for our master."

Filled with grief at being separated from Rama, Sita sighed and said to the Rakshasa women, "Devour me at once, good women. I have no desire

to live without my husband who has eyes like lotus leaves and wavy blue-black hair. Else, I will go without food and become emaciated, like a she-snake hibernating in a tala tree; I have no will to live. Know for certain: I will never live with any man other than Raghava, the descendant of Raghu. And knowing this, do what you like with me."

Hearing her, those raucous-voiced Rakshasis went to the king of the Rakshasas and reported what she had said. When the Rakshasis were speaking to Ravana, one of them, Trijata, kind-hearted and pleasantly-spoken, consoled the princess of Videha.

She said, "Listen, O Sita, to what I tell you, for I believe completely in what I am about to say. O you of the lovely hips, cast away your fear and listen. There is an intelligent and old chieftain of the Rakshasas known as Avindhya. He always wishes Rama well and he said this to me.

'Reassure and console Sita. Tell her that her husband the mighty Rama is well and that Lakshmana serves him faithfully. Raghunandana has struck up a friendship with Sugriva, the king of monkeys, and is ready to come to your rescue. Timid one, have no fear of Ravana, whom the world despises. O Daughter, Nalakubara's curse will keep you safe from him. Brahma cursed Ravana once for having ravished his daughter-in-law Rambha, and the Rakshasa's ten heads will blow apart in shreds if he ever forced himself on another woman.

Sita, your husband will come soon, with Sugriva and Lakshmana, and he will take you away from here.

Devi, I have had a terrible dream of evil omen, in which I saw the death of this wretch of Pulastya's race. Vicious and brutal is this night-ranger. His evil nature and ways inspire terror in one and all. Fate has taken good sense away from him, and makes him defy the gods and dharma. In my dream I saw omens that portend his end.

I saw Dasagriva, the ten-headed, with his head shaved, his body smeared with oil and covered in filth, dancing on a chariot drawn by donkeys. I saw Kumbhakarna and other Rakshasas, stark naked and also with shaven heads, and smeared all over with blood and excrement, running southwards.

Vibhishana was alone, with a royal white parasol unfurled over his head, and wearing a turban; his body was adorned in white garlands and his skin anointed with the finest unguents; and I saw him climb to the summit

of the Mountain Sweta. I also saw four of Vibhishana's ministers, similarly adorned, ascending the summit of that hill along with him.

These signs mean that only these five will survive the impending holocaust. Bhumi with her oceans and seas will be enveloped by Rama's arrows. Princess, your husband's fame will fill the earth. In my dream I saw Lakshmana's arrows devouring everything, in all directions; I saw him climbing onto a pile of bones and drinking rice and honey boiled in milk. And I saw you running northwards, weeping and covered in blood, and protected by a tiger. O Vaidehi, very soon you will be united with your lord Raghava and his brother."

The princess with eyes of the gazelle heard what Trijata said and hope woke again in her heart of seeing Rama again. And when the Pisacha women came back, they saw her sitting with Trijata, just as they had left her.' "

CANTO 279

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'The chaste Sita languished in Lanka, sunk in melancholy and filled with grief for her husband, wearing ragged clothes, with only a single jewel on the marital thread on her wrist, weeping constantly as she sat on a rock, and waited upon by Rakshasis. While she was in this state, Ravana, tormented by desire, came to her.

Inflamed by lust, clad in divine attire, decked with jewelled earrings, and wearing a beautiful garland and crown, that virile conqueror of the Devas, Danavas, Gandharvas, Yakshas and Kimpurushas, arrived in the asoka vana, like an embodiment of spring. Ravana had dressed with care and looked like the kalpa-vriksha in Indra's garden. But though he adorned himself with every embellishment, she saw him only as an evil spectre, like a glorious banyan tree in a cemetery.

The night-ranger came near the slender-waisted Devi, like Saturn approaching Rohini. Pierced by the arrows of the god of the flower emblem he accosted that woman of the perfect hips, startling her like some helpless doe.

He said to her, "O Sita, you have shown your devotion to your husband for long enough. Delicate-limbed one, take pity on me. Let these maidservants of mine bathe and adorn you now, and take me for your lord. Put on rich clothes and ornaments, and be the first among all my women. Many daughters of Devas and Gandharvas are mine. I am lord of countless lovely Danava and Daitya women.

One hundred and forty million Pisachas, twice as many man-eating Rakshasas of terrible deeds, and three times as many Yakshas are at my command. Only some of these are ruled by my brother Kubera, who is the lord of all treasures. In my drinking hall, lovely one of the beautiful thighs, Gandharvas and Apsaras wait on me and my brother.

I am the son of that Brahmanottama, Rishi Visravasa, of the immense tapasya. I am celebrated as the fifth Lokapala. Beautiful one, I enjoy the finest food and drink in all the worlds; why, I have as much wealth as the Devadeva himself. Let me put an end to your life of misery in the forest. O you of the fair hips, be my queen, equal to Mandodari."

The exquisite Vaidehi turned away, dismissively, as if he was as insignificant as a piece of straw, and replied to that night wanderer. The princess of Videha, who considered her husband her god, her deep, firm breasts drenched by her unending tears, said to that degenerate Demon, "It is my misfortune, O king of Rakshasas, that I am forced to listen to such noxious words. Blessings be yours, Rakshasa, lover of sensual pleasures. But turn your mind away from me; I am the wife of another and am faithful to my husband. You can never possess me. In this helpless state, I am not a fit wife for you. What joy will you find by forcing yourself on an unwilling woman?

Your father is a wise Brahmana, born of Brahma and equal to Prajapati. Being a Lokapala, why do you not live by dharma? How can you feel no shame for having disgraced your brother, the worshipful Lord of the Yakshas and the nine treasures, Kubera who is the friend of Maheswara himself?"

And Sita began to weep, her breasts trembling in agitation, and she covered her neck and face with her garment. Her long, black, glossy braid tumbled from her head, like a black snake.

Having heard Sita's sharp admonition, Ravana said sadly, "Devi, let the Deva who has a makara for his emblem burn me if I come near you, when you are unwilling. What can I do to you, who still adore Rama, a mere man?"

Saying this to that princess of blemishless character, the Rakshasa king made himself invisible and went away to a favoured spot, alone, to console himself. And Sita, surrounded by the Rakshasa women, and treated with gentleness by Trijata, continued to live there in sorrow.' "

CANTO 280

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Meanwhile, Rama and Lakshmana continued to live under the clear blue sky, on the hillside of the Malyavat mountain. One night, while gazing from the mountain-top at the bright moon surrounded by planets and stars in the cloudless sky, cool breezes, redolent with the scent of lilies, lotuses and other lily-like flowers blew, and Rama was reminded sharply of Sita.

Dejected at the thought of Sita in the home of the Rakshasa, Rama spoke to the heroic Lakshmana in the morning. "Go, Lakshmana, to Kishkindha and find that ungrateful king of the Vanaras, that selfish and licentious wretch, whom I set upon the throne of Kishkinda to rule over all apes, monkeys and bears. Mahabaho, look for that ingrate, for whose sake I killed Vali. Lakshmana, that worst of Vanaras has forgotten me in my time of anguish.

I think he will not fulfil his pledge, and out of foolishness, he disregards the one who has done him these favours. If you find him apathetic and indulging himself in pleasure, you must send him on the same path that we did Vali. It will be for the good of all creatures.

If, on the other hand, you find that he happily espouses our cause, bring him here at once. Hurry now and return quickly."

At once, the ever obedient Lakshmana, always mindful of his elders, set off, taking his beautiful bow and arrows with him. He entered the gates of the city of Kishkindha unchallenged. The Vanara king Sugriva came out to

meet him, realising that he had come in anger. He and his wife received Lakshmana in honour and with genuine humility. The heroic Saumitra then repeated Rama's words to him.

Great king, after hearing everything, Sugriva reverently folded his hands and, joined by his wife and servants, said joyfully to that most valiant Kshatriya, "Lakshmana, I am neither wicked, nor ungrateful, nor destitute of dharma. Let me tell you what efforts I have made to discover where Sita is being held captive. I have despatched intelligent monkeys in all directions and instructed them to return within a month. They will search the entire Earth—her forests, hills and seas, and her villages, towns, cities and deep mines. In five days, that month will end, and Rama and you will hear happy news."

Noble Lakshmana was pacified and he, in turn, paid his respects to the king of the Vanaras. They both went back to Malyavat, where Rama waited, and Lakshmana told him that the mission to rescue Sita had already begun. Soon, having meticulously sought Sita, thousands of monkey lords began to return from the three quarters of the earth—the north, the east and the west; only the ones that had gone south were yet to return.

Those that came back reported that although they had searched everywhere—on earth as well as across the seas, they had not found any trace of Vaidehi or Ravana. By now in an anguish of despair, Rama pinned his hopes on the monkeys that had gone south, and somehow eked out the days.

Two months went by, when several monkeys hurried to Sugriva and, in urgent voices said to him, "O king, Pavana's son and Vali's son Angada, along with the other great Vanaras that you sent to the south, have returned and are wrecking your madhuvanam, the vineyard that first Vali and then you nurtured so lovingly."

Sugriva, hearing this, knew that they had succeeded in their mission, for success often leads to such exuberance. Vanarottama Sugriva shared his thought with Rama. Rama, too, felt that Sita had been found. Then, rested and refreshed, Hanuman and the other monkeys came to their king, who was with Rama and Lakshmana. Bhaarata, Rama saw Hanuman's bearing and the colour of his face, and he was sure that this Vanara had actually seen Sita. Those successful monkeys, with Hanuman at their head, bowed low to Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva.

Rama took up his bow and quiver of arrows and said to the monkeys who stood before him, “Have you accomplished your mission? Are you going to breathe life into me again? Are you going to enable me to reign in Ayodhya after killing my enemy in battle and rescuing Janaki? As long as Vaidehi is a captive, and as long as Ravana remains alive, I do not care to live, robbed of both my wife and my honour.”

The son of Vayu said to Rama, “I bring you good news, O Rama: I have seen Janaka’s daughter! After searching all the lands of the south for a long time, its hills, forests and mines, we became weary. At last, we saw a great tunnel, many yojanas in length, and went into it. It was dark and deep, overgrown with tree-roots and infested with worms.

We went deep into the tunnel and suddenly emerged into sunshine, and we saw a beautiful palace. Raghava, it was the home of the Daitya Mayaa. There we saw a female Muni named Prabhavati at tapasya. She gave us food and drink and, refreshed, we continued our journey along the way she pointed to us.

At long last, we came out of the interminable tunnel and heard ocean waves; and we saw the Sahya, the Malaya and the great Dardura mountains.

We climbed the mountains of Malaya and saw the vast ocean below us. In pain and tormented by hunger, despairing of ever returning alive, we lost heart at the sight of it. Scanning the great ocean that extended over many hundreds of yojanas, that abounded in whales, crocodiles and other marine creatures, we grew dejected and grieved at our failure. We sat together and decided to starve ourselves to death.

In the course of conversation, we happened to speak of the vulture Jatayu, and just then we saw a bird, as big as a hill, so frightful so as to strike terror into every heart, and like a second son of Garuda Vinata.

Swooping down to devour us, the enormous avian said, ‘Who are you that speak of my brother Jatayu? I am his elder brother Sampati, and I am the king of birds. Once, long ago, we both flew in a race towards the sun. My wings were burnt, but not Jatayu’s. That was the last time I saw my beloved brother, the king of vultures! With my wings burnt, I fell onto this great mountain, and here I still am.’

We told him briefly of the heroic death of his brother and told him, also, of the calamity that struck you. Rajan, the mighty Sampati grieved and said, ‘Who is this Rama, and why was Sita carried away, and how was Jatayu slain? O best of monkeys, I want to hear everything in detail.’

We told him everything, about what had befallen you and the reason for our vow of starvation. The king of birds then persuaded us to abandon our vow. He said, ‘I know Ravana. The city of Lanka is his home. I saw it on the other side of the sea in a valley of the Trikuta hills. Vaidehi must be there, I am sure of it.’

Parantapa, we arose and excitedly began to discuss how we could cross the ocean. None dared to cross it, but I invoked the power of my father Vayu and crossed the ocean, which is a hundred yojanas wide. I slew some Rakshasis on the way, and finally I saw the chaste Sita in Ravana’s asoka vana. She was at tapasya, and yearning for her lord; her hair was matted; her thin body was covered with dirt; and she sat there broken-hearted and hopeless.

I recognised her as Sita by these unusual signs and, after waiting for a moment when she was alone, I approached that worshipful Devi and said, ‘O Sita, I am Rama’s messenger; I am a Vanara and Pavana’s son. I have flown through the sky to find you, and here I am. The Kshatriya brothers Rama and Lakshmana live in safety, protected and cared for by Sugriva, the king of monkeys. Rama and Saumitra are anxious about you, as is their good friend Sugriva. Your husband will soon be here with an army of Vanaras. Trust me, precious Devi; I am a monkey and not a Rakshasa.’

Sita seemed to meditate for a moment and then replied, ‘From what Avindhya told me, I know that you are Hanuman. Mahabaho, Avindhya is an old and respected Rakshasa. He told me that Sugriva is surrounded by faithful advisors like you. You may leave now.’

And she gave me this jewel as a token of proof that I had met her; indeed, this jewel helped the blemishless Sita muster the strength to live.

As further proof, Janaki told me that you once used mantras and turned a blade of grass into a deadly astra, with which you shot a crow, which was no crow but Indra’s son, while you lived on Chitrakuta. She said this would confirm that I had really met her and that she truly was Vaidehi herself.

I then allowed myself to be seized by Ravana’s soldiers, and I set fire to the city of Lanka,” said Hanuman,’ says Markandeya.”

CANTO 281

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'At Sugriva's command, all the best of monkeys and the Vanara chieftains assembled on the mountainside where Rama sat.

Vali's father-in-law, the illustrious Sushena, accompanied by a thousand crores of powerful jungle-folk, came there; those two foremost of monkeys, Gavaya and Gaja, each accompanied by a hundred crores of monkeys, came there. Rajan, the fearsome Gavakshya, with the tail of a bull, came with sixty thousand crores of monkeys; the renowned Gandhamadana, who lived on the mountain of the same name, came, bringing a hundred thousand crores of monkeys; the intelligent and mighty Panasa mustered fifty-two crores of monkeys, and came to Rishyamuka; that best and most illustrious of monkeys, Dadhimukha of the unquenchable energy gathered a large army of powerful monkeys, and came; Jambavan came, with a hundred thousand crores of ferocious black bears with tilaka marks on their foreheads.

All these and countless other great monkey chieftains came there, O king, to help Rama in his mission. With bodies like mountains, roaring like lions and leaping about everywhere in excitement, these monkeys set up a deafening commotion. Some of the Vanaras looked like mountain peaks; some looked like buffaloes; some were as dark as autumnal clouds; and some had faces as bright red as vermillion. Monkeys swarmed in from all directions, some leaping about, some falling down, and some scattering the

dust as they came. And that monkey army, vast as the sea at full tide, camped there at Sugriva's command.

Once the force of monkeys had gathered, Rama and Sugriva chose a good day, when the stars were in auspicious conjunctions, and led forth that massive host, eager for battle, their minds set on destroying the very world.

Hanuman, the son of Vayu, went in front, while the rear was guarded by the fearless son of Sumitra. Surrounded by the monkey lords, the two princes of Raghukula, with their fingers in lizard-skin gloves, shone as they rode out; and they were like the Sun and the Moon in the midst of the planets.

The monkey host, armed with rocks, and sala and tala trees, was like a vast cornfield under the morning sun. And that mighty army, protected by Nala and Nila, by Angada and Kratha, and by Mainda and Dwivida, marched to accomplish Raghava's purpose. The army made many peaceful overnight camps on their way, in wide, lush fields and valleys rich with fruit, roots and honey, where there was plentiful water and meat. Finally, the Vanara legions reached the shores of the ocean, and looking a sea itself, the jungle army brilliant with countless colours, camped there.

The noble son of Dasaratha called Sugriva to him alone and said, "This army is vast, and the ocean is, as well. How shall we cross the endless waves?"

At this, many vain monkeys said confidently that they could easily cross the ocean. But this was not of much use as they could not all cross on their own. Some of the monkeys proposed that they cross in ships, some in boats and some on rafts of various kinds.

However, appeasing them all, Rama said, "The sea here is a full hundred yojanas wide. O heroes, all the Vanaras will not be able to cross it. Besides, we do not have enough boats to carry across all the troops. It is not dharma for us to interfere with trade by commandeering merchant ships, or fishing boats or rafts.

Our army is immense, and the enemy will use any little weakness to wreak havoc on us. I do not recommend crossing the sea in ships, boats and rafts. I will pray to the Lord of the waters to show us the way. I will fast and lie on this shore. He will certainly show himself to me. If he does not, I will punish him with astras that blaze brighter than fire and are unquenchable."

Both Rama and Lakshmana touched the water in ritual purification and lay down on a bed of kusa grass, spread upon on the sand. The divine

Sagara, the lord of all rivers, surrounded by his aquatic creatures, appeared to Rama in a vision.

The Ocean, surrounded by innumerable gem-filled mines, spoke sweet words to Rama. He said, "O Son of Kausalya, Manavarishabha, tell me how I can help you. I, too, am from the Ikshvaku dynasty, and your kinsman."

Rama said, "O Lord of male and female rivers, I want you to create a pathway for my troops, using which, I can reach Lanka and kill Dasagriva Ravana, that dreg of the Pulastyas. If you do not make me the way I ask of you, I will dry you up with my divine astras."

Hearing what Rama said, the Ocean joined his hands in respect and said in distress, "I do not want to put any obstacles in your way. I am no enemy. Listen, Rama, to what I say and then do what is fitting. If I give your army passage at your command, others will threaten me with their weapons and order me to do the same.

In your army there is a monkey named Nala, who has boundless strength and skills. He is the son of Tashtri, the architect of the Devas. Whatever he throws into my waters, be it wood, grass or stone, I will hold it up on the surface, and you will have a bridge to cross on." Saying this, Sagara disappeared.

Rama arose, called Nala to him and said, "Build a bridge across the sea. You are the only one who can."

It was thus that Rama, scion of the Kakutsthas, had a bridge built, which was ten yojanas wide and a hundred yojanas long. And to this day that bridge remains famed and is known as Nalasetu, Nala's bridge. Only when the bridge was completed did Nala, of the mountainous body, come out of the water, at Rama's command.

While Rama was still on this side of the ocean, the virtuous Vibhishana, brother of the king of Rakshasas, accompanied by four of his ministers, came to him. The noble Rama welcomed him with affection. Sugriva, however, feared that he might be a spy, but Rama was convinced of his good intentions because of his transparent sincerity and demeanour, and he honoured the good Rakshasa. He installed Vibhishana as the sovereign of all the Rakshasas and made him his own counsellor and a friend of Lakshmana's. It was under Vibhishana's guidance, Rajan, that Rama and his troops crossed the great ocean by means of that bridge; and it took them a month.

As soon as they arrived in Lanka, Rama ordered the monkey army to wreck the numerous and expansive gardens. While Rama's troops were thus engaged, Vibhishana captured two of Ravana's ministers and spies, Suka and Sarana, who had disguised themselves as monkeys and come among the Vanaras. When those night-rangers assumed their real forms, Rama showed them around his troops and dismissed them quietly. Then, after creating camps for his legions in the gardens of that verdant island, he sent the wise Angada as his envoy to Ravana.' "

CANTO 282

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'He settled his army in Lanka's groves, abundant in food and water, fruit and roots; and Rama, descendant of the Kakutsthas, took loving care of them.

Ravana's city was magnificent and fortified, with many contrivances built to prevent the entry of enemies. Impregnable with formidable ramparts and gateways, it was circled by seven deep moats that were full of fish, sharks and crocodiles; into these moats pointed stakes of khadira wood had been driven.

The ramparts, heaped with stones for the great catapults that were used to protect them, were unassailable. The warriors who guarded the walls were armed with earthen pots filled with venomous snakes and toxic powders of many kinds; they also had fire-brands, arrows, lances, swords and battle-axes; and satagnis and sturdy maces covered in wax so they could be set alight.

At all the lofty gates of the city were both mobile and fixed encampments manned by large numbers of infantry, supported by countless elephants and horses.

Angada reached one of the gates of the city and announced himself to the Rakshasas. He entered the town without suspicion or fear and, surrounded by Rakshasas, that handsome Vanara prince looked like the Sun amidst dark clouds. He approached that scion of Pulastya's race, who sat in

the midst of his counsellors, and saluting Ravana, the eloquent Angada delivered Rama's message.

He said, "O king, Rama, the descendant of Raghu, who rules in Kosala, and whose fame has spread throughout the world, says these words to you:

Kingdoms are corrupted by sinful kings who cannot control their souls and are ruined by their sins. You have attacked me by abducting Sita, and you will cause the death of many innocent people. Inflated with power and pride, you have killed numberless Rishis living in the jungle and you have insulted the Devas. You have killed great kings and sorrowing women. Retribution for those vicious sins is about to overtake you, for I will kill you and all your advisors.

Fight! Show me your valour. O wanderer of the night, although I am a mere mortal, behold the power of my bow. Release Janaka's daughter Sita. If you do not set her free, I will rid the Earth of all her Rakshasas with my arrows."

The defiant message was intolerable to Ravana, and he became incoherent with rage. Four Rakshasas, adept at reading every nuance of their master's body and face, seized Angada, like four eagles taking a tiger. Held fast in the grip of those four, Angada sprang up and landed on the terrace of the palace with such velocity that the Rakshasas lost their hold on him and fell down to the flagstones below, bruised and their ribs broken. From the golden terrace on which he had alighted Angada leapt down, and out over the walls of Lanka, and flew to his comrades.

He went to Rama and, after relating all that had happened, and with Rama's permission, Angada of the magnificent tejas retired to rest before battle.

Then Rama used all those monkeys, who were as swift as the wind, in a single action, and stormed the walls of the city, bringing them crashing down. With Vibhishana and Jambavan, king of bears, marching ahead of him, Lakshmana blasted down the southern gate of the city that was once impregnable. Rama attacked Lanka with a hundred thousand crores of monkeys, skilled warriors all, and ruddy-skinned like young camels. Crores of grey bears with long limbs and huge paws also rushed forward to support the Vanara forces. The monkeys leapt up and down everywhere, and raised such a pall of dust that the bright orb of the Sun was invisible.

The people of Lanka saw their city-walls turn a tawny colour, covered as it was by monkeys, some as golden as stalks of ripe paddy, some grey as

shirisha flowers, some red as the rising Sun, and some pale like bleached flax or hemp. The Rakshasas, with their wives and elders, marvelled at that wondrous sight.

The monkey warriors pulled down pillars made of precious stones, and wrecked the terraces and roofs of palatial mansions. They shattered the catapults and their missiles into fragments and scattered them everywhere. They flung the sataghnis, the discs, clubs and stones down into the city, with great violence and explosions. The Rakshasas that had been stationed on the walls as guards took to their heels and fled, in their thousands.

Hundreds of thousands of dreadful Rakshasas, who could assume any form at will, came to battle at the command of the king. With a barrage of arrows they drove the forest-dwellers away and the demons stood on the ramparts in a display of strength. Those massive Rakshasas forced the monkeys off the walls and, struck by enemy lances, many monkey chieftains fell from the ramparts. Crushed by falling columns and gateposts, many Rakshasas, too, fell to their deaths.

The monkeys and the dreadful Rakshasas, who began to eat them, locked in a bloody struggle. They seized one another by the hair and tore each other apart with their claws and fangs. The roars of Vanaras and Rakshasas filled the air, and so many on both sides fell to rise no more. Neither side was willing to yield.

All this time, Rama poured a thick stream of arrows on Lanka, like clouds do rain, and his arrows inundated the city, killing innumerable Rakshasas. The mighty Saumitra, Lakshmana, untiring in battle, picked particularly strong Rakshasas on the ramparts and killed them one by one with narachas, iron arrows ablaze. And when the monkey army had pulled down the fortifications of the city of Lanka, making easy targets of everything within, Rama called a halt and commanded his simian forces to desist.' "

CANTO 283

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya said, 'While the withdrawn troops were resting, many small Rakshasas and Pisachas, loyal to Ravana, insinuated themselves invisibly amongst them. Among these infiltrators were Parvana, Patana, Jambha, Khara, Krodhavasa, Hari, Praruja, Aruja and Praghasa. But Vibhishana knew them and undid the maya which made them invisible; the Vanaras leapt on them and killed them all. Ravana could not bear this, and he marched out at the head of his troops.

Ravana, who was as expert in the art of warfare as Usana, marched out, surrounded by his fearsome army of Rakshasas and Pisachas in a vyuha known as Usana, and fell on the monkeys. Seeing Ravana come, with his army arrayed in that formation, Rama deployed his jungle legions in the apposite counter formation recommended by Brihaspati. And the battle between Rama and Ravana began.

Lakshmana faced Indrajit; Sugriva fought Virupakshya; Nikharvata fought Tara; Nala fought against Tunda, and Patusa engaged Panasa. Each warrior on the battlefield fought against one that he considered a match for him. That encounter, so frightful to the timid, became unbearably fierce, like that between the Devas and the Asuras in the days of old.

Ravana covered Rama with a storm of arrows, lances and swords; and Rama tormented Ravana with stone-whetted iron arrows. Lakshmana struck Indrajit with arrows that would penetrate the body's most vital organs; and Indrajit responded with an arrowy deluge. Vibhishana showered arrows on

Prahasta, who countered with a like shower, both fighting recklessly with winged arrows sharpened to deadly points.

And then, between those mighty warriors there followed a duel with awesome Devastras, and the three worlds with their mobile and immobile creatures were terror-stricken.' "

CANTO 284

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Prahasta suddenly rushed against Vibhishana and, with a roar, fetched him a staggering blow with his mace. Despite being struck with such force, the mighty-armed and wise Vibhishana held his ground and stood firm, like the Himavat mountain. He took up a javelin adorned with a hundred bells and, investing it with the power of mantras, hurled it at Prahasta's head. Like a thunderbolt, that weapon sloughed off Prahasta's head, and he looked like a mighty tree felled by the wind.

When he saw Prahasta killed, Dhumraksha charged the Vanara host in fury. And when the monkey leaders saw Dhumraksha's soldiers flying towards them like swift, dark storm-clouds, they broke ranks and fled. And when that tiger among Vanaras, Pavana's son Hanuman, saw those best of monkey warriors lose heart, he came forward to take up the fight. And, Rajan, when the retreating jungle warriors saw how fearlessly Pavana's son stood on the battlefield they turned back at once to support him.

Fearful was the din that arose from Rama and Ravana's forces clashing; the field was soon a quagmire of blood.

Leading the demon onrush, Dhumraksha attacked the monkey host with volleys of winged shafts; then Hanuman confronted him. Fierce was the contention between the Vanara and the Rakshasa heroes, like the one of long ago between Indra and Prahlada.

The Rakshasa struck the Vanara with maces and spiked clubs, and the monkey struck the demon with uprooted trees. Finally, the enraged Hanuman slew the Rakshasa along with his charioteer and horses, and smashed his chariot into little pieces.

Seeing Dhumraksha killed inspired the monkeys with courage, and abandoning all fear, they charged the Rakshasa army, with whoops and roars. They slaughtered countless Rakshasas, and the remaining fled back into Lanka. The remnants of the Rakshasa host came to their kng and told Ravana of everything that had happened. When he heard how Prahasta and Dhumraksha had been killed and their armies destroyed, Ravana sighed deeply and rose from his throne.

"The time has come for Kumbhakarna to come to battle," he said, and awoke his brother from his long, deep slumber with noisy instruments being blown into that monster's jug-like ears. In an anguish of anxiety, Ravana said to Kumbhakarna, now awake and sitting relaxed on his bed, "How fortunate, my brother, that you can enjoy profound and undisturbed sleep, unknowing of the calamity that has overtaken us. Rama and his monkey army have crossed the ocean by a bridge and, with scant regard for our might, wage a terrible battle against us.

I stole his wife Sita from him, and he has come to rescue her. He has already killed our kinsmen Prahasta and some others. Parantapa, there is no one alive, other than you, who can vanquish Rama. O bravest of all, put on your armour and go at once to dispatch Rama and his followers. Dushana's two younger brothers, Vajravega and Pramathina, will join you with their forces."

After Kumbhakarna, the Rakshasa king gave Vajravega and Pramathina their orders; and the warrior brothers marched out of the city behind Kumbhakarna.' "

CANTO 285

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Kumbhakarna set out from the city with his legion, and soon saw before him the victorious monkey troops. He scrutinized the monkey army, looking for Rama, and saw Sumitra's son Lakshmana standing at his post, bow in hand.

Seeing the titanic Kumbhakarna, the Vanara warriors rushed at him and, surrounding him, cast great trees at him. Fearlessly, many began to tear at his body with their nails, while other monkeys fought in more conventional ways. They mantled that lord of the Rakshasas with a shower of myriad weapons, but Kumbhakarna only laughed and began to devour them. He ate those best of the monkey-folk—Chala, Chandabala and Vajrabahu.

The other monkeys saw this and they howled long and loud with fear. Hearing the screams of the monkey chieftans, Sugriva, the noble king of the Vanaras, charged Kumbhakarna and struck the Rakshasa a stunning blow on his head with the trunk of a sala tree. The agile Sugriva broke the tree on Kumbhakarna's head, but it made no impression on the gigantic demon. Indeed, as if roused from his torpor by that blow, Kumbhakarna stretched his arms and seized Sugriva, and dragged him away towards the city.

Seeing Sugriva being hauled away, Lakshmana, the heroic son of Sumitra, the giver of joy to his friends, and the slayer of hostile heroes ran at Kumbhakarna and shot an astra embellished with golden wings at him. The arrow pierced the Rakshasa's coat of mail and passed cleanly through his body, and embedded itself in the earth, stained with his blood.

Kumbhakarna, his chest bored through, released Sugriva and, picking up a great boulder, charged at Lakshamana.

As the Rakshasa rushed towards him, Lakshmana cut off his upraised arms with two shafts whose tips were like razors. As soon as the Rakshasa's two arms were severed, twice that number of arms appeared on his body. The hands on every arm scooped up huge rocks, but Lakshmana, masterly bowman, cut them off, as well.

That Rakshasa assumed a stupendous form with many heads, arms and legs; but Saumitra sent forth a Brahmastra and blew the mountainous body apart.

Struck by that divine weapon, the Rakshasa fell on the field of battle, like a huge tree with spreading branches struck by a thunderbolt from heaven. The Rakshasa warriors saw the mountainous Kumbhakarna of the dazzling tejas, who was like Asura Vritra, lying lifeless on the field and ran in terror.

Seeing the Rakshasa warriors flee, the younger brothers of Dushana, rallied them and rushed at Saumitra in fury. However, with a roar, Lakshmana easily deflected the winged arrows with which the enraged Vajravega and Pramathina attacked him.

O Prithaputra, fercious was the battle that ensued between Dushana's brothers and the sparkling Lakshmana, and it made the hairs of the onlookers stand on end. Lakshmana shrouded the two Rakshasas with arrows, and the two enraged Rakshasa heroes covered Lakshmana with a storm of stinging shafts.

That encounter between Vajravega and Pramathina and Mahabaho Lakshmana lasted only a short while, when Pavanaputra Hanuman, an entire mountain peak in his hand, ran at Vajravega and flattened him with it; and the mighty Nala crushed Dushana's younger brother Pramathina, also with a massive crag.

Still, the deadly struggle between Rama and Ravana's soldiers raged unabated. The Vanaras killed hundreds of Rakshasas, and just as many of them were slain, as well. However, the Rakshasa lives that were lost far outnumbered the number of simian dead.' "

CANTO 286

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Ravana learned of the deaths of Kumbhakarna and his followers; he heard that the great Prahasta and Dhumraksha had been killed, and he said to his son, the heroic Indrajit, "O Parantapa, you must go to battle against Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva, and kill them all. My son, I had fame because you vanquished the wielder of the Vajra, the thousand-eyed husband of Sachi. My son, use maya to become invisible, use the divine astras you received as a boon from the Devas and annilhilate my enemies, O best of warriors.

Not Rama, Lakshmana or Sugriva will withstand even a mere touch of your weapons, let alone their followers. Let the victory that eluded Prahasta and Kumbhakarna be yours, Mahabaho. Raze, burn my enemies and their jungle legions and enhance my joy, my son, just as you did once by humiliating Indra."

Indrajit put on his armour, mounted his chariot and drove to the battlefield, O king. That Rakshasa loudly announced himself and challenged Lakshmana, the bearer of auspicious marks, to single combat. Lakshmana rose and rushed at that Rakshasa with his bow and arrows, striking fear into his opponent by twanging his bow-string against the leathern glove of his left hand. Awesome and dreadful was the duel between those warriors, both masters of the Devastras, each defying the other to match his prowess, and both desperate to win.

When Ravana’s son found that his arrows did not harm Lakshmana, Indrajit summoned his vast energy and hurled countless spears at him with blinding force. The son of Sumitra effortlessly clove the lances with his arrows, and the shredded weapons fell impotent to the ground.

Then the handsome Angada, the son of Vali, pulled up a huge tree and charged Indrajit, and struck him on his head with the bole. Undaunted, Indrajit cast a lance of sorcery at Angada but Lakshmana shattered that weapon.

Undeterred, Indrajit struck Angada, who stood close to him, on his left side with a mace. Warding off the blow, the enraged and vigorous son of Vali flung a massive sala tree at Indrajit. O son of Pritha, pitched with vicious force, the tree smashed Indrajit’s chariot and slew his horses and charioteer.

Ravana’s son leapt down from his ruined chariot and, using maya, vanished. When Rama saw the Rakshasa, that illusionist, vanish so suddenly, he ran forward to protect his troops. The invisible Indrajit, using Devastras, now freely pierced Rama and Lakshmana all over their bodies; but the brothers were never gravely injured; they fought on against Ravana’s son cloaked in maya.

The raging Indrajit besieged those Narapumgavas with thousands of razor-tipped shafts; the Vanara troops, armed with rocks, swarmed around, seeeking the invisible warrior who scorched them with an endless firestorm of arrows, even as he continued to attack the Kosala brothers. Pierced all over with fell arrows, Rama and Lakshmana suddenly fell, like the Sun and the Moon fallen from the sky.’ ”

CANTO 287

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Seeing Rama and Lakshmana lying unmoving on the ground, Ravana's son created a mesh of subtle astras and encased them inside it. Snared in Indrajit's arrowy net, those Naravyaghras looked like caged hawks. Sugriva and his Vanaras surrounded the brothers, who lay wounded and captive on the ground. The king of the jungle stood there, stunned, with Sushena and Mainda, Dwivida, Kumuda and Angada, Hanuman, Nila, Tara and Nala.

Meanwhile, Vibhishana, who had secured victory in another part of the field, arrived there and, using an astra called prajna, awakened the brothers from their swoon. Carefully, Sugriva drew Indrajit's arrows from their bodies and applied the miraculous herb Visalya to their wounds, while chanting divine mantras. The Kshatriya brothers arose, their pain gone, and full of vitality again.

Prithaputra, seeing that Rama of the Ikshvakus was quite restored, Vibhishana joined his palms together and said, "O Parantapa, Kubera, king of the Guhyakas, has sent one of his people to you from the Sweta mountains; and with him he has sent a gift of water from his enchanted gardens. Rajan, if you, or anyone you choose to give it to, wash your eyes with the water, you will be able to see anyone who has become invisible."

Saying *Tathaastu,* Rama took that sacred water and washed his own eyes with it; and the noble Lakshmana did the same. Then Sugriva and

Jambavan, Hanuman and Angada, Mainda, Dwivida and Nila, and many other important Vanaras cleared their eyes with that water.

Exactly as Vibhishana had said, O Yudhishtira, now they could all see much that they could not before: worlds and beings hidden to ordinary sight.

Meanwhile, flushed with his success, Indrajit went to his father and, after telling Ravana of his feats, quickly returned to the field of battle and placed himself at the van of his army. Then, urged by Vibhishana, Lakshmana ran towards Ravana's choleric son, who had returned lusting for battle.

Incensed by what had transpired earlier, Lakshmana came to kill the arrogant Indrajit who had not completed his nityakarma, and struck the conqueror of Indra with a torrent of arrows.

The duel between those two, both intent on killing the other, was like the long ago battle between Indra and Prahlada; it defied the imagination. Indrajit struck Sumitra's son with shafts that pierecd deep into his body, and Sumitra's son retaliated with his own fiery arrows. Wounded by Lakshmana, Ravana's son was beside himself and shot Lakshmana with vicious, venom-tipped barbs.

Now listen, Yudhishtira, to how the heroic Saumitra took his adversary's life with three final arrows, burning with energy. With the first one, he severed from Indrajit's body the arm with which the demon prince grasped his bow. With the second arrow he hewed away the other arm, which held arrows, and it fell to the ground. With the third, the last one, a bright and crescent-tipped shaft, he cut off Indrajit's haughty, handsome head with its fine nose and glittering earrings.

Shorn of arms and head, Indrajit's torso was frightful to look at. Thus, Lakshmana killed his greatest adversary and then, that mightiest of mighty men easily dispatched Indrajit's sarathy. The dead prince's horses galloped back to Lanka, dragging an empty chariot behind them.

Ravana saw the chariot without his son on it, and when he heard that his son had been killed his heart was gripped by a pang of intolerable grief. In his anguish, the lord of all Rakshasas wanted to kill the princess of Mithila. Seizing up a sword, Ravana ran to asoka vana, where Sita pined for her husband.

Avindhya saw what Ravana intended to do and tried to pacify him.

Listen, Yudhishtira, to the ways in which Avindhya tried to stop Ravana from the murder he was bent on. The wise Rakshasa said, "You sit on the glorious throne of an empire, and it is not fitting for you to kill a woman. Besides, being your prisoner, this woman is as good as dead. Destroying her body will not kill her spirit; kill her husband and she, too, will die broken. Not even Indra of the hundred sacrifices is your equal. In battle you have often chased away the gods with Indra at their head, as if they were a pack of jackals."

Seaking eloquently, and at some length, Avindhya succeeded in pacifying the seething Ravana, who grew calmer and abandoned his mad resolve. The Rakshasa king sheathed his sword and ordered his chariot to be readied for battle against Rama and his army of the wilds.' "

CANTO 288

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Smouldering with rage and grief at the death of Indrajit, the ten-headed Ravana climbed into his chariot, inlaid with gold and priceless gemstones. The most terrible Rakshasas, bearing all kinds of weapons, followed him, as the Rakshasa king steamed towards Rama, at whose side the monkey generals fought.

Seeing Ravana flying in high dudgeon towards Rama and the Vanara army, Mainda, Nila, Nala, Angada, Hanuman and Jambavan surrounded him with all their troops. Those foremost of monkeys and bears pounded Ravana's soldiers with tree-trunks, mashing them before their king's eyes. And seeing the enemy slaughtering his troops, Ravana, unparalleled master of sorcery, began to use dark spells against the forest warriors.

He extruded hundreds and thousands of Rakshasas from his body, all armed with spears and double-edged swords. Rama killed all those demons in a flash with Devastras, at which, O Bhaarata, the king of the Rakshasas resorted to more fell wizardry.

Now thousands of dire warriors, all replicas of Rama and Lakshamana, all armed with bows and arrows, sprang forth from his body, and rushed at the brothers from Ayodhya. Lakshmana cried out to Rama to raze that sinister legion. And Rama killed them all.

Now Indra's sarathy Matali came to Rama on the battlefield in a chariot that dazzled like the Sun, and was yoked with tawny horses. He said, "Son of the Kakutsthas, this victorious ratha drawn by this team of chestnuts

belongs to the Lord of the Devas. Purushavyaghra, it is from this chariot that Indra killed hundreds of Daityas and Danavas. Rama, climb into my chariot, and kill Ravana."

But Rama did not believe Matali; he suspected that this was also Ravana's sorcery. Vibhishana said to him, "Narapumgava, this is no maya of Ravana. Climb into the chariot, for it is indeed Indra's."

Rama did so and flew at Ravana, who also flashed forward to meet him. All the Earth's creatures howled loudly, and in Devaloka the gods roared to the beating of drums. And the battle between the ten-headed Rakshasa and the prince of Ayodhya began.

So fierce was it that the like had never been seen before. The Rakshasa hurled a sizzling javelin at Rama, which resembled Indra's thunderbolt, and was powerful as the potent curse of a Brahmana. In a blink, Rama cut that javelin into shards with his arrows. Seeing this, fear lanced briefly through Ravana.

The ten-headed one began to storm Rama with tens of thousands of weapons of all kinds—spears, maces, battle-axes, darts, sataghnis and stone-whetted arrows. With maya, the Rakshasa created monstrous illusions, and the monkeys fled in terror.

Then, from his quiver, Rama took a wonderful arrow, flighted with wings and golden feathers, and with a bright and beautiful head. He fitted it to his bowstring and invoked the Brahmastra. Seeing Rama chant mantras to transform the arrow into the Brahmastra, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Kinnaras, with Indra at their head, rejoiced, knowing that the Rakshasa was as good as dead.

Rama invoked Ravana's death and loosed that weapon of unrivalled ferocity. Bhaarata, the instant the arrow left the bow, drawn almost into a circle, and found its mark, the Rakshasa, his ratha, his sarathy and horses erupted in fire and were consumed in a flash. The Devas, the Gandharvas, the Charanas and all the other celestial ones were celebrant.

The five vital elements of life left Ravana; the Brahmastra deprived him of earthly dominion and incinerated him. His body was reduced to nothingness, not even his ashes could be seen.' "

CANTO 289

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Having killed sinister Ravana, king of the Rakshasas and enemy of the Devas, Rama, Lakshmana and their jungle army rejoiced. The Devas with the Rishis at their head paid homage to Rama Mahabaho. They blessed him fervently and shouted *Jaya!* The Devas, the Gandharvas and the Swargavasis delighted the lotus-leaf-eyed Rama with hymns in his praise and showered him with unearthly flowers. After worshipping him so, those ones of light returned to Devaloka, while the sky looked as if a great and joyous festival was being celebrated in its vaults.

Having killed Ravana, Rama of universal fame, conqueror of hostile cities, bestowed Lanka on Vibhishana. Then Ravana's wise old minister Avindhya, walking behind Vibhishana and with Sita before him, came out of the magnificent city.

Humbly, Avindhya said to Rama, "O illustrious one, take this Devi, Janaka's daughter of the unblemished character, to yourself."

Rama of the Ikshvakus alighted from the shining chariot and saw the tear-drenched Sita. Seeing that faultless one crushed by grief, her hair matted, her body covered in dirt, and wearing unwashed clothes, Rama seemed to quiver in fear: that her virtue had been lost.

He said harshly to her, "Vaidehi, you may go wherever you wish, for you are a free woman now. I have done my duty: I killed the Rakshasa because you are my wife, and he kept you forcibly in his home. But

knowing dharma as I do, how, for even a moment, can I take back a woman who has been enjoyed by another? Maithili, whether you are chaste or impure, I dare not touch you; you are like sacrificial butter that has been licked by a dog."

Hearing these heartless words, the princess swooned in grief, like an uprooted plantain tree. The colour that had suffused her face in joy disappeared, as quickly as breath that mists a mirror. The monkeys and Lakshmana, too, grew very still, as if in death, when they heard Rama.

Then, all at once, the Deva who is the embodiment of purity, Brahma of the four faces, Prajapati who sprang from a lotus, flew down on his heavenly Swan before Rama. Sakra, Agni and Vayu; Yama and Varuna; Kubera, Lord of the Yakshas, the holy Rishis and king Dasaratha, radiant in their divine forms, appeared as well, in a chariot drawn by swans. The sky was luminous, crowded with Devas and Gandharvas, as if the brightest in it had drawn near the Earth.

Sita arose from where she had fallen and, in the midst of all those who were there, said to the broad-chested Rama, "O Kshatriya, I do not blame you; you know dharma well, and how to conduct yourself with both men and women. But listen now to what I have to say.

Ever-moving Prana lives in the hearts of all creatures. If I have sinned, let my life-breath leave my body. O, if I have sinned, let the other four mahabhutas—fire, water, earth and ether—also forsake my body. All this while in Lanka, I have thought of none other than you, even in my dreams. Therefore, be my lord as God has ordained."

When Sita spoke, a sacred voice, resounding throughout the Earth, was heard speaking from the skies, bringing untold joy to the Vanaras. Vayu Deva said, "Sita speaks the truth, Rama. I am the Wind God, the witness of all things. The princess of Mithila is sinless. Therefore, O king, be united with your wife."

Now Agni Deva said, "Raghava, I dwell within the bodies of all creatures. Maithili is not guilty of the smallest transgression."

Varuna Deva said, "Rama, every creature's breath originates in me, and I tell you to take Maithili back."

Then, Brahma himself said, "Scion of Kakutstha, my son, I do not find this conduct of yours strange, knowing as I do how honest and pure you are, and how well you know the dharma of a Rajarishi. Yet, listen to what I have to say. You killed the invincible Rakshasa, enemy of the Devas, the

Gandharvas, the Nagas, the Yakshas, the Danavas and the great Rishis. It was because of my boon to him that, until now, none could kill him; and because, though he was evil, he was also so very great, I let him live a long life. But his abducting Sita was the sign that his end was near.

As for Sita, I protected her through the curse of Nalakubara, who said that if ever Ravana ravished an unwilling woman, his head would shatter in a hundred pieces. Rama, you have no need to be suspicious. Glorious one, take your wife back to yourself. You have achieved a mighty feat that benefits the Devas, radiant one."

Finally, Dasaratha said, "I am pleased with you, my child; bless you. I am your father Dasaratha. I command you to take back your wife and rule your kingdom, O Maryadapurusha."

Rama replied, "If you really are my father, I salute you with reverence, Rajarajan! At your command, I will return to wonderful Ayodhya."

Bhaaratarishabha, pleased with Rama, the corner of whose eyes were red, his father said, "Return to Ayodhya and rule your kingdom. My splendid son, your fourteen years of exile have ended."

Rama bowed to the gods, and with his friends' felicitations, was united again with his wife. And they looked like Mahendra, the Lord of the Devas, and Puloma's daughter. That chastiser of his enemies gave a boon to Avindhya; and he bestowed riches and honours on the Rakshasi Trijata.

Brahma, with all the Devas led by Indra, said to Rama, "Son of Kausalya, what boons does your heart desire that we can grant you?"

Rama prayed to him to grant him devotion to dharma, victory over his enemies, and the restoration to life of all the Vanaras that the Rakshasas had killed. Brahma did as he asked, and all the jungle-folk killed in battle came to life again and stood up on the battlefield, as if they awoke from a dream.

Sita granted Hanuman a boon, saying, "May you live for as long as the fame of Rama's achievements does, O Hanuman of the golden eyes; by my grace, may you always enjoy divine food and drink."

Then, even as the warriors of the immaculate deeds looked on, the Devas with Indra at their head disappeared. Seeing Rama united with Janaki, Sakra's sarathy Matali was delighted and addressed Rama as he stood in the midst of his friends.

Matali said, "Invincible Rama, you have dispelled the sorrow of the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Asuras, the Nagas and Manavas.

As long as the Earth remains, so long will all creatures—Devas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Punnagas—sing your praises."

Matali worshipped Raghava, the scion of Raghu; then, with his leave, climbed onto that chariot of Sun-like brilliance and flashed away.

With Saumitra and Vibhishana, accompanied by all the monkeys of Sugriva, Rama set Sita before all the rest and, after making arrangements for Lanka's security, crossed the ocean, home of the crocodiles, over the same bridge they had built. Rama rode in the flying vimana, Pushpaka, which could go anywhere at the will of he who rode in it. Rama, of the controlled senses, surrounded by his counsellors, in their order of importance, arrived at the same part of the seashore where he had earlier lain down in prayopavesa; and there, with the Vanaras in attendance, the virtuous king halted.

Raghunandana brought the monkeys before him, one by one, and venerated them all, giving them gifts of jewels and magical gemstones, and then sent them home. When the monkey lords, the bears and the bull-tailed apes had left, Rama went back to Kishkindha with Sugriva and Vibhishana, riding in the Pushpaka, and showing Vaidehi the sights of the forests in which they had been, as they flew over them.

When they arrived at Kishkindha, Rama, that best of warriors, installed the victorious Angada as Yuvaraja of the kingdom. Then, accompanied by the same friends, Sita and Lakshmana, taking them along the same path by which he had come, Rama flew back towards the city of his fathers.

On reaching Ayodhya, he despatched Hanuman as an envoy to Bharata. After careful observation, Hanuman made certain of Bharata's loyalty to Rama and then gave him the good news of his brother's return.

Rama went to Nandigrama, where he saw Bharata covered in dirt and clad in rags, seated with his brother's sandals before, him, talking to them even as if to Rama. O Bull of the Bhaaratas, indescribable was Rama and Lakshmana's joy at being united with Bharata and Satrughna; and great, too, was Bharata and Satrughna's rapture at being united with their brothers and at seeing Sita again.

Bharata worshipped his brother and gladly returned the kingdom that he had held as a sacred trust into Rama's hands. At the auspicious eighth hour of the day, under the Sravana nakshatra, Vasishtha and Vamadeva together crowned Rama as king of Ayodhya.

After his investiture, Rama gave leave to Sugriva, the Vanara king, and all his followers, as well as to Vibhishana of the Pulastyas, to return to their own kingdoms. Having paid homage to them with gifts and due rituals, it was with tears in his eyes and a heavy heart that Rama bid them farewell. He worshipped the Pushpaka Vimana, and sent it home to Vaisravana.

Later, assisted by Devarishi Vasishtha, Rama performed on the banks of the Gomati ten Aswamedha yagnas, with no hindrances of any kind, and with three times as many gifts to Brahmanas as before.' "

CANTO 290

RAMOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Mahabaho, that was how Rama of the ineffable tejas suffered during his exile in the forest. O Tiger among men, do not grieve; you are a Kshatriya, a slayer of your enemies. You walk the same path of dharma, dependent on the strength of your arms, which is sure to lead to success. You are sinless.

Even the Devas, with Indra at their head, and the Asuras will follow you in dharma. It was after similar tribulations that Indra, with the help of the Maruts, slew Asura Vritra, the invincible Namuchi and Dirghajihva, the Rakshasi with the long tongue. The man who has support fulfils all his goals.

What obstacle is there that cannot be overcome in battle by him who has Dhananjaya for his brother? Bhima of the awesome prowess is the strongest of the strong, and the young sons of Madri are mighty bowmen. With brothers like these, why do you despair, Parantapa? They can vanquish the combined armies of the Vajradhari and the Maruts.

Having such brothers, Bharatarishabha, you are sure to conquer all your enemies.

Look how these Kshatriyas performed incredible feats of valour to bring back Drupada's daughter Krishnaa, whom the sinful, arrogant Saindhava abducted. They overpowered Jayadratha, who then lay helpless and pitiful at your feet. Rama had only an army of Vanaras and Reekshas, when he rescued Vaidehi by killing Ravana in battle.

Rajan, bear all this in mind, and do not grieve. Noble souls like you never give in to sorrow, Parantapa.'

So Markandeya comforts the king, and that Kshatriya Mahatman shrugs off his melancholy and speaks once more to Markandeya."

CANTO 291

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA

"Yudhishtira says, 'Mighty sage, I do not so much grieve for myself, for my brothers or for the loss of my kingdom as I do for Draupadi. When our evil cousins tormented us at the game of dice, it was Krishnaa who saved us; and it is she that Jayadratha carried off from our forest asrama. Have you seen or do you know of any woman as faithful and devoted as this beloved daughter of Drupada?'

Markandeya says, 'Listen, Yudhishtira, to the story of the princess Savitri and how she attained the highest faithfulness. There was once a pious and virtuous king of Madra, who was devoted in his care of Brahmanas, who was pure-souled and true to his word, who was devout in performing yagnas, and who had his senses under firm control. He was the most generous of men and everyone loved him, in towns and villages alike. This lord of the Earth, ever committed to universal welfare, was called Aswapati.

This king, of the honest, self-controlled and forgiving nature, had no children. When he grew old, he was sorrowed over this. With the object of having children, he observed rigid vows and began to live frugally and with his senses subdued, like a brahmachari. Every day, this best of kings offered ten thousand oblations to the fire, recited mantras in honour of the Devi Savitri, and ate a small meal at the sixth hour of the day. He lived in this way for eighteen years.

After eighteen years of his life of austerity, the Devi Savitri was pleased with him and appeared in her physical form before him, from the fire.

The Goddess said to him, “I am pleased, O king, with your brahmacharya, your purity and self-restraint, your observance of vratas, and with all your penance and worship. Mighty king Aswapati, ask for the boon that you desire, bearing dharma in mind.”

Aswapati said, “It is to attain dharma that I have striven all these years. O Devi, grant that I will have many sons worthy of my race. If you are pleased with me, grant me this boon. The Dvijas have told me that having children brings great punya.”

Savitri replied, “O king, I knew what you wanted and I have spoken to the Pitamaha about your wanting sons. By the grace of Brahma, you will soon have a daughter of vibrant tejas. Brahma told me to give you this glad news, to which you need make no reply.” ’

Markandeya continues, ‘The king accepted Savitri’s boon, and when he had worshipped her and said, “May this happen soon,” she vanished.

The king went back to his city, and ruled his subjects justly. Some time elapsed, and the eldest queen of Aswapati became pregnant with his child. Bhaaratarishabha, the embryo in the womb of that princess of Malava grew like the Moon in the night sky during the waxing fortnight; and when the time came, she gave birth to a lotus-eyed daughter.

Aswapati joyfully performed the life-passage rituals for her, and because Devi Savitri had rewarded his offerings by blessing him with this child, he and the Brahmanas of his court named her Savitri.

The princess grew in the likeness of Devi Sri herself in an earthly, human form and, in the course of time, attained puberty. Seeing that graceful maiden, of the slender waist and flaring hips, who looked like a living golden statue, the people thought she was a goddess. Intimidated by her blazing energy, none could marry this lotus-leaf-eyed girl who pulsated with splendour.

One day, on the occasion of a parva, Savitri, having fasted and washed her hair, came before the family deity and had the Brahmanas offer the havis and other oblations to Agni. She took the flowers that had been offered to the sacred fire and, looking as beautiful as Lakshmi, went to her noble father.

She paid reverence at her father’s feet and offered him the flowers she had brought, and that lovely maiden joined her hands together and stood

beside the king. The king was sad to see that although his divinely beautiful daughter had attained puberty, she had no suitors.

He said, “My child, the time has come to give you in marriage, yet none asks for your hand. Therefore, you must select a husband whose qualities match your own and inform me of your choice. Choose anyone you wish for your husband, and I will, after deliberation, give you to him.

O blest one, listen to what I have heard Brahmanas quote from the Shastras. The father that does not give his daughter in marriage faces disgrace. The husband that does not enjoy his wife in her fertile season faces disgrace. The son that does not look after his widowed mother faces disgrace.

Take heed of what I say and find a husband. Ensure by your actions that the Devas have no cause to chastise us.”

Having spoken thus to his daughter in the presence of his faithful ministers, the king instructed his attendants to make preparations to accompany her wherever she chose to go. Bashfully bowing down to touch her father’s feet, the gentle girl set out without hesitation, to do her father’s will.

In her golden chariot, and accompanied by her father’s aged counsellors, she visited the delightful asramas of Rishis and the splendid palaces of Rajarishis. Everywhere, my son, she worshipped the feet of the venerable sages, and she travelled through all the forests one by one, distributing wealth in all the sacred tirthas where Dvijottamas lived.’ ”

CANTO 292

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, 'Bhaarata, one day the king of the Madras was seated in the midst of his courtiers, conversing with Narada, when, accompanied by his ministers, Savitri returned after visiting various tirthas and asramas. Seeing her father with Narada, she worshipped both of them by bowing her head down to their feet.

Narada said, "Where has your daughter been, Rajan, and from where has she come now? Why do you not give her in marriage, now that she has attained puberty?"

Aswapati answered, "It was on this very quest that I sent her, and from which she returns now. Devarishi, let us hear whom she has chosen as her husband."

Savitri took her father's command to be a divine request, and the blessed girl related in detail all that had happened, and at last she said, "There was, amongst the Salvas, a virtuous Kshatriya king named Dyumatsena, who was blind. This wise king had only one infant son, and an old enemy took advantage of the king's disability and seized his kingdom. With his wife and their infant held to her breast, he went to live in the forest, where he observed rigid vratas and practised austere tapasya. His son, though born in the city, grew up in an asrama. That youth Satyavan is the right husband for me, and I have given my heart to him."

Narada said, "Ah, Rajan, Savitri has erred gravely, she has made an ignorant choice. Satyavan, to whom she has give her heart, does have

excellent qualities. It is because his parents are both so truthful that the Brahmanas gave him his name. When he was a child he loved horses and used to sculpt steeds out of clay and paint pictures of horses. For this, he is sometimes called Chitraswa."

Raja Aswapati then asked, "Is prince Satyavan, who is devoted to his father, endowed with tejas, wisdom, a forgiving nature and courage?"

Narada replied, "In energy Satyavan is like the Sun; in wisdom he is like Brihaspati; in courage he is like the Lord of the Devas; and in forgiveness he is like Bhumi Devi, the Earth herself."

Aswapati then said, "And is prince Satyavan devoted and generous to Brahmanas? Is he handsome and charitable, and pleasant?"

Narada said, "In generosity within his means the mighty son of Dyumatsena is like Sankriti's son Rantideva; in truthfulness of speech and devotion to Brahmanas he is like Sibi, the son of Usinara; in magnanimity he is like Yayati; in beauty of face he is like the Moon; and in beauty of form he is like the twin Aswins. He has his senses under control; he is gentle, brave and honest. He is self-restrained, faithful to his friends, free from malice, modest and patient. In short, the exalted sages of tapasyashakti say that his conduct is impeccable in its dharma, and he wears honour like a crown."

Hearing this, Aswapati said, "Lord, you have described him as one who has every noble virtue. Tell me now of his defects, if he has any."

Narada said, "He has only one, and it overwhelms all his virtues. He, who cannot be conquered by any means, has only one defect, and no other. Within a year from today, Satyavan, granted with a short life, will cast off his mortal body."

Hearing these words of the Muni, the king said, "Come, Savitri, choose another for your lord, my lovely child. The single great blemish that this young man has eclipses all his virtues. The illustrious Narada, whom even the Devas honour, says that Satyavan will leave this earthly life in exactly a year from today."

Savitri said, "A die can be cast but once; a daughter can be given away but once in marriage; and only once can a person say, *I give*. These three things can happen only once. Whether he lives long or dies young, whether he is virtuous or bereft of virtue, I have chosen and will not choose a second time. A decision is first made in the mind, then it is declared and, finally, executed in action. Let my decision be proof of this."

Narada said, “Aswapati, your daughter is firm in her resolve and will not swerve from the path of dharma. No one else has Satyavan’s goodness. I give my approval to this union.”

The king said, “Your words must be obeyed, illustrious one, for you speak the truth. You are my Guru, and I shall do as you say.”

Narada said, “May peace reign over the bestowal of your daughter Savitri. I leave you now with my blessings.”

Saying this, Narada rose into the sky and went to Devaloka, and on Earth, king Aswapati began to make preparations for his daughter’s wedding.’ ”

CANTO 293

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya continues, "With Narada's words echoing in his mind, the king began to make preparations for the wedding. He summoned all the old Brahmanas, the Ritvijas and the other priests, and set out with his daughter on an auspicious day. On arriving at Dyumatsena's asrama in the sacred forest, he approached the Rajarishi on foot, accompanied by his Brahmanas.

He saw the blind monarch of great wisdom seated on a cushion of kusa grass under a sala tree. After paying his homage in proper fashion, king Aswapati humbly introduced himself, and in response the blind king welcomed him with arghya, a darbhasana to sit on and the gift of a cow.

Then he asked his royal guest the reason for his visit. The king told him why he had come.

Aswapati said, "Rajarishi, this beautiful girl is my daughter Savitri. I ask that you, who are learned in dharma, accept her as your daughter-in-law in accordance with Kshatriya custom."

Dyumatsena said, "Deprived of my kingdom, and living in the forest, we live the disciplined life of tapasvins. Your daughter is not used to this life of hardship, nor does she deserve it. How will she cope?"

Aswapati replied, "My daughter knows, as well as I do, that joy and sorrow are both fleeting; so, do not speak to me of these things. I have come here with my mind made up. I have greeted you in friendship, and you should not crush my hope. It is love that has brought me here and you ought

not to refuse me. We are equals in lineage and an alliance between us is fitting. Accept my daughter as your daughter-in-law and the wife of prince Satyavan."

Dyumatsena said, "For many years, I wanted such an alliance with you, but I hesitated to ask after I lost my kingdom. Let my long-cherished wish be fulfilled today. You are very welcome, indeed."

The two kings summoned all the Dvijas who lived in the asramas of that forest, and he solemnised the marriage with the traditional rites. Having bestowed his daughter, with rich clothes and ornaments, Aswapati went back in great joy.

Having gained a wife graced with every noble quality and accomplishment, Satyavan was happy indeed, and Savitri, too, rejoiced at having got the husband of her heart's desire.

When her father left, she took off all her ornaments and put on valkala and clothes dyed red. By her service and virtue, her affection and selflessness, and by the care she gave so willingly to all, she was a source of delight to all.

She pleased her mother-in-law by attending to her comforts and by adorning her in fine clothes and ornaments. She gratified her father-in-law by worshipping him as a god and controlling her speech before him. She made her husband happy by speaking sweetly to him, by her skill in all kinds of work, by her sweet nature and by demonstrations of her love in private.

They continued to live in the forest asrama, practising tapasya, but Narada's words were never far from the mind of the inwardly sorrowful Savitri.' "

CANTO 294

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'O king, a year flitted by and the time of Satyavan's death arrived. Ever conscious of what Narada had said, Savitri had been counting the days as they passed. On a day when she knew that only four days remained for her husband to live, she fasted day and night in observance of the Triratra vrata. Hearing of the vow she kept, the king was grieved and went to console Savitri.

He said, "Princess, this vrata that you have taken, to fast three nights in a row, is harsh and trying."

Savitri said, "Father, do not be sorry; I can keep the vow. I have undertaken it with firm resolve, and determination brings success."

Dyumatsena said, "I should not ask you to break your vrata. On the contrary, I ought to encourage you to fulfil it." And he said no more to dissuade her.

Savitri continued to fast and began to look wan and thin, like a wooden doll. And, Bharatarishabha, convinced that her husband would die the next morning, the griefstricken Savitri spent the night in anguish while she fasted. When the Sun had risen about two hands into the sky, Savitri, thinking that Satyavan's end was at hand, finished her morning rites and offered oblations to the fire.

She bowed down to the elderly Brahmanas and to her father- and mother-in-law, and she stood humbly before them with joined hands. All the Munis living in that asrama blessed her that she would never suffer

widowhood. Savitri, immersed in dhyana, accepted the words of the tapasvins in her mind, silently saying, *Tathaastu, so be it*.

The princess reflected on Narada's words and sat still, in expectation of the hour and the dreaded moment.

Then, Bhaaratottama, her father- and mother-in-law said to the princess, "You have completed the vrata successfully, and it is time for you to break your fast. You must do what is proper."

Savitri said, "Now that I have completed the vow, I will eat when the Sun goes down. This is my resolve and the vow of my heart." '

Markandeya continues, 'When Savitri spoke thus of her first meal, Satyavan hefted his axe onto his shoulders and was about to go into the forest for wood and fruit, when Savitri said to her husband, "It is not proper for you to go alone. Let me come with you; I cannot bear to be apart from you."

Satyavan said, "You have never gone into the forest before. My love, the paths are rough and you are weak from your fast. How will you be able to walk?"

Savitri said, "I feel neither weak nor tired from fasting. I have decided to go, and you must not stop me."

Satyavan said, "If you wish to come with me, I will not prevent you, but take my parents' leave so that I will not be held responsible."

Savitri bowed to her father- and mother-in-law and said to them, "My husband is going into the forest to gather fruit. With your permission, revered father and mother, I will go with him, for I cannot bear to be separated from him today.

Your son is going to the forest for wood to feed the sacrificial fire and fruit to feed his elders, and you must not stop him. Indeed, he might have been persuaded not to go had it been on some other errand. Do not stop me either; I will go into the forest with him. It is almost a year since I have been outside the asrama. I am so looking forward to seeing the forest in bloom."

Dyumatsena said, "From the time that her father gave Savitri to me as my daughter-in-law, I do not remember her asking for anything. Let her have her wish. My daughter, do not in anyway distract Satyavan from his work."

Having received the permission of her husband's parents, the illustrious Savitri went with her husband, smiling on the outside in seeming happiness,

but her heart torn in grief. As that princess of large eyes went along, she passed through picturesque and charmed glades inhabited by swarms of peacocks, but did not notice them.

Satyavan said sweetly to Savitri, “Look at these rivers of sacred waters and these lovely flower-decked trees.”

Looking only at him, the blemishless Savitri continued to watch her lord in all his moods, and remembering Devarishi Narada’s words, thought of her husband as already dead. Her heart breaking, she followed him, responding softly to all he said, dreading the final hour.’ ”

CANTO 295

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'With Savitri helping him, the mighty Satyavan plucked fruits and filled his bag with them. Then he began to cut branches from trees, and as he did so, he began to sweat profusely and his head ached from the exertion.

Exhausted, he came to Savitri and said to her, "The work has made my head ache; my body trembles strangely and my limbs and my heart also hurt. Mithibhashini, you of restrained speech, I feel unwell; oh, my head feels as if it has been pierced by a hundred arrows. I want to sleep, Savitri, for I am too weak to stand."

Savitri quickly went to him, sat on the forest floor, and took his head on her lap. Narada's words still clear in her mind, she began to calculate the arrival of the moment of his death, by the day, the hour and the minute. The next instant, she saw a great being, clad in red, with a crown on his head. He was huge and shone like the Sun. He was dark-skinned, had red eyes, and held a noose in his hand. And he was altogether dreadful to behold.

He stood beside Satyavan, gazing steadily at him. Savitri gently placed her husband's head on the ground. She got up and, her heart trembling, said in an anguished voice, "From your appearance, you must be a Deva. If it pleases you, tell me, great one, who you are and what you intend."

Yama Deva, the Lord of Death, replied, "Savitri, you are devoted to your husband and blessed with tapasyashakti. That is why you see me and why I am talking to you. Blessed one, I am Yama. Prince Satyavan's time to

live has ended, and I must bind him in my noose and take him away. This is why I have come."

Savitri said, "I have heard that your emissaries come to take away mortals, O worshipful one. Why then, have you come in person?"

The great lord of Pitrs found himself captivated by her purity, and wanting to oblige her with a reply. Yama said, "This prince is endowed with dharma and physical beauty. He is a sea of accomplishments and he does not deserve to be taken away by mere dutas. That is why I have come."

Saying this, Yama drew a thumb-sized Satyavan out of his body and bound him firmly in his noose. His linga sarira removed, Satyavan's body, deprived of life-breath, shorn of lustre and motionless, was unsightly. And binding Satyavan's pranatma, Yama went away in a southerly direction.

Overwhelmed by grief, the chaste Savitri, ever devoted to her lord and crowned with the success of her vratas, followed Yama.

Yama said, "Stop, Savitri. Go back and perform your husband's funeral rites. You are freed from all your wifely duties. You have come as far as you may."

Savitri said, "Wherever my husband is taken, or wherever he goes of his own will, I will follow him. This is the eternal dharma. By my tapasyashakti, out of my respect for my elders, from my love for my husband, by the strength of my vratas, and with your favour, my course is clear. Wise men learned in truth have declared that by walking just seven paces with another, one makes a compact of friendship with that person. As your friend now, I will say something to you, to which you must listen.

They that have their souls under control do not acquire punya by merely following the four varnasramas—brahmacharya, grihasta, vanaprastha and sannyasa. Spiritual merit is said to consist of true knowledge. And all the greatest sages have said that it is punya and not the passage of the four stages of life that is important.

By discharging the duties of just one of these four, Grihastasrama, we attain true punya and do not need the two that come after. It is for this that the wise have declared the punya gained in domesticity to be the highest of all."

Yama said, "What you say is true, Savitri, and I am pleased with you. Ask for any boon except the life of your husband, perfect one, and I will give you whatever you ask."

Savitri said, “Deprived of his kingdom and bereft of sight, my father-in-law leads a hermit’s life in our asrama. Give that king back his vision and let him be as powerful as Agni or Surya.”

Yama said, “Faultless one, I grant you this boon. It will be as you have said. You seem to be tired by your journey. Stop following me and turn back. Do not exhaust yourself any more.”

Savitri said, “What weariness can I feel when I am with my husband? My husband’s lot is mine too. Wherever you carry my husband, there I will also go. Best of Devas, hear what I have to say. Even a single conversation with one like you is a great blessing; friendship with such a one is greater still, and always fruitful. Therefore, one should live in the company of the righteous.”

Yama said, “Your words, so full of import, delight the heart and enhance the wisdom of even the learned. Savitri, ask for a second boon, anything other than the life of Satyavan.”

Savitri said, “My wise and intelligent father-in-law was deprived of his kingdom. May he regain it, and may he always adhere to his svadharma.”

Yama said, “The king will regain his kingdom, and never will he abandon his dharma. Princess, I have fulfilled your second wish. Now you must return. Do not trouble yourself anymore.”

Savitri said, “You control all creatures by your laws, and it is by your laws that you take them away, not according to your whims. That is why, Lord, you are called Yama, or the one who upholds the law. I beg you, listen to me.

The eternal duty of the righteous towards all creatures is never to injure them in thought, word or deed, but to show them love and give them their due. For me now everything in this world is like my husband – lifeless. Good men show mercy even to their enemies when these seek their protection.”

Yama said, “Your words are like water to a thirsty soul. Beautiful one, ask for one more boon, anything but the life of Satyavan.”

Savitri replied, “My father Aswapati has no sons. Grant that he may have a hundred natural sons, so that his line is perpetuated. This is the third boon I ask of you.”

Yama said, “Your father will have a hundred illustrious sons, who will perpetuate and increase their father’s line. Now, princess, you have your wish. Turn back now, you have come far enough.”

Savitri said, “Because I walk close to my husband, I am not conscious of how far I have come. Indeed, my mind travels a greater distance. Please listen, as we walk, to what I have to say.

You are the powerful son of Vivaswata, and the wise call you Vaivaswata. Lord, you dispense justice impartially to all beings, and so you are Dharma, the Lord of justice. People do not have as much faith in themselves as they do in those that are righteous. That is why all men aspire for close contact with men of dharma. It is purity of heart alone that inspires the confidence of all beings, and that is why they rely on those that live by dharma.”

Yama said, “I have never heard anyone speak as you do, devi. I am so pleased with what you say. Other than the life of Satyavan, ask for a fourth boon, and then go your way.”

Savitri said, “I wish for a hundred strong and powerful sons born to me of Satyavan, who will perpetuate our line. This is the fourth boon that I ask of you.”

Yama replied, “Devi, you shall have a hundred sons, strong and powerful, and the cause of your delight. Princess, do not tire yourself any more. Stop now. You have already come too far.”

Savitri said, “They that are righteous always practise eternal dharma. The communion of the pious with the pious is always fruitful. There is never any danger to the righteous from those that are righteous. It is the righteous who by their truth make the Sun move in sky, it is the righteous that support the Earth with their austerities, and, O Lord, it is the righteous upon whom both the past and the future depend. Therefore, they that are righteous are always happy in the company of the righteous. Knowing this to be the sanatana dharma, they that are righteous do good to others without expecting any benefit in return.

A good deed is never wasted on the virtuous, and such actions never injure honour or welfare. Since good conduct attaches to the righteous, they often become the protectors of all.”

Yama said, “The more you speak to me with words of deep meaning, in language so sweet to hear, the more I am taken with you. O you who are so devoted to your lord, ask me for some incomparable boon.”

Savitri said, “Bestower of honour, the boon you have already given me cannot be fulfilled without with my husband being alive. So, I ask that you restore Satyavan to life. Without my husband, I am as good as dead;

without my husband, I have no desire for happiness; without my husband, I do not wish for Swarga itself; without my husband, I do not want prosperity; without my Satyavan, I have no wish to live. You yourself granted me the boon of a hundred sons fathered by him, yet you are taking my husband away from me.

I ask for this boon: let Satyavan be restored to life, because only by that can your boon prove true."

Defeated, saying *So be it*, Vivaswata's son Yama, the dispenser of justice, untied his noose and said to Savitri, "Auspicious and chaste devi, I set your husband free. You may take him back whole and healthy. He will achieve great success and he will live with you for four hundred years. He will perform great yagnas and achieve unmatched fame in this world.

Satyavan will give you one hundred sons. And these Kshatriyas with their sons and grandsons will all be kings, and will always bring honour to your name.

Your father, too, will have a hundred sons with your mother Malavi. Known as Malavas, your godlike Kshatriya brothers will be renowned, as will be their sons and daughters."

Having bestowed these boons on Savitri, Yama left for his abode. After the Lord of death had gone, Savitri went back to the place where her husband's grey corpse lay. She went to him, sat down on the ground and took his head onto her lap. Satyavan awoke and gazed long and lovingly at her, like one who has come home after a long journey through an alien land.

He said to her, "I have slept long. Why did you not wake me? And where is that dark being who was dragging me away?"

Savitri said, "Manavarishabha, you have been asleep on my lap for a very long time. That ruler of the destiny of all beings, Yama Deva, has gone away. You are refreshed now and awake, O Prince. If you feel able, rise. Look, night is upon us."

Having awoken, Satyavan got up as if he had enjoyed a refreshing sleep and, seeing that they were in a thick forest, said, "My slender-waisted one, I came here with you to collect fruit. While I was cutting wood I felt a pain in my head and could not stand anymore. So I lay on your lap and slept. I remember all this, Savitri. Then, in your embrace, as sleep stole my senses, I saw that it was dark all around. In the darkness I saw a being of incandescent radiance.

If you know what happened, tell me whether what I saw was only a dream or if it was real."

Savitri said to him, "The night deepens. I will tell you everything tomorrow. Rise now, and may God bless you always. You of the excellent vows, come and see your parents! The Sun set a while ago and night advances. Creatures with fell voices are out. I hear the sounds of predators, rustling through the woods; and the awful howls of jackals that come from the south and east make me tremble in fear."

Satyavan said, "In this absolute darkness the forest is dreadful to see. You will not be able to see the path, and we cannot go now."

Savitri said, "A fire burned in the forest earlier today, and there is a withered tree that still burns. I see its flames every time the wind fans them. Let me fetch some twigs from there and light a fire here. Do not be anxious; I can do this even if you are too tired. You are still weak and will not be able to find your way through the blackness that cloaks the forest. Tomorrow, when we can see our way clearly, we will leave this place. Anagha, tonight let us stay here."

Satyavan said, "The pain in my head has gone and my limbs feel stronger. I want to see my father and mother. I have never returned late to the asrama; my mother keeps me within its enclosure before dusk. Even when I go out during the day my parents become anxious about me, and my father and other asramavasis come in search of me. Often, in their anxiety, my parents have rebuked me for going home late. How they must worry now because of me; they will surely be distraught.

One night, the old couple, who love me dearly, wept from deep sorrow and said to me, 'Without you, son, we cannot live for even a moment. We will live only as long as you do. You are our staff; without you we are blind. The continuance of our race, our funeral oblations, our fame and our descendants, all depend on you.'

My mother and father are old, and I am their crutch. If they do not see me return at night, what will their plight be? I blame myself for having slept, and causing my parents agony. I cannot bear to live without my father and mother. I am certain that by now my blind father, his mind crazed with grief, is asking everyone who lives in the hermitage about me. I am not worried for myself, but for my father and for my feeble mother who depends on him. Ah, they must surely be demented with anxiety about me. I

will live as long they live, and live for them. I know that I must take care of them and do only what pleases them."

The virtuous Satyavan, who loved and revered his parents, began to weep with his arms raised in a paroxysm of grief. Savitri wiped the tears from his eyes and said, "By the virtue of my tapasya, because of whatever I have done that is charitable and my sacrifices, may this night be a benign and peaceful one for my father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband. I do not remember ever having told a single lie, even in jest. Let my father-in-law and mother-in-law remain alive tonight by my truthfulness."

Satyavan said, "I long for the sight of my father and mother. Savitri, let us go immediately. Beautiful one, I swear on my own self that if I find any evil to have befallen my father and mother, I will not live. If you care about dharma, if you want me to live, if it is your dharma to do what pleases me, then go with me now to the asrama."

The lovely Savitri got up, knotted her hair and helped her husband up. Satyavan stood and rubbed his arms and legs briskly with his hands. As he looked about he noticed his bag, and Savitri said to him, "You can gather fruit tomorrow, and I will help you now by carrying your axe."

She hung the bag on the branch of a tree and, picking up the axe, went to her husband. The princess of the shapely thighs placed her husband's left arm on her left shoulder, and holding him with her right, she set out, with the swaying gait of an elephant.

Satyavan said, "Timid one, I know the forest paths well, for I use them regularly. I can also see them by the moonlight that shines from between the trees. We have reached the same path that we took this morning. Blessed girl, go by the way we came, rather than by some uncertain way. Near that glade of palasa trees the path forks. Take the path that goes north. I feel well and strong again, and eager to see my parents."

Saying this, Satyavan hurried towards the asrama.' "

CANTO 296

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'Meanwhile, the mighty Dyumatsena had regained his vision and could see everything around him. Bharatarishabha, he took his wife Saibya with him and went to all the neighbouring asramas in search of their son, becoming increasingly distressed by the moment.

The old couple searched in asramas, by rivers and lakes, and in the woods. Whenever they heard any sound, they stood with their heads raised, anxiously anticipating the return of their son, and saying, *O here come Satyavan and Savitri*. Soon, they rushed from place to place in a frenzy, their feet torn and bleeding, and pierced with thorns and sharp kusa blades.

All the Brahmanas living in their hermitage came to them and, surrounding them, comforted them and brought them back to their own asrama. There the old sadhus diverted Dyumatsena and his wife with stories of kings of the olden days. Although that aged couple yearned for their son, they were consoled, but grew disconsolate again when they began to think of his childhood.

They began to cry heartrendingly, "Ah, Satyavan my son, O chaste Savitri, where are you?"

A pious Brahmana named Suvarcha said to them, "Considering the austerities, self-restraint and purity of Savitri, there can be no doubt that Satyavan is alive."

Another mighty Brahmana, Gautama, said, “I have studied all the Vedas and their many angas, and I have acquired great punya. I have led a celibate life as a brahmachari, and I have pleased Agni and my superiors. With disciplined soul I have observed all the vows, living at times on air alone. By the strength of my tapasya, I know what everyone is doing. I tell you that I am certain Satyavan lives.”

His sishya said, “The words that my Guru has spoken can never be false. Satyavan is definitely alive.”

And the Rishi said, “His wife Savitri has auspicious marks on her body that show she will never be widowed. There is no doubt that Satyavan lives.”

Bharadwaja said, “Savitri’s conduct, self-restraint and tapasyashakti convince me that Satyavan is alive.”

Dalbhya said, “Because you have regained your sight, and because Savitri completed her vow of fasting before she left, I am certain that Satyavan lives.”

Apastamba said, “We hear birds and wild animals all around us in the stillness; miraculously you have got your vision back, and can involve yourself again in worldly matters. These are indications that Satyavan lives.”

Dhaumya said, “Your son is graced with every noble quality and is loved by one and all; he has the marks that indicate a long life. I, too, am in no doubt that Satyavan lives.”

At what those knowing sages said, Dyumatsena’s heartache eased a little. A short while later that night, Savitri and Satyavan reached the hermitage and entered it joyfully.

The Brahmanas said, “Lord of the Earth, greetings to you on being united with your son and on regaining your vision. Being able now to see your son and your daughter-in-law make your blessing manifold. What we have said must come to pass; there can be no doubt of this. From now on, your good fortune will grow rapidly.”

Partha, the Dvijas lit a fire and sat down before Dyumatsena, after which, Saibya, Satyavan and Savitri, who stood apart, sat with their permission, their hearts light. Then all the forest-dwellers who sat with the king, prompted by curiosity, asked Satyavan, “Illustrious prince, why did you not return sooner with your wife? Why have you come so late in the

night? What kept you? We want to know why you alarmed us and your parents so. Tell us what happened."

Satyavan said, "Savitri and I went into the forest with my father's permission. There, as I was chopping wood, I felt a sharp pain in my head, which made me fall into a deep sleep. This is all I remember. I have never slept so long before, and I have come home so late at night so that you will not worry about me anymore. There is no other reason."

Gautama said with a smile, "Then you do not know about your father's vision having returned? I think Savitri should tell us about that. I want to hear about it from you, for you know all the subtleties of dharma.

Savitri, you are like the Goddess Savitri herself in splendour. You must know how this happened. So, tell us truly; if it is no secret, tell us everything."

Savitri said, "I have no secret to keep, so listen to the truth of what transpired. Devarishi Narada predicted the early death of my husband, and today was the appointed day and I could not bear to be separated from him. After he had fallen asleep, Yama came and, tying my husband in his noose, began to take him away towards the abode of the Pitrs.

I followed that Deva and began to eulogise him, and he granted me five boons, of which I will tell you.

For my father-in-law I obtained two boons: the restoration of his sight and his kingdom. For my father I asked for a hundred sons. For myself I asked for a hundred sons and a life of four hundred years for my husband Satyavan. It was for my husband's life that I kept that vrata.

I have told you in detail how my enormous misfortune turned into great joy."

The Rishis said, "Chaste and gentle devi of the stern vows, graced with every noble quality and born of a noble line, you have rescued this best of dynasties, which was overwhelmed by adversity and sinking into an ocean of darkness."

The Rishis applauded her and paid their respects to that holy woman, and taking leave of the king and his son, they left for their homes, with peace and good cheer in their hearts.' "

CANTO 297

PATIVRATA MAHATMYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Markandeya says, 'When the night passed and the Sun rose in the sky, the tapasvins performed their morning rites and congregated at Dyumatsena's asrama. However much those mighty sages talked with Dyumatsena of Savitri's greatness and good fortune, they were never satisfied.

And it happened, O king, that there came to that hermitage a large group of people from Salva. They brought news that Dyumatsena's enemy had been killed by his own minister: how the minister had slain the usurper and all his friends and allies; how all the enemy's people had fled and how all the subjects were unanimous that their legitimate king be restored to the throne.

The emissaries from Salva said, "We have been sent to you with that message. This chariot and this army consisting of four kinds of forces have arrived for you. May God bless you, O king. Come! Your accession has been proclaimed in the city. Occupy forever the throne that belonged to your father and grandfather."

Seeing the king with his vision restored and looking strong, they bowed their heads and their eyes were round with wonder. After worshipping the elderly and the Brahmanas living in the hermitage, and being honoured by them in return, the king set out for his capital. With a force of soldiers protecting them, Saibya rode with Savitri in a golden palanquin, spread with splendid sheets and borne on the shoulders of men.

Arriving in the city, the priests joyfully installed Dyumatsena on the throne, also crowning Satyavan as Yuvaraja. In time, Savitri gave birth to a hundred sons, all warlike and steadfast in battle, who enhanced the fame of the Salvas. She also had one hundred powerful brothers, born to Malavi by Aswapati, the lord of the Madras.

This is the story, Yudhishtira, of how Savitri emerged from a desperate plight and took herself, her father and mother, her father-in-law and mother-in-law, as well as the dynasty of her husband to lofty heights. Like the gentle Savitri, the auspicious Draupadi, graced with a noble character, will save you all,' says Markandeya."

Vaisampayana said, "Encouraged by what the Mahatman Rishi says, the son of Pandu continues to live, now without anxiety, in the Kamyaka vana. The man who listens reverently to the blessed story of Savitri attains happiness, success in all his endeavours, and is never touched by misery."

CANTO 298

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "O Brahmana, why was Yudhishtira so afraid of Karna that Rishi Lomasa conveyed a message to the son of Pandu from Indra, who promised to remove that fear after Dhananjaya had left? And, Sreshta, why was it that the noble Yudhishtira never spoke of his fear to anyone?"

Vaisampayana said, "Rajashardulam, tiger among kings, listen and I will tell you.

After twelve years of their exile have passed and the thirteenth year has begun, Sakra, who is always a friend of the Pandavas, decides to ask Karna to give him his earrings. Vibhavasu, the Sun God, whose wealth is his light, finds out what Indra intends, great king, and goes to see Karna. Best of kings, one night, when that hero, devoted to Brahmanas and truthful in speech, is sleeping peacefully on his luxurious bed, covered by a silken sheet, the radiant Deva, moved by compassion and a father's love, comes to him in a dream.

He assumes the form of a handsome Brahmana, learned in the Vedas. Surya says sweetly to Karna, 'O best of truthful men, Mahabaho, listen to what I say now for I speak from affection and for your good. Karna, with the welfare of Pandu's sons in mind, Sakra wants to have your kundalas. He will come to you disguised as a Brahmana. He knows, as all the world does, of your vow that you will always give away anything the pious ask you for but never demand a thing in return. My son, you give Brahmanas wealth or

whatever they ask; indeed, you never refuse anyone. Indra is well aware of your oath and will come to beg you for your kavacha and kundala, as alms.

When he asks for the kundalas, you must not give them away, but instead appease him as best you can, for your own good. When he begs for them you must deflect him with many excuses, cite various precedents and refuse him the earrings; instead, offer Purandara other kinds of wealth, gems, women and cattle.

Karna, if you give away your golden earrings, which you were born with, your life will be shortened and you will soon meet your death. Wearing your kavacha and kundala, you are invincible to your enemies in battle. Take what I say to heart. Both your armour and earrings were made from the Amrita of immortality, and you must guard and keep them, if you value your life.'

Karna says, 'Who are you that tells me this and shows me such kindness? Please tell me, O lustrous one, who you truly are, in the guise of a Brahmana.'

The Brahmana says, 'Son, I am the Deva of the thousand rays. I say what I do out of love. Do as I say because it is to save your life that I have come to you.'

Karna replies, 'I am fortunate that the god of splendour is considerate of my welfare, and speaks to me. But listen to what I say; for I, too, speak from love. If you love me, you should not dissuade me from keeping my vow. O Vibhavasu, you are rich with the wealth of effulgence. The whole world knows that I have solemnly sworn to give anything, even my life, to a chaste Brahmana who comes to me for alms.

If Sakra comes disguised as a Brahmana, to beg so he can benefit the sons of Pandu, I will give him my kavacha and kundala, so that my fame, which has spread across the three worlds, does not diminish. It is not honourable for me to save my life by breaking my sworn oath; rather, it is my dharma to die earning the praises of the world. And so, I will give Indra my earrings and armour.

Besides, if the slayer of Bala and Vritra comes to ask for the kundala to help the Pandavas, it will enhance my fame and, also, put Indra to shame. Glorious Surya Deva, I wish for fame and honour in this world, even if it is to be bought with my life, because those who have fame enjoy Swarga, while those who have none are lost.

Renown keeps men alive in this world even as a mother does, while dishonour kills them even though they be physically healthy. Lord of the worlds, greatness is the very life of man, as is told in an ancient sloka that Prajapati Brahma himself sang: *In the next world his fame supports a man, and in this world it lengthens life*.

So, by giving away my earrings and mail, both of which I was born with, to a Brahmana, according to the laws that govern the giving of gifts; by offering up my body as a gift to the gods in the sacrifice of war; by doing what is hard to do and conquering my enemies in battle, I will acquire nothing but renown. By sparing frightened warriors who beg for their lives, and by dispelling the fears of old men, young boys and Brahmanas, I will win the highest fame and attain the loftiest heaven. I will guard my honour even with my life. This I swear.

By giving away such a valuable gift to Indra Maghavat, I will become a legend in this world.' ”

CANTO 299

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Surya says, 'Karna, never do anything that is harmful to yourself, your friends, your sons, your wives, your father or your mother. O best of this Earth's creatures, men wish for renown in this world and for lasting fame in heaven, but without having to sacrifice themselves. But you want undying fame at the expense of your very life, and fame will snatch your life from you.

Purusharishabha, in this world the father, the mother, the son and other kin are useful only to the man who is alive. A king's power is useful to him only as long as he lives. Don't you understand this?

O splendid warrior, fame benefits only those that are alive to enjoy it. Of what use is fame to the dead, whose bodies have been burnt to ashes? A dead man cannot enjoy his renown, but only while he lives. The fame of a dead man is like a garland of flowers draped around the neck of a corpse.

Because you worship me daily, I tell you this for your good, for I always protect those that worship me. Mahabaho, your worship is profound and inspires my love for you. Do not doubt me, but do as I say. Besides, there is a deep mystery attached to all this, ordained by fate, which is also why I say this to you. You must trust me. O bull among men, you cannot be told this secret, which even the gods do not know. I cannot reveal it to you now, but you will understand it in time.

I repeat what I have already said, Radheya. Take my words to your heart. When the wielder of the Vajra asks for them, do not give him your

kundala. Ah, with your shimmering earrings you look so radiant, like the Moon himself in the clear sky, amidst the stars of the Visakha nakshatra.

You know that fame helps only he that is living. When the king of the Devas asks for the earrings you should refuse him, my son. Repeat, over and over, different explanations for your refusing him and, in that way, Anagha, you will be rid of Indra's eagerness to have the kundala. Using pleasant and subtle arguments, Karna, remove his desire with reasoning of grave import.

O tiger among men, you always taunt and challenge the ambidextrous Savyasachi, and you will undoubtedly meet him in battle. As long as you wear your kundala Arjuna can never vanquish you, even if Indra himself comes to help him. Karna, if you want to kill Arjuna, you must never give these exquisite earrings of yours to Sakra.' "

CANTO 300

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says, 'Lord of splendour, knowing me as one who worships you, you also know that there is nothing I would not give away as daana in charity. Not my wives, not my friends, not my sons or my own self are as dear to me as you, because of the adoration I have for you. You know, maker of light, that exalted beings love their worshippers dearly. Thinking, *Karna is my faithful devotee and is dear to me; and he knows no other God in heaven*, you have told me what you think is good for me. Effulgent one, again I beseech you with bended head, once more I place myself in your hands, and I repeat the response I have already given you. I beg you, forgive me for refusing to do what you ask.

Death itself is not fraught with such terror for me as to break my vow. Especially when it comes to Brahmanas, I do not hesitate to give even my life for them. O Deva, I understand what you have said to me about Phalguna. Shed your anxiety about him; I will conquer Arjuna in battle. Jamadagni and Drona have both given me weapons of great power.

Permit me now, Devottama, to adhere to my vrata, so that to him of the Vajra coming to beg of me, I may give even my life.'

Surya says, 'If, my son of the mighty strength, you give your kundala to the Vajradhari, to ensure victory you must tell him of the hundred sacrifices that you will give him the earrings on a condition. Remember that with these earrings you are invincible to one and all. It is to see you killed in

battle by Arjuna that the enemy of the Danavas wishes to take your earrings away from you.

Adulate Indra with truthful words, praise Purandara who has irresistible weapons, and plead with him, saying, "Give me an infallible astra which can slay any enemy and I will, O thousand-eyed Lord, give you my kavacha and kundala."

Only on this condition should you give the earrings to Sakra. With that astra, Karna, you will slay your enemies in battle. Mahabaho, that singular weapon of the Lord of Devas does not return to the hand that casts it without killing enemies by the hundreds and thousands.'

The Lord of the thousand rays vanishes. The next day, after his prayers, Karna relates his dream to Surya Deva and tells him all that passed between them in the night. After hearing everything, that enemy of Svarbhanu, the resplendent and divine Surya, says to Karna, with a smile, 'That is so.'

And Radha's son, the slayer of hostile heroes, knowing his dream to be true, and wanting to have Indra's astra, waits for Vasava."

CANTO 301

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, “What was the secret that the lord of the fiery rays would not tell Karna? What were the kavacha and kundala like? From where did the armour and those earrings come? I want to hear all this, O you of the mighty austerities, tell me everything.”

Vaisampayana said, “Rajan, I will tell you the secret which the lord of the wealth of radiance does not reveal. I will also describe to you that coat of mail and those earrings.

A long time ago, there appeared before Kuntibhoja a Brahmana of fierce tejas. He was tall, with a beard and matted locks, and he carried a staff in his hand. He was handsome; his form was perfect and blazed in splendour. He had honey-coloured, yellowish-blue skin and his voice was melodious. He shone with tapasyashakti and Vedagyana.

This person said to Kuntibhoja, ‘O you who are free of pride, I would live as a guest in your house, eating food that you give me as alms. Neither you nor your people must ever displease or anger me. If, Anagha, this suits you, I will live in your house in this way. I will come and go as I wish, and no one should disturb me when I am eating or sleeping.’

Kuntibhoja cheerfully agreed and said, “*Tathaastu; so be it*, and even more. Wise one, I have an illustrious daughter named Pritha. She has an excellent character, she observes vows, is chaste, and of subdued senses. She will attend on you and take care of you with all reverence. You will be pleased with her disposition.’

Having said this to that Brahmana and paid him homage, the king went to his daughter Pritha of the large eyes and said to her, 'My daughter, this eminent Brahmana wishes to live in our house. I have agreed, my child, and I count on your skills in caring for Brahmanas. You must look after him with honour and reverence, to keep my word. Be prompt in giving this venerable one, who is engaged in the deep study of the Vedas, whatever he may want. Cheerfully give him everything he asks for.

A Brahmana is the embodiment of the highest tejas and also of the highest punya. It is because of the tapasya of Brahmanas that the Sun shines in the heavens. It is because of their cruelty and disrespect to Brahmanas that the Asuras Vatapi and Talajangha were killed by the curses of the holy ones.

And now, my child, I am entrusting the care of a most virtuous Brahmana to you. You must always attend on him with the utmost care. Daughter, I know that since your childhood you have always been attentive to Brahmanas, elders, relatives, servants and friends, and to your mother and me. I know how exemplary your conduct is, how you give due respect to all the deserving. My faultless one, because of your gentleness, there is not one person in the antahpuram of my palace, or even one among the servants, who is displeased with you. That is why I saw fit to have you wait upon the short-tempered Brahmana.

Pritha, you are still a girl; and you are my adopted daughter. You were born in the House of the Vrishnis, and you were Sura's favourite daughter. Your father himself gladly gave you to me because I had no child of my own. You are the natural sister of Vasudeva, and by adoption, the first of my daughters.

Your father promised me his firstborn child, and gave you to me when you were just a baby; and now you are my daughter. Born into a noble line and raised in one, you have come from one royal house to another, like a lotus taken from one lake to another.

My beautiful child, despite being disciplined with difficulty, low-born women develop perverted characters because their hearts are immature. But you are born in a royal race and you are extraordinarily lovely. You are graced with every accomplishment. Renounce pride, hauteur and self-importance, and worshipfully wait upon the boon-giving Brahmana; and you will be blessed, Pritha, and surely attain the realms of bliss. If,

however, you provoke the anger of the Dvijottama, he will destroy my entire race.' "

CANTO 302

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti said, 'Father, I will keep your promise and serve the Brahmana with devotion. Foremost of kings, these are not empty words. It is my nature to worship Brahmanas, and because in this case my doing so will please you, it will surely lead me to good fortune. Whether that worshipful one comes in the morning, evening, or at night, even at midnight, I will not give him cause for anger.

I both benefit and derive joy from serving the twice-born ones, and obeying all your commands. Dispel your anxiety; you can rely on me. Truly, that best of Brahmanas shall never have cause for dissatisfaction while living in your house. I will pay particular attention to what pleases the Brahmana, and also to what will bring punya and his blessings upon you.

Anagha, I know full well that, when pleased, such eminent Brahmanas bestow even moskha, but when offended they can destroy the one who offends them. I will take great care to please this best among Brahmanas.

You will not come to grief from him through any fault of mine. The hubris of kings resulted in Brahmanas bringing about their downfall. This is what happened with Chyavana as a result of what Sukanya did. Father, as you wish, I will diligently serve the Brahmanottama.'

After she had spoken at length to reassure the king, he embraced her, and gave her detailed instructions about her duties towards the Brahmana. And the king said, 'You will conduct yourself in this way, gentle one,

without fear, for my good as well as your own, and for the good of our dynasty, my perfect-limbed child.'

Saying this, the noble Kuntibhoja, who was devoted to Brahmanas, brought Pritha to that Brahmana and said, 'This is my daughter, O Dvija. She is very young and accustomed to luxury. Make allowances for her if she makes any mistakes. Great Brahmanas are never angry with old men, children and ascetics, even if these frequently err. Even a serious wrongdoing deserves forgiveness from a Brahmana. Brahmanottama, you must aceept the best worship and service that my child is able to offer you."

The Brahmana said, '*So be it*,' and the happy king showed him to his apartments, that were bright and white, like swan down, or moonbeams. In the yagnasala the king placed a grand throne that had been especially made for the Brahmana. The food and everything else that he provided were equally excellent. And casting aside idleness and self-importance, the princess devoted herself with all goodwill to serving the Brahmana.

And the chaste Kunti, of the pure character, moved to these apartments to wait upon the sage. Serving him faithfully, as if he was a Deva, she made him happy indeed."

CANTO 303

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "That young princess of the rigid vows succeeded in pleasing the Brahmana by serving him devotedly. Foremost of kings, sometimes, saying he would be back in the morning, he would return in the evening or at night. Regardless, the girl worshipped him at all hours with offerings of delicious food and drink, and a comfortably made bed.

Days passed, and her attention to his needs only grew instead of diminishing. Even when the Brahmana reproved her, finding fault with any of her arrangements, at times speaking harshly, Pritha never showed any displeasure or did anything that was disagreeable to him.

On many occasions, the Brahmana came after the appointed hour had long passed; and on others, in the dead of night, when it was difficult to serve him food, he would demand a meal. At all those times, Pritha would give him whatever he asked for. Like a sishya, daughter or young sister, that blemishless jewel of a girl devotedly served that Brahmana, who was pleased with her conduct and her caring attention, and he valued her service highly.

Bhaarata, every morning her father asked her if the Brahmana was happy with her ministrations, and every day the girl replied that he was. And at that, the noble Kuntibhoja was delighted.

A whole year went by without that Muni being able to find any fault with Pritha. One day, he said to her, 'Gentle maiden, I am pleased with you.

O lovely girl, blessed one, ask me for boons that are difficult for people of this world to obtain, which will make you more famous than all the women on Earth.’

Kunti said, ‘I have everything I want because I have made you, who are learned in the Vedas, happy; and my father is pleased with me. I consider every boon I could wish for as having already been given to me, O Brahmana.’

The Brahmana said, ‘Susheela of the sweet smiles, if you do not want any boon from me, let me give you this mantra to invoke the Devas. Any of the gods whom you call by chanting this mantra will appear before you and do as you tell them. Willing or not, by virtue of this mantra, the particular deity will become your meek and obedient slave, under your control.’

That faultless princess could not, for fear of incurring a curse, refuse the Brahmana a second time. O king, the Brahmana taught the girl of the tender limbs the invocations that are recited in the beginning of the Atharva Veda.

Then he said to Kuntibhoja, ‘Rajan, I have lived happily in your house, always worshipped and lovingly cared for by your daughter. I am going now.’

And saying this, he vanished from where he stood, leaving the king amazed. Kuntibhoja praised his daughter Pritha and looked on her with even more affection.”

CANTO 304

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "One day, after that great Brahmana had gone, the young Kunti began to think about the efficacy of mantras she had learnt, and she said to herself, 'I wonder what the mantras that the Mahatman taught me can achieve. Let me chant them now and discover for myself.'

Even as she thought this, she noticed the signs in her body that signalled the onset of puberty; she saw that she was menstruating. She was in her room sitting on her luxurious bed, and she saw the Sun rising in the eastern sky. Her eyes and her mind were riveted on Surya pulsing with light, and the slender girl gazed at him in fascination and could not tear her eyes away from the beauty of the Sun at dawn. Hardly aware of what she did, she mumrmured the mantra the Brahmana had taught her.

Suddenly, a celestial vision appeared within her and she saw, with her inner eye, the Sun embodied in a divine form, wearing blazing kavacha and kundala.

At the sight of Surya Deva, her curiosity to test the mantra was aroused, and she decided to try it on him. First she went through her pranayama and then invoked the Maker of Day. Instantly, he presented himself before her. His skin was golden like honey; his arms were powerful; his neck was marked with lines as on a conch-shell; he wore glittering bracelets on his arms and a crown on his head.

And he came to her, smiling and lighting up the chamber with his brilliance. With his yogic power he divided himself, setting to one side his burning half, and the other part of him standing before her.

He addressed Kunti in sweet words. The Deva said, 'Gentle one, I am bound by your mantra, and I have come to you in obedience. I am yours, to do whatever you command, princess. Tell me what you would have me do.'

Kunti said nervously, 'Worshipful one, you may go back to where you came from. It is only from curiosity that I invoked you. Forgive me, Lord.'

Surya said, 'O slender-waisted, I will return to where I have come from, as you command. However, you may not invoke a Deva in vain. Graceful one, your heart's intention was to have a son from Surya, a splendid son, born with kavacha and kundala, and with incomparable prowess. Give yourself to me, maiden with the swaying gait of a she-elephant. You shall have a son, just as you wished for.

Gentle girl of the sweet smiles, I will go back only after enjoying you. If you do not gratify me today, I will curse you in anger and your father and that Brahmana, as well. I will consume them all, and you will be to blame. I will exact retribution from your foolish father, who knows nothing of your wrongdoing, and from that Brahmana, who bestowed mantras on you without knowing your true character.

Purandara and all the Devas are watching me, and they laugh at me for having been deceived by you. Look, you can see them with your celestial vision, which I gave you so that you would be able to see me.'

The virgin princess saw the Devas standing in the heavens, each in his proper place, and in front of her was the resplendent Suryadeva of the blinding rays. The girl was frightened when she saw them all, and she blushed in mortification.

She said to Surya, 'O Lord of Light, please return to your own place. I am horrified at the outrage you propose, for I am still a maiden. Only a father, a mother and other elders can give their daughter's body away. I will not sacrifice my virtue; chastity is a woman's highest dharma. O splendid one, I called you because I was childishly eager to test the mantras. Consider that this is the act of a girl of tender years; you must forgive me, Lord.'

Surya said, 'Kunti, it is only because you are a young girl that I am speaking so gently to you. I would not make such concession to any one else. Surrender, Kunti; you will be happy. Because you have summoned me

with mantras, perfect-limbed one, I cannot leave without achieving my purpose, for if I do, I will be the laughing-stock of the world and ridiculed by the Devas. Give in to me; you will have a son in my image, and you will be praised by the whole world.' "

CANTO 305

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Try as she might, speaking sweetly, the princess could not dissuade the Deva of the thousand rays. Afraid of a curse, she began to reflect on what she ought to do.

She thought, 'How can my innocent father and that Brahmana be saved from the angry Vibhavasu's curse, for which I am to blame. Although tejas and tapasya can destroy sins, even honest people should avoid them, particularly if they are young. Because of my youthful folly, I am in a terrible predicament. I have put myself in the hands of this Deva. Yet, how can I do what is wrong by giving in to him?'

Wracked by the fear of his curse, and by her own anxiety, a languid torpor crept over her. She was so confused that she did not know what to do. Afraid, on the one hand, Rajan, of the reproach of her loved ones if she yielded to the deity and, on the other, of his curse if she did not, at last the girl said to the Deva, in a voice trembling and shy, 'O Lord, as my father and mother and my friends are still living, I cannot violate my dharma. If I commit this sin with you, I will sacrifice the honour of this family. If, O first among heat-givers, you consider this union to be worthy, I will give myself to you, even though my family has not bestowed me. By the truth that every being's virtue, reputation, fame and life are established in you, may I remain chaste after having surrendered my body to you.'

Surya replied, 'Neither your father nor your mother, nor any of your elders has the right to give you away. Blessings be upon you, beautiful girl.

Listen to me:

The word *kanya* is derived from the root *kama,* which means desire, and it is used to denote a virgin because she desires everyone. Therefore, lovely-hipped one of the finest complexion, a virgin is free to do as she pleases. You will not, in any way, be committing a sin by giving what I ask. Would I, who am devoted to the well-being of all creatures, ever do anything that violates dharma?

Nature's law dictates that men and women should not be bound by any restraints. Anything to the contrary is a perversion of nature.

You shall remain a virgin even after having gratified me, and your son shall be illustrious.'

Kunti said, 'If, O destroyer of darkness, I have a son from you, grant that he is born with kavacha and kundala, and that he is mighty-armed and great.'

Surya answered, 'Gentle princess, your son shall indeed be mighty-armed, and decked with divine kavacha and kundala. His armour will be invulnerable and his earrings made of Amrita.'

Kunti said, 'If the armour and earrings of the son you will have with me are truly made of Amrita, then fulfil your desire, O Deva! May my son be powerful, strong, vigorous and beautiful, like you, and may he be blessed with virtue.'

Surya said, 'Noble girl, these kundala were a gift to me from Aditi. Timid one, I will bestow them and this wonderful armour on your son.'

Kunti then acquiesced, 'O Lord of light, if I have such a son, I will do as you say and satisfy your desire.'

Surya Deva said, '*Tathaastu*,' and that sky ranger, the enemy of Svarbhanu, with his soul absorbed in yoga, entered into Kunti and touched her on her navel. Immediately, she lost consciousness and fell onto her bed.

Surya said to her, 'I leave you now, you of the graceful hips. You shall give birth to a son who will become the best of all warriors; and you shall remain a virgin.'

Then, Rajarajan, as the blazing Deva was about to leave, the girl bashfully whispered to him in her swoon, '*So be it*.'

It was thus that the daughter of king Kuntibhoja, having invoked Surya and then asked for a son, fell down in a stupor on her bed, like a broken creeper. And it was thus that, after stupefying her, the god of fierce rays

entered into her through the power of his yoga and impregnated her without breaking her virginal seal and dishonouring her.

When Surya had gone, the young girl regained consciousness.”

CANTO 306

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Lord of the Earth, Pritha’s son was conceived on the first day of the bright fortnight, in the tenth month of the year. Carrying a child as radiant as the lord of the stars, the maiden of the shapely hips hid her pregnancy from fear of disapproval, and no one knew of her condition. Living as she did in a virgin princess’ apartments, and using all her guile to carefully conceal her condition, only her nursemaid knew the truth.

In due time and by the grace of Surya Deva, the young Kunti gave birth to a godlike son. The baby was clad, like his father, in a coat of mail and adorned with glittering earrings. His eyes were tawny, like a lion’s; and his shoulders were broad, like a bull’s.

As soon as he was born, with the help of her nurse, Kunti placed the infant in a spacious and smooth wicker basket cushioned with silk sheets and a soft pillow. They coated it with wax, so it would not sink, and wrapped it in a rich cover. Then, with tears in her eyes, Kunti carried her baby to the river Aswa and set the basket upon the current.

She knew that an unwed girl should not have a child, yet she wept piteously, as her son was about to be borne away by the river. Listen to what she said, as she surrendered the precious basket to the Aswa.

‘My child, may all who live on this Earth—on land, in water, in the sky and in the heavens—do good to you. May all your paths be blessed. May

you face no obstacles. My son, may all whom you meet be your friends and bear you no enmity.

May that Lord of all waters, Varuna, protect you in the water. May the Deva that wanders the skies protect you in the sky. May Surya Deva, first of heat-givers, your father who gave you to me through destiny, protect you everywhere. May the Adityas and the Vasus, the Rudras and the Sadhyas, the Viswas, the Devas and the Maruts, the Cardinal Points with the great Indra and their guardians presiding over them, and all the heavenly ones protect you!

Wherever you may be, I will recognise you by your kavacha and kundala. Your father, the glorious Surya Deva, is fortunate indeed, for, with his celestial vision, he will watch over you as you float down the river. Blessed also is that woman who will, O Devaputra, take you for her son, and who will give you her breast when you are hungry. What a dream she has dreamed, that woman who adopts you who are as splendid as the Sun, who wear divine armour and earrings, with your lotus eyes and skin as lustrous as burnished copper, your lofty, powerful brow and hair ending in silken curls. Lucky is the woman who will see you crawl on the ground, covered in mud and uttering the sweetest inarticulate words of infancy. Blessed is she who will see you reach manhood like a maned Himalayan lion.'

Rajan, Pritha cried over the basket for a long time before she set it afloat down the Aswa, in the dead of night, with only her nursemaid beside her. Though she longed to keep standing there forever, she was afraid that her father might discover what had happened, and she returned to the palace. Meanwhile, the basket floated down the Aswa to the river Charmanwati, and from the Charmanwati into the Yamuna, and then on to the Ganga. Borne by the Ganga, the basket came at dawn to the city of Champa, which was ruled by a Suta, a charioteer.

The wonderful coat of mail and earrings, made of Amrita, and destiny, kept the child safe and alive."

CANTO 307

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “It happened that at this time a Suta named Adhiratha, who was a friend of Dhritarashtra, came to the river Ganga along with his wife Radha of great beauty. Parantapa, that otherwise blessed woman had done all she could to have a child, but without success.

Coming that day to the Ganga, she saw a large wicker basket drifting on Jahnavi’s current. It veered towards the bank where she stood, as if moved by some unseen hand, and the woman bent to arrest it. She called her husband Adhiratha the Suta, and he lifted the basket out of the water and prised it open.

Inside, he saw a boy, dazzling like the morning Sun. The infant wore golden armour, as if it was his very skin, and his stunningly beautiful face was adorned with earrings. The Suta and his wife were wonder-struck.

Taking the baby onto his lap, Adhiratha said to his wife, ‘I have never in my life seen anything so wonderful. This child must be of divine birth. Surely, seeing us childless, the gods have taken pity on us and sent him to me.’

Saying this, O Bhumipala, he gave the infant into Radha’s eager arms. And in accordance with divine law, Radha adopted the child of unearthly origin and form, who shimmered like lotus-stamens and was handsome past describing. She lavished him with all her love and care and, naturally endowed with more than human strength, the child grew apace.

After adopting Karna, Adhiratha had other natural children, and seeing the child adorned with shining mail and golden earrings, the Brahmanas named him Vasusena. That is how this resplendent Suryaputra of immeasurable prowess became the son of a sarathy, and came to be known as Vasusena and Vrisha.

Pritha discovered through some spies that her child was growing up amongst the Angas as the eldest son of the sarathy Adhiratha.

When the boy grew into a youth, Adhiratha sent him to Hastinapura. There, Karna lived with Drona, to learn the Astra Shastra, and the powerful youth befriended Duryodhana. He acquired all the four kinds of astras from Drona, Kripa and Parasurama, and achieved renown throughout the world as a mighty bowman. His friendship with Duryodhana ignited in him a hatred of the sons of Pritha, his brothers, though he did not know they were that, and he became obsessed with fighting the noble Phalguna.

O king, from the first time they met, Karna and Arjuna always challenged each other.

That Karna, born to Kunti of Surya Deva, was being brought up as a Sutaputra was Surya Deva's secret. Seeing Karna with his kavacha and kundala, Yudhishtira was troubled by the thought that he would be invincible. When, after bathing, Karna worshipped the irradiant Deva at high noon, Brahmanas came to beg alms of him, and, at that time of his fervent prayers, there was nothing that he would not give away to them.

And so, one day at that hour, assuming the guise of a Brahmana, Indra appears before Karna, and says, 'Give me alms,' to which Radha's son replies, 'You are welcome.' "

CANTO 308

KUNDALA HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Karna first sees Indra as just another Brahmana and welcomes him. Adhiratha's son says to the Brahmana, 'What shall I give you—a necklace of gold, beautiful damsels, cattle-rich villages?'

The Brahmana replies, 'I do not want you to give me either a golden necklace or pretty girls, or any other such thing. Give those to men that ask for them. If you are true to your vow, cut the golden kavacha and kundala you were born with from your body, and give them to me. Parantapa, I want you to do this at once; for me this one gift is better than all others.'

Karna says, 'O Brahmana, I will give you land for a house, beautiful virgins, cattle and fields; but I cannot give you my kavacha and kundala.'

Despite Karna trying to deflect him in so many ways, that Brahmana does not want anything else. Although Karna tries his best to placate him and though he pays him much homage, that Brahmanottama refuses to compromise on what he wants.

When that Dvijottama refuses to accept anything else, Radha's son says, 'Dvijottama, I was born with this kavacha as part of my body, and my kundala were created from Amrita. They make me invincible in this world, and I cannot part with them. Brahmanarishabha, let me give you the entire kingdom of the Earth, with no enemies, and full of prosperity, but not my kavacha and kundala. Without them, I can be killed by my enemies.'

When the illustrious Brahmana refuses to take any other gift, Karna says, now with a smile, 'Devadeva, I have recognised you already. O Lord Sakra, it is not right that I give you a gift which will bring ignominy upon you.

You are the king of the Devas, and it is you who should be bestowing boons on me. If I give you my kavacha and kundala, I will surely meet my end, and you will as surely be ridiculed. Therefore, O Sakra, take my mail and my earrings but give me something in return, so that you are not demeaned. Otherwise, I will not give the kavacha and kundala to you.'

Sakra replies, 'Even before I came, Surya Deva knew what I intended and told you about it. Karna, let it be as you wish. Except for the Vajra, tell me what it is you wish to have.'

Indra's words fill Karna with delight; his purpose is about to be accomplished. Intent upon procuring an inexorable astra, he says to Indra, 'O Vasava, in exchange for my kavacha and kundala earrings, give me a weapon that cannot be defied, one which will devour enemy armies in battle array.'

Concentrating his mind to summon that weapon, Indra says to Karna, 'Give me your kavacha that is your skin, and your kundala, and take this shakti, but on one condition. When I meet Daityas in battle and loose this invincible astra, it annihilates the mightiest enemies in their thousands and flies back to my hand after it has achieved its task. In your hand, however, Sutaputra, this shakti will slay only one enemy of yours, and having done so, it will return to me, roaring and ablaze.'

Karna says, 'There is only one enemy that I wish to slay in battle; he burns bright and fierce, like a fire, and I am afraid of him.'

Indra says, 'You shall indeed slay such an enemy in battle, but the one you wish to kill is protected by an exalted One. Those that are learned in the Vedas call this One "Invincible Varaha" and "Incomprehensible Narayana". Krishna himself protects your sworn enemy.'

Karna says, 'Even if this is so, O Illustrious, give me the weapon that will destroy only one powerful enemy, and I will cut the kavacha and kundala from my body and give them to you. However, grant that my body, thus wounded, will not be scarred or ugly to behold.'

Indra says, 'Karna, because you are devoted to the truth, your body will not be disfigured, and it will not have any scars. O Karna, finest among the eloquent, you shall be graced with the brilliance and prowess of your father.

Here is my Vasavi shakti; and remember that if you loose this astra in a fit of anger, while there are still other weapons available to you and your life is not in immediate danger, it will turn on you.'

Karna says, 'O Sakra, I will use this Vasavi astra only when I my life is in imminent peril. This I swear.'

Rajan, Karna accepts the smouldering weapon, and he begins to peel away the natural kavacha that coats his body. And the entire host of Devas and Danavas roar aloud to see him paring his own skin. Karna's face does not betray his pain, instead he still smiles. Celestial kettle-drums begin to beat, and heavenly flowers rain down on him.

Karna cuts his golden kavacha from his body and gives it, still dripping blood, to Indra. From his ears, he cuts his beautiful kundala and gives them, too, to the Deva king. And for this deed of his, he is called Karna.

Thus tricking Karna, but so giving him immortal fame, Indra is pleased that he has accomplished the Pandavas' goal, and he ascends into Devaloka. Hearing that Karna had been deceived, Dhritarashtra's sons are dismayed. On the other hand, learning of what has happened to the Sutaputra, Pritha's princes are filled with joy."

Janamejaya said, "Where were those Kshatriyas, the sons of Pandu, at that time? Who gave them this welcome news? And what did they do when the twelfth year of their exile was over? O Illustrious one, tell me all this."

Vaisampayana said, "By this time, the heroic Pandavas have defeated the Saindhava king and rescued Krishnaa. They have lived out the entire term of their painful exile in the jungle; they have heard ancient legends about Devas and Rishis from Markandeya.

Now those heroes return from their asrama in Kamyaka vana to the sacred Dwaita vana. With them are all their chariots, their sarathys, their followers, citizens of their kingdom and their cattle."

CANTO 309

ARANEYA PARVA

Janamejaya said, “What did the Pandavas do after they had endured such anguish on the kidnapping of Krishnaa, and after rescuing her?

Vaisampayana said, “After their difficult time, when Krishnaa was abducted, the ever-glorious Yudhishtira and his brothers leave the Kamyaka vana and return to the lush Dwaita vana. The sons of Pandu live there with their wife, frugally, eating fruit, and engaged in their vratas. During their stay in Dwaita vana, Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Arjuna and Madri’s sons undergo a great trial for the sake of a Brahmana. However, their troubles turn out to be the very means to their future weal. I will tell you of the strange difficulty that those foremost of Kurus face while living in those woods, which in the end brings them good fortune. Listen.

Once, as a deer is frolicking about, it happens that two arani sticks, which a devout Brahmana used to light his daily fire, and his churning-staff become entangled in its antlers. In alarm, the stag runs out of the asrama, swiftly and with long leaps, with the sticks and staff still caught on his head.

Kurusthama, the Brahmana sees his most precious possessions, which he uses to light his sacred fire, being carried away and, utterly distraught, comes running to the Pandavas.

He goes to Ajatasatru, who is sitting in the forest with his brothers, and cries, ‘A deer was playing near my asrama, O king, and my fire-sticks and churning-staff, which I had tied to a tree, got caught in its antlers. That swift creature fled with great leaps, taking my sticks and staff. Pandavas, you

must follow its tracks and retrieve them for me, so that my agnihotra does not pause.’

Yudhishtira is concerned. He takes up his bow, and the son of Kunti sets out at once. His brothers pick up their bows and follow him in search of the deer, all of them eager to help the Brahmana. The Maharathas spot the deer quite close by and shoot it with arrows, but, however they try, they cannot wound the animal at all, and it runs from them.

As they go after it, a long way, the fine stag suddenly vanishes. Dispirited at having lost their quarry, tired, thirsty and hungry, the Pandavas sit down in the shade of a banyan tree deep in the forest.

Here, Nakula, who is both disheartened and impatient, says to Yudhishtira, ‘In our clan, Rajan, we never abandon our dharma, nor do we ever lose our wealth from idleness. We never refuse or fail anyone who asks for our help, least of all a Brahmana. Why then have we met this fate today?’ ”

CANTO 310

ARANEYA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'There is no limit to troubles, nor is it possible to determine their final outcome. The Lord Dharma is solely responsible for giving out the fruits of both punya and paapa.'

Bhima growls, 'This is the bitter fruit of my not having killed the Pratikamin on the spot, when he dragged Krishnaa into the Kuru sabha like a slave.'

Arjuna says softly, 'We have met with this failure today because I did nothing to answer the vicious words of the Sutaputra, words that pierced me to my bones.'

Sahadeva says, 'Surely, Bhaarata, this calamity has befallen us because I did not kill Sakuni when he cheated you at dice.'

Yudhishtira says to Nakula, 'Climb this tree and look around at the ten points of the horizon. Can you see water or water-plants anywhere near us? Child, your brothers are tired and thirsty.'

Nakula quickly climbs the tree and, after looking all around, says, 'Rajan, I see many trees that grow beside some large body of water, and I hear the cries of cranes. There must surely be water somewhere near.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Handsome one, go and fetch water in these quivers.'

At his elder brother's command, Nakula hurries towards the trees he saw, and soon sees a lake of crystallline water, on whose banks cranes live, and he wants to drink from it. Just then he hears a voice from the sky, which says, 'O child, do not drink, for this lake belongs to me. Son of Madri, you

must first answer my questions, and then you may drink to your heart's content and also take as much water as you need with you.'

Nakula, however, is parched with thirst and, ignoring the asariri from the sky, he kneels and drinks the cool water. Immediately he keels over, dead.

Parantapa, seeing that Nakula is late, Yudhishtira says to Sahadeva, 'Our brother has been gone a long time. Go and bring your twin back, and fetch the water, too.'

Sahadeva sets out in the same direction, and soon he comes to the lake where his brother lies dead on its bank. In shock, and in an agony of thirst, he goes towards the water, when he hears a voice saying, 'O child, do not drink, this lake belongs to me. First answer my questions and then you may drink and take away as much water as you want.'

But Sahadeva is also parched and, disregarding the disembodied voice, drinks the water; and immediately he also falls dead.

When Sahadeva does not return, Yudhishtira says to Arjuna, 'It is a long time since your brothers went, Bibhatsu. Go and bring them back, as well as water. You are the one we always turn to when we are in trouble.'

Accordingly, Arjuna takes his bow and arrows, as well as his unsheathed sword, and goes towards the lake. Arriving, Svetavahana sees his two younger brothers who had come to fetch water, lying dead. Seeing them, that lion among men is heartbroken. He raises his bow and looks around but sees no one in the thick forest that surrounds the lake. He, too, is tired and goes towards the water.

As he nears it, he hears a voice speaking from the sky, 'Why are you going to the water? I am a Yaksha and this lake is mine. I forbid you to drink from it. O Kaunteya, if you can answer the riddles I will ask you, only then may you drink and take away as much water as you want.'

Arjuna says, 'Show yourself and then try to stop me. When my arrows pierce you, you will never speak again.' And he sprays his mantra-invoked arrows all around, displaying his expertise at shabdavedi: shooting an invisible target, tracking it only by sound. Annoyed by thirst and fatigue, he looses a towering fountain of countless arrows into the sky.

Then, the invisible Yaksha says, 'Why do you go through all this trouble, Partha? You need only answer my questions to drink from the lake. However, if you drink without doing so, you will also die.'

Arjuna ignores the asariri and helps himself to the water. Immediately, he drops dead.

On not seeing Arjuna return, Yudhishtira says to Bhimasena, 'Parantapa, it is such a long time since Nakula, Sahadeva and Bibhatsu went to fetch water, and they have not yet come back. Bhaarata, bless you, go and bring them back, and the water, too.'

Bhima sets out at once for the lake where those tigers among men, his brothers, lie dead. And seeing them, Bhima, afflicted though he is with thirst, is horrified. The mighty-armed hero thinks that this must be the work of some Yaksha or Rakshasa. Vrikodara thinks, 'I will surely have to fight today. So let me first quench my thirst.' And he goes quickly towards the lake to drink the water.

The unseen Yaksha says, 'O child, do not drink; this lake belongs to me. First answer my questions, then drink and take away as much water as you like.'

Bhima does not bother to reply, but bends and drinks from the lake; and as soon as he does so, he also falls dead.

Yudhishtira waits a little longer, saying to himself, 'Why are the two sons of Madri so late? Why does the wielder of the Gandiva delay? And what keeps mighty Bhima away so long? Ah, I will go and search for them.'

Tiredly, Yudhishtira gets up, his body burning with thirst and his mind with some dismay.

Yudhishtira thinks, 'Is this forest enchanted by some evil spell, or is it infested by deadly predators? Have they all vanished because they have disregarded some mighty being? Perhaps they did not find water where they went and are scouring the forest in search of some? Why have those bulls among men not returned?' Thinking these thoughts, the illustrious Yudhishtira, foremost of monarchs, enters the thick forest where no human sound is heard, where deer, bears and birds live, where bright green trees grow like ornaments, where black bees hum and birds warble sweetly.

He comes upon the lovely lake, which looks as if it has been created by Brahma himself. It is adorned with golden-hued flowers, lotuses and sindhuvaras, and encircled by dense woods of ketaka, karavira and pipala trees. The exhausted Yudhishtira sees the lake and is speechless with wonder."

CANTO 311

ARANEYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira sees his brothers, all as glorious as Indra, lying dead, as if they are the Lokpalas fallen from their places at the end of a yuga. He sees Arjuna's body, his bows and arrows strewn on the ground; he sees Bhimasena and the twins lying still; and the king sighs deeply and tears of sorrow bathe his face.

Dharmaputra, his heart torn in grief, mourns his dead brothers, sobbing, 'Noble Vrikodara, you swore to smash Duryodhana's thighs with your mace in battle. O Mahabaho, you who enhance the glory of the Kurus, your death has made everything meaningless. The promises that men make may be futile, but why has the word of God been rendered impotent?

Arjuna, when you were born, while our mother was still in labour, the gods said to her that you would be the equal of the Deva of the thousand eyes. And all the beings in the northern Pariyatra mountains sang your praises, saying that you would be the one who restored their prosperity, which had been stolen by their enemies. They said that you are invincible in battle. Why then has the mighty Jishnu succumbed to death? O, why does Dhananjaya, on whom we pinned our hopes and thus endured all our misery, lie lifeless on the ground, shattering my faith?

Why have the heroic and mighty sons of Kunti—Bhimasena and Dhananjaya—who always killed their adversaries and who are irresistible in battle been overpowered by an enemy?

This vile heart of mine must be made of stone that it does not burst when I see these twins lying on the forest floor. You bulls among men, who are versed in the Shastras and learned in the proprieties of time and place, who are rich in the wealth of tapasya, who are devout in the performance of all sacred rites, why do you lie so still and not speak to me as you ought? Ah, undefeated one, how do you lie insensible on the earth although your bodies are whole and show no injury or wound?'

Looking at his brothers, seeming as if there are in their usual blissful sleep on the hillside, that king is heartbroken. Sunk in a bottomless well of grief, he begins to think about what caused their deaths. Although the virtuous and mighty-armed king, who is learned in the laws that govern time and place, thinks long and hard, he can come to no conclusion about what he should do.

After lamenting a long time, Yudhishtira restrains his sorrow and thinks about who might be responsible for the deaths of his brothers.

He says, 'There are no marks of weapons on them, nor are there any footprints on the ground. Whoever has killed my brothers must be powerful indeed. I will think about this seriously, but first let me drink some water before I try to discover what happened.

Perhaps the evil Duryodhana arranged for this lake to be created here by the king of the Gandharvas. No sensible man would trust that vile and vicious man who sees no distinction between good and evil. Or perhaps, his own agents have done this awful thing.'

The king reflects in this manner, his mind flying in different directions. Yudhishtira does not believe that the water is poisoned because he sees that the bodies have no grey pallor and that the faces are still bright, as if with life, though they do not breathe.

The king continues his reflections, 'Each of these Manavottamas is as potent as a great waterfall. Who but Yama himself, who destroys all things when their time comes, could have laid my brothers low?'

Coming to this conclusion, he begins to perform his ritual ablutions in the lake.

As he steps into the water, he hears a voice in the sky, saying, 'I am a crane, living on tiny fish. It is I who have brought your brothers under the reign of the Lord of departed spirits. O Kshatriya, if you do not answer the questions I ask, you will become the fifth corpse. Do not do anything rash.

This lake belongs to me. Answer my questions first, Kuntiputra, then drink and take away as much water as you like.'

Hearing this, Yudhishtira says, 'Are you the Lord of the Rudras, or of the Vasus, or of the Maruts? Which Deva are you? This could not have been done by a bird! Who are you that have conquered the four mighty mountains—Himavat, Pariyatra, Vindhya and Malaya? Great is your feat, O strongest of the strong. You have killed my brothers whom the Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras and Rakshasas feared. What you have done is hard to believe.

I do not know what your intentions are, and I am curious but also frightened that you have possessed me. My mind is roiled and my head aches. I ask you, therefore, worshipful one, who are you that live here?'

The voice says, 'I am a Yaksha, not a krauncha. It is I who killed all your brothers.'

Hearing these wretched words spoken in a harsh voice, Yudhishtira approaches the Yaksha and stands before him. That Bharatarishabha sees the Yaksha—he has strange eyes and a huge body with a tail as big as a palmyra tree; he blazes like the Sun, like Fire; he is as indomitable as an immense mountain. He stands on a tree and growls as loudly and deeply as black clouds.

The Yaksha says, 'O king, your brothers ignored my warning and drank from my lake. That is why I killed them. He who wants to live should not drink this water. Prithaputra, be warned again. This lake belongs to me. First answer my questions and then take as much water as you want.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Yaksha, I do not want what you own. Virtuous persons do not approve of a man who praises himself. Therefore, humbly, and to the best of my knowledge, I will answer your questions. Ask me.'

The Yaksha says, 'What makes the Sun rise? Who stays by him? Who makes him set? And in who is he established?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Brahma makes the Sun rise; the Devas keep him company; Dharma makes him set; and he is established in Truth.'

The Yaksha says, 'How does one become learned? How does one attain greatness? How can one have a second self? And, O king, how can one acquire wisdom?'

Yudhishtira says, 'It is by the study of the Srutis that a person becomes learned; it is by tapasya that one acquires greatness; it is by intelligence that

a person can have a second self; and it is by serving the old that one becomes wise.'

The Yaksha says, 'What is the divine attribute of Brahmanas? What practices of theirs are pious? What is the human attribute of the Brahmanas? And what practices of theirs are sinful?'

Yudhishtira says, 'The study of the Vedas is their divine attribute; their tapasya is their pious behaviour; their vulnerability to death is their human attribute; and slander is their inherent tendency to sin.'

The Yaksha says, 'What is the divine quality of Kshatriyas? What conduct of theirs is pious? What is their human attribute? What practices of theirs are sinful?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Arrows and weapons form their divine aspect; celebration of yagnas is their piety; fear is their human attribute; and a refusal to give protection is their sin.'

The Yaksha says, 'What does sacrificial Sama consist of? What makes the sacrificial Yaju? What is the last resort and essential element of a yagna?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Life is the Sama of the yagna; the mind is the Yaju; the Rik is the essential element, which the sacrifice cannot do without.'

The Yaksha says, 'What is of most value to one that cultivates crops? What is of most value to the one who sows? What is of most value to one who desires prosperity in this world? And what is of most value to those that give birth?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Rain is of most value to those that cultivate; seeds are of most value to those that sow; the cow is of most value to those that desire prosperity; and a child is of most value to those that give birth.'

The Yaksha says, 'Is there a person, who is intelligent, who has the respect and affection of the world, who enjoys sensual pleasures, and who though he breathes, is not alive?

Yudhishtira says, 'The man who makes no offerings to Devas, guests, servants, Pitrs and to himself, does not live, although he breathes.'

The Yaksha says, 'What is heavier than Bhumi herself? What is higher than the Swarga? What is swifter than Vayu? And what is more numerous than grass?'

Yudhishtira says, 'The mother is weightier than the Earth; the father is higher than heaven; the mind is swifter than the wind; and our thoughts are more numerous than grass.'

The Yaksha says, ‘What does not close its eyes when asleep? What does not move after being born? What has no heart? And what swells with its own power?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘A fish does not close its eyes when it sleeps; an egg does not move after being laid; a stone has no heart; and a river swells with its own power.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Who is the friend of the exiled? Who is the friend of the householder? Who is the friend of the ailing? And who is the friend of one about to die?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The friend of the exile in a distant land is his companion; the friend of the householder is his wife; the friend of one who is ill is the physician; and the friend of one who is about to die is his charity.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Who is the guest of all creatures? What is the eternal dharma? What, O king of kings, is Amrita? And what is this entire Universe?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Agni is the guest of all creatures; cow’s milk is Amrita; oblation of Amrita is the eternal dharma; and this Universe is just space.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is that which journeys alone? What is that which renews its birth? What is the antidote for cold? And what is the largest field?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The Sun journeys alone; the Moon takes birth anew; Fire is the remedy against cold; and the Earth is the largest field.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the highest sanctuary of dharma? What of fame? What of Swarga? What of happiness?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Liberality is the highest sanctuary of virtue; a gift, of fame; truth is the sanctuary of heaven; and a good character that of happiness.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the soul of a man? Who is the friend bestowed on him by the Devas? What is a man’s chief support? And what is his chief refuge?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The son is a man’s soul; the wife is the friend bestowed on man by the gods; the clouds are his chief support; and charity is his chief refuge.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the best of all that is praiseworthy? What is the most valuable of all possessions? What is the best of all gains? And

what is the best of all the kinds of happiness?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The best of all praiseworthy things is skill; the best of all possessions is knowledge; the best of all gains is health; and contentment is the best of all the kinds of happiness.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the greatest dharma in the world? What virtue always bears fruit? What is that which, if controlled, does not lead to regret? And who are they with whom a friendship cannot break?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The greatest dharma is non-violence; the rituals ordained in the three Vedas always bear fruit; the mind, if controlled, does not lead to regret; and friendship with the good never breaks.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What, if renounced, makes one likeable? What, if renounced, causes no regret? What, if renounced, makes one wealthy? And what, if renounced, makes one happy?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Pride, if renounced, makes one likeable; anger, if renounced, causes no regret; desire, if renounced, makes one wealthy; and avarice, if renounced, makes one happy.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Why does one give to Brahmanas? Why to players and dancers? Why to servants? And why to a king?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘It is for punya that one gives to Brahmanas; it is for fame that one gives to players and dancers; it is to support them that one gives to servants; and it is for relief from fear that one gives to kings.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the world wrapped in? What prevents a thing from showing itself? Why are friends forsaken? And why does one fail to attain heaven?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The world is enveloped in darkness; darkness does not permit a thing to show itself; it is from avarice that friends are forsaken; and it is attachment to the world that prevents one from finding Swarga.’

The Yaksha says, ‘When is a person considered dead? When is a kingdom considered dead? When is a sraddha considered dead? And when is a sacrifice considered dead?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘A man without wealth may be regarded as dead; a kingdom without a king may be regarded as dead; a sraddha performed without a learned priest may be regarded as dead; and a sacrifice without gifts to Brahmanas may be regarded as dead.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the way? What is water? What is food? And what is poison? Tell me also what the proper time is for a sraddha; and then you may drink and take away as much water as you like.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘The virtuous are the way; the sky is water; the cow is food; and a request is poison. The availability of a Brahmana is regarded as the proper time for a sraddha. What do you think of all this, O Yaksha?’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is the sign of asceticism? What is true restraint? What is forgiveness? And what is shame?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Faithfulness to one’s dharma is asceticism; the restraint of the mind is true restraint; forgiveness is the ability to endure an enemy; and shame is refraining from evil actions.’

The Yaksha says, ‘O king, what is knowledge? What is tranquillity? What is mercy? And what is simplicity?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘True knowledge is knowledge of divinity; true tranquillity is that of the heart; true mercy is the desire for universal happiness; and true simplicity is equanimity.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What enemy is invincible? What is an incurable disease for man? What sort of man is honest; and what man is dishonest?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Anger is the invincible enemy; covetousness is the incurable disease; the honest man is the one who wants the well-being of all creatures; and the dishonest man is one who has no compassion.’

The Yaksha says, ‘O king, what is ignorance? What is pride? What is idleness? And what is grief?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Ignorance is not knowing one’s svadharma; pride is having a high opinion of oneself; idleness is not doing one’s duty; and grief is ignorance.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What do the Rishis refer to as steadfastness? What do they consider patience to be? What do they think of as a proper ablution? And what do they say is charity?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Rishis say that steadfastness is adherence to one’s own religion; patience is subduing the senses; washing the mind clean of impurities is the proper bath; and protecting all creatures is charity.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Who is a learned man? Who is an atheist? Who is an ignorant man? What is desire and where does it spring from? And what is envy?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘He that knows his dharma is learned; he that is ignorant is an atheist, and the atheist is ignorant, too; desire springs from possessions; and envy is nothing but grief.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What is pride? What is hypocrisy? What is the grace of the gods, and what is wickedness?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Stolid ignorance is pride. Hypocrisy is to wave the banner of religion; the grace of the gods is the fruit of one’s charity; and wickedness is speaking ill of others.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Dharma, artha and kama are opposed to one another. How can these exist together?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘When a man’s wife and his dharma do not oppose each other, then all the three you mention can exist together.’

The Yaksha says, ‘O Bharatarishabha, what man is condemned to everlasting naraka? Tell me this quickly.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘He who calls a poor Brahmana with the promise of a gift and then tells him there is none lives in hell forever. He who gives false meaning to the words of the Vedas, of the Dharma Shastras, of Brahmana’s and of Devas, and of rituals that honour the Pitrs also goes to hell everlasting. He that is wealthy but never gives any charity, nor enjoys his possessions because of miserliness and greed, saying he has none, also lives in eternal hell.’

The Yaksha says, ‘O king, how does a person become a Brahmana—by birth, by conduct, by learning or by study? Tell me this with certainty.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Listen, O Yaksha, it is neither birth, nor study, nor learning that makes a Brahmana. Without doubt, it is good character that makes one a Brahmana. Good conduct should always be maintained, especially by a Brahmana. One who is constant in good conduct is always strong. Masters and disciples, and all who study the scriptures, are considered illiterate if they have bad habits. The truly learned man is one who performs his duties faithfully. Even the man who has studied the four Vedas is regarded as vile and wretched, scarcely distinguishable from a Sudra, if his behaviour is unbecoming. Only he who performs the agnihotra and has his senses under control is a Brahmana.’

The Yaksha says, ‘What does the man who speaks pleasantly gain? What does the man who acts judiciously gain? What does the man who has many friends gain? And what does he who is devoted to dharma gain?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘He who speaks pleasantly is liked by all; he who acts judiciously gets whatever he wants; he who has many friends lives happily; and he who is devoted to dharma gains bliss in the next world.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Who is truly happy? What is most wonderful? What is the path? And what are the perennial tidings? Answer these four questions of mine and your dead brothers will return to life.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘O amphibious one, a man who cooks in his own house during the fifth or the sixth part of the day, with few vegetables, who is not in debt and who does not leave home, is truly happy. Day after day, countless creatures go to Yamaloka, yet those that remain behind believe they are immortal. What can be more wonderful than this? Argument never to any certain conclusion; the Srutis are all different; there is no Rishi whose opinion everybody accepts; the truth about dharma is hidden in caves; therefore, that is the path that the great have taken. This world, full of ignorance, is like a pot; the Sun is fire, the days and nights are fuel; the months and the seasons make up the wooden ladle; time is the cook that stirs all creatures in that pot. These are unchanging tidings.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Parantapa, you have answered all my questions, and correctly. Tell me now, who is truly a man; and what man truly possesses every kind of wealth?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Reports of one’s good deeds reach Swarga and spread across Bhumi. As long as these reports are alive, so long does a man, to whom persons pleasant or otherwise, happiness and sorrow, past and future are the same, possess every kind of wealth.’

The Yaksha says, ‘O king, since you have correctly told me who is a man and what man has every kind of wealth, one of your brothers may live again.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Let this dark-skinned one, whose eyes are red, who is tall like a large Sala tree, whose chest is broad and arms long, let Nakula, O Yaksha, rise and live.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Bhimasena is very dear to you, and Arjuna is the one on whom you all depend. Why, then, do you wish to give life to a half-brother? How can you forsake Bhima, who is as strong as ten thousand elephants, for Nakula? Everyone says that you love Bhima dearly. Then why do you ask for Nakula’s life? Why do you sacrifice Arjuna, of the mighty arms, whom all the Pandavas idolise, for Nakula’s sake?

Yudhishtira says, ‘If dharma is sacrificed, he that sacrifices it is lost; virtue cherishes the man who cherishes it. So I am careful that dharma, by being sacrificed, does not sacrifice us. I never abandon dharma. Abstention from doing injury is the highest dharma, even higher than the most valuable object. I try to practise that virtue. Therefore, revive Nakula, O Yaksha. Let men know that the king is always virtuous. I will never deviate from dharma. Let Nakula, therefore, live.

My father had two wives, Kunti and Madri. Let both of them have living children. This is what I wish. Madri is as much a mother to me as Kunti; I make no difference between them. I wish to act equally towards my mothers. Therefore, let Nakula live.’

The Yaksha says, ‘Since you consider non-violence to be more important than artha and kama, I will restore the lives of all your brothers, O bull among the Bhaaratas.’ ”

CANTO 312

ARANEYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "At the Yaksha's words, the Pandavas awake and get up, as if from a deep slumber. They are no longer hungry or thirsty.

Yudhishtira says, 'What Deva are you, invincible one, who stands on one leg in a lake? I cannot believe that you are a Yaksha. Are you a chief of the Vasus or of the Rudras, or the Lord of the Maruts? Or are you the Lord of the Devas, the wielder of the Vajra? Each of my brothers is capable of fighting like a hundred thousand warriors, and I do not see a warrior who could kill them all. They have woken up refreshed, as if from a pleasant sleep. Are you a friend of ours, or our father himself?'

The Yaksha says, 'Child, I am your father Dharma Deva. Bharatarishabha, I came here from a desire to see you. Fame, truth, self-restraint, purity, candour, modesty, steadfastness, charity, tapasya and brahmacharya are my physical body. Non-violence, impartiality, peace, penance, sanctity and freedom from malice are the doors through which I can be reached. You are always dear to me. Fortunately, you are devoted to the practice of the five virtues—equanimity of mind, self-control, abstinence from sensual indulgence, forgiveness and yoga. Fortunately, too, you have conquered the afflictions of hunger, thirst, sorrow, delusion, decrepitude and death. Of the six, the first two manifest themselves in the first part of life, the second two in the middle and the last two at the end in order to send men to the next world.

I bless you, my son! I am Dharma, the Lord of Justice. I came here to test you, and I am pleased to see your spirit of compassion. Anagha, I will grant you boons. Rajarajan, ask what you wish for and I will grant it. Those that are devoted to me never suffer.'

Yudhishtira says, 'A deer carried away a Brahmana's fire-sticks; so the first boon I ask is that the Brahmana's worship of Agni is not interrupted.'

The Yaksha says, 'Kuntiputra, it was I in the form of a deer who carried away the Brahmana's fire-sticks, to test you.' That Deva says, 'I grant you the boon you ask, and I bless you again. Godlike, ask for another boon.'

Yudhishtira says, 'We have spent the past twelve years in jungles and are now in the thirteenth year of our exile. Grant that no one will recognise us, wherever we choose to spend this year.'

The Deva says, 'I grant this boon,' and reassuring Kunti's son whose strength is truth, he says, 'Bhaarata, I grant that even if you range all the Earth in your own forms none in the three worlds shall recognise you. You perpetuators of the Kuru line, by my grace, you will spend this thirteenth year disguised and unrecognised in Virata's kingdom. You will all be able, at will, to assume any form you like. Now give the Brahmana his fire-sticks. It was only to test you that I carried them away as a deer.

Noble Yudhishtira, ask for another boon of your choice, and I will give it to you. I have not had my fill of giving you boons. Take a third boon that is great and incomparable. Rajan, you are my son, and Vidura is an amsa of me.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Eternal Devadeva, it is enough that I have seen you in your physical form. Father, I will gladly accept whatever boon you give me. May I always conquer greed, folly and anger, and may my mind be always devoted to daana, satya and tapasya.'

Dharmadeva says, 'Pandava, you are naturally endowed with these qualities, because you are dharma embodied. However, since you ask, I give you what you ask for.'

With these words, Dharma, on whom all the worlds meditate, vanishes. The noble Pandavas are united with each other after their plumbless sleep. No longer tired, the Kshatriyas return to the asrama and restore his fire-sticks to the Brahmana.

The man who listens to this great and fame-enhancing story of how the Pandavas are revived, and of the meeting of father and son, earns perfect tranquillity of mind, and he gets sons and grandsons, as well as a long life

of more than a hundred years. The mind of the man who takes this story to heart never delights in adharma, in discord among friends, in theft, in taking other men’s wives, or in evil thoughts.”

CANTO 313

ARANEYA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “In obedience to Dharma’s bidding to spend their thirteenth year, the one of ajnatavasa, in disguise, the Pandavas, observant of vows and with truth as their strength, sit with the learned Munis who, out of love, share their exile in the forest. With their hands joined in reverence, they speak to the tapasvins to have their blessings to spend the thirteenth year in this way.

They say, ‘You all know that the sons of Dhritarashtra deceitfully deprived us of our kingdom and wronged us in many other ways. We have passed twelve years of privation in the forest. The thirteenth year, which we have to spend undiscovered, still remains. We ask your permission to spend this year in hiding. If they discover us, Suyodhana, Karna and Subala’s vile son will make our friends and our people pay dearly. So, we must part ways here, O adored Djivas, for when our ajnatavasa ends, must we not establish ourselves in our own kingdom again?’

That pure-hearted son of Dharma is overwhelmed with grief at the thought of parting from the loyal Brahmanas and, breaking into loud sobs, he faints. The Brahmanas and his brothers revive him and try to cheer him.

Then, Dhaumya says with some gravity, ‘Rajan, you are learned, capable of withstanding great privation, firm in promise, and of subdued senses. Men like you do not crumble in the face of misfortune. The very Devas have wandered the worlds in disguise so they might prevail over their enemies.

Indra lived disguised in the Giriprastha's asrama in the Nishada kingdom and achieved his goal. Before he was born from Aditi, Vishnu spent a long time disguised as Hayagriva, the horse-headed, in order to vanquish the Daityas. You know that He disguised himself as a dwarf and deprived Mahabali of his kingdom. And you have heard how Hutasana went into the water and remained hidden in order to achieve a purpose of the gods.

O Dharmatma, you have heard that, wishing to vanquish his enemies, Vishnu entered Sakra's Vajra and lay hidden there. You have heard of the task that the Rishi Aurva once performed for the gods, by staying concealed in his mother's womb. Living hidden in every part of the Earth, Vivaswata used his energy and consumed his enemies with fire. And living disguised in the home of Dasaratha, Vishnu of the dreadful deeds slew Ravana Dasagriva in battle.

Many exalted ones have conquered their enemies by going for some time disguised, and so you will you.'

Encouraged by Dhaumya's words, Yudhishtira, relying on his own wisdom and knowledge gleaned from the scriptures, recovers his composure.

Now Mahabaho Bhimasena, that strongest of the strong, boosts the king's spirits.

He says, 'The wielder of the Gandiva looks to you for permission to have our revenge and, duty-bound, he has not done anything impulsive. Although Nakula and Sahadeva of the fearful prowess can raze our enemies, I have restrained them from doing so. We shall never swerve from our obedience to your will. Tell us what we should do. We shall conquer our enemies very soon.'

When Bhimasena says this, the Brahmanas bless the Bhaaratas, take leave of them and return to their homes. All those foremost of Yatis and Munis, versed in the Vedas, go back, but in excited expectation of seeing the Pandavas return to the home of their sires. The five Pandavas, equipped with their bows, and accompanied by Dhaumya, set out with Krishnaa.

Each of them is accomplished in a different shastra; all of them are proficient in mantras and know when to make peace and when to wage war. Those Purushavyaghras, who are about to start living in disguise the next day, go a krosa from their asrama and sit down to seek one another's counsel," said Vaisampayana.

The End of Vana Parva

Virata Parva

CANTO 1

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA

AUM! Having bowed down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of *Jaya*!

Janamejaya said, "Brahmana, how did my great-grandfathers live undiscovered in the city of Virata, fearful as they were of Duryodhana? How did their devoted wife, the most blessed Draupadi, unswerving in her faith in God, and in the grip of misery, spend her days without being recognised?"

Vaisampayana said, "Hear, O lord of men, how your great-grandfathers pass the period of their exile in King Virata's city without being discovered. Having obtained boons from Dharma Deva, Yudhishtira returns to the asrama and tells the Brahmanas all that has befallen them. Then, to the Brahmana who followed him, he restores the fire sticks and the churning staff that he had lost.

After that, O Bhaarata, Yudhishtira Dharmaputra calls together all his younger brothers and says, 'We have passed twelve years in exile from our kingdom. This, our thirteenth and most difficult year has come. Arjuna, you choose a suitable place where we can spend our days undetected by our enemies.'

Arjuna says, 'Lord of men, Dharma Deva's boon will enable us to go where we please and yet escape discovery. Still, I will suggest some pleasant and secluded places where we can live and you can choose one of them.

Surrounding the kingdom of the Kurus are many beautiful and bountiful lands such as Panchala, Chedi, Matsya, Surasena, Pattachchara, Dasarna, Navarashtra, Malla, Salva, Yugandhara, Saurashtra, Avanti, and the expansive Kuntirashtra. Which of these would you choose, Rajan? Where shall we spend this year?'

Yudhishtira says to his brothers, 'Mahabahos, whatever the Lord of all creatures has decreed must come to pass. Even so, after consulting together we must choose an agreeable and auspicious place where we can live free from fear. The aged Virata, king of the Matsyas, is virtuous, powerful and charitable. All men like him, and he is fond of us Pandavas. In his city then, let us spend this year and enter his service. Tell me, sons of Kuru, in what guises will you each present yourselves before king Virata of the Matsyas?'

Arjuna says, 'God among men, what service will you perform in Virata's kingdom? In what role will you live in the city of Virata? You are mild and kind-hearted, modest and virtuous, and a man of honour. Rajan, in your present adversity, what will you do? A king has to face troubles just like everyone else. How will you rise above yours?'

Yudhishtira says, 'Purusharishabhas, hear what I will do when I appear before king Virata. I will present myself as Kanka, a Brahmana skilled in the game of dice who enjoys playing, and become a courtier in Virata's sabha. I will entertain the king, his courtiers and his friends by astute moves of ivory chessmen—blue and yellow, red and white—on chessboards, and by clever throws of the black and red dice. Nobody will succeed in discovering me. And should the monarch be curious about me, I will say that I used to be a close friend of Yudhishtira's. This is how I intend to pass my days.

What work will you do, Vrikodara, in the city of Virata?' "

CANTO 2

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhima says, 'I will present myself before lord Virata as Ballava, a cook. I am skilled in the culinary arts; I will prepare food for the king that is better than anything his best cooks have ever set before him and thus charm him. I will carry mighty loads of wood and, seeing that amazing feat, the king will be pleased. O Bhaarata, the servants of the royal household will honour me when they see my superhuman abilility, and I will gain control of the royal storerooms.

I will be commanded to subdue powerful elephants and mighty bulls, which I will do. I will entertain the king by defeating anyone who challenges me in combat. However, I shall not take a life; I will only bring the man down without killing him. And if I am asked about my past, I will say that I was a wrestler and cook in Yudhishtira's court. Rajan, that is how I will spend our thirteenth year.'

Yudhishtira says, 'And, Bhima, what occupation will Dhananjaya have, this mighty scion of the Kurus, son of Kunti, best of men, long-armed, invincible in battle; to whom, while he was with Krishna, the divine Agni himself, wanting to consume the Khandava vana in flames, appeared humbly in the guise of a Brahmana? What can Arjuna undertake, this mightiest of Kshatriyas who pleased Agni by killing huge Nagas and Rakshasas from a single chariot, and who married the sister of the Naga king Vasuki?

Even as the Sun is the lord of all heat-givers, the Brahmana the best among all humans, the cobra the foremost of all serpents, Fire the first of all things of energy, the Vajra the most powerful of all weapons, the humped bull the greatest among bovines, the Ocean of all water-bodies, as rain-clouds are the best of all clouds, as Ananta is the chief of all Nagas, Airavata the mightiest of all elephants, as a son is the most beloved of loved ones and the wife the best of all friends, so is young Gudakesa the supreme bowman.

Bhaarata, what calling will he pursue, Bibhatsu the wielder of the Gandiva; whose chariot is drawn by white horses; who is equal to Indra and Krishna? What career will he have, who lived five years in the abode of the thousand-eyed Indra? He shines in celestial splendour and has mastered the Devastras. In my eyes he is the tenth Rudra, the thirteenth Aditya, the ninth Vasu and the tenth Graha.

The skin on his long, ambidextrous arms has become callused and scarred, as on the humps of bulls, by constant wielding of the bow. He is the greatest of Kshatriyas: he is as Himavat among mountains, as Varuna among water-bodies, as Sakra among the Devas, as Agni among the Vasus, as the tiger among beasts, as Garuda among birds!'

Arjuna says, 'Lord of the Earth, I will declare myself a eunuch. It is surely difficult to hide the marks of the bowstring on my arms, but I will cover both my scarred arms with bangles. I will adorn my ears with earrings and my wrists with bracelets of conch-shells. I will wear my hair in a long braid and pose as one of the third sex.

Brihannala will be my name, and passing for a hermaphrodite, I will entertain the king and the women of the harem by telling them stories. I will instruct the ladies of Virata's palace in singing and dancing and teach them to play musical instruments. I will also tell of great men's feats of valour, and so hide in disguise.

Should the king enquire, I will say that I worked in Yudhishtira's palace as Draupadi's sairandhri, her main waiting-maid. Best of kings, concealing myself like this, as fire is covered by ashes, I will pass my days quite happily in Virata's palace.' "

CANTO 3

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Arjuna falls silent and Yudhishtira addresses another of his brothers.

Yudhishtira says, 'Gentle Kshatriya Nakula, your tender nature deserves a life of ease. What career will you follow whilst living in the dominions of king Virata? Tell me what you plan.'

Nakula says, 'I will take the name Granthika and become the keeper of the king's horses. I have a deep knowledge of horses; I am skilful in caring for them and enjoy the work. I am good at training them and very fond of them, even as you are, O my brother. In my hands even high-spirited colts and fillies become docile and carry their riders and draw their chariots gently.

And if anyone in Virata's city should ask about me, I will say that I was once employed by Yudhishtira and given charge of his stables. In this disguise, Rajan, I will spend my days happily in the city of Virata. No one will discover my true identity, for I will please the king with my work.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How will you, Sahadeva, present yourself before the king? And what will you do, child, in order to go undiscovered?'

Sahadeva replies, 'Rajan, I will become a keeper of Virata's cattle. I am skilled at milking cows and know all about their pedigrees, and I am also good at taming bulls. I will call myself Tantripala and perform my duties ably. Let your anxiety be stilled, Bhumipala; I used to look after your herds and have deep knowledge of the work.

I know a great deal about cattle, their markings, and also much else about them. I can recognise bulls with certain auspicious marks, the scent of whose urine can make a barren woman fertile. I have always enjoyed this work, so that is how I will live. I will please the king and certainly no one will recognise me.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Draupadi is our beloved wife, dearer to us than our lives. She deserves to be cherished by us like a mother and respected as an elder sister. Unacquainted as she is with any womanly chores, what service will Krishnaa perform? Delicate and young, she is a princess whose virtue and devotion to her lords is well known. How will she live, who from the time of her birth has enjoyed nothing but fragrant flower garlands and perfume, ornaments and fine clothes?'

Draupadi says, 'There is a class of women known as sairandhris, who serve as important waiting-maids. Usually, women from respectable families do not become sairandhris, but some do. I will pose as one of these few. I shall be a sairandhri skilled in dressing hair, and if questioned I will say that I served in Yudhishtira's household as Draupadi's main waiting-woman. And in this way I will pass my days in disguise, serving the famous Sudeshna, king Virata's queen. Surely, she will be pleased with my services. Do not grieve so, Rajan.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Krishnaa, your words are sweet but, beautiful one, you are born into royalty. Chaste and always true to your vows, you have always lived a virtuous life and do not know what sin is; therefore conduct yourself in such a way that sinful men may not cast their eyes on you for their pleasure.' "

CANTO 4

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have all decided how to occupy yourselves sensibly, and I have, too. Our priest, the charioteers and cooks must go to Drupada's palace and keep our sacrificial fires burning. Indrasena and the others will take the chariots and leave at once for Dwaravati. Draupadi's maids can go to the Panchalas with the sarathys and our cooks. All of them must say that they do not know where the Pandavas went after leaving them at the lake in Dwaita vana.'

Now the Pandavas ask Dhaumya for his counsel. Dhaumya says, 'Sons of Pandu, the arrangements you have made for the Brahmanas, your friends, the chariots, weapons and the sacred fires are excellent. But, Yudhishtira and Arjuna, you must be particularly watchful of Draupadi's safety. You know what men are like.

However knowledgeable you are, as your friend I take the liberty of telling you what you already know, which is in the eternal interest of dharma, kama and artha. Listen to me carefully and remember my words.

To live in the court of a king is difficult, but I will tell you how you can be ideal members of a royal household. O Kurunandanas, you must somehow spend this year in the palace without being discovered; only thus will you be able to peacefully live out the final year of your exile.

Pandavas, the king, under whose protection everyone comes, is God in human form; he is like a fire sanctified by mantras.

First of all, only present yourselves before the king after obtaining permission at the gate. None of you should have any contact with royal spies; nor should any of you try to have a court position that someone else aspires to. If you find the king's favour, you must never use the king's personal chariot, sit on his throne or ride on his elephant. Also, avoid important positions whose occupation alarms envious and malevolent men. Only conducting yourselves thus, will you deserve to live in the king's household.

Offer the king advice only when he asks for it. Praise and pay homage to him at the appropriate time; at other times sit silently and respectfully beside him. Kings get annoyed with babblers and courtiers who speak ill of others.

Be wise; don't initiate friendship with the queen or ladies of the antahpura, or with anyone that the king dislikes. Whatever you do must be with the king's knowledge, and you must be willing to perform even the most trivial task for him. If you behave in this way you will not come to any harm.

Even if one of you attains the highest office, you should always uphold the king's dignity by your silence: consider yourself born blind, unless you are commanded by him. Parantapas, if their pride is wounded, the rulers of men do not forgive even their sons, grandsons and brothers. Kings should be served with the same attentiveness with which you serve Agni and the other Devas. If you are disloyal to your sovereign, he will destroy you.

Renounce anger, pride and indiscretion, and always be obedient to the king. After a careful study of various matters at hand, present to the king only those that are both beneficial and gratifying. If there happens to be something that is definitely beneficial, you must tell the king of it, even if it is unpleasant. You must always put the interests of the king first and never speak offensively or unnecessarily.

Be alert and never become complacent in the king's affection. Always focus on his happiness and prosperity, remain steadfast and do not swerve from your allegiance to him. Do not befriend the king's enemies. Never wrong the king. This is the way to succeed in a royal household.

A wise man sits beside the king, on his right or left; he should not sit behind him, for that is the place for his armed guards; and to sit in front of him is forbidden. None of you should ingratiate yourselves with the king by

intervening while he is dealing with his subjects' grievances. Even if the supplicant is poor and needy, such behaviour is inexcusable.

Never reveal a falsehood that the king may have spoken, because the king will hate those who expose his lies. Remember that kings distrust men who show themselves as being clever. You should not be vain about your bravery or intelligence. You will earn the monarch's respect and enjoy a prosperous life by being humble and subservient to the king's wishes. And Bhaaratas, even when you acquire wealth—which is not easy—and lead a comfortable life, you should continue to work towards the king's advantage and pleasure. Which man who is held in high regard would even think of displeasing the one whose anger results in the worst failure and whose favour brings great rewards?

You should always sit still in the king's presence. Speak mildly and use your spittoon softly when you are with the king. Do not laugh loudly or uproariously, nor be unnaturally grave when you see something amusing. Show your interest by smiling discreetly. If you are always conscious of the king's welfare, if you do not allow rewards to elate you or sorrows to deject you, then you will thrive in the king's court.

If you are wise and make the king and his princes happy by speaking pleasantly, you will become the king's favourite. And if, as the favourite courtier, you should then lose royal favour for a good reason, yet still do not speak ill of the king, you will regain it in time. If you are astute, you will speak only in praise of the king, both in his presence and out of it.

If you manipulate the king in order to achieve your own objective, you will jeopardise your position in court and risk death. Never initiate communications with the king's enemies with a view to furthering yourself. You should never try to best the king at any skill or talent. Be cheerful and mild-mannered, honest, strong and courageous; but live in the king's shadow. These qualities will make you worthy of living in the royal household.

When you are given a responsibility, accept it readily. This will make you deserving of living in the king's palace. If you are entrusted with a task, either within or outside the king's dominion, undertake it boldly for then you will deserve to live in the royal household. Although you are far away from home, do not show your grief at the absence of loved ones; show that you are willing to endure deprivation in expectation of future happiness. This is how you will succeed in living in the king's household.

You should not dress as grandly as the king; you should not laugh loudly in his presence; you should never divulge royal secrets. This is how you will win the king's favour. You should never be tempted by bribes to complete work that is assigned to you. This could lead to imprisonment, even death. You should always use the clothes, jewels and chariots that, in his magnanimity, the king gives you. This will please him.

My children, Pandavas, discipline yourselves during this year. Once you regain your kingdom, you can live as you please.'

Yudhishtira says to Dhaumya, 'You have tutored us well, O Dhaumya. May you be blest. No one could have advised us as you have, other than our mother Kunti and the wise Vidura. Now, you must perform the needful ceremonies for our departure, to help us come safely through our difficulties, and finally to vanquish our enemies.'

Dhaumya, the best of Brahmanas, performs the proper rites of leave-taking. He lights the fires and offers oblations accompanied by mantras. He prays for the prosperity and success of the Pandavas and for their re-conquest of the world. The Pandavas walk in pradakshina around sacred Agni and the holy Brahmanas, and set out with Yagnaseni at the head of their little procession of six.

When the noble Kshatriyas have left, Dhaumya takes their sacred fires and sets out for the Panchala kingdom. Indrasena and the others go to the Yadavas and live there in contentment, looking after the Pandavas' horses and chariots."

CANTO 5

PANDAVA PRAVSEHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The princes strap their swords around their waists, put on their lizard-skin finger guards and arm themselves with their other weapons. Closing the chapter of their life in dense forests and inaccessible mountain ranges, impatient to end their exile and recover their kingdom, the mighty warriors stride towards the southern bank of the river Kalindi.

Those Kshatriyas, who have been living like forest-dwelling deer hunters, pass through Yakriloma and Surasena. They pass the Panchala kingdom on their right and the Dasarna kingdom on their left. Now pale and bearded from their years in the forest, they finally emerge from it and enter the Matsya kingdom, still in the guise of hunters.

Here Krishnaa says to Yudhishtira, 'O look at these footpaths and fields. It seems the city is still some distance away. I am tired; let us break our journey and spend the night here.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Arjuna, carry Panchali in your arms. We have just this forest to cross and we shall arrive at the city.'

Like the bull-elephant of the herd, Arjuna picks Draupadi up in his arms and sets her down only when they near the city.

On reaching the city, Yudhishtira says to Arjuna, 'Where shall we leave our weapons before we enter? If, my brother, we go in armed, we will cause alarm. Also, everyone will recognise the Gandiva and it will not take them

long to know who we are. Remember that if even one of us is discovered, by our oath we must pass another twelve years in the forest.'

Arjuna says, 'Close to that smasana you see over there, near that steep hill, is a huge sami tree, difficult to climb because of its wildly spreading branches. Nobody will see us hiding our weapons there, or discover them when they are hidden, Pandava. The tree stands in the heart of a remote forest full of predators and crawling with snakes; and the gloomy cemetery is right beside it. Let us store our weapons in the sami tree and then, without anxiety, go to Virata's city.'

Saying this to Yudhishtira, Arjuna prepares to conceal the weapons in the tree. He loosens the string of the great and dreadful Gandiva, the bow whose twang fills the air like thunder, which razes enemies, with which Arjuna has single-handedly conquered Devas, Manavas, Nagas and entire kingdoms.

Then Yudhishtira unties the wondrous, undecaying string of his bow, with which he defended Kurukshetra. And the illustrious, pure-hearted Bhimasena unstrings his bow, with which he defeated the Panchalas and the lord of Sindhu, with which he singly opposed countless enemies who only had to hear the deafening mountain-splitting sound of his weapon to make them flee in panic from the battlefield.

Nakula, the copper-skinned, soft-spoken son of Pandu, named for his exceptional handsomeness, unfastens the string of his bow, with which he conquered all the western lands. The heroic but mild-mannered Sahadeva undoes the string of his bow with which he subjugated the southern countries.

With the bows, they place their flashing swords and quivers of razor-sharp arrows. Nakula climbs the tree and fastens this armoury in it, tying the weapons securely on high sturdy branches sheltered from the rain.

The Pandavas take a corpse from the neaby cemetery and hang it from the sami tree, knowing that anyone who even whiffs the stench of rotting flesh will avoid that place.

Just at that time, some cowherds happen to pass by and ask about the corpse. The Pandavas say to them, 'This is our mother, who was a hundred and eighty years old. We have hung her body from the tree, according to our ancient custom.'

At last, those slayers of their foes approach the city. Yudhishtira gives himself and his brothers other names to be part of their disguise: Jaya,

Jayanta, Vijaya, Jayatsena, and Jayatbala. They go towards the great city to pass the thirteenth year of their exile undiscovered, as they vowed they would to Duryodhana.”

CANTO 6

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “As he nears Virata’s city, Yudhishtira meditates on the divine Devi Durga and salutes her in praise. She is the supreme Goddess of the universe, born from the womb of Yasoda, font of the boons bestowed on her by Narayana, sprung from the race of the cowherd Nanda, giver of prosperity, enhancer of the glory of his bhaktas, nemesis of Kamsa, destroyer of Asuras. She, who flew into the deepest skies when Kamsa dashed her against a rock, is Krishna’s sister; she is adorned in celestial garlands and attired in heavenly raiment; she is armed with sword and shield.

This eternal bestower of blessings always rescues the devotee who, when stuck and drowning like a cow in a quagmire, calls out to her in distress to free him. It is She that Yudhishtira invokes, in his yearning to see her, by chanting her various names in praise and devotion.

Yudhishtira says, ‘Salutations, O giver of boons. You are one with Krishna. Devi Brahmacharini, you have observed the vow of brahmacharya. Your being blazes like the Sun at dawn. Your face is as radiant as the full moon.

I salute you! Four-handed, four-faced, round-hipped and deep-breasted, you wear bangles made of emeralds and sapphires, and exquisite bracelets adorn your upper arms. You shine, O Goddess, as Padma, the consort of Narayana. You that roam the akasa, your form and chastity are immaculate. Your face, as dark as black clouds, is beautiful like Sankarshana. Your two

great arms you hold upright in praise of Indra; in your six other arms you hold a vessel, a lotus, a bell, a noose, a bow, a discus and myriad weapons.

I salute you! You are the only truly pure female being in the universe. Your shapely ears are adorned with rings. O Devi, the radiance of your face challenges the Moon in lustre. Wearing a wondrous crown, with braided hair, in snake-skin robes and glittering waistlet you shine like snake-girdled mount Mandara. Iridescent peacock feathers decorate your head. You have sanctified Devaloka with your vow of celibacy. O Slayer of Mahishasura, you are praised and worshipped by the Devas themselves for the protection of the three worlds, Swarga, Bhumi and Patala.

I salute you! First of all Deities, give me your grace, show me your mercy, and bless me. You are Jaya and Vijaya; it is you who gives victory in battle. Grant me victory and boons, O Devi, in this my hour of distress.

I salute you! You are resplendent in your eternal abode on Vindhya parvatam, best of mountains. O Kali, Kali, Mahakali, wine, meat and animal sacrifice please you. You who can go anywhere at will, you who can bestow boons on your devotees, Brahma and the other gods are always with you on these journeys. There is nothing that cannot be had, children or wealth, by supplicants who call upon you for relief from their burdens and by those who bow to you at daybreak on Earth.

You are called Durga because you rescue those who are in distress, whether they are in a wilderness or sinking in an ocean. You are the sole refuge of men when they are attacked by robbers, when they flounder in rivers and seas, when they are oppressed in the wilderness and evil forests. Mahadevi, Great Goddess, men who meditate on you are never struck down.

I salute you! You are Keerti—fame, Sri—prosperity, Dhriti—constancy, Siddhi—success, Neera—modesty, Vidya—learning. You are man's wife and his offspring. You are knowledge and the intellect. You are Sandhya—the two twilights, Ratri—the dark night, Prabha—light, Nidra—sleep, and Jyotsna Kanti—the light of the Sun and the Moon. You are Kshama—forgiveness, Daya—mercy, and every virtue besides.

From those who worship you, you remove their fetters of ignorance, childlessness, poverty, disease, death and fear. I, who have been deprived of my kingdom, beg for your protection. I worship you with bowed head, Sureshwari, Goddess of the gods of light. O Devi Padmapatrakshi—lotus-leaf-eyed one, watch over me.

O Durga, to us who uphold dharma by our actions, be Truth incarnate and the granter of wishes. In your compassion for all who seek refuge in you, in your love for your devotees, give me your protection.'

Hearing these stutis, the Goddess appears before Yudhishtira and says, 'O Rajan, Mahabaho, hearken to me! My grace will help you vanquish the Kaurava army and will give you victory in battle. You will again be lord of the Earth and rid her of evil. And through my grace, you and your brothers will enjoy great felicity; every joy and prosperity will be yours.

All who chant praises of my attributes and victories shall be freed from their sins and made happy. I will bless them with lands, long life, physical beauty and children. They who invoke me as you have done, be they in exile or in their homes, in the midst of battle or in unseen danger from their enemies, in forests or in deserts, in seas or on mountains, will want for nothing in this world. Pandava, those who devotedly recite this powerful hymn of yours, or even listen to it, will enjoy success in all that they do.

My grace will ensure that neither the Kaurava spies nor the people of the Matsya kingdom will recognise you all as long as you live in Virata's city!'

Having spoken to Yudhishtira Parantapa, and having granted her protection to the Pandavas, the Goddess Durga disappears."

CANTO 7

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira wraps in brocade his dice of gold set with blue sapphires, tucks it under his arm and walks towards Virata's court. This illustrious lord of men, noble scion of Kuru, honoured by kings, mighty, irrepressible, as deserving of wariness as a venomous snake, a bull among men, powerful and beautiful, blessed with greatness and godlike in form is now like the Sun shrouded by thick clouds, like fire covered by ashes, when he appears before the famed king Virata in his court.

Virata and his courtiers see Yudhishtira, looking like the full moon veiled by clouds, his face as radiant as Soma Deva's.

The king says to his ministers, the Brahmanas, the Maharathas and the Vaisyas in his court, 'Who is this kingly man who enters my sabha? He cannot be a Brahmana. He looks like a lord among men, a lord of the Earth. He has no slaves, chariots or elephants with him, yet he has the majesty of Indra. I think the marks on his body indicate that he has been crowned at a sacred rite. He approaches me boldly much like an elephant walking towards a bed of lotuses!'

Yudhishtira comes before Virata and says, 'Maharajan, I am a Brahmana. I have lost all my possessions and come to beg you for the means to sustain myself. O Anagha, I will live here and serve you faithfully, my lord.'

The king is pleased and replies, ‘You are welcome here. Consider yourself appointed to whatever position you seek.’ Happily he gives Yudhishtira the appointment he asks for and says, ‘I ask you in affection, what kingdom do you come from? What is your name? Which family do you belong to? What skills and knowledge do you have?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘My name is Kanka, and I am a Brahmana belonging to the Vaiyaghra family. I am good at throwing dice, and I was once a friend of Dharmaputra Yudhishtira’s.’

Virata says, ‘I will grant you whatever you wish. You can even rule the Matsyas and I will be your subject. I like gamblers, even cunning ones. You, on the other hand, are like a Deva and deserve not a mere position in my court, but an entire kingdom.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘My first request, lord of Earth, is that my play should not be disputed by any low-born man. Further, I will keep my winnings at dice, whosoever I play against. Honour me by granting me these wishes.’

Virata says, ‘I will kill anyone who crosses you; if he be a Brahmana, I will banish him from my kingdom. Let all that are assembled here mark my words: from this day, Kanka is as much lord of this realm as I am! Kanka, you will be my companion and ride with me in my chariot. You will not lack for clothes; you shall have abundant food and drink. You will supervise my transactions, both at home and abroad; and for you my doors will be always open. When the destitute or job-seekers approach you, you will inform me immediately, whatever the hour, and I will help them. As long as you live with me, you need have no fear.’

Having received these assurances from Virata, Yudhishtira settles down to a happy life and quickly earns the respect of all. And during that time, no one suspects who he is.”

CANTO 8

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "In a short while, another of blazing beauty and strength comes before Virata. Holding a cook's ladle, a spoon and a gleaming, unsheathed sable-hued sword in his hands, he walks toward the king like a lion. Even in the guise of a cook, he lights up the court like the Sun shining on the world at daybreak. This man, strong as Himavat king of mountains, dressed in black, comes forward and stands at a small remove from the king of the Matsyas.

Virata looks at this regal one and says to his courtiers, 'Who is this extraordinarily handsome young man with the shoulders of a lion, this Manavarishabha? The stranger is like the resplendent Sun. Try as I might, I do not recognise him and cannot guess why he is here. His appearance suggests that he is either the king of the Gandharvas or Purandara himself. Find out who he is, and let his wishes be granted at once.'

Virata's messengers go quickly up to Bhimasena, and give him the king's message.

The noble Pandava approaches Virata and says in a cook's humble way, 'O best of kings, I am a cook. My name is Ballava and my skill lies in cooking the most exotic dishes. I beg you, employ me in your kitchen!'

Virata says, 'I cannot believe, Ballava, that cooking is your true calling. You resemble Indra the thousand-eyed; your strength, beauty and grace make you seem like a king.'

Bhima replies, ‘King of kings, first and foremost I am your cook and servant, but in truth it is not only cooking that I am expert at, although I used to prepare food for Yudhishtira himself at one time. Lord of the Earth, I am also a wrestler. There is no one as strong as me: I can fight lions and elephants, O Anagha, and entertain you otherwise.’

Virata says, ‘I will grant your wish; you may have the job you ask for, since you say you are skilled at it. Yet, I do not think that this is work worthy of you. You deserve the Earth with her girdle of seas, but it shall be as you wish. You will oversee my kitchens and have authority over everyone there.’

Once he is established in the kitchen, Bhima soon becomes the favourite of king Virata; he continues to live there unrecognised by the servants and others of the court.”

CANTO 9

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Her incomparable hair—fine, soft, long and black, ending in curls—is plaited. Dark-eyed, dark-skinned Draupadi of the sweet smiles throws her braid over her right shoulder and conceals it under the end of her upper cloth. As befitting her guise of a sairandhri, she is dressed in just a single piece of grand, but old, black cloth. She wanders here and there inside the palace grounds in apparent distress.

Seeing her drifting aimlessly, men and women hurry to her side and ask, 'Who are you? And what are you looking for?'

And she says, 'I am a royal sairandhri. I am looking for someone whom I can serve, who will take care of me.'

So lovely is she, so rich her clothes, so sweet her speech, that people cannot believe she is a maidservant in search of a job. While looking out from her terrace, Virata's beloved queen, the king of Kekaya's daughter, happens to notice Draupadi.

Seeing her forlorn appearance and shabby attire, Queen Sudeshna calls out to her, 'O Sundari, beautiful one, who are you, and what do you want?'

Draupadi answers, 'Foremost of queens, I am a sairandhri, willing to serve anyone who will take care of me.'

Sudeshna says, 'What you say does not match the beauty I see. You might well be the mistress of servants rather than a servant yourself.

Your heels are slim, your thighs rounded, and your navel is deep; you seem intelligent and your words are solemn. Your body is both young and

exquisite: your toes, breasts and hips, your back and sides, your toe-nails, your palms. The palms of your hands, the soles of your feet are the colour of the deep-red wild rose; your voice is sweet like a swan's; your hair is lovely; your breasts are shapely and graceful.

Like a Kashmiri mare you bear the marks of lofty lineage. You have curled eyelashes, pink lips, a slender waist, a neck with conch-like lines, delicate veins, and a face like the full moon. Your eyes are like lotus leaves; your body is fragrant like the lotus blossom. Indeed, you look like Lakshmi, whose best-loved seat is that autumnal flower.

Tell me who you are, incomparable one; you cannot be a sairandhri. Are you a Yakshi, a Devi, a Gandharvi or an Apsara? Are you the daughter of a Deva, or are you a Nagina? Perhaps you are the guardian goddess of some city? A Vidyadhari or a Kinnari? Are you Rohini herself? Or are you Alambusha, or Misrakesi, Pundarika, or Malini, or Indra Deva's queen, or Varuna's? Or are you the wife of Visvakarma, or the consort of Lord Vishnu himself? Of these goddesses who are celebrated in Devaloka, which one are you, most graceful one?'

Draupadi says, 'Revered queen, I am neither a goddess nor a Gandharvi, neither a Yakshi nor a Rakshasi. I am, truly, a maidservant of the sairandhri class. I know how to dress a royal lady's hair; I can make fragrant lotions and colourful malas of jasmines, lotuses, blue lilies and champakas.

At one time, I served Krishna's beloved queen Satyabhama; and I was once maid to Draupadi, most beautiful of Kurus and wife of the Pandavas. I wander about alone now, living as long as I can in any place where I can earn a good meal and fine clothes in exchange for my services. Draupadi used to call me Malini, maker of garlands.'

Sudeshna says, 'I would so love to take you into my care and pamper you if it were not for the anxiety that the king may lose his heart to you. Even the women and maids of the antahpura are drawn by your beauty and cannot take their eyes off you. What man could resist you? Surely, exquisite one of rounded hips, my husband Virata will see your supernatural loveliness and forsake me for you.

You of the perfect limbs, whose large eyes cast darting sidelong glances, any man you look at with desire will be struck by love. You of the sweet smiles and the perfect body, he whose eyes linger on you will be seared by desire. Like the man who risks his life by climbing a lofty tree,

even as the crab conceives her young ones who will kill her by their birth, I may destroy myself by giving you a home.'

Draupadi says, 'Lovely devi, neither Virata nor any other man will have me, for my five Gandharva husbands, sons of a powerful Gandharva king, protect me. No one can injure or dishonour me. My husbands have forbidden me to work for anyone who makes me wash their feet, and I am not allowed to eat food from another's plate. Any man who attempts to have me like a common woman will die that very night. My beloved and mighty Gandharvas protect me silently and at all times.'

Sudeshna says, 'You who gladden hearts, if that is the way of it, I will take you into my household, and you shall not be required to touch food that has been served to another person, nor wash another's feet.'

Janamejaya, with these words of queen Sudeshna, Krishnaa, devoted to her husbands, begins her life in the city of Virata, and no one knows who she really is!"

CANTO 10

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Sahadeva, dressed like a cowherd and speaking in Yadava dialect, makes his way to king Virata's cowsheds. Amazed to see this splendid bull among men, Virata instructs his men to summon the disguised Pandava to his presence.

When Sahadeva appears before him, the king says, 'Whose service are you in and where do you come from? What work are you looking for? I have never seen you before, Purusharishabha. Tell me about yourself.'

That distresser of his foes, Sahadeva, stands before the king, and in a voice as deep as thunder says, 'I am a Vaisya, and my name is Arishtanemi. I served those bulls of the Kuru race, the Pandavas, as a cowherd, but I want to live in your service now, Purushottama, because I no longer know where those lions among kings are, the sons of Pritha. I need a livelihood and I do not want to work for anyone but you.'

Virata says to him, 'You must either be a Brahmana or a Kshatriya. You look as if you are lord of all Bhumi and her seas. Be honest with me, you who mow down your foes. The work of a Vaisya is not fit for you. Whose kingdom do you come from? What knowledge and skills do you have? In what capacity would you like to stay here with us? And what payment would you accept?'

Sahadeva says, 'Yudhishtira, the eldest of Pandu's five sons, has many herds of cattle. One numbers ten thousand and eight hundred heads; one numbers ten thousand, another is twenty thousand strong; and I helped tend

all those cows and bulls. People call me Tantripala. I know the pedigrees of all cows living within ten yojanas. Raja Yudhishtira was familiar with my gunas, and he was very pleased with me.

I also know how to increase the fertility of cows and how to prevent diseases. I can distinguish bulls that have the auspicious marks that make them worthy of worship by men, and by the scent of whose urine barren women can conceive.'

Virata says, 'I have a hundred thousand cattle divided into separate herds. I give you charge of them all; and their keepers too will be under your authority. Henceforth my livestock will be in your care.'

From this day Sahadeva lives contentedly in the Matsya kingdom, working for Virata, his true identity unknown to the king or anyone else, except his brothers."

CANTO 11

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "The next to appear at the gates of the palace ramparts is a great and exquisitely beautiful man decked in women's ornaments. He wears large earrings and the finest conch-shell bracelets set in gold. He has powerful arms and his long, lush hair tumbles about his neck. He walks with the graceful gait of an elephant, and he makes the earth tremble as he comes into the sabha and stands before Virata.

Seeing the lustrous son of Indra, Arjuna Parantapa, disguised as a eunuch, enter the sabha with his magnificent gait and walk towards him, the king says to his courtiers, 'Where does this person come from? I do not recognise him.'

And when the courtiers say they do not know who the stranger is, the king says to Arjuna in wonderment, 'You look amazingly strong, like a Deva, and your youth and dark skin make you look like a bull-elephant, the leader of a herd. Wearing your seashell-and-gold bangles and earrings, decked with flower garlands, and with your soft hair, you shimmer like a fully-armed Kshatriya in his chariot.

I am old and want to give up my burden of kingship. Be like a son to me and share my burden, or even rule the kingdom of the Matsyas by yourself, as I do now. You are surely some great man and not a eunuch.'

Arjuna says, 'I sing, dance and play musical instruments, and I do all these very well. Lord of men, send me to princess Uttaraa to be her dance

teacher. As to how I became a eunuch, is there any point in telling the story when the memory of it only brings me pain? Suffice it to say, O king, that I am Brihannala, son or daughter without father or mother.'

Virata says, 'Brihannala, I will give you the position you ask for. Teach my daughter and the other princesses to dance. To me, however, this occupation seems too lowly for you. You deserve the Earth and her girdle of seas.'

The king of the Matsyas verifies Brihannala's gifts in dancing, music and other fine arts by watching him perform. He consults his ministers and immediately sends Brihannala to be examined by women, who confirm that he is indeed a eunuch and quite impotent. Virata sends him to princess Uttaraa's apartments. And there, Arjuna begins giving lessons in singing and instrumental music to the daughter of Virata, to her sakhis and sairandhris, and he captures their hearts.

In this way, Arjuna lives confidently in disguise, enjoying the pleasure of the princess' company, unrecognised both by those inside the palace and outside it."

CANTO 12

PANDAVA PRAVESHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After a few days, citizens of the Matsya kingdom see Nakula purposefully making his way towards king Virata's palace. Looking like the Sun pushing its way through the clouds as he comes, he keenly inspects the horses he sees in the royal stables.

Noticing this, the king of the Matsyas says to his entourage, 'I wonder where this man, who glows like a Deva, comes from. He looks so intently at my horses; he must be very knowledgeable about them. Bring him to me at once. He seems to be a Kshatriya; truly, he looks like a god!'

Splendid Nakula Parantapa goes up to the king and says, 'Victory to you, O Rajan! May you be blest. I am a horse-trainer who has earned the respect of kings. I will look after your horses with great care.'

Virata says, 'I will give you chariots, wealth and spacious living quarters, and you shall have charge of my stables. But first tell me, where do you come from? Who are you? And what brings you to my kingdom? What other skills do you have?'

Nakula replies, 'Bane of your enemies, I used to work for the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira. I was in charge of his stables. I am sensitive to a horse's every mood and have mastered the art of breaking them in. I can calm wild or violent horses and know how to treat their diseases. No animal in my care becomes weak or ill. With my training, stallions and mares become docile. Everyone, including Yudhishtira, knows me as Granthika.'

Virata says, ‘From today I put all the horses in my stables in your care. From now, all those who work in the stables and my charioteers, as well, shall be answerable to you. What remuneration will you accept for this?

But you are kingly, almost godlike, and the occupation of an equerry is not worthy of you. You look like a king and I am filled with respect for you. Your presence makes me as happy as if Yudhishtira himself was here. Ah, I wonder how he who is so scrupulously principled passes his time in the forest without anyone to serve him?’

From then on, Nakula, looking like a Gandharva lord, is shown great respect by the delighted Virata and, by his conduct, he makes himself well-liked by everyone in the palace, and no one recognises him while he lives under Virata’s protection.

In this way, the Pandavas, the very sight of whom is a blessing, live in the realm of the Matsyas. With great forbearance in their time of distress, these lords of the earth and seas remain true to their pledge and pass their days unknown.”

CANTO 13

SAMAYAPALANA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "While living disguised in the Matsya kingdom, what did the mighty Kuru princes do, Dvijottama?"

Vaisampayana replied, "Listen, O king, and I will tell you what those sons of Kuru do while they live disguised in the city of the Matsyas and serve that king.

By the grace of Rishi Trinabindu and of the sublime Dharma Deva, the Pandavas continue to live in Virata's city, undiscovered and in peace. Virata and the other nobles find in their new courtier, Kanka, a most congenial companion. An expert in the intricacies of the game of dice, this son of Pandu orchestrates dice games according to his will and makes players sit in the gaming hall like a row of birds on a wire.

Unknown to the king, Yudhishtira divides his winnings amongst his brothers. Bhima sends Yudhishtira meat and other food that he gets from the king. Arjuna distributes the used clothes that he is given in the antahpura of the palace. The Gopa, Sahadeva, gives them milk, curds and ghee. And Nakula shares the wealth that the king rewards him with for managing his stables. Carefully staying away from the gaze of men, forlorn Panchali keeps a watchful, loving eye on her husbands.

Whilst taking care of each other, those mighty Kshatriyas live in Virata's capital, hidden from view as if they are once more in their mother's womb. Ever vigilant of danger from Duryodhana, the Pandavas continue to live in hiding and watch over their wife.

Three months pass, and the grand festival of Lord Brahma is celebrated with pomp in the country of the Matsyas. Athletes from all parts of Bharatavarsha arrive in their thousands, like hosts of Devas flocking to the abode of Brahma or of Siva. They have mighty bodies and great strength, like the Kalakhanja Asuras. Virata honours them and they are proud indeed of their strength and achievements. Their necks, shoulders and waists are leonine. They are pure of body and heart and have already won many royal tournaments.

Amongst them there is one, Jimuta, who towers above the rest, and he challenges them all to a wrestling match. None dares approach him as he proudly stalks the arena. Seeing the dispirited wrestlers, the king of the Matsyas orders his head cook to meet the challenge.

Bhima reluctantly agrees, since he cannot openly disregard the royal request. Ballava the cook bows to the king and enters the capacious stadium, striding in with tigerish fearlessness. Then to the delight of the spectators, the son of Kunti roars a challenge to the towering Jimuta, whose strength and skill are as famed as the Asura Vritra's.

The awesome combatants are like two maddened bull-elephants in their prime. Those tigers among men begin their wrestling match, each one determined to crush the other. The very first clash between them sounds like a thunderbolt striking a stony mountain.

Delighted that they are evenly matched, each will take advantage of his opponent's slightest lapse. The excited adversaries are like elephants in musth. With clenched fists, they crash staggering blows into each other; they hurl each other away; each slams the other on to the ground; each holds the other down on the stadium floor. They get up again and squeeze each other's bodies in bone-crushing grips, in iron arms.

With stunning punches, they throw each other off balance; each grasps the other's legs and whirls him round before ramming him onto the ground. Their open palms strike like thunderclaps. They jab the nails of taut fingers into each other's bodies like spearheads. They kick; they dash head against head like the crash of granite against granite.

To the endless delight of the spectators, the furious hand to hand combat of the two titans rages on, kept up by the strength of their arms and the energy of their minds and bodies. Rajan, all are absorbed by the contention between the two, who battle like Indra Deva and Vritrasura, and they cheer them on with shouts of praise and applause.

The two long-armed, mighty-chested wrestlers heave, thrust, hurl, strike with their knees, all the while yelling taunts at each other. Their bare, glistening arms are truly like spiked iron maces. Then, finally, Bhima roars like some unimaginable lion and seizes his unyielding adversary, as a lion does an elephant. He picks him up, holds him aloft and, as the spectators—athletes and citizens of Matsya—watch in astonishment, he whirls him round and round over his head a hundred times until Jimuta is unconscious. And Mahabaho Vrikodara smashes him to death on the arena floor.

Virata and his friends rejoice at Jimuta's defeat and, in the exuberance of his elation, the king rewards Ballava with the legendary generosity of Kubera.

Bhima goes on to defeat and kill many other wrestlers, pleasing the king enormously. And when there is no one left who dares face him, Virata makes him fight with tigers, lions and elephants, not only in the public arena, but also in the antahpura for the entertainment of the women of the harem.

Arjuna sings and dances and, in his own way, entertains the king and those women of the inner apartments. Nakula keeps the king's stables full of well-trained, swift horses for the king and his men. Virata is pleased and gives Nakula rich rewards. Seeing the goshala filled with healthy bullocks and cows, Purusharishabha Virata makes gifts of all kinds of treasures to Sahadeva. And, O Rajan, poor Draupadi sighs in constant distress at seeing her Kshatriya husbands suffer.

It is in this way that the illustrious exiles render services to king Virata and live in disguise in the Matsya kingdom."

CANTO 14

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Living in their disguises, those mighty Kshatriyas spend ten months in the Matsya city.

Rajan, accustomed herself to being waited on, Draupadi serves Sudeshna in her apartments and lives in some anguish, even though Virata's queen and the other ladies are delighted with their sairandhri.

One day, towards the end of that year of exile, Sudeshna's brother Kichaka, fearsome commander of Virata's forces, happens to catch sight of Draupadi. Seeing that woman of ethereal beauty, so like the daughter of a Deva, like a goddess who has stepped out of Devaloka to walk on Earth, he is struck by a shaft of Kama and he yearns for her.

The flame of lust burns high in him, and Senapati Kichaka comes to Sudeshna and says to her, 'I have not seen this woman in the palace before, and the sight of her intoxicates me like the fragrance of fresh wine. Tell me, who is this bewitching Apsara, as beautiful as a goddess? Whose is she and where has she come from? She maddens my heart and has enslaved me, and only she can heal me.

Ah, your sairandhri is as beautiful as a Devi. Surely, she is not fit to be your servant. Let her rule over me and whatever is mine. Let her grace my jewelled palace; let her enjoy the abundance of rich food and drink served in fine dishes and goblets. I have a surfeit of everything she could want, besides my countless elephants, horses and chariots.'

Having spoken to Sudeshna, Kichaka goes to Draupadi, like a jackal to a lioness, and says to Krishnaa in a disarming voice, 'Who are you, exquisite one; and whose are you? Sundari, from where have you come to this city of Virata's? Tell me, dark and exquisite one. Your beauty and grace are incomparable, and your face is peerless and radiant as the luminous Moon. O you of the high-arched brows, your eyes are like lotus petals; your voice is sweet like the koyal's song, you of the slender arms. O beautiful-hipped, faultless one, I have never seen any woman as perfect as you.

Are you the Goddess Lakshmi who lives in the midst of lotuses? Or are you Bhuti, O slender-waist? Perhaps you are Hri, Sri, Kirti or Kanti? Or maybe you are Rati, the beloved of Manmatha.

The celestial lustre of your face is like moonlight. What man could resist you once he has seen your face? Your beauty is supreme, your grace divine; your face is lovely as the full Moon, your smile like his soft light, and your eyelashes like the delicate rays of his beams. Your soft, rounded, deep breasts, set close together, should be adorned with garlands of gold. The sight of your lotus-bud breasts stings me with desire and lashes me like Kama Deva's whip.

O sweet-smiling and slender-waisted, when I see your belly, marked with four lines and measuring but a span of my hand, bent forward by the weight of your breasts, when I see your hips flare from your body like the banks of a river, a fever of longing torments me. Ah, its flames ravage me, fierce as a forest-fire, fanned by the hope of possessing you. Sublime one, cool the fever kindled by Manmatha. My desire is the rain-cloud and your surrender its cooling shower.

Sharpened by my need for you, Kama's arrows recklessly stab my heart. Black-eyes, they pierce deep and torture me past endurance. You must release me from this. Embrace me and give yourself to me. Adorn yourself in the finest robes, garlands and jewellery, my sweet one, and enjoy with me all the pleasures you could desire.

You who walk with the swaying gait of an elephant in rut, in this place you are deprived of the happiness that you deserve. You should not have to live in hardship; let me give you joy. Drink nectar-like wines, enjoy myriad entertainments and be joyful, O blessed devi. Your loveliness, youth and purity are being wasted, while you are like a spring vanamala cast aside and unworn.

I will forsake all my wives; let them be your servants. And I too will stay by your side, your obedient slave, exquisite creature.'

Hearing his passionate declarations, Draupadi says, 'Sutaputra, I am a lowborn sairandhri, a mere hair dresser. I am not worthy of your desire. Besides, I am already married. These overtures do not become a man of your stature. I beg you to remember dharma: men should only delight in their wives. Do not let temptation lead you to adultery. Refraining from adharma is the way of good men. Ignorant, sinful men who give in to lust are doomed to shame or some worse disaster.'

Hearing the sairandhri, the lecherous Kichaka loses control of himself and, though aware of the danger of sinning, he is overcome by his lust.

He says to Draupadi, 'It is not right for you to disregard me, for it is you, graceful and bewitching temptress, who have lured me into Manmatha's spell. If you reject one who is enchanted by you and who speaks so adoringly to you, you will regret it later, timid, black-eyed one.

You of the flowing brows and waist like a lotus stalk, know that I am the real master of this kingdom. The people of this land depend on me for their lives. In ardour and vigour I have no rivals on this earth; and there isn't another man on earth as handsome, as virile, wealthy or rich in treasures as I am. Fortunate devi, why do you choose to be a servant when you can bask in luxury and have everything your heart desires? Accept me and I will make you mistress of this kingdom; anything you want will be yours for the asking.'

Draupadi answers Kichaka's wretched proposition, 'Sutaputra, do not be so rash and throw your life away. I am protected by my five husbands. You cannot have me; my husbands are Gandharvas and will kill you if you try. Do not bring death upon yourself. You have embarked on a path that no wise man should take. Fool, you are like an ignorant child on the seashore who wants to cross the waves. Even if you dive to the core of the earth, or fly deep into the sky or cross the ocean to the other shore, you cannot escape my divine Gandharvas who slaughter their enemies.

Kichaka, why do you pursue me so persistently, almost like a sick man who is impatient for death? Why do you yearn for me, like a baby lying on its mother's lap reaching for the moon? For you who crave their beloved wife there is no haven from my Gandharva husbands either on earth or in the heavens. Kichaka, for your own good, be wise and save your life.' "

CANTO 15

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Rejected by Draupadi, the lust-crazed Kichaka abandons good sense and says to Sudeshna, 'Daughter of Kekaya, O my sister, do whatever you must to make your sairandhri mine. Somehow see that this woman with the swaying gait of a she-elephant accepts me, for I am dying from wanting her, Sudeshna.'

Kichaka's ardent distress moves Virata's gentle queen to pity. She thinks deeply about what her brother wants and about Krishnaa's fears.

She says to her brother, the Sutaputra, 'On a festival day arrange for some special food and wine. I will send my sairandhri to you on the pretext of bringing me wine. When she comes to your home, make sure you are alone with her and undisturbed; then woo her in whatever way you think best. If her mind is soothed, she may be persuaded to give herself to you.'

Kichaka leaves his sister's apartments and in a few days begins his preparations. He procures wines fit for a king's table; he has expert cooks prepare every kind of delicacy, including superb meat dishes. When all is ready, Sudeshna sends Krishnaa to Kichaka's palace.

She says, 'My lovely Malini, go to my brother Kichaka's house and fetch me some wine for I am terribly thirsty.'

Krishnaa replies, 'My queen, I cannot go to Kichaka's home. You know how bold he is. Beautiful devi of the perfect arms, while I work for you in this palace I will not sin by being unfaithful to my husbands. O gentle queen, remember the conditions I made before entering your service. You of

the tresses ending in soft curls, foolish Kichaka is under Kama's spell and will dishonour me. You have so many maids; send any of them, for if I go, Kichaka will surely ravish me.'

Sudeshna says, 'You are going at my behest and from my house; he will surely not hurt you,' and hands her sairandhri a golden flask.

Her eyes full of tears, the helpless Draupadi prays for protection as she sets out for Kichaka's apartments. She prays, 'I have not been with any man other than my husbands; by virtue of my chastity grant that Kichaka be unable to overpower me even while I am in his presence.'

And she invokes Surya Deva. The Sun God hears her and commands a Rakshasa to protect her. The unseen Rakshasa follows the chaste Draupadi.

Seeing Krishnaa enter his presence like a frightened doe, the Suta rises from his chair, jubilant as a man who, desperate to cross a river, manages to acquire a boat."

CANTO 16

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kichaka says, 'O welcome, you of the shimmering tresses that end in curls of such beauty! Dawn has brought me an auspicious day for you are here today to be mistress of my house. Make me happy. I will have golden necklaces, conch-shells, bright gold earrings, precious jewels from distant lands, rubies and other gems, as well as silks and the softest deer-skins to be brought for you. I have a luxurious bed prepared. Come; sit on it and share this honey wine with me.'

Draupadi says, 'The queen sent me here to fetch wine. I beg you, give it to me quickly, for she is thirsty.'

Kichaka says, 'Gentle one, someone else will take the princess what she wants,' and seizes Draupadi's arm.

She cries, 'I have never been unfaithful to my husbands, even in my mind. Vile man, you have laid hands on me and I swear I shall see you dragged down to the ground and lying powerless.'

Provoked by the reproof of that large-eyed beauty, Kichaka suddenly takes hold of the end of her upper garment, even as she tries to escape. His brutishness is unbearable; Krishnaa's breath quickens, and her body trembles in rage as she thrusts him away from her, making the evil one fall like a tree whose roots are cut. Having flung Kichaka down, Draupadi, shaking, runs for refuge to the sabha where Yudhishtira sits. Kichaka jumps up and pursues her, catches her by her long hair in the very sabha, throws her down before the king himself, and kicks her savagely.

Then, O Bhaarata, the invisible Rakshasa, whom Surya Deva sent to protect her, attacks Kichaka forcefully as a gale-wind; and Kichaka reels and falls like an uprooted tree.

Yudhishtira and Bhimasena are both in that royal court, and they watch Kichaka's outrage of Krishnaa in fury. Bhima wants to kill Virata's senapati; he gnashes his teeth and beads of sweat break out on his heavy brow. His eyes darken as if with smoke, his eyelashes stand on end, and that slayer of enemies buries his head in his hands.

He is about to fly at Kichaka when, in fear of being discovered, Yudhishtira presses down hard on Bhima's thumbs, restraining him. And looking like an infuriated elephant eyeing a large tree, Bhima stays where he is, prohibited by his elder brother.

Yudhishtira says, 'Are you looking for trees for fuel, O cook? If you need kindling, go to the forest.'

Through her tears Draupadi of the graceful hips sees her enraged husbands, and she remembers their pledge and her duty to maintain her disguise. Her eyes flash fire as she says to the king of the Matsyas, 'Today this son of a Suta has insulted the proud and beloved wife of powerful beings; he will find no sanctuary, even if he puts four kingdoms between himself and them. O, this son of a Suta kicked the wife of great beings of truth who are devoted to Brahmanas and whose charity is unconditional. This son of a Suta has kicked the chaste wife of beings whose drums and bowstrings are never silent. This son of a Suta has dishonoured the dearly-loved wife of heroes who are mighty and vigorous, who are generous and proud. O, this son of a Suta has kicked the wife of beings who could destroy the whole world if they were not bound by ties of dharma.

Ah, where are those warriors now who, though living unknown, always grant protection to those who ask for it? Why do these fiery conquerors allow their wife to be abused by a Suta's son, as if they are eunuchs? Where is that rage of theirs, their power, their ardour? How can they stand by and watch a base wretch humiliate their wife? What can I do when dishonourable Virata calmly watches an evil man abuse an innocent woman?

You do not deal with this Kichaka as a king should. Your behaviour is that of a common criminal; it does no credit to this royal sabha. It is not dharma that I have been vilely abused in your presence and you do nothing to redress the wrong.

Let all who are present here see this outrage. Kichaka has ignored dharma; and Virata has done the same. You courtiers who wait upon such a king are equally lacking in honour,' rages Krishnaa, her eyes streaming.

Virata says, 'I did not see what quarrel led to this. Without knowing the truth how can I rule in one person's favour?'

When the courtiers hear what took place they support Krishnaa with applause saying, *Well done*, and condemn Kichaka.

They say, 'The husband who possesses this lovely-eyed and graceful woman of inestimable worth is a most fortunate man. Rare indeed is a woman of such extraordinary and flawless beauty. Why, she seems to be a goddess.'

Meanwhile, as the courtiers praise Krishnaa, Yudhishtira's brow perspires in anger, and that bull of the Kurus says to his wife, 'Do not stay here, sairandhri; return to Sudeshna's apartments. Wives must endure torment for the sake of their husbands; they attain swarga by suffering great hardships while serving their lords. Your Gandharva husbands, radiant as suns, do not consider this an apt occasion for unleashing their anger, which is why they do not rush to your side.

You weep theatrically in distress because you do not know the deeper significance of all things. Besides, you interrupt the play of dice in the king's court. Leave, sairandhri; the Gandharvas will do what you want. They know of your troubles and will kill the man who has wronged you.'

Krishnaa says, 'My husbands are loving, but they are controlled by one among them and cannot act freely, for that eldest of them is addicted to dice.'

And Krishnaa goes back to Sudeshna's apartments, her hair dishevelled, her eyes blazing and her face flushed and swollen from weeping; she returns like the moon breaking out from behind clouds.

Seeing her like that, Sudeshna asks, 'Ah lovely one, who has hurt you? Why do you cry? Who has upset you, gentle one? Why this grief?'

Draupadi says, 'When I went to fetch wine for you, Kichaka attacked me in the very presence of the king, in his sabha, as if in an unpeopled forest.'

Sudeshna says, 'Lust-maddened Kichaka abused you because he cannot have his way with you. I will have him killed if that is what you wish.'

Draupadi says to her, 'There are others, whom he has wronged, who will kill him. He will go to Yamaloka this very day.' "

CANTO 17

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Incensed by what the Suta's son did to her, Krishnaa, fervently praying for the death of Virata's senapati, goes to her room. Drupada's dark-eyed daughter bathes herself. She cries as she washes her body and she wonders how she can wash away her grief.

She says to herself, 'What am I to do? Where can I go?' Then she remembers Bhima and says, 'There is no one except Bhima who can do what my heart is set on.'

That night, griefstricken and wrathful Krishnaa, protected by her powerful, unseen Rakshasa guardian, leaves her bed and hurries to Bhimasena's apartment.

She glides into her second husband's chambers and says, 'How can you sleep while Kichaka, Virata's wretched senapati, my enemy, still lives after the vile thing he did to me today?'

The room where Bhima sleeps, his breath loud like a lion's, is lit by Draupadi's beauty and his own magnificence. Krishnaa goes to him in his cook's apartments, eagerly as a young untamed cow in her first heat to a bull, like a heron by the water-side to her mate in season. The princess of Panchala embraces the second son of Pandu as a frail creeper hugs the great sala tree on the banks of the Gomati. Krishnaa takes him in her arms and rouses him, as a lioness does a sleeping lion in the forest.

Embracing Bhimasena as a she-elephant does her mighty mate, Panchali says in a voice as alluring as a celestial veena playing a Gandharva raga,

‘Wake up, Bhimasena! Why do you lie so still, as if you are dead? Surely, one who is alive would not allow the wretch who disgraced his wife to live.’

Bhima Mahabaho wakes up; he sits up on his couch and says to his precious wife, ‘What brings you here in such anxiety? You look pale and worn. What has happened? Tell me everything. I must know the truth, happy or painful, pleasant or unpleasant, and I will find a solution to your distress. Krishnaa, of all your husbands I am most worthy of your trust; for it is I who always save you from danger. Tell me what you want and why; then return to your bed before others awake.’ ”

CANTO 18

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi says, 'How can a woman who has Yudhishtira for a husband be free from sorrow; and knowing all that I have sufferd how can you ask me this question? That Pratikami dragged me to the Kuru court and called me a slave before all the sabha. That agony, Bhaarata, still consumes me. Which other princess could suffer such misery and still live?

Who else but I could have borne what the evil lord of Sindhu did to me while we lived in the forests? Which other queen could live after being kicked by Kichaka in full view of the honourless king of the Matsyas? What is the point of my living, Bhima, when despite all this, you ask me why I am miserable?

The evil Kichaka is Virata's brother-in-law and commands his armies; he accosts me daily and propositions me, and asks me to be his wife. Like an over-ripe fruit, my heart is bursting from that wretch, who deserves to die, constantly importuning me.

Chastise your elder brother who is addicted to dice; my unhappiness is his doing. Only a reckless gambler stakes his kingdom and everything he owns, including his wife, on one throw, against a life in the forests. If he had gambled day and night for years and wagered thousands of nishkas and other precious possessions, his wealth: silver and gold, costly robes, cattle, sheep, goats and innumerable horses, would still be past reckoning. But now, stripped of everything by a single throw of the ivory dice, he sits mute and ponders his foolishness.

It is pitiful that he, who travelled with ten thousand elephants adorned with golden garlands in his retinue, now supports himself by throwing dice. Kings idolised Yudhishtira and hundreds of thousands of people worshipped him in Indraprastha. In his halls legions of serving-maids attended on countless guests day and night. That most generous of men, who gave thousands of nishkas in charity every day, is now fallen because of his gambling, that root of all evils, and has sunk to earning his livelihood by daily casting dice.

Throngs of poets and rich admirers decked in jewelled earrings once sang melodious praises and paid homage to him all day long. Sadly, the great Yudhishtira, whom a thousand holy sages, all Vedic scholars, served, and whose every wish he granted; Yudhishtira, who maintained eighty-eight thousand Snatakas with thirty servants each; Yudhishtira, who looked after ten thousand Yatis who had forsaken worldly life—this Yudhishtira now lives ajnatavasa, in pathetic disguise.

Yudhishtira is kind, without malice, and gives every man his due; he who has such admirable qualities now lives behind a mask. He of unquestionable power and steadfastness, who is fair-minded; compassionate Yudhishtira, who tends to the blind, the old, the helpless, the orphaned and the distressed—he is now a servant who calls himself Kanka, a thrower of dice in the Matsya king's court and dependent on him.

He, to whom kings of the Earth used to pay tribute in Indraprastha, now begs for subsistence. He, under whose dominion all the lords of the Earth came, has lost his sovereignty and is the subject of another.

Yudhishtira, who blazed over the world like the Sun, is now a liege of Virata. Pandava, look how your brother, whom kings and sages revered, now waits upon another, lesser king.

How can anyone who sees Yudhishtira fawning on Virata and making adulatory speeches as his courtier, not be heartbroken? How can anyone who sees the wise and noble Yudhishtira waiting on another for sustenance not be griefstricken, undeserving though my lord may be of that sorrow.

O Kshatriya, that Bhaarata whom the entire world worshipped is the one you now see adulating another man. When you can see all this, Bhimasena, why are you not able to see me in my misery, drowning in a sea of sorrow?'
"

CANTO 19

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi continues, 'O Bhaarata, I am going to tell you of another great sadness of mine. Do not be upset with me, for I say this out of grief.

Who would not be sad to see you, O Bhima, Bharatarishabha, doing the work of a cook, so entirely beneath you, and pretending to belong to the Ballava caste? What can be sadder than people knowing you only as one who is plunged in servitude as Virata's cook, and called Ballava? When your work in the kitchen is over, you wait on Virata, and despondency grips my heart. When that king makes you fight elephants for his amusement, and the women of the inner apartments titter in enjoyment, oh, I am sorely distressed.

When you wrestle with lions, tigers and bulls for the entertainment of princess Kaikeyi in the antahpura, I almost faint away. Kaikeyi and her maids come to help me and finding that it is only a swoon the princess says to her serving women, "It is the intimacy she has with this man and her love for him that agitates this sweet-smiling sairandhri when she sees the powerful cook wrestling with beasts. She is lovely and Ballava is handsome. It is difficult to know what is in her heart, but they seem to suit each other well. Very likely, she sheds tears for him because they are lovers. They did both enter into our service at the same time."

She scolds me and, when she sees that I am upset, suspects that we are lovers. When she speaks like that, my anguish is terrible. Even though I am

already sunk in grief because of Yudhishtira, in truth, it is when I see you, my awesome Bhima, enduring such torment that I want to end my life.

And he, who on his chariot single-handedly defeated all the Devas and Manavas, is now the dancing-master of Virata's daughter Uttaraa. This son of Pritha, the fathomless soul who pleased Agni in Khandava vana, now lives in the antahpura of the palace like fire hidden in a well. That bull among men, ah, the very same Dhananjaya who was the terror of his adversaries, now pretends to be that which all men abhor: a eunuch!

He, whose mace-like arms have been marked by the strokes of his bowstring, covers his wrists with conch-shell bracelets and lives in grief. Arjuna, the thunderous twang of whose bowstring on his gloves made enemies tremble, now entertains pampered women with his songs. Dhananjaya, who wore a crown of brilliant splendour, now wears braids ending in tawdry curls.

Oh Bhima, when I see that matchless archer wearing braids and living in the midst of women, I am weighed down by despair. That noble Kshatriya, master of all the Devastras and storehouse of all the shastras, now wears women's earrings. The man whom the greatest kings could not contain in battle, just as the waters of the oceans cannot cover the continents, is now dancing-master to Virata's daughter and waits on her in disguise.

My heart clenches in grief for Arjuna, the rumble of whose chariot-wheels made the Earth with all that rests on her tremble, whose birth banished Kunti's sorrows, that most honoured Kshatriya who is your younger brother, when I see him coming towards me with golden earrings and conch-shell bracelets, Bhimasena.

Dhananjaya, whom no bowman in this world can match, spends his time singing and surrounded by women. When I see Partha, peerless in virtue, truth and honour, the most admired man in the world, dressed as a woman, sorrow overwhelms me. The sight of the godlike Arjuna in the midst of women in the hall of music, like a bull-elephant surrounded by she-elephants, waiting on king Virata of the Matsyas, makes my mind reel.

My mother-in-law Kunti does not know that Dhananjaya is in such distress, nor does she know that the son of Kurus, Ajatasatru, thanks to his disastrous addiction to dice, is plunged in misery.

Bhima, when I see the youngest of you all, Sahadeva, disguised as a gopa and tending cattle, I grow pale. Sahadeva's plight is always on my

mind and robs me of sleep; what can I say about the rest of you? Mighty-armed, I do not know what sin Sahadeva, Kshatriya of perfect purity, committed that he suffers like this.

Bhaaratottama, when I see your beloved brother serving the king of the Matsyas as his cowherd, sadness floods my heart. When I see that proud Kshatriya, wearing clothes dyed red, giving his all to please Virata, a fever consumes me.

My mother-in-law Kunti always praised the nobility and unassailable integrity of Sahadeva. She, who is passionately fond of her sons, wept as she embraced him when we were about to set out for the forest, and she consigned him to my care. "Sahadeva is shy, soft spoken and virtuous. He is also my favourite child. Yagnaseni, watch over him day and night. He is delicate and brave, devoted to his elder brother the king and worships him. Panchali, tend to him yourself," she said.

Pandava, how can I bear to live whilst looking at this best of Kshatriyas tending cows and sleeping on a bed of calf-skins?

And then, he who wears like a crown the three qualities—beauty, strength and intelligence—is now the steward of Virata's stables. How destiny has changed Nakula! At the sight of him hosts of enemy forces would flee from the battlefield; now he trains swift horses for the Matsya king; and sad am I to see that handsome young man wait upon the gorgeously bedecked Virata and parade his horses before him.

O my Bhima, beset as I am with untold misery on account of Yudhishtira, how do you, slayer of foes, even dream that I could be happy? Listen to me, Kaunteya, while I tell you all my other heartaches, which are worse than these and which cause me to grow emaciated with anxiety, although you are alive.' "

CANTO 20

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Draupadi says to Bhima, 'Alas, because of that reckless gambler, I am now under Sudeshna's command and live in the palace as a sairandhri. Parantapa, it is a pitiable condition that I, a princess and a queen, am now forced to endure. I wait in torment for the end of our exile while I cling to the belief that success, victory and defeat are not permanent; and I live in hope that my husbands will rise up again. Prosperity and adversity rotate like a wheel; and so I live in expectation of my husbands' return to prosperity. The same fate that brings victory also fetches defeat. This hope keeps me alive.

Perhaps, Bhimasena, you should think of me as being dead? I have heard that those who give great charity, may, in time, have to beg; those who kill may themselves be killed; and those who vanquish others may themselves be overthrown by their enemies. Destiny will prevail and is inexorable. And so, like a once dry tank filling again, I await the return of good fortune. All the same, when a trade that has flourished by dint of hard work fails, a truly wise person should never try to make it prosper again.

Whether or not you want to hear it, I will explain why I say these things, for my sorrow is great. Who else but I, Drupada's daughter and queen of Pandu's sons, would want to live after sinking to such depths? My desolation is a shame upon the entire Kuru race, as well as the Panchalas and the Pandavas. There is no other woman who has so much to be joyful

about, having a father, brothers, a father-in-law and sons, who finds herself in a state such as mine is today.

I must have done something to anger Dhatri when I was young to deserve this. Yes, see how pale and worn I am; even a life of hardship in the forests did not have this effect. Bhima, you know how sublimely happy I used to be, but now I am reduced to servitude and I have no peace.

The awesome archer Dhananjaya now lives like a fire that has been extinguished; I attribute this to destiny. It is impossible for men to know the karma of living beings, O Prithaputra. Your fall could not have been averted.

She who has you and your brothers to care for her, men who are like Indra himself; she who is chaste and noble by birth and nature, has now to attend to the comforts of her inferiors. Pandava, look at my plight; I do not deserve this. You can see how kaala has inverted the just order of things.

Ah, she who had the whole Earth to the edge of the sea under her sway is now the sairandhri of Sudeshna and lives in fear of her. She who had protectors to walk before and behind her now walks before or behind Sudeshna. This wrteched servitude is something else that I cannot bear, Kaunteya. Listen to me; she who had never, not even for her own use, ground ointments, except for Kunti, now makes sandalwood paste for others. Look at my hands; oh, they were never like this.'

She shows him her callused hands and continues, 'She who had no fear, not of Kunti or of you and your brothers, now lives as a slave in fear of Virata; she worries about what that king might say to her about the preparation of the salves, for he does not like sandalwood ground by others.'

And Krishnaa begins to sob, her streaming eyes on Bhima's face. With tear-choked sighs, she stirs his heart powerfully, saying, 'Bhima, I must have offended the gods so terribly that, in my misery, I am still alive when I would rather be dead.'

Then that slayer of Kshatriya foes, Vrikodara, puts his face in his wife's delicate, scarred hands and begins to weep bitterly. He holds her hands in his and speaks to her through his tears," said Vaisampayana.

CANTO 21

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhimasena says, 'Fie on the might of my arms and fie on the Gandiva of Phalguna, for as your hands, once soft and smooth, are now covered with calluses. I would have brought carnage to Virata's court if Yudhishtira had not forbidden me. Like an elephant a melon, I would have crushed Kichaka's head, drunk with his own power as he is.

Krishnaa, when I saw Kichaka kick you, in my mind I slaughtered the Matsyas. Yudhishtira forbade me with a look and pressing down on my thumbs; I understood and stayed my hand.

Our kingdom has been taken from us and I have not yet killed the Kurus; I have still to collect the heads of Suyodhana, Karna, Subala's son Sakuni and the bestial Dussasana. And this eats away at my very entrails and turns constantly in my heart like a dagger's point.

Noble one of the graceful hips, do not sacrifice your virtue at the altar of wrath; suppress your anger instead. If Yudhishtira hears your rebuke, he will take his own life. If Dhananjaya and the twins hear you say what you have to me, they will do the same. And if they kill themselves, I could not bear to live.

In olden days Sarjati's daughter, the beautiful Sukanya, followed Chyavana of Bhrigu's race into the forest; that sage's mind was under such control that ants built a hill over him while he was lost in dhyana.

You may have heard of how Indrasena, beautiful as Narayani, followed her thousand-year-old husband.

You have surely heard about Janaka’s daughter Sita, the princess of Videha, who followed her lord when he went to live in the forest; and how that lovely one, Rama’s beloved wife, was beset by calamities and persecuted by Ravana, but was finally reunited with him.

Then, there was the young and captivating Lopamudra, who renounced all pleasures of the material world and followed Agastya Muni.

Lofty-minded and flawless Savitri followed Dyumatsena’s brave son Satyavan into Yamaloka.

You have all the virtues that these chaste women possessed, my adored Krishnaa. Be patient for just a little longer; in a fortnight the thirteenth year will be over, and you will be Queen again.’

Draupadi says, ‘I cannot bear my sorrows, and grief alone makes me weep; mighty Bhima, I do not condemn Yudhishtira for there is no point brooding over the past; instead one should live for today. I am pained by the efforts that the jealous Sudeshna makes to keep the king far from me. Knowing her anxiety, vile Kichaka constantly propositions me.

Subduing my anger and disgust, I said to the lustful wretch, “Kichaka, be warned. I am the beloved wife of five Gandharvas, and they will kill you, brazen one.”

The arrogant son of a Suta replied, “I am not in the least bit afraid of Gandharvas, O sairandhri of the sweet smiles. I can mow down a hundred thousand of them in battle. So, timid one, give yourself to me.”

I said to the lust-maddened Suta, “You are nothing before my illustrious Gandharvas. I am virtuous and born of noble blood so I never wish death on anyone. Kichaka, that is the only reason you are still alive!”

The fiend just laughed loudly. Constantly entreated by her brother and moved by her love for him, Sudeshna sent me to him saying, “O sairandhri, bring me wine from Kichaka’s palace.”

When he saw me, the Suta’s son first tried to woo me with cunning flattery and, when that failed, he grew furious and was about to ravish me. I pushed him down and ran to the king, but Kichaka followed me into the royal court; ah, he flung me to the ground and kicked me in Virata’s very presence and in full view of Kanka and many others, including charioteers, royal courtiers, elephant-riders and merchants. I rebuked the king and Kanka repeatedly, but Virata did nothing to stop Kichaka, nor did he punish him.

Kichaka's influence over Virata is powerful indeed. He is cruel and bereft of dharma. The queen and king are very fond of him although he is fearless, proud, sinful, adulterous and obsessed with pleasure; he has amassed vast wealth from the king and he forcibly takes anything he likes from other men, even if they cry in distress.

He does not walk the path of dharma, nor does he do anything virtuous. He is black-hearted, vicious, haughty, debased and licentious. Although I have rejected him repeatedly, if he sees me again he will violate me; and if that happens, I will take my life. Bhima, all your dharma and restraint will become meaningless if I die. You might keep your pledge to Yudhishtira, but you will lose your wife.

By protecting a wife, the children are protected, and by protecting the children, one's soul is preserved. In a wife one's own self is born, and that is why wise men call her Jaya. A wife must also protect her husband, thinking, "How else will he be born from me?"

I have heard Brahmanas declare the duties of the different varnas, and they say that a Kshatriya has no other duty than to put down his enemies. Kichaka kicked me in the presence of Yudhishtira and you.

Mighty Bhima, it was you who saved me from terrible Jatasura; with your brother's help, you defeated Jayadratha. Now kill this evil Kichaka who has humiliated me. Confident of being the king's favourite, Kichaka swells my sorrows. Break this lust-driven creature's body like a pot of clay against a stone.

Be warned, O Bhaarata, if another day dawns on this man who is the source of my grief, I will drink poison and put an end to my life. Before I am forced by Kichaka, I think it would be better that I die here in your presence.'

Krishnaa hides her face in Bhima's chest and weeps. And he holds her close and tries to console her as best he can. Soothing the slender daughter of Drupada with words of good sense and reason, he wipes her streaming face with his hands. Thinking of Kichaka, Bhima is dry-mouthed with rage; he moistens his lips and speaks to the distraught Draupadi."

CANTO 22

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhima says, 'I will do as you wish, my gentle one; I will kill Kichaka and all his men. Yagnaseni, tomorrow evening, put aside your sorrow and arrange to meet Kichaka in the dance-hall. The king of the Matsyas had it built for the princess and her companions to use during the day; the girls return to their homes at night, and there is a finely wrought wooden couch there. From that couch I will send Kichaka to his ancestors.

My slender Panchali, you must bring him there and be careful that no one sees you.'

Having spoken thus to each other and having shed tears, they wait impatiently for the night to end. The next morning Kichaka rises and goes to the palace, where he accosts Draupadi again.

He says, 'I threw you down in the court and kicked you in the presence of the king, and no one did anything because none dare face my wrath. This should show you that Virata is king of the Matsyas only in name. As senapati of the forces of the realm, I am the real lord of the Matsyas. Gentle one, yield willingly to me and I will be your slave. You of the graceful hips, I will give you a hundred nishkas even now; I will employ a hundred eunuchs and a hundred women to attend on you; I will give you chariots drawn by mares of the finest pedigree. Let us be together, timid one.'

Draupadi replies, 'O Kichaka, I have one condition. Neither your friends nor your brothers should know of your relations with me. I am

mortally afraid of being found out by my great Gandharvas. Promise me this, and I will give myself to you gladly.'

Kichaka cries, 'Let it be as you wish! I am lost in love of you of the shapely legs that taper like the stem of a plantain tree. I will come alone to your apartments to be with you so that your Gandharvas will know nothing.'

Draupadi says, 'No! When it is dark, go to the dance-hall that the Matsya king has built. The girls who use it during the day return to their homes at night. The Gandharvas do not know that place, and we will escape their notice.'

Dwelling on her conversation with Kichaka, impatient for revenge, the rest of the day seems as long as a month to Krishnaa. Not dreaming that it was Death who had assumed the perfect form of a sairandhri, Kichaka goes home in a fog of delight. His mind athrong with images of passion, he anoints his body with fragrant oils and adorns himself with jewels and garlands. All the while absorbed with thoughts of that doe-eyed beauty, he waits for the interminable day to end.

The magnificent Kichaka, who is about to lose his beauty forever, seems to shine more radiantly, like the flame of a lamp before it dies. Deceived by lust into trusting Draupadi, absorbed in lascivious imaginings of his tryst with her, Kichaka hardly notices the day pass.

Meanwhile, Draupadi goes to Bhima, stands before him in the kitchen, and she of the raven-black tresses says, 'O Parantapa, I have asked Kichaka to meet me in the hall of dance. He will come there alone at midnight. Kill him there, Bhima, this Sutaputra Kichaka who is so vain that he dares mock my Gandharva husbands. O strongest of all Kshatriyas, despatch him from the world, just as Krishna did the Naga Kaliya from the Yamuna. Pandava, dry my tears; and may you be blessed by protecting your own and Kshatriya dharma.'

Bhima says, 'Lovely one, this good news you bring is all I need to hear. I feel as elated as I did when I killed Hidimba. I swear by truth itself, by the lives of my brothers and by dharma that I will kill Kichaka even as Indra did Vritrasura. I will tear him apart, out in the open if I need to, and if the Matsyas fight on his part, I will kill them too.

And when that is done, I will kill Duryodhana and win back the Earth. If he wants to, let Yudhishtira continue to pay homage to the king of Matsyas.'

Knowing Bhima and the danger his unleashed fury could put them in, Draupadi says, ‘My Bhima, kill him in secret so that you do not break your word to me.’

Bhima reassures her, ‘I will kill Kichaka and all his friends tonight, but secretly and under cover of darkness. Perfect one, like an elephant crushes a mango, I will crush the vile Kichaka’s head, for daring to crave the unattainable.’

When night falls, Bhima covers himself in a silken sheet and goes in advance to the meeting-place where he lies on the fine couch like a lion waiting to ambush a deer, waiting for Kichaka. The Matsya senapati arrives at the appointed time, perfumed and adorned and quivering in anticipation of meeting the sairandhri of his dreams.

Instead, in that pitch-black hall the evil one encounters Bhima of the matchless prowess, who is already there, waiting on the couch. Like a moth to a flame, or a small animal to a lion, Kichaka comes to Bhima, death personified, lying covered on the couch, smouldering at the thought of what the Matsya senapati said and did to Krishnaa.

Filled with ecstatic expectation, lecherous Kichaka comes near Bhima and says, smiling, ‘O you of the arched brows, I have given you all kinds of precious things from my store-houses, a hundred maids, many beautiful clothes and a fine mansion with an antahpura full of lovely young sakhis, and furnished with everything to amuse and entertain you. Having arranged all these for you, I have come running to your side. You must know that women admire me, saying that no one is as handsome as I or as richly clothed.’

Pretending to be Draupadi, Bhima whispers, ‘I am glad that you are so handsome and it is just that you praise yourself. But I do not think you would ever have felt a touch as pleasurable as mine. You are gallant and strong, and your fingers burn my skin. You are an artist at lovemaking and a favourite with women, and surely there is none other like you in this world!’

Then, suddenly, mighty-armed, splendid and terrifyingly powerful Bhimasena, son of Kunti, rises from the couch and says with a laugh, ‘Wretch, today your sister will see me drag you along the ground, as lion does an elephant he has killed. With you dead, the sairandhri and we, her husbands, will live in peace.’

Saying this, Bhima takes Kichaka by his flower-decked hair. But the strong Kichaka pulls loose from Bhima's grasp and seizes Bhima's arms. Full of fury, those two lions among men fight like two bull-elephants over a female in season, why, bringing to mind the long-ago titanic battle between the Vanara brothers Vali and Sugriva.

Their arms raised like five-hooded snakes, Bhima and Kichaka tear at each other in a frenzy of fury. Kichaka's onslaught takes Bhima by surprise, but the Pandava does not falter.

Fiercely they fight, locked together, dragging each other this way and that, like two humped bulls, like snarling tigers. With teeth and nails, they fight unarmed; like elephants with temples cracked and oozing the wild juice of musth, they fling each other down. When Bhima seizes Kichaka, Kichaka the strong hurls him violently to the ground. The crash of arm against arm resounds like splitting bamboo.

Then summoning all his great strength, Vrikodara hurls Kichaka across the dance hall; he tosses him about like a tree in a hurricane. Besieged by Bhima, Kichaka begins to tremble with weakness but then he repels the Pandava and even Bhima stumbles. Kichaka strikes him with his knees and fells him, but Bhima gets up quickly, like Yama himself with mace in hand.

At midnight in that lonely place, intoxicated with their own strength, the Suta and the Pandava battle; and the whole edifice shudders with their roars.

Bhima clenches his great fist and strikes Kichaka squarely on his chest, but his lust for Panchali gives Kichaka unnatural strength and he stands his ground, but only for a moment. The Suta is exhausted; Bhima is overpowering and, seeing Kichaka weaken, Bhima pulls him to his chest and begins to crush him in iron arms. Panting in rage, Vrikodara seizes Kichaka's hair and roars like a hungry tiger that has killed some massive prey. Knowing his enemy is near the end, Vrikodara holds him fast, as if trussing an animal with rope.

The dazed Kichaka roars horribly like a broken trumpet as Bhima whirls him round and round; and then, to appease Krishnaa's anger, Vrikodara grasps his enemy's neck and squeezes it with his hands. By now all Kichaka's limbs are broken, and his eyelids are swollen shut, but Vrikodara smashes his knees into Kichaka's belly and unrelentingly crushes the body of that man, the worst of his clan, and kills him as if he is an animal.

At last, seeing that his prey lies motionless, Bhima rolls the inert Kichaka on the ground and, with a heartfelt sigh of deep release, says, ‘This dog who wanted to ravish our wife, this thorn in the flesh of the sairandhri is dead. I have discharged my debt to my brothers, and I am at peace.’

Then, still red-eyed, Bhima rises away from Kichaka, whose clothes and ornaments have been torn off but whose eyes roll in his head as his blood-drenched body still twitches in spasms. Wringing his hands and biting his lip in undiminished fury, Bhima launches himself once more upon his enemy.

He thrusts Kichaka’s head, neck, arms and legs into his torso and reduces him to a shapeless mass, as the wielder of the Pinaka once did the deer which Yagna became to escape his ire. Having crushed him to pulp, Bhima rolls Kichaka into a ball of flesh, and he calls out to Krishnaa, hiding in a corner, watching riveted, her breast heaving in excitement.

Mighty Bhimasena grinds Kichaka’s body under his feet and says to Draupadi, ‘Come, Panchali, and see what has become of the lecher!’

And, showing Kichaka’s body to Draupadi by the light of a lamp, he says to her, ‘Gentle, chaste one, I will kill anyone who lusts after you, exactly as I have done Kichaka.’

Having accomplished his difficult task to please Krishnaa, and having pacified his own rage, Bhima leaves Krishnaa, and hurries back to his kitchen. Her torment assuaged by Kichaka’s death, Draupadi, best among all women, is ecstatic.

She calls to the guards of the dance-hall, ‘Come all of you and look at Kichaka who lusted after other mens’ wives; look where he lies slain by my Gandharva husbands.’

The guards of the dance-hall hear her and rush in, torches in hand. They see Kichaka’s bloodied, dismembered body on the ground. They gaze at him in shock and say in amazement, ‘Where is his neck and where are his legs?’

When they see how their general has been slain, surely by superhuman forces, they decide that he has indeed been killed by a Gandharva.”

CANTO 23

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Kichaka's kinsmen rush to the dance-hall, see him there and gather round his body, wailing loudly. The sight of him lying there mangled, like a dead tortoise dragged out of the water on to dry ground, is too much for them; the hair on their bodies stands on end in horror. They take his body, crushed by Bhima like a Danava by Indra, and prepare it for the funeral rites.

The Suta clansmen assembled there then notice Krishnaa of the perfect body leaning against a pillar and exclaim, 'This loose woman, for whom Kichaka has given his life, must die. Or even better, instead of killing her here, let us cremate her alive on the pyre of the one who desired her. It is our dharma to do what the dead Sutaputra would have wanted.'

They go to Virata and say, 'It is because of her that Kichaka has died. It is only right that she is cremated along with him, and you must give us leave to do this.'

Virata is aware of the extent of the power the Suta wields and agrees to let the sairandhri be burnt alive with the body of the Suta's son. Kichaka's clansmen violently seize lotus-eyed Krishnaa, who is paralysed with terror. They tie up the slender-waisted one, haul her onto the funeral cart and set off excitedly for the smasana.

O King, as she is forcibly carried to the burning ground by the Sutas, the chaste Krishnaa, who is protected by her husbands, cries out aloud to them, 'Jaya! Jayanta! Vijaya! Jayatsena! Jayadbala! The Sutas are taking

me away! O swift Gandharvas, whose chariot-wheels rumble and whose bowstrings sound like thunderclaps, hear me. Oh, the Sutas are going to burn me alive!'

Bhima hears Krishnaa's cries, leaps out of his bed without a moment's thought and roars, 'I hear you, sairandhri! Have no more fear of the Sutas, gentle one.'

Bhima of the mighty arms stretches his body and dresses with care. He creeps out of the palace, climbs a tree and vaults over the lofty city wall. He runs to the smasana, where Kichaka's kinsmen have gone, and he charges the Sutas with dreadful roars.

On his way, he sees a large tree, tall as a palmyra, with a gigantic trunk and withered top-branches. Bhima grasps this tree that spans ten vyamas and uproots it as easily as an elephant would. With that tree across his shoulders, looking like Yama with his mace, the Kshatriya runs at the Sutas. In his wake, banyans, pipals and kinsukas crash to the ground.

The Sutas see Bhima rushing towards them like a furious lion; they tremble in panic and say fearfully to each other, 'Look! The Gandharva comes full of rage, with an uprooted tree in his hands. It is the sairandhri who has put us in danger; let us set her free.'

Staring at the tree uprooted by Bhimasena, they release Draupadi and run frantically back towards the city. Seeing them run away, Vayu's mighty son flings the tree at the fleeing Sutas and, just as Indra killed the Danavas, despatches a hundred and five of them to Yamaloka. O King, he frees Draupadi from her bonds and comforts her.

Irrepressible Vrikodara says to the agitated Panchali, her face bathed in tears, 'See, gentle one, I have killed those that wronged you. Krishnaa, return to the city; you need no longer be afraid. I will take another way back to the palace kitchens.'

Bhaarata, this is how one hundred and five Kichaka clansmen are slain; and their corpses lie on the ground like a copse of trees felled by a hurricane. The slaughtered Sutas number one hundred and five; including Virata's senapati Kichaka they number one hundred and six. The men and women gathered there watch the incredible feat and are all spellbound, O Bhaarata, speechless."

CANTO 24

KICHAKA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The citizens witness the massacre of the Sutas and report back to Virata, 'O great king, the mighty sons of Sutas have all been killed by the Gandharvas and lie scattered on the earth like mountain peaks fractured by thunder. The sairandhri has been released and is returning to the palace. Her presence here will endanger your kingdom. The sairandhri is unnaturally beautiful, and her Gandharvas are as powerful as she is lovely. Men are irresistibly drawn to her. O Virata, protect your kingdom from the vengeance of the Gandharvas for the wrongs done to her.'

Virata, lord of vast hosts, says, 'Perform the last rites of the Sutas. Let all the slain men of Kichaka's clan be cremated on one pyre with gemstones and frankincense.'

Then, fearful of what might happen, the king says to his queen Sudeshna, 'When the sairandhri comes back, say to her from me, "Blessings upon you, my beautiful sairandhri. You are free to go wherever you wish. You of the graceful hips, what your Gandharva husbands did has alarmed the king. Because these Gandharvas watch jealously over you, he dares not say this to you himself. A woman, however, cannot give offence by speaking to you; and so, he speaks through one." '

Saved by Bhimasena's slaughter of the Sutas, now the intelligent Krishnaa has no cause for fear. However, after she bathes her body and washes her clothes, she approaches the city, still nervous, like a doe

frightened by a tiger. Rajan, terrified of the Gandharvas, the people run in all directions when they see her. Some even shut their eyes!

Panchali sees Bhima standing at the palace-gates like an infuriated tusker. With eyes wide in adoring wonder, Draupadi whispers to him so no one else can hear, ‘I salute you, O prince of Gandharvas, my saviour!’

Bhima declares loudly, ‘All who have been living in servitude or debt, who hear these words of hers, are hereby freed from all their obligations.’

Draupadi sees Arjuna in the dance-hall teaching Virata’s daughters dance. When Krishnaa arrives there, all the girls come out with Arjuna to meet her.

They say, ‘Sairandhri, it is fortunate indeed that you have been rescued from danger, and you are lucky to return safe. We are glad that the Sutas who abused you are dead.’

Brihannala says, ‘How were you saved, sairandhri? And how did those sinful men die? I want to hear exactly what happened.’

The sairandhri replies, ‘Brihannala, you live contentedly in the women’s apartments. Why do you concern yourself with what has happened to a mere sairandhri? You do not face the trials that I have been through. Your questions are only to ridicule me in my distress.’

Brihannala says, ‘Blessed one, Brihannala, too, has sorrows of her own. She has become as low as an animal. Dear sairandhri, you do not understand this. I have lived with you and you with us; when you are beset with sorrow, who does not grieve for you? But no one can read another’s heart, and you do not know what I feel, gentle Malini.’

Draupadi then goes with the girls to the antahpura to see Sudeshna. When she comes before the queen, Virata’s wife says to her, ‘Sairandhri, I set you free this moment to go wherever you wish. The king is fearful because of what your Gandharvas have done. Lovely one, you are young and your beauty is without compare in this world. Besides, you are an object of desire for all men, and the Gandharvas are easily provoked to anger.’

The sairandhri says, ‘O gracious queen, I beg that the king allow me to live here for just another thirteen days. The Gandharvas, too, will be grateful to him for this. Then they will do what the king asks of them and take me away from here. Virata will reap great benefits if he agrees.’ ”

CANTO 25

GO-HARANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "O Rajan, the slaughter of Kichaka and his kinsmen fills people with awe. The talk in the city and provinces is that the king's cook Ballava is as brave and mighty a warrior as Kichaka but with the notable difference that Kichaka was cruel, lecherous and dishonoured the wives of other men; and that this was why that sinner was killed by the Gandharvas. In provinces all across the kingdom people say this of the hitherto invincible Kichaka, scourge of his enemies.

Meanwhile, the spies sent by Dritarashtra's son comb villages, towns and kingdoms. They fulfil their assignment and return to Nagarupa, pleased with at least one thing they have learnt.

Dhritarashtra's son, Duryodhana of the Kurus, sits in his court with Drona, Karna, Kripa, noble Bhishma, his own brothers and the great warriors the Trigartas, when his spies return to him.

Their leader says 'O Lord of men, we have searched meticulously for the Pandavas. We scoured unpeopled jungles full of deer and other animals, and thick with all kinds of trees and plants; we looked in wooded glades, but we did not discover where Pritha's sons may have gone. We searched everywhere for their footprints—in the mountains and on their unscaleable peaks, in every kingdom, in provinces and towns and in densely peopled cities. We found no sign of the sons of Pandu; bull among men, they seem to have vanished without a trace.

Although we followed those Kshatriyas like shadows we lost them suddenly and do not know where they are now. We even followed their chariots and gleaned some information. The charioteers reached Dwaravati without the sons of Pritha. Rajan, neither the Pandavas nor the chaste Krishnaa are in that Yadava city.

Since, we have not been able to discover where they went or where they are now. We must inform you that the sons of Pandu have disappeared without trace. We know what the Pandavas are like and the feats of which they are capable. Lord of men, tell us what more we should do to discover them.'

The man pauses, then continues, 'However, we do have some news which might please you. The senapati of the Matsya king, evil Kichaka who repeatedly vanquished and brutally killed the Trigartas, is dead along with all his kinsmen. They were killed by invisible Gandharvas. We were delighted to hear this news, O Kaurava.

Lord, now command us what we should do next.' "

CANTO 26

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana reflects a while on what his spies tell him and then addresses his courtiers.

He says, 'It is a difficult task but you must find the sons of Pandu, at any cost, in this the thirteenth year, which they must pass undiscovered by us. Most of their ajnatavasa is already over; only a short time of it remains. If the Pandavas, who are punctilious about keeping their word, can stay hidden for the rest of this year, they will have fulfilled their oath. They will then return like mighty elephants with rent temples, or like venomous snakes; and filled with wrath as they will be, their vengeance on the Kurus will be terrible.

Do whatever is necessary, and immediately, to find the Pandavas and make them go back into the forest, swallowing their rage like the bitterest bile. Use any means; make this kingdom peaceful and harmonious with no discontent, rebellion or enmity anywhere, and secure our borders.'

Karna adds to this, saying, 'Let better, more cunning spies be sent out immediately, Bhaarata. Let them disguise themselves well and travel throughout the land, through every populous kingdom and province. Let them make their enquires wherever learned men gather; in pleasant rural retreats; in the inner apartments of palaces; in shrines and holy tirthas; in deep mines and other secret places. The search for the disguised sons of Pandu must be exhaustive and carried out by an army of expert spies who are able, conscientious, and who keep themselves hidden and know the

Pandavas and their ways well. Let them search river banks, holy tirthas, villages and towns, asramas, in mountains and caves.'

The bestial Dussasana says to his elder brother, 'Lord of men, this time send out only those spies in whom we have complete confidence and pay them in advance. We approve of Karna's plan as well. Let these spies renew their search but more rigorously. Let others, too, go from province to province, combing every village and town, every forest and hill.

Yet, I do not believe that we will discover the Pandavas. They are surely well concealed; perhaps they have crossed the ocean. Or it may be that, despite their strength and courage, wild animals have devoured them. Possibly they have died in some rare, unforeseen circumstance. Therefore, O my brother, do not be anxious but do the best you can to achieve what you want.' "

CANTO 27

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Drona says, ‘Men like the Pandavas do not die in the ways you imagine. They are masters of all sciences and arts; they are brave, intelligent and have all their senses under control; they are humble and honest; they obediently follow Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. He is knowledgeable about neeti, artha and dharma; he loves them like a father; he is unswervingly truthful and lives strictly by the dictates of dharma.

The Pandavas are devoted to their illustrious elder brother, who is gifted with great intelligence, who never knowingly harms anyone and who, in turn, listens to his younger brothers: such men never die in the ways that you so fondly hope.

Why should Yudhishtira not be able to restore the prosperity of his noble and devoted brothers? They are only waiting for their exile to end. To my mind men like these never perish misfortunately. Therefore, without wasting time and with careful thought, do what has to be done.

Also, think hard and deeply where the Pandavas might have hidden themselves. They are spiritually disciplined, pure and heroic Kshatriyas, and it will be difficult indeed to find them. Yudhishtira is intelligent, possesses every virtue, is devoted to truth, principled, a holy man and the embodiment of immeasurable tejas. This son of Pritha can make ashes of his enemies with a mere glance.

Knowing all this, do what you think you should. Let us search for them once more by sending out holy Brahmanas and well-schooled Charanas,

and others who know about those peerless Kshatriyas.' "

CANTO 28

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Shantanu's son Bhishma, great uncle to the Kurus, who is well-versed in the Vedas, who is conscious of the appropriateness and timeliness of things, and who has a deep knowledge of the dictates of dharma applauds Acharya Drona's words. He speaks to the Bhaaratas with sage advice that would beneift them; what he says is dharma and expresses his fondness for Yudhishtira. His words are honest and commendable; impartial and revered by the wise are the words of Bhishma.

The Kuru pitama says, 'I approve of what Acharya Drona says; he knows everything that has transpired. I say this without hesitation. The Pandavas are blessed with every auspicious mark; they are strict in their observance of dharma-vratas and have studied the Vedas; they are devout and know all the sciences; they obey their elders and are always truthful. They know how to use time wisely; they have been true to the oath they have sworn; they are honourable and principled; and they live by Kshatriya Dharma. They are always obedient to the exalted Kesava; they are above reproach and have prowess beyond compare; and they are the guardians of Rishis. Misfortune can never put down those noble Kshatriyas.

Their noble qualities support the sons of Pandu who live in hiding, as they vowed to; and they will not die; of this I am convinced. Therefore, Bhaarata, let us be thoughtful about how we should deal with them. It would not be wise to use spies to discover where they are. I will tell you what I think we ought to do about the Pandavas.

Understand that what I say is not from ill-will towards you. I would never offer devious advice to anyone, for one should only ever offer honest counsel. My child Suyodhana, regardless of circumstances, the wise man who is devoted to dharma and respects the wisdom of elders should always speak the truth if he wants to acquire virtue. And so, I am bound to say that I disagree with the rest of you about where Yudhishtira spends the thirteenth year of his exile.

Child, the ruler of the city or province where Yudhishtira Dharmaraja lives will suffer no misfortune. The people of that kingdom will be charitable, generous, humble and modest. Their speech will be pleasing; they will be moderate, truthful, cheerful and healthy. Their conduct will be virtuous, and they will be skilled at what they do. The people who live where Yudhishtira is, will be without envy, malice, vanity or pride; and all will faithfully keep their svadharma.

Where king Yudhishtira lives, Vedic hymns will be chanted everywhere and yagnas performed; the last libations will always be fully poured, and gifts to Brahmanas will be generous. The clouds will bring abundant rain, the harvests will be plentiful and safety will prevail. Every grain of paddy will be full, every fruit juicy, flower garlands fragrant and the conversation of the people will be friendly.

Where Yudhishtira lives, the breezes will be fragrant, the meetings of men always congenial, and never will there be any cause for fear. Cattle will thrive in that kingdom, in robust health and numbers; milk, curds and butter will be sweet and nutritious. Every kind of grain will be wholesome, and all food will be full of taste.

Where Yudhishtira Dharmaraja dwells the five senses will be finely tuned, the lands all around beautiful and the Dvijas virtuous and steadfast in their duties.

Indeed, in the place where the Pandavas spend this thirteenth year of their exile the people will be contented, cheerful and free of sorrow and suffering. They will be devoted to the gods and guests, and worship them with equal reverence. They will be generous, tireless and assiduously practice all the virtues.

Where Yudhishtira is, the people will avoid evil and only strive for what is good. They will conduct yagnas and observe appropriate vows. They will hate lies and always work for what is auspicious and beneficial. They will only aspire to achieve what is honourable; they will be principled and,

because they observe proper vows, they will constantly acquire spiritual merit and great punya.

O child, even keen Brahmanas will not discover Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, who is a repository of intelligence, charity, tranquillity of soul, forgiveness, modesty, prosperity, fame, great vitality and compassion for all living things; how, then will your common spies find him, when he wants to remain hidden? Yudhishtira lives disguised in a place such as I have described. I need say no more about his exemplary life.

If you have any faith in me, O prince of Kurus, think carefully about what I have said and do what you think best.' ”

CANTO 29

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now Saradvata's son Kripa says, 'What Bhishma pitama says is full of good sense; it is in keeping with dharma and artha, reasonable and worthy of him. But listen to my views as well.

You owe it to yourself to put forth your agents and discover where the Pandavas are and then to do whatever benefits you. My child, anyone who is concerned about his own welfare should not disregard even an ordinary enemy. What can I say then about the sons of Pandu who are master Kshatriyas? When the time comes for the return of the Pandavas who, having lived twelve years in the forest, now hide in disguise, you should assess your own military strength and that of other kings, both those allied to you and those who are loyal to Yudhishtira. The return of the sons of Pandu is imminent.

When their term of exile ends, the illustrious and infinitely powerful sons of Pritha will come back full of vigour and with vengeance on their minds. Be clever, Duryodhana; increase your armed forces and build up your treasury so that you can make a treaty with them that is to your advantage. Estimate your power by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of your allies, and the contentment and dissatisfaction, willingness or otherwise of your own forces. And then we must either fight the enemy or negotiate a treaty of peace with Yudhishtira.

You have studied diplomacy; you are experienced in dealing with rebellion, corruption and loyalty, and you know when to reward or to punish. Attack your enemies and subdue those that are weak, and then win over your allies and their troops with persuasion. When you have augmented your army and filled your treasury, you will be able to fight any enemy at all, let alone the sons of Pandu who have few troops, horses or elephants. Follow this strategy with dharma and you will attain lasting happiness, Purushottama.' "

CANTO 30

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Susarman, powerful king of the Trigartas, who has a large force of chariots of war, who suffered many and frequent defeats at the hands of the Matsya's senapati Kichaka and his allies the Salyas, sees that the circumstances are advantageous for him and loses no time in speaking up.

Susarman lets Karna see scepticism in his eyes and says to Duryodhana, 'My kingdom has been invaded many times by the king of the Matsyas, with the mighty Kichaka his senapati. The perfidious and violent general, whose prowess was universally famed, who was cruel and sinful in all he did, has been killed by unknown Gandharvas. With Kichaka's death, Virata has been stripped of his strength and pride, and has no reason left to be courageous. Sinless friend, I think this is a good time to invade his kingdom, if it pleases you, the noble Karna and all the Kauravas.

Destiny has favoured us, so let us invade Virata's bountiful kingdom. We will take his jewels and other wealth, empty his coffers and share all his lands and villages amongst us. Let us plunder his city and seize his superb herds of cattle. If the Kaurava and Trigarta forces unite, we can have all his cattle for ourselves. Together, we can force him to beg for peace after we can destroy his armies. We will defeat him in fair fight, and then return happily to our kingdoms, and your might will surely increase by acquiring the Matsya kingdom.'

Karna says, ‘Susarman is right. The circumstances are favourable and promise us great profit. So, if it pleases you Anagha, let us marshal our forces for battle, array our divisions and set out at once. Or let Saradvata’s son Kripa, Drona and the wise Bhishma tell us how better to plan our strategy. Lord of the Earth, we must confer together and carry out our plans swiftly.

Why should we worry about the sons of Pandu? They have no wealth or power and have either disappeared for ever or are dead. Without misgivings or qualms, let us go forth and forcibly take the Matsya cattle for ourselves and the wealth of Virata’s city.’

Duryodhana agrees with Karna and says to his brother Dussasana, next in line and always obedient to him, ‘Consult the elders and gather our forces without delay. We will take the Kaurava armies and march on the Matsya kingdom. Let king Susarman precede us, with all the chariots and horses he needs, as well as the Trigarta legion of foot-soldiers.

Let Susarman attack with stealth, and we will follow closely the next day and pillage the prosperous Matsya lands. The Trigartas must enter the Matsya city without warning, surprise the cowherds and seize their fine herds; we will do the same the next day, swooping down from another direction, and together we will seize thousands of those invaluable Matsya cattle with the auspicious marks.’

The Trigarta warriors march to the south-east with their powerful foot-soldiers, full of hostile fervour, intent on taking Virata’s herds. Susarman sets out on the seventh day of the dark fortnight when the moon wanes; and, on the eighth day, the Kauravas and their troops capture thousands of Matsya cattle.”

CANTO 31

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “O great king, the Pandavas of fathomless souls and measureless might, who have entered into king Virata’s service and live disguised in his city, reach the end of their exile. After Kichaka is killed, Virata, bane of his enemies, begins to rely greatly on the sons of Kunti. O Bhaarata, it is on the very day that the thirteenth year of the Pandavas’ exile ends that Susarman seizes thousands of Virata’s cattle.

When the cattle are taken, Virata’s chief herdsman comes running into the city and its palace, where the king of the Matsyas sits on his throne surrounded by his ministers, jewel-adorned warriors all; those bulls among men, the Pandavas, are also present.

In the sabha, the cowherd bows to king Virata, enhancer of his kingdom, and says, ‘O foremost of kings, the Trigartas have defeated us in battle and taken hundreds of thousands of your cattle. You must rescue our herds as soon as you can. O, my lord, do not lose them.’

The king immediately assembles the Matsya force of chariots, elephants, horses, foot-soldiers and flag-bearers in battle array. The kings and all the noblemen put on armour that gleams in beauty and in worthiness of its heroic owners.

Virata’s beloved brother Satanika, next in line to him, puts on his coat of unyielding mail decorated with burnished gold. The second brother Madiraksha wears his gilded coat of mail, which can withstand every kind of weapon. The king himself dons his splendid kavacha, impenetrable,

adorned with a hundred suns, a hundred circles, a hundred auspicious tilakas and a hundred eyes.

The golden plating of the armour that Suryadatta puts on dazzles like the Sun and is as broad as a hundred fragrant kalahara lotuses. The mail of Virata's eldest son, Sankha, is made of inviolable polished steel and decked with a hundred golden eyes.

Thus do hundreds of godlike, mighty warriors arm and protect themselves with weapons and armour, and eagerly prepare for battle. They yoke their armoured horses to handsome white chariots. They hoist the king's glorious Matsya standard onto his radiant ratha, adorned with gold and incandescent as a heavenly body.

The other Kshatriya warriors also raise their banners of many shapes, all with gold thread woven into them, each with its own device.

When all is ready, the king of the Matsyas says to Satanika, 'Kanka, Ballava, Tantripala and Damagranthi—these men of the dazzling tejas, will surely fight for me. Give them chariots with banners; let them have comfortable, impervious mail and arm themselves with suitable weapons. They have such powerful arms, like the trunks of mighty elephants, and warriors' bearing. I do not believe that they cannot fight.'

O Rajan, Satanika immediately orders chariots for the royal sons of Pritha—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva—and the king's charioteers swiftly ready them in obedience to his command. Those Parantapas put on the fine coats of mail that the king gives them, those Kshatriyas of legendary fame in disguise. The four sons of Pritha, crushers of their enemies, best among all men, climb onto their chariots yoked to excellent horses, and their hearts sing within them. In their gold-decked rathas, the four master Kshatriyas, bulls of Kuru's race, the sons of Pandu of undiminished might, follow Virata into battle.

Awesome elephants in their prime—huge tuskers, wild juices of musth trickling from their cracked temples and making them look like dark clouds pouring rain—skilled and accomplished warriors mounted on them, amble behind the king like mountains on the move. The principal Matsya warriors who follow the king have eight thousand chariots, a thousand elephants and sixty thousand horses.

And, O Bharatarishabha, as it follows the trail of the hoof-marks of the seized cattle, Virata's army of fighting men who carry shining, powerful weapons, accompanied by majestic elephants, steeds of the purest

bloodlines and glittering chariots, is extraordinary and beautiful; it is splendid indeed.”

CANTO 32

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “The valorous Matsya legions leave the city and overtake the Trigartas in the afternoon. The two impassioned armies do fervid battle, and they roar in fury as weapons clash and spraks fly everywhere, while the Trigartas are as intent on capturing king Virata as the Matsya are on taking Susarman. Warriors riding enraged elephants manoeuvre them with spiked goads. And O Rajan, when the setting Sun is low on the horizon, the battle between the opposing infantries, cavalries, chariots and elephants is like the long ago one between the Devas and Asuras. The bloody encounter makes brave men’s hair stand on end, dyes the earth red and adds to the numbers in Yama’s kingdom.

The two armies loose arrows, hurl spears and slash each other with swords, spraying gore everywhere. A cloud of dust rises in a heavy fog, obscuring vision and even settling on birds, which fall to the ground under its weight. Arrows fly so thickly that they block out the Sun, and the sky is lit up as if by myriad swarms of fireflies. The archers spin around and move their gold-inlaid bows from one hand to the other to release their arrows in all directions. Chariots, horsemen, foot-soldiers and elephants crash against each other in the dark. Warriors hew viciously at their enemies with sword and axe and iron club; they shoot feathered shafts, cast long, slender javelins, all with utmost force. But, O King, for all their fercotiy, neither army prevails.

Severed heads roll in the dust, some with handsome noses divided, some with lips cleft, some with crimson gashes in well-tended black hair. And soon the battlefield is covered with the limbs of Kshatriya warriors, cut off and strewn everywhere like the trunks of sala trees. Beheaded faces glitter with earrings, and severed arms smeared in sandalwood paste resemble snakes as they lie on the ground, and they make the field of carnage eerily beautiful.

As chariots, horsemen, foot-soldiers and elephants fight, rivulets of blood soak the frightful dust, and even hardened soldiers faint at the horrible spectacle. Warriors abandon compassion, friendship and fairness, and fight ferally. Though blinded by the unending deluge of arrows, vultures swoop down to land on the field. Still, the armies fight on, and still neither side can vanquish the other.

Satanika has killed a hundred of the enemy; Visalaksha has claimed four hundred lives; and both these penetrate deep into the heart of the Trigarta formations. There, in close combat, the two Kshatriya heroes escalate the battle to even more savagery, as the men of both sides seize each other by the hair and tear at each other with their nails.

Turning away, Satanika and Visalaksha storm a dense cluster of Trigarta chariots. With Suryadatta and Madiraksha behind him, Virata kills five hundred of the enemy, as well as eight hundred horses and five Maharathas fighting from great chariots. Expertly manoeuvring his own chariot, at last the Matsya king encounters Susarman of the Trigartas, mounted on his golden ratha of war. Eager for this duel, the two kings roar to drown every other sound on that field and rush against each other like two bulls in a cow-pen. Truly a bull among men, Susarman meets Virata in single combat on chariots.

The enraged twain warriors shower arrows at each other even like clouds do torrents of rain. Both are masterly and, flitting here and there on the battlefield, attack each other with swords, short and bearded darts, maces and arrows from every direction. Virata pierces Susarman with ten shafts and each of his four horses with five. Irrepressible Susarman, as skilled in war, wounds Virata with fifty whetted shafts. In the swirling dust of that contention, Susarman's and Virata's men cannot distinguish one king from the other."

CANTO 33

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Dust and nightfall envelop the world, and the warriors of both sides rest awhile. When the moon emerges to dispel the gloom on the field and in their hearts, the Kshatriyas resume the battle with greater ferocity than ever, by silvery moonlight.

With his younger brother and all his chariots, Susarman charges king Virata of the Matsyas. Maces in hand, the Trigarta brothers, bulls among Kshatriyas, leap down from their rathas and mount a furious attack on the enemy chariots. Savagely, the hostile legions fall at each other with maces and swords, scimitars and battle-axes and sharply-tempered darts.

Routing the entire Matsya army, Susarman and his brother rush towards Virata. The Trigarta brothers kill Virata’s chariot horses, his charioteer and his two bodyguards; and, when he is stranded and alone, they capture him. Susarman attacks Virata brutally, much as a lust-driven man might a defenceless woman, flings the Matsya king into his own chariot and races off the field.

The Matsyas see Virata captured and flee in terror, chaotically. Yudhishtira sees that panic-stricken flight and says to Bhima, ‘The Trigartas have taken the Matsya king. O Mahabaho, rescue him from the enemy’s clutches. We have lived happily in Virata’s city and wanted for nothing. You must free him, Bhimasena, and thereby repay our debt to him.’

Bhimasena replies, ‘My brother, I will do what you say. Watch me fight the enemy with my bare hands. Stand aside with our brothers and witness

my might today. I will uproot this great tree and, using its trunk as a mace, rout the Trigartas.'

Yudhishtira sees Bhima eyeing the tree like an angry elephant and says, 'Bhima, do not be rash. Leave the tree alone. You must not use the tree as is your wont, or the people will know who you are. Instead, take some ordinary weapon—a bow, a spear, a sword or an axe—and rescue Virata without being recognised. Nakula and Sahadeva will defend your chariot, and together you can free the king of the Matsyas.'

Without more ado, Bhimasena takes up his bow and lets fly a gale of arrows, thick as a torrent of rain from a thundercloud. Red-eyed, he goes in pursuit of Susarman, roaring, 'Stop, coward!' at Susarman, and so reassuring Virata.

Susarman sees and hears Bhima, like Yama behind him, crying, 'Stop! And see what I do to you.'

The Trigarta king quickly takes up his bow and turns back with his brother. In an instant Bhima shatters all the chariots that face him. Virata watching, awesome Bhima demolishes thousands of chariots and slaughters elephants, horses, brave and skilled bowmen; this done, he pounds the foot-soldiers to death with his mace.

The irrepressible Susarman sees this fearsome onslaught and thinks, 'My brother seems to have succumbed with his vast legion. Shall my army also be annihilated?' And he draws his bowstring to his ear and shoots a rich salvo of keening arrows.

Seeing the Pandavas on their chariots come to help them, the Matsya warriors are encouraged; they urge their horses forward and grind the Trigarta army into the earth. Now Virata's son performs brave and quite amazing feats on the field. Yudhishtira kills a thousand hostile warriors, and Bhima despatches seven thousand to Yamaloka. Nakula slays seven hundred and Sahadeva three hundred fighting men.

Yudhishtira attacks Maharatha Susarman with a sizzling volley of shafts. The enraged Susarman strikes Yudhishtira with nine arrows and draws blood from the Pandava's four horses, piercing them with four barbs each.

But then Kunti's great and mercurial son Bhima kills Susarman's horses and bodyguard with bloody strokes of his mace, and drags his charioteer to the ground. Madiraksha, defender of the Susarman's chariot, sees his king without a sarathy and rides swiftly to help him, but Virata seizes

Susarman's mace, and though he is old, leaps down from the chariot to chase Madiraksha away with all the vigour and fierceness of a young man.

Bhima calls out to Susarman, who is now fleeing, 'Stop, Kshatriya! It is not dharma for a warrior to flee from battle. How could a mighty king like you stoop to lifting cattle? How can you abandon your companions and lose face before your enemies?'

Provoked by this son of Pritha's, Susarman, lord-commander of countless chariots, roars at Bhima, 'Stay!' and turns around and rushes at him. Bhima leaps down from his ratha and attacks the Trigarta king like a lion may a small deer. Titanic Bhima seizes Susarman by his hair and, raising him high, dashes him to the ground. As he lies crying in agony, Bhima kicks his head, then plants his great knee on the fallen king's chest and rains blows on him until he is senseless.

The fall of Susarman strikes panic into the Trigarta army, and his men flee in all directions, in perfect confusion.

The Pandavas have vanquished Susarman, retrieved the Matsya cattle, and saved Virata's life. They now stand before the Matsya king.

Bhimasena says, 'Wretched Susarman does not deserve to live but what can I do when the king is so forgiving!'

Picking up the dazed Susarman from the dust by his throat and tying him up, Pritha's son Vrikodara takes him in a chariot to Yudhishtira at the heart of the battlefield and displays him to his elder brother.

Seeing Susarman's plight, Yudhishtira smiles and says to Bhima, 'Let this worst of men be set free.'

Bhima says to Susarman, 'If you want to live, dog, listen carefully to me. You must declare in every court and assembly of men, "I am a slave." Only if you do this will I grant you your life. This is the law of the victor and the vanquished.'

His elder brother affectionately says to Bhima, 'If you respect my authority, liberate this evil man. He has already become king Virata's slave.' Turning to Susarman he says, 'You are a free man. Go now, and never repeat what you did today.' "

CANTO 34

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “On being spoken to thus by Yudhishtira, Susarman hangs his head in shame. He goes to Virata, salutes him wretchedly and leaves, a free man. Having routed the enemy and freeing their captive Susarman, the Pandavas spend that night on the battlefield.

Virata showers these mighty sons of Kunti with wealth and honours. He says to them, ‘From now, all my treasures are as much yours as mine. If it pleases you, continue to live happily with me. Parantapas, I will give you maidens decked with ornaments, riches in plenty and whatever else you want. I am victorious today because you four saved me from defeat. Be lords of the Matsyas beside me.’

The Pandavas join their hands in salutation and Yudhishtira says, ‘We thank you, O Rajan, but for us it is enough that your enemies have been defeated and that you are free.’

Virata says to Yudhishtira, ‘Come, we will install you as king of the Matsyas; we will bestow on you rare and coveted treasures of the earth, for you deserve everything we can give. O Kanka, foremost of Brahmanas of the Vaiyaghra family, I will give you gems and cattle, gold, rubies and pearls. I bow to you. It is because of you that I see my sons and my kingdom once more. I was attacked and my very life threatened, and you saved me.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘We are delighted at what you say. May you always be happy and compassionate to all the living. Send your messengers back to

the city to give the good news of your victory to the people.'

The Matsya king commands his messengers, 'Go to the city and proclaim my victory. Let young girls and mature courtesans, duly bedecked with ornaments, come out of the city and welcome us with music and dance.'

At the king's word, his men leave at once for the city to joyfully carry out his command. They arrive there by nightfall and, at daybreak, proclaim the king's victory all over the Matsya capital."

CANTO 35

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the king of the Matsyas leaves the city to recover his stolen herd of cattle from the Trigartas, Duryodhana and his allies invade Virata's kingdom from another direction. In this army are Bhishma and Drona, Karna and Kripa, Drona's son Aswatthama, Subala's son Sakuni and Dussasana, Vivimsati and Vikarna, Chitrasena, Durmukha and Dussaha and many other great rathikas. They quickly enter the Matsya lands, drive off king Virata's cowherds and lift the rest of his magnificent herds.

The Kauravas come with a multitude of chariots and seize sixty thousand head of cattle. Loud is the wail set up by the cowherds when they are attacked by the matchless Kuru warriors. In terror for his life, the chief among the cowherds hastily climbs into a chariot and rides to the city, crying in fear.

He drives straight to the palace, jumps off the chariot and runs inside. He sees the proud younger son of the Matsya king, prince Uttara, also called Bhuminjaya, and tells him about the seizing of the royal herd.

He says, 'The Kauravas have taken sixty thousand cows. Rise, O enhancer of the kingdom's fame, and bring back your herd. O prince, do not waste a moment, set out yourself! The king of the Matsyas has left you in the empty city, and as he went your father boasted, "My son Bhuminjaya is my equal; he is a Kshatriya and the upholder of our glory. He is a great

warrior, skilled with a bow and every other weapon, and he is brave as a lion."

O, may what the king said be true; best of all owners of cattle-herds, defeat the Kurus and their troops with your arrows and bring back our cows. Just as a mighty bull-elephant charges a herd, cut down the enemy with gold-feathered arrows from your bow.

Your bow is like a veena—its two ends the ivory rests; its string the main chord; its staff, the finger-board and the arrows its notes. Let your bow sing in the midst of the enemy. Lord, yoke your silvery horses to your chariot, hoist your standard with its golden lion; let your razor-sharp and gold-winged arrows flay the Kuru host and eclipse the very Sun.

Vanquish all the Kurus in battle, as the wielder of the thunderbolt did the Asuras of old; return victorious to the city and achieve great fame. O prince of Matsyas, you are the sole refuge of this kingdom even as the great Arjuna is the guardian of the sons of Pandu. As his brothers look to Arjuna for sanctuary so do we look to you. We, the people of this kingdom, look upon you as our protector and saviour.'

The prince's courage is boosted by what the cowherd says to him in the antahpura in the presence of the women of the harem, and he responds valiantly."

CANTO 36

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Prince Uttara says, 'I am a master archer and I would set out at once after our herd if only I had an expert charioteer. But I do not know of such a man. I am ready to leave, so look for a sarathy for me. My own sarathy was killed in the great battle that raged for twenty-eight days. The moment you find me an able charioteer, I will hoist my flag and ride forth. I will cut a swath in the enemy's force of elephants, horses and chariots; I will rout the ill-armed, feeble Kurus and bring back our cows.

Like a second Indra, and as he did the Danavas, I will strike terror into Duryodhana and Bhishma, Karna and Vikartana's son Kripa, Drona and his son, and all the others who have dared come to our kingdom. The Kurus seized our cattle because there was no one to oppose them. I could do nothing for I was not there. Today the Kurus will see my prowess and wonder if it is Arjuna himself who stands against them.'

Arjuna, who is in the antahpura, hears the prince and, well aware of the danger the moment is fraught with, quickly says to Krishnaa of the perfect form, Drupada's slender daughter born from the sacrificial fire, the sairandhri who is virtuous, chaste, truthful and entirely devoted to her husbands.

He says, 'My beautiful one, go at once and say to prince Uttara, "Brihannala was once Arjuna's own charioteer. He has seen many battles; he is a master sarathy and can drive your chariot." '

Panchali cannot bear to hear Arjuna saying this about himself, over and over, in the midst of the women. Shyly the princess of Panchala steps forward and softly she says to the prince, ‘This handsome youth Brihannala, who looks like a mighty elephant, used to be noble Arjuna’s charioteer. He was that illustrious Kshatriya’s disciple and as good an archer as any Kshatriya in the world. I knew him when I lived with the Pandavas. It is he who held the reins of Arjuna’s fine steeds when Agni consumed the Khandava vana. It was with him as his sarathy that Partha slew all the fell creatures in Khandavaprastha. In fact, there is no charioteer equal to Brihannala.’

Uttara says, ‘Sairandhri, you know this young eunuch and what he is, or not, capable of. However, I cannot myself beg Brihannala to drive my chariot.’

Draupadi says, ‘O Kshatriya, Brihannala will surely obey your younger sister, she of the graceful hips. If he agrees to be your sarathy, you will certainly defeat the Kurus and rescue your herd.’

Uttara is persuaded by Draupadi and says to his sister, ‘Go yourself, blemishless beauty, and fetch Brihannala to me,’ and at her brother’s request, she hurries to the dance-hall where the mighty-armed son of Pandu lives in disguise.”

CANTO 37

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Wearing a gold necklace, her waist slender as a wasp's, she who has the splendour of Devi Lakshmi, her slim and graceful form decked in peacock-feathers, her hips girdled by strings of pearls, she of the curled eyelashes, that enchanting princess of the Matsyas flies to the dance-hall like a streak of lightning to a dark cloud. Like a she-elephant her mate, Virata's faultless daughter seeks out the son of Pritha. Like a precious gem, the embodiment of Indra's wealth, her loveliness enhanced by her great, shining eyes, the adored and celebrated princess greets Arjuna.

He says to this golden-skinned girl of the closely set thighs, 'What brings you here, O devi wearing a golden necklace? Why have you come in such haste, gazelle-eyed one? Why the solemn face, lovely child? Tell me.'

Thus Arjuna demands to know why she, his pupil at dancing, has come to him in such distress.

Accompanied by her sakhis, the princess approaches that bull among men and says to him, 'The Kurus are driving away our cows, Brihannala, and my brother wants to ride after them and rescue our herd. His charioteer was killed in battle recently, and there is no one to drive my brother's chariot.

The sairandhri told my brother of your skill with horses and even said that you were Arjuna's favourite sarathy. She says it was with you in his

chariot that the mighty Arjuna single-handedly subjugated the Earth. Brihannala, I beg you, drive my brother's horses!

The Kurus must already have taken our cattle far away. I will die if you refuse this favour I ask of you with affection.'

Implored by his friend and disciple of the graceful hips, Arjuna, scourge of his foes, accedes and goes to the prince. As he strides along like an elephant in musth with rent temples, the young princess of the large eyes follows the Kshatriya with quick steps, like a mother elephant running behind her young one.

The prince sees him and says, 'With you as his charioteer, Kuntiputra Dhananjaya pleased Agni in the Khandava vana, why, he conquered the whole world! The Sairandhri, who knows the Pandavas, has spoken of you to me. So Brihannala, take the reins of my horses as you did Arjuna's, for I am eager to fight the Kurus and rescue my cattle. You were Arjuna's favourite sarathy and it was with you that that Pandavarishabha conquered the Earth.'

Brihannala replies, 'What qualifies me to be your charioteer on the field of battle? Yes, I can entertain you with song, dance and music, but what skills do I have to drive your chariot?'

Prince Uttara holds out a coat of armour and says, 'O Brihannala, you may be a singer and a dancer, but for now, don this kavacha, mount my chariot and take the reins of my superb horses.'

Now Arjuna pretends to fumble and be clumsy as he does what the prince asks. He puts on the armour back to front much to the amusement of the wide-eyed women, who burst out laughing. Impatiently prince Uttara himself fastens the rich coat of mail to Brihannala's rippling, powerful body. Then donning his own armour that shines like the Sun, and hoisting his lion-emblazoned standard, the prince hands the reins of his yoked and eager horses to Brihannala. With Brihannala at his chariot-head, the splendid young Kshatriya arms himself with many fine bows and beautiful quivers of arrows, and goes forth to face the Kurus.

Princess Uttaraa and her sakhis say to their friend and teacher, 'Brihannala, when you have defeated the Kurus led by Bhishma and Drona, bring back some special and fine silks for us to make clothes for our dolls.'

Brihannala smiles at their request and says in a voice deep as thunder, 'If prince Uttara can vanquish those mighty warriors in battle, I will certainly bring back some exquisite fabric.'

Heroic Arjuna flicks his reins expertly and urges his horses towards the Kuru army, its countless banners shimmering above a sea of chariots. But before they leave, the older women, young girls and Brahmanas of stern vows see Uttara on his chariot, his leonine standard hoisted high and Brihannala for his sarathy. They walk around the chariot in pradakshina and call down blessings upon them, saying, ‘Let victory like Arjuna had when, treading like a bull, he burnt Khandava vana be yours, O Brihannala, when prince Uttara and you meet the Kurus today.’ ”

CANTO 38

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "As they leave the city, Virata's brave son says to his charioteer, 'Ride swiftly to where the Kurus are. They have come certain of victory, but I will crush them, rescue my herds and return to the city.'

Brihannala urges his horses forward; and with their reins in his hands, the wind-swift steeds, caparisoned in chains of gold, seem to fly through the air. They have not gone far when Dhananjaya and the Matsya prince see the awesome Kuru army arrayed in battle formation near the cemetery; it looks like an ocean or a forest of countless trees, its warriors silhouetted against the horizon.

O Kurusthama, the cloud of dust that army raises obscures everything around it. Virata's son sees the mighty force of elephants, horses and chariots led by Karna and Duryodhana, Kripa and Bhishma, the great Drona and his son Aswatthama, and he begins to tremble with fear and the hair on his body stands on end.

He whispers to Arjuna, 'I dare not fight the Kurus. Look how the hair on my body stands on end. I cannot fight this Kuru host, ah, with its fierce and heroic warriors that even the Devas would find difficult to vanquish. I could never hope to penetrate this great Bhaarata army of bowmen, horses and elephants, chariots, foot-soldiers and flag-bearers.

My mind trembles at the very sight of the enemy, with Drona and Bhishma, Kripa and Karna, Vivimsati, Aswatthama and Vikarna,

Saumadatti and Bahlika, Maharatha Duryodhana and countless other splendid archers amidst their heroic legions. O! I feel faint with fear at the sight of the Kurus in battle array.'

The weak-minded and callow Uttara begins to whimper like a child before the battle-ready Arjuna, his charioteer. He says, 'My father took our whole army to meet the Trigartas, leaving me alone in the city. There are no troops to fight for me, and I am alone, a mere boy with little experience of battle. I cannot face these matchless warriors. Brihannala, stop the chariot!'

Brihannala says, 'Why do you add to the joy of your enemies by showing them your fear? You have not yet engaged the enemy. It was you who ordered me to bring you to the Kauravas, and I will take you where their flags fly. I will bear you, Kshatriya of the mighty arms, into the very midst of the hostile Kurus, who will fight for mere cattle like pariah kites over meat, though I would face them even if I thought they fought for the sovereignty of the Earth.

As we set out, you boasted of your manliness before the women of the harem; now why do you shy away from this fight? If you return without the cattle, all men and even women will ridicule you for ever.

As for myself, having been praised so highly by the sairandhri for my skills as a charioteer, I cannot go back to the city without rescuing the livestock. It is the sairandhri's praises and your asking me that made me come. So why should I not fight the Kurus? Control your fear, mighty prince.'

Uttara says, 'Let the Kurus rob the Matsyas of all their wealth; let men and women laugh at me, Brihannala; let my cattle die; let the city be a desert; let me stand stripped of honour before my father; but I shall not go into battle against these dreadful Kurus.'

And the terrified prince, who wears gleaming earrings, jumps down from his chariot, flings down his bow and arrows and, abandoning honour and pride, takes to his heels.

Brihannala cries, 'Fleeing a battle is not Kshatriya dharma. Even death while fighting is better.'

Arjuna climbs down from the glorious chariot and runs after the fleeing prince, his long braided hair and red clothes streaming behind him. Some Kuru soldiers, who are unaware that this is Arjuna himself, laugh at the sight of his plait flapping in the air as he goes.

The greater Kurus see him and say among themselves. 'Who is this person, disguised like fire hidden in ashes? He is part man and part woman; but even in this form, he resembles Arjuna. He has the same head and neck, the same mace-like arms, the same tigerish stride. He can be none other than Dhananjaya. As Indra is among the Devas, is Dhananjaya among men. Who in this world other than Arjuna would dare ride against us by himself?'

'Virata left only one son of his in the empty city. Childish bravado and not heroism brought him here. This must be Uttara who has come from the city; he must have made Pritha's son Arjuna, who is in disguise, his charioteer.

But seeing us, he runs in panic and beyond doubt Arjuna pursues him to bring him back.'

And thus, O Bhaarata, the Kauravas speculate on seeing the disguised son of Pandu, but they cannot be certain that the strange figure is indeed Arjuna.

Meanwhile, Brihannala runs after the fleeing Uttara, and within a hundred paces seizes him by his hair. Virata's son wails loudly, as if from some great affliction. He cries, 'Listen to me, O Brihannala of the handsome waist; turn the chariot around! He who chooses to live will prosper. I will give you a hundred coins of pure gold, eight brilliant gemstones of great clarity and chrysoberyls, cat's-eyes, set in gold, a chariot with a golden flagstaff and drawn by the finest horses, and also ten royal elephants. I beg you, release me, Brihannala.'

In reply, Arjuna, tiger among men, laughingly drags the sobbing, incoherent Uttara back to the chariot.

The son of Pritha says to the prince who is almost fainting from fear, 'If, O Parantapa, you are afraid to fight the enemy, take the reins of your chariot-horses and I will fight them. With the might of my arms you will easily penetrate the formidable array of chariots in which the Kuru heroes ride.

Fear not, O punisher of your enemies, you are a Kshatriya and the bravest of princes. Why do you yield to fear when faced with the enemy, Purushavyaghra? I will break open this seemingly impenetrable formation of chariots, vanquish the Kurus and recover the herds. Purushottama, you be my charioteer; I will fight the Kurus.'

Speaking thus to Virata's son Uttara, the unconquered Bibhatsu calms him down. Arjuna, greatest of all warriors, soothes and exhorts the timid, collapsing prince and helps him back onto his chariot."

CANTO 39

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The great Kuru warriors led by Bhishma and Drona watch that bull among men in a eunuch's guise persuade Uttara back onto the chariot; they watch the chariot drive into the forest and to the sami tree in it, and growing ever more certain that this eunuch is Arjuna, their skins crawl with fear.

Bharadvaja's son Drona, first among Acharyas of weaponry, sees the distraught Kurus; he also notices extraordinary omens all around them.

He says, 'Hot and wild gusts of wind raise palls of gravel and blow them about. The sky is overcast with an ashen gloom; dark clouds are all dry; our weapons magically unsheathe themselves; and jackals howl hideously in fear of the fires that spring up with no apparent cause and proliferate. Our horses weep and our banners wave as if from their own volition.

We must be vigilant of the danger that these fell omens portend. Arm yourselves and prepare the troops for battle. Expect a terrible slaughter and guard the cattle well.

This mighty bowman, this best of all warriors, this Kshatriya who comes disguised as a eunuch is Pritha's son Arjuna. Of this there is no doubt.'

Then to Bhishma the Acharya says, 'O Gangeya, this man is he who has been named after a tree; he is the son of the enemy of the mountains and

has on his banner the form of the ravager of the lord of Lanka's gardens. He will defeat us and take back the Matsya herd.

This slayer of foes is Pritha's inexorable Savyasachi. He does not shy away from battle even against the gods and demons combined. Having endured hardships in the forest he comes in anger. In war, he is like his sire and teacher Indra. O Kauravas, I do not see anyone here who can withstand him. This son of Kunti held up the Lord Mahadeva himself, who came as a hunter to test him in battle, on the slopes of Himavat.'

Stung to hear this praise for Arjuna, Karna says, 'You always demean us by speaking of Phalguna's great qualities. But Arjuna does not measure up to even a sixteenth part of Duryodhana or me.'

And Duryodhana says, 'Karna, if this eunuch is indeed Arjuna, I will have achieved my purpose. For, if they are discovered during this thirteenth year, the Pandavas must go into exile for another twelve years. And if this eunuch is someone else, I will soon bring him down with my arrows.'

Parantapa, hearing what Dhritarashtra's son says, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Aswatthama, his son, applaud his manliness."

CANTO 40

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "By the time they reach the sami tree, Arjuna realises just how young and inexperienced Virata's son is. He says to the prince, 'Do as I say, Uttara. Climb this sami and bring down the stash of weapons that you will find in it. Your weapons will not compass the span of my arms or withstand my strength when I attack horses and elephants. O Bhuminjaya, on that leafy branch, you will find a bundle secured, and in it are the bows and arrows, the banners and armour of the sons of Pandu—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the heroic twins.

In it, also, is that mighty bow, Arjuna's Gandiva equal to thousands of other bows and which by itself extends kingdoms. It is heavy as a palmyra tree and stands the utmost strain. It is the greatest of all weapons and will stop our enemy. It is radiant, smooth and broad, unblemished and inlaid with gold; it is truly a thing of beauty and without equal in prowess. The other bows in the bundle belong to Yudhishtira, Bhima and the twins, and are just as splendid and strong.' "

CANTO 41

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Uttara says, 'We have heard that there is a corpse tied high in this tree. Being a prince by birth, how can I touch it? It will pollute me for I am a Kshatriya, the son of a great king and I observe daily vratas and chant sacred mantras. Why do you want to make me an unclean bearer of corpses, by forcing me to handle a rotten body, Brihannala?'

Brihannala says, 'You will not be tainted, great Kshatriya; have no fear, there is no corpse in the tree, but only weapons. Why would I make an heir to the Matsya throne do such a vile thing?'

Hearing this, the prince gets down from the chariot and reluctantly climbs the sami tree.

Waiting in the chariot, Arjuna says to him, 'Fetch the bows down quickly, prince, our time is short.'

When the prince cuts away their wrappings and removes the ropes that bind the bundle, he sees the Gandiva and four other shimmering bows. Even as they are being uncovered, the bows radiate splendour like the Sun and blaze like the planets at their birth. At the sight of the awesome weapons like hissing serpents, prince Uttara is afraid. His hands trembling to touch those glorious bows, Virata's son speaks to Arjuna and his voice is also unsteady."

CANTO 42

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Uttara breathes, 'To which illustrious warrior does this magnificent weapon belong, which has a hundred golden studs and shines blindingly at both its ends? Whose is this that has such wide and smooth sides and such an excellent grip, this bow that is embossed with golden elephants that glisten so brightly? And whose is this bow decorated with sixty, evenly-spaced golden dragonflies, indragopakas? Whose is this that has on it three golden suns that blaze with brilliance? And whose is this beautiful bow inlaid with gold and gemstones, and with figures of insects of gold and priceless jewels?

Whose are these thousand gold-tipped, winged arrows in their golden quivers? Who owns these great shafts, so thick and flighted with vulture feathers, stone-sharpened, yellowish in hue, with razor-sharp points made of tempered iron? Whose is this quiver of fur with images of five tigers that holds ten arrows including some boar-eared ones? Whom do these seven hundred arrows belong to, that are long and thick, with ends like the crescent moon and which can surely drink the blood of enemies? Whose are these gold-feathered arrows whetted on stone, winged with parrot-green feathers and their shafts made of tempered steel?

Whose is this remarkable sword, invincible and surely terrible to enemies, with a frog engraved on it and pointed like a frog's head? Whose is this large sword with its exquisite blade embossed with gold and its hilt tinkling tiny golden bells and encased in tiger-skin? And whose is this

beautiful one with a blade polished like a mirror and a golden haft? Whose is this surely unbreakable and irresistible one made in the Nishada country with its blade gleaming in a leather scabbard? And whose is this wonderful, long, cloud-hued sword chased in gold and sheathed in goat-skin? Who owns this heavy, tempered sword, longer than thirty fingers, that shines from many battles and is kept in a case of fiery gold? Whose is this beautiful grey sword covered with golden studs that will cleanly divide an enemy's body with a single stroke, whose touch is as fatal as the bite of a king cobra, and which is inexorable and invokes terror in any adversary?

Answer me, Brihannala; tell me truly. I am awestruck at the sight of these wondrous weapons.' "

CANTO 43

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Brihannala says, 'The first that you asked about is Arjuna's celebrated bow, called Gandiva, which devastates hostile armies. It is embellished with gold; it is the best and the biggest of all weapons, this bow of Arjuna's. It alone is equal to a hundred thousand others and can conquer kingdoms. It is with this bow that Partha defeated all the world's kings and even the Devas in battle. It is worshipped by the Devas, Danavas and Gandharvas; it is great and smooth, many-hued and flawless. It first belonged to Siva for a thousand years; then Prajapati owned it for five hundred and three. Later, Sakra had it for eighty-five years, then Soma for five hundred and Varuna for a hundred years. Now it is Partha Swetavahana's and it has been his for sixty-five years. This divine bow of dazzling tejas is the best of all bows. Partha was given this bow by Varuna.

The golden-hafted bow of the beautiful sides is Bhima's, with which that son of Pritha, chastiser of his foes, conquered all the eastern kingdoms. The exquisitely shaped bow adorned with figures of indragopakas belongs, O Virataputra, to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. This one here, sparkling in splendour with golden suns on it, and radiating blinding light all round, belongs to Nakula. And this bow inlaid with golden figures of insects and set with gemstones is Madri's son Sahadeva's.

O Uttara, these feathered arrows, numbering one thousand, sharp as razors and deadly as venom, belong to Arjuna. When loosed in battle, these blaze more brilliantly still and become inexhaustible. The long, thick,

crescent-headed shafts, keen and capable of thinning enemy ranks, belong to Bhima. This quiver with five tigers on it, full of yellowish stone-sharpened arrows with golden wings, belongs to Nakula. And this is the quiver of Madri's son Sahadeva of the lofty intellect, with which he conquered all the western realms; his vari-coloured arrows, bright as the Sun, can raze enemies by the thousands. These short, thick, finely-honed shafts with long feathers, golden heads and three knots, belong to king Yudhishtira.

The long-bladed sword, with a frog carved on it and its tip like a frog's head belongs to Arjuna. Sheathed in tiger-skin, this other huge, wonderful and fearsome sword, the longest of all, belongs to Bhimasena. The exquisite sword with a golden hilt and an exquisitely decorated scabbard belongs to the wise Dharmaraja. This next versatile sword with its strong flexible blade and sheath of goat-skin belongs to Nakula. And this long one, encased in goat-leather and irresistible, is Sahadeva's.' "

CANTO 44

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Uttara says, 'Ah, these weapons adorned with gold and belonging to the heroic, light-handed and exalted Partha are handsome indeed. But where are Arjuna and Yudhishtira of the Kurus, and Nakula, Sahadeva and Bhimasena, the sons of Pandu? The noble Pandavas, who can vanquish any foe, have not been heard of since they lost their kingdom at dice. And where is Draupadi, princess of Panchala, famed as a jewel among women, who followed the Pandavas into the forest after their defeat at dice?'

Arjuna says, 'I am Arjuna, also called Partha. Your father's courtier is Yudhishtira, and your father's cook Ballava is Bhimasena; Virata's chief equerry is Nakula, and Sahadeva is his cowherd. The sairandhri is Draupadi, for whose sake the Kichakas were killed.'

His eyes growing ever wider, Uttara whispers, 'I will believe you if you can tell me the ten names of Arjuna, which I already know.'

Arjuna says, 'I will name you my ten names, son of Virata; compare them with what you know. Listen carefully. My names are are Arjuna, Phalguna, Jishnu, Kiriti, Swetavahana, Bibhatsu, Vijaya, Krishna, Savyasachi and Dhananjaya.'

Uttara says, 'Tell me why you are called Vijaya and why Swetavahana. Why are you named Kiriti and Savyasachi? Why are you Arjuna, Phalguna and Jishnu? And why Krishna, Bibhatsu and Dhananjaya? I know the

meanings of all the names of that peerless Kshatriya and I will believe what you say if you do, as well.'

Arjuna says, 'They call me Dhananjaya because I won great wealth during my conquest of all the kingdoms, when I took their treasures.

They call me Vijaya because I am always victorious in battle, even against invincible kings.

I am called Swetavahana because white horses in golden armour draw my chariot when I go into battle.

They call me Phalguna because I was born on Himavat Mountain when the nakshatra Uttara Phalguni was rising.

I am named Kiriti because a crown that dazzles like the Sun was placed on my head by Indra during my battle against the Danavas of Devaloka.

I am known as Bibhatsu among gods and men as I have never done anything dishonourable on the battlefield.

Since I am perfectly ambidextrous when I draw the Gandiva's bowstring I am known as Savyasachi.

They call me Arjuna because my complexion is rare and like that of the arjuna tree, and because my actions are always pure.

I am known among men and celestials as Jishnu because I am irrepressible, a tamer of my enemies, and son of the slayer of Paka.

And my tenth name Krishna was given me by my father out of his affection for a dark-skinned boy of great purity.'

The enthralled son of Virata stands very erect before Arjuna, and folding his hands in reverence, formally introduces himself. 'My name is Bhuminjaya and I am also called Uttara,' he says. 'It is my greatest good fortunte that I meet you, O mighty Arjuna. Welcome, Dhananjaya! You of the flashing red eyes and the arms that are each like an elephant's trunk, I beg you, forgive what I said to you in my ignorance. Knowing your unmatched achievements, all my fears are dispelled. Ah, great indeed is my admiration for you.' "

CANTO 45

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Uttara says, 'O Kshatriya, which enemy division do wish to attack first, mounted on this chariot, with me for your sarathy? Command me and I will drive you there.'

Arjuna says, 'I am pleased with you, O tiger among men. Do not be afraid; I will put your enemies to rout in battle, great warrior. Watch my feats of terror against our foes. Quickly tie my twin quivers to your ratha and draw the gold-adorned sword with the polished blade from its sheath.'

In a trice, Uttara shins down the tree with Arjuna's weapons. Arjuna says to him, 'Yes, I will fight the Kurus and recover your herd. Under my protection the canopy of this chariot will be your fortress, its many sections the streets and buildings of that fort, my arms its ramparts and gateway, this bow and these quivers its impregnable defences. And this single, grand banner, will it not be equal to all the standards of your city? My bowstring is the great catapult of war which will loose missiles at the invaders. My anger will make this a most formidable fortress. And the din of our chariot-wheels, will it not sound like drumrolls of thunder? Riding this chariot, I, with my Gandiva, render it invincible, O son of Virata. So banish your fear.'

Uttara says, 'I am no longer afraid. I know that, even like Indra or Kesava, you never waver in battle. Yet, I am bewildered by the guise and form in which I find you. I wonder what circumstance could have deprived one of such a powerful body with every auspicious mark of his manhood.

Indeed, to me you seem to be Mahadeva, or Indra or the lord of the Gandharvas. But, O Arjuna, in the guise of a eunuch?'

Arjuna says, 'The truth is that I am keeping this vow for one year at the behest of my elder brother. Mighty-armed, I am no eunuch but only became one at another's curse, to serve a higher purpose and gain spiritual punya. Know, O prince, that I have now fulfilled my vow and am fully a man again.'

Uttara says, 'You have done me a great service today, for I now know that my suspicions were not unfounded. Such a one as you, O Manavottama, could not be a eunuch. I now have an ally with whom I can fight the Devas themselves. My fears are gone. What shall I do? Command me!

I was taught the art of chariotry by an expert sarathy and, Purushavyaghra, expertly will I drive this chariot so it will scythe through the massed formations of the enemy. Bull among men, I am as skilful as Vasudeva's charioteer Daruka or Sakra's Matali. The first horse, yoked on the right, whose hooves are barely visible when he gallops, is like Krishna's Sugriva; the handsome one on the left, the best of steeds, is as swift as Meghapushpa. This beautiful creature at the rear left is as fast as Shaibya and even stronger. And the one yoked at the rear right is fleeter and more powerful than Balahaka.

This chariot is worthy of bearing an archer like you into battle, and you are an equally worthy warrior to ride in it. This is my opinion.'

Arjuna, of the measureless tejas, takes the bracelets off his arms and takes up archer's gloves embroidered with gold thread. He ties his wavy, black hair with a piece of white cloth. Then, sitting on that superb chariot, the mighty-armed Kshatriya folds his hands and faces the east to purify his body; he meditates to summon all his astras.

And all the divine weapons come to him and speak to the son of Pritha. 'We are here, O Illustrious. Indraputra, we are yours to command.'

Partha bows to them and receives them, saying, 'Stay with me in my mind,' and in a blur he strings his bow, the Gandiva, which no other man can bend; and he thrums on it, echoingly. That sound reverberates like two mighty bulls colliding. The twang that fills the air is dreadful; violent are the winds that rise and blow. Meteors rain down in torrents and a deep gloom falls everywhere. Birds fly about in alarm and great trees tremble.

From the thunderous sound the Kurus know that it is Arjuna’s hands that drew the string of that best of bows.

Uttara says, ‘Pandavottama, you are alone, and many are these warriors on their chariots. How will you vanquish all these Maharathas? O Kaunteya, you have no one to help you, while the Kurus are many. But I will be by your side, even if paralysed with fear.’

Laughing, Partha says to Uttara, ‘Do not be afraid, Kshatriya. Who did I have to help me when I fought the Gandharvas during the ghoshayatra? What ally did I have in the battle against the Devas and Danavas in Khandava? Who fought by my side when I fought for the Devas against the Nivatakavachas and the Paulomas? Child, who did I have beside me in battle against innumerable kings at the swayamvara of the princess of Panchala?

I was trained in the use of weapons by Acharya Drona, by Sakra and Vaisravana, by Yama and Varuna, by Agni, by Acharya Kripa, by Krishna of Madhu’s clan and by Siva who wields the Pinaka. Why would I not fight these who stand before us? Drive my chariot with all speed, and calm your fearful heart.’ ”

CANTO 46

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisamayana continued, “Gathering his weapons, and making Uttara his sarathy, the son of Pandu circles the sami tree in pradakshina and sets out. That Maharatha takes down the lion flag of the Matsya prince and leaves it on the ground beside the sami tree. And he hoists his own golden ensign emblazoned with the figure of a lion-tailed vanara, the emblem of Hanuman, as well as other fierce and warlike beings.

This standard is Visvakarma’s divine creation. The moment that Arjuna thinks of Agni Deva, the superhuman creatures take their places on the Pandava’s banner. A flagstaff of celestial craft, which holds this wondrous flag, with quivers attached and adorned with gold, falls from the heavens softly onto the chariot. Seeing the staff and its banner on his ratha, Arjuna walks around both in pradakshina.

Flying the monkey-standard, eases his hands into the lizard-skin gloves, takes up his bow and arrows and rides north towards the enemy. That Parantapa blows hard on his conch, a deafening blast that makes men’s hair stand on end. The swift horses fall to their knees. Uttara too, sits down in sheer fright. The son of Kunti takes up the reins himself, gently lifts up the horses and guides them back into their proper positions.

He embraces Uttara, saying, ‘Have no fear, O best of princes; you are a Kshatriya, a chastiser of your foes. Why do you, Purushavyaghra, lose courage in the face of the enemy? You must often have heard the blare of conches, the blast of trumpets and the roar of elephants from armies arrayed

for battle. Why does the sound of this conch terrify and weaken you as if you were just an ordinary youth?'

Uttara says, 'I have heard the bass of many a conch, the sounding of many a horn and the trumpeting of many an elephant on the battlefield, but never have I heard the sound of such a conch before. Nor have I ever seen a banner like this unworldly one or heard the twang of such a bow. The blast of your conch, the sound of your bow and the raucous cries of the macabre creatures on your banner affright me, and I tremble, for my heart clenches in shock. This flag seems to cover the whole sky, hiding everything above, and the sound of the Gandiva's bowstring has deafened and numbed me.'

Arjuna says, 'Stand firm, press your feet down hard on the floor of the chariot and hold the bridle tight. I am going to blow the conch again.'

Arjuna sounds his conch, the reverberant Devadatta, once more, this sea-shell that fills his enemies with grief and his friends with joy. And the sound is so loud that it seems to split mountains and go echoing through the deepest caves; and it reaches the four corners of the Earth. Uttara falls into his seat again and clings to it. The Earth quakes with the blare of the Devadatta, the rumble of the chariot-wheels and the twanging of the Gandiva. Seeing that Uttara is still afraid, Dhananjaya reassures him once more.

Meanwhile, Drona says, 'The clamour of the chariot, the way the clouds fill the sky and the trembling of the Earth tell me that this warrior can only be Savyasachi. Our weapons have turned dull, our horses droop and our fires do not burn despite being fed. Our horses whinny dreadfully at the Sun, and crows perch on our banners: dire omens all.

The vultures and kites to our right foretell some great danger. Notice the jackal that howls as it skitters through our ranks. Look! It escapes unscathed. This, too, portends some imminent calamity. All of you have your hair standing on end, warning of a great slaughter of Kshatriyas in battle.

All bright things have paled, while animals and birds look fierce; dark omens foretelling the slaying of Kshatriyas abound and warn of havoc coming upon us. O Duryodhana, your forces seem to be overwhelmed by fear at these meteors flaring down from above; your horses and elephants seem to weep; more and more vultures and kites circle overhead, as if come to a feast of corpses that will soon litter the ground.

You will rue this day when you see your army attacked by Partha’s arrows. Why, our forces seem to be defeated already, no man among them eager to fight. The faces of our warriors are pale, and they seem stupefied. We should send the cattle ahead and remain here, ready for battle.’ ”

CANTO 47

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, on that field, Duryodhana speaks to his grandsire Bhishma, to that tiger among warriors Drona, and to that Maharatha Kripa. He says, 'Both Karna and I have said this to our Acharyas and I will say it again, for it seems that once is not enough. The Pandavas vowed that, if they lost at dice, they would live in the open for twelve years in the forest, and then for one more year hidden from us. That thirteenth year is not over yet. Arjuna, who should still be hidden, is before us; and if he appears before their ajnatavasa ends, the Pandavas must spend another twelve years in the wilderness.

Whether they have lost count of time in their eagerness for a kingdom or whether we are mistaken is for Pitama Bhishma to say.

Uncertainty always stalks the path of anyone who has a goal in mind. Decisions may not always have the desired outcome. Even philosophers are puzzled when judging their own actions. As for us, we have come here to fight the Matsyas and seize their herds that they keep in the north. If, meanwhile, Arjuna comes to us, we are not to blame. We have come here as allies of the Trigartas to fight against the Matsyas, for Susarman and his people have been attacked many times by the Matsyas. We have come to help our allies the Trigartas, who are full of fear.

It was agreed between us that on the afternoon of the seventh day of the moon they should seize the Matsyas' most valuable herd in the east, and

that at sunrise of the eighth day we would seize the rest of the Matsya herds, while king Virata pursues Susarman's army.

It may be that the Trigartas now herd the Matsya cattle this way; or, having been defeated, they come to us to negotiate with Virata. Else, possibly, the Matsya army has driven away the Trigartas, and Virata comes with his fierce legions to attack us at night. It may be that one powerful warrior among them advances to vanquish us, or perhaps it is the king himself.

Be it Virata or Arjuna, we must fight, for we are sworn to battle. Why do all these superb rathikas—Bhishma, Drona and Kripa, Vikarna and Drona's son—sit panic-stricken in their chariots?

There is nothing for it but to fight. So stand firm and bold even if we meet Indra or Yama himself in our battle for the Matsya herds. Who can now return safely to Hastinapura? The enemy's arrows flying after them, how will the foot-soldiers escape on foot, when it is doubtful whether our horsemen and Maharathas can ride to safety?'

Hearing Duryodhana, Karna says, 'Ignore the Acharya and prepare for battle. He knows what the Pandavas wish to do and strikes terror into our hearts, for he bears them love. I see that his affection for Arjuna is great indeed, and, seeing him come alone, Drona praises him. Make sure that our troops do not break ranks. We have only heard the neighing of horses and a conch being blown, and instantly all is fear and confusion. Our soldiers travelled far from home to this thick forest in the summer heat; let them not fall into disarray and suffer defeat at the enemy's hands.

The Pandavas have always been Acharya Drona's favourites. They have cleverly planted the Acharya amongst us, and he betrays himself by what he says. Who would extol an enemy merely upon hearing the whinnying of his horses? Horses will neigh whether standing still, walking or galloping; the wind blows; Indra showers rain; it thunders frequently: what has Arjuna to do with these? Why are these attributed to him? All this foolish talk is only because Drona wants to help Arjuna, or perhaps because of his anger and hatred towards us.

Brahmanas are wise, pure-hearted and compassionate. However, they should never be consulted in a military crisis. The best place for learned men who make speeches is in grand palaces, their courts and pleasure gardens. They say many wonderful things in a royal sabha, and it is there they had best stay.

They are best consulted about the proper cleaning and placing of sacrificial utensils. It is in seeing others' shortcomings, in studying people's characters, in the science of horses, elephants and chariots, in treating the diseases of livestock—donkeys, camels, goats, sheep and cattle, in planning buildings and arches and in pointing out the imperfections in food and drink that learned Brahmanas come into their own.

Ignore the learned Drona who extols the heroism of Arjuna, and prepare for battle. Secure the cattle in a safe place; array the troops in battle-order and position guards in the proper places so that we can face and kill the enemy, whoever he might be.' "

CANTO 48

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says, 'I see in all these great men alarm, indecision and an unwillingness to fight. Be it Virata or Arjuna, I will contain the one who comes even as the shore does the swollen sea. Arrows will stream like snakes through the air from my swift hands and find their mark. My golden-winged arrows will shroud Partha as locusts do a tree. Stretched to loose them, my bowstring will slap against my leathern gloves like the booming of two great drums.

These past thirteen years, Arjuna has led the life of an ascetic and his skills will have turned mild. Kunti's son will have acquired the saintly qualities of a Brahmana and will meekly allow thousands of my arrows to pierce him. This mighty archer is, indeed, celebrated across the three Lokas, but I am in no way inferior to Arjuna Manavottama. My golden arrows, flighted with vulture-feathers, will fill the air and make the firmament seem to swarm with fireflies. I will kill Arjuna in battle today and, at last, repay my long-standing debt to Dhritarashtra's son.

What man exists, even amongst the Devas and Asuras, who can resist my unerring arrows? My light and lethal shafts, for they are both hollow and of perfect balance, will indeed swarm Partha like fireflies. He may be as strong as Indra's thunderbolt and have the same limitless urjas as the king of the Devas, but I will subdue him like branding an elephant. He may be a Maharatha and the best of all wielders of weapons, but I will snatch the hapless Partha from his ratha as Garuda would a snake in his talons. He is

the weapon-fed Pandava fire that burns up enemies, but I am the thundercloud that lashes down rain to extinguish him; my army of chariots is the thunder, and the speed of my horses, the wind.

My arrows will pierce Arjuna like poisonous snakes, like serpents burrowing through an anthill. My tempered shafts with golden wings, straight and true, and blistering with energy, will draw blood from his body today, and you will see Kunti's son decked in them like a hill covered by crimson karnikara flowers.

My weapons were given me by Jamadagni's son Parasurama Bhargava, and with them I am confident to battle even the Devas. My spear will strike the ape on his flag and it will fall to the ground with terrible cries. The sky will be filled by the howls of the other un-human creatures on his banner and they will fly in all directions.

Today I will pluck out the thorn that has long been in Duryodhana's heart by casting Arjuna down from his chariot. Today the Kauravas will see the great Partha, his chariot shattered, his horses dead, his valour gone, sighing like a snake. Let the Kauravas take the cattle and leave if they wish, or they can stay in their chariots and witness my victory.' "

CANTO 49

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kripa says, 'O Radheya, your twisted mind is always bent on war and bloodshed. You do not understand the true nature of these things, nor do you consider their consequences. The Shastras tell of many grave matters, and those who have studied them speak of battle as being the most sinful of them.

Battles result in victory only if they are fought at the right place and time. All the omens show that this moment is palpably inauspicious, and no good will come of this encounter. A display of prowess at the apt time and in the right place is beneficial. The appropriateness of any action is determined by its timeliness. Wise men do not follow the rash counsel of a sutaputra. Considering all this, a battle with Arjuna is foolhardy.

It is Partha who, on his own, saved the Kurus from the Gandharvas; alone, he satisfied Agni; alone, he took up Brahmacharya for five years on Himavat; single-handed, he rescued Subhadra on his chariot and challenged even Krishna to a duel. By himself, Arjuna fought Rudra who came to him in the guise of a vetala. Partha rescued Krishnaa from the clutches of Jayadrata in this very forest; he studied the astra shastra from Indra for five years; on his own, he vanquished all enemies and spread the fame of the Kurus throughout the world. Alone, this Parantapa defeated the Gandharva king Chitrasena and all his invisible troops. Alone, he quelled the fierce Nivatakavachas and the Kalakhanjas, whom the gods themselves could not conquer.

O Karna, what have you achieved compared to any of the sons of Pandu? They have each subdued many great kings. Even Indra cannot face Partha in battle. Therefore, he who finds himself filled with a desire to fight Arjuna should instantly disabuse himself of his absurd thought. You might as well want to pull out the fangs of an angry snake by stretching out your right hand and extending your forefinger; whilst wandering alone in a forest, you may want to try mounting an infuriated wild-elephant in musth or to attack a great boar without a hook or a weapon in your hand; you might want to walk through a blazing ghee-and tallow-fed fire, clad in silk and having smeared yourself all over with clarified butter, as you now want to fight Arjuna.

Which man would tie his hands and feet, tie a heavy stone to his neck and try to swim across the ocean? What manliness is there in such folly? Karna, only a fool, who despite being weak and having no real skill at arms, would want to fight the consummate warrior Partha.

Having been deceived by us and now freed from his exile of thirteen years, will the noble hero not destroy us all? We have come unknowingly to the place where Arjuna lay in wait like a fire in a well, and we have exposed ourselves to great danger.

Yet, alas, though he is invincible, we must fight him for that is our dharma. Let our armoured troops stand ready. Drona, Duryodhana, Bhishma, Drona's son, you, Karna, and all of us must go into battle against the son of Pritha.

O Karna, do not be foolish enough to fight Arjuna by yourself. If we six maharathas unite, we might be a match for the dauntless Kaunteya, who is as fierce and mighty as Indra Vajradhari. Supported by our troops, we six will face Arjuna as the Danavas did Vasava.' "

CANTO 50

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Aswatthama says, 'Karna, the cattle are not yet ours, for they have not yet crossed the Matsya borders, nor have they reached Hastinapura. Why do you boast so? Truly heroic men do not brag about having won many victories, or of having amassed vast fortunes or of the enemies they have vanquished. Fire burns silently and so too does the Sun shine. The Earth mutely sustains life, both mobile and unmoving.

Brahma, the self-existent, has ordained the duties of the four varnas so that they can acquire wealth by following their svadharma, without sinning. A Brahmana studies the Vedas, performs yagnas and officiates at sacrifices performed by others. A Kshatriya lives by his weapons and performs his own yagnas but does not officiate at those of others. A Vaisya ensures that the proper Vedic rituals are performed for him after he has acquired wealth. A Sudra always serves the other three orders. Flower-sellers and butchers may use some deceit to make their livelihood.

The noble sons of Pandu became sovereigns of the Earth by living according to their svadharma, as prescribed in the Shastras. They are always respectful to their elders, even if they are their enemies. What true Kshatriya shows delight at having obtained a kingdom by means of cheating at dice, as this evil and shameless son of Dhritarashtra does? Having gained untold wealth through deceit and fraud, like a vendor of meat, which wise man would boast of it?

You have taken their wealth, but have you ever defeated Dhananjaya or Nakula or Sahadeva in combat? In what battle did you best Yudhishtira, or that strongest of men Bhima? In which battle did you conquer Indraprastha? What you have done, however, O unscrupulous Duryodhana, is to drag the princess Krishnaa into court while she was in her period and wore just a single piece of cloth. You have hewn at the very root, delicate as that of the sandalwood, of the Pandava tree. When greed made you enslave the Pandavas, do you remember what Vidura said?

Men and other creatures, even insects and ants, show as much forgiveness as lies in their power. The Pandava may forgive you for everything else, but he will not forgive you for tormenting Draupadi. Dhananjaya comes to kill Dhritarashtra's sons. In an affectation of wisdom you make brave speeches, but Arjuna Parantapa will kill us all.

Dhananjaya will not flee even from Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras or Rakshasas. When inflamed, he will slay whoever he encounters like Garuda crushes a tree in his talons. He is far more powerful than you are; he is equal to Indra at archery and to Krishna himself in battle. Who would not praise Partha? What man is a match for Arjuna who can counter devastras with devastras and wordly weapons with mundane ones.

Those who are well-read in the scriptures say that a disciple is no less than a son in every way; that is why Arjuna is Drona's favourite.

Use the same deceit now, as you did when you played dice, the same stratagems by which you subjugated Indraprastha and the same bravado with which you dragged Krishnaa into the Kuru sabha. Let your clever uncle, who knows full well what Kshatriya Dharma is, the cheating Sakuni, prince of Gandhara, show us his mettle today!

The Gandiva does not cast dice as do the Krita or the Dwapara, but it looses countless fiery, winged arrows at adversaries, with lethal accuracy. The deadly vulture-feathered arrows of inexorable speed that fly from the Gandiva can penetrate even mountains. Yama, the destroyer, Vayu and the horse-faced Agni all leave something behind, but Dhananjaya with his wrath unbridled, does not.

You played dice with your uncle Sakuni's help; fight this battle today with him beside you. Let my father Drona fight if he chooses to, but I will not fight Arjuna. We came here only to do battle against the king of the Matsyas if he comes to retrieve his herds.' "

CANTO 51

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma says, 'Drona's son speaks well and Kripa is also right. As for Karna, he wants to fight only out of respect for Kshatriya Dharma. No man of wisdom can find fault with Acharya Drona. It is my view that we must fight, giving consideration both to the time and the place.

It is not surprising that any man is bewildered in the face of five adversaries, radiant as suns, Kshatriyas, beside, who have just emerged from adversity having been honed by it. Even those who know dharma would be confused about what they should do. Duryodhana, that is why I say this to you, whether or not you like what I say.

Aswatthama, what Karna said was only to boost our courage; forgive him for it. The task at hand is grave. The appearance of the son of Kunti is not a good time for us to quarrel among ourselves. Acharya Kripa and you must forgive everything. As light is innate to the Sun, the mastery over weapons is within you. As beauty is never separated from Chandrama, the Moon, so are the Vedas and the Brahmastra part of you. Usually, the four Vedas dwell in one man and Kshatriya attributes in another. We have never heard of these two existing together in any person other than the preceptor of the Bhaaratas and his son.

In the Vedantas, Puranas and Itihasas, O king, who other than Jamadagni is Drona's superior? The Brahmastra and the Vedas have never before co-existed in one person. Acharyaputra, be forgiving, for this is no time for disharmony among us. Let us unite and fight Indra's son who has

come to battle. Of all the calamities that may befall an army, wise men say the worst is dissent among its leaders.'

Aswatthama says, 'Purusharishabha, you have been fair and just in what you say. In his anger the Acharya elaborates on Arjuna's virtues. The qualities of even an enemy should be admitted, while the faults of even one's Guru may be pointed out. Therefore one must, to the best of one's ability, declare the merits and shortcomings of a son or a disciple.'

Duryodhana says, 'Let the Acharya grant his forgiveness and let peace be restored. If he is with us, all will be done as it should.'

Then, O Bhaarata, Duryodhana pacifies Drona with the help of Karna, Kripa and Bhishma Mahatman.

Drona says, 'I was already appeased by what Shantanu's son Bhishma said. We must ensure that Partha does not meet Duryodhana in battle lest Duryodhana is captured from his own rashness. Arjuna will surely not have shown himself before the term of his exile expired; nor will he pardon us by merely recovering the cattle. So, make sure that he does not attack Dhritarashtra's son and in one sroke defeat us all and our purpose. Like Duryodhana, I, too, am unsure exactly when the term of exile ends. Only Bhishma can clarify this.' "

CANTO 52

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhishma says, 'The Kaalachakra, the wheel of time, revolves with its divisions—kaalas, kashtas and muhurtas; days, fortnights, months and years; periods of the different constellations, planets and seasons. Every five years, their fractional increase of duration and the deviations of the planetary orbits create an excess of two months in time's measure. By my calculations, in thirteen years there would be an excess of five months and twelve nights. Therefore, the sons of Pandu have completed their exile exactly; they have kept their sworn oath. Arjuna makes his appearance because he is sure of this.

The Pandavas are virtuous and deeply-versed in the Shastras. With Yudhishtira to guide them, they would not deviate from the path of dharma, not by a hair's width. The sons of Kunti do not yield to temptation, and they have achieved a difficult feat. If they had wanted to establish their rights to the kingdom through adharma, those Kurus would have displayed their might even during the game of dice. Bound by dharma, they did not flout Kshatriya Dharma. He who thinks that they are ever capable of deceit will surely meet with defeat.

The sons of Pritha would prefer death to falsehood. When the time comes, however, those Purusharishabhas endowed with the limitless vitality of Sakra, will not give up what is theirs even if is defended by the wielder of the thunderbolt.

But now we must face the best of all warriors in battle. So let us plan our strategy without delay, and with the approval of good and honest men, so that Arjuna does not take what is now ours.

Duryodhana, I have never seen a battle in which one side can be certain of victory. In a battle there is victory and defeat, prosperity and adversity; and one side must have one of the two. Therefore, king of kings, despite the propriety, or lack thereof, of a battle at this moment, make your arrangements quickly, for Dhananjaya is here.'

Duryodhana says, 'Pitama, I will not give back the Pandavas their kingdom. So let us prepare for battle in every way, without a moment's delay.'

Bhishma says, 'I will tell you what is wise, if you care to hear it. I always speak for your good, O Kaurava. Ride at once to Hastinapuraa and take a fourth of the army with you. Let another fourth escort the cattle. With half our legions we will fight Pandu's son. Drona, Karna, Aswatthama, Kripa and I will withstand Bibhatsu, or the king of the Matsyas or indeed Indra himself if he comes. We will contain any of them as the shore restrains the surging sea.'

Duryodhna sees the sagacity of what Bhishma says, and the king of the Kauravas immediately does as he is told. When Duryodhana and the cattle have left, Bhishma begins to array his soldiers in battle formations.

He addresses Drona, saying, 'Acharya, stand at the heart of our legions with Aswatthama on the left; and let the wise Kripa defend the right wing. Encased in golden mail, let the Suta Karna station himself at the head of our forces. I will be at the rear and protect the whole army from there.' "

CANTO 53

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Bhaarata, the Kauravas take their positions, and the din of Arjuna's chariot-wheels fills the air as he flies towards them. The Kurus see his banner; they hear the rumble of his ratha and the deafening twang of the Gandiva.

Drona sees that Maharatha coming towards them and says, 'That glimmer in the distance is Partha's standard, the rumble is his from his chariot-wheels, and that frightful roar is of the ape on his banner. O, the Vanara strikes terror into our troops. And standing on the superb chariot is the greatest Maharatha, who draws the thunderous Gandiva, best of all bows.

Look! Two arrows fall together at my feet and two more skim past my ears. Having completed his exile and achieved many wonderful feats during these thirteen years, Arjuna salutes and whispers to me. It is after so long that I am seeing Dhananjaya, radiant with beauty and grace, this wise son of Pandu, beloved of his family. He blazes like fire in his chariot, with his bow and quivers of arrows, his conch and banner, his splendid armour, his crown, sword and bow, like a roaring ghee-fed yagna fire surrounded by sacrificial urns.'

Arjuna sees the Kurus ready for battle and says to Virata's son, 'O sarathy, rein in the horses as soon as the enemy is within bowshot. Meanwhile, let me locate Duryodhana, wretch of the Kuru vamsa, in the

midst of his forces. I will ignore the others, single out that vain prince and strike him down, for his death will signal the defeat of all the rest.

There stands Drona, and his son Aswatthama behind him, and there are those great archers Bhishma, Kripa and Karna. But I do not see Duryodhana. I suspect that, in his anxiety to save himself, he flees by the southern path, taking the cattle with him. Leave this formation of chariots and ride after Suyodhana. It is him that I will fight, O Virataputra, and the battle will not be in vain. Defeat him I shall, and return with your herds.'

The son of Virata holds back the horses and adroitly steers them away from where the Kurupumgavas stand in their chariots. He guides them towards Duryodhana.

Seeing Arjuna's chariot veering away from the dense cluster of Kuru chariots, Kripa guesses his intention and says to his men, 'Arjuna is after Duryodhana. We must outflank the Pandava's chariot. When his anger is roused, no one can challenge him other than thousand-eyed Indra, Devaki's son Krishna, Dronacharya, his son Aswatthama and Maharatha Bhargava. Of what use would these herds be to us if Duryodhana were to sink like a ship in the ocean that is Partha?'

Meanwhile, Arjuna rides at Kripa's division, announces himself, and in a blur covers the troops with a swarm of arrows, thick as locusts. Enveloped by Partha's countless shafts, the Kuru warriors cannot see, and the earth and sky become overcast, covered by a dome of arrows. The soldiers, who were ready to fight, stand still in stunned awe, unable even to flee; and in their minds they applaud Partha's astounding dexterity.

Arjuna blows his conch, the Devadatta that always makes the hairs of the enemy stand on end; he pulls on his bowstring, to excite the creatures on his flagstaff into even more frightful roars and screams. The boom of his conch, the drumroll of his chariot-wheels, the echoing twang of the Gandiva and the terrifying yowls of the un-human creatures on his flagstaff make the earth tremble.

The cattle low piteously and whisk their tails in terror; and they turn back, now heading south."

CANTO 54

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Having thrown the enemy forces into disarray and recovered the cattle, Arjuna, supreme archer, rides avidly towards Duryodhana. The Kuru lords see the herds running wildly towards the Matsya city and know that Kiriti has already prevailed. As he advances on Duryodhana, they charge Arjuna.

Arjuna Parantapa sees their legions in tight formation, flying a sea of brilliant banners, and he says to the Matsya prince, 'Spur your white horses to fly as fast as they can. Do your best, for I want to confront this mass of Kuru lions. Like an elephant eager to fight another tusker, the evil son of a Suta is impatient to fight me. Take me to him, Uttara, he has grown arrogant under Duryodhana's patronage.'

At Partha's command, Virata's son flicks his whips over his great horses in golden armour. They fly like the wind, break into the formation of chariots and take the son of Pandu into the midst of the battlefield and the Kuru army. The Kuru Maharathas Chitrasena, Sangramajit, Satrusaha and Jaya rush to help Karna, spears and arrows at the ready to meet Arjuna's onrush.

With flaming shafts, the enraged Pandava hero sets all their chariots afire, and incinerates them as a great conflgration does a forest.

The battle rages furiously when, mounted on his ratha, the Kuru hero Vikarna rides at Arjuna and covers him with a rain of thick, long, vicious

barbs. Arjuna severs Vikarna's rugged, gold-tipped bow and cuts down his flagstaff, and that Kshatriya flees in some haste.

Vikarna's flight leaves Satruntapa in an uncontrollable rage, and he looses a deluge of arrows over Partha. Arjuna is wounded by Maharatha Satruntapa but, though he seems to be drowning in a sea of Kuru warriors, he retaliates to Satruntapa's attack. Arjuna pierces that Kshatriya with five razorlike arrows and kills his sarathy with another ten. Then, shot by the bull of the Bhaaratas with another shaft that can cleave the sturdiest armour, Satruntapa falls dead on the field, like a tree on a mountain-top blown down by the wind.

Other valiant Narapumgavas are mangled in battle by that bravest bull among men; they stagger and tremble like vast forests shaken by the wind of the Mahapralaya, that blows at the dissolution of the universe. Struck by Partha, son of Vasava, the gloriously-attired Kshatriyas, those givers of wealth, heroes invested with the vital prowess of Indra, are vanquished and lie senseless on the field, like elephants clad in mail of black steel and gold.

Gandiva in hand, Arjuna rages across the battlefield in all directions, spreading death like a forest fire at the end of a dry summer. Kiriti, greatest of maharathas, like the spring wind that breaks thunderheads open and blows about fallen leaves, strews his adversaries all around him.

First killing the russet horses yoked to the chariot of Vikartana's brother's son, Sangramajit, Arjuna of boundless energy cuts off Sangramajit's head with a single crescent-tipped arrow. When his cousin is slain, Suryaputra Karna rushes at Arjuna like an elephant with tusks lowered, like a tiger at a mighty bull.

The Sutaputra wounds the Pandava with twelve arrows, pierces his horses all over and strikes prince Uttara's hand which holds the reins. Arjuna responds with an impassioned attack as fierce as that of iridescent Garuda swooping on a snake. Both men are superb archers, indefatigable and deadly.

The Kauravas excitedly stand aside to watch the duel between Karna and Arjuna. Incited to fury at the sight of Karna, and glad to be facing him at last, the Pandava casts a dark mantle of arrows over him, rendering him, his horses and chariot invisible. Bhishma's legion of warriors, whose horses, elephants and chariots too Arjuna shrouds and pierces with his arrows, scatter, wailing in terror and pain.

Breaking through the Pandava cloud of arrows, exploding into view like a mass of brilliant flame, illustrious Karna, bow in hand, gives Arjuna answer with countless arrows of his own. Loud applause breaks out as the Kurus cheer Surya's son with booming conches, trumpets and drum-rolls; and the air resonates with the sound of Karna's bowstring slapping his leather gloves. At the sight of Kiriti, who fills the air with the thunder of the Gandiva, of the upraised tail of the Vanara on his flag and of the other terrible creatures screeching furiously from the top of the flagstaff, Karna roars like a pride of lions.

Arjuna attacks Karna, his horses, his chariot and his sarathy with arrows; he releases an unrestrained cloudburst of arrows over him, while glancing briefly at Bhishma, Drona and Kripa. Karna replies with a torrent of his own arrows, and the crown-adorned Arjuna unleashes another downpour of keen-edged barbs. Attacking each other with arrows and astras beyond count, the two create so many arrow-clouds that they appear to the onlookers like the Sun and the Moon in a stormy sky.

Karna, of the light hands, wounds four of Arjuna's horses with whetted shafts and then strikes his sarathy and flagstaff with three arrows each. Provoked, like a lion woken from slumber, Jishnu, crusher of foes, bull of the Kurus, lets fly a hot stream of shafts at Karna.

A blizzard of arrows spumes at the Pandava, as Karna displays his prowess. Arjuna covers Karna's chariot with so many arrows that it looks like the Sun radiating his light over many worlds. Like a lion set upon by an elephant, Arjuna draws his bowstring to his ear and shoots crescented arrows into all parts of the Sutaputra's body. These seething shafts strike Karna's arms and legs, his head and neck, and every other limb like thunderbolts.

At last, somewhat mangled by Partha's superhuman archery, Karna, son of Vikartana, surrenders his position at the van of the Kuru army, and flees the battle like an elephant routed by another."

CANTO 55

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "After Radheya leaves the field, the other warriors, led by Duryodhana, attack the son of Pandu. As the shore withstands the fury of the sea, Arjuna withstands the rage of the teeming legions that rush towards him in battle-formations, shooting fusillades of arrows.

Kunti's son Svetavahana, first among all warriors, rushes at them, now loosing divine astras. Partha's arrows radiate from his Gandiva everywhere like rays from the Sun; amongst rathikas, horsemen, the elephant-mounted, and mail-clad foot-soldiers—there is not one who has even a two finger space left uninjured on his body. For his dexterity with Devastras, for the superbly trained horses and Uttara's skill in maneouvering them, for his infallible aim, for his strength and light-handedness, Arjuna is like the apocalyptic fire that burns to end the world with all its creations; and none can bear to look at him for he blazes in blinding splendour.

Devastated by Arjuna's tirades of arrows, the enemy legions look like clouds rising over the brow of a hill that reflect rays of sunlight, or like groves of upright asoka trees resplendent with clusters of flowers. Afflicted by Partha's arrows the enemy soldiers are like scalded garlands from which withered blossoms fall. Torn flags and royal parasols swirl about in the wind that blows everywhere. Terrified by bloody chaos, horses run in all directions, unyoked by Arjuna's sure arrows, and dragging shards of broken chariots behind them; and beleaguered elephants, their chests, ears, tusks

and trunks pierced, drop on the battlefield, making the ground tremble. Soon the earth is strewn with the corpses of Kaurava elephants and looks like a dark sky, overcast with black thunderheads, with no wind to blow them away.

O King, just as the conflagration at the end of the yuga consumes all that can perish in the world, so does Partha consume his foes in this battle. With the might of his arms, the twang of his bow, the inhuman cries of the creatures on his flagstaff, the dreadful roar of the great monkey and the blast of his conch, the all-powerful Parantapa Arjuna strikes terror such as they have never known into the hearts of Duryodhana's forces. Soon, the courage and strength of every hostile warrior seems to drain into the dust at the very sight of Arjuna.

Unwilling to sin by killing those that are defenceless, Arjuna rides another path and attacks the Kuru army from behind with a storm of feathered barbs that fly, like trained falcons, to find their marks. Soon the very world seems covered by arrows and the sky to stream blood. Just as the infinite rays of the mighty Sun break out from being crowded into an inadequate vessel, so do Arjuna's countless arrows find the vast sky too small.

Those who face him see his chariot only once, for a moment, when it nears them, for then they and their mounts leave this world. His arrows pass unobstructed through men's bodies, and his chariot flies unimpeded through hostile ranks. Arjuna tosses enemy troops carelessly about as if he is the thousand-headed Vasuki playing in the ocean. The noise made by the ceaseless tide of arrows from Kiriti's bowstring exceeds all other sounds, so loud that its like has never, ever, been heard before.

Their bodies pierced closely with arrows on fire, the elephants throng the field like black clouds flashing with lightning braids. As he looses his endless tide in all directions, Arjuna's bow draws perfect circles. The arrows from the Gandiva never miss their mark, not one, even as the eye dwells surely, solely, on things beautiful. The trail made by Kiriti's chariot is like that of a herd of elephants marching through a forest. Struck by Partha's uncanny gales of missiles, his enemies might well believe that, wishing for his son's victory, Indra himself, with all the Devas, is upon them. They see Vijaya, the ever-victorious, at his terrible sacrifice of slaughter, as Death incarnate.

Beset by Partha, the Kuru troops are devastated in a manner that only Arjuna could achieve; just its own metaphor, it cannot be compared to anything but the battles of Partha himself. He beheads his enemies as easily as a reaper snips the tops of paddies, and the Kurus are weak with fear.

Tossed about and torn by the hurricane that is Arjuna, the forest of his enemies bleeds into the earth and stains it purple; and the bloody dust whipped up by death's wind reddens the Sun's rays. Soon the sky is so red that it seems like the hour of sunset. But though the Sun stops shedding his light after he sets, the son of Pandu does not stop his stream of shafts. That Kshatriya of energy beyond imagining, who knows no fatigue, overwhelms all the great archers of the enemy with his divine weapons, despite their irresistible and combined prowess.

Arjuna shoots seventy-three arrows at Drona, ten at Dussaha, eight at Drona's son, twelve at Dussasana and three at Kripa the son of Saradvata, all inside a moment. The Parantapa wounds Shantanu's son Bhishma; he strikes Duryodhana with a hundred arrows; he slashes Karna's ear with a slim eagle-feathered shaft. When Maharatha Karna, who is truly a master of all weapons, is wounded and his chariot shattered, and his sarathy killed, his troops break up and flee.

Seeing Karna's army disintegrate, Virata's son wants to know what Partha intends, 'O Partha, to which division shall I now take you in my glorious chariot? Command me and I will bear you to it like the wind.'

Arjuna replies, 'Uttara, that great warrior you see yonder, clad in tiger-skin, mounted on a chariot with a blue flag and drawn by red horses, is Kripa. You can see the frontlines of his legions. Take me to him and I will show that great bowman my swiftness of hand.

That other Maharatha whose flag bears the device of a golden water-pot is Acharya Drona, greatest among all masters of weapons. I have always revered him, as have all Kshatriyas. Therefore, drive around him in pradakshina and let us bow our heads to him, for that is our dharma. I will strike him only if he strikes me first; then he will not be able to fault me.

The warrior beside Drona, whose flag has the emblem of a bow on it, is the Acharya's son, Maharatha Aswatthama. I and all Kshatriyas honour him too. So pause again when you come to his chariot.

The warrior who sits on his chariot wearing golden armour, surrounded by a third of the army consisting of the best troops, and whose standard bears an elephant against a background of gold, is the illustrious

Duryodhana, son of Dhritarashtra. O Kshatriya, take this chariot to him who can smash enemy chariots. This king is difficult to overcome and he can crush any enemy at all. He thinks of himself as the best of Drona's disciples in lightness of hand. Today, I will show him that I am the superior archer.

The warrior whose flag bears the device of a thick rope used for tethering elephants is Vikartana's son Karna, whom you already know. When you come before that evil son of Radha, be very careful, for he always challenges me to a fight, and he is a great warrior indeed.

The warrior whose flag is blue and has five stars and a Sun at their heart, who has limitless prowess, who sits on his chariot holding a huge bow in his richly-gloved hands, whose head is shaded by a pure-white royal parasol, who stands at the head of a multitude of chariots flying various banners, who looks like the Sun in front of massed black clouds, whose mail of gold sparkles like the light of the Sun and Moon together, and who in his golden helmet strikes fear into my heart, is Shantanu's son Bhishma, the grandsire of us all. Entertained with regal splendour by Duryodhana, he is partial to that prince, and very fond of him. Approach him last, for he might pose an obstacle to us. Now guide our horses with all your great skill.'

Virata's son responds by briskly guiding Arjuna's chariot towards where Kripa stands eager for battle.' "

CANTO 56

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Those ranks of fierce Kuru fighters resemble massed monsoon clouds drifting on a slow wind. Near them are innumerable horses and their riders; there are also ferocious elephants, resplendent in beautiful armour and ridden by skilled warriors who goad them with iron hooks and ankushas.

And O King, in the firmament above, accompanied by the divine Viswas and Maruts, and seated in a splendid vimana is Sakra. Yakshas, Gandharvas and Nagas also crowd the sky, so it seems bejewelled as a clear, star-spangled night. All the Devas have come, each in his own chariot, to see how well mortals use Devastras and to witness the great duel between Kripa and Arjuna. Indra's divine vahana, embellished with myriad gemstones and commanded by the will of its rider, its roof held up by a hundred thousand golden posts and a central one entirely jewel-encrusted, stands out conspicuous among the others.

Thirty-three Devas with Vasava at their head, and Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Nagas, Pitrs and Devarishis have come with the Lord Indra. Seated in the vimana of the king of Devas are radiant Rajarishis of old—Vasumanas, Balaksha and Supratardana, Ashtaka, Sibi and Yayati, Nahusha and Gaya, Manu and Puru, Raghu, Bhanu and Krisasva, Sagara and Nala. Then comes a magnificent procession—the chariots of Agni and Isa, Soma and Varuna, Prajapati, Dhatri and Vidhatri, Kubera, Yama, Alambusha and Ugrasena, and the Gandharva Tumburu. All the Devas, the Siddhas and the

foremost of Munis have come here to witness the encounter between Arjuna and the Kurus.

The sublime fragrance of heavenly vanamalas pervades the air like woodlands redolent with the perfumes of the blossoms of spring. Glorious are the great red parasols, the clothes, the garlands and the waving plumes on the heads of the gods. The dust of the earth has settled; lustre is everywhere, and the divinely-scented breezes waft soothingly over the combatants.

The sky is ablaze with the beauty of the shining craft of the Devas that adorn it—those that have already arrived and the ones that still come, in a train behind the Lord of gods. They surround him, the magnificent Indra, wielder of the thunderbolt, who sits in his awesome vimana, wearing a garland of lilies and lotuses. And the slayer of Bala gazes insatiably at his son on the battlefield below."

CANTO 57

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Partha, scion of the house of Kuru, looks at the Kuru army arrayed for battle and says to Virata’s son, ‘Ride at Kripa, son of Saradvata; approach the chariot whose flag flies the device of a golden altar from the south.’

At once, Uttara sets out, urging his silver-white horses protected by golden kavacha. Encouraging each of them to run faster and faster, he spurs those spirited, moon-silver steeds forward. As they near the Kuru legions, he expertly reins in his wind-swift steeds. The prince of the Matsyas skilfully wheels them around, making them go in circles and turning them to the left, bewildering the Kurus. Virata’s intrepid son finally makes a full circle and arrives near Kripa’s chariot; then he stops, facing the Brahmana.

Crying out his own name, Arjuna announces himself and blows a blast on the tremendous Devadatta. Blown on the field of battle by mighty Jishnu, the stentorian sound is like the roar of a mountain splitting. Amazed that the conch has not shattered with the force of Arjuna’s blowing, the Kurus and all their warriors begin to applaud it. The din reaches up into the sky and resounds there like a thunderbolt hurled at a mountain by Maghavat.

The fearless Maharatha Kripa is roused to fury by Arjuna; he cannot bear that sound and takes up his own conch-shell and blows it emphatically. Filling the three worlds with that sound, Kripacharya angrily pulls on the

string of his enormous bow. Like two suns, the two warriors stand face to face in their chariots, turbulent as monsoon clouds.

In a flash, then, Saradvata's son Kripa pierces Partha Parantapa with ten light-swift arrows that can penetrate deep into the body. Pritha's son raises the celebrated Gandiva and shoots back a cataract of iron arrows. Kripa shreds Partha's blood-sucking deluge into slivers even as they fly at him.

Arjuna employs every manner of manoeuvre to spray arrows all around him. He fills the sky with them, does Pritha's son of fathomless soul, and cloaks Kripa in a night of dark arrows. Wounded and bleeding, Kripa roars out his rage and looses ten thousand calescent shafts at the noble Partha of the boundless might.

Arjuna responds by wounding Kripa's four horses with four searing arrows from the Gandiva: sharp, straight and golden-winged. Struck by these flame-hot shafts, his horses rear up and Kripa loses his balance. Seeing him stagger in his chariot, Arjuna suspends his onslaught out of respect for his old master; but Kripa quickly composes himself and shoots ten kanka-feathered arrows at Savyasachi, piercing him deep. Partha severs Kripa's bow and shreds his gloves with a crescent-tipped barb. With great care, so as not to injure him, he cuts away Kripa's coat of mail, with arrows that could pierce the heart beating in any man's body. Divested of armour, Kripa looks like a snake that has shed its skin.

As soon as he loses his bow to Partha's arrows, Kripa takes up a new one and strings it in a flash, but Arjuna breaks that one too. And the Pandava breaks all his opponent's bows, one after the other, as soon as the son of Saradvata takes them up.

When most of his bows are broken, Kripa casts his javelin at Arjuna like a thunderbolt. Even as the golden spear flares at him meteor-like, Arjuna cleaves it with ten shafts of iron.

Kripa seizes up another bow and smoothly looses a hundred arrows of curved flights at Arjuna; but Partha cuts these, also, into shards with just ten uncanny barbs. Infused with furious urjas on the battlefield, the son of Pritha shoots thirteen stone-sharpened arrows that are like flames. With one of these, he severs the yoke of his opponent's chariot; with four he bloodies his four steeds; with the sixth he beheads the charioteer; with three he shatters the triple bamboo axle of the chariot, and with two its wheels; his twelfth chops down the flagpole; and with the thirteenth, Phalguna, looking like Indra, and smiling disdainfully, pierces Kripa's chest.

With his bow riven, his chariot broken, his steeds slain and his charioteer killed, Kripa leaps down, quickly takes up a mace and hurls it at Arjuna; but Arjuna uses his miraculous arrows to send that heavy, gleaming weapon back to its source. Kripa's warriors attack Partha from all sides in an effort to rescue the son of Saradvata.

The son of Virata turns his horses to the left and drives in the circular yamaka fashion, holding all those warriors at bay. Those bulls among men lead the chariotless, helpless Kripa away from the dangerous Dhananjaya, the son of Kunti."

CANTO 58

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now that Kripa has been rescued, invincible Drona takes up his bow with an arrow already notched and ready to fly; he charges Arjuna and his white horses with his own chestnuts.

Arjuna sees his Guru flying towards him on his golden chariot no great distance away and says to Uttara, 'Blessings on you, my young friend; take me before that warrior atop whose lofty banner you see a golden altar that looks like a tall flame, around which many flags fly, whose chariot is drawn by large and handsome chestnut horses, as well-trained, pleasant and docile as they are mighty, whose bodies are the colour of corals and their faces copper-hued. That warrior is Drona, whom I wish to fight.

This son of Bharadvaja is long-armed; he is irresistibly vigorous and illustrious; his prowess is celebrated across the three worlds; his mind is as brilliant as Usanas' and his knowledge of dharma as vast as Brihaspati's; he is well-versed in the four Vedas, and he is a chaste and devout Brahmachari. O my friend, he has mastered the loosing of devastras, as well as the mantras to withdraw them; indeed the science of weaponry, the very Astra Shastra, dwells within him. Forgiveness, self-control, truthfulness, abhorrence of causing injury and faultless conduct are some of the virtues of this Dvija. I would fight this most blest one on this field; so, Uttara, drive me to the Acharya.'

Virata's son urges his horses towards the chariot of Bharadvaja's son. At the same moment, Drona, too, plunges towards the onrushing Partha, like

one enraged elephant charging another, and blows on his conch a blast that equals the sound of a hundred trumpets. At that sound, the whole army is agitated like a tempestuous sea.

Seeing those beautiful, red horses mingling in battle with Arjuna's swan-white ones, all racing swiftly as thoughts, those watching are wonderstruck. Seeing Drona, the guru, and his sishya Arjuna confront each other on the field of battle—both are magnificent—the Bhaarata host trembles.

Arjuna is full of joy when he reaches Drona's chariot, and he salutes his teacher. That Parantapa humbly and affectionately addresses Drona, 'We have completed our term of exile and now want to avenge the wrongs done to us. You who are invincible in battle, there is no need for you to be angry with us. O Anagha, I have no intention of striking you unless you strike me first. It is for you to decide.'

Drona promptly sends more than twenty arrows whistling at Arjuna, but the swift Partha cuts them off before they can reach him. Displaying awesome lightness of hand, the Acharya covers Arjuna's chariot with a thousand arrows, and to provoke Partha he cloaks his silvery white horses with kanka-feathered arrows. The battle between Drona and Kiriti erupts, with both Maharathas shooting arrows of blazing splendour at each other.

The two adversaries are renowned for their achievements; they are both as swift as the wind, masters of all the devastras and invested with extraordinary prowess. They loose clouds of fiery shafts at each other and stupefy the Kshatriyas who watch. All the warriors there are filled with wonder at the sight, and they give Drona a great accolade.

Those that stand there on the battlefield say to one another, 'Well done! Who except Phalguna is worthy of fighting Drona in battle? How stern the dharma of war is: Arjuna fights his own guru!'

Inflamed, inspired, neither mighty-armed hero gains any advantage, as each covers the other with arrows. His rage mounting, Bharadvaja's son draws his huge gold-plated bow and stabs Arjuna repeatedly with a flurry of arrows; he assails Arjuna's chariot with arrows so numerous and so dazzling that they dim the light of the Sun. That Brahmana Maharatha rains arrows on Arjuna like a cloudburst on a mountain, and pierces him with many.

The son of Pandu takes up his Gandiva, the supreme bow, and nonchalantly responds with variegated shafts and checks Drona's lethal

deluge. All who watch are amazed. The handsome Savyasachi whirls about on his chariot, switching the Gandiva from one hand to the other, spraying his arrows on all sides simultaneously. They cover the sky in an expanse of dense shade, and Drona is invisible like the Sun hidden by fog. Shrouded by the golden arrows, Drona looks like a mountain on fire.

Seeing his chariot enveloped by Partha's archery, Drona, that jewel on the battlefield, bends his terrible bow that resounds like clashing clouds. It is a circle of flames as he draws it and lets fly a volley of crescented arrows; and the battlefield echoes with a sound like bamboo crackling in a forest fire.

Still, the smooth, golden-winged arrows of Arjuna's—he of unfathomable soul—choke the air on all sides and obscure the Sun. Planed smooth as mirrors and flighted with golden wings, the Pandava's shafts look like flocks of birds in the sky; while, touching each other, tip to end, Drona's arrows draw an unbroken line in the sky. The gilded arrows of the two splendid archers cover the heavens like a meteor shower, and surely the kanka-feathered ones look like rows of cranes coursing through the autumn sky.

The fierce and terrible encounter between Drona and Arjuna is like that ancient one between Vritrasura and Vasava. Drawing their bows into circles, loosing endless rills of missiles at each other, they are like elephants battling with lowered tusks. Enraged though they may be, those jewels of the battlefield fight strictly by the sacred laws of war, even while exhibiting their mastery over celestial weapons.

Arjuna resists his Acharya's astras with his own; the Pandava puts his marvellous skills on show: that most brilliant Kshatriya fills the air with a bounty of astras. The Acharya sees how fiercely and intently Arjuna fights, and he playfully fights back, in affection. The duel with unearthly weapons between Bharadvaja's son and Phalguna, those lions among men, each invincible to the other, is truly like the Devasura yuddha of old.

The son of Pandu repeatedly checks Drona's Aindra, Vayavya and Agneya astras with his own. The arrow-clouds of the two peerless archers cover the sky and cast a great shadow over the earth.

Arjuna's arrows fall on the hostile warriors like thunder and lightning, O Rajan. Elephants, chariots and horses are bathed in blood and look like kinsuka trees in full bloom. After the savage encounter between Arjuna and Drona, the spectacle of the field strewn with braceleted arms hewn off at the

shoulder, other dissevered limbs, the crimsoned corpses of grandly attired rathikas, gilded armour stained scarlet, horsemen and foot-soldiers and banners cut down, sends waves of panic through the Kuru host.

Wielding their invincible bows, the two sublime archers pare each other's forces. Bharatarishabha, this dread duel between Drona and Kunti's son is akin to the one of yore between Bali and Vasava. Bows drawn into circles of light, they assail each other, staking their lives.

A voice from the sky applauds the Brahmana, 'Drona performs a difficult feat indeed as he fights the firm-handed Arjuna, crusher of foes, invincible bowman, conqueror of Devas and Daityas, greatest of all Maharathas.'

Drona is wonderstruck at Partha's infallible aim, his unflagging vigour, his swiftness and the formidable range of his missiles. O bull of the Bhaaratas, Partha looses a blizzard of arrows at his Acharya. Those who watch from the field applaud on seeing his arrows like locust-swarms, and exclaim, *Excellent!* So swift and continuous is the stream of arrows he unleashes that there is no space between them even for air, and the onlookers see his movements only as a blur.

Lightness of hand rules the duel. Arjuna now shoots his arrows ever more swiftly, and hundreds of thousands of them fall at once on Drona's chariot.

The Kuru forces watch Drona being hidden from view by Arjuna's arrows and set up a dismal wail. Maghavat and the Gandharvas and Apsaras who have come here cheer Partha's magic fleetness of hand.

Then the Acharya's son, Maharatha Aswatthama, confronts the Pandava with a large force of chariots, and despite his rage to see his father sorely embattled, is filled with admiration for the noble son of Pritha. He charges Arjuna and inundates him with a pralaya of arrows. Partha turns his horses towards Aswatthama, giving Drona an opportunity to escape. Wounded, bereft of armour and banner, Drona hastily leaves the field."

CANTO 59

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Now Drona's son thunders forward to meet Arjuna in battle. Seeing Aswatthama charge him, covering him in an arrow-storm and riding at him like a rain-charged hurricane, Arjuna greets his Acharya's son with a flash-flood of his own arrows.

Harrowing is the encounter between them, like that between the Devas and Asuras. They shoot at each other as Virata and Vasava once did, completely enclosing the sky with their shafts and hiding the Sun. The very air falls hushed; and as they strike each other, the explosions of their weapons ring out like dry bamboo stalks bursting in a raging fire. Rajan, Arjuna draws deep blood from Aswatthama's horses; they falter and drag his ratha about in a daze, weakly.

Partha is everywhere at once, but Drona's tremendous son lifts his archery and severs the bowstring of the Gandiva with a horseshoe-headed arrow. The Devas watch this incredible feat and cry, *Well done! Well done!* So, too, do Drona, Bhishma, Karna and the great Kripa excitedly applaud Aswatthama's deed. The Acharya's son draws his own superb bow round and, with kanka-feathered arrows, pierces his adversary, that bull among warriors, squarely through his chest.

But Partha Mahabaho only laughs and restrings the Gandiva in the twinkling of an eye. Moistening the new bowstring with sweat from his brow dark as the new moon, he rushes at his adversary, an infuriated bull of a great elephant herd charging another tusker.

The contention between the two refulgent warriors makes the onlookers' hair stand on end, and they watch in awe, in disbelief as the heroes fight on, calmly, fiercely. They fight on with fiery, hissing, snakelike arrows: narachas. The Pandava's two quivers are inexhaustible, and he dominates the field, immovable as a mountain. Aswatthama's arrows, discharged without let, are soon exhausted, and only so does Arjuna prevail.

Then Karna pulls on the string of his awesome bow with great force, sounding it like spring thunder, and the fighting men of the Kuru army tremble and cry out in fear. Pritha's son turns his gaze in the direction of that sound and sees Radheya. His anger ignites and the Pandava bull stares at Karna with death in his eyes.

Seeing Arjuna now turn away from Drona's son, O King, the Kuru warriors shoot thousands of arrows on him. But Mahabaho Dhananjaya just wheels away and, his eyes turning red as plums, makes a dash at Karna. Eager for single combat with him, the son of Kunti speaks to his inveterate enemy."

CANTO 60

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'Karna, the time has come for you to make good the boast you made in the sabha, that you have no equal in battle. Today, Karna, you stand before me in battle; you will discover the limits of your prowess and never again be proud or dismissive. You abandoned good breeding and spoke brashly, but you will find it hard to translate your glib bragging into deeds. Radheya, you will fight me today before all the Kurus; let me see how you make good your lofty claims and all the insults you flung at me.

You will now face the consequences of exhorting evil men to outrage Panchali in the Kuru sabha. Fettered by dharma, I did not avenge her on that darkest of all my days. Today I will unleash my long withheld anger against you. Evil one, we suffered for twelve years in the forests; today you will reap the harvest of our vengeance. Come, Karna, face me in battle and let your Kaurava friends, my vile cousins, be witnesses to what I do to you.'

Karna replies, 'Partha, translate your boasts into deeds, if you dare. The world knows that your arrogance far exceeds your ability. It was not dharma but cowardice that prevented you from seeking revenge earlier. Prove yourself against me and we will acknowledge your prowess. If, as you claim, your forbearance was truly due to dharma, know that you are as bound by dharma today as you were before, although you consider yourself freed from that bond.

But how can you want to fight me, after living a vanaprastha's life for twelve years? Son of Pritha, even if Sakra fought at your side you would cause me no anxiety. Your wish is about to be fulfilled, Kaunteya. Fight me and you will see who the greater archer is and by how much.'

Arjuna replies, 'O Radheya, it is because you fled while fighting me that you are still alive. I have killed your younger brother. What other true warrior but you would flee from the battlefield after seeing his brother slain, and then boast, as you still do, before all these honourable men?'

With that, invincible Arjuna rides at Karna and discharges a salvo of barbs that can pierce any armour. But Maharatha Karna responds with alacrity and covers Partha in a lashing downpour of the keenest shafts. In the fierce duel that follows, arrows fly in tempests from every direction; they lacerate the combatants' arms and horses, and even shred each one's leathern gloves.

Arjuna severs Karna's bowstring but, undeterred, Karna takes up another one and draws blood from the Pandava's hand, loosening his grip on his bow. His rage stoked, Partha Mahabaho desiccates Karna's weapon in his very hands, so it falls to his feet in pieces. Karna picks up a javelin and casts it, like another Vajra, at his sworn enemy; but Arjuna carves it up with a sharp burst of arrows.

The forces that follow the son of Radha rush at Arjuna, who kills them all with deadly fire from the Gandiva. Drawing his bowstring to his ear, Bibhatsu fells Karna's horses with a refrain of rough-hewn arrows; and they drop to the ground, dead. The mighty Kaunteya strikes Karna's chest with a smoking shaft of untold vitality that pierces his armour and embeds itself deep in his body. Karna's vision blurs and he briefly faints. When he recovers, he is in great pain; without further ado, he flees the field and rides away, leaving Arjuna and Uttara looking after him in scorn."

CANTO 61

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Having defeated Vikartana's son, Arjuna says to Uttara son of Virata, 'Take me towards that division where you see the flag with a golden palmyra tree. My godlike pitamaha, Bhishma, waits there, eager to meet me in battle.'

Uttara, who is badly wounded, sees the great host of chariots, elephants and horses and says, 'O Kshatriya, I can no longer steer your horses. My spirits droop and my mind is clouded. The power of the devastras that you and the Kurus have used makes the world spin before my eyes. The stench of blood and fat from wounded flesh makes my senses reel. The sights I see make my head ache in fear.

Never have I seen such a vast army of war-horses. The slapping of gauntlets, the raucous blare of conches, the roars of the warriors, the shrieking of elephants and the thunderous twang of the Gandiva stupefy me.

O Arjuna, my heart pounds and my vision fails me from watching you draw fiery circles with your blazing Gandiva. I am terrified by the sight of your dreadful arrows and your savage mien when you fight, so like an enraged Indra, even like Rudra wielder of the Pinaka.

I am blinded every time you take up an arrow, fix it to your bowstring and send it forth. Though I am here, my very senses desert me and I cannot see what you do. I wilt and the earth churns before me, leaving me too weak to even hold my whip and reins.'

Arjuna says, 'Do not be afraid; take heart. You have performed many wondrous feats in battle, O great Kshatriya. You are blessed that you are born into the royal house of the illustrious Matsyas. It does not become you to be downcast when punishing your foes. So, my prince, Parantapa, stay on my chariot, muster your courage and guide my horses once more into battle for me.'

Arjuna Maharatha speaks again to Virata's son and says, 'Take me now to the front of Bhishma's army, and I will sever his bowstring. Today you will see me shoot divine weapons of great wonder and beauty, that flash like lightning amidst dark clouds.

Today the Kauravas will see my gold-backed Gandiva and they will argue about which hand I use—right or left—to shoot my arrows. Today I will create a hideous river to the netherworld; blood will be its waters, chariots its eddies and elephants its crocodiles. Today I will strip the Kuru forest of its branches by hewing off heads, arms and legs, by shredding mighty chests and muscle-rippling backs.

Alone, bow in hand, a hundred paths will open before me as I raze the Kurus. Today you will see the Kuru army beset by me, whirling in a blood-drenched spiral. Today I will show you my true skill at archery. Be the ground rough or smooth, stay firm on the chariot, for my winged arrows can pierce even Mount Sumeru that reaches up into Swarga.

Once, at Indra's behest, I killed hundreds and thousands of Paulomas and Kalakhanjas, and from him I have inherited my steadfast grasp of my bow. My lightness of hand comes from Prajapati Brahma, and from him I have learnt the tactics of attack and defence when surrounded by enemy forces. On the other side of the great ocean, I defeated sixty thousand chariot mounted warriors—all fierce archers from Hiranyapura.

Today I will vanquish the multitude of the Kuru host as easily as a tempest would blow away a pile of cotton. My fiery arrows will set the Kuru forest aflame, its banners the trees, its infantry the shrubs, its chariot-warriors the wild animals. Just as the wielder of the thunderbolt crushed the Danavas, I will bring the Kuru Maharathas down from their chariots.

In addition to my other weapons, I have obtained the Raudra from Rudra, the Varuna from Varuna, the Agneya from Agni, the Vayavya from Vayu and the Vajra from Sakra. Despite all the great warriors that protect it, I will bring the Dhartarashtra force to its knees. O son of Virata, do not be afraid.'

Thus assured by Savyasachi, prince Uttara penetrates that indomitable array of rathas protected by Bhishma. The illustrious son of Ganga, he of the fierce deeds, however, easily withstands the mighty-armed and relentless Kshatriya. Arjuna confronts Bhishma and, with a magic golden shaft, cuts down his standard, severing it cleanly at its base; and the flag bearing the golden palmyra crashes to the ground.

At this, four great Kauravas, Dussasana, Vikarna, Dussaha and Vivimsati—all of them masters in the use of astras, all decked in beautiful garlands and jewellery—charge towards that fearful bowman and surround hm. Dussasana pierces Uttara with a crescent-tipped arrow and also draws blood from Arjuna's chest. Partha shatters Dussasana's gilded bow with a vulture-feathered shaft, and he bloodies the most bestial Kaurava's hirsute chest with five more.

He cannot withstand the terrible Arjuna, and Dussasana flees the fight; swiftly, his brother Vikarna attacks the raging Pandava with a slew of his own vulture-winged shafts. But the son of Kunti stuns him with a thick, blunt shaft that strikes his head, and Vikarna falls out of his chariot. Dussaha, supported by Vivimsati, smothers Arjuna with a cloud of shining arrows.

Unperturbed, Dhananjaya strikes both of them, simultaneously, with two flashing darts and kills their horses immediately after. Chariotless and bleeding, those sons of Dhritarashtra are spirited away in his chariot by another Kaurava who dashes up to rescue them, with a host of other chariots.

Wearing his crown, the undefeated Bibhatsu, son of Kunti, continues to assail the enemy from every side with his supernal archery."

CANTO 62

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Then, O Bhaarata, all the Maharathas of the Kurus unite; they surround Arjuna and put forth all their might to subdue him. But he of the fathomless soul envelops them all in a fog of arrows, as mist covers the mountains. The trumpeting of enormous elephants and the booming of conch-shells mingle into deafening bedlam.

Partha's arrows fly in their thousands, piercing elephants and horses, as well as steely coats of mail. With incendiary archery, Pandu's son appears to vie with the midday Sun in brilliance.

Terror-stricken warriors leap from chariots and horseback, foot-soldiers flee helter-skelter. All the while, the air reverberates with the deadly clamour of Arjuna's arrows as they bore through armour of steel, silver and copper, and in a short time the field is littered with the corpses of elephant-warriors and horsemen, mangled by hissing serpentine shafts from the Pandava's bow. It is as if Dhananjaya, bow in hand, dances on the field of battle even like Siva at his Tandava.

Terror-struck by the thunderous twang of the Gandiva, many soldiers run from the stained field strewn with severed heads—some turbaned, some with earrings and necklaces of gold. Torsos, butchered by arrows, litter the ground, as well as torn limbs decked in ornaments, some still holding weapons in dead hands.

The Earth looks spectrally beautiful. O Bull of the Bhaaratas, heads sliced off by Arjuna fall in showers like meteors from the sky. And

menacing, formidable Partha ranges the field spewing the fire of his anger over the sons of Dhritarashtra.

Seeing how Arjuna scorches the enemy, the Kuru warriors lose all courage and stop fighting, although they are in Duryodhana's presence; while Arjuna, who has succeeded in terrorising the Kuru host and routing its Maharathas, one by one, continues to wreak havoc.

The son of Pandu creates a ghastly river of blood with rolling waves, quite like the river of death that time creates at the end of a yuga. This blood-river has the dishevelled hair of the dead and dying for its weeds, bows and arrows as its boats, and the flesh and the dying tissues of animals for its mud. Coats of mail and helmets float thick on its surface; it bears elephants instead of crocodiles, and chariots are its rafts; marrow, fat and blood form its foam; and it strikes abject fear into the hearts of those who look at it.

Hideous, horrible, and rippling with the howling of wild carrion-eaters, the scarlet river floats keen-edged weapons menacingly like crocodiles. Rakshasas and Pisachas stalk its banks from end to end. Strings of pearls form its beads of froth and other gemstones its sparkling bubbles. With clutches of arrows for eddies and horses for its tortoises, that river is unfordable. The great Kuru Maharathas form the large island in the ruddy stream, island that echoes with the blast of conches and the boom of drumbeats.

Thus does Partha create an uncrossable river of blood, river of death. So swift is he that no one discerns his taking up an arrow, notching it to his bowstring, drawing the string and loosing the shaft from the Gandiva as separate movements."

CANTO 63

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana and Karna, Dussasana and Vivimsati, Kripa, Drona and his son charge Arjuna with their bows bent, determined to kill him. Great king, Arjuna rides forward to meet their attack from his glittering chariot. Kripa, Karna and Maharatha Drona are the clouds that rain arrows on Dhananjaya. Keeping their distance, they cover his body with their arrows, so there is not even a two-digit space left unpierced on him.

Bibhatsu smiles unperturbed and sets the shimmering Aindrastra to the Gandiva. Sunlike, he stands wearing his crown on the battlefield and, like the Sun's rays, covers it with arrows. As lightning flashes in a stormy sky, as a flame flares in a rock cleft, the Gandiva flashes, glorious as the Indradhanush, the rainbow.

Like a thunderhead roaring and lashing down rain to soak the ground, the resonance of the Gandiva and the arrows that fly from it fill the air; and all the Kuru rathikas want to flee. Confusion and dismay strike the hitherto calm foot-soldiers; and despair spreads among those broken men who lose all hope of living."

CANTO 64

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "From the midst of the havoc amongst the devastated Kurus, Shantanu's son Bhishma, Pitama of the Bhaaratas, rushes at Arjuna with his golden bow and strikes him with scorching clutches of arrows. With his white parasol unfurled above him, Bhishma Purushavyaghra is full of deep splendour; he is as radiant as the Sun rising over the mountains. The son of Ganga blows his conch to cheer Dhritarashtra's sons, then wheels to his right to confront Arjuna.

The heroic son of Kunti sees him coming and receives him joyfully, as a mountain welcomes a rain-filled cloud. But Bhishma of boundless might cuts down Partha's flagstaff with eight arrows. These arrows flare on to reach the banner and strike the Vanara and the other creatures perched resplendently on it.

Pandu's son fells Bhishma's regal parasol with a great javelin, and it falls onto the earth. Kunti's son of the light hands strikes his grandsire's flagstaff, his horses and the two chariot-warriors who protect Bhishma's flanks.

Bhishma cannot bear Arjuna's onslaught and envelops him in a devastra. The Pandava of the deep soul invokes another divine weapon against Bhishma at the same time as he receives Bhishma's missile of enchantment lightly, as a mountain wears a cloud. Relentless is the duel that ensues between Partha and Bhishma, and the Kaurava troops and warriors

stand by watching in thrall. Arrows meet arrows and glimmer in the air like fireflies of the monsoon.

O Rajan, bent by the ambidextrous Partha, the Gandiva is a hoop of fire as the Pandava's missiles flow from it in a ceaseless stream. The son of Kunti covers Bhishma with a thousand shafts and Bhishma contains the cascade with his own astras, just as its shore does a swollen sea; he batters the Pandava with a fierce torrent in return. Shards of splintered arrows rain down around Phalguna's chariot, whilst the Pandava's golden-winged barbs swarm thickly from his bow like locusts. Bhishma deflects his grandchild's deadly shower with a thousand stone-whetted arrows.

The Kauravas shout *Excellent! Well done!* and applaud Bhishma's marvellous feats as the Pitamaha battles great Dhananjaya who is young, powerful, swift and dexterous. Who but Bhishma son of Shantanu, Devaki's son Krishna and Bharadvaja's son Drona, greatest among Acharyas, can withstand Partha in battle?

Countering astras with other astras, the two Bharatarishabhas, both astoundingly strong, fight as if they are at play, delighting all those who watch them. These two warriors flit here and there at will across the battlefield, wielding unearthly weapons given to them by Prajapati and Indra, Agni, Rudra and Kubera, Varuna, Yama and Vayu. All are wonderstruck by the contention between the illustrious twain, and they shout, *Partha Mahabaho! Ah, Bhishma!* So rare and awesome is the display of devastras that Bhishma and Partha invoke.

The duel between the two, both masters of all the astras, rages on as if it will never end. When they have exhausted the divine astras, they take up their bows and arrows once more. Now Arjuna flies at his Pitamaha and rives Bhishma's gold-covered bow with a razor sharp arrow, but without a moment's pause Mahabaho Devavrata takes up another and strings it.

In a flash the seething Bhishma casts a cupola of arrows over Dhananjaya; the tireless Pandava pierces the crafty dome at all the right points with a flurry of impossible accuracy. Again, Bhishma aims a ferocity of arrows at Pandu's son. Great king, no distinction can be made between those two noblest Kshatriyas as they fight, both masters of mundane and divine weapons.

The ten cardinal points of the sky are obscured by the arrows of Kiriti and the son of Shantanu, as each repeatedly attempts to smother his

adversary with shafts of fire and water, wind and sky. O king, it is past belief that this most wonderful duel is fought in this world of mortals.

Arjuna savagely cuts down the warriors who protect Bhishma's chariot. The Pandava's shafts flare from the Gandiva in all directions, as if they themselves want to slaughter the enemy indiscriminately. As they fly from his chariot, his enchanted barbs with golden wings look like a flight of unworldly swans in the sky. Indra and the Devas watch in wonder from the heavens as Arjuna, amazing archer, invokes yet another devastra.

A joyful Chitrasena sees the supreme Gandiva and says to Indra, 'Look how these arrows of Partha's course through the skies in an unbroken line! Dazzling is Jishnu's skill with this divine bow. It is beyond the power of any other mortal to wield the Gandiva; no other weapon like it exists on Earth. Wondrous and formidable is Arjuna's arsenal of ancient weapons. His movements are so swift that no gap of time or space can be discerned as he takes an arrow, fixes it to his gleaming bow and releases it from the bowstring drawn back to his ear.

The Kuru soldiers are blinded by the brilliance of the son of Pandu who blazes like the Sun at high noon. Neither does anyone try to gaze upon Bhishma, the son of Ganga. Both are celebrated for their achievements; both are powerful; both are equal in their heroic feats, and both are impossible to quell in battle.'

Upon hearing the Gandharva extol Partha and Bhishma, the king of the Devas showers divine blooms of petals of light over them.

Bhishma attacks Arjuna from his left flank. Laughing in delight at the sublime duel, Bibhatsu shatters Bhishma's bow with another vulture-feathered arrow and, although Bhishma fights as fiercely as he can, the Kaunteya pierces his chest with ten more whining shafts. Sorely wounded by these, pain lancing through him, Ganga's hitherto undefeated son staggers and has to lean against his chariot post. Then Bhishma swoons and, knowing what he must to save his warrior's life, his charioteer swiftly bears him away to safety."

CANTO 65

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “When Bhishma leaves the battle, Duryodhana hoists his flag high and comes roaring at Arjuna. He bends his bow into a circle and shoots Arjuna squarely through his forehead with a spear-headed shaft. With the arrow embedded in his brow, that Kshatriya looks strange and splendid, O Rajan, somehow like a lone mountain peak. Warm blood gushes from the wound and flows shining down his body like a mala of kinsuka flowers.

Arjuna’s rage billows up, and he pierces Suyodhana with clutch after clutch of hissing shafts. A duel erupts between Duryodhana and Partha, first among Kshatriyas, both Purushottamas. Both are born into the Ajamida race; both are formidable; and they attack holding nothing back.

Riding an enormous elephant, with four chariots around him in support, Vikarna also charges Arjuna. Dhananjaya sees the elephant lumbering at him and strikes it between its temples with a blistering arrow. Like a thunderbolt cast by Indra, that barb buries itself to its feathers in the mountainous creature’s head. The mastodon trembles in agony and, its knees buckling, crashes down onto the ground, its head riven like a mountain summit by the Vajra. When his great beast falls, Vikarna jumps off its back and runs some eight hundred paces in moments, to clamber onto Vivimsati’s ratha.

After he kills the elephant, Partha strikes Duryodhana in his chest with another lightning streak of an arrow, drawing a font of his cousin’s blood.

When they see the elephant slain and Duryodhana wounded, all the surrounding warriors, already bleeding from wounds inflicted by the Gandiva, lose their nerve and run in panic, following Vikarna and the Kuru king's bodyguard. And Duryodhana Kurusthama, seeing them go, turns his chariot around and speeds away from the terrible Partha.

He is sorely wounded and vomits blood as he flees, but Kiriti, his battle-lust undiminished, calls after him in anger, 'Why do you sacrifice your honour and glory? Why do you run away? Why don't you sound your trumpets now, as you did when you set out from your kingdom? I, who obey Yudhishtira, am the third son of Pritha; and I stand here ready to do battle.

Do not abandon Kshatriya Dharma; turn and face me, O son of Dhritarashtra. Your name Duryodhana has no meaning left. Where is your famous ferocity and fortitude that you run from battle? I do not see your bodyguards, Duryodhana, in front of you or behind. Go, great man, fly; save your precious life, coward, or this Pandava will take it!' "

CANTO 66

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana continued, "Stung deeper than arrows by the searing insult, Duryodhana turns back like an elephant prodded by a goad, like a snake trodden on.

A broad golden necklace shimmering upon his great chest, Karna sees Duryodhana turn back and prevents him from going to certain death. After soothing his beloved friend, Karna himself swings his ratha round to face north, and Partha, in battle. A recovered Bhishma also turns his great tawny horses round and, bow raised, rushes to protect Duryodhana from the fearsome Pandava. Drona, Kripa, Vivimsati, Dussasana and others turn back as well and, bows drawn, ride to defend Duryodhana.

Pritha's son Dhananjaya sees these warriors and their legions flash towards him in a tide and he rushes eagerly at them, as a crane to a rain-charged cloud. Arjuna is quickly surrounded by Maharathas, all armed with devastras.

They scathe him with a torrent of arrows, like clouds lashing a mountain's crest with rain. Arjuna cuts down every last shaft in flight, and then invokes an inexorable weapon against the Kuru bulls, the Sammohana which he got from Indra, an astra of sleep.

Covering all the cardinal points of the sky with his gorgeously-feathered arrows, the great Pandava pulls violently on his bowstring, stunning his enemies. Partha take up his Devadatta in both hands, and he blows it with such force that the sound fills the skies and echoes in the far corners of the

Earth. The Kuru heroes are stupefied and stand entranced from the enchantment of the Sammohana, still holding their bows, which hang limply from nerveless hands.

Seeing the transfixed Kuru army, Partha remembers princess Uttaraa's request and says to her brother, his sarathy, 'Purushottama, go amongst the Kurus while they are still frozen in trance and bring me Drona and Kripa's white silk scarves; bring Karna's beautiful golden one and the blue ones of Duryodhana and Aswatthama. I suspect that Bhishma is not under the astra's spell, for he knows how to repel the power of Sammohana. So pass him by, keeping his horses on your left, for you must avoid any great warrior who is awake.'

The Matsya prince promptly drops his reins, jumps down from the chariot and does what Arjuna asks. He returns with the warriors' silks and takes up the reins of his silver horses again, flicking them lightly over the white steeds' necks, and bearing Arjuna away from the battlefield, beyond the footsoldiers and standard-bearers.

Bhishma sees the Pandava go and strikes him with a flock of arrows, but Partha kills his Pitama's horses and sarathy in a flash and pierces the old warrior with ten vicious shafts. Leaving Bhishma helpless on the field, Arjuna bursts out from the multitude of chariots with the beautiful bow in his hands, surely like the Sun breaking out from behind dark clouds.

Duryodhana wakes from his trance and, seeing Partha riding away at his leisure, as majestic as the king of the Devas, says to Bhishma, 'How did he pass you, Pitama? Attack him; he must not escape!'

Shantanu's son smiles and says, 'Did you lose good sense as well as your strength and weapons whilst you were unconscious? Bibhatsu is not addicted to killing, nor does his soul incline towards sin. He will not violate his dharma even to gain the three worlds, and only because of this are all of us still alive.

Duryodhana, return to your city and let Arjuna go with the herds he has taken back from us. Do not be foolish and disregard what is good for you. Indeed, a man must always keep his own welfare in mind.'

Listening to his grandsire, Duryodhana quickly loses his hunger for battle. He sighs and falls silent. Meanwhile, the other warriors all awaken, one by one, and ponder Bhishma's counsel; they see the wisdom in it and that Arjuna is indomitable and, wanting to protect Duryodhana, decide to turn home.

Arjuna happily watches the Kuru warriors leave; he makes the Matsya prince turn his chariot around and follows them: he wants to pay his respects and speak to them. He honours and worships his Pitama Bhishma and his Acharya Drona with a salvo of beautiful arrows that fall at their feet; he also salutes Aswatthama, Kripa and the other Maharathas. Then, with a final arrow, the son of Pritha breaks Duryodhana's haughty, jewelled crown into pieces.

Having paid his homage to those he reveres and having humiliated his cousin he despises, he fills the three worlds once more with the reverberant twang of the Gandiva. He blows the Devadatta, and the sound pierces the hearts of all his enemies. Having humbled them all, he stands resplendent on the chariot flying the banner which mighty Hanuman adorns.

As the Kurus ride away, Arjuna says to Uttara, 'Turn back your horses. We have recovered your herds, the enemy has retreated, and you can ride home happily to your city.'

The Devas, who have witnessed the astounding encounter between the lone Phalguna and all the Kurus, also turn their invisible vimanas homewards and return to their ethereal abodes. Arjuna's feats are imprinted on their lustrous hearts."

CANTO 67

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Having vanquished the Kurus in battle, he with the eyes of a bull is taking the valuable Matsya herd back to Virata when he sees some wounded soldiers of Dhritarashtra’s routed army coming out of the forest. They are terrified when they see Partha; and they stand before him with folded hands, their hair dishevelled, exhausted with hunger and thirst. Confused and afraid, for they are in a strange land, they bow down before Partha and say, ‘We are your slaves.’

Arjuna says, ‘Welcome, and may you be blessed. Go your way, you have nothing to fear from me. I will not take the lives of the injured. You have my protection.’

The band of soldiers greets this with salutations and they sing praises of his achievements and fame, and bless him with long life. The Kauravas cannot face Arjuna while he is on his way back to the city of Virata; he is like an elephant with rent temples. He has scattered the Kuru army like a gale does fleecy clouds.

Partha, slayer of foes, thoughtfully says to the prince of Matsya, ‘You are the only one who knows that the sons of Pritha live in your father’s kingdom. Do not speak of them or praise them when you enter the city, for the king himself may hide in fear. Instead, in your father’s presence proclaim the defeat of the Kurus as your own doing. Say to him, “I have vanquished the Kurus and recovered our cattle.”

Uttara says, ‘What you have done is beyond my power; I could never achieve it. But if you command me, I will not expose you to my father for as long as you forbid it, O Savyasachi.’

After he has vanquished the hostile Kurus and retrieved the precious herds from them, Arjuna goes back to the sami tree in the smasana and stands before it, his body wounded by enemy arrows. In a flash of light, the monkey on his banner flies up into the sky and vanishes, along with the other supernatural creatures on the magical flagstaff; the illusion created by Visvakarma melts away, leaving prince Uttara’s own banner, bearing the device of a lion, on the chariot once more. The Matsya prince fastens the Pandavas’ arrows and quivers back in the tree, along with the matchless Gandiva. With Arjuna for his charioteer again, he rides towards his city in joy.

Having accomplished the stupendous rout of the enemy, Partha braids his hair as before, takes the reins from Uttara, and that glorious one will enter the city of Virata as Uttara’s sarathy Brihannala. Meanwhile, the defeated and dejected Kurus are well on their way back to Hastinapura.

On the way back to Virata’s city, Arjuna says to Uttara, ‘O Kshatriya, Mahabaho, send the cowherds with the cattle in advance, and we will enter the city in the afternoon after bathing our horses and giving them water to drink. Tell the cowherds to go speedily and proclaim the good news of your victory.’

Uttara commands the messengers, saying, ‘The enemy has been routed and the cattle have been recovered. Go and proclaim the king’s victory.’

Thus, well pleased with their victory, having restored the Pandavas’ weapons to the sami tree, having put on the garments and ornaments they left there, the two Kshatriyas triumphally ride into the city of Virata: the heroic son of Virata with Brihannala as his charioteer.”

CANTO 68

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, that morning, his wealth recovered and his own vast forces intact, Virata himself enters his city accompanied by the four still disguised Pandavas. The king and the sons of Pritha bask splendid in glory after shaming the Trigartas in battle and recovering all the Matsya herds. When Virata, enhancer of the joy of his friends, is seated on his throne, his subjects led by Brahmanas come before him. They adulate him, and happily he acknowledges their adoration and dismisses them.

Virata of the Matsyas asks where Uttara is. With some pride and pleasure, the royal women and young girls of the palace and the other women of the antahpura say, 'The Kurus came from the north and took the rest of our herds. Valiant prince Uttara rode against them alone, with Brihannala for his sarathy. He has gone to vanquish the six Maharathas who have come with the Kuru army—Shantanu's son Bhishma, Kripa, Karna, Duryodhana, Drona and Drona's son Aswatthama.'

Virata is filled with dread. He says nervously to his ministers, as if to console himself, 'I am sure that the Kauravas will turn back once they learn that the Trigartas have been defeated. But let my warriors who were not wounded by the Trigartas take a great force out to protect Uttara. Let them go at once.'

A vast army of horses, elephants, chariots and a teeming legion of foot-soldiers, equipped with all kinds of weapons, is mustered without delay, and

ready to go forth against the Kurus. They await their king's command.

A trembling Virata says, 'Go at once to my child. With a eunuch for his charioteer, I fear he may not be alive.'

Kanka, the king's dice-player, smiles and says to the distressed Virata, 'If, O King, Brihannala is his charioteer, the enemy will not escape with your cattle. If Brihannala protects him, your son will vanquish the Kurus today, even if they come with all the lords of the Earth, and even the Devas, the Asuras, the Siddhas and the Yakshas together.'

Just then, the swift dutas despatched by Uttara arrive in Virata's city with their joyful tidings. His chief minister quickly brings the amazing news to Virata in his court. He says, 'It is passing strange, but all our cattle have been rescued, the awesome Kurus defeated and prince Uttara, scourge of our foes, is well, and also his charioteer Brihannala.'

Yudhishtira says, 'These are happy tidings that the herds have been recovered and the Kuru army routed, but I do not find it strange that your son defeated the Kurus, for Brihannala was his charioteer.'

The hair on Virata's body stands on end in unbridled joy to hear of his son's incredible feat. He makes gifts of clothes to the messengers and issues orders to his ministers.

He says, 'Let our highways be lined with flags; let all the gods and goddesses be worshipped with offerings of flowers. Let princes, warriors, musicians and dancing-girls decked in jewels go out to receive my son. Let the bell-ringer go out on a swift elephant and proclaim Uttara's victory at every crossroad. Let Uttaraa put on her finest robes and, surrounding herself with maidens, musicians and singers of eulogies, go out to receive my heroic son.'

Beside themselves with excitement, all the people go to welcome Uttara, of the boundless prowess—some with auspicious gifts in their hands, many with cymbals, trumpets and conches, beautiful women in gorgeous attire, encomiasts and chanters of hymns along with minstrels, drummers and other musicians.

Having sent out his army, as well as maidens and bejewelled courtesans, to welcome his son home, the overjoyed monarch of the Matsyas says, 'Sairandhri, fetch the dice. Come Kanka, let us play.'

Kanka says, 'They say that one whose heart is overflowing with joy should not play against a cunning gambler. Therefore I would rather not gamble with you for you are in a transport of joy and as I am always

conscious of your welfare. However, if that is what you truly want, let us play.'

Virata says, 'Even if we do not gamble, you cannot be protecting my women, my cattle, my gold and all my wealth.'

Kanka replies, 'O king, bestower of honours, why do you want to gamble when it is fraught with evil? It should be shunned. You might have seen or at least heard of Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu. He lost his vast, prosperous kingdom and his godlike brothers at dice. That is why I am averse to the game; but if it is your wish, Rajan, I will play.'

While they play, the Matsya king says to the Pandava, 'Ah, my son has vanquished the formidable Kauravas in battle.'

To which the illustrious Yudhishtira says, 'And why should he not, when Brihannala was his charioteer?'

This cuts the Matsya king to the quick, and he cries, 'Wretch of a Brahmana! Dare you compare a eunuch to my son? Do you know nothing of what to say to your king, that you insult me so? Why should my son not vanquish all the Kurus led by Bhishma and Drona? Brahmana, it is only because of our friendship that I forgive you. But if you want to live, never speak such words to me again.'

But Yudhishtira says, 'Who other than Brihannala can fight a force consisting of Bhishma, Drona, Drona's son, the son of Surya, Kripa, Duryodhana, other Maharathas and, indeed, if the need arises, Indra himself surrounded by the Maruts? None has been, nor ever will be, his equal in prowess. Only Brihannala's heart fills with joy at the prospect of a terrible battle. He vanquished the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas. With such an ally, why should your son not conquer the enemy?'

Virata growls, 'Though I warned you, vile Kanka, you don't care to hold your tongue. If there is no punishment, no one would practise virtue.'

And the enraged king flings his heavy dice in Yudhishtira's face. 'Let this not happen again!' he thunders.

Yudhishtira's nose bleeds from being struck, but he contains the blood in his hands before it falls to the ground. He glances meaningly at Draupadi who stands at his side. Immediately understanding him, she brings a golden vessel filled with water to catch the blood that flows from his nose.

Meanwhile, Uttara enters the city being feted with sweet perfumes and flower garlands by the Matsyas, their women and even people from the

provinces. As he nears the gate of the palace he sends word of his arrival to his father.

The gatekeeper goes to the king and says, 'Your son Uttara is at the gate with Brihannala.'

The joyful Matsya king rises and says to him, 'Show them both in, ah, I am impatient to see them!'

Yudhishtira takes the dwarapalaka aside and whispers, 'Let Uttara enter alone; Brihannala must not come in yet. That Mahabaho has sworn a vow that whoever wounds me or sheds my blood, other than in battle, will not live. He will be enraged to see me bleeding and will kill Virata, even in the presence of his guards and ministers.'

Bhuminjaya enters and, having worshipped the feet of his father, approaches Kanka. He sees him seated in a corner of the sabha, bleeding, and waited upon by the sairandhri.

Uttara asks his father, 'O Rajan, who struck him? Who did this sinful thing?'

Virata says, 'I struck the devious Brahmana, and he deserves further punishment, for while I was praising you, he dared praise the eunuch.'

Uttara says, 'My lord, you have sinned gravely. You must appease him at once so the venom of a Brahmana's curse does not consume you.'

Calming down, his heart brimming over to receive his triumphant son, Virata turns to soothe Kanka the gambler, Yudhishtira like a fire hidden in ashes, and begs his forgiveness.

The Pandava replies, 'My lord, I was never angry that I need to forgive you. I was only worried because if blood from my nose fell on the ground, you and all your kingdom would have burned. Rajan, I do not blame you for having struck me, for those with great power sometimes succumb to unreasonable anger.'

When the bleeding has stopped, Brihannala enters the sabha. He greets Virata and Kanka and stands silent. Having appeased his gambler, Virata begins to sing the praises of his son Uttara in Savyasachi's hearing.

The Matsya king says, 'O you who gives the Kekaya princess so much joy, in you I truly have a son! I never had, nor shall have, another son who is your equal. My child, how did you do battle with the great Karna, whose aim is so unerring that he strikes every one of a thousand targets at once? How did you contend with Bhishma, who has no equal in the world of men? How did you fight Drona, that foremost of all wielders of weapons, the

Acharya of the Vrishnis and Kauravas, the Dvija who is seen as the preceptor of all Kshatriyas? How did you withstand the celebrated Aswatthama? How did you fight Duryodhana, who can pierce a mountain with his arrows?

My foes have all been destroyed and a delicious breeze seems to waft around me. And when you recovered my wealth which the Kurus stole, it seems that all those Maharathas were struck with panic. Without doubt, Purusharishabha, you have routed the enemy single-handedly and snatched the wealth that is my herds from them like his prey from a tiger.' ”

CANTO 69

GO-HARANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Uttara says, 'It is not I who retrieved the cattle and vanquished the Kurus. All this was done by the son of a Deva. That divine youth saw me running away in fear when I saw the fearsome Kuru army; he stopped me and himself mounted my chariot, making me his sarathy. It was he who put the Kauravas to rout and recovered the cattle. This incredible deed, father, is that hero's and not mine.

It was his arrows that repulsed Kripa, Drona, the Acharya's powerful son, the Sutaputra Karna and Bhishma. He it was who said to the terrified Duryodhana who fled like the leader of a herd of elephants, "O prince of Kurus, you will not be safe even in Hastinapura. Do all you can to protect yourself, because you will not escape me by fleeing. Prepare to fight. If you win, you will be sovereign of the entire Earth; if you lose, it is Swarga you will gain."

Hissing like a snake, and surrounded by his Maharathas, Duryodhana turned back to fight. He shot arrows like thunderbolts, and my legs trembled at the sight, respected father. Then, that heavenly youth raised his unearthly bow and sprayed the Kuru army of chariots and brave warriors with his divine arrows. He transfixed that throng of Maharathas with an astra of sleep, and that lionish, irradiant youth laughed as he robbed them of silks of different hues.

Indeed, the six greatest rathikas of the Kurus were vanquished by that hero alone, like a whole herd of deer in a forest falling prey to one ferocious

tiger.'

Virata says, 'Where is this mighty-armed youth of celestial origin, this hero who recaptured my wealth from the Kurus? I am agog to see him and pay my homage to that mighty warrior, for has he not saved you as well as my herds?'

Uttara replies, 'The Devaputra vanished immediately. I believe, however, that he will show himself either tomorrow or the day after.'

Virata remains ignorant of the Pandava whom Uttara describes to him, and who lives in his very palace in disguise.

With the noble Virata's leave, Partha gives with his own hands the Kuru silks he has brought to Virata's daughter, and the lovely Uttaraa and her sakhis are delighted with the fine and brilliant cloths with which they make clothes for their dolls."

CANTO 70

VAIVAHIKA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Three days later, at dawn, the five Pandavas bathe, clothe themselves in royal white robes, put on their ornaments, and enter Virata's palace with Yudhishtira at their head, looking as splendid as five fierce elephants. They walk into Virata's sabha, seat themselves on thrones reserved for kings, and they look like five sacrificial flames ablaze upon an altar.

In a while, Virata comes into the sabha to hold court; he sees the brothers in their splendour and stops short.

Angrily, he addresses Kanka who sits on the Matsya king's throne like a god, like Indra surrounded by Maruts. He says, 'I employed you as a courtier, a player of dice. How dare you sit on my throne wearing white silk and ornaments?'

Arjuna smiles and says, 'O king, this man is worthy of sharing a throne with Indra himself. He reveres Brahmanas, is well-read in the Vedas and indifferent to luxury and pleasures of the flesh. He performs sacrifices, is firm in his vows and, indeed, he is the embodiment of dharma. He is the very best among all men of power, more intelligent than anyone in the world, devout in his observance of ascetic rites and a master of all weapons. In fact, he knows more about astras than anyone else does, or ever will, in the three Lokas.

There is no one like him even amongst the Devas, Asuras, Manavas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kinnaras and Uragas. He is blessed with

foresight and vitality, and he is much loved by all the people both in the cities and villages. He is the Adiratha, the best chariot-warrior, among the sons of Pandu. He is the Yajaman at countless sacrifices, a man of piety and self-control.

Like the greatest sage, this saintly king is celebrated across the three worlds. He is strong, brilliant, capable, truthful and has his senses under perfect control. He is as wealthy as Indra and has amassed as much treasure as Kubera; he is as mighty a protector of the three worlds as the powerful Manu.

This great man who is as compassionate as he is powerful is none other than that bull of the Kurus, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira.

This king's achievements are like the Sun in brilliance; his fame has travelled over the world even like the rays of the Sun; and, as sunbeams follow the rising Sun, ten thousand elephants and thirty thousand chariots and carriages adorned with the purest gold and drawn by the noblest horses followed him when he lived amongst the Kurus. Eight hundred vabdhis and magadhis, wearing earrings set with shining gemstones, accompanied by minstrels, chanted his praises in those days, even as the Rishis sing in praise of Indra.

And, O Virata, the Kauravas and other lords of the Earth waited upon him like slaves, just as the Yakshas do on Kubera. This great king, who is as glorious as Surya at his zenith, once received tribute from all the lords of the Earth as if they were tenant farmers.

Eighty-eight thousand chaste Snatakas depended on him for their subsistence while they observed stern and lofty vows. This illustrious king of kings took care of the old, the helpless, the crippled and the blind as if they were his children, and he ruled justly over his subjects. Unflinching in dharma and self-control, keeping anger on a tight leash, generous, dedicated to Brahmanas, respectful and truthful, he is the eldest son of Pandu.

His prosperity and power inflamed the minds of Suyodhana and his followers, Karna and Subala's son Sakuni. O lord of men, the virtues of this man cannot be enumerated. This son of Pandu is ever virtuous and never does harm. Possessing such qualities, O Virata, is this bull among kings not worthy of a royal seat?' "

CANTO 71

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Virata says, 'If this is, indeed, the Kuru king Yudhishtira Kuntiputra, which amongst these is his brother Arjuna, and which the mighty Bhima? Which of these is Nakula, which is Sahadeva, and where is the celebrated Draupadi? After their defeat at dice, the sons of Pritha have not been heard of by anyone.'

Arjuna says, 'O King, the man you know as Ballava your cook is Mahabaho Bhima of unrivalled strength and mercurial energy. It was he who killed the angry Rakshasas on Mount Gandhamadana and plucked the fragrant saugandhikas for Krishnaa. He is the Gandharva who killed evil Kichaka, and it was he who killed tigers, bears and boars in the antahpura of your palace, for your pleasure.

He who has been the master of your stables is Parantapa Nakula; this one is Sahadeva, the man in charge of your herds. These handsome sons of Madri are famed Maharathas. These two bulls of the Bhaaratas, who, today have again put on royal garments and fine jewellery, are a match for a thousand great chariot-warriors.

This devi of the lotus-petal eyes, slender waist and sweet smiles, your wife's sairandhri, is Drupada's daughter, for whose sake the Kichaka clan perished.

And, O king, I am Arjuna whom you know of already—son of Pritha, Bhima's younger brother and elder brother to the twins.

Rajan, we have happily spent our ajnatavasa in your kingdom, as safe as infants in the womb.'

After Arjuna has identified the five Kshatriyas, the Pandavas, Virata's son Uttara speaks of Arjuna's prowess and confirms the identities of the sons of Pritha.

Uttara says, 'That one, with the glowing, golden complexion, who is tall, majestic as a lion, of the prominent nose, large eyes and broad, ruddy face, is the king of the Kurus.

Look at this other Kshatriya, whose tread is like a mighty elephant's, whose complexion is like molten gold, whose shoulders are huge, and arms long and powerful: he is Vrikodara.

That one who stands beside him, the dark-skinned youth who is like the king bull in a herd of elephants, who has leonine shoulders and an elephant's proud gait, whose eyes are large as lotus leaves, is Arjuna, greatest of all archers.

The two who stand close to the king are those Purushottamas, the twins who, like Vishnu and Indra, are unrivalled in beauty, strength and demeanour.

That devi who stands close to them is Krishnaa, who is beauty personified, the embodiment of light, dark like the blue lotus—a divine queen, like Sri Lakshmi come to life.'

Then Virata's son describes Arjuna's prowess. He says, 'It is he who killed our adversaries like a lion rampaging through a herd of deer. He cut a swath through a host of enemy chariots, slaying so many of their best rathikas. With a single arrow, he killed an enormous, angry war-elephant so it fell in its golden armour and its tusks gored deep into the ground. It is Arjuna who retrieved our herds and vanquished the Kurus in battle; and I was deafened by the boom of his conch. It is this hero of the fierce deeds who quelled Bhishma, Drona and Duryodhana. These achievements were his, not mine.'

The king of the Matsyas is full of both guilt and fear at having offended Yudhishtira. He says quickly to Uttara, 'The time has come for me to appease the sons of Pandu. If you approve, I will give my daughter Uttaraa to Arjuna.'

Uttara says, 'Do so, father. And let us so worship the sons of Pandu who are entirely worthy of worship.'

Virata says, ‘Bhimasena rescued me from the clutches of the enemy, and Arjuna recovered my cows. It is because of their might that we are alive and victorious. We and our ministers will pay our respects to Yudhishtira son of Kunti.’

And to Yudhishtira he says, ‘O Pandavarishabha, Dharmaraja, may you and your brothers be blessed! If we have unwittingly offended you, you must forgive us, most noble and honourable son of Pandu.’

Then the good Virata joyfully proposes an alliance to Yudhishtira by offering him his kingdom, his crown, his treasury and his city.

He says to the Pandavas, and to Arjuna in particular, ‘How fortunate I am to see you!’ and he embraces Yudhishtira, Bhima and Madri’s sons repeatedly and sniffs the top of their heads; but Virata, lord of a vast army, is still not satisfied.

The delighted king says to Yudhishtira, ‘I am the most fortunate man alive that you chose to spend your ajnatavasa in my home, and fortune continued to smile on us that you spent the thirteenth year of your exile undiscovered.

I hereby make a gift of my kingdom and whatever else I own to you sons of Pritha. Pandavas, accept these without hesitation. And let Arjuna Savyasachi accept the hand of my daughter Uttaraa; he is the best of all men and worthy of being her husband.’

In response, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira looks at his brother, and Arjuna says to the king of the Matsyas, ‘Rajan, I gladly accept your daughter, whose virtues I know well; but I will have her for my daughter-in-law. Let her become my son Abhimanyu’s wife. This alliance between the Matsyas and the Bhaaratas is fitting and brings us profound joy.’ ”

CANTO 72

VAIVAHIKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Virata says, 'Pandavottama, why do you not wish to accept my daughter as your wife?'

Arjuna says, 'When I lived in your antahpura I would see your daughter every day and, whether alone or accompanied, she trusted in me as in a father. I know about music and dancing, and she liked and respected me. She always considered me her teacher. I lived with her for a whole year even after she had attained puberty.

Given this circumstance, you or other men may entertain unfounded suspicions about me, or, worse, about her purity. And so, O Virata, I prefer to have Uttaraa for my daughter-in-law and bear witness to her chasteness. There is no difference between a daughter-in-law and a daughter just as there is none between a son and one's self. I am wary of slander and false accusations. I gladly accept your daughter Uttaraa as my daughter-in-law.

My son Abhimanyu excels every warrior on Earth in skill and prowess in battle; he is as handsome as a Deva. He is the favourite nephew of his uncle Krishna, who wields the Sudarshana chakra. O king, he is fit to be your daughter's husband, and your son-in-law.'

Virata says, 'What you say is wise, O Arjuna. Partha, do what you think best and you decide what we should do next. He whose daughter marries Arjuna's son has all his wished fulfilled.'

Yudhishtira gives his consent to the proposal. Bhaarata, Kunti's son and Virata send messengers who bear invitations to the wedding, to Krishna and

to all their friends and relatives.

At the end of the thirteenth year of their exile, the five Pandavas move to Upalavya, one of the finest towns in Virata's kingdom. Arjuna himself rides to fetch Abhimanyu, Krishna and many others of the Dasarha family from the country of Anarta. The king of Kasi and Saibya, who are Yudhishtira's friends, arrive with an akshauhini of troops each. The mighty Drupada, Draupadi's heroic sons, the unvanquished Sikhandi and the invincible Dhrishtadyumna arrive with another akshauhini of troops.

All the kings who come are not only lords of armies, but also conduct sacrifices, give bountiful gifts to Brahmanas, are deeply learned in the Vedas, heroic and always ready to die in battle. As they arrive, the virtuous king of the Matsyas honours them and provides entertainment for their armies, their servants and attendants; great is his gladness at giving his daughter to Abhimanyu.

Others come from different parts of the country. Then, Krishna arrives draped in bright, wild vanamalas made from forest blooms; Balarama, Kritavarma, Hridika's son Satyaki, Satyaki's son Anadhristi, Akrura, Samba and Nisatha, all magnificent Yadavas, come with Krishna. All these Parantapas come to Upalavya, bringing Abhimanyu and his mother Subhadra with them.

Indrasena and the others who have been living in Dwaraka for a year come in Krishna's train, bringing the Pandavas' chariots. Ten thousand elephants, ten thousand chariots, a hundred million horses, a billion foot-soldiers, and countless Vrishni, Andhaka, Kukura and Bhoja warriors of untold prowess form the entourage of the great Vrishni tiger, Krishna the Avatara. Krishna brings many nubile young women, ancient and magical jewels past compare and garments of unearthly weave and design for each of the illustrious sons of Pandu.

Soon, the wedding festivities are underway between the families of the Matsya king and the Pandavas. Conches, cymbals, horns, drums and other instruments sound, making music deep and wondrous, in Virata's palace. Hundreds of deer and other pure animals are slaughtered; wines and other intoxicating fruit juices are pressed and fermented, and flow in rivers. Actors, vabdhis, who are eulogists, and other singers and pauranikas entertain the kings by chanting their praises and genealogies, as well as recounting legends from time out of mind.

With Sudeshna at their head the royal Matsya women, wearing pearls and earrings of every other precious stone, come to the auspicious pandal where the marriage rites will be performed. Krishnaa by far outshines all the lovely, fair-skinned and bejewelled women in beauty, fame, virtue and splendour; dark Panchali is truly like a Goddess among them.

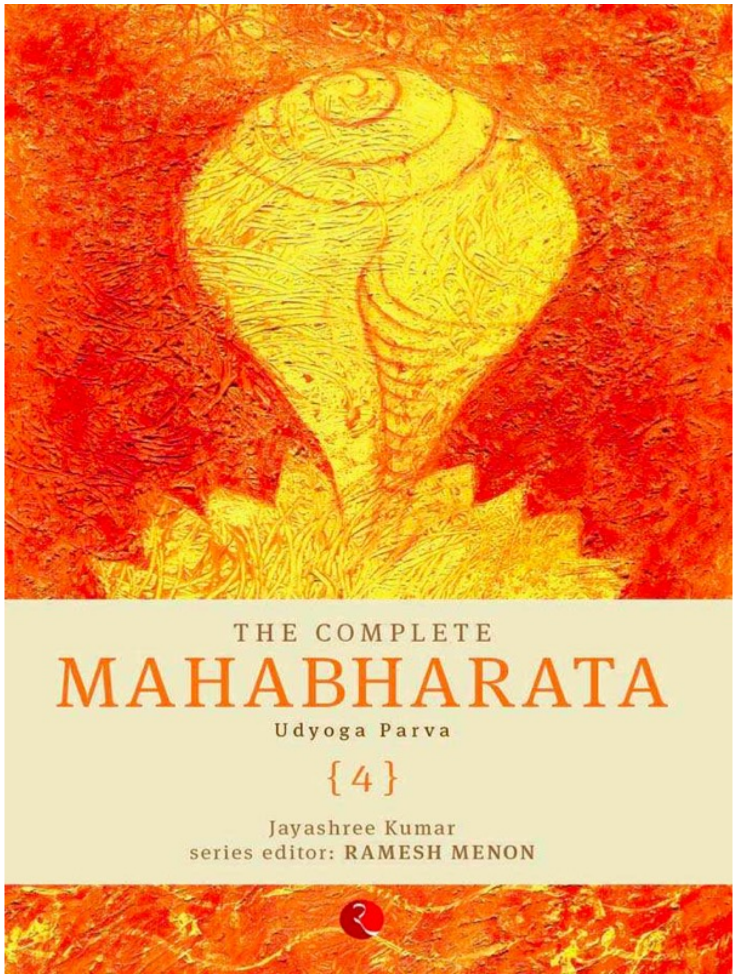
The women lead in princess Uttaraa, wearing rich red silk and ornaments handed down from antiquity in her family, and she looks like a daughter of Indra himself. Gravely, formally, Arjuna of the Kurus accepts Virata's flawless daughter on behalf of his son by Subhadra, and Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, who stands there like Indra, also receives her as his daughter-in-law.

With the formal acceptance, Partha, with Krishna before him, conducts the sacred wedding rituals of Subhadra's son. Virata gives him seven thousand horses, swift as the wind, two hundred elephants of the highest birth and wealth past telling. Libations of ghee are poured on the fire, and the Brahmanas are honoured. Now Virata offers his kingdom, his army, his treasury and himself to the Pandavas.

When the solemn and joyful ceremony is completed, Yudhishtira gives all the wealth that Krishna of immortal glory has brought, in daana to the great Brahmanas who have come to the Matsya kingdom from every corner of Bharatavarsha. He also gives thousands of the purest cows, all kinds of garments, extraordinay ornaments, chariots and carriages, mattresses of swan's-down and serves them the most varied and delicious food and drink. With the proper ceremonies, the king bestows vast lands on the Brahmanas. He gives away thousands of horses, treasuries of gold and other wealth to all the wedding guests, young and old.

Janamejaya, O Bharatarishabha, Virata's city teems with well-fed, contented, festive, celebrant men and women, and is lit by a festive glow, which, for the presence of Krishna, is unearthly and divine."

The end of Virata Parva


THE COMPLETE
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Udyoga Parva
{4}
Jayashree Kumar
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Jayashree Kumar

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for my mother

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A Brief Introduction

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa Publications India, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the Great Epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is

very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go, again, to Ramesh Menon for having given me the opportunity to be involved in this project; and to my mother, my son and my daughter for their love and support throughout the making of this volume.

CANTO 1

SENODYOGA PARVA

AUM! I bow down to Narayana and Nara, the most exalted Purusha, and to the Devi Saraswati and invoke the spirit of *Jaya!*

Vaisampayana said, “After the joyful celebrations of Abhimanyu’s wedding, the Kurus of the wedding party rest that night and present themselves in the morning before Virata in his sabha. King Virata’s court is full of treasures, the choicest vaiduryas and other precious stones; exquisitely wrought thrones and deep silk-covered armchairs are carefully laid out and the great hall is fragrant with the scent of a wealth of garlands.

The visiting kings are all present, when Virata and Drupada, the eldest among them, enter and occupy the thrones at the head of the sabha. Balarama, Krishna and their father Vasudeva are present. Satyaki, great Kshatriya of the Sini vamsa, and Rohini’s son Balarama sit beside the Panchala king. Krishna and Yudhishtira sit beside the king of the Matsyas and with them are all the sons of Drupada, Bhima and Arjuna, Madri’s sons, Virata’s princes, and Pradyumna, Samba, Abhimanyu. Draupadi’s sons, young lions who rival their fathers in courage, grace and prowess, are there as well, and they sit upon rich, gold-inlaid seats.

All these glittering heroes in their resonant ornaments and grand attire make that sabha of kings sparkle like the star-filled sky. Greetings exchanged all round and pleasantries done with, the assembled Kshatriyas fall quiet, their pensive gazes fixed on Krishna. And rising, he calls their

attention to the circumstances of the Pandavas. The sabha is hushed and the Kshatriyas are absorbed by what he says, which is grave and profound.

Krishna says, 'You all know how Yudhishtira was deceitfully defeated at dice by Subala's son, and how his kingdom was stolen from him. You also know of his oath to live in exile in the forest. Although Pandu's sons can conquer the very Earth, they kept the oath they had sworn and those incomparable princes fulfilled the cruel conditions imposed on them. This last, thirteenth year, was the most trying for them, but they have endured their ajnatavasa, disguised, suffering silently and unrecognised. You are all aware of these things.

These illustrious men spent that thirteenth year doing menial service. You must take all this into consideration and decide what course is best, and fair to both Yudhishtira and Duryodhana. What you decide about the Kauravas and the Pandavas must be in keeping with dharma and must have your unanimous approval.

Yudhishtira would not want even Devaloka if he violated dharma to gain the realm of the gods; he would gladly accept a single small village for his kingdom if that was righteous. All you kings and noble princes know how the sons of Dhritarashtra robbed Yudhishtira of the kingdom that was his birthright, and how he has suffered untold adversity. Although Dhritarashtra's sons cannot hope to resist Arjuna's prowess, Yudhishtira and his brothers still wish their cousins well; they wish for peace.

These matchless sons of Kunti and Madri only ask for what is theirs—what they won by vanquishing other kings in battle. When they were mere boys, you know how, many a time and using diverse methods, Duryodhana, his brothers and Sakuni plotted to kill the sons of Pandu, because Duryodhana always wanted the kingdom for himself. Consider how greedy those twisted, evil men are and how virtuous Yudhishtira. Consider deeply the relationship between them. I beseech you all to consult together and to decide on which side dharma lies.

The Pandavas have always been devoted to truth. They have fulfilled their oath faithfully. If the sons of Dhritarashtra do not give them justice now, and their kingdom back, the sons of Pandu will kill them all. When kings friendly to the Pandavas hear about the long suffering inflicted on them, they will all rally behind them and risk their very lives to see their tormentors punished, to see them die. Do not presume that the Pandavas are

too few or too weak to prevail over their enemies. United, and with the support of their allies, they will destroy those who oppose them.

However, we do not know Duryodhana's mind, or what he might do. How can we form any opinion about what is best for both the Pandavas and the Kauravas without knowing what Dhritarashtra's son intends? So, let an able ambassador—a high-born man who is virtuous, honest and alert—go to Duryodhana and persuade him to give half the kingdom to Yudhishtira.'

Full of wisdom and dharma, Krishna's words hang over the hushed sabha; he speaks impartially and for peace. His elder brother listens and then Balarama rises to addresses the gathering of kings."

CANTO 2

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Baladeva says, 'You have all heard Krishna. What he says is in keeping with dharma, prudent and impartial, and equally beneficial for both Yudhishtira and Duryodhana. The sons of Kunti are prepared to give up half their kingdom to Duryodhana; the sons of Dhritarashtra should be willing to do the same. The Kurus should be grateful to us and rejoice that the conflict between them has been so amicably resolved. The Pandavas will be content with this arrangement, provided their cousins do the honourable thing. And the satisfaction of the Pandavas is conducive to the welfare of all mankind.

I would be happy if one amongst us, committed to pacifying both the Kurus and the Pandavas, goes as a duta to Hastinapura, taking Yudhishtira's thoughts with him, and also to discover Duryodhana's intentions. This man must pay his respects to the noble Bhishma, to Dhritarashtra, to Drona and his son Aswatthama, to Vidura and Kripa, to Sakuni prince of Gandhara and to the Sutaputra Karna. Let him also pay his respects to the other sons of Dhritarashtra, who are all renowned for their strength and learning, who know dharma well, who are brave and aware of all that has happened, and who read the signs of the times.

When all these and the elders are assembled, let our messenger speak with humility, since this will best serve the interests of Yudhishtira.

While it is true that Dhritarashtra's sons took the kingdom with some deceit, our messenger must spare no effort to avoid provoking them. When Yudhishtira had his throne he forgot himself; he gambled wildly at dice and lost his kingdom.

Yudhishtira was never adept at dice-play, and despite his brothers and friends trying to dissuade him, he foolishly challenged Sakuni, who is a master gambler. Hundreds of other dice-players were present, whom Yudhishtira could have beaten, but he ignored them and, of all men, he challenged Sakuni. Naturally, he lost game after game but he still refused to play anyone but Sakuni, who easily routed him and took everything he owned. How can Sakuni be blamed for this?

Therefore, our messenger must employ the utmost humility and first placate Dhritarashtra, who might then persuade Duryodhana to deal in peace. We must not incite a war with the Kurus, but approach Duryodhana in conciliation. War can never achieve what a peaceful agreement would, an enduring result.'

While the great and ponderous Balarama is still speaking, suddenly Satyaki, prince of the Sinis, jumps up and, his face red with indignation, roundly condemns what Baladeva advocates."

CANTO 3

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Satyaki says, 'What a man says reflects what is in his heart; as do your words. Men are either brave or cowardly; of two branches of the same tree, only one might bear fruit; in the same dynastic line, there may be foolish men as well as those who have great strength of character.

O you whose banner bears the image of a plough, it is not what you say that I condemn, but those who listen to you. How can they allow a man who dares blame virtuous Yudhishtira to speak in this sabha? Clever dice-players challenged Yudhishtira even though he had little skill and, trusting in their integrity, he was vanquished. Can such men be said to have won honourably?

If they had come to Yudhishtira in his own house, whilst he played dice with his brothers, and bested him there, their victory would have been righteous. They challenged him, who was bound by Kshatriya dharma, and they won by deceit. How can what they did be called dharma? Having agreed to what they made the stakes in the game, a life in the forests, how could Yudhishtira demean himself by asking to be freed from his wager, even if he was beaten with cunning sleight of hand? Even if, by rights, Yudhishtira still owned his ancestral kingdom, it would have been beneath him to beg.

How can the Kauravas be termed righteous and their intentions honourable when they accused the Pandavas of having been discovered,

although the sons of Pandu had completed their ajnatavasa unrecognised? Bhishma and Drona begged them to return the Pandavas' rightful throne, but they refused.

I would use arrows rather than words to convince them. I would use force to make them prostrate at Yudhishtira's feet. They and their allies must bow before him, or they must die. When I, Yuyudhana, am provoked by anger to fight, they will not resist me, even as mountains cannot withstand a striking thunderbolt.

Who can withstand Arjuna in fight? Who can resist him who has the discus for his weapon? Who can stand against me? Who can face the inexorable Bhima? And who that values his life would come near the sons of Madri, whose bows are firmly held and who are like twin embodiments of Yama?

Who would dare face Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna, or these five sons of Pandu, who glorified Draupadi's name, who rival their father in valour and in every other way, and who are full of Kshatriya pride? Who would ride against Subhadra's son, whose mighty bow neither the Devas, nor Gada, nor Pradyumna, nor Samba can resist, and who is like Death himself, or like the very Vajra, or like Agni?

We will kill Duryodhana, Sakuni and Karna in battle and install Yudhishtira on the Kuru throne. There is no sin in slaying those who are intent on killing us, but to beg from our enemies is both adharma and shameful.

I ask you to do what Yudhishtira wants. Let Pandu's son regain the kingdom that Dhritarashtra surrenders. If Yudhishtira does not get his kingdom today, I will mow down our enemies.' "

CANTO 4

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Drupada says, 'Mahabaho, it will be as you say. Duryodhana will never give up the kingdom peacefully; his doting father Dhritarashtra will go along with him; Bhishma and Drona will, too, from helplessness and loyalty, and Karna and Sakuni from bravado. I like what Baladeva said; we must do as he advises, but only if we want peace.

We should not speak to Duryodhana with mild words. He has a vicious nature, and temperance will not persuade him to see reason. Gentleness is appropriate for dealing with a donkey, but only firmness for cattle. If we speak leniently to Duryodhana, that evil one will think we are fools and presume that he has won.

Let us make preparations and send word to our friends, asking them to gather an army for us. Let swift messengers go to Salya and Dhrishtaketu, to Jayatsena and the prince of the Kekayas. Duryodhana will also send word to these kings. By dharma, men will respond to the first one who asks them. So make haste to reach out to your friends.

A great undertaking awaits us. Send word quickly to Salya and to the kings loyal to him, to Bhagadatta of immeasurable valour who rules the eastern coast, to fierce Hardikya and Andhaka, to the brilliant king of the Mallas and to Rochamanas. Summon Brihanta and Senabindu; Senajit, Prativindhya and Chitravarman; Bahlika, Munjakesa and the ruler of the Chedis; Suparsva, Subahu and that Maharatha Paurava. Call the kings of the

Sakas, the Pahlavas, the Daradas; call Surari, Nadija and Karnaveshta, Neela and Bhumipala Viradharman; call Durjaya and Dantavaktra, Rukmi and Janamejaya, Ashada, Vayuvega and Purvapali; call Bhuritejas, Devaka, Ekalavya and his sons. Send also for the Karushaka kings and the valiant Kshemadhurti, and for the kings of the Kamboja and the Rishika tribes of the west coast; send for Jayatsena and the king of Kasi, for the rulers of the land of the five rivers, and for the son of Kratha; send for the rulers of the mountain realms, for Janaki and Susarman and Maniman, for Yotimatsaka and Dhrishtaketu, for the kings of Pansu, Tunda and Dandadhara, and for Brihatsena. Summon Aparajita, Nishada, Sreniman and Vasuman; call Brihadbala of untold might, Bahu the conqueror of hostile cities and the warlike Samudrasena and his valiant son; summon Udbhava and Kshemaka, Vatadhana, Srutayu and Dridhayu; summon the gallant son of Salva, the king of the Kalingas, and the unconquerable Kumara. Speedily send word to all these men. Yes, this plan appeals to me.

And let this learned Brahmana, my priest, be the messenger who goes to Dhritarashtra. Tell him what he must say to Duryodhana, how to address Bhishma, that noblest of warriors and what to say to Drona, that greatest of Maharathas.'"

CANTO 5

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'What you counsel surely befits the king of the Panchalas, for your deep kinship and allegiance towards Pandu's son. Yet, we want to adopt a wise course of action, and that is our first duty; it would be foolish to do otherwise. Our relationship to the Kauravas and the Pandavas is equal, regardless of their own inclinations towards each other. You and all of us were invited for a wedding. The marriage has been celebrated; let us go home happily.

You are the first of all the kings here, both in age and learning, and the rest of us are like sishyas to you. Dhritarashtra has always had great respect for you; and you are also a friend of the acharyas Drona and Kripa. So, I ask you to send a message to the Kurus on behalf of the Pandavas. We are unanimously resolved that you should be our duta.

If the Kuru king makes peace on equitable terms, the cordial, brotherly feelings between the Kauravas and Pandavas will be restored. If, on the other hand, Duryodhana takes a haughty stand and refuses peace, send for the others first and then summon us as well.

The wielder of the Gandiva will be ignited with anger; the dull-headed, evil Duryodhana, his kinsmen and his friends will meet their fate.'"

Virata pays homage to Krishna, bids farewell to him, and Krishna sets off home with his kinsmen. After Krishna leaves for Dwaraka, Yudhishtira and his followers join Virata and begin to prepare for war.

Virata and Drupada send messengers to all the other monarchs, and at their request many powerful kings gladly arrive to join them. The sons of Dhritarashtra hear that the Pandavas have amassed a great army and they, too, muster a force of many rulers of the Earth. O king, quickly the world teems with warriors galvanised to the cause of either the Kurus or the Pandavas. Armies composed of the four kinds of forces pour in from all sides and fill the land; and Bhumi Devi, with her mountains and forests, seems to tremble beneath their tread.

The king of the Panchalas consults Yudhishtira and sends his wise and learned priest to the Kurus."

CANTO 6

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Drupada says to his priest, 'Of all beings, those endowed with life are superior to the inert; of living beings, those endowed with intelligence are superior to the others; of intelligent creatures, men are foremost; of men, Dvijas are the highest; of the twice-born, students of the Vedas are the best; of Vedic students, those of refined minds are first; of cultured men, the practical are the best; and of practical men, those who know Brahman, the Supreme Being, are the highest.

You are at the very apex of this pyramid of beings. Distinguished by your age and learning, you are equal in intellect to Indra or Brihaspati. You know what kind of man the king of the Kurus is, and you know what Yudhishtira is. It was with Dhritarashtra's knowledge that the Kauravas deceived the Pandavas and, despite Vidura's counsel, that king follows his son.

On behalf of the Kurus, Sakuni challenged Yudhishtira to a game of dice, although the Pandava was as a callow beginner while he himself was an expert. Unskilled in play, and guileless, Yudhishtira adhered strictly to rules of Kshatriya dharma. The ruthless Kurus cheated and won Yudhishtira's kingdom from him, and they are not going to give it up voluntarily.

If you speak words of dharma to Dhritarashtra, you will certainly gain the hearts of his warriors. Vidura will support what you say and, thereby,

antagonise Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and the others. When the enemy commanders are alienated from their simple-minded fighting men, they will need to regain the confidence of their soldiers. In the meantime, the Pandavas will prepare their armies and gather their supplies, while, with you lingering in their midst and sowing subtle discord in the hearts of their men, the enemy will not be able to make adequate preparations for war. This plan of action seems the best.

It is possible that Dhritarashtra might agree to your proposal and do as you ask. You, being virtuous, must behave toward them with dharma. Win the hearts of the compassionate by discoursing at length on the trials that the Pandavas have endured and convince the elderly by reminding them about the customs of their forefathers.

I have no doubts in this regard, nor do you need to be apprehensive of any danger. You are a Brahmana, well versed in the Vedas; and you are going there as a duta; furthermore, you are elderly. So, old friend, set out at once for Hastinapura to promote the cause of the Pandavas. Set out on the day of the Pushyami nakshatra, during that part of the day called Jaya.'

The priest sets out for Hastinapura, mindful of Drupada's instructions. That learned man, who has a deep knowledge of the Artha Shastra, goes with a retinue of disciples towards the city of the Kurus, to advance the welfare of Pandu's sons."

CANTO 7

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “After the Pandavas send the priest to Hastinapura, they send other messengers to the kings of various kingdoms, and Arjuna sets out for Dwaraka. After Krishna and Baladeva leave for Dwaraka with all the Vrishnis, the Andhakas and hundreds of Bhojas, Dhritarashtra’s son sends out spies to garner information about what the Pandavas are doing.

Duryodhana hears that Krishna is on his way home and goes at once to Dwaraka, riding on fine horses swift as the wind, and taking a small troop of warriors with him. He and Arjuna arrive on the same day in the beautiful city of the Anarta realm. On reaching there, those two lions of Kuru vamsa find that Krishna is sleeping, and they go to his bedchamber.

Krishna is still asleep when Duryodhana enters the chamber and sits on a fine seat at the head of the bed. Arjuna enters behind him and stands at the foot of the bed, his head bent and hands folded. When Krishna awakes his gaze falls first on Arjuna. He greets both him and Duryodhana, and after asking if they had a safe journey, mildly enquires why they have come to see him.

Duryodhana says, ‘You must help me in the impending war. Arjuna and I are both your friends, Madhusudana, and you are related to both of us in the same way. Today, it is I who petitions you first. Men of dharma take up

the cause of the one who approaches them first. This is the way of the ancients.

Krishna, you are the first of all men of dharma, and everyone respects you, at all times. I ask you to follow dharma and do what is right.'

Krishna replies, 'That you have come first, O king, I do not doubt in the least. But, it is Arjuna that I saw first. Because you were the first to approach me and because Arjuna was the first one I saw, I shall help you both. It is said that those who are younger should choose first. That gives Dhananjaya the first choice.

There exists a vast force of Yadavas, numbering ten crores, known as the Narayanas. Each of them is stronger than me and each one can fight in the very thick of any battle. One of you can have these irresistible soldiers. The other will have me; but I will bear no arms and neither will I fight on the field.

Arjuna, you decide first which you will choose, because law dictates that you have the first choice.'

Arjuna chooses Krishna, who will not fight on the battlefield, who is Vishnu himself, creator, preserver and slayer of men, the uncreated one, born among men of his own will, foremost of all Kshatriyas, beyond all the Devas and Danavas. Duryodhana gladly accepts the Yadava army of Narayanas and, though he knows that Krishna will not be with him, he is thrilled at having acquired the massive force. Having secured that awesome army, Duryodhana goes in some delight to his old master, Rohini's son Balarama, to tell him of the reason for his visit and its outcome.

Baladeva says to Duryodhana, 'Remember all that I said at Virata's daughter's wedding. It is for your sake that I spoke against Krishna there and contradicted him. Again and again, I spoke of the equality of our relationship to both sides. However, Krishna did not adopt my views, and I cannot separate myself from Krishna for even a moment. Since I cannot go into battle against him, I have resolved not to fight, either for Kunti's sons or for you.

O Bharatarishabha, born as you are into the noble race of Bharata, go bravely into battle and fight with Kshatriya dharma.'

Duryodhana embraces that hero whose weapon is the plough and, despite being aware that Krishna is not on his side, he still considers Arjuna and the Pandavas as having already been defeated. He then goes to

Kritavarman, who gives him an akshauhini of troops. And surrounded by that terrifying host, he rides forth, to the great joy of his friends.

After Duryodhana has left, Krishna says to Arjuna, ‘Why did you choose me, when you knew that I will not fight at all?’

Arjuna answers, ‘I have no doubt that you will slay all our enemies, even without fighting yourself. I, too, can kill them all, by myself, Purushottama. You are the most illustrious being in this world, and your renown and honour will come with you. I wish for that, and that is why I chose you. I have always wanted to have you for my sarathy, and I ask you now to fulfil my long-cherished desire.’

Krishna says with a deep smile, ‘I am glad that you chose me, son of Kunti. As for your wish, yes, I will be your charioteer.’

His heart full of joy, Arjuna returns with Krishna to where Yudhishtira waits.”

CANTO 8

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O king, Salya hears the news that the messengers bring and, accompanied by his sons and a teeming legion of soldiers, every man mighty in battle, he sets out to come to the Pandavas.

His encampment extends over one and a half yojanas, so vast is Salya's force. Rajan, this most powerful king commands an entire akshauhini. In his army are heroes wearing armour of different colours, carrying a myriad of banners and all sorts of bows, adorned with diverse ornaments, garlands and jewellery, and wearing beautiful clothing. Hundreds of thousands of the foremost Kshatriyas are the leaders of his troops, and they are clothed and decorated, each in the tradition of his native land.

Salya moves slowly, majestically, toward the Pandava camp, frequently giving his men time to rest. The Earth's little creatures are crushed and the ground trembles under the tread of his legions. Hearing that the great and mighty warrior is on the march, Duryodhana makes all haste to win him over to his side. He swiftly has finely-decorated, palatial pavilions erected at many enchanting sites for Salya's comfort and pleasure, and sends performers to entertain that king.

The first of these retreats is adorned with garlands and stocked with meat and the choicest delicacies and refreshments. There are fine pools and tanks of different shapes, all delightful to see; there is plentiful food, and

there are spacious apartments. Salya arrives at the first exotic pavilion, and Duryodhana's best servants wait upon him as if he is a Deva.

Salya reaches another hall of entertainment that is as resplendent as an arbour of the gods. And there, luxuriating in comforts fit for any celestial, he thinks himself superior to the lord of the Devas and even thinks of Indra as being shabby in comparison.

The delighted Salya asks the servants, 'Where are Yudhishtira and the others who have arranged for these lavish mansions? Bring the men who built them before me; they deserve to be richly rewarded. I must acknowledge their work. I hope Kunti's son will approve.'

The surprised servants inform Duryodhana, who stays hidden until Salya's pleasure is so great that he is ready to grant even his life, and then he comes forward and reveals himself to his uncle. The king of the Madras sees him and understands that it is Duryodhana who has taken all these pains to fete him.

And Salya embraces Duryodhana and says, 'I want to give you something that you truly want.'

Duryodhana says, 'Auspicious one, let it be as you say, and grant me this boon: I ask you to lead my armies in battle.'

Salya says, 'So be it. What do I need to do?'

The son of Gandhari cries again and again, 'It is done! It is done!'

And Salya says, 'O best of men, go back to your city. I must pay Yudhishtira a visit. I will do that first and come to you very soon.'

Duryodhana says, 'O Bhumipala, come quickly indeed after seeing the Pandava. I depend on you entirely, so remember the boon you have granted me.'

Salya says, 'Blessings upon you! I will hasten back. Go in peace to your city, O protector of men.'

The two kings, Salya and Duryodhana, embrace and Duryodhana returns to his capital. Salya goes to inform the sons of Kunti of what has happened.

When he reaches Upaplavya and enters the encampment there, Salya sees all the sons of Pandu before him. The mighty-armed Salya meets them and accepts the customary courtesies—water to wash his feet with and honourable gifts, including a cow. The king of the Madras asks how they are and, with great joy, embraces Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and his sister's twin sons.

When they are all seated, Salya says to Yudhishtira, 'Naravyaghra, is all well with you? How fortunate it is that you have completed your exile. Such a difficult task you, your brothers and the princess have accomplished by living in the wilderness! No less trying was the year of your ajnatavasa.

When a man has his throne taken from him, there is nothing but hardship to look forward to. Rajan, what happiness is there for such a one? But after killing your enemies you will gain as much, no, a hundredfold more, felicity and joy than the torment that Dhritarashtra's son inflicted on you.

You are wise in the ways of the world and, so, my son, you never do anything out of avarice. You walk in the footsteps of the ancient Rajarishis. You must remain firmly on your path of generosity, selflessness and truth. Mercy, self-control, truth, universal compassion and every other wonderful quality present in this world are also present in you.

You are mild, generous, devout and large-hearted; and you look on virtue as the highest good. Many are the laws of dharma that prevail amongst men, and you know them all. In fact, you know everything there is to know of this world of ours.

Bharatottama, how great it is that you have emerged from your travails. How fortunate I am to see you, who are a treasure-house of dharma, now free and among your followers.'

Then, Bhaarata, the king tells Yudhishtira of his meeting with Duryodhana, and about the boon he granted him.

Yudhishtira says, 'Pledging your allegiance to Duryodhana out of heartfelt gratitude is dharma indeed. But, Bhumipala, I ask you to do one thing for me. Even if what I ask is not dharma, you must do it for my sake. Listen to my plea.

On the battlefield you are Krishna's equal as a charioteer. When Karna and Arjuna come face to face in a mortal duel, I have no doubt that you will be Karna's sarathy. At that time, I beg you, protect Arjuna, even while you are his enemy's sarathy. You must dampen the Sutaputra's spirits, for his lack of confidence is his only weakness, and only through that can Arjuna prevail over him. Uncle, you must do this, even though it is unseemly. For if Karna is not slain, we will lose the war.'

Salya says, 'Bless you, Pandava, and now listen to me. You ask me to dispirit Karna in battle. Yes, I am sure I will become his charioteer, for he does consider me equal to Krishna. When he prepares to fight Arjuna, I will

point out the dangers he faces. I will extol Arjuna and convince Karna that he is no match for your brother. Shorn of courage and pride, he will be easy to kill.

I swear that I am determined to do what you ask. Whatever else I may be able to do for your good, I will do as well. The anguish you suffered along with Draupadi during the game of dice; the savage words that the Suta's son spoke then; the misery that Jatasura and Kichaka inflicted on you; Draupadi's torment, which was like Damayanti's—this will all end in joy, O Kshatriya.

Do not grieve over what happened, for destiny is inexorable. From time out of mind, the noblest men have endured all manner of suffering; why, even the Devas have found grave misfortunes, Rajan. It is told that Indra and his wife had to endure great grief once, and were plunged in black despair.'"

CANTO 9

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Best of kings, how did Devendra and his queen come to endure such torment?'

Salya says, 'Listen, and I will tell you this ancient itihasa. Hear, Bhaarata, how affliction befell Indra and his consort.

Once, Tvashtri, the lord of creatures and among the foremost of Devas, sat in austere tapasya, and out of his rancour against Indra, created a son with three heads. That lustrous being of universal form, Viswarupa, hankered after Indra's throne. He had three awesome faces that resembled the Sun, the Moon and Fire. With one he read the Vedas, with one he drank wine and his gaze from the third seemed to imbibe the whole world. With unflinching tapasya, this imperturbable and self-controlled being lived a life of devout spiritual discipline. Severe and terrible was his penance.

Observing the sternness, courage and truthfulness of this being of immeasurable tejas, Indra worried that he would take his place as the lord of the Devas.

Indra thought to himself, "How can this one be made addicted to sensual pleasures? How can he be made to forsake his tapasya? If he grows any stronger, he will absorb the entire universe."

Having pondered thus within himself, Indra sent Apsaras from Devaloka to tempt the son of Tvashtri.

He commanded them, saying, “Hurry! Go and tempt the three-headed one to plunge deep into pleasures of the senses. You, who are blessed with captivating hips, adorn yourselves in provocative attire, deck yourselves in fine necklaces and employ passionate gestures and language. My lovely ones, my heart is perturbed; distract him and alleviate my dread. Beautiful nymphs, avert this peril that hangs over me. May well-being be yours.”

The Apsaras said, “O slayer of Bala, have no fear, we will seduce him. Together, we will tempt this rishi who sits in tapasya so fearful that his eyes seem to scorch everything they see. We will bring him under our control and put an end to your fears.”

They went to the three-headed one and, arriving there, those exquisite temptresses teased him with gestures of love and their beautiful bodies. Absorbed in deep tapasya, he looked at them but was unmoved. With subdued senses he was like the ocean, full to the brim and unshakeable.

Their efforts were to no avail. The Apsaras came back to Indra and, with hands joined, said, “O, we could not shake that tranquil one. Now do whatever you must.”

Indra honoured the Apsaras and dismissed them, thinking all the while about other ways of destroying his enemy. He soon lit upon a way to be rid of the three-headed one.

He said to himself, “Today, I will cast my thunderbolt at him, and he will die. Even the most powerful man must not take a nascent enemy lightly, of little account though he may yet be.”

And so, with the exhortations of the Shastras in mind, he decided to kill the three-headed being and hurled his Vajra at him. It was terrible to see, such a fire, and struck dread into the heart. Struck by that all-powerful thunderbolt, the three-headed one died, and as he fell he loosened the summit of a mountain.

The lord of the Devas saw that he was dead and lay still, like a mountain, but Indra found no peace. Instead, he was scalded by the effulgence of that being, who blazed in death as he had in life. Lying on the field, his three heads seemed eerily alive. Overawed and in fear of that dazzling lustre, Indra was plunged in dismay.

Just then, he saw a carpenter walking through the forest with an axe on his shoulder.

Indra said to him, “I ask a favour of you. Cut off this dead one’s heads.”

The carpenter said, “His shoulders are broad, and my axe is not big enough. Also, I will not do this sinful thing.”

Indra said, “Have no fear but quickly do as I say. At my command your axe will be as powerful as a thunderbolt.”

The carpenter said, “Who are you, who have done this dreadful thing? Tell me the truth, I want to know.”

Indra said, “Then know this: I am Indra, the lord of the Devas. Now do as I tell you. Do not hesitate, carpenter.”

The carpenter said, “O Indra, why are you not ashamed of your bestial crime? How it is that you do not dread the sin of killing a Brahmana, particularly this son of a Mahamuni?”

Indra said, “I will perform rigorous atonement to purify myself of these sins. He whom I killed with my Vajra was a powerful enemy. I am still uneasy; I fear him even now. Waste no time; cut off his heads and I shall bestow my favour upon you. I grant that in all sacrifices, you will get the head of the sacrificial beast as your share. Now do what I ask!”

Hearing this, the carpenter cut off the heads of the three-headed one with his axe. When the heads were severed, partridges, quails, pigeons and all kinds of birds flew out from the naked throats. From the head which the three-headed one used to recite the Vedas and drink Soma nectar, partridges flew out in a flock. From the head with which he looked at the cardinal points as if to absorb them all, quails emerged. From that head which he used to drink wine came sparrows and hawks.

With the heads removed, Indra’s trepidation left him. He returned to Devaloka with a light heart, and the carpenter went home. Indra was pleased that he had accomplished his objective.

When Tvashtri heard that Indra had killed his son, his eyes reddened, and he said, “Indra has killed my son, who was innocent of any offence, who was absorbed in constant tapasya, who was merciful, who was self-controlled and who had subdued his senses. To destroy Indra, I will create Vritra.

Let the Lokas behold my power; let the worlds see my tapasyashakti; let that inhuman, evil-minded Deva see what I do.”

With these words, the furious Tvashtri, famed for his tapasya, washed his mouth with water in achamana, offered oblations to the fire and created the dreadful Vritra. He spoke to the Asura he had made, saying, “O Vritra,

who are destined to slay Indra, may your might swell by the power of my tapasya."

And that Asura grew prodigiously in strength. Born of fire, like Agni's son, he towered towards the sky.

He said, "I have risen like the apocalyptic Sun; tell me what am I to do."

"Kill Indra," said Tvashtri, and left for the celestial realms.

A great battle ensued between Vritra and Indra. Both were fired with wrath, and the duel between them was terrible. The heroic Vritra seized the lord of gods and whirled him round and threw him into his open maw.

The Devas were terrified to see how easily Vritra had swallowed Indra, and they created Jrimbhika to kill Vritra. Waiting his chance, Indra drew his body into itself and flew out when Vritra opened his mouth to yawn. It is since then that the yawn became a characteristic of living beings in the three worlds. Great was the joy of the Devas at Indra's escape. And the furious battle between Indra and Vritra resumed.

They fought for a long, long time and, finally, Indra could not withstand Vritra, who was infused by the power of Tvashtri's tapasya; the Deva king fled and the Asura prevailed. In disarray after Indra's retreat, all the other Devas were easily overpowered by Tvashtri.

O Bhaarata, they consulted the greatest rishis and deliberated on the proper thing to do. Seized with dread, they sat on the top of the Mandara Mountain and invoked the indestructible Vishnu,' says Salya."

CANTO 10

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya continues, 'Indra said, "O Devas, Vritra has consumed the universe, and no-one can withstand him. Once I could have vanquished him, but not any more. What can I do now? He is unassailable: he has inexorable tejas; he is a Mahatman; victory will always be his in battle; he can swallow the three worlds with its Devas, Manavas and Asuras.

Swargavasis, I have decided that we must go to Vishnu and seek his counsel. He will help us find a way to kill this evil one.

At Maghavat's word, all the Devas and the Rishis went to the omnipotent Vishnu, to place themselves under the protection of that protector of all.

They said to the Supreme God, "O Narayana, it was you who once covered the three worlds in three strides. It was you who procured the Amrita and quelled the Asuras in battle. It was you who restrained the Asura Bali and placed Sakra on the throne of Devaloka. You are the Lord of the gods and the Soul of the universe. You are the almighty God whom all beings worship.

Best of Gods, be the means of our salvation, of all the Devas and Indra. O Asurasudana, all creation is pervaded by Vritra."

Vishnu said, "It is my dharma to do what benefits you. I will tell you how Vritra can be killed. Go with the Rishis and the Gandharvas to Vritra,

who has absorbed the universe into himself. Go in an attitude of conciliation and win him over with feigned humility.

By virtue of my power, Indra will be victorious, for I shall invisibly enter his Vajra. Go now, all of you, with the Rishis and the Gandharvas, and make peace between Sakra and Vritra."

When he had spoken, the Rishis and the Devas, with Indra at their head, left all together. As they approached, they saw Vritra's splendour, ablaze as if to incinerate the ten cardinal points and consume the three worlds; and glorious, like the Sun or the Moon.

The Rishis came up to Vritra and said to him in a soothing tone, "O unconquerable one, your energy has consumed the universe. However, you have not vanquished Indra, although you have fought him for so long. All beings, including gods, men and demons, suffer from your conflict. Let there be peace between you and Sakra. You will be happy and live forever in Indra's realm."

The mighty and noble Vritra heard what they said and, bowing his head to them, said, "Great ones, I hear you and the Gandharvas clearly. Now listen to what I have to say. How can there be friendship between Indra and me? How can there be amity between two inveterate enemies?"

The Rishis said, "Concord between righteous beings happens at a single meeting and is always desirable. After that first contact, whatever is destined will happen. One should not lose the opportunity of forming an alliance with a man of dharma. Indeed, one should actively seek the friendship of the righteous. Wise men say that friendship with a good man is like wealth in a time of poverty, for the friend will give sage advice when it is needed. The friendship of a good person is of great benefit and, so, a wise man should never want to kill a righteous being.

Indra is honoured by the just; he is the refuge of the magnanimous; he speaks the truth, always; he is without blame; he knows what dharma is; and his judgment is refined. Let there be eternal friendship between you and Indra. Have faith in him and let your heart not be otherwise inclined."

The illustrious Asura said, "I revere you Rishis who are endowed with supernatural powers. Do as I say, exactly as I say, and then, Devas, I will do everything these Brahmanottamas advise.

My condition is: I shall not be killed with anything that is wet or dry, with anything made of stone or wood, with a weapon used in close combat or with an astra, neither during the day nor at night, not even by Indra

himself or any of the gods. On these terms I will make eternal peace with Indra."

The Rishis agreed. Peace was restored, and Vritra was glad. Indra, too, was pleased, but thoughts of killing Vritra continued to fill his mind. The lord of the Devas passed his time, always uneasy and looking for a chink in the compact he had made with Vritra.

One day, in the eerie twilight of evening, Indra caught sight of the mighty Asura on the sea shore. He thought of the boon that had been granted to the Asura, and he thought, 'It is evening now—neither day nor night. I must kill Vritra, my enemy, who has stripped me of my power. Unless I slay this mighty Asura, even if I have to use deceit, I will not prosper."

At that moment, thinking these thoughts and bearing Vishnu's promise to him in mind, Indra saw a mass of foam in the sea, as big as a hill, and he said, "This is neither dry, nor wet, nor is it a weapon. Let me cast it at Vritra, and he will die."

And he infused that mountain of foam with the Vajra and cast it. Vishnu entered the foaming Vajra and sloughed off Vritra's head, and the matchless demon fell onto white, damp sands, his bare throat spouting a rill of blood. With the Asura's death, the universal pall of darkness lifted and the cardinal points shone again; fragrant breezes blew; and gladness filled all the living. The Devas, with the Gandharvas, Yakshas and Rakshasas, and with the great Nagas and Rishis, glorified Indra with hymns in his praise; and all of them bowed to him.

Indra and the Devas were happy, and Indra spoke soul-stirring words in joy at having killed his enemy. Ever conscious of dharma, Indra worshipped Vishnu, the most praiseworthy One of all.

However, having killed Vritra, bane of the gods, Indra was overcome by his crime of deceit, and black dejection seized his very soul. Terrorised by his sin of Brahmahatya, for he had killed a Brahmana when he slew Tvashtri's three-headed son, he withdrew from the world. He became like one who had lost his very mind. Haunted constantly by his sins, he was unrecognisable. He hid under water, writhing like a snake and, bereft of his presence, the Earth looked as if she had been devastated by a storm of the pralaya.

Bhumi became treeless, and her forests withered; rivers stopped in their courses, and lakes and even seas dried up; and animals were stricken

because it never rained and a drought without remit gripped the world. The Devas and all the great Rishis were seized in fear; the world, without a king, was wracked by cataclysms of every kind. With no lord, panic took the Devas and the Devarishis. They wondered desperately who could replace Indra, but none amongst them had any inclination to be the king of the gods.'"

CANTO 11

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'Then all the Rishis and Devas said, "Let us crown the radiant Rajarishi Nahusha as king of the Devas. He is strong and famed, and always devoted to dharma."

They went to him and said, "O Bhumipala, we want you to be our king."

Nahusha, with self-interest at heart, said to the Devas, Rishis and Pitrs, "I am feeble and cannot protect you. You need a powerful god to be your king. Only Indra always owned that prowess."

The Devas with the Rishis at their head said, "It is true that we all have weaknesses. Rule the realms of Devaloka with the help of our tapasya. Rajarajan, accept the crown of heaven and this boon from us: whatever being stands within your sight—be he a Deva, an Asura, a Yaksha, a Rishi, a Pitr or a Gandharva—you shall absorb his power. Thereby your own power will be enhanced and you will grow in strength. Be guided only by dharma and rule the worlds. Protect the Brahmarishis and the Devas."

Nahusha was crowned king of Devaloka and, placing dharma before everything else, he became sovereign of all the worlds. Nahusha had led a virtuous life, but when he obtained the precious boon and reign over Devaloka, his mind began to turn to sensual thoughts.

He surrounded himself with Apsaras and other celestial nymphs. He began to enjoy myriad pleasures in the Nandana vana, on Mount Kailasa,

upon the crest of Himavat, on the Mandara Mountain, on the slopes of the Sweta, Mahendra and Malaya mountains, and in the oceans and rivers. He listened to captivating stories and enjoyed the sweet strains of musical instruments and divine voices singing. Viswavasu and Narada, bevies of Apsaras, bands of Gandharvas and the six seasons embodied attended upon him. Scented breezes wafted around him, cool and refreshing.

Once, while the profligate king was enjoying himself in this way, he caught sight of Sachi Devi, Indra's favourite queen. He looked at her, and his soul in the grip of lust, he said to his courtiers, "Why does this Devi, Indra's queen, not minister to me? I am the lord of the Devas and the ruler of all the worlds. Let Sachi come to me at once."

Saddened when she heard this, Sachi said to Brihaspati, "O Brahmana, protect me from Nahusha. I take refuge with you. You have always said that I bear auspicious marks, being the favourite of the lord of the Devas; that I am chaste, devoted to my lord and destined never to become a widow. You say all this repeatedly; now let your words be proven true. You have never said anything in vain; therefore, Brahmanottama, all that you have said must come to pass."

Brihaspati said to Sachi, who was beside herself with fear, "What I have said will come true, Devi. It will not be long before you see the return of Indra. Truly, you have nothing to fear from Nahusha, and I shall unite you with Indra very soon."

Nahusha heard that Indra's queen had taken refuge with Brihaspati, the son of Angiras, and he was furious.'"

CANTO 12

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'Seeing that Nahusha was angry, the Rishis and Devas said to their king, who looked so fearsome now, "O Devaraja, shed your rage. When you are angry, the entire universe trembles, with its Asuras, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Nagas. Let go of this wrath, righteous one. A man like you should not lose his equanimity.

Devi Sachi is another man's wife. Calm yourself. Turn your mind away from the sin of ravishing another's wife. You are the king of the Devas, and may you prosper! Protect your subjects with dharma."

Nahusha was mindless with desire and paid no heed to what they said. Accusing Indra, he said, "Ahalya of the blemishless reputation was the wife of a Muni. Indra ravished her while her husband still lived. Why did you not stop him? Many were the deeds of inhumanity, of unrighteousness and of deceit that Indra committed in times past. Why did you not prevent him?

Let the Devi serve my pleasure; it will do her good and will protect you all, as well."

The Devas said, "We will bring Indra's queen to you, as you command. Set aside your anger and be at peace."

The Devas and Rishis went to inform Brihaspati and Sachi about what had transpired. They said, "Brahmanottama, we know that Sachi Devi has come to you for refuge and that you have promised to protect her. But we, the Devas, Gandharvas and Rishis, beg you to give her up to Nahusha. The

lustrous Nahusha is now the king of the Devas and is above Indra. Let the beautiful Devi accept him as her lord."

Hearing this, Sachi began to sob pitifully, and she said to Brihaspati, "O best of Devarishis, I do not want Nahusha for my lord. I have placed myself in your protection; save me from this calamity."

Brihaspati said, "I am resolved not to abandon you. You of the blemishless life, I shall not forsake you, for you are virtuous and devoted to truth. I do not want to commit a sin, especially since I am a Brahmana who knows dharma, for I worship the truth and am aware of all the dictates of dharma. No, I will never betray you. Go your ways, Devas. But first, hear what Brahma has said about this:

He who surrenders to a foe the terrified person who has asked for protection will not find refuge when he himself is in need of it. The seeds he plants will not grow, and rains will fail.

He who gives up to an enemy the terrified one who has asked for his protection never succeeds in anything that he undertakes. He will lose his senses and fall stricken from heaven. The gods refuse the offerings he makes. His progeny die untimely deaths, and his Pitrs fight among themselves. The Devas with Indra at their head will cast the Vajra at such a one.

Know this to be true. I shall not give up Sachi, who is Indra's queen and his favourite. I, Brihaspati, tell you this, which is for her good and mine. I will never surrender Sachi."

Then the Devas and the Gandharvas said, "Acharya Brihaspati, think of a solution."

Brihaspati said, "Let this auspicious Devi ask Nahusha for some time before she decides what to do. This will be to her advantage and ours, for Kaala might create many obstacles in Nahusha's way while we wait. Only Time knows the future. Nahusha has become powerful and haughty because of the boon you granted him."

Brihaspati's words pleased the Devas, who said, 'You have spoken well, O Guru. This is, without doubt, for the good of all the Devas. However, we must pacify this Devi."

Then the Devas led by Agni spoke soothingly to Indra's queen, saying, "You are the holder of the universe of mobile and immobile things. You are chaste and true. Go to Nahusha. That degenerate who lusts after you will

fail to have what he wants, and Indra will regain sovereignty over Devaloka.”

Indra’s queen went bashfully to Nahusha of the dreadful mien, but to attain her end, not his. Struck mindless with lust, Nahusha saw her, how young and lovely she was, and was ecstatic.’”

CANTO 13

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'Nahusha saw Sachi come, and said, "O sweet smiles, I am the lord of the three worlds. Take me for your lord as well."

That chaste Devi quivered in terror, like the slender stalk of a young plantain tree in the wind. She bowed her head to Brahma, then joined her hands and spoke to the truly fearsome Nahusha.

She said, "Devaraja, I need time. No one knows what became of Indra, or his whereabouts. I have sent my friends and servitors forth to look for him; if I get no news of him, I will come to you. I tell you this truthfully."

Nahusha was pleased, and said, "It shall be as you say. Come as soon as you discover what has happened. I hope you will keep your word."

The auspicious Sachi Devi went back to Brihaspati's home. There, she told Agni and the other Devas what had happened, and they began to deliberate on what they should do to best benefit Indra.

They went to the all-powerful Vishnu for refuge and said, "Indra has been overcome by the sin of killing a Brahmana. Devadeva, you are the Primeval One, the first creator, the ruler of the universe, and our refuge. You have assumed the form of Vishnu for the protection of all beings. When, by dint of your power, Indra slew Vritra he was guilty of the direst sin of killing a Brahmana, of Brahmahatya. How can he be absolved of his sin?"

Vishnu said, “Let him offer a yagna to me, and I will purify the Vajradharin. If he performs the Aswamedha yagna, the slayer of Paka will regain his position as king of the Devas. Nahusha’s hubris and indulgences will destroy him. Be patient and bide your time, Devas, but remain vigilant.”

Knowing that they are always true, Vishnu’s words were like amrita to their ears. And the Devas, their Acharya and the Rishis went to where the troubled Indra waited in constant terror. And there, they performed a great horse-sacrifice, which could expiate the sin of killing a Brahmana, so that Indra would be purified.

O Yudhishtira, Mahavishnu divided Indra’s sin among trees, rivers, mountains, the Earth and women; and Indra was rid of it. His fever of dread left him and he was himself once more.

From that place, Indra looked at Nahusha, before whom all living beings felt cowed, and who was unapproachable because of the boon that the Rishis had granted him. Sachi’s lord made himself invisible and wandered the universe, biding his time.

When Indra disappeared, Sachi sank into a well of grief. In utter misery she cried, “O Indra! If I have ever given you a gift, if I have ever made an offering to the gods, if I have ever propitiated my gurus, if there is any truth in me, then I pray that my chastity remains inviolate. I bow to Nisha Devi, Goddess of Night, who is holy and pure, and who rules during uttarayana, the northern course of the Sun. I pray that she answers my plea!”

Saying this, she purified herself in body and soul and worshipped Nisha Devi, whom she was able to invoke because of her chastity and devotion to truth, and she said, “Show me where the king of the Devas is. Let truth reveal the truth.””

CANTO 14

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'Devi Upasruti appeared before the virtuous and beautiful woman. Indra's queen gazed at this young and exquisite goddess and, with a glad heart, paid her worship.

She said, "Who are you, lovely one?"

Upasruti said, "I am Upasruti. I have made myself visible to you because of your truthfulness, noble one. You are devoted to your husband, you are self-restrained, and you are devout in your worship; and so I will show you where Vritrasudana Indra is. Follow me quickly; and you shall see him."

Upasruti, with Sachi following her, crossed celestial groves and many mountains. She crossed the Himavat Mountain and, by its northern flank, arrived at the sea. Many yojanas over the ocean, she flew to a large island covered with marvellous trees and plants of all kinds.

And there the two devis came to an enchanting and heavenly lake, eight hundred yojanas long and wide, with flocks of birds all around and upon the shimmering water. Bhaarata, on its crystalline surface grew full-blown lotuses of five colours with thousands of bees humming above them. In the middle of the lake was a large and exquisite bank of these flowers, at the heart of which stood a singular white lotus upon a tall stem.

Upasruti infused herself and Sachi into the stem of this wondrous flower, and there Sachi saw her lord Indra in a miniature form. Sachi and

Upasruti contracted themselves into tiny forms as well; and Indra's queen began to glorify her lord by reciting a litany of his celebrated deeds.

The divine Purandara said to Sachi, "Why have you come? How did you find me?"

Devi Sachi told him what Nahusha had done. She said, "O performer of a hundred sacrifices, he obtained the sovereignty of the three worlds and became powerful and haughty, and his soul became corrupt and vicious. He commanded me to serve him, and the wretch has even appointed a time by which I must go to him. If you do not save me, my lord, he will force me to give myself to him. That is why I have to come so desperately to you.

Mahabaho, kill the terrible Nahusha of the black soul. Reveal yourself, slayer of Daityas and Danavas. Assume your own power and rule Devaloka again.""

CANTO 15

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'The illustrious Indradeva said to Sachi, "This is no time for rashness. Nahusha is more powerful than I am, beautiful one. His power has been augmented by the benefits that the Rishis gain every time they make offerings to the Devas and the Pitrs. I have a judicious plan, which you will have to carry out. You must not disclose it to anyone, but do it secretly.

Go to Nahusha in private, address him as lord of the universe and invite him to visit you, riding on a palanquin borne by Rishis. Tell him that if he does this, you will gladly place yourself at his disposal."

Returning to Amaravati, the lotus-eyed Sachi went to Nahusha, who saw her and, smiling, said to her, "Welcome, devi of the rounded thighs and sweet smiles. What is your pleasure? Give yourself to me. I am devoted to you and I will do whatever pleases you. Do not be shy; trust me. I swear by truth that I will do whatever you ask."

Sachi said, "O Lord of the universe, I want the time that you granted me. After that, you will be my lord. And I do have a wish that you must fulfil before I become yours. I ask this indulgence, knowing your love for me. If you grant my wish, I will be yours to command.

Indra had horses to ride on, and elephants and chariots as well. I want you to have a unique vehicle, the like of which neither Vishnu nor Rudra, nor any of the Asuras and Rakshasas possess. Let a number of exalted

Rishis carry you in such a palanquin. This is what I wish. You should not think of yourself as being merely equal to any Asuras or Devas. You absorb their strength as soon as they look at you and, thus, there is no one as great as you."

Nahusha was pleased, and he said to that perfect goddess, "Fairest one, you speak of a conveyance never heard of before. I am taken with your thought, Devi; ah, I am in your power! A man who has Rishis as his palanquin-bearers cannot be a feeble person. I have practised tapasya and am mighty. I am the lord of the past, the present and the future. The universe would cease to exist if I were to be moved to wrath, for all the universe is established in me.

Devas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Nagas and Rakshasas together cannot withstand me when I am angry. My very gaze divests the man it falls on of his energy, whoever he is. And I am pleased to grant your request. The Saptarishis and other lofty sages will carry me, and you will look upon our greatness and splendour, lovely one."

Saying this with arrogant confidence, Nahusha dismissed Sachi. He harnessed a number of Rishis, all devout tapasvins, to him. Contemptuous of Brahmanas, capricious and intoxicated with power and pride, Nahusha made those divine sages bear his palanquin.

Meanwhile, Sachi went to Brihaspati and said, "Just a brief time remains of the period of grace that Nahusha granted me. Out of compassion for one who reveres you so much, I beg you to find Indra quickly."

Brihaspati said to her, "Excellent one, there is no need for you to fear Nahusha. He will not keep his power for much longer. Indeed, the wretch has already fallen for having ignored dharma and making the Maharishis his palanquin-bearers. I will perform a yagna for his destruction, and I will find Indra. Have no fear; for now, farewell."

Brihaspati kindled a sacred fire, in accordance with the Shastras, and made the choicest offerings into it, in order to discover where Indra was. After making his offerings, he commanded Agni to search for Indra.

Agni Deva, the consumer of burnt offerings, assumed a wonderful feminine form and vanished from there. With the speed of the mind, he searched everywhere—on mountains and in forests, on Earth and in the sky—and came back to Brihaspati within the blink of an eye.

Agni said, "Brihaspati, nowhere can I find the king of the Devas. The only place I have yet to search is the waters, which I am loth to enter, O

Brahmana. What would you have me do?"

The Acharya of the Devas said to Agni, "O Illustrious Deva, you must go into the water."

Agni said, "I cannot enter the water, for extinguishment awaits me there. I put myself into your hands, effulgent one; O may you be blessed. Fire originated in water; Kshatriyas rose from Brahmanas; iron was born in stone. All three, which can consume all other things, are powerless over the sources from which they spring.""

CANTO 16

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'Brihaspati said, "O Agni, you are the mouth of all the gods. You are the conveyor of sacred offerings. You see into the inmost souls of all creatures. The poets call you single and three-fold at the same time. Consumer of burnt offerings, the Universe would cease to exist if you abandoned it.

By worshipping you, Brahmanas, their wives and sons win in Swarga the rewards of their good deeds. Agni, it is you who are the bearer of the havis offered at every homa and yagna. Why, you are yourself the finest offering. In the most sacred of yagnas, it is you who are worshipped with gifts and oblations.

You created the three worlds, and it is you who will unleash your power and consume them when the time comes. You are the mother of the Universe, and its destroyer, as well. Wise men say that you are the clouds and their lightning; your heat supports all life. All the waters are contained in you, as is this entire world. You purify all things. There is nothing in the Trilokas that you do not know. Every being looks kindly on its parent; enter the water without fear. I will imbue you with strength by chanting mantras from the Veda."

Agni was pleased at being glorified by Brihaspati and said, "I will reveal Indra to you. I say this truthfully."

Then Agni entered the waters, including seas and little ponds, and came to the lake where, as he searched among the flowers, he saw the king of the Devas lying among the fibres of a lotus stem. Quickly, he returned and told Brihaspati how Indra had made himself minuscule and taken refuge inside a lotus stalk. And Brihaspati, accompanied by the Devas, the Rishis and the Gandharvas, went to where Indra lay and eulogised him by reminding him of his great deeds.

He said, “O Indra, you killed the great Asura Namuchi, as well as the terrible Sambara and Bala. Now rouse yourself and vanquish your enemy. Rise, Indra, and see the Devas and Rishis who are gathered here.

You delivered the three worlds by killing the Danavas; with the foam of the sea, infused with Vishnu’s fervour, you slew Vritra. You are the refuge of all creatures and worthy of worship. There is no one equal to you. You are the support of all creatures. And you made the Devas great. Now, regain your sway over the worlds and all living beings by reclaiming your might, O Mahatman.”

Thus glorified, Indra became bigger, little by little, and finally assumed his own resplendent, magnificent form. His strength flaring, he said to Brihaspati, who stood before him, “What more needs to be done? I have annihilated the two terrible Asuras—Tvashtri’s son and the gigantic Vritra who savaged the three worlds.”

Brihaspati said, “The mortal king, Nahusha, who gained the throne of Devaloka through the power of the Devarishis, now persecutes us.”

Indra said, “How did Nahusha gain the throne of heaven, which is well nigh impossible to have? What tapasya did he perform? How great is his power, O Brihaspati?”

Brihaspati said, “The Devas became insecure when you renounced the lordship of Devaloka, and they wished for a king to rule over them. The Devas, the Pitrs, the Rishis and the Gandharvas met together and asked Nahusha to be their king and protector of the universe. Nahusha claimed that he was feeble and asked them to infuse him with the power of their tapasya.

The Devas and Devarishis obliged him, O Indra, and Nahusha’s strength grew and became terrible. That is how he became Trilokapati. And now the wretch has harnessed the Devarishis to his palanquin and travels, thus, over the three worlds.

May you never come within the dreadful Nahusha's vision, for he emits venom from his eyes and absorbs the strength of every being he looks at. All the Devas are in terror of him. They hide from Nahusha and do not dare even cast a glance at him."

While Brihaspati was speaking, there came to that place Kubera guardian of the worlds, Yama the son of Surya, the luminous Soma Deva and Varuna.

They said to Indra, "We are fortunate that you killed Tvashtri's first son and Vritrasura. How lucky we are to see you safe and well, with your enemies dead."

Indra received those Lokapalas and greeted them gladly and with proper ceremony. He said, "Nahusha is the king of the Devas, and is dreadful. You must help me overcome him."

They replied, "Nahusha is truly fearsome. His vision is poison, and we are afraid of him. If you overthrow Nahusha, we, too, should be entitled to a share of the punya.

Indra agreed, "So be it. You Devas—Varuna, Yama and Kubera—will be crowned alongside me. With the help of all the Devas, let us vanquish Nahusha of the venomous eyes."

Agni said to Indra, "Give me a share in sacrificial offerings, and I will help you, too."

Indra said to him, "O Agni, you will receive a large share in Mahayagnas; you and I will have an equal share each."

Accordingly, Indra conferred upon Kubera sovereignty over the Yakshas and the wealth of the worlds; upon Yama authority over the Pitrs; and upon Varuna dominion over the waters."

CANTO 17

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'While the brilliant Indra was with the Lokapalas and other Devas, deliberating the destruction of Nahusha, there appeared at that place the venerable Rishi Agastya.

Agastya paid his respects to the lord of the Devas and said, "How happy I am that you, who killed Vritra and his brother who assumed the form of the universe, are well and growing in strength. Purandara, we are fortunate that today Nahusha has been removed from the throne of Swarga and that you have slain all your enemies."

Indra said, "Have you had a pleasant journey here, Maharishi? I am glad to see you. Oblige me by accepting this padya to wash your face and feet, this arghya and this cow for your yagna."

After the Brahmanottama accepted these, and when he was seated, the happy Indra said to him, "Dvijottama, tell us how Nahusha was cast out of Swarga."

Agastya said, "Listen, Indra, to how the vicious Nahusha, intoxicated with the vanity of power, was cast down from Devaloka.

The chaste Brahmanas and Devarishis who were his palanquin-bearers, weary from carrying him, questioned the haughty one, asking if he believed that the hymns in the Vedas to be recited while sprinkling water over cows were authentic. Nahusha, whose mind had been overpowered by tamas, said that they were not. The Rishis then told him that in fact they were, and that

the Maharishis had declared their sanctity. They accused him of having veered from dharma and of treading a sinful path.

At this, driven by evil, he touched me on my head with his foot. Immediately, he lost his power and majesty, and became agitated and frightened. I said to him, 'Because you have rejected the veracity of the Vedic hymns that the Brahmanas and Rishis validated, because you touched my head with your foot, and because, ignorant wretch, you have turned these exalted tapasvins who are like Brahma into your beasts of burden, I hereby divest you of your grandeur and cast you out of Devaloka.

You will fall straight down into Bhumi, for all your punya is exhausted. For ten thousand years, you will range the Earth in the form of an enormous snake. At the end of that time you may re-enter Swarga.'

O Parantapa, that is how black-souled Nahusha lost his throne. It is fortunate that our strength is waxing and that the thorn in the flesh of the Brahmanas has been removed. Go to Devaloka; subdue your senses, suppress your foes, protect the worlds and let the great Rishis glorify you."

The Devas and Rishis were joyful, as were the Pitrs, the Yakshas, the Nagas, the Rakshasas, the Gandharvas and all the Apsaras; and the lakes, rivers, mountains and seas, as well.

Together they came before Indra and said, "We are filled with gladness at your prosperity, O slayer of your enemies. How fortunate it is that Agastya cast the vicious Nahusha out of Amaravati and turned him into a snake on Earth!"' says Salya."

CANTO 18

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

"Salya says, 'With the adulation of the Gandharvas and Apsaras echoing all round, Indra mounted his Airavata, the king of elephants blessed with every auspicious mark. Accompanied by Agni, Maharishi Brihaspati, Yama, Varuna and Kubera, he went to Amaravati, surrounded by all the Devas, Gandharvas and Apsaras. There the performer of a hundred sacrifices was united with his queen and joyfully resumed his role as guardian of the three worlds.

The illustrious Devarishi Angiras came, too, to Indra's sabha and eulogised him with hymns from the Atharva Veda. Indra granted him a boon, saying, "Henceforth, your name will appear in the Atharva Veda as Rishi Atharvangiras, and from now on you will receive a share of all yagnas that are performed anywhere."

Maharajan, when Atharvangiras left after this honour was conferred on him, Indra honoured all the Devas and Rishis, rich with the wealth of tapasya and, in happy contentment, he ruled the Trilokas with dharma.

This is the story of the misery that Indra endured before being reunited with his wife; and, in order to slay his enemies, even he had to spend a time in hiding. Rajadhiraja, do not feel sorry for yourself because you, your brothers and Draupadi have suffered privations in the forest.

O joy of the Kurus, you will regain your kingdom in the same manner that Indra did after he killed Vritra. In the same way that Agastya cursed the

arrogant Nahusha, bane of Brahmanas, reducing him to a snake for many long years, you will soon quell your enemies—Karna, Duryodhana and other evil ones. Then you and your brothers, with Draupadi, will enjoy dominion of the Earth, as far as the sea.

When his forces are arrayed in battle formations and ready to fight, the king who desires victory must listen to this story of Indra's triumph. That is why, Yudhishtira, I have narrated it to you, to ensure your victory. Exalted men attain prosperity when they are glorified. The destruction of countless noble Kshatriyas is imminent because of the crimes that Duryodhana has committed, and by virtue of the might of Bhima and Arjuna.

He who reads this story of Indra's victory, with faith in God, is cleansed of his sins. He attains a state of beatitude, both in this world and in the next. He will never need to fear his enemies; he will have sons; he will never encounter peril of any sort; and he will enjoy great longevity. Everywhere his victory will be proclaimed; and he will never face defeat,"' says Salya.

That best of virtuous men, Yudhishtira whom the Madra king Salya so exhorts, honours him with due ceremony and says to Salya, 'There is no doubt that you will be Karna's charioteer. You must dampen his spirits by praising Arjuna.'

Salya says, 'So it shall be. I will do as you ask, and whatever else is within my power to do for you.'

Then Salya bids farewell to the sons of Kunti and goes with his army to Duryodhana."

CANTO 19

SENODYOGA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Satyaki, that great hero of the Satvata vamsa, comes to Yudhishtira with a vast army of foot-soldiers, horses, chariots and elephants. His soldiers, all men of valour, hail from diverse lands. Carrying weapons of various kinds, and all of them fierce and doughty, they embellish the Pandava army.

Yuyudhana's army looks splendid, with battle-axes, missiles, spears and lances; with mallets, clubs and staves; with cords; with gleaming swords and daggers; and with a variety of sharp, tempered arrows. The splendid army, made more magnificent by these weapons, is the colour of a cloudy sky, like a mass of clouds flashing with lightning. It consists of an akshauhini of troops, yet when it merges with Yudhishtira's force it is subsumed like a small stream flowing into the sea.

Dhrishtaketu, the powerful king of the Chedis, brings his akshauhini of troops and comes to the sons of Pandu. The immensely powerful Jayatsena, king of Magadha, adds his akshauhini of warriors to Yudhishtira's army; and the Pandya king from his coastal kingdom does the same with his troops.

O king, when all these legions are massed, the army with its finely attired, mighty warriors is a joy to behold. Drupada comes, too, with his tremendous sons and heroic fighting men from different lands, and they further enhance the splendour of that army. Virata, king of Matsyas,

accompanied by the king of the hill kingdoms, leads his legions to the sons of Pandu.

Seven akshauhinis augment the Pandava army, and a multitude of banners flutters in the air. Their eagerness to fight the Kurus gladdens the hearts of the Pandavas.

Raja Bhagadatta gives an akshauhini of his men to Dhritarashtra's son, pleasing him enormously. The unassailable mass of Duryodhana's army, filled with gold-clad Chins and Kiratas, sparkles in beauty, like a forest of Karnikara trees. To Duryodhana's aid come, also, the courageous Bhurisravas and Salya, each with one akshauhini. Kritavarman, the son of Hridika, comes with the Bhojas, Andhakas and Kukuras, with another akshauhini. All those terrific soldiers wear flower garlands and look as captivating as playful elephants ambling through a forest.

Other forces from the land of Sindhu and Sauvira, led by Jayadratha, come in such vast numbers that the mountains seem to tremble under their tread. One akshauhini they are, and as they move they look like clouds driven by the wind.

Rajan, more kings and their forces join the Kuru king. Sudakshina, the king of the Kambojas, along with the Yavanas and Sakas, comes with an akshauhini of troops that resembles a swarm of locusts. This force is absorbed by the Kuru army and blends seamlessly into it. King Nila comes from his capital Mahishmati with great warriors from the southern regions, who carry delicately wrought and lethal weapons. The two kings of Avanti come, each with a separate akshauhini of their men. Those tigers among men, the five princely brothers of Kekaya, hasten to Duryodhana with an akshauhini of warriors, adding to his elation. Illustrious kings from other parts of the land arrive with three divisions of fighting men.

Duryodhana now has an army of eleven akshauhinis, a sea of colour with countless flags, eager to do battle with the sons of Kunti. So crowded is Hastinapura that there is no space in it even for the commanders of Duryodhana's own army. This massive combined force fills the city of elephants and its surroundings.

The land of the five rivers, the entire region of Kurujangala, the wild forest of Rohitaka, Ahichatra and Kalakuta, the banks of the Ganga, Varana and Vatadhana, the hills bordering the Yamuna—the whole of this rich and extensive tract, abundant with corn, is entirely occupied by that Kaurava

army. And the priest whom the king of the Panchalas has sent to the Kurus sees this.”

CANTO 20

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, “Drupada’s priest, the emissary of the Pandavas, comes to the Kaurava king Dhritarashtra who, with Bhishma and Vidura, greets him with ceremonial honour. The priest gives them news of the Pandavas and goes on to enquire about the welfare of the Kauravas. After this, he speaks in the presence of all the leaders of Duryodhana’s army.

The wise and seasoned Brahmana says, ‘You all know what the dharma of kings is. However, I will remind you of some things again before I begin what I have really come to say. Dhritarashtra and Pandu are sons of the same father. It is clear that they should inherit their father’s wealth equally. How is it that the sons of Dhritarashtra possess ancestral wealth, but the sons of Pandu have none? Why did Pandu’s sons not receive their share?

You are all aware that Pandu’s sons did not receive their inherited share of their father’s wealth because Dhritarashtra’s sons usurped it. Dhritarashtra’s sons attempted to remove them from their path to power even by trying to have the Pandavas murdered; but their destined time on Earth had not run out, and they could not send the Pandavas to Yama’s halls. Then, when those noble princes had carved out a kingdom for themselves by dint of their own strength, the wretched sons of Dhritarashtra, helped by Subala’s son, robbed them of it by low deceit. As was his wont, Dhritarashtra gave his approval, even to this.

For thirteen years the sons of Pandu were exiled, to live in the wilderness. Honourable though they were, in the sabha they and their wife were scorned, humiliated. Great was the suffering they had to endure in the forests; and unspeakable were the sorrows they had to bear, comparable only to the suffering that sinners undergo when they are reborn into inferior species.

O Kurusattama, the sons of Pandu are willing to overlook all past miseries and injustices; they want a peaceful settlement with the Kurus. Bearing in mind the exemplary conduct of the Pandavas, as well as Duryodhana's sinful ways, his friends should persuade Duryodhana to make peace. The heroic sons of Pandu are not eager for war with the Kurus. They want to reclaim their rightful inheritance without bringing the world to disaster and ruin. If Dhritarashtra's son finds an excuse for war, it can never be a just one.

The sons of Pandu are more powerful than him. Yudhishtira has gathered seven akshauhinis of troops, who are so eager to fight the Kurus that they just wait for his command. He has in his forces tigers among men, who are equal in strength to a thousand akshauhinis—Satyaki and Bhimasena, and the twins of untold prowess.

Yes, truly, these eleven oceanic divisions are arrayed on one side, but they are balanced on the other by the mighty-armed Dhananjaya of many forms. Arjuna's prowess is greater than that of all these legions put together. There is also Vasudeva's son of dazzling effulgence and tejas. Faced with Arjuna's awesome valour and Krishna's plumbless wisdom, who is there that can fight them? So, I ask you to give what ought to be given, in accordance with dharma and the agreement you made. Do not lose this opportunity to do the right thing, and save yourselves and other lives beyond count.'"

CANTO 21

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Bhishma hears what the Purohita says and, after paying his respects to him, speaks wise words, fitting to the occasion.

He says, 'I am glad that the Pandavas and Krishna are well. I am glad that they have found help and that they have set their hearts on a course of dharma. How fortunate that those sons of the Kuru vamsa want peace with their cousins. There is no doubt that you speak the truth; however, you speak bluntly. I presume that is because you are a Brahmana.

The sons of Pandu must indeed have been sorely afflicted, here and in the forest. By law, they are entitled to their father's kingdom. Arjuna is powerful, a master of all weapons and a Maharatha. Who can withstand Dhananjaya in battle? Even the wielder of the thunderbolt cannot, let alone mortal warriors. Arjuna is unmatched in the three worlds.'

Now, an angry Karna insolently interrupts Bhishma even while he is speaking. He directs his glance at Duryodhana, while saying to the priest, 'There is no one in the world, Brahmana, who is not aware of all this. What point is there in repeating them over and over again? Sakuni played the game of dice on Duryodhana's behalf, and won. Yudhishtira went into the forest according to the agreed stipulation, which was that if any of them was seen before thirteen years had passed they must spend another thirteen

years in the vana. He now ignores that covenant and, confident of his alliance with the Matsyas and Panchalas, he wants his kingdom back.

Learned one, Duryodhana will not yield even a single foot of land if you try to threaten him; but if dharma required it, he would give up the whole Earth, even to an enemy. If the Pandavas want their ancestral throne back, they must pass another thirteen years in exile. Afterwards they can live as Duryodhana's liegemen, in safety and peace.

Let them not, out of stupidity, adopt a clearly sinful course. If they decide to abandon the path of dharma and go to war, they will, when they meet the unimpeachable Kurus, remember my words.'

Bhishma says, 'Of what use are your lofty, boastful speeches, Radheya? You would do better to remember the time when Arjuna single-handedly vanquished six Kuru Maharathas in battle. If we do not do what this Brahmana says, you can be sure that Arjuna will kill us all in battle.'

Dhritarashtra lauds Bhishma's words; then he rebukes the son of Radha, 'What Bhishma says is salutary—good for us, for the Pandavas and indeed for the whole world. I will deliberate over this and send Sanjaya to the sons of Pandu.

Brahmana, there is no need for you to wait; you can return today.'

The Kaurava king honours Drupada's priest and sends him back to the Pandavas. He then summons Sanjaya to the sabha and speaks to him."

CANTO 22

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, we hear that the Pandavas have arrived in Upaplavya. Go and enquire after them. You must greet Ajatasatru with these words: *It is fortunate that you have come out of the wilderness and arrived at a city such as this*. And to all of them you must say: *Are you well, after having endured the hardships of exile, which you did not deserve?* In no time they will think kindly of us, for, though we treated them treacherously, they are righteous and good.

Never have I known the Pandavas to be untruthful. It was their own efforts that won them their prosperity, yet they were always obedient to me. Despite the most severe scrutiny, I cannot find a single transgression for which I can blame them. They always conduct themselves with their status and with dharma in mind. They never yield to sensual temptations, to heat and cold, to hunger and thirst. They subdue sloth and apathy, joy, anger and thoughtlessness. The sons of Pritha are always conscious of dharma and are always pleasant and cordial.

When occasion demands, they give of their riches to their friends. Friendship with them never cools with passing time, for they bestow justly deserved honours and wealth on everyone. No one amongst the Ajamidas has ever hated them, excepting this vile, capricious and foolish Duryodhana and the even more evil-minded Karna. These two always envy and goad those Mahatmans who have been divested of friends and happiness.

The spoilt and pampered Duryodhana, full of initial bluster, thinks he has done well for himself. He is foolish to think that he can rob the Pandavas of their rightful inheritance while they still live. Before war breaks out, he would be wise to yield what is due to Yudhishtira, who has the support of Arjuna, Krishna, Bhima, Satyaki, Madri's two sons and the warriors of Srinjaya. From his chariot, Savyasachi, the wielder of the Gandiva, can devastate the whole world on his own; and so can the ever-victorious and exalted Krishna, the invincible Lord of the three worlds.

What mortal could face him who is the worthiest man in all the world, whose countless arrows roar like clouds and fly like locust-swarms to cover all sides? Alone on his chariot, with his Gandiva in his hands, he conquered the northern realms, including the Kurus who live there, and took all their wealth. He made the Dravida soldiers part of his own army. It was Arjuna who defeated the Devas and Indra in the Khandava vana, he who made offerings to Agni and enhanced the honour and fame of the Pandavas.

Of all mace fighters there is none to equal Bhima, nor any as skilful riding an elephant. On his chariot, he yields not to even Arjuna. As for the power of his arms, he is equal to ten thousand elephants. Of boundless energy, he is bitterly hostile, and his anger would consume my sons, making short work of them. Quick-tempered and immensely strong as he is, even Indra cannot subdue him in battle.

Large-hearted, powerful and endowed with lightness of hand, the twin brothers, Madri's sons, have been meticulously trained by Arjuna. Like a pair of hawks preying on flocks of small birds, they will not leave a single enemy alive.

If truth be told, despite being so vast, our army will be as nothing when it encounters the sons of Pandu. On their side they have Dhrishtadyumna of the boundless tejas, whom the Pandavas consider one of themselves. They have the king of the Somakas, with his legions, who is devoted to their cause and ready to lay down his life for them. Who would be able to withstand Yudhishtira who has the jewel of the Vrishnis, Krishna, for his lord?

I have heard that, though old now, Virata, king of the Matsyas, with whom the Pandavas lived for a year and whose wishes they fulfilled, has espoused the Pandava cause and is loyal to them, as are his sons. The five great princes of Kekaya, who were deposed from their thrones and want to

regain their kingdom, have become allies of the Pandavas; they wield mighty bows and are ready to fight.

All the bravest kings on Earth have come together on the side of Pandu's sons. All these, who have become allies of Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, are infused with great new courage, honour and devotion, by virtue of their love for him. Many warriors from the mountain kingdoms and other inaccessible fastnesses, many old and venerable ones and many Mlechcha tribes boasting weapons of myriad kinds have pledged themselves to the Pandava cause and gathered under the Pandava banner.

The Pandya king, who is as mighty as Indra, has come with innumerable warriors all eager for fight. Extraordinarily brave and of unparalleled might and energy, he is devoted to the Pandavas. Then there is Satyaki who, I have heard, was trained in the use of astras by Drona, Arjuna, Krishna, Kripa and Bhishma, and who is said to be equal to Krishna's son Pradyumna; and he, too, is faithful to the Pandavas.

Once, the kings of the Chedi and Karusha tribes assembled and combined their resources together. And there was one amongst them who blazed in beauty like the Sun, who was considered unassailable in battle and the best archer the Earth had known. Krishna killed him and, in an instant, robbed those Kshatriya kings of all their power. Kesava looked at that Sishupala, adulated by all the kings led by the king of Karusha, and beheaded him to enhance the glory of the Pandavas.

The other kings saw Krishna in his chariot drawn by Sugriva and his other horses, abandoned the king of the Chedis and fled like small animals at the sight of a lion. Left on his own and, from sheer audacity and folly, Sisupala faced Krishna in single combat. Krishna killed him, and he lay dead, looking like a karnikara tree uprooted by a storm.

O Sanjaya, the things I have heard about what Krishna has done for the sake of Pandu's sons, and what I know of his achievements, disturb me and drive away my peace of mind. No adversary can withstand those that have that lion of the Vrishnis for their lord. My heart trembles with fear when I hear that the two Krishnas will be together in one chariot.

If my dull-witted son abstains from fighting those two, he may yet do well. Otherwise, the two Krishnas will consume the very Kuru race, as Indra and Upendra did the Danavas. Arjuna is equal to Indra; and Krishna is Immortal Vishnu himself.

Pandu and Kunti's son Yudhishtira is virtuous and brave, and shuns any low deed. Duryodhana has wronged this man of awesome power. If not for his noble character, he would burn us all in a wink with his rage. Suta, I do not dread Arjuna, Bhima, Krishna or the twin brothers as much as I dread the wrath of Dharmaraja when his anger is kindled. He has practised austere tapasya and kept the vows of brahmacharya, and all his wishes will be fulfilled. When I think of his wrath and how justified it is, I am filled with alarm.

Go swiftly in a chariot, as my emissary, to the encampment of the Panchala forces. Ask Yudhishtira about his well-being and repeatedly address him in affectionate terms. Meet Krishna, bravest of all men, who is the most magnanimous soul. On my behalf, ask him, as well, about his well-being. And tell him that Dhritarashtra desires peace with Pandu's sons. There is nothing that Yudhishtira would not do at Krishna's bidding, for Kesava is as dear to the Pandavas as their life-breath. And wise beyond understanding or description, he is devoted to them. Declare yourself as my messenger and also enquire after the welfare of all the sons of Pandu, the Srinjayas, Satyaki and Virata, and the five sons of Draupadi.

In the midst of all those kings, Sanjaya, as the occasion arises, say whatever you deem appropriate and beneficial for the very race of Bharata, anything that is not distasteful or provocative.'"

CANTO 23

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Sanjaya goes to Upaplavya to see the mighty Pandavas. He goes to Yudhishtira and pays his respects to him before he speaks.

Sanjaya says to Ajatasatru, ‘O king, I am so happy to see you in good health and surrounded by your friends, you who are as powerful as Indra. The aged and wise Dhritarashtra, the son of Ambika, enquires after your welfare. I hope Bhimasena is well, and Dhananjaya, and the two sons of Madri also. I hope Drupada’s daughter, the princess Krishnaa, is well, too—she who never swerves from the path of truth, that devi of great tejas, that wife of heroes—as I hope are her sons, who are your joy, all that you hold dear, and whose welfare you constantly pray for.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘O Sanjaya, have you had a safe journey here? We are pleased to see you. I hope that you are well. I am in good health and so are my brothers. It is after a long time that I hear news of that Bhaarata, the revered king of the Kurus. Seeing you makes me as happy as seeing the king himself. Is our grandsire Bhishma, who is blessed with boundless energy and the highest wisdom, and who is always devoted to Kshatriya dharma, in good health? I trust he is as he ever was.

I hope the noble Dhritarashtra is well, and also his sons. I hope the great and learned king Bahlika, the son of Pratipa, is also in good health. I hope Somadatta is well, and Bhurisravas, and Satyasandha, and Sala, and Drona,

and Drona's son, and Acharya Kripa. I hope all those mighty bowmen enjoy robust good health.

O Sanjaya, the greatest and best archers, all the most intelligent and deeply learned, and the best of warriors, have allied themselves with the Kurus. I hope they receive the honour that they deserve and that they are well. How happy the people are in whose kingdom that mighty and handsome archer, Aswatthama, the honourable son of Drona, lives.

I hope Yuyutsu, the brilliant son of Dhritarashtra by his Vaisya wife, is in good health. I hope Karna, whose counsel the dull-witted Suyodhana takes so to heart, is also well. I hope the elderly mothers of the Bhaaratas are well, and that the kitchen-maids, the servants, the daughters-in-law, the nieces and nephews, and the grandchildren of Dhritarashtra's house are all free from ill health.

I hope the king continues to provide a livelihood to good Brahmanas. I hope Dhritarashtra's son has not appropriated from the Brahmanas the gifts I gave them, and that Dhritarashtra and his sons treat any hauteur on their part with forbearance. I hope he never neglects to provide for them, for that is the only way to Swarga. This is the excellent and clear path that Brahma has revealed to all living beings. If the sons of the Kuru house foolishly abandon tolerance of Brahmanas' shortcomings, they will be ruined.

I hope king Dhritarashtra and his son look after the administrators of the kingdom. I hope they have no enemies who, disguised as friends, plot their downfall. I hope none of these Kurus talk of our having committed any crimes, and that Drona, his son and the heroic Kripa do not think we are guilty in any way.

I hope all Kurus look up to Dhritarashtra and his sons as their protectors. I hope that, when they see a band of criminals, they remember Arjuna's deeds as the greatest warrior of all. I hope they remember how swift, unerring arrows flew from his Gandiva, its bowstring pulled taut, and the thunderous sound his dexterous fingers made as he stretched and released the string again and again. I have yet to see an archer to equal Arjuna, who can shoot sixty-one sharp, feather-flighted arrows with a single fluid motion of his hand.

Do they remember the mighty Bhima, who, like an elephant with the juice of rut trickling from rent temples trampling through a forest of reeds, makes hostile armies arrayed for battle tremble with dread? Do they remember the powerful Sahadeva, who conquered the Kalingas in

Dantakura by shooting arrows with both hands? Do they remember Nakula, whom you accompanied: how he subdued the Sibis and the Trigartas and brought all the western lands under my control?

Do they remember the disgrace they had to face when they came, ill-advised, to Dwaita vana on the pretext of inspecting their cattle? Those malevolent men were crushed in battle by the Gandharvas, and it was Bhimasena and Arjuna that rescued them. In the battle that ensued, Bhima protected Arjuna and Madri's sons from behind, and Arjuna emerged unscathed after savaging the enemy. Do they remember that?

O Sanjaya, a single deed cannot bring happiness now when, despite our many endeavours, we have not been able to win over Dhritarashtra's son.'"

CANTO 24

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'It is just as you say, noble son of Pandu! Those you ask about—the Kurus and the foremost among them—are in good health and spirits.

Dhritarashtra's son is surrounded by noble and righteous men, as well as by sinful, evil ones. He, who gives gifts even to his enemies, is not likely to withdraw the livelihood he provides to the Brahmanas. You Kshatriyas follow a dharma that makes you harm even those that bear you no ill will. Such dharma is fit only for butchers. If Dhritarashtra and his sons harbour ill will against you, who are righteous, they must be held guilty of treachery.

Dhritarashtra does not condone the injury done to you; he is sorry for it. The old man grieves, Yudhishtira, for he has learnt from wise Brahmanas that treachery is the greatest of all sins. O king of men, the Kurus remember your prowess on the battlefield, and that of Arjuna who leads your forces. They remember Bhima wielding his mace, and the sounds of his conch-shell and drum rising to a deafening, maddening pitch. They remember those fearless Maharathas, the sons of Madri, ranging in all directions on the battlefield, endlessly unleashing torrents of arrows at the enemy.

We cannot know what destiny has in store for anyone. See how you, Yudhishtira, who are endowed with every virtue, have had to suffer unendurable trials. I am certain that your wisdom will help you forget all

that misfortune, and cleave to fortitude. The sons of Pandu are all equal to Indra and would never abandon dharma for the sake of pleasure. You in your wisdom will secure peace for the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu, for the Srinjayas and all the other kings assembled here. Listen to what your uncle Dhritarashtra said to me after consulting his ministers and sons. Lend your attention to his message.'"

CANTO 25

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Suta, we are all gathered here—the Pandavas, the Srinjayas, Janardana, Yuyudhana and Virata. Tell us everything that Dhritarashtra asked you to say.'

Sanjaya says, 'I greet you all—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the two sons of Madri; Vasudeva, Chekitana, Virata, Satyaki, the venerable Drupada and his son Dhrishtadyumna. Hear what I say; I speak with a desire for the welfare of all the Kuru vamsa.

King Dhritarashtra welcomed the opportunity for peace and wasted no time in having the chariot prepared for my journey here. I hope Yudhishtira and his brothers, and his sons and kinsmen will accept the message I bring: Let there be peace.

The sons of Pritha are blessed with every virtue, with steadfastness, gentleness and candour. Born into a noble house, they are humane and generous, and eschew any shameful deed. They know dharma.

A base deed does not befit you, Yudhishtira, for you are noble, and the lord of a vast army. If you committed a sin, it would be a stain on your good name, like a smear of kohl on a white cloth. No one would ever knowingly acquire the guilt of an action that would result in universal slaughter; it is sinful and will lead to Naraka. Genocide is such an act, regardless of whether it results in victory or defeat.

The truly blessed are they who work for the success of their kinsmen's cause. The true son, relative or friend of the Kurus is he who would lay down his life, even at the risk of it being abused by evil, in order to ensure the welfare of the Kuru vamsa. If you, sons of Pritha, punish the Kurus by killing all your enemies, your life after that would be as death. Is life worth living after having killed your kinsmen?

Not even Indra himself, with all the gods on his side, can defeat you, who have Kesava, Chekitana and Satyaki by your side, and the protection of Dhrishtadyumna. On the other hand, who can defeat the Kurus who have Drona and Bhishma, Aswatthama, Salya, Kripa and Karna, and a host of Kshatriya kings supporting them? Who will be able to slay, without great loss of life on his side, the vast force that Dhritarashtra's son has assembled? I do not see any possible good ensuing from this war, either in victory or in defeat.

How can the sons of Pritha commit such a heinous crime, as if they were lowborn men who know nothing of dharma? I beg of you; I prostrate myself before Krishna and the venerable king of the Panchalas; I put myself under your protection, with folded hands, so that both the Kurus and the Srinjayas may prosper. Krishna and Arjuna are unlikely to ignore my words and spurn my plea. Both, if asked, would give up their lives for truth.

All this I say to ensure the success of my mission. The king and his mentor Bhishma both want to secure peace between you and the Kurus.'"

CANTO 26

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'What have you heard me say, Sanjaya, that suggests that we wish for war, and which makes you apprehensive? Peace is always preferable to war, Sarathy; which man who had an alternative would choose to fight? If a man can have everything he wants without having to actually do anything, he would not make the smallest discomfiting effort in any direction, far less go to war. Why should a man ever go to war? Who is so cursed by the gods that he would choose this horrible option?

The sons of Pritha do desire happiness, but their conduct is always marked by dharma and promotes the welfare of the world. The only happiness they want is that which accrues from deeds of dharma. The man who, in order to avoid sorrow, allows his senses to lead him in his quest for happiness is lured into actions that are wretched and miserable. A man's hankering for pleasure results in suffering; he who is free of such craving knows no sorrow. Like a fire that blazes more fiercely when fuel is added to it, desire is never satiated with the acquisition of its object; rather, it flares up, like embers when ghee is poured on them, always wanting more.

Compare the abundance that the fortunate king Dhritarashtra enjoys with what we possess. Unfortunate is the man who is never victorious; who does not enjoy music; who does not take pleasure in the fragrance of garlands and perfumes, or in cool, scented salves; and who does not enjoy

wearing fine clothes. If this were not so, we would not have been driven from our kingdom; and although all this is true, none of us brooded over our torments.

The king, in his troubled state, looks to the might of others for protection. This is not wise. Let their behaviour towards him reciprocate his own to them. The man who, at midday in spring, throws a burning log into the dense undergrowth in a forest has every reason to rue his lot as he tries to escape from the fire that is fanned into a blaze by the wind.

Sanjaya, why does Dhritarashtra complain even though his own prosperity is intact? It is because he followed the course of action espoused by his vicious and foolish son? Duryodhana disregarded Vidura, the best of his well-wishers, as if he were his enemy. Dhritarashtra, who wanted only to please his sons, knowingly chose a path of sin. Indeed, from his fondness for his son, he would not pay heed to Vidura who, of all the Kurus, is his wisest and most sincere friend, who is vastly learned, eloquent and virtuous in all that he does.

Dhritarashtra wants to please his son and, at the same time, have the respect of others. His son Duryodhana is full of envy and anger; he breaks the sacred laws laid down for the acquisition of dharma and artha. He has a foul tongue, allows anger to dictate his behaviour; and his soul is absorbed in indulging his senses and his vanity. He harbours hatred for so many; he obeys no law; his life is evil; he is obstinate and ruthless. For such a son as this, Dhritarashtra knowingly abandons dharma and true joy.

Even as long ago as the time when I was playing that game of dice, I suspected that the destruction of the Kurus loomed near, because Vidura's wise words received no praise from Dhritarashtra. It was when they ignored Vidura that the Kurus' downfall began. As long as they placed themselves under the guidance of his wisdom, their kingdom flourished.

Let me tell you, Sanjaya, who greedy Duryodhana's advisors are now: Dusasana, Subala's son Sakuni and the Sutaputra Karna. Look at his foolishness. However hard I think about it, I cannot see how the Kurus and the Srinjayas can prosper when Dhritarashtra has usurped the throne unlawfully and even once banished the far-sighted Vidura. Dhritarashtra and his sons now want undisputed sovereignty over the whole world. Peace is impossible. He thinks of what he has taken with deceit and treachery as being his own.

When Arjuna takes up his Gandiva, Karna believes that he can stand up to him. Why, then, was Karna not able to prevail in any of the battles that have already been fought? Karna, Drona, Pitamaha Bhishma, as well as many other Kurus know that there is no bowman to compare with Arjuna. All the kings know how Duryodhana became a king although Parantapa Arjuna was alive. He continues to convince himself that he can rob the sons of Pandu of what is theirs, despite knowing that it was Arjuna who once came to his rescue when he was helpless, with nothing but a bow, four cubits long, to fight an unearthly Gandharva host.

Dhritarashtra's sons are alive only because they have not yet heard the reverberation of the fully-stretched Gandiva. Duryodhana thinks that he has achieved his objective, because he has not yet seen Bhima's rage. Even Indra would not rob us of our rightful sovereignty as long as Bhima, Arjuna, heroic Nakula and patient Sahadeva live. The old king and his son fondly imagine that his sons will not be consumed on the battlefield by the fire of the Pandavas' anger.

Sanjaya, you know what misery they have made us suffer. Out of regard for you, I would forgive them all. You know what happened between the Kauravas and us, and how we conducted ourselves towards them; let things continue in the same way. I will take your advice and seek peace. Let me have Indraprastha for my kingdom; let Duryodhana give it to me.'"

CANTO 27

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'O Pandava, your unswerving dharma is known the world over. I also see it, Prithaputra. Considering that even a great life is transient, you must not kill the Kurus. Yudhishtira, if the Kurus will not give you your share peaceably, I think it is better for you to live on alms in the kingdom of the Andhakas and the Vrishnis than win your kingdom back through a bloody war.

Our mortal existence is short; blame easily attaches to us; we are subject to constant suffering; life is uncertain; and life can never be as important as a good name. Therefore, never sin. O king, desires cling to men and keep them from leading a virtuous life. A wise man, having extinguished all desire, acquires unblemished fame in the world. The thirst for wealth is a fetter; and the virtue of men who pursue it suffers. The wise man is one who seeks only dharma. Even as a man's worldly desires increase, their impermanence makes his miseries increase.

The man who places dharma before all else shines like the Sun at his most glorious. A man devoid of dharma, of sinful soul, is ruined, although he may gain the very Earth.

You have studied the Vedas and lived the austere life of brahmacharya; you have performed yagnas to satisfy the needs of Brahmanas and have given generously to them. With a view to achieving the loftiest state that a

man can, you have devoted yourself, for years on end, to the pursuit of tapasya.

He who devotes himself excessively to mundane indulgences cannot concentrate his mind on yogabhyasa, spiritual discipline; and such a man is always miserable. These fleeting sensual pleasures forsake him after his wealth is gone, and his lusts continue to drive him, even in frustration. He who has never lived a spiritually disciplined life, and sins, abandoning the path of dharma, has no belief in the permanence of the soul. This fool is slated for torment after death.

In the next world, a man's actions, both good and evil, are not nullified. All his deeds precede a man as he journeys from the mortal world to the next, and he cannot but follow them. Your deeds in this life are celebrated as being exceptionally noble and pure. They are like the delicious sattvik food specially prepared to offer, along with gifts, to Brahmanas and officiating priests at religious ceremonies. All karma is performed only as long as the mortal body lives, Prithaputra. After death there is no karma to be done.

You have performed mighty deeds that righteous men admire, and they will benefit you in the world to come. Death brings entry into the next world and, with it, freedom from old age, fear, hunger and thirst, and from everything that is disagreeable to the mind. After death, there will be nothing to do except to delight; such will be the fruit of your actions.

So, do not allow desire for temporal happiness to spur what you do in this world. At the end of your life and deeds do not, Pandava, take a path that forsakes truth, sobriety, honesty and compassion. You may perform the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha yagnas, but do not even think about any action that is sinful in itself.

If, after such a long time, you sons of Pandu yield to hatred and commit such a horrific crime as this war, you will have endured all these years of suffering in the forests in vain. It will have been for nothing that you went into exile, parting with your army, which was then under your control; from your loyal friends Krishna and Satyaki, golden-charioted Virata of the Matsyas and his son at head of his warriors, and from all the other kings, whom you once vanquished, and who have now come to fight by your side.

With all these mighty resources, with this army, with being held in dread by all, and supported by Krishna and Arjuna, you could well have slain your worst foes in battle; you could have long ago crushed

Duryodhana's pride. Why then have you allowed your enemies to grow so powerful and your friends so weak? What for have you lived in the wilderness for so many years? Why, having let slip the opportune moment, do you now want to fight?

A sinner of no wisdom may win apparent prosperity by fighting; a wise and righteous man can win enduring felicity by shedding his pride and, guided by his higher instincts, refraining from war. Yudhishtira, your instincts do not make you lean towards any adharma, and never have you committed any sin from anger. Why then do you now want to do this ghastly thing, against every dictate of dharma?

Wrath, mighty king, is a drug that cures no disease. Rather, indulging in it brings on a sickness of the mind; it robs a man of his justly earned fame, and leads him to sin. Good men quickly swallow and hold down anger, but not evil ones. I ask you to abjure your wrath and desist from war.

Who would indulge in anger which leads to mortal sin and perdition? Forbearance would be far better for you than the pleasures you would enjoy if your enemies—Bhishma, Drona and his son, Kripa, Somadatta's son, Vikarna, Vivimsati, Karna and Duryodhana—were killed. What happiness can you hope to enjoy after killing them? Tell me.

Even if you win all the sea-girdled Earth, you can never be free from decrepitude and death, pleasure and pain, bliss and misery. Knowing all this, do not go to war. If you want to take this savage course because it is what your advisors recommend, then abdicate everything to them and go away yourself. You must not leave the path that leads to Swarga.'"

CANTO 28

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'Sanjaya, what you say is true; deeds of dharma are the best of all deeds. But, before you censure me, you should first determine whether my conduct has been in accord with dharma or not.

Sometimes, vice appears to be virtue and virtue to be vice; and sometimes, goodness is truly just that. The learned should use their discernment to distinguish one from the other. Then again, during times of distress, virtue and vice, which are indeed eternal and absolute, can appear to be the other.

A man should live according to the svadharma of his varna; however, one's dharma changes during a crisis. When his means of living are gone, the destitute man should certainly look for ways, other than those prescribed, by which he may fulfil his dharma. Not only such a man, but also one who is not destitute, must both be reproached if they act in contrariness to the condition of their lives at that moment.

The Creator decrees atonement for Brahmanas who, in their desire to avoid being destroyed, act in a manner opposed to their svadharma. Surely, then, all men may, in times of dire distress, do what is contrary to the dharma of their varna. Sanjaya, you should regard as worthy those who live according to their dharma during normal times, as well as those who do not in a time of crisis. Equally, you should censure those who flout their dharma during normal times and those who live by it during a time of distress.

For men who wish to gain self-knowledge and bring their minds under control, the same practices that are ordained for Brahmanas are prescribed. However, for those who have no immediate desire for mukti, and who are not Brahmanas, the code that is prescribed for their particular varnas is the best. This is the path that our fathers, grandfathers and ancestors followed. As for those that want knowledge of the Atman and also to avoid all karma, they, too, hold the same view and consider themselves orthodox. There is no other way.

O Sanjaya, whatever wealth the Earth or the gods have; whatever is beyond reach—in the realm of Prajapati, in Devaloka or in Brahmaloka—I would not seek it by means that violate dharma.

Krishna is Dharmeswara—the lord of virtue; he has an all-lustrous mind and is a master of the artha shastra; he has waited upon Brahmanas; he is all-knowing; and he counsels many mighty kings. Let him say whether I shall be held to blame, whether I would be acting against my dharma by abandoning peace and pursuing war, for he is impartial and desires the welfare of both sides.

Satyaki, the Chedis, the Andhakas, the Vrishnis, the Bhojas, the Kukuras and the Srinjayas follow Krishna's advice and slay their enemies, to the delight of their friends.

The Vrishnis, the Andhakas and Ugrasena, led by Krishna, have become like Indra—high-spirited, devoted to truth, powerful and happy. Babhru of Kasi, having got Krishna, the fulfiller of wishes, as his brother, and upon whom Krishna showers all life's blessings, even as clouds shower the Earth's creatures with rain after the arid summer, has attained great prosperity. So great is Krishna.

Know that he is the authority on the propriety of all karma. Moreover, he is dear to us and our friend. I will never do anything against his advice.'"

CANTO 29

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'O Sanjaya, my wish is that the Pandavas live and prosper, and that their desires are fulfilled; and I wish the same for Dhritarashtra and his sons. I have always wanted to say to the Pandavas that peace is what king Dhritarashtra wants above all else; and I think it is best for them, too.

Yudhishtira has shown an extremely rare inclination to peace, but Dhritarashtra and his sons are so avaricious that I can understand why the Pandava's hostility has been aroused. You cannot claim to be more knowledgeable about dharma than Yudhishtira or me. Why then do you speak reproachfully of Yudhishtira's conduct? He has great tejas; he is devoted to his svadharma; he fulfils his familial duties thoughtfully and in keeping with justice.

Brahmanas have held various opinions on the matter we are discussing. Some say that success in the world to come depends upon karma; some declare that all action should be shunned and that salvation is attained by knowledge alone. Brahmanas say that although man knows there is food, his hunger is not appeased until he has actually eaten it. They say that only the knowledge that helps a man perform his duties bears fruit, for actions have visible results.

A thirsty man quenches his thirst by drinking water—effort produces results, and therein lies the efficacy of work. If anyone thinks that there is

something more productive than effort, his work and his words are meaningless. In the other world, it is by virtue of work that the Devas flourish. It is by effort that the wind blows. It is by effort that sleepless Surya rises every day and causes day and night, and Soma passes through the months and fortnights and the constellations. Fire uses energy to kindle itself and burn, doing good to mankind. The sleepless Bhumi Devi sustains her great burden by dint of her ceaseless effort. The sleepless rivers carry their waters without rest to sustain all beings. The ever-wakeful Indra pours down rain, making his power resound through the heavens and the cardinal points.

Wanting to be the greatest of the Devas, Indra led an austere life of wakefulness, like a holy Brahmana. He renounced pleasure and the gratification of his senses. Scrupulously and diligently he devoted himself to virtue, truth and self-control, forbearance, impartiality and compassion. It was by no small effort of devoting himself to this way of life that he acquired kingship over the Devas.

Brihaspati, too, did the same. He lived the austere life of brahmacharya with his mind closed to everything else. He gave up pleasure and controlled his senses, and became the Acharya of the Devas. Similarly, the Navagrahas, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Vasus, Yama Deva, Kubera, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas and the Apsaras, all worked hard to attain their positions. In the other world the Rishis shine as a result of their life of study, austerity and work.

O Sanjaya, knowing that this is the way followed by the best of Brahmanas, by Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, you being one of the wisest men, why are you making this plea on behalf of the Kauravas? You must know that Yudhishtira is constantly engaged in the study of the Vedas; that he is inclined to performing the Aswamedha and Rajasuya yagnas. Also, he rides horses and elephants, has a chariot, is arrayed in armour, and bears a bow and all other weapons.

If the Pandavas could see a course of action that does not involve the slaughter of the Kurus, they would take it. Their virtue would be saved, and they would achieve an act of punya, even if meant forcing Bhima to restrain himself. On the other hand, they might, as destined, die whilst fighting. If so, in trying their utmost to fulfil their dharma, their deaths would be praiseworthy.

If you approve of peace, I would like to hear your answer to this question: Is the dharma of a king to fight or not to fight? You must, O Sanjaya, take into consideration the division of the four varnas and their respective callings. You must hear the course of action the Pandavas plan to take. Then you may allot praise or censure, as you wish.

A Brahmana's dharma is to study, offer sacrifices, do charity and go on pilgrimages to holy tirthas; he should teach, officiate as a priest in yagnas offered by those who merit his help, and accept gifts from persons he knows.

A Kshatriya protects the people lawfully; he should practise charity, offer sacrifices, study the Vedas, marry and lead the virtuous life of a grihasta. If his soul is noble, and if he lives by the scriptures, he will easily attain the realm of the Brahman.

A Vaisya's svadharma is to study, work hard to earn and accumulate wealth through commerce, agriculture and cattle-rearing. He should conduct himself in a way that pleases Brahmanas and Kshatriyas; he should be upright, do good works and be a householder.

From olden times, the Sudra has been ordained to serve Brahmanas and be obedient to them. A Sudra should not study or perform sacrifices; he should be conscientious and alert in performing his service.

The king protects all these with care and ensures that all the varnas perform their svadharma. The king should not be addicted to sensual indulgence; he should be impartial and treat all his subjects equally. The king should never give in to sinful desires. If there is, in his kingdom, a man who is more praiseworthy than himself, and who is well-known and gifted with all the virtues, the king should encourage his subjects to recognise that man. An unworthy king, however, would not understand this. He would increase his own strength and grow in inhumanity, and become a target for the wrath of destiny. He would cast a covetous eye on the riches of others.

Now we come to war, for which weapons, armour, bows and arrows came into being. Indra invented these for putting plunderers to death. Punya is acquired by doing away with thieves. Many horrible evils have manifested themselves because the Kurus have been unrighteous and neglected law and religion. This is not dharma, Sanjaya.

Dhritarashtra, with his sons, has taken what rightfully belongs to Pandu's sons. He does not care about the eternal dharma of kings. And all the Kurus follow him. The thief who steals wealth stealthily and the one

who seizes it openly must both be condemned. What is the difference between them and Dhritarashtra's sons? His greed has convinced him that what he does out of anger springs from righteousness.

The share of the kingdom that the Pandavas are entitled to is clear. Why should that share be seized by that fool? This being the state of things, it would be great punya for us to be killed in battle. A kingdom gained as a birthright is preferable to a throne conferred by a stranger. Sanjaya, you must explain these time-honoured laws to the Kurus in the presence of the assembled kings—all those witless ones who have been brought together by Duryodhana and who are already marked by death.

Look once more at that vilest of all their deeds—what they did in the Kuru sabha on the day of the dice. It is shameful that the Kurus, with Bhishma at their head, did nothing while the beloved wife of the Pandavas, the chaste Draupadi of unblemished fame, was seized, even as she wept, by Dusasana, that monstrous slave of lust. All the Kurus, young and old, were there. If they had prevented the humiliation inflicted upon her that day, I would have been pleased with Dhritarashtra, and that would have boded well for his sons also.

Dusasana brutally dragged Krishnaa into the midst of the sabha, where her fathers-in-law sat. Expecting sympathy, she found none to take her part, except Vidura. None of the kings uttered a word of protest, because they were all fools. Vidura alone, from a sense of dharma, spoke just and righteous words; he alone opposed Duryodhana. Sanjaya, at that time you did not speak of law and morality, but now you come to instruct Yudhishtira about dharma.

Panchali, on the other hand, even though she was dragged shamefully into the sabha, set things right; and like a ship at sea, she rescued the Pandavas and herself from a tidal wave of misfortune.

As Krishnaa stood in that ancient hall, in the presence of her fathers-in-law, the Sutaputra said to her, "O daughter of Drupada, you have no refuge. Consider yourself a slave in Duryodhana's house. Your husbands are defeated and are no longer of any consequence. You have a loving heart, so choose someone else for your lord."

Karna's words were like arrows, cutting down all hope, piercing the very soul, so dreadfully. They buried themselves deep in Arjuna's heart.

When the sons of Pandu were about to put on garments made of black-deer skins, Dusasana said, scornfully, "These all are mean eunuchs, ruined,

and damned for a long time to come."

And Sakuni, the prince of Gandhara, spoke slyly to Yudhishtira during the game of dice. He said, "I have won Nakula from you; now what else have you got? You had better stake your wife Draupadi."

Sanjaya, you know all the shameful things that were said at the dice-game. I want to go myself to the Kurus to settle this most difficult matter. If, without injury to the Pandava cause, I succeed in bringing about peace with the Kurus, not only will it fetch great punya, but the Kurus will be saved from certain death. I hope Duryodhana will take heed of what I say to the Kurus, which will be wise, founded in dharma, full of good sense and compassion. I hope that when I arrive, the Kurus will pay me proper respect, or else Dhritarashtra's vile sons, already branded by the evil of what they have done, will be consumed by Arjuna and Bhima, who are keened for battle. Of this you can be certain.

When Pandu's sons were beaten at dice Duryodhana spoke vile and searing words to them. You can be sure that Bhima will remind him of what he said, at the first opportune moment.

Duryodhana is a mighty tree of evil; Karna is its trunk, Sakuni its branches, Dusasana its blossoms and fruits, and the wise Dhritarashtra himself its roots. On the contrary, Yudhishtira is a great tree of truth, Arjuna its trunk and Bhima its branches. Madri's twin sons are its copious flowers and fruits; and I, dharma, and men of dharma are its roots.

Dhritarashtra and his sons are the forest, and the Pandavas are the tigers in it. Do not cut down the forest with its tigers in it, nor drive the tigers from it. The tiger makes easy prey when it is outside its home; and the forest without tigers is easily entered and destroyed. The tiger protects the forest, which shelters it. Dhritarashtra and his sons are creepers, while the Pandavas are Sala trees. Creepers cannot flourish unless they have trees to cling to.

Pritha's sons are as eager to wait on Dhritarashtra as his own sons are keen for war. Let King Dhritarashtra do the right thing. The virtuous sons of Pandu, though well prepared for war, still keep the peace. Learned one, tell Dhritarashtra everything as it truly is.'"

CANTO 30

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Farewell, O divine one. Pandava, I will leave now; may you be prosperous. I hope I have not been carried away by my emotions and said anything to offend you.

Farewell also to you Janardana, Bhima and Arjuna, sons of Madri, Satyaki and Chekitana; I take my leave of you. May peace and happiness be yours; and I pray that all the kings here will look upon me with affection.'

Yudhishtira says, 'You have our leave, Sanjaya; may peace be yours. Learned one, you harbour no ill will towards us. We all know that amongst those in the court of the Kurus, you are a pure-hearted soul. Besides, you are a faithful ambassador, loved by us, gifted with eloquence, of distinguished deportment and sympathetic to us. Your mind is never clouded and, even if spoken to harshly, you never retort in anger. You never speak harsh or slighting words, or false or bitter ones. We know that what you say is without malice, always full of truth, and serious. Amongst all dutas you are our favourite. Besides you, the other who is welcome here is Vidura. We used to see much of you, and you are as dear to us as Dhananjaya. Go with all speed, Sanjaya.

Go to those Brahmanas of pure tejas, who are devoted to learning and live as brahmacharis, who study the Vedas whilst living on alms; go to the ascetics who live in the forest, as well as to the aged ones of other varnas. Pay your respects to them and enquire about their welfare on my behalf. Go

to Dhritarashtra's priest, his acharyas and his ritvijas; ask after their well-being, too.

There are those who, though not of high birth, are intelligent, righteous and are men of strong moral fibre; men remember us and speak of us; and who live to the extent they are able by their dharma—tell them I am well and ask after their health. Enquire about the welfare of the tradesmen in the kingdom and the officials.

In our name, salute our beloved Acharya Drona—our mentor, who is well versed in dharma; who took a vow of brahmacharya in order to master the Vedas; who has made the astra shastra full and complete and who is always gracious to us.

You should also greet Aswatthama from us and ask after his welfare. He is learned and devoted to Vedic study; by living as a brahmachari, he has acquired lustrous energy, even like a Gandharva youth; and he, too, has made the science of weapons full and complete. Sanjaya, you must go to the home of Saradvata's son Kripa, that Maharatha, that best of all realised souls. Repeatedly salute him and touch his feet in my name.

Convey news of my good health to Bhishma, the foremost of Kurus, who is always valiant and abstains from doing harm; in whom asceticism, wisdom and Vedic learning reside; that steadfast and most excellent of men.

Greet the wise and venerable king Dhritarashtra, the blind lord of the Kurus, who has vast gyana, and is respectful of the old.

Enquire, also, after Dhritarashtra's eldest son Duryodhana, that evil, ignorant, deceitful and vicious man, who now rules the world; and ask about the violent and vile Dusasana, hero and mighty bowman, who is like his elder brother, only more bestial.

Sanjaya, greet the wise chief of the Bahlikas, whose most cherished wish is for peace among the Bhaaratas. You must also pay our respects to Somadatta, who is endowed with the most noble qualities, who is wise and merciful, and whose affection for the Kurus makes him patient with them. The son of Somadatta is worthy of the greatest reverence among the Kurus. He is my friend and a brother to us. A mighty bowman and the foremost of rathikas, he is worthy in every way. Ask after his welfare, from me, as well that as of his friends and advisors.

Then there are the younger Kurus, our cousins. Ask about their health and prosperity and speak to each of them in ways that you deem appropriate. Enquire about the welfare of the kings who have been brought

together by Duryodhana to fight the Pandavas—the Kekayas, the Vasatis, the Salvakas, the Amvashtas and the leading Trigartas; the brave warriors from the east, north, south and west; those who have come from the mountain kingdoms; and all among them who are not cruel and who lead pure lives. Let that mighty host of honourable men know that I am well and that I ask after them; let all the elephant warriors, the horsemen, the chariot warriors and the footsoldiers know that I am well. Ask kindly after the king's servants—the revenue officials, the guards, the leaders of his troops, the accountants and officials who monitor other aspects of the affairs of the kingdom.

Sanjaya, enquire about the welfare of Dhritarashtra's son by his Vaisya wife—that young man who is among the best of all the Kurus, Yuyutsu, who never errs, who has great wisdom, who is blessed with every virtue, and who abhors the idea of this war.

Ask about Chitrasena, who is unrivalled at the intricacies of dice, whose tricks others never detect, who plays with great skill, who is a master of the game, who is unbeatable at the dice-board but not in battle.

Enquire after the health of Sakuni, the king of the Gandharas, native of the mountainous country, who has no equal in cheating at dice, who boosts Duryodhana's pride, and whose cleverness leads him only to ruthless deceit.

Ask about the well-being of Vikartana's son Karna, that hero who, alone on his chariot and unassisted, is ready to vanquish all the Pandavas whom no one else dares challenge in battle; Karna, who is peerless at beguiling the already deluded.

Ask also after the welfare of Vidura, who alone is devoted to us, who is our true guru, who raised us, who is our father, mother and friend, whose understanding is clear and unclouded, whose knowledge is deep, and who is our sagest advisor.

Greet all the elder ladies, of great good qualities, who are like mothers to us. Say this first, *Mothers of living sons, I hope your sons treat you well, with kindness and compassion*. Then tell them that I and my sons are well.

Greet those ladies, Sanjaya, who are equal in rank to our wives, and say to them, "I hope you are well-protected. I hope your good names are unblemished. I hope your lives are blameless and thoughtfully lived. I hope you behave with your fathers-in-law in a kind, praiseworthy manner. I hope you conduct yourselves so that you win your husbands' approval."

Then there are the younger women who are like our daughters-in-law, who have come to us from noble families, who are mothers and who deserve praise. See them all and tell them that Yudhishtira sends his affectionate greetings.

Embrace the daughters of your own house, Sanjaya, and ask kindly after their health on my behalf. Say to them, "May your husbands be kind and loving to you; may you please your husbands; may you have fine, clean homes, ornaments, clothes and perfumes; may you be happy and have all the joys of life at your command; may your faces and forms be beautiful and your words sweet."

You must ask after the others in the Kuru household, and tell them I am in good health—the maid-servants and man-servants, the humpbacked and the lame. Say to them, "I hope Dhritarashtra's son continues to provide you with the same comforts as before."

You must also see the people that Dhritarashtra supports with food and clothing—the physically and mentally disabled, the dwarfs, the blind, the old, the lame and the legless. Tell them I am well and that I ask about their well-being. Say to them, "Have no fear; do not be dispirited by your unhappy lives that are full of pain. They are the consequence of your sins in past lives. When I have defeated my enemies and gratified my friends, I will give you food and clothes in plenty."

I ask that you also see the weak and unprotected, those who strive in vain to make a living, the ignorant and all who lead sorry lives, and anyone who you consider deserving of our concern. Ask on my behalf about their welfare and peace of mind. You should also enquire after any outsiders who have sought Dhritarashtra's protection, those who have come to the Kurus of their own accord or who have been invited, and the ambassadors from other countries. Tell them all that I am well.

As for the warriors that Duryodhana has amassed, there are none on Earth to equal them. Dharma, however, is eternal; dharma is my strength, with which I will destroy my enemies. Sanjaya, say to Duryodhana from me:

That desire which tortures your heart, the desire to rule all the Kurus without a rival, is unreasonable and unjust. We will never do anything that harms you. Most heroic of the Bhaaratas, give me back my own Indraprastha, or fight me.'"

CANTO 31

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Sanjaya, the Creator controls everyone—the righteous and the sinners, the young and the old, the weak and the strong. It is that Supreme Being who imparts knowledge to the child and bestows innocence on the learned, at his will.

If Dhritarashtra asks you about our strength, tell him everything honestly, having first talked with all of us here and ascertained the truth. Go to the Kurus, greet the mighty Dhritarashtra, touch his feet and enquire about his welfare in our name. Then, when he is seated in the midst of his people, say to him,

"O king, the Pandavas live happily, because of your prowess. It was by your grace that those children got a kingdom. Having bestowed their kingdom on them, you should not neglect them now, for they would then be ruined."

Sanjaya, one person cannot rule over the entire kingdom. Say to him for us, "We wish to live united with you. Do not allow your enemies to divide us and vanquish you."

Sanjaya, with head bent, salute our grandfather Bhishma, the son of Santanu. Say to him, "You revived Santanu's race when it was threatened with extinction. Pitamaha, do what you think is best to make sure that your grandsons live in friendship and unity."

Then address Vidura, and say, *Dear friend, for Yudhishtira's sake, counsel peace*.

Then address that brash Duryodhana, when he is amongst all the Kurus; plead with him on my behalf. Say to him:

"We will forget the insults you heaped on our innocent and helpless Draupadi in the midst of the sabha, only because we have no desire to see the Kurus killed. The Pandavas have silently borne all the other injuries too, both before and after that, although they have the power to avenge them. The Kauravas know all this. Dear cousin, you even sent us into exile wearing deer-skins. This also we have endured because we do not want to see all the Kurus slain.

Commanded by you, and ignoring Kunti, Dusasana dragged Krishnaa into the sabha. That too we will forgive. But, Parantapa, we must have our rightful share of the kingdom. Turn your covetous heart away from what belongs to others. Peace will then reign amongst us, and we wish for peace.

Give us each even a single province of the empire. Give us Kusasthala, Vrikasthala, Makandi and Varanavata, and any province of your choice for the fifth. This will end the enmity. Duryodhana, give your five brothers at least five villages."

Wise Sanjaya, let there be peace between our cousins and us. Tell him also, "Let brothers be loyal to each other; let fathers and sons unite; let the Panchalas and Kurus come together in joy, and let the two clans be one. This is my fervent wish. Bharatarishabha, with joy in our hearts, let us make peace."

O Sanjaya, I am as able to make war as I am to strike peace; I am as prepared to acquire wealth as to earn punya; I can be as harsh as I am soft,' says Yudhishtira," said Vaisampayana.

CANTO 32

SANJAYA-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Given leave to go, and having listened to what Yudhishtira wants of him, Sanjaya sets out at once for Hastinapura. He enters the city and presents himself at the gate of the palace apartments.

He says to the gatekeeper, 'Dwarapala, inform Dhritarashtra that I have returned from meeting the Pandavas. Do this without delay, if the king is awake. I have important things to tell him.'

The gatekeeper goes to the king and says, 'Bhumipala, Sanjaya is at the palace gate and wants to see you. He comes with a message from the Pandavas. Command me, my lord; what shall I do?'

The king says, 'Tell Sanjaya that I am in good cheer and health. Bid him enter, and welcome him; I am always ready to receive him. Why does he, who is free to enter at any time, wait outside?'

Sanjaya enters the palace and, with folded hands, comes before Dhritarashtra who sits on his throne surrounded by his courtiers—the wise, the heroic and the noble.

Sanjaya says, 'Lord of the Earth, I, Sanjaya, bow to you. Rajan, I went to the Pandavas from here. After paying his respects to you, Yudhishtira, the lustrous son of Pandu, enquired after your welfare. He enquired about your family and asked whether you are pleased with your sons and grandsons, friends and counsellors, and all your dependents.'

Dhritarashtra says, ‘O child, my blessings upon Ajatasatru. Is Yudhishtira in good health, and are his sons, brothers and ministers all well?’

Sanjaya says, ‘Pandu’s son is well, as are those with him. He, who acquires wealth and virtue without doing anything dishonourable, who is intelligent, learned, far-sighted and good-natured, now desires what was once his. Yudhishtira regards ahimsa as being superior to dharma, and dharma as superior to artha. His mind always inclines toward tapasya and inward joy, and to deeds of dharma which are spiritually exalting.

In his worldly life, man is like a wooden puppet controlled by an outside force. Seeing how Yudhishtira has suffered, I realise that the power of destiny is stronger than the force of human endeavour. And seeing your adharma, which is not only sinful and shameful, but will also surely lead to misery, I am convinced that a man like you will enjoy praise only so long as your enemies bide their time.

Having renounced all wrong-doing, like a serpent sloughing its old skin, the heroic Yudhishtira shines resplendent in perfection; his sins are now transferred to you. Rajan, reflect on your actions, which are dishonourable and violate both dharma and artha, and which have earned you evil karma in this world and inevitable misery in the next.

You have followed your son’s evil advice, in order to enjoy wealth that would, otherwise, have been hard to come by; and you hoped to keep your enemies at bay. The world has denounced this sin, which is so unworthy of you. Calamity befalls a man who lacks wisdom, or is low-born or cruel, who holds grudges for a long time, who is not steadfast in Kshatriya dharma, who has no tejas, or who is base and shameless.

It is fate that makes a man take birth into a good family, or become strong, or famous, or learned. It is fate that gives him life’s comforts and fate that gives him the ability to subdue his senses and discriminate between virtue and vice. No man, who is waited upon by the best of advisors, who is intelligent and can tell right from wrong in times of distress, who performs the necessary rites and rituals, who has full use of all his faculties, would knowingly sin.

These, your loyal counsellors, are united in their determination that the Pandavas must not get back their share of the kingdom. Circumstances seem to move inexorably towards the destruction of the Kurus. Provoked by your crimes against him, if Yudhishtira wants to punish you, the very race

of the Kurus will be prematurely extinguished. He will shift all his sins, such as they are, to you and you shall bear the blame and the burden for them. Nothing other than the will of the gods can prevent this, for Arjuna was honoured by them in Devaloka when he left this world and went there. In the face of fate, all individual effort is as nothing.

The advantages of a noble birth and courage depend on what a man does for their development; and seeing that prosperity and adversity, stability and instability hold equal sway over a man and his possessions, Mahabali the Great, in his quest for the roots of suffering, failed to discover where the chain of karma of a former life began. He thought that the eternal Essence is the cause of everything. The eye, the ear, the nose, the skin and the tongue are the portals of a man's knowledge; if he suppresses desire, he achieves spontaneous gratification through them. Therefore, one must control one's senses, happily and without misgiving.

Of course, there are those that do not agree. They believe that if a man behaves thoughtfully, his actions will produce the desired result, like a newborn child growing when nurtured with food and drink. Men in this world are subject to love and hate, pleasure and pain, praise and blame. The honest man deserves praise, but you I censure for being the root cause of the enmity between the Bhaaratas, which will result in the erasure of countless lives. If peace is not restored, it will be your fault that Arjuna burns the Kurus, as a blazing fire does a heap of dry grass.

Rajan, in this world you are singular in the way you have given in to your son, who is completely unrestrained; in the way you complacently wear the crown of success, having done nothing to prevent the shame that occurred during the game of dice. Now reap the fruit of your weakness. By rejecting the advice of faithful friends and accepting the counsel of treacherous men, undeserving of your confidence, and by acting like a servant to your evil son's whim, you have as good as lost your great and prosperous empire.

I am tired from my journey and ask your leave to retire to bed now, Purushavyaghra, for tomorrow morning the Kurus will assemble to hear Yudhishtira's message to you.'"

CANTO 33

PRAJAGARA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "When Sanjaya leaves, Dhritarashtra says to an attendant, 'I want to see Vidura; have him come here at once.'

The messenger goes to Vidura and says, 'Wise one, our mighty king wishes to see you.'

Vidura comes immediately to the palace and tells the servant to inform the king of his arrival. The man goes to Dhritarashtra and says, 'Maharajan, Vidura is here as you commanded. He wants to worship your feet. What shall he do?'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Bid him of the great wisdom and foresight enter. I am never unwilling or unprepared to see Vidura.'

The attendant goes out and says to Vidura, 'Kshattri, the king bids you go into his inner apartment. He says he is always ready to see you.'

Vidura goes into Dhritarashtra's chamber and, with hands joined, says to his brother, who is sunk in dark thought, 'Wise one, here I am at your command, to do whatever you want.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Vidura, Sanjaya has returned and has gone home after rebuking me. Tomorrow in the sabha he will deliver Yudhishtira's message. I could not get him to divulge what that is, and sleep evades my burning body. Tell me what is good for my feverish insomnia, my child, for you know dharma and artha well. Ever since Sanjaya came back from the

Pandavas, my heart has known no peace; and filled with anxious thoughts about the message he will deliver, my senses are in turmoil.'

Vidura says, 'Sleeplessness is for a thief, a lustful man, one who has lost his wealth, one who has failed in his endeavour, or a weak man under attack by a strong one. I hope, my lord, that none of these has overtaken you, and that you do not grieve or covet another's wealth.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I want to hear you speak wise words of dharma. In our race of Rajarishis it is only you that the Munis respect.'

Vidura replies, 'Yudhishtira is blessed with every virtue; he deserves to be the ruler of the three worlds. Despite his worthiness to rule beside you, you exiled him.

Your qualities, on the other hand, are the opposite of his. Neither your virtues nor your knowledge of dharma entitles you to a share of the kingdom, for you are blind. As a consequence of his mildness and compassion, his righteousness and love of truth, his strength, and his reverence for you, Yudhishtira patiently endures innumerable and grievous wrongs. How can you hope to have prosperity or peace of mind when you have handed over the reins of the kingdom to Duryodhana, Subala's son, Karna and Dusasana?

The wise man is one who uses Atmagyana, hard work, forbearance and adherence to dharma to earn punya. The wise man is one who is known by his dharma, his rejection of sin, and by his faith and reverence. The wise man is one who cannot be swerved from his dharma by anger, joy, pride, false modesty, a crisis or vanity.

The man who keeps what he intends to say and do from his enemies and whose deeds become known only after he has done them is wise. The man who does not allow heat, cold, fear born of attachment, prosperity or adversity to obstruct his plans is wise. The man whose judgment is detached from desire, who pays equal attention to dharma and artha, who disregards pleasure and chooses goals that will stand him in good stead in this world and in the next is wise.

He who exerts as much effort as he can and does his very best, dismissing nothing as insignificant is wise. He who has a quick understanding, who listens patiently, who pursues his goals with good sense and not from desire, and who does not waste his energy on talking, unasked, about other people's affairs is wise. He who does not yearn for the unattainable, who does not grieve for what is lost, whose mind is clear even

in a crisis is wise. He who begins something and strives until it is completed, who never wastes his time, who has his soul under control is wise.

Bharatarishabha, wise men always delight in honest deeds; they do only what leads to their happiness and prosperity and never mock at what is good.

He who neither exults at being honoured nor grieves at being slighted, who remains serene like a lake on the Ganga is wise. He who knows the nature of all creatures—that no one and nothing is immortal—who is aware of the inter-connectedness of all things and all karma, and who knows the means that men may resort to for attaining their goals is wise. He who speaks confidently, who can converse on diverse subjects, who knows the art of debate, who has keen intelligence and who can interpret the meaning of what is written in sacred books is wise. He whose studies are regulated by reason, whose thinking follows the scriptures and who always pays homage to the good is wise.

On the other hand, he who is vain though ignorant of the Shastras, arrogant though poor, and who uses unfair means to reach his goals is a fool. He who ignores his own affairs and pries into those of others, and who deceives his friends is a fool. He who craves things he should not and pushes aside the things he can justly wish for and who maligns powerful men is a fool. He who thinks of his enemy as a friend and hates his friends and who commits evil is a fool.

Bharatarishabha, he who discloses his enterprises, who doubts everything and who dawdles over what can be done quickly is a fool. He who does not perform the sraddha for the Pitrs, who does not worship the Devas and who does not cultivate noble-minded friends is a fool.

He is a fool and the worst of men who enters a place uninvited, who talks a lot without being asked and who trusts the dishonourable. He is the most foolish of men who blames others for something he himself is guilty of and who, though powerless, gives vent to anger. He is a fool who does not know his own strengths, who ignores both dharma and artha and, without equipping himself adequately, yearns for something that is difficult to obtain.

O king, he who punishes the innocent, who pays homage to the undeserving and who keeps the company of misers is a man of little sense.

But he who, having acquired great wealth and prosperity, as well as vast learning, is not haughty is wise.

Who is more heartless than the man who, though wealthy and who eats and dresses well, does not share his riches among his dependants? The sins of one person result in advantages for many; but eventually it is the sinner alone who suffers the consequences of the sin, while the others escape. When an archer shoots an arrow he may or may not succeed in killing anyone, but when an intelligent man applies his mind, he can raze a kingdom and destroy its king.

Discriminate between the two by means of the one. Control the three by means of the four. Conquer the five by knowing the six, abstain from the seven and be joyful. Poison kills only one person, as does a weapon; but one evil man can annihilate an entire kingdom, its king and all his subjects. One should not, on one's own, gorge on tasty food, think about material gains, go on a journey or be the only one awake amongst a group of sleeping people. Listen now to what these are.

O king, that Being who is the Supreme One without a second, whom you have not been able to comprehend, is truth manifest and, like a boat on the ocean, the Way to salvation.

There is only one defect in those who are forgiving by nature—they are considered weak. That defect, however, should be ignored, for forgiveness is a powerful quality—a virtue for the gentle, an ornament for the strong. Forgiveness conquers all; there is nothing that the power of forgiveness cannot achieve. What can an evil person do to one who holds the sword of forgiveness in his hand? Cinder falling on grassless ground extinguishes itself. An unforgiving man defiles himself with many atrocities. Righteousness is the highest virtue; forgiveness is the supreme peace; knowledge is the supreme contentment and benevolence the supreme happiness.

Just as a serpent swallows small animals living in burrows, the earth devours two kinds of people: a Kshatriya who is an inept warrior and a Brahmana who does not undertake pilgrimages to holy tirthas. A man may attain fame in this world by doing two things: refraining from harsh speech and ignoring those that are evil.

Naravyaghra, there are two kinds of people who have no will of their own: women who desire men only because other women want them, and persons who worship another just because others do. Two things are like

sharp thorns tormenting the body: the desires of a poor man and the anger of the impotent. There are two people who never shine because of their contrary conduct: a householder who makes no effort and a beggar who plots intrigues.

There are two kinds of persons, Rajan, who live in a more blissful place than Swarga: a powerful man who is graced with the quality of forgiveness and a poor man who is charitable. There are two ways of misusing that which is honestly gained: by making gifts to the unworthy and by turning away the worthy.

Two kinds of men should be cast into deep water with weights tied to their necks: a wealthy man who does not give and a poor man who is proud. Two other kinds of men shine more splendidly than the Sun: a mendicant accomplished in yoga and a warrior who dies in battle.

Vedic scholars say that a man's means may be great, average or poor. A man's ability may be good, middling or bad. Every man should, therefore, be employed in work for which he is fit.

There are three kinds of persons who cannot have wealth of their own: the wife, the slave and the son; whatever they earn becomes the property of the man to whom they belong. There are three kinds of crimes which inspire great fear: the theft of another's property, the outrage of another's wife and the fight with a friend. There are three qualities which, besides being self-destructive, also lead to hell: lust, anger and greed; everyone should renounce them. There are three kinds of persons whom one should never abandon, even in the face of grave danger: a follower, the person who puts himself under one's protection and a guest in one's house. There are three actions that bring as much merit as rescuing an enemy from distress: conferring a boon, acquiring a kingdom and having a son.

Learned men have declared that a king, however powerful, should never consult with these four kinds of men: the dull-witted one, the procrastinator, the indolent one and the flatterer. Rajan, crowned with prosperity and leading the life of a grihasta, let these four kinds of persons live with you: elderly relatives, noblemen who have fallen on hard times, impoverished friends and childless sisters.

When Indra asked him, Brihaspati declared that there are four things that can come to fruition in a single day: the resolve of the gods, the understanding of intelligent people, the humility of learned men and the destruction of the sinful. These four, which are intended to remove fear,

fetch fear when they are improperly performed: the agnihotra, the vow of silence, study and sacrifice.

A man should worship these five fires: the father, the mother, the sacred fire, the soul and the guru. Men attain great fame in this world by serving these five: the Devas, the Pitrs, other men, beggars and guests. These five follow a man wherever he goes: his friends, his enemies, those that are indifferent to him, his dependents and those that are entitled to his maintenance. If one of man's five senses develops a flaw, then from that single egress all his intelligence leaks out, like water out of a perforated water bag.

These are the six evil habits that a man who wants to attain prosperity must avoid: sleep, heedlessness, fear, anger, sloth and procrastination. These six should be abandoned like a broken ship at sea: a teacher who cannot explain the Shastras, a priest who is illiterate, a king who gives no protection, a wife who speaks unpleasantly, a cowherd who does not want to go out to the pasture and a barber who wants to leave the village to live in the forest.

Man must never forsake these six virtues: truth, charity, diligence, benevolence, forgiveness and patience. These six things are instantly destroyed if neglected: cattle, service, agriculture, a wife, learning and a Sudra's wealth.

These six forget those who have done them favours: educated disciples forget their gurus; married men forget their mothers; men forget the woman once she has gratified their sexual desires; they who have achieved success forget those who helped them; they who have crossed a river forget the boat that carried them over; and patients who have been cured forget their physicians.

These six, O king, promote happiness: good health, freedom from debt, living at home, the companionship of good men, certainty of one's livelihood and living without fear. These six kinds of persons are always miserable: the envious, the malicious, the discontented, the bad-tempered, the suspicious and those depending upon the wealth of others. These six make up the happiness of men: acquisition of wealth, continuous good health, a loving and sweet spoken wife, an obedient son and knowledge that is lucrative.

There are six desires that are ever present in the human heart; and the man who gains mastery over them by controlling his senses never sins or

suffers any calamity. There are six kinds of persons who subsist on six other kinds: thieves upon those who are careless; physicians upon the ailing; women upon the lustful; priests on those that want to perform sacrifices; a king upon men who quarrel; and men of learning upon those that do not have it.

A king should renounce these seven faults that lead to disaster; they can bring even firmly established monarchs to ruin: women, dice, hunting, drinking, harsh speech, inhuman punishment and the misuse of wealth.

These eight conditions indicate a man's imminent downfall: hating Brahmanas, disputes with Brahmanas, appropriation of a Brahmana's possessions, taking the life of Brahmana, taking pleasure in abusing Brahmanas, an aversion to praising Brahmanas, forgetting Brahmanas on ceremonial occasions and giving vent to spite when Brahmanas ask for something. A wise man should understand and avoid them.

Bhaarata, only these eight conditions can produce sublime happiness: meeting with friends, accession of immense wealth, embracing a son, sexual union during intercourse, conversation with friends at proper times, the advancement of those one is allied to, the acquisition of what has been anticipated and being respected in society.

Eight qualities glorify a man: wisdom, noble birth, self-restraint, learning, prowess, moderation in speech, charity according to one's capacity to give and gratitude.

This house has nine doors, three pillars and five witnesses; and it is presided over by the soul. The learned man who realises this is truly wise.

Dhritarashtra, these ten do not know what virtue is: the intoxicated man, the inattentive one, the raving man, the exhausted one, the angry, the starving, the hasty, the covetous, the frightened and the lustful one. The wise man must avoid their company. In this connection there is an old story about what happened between the Asura lord and Duryodhana, for the sake of the Asura's son.

The king who renounces lust and anger; who gives wealth to deserving people; who is discerning, learned and active is a lord of men. The king who knows how to inspire confidence in others, who punishes the guilty with just punishment and knows when to show clemency enjoys great prosperity.

The wise man does not ignore even a weak enemy and is intelligently cautious about the foe who waits for an opportunity; he does not invite

hostilities with people who are stronger than himself; and he shows his strength only when he needs to. He is the most noble-minded of men, who does not grieve once a calamity has struck him, but deals with the crisis sensibly, and who patiently endures adversity; this man will defeat all his enemies.

Always happy is the man who does not live away from home without good reason, who does not make friends with sinners, who never molests another man's wife, who is never arrogant, who never steals, who is never ungrateful and who does not drink.

He is wise, who never boastfully pursues dharma, artha and kama; who always tells the truth when asked; who does not argue even for the sake of a friend; and who never gets angry even if insulted.

Everyone praises the man who has no malice towards others but is kind to all; who, being weak, avoids disputes; who does not speak arrogantly; and who forgives a wrong done to him.

Everyone loves the man who is never haughty, who never speaks ill of others while praising himself, and who never forgets himself and speaks harshly. Sages consider him a good man who does not rake up old quarrels, who is neither arrogant nor obsequious and who never violates dharma even when in distress.

The man who neither exults in his own happiness nor delights in another's misery, and who has no regrets after giving a gift is a good man. The man who is eager to learn about the customs of other countries and the languages and dharma of different varnas knows everything—important and insignificant; and wherever he goes, he gains authority over others, even the great. The intelligent man, who renounces pride, folly, insolence, sinful deeds, treasonous actions, dishonesty, enmity and arguments with men who are drunk, mad or evil is the best of men.

The gods bestow prosperity on the man who makes a daily habit of self-restraint, self-purification, performing sacred rites, worshipping the gods and conducting rituals of penance. The learned man, whose actions are well thought out and properly executed, arranges a marriage with someone of equal status to his own; he looks up to people who are better than him; he talks, mixes and forms friendships with persons of his own status.

The man who eats frugally after dividing the food amongst his dependents, who sleeps little after working hard, and who, when asked,

gives even to his enemies is a man with his soul under control. Disaster stays away from such a man.

The man who keeps his own counsel with plans and executes them without others knowing much about these, and whose actions, consequentially, never injure others, succeeds in achieving even the most trifling goal. The man who is intent upon abstaining from doing injury to all creatures, who is truthful, gentle, charitable and pure-minded shines among his kinsmen like a precious gem of the purest quality from the best mine.

The man who is ashamed of his faults, even though only he knows of them, is the most honourable of men. With his pure heart and boundless energy, with his mind turned inwards, he blazes in energy like the Sun.

King Pandu, suffering under a Brahmana's curse, had five sons born to him in the forest; they are like five Indras. You brought up those children and taught them everything; they are obedient to you. Give them back their fair share of the kingdom, and you and your sons will be happy; and then, Rajan, you will regain the trust and confidence of both gods and men.'"

CANTO 34

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me how a man copes with sleeplessness and burning anxiety. Only you know dharma and artha. Give me the benefit of your wisdom, generous Vidura; tell me what you think is good for both Yudhishtira and the Kurus. I think of my guilt, and I fear the dreadful things that may be in store for me. It is with terrible apprehension that I ask you this: what is Yudhishtira thinking?'

Vidura says, 'Even if one is not asked, one should be truthful in what one says—be it good or bad, pleasing or hateful—to the man whose downfall one does not wish. I will tell you what is for the good of the Kurus, which is both beneficial and dharma. Listen, Rajan.

Do not set your heart on unjust, sinful ways to achieve your ends. An intelligent man must not grieve if he does not succeed, despite using fair and righteous means. Before he embarks on a course of action, a man must take three things into consideration that all actions depend on: the competence of the person executing the plan, the nature of the deed itself and its purpose. He should think carefully about these and not act on impulse. The wise man must decide either to do something or not, after considering his ability, the act, and the consequences of failure and success.

The king who does not know the true extent of his kingdom, his profits and losses, his treasury, his population and the nature of the danda neeti—the law of punishment, cannot hope to keep his kingdom for long. On the

other hand, the king who is aware of all these, as prescribed in the ancient treatises, and who is learned in dharma and artha will retain his kingdom.

Just as the planets affect the stars, the senses affect this world, regardless of whether they are directed or uncontrolled in their journey to their respective goals. Like the Moon waxing during the bright fortnight, calamities pile up for the man who allows his senses to control him and direct his actions. The man who tries to control his counsellors before controlling himself, or to subdue his adversaries before controlling his counsellors, ultimately succumbs in weakness. Hence, the man who first achieves mastery over himself, thinking of the ego as an enemy, always succeeds in subduing his counsellors and adversaries.

Great prosperity is his who has subdued his senses, controlled his soul and is able to punish all offenders; who acts with discernment and is blessed with patience. A man's body is his ratha; the inner soul is the sarathy; the senses are the horses. When this chariot is drawn by well-trained steeds, the wise man journeys pleasantly through life and finds ultimate peace. Horses that are unbroken and wild always lead an unskilful charioteer to doom during the course of his journey; so, too, do one's senses, if they are not subdued.

The inexperienced man, who is driven by his rampaging senses, thinks he can extract evil from good and good from evil, and he confuses sorrow with happiness. He who forsakes dharma and artha, and follows his senses, soon loses prosperity, wealth, his wife and his life. He who is the master of riches but not of his senses loses his riches. One should strive to know one's self by using the Self, by controlling one's mind, intellect and senses; for the self is as much an ally as an enemy. The man who has conquered his self through the Self, has his self for a friend—the self can be either friend or foe.

Desire and anger tear at wisdom, just as large fish rip apart a flimsy net. The man who strives for success, paying heed to dharma and artha, wins happiness and all that he aspires for. He who wants to vanquish his outward adversaries without first conquering his inner enemies—his five senses—is overpowered by them. Many evil kings, because of their lack of mastery over their senses, are ruined by their own actions, which are directed by their unending lust for more territory and possessions.

Just as wet fuel burns along with the dry, so, too, is an innocent man punished by association with evil men. Friendship with sinful men must be

avoided. The ignorant man who fails to control his five greedy enemies, each of which has its own selfish goals, is overwhelmed by disaster.

Evil men never have these attributes: guilelessness, simplicity, innocence, contentment, sweetness of speech, self-restraint, truth and steadiness. Inferior men do not have Atmagyana; they are never stable, patient or devoted to dharma, and neither trustworthy nor charitable.

Fools try to injure the wise with false accusations and harsh words. In consequence, they acquire the sins of the wise who, freed from guilt, gain forgiveness. Malice is the strength of evil-minded men; protection of the weak and of women is the strength of kings; forgiveness is the strength of the virtuous.

To control speech is said to be most difficult. It is not easy to hold a long conversation full of meaningful words that also delight the ear. Well-spoken words produce many benefits, but harsh ones are the cause of all evils. A forest destroyed by arrows or cut down by hatchets may grow again, but a heart wounded by cruel words never recovers. Weapons such as arrows, spears and bearded darts can be removed from the body, but a dagger of words plunged into the heart cannot. The mouth shoots word-arrows that strike deep and cause anguish through day and night. A learned man should never discharge such arrows; they pierce the very soul.

The man whom the gods have destined for defeat loses his good sense and debases himself by dishonourable conduct. When one's intellect becomes clouded and one's destruction is imminent, one is convinced that wrong is right. Bharatarishabha, you do not see that your sons are in the grip of their deluded minds because of their hostility toward the Pandavas. Neither do you see that Yudhishtira, blessed with every auspicious mark and worthy of ruling the three worlds, is obedient to you.

Dhritarashtra, exclude all your sons and make Yudhishtira Dharmaraja your heir. Intelligent and wise, steeped in dharma and artha, he has suffered untold misery out of kindness and sympathy for you and in order to preserve your good name.'"

CANTO 35

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Effulgent one, tell me more about dharma and artha. My thirst for them remains unquenched, and your words delight my ears and my heart.'

Vidura says, 'Ritual bathing in all the tirthas and compassion towards all creatures have equal merit, with kindness having the edge. Rajan, be kind to all your sons; by that you will win great fame in this world, and heaven thereafter. A man is glorified in Swarga for as long as his good deeds are spoken of in this world. Listen to an ancient story about the conversation between Virochana and Sudhanwan, both suitors for Kesini's hand.

Once, long ago, there was a maiden named Kesini, whose beauty was unrivalled. Wanting a good husband, she decided to choose one through a swayamvara. Wanting her for himself, one of Diti's sons, Virochana, went to her swayamvara.

Kesini noticed this Daitya lord and said to him, "O Virochana, tell me, who are superior—Brahmanas or the sons of Diti? Why is Sudhanwan not sitting on the grander seat?"

Virochana said, "O Kesini, because we are the firstborn of Prajapati, we are superior to all creatures. The world is ours. Who are the Devas, and what are the Brahmanas before us?"

Kesini said, “We will remain in this pavilion, Virochana. Sudhanwan will come here tomorrow, and I want to see both of you sitting together.”

Virochana said, “Sweet and timid one, I will do as you say. Tomorrow morning, you will see Sudhanwan and me together.”

When the night passed and the Sun rose Sudhanwan came there and saw Virochana waiting with Kesini. Kesini got up; she offered him her seat, padya to wash his feet and arghya.

When Virochana invited him to share his seat, Sudhanwan said, “O Son of Prahlada, I will touch your beautiful golden seat, but since you are not my equal, I cannot sit on it with you.”

Virochana said, “You have the right to sit only on a wooden plank, an animal skin or a mat of grass or straw. You do not deserve to sit on the same seat as me.”

Sudhanwan said, “Only father and son, Brahmanas of the same age and equal learning, two Kshatriyas, two Vaisyas or two Sudras can sit together on the same seat; no others may sit together. Your father used to pay his respects to me and take a seat lower than mine. You are young, brought up in every luxury at home, and you understand nothing.”

Virochana said, “I will wager all the gold, cattle, horses and every other kind of wealth that we have among the Asuras to the one who is able to answer this question that has arisen.”

Sudhanwan said, “Leave aside your gold, your cattle and your horses, Virochana. Let us stake our lives and ask this question of those who can answer.”

Virochana said, “Who shall we go to when we wager our lives? I will not go before any of the Devas and never before any man.”

Sudhanwan said, “With our lives as wager, we will approach your father. Prahlada will never tell a lie, not even for his son’s sake.”

So, they made a wager, and Virochana and Sudhanwan, both roused, went to Prahlada.

Seeing them together, Prahlada said, “These two, who have never been companions, have come here like two angry snakes that have travelled by the same road.

He said, “Have you two become friends now, who never were before?”

Virochana said, “There is no friendship between Sudhanwan and me. Rather, we have both wagered our lives. O Lord of Asuras, I will ask you a question, which you must answer truthfully.”

Prahlada said, “Bring water, honey and curds for Sudhanwan. You deserve our worship, Brahmana. A plump white cow is ready for you.”

Sudhanwan said, “Water, honey and curds have already been given me on my way here. I will ask you a question, Prahlada; answer it truly. Are Brahmanas superior, or is Virochana?”

Prahlada said, “O Brahmana, here you both are in person—my only son and you, a Brahmana. How can I answer this question over which you two have fallen out?”

Sudhanwan said, “Keep your cattle and your other precious wealth, but you must declare the truth to settle our dispute.”

Prahlada said, “What will a person who misuses his tongue, to answer falsely rather than truly, suffer?”

Sudhanwan said, “The person who uses his tongue to lie suffers like a deserted wife who pines at night, with visions of her husband in the arms of another woman. He suffers like a man who loses at dice, or like one who is weighed down with an unbearable load of anxieties. He suffers like a man who is denied entry into a city and sits outside its gates, starving, and he is always faced with his enemies.

He who tells a lie for the sake of an animal will have five of his forefathers cast down from heaven. He who tells a lie for the sake of a cow will have ten of his Pitrs cast down from Swarga; a lie for the sake of a horse causes the downfall of a hundred; and a lie for the sake of a human being results in the fall of a thousand of one’s manes. An untruth for the sake of gold ruins the members of one’s race both born and unborn, while an untruth for the sake of land ruins everything. So never lie about land.”

Prahlada said, “Angiras is superior to me, and Sudhanwan is superior to you, Virochana; and Sudhanwan’s mother is superior to yours. You have been defeated by Sudhanwan; and he is now in command of your life.

Sudhanwan, I ask that you grant Virochana his life.”

Sudhanwan said, “O Prahlada, you have chosen dharma and not been tempted to lie. So, I grant the life of your son, who is so dear to you, and restore Virochana to you. He shall, however, have to wash my feet in Kesini’s presence.”

This is why, Rajan, you must never utter the slightest falsehood about the kingdom. Do not hasten your death and the deaths of your children and close associates by lying for your son. The gods do not protect men by

taking up wooden clubs as herdsmen would; however, they grant intelligence to those they wish to protect.

There is no doubt that the degree of a man's success is in direct proportion to the attention he pays to dharma. The Vedas never save a man who lives by falsehood from the guilt of sin. They forsake him while he is on his deathbed, like fledglings flying from their nests.

Drinking, quarrels, enmity with many, marital disputes, severance of marital relationships between husband and wife, internal dissent and treason are all sins that must be shunned. A palmist, a thief turned merchant, a fowler, a physician, an enemy, a friend and a minstrel are not acceptable witnesses. Performed from motives of pride, an Agnihotra, abstention from speech, study and sacrifice become harmful, although they are intrinsically innocent.

A man who sets fire to a house, one who gives poison, a pander, a vendor of alcohol, a fletcher, an astrologer, one who injures his friends, an adulterer, one who performs abortions, one who violates the wife of an elder, a Brahmana addicted to alcohol, one who is harsh-tongued, one who opens old wounds, an atheist, one who insults the Vedas, a taker of bribes, one whose upanayanam has been delayed beyond the appropriate time, one who secretly kills cattle, one who kills the man that comes to him for protection: all these are as lacking in dharma as a man who kills a Brahmana.

Gold is tested for purity by fire, a high-born man by the way he carries himself and an honest man by what he does. A man's courage is tested in a crisis, a man's self-control in times of poverty and the strength of a man's friendship or enmity in times of danger. Old age destroys beauty; ambition destroys patience; death ends life; envy removes righteousness; anger ruins prosperity; companionship with base persons destroys good conduct; lust sheds modesty; and pride takes away everything. Prosperity is born of good deeds; it grows by dint of work; its roots penetrate deep from well honed skill; it becomes stable from self-control.

Wisdom, good lineage, restraint, knowing the scriptures, prowess, not being garrulous, giving gifts as one is able, and gratitude are the eight qualities that glorify a man. But there is one factor which, on its own, can make all these attributes coalesce: royal favour can make all these qualities cover the favoured person with their lustre. These eight are celestial qualities in this world of men.

Of the eight, four are inherent in good people, and the other four they always practise. The four that are integral to good men are sacrifice, charity, study and asceticism; and the other four that good men always practise are self-restraint, truth, simplicity and abstention from causing injury.

Sacrifice, study, charity, asceticism, truth, forgiveness, mercy and contentment constitute the eight paths of dharma. The first four of these may be practised from motives of pride, but the last four can exist only in those that are truly noble.

No gathering of people can truly be a satsanga unless there are venerable men in it; and no one can be considered worthy of veneration unless he can say what dharma is. It is not dharma if it can be separated from truth; and it is not truth if it is tinged with deceit.

Truth, beauty, knowledge of the scriptures, learning, noble birth, good conduct, strength, wealth, courage and the ability to speak on a variety of subjects are ten qualities of divine origin.

A man who sins is overwhelmed by evil consequences; a man who is virtuous reaps great happiness. So, a man must be firm in his resolve to abstain from sin. Repeated sinning destroys intelligence, and the man who loses intelligence repeatedly sins. Being constantly virtuous enhances intelligence, and the man whose intelligence increases is constantly virtuous. The virtuous man attains bliss. Thus, a man should be firm in his resolve to be virtuous.

The man who is envious, he who is hurtful, the man who is cruel, the man who is quarrelsome and one who is deceitful come to grief. The wise man who is not envious always does what is dharma and never suffers sorrow; instead, he shines. The man who acquires wisdom from wise men is himself learned and wise. He who is wise pays attention to dharma and artha, and achieves joy.

Behave during the day in a way that will ensure an untroubled night; conduct yourself during eight months of the year in a way that will ensures happiness during the monsoon; spend your youth in a way that ensures a comfortable old age; and conduct your whole life on Earth in a manner that ensures bliss in the hereafter.

The wise man thinks highly of food that is easily digested, of the wife who is young no more, of the hero who is victorious and of the sannyasin whose efforts have been rewarded with success. The empty space that a

man tries to fill with wrongfully acquired wealth will never be filled; rather, new voids appear in other places.

The Guru controls those who have restrained their souls; the king controls the black-souled one; Yama controls those who sin in secret. The greatness of Rishis, of rivers, of river-banks, of mahatmans cannot be determined, like a woman's immorality.

O king, the man who is devoted to the worship of Brahmanas, he who is generous, he who is charitable to his relatives, and the Kshatriya who conducts himself honourably rule the Earth for ever. The man who is brave, learned and who knows how to protect others can always gather flowers of gold from the Earth.

Of all works, those performed by using the intellect are the best; next come those performed with the use of one's arms; those for which the legs are used are worse; and those performed by carrying loads are the lowest.

How can you expect to prosper when you have entrusted your kingdom to Duryodhana, Sakuni, the witless Dusasana and Karna? The Pandavas, who are blessed with every virtue, look up to you as a father. You must rely on them as your true sons.'"

CANTO 36

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'I know an ancient tale that is told in this connection: of the discussion between Atri's son and the Sadhyas.

Long ago, the deities known as Sadhyas approached the son of Atri, the wise Maharishi of the stern tapasya, while he wandered the world in the guise of a mendicant, and said to him, "O Maharishi, we are deities known as Sadhyas. We cannot tell who you are. You seem highly intelligent and a man of rigid self-control, which comes from a deep knowledge of the Shastras. Share your knowledge with us."

The mendicant Rishi answered, "Immortal ones, I have heard that by untying the knots in one's heart by means of tranquillity, by mastering one's passions and by following true dharma, one must learn to look on all beings—likeable or hateful—as if on oneself. One should not retaliate to slander or accusations, because when one bears pain silently it consumes the slanderer, and one also acquires the merit of his good deeds.

Do not indulge in slander or accusations; do not humiliate or insult others; do not quarrel with friends; do not seek the companionship of the vile and the base; do not be arrogant or dishonourable. Avoid speaking sharp or angry words, because they burn deep—into the heart and bones, and into prana itself. That is why the virtuous man never speaks harshly or in anger. He that does is the very worst of men. With hell on his tongue, he

sears the inmost parts of a man with his piercing words, and always causes misery.

The wise man, when wounded by another's wordy arrows that scorch like fire or the Sun, endures them silently, remembering that the slanderer's blessings become his. The man who serves a good man or an evil one, a saintly man or a thief, absorbs the characteristics of his companion, like a cloth soaked in dye.

The gods like to be with the man who, when stung with criticism, neither criticises nor makes others do so in retaliation; who, when struck, neither strikes back nor makes someone else do so for him; and who does not wish even the slightest injury on the one who hurt him.

Silence is better than speech; if you must speak, then it is better to speak the truth; if the truth is to be spoken, it is better to say what is pleasing; and if what is pleasing is to be said, then it is best to say what is dharma.

A man becomes like the person he lives with, or like the one he sees regularly, or like the one he wants emulate. A man is liberated from those things from which he abstains; and if he abstains from everything, he will not suffer even the least sorrow. Such a man neither vanquishes others, nor is vanquished by any. He is never hurtful or antagonistic to anyone. He is unmoved by praise or reproach. He neither grieves nor exalts.

The best human being is one who wants the prosperity of all and never gloats over the sorrows of others; he is truthful and humble; and he has his senses under control. The mediocre man is one who never consoles another with false platitudes; he gives what he has promised; and he is mindful of others' weaknesses. The despicable man is one who is difficult to control; he is easily affected by the prospect of danger; he is short-tempered; he is ungrateful; he cannot make friends; and he has an evil heart. The worst among men is one who is unappreciative of any good that comes to him from others; he is suspicious by nature; and he drives away all his true friends.

He who wants to prosper should keep the company of good men, perhaps occasionally those that are mediocre, but never those that are bad. The sinful man does, indeed, earn wealth by working hard, by his intelligence and by his strength; but he can never win fame, nor can he acquire the virtues and ways of noble families, even if he is born into one.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'The gods, those who respect dharma and artha and do not swerve from either, and those who have great learning have an

affinity to noble families. Tell me, Vidura, what families are truly noble?'

Vidura says, 'The family whose life is characterised by simplicity, self-restraint, Vedic knowledge, sacrifice, proper marriages and gifts of food is considered noble. Such vamsas never deviate from dharma; their ancestors are never pained by having to see their progeny's wrong-doings; they cheerfully practise all the virtues; they aspire to enhance the fame of their line; and they avoid every kind of falsehood.

Noble families fall and debase themselves because they neglect to perform sacrifices, make impure marriages, abandon the Vedas and insult Brahmanas. They are degraded because their members ignore or speak ill of Brahmanas, or because they misappropriate what others have entrusted to them.

Even if a family is extensive and owns much wealth and cattle, you cannot think of it as a cohesive family if its members lack good manners and deportment; whereas a family that lacks wealth, but is distinguished by good conduct, is noble indeed, and earns a great reputation. So, families must pay attention to good demeanour, for material wealth comes and goes. The man who is wanting in wealth is not really wanting, but the man who is wanting in decorum is really in want. Families that are rich in cattle and agricultural produce do not deserve fame if they lack good conduct.

Let none in our dynasty provoke quarrels, serve another king as minister, take what is not his, stir dissent, be deceitful or false, or eat before serving the Rishis, Devas and Sadasyas. Any of our vamsa who kills a Brahmana or feels antipathy towards them, or who obstructs farming, does not deserve to mix with us.

A seat of straw, a piece of ground to sit on, water to wash one's face and feet, and sweet words are never wanting in the house of a good man. Virtuous men devoted to dharma have these things ready to reverently offer to any guest who might come to his home. Just as the sandalwood tree is able to support weights that larger trees cannot, so too are those from noble families able to shoulder great cares which ordinary men cannot.

A man whose anger inspires fear, or whom people serve in fear is not a friend; but the man who is trusted like a father is. All other friendships are in name only. The man who acts as a friend, though not related by blood, is one's true friend, refuge and protector. The man of wavering affections who does not care for the elderly or one who is restless can never make friends. Like swans abandoning a tank whose waters have dried up, success

forsakes a man whose heart is unsteady, a man who cannot control his mind and a man who is a slave to his senses.

Weak-minded men give in to anger and are gratified too easily; they are as changeable as clouds. Even birds of carrion will not touch the dead bodies of men who are ungrateful to friends who have helped them. Whether you are poor or rich, you must honour your friends. The sincerity of a friend is tested only when you ask for his help.

Sorrow kills beauty; it debilitates; it destroys knowledge; and it makes the body vulnerable to disease. Rather than helping a man achieve his goals, grief dries up his body, to the delight of his enemies. Do not yield to grief. Men repeatedly die and are reborn; repeatedly they wither away and grow; repeatedly they ask others for help, and they themselves are asked for help; repeatedly they lament and are lamented.

Everyone experiences happiness and misery, plenty and want, gain and loss, life and death, at one time or other. The man who is self-controlled should neither exult in joy nor wilt in sorrow at these twinned opposites.

The six senses are always restless. One's understanding leaks out through the sense that is heightened, in direct proportion to the level of its dominance, like water from a pot with holes, big and small.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I have deceived Yudhishtira, who is like a flame. He will surely kill all my sons in battle. I see danger everywhere and my heart churns within me. Wise one, soothe my anxiety.'

Vidura says, 'Anagha, I see good only in knowledge and tapasya, in restraining the senses and in giving up greed. Atmagyana dispels fear; tapasya brings rich rewards; serving one's superiors gives learning; and self-restraint results in peace. Those who want moksha without first earning blessings by giving charity and practicing Vedic rituals go through life bound by anger and hatred. The happiness gained by a judicious course of study, by a battle fought virtuously or by stern tapasya always increases at the end.

Those who quarrel with their relatives get no sleep, even if they lie on the most comfortable beds; nor do they derive any pleasure from women or from hearing bards sing hymns and eulogies in their praise. Such men can never practise dharma; they can never be happy; they can never have honour. Peace holds no charm for them. They never appreciate good advice; they never get what they want or keep what they have. O king, such men can expect to meet with ruin.

As natural as milk is to cows, so is asceticism to Brahmanas, inconstancy to women and distrust to one's own kin. Many thin threads of equal length can, when stranded together, stand the strain of the shuttle passing constantly over them, because of their numbers. It is the same with family members who are bound by ties of dharma. Burning twigs produce only smoke, singly; but together they burst into flame. It is the same with kinsmen, Dhritarashtra.

Men who want to assert their authority over Brahmanas, women, relatives and cattle soon fall off their pedestals, like ripe fruits from their stems. The trunk of the tree that grows alone, though massive, strong and deep-rooted, is smashed and twisted by a strong wind. However, trees that grow close together in stands can resist violent gales by leaning on each other. In the same way, his enemies see the man who is alone, though blessed with all the good qualities, as being easy to bring down, like a lone tree by the wind. In contrast, relatives who are united grow in strength, like lotus-stalks in a lake.

These must never be killed: Brahmanas, cows, relatives, children, women, hosts whose food one has eaten and persons who surrender and ask for one's protection.

Rajan, without health a man's good qualities do not manifest themselves. If you are healthy, you can do much good; but if you have bad health, you might as well be dead.

Rajan, anger is a bitter, pungent, acrid and scalding drink, painful in its consequences; it is a dark draught not born of any physical illness; and those that lack wisdom can never digest it. Swallow your anger, Rajan, and be at peace. Men who are wracked by disease derive no joy from pleasures or from wealth; they are so full of sorrow that they do not know what happiness is nor enjoy wealth.

When I saw Draupadi won as a wager at dice, I told you that men of dharma never use deceit at gambling and urged you to stop Duryodhana. You paid no heed to me then. True strength is not opposed to softness; rather, the combination of both is the best and most effective course. Prosperity which is dependent on deceit is destined to be short lived; but that which depends on strength and softness is passed down to sons and grandsons intact.

Your sons and the Pandavas must love each other. Let them have the same friends and enemies and live together in happiness and prosperity.

Rajan, you are the refuge of the sons of Kuru. Indeed, the entire Ajamida vamsa depends on you. Preserve your good name by cherishing the sons of Pandu, especially for the great suffering they have endured in exile. O Kaurava, make peace with the Pandavas; do not let your enemies find a chink in your armour. The Pandavas are devoted to dharma. Draw Duryodhana away from his evil ways.'"

CANTO 37

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'Manu, the son of the Svayambhuva, the Self-Created One, spoke of the seventeen kinds of men who vainly strike air with their fists, who seek to bend Indra's heavenly bow of vapour—the Indradhanush, or want to catch the intangible rays of the Sun.

These foolish ones are the man who wants to control another who cannot be controlled; the man who is content with small gains; the man who humbly pays court to enemies; the man who seeks to control women; the man who solicits gifts from one who should not be asked for gifts; the man who boasts without having done anything; the high-born man who acts basely; the weak man who enters into hostilities with one that is powerful; the man who talks to one who listens with disdain; the man who desires the unattainable; the father-in-law who flirts with his daughter-in-law; the man who boasts about his fears being allayed by his daughter-in-law; the man who sows his seeds in another man's field; the man who speaks ill of his wife; the man who does not acknowledge having received something from another; the man who, in a holy tirtha, commits to give something away and then makes excuses when asked to make good his words; and the man who tries to prove the truth of what is false. Yama's dutas, with nooses in hand, drag these people away to hell.

A man should behave towards others in the same manner as others behave towards him, for this is good policy. One may behave deceitfully

with the deceitful, but must be honest with those who are honest. Old age withers beauty; patience takes away hope; death ends life; the practice of virtue denudes worldly enjoyments; lust abandons modesty; companionship with evil men destroys good character and deportment; anger ruins prosperity; and pride destroys everything.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'According to the Vedas, man's life-span on Earth is one hundred years. Why is it, then, that not all men attain the allotted span?'

Vidura says, 'Too much pride, excessive speech, overindulgence in food, giving in to anger, yearning for pleasure and inner discord are the six swords that cut short man's life on Earth. It is these six, not death, which kill men. Know this and be blessed.

Bhaarata, these acquire the guilt of killing a Brahmana: one who steals the wife of a friend who trusts him; one who violates the bed of his Guru; a Brahmana who marries a Sudra woman or drinks alcohol; a man who wields authority over Brahmanas, becomes their master or confiscates lands that support them; and one who kills those who give themselves up into his protection. The Vedas declare that contact with these kinds of people requires penance to purify oneself.

These persons attain Swarga: one who accepts the teachings of the wise; one who knows dharma; one who is generous; one who eats only after offering his food to the Devas and Pitrs; one who has no envy; one who is incapable of doing anything injurious; and one who is grateful, truthful, humble and learned.

O king, many are those who always say pleasing things; but rare is the man whose words are not always pleasant but yet medicinal, and the man who listens to him. The man who, without worrying about whether his words will please his master or not, tells him things that may seem unpalatable but are wise and in keeping with dharma, is an asset to the king.

For the sake of the family one of its members may be sacrificed; for the sake of the village, a family may be sacrificed; for the sake of a kingdom a village may be sacrificed; and for the sake of one's soul, the whole world may be sacrificed. A man should conserve his wealth, in case calamity strikes; he should use his wealth to protect his wives; and with his wealth and his wives he should safeguard himself.

From time immemorial it has been obvious that gambling causes disputes. The wise man should never gamble, even light-heartedly. At the time of that game of dice I told you it was sinful and dangerous. To you,

however, my words were as unpleasant as bitter medicine to a sick man. O king, you want to vanquish the sons of Pandu, who compare with your sons as peacocks to crows. You forsake lions in favour of jackals. The time will come when you will regret this.

The master who does not vent his displeasure against devoted servants that want only his welfare, gains their confidence. They stand by him even in times of distress. A man must never seek to save wealth by confiscating grants or not paying his employees; for, deprived of their means of livelihood and prosperity, even those who are fond of him will turn against him and abandon him in his time of need.

A king should first consider all his future plans, then fixing his servants' wages with his own income and expenditure in mind, he should make suitable contracts, for there is nothing that cannot be accomplished by just and strategic alliances. The officer who, with a complete understanding of his king's intentions, discharges his duties promptly and enthusiastically, who is respectable and devoted to his master, always tells him what is best for him. The king should regard the officer who is well aware of the strength of his own and the enemy's forces as a second self. However, the king should immediately rid himself of the servant who is so proud of his own intelligence that he disregards his master's instructions, refuses to obey him and argues with him.

Learned men say that a good servant possesses these eight qualities: he is not arrogant; he does not procrastinate; he is able, kind, clean and incorruptible; he is from a family free of disease; and he weighs his words before he speaks.

A man must never enter an enemy's house confidently after dusk, even with notice; he must never lurk in the yard of another's house at night; and he must never seek to be with a woman whom the king might enjoy.

One must never disagree with the decision arrived at by a man who keeps company with sinners and who is in the habit of consulting all and sundry. Never tell him you disagree with him; instead dismiss him on some pretext.

One must never borrow from, or lend to, these: a king who is inordinately soft-hearted, a woman of bad character, the servant of a king, one's son, one's brother, a widow with a child, one serving in the military and one who has suffered a great loss of wealth.

Eight qualities bestow lustre on a man. They are wisdom, noble lineage, knowledge of the scriptures, self-restraint, prowess, moderation in speech, the giving of gifts such as one can afford and gratitude. These qualities, sire, are mustered and held close by the wise.

The man who performs ritual ablutions acquires strength, beauty, a clear voice, the ability to clearly enunciate all the alphabet, delicacy of touch, a fine sense of smell, cleanliness, grace, delicacy of limbs and beautiful women. The man who eats sparingly wins good health, long life, ease, healthy children and freedom from sloth and accusations of gluttony.

A man should not shelter the following in his house: one who is ill-behaved, one who eats too much, one whom everyone dislikes, one who is deceitful, one who is cruel, one who does not know the correctness of time and place and one who dresses immodestly. A person, even in dire distress, should never ask a favour of a miser, of one who speaks badly of others, of one who has no knowledge of the Shastras, of a forest dweller, of one who is cunning, of one who does not respect those who are worthy of reverence, of one who is cruel, of one who is quarrelsome or ungrateful.

One should never serve these six worst types of men: an enemy, one who always errs, a habitual liar, one who wavers in his devotion to God, a cold-hearted man and one who is overconfident of his own abilities.

One's objectives depend on the means for their success; and means depend on the nature of the objective to be achieved through them. They are intimately intertwined, and success depends on both. A man must have sons, make them independent by providing for them, give daughters in marriage to suitable men and then retire to the life of a Vanaprastha. To receive the grace of the Supreme Being a man must always work for universal good as well as for his own happiness; and this is the root of success of all man's endeavours. A man who has intelligence, energy, prowess, strength, promptness and perseverance need have no anxieties about his livelihood.

Look at the evils that a quarrel with the Pandavas will bring, which would sadden Indra and all the Devas. Firstly, enmity with those who are like sons to you; secondly, a life of constant anxiety; thirdly, the ruin of the fame of the Kurus; and lastly, the joy of your enemies. O you who are as splendid as Indra, the wrath of Bhishma, Drona and Yudhishtira will consume the whole world, like a massive comet blasting through the Earth.

Your hundred sons, Karna and the sons of Pandu can together rule this vast Earth with its girdle of oceans. Rajan, your sons are the forest, and the Pandavas are its tigers. O, do not destroy the forest and its tigers. O, do not let the tigers be driven away from the forest. Without tigers there can be no forest and without a forest there can be no tigers. The forest shelters the tigers and tigers guard the forest.

Those who are sinful look more for the faults than for the good qualities of others. He who desires total success in his material ventures should be virtuous from the very beginning, for true artha is impossible to obtain without dharma, like amrita without swarga. He whose soul has been cleansed of sin and firmly fixed on dharma has understood all things, whether natural or artificial. He who pursues dharma, artha and kama at the appropriate times gains all three, in this world and the next. He who restrains the force of both anger and joy, and never loses his composure in a crisis, wins prosperity.

Listen to me, O great king. Men are said to have five different kinds of strength. Of these, the strength of arms is regarded as the least. The acquisition of good advisors is seen as the second most important. The wise have said that the acquisition of wealth is the third; the strength of one's lineage is considered the fourth. However, Bhaarata, the one by which all these are won, and which is the best and most important of all kinds of strength is the strength of the intellect.

After provoking the hostility of a man who is capable of doing great injury to others, one should not reassure oneself with the thought that one lives far away from him. A wise man does not repose his trust in women, kings, serpents, his own master, enemies, enjoyments or his longevity.

There are no physicians or physics for a man who has been struck by the arrow of wisdom; neither the mantras of homa nor auspicious ceremonies, neither the mantras of the Atharva Veda nor any of the antidotes for poison are of any use.

A man should not ignore snakes, fire, lions and blood relatives; all these are powerful. Fire is a thing of great energy in this world. It hides itself in wood but does not consume it until it is ignited by an outside agent. That same latent fire, when sparked by friction, consumes not only the wood in which it hides, but also an entire forest. Men of noble lineage are just like fire in their energy. Of a forgiving nature, they do not betray outward symptoms of wrath, and lie quiet like fire in wood.

O king, you and your sons are like creepers and the Pandavas are like Sala trees. A creeper cannot grow unless there is a large tree for it to twine round. Your sons are like a forest and the sons of Pandu are its lions. Without its lions the forest is doomed to destruction, and lions, too, are doomed without the forest to shelter them.'"

CANTO 38

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'The heart of a young man soars in joy when an older and venerable person comes to his house as a guest. His heart comes down to earth again when he goes forward and greets him. One who has self-control must first offer his guest a seat, then have his feet washed in clean water, after which he must make the usual enquiries of welcome, then give his own news and offer him food.

Wise men say that the man cannot be considered to be truly alive, in whose home a Brahmana conversant with mantras does not accept water, honey, curds or cattle from fear of either being unsure of whether he can take the gifts away, or from the miserliness and unwillingness with which the gifts are made. A householder must look on a newly arrived guest as being very dear, regardless of the fact that he may not be worthy of being offered water to wash his feet, be the guest a physician, a fletcher, a lapsed Brahmachari, a thief, a Brahmana who drinks, an abortionist, a soldier or a seller of the Vedas.

A Brahmana should never sell salt, cooked food, curds, milk, honey, oil, ghee, sesame, meat, fruits, roots, potherbs, dyed clothes, perfumes and sweets. The man who never gives way to anger, the one who is beyond grief, the one to whom friendship and quarrels are meaningless, he who disregards praise and blame and he who is detached from both the pleasant

and unpleasant is completely withdrawn from the world, and is a real Yogin of the Bhikshu order.

The virtuous sannyasin who lives on wild rice, roots or herbs, who has his soul under control, who carefully maintains his sacred fire for worship, who lives in the forest and is always mindful of guests is indeed the best of ascetics.

If a man wrongs an intelligent person, he should never become complacent in that he lives a great distance away from the one he has wronged. Far is the reach of an intelligent man, by which he can avenge the wrongs done to him. One should never trust an untrustworthy man, nor indeed repose too much trust on a reliable man, for both these make one most vulnerable.

Men should renounce envy, protect their wives, give everyone their due and speak pleasantly. A man should always speak sweetly to his wife but must never be enslaved by her. It has been said that wives who are blessed and virtuous, who are worthy of worship and who are the ornaments of their homes are embodiments of domestic prosperity, of the Grihalakshmi. They should be protected.

A man should delegate the supervision of his inner apartments to his father; of the kitchen to his mother; of his cattle to somebody he looks upon as his own self; but he must himself tend to his farming. A man should assign his servants to care for guests who are Vaisyas and give his sons the responsibility of looking after Brahmanas.

Fire has its origin in water, Kshatriyas in Brahmanas and iron in stone. Their energy can affect all things but is neutralised as soon as these things come in contact with their progenitors. Fire lies hidden in wood without showing itself. Good men of a forgiving nature and fiery tejas do not betray outwardly what is within them. The king whose plans are unknown to outsiders as well as to those around him, but who knows what others are planning, through his spies, enjoys long prosperity.

One should never talk about what one intends to do. Let anything you do, with regard to dharma, artha or kama, remain unknown until it is done. Reflect over and settle on your plans secretly, climbing to the top of a mountain or the terrace of a palace or going to a deserted wilderness devoid of trees and plants to do so. O Bhaarata, neither an ignorant friend nor a learned one who has no self-restraint should be trusted with secrets.

Rajan, never make a man your minister without examining him well, for your finances and inmost thoughts are in his hands. Fortunate is the king whose ministers know what he does, with respect to dharma, artha and kama, only after he has acted. The king whose counsels are kept close, and with complete faith, has success.

He who commits reprehensible deeds from ignorance loses his life because of unexpected consequences of those actions. Commendable deeds are always followed by peace of mind, and their omission leads to repentance.

Just as a Brahmana who has no Vedic learning is not fit to officiate at a Sraddha, so too, the king who is ignorant of the six ways of protecting his kingdom is not fit to engage in politics. The king who monitors the increase, decrease and surplus to his revenue, who is familiar with the six ways of protecting his kingdom, who has self-knowledge and whose conduct is always praised brings the whole world under his rule. The king whose anger and joy always produce results, who personally oversees all activity in his kingdom and who keeps his treasury under his own control brings the very earth under subjection.

A king should be content with the name he wins and the royal parasol that is held over his head. He should divide the wealth of the kingdom among those that serve him and not keep everything for himself.

A Brahmana knows a Brahmana, a husband understands the wife, a king knows his minister, and monarchs know monarchs. An enemy who deserves death should never be set free once he is subdued. If a man is weak and he deserves death, he should pay court to his enemies who are stronger than him. However, one must kill such an enemy as soon as one is powerful enough, for otherwise the enemy will become dangerous.

A man should make an effort to control his anger against gods, kings, Brahmanas, old men, children and the helpless. The wise man should avoid unprofitable quarrels, in which only fools get involved. Thus one wins great fame in this world and avoids suffering and sorrow.

The people never want for their master a man whose grace is without favour and whose anger is ineffective, just as a woman never wants a eunuch for a husband. Intelligence does not result in the acquisition of wealth nor idleness in adversity.

Only the wise man knows what causes conditions on Earth to be so diverse. The fool, Bhaarata, always ignores his elders, those eminent in

their conduct, the learned, the intelligent, the wealthy and the noble. Calamities befall those that are wicked, ignorant, filled with envy, sinful, foul-tongued and prone to anger. On the contrary, absence of deceitfulness, generosity, the observance of decorum, and controlled speech give a man domination over all creatures.

The man who is straightforward, active, grateful, intelligent and guileless wins friends, advisors and servants, even if his coffers are empty. Intelligence, tranquillity of mind, self-control, purity, refraining from harsh speech and the unwillingness to do anything unpleasant to friends are qualities that fan the flame of prosperity.

A man must avoid the wretched fellow who does not give others their due, who has an evil soul and is ungrateful and shameless. The guilty man who provokes suspicion about an innocent one cannot sleep peacefully at night, like a man in a room with a snake in it. A man must propitiate, as he would the gods, those who, when angry, put one's possessions and means of acquiring them in jeopardy. Success is doubtful for goals that depend upon women, careless persons, men who do not follow the dharma of their varna and those who are evil.

Like a stone raft has no choice but to sink, so do men who let a woman, a deceitful person or a child guide them. Those who are experts at something look down on men who are generally competent but have no particular skill. A man whom swindlers, actors and women of bad character speak highly of might as well be dead.

Bhaarata, you have forsaken the sons of Pandu, those Kshatriyas of immeasurable energy, and entrusted care of this mighty empire to Duryodhana. You will soon see your burgeoning prosperity falling away, as Bali did from Swarga.'"

CANTO 39

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Man has no control over his own prosperity or adversity. He is like a wooden string-puppet, and God subjects him to destiny. Go on speaking; I am listening attentively to everything you say.'

Vidura says, 'Bhaarata, words spoken at the inappropriate time, even by Brihaspati, are considered ignorant and reprehensible. There are three ways for a man to become popular—giving gifts, speaking sweet words and using spells and narcotics. However, the man who is naturally likeable is always so.

In the eyes of one who hates him, a man is always dishonest, stupid and foolish. A man attributes everything good to him whom he loves and everything bad to him that he hates.

O king, I told you on Duryodhana's birth that you should do away with this one son, for, by that, you would ensure the prosperity of the rest of the hundred of them; and that by keeping him, you would doom them all. One should never give importance to a gain that leads to loss. One must, instead, place great store by a loss that will eventually bring gain. It is no loss which results in gain; only the loss that begets greater losses is a real loss.

Some gain eminence because of their good qualities, others because they are wealthy. Dhritarashtra, keep away from the wealthy man who lacks dharma.'

Dhritarashtra says, ‘You speak wisely and for my good, but I dare not abandon my son. Let us reassure ourselves with the conviction that victory and dharma go hand in hand.’

Vidura says, ‘Those who are humble and graced with every virtue are always sensitive to the least suffering of living beings; but those who spend their time speaking ill of others always look for opportunities to quarrel with them and to inflict pain. It is wrong to accept gifts from, or to give to, those whose very presence is inauspicious and whose companionship is fraught with danger.

Those who are contentious, covetous, shameless and deceitful are without dharma, and one should avoid being with them. One should also avoid those who have other serious flaws in their character. When the circumstances which created the friendship end, one must end friendly relations with those of bad character; the good that comes from that connection, and the happiness, come to an end. Such men will then speak ill of the man who was their friend and try to make him suffer losses and be unhappy if the loss is small. Lacking control over themselves, they cannot find peace. The learned man will carefully and objectively analyse everything and shun the friendship of such evil-minded ones.

The man who helps his poor and helpless relatives will have children and animals, and will enjoy unending prosperity. Those who want their own good should always help their relatives. Therefore, Rajan, work for the glory of your great vamsa in any way you can. You will prosper if you treat all your kinsmen well and protect even those who are destitute of virtue.

Bharatarishabha, think about how much more they, who are blessed with goodness and humbly await your favour, deserve your protection. Grace the heroic sons of Pandu with your favour and give them some part of the kingdom for their livelihood. This will bring you fame in this world. You are old. You should control your sons; that alone will benefit you.

Know that I am your well-wisher. The man who wants his own good must never have enmity with his kin. Happiness must always be shared and enjoyed with one’s family, and not without them. Relatives should always eat together, talk with one another and love each other; they must never fall out. It is kinsmen who come to your rescue, and kinsmen who ruin you. The righteous ones are the ones who come to your help, while the sinful ones let you down.

O, you who are the giver of honours, use dharma in your dealings with the sons of Pandu. Surrounded by them, you will be invincible.

If a man shrinks in the presence of a prosperous kinsman, like a deer at the sight of a hunter armed with arrows, then the prosperous relative will absorb the sins of the other. Purushottama, you will regret your present course, of doing nothing to prevent a war, when you hear of the deaths of the Pandavas or your sons.

O, think of this: when life itself is uncertain, one should from the start avoid any awful deed that will plunge one into a world of fear and grief and give cause for irremediable regret later. It is true that anyone, other than Bhargava who authored the Dharmashastra, is likely, at one time or other, to sin. Intelligent men understand the justness of the consequences of their crimes.

As an elder of the Kuruvamsa, it is your duty to undo all the wrongs that Duryodhana inflicted on the Pandavas. By reinstating them to their rightful position you will be cleansed of all your sins in this world and be worshipped even by enlightened souls. The man who acts after carefully reflecting on what wise men say about the inexorable fruit of karma never loses renown.

Wisdom imparted by knowledgeable men is imperfect if misunderstood, or if understood but not put into practice. The learned man who never does anything that will result in sin and sorrow always grows in prosperity. The heedless, evil man, who stubbornly pursues the sinful course he has embarked on, falls into a deep mire.

The wise man must always be aware of these six ways by which his plans become known, and if he wants success and a lasting dynasty, he will be on his guard against them. They are intoxication, sleep, heedlessness of spies, one's own demeanour which reflects one's thoughts and confidence placed in evil-hearted advisors and inept representatives. The man who knows of these six doors through which secrets can slip out, who keeps them shut while conducting his life in dharma, artha and kama, succeeds in outwitting his enemies.

Even Brihaspati cannot win dharma or artha if he has no knowledge of the Shastras and if he does not serve the elderly. As anything cast into the sea is lost are words spoken into the ears of one who does not listen. The Shastras are lost on one who does not have his emotions under control. An offering of ghee is wasted if poured over the ashes of an extinguished fire.

The man who is blessed with intelligence forges friendships with the wise, having first used his intelligence to examine, his understanding to investigate and his ears to hear what others who have known and seen the man say about him, and then by relying on his own discernment. Humility prevents humiliation; prowess ends adversity; forgiveness conquers anger; and dharma neutralises evil omens.

Rajan, a man's lineage is judged by the things he enjoys, his place of birth, his home, his demeanour, his food and dress. Even a man who has attained spiritual freedom is tempted to indulge in pleasure, let alone the man who is still a slave to his desires. A king should treasure a minister who reveres the wise; who is blessed with knowledge and virtue; who has a pleasant appearance, good friends, sweet speech and a good heart.

Whether he is of low or high birth, the man who does not break the rules of polite conversation, who is conscious of dharma and who is humble and modest is superior to a hundred men of noble lineage. The friendship of men, whose hearts, private lives, pleasures and acquisitions are in complete accord with one's own, never cools.

The intelligent man should avoid an ignorant and evil man even like a deep pit covered by grass, for friendship with such a man is short-lived and dangerous. The wise man should never make a friend of one who is proud, ignorant, fierce or reckless and who has strayed from the path of dharma. One should want for a friend the man who is grateful, virtuous, truthful, large-hearted and devoted, and one who has his senses under control, who preserves his dignity and never forsakes a friend.

While the detachment of the senses from their objects is like death, excessive indulgence of the senses would ruin even the gods. Learned men say that humility, love of all creatures, forgiveness and respect for friends lengthen one's life. The wise say that the man who, with determination, uses means of dharma to accomplish goals that have been thwarted possesses real manhood. The man who knows of all the remedies that may be applied in the future, who is firmly resolved in the present time and who can predict at the start the result of his actions attains all his goals.

That which a man follows in thought, word and action wins him for itself; therefore, a man should always seek what is truly good for him. After achieving this, many other factors make a man prosper: effort, timely action in the right place, the means to do so, knowledge of the Shastras, diligent work, honesty and frequent contact with the good.

Perseverance is the key to prosperity, achievement and all that is beneficial. The man who pursues his goal with perseverance, without giving up in impatience, is great; and he will enjoy everlasting happiness. Then, O king, there is the quality of mercy; nothing promotes happiness, nothing is more appropriate for a powerful man than forgiveness, anywhere and always. The weak man must be forgiving under all circumstances; the mighty should show forgiveness, keeping dharma in mind; but forgiveness comes naturally to the man who is detached from the success or failure of his endeavours.

One must pursue, to the fullest extent, pleasure that does not go against dharma and artha. However, one should not be a fool and indulge one's senses indiscriminately. Prosperity never attaches itself to a man who tortures himself with grief; nor to one who is addicted to evil, who is an atheist or idle; nor to one whose senses are uncontrolled; nor to one who makes no effort. The humble man's modesty is mistaken for weakness, and the deluded persecute him.

Prosperity fearfully avoids the man who is too honest, who gives without limit, who is too brave or who is vain about his wisdom. She stays neither with the man who is highly accomplished nor with one who is not in the least so. She does not prefer a conjunction of all the virtues, nor is she pleased with their complete absence. At random, like a mad cow that cannot be steered, prosperity blindly finds her home.

The result of studying the Vedas is the performance of the homa; the fruits of knowing the Shastras are good manners and good conduct; the fruits of women are the pleasures of intercourse and children; and the consequence of wealth is the pleasure of doing charity.

He that performs rituals, with ill-gotten wealth, for his good in the next world does not enjoy the usual fruits of such rites because of the means by which the wealth used for this purpose was acquired. The man who has strength of mind knows no fear, not in the midst of the desert, in forests or other inaccessible fastnesses; not amidst dangers, crises or in the face of deadly weapons raised against him. Prosperity is born out of effort, self-control, skill, meticulousness, steadiness, a good memory and mature deliberation before any action.

Tapasya is the strength of tapasvins; the Vedas are the strength of scholars; envy is the strength of evil men; and in forgiveness lies the strength of the virtuous. Eight things could never negate a vow: water,

roots, fruit, milk, ghee, obliging a Brahmana's request, obeying a guru's command and good medicine.

One should never do to others anything that is against one's own self-interest. This is virtue. There are other kinds of virtue, but these issue from caprice. Anger must be conquered by forgiveness, evil by dharma, the miser by generosity, and falsehood by truth.

One must not trust a woman, a swindler, an idler, a coward, a vicious man, one who boasts of his own power, a thief, an ingrate and an atheist. The man who is respectful of his elders and serves the elderly will always see the growth of his achievements, longevity, fame and power.

Do not set your heart on things that can be acquired only through painful exertion, at the cost of dharma or by bowing down to an enemy. A man without knowledge is pitiable, as is intercourse that does not bear fruit, and also the people of a kingdom who have no food and a kingdom without a king. These cause pain and debility in the living. Rain erodes hills and mountains; the absence of enjoyment gives women anguish; and sharp words wound the heart like arrows.

The worst thing for the Vedas is not to study them, and for Brahmanas it is not to observe vratas; the worst beings on Earth are the Bahlikas; the worst characteristic in a man is falsehood and in the chaste woman, curiosity; and the worst condition for a woman is to be away from her home. The worst part of gold is silver; of silver, tin; of tin, lead; and of lead, grit. One cannot conquer sleep by lying down, women by desire, fire by fuel and wine by drinking. The crown of success rests on the man who has won over his friends by gifts, his foes by battle and his wife with food and drink.

Those who have a hundred possessions are just as alive as those who have a thousand. O Dhritarashtra, renounce your greed for excessive possessions. There is no one who cannot live within the considerable means you own. All the paddy, wheat, gold, animals and women on Earth cannot satiate even one man. A wise man reflects on this and does not grieve for want of owning everything. Rajan, I say to you again, treat your children equally—your sons and Pandu's.'"

CANTO 40

PRAJAGARA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'The good man will win fame by abandoning pride and pursuing his goals. He must take care not to overstep the limits of his power because honourable men can make the man who pleases them happy.

The man who voluntarily gives up something, even if it is magnificent, because it is charged with adharma lives happily and shakes off his enemies, like a snake shedding its skin. A victory won by a lie, by treachery towards the king and by insincerity towards one's elders is equal to the sin of killing a Brahmana.

Envy, death and boastfulness destroy prosperity. Carelessness in serving one's elders, undue haste and vanity are the three enemies of knowledge. Idleness, inattention, mental turmoil, restlessness, passing time idly with friends, hauteur, pride and jealousy are particular shortcomings of students. How can they that seek pleasure gain knowledge? Students cannot pursue learning and, at the same time, indulge themselves. Devotees of pleasure must give up knowledge, and those who seek knowledge must first abjure pleasure.

Fire can never have enough fuel; the mighty ocean can never receive enough water from the rivers that feed it; Death cannot be satiated even by devouring all living creatures; and a beautiful woman can never have too many men around her.

Hope kills patience; Yama kills growth; anger kills prosperity; miserliness kills fame; neglect kills cattle; and the anger of just one Brahmana destroys an entire kingdom. Ensure the presence of goats, brass, silver, honey, antidotes to poison, birds, Brahmanas versed in the Vedas, aged kinsmen and impoverished noblemen in your house.

Bhaarata, Manu has said that for the worship of the gods one must always have these in one's house: goats, bulls, sandalwood, flutes, mirrors, honey, ghee, iron, copper, conch-shells, salagramas and gorochana, Brahmanas and guests. All these are auspicious.

I will tell you of another sacred lesson, more exalted than these, one which will bear great fruit: virtue should never be forsaken from desire, fear or temptation, and not for life itself. Dharma is everlasting; pleasure and pain are transitory; indeed life itself is everlasting but transitory in each phase. Abandon the transitory and devote yourself to the permanent; and contentment, that best of all blessings, will be yours.

See how illustrious and mighty kings, having ruled lands abounding in wealth and corn, have fallen to Yama, leaving behind their kingdoms and vast fonts of enjoyment. When the child who is nurtured with loving care dies, weeping and wild-haired men carry his body in grief to the smasana and throw it onto the pyre, where it burns as if it were just another log of wood. Others enjoy a dead man's wealth, while birds and fire feast on his body. Only two things accompany him into the next world: his punya and his paapa. After discarding his body his kinsmen go home, even as birds abandon a tree that has no flowers or fruit.

The one cast into the funeral pyre takes with him only his own deeds. Therefore, men should carefully and purposefully earn punya for themselves. In the worlds above and below ours are regions of terrible darkness, O king, where men's senses suffer great torture. Do not allow yourself to go to there.

If you listen attentively to me and act accordingly, great fame will be yours in this mortal world, and you will never have fear now or hereafter. The soul is like a river; deeds of punya are its sacred tirthas; truth, its water; self-control, its banks; and kindness, its waves. The righteous man purifies himself by bathing in it, for the soul is scared, and the absence of desire is the highest merit. Life is a river whose waters are the five senses, and whose crocodiles and sharks are desire and anger. Make self-control the raft by which you cross its eddies, which are your repeated births.

The man who worships and pleases friends, who are wise, virtuous, knowledgeable and mature in years, is never misguided by the advice they give him. A man must restrain lust and hunger with patience, his hands and feet with his eyes, his eyes and ears with his mind and his mind and speech with his conduct.

The Brahmana who unfailingly performs his ritual ablutions, who always wears his sacred thread, who never neglects his Vedic studies, who avoids unclean food, who always tells the truth and who honours his guru by his actions never falls from Brahmaloka. The Kshatriya who studies the Vedas, who makes offerings to Agni, who performs yagnas, who protects his subjects, who has purified his soul by arming himself with weapons in order to safeguard Brahmanas and his cattle and who dies on the field of battle attains Swarga. The Vaisya who distributes his wealth among Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and his own dependants at the appropriate time, and who breathes the sanctified smoke of the three kinds of fires gains joy in the other world. The Sudra who worships Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas as is their due; who has washed away his sins by gratifying them; and who peacefully casts off his mortal body enjoys celestial bliss.

This is the dharma of the four varnas. Now listen to the reason I have told you all this. Yudhishtira has been unable to fulfil his Kshatriya dharma. You must place him in a position that he may discharge his kingly duties, Rajan.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'What you teach me is always right, and I, too, am inclined to do as you say. Although, in keeping with your advice, my heart moves towards the Pandavas, it veers in a different direction as soon as I see Duryodhana. No one can avert fate, which will always take its course; and I think individual effort is futile.'"

CANTO 41

SANAT SUJATA PARVA

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Vidura, if there is anything you have not told me, tell me now, for I am eager to listen. Your words delight my heart.'

Vidura says, 'Dhritarashtra, the ancient and immortal Rishi Sanat Sujata, who was a celibate all his life, said that there is no death. That most brilliant of all men will clear every doubt you have.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Do you not know what the deathless Rishi would say to me? You can advise me as well as he would; you have as much wisdom.'

Vidura says, 'I am a Sudra by birth and cannot say more than I have already said. The wisdom and knowledge of that Brahmarishi is infinite. A man who is born a Brahmana does not incur the disapproval of the gods, even when he expounds the most profound mysteries. This is why I will speak no more to you on this matter.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, Vidura, how I, in my mortal body, can meet this immortal and ancient one.'

Vidura meditates on that Rishi of stern vratas and, knowing that he was thought of, the sage appears. Vidura receives him reverently with the ordained rites and when, after a brief rest, Sanat Sujata is seated at his ease, Vidura says to him, 'O illustrious one, Dhritarashtra has doubts which I am not able to clear. I beg you to do what I cannot. He might then overcome his

sorrow, which stems from being confused about gain and loss, what is agreeable and disagreeable, old age and death, fear and jealousy, hunger and thirst, pride and prosperity, dislike, sleep, lust, wrath, decrease and increase.'"

CANTO 42

SANAT SUJATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vaisampayana said, 'Dhritarashtra applauds what Vidura says and, eager to obtain the highest knowledge, puts his questions to Sanat Sujata without speaking.

In his mind the king asks the Rishi, 'O Sanat Sujata, I hear that you believe there is no death. On the other hand, it is said that Devas and Asuras practise austere tapasya in order to avoid death. Which of these two is true?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Some say that death can be averted by specific karma; others are of the opinion that there is no death. You have asked me which of these is true. Listen to me, O king, while I tell you about this, so that your doubts are removed.

Kshatriya, both of these are true. The learned are of opinion that death results from ignorance. I say that ignorance is death. Thus, knowledge is immortality.

It is from ignorance that the Asuras became subject to defeat and death, and it is from the absence of ignorance that the Devas attained Brahman. Death does not devour, as a tiger does; its form cannot be known.

Some imagine Yama to be Death, deluded as they are by their weak minds. Immortality lies in the search for self-knowledge, the eternal Brahman. That imaginary Deva, Yama, rules over the realm of the Pitrs; he is the source of joy to the virtuous and a scourge to sinners. It is at his

command that death walks among men, in the form of wrath, ignorance and covetousness.

Swayed by pride, men walk the ways of dharma, and none amongst such men attains Atmagyana. With darkened minds and led by their passions, when they cast off their mortal bodies they fall into Naraka, over and over, and their unruly senses follow them always. That is why ignorance goes by the name of death. So, death also attaches to men who want the fruit of their actions. When the time for enjoying these fruit comes, they cannot avoid death. They leave their mortal bodies and go to Swargaloka. Men who do not desire to see the fruit of their deeds also go to Swarga when they leave their bodies; but for them there is no death.

Creatures with physical bodies are caught in a cycle of birth and re-birth in varying states because of their inability to attain Brahman and due to their attachment to worldly enjoyment. Man has a natural inclination towards pursuits that seek illusory goals, and this is the single cause of his senses being led astray. The soul that is led towards illusions remembers only that with which it is constantly occupied and, so, worships only the mundane pleasures that surround it. The desire for pleasure is the first cause of death for man; lust and anger come next. It is these three—craving for pleasure, lust and anger—that lead foolish men to death.

Those who have conquered their souls by self-restraint escape death. The man who has restrained his soul without falling prey to his ambitious desires subdues them; self-knowledge reveals their worthlessness to him. Ignorance, in the form of Yama, cannot overcome the learned man who controls his passions.

The man who follows his desires is destroyed along with his desires. However, the man who can renounce desire can keep grief away, whatever form it may take. Desire is ignorance; it is darkness and hell for all creatures, for, swayed by it they lose control of their senses. Just as drunken men walking along a street reel towards ruts and holes, so too, men intoxicated by desire and lured by illusory joys stagger headlong towards their downfall.

What can death do to a man whose soul has not been led by desire? For him death holds no terrors; it is like a straw tiger. Kshatriya, if you want to destroy desire, which is ignorance, you must not dwell on or pursue even the smallest wish.

Your soul, which is in your body, enmeshed as it is in wrath and covetousness, is filled with ignorance, which is death. Realising that death comes in this way, the man who relies on knowledge need have no fear of it. Indeed, as surely as death destroys the body, knowledge destroys death.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'The Vedas say that the sacred and eternal realms that Dvijas can attain through prayer and sacrifice offer emancipation. Why then should a learned man not perform such karma?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'It is true that the man who has no knowledge can take the path you mention, and what the Vedas say about bliss and moksha being there is also true. The man who has given up all material wants attains Brahman at once; but even the man who confuses the physical body with the Atman attains Brahman, if he is able to renounce desire. If, however, one seeks mukti without destroying desire, one has to go step by step along the prescribed path, leaving every step he takes irrevocably behind oneself and being careful not to have to retrace one's way.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Who is it that stimulates the Unborn and Ancient One into action? If He is this universe because he is present in everything, what form do action and happiness take for him who is without desire? Tejasvin Rishi, speak to me of this.'

Sanat Sujata says, 'You should not think of two essentially different things as being one. Creatures come into being by the union of the Purusha with Prakriti, both of which have no beginning, like time. This in no way lessens the supremacy and importance of the unborn and all-pervading Brahman. Men, too, have their origin in the same Supreme Being. All that appears to you is nothing but that everlasting Paramatman. Indeed, the universe is created by the transformations that the Supreme Soul goes through.

The Vedas say that the Paramatman has the power to transform Himself, and by that, causes transformations in this world.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Some practise dharma; some do not, but renounce all action and take sannyasa. Does virtue destroy vice, or is it destroyed by vice?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'The fruits of virtue and of perfect stillness, or inaction, can both be used to attain moksha. The wise man succeeds by gyana, knowledge; the worldly man acquires punya through karma, action, but in the process he also acquires paapa, sin.

After earning the transitory fruits of both virtue and vice and existing for a limited time in Swarga or Naraka the man of karma is involuntarily drawn to a life of action because of his previous karma. The wiser amongst such men exorcises his sins by his acts of dharma; dharma is powerful and is the path to moksha.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me about those eternal realms, in the order of their importance, that Dvijas attain as a result of following their svadharma. Tell me about other, similar realms. Learned one, I do not wish to hear of man's nature, sinful and condemnable as it is.'

Sanat Sujata says, 'The Dvijas who have good reason to be proud of their skills at Yoga, as strong men are of their physique, shine in Brahmaloka when they leave this world. Those Dvijas who can take pride in their knowledge and the pure performance of yagnas and Vedic rites attain Devaloka when they are freed from their mortal lives. There are Vedic scholars who believe that the performance of yagnas will lead to moksha. They, too, seek Atmagyana but place undue emphasis on rituals. They are not worthy of the highest respect.

The Yogi should seek his sustenance in a place where sattvik food and drink is abundant, like grass during the rainy season, rather than being a burden on a householder of scanty means. By no means, however, should he suffer from hunger or thirst.

In a situation where revealing one's superiority is fraught with uncertainties, the man who does not do so is more praiseworthy than the one who does. Wise men approve of the food offered by a man who is not offended by one who makes his superiority known and who never eats without first having offered a proper share to Brahmanas and Sadasyas. Just as a dog sickens because it eats its own vomit, so, too, do Yogins who get their sustenance by making their superiority obvious.

Wise men recognise as a Brahmana the man who practices his religion discreetly, so that even his family, in whose midst he lives, is unaware of it. Only such a Brahmana is worthy of realising Brahman, who is formless, unchangeable, singular and without duality. By similar conduct a Kshatriya, too, can realise Brahman as being within himself. He who takes his Soul to be his doing, feeling self sins by robbing the Atman of its true attributes.

A Brahmana should never try too hard or accept gifts; he should earn the respect of men of dharma; he should be quiet and modest about his Vedic knowledge. Only then will he gain Atmagyana and attain the

Brahman. He who is poor in material wealth but rich in punya and sacrifices, becomes unconquerable and fearless; and he is Brahman embodied.

The man who performs yagnas and succeeds in invoking the Devas and having them grant his wishes is a lesser man than one who knows that Brahman is the real performer of his yagnas; the former realises Brahman by effort, whereas the latter attains Him with ease. The man whom the Devas respect, though he does nothing for it, is truly honoured; the respect bestowed by men is not true honour. The lack of the honour of men is no cause for grief.

People generally act unthinkingly according to their natures, as involuntarily as they blink their eyes. It is only the learned who respect other men, and the man who receives respect should be aware of this. Men who are foolish, inclined towards sin and deceitful, never respect those who are worthy; in fact they go out of their way to be disrespectful.

The esteem of the world and the ascetic vow of silence, mowna vrata, can never go together. This world is enjoyed by men who want esteem, while the other world is for those who keep the vow of silence. In this world, Kshatriya, happiness rests in worldly prosperity, which is actually an obstacle to moksha, eternal bliss. Heavenly prosperity cannot be had by one who is not truly wise.

Wise men say that there are several closely guarded gates that are portals to moksha. They are truth, integrity, humility, self-control, purity of mind and conduct, and Vedic knowledge. These six portals destroy vanity and ignorance as one passes through them.'"

CANTO 43

SANAT SUJATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'What is the purpose of the mowna vrata? Which of its two kinds do you approve of—not speaking or dhyana? Learned one, tell me about true mowna. Can a learned man attain a state of stillness and freedom by practising it? Muni, how should it be practised?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Veda gyana, even if acquired with concentration and discipline, cannot reach the Paramatman; therefore Brahman itself is known as mowna. It is from mowna that the Vedic sound AUM and other ordinary sounds have been born; it is the Supreme Word, O king.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Is the man who knows the Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas tainted by any sins he may commit?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'A man who has not controlled his senses cannot escape from his sins by virtue of his knowledge of the Rig, Yajur or Sama Vedas. The Vedas never rescue a false man who lives by deceit; on the other hand, they forsake him at his end, like fledglings leaving their nests.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'O you who have restrained your senses, if, as you say, the Vedas cannot save a man from the consequence of his sins, then why do Brahmanas labour under the delusion that the Vedas destroy sin?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Although this universe has been born from the Brahman uniting with the gunas—attributes such as name and form, the Vedas stress that it is distinct from them. Mowna and yagnas are prescribed

for the attainment of Brahman, and they are the means by which a learned man acquires dharma. Sin is destroyed by virtue and the soul is enlightened by knowledge.

It is with the help of knowledge that a learned man realises Brahman. The man of little wisdom covets the four material goals and takes the fruits of these with him into the next world. There he dwells and enjoys these fruits for a limited time and, because they are only short-lived, he comes back into this world of karma. The worldly fruits of mowna are enjoyed by those who have not restrained their souls; but those who have, enjoy fruits of the other worlds as well.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Muni, how can the same ascetic austerities be sometimes successful and sometimes not? Tell us how this is so.'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Mowna that is not corrupted by desire or other failings is successful and results in moksha; the aspirant succeeds. The answers to all your questions touch the very roots of tapasya. It is with gyana and mowna that learned men realise Brahman and live forever.'

Dhritarashtra said, 'I now know the eternal mystery, with the understanding you have given me about the mowna that is untainted by defects. Tell me now, Sanat Sujata, about mowna that is marred by faults.'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Twelve human vices mar the effectiveness of mowna: anger, lust, avarice, ignorance of right and wrong, discontentment, cruelty, jealousy, vanity, grief, love of pleasure, envy, and speaking ill of others. Manavarishabha, a man should take care to avoid these twelve, for any one of them by itself can destroy him. Indeed, every one of these vices waits for its opportunity, like a hunter in ambush for a deer.

There are six forms of evil that sinful men practise, which make them arrogantly fearless of dangers in this world and the next: boasting about one's own superiority, enjoying the wives of other men, humiliating others, anger, fickleness and refusing to maintain those who deserve it.

These seven kinds of men—the man who makes the gratification of lust his main aim in life, one who is haughty, one who regrets the gifts he gives, the man who is miserly, one who oppresses his people with excessive taxes, one who delights in the humiliation of others and the man who hates his own wives—are also evil.

Twelve are the true attributes of a Brahmana's way of life: righteousness, non-violence, truthfulness of speech, self-restraint, asceticism, joy in the happiness of others, modesty, forbearance, love of

others, sacrifices, gifts, perseverance and knowledge of the Shastras. The man who acquires these twelve earns the power to control the Earth. A man who has three, or two, or even one of these can consider that he has reached his goal. Moksha lies in self-restraint, renunciation and Atmagyana. Wise Brahmanas say that these attributes are founded in truth.

There are eighteen defects that, if avoided, pave the way for a man to achieve self-control: non-performance of the prescribed rituals from laziness, falsehood, malice, lust, wealth, love of sensual pleasure, anger, grief, thirst, avarice, deceit, joy in the misery of others, envy, injuring others, regret, aversion to piety, forgetfulness of duty, speaking ill of others and vanity. These eighteen faults constitute mada, pride.

Renunciation is of six kinds, and the opposite of these six are also definitions of mada, making the total number twenty-four. All six kinds of renunciation are good; only the third is difficult to practise, but by it a man overcomes all sorrow. In fact, the man who is accomplished in this form of renunciation transcends the pairs of opposites, like joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

O king, the first kind of renunciation is not feeling joy on gaining prosperity; the second is giving up non-performance of yagnas and prayers; the third is the abandonment of desire, or withdrawing from the world. As a result of this third kind, one renounces the objects of enjoyment without having enjoyed them, not after knowing them; nor does one relinquish an acquisition after acquiring it and having no appetite for it.

The fourth kind of renunciation is not to allow oneself to grieve at the failure of one's efforts even those made using dharma and artha, wealth. It is to feel no pain when something unpleasant happens. The fifth kind of renunciation is to not ask for anything from anyone, even sons, wives and other dear ones. The sixth kind is to give to a deserving person who asks, which always brings punya. These five enable Atmagyana or Self-knowledge.

The last kind of renunciation has eight characteristics: truth, meditation, the ability to distinguish subject from object, the capacity to draw inferences, withdrawal from the world, never taking what belongs to another, adherence to brahmacharya—the vow of celibacy, and not accepting charity.

In the same way as renunciation has characteristics, so, too, are defects characteristic of mada, which is the opposite of dama—self-restraint—that

the Shastras elucidate. These faults should be avoided. I have told you about renunciation and self-knowledge. Just as self-knowledge has eight virtues, the want of it has eight faults. Those should also be avoided.

Bhaarata, the man who is liberated from his five senses, the intellect, the past and the future becomes happy. Let your soul be devoted to truth; all the worlds are established in truth. Truth is also the first attribute of self-control, renunciation and self-knowledge. Avoid these faults and practise mowna. Brahman has ordained that truth alone should be the vow of the righteous. Mowna that is dissociated from these faults and endowed with the virtues becomes the source of great prosperity.

I have now told you in brief about the sin-destroying and sacred subject which liberates a man from the cycle of birth, old age and death.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'The fifth Veda, the Akhyana, says that the Supreme Soul is the universe. Others recognise four Vedas, while some recognise three, some two and some only one. Then there are those who acknowledge Brahman alone as the one thing that exists, everything else having its existence in Him. Tell me, which of these has true knowledge of Brahman?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'There is but one Brahman, who is Truth. It is from ignorance of that One that men have conceived several Vedas. But who is there, O king, who has attained Brahman, that Absolute Truth?

Without knowing that One object of knowledge that they ought to, men think they have gained wisdom. From the hope of gaining happiness they engage in study and practice daana and perform yagnas. The purposes of such men, who have strayed from Truth, match their condition; they rely on the Vedic texts as the Truth and so emptily perform their yagna and daana.

Some perform and attain the object of sacrifices by dhyana, meditation; some by chanting prayers, japa; some by the completion of the yatishtoma and other costly rites. However, the man who seeks Brahman through Truth gets what he wants, in his very home.

When a man's objectives are aborted by lack of Atmagyana he must adopt vows such as mowna vrata and diksha vrata. In fact, the word diksha is its own root, and it means observance of vratas. For those who have attained Atmagyana, Truth is the highest object of their pursuit.

The fruits of gyana are visible; the fruits of mowna are only enjoyed in the hereafter. A Brahmana who, without gyana and mowna, has read much should only be regarded as a great reader; never assume that a man can be a Brahmagyani—one who knows Brahman—merely by reading the Shastras.

Know, on the other hand, that the true Brahmana is one who never deviates from the Truth.

O Kshatriya, the verses that were recited in olden times by Atharvan to a conclave of Maharishis are also called the Chhandas. Those who have read the Vedas but do not have knowledge of the One Being, that should follow, must not be considered as having acquired true Vedic knowledge. The Chhandas are the independent means of attaining Brahman without the need for doing anything else. Those who are only acquainted with the modes of sacrifice prescribed in the Vedas cannot be regarded as knowing the Vedas. On the other hand, those who have served men with true Vedic knowledge have as good as attained knowledge of the One Being that Veda gyana leads to.

There is no one quality of the intellect that can help a man acquire the true meaning of the Vedas, nor can all the qualities of the intellect; yet there may be some few men who have grasped it. Whatever might happen, the man who has only read them does not gain knowledge of the One Being that can be known through knowing the Vedas; it is the man who is firmly established in the Truth who knows Him.

There are no qualities, which delude men to perceive the physical body as the Self, that can lead to Atmagyana. A man's intellect alone cannot help him distinguish the Self from the not-Self. He who knows the Self also knows what is not-Self; but he who knows only what is not-Self does not know Truth.

He who knows the proofs knows that which he seeks to prove, but neither Vedic knowledge nor the Vedas themselves can perceive its true nature. But Brahmanas who have true knowledge of the Vedas succeed in knowing the One Being that a study of the Vedas can lead to.

Just as the twig of a particular tree is sometimes used for indicating the day of the new moon, the Vedas are used for indicating the highest attributes of the Paramatman. In my opinion, a Brahmana, or one who knows Brahman, is one who explains men's doubts, having first cleared his own; he is one who has true knowledge of his Self, Atmagyana.

You cannot find the Atman by searching in the East, South, West, North or in subsidiary cardinal directions, or even laterally. Very rarely can the man who thinks his body is the Self find Atman. Beyond the conception of even the Vedas, the man of Yoga dhyana can behold the Supreme Being.

Completely restrain all your senses and your mind and seek Brahman who resides in your own soul.

A man is no Muni who practises dhyana in silence, nor is he one who retires from the world and lives in the forest; a Muni is the man who knows his true nature.

A man is said to be a Vaiyakarana, or grammarian, who can trace every word to its root and explain it—Vyakarana. Every word has its root in Brahman. The man who sees all the Lokas before his eyes knows everything; the man who is established in Truth and knows Brahman is a real Brahmana; and a Brahmana possesses universal knowledge.

A Kshatriya who practises Brahmana dharma also beholds Brahman. He can also attain to that supreme state by going step by step in accordance to the teachings of the Vedas. I know all this for certain; and that is why I tell it to you.'"

CANTO 44

SANAT SUJATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanat Sujata, what you say of Brahman and the origin of the universe is illuminating indeed and lightens my heart. Tell me more of such things that are not to do with worldly pursuits and, so, not common among men.'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Brahman, about which you ask me so joyfully, cannot be attained in a hurry. After you have restrained your senses, when conscious thought is merged in pure intellect, the state that succeeds is one of utter absence of worldly thought. That condition is true knowledge and leads to the realisation of Brahman. It can be attained only by practising brahmacharya.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You say that the mind is where knowledge of Brahman naturally resides, being discovered only through brahmacharya; that, dwelling in the mind, it needs no effort to manifest itself; and that this happens whilst one seeks it through brahmacharya. How then is immortality associated with the attainment of Brahman?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Though dwelling in and inherent to the mind, the knowledge of Brahman is still unmanifest. Pure intellect and brahmacharya are needed to make it emerge into consciousness. Then, having attained that knowledge, Yogis forsake this world naturally. True gyana is found among great gurus. I will tell you now about this knowledge.'

Dhritarashtra says, ‘What should be the nature of brahmacharya by which the knowledge of Brahman might be attained without too much difficulty? Dvijottama, tell me this.’

Sanat Sujata says, ‘Those who live in the asramas of their gurus, who win their goodwill and friendship and who practise austere celibacy become earthly embodiments of Brahman. They cast off their bodies and become one with the Paramatman. Those who seek to attain the state of Brahman subdue all desires and, living in dharma, they succeed in dissociating their souls from their bodies, like a blade of grass standing upright on a flat heath.

The mother and father create the human body, but the birth that occurs as a result of obeying the guru is sacred and free from old age and death. The guru who discourses on Brahman, while granting immortality, wraps all his disciples in the mantle of Truth. The sishya should think of him as father and mother; and remembering the good he does, never do him injury.

A sishya must always greet his guru with respect; with a pure mind and body, he must direct his attention to his studies. He must not consider any service too humble to perform for him and must never feel anger. This is the first step of brahmacharya. The disciple who learns about his own duties by observing the duties of other disciples also takes the first step on the path of brahmacharya.

A sishya should do whatever pleases his guru in thought, word and deed, even at the expense of his own life and all his possessions. This is the second step of brahmacharya. Also a second step is for the disciple to behave towards his guru’s wife and son in the same way that he does to his guru.

The sishya must appreciate all that his guru has done for him and, understanding the goals, think with joy, *He has taught me and made me great*. This is the third step of brahmacharya. The good disciple should not leave his guru’s home without first getting his leave and without paying gurudakshina, while disassociating himself from being the giver of it. This is the fourth step of brahmacharya.

He achieves the first step towards knowledge of Brahman, which is the object of brahmacharya, in due course; the second step is through the guru’s teachings; the third is by his own intellect; and finally, the fourth is by satsanga and discussion.

Learned men have said that Brahmacharya consists of twelve virtues; the Yoga practices are called its Angas, and perseverance in Yoga dhyana is its nutrient. The man who has achieved mastery in Yoga, with his guru's help and with true understanding of the Vedas, becomes a successful Yogi.

A man must give whatever wealth he may earn, whilst he is a disciple, to his guru. It is in this way that the guru makes his livelihood by his svadharma. The sishya should do the same for his guru's son. Living in this manner as a Brahmachari, the disciple thrives and is blessed with progeny and renown. Men from all over the world shower him with wealth, and many come to his home to practice brahmacharya. It is through brahmacharya of this kind that the Devas obtained their divinity, and blessed sages of great wisdom attained Brahmaloka. This is how the Gandharvas and the Apsaras acquired physical beauty, and it is through brahmacharya that Surya rises to make the day.

In the same way that seekers of the stone that turns base metals into gold derive joy when they find what they are looking for, the Devas and others obtain great happiness on completion of their brahmacharya, for then they can have whatever they wish.

Rajan, the man who is devoted to tapasya takes up brahmacharya in its entirety and thus purifies himself. This man is wise for, by this, he becomes like an innocent child, free from dark passions; and he triumphs over death. Through karma, men can only obtain worldly wealth, which is perishable; but the man who is blessed with true gyana uses it to attain Brahman, which is everlasting. There is no path other than gyana and the attainment of Brahman that can lead to Moksha.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You say that a wise man sees Brahman in his own soul. Is Brahman white, red, black, blue or purple? Tell me what is the true form and colour of the omnipresent and eternal Being?'

Sanat Sujata says, 'Brahman may be seen as white, red, black, brown or fulvid. But neither on Earth nor in the sky, nor in the waters of the ocean is there anything like It. You will not see the like in stars, in lightning or in clouds. It cannot be compared with anything one may see in the air, in the Moon, in the Sun or in the celestial bodies.

Neither the Rig nor the Yajur, neither the Atharvan nor the pure Saman has anything that is comparable. It is not to be found in Rathantara, Varhadratha or in great yagnas. It cannot be measured and it lies beyond the

limited reach of the intellect. Even the universal Destroyer loses himself in It after the Pralaya.

One cannot see It, for It is as subtle as a razor's edge and also more immense than a great mountain. It is the basis upon which everything is founded; It is unchangeable; It is this visible universe; It is omnipresent, vast and delightful. All creatures have sprung from It and will return to It. It is free from duality; It is manifest as the universe; and It is all-pervading. Learned men say that It is changeless, except in the language that is used to describe It.

Those that know this Entity in which everything is established are emancipated.'"

CANTO 45

SANAT SUJATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanat Sujata says, 'Sorrow, anger, avarice, lust, ignorance, sloth, malice, self-importance, love of profit, affection, jealousy and evil speech are grave and destructive flaws in character. Each of these waits for an opportunity to capture a man, who then yields his good sense up to them, and helplessly sins.

A man who is covetous, one who is fierce, one who speaks harshly, a man who is garrulous, one who fosters anger and a man who is boastful are evil-minded and, once they acquire wealth, treat others discourteously. A man whose life's objective is sensual gratification, one who is vain, a man who boasts about the gift he gives, a miser, a man who is feeble-minded, one who admires himself and a man who hates his own wife are seven that one must consider sinful.

The twelve characteristics of a Brahmana are righteousness, truthfulness, asceticism, self-restraint, contentment, humility, self-sacrifice, selflessness, generosity, knowledge of the Shastras, patience and forgiveness. The man who adheres to these has the power to rule the world. The man who is invested with three, two or even one of these qualities never claims exclusive ownership of anything. Moksha lies in self-restraint, renunciation and knowledge. These are the attributes of wise Brahmanas who regard Brahman as the highest of all goals. Be it true or false, it is not

proper for Brahmanas to speak ill of others; those who do will surely find Naraka.

I have not yet spoken to you of the eighteen defects that mada has. They are ill-will towards others, obstruction of dharma, defaming others, dishonesty, lust, anger, excessive reliance on other people, slander, casting blame, wasting money, disputatiousness, insolence, cruelty to living creatures, malice, ignorance, disrespect of those that are worthy of deference, not recognising right and wrong, and hurtfulness. A wise man should never give in to mada, for its attributes are condemnable.

Friendship is indicated in six ways. Firstly, a true friend delights in the prosperity of his friends. Secondly, he is distressed by their adversity. Thirdly, if his friend asks him for something he values, even that which ought not to be asked for, he gives it unreservedly. Fourthly, a true friend would give away all his wealth, his beloved sons and even his own wife for the sake of his friend. Fifthly, a friend would rather enjoy only what he can earn than live in the home of his friend to whom he may have given everything. Sixthly, a friend would think nothing of sacrificing his own good for his friend.

The affluent man who wants to acquire these qualities, and who becomes charitable and keeps dharma, can do so by restraining his five senses. Such restraint is asceticism. When it grows it can take a man to realms of bliss in the hereafter. Gyana, however, can lead a man to moksha even in this world.

Men who, from impatience, are unable to acquire wisdom, can still gain such asceticism through the power of their goal of attaining moksha. As a consequence of his ability to grasp that Truth, which is Brahman, the source of all yagna, a Yogi can perform sacrifices with the power of his mind; others perform yagnas by sacred chanting, japa; and some by work, karma. Brahman resides in him who knows Brahman as being saguna, vested with attributes, but is established more firmly in him who knows Brahman as being nirguna, without any attribute.

Listen now to something else. All seekers should know this great and exalted philosophy; all other systems of belief are just so many words. The universe is established in this faith; those who know it never die. O king, one cannot attain Brahman merely by virtue of karma, regardless of how well one accomplishes one's work. The man who is destitute of knowledge can never achieve moksha through karma, even if he conducts countless

homas and yagnas. He does not experience lasting joy at their end. A man must restrain all the outward senses and on his own seek Brahman. He should give up all karma and still his mind. By this, he should neither feel elation on being praised nor anger on being censured.

O Kshatriya, by conducting himself in this way, step by step as prescribed in the Vedas, a man can attain Brahman in this very world. Of this I assure you.'"

CANTO 46

SANAT SUJATA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanat Sujata says, 'The Seed from which the universe originated is called Mahayasas. It is pure knowledge, devoid of extrinsic attributes, and It blazes with lustre. It leads the senses; It is what makes Surya shine. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The Seed, which is bliss itself, gives Brahma the ability to create and to grow. It is this Bija that gives heat and light to luminous bodies; It generates its own light and heat and is an object of terror to all heat-and light-giving bodies. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

From Brahman arise the five subtle elements, the mahabhutas, from which are born the five gross elements, the bhutas, which constitute the human body. The heart contains both the living soul, Atman, as well as the divine soul, Iswara, or Paramatman. Respectively, these two lose consciousness during sleep and at the time of Pralaya. Brahman, on the other hand, is ever awake. He is the Sun's Sun and holds up Bhumi and Swarga. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The Seed supports Atman and Paramatman, Bhumi and Swarga, the cardinal directions and the whole universe. The points of the compass and the rivers spring from the Seed; It is the point of origin of the vast seas. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The body is a chariot set on a course of destruction; its deeds, however, are undying. The wheels of that chariot are the deeds of past lives; the

horses that pull it are the senses that draw a man of true knowledge through the realms of the unconscious to the Immortal Being. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The form of the Supreme One cannot be described by comparison with any other. No one ever sees Him with the body's eye; the man of wisdom who sees Him with his mind and heart has no death. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The river of illusion is fearful; it is guarded by the gods and it bears twelve fruits. As they swim along, men drink its waters and see many desirable things in its midst. This river has its source in the Seed. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The Atman is destined to journey to and fro, from life to afterlife, enjoying only half the fruits of earthly actions in the other world. Iswara, however, is all pervading and the ordainer of all sacrifices. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The Soul is originally naked. Resorting to Avidya, which is like a tree with golden leaves, it clothes itself in attributes and takes birth again and again in different castes according to its current dominant guna. Thus does the Paramatman take forms that house the Atman. Yogis see the Eternal One, in whom all souls reside, with their inner eye.

External attributes come into contact with Brahman, giving him many forms. From the One has the universe sprung, and from the One have also sprung outward attributes that are in themselves whole. When a man succeeds in dispelling everything extrinsic, what remains is Brahman who is the intrinsic whole. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

It is from the Seed that the five elements have arisen, and the Seed is the seat of power that controls them. It is from the Seed that both the one who consumes and the consumed—Agni and Soma—have sprung; it is in the Bija that all life rests. Everything originates from It. In the Vedas the Seed is named Tat, and it is beyond description. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The vital air called apana is absorbed by the air called prana; prana is swallowed by the mind; the mind dissolves in the intellect; and intellect is consumed by Brahman. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The Supreme Soul, when embodied, is like a man with four legs, each leg a state of being—waking, dream, deep sleep and turiya. In the last, he is like a swan wading out from the deep waters of samsara, hiding one leg

deep in its wing. For the man who sees this hidden state of turiya as the means by which the other three are guided, death and moksha are the same. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

Only as large as a man's thumb, this eternal organism, the Seed, the Bija, is ever full. When It becomes part of a human body—with its prana, mind, intellect and ten senses—It is set in motion. That Supreme Sovereign, worthy of reverential hymns, capable of everything when vested extrinsically, the prime cause of everything, is manifest as Gyana in the human Atman. Only a fool does not see him. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

There are those who have gained mastery of their minds and those who have not. Yet the Supreme Soul is equally present in all men—in the emancipated and in the bound; the difference being that nectar flows in a thick stream into the emancipated Yogis, who see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

If, on his life's journey, a man attains knowledge of self and not-self, it matters little whether he performs Agnihotra or not. O king, do not let words like *I am your servant* fall from the lips of such a man. Brahman has another name, Pure Knowledge. Only those who have restrained their minds know Him. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

He is illustrious and complete; all living creatures are merged into Him. The man who knows this embodiment of Oneness achieves moksha whilst alive in this world. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

Everything, even that which flies away, stretching thousands of wings and with the speed of the mind, must come back to the central spirit within the body, in which the most distant things reside. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The eye cannot perceive his form; only the pure of heart can behold him. He is pure-hearted who seeks universal good, succeeds in controlling his mind and does not allow his heart to be touched by grief. Such a man can abandon the world and all its cares and become immortal. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

Like serpents lying coiled and hidden in a pit, there are those who despite their learning follow their own instincts; but they keep their vices hidden. They deceive only those who have little sense. They deceive people by an outward show of dharma and lead them to hell. Know that Brahman

may well be attained by companionship with unlikely men. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The man who is freed knows that his impermanent body cannot give him grief or joy, or indeed any other attributes that attach to it. For him there can be no death or birth. Since he realises that Brahman, which has no dualities and which is constant everywhere and all the time, is where reality and illusion both reside, he can be emancipated. He knows that Brahman alone is the beginning and end, all causes and effects. Existing in the form of I, or Self, the divine, Eternal One is beheld by Yogis with their inner eye.

The man who knows Brahman is equal to Brahman. He is neither glorified by good deeds nor defiled by evil ones. It is only in ordinary men that good and bad karma produce different results. The man who has seen Brahman is immortal, Amrita; he is in the singular state called Kaivalya, unaffected by virtue or vice. In this way a man receives the essence of sweetness that is Brahman. Yogis see the Eternal One with their inner eye.

The heart of such a man is not distressed by slander, or by not having studied the Vedas, or by not having performed the Agnihotra. The knowledge of Brahman imparts to him the wisdom that only they who have restrained their minds have access to. Yogis see the Eternal One, the Brahman which frees the soul from grief and ignorance, with their inner eye.

The man who sees himself in everything no longer grieves, for grief is the lot of those who are occupied with worldly pursuits. Just as one's thirst may as easily be quenched in a well as in a vast reservoir, a man's knowledge of Brahman will quench his thirst for knowledge as easily as does knowledge of the entire Veda. Dwelling in the heart, and only as big as a thumb, that illustrious embodiment of wholeness cannot be seen. He is unborn, yet moves in wakefulness, day and night. The man who knows him becomes learned and is filled with ineffable joy.

I am the mother and father. I am the son. I am the soul of all that ever was and of all that shall ever be. I am the venerable grandfather; I am the father; I am the son. You live within my soul; but you are not mine nor am I yours. The Soul is the cause of my birth and procreation. I am the warp and weft of the universe. The foundation upon which I rest is indestructible. Unborn, yet awake, I move day and night. To know me is to be learned and full of joy.

Thus is the Brahman.

Subtler than the subtle, capable of looking into the past and the future, Brahman is awake in every creature. Those who know Him know that the Universal Father dwells in the heart of everything in creation.'"

CANTO 47

YANASANDHI PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra passes the night in conversation with Sanat Sujata and Vidura.

In the morning, all the kings and princes come to the sabha, full of joy on hearing that the Suta has returned and looking forward to seeing him. Both anxious and eager, they go to the beautiful hall with Dhritarashtra at their head to hear Yudhishtira's message that is charged with dharma and artha. The capacious sabha is spotlessly clean and adorned with a golden floor. It is as bright as the Moon and sprinkled with fragrant sandalwood water; luxurious seats made of gold, wood, marble and ivory, covered with exquisite fabric, fill that majestic court.

In one body do these kings and powerful others enter the Kuru sabha, with Dhritarashtra leading them: Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Salya, Kritavarman, Jayadratha, Aswatthama, Vikarna, Somadatta, Bahlika, the immensely wise Vidura and Maharatha Yuyutsu. With the regal and choleric Duryodhana at their head, Dusasana, Chitrasena, Subala's son Sakuni, Durmukha, Dussaha, Karna, Uluka and Vivimsati enter the sabha, looking like Indra with his entourage of Devas. The hall, filled with these heroic men, their arms like iron maces, is like a mountain cave filled with lions. Those mighty and fiery archers blaze like the Sun as they enter and sit down on wonderful thrones.

Once all the kings are seated, the door keeper announces the arrival of the Sutaputra Sanjaya, saying, ‘Here comes the chariot that was despatched to the Pandavas. Borne by the fleet Sindhu steeds, our duta has returned swiftly.’

Approaching with speed, Sanjaya, adorned with golden kundalas, alights from the ratha and strides into sabha filled with noble kings.

The Suta says, ‘O Kauravas, I have returned from seeing the sons of Pandu. The Pandavas salute all the Kurus, each according to his age. They pay their homage to the elderly and send greetings and blessings to their contemporaries and the younger men. Listen, O Kshatriyas, to what I said to the Pandavas, as I was instructed by Dhritarashtra when I went from here, and hear what they said in reply.’”

CANTO 48

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, I ask you in the presence of my son and all these kings, what did the illustrious and mighty Dhananjaya, that first among warriors, the scourge of evil men, say?'

Sanjaya says, 'Let Duryodhana hear the words that noble Arjuna, who is eager to fight, said in Krishna's hearing and with Yudhishtira's approval. Fearless in battle, aware of the might of his arms and eager to fight, the heroic Kiriti spoke to me in Krishna's presence.

He said, "O Suta, say these words to Dhritarashtra's son, in the presence of all the Kurus, also in the hearing of that foul-tongued, black-souled, dull-witted Karna, whose days are numbered and who spoils for battle with me, and in the hearing of all the kings who have gathered to go to war against the Pandavas. Make sure that the king and his ministers mark my words well."

O king, as attentively as the Devas listen to Indra did the Pandavas and Srinjayas listen to Arjuna's grave words.

The wielder of the Gandiva, his eyes as red as lotuses and eager for war, said, "If Duryodhana does not give Yudhishtira of the Ajamida vamsa his kingdom, it is plain that the sons of Dhritarashtra must have committed some heinous sin whose consequences they have not yet reaped, for there can be no other reason why they should want to go to war against Bhimasena, Arjuna and the twins, against Vasudeva, Sini's son, the

infallible marksmen Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin, and against Yudhishtira, who is a second Indra and who can consume heaven and earth by merely wishing them ill. If Dhritarashtra's son wants war with these men, then the goals of the Pandavas will be accomplished. Therefore, do not propose peace to the sons of Pandu, but let us have war if you like.

Yudhishtira lay on a bed of sorrows in the forest when he lived in exile; O, let a more painful bed than that, on bare earth, be Duryodhana's now, and let him lie down on it at his end, deprived of life. Win Duryodhana's men over to Yudhishtira's side, for my brother is blessed with modesty and wisdom, asceticism and self-restraint, courage and the might of dharma. Our king is also humble, righteous and ever truthful, and though he was deceived and betrayed in so many ways, he has forgiven it all and patiently borne great injustice.

When this eldest son of Pandu, of the controlled soul, directs the terrible anger that has accumulated for years at the Kurus, Duryodhana will repent. In the same way that a blazing fire burns dry grass in summer, so will Yudhishtira's flaming wrath consume Dhritarashtra's army, why, with a mere glance of his eye.

When Duryodhana sees the great and furious Bhimasena standing in his chariot with his mace in hand and vomiting the venom of his wrath, he will repent. When he sees the mail clad Bhima, who always fights in the front, on whom even his own followers can scarcely bear to look, felling hostile heroes and devastating the enemy's ranks, as if he was Yama himself, then vain Duryodhana will remember my words.

When he sees Bhima strike down elephants like mountain peaks, and sees blood flowing from their shattered heads like water from broken casks, Duryodhana will repent. When the fierce Bhima of fearful form falls upon Dhritarashtra's sons, mace in hand, and slaughters them, like a great lion attacking a herd of cattle, Duryodhana will repent. When the heroic Bhima, undaunted even by great danger and skilled in the use of all weapons, that crusher of enemy hosts, mounted on his chariot, grinds into the dust innumerable and better chariots, as well as entire divisions of footsoldiers, seizing enemy elephants with his iron-hard noose and mowing down Dhritarashtra's forces, like a sturdy woodsman a forest with his axe, Duryodhana will repent.

When he sees Dhritarashtra's armies consumed like a village of straw huts by fire, or like a field of ripe corn by lightning; when he sees his vast

army scattered, its leaders slain and the terrified men turning to flee, and all the warriors, humbled to the dust, scorched by fire of Bhimasena's weapons, Duryodhana will repent.

When Nakula, Kshatriya of wonderful feats, foremost of rathikas, shoots endless streams of deadly arrows and mangles Duryodhana's chariot-warriors, Duryodhana will repent. When Nakula, who is accustomed to comforts and luxuries, thinks back on that bed of anguish on which he slept for years in the vana and spews his wrath in a venomous jet, like an angry snake, Duryodhana will repent.

When Duryodhana sees our allied kings, who are ready to lay down their lives for Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, urged into battle by him, furiously advance in their resplendent chariots against the enemy, the son of Dhritarashtra will certainly repent. When the Kuru prince sees the five heroic sons of Draupadi, tender in years but not in deeds, and all masters of arms, storm fearlessly at the Kaurava legions, Duryodhana will repent.

When Sahadeva, bent on carnage, and mounted on his chariot of silent wheels and inexorable course, set with golden stars and drawn by superb horses, makes the heads of kings roll on the field with his volleys of arrows; when Duryodhana sees that masterly warrior, riding his ratha in the frightful havoc of bloody war, attack the enemy in all directions, Duryodhana will repent. Indeed, when the modest but mighty Sahadeva, skilled in battle, truthful, devoted to dharma and of boundless vigour, attacks the son of Gandhari in fierce encounter and routs all his followers, Duryodhana will repent.

When he sees Draupadi's sons, all great archers, all heroes and masters of weapons and fighting from chariots, dart at the foe like vicious, poisonous snakes, then will the son of Dhritarashtra repent for this war. When Parantapa Abhimanyu, as expert in arms as Krishna, overpowers the Kaurava legions with dark gales of arrows, Duryodhana will repent.

When he sees Subhadra's son, a child in years but not in prowess, as skilled with weapons as Indra himself, attack the enemy ranks like Yama, Duryodhana will repent. When young Prabhadraka of leonine vitality, experienced in battle, is among Dhritarashtra's sons and their troops, Duryodhana will repent.

When those veteran Maharathas, Virata and Drupada, attack Dhritarashtra's sons as they stand at the head of their legions, Duryodhana will repent. When the master of astras, Drupada, seated in his chariot and

eager to take the heads off your young warriors, decapitates them with inexorable arrows, Duryodhana will repent. When Parantapa Virata and his cool-headed Matsya warriors penetrate the ranks of the enemy, felling them all around as they advance, Duryodhana will repent. When he sees the eldest son of the Matsya king fighting from the van of the Pandava army, sitting in his chariot, calm and courageous, and clad in shining mail, Duryodhana will repent.

When that greatest of all Kaurava heroes, the virtuous son of Santanu, is slain in battle by Sikhandin, then all our enemies will die. This I know beyond doubt. When Sikhandin advances on his armoured ratha towards Bhishma, shattering multitudes of enemy rathas on the way, Duryodhana will repent. When Duryodhana sees Dhrishtadyumna, who has learnt all the secrets of the astra shastra from Drona, standing in splendour in the van of the Srinjaya force, he will repent.

When the Senapati of the Pandava host, of immeasurable prowess, who can withstand the charge of any army, flies at Drona, on his way razing Dhritarashtra's warriors with his arrows, Duryodhana will repent. What enemy can withstand him, who has for his lord that lion of the Vrishni race, the chief of the Somakas, who is modest and intelligent, mighty and invested with untold urjas and blessed with every noble quality?

Say this also to Duryodhana: Do not covet the kingdom. We have with us the dauntless Maharatha Satyaki, the grandson of Sini, who is an unsurpassed master of weapons on this Earth. Broad-chested and long-armed, that Parantapa, unrivalled in battle and a master of the greatest astras, wields a bow four cubits long. When that bane of his foes, the chief of the Sinis, lashes the enemy with his arrow storms, at my urging, overwhelming their leaders, Duryodhana will repent.

When that shining warrior of the long arms and firm grasp is resolved to fight, then, like cattle that scent lions on the wind, enemy forces flee, even before battle begins. This Kshatriya can split mountains and consume the universe in revelational flames. Blessed with awesome lightness of hand, he shines on the field of war like the Sun in the sky.

That lion of the Vrishnis, scion of Yadu's line, whose tutelage has been meticulous, commands supernal weapons; Satyaki commands all the greatest astras. When he sees Satyaki's golden chariot on the field, drawn by four white steeds, Duryodhana of the uncontrolled passions will repent.

When he sees my own chariot, glittering like gold and with bright gemstones inlaid, drawn by white Gandharva steeds, flying the banner of Hanuman, and driven by Krishna himself, that wretch of uncontrolled passions will repent. When, in the midst of the great war, he hears the incessant thrumming of my leather-gloved hands pulling the bowstrings of the Gandiva, loud as rolling thunder, Duryodhana will repent.

When he sees his troops abandoning him and running like deer from the field, overwhelmed by the darkness that I create with my arrow banks; when he sees countless winged arrows, which excoriate a man's bowels, flash from the Gandiva like lightning from storm clouds, and raze enemies by the thousands and devour horses and armour-clad elephants, Duryodhana will indeed repent.

When he sees me turn enemy arrows back on their courses, or shred them with my own shafts, foolish Duryodhana will repent. When my broad-headed arrows pluck the heads of young warriors from their bodies, like birds picking fruit from the treetops, Duryodhana will repent. When he sees his peerless warriors fall from their chariots, and elephants and horses roll lifeless on the field, slain by my arrows, Duryodhana will repent. When he sees his brothers fall all around him, dying even before they come within range of his enemy's weapons, and without having raised a weapon in battle, Duryodhana will repent.

I will loose an endless river of blazing arrows and, like Yama with mouth agape, swallow multitudes of chariots and foot-soldiers, and then that dog Duryodhana will repent. When he sees his own troops, covered with the dust whipped up by my chariot as it wheels swiftly in all directions, torn to shreds by shafts from the Gandiva, and the living deranged by fear, the wretched Duryodhana will repent.

When he sees his entire army flee in terror, their arms and legs mangled, and their minds unhinged; when he sees his horses, elephants and his best warriors slain, and his dry-mouthed and panic-stricken troops dead or wailing aloud as they lie dying beside their exhausted animals; when he sees hair, bones and skulls lying in mounds, like half-finished works of the Creator, that vile prince will repent.

When he sees on my chariot Krishna with his Panchajanya, and me with my pair of inexhaustible quivers, my Gandiva, my Devadatta and my white horses, Duryodhana will repent. When I consume the Kauravas, as Agni

consumes all the evil souls that throng together at the beginning of a new yuga, Dhritarashtra and all his sons will repent.

When the evil and wrathful son of Dhritarashtra is deprived of his prosperity, along with his brothers, his army and his followers, that fool, stripped of pride and trembling, will repent.

One morning, when I had finished my ritual bath and prayers, a Brahmana said to me, *Partha, you will have a difficult task to perform; you will have to fight your enemies. Either Indra will ride before you on his superb mount and with his Vajra in hand, razing your foes in battle, or Vasudeva's son Krishna will protect you from behind, in his chariot drawn by horses with Sugriva at their head.*

With complete faith in what he said, I have passed over Indra the wielder of the thunderbolt, preferring to have Krishna on my side. I have chosen Krishna to help me annihilate these evil ones. I see the hand of God in all this. The man, whose success Krishna merely wishes for, is sure to prevail over his enemies without Krishna needing to take up arms on his behalf. This is so, even if the adversaries are the Devas with Indra leading them, let alone mere mortals.

The man who wants to vanquish that first among all heroes, Krishna of the mighty urjas, in battle, may as well try to cross the ocean by swimming across it. Such a fool is like a man who tries to split open the Kailasa mountain by striking it with his palm; he does not cause the mountain the slightest damage, while his hand might break and his nails tear. He may as well be able to put out a raging forest fire with his bare hands, or stop the Sun and Moon from moving, or steal amrita from the Devas.

This is the same Krishna who mowed down all the Bhoja warriors and carried off Rukmini in his chariot, to make her his wife; and their son is the noble Pradyumna. Krishna is the darling of the Devas; he devastated the Gandharas and defeated all Nagnajita's sons to rescue the mighty king Sudarshana from confinement. It was Krishna who killed King Pandya by striking him with his chest; and he who destroyed the Kalingas in battle. It is he who burnt the city of Varanasi, which remained kingless for many years because there was no one to succeed its prince Sudakshina.

Ekalavya, the king of the Nishadas, always challenged him to battle; but Krishna slew him and he lay dead on a hillside like the Asura Jambha of old. Krishna, with Baladeva at his side, slew Ugrasena's evil son Kansa, while he sat in the midst of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, and then gave

Ugrasena the kingdom. It was Krishna who, fearless with his fathomless powers, fought Salya, lord of Saubha, the city that floats in the skies; and Krishna caught the Satagni of a hundred fires in his hand, when Salya hurled it at him at the gates of Saubha. No mortal can face Krishna's might.

The Asuras had a city called Pragjyotisha, formidable and inaccessible. There, Narakasura, the son of Bhumi Devi, kept the jewelled ear-rings of Aditi that he had taken by force. The Devas, who do not fear death, with Sakra at their head, could not subdue Naraka. The Devas saw Krishna's prowess; they saw his irresistible Chakra; they knew the purpose of his birth, and they begged him to quell Naraka and his fell Asuras; and blithely Krishna agreed. In the city of Nirmochana he slew six thousand Asuras; he shredded their arrows and killed Mura and hosts of other Rakshasas; then he entered the city.

There, a stupendous duel erupted between the dreadful Naraka and Vishnu's Avatara; until, slain by Krishna, Naraka lay lifeless, like a karnikara tree uprooted by the wind. Having killed the Earth's son and Mura, and having recovered the incomparable ear-rings, Krishna of unearthly prowess came back, alight with divine lustre and crowned with undying fame. The Devas, who witnessed his ineffable feats, blessed him, saying, *You will never tire in a fight; neither earth nor water will obstruct you; weapons shall never pierce your body.* And Krishna regarded this blessing as ample reward. This is Krishna, who is beyond all compare.

Dhritarashtra's son aspires to vanquish this same Vishnu, of infinite tejas; and the evil one often thinks of imprisoning him. Krishna bears all this for our sake. And vile Duryodhana wants to create a rift between Krishna and me. He will see for himself, when he is on the battlefield, how far he will be able to take Krishna's love away from the Pandavas!

I will bow to Bhishma, to Drona and his son, and to the peerless son of Saradwat, our acharya Kripa; but then I will begin the battle to regain our kingdom. Dharmadeva will bring righteous destruction down on our sinful cousin who is so eager to fight us.

Deceitfully beaten at dice by those base men, we, of royal birth, spent twelve agonising years in the forest and one long year in hiding. While we, the Pandavas, are still alive, how can the sons of Dhritarashtra rejoice in their affluence or power?

If they defeat us in battle, with the help of Indra and the Devas, it will mean that vice is superior to virtue, and the very concept of dharma would

cease to exist. If indeed a man's actions do bear fruit and if we are better men than Duryodhana, I believe that, with Krishna at my side, I will kill Duryodhana and all his kinsmen. Lord of men, if robbing us of our kingdom is evil, if our own good deeds are not in vain, Duryodhana's is doomed.

O Kauravas, you will see with your own eyes that, if they come to war, the sons of Dhritarashtra will surely die. If they desist from fighting, they might live; but if there is a battle, none of them will be left alive. I will kill all Dhritarashtra's sons and Karna, and take the entire kingdom. Do whatever you think is best and, meanwhile, enjoy the time you have with your wives and other sweet things of life.

There are many venerable Brahmanas with us, who are knowers of the Shastras, of pure conduct, of noble birth, witnesses to all the events that have transpired. They, who can understand and interpret the astrological significance of the movements of the planets and their relative positions to the stars; who can explain the mysteries of destiny and predict the future; and who know the signs of the zodiac and what is happening every hour, prophesy a great defeat for the Kurus and the Srinjayas, and final victory for the Pandavas.

Because of this, Yudhishtira, who never made an enemy, considers that he has already achieved his goal, of vanquishing his enemies. Krishna, who sees the invisible future, sees all this; and I, too, with the clear and unerring foresight that I acquired years ago, the chaksushi I had from the Gandharva Angaraparna, see into the future. If they fight, the sons of Dhritarashtra will not live. My Gandiva stretches without my touching it; the bow-string trembles without being drawn; and arrows stand up in my quiver, impatient to fly out. My gleaming sword slides out of its scabbard by itself, like a moulting snake from its old skin; and terrible voices scream from atop my flag-staff, saying, *When will you yoke your chariot, Arjuna?* Hordes of jackals howl hideously at night; Rakshasas land from the sky in dense swarms; deer and jackals, peacocks and crows, vultures, cranes and wolves, and golden-plumed birds follow my chariot when I yoke my white horses to it.

Single-handedly, with torrents of arrows, I will despatch all these warrior kings to Yamaloka. Just as a blazing conflagration consumes a forest in summer, I will consume my enemies with the astras I invoke. I will loose the Sthuna, Karna, Pasupata, Brahma and the other inexorable missiles that Indra gave me; and with my heart set on the death of those

kings, I will obliterate all who enter the battlefield. Only after this, will I rest; this is my resolve.

Tell them all this, Sanjaya.

Look at Duryodhana's foolishness. He is planning to go to war against men who are invincible, even to Indra with the Devas. So let the wish of Santanu's aged son Bhishma, Kripa, Drona and his son, and the unfathomably wise Vidura—*May the Kauravas have long lives*, be proven true!" said Arjuna,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 49

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "O Bhaarata, in the midst of all the assembled kings, Santanu's son Bhishma says to Duryodhana, 'Once long ago, Brihaspati and Indra went to Brahma, accompanied by the Maruts, the Vasus and Agni, the Adityas, the Sadhyas, the seven Devarishis, the Gandharvas, Viswavasu and the Apsaras. Reverentially the Swargavasis bowed to the Lord of the universe and sat surrounding him. Then, the two ancient deities, the Rishis Nara and Narayana, drew into themselves the vital energies of all present there, and left the place.

On seeing this, Brihaspati asked Brahma, "Who are these two that leave without worshipping you? Pitamaha, who are they?"

Brahma replied, "These two, endowed with great tapasya, blaze in lustrous beauty, illuminating both Bhumi and Swarga. They, who are mighty, all-pervading and unequalled, are Nara and Narayana, who have come from the other world to live in Brahmaloka. Of incomparable glory, they shine with their tapasya and, by everything they do, enhance the joy of the world. The Devas and Gandharvas worship them, and their purpose is to destroy the Asuras."

Indra and the Devas, with Brihaspati at their head, went to the place where Nara and Narayana sat in tapasya. At that time, the Devas were in turmoil from a war that raged between them and the Asuras, and Indra asked the exalted pair to grant him a boon. They told him to name his wish,

and Indra asked for their help, promising that the Devas would do as Nara and Narayana wished. It was with their help that Indra vanquished the Daityas and Danavas. Parantapa Nara slew hundreds of thousands of Indra's foes—the Paulomas and the Kalakhanjas.

It was Nara, as Arjuna, who, from his whirling chariot that was broken during their duel, cut off Jambhasura's head with a broad-headed arrow just as the demon was about to swallow him. It was he who stormed Hiranyapura, the Daitya city across the ocean, and vanquished sixty-thousand Nivatakavachas. It was this conqueror, Mahabaho Arjuna, who gratified Agni by vanquishing the Devas led by Indra. Narayana, also, has slain countless other Daityas and Danavas. Such is their inexhaustible tejas and urjas; and you now see them together, their purpose one.

The two Maharathas you face, Krishna and Arjuna, are the same timeless and divine Narayana and Nara. Of all who live on this Earth, they alone cannot be vanquished by the Asuras or, indeed, by the Devas with Indra at their head. Narayana is Krishna and Nara is Phalguna.

They are one soul born as two. Their karma gives them the enjoyment of many eternal and inexhaustible realms; and they are born again and again into the world when cataclysmic wars become necessary to cleanse Bhumi Devi. Their mission is to fight and make a great sacrifice of human blood. This is what Narada, who is an authority on the Vedas, told the Vrishnis.

O Duryodhana, when you see Kesava, with his conch-shell, discus and mace in hand, together with the awesome bowman Arjuna armed with various astras; when you behold those eternal and irradiant ones, the two Krishnas, riding the same chariot, then you will remember what I have just said. Child, danger threatens the Kurus because dharma and artha have deserted your mind. If you pay no heed to what I say, you will hear of an unimaginable, revelational carnage, for all the Kauravas follow your lead.

All the Kurus listen to me but, Bull of the Bhaaratas, you put your faith in the opinions of just three men: Karna, a low-born Suta's son cursed by Parasurama; Sakuni, the son of Subala; and your vile and sinful brother Dusasana.'

Karna says, 'Bhishma, it is not right for you to still mock me as a Sutaputra, for I have adopted Kshatriya dharma without abandoning those who are my own. Besides, what evil is there in me? None among Dhritarashtra's people will accuse me of having committed any wrong; never have I done any injury to Dhritarashtra's son. And I will kill all the

Pandavas in battle. How can wise men make peace again with those who were once their sworn enemies? It is my duty to do whatever I can to please king Dhritarashtra, and especially Duryodhana, for the kingdom is his.'

Bhishma hears Karna and says to Dhritarashtra, 'Although this man often boasts about his intentions to kill them, he is not equal to even a sixteenth part of the noble Pandavas. The great calamity that is about to overtake your evil sons is the work of this Sutaputra. Relying on him, foolish Duryodhana insulted his cousins, those Kshatriyas of divine descent. Over the years, what feat has Karna achieved to equal any that each of the Pandavas has?

What did this man do when he saw mighty Dhananjaya kill his beloved brother? Why was he absent when Dhananjaya charged the assembled Kurus outside Virata's city, routed them in battle and stripped them of their clothes? Where was this son of a Suta, who roars like a bull now, when the Gandharvas captured your son during the Goshayatra? It was Bhima, the illustrious Partha and the twins who challenged the Gandharvas and vanquished them.

Heedless of dharma and artha, what Karna does best is boast. O may you be blessed, Bharatarishabha.'

Bharadwaja's high-souled son Drona listens to Bhishma and, after paying homage to the gathered kings, says to Dhritarashtra, 'O king, do what Bhishma says. It is not wise for you to follow the counsel of covetous men. Making peace with the Pandavas, before war breaks out, is the most judicious course open to you. Arjuna will do everything he has said, which Sanjaya has repeated here, for there is no bowman to equal him in all the three worlds.'

The king takes no notice of what Drona and Bhishma have said and, without responding to them, asks Sanjaya again about the Pandavas. It is at this moment, when the king does not offer any response to Bhishma and Drona, that the Kauravas lose all hope of living.'"

CANTO 50

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

“Dhritarashtra says, ‘What did Dharmaputra Yudhishtira say, Sanjaya, when he heard that a great force has assembled here in our support? What is he doing, in view of the war to come? Which of his brothers and sons look to him, waiting for his command? Who amongst his advisors tries to dissuade that honourable and virtuous king from war, and persuades him to make peace instead, knowing that my son’s evil, deceitful deeds have provoked him?’

Sanjaya says, ‘May you be blessed! All Pandu’s sons, as well as the Panchalas, wait eagerly for his command, but he restrains them. Multitudes of battle-ready war chariots belonging to the Pandavas and the Panchalas have come in separate divisions, making Yudhishtira glad. Just as the sky brightens at sunrise, so have the Panchalas’ hearts at being reunited with Kunti’s resplendent son, who floods the world with his lustre.

All the Panchalas, Kekayas and Matsyas, even their cowherds and shepherds rejoice with an equally happy Yudhishtira. Bevies of Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaisya girls have come to catch a glimpse of Arjuna in his coat of mail.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Sanjaya, tell us about the armies that Dhrishtadyumna, the Somakas and others have brought, using which the Pandavas will fight us.’

With this barrage of questions put to him in the great sabha, Sanjaya falls into dark thought and heaves long, deep sighs. Suddenly, he collapses onto the floor.

Vidura cries to his blind brother, 'Rajan, Sanjaya has fallen to the floor, unconscious and unable to speak.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I am sure it is from anxiety after seeing those Purushavyaghras, those Maharathas.'

Sanjaya recovers consciousness and is comforted. Then in the presence of all the Kurus in the sabha, he says to Dhritarashtra, 'O Rajarajan, I did indeed see those great warriors, the sons of Kunti. They are lean and trim from the austerities they observed while they lived in the Matsya kingdom. Listen, Rajan, to which kings and princes have joined them to fight you.

The noble Dhrishtadyumna will fight against you. He is a virtuous soul, who never forsakes virtue, not from anger, fear or temptation; not for the sake of wealth or because of an argument. He is an authority on dharma; and he is the best of righteous men. He has never made an enemy, but he will fight on the side of the Pandavas, against you.

Then there is the man who has no equal in the strength of his arms, who with his bow subjugated all the kings of this Earth, who long ago vanquished the kings of Kasi, Anga, Magadha and Kalinga. This man, Bhimasena, will fight for the Pandavas, against you. It is by his strength that his four brothers survived after he rescued them from the burning house of lac. This same Vrikodara saved them from the cannibal Hidimba; it is he who rescued Yagnaseni when Jayadratha abducted her; and it is he who saved the Pandavas from the forest fire at Varanavata. This formidable Bhima will fight for his brothers against you.

Then there is the warrior who slew the Krodhavasas to please Draupadi, successfully crossing the rugged and fearsome mountains of Gandhamadana. His arms have the strength of ten thousand elephants; and with him for their ally the Pandavas will fight against you. Long ago, and with only Krishna's help, this Kshatriya vanquished Purandara in order to please Agni; and he also gratified, with his prowess, the God of gods, Uma's trident-bearing lord Mahadeva, who dwells in his mountain fastness. This Arjuna, the greatest warrior, subjugated all the kings of the Earth, and with him the Pandavas will face you in war.

There is also that wonderful warrior Nakula, who vanquished all of the western world, the Mlechcha lands. He, too, this handsome son of Madri's,

this unrivalled archer, will fight against you, O Kaurava.

Then there is the Kshatriya who defeated the warriors of Kasi, Anga and Kalinga. With Sahadeva on their side, the Pandavas will meet you in battle. There are only four men on Earth to equal him in sheer vitality—Aswatthama, Dhrishtaketu, Rukmi and Pradyumna. And against this youngest of the Pandavas, the terrible Sahadeva Manavottama, source of Madri's joy, you must do battle.

There is also Sikhandin, who was once born on Earth as the king of Kasi's daughter, during which life she practised the most severe tapasya, praying to become the instrument of Bhishma's death in another birth. She passed through death and was born as the Panchala king's daughter; but by divine chance, she has become a man. Sikhandin knows the strengths and weaknesses of both sexes; this invincible prince of Panchala, who fought the Kalingas, who is skilled in all the astras, will now fight on the side of the Pandavas, against you. With this woman who was turned into a man, and a formidable bowman whose destiny it is to bring Bhishma down, the Pandavas will fight against you.

There are others. The mighty archers, the five Kekaya princes clad in wondrous mail, will fight beside the Pandavas against you. You must face Yuyudhana, Satyaki the warrior of the long arms, who is a master of astras, intelligent and of indefatigable prowess, that lion of the Vrishnis. You will encounter Virata, who has been the refuge of the Pandavas for some time.

The lord of Kasi, that Maharatha who rules in Varanasi, has become an ally of the Pandavas, and with him in their army they will fight you. The noble sons of Draupadi, tender in years but invincible in battle, as unapproachable as serpents, will fight beside the Pandavas against you.

Do not forget Abhimanyu, whose tejas is as lustrous as Krishna's and whose self-restraint is as stern as Yudhishtira's; with him on their side the Pandavas will fight you.

Sisupala's warlike son Dhrishtaketu, of great fame and incomparable energy, is inexorable when roused. With this king of the Chedis, who has come to their side with an akshauhini of troops, the Pandavas will fight you.

Krishna is the refuge of the Pandavas, as Indra is of the Devas; and with him on their side they will fight you. Sarabha, brother of the king of the Chedis, has come with Karakarsa; and with both these in their army, the Pandavas will fight you.

Jarasandha’s son Sahadeva, and Jayatsena, both unrivalled in battle, have also pledged themselves to the Pandava cause; and with them the Pandavas will fight you. And the mighty and fearless Drupada, with a vast force, is resolved to fight on the Pandava side against you.

O Bharatarishabha, with the support of these and hundreds of other kings from the east and north, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja prepares for war.’”

CANTO 51

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'All the men you mention are, indeed, great and valiant, but Bhima is equal to all of them together. I am as afraid of Bhima's anger as a plump deer of a hunting tiger. I pass my nights in fearful sleeplessness, heaving feverish sighs, yes, like a small animal terrified of a lion.

He is mighty-armed and as powerful as Indra, and I do not see in our whole army even one man who can withstand him in battle. Wrathful and unwavering in his hatred, this son of Kunti and Pandu does not smile even in jest; mad with rage, he looks askance at all and speaks in a thunderous voice. Impetuous and with no knowledge of fear, long-armed and dreadfully strong, he will not leave even one of my foolish sons alive.

Vrikodara, that bull among the Kurus, whirling his mace in battle like Yama, will kill all my sons, who have set themselves on this calamitous course. Even as I speak, I see that terrible mace of his—six-sided, made of iron and adorned with gold—raised in fury: like a Brahmana's curse. Bhima will wreak havoc among my troops like a lion amongst a herd of deer. He is the only one of the brothers who will seek the death of all my sons.

Since his childhood, he has a voracious appetite and was endowed with fiery energy; and also since then he has been hostile towards my sons. Even now my heart trembles at the memory of how Bhima crushed Duryodhana and my other princes during their childhood fights. With his superior

strength, he always dominated and bullied my sons, and it is Bhima of the terrible prowess who is the cause, the root, of this enmity.

I see Bhima, mad with rage, and fighting from the very van of their legions, devour my entire force of men, elephants and horses. He is also Drona and Arjuna's equal in his skill with other weapons; he is as swift as the wind, and in wrath like Maheswara himself. Who is there, Sanjaya, who can kill that dreadful Kshatriya in battle? I deem it a blessing that my sons have not already been killed by that awful Parantapa. How can any man withstand the prowess of this absolute warrior who has single-handedly savaged so many great Yakshas and Rakshasas? I was never able to control him even when he was a child. How will I do so now, especially since my dishonourable sons have wounded his great heart?

He is bitter and full of anger; he will not relent. Frowning and ever looking askance, as he does now, he cannot be persuaded away from horrible vengeance. He is heroic and has no equal in might or handsomeness. Fair-skinned and tall as a palmyra, taller than Arjuna by the span of the thumb, this second son of Pandu is swifter than a horse and stronger than an elephant. His voice is soft, deep and dangerous, and his eyes are the colour of honey.

Vyasa told me long ago of his remarkable physique and strength even when he was a child. Swinging his iron mace he will shatter chariots, elephants, men and horses. My child, for his disobedience to me I have, in the past, insulted this best of Kshatriyas, whose rage is so quickly sparked. How will my sons resist the power of his beautiful iron mace, which can kill a hundred men in moments, and which, when hurled at an enemy, makes the most fearful sound?

O, my foolish sons want to cross the vast, shoreless ocean that is Bhima, fathomless, swirling with vicious, tempestuous currents that are as deadly as whistling storms of arrows. My sons believe themselves wise and ignore my piteous appeals for caution. They see only the imagined honey of victory, not their impending doom. My sons, who will not hesitate to do battle with Yama, are doomed to death by the Supreme Ordainer; they are like little creatures already in a great lion's jaws.

Bhima's six-sided mace is four cubits long, and always lethal. When he hurls it at them how will my sons defy it? Bhima will whirl his mace around and smash the heads of our elephants; wetting the corners of his mouth with his tongue, he will draw deep breaths and rush, roaring, against our tuskers,

matching the angry beasts roar for roar. He will erupt into the tight knot of our chariots and with unerring aim kill the greatest of our warriors who dare face him. When this happens, will even one of my men escape this conflagration of a man? Bhima Mahabaho will crush my forces, scythe a passage through them and, dancing with his mace in his hand, reveal the spectacle of the pralaya at the end of this yuga.

Like a maddened elephant which brings flowering trees crashing down, Vrikodara in rage will mow down the ranks of my sons. Sanjaya, he will divest my warriors of their chariots, sarathies, horses and flagstaffs; wildly, he will be among our elephant warriors; and, like the tempestuous Ganga in spate uproots trees on her banks, that Purushavyaghra will devastate my sons' troops in battle. Terrified of Bhimasena, my sons, their followers and the kings allied to them will fly in all directions.

It was Bhima who, long ago with Vasudeva's help, entered the inmost apartments of Jarasandha, the invincible king of Magadha, and killed him, thereby enabling the Pandavas to subjugate Bhumi Devi herself and perform the Rajasuya yagna. That he did not conquer the Kauravas, who were protected by Bhishma's prowess, and the Andhakas and the Vrishnis with their brilliant diplomacy, is only because fortune smiled on these. Ah, Bhima went to Jarasandha, who had no equal, and with bare hands, tore his massive body in two. What could be more astounding than that?

O Sanjaya, like a serpent who has stored his poison for years, Bhima will spew all the venom of his wrath at my sons in battle. As Indra incinerated the Danavas with his thunderbolt, Bhimasena, mace in hand, will blast all my sons to their deaths. Oh, he is irresistible, and in my mind's eye, I see him even now, his coppery eyes ablaze, slaughtering my princes. Even without his mace or bow, chariot or armour, there is no man on Earth who can withstand Bhima.

Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Saradwat's son Kripa know as well as I do, Bhima's intelligence and strength. These bulls among men, who are deep knowers of Kshatriya dharma, and for whom death in battle is desirable, will take their stand in the van of our forces. Destiny is inexorable, especially for men; so, even though I see victory for the Pandavas, I will no more try to restrain my sons. These mighty bowmen of mine, keen to take the time-honoured path to Swarga, will lay down their lives in battle, but without betraying their fame on Earth.

Child, my sons and the Pandavas are equals; all of them are grandsons of Bhishma and disciples of Drona and Kripa.

These three venerable ones are men of honour and will repay the small services that we have done them. For a Kshatriya who has taken up arms and wants to observe his dharma, death in battle is the highest good and brings punya. I weep, however, for all those that will fight the Pandavas. The danger that Vidura foresaw is near.

On the one hand, Sanjaya, wisdom cannot overcome sorrow but, on the other, grief seems to make wisdom evaporate. When even Rishis who are free from worldly concerns and who view the affairs of the universe with detachment are all affected by adversity and prosperity, it is small wonder that I, who am attached to a thousand things, my sons, my kingdom, my wives, my grandsons and my kinsmen, grieve. What good can there possibly be in store for me in the face of this terrible danger? Considering all things, I am convinced that the end of the Kurus is at hand.

That game of dice was the cause of the terrible fate which overtakes us each moment. Foolish Duryodhana committed that sin out of greed, and ever-fleeting, all-knowing Time, who controls all things, made him do it. I am bound helpless to the wheel of Time and cannot escape it. Tell me, Sanjaya, where shall I go? What shall I do? How shall I do it? My foolish Kauravas will all die, for their time has come. Helplessly I will have to hear their women wailing when my hundred sons are killed. Ah, how will death come to me?

As a summer fire, fanned by the wind, consumes dry grass, Bhima, mace in hand and with Arjuna beside him, will raze all who fight for me.'”

CANTO 52

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'He whom we have never heard uttering a falsehood, he who has Dhananjaya to fight on his side, will attain sovereignty over the three worlds.

I cannot think of anyone who can face the wielder of the Gandiva in battle. When he shoots winged arrows, nalikas and other shafts that pierce men's mail and breasts, he has no rival. Perhaps, if those bulls among men, Drona and Karna, stand united against him the outcome could be uncertain; but I am sure that final victory will not be mine.

Karna is compassionate and, at the same time, rash; the Acharya is elderly and most fond of his favourite pupil, Arjuna of the firm grasp of the bow, Arjuna who is brilliant and mighty. The encounter between them will be ferocious and will not result in any one's clear defeat. All these are heroic, masters of weapons, and have earned great fame. They might give up sovereignty over the gods if it is offered them, but not the chance to prove themselves in the coming war.

Peace will certainly result if either Drona or Karna or Phalguna falls. However, if truth be faced squarely, there is no one who can kill Arjuna. O, how can we pacify his anger against my foolish sons? There are others who are masters of weapons, who conquer and are conquered, but Arjuna always prevails.

Thirty years have passed since Arjuna gratified Agni Deva in the Khandava vana by vanquishing all the Devas. We have never heard of him being defeated anywhere, my child. Like Indra, victory is always Arjuna's; he has Krishna for his charioteer, who is also never conquered. We hear that the two Krishnas riding in the same chariot and the Gandiva are united as a single ineluctable force. As for us, we do not have a bow of that calibre, or a warrior like Arjuna or a charioteer like Krishna. Duryodhana's foolish followers do not think of this.

O Sanjaya, even a thunderbolt that falls on one's head leaves something undestroyed, but Arjuna's arrows leave nothing. Even now I see him unleashing his arrows in hurricanes, wreaking devastation all round, unerringly plucking heads from bodies. Even now I see flaming arrows flare from the Gandiva, burning all around and consuming the armies of my sons. Even now I see my vast army with its diverse forces struck with panic at the rumble of Savyasachi's chariot, and fleeing in all directions.

Just as a great conflagration, its flames fanned by the wind and spreading wild in all directions, consumes dry leaves and grass, so will the flames that are Arjuna's astras consume my troops. He will loose arrows beyond count each moment; ah, he will be irresistible, like Yama Deva himself.

When I hear that all kinds of evil omens manifest in the homes of the Kurus, on the battlefield and all around them, I am certain that annihilation will overtake our Bharata vamsa.'"

CANTO 53

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'The followers of the Pandavas are as strong and eager for victory as the Pandavas themselves are, and determined to sacrifice their lives for it.

My son, you have told me who my enemies are—the mighty kings of Panchala, Kekaya, Matsya and Magadha. Not only them, but Krishna, that Creator of the universe, that all-mighty one who can conquer the three worlds with Indra at their head, is on the side of the Pandavas and bent on giving them victory. Then there is Satyaki, who acquired the entire astra shastra from Arjuna in a moment. That scion of the Sini vamsa will stand on the battlefield, shooting arrows as effortlessly as a farmer sows seeds. The prince of Panchala, Dhrishtadyumna, awesome and ruthless Maharatha, a master of all the astras, will also fight my forces.

Great is my fear of Yudhishtira's anger, of Arjuna's prowess, and of the twins and Bhimasena. I am afraid that when those lords of men spread their mesh of unearthly arrows over them, my troops will not extricate themselves. That is why I weep, Sanjaya.

Pandunandana Yudhishtira is majestically handsome, endowed with great tejas, blessed with the power of Brahma, intelligent beyond common ken, wise and virtuous. He has the best allies and advisors and is surrounded by men who are ready for battle. His brothers and father-in-law are Maharathas. That Purushavyaghra, the son of Pandu, is also blessed

with profound patience; he keeps his own counsel, is compassionate and modest; his might is unassailable; he is deeply learned, has his passions under control and his senses subdued, and is dedicated to serving the elderly. Possessed of every virtue, he is like an unquenchable fire.

What man is fool enough to fly moth-like into that blazing Pandava fire! Alas, I have deceived him and, like a long-tongued inferno, he will burn my foolish sons in battle, leaving none alive. I have come to the conclusion that it is better not to fight against him.

O Kauravas, let your minds be in accord with mine. Without doubt, all the Kuru vamsa will perish if there is war. I am blind, but this I see so clearly. If we do as my better lights urge, my heart might still find peace. If you agree that war is not the best option, we will do our utmost to bring about peace. Yudhishtira will not be unmoved when he sees us in distress; he is angry with me only because he blames me for this unjust war.'"

CANTO 54

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Great King, you speak truly. In the event of war, the annihilation of the Kshatriyas by the Gandiva is certain. I cannot understand how you, who are wise and well aware of Arjuna's power, still follow your son's lead.

You have wronged the sons of Pritha from the very beginning and repeatedly sinned against them; this is no time for remorse. A father is his children's best friend and, if he is always watchful and selfless in his affection, should swiftly seek their welfare. The man who wrongs them, instead, cannot be called a father.

When you heard of the defeat of the Pandavas at dice, you laughed foolishly like a child and said, *This is won, this is ours!* When cruel words were spoken to the sons of Pritha you did not intervene, for you were pleased at the prospect of your sons gaining the entire kingdom. At that time you did not foresee their inevitable downfall.

The Kuru kingdom, the lands called Jangala, is your paternal inheritance, but you have gained the whole Earth thanks to the might of the Pandava heroes, who made over their empire and all their vast conquests to you. You cannot imagine that you acquired all of it yourself. When the king of the Gandharvas seized your sons and when they were about to sink in a shoreless sea without a boat to save them it was Partha, O king, who rescued them.

In foolish glee you laughed at the Pandavas when they were beaten at dice, and again as they went into exile. When Arjuna looses a shower of his astras the very oceans will dry up and be no more, let alone men of flesh and blood. He is the best of all archers; the Gandiva is the best of all bows; Kesava is the best of all beings; the Sudarsana is the best of all weapons; and his chariot, with the Vanara emblazoned on its banner, is the best of all rathas. That chariot of his, flying that flag and drawn by white steeds, will consume us all in battle like the whirling wheel of Kaala.

Bull of the Bhaaratas, that best of kings who has Bhima and Arjuna fighting for him already owns the world. The Kauravas led by Duryodhana will see their forces fall, terror-struck and in despair; and when Bhima strikes they will all be razed. Paralysed by their fear of Bhima and Arjuna, your sons and their followers will find yawning defeat, and death.

The Matsyas, the Panchalas, the Salvas and the Surasenas have all withdrawn their homage and disregard you. Knowing the tejas of that wise king, they have all joined the son of Pritha and, loyal to him, will oppose your sons. He who has committed evil and wronged the sons of Pandu, who are all wedded to dharma and deserve neither punishment nor death; he who hates them even now, your sinful son Duryodhana, with all his followers, must be restrained by all the means you command.

It is not fitting that you grieve like this. The wise Vidura and I said as much even during the game of dice. Lamenting for the Pandavas as if you had no part to play in what resulted in their present condition is only hypocrisy, and will prove futile, O my king.'"

CANTO 55

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Fear not, O king; do not grieve for us. We are more than able to vanquish our enemy in battle.

When the Pandavas were living in exile in the forest many Maharathas came to them: Krishna came with a huge army, in battle array and able to crush entire kingdoms; the Kekayas, Dhrishtaketu and Pritha's kinsman Dhrishtadyumna came with numerous other kings. And, assembling in a place not far from Indraprastha, those great warriors denounced you and all the Kurus. Bhaarata, those Maharathas, led by Krishna, paid homage to Yudhishtira, who sat amongst them, wearing deerskin.

The kings urged Yudhishtira to take back his kingdom and expressed their fervent wish to kill you and all your adherents. When I heard this I was struck with fear at the danger that threatened our people and spoke to Bhishma, Drona and Kripa.

I said to them, "I do not think the Pandavas will keep the pact they made. Krishna wants to kill us all. With the exception of Vidura, all of you will be killed; Dhritarashtra, who knows dharma, will also be spared. Krishna wants to bestow the entire kingdom of the Kurus on Yudhishtira.

What should we do? Shall we surrender, or flee? Or shall we fight the enemy, even if it means giving up all hope of life? If we fight them, our defeat is certain, for Yudhishtira still commands all the kings of the Earth.

The people of the realm are disgruntled and our friends are also irate with us. All the kings, especially our friends and relatives, speak ill of us.

There can be no shame in our surrendering, for from time immemorial the weaker side has chosen to make peace. However, I grieve for that Purushottama, my blind father, who will be overcome by sorrow and endless misery. You already know, Rajan, that all your other sons opposed the enemy only to please me. The mighty sons of Pandu will avenge the wrongs done to them by butchering all Dhritarashtra's race along with all our ministers and royal counsellors."

Drona, Bhishma, Kripa and Aswatthama saw how I was wracked with anxiety and said to me, "Have no fear, Parantapa. If the enemy declares war against us, they will not vanquish us in battle. Each of us, singly, can quell all the kings of the Earth. Let them come. Our arrows will curb their pride.

Long ago, inflamed with anger on the death of his father, Bhishma humbled all the kings single-handedly from his chariot. Countless Kshatriyas that furious Kurusattama killed, and in terror those that lived surrendered themselves into his protection. This Bhishma is on our side, and even now can crush all our enemies in battle. Therefore, Bhaarata, you quell your fear."

The Pandavas of great prowess have now resolved to fight us. Once they ruled all the world, but now our enemies without allies and their old power, and cannot possibly defeat us. Bharatarishabha, I am now Sovereign of the Earth, and all these kings assembled here are loyal to me in prosperity and adversity. They will enter fire or water for my sake.

They laugh to see you lament like an ignorant child and so full of fear to hear the Pandavas being praised. Every one of these kings can withstand the Pandavas. Indeed, Rajan, every one of them thinks he is all-powerful. Indra himself cannot subdue my vast host. Brahma himself cannot destroy it, though he may wish to.

Yudhishtira has given up hope of getting a city and asks for just five villages because he is afraid of the army I have assembled and of my power. Your belief in Vrikodara's strength is baseless. You do not know how strong I am. There is no one on Earth who can match me in a duel with maces. No man has ever beaten me in a gada yuddha, nor ever will.

I suffered many privations out of my devotion to learning when I lived in the home of my Acharya. I have mastered all the knowledge and skills he had to impart. I am not afraid of Bhima or the others. Blessed one, waiting

humbly upon my guru Sankarshana as I did, he was sure that I, Duryodhana, have no equal in battle. In battle I am Balarama's equal, and in strength there is no one on Earth superior to me.

Bhima will not bear even a single blow of my mace. One wrathful stroke will send him to Yama. Rajan, I am eager to see Vrikodara with his mace in hand; long have I wished for this. I will strike him like thunder and my detested cousin will die, all his limbs shattered. Why, one blow of my mace will split the mountains of Himavat into thousands of pieces. Vrikodara knows the truth of this, as do Krishna and Arjuna: that there is no one equal to Duryodhana at the mace.

Dispel the fear that Bhima invokes in you, for have no doubt that I will kill him in savage battle. My lord, do not be dejected. After I have slain Bhima, my numberless chariot warriors, all as mighty as me, will quickly bring Arjuna down. Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Drona's son, Karna, Bhurisravas, Salya, the king of Pragjyotisha and Jayadratha king of the Sindhus can each kill the Pandavas on his own. United, they will send Arjuna to Yama in an instant.

There is no reason why the combined armies of all the kings, fighting as one, cannot vanquish Dhananjaya. Bhishma, Drona, Drona's son and Kripa will cover him in a hundred shrouds of arrows and, broken, Arjuna will vanish into death's catacombs.

Our Pitamaha Bhishma, born of Devi Ganga, is superior to Santanu. He was born amongst men, but he is a holy being, whom even the Devas cannot face. There is no man on Earth who can kill Bhishma. Pleased with the sacrifice Bhishma made for his sake, his father gave him an exceptional boon: *You shall not die except by your own wish*.

Drona was born of Bharadwaja Muni in a water-pot, with complete knowledge of the astra shastra at his very birth. Kripa, the best of Acharyas, whose father is Rishi Gautama, was born in a bank of river reeds and he, too, cannot be killed.

Aswatthama's father, mother and uncle were not born from a woman's womb. That hero, too, is on my side. All these Maharathas are veritable gods and can confound Indra himself in battle. Arjuna cannot even look upon any one of these. When united, these tigers among men will bring him down like a pride of lions does a deer.

Karna is equal to Bhishma, Drona and Kripa. Parasurama, too, declared him his equal. Karna was born with kundalas of dazzling beauty; and to

please Sachi Devi, Indra begged him for them in exchange for an infallible shakti. How will Arjuna escape Karna when Radheya has that astra?

I am sure of victory; it is a fruit I hold in my hand. The rout of my enemies is already being talked about everywhere.

Bhaarata, in war Bhishma kills ten thousand soldiers in a day. As powerful as him are the master bowmen Drona, Drona's son and Kripa. In addition, the Samsaptaka warriors are resolved to fight Arjuna to the death. There are other kings, too, who regard themselves as being superior to Savyasachi, and who are determined to kill him.

Why then are you so fearful of the Pandavas? Once Bhimasena is killed who amongst them will continue to fight? Seven warriors—the five Pandava brothers, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki—are the backbone of the Pandava forces. We have Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Drona's son; Karna, Somadatta and Bahlika; Salya of Pragjyotisha, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Jayadratha. We have your sons Dusasana, Durmukha and Dussaha, and the others; we have Srutayu, Chitrasena, Purumitra and Vivimsati; Sala, Bhurisravas and Vikarna. And I have assembled eleven akshauhinis. The enemy's army is far smaller than mine, with only seven. How will they defeat me?

Brihaspati has said that a king should fight an army which is less than his by a third. My army is bigger by more than that, my king. Besides, I know that the enemy has many shortcomings, while my forces are endowed with as many strengths. Knowing all this, and that my force is superior and that of Pandavas inferior, you must not to lose heart and good sense.'

Saying this, Duryodhana questions Sanjaya again, anxious to know more about the Pandavas' thoughts."

CANTO 56

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Sanjaya, I have gathered an army of seven akshauhinis; what have Yudhishtira and the kings who support him done to prepare for war?'

Sanjaya says, 'Yudhishtira is eager for war and full of assurance. Bhimasena, Arjuna and the twins are also confident and fearless. Arjuna yoked his horses to his chariot and took it out to test the astras he has acquired, lighting up the world in all directions. Clad in mail, he looked like a mass of clouds charged with lightning.

He was thoughtful for a while and then he said to me, "Sanjaya, look at the omens, they all predict our victory," and indeed what he said was true.'

Duryodhana says, 'You are happy to praise these sons of Pritha whom we routed at dice. Tell me, what sort of horses has Arjuna yoked to his chariot, and what banners has he raised?'

Sanjaya says, 'The divine architect Tvashtri has, with Indra and Dhatri's help, created all kinds of wonderful and beautiful forms for Arjuna's chariot. Using maya, he adorned Partha's banner with celestial spirits of diverse forms and sizes. At Bhimasena's plea, Vayuputra Hanuman will also enliven Arjuna's pennant with his own splendid and fearsome form. Tvashtri's genius is so powerful that the flag covers one Yojana, both in width and length, and even great trees cannot obstruct it.

Tvashtri’s creation is like Indra’s evanescent and colourful bow that appears in the sky; nobody knows what it is made of and its form changes constantly. This banner rears its head like a column of fire and smoke rising up into the sky, filling it with dazzling colours and beautiful shapes, weightless, yet finding no impediment anywhere.

Yoked to the chariot are one hundred celestial white horses endowed with the speed of the mind; they are the gift of the Gandharva king Chitrasena. Nothing can stand in their way, nothing can arrest their careen, not on Earth, in the sky, or in heaven. A boon ensures that their number will always be a hundred, regardless of how often or how many are killed.

Yudhishtira’s chariot is drawn by great ivory-coloured horses of equal strength. The horses that pull Bhima’s chariot are as fleet as the wind and as splendid as the Saptarishis. Sable-hued horses with backs streaked like the wings of the tittiri bird are yoked to Sahadeva’s chariot; they are Arjuna’s gift to him, and superior to Dhananjaya’s own. And Madri’s son Nakula, of the Ajamida vamsa, is borne, like Indra, by exalted steeds given by Indra himself, all mighty and quick as the mind.

Superb horses, gifts of the Devas, large and equal to those of the Pandava brothers in experience and strength, swift and handsome, bear Subhadra’s and Draupadi’s sons into war.’”

CANTO 57

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, whom have you seen come to the Pandava camp out of love for them? Who will fight for them against my son's forces?'

Sanjaya says, 'Krishna, chief of the Andhakas and the Vrishnis, has arrived. I have also seen Chekitana and Satyaki, also called Yuyudhana, both Maharathas, proud of their strength and renowned the world over; and they have each brought an akshauhini of troops. Drupada, the king of the Panchalas, has come, accompanied by his ten heroic sons—Satyajit and the others, led by Dhrishtadyumna, the fire-born.

Sikhandin has come in Drupada's support to honour Yudhishtira, with a full akshauhini of soldiers whom he has equipped well with everything they need. That lord of Earth Virata, and his two sons, Sankha and Uttara; Suryadatta and others headed by Madiraksha, with one akshauhini of troops and the support of his brothers and sons, have joined the son of Pritha.

Jarasandha's son, the king of Magadha, and Dhrishtaketu, the king of the Chedis, have arrived separately, each accompanied by an akshauhini. The five Kekaya brothers, flying purple flags, have joined the Pandavas with their akshauhini of warriors. All these valiant men, whom I have seen assembled there, will fight on the Pandava side against Duryodhana's armies. Maharathika Dhrishtadyumna, who knows all the vyuhas of Manavas, Devas and Gandharvas, leads the Pandava host as its Senapati.

O Rajan, Sikhandin is appointed to meet Santanu's son Bhishma in battle, with Virata and his Matsya warriors to support him. Yudhishtira will face the king of the Madras, though some feel that the two are not evenly matched. Bhimasena will fight Duryodhana, his sons and his ninety-nine brothers, as well as the eastern and southern kings. Arjuna will meet Vikartana's son Karna and Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, those irresistible Kshatriyas so proud of their strength.

The five mighty bowmen, the Kekaya brothers, will fight the Kekaya soldiers who are with Dhritarashtra. Also in their lot are the Malavas and the Salvakas, and the two famed Trigarta warriors who have sworn to conquer or die. Subhadra's son has been assigned to kill all the sons of Duryodhana and Dusasana, and also king Brihadbala. And those great archers, the sons of Draupadi, with gold embroidered banners on their chariots, and led by Dhrishtadyumna, will do battle against Drona.

Chekitana wants to meet Somadatta in his chariot, in single combat; Satyaki is anxious to do battle against the Bhoja lord Kritavarman; Madri's heroic son Sahadeva, who roars so dreadfully in battle, means to kill your brother-in-law, Sakuni son of Subala; and Madri's other son Nakula will meet the deceitful Uluka and the Saraswatas. The Pandavas have placed all the other kings under the leadership of one or other of their allies. Thus has the Pandava host been divided. You and your sons must do as you think best, and without delay.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Alas, my foolish sons, who cheated at dice, are already as good as dead, for it is Bhima they have chosen to meet in battle. Like moths to the flame, all the other kings will rush inexorably towards the Gandiva, as if consecrated for a yagna by Yama himself. In my mind's eye I see my host routed and killed by those illustrious Kshatriyas whom I have grievously wronged. Who will follow my warriors, when the sons of Pandu break their ranks?

The Pandavas are Maharathas of awesome accomplishments, with the energy of the fiery Sun and ever victorious. Indra himself cannot wrest the Earth from them, who have Yudhishtira for their king, Krishna for their protector, the heroic Savyasachi and Vrikodara for their warriors, and Nakula, Sahadeva and Dhrishtadyumna also fighting for them.

Indra cannot prevail against them, who have with them the son of Prishata, Satyaki, Drupada and Dhrishtaketu with his son, Uttamaujas, the unconquerable Yudhamanyu of the Panchalas, Sikhandin, Kshattradeva,

Virata's son Uttara, the Kasayas, the Chedis, the Matsyas, the Srinjayas, Babhru, the sons of Virata, the Panchalas, and the Prabhadrakas. These heroes are calm and steadfast on the battlefield; they can cleave the very mountains; they are endowed with every virtue and blessed with superhuman strength; and it is against them that my foolish son wants to pit himself, ignoring all my pleas.'

Duryodhana says, 'The Pandavas and we are of the same vamsa; we tread upon the same earth. Why do you think that victory will be theirs? Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, the unconquerable Karna, Jayadratha, Somadatta and Aswatthama are all mighty bowmen and endowed with great powers. When even Indra and the Devas cannot subdue them, what can the Pandavas do against them, O my father?

All these noble and heroic kings of the Earth, bearing weapons on my behalf, will easily contain and quell the Pandavas; the sons of Pandu cannot dare look at my troops, let alone face them in war. Why, by myself I can crush the Pandavas and their sons in battle. Bhaarata, all these sovereigns of the Earth, who are anxious to serve my cause, will even capture the Pandavas as they would net a herd of young deer. Rest assured, O Dhritarashtra, that, with our numberless chariots and tempests of arrows, we will annihilate the Panchalas and the Pandavas.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, my son speaks like a madman; he cannot prevail over Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. Bhishma knows the true might of the Pandavas and their sons, which is why he does not want war with them.

Tell me again, Sanjaya, of their movements. Tell me, who incites those bowmen of the wonderful tejas like priests feeding the homa fire with libations of ghee?'

Sanjaya says, 'Dhrishtadyumna urges the Pandavas to war, saying, "Fight, Bharatottamas! Have no fear whatever. All those rulers of the Earth, whom Dhritarashtra's son woos, will be no more than easy targets for your astras in war. I by myself can devour all the angry kings assembled, together with their kinsmen, like a whale swallowing swarms of little fish. Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Drona's son, Salya and Duryodhana—I will contain them all, as the shore does the swelling sea."

Yudhishtira said in reply, "The Panchalas and the Pandavas depend on your prowess and fortitude to see us safely through the war. I know, Mahabaho, that you are devoted to Kshatriya dharma. Indeed, you can kill

the Kauravas on your own. Parantapa, when they face us, eager for war, whatever strategy you decide on will be the best for us, of that I am sure.

Those who know the Shastras say that the Kshatriya who manifests his strength, and then helps those who flee the battlefield after the rout he has made and ask for his protection, is worth a thousand men. Purusharishabha, you are such a man—peerless. I have no doubt that you will be the refuge of those who are taken by fear on the field of war."

When Dharmatma Yudhishtira said this, Dhrishtadyumna said to me, "Go, Suta, without delay and say to all those that have come to fight for Duryodhana—the Kurus of the Pratipa vamsa, the Bahlikas, the son of Saradwata, Karna and Drona, Drona's son and Jayadratha, Dusasana, Vikarna and to Raja Duryodhana and Bhishma: *Do not offer yourselves up to be slain by Arjuna, whom the Devas protect. Before that happens, let some good man approach Yudhishtira with all repair and entreat that son of Pandu, that Purushottama, to accept the kingdom that they surrender to him, without delay.*

There is no warrior on the Earth like Arjuna, of the pure and unquenchable prowess. The Devas protect the wielder of the Gandiva's celestial ratha, and he cannot be vanquished by a human. Therefore, steer your minds away from war.""

CANTO 58

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Yudhishtira has the power of a Kshatriya by birth and since his youth led a life of brahmacharya. Sadly, my foolish sons ignore me and want to fight this noblest man, which is why I weep.

I beg you, Duryodhana, to turn away from this enmity. War is never commended under any circumstances. Half the Earth is quite enough for you and all your followers. Give back their rightful share of the kingdom to the Pandavas. All the Kauravas consider this course of action—to make peace with the sons of Pandu—to be in keeping both with nyaya and dharma.

Think carefully, my son, and you will realise that your own army will become the instrument of your death. Your folly prevents you from understanding this. I myself do not want war and neither do Bahlika, Bhishma, Drona and Aswatthama; nor do Somadatta, Salya and Kripa; nor Satyavrata, Purumitra and Bhurisravas. If truth be told, none of these kings wants war. The warriors upon whom the Kauravas depend disapprove of the war. My child, accept this. In your own heart, you do not wish for war, but sadly, Karna and the vile-minded Dusasana and Sakuni lead you to it.'

Duryodhana says, 'I challenge the Pandavas to battle without depending on you, Drona, Aswatthama or Sanjaya, on Vikarna, Kamboja, Kripa or Bahlika, on Satyavrata, Purumitra or Bhurisravas, or on any of the others in

our force. Purusharishabha, Karna and I, by ourselves, are prepared to celebrate the Yuddha yagna—the sacrifice of war—with all the needful rites and make Yudhishtira the yagnapasu, the sacrificial animal.

At that yagna my chariot will be the altar; my sword will be the small ladle and my mace the large one for pouring libations; my coat of mail will be the witness; my four steeds will be the officiating priests; my arrows will be the blades of kusa grass; and fame will be the ghrita, the clarified butter. Rajan, by performing such a sacrifice with war in honour of Yama, and by providing the ingredients for it ourselves, we will return crowned with victory and covered in glory after slaying our enemies.

The three of us—I, Karna and my brother Dusasana—will kill the Pandavas in battle. Either I will slay them and rule the Earth or, having killed me, they will. My king, O you of unfading glory, I am ready to sacrifice my life, my kingdom, my wealth and everything else, but I cannot live at peace with the Pandavas. *I will not surrender to the Pandavas even such land as may be covered by the point of a needle!*'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Ah, I now cast Duryodhana off forever; however, I grieve for all you kings who will follow this fool into Yamaloka. Like tigers let loose amongst a herd of deer, the sons of Pandu will devour all of you, who are so agog for battle.

I think of the Bhaarata host as a helpless woman who will be brutalised, then slain and cast into the distance by Yuyudhana of the long arms. Augmenting the strength of Yudhishtira's army, which was already powerful enough, Sini's son will take his stand on the field of battle and scatter his arrows like seeds on a ploughed field. And each one will take a life.

Bhimasena will assume his position at the very front of the Pandava forces with his soldiers arrayed fearlessly behind him, as behind a rampart.

O Duryodhana, when you see elephants as big as hills fallen on the ground with their tusks broken, their heads crushed and their bodies dyed with their own blood; when you see them lying on the field of battle like splintered mountains; then, terrified of Bhima, you will remember my words. When you see your forces of chariots, horses and elephants devastated by Bhimasena, and looking like the ruined, smoking wake of a great conflagration, you will remember my words.

If you do not make peace with the Pandavas, inexorable doom will find you. You will meet your end by the hand of Bhimasena with his gada, and

rest finally in peace. When you see the Kuru host levelled to the ground by Bhima, like a vast forest of trees torn up by their roots, then you will remember my words.'

Having spoken thus to all those rulers of the Earth gathered there, the king addresses Sanjaya once more."

CANTO 59

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Wise one, tell me what Krishna and Dhananjaya said. I am eager to hear that.'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen, O king, and I will tell you how Krishna and Arjuna are, and what those heroes said. With my eyes turned down, my hands joined in reverence and with my senses under control, I entered the antahpura to confer with those gods among men. Not Abhimanyu or the twins have free access to the apartments that Arjuna and Krishna share with Draupadi and Satyabhama. There I saw those Parantapas, anointed with sandalwood paste, and cheerful from having drunk sweet wine. They wore grand clothes and celestial ornaments and sat on a golden dais decked with gems and covered with closely woven, many-hued carpets.

Krishna's feet rested on Arjuna's lap, while Arjuna's lay on Draupadi's and Satyabhama's. Arjuna pointed to a golden foot-stool for me to sit on; I touched it in ritual salutation and sat on the ground. And when he drew his feet away from the foot-stool, I saw auspicious marks on both his soles—two dark lines ran from heel to toe.

Seeing the two Krishnas—both of them tall, dark and straight like the trunks of sala trees—sitting on the same seat, a great foreboding gripped me. They looked like Indra and Vishnu seated together. Relying on Drona and Bhishma, and on Karna's vain boasts, the deluded Duryodhana does not

realise that Yudhishtira, with these two obeying his every command, will have all his wishes fulfilled. My lord, of that I am entirely convinced.

They entertained me with food and drink and honoured me with other courtesies, too; then, raising my folded hands over my head in reverence, I conveyed your message to them. Arjuna, with his cicatrised hand, removed Krishna's auspicious foot from his lap and urged him to speak. Sitting up erect as Indra's banner, adorned with every ornament, and splendid in tejas as Indra himself, Krishna addressed me. His words were sweet, charming and mild, but full of doom for Duryodhana. Krishna spoke directly, clearly and meaningfully, but what he said at the end rent my very heart.

He said to me, "O Sanjaya, after greeting the elders and enquiring about the welfare of the younger ones there, say this to the wise Dhritarashtra, in the hearing of Kurusattama Bhishma and Drona:

'We hope that you have been performing yagnas, giving gifts to Brahmanas, and enjoying your sons and wives, for dire peril is imminent. We hope you have been giving wealth to the deserving, helping your near and dear ones and that you have been blessed with good sons, for Yudhishtira is eager for victory. My old vow to Draupadi remains unfulfilled. You have provoked Arjuna, whose bow is the fiery and invincible Gandiva, and who has me by his side. Even if he were Indra, is there any man who would challenge Arjuna, who has me to help him, unless that man's time on Earth has ended? Only the man who can lift the Earth in his arms, consume all creation in anger and who can cast the Devas out of Swarga, can hope to vanquish Arjuna. I do not see even one among the Devas, Asuras, Manavas, Yakshas, Gandharvas and Nagas who can face Dhanajaya in war.

That wonderful battle in Virata's kingdom is proof of this: when one man faced countless Maharathas and quelled them. That you all fled, routed single-handedly by this Pandava, is proof enough. No one has the might, prowess, energy, speed, lightness of hand, boundless stamina and patience that Partha does.'"

Krishna cheered Arjuna with these words and, also, with roars of exultation, like thunder in the sky, that would frighten even Indra. When he heard what Krishna said, Arjuna, too, spoke in similar vein to me, and his words made the hairs on my body stand on end.'"

CANTO 60

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “The wise Dhritarashtra weighs Sanjaya’s words, their merits and flaws. Once he has done this as best he can and has gauged the strengths and weaknesses of both sides, the Kuru king compares the might of each side, always keeping his sons’ interest at heart. He comes to the conclusion that the Pandavas, endowed with both human and divine ancestry and prowess, are more powerful.

He says to Duryodhana, ‘My child, I cannot shake off the anxiety that grips me. It clings to me so that I can almost see it, like some demon. My dark forebodings cannot be explained away by your reasoning; and it is natural, for you are my son. All beings love their progeny; they do everything in their power to please them, and work for their advantage. It is the same with benefactors—good men always want to reciprocate the good done to them and do what pleases their patrons.

Agni will remember what Arjuna did for him in the Khandava vana and will certainly help Arjuna in this unthinkable war. From paternal affection, Dharma, Indra, Vayu and the Aswins will come together to help the Pandavas; other Devas will join them. To protect them from Bhishma, Drona and Kripa, the wrath of the Devas will manifest itself like the very Brahmastra. Those Purushavyaghras, the sons of Pritha, are blessed with immense strength and are masters of all the godly and fell astras. When

they are as one with the Devas, our warriors—mere mortals, all—will not be able to even look at them.

He whose bow is the divine Gandiva; he who has a pair of inexhaustible celestial quivers from Varuna; he whose banner, which flies as freely as smoke in the air, has the Vanara upon it; he whose chariot has no equal on the Earth bound by the four seas, its rumble like clouds roaring, and which, like the crash of thunder, terrifies his enemies; he whose superhuman tejas the whole world knows; he whom all the kings of the Earth know to be the conqueror of the Devas; he who takes up five hundred arrows at a time and in the twinkling of an eye shoots them in a blur into far distances; this son of Pritha, Parantapa, tiger among Maharathas, whom Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Drona's son, Salya the king of the Madras and indeed all impartial men of thought consider invincible even by kings possessing phenomenal prowess; he who shoots five hundred arrows at each stretch of his bow and whose arms are as powerful as Kartavirya's—I see this great bowman Arjuna, who is equal to Indra or Upendra, this Kshatriya himself without equal, wreaking unimagined havoc in this war.

O Bhaarata, this thought preys on my mind night and day, and I am miserable and sleepless because of my fear for my sons and for all the Kurus. Savage and bloody carnage is about to overtake them unless this war is averted by striking peace. With all my heart, I am for making peace with the Pandavas and not for war. My son, I have always considered them greater than the Kurus.'"

CANTO 61

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "At his father's words, Dhritarashtra's volatile son is inflamed with rage and in a voice heavy with envy says, 'You assume that the sons of Pritha are invincible because they have the Devas on their side. Best of kings, dispel your fear. The Devas achieved divinity by virtue of the absence of desire, covetousness, hatred and of detachment from worldly affairs.

Bharatarishabha, once, Dwaipayana-Vyasa, Maharishi Narada and Jamadagni's son Parasurama told us that, unlike human beings, the motive for what the Devas do is never desire, anger, covetousness or envy. Indeed, if Agni, Vayu, Dharma, Indra or the Aswins had actively taken their side, the sons of Pritha would never have fallen into this pit of distress. Do not be anxious, for the Devas always act dispassionately, in accord with principles worthy of their divinity. If envy and lust are incentives, the laws that rule the Devas will nullify them.

Besides, even if he flares into an all-consuming blaze, I will charm Agni into extinguishment. The tejas of the gods is great, but mine is greater. If the Earth herself cleaves in two, or mountain peaks split, I can reunite them with my mantras, Rajan. If a violent tempest or a roaring deluge threatens the universe of animate and inanimate, moving and immobile creatures, I can, from compassion for life, stop them. I have the power to freeze all the great waters of the Earth, so chariots and fighting men can pass over them.

It is I who set in motion all the affairs of the Devas and Asuras. My horses take me anywhere at my will, wherever I go with my akshauhinis, on whatever mission. Within my dominions there are no fearful nagas and, protected by my mantras, innocent creatures within my kingdom never fall prey to others. The clouds bring rain at the appointed time and in the quantity wished for by my people. All my subjects are devout, and natural calamities never visit them.

The Aswins, Vayu, Agni, Dharma and Indra with the Maruts will not dare protect my enemies. Had they been able to, would the sons of Kunti have suffered for thirteen years? Know that neither Devas nor Gandharvas, neither Asuras nor Rakshasas can save him who has incurred my wrath. I have never before had any doubt about the aptness of reward or punishment to friend or foe. Parantapa, whenever I say something it is always just so. The people know me as a speaker of truth.

Everyone can bear witness to my greatness, whose fame has spread all around. I say this, Rajan, for your information and not from vanity. I have never praised myself before; to sing one's own praises is petty. And I say to you, my father, you will soon hear of my victory over the Pandavas, the Matsyas, the Panchalas, the Kekayas, Satyaki and Krishna.

Just as rivers cease to be when they enter the ocean, so will the Pandavas and all their followers when they encounter me. My intelligence is sharper, my energy is greater, my prowess is mightier, my knowledge is deeper and my resources are superior, by far, to theirs. The knowledge of weapons that our Pitamaha, Drona, Kripa, Salya and Sala have, I have it all.'

Saying this, Parantapa Duryodhana questions Sanjaya once more about Yudhishtira's preparations for the war.

CANTO 62

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Ignoring Dhritarashtra, who was about to ask about Arjuna, Karna addresses Duryodhana with words to cheer the spirit of the assembled Kurus.

He says, 'When Parasurama discovered the false pretence by which I obtained the Brahmastra from him, he cursed me that I would forget the mantra for that astra at the end of my days. Even for so great an offence, that Rishi, my guru, cursed me lightly; that Maharishi of the fierce tejas can consume the very Earth with her seas. By my diligence and bravery, I appeased him. I have that weapon with me still, and my end has not yet come. I am confident of victory. Let the charge of winning the war be mine.

Through my guru's favour, I will, in the twinkling of an eye, wipe out the Panchalas, the Karushas, the Matsyas, as well as the sons of Pritha, their sons and grandsons. I will win the war and bestow many realms upon you. Let the Pitamaha, Drona and all the kings remain here with you. I will go forth with the best of my warriors and kill Kunti's sons. Let that task be mine.'

Bhishma says to him, 'What are you saying, Karna? The approach of your end has dimmed your intellect. Do you not know that when our chieftains are killed, all the sons of Dhritarashtra will die? Considering that you know how Arjuna burnt down the Khandava vana, with only Krishna helping him, you ought to restrain yourself and your friends and relatives.

You will see the shakti that Indra gave you burnt to ashes when Krishna strikes it with his chakra. Your other astra, with the serpent's head, that shines in your quiver and which you worship with offerings of flowers, will be consumed and you with it, when Arjuna's arrows flare at you. Karna, remember that it is Krishna, who killed Bana and Bhumi's son Naraka in fervid battle, and who has slain many others much greater than you, who protects Arjuna.'

Karna says, 'There is no doubt that Krishna is all that you say, and I believe he is even greater. Pitamaha, you are invariably harsh to me, and this is my response to you today: I hereby lay down my weapons! From now, you will see me only in the sabha and not on the battlefield. When death stills your voice, Bhishma, and only then, will the rulers of the Earth see my prowess,' and with these words, the great archer, Mahadhanushman Karna, leaves the Kuru sabha and goes home.

Bhishma laughs mockingly and says to Duryodhana in the midst of the Kurus, 'How truly the Sutaputra keeps his word. When Bhimasena arrays his forces and brings havoc by decimating our legions, scattering hundreds of thousands of heads, how does Karna intend to keep his pledge to kill the kings of Avanti and Kalinga with Jayadratha, Chedidhvaja and Bahlika looking on?

When he presented himself as a Brahmana before the holy Parasurama, he did indeed obtain the Brahmastra, but he lost his dharma and punya.'

When Bhishma says this after Karna lays down his weapons and leaves, Vichitravirya's foolish grandson Duryodhana testily addresses Bhishma."

CANTO 63

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'Pritha's sons are men like any others, mortals like other men. Why then are you so sure victory will be theirs? Both we and they are equal in energy, in prowess, in age, in intelligence, in our knowledge of the Shastras, in our mastery over astras, in the art of war, in lightness of hand and every other skill. We are all human by birth. How then, Pitamaha, do you know that victory will be theirs?

I do not seek to accomplish my goals by relying on you, Drona, Kripa, Bahlika, or on any of the other kings. Vikartana's son Karna, my brother Dusasana and I will slay the five sons of Pandu in battle. Having done this, we will gratify Brahmanas by performing great yagnas of all kinds, with abundant dakshina and gifts of cattle, horses and wealth.

When my warriors haul the Pandavas' legions across the field, like hunters a herd of deer caught in a net, or like whirlpools do a crewless boat, Pandu's sons will see the might of our vast host of soldiers, chariots and elephants, and not only they, but Krishna as well, will surrender their pride.'

Hearing this, Vidura says, 'Venerable men of infallible knowledge say that self-restraint is the best of all virtues; and for a Brahmana it is his eternal dharma. He whose self-control follows the path of daana, tapasya, gyana and Veda dhyana, always wins success, forgiveness and the punya of his charity. Self-restraint enhances a man's tejas and is a most holy

attribute. By absolving a man of his sin and increasing his vitality, it even leads him to Brahman.

People always fear those who have no self-restraint, as if they are Rakshasas; and it is to curb Rakshasas that Brahma created Kshatriyas. Indeed, self-restraint is an excellent vow for all the four varnas to keep.

And these are the qualities of a man with self-restraint: forgiveness, firmness of mind, non-violence, respect for all things, truthfulness, simplicity, control over the senses, patience, gentle speech, modesty, steadiness, liberality, mildness, contentment and faith. He who is self-controlled sheds lust, avarice, pride, anger, sloth, vanity, malice and sorrow. Purity and straightforwardness are the hallmarks of a self-restrained man.

He who is not covetous, who is content with a little, who is indifferent to all things provocative or seductive, and who is as deep as the ocean, is a man of self-restraint. He who is virtuous, always pleasant and contented, who has Atmagyana and wisdom wins great respect in this world and bliss in the hereafter. The man who is wise and mature, who has no fear of other creatures and whom other creatures do not fear is the foremost of men.

Such a man, who seeks the good of all, is a universal friend and makes one and all happy. Blessed with depth of character, like the ocean, and happily content by virtue of his wisdom, this man is always serene and light-hearted. A man who has self-control and serenity, regulates his life by the example of men of dharma of the past and the present, and lives in joy. Alternatively, such a man, whose gyana has endowed him with contentment, abandons karma and, with his senses firmly restrained, wanders over the Earth, impatient for death and absorption into Brahman.

The path of the man who enjoys the contentment that his gyana brings is as invisible as the paths of birds in the sky. He who abandons the world and takes to sannyasa in pursuit of Moksha can look forward to the bright and eternal realms that are reserved for him in Swarga.'"

CANTO 64

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'O king, there is a tale told by men of old of the fowler who spread his net on the ground to snare birds. Two birds that lived together were trapped in the net at the same time, but they took the net up and soared up into the air. Seeing them fly into the sky, the fowler, without giving way to despair, began to follow them on the ground. Just then, a hermit living in a nearby asrama, who had finished his morning prayers, saw the fowler running to catch the birds.

The Muni said to the man, "Fowler, I find it strange and wonderful that you, who walk on solid ground are pursuing a pair of winged creatures of the air."

The fowler said, "These two, united now, are taking away my snare. Once they fall out I will indeed catch them."

Sure enough the two doomed birds soon began to quarrel, and they fell to the ground. Still caught in the net and facing death, they argued angrily with each other. The fowler came up stealthily and seized them both.

Kinsmen who fall out with one another over wealth fall into the hands of their enemies, like the quarrelling birds. The duty of kinsmen is to eat together and talk with one another, and not argue under any circumstances. Family members who lovingly wait on the elderly become unconquerable, like a forest guarded by lions; but those who are mean, although wealthy,

always contribute to the prosperity of their enemies. Dhritarashtra, cousins are like charcoal, blazing when united but only smoking when divided.

I will tell you of something else I once saw on a mountainside. Listen to this, O Kaurava, and then do what you think best. Once, we went to the northern mountain, Gandhamadana, accompanied by some hunters and a number of Brahmanas who liked talking about magical charms and medicinal plants.

Gandhamadana was a great sylvan tapovana, its slopes covered with trees and luminous herbs, and Siddhas and Gandharvas lived there. There we saw a jar of bright golden honey perched on an inaccessible precipice. That honey, which was Kubera's favourite drink, was guarded by poisonous snakes. To the one who drank it, it had the power to grant immortality to the mortal, sight to the blind and youth to the old. It was this honey, too, that those Brahmanas had spoken of. The hunters saw that honey and, in their frantic attempt to secure it, they all died either falling from that snake ridden cliff or being stung by the vicious serpents.

In much the same way, your son lusts for unrivalled ownership of the Earth. He sees the prize but, foolishly, not the terrible fall. Duryodhana wants to do battle with Savyasachi, but I do not see in him enough prowess or vigour to give him success.

On a single chariot Arjuna conquered all the Earth. Bhishma, Drona and others, with huge armies behind them, were terrified of Arjuna, who routed them outside Virata's city. Keep in mind what happened there. Arjuna still forgives you and looks to you in hope, waiting for your decision. When roused, Dhananjaya, Drupada and the king of Matsyas will leave no remnant of your army; they will be like apocalyptic flames fanned by the winds of yuganta.

O Dhritarashtra, embrace Yudhishtira. If you go to war, neither side can win without dreadful losses to themselves, not under any circumstances.'"

CANTO 65

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O my son Duryodhana, think carefully about what I tell you. Like an ignorant wayfarer, you mistake the wrong path for the right one.

The five sons of Pandu, whose tejas you are so eager to extinguish, are like the Panchabhutas, the five elements that support the very universe. You cannot vanquish Yudhishtira without sacrificing your life in the effort; this son of Kunti is the most virtuous man in the world. Like a weak tree against a howling storm, you dare defy Bhimasena, whose strength is unrivalled on Earth, and who is like Yama himself in battle. And what man of any sense would choose to face the wielder of Gandiva, greatest of all Kshatriyas, who is a man among men as Meru is among mountains?

There is no man whom Dhrishtadyumna cannot vanquish, the prince of Panchala who looses astras at his enemies even like Indra hurling his Vajra. The noble, irresistible Satyaki, whom the Andhakas and the Vrishnis honour, is always with the Pandavas. He, too, will slaughter your forces.

No man in his right senses would face the lotus-eyed Krishna, whose tejas and might surpass any in the three worlds. This same Krishna puts his wives, relatives, his own soul and the entire Earth on one side of a scale, and considers Arjuna on the other side to be equal to them all. Krishna, on whom Arjuna relies, is invincible; and the army with which he allies himself also becomes irresistible.

Listen, my son, to your well-wishers; they advise you for your own good. Accept your Pitamaha Bhishma as your mentor and guide. Listen to what I say and to what these other true friends of the Kurus—Drona, Kripa, Vikarna and Raja Bahlika—say. They feel for you as I do, and you would do well to regard them as you do me. Bhaarata, they all know dharma and love you as much as I do.

The rout by one man, and the ensuing panic of your troops, which you and your brothers saw outside Virata's city, is proof enough of the truth of what I am saying. When Arjuna could single-handedly do that, what can the Pandavas not achieve when united? Take them by their hands as your brothers and cherish them with a share of the kingdom.'"

CANTO 66

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Having said this to Duryodhana, the wise Dhritarashtra asks Sanjaya, 'Now, Sanjaya, tell me what you have not yet told me—what Arjuna said after Krishna spoke. I am eager to hear it.'

Sanjaya says, 'Having heard what Krishna said, the irresistible Dhananjaya spoke to me in Krishna's presence.

He said, "O Sanjaya, all the kings and the others who have assembled here to fight for the Kauravas are about to die—our Pitamaha, Dhritarashtra, Drona and Kripa; Karna and king Bahlika; Drona's son, Somadatta and Subala's son Sakuni; Dusasana, Sala, Purumitra and Vivimsati; Vikarna, Chitrasena and Jayatsena; Vinda and Anuvinda; the two lords of Avanti; Bhurisravas, Bhagadatta and Jarasandha and the other rulers of the Earth. Dhritarashtra's son has brought them together to serve as a libation in the Pandava fire.

In my name, Sanjaya, enquire after the welfare of those kings according to their status, making sure that you accord them proper respect. In their presence, address Duryodhana, that worst of evil men, who is wrathful, of sinful soul, and covetous. Make sure that fool and his advisors hear my message."

Saying this first, Pritha's son, Dhananjaya of the large eyes with red corners glanced at Krishna and then spoke words of dharma and artha.

He said to me, "You have heard the measured words of the high-souled lord of the Madhus. Tell the assembled kings that they are mine as well.

Say this for me to those kings, *Make peace with us so that you will not be poured as offerings into the arrow fire of the great yagna of war, in which the rumble of chariot wheels are the mantras and the annihilating bow is the sruva, the ladle which will pour blood into death's great fire. If you do not give his rightful share of the kingdom to Yudhishtira, I will send all of you, with your footsoldiers, horsemen and elephants, into the dark regions of departed spirits*."

I bowed before Dhananjaya and Hari of four arms and took leave of them, and here I am, come speedily to convey their grave message to you who are as effulgent as the Devas themselves.'"

CANTO 67

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana shows scant regard for Sanjaya's words; the other kings mutely rise to leave the sabha. As they go, Dhritarashtra, who, out of blind love, always does whatever his son wants, wishes all those kings success and secretly asks Sanjaya what the Kurus plan, and what the hostile Pandavas.

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me truly, Gavalgana putra, what are the strengths and weaknesses of our forces? You are minutely acquainted with the affairs of the Pandavas, so tell me where their superiority and inferiority lie. You are aware of the strength of both sides; you know everything; and you are versed in all matters pertaining to dharma and artha. I ask you, Sanjaya, which side will lose in the war?'

Sanjaya says, 'I will not say anything to you in secret, Rajan, for then you might bear ill-will towards me. Have your father Vyasa of the stern vratas and your queen Gandhari come here. Being knowledgeable about dharma, perceptive and able to discern the truth, they will remove any ill-feelings that you might have. In their presence, I will tell you what Arjuna and Krishna intend.'

Dhritarashtra sends for Gandhari and Vyasa, and Vidura ushers them in. Vyasa Dwaipayana, the wise, says, 'Sanjaya, tell Dhritarashtra everything he wants to know. Tell him honestly all that you know about Krishna and Arjuna.'"

CANTO 68

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Those wonderful archers Arjuna and Krishna, who are equally godlike, have been born of their own divine will. Krishna's chakra, of the boundless energy, is five krosas wide. At will, and empowered by maya, he can cast it at any adversary, great or small. It blazes in refulgence but will be invisible to the Kurus. Krishna's Sudarshana chakra is what determines the strength or weakness of the Pandavas.

With it that mighty scion of the Madhus effortlessly, almost playfully, vanquished the formidable Naraka, Sambara, Kamsa and the Chedi king Sisupala. Krishna is the most exalted of all men; he is divine and a Paramatman; and he can bring Bhumi, Akasa and Swarga under his sway, just by willing it. Again and again you ask me about the strengths and weaknesses of the Pandavas. Listen and I will tell you of these, simply.

If the whole universe is placed on one side of a balance and Krishna on the other, Krishna will be heavier. He can, at his pleasure, reduce the universe to ashes, but if all the forces in the universe combine, they cannot do the same to him. Wherever there is truth, righteousness, modesty and compassion, there is Krishna; and where he is, victory must be.

Janardana is the soul of all creatures; he is the highest of all Purushas; and he guides, as if in sport, the earth, the sky and heaven. Beguiling the world, he uses the Pandavas as his instruments to destroy your evil sons,

who are great sinners. The divine Kesava keeps the wheel of time, the wheel of the universe and the wheel of the yuga in constant motion.

Know that this glorious One is the lord of time, of death and of this brahmanda of mobile and immobile things; and this Mahayogi Hari, though the Lord of the universe, still performs his dharma, even like a humble labourer who tills the fields.

Indeed, Krishna beguiles the world with his maya; only those who have attained Him are not deceived.'"

CANTO 69

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'How have you come to know Krishna as the Lord of the universe, and I have not? Tell me this, Sanjaya.'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen, Rajan. You have lost your gyana, while the gyana I have acquired has not diminished. The man who has no gyana is wrapped in the dark cloak of ignorance and does not know Krishna. Through my gyana I know that in Madhusudana the three states—the gross, the subtle and the causal—come together. He is the Creator of all but is, himself, uncreated. He is divine; from him everything arises and into him everything returns.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'What is the nature of your faith in Krishna, which makes you know him to be the union of the kartaram, the akrutam and Devam?'

Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, worldly pleasures, which are really maya, hold no importance for me. I never perform empty rituals, like keeping vratas without a pure heart or faith in Krishna. With faith I have purified my soul and then realised Krishna through the shastras.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'O Duryodhana, turn to Krishna for protection. My child, Sanjaya is one of our truest friends. Seek refuge with Krishna.'

Duryodhana says, 'Even if the divine son of Devaki, united with Arjuna, were to destroy all mankind, I will not surrender to him.'

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Gandhari, this evil son of yours is determined to plunge us all into hell. Envious, black-souled and vain, he disregards the wisdom of his elders.’

Gandhari says to Duryodhana, ‘O covetous child who ignores the commands of your elders, you abandon your father and me; you give up prosperity and life; you enhance the joy of your enemies; and I am deeply distressed. When Bhimasena strikes you down and you die, you will, foolish boy, remember what your father said to you.’

Vyasa says, ‘Listen to me, Dhritarashtra. Krishna bears you love. Sanjaya, as your envoy, will do what is good for you. He knows Krishna, the ancient and exalted One. If you pay heed to him, he will certainly save you from the great danger that threatens you.

Son of Vichitravirya, men trap themselves because they are victims of krodha and kama. Those who are not content with what they have are like the blind leading the blind, into deep pits; deprived of their senses by avarice and desire, their actions lead them to a never-ending cycle of births and deaths. The path that the wise take is the only one that leads to Brahman. Those who are superior overcome death by keeping that path in view and reach their goal by it.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Sanjaya, tell me of that path without terrors, by which I can realise Hrishikesa and attain mukti.’

Sanjaya says, ‘A man of uncontrolled mind cannot know Krishna Janardana, who has perfect and absolute control over his soul. The performance of yagnas with uncontrolled senses is not the means to that end. Renunciation of the objects of our turbulent senses comes from true gyana. Spiritual enlightenment and abstention from injury arise from true wisdom. Therefore, O king, subdue your senses with all possible effort; let your mind not deviate from true knowledge; and detach your heart from the worldly temptations that surround you. Learned Brahmanas say that this subjugation of the senses is true wisdom; and this wisdom is the path by which learned men strive for their goal.

Rajan, Krishna cannot be realised by men who have not subdued their senses. He who has subdued his senses is gratified by spiritual knowledge that he gains from knowing the shastras and from the joy of absorption in Yoga, communion.’”

CANTO 70

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, tell me again about the lotus-eyed Krishna, so that, by knowing the significance of his names, I may attain that Purushottama.'

Sanjaya says, 'I have heard many of Krishna's auspicious names, and I will tell you of those that I know. They all describe him as immeasurable and beyond description.

He is called Vasudeva because he wraps all creatures with the cloak of maya, because of his glorious splendour and because he is the foundation and resting-place of the Devas. He is called Vishnu because he is all-pervading. He is called Madhava because he is an ascetic whose energy is always focused on the truth and absorbed in Yoga.

He is called Madhusudana because he killed the Asura Madhu and because he is the substance of the twenty-four objects of knowledge. He is called Krishna because he is of the Sattvata vamsa, because he is the embodiment of the unity of the words Krishi, *that which exists*, and Na, *eternal peace*.

His name Pundarikaksha comes from Pundarika, *the high and eternal abode*, and Aksha, *indestructible*.

He is called Janardana because he strikes fear into the hearts of all evil beings. He is called Sattvata because the sattva guna is embodied in him. He is called Vrishabhakshana because he is the union of Vrishabha—the

Vedas—and ikshana—eye: the Vedas are the eyes through which he can be seen. He is called Aja because he is Unborn; he has not taken birth in the usual way.

That Supreme Soul is called Damodara because, unlike the Devas, his effulgence is not acquired but emanates from him and because he has self-control and great splendour. He is called Hrishikesa because he is the union of joy and divinity—Hrishika, *eternal happiness* and Isa, *the six divine attributes*. He is called Mahabahu because of his mighty arms with which he supports the Earth and the sky.

He is called Adhokshaja because he never falls or deteriorates in any way. He is called Narayana because he is the refuge of all human beings. He is called Purushottama because he is the one who creates, preserves and destroys the universe—Puru means creator, preserver and destroyer. He is called Sarva because he knows and is all things. He is called Satya because he is the truth of Truth—Krishna exists in Truth and Truth in him. He is called Vishnu because of his prowess and Jishnu because of his success. He is called Ananta because he is eternal and Govinda because he knows all languages.

He makes the unreal appear real and beguiles all creatures. With these his attributes, being ever devoted to dharma, and divine, the slayer of Madhu, that mighty-armed one who does not decay, will come here to try and prevent the slaughter of the Kurus.'"

CANTO 71

YANASANDHI PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, I envy those who are gifted with sight, who will see Krishna, his beauty and radiance illuminating all the cardinal points of Earth and sky; Krishna, whose words the Bhaaratas listen to with reverence, which the Srinjayas consider sacred and auspicious, which those who seek prosperity regard as faultless and that the doomed find unpalatable; Krishna, who is full of exalted resolve, who is eternal and incomparably heroic, who is the bull of the Yadavas and their lord; Krishna who inspires awe in his enemies, who slays them and destroys their fame.

The assembled Kauravas will behold that high-souled and adorable One, that Parantapa, the lord of the Vrishnis, speaking words of kindness and enthralling my people. I surrender to the refuge of that Eternal One, whom Rishis blessed with Atmagyana, that ocean of eloquence, that Being whom ascetics realise, that bird called Arishta of the beautiful wings, that destroyer of creatures, that refuge of the universe, that thousand-headed one, that Creator and Destroyer of all things, that Ancient One without beginning, middle or end, of the infinite achievements, that cause of the primeval Seed, that Un-born one, that embodiment of Eternity, that highest of the high, that Creator of the three worlds and of Devas, Asuras, Nagas and Rakshasas, that foremost of all the learned and rulers of men, that younger brother of Indra.'"

CANTO 72

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA

Janamejaya said, "When Sanjaya left the Pandava encampment and went back to the Kurus, what did my grandfathers, the sons of Pandu, do? Brahmanottama, I want to hear all this; I beg you, tell me."

Vaisampayana said, "After Sanjaya has gone, Yudhishtira addresses Krishna, scion of Dasarha vamsa and lord of the Sattvatas.

He says, 'O you who are faithful to your friends, the time has come to show your friendship. There is no one but you who can save us from our distress. We put our faith in you and fearlessly demanded our share of the kingdom from Duryodhana, who is swollen with bottomless pride, and from his counsellors.

Parantapa, you protect the Vrishnis during all their times of misfortune; do the same for us Pandavas, who are in grave danger, for we deserve your protection.'

Krishna says, 'Here I am, Mahabaho. Tell me what you want and I will do it.'

Yudhishtira says, 'You have heard about Dhritarashtra's intentions; all that Sanjaya has said to me has Dhritarashtra's approval. Sanjaya, whom we must think of as Dhritarashtra's soul, has spoken the king's mind. A duta says what he is instructed to, for otherwise he deserves to die.

With a mind not inclined to look impartially upon all that is his, and impelled by avarice and a sinful heart, Dhritarashtra wants to make peace

with us without giving us back our kingdom. It was at Dhritarashtra's command, and believing that he would honour the pledge we made with him, that we spent twelve years in the forests and one more year in hiding. The Brahmanas who were with us will bear out the fact that we did not deviate from our given word.

Now the covetous Dhritarashtra does not want to keep Kshatriya dharma. Out of his love for his son, he listens to the counsel of evil men. Prompted by greed and selfishness, he takes Duryodhana's advice and treats us deceitfully.

What can be more sorrowful, Janardana, than my being unable to look after my mother and my friends? Even with the Kasis, the Panchalas, the Chedis and the Matsyas for my allies, and with you, Madhusudana, as my protector, I asked for only five villages—Avisthala, Vrikasthala, Makandi, Varanavata, and any one more of their choice.

Grant us five villages or towns, we said, *where we five may live together; we do not want to see Bharata vamsa destroyed*.

However, the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra thinks he is the sole master of the whole world, and he did not agree. What can be more sorrowful than this?

When a man, born and raised in a noble family, covets the possessions of others his avarice destroys his intelligence. Once intelligence is lost, he feels no shame; the lack of shame leads to an erosion of dharma; and the loss of dharma leads to the withering of prosperity. The destruction of prosperity, in its turn, ruins a man, for poverty is like death. Kinsmen, friends and Brahmanas shun a poor man, just as birds avoid a tree that has neither flowers nor fruit. Krishna, to me my relatives shunning me feels like death; I feel as if my prana is leaving my body.

Sambara said that nothing is more distressful than being wracked with anxiety about where one's next meal will come from and the uncertain future. It is said that wealth is the highest dharma and that everything depends on it. Those who have it are considered alive, whereas those who have none might as well be dead. A man who forcibly robs another of his wealth not only kills his victim but ruins his dharma, artha and kama.

When poverty overtakes them, some men choose death; others leave their cities and retire to villages; many retire to the forest; while some become sadhus and beggars in a bid to destroy themselves. For the sake of wealth, some drive themselves to madness; others live as subjects of their

enemies; and many go into the service of others. Poverty is more distressful to a man than death, for prosperity is the sole cause of a man's dharma as well as his kama. Actual death is not as painful, for it is inevitable and none can overcome it.

Krishna, a man who is poor from birth does not suffer as much as the man who, born into wealth and used to living in luxury, loses his prosperity. He may lose his wealth through his own fault, but he blames the gods and Indra, rarely himself. Even knowledge of the shastras fails to mitigate his pain.

Sometimes he gets angry with his servants and harbours malicious envy towards his friends. In his anger, he loses the clarity of his mind and, because his intellect is clouded, he commits evil. His sinfulness makes him careless about maintaining caste divisions. Varnasankarshana, the mixing of castes, leads to Naraka and is the worst sin of all. If a man is not made aware soon, he goes straight to hell. Wisdom is the only thing that can awaken him, and if he regains the eye of wisdom, he is saved. When wisdom returns the man turns to the shastras, which enhance his virtue. Shame becomes a treasured ornament.

The man who feels shame has an aversion to sin; his prosperity increases; and he is truly a man. He who is devoted to dharma, who has his mind under control and who always acts after careful deliberation, is never inclined towards adharma, nor does he sin.

He who feels no shame and has lost good sense is neither man nor woman. He cannot earn punya and is like a Sudra. He who feels shame pleases the Devas, the Pitrs and his own self, and thus attains moksha, the highest aim of all men of dharma.

Madhusudana, in me you have seen the truth of all that I say. You know how we have lived these years in exile, deprived of our kingdom. It is against our dharma to abandon what is rightfully ours. Our first efforts will be towards ensuring that both ourselves and the Kauravas enjoy prosperity and be united in peace. Otherwise, we will kill the Kauravas and regain the kingdom that is ours by right, although success won through bloodshed, even by killing the most hateful enemy, and in this case our close kin, is the very worst of violent deeds.

We have many kinsmen, and many of our elders have ranged themselves against us. To slaughter these is a grievous sin indeed. What good can come of war? Sadly, war is the dharma of a Kshatriya; and we are

born into that wretched varna. Sinful or virtuous, any other way of life would be wrong for us. A Sudra serves; a Vaisya lives by trade; the Brahmana has the wooden begging bowl to sustain himself; we have to live by war! A Kshatriya kills a Kshatriya; fish live on fish; a dog eats a dog. See how they all live according their inherent dharma.

O Krishna, Kali, wrath, is always present in battlefields; lives are lost; and despite the strict laws that govern warfare, success and defeat cannot be foretold. None of Earth's creatures control their own lives; and neither prosperity nor adversity come until their time is ripe.

Sometimes one man kills many; sometimes many together kill one; a coward may slay a renowned and celebrated hero. In war both sides cannot win, and both cannot lose, even though both sides may suffer equal losses. If a Kshatriya flees a battle, he loses honour and glory. Ah, under any circumstances war is a sin.

Who in striking another is not himself struck? For the one attacked, victory and defeat are the same, O Hrishikesa. Defeat is almost as bad as death, but the victor's losses are no less. Even if the victor is himself not killed, one or more of his dear ones may die and, stricken by the loss of his kin, he becomes indifferent to his own life.

Those who are quiet, modest, virtuous and compassionate are generally killed in battle, while evil ones escape unscathed. After killing his enemies a man is gripped by remorse. Moreover, the vanquished survivor will muster another army, to challenge the victor. In the hope of ending a dispute with finality, one often tries to annihilate the enemy, at times without success; and victory creates hatred, for the vanquished lives on in sorrow.

The man who wants peace sleeps happily, giving up all thoughts of victory and defeat, while the man who provokes hostilities sleeps in misery and anxiety, as if he shares the room with a serpent. The man who kills seldom wins renown; in fact he gains eternal and universal infamy. A war waged over a long period of time never ends, because even if there is one family member left alive, there is no dearth of those who will remind him of past enmities.

Krishna, enmity is never converted to peace by further enmity; it feeds on itself like a fire on ghee. There can be no peace without the complete obliteration of one side, because otherwise there will always be chances for a survivor to take revenge on the victor, a vice to which opportunists are addicted.

Confidence in one's own prowess is an incurable disease that can bring heartache. The only way to know peace is by renouncing war, or by death. Madhusudana, although it is true that we can achieve the goal by ridding oneself of an enemy by tearing him up by the very root, that is savage and cruel. The peace that one may achieve by giving up kingdom is almost like death, which comes if one loses one's kingdom and is utterly ruined by the enemy. We do not wish to give up our kingdom, nor do we wish to see the extinction of our vamsa. Considering all this, it is better to make peace by giving in to the Kauravas.

The time to show one's might is when those who desire peace and not war fail at conciliation and war becomes inevitable. Horrible results follow the failure of peacemakers. Learned men have seen this in fights even between dogs. First, the dogs wag their tails, then they bark, then they circle each other and bare their teeth, then growl and, finally, attack each other. The dog that is stronger prevails and takes his meat. It is the same with men; there is no difference whatever. Those who are powerful should avoid disputes with the weak, who will yield, for they must.

The father, the king and the elder always deserve respect and, so, Dhritarashtra deserves regard and reverence from us. But Dhritarashtra's love for his son is great; he will be obedient to his son and reject what we propose. What do you, O Krishna, think is best at this juncture? How can we preserve both our interest and our virtue? Whom else, besides you, Madhusudana, shall we consult in this most difficult matter? What other friend do we have, who is as dear to us as you are, who wants our welfare, who knows the consequences of all karma, and who knows the truth?'

Krishna says to Yudhishtira, 'I will go to the sabha of the Kurus, for both your sakes. If I can make peace without sacrificing your interests, I will have performed an act of great punya, which will bear immortal fruit. I will also have saved the angry Kurus and Pandavas, as well as Dhritarashtra's sons and this sacred Bhumi herself from the snare of death, and perdition worse than death.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I am not in favour of you going to the Kurus; Duryodhana will never do as you ask, even if you use the best advice to persuade him. All the Kshatriyas of the world are assembled there, obedient to his command. I do not like the thought of you going into their midst. If any harm comes to you, nothing, not the promise of godhood, not

sovereignty over all the Devas, let alone mere mundane success, will please us.'

The Divine One says, 'Rajan, I know how base and vicious the son of Dhritarashtra is; but by going there we will escape the censure of the kings of the Earth. Just like other animals before the lion, all the kings of the Earth united cannot stand before me when I am roused. If by some chance they try to do me harm, I will consume the Kurus. My going there will not be fruitless, for if our object is not fulfilled, we shall at least escape blame. And this is my intention.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Krishna, do whatever pleases you. May your plan be blessed. Go to the Kurus. I hope to see you return successful and in joy. Go and make such a peace that all the sons of Bharata may live together happily and in contentment. You are our brother and friend, as dear to me as to Arjuna. So close are we to you that we are not in the least concerned that you might neglect our welfare. Go there for our good.

You know us and you know our enemies; you know what our intentions are and what to say. Whatever you say to Duryodhana will be for our good. By whatever means peace is achieved, Kesava, keep our welfare at heart.'"

CANTO 73

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'I have heard what Sanjaya said and now I have heard you. I know Dhritarashtra's intentions as well as yours. Your wishes are based on dharma, while theirs stem from malice. You greatly value what you might obtain without war.

Yet, a long life of brahmacharya is not the way of a Kshatriya, O lord of the Earth. Men of all four varnas say that a Kshatriya should never live on alms. Brahma has ordained that either victory or death in battle is the eternal dharma of a Kshatriya; humiliating yourself by surrender is not for you. Yudhishtira Mahabaho, you cannot live by humbly giving in. Display your prowess and vanquish your enemies, Parantapa.

Through his long association with many kings, and because of their affection and friendship, Dhritarashtra's son has become powerful indeed. There is no hope that he will make peace with you. The Kurus think they are strong because they have Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and others with them. As long as you behave mildly towards them, they will not give up your kingdom. Dhritarashtra's sons will not accede to your wishes from compassion or mildness or from a sense of righteousness.

There is, Pandava, more evidence that they will not make peace with you. They felt no remorse despite having made you suffer terrible deprivation and hardship and making you wear a kaupina for your attire. The ruthless Duryodhana cheated to beat you at dice, in the sight of

Pitamaha Bhishma, Drona, the wise Vidura, many holy Brahmanas, the king, the citizens and all the important Kauravas; he deceived you, who are charitable, gentle, self-controlled, virtuous and of stern vratas; and he was not ashamed of his vile deed. Do not show the wretches any compassion. These men, who are so deserving of death at anyone's hands, are that much more deserving of it at yours, O Bhaarata.

With what ugly words Duryodhana, with his brothers, gladly and boastfully, tormented you and your brothers. He said, "The Pandavas now own nothing in this wide world. Their names and lineage are already extinct. In time, which is eternal, they have already died. I have all their punya, and they will now be scattered into the five elements."

While the game of dice was being played, the brutal Dusasana seized the weeping Draupadi by her hair and dragged her to the sabha, as if she had no protectors. In the presence of Bhishma, Drona and others he repeatedly called her "cow". Restrained by you and bound by dharma, your mighty brothers did nothing to avenge her. After you were exiled to the forests, Duryodhana spoke savage words and boasted to his kinsmen, who knew you were innocent and sat mute in the sabha and wept silently.

The assembled kings and the Brahmanas did not applaud him for this deed. Indeed, all in the court censured him. To a man of noble descent, Parantapa, censure is equal to death. Death is many times better than a life of blame. That was when he already died; but he felt no shame although all the kings of the Earth disapproved of what he did.

He whose character is utterly despicable is destroyed as easily as a tree supported by a single weak root. Duryodhana deserves death by any hand, like a snake. Kill him, Parantapa, without the slightest hesitation or remorse.

It is incumbent upon you, and I approve of it, that you should pay homage to your uncle Dhritarashtra and to Pitamaha Bhishma. I will go there and remove the uncertainty of all men who are still in any doubt of Duryodhana's evil nature and ways. There, in the presence of all the kings, I will tell of your shining virtues and Duryodhana's vices. The rulers of kingdoms, who hear my words full of dharma and artha, will recognise that you are virtuous and truthful while Duryodhana is moved only by his greed.

I will speak of Duryodhana's vices before the citizens of Hastinapura and the other people of the kingdom, before the young and the old, of all the four varnas, who will be gathered there. Because you ask for peace no one

will consider you sinful, while all the lords of the Earth will castigate the Kurus and Dhritarashtra. When Duryodhana dies the death of dishonour and of being forsaken by all men, my work will be complete. After that, do what needs to be done.

Mindful of your noble intentions but never sacrificing your interest, I will go to the Kurus and try to make peace. I will observe their preparations for war and return to make you victorious, Bhaarata.

I fear that war is certain; all the omens I see point to it. Birds and animals screech and howl at dusk; the best elephants and horses assume dreadful shapes; fires flame in many sinister hues. Such signs appear only when the pralaya is imminent.

Let your warriors ready their weapons, their machines of war, armour, chariots, elephants and horses, and prepare for battle. Collect everything you need for the war that looms. As long as he lives Duryodhana will never give back your magnificent kingdom, which he stole from you at a game of dice.'"

CANTO 74

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Bhima says, 'Madhusudana, speak in such a way that there may be peace with the Kurus. Do not threaten them with war. Do not speak harshly to Duryodhana, who is always quick to anger, resentful, flouts his own best interest and is arrogant. Treat him gently. His heart, like a criminal's, is naturally inclined to sin; he is intoxicated with pride in his own prosperity, and he is hostile towards the Pandavas. He has no foresight, is cruel and always blames others for his own sins; his strength is vicious; his wrath is not easily or quickly subdued. He does not learn from the mistakes of others or his own; his very soul is evil and he is full of deceit and treachery. He would rather give up his life than his opinion. Peace with such a man, Krishna, is difficult.

Duryodhana disregards the advice of his well-wishers; he is without virtue and loves falsehood; his actions violate the advice of his best counsellors, which wounds their hearts. Like a snake hiding in the reeds, he is a slave to his evil nature and his anger, and he sins again and again. You know well the strength of Duryodhana's army, his ways, his character and his prowess. Until now the Kauravas and their sons passed their days happily, and we, too, with our friends and Indra, as if we were Indra's younger brothers. But now, sadly, Duryodhana's wrath will consume all the Bhaaratas, as fire does forests at the end of winter.

O Krishna, you know about the eighteen kings who killed their friends and relatives. When Dharma's time came to an end, Kali[1] was born among the Asuras, who blossomed in prosperity and blazed with energy; Udavarta was born among the Haihayas; Janamejaya was born among the Nipas; Bahula among the Talajghanas; proud Vasu among the Krimis; Ajabindu among the Suviras; Rushardhika among the Surashtras; Arkaja among the Balihas; Dhautamulaka among the Chinas; Hayagriva among the Videhas; Varayu among the Mahaujasas; Bahu among the Sundaras; Pururavas among the Diptakshas; Sahaja among the Chedis and Matsyas; Vrishadhvaja among the Praviras; Dharana among the Chandravatsas; Vigahana among the Mukutas and Sama among the Nandivegas.

Vile and powerful souls, Krishna, take birth at the end of each yuga, in their respective races, for the destruction of their kinsmen. So has Duryodhana, the embodiment of sin, and the disgrace of his vamsa, been born at the end of the yuga into our clan, of the Kurus. Therefore, mighty one, you should speak gently to him in sweet, not bitter words, imbued with dharma and artha, and in depth on his favourite subjects, so you please him. All of us would rather submit humbly to Duryodhana than let the Bhaaratas be annihilated.

Krishna, conduct yourself in such a way that we may rather live as strangers to the Kurus than incur the sin of destroying the whole vamsa. Encourage our Pitamaha and other elders and counsellors to foster feelings of kinship amongst us cousins and to pacify the son of Dhritarashtra.

I say this and Yudhishtira approves. Arjuna, too, is opposed to war, for he is deeply compassionate.'"

[1] Kali refers to the demon Kali, not the Goddess Kaali.

CANTO 75

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing Bhima speak with such uncharacteristic mildness, as unexpected as hills without their bulk, or fire without heat, Krishna throws back his head and laughs aloud. And as if to provoke Bhima, like the wind fanning a fire, he speaks to him who was at that moment seized by an impulse of kindness.

Krishna says, 'O Bhimasena, you usually applaud war in your longing to slaughter Dhritarashtra's vile sons who delight in every bestiality, in destroying the lives of others. Parantapa, you stay awake the whole night, sitting with your head bent down. Frequently, you utter frightful exclamations of anger that express the storm that rages in your heart. Inflamed by the fire of your fury, you sigh in restlessness, like a smoking flame. You go off by yourself and lie down, your fevered breaths labouring, like a weak man weighed down by a heavy burden. Those who do not know the reason for all this think that you are mad.

Just as an elephant trumpets in rage while it tramples uprooted trees to pulp, you run wildly here and there, heaving sighs and making the Earth tremble under your tread. You take no delight in company and pass your time in solitude. Night or day, nothing pleases you so much as seclusion. Sitting by yourself, you suddenly laugh out loud; at times, you put your head between your knees and stay like that interminably, with your eyes

shut; at other times, you frown and bite your lips and stare fiercely, fixedly ahead of you, your eyes seeing nothing. These are all symptoms of anger.

Once, in the midst of your brothers, you seized your mace and cried, “As surely as the Sun rises in the east and displays his radiance, and as truly as he sets in the west by journeying around Meru, so do I swear that I will kill Duryodhana with this gada of mine. And this I, Bhima, solemnly vow.”

How does this same heart of yours now advocate peace, Parantapa? When fear enters even your heart, Bhima, all those who want war are dismayed as war draws nearer. Asleep or awake, you see inauspicious omens. Perhaps that is why you want peace. You seem to have lost your manliness, even like a eunuch. Panic grips you, which is why you are distraught. Your heart trembles; your mind is taken by despair; your thighs quiver in weakness, and all this makes you want peace. The hearts of mortal men, O son of Pritha, are as inconstant as the pods of a salmali seed in the wind.

At this moment, your words are as soft and mild as the language of cows; and your brothers’ hearts sink into a sea of despair to listen to you, like swimmers in the sea without a raft. That you of all men should speak such tame and cowardly words is as strange as a mountain moving. Remember your strength, your achievements, and the race into which are born; and do not give in to grief. Be strong, Bhima. This weakness is not worthy of you; a Kshatriya never enjoys anything he has not acquired through his own prowess.’”

CANTO 76

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The choleric Bhima, who can never tolerate a slight, is stung to the quick, and responds like a mettlesome thoroughbred to a whip.

He cries, 'Krishna, you wrong me! What I want is one thing and one thing alone: war. We have known each other a long time and you well know that I delight in war and that my prowess is irresistible. Or, perhaps you don't know me at all, like a swimmer unaware of the depth of the lake he swims in. That is why you speak to me like this. No one else, knowing Bhimasena, could say what you have to me.

And so let me tell you, O joy of the Vrishnis, about my unrivalled might. I know that to boast is vulgar, but you have wounded me, and I will tell you about myself and what I am.

Krishna, Sky and Earth are immovable, immense and infinite; they shelter the countless beings that are born into them. If, through anger, they suddenly come to collide like two mountains, I can keep them apart with my arms. Look at my mace-like arms; no man alive can extricate himself from their grasp. Indeed, the mountain Himavat, the Ocean and the mighty wielder of the thunderbolt—the slayer of Bala himself—cannot free the one that I seize in my great arms.

I will grind under my feet all the Kshatriyas who come to fight against the Pandavas. You do not know, Krishna, the prowess with which I

vanquished the kings of the Earth and subjugated them. If you really do not know my strength, which is as fierce as the midday Sun, you will see soon it in battle. You wound me deep with your cruel words; I feel the pain as of a foetid tumour being lanced. Ah, know that my strength is greater than I have described!

On the very day that the havoc of war breaks out you will see me fell elephants, warriors on chariots, elephants and horseback; and, my long withheld fury unleashed, you will see me butcher countless brave Kshatriyas. You and the others will see me do all this, and mow down the greatest Maharathas. The marrow in my bones has not yet dried, nor does my heart tremble. Even if the whole world rush at me in wrath, I will feel no fear.

Madhusudana, it is only from compassion that I advocate showing goodwill to the enemy. I quietly bear all our injuries, lest our Bharatavamsa become extinct.'"

CANTO 77

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"The Divine One says, 'I said what I did in affection and from a desire to know your true mind; it was not in reproach, from pride of knowledge, in anger, nor from any desire to hold forth. I know the magnanimity of your soul, your strength and your accomplishments. That is not why I was critical of you.

O Bhima, the benefit that the Pandava cause will gain from you is a thousand times greater than you give yourself credit for. You, Vrikodara, with your kinsmen and friends, are exactly the man that should be born into a noble house such as yours, which is honoured by all the kings of the Earth. However, those who have doubts about the consequences of dharma and adharma, and strength and weakness, can never arrive at the truth. Indeed, the very thing that is responsible for a man's success also causes his downfall. The consequences of human actions can never be certain.

Learned men, who can gauge the evil in any deed, declare how worthy or not any action is; yet, action can have the opposite and unforeseen results, even like the wind suddenly changing direction. Even those deeds of men, performed after great deliberation and with well directed policy, and consistent with dharma, are baffled by providence. Then, again, providential circumstances, such as heat, cold, rain, hunger and thirst, which do not depend on human endeavour, can be overcome by man's efforts. Also, apart from the course that a man is destined to follow as a

result of his past lives, he can be rid of all other karma if he so pleases; the Smritis and the Srutis testify to this.

Pandava, one cannot move through life on Earth by doing nothing. One should act in the knowledge that one's goals will be achieved by a combination of destiny and effort. The man who does with this belief is never pained by failure, nor delighted by success. To explain this, Bhimasena, was what I intended, not to proclaim that war would ensure victory for you.

When a man's mind is upset he should not lose his cheer or succumb to lassitude or dejection. This is why I spoke to you as I did: to put heart into you. Tomorrow I will go before Dhritarashtra; and I will strive to make peace without compromising your interests.

If the Kauravas make peace, everlasting fame will be mine; your goals will be achieved, and they, too, will reap great benefits. However, if the Kauravas disregard my advice and are obdurate with their opinion, there will surely be war. Bhimasena, the burden of fighting this war rests on you and Arjuna, and you two will have to lead all the others. In case of war, I will drive Arjuna's chariot; that is his wish, not that I want to fight.

I was fearful of the weakness your words conveyed. I only re-ignited your wrath, Mahabaho.'"

CANTO 78

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'O Janardana, Yudhishtira has already said whatever needed to be said. But after hearing you, it appears that you think that Dhritarashtra's greed and our relative weakness will make peace difficult to attain. Also, you think that human prowess alone is fruitless, that without showing our might our goals cannot be achieved. What you say may be true but, also, perhaps not always so. Nothing should be regarded as impossible. It is true that peace does seem to be unattainable, given our present condition, yet if peace is properly proposed, they might agree.

O Krishna, strive to strike peace with our enemies. You are the truest friend of both the Pandavas and the Kurus, even as Prajapati is of the Devas and the Asuras. Accomplish what is in the best interests of both sides. Bringing about our welfare is not difficult for you to achieve; if you try, you will surely succeed. Why, as soon as you go to Hastinapura, it will be done. Even if you decide to deal with Duryodhana in any other way, you must do as you wish. Whether you want peace or war with the enemy, Krishna, we will honour your decision.

Does the vile Duryodhana, with his sons and kinsmen, not deserve death when, unable to bear the sight of Yudhishtira's prosperity and finding no other honest course to assuage his own burning envy, he took our kingdom by cheating at dice? When invited to combat, what Kshatriya turns away from the fight, even if death is certain for him? When Duryodhana

defeated us with the lowest treachery and banished us to the forest, I thought that he deserved death at my hands. What you want to do for your loved ones is not strange; what is mysterious, though, is how you will achieve your objective, by mildness, or other means. If you think that for you to kill them all immediately is best, do it now; we need no further debate.

Surely, you know how Duryodhana shamed Draupadi in the Kuru sabha, and how we bore it with profound fortitude. I cannot believe that the same Duryodhana will now behave with dharma towards the Pandavas. Wise counsel will be lost on him, like seeds sown in barren soil.

So, Krishna, do what you think is right, and beneficial for the Pandavas, and also decide what should be done next.'"

CANTO 79

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"The Divine One says, 'I will do as you say, Mahabaho, and do my best to bring about an outcome that will benefit both the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Arjuna, of the two options, war and peace, only peace lies somewhat within my power. A farmer may, through his effort, water and weed his field, but without rain it will not yield crops. Some do say that his effort will result in success if he irrigates his field artificially; but even that is uncertain because a drought sent by fate may still make it dry. In view of all this, the Rishis of old have said that human endeavour will only succeed when providence collaborates. I will do all that can humanly be done, but I cannot prevail over providence.

Duryodhana goes in defiance of dharma and the world, and he feels no remorse. Moreover, his appetite for sin is fed by Sakuni and Karna, and by his brother Dusasana. Duryodhana will never make peace by giving back your kingdom, even if his obstinacy entails a bloody death for himself and his kinsmen at our hands. Yudhishtira does not wish to meekly give up his kingdom; neither will Duryodhana surrender it at any price. I think I need to deliver Yudhishtira's message to him, though Duryodhana will not agree to Yudhishtira's conditions. If he refuses, he deserves to die. Bhaarata, he deserves death at my hands because he is the one who always tormented all of you, ever since you were children, and later after cheating you of your

kingdom when he could not restrain his overweening envy of Yudhishtira's prosperity.

Many times he has tried to draw me away from you, but I never paid him any heed. You know what dreams Duryodhana dreams, and you also know that I want Yudhishtira's welfare. Knowing Duryodhana's heart and my own wishes, why do you doubt me, as if you knew nothing?

You know that an apocalyptic, revelational war has been ordained by the gods; how then, can we make peace with the enemy? I will say and do as much as I can, but do not expect peace. When Duryodhana made off with Virata's cattle, did Bhishma not try to persuade Duryodhana to make peace for the good of all?

I say to you today: as soon as you decided to fight them, their death was a foregone conclusion. Inexorably, and not surprisingly, Duryodhana has refused to part with even a very small part of the kingdom, for even a short time. As for me, I am always obedient to Yudhishtira's commands, and I must ponder again the sins of the wretched Duryodhana.'"

CANTO 80

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Nakula says, 'O Krishna, the benevolent Yudhishtira, who knows about dharma, has spoken at length; Bhimasena has heard him and has weighed his own strength against the desire for peace on the scales of dharma; you have heard what Arjuna said, too; and I have repeatedly expressed my own opinion, as well.

Set all this aside; concentrate now on what the enemy has in mind and do what you think is best, given the circumstances. Kesava, each situation warrants a different decision, but a man wins success if he does the apt thing for the particular situation in which he finds himself. A decision that suits one situation becomes the opposite in another. One cannot hold the same opinion all the time.

While we were in the forest, we adopted a particular way of life; things were different during the ajnatavasa. Now, when we need no longer hide, what we want has changed again. While we wandered in the vana, we were not as eager to have back our kingdom as we are now. Now our exile has ended and we have returned; and we hear that an army of seven akshauhinis has gathered to help us, by your grace, Janardana. Seeing these tigers among men, of immeasurable force, armed and ready for battle, what enemy of ours will not be terrified? Go to the Kurus; speak mildly first, then employ threats, so that the vile Duryodhana is filled with fear and anxiety.

What man of flesh and blood can stand up to Yudhishtira and Bhimasena, to the invincible Arjuna and Sahadeva, to Satyaki of the scintillating tejas, to me, to you or Balarama in battle, Kesava? Who can face Virata and his sons, Drupada and his allies, Dhrishtadyumna and the powerful king of Kasi, and Dhrishtaketu, lord of the Chedis?

Mahabaho, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja's objective will be accomplished immediately as you arrive there. Vidura, Bhishma, Drona and Bahlika will understand the wisdom of what you say. They will advise Dhritarashtra and the sinner Duryodhana to do as you say. When you, Krishna, are the speaker and Vidura is the listener, what is there in any of the worlds that cannot be communicated easily and effectively?'"

CANTO 81

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sahadeva says, 'What the king says is Sanatana Dharma, but you, Parantapa, must ensure, by what you do and say in Hastinapura, that there is war. Even if the Kauravas express a desire for peace with the Pandavas, you must provoke war with them. Krishna, you know how Panchali was dragged into the sabha and shamed. How can my anger be appeased without killing Duryodhana? Even if Bhima, Arjuna and Yudhishtira chose to be virtuous and peaceful, I will abandon dharma and meet Duryodhana in battle.'

Satyaki says, 'Mahabaho, noble Sahadeva speaks the truth. The anger I feel towards Duryodhana can be appeased only by his death. Do you not remember how enraged you were when you saw the distressed Pandavas in the forest, wearing rags and deer-skin? Purushottama, all the kings and warriors gathered here support what this fierce Kshatriya, Madri's heroic son, says.'

Hearing this, all the Kshatriyas set up a huge roar. They applaud Satyaki with shouts of *Excellent! Well said!* and, eager to fight, they are exhilarated.'"

CANTO 82

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vaisampayana said, 'Grief-struck Krishnaa of the long black tresses applauds Sahadeva and the great warrior Satyaki, whose words for her are resonant with dharma. Overwhelmed with sorrow to hear Bhimasena speak for peace, she turns to Krishna.

Her eyes are bathed in tears as she says, 'Madhusudana, you know how deceitfully Dhritarashtra's son, with his counsellors, robbed the Pandavas of their every happiness. You also know what message Yudhishtira sent through Sanjaya.

Effulgent one, he said, "Give us just five villages—Avisthala, Vrikasthala, Makandi, Varanavata, and for the fifth, any other of your choice." Krishna, this was the message sent to Duryodhana and his counsellors. Duryodhana heard what the humble Yudhishtira wants, and despite knowing that he is anxious to make peace, has done nothing towards it. If Duryodhana wants peace only without returning our kingdom, there is no need for you to go to Hastinapura.

The Pandavas, with the Srinjayas, can easily withstand the Dhartarashtra forces. When they are not amenable to conciliation, it is not right for you to show them mercy. To safeguard himself, a man must be severe with enemies with whom he cannot make peace either by conciliation or gifts. Krishna, the punishment you mete out, with the help of the Pandavas and Srinjayas, must be immediate and harsh. This is the best

course for the sons of Pritha and will, if accomplished, add to your glory and that of the entire Kshatriya race.

The man who is covetous, be he a Kshatriya or of any other varna, other than even the most sinful Brahmana, must surely be killed by a Kshatriya, true to his dharma. The exception in the case of a Brahmana is because a Brahmana is the teacher of all the other varnas, and he is the first to get a share in everything. Those who know the shastras declare that sin is incurred only by killing one who does not deserve killing. It is just as sinful not to kill one who does deserve it. With the Pandava and Srinjaya forces behind you, you must act in a manner that will not taint you with sin. I keep repeating what has already been said because I have faith in you.

Krishna, what other woman is there on Earth like me? I am the daughter of King Drupada, born from the fire of yagna. I am your beloved friend Dhrishtadyumna's sister. By marriage I have become a queen of the Ajamida vamsa, the daughter-in-law of the illustrious Pandu. I am the queen of Pandu's sons, who are each like Indra in splendour. To these five heroic Kshatriyas I have borne five sons, all mighty warriors, who are as close to you as Abhimanyu is.

I, this same woman, was dragged by my hair into the Kuru sabha and humiliated in the very sight of the sons of Pandu, and even while you live. Krishna, the Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Vrishnis all lived to see me treated like a slave by those sinners. And while the Pandavas sat silent without giving way to their anger, I called out to you in my heart, saying, "Save me, Krishna, save me!"

Then the illustrious Dhritarashtra, my father-in-law, said to me, "Ask for any boon, O princess of Panchala. You deserve that and honour from me."

I said, "Let the Pandavas be free men with their chariots and weapons."

The Pandavas were freed, only to be exiled into the forest. Janardana, you know all these sorrows of mine. Save me, lotus-eyed One, with my husbands, kinsmen and relatives, from that grief. By dharma I am a daughter-in-law to Bhishma and Dhritarashtra. Yet, I was forcibly enslaved before them. O, shame on Arjuna's skill as an archer; shame on Bhimasena's might, for letting Duryodhana live for even a moment after what he did. If I deserve any favour from you, if you have any affection for me, Krishna, direct your wrath at the sons of Dhritarashtra.'

The bewitching Panchali, her black eyes, large like lotus leaves, bathed in tears, walks with the lovely gait of a she-elephant and comes up to Krishna. Taking in her hands her lustrous tresses with wavy ends, so dark, almost deep-blue, scented with myriad perfumes, of every auspicious sign and, though braided, soft and glossy like some mighty serpent, she addresses him.

She says, 'O Lotus-eyed, who are anxious for peace with the enemy, remember in all that you do, these tresses of mine that Dusasana seized in his coarse hands. If Bhima and Arjuna have stooped so low as to long for peace, my old father will avenge me, with battle. My five sons, too, of the mighty tejas, with Abhimanyu at their head, will fight the Kauravas. What peace can my heart know unless I see Dusasana's dark arm severed from his body and cut into pieces?

Thirteen long years have I passed in expectation of better times, hiding my anger in my heart like a smouldering fire. Now, pierced by Bhima's words like arrows loosed by dharma, my heart is about to break.'

The doe-eyed Draupadi is convulsed with sobs, tears pouring down her cheeks and over the lovely princess's breasts like liquid fire.

The mighty-armed Kesava speaks comfortingly to her, 'Krishnaa, you will soon see the women of Bharata vamsa weep as you do. Timid one, they will cry for their relatives and friends who have been slain. They, with whom you are angry, have already lost their warriors and their power. For, at Yudhishtira's command, and with Bhima, Arjuna and the twins, I will accomplish what is ordained by destiny.

Their hour has come. If they do not listen to me, the sons of Dhritarashtra will lie on the earth and become food for dogs and jackals. Himavat might shift from his place; Bhumi might shatter into a hundred fragments; the sky with its countless stars might fall down; but what I say can never be in vain.

Stem your tears, Panchali; I swear that soon you will see your husbands crowned with prosperity, and their enemies slain.'"

CANTO 83

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'O Kesava, you are the truest friend of all the Kurus. You are related to both sides and a dear friend to both. You must bring peace between the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritarashtra, for only you can. Lotus-eyed Parantapa, go now with that intention and say what needs to be said to our irascible cousin. If the foolish Duryodhana does not accept your good advice, in keeping with dharma and artha, he will surely fall prey to what fate has destined for him.'

The Divine One says, 'Yes, I will go to Dhritarashtra. I want to achieve dharma, and weal for both ourselves and the Kurus.'

The night has passed and the Sun risen brightly in the east. The hour called Maitra has begun, and the rays of the Sun are still mild. The month is Kaumuda Kartika, the nakshatra Revati. It is the season of dew, for autumn has departed; and the Earth is verdant with lush crops.

This is how the world's stage is set that day, when Krishna, that mightiest of men, hears the auspicious and sacred sound of Brahmanas chanting the sweet mantras of prayer, like Indra hearing the adorations of the Devarishis. He performs his morning rituals, purifies himself with a bath, puts on his pitambara robes, adorns himself with ornaments and rubs himself with unguents, and worships Surya and Agni. He touches the tail of a bull and reverently bows to the Brahmanas; then he walks around the sacred fire and looks at the auspicious offerings laid out.

He remembers Yudhishtira's words and says to Satyaki, who sits nearby, 'Have my chariot prepared. Have my conch-shell, discus and mace, my quivers and arrows, and all my other astras placed in my ratha. Duryodhana, Karna and Subala's son are evil men and, yet, they must not be taken lightly.'

Krishna's attendants immediately begin to yoke his chariot, which is as effulgent as the fire that rages at the Pralaya, and which has no comparison in speed. Its two wheels are like the Sun and the Moon in lustre; it is emblazoned with crescent and full moons, fish, animals and birds; and it is adorned all over with garlands of flowers and with pearls and other gemstones of various kinds. It is grand and beautiful, and as splendid as the Sun. Besides its gold and jewelled decorations, it bears a wonderful flag-staff flying the finest pennants. Equipped with everything needed for battle, it is irresistible. Covered with tiger-skins, it can strip every enemy of his fame and enhance the joy of the Yadavas.

Yoked to this ratha are the superlative horses, Saibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Balahaka, all of which have been bathed and exquisitely caparisoned. And adding to Krishna's glory is Garuda, the Lord of birds, who is perched on the flagstaff of that awesome chariot.

Krishna ascends his ratha as lofty as Meru's summit, the deep rumble of its wheels like massed clouds, which, like the pushpaka vimana, takes its rider where he wills it. Taking Satyaki with him, Krishna sets out, filling the earth and the sky with the thunder of his chariot-wheels.

The sky becomes cloudless; cool, fragrant winds blow in the pure, clear air. Auspicious animals and birds, whirling always to their right, fly around the ratha; cranes, peacocks and swans follow the slayer of Madhu, uttering cries of good omen. The fire, fed with libations to the accompaniment of mantras, blazes up, smokeless, also sending its flames towards the auspicious right.

Vasishta, Vamadeva, Bhuridyumna, Gaya, Kratha, Sukra, Kusika, Bhrigu and other Brahmarishis and Devarishis stand to the right of Krishna, the joy of the Yadavas and Indra's younger brother. Worshipped by these and other illustrious Rishis and Munis, Krishna sets out for the city of the Kurus, being seen off by Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the twin sons of Madri; as well as by the heroic Chekitana, Dhrishtaketu of the Chedis, Drupada and the king of Kasi, that great warrior Sikhandin, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata with his sons and the princes of Kekaya. All these

Kshatriyas ride a respectful distance behind that bull of the Kshatriya race to honour him.

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja follows Krishna for some distance and then speaks to him in the presence of the other kings. The son of Kunti embraces that Purushottama, who has never sinned, not from desire, anger, fear or any wish for profit; whose mind is steady; who knows no greed; who is dharma embodied, and endowed with fathomless intelligence and wisdom; who knows the hearts of all creatures; who is the Lord of all and the God of gods; who is eternal; who has every virtue and bears the auspicious Srivatsa on his chest. The king embraces Krishna and tells him what he must do.

Yudhishtira says, 'We should ask after the welfare of our mother, who always keeps dharma, performing tapasya and propitiatory rituals; who is devout in her worship of Devas and Atithis; who always waits upon her superiors; who loves her sons with a boundless affection; and whom we love dearly. She rescued us from Duryodhana's many snares, like a boat saving shipwrecked sailors from the terrors of the sea. Krishna, though undeserving of woe, she has suffered untold misery because of us. We should pay homage to her. Embrace and comfort her repeatedly by telling her about the Pandavas.

Ever since her marriage she has been the victim of pain and grief because of the way her father-in-law behaved; suffering has been her lot. Krishna, will I ever see the day when my afflictions end and I can make my grieving mother happy? On the eve of our exile she ran after us, crying in anguish, but we left her behind and went into the forest. Sorrow does not always kill; she might still be alive and, though grieving constantly for her sons, being looked after in Hastinapura.

Glorious one, salute her for me, and salute Dhritarashtra also, as well as all the kings who are older than us. Greet Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Bahlika, Aswatthama, Somadatta and everyone of the Bharata vamsa. Salute the wise Vidura, counsellor of the Kurus, of the profound intellect and knowledge of dharma. Madhusudana, embrace everyone on our behalf.'

Having said this to Krishna in the presence of the kings, Yudhishtira circles him in pradakshina and asks his leave to return. Arjuna walks ahead a few steps and says quietly to his friend Krishna, the Avatara, 'Illustrious Govinda, all the kings know that we have decided to ask for our kingdom back. If, without insulting us and by honouring you, they give us what we demand, I will be pleased and they will escape mortal danger. If, however,

Dhritarashtra’s son, who is always deceitful, does otherwise, I will obliterate the very race of Kshatriyas.’

Bhima is delighted when Arjuna says this. That Pandava, who constantly quivers with rage he can scarcely contain, now lets out a dreadful roar of joy. Hearing him, all the bowmen tremble, and horses and elephants helplessly urinate and excrete in terror.

Having declared his resolve to Krishna, Arjuna takes his leave and turns back after embracing his divine cousin. Once all the other kings are persuaded to turn back, as well, Krishna sets out with a cheerful heart, on his chariot drawn by Saibya, Sugriva and the other horses. Urged by his sarathy Daruka, those steeds fly, devouring road and sky as they go.

On his way, Krishna Mahabaho meets some Rishis who shine with Brahmatejas, standing on both sides of the road. He gets down and greets them reverently and worships them.

He says, ‘Is there peace in the world? Is dharma being practised? Are the other three varnas obedient to Brahmanas? Where have you met with success? Where are you going and why? What can I do for you? What brings you illustrious ones to Earth?’

Jamadagni’s son, Brahma’s friend, that lord of Devas and Asuras, comes forward and embraces Krishna. Parasurama Bhargava says, ‘O Dasarha, Devarishis of pious deeds, Brahmanas of deep knowledge of the Shastras, Rajarishis and venerable Munis, who are witnesses to the feats that the Devas and Asuras have achieved, want to see all the Kshatriyas of the Earth gathered together from everywhere, the counsellors sitting in the ancient Kuru sabha, the kings, and, amongst them, you who are the Truth incarnate, O Janardana.

We are going to Hastinapura to witness that awesome sight. We are also anxious to hear what you will say to the Kurus in the presence of all those kings, words full of dharma and artha. Bhishma, Drona and others, as well as the illustrious Vidura and you, Yadavapumgava, will adorn that ancient sabha. We want to hear what you say there—divine words of wisdom.

You now know our purpose, Mahabaho. We will meet you again; go safely. We hope to see you in the midst of that sabha, seated on a noble throne, radiating lustre and might.’”

CANTO 84

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “O Parantapa, when Devaki’s mighty-armed son sets out for Hastinapura, ten powerful, fully armed and battle-ready Maharathas follow in his train. A thousand foot-soldiers, a thousand horsemen and hundreds of attendants carrying plentiful provisions also go with him.”

Janamejaya said, “How does the illustrious Krishna of Dasarha vamsa, the slayer of Madhu, leave on his journey? What omens appear when he sets out?”

Vaisampayana said, “I will tell you about the earthly and heavenly omens that appear on Krishna’s departure for Hastinapura. At first, the sky is clear and cloudless, yet thunder rolls and lightning flashes above. Later, light, fleecy clouds appear and pour down rain behind him, in his wake, as if in tribute. The seven great rivers, including the Sindhu, change their eastward courses and flow west instead. The cardinal directions seem to be reversed and all things seem in dizzy thrall. Fires blaze up everywhere, Rajan, and the Earth trembles.

In hundreds of wells and earthen pots water gushes up spontaneously and overflows. The whole universe is enveloped in darkness. Akasa is filled with dust that obscures the cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon. Loud roars sound in the sky, but no creature is seen to make them. This wonderful phenomenon is seen all across the land. A southwesterly wind,

roaring, uproots trees by the thousands and crashes them down upon the city of Hastinapura.

However, in those places through which Krishna passes delicious breezes blow and everything becomes auspicious. Lotuses and fragrant flowers fall in showers from above. The road becomes smooth and miraculously free from prickly grasses and thorns. Wherever Krishna stays, thousands of Brahmanas glorify that munificent One and worship him with offerings of curds, ghee, honey and rich gifts. Women come out onto the road and fling redolent wildflowers over him who is devoted to the welfare of all creatures.

Bharatarishabha, Krishna comes to wonderful Salibhavana abundant with every crop, an enchanting and sacred realm. He sees, with delight, villages crowded with animals; he passes through many cities and kingdoms. He passes through Upaplavya where its happy, good natured citizens, who have the protection of the Bhaaratas and, so, free from fear of invasion, and unknowing of danger or calamities of any kind, come out of their town and stand together on the way, eager to set eyes on holy Krishna. They see that illustrious one like a fire, and they worship him as they would an honoured and welcome guest.

When at last Krishna comes to Vrikasthala, the Sun is reddening the sky with his last rays of light. Alighting from his chariot, the Avatara performs the customary rites of purification, orders the horses unharnessed and sits down to his sandhya vandana. Daruka unyokes the horses, tends to them and lets them loose to graze and drink.

Krishna says, ‘We must spend the night here, for the success of Yudhishtira’s mission.’

His attendants quickly set up camp and serve fine food and drink.

Rajan, amongst the Brahmanas who live in that village, those who are of noble descent, and humble and obedient to the injunctions of the Vedas in their ways, approach Krishna and honour him with blessings and worship. They place their rich homes at his disposal.

Krishna joyfully accepts their hospitality and pays homage to each of them as befits their status. He visits their homes, then returns with his own people to his ample tent. Having eaten his meal with them and fed all the Brahmanas with sweet-meats, Krishna passes the night happily in Vrikasthala.’”

CANTO 85

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra, in the meantime, has discovered through his spies that Krishna is on his way. His hair stands on end as he reverently faces the mighty-armed Bhishma, Drona, Sanjaya and the illustrious Vidura, and Duryodhana and his confederates.

He says, 'O son of Kuru vamsa, we hear strange and wonderful news. Old men, women and children are talking of it in their homes; most speak of it in awe; others gather in groups outside and talk of it; wherever men congregate, in homes or open spaces, they are discussing just one thing. They all say that Krishna, the great scion of Dasarha vamsa, is one his way here on behalf of the Pandavas. He is worthy of every honour we can do him and our worship. He is the Lord of all creatures; everything in the universe depends upon him; intelligence, strength, wisdom and energy are centred in him.

This Narasreshta deserves the reverence of good men, for He is eternal virtue—Sanatana Dharma incarnate. He will bestow felicity and happiness if worshipped, and misery if not. If we please him with our offerings, we might have all our wishes fulfilled by his grace, in the presence of these kings.

Parantapa, waste no time; make arrangements to receive him worshipfully; have pavilions built on the road and furnish them with every luxury, so that Krishna is pleased with you. What does Bhishma think?'

Bhishma and the others warmly laud what Dhritarashtra says. Duryodhana immediately orders pavilions to be erected at regular intervals, at the most charming sites, and adorned with myriad jewels. The king has them furnished with luxurious beds and seats; he sends beautiful maidens, perfumes, ornaments, fine clothes, a variety of the best food and drink and fragrant garlands of many kinds. Especially for Krishna's reception and use, the king has a splendid, gem-studded pavilion built at Vrikasthala. Once these arrangements, made by superhuman or even divine effort, are complete, Duryodhana informs Dhritarashtra of them.

Krishna arrives at the Kuru encampment, but casts not even a glance at these opulent pavilions.'"

CANTO 86

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Vidura, Krishna has left Upaplavya. He is in Vrikasthala now and will be here tomorrow. He is the lord of the Ahukas; he is the foremost of the Sattvatas; he is a Mahatman endowed with great lustre and might. He is the guardian and protector of the prosperous kingdom of the Vrishnis; he is the Pitamaha of the three worlds. The vastly intelligent Vrishnis and Andhakas worship Krishna's wisdom, just as the Adityas, the Vasus and the Rudras do Brihaspati's. Virtuous one, I will, in your presence, offer our worship to this noble son of the Dasarha vamsa. Let me tell you what I plan to do.

I will give him sixteen rathas made of gold, each drawn by four superb, well-adorned, identically coloured Bahlika horses. I will give him eight elephants with the juice of musth running down their temples, with tusks as big as plough shares, which can smite down hostile ranks, and eight mahouts for each one. I will give him a hundred lovely maidservants with golden skins, all virgins, and a hundred man-servants as well.

I will give him eighteen-thousand soft woollen blankets that the mountain dwellers gave us. I will give him a thousand deer-skins from Cheena, and everything else that one like him deserves. I will give him this great and serene gemstone of the purest rays that shines day and night, for only Krishna is worthy of it. I will give him my own chariot, which can traverse fourteen yojanas in a day. I will set food and drink before him,

eight times more than what the animals and attendants in his entourage need.

All my sons, except Duryodhana, will go out to welcome him on their chariots. Thousands of graceful dancing girls, decked in ornaments and unveiled, will receive Krishna. Let all the citizens with their wives and children feast their prayerful eyes on the illustrious Madhusudana with as much devotion as they look at the rising Sun. Let pennants and banners be raised and the road by which Krishna comes be well-watered to settle the dust.

Let Dusasana's palace, which is better than Duryodhana's, be cleaned and decorated for Krishna to stay in. With its many beautiful mansions, and its abundant riches, it is enchanting indeed. All my wealth, as well as Duryodhana's, is kept there. Give Krishna all that befits one as great as him.'"

CANTO 87

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vidura says, 'O Rajan, you have the respect and love of everyone in all the three worlds, and you are considered the best of men. You are venerable and your mind is so serene that whatever you say will be in accord with the shastras and the dictates of reason. Your subjects are confident that dharma is as integral to you as writing etched on stone, as rays to the Sun or waves to the ocean. Your virtues make your subjects love you. Take care to preserve your noble traits. Be straightforward in all that you do. Do not, out of foolishness, be the cause of a slaughter of your sons, grandsons, friends, kinsmen and all your dear ones.

You plan to give much to Krishna as your guest; he deserves all that and more, indeed he deserves the Earth. However, your generosity does not stem from motives of dharma or a desire to please him, but from selfish reasons. It reeks of insincerity, falseness and deception. I clearly see the hidden intentions behind what you plan to do.

The Pandavas want only five villages, but you do not want to give them even that for the sake of peace. Instead, you are trying to win Krishna over with gifts and to alienate him from the Pandavas. You will not succeed in separating Krishna and Arjuna, neither with wealth, nor worship, nor with all your cunning stratagems. I know Krishna's magnanimity; I know how unshakeable Arjuna's devotion to him is; I know that Arjuna is as Krishna's life and he will never forsake him.

Krishna will not accept any hospitality from you other than water to wash his feet and to drink; the only courtesy he will offer is to enquire after the well-being of those he sees with you, nothing else. Rajan, offer him the honour of a welcome that he will accept. He is worthy of every reverence and deserves no less. Give Krishna what he comes for, which he desires for the good of both the Kurus and the Pandavas. He wants peace between you and Duryodhana, on one side, and the Pandavas on the other.

Do as he says, Rajan; you are like a father to the Pandavas; you are old and they are children to you by age. Behave as a father would towards them, for they look upon you as one.'"

CANTO 88

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Duryodhana says, 'All that Vidura has said about Krishna is true. Krishna is devoted to the Pandavas and inseparable from them. The gifts that you plan to give him are inappropriate. Kesava is indeed worthy of it all, but this is neither the time nor the place for it. He will think that we are honouring him out of fear. An intelligent Kshatriya must never do anything that may be considered cowardly or shameful.

I am well aware that Krishna of the large eyes is worthy of the worship of the three worlds, but given the circumstances we should not give him anything. The war that we have set our minds on should not be set aside or delayed out of considerations of hospitality.'

Listening to Duryodhana, the Kuru Pitamaha Bhishma says, 'Krishna will not be pleased or angry whether he is honoured or not; nor will he be insulted, for he is above such things. No one, however powerful he may be or however hard he may try, can obstruct his purpose. Do not hesitate to do as Krishna says, and use him to make peace with the Pandavas. He is righteous and his advice will be in keeping with dharma and artha. What is fitting is that you gratify him by doing what he asks.'

Duryodhana says, 'Pitamaha, I cannot live if I have to share my fortune with the Pandavas. I have made my own decision: when he arrives here in the morning, I will imprison Krishna, who is the refuge of the Pandavas. With him confined, the Vrishnis and the Pandavas, indeed the whole world,

will submit to me. Tell me how I should do this, so that Krishna does not guess what I intend, and so that we are not endangered.'

Dhritarashtra and his advisors are shocked to hear Duryodhana's abysmal plan.

Dhritarashtra says to Duryodhana, 'Never speak of this again, it is sinful! Hrishikesa comes as an ambassador. Besides, he is related to us and we love him. He has done us no wrong; how can you even think of imprisoning him?'

Bhishma says, 'Your sinful son faces his end by choosing evil over dharma despite his well-wishers' pleas; and you follow the lead of this wretch, who ignores all wise counsel and treads the path to doom. This vile prince of yours, with all his counsellors, will die the instant they lay hands on the pure Krishna. I dare not tarry to listen to this sinner anymore.'

And the inflamed Bhishma of the awesome might gets up and leaves the Kuru sabha."

CANTO 89

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Krishna rises at dawn and, having performed his morning ablutions and rituals and taken leave of those who rode with him, sets out for Hastinapura. The citizens of Vrikasthala bid farewell to the mighty-armed one and return to their homes.

Other than Duryodhana, all the grandly attired sons of Dhritarashtra, along with Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and others, go out to meet Krishna. Thousands of people come out to look at him—on chariots and on foot. He meets Bhishma of the immaculate deeds, Drona and Dhritarashtra's sons on his way; and they escort him into the city of elephants.

In honour of Krishna's visit, Hastinapura is vividly adorned and the main streets are bedecked with gold and gemstones of all kinds. Rajan, not a single man, woman or child remains indoors, so eager are the citizens to see Krishna. They come out and line the streets, and bow their heads in worship while they sing in his praise as he passes. Noble women crowd the balconies and terraces of great mansions to look at Krishna as he passes by; filling them until it seems they might collapse under their combined weight. And although swift, Krishna's horses move slowly through the thronging streets.

The lotus-eyed Parantapa enters the compounds of Dhritarashtra's ash-coloured stone palace with its numerous edifices. He passes through the first three chambers of the palace and then he meets Dhritarashtra. The blind

king stands to honour Krishna in welcome, and Drona, Bhishma, Kripa, Somadatta and king Bahlika rise with him. The Vrishni hero comes forwards and pays his respects first to the illustrious Dhritarashtra and Bhishma; he then greets the other kings one by one, in proper order. Finally, after Krishna has greeted Drona and his son, Bahlika, Kripa and Somadatta, Dhritarashtra shows him to a throne of wondrous artistry, made of gold and inlaid with resonant jewels.

When Krishna is seated, Dhritarashtra's priests make a ritual offering to him of a cow, honey, curds and water. Krishna stays awhile, surrounded by the Kurus, exchanging pleasantries with each one as befits their relationship with him. In due course, having accepted the honours of welcome accorded to him and having greeted all the Kurus in their sabha, he takes Dhritarashtra's leave and goes to Vidura's fine home. Vidura comes out to welcome Krishna of the Dasarha vamsa with all kinds of auspicious and loving offerings.

Tears in his eyes, Vidura says, 'O Lotus-eyed Lord, I cannot begin to describe the joy I feel to see you, for you are the inner soul of all the living, the antaratman.'

Vidura, who knows dharma, asks after the Pandavas. Krishna, for whom the past and future are merged into the present, who knows that the Pandavas love Vidura and he them, that he is learned, constant in dharma, ever truthful and wise, and that he bears no anger against the sons of Pandu, tells him in detail about what the sons of Pandu have been doing.'"

CANTO 90

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After noon, after visiting Vidura, Krishna, chastiser of his enemies, goes to see his aunt Kunti. When she sees him, his face glowing with the radiance of the Sun, she embraces him and begins to pour out her sorrow for her sons. At the long denied sight of Krishna, who is her sons' very prana, her tears flow. When Krishna has received her ritual welcome she speaks to him, her face careworn, her voice choked with tears.

Kunti says, 'O Kesava, from their childhood my sons have served their elders and superiors with reverence. They were always devoted to each other. They were cheated of their kingdom and sent into exile, when they ought to have lived in the midst of their friends and kin. They have mastered anger and joy; they are devoted to Brahmanas and always truthful. These children of mine, the noble sons of Pandu, tore my heart out when, abandoning kingdom and pleasures, and leaving me behind, they went into the forest. How did my sons live in the vana full of lions, tigers and wild elephants?

They have suffered untold misery. Deprived of their father in their infancy, I raised them all so tenderly. How did they live in the forest without seeing their mother? From their infancy the music of conches, drums and flutes woke them from their sleep. While at home, they slept in palatial apartments on soft sheets and skins of the runku deer; and were woken in

the morning by the trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses, the clatter of chariot-wheels, and the music of flutes and veenas, the sounds of conches and cymbals. They would worship at dawn while listening to sacred hymns chanted by Brahmanas; they worshipped the eldest of those Brahmanas with grand gifts of clothes, jewels and ornaments. And those illustrious Dvijas blessed them in return.

I cannot imagine how they slept in the deep forest where only the feral cries of predators ring. O how unjustified was their torment. They who were roused from their beds by music of cymbals, drums, conches and flutes, by the sweet voices of singers and by their praises being sung, how could they bear to be awoken in the forest by the roars of panthers and tigers?

My eldest son is modest and devoted to truth; he has his senses under control, and compassion for all creatures; he has conquered lust and malice; he always walks the path of dharma; he was able to bear the heavy burden of the ancient Rajarishis—Ambarisha, Mandhatri, Yayati, Nahusha, Bharata, Dilipa and Usinara's son Sibi; his character is taintless and his disposition immaculate; he is deeply versed in dharma; his prowess is irresistible; his accomplishments make him fit to rule the three worlds; his profound learning and devotion to dharma make him rightfully the foremost of the Kurus; he is handsome and mighty-armed; and he has no enemies. How is my Yudhishtira, O Krishna?

My pure-souled and golden-skinned second son is as strong as ten thousand elephants and as swift as the wind; he is the mightiest of the Pandavas and the most quick-tempered; he is devoted to his brothers and is beloved of them all. It is he who killed Kichaka and his brothers; he who slew the Krodhavasas, Hidimba and Baka. In prowess he is Indra's equal, in might Vayu Deva's; his anger is terrifying and like Rudra's; he is the foremost of all warriors. This Parantapa, this wrathful son of Pandu, restrains his anger, might and impatience, and he controls his soul in implicit obedience to his elder brother. Tell me, Krishna, how is my Bhimasena of immeasurable valour, whose terrifying appearance suits his name Vrikodara?

Krishna, what of my Arjuna, who with only his two arms is more powerful than his thousand-armed namesake of long ago, my son who shoots five hundred arrows with one draw of his bow? He is Kartavirya's equal with the astras; Surya Deva's equal in blinding energy; a Maharishi's equal in self-restraint; Bhumi Devi's equal in forgiveness. It is by his

strength that the Kuru kings have acquired their vast empire that blazes in splendour; and the Pandavas greatly value his prowess. This son of Pandu is the foremost of all Maharathas; his might is true and irresistible; no enemy has ever escaped him with his life; he is the conqueror of all, and invincible; he is the refuge of the Pandavas, as Indra is of the Devas. Krishna, how is your brother and friend, my Dhananjaya?

Ah, tell me about my tender-hearted son, who is kind to all creatures and blessed with modesty, who is a master of powerful astras, who is delicate and virtuous, who is my most beloved child. The mighty archer Sahadeva is the hero and ornament of all sabhas; he is young and devoted to the service of his brothers; he knows artha and dharma; his brothers always praise his noble character and manner. Madri and Pandu's son, the heroic Sahadeva, is the best of warriors; he waits submissively on his older brothers and reverentially on me; he is tender in years and of a gentle disposition; he is brave and handsome. He is loved by all and most dearly by his brothers, whose very life he is, though he inhabits his own body.

And tell me about my Nakula, who is a master of the various vyuhas of war; who is strong and a mighty archer also. My precious child was raised in luxury; is he well in body and mind? Mahabaho, shall I ever see my Nakula again? That Maharatha is still a stripling to me; he does not deserve this grief. O, how could I, who knew no peace if Nakula was out of my sight for even the blink of an eye, be still alive today?

Dearer to me than all my sons is Draupadi. She is nobly born and completely beautiful; she is endowed with every accomplishment; she always speaks the truth. She chose to accompany her husbands rather than stay with her sons and, leaving her children behind, followed the Pandavas. Once, a retinue of servants waited on her; her husbands, who love her, gratified her every little wish. She bears all the auspicious marks on her person and is accomplished in every way. Krishna, how is Draupadi?

Although she has five heroic husbands, all slayers of foes and all peerless bowmen who are each equal to Agni in urjas, she has suffered great torment. I have not seen my daughter-in-law Panchali for fourteen years; she herself has not seen her sons for as long, and must have endured constant anxiety for them. That Draupadi does not enjoy the happiness that should be hers for her wonderful character convinces me that happiness is not the result of one's deeds or nature.

Whenever I remember how she was forcibly dragged into the Kuru sabha, I stop loving Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva. Never before have I borne a heavier burden of grief as when the villainous Dusasana, driven by rage and lust, hauled Draupadi, who was in her menstrual period and wore only a single length of cloth, into the sabha where her father-in-law sat; and exposed her to the gaze of all the Kurus. Everyone knows that Dhritarashtra, Bahlika, Kripa, Somadatta and all the others were struck by sadness at this; but of all who were present in that sabha, it is only Vidura who spoke out for her, only him that I worship.

One does not become worthy of homage by learning or wealth. It is one's character alone that makes a man deserve honour. Krishna, the illustrious Vidura, with his great intellect and deep wisdom, is an ornament that adorns the world.'

Pritha is filled at once with joy at Krishna's presence and sorrow for her sons; and she vents all her grief. She says, 'O Parantapa, dissolute kings of ancient times occupied themselves with gambling and hunting deer. Can this be a happy way of life for the Pandavas? I am consumed by dark thoughts and images, Krishna—of Draupadi being violently dragged into the presence of the Kurus in their sabha by Dhritarashtra's sons, and abuse worse than death being heaped on her; of my sons being banished from their city; of them wandering in the wilderness. These and other sorrows fairly crush me.

Nothing could have been more painful to me or my sons than to have lived a year in wretched hiding, in a stranger's house. Fourteen years have passed since Duryodhana exiled my sons. If suffering destroys the karma of paapa, and if happiness depends on punya, then considering the torment we have been through, we might yet enjoy happiness again. I never treated Dhritarashtra's sons differently from mine. By virtue of that, O Krishna, surely I will see you emerge safely from this war, and with the Pandavas, their enemies slain and their kingdom restored to them. My sons have kept the oath they swore and lived so faithfully by dharma that their enemies cannot hope to vanquish them.

As for my sorrows, I blame neither myself nor Duryodhana, but my father alone. Like a wealthy man making a gift of money, my father gave me away. When I was still a girl, playing with toys, or with a ball in my hands, your grandfather gave me away to his friend, the illustrious

Kuntibhoja. Abandoned then by my father and now by my father-in-law, and suffering unbearably as I do, what point is there in my being alive?

On the night of Arjuna's birth, a disembodied voice said to me, "This son of yours will conquer the whole world and his fame will reach the heavens. Your son will destroy the Kurus in a great war and recover the lost kingdom, and with his brothers he will perform three mahayagnas."

I do not doubt the truth of that marvellous announcement. I bow to dharma that upholds creation. If dharma is real, you will surely make good all that the asariri said. Neither the death of my husband, nor the loss of wealth, nor our conflict with the Kurus inflicted such eviscerating pain on me as the separation from my children. What peace can my heart know when I do not see Dhananjaya, wielder of Gandiva and best of all Kshatriyas? I have not seen Yudhishtira, Arjuna and Bhima for fourteen years, Krishna. Men perform sraddha, last rites, for those who have gone missing for a long time, assuming that they are dead. Practically, my children are dead to me and I to them.

Tell Yudhishtira Dharmaraja that his dharma diminishes with each passing day. Tell him to stop this with a Kshatriya's rough deeds. Cursed are they, Krishna, who live as dependents at another's mercy. Death is better than a livelihood gained by such meanness.

You must tell Dhananjaya and Vrikodara that the time has come for them to fulfil the purpose for which a Kshatriya woman bears a son; that if they let time slip by without achieving anything, then, although they are still universally respected, they will become objects of contempt; and that if men's disdain taints them, I will abandon them for ever. Tell those Purushottamas that when the time comes even life, which is precious, should be laid down.

Tell Madri's sons, who are more devoted to Kshatriya dharma than to life itself, that they must strive to win comfort and wealth back through their prowess, for only objects gained like that can please the heart of a man who wants to live by Kshatriya dharma.

Go now, Mahabaho, and tell Arjuna, foremost of all Kshatriyas, to walk the path that Draupadi shows him. You know well, Krishna, that when inflamed Bhima and Arjuna are each like Yama and can vanquish even the Devas. Their wife Krishnaa being dragged into the sabha and spoken to as she was by the beasts Dusasana and Karna was a searing insult to them. Duryodhana, too, insulted the mighty Bhima in the presence of the Kuru

kings. I am certain he will pay for that, for Vrikodara knows no peace when an enemy provokes him. Indeed, once provoked, Bhima remembers the slight until he has killed his foes and their allies.

The loss of kingdom did not crush me; the defeat at dice did not sadden me; but the illustrious and beautiful princess of Panchala being dragged into the sabha, wearing only a single cloth, and there forced to hear the vilest taunts and abuse, grieved me more than anything I have known. Krishna, what could be a greater sorrow for me? Alas, that incomparable Kshatriya princess, so devoted to her dharma, had to suffer such savagery while in her delicate period and, though she had powerful protectors, was as helpless as if she had none.

O Madhusudana, I find it strange that I have had to bear such a burden of grief in spite of you, and that mightiest of men Balarama and that Maharatha Pradyumna being protectors of my children and myself; and despite my sons, the invincible Bhima, and Arjuna who never turns his back on the enemy, being alive.'

Krishna comforts his aunt so grief-stricken by the plight of her sons. He says, 'There is no other woman in the world like you, Matuli. You are the daughter of King Surasena, and by marriage you are of the Ajamida vamsa. The families of your birth and marriage are both noble; you are like a lotus transplanted from one great lake into another. You were blessed with prosperity and adored by your husband. You are the wife of a hero and have given birth to heroic sons. You possess every virtue and are endowed with great wisdom. It is fitting that you should bear joy and sorrow with equanimity and patience.

Your children have overcome sleep and sloth, anger and joy, hunger and thirst, cold and heat and enjoy happiness in the true Kshatriya way. They are endowed with great light and strength and, abandoning the sensual pleasures which the low-minded are addicted to, pursue the noble felicity which Kshatriyas should. Nor are they content with a little. Wise men enjoy the limits of joy or unhappiness from objects that give these. Ordinary men choose mediocre pleasures and are content with lethargy. Those that are superior desire either the most acute human suffering or the highest bliss that man can have. The wise delight in extremes; they find no pleasure in mediocrity. They hold the extremes with true happiness and see the in-betweens as real sorrow.

The Pandavas and Draupadi greet you through me. They send the message that they are well and ask after your welfare. You will soon see them become the lords of the whole world, with their enemy slain and themselves reinstated to power and prosperity.'

Consoled by Krishna, the sorrowing Kunti shakes off the gloom in which temporary ignorance has enveloped her and says to Krishna, 'Mahabaho, let us do whatever you think is proper, without abandoning dharma, and without deceit. I know the power of your truth and of your birth. I know also what wisdom and strength you will employ to accomplish what is best for your beloved cousins. In our vamsa you are dharma personified; you are truth; you are the embodiment of tapasya; you are Brahman. Everything is founded in you; and what you say must always be true.'

The mighty-armed Krishna bids her farewell, and after walking around her in pradakshina, leaves for Duryodhana's palace.'"

CANTO 91

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Having taken leave of Kunti and walked round her in pradakshina, Krishna goes to Duryodhana's opulent palace. It is richly adorned, with beautiful furniture, and as grand as Indra's abode. Krishna walks unobstructed through three large courtyards and enters the palace, which is as imposing as a mass of clouds, as tall as a hill, magnificent and resplendent.

There he sees Dhritarashtra's son of the mighty arms seated on his throne in the midst of a thousand kings and surrounded by all the Kurus. There he also sees Dusasana, Karna and Subala's son Sakuni, who sit next to Duryodhana. When Krishna enters the sabha, Dhritarashtra's illustrious son and his counsellors rise to honour him. Krishna greets Duryodhana and his counsellors, as well as all the kings present, according to their status, and then sits on a beautifully wrought golden throne spread over with a rich gold-embroidered cover.

The Kuru king makes the ritual offering to Krishna of a cow, honey, curds and water; and he places at his service all his palaces and other mansions, and the whole kingdom. In the presence of all the kings, the Kauravas worship Krishna, who is like the Sun in all his glory. Once the ritual of worship is completed, Duryodhana invites Krishna to eat with him in his palace. Krishna declines.

Duryodhana glances at Karna and, in a deceptively mild voice underlaid with malice, says to Krishna, 'O Janardana, why will you not accept the feast of food and drink, and the garments and beds that I have arranged for you? You are helping both sides in this dispute; you want the good of both. You are the greatest of Dhritarashtra's relatives and he loves you dearly. You also know dharma and artha, fully and in detail. Krishna, I want to hear the reason for your refusing my hospitality.'

Krishna raises his mighty right arm and, in a voice as deep as rumbling clouds, says to Duryodhana, 'Rajan, envoys accept food and worship only after the success of their missions. So, Bhaarata, when my mission succeeds, you may entertain me and my attendants.'

Duryodhana says, 'Krishna, it is not fitting that you behave in this manner. We are trying to please you because of your kinship to us, regardless of the success or failure of your mission. Our efforts seem to be futile; and we see no reason why you reject our worship, which we offer out of love and friendship. We have no quarrel or war with you; and on reflection, it seems what you say and do is not becoming.'

Krishna looks at Duryodhana and all his counsellors and says, 'I could never forsake dharma, not from desire, from wrath or malice; not for gain or for the sake of argument and not from temptation. One accepts food from another when one is in distress. You have not inspired love in me by anything you have done, nor am I in distress. Without any reason, you hated your gentle cousins the Pandavas, who have every virtue, from the moment they were born. The unreasonable hatred you bear the sons of Kunti does not become you.

The sons of Pandu are all devoted to dharma. Who would hurt them in the least? He who hates them, hates me; he who loves them, loves me. Know that the Pandavas and I have one soul. He who is driven by lust, anger and by the darkness of his heart, who hates and seeks to injure one who owns every good quality is the worst of men, even if he possesses every noble quality himself.

That wrathful villain of uncontrolled soul, who, from ignorance and greed, hates his godlike kinsmen, will never enjoy his prosperity for long. On the other hand, the one who, through good judgement, wins over virtuous men, even if he has an aversion to them in his heart, enjoys undying felicity and fame. The food you offer me is defiled by your

vileness, and I cannot eat it. The only food I will eat here is what Vidura offers me.'

Saying this to the wilful Duryodhana, who cannot bear to hear anything contrary to his wishes, Krishna leaves the glittering palace and sets out for Vidura's home. While he is there, Drona, Kripa, Bhishma, Bahlika and many of the Kauravas come to see him.

The Kauravas who have come place their palaces with all the wealth in them at Krishna's disposal. Krishna thanks them for the honour they have done him and gives them leave to go.

After the party of Kurus has left, Vidura entertains Krishna, the unvanquished, with lavish hospitality, providing him with everything he could want; and Kunti places sattvik, delicious food in abundance before him. Krishna first gratifies the Brahmanas who know the Vedas; he gives them food and gold. Only then he and his attendants, like Indra with the Maruts, dine on what remains of the feast that Vidura has prepared.'"

CANTO 92

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "In the night, when Krishna has dined and is refreshed, Vidura says to him, 'O Krishna, your coming has not been a well judged one. Dhritarashtra's son violates dharma and artha; he is evil and wrathful; he insults anyone he pleases, while he himself craves honour; and he disobeys the elders. He ignores the shastras; he is foolish and vile; he has set himself on a fateful, inexorable path to perdition; and he is malevolent towards those who are concerned for his welfare.

His soul is overcome by desire and lust, and he foolishly believes he is wise. He is the enemy of all his true friends. He is always suspicious, has no control over himself, is ungrateful and, having abandoned dharma, is infatuated by every sin. He is vain and immature, a slave to his senses, driven by bottomless greed, and indecisive.

And these are not his only faults. Even if you point out what is good for him, his arrogance makes him ignore such counsel. He has great faith in the prowess of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Drona's son and Jayadratha and, so, he spurns peace. Dhritarashtra's sons and Karna firmly believe that the Pandavas cannot even face Bhishma, Drona and the other Kshatriyas, let alone fight against them. Duryodhana has assembled an immense army and thinks that victory is already his. The fool believes that Karna can single-handedly vanquish the enemy, and so Duryodhana will never make peace.

Krishna, you want peace and brotherhood between the Kauravas and the Pandavas; but know that Dhritarashtra's sons have decided not to give the Pandavas what is rightfully theirs. Whatever you say to these men will be in vain, for they their minds are already made up. A wise man would not waste his breath when his words, good or bad, will surely prove ineffectual, even like singing to the deaf. Just as a Brahmana's discourse is wasted on Chandalas, your words will be utterly disregarded by these ignorant and evil men, who have no reverence for anything that is worthy of it.

Duryodhana is fatuous and, as long as he has strength, he will never heed your advice; everything you say to him will be futile. I do not think it is apt for you to go into the midst of these sinners, and speak out against them, who are black-souled, and many. Because they have no respect for age, are blinded by wealth and vanity, are full of the arrogance of youth and impatient, they will never accept your wise counsel.

Duryodhana has mustered a strong force and does not trust you. He will never do as you say. Dhritarashtra's sons are inspired by the conviction that Indra himself, with all the Devas, cannot defeat them in battle. Your words, always profound, will not move men of such dark beliefs, men driven by lust, greed and anger.

Secure amidst his vast army of elephants, chariots and soldiers, Duryodhana is fearless and thinks he has already conquered the Earth. He wants his empire without rivals. Peace with him is not possible, for he assumes that what he owns is unalterably his. Sadly, the end of the world as we know it is at hand because of Duryodhana, for kings of the world and all their Kshatriya warriors have gathered here to fight for him against the Pandavas.

Krishna, in the past, you have made all these kings, who are now arrayed against you, suffer grievous losses. Prompted by fear of you, these Kshatriyas have joined Karna and made an alliance with Dhritarashtra's sons. Reckless, and even prepared to die, they have joined Duryodhana for the pleasure of fighting against the Pandavas and you. I do not think it wise for you to go to them. How will you manage, surrounded by so many treacherous enemies all seated together? I am aware that you cannot be vanquished by the Devas themselves; I know how powerful and intelligent you are.

Krishna, I love you as much as I love the sons of Pandu, and what I say is from affection, respect and friendship for you. Need I tell you how

delighted I am to see you, Lotus-eyed One? You are the inner soul of all the living.’”

CANTO 93

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"The Divine One says, 'Vidura, all that a wise man should say; all that a far-sighted man would say; all that a man could to say to me as a friend; all that is truly worthy of you, in keeping with dharma and artha: all this you have said to me, as if I am your child. What you have told me is true, praiseworthy and sensible. Now, Vidura, listen to my reason for being here.

I am well aware of Duryodhana's evil nature and of the hostility of the Kshatriyas who support him; yet I have come to the Kurus. The Earth is in the grip of an enormous danger, and the man who saves her, with her elephants, chariots and horses, from imminent death will earn great punya. If this man does not succeed despite his best efforts to do what is dharma, he is anyway certain to merit the punya attached to that achievement, even though he fails. Similarly, as men who are versed in religion and the shastras know, if a man does not actually commit a sin, even if he intended to, he will not accrue the punishment attached to that sin.

I will try with all sincerity to bring about peace between the Kurus and the Srinjayas, who are about to be slaughtered in battle. Doom hangs over them because of the Kurus, fetched by the crimes of Duryodhana and Karna, while the other Kshatriyas only follow their lead.

Learned men condemn the man who does not persuade a friend who is about to plunge into death's maw to save himself. A man must do his

utmost, even seizing his friend by the hair, to turn him away from a grave sin. Such a man will win praise, not blame. Duryodhana would do well to accept my good advice, which is in keeping with dharma and artha, and which can avert the unimaginable war that looms. I will sincerely try to secure the welfare both of Dhritarashtra's sons and Pandu's, as well of all Kshatriya kind. If Duryodhana disregards me, I shall at least have the satisfaction of having followed my conscience, for a true friend is one who mediates when hostility breaks out between kinsmen.

I have come here so that no one can later say that, although he could have done so, Krishna made no attempt to stop the Kauravas and the Pandavas from slaughtering one another. I have come here to serve both sides and not all the gathered kings can reproach me.

If, after listening to my well-meant advice, Duryodhana does not accept what I say, he will only invite a horrific destiny to take millions of lives. If I can bring about peace among the Kurus without sacrificing the interests of the Pandavas, what I accomplish will be worthy indeed, and the Kauravas will be freed from death's clutches. If the sons of Dhritarashtra reflect calmly on what I say, then my objective will be achieved and the Kauravas will worship me as the one who brought peace to them.

If, instead, they try to injure me, I tell you now that all the kings of the Earth together are no match for me. They will be as a herd of deer before an angry lion.'

Saying this to Vidura, that bull of the Vrishnis and joy of the Yadavas lies down on his soft bed to rest."

CANTO 94

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The starlit night is spent in conversation between these two illustrious tejasvins. The night passes too quickly for Vidura, who listens and talks to Krishna about so many things, both of them speaking words filled with dharma and artha and delight.

At dawn, a choir of singers awaken Krishna with melodious voices, accompanied by the sweet sounds of cymbals and conches. Krishna rises and performs his morning rituals; he bathes, recites the sacred mantras and pours ghee onto the sacrificial fire. He dresses himself and worships the rising Sun.

While he is still at his morning devotions, Duryodhana and Sakuni come to him and say, 'Dhritarashtra is in his sabha, with all the Kurus headed by Bhishma, and all the kings of the Earth. They request your presence, Krishna, with as much yearning as the Devas desire Indra's.'

Krishna greets them both with courtesy, and when the Sun has risen a little higher into the sky he calls for a number of Brahmanas and presents them with gold, clothes, cattle and horses. After he has made generous gifts he sits down; his sarathy Daruka come and salutes him; at Krishna's word, the sarathy fetches his master's dazzling chariot adorned with rows of tinkling bells and harnessed to the superb horses. Seeing his ratha, which rumbles like massed thunderheads, ready, Krishna walks in pradakshina around the sacred fire and the Brahmanas present, puts on the jewel

Kaustubha and, blazing in beauty, surrounded by the Kurus and escorted by the Vrishnis, climbs onto the chariot.

Vidura follows Krishna, foremost of all the living and most brilliant among men, on his own chariot. Duryodhana and Sakuni follow in one Kuru chariot; Satyaki, Kritavarman and the other Vrishni Maharathas follow Krishna in chariots, and on horses and elephants. Rajan, those exotic chariots, adorned with gold and drawn by wonderful horses, flash and rumble as they move along.

In the lead, Krishna, radiant in beauty, comes to a broad avenue that has been swept and watered, and made fit for the most kingly of kings. As he approaches cymbals clash, conches sound and other instruments pour out their music in homage. Many young Kshatriyas, the most heroic in the world and lionish in their strength, surround Krishna's chariot as his escort. Thousands of soldiers, attired in a variety of uniforms and carrying swords, lances and axes, march in front of Krishna. Five hundred elephants and thousands of chariots follow that unconquered hero as he proceeds in majesty.

All the citizens of the city, men and women of all ages, come out onto the streets to catch a glimpse of him. The terraces and balconies of houses are so crowded by women that they look as if they will collapse. Worshipped by the Kurus as he comes down the king's highway, Krishna looks around, his eyes seeing everyone, he hears their adulations and responds to each one's greetings, individually, magically.

When at last he reaches the Kuru sabha his attendants blow their conches and trumpets, shaking the skies. And all the great kings assembled in the Kuru sabha shiver in excited anticipation of seeing Krishna. Hearing the rumble of his chariot, deep as the roll of thunderclouds, they know that he is near and the hair on their bodies stands on end.

Krishna reaches the lofty gates and, alighting from his chariot that is like the summit of Mount Kailasa, he enters the sabha, which glimmers like newly risen clouds and is as splendid as Indra's own court. He walks in with Vidura and Satyaki on either side; and he overshadows the splendour of the Kurus with his own, like the Sun dimming the lesser lights of the heavens.

Karna and Duryodhana face Krishna, and the Vrishnis with Kritavarman are behind him. Bhishma, Drona, the blind Dhritarashtra and his courtiers rise to honour Krishna. When Dhritarashtra stands the thousands of kings who surround him also rise. Krishna accepts the exquisite golden throne

that has been prepared for him at Dhritarashtra's command. He smiles and greets the king, Bhishma, Drona and all the other kings, according to each one's age. All the kings and all the Kurus worship him in return. Through a vast window Krishna sees at the great palace gates the Rishis he saw in the sky on his way to Hastinapura.

Seeing them here, with Narada at their head, Krishna calmly says to Santanu's son Bhishma, 'These Devarishis have come to this earthly conclave of ours. Invite them in and offer them the finest seats and your gracious courtesy, for none of us can sit until they do. Without delay, offer worship to these Rishis who have mastered their souls.'

Bhishma sees the Rishis at the palace gate and orders the servants to fetch the finest seats for them, inlaid with gold and gem-set. Only after the Rishis are seated and have accepted the arghya offered to them does Krishna sit, and then so do the other kings. Dusasana assigns an excellent seat to Satyaki, and Vivimsati gives another golden one to Kritavarman. Not far from Krishna that illustrious and wrathful pair, Karna and Duryodhana, sit together on the same wide couch. Subala, the king of Gandhara, surrounded by the chiefs of his country, sits with his son beside him. The high-souled Vidura sits on a jewelled armchair covered with a white deer-skin, so close to Krishna's that it touches it.

All the kings gaze at Krishna for a long time but, just as people who drink amrita are never satisfied, even after imbibing cup after cup of it, their eyes remain unfulfilled. Krishna, clad in pitambara robes and his skin like the dark atasi flower, sits in the midst of the sabha, like a sapphire set in gold. A profound silence descends, for no one stirs, or speaks a word, why, they hardly breathe."

CANTO 95

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Finally, Krishna, master of silence, of the perfect teeth and deep voice speaks. Although his words are addressed to Dhritarashtra, his words resound through all the sabha like thunderheads rumbling, and all the assembly hears him.

He says, 'I have come here to bring about peace between the Kurus and the Pandavas, to prevent a slaughter of Kshatriyas. I have nothing new to say, as you, Rajan, know everything there is to be known in this world. Because of its gyana and dharma, and because it is adorned with every accomplishment, your vamsa is the most distinguished of all royal dynasties. Joy in the happiness of others, grief at the sight of another's suffering, desire to alleviate distress, abstention from injury, sincerity, forgiveness and truth: all these prevail amongst the Kurus. Your dynasty is so noble that it would be sad indeed if anyone born into it did anything to break dharma, and tragic if it were you, King, who did so. For, you should be the first to restrain the Kurus if they sin against strangers or even their own people.

Know that your sons, led by Duryodhana, have abandoned dharma and artha and, deprived of their good sense by greed, now treat their own cousins despicably, most viciously. What your sons do is the cause of the terrible danger which threatens us all. If you ignore it, their deeds will result

in a massacre past imagining. If you so will, you can prevent this calamity even now, Bharatarishabha; peace is not difficult to achieve.

The establishing of peace depends on you and me, Rajan. You correct your sons and I will pacify the Pandavas. Your sons and their followers must obey your command, whatever it is. Indeed, their best course is to obey you. If you strive for peace by controlling your sons, it will be to your benefit, as well as to that of the Pandavas.

O great king, reflect carefully over this and do the proper thing. Let the Pandavas be your allies, and with their support seek dharma and artha. You cannot have better allies than them. With them as your protectors, Indra himself could not vanquish you. How can mere kings of the Earth withstand your might?

If you have the support of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Vivimsati, Aswatthama, Vikarna, Somadatta and Bahlika, of the rulers of the Sindhus and Kalingas, of Sudakshina the king of the Kambojas, of Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Arjuna and the twins, of the mighty Satyaki and Yuyutsu, what man is there who is so misguided that he would dare challenge you? If you have both the Kurus and the Pandavas at your side, you will be invincible, and the sovereignty of the whole world will be yours.

All the rulers of the Earth, your equals as well as your superiors, will want an alliance with you. Protected on all sides by sons, grandsons, fathers, brothers and friends, you will live in unalloyed felicity. With all of them around you, and treating them affectionately, as you once used to, you will enjoy lordship over all this Earth. With your sons, allies and the sons of Pandu to support you will easily subdue all your enemies. Dhritarashtra, this is the most advantageous course for you to take. In unity with your sons, kinsmen and counsellors, you will be lord of the whole world, which they surely win for you.

O great king, nothing but death lies in war. What good can you see in the annihilation of both sides? Tell me, Bharatarishabha, if the Pandavas are killed in battle or if your own sons fall, what happiness will you enjoy? All of them are brave and skilled warriors; all of them want war. Save them from the terrible danger that threatens them. After the war you will not see all the Kurus or all the Pandavas; Maharathas will kill each other and you will see both sides decimated.

All the rulers of the world are gathered here. They will exterminate the very population of the Earth in their anger. Save the world; do not let the

people of this sacred Bhumi be destroyed. If you regain your natural goodness, the world will continue to be peopled as it is now. Rajan, save these kings from the horrible danger that threatens them; they are all of pure descent, modest, generous and devout, and related to one another by blood or marriage.

Let go of your wrath and enmity; let these kings embrace one another in peace. Let them eat and drink together; let them return to their homes in joy, dressed in rich clothes, decked with garlands and paying kind courtesies to one another.

Let the affection you had for the Pandavas be revived in your heart and let it lead to peace. They lost their father while they were mere boys, and you raised them. Now cherish them as befits you, as if they were your own sons. It is your duty to protect them, especially when they are in distress. Do not abandon dharma and artha.

The Pandavas have greeted you reverently and said, "At your command, we have suffered great misery. For twelve years we lived in the forests, and we lived unknown in the thirteenth year. We never broke our sworn pledge and believed that our father, too, would keep his word. The Brahmanas who were always with us will testify that we never once broke our word.

We have kept our side of the agreement; now you must abide by yours. Our travail has been long and great; now let us have our share of the kingdom. Knowing dharma and artha as you do, it falls to you to rescue us. We have endured our suffering in silence because we owed you obedience. Be a father and elder brother to us now.

A guru should behave with his sishyas in ways that befit a teacher; and being your disciples, we regard you as our guru. So, treat us a guru should treat his sishyas. If we go wrong, it is the duty of our father to set us right. Therefore, set us on the right course and you, too, take the high path of dharma."

Your sons, the Pandavas, said this to the kings who have come here: "If the men in a sabha know dharma, they will not allow any impropriety to occur in their hallowed court. When, in the presence of men of dharma, sinners overpower the righteous and subvert truth by deceit, it is the evil ones who are vanquished. When, struck through by the arrow of adharma, good men seek the protection of a noble court, those who occupy that sabha are themselves pierced through by the arrow, if they do not extract it.

Indeed, in that case, dharma will fell the men of that assembly, even like a river eating away the roots of trees on its bank."

Bharatarishabha, be your own judge. The Pandavas have kept peace, with their hearts set firmly in dharma, and deeply reflecting on all things. Whatever they have said is in keeping with dharma and nyaya. Rajan, what can you say to them except that you will restore their kingdom to them? Let these kings who are here tell you what your answer to the Pandavas should be.

If you think that what I say is dharma and true, save all these Kshatriyas from certain death. Make peace, and do not give in to anger. Give the Pandavas their rightful share of their father's kingdom; then enjoy happiness and prosperity with your sons; and have all your hopes fulfilled, Parantapa.

You know that Yudhishtira always walks the path of dharma. You know how he has conducted himself with you and your sons. Although you tried to have him burnt him alive in the house of lac, he fled into the wilderness, he returned and put his faith in you, only to be banished by you to Khandavaprastha. Ruling from Indraprastha, he brought all the kings of the Earth under his sway and yet looked up only to you, to honour you. In spite of the noble manner in which he conducted himself, Subala's son robbed Yudhishtira of his kingdom and wealth, at a deceitful game of dice. And despite being reduced to absolute penury, and having to watch Krishnaa dragged brutally into this sabha, Yudhishtira of the immeasurable soul did not swerve from Kshatriya dharma.

I want both your good and theirs. For the sake of dharma and artha, for happiness, Rajan, do not mistake evil for good or good for evil and, thereby, allow the Earth's population to be razed. Restrain your sons, whose greed has made them cross every limit. The sons of Pritha are as willing to wait upon you dutifully as they are to fight. Do what you think is best, Parantapa.'

In their hearts, all the kings in the sabha laud what Krishna says, but none of them dares speak out for dharma in Duryodhana's presence."

CANTO 96

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "All in that sabha fall silent on hearing Krishna, the hair on their bodies stands on end. All the kings think that there is no man who would dare respond to what Krishna has said.

Seeing that all the kings sit silently, Parasurama addresses Duryodhana but speaks to the entire gathering of Kurus. He says, 'Listen to what I have to say and to the story I will tell to illustrate it; if you are convinced by me, do what will benefit you all.

There was a king named Dambhodbhava, who ruled all the world. They say that his kingdom covered all this Bhumi. Every morning, when he rose, he would call his Brahmanas and Kshatriyas to him and ask them if they knew of anyone—a Sudra, a Vaisya, a Kshatriya or a Brahmana—who was better than, or even equal to him in battle. The king wandered over the face of the Earth asking this question, and he became drunk with vanity.

High-souled Brahmanas, who knew the Vedas and who feared nothing, advised the boastful king to curb his pride. However, the king continued to ask his question day after day. Some great Brahmanas of immense tapasya became angry and spoke to the conceited king.

They said, "There are two men, who are the best of all men, and who are always victorious in battle. Dambhodbhava, you will be no match for either of them."

The king asked those Brahmanas, “Where might I find these two heroes? To what vamsa do they belong? What feats have they achieved? Who are they?”

The Brahmanas said, “We have heard that these two are Munis, named Nara and Narayana. They have both been born as mortals. Go and find them, O king. This illustrious pair practises the severest tapasya in a remote fastness of the Gandhamadana mountains.”

The king could not bear to hear of the greatness of Nara and Narayana. He mustered his vast army of six kinds of forces and hastened to the rugged Gandhamadana mountains, where those unvanquished Rishis lived. There, he began to search for them and finally discovered them hidden in a deep vana. He saw that they were emaciated from hunger and thirst; their veins were swollen and stood out; and extremes of cold and heat had debilitated them. He approached them, touched their feet and enquired after their welfare.

The two Rishis received the king hospitably, with fruits and roots, with a darbhasana and water. They enquired about the king’s business, and then blessed him, saying, *Tathaastu*. Dambhodbhava asked them what he always asked everyone.

He said, “I have conquered the Earth with the strength of my arms, and killed all my enemies. I have come here because I want to do battle with you. Do me the courtesy of hospitality by granting my wish, for I have wished for this for a very long time.”

Nara and Narayana said, “Best of kings, anger and covetousness have no place in this mountain asrama. How then can we do battle here? There are no weapons here, no adharma or malice. Look somewhere else for a fight; there are many Kshatriyas on Earth.”

Undeterred, the king tried to persuade them, but the Rishis ignored his repeated request and continued to try and placate him. Dambhodbhava, who was beside himself to fight them, would not relent.

Finally, Nara took up a handful of grass and said, “Since you are so eager for a fight, Kshatriya, take up your weapons and array your troops. I will rid you of your eagerness forever.”

Dambhodbhava said, “Rishi, do you really think this weapon you hold is fit to be used against me? Nevertheless I will fight you, for I have come here expressly for that.”

And with that, Dambhodbhava and his warriors shot arrows at the Muni from all sides. The Rishi, however, warded off those deadly banks of shafts that could mangle any enemy, with his blades of grass. The invincible Rishi directed his own astra, made just of the blades of grass, yet irresistible, at the king's army. Such was that weapon that it cut off the eyes, ears and noses of the troops.

The king saw the sky turned pale by those blades of grass, and he fell at the Rishi's feet and cried, "Bless me!"

Nara, who was always ready to grant refuge to anyone who asked for it, said to Dambhodbhava, "O king, always obey Brahmanas and live by dharma. Never again do what you have done today. The conqueror of hostile kingdoms, a Kshatriya who is mindful of his dharma, should never be as you are, even in his inmost heart. You must never, from pride in yourself, insult anybody at any time, be they inferior or superior to you. Conduct yourself in a manner that befits you.

Acquire wisdom, abandon covetousness and pride, control your soul, restrain your passions, be forgiving and humble, cherish your subjects and be well loved. Never slight anyone under any circumstances without first determining their true strengths and weaknesses. With our blessings, and by our leave, go now and change your ways from this day forth. We command you to ask sage Brahmanas what is good for you."

The king worshipped the feet of the two Maharishis and returned to his capital. And from that day on he began to live by dharma. This was the great feat that Nara achieved long, long ago.

The Rishi Narayana was superior even to Nara, for many more and greater qualities had their home in him. That is why the eight astras—Kakudika, Suka, Naka, Akshisantarjana, Santana, Nartana, Ghora and Asyamodaka—are integral to that best of bows, the Gandiva. Rajan, give up your pride and go humbly to Dhananjaya. His astras take lives.

These eight astras correspond with the eight sensual passions—lust, wrath, covetousness, vanity, insolence, pride, malice and selfishness. When these astras strike a man, he loses his senses and wanders about in bewilderment. Under their influence, men fall into a stupor, behave violently, vomit, pass urine and excreta, and weep and laugh uncontrollably.

Arjuna has Narayana—the Creator, the Lord of the Trilokas, the one who knows the destiny of every created being—as his ally beside him, and he is invincible in battle. Who is there in the three worlds who can vanquish

that Kshatriya—Arjuna of the Vanara banner—who has no equal in battle? Countless are the virtues that reside in Arjuna, and Krishna is his superior. You know Kuntiputra Arjuna well. I say to you, the ancient Nara and Narayana are now Arjuna and Krishna. Great king, that is who these foremost of men are. If you believe this, and if you trust me, make peace of dharma with the sons of Pandu. Realise that it is for your good not to have discord within your clan, then do not set your heart on war but make sacred peace.

You are the foremost of the Kuru vamsa. The dynasty to which you belong has high honour through time. Let the vamsa continue to be worthy of that regard. Blessings be upon you; think of what is conducive to your own welfare.'"

CANTO 97

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The noble Rishi Kanva, who is present in the sabha, hears Parasurama and speaks to Duryodhana.

Kanva says, 'Loka Pitamaha Brahma is indestructible and eternal, as are the Maharishis Nara and Narayana; for, of all Aditi's sons, Vishnu alone is eternal. Only he is unconquerable and indestructible; he alone exists for ever; he is the Lord of all and the possessor of divine attributes. All others, the Sun and Moon, Earth and Water, Wind and Fire, Sky, the planets and stars, can be destroyed; when the end of the universe comes all these will cease to exist. They are destroyed and created over and over, again and again. Human beings, animals, birds and other living creatures that live in the mortal world have impermanent lives. Even kings, having enjoyed great prosperity, reach the hour of their death and are reborn to reap the fruits of their good and evil karma.

Therefore, it is essential that you make peace with Yudhishtira. Let the Pandavas and the Kauravas both rule this Earth together. Duryodhana, do not be vain about your strength, for there are always men more powerful than those who are considered strong. Mere physical strength is not regarded as true strength by the wise. The Pandavas are all blessed with prowess equal to that of the Devas and they live by dharma; they are truly strong.

There is an ancient tale told that illustrates this, of Matali's search for a husband for his daughter.

Indra, king of the three worlds, has a charioteer named Matali, whom he loves dearly. A daughter was born to Matali, and she came to be celebrated across the world for her beauty. The girl, named Gunakesi, was blessed with celestial beauty; and in loveliness of face and form she outshone other women. Knowing that the time for giving her in marriage had come, Matali and his wife became anxious, and he wondered what he should do.

He thought to himself, "Alas, the birth of a daughter in families that are noble and upright, that are respected and of great humility, brings evil in its wake. Daughters, when born into noble families, always endanger the honour of three families—their maternal and paternal families and the family into which they marry. In my mind's eye I have scanned the worlds of Devas and Manavas, but I have not found an eligible groom for my daughter."

Amongst the Devas, Daityas, Gandharvas, Manavas and Rishis, not one did Matali consider a suitable husband for his daughter. One night, after consulting his wife Sudharma, he decided to travel to Nagaloka, thinking that since he had not found an eligible groom for Gunakesi amongst the Devas and Manavas, he might find one amongst the Nagas.

Telling his wife this, he took her leave and, sniffing the head of his daughter in affection, Matali set out for the under-world.'"

CANTO 98

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'On his way, Matali saw Narada Muni going towards Varuna Deva's abode. Narada asked him, "Where are you going? Are you on some work of your own or is it at Indra's bidding that you journey?"

Matali told Narada about his quest, and the Muni said, "Let us go together. I am coming from Devaloka to visit Varuna. While we range through Nagaloka, we will seek out a suitable husband for your daughter."

The illustrious pair went into the underworld and there they saw Varuna, the Lord of the waters. Narada was worshipped in a manner befitting a Devarishi, and Matali received what would be offered to Indra. The two of them, pleased that they could get on with the business at hand, explained why they were there. With Varuna's leave, they began to wander about in Nagaloka and, while doing so, Narada, who knew all the inhabitants of that realm, described them in detail to his companion.

Narada said, "O Sarathy, you have seen Varuna with his sons and grandsons around him. Now see his kingdom, so enchanting and rich. Varuna's son of great wisdom is distinguished for his conduct and saintly character. This beloved son has eyes like lotus leaves, is blessed with great beauty and is a joy to look at. Soma's daughter has chosen him for her husband. Her name is Jyotsnakali and she is as beautiful as Sree Devi. I remember that she once chose the eldest of Aditi's sons for her husband.

Matali, look at Varuna's dwelling, made of gold, where the wondrous wine called Varuni flows abundant. It is from having imbibed this wine that the Devas acquired their godly status. These blazing weapons of every kind that you see once belonged to the Daityas, who have since lost their sovereignty. These astras never decay and, when loosed at an enemy, return unerringly to the hand that cast them. The Devas obtained them as the spoils of war. Tremendous tejas is required for them to be used against enemies. Many tribes of Rakshasas and Daityas, who possessed all kinds of devastras, lived here long ago, but they were all vanquished by the Devas.

Look at that great fire in Varuna's lake; see where Vishnu's Chakra dazzles in the midst of those mighty flames. Look, there is that gnarled bow that was created for the destruction of the world. The Devas protect it constantly and vigilantly, and it is after this bow that Arjuna's Gandiva was named. It has the strength of a hundred thousand other bows, and the power that impels it in battle is indescribable. It quells all evil kings who are friendly towards the Rakshasas. Brahma, the first expounder of the Veda, created this fierce weapon, and Indra has declared it to be one of the most terrible of all weapons. This awesome astra obeys the command of Varuna's sons.

Look at Varuna Deva's sovereign parasol in that royal chamber. Like clouds, it showers cool water. The water that drops from it is as pure as the Moon and yet cloaked in such dense darkness that no one can see it.

Here, Matali, there are innumerable wonders to be seen. However, your mission will suffer if we spend more time in this palace of wonders. So let us go now," said Narada Muni,' says the Maharishi Kanva."

CANTO 99

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'Narada continued, "Here in the heart of Nagaloka is the city of Patala. It is celebrated across the universe and the Daityas and the Danavas worship it. Creatures that live on Earth cry out in terror if the ocean washes them to it. Here the fire, known as the Asura-agni, which is fed by water, burns continually. The Devas revere this fire, which does not move, being confined to this place.

It was here in Nagaloka that the Devas, when they had defeated and killed all their enemies, disposed of the Amrita that remained after they had drunk their fill. It is here that the waning and waxing of the Moon originate. It is here that son of Aditi, the horse-headed Vishnu, Hayagriva, rises and fills the universe with his lustre on festive occasions, to the accompaniment of Vedic hymns, at which times he is called Suvarna. This wondrous place is called Patala because the Moon and other forms of water shed blissful showers on it.

From here, the celestial elephant Airavata sucks cool water with which he fills the clouds for the nurture of the universe; and Indra pours the water down as rain. All kinds of aquatic animals of diverse shapes, the timingala and others, which get their nourishment from the Moon's rays, live here. Also living here are creatures that sunlight kills during the day and which are restored to life at night by the Moon. This is where the Moon rises every day and, with its rays, resuscitates the dead creatures with his touch. It is

here that many demonic Daityas, whom Indra defeated and deprived of their prosperity, stay imprisoned. It was here that the lord and master of all creation, Bhutapati, sat in austere tapasya for their benefit.

Many Maharishis live here, who observe the vrata called *go*, who are emaciated from their arduous study and chanting of the Vedas, who have suspended their pranas and achieved Moksha by their tapasya. A man is said to live by the *go-vrata* when he can sleep wherever he chooses, and when he lives only on food and clothes that are given to him. Here were born all the best of elephants descended from the elephant Supratika of great renown—Airavata the king of his tribe, Vamana, Kumuda and Anjana.

Look around, Matali, and see if there is a bridegroom here who stands out because of his superior qualities. I will go to him and ask him to accept your daughter's hand.

Look at that dazzlingly beautiful Egg in the water. It has been here from the beginning of the creation. It does not move, nor does it hatch. I have never heard how it was born or what it is, and nobody knows who its father or mother is. It is said, Matali, that when the end of the world comes, a mighty fire will erupt from within it and consume the three worlds, with all their moving and rooted beings."

Matali heard all that Narada said and replied, "I do not see anyone here who is eligible. Let us leave this place.""

CANTO 100

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'Narada continued, "Here is that great and most famous of cities, Hiranyapura. It belongs to the Daityas and Danavas who are skilled at one hundred types of maya. It was planned by the Danava Mayaa, and built by the divine architect Viswakarma. Many tejasvin Danavas, who obtained boons from Brahma long ago, live here, practising their thousand magical illusions. No one could vanquish them, neither Indra nor any other Deva, neither Yama, nor Varuna nor Kubera the Lord of treasures.

Also living here are the Kalakhanja Asuras, who sprang from Vishnu; and the Yatudhana Rakshasas, who came forth from Brahma's feet. All these violent beings have frightful fangs, are as swift and powerful as the wind, and have great powers of maya. Besides these, another invincible tribe of Danavas called Nivatakavachas also live here.

You know that Indra cannot vanquish them. Many times you with your son Gomukha, and Sachi's lord Indra Deva with his son, have had to flee before them. Look at their homes, Matali; they are all made of silver and gold, and grandly adorned. All these mansions are decked with vaiduryas and corals, and shine from the lustre of the jewels—arkasphatika and ajrasara. Many of these palaces seem as if they have been made of brilliant padmaragas, or of bright marble or of the most excellent wood. They dazzle like the Sun, or a blazing fire. Look how tall these jewelled edifices are, and

they stand close together. They are of magnificent proportions and beauty, and it is impossible to determine exactly what materials they are built of, or to describe them. Indeed, they are lovely.

Look at these grounds that the Daityas use for recreation and sport; look at their bedsteads, their opulent utensils set with precious stones, their majestic thrones. Look at these hills of theirs that seem like massed clouds, these water fountains, these trees that move of their own will and yield all the flowers and fruit that they are asked for.

Matali, see if you can find a suitable groom here for your daughter. If you cannot, we will go elsewhere."

Matali said, "Devarishi, it is not wise or fitting for me to do anything that the Devas might disapprove of. The Devas and Danavas, though brothers, are always at war with each other. How can I make an alliance with our enemies? Let us go to some other place. I must not look among the Danavas for a husband for my child. Ah Muni, I know your nature and how you love instigating and fanning quarrels.'""

CANTO 101

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'Narada said, "This region belongs to luxuriantly feathered birds that feed on snakes. They are tireless in their prowess, whether in flight or carrying loads. This avian tribe is descended from Garuda's six sons—Sumukha, Sunaman, Sunetra, Suvarchas, Surucha and that prince of birds Subala. These best of avians, born of Kasyapa's line, have multiplied and increased to create a thousand dynasties of birds. They are all of noble lineage and bring glory to Vinata's dynasty.

These birds are blessed with great prosperity; they all bear the auspicious Srivatsa mark; they are wealthy; and they are mighty. Their deeds are like a Kshatriya's, but living as they do on snakes, they are without compassion. And because they also prey on their own kind, they can never attain Brahman.

I will tell you their names, Matali. Listen well; these birds are respected because of the grace that Vishnu showers on them. They all worship Vishnu, who is their protector. He is always in their hearts and he is their refuge.

These are their names—Suvarnachuda, Nagasin, Daruna, Chandatundaka, Anila, Visalaksha, Kundalin, Pankajit, Vajraviskambha, Vainateya, Vamana, Vatavega, Disachakshu, Nimisha, Animisha, Trirava, Saptarava, Valmiki, Dwipaka, Daityadwipa, Saridwipa, Sarasa, Padmaketana, Sumukha, Chitraketu, Chitravara, Anagha, Meshahrit,

Kumuda, Daksha, Sarpanta, Sahabhojana, Gurubhara, Kapota, Suryanetra, Chirantaka, Vishnudharman, Kumara, Parivarha, Hari, Suswara, Madhuparka, Hemavarna, Malaya, Matariswan, Nisakara and Divakara.

These descendants of Garuda all live in one province of this subterranean realm. The names I have recited are only of those who are distinguished by their power, fame and achievements. If you do not find one to your liking here, I will take you to another region, where you might find an eligible groom for your daughter," said Narada,' says Kanva."

CANTO 102

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"''Narada said, "This, now, is called Rasatala: the seventh stratum below the Earth. Here Surabhi lives, the mother of all bovine species, who was born of Amrita. She continuously yields milk that is the essence of all the best things of the Earth; its unique, unmatched taste is an amalgam of the six tastes.

Surabhi, the embodiment of perfection, sprang in that ancient time from Brahma Pitamaha. When he was satiated with Amrita the best of everything flowed out of his mouth. A single jet of Surabhi's milk fell on the Earth and created the Kshirasagara. The shores of that ocean are always covered with white surf that looks like a flower garland. The best of ascetics, who are known as Fenapas, foam-drinkers, live by this ocean and subsist only on its surf, and so their name. They practise the most austere tapasya and even the Devas fear them.

Surabhi gave birth to four calves, who stand one each at each of the four cardinal points and support them. They are called the Dikpalis. Surupa supports the east and Hansika the south; Subhadra, of the wonderful nature and universal form, supports the west, which is ruled by Varuna; and Sarvakamadugha supports the north, where dharma reigns supreme and is named after Kubera, the lord of treasures.

The Devas and Asuras, with the Mandara Mountain as their rod, churned the waters of Kshirasagara to obtain the wine called Varuni. Devi

Lakshmi, Amrita, the prince of horses Uchchaisravas, and that most precious of jewels the ruby Kaustubha emerged from it as well. Matali, those waters that yielded these precious things are mixed with the milk of these four cows. As for Surabhi's milk, it becomes Sudha for those that live on Sudha, Swadha for those that live on Swadha and Amrita for those that live on Amrita.

Even today, learned men recite the verse that the dwellers of Rasatala sang in days of old: Neither in Nagaloka, nor in Swarga, nor in Vimana nor in Trivishtapa is one as happy as in Rasatala," says Kanva.'"

CANTO 103

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'Narada said, "This best of cities that you see now, which is like Indra's Amaravati, is Bhogavati. Vasuki, the king of the Nagas, is its ruler and he lives here. He supports the vast Earth by dint of having performed the most austere tapasya. His body is the size of Swetachala, the White Mountain; he is decked in celestial ornaments; he has a thousand heads; his tongues are like flames; and he is immeasurably strong.

Countless Nagas of varied forms and adorned in all kinds of ornaments, all sons of Surasa, live here happily. They are adorned with the marks of gems, swastikas, chakras and kamandalas. All of them are fierce and mighty; some have a thousand heads, some five hundred and some three; some have two heads, some five and some seven; all of them have mountainous bodies. There are perhaps millions of Nagas of each dynasty, or even tens of millions; they cannot be counted. Listen now as I name a few of the more famous amongst them.

They are Vasuki, Takshaka, Karkotaka, Dhananjaya, Kaliya, Nahusha, Kambala, Aswatara, Bahyakunda, Mani, Apurana, Khaga, Vamana, Elapatra, Kukura, Kukuna, Aryaka, Nandaka, Kalasa, Potaka, Kailasaka, Pinjaraka, Airavata, Sumanomukha, Dadhimukha, Sankha, Nanda, Upanandaka, Apta, Kotaraka, Sikhi, Nishturika, Tittiri, Hastibhadra, Kumuda, Malyapindaka, the two Padmas, Pundarika, Pushpa,

Mudgaraparnaka, Karavira, Pitaraka, Samvritta, Vritta, Pindara, Bilvapatra, Mushikada, Sirishaka, Dilipa, Sankhasirsha, Jyotishka, Aparajita, Kauravya, Dhritarashtra, Kuhura, Krisaka, Viraja, Dharana, Subahu, Mukhara, Jaya, Badhira, Andha, Visundi, Virasa and Sarasa. There are these as well as many other sons of Kasyapa. Matali, see if there is anybody here whom you can choose."'

All this time Matali was gazing intently at one who stood before them, at a small remove, and when Narada stopped speaking, the celestial sarathy, looking very pleased, asked Narada Muni, "What vamsa does that handsome, radiant youth belong to, who stands in front of Aryaka of Kauravya vamsa? Who are his parents? Of which line of Nagas is he, who stands tall and erect like a flagstaff? His intelligence, patience, beauty and youth make my heart lean towards him. He will make an excellent husband for my Gunakesi."

Narada saw how delighted Matali was at seeing the young Sumukha and told him of his noble parentage and feats.

He said, "This prince of Nagas is Sumukha. He is born in Airavata's line; he is Aryaka's favourite grandson, and his maternal grandfather is Vamana. His father was the Naga Chikura, whom Vinata's son Garuda killed not so long ago."

Matali was delighted to hear this and said to Narada, "Lord, I would like to have this best of Nagas for my son-in-law. I beg you, try to make this match, for I am extremely pleased at the thought of bestowing him on my precious daughter,"'"

CANTO 104

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kanva says, 'Narada said to the great Naga Aryaka, "This is Indra's sarathy Matali, and Sakra's dear friend. His conduct is pure; he has an excellent character and has many virtues; he has strength of mind, great tejas and might. He is Indra's companion, advisor and charioteer. In every battle, one sees that there is very little difference between him and Indra, in strength and prowess. In all the wars between the Devas and Asuras it is Matali who, with his mind, drives Indra's glorious and ever-victorious chariot, drawn by a thousand horses. The enemies of the Devas are defeated by Matali's expert handling of those unworldly steeds and by the might of Indra's arms: Matali first outmanoeuvres them and then Indra kills them.

Matali has an excellent daughter, of unrivalled beauty. She is truthful and accomplished; and her name is Gunakesi. Matali has searched all the trilokas for a suitable husband for her.

O Aryaka of godlike splendour, he finds your grandson Sumukha to be a suitable match for his child. If you think his proposal acceptable, decide quickly to receive his daughter as a gift to your grandson. As Lakshmi does Vishnu's, or Swaha Agni's, let the slender-waisted Gunakesi grace your vamsa. Accept her for Sumukha, for they are born for each other, like Sachi and Indra.

Although this youth has lost his father, we chose him for his good qualities and for the honour of being related to Airavata and yourself. Sumukha's virtues, his disposition, purity, self-restraint and other qualities have persuaded Matali to offer his daughter to him. Do Matali the honour of accepting her."

Aryaka was filled with delight and sorrow, at once, on hearing Narada's words—delight to see his grandson being chosen as a bridegroom and sorrow at the memory of his son's death.

He said to Narada, "How, Devarishi, how can I have Gunakesi for a daughter-in-law? That I do not approve is not for lack of reverence for you, for who is there who would not want an alliance with Indra's own sarathy? Mahamuni, I hesitate only because I feel that the alliance will not be a lasting one. Effulgent one, this boy's father—my son—was devoured by Garuda, and we are in deep mourning. Worse still, when he left Nagaloka, Garuda swore that, in a month's time, he would devour Sumukha as well. Suparna will surely do as he said. His parting words have plunged us in grief."

Matali then said to Aryaka, "I have a solution for your fear. I have chosen your grandson as a son-in-law. Let him come with Narada and me to Indra, lord of Devas. I will do everything in my power to make Garuda desist from doing as he has sworn. If he does not agree, I will ascertain the life span allotted to Sumukha. Blessings upon you, O Naga; let your grandson come with me to Indra."

Saying this, Narada, Matali and Aryaka took Sumukha with them and these radiant ones went to Indra, in Devaloka. Vishnu, who happened to be there at that time, heard Narada's account of Matali's search and his eventual choice.

Vishnu said to Indra, "Give this youth Amrita; let him be immortal like the Devas. By your grace, let Matali, Narada and Sumukha have everything they wish for."

Thinking about Garuda's awesome might, Indra agreed and commanded that Sumukha be given Amrita. To this, Vishnu said, "You are the lord of all mobile and unmoving creatures. Who would refuse a gift from you?"

Indra then granted the young Naga the boon of longevity, that he become a Chiranjeevi even without having to drink any Amrita. Sumukha's face was suffused with radiant joy, making him truly *sumukha*! He married Matali's daughter and returned home. Narada and Aryaka, delighted with

the success of their venture, departed after worshipping Indra, lord of the Devas.’

CANTO 105

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Kanva says, 'Meanwhile, Garuda heard about Indra's boon of longevity to Sumukha. Inflamed with rage the sky-ranger flapped his wings furiously and punished the three worlds with a hurricane.

He came to Indra and said, "Illustrious one, why have you deprived me of my food? Having granted me a boon of your own will, why do you now withdraw it? From the very beginning the Supreme Lord has ordained what my food is to be. Why do you now obstruct that divine decree?

I had chosen this great Naga and had appointed a time to kill him, for I wanted to offer the meat of his body as sustenance for my numerous young ones. Now your boon has made him immortal, how can I kill another of his species? How can you do as you please, so frivolously? I, my family and my servants will die of hunger; perhaps that will gratify you, Indra. Indeed I deserve this and worse because although I am powerful enough to be lord of the Trilokas, I agreed to become the servant of another. O Trilokapati, Vishnu is not the only cause of my inferiority. I am your equal, yet the sovereignty of the three worlds is yours.

Like you, I have Daksha's daughter for my mother and Kasyapa for my father. Like you, I can untiringly bear the weight of the three worlds. I have immeasurable and irresistible strength; no creature can withstand me. In the war with the Daityas I, too, achieved wondrous feats. I killed Srutasri and

Srutasena, Vivaswat, Rochanamukha, Prasrura and Kalakaksha and other sons of Diti.

I perch on the flag-staff of your younger brother Vishnu's chariot and protect him in battle; I sometimes carry him on my back. Perhaps this is why you disregard me. Who else in the universe can bear such heavy burdens? Who is stronger than me? In spite of my superiority, I carry your younger brother and his companions on my back. By interfering with my prey, my sustenance, you insult me, just as your brother does when he makes me carry him.

As for you, Vishnu, of all the mighty and strong ones that Aditi has given birth to, you are the most powerful. Yet I can carry you, without feeling any fatigue, on just one of my feathers. Think then, brother, which of us is stronger."

Hearing the Bird's haughty words, Vishnu, wanting to forestall the crisis he saw looming, provoked Garuda further, saying, "How do you think of yourself as being strong when in fact you are a weakling? It does not become you to brag like this in our presence. The three worlds together cannot bear the weight of my body. The truth is that I carry my own weight and yours as well. Come now, lift my right arm. If you can, I will consider your boast to be true."

Saying this, Lord Vishnu placed his arm on Garuda's shoulders, and the golden Eagle fell down unconscious. To Garuda the weight of Vishnu's arm felt as great as that of the entire Earth with her mountains. Compassionate Vishnu did not submit him to more suffering, and spared his life.

Crushed by the immense weight of the Lord's arm, Garuda gasped for breath and shed his feathers. His limbs were weak and terror confounded him. He bowed his head low before Vishnu and spoke to him.

Garuda said feebly, "Illustrious Lord, the power that sustains the universe dwells in you. It is no wonder that one arm of yours, stretched out but lightly, crushes me. Divine One, forgive this worthless winged creature that perches on your flag-staff, this fool intoxicated with pride in his own strength, for, O Lord, I am entirely helpless. I did not know how great your strength is and, so, thought my own unrivalled."

Vishnu was gratified and, affectionately saying to Garuda, "Never yield to such arrogance again," with his toe he cast Sumukha onto Garuda's breast.

From that time, Rajan, Garuda has always lived in friendship with that Naga, and that is how that mighty and illustrious kings of birds, the son of Vinata, was crushed by Vishnu's might and cured of his pride.

In the same way, Duryodhana, you will live as long as you do not confront the heroic Pandavas in battle. Who is there that Vayu's son Bhima, and Indra's son Arjuna cannot slay in battle? Your enemies are verily the gods themselves—Vishnu, Dharma, Vayu, Indra and the two Aswins. You are not worthy of even looking at them on the field, let alone face them in battle. Rajan, do not set your heart on war; with Krishna's help, make peace. It is your duty to save your very race by doing this.

Mahamuni Narada saw with his own eyes the incident I have just narrated; it should tell you how great is Vishnu. Krishna is that Vishnu, the wielder of the discus and the mace,' says Kanva.

Hearing what Kanva Muni says, Duryodhana's face darkens; frowns and breathes heavily. Then he looks at Karna and bursts into loud mocking laughter and slaps his thigh that is like the trunk of an elephant.

He says to the Rishi, 'Maharishi, I am what the Creator has made me. What will be must be. Whatever is ordained for me must happen; and I cannot prevent it. Of what use then are your futile sermons?'"

CANTO 106

Bhagavad-yana Parva continued

Janamejaya said, "Why did Duryodhana's friends not try to dissuade him from taking the path that led surely to doom, knowing that he was wedded to evil, blinded by avarice, addicted to sin and determined to bring ruin upon himself, thereby filling his kinsmen with grief, afflicting his friends and well-wishers with sorrow and making his enemies joyful. And why did neither Krishna nor Pitamaha Bhishma say anything out of affection?"

Vaisampayana said, "Krishna and Bhishma both advise him. Narada, too, says much. I will tell you what they all say.

Narada says, 'Rare is the man who takes his friends' advice; and rare, too, is the friend who gives honest advice. The man who needs advice is never where the man who is willing to offer it is. Kurunandana, I think you ought to listen to what your friends say. Do not be obstinate; the path you choose for yourself is fraught with evil and danger. I will tell you an ancient story to illustrate this, of how Galava disgraced himself because of his unyielding disposition.

In an ancient time, Dharma Deva assumed the form of the Rishi Vasishta and came down to Earth to test Viswamitra, who sat in austere tapasya. In this form—of one of the Saptarishis—and pretending to be hungry and in dire need of food, he came to Kausika's asrama. Viswamitra was awestruck and prepared charu—rice and honey boiled in milk—for

him. He cooked with such careful concentration that he could not properly wait on his guest; and it was not until after his guest had eaten what some other hermits gave him that he was able to offer the charu that he had made, which was still hot.

The holy one said he had already eaten and, telling him to wait there, went away. The Mahatapasvin Viswamitra waited, standing as still as a post, holding the food on his head with his arms raised, and subsisting on air. As he stood there, a muni named Galava began to wait upon him out of reverence and affection for him, and in order to please him.

A hundred years passed and Dharma Deva assumed the form of Vasishta once more, and came to Viswamitra to ask for food. Seeing the wise Maharishi still standing there with the food on his head, living all the while on air alone, he accepted the still warm and fresh charu from him. After eating, Dharma Deva expressed his gratification and went away.

At Dharma Deva's word, Viswamitra, once a Kshatriya, was, to his great joy, elevated to being a Brahmana. Pleased with the services and devotion of his disciple Galava, Viswamitra gave him leave to go wherever he liked.

Galava was happy with his Guru's command and affectionately said to the radiant Viswamitra, "Exalted one, what shall I give you as Gurudakshina? Bestower of honours, any spiritual deed becomes successful only when accompanied by this final gift, and the giver attains Moksha. Gifts are the fruit of one's actions, which one enjoys in heaven, and they are the embodiment of peace. Tell me what I should give to you, my Guru?"

Viswamitra knew that he had been won over by Galava's devotion and repeatedly tried to dismiss him, but Galava kept asking him what he should give as Gurudakshina. Annoyed with Galava's persistence, Viswamitra finally said, "Give me eight hundred horses, all of them as white as the Moon's rays and each with one black ear. Galava, go now!"""

CANTO 107

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Viswamitra's words filled Galava with such consternation that he could not sit, sleep or eat. He became a victim of anxiety and regret and, lamenting bitterly and burning with remorse, Galava grew pale and skeletal.

Duryodhana, smitten with sorrow, he cried, "O where will I find rich friends? Where will I find money? Have I any savings? Where will I find eight hundred moon-white horses? How can I enjoy food or the things I like? The very love of life is extinguished in me. Why do I need to live? I will go to the opposite shore of the great ocean, or to the furthest part of the Earth and give up my life. What is the use of living? What happiness can there be, without extreme exertion, for one who is poor, unsuccessful, deprived of all the good things of life, and burdened with debt? The man who has, from friendship, enjoyed a friend's wealth and cannot repay him is better dead than alive.

When he fails to keep his word, a man's good deeds lose their punya and become stained with falsehood. One who is tainted in this way cannot be beautiful, have children, or acquire power or influence. How can such a man attain bliss? What ungrateful man has ever earned fame? What is his proper place and where is his happiness? An ungrateful man can never win esteem or affection; neither can salvation ever be his. The wretched man

who has no wealth is barely alive; he cannot support his relatives or his friends. He is unable to repay favours, he will certainly be ruined.

I am this ungrateful wretch, destitute of resources and tainted with falsehood, for I have got what I wanted from my Guru but cannot do as he asks. I will do my best and then lay down my life.

I have never before begged the gods for anything, and they respect me for this in yagnas. I will seek the protection of Vishnu the divine lord of the Trilokas; I will place myself in Krishna's hands; he is the refuge of all who deserve protection. I will bow down and ask to see Krishna, that most exalted of ascetics, the Eternal One from whom all blessings flow to the Devas and the Asuras."

While Galava was thus lamenting, his friend Garuda, the son of Vinata, appeared before him and, wishing to help him, cheerfully said to him, "You are my dear friend. It is the duty of one who is prosperous to fulfil the wishes of his friends. Brahmana, Indra's younger brother Vishnu has blessed me with good fortune. I have spoken to him on your behalf and he is pleased to grant my wish to help you.

Come, we will go together wherever you like. I will carry you comfortably to the other shore of the ocean, or to the farthest end of the Earth. Come, Galava, do not linger."'

CANTO 108

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Garuda said, "God, who is the source of all knowledge, has commanded me. In which direction shall I take you first, to show you what there is? Shall I go east, south, west or north, Dvija?

That cardinal direction where Surya, the illuminator of the universe, rises; where the ascetics practice their evening tapasya; where the Primeval Intelligence that pervades the universe was born; where the two eyes of Dharma are positioned to guide the universe; where ghee was first offered in sacrifice and from where it then flowed: that direction is the gateway of day and time, Dvijottama.

There in time out of mind the daughters of Daksha gave birth to their children; and there the sons of Kasyapa first multiplied. That quarter is the source of all the prosperity of the Devas, for it was there that Indra was first anointed as their king. It was there that Indra and the other Devas performed tapasya. That is why this cardinal quarter, the East, is called Purva, or the First; and also because in the earliest times it was the home of the Devas and said to be owned by the oldest inhabitants of the universe.

The Devas performed all their religious ceremonies here. It is here that the Creator first sang the Vedas. It is here that the Devi Savitri was born from Surya's mouth to live as a sacred mantra. It is here that Surya presented the Yajur Veda to Yagnavalkya. It is here that the Gods first drank

sanctified Soma during yagnas. It is here that the Homa—the sacrificial fire—first accepted ghee and milk; and it is here that Varuna became prosperous when he left for the netherworld.

Here the ancient Rishi Vasishta was born, grew famous and died. Here *Om*, the mystical beginning of every mantra, was born and developed its one hundred branches. Here the smoke-imbibing Munis live as the smoke of sacrificial fires. Here Indra killed boar and other wild animals and dedicated them as sacrificial offerings to the Devas. Here the thousand-rayed Sun rises and in anger consumes all ungrateful and evil Manavas and Asuras.

This is the gateway of the three worlds, of Swarga and of happiness. This cardinal quarter is called Purva. If you like, we will go there. I will do whatever pleases you, my friend. Galava, tell me if there is any other direction to which you wish to go, and we will fly there. Listen, I will tell you about another cardinal quarter.'""

CANTO 109

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Garuda said, "Long, long ago Vivaswat performed a yagna and gave this quarter away as Dakshina to his Guru, which is why this region, the South, is known as Dakshina.

It is here that the Pitrs of the three worlds live; the Devas who live on smoke and the Devas known as Viswadevas also live here. They are worshipped in sacrifices in all the worlds and partake equally of the sacrifices with the Pitrs.

This cardinal direction is known as the second door of Dharma. It is here that the span allotted to man is calculated in periods of time known as trutis and lavas. It is here that the Devarishis, Pitrlokarishis and Rajarishis live, beyond the reach of pain. Here reside Dharma and Satya; here man's deeds bear fruit.

This quarter is the ultimate resting place of the deeds of the dead, and it is where everybody must eventually come. However, as all of them are shrouded by ignorance, they cannot be happy here, for thousands of Rakshasas have been created to obstruct the paths of men, and those who have not brought their souls under perfect control see them as obstacles.

Here, Brahmana, in Mount Mandara's glades and in the asramas of Rishis, Gandharvas chant hymns that entrance the heart and mind. Here the Daitya Raivata heard the hymns of the Sama Veda sung so sweetly that he left his wife, friends and kingdom and retired to the forest. Here the son of

Savarna and Yavakrita set a boundary which Surya cannot cross. Here illustrious Ravana of the Pulastyas, the king of the Rakshasas, performed austere tapasya and asked the gods for a boon of immortality.

It is here that Vritrasura brought Indra's hostility upon himself by his evil ways. It is here that the lives of all beings come, to be broken up into their five elements. It is here that men of evil deeds rot in agony. It is here that the river Vaitarani flows, filled with the bodies of those who cannot cross it to obtain Moksha. People who come here are subject to the extremes of joy or sorrow.

When it arrives here the Sun drops sweet water on the Earth and then, continuing towards the cardinal direction named Vasishta, sheds dew. Once when I was hungry, in this realm, I found for food a huge elephant battling with an enormous tortoise.

It is here that Maharishi Chakradhanu was born from Surya. That Devarishi later came to be known as Kapila and it was he who made ashes of Sagara's sixty-thousand wild sons. It is here that a class of Brahmanas known as Sivas, who mastered the Vedas, were crowned with the fruit of their tapasya and finally attained eternal Moksha.

In this region is the city called Bhogavati, ruled by Vasuki, the Naga Takshaka and Airavata. Those who come here after they die encounter a heavy gloom that is so dense that neither Surya nor Agni can penetrate it.

Worthy as you are of worship, you still have to pass this way. Tell me now if you wish to go in this direction. Otherwise, listen while I tell you about the West.'"

CANTO 110

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

'Garuda said, "The cardinal quarter, the West, is the favourite of Varuna, the lord of the ocean. He was born here and rules over it. Because it is here that the Sun sends his rays at paschata—the end of the day—it is called Paschima.

The divine Kashyapa installed Varuna as the king here to rule over all marine creatures and to protect the waters themselves. Here the Moon, the dispeller of darkness, drinks all six of Varuna's juices and renews himself at the beginning of every bright fortnight. It is here that Vayu defeated and captured the Daityas, who fled, panting, before a mighty tempest and finally laid themselves down to die.

Here, everyday, the mountain Asta lovingly embraces the Sun in welcome and dispels the evening twilight. It is from here that Ratri and Nidra—Night and Sleep—emerge at the close of day and spread themselves over the Earth to steal half the life-span of all living beings from them. It is here that Indra, seeing his pregnant stepmother Diti lying asleep, cut up the foetus in her womb into forty-nine parts, from which the forty-nine Maruts were born.

It is towards this cardinal direction that Himavat Parvata's base stretches to touch the immortal Mandara Parvata who is sunk in the ocean, and even if one travels for a thousand years one cannot reach it. It is here that Surabhi, the first cow, goes to the shores of the sea that is adorned with

golden lotuses and pours forth her milk. Here, in the midst of the ocean, is the headless torso of radiant Svarbhanu, Rahu, who is always intent on devouring the Sun and the Moon.

Here the invincible and ever youthful Suvarnasiras, of the immeasurable tejas, loudly chants the Vedas. It is here that Muni Harimedha's daughter Dwajavati was transfixed in the sky by Surya's command to stop and stay. Here wind, fire, earth and water are all deprived of their inherent capacity to inflict pain. It is from here that the Sun's course starts its deviation; it is here that all luminous bodies enter the solar sphere, and after travelling for twenty-eight nights with the Sun they leave the Sun's orbit and move with the Moon. It is in this region that the rivers which always feed the ocean have their sources.

In this, the abode of Varuna, dwell the waters of the three worlds, Ananta—the king of snakes, Vishnu, who is without beginning and without end, and Maricha's son Maharishi Kashyapa.

I have told you now about Paschima. Tell me, where shall we go?"'"

CANTO 111

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Garuda said, "O Brahmana, the cardinal quarter of the North saves a man from sin, and it is here that one attains salvation. The power to do both these is called Uttarana and hence this direction is called Uttara. It is sometimes called Madhyama, central, because the repository of all its treasures stretches in a straight line from east to west.

Dvijarishabha, this quarter is the best of all—no one who is unfriendly, of uncontrolled senses or unrighteous can live here. In a refuge known as Badari live Krishna who is Narayana, Arjuna who is Nara, that most exalted of men, and Brahma the Creator. Here on the slopes of the Himavat Mountain dwells Maheswara, blazing in effulgence like the fire at the end of a yuga, like Purusha with the universal mother Prakriti. Only Nara and Narayana can see him, and not all the different classes of Munis, or the Devas with Indra at their head, or the Gandharvas, Yakshas and Siddhas. Vishnu, of the thousand heads and thousand eyes, which appear as one by the power of his maya, lives here.

It is here that that Chandramas, the Moon, was crowned king of all twice-borns. It is here that Siva first received Ganga on his head and afterwards let her flow from heaven into the world of men. It is here that the Devi Uma performed tapasya from her desire to have Siva as her lord. It is here that Kama, Siva's anger Rosha, Himavat and Uma were born and

shone in unity. It is here that Kubera was vested with sovereignty over Rakshasas, Yakshas and Gandharvas.

Kubera's gardens, named Chitraratha, and the asrama of the Vaikshana Munis are here; the celestial river Mandakini and the mountain Mandara are here. The gardens called Saugandhi Kanaka are here, constantly guarded by Rakshasas. There are grassy, verdant plains, plantain forests and the celestial trees called sautanakas in this realm.

This is where the Siddhas, who have their souls ever under control and who wander as they please, have their luxurious and heavenly homes. This is where Arundhati and the Saptarishis reside, and where the constellation Swati rises. This is where Pitamaha Brahma lives, near the embodied Yagna. This is where the movements of the Sun, Moon and other stellar bodies are visible.

O Brahmanottama, here those illustrious and utterly truthful Munis called Dhamas guard the source of the Ganga; and no one knows where they came from, or how they look, or even what tapasya they perform. Indeed, the thousand dishes they use to serve food to those who go there, as well as how they prepare the food are all a mystery. Anyone who crosses the line of their protection is sure to meet with death; only the divine Narayana and the eternal Nara, Arjuna, can pass and remain unharmed.

It is in this cardinal quarter that Kailasa Parvatam lies and where Kubera lives. It is here that the ten Apsaras known as Vidyutprabhas were born. It is this quarter that Vishnu covered with three strides when he accepted the three worlds at the Asura king Bali's sacrifice; and one of his footprints is marked by a spot named Vishnupada.

Here, by the shore of the golden lake named Jambunada, is a place called Usirvija, where Raja Maruta performed his yagna. Here the lustrous gold mines of Himavat made themselves visible to Rishi Jimuta, who gave all their mined wealth away to Brahmanas and asked that it be named after him. That gold is called Jaimuta. Here, every morning and evening, the guardians of the four cardinal points call out and ask each other which person's affairs they should attend to.

O Brahmanottama, it for all these and many other reasons that the North is superior—uttara—to all the other cardinal quarters, and that is another reason for its name Uttara. I have described all four realms to you in detail. To which direction would you like to go? I am ready to show you all four quarters and all the Earth, so climb on to my back.”””

CANTO 112

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Galava said, "O Garuda, slayer of the king of serpents, you of the beautiful feathers, Vinataputra, carry me to the east, on which the two eyes of Dharma are focused. Take me to that region you described first, where the Devas are always, where Dharma and Satya reside. I want to meet all the Devas; so take me there.'

Narada continues, 'Accordingly, at Garuda's prompting, Galava climbed onto the Bird's back and said to him, "Devourer of snakes, your beauty as you fly is as radiant as that thousand-eyed maker of day, the morning Sun. Sky-ranger, you are so swift that the trees break in the storm of your flapping wings and seem to fly behind you in your wake; why, you seem to tow Bhumi with all her waters, mountains and forests in the airs you stir. The tempest that your wings blow lifts the waters of the oceans with all their fish, snakes and crocodiles into the air.

The fish, the timis and timingalas, that look alike, and snakes with human faces are all dashed about by your wing-storm. And I am so deafened and stunned by the roar of the oceans that I seem to forget the reason for my journey. Slow down; remember that you may be endangering a Brahmana's life.

O Garuda, I can no longer see the Sun, the cardinal points or the sky. I see only a thick gloom all round me. I cannot see my body, but only your eyes, shining like two brilliant gems. I cannot see your body, but at every

wing-beat I see fire spewing from it. Put out this fire and extinguish the dazzle from your eyes; I beg you, slow down! I do not need to go on this journey with you. Blessed one, I cannot bear your speed. I have promised to give my acharya eight hundred moon-white horses with one black ear each. I do not see how I can make good my word.

The only course open to me is to lay down my life. I have no wealth of my own, nor a wealthy friend; indeed, no wealth, however immense, can give me what I need."

Laughingly, and without slackening his speed, Garuda said to Galava, "Your wish to end your life shows that you are a man of little wisdom, O twice-born Rishi. Death can never be brought about by one's own effort. Death is God himself. Why did you not tell me what your intention was before we set out? There are many excellent ways by which your goal can be accomplished.

Here is the mountain Rishabha, on the seashore. We will rest here for a while and refresh ourselves with some food before we turn back."""

CANTO 113

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'The Brahmana and the Eagle landed on the summit of Rishabha and there they saw a Brahmana woman named Sandili in tapasya. Galava and Garuda bent their heads in respectful greeting and worshipped her. The devi asked after their welfare and invited them to sit. Seated, they accepted the food she offered, having first dedicated it with mantras to the Devas. After eating, they lay down on the ground and fell into a deep sleep. Garuda woke up, wanting to leave, but discovered that his wings had fallen off and that he had become a ball of flesh with only a head and legs.

Galava, seeing him in that plight, said, "What has staying here done to you? O how long will we have to remain here? Did you have any evil thoughts in your mind, for it cannot be a trivial sin that has taken your wings from you."

Garuda replied to the Brahmana, saying, "Actually, Dvija, I did think about carrying this Brahmani, of the tapasyashakti, away from here to where Mahadeva the Creator, Vishnu, and both Dharma and Yagna dwell, for I thought she ought to live there. For my own good, I will prostrate before this holy devi and pray to her.

Garuda said to the Brahmani, "With a sore heart, I confess that I entertained the idea of carrying you away. Whether I acted rightly or wrongly, my intention, of which you evidently disapprove, was prompted

by my regard for you. I beg you, from the nobility of your heart forgive me."

Pleased with the prince of birds and the Brahmana, she said to Garuda, "Do not be afraid, beautiful-feathered one. Here, have your wings back and cast off your fear. You insulted me, and I do not forgive insults. The sinner who insults me will quickly fall from Swarga. I bear no inauspicious signs at all and, being blemishless in my purity, I have achieved exalted tapasyashakti. Dharma and artha are the fruits of pure conduct, which removes all that is inauspicious.

Go from here where you wish, prince of birds, and take care never to insult a woman, even in thought, even if she is not chaste. You shall regain your strength and energy as they were before."

At these words Garuda had back his splendid wings, and they were more powerful than before. Taking leave of Sandili, Garuda flew away with Galava on his back. They could not, however, find the kind of horses they were looking for.

On their way, they met that most eloquent of men, Viswamitra, and in Garuda's presence he said to Galava, "Brahmana, the time has come for you to give me what you promised. I do not know what you will do to get me the horses but, since I have waited so long, I will wait a little longer. Find a way of making good your solemn word."

Hearing this, Garuda said to the downcast Galava, who was plunged in sorrow, "I have now heard what Viswamitra said to you earlier. Come, Brahmanottama Galava, we will think about it together. You cannot rest until you have given your Guru what you swore."""

CANTO 114

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Garuda said to the cheerless Galava, "This wealth is called Hiranya because Agni created it in the bowels of the Earth, which is also named Hiranmaya, and then Vayu increased it. Because this wealth supports the world and sustains life it is called dhana; indeed that has been its purpose in the Trilokas from the beginning.

On the particular Friday, when either the constellation Purvabhadra or Uttarabhadra rises, Agni creates more wealth by his will and confers it on mankind in order to add to Kubera's store of treasures. Deities called Ajaikapats and Ahirbudnas guard the wealth created in the Earth's core, making it rare and well nigh impossible to obtain. This wealth is your only chance to acquire the horses; beg some king born into a vamsa of Rajarishis to help you, without harming his own subjects.

I have a friend who is a king born into the Chandra vamsa. Let us go to him for, amongst all who live on Earth, he has the greatest wealth. This Rajarishi Yayati is the son of Nahusha, and has irresistible prowess. If you plead with him and I endorse your plea with my commendation, he will give us what we need; he is immensely wealthy, as wealthy as Kubera the lord of treasures. Learned one, by accepting this king's gift, we can pay your debt to your Guru."

Talking together in this way and thinking about the best thing to do, Garuda and Galava went to King Yayati in his capital. The king received

them hospitably and offered them arghya, and padya to wash their feet. Then he asked them why they had come.

Garuda said to him, "O Son of Nahusha, this ocean of tapasya is my friend Galava, who has been Viswamitra's sishya for several thousand years. This devout Brahmana, whom Viswamitra commanded to go wherever he chose, told his Guru that he wanted to give him gurudakshina. Viswamitra knew he was poor and did not ask for anything, but then, annoyed by his persistence, he asked for eight hundred moon-white horses with one black ear each. The Rishi told Galava that since he insisted, this is what he should give. The great tapasvin Viswamitra spoke in anger and it is this that grieves the Brahmana so painfully.

Unable to fulfil his Guru's command, he has come to you for refuge. Purushavyaghra, when he has accepted this favour he asks of you, he will pay his gurudakshina and happily devote himself to tapasya once again.

A Rajarishi such as you, endowed as you already are with great punya, will be even more enriched when this Brahmana gives you a share of his own tapasya. Lord of men, giving a horse as a gift entitles you to as much bliss as there are hairs on a horse's body.

This man is as worthy to accept the gift as you are to make it. Give it to him, as you would pour milk into a conch shell.""

CANTO 115

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Yayati, ruler of all the Kasis, performer of a thousand sacrifices, that most generous of men, reflected deeply on Garuda's words of truth.

He saw his friend Garuda and Galava's request for alms as an auspicious omen; he thought about Galava's tapasya, and he pondered the fact that these two had passed over all the other kings of the Surya vamsa and come to him.

Yayati said, "I and the vamsa into which I was born are blessed today. Sinless Garuda, you have blessed my kingdom. My friend, there is one thing that I wish to say to you. I am not as rich now as before, for my wealth is greatly reduced. Regardless, I cannot render your visit fruitless, nor can I disappoint this Rishi.

I will give him enough to allow him to accomplish his purpose. If a man who comes for alms leaves unfulfilled, he might destroy my entire race with a curse. There is nothing more sinful than to say, *I have nothing,* and dash the hopes of one who comes in need. The disappointed man can ruin the sons and grandsons of the one who fails to help him.

O Galava, take this daughter of mine, who will be the perpetuator of four dynasties. In beauty, she is like a daughter of the Devas; she will promote every virtue; and for her beauty, Devas, Manavas and Asuras are always me asking for her hand. The kings of the Earth would give entire

kingdoms for her, let alone eight hundred horses with a black ear each. Take my daughter Madhavi. My only wish is to have a grandson by her."

Galava accepted the king's gift and left with Garuda, saying to the king, "We will see you again," and taking the maiden with them.

Then Garuda said to Galava, "We finally have the means to obtain the horses," and took his leave and went home.

After the prince of birds had gone, Galava, with the maiden beside him, began to think about going to a king who would give him a fitting dower for her. He first thought of that best of kings Haryaswa of the Ikshvakus, who ruled in Ayodhya, who was endowed with great tejas, who possessed a great army consisting of the four kinds of forces, who had a well-filled treasury and an abundance of corn, whose subjects loved him and who respected all Brahmanas. Wishing to have children, he lived quietly, performing austere tapasya.

Galava went to Haryaswa and said, "Rajadhiraja, this maiden will increase her husband's family by bearing many children. Accept her from me as your wife, Haryaswa, by giving me a dower. Listen to what dower I expect and then decide what you will do."""

CANTO 116

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Raja Haryaswa reflected for a long time, breathing deep and fervent sighs at the thought of having a son. At last he said, "The six parts of the body that ought to be raised in one's body are well elevated in this maiden. The seven parts of the body that ought to be slender are indeed so in her. The three that ought to be deep are deep in her; and the five that ought to be reddish are flushed in her. It seems that her beauty is worthy of being gazed upon by Devas and Asuras, and she is accomplished in all the arts and sciences. With all these auspicious signs, she will certainly bear many children, and indeed one of them might become an emperor.

As for the wealth you seek, Brahmanottama, what should her dower be?"

Galava said, "Give me eight hundred horses of a lofty pedigree, which are all moon-white and with one black ear each. This blessed and large-eyed maiden will then become the mother of your sons, as the fire-stick gives birth to fire."

Hearing this, Rajarishi Haryaswa was filled with sorrow, but blinded by passion, he said, "I have only two hundred horses of the kind you want, but there are many others which roam in my kingdom. Galava, I want only one son with this maiden. Grant me my wish."

At this, the maiden said to Galava, “One who had attained Brahman once granted me a boon that I would, after the birth of every son, regain my maidenhood. Give me away to this king and accept his horses. In this way, you will get eight hundred horses from four different kings, and I will have four sons, as well. Collect the wealth that you want to give your Guru like this. This is what I think, but you may do as you think fit.”

Galava said to Haryaswa, “O Haryaswa, best of men, accept this maiden for a fourth of the dower that I have asked for, and have only one son with her.”

Haryaswa worshipped Galava and took the princess. In due time, she gave the king the son he so longed for, and the boy was named Vasumanas. He became richer than the wealthiest kings of the Earth and looked like one of the Vasus; and he came to be a great and generous king.

After some time had passed, Galava came back to the delighted Haryaswa and said to him, “O Rajan, you have had a son, a child who is as splendid as the Sun. The time has come for me to go to another king for alms.”

Haryaswa, being truthful and honourable in all that he said and did, and remembering the balance of six hundred horses that he had been unable to give the Brahmana Galava, gave Madhavi back to him. Madhavi left that radiant and prosperous king and, becoming a virgin once more, she followed Galava.

Galava said to Haryaswa, “Let the horses stay here with you,” and went with Madhavi to Raja Divodasa.’”

CANTO 117

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Galava said to Madhavi, "The ruler of the Kasis is the illustrious king Divodasa, who is Bhimasena's son. He is an immensely powerful king. Blessed one, we are now going to Divodasa; follow me slowly and do not worry. This king is virtuous and devoted to truth, and has his passions under control."

Muni Galava came before the king, who received him with due reverence and hospitality. Galava urged the monarch to have a child.

Divodasa said, "I have already heard about your quest, so you need not tell me much, Brahmana. As soon as I knew what you would come for, my heart was set upon it. I am honoured that you have passed over all other kings and come to me. What you want will be yours, but my wealth is like Haryaswa's, reduced. I shall, therefore, have only one royal son with this maiden."

The Brahmana gave the girl to the king, who duly married her. Rajarishi Divodasa enjoyed his time with Madhavi like so many illustrious couples: Surya with Prabhavati, Agni with Swaha, Vasava with Sachi, Chandra with Rohini, Yama with Urmila, Varuna with Gauri, Kubera with Riddhi, Narayana with Lakshmi, Sagara with Jahnavi, Rudra with Rudrani, Pitamaha Brahma with Saraswati, Vasishta's son Saktri with Adrisyanti, Vasishta with Akshamala, Chyavana with Sukanya, Pulastya with Sandhya, Agastya with princess Lopamudra of Vidarbha, Satyavan with Savitri,

Bhrigu with Puloma, Kasyapa with Aditi, Richika's son Jamadagni with Renuka, Kusika's son Viswamitra with Himavati, Brihaspati with Tara, Sukra with Sataparva, Bhumipati with Bhumi, Pururavas with Urvasi, Richika with Satyavati, Manu with Saraswati, Dushyanta with Sakuntala, the eternal Dharma with Dhriti, Nala with Damayanti, Narada with Satyavati, Jaratkaru with Jaratkaru, Pulastya with Pratichya, Urnayus with Menaka, Tumburu with Rambha, Vasuki with Satasirsha, Dhananjaya with Kumari, Rama with Sita the princess of Videha, Janardana with Rukmini.

And to Raja Divodasa, who delighted in her, Madhavi bore a son named Pratardana. After the child's birth, Galava came to Divodasa and said to him, "Let the maiden come with me, but let the horses that you are giving me remain here. I need to go to another kingdom to obtain more dowry."

The virtuous Divodasa, who was devoted to dharma, gave Madhavi back to Galava."'"

CANTO 118

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Madhavi was faithful to her promise and, abandoning prosperity and becoming a virgin once again, followed Galava. Galava, whose heart was set upon the accomplishment of his own business, had reflected on what he should do next and went to the city of the Bhojas, to King Usinara.

When he arrived before that king of the unrestrainable prowess, Galava said to him, "This maiden will bear you two royal sons, who will be like the Sun and the Moon. With these two princes you will be able to attain all that you hope for in this world and in the hereafter. O you who are knowledgeable about dharma, in exchange you must give me four hundred horses of moon-white splendour with one black ear each. My effort to obtain the horses is only for my Guru's sake; I myself have no need of them. If you accept my terms, do as I tell you, without hesitation.

Rajarishi, you are childless. Have two children, for children are like a life-saving raft, who will rescue you and your Pitrs. The man who enjoys the punya of having had a son never falls from heaven, nor will he ever have to go to that frightful hell, Naraka, to which the childless are doomed."

Raja Usinara said to him, "I have heard your words, Galava, and my heart is inclined to do as you say. However, only the Supreme Lord has ultimate power over all things. I have only two hundred horses of the kind

you want, but I have thousands of other kinds in my kingdom. I will do as Haryaswa and Divodasa did and have only one son by Madhavi.

My wealth is for all my subjects, in the city and in the country, and not for my own comfort and pleasures. The king who gives away, for his own benefit, the wealth that belongs to others can never earn virtue or fame. Give this divinely radiant girl to me. I will accept her to bear me only one child."

Hearing these and other things that Usinara said, Galava approved of him. He gave Madhavi to him and went away into the forest. And as any man of dharma enjoys well deserved happiness that his good deeds have earned him, Usinara enjoyed Madhavi, and they sported in valleys and dales of the mountains, beside fountains and waterfalls, in charming mansions, in gardens, forests and woods, in other places of delight, and on palatial terraces beneath the stars. In due time, a son was born to them, who shone like the morning Sun, and who later became the great king Sibi.

After the birth of this boy, Galava came to Usinara, took Madhavi from him and went to Garuda.'"

CANTO 119

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'Garuda saw Galava and said to him, "How happy I am to hear of your success."

Galava, however, informed him that a fourth part of his task was still unfinished, at which Garuda said, "Do not try to get the remaining two hundred horses, for you will not succeed. Long ago, Richika wanted to marry Satyavati, the daughter of Gadhi of Kanyakubja.

Gadhi said to Muni Richika, *Holy one, give me a thousand horses, all as brilliantly white as the Moon and each having one black ear.*

Saying, *So be it*, Richika went to Aswatirtha, the great home of horses in Varuna's abode, and found what he wanted, which he promptly gave the king. The king performed a yagna named Pundarika and gave those horses away as dakshina to deserving Brahmanas. The three kings, whom you made agreements with, each bought two hundred of those horses from the Brahmanas. The remaining four hundred were claimed by the river Vitasta, while they were being led across it.

You can never have that which is not there to be had. Virtuous one, give this girl as a gift to Viswamitra, along with the six hundred horses you have acquired. You will be freed from your grief and crowned with success."

Saying "*Tathaastu*," Galava went with Garuda to Viswamitra, taking Madhavi and the horses with him. On arriving, he said, "Here are six hundred horses of the kind you asked for. I offer you this maiden in place of

the remaining two hundred. I beg you, accept what I offer as gurudakshina. This girl has had three virtuous sons by three Rajarishis; let her fourth, and best, son be yours.

Let these six hundred horses be the complete discharge of my debt to you, so that I can be free to practice tapasya as I like."

Viswamitra saw Galava with the Bird and the maiden, and he said, "O Galava, why did you not give this girl to me before? All four sons, sanctifiers of my race, would have been mine. I accept this maiden, to give me one son. The horses can graze in my asrama."

Viswamitra lived happily with Madhavi, and she bore him a son, named Ashtaka. As soon as the child was born, Mahamuni Viswamitra instructed him in dharma and artha, and gave him the six hundred horses. Ashtaka went to live in a city, bright as the city of Soma; and Viswamitra gave Madhavi back to Galava and went away to the deepest forest.

The happy Galava who, with his friend Garuda's help, had succeeded in giving his Guru the dakshina he had asked for, said to Madhavi, "You have given birth to one son who is most charitable, to another who is very brave, to a third who is devoted to dharma and satya, and to a fourth who is a performer of great yagnas. Lovely Madhavi, through your sons you have saved not only your father but four kings and me, as well. Go to your father now, slender-waisted one."

Saying this, Galava bid farewell to Garuda that devourer of snakes, and after restoring the maiden to her father, went to live in the forest.'"

CANTO 120

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'King Yayati wanted to give his daughter in marriage by way of a swayamvara. He took Madhavi, decked in flower malas, in his chariot to a sacred asrama at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna, with his sons Puru and Yadu following him. Gathered in that place were innumerable Nagas, Yakshas, Manavas and Gandharvas; animals and birds; dwellers of mountains, trees and forests; and many inhabitants of that particular province. The vanas that surrounded the asrama were home to many Rishis, who were like Brahma himself.

The swayamvara began, and that loveliest of maidens passed over all those assembled there and chose the vana as her lord. Descending from her chariot and greeting all her friends, Yayati's daughter went into the sacred forest and devoted herself to a life of tapasya.

She emaciated herself by fasting, performing religious rites and rigid vratas; and she took to living the life of a deer. She ate soft, green grass whose tender stems looked like lapis lazuli and tasted bitter-sweet; she drank the cool, sweet, crystalline water of sacred mountain streams. She roamed with other deer through forests where no lions or tigers lived, in deserts where there was no danger from forest fires and in dense forest, leading the life of a wild doe. She earned great spiritual punya because of her life of austere tapasya and brahmacharya.

King Yayati lived for many thousands of years and, like many before him, eventually succumbed to inexorable Time. The progeny of his sons Puru and Yadu multiplied, thereby earning great reverence for Yayati in this and the other worlds. Yayati lived in Swarga, like a Maharishi; he was greatly honoured and respected, and enjoyed the best of those regions.

One day, after many thousands of years had passed in great joy, when Yayati sat amongst illustrious Rajarishis and Maharishis, he mentally ignored all the Devas, Rishis and Manavas who were there, from folly, ignorance and pride. Indra immediately saw into his heart. The Rajarishis, too, saw this and disapproved.

Everyone began to ask, "Who is this man? What king's son is he? Why is he in Swarga? What has he done to deserve this honour? Where did he practice tapasya and earn punya? What is he known for? Who knows him?"

The Swargavasis questioned each other about Yayati and asked hundreds of heaven's charioteers, gatekeepers and those who were in charge of the seats in heaven; but all replied that they did not know. Their minds were suddenly clouded so that none of them recognised the king, who immediately lost his heavenly splendour."""

CANTO 121

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'In this state—deprived of his place in Swarga and cast out, his trembling heart consumed by fear and burning with remorse, his unfading garlands withered, his senses in turmoil, shorn of his crown and ornaments, his head reeling, his limbs weak and his body unadorned and unclothed—no one recognised Yayati. In the bewilderment of the fog that blanketed his mind, the Swargavasis swam in and out of his vision as Yayati fell headlong towards the Earth.

As he fell, the king thought, "What sinful thoughts did I think that lost me my place in Devaloka?"

All the kings, the Siddhas and the Apsaras laughed to see Yayati fall. At Indra's command, came a Duta whose task was to remove from Swarga those whose punya had run out.

He said to Yayati, "Intoxicated with pride, there is no one whom you have not disregarded. It is because of your vanity that Swarga is no longer for you. You do not deserve to live here, Rajaputra. We do not recognise you here, so fall you must."

At the Devaduta's words, Yayati, the son of Nahusha, said three times, "If I must fall, let me fall amongst the righteous," and this king, who was the best of all who had attained Swarga, thought about where he should fall.

As he plunged down, Yayati saw the four mighty kings, Pratardana, Vasumanas, Sibi and Ashtaka, in a forest, and he fell toward them. At the

time, those kings were performing the Vajapeya yagna to gratify Indra, and the smoke that rose from their fire had reached the gates of Swarga, looking like a river that flowed between heaven and Earth. It resembled the sacred Ganga during her descent to Earth. It was the smoke that guided Yayati as he fell toward the Earth and brought him to those four lions among men, all blessed with great splendour, the foremost of all sacrificers, who were in fact his own kin, who resembled the four Lokapalas, and who blazed in glory like four mighty sacrificial fires. Having exhausted his store of punya, Yayati fell toward them, and hung in mid-air above the kings, and he was still dazzlingly beautiful.

Seeing him and how he shone, the kings asked, "Who are you? What race, country and city are you from? Are you a Yaksha, a Deva, a Gandharva or a Rakshasa? You do not appear to be a human being. Why are you here?"

Yayati answered, "I am Rajarishi Yayati. I have fallen from Swarga because my punya was exhausted. I wanted to fall amongst men of dharma and have fallen amidst you."

The kings said, "Purushottama, may your wish come true. Accept as yours our punya and the fruits of all our sacrifices."

Yayati said, "I am not a Brahmana but a Kshatriya, and I cannot accept charity; nor do I want to take others' punya from them."

Just at this time, Madhavi, in course of her wandering, came there. The four kings greeted her and said, "What brings you here? What would you command us to do for you? You have the right to command us, for we are your sons, O Tapasvini."

Madhavi was filled with delight when she heard this. She came before her father with reverence and greeted Yayati; and she touched the heads of all her sons.

She said to her father Yayati, "Rajadhiraja, these are my sons, your grandsons. They are not strangers. They will save you. This practice is not new; it has its origins in antiquity. I am your daughter Madhavi, and I have been living in the forest like a deer. I have earned punya, and you must accept half of it because all men have the right to enjoy a portion of the punya earned by their children. That is why men want their daughters to have sons. That is what you wished for when you gave me to Galava."

At their mother's words, the four monarchs paid homage to her and to their grandfather. They reiterated what their mother had said, as clearly and

affectionately as she had; and the whole Earth resounded with their wish to save their fallen grandfather.

Galava too came there and said to Yayati, “Accept an eighth of my tapasya from me and go back to Swarga.”””

CANTO 122

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, 'No sooner was Yayati recognised by those virtuous ones, than he rose once more into Swarga, without having touched the Earth at all. He regained his celestial form and shed his grief. Once again he was adorned in celestial garlands, raiment and ornaments; sprinkled again with celestial perfumes and vested with heavenly attributes; all this without having actually set foot on the Earth's surface.

Vasumanas, whose generosity was renowned through the worlds, announced to Yayati, "I hereby give you the punya that I have won on Earth by my blemishless conduct towards men of all varnas. Let it all be yours King. I have acquired the punya that one gains from generosity, and redemption from my sins through the yagnas I have performed; let those, too, be yours."

Then Pratardana said, "My devotion to Kshatriya dharma has earned me fame and a heroic name. I hereby give you this punya."

Sibi, the intelligent son of Usinara, affectionately said, "I have never spoken an untruth to children, to women or in jest, to those in danger, in a crisis or during a game of dice. I can give up all objects of desire and pleasure, my kingdom and my life itself, but I cannot give up satya. By virtue of this and of us having gratified Dharma, Agni and Indra, you will ascend to Swarga.

Lastly, Rajarishi Ashtaka—Madhavi and Kusika's son, said to Yayati, "I have performed hundreds of Pundarika, Gosava and Vajapeya yagnas. Take the punya of these. I have spared nothing for their performance, not jewels, gold or other treasures. By that truth, ascend to Swarga."

Immediately, Yayati left the Earth and began to soar towards Swarga, higher and higher as his grandsons said what they were doing for him, one after the other. That is how those kings saved Yayati, who had been cast down from heaven, and how these royal grandchildren of Yayati's, those perpetuators of their dynasties, made their grandfather rise again into Swargaloka by means of their dharma, yagnas and dana.

The four kings said in unison, "We are your daughter's sons, O Rajan, endowed with nobility and every virtue. By our dharma and punya, ascend again into heaven."""

CANTO 123

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada says, "Restored to his place on high by his grandsons, distinguished by the largesse of their sacrificial gifts, Yayati blazed in beauty, adorned by his own great deeds, showered with fragrant flowers and enveloped in scented, balmy breezes. He was welcomed back with the joyful clash of cymbals and entertained with songs and dances by diverse clans of Gandharvas and Asuras. Devarishis and Rajarishis paid homage to him, and the Devas worshipped him with arghya and other honours.

After he had returned to Swarga and, free from anxiety, regained tranquillity of heart, Brahma Pitamaha spoke words of approbation to him, saying, "You had earned the full measure—four padas—of dharma by your deeds on Earth. You had attained Swargaloka and renown for eternity. Rajarishi, you nullified all this punya by your vanity, which cloaked the hearts of Swargavasis in darkness so impenetrable that they could not recognise you, and you were cast down. You have been saved by the love and affection of your daughter's sons and returned, regaining this eternal, sacred, wonderful and deathless realm you won earlier by your own deeds."

Yayati said, "Holy One, I have a doubt, which only you can dispel. My punya was vast, augmented by my reign of dharma over my subjects for thousands of years, and won by innumerable sacrifices and gifts. How could

such immense punya become exhausted, and I be cast down from here? You know that the place created for me was eternal. Why was it destroyed?”

The Pitamaha said, “Your merit, earned by countless yagnas and increased by your rule of dharma, perished because of a single fault: your vanity, and it made you the object of contempt of all the Swargavasis. Vanity, pride of strength, malice, deceitfulness or deception will all reduce your time in Swarga. Never disregard those that are inferior, superior or equal to you. There is no greater sinner than the man who is consumed by the fire of vanity. Those who tell of your fall and re-ascension will be protected from all calamities.”

Rajan, this is the story of how vanity brought Yayati’s downfall, and the distress that Galava suffered because of his obstinacy. Those who want their own good should listen to their well-wishers. One must never be stubborn, for it is the root of ruin.

O Son of Gandhari, forsake vanity and wrath; make peace with the Pandavas. Abandon anger; let go of what you have once given away, that which is done, austerities that you have practised and libations that you have poured on fire. These are indestructible and cannot be diminished. Also, no one other than their doer enjoys their fruit.

The man who understands this greatest and best of stories, which is praised by those who know the scriptures and who are free from anger and greed, gains knowledge of dharma, artha and kama, and sovereignty over the world.’”

CANTO 124

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Holy one, it is as you say. I, too, want to do exactly as what you tell us to, but I am powerless.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "The Kuru monarch then addresses Krishna and says, 'O Kesava, you have spoken about the path that leads to Swarga, which is for the world's good, full of dharma and wise. However, being blind, I cannot act independently, and Duryodhana never pays heed to me. Krishna, you must persuade my foolish, unprincipled and disobedient son. He never listens to the advice of Gandhari, Vidura or other true friends, or Bhishma the chief of them, all of whom want his good.

Counsel my dishonest and evil prince, for by so doing you will have acted nobly, as a friend should.'

Krishna, all-knowing about dharma and artha, says to Duryodhana, 'Kurusattama, listen to what I say, which is good for you especially, as well as for your followers. You are born into a vamsa that is distinguished for its great wisdom, and you are honour-bound to keep dharma.

You are learned and possess so many excellent and qualities. Only low-born, evil, shameless and cruel men do what you mean to. Men of dharma are always inclined towards virtue while sinful men lean the opposite way. Everything you are thinking of doing is against dharma. Insisting on going to war is nothing but sinful, vicious and evil, and will lead you to death.

Abandon this dangerous path you have chosen to tread; it is unworthy of you and will only lead to untold suffering and doom.

You will do yourself, your brothers and your followers a great service if you make peace with the Pandavas instead. The sons of Pandu are wise, courageous and learned; they have immeasurable tejas and perfect control over their souls. If you do what I ask, that will please Dhritarashtra, as well as Pitamaha Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Somadatta, Bahlika, Aswatthama, Vikarna, Sanjaya, Vivimsati and many of your kinsmen and friends. The whole world will benefit from that peace.

You are blessed with modesty, noble birth, learning and kindness. Listen to what your father and mother tell you; a good son always obeys his father's command, knowing it will benefit him. When calamity strikes, men remember their father's advice, which they once ignored. Making peace with the Pandavas will please your father; so let peace recommend itself to you and your advisors.

The man who hears the counsel of his well-wishers but does not heed it will be consumed by the consequences of his disregard, even as if he has eaten the poisonous kimpaka fruit. The fool who rejects sage advice and procrastinates will fail to achieve his objective and then repent. On the other hand, the man who heeds wise counsel and accepts it, setting aside his own opinion, will always be happy.

He who discards the words of well-meaning friends, deluded that what they say is not in his best interest, will be crushed by his enemies. The man who ignores the views of the righteous and clings only to those of the sinful, who flatter his vanity, will sink into misery and make his friends weep for him. He who turns away from superior advisors and seeks out inferior ones will fall into distress, from which he will not be able to extricate himself. The Earth will abandon the man who befriends sinners, who behaves deceitfully, who ignores what his friends say, who honours strangers but hates his own people.

Bharatarishabha, you have chosen to make enemies of the Pandavas and look to incompetent, foolish and sinful men for support. What other man is there on Earth besides you, who would disregard kinsmen who are all Maharathas, each like an Indra, and instead seek refuge and help from strangers? You have persecuted the sons of Kunti from the time they were born, but because they are virtuous they were not angry with you. Indeed, although you have been deceitful to them since their birth, those noble men

have always been noble and generous to you. You ought to reciprocate their magnanimity in like measure.

Do not yield to anger. Wise men's energies are always focused on dharma, artha and kama. If all three cannot be attained, men pursue at least dharma and artha. Even if these three are followed separately, superior men, who have their senses under control, choose dharma as their priority; those who have a position between good and evil choose artha, which is subject to dispute; while those whose minds are darkened by tamas concentrate on gratifying their desires, however base.

The fool who abandons dharma to pursue artha and kama by sinning is soon destroyed by his own senses. The man who seeks artha and kama should first practice dharma, because all three are inextricably linked. Rajan, the wise say that dharma is the primary source, and so he who seeks all three purusharthas will, by practicing dharma alone, flourish, like fire when it touches a hayrick.

Bharatarishabha, you want to employ sin to obtain sole sovereignty over this vast and flourishing empire. The man who deals falsely towards those who live by dharma cuts himself down, like a forest felled by the axe. One seeks to destroy the very mind of the man one wants to defeat, for with his mind in chaos he cannot devote his attention to his true welfare.

The man who has his soul under control is never heedless of anyone, not even the most common of creatures, far less those bulls among men, the Pandavas. He who gives in to anger loses his sense of right and wrong. Evil must not be allowed to grow; look at the proof of this.

Solidarity with the sons of Pandu is far better for you than union with sinners. If you make peace with them, you will make peace with yourself, and have everything that you wish for. You now enjoy the kingdom that the Pandavas founded, but you ignore them and go to others for friendship and protection. Wanting the undiminished continuance of your prosperity, you have vested the care of your kingdom with Dusasana, Durvisha, Karna and Subala's son, men far inferior to the Pandavas in knowledge, in dharma, in their ability to garner wealth and in prowess.

Let alone these four men, all these kings together, with you at their head, cannot even look at an angry Bhima on the battlefield. This army of so many kings of the Earth is at your command. Also with you are Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Kripa, Bhurisravas, Somadatta, Aswatthama and Jayadratha. All of them together cannot face Arjuna, whom even the Devas,

Asuras and Gandharvas cannot quell. Do not set your heart on war, Duryodhana.

Have you seen any man who has encountered Arjuna in battle and come away unscathed, let alone victorious? What can you gain from a universal slaughter? Show me one man who will defeat Arjuna, whose defeat alone can ensure your victory. Who will face that son of Pandu in battle, who vanquished all the Devas, Gandharvas, Yakshas and Nagas at Khandavaprastha? There is also that marvellous account of the encounter in Virata's city, of one against many, which should convince you.

Do you hope to vanquish an enraged Arjuna, invincible, irresistible, ever-victorious and unfading, that hero who gratified even Mahadeva Siva in fight? When, with me as his sarathy, that son of Pritha storms on to the battlefield, like Indra himself, who will dare challenge him? He who would vanquish Arjuna in battle could lift up the Earth in his arms, consume in his rage the entire population of the world and cast the very gods out from heaven.

Look at your sons, brothers, cousins and other relatives. Let them not die because of you. Let the Kaurava vamsa not horribly dwindle or even become extinct. Rajan, let the people not call you the exterminator of your dynasty and the destroyer of its noble achievements. If you make peace with them, the Pandava Maharathas will install you as Yuvaraja and your father Dhritarashtra as the king of this vast empire.

Do not dismiss the prosperity that awaits you, which is sure to come if you tread the path of dharma. Give half the kingdom to the sons of Pritha and win great prosperity. Listen to your well-wishers. By making peace with the sons of Pandu and living with them in harmony you will be blessed for eternity.'"

CANTO 125

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "After listening to Krishna, Bhishma says to the angry Duryodhana, 'Krishna has spoken to you out of a desire to establish peace between cousins. Follow his advice; do not give in to vindictiveness. If you do not do as Krishna says, you will never gain prosperity, happiness or your own welfare.

What Krishna said to you is in keeping with dharma and artha. Do as he says and you will achieve your every objective; do not obliterate the Earth's population. Do not destroy this resplendent prosperity of the Bhaaratas amongst all the kings of the Earth, even while your father Dhritarashtra is still alive. If you disregard Krishna, your father and the wise Vidura, your stubborn arrogance will take you to your death and, with you, all your counsellors, sons, brothers and kinsmen will also die. What your true well-wishers counsel is dharma and will benefit you greatly.

Do not become the extinguisher of your vamsa; do not cleave to evil; turn your heart away from sin; do not tread the path of adharma; do not drown your parents in a sea of grief.'

When Bhishma has spoken, Drona says to Duryodhana, who by now is panting with rage, 'Rajan, what Krishna said is consistent with dharma and artha, and Bhishma has said the same. Accept their counsel. Both of them are wise, learned, of superior intelligence, have their souls under control and want only what is good for you. What they say is salutary; listen to

them. Wise king, do as Krishna and Bhishma say; do not disregard Krishna, who counsels you gravely out of your vain delusion.

The men who have been blithely encouraging you cannot give you victory. They will deny their responsibility and cast the burden of war onto others. Do not slaughter the Earth's population nor slay your sons and brothers. The army which has Krishna and Arjuna in it is invincible. If you reject what Krishna and Bhishma have said, you will have cause to repent. Arjuna is even greater than Bhishma describes, and as for Devaki's son Krishna, not the gods can withstand him.

Bharatarishabha, there is no use in continuing to tell you what is good for you. Everything that needed to be said has been said. Now do as you wish; I have nothing further to add.'

After Drona has spoken, Vidura looks at Duryodhana and says, 'Duryodhana, I have no sympathy for you. I do grieve, however, for your elderly parents Gandhari and Dhritarashtra. With an unprincipled protector like you, whom they will soon lose, they will be left to wander the Earth like beggars and, deprived of their friends and counsellors, as well, they will be like a pair of birds whose wings have been shorn.

Having a sinful son, who will cause the extermination of the human race as we know it, they will sorrowfully roam the Earth, living on alms.'

Now the king turns to Duryodhana, who sits among his brothers and all the other kings. Dhritarashtra says, 'Listen, Duryodhana, to what Krishna Mahatman advises. Do as he says, for his words are eternal, auspicious and will lead to your salvation. With the help of blemishless Krishna we, of all the kings, are sure to achieve our most cherished goals.

Join Krishna and reconcile your differences with Yudhishtira; give this the same importance you would a mahayagna, for the weal of all the Bharatas, the Pandavas and Kauravas as one. With Krishna's help, bind yourself closely with the Pandavas, in love. This is the time to make peace; do not let the opportunity pass.

If you choose to disregard Krishna, who wants your welfare as much as that of the sons of Pandu, and who urges you to make peace for your own good, you can never win the war that will be and ruin will overtake us all.'"

CANTO 126

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra's impassioned words prompt Bhishma and Drona, who sympathise with the old king, to speak to the recalcitrant Duryodhana.

They say, 'While the two Krishnas are not yet clad in their armour; while the Gandiva is still quiet; while Dhaumya has not yet begun to burn his enemies in the fire that he will light and feed for the war; and while that mighty archer Yudhishtira, who wears modesty like a garment, has not yet begun to look on your army with anger, let all hostilities cease.

While Bhimasena has not yet positioned himself in the midst of his troops, let enmity end. While Bhima has not yet entered the battlefield with his mace in hand and begun to smash down his enemies, make peace with the Pandavas. Before Bhima with his deadly gada makes the heads of elephant-warriors roll on the field like ripe palmyra-fruit, make peace. While Nakula and Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's vamsa, Virata, Sikhandin and Sisupala's son, all seasoned warriors versed in the astra shastra, have not yet donned their armour or penetrated your army, like crocodiles cutting through helpless waters, and showered you with fusillades of burning arrows, put a stop to this insane enmity.

As yet, fierce-winged barbs do not fall upon the vulnerable bodies of the assembled kings; as yet, iron shafts, shot by mighty bowmen who unerringly find any target at whatever distance, do not pierce the breasts of

your warriors, who sit here smeared with sandalwood and other fragrant pastes and adorned with golden necklaces and jewelled ornaments. Let hostilities end before they do.

Let that elephant among kings, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, receive you with an embrace while you salute him with your head bowed down. Bharatarishabha, let that king, renowned for the munificence of his sacrificial gifts, place his right hand marked with the signs of banner and hook on your shoulder. Let him set his gem-adorned and red-palmed hands on your back when you are seated before him.

Let Mahabaho Vrikodara, his shoulders as broad as the sala tree, embrace you with goodwill for the sake of peace. When Arjuna and the twins greet you with respect, sniff their heads in affection and speak lovingly to them.

Let all these kings who have gathered here shed tears of joy on seeing you united with your heroic cousins. Let the news of this happy union be proclaimed in their cities. Rule the Earth with brotherly affection in your heart and let her forever be freed from the fever of envy and anger.'"

CANTO 127

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “In the Kuru sabha, Duryodhana is not pleased to hear this, and he says to Krishna, ‘O Kesava, it is indeed just that you speak as you have after reflecting on all the circumstances. Yet you speak harshly and, without reason, find fault only with me, whilst always speaking kindly to the Pandavas. Have you weighed the strength and weaknesses of both sides before censuring me?

You, Vidura, the King, the Acharya and the Pitamaha all reproach only me and none other. I do not find the least fault in myself, yet all of you, including my own father, despise me. Parantapa, even after reflection I cannot find any shortcoming in me, grave or insignificant.

At the game of dice, which the Pandavas happily accepted, Sakuni defeated them and won their kingdom. How can I be blamed for that? On the other hand, I commanded that the wealth I won from the Pandavas be returned to them. It cannot be any fault of mine that the invincible Pandavas lost again at dice and had to go into exile in the forest. What fault do they lay at my door and make me their enemy?

Krishna, why do the weakened Pandavas so confidently choose to have war with us, as if they were as strong as they were once? What have we done to them? For what injury do the sons of Pandu, as well as the Srinjayas, seek to slaughter the sons of Dhritarashtra? Neither their fierce

deeds nor their intimidating words will deprive us of our good sense and make us bow in fear, to them or even to Indra.

I do not see any Kshatriya who can conquer us in battle. Let alone the Pandavas, the Devas themselves cannot vanquish Bhishma, Kripa, Drona and Karna. If, Madhava, we die while keeping our Kshatriya dharma in battle, we will still go to Swarga.

Our highest duty as Kshatriyas is that we lay ourselves down on the field of battle on a bed not of down but arrows. If we do this without bowing to our enemies, that sharp bed will not injure us. Is there a Kshatriya who lives by his dharma, who would bow to an enemy out of fear and the wish to save his own life? Warriors who seek their own good honour what Rishi Matanga said: *a Kshatriya should always keep himself erect and never bow down, for effort is manliness; he should rather break than bend*.

A Kshatriya like me should only bow to Brahmanas, out of piety, and not to anyone else; and with all others, I must conduct myself as Matanga said. This is Kshatriya dharma, and I have always been true to it.

The portion of the kingdom that my father gave the Pandavas can never be theirs again, not as long as I live. As long as Dhritarashtra lives, both we and they must put away our weapons and live under his command as his dependents. The kingdom was given away from ignorance and fear when I was a callow youth and a dependent. It will never be given away again, and the Pandavas will never have it.

As long as I live, I shall not give the Pandavas even as much of our land as may be covered by the point of a needle!'"

CANTO 128

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Krishna is thoughtful for a moment and then, his eyes reddening ominously, he addresses Duryodhana in the presence of all who have come to the Kuru sabha.

Krishna says, 'You wish for the bed of heroes, and you shall have it, and your counsellors as well. For a great slaughter will soon happen. Does your small intelligence truly make you believe you have not committed any sin against the Pandavas? Let the kings who are assembled here be your judges.

Piqued by the prosperity that the noble sons of Pandu enjoyed, you and Subala's son conspired to arrange the game of dice. Why would those virtuous, honest and noble cousins of yours otherwise play such a vile game with the deceitful Sakuni? Gambling robs even the best of their intellect; as for the evil, it fetches disputes and other problems. It was you who, with your evil confederates, planned that disaster in the form of a game of dice, without consulting any men of dharma.

Who else could shame his brother's wife in the way that you shamed Draupadi by dragging her into the sabha and speaking as coarsely to her as you did? She is of noble birth and of pure conduct, and dearer to Pandu's sons than their lives; yet you treated Panchali despicably.

All the Kauravas know what Dusasana said that day in the sabha to Kunti's sons when they were about to set out for the forest. Who could behave so disgracefully towards honourable kinsmen, who are always

virtuous, untouched by greed and cleave to dharma? Karna, Dusasana, and you, too, used words that only the most cruel and contemptible men use.

You took great pains, albeit without success, to immolate the Pandavas and their mother at Varanavata, when the princes were just youths. They escaped and were forced to hide in the home of a Brahmana in the town of Ekachakra. You tried again to kill them with poison, with snakes and by strangling; indeed you used every means to have the Pandavas killed, but none of your plans succeeded. When you have always behaved so malignantly towards the noble sons of Pandu, how can you say you have not offended them?

O sinful one, you are not willing to give them their rightful share of the kingdom, although they beg you for it. But you will be forced to give it to them when you are vanquished in battle and forcibly stripped of your prosperity. Having wronged the Pandavas so cruelly and so grievously, you now want to present yourself in a different light.

Repeatedly, your parents, Bhishma, Drona and Vidura tried to persuade you to make peace, but you did not. Peace would be advantageous to both you and Yudhishtira, but you fail to see the good in it. What else can be said of you than that you are ignorant? Going against the advice of your well-wishers, your true friends, can never bring you felicity. What you are about to do is fraught with disgrace, sin and danger, and will fetch a doom you cannot begin to imagine.'

Now Dusasana speaks to Duryodhana. In the Kuru sabha he says, 'My brother, if you do not willingly make peace with the Pandavas, the Kauravas will bind and surrender you to Kunti's son; Bhishma, Drona and your own father will hand Karna, you and me to the Pandavas.'

His heavy breath hissing like a great snake's, Duryodhana rises in rage. He ignores Vidura, Dhritarashtra, Bahlika, Kripa, Somadatta, Bhishma, Drona and Krishna, indeed, all those present, and stalks out of the sabha, followed by his brother, his counsellors and all the other kings loyal to him.

Bhishma says, 'The enemies of the man who abandons dharma and artha to follow his greed and anger rejoice when he falls into distress. This evil son of Dhritarashtra, this foolish Duryodhana who knows nothing of dharma, who is undeservingly vain of his sovereignty, obeys only the dictates of wrath and avarice. Alas Krishna, I see that the end of all these Kshatriyas has come, all these deluded kings who follow Duryodhana.'

Lotus-eyed Krishna says to those that remain, chief among them Bhishma and Drona, 'This is the great sin that all the Kuru elders are guilty of: that they do not stop this evil king from enjoying sovereignty. The time has come to stop him, for that may still do some good. Listen to me, sinless ones. What I say will benefit you.

During the lifetime of the old Bhoja king, his son, who was evil and a slave to his passions, usurped his father's throne and was eventually killed. It was I who killed Ugrasena's son Kansa, whom his friends and relatives abandoned, in a great battle for the weal of the world. My kinsmen and I then paid homage to Ugrasena, son of Ahuka, and re-installed him on the Bhoja throne. All the Yadavas, Andhakas and Vrishnis found prosperity and peace by abandoning a single evil one: Kansa.

Rajan, when the Devas and Asuras were arrayed for battle with their weapons raised and ready to strike, Paramesthin, the lord of all creatures, said something which is pertinent to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

When the peoples of the worlds were divided into two sides and were about to be slaughtered, the divine Creator and Protector of the universe said, "The Asuras, Daityas and Danavas will be vanquished, and the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras and other Swargavasis will be victorious. The Devas, Asuras, Manavas, Gandharvas, Nagas and Rakshasas will massacre one another in this war."

With this in mind, Paramesthin commanded Dharma, saying, "Tie up the Daityas and Danavas securely and hand them over to Varuna," which Dharma accordingly did. Varuna bound them again, fastening his knots over Dharma's and even now keeps them in the depths of his watery kingdom, guarding them carefully.

Even so, secure Duryodhana, Karna, Sakuni and Dusasana and give them up to the Pandavas. For the sake of a family, an individual may be sacrificed; for a village a family may be sacrificed; for a province a village may be sacrificed; and for the sake of one's soul, the very Earth may be sacrificed.

Rajan, restrain Duryodhana and make peace with the Pandavas. Do not be the instrument by which the entire race of Kshatriyas is annihilated.'"

CANTO 129

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra turns to Vidura, who knows all aspects of dharma.

He says, 'Go to the wise, far-seeing Gandhari and bring her here. Together with her, I will plead with my black-hearted son. If she can pacify him, we may yet be able to do as Krishna says. By speaking for peace, she might bring my greedy, foolish son, influenced by his evil friends, back to the path of dharma. If she can avert the calamity that Duryodhana is about to cause, we might be able to preserve peace and enjoy happiness for ever.'

Vidura brings Gandhari into the sabha, and Dhritarashtra says to her, 'My queen, with utter disregard for my commands, and greedy for power, your son is about to sacrifice the kingdom and his very life. Like some rough peasant, showing contempt for his superiors and the advice of his well-wishers, he walked out of our court with his sinful friends.'

Gandhari says, 'Have that sinful son of mine fetched here. The man who has a coarse soul and sacrifices dharma and artha does not deserve to rule a kingdom. Arrogant, envious and greedy, obtained a kingdom by the vilest means. Indeed, Dhritarashtra, you who are so fond of your son, are to blame for this, for, knowing his evil heart, you did as he wanted. Lust and wrath have seized this son of yours and he is a slave to delusion. You cannot force him to change his ways, Rajan; it is too late for that. Now you

reap the fruit of having given charge of the Kuru kingdom to an ignorant, selfish and evil prince, and one with unscrupulous advisors.

Are you not affected by the imminence of the war that will be fought between such close relatives? Your enemies will rejoice at your discord with the Pandavas, who are as your own sons. What sane man would use force to overcome a calamity that can be resolved by conciliation and generosity?'

At Dhritarashtra and Gandhari's command, Vidura brings Duryodhana into the sabha. His tread is heavy, his angry breath hisses snake-like and his eyes glitter coppery as he comes back into the sabha to hear what his mother has to say. Gandhari rebukes him and speaks to him in an attempt to make him see reason and to secure peace.'

Gandhari says, 'Duryodhana, my son, listen to what I say; it is for your good and that of your followers as well. What I say is easy for you to do, and it will bring you prosperity and happiness. Duryodhana, do as your well-wishers tell you, those Bharatottamas: your father, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Vidura. If you make peace, you will pay homage to Bhishma, to your father, to me and to all the others who love you with Drona at their head.

Nobody succeeds in acquiring, retaining or enjoying a kingdom by his own effort alone. The man who does not have his passions under control can never enjoy a throne for any length of time. Only the restrained man, one endowed with great intelligence, can rule a kingdom. Unbridled lust and wrath make a man lose his possessions and enjoyments. It is after first conquering these enemies within himself that a king brings the Earth under his subjection.

Sovereignty over men is a great thing. Evil men may want to win a kingdom, but they cannot rule it when they do acquire it. He who desires to acquire an empire must firmly tether his senses to dharma and artha, for, if the senses are restrained, intelligence increases, like a fuel-fed fire. If uncontrolled, his senses can even kill him, like unbroken, wild horses can kill an unskilled rider.

The man who tries to win over his counsellors without first conquering himself, and who tries to conquer his enemies without subduing his counsellors, is soon vanquished and ruined. He who masters himself first, taking himself for his worst enemy, will later succeed in conquering his confederates and outside enemies. Prosperity worships the man who

commands his senses and his advisors, who metes out punishment to transgressors, who acts after deliberation and who is calm and wise.

Lust and wrath, which live within a man, are like two small fish caught in the net of wisdom and restrained. These two, when they manage to escape and grow, make the gods shut the doors of heaven against a man who has shed his worldly desires and who is, otherwise, qualified to enter. The king who understands how to conquer lust, wrath, greed, boastfulness and pride can indeed rule the whole world.

The king who wants to acquire artha and dharma, and who wants to vanquish his enemies, should always restrain his passions. The man who, influenced by lust or anger, behaves deceitfully towards his kinsmen or others can never win true allies. By uniting with the heroic sons of Pandu, who are all blessed with great wisdom, you can happily enjoy the Earth, my son. What Santanu's son Bhishma and Maharatha Drona tell you is true—Krishna and Arjuna are invincible. So, seek the protection of this Mahabaho, to whom any exertion is as nothing, for if Krishna decides to be gracious, both sides will be happy.

The man who does not obey wise and learned friends, who want his prosperity, will gladden only his enemies. My son, there is no good in battle, no dharma, no artha. How then can it bring felicity? Besides, child, victory is far from certain. Do not set your heart on war. Bhishma, your father and Bahlika gave the Pandavas their share of the kingdom from fear. Parantapa, never even think of going to war against Pandu's sons. The peaceful state of your sovereignty over the Earth is the result of their rule, during which they removed all obstacles to harmony.

Give the Pandavas what is only their due. If you wish to enjoy, with your friends and advisors, your half of the empire, give them their share. Half the Earth is enough to support you and yours. By doing as your well-wishers say, you will win great fame, Bhaarata. A war with the sons of Pandu will result only in the loss of everything you now have, for they are all blessed with prosperity; they have their souls under control; they are vastly intelligent and they have conquered their passions. Dispel the anger of your elders and rule your kingdom in a manner that becomes you: by giving the Pandavas back their rightful share.

My son, for thirteen years you have made the Pandavas suffer; it is enough. Douse the fire that your lust and anger have fed. Neither you who covet their wealth, nor the always angry Sutaputra nor your brother

Dusasana is a match for them. The fury of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Bhimasena, Dhananjaya and Dhrishtadyumna can obliterate the Earth's very population. Do not let your anger become the cause of the end of the Kurus. Do not let the world be destroyed for your stubbornness.

Your limited intellect deludes you into thinking that Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and all the rest will fight whole-heartedly for you. That will never happen, for these men, who have Atmagyana, are just as fond of the Pandavas as they are of you. Even if they are willing to give up their lives in gratitude for the care that Dhritarashtra has given them, they could never be angry with Yudhishtira.

Men never acquire true wealth through greed. Give up your avarice and desist, my son, O Bharatarishabha.'"

CANTO 130

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana ignores his mother's words and, again, angrily walks away to be with his evil friends. Now the prince conspires with Sakuni, the crafty player of dice, and, together, he, Karna, Sakuni and Dusasana alight on a foul plan.

They decide, 'Krishna is always quick to act and, with Dhritarashtra and Santanu's help, he will want to seize us. So we must take him captive first, even as Indra did Bala. When the Pandavas hear of his being our prisoner they will lose heart and become hapless, like snakes without fangs. Mahabaho Krishna is their protector and their refuge. If we imprison this granter of wishes, this bull of all the Sattvatas, the Pandavas and the Somakas will despair and become impotent to fight.

We will ignore Dhritarashtra and take Krishna captive, even here in Hastinapura, and then go to war against the enemy.'

The intuitive Satyaki, who can read men's intentions by what he sees around him, soon realises what Duryodhana is plotting. He comes out of the sabha with Kritavarman.

Satyaki says to Kritavarman, 'Array our troops now! Wait with your armed men at the entrance to the sabha, while I speak to Krishna.'

He walks back into the sabha, like a lion into a mountain cave, and informs first Krishna, then Dhritarashtra and Vidura of the conspiracy.

Then he laughs, 'What these evil men have plotted violates dharma, artha and kama. Besides, they will never be able to achieve what they plan. Overwhelmed by their passions and yielding to their wrath and greed, these sinners want to commit the most heinous sin. These despicable men, who want to seize lotus-eyed Krishna, are like children who want to hold a blazing fire in their hands.'

Vidura says to Dhritarashtra in the Kuru sabha, 'O Rajan, the hour of all your sons' deaths is at hand for what they are plotting, however incapable they might be to actually accomplish this unspeakable plan. Alas, they are united in their wish to vanquish Indra's younger brother and make him their prisoner. When they encounter this Purushavyaghra they will all perish like insects in a fire. Even if they fight as one, if Krishna wants he can send all of them to Yama, like an angry lion dispatching a herd of deer.

However, he will not do anything so sinful. This best of men, of everlasting glory, will never leave the path of dharma.'

Krishna looks at Dhritarashtra, who sits in the midst of so many good men, all heedful of sage counsel, and he says to the Kuru king, 'Rajan, if these men of anger want to use violence against me, allow them to. As for me, easy though it may be for me to kill all of them, I will not commit any sin. Because of their greed for what belongs to the Pandavas, your sons will lose even what is rightfully theirs. And if they try to take me their prisoner, Yudhishtira will accomplish his purpose without fighting a war, for I will seize them and all their followers and make them over to the Pandavas. I tell you, it will not be difficult for me.

However, Bhaarata, I will not be driven by anger or evil, nor commit this offence in your presence. Let Duryodhana do as he likes; I give him and all your sons my leave to do as they plan.'

Dhritarashtra says to Vidura, 'Bring sinful Duryodhana, with his friends, counsellors, brothers and followers into my presence. I will make one last attempt to set him on the right path.'

Again, Vidura fetches the reluctant Duryodhana into the sabha with his brothers and the kings who follow him. Dhritarashtra says to Duryodhana, who stands haughty and defiant, surrounded by Karna, Dusasana and all those other kings, 'O, you wretch of accumulated sins, how do you even dream of doing what you and these sinful allies of yours have plotted? O, you disgrace to your race, only you could think of committing this impossible crime. You want to make the invincible and inexorable lotus-

leaf-eyed Krishna you prisoner! Like a child wanting the Moon, you want to do what even all the Devas led by Indra cannot achieve.

Do you not understand that no one can withstand Krishna in battle, not the Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Uragas or Manavas? As impossible as seizing the wind, as reaching for the Moon with one's hand or as supporting the Earth on one's head is taking Krishna by force.'

Vidura looks at Duryodhana and says to Dhritarashtra's malignant son, 'Duryodhana, listen to what I have to say. At the gates of Saubha, the great Vanara Dwividha, who fought beside Rama at the gates of Lanka in the Treta yuga, covered Krishna with a thunderous shower of rocks, wanting to capture him. He did not succeed. And you want to apprehend Krishna by force?

When Sauri went to Pragjyotisha, Narakasura with all the Danavas could not overcome him. And you want to seize him by force? He slew Naraka, rescued a thousand women from his city and married them all, by law.

In the city of Nirmochana, six thousand awesome Asuras could not capture him with their sorcerous nooses. And you think you can take him by force? When he was a child he slew Putana and two other Asuras who took the shape of birds. He held up Govardhana on his little finger to protect the herd from Indra's deluge. He slew Arishta, Dhenuka, the powerful Chanura, Aswaraja and the evil Kansa. He vanquished Jarasandha eighteen times in battle, and killed Vakra and Sisupala, Bana and countless other kings.

His strength is limitless, immeasurable. He vanquished Varuna and Agni, and when he brought the Parijata tree down from Devaloka, he routed Lord Indra himself, along with all the gods. While floating on the Ekarnava, the single infinite ocean, he slew Madhu and Kaitabha; and in another birth he killed Hayagriva. He is the Creator of everything but is himself uncreated. He is the origin of all power. Whatever he wishes, he accomplishes without effort.

Don't you know that sinless Krishna is permanent and undecaying? Like an angry cosmic snake, he is the never ending source of energy. By trying to use violence against Krishna, you and all your followers will perish, like insects that fall into a great fire.'"

CANTO 131

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Vidura has spoken passionately, Krishna says mildly to Duryodhana, 'You are under the delusion that I am alone, which is why you think of overpowering me and taking me captive. But look, foolish prince, here are all the Pandavas and all the Vrishnis and Andhakas. Here are all the Adityas, the Rudras and the Vasus, with all the great Rishis.' And throwing back his beautiful head, he laughs ringingly.

As the divine one laughs, from his body emerge myriad gods, each flashing like brilliant lightning and no bigger than a man's thumb. On his brow Brahma appears, on his breast Rudra, on his arms the Lokapalas, and from his mouth issue Agni, the Adityas, the Sadhyas, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Marutas, Indra, the Viswadevas and hosts of Yakshas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas, all in miniature forms.

From his two arms Balarama and Arjuna appear. Arjuna stands on his right with his bow in hand, and Baladeva on his left armed with the plough. Behind him are Bhima, Yudhishtira and the two sons of Madri, and before him are all the Andhakas and the Vrishnis with Pradyumna and other chieftains, with mighty weapons raised. In his countless other arms, now in view, flash the conch, the discus, the mace, the bow called Saranga, the plough, the javelin, the Nandaka and every other weapon, all shining with lustre and ready to strike. From his eyes, nose, ears and every part of his

body burst forth dazzling sparks of fire and smoke; and from his pores flames spring, like the rays of the Sun.

Beholding the magnificence of this form of Krishna, all the kings shut their eyes in fearful awe, except Drona, Bhishma, the wise Vidura, the blessed Sanjaya and the saintly Rishis imbued with their profound tapasya, for the Lord has revealed this divine form to them before. While this wondrous vision is manifested in the Kuru sabha celestial drums beat in the sky, flowers rain down upon Krishna, the Earth trembles and the oceans churn turbulently. And, O Bharatarishabha, all living things on Earth are filled with uncanny wonder.

Krishna withdraws his divine and auspicious form and, taking the Rishis' leave, and his arms linked with Satyaki's and Kritavarman's, he leaves the Kuru sabha. An uproar breaks out, during which the Rishis, Narada and others, vanish from sight to return to their sacred abodes. And this, too, is marvellous to see.

Seeing Krishna leave the sabha, the Kauravas and all the kings follow him, like the Devas behind Indra. However, without a thought for any who walk behind him, Krishna of the fathomless soul emerges into the open, like a fire. At the gate his sarathy Daruka waits for him with his white chariot of the tinkling moonbells and golden embellishments, of untold speed, whose wheels rumble like thunderheads, its seats covered with white tiger-skins, and to which Saibya and his other horses are harnessed. Mounted and ready to ride with Krishna is that favourite of the Vrishnis, Hridika's son, Maharatha Kritavarman.

Krishna is about to leave when Dhritarashtra calls after him:

'O Parantapa, Janardana, you have seen how powerless I am to control my sons. You know everything now. Having seen how fervently I try to bring peace between the Kurus and the Pandavas, and knowing that I am blind and helpless, it is not fitting for you to doubt me. Kesava, I have no ill-will towards the Pandavas. You heard what I said to Duryodhana. The Kauravas and all the kings of the Earth also know that I have done everything in my power to make peace.'

Krishna now says to Dhritarashtra, Drona, Pitamaha Bhishma, Vidura, Bahlika and Kripa, 'You have all witnessed what transpired in the hallowed Kuru sabha. You have seen how Duryodhana, like some lout, walked out of the court in anger, and how Dhritarashtra describes himself as being

powerless. Now with leave from you all, I will return to Yudhishtira.' And, saluting them, Krishna climbs into his chariot and departs.

Those Bharatarishabhas, those maharathas Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Vidura, Aswatthama, Vikarna and Yuyutsu follow him. And as the Kurus look on, Kesava turns his great white ratha of the tinkling bells toward the home of his aunt Kunti."

CANTO 132

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vaisampayana said, 'After entering Kunti's house and worshipping her feet, Krishna tells her briefly about all that happened in the Kuru sabha.

He says, 'The Rishis and I spoke in many ways and reasonably to persuade Duryodhana, but he would not heed anything we said. The time of his and his followers' end has come. Let me go now to the Pandavas. What message would you send them? Wise Matuli, speak to me, I want to hear what you have to say.'

Kunti says, 'Krishna, say to virtuous Yudhishtira: "My son, your dharma has diminished. Your mind is afflicted and you are like a man who vainly reads the Vedas without understanding their inner meaning, and who, thus, remains ignorant. You choose to take the Vedas literally while only your own intellect can see the truth. Think about your svadharma, for which Brahma created you. The Kshatriya was created from his arms, and by the strength of his arms he must live and perform the harsh deeds he may need to in order to protect his people. There is a story told in this connection, which I heard long ago.

In the days of yore, a gratified Vaisravana gifted the Earth to the Rajarishi Muchukunda. The sage refused the gift and said he wanted only to enjoy what he had won by his own prowess. The delighted Vaisravana

marvelled at his response. In keeping with Kshatriya dharma, Muchukunda conquered the Earth by the strength of his arms and ruled over it.

Remember, Bhaarata, that a fourth of the punya gained by the subjects of a king who protects them accrues to the king himself, if a king keeps dharma that confers divine status on him, but if he sins, he finds Naraka, hell, for himself. Dandaneeti, the law of punishment, enforced by the king, ensures that the four varnas live by their inherent svadharma; and this leads to the king acquiring dharma, artha and moksha.

When the king fully upholds the Dandaneeti, the law, without discarding any part of it, the golden immaculate age, the Krita Yuga, sets in. Have no doubts about whether the king makes the yuga, or the yuga makes the king, do as he does. We know for certain that it is the king who ushers in the yuga. Indeed, it is the king who is responsible for ushering in all the yugas—Krita, Treta or Dwapara, and even the Kali yuga.

That king who ushers in a Krita yuga enjoys Swarga to the fullest. The king who causes a Treta yuga to set in does enjoy heaven but not fully. For fetching a Dwapara yuga, a king enjoys Swarga in proportion to his deeds. However, the evil king who causes a Kali yuga earns untold sin and lives in Naraka for countless years. This king's sins affect the world, and the world's sins affect him.

Observe your kingly duties as befits your lineage. The path you want to take is not the way of a Rajarishi. The man who, from faintness of heart, allows his compassion to shake him from his dharma does not find the punya that accrues from cherishing his subjects with love. When we blessed you, neither Pandu, nor your grandfather Vyasa or I ever wished on you the impulses which now prompt you. What we prayed for was sacrifice, charity, merit, courage, subjects and children, greatness of soul, and might and energy.

Brahmanas who wished you well worshipped and gratified the Devas and the Pitrs for life, wealth and children for you, whilst adding *Swaha* and *Swadha* to their mantras. As do the Devas, parents expect from their children generosity, tolerance, performance of yagnas, study and protection of their subjects. Whether this is virtue or not, you must perform these duties because of your birth. Though nobly born, my sons are destitute and persecuted. Hungry men can approach a brave and benevolent king and he will give them food and refuge. What can be more virtuous than for a man, who has acquired a kingdom, to make all the people of the world his own

with his generosity, or establish his authority over them by the truth of his words?

A Brahmana’s dharma is to be a priest or a mendicant, a Kshatriya’s is to protect his subjects, a Vaisya’s dharma is to earn wealth and a Sudra’s is to serve the other three varnas. The life of a beggar is forbidden for you, and so is farming. You are a Kshatriya and, therefore, the protector of all who are in distress. You have to live by the prowess of your arms. Mahabaho, recover your rightful share of the kingdom, which you have lost, by conciliation, by argument, by giving gifts, by diplomacy or violently.

What can be sadder for me, who brought you into this world, than to be dependent on others for my sustenance? Fight, in keeping with your duty, the dharma of kings. Do not allow your Pitrs to sink into the disgrace of infamy. Do not exhaust your punya and, with your younger brothers, meet a sinful end.”’”

CANTO 133

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'Krishna, there is an ancient story told of the conversation between Vidula and her son. You must tell Yudhishtira this story, or any other that you think better. Listen to the tale.

There was a noblewoman, a queen called Vidula, who was blessed with great wisdom and foresight. She was famous, prone to anger and devoted to Kshatriya dharma. She was well-educated, and all the kings of the Earth knew of her. Vidula would listen to discourses of all kinds given by eminent sages.

One day, she rebuked her son, who lay prostrate with grief and despair after having been defeated in battle by the king of the Sindhus. She said, "You are not my son, making your enemies joyful as you do. You are not born from your father and me; from where have you come? You have no anger and cannot be called a man; and your unmanly body is a eunuch's and bears no sign of strength. Do you mean to spend your life in dejection and despair? For your own sake, be as a Kshatriya should and do your duty by your subjects.

Do not disgrace your soul; do not be satisfied with a little. Set your sights on great things and shed your fear. Rise, coward; you collapse like a woman after one defeat; do not be the source of delight to your enemies and grief to your friends; do not abandon honour and good sense.

Little streams are filled with only a little water. The palms of a mouse hold a very small quantity. It takes very little, small acquisitions, to satisfy a coward. It is better to die pulling out the fangs of a serpent than to die like a dog. Exercise your strength and risk your life. Like an intrepid hawk that ranges the skies, fearlessly wander the Earth, display your strength, silently watch your enemies and wait for an opportune moment.

You lie here like a man struck by lightning, a corpse. Rise, coward; shake off the memory of your defeat. Do not cower in hiding, so miserably. Let your deeds bring you renown. Eschew mediocrity; do not stand behind anyone, but proudly stand at the head of all. Blaze forth like a roaring fire. Even if for a moment, shine like a tinduka twig, rather than smoulder from unfulfilled desire like chaff. It is better to blaze for a single moment than to smoke impotently for ever.

It does not befit a Kshatriya to be either too fierce or inordinately mild. By achieving every possible feat on the battlefield, a brave man discharges his Kshatriya dharma and never disgraces himself. Whether he gains his objective or not, the man of good sense never wallows in grief. A true Kshatriya forges ahead to accomplish his next objective, without caring for even his life.

So, my son, show your strength or give up your life. What use is living like this, without honour, in shame, in disregard of Kshatriya dharma, and having lost the punya of all the yagnas you performed and nullified your past achievements? The basis of all your joy has been destroyed. Why, then, do want to live? If a man must fall, he should seize his enemy and fall with him. Even if his roots are severed, a man must not give in to despair. Think of the horse, which uses all its strength to pull carriages and chariots, or carry heavy burdens, and use your own strength and honour.

Understand what real manliness is, and work to redeem and elevate the honour of your race that has been lost because of you. The man who has failed to accomplish anything great or noteworthy only increases the human population by one. He is neither man nor woman. He whose fame is not based on charity, asceticism, truth, learning and the acquisition of wealth is only waste born of his mother's body; while, he who surpasses others in learning, asceticism, wealth, prowess and deeds is truly a man.

For you to adopt the idle and wretched life of begging alms is in no way noble but only cowardly. A man can never have joy from a weak friend, whom enemies are delighted to see, who is despised by others, who has

neither possessions nor fine clothes, who is pleased with the smallest acquisitions, who is destitute, who has no courage and who is base.

Driven out of our home, exiled from our kingdom, deprived of all sources of enjoyment and wealth, we will soon die. I have given birth to Kali himself in the form of my son, who is a sinner among the virtuous, and who destroys our dynasty and family. O, let no woman ever have the misfortune of bearing a son like you, apathetic, weak, self-pitying and the joy of his foes. Do not smoulder sadly, but flare up like a great flame and show your prowess. Slay your enemies. Even if for a brief moment, blaze over your enemies' heads.

A real man nurtures his wrath and gives no quarter, whilst a man who forgives easily and has no anger is neither a man nor a woman but a eunuch. Contentment, softness of heart, fearfulness and the lack of effort destroy prosperity. The man who makes no effort does not win greatness. My son, exert yourself to undo the shackles of these failings that will lead to ruin. Steel your heart and go after your lost wealth.

A man is called a purusha because he can overcome his enemy. The man who acts like a woman does not deserve to be called a purusha. A brave and mighty king, who goes majestically through life like a lion, is subject to fate, like all other creatures, but his subjects are never unhappy. The king who disregards his own happiness and pleasure and seeks the prosperity of his kingdom is the source of great joy to his ministers and friends."

Hearing these words, the son said, "If you do not see me, of what use would the whole Earth be to you, of what use your ornaments, all objects of pleasure, and life itself?"

The mother said, "Let your enemies conquer regions that are the domain of the poor and low-born; let your well-wishers enjoy realms that are reserved for noble souls. Do not live the wretched life of a beggar, destitute and without servants, a weak and powerless life, lived on food given in charity. Our Brahmanas and your friends should depend on you for their sustenance, just as all the living depend on clouds for rain, as the Devas depend on Indra.

The life of a man, on whom all other beings depend for their well-being, is not in vain, but like the tree full of ripe fruit that birds flock to. Indeed the life of that brave man, by whose strength his friends attain happiness, like the Devas derive happiness through Sakra's prowess, is blessed. The man

who lives on the strength of his arms wins fame in this life and bliss in the hereafter.’’

CANTO 134

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'Vidula said, "If, defeated, you choose to give up manliness, you will soon find yourself on the path that the lowly walk. A Kshatriya who does not exercise his might to the best of his ability, from fear of death, is like a thief.

Ah sadly, my grave words, which are for your good, and fitting and reasonable as well, fall uselessly on your ears, like medicine given to a dying man. What I say makes no impression on you.

It is true that the king of the Sindhus has many followers. Discount them, for they are weak and ignorant; but though discontented under his command, they can do nothing for themselves but wait for their master to be overtaken by some disaster to be free of him. As for his enemies, they will join their forces with yours when they see your strength. Unite with them and bide your time in the mountains, until fate strikes at your enemy, as it must, for he is old and not immune to disease or death.

Your name, Sanjaya, means victorious. I hardly see you living up to it. Be true to your name; do not prove it falsely given. A great Brahmana saw you when you were a child and predicted that you would fall into distress but rise to greatness again. Remembering his words, I feel some hope, and that is why I repeat myself over and over, my son.

The man who pursues his objectives prudently, and with determination, and who has others working with him towards the same end, will surely be

successful. Whether I stand to gain, or lose what I have, Sanjaya, I will not stop fighting.

Sambara said that there is nothing more miserable than not to know where one's next meal will come from. It is worse than losing a husband or a son. Poverty is only another form of death.

I was born into a noble family and have been taken from one great lake to another. I am much blessed; my husband respects and cherishes me and I wield authority over so many. My friends have seen me living amongst well-wishers, my body bathed and adorned in rich clothes, garlands and ornaments. When you see me and your wife emaciated by hunger, you will not want to live, Sanjaya. Of what use will life be to you when you see our servants, our Acharyas and our Brahmanas leave us from want of sustenance?

What peace can my heart have if I do not see you following your dharma again, to reach for mighty achievements in the way you once used to? My heart will burst if I have to turn away a Brahmana, for my husband and I have never done so in the past. We were the protectors of others and never had to ask for protection ourselves. I will die if I have to be dependent on someone else.

My son, be our means of crossing this stormy ocean; be our raft. Make lavish room for us where now there is none. Bring us back to life. If you have a lust for life, you will be able to face any enemy. But if you insist on behaving like a eunuch and wallowing in self-pity, it would be better to end your life.

A brave man wins fame by killing even a single enemy. By killing Vritra, Indra achieved greatness; he acquired sovereignty over the Devas, the cup for drinking Soma and the lordship of all the worlds. When a Kshatriya declares himself in battle and challenges his mail-clad foes, when he slays the best of the enemy warriors, when he wins renown in fair fight, his enemies feel pain and bow to him. Men who are not brave contribute their own wealth to his cause and fight his fight, uncaring of their lives. Whether kingdoms are overtaken by ruin, or whether life itself is endangered, noble men do not give up until they destroy the enemy who is within reach.

Sovereignty is either Amrita or the gate of Swarga. Think of it as such and, bearing in mind that it is now shut against you, fall like a burning torch amongst your enemies. Rajan, slay your foes in battle; do your duty as a

Kshatriya; let me not see you downcast. Enhancer of your enemies' fears, let me not see you dejected and miserable, surrounded by us who also grieve, while your enemy exults.

Rejoice in your wealth, and with the Sauvira daughters; do not be weak and ruled by the daughters of the Sindhus. If a handsome, educated, noble young man of renown, like you, yields in this unbecoming manner, like an angry bull with its yoked burden, life is like death itself.

How can my heart know peace if I see you eulogise other men or walk submissively behind them? Never has there been anyone in our race who walked behind another. My son, it is not fitting for you to live as a dependent.

I know what the essence of Kshatriya dharma is, as declared by our elders and sages of antiquity. Eternal and constant, Brahma himself ordained it. He who has been born into this world as a Kshatriya of a noble family, and who has studied Kshatriya dharma, will never be anxious about his sustenance, or bow to anybody on this Earth. You must stand erect with courage and honour and put forth your effort to vanquish your enemy, for effort is manliness. One should rather break in the joints than bend his will to another's. A noble Kshatriya should always walk like an infuriated elephant. He should, my Sanjaya, bow only to Brahmanas, for the sake of dharma. He should rule over all other varnas, destroying every evil-doer. Whether or not he has allies, this is how he should live, all his life.'""

CANTO 135

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'Hearing his mother's words, the son said, "O cruel and wrathful mother, you value heroism on the battlefield so highly, it seems as if your heart is made of stone. Fie on Kshatriya dharma, with which you urge me to battle, as if I were a stranger to you and not your only son, as if you were not my mother. If you do not recognise me, if you disown me, of what use will all the Earth be to you, of what use your jewels and riches, indeed, of what use your life itself?"

The mother said, "My son, wise men always base their actions on dharma and artha. I urge you to focus on these virtues and go to battle. This is time to show your prowess. If you do not fight, you will earn general contempt and my disapproval. If I say nothing when you are about to be tainted with dishonour and ridicule, my love for you would be as worthless a donkey's for her young.

Do not take the path that the wise disapprove of, which fools would take, for it is a base and ignorant way, in which innumerable common creatures of the world take refuge, with neither honour nor glory. However, if you choose the way of the Kshatriya, the way of war, you will endear yourself to me. If you tread the high path of dharma and seek artha, while using only ways of the godly and the honest, and relying on your own effort, you will be dear to me indeed. Real joy comes from sons and grandsons who are well taught and brave; while one who is happy with a

son who is apathetic, immodest and without dharma might as well not have a son.

The base man, who never performs his duty but cleaves to cowardice and sin, does not find happiness here or in the hereafter. A Kshatriya is born to do battle and win victory. Whether he wins or dies, he will attain Swarga. The joy that a Kshatriya experiences by conquering his enemies has no equal even in the realms of Indra. If a great Kshatriya meets with defeat many times, he would still wait, burning with anger, for a chance to avenge himself and vanquish his enemy. How can he have peace of mind other than by killing his enemy or dying himself in the attempt?

The wise man considers pettiness distasteful. Insignificant things will eventually become the source of great pain to the man who finds them attractive. The man who does not have what is worthy soon becomes unhappy. He becomes needy and is overwhelmed, like the Ganga when she enters the ocean."

The son said, "Mother, you should not be saying such things to your son. Be loving and stand by him silently."

The mother said, "I am pleased to hear this. You have the right to remind me of my duty. And so, I will urge you even more to do yours. I will honour you only when I will see you crowned with success after slaughtering all the Saindhavas."

The son said, "With no wealth or allies, how can I have success or victory? Knowing this, I have relinquished the desire for kingdom, as a sinner does his wish for heaven. If, in your wisdom, you can see how I can succeed, tell me of it, and I will do as you command."

The mother said, "My son, do not disgrace yourself by anticipating failure. In the past, you have had victories as well as losses. You should never try to attain your goals using anger and foolhardiness. Success is never certain, yet men still act. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes do not. However, those who do nothing will never succeed. How can anyone dream of success without effort?

Effort can have one of two results—success or failure. The man who already believes that he will fail will never have success or prosperity. With firm belief in yourself, and with alertness, put all your energy into everything you do. Prosperity comes to the wise king who acts with valour and forethought, after having performed all auspicious rites to propitiate the

Devas and Brahmanas. As the Sun does to the east, the goddess of fortune comes to him.

You have heard what I want you to do; now show me your manliness. It is your dharma to do your utmost to achieve your goals. Gather to you others who have enmity towards your enemy, men who are also hungry for victory and prosperity, men whom your enemy has weakened, who are jealous of him, whom he has humiliated. With their help you can break the ranks of the Saindhava, even as a violent storm does clouds.

Give your allies their share of wealth before it is due, be active and speak pleasantly, respectfully, to them; and they will stand by you in battle. When the enemy realises that you care little for your life, he will be as fearful of you as of a snake living in his house.

If a man does not try to kill in war an enemy he knows is powerful, he should at least conciliate him with friendly overtures and gifts, which is almost a victory. You can find artha through diplomacy, and if your wealth increases, your friends will adulate you and look on you as their refuge. If you lose your wealth, your friends and relatives will abandon you and, worse still, mistrust and despise you.

However, the man, who befriends his enemy, can never regain his kingdom.”””

CANTO 136

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'The mother said, "Whatever calamity may strike a king, he must never betray his fear. Seeing a frightened king, the whole kingdom, his army and ministers will also be afraid and his subjects will become disunited. Some will defect to the enemy; others will abandon the king; some, whom he has humiliated, will try to finish him. His close friends might stay loyal to him and want his welfare, but will wait helplessly, like a cow for her tethered calf.

Well-wishers grieve for their king when he is plunged in distress, as true friends will. There are many, whom you have honoured in the past, who still bear friendship for you; and you have many true friends, who grieve over your loss of the kingdom and who want to share your troubles. Do not make them abandon you at seeing how frightened you are.

I tell you all this because I want to see your strength, manliness and intelligence; and to encourage and awaken your strength. If you understand that I speak the truth, gather courage and set your mind on victory, Sanjaya. We have a number of treasure-houses that you are unaware of; only I know they exist. I will place all these at your disposal. You also have many sincere friends who will share not only your joys but your troubles, and will not turn away from battle. Parantapa, such men are fitting allies and advisors of a king who wants victory."

Although he was not greatly intelligent, his mother's words melted away the despair that had gripped Sanjaya's heart; and he said to her, "With you, who are so devoted to my welfare, for my guide, I will lift my kingdom out of the depths into which it has sunk, or die in the attempt. I stayed mainly silent while you spoke, because I wanted to hear more. Just as a man's thirst for amrita is never slaked, I am not yet satiated with your love and wisdom.

Mother, I swear to you, I will win the support of my friends, and rouse myself to crush my enemy and be victorious!"

Stung by what his mother said, Sanjaya reared up like a proud horse of high pedigree and soon achieved everything she had urged him to.

When enemies beleaguer a king and he is overwhelmed by despair, his minister should tell him this excellent tale, to arouse his courage and infuse him with strength. Indeed, this story is called Jaya, and everyone who desires victory should hear it. And, having listened to it, a Kshatriya may vanquish his enemies and conquer the whole world.

A pregnant woman who hears it will give birth to a son, and repeatedly hearing it will ensure that a hero is born to her. The Kshatriya woman who listens to it will have a son of irresistible prowess, deeply learned and the most generous of men; who practises the severest tapasya and is utterly devout; who blazes with tejas and is the best of men; who is mighty and greatly blessed; who is a Maharatha, highly intelligent, irresistible in battle, ever victorious and invincible; and who suppresses the sinful and protects the righteous.'""

CANTO 137

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Kunti says, 'Say to Arjuna, "When you were born and I was in the asrama surrounded by my sakhis, a celestial voice spoke from the sky, saying, *Kunti, this son of yours will rival the thousand-eyed Indra. He will vanquish all the assembled Kurus in battle. With Bhima, he will conquer all the Earth and his fame will reach into the heavens. With Vasudeva as his ally he will slay the Kurus in battle and recover his lost kingdom. He will be blessed with great prosperity and, with his brothers, he will perform three mahayagnas.*

Ever-glorious one, you know how devoted to truth Arjuna is, and how irresistible. Let it be as that asariri said. If dharma exists, those words will prove true, and you will fulfil them. I do not doubt what the voice said. I bow to dharma, which supersedes everything else. Tell my Dhananjaya all this.

To Bhima, who is always ready for battle, say these words, "The time has come to fulfil the reason for which a Kshatriya woman gives birth to a son. The best men never grieve when a war has to be fought." You know Bhima's heart. That Parantapa will not rest until he has exterminated his enemies.

Krishna, speak next to the beloved Draupadi of great renown, noble Pandu's daughter-in-law, who knows every detail of dharma. Say to her,

“Panchali, you are of noble descent and endowed with great fame. You are an exemplary wife to my sons and I bless you.”

You must say to the sons of Madri, who always live by Kshatriya dharma, “Treasure that which you acquire by prowess more than life itself. Objects thus won fill the heart of a true Kshatriya with joy. Even while you lived a virtuous life, before your very eyes the Kurus spoke cruel and abusive words to Panchali. Will any Kshatriya worth his name forgive such an insult?

The loss of the kingdom did not distress me nor did the defeat at dice; but to see the noble, beautiful Draupadi weeping in the sabha broke my heart. Alas, she, who is ever devoted to Kshatriya dharma, found no protector then, though her husbands are such powerful men.”

O Mahabaho, tell Purushavyaghra Arjuna, that best of warriors, that he should always do as Draupadi says. You know that, when angered, Bhima and Arjuna can send even the Devas to Yamaloka. Was it not an unbearable torment for them to see their wife being dragged into the sabha? Kesava, remind them of the vile things that Dusasana said to her in the presence of all the Kuru warriors.

Ask after the welfare of the Pandavas, Draupadi and their children for me. Tell them that I am well. Now go on your auspicious mission and, precious Krishna, protect my sons,’ says Kunti.

Krishna pays homage to her by walking around her in pradakshina, and then the mighty-armed one walks in leonine majesty out of Pritha’s apartments. He dismisses the Kurus, who follow him with Bhishma at their head, and, taking Karna with him in his chariot, leaves the Kuru capital accompanied by Satyaki.

And after he leaves, the Kurus gather and discuss what Krishna said and the wonderful vision he showed them. They say, ‘Overcome by ignorance, the Earth is caught in death’s meshes. Through Duryodhana’s folly, everything is doomed.’

Krishna leaves the city and goes on his way, talking at length with Karna, before letting him go and urging his horses to greater speed. With Daruka holding their reins those horses fly with the speed of the mind and flash across the sky, devouring it as they go. Covering the long distance like swift hawks, they arrive at Upaplavya, bearing the wielder of the Saranga,” said Vaisampayana.

CANTO 138

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When they hear of Kunti's message to her sons, Bhishma and Drona say to the defiant Duryodhana, 'Naravyaghra, did you hear the fiery words that Kunti said to Krishna? Her sons will do as she says, especially as Krishna approves. They will not be pacified until they have their share of the kingdom.

You inflicted untold pain on Draupadi and the sons of Pritha in the sabha. Bound by dharma, at the time they swallowed your savage insults. Now that Yudhishtira has Arjuna, master of the astra shastra, the determined Bhima, the Gandiva and its inexhaustible quivers, Arjuna's chariot that flies the Vanara banner, Nakula and Sahadeva, both blessed with brilliant tejas and awesome might, and Krishna and his allies by his side, the Dharmaraja will be unforgiving.

Duryodhana, you saw for yourself how Arjuna vanquished us in battle outside Virata's city. Dhananjaya, who flies the emblem of Hanuman on his flag, singly annihilated the dreaded Nivatakavachas. Have you forgotten the incident with the cattle, when the Gandharvas routed Karna and seized you and your brothers, whilst you wore armour and rode in your rathas? It was Arjuna who rescued you. Is all this not proof enough for you of what will happen if you go to war against Kunti's sons?

Bharatottama, you and your brothers must make peace with the Pandavas. O save this mother Earth from the apocalypse that looms.

Yudhishtira is your elder brother; he is virtuous, affectionate, sweet-spoken and learned. Give up your evil plans and unite with that tiger among men.

If the Pandava sees you put away your bow, and wipe the angry frown from your face and look cheerful, it will bode well indeed for your vamsa. Go to him with your ministers and embrace him as a brother. Pay your respects to him as a king, as you used to, and let Yudhishtira hold you lovingly in his arms.

Let that most terrible warrior Bhima, of the lionish shoulders, mighty thighs and long, powerful arms embrace you. Then let Dhananjaya, of the lotus-petal eyes, wavy hair and conch-like neck greet you respectfully. Let those Purushavyaghras the twins, their beauty unrivalled on Earth, wait on you as their guru, affectionately and reverently. Let all the Kshatriyas with Krishna at their head shed tears of joy.

Divest yourself of pride and reunite with your brothers. Rule the whole Earth with them. Let all the kings embrace one another and joyfully return to their homes. There is no need for war, Duryodhana. Listen to your friends' sage advice, for they warn you that a complete decimation of Kshatriyas will be the only outcome of the war you mean to fight.

The stars are not propitious: animals and birds of ill omen, and all kinds of ominous signs can be seen, particularly in our kingdoms, which portend an unprecedented massacre of Kshatriyas. Meteors fall on your forces; our animals are listless and seem to weep; vultures wheel above our troops. The city and the palace have lost their old appearance and seem sinister. Jackals howl and run in all directions, and fires blaze up everywhere of their own accord.

Listen to your parents and to us, who want only your good. Mahabaho, war and peace both lie within your control. If you ignore the advice of your friends, you will repent when your army is shredded by Partha's arrows. You will remember these words when you hear mighty Bhima's terrible battle cry and the twang of the Gandiva. If you cannot find it in yourself to return to dharma, what we say will inexorably come to pass.'"

CANTO 139

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Duryodhana frowns, his eyes glitter and he averts his gaze from his elders, saying not a word in reply. Bhishma and Drona look at each other and address him once more.

Bhishma says, 'What can be sadder for us than to have to fight against Yudhishtira, who is devoted to serving his elders, who has no envy, who knows himself and is truthful?'

Drona says, 'I love Arjuna more than I love my son Aswatthama; and that hero who flies the ape-emblazoned banner reveres me more than my son does. Alas, out of loyalty to the Kuru House, I will have to fight him, who is dearer to me than my son. Fie on Kshatriya dharma. By my grace, there is no archer to equal Arjuna on Earth.

He who hates his friends, he who is sinful, he who denies God and he who is crooked and deceitful never receives the worship of the righteous, like a sacrifice performed by an ignorant man. Though dissuaded repeatedly, a sinful man will still want to continue sinning, while a righteous man will never abandon dharma, even if he is tempted to sin. Though you have been deceitful and vicious to the Pandavas, they still want to do the right thing by you.

O Duryodhana, your sins will bring you to disaster. The Kuru Pitamaha, Vidura, Krishna and I have all spoken to you, but you have not understood what is good for you. Like the Ganga flowing into the ocean, which

abounds with sharks, crocodiles, timingalas and giant tortoises, you want to penetrate the Pandava host, which teems with heroes. You enrobe yourself in Yudhishtira's wealth as if it was discarded by him, and you think of it as your own.

Though Pritha and Pandu's son lived twelve years in the forest with Draupadi and his brothers, who, even amongst kings, can vanquish him? Yudhishtira shone in splendour even in the presence of Kubera, to whom all the Yakshas and their kings are servile. The Pandavas went to Kubera's court and obtained immense wealth from there, and now they want to attack your swollen kingdom and take back their sovereignty.

Both Bhishma and I have given gifts, poured libations on the fire, studied the scriptures and gratified Brahmanas by gifts of wealth. Our life on Earth has come to an end. Our work is done. You, however, have much to lose—happiness, your kingdom, friends and wealth—and great will be the catastrophe you face, if you go to war against the Pandavas.

How can you vanquish Yudhishtira when Draupadi, who is ever truthful and devoted to stern vratas and tapasya, prays for his success? How will you overcome that son of Pandu who has Krishna for his mentor, who has Dhananjaya for a brother? How will you defeat that son of Pandu, of the austere tapasya, who has on his side so many greatly intelligent Brahmanas who have mastered their senses?

In the way that a well-wisher would when he sees his friend drowning in an ocean of distress, I tell you again—there is no need of war. Make peace with those heroes for the sake of the prosperity of all the Kurus. Do not court defeat and death, with your sons, allies and our army.'"

CANTO 140

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, in the presence of all the princes and vassals Krishna left the city, taking Karna with him in his chariot. What did he of the immeasurable soul say to Radheya? What pacifying words did Govinda speak to the Sutaputra? Tell me, Sanjaya, whatever Krishna, of the voice as deep as newly formed monsoon clouds, said to Karna, mild or stern.'

Sanjaya says, 'Bhaarata, I will repeat the very words, both intimidating and mild, full of dharma, fraught with truth, beneficial and pleasing to the heart, that Krishna spoke to Radha's son.

Krishna said, "Radheya, you have worshipped many Brahmanas who have perfect knowledge of the Veda. With dhyana, and a mind free of envy, you have frequently sought knowledge from them, and thus you know the eternal truth of the Vedas and the subtleties of the Shastras.

Those who know the Shastras say that sons are of two kinds—kanina and sahoda. Both are born before her marriage to an unwed maiden who later marries their father. You were born in this way, Karna; you are Pandu's son. Be a king, as the Shastras dictate you should. On your father's side you have Pritha's sons for kin, and on your mother's, the Vrishnis. Bharatarishabha, both these families are your own.

Come with me today and let the Pandavas know that you are Kunti's son, born before Yudhishtira was. The five Pandava brothers, Draupadi's

five sons and Subhadra's invincible son will all worship at your feet. All the kings and princes, who have gathered for the Pandava cause, all the Andhakas and all the Vrishnis, will do the same. For your investiture, queens and princesses will bring water in gold, silver and earthen jars, aromatic herbs and all kinds of grain, jewels and flowers. Draupadi will be a wife to the six of you.

Let Dhaumya, of the restrained soul, pour ghee on the sacred fire, and let the Pandavas' Brahmanas, for whom the Vedas are the final authority, perform your investiture. Let the Pandavas' family priest, who is devoted to Vedic rites, the five sons of Pandu, all bulls among men, Draupadi's five sons, the Panchalas, the Chedis and me join in installing you as sovereign lord of the Earth.

Let Dharma's son Yudhishtira, of the great soul and stern vows, be your heir apparent and rule the kingdom under your authority. Let him stand behind you in your chariot, holding the white chamara fan. Let Bhimasena hold the royal white parasol over your head. Arjuna will drive your chariot drawn by white horses, adorned with a hundred tinkling bells, its sides covered with tiger-skins. Nakula and Sahadeva, Draupadi's five sons, the Panchalas and that Maharatha Sikhandin will all follow. I with all the Andhakas and the Vrishnis will walk behind you. All the Dasarhas and the Dasarnas will be your kinsmen.

O Mahabaho, enjoy the sovereignty of the Earth with your brothers the Pandavas, with japas and homas and auspicious rites being performed in your honour. Let the Dravidas, the Kuntalas, the Andhras, the Talacharas, the Chuchupas and the Venupas, all walk ahead of you. Let vabdhis and magadhis sing hymns in your praise. Let the Pandavas proclaim, *Victory to Vasusena*!

O Kuntiputra, rule the kingdom surrounded by the Pandavas, like the Moon by the stars, and gladden Kunti's heart. Let your friends rejoice and your enemies tremble. Even today, let there be a union between you and the sons of Pandu, your brothers.'"

CANTO 141

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna said, "O Kesava, I have no doubt that you speak out of love, affection and friendship for me, and also because you wish me well. I already know and understand everything you have said.

By descent, as well as by the laws of the Shastras, I know that I am Pandu's eldest son. Before she married Pandu, my mother, while still a virgin, conceived me through intercourse with Surya Deva, and, at his command, abandoned me as soon as I was born. Yes, by dharma I am indeed the firstborn son of Pandu.

Kunti abandoned me without a thought. The Suta, Adhiratha, saw me floating down the river, took me home and gave me to Radha. Her breasts filled with milk out of a mother's love, and she adopted and raised me as her own. How can we, who know dharma and are always listening to scriptures deprive her of her pinda?

Adhiratha, too, looked upon me only as a son and I loved him as my father. It was he who, with a father's love, performed all the samskaras for me from my infancy, as prescribed in the shastras. He had the Brahmanas name me Vasusena. When I grew to be a young man I married the girls my father chose. Through them all my sons and grandsons were born. My heart is bound to them by love. Neither from joy nor fear, neither for all the Earth nor mountains of gold will I break those bonds.

For thirteen years I have enjoyed lordship, without a thorn in my side, under Duryodhana's patronage. At the same time, I have performed the yagnas that being a Suta demands; and all my family rites and marriages were performed in accordance with Suta customs. Knowing that I am loyal to him, Duryodhana has made preparations for war and taken an openly hostile stand against the Pandavas. This is also why I have been chosen to fight Arjuna in the war that will be. O Krishna, I could never be disloyal to Duryodhana, not from fear of death, nor for ties of blood or any temptation at all. If I now withdraw from meeting Arjuna in battle, I will disgrace both myself and him.

I know that you said whatever you did out of love for me. The Pandavas are obedient to you and will do as you say. However, you must keep our conversation to yourself. If Yudhishtira comes to know that I am Kunti's first-born son, he will never accept the kingdom; and if this mighty and burgeoning empire becomes mine, I will give it to Duryodhana.

Let Dharmaraja Yudhishtira become king. He, who has Krishna for his mentor, Dhananjaya and Bhima for his warriors, and Nakula, Sahadeva and the sons of Draupadi by his side, is fit to rule the Earth. The Panchala prince Dhrishtadyumna, that mighty Maharatha Satyaki, Uttamaujas, Yudhamanyu, the prince of Somakas who is devoted to dharma, the ruler of the Chedis, Chekitana, the invincible Sikhandin, the Kekaya brothers whose skin is the hue of indragopaka insects, Bhimasena's uncle Raja Kuntibhoja who has rainbow coloured horses, Maharatha Syenajit, Virata's son Sanka and you yourself, Krishna, are on his side. This assemblage of Kshatriyas is like an ocean. Yudhishtira has as good as already won this radiant kingdom, celebrated among all the kings of the Earth.

Duryodhana is about to perform a great astra yagna, a sacrifice with weapons, of which you, Krishna, will be the Yajaman, as well as the Adhvarya, the head priest. Clad in his coat of mail, Arjuna, who flies the Vanara-emblazoned banner, will be the Hotri, the giver of offerings. His bow Gandiva will be the sruva, the sacrificial ladle, and the prowess of his warriors will be the ghrita he pours. The Aindra, Pasupata, Brahma and Sthunakarna astras he invokes will be the sacrificial mantras. Arjuna and Subhadra's son Abhimanyu, who is equal to, if not more powerful than, his father, will be the hymn that is sung. Mighty Bhima who roars in battle, that destroyer of elephant legions, that Naravyaghra will be the Udgatri, who chants the Veda, and the Prastota, who makes all the preparations, at this

yagna. Dharmatma Yudhishtira, who is devoted to the performance of japa and homa, will be the Brahmana of that sacrifice.

The sounds of conches, tabors and drums, and the leonine roars rising into the heavens will be the gong that announces the meal. Madri's two sons Nakula and Sahadeva, of the great renown and strength, will be the slayers of the sacrificial animals. Rows of shining chariots, flying flags of all colours, will be the stakes to which the yagnapasus are tied. Karninas, nalikas, narachas and arrows with heads like calf-teeth will be the spoons used to distribute the Soma rasa; tomaras will be the vessels holding the Soma, and bows will be the pavitras—kusa leaves for pouring ghee.

Swords will be the papalas—the chalices, the heads of slain warriors will be the purodasas—the oblations, and their blood the ghrita. Lances will be the paridhas—the kindling, and bright maces will be the saktis—pokers used to stir the fire. Drona and Kripa's disciples and Saradwat's son will be the Sadasyas—the guests and assisting priests. The arrows shot by Arjuna, by other mighty warriors, by Drona and Drona's son will be the ladles for serving the Soma.

Satyaki will be the chief assistant to you, Krishna, the Adhvarya. Duryodhana will be the Dikshita—performer of this yagna, and his vast army will play the role of his wife. When the evening rites of this yagna begin with the animal sacrifices, mighty Ghatotkacha will be the slayer of the animals. Dhrishtadyumna, who was born from a sacrificial fire, will be the Dakshina—the fee paid to the priest—of the yagna.

I am consumed with remorse for my sin of speaking harsh words to the Pandavas in order to please Duryodhana. Krishna, the moment of my death at Arjuna's hands will mark the commencement of the punaschiti, the second part of the yagna of war. When Pandu's second son Bhima drinks the blood of the roaring Dusasana, only then the part of the yagna when the Soma rasa is drunk will occur.

When the two Panchala princes Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin overthrow Drona and Bhishma the yagna will be paused for a while; and when mighty Bhimasena kills Duryodhana the yagna will end. When the wives of Dhritarashtra's sons and grandsons stream onto the battlefield haunted by dogs, vultures and other birds of prey, and weep loudly in mourning with Gandhari for their slain husbands, sons and protectors, then the avabhrita snana, the final bath at the conclusion of the yagna, will take place.

Krishna, I pray you, for your own sake, do not let the old and learned Kshatriyas die miserable deaths. This vast host of Kshatriyas must die honourably by weapons on Kurukshetra, that most sacred of all places in the three worlds. Lotus-leaf-eyed one, somehow enable us to achieve our goal, so that the Kshatriya race may attain Swarga. As long as mountains stand and rivers flow the fame of this sacrifice in blood will last. Brahmanas will recite the Mahabharata, this great war of the Bhaaratas. The fame that they achieve in battle is Kshatriyas' true wealth.

O Krishna, bring Kuntiputra Arjuna before me to fight; and keep our conversation a secret forever.'""

CANTO 142

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Krishna smiled and said to him, "Karna, do you not wish to have the empire in the way I have shown you? Do you not want to rule over the Earth, which I am giving you?

The victory of the Pandavas is certain; there is no doubt of that. Arjuna's triumphal banner with the fierce Vanara on it seems to be flying already. The divine illusionist Bhaumana has created it with such enchantment that it stands high, like Indra's banner, and displays on it celestial creatures of forms that symbolise victory. Rising upwards and across for a Yojana, unobstructed by mountains or trees, it blazes like fire. When you see Arjuna in battle on his chariot drawn by white horses, with Krishna as his sarathy; when he looses the astras Aindra, Agneya and Maruta; and when you hear the twang of Gandiva splitting the air like thunder, then all signs of the Krita, the Treta and the Dwapara yugas will disappear. Only the wrath of the Kali will remain.

When you see in battle the invincible Yudhishtira, who is devoted to japa and homa, and who dazzles in brilliance like the Sun, protecting his mighty army and burning the army of his enemies, then all signs of the Krita, the Treta, and the Dwapara yugas will disappear.

When you see in battle the mighty Bhimasena, having drunk Dusasana's blood, dance like a fierce elephant with rent temples that has killed a

fearsome antagonist, then all signs of the Krita, the Treta and the Dwapara yugas will disappear.

When you see in battle Arjuna contain Drona, Bhishma, Kripa, Duryodhana and Jayadratha of the Sindhus, all of whom rush to attack him, then all signs of the Krita, the Treta and the Dwapara yugas will disappear.

When you see in battle the two mighty sons of Madri, those Maharathas who shatter enemy chariots into shards, wreak havoc on the armies of Dhritarashtra's sons from the very moment that weapons begin to clash, like a pair of maddened elephants, then all signs of the Krita, the Treta and the Dwapara yugas will disappear.

Karna, go back and tell Drona, Bhishma and Kripa that this month is a delightful one, with an abundance of food, drink and all things salubrious. Plants and herbs are in a season of vigorous growth; the trees are full of fruit, and the flies are gone. The roads are free of slush, the water is sweet and the weather is pleasant, neither hot nor cold.

Seven days from now will be Amavasya, the day of the new moon. Let the battle begin then, for it is Indra's day. Tell all the kings who have come to fight that I will fulfil their cherished desires. All the kings and princes who are with Duryodhana, and who are killed by weapons, will attain Moksha.'"

CANTO 143

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing Krishna's auspicious words, Karna worshipped him and said, "Knowing everything, why do you still want to confuse me? The destruction of the whole world is at hand because of Sakuni, Dusasana, Duryodhana and me. Certainly, Krishna, a great and fierce war will soon be fought between the Pandavas and the Kurus, which will soak the earth with blood. All the kings and princes who follow Duryodhana will be consumed by the fire of weapons and go to Yama.

Frightful visions and omens appear, making the people's hair stand on end; and they all portend Duryodhana's defeat and Yudhishtira's victory. That fierce planet of dark effulgence, Sanaischara—Saturn—is in opposition to the star Prajapatya, and will bring untold suffering on Earth. The planet Angaraka—Mars—wheels towards the constellation Jyeshta and approaches Anuradha as if seeking friendship, foretelling a great slaughter. Without doubt, Krishna, a terrible calamity for the Kurus is at hand, especially as all the planets oppose the nakshatra Chitra. The Sun spot has changed its position and Rahu approaches Surya to devour him. Meteors, thundering and shaking, fall from the sky.

Elephants trumpet loudly, the horses shed tears and shun food and water. Mahabaho, these omens forecast a great and universal slaughter. In Duryodhana's army the horses, elephants and soldiers, eat little but excrete a lot. Wise men say that these conditions are harbingers of defeat.

The elephants and horses that belong to the Pandavas are all in good spirits and the animals all wheel to the right. These signs augur success. In Duryodhana's army, all the animals move to the left while disembodied voices speak overhead, warning of doom. Auspicious birds—mayuras, hamsas, kraunchas, chatakas, jivajivas and sankhas—follow the Pandavas, while kazhukas, lankas, vakas, hawks, pisachas, jackal packs and swarms of bees follow the Kauravas. The Pandava drums boom without being struck, while those in Duryodhana's camp stay silent even when they are beaten.

Many other signs of defeat manifest themselves in Duryodhana's encampment: water tanks roar like bulls; soldiers are drenched in rains of flesh and blood; misty, ethereal edifices with high walls, deep trenches and imposing entrances suddenly appear, shimmering in the skies over the Kuru camp; and a black ring encircles the Sun. Sunrise and sunset are macabre, and jackals howl hideously at these sandhyas. These omens all foretell defeat.

Bizarre birds, all one-winged, one-eyed and one-legged, screech horribly, also portending defeat. Other ferocious birds with black wings and red legs hover over the Kuru camp at nightfall. Duryodhana's soldiers show hatred for Brahmanas, for their gurus and for all their loyal servants. From Duryodhana's camp the eastern horizon appears red; the south has the hue of weapons; and the west the colour of the Earth; and all the four directions seem ablaze. I know that all these omens augur grave danger.

I had a vision, Krishna, in which I saw Yudhishtira and his brothers climbing to a palace built on a thousand pillars. They all wore white robes and crowns and sat on white thrones. I saw you wrap the blood-dyed earth in an uncanny cover of weapons. Yudhishtira climbed upon a heap of bones and happily ate payasa and ghrita out of a golden cup. I saw him swallow the Earth, which you handed to him. He will surely rule this Bhumi.

I saw Vrikodara, of fierce deeds, standing on the summit of a mountain with his mace in his hand, and he looked as if he was devouring this world. For sure, he will slay us all in savage battle. I know that victory follows dharma.

I saw Dhananjaya, wielder of the Gandiva, riding with you on the back of a white elephant, and he shone with lustre. I have no doubt, O Krishna, that you will kill all the kings led by Duryodhana in the war that will be.

I saw Nakula and Sahadeva, and that Maharatha Satyaki, adorned with white bracelets, white necklaces, white garlands and wearing white robes.

Those tigers among men sat on grand palanquins borne on men's shoulders, with great royal parasols held over their heads. I saw three of Duryodhana's warriors—Aswatthama, Kripa and Kritavarman of the Sattvatas—also clad in white turbans, while all the other kings wore red turbans.

I saw the Maharathas Bhishma and Drona climbing into a carriage drawn by camels, and they rode past Duryodhana and me towards Agastya's kingdom. We shall soon find Yamaloka for ourselves. I have no doubt that all the kings and I, and indeed the entire assemblage of Kshatriyas, will enter the Gandiva fire and die."

Krishna said, "Yes, Karna. If you spurn my advice, the Earth will soon be destroyed. When a pralaya is at hand, adharma assumes the appearance of dharma and lodges itself in the heart."

Karna said, "Krishna, if we emerge alive from this great battle, which will raze numberless heroic Kshatriyas, we might meet here again. Otherwise we shall meet in Swarga and, O Anagha, to me this latter seems the only possibility."

Saying this, Karna clasped Krishna to him in a fervent embrace. With that, he alighted from Krishna's chariot and, riding in his own gold-decked one, the dejected Karna returned here to Hastinapura,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 144

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Krishna's mission for peace in Hastinapura fails, and after he leaves the Kurus and sets out for the Pandava camp, Vidura comes to Kunti and speaks to her, slowly, in grief.

He says, 'O Jivaputri, mother of living children, you know that I am always inclined to peace, but, although I cry myself hoarse, Duryodhana pays no heed to what I say. Yudhishtira has as allies the Chedis, the Panchalas and the Kekayas; he has Bhima, Arjuna, Krishna, Satyaki and the twins. Despite this he remains in Upaplavya, and out of his love for his kinsmen, still looks to dharma, seeming weak though he is in fact so powerful. Dhritarashtra, though he is old, does not care for peace and, intoxicated with pride in his sons, walks a sinful path.

The evil-mindedness of Jayadratha, Karna, Dusasana and Sakuni has caused this strife between cousins. Their sins against Yudhishtira Dharmaraja will soon fetch nemesis upon us all. Is there anyone who would not be filled with sorrow to see the Kurus persecuting dharma? When Krishna returns without having been able to make peace, the Pandavas will prepare for war, and the sins of the Kurus will lead to the very race of Kshatriyas being annihilated. My mind is filled with these thoughts and I get no sleep by day or by night.'

Kunti listens to Vidura, who has always wished her sons well and, sighing deeply in grief, she thinks to herself, 'Fie on wealth, for the sake of

which this great slaughter of kinsmen is about to take place. In this war friends will slay friends and kinsmen their own blood. What can be sadder than to see the Pandavas, the Chedis, the Panchalas and the Yadavas assembled to fight the Kurus? Ah, I see no benefit whatever in war. On the other hand, if we do not fight, we face poverty and humiliation. Death is preferable to poverty, but the extermination of one's kinsmen is not victory.

As I reflect on this my heart wells with sorrow. That Pitamaha Bhishma, Acharya Drona and Karna are on Duryodhana's side sharpens my fear. Surely Drona will never fight willingly against his pupils. Why does the Pitamaha not show any affection for the Pandavas? That leaves the sinful Karna, who follows the deluded Duryodhana who hates the Pandavas.

Single-mindedly pursuing the ruin of the Pandavas, Karna is powerful indeed. This thought is what most burns me now. I will meet him today and disclose the truth of his birth to him, and try to draw his heart towards the Pandavas.

When I was a maiden in my father Kuntibhoja's antahpura, Durvasa Muni was pleased by the way I looked after him and gave me a boon of mantras. With a trembling heart, I thought of the power of those mantras and what Durvasa said: that they were incantations to summon any Deva I chose. I was just a girl then, and had not attained puberty; and I thought constantly about the mantras. Watched over by my nursemaid and surrounded by my sakhis, not wanting to incur any reproach and wanting to keep my father's honour, I thought long about how I could use the secret mantras without sinning.

Finally, I bowed to the Muni in my mind, and from curiosity and childish folly, I spoke the mantras to invoke Surya Deva into my maidenhood, and that is how Karna was born. Why should this child that I held in my virginal womb not obey me, when what I will say to him is both dharma and beneficial to himself and his brothers?'

After reflecting in this way, Kunti makes a decision. She sets out for the sacred Bhagirathi, and arrives on the banks of the Ganga. There she hears her son chanting slokas from the Veda. Karna stands facing the east with his arms raised above his head. Kunti stands behind him and waits for him to complete his prayers. In the noonday heat Kunti begins to wilt, like a faded lotus garland; she comes closer and stands in the shade cast by awesome Karna's great body.

Karna continues his prayers until his back burns from the Sun's heat and his body radiates lustre. At last, he finishes his worship, lowers his arms and turning round, he is startled to see Kunti. He greets her respectfully, folding his hands together; he bows and speaks gently to her."

CANTO 145

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Karna says, 'I am Karna, son of Radha and Adhiratha. Devi, what brings you here? What can I do for you?'

Kunti says, 'You are Kunti's son, not Radha's, and Adhiratha is not your father. Karna, you are not a Suta; believe what I say to you.

You were born to me when I was a girl; I carried you in my womb. My son, you were born in Raja Kuntibhoja's palace. Resplendent Surya Deva, who makes everything visible, is your father. You were born in my father's house, wearing ear-rings and armour that were a part of your body, and you were radiantly beautiful. It is not right that you remain ignorant of who your brothers are and serve Duryodhana. It is a sin. The laws of dharma state that a man's highest duty is to obey and please his father and his mother. His mother is the one who most loves her child.

Evil men have, from avarice, taken Yudhishtira's wealth, which Arjuna won for him. Retrieve it from Dhritarashtra's sons and enjoy that prosperity. Let the Kurus see Karna and Arjuna uniting today in brotherly love; and let the evil ones bow to you. Let yours and Arjuna's names be spoken of in the same breath as Krishna's and Balarama's. If you two are united, what is there in this world that is unattainable?

O Karna, surrounded by your brothers, you will blaze in glory, even like Brahma surrounded by the Devas at a mahayagna. Endowed with every

virtue, you are my first born. Let the world no more call you a Sutaputra; you are a Partha—a son of Pritha, and you are a great tejasvin.'"

CANTO 146

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Kunti has finished speaking, Karna hears a voice redolent with love coming from the Sun above. The far away voice is Surya Deva's.

The voice says, 'What Pritha says is true. Karna do as your mother tells you; great good will come of it.'

Though his mother and his natural father have spoken to him, Karna's heart is resolute, for he is devoted to the truth.

He says, 'O Kshatriya Devi, I cannot accept what you say, that to obey you is my highest dharma. Mother, you abandoned me as soon as I was born. This grievous injury not only put my life at risk, but has been detrimental to my achievements and fame. If indeed I am a Kshatriya, you have deprived me of all my rightful samskaras. An enemy could not have done me more harm.

You mercilessly robbed me of the rites of passage that are my birthright, and now you come to demand my obedience. Never until now have you cared about my welfare, as a mother should; and you have come to me today only for your own good. Who is there who would not be afraid of Dhananjaya, who has Krishna as his sarathy? If I go to your sons now, everyone would think that I do so because I am afraid. Nobody knows I am their brother. If this becomes known on the eve of battle, and I join the Pandavas, what would all the Kshatriyas say?

Dhritarashtra's sons have given me everything I want, and they have worshipped me purely from a desire to make me happy. How can I make a mockery of this friendship and render it futile? Even though they have initiated hostilities with others, they have always honoured me and bowed to me, even as the Vasus do to Vasava. They base their confidence that they can conquer their enemies on my might. How can I betray their cherished hope? With me as their boat, they would cross the impassable ocean of war. How can I abandon them, when I am their only refuge?

This is the time when all those who have received patronage and support from Dhritarashtra's sons should show their gratitude and loyalty. I, surely, will fight for them, uncaring of even my life. Sinful, faithless men who, at the time to repay the kindness done to them, turn traitors to those who have fed them and met their every need, are like thieves who steal their master's food. They will not prosper in this world or in the next.

I will not lie to you. For Duryodhana's sake I will fight against your sons, putting forth all my strength and might. At the same time, I will be compassionate, and I will observe my dharma. Therefore, however benevolent your words may be, I cannot obey them. Yet, your pleas shall not be in vain. Other than Arjuna, I will not kill your other sons—Yudhishtira, Bhima and the twins; I will spare their lives even when I hold them in the palm of my hand.

Of all the warriors in Yudhishtira's army, it is with Arjuna alone that I will fight. If I kill Arjuna, I will achieve great renown, and if he kills me, I will yet be covered in glory. Devi, you will always have no less than five sons. Five they will number, either including me, or Arjuna, if I am killed.'

Kunti trembles in grief and embraces her son, who remains resolute, and she says, 'Karna, even if what you say is true, the Kauravas will certainly be killed. Destiny rules supreme. You have sworn you will not harm four of your brothers. Remember this oath when you are in the midst of battle. Be blessed with good health, my son.'

Karna says *Tathaastu*, and they both leave, each in a different direction."

CANTO 147

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Krishna returns to Upaplavya from Hastinapura and tells the Pandavas all that has transpired. He confers with them for a long time, and then goes to his own apartments to rest. The Pandavas give leave to Virata and the other kings, and at sunset they say their evening prayers.

With their hearts set on Krishna they think worshipfully of him. At last, they bring Krishna into their midst and deliberate again on what they should do.

Yudhishtira says, 'O you of the eyes like lotus-petals, tell us what you said to Duryodhana in the Kuru sabha when you went to Nagapura.'

Krishna says, 'What I said to Duryodhana in Nagapura was honest, reasonable and benign. But that evil one paid me no heed.'

Yudhishtira says, 'When Duryodhana declared his intention to take the path of sin, what did the Kuru Pitamaha say to the vindictive prince? What did the noble Acharya, the son of Bharadwaja, say? And what did Duryodhana's parents Dhritarashtra and Gandhari say? What did our uncle Vidura, who is the best of all those who know dharma, who grieves for us whom he loves as his own sons, say to Duryodhana? What did all the kings who sat in that ancient court say? Krishna, tell us everything, exactly as it happened.

You have already told us all that Bhishma and Dhritarashtra, as well as the others in that sabha, said to Duryodhana, who believes himself wise, while he is ruled only by lust and greed. But I wish to hear everything again. Lose no time, Krishna, you are our refuge, our lord, our guide.'

Krishna says, 'Rajan, listen to what was said to Duryodhana in the Kuru sabha, and remember the words.

After I had spoken, Duryodhana laughed aloud, at which Bhishma grew incensed and said, "Duryodhana, listen to me for the sake of our vamsa. Then do whatever you think is best for your family.

My father Santanu was famed throughout the world. At first, I was his only son, but he began to wish for another because the wise say that an only son is as good as not having any. He wanted his vamsa to live and his fame to spread. Knowing what he wished for, I made the dark Satyavati my step-mother and swore the most difficult vow, of lifelong celibacy: for my father's sake and for the continuance of our royal line. You know how I could not be king and remain celibate, without breaking my solemn vow. I have no regret; I have lived contentedly, keeping my vrata. My step-mother bore my younger brother Vichitravirya, mighty-armed and handsome supporter of Kuru vamsa.

When my father attained Swarga I installed Vichitravirya as ruler of the kingdom and served him as his subject. Later, I defeated several monarchs at the swayamvara for the daughters of the king of Kasi, and I brought home suitable wives for him. You have heard all this many times.

Sometime after, I fought a duel against my guru Parasurama Bhargava, and my brother fled from fear of Rama and because his subjects deserted him. During this time, he indulged himself entirely in his wives and, because of the time he spent with them, was afflicted by consumption and died. There was anarchy in our kingdom.

Indra did not send us a drop of rain, and the subjects, plagued by fear of hunger, came to me and said, 'Your people are on the point of extinction. Be our king for our good. End this drought, and be blessed, O perpetuator of Santanu's dynasty. Your subjects suffer from fearsome diseases, and very few are left alive. It is incumbent on you to save them, Gangaputra. Put an end to our suffering and rule your subjects with dharma. Let your kingdom not be destroyed even while you live.'

I remained unmoved by their tearful pleas. Remembering dharma, I wanted only to be faithful to my vow. Then, Rajan, the citizens, my step-

mother Kali, our servants, priests, acharyas and many learned Brahmanas, all beset with sorrow, begged me to take the throne.

They said, 'While you still live will this ancient kingdom that was once ruled by the illustrious Pratipa go to ruin? Generous one, be the king for our sake.'

I joined my hands together and, filled with anguish, I told them about the vow I had sworn for my father's sake. I told them that it was for the sake of our kingdom, and especially for my step-mother, that I had taken the vow of celibacy and renounced the throne. I begged them not to place the burden of kingship on me.

I joined my hands once more and pacified my step-mother, saying repeatedly, 'Mother, as Santanu's son, and a Kuru, I cannot break my word. I took this vow especially for your sake; and I am your servant and yours to command, my loving mother.'

I placated her and the people, and then she and I begged Mahamuni Vyasa, who was also Satyavati's son from the Rishi Parasara, to father children on my brother's widows. He granted our prayers. The Rishi fathered three sons, Bharatottama: Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura. Your father Dhritarashtra was born blind and he could not be king. Instead, the noble, mighty and celebrated Pandu ruled the Kuru kingdom; he expanded its boundaries immeasurably and the people flourished under his golden reign.

Since Pandu was the king, his sons must rightfully inherit their father's kingdom. Rajan, do not go to war; give them half the kingdom. While I am alive, what other man is fit to reign? Do not disregard what I say. My only wish is for peace amongst you. I make no distinction between you and them, and love all of you equally.

What I have said to you now is also the opinion of your father, Gandhari and Vidura. One must always pay heed to one's elders; do not ignore what I say. Do not destroy all that you have and the very Earth as well.”””

CANTO 148

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'After Bhishma spoke, Drona, always eloquent, says to Duryodhana in the midst of the assembled kings, "May you be blessed, Duryodhana. Pandu was as devoted to the Kuru vamsa as Pratipa's son Santanu was, and as Devavrata Bhishma is. Pandu was devoted to truth, had his senses under control, was virtuous, practised excellent vratas and was attentive to all his duties in dharma. Although he was king and conqueror, that perpetuator of the Kuru vamsa made over the sovereignty to his elder brother Dhritarashtra, of deep wisdom, and to his younger brother Vidura. After installing Dhritarashtra on the throne, Pandu went to live in the forest with his two wives.

Vidura, in great humility, placed himself under Dhritarashtra's command and waited on him like a servant, fanning him with palm leaves. All the subjects of the kingdom took his lead and submitted to Dhritarashtra just as they had to Pandu.

Having handed the kingdom over to Dhritarashtra and Vidura, Pandu, conqueror of hostile cities, wandered the Earth. Vidura, ever devoted to dharma, took charge of the treasury, and of administering the kingdom and the welfare of its subjects. Bhishma, of the mighty tejas, took charge of the army, of making war and peace, and the giving or withholding of gifts to other kings. All the time that Dhritarashtra has sat on the throne, the noble Vidura stayed near him.

How could you, who have been born in Dhritarashtra's dynasty, even think of creating a rift in the family? Unite with your brothers the Pandavas and enjoy every pleasure. Rajan, I do not say this to you from cowardice or for the sake of wealth. Best of kings, the wealth I enjoy is what Bhishma, and not you, gave me. I do not desire any means of sustenance from you. Where Bhishma is, there Drona must be.

Do what Bhishma has told you. Parantapa, give the sons of Pandu half the kingdom. I was their teacher as much as yours. Indeed, Arjuna is as much a son to me as Aswatthama. But, ah, of what use are speeches? Victory and dharma go together."

Now the virtuous Vidura turned to his uncle Bhishma and, looking him in the face, said, "O Devavrata, pay heed to what I say. When Kuru vamsa was threatened with extinction you revived it. That is why you are now indifferent to my pleas. Duryodhana is a blot on our royal house; and you follow his inclinations, although he is evil, ungrateful, and a slave to greed and lust.

Duryodhana disregards his father's command, which is in keeping with dharma and artha, and the Kurus must face the dire consequences of war. O Maharajan, do what needs to be done so entire house of Kuru is not extinguished. Even as an artist creates a painting, you brought Dhritarashtra and me into this world. The Creator creates beings and destroys them; do not do as he does, for you are not Him. Do not turn away in indifference from the coming extinction of your vamsa, which you see plainly before your eyes. If the imminence of a pralaya of blood has robbed even you of your vision, then take sannyasa in the forest, and take Dhritarashtra and me with you. Otherwise, this very day restrain Duryodhana, who uses deceit as wisdom, and rule this kingdom yourself with the sons of Pandu guarding its boundaries.

Relent, O tiger among Kshatriyas. A great slaughter of the Pandavas, the Kurus and of other mighty kings is about to happen," Vidura said, and he stopped and sighed deeply, his heart overflowing with sorrow.

Then, alarmed at the prospect of the destruction of an entire race, King Subala's daughter Gandhari spoke in anger to her sinful son Duryodhana in the Kuru sabha, words of dharma and artha.

She said, "Let all the kings present in this ancient sabha, the twice-born Rishis and others who have gathered here listen to me proclaim your guilt for the sins that you and your companions have committed. The kingdom of

the Kurus is inherited in the proper order of succession. This has always been the custom of our royal line, but you, of evil soul and inhuman deeds, seek to destroy the kingdom. The wise Dhritarashtra now rules the kingdom, with the far-sighted Vidura as his advisor. Why do you want the kingdom for yourself? What is your right to pass them by?

Indeed, Dhritarashtra mahatman and Vidura should both be subordinate to Bhishma while he is alive. Gangaputra Bhishma has foresworn sovereignty for the sake of dharma. That is how Pandu became the king. And only his sons are the true kings today. This vast kingdom rightfully belongs to the Pandavas, and to their sons and grandsons, as their inheritance by the laws of succession.

We must all do as Pitamaha Bhishma says, in accord with Kshatriya dharma and for the sake of our kingdom. In obedience to Bhishma's command, Dhritarashtra and Vidura must declare the same thing, as must everyone who wishes us well, setting dharma above all else. I say let Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, guided by Dhritarashtra and with Bhishma for his mentor, rule this kingdom of the Kurus for many long years.'"

CANTO 149

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Then Dhritarashtra addressed Duryodhana in the midst of the assembled monarchs, saying, "Duryodhana my son, listen to what I say, and may you be blessed. Obey me if you have any respect for your father.

Soma Deva, the lord of creatures, was the original progenitor of the Kuru vamsa. Nahusha's son Yayati was sixth in descent from Soma; and Yayati had five sons who were all Rajarishis. The eldest of them was tejasvin Yadu and the youngest was Puru, from whom we are descended. Puru's mother was Vrishaparva's daughter Sarmishta, and Yadu's mother was Devayani, and thus he was the grandson of Sukra of the immeasurable tejas, who is also called Kavya.

Our ancestor Yadu was mighty, but also arrogant and seized by evil. Intoxicated with his prowess, he humiliated all the Kshatriyas of the world; and disobeyed his father, and insulted his younger brother. Yadu became all-powerful on Earth and, suppressing everyone, he established himself in his capital city, which he named Hastinapura. His enraged father cursed him and expelled him from the kingdom. The furious Yayati cursed his other sons, too, who were obedient to their arrogant eldest brother. He set his youngest son Puru, who was obedient and devoted to him, on the throne. Thus the eldest son may be passed over and deprived of the kingdom, and

younger sons may, because of their reverence towards their elders, inherit the kingdom.

Then there was my great-grandfather Pratipa, who was devoted to dharma and celebrated through the three worlds. This narasimha, this virtuous king, had three sons, all of great renown and like three Devas. Devapi was the eldest, Bahlika was second and my grandfather Santanu, of the scintillating intellect, the youngest. Devapi, who suffered from an ailment to his skin, was endowed with prodigious energy; he was virtuous, truthful, and devoted to the service of his father. Respected and popular among his subjects, loved by young and old, in cities and villages, Devapi was generous, firm in his adherence to dharma, devoted to the good of all creatures and obedient to his father and the Brahmanas. His noble brothers Bahlika and Santanu loved him dearly.

In time, in accord with the shastras, Pratipa began to prepare for Devapi to inherit the throne, and all the arrangements he made were auspicious. However, the Brahmanas and the elders in the kingdom forbade him. Hearing this, the voice of the old king became choked with tears and he began to grieve for his son. Thus, though Devapi was liberal, virtuous, devoted to truth and loved by the subjects, he was deprived of his inheritance because of his sickly skin, for the gods do not approve of a king who has a physical disability. Those best of Brahmanas did not allow Pratipa to enthrone his eldest son as king. Devapi saw how his father grieved for him and took sannyasa in the forest.

Bahlika left his father's city and lived with his maternal uncle, whose rich kingdom he inherited. On Pratipa's death, Santanu took Bahlika's leave and became king. That is why, though I am the eldest, wisely, and after much thought, I was excluded from inheriting the Kuru throne, and, though he was younger than me, Pandu became king.

After his death, Parantapa, our kingdom must pass to his sons. When I could not have the kingdom, how can you want it? You are not the son of the true king and you have no right to this kingdom. Despite that, you want to take what rightfully belongs to another. Dharmatma Yudhishtira is the eldest son of the king and this kingdom is his in dharma. This magnanimous soul is the sovereign lord of our Kuru vamsa.

Yudhishtira is devoted to truth, clear thinking, heedful of the advice of his well-wishers, honest, loved by all his subjects, kind-hearted, master of his passions and a chastiser of criminals and sinners. All the kingly

attributes dwell in him: forgiveness, renunciation, self-control, a deep knowledge of the scriptures, compassion and the ability to rule with dharma as his sceptre.

You are not the son of a king, and are always inclined to sin against your own blood. How can ever you appropriate this kingdom that lawfully belongs to another? Dispel this delusion and give away half the kingdom with the proper share of wealth, animals and other possessions and treasures. Then, Duryodhana, you can hope to live a long life with your younger brothers.”””

CANTO 150

BHAGAVAD-YANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Krishna says, 'Although Bhishma, Drona, Vidura, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra spoke to him, the evil one could not be made to see sense. Duryodhana ignored them all and left the sabha, his eyes red with anger. All the kings he had called upon followed him, prepared to lay down their lives for his cause.

Duryodhana said to those kings, "Today the Pushya nakshatra rises. Let us march at once to Kurukshetra!" And, inexorably propelled by destiny, those kings gladly set out with their armies, making Bhishma their Senapati, their Commander-in-chief.

Eleven akshauhinis of troops have assembled on the Kaurava side. At the head of that host, Bhishma shines, flying the flag with the palmyra emblem on his chariot.

In view of all that has happened, do what you think proper, Yudhishtira. I have told you everything that Bhishma, Drona, Vidura, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra said in my presence. I did my very best to establish brotherly feelings between yourselves and your cousins: for the preservation of the race of Kuru and for the survival and prosperity of the Earth's people. When conciliation failed, I used the art of dissent by creating disunity amongst his warriors, and I spoke about all your extraordinary powers and feats.

When Duryodhana showed no interest in my attempts at conciliation, I had all the kings gather together and tried to create dissension amongst them. I showed them strange and terrible manifestations. I rebuked those kings and ridiculed Duryodhana; I terrified Karna and upbraided Sakuni for contriving the game of dice. I tried once more to disunite the kings with intrigue; and again, I resorted to diplomacy. To unite the Kurus, and given the uniqueness of the circumstances, I spoke also of charity.

I said, "As subjects of Dhritarashtra, Bhishma and Vidura, the sons of Pandu will sacrifice their pride. You keep the kingdom; let them not have any power; let it all be as Dhritarashtra, Bhishma and Vidura decide. Let the kingdom be yours. Give just five villages to the Pandavas. Best of kings, the Pandavas deserve your father's support and protection."

That malevolent one would still not yield; Duryodhana said he would not give up even land that would cover the point of a needle. The only method one can use against this evil man is danda, punishment. Why, even as we speak, those kings have already marched to Kurukshetra.

I have told you everything that happened in the Kuru sabha. Pandava, they will not give you your kingdom without battle. Death awaits them, and they have chosen to become the cause of an apocalyptic war that will see the very race of Kshatriyas perish.'"

CANTO 151

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Dharmaraja Yudhishtira now says to his brothers in Krishna's presence, 'You have heard all that happened in the Kuru sabha; you have understood what Krishna said. Purushottamas, array our troops for battle.

Seven akshauhinis of fighting men have gathered to give us victory. Listen to the names of the seven celebrated warriors who will lead these akshauhinis. They are Drupada, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, Satyaki, Chekitana and Bhimasena. These heroes are learned in the Vedas; they are valiant, and they have all practised excellent vratas. They are modest, conversant with politics, Maharathas and masters of mundane weapons and astras of the gods.

Tell us now, Sahadeva, my wise brother, which warrior will be our Senapati? Who will lead our seven akshauhinis in battle, who knows about all the divisions of our forces? And who can withstand Pitamaha Bhishma, who will be an unimaginable fire shooting arrows of flame. Tell us, Narashardula, who you think is capable of being our Commander?'

Sahadeva says, 'Mighty Virata, king of the Matsyas, is closely related to us; he sympathises with our cause; he is powerful, knows dharma, is skilled in weapons and irresistible in battle. We should rely on him to win our kingdom back, for he can surely withstand Bhishma and all the other Maharathas.'

The eloquent Nakula says, ‘There is one, who is an elder, who is learned in the Shastras, whose family and birth are impeccable and who is widely revered. He is blessed with modesty, strength and prosperity; he is deeply-versed in all branches of learning; he has studied the astra shastra under Rishi Bharadvaja; he is invincible; he is steadfast in dharma; he boldly challenges Drona and Bhishma; he belongs to one of the foremost royal houses; he is a renowned leader of armies; he resembles a tree of a hundred branches, so many sons and grandsons surround him. Impelled by wrath, this king, with his wife, performed the most arduous tapasya to effect the death of Drona; this Kshatriya is an ornament of any sabha; this bull among monarchs cherishes us as a father would. I speak of our father-in-law Drupada, and he should have full command of our army.

I believe that he will withstand Drona and Bhishma in battle, for he is Drona’s peer and as much a master of the devastras as the Acharya.’

After the two sons of Madri express their opinions, Indra’s son, Arjuna, his father’s equal, says, ‘There is a mighty-armed, celestial man, who was born from fire through austere tapasya and Rishis being gratified. He emerged full-grown from a sacrificial fire armed with bow and sword, clad in iron mail and mounted on a chariot, yoked to superb horses, the clatter of whose wheels was as deep as the roar of massed thunderclouds. This Kshatriya is endowed with lionish energy and strength, and leonine are his shoulders, arms and chest; even his voice is like the lion’s roar. This splendid hero is handsome with a chiselled face, perfect teeth, round cheeks, long arms, sturdy thighs, large eyes, strong legs and a powerful frame.

This prince, who cannot be pierced by weapons of any kind, and who looks like an elephant with rent temples, is Dhrishtadyumna. He is truthful in speech and has his senses under control; he was born to kill Drona.

It is Dhrishtadyumna who will resist Bhishma’s arrows, which look like snakes with fiery tongues and strike with the fierceness of thunderbolts, which are as swift as Yama’s dutas and which fall like flames consuming everything they touch, and which so far only Parasurama Bhargava could bear in battle. Rajan, I do not see any man other than Dhrishtadyumna who will withstand Devavrata Bhishma.

Blessed with lightness of hand, a master of every vyuha of war, and accoutred in impenetrable mail, this brilliant Kshatriya is like the lord of a great elephant herd. Only Dhrishtadyumna is fit to be our Senapati.’

Bhima says, ‘O king, Rishis and Siddhas have said that Drupada’s son Sikhandin was born to kill Bhishma. On the battlefield, with his devastras, he looks like the illustrious Rama himself. I do not see the man who can cleave Sikhandin’s kavacha when he stands in his chariot ready for battle. No warrior, other than Sikhandin, can kill Bhishma. I think that only Sikhandin is fit to be our Senapati.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Rajan, Krishna knows the strength and weakness of everything in the universe; he knows the mind of every man here. Be he a Maharatha or not, be he old or young, let Krishna choose the man who will lead my forces. Krishna is the bedrock of our victory or defeat. In him our lives rest, our kingdom, our prosperity or adversity, our happiness or sorrow. He is the Ordainer and Creator; in him dwells the fruition of our endeavours. Yes, let Krishna name the leader of our force.

And let him tell us his choice now, for night draws near. Once Krishna has chosen our Senapati, we will worship that man with offerings of weapons, flowers and perfumes, and then under Krishna’s will, we will march into battle.’

The lotus-eyed Krishna looks at Arjuna and says, ‘Rajan, I approve of all the powerful warriors that each of you has named to be your Senapati. All of them can withstand your enemies. They can affright Indra himself in battle, let alone the greedy and evil sons of Dhritarashtra.

Mahabaho, for your sake, I made great efforts to prevent the war and bring about peace. We have discharged our duty to dharma. Even the most critical man cannot fault us. Foolish Duryodhana has lost all good sense; he thinks that he is a great Maharatha, and, though weak with sins, imagines he is strong.

Array your troops quickly, for war is the only way to retrieve your kingdom. When they see Arjuna with Satyaki behind him, when they face Abhimanyu and the five sons of Draupadi, and Virata, Drupada and our other mighty kings, all of them lords of akshauhinis, Dhritarashtra’s sons will not stand their ground.

Our army is great and invincible; it is inexorable. Our forces will raze Dhritarashtra’s legions. And for our Senapati, I name Parantapa Dhrishtadyumna.’”

CANTO 152

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Krishna has spoken, all the kings are filled with joy and shout out their delight. The troops swiftly begin to array themselves, calling out *Draw up! Draw up!* The air is filled with the whinnying of horses, the trumpeting of elephants, the rumble of chariot wheels, the blare of conches and the booming of drums, making a tremendous din. The Pandava host teems with chariots, foot-soldiers, horses and elephants; and the invincible Pandava warriors bustle, putting on their armour and shouting battle-cries; and they look like the turbulent Ganga in spate, churning with fierce eddies and waves.

At the van of the army march Bhimasena, Madri's two sons, Subhadra's son, Draupadi's five sons and Dhrishtadyumna of the Prishata vamsa. Behind Bhimasena march the Prabhadrakas and the Panchalas. The joyous roar made by the marching hosts is like the boom of the sea at high tide on a new moon night. Such is the tumult that it seems to reach the heavens, as those warriors march in joy.

Kuntiputra Yudhishtira marches with them, accompanied by his chariots and other conveyances to transport food, fodder for the animals, tents, carriages, draught animals, treasury-chests, war-machines and weapons, surgeons and physicians, even invalids and weak soldiers, attendants and camp-followers.

Panchali remains in Upaplavya with the noblewomen of the household, and surrounded by her servants and maids. To protect them and safeguard their treasures, soldiers are posted in a circle around them and more men in a vigilant, mobile outer ring. The Pandavas are ready to set out with their awesome host. First they give gifts of cattle and gold to the Brahmanas, who walk around them and utter blessings; and then the sons of Pandu march, riding in jewelled chariots.

Behind Yudhishtira march the Kekaya princes, Dhrishtaketu, the prince of Kasi, Sreniman, Vasudana and the invincible Sikhandin, all men in their prime, wearing shimmering armour, bearing weapons and glittering with rich jewels. Bringing up the rear are Virata, Dhrishtadyumna the son of Yajnasena of the Somakas, Susarman, Kuntibhoja, Dhrishtadyumna's sons, forty-thousand chariots, five times as many horsemen, foot-soldiers numbering ten times as many as those, and sixty-thousand elephants[2]. Anadhrishti, Chekitana, Dhrishtaketu and Satyaki ride in formation around Krishna and Arjuna.

Those warriors arrive at the field of Kurukshetra in battle-array and, like a herd of bellowing bulls, the Parantapas blow their conches; Krishna and Dhananjaya sound theirs as well. The Pandava army hears the thunderous boom of the Panchajanya and rejoices. The Earth, the skies and the oceans resound with the leonine roars of those warriors, mingled with the blare of conches and drum beats.'"

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[2] The actual numbers should far exceed these, given the composition of an akshauhini.

CANTO 153

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira orders his troops to set up camp on a part of the field that is flat, cool and rich in fodder and fuel to burn. At this delightful, fertile and auspicious site, where no cemeteries, temples, shrines, asramas or other sanctified places will be violated, Yudhishtira establishes his camp.

After the animals have rested, the Pandava monarch rises and, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of kings, stands forth in joy that this hour is upon them. Krishna and Arjuna range the perimeters of the field, putting to flight hundreds of Dhritarashtra's soldiers posted there as sentries. Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki supervise the measurement of the camp boundaries. Krishna orders the soldiers to dig a moat around the camp and to fill it by diverting the clear, pure water of the sacred lake Hiranvati, where a holy asrama is located, and whose bed is free of sludge and pebbles. He has soldiers stationed there as guards. Krishna instructs the other kings who are Yudhishtira's allies to establish their camps and erect their tents, exactly as the Pandavas have done.

Lakhs of rich and impregnable tents are put up, separately for each of the kings; and they look like palaces, replete with food, drink and fuel to cook and warm the nights. Hundreds of skilled and experienced workmen are engaged in creating and fortifying the camp; surgeons and physicians, experts in their fields, are provided with everything they might need. In

special pavilions, veritable mountains of bows and bow-strings, armour, weapons, honey, ghee, powdered lac, water, cattle-feed, chaff, coal, heavy machines, spears, lances, battleaxes, breast-plates, swords and quivers are heaped. Countless war elephants covered in armour and spiked mail, giant tuskers that can crush lakhs of fighting men, are tethered to iron stakes and pillars.

O Bhaarata, when they learn that the Pandavas have camped on that field, numerous other kings arrive from their respective kingdoms, with their legions and animals, to support the sons of Pandu. Many of the kings who come to ensure the Pandavas' success have practised strict brahmacharya, imbibed consecrated Soma rasa and have given generous gifts to Brahmanas at yagnas."

CANTO 154

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "What measures does Duryodhana take when he hears that Yudhishtira has come with his army and set up camp on Kurukshetra, ready for battle under Krishna's protection, supported by Virata and Drupada with their sons, surrounded by the Kekayas, the Vrishnis and numberless other kings, and by countless mighty Maharathas, and looking like glorious Indra surrounded by the Adityas?

O Mahatman, I want to hear in detail all that happened in Kurujangala on that horrific occasion. The son of Pandu, with Krishna, Virata, Drupada, the Panchala prince Dhrishtadyumna, the Maharatha Sikhandin and the mighty Yudhamanyu, whom even the gods cannot withstand, could strike fear into the hearts of all the Devas with Indra at their head. O you of tapodhana, tell me everything that the Kurus and the Pandavas did, just as it happened."

Vaisampayana said, "When Krishna leaves the Kuru sabha, Duryodhana says to Karna, Dusasana and Sakuni, 'Kesava has gone to the sons of Pritha, without fulfilling his goal. He is furious and will stir up the Pandavas. He is anxious to see a war between me and Pandavas, and Bhimasena and Arjuna are of the same mind. Yudhishtira, who has no animosity, is influenced by Bhimasena and, besides, I have indeed persecuted him and his brothers. Virata and Drupada, against whom I have

fought, are obedient to Krishna, and both have become leaders of Yudhishtira's forces. The war will be savage and terrible.

With meticulous care and heedfulness, make preparations for war. Let all the kings who are my allies pitch their thousands of tents on Kurukshetra. Their tents must be large, well protected and within easy reach of plentiful water and fuel; their camps should be in positions where the enemy cannot sever communications and supplies between them; they must be stocked with a plenitude of all kinds of weapons and adorned with streamers and flags. Have the road from our capital levelled in preparation for the march of our armies. Make a proclamation today, at once, that we will set out tomorrow.'

Saying *Tathaastu*, those great warriors make arrangements for the kings, who hear Duryodhana's command and rise from their thrones, now focusing their Kshatriya wrath on the enemy.

The kings massage and flex their mace-like arms that dazzle with gold bracelets and are smeared with sandalwood paste and daubed with fine perfumes. With their lotus-like hands, they tie their turbans, fasten their upper and lower garments and put on their ornaments. Maharathas supervise the equipping of their chariots; syces harness the horses; mahouts prepare the elephants. The warriors don kavachas made of gold and arm themselves with every sort of weapon. Foot-soldiers pick up their weapons and put on their gold-inlaid armour. And, O Bhaarata, Duryodhana's capital city Hastinapura, filled by these jubilant warlike millions, looks festive.

With the excitement of impending battle, the city swells like the ocean at high tide; the vast crowds of the people are its current; the chariots, elephants and horses are its fish; the tumult of conches and drums is the ocean's roar; the treasure chests are the jewels on the ocean floor; the warriors' ornaments and armour are its waves and their shining weapons are its surf; the rows of houses are the mountains on the shore; and the masses of chariots are the lakes on the sea bed.

His warriors shine on Duryodhana like the Moon over the ocean, making him look like the ocean at moonrise."

CANTO 155

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira remembers what Krishna said, and says to him, 'O Krishna, how could Duryodhana say what he did? Ever glorious one, what should we do? How shall we conduct ourselves so we do not swerve from Kshatriya dharma?

You know how Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni think, and you know my brothers' and my mind as well. You have heard what Vidura and Bhishma said, as well as Kunti's wise message to us. But set all that aside, and you tell us unequivocally, Krishna, what is best for us.'

In a voice that booms as deeply as thunderclouds, or great drumbeats, Krishna says, 'What I said to Duryodhana in his sabha was to his advantage and in keeping with dharma and artha, but I got no response from the Kuru prince, whose wisdom has been replaced by delusion and deceit. That sinner does not pay the slightest heed to Bhishma, Vidura or to me. He relies just on Karna, and assumes he has already won the war.

Black-hearted Duryodhana even wanted to make me his captive, but he did not succeed. Neither Bhishma nor Drona said anything about that; and all, except Vidura, follow Duryodhana's lead.

Subala's son Sakuni, Karna and Dusasana, all equally foolish, constantly give Duryodhana evil counsel about what he should do. Is there any use in my repeating everything that Duryodhana said? Suffice it to say that the wretch bears you nothing but ill will. More sinfulness resides in

Duryodhana’s black heart than in all the kings and all the men in your army put together. As for us, we do not want to make peace with the Kauravas at the cost of losing what is ours. Yudhishtira, war is the only course open to you.’

All the kings hear Krishna and wordlessly look at Yudhishtira, who understands their silence and quietly tells Bhima, Arjuna and the twins to see that their forces are arrayed for battle. His command passes around like light, and a great tumult rises in the Pandava host and fills the warriors with joy. Yudhishtira, however, sighs, seeing in his mind’s eye the impending massacre of the undeserving.

He says to Bhima and Arjuna, ‘I went into exile in the forest and suffered to avoid the very calamity that now overtakes us. The thing that we strove for so intensely slips out of our grasp even as if because of our striving for it. Instead, Kali Yuga comes to us uninvited. How are we going to fight against our revered elders, whom we must not kill for any reason whatever? What kind of victory shall we achieve by slaying our acharyas?’

Seeing Yudhishtira’s mood, Arjuna repeats everything Krishna has said, and he says to his brother, ‘Rajan, you know and understand what Kunti and Vidura said, which Krishna also affirms. I am certain that neither Vidura nor Kunti would say anything that is adharma or sinful. Kuntiputra, we cannot turn away from war.’

Krishna vouchsafes what Arjuna says, and then, O Rajan, with their soldiers, Pandu’s sons pass the night in some hope, and even happiness, their minds now resolved on war.”

CANTO 156

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When the night has passed, Duryodhana deploys his army of eleven akshauhinis, in proper order. He divides men, elephants, chariots and horses into three classes, superior, medium and inferior, and sets them in the front, middle and rear of his ranks.

Well equipped and cared for is Duryodhana's army: it has timber and wooden planks for repairing damage to the chariots in the battle; large containers of tiger-skins and other stiff leathers to encase the sides of the chariots; and barbed javelins. Elephants and horses carry quivers full of iron spears, and foot soldiers carry heavy wooden clubs. Flagstaffs fly vivid banners; long, heavy arrows for bows are heaped in hillocks, as are all sorts of nooses and lassoes, armour of many kinds and in every size, and short, sharp clubs made of wood. Oil and sand; earthen pots filled with poisonous snakes, pulverised lac and other inflammable materials; short spears with tinkling bells; weapons of iron and machines for hurling hot oil, water and stones; whistling hardwood clubs, wax, heavy mallets, spiked clubs, plough-poles and poisoned arrows: all these are stocked in plenty. Long syringes for spraying hot oil over the enemy, planks of cane, battle-axes, forked lances, spiked gauntlets, axes and pointed iron-spikes; chariots whose sides are covered with tiger- and leopard-skins; razor-sharp discs, horns and every other weapon imaginable; kuthara axes, spades, cloths soaked in oil and ghee: these, too, are stocked in endless store.

Handsome warriors glitter in their gold embroidered battle-dress; they are radiant in jewels and gemstones. Kshatriyas of noble birth, in glittering kavacha, all master horsemen, swordsmen and archers, ride in splendid chariots, which carry stores of potent medicaments for wounds and are drawn by horses that have rows of bells and pearls on their heads; they fly fine banners on towering, richly ornamented flagstaffs; they bear loads of shields, swords, spears, slender javelins that can be flung far and spiked maces. Each ratha is yoked to four pedigreed horses; each carries a hundred bows; and each has one sarathy for the pair of horses in front, and two for the horses yoked to the wheels on either side; and all three charioteers are men of the highest skill. These chariots, numbering thousands, protected even like fortified towns and unassailable, are positioned on all sides.

The elephants, too, are decked with rows of bells, pearls and other ornaments; on their backs each mighty beast carries seven warriors and, so, look like jewelled hills. Two of the warriors are armed with hooks, two are archers, two are expert swordsmen, and one is armed with a lance and trident. Duryodhana's army teems with countless war-elephants, which bear loads of weapons and quivers filled with arrows, and all the great beasts are devastating in battle.

Thousands of richly caparisoned horses fly their heroic riders' flags. Hundreds of thousands of these well-broken and superbly trained steeds stand patient and docile before the war, neither restive nor whinnying in any excitement, though knowing full well why they are here.

Hundreds of thousands of foot-soldiers of diverse races, wearing golden ornaments and armour of diverse hues and kinds, armed with a variety of weapons, have all come as part of the eleven teeming akshauhinis. Every chariot is protected by ten elephants, every elephant by ten horses and every horse by ten foot-soldiers. A large force is kept to regroup broken ranks, and this reserve force has countless chariots each with fifty elephants surrounding it; one hundred horsemen, and seven foot-soldiers follow each horse.

One sena consists of five hundred chariots, five hundred elephants, one thousand five hundred horses and two thousand five hundred foot-soldiers. Ten senas make a pritana, and ten pritanas make a vahini. In common parlance, however, the words sena, vahini, pritana, dhwajini, chamu, akshauhini and varuthini are used in the same sense.

The brilliant Duryodhana arrays his force in this manner, and, between the two sides there are eighteen akshauhinis, with seven in the Pandava army and eleven for the Kauravas.

Two hundred and fifty men make a patti. Three pattis make a senamukha or gulma. Three gulmas make a gana. In Duryodhana's army, there are hundreds and thousands of such ganas of able warriors, all impatient for battle. Duryodhana selects from among them the bravest, most intelligent men and makes these the leaders of his troops. He places an akshauhini of troops under each of those Purushottamas—Kripa, Drona, Salya, Jayadratha the king of the Sindhus, Sudakshina of the Kambojas, Kritavarman, Drona's son Aswatthama, Karna, Bhurisravas, Subala's son Sakuni and the mighty Bahlika. The king summons them every day and at all hours, looks after them himself, talks to them and honours them personally, making them and their followers eager to please him."

CANTO 157

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “With all his allied kings gathered round, Duryodhana, with folded hands, says to Bhishma, ‘Without a great Senapati, even the mightiest army can be crushed in battle like a swarm of ants. Two intelligent men will have different opinions and are often jealous of each other’s prowess.

Wise one, I have heard the story of how, once, the Brahmanas, fighting under a banner of Kusa grass, clashed with the mighty Kshatriyas of the Haihaya clan. Pitamaha, the Vaisyas and the Sudras followed the Brahmanas, so that three varnas were on one side with the Kshatriyas alone on the other. In the battles that ensued, the Kshatriyas vanquished the combined force of the three varnas. The Brahmanas asked the Kshatriyas to explain how this had happened.

The truthful ones among the Kshatriyas said to them, “In battle we obey the orders of one man blessed with great intelligence, while your forces are not united, but each follow different paths.”

The Brahmanas made one amongst themselves as their Senapati, a man who was brave, a skilled tactician and diplomat, and they vanquished the Kshatriyas. Those who appoint a seasoned, courageous, wise and sinless man, devoted to the good of his men, always win battles.

You are equal to Usanas himself, and always look to my welfare; you are invincible and devoted to dharma. Pitamaha, you be our Senapati. You

shine amongst us like the Sun among the planets, like the Moon over fragrant herbs, like Kubera among the Yakshas, like Indra among the Devas, like Meru among mountains, like Suparna among birds, like Kumara among the Devas, like Havyavaha among the Vasus. If you protect us, as Sakra protects the Devas, even the gods will not be able to defeat us. Ride at the head of our forces, as Agni's son Kumara leads the Devas; we will follow you like calves behind a mighty bull.'

Bhishma says, 'Mahabaho, what you say might be true, but the Pandavas are as dear to me as you are and, although I will fight on your side because I have given you my word, I must be mindful of their welfare as well. There is no warrior on Earth who is my equal, except Arjuna. He is brilliant, and is a great master of the devastras, but he will never engage me in open war.

With all the astras I command I can destroy this universe of Devas, Asuras, Rakshasas and Manavas in an instant, but Pandu's sons are invincible, even by me. But every day I will kill ten thousand enemy warriors and denude the Pandava forces, as long as I am not killed in battle.

Then, there is one more condition that you must fulfil before I accept the command of your forces. Either Karna or I shall fight, but not both together. The Sutaputra always boasts and compares his prowess with mine.'

Karna says, 'O king, as long as Gangaputra Bhishma lives I will not fight. After he is killed, I will fight Arjuna.'

Duryodhana makes Bhishma the Senapati of all his army and distributes generous gifts all round. Installed in his command, Bhishma blazes in splendour. The king orders musicians to joyfully beat drums and sound the conches in their hundreds of thousands. Loud roars of soldiers and the sounds of their animals fill the air. From the cloudless sky bloody showers rain down, soaking the ground; whirlwinds and earthquakes shake the Earth; horses whinny in fear, elephants trumpet, and the soldiers' hearts tremble in dread. Ethereal voices are heard, and falling meteors flash across the sky; jackals howl hideously, foretelling a great cataclysm. A hundred other dreadful omens appear at Bhishma's installation as the Senapati of Duryodhana's army.

Duryodhana gives an abundance of cattle and gold to Brahmanas and asks for their blessings. Basking in their benedictions and surrounded by his troops, with Bhishma in front and his brothers alongside him, Duryodhana

marches to Kurukshetra with his immense host. He inspects the plain with Karna and decides to camp on a level field, a pleasant and fertile place, rich in grass and firewood, and it dazzles with that awesome force of men, their armour, ornaments, gold and weapons, like Hastinapura."

CANTO 158

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, "When Yudhishtira hears that Ganga's mahatman son Bhishma, first among Kshatriyas, Pitamaha of the Bhaaratas, foremost of all regents, and Brihaspati's equal in wisdom, deep as the ocean in character, calm and unshakable as Himavat, like Brahma himself in nobility, like the Sun in tejas; Bhishma who razes whole armies single-handedly, even as Indra does, has been made Senapati of the Kaurava army on the eve of the horrific war to be, the prospect of which makes the hair on men's bodies stand on end, until death strips him of the command, what did Pandu's mighty-armed son, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja say? What did Bhima and Arjuna say? And what did Krishna say?"

Vaisampayana said, "When the news reaches him, Yudhishtira calls his brothers and Krishna to him.

He says calmly, 'Make your rounds among the men and take precautions by putting on your armour. Our first encounter will be with our Pitamaha. Inform the leaders of our seven akshauhinis.'

Krishna says, 'Bharatarishabha, let it be as you say. I approve. Let us summon the seven lords of our akshauhinis'

Yudhishtira summons Drupada, Virata, Satyaki bull of the Sini vamsa, Dhrishtadyumna prince of the Panchalas, Dhrishtaketu, Sikhandin, and Sahadeva lord of the Magadhas, all of whom are eager for battle. Dhrishtadyumna, born from a sacrificial fire, is Senapati of the Pandava

forces, the Panchala prince born to kill Drona. Yudhishtira sets Arjuna, of the curly hair, at the head of the other seven commanders, and gives Krishna charge of being Arjuna's sarathy and guide.

Upon learning that the war of the age is at hand, many other kings come to the Pandava encampment to support them: Halayudha with Akrura, Gada, Samba, Uddhava, Rukmini's son Pradyumna, Ahuka's sons, Charudeshna and more. Mighty-armed and handsome Balarama arrives, surrounded by the foremost Vrishni warriors, who resemble a herd of mighty tigers, and he looks like Indra in the midst of the Maruts. He arrives in his lion's gait, wearing his customary blue silken robes, the corners of his eyes red from drink, and looking like the peak of Mount Kailasa.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, Krishna of matchless effulgence, Vrikodara of terrible deeds, Arjuna wielder of Gandiva and all the other kings there rise from their places and offer worship to Balarama; and Yudhishtira touches his hands lovingly in greeting. Rama, in return, greets them all, with Krishna at their head and, respectfully saluting Virata and Drupada, he sits beside Yudhishtira on the same seat.

After the other kings have resumed their seats, Rohini's son Rama looks at Krishna and begins to speak.

He says, 'This great and brutal slaughter is inevitable. It is fate's decree, and it cannot be averted. I hope to see all of you, with your friends, come safely and uninjured out of this war. Without doubt, all the Kshatriyas of the world who are assembled here have reached the end of their days. This war without precedent, this war like no other will cover the Earth with flesh and blood.

Many times I said to Krishna, "Madhusudana, be impartial to all that are related to us in the same way. As are the Pandavas to us, so is Duryodhana. Give Dhritarashtra's son the same help you do Yudhishtira. Indeed, he always asks for it."

However, for your sake, Krishna ignored what I said. For Arjuna's sake, he has devoted himself entirely to your cause. I am certain that a Pandava victory is what he wants. As for me, I dare not face the world without Krishna by my side. That is why I aspire to whatever Krishna seeks to achieve. However, Bhima and Duryodhana are both my disciples and I love them equally. Hence, I will go to the tirtha of the Saraswati to bathe, for I cannot be indifferent to the slaughter of the Kauravas.'

Mahabaho Balarama takes leave of the Pandavas and, preventing Krishna from following him, sets out on his journey to the sacred river."

CANTO 159

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “At this time, there comes to the Pandava camp Bhishmaka’s son Rukmi, one of the most truthful men in the world. The Rajarishi Bhishmaka, also named Hiranyaroman, is Indra’s friend; he is the most illustrious of the descendants of Bhoja; and he is the ruler of the whole southern country. Rukmi was a disciple of that lion among the Kimpurushas, Drona, who lived on Gandhamadana Mountain. He learnt the entire astra shastra of four divisions from his guru, and also obtained the celestial bow Vijaya, which once belonged to Indra, and which is as powerful as the Gandiva and Krishna’s Saranga.

Three celestial bows were owned by the lords of heaven: Varuna owned the Gandiva, the Vijaya belonged to Indra, and Vishnu the Saranga; all of them struck fear in the hearts of enemy warriors. Indra’s son Arjuna had the Gandiva from Agni after he burnt down Khandava Vana, and Rukmi had the Vijaya from Drona. Krishna obtained the Saranga when he baffled the Asura Mura’s paasas, deadly nooses, slew that demon, and then vanquished Bhumi’s son Naraka Asura to recover Aditi’s jewelled earrings, sixteen thousand exquisite women and various jewels and gems of beauty and power.

Rukmi, who has the Vijaya, whose twang is like the roar of thunderclouds, comes to the Pandavas, and fills the universe with dread.

The heroic Rukmi was arrogant of his might and, unable to tolerate Krishna's abduction of his sister Rukmini during her swayamvara, he set out in pursuit, swearing that he would not return to his city without killing Krishna. With a large army of four kinds of forces, clad in beautiful mail and armed with every kind of weapon, and looking like the swollen Ganga, Rukmi went after Krishna.

When he overtook Krishna, despite the power of every punya that tapasya can possibly confer, Rukmi was routed. In shame, he did not to return to his capital Kundina, but built a great new city for himself in the very place where Krishna vanquished him, and he called it Bhojataka. He filled the city with innumerable soldiers, elephants and horses, and it became renowned throughout the world.

Now, this great Kshatriya and tejasvin enters the Pandava camp clad in mail, bearing many bows, lances, swords and quivers, and with an akshauhini of troops. He marches with his vast army under a flag as bright as the Sun, and comes haughtily before the Pandavas, expressing his wish to serve under Krishna's command. Yudhishtira comes forward and pays his respects, and the Pandavas worship him and praise him. He salutes them in return and rests for a while with his troops.

Then he addresses Arjuna grandly in the presence of the assembled Kshatriyas, saying 'If, Panduputra, you are afraid, I am here to support you in battle. Your enemies will not withstand me. No man in this world is my equal in prowess. I will slay whichever of your enemies you ask me to. I will kill Drona, Kripa, Bhishma or Karna. Let all the kings who are here step aside; I will annihilate all your enemies myself and make a gift of the Earth to you.'

When Rukmi says this in the presence of Yudhishtira, Krishna, their allied kings and all the others in the camp, Arjuna looks at Krishna and Yudhishtira and replies, smiling, 'Having been born into the Kuru vamsa, and especially being a son of Pandu; having had Drona for my guru and having Krishna for my ally; and having the bow Gandiva for my weapon, how can I be afraid?

O Kshatriya, when I fought the mighty Gandharvas to free Duryodhana, who was there to help me? When countless Devas and Danavas united against me in Khandava vana, who fought by my side? When I fought the Nivatakavachas and the Kalakeyas, who was my ally? When I fought countless Kurus outside Virata's city, who helped me in battle?

I, who have paid due obeisance to Rudra, Sakra, Vaisravana, Yama, Varuna, Pavaka, Kripa, Drona and Krishna before going to war; I, who wield the Gandiva; I, who have twin quivers that well with inexhaustible arrows and all the devastras to command, how can a man like me say to my father Indra, who wields the Vajra, words of shame: that I am afraid? Mahabaho, I am never afraid, nor have I any need of your help. Go away or stay; do as you please.'

Rukmi takes his ocean-like army and goes to Duryodhana. He says the same thing to Duryodhana, but that proud king spurns him scornfully, as the Pandavas did. Thus, two great Kshatriyas take no part in the war on Kurukshetra—Balarama and Rukmi.

After Rohini's son Rama has set out on his tirtha-yatra, after Bhishmaka's son Rukmi has left, the sons of Pandu sit together once more in consultation. Yudhishtira presides over this meeting attended by many kings, and that conclave dazzles like the sky spangled with stars with the Moon in their midst."

CANTO 160

SAINYA NIRYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Janamejaya said, “O Brahmanarishabha, after the troops have been arrayed on Kurukshetra, what did the Kauravas do, impelled as they were by destiny?

Vaisampayana said, “O Bharatarishabha, when his troops have been arrayed, Dhritarashtra says to Sanjaya, ‘Come, Sanjaya, and tell me in the fullest detail all that is happening in the Kuru and Pandava camps. I am convinced that destiny reigns over effort, for, although I understand that this war will lead only to ruin, I cannot restrain my son, who rejoices in gambling and considers deceit to be wisdom. I understand all this, yet I can do nothing to prevent the slaughter that will be.

O Suta, I clearly see my son’s defects, but when I am with him my mind turns away from dharma. Sanjaya, what will be must be. To sacrifice of one’s body in battle is the duty of every Kshatriya, and it is praiseworthy.’

Sanjaya says, ‘What you say is true, but you cannot blame Duryodhana entirely. Listen to me, O king.

The man who comes to evil because of his own sins can never impute the fault to either time or the gods. The man who perpetrates great evil deserves to die. The sons of Pandu silently bore all the injuries inflicted on them during the game of dice, looking only to you for refuge, which you denied them.

Let me tell you now, Rajan, of the general carnage that stalks us close, the bloody massacre of horses, elephants and kings of measureless tejas. Listen patiently, wise one, to the destruction of the world as we know it that this war of wars will inexorably fetch; and the only conclusion you can come to is that man is never the agent of what he helplessly does, right or wrong.

Like a wooden puppet, man is not the doer. However, there are three differing opinions about this. Some say that God ordains everything; some say that we act out of free will; and some say that all our actions are a result of our past lives. Now hear about the evil that is upon us.'"

CANTO 161

ULUKA DUTA GAMANA PARVA

"Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, after the great-souled Pandavas established their camp by the Hiranvati, the Kauravas too set up theirs. Duryodhana deployed his troops; he paid homage to all the kings on his side; he set up outposts and deployed soldiers in these to protect the camp. Then he summoned Karna, Dusasana and Sakuni. First he consulted with Karna and next with his brother Dusasana and Sakuni together. He summoned Uluka and spoke to him privately.

He said to Uluka, "O Uluka, you are the son of a master of dice. Go now to the Pandavas and Somakas and repeat what I say to Yudhishtira, in Krishna's hearing.

Say to him, 'The long awaited war between the Kurus and the Pandavas is at last upon us. The time has come, Kuntiputra, to make good the boasts you roared out with your brothers and Krishna, which Sanjaya repeated to me in the Kuru sabha. Now let us see you actually do everything you so glibly said you would.

How does your virtuous character allow you, with your brothers, the Somakas and the Kekayas, to fix your heart on a sinful war? How can you want the destruction of the very world when you should be the dispeller of all people's fears?

O Bharatarishabha, this is the sloka, which Prahlada chanted when the gods took his kingdom from him: *O Devas, the man who always flies the*

flag of dharma, whose sins are hidden, is like the cat in this story. Listen to that excellent story Narada told my father.

O king, long ago, a wicked cat began to live on the banks of the Ganga, sitting still and with his arms raised above his head in the way of a tapasvin. Wanting to lull the other creatures there into trusting him, he announced that he had indeed begun to practice tapasya and had purified his heart. In time, the birds in that place trusted him and came to praise him. Seeing the feathered ones come to worship him, the cat, bird-eater that he was, considered the reason for his tapasya already accomplished.

Time passed, and mice began to come there as well, and they too saw him as a virtuous creature practising tapasya. Firmly convinced of the cat's virtue, they, who had many enemies, decided to make the cat their matulan, their maternal uncle, and ask his protection for the young and old of their kind.

They went to the cat and said, "With your grace, we want to live our lives happily and without fear. You are our friend, and we place ourselves under your protection. You are devoted to dharma and always engaged in acquiring punya. Wise One, protect us in the same way as Indra Vajradhari does the Devas."

The cat answered the mice, "I do not see how my tapasya and this protection you ask for are connected. However, I am your well-wisher and I cannot refuse what you ask. All of you must obey me and do what I say. My tapasya has weakened me I and cannot move from where I sit. Everyday, you must carry me to the river for my ablutions."

The mice agreed and sent all their old and young ones to attend on the cat. That sinful feline began feeding on the mice and became fat, healthy and strong. The mice reduced in numbers, while the cat grew fatter daily. One day, all the mice met together and remarked that their uncle grew fatter by the day, while their numbers decreased.

A wise mouse called Dindika told his entire tribe to go to the riverside together and said that he would follow with their uncle the cat. They did as Dindika said, for his words seemed grave and important to them. The cat knew nothing of this and ate Dindika that day.

When Dindika did not appear at the river, the worst suspicions of the other mice were confirmed. A very old mouse called Kilika said to them, "Our uncle, the cat, does not really want to acquire punya. He is a hypocrite, and pretends to be our friend while he is really our enemy. The

excreta of a creature that lives only on fruit and roots never contains hair or fur; and look how he grows fatter by the day, and our numbers dwindle. We have not seen Dindika for eight days."

The mice fled in all directions and the cat went back to where he had first come from.

Sinful Yudhishtira, you are like that cat. You treat your kinsmen in the same way as the cat did the mice. You have honeyed words of dharma on your lips, but your actions are a sinner's. Your devotion to the shastras and your mildness is only for show. You are no Brahmana. Stop your hypocrisy, O king, and be a Kshatriya; and you might deserve to be called Dharmaraja.

Win the Earth through your prowess and give gifts to Brahmanas and offerings to your Pitrs, as you ought. Look to the welfare of your mother, whom you have distressed for many years; dry her tears and honour her with victory over your enemies in war. You have humbly asked for only five villages, and we refused even that. All we wanted was to anger you sons of Pandu and provoke a war.

Remember that we dismissed the cowardly, treacherous Vidura because of you; remember, also, how we tried to burn you alive in the house of lac; at least now, be a man and fight, as you told Krishna you would when he set out from Upaplavya for the Kuru sabha. You sent a message to us through him, telling us that you are prepared both for peace or for war. The time for war has come, Yudhishtira, and I am ready for it. What better way is there for a Kshatriya to acquire punya than battle?

You were born a Kshatriya; your fame has spread across the world; you have got weapons from Drona and Kripa; why then, Bharatarishabha, do you depend on Krishna, who is not in any way better than you by birth, as a Kshatriya, or in might?"

Uluka, in the presence of the Pandavas say to Krishna, "For your own sake, as well as for the Pandavas, face me in battle as best you can. Use your powers of maya and take the form which you took in the Kuru sabha and, with Arjuna, fight me. A conjuror's tricks can be frightening but only provoke rage in the man who stands ready for war. I, too, can use maya, sorcery, to fly into the sky, to plunge into the bowels of the Earth, to ascend into Indraloka and to assume many forms. However, it is not by terrifying another that a man attains his goal. The Creator brings all creatures under his control by the power of his will alone, and not by conjuring tricks.

You say that you will confer absolute sovereignty on the sons of Pritha by annihilating Dhritarashtra's sons in battle. Sanjaya brought me this message from you. You also said that when we declare war against Arjuna, it will also be against you. Keep your word now and put forth all your might for the Pandavas. Show us that you can be a man.

The man, who knows his enemy's faults and, using his manliness, makes them suffer, is truly a man. Your fame in the world is unjustified. The truth will soon be known that there are those in the world who appear to be manly but are really eunuchs. You were Kansa's slave, and it does not befit me as a king to don armour to fight you."

O Uluka, next give this message to that stupid, ignorant and gluttonous Bhimasena, who is like a bull without horns, a bullock even. Say to him, "Prithaputra, you became a cook and called yourself Ballava in Virata's city, because of what I did to you. Let the vow you swore before me in the Kuru sabha not be a lie. Drink Dusasana's blood if you dare. You have often boasted that you will kill all Dhritarashtra's sons in battle. The time has come to make good that boast. Bhaarata, you always deserve to be plied amply with food and drink, but there is a great difference between cooking food and fighting a war. Fight now; be a man. You will lay down your life and fall on the field, clutching your mace. And all your boasts in the Kuru sabha shall be proved vain, Vrikodara."

Then, Uluka, say to Nakula, "Fight us, Bhaarata; we want to see your manliness, your reverence for Yudhishtira and your hatred for me. Remember all the suffering that Draupadi has endured."

Next, say to Sahadeva in the presence of the assembled monarchs, "Fight now, to the best of your little prowess. Remember all your sorrows and meet us on the field."

Then say to Virata and Drupada, "Since the beginning of time, slaves, however accomplished, have never fully understood their masters; nor have wealthy kings been able to understand their slaves. Possibly, you pit yourselves against me assuming that I have done nothing praiseworthy. Unite now and fight to kill me; do your utmost to accomplish your goal, which is the same as the Pandavas'."

Say to Dhrishtadyumna prince of the Panchalas, "Your time has also come, and your end is near. When you face Drona in battle, you will discover the harsh truth. Yet, fight for your friends, your kinsmen, and die trying to accomplish the impossible."

Next, Uluka, say to Sikhandin, and emphasise these words, “Gangaputra Bhishma, foremost of all bowmen, will not kill you, since you became a woman once. So fight fearlessly and put forth your best in battle. We want to see your prowess.”’

Duryodhana laughs aloud and continues, saying to Uluka, ‘Address Arjuna once more, in Krishna’s hearing. Say to him, “Kshatriya, either vanquish us and rule the world, or submit to us and lay down your life on the field of war. Remember how you suffered when you were banished from the kingdom; recall the sorrows you endured whilst you lived in the forest; remember Krishnaa’s torment; and be a man, Pandava. The time has come to fulfil the purpose for which a Kshatriya woman gives birth to a son.

Display your might in battle; show us your tejas, your courage, your manliness, your dexterity and speed with weapons; appease your wrath. Is there a Kshatriya whose heart would not have broken had he been driven from his kingdom, as you have, tormented with grief and despondent in long exile? Is there a man born into a noble house, who is brave and not covetous of another’s wealth, who would not be enraged when his ancient kingdom, handed down through the generations, is attacked and seized?

Translate your lofty speeches into deeds. Good men regard the man who boasts without doing anything as worthless. Recover your kingdom and your wealth, which are now in the hands of your enemies. These are the twin objectives of a Kshatriya who wants war; so, Dhanajaya, show us your might.

We defeated you at a game of dice and we dragged Krishnaa into the sabha. This alone should have been enough fuel to ignite the wrath of a real warrior. You have spent twelve long years in the forests, exiled from your home; and you have spent a year in Virata’s service. Remember the pangs of banishment, the hardships of your life in the vana, the torment that Draupadi has suffered, and show yourself to be a man. Vent your righteous anger on those who spoke cruel words to you and your brothers, for this is the way of a Kshatriya.

Express your rage; display your might and your knowledge; show us your lightness of hand. Fight, Kaunteya, and prove your manhood. You have invoked your astras; the field of Kurukshetra has been cleared; your horses are strong and fleet; your soldiers have received ample wages. With Krishna as your sarathy, fight us.

Why do you brag even before you have encountered Bhishma in battle? You are like the fool who boasts of scaling the summit of Gandhamadana before beginning to climb it. How can you eye your kingdom without defeating the invincible Karna, or Salya, or Drona that mightiest of Maharathas, our Acharya who is Indra's equal in battle? How vain is your fond desire to conquer the effulgent Drona, commander of armies, teacher of the Vedas and archery, master of both bodies of knowledge, open and hermetic, foremost in the arts of war, unshakeable as a mighty tower, whose strength knows no diminution. It is like dreaming of the wind moving Mount Meru! If what you wish for does come to pass, the wind will blow Sumeru away, heaven will fall to the Earth and the yugas will change their order and duration.

Which man, Arjuna or anyone else, could hope to escape with his life if he dares fight Drona? What man who walks the Earth could escape alive after facing Drona and Bhishma's arrows in battle? Like a frog in a well, you do not see the vastness of the mighty armies of the countless kings who are with me, the armies that look like the celestial host, and which they protect just as the Devas do their forces. This army is ready for war and as difficult to ford as the Ganga; the kings of the East, the West, the South and the North lead it; as do the Kambojas, the Sakas, the Khasas, the Salwas, the Matsyas, the Kurus of the middle country, the Mlechchas, the Pulindas, the Dravidas, the Andhras and the Kanchis.

Foolish Arjuna, how can you dare fight against me when I, Duryodhana, stand in the midst of my elephant legion? We will test your inexhaustible quivers, your chariot that Agni gave you and your ape banner. Do not brag, Arjuna, come and fight. Why so much vaunting? Victory in battle comes from fighting, never from vainglorious boasting. If boastfulness could indeed garner success, all men would achieve their objectives, for who is there that cannot boast?

I know that you have Krishna for your ally. I know that your Gandiva is six cubits long. I know that there is no warrior equal to you. Yet, despite all this, I still hold your kingdom. A man can never win success merely by virtue of his lineage. It is Brahma alone who, if he wills it, can turn the tide of misfortune. For the past thirteen years, I have enjoyed sovereignty while you wept. I will kill you, your brothers and your kinsmen and continue to do so.

Where was your Gandiva when you were put up as a stake in the dice game and we won you for a slave? What happened to Bhima's might then? Your deliverance came neither from Bhimasena armed with his mace, nor from you with your Gandiva, but from the faultless Draupadi. It was the daughter of Prishata's house who rescued you all who had been bound in slavery to work as menials. You were all like de-husked sesame seeds, and covered by nothing but shame.

Partha, did you not later wear a woman's braid whilst living in Virata's city, and was Bhima not exhausted by cooking in Virata's kitchens? Is this what you call manliness or being a Kshatriya? Arjuna, you became a eunuch, covered yourself in hip- and waist-chains, braided your hair and taught young girls to dance. All from fear of fighting us. This is how Kshatriyas punish lesser Kshatriyas.

I will not give up my kingdom out of fear of you or of Krishna. Fight, with Kesava as your ally. Neither deception, nor conjuror's tricks, nor jugglery can frighten the Kshatriya who is armed for battle. Instead, these pretty tricks will only provoke his wrath. A thousand Krishnas and a hundred Arjunas will fly from me in panic and in all directions. Encounter Bhishma in war; you will find it is like butting the hill with your head or swimming across the vast, deep sea.

My army is like the ocean; Saradwata's son is its sharks, Vivimsati its huge snake; Bhishma is its immeasurably powerful tide, Drona as its unconquerable alligator; Karna and Salya are its fish and whirlpools, the king of Kambojas is the badavamukha, the horse-headed creature that spits fire from his mouth; Brihadbala is its fierce waves, Somadatta's son its whale, Yuyutsu and Durmarshana its waters, Bhagadatta its wind; Srutayus and Hridika's son is its gulfs and bays, Dusasana its current; Sushena and Chitrayudha are its hippopotami and crocodiles, Jayadratha its submarine rocks; Purumitra its deeps and Sakuni its shores!

Plunging into this surging ocean with its inexhaustible waves of weapons, you will see all your relatives and friends killed, and you will repent. Then your heart will turn away from the thought of ruling the Earth, like the heart of a sinful man turning away from hope of heaven. Indeed, for you to win a kingdom is as impossible as for one without tapasya punya to attain Swarga," said Duryodhana to Uluka,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 162

ULUKA DUTA GAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'The gambler's son Uluka went to the Pandava camp and, presenting himself to the Pandavas, addressed Yudhishtira and said, "You know full well the role of envoys and how they speak. So you must not be angry with me for repeating Duryodhana's words exactly as he told me to."

Yudhishtira said, "You have nothing to fear, Uluka. Tell us without any anxiety what the greedy and short-sighted Duryodhana thinks."

In the midst of the illustrious Pandavas, the Srinjayas, of Krishna of the great renown, of Drupada and his sons, of Virata and of all the kings, Uluka delivered Duryodhana's message.

Sakuni's son said, "This is what the noble king Duryodhana, in the presence of all the Kuru heroes, instructed me to tell you. Listen to what he said, O Yudhishtira.

'We beat you at dice and dragged Draupadi into the sabha. Any real Kshatriya would be enraged at this. You were exiled to the forest for twelve years, and then lived for a year in Virata's service. Remember the reasons for your wrath—your exile, and our shaming of Krishnaa—and be a Kshatriya, O Pandava. Despite his weakened state, Bhima made a vow; now let him drink Dusasana's blood. You have worshipped your weapons and invoked the deities who preside over each of them. The field of

Kurukshetra is clear; the roads are smooth and your horses are well-fed. Begin the battle tomorrow, with Kesava as your ally.

Why do you boast glibly without having faced Bhishma in battle? Like the fool who brags of his intention to climb Gandhamadana, without having set foot on it, you want sovereignty without having vanquished invincible Karna and Salya the mightiest of men, who is equal to Indra in combat.

Salya is a preceptor of the Vedas and archery, having attained the ultimate levels in both branches of learning. You wish, in vain, to vanquish the illustrious Drona, who fights from the front. He is infinitely strong, unshakeable. We have never heard of the mountains of Sumeru being stirred by the wind! But the wind will blow away Sumeru; Swarga will fall down on Bhumi and the very yugas will be reversed if what you said to me comes to pass. Could any man escape with his life after facing Parantapa Drona in war, even if he fought from on the back of an elephant, a horse, or from a chariot?

What creature that walks on Earth could escape with his life, if Drona and Bhishma attack him in battle and pierce him with their terrible arrows? You are like a frog in a well, that you do not see the awesome massed armies of kings, like the very host of the gods. My legions teem with the kings of the East, West, South and North; with Kambojas, Sakas and Khasas; with Salvas, Matsyas, Kurus of the middle country, Mlechchas, Pulindas, Dravidas, Andhras and Kanchis. Indeed, so many nations ready for battle are uncrossable like the swollen tide of Ganga. O, foolish cousin, how will you fight me when I take the field with my legion of elephants?'"

Having repeated Duryodhana's words to Yudhishtira, Uluka turned to Arjuna and delivered the message Duryodhana sent to him:

"'Arjuna, why do you brag so much? Fight, instead. Victory comes from deeds. A war is never won by boasts. If enterprises could succeed just by boasting, then all men would achieve their goals, for who cannot brag? I know that you have Krishna for your ally. I know that your Gandiva is six cubits long. I know that there is no warrior equal to you. Knowing all this, I still hold your kingdom. A man never wins success merely because of his lineage. It is the Supreme Ordainer alone who, by his will, turns hostility into friendship and subservience.

For the past thirteen years have I enjoyed sovereignty, while you were sunk in grief. And I shall continue to rule, after killing you and your people. Where was your Gandiva when you were made a slave won at dice? Where,

Phalguna, was Bhimasena's might then? Your deliverance came neither from Bhimasena with his mace, nor from you with the Gandiva, but from the faultless Krishnaa. It was she, the daughter of Prishata's house, who delivered you all, who were bound to us in slavery. I think of you as husks, sesame seeds without kernels, eunuchs. Did you not wear a braid while living in Virata's city? Bhimasena tired himself out, working as a cook in Virata's kitchens. Is this evidence of your manliness, Kuntiputra? To avoid facing me in battle, you braided your hair and taught girls how to dance. This is how Kshatriyas punish Kshatriyas.

I will not give up the kingdom, Arjuna, from fear of Krishna or of you. Fight us, with him as your ally. Neither deception, nor conjuror's tricks, nor jugglery can affright a Kshatriya armed for battle; on the contrary, these only ignite his wrath. A thousand Krishnas and a hundred Arjunas will fly from me in all directions. Encounter Bhishma in combat; it is like shattering the mountains with your head. Penetrate my army; it is like swimming across the vast and deep ocean. My army is a veritable ocean; Saradwata's son is its large fish, Vivimsati its smaller fish, Brihadbala its waves, Somadatta's son its whale, Bhishma its mighty current, Drona its unconquerable alligator, Karna and Salya its fish and whirlpools, Kamboja its horse's head vomiting fire, Jayadratha its submarine rock, Purumitra its depth, Durmarshana its waters and Sakuni its shores.

When, having plunged into this swelling ocean with its inexhaustible waves of weapons, you wilt from fatigue and have all your relatives and friends slain, then repentance will grip your heart. Then your heart will turn away, Partha, from the thought of ruling the Earth, like the heart of a sinner giving up hope of heaven. Indeed, for you to win a kingdom to rule is as impossible as for a man without any tapasya to attain Swarga,'" said Uluka,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 163

ULUKA DUTA GAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, Uluka repeated these words to Arjuna, provoking him who is like a venomous snake further. The haughty, scornful message Uluka brought goaded the already incensed Pandavas beyond endurance.

They began to flex their mighty arms and, truly like angry cobras, looked at one another, fire in their eyes. Bhimasena, with his head bent down and his breath hissing like a great hamadryad's, turned his blood-red eyes to look at Krishna. Krishna saw how Bhima suffered and spoke to Uluka.

He said, "Go now, Uluka, and tell Duryodhana that we have heard and understood his words. Let it be as he wishes."

Having said this, Krishna looked once more at the wise Yudhishtira. Then in the presence of all the Srinjayas, of Draupadi, of Drupada and his sons, of Virata and of all the other kings, Uluka yet again repeated what he had already said to Arjuna, like prodding a great and already furious serpent with a stick.

And he repeated the same message again to Krishna and the others.

Arjuna's mighty body quivered with rage, and sweat beaded his brow. The kings saw him like that and were afraid; and the Pandavas' Maharathas were greatly agitated to listen repeatedly to Duryodhana's mocking message. They were all men of firm equanimity, but now they burned with

anger. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, Maharatha Satyaki, the five Kekaya brothers, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, the sons of Draupadi, Abhimanyu, Dhrishtaketu, Bhimasena and the twins jumped up from where they sat, their eyes crimson, swinging their splendid arms that were decked with red sandalwood-paste and golden ornaments. Knowing what was in their hearts, as Bhima sprang up he gnashed his teeth and wet the corners of his mouth with his tongue. Beside himself with anger, he clenched his huge fists and, turning his furious gaze on Uluka, spoke to him.

He said menacingly, "Fool, we have heard Duryodhana's vile message, sent to taunt us. Now listen to what I say, and, in the hearing of the Suta's son and your black-hearted father Sakuni, repeat it to Duryodhana, who stands protected in the midst of his many Kshatriyas. Say to that sinner from me:

'We always want to please our elder brother. That is why we tolerated everything you did to us. Do you not see this as being fortunate for you? It was for only the good of our entire vamsa that Yudhishtira Dharmaraja sent Krishna to the Kurus to try and make peace. But fate drives you to long for death. Come, fight us! Tomorrow, there will be war. I have sworn to kill you and your brothers. Sinful fool, do not have the slightest doubt that I will fulfil my vow.

Varuna's abode, the ocean, might suddenly flood the continents; and the mountains might split open, but what my oath will never prove false. Even if Yama, Kubera, or Rudra himself helps you, the Pandavas will still accomplish what they have sworn to do. I will drink Dusasana's blood as I have sworn. I vow that I will kill any Kshatriya who comes to me in anger, even if he comes with Bhishma himself before him. All I have said in the Kuru sabha will come to pass. This I swear by my very soul.'"

When Bhima finishes, Sahadeva, whose eyes have also turned red as plums, spoke before the assembled forces, in the ringing voice of a great, proud Kshatriya.

He said to Uluka, "Listen well, sinner, to what I say, and convey this message to your father:

'No difference would ever have arisen between us and the Kurus, if Dhritarashtra had not befriended you. You were born an embodiment of dissent and to be the instrument of the destruction of Dhritarashtra's vamsa and of the whole world.'

O Uluka, from the time we were born your evil father always tried to do us injury. I will cross the sea of malice and first kill you before his eyes, and then kill him in the sight of all the warriors."

Hearing Bhima and Sahadeva, Arjuna smiled and said to Bhima, "Bhimasena, those who have incited your enmity will not live. Even if they think they are safe in their homes now, they will surely be caught in death's meshes. My brother, Uluka does not deserve to be spoken to harshly. What is his fault, who is only a messenger, and merely repeats what he has been instructed to say?"

Then Arjuna Mahabaho addressed his allies and well-wishers, led by Dhrishtadyumna, saying, "You have heard the foul message of the sinful son of Dhritarashtra, sent to insult Krishna and especially me, and you are full of anger because you wish us well. Before Krishna's might and yours, all the Kshatriyas of the Earth together, count for nothing. With your leave I will give Uluka a response to his message, to take back to Duryodhana:

'When tomorrow comes, I will keep myself at the head of my legions, and answer to your vile message with the Gandiva, for it is only eunuchs who respond in words:'"

And all the kings applauded Dhananjaya. Now Yudhishtira Dharmaraja spoke respectfully to the friendly kings, to each according to his age and as befitted his rank; and, finally, to Uluka he gave this message for Duryodhana.

Yudhishtira said, "No good king should patiently bear an insult. I have heard what you had to say; this is my reply."

Bharatottama, in response to Duryodhana's message Yudhishtira, eyes red with rage, breath hissing like a serpent's, tongue wetting the corners of his mouth, and trembling with anger, looked at Krishna and his brothers and spoke both gently and strongly to Uluka.

Flexing his great arms, he said to the gambler's son, "Go, Uluka, and say to Duryodhana, that ungrateful, evil embodiment of violence, that wretch of his race:

"Malignant one, you always hated us Pandavas and treated us with deceit. The man who relies on his own strength, calls his enemies to battle, displays his prowess and makes good his boasts is a true Kshatriya. Be a Kshatriya and face us in war. Do not come to battle with those whom we revere at your head. Kaurava, rely on your own might and on that of your servants when you summon the sons of Pritha to war; be a Kshatriya in

every way. He who declares war on his enemies, counting on the might of others, is a eunuch.

You think highly of yourself, but you rely on the might of others. Being so weak and incapable yourself, why do you roar at us so grandly?”

Krishna said, “O Son of Sakuni, take my words, as well, to Duryodhana:

‘When tomorrow the war dawns on you, show yourself to be a man, O evil one. You are foolish to think Krishna will not fight because the Pandavas have chosen him to be a charioteer; that is why you are fearless. But I say to you that if my anger is ignited, I will consume all the kings whom you have brought together, as fire burns a heap of straw. But since Yudhishtira commands me, I shall be a sarathy to Arjuna, and he alone will actually fight.

But hear me, sinner, even if you hide beyond the three worlds, or deep in the bowels of the Earth, you will, even there, see Arjuna’s chariot flying at you tomorrow. You think that Bhima’s boasts are empty, but know that Dusasana’s blood is already as good as drunk. Know also that, although you have said a lot, and so haughtily and mockingly, not Arjuna, Yudhishtira, Bhimasena or either of the twins thinks much of you.’”

CANTO 164

ULUKA DUTA GAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna looked at Sakuni's son Uluka with angry red eyes, and then at Krishna and, raising his arms, he said to Uluka, "The man who challenges and fights his enemies fearlessly, relying on his own strength, is a Kshatriya. While the man who summons his enemies to battle, depending on the strength of others, is a disgrace to all Kshatriyas and is considered the lowest of men. Tell Duryodhana from me, again:

'Cowardice makes you use the strength of others as your own, and you depend on them to vanquish your enemies. You have given the command of your forces to Bhishma, who is the eldest of the Kshatriyas, who is devoted to dharma, who has his passions under control and who is wise; and by this you make him face certain death. And then you brag! We know that you assume that we Pandavas will not kill our Pitamaha. But, Duryodhana, Bhishma is the first man that I will kill, and in full view of both armies.'

Uluka, go back to the Bhaaratas and tell Duryodhana that I, Arjuna, say this to him: 'So be it. Tomorrow the great war will begin. Bhishma, of tireless might and devotion to truth, has already said to you that the task of destroying the Srinjaya and Salweya armies is his, and that he can kill anyone on Earth, excepting Drona; and that you need have no fear of the Pandavas. His assurances make you presume that the Pandavas will be easily vanquished and that you will become the undisputed sovereign of the

world; and this fills you with pride. But what you will find is your own defeat and death.

First of all, I will slay Pitamaha Bhishma before your very eyes. At sunrise tomorrow come with your chariots and banners to protect your Senapati, who is firm in his resolve; and watch my arrows fell him, who is your refuge. Tomorrow, when you see our Pitamaha covered by my arrows, you will realise the difference between bragging and battle.

Duryodhana, very soon you will see Bhima fulfil the angry oaths he swore in the Kuru sabha to your bestial brother Dusasana. You will reap the terrible consequences of vanity, of wrath and cruelty, of arrogance and boastfulness, of vicious words and deeds, of adharma and sin, of speaking ill of others, of disobedience to elders, of prejudice and of all your vices.

O you scum of the Earth, how can you hope to live or keep the kingdom if I, with Krishna beside me, give rein to my anger? After Bhishma and Drona have been stilled, and after Karna is slain, you will have no hope of any kingdom, of your son's lives or your own worthless one. When you hear of the slaughter of your brothers and sons, and when Bhima strikes you a final, mortal blow, you will remember all your sins.'

Tell him, Uluka, that I make a vow only once. I swear that everything I have said will come to pass."

Now Yudhishtira said, "Repeat my words as well when you go to Duryodhana. Say to him:

'Do not judge me by your own dark nature and ways. We are as different as dharma and adharma. I never wish harm to even the smallest creatures, ants and other insects, let alone desire the massacre of my cousins. That is why I asked for just five villages. Why don't you see the horrific calamity that threatens you? Your soul is overwhelmed by greed and lust, and you boast from being deluded. And you ignore even Krishna's counsel. But the time for words is past; fight us with all your allies.'

Uluka, also say to the pathetic Kuru prince: 'I have heard and understood what you said. Let it be as you wish.'"

Then Bhimasena said, "Uluka, take my message to Duryodhana, who is an embodiment of sin.

Say to him: 'You are destined to find a home either in a vulture's belly or in Hastinapura. I will fulfil the vow I swore in the Kuru sabha. I swear in the name of Truth: I will kill Dusasana in battle and drink his blood. I will kill all your brothers and then smash your manhood, and you will die in

agony. Know, Duryodhana—I am the nemesis of all Dhritarashtra's sons, and Abhimanyu will be the scourge of your younger princes. I will gratify you all with my deeds.

Duryodhana, when I have killed you and your brothers, I will kick your stamp on your head with my foot in the sight of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja.'"

Nakula said, "Uluka, tell Duryodhana that I have heard and understood everything he has said. Tell him that I will do exactly as he has asked me to."

Sahadeva said, "Tell Duryodhana for me: 'Your fond hopes will all prove vain. You will repent, with your sons, kinsmen and your friends, that you bragged in joyful anticipation of killing us.'"

The two old kings, Virata and Drupada, said to Uluka, "We are glad to serve a good man. Tomorrow we shall see who is the servant and who the master, and who will prevail in battle."

Now Sikhandin said to Uluka, "You must say to Duryodhana, who is addicted to sin: 'Watch helplessly, O king, my fierce deeds on the field. I will kill your grandfather, on whose prowess you depend for victory. I was created by Brahma to kill Bhishma, and I will do what I was born to in the sight of all your bowmen.'"

Dhrishtadyumna said to Uluka, "Say to Duryodhana: 'I will kill Drona with all his followers; this task is mine and no one else's.'"

Yudhishtira spoke again, noble and compassionate words: "'Rajan, I do not want the slaughter of my kinsmen, and everything that is now sure to happen is your fault. I have no choice but to sanction what all these great men around me will do.'

Now either go from here without delay, Uluka, or stay with our blessings; for we too are your kinsmen."

Uluka took leave of Yudhishtira and went back to Duryodhana, taking with him all that had been said; and when he came before Duryodhana, he repeated everything that Arjuna had told him to say. He faithfully delivered the messages that Krishna, Bhima, Yudhishtira, Nakula, Virata, Drupada, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin had given him; and then what Arjuna and Krishna had said later.

Duryodhana listened to Uluka, and he ordered Dusasana, Karna and Sakuni to array their own and the troops of the allied kings for war before dawn broke. At Karna's command, messengers mounted their chariots,

camels and horses and rode through the camp, calling out, *Into battle formations before sunrise!”*

CANTO 165

ULUKA DUTA GAMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After listening to Uluka's messages from Duryodhana, Yudhishtira also deployed his army led by Dhrishtadyumna and the others: the vast army of the four kinds of forces—infantry, elephants, chariots and cavalry—as awesome and immovable as the Earth herself. The Pandava army was protected by mighty Maharathas led by Bhima and Arjuna, and was like the ocean, immense, still and calm.

At the head of that sea-like force was the invincible bowman Dhrishtadyumna, prince of the Panchalas; and he chose Drona as his particular adversary and target. As Senapati, Dhrishtadyumna picked individual warriors from the enemy ranks and told his own warriors which one they would fight. He gave his chariot-warriors battle instructions, each according to his strengths.

He assigned Karna to Arjuna, Duryodhana to Bhima, Salya to Dhrishtaketu, Kripa to Uttamaujas, Kritavarman to Nakula, Jayadratha to Satyaki, and Bhishma to Sikhandin. He pitted Sahadeva against Sakuni, Chekitana against Sala, and the five sons of Draupadi against the Trigartas. He set Abhimanyu against Karna's son Vrishasena as well as against the rest of the kings, for he considered Abhimanyu superior to Arjuna himself in battle. He allocated responsibilities to his warriors, individually and collectively, and finally this Maharatha, brilliant as a blazing fire, reserved Drona for himself.

And having arrayed the Pandava troops and its maharathas, Dhrishtadyumna waited coolly for the war to begin, his mind firmly fixed on victory for the sons of Pandu.'"

CANTO 166

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra says, 'After Arjuna had sworn to kill Bhishma in battle, what did my evil sons, led by Duryodhana, do? Ah, I can already see the sure-handed Arjuna, with Krishna by his side, killing my uncle Bhishma. And what did that greatest Kshatriya Bhishma, who is immeasurably wise, say when he heard Partha's words? Having accepted the Kaurava command, what did that splendid warrior do?'

Sanjaya tells him everything that Pitamaha Bhishma said.

Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, having been given the command of the Kaurava force, Bhishma spoke words to Duryodhana that pleased him greatly.

Bhishma said, "I bow to Lord Kumara, Velayudha, bearer of the inexorable spear, Senapati of the armies of Devaloka and I gladly accept command of your army. I know about the affairs of state, about every kind of battle formation, and how to inspire fighting men to give their best efforts. I know as much about the deployment of the vyuhas of war and their strategic movements as Brihaspati himself. I know the methods of attack and defence that the Devas, Gandharvas and Manavas use; and with these I will confound the Pandavas. Dispel the fear in your heart. I will fight the enemy, whilst protecting your army, in keeping with the dharma of war. Cool the fever of your mind."

Duryodhana said, "O Gangaputra, Mahabaho, I do not fear the hosts of the Devas and Asuras combined; then how will I fear these Pandavas with

you as my Senapati and with Drona beside you, fighting for me? With you both on my side I will surely win this war; why, I could I could even win sovereignty over the gods.

But tell me, Pitama, who amongst our warriors we count as a Ratha and who as an Atiratha. Pitamaha, you know the strengths of every warrior on both sides. I want to hear what you think with all these kings present."

Bhishma said, "Listen, Rajarajan, and I will tell you who the Rathas and Atirathas in your army are. In your legions are many millions of Rathas, but I will name the main ones. Firstly, there is you. Amongst your brothers, including Dusasana, you are the foremost of all the Rathas. All of you are skilled fighters, experts at attacking and destroying chariots. You are all great charioteers when you take the reins of the sarathy, and expert elephant-riders, as well. You are all doughty mace-fighters, excellent archers and swordsmen; you also wield impenetrable shields. You are learned in the astra shastra and ably discharge your duties. You are all Drona's and Kripa's disciples in archery and at others weapons. In the coming war, the mighty sons of Dhritarashtra will put forth their prodigious energy to destroy the irresistible Panchalas.

Next come I, the Senapati of your troops. I will vanquish the Pandavas and extirpate the enemy forces. It does not become me to speak of my own strengths, but I believe you know me well.

One of the finest among all warriors is Raja Kritavarman of the Bhojas. He is an Atiratha, and he will accomplish your goal in battle. No man, not the most skilled warrior, can overcome him. Shooting or hurling his weapons to great distances, and a master swordsman in close combat, he will raze the enemy ranks, just as Indra did the Danava hordes.

The lord of the Madras, the mighty Salya, is an Atiratha. He considers himself equal to Krishna in every battle he fights. He has deserted his sister's sons to take your side. In this war he will decimate the Maharathas of the Pandava army with tidal waves of arrows.

The great archer Bhurisravas, the son of Somadatta, is an Atiratha and one of your sincerest friends. He has overall command of the heads of all our chariot divisions. He will wreak havoc among the enemy and swiftly reduce their numbers.

Jayadratha king of the Sindhus is, in my opinion, equal to two Rathas. That best of chariot-warriors will display his prowess in battle. He still smarts from the humiliation the Pandavas meted out to him when he

abducted Draupadi. He practised severe tapasya and obtained a boon most difficult to acquire, one he will use while fighting the Pandavas themselves. Harbouring his old hatred, he will fight, reckless of his life, which is well nigh impossible to take anyway.”””

CANTO 167

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Sudhakshina, king of the Kambojas, is equal to one Ratha. He wants your victory, and he will fight boldly against your enemies; and the Kauravas will see that the prowess of this lion amongst Maharathas as he fights for you is equal to Indra's. His Kamboja force of fierce chariot-warriors will swarm over the battlefield like locusts.

Then there is Nila of Mahishmati, clad in blue mail; he is one Ratha. With his chariot army he will bring bloody havoc to your enemies. He detests Sahadeva and will fight loyally for you. The princes Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti are powerful and seasoned warriors; they are two Rathas. These two will consume the enemy's troops with maces, feathered arrows and swords, with spears and javelins. Lusting for battle, these Kshatriyas will range across the battlefield like bull elephants sporting in the midst of a herd, each of them looking like Yama.

The five princely Trigarta brothers are, in my judgment, the best of Rathas. Pritha's sons provoked enmity with them outside Virata's city. Like great crocodiles churning the stream of the Ganga into high crested waves will they agitate the ranks of the Pandavas in battle. All five are Rathas, with Satyaratha being the first among them. They still remember the shame that Arjuna inflicted on them, many years ago, when he swept through the

land with his white horses, on his campaign to subjugate all the kings of the Earth. They will give their all and, having already fought many of the leading Pandava warriors in the past, they will surely slay them now.

Your son Lakshmana and Dusasana's son are both tigers among men and unwavering in battle. In the prime of youth, of lithe limbs, and endowed with powerful energy, these two princes are expert warriors and could well lead all the Kuru chariots. I believe they are our two best Rathas and devoted to Kshatriya dharma. They will achieve great feats.

Dandadhara is equal to a single Ratha. Guarded by his own soldiers, he will fight for you. Raja Brihadbala of the Kosalas, who is blessed with mighty tejas and strength, is equal to one Ratha. A fierce fighter, this great bowman is devoted to the Dhartarashtra cause, and will exert himself powerfully in battle, to the joy of his friends.

Saradwata's son Kripa is a commander of leaders of chariot forces. Uncaring of his life, he will consume your enemies at will. Kripa, who was born in a clump of heath as the son of Mahamuni Saradwata, also called Gautama, is as invincible as Kartikeya. Burning numberless warriors with all kinds of astras, he will rage across the field like a blazing fire.'""

CANTO 168

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Your uncle Sakuni is equal to one Ratha. Being the cause of the hostilities with the sons of Pandu, he will definitely fight. His troops are irresistible when they charge the enemy and are armed with arsenals of all kinds of weapons; and they are as swift as the wind.

Drona's son Aswatthama is superior to all other archers. He is a profound knower of the astra shastra and his weapons are inexorable. He is a great Maharatha. Like Arjuna's arrows shot from the Gandiva, Aswatthama's shafts fly in an unbroken line, touching one another. This best among Rathas, whom I cannot laud enough, can consume the three worlds, if he sets his mind to it. He has performed austere tapasya and augmented his fury and energy. Brilliant is his intellect, and Drona has favoured his son with the gift of devastras.

However, Aswatthama has one great defect, and for that I do not consider him a Ratha or an Atiratha: he loves his life too much, and holds it too dear. Yet, there is not a man amongst the warriors of both armies who is his equal.

From a single chariot he can put the army of the Devas to rout. So powerful is his powerful body, that he can rive mountains merely by slapping his bowstring on the leather sleeve of his arm. Blessed with

countless exceptional qualities, Drona's son of fierce effulgence will range over the battlefield, as irresistible as Yama with his mace. Lustrous Aswatthama of the lion's neck will extinguish your enemies like the fires of the pralaya do at the end of a yuga.

His father Drona is endowed with great tejas, though old, he is superior to any younger man. He will perform great deeds in battle; of this I have no doubt. Standing immovable on the field, he will burn Yudhishtira's troops with many fires. The Pandava army will be the dry grass and fuel in which those fires will be sparked, and the power of Drona's weapons will be the wind that fans it into mighty flames. This bull among men is a leader of Maharathas. The son of Bharadwaja will achieve astounding feats for you.

The venerable Acharya Drona, guru of all the royal Kshatriyas, will exterminate the Srinjayas. However, he loves Dhananjaya and, remembering the remarkable virtues Arjuna has acquired, and remembering that Arjuna is his most beloved disciple, he will never be able to bring himself to kill him. Indeed, Drona always prides himself on Arjuna's accomplishments, and looks on him with more affection than on his own son. Otherwise, such is his prowess that he can, from a single chariot, vanquish all the Devas, Gandharvas and Manavas united together, with his devastras.

Narashardula Paurava is one of your finest Maharathas, and he can shatter the ranks of enemy chariots. He will attack the enemy from the front of his own large force and consume the Panchalas like fire burns dry grass.

Satyasravas, the son of Brihadbala, is equal to one Ratha. He will sear through your enemy's troops like Death himself. His men, wearing motley armour and armed with all manner of weapons, will spread across the field, killing all that stand against them.

Karna's son Vrishasena is one of your best chariot-warriors and is a Maharatha. He will devastate your enemy's forces.

Then there is the great tejasvin Jalasandha, and he is among your foremost Rathas. Born in Krishna's vamsa, he is always willing to give his life in battle. He is a true warrior and will scatter the enemy before him, whether from his chariot or elephant back. That best of kings is, in my judgment, a Ratha. He will fight a brutal battle, ready to surrender his life for your sake, and among his mighty legions, expert in all types of warfare, he will be fearless.

Brave and like Yama himself, Bahlika is an Atiratha. He rushes headlong into any encounter and never retreats. He will blow away any enemy in his path even like Vayu Deva.

Another router of hostile chariot divisions, Maharatha of wonderful feats in battle, is Satyavan. He knows no fear of war. He will fall like a blood-storm on those that stand on his way; and in the fierce press of battle he will achieve all that a Kshatriya should.

The lord of Rakshasas, the feral Alambusha, is a Maharatha. Remembering his old hatred of the Pandavas, he will kill a countless enemy fighters. He is the best of Rathas amongst all the Rakshasa warriors and, with his magical powers and his uncompromising enmity, he will be merciless on the field.

The great sovereign of Pragjyotisha, the powerful Bhagadatta, is the best of all elephant-warriors. Once, he and Arjuna fought for days on end, each avid for victory. Then, for the sake of his friendship with Indra, Bhagadatta made a treaty of peace with Indra's son. And during this war, that king will fight from his formidable elephant's back like Indra mounted on Airavata and fighting for the Devas.”””

CANTO 169

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"'Bhishma said, "The brothers Achala and Vrishaka are Rathas. They are invincible in battle and will raze your enemies. These Naravyaghras are the best of Gandharvas and never relinquish their anger. They are young, handsome and of unworldly prowess.

This brings me to your dearest, most devoted friend Karna, always so proud of his battle skills, and who constantly goads you into fighting the Pandavas. You have taken this braggart as your advisor, guide and friend and elevated him to too high a position. The arrogant fellow is neither a Ratha nor an Atiratha. Yet he is generous and, deprived of good sense, he gave away his natural coat of mail and his divine earrings, which made him invincible. Without his kavacha and kundala, because of his guru Parasurama's curse, as well as that of another Brahmana, he is merely an ardharatha, half a Ratha. When he faces Arjuna in battle, he will not escape with his life."

Hearing this, Drona said, "I agree with Bhishma. Karna boasts on the eve of every battle, and he has fled from every encounter. I judge him to be only half a Ratha because his generosity in giving away his kavacha and kundala was reckless and because of his brash and unrestrained ways."

Karna heard all this and his eyes widened in anger. He glared at Bhishma and said, "O Pitamaha, I am innocent, but your dislike for me

makes you malign me as you please, with words like arrows at every step. I tolerate it for Duryodhana's sake. You calling me an ardharatha makes plain how worthless you think I am, why, as if I were a coward!

You, Gangaputra, are an enemy of the whole universe, especially of all the Kurus. But the king is unaware of this. What man but you, Bhishma, would seek to create envy and discord among us, to sap the united purpose and energy of these kings, all equals in rank and courage, as you do from your contempt for their great accomplishments?

Neither years, nor wrinkles, nor wealth, nor possession of friends would entitle a Kshatriya to regard himself as a Maharatha! It has been said that a Kshatriya acquires greatness only through might proven on the field, just as Brahmanas acquire eminence through superiority in their knowledge of mantras, Vaisyas through wealth and Sudras with age. Influenced by hatred and envy, and speaking loosely from malice and ignorance, you list Rathas and Atirathas, capriciously, according to your whim.

May you be blessed, Mahabaho Duryodhana; you be the true judge of this. Abandon the evil Bhishma, who wrongs you. Once seeds of discord are sown it is difficult to reunite warriors who have been divided by cunning comparisons. With some effort, your own army can be reunited in spirit, but it will be far more difficult to do the same with the armies from outside. Look how doubt has already raised its head in the hearts of your warriors. Bhishma subtly weakens us, even as we stand here, before the first arrow has been loosed in war. Besides, judging the true merits of Rathas is beyond Bhishma of the limited intellect.

Alone, I, Karna, will withstand the Pandava army. My every arrow is unerring and deadly; when they face me, the Pandavas and the Panchalas will fly in all directions, like oxen before a tiger.

Bhishma is old and twisted; he is not the one who should speak of battle or the dangers of war; he should not be the one to rely on for sage advice. Indeed, he is fated to be the first victim of destiny. He challenges the whole world, and deludes himself that no one else is a man or a warrior. It is true the shastras teach us to heed the elderly. But they do not mean those who are far too old, for they become children again.

Alone, I would extinguish the Pandava army. However, the fame of that feat will go to Bhishma. You have made him your Senapati, and recognition always belongs to the leader and not to those who fight under him. Rajan, as

long as Bhishma lives I will not fight. After Bhishma falls I will fight all the enemy Maharathas together, and kill them all for you.”

Bhishma said, “I am about to assume the onerous burden of fighting Duryodhana’s war against the Pandavas. I have thought of this day for many years and now the time for this dreadful battle is upon us, I still would not have conflict between the Bhaaratas. It is you, Sutaputra, who were born for that vile task. It is fated; otherwise, old though I am and you young, I would quell your lust for war by taking your life.

Your guru, Jamadagni’s son Parasurama, could not do me the least injury with his unearthly astras; so what could you do? Good men do not approve of self-praise. O wretch of your vamsa, I speak like this because I am angry and I am sad.

From my lone chariot, I vanquished all the assembled Kshatriyas of the world at the swayamvara of the king of Kasi’s daughters and carried away those princesses. Alone, on so many fields, I stopped the charge of countless kings with their soldiers.

With you as an embodiment of violence, a great carnage is about to overtake the Kurus. Yes, Karna, strive to vanquish our enemies; be a man and fight Arjuna, whom you envy so much and never tire of challenging. Evil one, I want to see how you come out of that encounter alive.”

Duryodhana said to Bhishma, “Look at me, Gangaputra. The task we have at hand is dire and grave. Think earnestly of what is best for me. Both of you will render me great services. I want to hear now of the best of the enemy’s chariot-warriors, of their Rathas and Atirathas. I want to hear of the strengths and weaknesses of my enemies. When this night is over our great war will begin.”””

CANTO 170

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "I have told you who your Rathas, Atirathas and Ardharathas are. Listen now to who the Pandavas' Rathas and Atirathas are. If you truly wish to know, hear, with these kings, of the Rathas in the army of the Pandavas.

Yudhishtira himself, the son of Pandu and Kunti, is a mighty Ratha. Without doubt he will course unimpeded through the battlefield like a blazing fire.

Bhimasena is equal to eight Rathas; none can remotely match him with the mace or with arrows. With the strength of ten thousand elephants, and with his enormous pride, his might and energy are superhuman.

The two sons of Madri are both Rathas. In beauty they are like the twin Aswins, and they are blessed with mighty tejas. Stationed at the head of their divisions, they will remember the torment you inflicted on them and range the field like many Indras.

All the Pandavas have noble souls; they are tall like Sala trees, taller than other men by half a cubit; they are brave as lions and blessed with awesome prowess. Rajan, all of them have practised brahmacharya and other stern austerities; they are modest; they have tigerish strength; in speed, in smiting and crushing foes, they are more than human. During their campaign of universal conquest before the Rajasuya yagna, each of them

vanquished many great kings. No other men can wield their weapons; no other men can even string their bows or heft their maces, let alone shoot their arrows.

In speed, in aim, in eating and in every sport they used to excel all of you even when you were all boys. With their prodigious might, they will exterminate this army. War with them is not desirable. Each of them, by himself, can slay all the kings of the Earth. You saw for yourself, Rajan, what happened during the Rajasuya yagna. Now they will remember Draupadi's sufferings and the abusive, vicious words you spoke after the game of dice, and they will come to war like so many Rudras.

As for Arjuna Gudakesa, of the reddish eyes, with Krishna as his sarathy, there is no warrior in either army who is remotely his equal. Let alone men, I have not heard of any among the Devas, Asuras, Uragas, Rakshasas and Yakshas, who has been born already or yet to be born, who can compare with him.

His chariot flies the banner of Hanuman; Krishna is his sarathy; Dhananjaya himself is the Kshatriya who fights from it; his bow is the Gandiva; his horses are as fleet as the wind; his unworldly coat of mail is impenetrable; his two quivers are inexhaustible; he has obtained his astras from Indra, Rudra, Kubera, Yama and Varuna; and his chariot bears maces of dread and all sorts of other astras, including the Vajra.

What warrior can equal Arjuna, who killed a thousand Danavas in Hiranyapura from his lone chariot? Inflamed with wrath, his prowess beyond your imagination, this Mahabaho will raze your army even as he protects his own legions.

Dronacharya and I, with no third warrior, can stand against Dhananjaya's arrow storms for a time. Yet, when this son of Kunti comes to war, with Krishna seated before him, his gales of astras will not cease, but blow like monsoon winds. He is masterly and young, while Drona and I are both old and worn; we will not last against Nara and Narayana."

Listening to Bhishma, and now vividly remembering, with a trembling heart, the valour of Pandu's sons, and thinking of the war as if it was already happening before their eyes, the kings' great arms, decked with bracelets and smeared with sandal-paste, seemed to hang limp, sapped of their strength,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 171

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"''Bhishma said, "Draupadi's five sons are Maharathas. Virata's son Uttara is among the best Rathas. The mighty-armed Abhimanyu is a commander of the leaders of their chariot divisions; this youthful Parantapa is Arjuna or Krishna's equal. Gifted with marvellous lightness of hand, and steeped in the ways of the astra shastra and every kind warfare, he has untold energy and is firm in his vratas. He will remember his father's agonies and put forth all his valour.

Brave Satyaki of the Madhu vamsa is also a commander of leaders of chariot divisions. Foremost among the Vrishnis and of towering wrath, of fear he knows nothing. Uttamaujas is also a magnificent chariot-warrior, as is Yudhamanyu. All the kings own many thousands of chariots, elephants and horses, and they will fight, uncaring of their lives, to please Kunti's sons. They will unite with the Pandavas and sweep through your troops like fire and wind, burning through and scything down all warriors that confront them.

Virata and Drupada, bulls among men, are both blessed with awesome prowess. Both are Maharathas. Though old, they are devoted to Kshatriya dharma, and will give their utmost in battle. Because of their relationship to the Pandavas, the energy of these two great bowmen will only swell in tide. Men become heroes or cowards by the righteousness of their cause.

Motivated by a singleness of purpose, both these aged kings will lay down their lives to destroy your troops. Fiery in battle, leading great akshauhinis, these most noble Kshatriyas will accomplish great and terrible feats, and justify both the confidence that the Pandavas have placed in them and their relationship with them.”””

CANTO 172

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Sikhandin, scion of the Panchalas, is a subjugator of hostile cities and is among the foremost of Yudhishtira's Rathas. He will fight your troops to win great fame. He has a vast legion of Panchala and Prabhadraka troops to support him. With his hosts of chariots he will achieve dreadful feats.

Dhrishtadyumna, Senapati of Yudhishtira's army, disciple of Drona, is a Maharatha. He is an Atiratha. He will harry his foes and, by himself, sweep the field clean, as Mahadeva does the worlds with his Pinaka at the Pralaya. Great warriors will speak in awe of his oceanic chariot forces, which are like those of the Devas.

Dhrishtadyumna's son Kshattradharman is young and inexperienced, and so I consider him only half a Ratha. Sisupala's heroic son Dhrishtaketu, who is kin to Pandavas, is a mighty bowman and a Maharatha. This king of Chedis and his son will perform deeds of valour in battle that are difficult even for a Maharatha.

Kshattradharman is a conqueror of enemy cities, and he is devoted to Kshatriya dharma; and his son Kshattradeva is one of the best of the Pandavas' Rathas. Then there are the dauntless Panchala warriors—Jayanta, Amitaujas and the Maharatha Satyajit. They are all noble Maharathas and will fight like angry elephants. Aja and Bhoja are both Maharathas and will

fight for the Pandavas. Both are gifted with uncanny lightness of hand; they use every manner of weapon and are exceptional warriors.

Five Kshatriya brothers, related to the Pandavas by blood, are almost impossible to defeat. They, too, fight with diverse weapons, and are skilful, fierce and unshakeable. These five who fly blood-red banners, Kasika, Sukumara, Nila, Sankha, also called Madiraswa, and Suryadatta, are incomparable Rathas.

Vardhakshemi is a Maharatha. Raja Chitrayudha is a superlative Ratha and, besides being an asset in battle, he is utterly devoted to Arjuna. The two Maharathas, Chekitana and Satyadhriti, are tigers among men and two of the Pandavas' unrivalled Rathas, as are Vyaghradatta and Chandrasena.

Senabindu, also named Krodhahantri, is a warrior equal to Krishna and Bhimasena; he will fight with formidable audaciousness. That best of kings is proud of his achievements in battle. You should think of him as you do of Drona, Kripa and me. Then there is Kasya, who is truly praiseworthy for his dexterity with every weapon. This subduer of hostile cities is equal to one Ratha.

Drupada's son Satyajit, though young in years, shows great prowess in battle, and he is equal to eight Rathas. He is Dhrishtadyumna's equal and, thus, an Atiratha. He will also accomplish great and savage deeds in battle in his eagerness to spread the fame of the Pandavas.

Devoted to Pandu's sons and brave beyond common ken is another great Ratha—Pandya, bowman of scintillating tejas. The superb archer Dhridadhanwan is a Maharatha; and Kurusattama Srenimat and Raja Vasudeva are both Atirathas.'''

CANTO 173

RATHATIRATHA SANKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"“Bhishma said, “Rochamanas is another Maharatha in the Pandava army. He will fight against us like a Deva. Bhima’s uncle Kuntibhoja is an Atiratha. He will fight with the same might as Indra did against the Danavas, and his renowned warriors are all accomplished and fearless. Devoted to his nephews, he will achieve extraordinary feats for their sakes.

Bhima and Hidimba’s son, the Rakshasa prince Ghatotkacha is gifted with powerful magical powers. He is a commander of the leaders of chariot-divisions. He revels in battle and, using maya, he and his feral Rakshasa legion will also fight without fear.

All these and many other kings, with Krishna at their head, have gathered to fight Yudhishtira’s cause. I have listed the main Rathas, Atirathas and Ardharathas of the Pandava army, and these will lead Yudhishtira’s fearsome legions, protected by Kiritin Arjuna. I will confront these warriors in battle, some of whom will fight with sorcery, and all of whom are fired by a consuming will to win the war; and I, too, am prepared for victory or for death.

I will ride against Krishna and Arjuna who, with the Gandiva and the Chakra, are like the Sun and the Moon shining together in the evening sky. I will face Yudhishtira’s other Maharathas and their swarming troops.

Duryodhana, I have named for you, in their order of importance, the Rathas, Atirathas and Ardharathas in your army and theirs. I will fight Arjuna, Krishna and all the other lords of Earth whom I encounter, but I will neither strike nor kill Sikhandin, prince of Panchalas, not if I see him rushing at me with his weapons raised.

The world knows how, to please my father, I renounced the kingdom I inherited and have lived as a brahmachari. I made Chitrangada king of the Kurus and the child Vichitravirya the Yuvaraja. I swore a pledge in the presence of all the kings of the Earth that I will never kill a woman or one who was once a woman. Sikhandin was a woman once. Born as a girl child, he later changed himself into a man. I will not fight against him.

Also, Rajan, although I will strike down all the other kings I meet on the battlefield, I could not kill the sons of Kunti.”””

CANTO 174

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA

"Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana said, "Why will you not kill Sikhandin even if you see him riding at you to take your life? You once told me that you would destroy the Panchalas and the Somakas; why now this reluctance, Gangaputra?"

Bhishma said, "Duryodhana, I will not kill Sikhandin, even if I meet him in battle. Hear why, you and all these other kings.

My father Santanu was renowned throughout the world. When that virtuous king died I crowned my brother Chitrangada king of the vast Kuru kingdom. On Chitrangada's death, in keeping with dharma and with Satyavati's acquiesance, I made Vichitravirya king. Vichitravirya was a mere boy then, and though I had invested him with sovereignty, I ruled in his name and he looked to me in all things.

When the time came, I wanted to him to wed and began to look for princesses from a royal house equal to our own. I heard that the three daughters of the king of Kasi, Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, of unrivalled beauty, were to hold a swayamvara, and that all the kings of the Earth had been invited. Amba was the eldest, Ambika the second and Ambalika the youngest. On a chariot, I rode on my own to the city of Kasi and saw the three girls clad in finery and bejewelled, and I saw all the kings who had been invited there.

Bharatarishabha, I seized the three princesses, lifted them into my chariot and said to the kings, *I, Bhishma, son of Santanu, abduct these young women! O kings, do your best to rescue them. I am taking them away by force, with all of you as witnesses.*

The kings sprang up and shouted to their sarathies to fetch their chariots. Those Kshatriyas rode after me in their rathas, with weapons unsheathed—chariot warriors looking like dark clouds massed; those mounted on elephants, and others on horseback. They surrounded me with countless chariots, but I vanquished them all, as Indra does Danava hordes.

Laughing, and easily, I cut down the kings' many-coloured flags embroidered with gold thread. I felled their horses, elephants and sarathies, each one with a single arrow. Seeing my lightness of hand, they stopped fighting and yielded. I returned victorious to Hastinapura and brought the young princesses to Satyavati, as brides for my brothers, telling her everything I had done.”””

CANTO 175

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Coming before my mother Satyavati, a daughter of the dasa clan, I saluted her, the mother of heroes.

I said to her, *I defeated all the kings and took these daughters of Kasi, who have their beauty as dowry, to be Vichitravirya's brides*.

Rajan, Satyavati's eyes streamed tears as she sniffed my head in affection and she was joyous at my triumph. With Satyavati's approval the nuptials approached, when Amba, the Kasi king's eldest daughter spoke bashfully to me.

She said, 'Bhishma, you know dharma well and the shastras. Hear what I have to say and then do what you think is just. I had already chosen the king of the Salvas to be my husband before when you took me away from the swayamvara. He proposed to me privately, without my father's knowledge. Can you, O Bhishma of the Kuru vamsa, go against dharma by forcing someone who longs for another to live in your household? Bear this in mind and decide what you will do.

The king of the Salvas waits for me, and you must let me go to him. Be merciful to me, O most righteous of men. All the world knows of your devotion to dharma.'"'"

CANTO 176

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "I shared what Amba told me with my mother Kali, otherwise called Gandhavati, as well as with our ministers and our priests, and we allowed the eldest princess Amba to leave. She went to the city of the Salva king with an escort of Brahmana elders and her own maid.

She went before the king and said, 'Mahabaho, I have come to you, take me for your wife.'

But the king of Salva laughed and said to her, 'Princess, you have already been taken by another, and I will not marry you. So, go back to Bhishma. He abducted you and I no longer desire you. When he defeated the other kings and took you away, you went happily. He humiliated and vanquished all the kings of the Earth, and I do not want another man's leavings. I am a king and a lawmaker, who knows the shastras; how will I take a woman already given into my home? Devi, go wherever you wish; do not waste your time here.'

Amba, who was struck by Kama Deva's subtle arrows, cried to Salva, 'Ah, do not say this, Rajan, for it is not true. Parantapa, I did not go happily with Bhishma. He seized me by force, defeated all the kings, and I wept the whole time. Accept me; I am innocent.

The shastras do not approve of a man abandoning one who loves him. I told Bhishma about our love, begging him to release me, and I have come

to you with his leave. Besides, Bhishma does not want me for himself; it is for his brother that he abducted me. He has given my two sisters Ambika and Ambalika to his younger brother Vichitravirya. O lord of the Salvas, I swear on my very life that I have never thought of any man but you as my husband. I do not come to you as a betrothed woman. I speak the truth, Salva; I swear it on my soul.

Take me as a maiden who comes to you on her own, as one who is not promised to another, as one who asks for your grace.'

Although she spoke in this vein, Salva rejected the princess of Kasi, like a snake sloughing off his old skin. Although she entreated him repeatedly, the king of the Salvas would not relent. Then rage filled Amba and, her eyes streaming, she cried, 'You may have cast me out, Rajan, but righteous people will protect me wherever I may go, for truth is indestructible.'

This is how the lord of the Salvas spurned the princess, who pleaded with him and sobbed so piteously in grief.

The king of Salva said, 'Go, go! I am in terror of Bhishma, you of the lovely hips, and you are Bhishma's prize.'

Thus evicted by Salva, the princess Amba left his city, crying like an osprey.'""

CANTO 177

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"'"Bhishma said, "As she left the city, sobbing, Amba thought, 'There is no woman in the world in as miserable a plight as me. Without family or friends and cast out by Salva, I cannot return to Hastinapura after begging Bhishma to let me leave. Who can I blame—myself, or the invincible Bhishma, or my father who held a swayamvara for me?

Perhaps it is my own fault. I could have leapt off Bhishma's chariot when he fought the other kings, and gone to Salva then. My turmoil and anguish are because I did not do that. I curse Bhishma. I curse my own wretched and misguided father, who fixed valour as my bride price, as if I were a commodity to be sold. I curse myself. I curse the king of Salva. I curse my Creator too. I curse them all, who have been the cause of my terrible misery.

Human beings suffer what they are destined to; but the cause of my suffering is Bhishma, and I will avenge myself on him, either through tapasya or by battle. But is there a king who would dare face Bhishma in battle, to fight my cause?'

Deciding that she would have revenge on Bhishma, she set out for an asrama of virtuous Munis, where she stayed the night, protected by them. The once sweet-smiling devi told them all that had happened to her, to the smallest detail, of how Bhishma abducted her and how Salva betrayed her love. She begged their help.

There lived in that asrama a Brahmana of great tapasya called Saikhavatya, who was a teacher of the shastras and aranyakas. This Muni said to the suffering princess, from whom pitiful sighs came like her very breath, 'Princess, how will we Rishis, who perform tapasya in the forest, help you?'

Amba said, 'Be merciful to me. I have renounced the world and wish to live in the forest. I will practise the severest of tapasya. My suffering is the result of the sins I committed in ignorance. I have no desire to return to my family, and grief has its way with me after Salva humiliated me. You are a godly man, who have washed away your sins; teach me how to perform tapasya. Be merciful to me.'

The Muni comforted her with examples and explanations from the scriptures, and he and the other Brahmanas promised to help her."""

CANTO 178

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Those Munis then went about their daily chores, study, penance and worship, thinking all the while about what they could do for that devi.

Some amongst them said that she should be taken back to her father; some said she ought to blame me; some thought that they should go to the king of Salva and persuade him to accept her; some disagreed with this for he had shamed her in his court.

After some time had passed in such deliberations, Saikhavatya Muni said to her, 'Devi, what can sadhus of self-restraint do for you? Do not renounce the world and devote yourself to a life in the forest. Listen to me; I speak for your good. Go from here to your father's palace. Your father, the king, will do what needs to be done. You can live there happily, in luxury. You are a woman and, so, your only protector is your father.

Fair child, a woman's protector is either her father or her husband. Her husband is her protector when she is happy, but when she is plunged in grief it is her father she goes to. A life in the wilds is very difficult, especially for one who is delicate. You are a princess by birth and you are fragile. Devi, a life in the forest entails many hardships and tribulations, none of which you have known in your father's house.'

The other Munis looked at the helpless girl and said, 'Seeing you alone in the deep and lonely forest, wild hunters, bandits or even kings may seek

to ravish you. Do not set your heart on a life of sannyasa.'

Amba said, 'I cannot go back to my father's house in Kasi, for I am certain to be shunned by all my relatives. Rishis, I spent my childhood there, but I cannot return to my father's city. With your protection, I want to practise penance, so that someday I can be rid forever of suffering. Maharishis, I want to be a tapasvin.'

Whilst the Brahmanas deliberated on what to do with her, there came to that forest the mighty sage, Rajarishi Hotravahana. The Munis paid their homage to him and welcomed him courteously, offering him padya, arghya and a darbhasana. After he was seated and had rested a while, the Munis began to talk to the devi once more, in his hearing.

Hearing the story of Amba and the king of Kasi, Hotravahana grew distraught. He heard how she spoke and saw how distressed she was, and that Rajarishi was moved to pity. In fact, Hotravahana was her grandfather, and he stood up suddenly, tears springing in his eyes; and, taking her onto his lap, he comforted her lovingly. He asked her in detail about her sorrows from the beginning, and she told him everything that had happened. He was filled with sadness when he had heard it all and decided what she should do.

Trembling in some agitation, he said to the tormented girl, 'Do not go back to your father's house. Devi, I am your mother's father. I will remove your grief; rely on me, child. Your suffering must be great that you are so wan and thin. You must go to Jamadagni's son Parasurama Bhargava. He will rid you of your deep sorrow. He was Devavrata's guru and will kill Bhishma in battle if the Kuru does not obey him. Go to that greatest of all the Bhrigus, whose tejas and urjas are like the flames of the pralaya. That Maharishi will set you on the right path.'

The girl, who wept on while he spoke, bowed her head reverentially to Hotravahana and said to him, 'I will go to that greatest of sages, but will I succeed in even catching a glimpse of Parasurama, whose renown echoes through the world? How will the Bhargava dispel my torment? How will I find him? Tell me, O my grandfather.'

Hotravahana said, 'You will find the mighty Parasurama in the great tapovana on the mountain Mahendra, where he sits in tapasya with many Rishis learned in the Vedas, many Gandharvas and Apsaras. Go with my blessings and tell the Mahamuni what I said, after first bowing your head to him in worship. He is a sage of strict vratas and fathomless ascetic punya.

Tell him whatever you wish for. If you name me, Parasurama will do anything for you, for he is my devoted friend and always wishes me well.'

Even as Hotravahana was speaking to the princess, Akritavrana, a close companion of Parasurama's, arrived there. All the hundreds of Munis and the Srinjaya king Hotravahana rose, and together they performed all the rituals of welcome and hospitality and then sat down around him. Delighted to have him amongst them, they spoke with him on many profound and wonderful subjects. When silence fell on the sacred gathering, Hotravahana asked Akritavrana where Parasurama was at the time.

Akritavrana said, 'Lord, Parasurama always speaks of you as his dear friend, and I believe he will arrive here tomorrow morning, for he comes even to see you.

But why has this maiden come to the forest? Whose is she, and what is she to you? I wish to know all this.'

Hotravahana said, 'She is the favourite daughter of the king of Kasi, and her mother is my daughter. She is Amba, the eldest daughter of the king of Kasi. She and her two younger sisters Ambika and Ambalika were in their swayamvara in Kasi, for which all the Kshatriya kings of the Earth had come. Great festivities were underway there, when Santanu's son, Bhishma of mighty valour, brushed aside all the kings and abducted the three princesses. Bhishma of Bharata vamsa took them to Hastinapura and to Satyavati. He asked his brother Vichitravirya to marry the princesses he had brought.

Seeing arrangements for the wedding being made, this devi Amba said to Bhishma, 'O Kshatriya, in my heart I had already chosen the lord of the Salvas to be my husband. Knowing dharma as you do, you know that your brother must not marry me, when my heart is given to another.'

Bhishma consulted his ministers and after deliberation, and with Satyavati's consent, gave Amba leave to go to Salva. She went to that king and told him that she had come with Bhishma's permission; that she had not done anything to break adharma and that she had chosen him, Salva, for her husband.

But Salva rejected her, suspecting her purity. Now she has come to these sacred forests, fervently wanting a life of tapasya. I recognised her from what she told me of her parentage. She blames Bhishma for her sorrow.'

Then Amba said to Akritavrana, 'Holy one, what my grandfather says is true. I cannot go back to my own city for fear of disgrace and shame. I have

decided to obey whatever Parasurama tells me to do.’

CANTO 179

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Akritavrana said, 'Devi, for which of your two problems do you seek a remedy? Do you wish that the king of Salva should be persuaded to marry you? Parasurama Mahatman will certainly urge him to do so for your sake. Or, if you want to see Gangaputra Bhishma defeated in battle by Parasurama, Bhargava will gratify even that wish of yours. Let us hear what Hotravahana has to say further, and what you say as well, and decide today what should be done for you.'

Amba said, 'Holy one, Bhishma abducted me without knowing that I had given my heart to Salva. Bear this in mind, and dharma, when you decide what I should do. Do what is just, towards both Bhishma and Salva. I have told you honestly about the root of my grief; now you must decide what is best for me.'

Akritavrana said, 'Lovely Devi, what you say is imbued with dharma, and worthy of you. If Bhishma had not taken you to Hastinapura, Salva would have married you on Parasurama's asking him to. It is because Bhishma carried you away by force that Salva is suspicious of you. Bhishma is proud of his valour and is crowned with success. Your vengeance should be directed at him.'

Amba said, 'Dvija, I too dearly want to kill Bhishma in battle. Mahabaho, be it Bhishma or Salva, punish the man you think guilty, the one who has made me suffer.'

With a delicious, balmy breeze blowing, that day passed, and the night as well, while they discussed Amba's plight. In the morning, awesome, splendid Parasurama arrives in that asrama, his matted hair in jata, clad in deer-skin and carrying his bow, sword and battle-axe.

He came to Hotravahana, and that Rajarishi, all the Munis and the distressed princess stood up and waited on him with joined hands. They worshipped Bhargava with offerings of honey and curds, and he sat down in their midst, and Hotravahana and the great Bhargava began to speak of many profound and mysterious matters.

Finally, at an opportune moment, Hotravahana said, 'Rama, this girl is the daughter of my daughter and the king of Kasi. She needs your blessing from you. You are the lord of all things; I beg you, listen to what she has to say.'

Now Parasurama asked the princess to tell him what she wanted to say. Amba approached Parasurama, who blazed with tejas, like a fire. She laid her head at his feet in worship, touched them with her two lotus-like hands, and then stood silently before him. Overwhelmed by grief, and her eyes bathed in tears, she asked for his protection, for he was the refuge of all those in distress.

Parasurama said, 'Tell me what grief you hold in your heart, and I will do what needs to be done.'

Encouraged, Amba said, 'O holy one of the great vratas, I seek refuge with you. Free me from my suffering and raise me out of this ocean of sorrow.'

Seeing her beauty and her youthful, tender body, Parasurama sat silently in thought for a time, filled with pity, wondering what she would ask. Then he asked Amba to tell him everything, and she told him all that had happened.

Parasurama heard her out and, having first resolved what he should do, said to the exquisite girl, 'Beautiful devi, I will send word to Kurusattama Bhishma. He will do whatever I ask, and if he does not, I will consume him in battle. Or, if you prefer, I can speak to the heroic king of the Salvas and tell him to marry you.'

Amba said, 'O Bhargava, Bhishma allowed me to leave Hastinapura as soon as he heard that I had already given my heart to the lord of the Salvas. I went to Salva and spoke to him in forthright words. Doubtful of my purity,

he refused to accept me. O great one, reflect on all this, and in your wisdom, do what you think is best.

However, Bhishma is the root cause of my distress, for he assumed control over my life by carrying me away in his chariot. Ah, kill Bhishma for me, Mahabaho; it is because of him that I suffer so grievously. Bhishma is covetous, mean and proud of his victory. Anagha, you must punish him. In my heart I wished for Devavrata Bhishma's death even while he was abducting me. Sinless Parasurama, gratify this desire of mine; slay Bhishma, as Purandara slew Vritra.'""

CANTO 180

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "O Rajan, Parasurama said to the weeping girl, who repeatedly urged him to kill Bhishma, 'Daughter of Kasi, I do not take up arms on any account now except on behalf of Brahmanas. Tell me what else I might do for you.

Both Bhishma and Salva are implicitly obedient to me. Do not grieve, I will accomplish what you wish for. But I will not take up arms, unless I am asked to by a Brahmana, for this is the law I live by.'

Amba said, 'Ah, holy one, somehow dispel my misery, which Bhishma has caused. Do not delay, kill him!'

Parasurama said, 'Princess of Kasi, you have only to ask and I will have Bhishma set your feet on his head.'

Amba said, 'Parasurama, slay Bhishma, who roars like an Asura. If you want to allay my torment, let him call you to a duel and kill him there. You have given me your word that you will help now; you must not break it.'

Now Rishi Akritavrana intervened, 'Mahabaho, you should not break your word to this child, who seeks your protection. If, when you summon Bhishma, he comes and does what you ask, or you humble him in battle, if he does not, Amba's wish will be fulfilled and you will not forswear yourself.

Mahamuni, you swore an oath that after you have conquered all the Kshatriyas, you would kill any man, be he a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a

Vaisya or a Sudra, who is an enemy of us Brahmanas. You also swore that as long as you lived you would not forsake anyone who sought your protection in fear. You also said that you would slay the arrogant warrior who vanquished all the Kshatriyas of the Earth.

Lord, Bhishma, scion of Kuru vamsa, has achieved such a victory. Go to him now, O Bhargava, and humble him.'

Parasurama said, 'Best of Rishis, I remember that vow I once took. However, in this instance, I must first use the way of conciliation as best I can. What the princess of Kasi wants is grave indeed, Brahmana. I will take her with me and go to Bhishma. If he does not do what I ask, I will kill that arrogant one. The arrows I shoot do not glance off the bodies of my enemies, but pass through them. You know this when I fought the Kshatriyas of the Earth and spilled their blood in rivers.'

Parasurama and the Brahmanas decided to set out from the asrama. They spent the night there and duly performed their homas and recited their prayers the next morning; then they set out, intending to kill me.

Rajan, Parasurama came to Kurukshetra with the young princess and his followers. With the Bhargava at their head, those great Munis arrived on the banks of the Saraswati," said Bhishma.'"

CANTO 181

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma continued, "On the third day, Parasurama sent a message to say that he had come to help me.

Hearing that this Rishi of tejas, vast as the ocean had entered our kingdom, I went to him at once, and in joy. A cow led my retinue, and many of our family priests went with me, as also other great Brahmanas, whom we employed for special occasions such as this.

Parasurama accepted the worship that I offered and said to me, 'Bhishma, having cleansed yourself of desire, what were you thinking when you abducted the king of Kasi's daughter during her swayamvara, and then later when you let her leave? You have sullied her virtue; and, since you have touched her who will marry her now? Salva spurned her because you abducted her. Take her for yourself, Narapumgava, and let this princess fulfil a woman's dharma. It is not dharma that she be humiliated like this.'

I saw Parasurama's anguish at the princess' plight and said to him, 'O my guru, there was no way that I could bestow this girl on my brother once she herself told me that she belonged to Salva; and so I let her go to him. As for me, I cannot break my vrata and abandon Kshatriya dharma; not for fear, pity, wealth or lust.'

Parasurama's eyes rolled, and he said to me, 'Bharatarishabha, if you do not do as I say, I will kill you and all your followers this very day,' and he repeated this again and again in his fury.

I pleaded with him, but to no avail. I bowed my head before that Brahmanottama and asked him why he wanted to fight me.

I said, 'When I was a child it was you who instructed me in all four parts of the Dhanurveda. I am your sishya, O Bhargava.'

His eyes still red, he retorted, 'Bhishma, you acknowledge me as your guru, but you refuse to please me by taking this princess of Kasi for your wife. I will not be satisfied unless you do what I ask. Take this devi and safeguard the dharma of your vamsa; you abducted her forcibly from her swayamvara, and now she cannot find a husband. You must marry her yourself.'

I said, 'That I cannot do. I am eager to please you because you were once my guru. I refused this princess before I was aware of the great evil that the frailties of women can bring. No man will welcome into his household a woman whose heart belongs to another, and who is, thus like a venomous snake. I would never forsake my dharma by breaking my solemn oath, not even for fear of Indra. Be gracious, or do to me now what you think is just.

There is a sloka from the Puranas, which Maruta Mahatman once told me of: A man may disobey the command of even a guru who is filled with vanity, who does not know right from wrong and who walks a path of adharma.

You are my guru and I have revered you out of my love for you. However, you do not know the dharma of a guru, and I would fight you. But I could never kill a guru in battle, especially if he is Brahmana, and more so, one who is blessed with boundless tapasya. And so I forgive you.

It is a well known scriptural truth that no guilt attaches to a man who kills a Brahmana who has taken up arms as if he were a Kshatriya, and who fights in anger without trying to escape. I am a Kshatriya, and I am devoted to my dharma. One does not sin, neither does one do any harm, by treating a person as he deserves. When a man, who is aware of the timeliness of things, and versed in dharma and artha, is doubtful about anything, he should, without misgivings, follow his svadharma, for that will give him the most punya.

O Bhargava, you have violated dharma by asking me to break my vow, and I have no qualms about fighting you. You know that my prowess is superhuman, and I will give my all when I face you on the field of

Kurukshetra. Effulgent one, prepare yourself for single combat; take your position.

My arrows will purify you and you will attain the regions to which your tapasya has entitled you. I will come to fight you, who so love battle, on Kurukshetra, where long ago you propitiated your ancestors with sea-like offerings of Kshatriya blood. There, Bhargava, I will propitiate those slain Kshatriyas by killing you.

Come, do not delay. On Kurukshetra I will curb your pride, of which the Brahmanas speak. For long years you have boasted that you single-handedly slew all the Kshatriyas in the world. And well you could boast, for in those days Bhishma was not yet born, nor were there any Kshatriyas like him. Only later did the truly valiant Kshatriyas come into this world.

All your vaunted conquests were against men of straw. The man who can quell your pride has since been born. I, Bhishma, am that man: the conqueror of enemy kingdoms. I will crush your pride of old conquests.'

Parasurama said to me, laughing, 'I am glad that you will do battle with me, Bhishma. I will come to Kurukshetra with you even now. Yes, I will do what you want. Come there, and let your mother Jahnavi see you lying dead on the battlefield, pierced by my arrows and become carrion for vultures, crows and jackals. Let that Devi, whom the Siddhas and Charanas worship, Bhagiratha's blessed daughter who took the form of a holy river and who gave birth to you, weep today when she sees you lying lifeless on Kurukshetra, although she does not deserve the grief of such a sight.

Come, Bhishma; follow me, arrogant Kshatriya always hungry for battle, and bring your chariot and weapons.'

I worshipped Parasurama with my head bent and answered him by saying *Tathaastu*.

He strode away toward Kurukshetra, and I went to our city to inform Satyavati of what had happened. I performed propitiatory rites for victory, took my mother's blessings, and made the Brahmanas utter their blessings over me. I mounted a superb silver chariot yoked to white horses. It was finely crafted, spacious and covered on all sides with tiger-skin; it had many great weapons in it. My sarathy was a brave nobleman, an expert horseman and charioteer, and one who had seen many battles.

I wore a white coat of mail and carried my white bow; and I set out, Bharatottama. A royal white parasol was held over my head and white chamaras waved over me. Clad in white silk and with white head-gear, all

my adornments were also white. I rode out of Hastinapura to songs of praise and to the sound of Brahmanas wishing me victory, and I rode to Kurukshetra.

Spurred by my sarathy, the steeds, fleet as the wind or the mind, bore me swiftly to the great encounter. Upon Kurukshetra, Parasurama and I, both keened for battle, would display our prowess. When I came within sight of Parasurama I blew a loud blast on my conch. Many Brahmanas and sadhus who lived in the forest had come to watch our duel. Divine garlands, celestial music and canopies of clouds were all around and above us, and the Rishis who had come with Bhargava stood on the periphery of the field.

Suddenly, my divine mother Ganga, who washes the sins of men in her sacred waters, appeared before me in her human form and said, 'What is this that you are about to do? I will go to Jamadagni's son and beg him not to fight Bhishma, who is his disciple. My son, you are a Kshatriya; you must not fight Parasurama; he is a Brahmana.'

She continued to reproach me, 'My son, Parasurama Bhargava is as powerful as Mahadeva himself; he once exterminated the entire Kshatriya varna. You do not know this as I do, who saw it all, and you want to face him in battle!'

I saluted the Devi reverentially and with folded hands recounted the events that had taken place at the swayamvara; I told her everything that happened with the princess of Kasi, and how I had tried to dissuade Parasurama from fighting me.

My mother Ganga went to Parasurama and beseeched him to desist since I was his disciple. He said to her that she ought to urge me to obey him, and that he had challenged me because I refused to do what he wanted."

Out of her love for him, Ganga came back to persuade Bhishma to relent, but the angry Bhishma refused. And just then, Parasurama of the Bhrigu vamsa came to Bhishma and said they should begin their duel,' says Sanjaya."

CANTO 182

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

'''Bhishma said, "Smiling, I said to Parasurama, 'You stand on the ground and I do not want to fight you from my chariot. Mount a chariot and put on a coat of mail, if you wish to fight me.'

He also smiled and said, 'The Earth is my chariot and the Vedas are the steeds that pull me; the wind is my sarathy and the mothers of the Vedas are my coat of mail—Gayatri, Savitri and Saraswati. With their protection, I will fight.'

With that, he covered me with a barrage of arrows; and indeed I saw him, standing on a supernal chariot equipped with weapons of every kind. Wondrous was his chariot, created by his will, and great and beautiful, like a town. Celestial horses were yoked to it, and it was armoured on all sides. It was decked with ornaments of gold, covered with tough skins, and it bore the symbols of the Sun and the Moon. Parasurama was armed with a bow and quiver of arrows, and his fingers were encased in leather gloves. His friend Akritavrana was his sarathy.

Parasurama repeatedly summoned me to battle, crying, *Come, come, make me a happy man!* And so that invincible exterminator of Kshatriya kind, resplendent like the rising Sun, became my adversary in battle.

He showered me with three bursts of arrows, curbing my horses; I alighted from my chariot, set aside my bow and walked up to him. I paid reverent homage to him.

I said, 'My lord, whether you are equal or superior to me, I will fight you, my virtuous guru. Bless me and wish me victory.'

He said, 'The man who desires victory should do as you have. Those who fight with warriors elder and more eminent than themselves must perform such homage. Kshatriya, I would have cursed you if you had not come to me in this way. Go; fight carefully and call on all your patience. I cannot, however, wish you victory, for I am here to vanquish you. Go, fight in dharma. I am pleased with you.'

Bowing to him, I quickly returned and, climbing onto my chariot once more, I blew my conch. The fervid duel between us began. It lasted many days. Parasurama drew first blood, striking me with nine hundred and sixty vulture-feather-winged arrows, which covered my horses and my sarathy, although I myself was unscathed in my coat of mail.

Bowing to the Devas, and especially to the Brahmanas, I said to Parasurama, 'Although you have shown scant respect for me, I have paid you full reverence as my guru. There is another auspicious duty to be discharged if you want to earn punya. I do not loose my arrows at the Vedas you have absorbed, or at you as a Brahmana or at your great tapasya. I take aim at the Kshatriya warrior you have chosen to become. When a Brahmana takes up weapons he becomes a Kshatriya. Now witness the power of my bow and the might of my arms. Look how I sever your bow with my single arrow!'

I shot a sharp broad-headed arrow at him and cut off one of the horns of his bow, which fell on the ground. I then shot a hundred arrows at his chariot. They flew through the air like serpents and pierced him. Blood covered his body and poured out. And he shone in battle, like Mount Sumeru with molten lava flowing down its sides, or like an asoka tree in spring when it is covered with red flowers, or the kinsuka tree in bloom.

Angrily, he took up another bow and inundated me with keen, golden-winged arrows and, like snakes, fire or venom, these vicious barbs of terrific impetus flashed at me from all sides, piercing me deep and making me tremble. I gathered myself, and struck Parasurama with a hundred shafts that were like fire, or the Sun, and which also looked like snakes spitting venom, and he seemed to swoon away.

Pity surged in me and I lowered my bow, in disgust of battle and Kshatriya dharma. Grief quite overwhelmed me and I kept saying to myself,

Ah, great is the sin I have committed by observing my dharma. I have sorely wounded my own guru, who is a virtuous Brahmana, with arrows!

Thousand-rayed Surya, having warmed the Earth, now sank away to his abode in the west at the close of day; and the duel between the Bhargava and me ceased.”””

CANTO 183

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"'"Bhishma said, "After the day's battle ended, my sarathy skilfully drew out the arrows embedded in his own body, from the bodies of our horses and from mine as well. The next morning, at sunrise, we resumed battle.

My horses had been bathed, fed, given water and had rested, rolling luxuriantly in the grass, and they were re-invigorated. Seeing me come, in my coat of mail, Parasurama refitted his chariot with care. And when I saw him ride towards me, eager to fight, I put down my bow and got down from my chariot. I paid him worship, before climbing back on, and now stood fearlessly before him, ready for battle.

I overwhelmed him with a thick shower of arrows, and he mantled me with a barrage of shafts in return. His rage mounting, my guru loosed a storm of serpentine shafts with blazing mouths. I retaliated with lakhs of arrows, cutting off his barbs before they could reach me.

He now invoked devastras against me, which I repelled with greater astras of my own; the spirit of war risen in us absorbed both of us entirely. The thunder of astra fusing with astra rose into the sky. I cast the Vayavyastra at him, but he quelled it with his Varunastra. And so we fought, each of us subduing the astras of the other.

Suddenly, he wheeled to my right and struck me squarely through the chest, and I fainted in my chariot. My sarathy quickly bore me away from

the field. Great was the joy of Akritavrana, Amba and all Parasurama's followers, who began to shout with joy when they saw me being borne away unconscious.

Regaining my senses, I ordered my sarathy to take me back into battle, for I was recovered. He flicked his reins over the superb wind-swift horses, which seemed to dance as they flew across the plain, and we were soon there.

In fury, and now determined to vanquish my adversary, I covered him with a deluge of arrows that fell from the sky. But the Bhargava shot three missiles for every one of mine and bisected my arrows in the air. His followers were joyous again, seeing my countless arrows cloven by his.

Now the urge to kill him seized me. I struck him with an arrow of blazing effulgence, with Death sitting at its head. He fell unconscious from his chariot. Exclamations of *Oh!* and *Alas!* arose on all sides, and everywhere was confusion and alarm, as might have been if the Sun were to fall from the sky.

All the gathered ascetics and the princess of Kasi rushed, in great anxiety, to where he lay. They embraced him and soothed him with the soft touch of hands cooled by having been dipped in water, and with assurances of victory.

Parasurama rose, fixed an arrow to his bow and roared at me, *Stay, Bhishma. You are slain!*

The arrow he shot at me pierced my left side and I began to tremble like a young tree in a gale. Calmly, he killed my horses and, with unearthly lightness of hand, shot locust-like swarms of winged arrows which enveloped me in darkness. I, too, loosed arrows beyond count to stem his tide. Our arrow clouds covered the sky, suspended there interlocked and not falling down. The Sun's rays could not penetrate them and the wind could not pass through them. From their vast friction a conflagration flared up in the sky. Every arrow burst into flames and fell to the Earth as ashes. Beside himself with fury, Parasurama loosed crores and crores of deadly barbs at me; and I shot them into fragments and they fell around us like snakes chopped up.

Finally, when the shadows of evening fell, my guru withdrew from the field."""

CANTO 184

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "The next day, the duel was no less frightful. Day by day, that Mahatman, master of celestial weapons, invoked more devastras, of diverse kinds. With no thought for my life, so difficult to sacrifice, in the ferocity of that duel, I baffled all his weapons with astras of my own. And, Bhaarata, when his astras proved ineffectual, Jamadagni's mighty son cast a fierce and sorcerous lance at me, blazing like a meteor, with a flaming mouth, filling the whole world with its effulgence, and like Yama's very dart. But I cut that missile in three, that occult weapon which shone like the Sun that rises at end of the yuga.

At this, fragrant breezes began to blow around me. His anger burning higher, Bhargava loosed a ferocious astra at me. Their forms, Bhaarata, I cannot describe, but terrible was their lustre and speed. I saw those missiles flare at me from all sides, interminable tongues of flame, truly like the twelve suns that arise at the pralaya, and I was filled with fear. Holding my nerve, I doused the fire of those missiles with a great astra of water, and never pausing, shot down the twelve with twelve arrows of my own.

Undeterred, Parasurama showered a fusillade of golden-winged darts over me, with variegated handles chased with gold, which were like comets afire. I warded them off with my shield and sword so they fell impotent on the ground. I covered Parasurama's horses and charioteer with clouds of

gold-shafted arrows. His wrath mounted further to see my barbs like snakes coming out of their nests, and once more he summoned the devastras.

Locust-like swarms of missiles overwhelmed me, my steeds, my charioteer and my chariot. Indeed, Duryodhana, my ratha, horses and sarathy were completely enmeshed by those arrow nets. The yoke, shaft, wheels and the wheel-spokes of my chariot broke.

When his arrow storm ceased, I, too, covered my guru with a heavy shower of weapons. That sage of Brahmic punya began to bleed copiously. I was also densely pierced by his barbs.

When, at last, the Sun set behind the western hills, our savage duel ended for the day.”””

CANTO 185

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"''Bhishma said, 'The next morning, Bhargava and I resumed our contention. From his chariot, he rained a downpour of arrows on me, as clouds do on a mountain. My sarathy was struck and fell unconscious to the ground; to my great grief, he succumbed to his injuries.

Rajan, fear gripped my heart, and while I was still numb Parasurama shot me with an arrow that pierced deep into my chest, and I fell to the ground with the arrow. Presuming that I was dead, Parasurama roared in triumph, like a thundercloud. All his followers rejoiced loudly with him, while the Kurus who had followed me, and all the rest who were watching, were stricken.

As I lay there, I saw eight ethereal Brahmanas, who shone like the Sun. They surrounded me and picked me up in their arms. My breathing was laboured as they held me; and, sprinkling me with water and still carrying me, they blessed and reassured me repeatedly. Soothed by their words, I got up, and I saw my mother Ganga standing embodied on my chariot.

O king of the Kurus, it was that great Devi who had held my horses' reins after my sarathy fell. I worshipped my mother's feet and my Pitrs, and I climbed onto my chariot with my weapons. I begged my mother to leave and took the reins myself and, restraining those steeds gifted with the speed of the wind, I resumed my duel with Parasurama and we fought until that day ended.

I shot him with an arrow that pierced his breast, so he lost his grip on his bow and fell onto his knees, and then out of his chariot, unconscious. Masses of clouds filled the sky and rained blood. Hundreds of meteors fell and thunder rolled across the sky, making everything tremble. Rahu covered the Sun, and violent winds blew. The Earth herself trembled, and vultures, crows and cranes began to alight in joy, in anticipation of a feast. The points of the horizon seemed to be on fire, and jackals howled. Drums rang out spontaneously in cacophony. When the great Parasurama embraced the Earth all these frightful omens of evil appeared.

All of a sudden, he arose and came towards me, more furious than ever and ready to fight again. That Mahabaho took up his bow of immeasurable power and shot a deadly arrow at me; but I struck it down in flight. The Rishis who watched were filled with horror and pity, but Bhargava felt only rage. I shot an arrow fulgurant as the fires of the pralaya, but Parasurama of the fathomless soul baffled my weapon. Clouds of dust obscured the splendour of the Sun as it moved to the western sky. Night came with its cool breezes, and both of us suspended our duel till the morrow.

In this way, stopping when dusk came and resuming at daybreak, we fought relentlessly for twenty-three days.'''

CANTO 186

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "That night, after paying my respects to the Brahmanas, the Rishis, the Devas, the creatures of the night and the kings of the Earth, I lay down on my bed, and in the solitude of my chamber I began to reflect.

I thought to myself, *The battle between Bhargava and me has gone on for many days without my being able to defeat this tejasvin. If indeed I am going to overcome Parasurama, then let the gods appear before me tonight.*

As I lay asleep on my right side, my body fairly mangled by arrows, the same Brahmanas who had lifted me up when I fell from my chariot on the field, and who reassured me then, appeared in a dawn dream. They stood around me and said:

'Rise, Kurupravira. Gangaputra, have no fear; we will protect you, for you are our own body. Jamadagni's son Parasurama can never vanquish you in battle. Instead, you will conquer him. In another life you commanded the matchless Praswapastra, which belongs to the Lord of all creatures, and which Tvashtri forged; it shall be yours again to invoke. Neither Parasurama nor anyone else but you knows it. Think hard of it, Mahabaho, and it will come to you on its own.

With the Praswapa, you can vanquish the greatest tejasvins of the world. But you will not be able to kill Parasurama, so you will not sin by using it

against him. Overpowered by the mighty astra, Parasurama will fall into sleep, and you will awaken him with the Sambodhanastra.

In the morning, from your chariot, do what we have said. We think of sleep and death as being the same; Parasurama will not actually die, but fall into a deathlike slumber. At the right moment, invoke the Praswapastra gladly and use it against the Bhargava.'

Saying this, those eight lustrous and identical Brahmanas vanished.”””

CANTO 187

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"'Bhishma said, "When the night passed, I awoke and, thinking of my dream, was filled with joy. Then, Bhaarata, we took to the field again and fought with so far unprecedented ferocity, so the hairs of all those who watched stood on end.

Bhargava unleashed a deluge of arrows over me, but I checked it with a rising shower of my own. Then, filled with wrath at what he had seen the day before and what he now saw, he hurled an occult spear at me, as hard and as brilliant as Indra's Vajra, like Yama's very mace. It flew towards me, flaming, hungrily consuming the whole battlefield, before falling on my shoulder like a bolt of lightning.

Blood gushed from me like streams bubbling down a mountain after rain. Shaken, stung, I shot a naracha like a venomous snake at him. It struck him on the brow, ah, turning him so handsome, like a crested hill. He assumed a fresh archer's stance, drew his bowstring taut and shot a deathly shaft at me. It streaked through the air and took me in the chest. I fell on the ground, covered in blood.

Coming quickly awake, I cast a dazzling missile, another veritable thunderbolt, which pierced his breast, so he trembled and, his eyes glazing over, swooned. Akritavrana held him close and comforted him. Waking, his eyes now turned red as plums, and Parasurama invoked the Brahmastra. I

called upon the same astra myself, and the two weapons fused high above us and broke into a conflagration that occurs only at the end of a yuga.

The sky was on fire; all the Earth's creatures were terrified; the Rishis, the Gandharvas and the Devas panicked; the Earth, her mountains, seas and trees shook violently; and every living being burned in the energy the fused astras radiated. As the sky blazed, all ten points of the horizon billowed with smoke, and sky creatures fell helplessly to the ground.

The whole world with the Devas, the Asuras and the Rakshasas cried out in terror, and I thought that the time had come for me to invoke the Praswapastra. At my very thought, the mantras for the astra flashed into my mind.”””

CANTO 188

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"'"Bhishma said, "A tumult of unearthly voices sounded in the sky, begging me not to invoke the Praswapastra. When I still aimed the astra at the Bhargava, Narada appeared there and said to me, 'In the sky, O Kaurava, are the Devas. They forbid you from what you are about to do. Do not loose the Praswapastra. Parasurama is a tapasvin of Brahma punya, and he is also your guru. Never humiliate him.'

As Narada spoke, I saw those eight Brahmanas in the sky. Smiling, they said to me, 'Bharatottama, do as Narada says, for it will benefit the whole world.'

I recalled that astra and invoked, instead, the Brahmastra. When Parasurama saw the Praswapastra being withdrawn, he exclaimed, *Bhishma, you have vanquished this wretch!*

Then he saw before him his father and his grandfathers. They stood around him and spoke words of consolation to him, 'Never again challenge Bhishma or any Kshatriya to a fight, Bhargava, for it is their dharma to fight and not yours. The study of the Vedas and practice of vratas are a Brahmana's greatest wealth. Once, we did indeed command you to take up arms, and you annihilated all the Kshatriyas of the world. Let this battle with Bhishma be your last, for you have done enough already. Retreat from battle, Mahabaho. Our blessings be upon you. Let this be the last time you pick up a bow. Throw your weapon away and return to your tapasya.

See how the Devas forbid Bhishma. They try to pacify him and make him desist from this battle; they try to prevent him from fighting against you, who are his guru, for, they say, it is not proper that he vanquishes you in battle. They tell him to do you every honour on the field. As his superiors they forbid him to humiliate you.

Bhishma is the greatest of the Vasus. You are fortunate to be alive. How can you defeat this son of Santanu and Ganga? Stop, Bhargava. Brahma has ordained that Indra's mighty son Arjuna will be the one to slay Bhishma.'

Parasurama answered his Pitrs, 'I cannot abandon a battle; that is my solemn vow. I have never yet given up a fight or left any battlefield. Pitamahas, if you so wish, tell Bhishma to stop, for I cannot.'

Hearing him, the Rishis with Richika at their head came to me with Narada and said, 'Bhishma, desist from battle. Honour your guru the Bhargava.'

I replied, 'In keeping with Kshatriya dharma I have sworn never to yield in battle, or turn my back, or allow arrows to strike me in the back. Not from temptation, distress, fear, or for any gain or wealth, renounce my dharma. In this I am resolved.'

All those tapasvins and Narada, as well as my mother Bhagirathi, stood on the battlefield before me. I stood quietly, with my bow and arrows as before, determined to fight on.

They turned towards Rama once more and said to him, 'The hearts of Brahmanas are soft like butter. Be pacified, Bhargava, give up this battle. You cannot kill Bhishma; and neither can he kill you.'

They stood between us as they spoke and made Bhargava set aside his weapons. Just then I saw those eight Brahmanas once more, irradiant, and like bright stars in the sky.

They said to me gently, with great love, 'Mahabaho, Parasurama is your guru; you must go to him first. Do what is good for the world.'

When I saw that the Bhargava restrained himself, I too, set aside my weapons, for the weal of the world. Although I was sorely wounded, I came before Parasurama and worshipped him.

The Maharishi smiled and, with great affection, said to me, 'There is no Kshatriya equal to you on Earth. Go now, Bhishma, for you have pleased me greatly in battle.'

He summoned the princess of Kasi into our presence and spoke to her with some regret in the midst of all those Mahatmans.”'”

CANTO 189

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Parasurama said, 'Devi, in the presence of all these great ones, I put forth all my prowess and fought as hard as I could. Even by using the most formidable astras I could not prevail over Bhishma. Beautiful Amba, go wherever you wish, unless there is something else you want from me. Seek refuge with Bhishma, for you have no other now. He has vanquished me in battle.' The Bhargava sighed and fell silent.

Amba said, 'Holy one, it is true what you say: Bhishma of the great intellect cannot be vanquished, even by the Devas. You have done what I asked, as best you could. You used tejas that cannot be dimmed and weapons of all kinds. Yet, you could not conquer Bhishma. As for myself, I will not go to Bhishma a second time. Instead, I will go to the place where I might acquire the means to kill Bhishma in battle myself.'

Saying this, Amba left, wild-eyed in anger, my death her sole aim, and resolved to devote herself to tapasya. Bhargava bid me farewell and, with the tapasvins, departed for the mountains from where they had come. I also left on my chariot, praised by the Brahmanas, and when I entered Hastinapura I told my mother Satyavati everything that had taken place; and she invoked blessings on me.

I sent forth trusted agents to discover where Amba had gone and what she did, and these loyal spies brought me regular reports of her, from day to

day. When Amba went into the forest, resolved to perform tapasya, melancholy and heartache gripped me and I became unwell. No Kshatriya can vanquish me in battle, other than one who knows Brahman, and who observes perfectly austere and praiseworthy vratas.

O king, I humbly told Narada and Vyasa all about Amba, and they both said to me, 'Bhishma, do not yield to sorrow because of the princess of Kasi. Who would try to avert destiny by his own efforts?'

Meanwhile, Amba went to live near some asramas and began practising tapasya so stern that it was beyond human endurance and belief. Without food, emaciated, dry, with matted-locks and grimy, for six months she lived only on air, and stood immobile like a post. After this, that devi, now rich in tapasya, fasted for a year, standing in the waters of the Yamuna. The whole of the next year, her anger unabated, she stood on her toes, having eaten only one fallen leaf. In this way, for twelve years, she scalded heaven with her austerities, and though her relatives tried to dissuade her, she would not be moved.

She then went to Vatsabhumi tirtha, the retreat of lofty, pious Rishis, and where Siddhas and Charanas lived. There she bathed frequently in the sacred waters and wandered about as she pleased. In this way she went to many tirthas, one after the other. She went to Narada's asrama, then to Uluka's, then to Chyavana's, then to the place most sacred to Brahmanas, then to Prayaga the yagnashala of the gods, then to that forest sacred to the gods, then to Bhogavati, then to the Viswamitra's asrama, to Mandavya's, to Dilipa's, then to the sacred lake Ramahrida, and then to the hermitage of Garga. In the sacred waters of all these places the princess of Kasi performed ablutions, while constantly observing the most difficult of vratas.

One day, from the waters my mother Ganga asked her, 'Blessed devi, why do you torture yourself like this? Tell me truly.'

That faultless princess answered with folded hands, 'O you of the beautiful eyes, Bhishma vanquished Parasurama. What other Kshatriya king would venture to face Bhishma in battle when he has his weapons raised? I am performing the severest tapasya in order to kill Bhishma. I wander over the Earth with just one purpose—that I obtain the means to kill that Kshatriya. Devi, in everything I do this is my only goal.'

Ganga said, 'Devi, what you do is not wise. Weak girl, you will never achieve your end. If you observe these vratas for Bhishma's death, and if you lose your own life whilst doing so, you will become a river in your next

birth, sourceless, its course crooked and filled only by rain water. All the bathing ghats along your course will be difficult to reach and filled only during the rainy season. You will be dry for eight months of the year. You will be full of terrible crocodiles and other frightful monsters. ‘

Speaking to Amba in this way, my mother Ganga, the thrice-blessed Devi, sent the princess of Kasi away. Amba renewed her tapasya, going without food and water, sometimes for eight months and sometimes for ten. She wandered here and there in her passionate quest of holy tirthas until she came back once more to Vatsabhumi. It is here that she became a river, filling only during the monsoon, abounding with crocodiles, her waters flowing a crooked course, and difficult to find or ford. But, O king, because of her tapasya only half of her turned into this river in Vatsabhumi, while her other half remained a woman.”””

CANTO 190

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "All the Rishis living in Vatsabhumi saw how intent the princess of Kasi was in her tapasya, and they tried to dissuade her from it. The aged ascetics asked her what she wanted, to which Amba responded, 'Bhishma cast me out and deprived me of the dharma of living with a husband. I keep these vratas for his destruction, and not to gain Swarga. O you of tapasyadhana, I will find peace only with Bhishma's death.

I will not rest until I kill the son of Ganga in battle. All my grief is because of him; he has robbed me of the punya I would have gained by having a husband; because of him I am neither man nor woman. As a woman, I no longer have any desire. I want to be a man, for then I can take my revenge on Bhishma. So, you should not try to keep me from my penance.' And she kept repeating this to the munis.

Soon, the divine lord of Uma, the Trisulin, appeared before that tapasvini who lived amongst the Maharishis. Mahadeva Siva told her to ask for a boon; she begged for my death.

You shall slay him, were the words Siva said to that devi of the great strength of mind.

Amba was reassured but said again to him, 'How can I, a woman, defeat mighty Bhishma in battle? Umapati, as a woman, my heart is perfectly

calm. However, you have promised me Bhishma's death. Vrishabdhvaja, do what you must to keep your word that I will kill Santanu's son in battle.'

The Devadeva said to Amba, 'The words I have uttered cannot be false. Blessed Amba, they will prove true. You will become a man and slay Bhishma. You will also remember everything about this life even when you inhabit a new body. You will be born in Drupada's house and become a Maharatha. You will be swift in the use of astras, and a fierce warrior; and you will be skilled in battle. O princess, all that I have said will be come to pass, in time.'

The god of gods, the Kapardin, who has the bull for his emblem, vanished while the Brahmanas looked on in awe. Without delay, that faultless and lovely princess, eldest daughter of the king of Kasi, gathered wood from the forest and, in the presence of those Maharishis, heaped a large funeral pyre on the banks of the Yamuna. She lit it, and eagerly entered the blaze, her heart yet another fire. As she walked into the flames, she repeatedly reminded herself of her purpose, *This I do for Bhishma's death*."'"

CANTO 191

AMBOPAKHYNA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana said, "Tell me, Pitamaha, how Amba, having been a woman, later became a man."

Bhishma said, 'Duryodhana, the eldest and beloved queen of king Drupada of the Panchalas was at first childless. Drupada went into the vana and worshipped Lord Sankara with a fervid tapasya for the sake of sons, for he wanted to have a son who would kill me.

He begged Mahadeva, 'Let a son, and not a daughter, be born to me. I want a son to take revenge on Bhishma.'

Mahadeva said to him, 'You shall have a child who will be both female and male. Stop your penance, king, it will not be otherwise.'

Returning to his capital, Drupada said to his wife, 'Devi, I worshipped Siva and He said to me that my child would be a daughter first and then become a man.

And though I asked him repeatedly, all Siva said was, 'This is fate's decree. It will not be otherwise; that which is destined must come to be.'

Drupada's queen came to Drupada as her fertile time drew near. Purifying herself, she came to him and in due time she conceived. Narada told me this. And that lady, of eyes like lotus-petals, held the embryo in her womb, and Mahababo Drupada saw to his beloved dear wife's every comfort. Kaurava, the queen of that childless lord of the Earth had all her wishes granted when she gave birth to a beautiful daughter.

The strong-minded queen announced that she had given birth to a son. King Drupada had all the samskaras prescribed for a male child to be performed for his daughter, as if she were a son. Drupada's queen guarded her secret closely; nobody in the city other than she and Drupada knew the sex of the child. With faith in what the ever-glorious Siva had said, the Panchala king also kept the secret, saying, *It is a son*.

Drupada named the child Sikhandin. But, through my spies and from Narada's news, I knew the truth, for I knew from my spies about Amba's tapasya and what Siva had promised her."''

CANTO 192

AMBOPAKHYNA PARVA CONTINUED

"""Bhishma said, "O Parantapa, Drupada paid careful attention to the education of his daughter. He taught her writing, painting and all the arts. In the astra shastra the child became a disciple of Drona. And when the time came, Sikhandin's lovely mother urged her husband to find a wife for their daughter, as if she were a son.

When the king saw that his daughter had reached puberty and her femininity become apparent, he spoke to his queen.

Drupada said, 'Our daughter, who fills me with sorrow, has attained maturity. On the strength of Mahadeva's word, I have so far kept the truth secret.'

The queen said, 'Great king, what Siva says can never be untrue! Why would the Lord of the three worlds say something that will not happen? If it pleases you, my husband, listen to what I have to say and then follow your own heart. Have our child married to a young woman, for Siva words can never prove false. Of this I am certain.'

The royal couple chose the daughter of the king of the Dasarnakas to be Sikhandin's wife. Drupada, lion among kings, made inquiries from all the kings of the world about the purity of her lineage before he chose this maiden. And Hiranyavarman of the Dasarnakas gave his daughter to Sikhandin.

Hiranyavarman was a powerful king, not easy to vanquish. He himself was irresistible and he had a large army. A while after the wedding, Hiranyavarman's daughter attained puberty. Sikhandin returned to Kampilya and his wife soon knew that her husband was a woman like herself. Shyly, Hiranyavarman's daughter told her sakhis and servant-maids about Sikhandin's secret.

The women who had come to Kampilya with the Dasarnaka princess were aghast and sent word to Hiranyavarman. When he heard about the fraud that had been perpetrated against him, Hiranyavarman was beside himself, and sent a messenger to Drupada's palace.

The king's messenger approached Drupada and said to him in private, 'Rajan, the king of the Dasarnakas is outraged at the deceit you have shown him. Sinless one, he is furious and he said these words to you:

Foolish Drupada, you have humiliated me by making my daughter your daughter's wife. Now reap the consequence of your vile deception; wait just awhile, and I will kill you with all your relatives and advisors!'" said Bhishma.'"

CANTO 193

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma said, "Drupada, found out, was numbed by Hiranyavarman's message. He made every effort to pacify the Dasarnaka king; he sent messengers to him with instructions to speak sweetly and persuasively. King Hiranyavarman, however, having confirmed that the child of the Panchala king was really a daughter, left Kampilya immediately.

He sent messages to all his powerful friends about what Drupada had done. That best of kings mustered a great army to march against Drupada. Hiranyavarman consulted his ministers, and it was decided that they should bind Drupada and drag him out of his city; and after installing another king to rule over the Panchalas, they would kill both Drupada and Sikhandin.

Hiranyavarman again sent a duta to Drupada with the same message, *I will kill you, just wait*.

King Drupada was not naturally brave and, because he was guilty, he was filled with fear. He sent his own messenger again to Hiranyavarman to placate him; and panic-stricken by now, he went to his wife to discuss the matter with her.

The terrified king said to his favourite wife, Sikhandin's mother, 'The powerful Hiranyavarman has gathered a large force and is coming here in rage. My queen, we have both been fools; what are we to do now about Sikhandin? Hiranyavarman and his allies want to kill me for deceiving him.

O you of the beautiful hips, tell me what you think, and I will decide what to do. I am in grave peril and so is Sikhandin. Why, my queen, you are also in danger. For all our sakes, tell me where you think dharma lies.

Although you misled me about my duty towards our son, who is no son at all, I show you both mercy. So have no fear, and do not let our daughter be afraid either.

I have indeed deceived the king of the Dasarnakas. Tell me what I must do now so that everything turns out well?'

Drupada had always known the truth about Sikhandin, but now he spoke to his wife in the presence of others in this way, to proclaim his own innocence. And his queen answered him.”””

CANTO 194

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"''Bhishma said, "Sikhandin's mother openly declared the truth about her daughter, keeping up the pretence that Drupada had not known the truth.

She said, 'I was childless, Rajan, and it was from fear of your other wives that, when she was born, I pretended that our daughter was a son. Out of your love for me, you did not question me and had all the samskaras for a son performed, for our Sikhandin. You had her married to the daughter of the king of Dasarnakas, and, remembering the words of Mahadeva, I approved of the wedding. I did not try to stop the marriage because Siva said*, She will be born a daughter, and she will become a son*.

Thus, subtly, Drupada Yajnasena informed all his counsellors of the truth, and sought their advice on how to protect his subjects from Hiranyavarman's invasion. Although he had himself deceived the king of the Dasarnakas, he made it seem as if he had not known about Sikhandin's sex; and then he turned his undivided attention to the looming threat from Hiranyavarman.

King Drupada's city was already well-protected, but he now bolstered its fortifications. The king and his queen were, however, consumed by the thought of how to avoid a war. Drupada began to pay fervent homage and adoration to the gods, and his wife did as well.

Then she said to him, 'Paying homage to the gods has its benefits and is approved of by the righteous. What shall I say of those that are plunged in

an ocean of distress? Pay homage to your elders and superiors and worship all the gods; making bounteous gifts to Brahmanas; pour oblations on the fire to pacify the ruler of the Dasarnakas. My lord, think of a way of pacifying Hiranyavarman without a war. The grace of the gods will help you make peace with him.

Take the counsel of your ministers for the protection of our city. Do everything they advise, for reliance on the gods, when supported by human effort, always leads to success. These two must go hand-in-hand; one by itself cannot be successful. So, consult your advisors and make every arrangement to defend our city, and also worship the gods.'

While husband and wife were conversing, both full of grief and fear, their hapless daughter Sikhandin was full of shame and guilt. Thinking that it was because of her that her parents were in such anguish, she decided to end her life. She left Kampilya, her heart breaking, and went into a dense and lonely forest that was the haunt of a formidable Yaksha called Sthunakarna, for fear of whom no-one ever entered that forest.

In that vana stood a mansion with high walls; it was plastered with clay and rich with smoke that bore the fragrance of roasted paddy. Sikhandini entered that mansion and began to emaciate herself by fasting for many days. The Yaksha named Sthuna, who was a kindly being, appeared before her.

He said to her, 'What is the purpose of your endeavour? I will accomplish it for you; tell me what it is.'

Sikhandini replied, 'You cannot.'

The Yaksha retorted, smiling, 'Accomplish it I will! I am a follower of the Lord of treasures and I can grant boons, princess. I will grant you even the impossible. Tell me what you want.'

Now Sikhandini told Sthunakarna everything that had happened, in detail. She said, 'O Yaksha, my father will soon meet his end. The king of the Dasarnakas marches against him in rage. Hiranyavarman in his golden armour is mighty and invincible. Yaksha, save me, my mother and my father! You have already said you will give me what I want. Through your grace, Yaksha, I want to become a man in all my parts. Be gracious to me, great Yaksha."'

CANTO 195

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

"''Bhishma said, "Bharatarishabha, the Yaksha heard Sikhandin's strange story and saw it was fraught with destiny, when she said, 'It was all pre-ordained, and it was ordained for my grief.'

The Yaksha said, 'Blessed princess, I will do what you wish. Listen, however, to the condition I have. For a specified time, I will give you my own manhood, and take your womanhood upon myself. But you must come back to me at the specified time. Promise me this, and you shall become a man. I am a ranger of the skies and wander at my pleasure; I have great powers and I can accomplish whatever I want. Take my boon, and save your city and all your kin. Swear in truth to return my manhood to me, and I will do what you want.'

Sikhandin said to him, 'Holy one of most excellent vows, I will return your manhood to you. Wanderer of the night, bear my womanhood for a short time only. After the king of the Dasarnakas, who wears golden mail, has left my city, I will become a woman once more and you will be a man again.'

Thus, the two made a pact with each other and exchanged their genders. The Yaksha Sthuna became a female, while Sikhandin obtained the resplendent form of the Yaksha.

Sikhandin of the Panchala vamsa entered Kampilya in great joy and approached his father. He told Drupada everything that had happened and

Drupada heard it and was very glad; and the king and his wife remembered Mahadeva's words.

Forthwith, Drupada sent a messenger to Hiranyavarman saying that his Sikhandin was indeed a son. Meanwhile, the king of the Dasarnakas arrived suddenly outside Kampilya and despatched a messenger to the Panchala king, a man who was one of the foremost of Vedic scholars.

The king of the Dasarnakas said to his messenger, 'O duta, say to that worst of kings, the ruler of the Panchalas:

O evil-minded one, you chose my daughter as a wife for your daughter. Today, you will taste the fruit of deception.'

The Brahmana messenger went before Drupada. The king of the Panchalas, with Sikhandin, offered the duta a cow and honey. However, without accepting that worship, the Brahmana delivered Hiranyavarman's rough message.

The duta said, 'My lord Hiranyavarman says: *O vile Drupada, you have deceived me. I will kill you and all your counsellors, sons and kin!*'

Forced to listen to King Hiranyavarman's censure in the midst of his counsellors, Drupada assumed a mild and friendly manner and said, "My reply to my brother's words I will send to him with my duta."

Drupada sent a Brahmana, learned in the Vedas, to Hiranyavarman.

The messenger delivered this message: "Sikhandin is my son, you can have him examined. Somebody has lied to you; do not believe the liar."

King Hiranyavarman of the Dasarnakas was filled with sorrow. He sent some beautiful virgins to ascertain the truth about Sikhandin's sex. These maidens returned and told the king that Sikhandin was a powerfully built man. The king of the Dasarnakas was filled with great joy. He accepted Drupada's hospitality and stayed happily with him for a while.

In his joy, he gave Sikhandin much wealth, many elephants, horses, cows and bulls. For as long as he was there, Drupada treated him worshipfully, and, before leaving, Hiranyavarman rebuked his daughter for what she had done. Sikhandin rejoiced that Hiranyavarman left in joy and with his anger pacified.

Meanwhile, a while after Sikhandin became a man, Kubera, in the course of his wanderings over the world, borne as always on the shoulders of men, arrived at the home of the Yaksha Sthuna. From the sky, he looked down at the Yaksha Sthuna's palace and saw that it was adorned with beautiful garlands of flowers, and perfumed with fragrant extracts of fine

grass and other sweet scents. It was decked with canopies, and incense wafted in the air. Beautiful flags and banners adorned the palace, which was filled with food and drink of every kind.

Kubera, lord of the Yakshas, saw Sthuna's glorious abode filled also with strings of jewels and gems, perfumed with the fragrance of many different kinds of flowers, well-watered and swept.

He said to the Yakshas in his train, "My mighty ones, grand indeed is this mansion of Sthuna's, but why does the wicked one not come out to greet me, though he knows I am here? He deserves some stern punishment."

The Yakshas said, "Lord, the king Drupada had a daughter born to him, named Sikhandini. Sthuna has given her his own manhood and become a woman in her place. He remains inside his palace because he is ashamed to come before you. Now do what you think is right."

Kubera ordered his chariot to stop there and Sthuna brought before him, still repeatedly vowing to punish Sthuna. Summoned by the lord of Yakshas, Sthuna came out and stood before his Lord, head bent in shame.

The Lord of treasures cursed him in anger, "Guhyakas, let this wretched Yaksha remain a woman!

Sinner, you have shamed all Yakshas by giving your manhood to Sikhandini and becoming a woman. You have done what no one has ever done before, and from this day you shall remain a woman and she a man."

Now all the Yakshas tried to pacify him for Sthunakarna's sake and begged him to limit his curse.

Kubera relented, "After Sikhandin's death, O Yakshas, this one will regain his own form. So, let the noble Sthuna not worry."

And the illustrious lord of the Yakshas received worship and departed with his colourful and wild people, who could travel great distances in short time. And, thus cursed, Sthuna continued living in his fine sanctuary.

When Hiranyavarman left, Sikhandin came at once to the Yaksha Sthuna, as he had promised. Sthuna was pleased that the prince had kept his word, and he told Sikhandin everything that had happened.

The Yaksha said equably, "O Kshatriya, because of you, Vaisravana cursed me. Go now and live happily amongst men as you please. Both your arrival and Kubera's visit were fated, and they could not be avoided."

Sikhandin went back to his city, full of joy. He worshipped the gods, the Brahmanas, the great ancestral trees and the crossroads with all kinds of

garlands and costly gifts. Drupada, king of the Panchalas, his son Sikhandin whose wish had been crowned with success, and his kinsmen, all rejoiced. The king sent his son Sikhandin, who had once been a woman, to Acharya Drona as a sishya. With all of you, Sikhandin mastered all four parts of the astra shastra, as did his brother Dhrishtadyumna.

Rajan, I gathered all this information through my spies whom I set on Drupada, disguised as fools or blind men.

This is how Maharatha Sikhandin of the Panchalas was born as a girl, and later became a man. And it was the king of Kasi's eldest daughter, Amba, who was born into Drupada's royal house as Sikhandin.

If Sikhandin comes to fight me, bow in hand, I will not so much as look at him, let alone attack that prince. The world knows that I have vowed never to take up arms against a woman, or one who was once a woman, or one who has a woman's name, or one who looks like a woman. I will not kill Sikhandin. Now that I know about this prince's past, I will not slay him in battle even if he rides at me with his weapon raised. If I, Bhishma, kill a woman, the righteous will speak ill of me." When he heard this, Duryodhana, after a moment's reflection, agreed with Bhishma.'

CANTO 196

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'When night passed and morning broke, your sons, standing in the midst of their vast legions, asked their Pitamaha, "O Gangaputra, Yudhishtira's army is ready for war; it teems with men, elephants and horses; Maharathas throng its ranks and protected by these mighty bowmen—Bhima, Arjuna and others headed by Dhrishtadyumna, who are all like the rulers of the world—that great force is impregnable, invincible; it resembles the endless sea. Even the gods cannot perturb it in battle; how long will it take you to raze Yudhishtira's army? How long will Acharya Drona need, and Kripa, and Karna who loves battle? How long will that Brahmanottama, Aswatthama son of Drona, need? My army has you all, who have devastras at your command.

I am beset by curiosity. Mahabaho, tell me what I want to know."

Bhishma said, "First among Kurus, your question about the strength and weakness of your enemy is worthy. I will tell you of my prowess in battle, of my own strength and the power of my weapons. One should fight common soldiers in a simple, straightforward way, but one must use cunning with those who resort to deception. This is the dharma of a Kshatriya.

I can indeed raze the Pandava army. Every morning, I can mark ten thousand common warriors and a thousand chariot-warriors to kill, and accomplish my task by dusk. So, given time, donning my impenetrable

kavacha and putting forth my tireless urjas, I can entirely destroy the vast enemy forces. However, if I loose my devastras, which consume thousands in moments, I can complete the massacre in a month."

Duryodhana then asked Drona, "Acharya, in how much time can you annihilate the legions of Pandu's son?"

Drona said, smiling, "I am old, Mahabaho. My tejas and urjas have both waned, but with the fire of my astras I can, like Santanu's son Bhishma, consume the Pandava army in a month."

Then Kripa declared that he could finish the enemy in two months. Drona's son Aswatthama swore that he would do the same in ten nights; and Karna, who commanded the most potent astras, claimed he would achieve that feat in five days.

Bhishma laughed aloud to listen to Karna, "Radheya, your vainglory will last until you encounter Arjuna, flying into battle on his chariot, with his conch, bows and arrows, and with Krishna beside him. You can say anything you like, for talk is cheap."'

CANTO 197

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "When Yudhishtira hears what the Kuru commanders said, he summons his brothers and speaks privately to them.

Yudhishtira says, 'The spies I sent into Duryodhana's army brought me news this morning.

They told me that Duryodhana asked Bhishma how long it would take him to raze our army and Bhishma said he could do it in a month. Drona declared that he could achieve the same thing in the same time; Kripa indicated twice that period; so we have heard. Aswatthama, who has powerful astras, said he would take only ten nights; and Karna, who, also, can summon the most devastating astras, declared that he could complete the slaughter in five days.

Arjuna, I want to hear what you have to say. How long will you take to vanquish the enemy?'

Dhananjaya, of the curly hair, glances at Krishna and says, 'Bhishma and all these other warriors are Mahatmans, masters of arms and all the methods and vyuhas of war. They can, doubtlessly, destroy our forces as they have said. But, my lord, dispel the anxiety in your heart. With Krishna beside me, from a single chariot, I, Arjuna, can incinerate the three worlds, with even the gods, and indeed all living creatures that were, are and will be in the blink of an eye. This is my belief.

I still command the awesome astra which Mahadeva, Lord of all creatures, gave me when I fought him hand-to-hand, when he came as a Vetala; the Pasupatastra is still mine. O Naravyaghra, I have, besides, the astra that Mahadeva uses to destroy creation during the Pralaya at the end of a Yuga. Bhishma knows nothing of that astra, nor do Drona, Kripa and Drona's son. How can the Sutaputra Karna have any knowledge of it? However, it is adharma, and a great sin, to use such devastras against ordinary mortals in war. We will vanquish our enemies in a fair contention.

Then, Rajan, look at all these mighty kings, your allies. They are all masters of devastras and all eager for battle. After their initiation into the Vedas, they have all performed the final ritual bath in great yagnas. All of them are undefeated, and they can vanquish even the host of the Devas in battle.

You have for your allies these incomparable Kshatriyas: Sikhandin and Yuyudhana; Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata vamsa; Bhimasena and Madri's twins; Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas; and Virata and Drupada who are Bhishma and Drona's equals in battle; Mahabaho Sankha, Hidimba's mighty son and his son Anjanaparva, whose strength and prowess defy description; Sini's descendant, Mahabahu Satyaki; and Abhimanyu and Draupadi's five sons.

And then, you, by yourself, Dharmaraja, can destroy the three worlds. O you who are blessed with the effulgence of Indra himself, I know, for it is manifest, that you can turn any man, whom you look upon in anger, to ashes.'"

CANTO 198

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "The next morning, under a cloudless sky, led by Duryodhana, all the kings in his army, prepare themselves for the great war, what will be the Mahabharata yuddha, against the Pandavas. They leave Hastinapura and go forth to Kurukshetra like a sea leaving its bed.

They take ritual baths of purification; they put on royal white robes and drape garlands around their necks. They pour ritual offerings onto sacred fires, and when they have received the blessings of their Brahmanas they take up their weapons and raise their standards. All these kings are knowers of the Vedas; they are courageous without exception, and have observed stern vratas. They are great warriors, and men of kingly generosity. Those mighty lords of the Earth, all of them equally confident of their own prowess and that of their companions, share the single-minded desire to attain mukti through battle: the greatest goal of any Kshatriya.

First, the Avantis, Vinda and Anuvinda, the Kekayas and the Bahlikas go forth with Bharadwaja's son, Drona, at their head.

Then come Aswatthama, Bhishma and Jayadratha of the Sindhus; the kings of the southern and the western countries and of the mountainous regions; Sakuni, king of the Gandharas, all the chiefs of the eastern and the northern regions, the Sakas, the Kiratas, the Yavanas, the Sibis and the

Vasatis with their Maharathas at the heads of their respective divisions: all these great chariot-warriors ride in the second legion.

And next: Kritavarman, at the head of his swarming troops; that Maharatha—the king of the Trigartas; Raja Duryodhana surrounded by his brothers; Sala, Bhurisravas, Salya and Brihadratha the king of the Kosalas. All these, with Dhritarashtra's sons at their head, make up the rear; they are magnificent warriors, without exception, and, uniting together in immaculate formations, their armour shimmering like some vast lake of lustre, they make camp on one side of the hallowed field of Kurukshetra.

Duryodhana has his encampment adorned to look like a second Hastinapura. Indeed, even the citizens of Hastinapura could hardly distinguish their city from the sprawling cantonment. By order of the Kaurava king, there are hundreds of thousands of inaccessible pavilions, each one as grand as his own, for every king in his army. The tents for the troops occupy five yojanas of the field, and the lords of the Earth and their fighting men enter those countless pavilions and tents, all richly appointed and replete with every excellent manner of provender and comfort, even like some unimaginable pride of lions.

Rare and of the finest quality are the supplies and comforts Duryodhana orders for the kings, their footsoldiers, elephants and horses, and all their followers. He makes more than ample provisions for the engineers, bards, singers and panegyrists loyal to him, for the vendors and traders, for prostitutes, spies and the people who have come to witness the great war."

CANTO 199

AMBOPAKHYANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Like Duryodhana, Yudhishtira, too, commands his heroic legions and warriors led by Dhrishtadyumna. He does this through his Senapati the Panchala prince, through Dhrishtaketu of the Chedis, Kasis and Karushas, as well as through Virata, Drupada, Yuyudhana and Sikhandin, and the two other Panchala princes, the peerless bowmen Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas.

These warriors in their shining kavachas, adorned with golden kundalas, blaze like flames in a ghrita-fed yagna fire and are as resplendent as the great planets in the sky. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja honours all his warriors and then commands them to take the field. He, also, provides the best of food and drink for the Mahatman kings, as also for their footsoldiers, elephants and horses, their camp followers and engineers.

Yudhishtira first has Abhimanyu, Brihanta and Draupadi's five sons set, with Dhrishtadyumna at their head; he then sends Bhima and Arjuna with the second division of his forces. The din that the men make as they harness their horses and elephants and load the chariots with weapons and other battle equipment, and the excited shouts of the soldiers, rises into the heavens. And last of all, the king himself sets out, with Virata, Drupada and all the other kings come to fight for him.

And the army of fierce bowmen that Dhrishtadyumna leads, which until now was gathered in one place, now streams into interminable columns, and

looks like the wide and turbulent Ganga. Yudhishtira sends forth his divisions in formations calculated to bewilder Duryodhana; and at this, he succeeds.

In Yudhishtira's first division ride the five sons of Draupadi, Maharathas; Abhimanyu, Nakula, Sahadeva and all the Prabhadrakas are part of this vast complement of warriors, as are ten thousand horses, two thousand elephants, ten thousand foot-soldiers and five hundred chariots. And Yudhishtira gives charge of this force to Bhimasena.

In the middle division of his army he places Virata and Jayatsena; the two Maharathas Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, those noble Panchala princes, both of great prowess and both armed with maces and bows; and Krishna and Arjuna, as well as countless other master warriors who seethe with rage and warlust. Countless are the valiant horsemen, five thousand the elephants, all these surrounded by fleets of chariots. A thousand fearless footsoldiers, armed with bows, swords and maces, march behind them and a thousand before them, all united in spirit and purpose like a single terrible Being.

In the oceanic division, in which Yudhishtira himself is, numberless great kings ride, along with thousands of elephants, tens of thousands of horses, and thousands upon thousands of chariots and footsoldiers.

Chekitana and the Chedi king Dhrishtaketu march with their own immense akshauhinis; with them rides the most brilliant Satyaki, best of the Vrishni Maharathas, whom hundreds of thousands of chariots surround. The Purusharishabhas Kshattradharma and Kshattradeva bring up the rear, where, also, are carts, stalls, wagons laden with battle-fatigues, other conveyances for immense stores of weapons and provisions, and draught animals, as well; here go thousands of elephants and tens of thousands of horses.

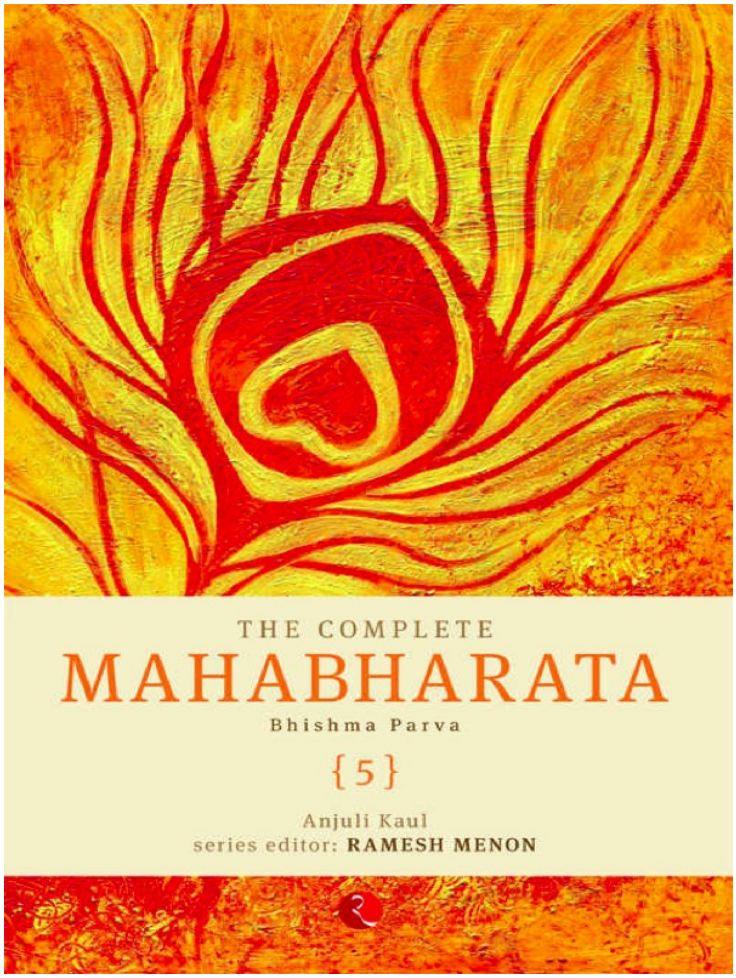
Yudhishtira goes forth slowly, majestically, his elephant divisions bringing all the sickly and women, all the emaciated and the weak to watch the great war; pack animals carry the Pandava king's treasures, and the contents of his granaries. The ever truthful and invincible Sauchitti follows him; and Srenimat, Vasudeva and the king of Kasi's son Vibhu, as well, with twenty-thousand chariots, and a hundred million mettlesome horses with bells on their legs. Twenty-thousand fighting elephants with curved tusks as long as plough-shares, all of the highest pedigree, and looking like

dark, rolling cloud masses, bring up the rear, ambling behind the kings, in lordly gait.

Besides these twenty-thousand war-elephants in Yudhishtira's division, are seventy-thousand more, in his army of seven akshauhinis. The juice of musth trickles down their trunks and spills out of their mouths, and they are like moving mountains with spring water flowing down them.

Thus does Yudhishtira array his awesome army, upon which he relies in the war against his cousin Duryodhana. Besides these that I have named, there are others: lakhs of smaller legions of free men, who follow the main body of Pandava army, roaring as they march. Thousands of warriors infused with the joy of imminent battle upon them beat thousands of drums and sound tens of thousands of booming conches," said Vaisampayana.

The End of Udyoga Parva


THE COMPLETE
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{5}
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Bhishma Parva

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For Richa, naturally.

And for Akshay, necessarily.

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CANTO 1

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRAMAN PARVA

AUM! Having bowed down to Narayana, and Nara, the most exalted of Purushas, and also to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of *Jaya!*

Janamejaya asked, “How did those heroes, the Kurus, the Pandavas and the Somakas, and the great kings assembled together from various countries, fight?”

Vaisampayana replied, “O lord of the earth, hear now how those heroes, the Kurus, the Pandavas, and the Somakas fought on the sacred plain of Kurukshetra. Seeking victory, the mighty Pandavas, along with the Somakas, advance against the Kauravas. Accomplished masters of the Vedas, they take great delight in battle. Eager for success, they and their legions face the war.

Approaching the army of Dhritarashtra’s son, those invincible warriors and their troops station on the western part of the plain, facing the east. Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, has thousands of tents erected beyond Samantapanchaka. The whole earth seems then to be empty, divested of horses and men, destitute of chariots and elephants, with only the children and the old left at home.

That immense force has come from all of Jambudwipa over which the sun sheds his rays. Men of all races assemble together and occupy an area of many yojanas over plains, rivers, hills and forests. That bull among men, king Yudhishtira, orders excellent food and other things of enjoyment for all of them and their animals. He fixes diverse code-words for them so that anyone saying these would be known as belonging to the Pandavas, and also gives names and badges to all of them for recognition during the war.

Seeing the standard-top of Pritha’s son, the great son of Dhritarashtra, with a white royal parasol held over his head, in the midst of a thousand elephants, surrounded by his ninety-nine brothers and allied kings, begins to dispose his troops against the son of Pandu. Seeing Duryodhana, the Panchalas, who take delight in battle, are filled with joy and blow on their booming conches and clash cymbals of sweet sounds.

Watching the happy troops, the hearts of Pandu's son and Vasudeva fill with joy. And those tigers among men, Krishna and Arjuna, seated together in one chariot, blow their celestial conches. And hearing the blast of the Panchajanya and the echoing blast of the Devadatta, the enemy soldiers are terrified, even as other animals are filled with fear on hearing the roar of the lion; many helplessly urinate and even defecate.

A frightful pall of dust arises and nothing can be seen, for, suddenly enveloped by it, the sun himself seems to have set. A black cloud pours a shower of flesh and blood over the troops all around. All this seems macabre and extraordinary. A wind rises, blowing along the earth numberless tiny stones, and harries the hundreds and thousands of fighting men.

Despite that, O king, both armies, filled with joy, stand keen for battle on Kurukshetra like two stormy seas. Indeed, that encounter of the two armies is wonderful, like that of two oceans when the end of the Yuga has arrived. The whole world is empty, having only the children and the old left at home, from that vast army having been mustered by the Kauravas.

O Bharatarishabha, then the Kurus, the Pandavas, and the Somakas make certain covenants, and agree on the laws governing the different kinds of combat. In order to fight fairly, men equally circumstanced must encounter each other. And if, having fought fairly, the combatants withdraw, they should be able to do so without fear of being attacked. Those who engage in contests of words should be fought with words. Those that leave the ranks should never be killed.

A warrior in a chariot should be opposed by another such warrior; one on the neck of an elephant should have a similar adversary; a horseman should be met by a horseman, and a foot-soldier, O Bhaarata, should be met by a foot-soldier.

Guided by considerations of fitness, willingness, daring and strength, one fighting man should strike another, after giving notice. An unprepared or panic-stricken opponent must not be attacked. A soldier who is engaged with another, or is seeking refuge, or retreating, or one whose weapon is broken, or one unprotected by armour, should never be shot at or struck. Charioteers, animals yoked to chariots or bearing weapons, men engaged in the transport of weapons, drummers and blowers of conches, must never be assaulted.

Having decided on these rubrics of battle, the Kurus, and the Pandavas, and the Somakas gaze at each other in awe. After positioning their troops, the exhilaration felt by these powerful and high-souled men is reflected in their faces, which shine.”

CANTO 2

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Seeing the two armies standing on the east and the west for the fierce and imminent war, the holy Rishi Vyasa, the son of Satyavati, learned in the Vedas, that grandfather of the Bhaaratas, trikalagyani, knower of the past, the present and the future, seeing everything every time as if they were before his eyes, says these words in private to the royal son of Vichitravirya, who is distressed and dejected, thinking of the evil policy of his own sons.

Vyasa says, 'Dhritarashtra, the day of reckoning for your sons and the other kings has arrived. Assembled for battle they will kill one another. O Bhaarata, their hour having come, they will all perish. Bearing in mind the changes brought on by time, do not grieve. O king, if you wish to see them fighting, I will grant you vision. Behold the war.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'O Maharishi, I would not like to watch the slaughter of kinsmen. I will, however, through your powers, listen to the details of this battle.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Upon his not wanting to see the battle but wishing to hear of it, Vyasa, that lord of boons, gives a boon to Sanjaya and says to Dhritarashtra, 'O Rajan, Sanjaya will describe the war to you. Nothing in the war will be hidden from his eyes. Endowed with celestial vision, Sanjaya will describe the fighting to you. He will have knowledge of everything.

Sanjaya will know everything: that which is manifest or concealed, occurring by day or by night, even that which is thought of in the mind. Weapons will not hurt him and exertion will not fatigue him. This son of Gavalgani will come out of the battle alive.

As for myself, I will spread the fame of these Kurus, and of the Pandavas. Do not grieve. This is destiny, O tiger among men. It does not become you to give way to grief. The war cannot be prevented. As for victory, it lies with the righteous.

There will be great slaughter in this war. I see numerous omens of terror. Hawks and vultures, crows and herons, together with cranes, alight on the tops of trees and gather in swarms. Delighted at the prospect of battle, these birds look down on the field before them. Carnivorous beasts will feed on the flesh of elephants and horses. Fierce herons, foreboding terror, and uttering merciless cries, circle across the centre of the field towards the south.

In both the twilights of every day, I see, O Bhaarata, the sun, while rising and setting, covered by headless trunks. Tri-coloured clouds with their white and red ends and black necks, charged with lightning, and shaped like maces, envelop the sun at both dawn and dusk. I see the sun, the moon and the stars to be all ablaze, with no difference in their appearance at nightfall. I have seen this all day and all night. All of it forebodes fear.

On even the full moon night of the month of Kartika, the moon becomes invisible, or turns the colour of fire, the sky being of the hue of a lotus. Many heroic kings and princes, with arms like maces, will be slain and strewn upon the earth. Every night, in the sky I hear the fierce cries of battling boars and cats. The idols of the Devas and Devis sometimes laugh, sometimes tremble; sometimes they vomit blood through their mouths, sometimes they sweat and sometimes fall down.

Drums, without being beaten, sound, and the great chariots of Kshatriyas move without being drawn by yoked horses. Kokilas, wood-peckers, water-cocks, parrots, crows, and peacocks utter fell cries. Here and there, cavalry soldiers, encased in mail, armed with weapons, shout fiercely. At sunrise, millions of insects fly everywhere in thick swarms. At both dawn and dusk, the four quarters of the earth seem to be on fire, and the clouds, Bhaarata, shower down dirt and flesh.

Arundhati, who is celebrated over the three worlds and applauded by the righteous, keeps her lord Vasistha at her back. The planet Sani appears to afflict the constellation Rohini. The sign of the deer in the moon has shifted from its usual position. A great terror is indicated. A dreadful roaring can be heard in the cloudless sky. The animals are all weeping, their tears falling fast.'"

CANTO 3

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vyasa says, 'Cows are giving birth to asses. Men desire sexual pleasure with their mothers. The trees in the forests exhibit unseasonal flowers and fruit. Pregnant women, and even those who are not, are giving birth to monsters. Carnivorous beasts and birds live and feed together. Ill-omened beasts, some with three horns, some with four eyes, some with five legs, some with two sexual organs, some with two heads, some with two tails, some with fierce fangs, are being born, and maws agape, utter unholy cries. Horses with three legs and strange crests, with four rows of teeth and horns, are also being born.

O Rajan! Strange sights are seen in your city: the wives of many Brahmavadis are giving birth to eagles and peacocks, the mare is bringing forth a calf and the bitch jackals and cocks, while deer and parrots all screech inauspiciously.

Some women give birth to four or five daughters together, who begin to dance, sing and laugh as soon as they are born. The coarse laughing, dancing and singing of the lowest born portend dire events. Infants, as if drawn by death, fight each other with clubs and break down the little towns they built while playing.

Many kinds of lotuses and lilies grow on trees. Fierce winds blow and dust flies everywhere.

The earth trembles frequently and Rahu approaches the Sun. The white Ketu stays still, having passed beyond the asterism of Chitra. All these prophesy the destruction of the Kurus. A fierce comet rises, afflicting the constellation of Pusya. This great thing will bring calamity on both the armies.

Mars spins towards Magha and Brihaspati towards Sravana. Sani approaches the nakshatra Bhaga, afflicting it. Sukra, ascending towards Purva Bhadra, shines brilliantly, and wheels towards and faces the Uttara Bhadra arranging itself next to a smaller planet. Ketu, blazing like fire

mixed with smoke, is stationary, having attacked the bright star of Jyeshta so sacred to Indra.

Dhruva burns strongly and turns to his right. Both the Moon and the Sun afflict Rohini. Ferocious Rahu has taken up his position between the constellations of Chitra and Swati. The red-bodied, fiery Mars orbits circuitously, staying aligned with the nakshatra of Sravana over-ridden by Brihaspati.

The Earth that produces crops each in their season is now covered with crops of every season. Every barley-stalk is graced with five ears, and every paddy-stalk with a hundred. When milked after their calves have suckled, cows, those best of creatures upon whom the universe depends, flow only blood.

Radiant beams of light emerge from bows, and swords shine brightly. It appears that the weapons can already see the war before them, as if it is already being fought. The weapons, the water, and the coats of armour all assume the colour of fire.

A great slaughter will take place. In this battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas, O Bhaarata, the earth will be a river of blood and the standards of warriors its rafts. The wild cries of animals and birds with blazing mouths are evil omens of dreadful outcomes. A fierce bird with but one wing, one eye, and one leg, hovering over the sky in the night, screams in such great anger, so as to make its hearers vomit blood.

It seems, O great king, that all weapons are now shining radiantly. The lustre of the Saptarishi mandala has been dimmed. Having approached the asterism of Visakha, Brihaspati and Sani, ablaze, have been still there for a whole year.

Three lunations twice meeting together in the course of the same lunar fortnight, the duration of the latter is shortened by two days. On the thirteenth day, therefore, from the first lunation, according to whether it is the day of the full moon or the new moon, the Moon and the Sun are afflicted by Rahu. Such strange eclipses, both lunar and solar, forebode a great carnage.

Overwhelmed by showers of dust, all the quarters of the earth look inauspicious. Predicting danger, angry clouds rain bloody showers during the night. Rahu of fierce deeds also balefully impacts the constellation of Krittika. Rough winds of evil omen are constantly blowing. All these will beget a war of numberless sorrows and untold grief.

The Nakshatras are of three types: the Deva, the Asura and the Manushya. A malignant planet casts its influence upon at least one of each, foreshadowing terrifying dangers. A lunar fortnight usually consists of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen days. Never have I known the day of new moon to fall on the thirteenth day from the first lunation, or the day of full moon on the thirteenth day from the same. And yet, in the course of the same month both the moon and the sun have undergone eclipses on the thirteenth days from the day of the first lunation. These will result in a great massacre of the earth's creatures.

Though drinking blood in mouthfuls, the rakshasas are not satiated. The great rivers are flowing back to their sources, and their waters have become bloody. The wells are frothing and bellowing like bulls. Meteors, effulgent like Indra's thunderbolt, fall in showers with loud hisses. This night will be followed by direst evil.

People will have to light torches when they emerge from their houses to assemble and still be enveloped in the encircling thick gloom. Great Rishis have said that in such circumstances the earth drinks the blood of thousands of kings.

From the peaks of Kailasa, Mandara and Himavat, thousands of explosions are heard and hundreds of great crags and peaks come crashing off their summits. Earthquakes swell the four oceans, which threaten to break their banks and sweep over the continents to drown the land.

Violent winds filled with sharp pebbles blow and mighty trees fall. In villages and towns both sacred and ordinary trees are struck by lightning and felled by savage winds. When Brahmanas pour libations onto the sacrificial fire, it burns blue, or red, or yellow. Its flames bend towards the left, giving off a vile stench and loud reports.

Touch, smell and taste, O king, have changed their very nature.

The flagstaffs of warriors tremble continually and emit smoke. Drums and cymbals shower coal-dust. And from the tops of tall trees all around, crows, wheeling in circles from the left, utter fierce cries of *paka! paka!* and perch upon the tops of standards for the destruction of the kings.

Demented wild elephants, their great bodies shaking in fear, dash here and there, spraying urine and dung. The horses in our stables are all melancholy, while our elephants wade into water. O Bhaarata, pay heed to all these omens, and do what needs to be done so that the world may not be completely destroyed.'"

Vaisampayana continued, “Hearing these words of his father, Dhritarashtra says, ‘I think all this has been preordained. A great slaughter of men will indeed take place. If the kings die in battle observing Kshatriya dharma, they will be assured a place in those blessed regions where heroes go when they die and will find only happiness there. These great Purushavyaghras, who give up their lives in this battle, will win fame in this world and great bliss in the next.’

O great king, thus addressed by his son Dhritarashtra, that prince of poets, the Muni Vyasa concentrates his mind in supreme dhyana. After meditating for a short time, Vyasa says, ‘Without doubt, O king of kings, it is Time that destroys the universe. It is Time also that creates the worlds. Nothing here is eternal. Show the path of dharma to the Kurus, to your kinsmen, relatives and friends. You have the power to restrain them. The slaughter of kinsmen has been declared sinful. Do not do that which is disagreeable to me.

Rajan, Death himself has been born in the guise of your son. Killing is never praised in the Vedas. It can never be beneficial. The members of one’s race are as the limbs and organs of one’s own body. Those limbs slay him that destroys them. Although you can well walk the righteous path of dharma, it is for the destruction of this race and of those kings of the earth that Time makes you deviate onto the evil path like one in distress.

O Rajan, your kingdom brings calamity upon you. Your virtue has been greatly diminished. Show your sons the meaning of dharma. You invincible one, of what value is that kingdom which brings sin upon you? Protect your good name, your virtue, and your fame. Then alone can you win heaven. Let the Pandavas have their kingdom, and let the Kauravas have peace.’

While Vyasa Brahmanottama is speaking, sadly, Dhritarashtra, the eloquent son of Ambika, once more addresses him, ‘My knowledge of life and death is similar to yours and I know the truth of these things. Yet when a man’s own interests are involved, he loses his discernment.

Father, I am like any ordinary man. I ask you to extend your boundless power to us. As a self-controlled soul you are our refuge and our guru. My sons do not obey me, great Rishi. I too am not inclined to commit this enormous sin. You are the cause of the fame, the achievements, and the inclination for virtue, of the Bhaaratas. You are the revered grandfather of both the Kurus and the Pandavas.’

Vyasa says, ‘Royal son of Vichitravirya, tell me openly what is in your mind and I will remove your doubts.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Holy one, tell me about all that happens to those that will be victorious in battle.’

Vyasa says, ‘The sacred fire glows and its light ascends upwards. Its flame bends towards the right. It blazes up without being smoky. The offerings poured on it give out a sweet fragrance. It is said that these are the indications of future victory. The conches and cymbals emit deep, sweet sounds. The Sun and the Moon emanate pure rays. It is said that these are the signs of future success.

Crows, whether stationary or in flight, utter agreeable cries. Those that are behind them, encourage the warriors to advance; while they that are ahead forbid all advance. Where vultures, swans, parrots, cranes and woodpeckers utter delighted cries, and turn towards the right, the Brahmanas say that victory in war is certain there. Those armies whose ornaments, armour and standards shine so brightly that one cannot gaze upon them, and whose horses neigh melodiously, will always defeat their enemies.

The warriors who utter cheerful, energetic shouts, O Bhaarata, and whose garlands do not fade, always win in battle. Having penetrated the legions of their adversaries with cheerful cries, they who utter kind words, even to the enemy, and warn them before attacking, are victorious. The objects of the senses, not changing for the worse, become auspicious. Another indication of a victorious army is the joy among the soldiers at all times. Other signs of success include favourable winds, clouds and birds, while clouds and the rainbows bring beneficial rain.

This, O king, is what happens to the armies about to be crowned with victory, while the opposite happens to those that are about to be destroyed. Whether the army is small or large, the morale of the combatants is said to be a sure indication of victory.

One panic stricken soldier can cause even a vast army to take flight. And when this happens, it frightens even heroic warriors. If such an army is once broken and put to flight, it cannot be stopped, even like a frightened herd of deer or a powerful wave of water.

It is impossible to rally a mighty army once routed; why, seeing this, even those best fighters lose heart. Watching frightened and fleeing soldiers makes the panic spread in other directions, and soon the whole army is

demoralised and scatters in all directions. And when an army is routed, even brave leaders cannot rally them.

Always exerting himself with activity, an intelligent man should strive to win success using peaceful means. It is said that the noblest success is that which is won through negotiation. That which is achieved by creating dissension in the enemy ranks is undistinguished. But the victory which is won by war is the worst.

There are many evils in battle, the first and greatest one being killing. Even fifty brave men who know one another, who are calm and determined, and free from family ties, can crush a large army. Even five, six, or seven men, who are unyielding, can achieve victory.

Vinata's son Garuda, O Bhaarata, did not ask for the help of many followers to defeat a great flight of birds. The numerical strength of an army is not always the reason for its victory. Victory is uncertain. It depends on chance. Even those who are victorious have to sustain losses.'"

CANTO 4

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, “Having spoken thus to Dhritarashtra, Vyasa departs. And Dhritarashtra, having heard those words, reflects in silence and soon begins to sigh repeatedly.

And then, Bharatarishabha, he tells the noble-souled Sanjaya, ‘O Sanjaya, these kings, these lords of the earth, so brave and taking pleasure in battle, are in favour of striking one another with a variety of weapons. They are prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of owning the earth. Impossible to restrain, they are, indeed, killing one another to increase the population of Yama’s kingdom. They are incapable of tolerating each other because of their desire to possess the earth and be prosperous.

Therefore, I believe that the earth must have many wondrous qualities. Tell me about these, O Sanjaya. Many thousands, millions, tens of millions, many hundreds of millions of heroic men have come together at Kurujangala. I want to hear in accurate detail about the locations and sizes of their countries and cities. Through the power of Vyasa’s boundless tejas, you are endowed with the light of divine vision and knowledge.’

Sanjaya says, ‘Wise king, I will describe to you the merits of the earth according to my knowledge. You can see them with your eye of wisdom. I bow to you, O bull of Bharata’s race.

Creatures in this world are of two kinds, mobile and immobile. By birth mobile creatures are oviparous, viviparous, and those engendered by heat and damp. Of these the foremost are the viviparous of which the leading ones are men and animals. There are fourteen species of animals, O king. Seven live in forests, and seven are domestic. Lions, tigers, boars, buffaloes, elephants, bears and monkeys are regarded as wild. Cows, goats, sheep, horses, mules, asses and men are the seven animals regarded as domestic by the learned.

These fourteen species of domestic and wild animals are mentioned in the Vedas, and sacrifices rest upon them. Of creatures that are domestic,

men are foremost, while lions are the foremost of those that live in forests. All creatures support themselves by living upon one another.

Vegetables are said to be immobile; their five species include trees, shrubs, creepers, creeping plants living for only a year, and all stemless grasses. Thus there are a total of nineteen species of mobile and immobile creatures, and there are five of their universal constituents, the panchabhutas.

These twenty-four are described as Gayatri Brahman as everyone knows. He who truly knows these to be the sacred Gayatri, having every virtue, cannot be annihilated in this world. Everything comes from the Earth and everything, when destroyed, merges back into the Earth. Bhumi is the home and refuge of all creatures, and it is eternal. He who has the Earth, controls the entire universe with its mobile and immobile creatures. It is for this desire to possess the Earth, that kings kill one another.'"

CANTO 5

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, so knowing of all things on the earth, the names of rivers and mountains, and its forests, and their dimensions, give me a detailed description of them all.'

Sanjaya says, 'Great king, since everything in the universe possesses the five elements, the wise deem all of them equal. These panchabhutas are space, air, fire, water, and earth. Their respective attributes are sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell. In addition to what is notably its own quality, each of these elements has the attribute or attributes of that or those coming before it.

The earth, say the Rishis, is the first among them all, possessing as it does the qualities of the other four, besides what is specially its own. Water has four attributes but not scent. Fire has three, sound, touch, and sight. Sound and touch belong to air, while space, akasa, has sound alone.

The existence of all living things depends, O king, on these qualities of the panchabhutas.

When the universe is held in balance, they exist in their natural state, separate and independent. When, however, they exist in conjunction with one another, then creatures with bodies spring into life. This is the unchanging order of things.

The elements are destroyed and the one succeeding merges into the one that precedes; and so also do they spring into existence, one arising from the one before it. All these are immeasurable, their forms being Brahman itself. In the world creatures consisting of the five elements can be seen. Men strive to discover their forms by using reason. However, inconceivable matters should never be sought to be understood by reason. That which is beyond human nature is an indication of the inconceivable.

But, O Kurunandana, I will describe to you the island of Sudarsana. This dwipa, Rajan, is formed like a wheel. Rivers and lakes cover it and its mountains look like a blur of massed clouds; it has many cities and

delightful regions. It is also full of blossoming trees, which bear sweet fruit, varied crops, and other kinds of wealth. The ocean of salt surrounds it on all sides.

As a man can see his own face in a mirror, even so is the island called Sudarsana seen in the lunar disc. Two of its parts seem to look like a pipal tree, while two others appear like a large hare. It is surrounded on all sides with an assortment of deciduous plants. Besides these, the rest is covered by water. I will describe more to you in brief, and the rest later. Now listen to what I describe in brief.'

CANTO 6

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'You are intelligent, O Sanjaya, and know the truth about everything. You have described the dwipa in brief. Now tell us about the island in detail. Tell me about the size of the expanse of land that looks like a hare. Then speak of the part resembling the pipal tree.'"

Vaisampayana said, "Sanjaya says, 'Stretching from east to west, between the two oceans, are six mountains of equal majesty. These are Himavat, Hemakuta, that most excellent mountain named Nishadha, Nila abundant with lapis lazuli, Sweta as white as the moon, and the mountain Sringavat made of many metals.

These six mountains are always the abodes of Siddhas and Charanas. A thousand yojanas lie between each of them, and many delightful kingdoms are situated there.

These divisions are called Varshas, O Bhaarata. Creatures of diverse species live in those kingdoms. The land where we are is in the Varsha named after Bharata. Moving northwards, the next is the Himavatvarsha. The land beyond Hemakuta is called Harivarsha. South of the Nila range and north of the Nishadha is a mountain called Malyavat that extends from east to west. Beyond Malyavat to the north is the mountain Gandhamadana.

Between these two lies the greatest mountain, called Meru, made of gold. Effulgent as the morning sun, it is like fire without smoke. Both its height and its depth measure eighty-four thousand yojanas. It stands bearing the worlds above, below and across.

Four islands are located near Meru: Bhadraswa, Ketumala, Jambudwipa otherwise called Bharatavarsha, and Uttara-Kuru which is the abode of men of dharma. The bird Sumukha, the son of Suparna, seeing that all the birds on Meru had golden plumage, thought that he should leave that mountain since no distinction could be made between the good, average and lowly

birds. The luminous Sun, the Moon with its attendant nakshatras and Vayu the Wind-god all circle Meru.

The mountain, O king, is abundant in celestial fruits and flowers, and it is dotted with sparkling golden mansions. There, on that mountain, the heavenly beings, the Gandharvas, the Asuras, and the Rakshasas, accompanied by the Apsaras, frolic and play.

There Brahma and Rudra and also Sakra the king of the Devas, assemble to perform many kinds of sacrifices with bountiful gifts. Tumburu, and Narada and Viswavasu, and the Hahas and the Huhus, go there to praise them with sublime hymns.

The great-souled Saptarishis and Kasyapa, the lord of creatures, go there on every parva day. Upon its peak, Usanas, Sukra otherwise called the Kavi, sports with his disciples, the Daityas.

All the jewels and gemstones that we see and all the mountains abounding in precious stones are of Meru. A fourth part of this is enjoyed by the holy Kubera. Only a sixteenth part of that wealth is given to men. On the northern side of Meru is the lovely forest of karnikaras, extending over a range of hills and covered with the flowers of every season.

There the illustrious Pasupati himself, the creator of all things, resplendent with his three sun-like eyes, surrounded by his celestial ganas and accompanied by Uma, wears a chain of karnikara flowers on his neck, which reach down to his feet. Only the ascetic Siddhas can gaze upon him for they are truthful, steadfast and practise austere tapasya. Indeed, Maheswara cannot even be seen by evil men.

From the summit of that mountain, like a stream of milk, O ruler of men, the sacred and auspicious Ganga, Bhagirathi adored by the most righteous, gushes like a cataract, with a tremendous sound, falling headlong into the delightful lake Chandramas.

Indeed that sea-like sacred lake was formed by Ganga herself. While leaping from the mountains, Ganga, too turbulent to be supported by even the mountains, was held for a hundred thousand years by Siva, the bearer of the Pinaka, on his head.

On the western side of Meru, lie Ketumala and Jambu-khanda, both great seats of humanity. There, O Bhaarata, the span of human life is ten thousand years. The men all have golden complexions, and the women are like Apsaras. They dwell in happiness without sickness or sorrow. The men born there are of the radiance of liquid gold.

On the summits of Gandhamadana, Kubera, the lord of the Guhyakas, with many Rakshasas and Apsaras, passes his time in joy. Besides Gandhamadana there are many smaller mountains and hills. The measure of human life there is eleven thousand years. There, O king, the men are most energetic, strong and full of good cheer; the women are all very beautiful, with the complexion of lotus flowers.

Beyond Nila is the Varsha called Sweta, beyond Sweta is Hiranyakavarsha, and beyond that lies Airavatavarsha, the vast. The last Varsha in the extreme north and Bharata's Varsha in the extreme south are both shaped in the form of a bow.

The five Varshas of Sweta, Hiranyaka, Elavrita, Harivarsha, and Himavatvarsha lie in the middle, and Elavrita is at the very heart of them all. Amongst these seven Varshas, the five already mentioned and Airavata and Bharata that which is further north surpasses the one to its immediate south in respect of the lifespan, stature, health, dharma, kama and artha of its inhabitants.

In these Varshas, O Bhaarata, creatures of diverse species co-exist.

Thus is Earth covered with mountains. The majestic mountains of Hemakuta are otherwise called Kailasa where Vaisravana passes his time joyfully with his Guhyakas. Immediately to the north of Kailasa and near the mountains of Mainaka there is a large and beautiful mountain called Manimaya with golden peaks. Beside this mountain is a great, splendid lake with crystal-clear waters called Bindusaras with a beach of golden sand on its shores. There seeing Ganga, since called Bhagirathi after his own name, the Rajarishi Bhagiratha lived for many years in an awesome tapasya.

Numberless sacrificial stakes made of gems and the Chaitya tree made of gold can be seen there. It was there that Indra of a thousand eyes and great fame gained spiritual triumph by performing a thousand sacrifices.

There the Lord of all creatures, the eternal Creator of all the worlds, Siva of supreme tejas, surrounded by his ghostly attendants, the ganas, is adored. There Nara and Narayana, Brahma and Manu, and Sthanu are ever present.

And there the celestial Ganga of three streams, issues out of Brahmaloka, and first shows herself; she then divides herself into seven streams, and becomes Vaswokasara, Nalini, the sin-cleansing Saraswati, Jambunadi, Sita, Ganga and Sindhu. The Supreme Lord himself arranged for the divine river, beyond human understanding, to flow from that place

down into this world. It is there that since the beginning of creation, on thousands of occasions, the Devas and Rishis have performed sacrifices, after every pralaya, when creation begins afresh.

As for the Saraswati, in some parts of her course she becomes visible and in some parts remains hidden. This celestial seven-fold Ganga is renowned across the three worlds.

Rakshasas live on Himavat, Guhyakas on Hemakuta, and serpents and Nagas on Nishadha, while Rishis dwell on Gokarna. The Sweta mountains are said to be the abode of the Devas and the Asuras. The Gandharvas always stay on Nishadha, and the regenerate Rishis on Nila. The mountains of Sringavat also are regarded as the resort of the gods.

Thus, O great king, is the world divided into the seven Varshas. Diverse creatures, moving and unmoving, are found in all of them. Both providential and human prosperity are seen in these realms. They cannot be counted. Those who want their wellbeing believe what I have now told you about this delightful land in the form of a hare about which you asked.

At the edges of that region are the northernmost and southernmost Varshas. I have described these as well. The two islands Naga-dwipa and Kasyapa-dwipa are the two ears of this great land shaped like a hare.

The beautiful mountains of Malaya, whose rocks look like plates of copper, are another prominent part of Jambudwipa whose shape resembles a hare.'"

CANTO 7

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me in detail, O wise Sanjaya, about the regions to the north and the east of Meru, as also of the mountains of Malyavat.'

Sanjaya continues, 'To the south of the Nila mountain and the northern side of Meru are the sacred Northern Kurus, O king, which are the home of the Siddhas. The trees there are always covered with sweet fruits and flowers. All the flowers are fragrant, and the fruits delicious. Indeed, some of the trees bear fruits according to the desire of the plucker.

Some other trees are described as milk-yielding. These produce milk and the six different kinds of food that taste of Amrita. They also provide cloth and in their fruits lie ornaments to be used by men.

The entire land is covered in fine golden sand. A part of the region has the radiance of gemstones like rubies or diamonds, or of the lapis lazuli. All the seasons there are pleasant and the land has no swamps.

The tanks are charming and full of delicious pellucid water. The men born there have descended from the Devas. All are of pure birth and extremely handsome. Of the fraternal twins the women resemble Apsaras in beauty. They drink the milk, sweet as Amrita, from those milk-yielding trees. Of the twins born there, both men and women possess equal beauty, both are endowed with similar virtues, and both equally resplendent, grow up in love, like a couple of chakravakas.

The people of that province are always happy and free from illness. They live for tens of thousands of years and never abandon one another. A species of birds called bharunda, who have sharp beaks and great strength, lift them up when they die and throw them into mountain caves. I have just described to you, O king, the Northern Kurus briefly.

I will now describe to you the eastern side of Meru. Of all the regions there, the best is called Bhadraswa, where there is a large forest of Bhadrasalas, and a huge tree called Kalamra which always bears flowers

and fruit. That tree is a yojana in height and is adored by the Siddhas and the Charanas.

The men there are fair in complexion, and possess great energy and strength. The women have the colour of lilies, and are very beautiful to behold. White and radiant, their faces resemble the full moon; their bodies are as cool as its rays. All of them are skilled in singing and dancing. The life span of humans there, O Bharatarishabha, is ten thousand years. They remain young by drinking the juice of the Kalamra.

To the south of Nila and the north of Nishadha, stands a gigantic Jambu tree that is eternal. Adored by the Siddhas and Charanas, that sacred tree grants every wish. This realm has been named Jambudwipa after this tree. That prince among trees, a thousand and a hundred yojanas tall, touches the very heavens. The circumference of its fruit measures two thousand five hundred cubits, and it bursts open when ripe.

These fruit fall on the earth with a loud sound, and then pour out a silvery juice. That juice of the Jambu becomes a river, and encircling Meru, reaches the land of the Northern Kurus. If the juice of that fruit is drunk, it produces peace of mind. After drinking it, no thirst is ever felt again, nor the weakening effect of ageing.

A type of dazzling gold of the colour of Indragopaka insects called Jambunada, used for celestial ornaments, is found there. The men born there look like the morning sun.

On the summit of Malyavat, the fire called Samvartaka can always be seen, which blazes forth to destroy the universe at the end of the yuga. There are many small mountains towards the east on its peak, and Malyavat, itself, measures eleven thousand yojanas. The men born there have golden-coloured skins and these Brahmavadis are descended from the world of Brahma.

They perform the severest tapasya, drawing their vital seed up into their bodies. For the protection of creatures they all enter the Sun. Numbering sixty-six thousand, they fly before Aruna, surrounding the Sun’s chariot. Heated by the sun’s rays for sixty-six thousand years, they then enter the Moon.’

CANTO 8

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, O Sanjaya, the names of all the Varshas, and of all the mountains, and also about all those that live on those mountains.'

Sanjaya says, 'To the south of Sweta and the north of Nishadha, is the Varsha called Romanaka. The men that are born there are fair in complexion, of good parentage, and handsome. These men also do not have any enemies. And they live joyfully for eleven thousand and five hundred years.

To the south of Nishadha lies the Hiranmayavarsha where the river Hiranvati flows. There, O king, lives that great bird named Garuda. And the people there are all followers of the Yakshas, wealthy, and attractive in appearance. These men are endowed with great strength and happy dispositions. And they live for twelve thousand and five hundred years.

The mountains of Sringavat, O ruler of men, have three beautiful summits. One of these is made of jewels and gemstones; another, also made of all kinds of gems, is adorned with palatial mansions. There lives the self-luminous lady named Sandili.

From the north of Sringavat upto the sea is the Airavatavarsha, the most excellent of them all because of the presence of this jewelled mountain. The Sun gives no heat to this land and men do not age or decay. The Moon and the stars in the sky are the only source of light.

The men born there have the radiance, complexion and fragrance of the lotus; even their eyes resemble lotus-petals. With unblinking eyes, and an agreeable scent, they live without food and have mastery over their senses. Descended from the heavens, they are all without any sin. They live for thirteen thousand years.

To the north of the milky ocean, the Lord Hari of unlimited strength lives in his golden chariot. That vimana, with the speed of the mind, has

eight wheels, with many supernatural creatures in it. It is the colour of fire, covered with Jambunada gold, and has a powerful energy.

Lord Hari is the lord of all creatures, and enjoys great wealth. The universe merges into him at the moment of Pralaya, and it again emanates from him when the desire to create takes him once more. He is the principal actor, and the One who directs the actions of others. He, O monarch, is earth, water, space, air, and fire. He is Yagna embodied for all creatures, and Agni is his mouth.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "When Sanjaya says this, the great Dhritarashtra becomes absorbed in thought about his sons. Having thought deeply, and filled with energy, he says, 'Without doubt, O Suta's son, it is Time that ends the universe. And it is Time that again creates everything. Nothing here is eternal. It is the all-knowing Nara and Narayana that destroy all creatures. The gods speak of him as Vaikuntha, of immeasurable might, while men call him Vishnu, one that pervades the Universe!'"

CANTO 9

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me Sanjaya about this Varsha that is named after Bharata, where this senseless force has been collected, a land which I know both my son Duryodhana and the sons of Pandu want to possess. Tell me about this place; you are all-knowing.'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen to me, O king. The sons of Pandu do not covet this earth. It is Duryodhana who is greedy, and Sakuni, the son of Subala, and many other Kshatriya rulers who are inimical towards one another.

I will now tell you about Bharatavarsha. This land is loved by Indra, and also by Manu, the son of Vivaswar. It is the beloved of Prithu, of Vainya, of the high-souled Ikshvaku, of Yayati, of Ambarisha, of Mandhatri, of Nahusha, of Muchukunda, of Sibi, the son of Usinara, of Rishava, of Ila, of King Nriga, of Kusika, of the great Gadhi, of Somaka, and of Dilipa, and also of many other mighty Kshatriyas.

Let me describe to you that land as I heard of it. Listen to me, Rajan, as I tell you about what you have asked me. Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Suktimat, Rakshavat, Vindhya, and Paripatra, these seven are the Kala-mountains of Bharatvarsha. Besides these there are thousands of unknown mountains that are tall and mighty cloven with wondrous valleys. There are also many other smaller mountains inhabited by barbarous tribes.

Aryans and Mlecchas, O Kauravya, and many other races drink the waters of these rivers: the magnificent Ganga, Sindhu, and Saraswati; the Godavari, and Narmada and the great Yamuna; the Drishadwati, Vipapa, Vipasa and Sthulavaluka; the river Vetravati, and the Krishna-vena; the Iravati, Vitasta, Payosyini and Devika; the Vedasmrita, Vedavati, Tridiva and Ikshumalavi.

They also drink from the Karishini, Chitravaha, and Chitrasena; of Gomati, and Dhutapada and the mighty Gandaki, of Kausiki, Nischitra, Kirtya, Nichita and Lohatarini; of Rashasi and Satakumbha, and also the Sarayu; of Charmanwati, and Vetravati, and Hastisoma, and Disa; of the

river called Saravati, and Venna and Bhimarathi; of Kaveri, Chuluka, Vina, and Satabala; of Nivara, and Mahila, and Suprayoga; of Pavitra, and Kundala, and Rajani, and Puramalini; of Purvabhirama, and Vira, and Bhima, and Oghavati; of Palasini, and Papahara, and Mahendra, and Patalavati, of Karishini, and Asikni, and the wide Kusachira; of Makari, and Pravara, and Mena, and Hema, and Dhritavati; of Puravati, and Anushna, and Saivya, and Kapi, O Bhaarata; of Sadanira, and Adhrishya, and the great stream Kusadhara; of Sadakanta, and Siva, and Viravati; of Vatsu, and Suvastu, and Kampana with Hiranwati; of Vara, and the mighty river Panchami, of Rathachitra, and Jyotiratha, and Viswamitra, and Kapinjala; of Upendra, and Bahula, and Kuchira, and Madhuvahini: of Vinadi, and Pinjala, and Vena, and the mighty Pungavena; of Vidisa and Krishna-vena, and Tamra, and Kapila, of Salu, and Suvama, the Vedaswa, and the mighty river Harisrava; of Sighra, and Pischala, and the river Bharadwaji, of the river Kausiki, and Sona, and Chandrama; of Durgamantrasila, and Brahma-bodhya, and Brihadvati; of Yaksha, and Rohi, and Jambunadi; of Sunasa and Tamasa, and Dasi, and Vasa, and Varuna, and Asi; of Nila, and Dhrimati, and the Parnasa; of Pomasi, and Vrishabha, and Brahma-meddhya, and Brihaddhani.

These they drink from, and many other great rivers, like the Sadonirmaya and Krishna, and Mandaga, and Mandavahini; and Mahagouri, and Durga, O Bhaarata; and Chitropala. Chitraratha, and Manjula, and Vahini; and Mandakini, and Vaitarani, and Kosa, and Mahanadi; and Suktimati, and Ananga, and Pushpaveni, and Utpalavati; and Lohitya, Karatoya, and Vrishasabhya; and Kumari, and Rishikulya and Marisha, and Saraswati; and Mandakini, and Supunya, Sarvasanga.

These rivers, O Bhaarata, are all mothers of the universe and confer deep punya. Besides these, there are hundreds and thousands of rivers whose names are not known. I have now recounted to you all the rivers I remember.

Now listen to the names of the peoples of the various kingdoms. They are the Kuru-Panchalas, the Salwas, the Madreyas, the Jangalas, the Surasena, the Kalingas, the Bodhas, the Malas, the Matsyas, the Saubalyas, the Kuntalas, the Kasi-kosalas, the Chedis, the Karushas, the Bhojas, the Sindhus, the Pulindakas, the Uttamas, the Dasarnas, the Mekalas, the Utkalas; the Panchalas, the Kausijas, the Nikarprishthas, Dhurandharas; the

Sodhas, the Madrabhujingas, the Kasis, and the Ati-Kasis; the Jatharas, the Kukuras, O Bhaarata.

There are the Kuntis, the Avantis, and the further-Kuntis; the Gomantas, the Mandakas, the Shandas, the Vidarbhas, the Rupavahikas; the Aswakas, the Pansurashtras, the Goparashtras, and the Karityas; the Adhirjayas, the Kuladyas, the Mallarashtras, the Keralas, the Varatrasyas, the Apavahas, the Chakras, the Vakratapas, the Sakas; the Videhas, the Magadhas, the Swakshas, the Malayas, the Vijayas, the Angas, the Vangas, the Kalingas, the Yakrillomans; the Mallas, the Suddellas, the Pranradas, the Mahikas, the Sasikas.

There are the Balhikas, the Vatadhanas, the Abhiras, the Kalajoshakas; the Aparantas, the Parantas, the Pahnabhas, the Charmamandalas; the Atavisikharas, the Mahabhutas, O Sire; the Upavrittas, the Anupavrittas, the Surashatras, Kekayas; the Kutas, the Maheyas, the Kakshas, the Samudranishkutas; the Andhras, and many hilly tribes, and many tribes living on lands in the foothills, and the Angamalajas, and the Manavanjakas; the Pravisheyas, and the Bhargavas; the Pundras, the Bhargas, the Kiratas, the Sudeshnas, and the Yamunas, the Sakas, the Nishadhas, the Anartas, the Nairittas.

There are the Durgalas, the Pratimasyas, the Kuntalas, and the Kusalas; the Tiragrahas, the Ijakas, the Kanyakagunas, the Tilabharas, the Samiras, the Madhumattas, the Sukandakas; the Kasmiras, the Sindhusauviras, the Gandharvas, and the Darsakas; the Abhisaras, the Utulas, the Saibalas, and the Valhikas; the Darvis, the Vanavadarvas, the Vatagas, the Amarathas, and the Uragas; the Bahuvadhas, the Kauravyas, the Sudamanas, the Sumalikas; the Vadhras, the Karishakas, the Kalindas, and the Upatyakas; the Vatayanas, the Romanas, and the Kusavindas; the Kacchas, the Gopalkacchas, the Kuruvarnakas; the Kiratas, the Varvasas, the Siddhas, the Vaidehas, and the Tamraliptas; the Aundras, the Paundras, the Saisikatas, and the Parvatiyas.

There are other kingdoms, O bull of Bharata's vamsa, in the south. They are the Dravidas, the Keralas, the Prachyas, the Mushikas, and the Vanavashikas; the Karanatakas, the Mahishakas, the Vikalpas, and also the Mushakas; the Jhillikas, the Kuntalas, the Saunridas, and the Nalakananas; the Kankutakas, the Cholas, and the Malavayakas; the Samangas, the Kanakas, the Kukkuras, and the Angara-marishas; the Samangas, the Karakas, the Kukuras, the Angaras, and the Marishas.

There are also the Dhwajinis, the Utsavas, the Sanketas, the Trigartas, and the Salwasena; the Bakas, the Kokarakas, the Pashtris, and the Lamavegavasas; the Vindhyachulakas, the Pulindas, and the Valkalas; the Malavas, the Vallavas, the further-Ballavas, the Kulindas, the Kalavas, the Kuntaukas, and the Karatas; the Mrishakas, the Tanavalas, the Saniyas; the Alidas, the Pasivatas, the Tanayas, and the Sulanyas; the Rishikas, the Vidarbhas, the Kakas, the Tanganas, and the further-Tanganas.

Among the tribes of the north are the Mlecchas, and the Kruras, O best of the Bhaaratas; the Yavanas, the Chinas, the Kambojas, the Darunas, and many Mleccha tribes; the Sukritvahas, the Kulatthas, the Hunas, and the Parasikas; the Ramanas, and the Dasamalikas. These countries are, besides, the abodes of many Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra tribes.

Then again there are the Sudra-abhiras, the Dardas, the Kasmiras, and the Pattis; the Khasiras; the Atreyas, the Bharadwajas, the Stanaposhikas, the Poshakas, the Kalingas, and diverse tribes of Kiratas; the Tomaras, the Hansamargas, and the Karamanjakas. These and other kingdoms are on the east and on the north. My Lord, alluding to them briefly, I have told you all.

If the Earth's resources are properly used according to their qualities and nature, Bhumi is like an ever-yielding cow, which may be milked for its fruits of dharma, artha and kama.

Powerful kings who know of dharma and artha have become greedy for the Earth. They are restless in their craving for this wealth, for which they are willing to sacrifice their very lives in battle.

Bhumi is the home of both creatures with heavenly bodies and those with human ones. Wanting to enjoy the pleasures of Earth, the kings have become like dogs that snatch meat from one another. Their unbounded ambition cannot be satisfied.

It is for this that the Kurus and the Pandavas are striving for possession of Earth, by negotiation, creation of discord, bribery, and battle. If Earth is well nurtured, it becomes the father, mother, children, sky and heaven of all creatures, O Purusharishabha.'

CANTO 10

JAMBU-KHANDA NIRMANA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, Sanjaya, in detail, about the lifespan, the strength, the virtues and vices, the future, past and present, of the people of Bharatavarsha, of Himavatvarsha, and also of Harivarsha.'

Sanjaya says, 'Bharatarishabha, the four yugas set in Bharata's Varsha are Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. The yuga that comes first is Krita; next comes Treta; after Treta comes Dwapara; and at the very end, the Kali.

In the Krita Yuga, men live for four thousand years, while in the age of Treta they live three thousand years. At present in Dwapara, men live on Earth for two thousand years. In the Kali, however, there is no fixed measure of life, so much so that men sometimes die while still in the womb, or soon after birth.

In the Krita Yuga, men are born and have children, in hundreds and thousands. They have great strength and power, and are endowed with great wisdom, wealth and beauty. In that age Munis are born with the knowledge of asceticism and are naturally capable of great tapasya. They have great souls, are virtuous and truthful in speech.

The Kshatriyas born in that age are agreeable in appearance and able-bodied. Having great tejas, they are accomplished in the use of the bow, highly skilled in battle and brave.

In the Treta Yuga, all the Kshatriya kings are emperors ruling vast lands, which extend from sea to sea. They give birth to invincible warriors, who enjoy long lives, are heroic, and wield the bow in battle with great skill.

When the Dwapara sets in, all the four varnas born are energetic and ambitious, wishing to conquer one another.

The men born in the Kali Yuga have little energy, and are given to anger, greed and dishonesty. Jealousy, pride, anger, deception, malice and covetousness, O Bhaarata, are the qualities of the creatures in this age. A small part of the Dwapara Yuga remains before the advent of Kali.

With respect to all qualities the Varsha known as Himavat is superior to Bharatavarsha, while Harivarsha is more excellent than Himavatvarsha.’

CANTO 11

BHUMI PARVA

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, you have described Jambu-khanda to me. Now tell me of its size and expanse. Tell me also, in detail and without omission, about the extent of the ocean of Sakadwipa, and Kusadwipa, of Salmalidwipa and Kraunchadwipa. Tell me also of Rahu, Soma and Surya.'

Sanjaya says, 'There are many islands, over which the Earth extends. I will speak of only seven islands to you, and of the Moon, and the Sun, and the planet Rahu.

The Jambu mountain spreads across eighteen thousand six hundred yojanas. The extent of the ocean of salt is said to be twice this size. That ocean is dotted with many kingdoms, and is adorned with precious stones and corals. It is also covered with mountains made of many metals. Thickly peopled by Siddhas and Charanas, the ocean is circular in form.

I will now speak to you of Sakadwipa; listen to me, O Bhaarata, as I describe it. That island is twice the size of Jambudwipa and the ocean is twice the extent of that island. Indeed, Sakadwipa is surrounded by the ocean on all sides. The kingdoms there are infused with dharma, and the men there live eternal lives. How can famine occur there? The people are all full of forgiveness and great tejas.

I have now briefly described Sakadwipa to you. What else, O king, do you wish to know?'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You have given me, wise Sanjaya, a brief description of Sakadwipa; now tell me everything in detail.'

Sanjaya says, 'On that island, there are seven mountains strewn with jewels and have mines of gemstones. There are also many rivers whose names I will recount to you. Everything there is excellent and delightful.

The first mountain is named Meru. It is the home of the Devas, Rishis, and Gandharvas. The next mountain is called Malaya, stretching towards the east. It is there that clouds arise, and from there they scatter in all directions. The next one is Jaladhara from where Indra daily draws the finest water. It is from this water that we get seasonal rain.

Over the next high mountain called Raivataka, the constellation of Revati has been fixed in the sky. Brahma himself has done this.

To the north of this is the lofty mountain Syama. Its beautiful bright body is made brilliant by ascending clouds. And since those mountains are dark, the people living there are all dark in complexion.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'A great doubt arises in my mind because of what you say. Why do the people there have dark complexions?'

Sanjaya says, 'On all islands, there are fair and dark men, and those produced by a union of the fair and the dark races. But that mountain is called the Dark Mountain because all its people are dark. Beyond this lies the great mountain called Durgasaila, and the next one is called Kesari. The breezes that blow from that mountain carry sweet fragrances. The height of each mountain is twice that of the one mentioned immediately before it.

O Kurunandana, the wise say that there are seven Varshas in that island. The Varsha of Meru is called Mahakasa; that of the water-giving Malaya is called Kumudottara. The Varsha of Jaladhara is called Sukumara: while that of Raivataka is called Kaumara; and of Syama, Manikanchana. The Varsha of Kesara is called Mandaki, and that named after the next mountain is called Mahapuman.

At the heart of that Dwipa is a mighty tree called Saka equal in height and breadth to the Jambu tree in Jambudwipa and the people there always worship the Saka.

In the many delightful provinces of that island, Siva is worshipped, and it is there that the Siddhas, the Charanas, and the unearthly beings find rest and rejuvenation. The people are virtuous, and all the four varnas devote themselves to their svadharma. There is no theft. Freed from decay and death and gifted with long lives, the people grow as rivers during the monsoon rains.

The rivers there are full of holy water. Ganga herself, divided into many streams, is there, as are Sukumari, Kumari, Seta, Keveraka, and Mahanadi; so also are the rivers Manijala, Chakshus, and Vardhanika, O Bharatottama. There are other innumerable sacred rivers, from which Indra draws water for showering rain. It is impossible to recount the names and lengths of all these rivers. All of them are awesome and sin-cleansing.

There are four sacred provinces known to men on the island of Saka. They are the Mrigas, the Masakas, the Manasas, and the Mandagas. The Mrigas are largely inhabited by Brahmanas devoted to their svadharma.

Amongst the Masakas are virtuous Kshatriyas who grant the Brahmanas their every wish.

The Manasas live by following the duties of the Vaisya order. They, too, have all their desires fulfilled; they are brave and steadfast in their devotion to dharma and artha. The Mandagas are all brave and upright Sudras.

In these lands there is no king, no punishment, indeed no person that deserves to be punished. They are all conversant with and diligently engaged in the practice of their respective duties and protect one another. This is what can be said about Sakadwipa.

To listen to the description of this great island also confers merit on the listener.'

CANTO 12

BHUMI PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'O Bhaarata, I will tell you about what is known of the islands in the north. Listen to me. In the north, the first ocean has waters of ghee. Then is the ocean whose waters are curds. Next comes the ocean whose waters are wine, and then is another ocean of water. The islands double in area as we proceed further north and these oceans surround them.

In the centremost island is a lofty mountain called Goura made of red arsenic; on the western island is the mountain Krishna, the favourite abode of Vishnu. There celestial gemstones are found in abundance, guarded by Kesava who, inclined to grace, bestows happiness on all creatures.

Along with the kingdoms there, a field of divine Kusa grass in Kusadwipa and the Salmali tree in Salmalika are adored.

In the Kraunchadwipa the mountain called Maha-krauncha is a mine of precious stones and is worshipped by all the varnas. On the mighty Gomanta, rich in all kinds of precious metals, lives the mighty Narayana, endowed with wealth and eyes like lotus leaves, with those who have attained moksha.

In Kusadwipa there is another mountain mottled with varicoloured corals and named after that island itself. This mountain is inaccessible and made of gold. O Kauravya, there is another splendid mountain there called Sumida. The sixth is called Harigiri.

These are the six principal mountains. The intervening space between these mountains doubles, moving further and further towards the north.

The first Varsha is called Audhido; the second is Venumandala; the third is called Suratha; the fourth is known by the name Kamvala; the fifth Varsha is called Dhritimat; and the sixth is Prabhakara; the seventh Varsha is called Kapila. These are the seven successive Varshas.

In these, Devas and Gandharvas, and other beings of the universe, sport and find their delight. The inhabitants of these Varshas are immortal. There are no robbers, nor any tribes of Mlecchas. All those who live there are almost white in complexion and very delicate.

As for the rest of the Dwipas, I will tell you all that I have heard. Listen with an attentive mind. In the Kraunchadwipa there is a towering mountain called Krauncha. Next to Krauncha is Vamanaka; and next to Vamanaka stands Andhakara. And next to Andhakara is that excellent massif Mainaka. After Mainaka lies the most wonderful of mountains called Govinda; and after Govinda is the mountain called Nivida.

Rajan, the spaces between these mountains increase twofold. I will now tell you about the lands that lie there. Listen to me.

The land near Krauncha is called Kusala; that near Vamanaka is Manonuga; that next to Manonuga is Ushna. After Ushna is Pravaraka; and after Pravaraka is Andhakaraka. The country after Andhakaraka is Munidesa. After Munidesa, in the land called Dundubhiswana live Siddhas and Charanas. The people there are almost white in complexion.

All these lands are inhabited by Devas and Gandharvas. In the island of Pushkara is a mountain by the same name, rich in jewels and gemstones. There dwells Prajapati himself praised and worshipped by all the Devas and Maharishis. A variety of precious stones from Jambudwipa is found there, and used for diverse purposes.

In all these islands the celibacy, honesty, discipline, health and lifespan of the inhabitants doubles as one moves northwards.

The land in those Dwipas, O Bhaarata, comprises but one country in which but one religion prevails. The Supreme Prajapati himself lives there; he holds the danda of chastisement and protects those islands. He is the king and the source of their bliss. He is the father, and the grandfather; he protects all creatures there, mobile or immobile. Cooked food appears by itself and is enjoyed by the people.

Mahabaho, after these vast lands can be seen Sama, a starshaped land with four corners, and thirty-three mandalas. There, O Kauravya, live four grand elephants adored by all. They are Vamana, Airavata, Supratika and Sarvabhauma. All efforts to calculate the proportions of these four Diggajas are fruitless. Their length, breadth and width remain unknown.

In those regions winds blow irregularly from all directions and are caught by those elephants with the tips of their splendid trunks that have the colour of lotuses and can draw up everything in their path. They then exhale to release these winds which then arrive on Earth thus allowing all creatures to breathe and live.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘You have, Sanjaya, told me everything about the first subject in detail. You have also indicated the positions of the islands. Speak to me now about what remains.’

Sanjaya says, ‘Indeed, O great king, the Dwipas have all been described to you. Listen now to what I tell you about the heavenly bodies and about the size of Swarbhanu. The planet Swarbhanu is large and round with a diameter of twelve thousand yojanas, and a circumference of forty-two thousand yojanas, according to the learned of ancient times.

The diameter of the moon is said to be eleven thousand yojanas while its circumference is declared to be thirty-eight thousand nine hundred yojanas of the illustrious planet of cool rays.

Anagha, sinless, it has been said that the great, swift, beneficent, and luminous Sun, is ten thousand yojanas across, and thirty-five thousand eight hundred around. These are the dimensions estimated here, O Rajan, of Arka.

The planet Rahu, on account of his great size, eclipses both the Sun and the Moon at regular intervals. I recount this to you briefly. I have now given you answers to all your questions. Let peace be yours. I have told you about the construction of the universe as indicated in the Shastras. Therefore, O Kauravya, pacify your son Duryodhana.

Having listened to this charming Bhumi Parva, a Kshatriya is endowed with prosperity, obtains the fruit of his desires, and wins the approval of the righteous. The king who listens to this on days of the full moon or the new moon, while carefully observing vows, finds enhancement in his lifespan, his fame and energy. The spirits of his ancestors are appeased. You have now heard of all the merits that flow from Bharatavarsha!’

CANTO 13

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Knowing the past, the present and the future, and seeing all things as if present before his eyes, Sanjaya rushes grief stricken into court from the battlefield. To Dhritarashtra, who sits lost in thought, he announces that Bhishma the grandfather of the Bhaaratas has been killed.

Sanjaya says, 'I am Sanjaya, O great king. I bow to you. Bhishma, the son of Shantanu and the grandsire of the Bhaaratas, has been cut down in battle. That foremost of all warriors, that Pitamaha of the Bhaaratas, is fallen. That greatest Kshatriya, who embodied the urjas of all archers, that grandfather of the Kurus, lies today on a bed of arrows.

That Bhishma, on whose strength your son relied as he played the game of dice, now lies on the battlefield felled by Sikhandin. That Maharathika who defeated all the kings of the Earth gathered together in a fierce contention at the city of Kasi, he who fearlessly fought Rama, the son of Jamadagni, oh, even he has today fallen to Sikhandin.

Resembling the great Indra himself in courage, and Himavat in firmness, like the ocean in gravity, and the Earth herself in patience, that invincible warrior with arrows for teeth, a bow for his mouth, and a sword for his tongue, that lion among men, has been brought to grief by the prince of Panchala.

That Parantapa, on seeing whom in battledress even the mighty army of the fearless Pandavas would tremble like a herd of cows facing a lion, having protected your army for ten nights and having accomplished mighty and well-nigh impossible feats, has set like the Sun.

He, who like Sakra himself, calmly shot arrows by the thousands, killed ten thousand soldiers every day for ten days: even he, slain by the enemy, lies, undeserving on the bare ground like a mighty tree felled by the wind, as a consequence, Rajan, of your evil counsels.'"

CANTO 14

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'How has Bhishma been cut down by Sikhandin? How has my father, who resembled Vasava himself, fallen from his chariot? What has become of my sons, O Sanjaya, deprived of the support of mighty Bhishma, he who was like a divine being, and who led the life of Brahmacharya for the sake of his father? How do our warriors feel about the loss of that tiger among men who was filled with great wisdom, great power and great energy?

Hearing that that great leader of men, that unfaltering Kshatriya, is fallen, a terrible sadness pierces my heart. While advancing against the enemy, who followed him and who marched ahead? Who stayed by his side? Who moved alongside? What brave fighters followed protecting the rear of that Maharathika, that wonderful archer, that bull among Kshatriyas, while he penetrated into the ranks of the foe?

While attacking the enemy's divisions, which warriors opposed that great luminary of a thousand rays, who spread fear and destruction among their ranks like the Sun destroying darkness, and who accomplished near impossible feats in battle among the ranks of Pandu's sons?

How, indeed, Sanjaya, did the Pandavas stand up to the son of Shantanu, that invincible Kshatriya, when he attacked them? How did Kunti's son conquer the unconquerable one, who, though modest, was a tiger among men slaughtering the enemy's ranks with great ferocity, having arrows for his teeth, a bow for his mouth, and a terrible sword for his tongue?

Oh, how undeserving is he of such a fate, that fierce archer shooting raging arrows, mounted on this chariot, beheading his foes, that irresistible hero, irresistible as the fires at the end of the yugas, seeing who in readiness for battle made the great army of the Pandavas falter in its advance.

Having achieved great feats on the battlefield, destroying the hostile armies for ten nights, alas, that greatest of Kshatriyas has set like the Sun. He who, like Sakra himself, loosed an unending stream of arrows, and killed millions of soldiers in ten days, that descendant of Bharata's race,

now lies on the bare ground, on the field of battle, a mighty tree uprooted by the winds, as a result of my evil counsels!

Seeing Shantanu's son, how could the army of the Pandavas succeed in striking him down? How did the sons of Pandu fight Bhishma? How is it that Bhishma fell when Drona lives? When Kripa was near him, and Drona's son Aswatthaman also, how could Bhishma, that foremost of destroyers be himself destroyed?

How could Bhishma who was an Atiratha and who could not be vanquished by the very gods, be defeated by Sikhandin, the prince of Panchala? He, who always regarded himself equal to the mighty son of Jamadagni in battle, he whom Jamadagni's son himself could not quell, he who resembled Indra in valour, alas, O Sanjaya, tell me how that hero, Bhishma, born in the race of Maharathas, was brought down, for without knowing all the details I cannot regain my composure.

Which great archers of my army did not desert that glorious hero? What heroic warriors, at Duryodhana's command, stood protecting him? When all the Pandavas with Sikhandin in the vanguard moved against Bhishma, did not all the Kurus stay by his side?

Hard as my heart is, surely it is not unbreakable, for why does it not break on hearing the news of the fall of Bhishma! In him lay boundless truth, intelligence, and political acumen. Alas, how was he slain in battle?

Like an imposing cloud, the twang of his bowstring, its roar, his arrows its raindrops, and the sound of his bow for thunder, that Kshatriya shot his arrows at the Pandavas and the Panchalas and the Srinjayas who stood at their side; he struck hostile charioteers like the slayer of Bala smiting the Danavas.

Who were the heroes that resisted, like the shores of the surging sea, him that punished enemies, who was a terrible ocean of weapons, an ocean in which arrows were inexorable crocodiles and bows were the waves? Who resisted this limitless ocean, without an island, agitated and with no raft to cross it, in which maces and swords were like sharks, and horses and elephants like eddies, foot-soldiers like fishes in abundance, and the sound of conches and drums like its roar?

Who resisted this Kshatriya, this ocean that swallowed horses and elephants and foot-soldiers, an ocean that devoured enemy heroes and that seethed with wrath that constituted its Yadava-fire?

When, in Duryodhana's interests, Bhishma achieved great feats in battle, who were in his vanguard? Who were they that protected the right wheel of that tremendous warrior? Who were they that resisted hostile heroes who came from behind him with patience and vigour?

Who positioned themselves to guard him from the front? Who protected the fore-wheel as he battled the adversary? Who struck at the Srinjayas from beside his left wheel? Who were they that defended the irresistible advance troops? Who protected the flanks of that warrior who has made his last painful journey? And who, O Sanjaya, fought the enemy heroes in the general conflict?

If he was protected by our heroes, and if they were protected by him, why could he not then swiftly humble the army of the Pandavas, invincible though it may be? Indeed, how could the Pandavas succeed even in striking Bhishma who was like Siva Parameshti himself, that Lord and creator of all creatures?

Sanjaya, you speak of the fall of Bhishma; that tiger among men, that mighty warrior, our refuge upon whom the Kurus were relying to fight the Pandavas, how was he slain by the enemy? In ancient times, all the Devas sought that Kshatriya's assistance to annihilate the Danavas. That foremost of sons filled with great tejas, on whose birth the famous Shantanu cast aside all grief, despair, and sorrows, how can you tell me that that celebrated hero, that great refuge of all, that wise and holy man who was devoted to his dharma and conversant with the truths of Vedic knowledge, has been slain?

Accomplished in the use of every weapon and imbued with humility, if the son of Shantanu, gentle, restrained, yet so intrepid, has been felled, then I regard the rest of my army as already destroyed. In my judgment, immorality has now become stronger than righteousness, for the sons of Pandu desire sovereignty even by killing their venerable elder! In olden days, Jamadagni's son Rama, who was acquainted with every weapon and who was superior to all, when fighting on behalf of Amvya, was defeated by Bhishma in combat.

You tell me that Bhishma, that greatest of warriors who resembled Indra himself in his feats, has been vanquished. What can bring greater despair to me than this? Suffused with great intelligence, he who was not slain even by that destroyer of hostile heroes, that Rama, the son of Jamadagni, who repeatedly defeated hordes of Kshatriyas in battle, he has now been laid low

by Sikhandin. Surely then, Drupada's son Sikhandin, who has quelled that bravest and most skilful Kshatriya, who commanded the most powerful weapons, must be superior in energy and strength to the mighty Bhishma!

In that encounter, who were the heroes that accompanied that destroyer of enemies? Tell me how the battle was fought between Bhishma and the Pandavas. The army of my son, O Sanjaya, bereft of its hero, is like an unprotected woman. Indeed, that army of mine is like a panic stricken herd of cows lost without its herdsman. When he, who was braver than anyone else, was vanquished, what was the state of mind of my army? What power remains in our lives, when we have killed our all-powerful father, the most righteous of men in the world?

Like a man who wishes to cross the sea as he watches his boat sink in deep waters, my sons, I imagine, are weeping grievously on Bhishma's death. My heart must surely be hard that it does not tear apart even on hearing of Bhishma's fall. Endowed with vast weapons, intelligence, and insight, how could that invincible warrior have been quelled?

A man cannot free himself from death using weapons or courage, ascetic merit or intelligence, firmness or offerings. Indeed, time cannot be transgressed by anything in the world, when you tell me that Shantanu's son Bhishma is fallen. Consumed by grief because of my sons, indeed overwhelmed with great sorrow, I had hoped for relief from Bhishma. When he saw Shantanu's son lying on earth like the Sun fallen from the sky, what other refuge did Duryodhana seek?

Reflecting on this, I cannot foresee how this will all end, both for our allies and for our enemies as they range themselves in opposition to each other.

Sadly the duties of the Kshatriya varna as laid down by the Rishis are cruel; the Pandavas desire sovereignty even at the cost of the death of Shantanu's son, and we too crave it by offering up in sacrifice that great hero. The sons of Pritha and mine do all observe their Kshatriya dharma and, thus, incur no sin. This is the path of a righteous man in times of terrible calamity. The display of valour and great strength has been laid down among the duties of Kshatriyas.

How, indeed, did the sons of Pandu oppose my father Bhishma in battle? How were the troops arrayed, and how did he fight against those high-souled adversaries? How, O Sanjaya, was my father Bhishma cut down, and

what did Duryodhana, Karna, the deceitful Sakuni, the son of Subala, and Dussasana say when Bhishma fell?

In the house of death that is war, where the chessboard is made up of the bodies of men, elephants, and horses, where arrows and javelins, mighty swords and darts kill and maim, who were those wretched gamblers, who staked their very lives? Who won in this game, who were defeated, who cast the dice successfully, and who have been killed, besides Bhishma, the son of Shantanu?

Tell me all, Sanjaya, for I am not at peace, hearing that Devavrata has been slain, that father of mine, of great and terrible deeds, that jewel of battle, Bhishma! Anguish like a blade pierces my heart, born of the thought that all my children will die. As a fire blazes brighter when ghee is poured on it, you do deepen my sorrow.

My sons must even now be grieving, seeing Bhishma fallen, that great Bhishma celebrated in all worlds and who took upon himself a heavy burden. I will listen to all those sad outcomes of Duryodhana's terrible folly. Therefore, tell me everything that happened there, everything that happened in the battle, born of the folly of my wicked son. Confused or clear, tell me everything, Sanjaya.

Whatever was achieved in the war by the tejas of the great Bhishma who desired victory; tell me everything and in complete detail of how each battle between the armies of the Kurus took place.'

CANTO 15

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'You are deserving and this is a noble question. However, it does not befit you to blame Duryodhana. The man who incurs evil as the consequence of his own misdeeds, should not attribute the blame to others.

Great king, the man who injures others deserves to be killed for his sins. The upright and blameless Pandavas, along with their friends and counsellors, look up to you; they have endured their injuries, forgiven them, and lived peaceably in the forest.

Do not grieve as you listen to the grim stories of horses and elephants, and powerful kings I have seen by Yoga-shakti. For all this was pre-destined.

I have bowed before your wise and high-souled father, the Mahatman Vyasa, who has bestowed upon me the boon of divine understanding, a sight beyond the vision of the eyes, heightened hearing from a great distance, a knowledge of other people's thoughts and of the past and the future, a knowledge also of the origin of all those who transgress the sacred ordinances, the delightful power of coursing through the skies, and protection from all weapons in battle.

Now listen to me carefully as I narrate the romantic and awesome battle between the Bhaaratas, a battle that makes one's hair stand on end.

When the combatants were ready and arrayed by the rules of war, Duryodhana says to Dussasana, 'O Dussasana, let chariots be moved swiftly to protect Bhishma, and order our akshauhinis to advance.

I now recollect what I have been thinking for many years about the war between the forces of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. For us, nothing is more important than keeping Bhishma safe. If protected he will annihilate the Pandavas, the Somakas and the Srinjayas.

That pure-souled Kshatriya has said that he will not slay Sikhandin. Sikhandin was a woman in an earlier birth, and so Bhishma refuses to fight him. For this, Bhishma should be particularly well protected.

Let all my soldiers take up their positions, and be determined to kill Sikhandin. Also let the troops from all cardinal directions, skilled in the use of every kind of weapon, watch over the Pitamaha. Even the mighty lion, if left unprotected, may be slain by the wolf. We must not allow Bhishma to be slain by Sikhandin like the lion by the jackal.

Yudhamanyu guards the left wheel and Uttamauja the right wheel of Arjuna, and thus shielded, Phalguni himself safeguards Sikhandin. O Dussasana, ensure that Sikhandin, who is protected by Arjuna, and whom Bhishma will not attack, does not kill Ganga's son.'

CANTO 16

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Sanjaya says, 'When the night passed, loud exclamations of the kings rend the air. The blast of conches and the sound of drums resembling the roars of lions, the neigh of horses and the clatter of chariot wheels, the noise of raucous elephants and the shouts, clapping of arm-pits, and cries of roaring combatants, all raise a thunderous noise.

The teeming armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, rising before dawn, complete all their deployments. When the Sun rises, the fierce weapons of attack and defence, the armour of your sons and the Pandavas, and the great splendid armies of both sides, are fully seen. Elephants and chariots, adorned with gold, look radiant like clouds streaked with lightning. The arrays of chariots look like cities.

Standing there, your father shines brilliantly like the full moon. And the warriors armed with bows and swords, scimitars and maces, javelins and spears, and other bright weapons of many kinds, take up their positions in the ranks. Resplendent standards, belonging to us and the enemy, are seen, hoisted by the thousands. Thousands of golden banners decorated with gemstones blaze like fire. They look beautiful even like the armoured heroes longing for battle.

Countless great Kshatriya commanders, wearing quivers, and with eyes big as those of bulls, and with hands cased in leather gloves, stand at the heads of their divisions, with shining weapons raised.

Subala's son Sakuni, and Salya, Jayadratha and the two princes of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, the Kekaya brothers, Sudakshina the ruler of the Kambojas and Srutayudha the lord of the Kalingas, and king Jayatsena, Brihadbala, king of the Kosalas, and Kritavarman of the Satwata vamsa—these ten powerful tigers among men, whose arms resemble maces, these performers of sacrifices and givers of gifts to Brahmanas, stand each one at the head of an akshauhini of troops.

These and many other kings and princes, maharathikas all, knowers of statecraft, obedient to the commands of Duryodhana, all sheathed in mail,

are seen at the head of their legions. All of them, wearing black deerskin, imbued with great strength, accomplished in battle, and cheerfully prepared, for Duryodhana’s sake, to give up their lives and attain Brahmaloka, stand there commanding ten powerful akshauhinis.

The eleventh great division of the Kauravas, consisting of the Dhartarashtra troops, are positioned in front of the great army.

There in the vanguard of that division is Shantanu’s son. With his helmet, royal parasol, and armour, all in white, we see the unfailingly mighty Bhishma looking like the risen moon. His standard bears the sign of a golden palmyra; he himself is mounted on a silver ratha. Both the Kauravas and the Pandavas gaze upon that hero, looking like the full moon encircled by white clouds.

On seeing Bhishma, the great archers amongst the Srinjayas, led by Dhrishtadyumna, appear like little lesser animals looking at a mighty yawning lion. Indeed, all the warriors led by Dhrishtadyumna tremble in fear.

These, O Rajan, are the eleven splendid divisions of your army.

So also the seven akshauhinis belonging to the Pandavas are protected by the greatest Kshatriyas. Indeed, the two armies facing each other look like two oceans at the end of the Yuga agitated by fierce makaras, teeming with monstrous crocodiles. Never before did we see or hear of two such armies encountering each other like these of the Kurus.’”

CANTO 17

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Just as predicted by the holy Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, the kings of the Earth gather in that manner for the great contention. On the day the battle begins, Soma approaches the region of the Pitris. The seven great planets are ablaze as they appear in the sky.

The Sun, as he rises, seems to be split in two, and bursts into flames. Carnivorous jackals and crows, expecting to feed upon the dead, call out fiercely from all burning directions.

Every day the Pitamaha of the Kurus, and the son of Bharadwaja, rising from their beds in the morning, say with dhyana, "Victory to the sons of Pandu", while those mighty warriors are pledged yet to fight for your cause. Your father Devavrata, aware of varna dharma, summons all the kings and speaks to them.

"Kshatriyas, the broad door into heaven is open to you. Pass through it to the region of Sakra and Brahma. The ancient Rishis have shown you this eternal path. Bring honour upon yourselves by fighting with alert minds. Nabhaga and Yayati, and Mandhatri, and Nahusha and Nriga, were triumphant in battle and attained bliss. It is a sin for a Kshatriya to die of sickness at home; to die in battle is his eternal duty."

Thus addressed by Bhishma, the magnificent kings, in their majestic chariots, move to the heads of their respective akshauhinis. Only Vikartana's son Karna, with his friends and relatives, puts aside his weapons for the sake of Bhishma. Without Karna then, your sons and their allies forge ahead, to the ten points of the horizon which reverberate with their leonine roars.

And their legions shine brightly with white sovereign parasols, banners, standards, elephants, horses, chariots, and foot-soldiers. And the Earth fills with the sounds of drums and cymbals, and the clatter of chariot wheels. And the maharathas, bedecked with golden ornaments and with their bows streaked with gold, look as resplendent as hills of fire.

And with his large palmyra-standard, bearing five stars, Bhishma, the Senapati of the Kaurava army, looks like the radiant Sun himself. He orders

your noble archers to take up their positions, which they do with alacrity.

King Saibya of the country of the Govasanas, accompanied by all the others, goes forth on a royal elephant graced with a banner on its back. And the lotus-complexioned Aswatthaman rides out prepared for every contingency, stationing himself at the very head of all the divisions, with his standard bearing the emblem of the lion's tail.

And Srutayudha and Chitrasena, and Purumitra and Vivimsati, and Salya and Bhurisravas, and that mighty maharathika Vikarna—these seven great archers mounted on their chariots and encased in excellent mail, follow Drona's son with Bhishma behind them. The lofty golden standards adorning their chariots shine brilliantly.

The standard of Drona, that most excellent of acharyas, bears the emblem of a golden shrine ornamented with a kalasha and a bow. That of Duryodhana, bearing a jewel-encrusted elephant, guides many hundreds and thousands of divisions. The rathas of Paurava, the king of the Kalingas, and Salya, are positioned in Duryodhana's vanguard.

The king of the Magadhas guides his akshauhini against the enemy on a bejewelled chariot with his standard bearing the image of a bull. The great force of the Eastern Kingdoms, protected by the chief of the Angas, Karna's son Vrishaketu, and the powerful Kripa, appears like the soft white clouds of approaching winter.

Stationed in front of his troops, with his silver standard bearing the emblem of the boar, is the splendid Jayadratha. A hundred thousand rathas, eight thousand elephants, and sixty thousand cavalry are under his command.

Commanded by the king of the Sindhus, that vast akshauhini in the forefront of the army with countless chariots, elephants and horses, is truly magnificent. With sixty thousand chariots and ten thousand elephants, the ruler of the Kalingas, accompanied by Ketumat, advances. His majestic elephants, looking like hills, and adorned with yantras, lances, quivers and standards, are strikingly beautiful.

The ruler of the Kalingas blazes forth with his lofty standard effulgent as fire, his royal parasol, golden cuirass, and the chamaras which fan him, all shining. Ketumat, riding on an elephant and holding a wonderful and beautiful goad, is also stationed in battle, O king, like the Sun in the midst of dark clouds.

And king Bhagadatta, fiery with energy and riding on his legendary elephant, goes out like the wielder of the thunder. And the two princes of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, regarded as equal to Bhagadatta, follow Ketumat, riding on the necks of their elephants.

Thus arrayed by Drona and Bhishma, and by Drona's son, and by Bahlika and Kripa, the Kaurava vyuha, of numberless divisions of chariots, appears as if elephants form its body, the kings, its head; and the horses, its wings. Facing all sides, that fearsome vyuha seems to smile in readiness to spring upon the enemy.'

CANTO 18

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'A loud uproar made by the fighting men in readiness for battle causes the heart to tremble. Indeed, the Earth seems to split into two with the sounds of conches and drums, the bellows of elephants and the clatter of chariot wheels. Soon the Sky and the Earth are filled with the neighing of chargers and the shouts of warriors.

O great Rajan, the troops of your sons and of the Pandavas both tremble when they face each other. There on that battlefield, elephants and chariots, decked in gold, are as beautiful as clouds flecked with lightning. And the standards of your allies, adorned with golden rings, glow like fire. And those standards of your side and theirs resemble the banners of Indra in his celestial mansions.

And the heroic warriors, all fitted out in golden coats of mail with the brilliance of the blazing Sun, themselves look like Agni or Surya. All the leading Kshatriyas amongst the Kurus, with magnificent bows, and other weapons ready, with leather gloves on their hands, and with standards, those mighty bull-eyed archers, stand lordly at the heads of their akshauhinis.

Protecting Bhishma from behind, among your sons are Dussasana, and Durvishaha, Durmukha and Dussaha and Vivimsati, and Chitrasena, and that maharatha Vikarna; also amongst them are Satyavrata and Purumitra, Jaya, Bhurisravas and Sala.

And twenty thousand maharathas follow them. The Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, and the Vasatis, the Swalyas, the Matsyas, the Ambashtas, the Trigartas, and the Kekayas, the Sauviras, the Kitavas, and the dwellers of the Eastern, Western, and the Northern kingdoms, these twelve brave races are resolute in their determination to fight, heedless of their lives.

These protect the Pitamaha with an awesome array of chariots. And with a division of ten thousand war elephants, the king of Magadha follows that akshauhini. They who guard the wheels of the chariots, and they who protect the elephants, number a stupendous six million.

And the foot-soldiers that march ahead, armed with bows, swords, and shields, number many hundreds of thousands. And they fight using also their nails and bearded barbs. And the eleven akshauhinis of your son, O Bhaarata, look like Ganga separated from Yamuna.'

CANTO 19

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Seeing our eleven akshauhinis laid out in battle formation, how does Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu, with his smaller number of legions, make his counter-array? How does Kunti's son, Sanjaya, create his battle formation against that Bhishma who was a master of all kinds of vyuhas, Manushya, Deva, Gandharva, and Asura?'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Dhritarashtra's legions arrayed, Pandu's son of virtuous soul, Yudhishtira Dharmatma, says to Arjuna, "We have long known the wise words of Maharishi Brihaspati, that a small army must be made to fight by compressing its troops, while the large army may be stretched out at will. In encounters of the few with the many, the vyuha to be formed is the suchimukha, the needle-mouthed one. Our troops compared with the enemy's are few. Deploy our troops, Arjuna, in accordance with the precept of the great Rishi."

Arjuna answers Yudhishtira, "I will create for you an unshakeable and invincible vyuha known as the Vajra, designed by the very wielder of the thunder-bolt himself. He who is like the bursting tempest, he who cannot be defeated by the enemy in battle, Bhima that greatest of smiters, will fight at our head. That foremost of men, knower of all ayudhas, will be our leader at the front destroying our adversaries, shattering their very confidence.

Seeing Bhima, awesome in battle, all the enemy soldiers led by Duryodhana will retreat in panic like smaller animals upon seeing the lion; Bhima will protect us like a wall and dispel our fears like Indra who gives refuge to all heavenly beings. There is no living man who can even look upon Vrikodara of fierce deeds when he is angry."

Having said this, Dhananjaya moves to form his vyuha. He swiftly orders his troops into battle-array and advances against the enemy. And the mighty army of the Pandavas, seeing the Kuru army move, appears itself to look like the swelling, rushing and powerful current of Ganga. And Bhima, and Dhrishtadyumna blessed with great tejas, and Nakula, and Sahadeva, and king Dhrishtaketu, become the leaders of that force.

And king Virata, surrounded by this akshauhini, along with his brothers and sons, marches in the rear, protecting them from behind. The two radiant sons of Madri become the guardians of Bhima's wheels, while the five sons of Draupadi and the son of Subhadra, all blessed with tejas, protect Bhima from behind. And that maharathika, Dhrishtadyumna the prince of Panchala, with the valiant Prabhadrakas, protects those princes from the rear.

And behind him is Sikhandin, who in turn is guarded by Arjuna, and who advances with dhyana for the destruction of Bhishma. Behind Arjuna, to guard his wheels, rides the powerful Yuyudhana and the two princes of Panchala, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, along with the intrepid Kekaya brothers, and Dhrishtaketu, and Chekitana.

Bhima, wielding his mace made of the sternest metal, moving with fierce speed on the battlefield, can dry up the very ocean. And there the sons of Dhritarashtra with their counsellors, stand looking at him. This, O Rajan, is what Bibhatsu says pointing out the mighty Bhima to Yudhishtira; while Arjuna speaks, all the gathered troops bow to praise and worship him.

King Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, takes up his position at the heart of his army, surrounded by vigorous overpowering elephants which resemble moving hills. The high-souled and valorous Drupada, lord of the Panchalas, stations himself behind Virata with an akshauhini to fight for the Pandavas. And on the chariots of those kings are high standards bearing diverse emblems, decorated with beautiful ornaments of gold, and with the radiance of the Sun and the Moon.

Moving those kings to make space for himself, Maharatha Dhrishtadyumna, his brothers and sons around him, watches over Yudhishtira from behind. Transcending the lofty standards on all the chariots, yours and those of your opponents, is the gigantic Vanara on Arjuna's chariot.

Hundreds and thousands of foot-soldiers, armed with swords, spears and scimitars, advance in front to safeguard Bhima. And ten thousand dauntless elephants, big as hills, emblazoned with golden armour follow the king like moving mountains. With temporal juice trickling down their faces, they resemble great rain clouds, and emit the fragrance of lotus flowers.

And the unconquerable Bhimasena, Mahatman, swinging his fierce mace that resembles a parigha surely looks as if he can easily crush the sprawling army of your son. Appearing like the Sun himself, and scorching

the hostile army like fire, it is impossible for the warriors to even look at him.

This fierce and fearless Vajravyuha, facing all sides, and having bows for its lightning sign, is protected by the wielder of the Gandiva himself. Deploying their legions in this manner against your army, the Pandavas await battle. And protected by the Pandavas, that vyuha is veritably invincible in the world of men.

And as both armies stand waiting for sunrise, a wind begins to blow, gentle rain falls with no clouds in sight, and the roll of thunder is heard. Dry winds blow showering the ground with sharp stones and a thick dust arises covering the world with darkness. Meteors begin to fall towards the east and, striking against the rising Sun, shatter loudly into fragments.

As the troops stand ready for battle the Sun rises without his customary splendour, and the Earth trembles and cracks open reverberantly in many places. The sound of thunder, O king, can be heard frequently on all sides and so thick is the billowing dust that nothing can be seen.

And the towering standards of the warriors, furnished with strings of bells, decked with golden ornaments, garlands of flowers, and rich cloths, graced with banners and like the Sun in splendour, are shaken by the wind, and jingle loudly like a forest of palmyra trees with a gale blowing lustily through.

Thus stand those tigers amongst men, the sons of Pandu, joyful in battle, having arrayed their legions against the army of your son, sucking as it were, the marrow of our warriors, with Bhima, mace in hand, stationed at their head.’

CANTO 20

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'When the Sun rises, O Sanjaya, of my army led by Bhishma and the Pandava army led by Bhima, which, in joyful readiness for battle, approaches the other first? To which side are the Sun, the Moon and the Wind hostile, and against whom do the beasts of prey utter inauspicious cries? Who are those beautiful and daring young men? Tell me everything and in detail.'

Sanjaya says, 'Both armies look equally joyful and equally beautiful like blooming forests. Both armies abound in elephants, chariots and horses. Both are vast and terrible to behold, and hostile to each other. Both of them teem with outstanding warriors organised to conquer the very heavens.

The Kauravas stand facing the west, while the Pandavas face the east, ready to fight. The troops of the Kauravas appear like the army of the Danavas, while those of the Pandavas look like the army of the Devas. The wind begins to blow from behind the Pandavas against the face of the Dhartarashtras, and the predators howl against your son's legions. The elephants of your sons cannot bear the strong odour of the temporal juice emitted by the majestic elephants of the Pandavas.

And Duryodhana rides on a lotus coloured elephant, with rent temples, graced with a golden kaksha on its back, and protected by netted steel armour. He is at the very heart of the Kurus and is extolled by bards and singers. And a white sovereign parasol with a golden chain and moon-like brilliance is held over his head.

Sakuni, the lord of the Gandharas, follows, surrounded by his mountain men. And the revered Bhishma is at the head of all the troops, with another royal white parasol over him, armed with bow and sword, with a white helmet, a white banner atop his chariot yoked to white horses, looking altogether like a white mountain.

In Bhishma's legion are all the sons of Dhritarashtra, and also Sala of the Bahlikas; there are also all those Kshatriyas called Amvastas and Sindhus, and also the Sauviras, and the heroic people of the land of the five rivers.

And on a golden chariot drawn by red horses stands the valiant Mahatman Drona, bow in hand, the Acharya of almost all the kings, who remains behind all the troops, protecting them like Indra. And Saradwat's son Gautama, that frontline fighter, that high-souled and mighty archer familiar with all manner of warfare, accompanied by the Sakas, the Kiratas, the Yavanas and the Pahlavas, takes up his position at the northern point of the army.

That immense force which is well guarded by maharathas of the Vrishni and the Bhoja vamsas, as also by the fighting men of Surashtra, well-armed and masters of weapons, and which is led by Kritavarman, goes towards the south of the army. Ten thousand chariots of the Samsaptakas, masterful warriors all, who were created for either the death or the fame of Arjuna, and who intend to stay close to and hunt Arjuna, all advance along with the brave Trigartas.

In your army, O Bhaarata, are a thousand magnificent war elephants to each of which are assigned a hundred chariots. A hundred horsemen are given to each chariot; each horseman has ten archers, each of whom is accompanied by ten foot-soldiers armed with sword and shield. Thus does Bhishma lay out your legions.

As each day dawns, your great Senapati, Bhishma the son of Shantanu, sometimes moves your troops in the Manava vyuha, sometimes in the Deva, sometimes in the Gandharva, and at others in the Asura. Thronged with a large number of maharathas, and roaring like the very ocean, the Dhartarashtra army, disposed by Bhishma, stands facing the west for battle. Unbounded and dreadful as your army is, the army of the Pandavas, though smaller, appears to me to be colossal and invincible since Krishna and Arjuna lead it.'

CANTO 21

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the vast Dhartarashtra army ready for battle, king Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, gives way to grief. Seeing that formidable vyuha formed by Bhishma and knowing it to be impenetrable, the king grows pale and says to Arjuna, "Dhananjaya, how will we fight the Dhartarashtras who have the Pitamaha as their Senapati?

How will we withstand the unshakeable and invincible vyuha which has been designed by that destroyer of foes Bhishma of transcendent glory, by the directions laid down in the scriptures? Parantapa, given the numbers of our troops we are doubtful of success. How, indeed, will we obtain victory in the face of this mighty formation?"

Arjuna answers Yudhishtira who is troubled by grief at the sight of your army, "Listen, O king, to how a few soldiers may defeat a vast army having many strengths. Since you are without malice, I will tell you the means by which we can triumph.

The Rishi Narada knows it, as do both Bhishma and Drona. Brahma himself in olden days during the battle between the Devas and the Asuras said to Indra and the other celestials, 'They who desire victory do not conquer by might and force so much as by truth, compassion, righteousness and vitality.'

Discriminating then between dharma and adharma, and understanding what covetousness is and what it is to fight without arrogance, victory lies with righteousness. Know, O Rajan, that victory is already assured to us in this war.

Indeed, as Narada says, 'Where Krishna is, there is victory. Victory is inherent to Krishna, indeed it follows him. And as victory is one of his attributes, so is humility. Govinda possesses infinite energy. Even in the midst of uncountable enemies, he is without pain. He is the most eternal of Purushas. And victory surely lies where Krishna is.'

Even he, indestructible and impossible to conquer with weapons, appearing as Hari in olden days, said clearly to the Devas and the Asuras, 'Who amongst you would be victorious?' Even the conquered Devas

replied, ‘With Krishna to lead us we will prevail.’ And it was through Hari’s grace that the three worlds were conquered by the gods led by Sakra.

I do not, therefore, see any reason for you to be dejected, you who have the Sovereign of the Universe and the Divine Lord of the gods himself wishing you triumph.”’

CANTO 22

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Then king Yudhishtira, laying out his own troops against the legions of Bhishma, urges them on, saying, "The Pandavas have now deployed their forces in counter array in keeping with the scriptures. Fight fairly, you sinless ones, who wish to enter the highest heaven!"

In the midst of the Pandava army is Sikhandin, and his troops are protected by Arjuna. And Dhrishtadyumna advances in the vanguard, protected by Bhima. The southern akshauhinis are guarded by that mighty archer, the handsome Yuyudhana of the Satwatas, who resembles Indra himself.

Yudhishtira is stationed on a chariot that is worthy of bearing Mahendra himself, adorned with an excellent standard, mottled with gold and glittering gemstones, and furnished with golden reins for the horses, in the midst of his war elephants. His sovereign white parasol with an ivory handle, unfurled over his head, is resplendent; and many great Rishis walk around him singing his praises.

Many priests, and regenerate Rishis and Siddhas, chant laudatory hymns, praying for the destruction of his enemies, with the help of japas and mantras, potent drugs, and a variety of propitiatory ceremonies. That Mahatman king of the Kurus, showering the Brahmanas with gifts of cows and fruit, flowers and gold, along with rich cloths, advances like Sakra, king of the Devas.

The chariot of Arjuna, with a hundred bells, the best Jambunada gold, having excellent wheels, possessing the effulgence of fire, and pulled by white horses, shines brilliant as a thousand suns. And on that chariot whose banner bears the Vanara emblem, whose reins are held by Krishna, stands Arjuna with the Gandiva and arrows in hand, peerless archer whom none can ever equal.

For crushing your sons' troops, the mighty Bhimasena Vrikodara, who assumes the most terrifying aspect, who without weapons and with his mere bare hands pounds men, horses, and elephants into the dust, that Mahabaho

accompanied by the twins, is the protector of the heroic maharathikas of the Pandava army.

Seeing indomitable Vrikodara, like the towering leader of a herd of elephants, an enraged prince of sprightly lions, or like great Indra himself in earthly form, at the forefront of the army, the strength of your fighting men turns weak with fear, and they begin to tremble like elephants in mire.

And Krishna says to the valiant Arjuna standing in the midst of his troops, “There is the banner of Kuru’s race, Bhishma, who scorches us with his wrath and stands rocklike in the midst of his forces. He who will attack our men like a lion, he who has performed three hundred Aswamedha yagnas, stands surrounded by great Kshatriyas who envelop his brilliance like clouds. Great Kshatriya, Purushottama, kill those troops and seek out that greatest of warriors, Bhishma Bharatarishabha!”’

CANTO 23

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the Dhartarashtra army approach ready for battle, Krishna says these words to Arjuna.

The Holy One says, "Purifying yourself, O Arjuna, on the eve of the battle, recite the hymn to Durga to achieve the enemy's defeat."

Thus addressed on the eve of battle by Krishna of fathomless intellect, Pritha's son Arjuna, alighting from his chariot, recites this hymn with folded hands.

Arjuna says, "I bow to you, O Mahayoginis, you who are Brahman, you who dwell in the forest of Mandara, free from decay and dissolution, O Kali, wife of Kapala, of a black and dusky hue, I bow to you! I submit to you, Mahakali, wife of Siva, the destroyer of the universe, you who bestow blessings on your devotees.

O exalted Durga, you who rescue us from danger, you who are blessed with every auspicious attribute, which has sprung from the Katas, you who deserve the most devoted worship, fierce one, giver of victory, victory's own self, you who bear a banner of peacock plumes, decked with every ornament, bear a terrible spear, hold a sword and shield, you who are the younger sister of the lord of cowherds, O Eldest, born amongst the Nanda cowherds, always fond of buffalo's blood, born in the race of Kusika, O Pitambara, you who, assuming the face of a wolf, have devoured Asuras, I bow to you who take delight in battle!

O Uma, Sakambhari, you who are white in hue, you who are also black, you who slew the Asura Kaitabha, O tawny-eyed and many-eyed, you who have eyes the colour of smoke, I venerate you!

You are the Vedas, the Srutis, and the highest virtue; you are auspicious to Brahmanas performing yagnas. O you who know the past, you who are ever present in the sacred shrines erected for you in the cities of Jambudwipa, I bow to you!

You are the Brahmavidya among sciences, and you are that slumber from which there is no waking. Mother of Skanda, who possesses the six

noblest qualities, Durga, you dwell in the remotest corners of the Earth, and are described as Swaha and Swadha, as Kala, as Kashta, and as Saraswati, as Savitri, the mother of the Vedas, and as the Vedanta.

With inner soul cleansed, I praise you. Mahadevi, let me always be victorious on the battlefield, always minister to me through your grace on the field of war. You dwell in remote regions, where there is fear, in places of hardship, in the homes of your worshippers and in Patala. You always vanquish the Danavas. You are the mahanidra, the great sleep, the illusion, the modesty and the beauty of all creatures.

You are the twilight and the day, you are Savitri, and you are the Mother. You are contentment, you are sustenance, and you are light. It is you who supports the Sun and the Moon and make them shine. You are the wealth of the prosperous. The Siddhas and the Charanas look upon you in dhyana."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Understanding the depth of Arjuna's devotion, Durga, who is always graciously inclined towards mankind, appears in the sky, and in the presence of Krishna, the Devi says, "You will swiftly defeat your enemies, O Pandava. Invincible one, you have Narayana on your side. You cannot be vanquished even by the Vajradhari Indra himself."

The boon-granting Goddess disappears. Having that boon from her, the son of Kunti now regards himself as already victorious and mounts his magnificent chariot. And then Krishna and Arjuna, seated on the same chariot, blow their celestial conches.

The man who recites this hymn rising at dawn, does not fear Yakshas, Rakshasas or Pisachas. He can have no enemies; he does not fear snakes and any animal with fangs and teeth; nor does he fear kings. He is certain to be victorious in all battles, and if bound, he is freed from his shackles. He is sure to overcome all obstacles, is free from thieves, ever victorious in battle and has the blessings of Lakshmi Devi for eternity. In health and strength, he lives for a hundred years.

I know all this through the grace of Vyasa imbued with great wisdom. However, your evil sons, all entangled out of ignorance in the snare of death, do not recognise them as Nara and Narayana. Nor do they, ensnared by death, know that the hour of the end of this kingdom has arrived. Dwaipayana and Narada, Kanwa and the sinless Rama have all warned your son. But he does not accept what they say.

Where dharma is, there lie glory and beauty. Where modesty is, prosperity and intelligence are to be found. And in righteousness, there is

Krishna; and where Krishna is, there is victory.'

CANTO 24

BHAGAVAT-GITA PARVA CONTINUED

Vaisampayana said, "Dhritarashtra says, 'There on that field, Sanjaya, which army first advances gladly into battle? Whose hearts are filled with confidence, and who are dispirited and downcast? In that war which makes the hearts of men tremble, who strikes the first blow, my forces or those belonging to the Pandavas? Tell me all this, Sanjaya. Among whose troops do the flowery garlands and balms emit fragrant scents? And whose troops, roaring fiercely, speak merciful words?'

Sanjaya says, 'The fighters of both armies are joyful and the flowery garlands and perfumes of both armies emit equal fragrance. Fierce is the collision that takes place when the tightly compacted ranks arrayed for battle encounter each other.

And the sound of musical instruments, mingled with the blast of conches and the noise of drums, and the shouts of brave warriors roaring fiercely at one another, reverberate all around. Terrible is the impact of the encounter of the warriors of both armies, filled with assurance and staring at one another, with the elephants uttering boisterous grunts.'"

CANTO 25[1]

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA

Aum Sri Ganapatheyah namaha
Aum Sri Saraswatheyah namaha
Aum Sri Krishnayah namaha

Arjuna vishada yoga: The despair of Arjuna

"Dhritarashtra says:
'Upon the field of dharma,[2] field of Kuru, gathered keened for war, my force and the sons of Pandu, what did they do, Sanjaya?'
Sanjaya says:
'Seeing the Pandava army arrayed, Duryodhana then
his honoured master approaches; the king says these words:
"Behold this immense army, master, of the sons of Pandu,
deployed by Drupada's son, your brilliant pupil.
Here, heroes, mighty bowmen, of Bhima and Arjuna equals in war—
Yuyudhana and Virata, and Drupada maharatha;[3]
Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana, and the valiant Kasiraja,
Purujit and Kuntibhoja, and the Saibya, bull among men.
And Yuddhamanyu the brave and the intrepid Uttamaujas,
Subhadra's son[4] and Draupadi's princes—surely, maharathas all.

Be aware, also, of the distinguished amongst us, O best of dvijas[5],
the commanders of my army—let me name them for you to know.
Yourself and Bhishma and Karna, and Kripa winner of wars;
Aswatthaman and Vikarna, and the son of Somadatta, as well.
And so many other heroes, too, willing to give their lives for me;
myriad weapons they wield, all of them masters of war.

Our army is invincible, defended comprehensively by the might of Bhishma;

their force is inferior, guarded by Bhima's strength all around.
And positioned at every ingress, each at your station,
Bhishma alone you must all perfectly protect, surely, from every side."

To hearten him, the mighty Kuru ancient,[6] the grandsire,
a lion's roar lets out and blows his conch reverberantly.
Then, conches and bugles and trumpets, kettledrums, horns
resound suddenly, all together: that sound was tumultuary.

When, from a magnificent chariot, white horses yoked to it,
Madhava[7] and the Pandava,[8] also, their divine conches sound.
The Panchajanya, Hrishikesa;[9] the Devadatta, Dhananjaya;[10]
the great conch Paundra blows Vrikodara[11] of awesome deeds.
The Anantavijayam, the king, Kunti's son Yudhishtira;
Nakula and Sahadeva: the Sughosha, the Manipushpaka.
And the Kaasi, supreme archer, and Sikhandi, maharatha;
Dhrishtadyumna and Virata and Satyaki, the unvanquished.
Drupada and all the sons of Draupadi, O lord of the earth,
and Subhadra's mighty-armed son sound their conches, every one.
That clamour Dhritarashtra's sons' hearts pierces;
and sky and earth, also, that fierce uproar shakes.

Now, watching in formation the sons of Dhritarashtra, the monkey-bannered[12] Pandava, when weapons are about to be loosed, raises his bow.
Then, to Hrishikesa he speaks these words, lord of the earth.

Arjuna says:
"Between the two armies, set my chariot, Achyuta.[13]
So I can look at those arrayed against us, seeking war,
against whom I must fight—before battle begins.
The warriors let me see, that have come together here,
wanting to please Dhritarashtra's evil-minded son with war."'

Sanjaya says:
'Asked this by Gudakesa,[14] Hrishikesa, O Bhaarata,[15]
drawing up that fine chariot between the two armies,

before Bhishma, Drona and all the rulers of the earth,
says, "Partha,[16] look at these massed Kurus."

Then Partha sees standing there fathers and grandfathers,
masters, uncles,[17] brothers, sons, grandsons and friends,
fathers-in-law and well-wishers—and in both armies, besides;
the son of Kunti looks closely at all those kinsmen deployed there.
By great pity overcome, stricken, he says this.

Arjuna says:
"I see my kinsmen, Krishna, gathered avid for war.
My limbs turn weak, my mouth is parched;
and my body trembles, and my hair stands on end.
The Gandiva slips from my hands and my skin burns;
and my anxiety I cannot control and the fierce whirling of my mind;
and omens I see, evil, Kesava,
and nor do I see what good can come from killing my kinsmen in battle.
I do not want victory, Krishna, neither kingdom nor happiness;
for what a kingdom, Govinda, what for pleasures or even life?
Those for whose sake we want a kingdom, pleasures or happiness,
they are here for war, leaving their lives and wealth.
Masters, fathers, sons, and grandsires, too;
uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other kinsmen;

I do not want to kill them even if they kill me, Madhusudana:[18]
not for lordship over the three worlds,[19] what then of this earth?
Killing Dhritarashtra's sons, what joy will we get, Janardana?[20]
We will only find sin ourselves if we slay these sinners.
So we must not kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, who are our kin;
for, after killing our own, how can we be happy, Madhava?[21]
Even if these, their hearts ruined by greed, see no
atrocity in destroying the clan and no crime in harming friends,
why don't we realise that we must desist from this sin,
when we see clearly how heinous it is to exterminate one's race, Janardana?

With the destruction of the clan, ancient family traditions are lost forever;
when dharma is no more, evil takes all that race.

When adharma rules, Krishna, the women of the clan become loose;
when the women are depraved, Vaarshaneya,[22] the varnas[23] become mixed.
Crossbreeding only casts into hell those that ruin the clan, and the clan, itself;
their manes surely fall, for the ritual of the offering of rice-balls and holy water having disappeared.
Through the sins of these clan-destroyers, defilers of the varnas,
lost are sacred traditions[24] of caste and family, forever.
Men whose kuladharma has been destroyed, Janardana,
will live forever in hell, as I have heard.

Ah, what a great sin we have decided to commit:
that from greed for the pleasures of kingdom, we are ready to kill our kinsmen.
While I am unarmed and unresisting,
let Dhritarashtra's sons kill me on the field of war—that I could still bear."'

Sanjaya says:
'Saying this, Arjuna sits down in the back of that chariot, in war;
he casts aside his arrows and bow, his heart plunged in profound anguish.'

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1. The translation of the Bhagavad Gita given here is a verse translation by Ramesh Menon from the original Sanskrit. It preserves the Sanskrit order of words, and tries to reflect the Sanskrit cadences. This is not a reworking of Ganguli's translation.
2. truth; righteousness
3. great (chariot) warrior
4. Abhimanyu
5. the twice-born, the two upper castes; in this case, the Brahmanas
6. Bhishma
7. Krishna
8. Arjuna
9. Krishna; Vishnu
10. Arjuna; lit. 'winner of wealth'
11. Bhima; lit. 'wolf-belly'
12. Hanuman
13. Krishna; immaculate one
14. Arjuna; curly-haired; conqueror of sleep
15. Dhritarashtra is a descendant of the ancient king Bharata, after whom Bharata-varsha is named
16. Arjuna; Pritha's (Kunti) son
17. maternal

18. Krishna, slayer of the demon Madhu
19. Swarga, Bhumi and Patala; heaven, earth and the under-world
20. Krishna
21. Krishna
22. Krishna, scion of the Vrishnis
23. castes
24. dharma, spiritual

CANTO 26

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Samkhya yoga: The way of Samkhya[25]

Sanjaya says:
'Seeing him so, in the grip of pity, tearful, agitated,
grief-stricken, these words to him speaks Madhusudana.

The Gracious Lord says:
"From where has this stain come over you at this critical time?
This is the way of the base; it does not lead to heaven but fetches infamy, Arjuna.
Do not go this cowardly way, Partha; it is beneath you;
abandon this vile faint-heartedness, and arise, O bane of your enemies!"

Arjuna says:
"How will I attack Bhishma and Drona in battle, Madhusudana,
with arrows, when they are worthy of worship, Arisudana?[26]
Surely, without killing one's masters and noble elders, it is better to live by begging alms in this world;
else, by killing our masters, if we enjoy wealth and pleasures we shall enjoy blood-stained spoils.
We do not know which of these would be better for us:
that we conquer them or that they vanquish us!
They whom killing, we would not wish to live—standing before us, the sons of Dhritarashtra.
The weakness of pity besieges my nature; my mind confounded about what dharma is, I ask you—
tell me what is unquestionably best for me. I am your disciple;
teach me, I submit to you.
Because I cannot see what can exorcise this anguish that withers my senses,

not if I gained a thriving and unrivalled kingdom on earth, and even lordship over the gods of light.[27]"'

Sanjaya says:
'Speaking thus to Hrishikesa, Gudakesa, scourge of his enemies,
says "I will not fight" and falls silent.

Then, Hrishikesa speaks smilingly, Bhaarata,
between two armies, to him who sorrowed, these words.

The Gracious Lord says:
"You grieve for those not worth grieving over, and argue as if you were a wise man discoursing;
not for the dead or for the living do the wise grieve.
Surely, at no time ever did I not exist, or you, or all these kings;
and for sure, not in any future to come will any of us cease to exist.
Just as the indweller passes, in the body, through childhood, youth and old age,
the soul also assumes new bodies; the wise are not perplexed by this.
Contact between the elements alone, son of Kunti, causes cold and heat, pleasure and pain;
these come and go, they are evanescent; endure them, Bhaarata.
Whom these cannot perturb, the wise man, O bull among men;
who is the same in sorrow and joy, steadfast, is fit for immortality.
Never does the unreal exists, and the real never ceases to be;
of both these, surely, the end has been seen by seers of truth.
But, know, what pervades all this is immortal;
that everlasting being no one can destroy.
Mortal these bodies; eternal, it is said, the embodied soul;
It is immortal, ineffable—so, fight Bhaarata!

He that thinks of it as being a killer and he who thinks *This* is slain:
both do not know—it neither kills nor is slain.
This is not born nor ever dies, not in the past, present or future;
un-born, changeless, eternal it is, primeval; it is not killed when the body is slain.
Knowing this is indestructible, constant, un-born, immutable,

how does a man kill anyone, Partha, whom does he kill?

Even as a man abandons old, tattered clothes and puts on other fresh ones,
the indweller leaves old, worn bodies and enters other new ones.
Weapons cannot pierce *it*; fire cannot burn it;
water does not wet it, nor dry it, the wind.
Not pierceable, not burnable, not wettable, and also not dryable—
permanent, ubiquitous, abiding, invariable, eternal.
unmanifest, *it*; inconceivable, it; changeless, it, they say;
So, knowing it is such, you must not despair.
and if you think that it is constantly being born and continually dying,
even then, mighty-armed, you ought not to despair.
For he who is born death is certain, and birth is certain for who dies;
so, over what you believe to be ineluctable, you should not despair.
Unmanifest the source of beings, manifest their interim, Bhaarata;
unmanifest, too, their end; so why grieve for them?

As a miracle, some see it; and others say it is marvellous;
and others learn that it is ineffable; and some, after having learnt,[28] still do not know it.
This eternal spirit is unkillable, in every body, Bhaarata;
so, you must not grieve for any of the living.
And also, looking at your svadharma[29] you must not falter;
for, there is nothing higher for a Kshatriya than a war for truth.
Fortuitous and just, an open portal to heaven—
joyful are Kshatriyas, Partha, who find such a war!

But if you do not fight this battle of dharma,
then, forsaking your svadharma and your fame, you will find sin.
Besides, of your ignominy all men will tell forever,
and for the honoured, infamy is worse than death.
That out of fear you quit the battle these maharathas will think;
and in those that once held you in great esteem, you will find contempt.
And your enemies will malign you with vile slander,
scoffing at your prowess; what can be more painful than that?
Either being killed you will attain heaven, or, victorious, enjoy the earth;
so arise, Kaunteya, resolved to fight!

Pleasure and pain equally treat: gain, loss: victory,
defeat; then join battle—you will no sin incur.

I have told you about samkhya;[30] to the yoga of buddhi[31] now listen;
yoke[32] your intellect with this, Partha, the bonds of karma put to sword.
In battle, with this,[33] there is no-one killed, no sin to consider;
even the least bit of this dharma preserves from great fear.
In the resolute soul, the mind is one, joy of the Kurus;
many-branched and unending are the thoughts of the irresolute.
With these memorised flowery words those of small vision
eulogise the panegyrics of the Veda, Partha, saying nothing else[34] exists.
Their hearts of desire, swarga their ideal, the rewards of births and rites they seek;
frequent, unvarying rituals, to have pleasure and power, they perform.
To pleasure and power attached, their thoughts beguiled by these;
with devoted mind to attain samadhi[35] they do not strive.
With matters of the three gunas[36] the Vedas deal; be without the three gunas,
Arjuna:
free from duality; always established in sattva,[37] unattached, serene.

As much use as in a well to a deluge of water everywhere:
so much in all the Vedas to a Brahmana of enlightenment.
You surely have the right to do your karma,[38] not to its fruit, at any time;
the fruit of karma should not become your motive, nor be attached to sloth.
Steadfast in yoga, do your duty, renouncing attachment, Dhananjaya;
success and failure becoming the same: that equanimity is called yoga.
Far inferior is ritual to the yoked mind, Dhananjaya;
in wisdom seek refuge: pitiful are those driven by gain.
Mind yoked, you can be free here[39] of both good and evil;
so, to yoga devote yourself; yoga is genius at karma.

Performing karma, mind devoted, but its fruit renouncing, wise men,
from the bondage of birth entirely freed,[40] come to the place of no sickness.
When beyond this chaos of illusions your mind passes,

then you will arrive at indifference to what you have heard and what you will hear.[41]
By the srutis confused:[42] when your mind becomes still, unmoving,
in samadhi permanently, then you will find yoga."

Arjuna says:
"How can you tell a man of resolution, who is founded in samadhi, Kesava?[43]
How does a realised one speak? How does he sit, how walk?"
The Gracious Lord says:
"When a man abandons all desires, Partha, which spring in the mind,
and gratifies himself in just his soul, a man of unshakeable wisdom he is said to be.
Unaffected by adversity, whose mind, in fortune unmoved to desire;
free of passion, fear and anger, a true muni is called.
Who everywhere is without affection; who, upon finding fortune or misfortune,
neither exults nor feels aversion, his wisdom is founded.
And when, like a tortoise completely retracts all its limbs, a man
does his senses from their objects of desire, his wisdom is founded.
Through restraint the embodied can refrain from indulging the senses,
but not from desire; even his desires disappear at the vision of *God*.

Of even, son of Kunti, a restrained man,
his turbid senses forcibly ravish his mind.
All the senses restraining, the sage sits intent on me;
for, one whose senses are tamed, his wisdom is established.
Dwelling on the objects of desire,[44] a man becomes attached to these;
from attachment is born desire; from desire anger arises.
From rage comes upheaval;[45] from turmoil, the wavering memory;
after the loss of memory, destruction of the mind; when the mind is destroyed, he dies.

Emancipated from attraction and revulsion, but going among the objects of the senses,
tamed by the Atman, ruled by the soul, he attains grace.
With grace, of all suffering the end comes;

the tranquil one's wisdom, surely, is quickly constant.
No wisdom for the wilful, and not for the reckless, faith;
and for the faithless, there is no peace; for the peaceless, from where joy?
Which ever of the ever-roving senses the mind yields to,
that bears his wisdom away, as the wind a boat on the sea.

So, he, Mahabaho, who withdraws completely
the senses from the objects of sensuality, his wisdom is profound.
When night comes for all creatures, is when the ascetic awakes;
what is waking for the rest, that is night for the visionary.
Always still, the ocean, though being filled by water entering into it;
equally, he who contains all desires entering him, acquires peace, not he who submits to desire.
Leaving the things of desire, who roams the earth, unattached,
without 'mine', without 'I', he attains peace.
This is the Brahmi state,[46] Partha; attaining to this, he is no more tempted;
abiding in this at his final hour, as well, he goes to Brahmanirvana."[47]

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25. see appendix for samkhya and yoga
26. slayer of enemies
27. the Devas
28. one who knows, has studied, the Veda; knowing the scriptures
29. inherent caste duty, here as a Kshatriya warrior
30. system of philosophy founded by Kapila muni
31. mind
32. Yoga means to yoke; control, restrain, here.
33. yoga of knowledge
34. higher
35. communion with God, liberation
36. sattva, rajas and tamas
37. the pure guna
38. natural duty
39. in this world
40. repeated birth, death and rebirth
41. srotasi refers to what you will hear in the Vedas, too
42. now confused
43. Krishna
44. sense objects; objects of sensuality
45. 'delusion' is the most common translation for sammohah
46. union with Brahman

47. Nirvana: absorption; eternal bliss; highest felicity; union; dissolution in; extinction; death; vanishment

CANTO 27

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Karma yoga: The way of action

Arjuna says:
"If you think knowledge superior to action, Janardana,
then why to this ghastly deed do you commit me, Kesava?
With your seemingly ambiguous words, you only confuse my mind;
say one thing, decidedly, by which I can attain felicity."

The Gracious Lord says:
"In this world, two kinds of devotion were of old ordained by me,
O sinless—
the yoga of knowledge for samkhyas, the way of deeds for yogis.

By not doing his duty a man does not achieve freedom from karma;
nor by mere abstention is transcendent perfection attained.
Nor, certainly, can anyone even momentarily ever stay inactive;
because all are helplessly made to act by the Prakriti-born gunas.
He that restrains the organs of karma but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of sensuality, that foolish soul is deemed a hypocrite.
But he who, restraining the senses with the mind, Arjuna, engages the organs of action in karma yoga, dispassionately—he excels.
You must always do your duty; because action is higher than inactivity;
besides, you will not succeed even in keeping your body through inertia.
All karma other than that done as an offering binds this world in rebirth;
for that, act, Kaunteya, free from attachment, consummately.

Together with sacrifice, creating men, of old Prajapati[48] said,
'By this, you will generate and multiply; let this be the yielder of your wishes.
Adore the Devas by this; let the Devas succour you;

by each other nourished, supreme felicity you will have.
Bound by the nurture of sacrifice, the gods will surely give you the pleasures you desire;
one who enjoys these gifts, without giving to them, he is certainly a thief.'

The saintly who eat the leftovers of a sacrifice are liberated from all sins;
but the sinful eat sin, who cook food just for themselves.
From food are born beings; from rain, food grows;
from sacrifice, come the rains; sacrifice from karma[49] springs.
Karma from Brahma arises, know; Brahma of the Imperishable is born;
so, ubiquitous Brahma always abides in sacrifice.
Hence, this turning wheel, who does not live by it here,[50]
lives in sin, indulging the senses—in vain, Partha, he lives.
But for him who is devoted only to the Atman,[51] and remains absorbed in the Atman, the man
who, also, is fulfilled only in the soul—for him no duty is ordained.
He surely has nothing to gain here, either by doing or by not doing;
nor does he, among all the living, seek any gain.
Thus, without attachment, always do your duty consummately;
for, by performing karma without attachment man attains the Supreme.
Indeed, only through karma did in absolute perfection abide Janaka[52] and others;
besides, also considering the good of the world, you must act.
Whatever a great man does: all that other men also do;
whatever norm he sets, that all the world follows.

Not for me, Partha, is there any duty in the three worlds,
nor anything to attain that is unattained; and I am always at work.
Surely, if ever I am not at my work, tirelessly,
my path would be followed by men, Partha, of every walk.
Plunged into ruin these worlds, if I did not do my work;
and I would be the cause of crossbreeding,[53] diminishing these generations.
As the ignorant perform karma with desire, attachment, Bhaarata,
so must the knowing act, unattached, wanting the weal of the world.
Not creating confusion in the minds of the unknowing attached to karma,
silently the wise man does all his work, yoked, absorbed.
Nature's essences perform karma, in every way;

he who is beguiled by egoism thinks, 'I am the doer'.
But he who knows the truth, Mahabaho, about the difference between guna and karma—
the gunas act upon the gunas—so knowing, is not attached.
Those deluded by the gunas of nature become enmeshed in karma born of the gunas;
those dull ones that do not know the *All*[54], a knower of everything must not agitate.

To me all karma consigning, to the Atman your thought;
becoming desireless, dispassionate, do battle, leaving panic.
This my teaching, those men who always follow,
with faith, without derision, are also liberated from karma.
But they who slight this, do not follow my precept,
fools to all knowledge, are, know, lost, insensate.
In concord with his nature, acts even the wise man;
nature, beings obey—what can inhibition achieve?
For the senses, attraction and revulsion towards the objects of sensuality are inexorable;
no man must come under their sway, for they are his enemies.
Better in one's own dharma, flawed, than another's dharma immaculately done;
death in one's own dharma is auspicious; another's dharma is dangerous."

Arjuna says:
"Then what makes a man to commit sin,
even unwillingly, Vaarshaneya, with force as if coerced?"
The Gracious Lord says:
"It is desire, it is anger, arisen from the rajoguna[55]—
voracious, direly sinful, know this, here, for an enemy.
As fire is obscured by smoke and a mirror by dust,
as the womb hides an embryo, so is *it* hidden by that.
Shrouded, wisdom by this, of the wise the constant enemy,
with lust's form, Kaunteya, and an insatiable fire.
Senses, mind, intellect, its abode, it is said;
by these confounding, it shrouds the wisdom of the embodied.
So, your senses first control, Bharatarishabha;

kill this malignant thing, for this is the ruiner of knowledge and wisdom.
The senses are lofty, they say; higher than the senses is mind;
and beyond mind is intellect; but past intellect is *He*.
So, knowing what is beyond the intellect, stilling the self with the soul,
vanquish, Mahabaho, the enemy, lust-formed, unassailable."

48. Brahma, the creator; lord of the people
49. action, duty, caste duty, sacred duty
50. in this world
51. Soul; Self
52. the Rajarishi king Janaka, Sita's father, Sri Rama's father-in-law
53. varnasamkarasya: anarchy through mixing of the castes
54. the Truth, Brahman
55. the second guna, mode of Prakriti, of the essence of passion

CANTO 28

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Gyana yoga: The way of knowledge

The Gracious Lord says:
"This yoga to Vivaswat[56] I revealed, immortal;
Vivaswan to Manu[57] taught it; Manu to Ikshavaku[58] imparted it.
So, by lineal tradition received, this the Rajarishis[59] knew;
after great time, here, the yoga was lost, Parantapa.
That very same have I to you today revealed, the ancient yoga:
for you are my devotee and my friend, because this is the secret supreme."
Arjuna says:
"Recent your birth, earlier the birth of Vivasvat;
so how do I comprehend this—you first taught him?"

The Gracious Lord says:
"Myriad births of mine are past, and yours, Arjuna;
these I know, every one; you do not know, Parantapa.
Though un-born, my soul immortal, the Lord of creatures though being,
abiding in my own nature, I incarnate through my soul's maya.[60]
Whenever there is a decline of dharma, Bhaarata,
an ascendancy of adharma, then myself I manifest.
For the deliverance of the good and for the destruction of sinners;
in order to establish dharma, I come from age to age.
So, who my divine birth and deeds knows truly,
after leaving the body does not find rebirth; he finds me, Arjuna.
Gone, passion, fear, anger; absorbed in me, sheltering in me,
many, purified by wisdom's penance, have come to my being.
As they come to me, so do I cherish them;
my path men walk, Partha, on every path.

Those who wish for gain from karma sacrifice here to the gods;

for, speedily in the world of men gain attends on ritual.
The four varnas, my creation: by gunas, karma, divided;
its creator, also, know that I am act-less, immutable.
I am not by karma tainted; I do not desire the fruit of karma;
one who recognises me to be thus, he is not bound to karma.
This knowing, the ancients, too, performed karma, the seekers after mukti;[61]
so must you do your duty, as the ancients did of old.

What is karma, what is akarma? By this even the seers are baffled;
of that karma I will tell you, knowing which you will be saved from every ill.
What karma is must also be understood, and what is forbidden karma;
and what is not karma be known—deep is the way of karma.
Who in work repose sees, and in inactivity ado,
he is wise among men; he is a sage, all his duty done.
Whose every endeavour is without desire's intent;
whose deeds are burnt in wisdom's fire, him the wise call a sage.
Renouncing attachment for the fruit of work, always contented, independent,
though incessantly at work, he does nothing at all.
Desireless, he of restrained mind, leaving all possessions,
just the body doing work, finds no sin.
With whatever chance gives contented, beyond duality, without envy,
and equable in success, failure—though doing, he is not bound.
Whose attachments are gone, who is free, mind founded in wisdom;
who acts only as a sacrifice—all his karma dissolves entirely.

Brahman the sacrifice, Brahman the oblation;
Brahman the fire into which Brahman makes the offering;
Brahman he surely attains through the devotion of Brahmakarma.[62]

Only with sacrifices to the Devas, some yogis worship;
into the fire of Brahman others sacrifice itself as sacrifice offer.
Hearing, the other senses, some into restraint's fire offer;
sound, the other objects of sensuality, others into the fire of the senses offer.
All the senses' karma and the karma of life, others

offer into self-restraint's yogic fire, kindled by wisdom.

Material sacrifice; penance as sacrifice; with yoga, too, others sacrifice;
sacred study and knowledge, sacrifice the ascetics of stern vows.
Inhaling they offer into exhalation; exhaling into in-breath, as well, others:
prana, apana's, movement stilling, those devoted to pranayama.
Others curb what they eat, into prana, prana offer;
all these, also, knowers of sacrifice: by sacrifice, their sins expelled.
Eating sacrificial remains, ambrosia, they go to eternal Brahman;
not this world is for the unsacrificing, much less any other, best of Kurus.

So, many kinds of sacrifice are spread across Brahman's face;
karma-born, know, all these; so knowing, you will become free.
Better than sacrifice of wealth, the devotion of wisdom, Parantapa;
all karma, in entirety, Partha, culminates in wisdom.
That learn, through homage, by inquiry and service:
the wise, seers of truth, will teach you wisdom.
Which knowing, not again will delusion so torment you, Pandava;
with this, all creatures, without exception, you will see in yourself, and in me.
Even if you, of sinners, of them all, are the greatest sinner,
all distress, by wisdom's boat, you will surely cross.
Just as its fuel of wood a fire makes ashes, Arjuna,
wisdom's fire all karma to ashes turns, as surely.
Nothing to equal wisdom in purity exists here;
that, of himself, one evolved in yoga, in time, within himself attains.
He of faith attains wisdom: absorbed, senses restrained;
wisdom gained, to supreme peace, also, he quickly comes.

The ignorant and the faithless and the doubting soul perishes;
not this world, not the next, nor happiness for the doubting soul.
Through yoga renouncing karma, with wisdom severing doubt,
a self-possessed one no karma binds, Dhananjaya.
So, cut away ignorance-born doubt seated in your heart, with wisdom's soul sword;
turn to yoga—arise, Bhaarata!"

56. the Sun god; Surya Deva
57. Surya's son Vaivaswata Manu: progenitor of the Manushyas or Manavas, humankind
58. Manu's son, great king, founder of the Suryavamsa, royal house of the Sun, into which Rama was born
59. royal sages, saintly kings
60. mysterious power of illusion
61. liberation; final salvation
62. working for Brahman; serving Brahman

CANTO 29

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Sannyasa yoga: The way of renunciation

Arjuna says:
“Renunciation of karma, Krishna, then again, yoga you extol;
which one of the two is better for me, say for certain.”

The Gracious Lord says:
“Sannyasa and karma yoga effect liberation, both;
but of the two, doing karma is superior to inaction.

Know him as a constant renunciate, who neither dislikes nor desires;
for, detached from duality, Mahabaho, he is easily freed from bondage.
The callow say that samkhya and yoga are different, not the wise;
for, who is absorbed in one, of both enjoys the fruit.
The condition the samkhyas achieve, that yogis also attain;
and as one, who samkhya and yoga sees, he sees.
But sannyasa, mighty-armed, is difficult to attain without yoga;
the sage yoked to yoga, to Brahman swiftly comes.
Who is absorbed in yoga, pure soul, master of his mind, subduer of the senses,
who is the soul of all souls—though he does, he is not tainted.
‘I do nothing’ a yukta[63] thinks, a knower of truth:
while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing,
speaking, emitting, ingesting, staring and blinking:
the senses in sensuality are engaged—in this awareness.

Resigning his karma to Brahman, without attachment, who works:
he is not stained by sin, as a lotus leaf by water.
With the body, with the mind, with the intellect, or merely with the senses,

yogis perform karma, leaving attachment—to purify the soul.
The yoked, sacrificing the fruit of karma, attains profound peace;
the unyoked, moved by desire, devoted to the fruit, is bound.
All karma with the mind relinquishing, dwells the restrained one, at ease,
in the city of nine doors,[64] the embodied—surely, neither doing nor causing.[65]
Neither doer nor deed for the world, the Lord creates;
not union of work with its fruit; only nature acts.

Neither anybody's sin nor, indeed, their virtue does God assume;
wisdom is shrouded by ignorance; by this the living are deluded.
But whose ignorance is destroyed by knowledge of the Atman,
their sunlike wisdom illumines *that*, highest.
That their mind, that their soul, that their faith, that their devotion—
they go to non-return, by wisdom their sins destroyed.

A Brahmana endowed with learning, humility; a cow, an elephant,
and even a dog and a dog-eater,[66] the wise see as equal.
Even here, they conquer nature, whose minds are founded in equalness;
because Brahman is immaculate, equal, so they abide in Brahman.
Not elated at getting the agreeable and not dejected upon finding the unpleasant;
mind calm, undeluded, the knower of Brahman in Brahman dwells.
Who is detached from the outward touch,[67] finds the bliss in the Atman;
the one yoked in Brahman through yoga, he immortal bliss enjoys.
Surely, the pleasures of the touch of the senses, they are only wombs of sorrow;
they begin and end, Kaunteya; not in them dwells a wise man.
Who can, even here, before leaving the body, endure
the lust- and anger-born rush, he is a yukta; he is the happy man.
Who joy within, rest within, and also light only within finds;
that yogi dissolution in Brahman, union with Brahman, attains.
Those rishis find Brahmanirvana, whose sins are exhausted,
doubts scattered, minds restrained: to the felicity of all beings devoted.
Freed from lust, anger, yatis, with minds restrained,
live subsumed in Brahmanirvana, those who know the Atman.

Outward objects of sensuality shutting out, and gaze fixed between the brows;
making equal outward and inward breath, moving within the nose;
with restrained senses, mind and intellect, the sage devoted to liberation,
who has departed desire, fear and anger, he is surely always free.
Enjoyer of sacrifices and penance, great Lord of all worlds,
friend to all beings—me, knowing, he comes to peace."

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63. a yoked one, who is united with the divine
64. the body of nine inlets
65. anything to be done
66. Chandala
67. of sensual contact, pleasure

CANTO 30

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Dhyana yoga: The way of meditation

The Gracious Lord says:
"Not seeking karma's fruit, who does his ordained work,
he is the sannyasi and the yogi; and not one without the fire,[68] and not him without ritual.
So, what they call sannyasa, know that is yoga, Pandava;
for, without renouncing desire, no one becomes a yogi.
For the sage who aspires to yoga, karma is the way, it is told;
who has attained yoga, only for him is quiescence the way, they say.
Only when neither to the objects of sensuality attached,
he who renounces all desire is said to have attained yoga.
Raise yourself through the Atman; never abase yourself;
for, only you are your own friend; you alone, your own enemy.
His Atman is his friend only to him who has mastered himself;
for the uncontrolled, his very soul is hostile like an enemy.

Who has conquered himself, who is tranquil, his soul is entirely composed,
in heat and cold, joy and sorrow, also, in honour and ignominy.
In knowledge and wisdom, fulfilled, unshakeable, master of his senses;
that yogi is said to be yoked for whom the clod of earth, a stone and gold are the same.
With the friend, the companion, an enemy, a stranger, an arbiter, an odious man, a relative,
as well as a saint and a sinner, he who is equal-minded, excels.

The yogi should constantly yoke himself: in seclusion,
alone, heart and mind controlled, without desire and possession.
In a clean place, setting his seat firm, himself,

neither too high nor too low, with kusa grass, cloth and deerskin, one over the other.
There, making his mind one-pointed, controlling his thought and senses,
sitting upon the seat, he should absorb himself in yoga, to purify his heart.
Aligning body, head and neck, keeping still and steady;
fixing his gaze on the tip of his nose, and not looking around;
serene, fearless, steadfast in the vow of celibacy;
mind controlled, intent on me, yoked, he sits devoted to me.
Thus yoking himself always, the yogi of subdued mind
to peace, supreme nirvana which abides in me, attains.

Not for one who eats too much is yoga, nor for him who overly fasts;
and not for him given to too much sleep, nor yet for the overly wakeful, Arjuna.
Who is restrained in food and pleasure, devoted in thought and deed;
moderate in sleep and waking, attains yoga, leaving sorrow.
When the restrained mind is founded exclusively in the Atman,
indifferent to every desire, then he is said to be a yukta.

As a lamp in a windless place does not flicker: similar, it is recorded,
is a yogi of restrained thought, engaged in the yoga of the Atman.
Where thought ceases, curbed by the practice of yoga;
and where, also, the mind sees the soul, and is fulfilled in the Atman;
in which infinite joy, through the intellect experienced, beyond the senses,
he knows; and in which established, he surely does not move from truth;
and gaining which, no other gain he considers as greater than that;
wherein founded, no grief, even the heaviest, shakes him:
that, know—the disunion from union with pain—to be absorption in yoga;
this, with conviction, practise: yoga, with an undismayed heart.

Will-spawned desires, all, renouncing entirely;
with the mind, the host of senses surely restraining, on every side;
by degrees growing still, through firmly restraining the intellect;
in the soul having established the mind, let him not think of anything.
Wherever the restless and fickle mind strays, from there it must be restrained,
brought back under the sway of just the Atman.

Who is of serene mind, only to this yogi the highest bliss
comes, his passion stilled, his spirit in Brahman, sinless.
Thus constantly devoting himself, the yogi, delivered from sin,
easily communes with Brahman, enjoys infinite bliss.

In all beings the Atman, and all beings in the soul:
the one absorbed in yoga sees everywhere the same.
Who sees me everywhere, and everything sees in me,
to him I am never lost, and he is not lost to me.

As abiding in all beings, who worships me, founded in oneness,
whatever his life, he is a yogi and lives in me.
In the image of himself, who everywhere sees the same, Arjuna,
be it in pleasure or in pain, he is deemed the highest yogi."

Arjuna says:
"This yoga you have said to be sameness, Madhusudana,
for this I see no enduring stability—out of restlessness.[69]
Fickle, surely, is the mind, Krishna, turbulent, strong, obstinate;
to control it, I think, is so difficult—like[70] the wind."

The Gracious Lord says:
"Doubtless, Mahabaho, the mind is difficult to control, unsteady;
but with practice, Kaunteya, and dispassion, it is restrained.
For the unrestrained, yoga is difficult to attain, I agree;
but the restrained soul, striving expediently, can attain it."

Arjuna says:
"Who cannot control himself, though he has faith, whose mind strays from yoga,
without attaining consummation in yoga, to what end, Krishna, does he come?
Does he not, from both fallen,[71] and like a rent cloud, surely perish,
unstable, Mahabaho, confounded along the path of Brahman?
This my doubt, Krishna, you must dispel entirely;
none but you, for sure, can effect the undoing of this doubt."

The Gracious Lord says:
“Partha, neither here nor hereafter, does he find harm;
for never does any good man, my friend, come to evil.
Having attained worlds of the righteous, living there for countless years,
into a home of the pious and the prosperous, the one fallen from yoga is nobly born.
Else, born even into a family of yogis of wisdom;
though rare indeed in the world is such a birth.
Thereupon, the evolution of his past life he recovers;
and, with that, strives again for perfection, Kurunandana.[72]
Also, that same previous practice bears him away, inexorably;
even a seeker after yoga transcends the Veda.[73]
But the yogi who strives with zealous mind, purified of all sin,
through many lives perfected, then comes to the supreme.
Than the tapasvin[74] greater the yogi; also greater than the gyani,[75] regarded;
Than the karmi[76] greater the yogi—so a yogi become, Arjuna.
Of all yogis, even, who abides in me in his inmost soul,
who devotedly worships me, him I consider the foremost yukta.”

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68. who does not light the sacred fire
69. of mind
70. controlling
71. devotion and yoga
72. joy, child of the Kurus
73. Vedic ritual
74. ascetic
75. man of knowledge, wisdom
76. man of deeds, work

CANTO 31

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Gyana Vigyana yoga: The way of knowledge and realisation.

The Gracious Lord says:
"To me the mind cleaving, Partha, devoted in yoga, taking refuge in me,
without doubt, you will know me in full—listen how.
This knowledge to you, I, together with wisdom, will tell in full,
which knowing, nothing else here will remain to be known.
Among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection;
among these seekers, even among sages,[77] hardly one knows me in truth.

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and also
ego—this my differentiated nature, eight-fold.
This is my lower nature; know my other transcendent nature—
the *Living Spirit*, Mahabaho, which supports this world.
These two are the womb of all beings, know;
I am all the world's source and its dissolution, as well.
Than me higher nothing else at all exists, Dhananjaya;
in[78] me all this is strung like so many jewels on a thread.

Taste am I in water, Kaunteya; light I am in moon and sun;
Aum in all the Vedas, sound in ether, manliness in men.
The pure fragrance in the earth I am, and brilliance in fire;
life in all beings am I, and austerity in ascetics.
The seed am I of all creatures, know, Partha—eternal;
the intelligence of the intelligent I am; the splendour of the splendid, I.
And I am the strength of the strong; of lust, passion devoid;
in beings, legitimate desire am I, Bharatarishabha.
And whatever sattvik existences, of rajas and tamas there are:
from me alone they are, know—I am not in them; they are in me.

By all these, the three gunas' manifestations, this whole world,
deluded, does not know me, transcendent, supreme, immutable.
For, this divine, guna-comprised maya of mine is impenetrable;
only who in me refuge, they cross over this maya.
Not in me evil-doers, fools, refuge, lowest of men;
robbed by maya of wisdom, they yield to demonic ways.

Four kinds of men worship me, virtuous ones, Arjuna:
the distressed, the aspirant,[79] the material seeker,[80] and the wise man, Bharatarishabha.
Of these the wise man, always in communion, of singular devotion, is the best;
for, most dear to the wise man I am, and he is dear to me.
Noble are all these, surely, but the gyani I regard as my own self;
Because he, the yoked soul, is absorbed just in me, as his highest refuge.
At the end of many lives, the wise man resorts to me:
'Because Vasudeva is all'—such a great soul is exceedingly rare.

Through desire they whose wisdom is swayed, worship other gods,
a myriad of rites observing, by their own natures compelled.
Whatever form, however, any devotee wishes to worship with faith,
in just that his faith I make firm.
He, to this faith yoked, *that*[81] to propitiate seeks;
and through that, obtains his wishes, which in truth by me alone are granted.
But they have an end, the fruits of these small-minded ones;
to the Devas, the worshippers of Devas go; and my devotees come to me.
The Unmanifest as reduced into manifestation: the ignorant regard me;
my supreme nature not knowing—imperishable, unsurpassed.
I am not plain to all, being cloaked by my yogamaya;
this foolish world does not know me: un-born, immortal.
I know equally, Arjuna, past and present
and future beings; but me no one knows.
By desire- and aversion-arisen duality seduced, Bhaarata,
all creatures are born to ignorance, Parantapa.
But whose sins have come to an end, men of virtuous deeds:
they, from duality's delusion freed, worship me with unswerving devotion.

For liberation from decay, death, who strive, sheltering in me,
they the Brahman truly know, the Atman entirely, and all about karma.
As the Lord of creatures,[82] master of gods, the support of sacrifice, me who know,
with absorbed minds they also know me even at the hour of death."

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77. Siddhas: the perfect. A Siddha is also a semi-divine being of great purity, characterised by eight supernatural faculties, or siddhis
78. on *me*
79. after knowledge; the spiritual seeker
80. of wealth, gain
81. form, deity
82. the elements, the material world

CANTO 32

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Akshara Brahma yoga: The way of immortal Brahman
Arjuna says:
"What is that Brahman, what Adhyatma,[83] what karma, Purushottama?
and what is called Adhibhutam, what said to be Adhidaivam?
Who is the Adhiyagna, and how: here in this body, Madhusudana?
And at the hour of death how are you known by the restrained soul?"

The Gracious Lord says:
"Deathless Brahman is supreme; nature is called Adhyatmam;
beings, souls, that which creates, sends forth, is named karma.
Adhibhutam is mortal forms, and Purusha,[84] Adhidaivatam;
Adhiyagna even I am, in this body, O most excellent of the living.
And at the time of the end, only me remembering, while leaving the body,
who departs, he comes to mybeing: of this there is no doubt.
Or else, of whatever thinking he gives up the body,
even to that he surely attains, Kaunteya, being ever absorbed in that thought.
So, at all times, think of me, and fight;
to me your heart and mind offered, to me you will surely come, without doubt.
Mind engaged in absorption in yoga, not straying,
who meditates, Partha, the supreme Purusha, divine, attains.
Who meditates on the Seer, the Ancient, the Ruler, smaller than the smallest,
the support of everything, of inconceivable form, Sun-coloured, beyond darkness,
at the hour of death, mind stilled, with devotion, yoked, and also, with the power of yoga,
prana fixed firmly between the brows—he, that supreme Purusha attains, divine.

That *Immortal* of which Veda knowers speak, which passionless sages enter;
wanting which, they practice brahmacharya—that condition to you briefly I will tell.

All inlets[85] restrained, and the mind confined in the heart;
in the head fixing the soul's life-breath, founded firm in yoga,
AUM, the one-syllabled Brahman, uttering, remembering me,
who departs, leaving the body, he goes to the highest destination.
Of nothing else aware, who ever remembers me, with constancy,
to him I am attainable, Partha, to the always yoked yogi.
Attaining me, to rebirth, house of sorrow, impermanent,
great souls do not return—the highest perfection they have reached.
Up to Brahma's realm, all worlds are subject to rebirth, Arjuna;
but upon me attaining, Kaunteya, there is no experiencing birth again.

A thousand yugas lasts Brahma's day, who know,
that his night lasts a thousand yugas, they are knowers of day and night.
From the Unmanifest all the manifest come forth at the advent of day;[86]
at the coming of night, they then dissolve into that same, called the Unmanifest.
The host of beings, they the same which recur, dissolves,
when night comes, helplessly, Partha, comes forth, when day arrives.
But beyond this existence is another unmanifest unmanisfestation eternal:
He who, when all beings perish, is not destroyed.
This Unmanifest is said to be imperishable: this, which is called the supreme condition,
whom attaining, they do not return—that is my supreme abode.
He is the supreme Purusha, Partha, but through singular devotion can be attained—
in whom all beings dwell, by whom all this is pervaded.

Now the times of yogis not returning, and also returning,
when departing hence—those times I will tell you, Bharatarishabha.
Fire, light, day, the bright fortnight,[87] the northern course:[88]
by these departing, those who know Brahman to Brahman go.
Smoke, night, also the dark fortnight, the six months of the southern course:

there, the lunar light, the yogi, obtaining, returns.

The bright, the dark: surely these paths of the world are considered eternal;
going by one, he does not return; by the other he comes back again.
Not, these paths, Partha, knowing, is the yogi deluded, ever;
so, at all times, yoked in yoga be, Arjuna.
By the Veda, by sacrifice, through penance, and also from charity what good fruits accrue—
the yogi transcends all that, and, this knowing, the supreme place attains, the primeval."

83. the Supreme Soul
84. the Cosmic Person
85. of the body, the senses
86. Brahma's day
87. when the moon waxes
88. the six months of the sun's northern course

CANTO 33

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Rajavidyarajaguhya yoga: The way of royal knowledge, the royal secret

The Gracious Lord says:
“Now to you, this deep secret I will reveal, O unenvious,
along with knowledge, wisdom—knowing which, you will be delivered from evil.
The sovereign knowledge, sovereign secret, sacred, this, supreme,
directly perceived, righteous, most easily practised, immortal.
Men who are faithless in this teaching, Parantapa,
not attaining me, return to the path of this world of death.[89]

By me is pervaded all this world: in unmanifest form;
in me are all creatures, and not I in them situated.
And not in me are the creatures founded—behold my divine yoga!
The support of beings and not founded in the beings, my soul the beings’ source.
As in akasa[90] is founded, ever, the great wind going everywhere,
even so do all beings in me abide, reflect.
All beings, Kaunteya, into Prakriti pass, mine,
at kalpa’s[91] end;
again, these, at kalpa’s beginning, I send forth.
In my own nature resting, I emit, again and again,
this entire host of beings, helpless, in Prakriti’s sway.
And not me do these acts bind, Dhananjaya;
as one indifferent I remain, unattached amidst these works.
Under my rule, nature gives birth to all the moving and the immobile;
because of this, Kaunteya, the world revolves.

Fools mock me, who have assumed a human body:
my supreme nature not knowing—the Great Lord of beings.

Of vain hopes, of vain deeds, of vain knowledge, witless;
and also of Rakshasas' and Asuras' deluded nature partaking.[92]
But great souls, Partha, abiding in divine nature, me worship, single-mindedly,
knowing[93] the source of beings, imperishable.
Always hymning me, and striving, with stern vows;
venerating me with devotion, ever yoked, they worship.
And through the ritual of wisdom yet others sacrifice, worship me:
as one, as apart, as many, universe-faced.

I am the ritual; I am sacrifice; the ancestral oblation, I; I, the herb;
the mantra, I; I alone the clarified butter; I, the fire; I, the offering.
the father, I, of this world, the mother, supporter, grandsire;
That which is to be known, the purifier, *Aum*, Rik, Sama and Yajus, also.
The goal, sustainer, lord, witness, abode, refuge, friend;
the origin, dissolution, the ground, the receptacle, the seed eternal.
I give heat; I withhold and send forth rain;
immortality and death, also, and reality and unreality—I, Arjuna.

Veda-knowers[94] who drink soma and are cleansed of sin, worshipping
me with sacrifices, pray for the passage to heaven;[95]
they attain the holy world of Indra, enjoy in heaven divine pleasures of the gods.
They that enjoy the vast world of swarga, when their merit is exhausted enter the mortal world;
thus, followers of the triune faith, seekers after pleasure, come and go.

With no other thought, they who worship me:
constantly, assiduously, their welfare I support.

Those, too, other gods' devotees, who sacrifice with faith,
they, also, only to me, Kaunteya, sacrifice;[96] not by ancient law.
For, I of all sacrifices am the enjoyer, and the lord, as well;
but they do not know me truly; so, they fall.
Deva worshippers go to the Devas; to the manes go adorers of the Pitris;
To spirits go spirit worshippers; and my worshippers come to me.
A leaf, flower, fruit, water, who, to me, with devotion offers:

that devout offering, of a pious soul, I accept.
Whatever you do, what you eat, that which you sacrifice;
whatever penance you perform, Kaunteya—that make an offering to me.

Thus from good and bad consequences you will be free, the bondage of karma;
to renunciation and yoga mind yoked, liberated, me you will attain.
The same, I, to all beings: none to me is hateful, none dear;
but those who worship me with devotion, they are in me and I, too, in them.
If even a most sinful one worships me, single-mindedly,
a saint he must be considered, for he has rightly resolved.
Quickly he becomes a righteous soul, eternal peace attains;
Kaunteya, know for certain, never does my bhakta perish.
For, in me, Partha, those who refuge, even they of sinful birth,
women, vaishyas and sudras, they also attain the supreme goal.

How much more then, pure Brahmanas and devout Rajarishis;
this impermanent, unhappy world having found—worship me.
Your mind on me; be my devotee; to mesacrifice; to mebow;
to me you will surely come, thus devoted, your mind on me intent."

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89. Samsara is also the world of illusions
90. space, sky, cosmic ether. The fifth element
91. see appendix: note on time
92. those that mock me
93. I am
94. knowers of the three Vedas. The Atharva is often not included in Vaishnava texts.
95. Swarga
96. though

CANTO 34

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Vibhutih yoga: The way of Brahman

The Gracious Lord says:
“Yet again, Mahabaho, hear my supreme word,
which to you, I, holding you dear, will tell, wishing your weal.
Neither the hosts of Devas my origin know, nor the Maharishis;
for I am the source of the Devas and the Maharishis, in every way.
Who me, un-born and beginningless, Great God of the world, knows—
undeluded, he, among mortals, from all sin liberated.
Intelligence, knowledge, clarity, patience, truth, self-control, calm;
joy, sorrow; being, non-being; and fear and also fearlessness;
non-violence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, infamy—
born, these dispositions of beings, from me alone, of different kinds.

The great sages, the seven,[97] and the earlier four;[98] the Manus, also:
of my being, mind, born—from these, this world’s progeny.
This power and work of mine who knows in truth,
he to unfaltering communion is joined—of this, no doubt.
I, of all the source; from me everything begins;
this knowing, me the wise worship, with devotion.
In me their thought, to me given their life, awakening one another;
and speaking of me always; and contented and joyful.
To them, always devoted, worshipping with love,
I give buddhi yoga, by which to me they come.
For these, out of tenderness alone, I their darkness of ignorance,
dwelling in my Self, dispel—with the lamp of wisdom, resplendent.”

Arjuna says:
“The supreme Brahman, the highest abode, absolutely pure, you are,
the Purusha eternal, divine, the primeval God, un-born, immanent,

say all the sages, Devarishi Narada, too,
Asita, Devala, Vyasa; and you yourself tell me so.
All this I hold true, which to me you say, Kesava;
not, surely, Lord, your origin the Devas know, nor the Danavas.[99]
Only you yourself your soul, with your soul, know, Purushottama,
Source of beings, Lord of beings, God of gods, Lord of the world.
Surely, you alone can tell fully of the divine powers,
with which glories these worlds, you, pervading, abide.
How can I know, O Yogin, you, with constant contemplation?
And in which various forms are you, Lord, to be thought of by me?
Expatiate again on your power and might, Janardana;
for, I am not satiated hearing your words, like nectar."

The Gracious Lord says:
"Yes, I will tell you my divine manifestations,
only those which are main, best of the Kurus—there is no end to my extent.
I, the soul, Gudakesa, in all beings' hearts dwelling,
and I the beginning and middle, and, also, the end of beings.
Of the Adityas I am Vishnu; of luminaries, the Sun, radiant;
Marichi of the Maruts I am; of stars I am the Moon.
Of Vedas, the Sama Veda am I; of Devas, I am Vasavah;[100]
and of senses the mind, I; in beings I am consciousness.
Of Rudras, Sankara I am; Vittesha[101] among Yakshas and Rakshasas;
and of Vasus I am fire; Meru among mountains, I.
And of priests, the chief, I, know, Partha: Brihaspati;
of generals, I am Skanda; of lakes, I am the ocean.
of Maharishis, Bhrigu, I; of speech, the single syllable;[102]
of sacrifices the Japa yagna[103] I am; of mountains, Himalaya.
The Aswattha among all trees, and of Devarishis Narada;
of Gandharvas, Chitraratha; among Siddhas, Kapila muni.
Ucchaisravas among horses, know me to be, nectar-born;
Airavata among elephant lords, and among men, the king.
Of weapons, I, the Vajra; of cows am I Kamadhenu;
and among progenitors, I am Kandarpa;[104] of serpents I am Vasuki.
and Ananta I am among Nagas; Varuna of ocean-dwellers, I;
and of the manes Aryaman am I; Yama of regulators, I.

And Prahlada I am of Daityas;[105] Time, of reckoners;
and of beasts, the king of beasts, I, and Vainata[106] of birds.

The wind among purifiers I am; Rama of weapon-bearers, I;
and among fish the crocodile I am; among rivers I am Jaahnavi.[107]
Of creations, the beginning and end, also the middle, I, Arjuna;
metaphysics of sciences, the dialectic of debaters, I.
Of alphabets, the *a* am I and of compounds, the dual;
I alone, eternal Time; the Creator, I, facing everywhere.
And death, taking all, I, and the source of what is to be;
fame, fortune, speech of women, memory, intelligence, fortitude, patience.
The Brihat Saman, also, of hymns, the Gayatri among mantras, I;
of months, Margasirsa, I; of seasons, the flower-mine.[108]
Of deceivers, gambling I am; the splendour of the splendid, I;
victory I am; effort I am; the goodness of the good, I.
Of Vrishnis, Vaasudeva[109] I am; of the Pandavas, Dhananjaya;
of sages Vyasa, also, I; of poets, the poet Usana.[110]
The rod[111] of punishers I am; the strategy I am of conquest seekers;
and the silence, also, I am, of secrets; the wisdom of the wise, I.
And, further, what is the seed of all beings—that, I, Arjuna;
which can exist without me: there can be no being, moving or unmoving.
No end is there to my divine manifestations, Parantapa;
All this that I have said are[112] illustrative of my infinite glories.
Whatever existence is glorious, graceful or powerful, surely,
that, know you, from a portion of my splendour is born.
Anyway, of what avail all these knowing, to you, Arjuna?
I pervade all this with an iota of myself, support the Universe."

97. Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishta
98. Sanatkumara, Sanatana, Sananda and Sanaka
99. demons, sons of Danu
100. Indra
101. Kubera
102. Aum
103. chanting god's names
104. Kama, god of love
105. demons, sons of Diti

106. Vinata's son, Garuda
107. Ganga
108. Spring
109. Vasudeva's son, Krishna
110. Sukra
111. Yama's danda, rod of chastisement
112. merely examples

CANTO 35

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Viswarupa darshana yoga: The way of the vision of the Cosmic Form.

Arjuna says:
"To bless me, the supreme, secret, Adhyatmam, you revealed;
with these words that you spoke, my bewilderment has gone.
Indeed, of the appearance and passing of beings, I have heard extensively
from you, Lotus-eyed; and also your greatness, imperishable.
It is just so: what you have said about yourself, Parameswara—
I want to see your Form Divine, Purushottama!
If you think *That* can be seen by me, Lord,
Yogeswara, then, to me show your Self Eternal."

The Gracious Lord says:
"Behold, Partha, my forms, hundreds and thousands,
of many kinds, divine, vari-coloured and -shaped.
Behold the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, the two Asvins, also the Maruts;
many previously unseen wonders, behold, Bhaarata.
Here, as one, the Universe, whole, see now, moving and immobile,
in my body, Gudakesa; and whatever else you wish to see.

But you cannot see me with just these your eyes;
I give you divine sight—behold my Sovereign Yoga."'

Sanjaya says:
'So saying, then, my king, the Great Lord of yoga, Hari,
shows Partha his supreme Form Divine.

Countless mouths, eyes; countless amazing visions;
countless divine ornaments; countless divine weapons raised;
divine garlands, raiment, wearing; with divine perfumes anointed;
of all wonders, refulgent; infinite, faces everywhere.

In the sky, if a thousand suns were together risen,
light like that might perhaps compare with the splendour of that *Great Being*.

There, as one, the Universe, whole, of divisions manifold,
sees, in the God of gods' body, then, the Pandava.
Then, he, wonderstruck, horripilating, Dhananjaya,
bowing his head before *God*, with hands folded, speaks.

Arjuna says:
"I see the Devas, O God, in your body, and also all the myriad hosts of beings,
Brahma, the Lord upon lotus-throne seated, and all the Rishis and Uragas[113] divine.

With countless arms, bellies, mouths, eyes: I see your infinite form everywhere;
neither your end nor middle, nor again your beginning, do I see,
crying, the Maharishi, Siddha hosts
With crowns, maces, and chakras, a mass of light, everywhere shining,
I see you, hard to look at, on all sides with irradiance of fire, blazing sun—immeasurable.
You, the imperishable, the supreme,[114] to be known; you are the universe's ultimate basis;
you, the changeless guardian of everlasting dharma; the eternal Purusha, you, I believe.
Without beginning, middle, end; of infinite power; endless armed; the Sun, Moon, your eyes,
I see you, burning fire your faces, with your refulgence this universe searing.
This space between heaven and earth, surely, is pervaded by just you, and the dishas all;[115]
seeing this your astounding, dreadful form, the three worlds are terrified, Mahatman.
Ah, you these hosts of Suras enter; some, in fear, hands folded, give praise;
Svasti!,[116] so crying, the Maharishi, Siddha hosts adore youwith hymns of mighty praise.

The Rudras, Adityas, Vasus, and these Sadhyas; the Viswas, the two Asvins and the Maruts, and the Usmapas;[117]
the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Asuras, Siddha hosts gaze at you in wonder, also, surely, all.
Your great *Form*, many-mouthed, -eyed, Mahabaho, of many arms, thighs, feet,
many bellies, many fangs, horrible, seeing, the worlds tremble, as also I.
Sky-touching, ablaze, countless-hued, mouth agape, huge blazing eyes:
seeing only you, my inmost soul quails; no stability do I find, nor peace, O Vishnu.
And seeing your fearful, fanged mouths, like time's fire flaming,
the directions I do not know, nor find joy—be merciful, Lord of gods, abode of the universe!

And Dhritarashtra's sons, all, with the hosts of kings;
Bhishma, Drona, and that Sutaputra,[118] also, with our side's main warriors, too,
into your fearful jaws, terrible with fangs, rush;
some stick between the teeth; are seen, heads crushed.
As many rivers' swift waters just towards the ocean flow,
even so, those heroes of the world of men enter your fiery mouths.
As a burning fire moths enter, to perish swiftly,
even so, to perish, these men, also, fly into your mouths at great speed.

You lick,[119] devouring on all sides the worlds, entirely, with mouths aflame;
your brilliance covers all the universe, you lustre terrible, searing, O Vishnu.
Tell me who you are, of dreadful form; salutations to you, best of gods, have mercy!
I want to know you, the first, for I do not understand what you do."

The Gracious Lord says:
"Time I am, world-waster, ancient—the world to annihilate, here, my mission;
even without you,[120] no future have all these, arrayed hostile, the warriors.
So, arise, glory gain: defeating your enemies, enjoy a thriving kingdom;

by me alone these have been killed already—the instrument, only, become, Savyasachin.[121]
Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha and Karna, as also other warrior heroes, by me slain already, you raze; do not be afraid—fight, you will conquer in battle, the enemies."'

Sanjaya says:
'Hearing these words of Kesava, hands folded, trembling, Kiriti[122]
bows, again, speaks to Krishna, falteringly, in terror, prostrating.

Arjuna says:
"Rightly, Hrishikesa, by your praises is the world enraptured and fascinated;
Rakshasas, terrified, flee in all directions, and the Siddha hosts pay homage.
And why not worship you, Mahatman, who are greater than Brahma even, the first creator;
O Infinite, Lord of gods, Abode of the universe, you are deathless; real, unreal; and what is beyond that.
You, the first God, the ancient Purusha; you are the supreme home of the universe;
you are the knower and the known[123] and the final resort—by you the universe is pervaded, infinite-formed!
Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, Sashanka, and Prajapati,[124] the great Grandsire—you.

Hail, hail to you, a thousand times, and again, yet again, hail, hail to you!
Obeisance in front, also from behind, to you; obeisance to you on every side, O All!
Of endless prowess, boundless compass, you; everything you suffuse, so you are all.
'My friend', so thinking, rashly, whatever I said, 'O Krishna', 'O Yadava', 'O friend', thus,
not knowing *This* your greatness, out of my carelessness or out of love,
and whatever slight, in jest, was shown, at sport, lying down, seated, while eating,
alone or, Achyuta, in the presence of others—all that forgive me, O Incomprehensible.

The father you are of this world, of the moving, the unmoving; you are its adored and loftiest guru;
none is your equal, how then any greater, in the three worlds, as well, O unequalled power?

So, bowing, prostrating my body, I worship you, Lord adorable;
as a father his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, you must, Lord, suffer me.

The never-before-seen, seeing, I rejoice, and with fear my heart is shaken so;
so, Lord, your other form show me—be merciful, God of gods, home of the universe!
crowned, with mace, disc in your hands—I want to see you, just as before;
that same form, four-armed, assume, O thousand-armed, universe-bodied!"

The Gracious Lord says:
"By my grace, to you, Arjuna, this *Form Supreme* was shown, through my divine yoga—
resplendent, universal, infinite, primal, which none but you has seen before.
Not by the Veda, sacrifice, learning, not by charity, and not by rituals, not by fierce penance,
in this form can I, in the world of men, be seen by anyone but you, O Kurupravira.[125]
Do not be afraid, nor confounded, seeing this terrible *Form*, like this, of mine;
free from fear, with a glad heart, again, then, the same, this my form, see."'

Sanjaya says:
'Thus to Arjuna saying, Vaasudeva his own form shows again,
and comforts that terrified, becoming once more the gentle, beautiful Mahatman.

Arjuna says:
"Seeing this human form of yours, gracious, Janardana,
now, I become calm, return to myself."

The Gracious Lord says:
"Most difficult to see, this form which you have seen, of mine;
the Devas, even, always, this form to see are keen.
Not through the Veda, not by tapasya, not through daana, nor yet by yagnas,
can I like this be seen, as you have seen me.
But through devotion, singular, can I like this, Arjuna,
be known, seen, and, in truth, also entered into, Parantapa.

Who for me does work; I his supreme; my devotee, of attachment rid;
without hostility towards any of the living, he comes to me, Pandava."

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113. serpents
114. the thing to be known
115. the four quarters, directions of the sky
116. hail, peace!
117. manes, ancestors
118. Karna
119. them up, while
120. killing them
121. Arjuna was ambidextrous
122. Arjuna, the crown-wearer
123. knowable, that which is to be known
124. the Gods Wind, Death, Fire, Sea, Moon, Brahma
125. great hero of the Kurus

CANTO 36

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Bhakti yoga: The way of devotion.

Arjuna says:
"Thus, always yoked, those devotees who worship you,
and, again, those who do the Imperishable, the Unmanifest—of these, which have yoga?"

The Gracious Lord says:
"On me fixing the mind, who, ever absorbed, me worship,
with devotion supreme endowed, them, I the best yogis consider.
But who the Imperishable, ineffable, unmanifest, worship, the ubiquitous and inconceivable, highest, unmoving, permanent,
restraining all the senses, everywhere even-minded,
they attain me, surely—to the weal of all beings devoted.
The travail greater of them, on the Unmanifest whose minds are set;
for, the way of the Unmanifest is painfully by the embodied attained.
But who all karma to me renounce, on me intent,
with singular yoga, me, through meditation, worship:
of them, I, the deliverer from death, samsara's[126] sea,
become, quickly, Partha—on me whose minds are set.

On me alone your heart set; in me let your mind dwell:
you will live in me, surely, thereafter, beyond doubt.

If your mind you cannot fix on me, steadily,
through the practice of yoga, then, me seek to attain, Dhananjaya.
Abhyasa,[127] even, if you cannot do, let my work your highest be;
for my sake, even, work doing, perfection you will find.
If even this you cannot do, in performing yoga for me refuge;
all karma's fruit renounce, then, with subdued mind.

Better, surely, knowledge than routine; than knowledge meditation is superior;
than meditation, the sacrifice of karma's fruit—upon renunciation, peace follows.

Without aversion towards any creature, friendly and compassionate, only,
without 'mine', without 'I'; equal in pain, pleasure; forgiving;
contended always, the yogi, self-controlled, of firm resolve,
to me given heart, mind—who is my devotee, he is dear to me.
By whom the world is not disturbed; and the world does not disturb him;
from exultation, anger, fear, agitation who is free, he, too, is dear to me.
Independent, pure, competent, indifferent, free from pain;
who all endeavour has abandoned—my devotee, he is dear to me.

Who neither exults nor dislikes; neither grieves nor desires;
good, evil, abandons—that devotee, he is dear to me.
And alike with enemy and friend; also, to honour, dishonour;
in heat, cold, joy, sorrow, the same; free from attachment;
equal in blame, praise; quiet, contented with anything;[128]
Homeless, of firm resolve—my devotee, a man dear to me.
But who this immortal dharma, as told, follow,
with faith, me the[129] goal, those devotees are very dear to me."

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126. the mortal world of delusion, transmigration
127. the exercise, practice of yoga
128. which comes
129. their

CANTO 37

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Kshetra Kshetrajna vibhaga yoga: The way of discernment between the field and its knower.

Arjuna says:[130]
"Prakriti and Purusha, also; kshetra and kshetrajna, too:
these, I wish to know; knowledge and the known, Kesava."

The Gracious Lord says:
"This body, Kaunteya, the field it is called;
this who knows, he is called kshetrajna,[131] by those who know.
And the kshetrajna, also, me in every field, Bhaarata;
of kshetra, kshetrajna,[132] the knowledge: that, true knowledge, in my view.
and what that field is, and what its nature, and what its transformations, whence arisen,
and what *He*[133] is, and of what origin—that, in brief, from me hear.
By the rishis, variously, sung, in chhandas,[134] diversely, distinctly;
and also in Brahma sutra[135] passages, logical, decisive.
The mahabhutas,[136] ego, intelligence, and also the unmanifest;
the senses, ten, and the one,[137] and five sense pastures;
desire, aversion; pleasure, pain; the organism, consciousness, fortitude—
thus, the field, in brief, is described, with examples.

Humility, integrity, non-violence, patience, uprightness;
serving the guru, purity, stability, self-control;
for the objects of sensuality, aversion; lack of egotism; and also,
in birth, death, old age, sickness—pain, evil, seeing;
detachment, no clinging to son, wife, home, the likes;
and, always, even-mindedness to desired,[138] unwanted happenings;
and for me, through exclusive yoga, devotion abiding;
to solitary places resorting; distaste for gatherings of men;

in spiritual wisdom, constancy; the knowledge of truth's end seeing—
all this gyana is called; ignorance, what is other than this.

That which is known, I will tell you, which knowing immortality is gained;
beginningless, *It*, supreme Brahman; neither being, *That*, nor un-being, it is told.
Everywhere, hands, feet: that; everywhere, eyes, heads, faces;
everywhere, ears—in the world everything enveloping, it dwells.
all the senses' qualities reflecting, of all the senses devoid;
unattached and also all-supporting; without gunas and experiencing the gunas.

Outside and within the living, mobile and unmoving, too;
being subtle, that, imperceptible; and far and near, that.
And undivided, in beings, also, seemingly, divided, exists;
and as beings' support that is known, devourer and creator.
Of lights, also, that the light, beyond darkness, said to be;
knowledge, the known, gained through knowledge, in the hearts of all seated.
Thus, the field and also knowledge and the known, told in brief;
my devotee, this knowing, to my being attains.

Prakriti[139] and also Purusha,[140] know, are beginningless, both;
and transformations and also gunas, know—of Prakriti born.
Effect, cause, instrument, agency—Prakriti, it is told;
Purusha, of joy, sorrow's, experience, the cause, it is said.
For, the Purusha, dwelling in Prakriti, enjoys the Prakriti-born gunas;
the cause, attachment to the gunas: of its birth in good, evil wombs.
Witness and sanctioner, lord, experiencer, great God,
and also the supreme soul, it's told—in this body, the Purusha transcendent.
Who thus knows Purusha and Prakriti, with the gunas,
whatever his life, he is not born again.

Through meditation, the Atman see, some, in the Atman, with the Atman;
others, through samkhya yoga, and by karma yoga, others.
Yet others, not thus knowing, hearing from others, worship;
and they also, surely, transcend death by devotion to what they hear.[141]

Whatever being is born, motionless or mobile—
from kshetra and kshetrajna's union: that know, Bharatarishabha.

Equally in all creatures abiding, the Supreme God,
amidst the perishing, imperishable, who sees, he sees.
For, the same God seeing, everywhere, omnipresent,
he injures not the Atman with the Atman, so attains the final goal.
And only by Prakriti, karma is done, in every way,
who sees, also that the Atman is act-less, he sees.
When the diversity of beings as situated in the one, he sees,
and also, therefrom, their spread, the Brahman he then becomes.
Beginningless, without attributes, this Paramatman, immortal,
though dwelling in the body, Kaunteya, neither acts nor is tainted.
As, being subtle, the ubiquitous ether is not tainted,
so also, everywhere located, in the body, the Atman is not stained.
As one sun illumines this whole world,
so, too, the kshetri[142] illumines this entire kshetra,[143] Bhaarata.

Between kshetra, kshetrajna, thus, the distinction, with eye of wisdom,
and the deliverance of beings from Prakriti, who know, they attain the Supreme."

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130. this verse is not included in many versions. If it is, the number of slokas in the Bhagavad Gita becomes 701, instead of 700. As in Radhakrishnan's translation, I have not numbered it here.
131. knower of the field
132. Swami Vireswarananda: matter and spirit
133. the kshetrajna
134. Vedic hymns
135. aphorisms of Brahman
136. the five elements
137. mind
138. and
139. nature, the feminine principle
140. soul, the masculine principle
141. Sruti is also the Veda
142. embodied soul
143. field, universe

CANTO 38

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Gunatrai vibhaga yoga: The way of the division of the three gunas.

The Gracious Lord says:
"Again, the highest I will tell you, of wisdoms the best wisdom;
this knowing, the sages, all, to final perfection from here passed.
This wisdom resorting to, my nature attaining,
at creation, even, they are not born, and not during the dissolution disquieted.
My womb great Brahma, into which the seed cast I;
to birth all beings, from that, come, Bhaarata.
In all the species, Kaunteya, whatever forms take birth,
of them, great Brahma the womb, I the seed-giving father.
Sattva, rajas, tamas, these gunas, Prakriti-born,
bind, Mahabaho, into the body the dweller imperishable.

Of these, sattva, being pure, is illumining, health-giving,
through attachment to happiness binds, and through attachment to knowledge, O sinless.
Rajas has passion's nature, know, from craving, attachment, sprung;
it binds, Kaunteya, with addiction to action, the embodied.
But tamas, ignorance-born, know, deludes all the living;
through rashness, sloth, stupor, it binds fast, Bhaarata.
Sattva to happiness binds; rajas to activity, Bhaarata;
but, wisdom shrouding, tamas to rashness, it is told.

Rajas and tamas subduing, sattva prevails, Bhaarata;
Rajas, the same, over sattva and tamas; tamas, even so, over sattva and rajas.

When through all doors[144] of this body, light radiates,

knowledge: then, know, sattva surely waxes.
Greed, activity, undertaking karma, disquiet, desire—
when rajas increases, these prevail, Bharatarishabha.
Darkness and inactivity, neglect and also delusion:
when tamas increases, these prevail, joy of the Kurus.

Now, while sattva waxes, if to dissolution[145] the embodied goes,
then, worlds of the highest sages, taintless, it gains.
In rajas, death finding, among those addicted to karma it is born;
and if dissolved during tamas, in dark wombs it is born.
Of virtuous karma, it is told, sattvik and pure the fruit;
while rajas' fruit is sorrow, and darkness the fruit of tamas.

From sattva arises knowledge; and from rajas only greed;
heedlessness, delusion, from tamas come, and also ignorance.
Upwards go those founded in sattva; midway remain the rajasas;
those steeped in the vile guna, go downwards, the tamasas.

No other agent than the gunas, when the seer sees,
and what is beyond the gunas knows, to my being he attains.
These gunas transcending, triune, which spring from the body, the embodied,
from birth, death, old age, pain, is liberated, immortality gains."

Arjuna says:
"What signs of one who these three gunas has transcended, Lord?
what his deportment, and how does he the three gunas transcend?"

The Gracious Lord says:
"Light and activity and, even, delusion, Pandava,
he does not shun, when they arise, nor, when they cease, long for.
As if indifferent seated, by the gunas who is not moved;
the gunas act: this knowing, who is still, unwavering.
The same in joy, sorrow, contented; equal[146] a clod, stone, gold;
the same to the pleasant, unpleasant; calm; equal to blame of himself, to praise.
In honour, disgrace, the same; equal to a friend, an enemy;

all endeavours who has renounced—gone beyond the gunas, he is said to have.
And me who, with unfailing yoga of devotion, serves,
he, these gunas transcends, for becoming Brahman is fit.
For, Brahman’s abode I, immortal and imperishable;
and of eternal dharma, and absolute bliss.”

144. of perception
145. death
146. for him

CANTO 39

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Purushottama yoga: The way of the Supreme Person.

"Root above, branches below, the Aswattha,[147] they tell of, imperishable,
of which the chhandas are the leaves; who knows this, he is a Veda knower.

Below and above, extend its branches, guna-nourished,
sense-objects for twigs;
and below its roots stretch, binding in karma the world of men.
Not its form,[148] either, is here perceived, not its end, nor beginning, and neither its foundation.
This aswattha, deep-rooted, with the mighty sword detachment severing,
then, let that condition be sought, going where, there is no returning again;
only to that original Purusha surrender, from whom this ancient world came.
Without pride, delusion; quelled, the sin attachment; spiritual always; rid of desire;
liberated from the dualities, called pleasure, pain—the undeluded go to that state eternal.

Not that, the sun illumines, not moon, not fire;
who go there do not return—that abode supreme, mine.

A mere particle of myself, a living spirit, eternal,[149]
into the world of jivas the senses, mind the sixth, founded in nature, draws.[150]
A body when assuming, and also when leaving it, the Lord
takes all these, leaving, even as the wind scents from their places.

Ears, eyes, and touch, taste, and also smell
dwelling in, and mind, he the sense-objects enjoys.

Departing or dwelling, as also experiencing, while associated with the gunas,
the deluded do not see;[151] they see who have wisdom's eye.
Striving yogis also, *That* see, in themselves situated;
even striving, the unrestrained do not see it, unawakened ones.

That lustre of the sun, which the whole world illumines,
that in the moon, and that in fire—that light, know, is mine.
And the earth entering, creatures I support with energy;
and nourish all plants, the moon becoming, sapful.
I the fire become, in creatures' bodies dwell;
prana, apana,[152] uniting with, digest food, the four kinds.
And, of all, I in their hearts am lodged; from me, memory, wisdom, and their loss;
and in all the Vedas, I alone, the known; Vedanta's author, and also the Veda-knower, I.

And two persons in this world: the mortal, and also the immortal;
mortal, all creatures; the unchanging, the immortal called.
But the highest being, another, Paramatman called,
who the three worlds enters, sustains them, imperishable *God*.

Because the mortal I transcend, and even the immortal surpass,
so, I am, in the world and in the Veda, known as Purushottama.[153]
Who, thus, undeluded, knows me, Purushottamam,
he, knowing everything, worships me with all his being, Bhaarata.

Thus, this most secret Shastra has been taught by me, O sinless;
this, understanding, wise he becomes; and all his duty done, Bhaarata."

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147. peepul tree
148. true form
149. becoming
150. to itself
151. the indweller; *It*
152. inward and outward breaths
153. the Supreme Person

CANTO 40

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Daivaasurasampad vibhaga yoga: The way of the distinction between the divine and the demonic qualities.

The Gracious Lord says:
“Fearlessness, essential purity, in wisdom’s yoga steadfastness,
charity and self-control and sacrifices, sacred study, austerity, rectitude;
non-violence, honesty, without anger, renunciation, not critical, mercy
for the living, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, free of caprice;
vitality, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, without malice, without hubris—
the wealth of one with divine nature born, Bhaarata.
Ostentation, arrogance and great conceit, anger, and also violence,
and ignorance—the endowments of those born, Partha, demonic.

The divine inheritance liberates, the demonic binds, it is thought;
grieve not: you to wealth divine are born, Pandava.

Two kinds of being in the world, the divine and also the demonic;
the divine at length have been spoken of; of the demonic, Partha, from me hear.

Neither what to do nor what not to, they know, the demonic;
no purity and neither conduct, no truth, in them found.
Unreal, un-founded, they say, the world, *God*-less,
of continuing origin, nothing other than lust-begotten.
To this view cleaving, lost souls, of small minds,
come forth, of savage deeds, for the destruction of the world, its enemies.
To lust surrendered, insatiable; by hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, possessed;
through delusion seizing fell designs, they act, sworn to evil.
And to cares boundless, ending in death, surrendered;
sensual enjoyment the highest:[154] that this is all convinced;

by desire's bonds, hundreds, bound; to lust, anger, yielded;
they strive, in order to gratify their desires, unscrupulously, great wealth to amass.
'This, today, by me gained; this heart's desire I will satisfy;
this there is, and this, too, I will have:[155] more wealth.
By me[156] slain that enemy; and I will kill others, too;
the lord, I; I, the enjoyer; successful, I, strong, happy;
rich, well-born I am; who else is[157] like me?
I will sacrifice, give charity, rejoice!'—thus, by ignorance deluded.

By countless fancies confounded, in delusion's net ensnared;
addicted to satisfying lusts, they fall into foetid hell.

Smug with conceit, obdurate, with wealth's pride intoxicated,
they sacrifice,[158] in name sacrifice, with ostentation, disregarding precept.
To egotism, force, pride, lust and rage given:
me, in their own and other's bodies, hating, these envious ones.
These, haters vicious, vilest of men, in samsara,
I cast repeatedly only into inauspicious, demon wombs.
Fiendish wombs finding, the deluded, birth after birth,
me far from attaining, Kaunteya, then devolve to the basest state.

Triune, of this hell, the gates, which destroy the soul—
lust, anger and greed; so, these three abandon.
From these the man who is liberated, Kaunteya, gates to darkness, three,
does what is good for his soul, then reaches the supreme condition.

Who scriptural law forsakes, acts by desire's dictates,
he does not perfection attain, not happiness, not the highest goal.
So, let the Shastras[159] be your authority: what may be done, what is forbidden, to determine;
knowing what the scripture's laws declare, your karma you must do, here."[160]

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154. aim

155. in future
156. already
157. there
158. only
159. scriptures: the Vedas, the Vedanga/Upanishads, the 18 great Puranas. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are traditionally only considered Itihasas, histories
160. in this world

CANTO 41

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Sraddhatrai vibhaga yoga: The way of the divisions of the three kinds of faith.

Arjuna says:
"Who scriptural laws forsake, but worship, with faith—
what is their condition, Krishna, sattva, rajas or tamas?"

The Gracious Lord says:
"Threefold is the faith of the embodied, of their nature born—
sattvik, rajasik and also tamasik; and hear about it.

In concord with his nature everyone's faith is, Bhaarata:
of his faith's nature, man—what his faith is, that indeed is he.

The sattvikas worship the Devas; the rajasas do yakshas and rakshasas;
pretas and other kinds of bhutas, tamasik men worship.

Not ordained by the Shastras, violent austerities those men perform,
to pride, egotism yoked, by lust, passion's force possessed.
Torturing the elements in the body, the senseless,
and me, also, dwelling in the body—these, know, of demonic resolve.

The food, too, by all liked, is of three kinds;
sacrifice, austerity, charity, as well; of the divisions of these, hear.
Longevity, vitality, strength, health, happiness, love, which augment;
succulent, soft, nourishing, tasty—foods dear to the sattvik.
Bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, harsh, burning—
foods by the rajasika liked: pain, grief, disease causing.
Cold, insipid, putrid, stale and what is
refuse and also unclean—food to tamasas dear.

By those expecting no reward, the sacrifice which by scriptural decree is offered,
exclusively as a duty, mind absorbed, that is sattvik.
But aiming for its fruit, and also for display, what
is offered, best of Bhaaratas, that sacrifice, know, is rajasik.
Against law,[161] where no food is given, without mantras, without dakshina,[162]
of faith devoid, the yagna is tamasik, they say.

Of the gods, the twice-born, gurus, the wise, worship; purity, rectitude,
continence and non-violence—bodily austerity is called.
Speech which no offence causes, and which is truthful, pleasant and benign,
and also regular recitation of the Veda—verbal austerity is called.

Mental calm, gentleness, silence, self-control,
purity of feeling, all these—austerity of mind are called.
With faith transcendent undertaken, this three-fold penance, by men
who wish for no gain, devoted—sattvik is called.

For respect, honour, reverence, the austerity, and which with ostentation
is performed, that, here, is deemed rajasik: fleeting, impermanent.
From foolish belief, the self-torturing, the penance that is practised,
or to others meaning harm—that tamasik is said to be.

'To give is a duty': thus,[163] to give charity, without[164] obligation,
and at a proper time and place—that charity is sattvik regarded.

But that which to be reciprocated, or aiming for its fruit, in future,
and given grudgingly—that charity rajasik is considered.
at the wrong place, time: that charity given, and to the undeserving,
without respect, contemptuously—that tamasic is told.

Aum tat sat—this is declared Brahman's triad name:
Brahmanas, by this, and the Veda and Sacrifice, were created of old.
So, *Aum*, thus uttering, acts of sacrifice, charity, austerity are
performed, scripture-enjoined, always by Brahmavadis.[165]
Tat: thus,[166] without desiring their fruit, acts of sacrifice, penance

and various deeds of charity are performed, by liberation seekers.
Reality and goodness, *sat* for these is used;
for laudable deeds, as well, the word *sat*, Partha, is used.
In sacrifice, austerity and charity, constancy—*sat* is called;
and also karma done for *that*, *sat*, indeed, is named.

Without faith, oblation,[167] gifts,[168] austerity performed, and whatever[169] done—
Asat it is called, Partha, and is of no account hereafter nor here."

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161. scriptural
162. the fee paid to priests
163. thinking
164. expecting
165. expounders, followers of the Veda
166. they say
167. offered
168. given
169. else

CANTO 42

SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA CONTINUED

Moksha Sannyasa yoga: The way of renunciation, liberation.

Arjuna says:
“Of sannyasa[170], Mahabaho, the truth I wish to know,
and about tyaga,[171] Hrishikesa,[172] separately, Kesinisudana.[173]

The Gracious Lord says:
“Desire-impelled karma abandoning, as sannyasa the seers understand;
all karma’s fruit sacrificing, call tyaga, the knowing.

‘Renounced as an evil, all karma,’ say some thinkers;
‘Acts of sacrifice, charity, austerity must not be abandoned,’ and so say others.

Decisively hear from me about this tyaga, best of the Bhaaratas;
for, relinquishment, Purushavyaghra,[174] of three kinds is declared.

Works of sacrifice, charity, these are not be relinquished but surely performed;
sacrifice, charity and also austerity are purifiers of the wise.
But even these works done, attachment leaving and fruit,
as duty—this, Partha, my decided view, the best.
But with religious duty, the renunciation of[175] karma is not proper;
through delusion its abandonment, tamasik is declared.
Painful: so being, a duty; bodily suffering fearing, if it is abandoned—
he, performing merely a rajasik relinquishment, surely does not relinquishment’s fruit gain.

When just because it ought to be, a prescribed duty is done, Arjuna,

leaving attachment, and also its fruit, that relinquishment is considered sattvik.
Neither averse to unpleasant karma, nor to pleasant work attached—
the tyagi: of sattva possessed, intelligent, doubts dispelled.

Surely, impossible, for the embodied to renounce karma entirely;
but who the fruit of karma relinquishes, he a tyagi is said to be.

Unpleasant, pleasant and mixed: of three kinds karma's fruit,
accruing to non-relinquishers after death, but not to sannyasis, ever.

These five, Mahabaho, causes, learn from me,
in the samkhya doctrine mentioned, for the accomplishment of all karma.

The place and also the doer; and the various actions;
the many and different endeavours; and also destiny, the fifth of these.
With body, speech, mind, whatever karma a man undertakes,
whether just or the opposite, these five are its causes.
This being so, who, yet, as the only doer himself
sees, from ignorance, he does not see: a foolish one.

Who no egotism has, whose intellect is not defiled,
though he kills these men, he neither slays nor is bound.[176]

Knowledge, the known, the knower: the triple impulse to karma;
the instrument, action, the agent, these the three-fold conjunction of karma.
Knowledge and action and agent, of three kinds only, the distinctions of the gunas,
said to be, in the philosophy of the gunas; respectively, hear, of these, also.

In all beings, the knowledge by which the *One*, imperishable, is seen,
undivided in the divided, that wisdom, know, is sattvik.
But separately, which knowledge, diverse entities, of various kinds,
perceives, in all creatures—that knowledge, know, is rajasik.
But what, as the whole, to one effect clings, illogically:
The unreal and trivial, that tamasik is said to be.

Which, ordained, without attachment, without attraction or aversion is done,
by one not desiring its fruit, that karma is sattvik called.
But that karma, prompted by desire, or again, with egotistical motives,
done, with great strain, that is rajasik called.
For consequence, loss, violence: disregard, and for capability;
through delusion the karma undertaken, that tamasik is called.

Free from attachment, not egotistical, of fortitude, zeal, possessed;
by success, failure, unmoved—that doer is sattvik called.
Passionate, keenly wanting karma's fruit, greedy, violent-minded, impure;
by elation, dejection moved—that agent rajasik is deemed.
Unstable, feral, obstinate, deceitful, spiteful, lazy;
morose and procrastinating—that doer tamasik is said to be.

To the divisions of intellect and also fortitude, according to the gunas, threefold, listen,
told fully, separately, Dhananjaya.

Action and inactivity and what to do, what not to do, fear, fearlessness,
bondage and liberation the intellect which knows, that, Partha, is sattvik.
By which dharma and adharma, and what to do and also what not to,
is erroneously known—that intellect, Partha, rajasik.
Adharma as dharma that which regards, in darkness shrouded,
and all things perversely—that intellect, Partha, tamasik.

The fortitude by which one rules mind, life breaths, senses' functions,
through yoga unwavering—that firmness, Partha, sattvik.
But the fortitude by which to dharma, kama, artha one clings, Arjuna,
through attachment to the desire for gain[177]—that firmness, Partha, rajasik.
By which sleep, fear, sorrow, dejection and also arrogance
a fool does not leave—that obduracy, Partha, tamasik.

But of happiness, now, the three kinds, hear from me, Bharatarishabha—
long practice through which enjoyed, and sorrow's end attained.
That which at first like poison, at the end like amrita,[178]
that joy sattvika, it's told, of the soul's intelligence,[179] serene, born.

From contact between objects of sensuality,[180] the senses, which arises, at first like amrita,
but at the end is like poison—that joy rajasik is called.
And which joy, both at first and at the end, binding in delusion the soul,
and which from sleep, sloth, heedlessness arises—that tamasik is deemed.

There is not on earth or, again, in heaven among the gods,
a being that is free from these Prakriti-born three gunas.
Of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras, Parantapa,
their duties are divided, by their innate qualities.
Serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance, and also uprightness;
knowledge, wisdom, belief in God—a Brahmana's duties, of his nature born.
Valour, boldness, fortitude, skill, and even in war not fleeing;
generosity and lordliness—a Kshatriya's duties, of his nature born.
Farming, tending the cow, commerce—a Vaishya's karma, nature born;
karma of the essence of service, a Sudra's, also of his nature born.

Each to his own duty devoted, man attains perfection;
in his own karma absorbed, how perfection one attains, that hear.
From Whom beings arise; Who all this pervades:
through one's own karma Him worshipping, perfection a man achieves.

Better in one's own dharma, imperfectly, than in another's dharma, immaculately;
by one's naturally ordained karma doing, one incurs no sin.
The karma one is born to, Kaunteya, though flawed, one must not abandon;
for, all endeavours by faults, even as fire by smoke, are clouded.

Unattached, his intelligence, everywhere; mind conquered; desire gone;
to inaction's perfection supreme, through renunciation, he comes.
Finding this perfection, Brahman, also, how he finds learn from me,
in brief, Kaunteya, that consummation of knowledge, transcendent.
With intellect, pure, endowed, and firmly the mind restraining,
sound and objects of sensuality leaving, and likes, dislikes, rejecting;
living in solitude, eating little, controlling speech, body, mind;
in dhyana yoga[181] absorbed, always, in dispassion sheltering;

egotism, force, arrogance, lust, anger, possessions,
forsaking, without 'mine', peaceful—to become Brahman, he is fit.

Becoming Brahman, clear-souled, he neither sorrows nor desires;
alike to all beings, for me devotion he finds, supreme.
Through devotion, me, he knows, how much and what I am, in truth;
then, me truly knowing, he enters into me.

Even[182] all karma always doing, in me sheltering,
through my grace, he attains the eternal state, immutable.
Through thought, all karma to me renouncing; me the ultimate;
to buddhi yoga resorting, on me your heart constantly fix.

On me your thought,[183] all difficulties by my grace you will cross;
but if you, from pride, do not listen, you will perish.
If, ego indulging, 'I will not fight', you think:
Vain this resolve of yours—your nature will compel you.
By your own nature-born karma, Kaunteya, bound,
what you do not want to do—being deluded—even that you will do, helplessly.

God in all beings' hearts, Arjuna, dwells,
deluding[184] all creatures, as[185] upon a contrivance, with maya.
To Him alone for refuge go, with all your heart, Bhaarata;
by his grace, supreme peace you will find, the place eternal.

Thus, to you, has the wisdom, more secret than secrets, been told by me;
reflect on it fully, and do as you wish.

Of all the most secret, again, hear: my supreme word;
since dearly loved you are by me, so I tell you, for your good.
Mind[186] on me; to me be devoted; to me sacrifice; to me prostrate;
to me you will surely come—truly, I promise you, who are dear to me.

All duty abandoning, to me, the sole refuge, come;
I will liberate you from every sin, do not grieve.

This, you must not to the in-austere, nor the devotionless, ever,
nor one who has no wish to listen, tell, nor me who derides.
Who this supreme secret to my devotees teaches,
the highest devotion to me performs, to me surely comes, without doubt.
Nor is there among men anyone who to me does dearer service than he;
nor will there be than he, to me, another, dearer on earth.
And who studies this sacred conversation of ours,
through knowledge's sacrifice, by him, I adored will be—this, my view.
Faithful and without cavil, who just listens, that man:
he, too, liberated, to blessed worlds attains, of those of virtuous deeds.

Has this been heard, Partha, by you, with singular thought?
has your ignorant delusion been dispelled, Dhananjaya?"

Arjuna says:
"Dispelled my delusion, understanding gained, through your grace, Achyuta;
I stand firm, doubts gone; I will do as you say.[187]"

Sanjaya says:
'So, I, between Vaasudeva and Partha, great souls,
this converse heard, wondrous, making my hair stand on end.
Through Vyasa's grace heard I this secret, supreme
yoga, from the Lord of yoga, Krishna, directly, as he told it himself.

O king, I remember, again and again, this wonderful conversation
of Kesava, Arjuna, sacred, and thrill with joy, over and over.
And as I repeatedly recall that *Form*, most awesome, of Hari,
great my astonishment, O king, and I tremble with joy again and again.

Where the Lord of yoga, Krishna, where Partha the bowman:
there, fortune, victory, prosperity, eternal justice—this, my belief!'"

Aum shanti shanti shanti.
Hare Krishna.[188]

170. renunciation
171. relinquishment
172. Krishna
173. Krishna, Vishnu: slayer of the demon Kesin
174. best of men; tiger among men
175. such
176. by what he does
177. the fruit of karma
178. nectar
179. in the sense of realisation, enlightenment
180. and
181. meditation
182. while; though
183. fixing your thought on *me*
184. whirling, spinning, turning around
185. if mounted
186. fix your
187. your bidding
188. Appendix for the Bhagavad Gita at the end of this volume

CANTO 43

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Sanjaya says, 'Upon seeing Dhananjaya once again take up his arrows and Gandiva, the mighty Pandava maharathas utter a tremendous shout. And those heroes, the Pandavas and the Somakas, and those who followed them, filled with joy, blow their sea-born conches. And drums, and pesis, and krakachas, and cow-horns are beaten and blown together, to make a loud uproar.

And then there come the Devas, with Gandharvas and the Pitris, and the hosts of Siddhas and Charanas, wanting to witness the sight; and a host of most blessed Rishis accompany Indra of a hundred sacrifices leading them, to witness that great slaughter.

Then, seeing the two armies, that look like two oceans, ready for the encounter and restlessly moving, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja takes off his coat of mail and puts aside his excellent bow, and quickly alighting from his chariot, with joined hands, goes quietly on foot towards his Pitamaha Bhishma, facing the east, towards the direction where the enemy army stands.

Seeing this, Arjuna hastily alights from his chariot and follows Yudhishtira, accompanied by his brothers. And Krishna also follows; and the chief kings of his army, filled with anxiety, also follow Yudhishtira.

Arjuna says, "What are you doing, O king, that abandoning your brothers, you go on foot, facing east, towards the enemy?"

Bhima says, "Where are you going, O king of kings, having cast off your armour and weapons, towards the enemy warriors, leaving your brothers?"

Nakula says, "You are my eldest brother, O Bhaarata; seeing you go this way, I am afraid. Tell us, where do you go?"

Sahadeva says, "When these vast and powerful forces are by our side ready to fight, where do you go, O king, in the direction of our enemies?"'

Sanjaya continues, 'Yudhishtira of restrained speech says nothing but walks on towards the enemy army. The high-souled, wise Krishna smilingly says to them, "I know his purpose. He will fight the enemy only after

having paid his respects to all his superiors: Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Salya.

It is heard in histories of olden times that he who fights against those that are his superiors, after having paid his respects, according to dharma, to his preceptors, those revered in years, and his kinsmen, is sure to be victorious in battle. This is my view as well."

When Krishna says this, loud exclamations can be heard among the ranks of Dhritarashtra's son, but the Pandava army remains perfectly still. Seeing Yudhishtira, the heroic warriors of Dhritarashtra's son speak among one another, "This one is a wretch of his race. It is clear that he is coming in cowardly terror to Bhishma's side. Yudhishtira, with his brothers, is seeking Bhishma's protection.

When Dhananjaya protects him, and Bhima, and Nakula, and Sahadeva also, why does the eldest son of Pandu come here in fear? Though renowned through the world, he could never have been born in the Kshatriya varna, for he is weak and his heart is filled with fear at the prospect of battle."

Then those soldiers all praise the Kauravas. Rejoicing with cheerful hearts, all of them wave their cloths. All the fighting men there then censure Yudhishtira and his brothers and Krishna too. The Kaurava army, having disdained Yudhishtira, becomes perfectly still. What would this king say? What would Bhishma say in reply? What would proud Bhima say, and what Krishna and Arjuna? What, indeed, has Yudhishtira to say?

Both the armies are filled with great curiosity. Meanwhile, penetrating the hostile vyuha bristling with arrows and spears, Yudhishtira, surrounded by his brothers, walks quickly towards Bhishma. Seizing his feet with his two hands, the royal son of Pandu speaks to Shantanu's son who stands there ready for battle.

Yudhishtira says, "I salute you, O invincible one. We will wage war against you. Grant us your leave to do so. Give us also your blessing."

Bhishma says, "Had you not thus come to me in this battle, I would have cursed you, O Bhaarata, to bring about your defeat. I am gratified, my son. Fight then and let victory be yours. O son of Pandu, whatever else you desire, may you obtain it in battle. Ask us also for any boon you want and if it is in my power to give, then you will not be defeated.

A man is the slave of wealth, but wealth is no one's slave. This is the truth and I have been bound by the Kauravas with their wealth. It is for this

reason, Kurunandana, that I speak these words like a eunuch. Bound am I by the Kauravas with wealth. Beyond battle, what do you desire?"

Yudhishtira says, "Wise Pitamaha, keeping my welfare in mind, from day to day, look after my interests. Do battle, however, for the Kauravas. This is my prayer to you."

Bhishma says, "Rajan, what help can I give you in this? I shall, of course, fight for your adversaries. Tell me plainly what you have to say."

Yudhishtira says, "Bowing to you, I ask you, O Pitamaha, how shall we vanquish you who are invincible in battle? Tell me this for my benefit, if you see any good in it."

Bhishma says, "I do not, O son of Kunti, see the warrior who, even if he were the Lord of the Devas himself, can defeat me in battle when I fight."

Yudhishtira says, "My salutations to you, Pitamaha! And that is why I ask you this. Tell us how your own death may be achieved by your enemies in battle."

Bhishma says, "I do not see the man who can quell me in battle. The time of my death has also not yet arrived."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Saluting him again, Yudhishtira accepts Bhishma's words with a bow of his head. And that Mahabaho, along with his brothers, goes towards the chariot of Acharya Drona amidst all the soldiers who watch him. Saluting Drona and walking around him in pradakshina, the king speaks to that invincible warrior.

Yudhishtira says, "With your leave, Acharya, I will fight with dharma, and thus permitted by you, O sinless one, I will defeat all my enemies."

He now goes to get the blessings of Acharya Kripa, who says, "If, having resolved to fight, you had not come to me, I would have cursed you, O king, for your complete overthrow. A man is the slave of wealth, but wealth is no one's slave. This is so true. Since I have been bound with wealth by the Kauravas, I must fight for them. I therefore speak like a eunuch in asking you: besides battle, what do you desire?"

Yudhishtira says, "Sorrowfully, I ask you, Acharya, to listen to what I say." Saying this, the king, greatly troubled and confused, stood silent.'

Sanjaya continues, 'Understanding, however, what he intended to say, Gautama Kripa says, "I cannot be killed, Rajan. Fight and triumph. I am gratified by your coming. Rising every morning I will pray for your victory. I say this to you sincerely."

Hearing Kripa's words, and paying him due respect, Yudhishtira goes to where the ruler of the Madras stands. Saluting Salya and walking around him in pradakshina he says to that invincible warrior, words that are for his own benefit.

Yudhishtira says, "With your leave, invincible one, I will fight without incurring sin, and so defeat my valiant enemies."

Salya says, "If, having resolved to fight, you had not come to me thus, I would have cursed you to be routed in battle. I am gratified and honoured by you. Let it be as you wish. I grant you leave: fight and be victorious. Speak, O Kshatriya, what do you need? What shall I give you?

Under these circumstances, beyond battle, what do you wish? A man is the slave of wealth but wealth is no one's slave. This is the truth. I have been bound with wealth by the Kauravas, and so I speak to you like a eunuch: I will grant you your cherished desire. Besides battle, what do you wish?"

Yudhishtira says, "Think daily of what is for my greatest good. Fight, according to your pleasure, for the sake of my enemy. This is the boon that I seek."

Salya says, "Given these circumstances, tell me how I can support you? I must, of course, fight for your enemy, having been bound by the Kauravas with their wealth."

Yudhishtira says, "O Salya, the boon I want is the one I sought during the preparations for the war: that you must weaken the energy of the Suta's son Karna during battle."

Salya says, "I grant you your wish, son of Kunti. Go, fight at your pleasure. I shall ensure your victory."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Having obtained the permission of his maternal uncle, the ruler of the Madras, Yudhishtira, surrounded by his brothers, comes out of that vast army.

Krishna goes up to Radha's son on the battlefield. And on behalf of the Pandavas, Krishna says to Karna, "I have heard, Karna, that because of your hatred of Bhishma you will not fight. Come to our side, O Radheya, and remain with us as long as Bhishma is not slain. After Bhishma is killed, you can fight for Duryodhana, if you have no preference for any of the sides."

Karna says, "I will not do anything that is offensive to Dhritarashtra's son, Kesava. Devoted to Duryodhana's good, know that I have offered up

my life for him." Krishna stays silent, and rejoins the Pandavas.

Amidst all the fighting men, Yudhishtira loudly exclaims, "He who will choose us now shall be our ally!"

Seeing them, Yuyutsu says cheerfully to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, "I will fight under your banner in war, against the sons of Dhritarashtra, if you will accept me, sinless one!"

Yudhishtira says, "Come, all of us will fight against your foolish brothers, Yuyutsu. Krishna and we all say to you: we accept you, Mahabaho, fight for my cause. It appears that both the thread of Dhritarashtra's line as also his funeral rites rest upon you. Splendid prince, accept us who receive you. The wrathful and evil-minded Duryodhana will cease to live."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Yuyutsu, abandoning the Kauravas, your sons, crosses over to the army of the Pandavas, to the beating of drums and cymbals. Yudhishtira, again joyfully puts on his radiant coat of armour.

Those bulls among men mount their respective chariots and they organise their troops in battle formation as before. They cause hundreds of drums and cymbals to be sounded. They roar like lions. Seeing those tigers among men, the sons of Pandu, on their chariots, the allied kings, with Dhrishtadyumna and others, once more set up shouts of joy.

Observing the nobility of the Pandavas, who had paid due honour to those that were deserving of it, all the gathered kings praise them. And the kings talk with one another about the friendship, the compassion, and the kindness to kinsmen, displayed at the proper time by those high-souled ones. *Excellent! Excellent!* These are the words spoken everywhere, together with eulogies about those famed heroes.

As a result of this, the minds and hearts of everyone present are drawn to them. The Mlechchas and the Aryas there, who saw or heard of what the Pandavas had done, all weep, deeply moved. Those great warriors, of terrific tejas, cause large drums and pushkaras by the hundreds and thousands to be sounded; they blow their milk-white conches.'

CANTO 44

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'When the legions of both my side and that of the enemy are thus arrayed, who strikes first, the Kauravas or the Pandavas?'

Sanjaya says, 'Hearing the words of his elder brother, your son Dussasana advances with his troops, with Bhishma at their head. The Pandavas, led by Bhima, also advance with joyful hearts, wanting battle with Bhishma. Leonine shouts, the noise of krakachas and the blare of cow-horns, and the sound of drums and cymbals, rise on all sides. The fighting men of the enemy assail us, and we too charge against them with loud shouts. The ensuing uproar is deafening.

In that terrible encounter, the vast armies of the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras shudder for that reverberance of conches and cymbals, like forests shaken by the wind. The clamour of the hordes of kings, elephants and horses, rushing against one another in that evil hour, is as loud as that of tempestuous oceans.

And when that din, making one's hair stand on end, arose, Mahabaho Bhima begins to roar like a bull. Bhima's roars resound above the clamour of conches and drums, the grunts of elephants, and the leonine shouts of the warriors. Indeed, the shouts of Bhima transcend the neighing of the thousands of horses in both armies.

Hearing Bhima roaring like thunderclouds, his voice like the report of Sakra's thunder, your warriors are terrified. At those roars of that Kshatriya, the horses and elephants all urinate and excrete as other animals do at the roar of the lion. Thundering like a deep mass of clouds, and assuming an awful form, Bhima falls upon your sons.

Duryodhana, Durmukha and Dussaha, and that maharathika Dussasana, and Durmarshana, and Vivimsati, and Chitrasena, and the mighty maharatha Vikarna and also Purumitra, and Jaya, and Bhoja, and the valiant son of Somadatta, shake their splendid bows like masses of clouds streaked with flashes of lightning.

Drawing from their quivers long arrows resembling snakes that have just cast off their skins, they surround that mighty archer charging towards them, covering him with flights of arrows like the clouds shrouding the sun.

The five sons of Draupadi, and the majestic warrior Saubhadra, and Nakula, and Sahadeva, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race, attack those Dhartarashtras, rending them with arrows like mountain peaks with bolts of lightning. In that first encounter of the awe-inspiring twang of bowstrings and their flapping against the leather gloves of the fighting men, no warrior, on either side, retreats.

Bharatarishabha, I saw the lightness of hand of Drona's disciples, in particular those who, shooting countless arrows, always succeed in finding their target. And the sound of bowstrings is unceasing, and the blazing arrows flare through the air like meteors falling from the sky.

All the other kings stand as silent spectators witnessing that dread encounter of kinsmen. Those maharathikas remember the old injuries sustained at one another's hands, and wrathfully strive in battle, Bhaarata, always challenging each other aloud.

The two armies, of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, teeming with elephants, horses and chariots, look exceedingly beautiful on the battlefield like figures in a painting. The other kings all take up their bows. And the Sun himself is veiled by the dust raised by the soldiers.

They attack one another, at the heads of their respective troops, at the command of your son. The uproar of the elephants and the horses of those kings dashing into battle mingles with the leonine shouts of the warriors and the blast of conches and the sounds of drums. The tumult of that ocean, having arrows for its crocodiles, bows for its snakes, swords for its tortoises, and the bounding leaps of warriors for its gale, resembles a real surging sea. And kings in thousands, commanded by Yudhishtira, along with their forces, fall upon your son's legions.

The encounter between the warriors of the two armies is intense, and no difference can be seen between the men of the two warring sides, whether battling, or retreating in disarray, or rallying again to the fight. In that terrific and dreadful melee, Pitamaha Bhishma is most radiant, dominating that teeming host.'

CANTO 45

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'On the morning of that fateful day, the war that mangled the bodies of many kings begins. And the deafening shouts, the leonine roars of the Kauravas and the Srinjayas, both wanting victory in battle, resound through earth and sky. And a tumultuous pandemonium is heard mingled with the flaps of leather gloves and the blast of conches. Like roaring tigers, the men shout against one another.

The sound of bowstrings stretched by gloved hands, the heavy tread of foot-soldiers, the furious neighing of horses, the falling of sticks and iron hooks on the heads of elephants, the clash of weapons, the jangle of the bells of elephants as they rush against one another, and the rumble of chariots like thunderclouds, mix to produce a clamour that makes one's hair stand on end.

And all the Kaurava warriors, reckless of their very lives and their intentions cruel, charge, with standards raised, against the Pandavas. Bhishma himself, taking up a bow that resembles the rod of Yama, charges Dhananjaya on the field. Arjuna of flaming tejas, seizes up the celebrated Gandiva, and rushes against Ganga's son. Both these tigers among the Kurus are determined to kill each other.

The mighty son of Ganga, despite a searing attack on the son of Pritha, cannot make him falter. And so also Arjuna cannot make Bhishma waver in battle.

The great archer Satyaki rides against Kritavarman. The battle duel these two is fierce and makes the hair of onlookers stand on end. With loud yells, Satyaki strikes Kritavarman, and Kritavarman smites Satyaki, and each weakens the other. Pierced all over with arrows, these maharathas shine like two blossoming kimsukas in spring bedecked with blood flowers.

The awesome young Abhimanyu battles Brihadbala. Soon, however, the ruler of Kosala cuts off the standard and kills the sarathy of Subhadra's son. Abhimanyu wrathfully pierces Brihadbala with nine arrows, and with two more that parantapa cuts down Brihadbala's standard, and with yet another,

kills one of the protectors of his chariot wheels, and his charioteer as well. And the two continue to exhaust each other with vicious arrows.

Bhima faces your son Duryodhana, that maharathika, proud and pompous, who had so harmed the Pandavas. Both princes are tigers among men and maharathas. And on the battlefield, they cover each other with showers of arrows. And seeing these high-souled warriors fight, all are amazed.

Dussasana charges maharathika Nakula and pierces him with countless barbs which can pierce an enemy's very vital organs. Laughing, the son of Madri severs his adversary's standard and bow, and strikes him with twenty-five fine arrows. In the ferocious encounter, your powerful son kills Nakula's horses and cuts down his standard.

Durmukha assails the mighty Sahadeva, covering him with a storm of shafts. The heroic Sahadeva fells Durmukha's charioteer with a razor-tipped arrow. Both men, irrepressible in fight, attempt to strike terror into each other with vigorous shafts.

King Yudhishtira himself faces the ruler of the Madras, who breaks Yudhishtira's bow in his hands. Throwing aside the riven bow, Kunti's son takes up a stronger bow and one that can loose arrows more swiftly. With wrathful cries and unerring aim, he covers the Madra king with deadly shafts.

Dhrishtadyumna, O Bhaarata, rushes against Drona in wrath, and the great Drona breaks the unyielding bow of the high-souled prince of Panchala that always finds its deadly mark. He looses a terrible shaft that is like the rod of Yama; this barb pierces the body of the Panchala prince. Swiftly snatching up another bow and fourteen arrows, the son of Drupada stabs Drona with a fluent volley. In high rage, they battle fiercely on.

The impetuous Sankha encounters Somadatta's son who is equally impulsive in battle and, asking him to stop and fight, shoots him in his right arm. The son of Somadatta strikes Sankha through the shoulders. The duel that follows between these two proud Kshatriyas soon becomes as ferocious as an encounter between the Devas and the Danavas.

Maharatha Dhrishtaketu of immeasurable soul and great wrath storms against Bahlika, himself an embodiment of rage. With a leonine roar, Bahlika draws blood from Dhrishtaketu with a shower of keen shafts. The king of the Chedis swiftly pierces Bahlika with nine savage arrows. Like two incensed elephants, they duel in thunderous rage.

They confront each other, appearing even like the planets Angaraka and Sukra.

The feral Ghatotkacha encounters the brutal and mighty rakshasa Alambusha like Sakra facing Bala in battle. And Ghatotkacha, O Bhaarata, pierces the rakshasa with ninety keen shafts.

Alambusha strikes Bhima’s son copiously with his straight and wild wooden barbs. Lacerated, they shine like the mighty Sakra and the powerful Bala during the ancient Devasura yuddha.

Sikhandin rides against Drona’s son Aswatthaman, only to be deeply wounded with a long arrow, making him tremble. Sikhandin also strikes Drona’s son deep with an elegant shaft, and they continue in this vein with various kinds of barbs, plain and exotic.

Virata, the Senapati of a vast legion, swiftly advances to face Bhagadatta in battle, and covers Bhagadatta with a shower of arrows like the clouds showering rain upon a mountain breast. But Bhagadatta, that lord of the earth, swiftly envelops Virata with his own arrow cloud like thunderheads might the risen sun.

Kripa, son of Saradwat, rushes against Brihadkshatra, king of the Kaikeyas, and shrouds him in a barrage of arrows. Brihadkshatra also rains arrows down on the incensed son of Gautama. And having killed each other’s horses and cloven off each other’s bows, those two soon find themselves deprived of their chariots. In rage, they approach each other to fight with swords. And dreadful and unparalleled is the duel which ensues between them.

King Drupada wrathfully attacks Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, who is cheerfully awaiting battle. Jayadratha stabs Drupada with three arrows and Drupada pierces him with a brace of barbs in return. And the battle between them, also, is awesome and fierce, and brings great satisfaction to all onlookers for it resembles a conflict between Sukra and Angaraka.’

CANTO 46

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhaarata, I will now describe to you the clashes between hundreds and thousands of foot-soldiers, who abandon all restraint. Here the son does not recognise the father, or the father the son of his loins; the brother does not acknowledge the brother, nor the sister's son his maternal uncle. The maternal uncle does not acknowledge the sister's son, the friend not the friend.

The Pandavas and the Kauravas fight as if possessed by demons. Some mighty warriors fall with their chariots shattered. The axle rods of chariots break as they clash against shafts, and the spikes of chariot yokes against spikes of chariot yokes.

And some warriors unite together to fight others that are similarly together, all wanting to kill. Some chariots, obstructed by other rathas, cannot move. Lofty elephants with rent temples fall upon other elephants, rending one another in many places with their tusks. Others encountering massive tuskers with arched howdahs and standards on their backs, and trained to fight with their tusks, scream in agony.

Disciplined by training and goaded by pikes and hooks, elephants not in rut attack those in demented musth. And some leviathans, encountering those in rut, run in all directions, screeching like cranes. Many towering mastodons, well-trained, and with juice trickling down from rent temples and mouth, lacerated by swords, spears and arrows in their vital parts, trumpet awfully and fall dead, shaking the earth. Some utter frightful cries and run in all directions.

The broad-chested, powerful foot-soldiers that protect the elephants are armed with pikes and bows, and bright battle-axes, and with maces and clubs mounted with iron spikes, and short arrows, and lances, and brightly polished swords; they, too, charge in all directions seeming determined to kill each other. And the swords of brave fighters, steeped in human blood, shine brightly.

And the sound of the swords of Kshatriyas as they whirl and fall upon the vital parts of enemies is sickening. The heartrending wails of the hosts

of fighting men, crushed with maces and clubs, and cut down with well-tempered swords, and pierced with the tusks of elephants, and grained by tuskers, calling upon one another, can be heard, Bhaarata, ah, like the cries of those cursed to hell.

Horsemen, on flying chargers with outstretched tails resembling the plumage of swans, dash against one another. And hurled by the riders, long-bearded golden barbs, polished and sharp, fall like snakes. Some heroic horsemen, on agile coursers, leaping high, hew off the heads of warriors in their chariots.

Here and there a maharatha, finding a host of cavalry within range, decimates them with arrows. Many incensed elephants bedecked with trappings of gold, and looking like newly-risen clouds, trample the horses underfoot to bloody pulp. Some elephants, struck on their frontal globes and flanks, and mangled by spears, scream horribly.

Massive tuskers, in the bewildering commotion, fling down and crush horses along with their riders; and some, overthrowing horses and riders with the points of their tusks, roam about smashing chariots with their standards.

Some majestic bull elephants, bursting with a surfeit of energy and gushing temporal juice, kill horses and their riders with trunks and legs. Nimble arrows, polished and pointed, so like snakes, fall upon the heads, the temples, the flanks, and the limbs of these great beasts.

And polished javelins, meteoric, hurled by noble arms, fall on all sides, piercing coats of mail in scarlet bursts and penetrating the bodies of men and horses. Many, drawing polished swords from sheaths made of the skins of leopards and tigers, cut down the enemy with fell strokes. Others, though themselves attacked and with gashed bodies, angrily fall upon their foes with swords, shields and axes.

Some tuskers, dragging down and hurling chariots and their horses with their trunks, begin to wander in all directions, exhorted by the cries of those behind them. The men, some pierced by spears, some dismembered by battle-axes, and some crushed by elephants and others trodden down by horses, and some slashed by chariot wheels, and others by axes, cry out plaintively to their kinsmen.

Some call out to their sons, and some to their fathers, and some to brothers and other kinsmen. Some call to their maternal uncles, and some to their sister's sons. And some call out to others, on this frightful battlefield.

Countless warriors lose their weapons, or have their thighs broken. Others with arms torn off or with gaping wounds, wail loudly, desperately wanting to live. And some, with a little remaining strength, tortured by thirst, and lying gasping on the field of battle, on the bare ground, beg for water. And some, soaking in pools of blood, O Bhaarata, censure themselves and your sons gathered for battle.

Brave Kshatriyas, who having injured one another, do not abandon their duels or cry out. Instead, lying on the battlefield, they roar with joyful hearts, and in great fury, they bite their own lips. They glower at one another with faces rendered fierce by the furrowing of their brows. And still others, enduring the pain caused by arrows and ghastly wounds, with strength and tenacity, remain perfectly still and silent.

Other maharathikas, deprived of their own chariots, and flung down and wounded by elephants, ask to be taken up on to the chariots of others. Many look glorious with their wounds like blooming kinsukas. In all the legions, countless cries can be heard, rising into the heavens.

And in this awful war that destroys Kshatriyas, the father kills the son, the son kills the father, the sister's son cuts down the maternal uncle, and the uncle the sister's son. Friend fells friend, and all kinsmen one another. Such is the slaughter in this conflict of the Kauravas with the Pandavas.

In that monstrous war of no mercy, the forces of the Pandavas, approaching Bhishma, begin to waver.

Mahabaho Bhishma, with his silver standard graced with the sign of the palmyra with five stars, sitting on his majestic chariot, shines like the full moon under Meru's peak.'

CANTO 47

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'After most of the morning of that terrible day passes in that awesome engagement, so destructive of the most magnificent men, Durmukha and Kritavarman, and Kripa, and Salya, and Vivimsati, urged by your son, ride to Bhishma to protect him. Shielded by those five maharathas Bhishma penetrates the Pandava host.

The palmyra standard of Bhishma glides through the Chedis, the Kasis, the Karushas, and the Panchalas. With broad-tipped arrows, that Kshatriya razes the enemy, cutting off heads, and shattering chariots with their yokes and standards. Bhishma seems to veritably dance on his chariot as it courses along its path.

Elephants, struck by him in their vital parts, shriek dismally. Abhimanyu, mounted on his chariot yoked to excellent tawny steeds, charges at Bhishma's chariot in fury. With his standard adorned with a golden karnikara tree, he draws near Bhishma and the five maharathas who protect him. Abhimanyu strikes the standard of the palmyra-bannered warrior with a keen shaft, and hotly engages Bhishma and his defenders.

Piercing Kritavarman with one arrow, and Salya with five, Abhimanyu draws blood from the great patriarch with nine more. And with one shaft brilliantly shot from his bow drawn to its fullest stretch, he cuts off his adversary's gold standard.

With another barb, piercing through every defence, he severs the head of Durmukha's sarathy from his body; with another, he breaks Kripa's gold bedecked bow. With a flurry of jagged shafts, this young maharatha strikes so furiously, he also appearing to dance the while.

And seeing the lightness of his hand, the Devas are gratified. The deadly accuracy of Abhimanyu makes the other maharathas, headed by Bhishma, look upon him as being as much an archer as Arjuna himself. Sounding a twang even like that of the Gandiva, while stretched and re-stretched, his bow seems to revolve like a circle of fire.

Bhishma charges forward and pierces Arjuna's son with nine seething barbs; in turn, Abhimanyu burns the standard of that warrior of great tejas,

while Bhishma strikes Abhimanyu's charioteer.

And Kritavarman, and Kripa, and Salya also, shoot Abhimanyu, but he stands before them like the Mainaka mountain. Though surrounded by these maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army, he continues to rain a ceaseless storm of arrows upon them.

He obstructs their mighty weapons with his tumult of arrows, and showering Bhishma with them, he sends up a joyful roar. And in this battle with Bhishma, the strength of Abhimanyu's handsome young arms is wonderful to see. Despite this prowess, Bhishma also looses his arrows at him. But Subhadra's son wards them off, and fells Bhishma's standard with nine arrows. And seeing that wondrous feat, the soldiers there set up a loud shout.

Bedecked with jewels, Bhishma's lofty silver standard, bearing the device of the palmyra, falls to the ground. Seeing this, the proud Bhima sets up a great roar to cheer on the son of Subhadra.

The irresistible Bhishma now invokes powerful devastras to appear. The Pitamaha of immeasurable soul envelops Abhimanyu with thousands of mystic arrows. Ten great archers and maharathas of the Pandavas swiftly advance in their chariots to protect the youthful hero Virata with his son, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race, and Bhima, the five Kekaya brothers, and Satyaki.

As they recklessly fall upon him, Bhishma pierces the prince of Panchala with three sizzling shafts, and Satyaki with ten. And with one winged, razor like arrow, shot from his bow fully drawn bow, he cuts off Bhima's standard. That standard made of gold and bearing the device of a lion, plunges from Bhima's chariot. Bhima enraged stabs Bhishma with three arrows, Kripa with one, and Kritavarman with eight.

And Uttara, the son of Virata, seated on a tusker with upraised trunk, attacks the king of the Madras. Salya, however, succeeds in checking the unparalleled speed of that prince of elephants racing towards his chariot. Uttara wrathfully sets his leg upon the yoke of Salya's chariot, and kills his four magnificent horses.

Salya remains in that chariot, and hurls an iron spear like a venomous snake at Uttara. The lance pierces Uttara's coat of mail and he falls dead from his elephant's neck, with the hook and the lance loosened from his grasp. And Salya takes up his sword and, leaping down from his chariot, severs the enormous trunk of that mighty elephant. His coat of mail pierced

all over with a torrent of arrows, and his trunk hacked, the elephant cries out and falls dead.

Salya hastily climbs into Kritavarman's splendid chariot. Seeing his brother Uttara slain and seeing Salya with Kritavarman, Virata's son Sweta blazes up in fury, like a fire on which ghee is poured. Stretching his majestic bow that resembles the bow of Sakra himself, the mighty Sweta rushes forward to kill Salya.

Surrounded on all sides by a host of chariots, Sweta moves towards Salya's chariot raining arrows at him. And seeing him charging like an incensed elephant, seven of your maharathas, Rajan, surround him on all sides, to save the king of the Madras from a certain death.

Those seven warriors are Brihadbala king of the Kosalas, and Jayatsena of Magadha, and Rukmaratha, the gallant son of Salya, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Sudakshina, king of the Kambojas, and Jayadratha, lord of the Sindhus and the kinsman of Brihadkshatra. The stretched bows of these high warriors, decorated with many colours, look like flashes of lightning in the clouds. And they all rain unceasing arrows on Sweta's head like the clouds tossed by the wind that pour rain on the mountain breast at the end of summer.

That brilliant Kshatriya, enraged, strikes their bows with seven swift broad-headed arrows, and continues to assail them. And in the same moment as their bows are riven, they all instantly take up other bows. And they shoot seven arrows at Sweta.

And again that Mahabaho of immeasurable soul breaks these other bows with seven shafts. Their anger mounting, the maharathas whose bows have been riven, seize seven lances, roar loudly, and cast those seven javelins at Sweta's chariot. Those fiery spears, which course through the air like comets, with the sound of thunder, are all cleaved by seven uncanny shafts before they can reach that most excellent warrior, master of the most fearful astras.

Taking up a missile which can pierce every part of the body, he unleashes it at Rukmaratha. And this powerful weapon, with a force greater than that of a thunderbolt, pierces Rukmartha's body and he falls unconscious in his chariot. His charioteer fearlessly carries him away, unconscious, before the eyes of all.

Taking up six other arrows adorned with gold, Mahabaho Sweta cuts off the standard-tops of his six adversaries. That chastiser of enemies, piercing

their horses and charioteers, and raining ceaseless barbs upon these six fighting men, moves towards the chariot of Salya. And seeing that commander of the Pandava forces moving swiftly towards Salya's chariot, a loud uproar of anxious cries rises up in your army, O Bhaarata.

Your valiant son, with Bhishma at the head of his forces, and supported by noble Kshatriyas and vast troops, advances towards Sweta's ratha, and rescues the Madra king from the jaws of death. A hair-raising battle erupts between your soldiers and those of the enemy, one in which chariots and elephants are all embroiled in bedlam. The old Kuru Pitamaha rains a flurry of arrows upon Abhimanyu and Bhima, and the maharathika Satyaki, and upon the ruler of the Kekayas, and Virata, and Dhrishtadyumna, and upon the Chedi troops.'

CANTO 48

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'When that brilliant archer Sweta advances towards Salya's chariot, what do the Kauravas and the Pandavas do, Sanjaya? And also what does Bhishma do? Tell me, I entreat you.'

Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, hundreds and thousands of noble Kshatriyas, all brave maharathas, placing Sikhandin in the vanguard, and displaying their strength to your royal son, want to rescue Sweta. And they move swiftly towards Bhishma's chariot, bedecked with gold, to kill that meridian warrior. The battle that follows is hair raising to watch.

I will describe to you that astonishing and chilling battle between your troops and those of the enemy. Bhishma empties many chariots of their maharathas by sloughing off their heads with a barrage of arrows. Imbued with energy equal to that of the sun, he shrouds the very sun with his shafts; he eliminates his enemies that encircle him, like the rising sun dispels the surrounding darkness.

The son of Shantanu shoots hundreds of thousands of arrows that claim the lives of countless Kshatriyas. He cleaves the heads of countless valiant fighting men. Elephants cased in spiked armour fall like mountains peaks struck by lightning.

Chariots are seen entangled with one another. One chariot lies upon another chariot, and one horse upon another. And reckless chargers bear the corpses of daring young riders, hanging from their saddles with their bows still in their lifeless hands.

With swords and quivers as yet attached to their bodies, and loosened coats of mail, hundreds of men lie dead on the ground, sleeping on beds worthy of heroes. Charging against one another, falling down and rising up again, and charging once again, they fight hand to hand. Wounded deep by each other, they reel on the battlefield.

Incensed elephants rush in all directions, and hundreds of maharathas are slaughtered. Chariots and their riders are crushed on all sides. And they fall upon each others' chariots, and are killed by the arrows of another. A

maharatha can be seen to plunge from a height, his charioteer also having been slain.

A thick pall of dust rises, and it is only by the twang of a hostile bow that the presence of an opponent is known to an embattled fighter. From the pressure upon their bodies, warriors gauge their enemies. And they fight on with arrows, guided only by the sound of bowstrings.

The very hiss of the arrows shot by the fighting men at one another cannot be heard. And so loud is the sound of drums that it seems to pierce the ears. In that tumultuous uproar making the hair stand on end, the name of the warrior called out as he shows his prowess, cannot be heard. The father does not recognise the son of his loins.

As a wheel breaks, or the yoke is torn off, or a horse killed, the maharatha is flung from his chariot, along with his sarathy. Many daring fighters, deprived of their rathas, are seen to take flight. Some are killed, while others are struck in their very vitals: but none escape unscathed, when dreadful Bhishma attacks the enemy.

In that burning, awesome fray, Sweta slaughters a vast number of the Kauravas. And he kills hundreds upon hundreds of noble princes with his inexorable arrows; in every direction, he smashes the bows and cuts off the heads of hundreds of great warriors, their arms decked with angadas.

Sweta annihilates maharathas and splinters chariot wheels, the chariots themselves, and shreds standards both small and large and precious, and numerous horses, and a multitude of men. As for me, fearing Sweta, and abandoning the magnificent Bhishma, I retreated from the battle and now stand before you, Rajan.

And all the Kauravas, though armed for war, desert Bhishma, and stand like spectators beyond the range of arrows. Joyful in the hour of widespread gloom, that tiger among men, Bhishma, alone stands unshakeable like Meru.

Melting the enemy, like the sun at winter's end, he stands in the shining radiance of his chariot like the irradiant sun. And that great archer shoots a tempest of arrows and mows down the enemy.

And being slaughtered by Bhishma in that fierce fight, the enemy warriors break ranks and flee from him, as if from a dire inferno. Encountering the prodigious Sweta, Bhishma alone stands calm and undaunted. Devoted to the cause of Duryodhana, he begins to ravage the

Pandava warriors. Uncaring for his life, which is so precious to all men, he fearlessly destroys the Pandava army.

Seeing Sweta strike down the Dhartarashtra legions, your father Bhishma charges him. Sweta covers Bhishma with a fusillade of arrows. And Bhishma also cloaks Sweta in a shroud of shafts. And roaring like two bulls, they fall upon each other, like colossal maddened elephants or two raging tigers.

Thwarting each other's weapons with their own, those bulls among men, Bhishma and Sweta, fight, each to kill the other. In a single day the angry Bhishma can obliterate the Pandava army, if Sweta did not protect it.

Seeing Sweta holding off the Pitamaha, the Pandavas are filled with joy, while your son becomes despondent. Supported by his allies, Duryodhana garners his troops and wrathfully attacks the Pandava host.

Momentarily turning away from the son of Ganga, Sweta begins to energetically slaughter your son's forces like a violent wind uprooting trees. Beside himself with wrath, having routed your army, the son of Virata advances again towards Bhishma.

And those two high-souled maharathas, both blazing arrows, battle each other like Vritra and Vasava of old. Drawing his bow to the fullest stretch, Sweta pierces Bhishma with seven shafts. Bhishma swiftly checks his adversary like an incensed elephant curbing an angered rival.

Sweta, who delights the Kshatriyas with his prowess, strikes Bhishma, who in return stabs him with ten shining barbs. Yet that glorious warrior stands still like a mountain. Sweta gores Shantanu's son with twenty-five shafts, filling all those around them with wonder.

Smiling and licking the corners of his mouth, Sweta shatters Bhishma's bow into ten pieces with ten perfect arrows. Then aiming a plumed iron barb, he cleaves the palmyra on top of Bhishma's standard.

Seeing the standard of Bhishma cut down, your sons think that Sweta has killed the Pitamaha. The elated Pandavas, thinking the same, blow their conches. Seeing the palmyra standard of the great Bhishma laid low, a furious Duryodhana urges his troops into battle. And they all converge to protect Bhishma who was in danger.

To both his forces and to bystanders, the king says, "Either Sweta will die today, or Bhishma!"

Hearing Duryodhana, his maharathas swiftly advance to protect the son of Ganga. With great alacrity, Bahlika and Kritavarman, and Kripa, and

Salya also, O Bhaarata, and the son of Jarasandha, and Vikarna, and Chitrasena, and Vivimsati surround Bhishma, and shower Sweta with a high storm of arrows.

That celebrated Kshatriya adroitly checks those angry opponents, displaying his own dexterity. Stopping them like a lion might a herd of elephants, Sweta smashes Bhishma's bow with a singing cloud of arrows.

Bhishma takes up another bow and pierces Sweta, Rajan, with feathered barbs. Sweta animatedly strikes Bhishma with numerous shafts before everyone's eyes.

Duryodhana is distraught seeing Bhishma, that most excellent Kshatriya, thwarted in battle by Sweta, and your whole army is alarmed. And all who see great Bhishma, mangled by Sweta's arrows, believe him to be dead.

Enraged, seeing his standard fallen and the Dhartarashtra army checked, Bhishma looses a refulgent volley at Sweta. But Sweta, magnificent maharatha, wards off Bhishma's arrows, and once again rives the Pitamaha's bow with a thick and heavy shaft.

Beside himself, Bhishma flings aside that bow and takes up another bigger and stronger one. Aiming seven flat, whetted arrows, he kills Sweta's four horses with four, cuts down his standard with two, and with the seventh, provoked beyond all measure, cuts off his charioteer's head.

The stricken Sweta jumps down from his chariot. Bhishma attacks him from all sides with dense, relentless broadsides of arrows. Bleeding from many wounds, Sweta leaves his bow on his abandoned chariot and seizes up an occult golden lance.

Taking up that fierce astra which resembles the rod of Yama and could slay Death itself, Sweta furiously cries to Bhishma, "Stop and watch me, best of men!" And that great young hero hurls the serpentine lance, displaying his valour on behalf of the Pandavas. Loud exclamations arise among your sons, as they see that awesome missile in all its splendour. And launched by Sweta's arm, that ayudha like a snake that has just cast off its skin, falls like a meteor from the sky. Without the slightest quiver of fear, Bhishma cuts the shining thing that blazes through the air into nine fragments with eight winged arrows.

All your forces roar in jubilation. The son of Virata, seeing his lance of power desiccated, stands shocked, trembling suddenly, uncertain like one touched by the arrival of his final hour. But his rage still high, Sweta masters himself, and smiling, takes up a recondite mace to kill Bhishma.

His eyes ruby red, and even more like a second Yama now, he assails Bhishma like a swollen river dashing against rocks.

So knowing of the strengths of others, knowing that Sweta's gada is impossible to thwart, Bhishma leaps down from his chariot to escape that sorcerous weapon. Sweta whirls the heavy mace in fury and casts it at Bhishma's chariot like Siva himself. And the mace, intended for Bhishma's destruction, reduces his chariot, its standard and its charioteer, its horses and its shaft, all to ashes. On seeing great Bhishma reduced to fighting on foot, many maharathas like Salya rush to his rescue.

Mounting another chariot and rather dejectedly stretching his bow, Bhishma slowly advances towards Sweta; he hears a celestial voice, an asariri in the skies, fraught with his own good, which says, "Mahabaho Bhishma, strive without losing a moment. This is the hour fixed by Brahma for your victory over this one."

Hearing those words spoken by the celestial voice, Bhishma joyfully moves towards Sweta to kill him. Seeing maharatha Sweta fighting on foot, many great Pandava warriors rush to his rescue: Satyaki, and Bhimasena, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race; and the five Kekaya brothers, and Dhrishtaketu and Abhimanyu of great energy.

And seeing them, Bhishma, along with Drona and Salya and Kripa, arrests them all like a mountain stopping the force of the wind. When all the high-souled warriors of the Pandava side are thwarted, Sweta cleaves Bhishma's bow with a sword. Throwing aside that bow, the Pitamaha, having heard the celestial message, decides it is time to slay Sweta.

Though baffled by Sweta's genius, maharatha Bhishma seizes up another bow, as splendid as that of Sakra himself, and instantly strings it. He advances towards Sweta alone, though the prince is surrounded by those tigers among men with Bhima at their head.

Seeing Bhishma near, Bhima pierces him with sixty shafts. But Bhishma checks Bhima, Abhimanyu and the other maharathas with awesome astras. He also strikes Satyaki with a hundred arrows, Dhrishtadyumna with twenty and the Kekaya brothers with five.

Holding up all those great archers with his own deadly fire, the Pitamaha advances purposefully towards Sweta. Invoking an inexorable weapon of Death, Bhishma sets it to his bowstring. And that winged shaft, imbued with the force of the Brahmastra, is watched by the Devas and Gandharvas, and Pisachas and Uragas, and Rakshasas at the moment Bhishma releases it.

In an eruption of blood, that blazing ayudha plunges cleanly through Sweta's coat of mail and his body and passes into the earth, with a flash akin to lightning. Like the setting sun that divests the earth of light, the astra passes through Sweta, carrying away his life. Thus slain in battle by Bhishma, we see that young tiger among men fall to the ground like a crumpled mountain peak.

And all the maharathas of the Kshatriya race on the Pandava side lament. Your sons and all the Kauravas are elated. Seeing Sweta slain, Dussasana dances in joy on the battlefield to the loud music of conches and drums.

When that magnificent archer, that jewel of battle, is killed by Bhishma the other Pandava archers led by Sikhandin tremble in fear. Arjuna and Krishna slowly withdraw the men for the nightly rest. Bhaarata, the forces of both sides withdraw with frequent roars. And the Partha maharathas enter their quarters downcast, thinking of the dreadful slaughter of their splendid commander.'

CANTO 49

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'When Sweta is killed, how do the Panchalas, those mighty archers, on the Pandava side, respond? Hearing that Sweta has been slain, what transpires between his comrades and his opponents that retreat before them?

Sanjaya, hearing of our victory, your words please me. My heart feels no shame in remembering our wrongdoing. The Pitamaha of Kuru's race is ever triumphant and devoted to us.

As for Duryodhana, having provoked war with that intelligent son of his uncle, on one occasion he looked for the protection of the sons of Pandu as he was anxious and afraid of Yudhishtira. At that time, abandoning everything, he was despondent. In view of the skill of the Pandavas, and thwarted and ensnared on all sides, Duryodhana for some time showed honourable behaviour, and placed himself under their protection.

Why, therefore, Sanjaya, has Sweta, who was loyal to Yudhishtira, been killed? Indeed, this magnificent prince has been hurled down to patala by a number of these despicable enemies of ours.

Bhishma does not support the war, nor does Acharya Drona; neither Kripa nor Gandhari likes it. Sanjaya, nor do I like it; neither does Krishna of Vrishni's race, nor Yudhishtira; nor Bhima, nor Arjuna, nor the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, bulls among men. Always warned by me, by Gandhari, by Vidura, by Rama the son of Jamadagni, and by the high-souled Vyasa also, the depraved and corrupt Duryodhana, with Dussasana, always following the evil counsels of Karna and Subala's son, has behaved maliciously towards the Pandavas, and so great misfortune has fallen upon him.

After the killing of Sweta and the victory of Bhishma, what does the enraged Partha, with Krishna, do in battle? Indeed, it is Arjuna that I fear, and these fears cannot be dispelled. He is so very brave and powerful. He can decimate his enemies with his arrows. The son of Indra, and equal to Upendra, the younger brother of Indra, he is a warrior whose fury and intent

are never futile. When you behold him on the field of war, what is your state of mind?

Valiant, familiar with the Vedas, resembling the Fire and the Sun in radiance, and owning knowledge of the Aindrastra, this Kshatriya of immeasurable soul is always victorious. His weapons always descend on his enemies with the force of the thunderbolt and he is blindingly quick in drawing his bowstring.

The formidable son of Drupada is also endowed with great wisdom. What does Dhrishtadyumna do when Sweta is killed? I am certain that the implacable hearts of the Pandavas burn for the injustices heaped upon them and the death of Sweta. Thinking of their wrath I am never at ease, by day or by night, on account of Duryodhana. How does the great war unfold? Tell me all about it, Sanjaya.'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen carefully, Rajan, to the account of your own wrongdoings. It is not fitting for you to attribute their outcome to Duryodhana. Your understanding is much like the construction of an embankment after the waters have disappeared, or like the digging of a well when the house is on fire.

With the passing of the morning, and the killing of Sweta by Bhishma, Virata's son Sankha, that grinder of the enemy, always delighting in battle, seeing Salya stationed with Kritavarman on his chariot, suddenly blazes in anger, as does a fire when ghee is poured on it. Stretching his immense bow that is like the bow of Indra himself, he rides to kill the king of the Madras, supported on all sides by a legion of chariots. And Sankha shoots a torrent of arrows as he dashes towards Salya's chariot.

Seeing him come like an enraged elephant, seven of your maharathas surround Salya to save him from the jaws of death. Mahabaho Bhishma, thundering like the very clouds, and taking up a bow six cubits long, rides swiftly at Sankha.

And seeing great Bhishma charge, the Pandava host trembles like a skiff tossed in a storm. Arjuna swiftly places himself in front of Sankha to protect him from Bhishma. And the duel between Bhishma and Arjuna begins. Loud exclamations arise among the gathered. One army blurs into the other, and all are filled with wonder.

Salya alights from his great chariot, and savagely kills Sankha's four horses with his mace. Sankha jumps down from his chariot and, sword in hand, runs to Arjuna's chariot where he is safe, and mounts it. A dense

cloud of arrows from Bhishma's chariot covers all the sky and the earth. The arrows that fall from that most excellent archer's deadly cloud annihilate the Panchala, the Matsya, the Kekaya and the Prabhadraka horde and rills of blood flow on Kurukshetra.

Leaving Arjuna Savyasachin, the perfectly ambidextrous bowman, Bhishma dashes towards Drupada, king of the Panchalas, surrounded by his forces. And he shrouds his beloved kinsman with a dazzle of arrows. Like a forest consumed by fire at winter's end, the troops of Drupada are obliterated.

Bhishma stands in that battle like a radiant smokeless fire, or like the sun himself at noon scorching everything with his heat. The Pandava fighting men are unable to even look at him. In terror, they look around for a protector, and seeing none, seem like a herd of trembling cows.

The Pandava forces, slaughtered or retreating dejectedly, lament dispiritedly while being pursued.

Bhishma, with bow always drawn in a circle, shoots fiery shafts like virulent poison, creating a continuous stream of arrows in all directions; that hero of rigid vows kills the Pandava maharathas naming each aloud as he picks them off one by one. When the Pandava troops have been routed and crushed, corpses askew strewn across the battlefield, the sun sets and nothing can be seen.

And then, Bharatarishabha, beholding Bhishma, proudly standing before them, the Parthas withdraw their forces for the night.'

CANTO 50

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'When the troops have been withdrawn on the first day, and when Duryodhana is elated seeing Bhishma in full fury of battle, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira hastily approaches Krishna, accompanied by all his brothers and his allies.

Filled with great despair thinking of his rout, and seeing Bhishma's dominance, he says to Krishna, "See how Bhishma of terrible prowess consumes my forces with his arrows like fire consuming dry grass. How can we even look at that high-souled warrior who is sweeping through my men like flames fed with ghee?

Watching that purushavyaghra with his mighty bow, my men flee, excoriated by his barbs. Enraged Yama himself, or Indra armed with the Vajra, or even Varuna with Paasa in hand, or Kubera with his mace may be defeated. But maharatha Bhishma is impossible to overcome. I am drowning in the fathomless ocean called Bhishma, without a boat to rescue me.

Kesava, it is from my abysmal ignorance that I have Bhishma as my adversary in war. I want to quit this terrible massacre and take sannyasa in the forest. To live there is preferable to sacrificing these earthly kings to Death come hunting us in the form of Bhishma.

Bhishma is a master of the greatest astras, and he will annihilate my army. My fighting men are like insects rushing into a raging fire to their certain death. In fighting for a kingdom, I am being led only to sure destruction.

My gallant brothers also bear arrows for my sake, having lost both sovereignty and happiness for the love of me, their eldest brother. We regard life highly, and it is too precious to be so lightly sacrificed. During the rest of my days I will practise the severest tapasya. I will not anymore be the cause of the deaths of my friends and my kinsmen.

The resplendent Bhishma, with his divine weapon, ceaselessly thwarts thousands of my maharathas, the most excellent of great warriors. Tell me, Krishna, without delay, what should I do for my own good?

As for Arjuna, I see that he is an unmoved spectator in this battle. Only great Bhima, remembering Kshatriya dharma, fights with all his strength. With his mighty mace, this high-souled Kshatriya achieves the most difficult victories over foot-soldiers and horses, chariots and elephants. But this hero cannot in fair fight destroy the enemy even in a hundred years. Only your Arjuna can achieve this with his Devastras.

He looks on indifferently as we are overpowered by Bhishma and Drona. The unceasing astras of Bhishma and Drona raze all our Kshatriyas. Unquestionably, the raging Bhishma and his allies will annihilate us. Krishna, go look for that great archer, that maharatha, who can extinguish Bhishma like rain clouds a forest fire. Then with your blessings, the sons of Pandu, their enemies defeated and their kingdom restored, will be at peace with their kinsmen."

Having said this, Yudhishtira, with a grieving heart and mind in turmoil, remains silent in reflection for a long time. Seeing the son of Pandu stricken with grief, Krishna lifts the spirit of the Pandavas saying, "Do not mourn, lord of the Bhaaratas. It does not befit you to lament, when your brothers are all brave archers renowned the world over.

I also am engaged in working towards your welfare, as are the revered maharathas Satyaki and Virata and Drupada, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's line. All these kings and their legions honour you and are devoted to you. Maharatha Dhrishtadyumna, who commands your army, wants your welfare, as also Mahabaho Sikhandin, who is the one certain to kill Bhishma."

Hearing these words, before the assembled men and in the presence of Krishna, Yudhishtira says to Dhrishtadyumna, "You of Prishata's lineage, listen to my words which must not be violated. Approved by Vasudeva, you have been our Senapati. As Kartikeya was the Senapati of the divine forces, in bygone days, so also are you for the Pandava army.

Use your prowess, O tiger among men, and exterminate the Kauravas. I will follow you along with Bhima, and Krishna also, and the sons of Madri, all united together, the sons of Draupadi in full armour, and all the other valiant kings."

Dhrishtadyumna says, "Ordained by Shambhu himself, I am the proclaimed destroyer of Drona. I shall wage war against Bhishma, and Drona and Kripa, and Salya and Jayadratha, and all the proud kings on the Kaurava side."

When that most glorious of princes, that slayer of enemies, the son of Prishata, says this defiantly, the Pandava warriors are once more filled with great unyielding courage and heart, and roar loudly.

Yudhishtira says to Dhrishtadyumna, "Form the vyuha called Krauncharuma. This formation was the one advocated by Brihaspati to Indra in ancient days when the Devas and the Asuras fought, and it devoured enemy hosts. Unseen before, dazzle the Kauravas with its power."

Thus addressed by that god among men, Yudhishtira, like Vishnu by Indra, Dhrishtadyumna places Arjuna in the vanguard of the army at dawn. And Dhananjaya's standard, crafted by divine power at Indra's command, waves gloriously in the crisp morning air.

Decked with the colours of the Indradhanusha, the rainbow, that standard coursing through the air looks like an edifice of vapour which seems to glide along its chariot. And the bearer of the Gandiva, adorned with jewels, and that standard beside him, looks doubly brilliant, like Brahma with the Sun, and the Sun with the Self-created One.

King Drupada, surrounded by a host of fighting men, becomes the head of that vyuha. And the two kings Kuntibhoja and Saibya become its two eyes. And the ruler of the Dasarnas, and the Prayagas, with the Daserakas, and the Anupakas, and the Kiratas are its neck, Bharatarishabha.

Yudhishtira with the Patachcharas, the Hunas, the Pauravakas and the Nishadas, so also the Pisachas, with the Kundavishas, and the Mandakas, the Ladakas, the Tanganas, and the Uddras, and the Saravas, the Tumbhumas, the Vatsas, and the Nakulas, become its right wing. And Nakula and Sahadeva place themselves on the left wing.

On the joints of the wings are ten thousand chariots, and on the head a hundred thousand; on the back of the vyuha are a hundred million and twenty thousand rathas, and on the neck a hundred and seventy thousand. On the joints of the wings and their tips move majestic elephants, like blazing mountains. And the rear is protected by Virata with the Kekayas, and the ruler of Kasi and the king of the Chedis, with thirty thousand chariots.

Forming this mighty vyuha, the Pandavas, eager for sunrise, await battle in armour. And their white royal parasols, rich and sparkling, as brilliant as the sun, bedazzle on their elephants and chariots.'

CANTO 51

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the awesome Krauncha vyuha, formed by Pandu's son of immeasurable energy, your son approaches Acharya Drona, and Kripa, and Salya, and Somadatta's son, and Vikarna, and Aswatthaman also, and all his brothers, led by Dussasana, and other mighty Kshatriyas gathered for battle, and speaks these judicious and pleasing words, "Armed with diverse weapons, you are all familiar with the shastras. Each of you maharathas is singly capable of decimating the sons of Pandu with their legions. How much more then we can accomplish when you are united. Our forces, protected by Bhishma, are beyond measure, while theirs, protected by Bhima, are limited.

Let the Samsthanas, the Surasenas, the Venikas, the Kukkuras, the Rechakas, the Trigartas, the Madrakas, the Yavanas, with Shatrunjayas, and Dussasana, and that admirable Vikarna, and Nanda and Upanandaka, and Chitrasena, along with the Manibhadrakas, protect Bhishma with their fighting men."

Then Bhishma and Drona and your sons form a mighty vyuha for resisting that of the Parthas. And Bhishma, surrounded by a vast fighting force, advances like the king of the Devas himself. And that mighty archer, the son of Bharadwaja, endowed with immense tejas, follows him with the Kuntalas, the Dasarnas, and the Magadhas, and with the Vidarbhas, the Melakas, the Karnas, and the Pravaranas also.

The Gandharas, the Sindhusauviras, the Sibis and the Vasatis with all their legions follow Bhishma, that ornament of battle; and Sakuni, with all his warriors, protects him. King Duryodhana, with all his brothers, with the Aswalakas, the Vikarnas, the Vamanas, the Kosalas, the Daradas, the Vrikas, as also the Kshudrakas and the Malavas, advances spiritedly against the Pandava army.

And Bhurisravas, and Sala, and Salya, and Bhagadatta, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, guard the left flank. And Somadatta, and Susarman, and Sudakshina, the ruler of the Kambojas, and Satayus, and Srutayus, are on the right flank. Aswatthaman, and Kripa, and Kritavarman of Satwata's

race, with a very large akshauhini, are at the rear of the army. And behind them are the kings of many lands, Ketumat, and Vasudana, and the powerful son of the king of Kasi.

All the forces on your side joyfully await battle, blowing their conches with delight, and roaring like lions. Hearing these happy shouts the revered and powerful Bhishma also roars and blows his conch. Conches and drums, and many kinds of pesis and cymbals are sounded by others, setting up an upsurge of pulsating noise.

Krishna and Arjuna, both on a majestic chariot yoked to white horses, blow their beautiful conches decked with gold and jewels. Hrishikesa blows the Panchajanya, and Dhananjaya the one named Devadatta. Bhima of terrible deeds blows the enormous Paundra, and king Yudhishtira blows the Anantavijaya, while Nakula and Sahadeva blow upon the Sughosa and Manipushpaka.

The ruler of Kasi, and Saibya, and maharathas Sikhandin and Satyaki, and Dhrishtadyumna, and Virata, and that awesome archer, the king of the Panchalas, and the five sons of Draupadi, all blow their conches and set up leonine roars. And the great uproar of these Kshatriyas reverberates thunderously through the earth and the sky.

Thus, Rajan, the Kauravas and the Pandavas advance against each other eager to scorch each other in further battle.'

CANTO 52

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'When the two armies stand ready in battle formation, how do those excellent warriors begin their attack?'

Sanjaya says, 'When all the forces are arrayed, the fighting men wait, in full armour, with their beautiful standards raised. And seeing the Kaurava army looking like the boundless ocean, your son Duryodhana, standing within it, commands his forces into fight.

The soldiers, with savage intent, abandoning all caution, charge the Pandavas, with standards aloft. The battle is fiercely fought and makes one's hair stand on end. The chariots and elephants blur into each other. And vigorous, beautifully feathered shafts shot by maharathas rain down on the elephants and horses.

Mahabaho Bhishma of awesome prowess, encased in mail, takes up his bow, and approaching them, looses a torrent of arrows on the valiant son of Subhadra, and maharatha Arjuna, and the king of the Kekayas and Virata, and Dhrishtadyumna, as also upon the Chedi and the Matsya warriors.

And that mighty Pandava vyuha wavers at Bhishma's onslaught. Terrible is that encounter, terrible the Kuru grandsire. Horses and riders, and maharathas, fall swiftly. The Pandava chariot akshauhinis melt away.

Then that tiger among men, Arjuna, seeing the supreme Bhishma, angrily says to Krishna, "Press forward towards the Pitamaha. Bhishma incensed will annihilate our army for Duryodhana's sake. And this Drona, and Kripa and Salya and Vikarna, united with Dhritarashtra's sons headed by Duryodhana, and protected by this awesome archer, will slaughter the Panchalas. I must stop him."

Krishna cautions him saying, "Be careful, Dhananjaya, as I take you towards the Pitamaha's chariot." And he drives Arjuna's celebrated chariot towards Bhishma's.

With numerous banners waving, with handsome steeds resembling a flight of white cranes, with a raised standard bearing a roaring Vanara, Arjuna, the friend of friends, swiftly draws up on his chariot of sunlike

radiance and the thunder of clouds, razing the Kaurava and the Surasena hordes.

Dashing like an incensed elephant he terrifies brave warriors felling them all round with his shafts, and encounters Bhishma, protected by the forces headed by Saindhava and by the fighting men of the East, and the Sauviras and the Kekayas. Who other than Bhishma, Drona and Karna can advance in battle against the bearer of the Gandiva?

Bhishma strikes Arjuna with seventy-seven arrows and Drona shoots him with twenty-five, and Kripa with fifty, and Duryodhana with sixty-four, and Salya with nine; and Drona's son, that purushavyaghra, with sixty, and Vikarna with three barbs; and Saindhava with nine and Sakuni with five. And Artayani pierces Pandu's son with three thick shafts.

Though pierced from all sides with sharp arrows, Mahabaho Arjuna does not falter; he is like a mountain struck by straws. In response, this Kiriti of immeasurable soul pierces Bhishma with twenty-five and Kripa with nine barbs, and Drona with sixty, and Vikarna with three shafts, and Artayani with three, and Duryodhana also with five.

And then Satyaki, and Virata and Dhrishtadyumna, and the sons of Draupadi, and Abhimanyu, all ride up, surrounding him for protection. The prince of the Panchalas, supported by the Somakas, advances towards the great Drona, who guards Bhishma.

Maharatha Bhishma swiftly stabs the son of Pandu with eighty fierce arrows, greatly pleasing your soldiers. Hearing the shouts of those maharathikas, Arjuna joyfully enters into their midst raining fire upon them.

Watching his troops struggle in battle against the son of Pritha, Duryodhana says to Bhishma, "This mighty son of Pandu, with Krishna, felling all our troops, cuts away our roots, even while you and Drona live. It is on your account that Karna has laid aside his weapons, and does not fight against the Pandavas. O son of Ganga, Arjuna must be killed!"

Bhishma Pitamaha saying, "Fie on this cruel Kshatriya dharma!" rides towards Arjuna's chariot. And all the kings, seeing both those warriors with white horses yoked to their chariots, roar like lions and blow their conches. Drona's son and Duryodhana, and your son Vikarna, encircle Bhishma and stand prepared; and so also do all the Pandavas, surrounding Dhananjaya. And the battle begins.

Bhishma pierces Arjuna with nine shafts; Arjuna strikes him in return with ten, probing his very vitals. With a thousand adroit missiles, Arjuna,

famed for his archery, shrouds Bhishma in a net of arrows. Bhishma responds with a like mesh of his own. And both are pleased, and both delighting in battle, contend with each other without either gaining any advantage.

The flights of arrows from Bhishma's bow are dispersed by Arjuna's shafts. And so the torrents of arrows shot by Arjuna, cleaved by the arrows of Ganga's son, all fall tamely to the ground. Arjuna strikes Bhishma with twenty-five keenly whetted barbs. Bhishma strikes Partha with nine.

And these two glorious warriors, those Parantapas, sport with each other, piercing each other's chariots, horses, shafts and wheels. Suddenly Bhishma strikes Krishna squarely in his chest with three sizzling barbs, and Krishna bleeds red, Rajan, like a flowering kinsuka.

Infuriated at seeing Krishna wounded, Arjuna strikes Bhishma's sarathy with three searing arrows. Both maharathas strive against each other, without success. The dexterity of their charioteers allows them to display beautiful circles and advances and retreats with their chariots. They zealously seek any slight opening to strike, frequently changing positions.

Both Kshatriyas blow their conches echoingly, the boom of which mingles with their leonine roars; those maharathas twang their bows deafeningly. The resonance of their conches and the rattle of their chariot wheels agitate the very Earth, which begins to tremble and make cavernous sounds.

No one detects any weakness in either of them. Both are strong and courageous, and a match for the other. Guided by his fleeting standard, the Kauravas seek refuge in Bhishma; the Pandavas are inspired by Arjuna's moving banner. Seeing this stunning display of prowess, all present are filled with wonder.

No one, Bhaarata, observes any difference between the two, just as no one finds lapses in a man of dharma. At times, both become perfectly invisible in the prevailing clouds of arrows. At times, both are clearly seen.

The Devas with the Gandharvas and the Charanas, and the great Rishis watching this, say to one another, "These wrathful maharathas cannot be defeated by the Devas, the Asuras and the Gandharvas. This breathtaking battle will be held in awe in all the worlds. Indeed, such a war will never take place again.

Bhishma cannot be overcome by even brilliant maharatha Arjuna raining down arrows. So also Arjuna, who cannot be vanquished by the

very gods, will not be defeated by Bhishma. As long as the world itself lasts, so will this battle continue without an outcome." We hear these words in praise of both embattled warriors.

While these two are engaged in displaying their magnificent dexterity, other soldiers of both armies kill one another with sharp-edged swords, polished battle-axes, innumerable arrows, and a variety of weapons. Brave fighting men continue to fell each other in the murderous war.

And the clash between Drona and the prince of the Panchalas is terrible too.'

CANTO 53

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, Sanjaya, how that great archer Drona and the Panchala prince of Prishata's race fight, each striving to put forth his utmost. I regard destiny to be superior to exertion, considering that Bhishma could not escape Arjuna in battle. Indeed, when enraged, Bhishma can destroy all mobile and immobile creation; then why can he not kill the son of Pandu?'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen attentively, Rajan, to the story of this awesome war. The son of Pandu cannot be defeated by the very gods led by Indra. With a range of arrows Drona pierces Dhrishtadyumna and fells his charioteer. He also strikes Dhrishtadyumna's four horses with four brilliant shafts. The daring Dhrishtadyumna strikes Drona's body deep with nine arrows and arrests him.

Bharadwaja's son, of great prowess and immeasurable soul, shrouds the wrathful Dhrishtadyumna with his arrows. And he takes up a forbidding missile, like a second rod of death, as powerful as Indra's Vajra. Seeing that astra aimed by Drona, fearful shouts arise among the fighting men.

We watch Dhrishtadyumna's prowess as he stands alone like a mountain, adamant. He cuts down that blazing arrow flying towards him like his own death, and rains a storm of barbs on Drona. Seeing that incredible feat of Dhrishtadyumna's, the Panchalas with the Pandavas roar in delight.

Always seeking Drona's death, that fire prince hurls a spear at him, decked with gold and stones of lapis lazuli, like a thunderbolt. Drona smiles and cuts it into three slivers. Seeing his missile frustrated, Dhrishtadyumna looses a gale of arrows on Drona. Containing that squall, maharatha Drona smashes the Panchala prince's bow in his hands.

His bow riven, Dhrishtadyumna casts a mace weighty as a mountain at Drona. As it flies for Drona's life, we witness the astounding dexterity of Bharadwaja's son. By a nimble movement of his chariot, he avoids that golden arcane mace, in a wink, and looses a clutch of inscrutable golden-

winged shafts at Prishata's son. These pierce Dhrishtadyumna's armour drinking his blood.

The high-souled Dhrishtadyumna takes up another bow, and strikes Drona with five barbs. Those two bulls among men, both covered in blood, look quite beautiful, like two blossoming kinsukas in spring.

Drona again breaks Drupada's son's bow in his hands. That profound Kshatriya, the Acharya with arrows, like clouds lashing a mountain with rain. Roaring like a lion, he fells his enemy's sarathy and his four horses from his bay in the chariot; elegantly, fiercely he cuts away the leather glove that protects Dhrishtadyumna's right hand.

His bow broken, deprived of his chariot, his horses slain, and charioteer overthrown, the prince of Panchala begins to alight from his ruined ratha, mace in hand, ready to display great prowess. But before he can leap down, Bhaarata, Drona smashes his mace into fragments with arrows swifter than seeing. Ah, that is breathtaking to see!

The stalwart prince of the Panchalas, that Mahabaho, takes up a grand shield decked with a hundred moons, and a mighty sword, and dashes out, like a ravenous lion towards an incensed elephant to kill Drona. With lightness of hand and power, we see Bharadwaja's son curb Prishata's son with a spate of arrows.

Yet for all his great power, Drona cannot himself advance, for the maharatha Dhrishtadyumna stands resolute and unmoving, warding off those arrow clouds with his shield with unmatched skill. Bhima swiftly moves to help Dhrishtadyumna. He stabs Drona with seven arrows, and forces him to clamber on to another chariot. Duryodhana cries at the king of the Kalingas, with his large force, to protect Drona.

The fearsome Kalinga legion charges against Bhima at your son's command. And Drona, abandoning the prince of Panchala, faces Virata and Drupada together. Dhrishtadyumna advances to support Yudhishtira. A fierce fight breaks out between the Kalingas and Bhima, making one's hair stand on end; it quickly swells into an encounter that threatens to destroy the universe.'

CANTO 54

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'How does the king of the Kalingas, that commander of a vast army, goaded by my son, fight Bhima of stupendous feats, that Kshatriya ranging over the field of war with his mace like Death himself?'

Sanjaya says, 'Driven by your son, the mighty king of the Kalingas, accompanied by a colossal force advances on Bhima's chariot. And Bhima, supported by the Chedis, charges that army, replete with chariots, horses and elephants, and bristling with powerful weapons, flying towards him with Ketumat, the son of the king of the Nishadas.

And Srutayus also, lively and armoured, followed by his troops in battle formation, rides with king Ketumat to assail Bhima. The lord of the Kalingas with thousands of chariots, and Ketumat with ten thousand elephants, and the Nishadas encircle Vayu's mighty son.

With Bhima at their head, the Chedis, the Matsyas and Karushas, along with others, plunge wildly at the Nishadas. A fierce and majestic battle erupts between Bhima and his enemies, all avid to kill one another, a terrific fray that resembles the clash between Indra and the host of Diti's sons. The uproar of that horde reverberates like the booming ocean.

The fighting men fell one another, transforming the battlefield into a cremation ground strewn horribly with flesh and flowing blood. The warriors, in their frenzy of killing, cannot distinguish friend from foe, and so men strike down their own. Ah, feverish is the encounter between the few and many, between the Chedis on one side, and the Kalingas and the Nishadas on the other.

After briefly displaying fierce valour, the Chedis abandon Bhima, and turn away. Unruffled by the desertion, the son of Pandu takes on the Kalingas single-handedly. The mighty Bhima stands unwavering, and inundates the Kalinga legions with torrents of arrows.

That mighty archer, the king of the Kalingas, and his son the maharatha Sakradeva, both strike Bhima painfully. Mahabaho Bhima fights back bravely, but his horses are felled by Sakradeva's volleys. Seeing Parantapa

Bhima without a chariot, Sakradeva attacks him fervently with a gale like a cloudburst at the end of summer.

Bhima remains in his horseless chariot, and hurls an iron mace at Sakradeva. The son of the Kalinga king plunges to the ground, with his standard and sarathy, dead. Seeing his son killed, maharatha Srutayush surrounds Bhima with thousands of chariots.

Bhima discards his mace and takes up a sword. Crimson eyed with anguish and wrath, the great Kalinga rubs his bowstring, takes up an arrow deadly as a king cobra, and shoots it at Bhima. Bhima cleanly divides that coursing arrow in two with his imposing sword. And he roars in triumph, terrifying the soldiers.

In deranged fury, the Kalinga launches fourteen bearded stone-whetted shafts at Bhima, who in a blur smashes those arrows surging through the sky into bits with his sword. Bhima, husky bull among men, attacks Bhanumat. Bhanumat envelops Bhima with a shower of arrows, and makes the sky echo with a resounding shout. Bhima responds with strident roar after roar, like an angry tiger.

Hearing him roar so awfully, the Kalinga army grows fearful. That army suddenly sees Bhima as being more than a mere man. Levering himself by its tusks, Bhima, sword in hand, leaps onto the back of Bhanumat's elephant, and slices through Bhanumat with his magnificent sword, bisecting his trunk in a flash of scarlet.

Having killed that prince of the Kalingas, Parantapa Bhima dissevers the neck of his tusker which falls to the ground with a deafening bellow, like a cliff whose base has been eroded by the heaving sea. Leaping down from that dying elephant, the prince of Bharata's race stands once again on the ground, his mighty chest heaving, sword in hand and impervious as ever.

Destroying numberless elephants on all sides, he wanders across the battlefield, looking like a moving wheel of fire, decimating akshauhinis of cavalry, elephants, chariots, and hordes of foot-soldiers.

And that lord among men, the mighty Bhima, moves hawklike, cleaving the bodies and heads of elephants and their riders with his keen-edged sword. On foot and furious, he strikes fear into his bravest opponents and baffles them single-handedly, like Yama during the pralaya. Only the foolish dare challenge him rashly as he roams the battleground, sword in hand.

That hulking, terrifying Kshatriya smashes the shafts and yokes of chariots, also killing their warriors. Bhima displays all kinds of movements, so surprisingly agile and graceful for one of his bulk: he turns, and wheels, makes side-thrusts, jumps, runs, and leaps high. He races forwards and flies upwards. And some are mangled, struck by his sword through their very vitals, and others beheaded.

Many elephants, Bhaarata, some with their trunks and tusks severed, others with their temporal lobes slit open, deprived of riders, kill their own ranks and fall down with plaintive cries. And broken spears, and the heads of elephant drivers, and beautiful caparisons of elephants, and dazzling golden chords, and collars, and arrows and mallets and quivers, many kinds of war machines, and beautiful bows, short arrows with polished heads and hooks, and iron goads for driving elephants, bells of many shapes and tones, and hilts decked with gold, are seen tumbling to the ground along with horsemen past count.

And with elephants spread on the ground with parts of their bodies and their trunks cut, or killed, the field appears to be spread with fallen hills. That bull among men, having killed those majestic tuskers, moves on to raze the horses, and also fells their riders. Savage and ferine is the battle between him and them.

We see hilts and traces, and radiant golden saddle girths and covers for the backs of horses, and bearded shafts, and costly swords, and coats of mail, and shields, and beautiful ornaments scattered all around in that virile encounter. Bhima covers the earth with blood as if it were dotted with crimson lilies.

The mighty son of Pandu leaps high and dragging some maharathas down, fells them and their standards with his sword. Filled with entirely boundless energy, that Kshatriya sometimes lunges, or dashes on all sides, along many sudden paths; and the fighting men all look on in wonder.

And some he kills with his legs, and others he drags down, thrusting them into the earth. Some he strikes with his sword, and others he petrifies with his roars. Some men are thrown to the ground by the force of his thighs as he runs through them; others escape hastily, terrified to see him.

Yet again, the vast and vigorous force of the Kalingas rushes at the dreadful Bhima and surrounds him. Seeing Srutayush at the head of the Kalinga forces, Bhima charges him. The Kalinga king pierces Bhima's

chest with nine whistling arrows. Like an elephant pierced with a goad, Bhima blazes up in anger, like a fire fed with ghee.

Ashoka, that most excellent sarathy, brings up a golden chariot for Bhima to mount. The son of Kunti swiftly climbs on and rides at the ruler of the Kalingas, calling out to him to halt.

The mighty, infuriated Srutayush looses a luculent volley at Bhima, flaunting his marvellous lightness of hand. Struck forcefully by nine shafts from Kalinga's bow, Bhima shivers like a snake beaten with a rod. With a growl he raises his bow and kills the Kalinga king with seven massive iron shafts.

With another two arrows he brings down the two powerful protectors of Srutayush's chariot wheels. He despatches Satyadeva and Satya to Yamaloka. Of immeasurable soul, Bhima has Ketumat's life with a mad flurry of arrow and spear. Supported by a force of many thousands, the Kshatriyas of the Kalinga country rise in incensed froth to confront the raging Bhima.

With spears and maces, swords and battle-axes, hundreds upon hundreds of the Kalingas besiege Bhima. Grandly foiling their torrents of missiles, the mighty one takes up his mace and again leaps from his chariot.

Bhima on his fresh rampage kills another seven hundred brave Kshatriyas; that Parantapa sends two thousand more Kalingas to their death. Ah, truly wonderful, even by his lofty norm, is his feat. Thus does Bhima of awesome prowess fell teeming bands of the Kalingas.

Elephants deprived of their riders by Bhima, and stricken with arrows, blunder frenetically across the battlefield, trampling their own men, with deafening roars, like masses of clouds driven by the wind. Mahabaho Bhima, sword in hand, triumphantly and stridently blows his conch.

And that blast makes the Kalinga forces tremble, all of them absolutely panic-stricken. The warriors and the animals quake in terror for Bhima charges down many paths, impetuously, in every direction, like a prince of tuskers, roaring, leaping high time and again. His enemies are flung into a trance.

The Kalinga army shudders in dread of Bhima like a vast lake agitated by a great crocodile. And seeing Bhima's wondrous feats, the Kalinga forces flee in all directions. When they rally again, the Pandava Senapati Dhrishtadyumna, Bhaarata, orders his own troops to fight.

Obeying their Senapati, many warriors of the Pandava army led by Sikhandin surge towards Bhima with their akshauhinis of consummate chariots. Dharmaraja Yudhishtira follows them with a grand elephant force the colour of clouds. Exhorting his men, the son of Prishata, surrounded by so many great warriors, takes upon himself the protection of one of Bhima's flanks.

There exists no one on earth who is more cherished by the prince of the Panchalas than Bhima and Satyaki; indeed he values them more highly than his life. As that Parantapa, the son of Prishata, watches Mahabaho Bhima rampaging among the Kalingas, he roars in exultation. He blows his conch and lets out a leonine roar. And Bhima, seeing the red standard of Dhrishtadyumna's chariot decked with gold and yoked with horses white as pigeons, is reassured. Soon enough he remounts his own chariot again.

Dhrishtadyumna of immeasurable soul advances to rescue Bhima beleaguered by the Kalingas. And both those Kshatriyas, Dhrishtadyumna and Bhima, of pulsating tejas, noticing Satyaki at a distance, furiously fall upon the Kalingas.

And that bull among men, Satyaki Yuyudhana, grandson of Sini, foremost of victorious warriors, swiftly rides to defend the flanks of Bhima and Prishata's son. Bow in hand, fighting ferociously, he devastates the enemy's ranks. Bhima lets flow a crimson river, a bloody current floating the shredded flesh of the Kalinga fighting men.

Beholding Bhima the men cry out, "This is Yama himself fighting against the Kalingas in Bhima's form!" Hearing those cries, himself encircled by armed adversaries, Bhishma breaks free of his encirclement and rides at Bhima.

Satyaki and Bhima, and Dhrishtadyumna rush at Bhishma's silver chariot decked with gold. And all of them surround Ganga's son and pierce him, each with three scathing barbs.

Bhishma pierces each of those mighty archers with three straight shafts. And checking those maharathas with thousands of arrows, loosed in moments, he kills Bhima's horses. Resplendent with golden armour and filled with tejas, Bhima stands firm on that horseless chariot and launches a spear at Bhishma's chariot, which the Pitamaha cleaves in two before it can reach him.

Bhima seizes a mighty mace made of Saikya iron and leaps down from his chariot. Dhrishtadyumna swiftly takes him into his own chariot and

carries him to safety in plain view of all the soldiers.

Satyaki kills Bhishma’s sarathy with a single arrow, and Bhishma is borne away from the battlefield by his horses with the speed of the wind. Bhima remains in the midst of his men, burning like a mighty fire consuming dry grass as he kills all the Kalingas. None of your warriors, Bharatarishabha, dare to oppose him.

And revered by the Panchalas and the Matsyas, he embraces Dhrishtadyumna and then Satyaki. In the presence of Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, tiger among the Yadus, of unthwarted prowess, gladdens Bhima by saying, “By our good fortune the king of the Kalingas, and his son Ketumat, and their kinsman Sakradeva, indeed, all the Kalingas, have been killed. With the strength of your arms alone, the vast legions of the Kalingas teeming with elephants, horses and chariots, noble Kshatriyas, and brave fighting men, have been decimated.”

Having said this, the long-armed grandson of Sini, that Parantapa, climbs back into his chariot and embraces the son of Pandu. That maharatha begins to slaughter your forces vigorously augmenting Bhima’s efforts.’

CANTO 55

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'As the morning passes, and the destruction of chariots, elephants, horses, horsemen and foot-soldiers and cavalry continues, Dhrishtadyumna engages with the three maharathas, Drona's son, Salya, and the high-souled Kripa.

And the valiant heir of the king of Panchala kills the celebrated steeds of Drona's son with a storm of arrows. Deprived of his animals, Aswatthaman climbs into Salya's chariot and showers him with his shafts.

Seeing Dhrishtadyumna battling Aswatthaman, the son of Subhadra rushes forward, loosing a tide of fire. He pierces Salya with twenty-five arrows, Kripa with nine, and Aswatthaman with eight. Drona's son retaliates, striking Arjuna's son with a fusillade of winged shafts; Salya stabs him with twelve, and Kripa with three fierce barbs.

Your grandson Lakshmana storms at Abhimanyu and a duel between them ensues. Duryodhana's vehement son covers Abhimanyu in a fury of arrows. His feat, O king, appears truly wonderful!

The magnificent Abhimanyu blithely shoots five hundred arrows at his cousin, in a flash. Lakshmana responds by carving up his adversary's bow in his hands, seeing which all the warriors send up a loud shout. That Parantapa, the son of Subhadra, discards his broken bow and seizes up another strong one.

The two young bulls among men defy each other ferociously, drawing rich, royal blood. Seeing his powerful son afflicted by Abhimanyu, Duryodhana himself rides to where the cousins fight feverishly. All the enemy kings surround the son of Arjuna with hosts of chariots. Invincible in battle and equal to Krishna himself in prowess, that resplendent Kshatriya remains unperturbed. Seeing Subhadra's son in the midst of fierce fighting, Arjuna rushes to rescue him. The kings allied to the Kauravas, led by Bhishma and Drona, with their chariots, elephants and horses, briskly attack Savyasachin.

A pall of dust, raised by foot-soldiers and horsemen, horses and chariots, obscures the sky. Coming within range of Arjuna's arrows, those thousands

of elephants and hundreds of kings cannot advance. All the creatures there wail loudly and darkness cloaks every direction.

The violation of the Kauravas assumes a fierce and dreadful mien. Neither the sky nor the sun, nor any of the cardinal points of the earth can be distinguished for Arjuna's tempest of arrows.

Many elephants have the standards cut down from their backs, and many maharathas their horses killed. Some commanders of chariot akshauhinis can be seen wandering purposelessly on foot, bereft of their chariots. And other maharathas, their arms graced with angadas, roam aimlessly with their weapons.

Fearing Arjuna, riders of horses and elephants abandon their beasts, and flee in all directions. Kings are felled by Arjuna's arrows or plunge to the ground from chariots and elephants and steeds. With his terrible volleys, Arjuna, fierce-faced, dissevers the upraised arms of warriors grasping maces and swords, or spears, quivers, arrows, bows, hooks, or standards.

Bhaarata, we see spiked maces shattered, and mallets, and bearded shafts, and short arrows, and swords, and sharp battle-axes, and spears and shields smashed into shards, and coats of mail and standards, and other weapons of all kinds, and parasols furnished with golden staves, and iron goads, and whips, and traces strewn across the battlefield in stacks.

There is no warrior who can face Arjuna in battle; whoever advances against him is killed. When all your fighting men scatter, Arjuna and Krishna blow their conches.

Bhishma sees the routed host and smilingly addresses the brave son of Bharadwaja, "The daunting, with Krishna in his chariot, frustrates all our forces. He cannot be overpowered today by any means; today he is like Siva at the end of the yuga and we cannot rally our legions, vast though they be.

Look how our forces scatter. The setting sun is about to reach that best of mountains, the sunset mountain Asta. Bharatarishabha, I think that the hour has come for us to withdraw our army. Our warriors are weary and panic-stricken and cannot fight anymore."

Having said this to Acharya Drona, Maharatha Bhishma orders the retreat of your army. And thus at nightfall, both sides withdraw.'

CANTO 56

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'With the arrival of dawn, Parantapa Bhishma gives the order for the Kaurava army to prepare for battle. The son of Shantanu, eager for the victory of your sons, forms the Garuda vyuha.

And on the beak of that Garuda is Bhishma himself. Its two eyes are Drona and Kritavarman of Satwata's race. The famed Aswatthaman and Kripa, supported by the Trigartas, the Matsyas, the Kekayas, and the Vatadhanas, stand at its head. Bhurisravas and Sala, and Salya and Bhagadatta, and the Madrakas, the Sindhu-Souviras, and the Pancha-Noadas, together with Jayadratha, are placed on its neck.

And upon its back is Duryodhana with his followers. Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and the Kambojas with the Sakas, and the Surasenas, Rajan, form its tail. The Magadhas and the Kalingas, with all the tribes of the Daserakas, encased in mail, form the vyuha's the right wing. And the Karushas, the Vikunjas, the Mundas, and the Kaundivrishas, with Brihadbala, are its left wing.

Arjuna, seeing this vyuha, forms another with Dhrishtadyumna to oppose it. The son of Pandu forms the commanding crescent moon vyuha.

Surrounded by kings of many lands, abundantly armed, stationed on the right horn, Bhima dazzles. Beside him are those maharathas Virata and Drupada; next to them is Nila bearing deadly weapons. After Nila stands the maharatha Dhrishtaketu, surrounded by the Chedis, the Kasis, the Karushas, and the Pauravas.

Dhrishtadyumna, and Sikhandin, with the Panchalas and the Prabhadrakas, supported by other forces, are stationed in the centre, Bhaarata, ready for battle. And there also stands Yudhishtira Dharmaraja surrounded by his akshauhini of elephants. Next to him are Satyaki and the five sons of Draupadi. Immediately beyond is Iravan. After these are Bhima's son Ghatotkacha and those maharathas, the Kekayas.

On the left horn of that vyuha stands that best of men, he whom Janardana, the preserver of the Universe, protects. It is thus that the

Pandavas form their powerful vyuha to counter and destroy your sons and their allies.

Conches boom and the war between your forces and those of the enemy begins again. Chariots and elephants charge one another and blur on grim Kurukshetra. Hordes of elephants and hosts of chariots can be seen everywhere rushing wildly forward to effect the destruction of the enemy.

The roar of the chariots swiftly moving to either join the general fray or to fight individually is fused with the thunder of drumbeats. The shouts and yells of the dauntless warriors on both sides as they cut each other down reaches the very heavens.’

CANTO 57

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'After the two armies have been disposed in battle formations, maharatha Arjuna wreaks great carnage on the commanders of the enemy's hosts of chariots with his arrows. Despite being slaughtered by him, who is truly like Siva at the end of the yuga, the Dhartarashtras persevere to fight the Pandavas.

Wanting to win blazing glory, unrelenting and absorbed in their task, scorning death, they break the Pandava ranks in many places and are also themselves broken. In places, Pandava and the Kaurava troops both briefly scatter and flee.

Nothing can be distinguished. A swirling dust arises and shrouds the very sun. The cardinal and subsidiary directions are a haze; the warriors are guided only by the indications of colours, passwords, names and tribal distinctions. Protected by great Drona, the vyuha of the Kauravas remains whole and steadfast. So also the formidable Pandava vyuha holds firm, defended by Arjuna and Bhima.

Chariots and elephants, in close ranks, and hordes of fighting men of both the armies, clash vigorously. In that savage fight, riders on horses kill one another with polished swords and long spears. Maharathas cut each other down with golden-winged arrows. And elephant-riders mow down others with broad-headed shafts and lances.

Hosts of doughty foot-soldiers cheerfully slaughter others with short arrows and battle-axes. Maharathas kill elephants and their riders; and are in turn slain by the latter. Bharatarishabha, the horseman fells the maharatha with his spear, and is in turn flung down to the ground by the chariot warrior. In both the armies, the foot-soldier kills the maharatha only to be razed by another rathika. Elephant-riders fell horse-riders, and horse-riders fell warriors on the backs of elephants.

All this seems all too awesome and so very bloody. Roars and screams of slayer and slain thicken the air and men quit their bodies in their thousands, each moment, and the air is a denseness of the shocked or bemused spirits of fighting men.

Everywhere foot-soldiers, elephant-riders and horse-riders despatch each other; and strewn with broken standards and bows, spears and housings of elephants, costly shawls and feathered barbs, maces and spiked clubs, kampanas and arrows, mottled coats of mail and kunapas, iron hooks, and polished swords, and golden winged shafts, the gore-slicked battlefield shines as if with floral wreaths.

The earth, mired with chunks of hewn off flesh and spilt blood, becomes impassable with the corpses of men and horses and elephants killed in that most dreadful war. Drenched with human blood, the dust settles, and the cardinal points become perfectly clear once again. Many headless bodies rise up in macabre pageant to intimate the end of the world. And in that fell and gruesome battle, maharathas can be seen escaping in all directions.

Then Bhishma and Drona, and Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, and Purumitra, and Vikarna, and Sakuni the son of Subala, all leonine and invincible in battle, break through the ranks of the Pandavas. Bhima and Ghatotkacha, and Satyaki, and Chekitana, and the sons of Draupadi, supported by their allies, begin grinding down your forces and your sons, like the Devas razing the Danavas.

And those bulls among Kshatriyas, smiting one another, are awesome to behold; covered in blood, dripping blood, they glow like kinsukas. The foremost warriors of both armies, striking down their opponents, look like the luminous planets in the sky.

Your son Duryodhana, supported by a thousand chariots, storms at the Pandavas and Ghatotkacha, the Rakshasa. The Pandavas, with a great host of fighting men, charge the Parantapas Bhishma and Drona.

The diadem-decked Arjuna furiously attacks all the foremost among the enemy kings. Abhimanyu and Satyaki ride against the forces of Subala's son Sakuni. A bloodthirsty encounter breaks out again between the two sides both of whom yearn for victory, a battle that makes one's hair stand on end.'

CANTO 58

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Then those kings, seeing Arjuna in battle, furiously hem him round with thousands of chariots and shroud him with a dark and dense cloud of arrows. And they hurl shining spears, and maces, and spiked clubs, and feathered barbs and battle-axes, and mallets and bludgeons at his chariot—braids of eerie lighting flashing.

With golden shafts Arjuna thwarts that shower of weapons coursing towards him like a flight of locusts. Watching the superhuman lightness of that hand, the Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Uragas and the Rakshasas cry out: "Magnificent, truly magnificent!"

The daring Gandharas, led by Subala's son with a vast force, encircle Satyaki and Abhimanyu. With diverse astras, Sakuni's warriors shatter the chariot of the Vrishni hero. Satyaki abandons his chariot and swiftly mounts Abhimanyu's. The two begin to slaughter the army of Subala's son.

Drona and Bhishma steadily dwindle the forces of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja with jagged shafts furnished with the feathers of the kanka bird. The son of Yudhishtira and his uncles, Madri's twins, now savagely raze Drona's legions in plain sight of both vast armies. That hair-raising battle can be likened to the one between the Devas and the Asuras in ancient times.

Bhima and Ghatotkacha achieve stupendous feats; until, riding up in fury, Duryodhana thwarts them both. We see Hidimbi's son displaying his prowess and even transcending his father. Enraged, Bhima shoots Duryodhana squarely through his chest, smiling the while. Duryodhana slumps onto the floor of his chariot and faints. His charioteer quickly bears him away to safety, and the forces supporting Duryodhana break rank and scatter.

Pursuing them, Bhima hunts the fleeing Kaurava army with inexorable archery.

Even before the eyes of Drona and Bhishma, blazing Dhrishtadyumna, foremost of warriors, thins their army with stunning flurries from his great bow. The Acharya and the Pitamaha together cannot stop your son's host

from breaking ranks and fleeing from the terror that the Panchala prince brings.

When those thousands of maharathas have fled in all directions, Subhadra's son and Satyaki, that bull of Sini's race, together in the same chariot, attack the army of Subala's son. And Sini's grandson and that bull of the Kuru vamsa are radiant like the sun and the moon together in the sky after the last lunation of the dark fortnight.

Arjuna yet furiously rains down his remitless arrow storms on your army in mighty cloudbursts. Trembling like children, the Kaurava army flees his terror and his slaughter. Seeing their army run from battle, the enraged Bhishma and Drona move to stop its retreat.

Duryodhana himself comforts the fighting men and prevents a further flight of his unnerved forces. All the maharathas stop when they see your son. The common soldiers, seeing them halt, stop of their own accord; ashamed and wanting to display their courage to one another, Rajan, your army rallies like the surging sea at moonrise.

Seeing his legions revive, Duryodhana quickly rides upto Bhishma and says, "Pitamaha, while you are alive, and Drona, master of weapons, with Aswatthama and all our other friends, still alive, and that mighty archer Kripa, it is dishonourable that my army should take flight.

The Pandavas are not any match for you or for Drona, or for Drona's son, or for Kripa. Pitamaha, you are favouring the sons of Pandu by disregarding this massacre of my army. You should have told me before this war began that you will not fight against the Pandavas.

Had you and Drona said this, I would have reflected upon the course I should pursue with Karna. If I do not deserve to be abandoned by you both in battle, O bulls among men, fight with your full powers."

Hearing these words, Bhishma laughs and, rolling his eyes in anger, says to your son, "Many a time, I spoke to you in the interest of your good. As long as Krishna is with them, the Pandavas are invincible even against the Devas.

However, what my age and strength permit, best of kings, I will do in this war. With your kinsmen, witness it today! In the sight of all, single-handedly I will contain the sons of Pandu as they lead their forces with all their kin. I will kill ten thousands of their men each day."

Thus addressed by Bhishma, your son has conches blown and drums beaten in joy. And the Pandavas also, hearing that loud uproar, blow their

conches, and sound their drums and cymbals.’

CANTO 59

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'After his dreadful vow made when stirred by the words of my son, what, Sanjaya, does Bhishma do to the sons of Pandu; what do the Panchalas do to the Pitamaha? Tell me all, O Sanjaya.'

Sanjaya says, 'After the passing of that morning, as the sun moves on his westward course, and after the high-souled Pandavas are victorious, Bhishma, knower of every nuance of dharma, protected by a vast force and by all your sons, rides on his ratha yoked to the swiftest horses towards the Pandava army.

As a result of your sinful policy, O king, a horrific battle breaks out between us and the Pandavas. The twang of bows and the flapping of bowstrings against leather gloves, unite to make a tumult like the cracking of mountains.

"Stay! Watch me! Know this one! Turn back! Stand! I await you—strike!" These roars resound everywhere. And the sounds of tumbling golden coats of mail, of crowns and diadems, and of standards, resemble the clatter of stones onto a great bed of rock. Heads and arms decked with ornaments fall by the thousands upon the field of the awful sacrifice of living men.

Some warriors, with heads severed from their bodies, continue to stand, weapons in hand or armed with drawn bows. Soon a ghastly turbulent river of blood flows, choked with lifeless dismembered men and hewn limbs, and the corpses of elephants its jutting rocks. It flows from the bodies of horses, men, and elephants, delighting swarming raucous vultures and jackals, and it races towards the ocean of the next world. A war such as this one, Rajan, fought between your sons and the Pandavas, has never been seen or heard before.

The bodies of slain soldiers render the field impassable for chariots. And dead elephants lying on the ground make Kurukshetra appear to be covered with the peaks of blue hills. And, ah, the battleground, strewn with

multicoloured coats of mail and turbans, is also as beautiful as an autumn sky.

Some fighting men, though sorely wounded, can be seen charging joyfully and proudly against the enemy. Many fallen on the field, cry out, “O father, O brother, O friend, O kinsman, O companion, O uncle, do not abandon me!” Others shout, “Come! Come back! Why are you frightened? Where do you go? I stand firm in battle, do not be afraid.”

In that deathly conflict, Bhishma, with bow drawn to a circle, looses astras like deadly snakes. Raining down a continuous tempest of arrows in all directions, that hero of rigid vows strikes the Pandava maharathas naming each one. Displaying his unearthly skill, and dancing as it were along the path of his chariot, he appears to be present everywhere, like an ubiquitous circle of fire.

The Pandavas, along with the Srinjayas, behold that lone Kshatriya as multiplied a thousand-fold; all who are there regard Bhishma as having multiplied himself with maya. Having seen him now in the east, the next moment they see him in the west. Having seen him in the north, the next instant they see him in the south. Thus the son of Ganga fights that war. None among the Pandavas is able to even gaze upon him. They see only the bankless, seamless blaze of arrows radiating from his bow.

Valiant warriors, seeing him butcher their ranks, lament loudly. And, kings in thousands attempt to face the Pitamaha, who seems to fly over the field in a superhuman way, falling into the fire, the conflagration that is the enraged Bhishma, like senseless insects that fly into a flame, only to be devoured.

Not a single shaft of that warrior is futile; each one claims a life, felling men, elephants and horses without favour. With a single arrow he kills a mighty tusker like a hill being riven by the Vajra. Another single shaft does to bring down two or three armoured elephant-riders standing together.

Whoever approaches Bhishma, that tiger among tigers among men, is seen for but a moment before slumping to the ground. And being annihilated by Bhishma of incomparable prowess, that vast host of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja scatters in all directions. Assailed by Bhishma’s simoom of arrows, the immense Pandava army trembles despite the presence of Krishna and Arjuna.

The gallant efforts of the heroic leaders of the Pandava army cannot check the flight of the maharathas afflicted by Bhishma’s volleys; the

prowess that routs this great legion equals that of Indra himself. Yudhishtira's army is so completely dispersed, that no two men can be seen together.

Chariots and elephants and horses are pierced all over, and standards and shafts of chariots strewn across the field. The Pandava forces cry out in anguish. The father strikes the son and the son strikes the father; and friend challenges the dearest of friends to battle to death as if goaded by destiny.

Many of the Pandava allies flee, dishevelled and distraught, flinging off their coats of mail. Loudly, dismally, the Pandava army wails and screams as it witnesses the best of its maharathas appearing as bewildered as a herd of cows lost in a terrible jungle.

Krishna, observing the rout of the army, stops the chariot and says to Arjuna, "The hour you awaited has arrived, Partha. Strike Bhishma now before you are lost. Remember, in an assembly of kings you said, 'I will slay all the warriors of Dhritarashtra's sons, headed by Bhishma and Drona; why, I will not leave a single man who fights against me alive.'

Son of Kunti, Parantapa, make those words true. Bibhatsu, look at your legions being routed on all sides. Seeing Bhishma looking like Rudra himself with open maw, watch how Yudhishtira's allies flee. Terrified they run, like weaker beasts on seeing the lion."

Arjuna replies, "Plunging through this sea of the hostile host, drive the horses to where Bhishma stands. I will overwhelm that invincible warrior, the revered Kuru Pitamaha."

Krishna drives his silvery horses to where Bhishma's chariot stands, chariot that shines like the sun, impossible to even gaze upon. Seeing Mahabaho Arjuna charging at Bhishma, the mighty army of Yudhishtira rallies for battle.

Bhishma, that foremost of Kuru warriors, roars like ten lions, and swiftly shrouds Arjuna's chariot with a gale of arrows. In a moment, that chariot, with standard and charioteer, becomes invisible. Patiently, fearlessly, Krishna guides his horses wounded by Bhishma's barbs. And Arjuna takes up his celestial bow, whose twang resembles the roar of thunderclouds, and cleaves Bhishma's bow with a clutch of jagged shafts.

The Pitamaha takes up another and strings it in a flash; with his two hands, he stretches that bow whose reverberations are like thunder. But Arjuna, excited with wrath, severs that bow as well.

The son of Shantanu applauds Arjuna, saying, "Excellent, Mahabaho, son of Pandu! Magnificent Dhananjaya, such a marvellous feat is truly worthy of you. I am pleased with you. Fight hard against me."

Having praised Arjuna, Bhishma seizes up another great bow and unleashes a fiercer storm on Arjuna's ratha. Krishna displays divine skill guiding that chariot in sharp, impossible circles, frustrating Bhishma's transcendent archery. But tireless Bhishma soon strikes both Krishna and Arjuna with subtle, whetted barbs. And pierced by those shafts, those two tigers among men look like two roaring bulls with the gashes of horns on their bodies.

In high dudgeon, Bhishma covers the two Krishnas from all sides with an unprecedented fusillade, which makes Krishna shiver. Laughing loudly, Bhishma fills even blue Krishna with wonder.

Mahabaho Krishna contrasts the prowess of Bhishma with the mildness of Arjuna; he sees Bhishma loosing incessant firestorms of arrows, looking like the all-consuming sun himself in the midst of the two contending armies. And marking that that Kshatriya ancient was killing the best of Yudhishtira's warriors, bringing havoc to the legions as if Pralaya had arrived, Kesava of the fathomless soul, slayer of enemy hosts, thinking that Yudhishtira's army will be annihilated, cannot bear what he sees.

He thinks, "In a single day this Bhishma can kill all the Daityas and the Danavas. How easily then will he crush the sons of Pandu with their forces and allies. The vast Pandava army is again being scattered. And the Kauravas, seeing the Somakas routed, fight in high spirits, much to Bhishma's delight.

Protected by my kavacha, I will stop Bhishma today for the sake of the Pandavas. I will lighten their burden. As for Arjuna, though struck with keen shafts, he still hesitates, out of his reverence for Bhishma."

While Krishna thus reflects, Bhishma again looses a deep and violent swarm of arrows at Arjuna's chariot. All the cardinal directions are completely shrouded. And neither the sky nor the quarters nor the earth nor the brilliant sun can be seen. The gusts of winds that blow are mixed with smoke, and all the points of the compass are agitated.

And Drona, and Vikarna, and Jayadratha, and Bhurisravas, and Kritavarman, and Kripa, and Srutayush and the ruler of the Amvashtas and Vinda and Anuvinda, Sudakshina and the rulers of the western kingdoms,

and the tribes of the Sauviras, the Vasatis, and the Kshudrakas, and the Malavas, swiftly advance towards Kiritin, at Bhishma's command.

The grandson of Sini sees that Arjuna is surrounded by hundreds of horses and foot-soldiers, chariots and colossal elephants. Seeing both Krishna and Arjuna encircled, Satyaki rides swiftly forward. Coming to Arjuna's side like Vishnu to the aid of Indra, that noblest archer charges the gathered enemy.

In grand exhilaration, he addresses Yudhishtira's host of fighting men who, cowed by Bhishma, their elephants, steeds, chariots and standards slain, mangled and shattered, roaring, "Brave Kshatriyas, where do you go? This is not the dharma of the righteous as proclaimed by the ancients. Excellent heroes, do not break your vows. Keep your Kshatriya dharma!"

Unable to bear the flight of the army, marking the mildness with which Arjuna fights, and seeing Bhishma's forceful exertions, and the Kauravas rushing in from all sides, Krishna, younger brother of Vasava, and protector of all the Dasarhas, cries to the intrepid and famed Satyaki, saying, "O hero of Sini's race, let they who retreat go. And let they who remain, let them also flee.

I will fling Bhishma down from his chariot, and vanquish Drona, too, and all their followers. No one in the Kaurava legions will escape my wrath. I will kill Bhishma of high vows with my Sudarshana. Killing those two greatest of maharathas, Bhishma and Drona, and their forces, O my Satyaki, I will please Arjuna and Yudhishtira, and Bhima, and the twin Aswins. And killing all the sons of Dhritarashtra and all their allies, I will joyfully deliver unto king Ajatashatru a kingdom today."

Saying this, Vasudeva's son releases the reins of his horses, leaps off the chariot, and materialises over his right hand his beautiful chakra whirling, sharp as a razor, as radiant as the sun, with the force of a thousand thunderbolts. Making the earth tremble under his step, Krishna runs towards Bhishma.

And that Parantapa, the younger brother of Indra, charges Bhishma in the midst of his forces, like a lion wanting to kill a prince of elephants blinded with fury, proudly awaiting the attack. The fringes of Krishna's yellow pitambara robe flutter in the air like a lightning-charged cloud in the sky.

That lotus-like Sudarsana, having for its stalk the beautiful arm of Saurin, is as beautiful as the primeval lotus, bright as the morning sun,

which springs from the navel of Vishnu Padmanabha. Krishna's anger is the morning sun that makes that lotus sway. And the exquisite leaves of that lotus are as sharp as a dagger's edge.

Krishna's body is the beautiful lake, and his right hand the stalk that, springing from it, holds the shining lotus. Seeing him, in wrath and roaring loudly, armed with that chakra, all creatures howl piercingly, thinking that the destruction of the Kauravas is imminent. With his chakra, Krishna looks like the Samvarta fire that appears at the end of the yuga to consume the world. And the preceptor of the universe blazes like a fierce comet risen to consume all creatures.

Seeing that Avatara advancing with the Sudarsana, Bhishma standing in his chariot, bow and arrow in hand, cries fearlessly, "Come, come, Lord of the Devas, you who dwell in all the universe! I bow to you, you who are armed with mace, sword and Saranga.

Lord of the universe, cast me down from this chariot, O you who are the refuge of all creatures in this war. Krishna, were I to be slain here by you, great will be my fortune both in this world and the next. You show me exalted regard, Lord of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas. My fame will be celebrated in all the three worlds."

Hearing Shantanu's son, Krishna charges him and says, "You are the cause of this great slaughter on earth. You will see Duryodhana killed today. A wise minister who walks the path of dharma must restrain a king addicted to the evil of gambling. That despicable one who transgresses dharma should be abandoned as one whose intelligence has been led astray by destiny."

Hearing this, the royal Bhishma says to the Lord of the Yadavas, "Destiny is all powerful. The Yadavas abandoned Kamsa for their own good. I said this to Dhritarashtra but he paid no heed. Destiny perverts the listener's understanding and, to his own detriment, he cannot receive good advice."

Meanwhile, leaping off his chariot, Mahabaho Arjuna runs towards Krishna and seizes him by his two hands. That supreme deity is incensed, and, though seized, he forcibly drags Jishnu after him, like a tempest bearing away a single tree. The high-souled Arjuna forcefully holds Krishna's feet, as he rushes towards Bhishma, and succeeds, Rajan, in stopping him with great difficulty at the tenth step.

And when Krishna halts, bedecked with a beautiful gold garland, Arjuna joyfully bows down to him and says, “Subdue your anger. You are the refuge of the Pandavas, O Kesava. I swear by my sons and my brothers that I will not retreat from what I have pledged myself to. Krishna, at your command I will annihilate the Kauravas.”

Hearing Arjuna’s vow, Krishna grows calm; he is gratified. And devoted to the cause of that most excellent Kuru, he once more mounts his chariot, still armed with his chakra. And that Parantapa takes up the abandoned reins, and blowing on his conch the Panchajanya, he fills all of the earth and the sky with its blast.

Seeing Krishna, decked with necklace and angada and earrings, with curling eyelashes coated with dust, and with teeth of perfect whiteness, take up his conch again, the Kuru heroes cry out stridently. The clash of cymbals and drums, and the thunder of chariot wheels and the clatter of smaller drums, mingle with those leonine shouts to become a fierce uproar. And the twang of Arjuna’s Gandiva, like the roll of thunder, fills the sky and all the quarters of the earth. Its burning shafts flare out in all directions.

The Kaurava king, with a vast force, along with Bhishma and Bhurisravas, arrows in hand, resembling a comet risen to consume a constellation, dashes against him. Bhurisravas hurls seven spears with wings of gold at Arjuna, while Duryodhana flings a brutal lance; Salya launches a mace, and Bhishma looses an astra.

Arjuna stops Bhurisravas’s spears with seven shafts, and cleaves the lance hurled by Duryodhana with another. He thwarts the blazing pike, as luminous as lightning, cast by Bhishma, and the mace of the ruler of the Madras, with two mighty arrows of his own.

Then drawing with both hands and with great energy his magnificent Gandiva, he invokes with fitting mantras the awesome Mahendra astra to appear in the sky. With it, that maharatha, decked with diadem and a garland of gold, produces an intense storm of flaming arrows that frustrates the Kaurava host.

Those shafts from Arjuna’s bow sever arms, bows, standard-tops, and chariots; they pierce the bodies of the enemy kings and their imposing tuskers and horses. Arjuna fills the cardinal and subsidiary directions with his awe-inspiring arrows and makes the hearts of his adversaries tremble with the twang of Gandiva.

The blast of conches, the beat of drums and the sonorous rumbling of chariots are silenced by the resonance of the Gandiva. Following that reverberation, king Virata and other Kshatriyas, and the brave Drupada, the king of the Panchalas, all joyfully advance towards Arjuna.

All your warriors are fearful and become rooted to where they stand when they hear the Gandiva. None dare to venture to the place from where the sound springs. In that terrific war of kings, valiant warriors are killed along with maharathas and their sarathies. And elephants with resplendent golden howdahs and beautiful standards, pierced with broad-headed shafts, fall dead, their bodies truncated by Arjuna.

Struck by Partha's winged wide shafts, the standards of many kings stationed at the heads of their yantras and Indrajalas are cut down. Hordes of foot-soldiers and maharathas, and horses and elephants, fall rapidly on the battleground, their limbs paralysed, or themselves killed, by Arjuna's arrows.

Rajan, many fighting men have their armour and bodies perforated by the all-powerful Mahindra astra. And with his deadly shafts, Arjuna makes a vile river of blood course across the battlefield, formed by the twisted bodies of the warriors, with their fat as its froth. The bodies of slain elephants and horses form its banks.

Its mire consists of the entrails, the marrow, and the flesh of men, while Rakshasas are the majestic trees on its banks. And a profusion of human skulls, covered with hair, forms its floating morass; heaps of human bodies, forming its sandbanks, cause the current to flow in a thousand directions. The coats of mail strewn all over form its hard pebbles.

Its banks are infested with jackals and wolves, cranes and vultures, crowds of Rakshasas and Pisachas, and packs of hyenas. And they that are alive gaze upon that terrible river of fat, marrow and blood, caused by Arjuna's arrows, the river that embodies man's cruelty, like the great Vaitarani.

Seeing those outstanding warriors of the Kaurava army decimated by Phalguni, the Chedis, the Panchalas, the Karushas, the Matsyas, and all the Pandava allies roar jubilantly in unison to terrify the Kaurava fighting men. Their triumphant shouts proclaim the victory of Arjuna, who razes the Kaurava legions, though they are protected and led by the noblest men, the greatest maharathas, mighty leaders of akshauhinis; Arjuna terrifies them like a lion frightens herds of small animals.

And then the bearer of Gandiva himself and Krishna roar in delight. The Kauravas, with Bhishma, and Drona and Duryodhana and Bahlika, are savagely wounded by Arjuna's weapons. Watching the setting sun, and seeing the irresistible Aindrastra spread out as if to invite the end of the yuga, they withdraw their forces for the night and rest.

Famed for crushing his enemies, the victorious Arjuna, having achieved a great feat, seeing the sun turn red as dusk approaches, also retires with his brothers to their camp.

Then when darkness is about to descend, there arises a terrible lament in the Kaurava camp. And all cry, "In today's battle Arjuna has killed ten thousand maharathas and seven hundred elephants! All the forces of the western kingdoms, and all the tribes of the Sauviras, and the Kshudrakas and the Malavas, have been annihilated. Arjuna has achieved a mighty feat indeed. There is no other who could do this.

Srutayush, the ruler of the Amvashtas, and Durmarshana, and Chitrasena, and Drona, and Kripa, and the ruler of the Sindhus, and Bahlika, and Bhurisravas, and Salya, and Sala, and other warriors united in hundreds, along with Bhishma himself, have been defeated today by the angry son of Pritha, Arjuna, that most wondrous of warriors."

Talking thus among themselves, Bhaarata, all your soldiers leave the battlefield and enter their tents. Petrified by Kiritin, your warriors enter their beautiful tents illuminated by countless torches and lamps.'

CANTO 60

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Next morning, the incensed Bhishma, supported by an enormous force, at the head of the Bhaarata army, advances against the enemy. And Drona and Duryodhana and Bahlika, and also Durmarshana and Chitrasena, the mighty Jayadratha, and other royal warriors, backed by massive legions, surround him on all sides. Protected by those magnificent maharathas, Bhishma shines forth like Indra in the midst of the Devas.

The colourful standards, red, yellow, black and brown, waving in the air, on the backs of the elephants in the vanguard, look beautiful. The entire army, with Bhishma and other chariot warriors, with their elephants and horses, glows, like a mass of clouds charged with lightning, or like dark thunderheads gathered in the sky during the monsoon.

The Kaurava army, ready for battle and led by Bhishma, charges towards Arjuna like the turbid current of the Ganga rushing towards the sea. Filled with many kinds of mighty forces, and having in its wings a profusion of elephants, horses, foot-soldiers, and chariots, Arjuna, with the great Vanara on his banner, sees that vyuha like a dense mass of approaching clouds.

That Kshatriya mahatman, bull among men, upon his chariot furnished with a lofty standard, yoked to white horses, riding at the head of his own great army presses forward against the enemy.

Seeing the warrior with the wild Hanuman on his banner, lofty standard and chariot shaft wrapped in costly sheath, with Krishna Yadupumgava, his charioteer in battle, your sons and all the Kauravas are dismayed. Your army gazes upon that most excellent vyuha with four thousand elephants at each corner, protected by maharatha Arjuna with astras ready.

This vyuha of the Pandavas is as wonderful at the one formed just yesterday by Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, the like of which has never been seen or heard before by men.

Thousands of drums are pounded, and the deafening sound of conches, the blast of trumpets, and many leonine roars arise from every legion. The

twang of countless bows stretched by noble warriors and the blowing of conches, silence that din of drums and cymbals.

The sky resounds with the booming of the conches and, diffused with an earthly dust, is awesome to behold; the sky looks like a vast canopy spread overhead. Seeing that canopy, the fighting men charge into battle.

Maharathas are overthrown by maharathas, with their sarathies, horses, chariots, and standards. Elephants fall to the ground, attacked by elephants, as do foot-soldiers struck by other foot-soldiers. Racing horsemen are felled by horsemen with spears and swords. And all this seems amazing.

Beautiful shields decked with golden stars and radiant like the sun lie smashed on the field, riven by battle-axes, lances and swords. Many maharathas, gored and mangled by the tusks and the trunks of elephants, collapse along with their charioteers; many are struck down by other chariot warriors. Hearing the cries of riders and foot-soldiers pierced by the tusks or crushed by the massive legs of elephants as they charge in close ranks, other warriors fall senseless to the ground.

As the horsemen and foot-soldiers fall fast, and elephants, horses and chariots scatter in fear, Bhishma, surrounded by maharathas, glimpses him who has the mighty Vanara on his standard. The five Palmyra bannered warrior, attacks the diademed Arjuna, the Kiritin, whose chariot, because of the swift horses yoked to it, and the power of his mighty astras, blazes with energy like lightning.

And so against that son of Indra who was like Indra himself, advance many warriors headed by Drona and Kripa, and Salya and Vivimsati, and Duryodhana and Somadatta's son.

The gallant Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, master of all weapons and protected by golden armour, attacks those warriors; and he of most wondrous feats, thwarts their mighty weapons, fiery like the adored Agni himself, on the sacrificial altar, invoked with mantras.

Bhishma of great tejas, letting a veritable river of the blood of his enemies, avoiding Subhadra's son, encounters Arjuna himself.

With sparkling coronet and bright garlands, with his Gandiva of wonderful mien and twang as loud as thunder, shooting cataracts of arrows, Arjuna foils the astras of Bhishma. And that invincible Kshatriya, with Hanuman on his banner, looses a towering gale of shafts upon the son of Shantanu.

Your troops watch that swarm of arrows shot by Arjuna dispersed by Bhishma like the maker of day dispelling the darkness of night. And the Kurus and the Srinjayas, and all the men there, behold that clash between those two supreme heroes, Bhishma and Dhananjaya, distinguished by the dreadful twanging of their bows.’

CANTO 61

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Drona's son, and Bhurisravas, and Chitrasena, and the son of Samyamani also, all attack Subhadra's son, who fights back single-handedly with great urjas against those five tigerish men, like a young lion against five tuskers. None among them equals Krishna's nephew in bravery, in lightness of hand or in the knowledge of astras.

Seeing his son, that Parantapa, displaying his prowess, Arjuna sets up a leonine roar. And seeing your grandson, Rajan, thus afflicting your army, your warriors encircle him. The valiant son of Subhadra, advances cheerfully against the Dhartarashtra host. His powerful and radiant bow is seen to be relentlessly stretched, always ready to strike.

Piercing the son of Drona with one shaft, and Salya with five, he overthrows the standard of Samyamani's son with eight. With another whetted arrow he cleaves the snakelike golden spear hurled at him by Somadatta's son. The heir of Arjuna cuts down his many deadly shafts and kills his four horses.

Bhurisravas, and Salya, and Drona's son and Samyamani, and Sala, terrified by this display of arms, cannot stand before him. Goaded by your son, the Trigartas and the Madras, with the Kekayas, numbering twenty-five thousand, all excellent men skilled in the science of weapons and unconquerable in war, surround Arjuna and his son to destroy them.

The Senapati of the Pandava army, the prince of the Panchalas, sees their chariots surrounded. Leading thousands of elephants and chariots, and hundreds of thousands of horsemen and foot-soldiers, he stretches his bow in great wrath, and advances against that horde of the Madras and the Kekayas.

That division of the Pandava army, protected by this brilliant archer, and consisting of chariots, elephants, and horsemen, is so majestic as it advances. Moving towards Arjuna, that perpetuator of Panchala's race pierces Saradwat's son's shoulder with three keening arrows. He swiftly strikes the Madrakas with ten shafts, killing him who protects Kritavarman from the rear.

With a thick shaft, that Parantapa slays Damana, the heir of the high-souled Paurava. The son of Samyamani stabs the indomitable Panchala prince and his charioteer with ten arrows each. Though wounded, Dhrishtadyumna merely licks the corners of his mouth, resolutely, and cleaves his enemy's bow.

The prince of Panchala attacks his adversary with twenty-five arrows and kills his horses, and both the protectors of his flanks. Bharatarishabha, Samyamani's son, standing on that horseless chariot, looks intently at the son of the famed Drupada. Taking up a terrible sword of steel, Samyamani's son walks towards the Panchala prince who awaits him in his chariot.

The Pandavas, the soldiers and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race watch him come like a surging wave, a snake falling from the skies. Dazzling like the sun, he whirls his sword and advances with the tread of an incensed elephant.

As Samyamani's son, sword and shield in hand, nears his enemy's chariot, the enraged prince of Panchala takes up a mace and smashes his head. The young warrior plunges to the ground, dribbling blood and brains, with his shining blade and shield loosened from his grasp. And so, having killed his opponent, Dhrishtadyumna wins great glory.

Upon the slaying of that maharatha and most excellent archer, loud lamentations can be heard among your troops. Beside himself at seeing his son killed, Samyamani charges towards the invincible fire prince of Panchala. All the kings of both the Kaurava and the Pandava armies watch those two noble maharathas lock in battle.

The Parantapa Samyamani strikes down the scion of Prishata's race with three shafts much like a mahout of an elephant felling a mighty tusker with hooks. Thus does Salya, that jewel among kings, pierce the valiant son of Prishata in the chest. And another battle begins.'

CANTO 62

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'I regard destiny to be superior to exertion, Sanjaya. This is clear to me as I watch my son's army being decimated by the Pandava host. You always describe my forces as being slaughtered, and you speak of the Pandavas as being unslain and cheerful. Indeed, you speak of mine as stripped of manliness, felled and falling, even as they fight uncompromisingly and strive hard for victory.

You portray the Pandavas as achieving victory and my sons as becoming progressively weaker. I incessantly hear of countless causes of unbearable and poignant sorrow caused by Duryodhana's deeds. I do not see, Sanjaya, the means by which the Pandavas may be diminished and my sons can triumph in this war.'

Sanjaya says, 'This great evil has ensued from you, Rajan. Listen now with patience to the annihilation of men, elephants, horses and maharathas. Dhrishtadyumna, wounded by Salya's nine shafts, pierces the ruler of the Madras with many steely arrows. We watch the awesome prowess of Drupada's son as he swiftly impedes Salya.

The battle between them is brief, and they fight vigorously without rest. Salya rives Dhrishtadyumna's bow with a tempered shaft; he covers him with a deluge of arrows like a cloudburst on a mountain's breast during the monsoon. While Dhrishtadyumna is being attacked, Abhimanyu wrathfully charges towards the chariot of the ruler of the Madras. Nearing it, he stabs Artayani with three sizzling barbs.

To oppose Abhimanyu, your warriors quickly surround Artayani's chariot. And Duryodhana, and Vikarna, and Dussasana, and Vivimsati and Durmarshana, and Dussaha, and Chitrasena, and Durmukha, and Satyavrata, and Purumitra position themselves to defend that chariot.

Incensed, Bhima, and Dhrishtadyumna, and the five sons of Draupadi one by each Pandava, and Abhimanyu, and the twin sons of Madri and Pandu attack the Dhritarashtra army with a rage of astras. They fight to kill one another, Rajan, as a result of your evil deeds.

When those ten enraged maharathas clash with the enemy ten, the other maharathas of both armies stand still like spectators, and gaze. Those powerful warriors bellow stridently and strike one another with myriad astras. With ever rising anger, they roar fiercely and challenge each other. They unite and fight the enemy with deadly, mighty weapons.

Choleric Duryodhana pierces Dhrishtadyumna with four shafts. Durmarshana pierces him with twenty, and Chitrasena with five, and Durmukha with nine; he shoots Dussaha with seven, and Vivimsati with five, and Dussasana with three barbs. Dhrishtadyumna resists each of them expertly with twenty-five arrows of his own.

Abhimanyu pierces Satyavrata and Purumitra each with ten shafts. The sons of Madri shroud their uncle with sheets of lean missiles. And all this appears wonderful. Salya attacks his nephews, those two excellent maharathas who want to counter their uncle's exploits; but the sons of Madri do not falter.

The mighty Bhima, seeing Duryodhana, and wanting to end the very war, takes up his mace. Beholding Mahabaho Bhima with raised mace and looking like the peak of Kailasa, your sons flee in terror. Duryodhana, incensed, goads the Magadha legion of ten thousand majestic tuskers to attack. Surrounded by that legion and placing the ruler of Magadha before him, Duryodhana rushes at Bhimasena.

Watching that legion of elephants coming towards him, Vrikodara, mace in hand, leaps down from his chariot with a lion's roar. Armed with that awesome mace, having the weight and strength of adamant, he charges like Siva himself with cavernous mouth agape.

Like a slayer of Vritra among the Danava host, Bhima ranges across the battleground killing elephants with his mace. With his frequent roars, that make the heart and mind tremble, the elephants cower and cannot move.

The sons of Draupadi, and the son of Subhadra, and Nakula and Sahadeva, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race, protecting Bhima's rear, move swiftly behind him, and stop all by loosing a barrage of arrows, truly like the very clouds pouring rain on a mountain's breast. From the backs of elephants, those Pandava warriors sever the heads of their adversaries with exquisite shafts.

The heads of elephant-riders, and arms decked with ornaments, and hands still holding iron-hooks, falling fast, resemble a downpour of strange rocks. The headless bodies of those riders on the necks of the beasts they

rode look like crownless trees on mountain peaks. And we see mighty elephants felled and falling, killed by Dhrishtadyumna.

The ruler of the Magadhas goads his elephant which looks like Airavata himself towards the chariot of Subhadra's son. Parantapa Abhimanyu kills it with a single shaft. After killing his elephant, Abhimanyu cuts off that king's head with a silver-winged arrow.

Bhima penetrates that horde of elephants and meanders about, crushing those royal beasts around him like Indra crushing the mountains of yore. We watch Bhima kill those tuskers, each with but a single stroke of his mace, like hills riven by thunder. Numerous elephants as grand as hills perish, having their tusks broken, or temples, bones, backs, or frontal lobes shattered. Others lie dead, with foaming mouths. Many mighty elephants, with frontal lobes smashed, vomit streams of blood. And some, from fear, lie down on the ground side by side like a range of hills.

Smeared with their fat and blood, and almost bathed in their marrow, Bhima roams over the field like Siva himself; whirling his blood-soaked mace, he is terrible to behold, like Rudra armed with his Pinaka. Being crushed by the raging Bhima, those massive tuskers run wildly in pain, trampling their own warriors.

All the while, the daring archers and maharathas, led by Subhadra's son, guard that awesome Kshatriya, whirling his gory mace, dripping the blood of elephants, like the Devas protecting Indra. Of terrible soul, Bhima now truly looks like none but Sankara.

Indeed, Bhaarata, displaying his strength on all sides, we see Bhima like Siva dancing his Tandava at the end of the yuga; his heavy and resounding mace resembles the club of Yama, it echoes with the sound of Indra's thunderbolt. His bloodthirsty mace, smeared with marrow and hair, seems to be the Pinaka annihilating all creatures during Rudra's rage.

As a herdsman chastises his herd of cattle with a goad, Bhima smites that elephant legion with his club. Slaughtered by Bhima and pierced with the arrows of the warriors who protect his rear, the elephants scatter, crushing your chariots. Driving away those great beasts from the field like a mighty wind great clouds, Bhima stands like the wielder of the Trisula on a cremation ground.'

CANTO 63

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'When that elephant akshauhini is destroyed, your son Duryodhana rouses his entire army, commanding his warriors to kill Bhima. The whole awesome force rushes towards Vrikodara. That vast host, a challenge for the very Devas, impossible to cross like the surging sea at the full or new moon, teeming with chariots, elephants and horses, resounding with the blast of conches and the beating of drums, with countless foot-soldiers and maharathas, and shrouded by the swirling dust it raises, that sea of hostile forces, is arrested by Bhima, like the shore containing the ocean. We are wonderstruck by Bhima's superhuman exploit.

With his mace, he fearlessly checks all those kings cholerically attacking him, with their steeds and chariots and elephants. Withstanding that vast force with his mace, Bhima stands in that fierce melee as unyielding as Meru.

And in that tremendous encounter, his brother and sons, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race, and the sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu, and the undefeated Sikhandin do not cravenly abandon him. Taking up his hefty mace made of Saika iron, Bhima charges the warriors of your army like Mahadeva turned to ire. Grinding a multitude of chariots and throngs of horsemen into the earth, Bhima roves across the battleground like the fire consuming all at the end of the yuga.

Pandu's son of infinite prowess smashes a host of chariots just with his legs like iron and kills another host of your fighting men. He crushes your troops with such ease, like an elephant ploughing through a forest of reeds. Dragging down maharathas from their chariots, and horsemen from their horses, and foot-soldiers as they stand their ground in your son's forces, Mahabaho Bhima demolishes them all with his mace like the mighty wind risen uprooting frail trees.

Slaughtering elephants and horses, smeared by now richly with fat, marrow, flesh and blood, his mace looks gruesome indeed. With the bodies of warriors and horsemen lying scattered, Kurukshetra appears like Yama's

abode. Bhima's mace, that bludgeon of death with the brilliance of Indra's Vajra, is like the Pinaka of Rudra claiming all living creatures.

That swinging mace is fiercely resplendent like the Khatvanga of Siva at the end of the yuga. Seeing him routing that enormous force, your fighting men are dismal. Wherever Bhima casts his eye, there all the warriors seem to melt away.

Beholding Vrikodara consuming those legions, himself impregnable, Bhishma charges at him on his chariot radiant like the sun and with the sound of thunderous clouds, covering the sky with his gale of arrows like a misty rain-filled awning.

Seeing Bhishma charging him like another Rudra, Mahabaho Bhima attacks him fiercely. At that moment, that foremost Kshatriya of Sini's race, the matchless Satyaki, also assails the Pitamaha, killing so many of the enemy as he gloriously rides, filling your son's army with fear. Your warriors, Bhaarata, cannot stop or stand up to him at all, flying along with his silvery horses, spraying splendid winged shafts.

Only the Rakshasa Alambusha pierces him with ten shafts. Satyaki shoots Alambusha with four arrows and continues on his careen. Watching that recalescent warrior whirl through his enemies, scything through the foremost of Kaurava fighting men, and roaring loudly all the while, your warriors shower him with clouds of arrows. But their deadly rain falls as onto a mountain's breast of rock. They cannot impede that gallant hero who looks like the noon-day sun in full glory.

Everyone is despondent, except for Somadatta's son, Bhurisravas, who, seeing the maharathas of his side dispersed, charges against Satyaki with his mighty bow.'

CANTO 64

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhurisravas, excited with great wrath, pierces Satyaki with nine arrows. Before the eyes of all, Satyaki stabs the Kaurava warrior with nine shafts of his own. Duryodhana and his brothers surround Somadatta's son as he fights passionately.

The Pandavas quickly encircle Satyaki, protecting him. Ever furious Bhima, mace raised, roars his challenge at all your sons led by Duryodhana. Supported by thousands of chariots, your son Nandaka attacks Bhima with arrows winged with the feathers of the kanka bird.

Duryodhana strikes Bhima in the chest with nine shafts. Mahabaho Bhima, standing in his chariot, says to his sarathy Vishoka, "These heroic and mighty sons of Dhritarashtra, all maharathas, are furious, and want to kill me. I will slaughter all of them today. So steer my horses carefully into battle."

O Dhritarashtra, saying this, Pritha's son strikes your son with a rash of gold decked arrows. And he pierces Nandaka with three barbs in his chest. Duryodhana stabs the mighty Bhima with six shafts and Vishoka with three. Duryodhana calmly cuts off Bhima's resplendent bow at its grasp with three arrows of incredible aim.

Bhima, bull among men, cannot bear to see Vishoka wounded by Duryodhana; he seizes another excellent bow to kill your son. Drawing a crescent-tipped winged arrow, he cleaves Duryodhana's bow in his hands. Roaring, your son discards it and plucks up a more robust one.

Aiming a fearful shaft blazing like Yama's danda, Duryodhana strikes Bhima. Deeply and painfully pierced in his chest, the mighty one drops down in his chariot and faints. Unable to endure seeing Bhima wounded, the illustrious maharathas of the Pandava army, led by Abhimanyu, with unwavering accuracy, loose a harmattan of arrows upon your sons.

Bhima regains consciousness and first covers Duryodhana with a hail of shafts. That gallant son of Pandu pierces Salya with twenty-five golden-winged barbs. Salya is carried off in a swoon from the battleground.

Your fourteen sons, Senapati, Sushena, Jalasandha, Sulochana, Ugra, Bhimaratha, Bhima, Virabahu, Aolupa, Durmukha, Dushpradarsha, Vivitsu, Vikata, and Sama, face Bhima. Unitedly they charge Bhima and with eyes red with anger wound him deeply with countless arrows.

Mahabaho Bhima, licking the corners of his mouth like a wolf amidst smaller creatures, falls upon them with the ferocity of Garuda. With a crescent-tipped shaft, Bhima decapitates Senapati. Exultant, laughing all the while, that towering Kshatriya kills Jalasandha with three arrows. Smiting Sushena, he dispatches him to Yama. And with a single barb he hacks away the stately head of Ugra, beautiful as the moon, decked with turban and adorned with ear-rings.

With seventy arrows, Bhima kills Virabahu and his horses, standard and charioteer. The smiling Bhima slays both the brothers Bhima and Bhimaratha. In that great war, Bhima also fells Sulochana. The rest of your sons, seeing indomitable Bhima roused like that, flee.

Bhishma addresses all the maharathas of his army saying, “Bhima, excited with wrath, can annihilate the mighty sons of Dhritarashtra and every other maharatha, all united together, regardless of their knowledge of weapons, and their valour. All of you must attack and kill that son of Pandu.”

Hearing this, the vast legions of the Dhritarashtra army rush at Bhima. Bhagadatta, on his elephant of rent temples, dashes to where the massive Pandava stands. He mantles Bhima with countless arrows, like the clouds covering the sun.

But those intrepid maharathas of the Pandava army cannot bear seeing that shrouding of Bhima by the torrent of Bhagadatta’s shafts, and they surround Bhagadatta, raining arrows on him. They also pierce his elephant with showers of barbs. Struck by the awesome shafts of those maharathas, that elephant of the ruler of the Pragjyotishas, with blood flowing down his body, appears as strikingly handsome as a mass of clouds stained by the sun’s rays. With temporal juice pouring down, that elephant Supritika is goaded by Bhagadatta to race forward, shaking the earth with his tread.

The Pandava maharathas, gazing upon the beast’s dreadful appearance, lose all courage. King Bhagadatta, lion among men, forcefully strikes Bhima in the chest with a straight shaft of great length. Bhima faints and falls to the floor of his chariot, holding onto his flagpole. Seeing the fear of

the enemy maharathas and an unconscious Bhima, Bhagadatta roars exultantly.

Seeing his father Bhima fainted, the feral Rakshasa Ghatotkacha is incensed and vanishes from sight using maya. Creating a macabre illusion, he reappears the next moment in a form so prodigious and fierce as to fill the hearts of the timid with nameless dread. Riding on an Airavata created by his maya shakti, the other celebrated elephants, Anjana, Vamana, and Mahapadma, follow him.

Ridden by Rakshasas, those massive tuskers, with juice profusely trickling down in three lines, thunder into battle. Ghatotkacha spurs his own elephant forward to demolish Bhagadatta and his great beast. The other mastodons, each endowed with four tusks, goaded by huge and sinister Rakshasas, attack Bhagadatta's elephant from every side, goring him, shooting him with savage arrows.

Wounded by excruciating shafts, Supritika bellows boomingly as loud as Indra's thunder. Hearing those deafening cries, Bhishma says to Drona, Suyodhana and all the kings, "The mighty Bhagadatta, battling the evil son of Hidimbi, is in distress. The Rakshasa is formidable, and the king beside himself with anger. They will slaughter each other. Loud shouts of the rejoicing Pandavas can be heard, as can the agonised cries of king Bhagadatta's terrified elephant.

Let us all ride to save the beleaguered king or he will be killed! Warriors of great urjas, do not delay. The battle becomes even fiercer, making one's hair stand on end. That legion's commander is of high varna, brave, and devoted to us. O my heroes of unfading glory, we must save him."

Hearing Bhishma's words, all the kings of the Kaurava army, led by Drona, charge towards Bhagadatta, sovereign of the Pragjyotishas. Seeing them come, the Panchalas with the Pandavas, led by Yudhishtira, pursue them. Ghatotkacha, mighty prince of Rakshasas, roars shatteringly as he sees the enemy legion press forward.

Hearing that roar and seeing those battle elephants, Bhishma says to Drona, "I do not wish to fight today with the evil son of Hidimbi. Mighty and vigorous, he is so well supported at the moment that even Indra could not vanquish him. He has a deadly aim. As for us, today our animals are tired. We have been crushed by the Panchalas and the Pandavas. I would not like a fresh encounter with them just now. Order our army to withdraw. Tomorrow we will fight anew."

Hearing these words of the Pitamaha, the Kauravas, terrified of Ghatotkacha and ready to use nightfall as a pretext, obey him promptly. After the Kauravas have withdrawn, the conquering Pandava lions roar and roar in victory, and their roars echo with the blast of conches and mingle with the notes of flutes. Bhaarata, in this way did the Kauravas and the Pandavas led by Ghatotkacha fight each other on that day.

The Kauravas, overcome with shame at being decimated and humiliated by the Pandavas, retire downcast to their tents. And those maharathas, the sons of Pandu, lacerated by arrows and wearied by the fighting, also retire to their camp led by Bhima and Ghatotkacha. Joyfully, they praise these two heroes. Their triumphant shouts mingle with the music of horns. Those sounds make the very earth tremble, carving the hearts of your sons.

Thus those Parantapas retreat into their tents. Duryodhana, stricken by the death of his brothers, is forlorn, overcome with grief and weeping. He passes the hours in meditation, anguish over the killing of his brothers burning him.’

CANTO 65

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Hearing of those feats of the Pandavas, before whom the very Devas appear powerless, my heart, Sanjaya, is filled with awe and fear. Hearing also of the humiliation of my sons, I dread the outcome of this war. Vidura’s words trouble me. Everything that has occurred appears to be the will of fate.

Led by Bhishma, The warriors of the Pandava army confront and annihilate our exceptional fighting men who are led by Bhishma and are so skilled in using every weapon. What ascetic penances have the high-souled and mighty sons of Pandu performed, what boon have they obtained, what science is known to them, that they do not diminish like stars in the sky? I cannot bear that my army is being slaughtered by them. This divine and cruel punishment has fallen on me alone.

Tell me everything truly, Sanjaya, that explains the invincibility of the Pandavas and the vulnerability of my sons. I am drowning in this ocean of anguish and cannot see the other shore. I am like a man thrashing to cross this vast ocean by just the strength of my two arms. I know that a great calamity has engulfed my sons. Certainly, Bhima will crush them. I do not see any hero who will be able to protect them. Their death, in this war, is assured.

I implore you, O Suta, to tell me everything about the true cause of all these events. Seeing his troops retreating from the melee, what does Duryodhana do? And what the respected Bhishma and Drona, and Kripa, and Subala’s son, and Jayadratha, and that forceful archer, Drona’s son, and mighty Vikarna? Wise Sanjaya, watching my sons withdraw, what do the Pandavas resolve to do?’

Sanjaya says, ‘Listen carefully, Rajan, and having heard, understand this. Nothing is the result of a spell, or the outcome of chimera of any kind. Nor have the sons of Pandu created any new terrors. They are mighty, and fight fairly in this war. Seeking glory, the sons of Pritha always cleave to dharma, even when their own lives are at risk.

Having both great wealth and strength, they continue to battle, never straying from righteousness. And victory lies with the virtuous. This is why the sons of Pritha are unassailable and always victorious. Your sons are evil and sinful. They are cruel and shameful in what they do. This is why they are being diminished.

Your sons' actions towards the Pandavas have been devious and ruthless. The sons of Pandu have always disregarded these offences. On many occasions your sons have humiliated them. Let them now reap the terrible fruit, like poison, of that persistent course of sins. Rajan, you too will harvest that fruit, along with your sons and kinsmen, since you could not be persuaded to return to dharma despite the counsel of your well-wishers.

Repeatedly forbidden by Vidura, by Bhishma, by the high-souled Drona, and by me also, you would not understand, disregarding what we said for your good, like a sick man refusing medicine that would save him. Instead believing your sons' opinions, you considered the Pandavas already defeated. Again, listen to me about the true cause of the Pandava victory. Parantapa, I will tell you what I have heard.

Duryodhana asked the Pitamaha this very question. Seeing his brothers, all mighty chariot warriors, routed in battle, your grief-stricken son humbly goes to the wise Bhishma during the night and asks him this same thing. Rajan, I will tell you all about it.

Duryodhana says, "Drona and you, and Salya, and Kripa, and Drona's son, and Kritavarman the son of Hridika, and Sudakshina the ruler of the Kambojas, and Bhurisravas, and Vikarna, and Bhagadatta of exceeding prowess, are all deemed maharathas. All are dvija, and prepared to sacrifice their lives in battle.

It is my view that these are a match for even the hosts of the three worlds combined. All the warriors of the Pandava army jointly cannot oppose your prowess. A doubt has risen in my mind. Explain it to me. Whom do the Pandavas rely on to repeatedly subdue us?"

Bhishma says, "Listen to me, Suyodhana. I frequently advised you about this but you did not listen. Bharatarishabha, make peace with the Pandavas. This will benefit both the world and you. Enjoy this earth with your brothers and be happy, gratifying all your well-wishers and delighting your kinsmen.

Although I beseeched you, you did not heed my counsel. You have always scorned the sons of Pandu. The outcome has now overwhelmed you. Listen also to the reason why the tireless Pandavas cannot be slain.

There is not, was not, nor will be, in all the worlds a warrior who can overpower the sons of Pandu who are all protected by the wielder of the Saranga. Knowing dharma as you do, listen to that ancient history, itihasa, which was narrated to me by sages of restrained souls.

In olden days, all the Devas and the Rishis, united together, waited respectfully on the Pitamaha Brahma upon the mountains of Gandhamadana.

And the Lord of all creatures, seated in their midst, saw a wonderful luminous chariot in the sky. Having gained knowledge of it through dhyana, calmly joining his hands, Brahma, with delighted soul, greeted the highest Divine Being. The Rishis and the Devas, beholding this form in the sky, all stood up with folded hands, their eyes fixed on that wonder of wonders.

Worshipping him duly, Brahma, the Creator of the universe, aware of Brahman, conscious of the highest rectitude, spoke these noble words: 'With your form, you endow magnificence upon the universe. You are indeed the protector of the universe. O most Supreme One, the universe is your creation. You are Vasudeva. Therefore, I seek refuge in You who are the soul of yoga and the highest God. Victory to You who are the Supreme Deity!

Victory to You who personify all the good of the worlds. Victory to you, Lord of yoga, who are omnipotent. Victory to You who both precede and succeed yoga. With the lotus springing from your navel, and having all-embracing eyes, victory to You who are the Lord of the Devas. O Holy Being of the past, the present, and the future, victory to You, the embodiment of gentleness!

You are the sun of suns. The receptacle of countless attributes, the refuge of all things, may You triumph. You are Narayana, too deep to be fathomed. Wielder of the Saranga, may victory be yours.

Unsullied and blessed with every attribute, having the universe for your form, may you always prevail. Lord of the universe, Mahabaho, one who blesses the worlds, victory to You. O great Snake, mighty Varaha, O first Cause, with tawny hair, all-powerful One, may You always be victorious!

Saffron-robed Lord of the cardinal and the subsidiary directions, You, who pervade all the universe, are infinite and eternal, the manifest and the

unmanifest. You that are the immeasurable Akasa, with all your senses under control, who attains what is good, You that are immeasurable, You who alone know your own nature, victory to You!

You are profound and vast; you grant all wishes, One without end, known as Brahman, You that are eternal, the Creator of all creatures, ever successful and wise, are familiar with dharma, the One who confers victory, You of mysterious Self, You are the soul of all yoga. You who cause everything to be born, who are the knowledge of the selves of all beings, Lord of the worlds, victory to you. Svayambhu, most blessed, you are also the veritable Destroyer.

Inspirer of all thoughts, dear to all conversant with Brahman, ever creating and destroying, controller of all wishes, Supreme Lord, the cause of amrita, You are all-existent, nityasya. You are the first to appear at the end of the yuga, guardian of victory, Divine Lord of the Lord of all creatures, from whose navel springs the lotus, mighty and, arisen from Yourself, embodying the great elements in their primeval state, You who are the soul of all rites and rituals, victory to You who grants everything!

Bhumi Devi represents your two feet, the cardinal and the subsidiary directions your arms, and the sky your head. I am your form, the Devas your limbs, and the sun and the moon are your two eyes. Tapasya and satya born of dharma and yagna are your strength. Agni is your energy, Vayu is your breath, and the waters have sprung from your sweat. The Aswins form your ears, and Saraswati is your tongue. The Vedas are your knowledge, and upon you rests this Brahmanda. Lord of yoga and yogins, we do not know your extent, your measure, your energy, your prowess, your power, your origin.

Vishnu, we worship you fervently, with vows and ceremonies, as the Supreme One, and depend upon you. The Rishis, the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Pannagas, the Pisachas, the Manavas, animals and birds, were all created by me on Earth through your grace.

Krishna, with the lotus springing from your navel, O you of large expansive eyes, you dispel all despair and are the refuge and guide of all creatures. The Universe is your mouth and the Devas delight in your blessings. Through your grace the Earth is freed from terrors.

Therefore, take birth in the Yaduvamsa. Establish dharma, slay the sons of Diti, and uphold the universe. Vasudeva, I sing your supreme mystery

through your own benevolence.

Having created the divine Sankarshana out of your own self by yourself, Krishna, you then made yourself as Pradyumna born of yourself. From Pradyumna you created Aniruddha known as the eternal Vishnu. And it was Aniruddha who created me as Brahma, the support of the universe. Created out of Vasudeva's essence I have, therefore, been created by you.

Krishna, dividing yourself into amsas, take birth among human beings. Slaughtering the Asuras there for the bliss of all the worlds, establishing virtue, and winning fame, You will again realise Yoga.

The regenerate Rishis on Earth and the Devas are devoted to you and sing of your wonder, pronouncing all your names. Mahabaho, all classes of creatures depend on you, having taken refuge in You who grants boons. The regenerate ones sing of you being Setu, the world's bridge to salvation, having no beginning, middle and end, possessing unlimited Yoga.'''

CANTO 66

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma says, "Then the Lord of the worlds said to Brahma in a soft rumbling voice, 'Through Yoga, I know what you desire. It will be as you wish.'

And saying this, he disappeared. Then the Devas, Rishis and Gandharvas, filled with great wonder and curiosity asked Brahma, 'Who is that one that you worshipped with such humility and praised so highly? Tell us.'

The celebrated Pitamaha replied to all the Devas, the regenerate Rishis, and the Gandharvas, in sweet tones, 'He who is called TAT, He who is Supreme, He who exists now and for all time, He who is the highest Self, He who is the Soul of beings, and who is the great Lord, it was to Him that I spoke. I pleaded with the Lord of the universe, for the good of the universe, to take his birth among men in the family of Vasudeva.

I said to Him: Take birth in the world of men to slaughter the Asuras! Those fierce and strong Daityas and Rakshasas, killed in unworldly battle, have been born among men. Incarnating in a human womb, You will live on the Earth accompanied by Nara.

Those ancient and excellent Rishis, Nara and Narayana, cannot be defeated in battle by even all the Devas united. Of immense effulgence, those Rishis when born together in the world of men will not be recognised by fools.

He, from whose Self, I, Brahma, the Lord of the whole Universe, have sprung, that Vasudeva, that Supreme One, is worthy of your adoration. Imbued with great tejas, and holding the conch, the discus, and the mace, he should never be regarded as a mere man. He is the Unmatched Mystery, the Ultimate Refuge, the Supreme Brahman, and the Greatest Glory.

Unmanifest and eternal, he cannot perish. He has been praised as Purusha, though no one can understand him completely. The Creator has extolled him as the Supreme Energy, the Supreme Felicity, and the Supreme Truth.

Therefore, Vasudeva of vast capacities should never be considered as just a man, not by all the Asuras and the Devas led by Indra. Someone who speaks of Hrishikesa as only a man is a fool and a wretch.

People who disregard that Yogin of illustrious soul for entering into human form are blind. They labour under darkness who do not know that Divine luminary, that Soul of the mobile and the immobile creation, that one bearing the Srivatsa on his chest, that one of dazzling brilliance, that one from whose navel has sprung the primeval lotus.

He who disdains that high souled one, the wearer of the divine crown and the Kaustubha ruby, one who dispels his friends' fears, sinks into deep darkness. Vasudeva should be adored by all.'

Having said these words to those Devas and Rishis, the illustrious Brahma, dismissing them all, returned to his own abode. The Devas and the Gandharvas, and the Munis and the Apsaras, having heard those holy words of Brahma, were delighted and returned to Devaloka. I myself heard this about Krishna from Rishis of cultured souls speaking in their assembly.

You who know the Shastras well, I heard this from Rama, the son of Jamadagni, and Markandeya of great wisdom, and Vyasa and Narada. Having learnt all this and heard of the illustrious Vasudeva as the Eternal Lord, the Supreme God of all the worlds, and the great Master, from whom Brahma himself has sprung, I ask: why should not that Vasudeva be adored and worshipped by men?

You were forbidden by great sages who asked you never to go to war with that Vasudeva armed with his bow as also with the Pandavas. Your foolishness prevented you from comprehending what they said. I hence consider you a wicked Rakshasa. You are also enveloped in ignorance. It is for this reason that you hate Krishna and Arjuna, for who else among men would hate the divine Nara and Narayana?

It is for this, Duryodhana, that I say to you that this one is Eternal and Unfading, pervading the whole Universe, Unchanging, the Ruler, Creator and Upholder of all, and the truly Existent. He supports the three worlds. He is the Supreme Lord of all mobile and immobile creatures, and He is the great Master. He is warrior, He is Victory, He is Vanquisher, and He is the Lord of all nature.

He is full of goodness and without all the qualities of tamas and rajas, darkness and passion. Where Krishna is, there is righteousness; and where righteousness dwells, there is victory. It is by the Yoga of his Supreme

Excellence, and the Yoga of his Self, that the sons of Pandu are supported. Therefore, they will surely triumph.

To the Pandavas he imparts understanding permeated with righteousness, and strength in battle; and He always protects them from danger. He is the Eternal God, pervading all beings, and ever blessed. Known as Vasudeva, he is humbly served by all, Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, who, fulfilling their own dharma, worship Him with restrained hearts.

Towards the close of the Dwapara Yuga and the beginning of the Kali Yuga, it is He who is praised with songs of devotion by believers. It is that Vasudeva who creates, yuga after yuga, the worlds of the Devas and Manushyas, all the cities encircled by the sea, and all the regions where men live.'"

CANTO 67

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana says, "In all the worlds Vasudeva is known as the Supreme Being. Pitamaha, I want to understand his origin and glory."

Bhishma says, "Vasudeva is the Supreme Being. He is the God of all Gods. With eyes like lotus petals, there is none more exalted than him. Markandeya speaks of Govinda as the Most Wonderful and the Most High, as the All-being, as the All-soul, as the Highest soul, and as the Supreme Purusha.

He created Water, Wind, and Fire. That Divine Master created this Earth. That Supreme Being of illustrious soul and all kinds of Tejas laid himself down on the ocean and slept in Yoga. From his mouth He created Fire, and from his breath, the Wind. Of unfading glory, He created from his mouth Vak, the Word and the Vedas.

It was thus that he created first the Worlds and also the Devas along with the many classes of Rishis. And he created the decay and death of all beings, as well as birth and maturity. He is Dharma itself. He grants us boons and desires. He is the Actor and Action, and He is himself the Divine Guru.

He created the Past, the Present, and the Future; He is the Creator of the Universe. Of illustrious soul, He is the magnificent Preceptor. He created Sankarshana, the First-born of all creatures. He created the divine Sesha Ananta, who supports the Earth with all her creatures and mountains.

Of matchless Tejas, the regenerate ones know Him through Yoga. Sprung from the secretions of his ear, the fierce and merciless Asura Madhu, who intended to and almost destroyed Brahma, was slain by Vasudeva. And so the Devas and the Danavas, the Manavas and Rishis call Janardana the slayer of Madhu, Madhusudana.

The great Varaha, the great Narasimha, He is the Three-stepped Vamana. He is the Mother and the Father of all living creatures. There never was, nor will be, any more excellent than He of eyes like lotus petals.

He created the Brahmanas from His mouth and the Kshatriyas from His arms; from His thighs He fashioned the Vaisyas, and from His feet the Sudras. One who serves Him dutifully, observing vows with ascetic austerities on days of the full-moon and the new-moon, is sure to obtain the Divine Kesava, that refuge of all embodied creatures, that essence of Brahman and Yoga.

Kesava is the higher Energy, the ancestor of all the worlds. The sages call Him Hrishikesa. All should know Him as the Acharya and the Pitamaha. Him with whom Krishna is delighted, attains eternal regions of blessedness.

He who is fearful should seek Kesava’s protection; and he who repeatedly reads this stuti, achieves happiness and prosperity. Those who attain Krishna are never deceived; Janardana always sustains those who are frightened.

Rajan, knowing this truly, Yudhishtira, has wholeheartedly sought refuge in Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, and the Lord of the Earth.’’

CANTO 68

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

'Bhishma says, "I will recite this hymn that Brahma himself sang. In ancient times, this hymn was imparted by regenerate Rishis and the Devas to men:

'Narada described you as the Acharya and the Supreme Lord of the Devas and all the Sadhyas and the heavenly beings, and as one who knows the nature of Brahman. Markandeya spoke of you as the Past, the Present, and the Future, the sacrifice of sacrifices, and the austerity of austerities.

The celebrated Bhrigu said that you are the God of the gods and all creatures, the ancient form of Vishnu. Dwaipayana said that you are Vasudeva of the Vasus, who establishes Sakra. When mortals were being born, the sages described you as Daksha, the Father of creation.

Angiras said that you are the creator of all beings. Devala said that your body comprised the unmanifest, your mind the manifest, and that all the Devas are produced by your breath. The heavens are filled with your heads, and your arms support the Earth. In your stomach are the three worlds and you are the Eternal Being.

Even thus do men exalted by asceticism know you. You are the Sat of Sat, with Rishis gratified with sight of the Atman. With royal sages of liberal minds, resolute in battle and with ethical aims, you, destroyer of Madhu, are the only refuge.'

The Supreme Being, Hari, is thus adored and worshipped by Sanatkumara and other ascetic yogis. I have now described the truth about Kesava to you, both in brief and detail. Turn to him in love."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Hearing this sacred story, your son begins to revere both Kesava and the Pandava maharathas. Then, O Rajan, Bhishma says to Duryodhana, "You have now heard about Krishna's glory and about Nara. You also now know why Nara and Narayana have incarnated among men.

You have also been told why those heroes are invincible and have never been defeated in war, and why also no one can kill the sons of Pandu in war. Krishna greatly loves the sons of Pandu. And so I say: Make peace with the Pandavas. Curb your passions and enjoy the Earth with your mighty

brothers. By disregarding the divine Nara and Narayana, you will be destroyed.”

Having said these words, the Pitamaha becomes silent, and dismissing King Duryodhana, enters his tent. Duryodhana also returns to his tent, after paying his respects to Bhishma. And then, Bharatarishabha, he lies down to sleep.’

CANTO 69

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'When the night passes and the sun rises, the two armies face each other again. Each side moves forward in united and furious ranks to overcome the other. And as a result of your evil deeds, the Pandavas and the Kauravas advance, encased in armour and in battle formation.

The vyuha that Bhishma protects from all sides is that of the Makara, the great crocodile. The Pandavas also form and protect their vyuha. Maharatha Bhishma rides with a large akshauhini of chariots. Chariot warriors, foot-soldiers, elephants, and horsemen, all follow him, positioned in assigned places.

Seeing them ready for battle, the Pandavas deploy their forces in the invincible Syena vyuha. On that vyuha's beak shines the formidable Bhima. The invincible Sikhandin and Dhrishtadyumna are its eyes. In its head is the heroic Satyaki of indomitable prowess.

On its neck stands Arjuna vibrating his Gandiva. Upon its left wing is the high-souled and blessed Drupada with his son supported by an akshauhini of all forces. And the king of the Kekayas, with an akshauhini, forms the right wing of that vyuha. On its back are the sons of Draupadi, and Subhadra's wonderful son. And at its tail is the heroic and excellent Yudhishtira himself, supported by Nakula and Sahadeva.

In the battle that ensues, Bhima penetrates the Kaurava vyuha of Makara through its mouth, and approaching Bhishma, covers him with stern arrows. Mighty Bhishma looses his deadly weapons, baffling the Pandava forces. And when the Pandava fighting men are thus confounded, Arjuna swiftly strikes Bhishma with a thousand shafts. Countering Bhishma's weapons, Arjuna, supported by his own spirited men, erupts into battle.

Maharatha Duryodhana, seeing the bloody carnage wreaked on his army and remembering the slaughter of his brothers, rushes up to Drona and says to him, "Acharya, ever my well-wisher, relying on you and on the Pitamaha, we hope to defeat the very Devas in battle, let alone the sons of

Pandu who are floundering with neither energy nor prowess. O blessed one, fight today so that the Pandavas are annihilated.”

At this, Drona plunges into the Pandava vyuha before Satyaki’s very eyes, who quickly retaliates to stop the son of Bharadwaja. The battle that follows is pitched and fierce. Roused, the great Drona, smiling the while, pierces the grandson of Sini with ten shafts in his shoulder. Bhima shoots Drona with a rash of arrows, seeking to protect Satyaki. Infuriated, Drona, Bhishma and Salya shroud Bhima with their fire. Abhimanyu and the sons of Draupadi wound those armed warriors with their sharpest barbs.

In that brutal contention, the great archer Sikhandin charges against Bhishma and Drona who have fallen upon the Pandavas. Firmly grasping his bow, whose twang is the roar of clouds, that Kshatriya, obscuring the very sun with his volleys, ferociously attacks his adversaries. The Pitamaha, finding Sikhandin before him, avoids him, remembering his once womanhood.

Spurred on by your son, Drona, wanting to protect Bhishma, presses forward. Sikhandin quickly turns on Drona, avoiding the Pitamaha, fearing that warrior who is like fire that appears at the end of the yuga. Duryodhana moves to protect Bhishma with a vast legion.

And the Pandavas, resolved on victory, also press forward, and the encounter between the two sides, both seeking fame and triumph, is breathtaking, indeed like the Devasura yuddha of old.’

CANTO 70

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma, son of Shantanu, fights awesomely to protect your sons from Bhima. The battle between the kings of the Kaurava and the Pandava armies is shocking and bloody, annihilating great Kshatriyas. From that war, a tumult rises, reaching the very heavens. Deafening is that bedlam, as tuskers scream and horses whinny, while conches blast and drums pound, and mighty enemies roar at one another like contending bulls in a cow-pen. Severed heads fall ceaselessly, like some grisly rain of weird rocks from the sky.

Bharatarishabha, countless heads lie strewn across the battlefield, with bright earrings and ornamented turbans. And the earth is covered over with limbs hacked away with broad-headed shafts, and bejewelled arms; with bodies sheathed in gleaming, red-stained armour, with braceleted arms, with moon-like faces and kohl-tinted eyes; limbs of elephants, horses and men lie everywhere. Dust swirls everywhere in a thick cloud, and bright weapons flash like lightning. The sound of all the weapons together is the roar of thunder.

The horrible war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas lets flow a bloody river, sprung from a million wounds made by the incessant tirade of arrows loosed by invincible Kshatriyas upon Kurukshetra. Bleeding from that gale of vicious barbs, the elephants of both armies shriek, and course furiously in all directions. Everything is hidden in the twang of virile bows and the mighty flapping of bowstrings against the leathern gloves of incensed and heroic fighting men.

On Kurukshetra, looking like a lake of blood, stand headless trunks, briefly; kings determined to kill their enemies charge reckless at them; mighty warriors, with club-like arms, slaughter one another with barbs, maces and swords; riderless horses and elephants, pierced with arrows, plunge wildly in all directions; many soldiers on both sides leap high and fall, heads stricken off.

In the battle between Bhima and Bhishma, ever-growing heaps of arms and heads, as also of bows and maces and spiked clubs, and hands and

thighs, of legs, and jewels and bracelets, are strewn over the field. Across that dreadful field, Rajan, masses of unretreating elephants, horses and chariots can be seen. Kshatriya warriors, moved by destiny, decimate one another with maces, swords, spears, and arrows. Heroic and skilled fighting men contend with bare arms that resemble spiked iron clubs.

Other valiant men of your army fight the Pandava host, killing thousands with clenched fists and knees, slaps and blows. The fallen and falling warriors, and those lying on the ground wounded and in agony, make the fell field a horrible spectacle; maharathas, bereft of their chariots, still holding their swords, always eager to kill, attack one another in mad rage.

Surrounded by a large Kalinga akshauhini, with Bhishma at its van, Duryodhana charges the Pandavas. The Pandava warriors supporting Bhima ride wildly, intently against Bhishma with their fine horses and lumbering elephants.'

CANTO 71

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing his brothers and the other kings battling Bhishma, Arjuna storms towards him, weapons raised. Hearing the blast of the Panchajanya and the twang of the Gandiva, and seeing his standard, we are terrified. That standard bears the emblem of a lion's tail and looks like a mountain blazing in the sky. Beautiful and of divine workmanship, it is flecked with many colours, looking like a rising comet on a horizon unobscured by any trees.

All the warriors see the Gandiva, chased with purest gold, as magnificent as a great flash of lightning amidst dense clouds in the sky. While razing the soldiers of your army, Arjuna's shouts are like the thunderous roars of Indra himself; the slaps of his palms are deafening.

Like a cloud mass charged with lightning, bolstered by a raging wind, Arjuna relentlessly looses his arrows on all sides, completely shrouding the ten points of the compass. He of the terrifying astras advances rapidly towards the Pitamaha. We that watch are struck senseless and cannot distinguish the East from the West.

Bharatarishabha, your men are bewildered and depressed, their animals tired, their horses slaughtered; huddling close to one another, together with your sons, they seek Bhishma's protection. And in that battle Bhishma becomes their protector.

Fearstricken maharathas leap from their chariots, horsemen from the backs of their steeds, and foot-soldiers fall where they stand. Hearing the thunder of the Gandiva, all your fighting men flee, shutting their ears.

With many swift horses of the Kamboja breed, surrounded by thousands of Gopas with a large Gopayana force, and supported by the Madras, the Sauviras, the Gandharas and the Trigartas, surrounded by all the principal Kalingas, along with king Jayadratha accompanied by all the kings, and supported by a large force of diverse races with Dussasana at their head, and fourteen thousand leading horsemen, spurred by your son, the great Kamboja king encircles Sakuni, son of Subala, to protect him.

All the sons of Pandu, united, again desiccate your forces from their chariots and animals. And the dust raised by maharathas, horses and foot-soldiers, flecked generously with spraying blood, renders Kurukshetra hideous, like a dark precinct of hell.

With a vast legion of elephants, horses and chariots, armed with spears, barbs and arrows, Bhishma fights Arjuna Kiritin. The king of Avanti engages the lord of the Kasis, and the ruler of the Sindhus, Bhima. With his sons and advisors, Yudhishtira battles Salya, his uncle, the famed ruler of the Madras. Vikarna engages with Sahadeva, and Chitrasena with Sikhandin. The Matsyas fight Duryodhana and Sakuni, while Drupada and Chekitana, and the maharatha Satyaki encounter the high-souled Drona and his son Aswatthaman. Kripa and Kritavarman both charge against Dhrishtadyumna.

Thus, all over the field, storming bodies of horses, elephants and chariots break upon each other. Although there are no clouds in the sky, flashes of lightning are seen on high. Every direction is darkened by flying clouds of dust raised by the hostile forces. Fierce meteors fail with loud reverberations. Violent winds blow swirling the dense dust everywhere. The sun is eclipsed by these. And all the warriors, wielding weapons, are choked by that dust and swoon.

The roar of weapons, discharged from the arms of the fearless, missiles which can cut through armour like knives through butter, rises to another tumult. Bharatarishabha, those weapons of stellar brightness, illuminate the sky. Dappled leather shields plated with gold are scattered all around. Heads and limbs are seen falling on all sides, cut down with radiant swords and spears. Their chariot wheels, axles and carriages smashed, their horses killed, valiant maharathas plunge to the ground, their proud standards toppling about them.

The horses of these slain chariot warriors, dragging their riderless chariots, mangled with weapons, finally crash to the ground. Some excellent horses, despite having their limbs mangled with arrows, continue to run, dragging their chariot yokes behind them. Maharathas, their sarathies and horses are all flattened like meat on a cook’s board by powerful tuskers.

Many elephants, smelling the temporal juice of others, sniff the air repeatedly through wrinkled trunks. And the whole field is strewn with hilly corpses of these massive beasts, slaughtered by arrows, fallen along with their howdahs and mahouts. Many elephants, with their standards and

riders, are trampled by others goaded on by their riders. Terror stalks Kurukshetra in every sinister guise.

Swinging thick trunks, the colossal war beasts, each one an Airavata, shatter chariot shafts all around; and many maharathas, with the jalas of their chariots cracked, are dragged by the bloodthirsty elephants from their rathas by their long hair, like branches of trees, and smashed again and again on the ground, crushed into shapeless heaps. Other enormous tuskers drag tangled chariots as if they were lotus stalks in lakes, and run bellowing in all directions.

And so we see that Kurukshetra grimly, copiously, adorned with the bodies of horse-riders and foot-soldiers, maharathas and their standards.'

CANTO 72

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Sikhandin, with Virata the Matsya king, swiftly nears the invincible Bhishma. Arjuna encounters Drona and Kripa, and Vikarna and many other brave kings, all powerful archers; he also faces that mighty bowman, the ruler of the Sindhus, supported by his friends and kinsmen and many kings of the west and the south.

Bhima marches against your malicious son Duryodhana, and also against Dussaha. Sahadeva advances against those invincible warriors, Sakuni and the maharatha Uluka, those great archers, father and son. Maharatha Yudhishtira, so treacherously treated by your son, presses forward against the Kaurava akshauhini of elephants.

And that son of Pandu and Madri, the valiant Nakula, who can reduce any enemy to tears, faces the excellent Trigarta maharathas. Satyaki and Chekitana, indomitable, and the mighty son of Subhadra ride against Salya and the Kekayas. The unassailable Dhrishtaketu and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha break upon your sons' chariots.

Maharatha Dhrishtadyumna, Senapati of the Pandavas, opposes fierce Drona. Thus those fearless and heroic archers of your army and the Pandavas engage in battle.

When the sun is overhead and the sky brilliantly illuminated by his rays, the Kauravas and the Pandavas massacre one another. Beautiful chariots, draped in tiger skins, race across the field, their flags and pennants fluttering in the wind. Warriors let out leonine roars as they contend fiercely.

Furious and wonderful to watch is the encounter between the noble Srinjayas and the Kauravas. Arrows fly thickly in every direction, covering the sky, the sun and every point of the compass.

The splendour of polished barbs looking like blue lotuses, of bearded spears hurled like thunderbolts, of tempered swords, of flecked coats of mail, and of the ornaments worn by the fighting men, light up the sky and the earth with blinding radiance. And Kurukshetra shines with the brightness of embattled kings as if with the lustre of the sun and the moon.

Brave maharathas, tigers among men, glow in that battle, Rajan, like the planets in the sky.

Maharatha Bhishma challenges the mighty Bhima before the eyes of all. Bhishma's golden-winged arrows strike Bhima. Bhima looses a serpentine astra at Bhishma, who cleaves that tangential weapon as it courses towards him with a flight of straight shafts. With another, he breaks Bhima's bow in two.

Satyaki flies up in his ratha and recklessly pierces Bhishma with a constellation of shimmering barbs shot from his bowstring drawn to his ear. Bhishma fells Satyaki's sarathy, while his horses bolt. Swift as the mind or a storm, they run wildly over the battleground.

Roars, yells, shouts and cries rise all around from the horrible melee: *Run, seize, check the horses, hurry!*

And this uproar follows Yuyudhana's chariot. Bhishma meanwhile begins to destroy the Pandava forces like Indra killing the Danavas. But the Panchalas and the Somakas, though suffering, courageously attack the Kuru grandsire. Other Pandava warriors, led by Dhrishtadyumna, determined to thin the ranks of your son's army, charge at Bhishma.

In this manner, the warriors of your army, headed by Bhishma and Drona, fearlessly harry their enemies. Then the warriors ride away from their many contentions and other fresh battles begin.'

CANTO 73

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Virata pierces Bhishma with three shafts; he strikes his opponent's horses with three golden winged arrows. Aswatthaman, the deadly maharatha, shoots Arjuna through his chest with six whistling barbs. Arjuna rives Aswatthaman's bow and strikes him deep with five shafts. Incensed, Drona's son snatches another great bow and pierces Arjuna with ninety whetted arrows and Krishna with seventy.

Arjuna and Krishna breathe deeply and pause to take thought. Firmly grasping the Gandiva in his left hand, Arjuna fits some vicious astras to his bowstring, and looses them at Aswatthaman. They plunge through the armour of Drona's son and drink his blood. But Aswatthaman does not flinch. With his heart set firm on protecting Bhishma, he unleashes his own robust volley back at Arjuna. And since he has faced the two Krishnas undaunted, the Kaurava legions roar his praises.

Aswatthaman has been taught the great astras by his father Drona, and he fights without fear.

"He is the son of my Acharya. He is Drona's beloved son. He is a Brahmana, and worthy of my respect," thinks Arjuna. And so he is lenient towards Drona's son. He avoids him, and instead decimates your other forces with terrible swiftness.

Duryodhana strikes Bhima with ten keen golden shafts winged with feathers of vultures. With a roar, Bhima seizes up a powerful bow which can despatch any enemy, and ten terrific arrows. He aims those shafts, draws his bowstring to his ear, and pierces the Kaurava king's wide chest. The pendant of Duryodhana's necklace, surrounded by those arrows, shines like the sun in the sky encircled by the planets.

Hissing like a beaten snake, Duryodhana responds in fury, covering Bhima with a rash of golden barbs. Thus your two mighty sons battle and draw blood from each other, looking like two Devas.

Abhimanyu assails Chitrasena with a haze of arrows and Purumitra with seven. Piercing Satyavrata with seventy shafts, Arjuna's son is like Indra

himself in battle, as he seems to dance on the battleground drawing geysers of blood and sowing death all around.

Chitrasena attacks him with ten missiles, Satyavrata with nine, and Purumitra with seven. Abhimanyu is covered in blood, but he smashes Chitrasena's formidable bow, and strikes him deep through his breast with a potent shaft.

The wrathful kings of your army, magnificent maharathas, together stab Abhimanyu with barbs beyond count. And Abhimanyu, knower of the deadliest astras, shrouds them in supernal arrows. Seeing the splendid young Kshatriya consume your army like a blazing fire burning dry grass in summer, your sons surround him. As Abhimanyu devours your forces, he glows like a god on the profound and dreadful field of death.

Seeing him like that, Rajan, your grandson Lakshmana rounds on him. In a flash, Maharatha Abhimanyu pierces Lakshmana and his charioteer with six fleet shafts. Lakshmana responds with a flare of his own barbs. And this duel between the young princes is glorious.

Abhimanyu kills his four horses and his sarathy, and charges at Lakshmana, who looses a snakelike astra at Abhimanyu's chariot. Abhimanyu easily foils that ayudha, and Kripa rides up quickly to bear Lakshmana away from the field in full sight of all the warriors.

The fighting spreads like a dread disease, with men killing and dying thickly on every side. The great archers of your army and the maharathas of the Pandava host slaughter each other without pause, recklessly. Kurukshetra is a yawning portal to Yamaloka through which fervid hosts of warriors flow into death, in dark tide. With wild, dishevelled hair, deprived of armour and chariots, and their bows riven, the Srinjayas fight the Kauravas with their bare arms.

Mahabaho Bhishma continues to vigorously massacre the soldiers of the Pandava army with his divine weapons. And the earth is covered with the fallen bodies of elephants, horses, chariot warriors and horsemen.'

CANTO 74

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Mahabaho Satyaki takes up a fresh powerful bow and covers the field of Kurukshetra in a swathe of death. He is like a looming cloud of murder, as he draws his arrows, fits them to his bowstring and unleashes his bankless storms all round him in a seamless blur.

Seeing him blaze like a fire of the pralaya, Duryodhana sends ten thousand chariots against him. Satyaki is unmoved; he kills those maharathas in a flash flood with his divine weapons. He flares on towards Bhurisravas. Noble Bhurisravas, stricken to watch the decimation of the Dhartarashtra army, charges Satyaki in blind rage. Drawing his vast bow like Indra's, he looses a towering masterly salvo of thousands of shafts at the Vrishni. The warriors who follow Satyaki cannot endure that fulminant fire and scatter in all directions, abandoning their invincible leader.

Satyaki's mighty sons, celebrated maharathas all, cased in shining mail, bearing diverse weapons and flying fine standards, advance towards the great Bhurisravas, with his pennant with the emblem of a yupastamba, a sacrificial stake. They cry at him, "Kinsman of the Kauravas, come and fight us, jointly or separately. Either defeat us in battle and win fame, or be crushed by us and die!"

Proud of his strength, Bhurisravas roars back, "Kshatriyas, you speak nobly! Fight me jointly and vigilantly. For I will kill all of you in battle."

Those heroic archers energetically cover that lone Parantapa in a deluge of arrows. That majestic battle between Bhurisravas and those united against him is fought in the afternoon. The ten Kshatriyas, Satyaki's sons, rain unending storms on Bhurisravas, hiding him in a shroud of ferocious shafts. But none finds a mark on his leonine body, for he cuts them down with unworldly dazzling archery. All the while the Vrishni heroes press in on Bhurisravas, surrounding him, drawing nearer each moment. With incredible genius and prowess, whirling round and round in his ratha, he breaks their bows in their hands and sloughs off their handsome heads in scarlet explosions. And they plunge to the ground like majestic trees felled by thunder.

Seeing his mighty sons killed, Satyaki roars deafeningly and rushes at Bhurisravas. They thrust their chariots against each others. They destroy each other's horses. They leap down to the ground from their useless chariots. Taking up mighty swords and great shields they charge into each other, glow radiantly, those purushavyaghras. But then, armed with a mighty sword, Bhima streaks up to Satyaki and spirits him away in his chariot. And your son Duryodhana takes Bhurisravas into the safety of his chariot.

In that great war, the Pandavas fight vigorously, spiritedly against maharatha Bhishma. Near sunset, Arjuna massacres twenty five thousand maharathas. These had been sent by Duryodhana against him, but he destroys them entirely before they can even approach him, burning them with astras like insects by a blazing fire.

The Matsyas and the Kekayas, all masters of astras, surround Arjuna and Abhimanyu to bolster them. Just then the sun disappears, and all the fighting men are exhausted.

His horses tired, Bhishma orders the withdrawal of the forces. And the armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, both anxious and shaken by the day's carnage, return to their camps. The two armies rest for the night in accordance with the laws laid down for war.'

CANTO 75

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Having rested the night, most sleeping only fitfully with nightmares of the dreadful day raging through their sleep, at dawn of the next morning, the Kauravas and the Pandavas emerge again for battle.

A deafening roar rises from fearless, still excited Kshatriya maharathas as they ready themselves to take the field. And great tuskers trumpet as they are readied for the day's conflict, and foot-soldiers shout, at least to embolden themselves, as they wear their armour, and restless horses whinny, their eyes wild. The boom of conches and the beat of drums resound again across Kurukshetra.

King Yudhishtira addresses Dhrishtadyumna saying, "Mahabaho, deploy the forces in the Makara vyuha that will scorch the enemy," and maharatha Dhrishtadyumna arrays his rathikas in that formation of the great crocodile.

Drupada and Arjuna form the war beast's head, Sahadeva and Nakula its two eyes, and mighty Bhima is its snout. Subhadra's son and the sons of Draupadi and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, and Satyaki, and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira are positioned at its neck. King Virata, with a large akshauhini, becomes its back, supported by Dhrishtadyumna and his vast force. The five Kekaya brothers comprise its left flank, and that tiger among men, Dhrishtaketu, and Chekitana of great prowess, are its right flank, to protect the vyuha.

The great reptile's two feet are formed by the maharathas Kuntibhoja and Satanika, solidly supported. And the illustrious Sikhandin, surrounded by the Somakas and Iravat, make up the tail of the Makara.

Having shaped this wondrous formation, the armoured Pandavas, Rajan, stand ready for battle at dawn. With elephants and horses, chariots and foot-soldiers, with raised standards and unfurled parasols, with weapons gleaming, they march against the Kauravas.

Seeing the Pandava vyuha, Bhishma forms a great Krauncha vyuha, formation of the crane. On its beak is Drona. Aswatthaman and Kripa form its two eyes. Kritavarman, most excellent archer, with the king of the

Kambojas and with the Bahlikas is stationed on its head. In its neck are Surasena and your son Duryodhana, surrounded by many other kings.

The ruler of the Pragjyotishas, along with the Madras, the Sauviras, and the Kekayas, followed by a massive force, make up its chest. Susarman, king of Prasthala, with his legion forces, stands in full armour as the left wing. The Tusharas, the Yavanas and the Sakas, along with the Chulikas, form the right wing of that vyuha. And Srutayush and Satyatish and Somadatta's son stand in the rear protecting the others.

The Pandavas charge the Kauravas. The sun rises above the horizon as the battle begins. Elephants advance against elephants, horse-riders against horsemen, chariot warriors against others like them, and also against war elephants in the war to end all others.

Maharathas attack riders of elephants, who bear down on horsemen. Foot-soldiers engage with maharathas, horse riders with foot-soldiers. All the fighting men storm against each other in battle.

The Pandava army, protected by Bhima and Arjuna and the twins, seem beautiful as the night spangled over with stars. And your army also, with Bhishma and Kripa, and Drona and Salya, and Duryodhana, shines like the sky sparkling with luminous planets.

Powerful Bhima, seeing Drona, wildly attacks the Acharya's akshauhini of swift horses. The spirited Drona pierces Bhima with nine iron arrows, deeply wounding his arms and legs. Bhima, roused, kills Drona's sarathy.

The adroit son of Bharadwaja, himself guiding his horses, begins to consume the Pandava army like fire consuming a stack of cotton. Slaughtered by Drona and Bhishma, the Srinjayas along with the Kekayas flee. Your troops also, mangled by Bhima and Arjuna, are benumbed and they stand still, like a magnificent lioness in her pride. In this war that annihilates Kshatriyas, both armies suffer grievously.

We are overwhelmed by the sight of men fighting frenziedly, unconcerned for their very lives. In this war, the Pandavas and the Kauravas oppose each other with all their energies and weapons.'

CANTO 76

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Our army is skilled, resourceful and has diverse forces. It is organised, deployed expertly and should be invincible. It is loyal to us. It is obedient, and free from the vices of drunkenness and licentiousness. Its abilities are proven. The soldiers are neither very old nor very young. They are neither thin nor fat. They are robust, muscular and healthy.

They are well armed and armoured. They are proficient in the use of all kinds of astras. They fight skilfully with swords, maces and even bare arms. They are well trained in the use of spears and arrows of many kinds.

The men are fit, adept in mounting and alighting from the backs of elephants, in marching forward, attacking and retreating, and in effectively striking the enemy. They have been often tested in their handling of elephants, horses and chariots. They are paid soldiers, hired not because of their lineage, or on the basis of their earlier associations with us; neither have we chosen them in order to favour them.

They are upright and honest; their kinsmen have been treated well by us in the past. We have esteemed them highly for their services. They are all eminent and capable men.

They are in turn led by many dynamic and famed warriors, rulers of the earth, celebrated all over the world. Countless illustrious Kshatriyas, who have freely allied with us, with their forces also protect them.

Our army is like the vast ocean filled with the water of a myriad rivers flowing from all directions. It has countless elephants, and its chariots, though wingless, fly even like birds. Warriors are the waters of that ocean, and the horses and other animals are its lashing, terrifying waves. Swords, maces, spears and arrows are the oars of our vast and numberless craft. Rich in emblems and jewels, adorned with cloth inlaid with gold and gems, the charging horses and elephants are the stormy winds that make that ocean surge.

Our host resembles the vast, shoreless, raging ocean. It is defended by Drona and Bhishma, and by Kritavarman and Kripa and Dussasana, and

others headed by Jayadratha. It is also protected by Bhagadatta and Vikarna, by Drona's son, and Subala's son, and Bahlika, and by other mighty and high-souled Kshatriyas.

That our army is being destroyed is only due to Destiny, Sanjaya. Neither men nor highly blessed Rishis have ever before seen such preparations for war on earth. That such a vast and loyal force, deployed so scientifically, can be slaughtered in battle can only be the outcome of Destiny. All this appears strange and inexplicable.

Vidura had often given useful and wise advice. But my evil son Duryodhana would not accept it. I believe that Vidura foresaw all that is happening now; and hence he gave his counsel. Or it may be that all these, in every detail, has been predetermined by God, for that which is ordained by the Creator must happen and not otherwise.'

CANTO 77

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'You are the victim of this calamity because of your own weakness. Bharatarishabha, you, and not Duryodhana, clearly saw that what was done to the Pandavas was wrong.

That the game of dice was ever played was your folly. And it is your fault that this war against the Pandavas has been fought. Having done wrong, you must now face the outcome. One reaps the fruit of one's own actions. You must now reap the fruit of your sins in this life and the next. Rajan, be calm and accept the unfolding tragedy; listen to my narration of the battle.

Having smashed your awesome vyuha with his shafts, Bhima advances upon Duryodhana's younger brothers. Mighty Bhima sees Dussasana and Durvisaha, Dussaha and Durmada and Jaya, Jayasena and Vikarna and Chitrasena and Sudarsana, and Charuchitra and Suvarman and Duskarna and Karna, and other maharathas of the Dhartarashtra host approach him; he attacks your vyuha protected by Bhishma.

Seeing him amidst them, these warriors cry, "Let us kill Bhima!" and Bhima is surrounded by his indomitable cousins. He resembles the burning sun encircled by the malevolent planets at the end of the yuga.

Though besieged in the very heart of the Kaurava vyuha, Bhima is fearless, like Indra surrounded by the Danavas in the ancient battle between the Devas and the Asuras. Thousands of maharathas engulf him with deadly arrows. Valiant Bhima ignores the sons of Dhritarashtra and slaughters many other mighty Kaurava warriors fighting from chariots and from the backs of elephants and horses.

Then, knowing that his cousins are determined to kill him, Bhima sets himself to exterminate them all. Leaping down from his chariot, mace in hand, he begins to destroy the enemy.

As he penetrates the Kaurava army, Dhrishtadyumna turns away from Drona whom he has been fighting and swiftly advances towards Subala's son Sakuni. Killing so many warriors of your army, he notices Bhima's empty chariot. He sees Bhima's sarathy Visoka, and is distraught.

Filled with sudden sorrow, and in a choking voice, he asks Visoka, "Where is Bhima who is as precious to me as life itself?"

Visoka replies humbly, "Bhima commanded me to wait here, while he strikes out alone into the heart of the Dhartarashtra host vast as the ocean. He cheerfully said to me, 'Wait here with my horses for some time, until I kill those who are determined to kill me.' Seeing him storm ahead, mace in hand, all our fighting men were elated. Bhima smashed through the enemy's mighty vyuha in his awesome way."

Hearing Visoka's words, Dhrishtadyumna says to him, "My life would be worthless if I deserted Bhima in battle. If I return without Bhima, what will the Kshatriyas say about me? What will they say when they know that while I was on the battlefield Bhima charged alone into the enemy vyuha?

The Devas led by Indra curse those who abandon their comrades in war and return unharmed themselves! Brave Bhima is my friend and kinsman. He is devoted to me, and I too love that Parantapa dearly. I will go where he has gone. Watch me raze the enemy like Vasava slaying the Danavas."

Dhrishtadyumna rides right through the enemy, along the path opened up by Bhima and marked by elephants crushed under his mace. He sees Bhima consuming the Kaurava host, felling Kshatriya warriors like a storm ravaging trees. Maharathas and horsemen, foot-soldiers and tuskers scream aloud as he slaughters them. Your men cry in anguish as he massacres them.

The Kaurava warriors surround Bhima and shower him relentlessly with their arrows. Dhrishtadyumna sees Bhima attacked from all sides; mangled with shafts, on foot, and vomiting the poison of his anger, mace in hand, he looks like Siva at the end of the yuga. Dhrishtadyumna moves towards him and takes him into his chariot; he plucks out the shafts from his body, and embraces him in the sight of the enemy.

Duryodhana, seeing this, says to his brothers, "Dhrishtadyumna has allied with Bhima. Let us attack and kill him. We must be on the offensive and not wait for the enemy to strike us."

Goaded by their eldest brother's command, the Dhartarashtras, with raised weapons, hurtle towards Dhrishtadyumna, looking like fierce comets at the hour of universal dissolution. Like clouds shrouding a mountain with torrential rain, these Kshatriyas loose a volley of arrows on him, wielding their beautiful bows, making the earth shiver with the twang of their bowstrings and the rattle of their chariot-wheels.

But Dhrishtadyumna, proficient in all kinds of warfare, does not falter for a moment. Seeing your sons ready to kill him, he uses the Pramohana astra against them, again looking for all the world like Indra facing the Danavas. The Pramohana of sleep instantly makes the Kaurava princes weak and they swoon. Seeing your sons faint, your forces flee in all directions, with their horses, elephants and chariots.

Drona advances towards Drupada and pierces him with three searing shafts. Drupada, remembering his earlier enmity with Drona, leaves the battlefield. Drona blows his conch triumphantly, and the Somakas are terrified on hearing that blast.

Wielder of weapons, Drona, full of tejas, now hears of your sons being overwhelmed by the Pramohana astra, and rides in a flash to where they struggle vainly to remain conscious. Drona sees Dhrishtadyumna and Bhima careering across the battleground. And the maharatha watches your sons rendered unconscious. He uses the Prajna astra to make powerless the Pramohana loosed by Dhrishtadyumna. Your sons recover and again storm ahead to fight Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna.

Yudhishtira says to his warriors, “Send twelve brave maharathas, led by Abhimanyu, to Bhima and Prishata’s son. Let them find out about those two warriors. I am anxious.”

Those Kshatriyas sally forth at mid-day. The Kekayas and the sons of Draupadi, and Dhrishtaketu, supported by a large force and with Abhimanyu at their head, form the Suchimukha vyuha and drive deep into the Dhartarashtra chariot akshauhini.

Your forces, already terrified by Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna, cannot withstand the charge of those maharathas led by Abhimanyu. They are weak like an unprotected woman.

With standards flecked with gold, the Pandava warriors cleave swiftly through the Kaurava ranks to rescue Dhrishtadyumna and Bhima. Seeing them approach, Bhima is elated and, with a glad roar, continues to demolish your soldiers.

The heroic Dhrishtadyumna sees the Acharya advance towards him, to protect your sons. He has the chariot of the king of the Kekayas take Bhima away, while he himself engages the superlative Drona.

With a broad-headed shaft Parantapa Drona cuts down Dhrishtadyumna’s bow even as the Panchala prince rides recklessly towards

him. Remembering his loyalty to Duryodhana, he also shoots hundreds of arrows after Prishata's son.

Dhrishtadyumna seizes another bow and pierces Drona with seventy whetted shafts, all golden winged. Drona again severs his bow and slaughters his four horses with four incredibly excellent barbs, and also kills his charioteer with a heavy shaft. Mahabaho Dhrishtadyumna leaps off his chariot and climbs onto Abhimanyu's colossal ratha. Right before Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna, Drona makes the Pandava army with all its chariots, elephants and horses tremble in fear.

Seeing that army devastated by Drona, all its maharathas cannot stop its flight. Slaughtered by Drona, that army heaves like a stormy sea. Seeing the Pandava army reduced, your forces are jubilant. Seeing the fiery Acharya consume the enemy, all your warriors roar loudly in praise of Drona.'

CANTO 78

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'On recovering, Duryodhana again looses a tide of arrows at Bhima. And again those maharathas, your sons, unite and bravely oppose the great Pandava. Mahabaho Bhima mounts his chariot and rides straight at your sons. He takes up a golden bow, with the power to overcome any enemy, and he covers your sons with his wrath.

Duryodhana strikes him deep with a spear. Roaring, Bhima draws his bow in a circle and pierces Duryodhana through his arms and his chest with three fierce barbs. But the king stands firm like a prince of mountains.

Seeing those great Kshatriyas fight, Duryodhana's younger brothers renew their resolve to kill Bhima and attack him again, prepared to die if they must. The mighty Bhima charges them like an elephant charging another. With untold power, Bhima strikes your son Chitrasena with a long arrow, and your other sons with many kinds of swift and golden-winged shafts.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira meanwhile sends his twelve maharathas led by Abhimanyu to follow Bhima. These ride towards your sons. Looking at those Kshatriyas on their chariots, resembling the Sun himself or a radiant fire, beautiful and resplendent in their golden ornaments, your mighty sons turn away from Bhima. The Pandavas, however, are determined not to let them leave the battle alive.'

CANTO 79

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu, along with Bhima, hunts and dismays all your sons. The maharathas of your army, including Duryodhana, see Abhimanyu and Bhima united with Dhrishtadyumna in the very middle of the Kaurava forces; they seize their bows and ride swiftly at those three warriors.

Ah, such a dreadful battle there is that afternoon, Rajan, between the two armies. Abhimanyu kills Vikarna's horses and pierces him with twenty-five fine arrows. Maharatha Vikarna abandons that chariot and mounts Chitrasena's shining one.

Abhimanyu envelops those two brothers of Kuru's race, standing together on one chariot, with a barrage of shafts. Durjaya and Vikarna stab Abhimanyu with five iron barbs. Abhimanyu stands firm like the mountain Meru.

Dussasana fights valiantly with the five Kekaya brothers. All these feats are more awesome than can be told. The Pandavas furiously round on Duryodhana and each of them pierces your son with three arrows. Your indomitable prince, too, shoots each of them with whetted shafts. Thus pierced and drenched in blood, he glows like a mountain with rivers of muddy water running down its sides.

And the mighty Bhishma persists against the Pandava army like some herdsman belabouring his recalcitrant herd. The twang of the Gandiva is heard repeatedly as Arjuna slaughters his opponents on the right of the army. In that corner of the battlefield thousands of headless bodies of both sides can be seen still standing macabre among the living forces. And Kurukshetra resembles an ocean with blood for its water, with arrows as its currents. The elephants are its islands and horses its waves. Chariots form the boats that bold men use to cross that ocean. Thousands of brave warriors, with arms amputated, without armour, and hideously mutilated, lie on the ground.

With the bloody bodies of massacred elephants, the battleground looks as if scattered with hills. What a sight! Not a single warrior in both armies

is less than eager to fight. And so they battle on: those daring warriors of both your army and that of the Pandavas, seeking victory and glory.'

CANTO 80

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'At sunset, Duryodhana charges Bhima, always to kill him. Seeing him come with loathing in his heart, Bhima says, "The awaited hour has come. If you do not yield, I will kill you today.

By killing you I will dispel Kunti and Draupadi's sorrows, and all our anguish during our exile in the forests. You arrogantly humiliated the sons of Pandu. O son of Gandhari, you will reap the fruit of all your sins today.

You always listened to the vicious counsel of Karna and Subala's son, and, dismissive of the Pandavas, you had treated us unjustly. You ignored Krishna who had pleaded with you for peace. Jubilantly you had sent haughty, mocking messages to us through Uluka. Today I will kill you and all your kinsmen, and avenge all the insults and suffering you inflicted on us."

Bhima stretches his bow, takes up many terrible shafts that shimmer like lightning, and looses thirty-six of them at Duryodhana. Flaming they fly at his cousin like thunderbolts. With two shafts, Bhima smashes Duryodhana's bow in his hands, and strikes his charioteer with two more. With four shafts he kills Duryodhana's four horses; with another two he cuts down the king's royal parasol. With three others he fells the Kaurava's magnificent, jewel worked standard, which falls to the earth like a flash of lightning from the clouds. All the gathered rulers see that radiant Kaurava standard, bearing the emblem of a great tusker, adorned with precious stones, plunge to the ground, and Bhima roars triumphantly.

Smiling, maharatha Bhima stabs Duryodhana with ten shafts like a mahout piercing a colossal elephant with his hook. The mighty king of the Sindhus, with many brave warriors, swiftly sets himself at Duryodhana's flank, while maharatha Kripa quickly takes the seething Duryodhana onto his own chariot. The king, deeply wounded by Bhima and suffering, collapses on its platform.

Jayadratha surrounds Bhima with thousands of chariots to have his life. Dhrishtaketu and Abhimanyu, and the Kekayas, and the sons of Draupadi, all clash with your sons. And the high-souled Abhimanyu strikes each of

them with five straight shafts that appear like dark lightning or guises of Yama.

They, in turn, unleash a storm of arrows at Abhimanyu, like black clouds pounding Meru with rain. But brilliant Abhimanyu makes your sons tremble like Indra did the mighty Asuras during the ancient Devasura yuddha. In a moment, he shoots fourteen broad-headed shafts like snakes at Vikarna; as if dancing in battle, Abhimanyu destroys Vikarna's standard and kills his charioteer and horses.

Subhadra's resplendent son covers every direction around him with astounding gales of arrows, shafts that can pierce the best armour. Plumed with feathers of the kanka bird, these barbs pass right through Vikarna's body and enter the ground like hissing snakes. And decked with gold, drenched in Vikarna's blood, they seem to vomit blood on the earth.

Seeing Vikarna wounded, his brothers charge the maharathas led by Abhimanyu and engage the heroes of the Pandava army, who shine like so many suns.

Durmukha pierces Srutakarman with five shafts, breaks his standard with a single shaft and strikes his sarathy with seven. Advancing, he butchers his enemy's horses, as swift as the wind and wearing bright armour, with six arrows, and kills his charioteer too.

Srutakarman stands firm on his horseless chariot and casts a meteor-like astra at Durmukha; that weapon cuts through Durmukha's kavacha and plunges into the ground behind him, glowing all the while. Sutasoma helps Srutakarman into his chariot, in plain sight of all the forces.

The heroic Srutakirti storms at Jayatsena. Your son severs Srutakirti's bow with a horse-shoe headed arrow. Seeing his brother's bow broken, brave Satanika rides up swiftly roaring like a lion. In a blink, Satanika pierces Jayatsena with ten shafts, and then bellows his victory like a wild elephant trumpeting.

Satanika stabs Jayatsena deeply in the chest; Dushkarna who is near his brother Jayatsena, breaks Satanika's bow. The mighty Satanika seizes another powerful bow and, roaring dreadfully, looses a tide of arrows at Dushkarna before Jayatsena arrests him with some serpentine nagapasas.

Recovering in a moment, Satanika destroys Dushkarna's bow with one fell barb, kills his charioteer with two more, and pierces Dushkarna himself with seven unerring astras. That flawless warrior slaughters all Dushkarna's swift glossy horses with twelve sharp shafts. Satanika strikes Dushkarna

deeply through his chest and Dushkarna plunges to the ground like a tree felled by lightning.

To avenge Dushkarna's death, five maharathas surround Satanika determined to kill him. They attack him with dense volleys. The five Kekaya brothers press forward to protect Satanika. Seeing them advance, your sons fly at them like elephants thundering at other colossal tuskers.

Your sons Durmukha and Durjaya, and the youthful Durmarshana and Satranjaya and Satrusha, all celebrated warriors, plunge red-eyed at the five Kekaya brothers. They ride on splendid chariots that look like fortified cities, yoked to bejewelled horses and bearing beautifully coloured standards; those Kshatriyas carry formidable bows, and wearing beautiful coats of mail they penetrate the enemy force like lions entering one forest from another.

A pitched earthshaking battle erupts, in which chariots and elephants are shattered and mangled. With untold hatred, they fight until sunset; countless warriors on both sides are killed. Thousands of great chariot-warriors and horsemen are strewn over the battlefield, like rag dolls now, drenched in crimson.

In rage, Bhishma continues his massacre of the Pandava forces with banks and banks of straight shafts, streaming ceaselessly from his matchless bow. His arrows annihilate the Panchala fighting men. Having savagely reduced the ranks of the Pandavas, the Pitamaha withdraws his forces and retires to his camp.

And seeing Dhrishtadyumna and Bhima both safe, Yudhishtira is relieved and he also leaves the field and enters his tent.'

CANTO 81

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Those Kshatriyas return to their tents, blood-spattered and with the hatred and enmity in their hearts undimmed. They praise each other for their glorious feats of the day and spend the night, some in deep sleep, others tossing and turning in their beds from the dark and violent dreams which plunge through their sleep. The next morning finds them again in full armour and ready for battle, which is now their very life to them; no other thought occupies their minds.

Duryodhana is anxious, and with blood still oozing from his wounds, asks his Pitamaha, "Our fierce forces carry countless standards. They are perfectly drilled and deployed. Yet the Pandava maharathas penetrate our vyuha, slaughter our men, and escape unharmed.

They humble us and win fame in battle. Smashing through our Makara vyuha, powerful as the Vajra, Bhima wounded me with terrible shafts each like a Yama danda. I was baffled by him. Even now I cannot regain my composure. Pitamaha only you can help me kill the sons of Pandu and achieve victory."

Foremost of all wielders of weapons, and imbued with great tejas, Bhishma understands Duryodhana's anguish; though inwardly despondent, he cheerfully says, "My child, I truly exert myself wholeheartedly, to crush the Pandava forces and bring you victory and joy, O king. For your sake I do not hesitate.

The Pandava's allies in this war are many and magnificent. Celebrated maharathas, they are more than merely brave and great masters of astras. Tireless, they spew forth their righteous anger. They hate you, Suyodhana, and swelling with prowess, they will not be easily defeated. I will fight them with my whole soul, risking my life. For your sake, for your glory, I will stake my life.

For you, my child, I would consume all the worlds with the Devas and the Daityas, not just your enemies on this battleground. And I will fight the Pandavas, and do whatever pleases you."

Hearing these words, Duryodhana is reassured and filled with hope and joy. He cheerfully orders his forces, along with the allied kings, to advance. And his army of chariots, horses, foot-soldiers and elephants moves regally forward.

And sensing their king's fresh confidence, that vast force, armed with every kind of weapon, is also full of joy. It looks wonderful with its elephants, horses and foot-soldiers. And its colossal tuskers, brightly caparisoned, formed in massive akshauhinis, and skilfully goaded, look the most resplendent. Many royal Kshatriyas, all accomplished in the use of diverse weapons, are seen amidst your forces. And the dust, red as the morning sun, raised by the chariots and foot-soldiers and elephants and horses as they move across the field, is deeply beautiful, even as it swirls up to obscure the face of the sun.

And the vari-coloured banners on the chariots and elephants wave in the air and look like many-hued lightning in clouds in the sky. The din raised by the twang of stretched bows is like the roar of the ocean when the Devas and the Asuras churned it together during the Krita Yuga, to fetch up the Amrita.

The stately and accomplished army of your sons, consisting of a great variety of fighting men, roar and shout fiercely, looking like the clouds of the Pralaya that appear at the end of the yuga.'

CANTO 82

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'O Bharatarishabha, Bhishma once again addresses your thoughtful son with these pleasing words:

"Drona and I, and Salya and Kritavarman of Satwata's race, and Aswatthaman and Vikarna, and Bhagadatta and Subala's son and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Bahlika with the Bahlikas, and the mighty king of the Trigartas and the invincible ruler of the Magadhas, Brihadbala the king of the Kosalas, and Chitrasena and Vivimsati and thousands of maharathas with lofty standards, excellent horses mounted by superior riders, many incensed tuskers with the juice of rut trickling from their mouths and temples, and numberless brave foot-soldiers from many lands, are all prepared to fight for you.

These, and many others, are ready to lay down their lives for you, capable as they are of defeating the very gods in battle. I will however advise you again in your best interests.

The Pandavas are unconquerable even by the gods. With Krishna for an ally they are equal to Mahendra himself in prowess. As for myself, I am at your command. Either I shall crush the Pandavas or they will overcome me."

Saying this, Bhishma applies a poultice of medicinal herbs to Duryodhana's wounds and these heal instantly, magically.

At dawn, with a clear sky overhead, the valiant Bhishma, consummate master of vyuhas of all kinds, himself organises his fighting men in the Mandala vyuha, the formation of the Galaxy, bristling with weapons. And it still abounds in outstanding warriors, elephants and foot-soldiers.

It is protected on all sides by thousands of chariots, and with legions of horsemen armed with swords and spears. Near every elephant are seven chariots, and besides every chariot are seven horsemen. Behind every horseman are seven archers, and behind every archer are seven soldiers with shields. Thus, your army, assembled by mighty maharathas and protected by Bhishma, stands ready to fight.

Ten thousand horses, and as many elephants, and ten thousand chariots, and your sons, all covered in mail, the heroic Chitrasena and many others, all guard the Pitamaha. Thus Bhishma is protected by those intrepid princes, and they in turn are safeguarded by him. And Duryodhana in his coat of mail sits on his chariot, graceful and resplendent like Sakra himself.

Your sons let out thunderous shouts, and the clatter of chariots and the sound of musical instruments is deafening. The mighty and impenetrable Mandala vyuha of the Dhartarashtras created by Bhishma begins to move westwards. It is invincible and so beautiful to behold.

Seeing the Mandala vyuha, Yudhishtira himself arrays his forces in the Vajra vyuha. When all the akshauhinis of chariot-warriors and horsemen are suitably stationed, he roars like a most noble lion. The warriors of both armies advance; a thirst for battle, they want to destroy the other's vyuha, leaving not a single enemy alive.

Bharadwaja's son Drona rides against the king of the Matsyas, and his son, Aswatthaman, against Sikhandin. And king Duryodhana himself strikes out at the son of Prishata. Nakula and Sahadeva attack the king of the Madras.

And Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti charge against Iravat. Many kings unite to oppose Arjuna. Bhima challenges the son of Hridika, while Abhimanyu faces your sons Chitrasena and Vikarna and Durmarshana.

Hidimbi's son, Ghatotkacha, that prince of the Rakshasas, charges the mighty Bhagadatta, king of the Pragjyotishas, like one incensed elephant against another. The Rakshasa Alambusha, Rajan, with rising anger, battles the indomitable Satyaki surrounded by his Vrishni warriors. And Bhurisravas fights with vim against Dhrishtaketu.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira advances against king Srutayush. Chekitana challenges Kripa. Other Kaurava fighting men confront maharatha Bhima. And thousands of other kings armed with spears, arrows, maces, and spiked clubs surround Arjuna.

Arjuna says to Krishna, "Behold, O Madhava, the Dhartarashtra troops, assembled by Bhishma conversant with every kind of vyuha. Look at these myriad daring warriors who seek to fight me. Kesava, look, there stands the lord of the Trigartas with his brothers. Today I shall kill them all, Janardana, before your eyes."

Saying this, Arjuna rubs his bowstring to warm it, pulls it to affright his foes and overwhelms that host of kings with his arrows. And those

celebrated archers also cover him in gales of shafts, like monsoon clouds filling a lake with their torrents. Strident roars are heard in your army as the two Krishnas are mantled in a deluge of arrows. Seeing this from on high, the Devas, the celestial Rishis, and the Gandharvas with the Uragas are awestruck.

Arjuna, enraged, invokes the Aindra astra. We can only marvel at his impossible prowess, as he repels his enemies' scathing volleys, effortlessly. Thousands of kings, horses and elephants are direly wounded by Arjuna's unearthly archery; others are each pierced with two and three of his barbs and quickly flow blood.

The wounded warriors seek Bhishma's protection. The Pitamaha comes to their rescue as they flounder in the bottomless ocean that is Arjuna's mystic archery. Rajan, as they scatter in fear and confusion and tangle with other warriors, your broken ranks appear like a sea heaving in a storm.'

CANTO 83

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'When the battle rages on, after Susarman stops fighting, and the other valiant Kshatriyas of the Kaurava army are routed by the high-souled son of Pandu, indeed, after your army has been tossed like a slight fleet of boats upon a great and turbulent ocean, and Bhishma has charged swiftly against the chariot of Vijaya, Duryodhana, seeing Arjuna straddle Kurukshetra like Yama come hunting, rides up and speaks comfortingly to those belaboured, lacerated kings, and to the mighty Susarman in the vanguard.

Duryodhana says, "This Bhishma, the son of Shantanu, uncaring for his very life, will fight wholeheartedly against Arjuna. United, exert yourselves, and protect Bhishma as he forges at the enemy."

All the akshauhinis rally and follow the magnificent Pitamaha. Mighty Bhishma charges to confront Arjuna, who also thunders towards him on his splendid chariot yoked to white horses, flying his standard bearing the fierce Vanara, who gives vent to the most bloodcurdling cries and roars.

Your entire army, seeing the diadem-decked Dhananjaya advancing into battle, cries out in terror. And your forces cannot gaze upon Krishna, as he stands, reins in hand, a fiery, magnificent sun.

The Pandavas also cannot look at Bhishma, who, with his white horses and gleaming bow, resembles Sukra rising in the sky. The son of Shantanu is ringed by the noble Trigarta warriors led by their king with his brothers and sons, and by many maharathas.

Drona strikes the king of the Matsyas with his winged shafts. He cuts down Virata's standard with a single arrow, and his bow with another. Virata, Senapati of a vast akshauhini, discards the cloven bow and swiftly takes up another that is strong and resilient. He seizes many blazing arrows resembling poisonous snakes, stabs Drona with three of these and his four horses with four. He fells Drona's standard with another barb, and his sarathy with five. Cracking Drona's bow in his hands with yet another shaft, he enrages that bull among Brahmanas.

Drona kills Virata's horses with eight long shafts, and then his charioteer with one. Virata has to leap down from his chariot whose horses have been slaughtered. Virata, that most excellent maharatha, mounts his son Sankha's chariot. Riding together, father and son powerfully resist Drona with a refulgent wrath of arrows.

In fury, Drona strikes Sankha with a missile like a serpent spitting venom. This shaft pierces Sankha's chest and he falls to the ground bathed in his own spraying gore. He plunges down from his chariot, before his father's eyes, his bow and arrows falling out of his grasp. Seeing his son killed, Virata flees howling in shock and terror, flees from the awful Drona who looks like Death with mouth agape.

Drona rapidly thwarts the vast Pandava host. Sikhandin strikes Drona's son in his forehead with three sharp darts. Aswatthaman glows like Meru with its three golden peaks. Incensed, in less than a blink of the eye, Aswatthaman overwhelms Sikhandin's charioteer and cuts down his standard, horses and weapons, covering them all in a swathe of arrows. Sikhandin, scorcher of enemies, leaps off his horseless chariot. Taking up a gleaming sword and shield, he moves as he wishes, wrathfully and sharply like a hawk. Aswatthaman cannot kill Sikhandin and all are filled with wonder.

Aswatthaman looses thousands of arrows at his enemy but mighty Sikhandin wards them off with his whirling sword and shield, as if in another dimension of time. Drona's son shoots Sikhandin's radiant shield decked with a hundred moons into shards, and cuts his sword in two. He now stabs Sikhandin himself with a volley of winged arrows.

Sikhandin whirls the remaining length of his snake like blade, and hurls it at Aswatthaman like lightning. Drona's son shoots that blade into slivers even as it flies at him, brilliant like the fire that blazes at the end of the yuga. And he strikes Sikhandin himself with countless solid iron arrows. Deeply wounded and in agony, Sikhandin climbs onto Satyaki's chariot.

Satyaki pierces the feral Rakshasa Alambusha all over, on every side, deeply with his lusty arrows. That prince of Rakshasas shatters Satyaki's bow with a crescent-tipped shaft, then draws blood from Satyaki himself with countless other barbs. Using his Rakshasa's maya to create a formidable illusion, he shrouds Satyaki with torrents of fire and water, and storms of very real sharp missiles.

The grandson of Sini displays breathtaking prowess as he remains undaunted by that ferocious fusillade. The son of Vrishni's race intones a profound mantra and launches the Aindra astra, which he had from his guru Arjuna. The astra burns down that demonic illusion and envelops Alambusha in a torrid arrow storm. Wounded sorely by that exceptional Kshatriya, Alambusha flees to avoid facing Satyaki.

Defeating that prince of Rakshasas, unbeatable by Maghavat himself, the grandson of Sini flings back his handsome head and roars and roars before your stunned forces. The indomitable Satyaki now begins to decimate and scatter your fighting men at will.

Meanwhile, O Rajan, Dhrishtadyumna covers your son in a shroud of fire. Your royal Suyodhana stands rocklike and undaunted. He strikes Dhrishtadyumna with sixty shafts, and in a wink with thirty more. And all these feats seem amazing. The Pandava Senapati responds by smashing your son's bow in fury. That maharatha slaughters your son's four horses, and pierces him with seven finely-honed arrows.

Your son, so strong and vigorous, leaps from his horseless chariot, and runs straight at the son of Drupada wielding a raised sword. The mighty and loyal Sakuni quickly takes Duryodhana into his own chariot. Having routed their king, Drupada's fire prince begins to raze your forces like Indra killing the Asuras.

Kritavarman swathes maharatha Bhima with his shafts, overwhelming him like a mass of clouds hiding the sun. That nemesis of enemies, Bhima, only continues to furiously shoot arrows at Kritavarman, laughing in glee. That atiratha of the Satwatavamsa, outshining everyone, boldly strikes Bhima with a ceaseless stream of lean missiles. The colossal Bhima kills Kritavarman's four horses and strikes down his sarathy and his beautiful standard; and masterful Bhima stabs Kritavarman with many kinds of arrows.

Pierced all over, his limbs mangled, Kritavarman runs to Vrishaka's chariot, in the sight of both Salya and your son. Fury unabated, Bhima begins to butcher your men all around. He beats them to pulp, like Siva with his mace.'

CANTO 84

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'I hear you speak of the countless awesome single contests between the Pandavas and my warriors. You do not mention, however, Sanjaya, the heroism or high spirits of anyone of my side. You talk of the cheerful and invincible sons of Pandu, and of mine as being listless, dejected and vulnerable in battle. Unquestionably, all this is Destiny.'

Sanjaya says, 'Bharatarishabha, your fighting men display strength and courage to their utmost. But just as the sweet waters of the celestial Ganga turn salty when they meet the sea, so is the valour of your sons rendered futile when they meet the heroic sons of Pandu in battle.

They exert themselves forcefully, and accomplish the most difficult feats: you should not censure your forces. It is your sins, and those of your sons, that have resulted in this horrific destruction of the world, all this shameful and bloody waste and ruin.

It does not befit you, Rajan, to mourn what you have caused. The duty of kings in this world is not merely to protect their lives. Wishing to win the realms of the righteous, they fight daily, thrusting into enemy akshauhinis, with the heavens alone as their aim.

In the bright morning, widespread carnage ensues, yes, even like in the Devasura yuddha, the first of all wars. Hear of it with undivided attention.

The two lustrous princes of Avanti, those mighty archers, rush at Iravat. The battle that breaks out between them is brutal, making one's hair stand on end. The incensed Iravat strikes the divine brothers with a luminous and deadly volley, which they cut down in a shower of sparks. Hotly the three battle their only thought to have the enemy's life; so feverishly do they fight that they cannot be distinguished one from the others in the rage of arrows with which they darken earth and sky.

Iravat kills Anuvinda's four horses with four terrific shafts, and demolishes Anuvinda's bow and standard with another two, all of which pierce the general cloud of arrows all round. And this feat is truly wonderful.

Abandoning his chariot, Anuvinda leaps onto Vinda's. From that single ratha, the inspired brothers of Avanti unleash an elemental fury of missiles at the high-souled Iravat. Those golden arrows course through the air and cover the sky. Cut to the quick, Iravat creates a thunderhead of shafts in the sky and they lash down in a cataract on the two splendid maharathas and fell their sarathy.

When their charioteer falls dead to the ground, the unrestrained horses run amok, dragging the chariot wildly behind them. In some satisfaction, Iravat begins to consume your foot-soldiers all around him. And the mighty Dhartarashtra host, thus slaughtered, reels like a man drunk on poison.

Mounted on his black ratha, its flag flying high, that prince of Rakshasas, Hidimbi's looming son Ghatotkacha charges Bhagadatta. The king of the Pragjyotishas rides his prince of elephants, Supritika, even like Indra did Airavata in the battle of antiquity provoked by Taraka's molestation.

The Devas, the Gandharvas, and the Rishis all assembled in the subtle akasa cannot distinguish between Ghatotkacha and Bhagadatta. As the infuriated king of the Devas once infused the Danavas with fear, so does Bhagadatta terrify the Pandava warriors. And stricken on all sides, they look around vainly for a protector among their ranks.

The son of Bhima stands valiant with darkly glimmering defiance on his chariot, while other maharathas melt away disheartened. When the Pandava forces rally, there rises a deafening roar among your fighting men. Ghatotkacha, O Rajan, pours down a thunder shower of arrows on Bhagadatta, as the clouds of the monsoon do on Meru's great summit. Bhagadatta foils every falling shaft from the Rakshasa's bow, and strikes Ghatotkacha deeply in all his marmas, the vital parts of his hulking body, lancing agony through him. That prince of the Rakshasas does not waver for a moment but stands still like a mountain pierced.

Rage mounting, the Pragjyotisha king hurls fourteen spears, all of which the magnificent Rakshasa cuts in slivers. Mahabaho Ghatotkacha stabs Bhagadatta with seventy keening shafts, each one like Indra's Vajra.

But laughing all the while, Bhagadatta slaughters the Rakshasa's four horses. Ghatotkacha remains steadfast on his ratha and launches a deadly javelin at Bhagadatta's elephant. The mountain king smashes that swift golden lance hurtling wildly towards him into three harmless stalks.

Ghatotkacha flees terrified, like Namuchi, that foremost of the Daityas, did from Indra in the primordial battle.

Having defeated that daring Kshatriya, unassailable even by Yama himself or Varuna, king Bhagadatta with his elephant begins to crush the Pandava forces like a wild tusker trampling the lotuses in a lake.

Salya of the Madras fights his sister's sons, the twins. And he overwhelms them with salvos of arrows. Sahadeva shrouds his dead mother's splendid brother with arrows like clouds veiling the sun. Covered by these shafts, the king of the Madras is delighted, and the twins also are satisfied for their mother Madri's sake.

Maharatha Salya kills Nakula's four horses. Nakula leaps down from his own chariot and mounts his brother's. Standing on one ratha, the two brilliant Kshatriyas draw their bows in circles and pound Salya's chariot with a battery of arrows. That purushavyaghra remains unmoved as a mountain. Laughing, happy to see his nephews' prowess, he also inundates them with arrows.

Sahadeva charges at Salya, adroitly stabbing him with a powerful astra. Like Garuda's beak, the arrow pierces the Madra king and he falls in a faint in his chariot. Seeing him felled by the superb twins, and unconsciousness and prostrate, his sarathy steers him away to safety. Watching Salya's chariot leave the field, the Dhartarashtras are shocked, crestfallen, thinking he is dead.

Having bested their uncle, the twins blast their conches and roar triumphantly. They fly exultantly, Rajan, towards your forces like Indra and Upendra at the Daitya host.'

CANTO 85

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'At noon, seeing Srutayush, Yudhishtira goads his horses at that Kshatriya. He attacks Srutayush, that chastiser of foes, striking him with nine keen shafts. Foiling those arrows, the illustrious Srutayush pierces Yudhishtira with seven barbs loosed in a single moment, which pierce his armour, spilling his blood and sapping the Dharmaraja's tejas.

Though painfully wounded, the son of Pandu shoots a missile formed like a boar's ear into Srutayush's breast and fells his standard from his chariot with another shaft. Seeing his proud standard destroyed, Srutayush strikes Yudhishtira with seven emerald arrows. The Dharmaraja is inflamed, and flares up like the fire that blazes at the end of the yuga consuming all creatures.

Seeing the son of Pandu's towering wrath, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Rakshasas tremble on high, and the very universe is disturbed. And they fear that Yudhishtira will incinerate the three worlds that very day. And the Rishis and the Devas pray for peace. Still enraged and frequently licking the corners of his mouth, Yudhishtira looks like the sun that rises at the end of the yuga. Rajan, all your warriors fear for their lives.

With perfect composure, mighty Yudhishtira cleaves Srutayush's bow at its very grasp, and before the eyes of all the fighting men, he strikes Srutayush with a long arrow squarely though that king's chest. Summarily, the Pandava king despatches Srutayush's horses and his charioteer.

Srutayush abandons his horseless chariot and flees, and a wave of shame courses through Duryodhana's army. And now Yudhishtira begins to decimate your men at will, like Yama himself with mouth agape come hunting to Kurukshetra.

All see Chekitana of the Vrishnis cover maharatha Kripa Gautama with an extravagance of arrows. Cutting these down in flight, Kripa son of Saradwat shatters Chekitana's bow and fells his sarathy. Kripa kills Chekitana's horses, and the two warriors that protected his flanks.

Chekitana leaps down from his chariot with a mace in his hands. Dashing forward, he kills Kripa's horses and his charioteer with five

sickening, bloody blows. Kripa, too, jumps down from his useless ratha and from the ground looses sixteen flashing arrows at Chekitana in the blink of an eye. Those barbs pierce cleanly through that noble Kshatriya and plough into the earth. Blossomed in blood flowers, in pain and enraged, Chekitana flings his mace at Kripa, like Purandara when he wanted to kill Vritra.

Gautama pulverises that gleaming gada coursing at him with a thousand arrows shot in an instant. Chekitana draws his sword and charges Gautama, who discards his bow, and drawing his own polished blade, also rushes towards his opponent. Both mighty warriors flay each other with their glinting weapons, sparks flying. Both bulls among men are wounded and fall onto the Earth, mother of all creatures. Exhausted, they faint.

Karakarsha, moved by friendship, rides up, and that invincible Kshatriya quickly lifts Chekitana into his chariot. And your brother-in-law, the intrepid Sakuni, swiftly helps maharatha Kripa onto his ratha.

Dhrishtaketu strikes the son of Somadatta in his chest with a blur of ninety shafts. And adorned with those arrows, Somadatta's son looks like Surya Deva with his burning rays.

Bhurisravas destroys maharatha Dhrishtaketu's chariot and kills his sarathy and his horses. Seeing him defenceless, Bhurisravas cloaks Dhrishtaketu with a veil of fine arrows. Dhrishtaketu abandons his chariot and mounts Satanika's. Encased in golden armour, maharathas Chitrasena, Vikarna and Durmarshana unite to attack the son of Subhadra. A fierce battle ensues between them and Abhimanyu, like the struggle of the body with vata, pitha and kapham, wind, bile, and phlegm.

Abhimanyu, tiger among men, smashes your sons' chariots, but does not kill them, remembering Bhima's vow to kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra himself. Arjuna sees Bhishma, invincible even against the Devas, advancing to save your sons from the terrible young Abhimanyu, already a maharatha among maharathas.

He addresses Krishna, "Urge your horses, Hrishikesa, to where those indomitable maharathas gather. Guide our horses so that the enemy does not annihilate our forces."

Krishna steers the chariot yoked to white horses into battle. Seeing Arjuna advance on your army, a loud clamour is heard among your fighting men. As he nears the kings protecting Bhishma, Arjuna addresses Susarman, "I acknowledge you both as excellent warriors and as our dire

enemy. Today you will taste the harsh fruit of your sins. Today I will send you to the resting place of your ancestors."

That commander of chariot akshauhinis, Susarman, makes no reply to Arjuna's threat. Riding at Bibhatsu, with a large host of his allies, he surrounds him, and, supported by your sons, envelops him in a billowing gale of arrows, which hide the face of the sun.

Another dreadful battle breaks out between your army and that of the Pandavas, in which blood runs like water.'

CANTO 86

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Mighty Arjuna, pierced by Susarman and his host, inhales deeply and dissects the bows of those maharathas with his own arrow storm; he draws copious blood from all their bodies. Many of them fall bleeding on the ground. The limbs of some lie dissevered, and the heads of others roll, cut cleanly from their neck. Some die with bodies twisted and their coats of mail mangled. Struck by Arjuna's tremendous arrows, they plunge to gory death.

Seeing this carnage, Susarman, king of the Trigartas, yet advances on his chariot. And thirty-two other maharathas, who had been protecting the rear of those slain warriors, also attack Arjuna. Surrounding him, drawing their powerful bows in circles, they assail him relentlessly with deadly fire. Wounded by their deluge, Arjuna is incensed, and kills them all with six extraordinary shafts. Having slain sixty maharathas in moments and their legions in a few more, the glorious Kshatriya is exhilarated and he dashes ahead to kill Bhishma.

Seeing his allies overthrown, Susarman of the Trigartas still rushes at Arjuna with some other kings in his vanguard. Watching them press forward, the Pandava legion led by Sikhandin charges at them to protect Dhananjaya's chariot.

Arjuna turns and unleashes another arrow storm from the Gandiva at Susarman and his Samsaptakas. Eager to confront Bhishma, great Arjuna sees Duryodhana and some other kings led by the sovereign of the Sindhus, guarding the Kuru grandsire. Erupting into a grand inspiration of unearthly archery, sublimely thwarting the warriors who protect Bhishma, Arjuna who knows no fear adroitly avoids Duryodhana, Jayadratha and others, and forges on to engage the awesome son of Ganga.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira also nimbly avoids the Madra king Salya, who has been assigned to harry him, and, along with Bhima and the sons of Madri, rides furiously at Bhishma.

Dominating the field of war as ever, peerless Bhishma faces the unified onslaught of the sons of Pandu, never wavering. The dexterous Jayadratha

takes careful aim and with gusto smashes the bows of all those Pandava maharathas. Always wrathful, Duryodhana strikes Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins with a firetide of flaming shafts. Pierced roundly by Kripa and Sala and Chitrasena, Rajan, the Pandavas appear like the Devas attacked by the united Daitya hordes in ancient times.

Yudhishtira sees Sikhandin flee when Bhishma, with some disdain, consumes an astra loosed by the Panchala prince, and the Dharmaraja is stirred to anger. He cries at Sikhandin, “In the presence of your father, you had sworn to me that you would kill Bhishma. That was your solemn oath. Why do you not fulfil it now? O Kshatriya, do not neglect your vow. Defend your virtue, your noble race and your honour.

Look how Bhishma burns my troops with his fiery shafts, consuming them like Death himself. Your own bow is riven and you are repeatedly vanquished by Shantanu’s terrible son. Where do you go, deserting your kinsmen and brothers? This does not befit you.

Ah, you are terrified, and the colour fades from your face to watch indomitable Bhishma, and our army routed and in retreat. But you do not yet know that Arjuna has joined this dreadful fray. O celebrated Kshatriya, why are you afraid of Bhishma today?”

Hearing Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, harshly though the Dharmaraja speaks, Sikhandin is quickly reassured, and turns back to fight, once more his sole and fervid purpose to destroy great Bhishma. As that prince rides back with verve into battle, Salya greets him with a flaming agneyastra. The son of Drupada, powerful as Indra himself, is undaunted, by that weapon, luminous as the fire that burns at the end of the yuga. Sikhandin stands firm, and invokes a Varunastra, and douses Salya’s flames with a great tide of water in the sky. The Devas in the akasa and the kings of the earth all watch that awesome spectacle in wonder.

Meanwhile, the noble Bhishma breaks Yudhishtira’s bow and cuts down his standard. Seeing Yudhishtira suddenly seized by fear, Bhima sets aside his bow and arrows, and, seizing a club, rushes roaring at Jayadratha on foot. Jayadratha riding in a circle pierces Bhima from all sides as the great Pandava runs at him, with five hundred whetted arrows each like a Yamadana. Calmly ignoring those barbs, the daring Vrikodara, incensed, turns his fury on Jayadratha’s horses, foaled in Aratta, the kingdom of the Sindhus, and slaughters them all in explosions of blood.

Seeing Bhima fighting on foot, your son, the unrivalled Chitrasena, who, also, resembles the king of the Devas, swiftly attacks him from his chariot with astras. Mace in hand, Bhima bellows like ten wild bison and storms recklessly at your prince. Seeing Bhima's raised rod of Death, the Kauravas abandon your brave son and run like terrified boys.

In that fierce and bewildering fray, O Bhaarata, Chitrasena is undaunted as he watches that blood-dripping club flung by Bhima's tremendous hand course towards him through the air. Taking up a shining sword and shield, he leaps down from his chariot like a lion from the top of a cliff, to fight on foot. In that moment, falling on them like some meteor from the sky, Bhima's mace crushes Chitrasena's magnificent chariot, its horses and its sarathy. Watching your son's heroic and narrow escape, your forces are elated and shout triumphantly to applaud his deed.'

CANTO 87

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Your son Vikarna dashes up to Chitrasena and lifts him on to his own chariot. As the relentless war, fought at terror's very heart, continues, Bhishma attacks Yudhishtira. The Srinjayas, despite their chariots, elephants and horses, tremble to see the utterly frightening grandsire, and they believe Yudhishtira to be near his end.

Yudhishtira, accompanied by the twins, presses forward towards Bhishma, most illustrious archer, tiger among tigers among men. He shrouds Bhishma with thousands of arrows, clouds hiding the sun. And those countless arrows, so skilfully shot by Yudhishtira, reach the son of Ganga in distinct flights of hundreds and thousands.

And Bhishma responds by releasing a myriad shafts that are like dense locust swarms. In a flash, Bhishma mantles Kunti's son in several cerements of arrows which he looses in tide upon tide. Yudhishtira, stung, responds with an elongated nagapasa with venomous jade scales. Maharatha Bhishma destroys Yudhishtira's shaft in the air with a horse-shoe headed arrow.

Bhishma slaughters Yudhishtira's gold decked horses and the Pandava king abandons his horseless chariot and swiftly mounts Nakula's. Bhishma, conqueror of hostile cities, confronting the twins in battle, covers them entirely with his arrows. Seeing his afflicted brothers, Yudhishtira begins to seriously plot Bhishma's end.

He goads his friends and allies to the deed, crying, "Unite and kill Bhishma!" Hearing these words, the kings surround the Pitamaha with many chariots. But Bhishma, almost playfully, fells the maharathas, one after the other with his transcendent archery.

The Pandavas helplessly watch Bhishma thundering all over the battlefield, Bhishma like a young lion in a forest amidst a herd of deer. Roaring, he terrifies the bravest warriors; all the gathered Kshatriyas before him are like lesser animals before a lion. They see his swirling majestic movements in his chariot as being like a blazing wind-blown inferno devouring a heap of dry grass.

And Bhishma beheads maharathas like a forester felling ripe fruits from palmyra trees with stones. And those heads of helmeted soldiers fall upon the earth with the clatter of cascading rocks.

As that dreadful battle rages, utter chaos reigns among the armies. The carefully deployed legions of both armies fall into complete disarray. And the Kshatriyas challenge one another to individual combat.

Sikhandin charges at the Pitamaha, shouting to him to stop and fight. But Bhishma thinks of the princess Amba that Sikhandin once was, and disdaining him, advances against the Srinjayas who are delighted at seeing him approach. They cheer deafeningly and blast their conches.

Another bloodthirsty battle erupts in which chariots and elephants are mangled, and a thousand good fighting men die each moment. And the day passes as in a scarlet nightmare.

Dhrishtadyumna, prince of the Panchalas, and maharatha Satyaki are tormented by a barrage of arrows and spears aimed at them. With riptides of fire they begin to burn columns and columns of your warriors. Though under fiery siege, your forces do not retreat, but fight back bravely by now determined to die for honour if they must. Slaughtered by the illustrious son of Drupada, they cry out in anguish and fall in waves into the sea of blood which spreads everywhere and congeals upon sacred ground.

Hearing the desperate screams of those dying legions, maharathas Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti ride in a froth at Dhrishtadyumna at his horrible sacrifice of living men. Abruptly killing his horses, they envelop him in deadly storms of dark arrows. The prince of the Panchalas leaps off his chariot and mounts that of the noble Satyaki.

King Yudhishtira, supported by a vast akshauhini, rides against the two enraged princes of Avanti. And your son surrounds them defensively.

Arjuna fights against many bulls of the Kshatriya race, like Indra against the Asuras. Drona, always ready to defend your son, begins to devour the Panchalas like fire consuming a heap of cotton. Your other sons, Rajan, loyal to Duryodhana, surround Bhishma, and confront the Pandavas.

When the evening sun turns red, Duryodhana says to your forces, “Hurry!” And as the sun sets behind the western hill, and the soldiers accomplish difficult feats, the ghastly river of blood flows and swells, infested by jackals.

And the battlefield turns hideous, full of spectres, and the jackals howl, portending further evil. Thousands of Rakshasas and Pisachas and other

flesh eaters and blood drinkers are seen all round.

Having routed the kings led by Susarman and their soldiers, in the very midst of their akshauhini, Arjuna returns to his tent. And Yudhishtira and his brothers, followed by his men, withdraw to theirs.

Bhima, too, having brought deadly havoc among Duryodhana's warriors, returns to his tent. And Duryodhana, with his troops, after defending Bhishma successfully another savage day, turns back to his.

And Drona, and Drona's son, and Kripa, and Salya, and Kritavarman of the Satwata vamsa, all of the Dhartarashtra army, retire to their tents. Satyaki too and Dhrishtadyumna, the son of Prishata, shepherding their army, withdraw towards theirs.

Thus those fearless chastisers of enemies, your forces and the Pandavas, stop fighting at sunset. Both the Pandavas and the Kauravas enter their tents and praise one another.

Making arrangements for the protection of their fearless legions through the night, having their watch posts manned, they pluck out the day's arrows from their bodies and bathe in many kinds of water. And Brahmanas perform propitiatory rites for them, and poets sing their praises.

Those illustrious men amuse themselves with singing and instruments. And for a while the whole place resembles heaven itself! Those bulls among men do not speak of the war. And when both armies sleep, exhausted men and elephants and horses, they are serene and beautiful to watch.'

CANTO 88

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Having passed the night in sound sleep, at daybreak the Kauravas and the Pandavas once more advance into battle. As they come onto the battleground again, a great deep sound like the roar of the ocean is heard.

Duryodhana, and Chitrasena, and Vivimsati, and that most excellent maharatha Bhishma, and Drona, all united and in full armour, expertly array the Kaurava vyuha against the Pandavas. Fierce as the stormy sea, with horses and tuskers for its billows and current, the Pitamaha leads that dwindled but still vast army, supported by the Avantis and the Malavas, the people of the southern kingdoms.

Beside him is the noble son of Bharadwaja, with the Pulindas, the Paradas, and the Kshudraka-Malavas. The valiant and stalwart Bhagadatta is in your ranks, along with the Magadhas, the Kalingas, and the ghoulish Pisachas.

Behind Bhagadatta is Brihadbala king of the Kosalas with the Melakas, the Tripuras, and the Chichilas. Next to Brihadbala is the brave Trigarta, king of the Prasthala, surrounded by a vast number of the Kambojas, and by Yavanas in thousands.

Next to the lord of the Trigartas, Bhaarata, advances that mighty Kshatriya, Aswatthaman son of Drona, filling the earth with leonine roars. Alongside is king Duryodhana himself with his entire army, surrounded by his magnificent brothers. Behind Duryodhana rides Kripa the son of Saradwat.

Thus, that mighty vyuha, resembling the turbulent ocean, presses into battle. And standards and royal white parasols, beautiful bracelets and costly bows, shine radiantly. Watching the enemy advance, maharatha Yudhishtira says to Dhrishtadyumna, "'Behold that oceanic vyuha! O son of Drupada, create another swiftly to contain and destroy it."

The gallant Dhrishtadyumna forms the Sringataka vyuha, which is known to raze all other vyuhas. At its horns are Bhima and Satyaki, with thousands of chariots, horsemen and foot-soldiers. Near them is Arjuna,

with his chariot yoked to white horses driven by Krishna. In the centre stand Yudhishtira and Madri's twin sons.

Other royal archers, all knowers of the vyuha shastra, with their forces, fill the remaining spaces. Abhimanyu, and Virata, the sons of Draupadi and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha are told to bring up and defend the rear.

Having created this awesome vyuha, the noble Pandavas stand on the field, longing for battle and eager for victory. And the crashing of drums mingles with the blast of conches; the leonine roars of the soldiers and the slapping of their armpits are thunderous and fill every direction.

Those mighty warriors advance, and stare across Kurukshetra, field of dharma, chasmic field of death, unwinkingly. After a moment's perfect silence they erupt into fierce roars and yells, challenging each other, and attack! The war on the crack of the ages between your sons and their enemies, their cousins, resumes beneath its enveloping canopy of wrath.

Quickly lethal shafts fall like showers of serpents with mouths agape, and polished gleaming barbs rain down like gashes of lightning. Glittering maces loosed from bright slings fly up and whistle down over the enemy in batteries of thunder and blue swords and leather shields decked with a hundred moons look wondrous as they adorn the field of endless death.

The two hostile armies look at once awful and resplendent, like the Devas and Asuras fighting each other. In every direction they storm against one another, and the air is a thick hoarseness of roars and screams.

Celebrated maharathas crash violently into others, the yokes of their chariots tangling with those of their opponents. The friction of the tusks of elephants as they collide sets off flashes of fire and smoke.

Warriors on the backs of elephants, struck through with spears, fall like loosened rocks from hillsides. And the spectacle of foot-soldiers, fighting with bare arms or impaling one another with spears, is both magnificent and poignant.

With unending banks of arrows of every size and description, Kaurava and Pandava warriors mow each other down as if in some terrible game, a nightmare difficult to conceive. Bhishma charges the Pandavas, filling the air with the clatter of his chariot, while the twang of his bowstring petrifies his enemies all over again.

The resolute Pandava maharathas, led by Dhrishtadyumna, roar stridently and rush at him. This ignites a general battle between the foot-soldiers, chariot warriors, and elephants of both sides, in which countless

bright fighting men, old and young, killing and dying, become tangled with one another, their bodies and already written destinies.’

CANTO 89

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'The Pandavas cannot even look upon Bhishma who rages over the battleground scorching every side like the Sun himself. The Pandava army, commanded by Yudhishtira, attacks the son of Ganga who destroys everything around him with blazing tides from his noble bow.

In elation, Bhishma razes the best of the Srinjaya and the Panchala archers. Yet the Panchalas and the Somakas continue to attack him with no thought for their lives. Bhishma severs the arms and heads of their maharathas. He smashes their chariots. And the heads of horsemen fall like eerie hail as they are hewn off in vermilion blasts.

We see countless war elephants, paralysed by Bhishma's astras, sprawled like hills on the ground, their riders crushed under them. None among the Pandavas can resist Bhishma, but only the formidable Bhima. Bhima rides to face his Pitamaha in battle, scything a bloody path through the Kaurava ranks, who roar or scream at him even as kills them. The jubilant Pandavas too roar like lions to see the carnage Bhima inflicts on the enemy.

Duryodhana, surrounded by his brothers, protects Bhishma. Inexorable Bhima still thunders up and beheads Bhishma's charioteer. Uncontrolled, his horses run wildly from the field, dragging their chariot behind them. Bhima decapitates Sunabha with horse-shoe headed arrow, so that son of yours falls out from his chariot. Seven of his brothers watch this cool brutal slaying and cannot bear it.

Adityaketu and Bahavasin, Kundadhara and Mahodara, and Aparajita, and Panditaka and the invincible Visalaksha, dressed in silver-flecked armour and carrying splendid weapons, attack Bhima in fury. Mahodara pierces Bhima with nine thunderbolt like arrows, quite like Indra assailing the great Asura Namuchi.

Adityaketu stabs him with seventy shafts and Bahavasin with five. Kundadhara strikes him with ninety barbs and Visalaksha with seven. And that conqueror of enemies, the maharatha Aparajita makes Bhima's mighty

body a home for countless smoking barbs. And Panditaka also pierces him with three shafts.

Bhima does not flinch, instead he laughs, roars, in echoing peals and roars to make your sons' blood run cold. His bow firmly held in his left hand, Vrikodara of the cavernous appetites sloughs off your son Aparajita's most handsome head. And that head falls to the ground and rolls some way like some grisly ball.

While both armies watch transfixed, Bhima cuts your son Kundadhara's body in two with an exceptional sword-headed arrow. His next shaft, Rajan, is aimed at Panditaka and its rips through his armour so his heart bursts in a hot red font, and passing clean through your son's body, that irresistible barb burrows into the ground like a snake entering its hole after claiming its marked victim.

In great joy now, for he thinks of all the pain and shame your sons inflicted on him in the past, he cuts away Visalaksha's head. Bhima strikes the mighty Mahodara square through his chest with an interminable arrow which excoriates this next son of yours and your prince plunges lifeless to the ground. Slashing down Adityaketu's royal chatra with one light like shaft, he beheads this boy of yours as well with another. Animated, roaring, roaring all the while, Bhima next kills Bahavasin in a bright red flash of gore.

Suddenly remembering the solemn oath that dreadful Bhima swore in the Kuru sabha, that he would kill every one of your sons, your other princes panic and flee from him. Stricken, sobbing, wailing to watch the brutal death of his brothers, Duryodhana roars at his forces, "There stands Bhima, preening. Destroy him!"

And your sons, those famed archers, seeing their brothers killed, painfully remember the wise and precious warning and counsel of the dignified and upright Vidura. For whatever nemesis he warned them of they now see unfolding before their eyes. Indeed, Rajan, everything that Vidura warned you of is coming to pass on Kurukshetra, field of dharma, field of death. But then you were blinded not just in your eyes, but your very heart by your greed, your foolishness and your inordinate love for your sons.

Ah, to watch that mahabaho decimating the Kauravas, it is amply clear that Bhima has undoubtedly been born to kill all your sons.

Overwhelmed by sorrow, Duryodhana rides up to Bhishma, and laments, "Bhima slaughters my brave brothers in battle like animals in a hunt. Our

forces fight courageously, but they are failing. You seem to be an indifferent spectator, unconcerned about our fortunes. What terrible path have I taken? Ah, behold my evil destiny.”’

Sanjaya continues, ‘Hearing Duryodhana’s sad and cruel outburst, Bhishma’s eyes fill with tears, and he says, “I said this before, as did Drona, Vidura, and the revered Gandhari. O my child, you did not understand it then. Parantapa, I have long ago determined that neither I nor Drona will leave this war alive.

But I also tell you this: Bhima will kill all whom he targets in this war. So muster your fortitude, and firmly resolved on battle, fight the sons of Pritha, making only Swarga your goal. As for the Pandavas, with Krishna on their side, they cannot be vanquished by the very Devas. Be resolute and brave; fight, O Bhaarata!”’

CANTO 90

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Seeing so many of my sons killed by a single man, Sanjaya, how do Bhishma and Drona and Kripa respond?

Day after day my sons are being slaughtered. Ah, I believe they are being overtaken by dark destiny; for they seem unable to find victory and always appear to face defeat. If my sons are being overcome despite Drona and Bhishma, and the high-souled Kripa, and Somadatta's gallant son, and Bhagadatta, Aswatthaman and other invincible heroes being with them, it can only be the will of fate.

Though reproached by me, Bhishma and Vidura, heinous Duryodhana paid no heed to what we said. Gandhari, too, warned him, but the dissolute Suyodhana did not realise his folly. And his folly now results in the death of my reckless sons at the hands of Bhima, day after day in battle.'

Sanjaya says, 'You yourself did not then understand Vidura's august words spoken for your good, but they have now come true. Vidura said, "Restrain your sons from gambling."

Like a man whose hour is come, refusing the remedy which can save him, you did not listen to the counsel of your well-wishers. The words of the righteous are being fulfilled and the Kauravas now perish for disregarding what the wise Vidura and Drona and Bhishma and other well-wishers warned them about. Why, O king, the dark omens portending the unthinkable tragedy which would ineluctably unfold were in evidence even when you refused to listen to their dire warnings.

It is far too late now and you cannot turn time back. So listen instead to my narration of the war exactly as it happens.

At noon, the battle turns even more savage and bloody. At the command of Dharma's son, the Pandava forces charge Bhishma yet again, always seeking to kill him. Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin, and maharatha Satyaki, with their spirited legions, ride at Bhishma as he stands alone like some great and unassailable column of light and death looming over Kurukshetra.

Maharathas Virata and Drupada, with all the Somakas, attack the solitary Bhishma. And the Kaikeyas, and Dhrishtaketu, and Kuntibhoja,

armoured and bolstered by their forces, advance against the grandsire. Arjuna and the sons of Draupadi, and the fierce Chekitana press forward against all the kings commanded by Duryodhana who protect Bhishma. The noble Abhimanyu, terrible Ghatotkacha, and the smouldering Bhima fall upon the remaining Kauravas.

These three Pandava legions begin to slaughter the Kauravas, and the Kauravas also kill their enemy in ever mounting numbers. Drona assails the Somakas and the Srinjayas, meaning to raze them from the face of the earth. Shrill cries of anguish rise among the brave Srinjayas as they are mown down by Drona's remorseless tide of fire.

Countless Kshatriyas, struck by Drona, shudder and writhe in agony like men in the grip of some terrible disease. All over the field wounded men moan, some scream in pain, some groan hollowly like men dying of thirst or starvation.

And so also, like a second Yama, Bhima ravages the Kaurava forces. The river of blood swells and surges frothing across Kurukshetra and every moment hundreds of souls increase the population of Yama's kingdom. Bhima runs amok among the elephant akshauhini of the Kauravas, striking the great beasts down at will with arrows and mace, so their trumpeting rings horribly with the screams and mortal cries of dying men and their blood foams copiously into the ankle-deep lake of gore which spreads across the field of horror.

Struck with Bhima's shafts, some of those tuskers plunge to the ground, some are paralysed and cannot move, some bellow in pain, while others run dementedly everywhere crushing men and chariots of both armies. Majestic elephants, their trunks cut off and limbs mangled, scream like cranes, and briefly pirouette ungainly before plummeting to the ground, shaking the earth.

Nakula and Sahadeva are at the Kaurava horsemen. Thousands of the finest horses, wearing garlands of gold on their heads and golden jewels on their necks and chests, are butchered by the radiant twins. The earth is strewn with handsome fallen steeds. Some have had their tongues cut away; some lying limbs askew with wild eyes, their flanks heaving; some whinny weakly in agony, while others are still, no movement or breath stirring in them and their noble spirits fled. The field of war presents a strange and unnerving sight, adorned with fallen horses of many breeds and colours.

The very earth looks fiercely resplendent, with the bodies of countless kings killed by Arjuna; and with broken chariots, slashed banners and brilliant parasols, with rent chamaras and fans, and mighty ayudhas smashed in pieces, with garlands and gold necklaces, with jewelled bracelets, with heads still decked with ear-rings, with crowns fallen from royal heads, with standards, with jutting bases of beautiful chariots ruined, O Rajan, and with traces and reins Bhumi Devi is as radiant as she is in spring when strewn with flowers. But with such a grim and eerie splendour.

Bhaarata, thus the Pandava host is devastated when Bhishma and Drona, and Aswatthaman, and Kripa and Kritavarman fight with their utmost ferocity, while your army also faces similar devastation when the Pandava heroes unleash their long withheld simmering rage and put forth their might.'

CANTO 91

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'As that war greater and more horrible than any other continues to claim brave Kshatriyas all around, Sakuni charges the Pandavas. Hridika's son of the Satwata vamsa also rides at them.

Suddenly, joyfully, as if some hidden tide has turned in their favour, your warriors encircle the Pandava army; their horses are the best of the Kamboja breed and those born in the northern plains, those of Aratta and Mahi and Sindhu, Vanayu's white horses, and those of the mountain kingdoms. The Tittiri horses, swift as the winds, surround the Pandavas. And with swift, mail-covered horses, decked with gold, Parantapa Iravat, son of Arjuna, rides at the Kaurava legion.

Iravat is the son of Arjuna, born to the daughter of the king of the Nagas who was vulnerable and despondent when her husband was killed by Garuda. Childless, she was given to Arjuna by Airavat. Partha took her to be his wife for she desired him. Thus that son of Arjuna was born to the wife of another.

Abandoned by his uncle who hated Arjuna, he was raised among the Nagas, protected by his mother. He grew up handsome, strong and accomplished, with unassailable strength and many occult powers. Hearing that Arjuna had gone to Indraloka, he promptly went there. He approached his father and greeted him with folded hands. He introduced himself to Arjuna, saying, "I am Iravat. Blessed are you, and I am your son."

He reminded Arjuna of the circumstances of the Kshatriya's meeting with his mother. Arjuna embraced his son who was so like him in heroic deeds, and exulted. Mahabaho Iravat was then joyously commanded by Arjuna, "When the war begins, you shall fight for us." Agreeing happily, Iravat left.

And now at the hour of battle he presents himself, with many swift and beautifully coloured horses. Decked with gold ornaments, they glide across the field like swans on the surface of a lake. Those stallions dash headlong against yours and both fall to the ground with a reverberation like the swish of Garuda's wings. And the horse-riders hack one another down. The

riderless chargers of both sides break free and scatter wildly in every direction.

Their strength sapped by receiving so many arrows upon their splendid bodies, their horses killed under them, brave Kshatriya horsemen stagger exhaustedly on Kurukshetra and die. When those legions of horses diminish and only a few survive, the younger brothers of Sakuni ride out of the Kaurava vyuha to the front, mounted on fresh, rested, well trained chargers, neither old nor young, swift and forceful as a gale.

Those six powerful brothers, Gaya, Gavaksha, Vrishava, Charmavat, Aarjavam, and Suka storm out of the Kaurava vyuha. They are supported by Sakuni and by their ardent fighting men, all wearing armour. Breaking through the hitherto inviolable Pandava legion of horsemen, those indomitable and jubilant Gandhara warriors penetrate deep into it, longing for victory or death and the bliss of heaven.

Seeing these exhilarated warriors, Iravat says to his bejewelled Naga soldiers, "Destroy these, their astras and their beasts." And his uncanny fighters, many of them half human and half great serpents, begin to cold-bloodedly harvest the onrushing cavalry of spirited Dhartarashtra warriors.

Watching their horsemen being coolly erased by Iravat's nerveless legion, the distraught sons of Subala charge Iravat and surround him. Their forces attack Iravat and his Naga cavalcade with spears, and gory pandemonium rules all Kurukshetra.

Pierced with deep spears and drenched in blood pouring free from his wounds, Iravat looks like an elephant repeatedly pierced with a hook. Though wounded deeply in his chest, back, and thighs, he faces his adversaries alone and never wavers, not for a moment, Arjuna's heroic son.

Iravat stuns his rivals with a tornado of arrows so they swoon. That parantapa rips out the spears from his body, and flings them back at the sons of Subala striking them deep. He charges them with sword and shield in hand to kill them. They recover consciousness and attack him ferociously. Undaunted, Iravat continues to run at them, blade upraised. So swiftly does he weave and run, that even on their fleet chargers they cannot accost him.

His enemies ring him round and try to capture him. But as they near him that parantapa hacks off their arms in a flurry and hacks away the legs of some. Their ornamented arms and weapons fall, and Arjuna's terrifying Naga son cuts off their heads all around.

Only the wounded Vrishava, Rajan, escapes alive from Iravat. Seeing those valiant Kshatriyas killed in moments, Duryodhana says to the sinister Alambusha, master of maya, who loathes Bhima for having killed his brother Baka once, "Look how Iravat has slaughtered my troops. You, too, have maya at your command and can go anywhere at will. You loathe Arjuna. Now kill his son in battle."

Alambusha roars like a lion and, with the fiendish Rakshasas of his akshauhini, wielding weirdly shining spears, charge Iravat. With the remainder of the Kaurava horsemen, too, Alambusha rushes at the mighty Iravat, who covers him in blizzard of arrows in the twinkling of an eye. Immediately, the Rakshasa begins to uses sorcery against the Naga prince. He conjures illusory chargers ridden by Rakshasas armed with spears and axes.

Two thousand die in moments in the battle between Iravat and Alambusha, and the two of them quickly come face to face like Vasava and Vritra. As Alambusha closes on him, Iravat cleaves his bow with his sword, and, whirling like some dervish, cuts down the Rakshasa's arrows all round him.

Alambusha flies up into the air and flitting here and there, changing his form moment to moment, tries to confound Iravat with maya. But Iravat can also shift his shape at will, and baffles Alambusha with his chimeras, and swiftly hacks off the fiend's arms and legs, shredding them with lightning sword strokes.

But lo, Alambusha reappears in a wink, now with a youthful appearance. Making illusion is natural to rakshasas, and they can choose their age and form at will. The Rakshasa's severed limbs join magically together and are now darkly splendid and rippling with youth and vigour. With a howl, Iravat hacks at Alambusha with his axe, like a woodsman cutting down a tree, mangling him again so his blood flows in rills. Alambusha's horrible roaring echoes across the field entirely patinaed with a skin of blood.

Yet again, Alambusha's desiccated body rejoins miraculously and now assuming a more macabre form than any he yet has, he rushes forward to try to seize Iravat bodily. Arjuna's son never flees a battle. Quickly a great Naga, a kinsman of his mother, appears at his side, and through that uncle's maya, Iravat is surrounded by his serpentine kin.

Surrounded by glimmering emerald-scaled Nagas, Iravat assumes a form as vast as Ananta himself. He then mantles monstrous Alambusha in a

writhing mass of snakes. The Rakshasa reflects for only a moment and, assuming the form of Garuda, devours those snakes and Iravat's uncle with them. Seeing that Naga of his mother's line consumed through illusion, Iravat is momentarily confounded. In that moment, the Rakshasa kills him with his sword; Iravat's crowned head, lovely as a lotus, beautiful as the moon, rolls to the ground.

When Arjuna's noble son is slain by the Rakshasa, the Dhartarashtra legions erupt in celebration. Conches boom and drumrolls fill the air thick with ghosts of men and their beasts dying in thousands all the while, and hardly aware yet they have been killed.

What a bloodletting there is on both sides in the war on Kurukshetra. Horses and elephants and foot-soldiers are killed by rampaging tuskers, gored and trampled. And glossy steeds and countless elephants are felled by swarming foot-soldiers. Maharathas annihilate chariots and warriors in numbers that cannot be counted or told as death's hurricane swirls on, only mounting in savagery by the passing day, by the hour.

Unaware of his son's death, Arjuna continues to decimate the kings who shield Bhishma. The warriors of your army and the Srinjayas sacrifice their lives by the thousands as libations in the yagna fire of war. And having lost their swords and bows, many maharathas, with dishevelled hair, fight with their bare arms.

Bhishma kills so many maharathas with supernal astras of wind, fire and shafts of solid water and the Pandava forces tremble before him. He massacres horses, elephants, horsemen and chariot warriors without favour, the river of blood surging before him most of all. Surely, Bhishma's prowess appears equal to Sakra's.

The fearsome valour of Bhima and Parshata is no less than Bhishma's, and scintillating handsome Satyaki's no less than theirs. Yet on this day the Pandavas are most fearful when they see Drona put forth his might. They think: "Drona can destroy us and our forces singlehandedly. What can he not do when he has a legion of maharathas with him?" Even Arjuna thinks like this and is afraid to watch his Acharya sow death all around him as casually as a farmer sowing seeds in a fertile, darkling field.

With every passing hour of war, the warriors of both sides become more ruthless and cruel, as if demons possess them and impel them to commit every atrocity they can. Quickly the war, which began with noble covenants

being made between both armies, degenerates in this horrible contention that is like a fell carnage between two Rakshasa hosts.'

CANTO 92

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Tell me, Sanjaya, how does Arjuna respond when the Pandavas learn that Iravat is dead?’

Sanjaya says, ‘Seeing his cousin Iravat slain, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha roars terribly again and again in anguish. And the earth, with her oceans and mountains and forests, trembles. The sky and the four quarters of the world shudder.

Hearing those roars, the legs and arms of warriors quiver, and they sweat profusely. Your army is terrified. Everywhere, your soldiers stand frozen, like a herd of tame elephants fearing the charging lion.

With shattering roar after roar, Ghatotkacha assumes a truly terrifying form; with a raised flaming spear, encircled by many fierce Rakshasas all wielding astras, he charges in wrath like Siva at the end of the yuga. Seeing him come like some plague and his own troops scatter in absolute panic, Duryodhana, roaring like a pride of lions, rides headlong at the wild Rakshasa loosing a rage of flaming arrows at Ghatotkacha. Behind Duryodhana rides the king of the Vangas, with ten thousand great tuskers with musth juice trickling down.

The sight of your son with a legion of elephants angers Ghatotkacha further and his slanted eyes seem to spew flames. A pitched battle, that makes the hair stand on end, breaks out between him and Duryodhana. Seeing the lumbering elephant force towering on the horizon, the infuriated Rakshasas rush at it, weapons in hand, thundering forward like clouds charged with lightning, with chilling cries and yells. With sword and arrow, spear and mallet and rough hewn axe, they begin to raze that elephant host.

They kill majestic tuskers with great rocks and uprooted trees. As the Rakshasas demolish the elephants, we see some of the mighty beasts with their frontal globes smashed, some bathed entirely in their own blood, others with their limbs mangled or trunks sliced off leaving blood spraying hollow stumps whistling.

As his elephant host is laid waste, Duryodhana charges the Rakshasa horde recklessly. He looses cataracts of arrows at Ghatotkacha’s legion of

night, killing any number of those dark and excellent warriors. Inflamed, Suyodhana strikes four of the best and most dangerous Rakshasas, Vegavat, Maharudra, Vidyujihva and Pramathin, with four particularly deadly arrows and swathes the entire fell force in a calorific mantle of arrows. Many handsome and magnificent Rakshasas perish.

Bhima's wild son blazes up at your son's success. He draws his resplendent bow and charges Duryodhana. But your son is unperturbed at seeing Ghatotkacha storming towards him like Yama at Siva's bidding.

With fiery eyes, Ghatotkacha says to Duryodhana, "Today I will be released from my debt to my elders, and my mother; they were exiled by your vile game of dice. You dragged Drupada's daughter Krishnaa, in her period and clad in a single garment, into the Kuru sabha and humiliated her. Your persecution did not end there, and at your command, Jayadratha of the Sindhus tried to ravish her in the forest. Wretched Duryodhana, if you do not surrender, I will avenge all those injuries today!"

With that, Hidimbi's son bites his lower lip with his fangs, and licking the corners of his mouth with his long sharp tongue, covers Duryodhana in a scathing tide of arrows.'

CANTO 93

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, ‘Duryodhana calmly bears that storm of arrows, hard even for the Danavas to withstand, like a bull elephant, lord of his herd, enduring the rains. Bharatarishabha, your son is in grave danger, but heedless of it he looses twenty five keen arrows, which flash to strike great Ghatotkacha, like poisonous snakes on the chest of Gandhamadana. Pierced by those shafts, blood trickles down the Rakshasa’s body and he looks like an elephant with rent temples and juices flowing down.

Ghatotkacha turns his attention on Duryodhana, to kill your son no less. He seizes up an enormous spear, which could rive even a mountain. He chants an arcane mantra over it and it begins to blaze with light, like a comet, like a streak of lightning in his awesome hands. The Rakshasa raises it high above his head to cast it at Duryodhana, certainly impaling him, having his life.

Even as the recondite and dreadful thing burns and fizzes in Ghatotkacha’s hand, Bhagadatta king of the Vangas, riding an elephant taller than any other, the peerless Supritika, thunders and sets himself squarely between Suyodhana and the Rakshasa, shielding your son completely.

Ghatotkacha fumes to see his intention foiled and casts his incendiary lance at Bhagadatta’s elephant instead. Supritika gives a most abysmal bellow as the fiery ayudha strikes him with a huge explosion, blasting a gaping hole in his side, blowing his great heart to shreds, and slowly, his eyes screaming a legend of grief and pain that lord of all mountain elephants buckles at his knees and falls over dead, shaking the earth. Bhagadatta leaps down to save his life, with a heartbroken roar to see his beloved beast die.

Duryodhana is anguished to see that prince among elephants killed and his troops give way to the wave of despair that sweeps over them and they run in dismay in every direction. But steadfast himself, cleaving to his Kshatriya dharma and his dignity, and full of fresh wrath, the Kaurava king

unleashes an astra seemingly made of the flames of the pralaya at Ghatotkacha.

With alacrity, Ghatotkacha thwarts that burning shaft in flight. He seems to grow even taller with the mahima siddhi he commands and looming like some great shadow over the cowering Kaurava legions, his eyes shining crimson red with rage, he gives a roar truly like a thundercloud's, so your warriors stand rooted and trembling before him. Again and again, Ghatotkacha roars and all Kurukshetra quakes to hear him.

Hearing him, Bhishma rides up to Drona and says, "Hidimbi's son is battling Duryodhana and no creature on earth can quell Ghatotkacha. O blessed one, go and protect the king or the Rakshasa will have his life today. Hurry Drona, and all your parantapas, this is our highest dharma!"

Drona and the other maharathas rush towards where the king of the Kauravas stands facing the roaring Rakshasa. They meet Duryodhana and Somadatta, Bahlika and Jayadratha, Kripa and Bhurisravas and Salya, and the two princes of Avanti, along with Brihadbala, Aswatthaman and Vikarna, Chitrasena and Vivimsati, all in the thick of the wheeling, whirling, blood spraying battle.

Thousands of other maharathas and their legions press forward to defend your son who is being cornered. Seeing those invincible forces dash towards him, Ghatotkacha stands unyielding as the Mainaka mountain, bow in hand, surrounded by his fiendish kinsmen armed with clubs and mallets and many astras.

The Rakshasas on one side and the best of Duryodhana's akshauhinis on the other launch into a mortifying battle. The twang of bows everywhere is like the ear-splitting cracks of burning bamboos cracking at their knots. The clatter of weapons falling upon coats of mail is as deafening as mountains shattering. Spears hurled by noble arms course through the sky like snakes.

Ghatotkacha raises his enormous bow, roars like a pride of lions, and cleaves Drona's bow with a strange, curved arrow. He fells Somadatta's standard with another broad-headed one. He pierces Bahlika with three shafts through his chest. He strikes Kripa with one arrow and Chitrasena with three. With another swift one from his fully stretched bow, he strikes Vikarna in the shoulder. Spouting blood, Vikarna falls to the floor of his chariot.

The Rakshasa vigorously drives fifteen shafts into Bhurisravas; they pierce through his armour and flesh and enter the earth. He smashes the

chariots of Vivimsati and Aswatthaman. They drop the reins of their horses, and fall to the ground.

With another crescent-tipped arrow he fells Jayadratha's standard bearing the emblem of a golden boar; with a shaft he rives the Sindhu king's bow. In frightful rage, he kills the king of Avanti's four horses with four unerring barbs. With another well tempered shaft, he stabs king Brihadbala deep, and the wounded king stumbles in his chariot. Never pausing, Ghatotkacha looses a clutch of serpentine narachas, which pierce the celebrated Salya.'

CANTO 94

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Having scattered all your warriors, the rampant Rakshasa attacks Duryodhana, at which many indomitable warriors of your army rise up to kill Ghatotkacha.

Those maharathas draw their mighty bows and charge at him, roaring like a countless lions. Surrounding him, they lash him with arrows like clouds belabouring a mountain with torrential rain. Deeply struck and in agony Ghatotkacha is like an elephant pierced repeatedly with a cruel hook. Then, like Garuda, he soars up into the sky, from where he thunders like stormclouds, and his fierce roaring resounds in every direction.

Hearing the Rakshasa's roars, Yudhishtira says to Bhima, "Listen to Ghatotkacha! For certain he is battling the maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army. The Pitamaha stands always ready to slaughter the Panchalas and Arjuna fights to protect them. Mahabaho, both these tasks demand your immediate attention; go and support Hidimbi's son who is in grave danger."

Bhima advances swiftly, terrifying the enemy with his tigerish roars that sound like the ocean at full moon. The valiant Satyadhriti and Sauchiti, and Srenimat and Vasudana, and the powerful son of the king of Kasi, all follow Bhima Vrikodara. Countless other rathikas led by Abhimanyu, and by the sons of Draupadi, and the bold Kshatradeva, and Kshatradharman, and Nila follow these. To protect Ghatotkacha they encircle him with a great force of chariots and six thousand war elephants.

Their loud shouts and roars, the thunder of their horses' hooves and the clatter of their chariot wheels make the earth shudder. Hearing that tumult, your anxious forces, ever fearing Bhima, turn ashen. Leaving Ghatotkacha, they flee. An unrelenting battle breaks out between those high-souled warriors and yours. Maharathas unleash astras at each other.

The war makes the brave exult and strikes terror into the hearts of the timid, as horsemen and elephant warriors face each other, and foot-soldiers and maharathikas. Absolutely possessed by the spirit of battle and bloodlust, they fight blindly, in rage.

In that seething ferment of chariots, horses, elephants, and foot-soldiers, a pall of dust rises from chariot wheels and the running feet of men and animals. Impenetrable, like red smoke, it obscures Kurukshetra. The warriors cannot distinguish friend from enemy. The father does not recognise the son, nor the son the father, in that vicious, unfeeling war which makes one's hair stand on end.

The ceaseless ominous whine of coursing weapons and the roars and screams of fighting men are like the howls of dead souls in torment. The blood of men and their beasts flows in frothing rivers; warriors' hair upon dissevered heads form its ghastly weeds and moss. Indeed, severed heads fall like hail on Kurukshetra. The earth is scattered with headless corpses of men, alongside mangled bodies of elephants and hacked limbs and bodies of horses.

Maharathas pursue each other and loose elemental astras to consume the enemy. Chargers, goaded by their riders, dash against others and fall down dead, their wild eyes glazing over in death. And men with burning, mad eyes, who have lost their weapons, dash against each other breastplate on breastplate, helmet on helmet, and fall stunned. Cruelly prodded by their mahouts, elephants gore other elephants disembowelling one another. Covered with bleeding wounds, their backs decked with standards, they are seen locked horribly, inextricably into each other like clouds charged with ivory lightning.

Some lie on top of others; some have their frontal lobes split with spears; they run wildly thundering like roaring clouds. Some, with their trunks lopped off, others with mangled limbs, plunge to the ground like mountains shorn of their wings of old by Indra. Other majestic tuskers bleed copiously, their sides ripped open; they look like mountains with red muddy streams gushing down their sides after a cloudburst. Others, riderless and pierced with arrows and spears, are like mountains shorn of their peaks.

Some of the great beasts are blind with fury, with juice streaming down their temples and cheeks and over their maddened eyes; no longer guided or restrained by any goad, for their riders have fallen, they trample hundreds of chariots, horses and foot-soldiers.

Horses, attacked by horsemen with bearded arrows and spears, whinnying in pain and rage and helplessness, careen at their assailants, disturbing all the points of the compass. Noble maharathas, encountering others, all fight without fear, recklessly. All those that fight on that abysmal

field seek earthly glory or eternal life as they hew and smite and loose coruscating tumults of arrows.

Then, their spirits suddenly broken by the primeval brutality of it all, the Dhartarashtra troops quit the battle and flee the field.’

CANTO 95

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana is incensed on seeing his forces decimated and he charges Bhima. With his bow luminous as lightning, he envelops Pandu's son with a wither of arrows. He cleaves Bhima's bow with a crescent-moon-tipped winged shaft. He ruptures his detested enemy's chest with a missile with the power to split mountains. Pain screaming through him in a flash, yet Bhima remains tenacious, clasping his golden flag pole.

Seeing his father spurting blood, Ghatotkacha blazes up like a wrathful inferno. With booming shouts, a swarm of Pandava maharathas, led by Abhimanyu, attacks Duryodhana.

Seeing them, Drona says to your maharathas, "The Pandava maharathas, with Bhima at their head, hem Duryodhana in. They terrify our own warriors with squalls of fire. The king is in mortal peril, fly to protect him!"

Led by Somadatta your rathikas fall upon the Pandava ranks. Kripa and Bhurisravas and Salya, and Drona's son and Vivimsati, and Chitrasena and Vikarna, and Jayadratha, and Brihadbala, and the two princes of Avanti, encircle Bhima in a ring of protection. The Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras encounter each other a mere twenty paces apart.

Mahabaho Drona bends his colossal bow and strikes Bhima with twenty six shafts. He bedevils Vrikodara with a luciferous volley like a cloudburst upon a mountain. Mighty Bhima swiftly pierces his Acharya with ten barbs through his left side. Frail with age, and tormented by pain, Drona faints on to the floor of his chariot. Roaring, Duryodhana dashes at Bhima with Aswatthaman beside him.

Seeing them come, each like a Yama at the end of the yuga, Bhima seizes a mace, and, leaping off his chariot, he stands like a hill on the field, unyielding. Why, he is like the imposing Kailasa, as Aswatthaman and Duryodhana attack him fervidly. Bhima, who knows no fear, runs straight toward them mace aloft. So terrible is his face that the Kaurava aim great astras at him to stop him somehow. Led by Drona, they harangue him from every side. Such is the immediate danger to his life and such his disdain for

it, that the host of Pandava maharathas, led by Abhimanyu, dash forward, all of them ready to sacrifice their lives to save him.

Looking like a mass of blue clouds, heroic Nila charges Aswatthaman. A famed archer himself, he had long desired a duel with Drona's son. He strikes Aswatthaman with an irruption of winged shafts, even like Sakra who chastised Viprachitti, the Danava who once terrified the Devas and the three worlds.

Blood drenched in moments, infuriated, Aswatthaman draws his bowstring and, with a twanging as loud as Indra's thunder, unleashes a refulgence of flaming barbs at Nila. He fells Nila's standard and four horses with six rutilant shafts. With a seventh, he find Nila's chest and Nila, gushing blood, slumps down in his chariot.

Seeing Nila swoon, Ghatotkacha, with his invincible Rakshasas, falls upon Aswatthaman, who turns calmly to ride directly at his assailants. Quick as light, deadly as venom spitting king cobra, Drona's son despatches a host of Rakshasas in Ghatotkacha's vanguard. His anger stoked, Ghatotkacha uses powerful maya to create a great and demonic illusion. Aswatthaman stands bewildered and momentarily afraid. Your men run from that hellish vision, as part of which they see one another, though alive and breathing, lying dead, convulsed by death's spasms on the field of all horrors.

Drona and Duryodhana, Salya and Aswatthaman, and other noble Kaurava archers scatter before Ghatotkacha's fell sorcery. In his hallucinatory illusion, all your maharathas appear as being already routed, and all your allied kings slain. Meanwhile, the Pandava maharathas raze thousands of your horses and horsemen. Wailing, your legions escape to the safety of their tents.

Bhishma and I cry out to them, "Fight, do not run away! This is merely Rakshasa maya conjured up by Ghatotkacha."

Panic-stricken, they pay no attention to us, they do not stop. Watching this flight, the Pandavas regard themselves victorious. Along with Ghatotkacha they roar like lions. The air resounds with their shouts, the blast of their conches, and the throbbing of their drums.

By dusk, your entire army has been routed and scattered by Ghatotkacha.'

CANTO 96

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'After that rout, Duryodhana approaches Bhishma and, with a humble salutation, tells him about the defeat at the hands of Ghatotkacha.

Dejectedly he says to the Pitamaha, "O sire, relying on you, just as the Pandavas rely on Krishna, I began a fierce war with the Pandavas. Parantapa, I and my eleven akshauhinis obey your command. Despite this, I have been routed in battle by the Pandavas drawing on the powers of Ghatotkacha.

Ah, this consumes my limbs like a fire burning down a dry tree. O Parantapa, with your support and blessings, I want to crush Ghatotkacha myself. It befits you to fulfil my desire."

Bhishma says to Duryodhana, "O king, you should always conduct yourself suitably. Protect yourself in battle under every circumstance. Fight against Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, or with Arjuna, or with the twins, or with Bhima. In accordance with varnadharma, a Kshatriya must only contend with another Kshatriya.

Myself, and Drona, and Kripa, and Drona's son, and Kritavarman of the Satwata race, and Salya, and Somadatta's son, and that maharatha Vikarna, and your valiant brothers led by Dussasana, will all combine to fight the Rakshasa. Or if you are inconsolable at the carnage he brought to your legions, let Bhagadatta, who is equal to Purandara himself in war, fight Ghatotkacha."

And Bhishma says to Bhagadatta, "Advance swiftly, Rajan, against the son of Hidimbi. Engage that savage Rakshasa with caution, like Indra in ancient times did Taraka. You have divine weapons; your prowess is great. You, who have vanquished many Asuras in the past, are a true match for Ghatotkacha on the field. Backed by your vast forces, kill that bull among Rakshasas."

Hearing Bhishma's words, Bhagadatta advances towards the enemy, roaring like a lion. Seeing him approach like a storm of thunderheads, many Pandava maharathas furiously move against him: Bhima, Abhimanyu and

Ghatotkacha, the sons of Draupadi, and Satyadhriti, and Kshatradeva, and the rulers of the Chedis, and Vasudana, and the king of the Dasarnas.

Mounted on his great new elephant, Bhagadatta charges into battle. A truculent encounter erupts. Forceful shafts, shot by maharathas, fall on elephants and chariots. Majestic trained tuskers with rent temples fall upon one another. Blind with rage, with temporal juice trickling down their bodies, they gore one another with column-like tusks.

Regal horses, ridden by warriors armed with spears, are goaded to fearlessly fly at each other. And thousands of foot-soldiers, attacked by legions of foot-soldiers with spikes and arrows, plunge to the ground, their legion spirits quitting their carved and mangled bodies in thick swarms. Roaring maharathas slaughter their daring adversaries with livid coruscations of barbed arrows.

In that battle which makes one's hair stand on end, the famed Bhagadatta, mounted on his elephant of rent temples with juice trickling down in seven streams, which makes him look like a mountain with seven rivers gushing down after heavy rain, like Indra himself riding Airavata, attacks Bhima in fury. Riding on the head of his massive beast, he looses a fulmination of arrows on the hulking Pandava.

King Bhagadatta unleashes that volley on Bhima like clouds lashing rain on to a mountain at the end of summer. Incensed, Bhima kills more than a hundred fighting men that protected Bhagadatta's rear and flanks in a sanguinary flash.

Wrath surges up in Bhagadatta and he goads his elephant straight at Bhima's chariot, why, even like some unimaginable arrow from a great god's bow! Bhima leads a host of Pandava maharathas directly at the attacking elephant. These warriors are the five Kekaya princes and Abhimanyu, the five sons of Draupadi and the ruler of the Dasarnas, Kshatradeva and the ruler of the Chedis, and Chitraketu. They wield divine astras with consummate skill and prowess, and they quickly surround their opponent's elephant.

That majestic tusker, stabbed with many arrows, streams blood from his wounds, and looks resplendent like a mountain plastered with red mud after the rains. The ruler of the Dasarnas rides his elephant out towards Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta's beast contains the attack like a continent the surging sea. Seeing this remarkable resistance, even the Pandava troops applaud and marvel.

The ruler of the Pragjyotishas is enraged and casts fourteen spears at the Dasarna king's regal mammoth. Like snakes entering anthills, these pierce the tusker's gold-decked armour. Deeply pierced and sorely wounded, that elephant's fury subsides and it swiftly retreats. As it flees, it mows down the Pandava host of its own side like a gale smashing down young trees.

With their elephant defeated, the maharathas of the Pandava army roar like lions and setting Bhima at their head, storm at Bhagadatta loosing all manner of arrows and astras at him. Bhagadatta is unmoved by these weapons and the legion that surges roaring at him; instead, he goads his great prince among elephants at them, prodding it with his hook and spurred boots. That elephant provoked with hook and spur seems to assume the form of the Samvarta fire that destroys everything at the end of the yuga.

Crushing hordes of chariots, elephants and horses with their riders, it thunders about in every direction, pounding down foot-soldiers by the thousands. The vast legions of the Pandavas shrink like leather exposed to fire.

As Bhagadatta thins the Pandava vyuha, Ghatotkacha, with fiery eyes and blazing face, charges towards him. Assuming a terrible form alight with rage, he seizes a bright lance that can penetrate a mountain and hurls the flaming thing at Bhagadatta's elephant. Seeing it course towards him, the ruler of the Pragjyotishas cuts it in two with a crescent-headed arrow, and the golden spear plunges into the earth like Indra's thunderbolt.

With a shout, Bhagadatta takes a glittering spear and in a fluid blur casts it at Ghatotkacha, who leaps up into the air and seizes it in his hand. The Rakshasa snaps it like a twig against his knee before the eyes of the assembled kings. All this appears awesome. The Devas, the Gandharvas and the Munis are wonderstruck. And the Pandava warriors, led by Bhima, also cry out their praises at what Ghatotkacha incredibly does.

Bhagadatta cannot endure these exultations. He roars, draws his radiant bow, and shoots a scintillation of fire shafts at all the Pandava maharathas. He strikes Bhima with one arrow and Ghatotkacha with nine. He shoots Abhimanyu with three, and the Kekaya brothers with five. With his bow drawn in a circle, he pierces Kshatradeva's right arm deeply so that the Kshatriya's bow falls from his hand.

Bhagadatta strikes the five sons of Draupadi with five arrows; he kills Bhima's horses; with three feathered shafts, he cuts down Bhima's standard bearing the lion emblem. And with three more searing arrows he pierces

Bhima's charioteer Visoka, who plunges to the floor of his chariot in agony. Bhima leaps down from his chariot with his mace. All your forces are terrified, watching him with gada upraised, looking like a mountain peak.

As Bhima and Ghatotkacha are battling the ruler of the Pragjyotishas, Arjuna appears, slaying the enemy on all sides. He sees his embattled brothers and radiates tides of fire in every direction. Duryodhana swiftly moves his legion of chariots and elephants. Arjuna charges that Kaurava akshauhini on his chariot of white horses.

Riding his elephant, Bhagadatta crushes the Pandava ranks, and storms towards Yudhishtira. A fierce battle begins between Bhagadatta and the Panchalas, the Srinjayas and the Kekayas. Bhima narrates the details of the slaughter of Iravat to Krishna and Arjuna.'

CANTO 97

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Hearing of his son Iravat's death, Arjuna's eyes glisten with tears and he sighs deeply. He says to Krishna, "Ah, the wise Vidura Mahatman surely saw this terrible destruction of the Kauravas and Pandavas clearly with his mind's eye. And so did he warn Dhritarashtra repeatedly.

Krishna, the Kauravas have killed so many of our heroes, and we have killed many of theirs. What contemptible deeds have been done in the pursuit of kingdom and wealth! I curse these that have led to such slaughter of kinsmen.

For him who is penniless, even death would be better than acquiring a fortune by killing his relatives. Krishna, what will we gain by destroying our own blood and lineage? Duryodhana, Sakuni and Karna are to blame for the extermination of the very Kshatriya race.

I now understand, Mahabaho, that Yudhishtira was wise to ask Suyodhana for only half the kingdom, indeed for only five villages. And even that was not given. Seeing so many brave warriors lying dead on the field, I curse myself and curse the dharma of a Kshatriya.

I continue to fight only so that I am not called weak and cowardly. Otherwise, this war repulses me. Ah, drive the horses forward towards the Dhartarashtra army; let me continue with this bloodthirsty sacrifice. There is no time to lose."

And Krishna goads those fleet white horses forward, while your troops are disturbed like the stormy ocean at high tide. The battle between Bhishma and the Pandavas is dreadful and deafening like thunder.

Your sons surround Drona like the Vasus surrounding Vasava, and storm into battle against Bhima. Bhishma and maharathas Kripa, Bhagadatta and Susarman advance against Arjuna. Kritavarman and Bahlika attack Satyaki. And king Amvashta sets himself before Abhimanyu. Other great chariot-warriors clash with each other. On every side, the war is ever more fierce and gruesome.

Bhima is a fire that blazes up with offerings of ghee. Your sons shroud him with arrows, but that Kshatriya, his body and litheness like a tiger's, licks the corners of his mouth in savage glee. Bhima kills your son Vyudoroska with a horseshoe-headed arrow; with another keen shaft, he blows Kundalin's heart to shreds like a great lion killing a small cub. He covers your other sons who are close in gusts of fire, killing Anadhriti, and Kundabhedin, and Virata, and Dirghalochana, and Dirghabahu, and Subahu, and Kanykadhyaja, who topple lifeless from their chariots, Bharatarishabha, looking like mango trees sprouted with red blossoms in spring.

Your other sons flee from Bhima as if from Yama himself. Drona envelops him in a shroud of arrows. But Bhima is irresistible, his prowess astounding as he continues to massacre your sons in the face of Drona's best efforts to thwart him. Bhima laughing aloud wildly, magnificently foils Drona's intense volleys, while he continues to feed the blood and corpses of your sons to yawning thirsty Kurukshetra. He sports among your sons like a tiger among a herd of deer. Like some mythic wolf, Vrikodara terrifies your sons and kills them one after the other.

Meanwhile, Bhishma, Bhagadatta and Kripa oppose the daring Arjuna. Dhananjaya thwarts the astras of his adversaries with his own, and kills many leading warriors of your army.

Abhimanyu divests king Amvashta of his chariot with a flurry of arrows. Amvashta leaps out of his ruined ratha in shame, hurling his sword at the high-souled Abhimanyu. And he hastily mounts the chariot of Hridika's son, while Abhimanyu shatters his sword in the air. The Pandava warriors marvel at the inspired archery of Subhadra's son and cheer loudly. Others led by Dhrishtadyumna continue to raze your forces, which still stand valiant, fighting on, facing death squarely.

With great feats of daring, the war swells and plunges on, claiming thousands of lives across grisly Kurukshetra every moment. Brave fighting men seize one another by the hair, fight with their nails and teeth, fists and knees, heads and hands and swords, and strapping arms. With frightening vigour they slaughter each other.

Father and son kill one another. The soldiers fight desperately using all their limbs. Beautiful bows with golden arrows slip from the hands of fallen warriors, and precious jewels and gleaming feathered shafts lie scattered thickly across the killing field; glistening arrows resemble snakes with shed skins.

Golden swords with ivory handles, and shields dappled with gold, lie fallen on the field, blood slicked, glistening under the hazy sun. Arrows, axes, swords and spears, many decked with gold, beautiful coats of mail, and heavy and spiked clubs, and howdahs of elephants, and yak tails, and fans, are strewn everywhere.

Lifeless maharathas, still clasping their weapons, look as if they are still alive, biting bloodied lips. Their arms and legs shattered with maces and heads smashed with clubs, or crushed by elephants, horses and chariots, foot-soldiers lie like broken puppets on the crimsoned earth. The earth laden thickly with the corpses of horses, men and elephants, looks beautiful, Rajan, as if dotted with hills great and small. How copiously Kurukshetra of the terrible blood sacrifice is covered with arrows, axes, swords, spears, cudgels, satagnis and mangled bodies.

Bleeding profusely, warriors lie with limbs askew, some silent in death, others moaning in anguish. What a sight the Earth presents! Smeared with sandalwood paste and wearing fine leather gloves and golden armlets, severed arms of powerful warriors are to be seen everywhere one looks; also mighty, shapely thighs like the trunks of elephants, and fallen bejewelled turbaned heads; and all this fills the field of dread with strange and poignant beauty.

The field of the Kurus, stained with blood, covered with bloodied coats of armour and radiant ornaments, looks as if on fire. Like a beautiful woman adorned with jewels, Bhumi appears eerily lovely with scattered ornaments, bows, arrows with golden wings, smashed chariots with silvery bells, and horses with tongues lolling out, with standards, quivers, banners and great conches of heroes, and elephants with severed trunks—with all these.

Wounded elephants groan in agony and appear like shifting mountains. Colourful mantles and finely wrought hooks studded with stones of lapis lazuli, and bells, flecked cloths and deerskin, neck-chains and golden girdles that once adorned majestic tuskers, are spread across the ground as if in some great and bizarre exhibition.

Various devices lie broken by golden darts, and embroidered saddles of horses, caked with mud. The hacked arms of horsemen, decked with bracelets, are everywhere, along with shining spears and swords, and turbans fallen off noble heads.

The earth looks like the star-strewn sky with crescent-headed arrows, crushed saddles of ranku deer skin, and glistening jewels from the coronets of kings. It glows with the resplendent parasols, yak tails and fans, and with faces, bright as the lotus or the moon, of daring Kshatriyas, with gleaming ear-rings and elegant beards, who lie lifeless.

Thus the two armies annihilate each other in the fight. The warriors are exhausted in body and spirit; the events and sights of the day have been splendid and horrifying beyond imagining; until, dark night sets in and nothing can be seen. The Kauravas and the Pandavas withdraw their armies. Retiring to their tents, they rest for the night.'

CANTO 98

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana, Sakuni, Dussasana and the invincible Karna sit together and evaluate their situation. How can the sons of Pandu and their allies be defeated? This is the subject of their discussion.

Duryodhana says to them, "Drona, Bhishma and Kripa, and Salya and Somadatta's son do not challenge the Pandavas. I do not know why. Unopposed, they are destroying my forces. Karna, I am being weakened and my weapons exhausted. I am baffled by my adversaries; I feel that even the Devas cannot vanquish them. My mind is filled with doubt; how can I quell the Pandavas in battle?"

Karna replies, "Do not be distressed, O lord of the Bhaaratas, for I will achieve the end you desire. Let Bhishma withdraw from the great war. When he puts down his weapons, I will kill the Parthas and the Somakas, before Bhishma's eyes.

I swear I will do this. Indeed, Bhishma shows mercy towards the Pandavas everyday. He cannot defeat those maharathas. Bhishma is proud in battle. He enjoys the fight. Why would he subdue the Pandavas, for then the war itself will end?

Go to Bhishma's tent, and ask the revered Pitamaha to set aside his weapons. When he does this, consider the Pandavas dead, slain along with all their supporters and kinsmen by me alone."

Thus addressed by Karna, Duryodhana says to his brothers, "Dussasana, get ready to accompany me." He says to Karna, "Parantapa, I will persuade Bhishma to consent to what you ask, and then promptly come to you. After Bhishma retires from the fight, you will destroy the enemy."

Accompanied by his brothers, your son sets out like He of a hundred sacrifices accompanied by the Devas. Dussasana makes him mount on his horse. Adorned with bracelets, with a crown on his head, and ornaments on his arms, he shines brilliantly as he goes forth. Smeared with fragrant sandalwood-paste, bright as the burnished gold of the bhandi flower, wearing spotless garments, Duryodhana goes forth like a great lion, looking like the glowing sun in the sky.

And as that tiger among men goes towards Bhishma's tent, many celebrated archers follow him. His brothers also accompany him, like the Devas walking behind Vasava. Other gallant men, riding on horses, elephants and chariots, go with him.

Like the Devas surrounding Sakra, his well-wishers assemble in hordes to protect him. Adored by all the Kauravas, Duryodhana rides slowly, regally towards Bhishma's tent.

He raises his right arm, like an elephant's trunk with which he can crush all enemies, and accepts the homage paid to him by the bystanders who stand with folded hands raised above their heads. As he canters along, he hears the sweet voices of the people of many lands. He is praised by their bards and poets. That great king responds with equal respect to all.

Many high-souled men stand around him with golden lamps burning with perfumed oil. Duryodhana looks radiant like the moon surrounded by blazing planets. Attendants with head-gear decked with gold, with canes and jhariharas in hand, gently part the crowd.

The king reaches Bhishma's tent and dismounts from his horse. He greets the Pitamaha and sits on a golden seat covered with an ornate cloth.

With hands folded, tearful eyes, and in a grieving voice, he says to Bhishma, "Parantapa, under your protection, we could defeat the very Devas and Asuras led by Indra. What can I say, then, of the gallant Pandavas, their kinsmen and friends?

Son of Ganga, be merciful. Kill the sons of Pandu like Mahendra destroying the Danavas. *I will slay all the Somakas and the Panchalas, and the Karushas along with the Kekayas*: these were your words to me. Stand by those words.

Kill the Parthas, and the Somakas. Honour your promise. If your love for the Pandavas, or loathing towards me, sways you to spare them, then allow Karna to fight. He will put a swift end to them along with their allies and kinsmen."

Having said this to Bhishma, your son Duryodhana falls silent.'

CANTO 99

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma is saddened by your son's dagger like words. But he does not reply with a single harsh word. He is overwhelmed with grief and anger, sighs deeply and reflects silently for a long time.

Looking up, as if angrily swallowing the world with the Devas, Asuras, and Gandharvas, Bhishma speaks calmly to Duryodhana, "Why do you stab me with such sharp words? I always try hard to achieve your interests. For this I am prepared to sacrifice my life in this battle.

The Pandavas cannot be defeated. This is clear ever since the brave son of Pandu pleased Agni in the Khandava vana, after vanquishing Sakra himself in battle. O Parantapa, Arjuna rescued you when you were captured by the Gandharvas; even that was a clear sign.

On that occasion, your brave brothers fled, as did Radha's son. What Arjuna did even then clearly revealed his prowess. In Virata's city, he single-handedly subdued us all. That was a sufficient indication.

He defeated and disrobed both Drona and me. That was ample evidence. When the cows were stolen, he overcame Aswatthaman and Saradwat. This surely should have shown you what he is.

Having easily quelled Karna, who boasted loudly of his manliness, Arjuna took his robes and gave them to Uttara. That should have been unmistakable proof for you. Arjuna defeated the Nivatakavachas who were invincible even to Vasava. How much clearer could it be, Suyodhana?

Who can hope to defeat such a hero, and besides one protected by the Protector of the Universe armed with sankha, chakra and gada? Krishna has infinite power, and is the Destroyer of the Universe. He is the highest Lord of all, the God of Devas, the eternal Paramatman. He is eulogised by Narada and other great Rishis.

But, ah, you are foolish and do not know what should be said and what should not. To a man on the point of death, all trees appear to be made of gold. Son of Gandhari, you see everything as being the opposite of what they truly are. Having provoked war with the Pandavas and the Srinjayas,

fight them now. Let us see you not moan and whine like a boy, but fight like a man.

As for me, I will bring death to the Somakas and the Panchalas, avoiding only Sikhandin. If killed, I will go to Yama's abode; if I kill them, I will give you joy.

Once, Sikhandin was born in Drupada's palace as a woman. Upon receiving a boon, she became a man. She is Sikhandini. I cannot kill him even to save myself. She is the same Sikhandini created by Brahma. Sleep peacefully tonight. Tomorrow I will fight so fiercely that men will remember the battle as long as the world lasts."

Duryodhana comes away with these words. He bows to the Pitamaha and returns to his own tent. He dismisses his attendants. He enters his tent and sleeps. At dawn he rises, and orders the royal warriors, "Gather our forces. Today Bhishma will slay all the Somakas."

Bhishma regards Duryodhana's lamentations as commands to himself. Saddened, and deploring his servile position, he thinks carefully about a possible duel with Arjuna.

Duryodhana anticipates Bhishma's plan and commands Dussasana, "Deploy the chariots to defend Bhishma. Press all our twenty two legions into battle formation. The moment that we have been thinking about for years, the slaughter of the Pandava army and seizing the whole kingdom, has arrived.

For this, our first duty is to protect Bhishma. Well guarded, he will protect us and kill the Parthas in battle.

Bhishma said to me, 'I will not kill Sikhandini, for he was a woman once and I will not face him in battle. The world knows that, to honour my father, I gave up a vast kingdom. I will not kill any woman or anyone who was once a woman. This is the truth by which I live and the dharma I will never break.

Sikhandin was first born a woman. You have heard that story as I have narrated it to you before the war began. Killing herself first and taking birth as a daughter, she who was once the princess Amba of Kasi has become a man. She will fight me, but I will never aim an arrow at her.

Other Kshatriyas who fight for the victory of the Pandavas, I will consume them all with devastras.' These were the wise Bhishma's words to me.

Our first and last duty is to protect the son of Ganga. If a lion is left unprotected in the jungle, he can be killed even by a wolf. We cannot allow the Pitamaha to be slain by Sikhandin like the lion by the wolf. Let Sakuni and Salya, Kripa and Drona, and Vivimsati safeguard Bhishma. If he is safe, our victory is assured."

Hearing Duryodhana, all surround Bhishma with a majestic legion of chariots. Your sons position themselves around him and ride into battle. As they advance the earth and the sky shudder and strike fear into the hearts of the Pandavas.

The Kaurava maharathas stand around Bhishma, in full armour, backed by that resplendent chariot force and by their elephants. They hold their positions to protect the Pitamaha even like the Devas watching over Indra in the war against the Asuras.

Duryodhana says to his brother, "Yudhamanyu protects the left wheel of Arjuna's chariot, and Uttamaujas his right wheel. Arjuna in turn protects Sikhandin. Dussasana, see that Bhishma is never left unprotected for even a moment so that Sikhandin might attack him."

With his surging forces, Dussasana rides with Bhishma in the vanguard of the Kaurava army. Seeing Bhishma encircled by so many chariots, Arjuna says to Dhrishtadyumna, "Prince of Panchala, place Sikhandin before Bhishma today, and I myself will be your brother's protector."'

CANTO 100

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma advances with his forces. He ranges them in the sweeping, encompassing Sarvatobhadra vyuha. Kripa and Kritavarman, and maharatha Saibya, and Sakuni, and Jayadratha of the Sindhus, and Sudakshina king of the Kambojas take their positions at the forefront of the army and the vyuha, along with Bhishma and your sons.

Drona and Bhurisravas, and Salya and Bhagadatta, guard the vyuha's right flank. Aswatthaman and Somadatta, and those maharathas, the two princes of Avanti, with a vast host, protect the left. Surrounded by the Trigartas, Duryodhana places himself in the middle, ready for the Pandavas. Maharathas Alambusha and Srutayush, position themselves behind that vyuha and the whole army.

Your mail-clad warriors form this enveloping vyuha and they look like flames upon Kurukshetra.

Yudhishtira and Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva, in glistening armour, position themselves in the vanguard of their vyuha, in front of all their fighting men. Dhrishtadyumna and Virata, and maharatha Satyaki stand ready, hungry for battle. Sikhandin and Arjuna, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, Mahabaho Chekitana, and the valiant Kuntibhoja, all encircled by their forces, stand prepared. Abhimanyu and Drupada, and the five Kaikeya brothers, all in their chariots, are splendid to behold, weapons at the ready.

Having formed their mighty vyuha, the Pandavas serenely wait for the conches to boom, the drums to roll and the day's fighting to begin. Today, the kings in your vyuha and their warriors set Bhishma at their head and with a tumult of blaring sankhas and deafening roars, they charge out against the Parthas. The Pandavas, led by Bhimasena, rush out against Bhishma seeking victory.

Roaring and shouting, blowing their krakachas and cow-horns, beating their drums and cymbals, the Pandavas forge into battle. We respond to their call with the pounding of our drums, and clash of cymbals and conches; roaring like lions, we attack our enemies furiously.

Those sounds from both armies mingle like two surging seas and the warriors of the two armies charge wildly into the ranks of the enemy, so that in moments there are no longer two great forces facing each other but a single throng of men all intent on killing one another as brutally as they can. The earth shudders with the clamour of that vast collision.

Birds scream and wheel in the sky. The radiant sun dims. Fierce winds blow, portending ever greater terrors. Jackals roam howling, foretelling another horrible carnage. All corners of the earth seem to be on fire, and dust rains down.

A rain of hewn limbs and spurting, splashing blood falls on to the earth. And tears fall from the eyes of weeping animals. In their distress they urinate and defecate. The cries of the Rakshasas drown every other roar and shout of the battle. Jackals and vultures, and crows and dogs wheel at the perimeter of the holocaust and also in the air above the canopy of arrows and spears that quickly covers Kurukshetra.

Ominous meteors collide against the sun and fall to the earth, foreboding incomprehensible tragedy. The blast of conches and drums shake the Pandava and the Dhartarashtra hosts like forests in a hurricane. The uproar of the two armies, kings, elephants and horses, which face each other in that malevolent hour, resembles that of a raging ocean.’

CANTO 101

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Riding his tawny horses, the dashing Abhimanyu charges Duryodhana's host, his bow flaring arrows. Bharatarishabha, your warriors cannot withstand him, as he plunges into the sea of Kaurava hordes with his wealth of astras.

Subhadra's son kills many Kshatriyas with deadly shafts that are like venom-spitting cobras and rods of death. Phalguni's son truncates maharathas and their chariots, horses and riders, elephant-warriors and their tuskers. The kings of the earth are delighted, and laud these feats and those who achieve them, regardless of whether they are ally or enemy.

Abhimanyu tosses those Kaurava legions about like a storm that scatters a heap of cotton in every direction. Like elephants stuck in mire, your men flounder without a protector. Having routed them, Abhimanyu stands like a fire which blazes pure and smokeless. Like insects drawn irresistibly to a fire but consumed by it, your warriors cannot endure that Parantapa. Abhimanyu looks like Vasava himself armed with his Vajra.

His gold inlaid bow flashes like lightning amidst clouds as it courses through the enemy in its magnificent archer's hand, loosing endless shafts like swarms of bees from trees blossoming in the forest. No one is able to strike or contain Abhimanyu, as he careers over Kurukshetra in his golden chariot. Riding swift as the wind, the sublime youth baffles Kripa and Drona, Aswatthaman and Jayadratha. He consumes your forces, his bow always bent in a circle, his chariot also wheeling in a circle, resembling the bright halo sometimes seen around the sun.

Seeing him lustily decimating the enemy, brave Kshatriyas think that the world contains two Arjunas. The vast host of the Bhaaratas reel under that golden prince's onslaught like a drunken woman. He routs them everywhere, terrifying maharathas and delighting his friends, like Vasava who pleased the Devas when he vanquished Mayaa.

Your warriors roar in anguish even like thunderclouds. Hearing that awful wail like the turbulent sea raging at full tide when lashed by violent winds, Duryodhana says to Rishyasringa's Rakshasa son Alambusha,

"Abhimanyu single-handedly destroys my army like Vritra routing Indra's legions. You, who know war so well, must challenge him for it seems none else can. Ride swiftly, Alambusha, and kill the preening sons of Arjuna. And led by Bhishma and Drona, we will kill Arjuna himself."

That dreadful Rakshasa charges into the fray, his roars like thunderclouds rumbling, and the Pandava host trembles. Why, many warriors are so terrified by those roars that they fall dead. Jubilant, dancing in glee, it appears, in his chariot, Alambusha advances towards Abhimanyu with bow drawn round. On reaching Arjuna's son he begins to despatch his supporters. Alambusha dwindles the Pandava legion, like Balasura once did the divine host.

Carnage and rivers of blood flow once more when the Rakshasa assails the Pandava force with thousands of immaculate arrows. Terror-stricken, the Pandava army flees his slaughter. Ravaging the enemy like an elephant trampling lotus-stalks, Alambusha now rides at the Pandavas themselves. The five sons of Draupadi attack the Rakshasa like five planets plunging at the Sun. They torment him as the five planets afflict the Moon at the end of the yuga.

Prativindhya pierces the Rakshasa with shafts as heavy and sharp as battle-axes, which can cleave any armour, drawing geysers of blood from the Rakshasa, who looks like clouds stabbed by the sun's rays. Lacerated by golden-winged shafts, he looks like a mountain with peaks ablaze.

The Pandavas wound him grievously with gusts of arrows that look like angry snakes. Alambusha is enraged like the king of the Nagas himself. Pierced all over by those maharathas, he faints and remains unconscious for a long time. Awakening, he jumps up with a fulminant roar and using the mahima siddhi grows to twice his size, and in fury carves up their bows, arrows and standards. Baring great fangs in a hideous smile, he shoots them each with five seething shafts.

Wild Alambusha dances in his chariot, and kills their horses and sarathies. Burning, he stabs them with thousands of every kind of fell barb. That night ranger dashes forward now to kill the beleaguered sons of Pandu. Seeing them tormented by the Rakshasa, Abhimanyu attacks him. The battle between him and the Rakshasa compares with that between Vritra and Vasava. The maharathas of both armies witness that encounter. Their eyes bloodshot, both warriors seem to be aflame with wrath, and regard each other as the fire that burns at the end of the yuga.

The duel between them is like the ancient one between Sakra and Sambara in the war between the Devas and Asuras.'

CANTO 102

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, how does Alambusha resist Abhimanyu who so imperiously dominates our maharathas? How does the son of Subhadra face Rishyasringa's son? Tell me all this in detail, exactly as it happened. How do Bhima, and Ghatotkacha, Nakula and Sahadeva, and maharatha Satyaki, and Arjuna confront my forces? You are a master narrator, Sanjaya; tell me everything.'

Sanjaya says, 'I will describe the merciless, tumultuary duel between Alambusha and Abhimanyu. I will also describe Arjuna's prowess in battle, and the marvellous feats of Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva, and the achievements of your warriors led by Bhishma and Drona.

Alambusha roars at Abhimanyu to stand and fight and then charges him. Abhimanyu whirls around to face his father's sworn enemy. Mounted on their chariots, like Deva and Danava, man and Rakshasa confront each other. Alambusha owns the hermetic powers of maya, while Abhimanyu is accomplished in the use of divine astras.

Abhimanyu strikes the Rakshasa with three sizzling shafts, and yet again with five. Alambusha pierces Abhimanyu's chest with nine barbs like a mahout goading his elephant with his hook. In a wink, he looses a scathing volley of a thousand shafts at Arjuna's superb son. Incensed Abhimanyu makes a bloody home in the Rakshasa's hirsute breast for nine steely arrows, which delve deep into Alambusha's innards. The bloodied Rakshasa looks like a mountain lush with flowering kinsukas. The Rakshasa bears those golden-winged shafts and glows like a mountain on fire.

Alambusha shrouds Abhimanyu, equal to Mahendra himself, in clouds of smoking arrows. Like Yama dandas these pass through Abhimanyu into the earth. Abhimanyu's golden shafts plunge through the Rakshasa and also enter the ground. Alambusha retreats before the prince's scintillating barrage of arrows, like Mayaa repulsed by Sakra. Quickly the Rakshasa invokes sorcery, mantling the field in perfect darkness using maya. All the warriors on Kurukshetra are lost in that blind night. Abhimanyu is hidden by it, and friend and enemy cannot be distinguished.

Abhimanyu calls forth the blazing Suryastra and Alambusha's illusional night is dispelled in a moment, and everything is visible again. With renewed ferocity Abhimanyu covers the Rakshasa with a solid swath of brilliant arrows.

Now Alambusha creates a slew of magical illusions, hunts of sinister beasts and monsters bound at Arjuna's son from every side. Abhimanyu dissipates them all with knowing astras. His every sorcery pierced and made impotent, and bleeding from countless wound mouths that Abhimanyu opens all over his devilish body, Alambusha flees in terror from the lustrous prince.

After routing the devious Rakshasa, Abhimanyu begins to demolish your forces, truly like a maddened tusker wading into a lake of lotuses. Seeing the field being richly strewn with his warriors' corpses, Bhishma looses a tremendous volley at Abhimanyu, shrouding him in a wave of arrows.

Swiftly, numerous maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army encircle that angelic and terrible young Kshatriya and strike him repeatedly. So resembling his father and equal to Krishna in profound valour, Abhimanyu demonstrates his stunning genius worthy of both his vamsas. He astounds his gathered enemies with archery not yet seen on Kurukshetra.

Seeing his precious magnificent son hemmed in, Arjuna arrives at the place where Abhimanyu continues to raze your warriors with breathtaking ease. Immediately Bhishma rides at Arjuna, like Rahu approaching the Sun. Supported by chariots, elephants, and horses, your sons surround the Pitamaha as he comes. And the Pandavas ride with Arjuna and a feverish battle breaks out.

Kripa stabs Arjuna with twenty-five arrows, as Dhananjaya engages Bhishma. Like a tiger attacking an elephant, Satyaki pierces Kripa with countless whetted shafts. Enraged, Gautama bloodies his chest with nine arrows like time. Sini's grandson draws his bow round and looses a deadly astra him at Kripa, but fiery Aswatthaman cuts it down as it flames at the old Acharya. Satyaki leaves Kripa and charges Drona's son like Rahu flying to devour the Moon. Aswatthaman rives Satyaki's bow in two, and launches a fury of barbs at the bright Vrishni.

Satyaki seizes up another colossal bow and strikes Aswatthaman with six searing arrows through his chest and arms, drawing a howl of pain from him. Aswatthaman faints and falls to the floor of his chariot, clinging on to

its flagpole. Regaining his senses in a moment, he looses a long shaft at Satyaki, which passes right through the handsome body of Sini's grandson, and plunges into the earth like a young snake entering its hole after the end of winter.

Another arrow shatters Satyaki's standard. Drona's son roars like five lions and covers his adversary in a rain of arrows as the clouds do the sun at the onset of the monsoon. Like the sun from behind clouds, Satyaki emerges undimmed, and shrouds the son of Drona with twisting sheets of arrows, vicious windings. Aswatthaman unravels them unscathed. Anger mounting, with a roar, Satyaki unleashes a thousand arrows in a moment, a deadly relucent torrent of shafts. Seeing his son afflicted like the Moon by Rahu, Drona storms at Satyaki, striking him deep with a streak of lightning from his great bow.

Satyaki turns away from Aswatthaman and pierces Drona with a scourge of twenty stinging barbs. Immediately, Arjuna rushes at Drona, and these two, guru and sishya, assail each other like the planets Budha and Sukra in the sky.'

CANTO 103

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'How do those famed warriors, Drona and Arjuna, face each other in battle? The son of Pandu is as dear as a son to Drona. Arjuna worships the Acharya. Both maharathas delight in war, and both are awesomely powerful. How do they battle each other?'

Sanjaya says, 'In battle Drona remains distant from his love of Arjuna. Arjuna focuses on his dharma as a Kshatriya and does not recognise his teacher but only an enemy. Kshatriyas never turn away from battle. They are detached, and fight their fathers and brothers.

Arjuna stabs Drona with three scalding shafts. Drona remains unperturbed. Arjuna covers the Acharya in a mantle of arrows. Drona blazes up in anger at the heart of the dreadful war, like a fire in a dense forest. Drona covers Arjuna with myriad arrows. Duryodhana sends Susarman to protect Drona's flank. The king of the Trigartas swathes Arjuna in countless iron-tipped missiles, beautiful like cranes flying through the sky. They pierce Arjuna like birds vanishing into a fruit laden tree. Arjuna roars and savages Susarman and his son with riptides from the Gandiva.

Despite the towering attack, and quite ready to die, they do not retreat. They target Arjuna's chariot and the Pandava faces their onslaught like a mountain receiving a cloudburst. Partha's prodigious archery is superhuman as, almost with disdain, he scatters his enemies' combined, virile flurries of fire, cutting down their storms of arrows as if he were facing some boys in battle, why like a high wind scattering fleecy clouds. The Devas and Danavas congregated in the firmament acclaim his feat.

Arjuna invokes the Vayavya astra against the Trigarta legion. A mighty gale sweeps across Kurukshetra, shaking the sky, felling trees, and blowing away enemy chariots and soldiers like bits of straw. Drona looses the Sailastra, which makes Arjuna's squall abate and calm returns to all quarters. But, fearing Arjuna now that they have seen some part of his actual prowess, the Trigarta maharathas are despondent and leave the battlefield.

Duryodhana and Kripa, and Aswatthaman, and Salya, and Sudakshina, the king of the Kambojas, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Bahlika supported by the Bahlikas, surround Arjuna with their chariots. Bhagadatta and the mighty Srutayush encircle Bhima with an akshauhini of elephants. And Bhurisravas, and Sala, and Subala's son attack the twins with luminous whetted arrows. Along with your sons, Bhishma rides to surround Yudhishtira.

Bhima watches that legion advance and licks the corners of his mouth like a hungry lion. He seizes his mace, leaps off his chariot again, terrifying your warriors. The elephant-warriors besiege him from all sides. At the very heart of your sons' forces, Bhima looks like the sun in the midst of dark clouds. And like the wind that scatters those clouds, the Vayuputra swings his mace all around him in scarlet eruptions to slaughter your son's elephant legion. The shrill trumpeting of those tuskers and Bhima's dreadful roars shake the very earth; covered with gashes inflicted by the tusks of the elephants, Bhima blossoms in blood like a flowering kinsuka.

Seizing some of the elephants by their tusks, he rips them out and then with those tusks smashes other elephants on their round foreheads and kills them like Siva himself. Like Rudra, his body and mace are drenched in blood. A few surviving tuskers run in every direction, crushing their own ranks as they blunder away from the fearful Bhima. Duryodhana's frantic forces quit the field any way they can.'

CANTO 104

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'At high noon a bloody battle breaks out between Bhishma and the Somakas. Bhishma denudes the Pandava ranks with thousands of immaculate arrows, every one claiming a life. He crushes them like a herd of bulls grinding paddy clumps under their hooves.

Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin, and Virata and Drupada attack maharatha Bhishma with a torment of arrows. Bhishma pierces Dhrishtadyumna and Virata each with three exquisite barbs, and aims a long lance at Drupada. Wounded, shamed by Parantapa Bhishma, those maharathas are like snakes stamped upon. Sikhandin darts within range and besieges the Pitamaha with countless arrows. Bhishma does not shoot back, still regarding his enemy as a woman.

Dhrishtadyumna skewers Bhishma with three lean shafts through his arms and chest. Drupada pierces him with twenty-five barbs, Virata with ten, and Sikhandin with another twenty-five. Bhishma is covered in blood, and looks quite magnificent like an ashoka in full carmine bloom. Bhishma shoots them each with three arrows. He cracks Drupada's bow with a broad-headed shaft. Drupada seizes another bow and strikes his adversary with five barbs quick as one. He stabs Bhishma's sarathy with three shafts.

Draupadi's five sons, the five Kaikeya brothers and Satyaki, all led by Yudhishtira, charge Ganga's son to protect the Panchalas and Dhrishtadyumna. All your warriors attack the Pandava host to defend Bhishma.

Another pitched battle ensues, resulting in another carnage. Maharathas kill maharathas. Soldiers, elephant-riders and horse-riders kill others with inhuman, heartless projectiles. Riderless chariots are hauled wildly across death's abysmal field. Careening blindly, these crush countless men and mow horses down; they dash everywhere like the wind strewing cloud forms across a sunset sky, bathing it in stains of blood.

With sparkling ear-rings, bright garlands and bracelets, handsome as the sons of Devas, surpassing Vaisravana in wealth and Brihaspati in

intelligence, great rulers of vast kingdoms, brave maharathas left without their chariots, run like ordinary men in every direction.

Mighty tuskers, their skilled riders slain, crush friendly ranks and run wildly until they fall. These mammoths, their armour cut away by arrows and spears, flowing blood from all over their massive bodies, roar like clouds and scatter in all directions. The chamaras and dappled standards, their golden parasols, and the dazzling spears of their riders lie in ruins everywhere.

Elephant-riders of both armies, their mounts slain, run on foot in that awful melee. Thousands of horses with golden ornaments gallop away from death's field. Armed with swords, but without horses, horsemen run from their assailants.

Elephants continue to dash against other elephants, crushing foot-soldiers and horses on their way. They smash countless chariots; chariots ride tilting over fallen horses lying in their path. Horses trample foot-soldiers under their hooves. Thus, O Rajan, they massacre one another and mercy has fled this war entirely.

The river of blood swells every hour, frothing across Kurukshetra with a hundred tributary streams. Fallen bows obstruct its straight course, and the hair of dead warriors forms its moss. Smashed chariots are its islands, and arrows beyond count create its eddies. Horses make up its fish; heads of tuskers its boulders; butchered elephants are the river's crocodiles. And coats of mail and helmets form its froth.

Bows still clutched by fallen warriors regulate its swift current and swords are its tortoises. Banners and emblems stand like forlorn trees on its banks. And bodies of men are its banks relentlessly consumed by the russet river. Countless carnivores are its swans, drinking thirstily of its sanguine waters.

That river swells not the ocean but Yama's kingdom. Noble and fearless maharathas try to cross that river with their chariots, elephants, and horses for rafts and boats. Like the river Vaitarani bears the dead to Yama's realm, so does that bloody river on Kurukshetra sweep along diffident and unconscious men.

The Kshatriyas look upon that horrible carnage and exclaim, "Alas, the very race of Kshatriyas will perish from Duryodhana's sin. Deluded by greed, why, O Dhritarashtra, was he so envious of the virtuous Pandavas?"

Such cries are accompanied by others that praise the sons of Pandu. Hearing these reproaches, Duryodhana says to Bhishma and Drona and Kripa and Salya, “Fight without pride. Why do you delay?”

The murderous war caused by a game of dice, resumes between the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Son of Vichitravirya, you see now the dreadful outcome of disdaining the advice of your true friends. Neither the Pandavas nor their forces and allies, nor the Kauravas, fear for their lives in this war. And for this very reason, Rajan, of savage Kshatriya dharma, such a terrible destruction of kinsmen is underway on Kurukshetra, ah, caused either by Destiny or your wicked design.’

CANTO 105

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'With banks of razor like arrows Arjuna kills the warriors who ride with Susarman. Susarman strikes Arjuna with an angry volley. He pierces Krishna with seventy barbs and Arjuna again with nine. Serenely, Arjuna continues to kill Susarman's men.

Those maharathas flee from Arjuna as if Death himself had come to hunt them at the end of the yuga, for indeed the Dwapara Yuga is drawing to its end and the Kali, age of wrath, is rising near. Some of the Trigartas jump down from their horses, some from their chariots, others clamber down from their elephants and flee. Others swiftly escape on their very mounts and chariots. Foot-soldiers throw away their weapons in panic, and run helter-skelter with no thought for their comrades. Though stridently forbidden by Susarman and other noble kings, they desert their armies.

Seeing this rout, Duryodhana, together with Bhishma, mounts a driving attack against Arjuna to protect Susarman. While his men take to their heels all around him, Duryodhana is unyielding and, surrounded by his brothers, continues to engage the enemy with undiminished vigour.

To protect Arjuna, the other Pandavas advance on Bhishma. Aware of Phalguni's prowess, they still dash forward roaring, and the Pitamaha relentlessly dwindles the Pandavas army with every moment, his every arrow a killer. At noon, absolute, bloody, chaos reigns on Kurukshetra so it seems unclear whether the war between cousins is being fought in the realm of the living or the dead, whether on Bhumi or in Yamaloka.

Striking Kritavarman with five arrows, the triumphant Satyaki kills thousands of Dhartarashtra men with uncanny archery so like his master Arjuna's. King Drupada, having already drawn blood from his old and hated enemy, his boyhood friend Drona, strikes the Acharya with seventy shafts, all loosed in a moment, and Drona's sarathy with another nine.

Bhima roars like some mythic tiger after wounding his great granduncle, king Bahlika. Chitrasena wounds Abhimanyu deep with a brace of torrid shafts, and the luminous Abhimanyu adorns Chitrasena's broad breast with three perfect barbs. Locked in battle, the two are as glorious on the field as

Venus and Saturn in the sky. Then, in a flash, Abhimanyu kills his noble adversary's horses and charioteer and maharatha Chitrasena leaps off his chariot and mounts Durmukha's.

Drona repeatedly carves slivers off Drupada's ratha, and remembering their enmity of such long standing, the Panchala king retreats with his swift horses.

Bhima kills Bahlika's horses and sarathy. Finding himself in grave danger, Bahlika jumps down from his chariot and mounts Lakshmana's and they ride away from dreadful Bhima.

Satyaki thwarts Kritavarman, who fights for Duryodhana, and looses a plethora of every kind of barb upon the Pitamaha whom Kritavarman protects. Piercing Bhishma with sixty whetted feathered shafts, the ebullient Satyaki seems to dance on his chariot, brandishing his bow. Bhishma shoots an extraordinary iron arrow at the Vrishni, flecked with gold, serpentine and beautiful as a Naga woman.

But Satyaki intercepts it with another astra and both exceptional weapons explode into flames and lunge harmless to the ground like extinguished meteors. Satyaki seizes up a shimmering golden spear and casts it like a streak of lightning at Bhishma. It flies at the Kuru ancient like his very death coming to claim a doomed man. Quicker than seeing, Bhishma trisects it with two lean horseshoe-headed arrows and it falls to the ground in three strips, undone.

Possessed by the murderous spirit of war, yet smiling the while, Parantapa Bhishma strikes Satyaki through his chest with nine arrows in an incredibly close and neat cluster. With their chariots, elephants and horses, the Pandava warriors besiege Bhishma from every side to rescue Satyaki.

Yet another general fray, always more bloody than the ones gone before, breaks out between the Pandava and the Kaurava hosts, both seeking glory, both wanting victory more than life itself.'

CANTO 106

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Bhishma seethe upon Kurukshetra, encircled by the Pandavas, like the sun in the sky by monsoon clouds, Duryodhana says to Dussasana, "Parantapa Bhishma is surrounded by the Pandavas. Your only charge is to protect him. If we guard him well, our Pitamaha will destroy the Panchalas and the Pandavas. Defending Bhishma is our first and highest dharma, for he is our protector and our main hope. Surround him with your legions, Dussasana, and make sure he comes to no harm!"

Dussasana surrounds Bhishma with a vast force and stands ready to fight anyone who threatens his grandsire. With thousands of horsemen carrying shining spears, swords and standards, forming a confident legion, together with twice as many proficient foot-soldiers, Subala's son Sakuni assails Nakula, Sahadeva and Yudhishtira.

Duryodhana sends ten thousand horsemen to attack the Pandavas. As they fly like so many Garudas, the earth trembles and groans under their horse hooves, the din of which resounds like a bamboo forest on fire. They raise a cloud of dust as they hurtle across the battlefield, obscuring the sun. They unnerve the Pandava host like a flight of swans that disturbs a lake while descending on it. Nothing can be heard above their loud neighing.

Yudhishtira and the sons of Madri contain their charge like the shore the surging sea at high tide. Those three maharathas mow down line after line of horsemen with tides of arrows. Themselves wheeling across the battleground, the three Pandava brothers display some incredible archery in concert as they decapitate those onrushing lines of horsemen while never so much as scratching any other part of their bodies.

Felled with swords and arrows, heads drop like fruits from tall trees. Everywhere riders and their horses fall dead to the ground. Many horses bolt in fear like deer on seeing lions. And the Pandavas blow their conches and beat their drums in triumph.

Duryodhana is crestfallen to see his forces demolished again and says to Salya, king of the Madras, "Before your eyes, Yudhishtira and the twins

have routed our army. Mahabaho, you are powerful and irresistible. Stop Yudhishtira, like the continent that resists the ocean."

Salya rides at Yudhishtira with a legion of chariots. As he rushes at Yudhishtira like a tidal wave, the Pandava calmly strikes Salya through his chest with ten thudding shafts. Nakula and Sahadeva assail him with seven more. Salya, whose very name means to menace, to harry, pierces them each with three arrows, and further stabs Yudhishtira with sixty keen darts. Enraged, he makes the twins bleed with two shafts each. Parantapa Bhima sees Yudhishtira within Salya's reach, as in the jaws of Death, and rushes to his defence.

And as the sun begins to set, one more dark and destructive battle begins.'

CANTO 107

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma bestrides the yawning field and his great bow radiates arrows in every direction, every shaft claiming an enemy soldier's life or drawing blood from a Pandava maharatha. Yet he fights without rancour even with deep sadness in his aged heart, and even for this is more terrible. He strikes Bhima with twelve arrows and Satyaki with nine. Stabbing Nakula with three barbs, he shoots Sahadeva with seven. Yudhishtira he pierces through his arms and chest with twelve faultless shafts. Lacerating Dhrishtadyumna with a flat flight of barbs, that mighty old lion roars deafeningly.

Nakula stabs him with twelve arrows and Satyaki with three. Dhrishtadyumna shoots him with seventy shafts and Bhima with seven. Yudhishtira pierces the Pitamaha with twelve barbs. Drona attacks Satyaki and Bhima at once, stabbing them each with five whetted arrows like Yama dandas. Bhima and Satyaki retaliate without a moment's pause.

Rulers of the eastern, western and northern regions, the Sauviras, the Kitavas, the Malavas, the Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, and the Vasatis, vigorously assail Bhishma despite his endless barrage of arrows. Other kings of various realms loose many astras of fire, water and air at the Pandavas themselves.

The Pandavas surround the Pitamaha. Encircled and doubly defiant, the aged lion blazes like a forest fire, continuing to raze the enemy army with transcendent archery. His chariot is his fire-chamber; his bow its flames; swords, arrows and maces are his fuel; his shafts are sparks; and Bhishma himself becomes the fire that consumes his adversaries.

Bhishma shrouds the Pandava hosts with golden-winged shafts decked with the feathers of vultures, with nalikas, and dirghastras, elongated barbs. He fells elephants and chariot-warriors. He makes the Pandava legion of chariots look like a forest of palmyras shorn of their leafy heads. He decimates riders of horses, elephants and chariots without favour. Hearing the thunder of his bowstring and the thunderclaps of his palms as he looses his tirades of fire, all the soldiers tremble.

His arrows shot from his bow pierce through armour like through butter. And again, endlessly, we see riderless chariots dragged across the battlefield by their yoked horses. Fourteen thousand celebrated and noble maharathas, with golden standards, of the Chedis, the Kasi, and the Karushas, stand firm and ready to sacrifice their lives; they do not retreat, and are swiftly despatched, in blasts of gore, along with their horses and elephants, by Bhishma like Siva with mouth agape.

We see thousands of chariots with smashed axles, terraces and wheels. The ground is covered with wrecked chariots, arrows, axes, ruined coats of mail and the mighty bodies of maharathas, which seem to glow on even after life has left them. Maces and arrows, quivers and bows, swords, and jewelled severed heads lie scattered in profusion; as do gloves and felled standards, and riven bows.

Riderless elephants and horse-riders lie dead as if they are mere clods of earth, so plentiful are they. The most valiant efforts of the Pandavas cannot any more rally their maharathas who lose their nerve and flee before Bhishma's relentless arrow storms. By himself the Kuru Pitamaha disperses that teeming force of fighting men with the ageless energy of Indra. With its chariots, elephants, horses and standards felled, the Pandava army in disarray laments loudly and scatters. Driven by ruthless destiny, fathers, sons and friends kill one another, on and on.

The Pandava warriors tear off their armour and run dementedly in all directions, like terrified bulls lowing in despair, and running wild and unrestrained from the great terror which is Bhishma.

Seeing the Pandava army disbanding, Krishna reins in Arjuna's chariot, and says to his warrior, "The awaited hour has arrived. Strike now, O tiger among men, or you will be lost. You said, in Sanjaya's presence, in the assembly of kings in Virata's city, 'I will kill all Duryodhana's warriors and their followers, including Bhishma and Drona, if they oppose me in battle.' Son of Kunti, O Parantapa, honour your words now. Remember your Kshatriya dharma; fight fearlessly."

Arjuna, troubled and unsure, says, "I can seize the kingdom, slaughtering the innocent, or accept exile in the forest. These are my choices. Which of these should I strive for? Spur the horses on, Krishna; I will obey you. I will kill the invincible Bhishma." Krishna goads the silvery white horses to where Bhishma stands dazzling like the sun.

Seeing Arjuna riding at Bhishma, Yudhishtira's host rallies to the fight. Roaring, the Pitamaha shrouds Arjuna's chariot in an opacity of arrows so it is hidden from view. Krishna adroitly urges the wounded horses on. Arjuna raises the Gandiva and slashes Bhishma's bow into pieces. Bhishma promptly strings another bow. Arjuna breaks this one as well. Bhishma cries out in some delight, "Wonderful, Mahabaho! Well done, son of Kunti."

Bhishma takes up another beautiful bow and looses a crescendo of arrows at Arjuna's chariot. Krishna skilfully manoeuvres his horses and avoids the searing volley. Yet some shafts find their mark, and those two tigers among men look like two angry bulls gored by horns in a fight.

Meanwhile, yet again, Krishna sees that while Bhishma, positioned between the two armies, unleashes his firestorms of arrows, scorching everything like the Sun himself, and killing Yudhishtira's warriors relentlessly, proclaiming, as it were, the end of the yuga, Arjuna still hesitates and turns mild when faced with his grandsire.

Leaving Arjuna's horses, Krishna leaps off the chariot in fury. His eyes crimson, his body burning with terrible light, and the whip in his hand his only weapons, the Lord of the universe runs straight at Bhishma, like some great lion, his strides appearing to cleave the earth, and his heart set on killing the Kuru ancient.

All the assembled warriors can only watch, rooted and stunned as they see Krishna rush Bhishma. "Bhishma is dead!" they cry. Their shouts of dismay are loud and fearful.

Dark as lapis lazuli, clad in yellow silk, Krishna streaks towards Bhishma, like a thunderhead charged with lightning. Like a lion at an elephant, or a great bull thundering at another, Krishna roars as he storms at Bhishma.

Seeing the Dark One come with cosmic fury on his brow and in his eyes, Bhishma stands perfectly calm and fearlessly draws his great bow. Serenely he says to Krishna, "Come, O you with eyes like lotus petals. O Lord of the Devas, I bow to you. O best of the Satwatas, kill me today in this great war, for, Govinda, I will be blessed in every way if I die by your hand in battle. Krishna, the honour in the three worlds is mine today. Kill me as you please, for I am your slave."

But Arjuna has leapt down from his chariot and running after Krishna, seizes the Blue God in his arms, restraining him. Krishna hardly seems to

notice Arjuna and drags him along as if he were not there at all. At the tenth step, Arjuna falls to the ground and stops Krishna by clinging to his legs.

Arjuna cries in despair to the terrifying Lord, “Stop, Krishna! You must not break your vow that you will not fight or men will say that Krishna is a liar. This burden is mine and I will kill the Pitamaha. I swear by my weapons, by truth, and my punya that I will do everything in my power to destroy all my enemies. Watch me now and I will effortlessly quell this great maharatha, even like the crescent moon being extinguished at the end of the yuga, at the moment of final destruction.”

Krishna’s brow is still like thunder, but he remains silent and allows Arjuna to lead him back to their chariot. The moment of absolute dread passes and the universe breathes again!

Bhishma once more envelops the two Krishnas in a cloud of arrows, while continuing to consume the Pandava ranks like the sun sapping the life force of all things in summer. The Pitamaha kills two Pandava soldiers for every life that the sons of Pandu claim from his own army. Without being able to even look upon him who blazes like the noonday sun, thousands of helpless dispirited warriors perish at Bhishma’s hands.

Fearful and grown timid, the Pandavas themselves are powerless before Bhishma’s super-human feats in war. Unprotected, their forces flee like a herd of cows swarmed by an army of ants, his millions of arrows.

The Pandavas, too, cannot bear to look upon that maharatha who turns his fire on Yudhishtira, their king. As the sun sets ever so slowly for the decimated Pandava army, and too swiftly for the triumphant Kauravas, the exhausted soldiers withdraw from the battlefield.’

CANTO 108

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Even while they fight like figures in a nightmare scathed by the many flares of Bhishma, the sun sets and in the deep twilight nothing can be seen, not the corpses now past all count with which the awesome grandsire has strewn Kurukshetra. Yudhishtira sees the remnants of his devastated forces throw down their weapons and eagerly quit the battlefield before the conches have been sounded for the day's slaughtering to end. But Bhishma stands still blazing in the gloom of dusk, still unleashing his arrow storms all around him. The shaken Pandava king orders the conches to be blown for the armies to withdraw.

In honour, Bhishma also withdraws his legions, and all the wounded and weary maharathas, those left alive, return to their tents.

As they have their wounds inflicted by Bhishma tended, the Pandavas reflect on how entirely terrible and invincible their Pitamaha had been through the day he has won so resoundingly for the Kauravas, and they are deeply distraught. Across the darkling field on which numberless corpses lie under the stars, Duryodhana and the Kauravas eulogise Bhishma's exploits as the old lion makes his way to his tent with some satisfaction surrounded by your jubilant sons.

Night, that quietens all creatures, sets in. In that intense hour, the Pandavas, the Vrishnis and the Srinjayas confer. Those noble ones, experienced in deliberations, discuss the courses that lie before them.

Yudhishtira says sombrely to Krishna, "Ah, look how the Pitamaha savaged our men like an elephant trampling a forest of reeds. We dare not even look at him, while he consumes my army like a raging fire. He is grown as fierce as the poisonous Takshaka. Yama can be defeated, even Indra armed with the Vajra, or Varuna, noose in hand, or the Lord of the Yakshas with his mace. But Bhishma cannot be killed.

Krishna, I am helpless, and drown in anguish, when I face Bhishma in battle. I will go into the forest and take sannyasa. That would benefit me. I do not want to fight this hopeless war any more. Bhishma conquers us always. Riding against him, I am like an insect that flies into a fire only to

meet certain death. By foolishly fighting for a kingdom, I am being destroyed.

My brave brothers have all been wounded, look how they still bleed. Out of their love for me, their eldest brother, they lost their kingdom and followed me into exile. For my sake, Krishna, you also suffer. Life is so precious and now even that is threatened. If I survive this war, I will devote the rest of my days to the performance of penance and good deeds. If you bear us good will, Krishna, tell me what I should do, without forsaking the duties of my varna, my Kshatriya dharma."

Krishna speaks kind, comforting words to Yudhishtira, "Son of Dharma, you are unwavering in your commitment to truth; do not be sad, blessed as you are with Parantapas for brothers. Arjuna and Bhima are imbued with the energy of the Wind and Fire. The twin sons of Madri are as valiant as the king of the Devas.

Honour our friendship; use me and achieve victory. I will fight with Bhishma myself. Only command me and I will show you my prowess in war. If Arjuna will not, I will challenge Bhishma and kill him, in the very sight of the Dhartarashtras. If you think that killing noble Bhishma will help you triumph, I will single-handedly destroy the Pitamaha. My prowess is equal to Indra's in battle. I will overpower that Kshatriya of great weapons.

He, who is an enemy of the Pandavas, is also my enemy; and my detractors are yours. Your brother Arjuna is my friend, kinsman, and devotee. I will cut off my flesh and sacrifice it for Arjuna's sake. He, too, will give up his life for me. This is our sacred bond, and we will protect each other.

So command me: how should I fight? At Upaplavya, Arjuna vowed that he would kill Bhishma. Now he must honour his words with deeds. If he asks me to, I will fulfil what he swore he would do, unquestioningly. Otherwise, he must accomplish the task himself. It is not difficult for him, he can kill Bhishma easily, for this Arjuna can achieve feats that others cannot.

He can annihilate the very Devas, along with the Daityas and the Danavas. What then of Bhishma? Bhishma is old now, dull, his strength reduced by his years, and he cannot stand against Arjuna, if Arjuna once decided that he will indeed bring Bhishma down."

Yudhishtira says, "It is as you say, Mahabaho. When you both are united, not Bhishma or all the Kaurava maharathas together can stand

before you. Krishna, with you by my side I am certain to have victory and everything that I might wish for. With you as my defender, I can overcome the very Devas with Indra at their head. And Bhishma, though he is the greatest maharatha, can also be vanquished.

But, Krishna, for my own honour and truth, I cannot let you break your vow that you would not actually fight. Give me the support you promised, but without actually fighting yourself. Bhishma said to me, 'I am obliged to fight for Duryodhana and against you. But you can always come to me for advice.

Krishna, Bhishma might still help me regain my kingdom by telling me what I should do. Taking you with us, we will all go to the Pitamaha once again and ask him how he can be killed. Let us go to him even now and I will do whatever he tells me to in battle. He is honourable and a man of unswerving dharma. His heart lies with us and he will tell me how I can win this war."

Yudhishtira's eyes are moist and his voice is low as he says, "We were orphans, mere children, and our Pitamaha raised us with his love. Ah, how cruel this Kshatriya dharma is that today I must go and ask my grandfather how I can kill him."

Krishna says to Yudhishtira, "Wise king, I approve of what you say. Bhishma is an unrivalled maharatha, the greatest master of astras. He can kill an enemy with just a look from his eyes. Yes, let us go to him and ask him how he himself can be killed. He will answer truthfully, especially if you are the one that asks this question. Let us go to him even now and ask him how we can win this war."

The Pandavas and Krishna set aside their armour and weapons and go towards Bhishma's tent; they enter, and bow to him. The Pandavas pay him obeisance and worship, and ask for his blessings.

The Pitamaha, Mahabaho Bhishma, says warmly to them, "You are welcome, my sons. Welcome to you Arjuna. Welcome Yudhishtira Dharmatma, and you also, my Bhima. Welcome Nakula and Sahadeva. Tell me why you have come to me at this hour. What can I do for you? Let it be anything, however demanding, and I will do it wholeheartedly."

His head bowed, Yudhishtira replies, "Pitamaha, wise Bhishma, tell us how we can win this war and have our kingdom back. Tell us how we can end this terrible slaughter of men. You, great Kshatriya, are invincible on the field of battle, you leave no chink through which an enemy might strike

you down. As long as you live, we can never hope to win this war. O Pitamaha, tell us how you can be killed!

Your bow is always drawn and streams tides of arrows razing my army. Day after day, we see you, Parantapa, mounted on your chariot, blazing like a second sun, as you consume our chariots and horses, men and elephants.

Bharatarishabha, there is no man who can defeat you, and you wreak destruction on us with your arrows. Pitamaha, tell me how we can triumph against you in battle, regain what is rightfully ours, and prevent any more bloodshed."

Bhishma says to Yudhishtira, "'As long as I live, you cannot win. This is the simple truth. Sons of Pandu, only if you vanquish me can victory be yours. Indeed, if you want to win this war, you must kill me immediately otherwise your cause will be lost. I gladly give you leave to strike down me in any way. Why, I would be the happiest one if you did so for I hate this war in which I must fight against you. After you kill me, the others can all be slain. I do not ask you to do this, I, your Pitamaha, command it."

Yudhishtira says, "Tell us how we can defeat you in battle, you who are like the mace wielding Siva himself. Indra, Varuna, or Yama may be quelled, but not the Devas and Asuras united under Indra's command can overcome you."

Bhishma says, "What you say is true, Mahabaho. As long as I fight with my bow and my astras, I cannot be defeated by the Devas and Asuras led by Indra. But if I lay down my weapons, these brothers of yours, these maharathas can surely kill me. I never fight against one who has discarded his weapons, who has fallen, who has lost his armour, whose standard has collapsed, or who is fleeing from battle; nor will I confront anyone who is afraid, who humbles himself before me, or one who is weak and vulnerable, or a man who has only one son, or a vulgar lowly man. And I will never bear arms against a woman or a man who bears a woman's name.

This is my old resolve. I will never fight if I see an inauspicious sign. Sikhandin, son of Drupada, brave and tenacious in war, fights on your side; he was once a woman, a royal princess, before he became a man. We all know how this happened and the reasons for it.

Let Arjuna set Sikhandin in front of him, and then attack me. When I see that inauspicious sight, that ill omen in the form of a prince who was once a woman, I will never attack him. I will put down my bow and Arjuna must

seize that moment to strike me down me with his arrows, piercing me through every limb and organ, from every side.

Even if I lay my weapons down, other than Krishna and Arjuna, there is nobody from any of the three worlds who can kill me in battle. Setting Sikhandin before him, let Arjuna, with his Gandiva and every astra, strike me down from my chariot. Then, and only then, will your victory be assured. Do as I have told you, Rajan, and after I have fallen you will surely kill all the Dhartarashtras."

The Pandavas listen numbly to what their grandsire says. They can only bow in silence to acknowledge the terrible counsel he gives them. Taking the dust from his feet, they return grimly to their tents.

Arjuna hears Bhishma's awful advice, he sees how his beloved Pitamaha is ready, so eager to die, and he is filled with shame and anguish. He cries to Krishna, "Krishna, how can I do what Bhishma asks me to? How can I kill our Pitamaha, who is so great and wise, and the eldest of our race?

In my childhood, I would climb onto his lap and playfully smear his face and body with dust. He is my father Pandu's father. As a child I once called him father as I clambered on his lap; and he said: I am not your father, but your father's father. That was his reply.

How can I kill someone who said those words to me? Ah, let my army perish and let me also die. I do not care if we lose this war, but I will never fight my Pitamaha. And how can I even think of killing him in the cowardly, shameful way that he commands me to? Ah Krishna, save me from this sea of grief in which I am drowning. Tell me what you think!"

Krishna says, "Having once sworn to kill Bhishma, how can you now break your solemn vow, without violating your sacred dharma as a Kshatriya? Arjuna, you must strike Bhishma down, for you cannot win this war unless you kill Ganga's invincible son. And he has told you the only way by which he can be sent to Yama's realm, and you are the only one who can do this thing.

The Devas decided this a long time ago and what is destined to happen must happen. It cannot be otherwise. You alone, not even Indra, can conquer Bhishma, who is like Siva with mouth agape. Fearlessly kill the Kuru Pitamaha.

My words are but those that Brihaspati said to Sakra. One should kill even an old person, however meritorious and revered, if he comes as an enemy, indeed one must kill anyone who comes to destroy you. Arjuna, this

is the eternal dharma of Kshatriyas; they must fight, protect their subjects, and perform sacrifices, without hatred."

Arjuna says, "Sikhandin will certainly become the cause of Bhishma's death, for as soon as he sees the prince of the Panchalas my Pitamaha will put down his bow. We will keep Sikhandin in front of us, I will thwart the other archers who surround him and thus we will vanquish Bhishma. Sikhandin will fight Bhishma alone. I know that he will not strike Sikhandin, for he was once a woman."

Yet again, Krishna gives Arjuna the courage he needs for the great and violent deed. Having decided on their course, at Bhishma's own counsel and with his leave and blessings, the Pandavas feel relieved and hopeful again. And past midnight, these bulls among men retire to sleep.'

CANTO 109

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'How did Sikhandin ride against Bhishma, and how did Bhishma press forward against the Pandavas? Tell me everything, Sanjaya.'

Sanjaya says, 'At dawn, to the beating of drums and the clash of cymbals, and the blast of milk white conches, the Pandavas advance into battle, setting Sikhandin before them. They form a daunting vyuha.

Sikhandin is positioned in the vanguard. Bhima and Arjuna defend his chariot wheels. The sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu ride behind the Panchala prince. In turn, Maharathas Satyaki and Chekitana guard them. Behind them is Dhrishtadyumna surrounded by the Panchalas. Behind Dhrishtadyumna ride Yudhishtira and the twins, filling the air with roars. They are followed by Virata, surrounded by his troops.

Alongside Virata is Drupada. And the five Kaikeya brothers and the valiant Dhrishtaketu protect the rear of the Pandava army. Having prepared their vyuha, the Pandavas, taking their lives in their hands, charge your army by first light.

The Kauravas place maharatha Bhishma at the head of their army and advance against the Pandavas. That indomitable Kshatriya is protected by your mighty sons. Behind him are Drona and Aswatthaman.

Bhishma is followed by Bhagadatta surrounded by his elephant akshauhini. Behind Bhagadatta are Kripa and Kritavarman. Behind them are Sudakshina of the Kambojas, and Jayatsena of the Magadhas, and Sakuni and Brihadbala. Countless other kings, all great archers, protect the rear of your army.

Every day, Bhishma forms vyuhas, sometimes like those of the Asuras, sometimes similar to those of Pisachas, at other times comparable to ones of the Rakshasas. The battle between the two forces begins yet again; sweeping into each other, both forces recommence the great slaughtering, the blood sacrifice on Kurukshetra.

The Parthas with Arjuna leading them place Sikhandin before them all, and attack Bhishma with every kind of arrow and astra maiming and killing

your warriors in waves. Nakula, Sahadeva and maharatha Satyaki vigorously annihilate your forces.

Such is the carnage the Pandavas bring to your warriors this day, from every side, that it does not take them long to scatter and flee from the rampaging maharathas. Felled by the whetted arrows of the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, your troops cannot defend themselves.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, Sanjaya, what does Bhishma do when he sees my army afflicted by the Parthas? How does that greatest Kshatriya, that Parantapa, storm the Pandavas and slaughter the Somakas?'

Sanjaya says, 'I will tell you what Bhishma does when attacked by the Pandavas and the Srinjayas. In great heart after the night's secret meeting with Bhishma, the Pandavas assail your son's forces, slaughtering all in their path. Seeing their inexorable, bloody advance, seeing his men, elephants and horses razed at will, Bhishma blazes up in wrath.

Uncaring of his life, that greatest maharatha unleashes a tornado of every kind of shaft at the enemy, elongated arrows, calf-toothed and crescent-headed ones, and many others. He covers the five mighty Pandavas in sheets of fire, holding them up; countless elephants and horses he kills; and that bull among men unseats so many maharathas from their chariots, riders from their horses, elephant-warriors from the backs of their beasts, and strikes fear into the hearts of the enemy.

All together, the Pandava warriors charge maharatha Bhishma, like the Asuras assailing Indra in unison. He brings them up sharply with a storm of stone-whetted arrows, each like Indra's thunderbolt, and so fierce his very countenance, that the enemy quails to look at him. Like Sakra himself, his vast bow is always drawn in a circle, and arrows flare from it in tide.

Watching their Pitamaha, your sons are awestruck and humbled. The Pandavas are as shaken as they look at Bhishma dominate Kurukshetra as he pleases as the Devas were dejected by the feats of the Asura Viprachitti. They have neither the nerve nor the prowess to face that Kshatriya who looks like Siva with mouth agape.

On that tenth day of the great Mahabharata yuddha, the day on which the Dwapara Yuga ends and the Kali Yuga actually rises over the world, Bhishma devours Sikhandin's akshauhini like a fire burning down a dry forest. Resembling an angry Naga, or indeed Siva goaded by Yama himself, Sikhandin pierces the flaming Kuru grandsire squarely through his breast

with three sizzling shafts. The surprised, wounded Bhishma sees that it is Sikhandin who has struck him.

Incensed, yet Bhishma laughs and says, “Whether you attack me or not, I will never fight with you. You remain the same Sikhandini, the princess Amba whom the Creator first made.”

Sikhandin’s eyes turn red, and licking the corners of his mouth he says to Bhishma in a ringing voice, “I know you, Parantapa, to be the exterminator of the race of Kshatriyas. I have also heard of your battle against your guru, Jamadagni’s son. I have heard a great deal about your superhuman prowess. Despite all that I have heard, I will fight you today.

What satisfies the Pandavas is also what I want; Parantapa, I will not only fight you but surely kill you today. I solemnly swear this. You have heard me now; do whatever you must. Whether you resist me or not, you will not escape alive. O mighty, ever-triumphant Bhishma, look at this world for the last time.”

Having loosed these word barbs, Sikhandin pierces Bhishma with five straight shafts. Arjuna urges the Panchala prince on, “Sikhandin, I am behind you, and the enemy will not stand before my arrows. Attack Bhishma and kill him now!

If you return without killing Bhishma today, you will be ridiculed by all. Kill him now, so that we may not be mocked in this great war. I will protect you from the Kaurava maharathas. Kill Bhishma, O Sikhandin!

I will contain Drona and his son, and Kripa, and Suyodhana, and Chitrasena, and Vikarna, and Jayadratha of the Sindhus, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Sudakshina of the Kambojas, and the mighty Bhagadatta, and Salya of the Magadhas, and Somadatta’s son, and Rishyasringa’s son Alambusha and his fierce Rakshasas, and Susarman and the Trigartas, and all the other Kaurava maharathas.

I will contain them all like a continent does the surging sea. Destroy the Pitamaha even now!”’

CANTO 110

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'How does Sikhandin attack the noble and righteous Bhishma? Which Pandava maharathas, armed with astras and seeking victory, protect Sikhandin? On the tenth day of the war, how does Bhishma fight the Pandavas and the Srinjayas? I cannot bear the thought of Sikhandin meeting Bhishma in battle. When Sikhandin attacks Bhishma what happens to the Pitamaha's chariot and to his bow?'

Sanjaya says, 'Neither Bhishma's bow nor his chariot is in the least damaged in that battle. He continues to mow down the enemy with deadly banks of arrows. Thousands of your maharathas and elephants and horses, led by the Pitamaha, advance into battle. Bhishma fulfils his word given to Suyodhana to massacre the Pandava forces. The Panchalas and the Pandavas can in no way withstand the magnificent Kshatriya and he destroys their forces as he likes.

On the tenth day, Bhishma scythes through the enemy with his countless shafts. Rajan, the sons of Pandu cannot remotely contain him for he is truly like Siva with his flaming trident come to Kurukshetra. Then Arjuna, with Krishna at his chariot head, appears and the perfectly ambidextrous Savyasachin is at your maharathas like some dreadful plague.

Roaring like a lion now, the greatest of them all, he seems to be everywhere, so prodigious is Krishna's chariotry, and the Pandava's bow, the peerless Gandiva, appears to have life of its own for it seems to hang in the air, always drawn in a round of flames, so one cannot see that awesome archer's hands or any apparent movement from them, while firetides of unearthly arrows flare in seamless spate from his chariot, incinerating the enemy all around him wherever he goes.

Your warriors are petrified, and either stand rooted while this Kshatriya like one they have never seen the like of before, while this bowman like Yama strews the field with their corpses, reduces them to ashes, or they flee like small animals at the growl of the lion.

Duryodhana, alarmed, cries to Bhishma, "Look at Arjuna, white horses yoked to his chariot, driven by Krishna, consuming your army like a flame

of the pralaya burning a forest. O great Kshatriya, see how he devours our men, thinning our army by a thousand lives every moment.

My maharathas are as hard pressed as some cowherds in the jungle trying to control their stampeding herd attacked by a two great lions. From every side Arjuna and Bhima beset my legions and my men are butchered, and those that still live are terrified, their spirits broken. Satyaki, and Chekitana, and the twin sons of Madri, and the terrific Abhimanyu hunt with Arjuna and Bhima, and panic sweeps through my legions and they flee as they can.

Dhrishtadyumna and Ghatotkacha also put my men to rout so their blood flows again in rills. Ah, in this carnage, I see no one other than you, with your divine powers, who can prevent the Pandava maharathas from winning this war within the hour. Pitamaha, save us or we are lost!"

Bhishma ponders these words, and says slowly to your son, "Duryodhana, listen calmly to what I say. I vowed that I would kill ten thousand noble Kshatriyas every day, and return triumphant from the battlefield. I have fulfilled that vow!

Even today I will achieve a great feat as you watch me. I will either kill the Pandavas or die. Tiger among men, today I will free myself from my debt to you by sacrificing myself while leading your army." And Bhishma attacks the Pandava host.

The Pandavas oppose the son of Ganga who stands at the heart his forces seething like an angry snake. He annihilates thousands of warriors on that tenth day of the war. Like the sun sucking the earth dry of her moisture, he exhausts the regal ranks of the Panchala maharathas. He kills ten thousand spirited elephants, ten thousand horses with their riders, and two hundred thousand foot-soldiers; like a smokeless fire, Bhishma blazes like a flame which burns at its brightest just before being extinguished.

And none among the Pandavas can even look at him who is like the sun fixed in the northern solstice. The heroic Pandavas and the Srinjaya maharathas still storm at him in waves. Battling the countless warriors who surround him, Bhishma looks like Meru's steep slopes covered by dense clouds.

Your sons surround Bhishma with a vast protective force. Another fierce battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas ensues.'

CANTO 111

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Watching Bhishma ablaze, more fearsome than he has yet been, Arjuna says to Sikhandin, "Ride towards the Pitamaha. Do not fear him today. For it is I who ride behind you and I who will strike him down from his chariot today."

Sikhandin charges Bhishma, and Dhrishtadyumna and the radiant Abhimanyu ride with him, their bows streaming many fires. Splendid in their armour, old Virata and Drupada, and Kuntibhoja also attack Bhishma before your son's eyes. And Nakula, Sahadeva, and Yudhishtira too, along with the other warriors ride at only Bhishma.

As for your Kshatriyas, listen, O Rajan, as I speak of them who advance so bravely, united against the Pandava army. Like a young tiger attacking a bull, Chitrasena charges Chekitana who is harrying Bhishma. Kritavarman holds up Dhrishtadyumna who is threateningly close to the Kuru Pitamaha.

Somadatta's son fearlessly attacks Bhima who is also furiously trying to make Bhishma's great frame a home for his powerful arrows. Vikarna creates a magical wall of shafts between Nakula's gales of barbs and the grandsire.

Kripa prevents Sahadeva from approaching Bhishma's chariot. Durmukha storms against the mighty Ghatotkacha who also wants to kill just the son of Ganga. Duryodhana stops Satyaki from advancing. Sudakshina, king of the Kamabojas, engages and holds up Abhimanyu as he nears Bhishma's chariot. And Aswatthaman foils both Virata and Drupada.

Drona somewhat easily contains Yudhishtira who also is bent just on having Bhishma's life today. Showing incredible skill today, Dussasana thwarts Arjuna himself who, with Sikhandin before him, is dashing towards Bhishma, lighting up the ten quarters of the world with his shining astras.

Other warriors of your army clash with the Pandava maharathas advancing against Ganga's majestic son.

Dhrishtadyumna rides at Bhishma alone, crying to his forces, "Look at Arjuna storming at Bhishma. Be without fear today and attack just the son of Ganga. Bhishma will be helpless to harm you today. Why, Vasava

himself cannot face Arjuna in battle, then what to say of Bhishma who, though he great indeed and courage incarnate, is also old and weak?"

Hearing this from their Senapati, the Pandava maharathas are jubilant and rush all together towards Bhishma's chariot. Many excellent men of your army spiritedly resist those Kshatriyas hurtling hungrily towards Bhishma.

To shield him from the hunting Arjuna, Dussasana fearlessly attacks the Pandava. The other sons of Pandu assail your mighty sons who surround Bhishma's chariot. It is wonderful to see Arjuna stopped short by Dussasana. As the shore contains the surging sea, your son Dussasana holds up the storming son of Pandu.

Both of them are excellent maharathas. Both are invincible. Both magnificent to behold, they resemble the sun and the moon. Both are incensed, and both want to kill the other. They fight like Mayaa and Sakra in olden days.

Dussasana stabs Arjuna with three shafts and Krishna with twenty. Enraged to see Krishna bleed, Arjuna looses a hundred shafts at Dussasana, which flash through his armour and draw spouts of blood. Dussasana strikes Arjuna in the chest with five barbs, and upon his brow with three whetted shafts. These project from his head, making him look like Meru with lofty peaks. Looking like a radiant kinsuka, your son harangues Arjuna in that duel.

Inflamed like Rahu on a full moon night, Arjuna unleashes a flurry of arrows winged with the feathers of the kanka bird, and wounds Dussasana deeply. Arjuna cleaves Dussasana's bow and smashes his chariot with three shafts, and looses countless arrows like barbs of death at your son. But splendid Dussasana swiftly thwarts them in flight. All this appears so marvellous.

Dussasana strikes Arjuna with a hundred shafts and the angry Partha replies with flocks of searing arrows that plunge into Dussasana's body like swans diving into a lake. Covered in his own blood and staggering from the wounds of Arjuna, your son now runs towards Bhishma's chariot. He seeks Bhishma out like a drowning man clings to an island.

Finding refuge, your heroic Dussasana once more rains arrows at Arjuna, even like Purandara resisting Vritra. Though he is so mighty and powerful, his best efforts to vanquish Arjuna are in vain.'

CANTO 112

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Alambusha thwarts Satyaki and rides towards Bhishma to offer his protection. The incensed Satyaki strikes the Rakshasa with nine dire arrows. Alambusha responds with nine shafts as well. Satyaki unleashes a storm of arrows at the Rakshasa, who, roaring dreadfully, responds in kind. Deeply injured by Alambusha, Satyaki laughs off his wounds. Bhagadatta stabs him with more keenly whetted shafts like a mahout piercing a tusker with his hook.

Satyaki turns away from Alambusha to vent his wrath upon Bhagadatta, who calmly breaks the shining Vrishni hero's massive bow in his hands. Satyaki Yuyudhana seizes another and pierces Bhagadatta deeply, drawing small fonts of blood from his great frame. Bhagadatta licks the corners of his mouth and flings a most deadly iron spear, shimmering with gold and lapis lazuli, fierce like Yama's rod, at his enemy.

Satyaki cuts down that coursing shaft even as it flies at him, and it falls lustreless, like a burnt out meteor. Duryodhana surrounds Satyaki with many chariots.

He says to his brothers, "Kauravas, ensure that Satyaki does not escape from this encirclement. If he is killed, consider the vast host of the Pandavas also destroyed." Before Bhishma's eyes, those Kaurava maharathas attack Satyaki all together.

The king of the Kambojas sees Abhimanyu sweeping towards Bhishma and rides to bar his way. In a flash, Arjuna's son strikes Sudakshina with sixty four shafts. The Kamboja pierces Abhimanyu with five arrows and his charioteer with nine, to defend Bhishma. The duel between these two is ferocious and wonderful.

Meanwhile, Sikhandin continues to advance towards the Pitamaha. Destroying the teeming Kaurava army, maharathas Virata and Drupada also press their way towards Bhishma but they are confronted by an infuriated Aswatthaman.

Virata strikes Drona's son, that ornament of battle, sharply, as he dashes at them, and Drupada pierces him with three heavy shafts. Aswatthaman

looses a fuming volley at the twain. With awesome archery the two old warriors serenely thwart Aswatthama's arrow storm.

Like an incensed elephant charging another in a forest, Kripa rides at Sahadeva who is also advancing upon Bhishma. He strikes Sahadeva with seventy golden shafts. The son of Madri cleaves Kripa's bow in his hands and pierces his first acharya with nine barbs.

Seizing another great bow, Kripa shoots ten immaculate barbs at Sahadeva in the space of a wish. Possessed by the single thought of killing Bhishma, annoyed at being thus held up, Sahadeva unleashes an altogether more savage clutch of missiles at his aged master's chest. And another zealous duel begins.

Parantapa Vikarna, also wanting to protect Bhishma, strikes Nakula with sixty shafts and Nakula replies with a hot salvo of seventy-seven barbs. Quickly, those purushavyaghras battle like two bulls in a herd over a cow. For Bhishma's sake, too, your son Durmukha whirls at Ghatotkacha who is slaughtering your army as he also rides at Bhishma. Hidimbi's son opens a deep gash in Durmukha's breast with one arrow like time. Durmukha only roars at the wound, even in elation, and stabs Ghatotkacha with sixty keen darts.

Dhrishtadyumna, also, sweeping down on Bhishma and Hridika's son Kritavarman, obstructs him. Drupada's fire prince looses a sear of five molten shafts at Kritavarman and strikes him with another fifty iron barbs in his chest, most of which glance off his mail. Dhrishtadyumna swift as the mind shoots nine more burning arrows, winged with the feathers of the kanka bird at the Yadava prince.

They battle impassionedly for Bhishma's sake, as fiercely as Vritra and Vasava. Bhurisravas assails Bhima who is also advances ever nearer the mighty Bhishma. That grand Kuru warrior pierces Bhima's commodious chest with a telling golden-winged arrow; so awesome does Bhima look as dramatic as the Krauncha mountain did of old when it bore Lord Skanda's barb. Ablaze, the two Kshatriyas, Purusharishabhas both, loose livid rivers of missiles, bright as sunflares, at each other. Bhima fights, longing for Bhishma's death, while Somadatta does to secure Bhishma's victory, and each matches the other's stunning feats.

Drona arrests the careen of Yudhishtira storming towards Bhishma. The Prabhadrakas tremble hearing the roar of Drona's chariot that is like the

rumble of massed thunderheads, and that vast Pandava host cannot advance even a step because of Bharadwaja's formidable son.

Your tenacious son Chitrasena impedes the fierce Chekitana, also riding at Bhishma. Chekitana attacks him vigorously, and scintillating is the duel between these two. Though Dussasana powerfully obstructs Arjuna's path to Bhishma, that irresistible Pandava overwhelms him and forces your son to retreat. Arjuna strews the field with Kaurava corpses at his majestic, inexorable will, and the other Pandava maharathas also decimate your legions which try to keep Bhishma safe.'

CANTO 113

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Like an incensed elephant, Drona penetrates the Pandava ranks, and mows them down on every side with his godlike archery. Drona, knowing interpreter of omens, sees the signs of an age ending and another rising all around him and says to Aswatthaman who also ravages the enemy on every side, "This is that day on which Arjuna will put forth all his prowess to have Bhishma's life.

My arrows leap out from their quiver by themselves. My bow seems to yawn. My astra seems unwilling to obey me, and I feel a great despondence. Animals and birds cry relentlessly in fearful voices. Vultures fly down and vanish under the feet of the Bhaarata forces.

The Sun appears dull. The four quarters are on fire. Everywhere the Earth seems to wail and tremble in some great fear. Kankas, vultures and cranes cry out repeatedly warning of some dreadful evil. Jackals scream and wheel in inauspicious apradakshina also predicting grave danger.

Immense meteors seem to flare down from the heart of the Sun. The Parigha constellation appears around Surya Deva, shrouding his light. The Sun and Moon look threatening, foretelling a massacre of Kshatriyas. The statues in the temples of the Kauravas tremble and laugh and dance and weep, as if they have gone mad. The glowing crescent moon rises with horns turned down. The bodies of the kings in the Kaurava army appear pale, and though clad in armour, they are strangely dull.

The blast of Panchajanya and the twang of Gandiva resound all around both armies, above every other sound. Today, bearing all his astras, Arjuna will surely mow his way through all our maharathas and mount his attack on Bhishma.

The pores of my body contract, and all my hope drains from me, when I think of the coming battle between Bhishma and Arjuna. Ah, look! Keeping the deceitful Panchala prince before him, even now Arjuna rides at the Pitamaha. Bhishma has said that he will not kill Sikhandin because this prince was born a woman, and only later became a man.

That mighty son of Yajnasena is himself the most inauspicious omen. Bhishma will never fight with such an unnatural one. Ah, my son, fear grips my heat in a vice knowing that every moment Arjuna draws nearer the revered Pitamaha.

Yudhishtira's anger, which has been restrained so long, the very thought of Arjuna fighting his beloved grandsire, and me, a Brahmana taking to arms in a war, all portend the gravest tragedy. Arjuna is imbued with untold tejas; he is powerful, brave, and a great master of weapons. Apart from loosing his arrows farther and more powerfully than any other man, he too is a sure reader of omens.

So strong, intelligent and tireless is Arjuna that not the Devas with Vasava at their head can defeat him in battle. He has the most virulent astras and he is called Vijaya because he never loses a battle but always triumphs in war. Avoid him, my son, and ride to defend Bhishma from this terrible son of Pandu.

Today we shall see such carnage that not even this war among all wars has yet shown us. The beautiful golden armour of heroic Kshatriyas will be riven by his arrows, and Arjuna will cut down their flags, and bearded javelins in flight, and bows, and bright pointed spears, and glittering arrows, and the standards on the backs of their elephants.

O my son, this is not the time to care for our lives. Focussed on heaven, fame and victory, go and fight. There, the Vanara-bannered Arjuna crosses the treacherous river of battle in his chariot, the river that has blood for its currents and shattered chariots, dead elephants, and horses for its islets.

Regard for Brahmanas, self-restraint, liberality, asceticism, and noble conduct are to be found in Yudhishtira alone; for his brothers he has Arjuna, the mighty Bhima, and the twin sons of Madri by Pandu; and he has Krishna of the Vrishni vamsa for his protector.

His body has been purified by the flames of tapasya, and Yudhishtira's anger, born of grief, is directed at the black-souled son of Dhritarashtra and this righteous anger is what destroys the Bhaarata host.

There comes Arjuna; with Krishna as his sarathy and refuge he advances irresistibly and lays waste the entire Dhartarashtra army. Look, he terrifies our host like a great whale stirring up an ocean with towering waves. Listen to the frantic sad cries of our army.

Charge against the heir of the Panchala king. I will ride against Yudhishtira. The heart of his vyuha is difficult to penetrate. Inaccessible as

the depths of the sea, it is guarded on all sides by Atirathas. Satyaki, and Abhimanyu and Dhrishtadyumna, and Bhima, and the twins, all protect Yudhishtira.

Dark as the younger brother of Indra, and standing like a tall sala tree, behold Abhimanyu storming ahead at the head of the Pandava host, like a second Arjuna! Seize your mighty weapons, and with your great bow ride against Sikhandin and Bhima.

Who doesn't want their son to live long? However, I now observe the dharma of a Kshatriya, and I assign this task to you. Ah, look where Bhishma also razes the swarming Pandava host. O son, the Kuru Pitamaha is equal to Yama or Varuna himself in battle.'"

CANTO 114

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Hearing what Drona says, Bhagadatta and Kripa and Salya and Kritavarman, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Jayadratha of the Sindhus, and Chitrasena and Vikarna and Durmarshana, these ten warriors of your army, supported by a legion of diverse soldiers, boldly face Bhima, wanting to win fame in the war for Bhishma's sake.

Salya strikes Bhima with nine arrows, and Kritavarman stabs him with three, and Kripa with nine. And Chitrasena and Vikarna and Bhagadatta, each pierce him with ten barbs. Jayadratha strikes him with three, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti each with five shafts.

Duryodhana attacks him with twenty arrows. In return Bhima relentlessly pierces each one of those kings, those maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army. He shoots Salya with seven arrows and Kritavarman with eight. And he cleaves Kripa's bow in two. He pierces Kripa once more with seven shafts. And he strikes Vinda and Anuvinda with three barbs each.

Bhima strikes Durmarshana deep with twenty arrows, Chitrasena with five, Vikarna with ten, and Jayadratha with five; and once more flaying the king of the Sindhus with three astras, Bhimasena roars loudly with delight.

Kripa, maharatha, angrily stabs Bhima with ten polished shafts. Pierced like an elephant by a goad, Bhima's eyes turn red in a moment and he looses a vicious salvo at Kripa, drawing founts of blood from his old master. Splendid as Yama, as he appears at the end of the yuga, Bhima kills Jayadratha's horses with three scarlet explosions, and also his charioteer. Maharatha Jayadratha leaps down from his horseless chariot and looses a squall of keen shafts at Bhima.

Bhima destroys Jayadratha's bow with two broad-headed arrows. His bow broken, his chariot stranded, his horses and sarathy killed, Jayadratha mounts Chitrasena's chariot. Triumphant Bhima draws blood from all the maharathas before him; celebrant, he smashes Jayadratha's chariot into pieces in the very sight of all the Kaurava army. Watching Bhima's dreadful

feats, Salya roars out a challenge to him; he looses a gale of gleaming barbs at the monumental Pandava.

Kripa and Kritavarman and the valiant Bhagadatta, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and Chitrasena, and Durmarshana, and Vikarna, and Jayadratha all attack Bhima in concert. Irrepressible Bhima stabs each of them with hot clutches of arrows, five for each one. And he harries Salya with seventy shafts loosed in the twinkling of an eye, and again with ten more. Salya drives nine steaming arrows through him, and then five more. With another broad one he pierces Bhima's charioteer deep.

Seeing his charioteer Visoka wounded deep, with a terrible cry, Bhima drills three searing shafts into the arms and chest of the Madra king; he riddles the other maharathas each with three perfectly straight arrows and, throwing back his massive head, lets out a deafening, lion's roar.

Those mighty archers gore Bhima, probing his very vitals. Wounded, he yet remains still, like a mountain drenched by lashing rain clouds. That Pandava maharatha, that celebrated Kshatriya, wrathfully reams the ruler of the Madras with three light like arrows; he punishes the ruler of the Pragjyotishas with a hundred.

He castigates Kripa with countless barbs and, with astounding dexterity, cleaves Kritavarman's bow with a single shaft—all this in a breathtaking instant. Kritavarman, parantapa, scourge of his enemies, takes up another bow and strikes Bhima right between his eyes with a fine long arrow.

Having pierced Salya with nine iron arrows, and Bhagadatta with three, and Kritavarman with eight, Bhima chastens the others led by Kripa, each with two shafts. These warriors reply with calid flurries, making blood flowers sprout on great Bhima. They scathe him with diverse astras, but Bhima remains nonchalant and courses effortlessly across the battleground, spraying Kurukshetra liberally with enemies' blood. Hundreds of thousands of arrows rain down on him from every side.

Bhagadatta casts a fierce golden javelin spear at him; the Sindhu king, Mahabaho, flings both a javelin and a battle-axe at Bhima in wrath, to remember the humiliation this Pandava inflicted on him once in the forest. Kripa unleashes a satagni of a hundred flames at Bhima, and Salya a single arrow as fulgurant. The other archers each aim five punitive shafts at him.

The son of Vayu cleaves Bhagadatta's missile along its deadly length; he pulverises Jayadratha's axe as if were a stem of sesame. He douses the satagni with five occult shafts winged with the feathers of the kanka bird,

blows Salya's one arrow of dread into dust. Proud Bhima, who knows neither doubt nor fear, cuts every other arrow flying at him in three. And he strikes each of those illustrious archers who attacked him with blinding archery that rivals, why, now exceeds, his brother Arjuna's.

As the war burns on, Arjuna sees Bhima devouring the enemy on all sides like Yama and rides towards him on his chariot. The warriors of your army watch those two enkindled sons of Pandu come together, and their spirits tremble.

Arjuna has only a single intention today—to kill Bhishma. Setting Sikhandin before him, he nears Bhima who has been battling the ten Kaurava maharathas by himself; Arjuna descends on those fierce ten like some dreadful plague. In a wink he strikes all of them with arrows that fling them back in their chariots or strike them down.

In some alarm, Duryodhana cries to Susarman, the Trigarta king, "Great Susarman, fly taking your Trigarta host with you. Let the earth drink the blood of Pandu's sons Dhananjaya and Vrikodara today!"

Roaring, his host of sterling archers riding with him, Susarman, king of the Trigartas, lord of Prasthala, swoops on Bhima and Arjuna and surrounds them with thousands of chariots. A stupendous duel spumes up between him and Arjuna.'

CANTO 115

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'With shafts of fierce precision, Arjuna envelops maharatha Salya who fights him gallantly. Arjuna pierces Susarman and Kripa with three arrows each.

Atiratha Arjuna torments your army all around him; he adorns Bhagadatta and Jayadratha, and Chitrasena, and Vikarna, and Kritavarman, and Durmarshana, and those two maharathas, the princes of Avanti, each with three barbs winged with the feathers of the kanka and the peacock.

Jayadratha, whom Siva blessed, putting forth his best fight, pierces Arjuna and also Bhima from Chitrasena's chariot. Salya and Kripa both strike Arjuna with diverse arrows, which burrow deeply into his virile form. Your sons led by Chitrasena, Rajan, each pierce Arjuna and Bhima with five arrows like daggers.

Kunti's two prodigious sons, both maharathas without compare, Bhima and Arjuna, begin to pound the mighty Trigarta host. Then Susarman looses nine extraordinary arrows at Arjuna, all of which find their mark, and roaring loudly terrifies the Pandava forces.

Other noble Kshatriyas rack Bhima and Dhananjaya with many whetted golden winged shafts. Standing amidst them, those two bulls of the Bharata vamsa only ever more look magnificent and they seem to tantalise their opponents like two furious lions hunting in a herd of cows.

The two peerless Kshatriyas cleave their most valiant adversaries' bows and barbs and fell the heads of countless warriors. Innumerable chariots they smash, hundreds of horses they kill, and so many elephants, along with their riders, in that tumultuary and dreadful battle. Chariot warriors and untold numbers of horsemen and elephant-riders are slain outright or seen convulsing in death's final spasms all over Kurukshetra. And the earth is covered with the corpses of elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, and chariots destroyed in many ways.

Arjuna's prowess is wonderful to behold, as he thwarts his enemies and slaughters them in droves. Kripa, and Kritavarman, and Jayadratha, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti remain resolute. And as if inspired at being

opposed by any, Bhima and Arjuna appear to raise the level of their archery and where hundreds died at their hands each moment now thousands perish and the rout of the fierce Kaurava host swells exponentially. The enemy kings loose millions of arrows with peacock feathers at Arjuna's chariot. Dazzling, thought-swift Arjuna cuts all these missiles down as in some dream and in the same moment, it seems, annihilates his challengers.

Inflamed to watch this, Salya strikes Arjuna in his chest with some broad headed shafts. With five startling barbs, Arjuna breaks Salya's bow and shreds his leather gloves, and pierces him deep in his body. Snatching up another powerful bow, the Madra king furiously attacks Arjuna with three arrows and Krishna with five. He gores Bhima in the arms and the chest with nine shafts.

At Duryodhana's urgent command, Drona and the Magadha king ride swiftly to where Arjuna and Bhima massacre the mighty Kaurava army at will. As his rides up, Jayatsena pierces Bhima of terrible weapons with eight serrated arrows. Bhima looses a flash of fifteen searing shafts at him. With another broad-headed arrow he fells Jayatsena's charioteer from his chariot head, and the Magadhan's unrestrained horses dash wildly away and carry him out of battle in the sight of all the troops.

Drona, seeing an opening, stabs Bhima with eight unusual barbs with heads like a frog's mouth. Bhima, always delighting in battle, wheels round and strikes the Acharya with five heavy arrows, and O Bhaarata, with sixty more fleet ones.

Arjuna looses countless iron barbs at Susarman himself, while also demolishing his Trigarta forces like a high wind dispersing massed clouds. Bhishma and Duryodhana, and Brihadbala, king of the Kosalas, wrathfully advance upon Bhima and Dhananjaya. At this, the gallant Pandava warriors and Dhrishtadyumna charge against Bhishma who is pressing forward like Yama with mouth agape.

Sikhandin sees the Pitamaha of the Bhaaratas; he charges fearlessly and jubilantly towards that greatest maharatha. All the Parthas with Yudhishtira at their head, uniting with the Srinjayas and setting Sikhandin in their van, come hunting Bhishma. With Bhishma at their head, all the warriors of your army confront all the Pandava legions with Sikhandin in their van. That pitched battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, fought for Bhishma's victory or his death, is the fiercest and most terrifying one yet.

Indeed, on that fateful tenth day, first of the fell Kali Yuga, age of vileness and wrath, in that brutal game of war, being played out on sacred, bloodied Kurukshetra, field of dharma, Bhishma becomes the stake wagered, his life the precious thing on which the success or defeat of your army depends.

Dhrishtadyumna roars his command at all his men, “Charge against the son of Ganga. Be fearless, O you wonderful maharathas!”

Hearing their Senapati’s call to the moment of a great reckoning, the Pandava host swarms towards Bhishma, themselves roaring, ready to lay down their lives to achieve holy, priceless victory. Great Jaya! Maharatha Bhishma receives that storming host like a continent withstanding the surging sea.’

CANTO 116

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, how does mighty Bhishma fight the Pandavas and the Srinjayas on the tenth day of the war? How do the Kauravas oppose the Pandavas? Describe the great endeavour of that jewel of battle.'

Sanjaya says, 'I will tell of how the Kauravas fight the Pandavas, and the details of their battle. Day after day, Arjuna Kiritin obliterates countless maharathas of your vast army with his astras. The triumphal Bhishma also wreaks great carnage upon the Pandavas. O Parantapa, seeing Bhishma ablaze at the head of the Kurus, and Arjuna at that of the Panchalas, it is hard to say who will be victorious.

On the tenth day, when Bhishma and Arjuna face each other, there is an unprecedented bloodbath on Kurukshetra. Bhishma slaughters thousands of unknown but heroic warriors, all resolute in battle. Scorching the Pandava army for ten days, Mahabaho Bhishma fights without the slightest care for his life, and magnificently, yet with sorrow in his noble heart. And on this day of moment, he wishes fervently that he may not take any more noble lives discharging his terrible Kshatriya dharma, and he wishes for his own death.

Seeing Yudhishtira near him, he says, "Wise Yudhishtira, listen to my righteous words. I no longer want to save my body. I have already killed countless great warriors. If you want to truly please me, your Pitamaha, set Arjuna with the Panchalas and the Srinjayas in your van, and exert yourself to the utmost to take my life."

Understanding him, Yudhishtira presses forward with the Srinjayas. Also having heard what Bhishma said, Dhrishtadyumna goads his legions forward.

Yudhishtira cries with as much rage as grief, "Fly at Bhishma and kill him even now! Arjuna will protect you, as will Dhrishtadyumna and Bhima. Srinjayas, do not fear Bhishma today. With Sikhandin before us, we will surely vanquish the Pitamaha."

Determined to either triumph or die, led by Sikhandin and Arjuna, the Pandava host essays at Bhishma giving their all and with nothing to lose. Many powerful kings, urged on by your son Suyodhana, along with Drona and his son and a vast force, with Dussasana at the head of all his brothers, also fly toward Bhishma at the very heart of all the unspeakable and resplendent butchery.

Keeping Bhishma at their head, your legions spiritedly engage with the Pandavas led by Sikhandin. Supported by the Chedis and the Panchalas, the Vanara-bannered Arjuna, keeps Sikhandin before him, and storms at his Pitamaha. Satyaki clashes first with Drona's son, and Dhrishtaketu with Puru's descendant; Yudhamanyu grimly fights Duryodhana and his legion. Virata leads his heroes against Jayadratha's.

Parantapa, Vardhakshatra's heir encounters Chitrasena of the most excellent bow. And Yudhishtira faces the haranguing Salya at the head of his forces. Bhima, purest, mightiest and most unalloyed of all Kshatriyas in spirit, roaring, always roaring in exultation at being in battle at last, storms yet against the Kaurava elephants.

Dhrishtadyumna, fire prince of Panchala, along with his brothers, furiously attacks the unconquerable Drona, foremost of all wielders of weapons. Parantapa Brihadbala, who flies the lion on his standard, hurtles at Abhimanyu whose standard bears the karnikara flower. With countless kings going with them, your sons advance upon Sikhandin and Arjuna. When these warriors clash, the earth trembles.

Seeing Bhishma approach, both armies fall into disarray and become hopelessly entangled, flailing out with sword and spear, covering the air with a single dense cloud of arrows. Great is the commotion they make, those warriors inflamed with rage charge madly, bloodthirstily at one another. The tumult rings all around, a ceaseless deafening din, shattering the eardrums of warriors so blood oozes down their necks before those necks are hewn.

The blast of conches and the tigerish roars of fighting men form what appears to be an unending bellow of pain from the wounded earth's very womb. The radiance of the bracelets and crowns of all the heroic kings, equal to that of the sun or the moon, is dimmed by the dust raised by flying hooves, thundering elephants' charges, the running feet of millions of foot-soldiers, the whirling swerving wheels of numberless chariots; against this

dark thunderhead of dust and smoke, the flash of weapons everywhere is like braids and streaks of lighting.

The twanging bows, the stentorian hum of arrows like that of black bee swarms beyond count disturbed, the booming conches, the pounding drums, and the dementedly barbarous clatter of chariot-wheels, of both the armies, is numbing. And the sky darkens deeper by the moment with rich flights of bearded barbs, spears, swords wildly flung and the ceaseless rain of fell astras.

Maharathas and horsemen cut each other down as if offering rivers of noble blood to the earth in some ghastly sacrifice in that awesome war, at once so abominable and so irresistibly beautiful. And elephants gore down elephants, and foot-soldiers butcher foot-soldiers. And the war on that tenth day, being fought for Bhishma's life, between the Kauravas and the Pandavas assumes an incrementally hideous aspect, while it is also like a fight between two hawks for a fine piece of flesh. The crimson river of death foams ever higher and darker on bleeding, incomparable Kurukshetra.'

CANTO 117

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu displays his prowess before Bhishma, and challenges your mighty eldest son. Duryodhana strikes Abhimanyu through his chest with nine straight arrows, and in a flash with three. Arjuna's son hurls a fierce and strange lance resembling Yama's rod at Duryodhana's chariot. Your son cleaves it along its length as it courses towards him.

Seeing his spear plummet, Abhimanyu seizes his bow and strikes Duryodhana deep with three shafts through his arms and breast. Quicker than the eye sees, that scintillating young maharatha stabs the Kaurava king with a blur of ten barbs making a neat feathered circle of quivering arrows on his wide chest.

And the duel between those two Kshatriyas, one fighting to kill Bhishma and the other to vanquish Arjuna, is brutal and breathtaking to watch, and gratifying to the senses; it is praised by all the kings.

The son of Drona, that bull among Brahmanas and chastiser of enemies, bloodies Satyaki's chest with a salient arrow. The grandson of Sini also pierces all his vital limbs with nine signal shafts winged with the feathers of the kanka bird. Aswatthaman stabs Satyaki's arms and breast with nine horned barbs, and then with thirty significant shafts more. That celebrated bowman of the Satwatavamsa returns the fire cardinally, covering Aswatthaman in blood.

Maharatha Paurava swathes Dhrishtaketu with his remarkable volleys and fairly mangles him. But the formidable Dhrishtaketu is unmoved and looses a jagged volley of lightning bolts at Paurava. Paurava smashes Dhrishtaketu's bow, and roaring loudly, strikes him repeatedly with a clutch of keen arrows. Dhrishtaketu seizes another bow and gouges Paurava with an astonishing salvo of seventy-three shafts all shot in the heart of a moment.

Those two illustrious archers cover each other with arrows. Each shatters the other's bow, and each kills the other's horses. They face each other with gleaming swords drawn, and bull's hide shields, one adorned

with a hundred moons and the other with a hundred stars. They run at each other like two lions in the forest, over a lioness in heat. They wheel around in elegant circles, advance and retreat, and display other dancelike movements, all the while looking for an opening to strike the adversary.

Growing impatient, Paurava roars at Dhrishtaketu to stop and fight, and swiftly strikes him on his mail-covered collar bone, a mighty blow. Not flinching, the Chedi king fetches Paurava a powerful stroke on his shoulder, so some blood flies from the wound. In a blink, they rain a dreadful flurry of cuts, thrusts and wild swings on each other, so that both fall to the ground. Your son Jayatsena takes Paurava into his chariot and bears his away from the field, while Sahadeva bears Dhrishtaketu away.

Chitrasena, having already pierced Susarman with manifold arrows, looses a fresh salvo of sixty-nine burning shafts at him. The incensed Susarman wounds your son all over his body with hundreds of barbs. Chitrasena, infuriated, retaliates with thirty penetrating shafts, and Susarman strikes Chitrasena again.

In that battle for Bhishma's life, Subhadra's son further swells his fame and honour when he flays Brihadbala, drawing that maharatha away from Arjuna, and then marching towards Bhishma. The Kosala king attacks Abhimanyu with five heavy iron shafts, and then with twenty more. Abhimanyu stabs Brihadbala with eight similar missiles, which Brihadbala only shrugs off and Arjuna's son lifts his archery to rive Brihadbala's bow in his hands, and strikes him again thirty barbs swifter than light. Brihadbala takes up another bow and covers the brilliant youth of just sixteen summers in fire.

Both Kshatriyas, one so young and the other seasoned and mature, are such masters of war, that the duel between them is surely reminiscent of the contention between Indra and Bali during the Devasura yuddha in time out of mind.

Bhima, wild and bloody amongst the elephants, looks as resplendent as thunderous Sakra after splitting lofty mountains. The screams and dismal bellows of the great beasts, big as cliffs, that he strikes down as he pleases, fill the world. Hillocks of antimony, the tuskers lying dead across Kurukshetra with their round temples cloven by terrible Bhima are like mountains scattered over the earth.

Well protected, Yudhishtira attacks Salya, king of the Madras, who loses no time turning on his assailant. Jayadratha of the Sindhus strikes Virata

with nine keen arrows, and seamlessly with thirty more. Commanding a vast legion, Virata makes a home in Jayadratha's chest for thirty polished shafts. And radiant are those two, the lord of the Matsyas and the ruler of the Sindhus, both armed with beautiful bows, swords and other weapons, wearing dazzling armour, and flying brilliant pennants.

Drona encounters Dhrishtadyumna and mounts a ferocious attack on the prince sworn, why, born to kill him. Smashing Drupada's son's bow, Drona excoriates him with a hum of fifty barbs. That parantapa raises another bow and vents his wrath on the Acharya with a fiery volley. Maharatha Drona slices those arrows along their length even as they flare at him, and looses five keening barbs at his old enemy Drupada's prince. Dhrishtadyumna, roaring, hurls a knobbed golden mace at the Brahmana warrior and Drona nervelessly shatters it with fifty arrows loosed in a blink.

Dhrishtadyumna launches a most refined astra at Drona, who effortlessly foils it with a clutch of nine smoking barbs, unsettling the Pandava Senapati. Rajan, thus they fight, master and disciple, both inspired to draw upon their deepest skills, during this duel fought for the life of Bhishma.

Arjuna, meanwhile rushes towards Bhishma like one king elephant at another, showering ceaseless fire over his Pitamaha. Bhagadatta arrests Arjuna's dangerous careen, setting his massive Supratika between the marauding Pandava and the Kuru grandsire and lashing down a gale of arrows from his height. Arjuna storms straight at Bhagadatta, unleashing a fury of silver shafts at his towering beast, so that Bhagadatta quickly turns away and thunders down upon Drupada's chariot.

Again, Arjuna sets Sikhandin before him and courses on towards Bhishma, who is all he sees before him, his only real target. With loud yells and roars, hordes of your brave fighting men assail Arjuna, who so calmly sows death all around him, in a carmine flash flood. And, ah, all this appears wonderful.

Like the high wind scattering fleecy clouds in a summer sky Arjuna disperses your son's akshauhinis, all the while thinning them, thinning them dreadfully. Each moment, Sikhandin of the single obsession that has possessed him through two strangest lives, heralding his advent with an endless stream of wooden arrows, plunges ever nearer Bhishma.

As for Bhishma, his chariot is his fire-chamber. His bow is the flame of that fire. And swords, shafts and maces are its fuel. The arrows he shoots are the blazing sparks that consume Kshatriyas in that grisly war. As a

raging fire rolling across a field of dry grass with the wind, Bhishma burns gloriously as he unleashes his divine astras.

And he decimates the Somakas that follow Arjuna into battle; that effulgent maharatha attenuates the other Pandava legions that ride with Arjuna with swarms of golden-winged shafts. Bhishma fills all the directions, with his leonine roaring, and endlessly strews the awful field of dharma with corpses of chariot warriors and horses with their riders. He reduces the massed chariots to look like palm forests with their leafy heads severed. He strips horses, elephants and chariots of their riders, a thousand each moment.

Hearing the twang of his bow and the slap of his palms against his bowstring, like rolling thunder, terror sweeps through the Pandava ranks; even your own fighting men are affrighted. Not an arrow shot by the daunting Pitamaha misses its mark. They do not just pierce or slay his numberless victims; his barbs plough right through their armoured bodies in bright red eruptions and enter the earth behind them. What count is there of chariots careering across the field of death, with riders and sarathies slain and yoked horses dragging them on all sides with the speed of the wind?

Fourteen thousand noble maharathas, all ready to sacrifice their lives, with gold-worked standards, great warriors belonging to the Chedis, the Kasis, and the Karushas, attack Bhishma, Kshatriya who can only be Siva himself with mouth agape; in moments they are destroyed along with their horses, chariots and elephants.

Rajan, not a single maharatha of the Somakas returns alive from that encounter with Bhishma. Seeing his prowess, all know that none who dares ride against Bhishma this day will escape with his life. And indeed, after the massacre of the Somakas, no rathika will approach Bhishma anymore, but only Arjuna Swetavahana of the white horses, with Krishna as his charioteer, and Sikhandin, prince of Panchala.'

CANTO 118

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Sikhandin storms within range of Bhishma and strikes him squarely through his chest with ten broad-headed arrows. The son of Ganga merely looks at Sikhandin as if to kill him with withering disdain. Bhishma will not shoot back at Sikhandin.

Sikhandin pauses, bemused. Arjuna cries at the Panchala prince, "Do not hesitate, Sikhandin. Destroy Maharatha Bhishma, for you alone can. This is the truth. Kill him, Purushavyaghra, kill him now!"

Like a dreamer waking, Sikhandin covers Bhishma in a tirade of every kind of arrow. Ignoring these, Bhishma only looses his own shafts at Arjuna; he also razes the Pandava ranks behind these two. Like grim clouds occluding the sun, the Pandavas, with their vast hosts, push forward to engulf Bhishma.

Bharatarishabha, though surrounded on all sides, that Kshatriya without equal continues to consume the advancing legions like the forest fire does countless trees. Dussasana's shining prowess is wonderful to see as he battles Arjuna to protect the Pitamaha. Even his enemies laud his sheer courage as he fights alone and gloriously against all the Pandavas, and they cannot resist him.

Dussasana smashes the chariots of so many maharathas. With deadly salvos he fells mighty archers from horseback, powerful rathikas and elephants. The great beasts thunder away from the terror and pain of the incandescent Dussasana; flowing blood from the wounds he inflicts on them they scatter in all directions.

Like a fire that blazes more fiercely when fuelled, so does your son rage against the Pandava host. And no Pandava maharathika dares to advance against him as he is then, other than Arjuna with his white horses and Krishna for his sarathy. And, watched by all the warriors, Arjuna, the Vijaya, ineluctably quells the flaming Dussasana and flashes past him towards Bhishma. Though beaten, your son, still relying upon Bhishma's invincible might, comforts his forces and continues to fight fiercely against

the Pandavas. Arjuna is radiant; his body seems to blaze with light as he scythes through his enemies.

Sikhandin pierces the Pitamaha with many arrows deadly as lightning and fatal as a snake's venom. But all the Panchala prince's missiles have little impact as Bhishma receives them smiling, as if with delight. Even as a man whose body is fevered by summer heat welcomes torrential rain so does awesome Bhishma seem to welcome Sikhandin's arrows.

All the assembled Kshatriyas behold Bhishma as a great and fierce being, more than merely a man, who relentlessly devastates the Pandava warriors. Duryodhana says to his troops, "Attack Arjuna from all sides. Bhishma will protect you."

The Kaurava forces shed their fears and charge the Pandavas. Duryodhana says again to them, "With his lofty standard with the golden palmyra, Bhishma stands resolute, protecting the honour and the power of all the Dhartarashtra warriors. The very Devas cannot defeat him. What then to say about the Pandavas who are mere mortals? Kshatriyas, do not flee when you face Arjuna. I myself will fight the Pandavas, and be your support."

Hearing your son's words, Rajan, enraged warriors of the Videhas, the Kalingas, and the many tribes of the Daserkas fall upon Phalguni. And many belonging to the Nishadas, the Sauviras, the Bahlikas, the Daradas, the western and northern kingdoms, the Malavas, the Abhighatas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, the Vasatis, the Salwas, the Sakas, the Trigartas, the Ambashtha, and the Kekayas, also swoop down on Arjuna, like swarms of insects upon a fire.

Arjuna aims his devastras at the maharathas leading their akshauhinis; he makes ashes of them, like a fire swallowing insects. As he creates thousands upon thousands of arrows with his astras, his Gandiva dazzles.

Wounded by those arrows, their grand standards torn, those Kshatriyas, even united, cannot so much as draw near Arjuna. Assailed by Kiritin's shafts, rathikas fall with their standards, horsemen with their horses, and elephant riders with their elephants. Soon the earth is covered with the fleeing forces of those kings, routed by Arjuna's arrows.

Having crushed the Kaurava army, Arjuna looses a storm of arrows at Dussasana. The iron shafts pierce through him, and enter the earth like snakes through ant-hills. Arjuna kills Dussasana's horses and his charioteer.

With twenty barbs he smashes Vivimsati's chariot, then strikes that prince with five straight shafts. Attacking Kripa and Vikarna and Salya with a terrific volley, he demolishes their chariots. Defeated, they flee, along with Dussasana and Vikarna and Vivimsati.

Victorious over those maharathas, Arjuna blazes like a god on Kurukshetra. Unleashing waves of arrows on every side, even like the sun streaming rays, Partha overcomes many other kings. Bhaarata, killing them disdainfully with his unearthly archery, he makes another bloody river flow between the Kaurava and Pandava hosts.

Elephants and horses and maharathikas are slaughtered by chariot warriors. And many chariot warriors are trampled by elephants, and many horses are butchered by foot-soldiers. The bodies of elephant-riders and horsemen and chariot warriors are hacked to pieces, which, along with their heads, tumble to the ground.

And the field of the dread war, Rajan, is strewn with the corpses of princes, maharathikas all falling or fallen, decked with ear-rings and bracelets. The bodies of warriors bisected by chariot wheels, or crushed by elephants, also lie scattered. And foot-soldiers and horse riders flee.

Elephants and maharathikas plunge to the earth on all sides. Numerous chariots, with their wheels, yokes and standards smashed, lie strewn across Kurukshetra, as if by some vengeful god's hand. Dyed with the gore of numerous elephants, horses and chariot warriors, the earth looks beautiful like a red cloud in the sky.

Dogs, crows and vultures, wolves and jackals, and other terrifying beasts and birds howl and screech, hungering for dead flesh. Many fell winds blow from all sides. And Rakshasas and Pisachas can be seen with monstrous and ghoulish visages roaring fiercely. Golden strings and costly banners flap in the unnatural wind. Thousands of royal parasols and lofty chariots with splendid standards lie ruined on the ground.

Before all the archers, Bhishma invokes an agneyastra and aims it at Arjuna. His kavacha glittering, Sikhandin rides between the Kuru ancient and Arjuna and attacks Bhishma fiercely. Bhishma promptly withdraws the blinding astra of flames. Arjuna of the white steeds continues to raze your forces, letting ever more streams of blood, while Bhishma is a helpless spectator to the massacre of his army.'

CANTO 119

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Resolved to fight to the death, the teeming legions of both armies are ranged against each other, tenacious Kshatriyas ranged in vyuhas which have long since been violated. And no more, as had been agreed before the war began, do rathikas exclusively fight other chariot warriors, or foot-soldiers against foot-soldiers, or horsemen face other horsemen, or elephant-warriors other elephant-warriors. Instead, possessed completely by the feral spirit of war they attack each other wildly, chaotically, like men gone mad.

Ghastly devastation sweeps both armies, as elephants and men fight each other without distinction.

Then Salya and Kripa, and Chitrasena, and Dussasana, and Vikarna, mounted on their shining chariots, bring swift terror to the Pandava host. Savaged by those great Kshatriyas, the Pandava army reels and lurches like a boat tossed on the ocean by the wind. Like the biting cold that chills the blood of soft cows, Bhishma ploughs through the forces of sons of Pandu.

Immaculate and absolute mayhem rules Kurukshetra. Celebrated Arjuna fells your mighty tuskers like bulging clouds; his arrows drink the blood and claim the lives of great rathikas by now past all count. Struck by tempests of arrows and spears, whole elephant legions fall trumpeting. And oh, the battlefield looks eerily magnificent with the lifeless bodies and heads of warriors still adorned with sparkling ornaments.

Watching the Pitamaha exert himself against the storming Arjuna, your sons draw near him and surround him with their forces. Wanting to give up their lives and attain swarga this very day, they ride fearlessly at the Pandavas. Remembering all the insults and injuries inflicted upon them by you and your son, the noble Pandavas, eager for revenge and victory, joyfully engage your sons and their army.

The Pandava Senapati Dhrishtadyumna roars to his men, "Somakas and Srinjayas, attack Bhishma!" And though wounded by innumerable arrows, they charge at the son of Ganga. Himself in the grip of the fury of battle, the Pitamaha turns on the Srinjayas. When he was a boy, Bhishma learnt the

astra shastra from great Parasurama, who imparted to him knowledge of mighty devastras which could consume hostile armies. Using that knowledge now, the Kuru ancient wreaks havoc on the enemy ranks, killing ten thousand great warriors every day.

Bharatarishabha, on the tenth day, Bhishma single-handedly slaughters ten thousand elephants. He kills seven famed maharathikas of the Matsyas and the Panchalas; he kills five thousand foot-soldiers, one thousand tuskers, and ten thousand horses and horsemen.

Having razed the troops of all the kings who have come to war for the Pandavas, he kills Satanika, Virata's beloved brother. The incomparable Bhishma annihilates a thousand Kshatriyas with his broad-headed inexorable shafts. He cuts a russet swathe through the Kshatriyas of the Pandava army as they advance towards him following Arjuna.

Enveloping the Pandava host with dense barrages of arrows, with fire, water and wind of awesome devastras, Bhishma stands imperious at the head of the Kaurava forces. On the tenth day of the war, he stands between the two armies, bow in hand, and none of the kings can even look at him, for he burns like the mid-day sun in the summer sky. As Sakra scorched the Daitya host in battle, even so does Bhishma sear the Pandava army.

Seeing the Kuru Pitamaha's torrid prowess, Krishna says blithely to Arjuna, "'There between the two armies stands Bhishma, the son of Shantanu, devouring our ranks. Only you can withstand Bhishma's arrows. Only you can bring him down. Kill Bhishma today, Arjuna, or this war will be lost."

The Vanara bannered Arjuna lifts his archery and shrouds Bhishma, his chariot, horses and standard with his blistering arrow storm. But serenely Bhishma cuts Arjuna's every shaft down.

Dhrishtaketu, Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna, Nakula and Sahadeva, Chekitana, and the five Kaikaya brothers, and Mahabaho Satyaki and Subhadra's son, and Ghatotkacha, and the five sons of Draupadi, and Sikhandin, and the valiant Kuntibhoja, and Susarman, and Virata, and countless powerful Pandava warriors have been wounded by Bhishma's arrows, and they all seem plunged in an ocean of despair, until Arjuna arrives to rescue them.

Protected by Arjuna, Sikhandin seizes a mighty astra and charges toward Bhishma alone. The indomitable Arjuna makes short and bloody work of those who surround and follow Bhishma, and then himself attacks

the Pitamaha. Satyaki, and Chekitana, and Dhrishtadyumna, and Virata, and Drupada, and Madri's twin sons, all led and shielded by Arjuna, attack Bhishma. And Abhimanyu, and the five sons of Draupadi, with raised weapons, also storm against him.

All those unwavering maharathas pierce various parts of great Bhishma's body with deadly barbs. Disregarding them entirely, Bhishma plunges ahead into the Pandava ranks with undimmed assurance. Effortlessly he thwarts all the arrows they rain down upon him and strikes them with terror and death.

Glancing frequently at Sikhandin, always with a mocking smile, always remembering this prince was born a woman, he does not aim a single arrow at him. Instead he kills seven maharathikas of Drupada's akshauhini. Confused and despairing shouts arise amongst the Matsyas, the Panchalas, and the Chedis, who unitedly attack that preternatural Kshatriya. With vast numbers of foot-soldiers and horses and chariots, and with unending volleys of arrows, they engulf Bhishma, son of Bhagirathi, that devourer of his enemies, like clouds hiding the sun.

Truly now, the war is turned as awesome as the Devasura yuddha of old at its most brutal, and Arjuna Kiritin sets Sikhandin before him and strikes Bhishma repeatedly with transcendent archery, with terrible fusillades.'

CANTO 120

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Keeping Sikhandin in front, the Pandavas surround Bhishma and rain wave upon wave of arrows at him. All the Srinjayas unite to strike him with hundred-flamed satagnis, with spiked maces and battle-axes, clubs and bearded barbs, golden winged shafts and spears and Kampana, arrows with heads shaped like the calf-tooth and myriad other missiles.

His coat of mail is pierced all over; he is wounded in every vital part and blood gushes from all him limbs; but Bhishma feels no pain. And to his enemies, he looks like the fire that blazes at the end of the yuga. His bow and arrows are the apocalyptic flames of that fire. The flight of his astras is like the winds of the pralaya. The clatter of his chariot wheels is its heat, and his weapons are its blinding brilliance. His beautiful bow forms its fierce tongue and the bodies of heroic warriors he slays is the source of its energy.

Bhishma blasts his scarlet way through hosts of chariots that encircle him and emerges triumphant from the welter of that seething throng. Ignoring the king of the Panchalas and Dhrishtaketu, he penetrates deep into the Pandava army. He stabs the six Pandava maharathas, Satyaki and Bhima, Arjuna and Drupada, Virata and Dhrishtadyumna, with a many headed dragon of arrows which can melt any armour on earth.

Those maharathas foil Bhishma's beast of barbs and strike him forcefully with ten barbs, always closing in on him still. Sikhandin continues to pierce great Bhishma's body with his golden winged arrows, and Bhishma never offers him any response. And protected by Sikhandin, Arjuna dashes at Bhishma and smashes his bow in his hands.

The seven maharathas, Drona and Kritavarman, Jayadratha and Bhurisravas, Sala and Salya, and Bhagadatta cannot bear to watch this affront. Inflamed, they assail Arjuna; they cover him with elemental devastras and the thousands of shafts that these divine weapons spew. As they charge Arjuna's chariot, their roaring is like that of the raging ocean at

the end of the yuga: *kill, bring up our forces, take, pierce, hack them down!* These shouts resound all around.

Hearing that tumult, the Pandava maharathas fly up to defend Arjuna. Satyaki, and Bhima, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's race, and Virata and Drupada, and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, and the wrathful Abhimanyu: enraged, and bearing mighty bows, they advance like seven storms. And the battle that breaks out between them and the Kaurava warriors makes one's hair stand on end, even on this tenth blood-soaked day of the war, for it is like the battle of the Devas against the Danavas.

Guarded by Arjuna, the Kiritin, Sikhandin strikes Bhishma with ten deep arrows after the Pitamaha's bow was broken. He strikes Bhishma's charioteer with another volley, and fells his standard with yet another.

Bhishma takes up another colossal bow. That too is riven by Arjuna with three barbs. Bhishma seizes up another, quick as thinking, but ambidextrous Arjuna, switching the Gandiva from hand to hand, breaks that one as well, and, indeed, every other bow which his Pitamaha picks up.

Bhishma licks the corners of his mouth and takes up a spear charged with an astra which can split a mountain. He hurls it furiously at Arjuna's chariot. Watching it course towards him like lightning, Partha looses five thick arrows swift as the mind and shatters Bhishma's recondite missile into five pieces. And it plummets, extinguished, like a flash of lightning separated from a mass of clouds.

Bhishma flares up in anger. That Kshatriya, that conqueror of enemy cities, now says to himself, "With a single bow I could kill all the Pandavas, if they were not protected by Mahavishnu himself.

But I will not fight them for two reasons: because they cannot be slain and because Sikhandin is a woman. When my father married Kali, he granted me two boons: that no one could kill me in war, and that I could choose the time of my death. I believe that this is the fitting hour, and I should now wish my own death."

Knowing Bhishma's resolve, the Rishis and the Vasus in the sky say, "We commend your decision, O son! Do as you have resolved and withdraw your heart from battle." As they finish speaking, a fragrantly moist and auspicious breeze blows along a natural direction. Heavenly cymbals clash and a shower of bright unearthly flowers rains down upon Bhishma.

Only Bhishma hears the words spoken by the Rishis and the Vasus. And I hear them through the power given to me by the Muni. The hearts of the Devas are full of anguish at the thought of Bhishma, that favourite son of all the worlds, falling from his chariot.

Having heard those divine words, though deeply pierced already, Bhishma of great tapasya attacks Arjuna more violently than ever. Incensed, Sikhandin strikes the Pitamaha in the chest with nine sharp arrows. Bleeding profusely, yet Bhishma remains fearless, and unyielding as a mountain during an earthquake. With a ferocious laugh, Arjuna draws his Gandiva, strikes the son of Ganga with twenty five barbs, and then roaring he pierces him through every limb and vital organ with a fiery sermon of hundreds of arrows.

Maharatha Bhishma remains unmoved and returns Arjuna's mighty fire, shaft for shaft. As for Sikhandin's whetted arrows with golden wings, they make not the least impression on the Kuru grandsire.

Still keeping Sikhandin before him, and his rage quickening each moment, even as if he finds himself hurtling, now helplessly, toward some great and fateful moment in time, Arjuna continues to advance towards Bhishma and once more breaks the bow in his hands. Striking Bhishma with ten punitive arrows, he cleaves the Pitamaha's standard with another. Pounding Bhishma's chariot with ten explosive shafts, he makes him shudder.

The son of Ganga takes up an even greater bow. But no sooner does he heft it than Arjuna slices it into three slivers with a trinity of broad-headed shafts. And thus the son of Pandu destroys all Bhishma's bows in that duel.

Suddenly the last vestige of resistance within Bhishma, the pure Kshatriya, gives way and with it Bhishma no longer wants to fight Arjuna. Arjuna strikes him with another tremendous volley of twenty five thudding shafts. Dripping blood, down his noble face and his magnificent body, Bhishma says to Dussasana, "Behold Arjuna, this magnificent Pandava maharathika, who has single-handedly pierced me with countless arrows. Not even Indra can vanquish Arjuna in battle. As for me, even united, the Devas, Danavas and Rakshasas cannot quell me. What then of maharathas among men?"

Even while Bhishma is speaking, Arjuna, still with Sikhandin before him, continues to attack his Pitamaha.

Deeply wounded by Arjuna's unearthly shafts, Bhishma says to Dussasana with a smile, "These arrows coursing at me in a straight line, whose touch is like lightning, are not Sikhandin's but Arjuna's. They plunge easily through my impenetrable armour, strike me with the force of mushalas and shake me with their ferocity. These shafts are not Sikhandin's.

Hard as the Brahmana's rod of punishment and with an irresistible force like lightning, these arrows ravage my very prana. These are not Sikhandin's. Each as forceful as a mace or a jagged club, these arrows destroy my strength like messengers sent by Yama himself. These are not Sikhandin's. Like angry serpents, flicking their tongues, these barbs eat into my vitals. These are not Sikhandin's—these that cut through me like the biting cold of winter that kills cows.

Other than the valorous wielder of Gandiva, the Vanara-bannered Jishnu, all other kings, even united, cannot harm me in the least."

And then, once more Kshatriya fire blazes up in the old warrior, like a lamp burning high just before it is put out, and Bhishma unleashes a terrible astra at Arjuna as if to destroy all the Pandavas with that single weapon. Before all the great warriors of your army, Arjuna truncates the incendiary shaft with three light like arrows, and it falls harmlessly to the ground. Ready for either death or victory, Bhishma takes up a sword and a golden shield. Before he can even alight from his chariot, Arjuna shatters that shield into a hundred pieces. All this, my lord, is breathtaking.

Yudhishtira goads his forces on crying, "Charge at Ganga's son. Do not be afraid!" And roaring all together, as if in some god's gigantic voice, they attack that solitary warrior from all sides with bearded shafts and long spears, axes and swords, with calf-toothed and thick arrows.

Longing for Bhishma's triumph, your sons surround him also roaring like lions. On that tenth day of the great war, when Bhishma and Arjuna face each other in that final contention, the two armies, with everything at stake this momentous day, fight a battle like none yet seen, inundating Kurukshetra with noble warriors' gore. An abysmal whirlpool of killing and dying rises and spins wildly where the two armies collide, even like the vortex that occurs where the Ganga meets the ocean. And the bloody Earth assumes a fierce form. Her even and rough surfaces can no longer be distinguished; the swollen tide of blood covers them.

Although pierced in all his limbs and vital organs, Bhishma stands serene, having annihilated ten thousand warriors. At the head of his forces,

Arjuna breaks through the very heart of the Kaurava legions. With white horses yoked to his whirling chariot, he terrifies us with his astras, and your men flee from the nightmared field.

The Sauviras, the Kitavas, the kings of the eastern, western and northern regions, the Malavas, the Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, the Vasatis, the Salwas, the Sayas, the Trigartas, the Ambashthas, the Kaikeyas, and many other illustrious warriors, all mutilated by implacable, paramount Arjuna, desert Bhishma and flee.

The Pandava hosts encircle Bhishma and overwhelm the Kauravas that protect him. *Kill, hack them to pieces, show no mercy, drink his blood, off with their heads!* These are the unmitigated roars and yells which ring out around Bhishma's chariot.

Having killed so many thousands, now every inch of Bhishma's body is pierced by arrows, most of them Arjuna's keen shafts. And then, with a final echoing roar, with his head to the east, just before sunset, before your sons' very eyes, mighty, mighty Devavrata falls out of his chariot and onto to the waiting, grieving earth.

When Bhishma falls, the sky is rent with the sad cries of the Devas and of earthly kings. Seeing the high-souled Pitamaha fall, our hearts fall with him. That greatest of all maharathas, that Mahabaho, plunges to the ground like Indra's standard cut down, and the earth shakes.

With arrows protruding from him all over, his body never touches the ground. O Bharatarishabha, at that awful moment a miracle reveals him lying on a bed of arrows all plunged deep into his own body! Cloud scud into the sky at that twilight hour and bathe his resplendent, bleeding form with a soft, cool, fragrant shower; and Bhumi Devi trembles.

Fallen Bhishma observes that the sun is in the southern solstice, and he does not allow himself to die, for it is Dakshinayana still and an inauspicious time. The very sky is full of divine voices saying, "Why does Ganga's son, that foremost of all men, give up his life during the southern declension?"

Hearing them, Bhishma replies, "I am alive!"

Although fallen, Bhishma waits for Uttarayana, the northern declension, to die. Learning of his resolve, Ganga, the daughter of Himavat, sends some great Rishis to him. They come as swans who dwell on the Manasa lake, and fly down together to Bhishma, where he lies on his bed of arrows.

Those Rishis alight from the sky and walk around him in pradakshina. Knowing well that it still Dakshinayana, while the Sun is on his southern journey, they say to one another, "Being such a Mahatman, why should Bhishma pass from the world during the southern declension?"

Having said this, they fly up and towards the southern direction. Knowing Bhishma sees them and reflects for a moment. And he says to them, "I will not leave this world as long as the sun is in the southern solstice. I will die when the Sun resumes his northern journey, during Uttarayana. O swans, I swear this to you. I will keep my breath in this broken body until the northern declension.

I can choose the hour of my death, it was my father's boon to me and let his boon be proved true. I will stay alive, and die only when the Sun resumes his northern course during Uttarayana. I will hold life within this body and I have the power to decide the time of my death." Having said these words to the swans, Bhishma continues to lie upon his bed of arrows.

The Pandavas and the Srinjayas rejoice when they see Bhishma fall, and your son is aghast when the Pitamaha is overthrown. All the Kauravas are stricken, benumbed. Led by Kripa and Duryodhana they stand transfixed, tears leaking from their disbelieving eyes. Overcome, they remain motionless for a long time; as if frozen in that abyssal moment, they no longer fight the Pandavas.

When the unslayable Bhishma of untold tejas is felled, all the Kauravas think that the destruction of the Kuru king is now certain. Routed by Arjuna, in the midst of their fallen heroes, themselves mangled, they are all bemused, not moving a muscle, not knowing what to do.

The daring Pandavas, raise massive arms that look like spiked maces, and exult in their victory and blow their great conches. And the Somakas and the Panchalas rejoice. Thousands of trumpets are blown, and the mighty Bhima slaps his arm-pits and roars and roars above the shocked silence, peals of thunder.

When Bhishma falls, the warriors of both armies put down their weapons. Some then scream loudly and some flee, while others faint. Some condemn the ways of the Kshatriya varna while others praise the fallen Bhishma.

The Rishis and the Pitris all extol Bhishma of lofty vows; the departed ancestors of the Bhaaratas also honour Bhishma. Meanwhile, wise Bhishma himself, the noble son of Shantanu who knows the final Yoga, the

communion described in the Vedanta, prays silently. He is quiet, and awaits his hour.’

CANTO 121

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Dhritarashtra says, 'Alas, deprived of Bhishma, god-like Brahmacharin, what is the state of my warriors, O Sanjaya? The very moment that Bhishma did not attack Sikhandin, even though he despised him, I knew that the Kurus would soon be vanquished by the Pandavas.

Ah, I am dejected to hear of the Pitamaha's fall. What can be a heavier sorrow than this? My heart must surely be made of stone that it does not break into a hundred pieces on hearing of Bhishma's end! Tell me of his achievements for, alas, the war has claimed even he who was invincible.

I cannot bear that Devavrata should be killed in battle. He who could not be overcome by Jamadagni's son himself, even with divine astras, alas, he is now felled by Drupada's son Sikhandin, that paltry prince of Panchala.'

Sanjaya says, 'Overpowered in the twilight hour, the Pitamaha Bhishma dismays the Dhartarashtras and delights the Panchalas. Falling onto the lap of the Earth, he lies on his bed of arrows without his body touching the ground.

When he plunges from his chariot, despondent cries are heard among all creatures. When that great tree of shelter of the Kurus, the ever victorious Bhishma, plummets, the Kshatriyas of both armies are astounded. Seeing Bhishma overthrown with his standard, his armour desiccated, the Kauravas and the Pandavas are both grief-stricken. And the sky darkens and the Sun himself is dimmed. The Earth seems to cry out when Bhishma is cut down.

This one is the foremost of those with knowledge of the Vedas! He is unsurpassed in this learning! This is what all men say of that Purusharishabha as he lies on his bed of a thousand arrows.

Once, discovering that his father Shantanu had been struck by Kama, he resolved to draw up his vital seed and to remain a brahmacharin throughout his life—this is what the Rishis, Siddhas and the Charanas say of Bhishma as he lies on his bed of arrows.

When Bhishma, the Pitamaha of the Bhaaratas, is struck down, your sons stand as if in a nightmare, bewildered, disbelieving, not knowing what

to do next. Their hearts and faces are suffused with sadness. Their splendid appearances are dull. They hang their heads low in shame.

The victorious Pandavas, on the other hand, stand jubilantly at the head of their forces; and they blow their golden conches. As thousands of trumpets blast celebrantly, we see the mighty Bhima, drenched in blood, looking like some gory phantasm, prancing about, dancing, roaring, even singing in delight, having himself slaughtered countless enemy maharathas, among them many of your sons.

The Kauravas are crippled in spirit. Karna and Duryodhana sigh deeply. When Bhishma falls, cries of anguish and dismay are heard all around, and great confusion sweeps your son's ranks.

Seeing Bhishma fall, your son Dussasana swiftly rides into Drona's akshauhini. Duryodhana had given charge of protecting Bhishma's life to his younger brother, with his legion. Dussasana is now surrounded by a sea of abject, shocked fighting men. The Kauravas surround him wanting to hear what he has to say.

Dussasana gives Drona the grave tidings, and the Acharya staggers as if struck by an astra and falls down in a dead faint. When he recovers, he stops the Kuru army from continuing the battle. Seeing the Kauravas hold back, the Pandavas send messengers on horseback to forbid their forces also from fighting on. The kings of both armies remove their armour and move towards Bhishma.

Thousands of other warriors too put down their weapons and advance towards the high-souled Bhishma, like the Devas towards Indra. The Pandavas and Kauravas approach Bhishma, lying on his bed of arrows, and bow reverently to him.

Bhishma speaks to the Pandavas and the Kurus who stand sorrowing and silent before him. He says, "Welcome to you, blessed ones! Welcome to you, maharathas! I am pleased to see you, who are the equals of the very Devas." His head lolls back awkwardly unsupported. Bhishma says, "My head need a pillow, fetch me one."

The assembled kings rush away and bring back many soft and fine pillows. The Pitamaha refuses them all. That purushavyaghra says with a laugh, "These are not fitting for a Kshatriya's bed." Seeing the world's greatest maharatha, Arjuna, he says "Dhananjaya, Mahabaho, my head hangs back. Give me a pillow that you regard fitting."'

CANTO 122

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Sanjaya says, 'Stringing the Gandiva and bowing, Arjuna, with tear-filled eyes, says, "Command me, you invincible one, greatest of all Kshatriyas, O foremost among the Kurus, for I am your slave! What should I do, Pitamaha?"

Bhishma says, "My head droops. O Phalguna, quickly get me a pillow for my bed. You are the most outstanding archer. You know Kshatriya dharma, and you are both wise and noble."

Arjuna says, "So be it," and sets himself to the task. He raises the Gandiva and, with Bhishma's leave and chanting mantras, drills three arrows into the ground beneath the Pitamaha's head, to be its support! Bhishma is satisfied and he praises Arjuna.

Looking at all the Bhaaratas there, he says to Dhanajaya, "Son of Pandu, you have given me a fitting pillow for a fallen Kshatriya. Had you done otherwise, I would have cursed you. Mahabaho, a Kshatriya should sleep on the battlefield on even such a bed of arrows."

Bhishma then says to the gathered kings and princes, "Look at the pillow that Arjuna has given me. I will lie on this worthy bed until the sun turns north again at Uttarayana. Those kings who come to see me then will watch me die. When the Sun moves towards Vaisravana on his swift chariot yoked to seven horses, only then will I leave my body even like the dearest friend.

Dig a ditch around me, O kings. Lying upon these hundreds of arrows, I will worship the Sun. As for you, forsake your enmity and stop fighting."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Now some physicians and men skilled in drawing out arrows, bring the tools of their trade. Seeing them, Bhishma says to your son, "Dismiss these physicians with gifts, after paying proper respect to them. I have no need for them now. I have won the highest and most praiseworthy state ordained for Kshatriyas!

Lying on this bed of arrows, it is not proper for me to accept any treatment. I should be burnt with these arrows in my body." Duryodhana honours and dismisses the physicians. The rulers of different realms who

witness this display of great Bhishma's steadfast virtue are moved to wonder.

The Pandavas and the Kauravas together draw near Bhishma Mahatman lying on his magnificent bed. They pay him worship and circumambulate him three times in pradakshina; posting guards around him, those Kshatriyas, with bodies drenched in blood, retire to their tents in anguish, reflecting on what they have seen this dreadful day, the first of the Kali Yuga.

Krishna comes to the Pandavas, as those maharathas sit together both elated and grief-stricken at the fall of Bhishma, and says to Yudhishtira, "Your victory is the outcome of your good fortune. Through good fortune alone the indomitable Bhishma has fallen. Or perhaps it is destiny that he who was a master of every weapon found you, O king of dharma, as his enemy and has been consumed by your wrathful eye!"

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira replies feelingly, "Krishna, through your grace comes victory, and through your fury defeat! You dispel the fears of those who worship you. You are our refuge. It is no surprise that they whom you have always protected in battle, in whose welfare you have always been engaged, Kesava, should triumph. With you as our protector, I do not regard anything as surprising, fortunate or wonderful!"

Krishna answers with a smile, "O best of kings, only you can speak such words!"'

CANTO 123

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'The next morning, all the kings, the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras go again to the Pitamaha. They worship that incomparable Kshatriya, lying on his hero's bed, and stand before him with folded hands. Thousands of maidens shower powdered sandalwood, cooked rice grains over him; they drape auspicious garlands of flowers on him.

And women and old men and children, and countless other spectators to the gruesome war, all approach Bhishma like earthly creatures wanting to gaze at the setting sun. Hundreds of thousands of conches boom and trumpets resound, and actors, mimes, and skilled craftsmen draw near the aged Pitamaha to pay homage.

The war pauses, as the Pandavas and the Kauravas put aside their armour and weapons and together come to that Parantapa. And once more, as in earlier times, they stand there together, kinsmen and enemies, and speak to each other amiably. That assemblage of hundreds of Bhaarata kings, adorned by Bhishma in their very midst, is glorious like a gathering of the Devas in Swarga. And they honour him like the Devas adore Brahma.

Though his body is broken by the very arrows on which he now lies, and they sear pain through him like burning fire, Bhishma shows hardly any sign of agony. Almost unconscious because of his wounds, Bhishma looks at the kings and asks for water. Those Kshatriyas bring him many beautiful jars of cool, crystalline water, and other exquisite drinks besides.

Seeing all that sweet water and wine, Bhishma says curtly, "I am now distanced from worldly pleasures and this fine water and wine is of no use to me. I am lying on a bed of arrows, waiting for the return of the Moon and the Sun!" Thus reproaching the kings in a low voice, he says, "I want to see Arjuna."

Mahabaho Arjuna comes forward, stands with folded hands, and says, "What shall I do?"

The righteous Bhishma says to him, "My body burns with your shafts and I am in agony. My mouth is parched. Give me water, O Arjuna. You are

a great archer, and only you can give me water to quench my thirst."

Arjuna says, "I will, Pitamaha."

He mounts his chariot, and stretches the Gandiva. Hearing the twang of his bow and the slap of his palms like a thunderclap against his bowstring terrifies the armies and the kings. That maharatha mounts his chariot and circles the fallen Pitamaha. Before both vast hosts, chanting mantras to invoke the Parjanyastra, Arjuna shoots a candescent arrow into the ground, slightly south of where Bhishma lies.

Nectar-like in scent and taste, a spring of pure, auspicious and cool water gushes out of the earth and up into Bhishma's lips. And with that jet of water Arjuna slakes the thirst of Bhishma, that bull among the Kurus, of godlike deeds and prowess.

Watching that Sakra-like feat of Arjuna's, all the kings are amazed; and seeing his superhuman ability, the Kurus tremble like cows shivering in the cold. The gathered sovereigns of the world wave their pennants in admiration. And the deafening blast of conches and the pounding of drums are heard all over the battlefield.

His thirst quenched, Bhishma praises Arjuna before all the kings saying, "O Mahabaho, this is not as amazing as it seems, O son of Kuru's race, for, you of immeasurable effulgence, even Narada spoke of you as the ancient Rishi Nara!

With Krishna for your ally, you will accomplish things that even Indra may not try to achieve. Those who know such things recognise you as the destroyer of the entire race of Kshatriyas. You are the supreme archer. You are the most superior man. Just as humans are the best of all animals, and as Garuda is the foremost of all avians; as the Ocean is the best among all water bodies, and the cow foremost among all quadrupeds; as the sun is the most brilliant among all luminous bodies and Himavat among all mountains; as the Brahmana is among all varnas, you are the greatest archer!

Duryodhana did not listen to what Vidura and Drona and Rama and Janardana and I, and also Sanjaya repeatedly said to him. Rashly, foolishly, he ignored our most earnest advice. Beyond all counsel, he will die at the hands of Bhima!"

Hearing these words, Duryodhana is plunged in dejection. Bhishma says, "Listen to me, O king, and at least now discard your anger. You have

seen how Arjuna created this spring of water like amrita for me. No one else on earth can achieve such a feat.

The weapons of Agni, Varuna, Soma, Vayu, and Vishnu, those of Indra, Pasupati, and Paramesthi, and those of Prajapati, Dhatri, Tashtri, Savitri, and Vivaswat—in this world of men, all these are known only to Arjuna. Yes, Krishna also knows them. But there is no one else.

Not even if the Devas and Asuras unite can they defeat this son of Pandu in battle. His powers are more than superhuman. Make peace with this mighty warrior, this ornament of battle. Before great Krishna is moved to complete wrath, king of the Kurus, it is dharma for you make peace with the heroic sons of Pandu. As long as a few of your brothers still remain unslain, let peace, O Rajan, be struck. Before Yudhishtira, with eyes blazing fury, entirely annihilates your forces, let peace be made. Before Nakula, and Sahadeva, and Bhima exterminate your army, you must befriend the Pandavas again.

Let this war end today with my death. Make peace with the Pandavas; listen to me, Anagha, and do as I say! Only this can still save you, and indeed the entire Kuru vamsa. Put aside your rage and make peace with your cousins.

What Arjuna has achieved is enough. Let Bhishma's death renew love between the sons of Dhritarashtra and those of Pandu. Let the surviving warriors live. Relent, O Rajan! Give half the kingdom to the Pandavas. Let Dharmaraja Yudhishtira go to Indraprastha. Do not be small-minded or incite further bloodshed; this will only bring you eternal disgrace among the kings of the earth.

With my death, let peace come to all. Let all the rulers of the earth embrace and mingle joyfully with one another. Let father be united with son; let sister's son join his uncle. Ah Suyodhana, if ignorance and foolishness keep you from listening to me, you will repent greatly. This is the truth. Stop this war now!"

Having said this kindly to Duryodhana in the midst of the gathered kings, Bhishma falls silent. The arrows burn his body and, withdrawing his mind from the pain with dhyana, he applies himself to yoga.

Your son disregards what Bhishma has told him, those words of dharma which might still have saved him, like a dying man refusing medicine.'"

CANTO 124

BHISHMA VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After Bhishma shuts his eyes and falls silent, all the assembled kings return to their encampments. When he hears that Bhishma has been struck down, Radha's son Karna comes alone to him, in some fear. He sees that most illustrious Kshatriya lying on his bed of reeds.

With eyes closed, he approaches Bhishma and falls at his feet. His voice choking, Karna says, "O Lord of the Kurus, I am Radha's son, whom you always looked upon with hate whenever I was near."

Bhishma opens his failing eyes, asks the guards around to withdraw, and suddenly he embraces Karna with one arm, like a father holding his son, and speaks to him lovingly. "Come, come near me. You are my adversary who always challenges me. If you had not come to me, I would have been sad indeed.

You are Kunti's son, not Radha's. Adhiratha is not your father. Mahabaho, I heard this from Narada and from Krishna. And it is true. Ah Karna, I do not bear you any grudge. I only spoke harshly to you to weaken your resolve.

You of excellent vows, you speak ill of the Pandavas for no reason. You were born out of wedlock and that is why you have said and done whatever you have. Through pride, and keeping the company of base men, you have come to hate men of worth. And so I spoke unkindly about you in the Kaurava camp.

I know too well that your prowess in battle is irresistible. I also know of your deep reverence for Brahmanas, your courage, and your charity. You are like a Deva and there is none like you among men. I wanted to prevent this war between brothers and that is why I always spoke cruelly and contemptuously about you, for I knew that Duryodhana depended on you to win this war for him. And, my child, as a warrior and an archer you are Arjuna's equal in battle, why, even Krishna's peer!

O Karna, you rode by yourself to Kasi with your bow and vanquished all the kings there single-handedly to get a bride for Duryodhana. The

invincible Jarasandha, who always boasted of his great prowess, was no match for you in battle and you quelled him.

You are devoted to Brahmanas; you always fight fairly. In strength and vigour, you are equal to a child of the Devas and superior to all men. I have never felt any true anger towards you and that which I showed is now dispelled. For I have learnt that men's best efforts cannot prevent Destiny from taken its course, having its way.

O Parantapa, the valiant sons of Pandu are your brothers. Mahabaho, if you want to gratify me, your Pitamaha, join them. O Suryaputra, let this war end with me. Even today let all the kings of the Earth who remain alive be freed from danger!"

Karna says, "I know this, Mahabaho! It is as you say. I know I am Kunti's son, and not the son of a Suta. But I was abandoned by Kunti, and I have been raised by a Suta. Having enjoyed the wealth and friendship of Duryodhana, I cannot betray his trust now. Like Krishna who fights resolutely for the Pandavas, I too am willing to sacrifice my possessions, my body itself, my children, and my wife, for Duryodhana's sake. It is fitting for a Kshatriya to die on the battlefield, and not from disease or old age!

Relying upon Suyodhana I have always chosen to oppose the Pandavas. This choice will run its full course. It cannot be changed. Who dares, O Bhishma, to challenge Destiny? Who can prevail against what is written in the stars before we are even born?

Pitamaha, you saw and spoke of various signs and omens which portended the destruction of the world. I know only too well that Arjuna and Krishna cannot be conquered in battle. Still we will fight them. And I will overcome Arjuna in war! This I am determined to do. I cannot put aside this hatred I have for the Pandavas. Readily and unwaveringly, I will face Arjuna in battle. I am firm in my resolve, so give me your leave to go to war.

Now that you have fallen, I will fight. This is my only wish. Ah Pitamaha, forgive me any cruel words that I may have spoken to you, or any angry or callous deed which I might have directed against you."

Bhishma says, "I allow you to fight, Karna, if you cannot root out this loathing in your heart. Fight, moved by the wish to attain Swarga! Without anger and spite, serve your king righteously with all your power and courage.

You have my leave, Karna! Achieve what you seek. Through Arjuna you will attain what is possible by fulfilling the dharma of a Kshatriya. Free of pride, fight vigorously and well, for a Kshatriya's source of happiness lies in a just war. For a long time I tried to make peace between the sons of Pandu and the sons of Dhritarashtra. But, Karna, I failed. This is the truth."'

Sanjaya says, 'Having obtained Bhishma's forgiveness and his blessing, Karna takes the dust from his Pitamaha's feet, bows deeply to him, mounts his chariot and rides towards Duryodhana's tent.'"

End of Bhishma Parva

APPENDIX FOR THE BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Samkhya

Notes directly quoted from Sanskrit-English dictionary of Vaman Shivram Apte:

1. Relating to numbers. 2. Calculating, enumerating. 3. Discriminative. 4. Deliberating, reasoning, a reasoner. 5. Of one of the 6 systems of Hindu philosophy, attributed to the Sage Kapila. The philosophy is so called because it enumerates 25 tattvas or true principles; its chief objective is to enter the final emancipation of the 25th tattva, the Purusha or Soul, from the bonds of this worldly existence—the fetters of phenomenal creation—by conveying a correct knowledge of the 24 other Tattvas and by properly discriminating the Soul from them. It regards the whole universe to be a development of an inanimate principle called Prakriti q.v., while the Purusha is altogether passive and simply an onlooker. Samkhya agrees with the Vedanta in being synthetical and thus differs from the analytical Nyaya or Vaiseshika; but its great point of divergence from the Vedanta is that it maintains two principles that Vedanta denies, and it does not admit God as the creator of the universe, which the Vedanta affirms.

2. Yoga

Also from the dictionary of Vaman Shivram Apte:

1. Joining, uniting. 2. Union, conjunction. 3. Deep and abstract meditation, contemplation with the Supreme Spirit. 4. The system of philosophy established by Patanjali, which is considered to be the second

division of the Samkhya philosophy, but is practically reckoned as a separate system. The chief aim of the Yoga philosophy is to teach the means by which the human soul may be completely united with the Supreme Spirit and thus secure absolution; and deep abstract meditation is laid down as the chief means to securing this end, elaborate rules being given for the proper practice of such Yoga or concentration of mind.

3. For further details on Samkhya and Yoga philosophy, see:

1. 'Samkhya and Yoga. Two classical Hindu "paths of insight", by Professor Russell Kirkland, University of Georgia.
2. Samkhya and Yoga, Encyclopaedia Britannica article.
3. Samkhya and Yoga, Wikipedia.
4. *Classical Samkhya and Yoga: An Indian Metaphysics of Experience*. Mikel Burley (Routledge. July, 2006).

4. Kalpa

A NOTE ON HINDU TIME

365 human years make one year of the Devas and Pitrs, the Gods and the manes.

Four are the ages in the land of Bharata: the krita, the treta, the dwapara and the kali. The krita yuga lasts 4800 divine years, the treta 3600, the dwapara 2400, and the kali 1200; and then, another krita yuga begins.

The krita or satya yuga is the age of purity; it is sinless. Dharma, righteousness, is perfect and walks on four feet in the krita. But in the treta yuga, adharma, evil, enters the world and the very fabric of time begins to decay. Finally, the kali yuga, the fourth age, is almost entirely corrupt, with dharma barely surviving, hobbling on one foot.

A chaturyuga, a cycle of four ages, is 12,000 divine years, or 365 x 12,000 human years long. 71 chaturyugas make a manvantara; fourteen manvantaras, a kalpa. A kalpa of 1000 chaturyugas, 12 million divine years, is one day of Brahma, the Creator.

8,000 Brahma years make one Brahma yuga, 1,000 Brahma yugas make a savana, and Brahma's life is 3,003 savanas long.

One day of Mahavishnu is the lifetime of Brahma.'

ANJULI KAUL grew up in Mumbai, lives in Goa, but dreams of Kodaikanal. She has been a teacher for thirty years. More recently, her love of language and literature has drawn her into editing and writing. She is passionate about education, organic farming, sustainable living and sunsets.

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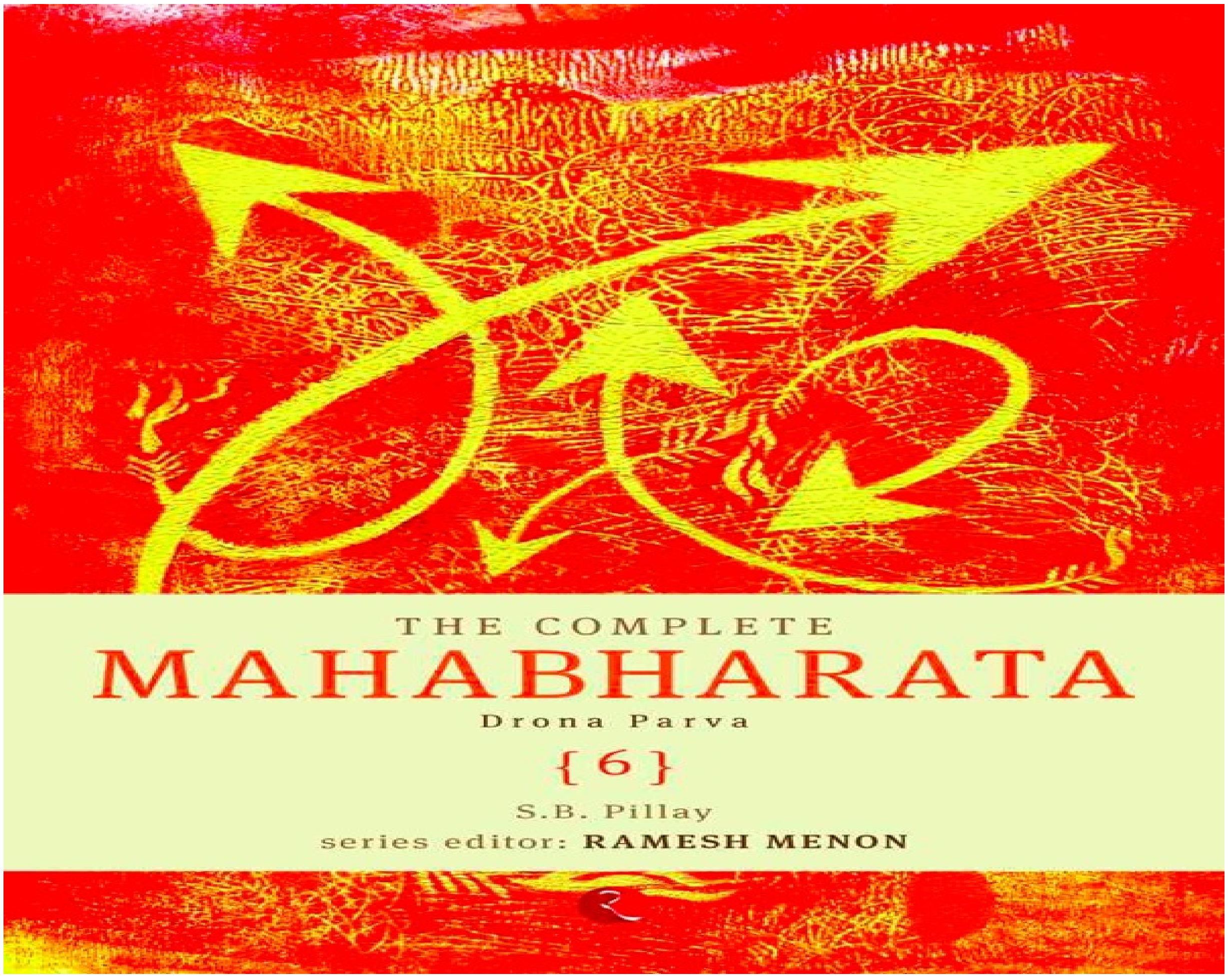
Performing karma, mind devoted, but its fruit renouncing, wise men,

from the bondage of birth entirely freed, come to the place of no sickness.

When beyond this chaos of illusions your mind passes,

then you will arrive at indifference to what you have heard

and what you will hear.


THE COMPLETE
MAHABHARATA
Drona Parva
{6}
S.B. Pillay
series editor: RAMESH MENON

THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Drona Parva

Born in 1951, S.B. Pillay is a retired Indian Audit and Accounts Service officer. He was educated at St Xavier's High School (Delhi), Loyola College (Kolkata), and received his master's degree from Loyola College in Chennai. He went on to study Law at St Xavier's College, Mumbai.

During an illustrious career in the IA&AS, he worked all over India and abroad, as well, and has a deep insight of Indian life. He was director general of the NAAA in Shimla and retired as additional deputy CAG in 2011.

He has always been an avid reader and is the author of several comic and satirical pieces.

THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Volume 6

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S.B. Pillay

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To my wife Anita

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A Brief Introduction

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa Publications India, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the great epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my old friend Ramesh Menon, who brought me to this project. And to Kadambari Mishra, who proofread this volume.

CANTO 1

Dronabhisheka Parva

AUM! Having bowed down to Narayana, Nara, the foremost of Purushas, and to Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of *Jaya*!

'Janamejaya said, "O regenerate Rishi, what does the powerful and disconsolate Dhritarashtra, his eyes bathed in tears, do when he hears that Sikhandin, prince of the Panchalas, has felled his sire, the incomparable Bhishma of matchless tejas? His son Duryodhana wants to vanquish the sons of Pandu, mighty bowmen all, through Bhishma, Drona and other maharathas, and have undisputed sovereignty. Tell me, O Tapodhana, you of the wealth of penances, what the scion of the Kurus does after Bhishma, greatest of all bowmen, falls."

'Vaisampayana replied, "When he hears that his sire has fallen, Dhritarashtra is filled with anxiety and sorrow, and has no peace of mind. While he is plunged in grief, Gavalgana's son Sanjaya, who has returned that night to Hastinapura, visits the son of Ambika. With a cheerless heart and anxious for his son's victory, the king in great distress laments and then questions Sanjaya, 'Tell me, Sanjaya, after weeping for the felled mahatman, the invincible Bhishma of terrible prowess, what did the Kauravas do next, sunk as they were in an ocean of grief? Indeed, now that

the swelling forces of the Pandavas would strike fear into even the three worlds, what did the assembled kings do after the Bharatarishabha Bhishma's fall?'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen attentively, Rajan, and I will tell you what happened after great Bhishma's fall.

Your warriors and the Pandavas both reflect on the dharma of the Kshatriya and are filled with wonder and joy. Then, following their swadharma, they all bow to the maharatha and make a bed of straight arrows for him, as well as a pillow, and also arrangements for his protection, all the while engaging one another in pleasant converse. The Kshatriyas bid Ganga's son farewell and circumambulate him in pradakshina; looking at one another with angry red eyes and urged by fate, they take the field once more to do battle again.

The best part of the day has passed, when the divisions of your army and those of the enemy, sally forth with a blast of trumpets and the beat of drums. With hearts filled with wrath and touched by fate, they engage each other again, disregarding the wise counsel of Ganga's son Bhishma. Due to your folly and your son's folly and the fall of Bhishma, Death himself seems to summon the Kauravas with all the kings allied to them.

Deprived of Devavrata and filled with great anxiety, the Kurus resemble a herd of goats and sheep without a herdsman lost in a forest teeming with beasts of prey. Indeed, the Kuru army looks like the firmament without its stars, like the sky without the planets, like the earth with her crops all burnt, like an oration flawed by bad grammar, like the ancient Asura sena after Mahabali was struck down, like a beautiful bride deprived of her husband, like a river whose waters have dried up, like a doe who has lost her mate and is surrounded in the vana by wolves, or like a spacious mountain cave with its lion killed by a Sarabha. Indeed, O king, the Bharata army is like a frail boat on the bosom of the ocean, tossed by a tempest blowing from every side.

Hard pressed by the heroic and inexorable Pandavas, the Kaurava host, its steeds, maharathas and elephants are distressed, helpless and panic-stricken. With the frightened kings and the common soldiers no longer relying upon one another, the army deprived of Devavrata seems to sink into the deepest Patala.

Then the Kauravas remember Karna, who, indeed, is equal to Bhishma himself. All hearts turn to the greatest of all wielders of weapons, the one

resembling a Guest resplendent with gyana and tapasya, even as the suffering heart of a man turns to a friend who can allay his distress. The kings then cry out, “Karna! Karna! The son of Radha, our friend, the Sutaputra, who is ever prepared to lay down his life in battle! The illustrious Karna, with his followers and friends, did not fight these ten days. O, summon him quickly!”

In the presence of all the Kshatriyas, Bhishma, during the enumeration of valiant and mighty maharathas, called Karna an ardharatha, although that bull among men is equal to two maharathas! Thus did Bhishma slight Karna who is easily the greatest of all rathas and atirathas, he whom all Kshatriyas respect, he who would venture to fight even Yama, Kubera, Varuna and Indra!

In anger at this insult, Rajan, Karna vowed, “As long as you live, O Bhishma, I will never fight! And if you succeed in slaying the sons of Pandu in battle, I will, with Duryodhana’s leave, retire to the forest and take sannyasa. But if, Bhishma, the Pandavas kill you and you find swarga, then I will fight from a single chariot, and kill all those whom you regard as great maharathas.”

Having said this, and with your son’s approval, Karna Mahabaho did not fight for the first ten days of the war. The awesome Bhishma slew a multitude of Yudhishtira’s warriors but when he is struck down, your sons think of Karna, like men wanting to cross a river thinking of a boat.

Your warriors and sons, together with all the kings, cry out in unison, “Karna!” And they all say, “This is the time to display your valour.”

We look to the invincible Karna, whom Jamadagni’s son Parasurama taught the astra shastra! He, Rajan, can save us from great peril, why, even like Govinda always rescues the Devas from the gravest dangers.”

To Sanjaya who thus repeatedly lauds Karna, Dhritarashtra sighs like a snake and says, ‘I understand that your hearts are all turned towards Vikartana and Radha’s son Karna and depend on the hero of the Sutas who is always ready to give his life in battle. I hope that shura will not belie the expectations of the grieving Duryodhana and the Kauravas, all of whom look to him for sanctuary. With Bhishma, the refuge of Kauravas fallen, will Karna, greatest of bowmen, fill the void he left and strike fear into the hearts of the enemy and crown my sons’ hopes of victory with success?’”

CANTO 2

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Then Karna, Adhiratha's son of the Suta varna, knowing that Bhishma has fallen, comes like a brother who wants to rescue your son's army from the distress into which it has fallen. Indeed, hearing that Santanu's son, the maharatha of unfading glory, has been struck down from his chariot, Karna, greatest of all wielders of bows, swiftly joins the battle, coming to rescue the Kuru host which is like a boat sunk in the ocean, like a father to save his children.

Karna addresses the soldiers, "When Bhishma parantapa, who possessed firmness, intelligence, prowess, vigour, truth, self-restraint and all the virtues of a Kshatriya, and also devastras, humility, modesty, pleasing speech and freedom from malice, the slayer of the enemies of Brahmanas, in whom these attributes resided as permanently as Lakshmi in the moon, alas, has fallen, I regard all the other Kshatriyas as already slain. Due to the eternal connection of all things with karma, nothing exists in this world that does not perish. When Bhishma Mahavrata has been felled, who can say with certitude that tomorrow's sun will rise? When he, endued with prowess equal to that of the Vasus, born of the tejas of the Vasus, when he, the

sovereign of the earth, has fallen, do you grieve then for your possessions, your children, for this very Bhumi, the Kurus and this host?"

Thus does Karna, with a dismal heart and eyes filled with tears, attempt to console your sons. Hearing what he says, your sons and their soldiers, initially wail and weep copious tears. However, when the dreadful battle is rejoined, the Kaurava akshauhinis, urged on by the kings, once more set up loud shouts, and Karna, bull among maharathas, speaks to the great chariot warriors of the Kaurava army, words which bring great joy.

Karna says, "In this transient world, I regard all things as ephemeral for they continually flit towards the jaws of Death. Still, with all of you present, how could Bhishma, bull of the Kurus, immovable as a hill, be struck down from his ratha? The son of Santanu even now lies on the ground like the Sun himself fallen from the firmament and the Kuru kings are scarcely able to face Arjuna, like trees that cannot bear the mountain-wind. Let the burden to protect this helpless and despondent Kuru army, whose greatest warrior the enemy has already cut down, now devolve on me. In this fleeting universe, since the greatest of all Kshatriyas has been laid low, why should I have any fear of battle? Rampaging through this field, I will despatch the Pandavas to Yama. I hold honour and fame as the highest objectives in the world and I will annihilate them in battle, or be slain and sleep on the field of war.

Yudhishtira possesses determination, intelligence, virtue and might; Bhima is equal to a hundred elephants in strength; Arjuna is young and is the son of Indra, the king of the Devas; thus, even the gods cannot easily vanquish the Pandava force. They include in their ranks, the twins, each like Yama himself, Satyaki and Devaki's son Krishna. Approaching them is like entering the jaws of Death from which no coward can return.

As the wise meet growing ascetic power with their own tapasya, so should force be opposed by force. Truly my mind is fixed firmly upon fighting the enemy and protecting my own. O sarathy, today I will defy the enemy's might and vanquish him on this Kurukshetra. I will not allow this feud between cousins to continue. When the troops are broken, he who helps in the endeavour to rally them is truly a friend. I will either achieve this deed of dharma worthy of an honest man, or casting off my life, I will follow Bhishma. I will either slay all my enemies united, or killed by them, find for myself the regions reserved for heroes. O Suta, I know that this is what I must do when women and children cry for help, or when

Duryodhana's power sustains a diminution. Therefore will I today vanquish the foe in this terrible war, heedless of my very life; I will protect the Kurus and destroy the sons of Pandu and all my other enemies banded together. And then I will bestow undisputed sovereignty on Dhritarashtra's son.

Let me don my golden kavacha, bright and radiant with jewels and gemstones, and my crown, effulgent as the sun, let me take up my bows, and arrows that resemble fire, poison or serpents. Let also sixteen quivers be tied to my chariot in their proper places and let a number of superior bows be stocked in it as well. Let also shafts, spears, heavy maces and my conch worked with gold, be got ready. Fetch my many-coloured, beautiful and brilliant gold standard, with the lustre of the lotus and bearing the device of an elephant; clean it with a fine cloth and deck it with garlands and cover it with a mesh of wires. O Suta's son, bring me some fleet horses, not lean, of the hue of tawny clouds, bathed in water sanctified with mantras and caparisoned in trappings of bright gold. Quickly bring me such an excellent ratha, decked with garlands of gold, adorned with gems bright as the sun or the moon, stored with every weapon and yoked to superb steeds. Bring me also a number of strong bowstrings for my bows; bring me quivers, large and full of arrows, and armour for my body. Bring me also with haste, every auspicious thing needed before setting out for battle, the brass and gold vessels full of curd. Bring garlands of flowers and tie them to the limbs of my body. Let drums be beaten for victory!

Then fly to where Arjuna Kiritin, Vrikodara, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira and the twins are. I will either kill them, or being killed by them, follow Bhishma. Arjuna, Krishna, Satyaki and the Srinjayas are a force that cannot be conquered by the kings. But even if all-destroying Death himself, with unremitting vigilance, is to protect Arjuna, I will still have his life; or go myself to Yamaloka like Bhishma. Truly I say to you, I will ride into the very midst of those Kshatriyas. The kings that are my allies are not provokers of feuds, or of weak attachment to me, or of unrighteous souls."

And so, riding on a wonderful, rich and mighty chariot, with an excellent flagstaff and to which are yoked the best horses, fast as the wind, decked with gold, auspicious and flying a noble standard, and whose rumble resembles the rumbling of clouds, Karna rides forth fully prepared for battle. Worshipped by the greatest of Kuru maharathas, even like Indra by the Devas, the mahatman and fierce archer, of immeasurable energy like the

Sun himself, rides leading a large force to the heart of the battlefield where Bharatarishabha Bhishma has paid his debt to nature.

Handsome and with the splendour of fire, the son of Adhiratha, the matchless bowman and mighty warrior, then mounts his radiant chariot and shines like Indra riding on his celestial vimana.'"

CANTO 3

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the Pitamaha, the venerable Bhishma, that destroyer of all the Kshatriyas, the soul of dharma, and of infinite tejas, that matchless archer shot down from his chariot by Arjuna with his devastras and lying on a bed of arrows, looking like the vast ocean dried up by mighty winds, the hope of your sons for victory disappears along with their peace of mind. He was always an island for men sinking in the fathomless ocean in their endeavours to cross it; and that Kshatriya now lies covered with arrows that coursed in a stream as continuous as that of the Yamuna, looking like Mainaka of awesome splendour struck down by Indra. He lies prostrate on the earth like the sun fallen from the firmament, he who looks like the inconceivable Indra himself after his defeat of long ago by Vritra. The depriver of all warriors of their very senses, the greatest of all shuras, the idol and ideal of all bowmen, bull among men, your Pitamaha Bhishma Mahavrata, the grandsire of the Bharatas, has been struck down in battle, covered with Arjuna's terrible shafts, and lies on a Kshatriya's bed.

Adhiratha's son Karna alights from his chariot in great sorrow, numb with grief and in tears. He approaches on foot and with joined palms, says

reverentially, "I am Karna. Be you blessed! O Bhaarata, open your eyes and look at me and speak sacred and auspicious words to me. Certainly no man can enjoy in this world the fruits of his pious deeds, when you, venerable in years and devoted to dharma, lie mortally wounded on the ground. O Kurusattama, I do not see that there is anyone else among us who is remotely your equal in filling the treasury, in counsels, in the deploying of troops in the vyuhas of war and in the use of weapons. Alas, you who are endowed with a righteous intellect and have always protected the Kurus from every danger and killed numberless warriors are now on your way to the realm of the Pitris.

From this day, the Pandavas, energised by this success, will slaughter the Kurus like tigers hunting deer. Today the Kauravas, familiar with the force of the twang of the Gandiva, will view Arjuna with complete terror, like the Asuras do Vajradhari Indra. Today, the sound of the arrows shot from the Gandiva, like heaven's thunder, will fill the Kurus and all other kings with absolute fear and like a raging conflagration devours a forest, the shafts of the Kiritin will consume the Dhartarashtras. In the parts of a forest through which fire and wind flare together, they burn all plants, vines and trees. Without doubt, Arjuna is such a surging fire and Krishna is like the wind. The blast of the Panchajanya and the twang of the Gandiva will fill all the Kaurava troops with abject terror and panic.

Without you, when Arjuna rides at them, our kings will hardly bear the thunder of his monkey-bannered chariot. Who among the kings, save you, can match him whose feats in battle the wise say are all superhuman? Superhuman was the battle that he fought with the Mahadeva of three eyes. From Him he obtained a boon that men of unsanctified souls can never attain. Delighted by the duel, Siva blessed the son of Pandu and gave him his own astra. Who is there to vanquish him whom even you could not defeat although you vanquished the fierce destroyer of the very Kshatriya race, Parasurama, whom the Devas and the Danavas worship?

I am skilled and can withstand the son of Pandu, that greatest of Kshatriyas. With your leave and blessing, I will even kill this valiant and ferocious warrior who is like a snake of virulent poison and who slays his enemies with just the looks from his eyes!"""

CANTO 4

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After listening to Karna, the aged Kuru Pitamaha, with a happy heart, gives this valuable advice, "Like the ocean to rivers, like the Sun to all luminous bodies, like men of dharma to Truth, like fertile soil to seeds, like the clouds to all creatures, be the refuge of your relatives and friends! As the Devas depend on him of a thousand eyes, let your kinsmen look to you. Be the conqueror of your enemies and the enhancer of the joys of your friends. Be to the Kauravas what Vishnu is to the dwellers of swarga.

O Karna, for Dhritarashtra's son you once conquered the Kambojas of Rajapura. In Girivraja, you defeated many kings, among whom Nagnajit was the greatest, as well as all the Ambashtas, the Videhas and the Gandharvas. You forced the Kiratas, so fierce in battle, who dwell in the fastness of Himavat, to accept Duryodhana's sovereignty. You subdued all the Utpalas, the Mekalas, the Paundras, the Kalingas, the Andhras, the Nishadas, the Trigartas and the Balhikas. In many other countries, Karna, driven by just the wish to benefit Duryodhana, you crushed many vamsas and kings of great tejas.

Like Duryodhana, with his kinsmen, relatives and friends, be you also the refuge of all the Kauravas. In words of blessing I command you, go and fight the enemy. Lead the Kurus in battle and bring victory to Duryodhana. You are my grandson just as Duryodhana is. According to the law, all of us also are as much yours as Duryodhana's! The wise say that the companionship of the righteous with other men of dharma is a superior relationship to the one with those born of the same womb. Therefore, regard the Kaurava army as your own and protect it even as Duryodhana would."

Karna reverentially touches Bhishma's feet, bids him farewell and joins the other Kaurava archers. Looking at the vast and matchless Kuru army he encourages and exhorts the well-armed and broad-chested warriors. All the Kauravas led by Duryodhana are overjoyed and seeing the Mahabaho Karna take the field and station himself at the head of their army; eager again for battle, they receive him with loud shouts, slapping of armpits, leonine roars, twanging of bows and diverse other kinds of loud bold sounds.'"

CANTO 5

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Karna Purushavyaghra mount his chariot, Duryodhana is filled with joy, and says, "With your protection, this army now has a proper leader. Let us decide our strategy and what we can achieve with our might.'

Karna replies, "Tell us yourself, O Naravyaghra, for you are the wisest of kings. No one can know better what to do than the one who is the most concerned. All these kings want to hear what you have to say. And I am sure that you will say nothing that is amiss."

Duryodhana says, "Bhishma was our commander, our aged and seasoned senapati, mighty, learned and supported by all our warriors. He achieved great glory, massacred vast numbers of my enemies, and served us by fighting with dharma for ten days. He achieved the most difficult feats but now that he is fallen, who, Karna, do you think is fit to be our senapati after him? Without a senapati, an army cannot fight a war for even a short while. You are the greatest warrior among us. An army without a general is like a boat without a helmsman or a chariot without a charioteer. Like a merchant who falls into every kind of distress when he is unacquainted with the ways of the country he visits, an army without a senapati is exposed to

every kind of danger and loss. Therefore, look among the noble warriors of our host and identify a commander who can succeed the son of Santanu. All of us, without hesitation, will accept anyone you choose as the one fit to lead us."

Karna says, "All these best of men are mahatmans, and every one of them deserves to be our senapati. There is no need for any minute examination since all of them are highborn and masters of the art of war; they all own prowess and intelligence, and are heedful men who know the shastras. They are all wise and resolute in battle. Yet, since not all of them can at once be the supreme commander of our forces, we must choose just one of them in whom there are special and exceptional merits to be our senapati. All of them regard one another as equals and if you honour one among them, the others will be discontented and will no longer fight wholeheartedly for you.

Drona, however, is the Acharya of all these warriors; he is venerable in years, and worthy of reverence. Therefore, let this greatest of all warriors be made our senapati. Who else is worthy of becoming our supreme leader, when the invincible Drona, foremost of men who know the Brahman, equal to Sukra or Brihaspati, is among us? Among all the kings in your army, Bhaarata, there is not a single warrior who will not gladly follow Drona when he takes the field. Drona is the foremost of all our commanders, our greatest warrior, and the first among all intelligent men. Besides, Rajan, he is your guru. So, Duryodhana, make him the senapati of your forces without hesitation or delay, even as the Devas made Kartikeya theirs in their war against the Asuras."'

CANTO 6

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing what Karna says, king Duryodhana addresses Drona, who stands amongst the troops. "For the superiority of the varna of your birth, for the nobility of your parentage, for your learning, your age and intelligence, for your prowess, skill, invincibility, knowledge of the world, policy, self-conquest, as well as for your tapasya and your gratitude, superior as you are in every virtue among these kings, there is none who will make a better senapati than you. Protect us, therefore, as Indra did the Devas. With you as our general, we will, O best of Brahmanas, vanquish our enemies.

As Kapali among the Rudras, Pavaka among the Vasus, Kubera among the Yakshas, Vasava among the Maruts, Vasishta among Brahmanas, the sun among light-givers, Yama among the Pitris, Varuna among aquatic beings, as the Moon among the stars, and Usanas among the sons of Diti, so are you the greatest of all lords of armies. Therefore, be you, O Anagha, our lord in war. Let these eleven akshauhinis be obedient to your command. Deploy these men for battle and destroy our enemies like Indra slaying the Danavas. You lead us all, even like Pavaka's son Kartikeya at the head of the celestial host.

We will follow you into battle, like bulls following the leader of a herd. You are a fierce and great archer, and besides, seeing you stretch your bow at the head of our forces, Arjuna will not strike. Without doubt, Naravyaghra, if you become our senapati, I will vanquish Yudhishtira with all his followers and kinsmen in this war."

After Duryodhana says these words, all the kings in the Kaurava army cry "Jaya! Jaya Drona!" They delight your son with a tremendous shout. The troops, with Duryodhana at their head, filled with joy and eager to win great renown, begin to glorify that best of Brahmanas. Then, Rajan, Drona addresses Duryodhana.'"

CANTO 7

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

'Drona says, "I know the Vedas and their six angas. I am also familiar with the science of human affairs and know the Saivastra and diverse other weapons. I will attempt to display all the virtues that you have attributed to me, while I fight the Pandavas. However, O king, I will not be able to kill Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna, for he was born to kill me. I will fight the Pandavas who will not fight me with happy hearts and I will raze the Somakas."

Thus permitted by Drona, your son, Rajan, then makes him senapati of his forces with the rites laid down in the shastras. The kings in the Kaurava army led by Duryodhana perform the investiture of Drona as the supreme commander of their forces, even like the Devas led by Indra in the ancient days, performing the investiture of Skanda.

The pounding of drums and the blare of conches follow this ritual—the expression of the Kaurava army's joy. They honour Drona with such cries as greet one's ears on a festive day, with auspicious invocations by Brahmanas, and gratify him with cries of *Jaya!* from the foremost of Brahmanas and with the dance of mimes and other players. The Kaurava warriors regard the Pandavas as already vanquished.

Then maharatha Drona, Bharadwaja's son, now senapati of the Kaurava army, deploys his troops for battle, and goes forth to the field with your sons to engage the enemy. The ruler of the Sindhus, the king of the Kalingas and your son Vikarna, all clad in mail, take up their positions on Drona's right side, supported by Sakuni and a squadron of great horsemen belonging to the Gandhara tribe, bearing bright lances. Kripa, Kritavarman, Chitrasena, and Vivimsati, led by Dusasana, protect the left flank supported by the swift cavalry of Kambojas led by Sudakshina, the Sakas and the Yavanas. The rear guard is comprised of the Madras, the Trigartas the Ambashtas, the westerners, the northerners, the Malavas, the Surasenas, the Sudras the Maladas, the Sauviras, the Kaitavas, the easterners and the southerners with your son Duryodhana at their head.

The Suta's son, Karna, at the head of the bowmen, adds prowess to the advancing force and gladdens the warriors of their army. His blazing, large and tall standard bearing the device of the elephant's girth rope, shines with an effulgence like that of the sun, gladdening his own akshauhinis; seeing Karna, no one anymore regards Bhishma's death as a calamity and the kings, along with the Kurus, are rid of their grief.

Large numbers of warriors huddle together and tell one another, 'Finding Karna on the field, the Pandavas will never be able to face us in battle. When Karna can vanquish the very Devas with Indra at their head, what can the sons of Pandu do, who are of little energy and strength? The Mahabaho Bhishma spared the Parthas in battle, but Karna will kill them with his scorching shafts.' Speaking thus to among themselves and filled with elation, they advance boldly, applauding and worshipping Radha's son Karna.

Drona arrays our legions in a Sakata vyuha, the cart formation, Rajan, while the serene Yudhishtira chooses the vyuha of the Krauncha, the crane, for his army. At the head of their formation are those two greatest of all men, Krishna and Dhananjaya, flying their banner with the device of the great Vanara. The inspiration of the whole army and the refuge of all its bowmen, Partha's banner, imbued with immeasurable tejas as it floats in the sky, seems to illumine the entire host of Yudhishtira Dharmatman. The potent standard of Arjuna seems like the blazing sun that rises at the end of the yuga to consume the world.

Among archers, Arjuna is the best; among bows, the Gandiva is the foremost; among all beings, Krishna is the first; and among all kinds of war

chakras, the Sudarshana chakra is the greatest. Bearing these four embodiments of tejas, Swetavahana in his chariot takes up his position at the front of the enemy army, quite like the fierce chakra upraised to strike. Thus, the two greatest warriors stand at the very head of their respective forces—Karna at the head of your army and Dhananjaya at the head of the hostile one. Both excited with wrath and each wanting to kill the other, Karna and Arjuna glower at each other.

When Bharadwaja's son, maharatha Drona rides into battle like a storm, the very earth seems to tremble with a deep, chasmal wailing. The thick dust raised by the wind envelops the sky and the sun like a canopy of tawny silk. Though the firmament is cloudless, a shower of pieces of flesh, bones and blood falls on the earth. Vultures, hawks, cranes, kankas and crows in thousands, incessantly fall upon the Kaurava troops. Jackals howl and many fierce and terrible birds repeatedly wheel to the left of your army, in evil omen, impatient to eat flesh and drink blood; showers of blazing meteors, illuminating the sky and with their tails spread wide, fall on the field echoing with loud and uncanny sounds. And when the senapati of the Kaurava army rides forth, the wide disc of the sun, Rajan, seems to emit flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. One sees these and many other fierce portents, indicating an imminent devastation of Kshatriyas.

Battle erupts again between the armies of the Kurus and the Pandavas, each wanting to annihilate the other. So loud is the din that it seems to fill the whole world; and the Pandavas and the Kauravas, all masters of war, all in the grip of battle's consuming rage, strike each other with every manner of weapon, all determined to win the war.

Drona of blazing glory rides recklessly, furiously at the Pandava host, spraying hundreds of arrows at the enemy every moment. The Pandavas and the Srinjayas reply, O king, with their own searing fusillades. But swiftly routed by Drona, the vast host of the Pandavas and the Panchalas break ranks, like flights of cranes buffeted irresistibly by a dread wind. Invoking a slew of devastras, in moments Drona dreadfully besieges the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, while their blood sprays everywhere. Drona slaughters the Panchala forces led by Dhrishtadyumna, like Indra the Danavas. The Acharya lances terror through the enemy ranks.

Then, spurred to blind rage, Yagnasena's son, maharatha Dhrishtadyumna, master of devastras looses storms of recondite shafts at Drona's troops and rends them savagely all around, hundreds of men falling

to his towering archery. He, the Pandava senapati, slaughters as many of Drona’s men as the Acharya does his. The mighty-armed Drona quickly rallies his forces around him, and charges Drupada’s son ablaze on Kurukshetra. Like an enraged Maghavat attacking the Danavas, Drona assails the Pandava and the Srinjaya ranks, so powerfully and remorselessly that they break ranks and flee before the terrible Brahmana like a herd of small animals set upon by a great lion. The mighty Drona devastates the Pandava force like the fabled ring of fire that protects the chalice of amrita.

It is truly amazing, wondrous, O Rajan, how Drona mounted on his magnificent ratha even like a city coursing through the sky, his horses past superb, his sarathy masterful, his flagstaff like shining crystal, and his banner flapping wide in death’s wind, strikes perfect and absolute terror into the hearts of the enemy and wreaks unprecedented carnage among them.’”

CANTO 8

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Drona furiously destroy horses, riders, maharathas and elephants, the Pandavas surround him. Yudhishtira tells Dhrishtadyumna and Arjuna, "Carefully surround the pot-born Drona with our men and check the slaughter he brings to us."

The maharathas Arjuna and Dhrishtadyumna, along with their soldiers, challenge Drona's wild onslaught. The Kekaya princes, Bhimasena, Subhadra's son, Ghatotkacha, Yudhishtira, Nakula and Sahadeva, Virata of the Matsyas, Dhrishtadyumna and the five sons of Draupadi, all exhilarated, and Dhrishtaketu, Satyaki, the fierce Chitrasena, the maharatha Yuyutsu, and many other kings who follow the sons of Pandu, all achieve diverse feats in keeping with their lineage and prowess, while now Drona looks on in frustrated rage.

Further inflamed, the invincible Brahmana warrior standing erect in his ratha yet consumes the Pandava host like a tempest dispelling cloud masses. Tilting from all sides at chariot-warriors, horses, foot-soldiers and elephants, Drona, despite his years, careens over the field like a young man. His thoroughbred chestnut horses, fleet as the wind, covered in blood, are beautiful and awesome. Yudhishtira's soldiers flee when they see him razing

their ranks like an angry Yama. And as some take flight, others rally, some look at him dazed, and others remain on the field, the noise they make is tumultuous and terrible. The fearful din, which delights the brave and makes the timid tremble, fills all the sky and the earth. And once more Drona, roaring out his own name like a battle cry, makes himself still more awful, scourging his enemies with hundreds of arrows.

Indeed, though old, the mighty Drona even looks half his years as he rides everywhere loosing his tides of arrows at the Pandava legions like Death himself, striking off heads and arms decked with ornaments, emptying chariots in gory blasts, all the while uttering tigerish roars. At his terrifying roars and the force of his shafts, the enemy warriors, my lord, shiver like a herd of cows beset by deep winter's cold.

Kurukshetra resounds with the rumble of Drona's chariot, the twanging of his bow. His shafts fly in thousands from his bow, enveloping all the points of the compass, and fall upon enemy elephants, horses and horsemen, chariots and foot-soldiers.

The Panchalas and the Pandavas unflinchingly advance on Drona, who, with his mighty bow, resembles a dread fire with arrows and astras for its leaping flames. Countless elephants, foot-soldiers and horsemen he despatches to Yama and turns the battleground into bloody mire. Invoking mighty astras and spraying his shafts thickly on every side, Drona soon covers all the points of the compass, so that among millions of foot-soldiers, chariots, horsemen and elephants, one can see nothing save Drona's arrows. The pennant on his chariot is all that one sees, flashing here and there like streak lightning amidst all the other chariots.

The irrepressible Drona attacks the five princes of Kekaya, Drupada of the Panchalas, and then dashes against the akshauhini of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja.

Bhimasena, Arjuna, Satyaki, the sons of Drupada, the ruler of Kasi, the son of Saibya, and Sibi himself, gladly and with loud roars, swathe him with their arrows. Shafts in thousands, with wings of gold, shot from Drona's bow, pierce right through the bodies of the elephants and the young horses of these warriors, and plunge into the earth, their feathers dyed in blood. Strewn with chariots and the prostrate forms of numberless warriors, elephants and horses torn by the Brahmana's shafts, Kurukshetra looks like the sky covered with banks of black clouds.

Ever seeking victory for your sons, Drona rampages to decimate the divisions of Satyaki, Bhima, Dhananjaya, Subhadra’s son, Drupada, the king of Kasi, and excoriates many other Kshatriyas as well. Indeed, achieving these and many other terrible feats, that maharathin scorches the world like the sun as he rises apocalyptic at the end of the yuga.

After Drona entirely destroys more than two Pandava akshauhinis of brave and resolute warriors, the canny hero Dhrishtadyumna Mahabuddhi finally slays the Brahmana shura with the golden chariot; and Drona attains mukti, the highest state. Indeed, Rajan, it is only after he has brought the most horrific carnage to the Pandava and Panchala legions with his astras, letting rills of blood on hallowed ground, do they finally kill him.

When the Acharya dies, a loud uproar from all creatures and all the troops fills the sky. Resounding through heaven, earth and the intermediate space and through the cardinal and the subsidiary directions, one hears the loud cry “O Fie!” from all beings; and the Devas, the Pitris, and his friends; all watch that incomparable maharatha, the son of Bharadwaja, slain. With this triumph, the relieved and overjoyed Pandavas give vent to leonine shouts, and the earth trembles with their celebrant roaring.’”

CANTO 9

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'How did the Pandavas and the Srinjayas kill Drona, who was such a matchless warrior? Did his chariot break down in the fight? Did his bow break while he was shooting at the enemy, or was Drona careless at the moment when he was killed? Sanjaya, how could Prishata's son kill the greatest of Brahmanas, that invincible hero gifted with such speed of hand, who could loose torrents of gold-winged shafts to great distances in the twinkling of an eye, who was a master of all the forms of warfare, of astounding skills, self-restrained, and also a master of the devastras?

It is plain to me that destiny is superior to effort and exertion since Dhrishtadyumna has killed the magnificent Drona, maharatha of unfading glory, who was always cautious, who achieved incomparable feats in battle, the Brahmana who verily embodied the four kinds of weapons. Ah, alas, you tell me that the same Drona, Acharya of archery, is slain!

Oh, hearing that the hero who rode his bright ratha covered with tiger skins and adorned with the purest gold is dead, I cannot contain or drive out my burning grief! Undoubtedly, Sanjaya, no one dies of grief from another's end, since, wretch that I am, I am still alive after hearing of

Drona's death. Destiny is truly all-powerful and all effort fruitless. Surely, my heart is made of adamant, since it does not break into a hundred pieces after hearing of Drona's death. How can Death take him whom Brahmanas and Kshatriyas alike came and served to acquire instruction in the Vedas and divination and archery? Oh, I cannot brook the killing of Drona; it is even like the ocean drying up, or Meru being uprooted from his place, or the sun falling from the sky.

He restrained the evil, and protected men of dharma, and now he has given up his life for the wretched Duryodhana! He was equal to Brihaspati or Usanas himself in intelligence and upon his ability rested the hope of victory that my evil sons entertained. Alas, how was he slain?

Did his great, strong, keenly-trained, chestnut Sindhu horses, caparisoned in golden mesh, swift as the wind, yoked to his mighty chariot and drawing it so wonderfully, always neighing joyfully and invincible to every weapon, and always protecting him in the midst of war, grow suddenly weak and collapse? How did they overwhelm those Sindhu steeds of wonder that drew Drona's chariot, which could calmly face the sound of elephants trumpeting in war, the blare of conches and the pounding of drums; which were unmoved by the twanging of bows and showers of arrows and other weapons; those steeds that were ominous by their very appearance, never short of breath, exhausted or in pain? When such were the horses that drew his golden ratha, why could he not cross the sea that is the Pandava army?

What feats did Drona achieve in battle, the warrior who always drew tears from other Kshatriyas, and upon whose knowledge of weapons all the best archers of the world rely! What all did this mighty man of dharma do in battle?

Who were the maharathas who challenged that doer of fierce deeds, the best of all the bowmen, first among shuras, who was like Indra himself?

Did the Pandavas flee on seeing him, mighty and strong on the golden chariot, and invoke devastras? Or, did Dharmaraja Yudhishtira and his brothers with Dhrishtadyumna for their binding cord, fall upon Drona after surrounding him with their troops on all sides? Arjuna with his faultless arrows must have checked all the other chariot-warriors, and then, protected by Partha, Dhrishtadyumna must have brought death to the mighty Acharya. Possibly the brave Kekayas, Chedis, Karushas, Matsyas and the other kings surrounded the Acharya, like ants crawling over a snake, even

while he was engaged in some difficult feat, and so allowing the wretched Dhrishtadyumna to bring him down.

How could the venerable Brahmana, master of the four Vedas with their angas and the Itihasas the fifth Veda, the refuge of all Brahmanas as the ocean is of rivers, that blazing parantapa, who lived both as a Brahmana and as a Kshatriya, alas, meet his end at the point of a weapon?

A proud spirit, he had yet to often endure humiliation and to suffer much pain on my account. However undeserving, he met his end at the hands of his pupil Arjuna. Such a dharmatman and yuddhavira, whose feats all bowmen in the world looked up to—alas, how could men greedy for riches kill such a one? Foremost in this world, like Indra in swarga, of great might and energy, alas, how could the Parthas kill him, like a whale being killed by smaller fish? He, from whose presence no challenger could ever escape with life, he whom, while he lived, the two sounds of the Vedas being chanted by those learning Vedic lore and the twang of bows, never left; he who was never dispirited or dejected, alas, that Naravyaghra, that shura endowed with prosperity and never vanquished in battle, that warrior of prowess equal to that of the gaja or the simha, has been slain!

Sanjaya, I cannot bear the very thought of his death. How could Dhrishtadyumna, in the sight of all the greatest men in the world, murder the invincible Drona whose might was unequalled and his fame never tarnished?

Who fought in Drona's van, protecting him, and who, riding by his side? Who guarded his rear and who were the maharathas who shielded the right and the left wheels of Drona? Who were before him while he strove in battle? Who were they, who reckless of their lives, met death with him and joined him on his last journey? Did any of these Kshatriyas assigned to protect Drona prove false and abandon him in battle, thus letting the enemy kill him while he was alone? However great the danger, Drona would never turn his back on battle from fear. How then did the enemy kill him? Even in great distress, Sanjaya, an illustrious man should demonstrate his prowess to the full measure of his might. All this was in Drona. Ah, Sanjaya, I am losing my mind! Let us stop this speech a while until I regain my reeling senses.'"

CANTO 10

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

'Vaisampayana said, "Saying this to Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra, in extreme grief and distressed about the hopelessness of his son, Duryodhana's, victory, falls unconscious onto the ground. His attendants rush forward to fan him and sprinkle him with perfumed cold water, while the royal Bhaarata women surround him, weeping, gently rub him with their soft hands; and slowly lifting him up from the ground, seat him on his throne. He remains insensate and still, until a tremor passes through his body and he slowly regains consciousness.

He begins to question Sanjaya again about the incidents that occurred on the battlefield.

Dhritarashtra asks, 'Ajatasatru Yudhishtira who, like the risen sun, dispels darkness with his own light, who charges an enemy like an inflamed tusker in musth, whom no other herd leader can arrest, rushing eagerly towards a female elephant in heat—which of my warriors keep him at bay when he charged Drona? Who are the Kshatriya heroes that surrounded that best of glorious men, who killed so many of my brave men, that intelligent, courageous king of unbaffled prowess, who, bent on victory, could single-handedly consume the entire host of Duryodhana with just his terrible

glances, that resplendent archer, that self-restrained king whom the whole world reveres?

Which valiant men of my army surround the invincible prince, Kunti's son Bhimasena, bowman of unfading glory, Naravyaghra, hero of gigantic fame and untold valour, strong as ten thousand elephants, when he rushed wildly at Drona?

When Arjuna, maharatha of exceeding tejas, came looking like a mass of clouds discharging thunderbolts, loosing showers of arrows like Indra pouring down rain, and making all the points of the compass resound with the slapping of his palms and the rattle of his chariot-wheels; when he whose bow is like the lightning's flash, whose chariot too resembles a cloud with the sound of its wheels its thunder, the hum of whose arrows is so very fierce, whose wrath resembles a dreadful thunderhead and who is as quick as the mind or the tempest; who always strikes an enemy deep in his very vitals, who is terrible to look at, who like Yama himself bathes all the points of the compass with human blood and who, with awful visage and fierce noise, wielding the Gandiva, lashes my warriors led by Duryodhana with arrows whetted on stone and fletched with vultures' feathers—alas, when that hero of great intellect descended upon you, what was your state of mind?

When Arjuna, with Hanuman upon his banner, obstructed the sky with dense swarms of arrows, what was your state of mind? Did Partha advance upon you, slaying your troops at will, with the Gandiva pealing in his hands, accomplishing great feats on the way? Did he take your lives like the tempest destroying gathering cloud-masses or felling forests of reeds by blowing through them? Who is there that can face the Gandivi in battle?

Just hearing that he leads the enemy's forces, the heart of every opponent would seem to be broken. In the war in which the troops tremble and even great Kshatriyas are terrified, who stood firm by Drona and which cowards abandoned him from fear? Who, reckless of their lives, met Death himself, facing them squarely in the shape of Dhananjaya who can vanquish even unworldly adversaries in battle?

My troops cannot withstand the impetus of Swetavahana and the twanging of the Gandiva that is like the thunder of the very clouds. Why, I believe the very Devas and the Asuras united together cannot conquer the chariot that has Vishnu himself for its charioteer and Dhananjaya for its warrior.

When the son of Pandu, Nakula, delicate, young, intrepid and so handsome, gifted with exceptional intelligence, skill, wisdom and prowess, invincible in battle, attacked Drona with loud roars, which shuras of my army contained him?

When Sahadeva, who resembles an angry snake of virulent venom, that invincible hero of the white steeds, who observes laudable vows, is resolute and modest attacked us, which Kshatriyas of our army encircled him?

O Sanjaya, which of my warriors resisted Satyaki who, having crushed the mighty host of the Sauvira king, took for his wife the beautiful, perfect-limbed Bhoja maiden, that bull among men Yuyudhana, gifted with decisiveness, awesome courage and brahmacharya, that maharatha always keeping dharma, never unhappy, never vanquished, who in battle is equal to Krishna and is regarded as Krishna's second self, who, through Arjuna's tutelage has become the greatest of bowmen, why, equal to Partha himself. Who resisted Satyaki, at least trying to keep him away from Drona?

Know, O Sanjaya that Satyaki of the Satwata vamsa, Yuyudhana greatest hero of the Vrishnis, is equal to Parasurama himself in his knowledge and genius in the use of weapons. Ability, fame, truth, determination, intelligence, heroism, the knowledge of Brahman, and of the great astras, are all to be found in him, as the three worlds are in Krishna. Which Kshatriyas of my host confronted this peerless bowman, the indomitable Satyaki whom not the Devas can contain?

Which of my warriors surrounded Uttamaujas, greatest among the heroic Panchalas, ever achieving wondrous feats at arms, high-born, favourite among champion warriors, devoted to Arjuna, born just to destroy my evil, equal to Yama, Vaisravana, Aditya, Mahendra, or Varuna, fearless maharatha always ready to lay down his life?

Who opposed that singular Chedi warrior Dhrishtaketu, ally of the Pandavas, when he charged Drona?

Who resisted the heroic Ketumat, slayer of prince Durjaya, even when Durjaya took refuge in Girivraja? Who kept the predatory Ketumat away from Drona?

Which of my Kshatriyas challenged the Naravyaghra Sikhandin, Yagnasena's son who knows the strengths and weaknesses of his own nature, who is man and also woman, who is always unperturbed in battle, the Kshatriya who became the cause of Mahatman Bhishma's fall? Who kept Sikhandin away from Drona?

O which Kshatriyas of my army defied the greatest hero of the Vrishnis, the noble Abhimanyu, Subhadra's son, that most transcendent of all archers, the intrepid son of Arjuna more accomplished than Dhananjaya himself, in whose weapons truth and brahmacharya dwell, who is equal to Krishna in tejas and Dhananjaya in urjas, who in splendour is equal to Aditya and in intelligence to Brihaspati, who is like Yama himself with yawning maw? Which of my heroes contained the youthful and radiant Abhimanyu when he charged Drona? What was your state of mind when that Parantapa of boundless vigour plunged towards the Acharya?

Which Kshatriyas surrounded the Purushavyaghras, the sons of Draupadi, when like rivers rushing towards the sea they hurtled at Drona? Who tried to keep those children, the heroic sons of Dhrishtadyumna—Kshatranjaya, Kshatradeva, Kshatravarman and Manada, who gave up all boyishness and sport for twelve years to observe stern vratas and to wait upon Bhishma to acquire the astra shastra from him? Who kept those ferocious youths away from the Acharya?

Who defied the great archer Chekitana, whom the Vrishnis regard as superior in battle to a hundred other maharathas, to keep him away from Drona?

O, which of the Kshatriyas of my army attempted to stop the onrush of the five Kekaya brothers, valiant, virtuous, irresistible in fight and of exceptional skills and prowess, who have the hue of the Indragopaka insect, clad always as they are in red coats of mail, with red weapons and red banners, cousins and fervent supporters of the Pandavas? Who faced those heroes when they rode at Drona to have his life?

Which champion from my army withstood Yuyutsu, lord of war, first among great bowmen, of unerring aim and prodigious strength, Naravyaghra whom many vengeful kings battled for six months at Varanavrata but could not quell him, and who, in a swayamvara at Varanasi, overthrew the prince of Kasi with a broad-headed arrow, and seized a young princess for his wife?

Which Kshatriyas of my host confronted the mighty, mighty Dhrishtadyumna, raised almost in Drupada's lap, the fire-born prince who is the chief counsellor and senapati of the Pandavas, who so hates Duryodhana, who was born to kill Drona, when he attacked the Acharya, breaking through my ranks, destroying all my warriors in battle in scarlet tide?

The Maharatha Saibya measured this earth on his chariot as if with a leather belt, and as a substitute for all other sacrifices, performed without hindrance ten Aswamedha yagnas with ample and excellent food, drink and gifts offered in profusion. He rules his subjects as if they are his children, gives away in sacrifices kine as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganga; he whose feats none among men has or will ever be able to imitate, and after the performance of which, the very Devas once cried out, "We do not see in the three worlds with their mobile and immobile creatures anyone other than Usinara's son, who ever was, is, or will ever be born, who has acquired the rarest realms in the after-life unattainable by other men." O, Sanjaya, who in my army stood firm against this Saibya, Usinara's grandson, while he attacked Drona?

Which heroes of my army encircled the chariot-division of Parantapa Virata, king of the Matsyas, when it neared Drona on the field?

Who kept the gigantic Ghatotkacha away from Drona, that heroic Rakshasa who always puts forth his inhuman strength for the Pandavas' victory, Ghatotkacha who owns great powers of maya, apart from enormous strength and superhuman prowess, he who was born to Bhima in the course of a single day and of whom I entertain such terrible fears?

Who, Sanjaya, can remain unconquered by those who are prepared to lay down their lives in battle? How can the sons of Pritha meet with defeat, when they have the greatest of all beings, Krishna, wielder of Saringa, for their refuge and benefactor? He is, indeed, the Master of all the worlds, the Lord of all, the Eternal One! Narayana Divyatman, of infinite power, is the refuge of men in battle. The wise tell of his unearthly feats. Ah, let me also recite them with devotion, so that I may recover my composure and resolution!'"

CANTO 11

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Yes, as I saw everything that happened with my own eyes, I will describe how Drona falls, slain by the Pandavas and the Srinjayas.

After he is appointed senapati of the Kaurava army, Bharadwaja's son, Drona maharatha, says to your son in the midst of all the troops, "O Rajan, how can I thank you for honouring me with the command of your legions after the son of Ganga? What desire of yours can I now fulfill? Ask any boon that you wish."

Having consulted with Karna, Dusasana and others, Duryodhana says to the Acharya, "If you will give me a boon, seize Yudhishtira alive and bring him here to me!"

Drona replies, gladdening all the men there, "Praise be to Yudhishtira, Kunti's son, whom you wish only to capture O invincible one. Why do you, Duryodhana, who are a strategist, not seek Yudhishtira's death? It is wonderful that he has no enemy wishing his death. Do you want him to live to preserve your race from extinction, or having vanquished the Pandavas in battle, are you keen to establish brotherly relations with them by giving back their kingdom? Auspicious was the birth of the intelligent prince

Yudhishtira Mahabuddhi. He is truly called Ajatasatru—the man with no enemies, for even you have affection for him."

Hearing these words of Drona, the feeling that is ever present in your son's heart is plainly exposed. Not even a Brihaspati can conceal the expressions of his countenance! Your son filled with joy, answers, "By killing Kunti's son in battle, Acharya, victory cannot be mine. The very Devas cannot slay all of them and if Yudhishtira is slain, Arjuna or he among them who survives, will surely annihilate us. Yudhishtira, however, is truthful in his promises. If brought here alive and defeated once more at dice, the Pandavas will again go into the vana, for they are all obedient to their eldest brother. Such a victory will be an enduring one. This is why I do not wish to kill Dharmaraja Yudhishtira but to take him alive."

Ascertaining this crooked purpose of Duryodhana, Drona, conversant with the truths of the science of artha and gifted with great intelligence, reflects a little and gives him the boon, circumscribing it in the following way. Drona says, "If Arjuna does not protect Yudhishtira, you can consider the eldest Pandava as already brought captive to you. As for Arjuna, the very Devas and the Asuras together, led by Indra, cannot face him in battle. It is for him that I dare not do what you ask of me. Without doubt, Arjuna is my sishya and I am his Acharya. He is, however, young, blessed with great good fortune, and set upon achieving his purposes. He has obtained many astras from Indra and Rudra; and, besides, you have provoked him direly. I dare not, therefore, do what you ask.

However, if Arjuna is removed from the battle by whatever means, you may regard Yudhishtira as already taken. Since our victory rests upon his being captured alive, and not upon his death, we can accomplish this by stratagem, O bull among men! Seizing the king devoted to truth and dharma, this very day, I will yield him up to you. But only if he faces me in direct battle for at least a moment, and if you can lure Arjuna away from the field. For otherwise Yudhishtira cannot be captured."

After Drona promises that he would seize Yudhishtira, but if Arjuna is far from him, your foolish sons consider the Dharmaraja as already taken. Duryodhana knows Drona's partiality for the Pandavas and in order to make Drona fulfil his given word, he proclaims Drona's oath before all his troops.'"

CANTO 12

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When your troops hear of Drona's vow to capture Yudhishtira, they roar their approval, mingling their lusty yells with the whistling of their arrows and the booming of their conches. Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, however, soon learns of Drona's oath and his intention through his spies. He brings together all his brothers and the other kings of his army and tells Arjuna, "You have heard, Naravyaghra, of Drona's plot. Take such measures that will prevent him from capturing me. It is true that Drona has sworn his pledge but its success or failure depends on you. Therefore, stay and fight today in my vicinity so that Drona will not keep his word given to Duryodhana."

Arjuna says, "Just as I can never cause the death of my Acharya, I can never give you up, my brother. O Yudhishtira, I would rather sacrifice my life in battle than fight against my guru. This son of Dhritarashtra wants sovereignty by taking you his captive in battle. He will never succeed. The Sky with its stars may fall down, the Earth herself may split in pieces, but Drona will not take you his captive as long as I am alive, not even if Vajradhari Indra or Vishnu at the head of the Devas comes to help him. As long as I live, Rajan, do not have any fear of Drona, although he is the

greatest of all warriors. I further assure you that my word is never broken nor does what I swear ever remain unfulfilled. I do not recollect ever having spoken an untruth, ever being defeated, or leaving the least part of a vow unfulfilled."

Then, Rajan, small and big conches, drums and cymbals are sounded and beaten in the Pandava camp. The noble Pandavas roar and shout, and the awful twanging of their bowstrings and the slaps of palms reach into the high heavens. Hearing the loud booming of conches that arises from the camp of the mighty sons of Pandu, your divisions also sound diverse instruments.

Your legions and the enemy's forces slowly advance against each other in battle order and soon savage, bloodcurdling battle breaks out again between the Pandavas, the Kurus, Drona and the Panchalas. The Srinjayas fight vigorously but cannot make headway as Drona himself shields his forces. So also, your son's best maharathas cannot beat back the Pandava army, for the diademed Arjuna Kiritin protects it. Guarded by Drona and Arjuna, both sides appear as if to stand quite still, like two blossoming forests in the silence of the night.

Then Drona, mounted on his golden chariot, like the magnificent Sun, bursts headlong through the ranks of the Pandavas, smashing them down at will. The Pandavas and the Srinjayas are afraid and feel as if this single mahatejasvin warrior upon his racing ratha has multiplied into many maharathas. Drona's terrible shafts fly in all directions, petrifying his opponents and he is indeed like the Sun himself at mid-day shedding a thousand rays of light all around. Just as once the Danavas could not face Indra, there is no one among the Pandavas who is able to face the raging son of Bharadwaja. After he confounds the hostile troops, Drona swiftly begins to decimate the legion led by Dhrishtadyumna, mowing them down with his incessant volleys of arrows which cover all the points of the compass.'

CANTO 13

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Drona, wrathful warrior in his golden chariot, causing great havoc among the Pandava host and destroying their divisions like a forest-fire consuming a vana, the Srinjayas tremble in fear.

In battle, the twang of the maharatha's taut bow resounds like roaring thunder. Fierce arrows that Drona shoots with light like speed decimate chariot-warriors, horsemen, elephant-warriors and foot-soldiers, along with their elephants and horses. Showering down arrows, like roaring clouds helped by the wind raining hailstones at the close of summer, he brings terror to the hearts of the enemy. Raging through the hostile ranks and petrifying the troops, the mighty Drona swells the unnatural fear that his enemies feel. The gold-decked bow on his fleeting ratha is like the streak of lightning in a mass of dark clouds.

The shura, firm in truth, wise and always devoted to dharma, causes an awful river of angry current to flow there, such as seen only at the end of the Yuga. The river has its source in the recklessness of Drona's wrath and is haunted by thronging carnivores. Fighting men are the waves that cover its surface, and great heroes constitute the trees on its banks whose roots the

river's current constantly erodes. Its waters are the blood shed in the battle, chariots are its eddies, and elephants and horses form its banks. Coats of mail are its floating lilies, the flesh of men is the mire on its bed, the fat, marrow and bones of fallen animals and men are the sands on its banks, and fallen head-gear is its froth.

The battle itself is the canopy above its surface; lances, the fish with which it abounds, and it is uncrossable for the vast number of slain men, elephants and horses that fall into it. The impetus of shafts loosed constitute its flow, corpses the timber floating on it; chariots its tortoises; heads the stones strewn on its banks and bed; swords and scimitars its fish in profusion; chariots and elephants form its lakes and it is decked with many adornments. Maharathas constitute hundreds of little whirlpools and blood-damp earth its wavelets. Though it can easily be crossed by men of exceptional valour, the timid can never ford the dread river of death. Heaps of bodies pile up on sandbanks, obstructing its navigation, and it is the seething haunt of kankas, vultures and other birds of prey.

It bears away thousands of maharathas to Yama's abode. Long spears are the snakes that infest it in profusion and the living combatants are the fowl frolicking on its waters; torn chatras, parasols, are its swans, and diadems the smaller birds that adorn it. Wheels are its turtles, maces its alligators, and arrows its smaller fish. It is home to frightful swarms of crows, vultures and jackals.

The river carries away hundreds of those that Drona kills in battle to the region of the Pitris. Dammed by these numerous bodies floating upon it, the hair of slain warriors and animals are like its moss and weeds. The inexorable and awesome Drona causes even such a river to flow there, terrifying the timid, magnifying their fears.

While Drona is thus desiccating the enemy army everywhere, the Pandava warriors led by Yudhishtira rush at him from all sides. Seeing this, your brave soldiers counter attack from every direction and a hair-raising battle ensues. Sakuni, full of a hundred kinds of deceit, attacks Sahadeva and pierces his charioteer, standard and chariot, with many keen shafts. Sahadeva, however, remaining unruffled, first cuts down Saubala's standard, breaks his bow, strikes his charioteer and carves splinters from his ratha; and he then pierces Sakuni himself with sixty shafts like thunderbolts.

Seizing up his mace, Sakuni jumps down from his fabulous chariot and fells Sahadeva's charioteer with a blow, so the sarathy falls out of his ratha. Then, Rajan, those two heroic and mighty warriors, both on foot and armed with gadas, battle like the peaks of two mountains.

Drona and Drupada, king of the Panchalas, draw blood from each other with braces of searing arrows. Bhimasena strikes Vivimsati sharply, but Vivimsati remains wonderfully unmoved. Serenely he cuts down Bhimasena's horses, standard and bow winning the worship of all the witnessing troops. The incensed Bhima cannot brook this and in a blur kills Vivimsati's pedigreed horses, at which the mighty Vivimsati, taking up a shield and sword, jumps down and charges Bhimasena and they fight like two demented elephants.

The heroic Salya, laughing the while, pierces, as if in jest, his own beloved nephew Nakula with a flurry of arrows, mainly to annoy him. Nakula, however, in a hot flash shoots down his uncle's horses, royal parasol, standard and charioteer, and blows his conch in echoing triumph.

Dhrishtaketu engages Kripa, wards off diverse kinds of arrows Kripa looses at him, pierces him with seventy fiery barbs and then cuts down the device of his standard with three perfect arrows. Kripa replies with a thick shower of shafts and the fight between the Brahmana and Dhrishtaketu rages on.

An amused Satyaki bloodies Kritavarman squarely through his chest with a special long arrow and then strikes him in a wink with seventy more. The Bhoja replies in kind but like swiftly coursing winds failing to move a mountain, Kritavarman cannot move Satyaki at all or affright him in the least.

The Pandava senapati strikes Susarman deeply in his vitals and is himself stabbed with a lance through his shoulder-joint. Virata, with his energetic Matsya warriors, manfully resists Vikartana's son and this feat of the Matsya king is a deed of great valour for he singly contains an entire legion with his immaculate archery.

King Drupada engages with Bhagadatta, and the combat between these two warriors is quite beautiful to watch. Bhagadatta, bull among men, lacerates Drupada, his sarathy, his standard and whole chariot with a myriad of arrows. The wrathful Drupada swiftly strikes the maharatha squarely through his chest with a flawless shaft. The two great warriors, Somadatta's son Bhurisravas and Sikhandin, masters of every kind of weapon, fight a

fierce duel that terrifies all. Bhurisravas covers Yagnasena's son Sikhandin with a heavy downpour of arrows and is in turn pierced with ninety shafts, making him tremble.

Both capable of creating a hundred illusions, and swelling up with pride, Hidimbi's son Ghatotkacha and Alambusha, fierce Rakshasas, battle each other in the most astonishing manner, using their powers of maya, vanishing and reappearing at will—each set on vanquishing the other.

The fierce Chekitana fights Anuvinda, and they range right across the field, causing great amazement. Lakshmana fights Kshatradeva fiercely, even like Vishnu, long ago, against the Asura Hiranyaksha. The mighty Paurava roars at Abhimanyu as he attacks him wildly. Abhimanyu retaliates fiercely but Paurava envelops him in a mantle of arrows. Arjuna's marvellous son fells his antagonist's standard, parasol and rives his bow. He pierces Paurava with seven arrows and with another five strikes deep his charioteer and horses, gladdening his own troops, and then repeatedly roars like a lion.

In a blur, Abhimanyu fits an arrow to his bowstring that is certain to take Paurava's life. Seeing this, Kritavarman, Hridika's son, with two thunderbolt like shafts, breaks both Abhimanyu's bow and arrow. Abhimanyu flings aside his broken bow, takes up a bright sword and a shield decked with many stars, and whirling these at great speed, he careens across the field, putting his prowess on display. Whirling them overhead and then brandishing them fiercely, and leaping high himself, he makes no difference between using blade and shield for defence and vicious attack.

He leaps suddenly onto the axle-shaft of Paurava's ratha, gives a mighty shout and next moment is in the chariot and seizes Paurava by his hair, meanwhile breaking his sarathy's neck with a terrific kick, and cutting down his proud standard with a fluent stroke of his sword. Abhimanyu raises Paurava up high, like Garuda a snake from the bottom of the sea, agitating the waters. All the kings see Paurava helplessly flung down and dragged about on his chariot floor, his hair disheveled, and looking like an ox deprived of its senses and on the point of being killed by a lion. Jayadratha cannot bear to watch Paurava being so roughly mishandled; seizing up a sword and a shield that bears the device of a peacock, decked with a hundred little bells hung in rows, he jumps down from his chariot with a roar. Abhimanyu sees the king of the Sindhus, lets Paurava go and springs like a launching hawk from that warrior's ratha, landing lithely on

the ground. Like some dancer, he effortlessly wards off with his sword and shield the javelins, arrows and swords that his enemies aim at him, showing off the strength of his own arms.

Mighty Abhimanyu once more raises his great sword and shield, and now rushes at Vriddhakshatra's son, a sworn enemy of his father, why, like a tiger rushing at an elephant. Both shuras, they joyfully fall on each other, just like a tiger and a lion with claw and tusk. No one finds any difference between them in the swinging strokes and the flashing thrusts and parries of their swords and shields. They circle each other gracefully, quite beautifully, and seem like two winged mountains of old.

Abhimanyu bends low and thrusts out with his sword, and in a blink Jayadratha dances aside and swings down mightily from above with own blade but it breaks in shards against the gold-plated shining shield of Arjuna's son. Jayadratha hastily retreats six steps and in the twinkling of an eye, is back on his own chariot. The duel with the sword over, Abhimanyu also climbs back into his own chariot. Ten enemy kings of the Kuru army now unite and surround him, but still eyeing Jayadratha, mighty Abhimanyu continues to whirl his sword and brandish his shield and lets out a deafening roar of triumph.

Having bested Jayadratha, Abhimanyu proceeds to burn the Kaurava legions like the Sun scorching the world at midday. Salya casts a vicious iron spear at him, decked with gold and like a blazing flame. Abhimanyu jumps up high and catches it in flight, as Garuda may a mighty snake in the air. Seeing this, all the kings together give a great howl and in a flash Arjuna's son casts Salya's own spear back at him like a streak of lightning. Looking like, a snake that has recently cast off its slough, the missile kills Salya's charioteer in a burst of blood and fells him from the ratha. Virata, Drupada, Dhrishtaketu, Yudhishtira, Satyaki, Kekaya, Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, Nakula and Sahadeva, and the five sons of Draupadi all exclaim, "Uttamam! Excellent!"

Diverse kinds of sounds fill Kurukshetra—the loud hum of arrows, leonine shouts, all exhorting the aggressive son of Arjuna. Your sons cannot bear these sounds and all of them suddenly surround Abhimanyu and cover him with hails of arrows like clouds pouring down rain on a mountain-breast. The parantapa Salya storms up to support your sons and remembering the death of his own charioteer, attacks Abhimanyu furiously.'"

CANTO 14

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, you have described to me many awesome duels. Hearing about them, I envy those that have eyes. All men will speak of this battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas, which reminds one of the great and wonderful wars of ancient times between the Devas and the Asuras. Ah, I am agog to listen to your narration of this stirring battle. Tell me more about the duel between Salya and Abhimanyu.'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing his charioteer killed, Salya, with his iron mace upraised, jumps down in rage from his ratha; at which, Bhima hefts his own huge gada and rushes at Salya who looks like the blazing Yuga-fire or the Destroyer Himself, armed with his cudgel. Abhimanyu, too, plucks up a remarkable mace like the Vajra itself, and taunts Salya, crying, "Come! Come on!"

Bhimasena, though, persuades his nephew to stand aside, and advances on Salya who stands immovable as a hill, calmly watching Bhima come towards him like a tiger at an elephant. The blare of trumpets, thousands of conches booming, roars and shouts and the sound of drums then erupt and

cries of “Jaya! Jaya!” arise among hundreds of Pandava and Kaurava warriors charging towards each other.

There is no one among all the kings, O Bhaarata, other than the king of the Madras who can bear the might of Bhimasena in single combat; similarly, who else in the world, save Vrikodara, can withstand the illustrious Salya’s mighty mace? Grasped by Bhima, his prodigious gada, bound in hempen strings mixed with wires of gold and magnificent to behold, shines so brilliantly. And Salya’s mace, adorned with beautiful circles, looks like a blaze of lightning. Both of them bellow like bulls, circle each other, and standing as they do with their maces slightly bent, truly resemble a hillocky pair of horned bulls. The duel between the two lions among men is in every way evenly matched. Bhimasena strikes Salya’s formidable mace with his own, and draws a burning cascade of sparks. And Bhima’s gada, struck by Salya, is like a beautiful tree covered by fireflies at eventide, during the monsoon.

The mace that Salya hurls at Bhima lights up the sky; likewise, the gada that Bhima flings at his enemy scorches Salya’s forces like a meteor falling from the sky. Both wonderful maces strike each other like hissing she-snakes and we see flashes of fire. Like two great tigers mauling each other with their talons, or like two mighty elephants goring each other with their tusks, the titanic warriors circle, striking one another with utmost violence; and soon, covered with blood, they look like a couple of flowering Kinsukas. The sound of the blows of the maces wielded by those two lions among men is as loud as Indra’s thunder; and it echoes on all sides. Soon, they are so battered that they can hardly move, like hills stricken by lightning. Yet, both of them are still full of vigour and, moving in smaller circles, quickly fall upon each other again like two bull-elephants, the leaders of their herds, and pound each other with their iron maces, and then fall down at the same moment like a pair of Indra’s massive sacrificial stakes!

In a wink, Maharatha Kritavarman darts up to Salya lying breathless and senseless on the field, hauls him up into his chariot and bears him away. Immediately, reeling like a drunk, Bhima gets up and stands ready, gada in hand, for further fight. Seeing Salya of the Madras turn away from the battle demoralizes your sons, along with their elephants, foot soldiers, horsemen and chariot-warriors. Sensing victory, the Pandavas quickly attack the

frightened men of your army, who break ranks and flee in all directions, like masses of clouds scattered by the wind.

The triumphant Pandava maharathas are resplendent in that moment, Rajan, like blazing fires. Elated and joyful, they let out loud yells and roars, blow their conchs, beat their drums, large and small, clash cymbals and sound other instruments.'"

CANTO 15

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing your army comprehensively routed, Rajan, Karna's son, the valiant Vrishasena, single-handedly comes to their defence, creating an astounding mayic illusion with his astras. He sends flights of thousands of arrows of blinding effulgence soaring in all directions, like the rays of the sun in mid-summer, and striking men, horses, chariots and elephants, destroying chariot-warriors and horsemen, who fall like trees broken by the wind, in their thousands. Watching this single warrior wheel fearlessly on the field, all the kings of the Pandava army unite to surround him. Nakula's son, Satanika, attacks him and strikes him with ten keen barbs, but in a flash Vrishasena breaks his bow and cuts down his standard.

The other sons of Draupadi, anxious to rescue their brother, charge Vrishasena and shroud him with their arrows. Immediately, many maharathas led by Aswatthama dash up to defend Vrishasena and lash the mighty sons of Draupadi with all kinds of shafts, which fall like rain on mountain breasts. The Pandavas join the fray. The ensuing battle between your troops and those of the Pandavas is fierce and enthralling, indeed like the Devasura yuddha of old.

Having stoked intense enmity between them for past wrongs, in the grip of wrath, the heroic Pandavas and Kauravas fight savagely, even like Garuda and the mighty Nagas battling in the sky. With Bhima, Karna, Kripa, Drona, Aswatthama, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki, the battlefield is lustrous, terrible and resplendent as the all-destroying Sun that rises at the end of the Yuga. The brutal and awesome contention is surely like the Devasura yuddha of yore. Roaring like the swollen sea, Yudhishtira's host brings slaughter to your army, and even your maharathas flee the fight. Seeing the debacle, Drona rallies them, crying, "Kshatriyas do not run!"

Drona of the red steeds, now fuming with rage, is like Indra's four-tusked elephant Airavata, and surging forward he scatters the Pandava soldiers, penetrates deep into their host and attacks Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira responds with a fever of arrows fletched with the feathers of the kanka bird, drawing blood on his Acharya. Drona breaks Yudhishtira's bow in his hands and forges ever closer to the Pandava king.

Kumara, renowned prince of the Panchalas, protector of Yudhishtira's chariot-wheels, confronts the advancing Drona, like a continent receiving the surging sea. Seeing Drona, that bull among Brahmanas, contained by Kumara, loud shouts of "Uttamam! Wonderful!" are heard from the Pandava warriors.

Excited and his blood risen, Kumara roars and roars, and pierces Drona deep with an arrow through his chest. Holding up the dangerous Acharya, though tiring, the mighty Kumara shows amazing lightness of hand, and strikes Drona with a thousand shafts. But then, the incensed Drona, bull among men, kills valiant Kumara, Kshatriya of dharma, who knew both mantras and astras well.

The inexorable Brahmana plunges on, loosing firestorms of arrows in every direction, mowing down your legions at his august will. He strikes Sikhandin with twelve arrows, Uttamaujas with twenty, Nakula with five, Sahadeva with seven, Yudhishtira with twelve searing shafts, each of the five sons of Draupadi with three barbs, Satyaki with five, Virata with ten. He attacks each of the Pandavas, one after the other, and beleaguers their entire host. All the while, he is advancing on Yudhishtira, seeking to capture him. Yugandhara looms before the threatening Drona, and holds him up for a while. He only provokes the raging Drona, like the ocean whipped into fury by the tempest. The Acharya strikes him with a fusillade of immaculate

arrows in the heart of a moment, and then with a wedge-headed shaft beheads him, and brave Yugandhara falls out of his chariot.

Virata, Drupada, the Kaikeya princes, Satyaki, Sibi, Vyaghradatta, the Panchala princes, the valiant Singhasena and many others rush forward to protect Yudhishtira from the marauding Drona. They surround Drona to slow him down, while he burns on loosing riptides of fire on every side. Vyaghradatta, prince of the Panchalas, strikes Drona with fifty keen barbs, and the Pandava troops shout in exultation. Singhasena also draws blood from the Brahmana; Drona bristles and then, throwing back his head, gives such a dreadful roar that even those Pandava maharathas feel terror touch their hearts. Red-eyed Drona glares, twangs his bowstring like thunder and charges the pair that dares confront him. With two perfect wedge-headed arrows, he decapitates both Singhasena and Vyaghradatta. Flaring on, harrying the other maharathas of the Pandavas with remitless tirades of arrows, he stands before Yudhishtira's chariot, like all-destroying Yama himself.

Then, Rajan, loud cries of *The king is slain!* are heard among Yudhishtira's warriors; seeing Drona's fearsome, ineluctable prowess, many cry in dismay, *Today Dhritarashtra's son will have victory for Drona has captured Yudhishtira!*

But even as black despair grips them, Arjuna Swetavahana thunders up on his chariot of white steeds and suddenly stands implacable between the Brahmana and his brother. He comes bringing carnage with him, leaving a river of blood in his terrible wake, whose eddies are broken chariots and the severed limbs, heads and bodies of brave warriors, whose froth is floating arrows, whose fish are spears and other weapons clutched in the hands of fallen men, river that bore them in swift tide to where spirits of the departed dwell. Driving the enemy before him like wretched animals on a hunt, Arjuna Kiritin breaks like a flash-flood upon Drona's divisions and mantles them in a thick cloud of deadly arrows, every shaft claiming a life.

No one can distinguish when he sets his arrows to his bowstring or looses them; it is a single uninterrupted motion, without pause or let, a fluid blur, a dance, a tandava of slaughtering. Neither the four cardinal directions, nor the firmament above, nor the earth, Rajan, can be distinguished, for the singular darkness of Arjuna's arrows, engulfing all. And then the Sun also sets in a pall of dust, and friend and enemy cannot be told apart. Drona, so

close to taking Yudhishtira alive, is frustrated and lets out a howl that reaches into the very sky.

The day's battle ends, and Drona and Duryodhana, Arjuna and the others slowly withdraw their denuded legions. The Pandavas, the Srinjayas and the Panchalas are full of relief and joy, and praise Partha as the Rishis eulogise the Sun. Having thus vanquished his enemies, a happy Arjuna, rides slowly to his tent at the very rear of the rest of the army, with Krishna for his companion. Standing on his beautiful chariot decked with the costliest of sapphires, rubies, gold, silver, diamonds, corals and crystals, the son of Pandu is glorious as the Moon in a firmament spangled with stars.'"

CANTO 16

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'The troops of both the armies retire in disciplined order to their tents, Rajan, according to the divisions and the subdivisions to which they belong.

Having withdrawn the legions, Drona, in great sadness, says to Duryodhana "I told you that when Arjuna is with Yudhishtira, he cannot be captured even by the very Devas. Look how, although all of you fell upon him, Partha frustrated all of you. Do not doubt me when I say that Krishna and Arjuna are invincible. If, however, Swetavahana Arjuna can somehow be lured away from Yudhishtira's side, I say to you that Yudhishtira will be your captive. Let someone challenge Arjuna to a battle and draw him away to a far corner of the field from where he cannot return without vanquishing the challenger. While Arjuna is away, I will penetrate the Pandava host and, in the very sight of Dhrishtadyumna, seize Yudhishtira. This I swear I will do, but only if the son of Dharma stands alone before me for at least a moment in battle. And surely, that single feat of mine will benefit us more than defeating the whole Pandava army!"

Hearing this from Drona, Susarman, king of the Trigartas, who is present there with his brothers, says, "Arjuna constantly wrongs and

humiliates us, Rajan, although we have done him no injury. Remembering all those humiliations, we burn in anger and cannot sleep at nights. With some good fortune, Arjuna will confront us on the field and we will have revenge on him, which will not only suit your purpose but also bring us renown. We will lure him out of the very field and kill Arjuna. We solemnly swear that today the Earth will be either without Arjuna or without the Trigartas. Our oath will never prove false."

The five brothers Satyaratha, Satyavarman, Satyavrata, Satyeshu and Satyakarman also endorse what he says. With ten thousand chariots, they come to Duryodhana, having sworn their oath on the battlefield. The Malavas, the Tundikeras with a thousand chariots, and Purushavyaghra Susarman, lord of Prasthala, with the Mavellakas, the Lalithyas, and the Madrakas, also with ten thousand rathas, and his brothers, with another ten thousand chariots from diverse realms, also come.

They bring fire and each prepares for lighting one for himself. They take up ropes of Kusa grass and after they don remarkable coats of mail, they bathe in ghrita, put on robes of Kusa grass and tie their bowstrings as girdles around their waists. These Kshatriyas, who have given away hundreds and thousands of cows and gold nishkas as gifts to Brahmanas, who have performed many yagnas, who have been blessed with children, who have nothing more to achieve in this world, who have earned blessed regions in the hereafter, who are prepared to lay down their lives in battle, who have devoted their souls to the attainment of fame and victory, now only want to reach those unearthly kingdoms through dharma yuddha, those realms attainable by yagnas, with abundant dakshina to Brahmanas and through sacred rites, the chief among which are Brahmacharya and study of the Vedas. Having each gratified Brahmanas by giving them gold, cattle, fine clothes, and having addressed one another in loving discourse, those Kshatriyas kindle their sacred fires and take the solemn vow to either kill or be killed by Arjuna.

In ringing voices they declare in the hearing of all men, "Those realms shall be ours that are reserved for men of mahavratas, worlds which are not for those who drink wine, or have adulterous relations with their guru's wife, steal from Brahmanas, enjoy the king's favour without satisfying its conditions, or who abandon those who seek protection, who slay a rival out of selfish greed. Those exalted worlds are not for those who set fire to homes, who kill kine, who wound others with words or deeds, who harbour

malice against Brahmanas, who from folly do not seek the companionship of their wives in their season, who seek the congress with women on the day they are to perform the Sraddha for their ancestors, who harm themselves, who misappropriate what is given to them in trust for safekeeping, who destroy learning, who have battle with eunuchs, who follow mean base men, who are atheists, or those who abandon their sacred fires, their mothers, and who are generally sinners.

May we lose those lofty, sacred worlds if we return from the field without killing Dhananjaya, or if we run from him on the field in fear. While if we do indeed achieve the most difficult feat in the world, of killing Arjuna, we will indeed attain to those most blessed realms of felicity and grace!"

Having said these words, sworn the grave oath for which they are henceforth called the Samsaptakas, Rajan, those Kshatriya shuras go forth into battle, and loudly challenge Arjuna, summoning him to the southernmost part of Kurukshetra. Thus challenged, Arjuna, tiger among men, subjugator of hostile cities, immediately says to Yudhishtira, "I never refuse a challenge. It is a sacred vow I have sworn. These men, Susarman and his brothers, themselves sworn to conquer or die, have challenged me to battle. You must give me leave to kill Susarman with all his followers, O Purusharishabha, for I cannot brook their arrogance and I say to you that these enemies are already dead."

Yudhishtira says, "You know, my child, what Drona has resolved to accomplish. You must not let him succeed in keeping his vile word given to Duryodhana. Drona is endowed with great prowess. He is a shura, accomplished in arms and tireless, and he has vowed to seize me."

Arjuna says, "Rajan, this Satyajit will protect you today in battle. As long as Satyajit lives, the acharya will never succeed in taking you. If, however Satyajit is slain in battle, you must not remain on the field for a moment, even if all our other warriors surround you."

Yudhishtira then gives Arjuna leave to face the Samsaptakas; the king embraces his brother lovingly and chants many mantras of blessing over him. After he makes this arrangement for Yudhishtira's protection, the mighty Partha rides against the Trigartas, like a hungry lion hunting a herd of deer. Filled with joy at Arjuna's absence from Yudhishtira's side, Duryodhana's men are eager to capture Yudhishtira. Both armies plunge

furiously at each other, like the Ganga and the Sarayu in spate in the season of rains, when both rivers are swollen with water.'"

CANTO 17

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The Samsaptakas, sworn to kill Arjuna or die, are full of delight as they take their stand on a level part of the field, arraying their chariots in the vyuha of the Half-moon. Seeing Arjuna Kiritin come towards them, they give vent to lusty shouts that fill the sky and all the points of the compass. Because it is an open plain covered only with men, their roars create no echoes.

Seeing them so full of joy, Dhananjaya, with a small smile, tells Krishna, "Look, the Trigarta brothers, who are about to die, are full of delight when they should weep instead. Or, perhaps this is their moment to rejoice, since they will go to those transcendent realms that cowards can never attain."

Arjuna comes upon the arrayed ranks of the Trigartas, takes up his gold embellished conch, the Devadatta, and blows it with great force, filling the place with its blare, suddenly terrifying the Samsaptaka chariot legion, and all their animals, who stand, petrified, with staring eyes, ears, necks and lips paralysed. They urinate helplessly and some even vomit blood.

When they regain composure, they quickly form their ranks and loose their arrows all together in a stream at Arjuna. The mind-swift Pandava

invokes fifteen astras and shoots down all those thousands of shafts in flight, before they can reach him. The Samsaptakas strike Arjuna with ten arrows each, and he, them with three. Each of them pierces Arjuna with five shafts; he, with two of storm force.

They shower Arjuna and Kesava with a downpour as thunderclouds do when they open. Thousands of arrows fall upon Arjuna, like swarms of bees on a flowering stand of trees in the forest. Thirty of these gold-winged barbs pierce Arjuna's crown of adamant and stick there, so he seems to wear golden ornaments, and shines like the newly risen sun.

With a wedge-headed arrow, Arjuna shreds Subahu's leathern shield; he covers Sudharman, Sudhanwan and Subahu in searing fire. They find Partha with ten arrows each, and he, the monkey-bannered shura, strikes them all with rashes of arrows, also cutting down their golden standards. He breaks Sudhanwan's bow, kills his horses and then, in a scarlet flash, cuts his turbaned head from his neck.

This terrifies the Samsaptaka troops and, panic-stricken, many break ranks and run headlong back to Duryodhana's main army. The incensed Arjuna inundates the mighty legion with a flood of arrows; he falls upon that host and begins to raze it with a ceaseless torrent of arrows, like the Sun destroying darkness with his rays. The Trigarta forces visibly melt away on all sides. The Samsaptakas are as full of fear as Arjuna is of wrath; they stand transfixed, helpless before him like a terrified herd of deer, and he slaughters them with his supernal archery. And then even their maharathas turn their chariots to flee from the terrible Pandava.

Susarman roars in rage at his maharathas, "Stand and fight, Kshatriyas! It is shameful to flee from battle. You swore such a dread and solemn oath before all the army. What will you say to Duryodhana's great commanders when you go running back to them? The whole world will mock us for such cowardice. Stand and fight!"

Hearing him, Rajan, those shuras roar aloud and blow on their conches to embolden themselves. The Samsaptakas return to the field, along with the fighting Narayana cow-herds, resolved now to face Yama himself.'"

CANTO 18

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the Samsaptakas return to the field, Arjuna says to his sarathy, the divine Krishna, "Hrishikesa, ride at the Samsaptakas! They will not yield as long as they are alive. Today you will see the might of my arms and of this Gandiva. Today I will slaughter all these men like Rudra does the creatures at the end of the Yuga."

The invincible Krishna smiles, heartens his warrior with some auspicious words, and sets his chariot towards the enemy. That chariot yoked to white horses is as splendid as a celestial vimana coursing through the sky. And like Indra's ratha, Rajan, in the war between the Devas and the Asuras in olden days, it could fly in every direction.

Armed with diverse weapons, the wrathful Narayanas surround Dhananjaya, and cover him with a thick darkness of arrows. Bharatarishabha, in moments Arjuna and Krishna are entirely shrouded, invisible. His face dark with anger, Arjuna grips the Gandiva more tightly, rubs its bowstring and, his great brow furrowed deep, he blows a reverberant blast on his prodigious conch, the Devadatta. His ire provoked, his greater might summoned, the Pandava invokes and looses the devastating astra called the Tvashtri. Thousands of shining terrible Arjunas

and Krishna appear on that field. Confounded and maddened by that sight, the enemy soldiers turn on one another for they see just Arjunas and Krishnas everywhere, and their every comrade one!

"Hah! Arjuna!"

"Krishna!"

"Pandu's son!"

"Yadava!"

Bewildered by the hallucinations of the astra, crying out thus, they hew blindly at one another, and their bodies are quickly like blossoming Kinsukas, sprouted in red flowers and beautiful. The astra consumes all the thousands of arrows they shot at the real Arjuna and Krishna, plunging them in a solid night; the two emerge from darkness glorious as ever. All the while, the occult weapon sends Samsaptaka heroes past counting to Yama's halls. Then, laughing in exhilaration, Arjuna turns to further raze the Lalithya, the Malava, the Mavellaka, and the Trigarta warriors. Arjuna massacres those Kshatriyas in the grip of fate, but they valiantly continue to besiege him with so many different kinds of missiles.

Yet again, the Samsaptaka arrows plunge Arjuna and Krishna in darkness and neither they nor their ratha can be seen. Seeing their arrows find their mark, their enemies roar in joy; they already celebrate, waving bright silks scarves, thinking the two Krishnas are dead. They blow their conches, beat their drums and clash cymbals in thousands, and roar in exultation like some vast pride of lions.

Krishna, bathed in sweat and weak, speaks to Arjuna in the unnatural dark, "Where are you, Partha? I do not see you. Are you alive, O Parantapa?"

At once, Arjuna invokes the Vayavyastra, weapon of the Wind, and blows away the sinister cupola of arrows, and the darkness with it. Illustrious Vayu, god of that mighty astra, blows away whole legions of Samsaptakas, thousands of men, with their horses, elephants, chariots and weapons, as if they are dry leaves. And ah, they look beautiful, like flights of birds taking wing all together from their trees!

Even while they are borne through the air and along the ground, Arjuna cuts off thousands of martial and royal heads; he cuts away weapon-wielding hands from wrists, dissects warriors' thighs like elephants trunks, and strikes others deep and fatally through backs, arms and eyes.

Arjuna dismembers his enemies and shatters their richly adorned chariots that look like cloud palaces in the sky; he kills rathikas, horsemen, elephant-riders and their beasts of war. Ruined chariots lie everywhere in dense profusion, with standards broken, looking like forests of headless palmyra trees. Elephants bearing proud banners, hooks, goads and royal standards, fall like wooded mountains split by Indra's Vajra.

Horses in mail with yak-like tails, roll on the ground with their riders, in death's spasms, their entrails and eyes gouged out, all struck by Partha's shafts. Foot-soldiers lie askew in the final postures of death, their hands no longer grasping the swords that had been their talons, their armour shredded, their bones broken and protruding ghastly, their vitals excoriated, all slain by Arjuna's irresistible arrows.

Kurukshetra, field of war, is dreadful with corpses, with warriors still being killed, the fallen and then falling, standing or being swept away. The showers of blood sprayed copiously all around by Arjuna's indescribable archery wetly clears the air of it dust. The ground strewn with thousands of headless trunks is impassable.

Arjuna's chariot shines fiercely like Rudra's ratha at the end of the Yuga, when the Lord comes as Hara to destroy creation. The warriors, with their holy horses, chariots and elephants, slaughtered by Arjuna become the guests of Indra. Strewn thickly with dead maharathas, Kurukshetra is as macabre as Yama's domains that teem with the spirits of departed creatures.

Meanwhile, as Arjuna is furiously engaged with the Samsaptakas, Drona at the head of his forces in battle array, along with many armed and famous maharathas, hunts Yudhishtira, determined to capture him. The ensuing battle is unimaginably brutal.'"

CANTO 19

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The next morning, Maharatha Drona tells Suyodhana, "'I am ready! I arranged for Arjuna to be lured away by the Samsaptakas."

When Partha rides after the Samsaptakas, Drona, at the head of his vyuha, sets out to capture Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. Seeing Drona array his forces in a Garuda vyuha, Yudhishtira deploys his troops in an Ardhachakra vyuha.

At the beak of the Garuda is Drona himself while Duryodhana surrounded by his brothers forms the head with Kritavarman and the illustrious Kripa being the two eyes of that Eagle. Bhutasarman, Kshemasarman, the valiant Karakaksha, the Kalingas, the Singhalas, the Easterners, the Sudras, the Abhiras, the Daserakas, the Sakas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Hangsapadas, the Surasenas, the Daradas, the Madras and the Kalikeyas, with hundreds and thousands of elephants, horses, chariots, and foot-soldiers are stationed at its neck. Bhurisravas, Salya, Somadatta, and Balhika, surrounded by a full Akshauhini, take up their position as the right wing, while Vinda, Anuvinda of Avanti and

Sudakshina, king of the Kambojas, station themselves at the left wing with Drona's son Aswatthaman.

At the rear of that Garuda are the Kalingas, the Ambashtas, the Magadhas, the Paundras, the Madrakas, the Gandharas, the Sakunas, the Vasatis, the Easterners and the Mountain-men. At its tail is Vikartana's son Karna, with his sons, kinsmen and friends, leading a large force raised from diverse kingdoms. At the heart of that formation are Jayadratha, Bhimaratha, Sampati, the Jayas, the Bhojas, Bhuminjaya, Vrisha, Kratha, and the mighty king of the Nishadas, all masters of war, surrounded by a large host, keeping Brahmaloka in their hearts and as their goal.

Drona's vyuha with its foot-soldiers, horses, chariots and elephants, heaves like a tempest-tossed ocean, as it advances to engage the enemy. Impatient warriors sally forth from its flanks, like roaring summer clouds charged with lightning, scudding in from all sides. In the midst of that army, the king of the Pragjyotishas, mounted on his war elephant, is magnificent, Rajan, like the rising sun. Decked in garlands of flower and with a royal white chatra held over his head, he is like the full moon when Soma is in conjunction with the Krittika nakshatra. His elephant, blind with the wine-like exudation from its temples rent in musth, looks like a mass of black antimony and shines like a mountain washed by the showers of mighty clouds. Bhagadatta himself, armed with various weapons, riding in the midst of many heroic kings of the hill countries, is like Indra himself surrounded by the Devas.

Yudhishtira sees that superhuman and invincible vyuha and tells Dhrishtadyumna, "O you of the steeds white as doves, do whatever you must to ensure that the Brahmana does not take me his captive."

Dhrishtadyumna replies, "O Punyavrata, Drona will never take you, however he strives to, for I myself will contain him and his forces. As long as I am alive, O Kurusthama, have no fear. Under no circumstances can Drona vanquish me in battle."

With this, Dhrishtadyumna, the mighty son of Drupada, with bow raised and streaming arrows charges Drona. Seeing the fire-born Panchala prince ride straight at him like an evil omen, Drona feels a pang of fear and weakness. Watching this, your son Durmukha, rides between the Acharya and Dhrishtadyumna, and a pitched battle erupts between them, O Bhaarata. Dhrishtadyumna covers Durmukha in a rage of arrows, and looses a

scathing volley at Drona as well. Durmukha replies with thick swaths of violent shafts, arrow clouds of every hue and kind.

Even while they are thus engaged, Drona consumes many legions of Yudhishtira's army, like the wind scattering a cloudbank. Only briefly does that battle resemble an ordinary encounter, Rajan, for it swiftly turns into a wild carnage of men of absolute wrath, in the grip of the feral spirit of kali. The men can no longer distinguish their own from the enemy and the battle rages with the warriors guided only by instinct and the crying out of names. Rays of light like those of the Sun seem to fall and play upon the gemstones on their helmets, their necklaces, other ornaments and upon their coats of mail, and turn the chariots, elephants and horses adorned with streaming banners, into clouds with flocks of cranes under them.

Foot soldiers butcher other foot soldiers, cavalrymen riding horses of fiery mettle slay other horsemen, chariot-warriors kill other rathikas, and the elephant-mounted bring down other elephant-riders. Perhaps the most ferocious contention is between the elephant legions with lofty standards on their backs. The mastodons lumber at one another and great bodies collide in thunder; they gore each other deep with curved tusked, while smoke issues from white tusks locking and grinding against other tusks, so that the spectacle is like dark clouds massed in the sky and charged with lighting. The earth, spread over with elephants in mortal combat, dragging along other leviathans, trumpeting shrilly in fury and pain, drawing geysers of blood and then falling with dismal screams, quakes and looks beautiful like the autumn sky covered with clouds. The deep cries of the great beasts cut down by thousands of arrows and savage spears are like the rumble of thunderheads during the monsoon.

Some of the massive beasts, wounded with lance and barb, are panic-stricken and their tails curling run wildly from the field trumpeting in terror even like the roaring of the apocalyptic clouds of the pralaya when a Yuga ends. Some are turned back by their redoubtable riders, to the fray with sharp hooks and goads to charge the enemy again. They come back in renewed frenzy trampling, crushing to bloody pulp all that stand in their way.

Mahouts attack other mahamatras with arrows and lances and fell them from the backs of their beasts, their weapons and hooks falling from dead hands. Many riderless elephants blunder about like clouds torn from greater masses until they encounter one another and then fall to again. Some

towering beasts, bearing slain warriors on their backs, or those whose weapons have fallen from their grasps, wander singly, aimlessly in all directions.

In that awful carnage of mammoths, untold numbers of the great animals are killed with spears, arrows, swords and battle-axes, and fall, shaking the earth with their heavy bodies and the sky with their echoing screams. The earth trembles repeatedly, struck all around by the falling creatures heavy as hills. With elephants killed along with their riders lying everywhere with the standards still on their backs, the earth looks eerily beautiful as if strewn with shapely grey hills running streams of red down their sides. The mahamatras on the backs of countless hulking beast, their breasts pierced by broad-headed shafts, collapse, their spears and hooks loosened from nerveless hands. Some elephants, struck through with long shafts, utter crane like cries and bolt in all directions, trampling allies and enemies alike, leaving ghastly patches of crushed bodies in their wake.

Covered with countless corpses of elephants, horses and chariot-warriors, the Earth, Rajan, is sludge of flesh and blood. Large chariots with wheels and many without wheels, shattered by great tusks, are tossed high into the air by the maddened elephants on the rampage, ever cruelly goaded by the warriors perched on their backs. Chariots are seen careering everywhere, their charioteers and warriors slain; and riderless horses and elephants, pouring blood from deep wounds and all crying out pitiably.

On horrible Kurukshetra, father slays son, and son kills father, for the war has turned altogether ghastly; the kali yuga is upon the world and dharma has left the sacred field stalked by unseen demons and every manner of sinister savagery. Men sink ankle-deep in the gory mire and look like tall trees whose lower parts have been swallowed in a forest-fire. Fine Kshatriyas' capes, coats of mail, parasols and standards are all dyed with blood and everything on the yawning field of Yama seems to have turned death's stark crimson. Muscular corpses of slain steeds ripple no more, chariots lie sad and broken, as do brave fighting men beyond count; yet the war rages on and these are further ridden over and truncated by the chariot wheels of those that fight on.

The sea of troops with elephants for its stream, slain men for its floating moss and weeds, and chariots for its fierce eddies, makes a grim and horrific spectacle. Warriors, with horses and elephants for their large craft, seeking victory for their spoil, plunge into that sea, and do not sink but soldier

madly on to have their enemies' lives at any cost. When all the warriors, each bearing his particular insignia, are lashed by scathing arrow-storms, none among them loses heart, not though all have lost their proud emblems. In that greatest and most awful battle, Drona flays all the maharathas ranged against him, protecting Yudhishtira, confounding them with archery that defies both imagination and belief. Finally, the Brahmana afire draws near enough to charge Yudhishtira himself.'"

CANTO 20

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya continues, 'Seeing Drona near him, Yudhishtira greets him fearlessly with a thick shower of arrows. Yudhishtira's troops receive this like a herd of elephants trumpeting when a lion attacks their leader. Seeing Drona close in on Yudhishtira, the powerful Satyajit rushes at the Acharya; the Panchala prince and the Brahmana come hunting the Pandava king fight lustrously, stirring their troops even like Indra and Bali.

In a blur, Satyajit strikes Drona's charioteer with five barbs smoking like snake-venom, each one looking like Death himself. Drona swoons. Satyajit swiftly kills Drona's horses with ten deadly shafts; incensed, he pierces each of Drona's Parshni charioteers with ten arrows. Flaring around the field in a circle at the head of his troops, wrath of battle high in him, he cuts down Drona's standard.

Recovering himself, seeing his enemy's feats, Drona resolves to dispatch him. The Acharya first breaks Satyajit's bow, even as the prince draws the weapon's string back with an arrow fitted, and then plunges ten more terrible shafts deep into that Kshatriya's body. In a flash, valiant Satyajit takes up another bow and quick as thinking strikes Drona with thirty barbs winged with the feathers of the Kanka bird. The Pandavas roar

in joy and wave their capes to celebrate Satyajit's valour. Now the mighty Vrika amazes all by striking Drona squarely through his chest with a swath of sixty arrows shot in a single moment. Mighty Drona glowers and reaching into his great heart summons all his energy.

He breaks both Satyajit and Vrika's bows, and with six missiles like thunderbolts, in a red flash, he kills Vrika with his charioteer and horses. Satyajit seizes up another stronger bow and again makes Drona, his sarathy and his horses a home burning shafts. Drona cannot bear this ignominy and pounds Satyajit with a hail of shafts, drawing blood from his horses, cleaving the very grip of his new bow, and wounding both his Parshni sarathies. Yet, though his bows are thus repeatedly riven, the Panchala prince, master of the greatest astras, continues to ferociously engage the Brahmana of the red chargers. Seeing Satyajit grow in energy in their pitched duel, Drona strikes off that shining young warrior's handsome head with a crescent-tipped arrow.

When he sees the Panchala prince die, Yudhishtira does not pause a moment but, borne away by his fleet steeds, flees that perilous encounter for fear of the hunting Acharya. The Panchalas, the Kekayas, the Matsyas, the Chedis, the Karushas and the Kosalas dash at Drona from every side to protect Yudhishtira. However, awesome Drona, razer of teeming enemy hosts, calmly begins to consume those legions, like fire consuming some heaps of cotton. Virata's younger brother Satanika leads a sally against Drona, and roaring like a tiger, strikes Drona, his charioteer and horses with six streaks of lightning, polished bright as sunrays. Never pausing, though it is a hard and wild thing he does, for Drona is a Brahmana, Satanika bathes Bharadwaja's maharatha son with arrow showers.

Then, Drona aroused roars back at Satanika and, with an arrow sharp as a razor, dissevers the Matsya hero's head decked with bright earrings. And the Matsya warriors all flee. Having vanquished the Matsyas, the inexorable son of Bharadwaja repeatedly routs the Chedis, the Karushas, the Kaikeyas, the Panchalas, the Srinjayas, and the Pandus.

Seeing the enraged warrior of the golden chariot consuming their akshauhinis like a fire devouring a forest, the Srinjayas tremble with rage and fear. Drona is everywhere massacring the enemy, and we hear the awful twang of his bowstring everywhere. Fierce arrows stream from his bow without pause or let, cutting down elephants, horses, foot-soldiers, chariot-warriors and elephant-riders. As a mighty mass of roaring summer clouds

blown by violent winds batters down hailstones, so Drona does arrows and fills fear in the hearts of his enemies. He blows in every direction, seemingly ubiquitous, agitating the enemy sea. We see his gold chased bow in his hands of untold genius, all around us, like streak lighting amidst dark clouds. The beautiful emblem of the Vedi, the altar on his banner resembles a peak of Himavat.

The carnage that Drona fetches to the Pandava troops is like the slaughter that Vishnu, adored by both the Devas and the Asuras, brought to the Daitya army. Heroic, truthful in speech, wise beyond measure, mighty and inexorable, the illustrious Brahmana lets a fierce river of blood, which strikes terror into the timid. Coats of mail are its waves, standards its eddies, and it bears away, as it flows, countless numbers of mortal creatures, elephants and horses its great crocodiles, and swords its fish. Ah, no one can easily cross Drona's river of death.

The bones of heroes form its pebbles; drums and cymbals its tortoises; shields and armour are its boats; the hair of Kshatriyas its floating moss and weeds; arrows are its wavelets and bows its current; the writhing arms of soldiers form its snakes; and that river of fierce tide runs over the battlefield, sweeping away both Kurus and Srinjayas. Human heads, are its grisly stones; their thighs its large fish; maces form the rafts by which many seek to cross it; and floating helmets are the froth that covers its surface and the entrails of animals of war are its reptiles. Terrible in aspect, it bears away numberless heroes to the other world; blood and flesh make up its sludge; elephants its crocodiles and flagstaffs the trees on its banks. Thousands of Kshatriyas sink in it. Fierce corpses clog it and with horse-soldiers and elephant-warriors for its sharks, Drona's blood river is impassable, as it hurtles towards Yamaloka. It abounds with Rakshasas, wild dogs and jackals and macabre pisachas haunt its banks and drink thirstily from it.

Then, led by Yudhishtira, a host of Pandava warriors attacks Drona, as he burns on Kurukshetra like the Sun beating down on the world and devours their legions greedily like Death himself. The Pandava forces surround Drona from every side, hemming him in. At this, Rajan, the kings and the princes of your army, with weapons raised, all rush to support the Brahmana shura. Meanwhile, Sikhandin strikes Drona with five perfectly straight barbs, Kshatradharman with twenty, and Vasudeva with five; Uttamaujas pierces him with three shafts, and Kshatradeva with five;

Satyaki drills him with a hundred thunderbolts, and Yudhamanyu with eight. Yudhishtira shoots the fearsome Brahmana with a dozen shafts, and Dhrishtadyumna with ten and Chekitana with three.

But then Drona, like an elephant with rent temples, routs the chariot-division of the Pandavas and he kills Dridhasena. Attacking king Kshema, who fights without fear, the wild Acharya kills him with nine arrows loosed in the space of a wish and Kshema falls lifeless in his very ratha. Ploughing his way into the very heart of the hostile troop, Drona careening everywhere, Drona bestriding the war, protects his own luminously, while he himself needs no protection at all. He strikes Sikhandin with twelve singing shafts and Uttamaujas with twenty. He despatches Vasudeva with a wedge-tipped arrow that severs his head so very cleanly; Drona savages Kshemavarman with eighty arrows shot quicker than seeing, and Sudakshina with six and twenty. He shoots Kshatradeva down from his chariot with a thick and heavy shaft. Having wounded Yudhamanyu with sixty-four arrows and Satyaki with thirty, Drona of the golden chariot once again rounds on Yudhishtira, that best of kings, who wisely flees like the wind from his Acharya.

Panchala, son of Drupada, attacks Drona feverishly. Drona in his froth breaks his bow, fells his horses and his charioteer and with a single final shaft that plunges through Panchala's armour and blows his noble heart to shreds kills Drupada's son with some satisfaction, and the young hero falls lifeless from his sad chariot like a bright star come loose from the sky.

Upon the fall of the illustrious Panchala, we hear loud cries, "Kill Drona! Kill Drona!"

But the imperturbable and violent Brahmana continues to maim and slaughter the Panchalas, the Matsyas, the Kaikeyas, the Srinjayas and the Pandavas. Supported by your Kurus, Drona then triumphantly quells Satyaki, and Chekitana's son, and Senabindu, and Suvarchas, and many other majestic Kshatriyas. Your warriors, Rajan, are victorious in that fervid encounter, and massacre the Pandava forces as they fly in all directions. The Panchalas, the Kaikeyas and the Matsyas shake with fear as they are butchered on all sides like the Danavas were of old by Indra.'"

CANTO 21

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'When Bharadwaja's son breaks through the Pandavas and the Panchalas is there anybody who challenges him? Alas, seeing Drona standing there at the head of his troops like a tiger or an elephant in musth, such a terror to his enemies, and willing to die for Duryodhana's cause, was there no man who could face him, none of courage to enhance the fame of the Kshatriyas, a spirit that lower men can never have and which is distinctive only of the greatest? Tell me, O Sanjaya, which shuras faced Bharadwaja's son at the head of his forces?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Seeing Drona ravish the Panchalas, the Pandavas, the Matsyas, the Srinjayas, the Chedis, the Kaikeyas with his astras, so they shamefully flee from his unbearable archery, so they are like skiffs by the dreadful waves of a tempested ocean, your sons the Kauravas, roaring like lions, and blowing their conches and beating their drums, suddenly fall recklessly upon the enemy's chariots, elephants and foot-soldiers from all sides. The Pandava fighters break ranks entirely and flee blindly from the fray. At the head of his own forces, surrounded by his brothers and kinsmen, Duryodhana exults, and laughingly says to Karna, "Look Radheya, the Panchalas before Drona are like a herd of the wild deer

terrified by a lion. I do not think they will come back to battle for our Acharya has blown them away as a great storm does mighty trees.

Each man for himself, they flee from his golden-winged arrows, no two of them together. They panic as men caught in whirlpools; and look now how they huddle together like elephants in a forest-fire. They are like trees in blossom swarmed by the dark bees that are Drona's arrows. With their blood flowing, they run all together, for they have no answer to the Acharya.

Look there Karna, the sight of the angry Bhima, abandoned by the Pandavas and the Srinjayas and surrounded by my warriors, delights me most of all! Ah today, that evil one see the world full of just Drona! I have no doubt that Pandu's wretched son has lost all hope today of life and kingdom."

Karna replies quietly, "Mahabaho Bhima will not abandon the battle as long as there is life in him. Neither will he brook our triumphant shouts, and nor will the Pandavas be vanquished in battle. They are valiant, resilient, powerful beyond common understanding and hard to resist in war. When they remember how we tried to poison them and burn them alive, and the shame and exile that arose from the game of dice, the Pandavas will not abandon the war.

Look where the mighty-armed Vrikodara of endless tejas has already turned back to the fight. This son of Kunti will certainly kill many of our best maharathas. With sword and bow, with astras, horses, elephants, men, chariots and with his iron gada, he will raze many legions of our soldiers. Other maharathas of the Panchalas, the Kekayas, the Matsyas, and especially the Pandavas themselves, follow him. All of them are intrepid, powerful and skilled. The mighty Bhima leads them again in wrath. Vrikodara surrounded by the bulls of his vamsas, like the clouds around the Sun, engages Drona from all sides.

Intent upon their one object, they will besiege the unprotected Drona, like insects near death flying at a burning flame. They are masters of weapons and equal to facing the Acharya in battle. Heavy is the burden that now rests on Bharadwaja's son. Let us ride quickly to Drona. We must not let them kill him like wolves hunting down a mighty elephant!"

Listening to what Karna says, Duryodhana with his brothers rushes to Drona's rescue. The sound of the Pandava warriors returning to the fight on

their chariots drawn by superb horses of diverse colours, all bent upon Drona's death, is deafening.'"

CANTO 22

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Describe for me, Sanjaya, the distinctive marks of their rathas, all those who fight for Bhimasena against Drona.'

Sanjaya says, 'Vrikodara rides a chariot drawn by dappled horses coloured like the antelope, while the brave Satyaki's has a ratha is harnessed to silvery chargers. The furious and irresistible Yudhamanyu rides a ratha with superb horses of variegated hue. Dhrishtadyumna's chariot has fleet horses yoked, in trappings of gold and grey. Red horses draw the ratha of Dhrishtadyumna's son, Kshatradharman of firm vows, who fights to protect his father and ensure his complete success. Sikhandin's son Kshatradeva's finely caparisoned horses are of the colour of lotus-leaves and have pure white eyes.

Beautiful Kamboja chargers, decked with the feathers of the green parrot, bear Nakula towards your army. Horses dark like thunderclouds take Uttamaujas into the battle, against the invincible Drona standing with arrow drawn. Sahadeva, his weapons raised, has horses fleet as the wind and of variegated hues, during that fight encounter.

Yudhishtira Naravyaghra's steeds are ivory coloured with black manes, high-strung and fleet like the wind. He rides at the head of many warriors borne along by equally swift horses, decked in gold trappings. Behind him is Drupada, the king of the Panchalas, with a golden parasol over his head, protected by all these soldiers that follow Yudhishtira. Sautabhi, great archer, has truly beautiful horses that can endure every frightful sound of war, and Virata follows him.

The Kaikeyas, Sikhandin and Dhrishtaketu, surrounded by their respective troops, follow the king of Matsyas. Excellent horses of the pale red tint of trumpet-flowers are most handsome to behold as they bear Virata into the fight, while fleet yellow steeds yellow drawn with chains of gold, carry his son Uttara. Chargers of deep red hue bear the five Kekaya brothers. The aureate Kshatriyas, with red pennants and decked with golden chains, all great heroes, loose arrows like clouds pouring down rain.

Superb steeds of the colour of unbaked earthen pots, the gift of Tumburu pull the chariot of Sikhandin, Panchala prince of great tejas.

Altogether, twelve thousand maharathas of the Panchala race take the field. Of these, six thousand follow Sikhandin. Spirited piebald horses, dappled like the antelope, carry the son of Sisupala into the fray. The bull among the Chedis, the strong and invincible Dhrishtaketu, has Kamboja steeds of variegated complexion, while, fabulous Sindhu horses of beautiful limbs and of the hue of straw smoke draw the Kaikeya prince Brihadkshatra's chariot. Of eyes of pure white their skins the colour of the lotus, horses foaled in the country of the Balhikas and decked with fine ornaments, bear Sikhandin's son, brave Kshatradeva. Senabindu, scourge of his enemies, has quiet horses of the rich hue of red silk, caparisoned in gold. Exceptional stallions of the colour of cranes bring the youthful maharatha, the delicate son of the king of the Kasi, into battle.

White steeds with black necks, swift as the mind, yet always obedient to their sarathy, bear Prince Prativindhya. Arjuna's son Sutasoma has cream-coloured steeds, which he has received from Soma Deva himself. He was born in the Kuru city of Udayendu. Blessed with the brilliance of a thousand moons he came to be called Sutasoma because he also had won great renown in an assembly of the Somakas. Horses of the colour of sala flowers or of the morning sun bear Nakula's praiseworthy son Satanika. Horses of the hue of the peacock's neck, in trappings of gold, carry Draupadi's son by Bhima, the Naravyaghra Srutakarman, her son Srutakirti,

who like Arjuna is an ocean of learning, uses marvellous steeds coloured like kingfisher.

The youthful Abhimanyu, who is regarded as one and a half times superior to Krishna or Arjuna in battle, has tawny horses yoked. Horses of gigantic size bear Yuyutsu, the only son of Dhritarashtra who, abandoning his brothers, fights for the Pandavas, into battle. Plump and well-decked horses of the colour of the dried paddy stalk, bear the most energetic Vardhakshemi into the terrible battle while the youthful Sauchitti has obedient horses with black legs, fitted with golden breastplates. Srenimat has well-broken horses, their skins like red silk, whose backs are covered with golden armour and drawn with chains of gold.

Satyadhriti, accomplished in the astra shastra and in the divine Vedas, yokes red horses. Steeds coloured like pigeons draw the ratha of Dhrishtadyumna, senapati of the Pandava army, who always views Drona as his victim by fate. He follows Satyadhriti, the irresistible Sauchitti, Srenimat, Vasudana and Vibhu, son of the Kasi king. They have thought-swift steeds of the best Kamboja breed adorned with chains of gold. Each resembles Yama or Vaisravana as they take the field, striking fear into the hearts of the enemy soldiers.

Six thousand Prabhadrakas of the Kamboja country, with exceptional steeds of different colours yoked to their gold-decked chariots, and resolved to die together, ride into battle, their bows always stretched and loosing tirades of arrows at their enemies, making them tremble. Exceptional warhorses, the shade of tawny silk, decked with shining chains of gold, heartily bear Chekitana into battle.

Arjuna's uncle Purujit, also called Kuntibhoja, has extraordinary rainbow-coloured horses. Steeds the colour of the star-spangled firmament draw king Rochamana's ratha, while stallions the colour of red deer, with white streaks on their bodies, are yoked to the chariot of the Panchala prince Singhasena, son of Gopati.

That tiger among the Panchalas called Janamejaya, has sturdy horses of the hue of mustard flowers. Fleet, massive and dark blue, with golden chains, their backs the colour of curd and faces that of the Moon, are the animals of Drupada himself, which bring him storming into battle. Fearless red steeds with striking white heads, their splendour like that of the sky or the lotus, are Dandadhara's. Vyaghradatta has light brown horses with

mouse-coloured backs and their necks proudly drawn up. The Purushavyaghra Sudhanwan, prince of Panchala, yokes dark-spotted horses.

Chitrayudha drives fiercely mettlesome horses of the bright colour of Indragopakas, with variegated patches, and they resemble Indra's very Vajra; while Sukshatra, the son of the king of the Kosalas' horses, draped in golden chains, have bellies the colour of the chakravaka. Stunning tall beasts of many colours and giant bodies, yet exceedingly docile, and draped with chains of gold, fetch the seasoned Satyadhriti to the fight; Sukla's standard, armour, bow and horses are all white.

Magnificent steeds born on the sea-coast and white as the moon, are yoked by Samudrasena's son Chandrasena of burning tejas, while Saiba rides an exotic chariot drawn by horses of the complexion of the blue lotus, lavishly adorned with golden ornaments and bright garlands of flowers. The inexorable Rathasena has superior steeds the colour of kalaya flowers with white and red streaks, while white horses carry that bravest of men Chitrayudha, king who slew the Patachcharas. His chariot is also drawn by other pedigreed horses red as kinsuka flowers, and Chitrayudha himself wears beautiful garlands and wears striking armour, bears diverse marvellous weapons and flies a majestic standard.

King Nila comes to battle with standard, armour, bow, banner and horses all the same colour—blue.

Chitra's chariot-fence, standard and bow are bejewelled and his horses and banner remarkable. Grand steeds of the colour of the lotus carry Hemavarna, the son of Rochamana, into the fight, while bold, strong stallions, which can haul a heavy load of weapons, whose backs are the colour of reeds, and their testicles white as the hen's egg, pull Dandaketu's ratha.

Chargers like the moon's rays wearing kavacha set with stones of lapis lazuli draw the chariot of the mighty Sarangadhwaja, king of the Pandyas, and he advances upon Drona, stretching his tremendous bow into a circle. Krishna had killed his father in battle; his country had been invaded and his kinsmen had fled. Prince Sarangadhwaja learnt and acquired the devastras from Bhishma, Drona, Rama and Kripa, and became the equal of Rukmi, Karna, Arjuna and Krishna in battle. He then wanted to destroy Dwaraka and to subjugate the whole world. Wise friends counselled him against this reckless course. Having given up all thoughts of revenge, he now rules his own dominions. Horses all the colour of the atrusa flower carry a hundred

and forty thousand principle mama-rathas that follow Sarangadhwaja into battle.

Chargers of diverse colours and many different kinds of troops follow the heroic Ghatotkacha. Enormous steeds of the Aratta breed are yoked to the golden ratha of Mahabaho Brihanta of the red eyes, prince, who flouted the counsel of all the Bharatas, and singly, from his reverence for Yudhishtira, went over to him, abandoning all his most cherished hopes and desires.

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja yokes the most exceptional steeds shining like gold.

Bhimasena leads a large contingent of Prabhadrakas with horses of various colours, all flying standards of gold and ready to battle with their very lives. Rajan, that force of Bhima's truly resembles the celestial army of Swargavasis, with Indra at their head. This assembled host pleases Dhrishtadyumna no end.

Yet, Drona surpasses all these warriors in splendour. His standard with a black deerskin and the beautiful kamandalu waving in the wind is the most striking. Bhimasena's standard, with the device of a great lion emblazoned in silver, its eyes of lapis lazuli, is also splendid. Yudhishtira's standard of great tejas bears the device of a golden moon with planets around it; it, too, is marvellous. Two large and exquisite kettledrums, called Nanda and Upananda, are fastened to it. Played upon by a yantra, these create wonderful music that delights all who hear it.

We see the tall and fierce standard of Nakula, which strikes terror into the enemy, for it bears the emblem of a golden-backed Sarabha. A graceful silver swan graces Sahadeva's banner, with bells upon; it is somehow terrible, as well, and brings grief to the enemy. The pennants of the five sons of Draupadi bear the marvellous images of Dharma, Maruta, Sakra and the twin Aswins. On youthful Abhimanyu's chariot is a gorgeous flag with a peacock, bright as molten gold. On Ghatotkacha's banner is a vulture which shines brilliantly and his horses can go anywhere at will, like those of Ravana in old days.

In Yudhishtira's hands is the celestial bow Mahendra; Bhimasena has the Vayavya; Phalguni wields the Brahmaa which was created to protect the three worlds; Nakula grasps the Vaishnava, and Sahadeva the Aswina. In Ghatotkacha's hand is the terrible Paulastya.

The jewels among weapons wielded by the five sons of Draupadi are the Raudra, the Agneya, the Kauverya, the Yamya and the Girisa. The great bow called the Raudra, which Rohini's son Baladeva had, he later gave to the noble son of Subhadra, being delighted with Abhimanyu.

We see these and many other standards decked with gold flying on Kurukshetra, all of which belong to brave warriors, all of which strike their enemies with dread. The host that Drona commands does not have a single faint-hearted man in its ranks. Its countless standards flying high together seem to obscure the sky, looking like magic images in a painting. As is the custom, we hear the brave warriors announce their names and lineage as they charge Drona in battle.

Then the royal Drupada takes the field against him at the head of a mighty akshauhini and their encounter is terrible, like that between two aged and mighty tuskers, the leaders of their herds, and yet in musth. Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, with their troops, encounter Virata, the Matsya king at the head of his forces, as Indra and Agni did the Asura Bali in days of yore. The dread contention between the Matsyas and the Kekayas, in which horses, maharathas and elephants fight so savagely, is like the Devasura yuddha of older days. Bhutakarman, also called Sabhapati, keeps away from Drona. However, Nakula's son Satanika attacks this Bhutakarman and with three broad-headed shafts, sharper than razors, hews off both that Kshatriya's arms and then his head.

Vivimsati intercepts the heroic and mighty Sutasoma as he advances towards Drona, spraying him with arrows. Inspired in wrath, Sutasoma drills his uncle with a clutch of line-straight barbs and, cased in mail, stands ready for a duel. Duryodhana's brother Bhimaratha looses six shafts of solid iron at the other Salwa, not the uncle of Madri's twins, and sends him straight to Yama, along with his horses and charioteer.

Chitrasena's son, Rajan, closes with your grandson Srutakarman as Srutakarman rides into battle with horses that are coloured like peacocks. These two grandsons of yours, both invincible in battle, and each determined to kill the other, fight vigorously, each one for his grandsire. Seeing Prativindhya in the van of the thick and heady fray, Aswatthaman attacks him wildly—for the honour of his father. The infuriated Prativindhya looses a rash of arrows, drawing blood from Aswatthaman who flies a lion's tail upon his standard.

Srutakirti, Draupadi's eldest son by Arjuna, sprays Drona's son with his barbs, like a farmer scattering seeds in the sowing season. The son of Dusasana bars the way of maharatha Srutakirti as Draupadi's prince flashes towards Drona. Srutakirti, however, who is equal to Arjuna himself, breaks Dusasana's son's bow in his hands, lacerates his standard and charioteer with three keen wedge-headed missiles, and charges on towards Drona.

Duryodhana's son Lakshmana stands firm against the slayer of the Patachcharas, whom both the armies regard as the bravest of the brave. Srutakirti, however, destroys both Lakshmana's bow and the standard and drawing blood-flowers from his enemy with great swiftness of hand, flares up in splendour. The wise and youthful Vikarna rounds on Sikhandin, son of Drupada, who greets Vikarna with a hot burst of arrows. The mighty Vikarna stands firm against this onslaught and is glorious on darkling Kurukshetra.

Angada confronts the heroic Uttamaujas as that Panchala prince dashes at Drona. Ferocious is the encounter between those two Naravyaghras and it infuses their troops with zeal. The mighty Durmukha covers the valiant Purujit with sizzling arrows as Durmukha also rides towards Drona. Purujit strikes Durmukha between his eyes with a long and slim shaft, so Durmukha's face resembles a lotus on its stalk!

Karna faces the five Kekaya brothers who fly red standards and course at Drona; he burns them with scorching volleys. Scathed by Karna's majestic archery, the five brothers respond with fire of their own, and a running battle erupts. Engulfed by arrows, neither Karna nor the five brothers can be seen, nor their horses, chariots, charioteers and standards.

Your sons Durjaya, Jaya and Vijaya set upon Nila, and the king of the Kasis and Jayatsena; intense is the encounter between these and it enthralls those who watch; it is as if they saw a fight between a lion, a tiger and a wolf, on the one side, and a bear, a buffalo and a bull on the other! The brothers Kshemadhurti and Brihanta harry Satyaki as the Satwata flies at Drona. The battle between these two and Satyaki is breathtaking, like one between a lion and two mighty elephants in musth, in a dim forest.

The king of the Chedis, aflame, kills hundreds of men with wrathful volleys; Ambashta, always delighted by bloody battle, keeps him far from Drona. Ambashta then strikes his antagonist with a long, long arrow that plunges into his very entrails and fells him from his chariot, the bow and arrow loosened from his grasp.

The noble Kripa, son of Saradwata, holds up Vardhakshemi of the Vrishnis, who is fury incarnate on the field, with a storm of short, thick shafts. Those who watch this duel stand riveted; they cannot tear their gazes away from the tremendous contest.

Somadatta's son, fighting of Drona, challenges the vital king Manimat. Manimat breaks his bowstring, flagstaff and sovereign parasol, so they fall out of his chariot. The son of Somadatta, who flies a yupastamba, device of the sacrificial stake, on his banner, leaps down from his ratha and with his great curved sword hacks down his adversary, along with his horses, charioteer, and carves his chariot into shards. Climbing back onto his own ratha, taking up another bow and his horses' reins himself, he begins, Rajan, to consume the Pandava host.

Vrishasena, the gifted son of Karna, looses a thick flock of arrows at the Pandava king, who is rushing into battle like Indra himself after the Asuras. With gadas, spiked cudgels, swords, stones, thick clubs, mallets, discs, short arrows, battle-axes, occult storms of dust and wind, fire and water, ashes, bricks, straw and trees, does Ghatotkacha fall on your forces, smiting and shattering—altogether terrifying as he lets rills of blood flow, also on his careen towards Drona. The fell Rakshasa Alambusha bars Ghatotkacha's way with a myriad of weapons common and strange. The battle between those fiercest and greatest of Rakshasas resembles the one between the Asura Sambara and Indra of long ago.

Thus, with your blessings, O king, hundreds of fervid single battles blaze between the maharathas, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers of your army and theirs in the midst of the dreadful general engagement. Such is the battle, at whose eye is Drona, so bloody and so brutal, that none like it has ever been seen or heard of before. Indeed, O lord, numberless are the pitched encounters that burn across all parts of the field, some of them vile and horrible, some inspired and even beautiful, and some just so fierce.'"

CANTO 23

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'When the troops in separate akshauhinis are thus ferociously engaged, how does Arjuna fight my army, how does he battle the maharathas of the Samsaptakas? And how, O Sanjaya, do the Samsaptakas face Arjuna?'

Sanjaya says, 'As the battle swells all around, your son Duryodhana himself leads his elephant division against Bhimasena. Like one elephant encountering another, like a bull meeting a bull, Bhima, challenged by Suyodhana himself, falls gleefully on the Kauravas' elephant legion. With gales of arrows, awesome Bhima brings bloody havoc to the great beasts of war, big as hills, with blood and ichor trickling from every part of their bodies. Single-handedly, and like a terrific wind scattering clouds massed in it path, Bhima savages the elephant host and the beasts left alive turn tail and flee from him in terror. Bhima is as magnificent as the risen Sun striking everything in the world with his rays swifter than thoughts. Struck by Bhima's bolts of thunder and lightning, the looming, lumbering beasts, bathed in blood, look like cloud masses in the sky painted upon by red rays of the sun.

Duryodhana, livid, looses a wrath of shining arrows at Vayu's son, his detested cousin who mows down his much-vaunted elephant force so joyfully, so disdainfully. He draws blood from Bhima whom, more than any other, Duryodhana would love to kill. Bhima's eyes turn red as plums and he unleashes a lucific volley at your son, whom he hates as much as he is hated by the Kaurava king. Pierced all over by Bhima's manic shafts, stricken with his cousin's warm barbs, but outwardly cool and grinning mockingly, Duryodhana responds with a brace of arrows bright and hot as the sun, piercing Bhima deep.

In a flash Bhima breaks Duryodhana's bow with two flat-headed shafts; he cuts down your son's black banner with the device of the jewelled elephant, unnerving Duryodhana with his ferocity. Seeing Duryodhana violently set upon by Bhima, the king of the Angas quickly thunders up on his loudly trumpeting elephant to rescue your son. Turning on the Anga, Bhimasena shoots a long arrow deep into that great grey beast's head, directly between its temples. The elongated barb drives right through the mastodon's head in a scarlet eruption and plunges into the earth beyond the beast. With an echoing bellow Anga's elephant falls like a hill riven by thunder, and the Mleccha king falls with it. Quicksilver for all his bulk, Vrikodara cuts Anga's head from his neck before that king's body strikes the ground.

When the heroic king of the Angas falls, his akshauhinis panic and flee in all directions. The fleeing chargers, elephants, chariot-warriors trample and run over their own foot-soldiers.

Then the king of the Pragjyotishas, Bhagadatta, riding his elephant, comes to challenge Bhima. Its eyes rolling in rage, it raises its trunk and forelegs and crashes them down on Bhima blazing like a dread fire on Kurukshetra. The great beast pulverises Bhima's chariot and crushes his horses into bloody pulp. Bhima, who has leapt out of his ratha just in time, does not flee but runs under that towering animal's belly. For Bhima knows the Anjalikabedha, the science of fighting the war elephant on foot.

From below Bhima repeatedly strikes Bhagadatta's elephant Supratika with thunderous blows of his mighty fists. The elephant turns and twists in frenzy, desperate to find Bhima and impale him on its tusks. But Vayu's son was born with the strength of ten thousand elephants and he seizes the great pachyderm and begins to whirl it around as potter does his wheel. Having dealt many staggering blows to that colossus, Bhima once more darts out

from under its body and stands facing the beast. In a blink, Supratika seizes Bhima in his trunk, by his throat, and lifting him high dashes him down on the ground.

Twisting the elephant's trunk viciously, Bhima frees himself in trice and again gets under the body of the massive creature. Meanwhile, an elephant from the Pandava's side thunders up to face Supratika and now Bhima escapes, running quick as the wind! So swiftly does he go, that believing him dead, a dismal cry goes up from the Pandava army, 'The elephant has killed Bhima!'

Affrighted by the elephant Supratika, the Pandava host breaks and runs, back to a living, waiting Bhima. Meanwhile, Yudhishtira thinks that Bhima has been killed and in fury, riding with the Panchalas, he surrounds Bhagadatta with countless chariots, covering him in gales of vengeful arrows. But Bhagadatta, king of the mountains, strikes aside those arrow showers with his iron goad. Then falling like a natural disaster on the Pandavas and Panchalas, he tramples their legions with his terrible, hulking beast. Rajan, it is wonderful to watch—Bhagadatta and Supratika rampaging among the enemy, crushing them on every side.

The king of Dasarnas, mounted himself on a swift elephant, its temples too rent and the juice of mad musth streaming down, storms at Bhagadatta, attacking him from a flank. The battle that erupts between those two beasts of awful size is as the mythic one of old between two winged mountains covered with forests. Bhagadatta's elephant wheels around in a flash and, with tusks like streaks of lightning, rakes the Dasarna king's animal, tearing open its flank, killing it instantly. Even as that beast totters and falls, Bhagadatta kills the Dasarna king with seven lances cast in the blink of an eye, and bright as sunrays.

Yudhishtira once more surrounds Bhagadatta with a number of chariots, and makes his body a home for countless arrows. Ah, Bhagadatta seated lordly on Supratika, surrounded by the Pandava maharathas, blazes like a fire on a mountaintop, in a dense forest. He stays fearlessly in the midst of these serried rathas ridden by fierce archers, all of whom rain arrows at him.

The king of the Pragjyotishas presses down on his beast's back, hard with his great toe, urging Supratika to thunder down on Satyaki's chariot. The prodigious beast seizes Satyaki's ratha with his trunk and hurls it like a toy through the air so it shatters on the ground some distance away. Satyaki,

however, jumps off in time and escapes. His charioteer, also, abandons the great Sindhu steeds yoked to his chariot and quickly follows his warrior.

Meanwhile, Supratika easily breaks out from the encirclement of Pandava and Panchala chariots, and brings mayhem to the Kshatriyas that stand in his dreadful way. Terrified out of their wits by that singular mastodon attacking them, those bulls among men look up at it in awe as if it has multiplied into a hundred great elephants, why, a thousand. From that indomitable animal's back Bhagadatta razes the Pandava army, even like the king of the Devas mounted on Airavata mowing down the Danavas in ancient times.

Their own elephants trumpeting shrilly and their horses whinnying awfully in fright and panic, the Panchalas flee in all directions. All the while Bhagadatta destroys the Pandava troops. And then wrathful Bhima rushes at the king of the Pragjyotishas. But Supratika terrifies Bhima's horses by spraying thick streams of water over them and the animals bolt from the field with a helpless Bhimasena.

Now Kriti's son, Ruchiparvan, rides at Bhagadatta, spewing arrows like Death himself. The handsome and magnificent Bhagadatta of the mountains shoots just a single shaft and sends Ruchiparvan to Yamaloka.

Upon the fall of the brave Ruchiparvan, Subhadra's son, the sons of Draupadi, Chekitana, Dhrishtaketu and Yuyutsu turn their attention to killing the elephant Supratika. With loud roars, they loose downpours of arrows on the colossal beast, like clouds drenching the earth with rain. Goaded by the masterful Bhagadatta, with heel, hook and toe, with trunk outstretched and eyes fixed and glittering, Supratika thunders at the enemy. Stamping down Yuyutsu's horses, the elephant kills his charioteer as well; Yuyutsu has to abandon his chariot and flee.

The Pandava warriors continue their combined assault on Supratika, prince of all elephants, inundating him with ceaseless volleys of deadly fire. And now, your son, incensed Duryodhana, wildly attacks Abhimanyu in his chariot.

Bhagadatta on his elephant, loosing arrows in tornadoes over the enemy, is radiant like the Sun himself covering the earth with his rays. Abhimanyu strikes Supratika with a dozen shafts Yuyutsu with ten, and each of the sons of Draupadi and Dhrishtaketu with three feral barbs. Bleeding from these missiles, the grand elephant looks magnificent like a mighty thunderhead wounded by the Sun's rays, bleeding. Impervious to his wounds, Supratika

charges ahead tossing enemy warriors, their chariots and horses, around like straws in his mighty path.

Like a cowherd belabouring his cattle in the forest with his staff, Bhagadatta repeatedly strikes the Pandava host. Like the frenzied cawing of scattering crows attacked by hawks, we hear a loud and raucous din among the Pandava troops as they run from the savage elephant and his rider. Prodded repeatedly by Bhagadatta's sharp hook, Rajan, that prince of elephants resembles, an ancient winged mountain; and Supratika fills his enemies' hearts with naked fear, akin to merchants fearful at the sight of a swollen surging sea. As they flee, the elephants, maharathas, horses and kings of the Pandavas, create a resounding commotion, an echoing clamour that fills earth, sky, heaven and all the directions. Mounted on that greatest of elephants, Bhagadatta cleaves the hostile army like the Asura Virochana, who ripped through the celestial host though it was well protected by the Devas.

A violent wind begins to blow; a thick cloud of dust covers the sky and the troops and always the enemy sees that single elephant as multiplied into many, and stampeding murderous across all Kurukshetra.'"

CANTO 24

Dronabhisheka Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'You asked me about the feats of Arjuna in battle. Listen, O Mahabaho to what Partha achieves in the fight. When he sees the rising pall of dust and hears the wail of the troops when Bhagadatta buffets them like a bloody tempest having sway over all the war, Arjuna says to Krishna, "O Madhusudana, it seems that the king of the Pragjyotishas has come to the field on his elephant. This din that we hear must be from his advent. He fights from elephant-back and stamps on all that come in his way. He is no less than Indra himself in battle, why, I believe he is the greatest of all elephant-warriors in the world.

His elephant Supratika, again, has no rival in war. He is amazingly nimble for all his massive bulk; he knows no fatigue, and is impervious to all weapons. Not even fire burns Supratika; by himself, he can destroy the entire Pandava army today. Other than the two of us, no one else can check this giant from the mountains.

Krishna, turn our horses towards Bhagadatta. He is arrogant because of his elephant's strength, and proud of his age. This very day I will send him to be a guest in the halls of Indra."

Krishna turns his chariot to where Bhagadatta continues to devastate the Pandava forces. While Arjuna is riding at Bhagadatta, the mighty Samsaptaka maharathas, numbering fourteen thousand, of which ten thousand are Goals or Narayanas, who once followed Krishna, return to the field and summon him to battle. Seeing the Pandava host broken by Bhagadatta, and challenged on the other hand by the Samsaptakas, Arjuna finds himself in a quandary. He asks himself, "Should I return to fight the Samsaptakas or ride to help Yudhishtira?"

Reflecting on this for a moment, O Kurupravira, Arjuna decides that he would devote himself to extirpating the Samsaptakas.

Wanting only to kill as many maharathas as possible—in their thousands—flying his banner with the image of Hanuman, greatest of Vanaras, Arjuna suddenly turns back. This is exactly as both Duryodhana and Karna had planned. Arjuna's heart wavers for a time, but finally he resolves to face the Samsaptakas and he appears to serve his enemies' purpose.

The excited Samsaptaka maharathas greet Arjuna's return with extravagant salvos, thousands of missiles loosed all together in a moment, shrouding him entirely with a dense locust swarm of arrows so one can no longer see Kunti's son, Krishna, their horses or their shining chariot. So sudden and overwhelming is the onslaught that Krishna briefly breaks into a profuse sweat and even swoons; at least he appears to! Now Arjuna is compelled to summon the Brahmastra and loose it at his enemies. In an apocalyptic flash, with a sound as if the earth broke in two, that astra of the Creator obliterates almost the entire Samsaptaka force in a moment. Thousands of arms with bows, arrows and bowstrings in their grasp, cut clean from their trunks, and thousands of standards, steeds, charioteers and maharathas, fall in the blinding flash of that astra. Elephants big as forested hills, or cloud masses, fall with muffled peals of thunder, their riders dead.

Arjuna does not pause. Countless elephants fall to his supernatural archery, their fine trappings shredded by the Kiritin's arrows, their housings torn, their riders crushed by them. Partha's flat-headed arrows shear countless arms from their shoulders, their hands still clutching spears and swords, clubs and axes. Heads, also, handsome as the morning sun, the lotus or the moon, severed cleanly by Arjuna roll onto the earth. While Phalguni in rage razes the Samsaptakas with storms of diverse missiles, the enemy host seems to be alight. Seeing great Dhananjaya crush the

Samsaptaka legion like an elephant trampling some lotus-stalks, all men, why, all creatures applaud him, saying, "Uttamam! Wonderful!"

Krishna marvels seeing Partha's feat which is no less that those of Vasava himself. Indeed Madhava folds his hands to Arjuna and says, "Truly, Partha, I believe that not Sakra, Yama or Kubera can do what you have just done. Ah, in moments you have killed thousands of mighty Samsaptaka warriors."

Having despatched the battling Samsaptakas, Arjuna says to Krishna, "Now let us ride at Bhagadatta.""

CANTO 25

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Krishna turns his white chargers, wearing golden armour and swift as the mind, towards Drona's akshauhini. Even as the Kurusattama courses along toward his brothers beset by Drona, Susarman with his brothers ride after him roaring out a challenge.

The ever-victorious Arjuna says to Krishna, "O you of unfading glory, Susarman and his brothers challenge me again! Towards the north, Drona has broken our army once more. Lord, my heart is full of uncertainty. Shall I kill the Samsaptakas now or save my beleaguered troops from further harm? Which shall I do?"

Without a word, Krishna turns the chariot back towards Susarman, king of the Trigartas. Arjuna stabs Susarman deep with seven visceral shafts and breaks both his bow and standard with two more razor-headed arrows. Never pausing, he sends the Trigarta king's brothers to Yama with another six barbs loosed in the space of a wish. Roaring in shock, Susarman looses a serpentine iron naracha at Arjuna, and casts a thunderbolt of a spear at Krishna. Arjuna cuts both missiles down in flight and with a sizzle of arrows strikes Susarman unconscious in his chariot.

Partha turns back and courses again towards your army, lashing it with his mighty volleys like Vasava pouring down rain. And none among your troops ventures to oppose him. Like a fire consuming bales of straw as he comes, he flares on scorching all the Kaurava maharathas with his flaming missiles. As no living creatures can stand the touch of fire, your troops cannot bear the irresistible Arjuna.

Decimating your legions, Arjuna rides at Bhagadatta, king of the Pragjyotishas, like Garuda swooping down on his prey. Kunti's matchless son grasps the Gandiva in his hands, mighty and mystic bow which protects the Pandavas and is deadly to all enemies. Your son Suyodhana, Rajan, brought destruction down on the race of Kshatriyas when he used deceit in the game of dice to achieve his ends. And now, assailed by Partha, your army shatters like a boat striking a great rock.

The ten thousand archers, all brave and fierce, engage Arjuna and with dauntless hearts those maharathas surround him. Unruffled, mighty Arjuna is upon them like an angry elephant of sixty years in musth among a bed of lotuses; he crushes that legion of your army. Bhagadatta on his elephant charges Arjuna, Naravyaghra, who turns calmly to face him.

Fierce and fervid is the encounter between Arjuna's ratha and Bhagadatta's elephant. These two heroes wheel all over the field, one on his chariot and the other on his elephant. Like the lord Indra from his elephant, looking like a mass of clouds, Bhagadatta rains down arrow showers on Dhananjaya. Intrepid Arjuna fluently cuts all these down in flight before they can reach him. Avoiding Arjuna's fire, the king of the Pragjyotishas now strikes both Partha and Krishna with a veritable cloudburst of arrows, overwhelming them. He prods his Supratika forward to trample the two Krishna in the ratha. Seeing the angry elephant come at them like Death himself, Krishna adroitly maneuvers his chariot out of harm's away, keeping the great beast on his left.

Arjuna has the opportunity to kill both Supratika and Bhagadatta from behind, but always remembering the laws of a dharma yuddha, he has no wish to do this cowardly thing. However, when he sees Supratika wildly slaughtering other elephants and horses, crushing chariots that comes in his way, red rage rises in Arjuna.'"

CANTO 26

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'Tell me all, O Sanjaya, what does the wrathful Partha, the son of Pandu, do to Bhagadatta? And what Bhagadatta to the son of Pandu?'

Sanjaya says, 'While Partha and Krishna are engrossed with the king of the Pragjyotishas, all around them saw them as if in the very jaws of death. From his perch on the neck of his elephant, Bhagadatta looses gales of arrows down on the chariot borne Krishnas. Drawing his bow in a circle, He pierces Devaki's son with many golden-winged arrows of black iron. These sizzling bolts of fire pass right through Krishna into the earth.

Arjuna then breaks Bhagadatta's bow and kills the warrior who protects his flank; why, the inspired Dhananjaya seem to toy with the Pragjyotisha king. Bhagadatta hurls fourteen formidable spears, bright as sunrays, at Arjuna, who with dazzling virtuosity cuts each lance into three slivers. With a thick swath of shafts, he neatly disjoints the armour that encases Supratika, and the kavacha clatters to the ground. Bare without his coat of mail, grievously wounded by Arjuna's arrows, Supratika looks like a naked mountain without any cloud cover, with red streams frothing down its sides.

Once more Bhagadatta flings a vicious iron spear at Krishna, lance streaked with gold that Arjuna neatly bisects in flight. Cutting down the mountain king's standard and parasol, quicker than seeing, Arjuna, smiling, strikes him with a beautiful volley of ten shafts, winged with kanka feathers. Pierced deep, roaring, the incensed Bhagadatta casts a flurry of thick spears down on Arjuna's head, knocking down his crown. Arjuna calmly picks up his kirita, sets it back on his head and cries up to the ruler of the Pragjyotishas, "Look well on this world! For you will not see it long."

Bhagadatta's fury mounts; he seizes up another bright bow and unleashes a torment of arrows down on both, Arjuna and Govinda. Partha, quick as the mind, breaks Bhagadatta's bow, rends his quivers, and then strikes him with a rage of seventy-two shafts, piercing him deep, lancing agony through all his limbs. Roaring still more loudly, Bhagadatta invokes the Vaishnava astra into his goad with mantras, and hurls it straight at Arjuna's chest.

But Krishna sways into the path of that fatal weapon and, shielding Arjuna, receives the Vaishnavastra himself. Striking Krishna's breast, the astra turns into a triumphal garland of flowers!

Arjuna bleakly asks Kesava, "Sinless one, you said that you would only guide my chariot and not fight the war! O lotus-eyed one, why do you break your word? Only if I am helpless and cannot resist an enemy or a weapon, should you intervene; not when I am still standing and able. You know that I can subdue all these worlds of the Devas, Asuras and Manushas with my bow and arrows."

Krishna replies, "Listen, O Partha, to this secret and ancient itihasa! I have four forms, eternally engaged in protecting the worlds. Dividing my own Self, I maintain the weal of the worlds. One form of mine stays on the earth and is engaged in tapasya. Another sees the good and the evil deeds in the world. My third form is in this world of men, engaged in karma. My fourth form lies in sleep for a thousand years and, upon awakening, grants exceptional boons to deserving men. Once, the Earth, knowing that the time had come, asked me for a boon for her son Naraka. The boon, Partha, was for the Vaishnavastra for her son, so that the Devas and the Asuras could not kill him. "You must give me this astra, she pleaded.

Hearing her prayer, I gave of old the supreme Vaishnavastra to the Earth's son. I also said at that time, 'O Bhumidevi, this astra will protect

Naraka. No one will be able to kill him, and your son will be invincible in all the worlds and vanquish his enemies.'

Saying, 'Tathaastu!' the Devi went away, her wish fulfilled. And so Naraka became invincible and always destroyed his enemies.

It was from Naraka, O Partha, that the lord of the Pragjyotishas received my weapon. There is no one in the entire world, not even Indra and Rudra, who cannot be killed with this weapon. So, it was for your very life that I received it upon myself. I have divested the great Asura of that supreme astra. Now kill your invincible enemy Bhagadatta, enemy of the Devas, even as, for the good of the worlds, I slew the Asura Naraka."

Hearing this, Arjuna suddenly overwhelms Bhagadatta with a solid swath of jagged arrows. In a blur, Arjuna looses a long arrow straight into the brow of Supratika, missile that rives the elephant like thunder splitting a mountain and pierces its body up to its wings, like a snake flashing into an anthill. Bhagadatta repeatedly prods it with his iron goad, but even as a poor man's wife will not obey her lord, Supratika does not obey him. Its limbs paralysed, the great beast's legs buckle and it falls forward, its tusks goring the earth. With a last dreadful bellow, the mighty elephant dies.

Never pausing, Arjuna looses a deathly shaft straight into Bhagadatta's chest, killing the king of the Pragjyotishas in a crimson explosion. His bow and arrows fall from his lifeless hands; loosened from his head, his rich and precious turban falls off his head like a petal from a lotus whose stalk is violently shaken. Bhagadatta himself, decked with golden garlands, falls from his immense beast's back like a flowering kinsuka uprooted from a mountaintop by a terrific gale.

Having killed the king who resembled Indra himself in power, Bhagadatta who was Indra's friend, Indra's son Arjuna now sweeps unobstructed through your army devastating it like a great storm tearing down a forest of trees.'"

CANTO 27

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After killing Bhagadatta, who was always Indra's favoured friend and a hero of untold tejas, Arjuna circumambulates the fallen warrior, the Earth's grandson, in solemn pradakshina.

The two sons of the Gandhara king, Sakuni's brothers Vrishaka and Achala, subduers of hostile cities, attack Arjuna feverishly. They ride at him from in front and behind and scourge him with ferocious volleys. Magnificent Arjuna, ablaze after killing Bhagadatta, fairly shreds Vrishaka's horses, charioteer, bow, chatra, standard and chariot. With clouds of arrows and diverse other missiles, Arjuna falls upon the Gandhara army, killing five hundred brave and mighty warriors in moments.

Jumping down from his ruined chariot, its horses dead, Vrishaka swiftly mounts his brother's ratha and takes up another bow. From their single chariot, the Gandhara brothers once more mount a raging attack on Arjuna. They cover him with dark arrow clouds even as Vritra or Bala did Indra in time out of mind. Their aim unerring, the two princes, themselves unhurt, strike Arjuna viciously, tormenting him as the two months of summer do the world.

But then, Rajan, Arjuna kills the two princes, those tigers among men, Vrishaka and Achala, cutting both down as they stand side by side in their chariot—with a single arrow! The splendid brothers, both so alike, both red-eyed, both like lions, both beloved of their kinsmen and their friends, fall onto the earth at the same moment, and lie there, spreading sacred fame all around.

Seeing their heroic uncles cut down by Arjuna, your sons rain a fury of fire down on the Pandava. Sakuni, dark and master sorcerer, sees his brothers die and creates sinister illusions of maya to confound the two Krishnas. Cudgels, iron balls, rocks, sataghnis, darts, gadas, spiked maces, swords, spears, mallets, axes, kampanas, curved scimitars, showers of nails, short clubs, flights of razors, arrows with sharp broad heads, nalikas, calf-tooth tipped shafts, arrows with heads of bone, discs, snake-headed shafts, and diverse other weapons, fall upon Arjuna from everywhere. Donkeys, camels, buffaloes, tigers, lions, deer, leopards, bears, wolves, vultures, monkeys, various reptiles, diverse pisachas and swarms of crows, all ravenous and in frenzy, fly at Arjuna. But Dhananjaya, knower of devastras, greets these occult assailants with mystic weapons of his own; crying out in fear and pain, they either vanish or perish.

Now a turgid darkness appears and covers Arjuna's chariot; from within the gloom, harsh voices rebuke Arjuna. He invokes the Jyotishkastra, which dispels Sakuni's awful night of sorcery. Immediately, cataracts of water rush at Arjuna from every side; he vaporises them with an Adityastra.

Smilingly does Arjuna dispel and destroy the mayic weapons that Sakuni repeatedly creates to assail him. Seeing the ease with which the Pandava negates his most powerful and abstruse spells, fear unmans Sakuni and he flees the duel like some low and vulgar coward, borne by swift horses.

Arjuna, transcendent master of war, puts his unearthly genius on display, and continues to raze the Kaurava forces at will. He is like a mountain that cleaves the very Ganga into two streams, as he faces your legions squarely and massacres your men. One of these panicked streams flows towards Drona and the other, with loud cries, towards Duryodhana.

A thick pall of dust rises and covers all the troops, and we cannot see Arjuna. We only hear the reverberant twanging of the Gandiva, echoing above the blare of conches and the beat of drums and the noise of all the other instruments across the field. Then, on the southern part of the field, a

fierce battle breaks out between many great Kuru maharathas and Arjuna. However, I followed Drona.

The various akshauhinis of Yudhishtira's army beset the enemy on every part of the field. Arjuna strikes your son's divisions, O Bhaarata, like the hot wind of summer destroying cloud masses in the sky. Arjuna falls on your legions, loosing clouds of arrows, like Vasava pouring down heavy showers of rain; and there is none in your army who can resist that tiger among men.

Struck by the storm of fear, pain and death that is Partha, your warriors flee, trampling so many of their own as they escape. The arrows Arjuna shoots are fletched with kanka feathers and they pierce every armour, and cover earth and sky like a dire locust swarm. Piercing right through horses, rathikas, elephants and foot-soldiers, the shafts enter the earth like snakes plunging into anthills. Arjuna never shoots twice at any elephant, steed or man; every arrow of his is a killer.

With dead men, elephants and horses lying all around, and echoing with the yowls of dogs and jackals, Kurukshetra presents a strange and horrific sight. Wounded by Arjuna's arrows, fathers abandon sons, friends desert friends and sons leave behind fathers as each one flees for his own life. Struck by Partha's shafts, many warriors abandon the very animals that bear them in war.'"

CANTO 28

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'What is our state of mind when my akshauhinis are routed and all of you flee the field? To rally broken and fleeing men, who find nowhere to make a stand, is always difficult. Tell me all about it, O Sanjaya!'

Sanjaya says, 'Although your general ranks are broken, Rajan, many great kshatriyas of the world, who fight Duryodhana's cause and want to keep their honour and fame, still follow Drona. In the dreadful pass, they fearlessly follow their senapati, achieving great feats against the Pandava troops and Yudhishtira within striking distance.

Taking swift advantage of a careless oversight from Bhimasena, Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna, the Kuru leaders fall upon the Pandava army. The Panchalas exhort their troops, chanting, "Drona, Drona! Death to Drona!"

Your sons, however, roar to all the Kurus, "Let not Drona be killed! Let Drona not die!"

One side crying, "Kill Drona!", "Kill the Brahmana!" and the other, "Don't let Drona be killed!", "Let not Drona be slain!" the Kurus and the Pandavas seem to gamble again, now with Drona as their stake.

Dhrishtadyumna, fire-prince of the Panchalas, rides up to all the Panchala maharathas whom Drona seeks to annihilate. The kali yuga come and the war turned feral, they no longer observe any law of dharma yuddha about which enemy each warrior could fairly choose to fight. The battle is appalling with Kshatriya fighting Kshatriya with bestial cries and roars. But now maharathas wipe out phalanxes of foot-soldiers with astras; chariot-warriors hack down horsemen; great heroes crucify lesser soldiers. A new darkness falls on sacred Kurukshetra; all nobility melts away.

Their enemies cannot make the Pandavas flinch; while the sons of Pandu remember all their sufferings, and make their enemies tremble with fear. Though humble, yet agitated by rage, and in the grip of the naked spirit of revenge, and they fight as men possessed, reckless of their very lives, to kill Drona. They fight heroes of immense energy, making a sport of horrible war, with life the only stake. The two hosts falling on each other resemble elemental iron colliding with pristine adamant.

And not the oldest men can remember hearing of, let alone seeing, a battle as brutal as this. Carnage spreads in a great stain across the earth; weighed down with those two enormous hosts, Bhumi shudders; the bedlam raised by your army and theirs paralyses blood-drenched holy ground, pierces the firmament, and rings even in Devaloka.

Coming upon the Pandava forces in their thousands, Drona is everywhere on the field in his magnificent ratha, mowing the enemy down at his supreme ease and will. Seeing the awesome Brahmana cover Kurukshetra in blood, Dhrishtadyumna, the Pandava senapati, rides himself to contain him. Breathtaking is the duel between Drona and the Panchala prince. Ah, Rajan, I am convinced that it has no equal.

Like a fire, of which his bow is the flame and his arrows the flaring sparks, Nila begins to consume the Kuru ranks like heaps of dry grass. Drona's great son Aswatthaman, who always wanted to fight Nila, cries smilingly to him, "O Nila, what honour do you gain by burning so many common soldiers with your astras? Fight me instead!"

Nila, the brightness of whose face resembles the splendour of a full-blown lotus, instantly looses a ferocious volley at Aswatthaman, whose body is like a bank of lotuses and whose eyes are like lotus-petals. Deeply and suddenly struck by Nila, Drona's son breaks his adversary's bow and cuts down his standard with three broad-headed arrows. Leaping down from his chariot, with a shield and a marvellous sword, Nila rushes at

Aswatthaman wanting to pluck his head from his neck like a bird bearing away its prey in its talons. But, instead, in a gory flash, Drona's son severs Nila's handsome head, with its fine hooked nose, and long kundalas. The tall mighty Nila, whose face is bright as the full moon, and his complexion of a lotus, sprawls dead never knowing how he was killed.

Shocked and grief-stricken, the Pandava host trembles when Drona's son kills Nila of blazing tejas. The Pandava maharathas all wonder in some despair, "Ah, how will Arjuna save us when he is far away to the south locked in battle with the remnant of the Samsaptakas and the Narayana force?"""

CANTO 29

DRONABHISHEKA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhima cannot bear to see the slaughter of his army. He attacks Balhika with sixty wrathful arrows and Karna with ten. Drona wants to kill mighty Bhima and excoriates him with twenty-six shafts of untold violence, which plunge into the very vital organs of Vayu's son like snakes of virulent poison.

Karna strikes Bhima with a dozen shafts, Aswatthaman with seven, and Duryodhana also with six more. Dauntless Bhimasena roars like five lions, and unleashes fifty burning arrows at Drona, ten at Karna, a dozen at Duryodhana, and eight thunderbolts at Drona.

Yudhishtira sees his mighty brother, his favourite brother, beset by a host of enemies who all fight reckless of their lives, in that battle where death is so easy to find; the Dharmaraja despatches a cohort of his own maharathas to Bhima's side. These tejasvin Kshatriyas, led by Nakula and Sahadeva, and others led by Satyaki, fly to Bhima's rescue. Full of battle lust, those bulls among men unitedly storm Drona's legions, protected by so many stalwart bowmen, and they are determined to tear the Acharya's forces apart.

Together now, Bhima and the others fall furiously upon Drona's host. But serene Drona, ablaze, easily checks their surging careen, holding them all at bay. The warriors of your army fight the Pandavas without a thought for their own kingdoms, without fear for their lives.

The war burns on; horsemen encounter horsemen, and maharathas other maharathas; arrows fly against arrows, swords clash against swords, and axes ring against axes. Fiercest is the battle of swords, making a terrible carnage. The elephant legions of both sides collide again in earthshaking thunder. Men plunge head first from elephant back and horseback, countless warriors, while others are struck out of their rathas dismembered by arrow showers everywhere.

In the brutal press, some lose their armour and fall to be crushed by elephants, their handsome bodies and noble heads pulped. Indeed, everywhere elephants stamp on fallen men, grinding them into flat patches of blood, flesh and bone; other great beast impale standing men on flashing tusks and fling their corpses high into the air or tear them apart after laying them on the ground. The dark and wild spirit of war possesses man and beast equally and absolutely.

Other elephants, with arrows protruding from their trunks, range madly across the field, goring and crushing men in their hundreds; while others great beasts continue to stamp fallen warriors, horses and smaller elephants cased in armour of black iron, as if these were mere reeds. Many humble and brave kings, their hour having come, lie in the last sleep on beds of pain, overlaid with vultures' feathers.

Battling from chariots, father slays son; and maddened son, also, attacks his father. The wheels of rathas are broken; banners are torn; regal parasols fall onto the earth. Dragging broken yokes, horses run everywhere. Arms still grasping swords, and heads decked with twinkling ear-rings fall continually in macabre rain. The irresistible elephants haul chariots around, then overturn them and smash them into fragments. Waylaid by elephants, horses and their riders are strewn everywhere, maimed, disfigured past recognition.

Savage pandemonium reigns; the merciless war rages on, the battle from which every shred of mercy and nobility have gone so it seems like a contention of demons.

Oh father! Oh son! Where are you, friend? Wait! Where do you go! Strike! Kill this one!—these cries and roars echo all around, as does the

deranged laughter of butchery. The blood of men, horses and elephants mingle and flow together in streams, covering all the filed in scarlet. The brave exult and cowards tremble at the heart of unbridled savagery loosed upon the sacred earth.

Here a Kshatriya gets his chariot-wheel entangled with that of another, and at this intimate proximity, smashes the other's head with his mace. Why the bravest, most seasoned warriors wish for safety where there is none; they drag one another by the hair, and fight with fists, teeth and nails. Here a hero's arm upraised, sword in its hand, is hacked off at the elbow; there another's arm is lopped off at the shoulder, the hand still wielding bow, arrow or hook. Here, one roars a ringing challenge at another; and there, another turns his back on the battle and flees. Here, one cuts another's head from his throat, finding him within reach; while another rushes with loud shouts at an enemy. One soldier is filled with fear at another's roar, while another hews down another, who was a dear friend and is now an enemy.

Somewhere, a bull elephant, big as a hill, his heart pierced with an elongated shaft, falls on the field and lies like an island in a river during the summer. Elsewhere, another elephant, with sweat streaming down its body, like a mountain with rivulets flowing down its breast, also lies on the field, having crushed a glorious maharatha and his horses and charioteer when it fell.

Seeing grave and awesome warriors, masters of war, covered in blood and fighting passionately on, the timid and faint-hearted, are sombre, some even swoon. Darkness of spirit and savagery mantle Kurukshetra, as does the pall of dust raised by the teeming hosts. Suddenly, Dhrishtadyumna roars, *This is the time!* and plunges forward to assail the most vigorous and heroic enemy warriors. Riding after him the Pandavas themselves strike the Kaurava army like a storm of death and fly towards Drona's chariot like swans towards a lake.

Roars and yells of *Seize him! Stand firm! Do not run! Do not fear! Hack them to pieces!* echo close to of Drona's ratha above the rest of the tumult.

Drona, Kripa, Karna, Aswatthaman, Jayadratha, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti and Salya, rally to thwart the marauding Pandava Kshatriyas. They draw blood from the Panchalas and the Pandavas; but stirred by dharma and the desire for noble revenge, the attacking warriors ride on at Drona. Then Drona, enraged, looses hundreds of arrows and brings a great carnage to the Chedis, the Panchalas and the Pandavas. We hear the twanging of his

bowstring and the slaps of his palms on all sides; and they are like peals of thunder and strike fear into the hearts of all.

Meanwhile, Arjuna, having killed a large number of Samsaptakas, storms up to join battle with Drona who sows death so liberally among the Pandava troops. Arjuna fords many lakes of blood, whose fierce waves and eddies are Drona's arrow gales, and arrives at the heart of the dreadful war. Suddenly he erupts on Drona's troops, Vijaya of measureless fame, Dhananjaya splendid as the Sun, flying wild Hanuman on his shining banner, whose roars terrify his enemies. Having dried up the Samsaptaka ocean with his astras, the third son of Pandu now scathes the Kurus as if he is the very Sun that rises at the end of the Yuga; as if he is like the Fire that appears then to devour all creatures.

Elephant-riders, horsemen and rathikas fall before Arjuna's lucific barrages of arrows, leaking blood onto already wet earth Some utter cries of distress while others set up loud shouts. Some struck by the shafts of Partha fall dead. Arjuna still fights the dharma yuddha—he will not shoot at those who have fallen from their mounts or in their chariots; he does not aim at those who flee the battle; he spares those that are unwilling to fight.

Deprived of their chariots and overawed, almost all the Kauravas run from the filed with piteous cries, and call out to Karna to save them. Hearing their shouts and screams, Karna roars his assurance to the Kuru troops, *Do not fear!* and he dashes up to confront Arjuna.

Karna, greatest among all the Kaurava maharathas, invokes the Agneyastra and unleashes the weapon of fire at Arjuna. Quicker than sight, Arjuna douses it with an astra of his own, of water. Without a moment's pause he looses another elemental missile at Karna, who as swiftly quells it with another astra. A lofty and dangerous contention of devastras ensues between the two, and each is the other's equal. Then Dhrishtadyumna, Bhima and Satyaki all ride at Karna; each one striking him deep with three long and vicious barbs. Even as he fights his towering duel with Arjuna, Karna, incredibly, breaks the bows in the hands of the other three maharathas, leaving them like snakes without fangs.

They fling deadly lances at him from their chariots, with tigerish roars. The fierce and brilliant javelins hurled by mighty arms fly like snakes at Karna's ratha. Unruffled, lightning swift Karna calmly destroys those lances with three of his own, all the while covering Arjuna with arrows; Karna maharatha gives a great roar. Arjuna drills Karna with seven shafts; he kills

Karna's young brother Satrunjaya with another six, and with a wedge-headed barb, strikes off Vipatha's head. Before the eyes of the Dhritarashtras and Karna, Arjuna kills Karna's three brothers.

Bhima leaps down from his ratha, fierce as another Garuda, and hacks down fifteen of Karna's followers with his huge sword. Mounting his chariot again in a trice, seizing up another bow, he strikes Karna with ten arrows and his charioteer and horses with five. Dhrishtadyumna also hefts a sword and a dazzling shield, and kills Charmavarman and Brihadkshatra, king of the Nishadas. Remounting his chariot, swooping up another bow, the Panchala prince strikes Karna with a fusillade of seventy-three arrows, and then gives a shattering roar.

Satyaki, splendid as Indra himself, also takes up a fresh bow, strikes Karna with sixty-four barbs, and he also roars like a pride of lions. In wink he severs Karna's bow in his hands and pierces his arms and chest with three shafts like serpents.

Duryodhana, Drona and Jayadratha rush forward to rescue Karna from the Satyaki-ocean, in which he is about to drown. Hundreds of your foot-soldiers, horses, chariots and elephants swarm to where Karna still terrifies his assailants. Dhrishtadyumna, Bhima, Abhimanyu, Arjuna himself, Nakula and Sahadeva dash to Satyaki's defence. The fevered battle between these archers swells towards some unthinkable crescendo.

All fight without any thought for their lives. Infantry, chariots, cavalry and elephants fight against rathas and footsoldiers, while maharathas engage with elephants and men on foot and horsemen; and rathas and infantrymen confront chariots and elephants. We see horses tilt at horses, elephants thunder at other elephants and foot-soldiers run at foot-soldiers. Thus is the horrific battle fought, marked by great bedlam, and hundreds of noble fighting men and beasts perish every moment, to the delight of the blood-drinking pisachas and carnivores that stalk Kurukshetra with burning eyes. Indeed, every moment the grisly war swells the population of Yama's kingdom.

Men, rathas, horses and elephants destroy each other in vast numbers. Elephants kill elephants and chariot-warriors with weapons raised are slain by other rathikas, horsemen by horsemen, and the massacre of foot-soldiers by other foot-soldiers is ceaseless, ubiquitous. But, also, elephants are killed by rathikas, and magnificent steeds gored or trampled by grey tuskers; horsemen mow down foot-soldiers, and cavalrymen are killed by chariot-

warriors—all these against the laws of dharma yuddha, for the kali yuga has indeed dawned darkly on the world. With tongues lolling, teeth and eyes gouged out, with coats of mail and ornaments crushed into the dust, the slaughtered creatures fall in hundreds every moment.

Others who are struck or flung down onto the ground are then trampled into the earth by horses' hooves, by the mighty tread of elephants, and mangled and vivisected by heavy chariots and flying chariot wheels. Ah, how the pisachas, jackal and wild dog packs, the wolves, vultures, crows and other birds and beasts of prey delight in the vigorous, endless butchering—for the feast that will follow.

When men and beasts now beyond all count have been sacrificed to Death's maw yawned wide on Kurukshetra, the survivors bathed in blood take panting pause and look glazed-eyed at each other. The Sun sets in the western hills, and slowly both armies, O Bhaarata, retire to their encampments and tents.'"

CANTO 30

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA

"Sanjaya says, 'We look upon your warriors as defeated because the invincible Arjuna first breaks them and then Drona fails to keep his vow to capture the well-protected Yudhishtira. All of them, dusty and with rent coats of mail, cast anxious glances around. With Drona's consent they retire from the battlefield, after their flawless enemies vanquish and humiliate them; and, as they march, they hear everyone praise the countless merits of Arjuna and speak about Krishna's friendship with him. They pass the night like men under a curse, reflecting upon the course of events and in perfect silence.

Next morning, from petulance, wrath and distraught at the success of his enemy, Duryodhana, in the hearing of the troops, says to Drona, "Dvijottama, I have no doubt now that you have marked us as your enemies, that we face such defeat. You did not seize Yudhishtira today, though you had him within reach. No foe can escape you once you have him in your sights, not if the Pandavas, helped by the very gods, protect him. You granted me a boon; but now you do not honour it. The noble never betray the hopes of those devoted to them."

Drona is mortified by Duryodhana's words and, says, "You must not even think this let alone speak thus to me. I have always tried to fulfill your wishes. The three worlds with the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Nagas and the Rakshasas cannot defeat a force that the diadem-decked Arjuna leads. Where Krishna, the Creator of the universe is, and where Arjuna leads the army, whose might can prevail against them, save the three-eyed Mahadeva's? I vow that today that I will slay a maharatha for you, one of the greatest heroes of the Pandavas. Today I will also form a vyuha that the very Devas cannot penetrate. However, Duryodhana, lure Arjuna away from the battle again, for there is nothing that he does not know or cannot achieve in war."

After this, the Samsaptakas once more challenge Arjuna to battle and draw him away to the southern side of the field. There a battle ensues place between Arjuna and Susarman's forces the likes of which has never been seen or heard of before.

Meanwhile, Rajan, the chakra vyuha that Drona forms, is magnificent, why, even hard to look at, like the sun at his zenith when he scorches everything below. At Yudhishtira's command the dashing, invincible Abhimanyu pierces the otherwise impenetrable circular formation. Once inside he kills thousands of the enemy, fighting like a god, until six great Kaurava maharathas face him together. Finally, Abhimanyu succumbs to Dusasana's son and gives up his life. This fills our side with joy and the Pandavas with black grief. After Abhimanyu dies, we withdraw our troops for the night.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Oh Sanjaya, my heart seems to break in pieces when I hear of youthful Abhimanyu's death. Cruel and savage is Kshatriya dharma that the law-givers have laid down, when brave men, who want sovereignty have no scruples and ruthlessly butcher even a child. Tell me how so many maharathas slay that boy who, though raised in luxury, fights so fearlessly? Tell me how our warriors quell Subhadra's son of immeasurable tejas, who stormed into our chakravyuha.'

Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, I will describe the death of Subhadra's son to you in detail. Listen to how, after breaking into our midst, Abhimanyu wields his weapons even as if he were at play, and how he dismays and routs all the irresistible heroes of your army. Like the denizens of a dense forest fear a forest conflagration, Abhimanyu terrifies all the warriors of your army.'"

CANTO 31

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The very devas cannot oppose the five sons of Pandu and Krishna, all maharathas, as their feats in battle show. There never was and never will be another man so blessed as Yudhishtira, in dharma, karma, lineage, intelligence, achievements, fame and prosperity. Devoted to satya and dharma and with his passions under control, because of his worship of the Brahmans and other virtues, Yudhishtira always seeks and enjoys the bliss of Swarga.

We also speak of these three as being equal—the Destroyer himself at the end of the Yuga, Jamadagni's son Parasurama, and Bhimasena on his chariot, Of Arjuna, wielder of the Gandiva, who always fulfills his battle vows, I do see no equal on earth. These six qualities—reverence for elders, keeping his own counsel, humility, self-restraint, a handsome and radiant appearance and bravery—are always present in Nakula. In the knowledge of the shastras, gravity, sweetness of temper, dharma and prowess, the heroic Sahadeva is equal to the Aswins themselves.

Yet all the noble qualities that are in Krishna, and all those that the Pandavas possess, together, can be found together only in Abhimanyu. In resolve, he is equal to Yudhishtira, in conduct to Krishna; in exploits, to

Bhimasena of terrible deeds; in comeliness, in skill and in knowledge of shastras, he is the equal of Arjuna, and in humility, he is equal to Sahadeva and Nakula.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I wish, O Suta, to hear in detail, how the invincible Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra, is slain on the battlefield.'

Sanjaya continues, 'Be calm, Rajan, and endure your insupportable grief. I will tell you about the death of your young and incomparable kinsman.

The Acharya forms the great circular vyuha, a Chakra, and in it he positions all the kings of our side that are each equal to Indra himself. At the entrance, he stations all the princes of sun like refulgence and who have all sworn to stand by one another. They have standards decked with gold, all of them wear red robes with red ornaments, red banners and are adorned with garlands of gold and wildflowers; they are smeared with sandalwood-paste and other scented liniments.

All the renowned Kaurava archers, numbering ten thousand, face Abhimanyu in a body. They set your handsome grandson Lakshmana at their head and all of them are in consort, are comrades in joy and grief, emulate one another in feats of courage, want to excel one another and are also devoted to one another.

Surrounded by the maharathas Karna, Dusasana and Kripa, Duryodhana stands at the heart of his forces and has a white royal chatra over his head. Fanned with yak tails, he is as resplendent as the king of the Devas. At the head of your army is the senapati, Drona like the rising sun. Immovable as Meru stands the striking Jayadratha, ruler of the Sindhus. At his side and led by Aswatthaman, are your thirty sons, resembling the very gods. Also beside Jayadratha, are these maharathas—the gambler Sakuni, king of Gandhara, Salya and Bhurisravas.

The day's battle begins, fierce, breathtaking, making one's hair stand on end, both sides fighting to the death.'"

CANTO 32

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Led by Bhimasena the Pandava forces advance on the invincible chakravyuha created by Bharadwaja's son. All of them are seasoned and skilled warriors, wily and full of battle lust, keened for the fight—Satyaki, Chekitana, Dhrishtadyumna, the son of Prishata, Kuntibhoja of great ability, the mighty Drupada, Abhimanyu, Kshatradharman, the valiant Brihadkshatra, Dhrishtaketu, the ruler of the Chedis, the twin sons of Madri, Ghatotkacha, the powerful Yudhamanyu, the unvanquished Sikhandin, the irresistible Uttamaujas, maharatha Virata, the five sons of Draupadi, the valiant son of Sisupala, the Kaikeyas of terrific energy and the Srinjayas in their thousands. These and others, all master warriors at the head of their forces, charge roaring against Bharadwaja's son Drona.

The heroic Drona, however, coolly checks all of them with a torrid storm of arrows. Like a mighty wave striking an impregnable hill, like the surging sea restrained by its shores, Drona drives them back. The Pandavas and the Srinjayas suffer grim losses and cannot sustain their charge against the prodigious Acharya. Seeing Drona advance in fury, a frantic Yudhishtira thinks of what he can do to arrest the Brahmana warrior. Finally, in despair,

Yudhishtira places the intolerable burden on the young shoulders of Abhimanyu.

Yudhishtira, who is not less than Vasudeva himself, and whose tejas is superior to Arjuna's, says to Abhimanyu, "My child, fight today so that when Arjuna returns after killing the Samsaptakas, he will not reprove us. We do not know how to break into the chakravyuha. Only you, Arjuna, Krishna, or Pradyumna can pierce the wheeling circle; there is no fifth. Abhimanyu, child, you must accomplish this thing, you must do this for us; it is your sires, your uncles, and all these troops that ask this boon of you. Take up your weapons and destroy Drona's vyuha before Arjuna returns to rebuke us all!"

Abhimanyu says, "I will breach this most difficult vyuha that Drona has formed and bring victory to my vamsa. My father has taught me how to attack and pierce the chakravyuha. However, he has yet to teach me how to come out of it once I am in, if danger overtakes me."

Yudhishtira says, "Break the vyuha once, O maharatha, and make a passage for us. In battle, you are equal to Arjuna himself. Once you break in the rest of us will follow you and protect you from all sides."

Bhima says, "I will follow you close, and Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the Panchalas and the Prabhadrakas. Once you make the first breach, we will break the chakravyuha apart, and kill the greatest warriors within it."

Abhimanyu says, "I will break into Drona's impenetrable vyuha, why, like a frenzied insect flying into a flame. Today I will do what will benefit both my father and my mother's vamsas. I will make my mother and my uncles proud. Today, everyone will see the endless carnage that I, a boy by himself bring to the teeming enemy. If anyone who faces me in battle today escapes with his life, I will not call myself the son of Arjuna and Subhadra anymore. If from a single chariot I do not truncate the very race of Kshatriyas into eight slivers, I will no longer regard myself the son of Arjuna!"

Yudhishtira says, "Abhimanyu, child of splendour, glorious Kshatriya, let your strength, O son of Subhadra, increase a thousand fold to break Drona's vyuha protected by Naravyaghras, such great and fierce bowmen, warriors that resemble the Sadhyas, the Rudras, or the Maruts, who are like the Vasus, Agni or Aditya himself in prowess!"

When Yudhishtira says this, Abhimanyu cries to his charioteer, Sumitra, "Fly at Drona's vyuha, sarathy!""

CANTO 33

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu charges headlong at Drona's chakravyuha, roaring to his sarathy, "On! Ride on!"

The charioteer says to Abhimanyu, "Ah, you are blessed with length of days, and heavy is the burden the Pandavas have laid upon you! Think well if you are ready to engage Drona, who is an old master of war and all the great astras. While you have been reared in luxury and are new to war."

Abhimanyu replies with a laugh, "O Suta, who is Drona? What is this vast gathering of Kshatriyas? I will defy Indra himself in battle, riding his Airavata and all the devas with him. I feel no anxiety whatever about all these Kshatriyas, for they do not measure up to even a sixteen part of myself. O son of a Suta, fear will not enter my heart even if my uncle Krishna, conqueror of the universe, Vishnu himself, or my father, Arjuna confronts me in battle."

Disregarding the charioteer's advice, Abhimanyu presses on, crying, "Fly like the wind at Drona's army!"

His heart heavy, the charioteer Sumitra whips Abhimanyu's three-year old horses, caparisoned in gold, with greater speed towards Drona. Seeing him dash at them all the Kauravas led by Drona, advance to meet him,

while the Pandavas follow Abhimanyu. Wearing golden armour and flying the device of a karnikara tree, Abhimanyu fearlessly attacks those warriors led by Drona, like a lion-cub a herd of elephants!

The elated warriors begin to strike Abhimanyu while he attempts to pierce their vyuha. For a moment, the disturbance there is like the one in the ocean where the Ganga flows into it. Quickly it grows frenzied and appalling; and then in a flash, under Drona's very eye, Abhimanyu breaks into the chakravyuha.

Legion elephants, cavalry, chariots and infantry surround the young hero and attack him all together. The earth resounds with the noise of diverse musical instruments, with shouts and slaps on arm-pits and roars, with yells and leonine shouts, with exclamations of *Stop! Stop!* with fierce cries *Wait! Fight me!* with repeated exclamations of *Here! I am the enemy!* With trumpeting elephants, with the chiming bells and ornaments, with bursts of laughter and the din of horses' hooves and chariot-wheels, the Kaurava warriors lay into Abhimanyu.

But that tremendous young shura, who knows all the marmas of the body, unleashes a keen hot wind of astras at his enemies, missiles that pierce all their vital organs, scorching the advancing warriors, mowing whole legions down in moments with a myriad of astras, so swiftly reducing them to helplessness. Like insects falling upon a blazing fire, they yet ride and run at Abhimanyu; he cuts off thousands of warriors' weapon-bearing arms and scatters the earth with bodies and limbs, like priests strewing the altar at a sacrifice with blades of Kusa grass.

Some of them wear corselets made of iguana skin, some hold bows and shafts, some swords or shields or iron hooks and reins; some, lances, battle axes, maces, iron balls or spears, some, rapiers, crowbars or axes. Several of them grasp short barbs, spiked maces, darts, or kampanas. Many have goads and prodigious conches; some, bearded darts and kachagrahas; a few wield mallets; several others, all manner of missiles—some nooses, some heavy clubs and some stones and bricks. Their arms are decked with amulets and laved with delightful perfumes and lotions; and with these arms dyed brightly with blood, the field of battle soon presents a startling sight, as if strewn with five-headed snakes slain by Garuda.

Abhimanyu casually scatters countless heads, graced with fine noses, faces and hair, and adorned with ear-rings. Blood flows copiously from these heads, their lips bitten with anger. Wearing gorgeous garlands,

crowns, turbans, pearls and gems, and splendid as the sun or the moon, they fall like lotuses severed from their stalks. Fragrant with many perfumes, these heads could speak so pleasantly and eloquently while life was in them.

Abhimanyu destroys well-equipped and ethereal looking chariots, fitted with bamboo poles, with grand pennants flying, and their wonderfully crafted janghas, kuvaras, nemis, dasanas, wheels, standards and footboards. He breaks all the instruments of war they carry; blows away the rich cloths with which they are overlaid, and slays by thousands the warriors riding in them. Mangling everything before him with unearthly archery, rampaging Abhimanyu desiccates elephant-warriors and elephants, shredding their standards, hooks, banners, quivers, coats of mail, girths and neck-ropes blankets, bells, trunks, breaking their tusks; and also razing the foot-soldiers who protect the elephants.

We see so many horses of the Vanayu, the Hilly, the Kamboja and the Balhika breeds, with tails, ears, eyes motionless and fixed, fleet, well-trained, and ridden by accomplished warriors armed with swords and lances, lose everything, even the excellent ornaments on their lush tails. Many lie with tongues lolling out and eyes detached from their sockets, entrails and livers gouged out, the rows of bells that adorn them all ruined while the riders on their backs lie lifeless by their sides. Lying thus all over the battlefield, they delight the pisachas, rakshasas and beasts of prey, the blood-drinkers and flesh-eaters.

With the coats of mail and the other leather armour covering their limbs cut open, they lie in dung they excrete themselves. Thus slaying many great horses of your army, Abhimanyu looks splendent. Achieving the most difficult feats, alone, like the inconceivable Vibhu in days of old, Abhimanyu crushes your vast host of chariots, elephants and cavalry, like the three-eyed Mahadeva of immeasurable power crushing the terrible Asura host. Indeed, Abhimanyu, performs feats his enemies cannot match, mowing down whole divisions of your foot-soldiers everywhere.

Seeing him slaughter your army single-handedly, like Skanda the Deva-senapati did the Asuras, your warriors and sons look around vacantly, dazed. Their mouths are dry; their eyes restless; sweat covers their bodies; and their hair stands on end. Fearing complete defeat, they run for their lives. They call one another by their names and the names of their families, abandon wounded sons, fathers, brothers, kinsmen and relatives by

marriage on the field, and try only to escape, goading their horses and elephants to their greatest speed.'"

CANTO 34

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Abhimanyu of blinding tejas put his army to flight, an angry Duryodhana takes the field against him. At this, Drona roars to all the Kaurava warriors, "Rescue the king! Look where the valiant Abhimanyu kills anyone he wants at will. Go quickly against him, and bravely protect Duryodhana."

Then many grateful, mighty warriors, who fear for Duryodhana, lay a protective ring around your son. Drona, his son, Kripa, Karna, Kritavarman, Subala's son, Brihadbala, Salya of the Madras, Bhuri, Bhurisravas, Sala, Paurava and Vrishasena loose tirades of arrows at Abhimanyu to keep Duryodhana safe. Abhimanyu attacks the maharathas, their charioteers and the horsemen with thick deluges of arrows, and roars in triumph when he makes them turn back. Hearing him roar like a hungry lion, your warriors, with Drona at their head, cannot stand it. They surround him again with a host of chariots and shoot all kinds of arrows at him.

Abhimanyu not only cuts down all their shafts before they reach him, but wounds your warriors with his own barbs, killing many. Ah, his feat is extraordinary and wonderful to behold. Scathed by his arrows like serpents, they encircle him, desperate to kill him. However, Abhimanyu singly holds

off the sea of Kaurava troops, like the continent resisting the surging ocean. None among those Kshatriyas, neither Abhimanyu nor his opponents, turns away from the battle.

In that pitched and awesome encounter between a youth and an army, Duhsaha pierces Abhimanyu with nine shafts; Dusasana strikes him with a dozen; Saradwata's son Kripa, with three; Drona strikes him with seventeen arrows, each one a virulent snake; Vivimsati with seventy; Kritavarman with seven; Brihadbala with eight; Aswatthaman with seven shafts; Bhurisravas shoots him with three barbs; the king of the Madras with six, Sakuni with two, and king Duryodhana with three arrows.

The valiant Abhimanyu, however, dancing on his chariot, wounds each of these warriors with three shafts in return, quicker than seeing. Filled with rage at your sons' attempts to frighten him, he displays his wondrous prowess, inborn and honed with long practice. Borne by his marvellous steeds, fleet like Garuda or the Wind and obedient to their sarathy, he confronts the handsome heir of Asmaka, crying *Stop!* and strikes him first with ten shafts and then with ten more; he kills his horses and charioteer and cuts off his standard, his two arms, breaks his bow and severs his head; so all these fall to the ground, while Abhimanyu smiles all the while.

After Abhimanyu kills the heroic king of the Asmakas the whole of his fickle army quits the field. Then Karna, Kripa, Drona, Drona's son, the ruler of the Gandharas, Sala, Salya, Bhurisravas, Kratha, Somadatta, Vivimsati, Vrishasena, Sushena, Kundavedhin, Pratardana, Vrindaraka, Lalithya, Prabahu, Dirghalochana, and a livid Duryodhana cover the radiant Pandava prince with their arrows. Struck by the many barbs from these great bowmen, Abhimanyu responds by striking Karna deep with shafts that pierce both his armour and body. One arrow passes right through Karna's kavacha and his body and streaks down into the earth like a snake through an anthill. In agony, mighty Karna trembles like a hill during an earthquake.

Still seething, Abhimanyu kills Sushena, Dirghalochana and Kundavedhin, all in a flash. Meanwhile, Karna recovers and pierces Abhimanyu with twenty-five shafts; and Aswatthaman strikes him with twenty, and Kritavarman with seven. Covered all over with arrows stuck into him, Arjuna's son storms all over the field in rage and your troops see him as Yama with his noose.

He attacks Salya, who happens to be near, with a burn of arrows, and raises loud shouts, frightening your men further. Struck deep in his very

vital organs by Abhimanyu, Salya gives a sigh and faints on his chariot's platform. Seeing Salya collapse, all your troops flee like a herd of deer attacked by a lion, even as Drona looks on. And Abhimanyu is resplendent, like a sacrificial fire fed with ghee; and the Pitris, the Devas, Charanas and Siddhas, as well as different beings of the earth sing praises of his heroism and unworldly skill.'"

CANTO 35

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'While Abhimanyu devastates our best bowmen, which of my warriors try to check him?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Hear, Rajan, of the superb skill the youthful Abhimanyu displays while putting to rout the chariot-ranks of the Kauravas, which Drona himself leads.

Seeing Abhimanyu's volleys unman Salya, the Madra king's younger brother, filled with fury, rushes at the youthful, incredible prince, raining arrows on him. But Abhimanyu kills his charioteer, cuts down his triple bamboo-pole, smashes his seat on the ratha, his chariot-wheels, his yoke, shafts, quiver and his chariot's floorboard, his banner and every other implement of war with which the chariot is equipped; and he beheads Salya's brother as well. All this happens in the space of a thought, so swiftly that none can discern the prince's movements; they occur in another dimension where time stands still before Abhimanyu's staggering genius. Never knowing how he dies, Salya's brother, great Kshatriya, falls headless onto the ground like a hill uprooted by a tornado. His followers flee in all directions. Witnessing this feat, all men and indeed all creatures, O Bhaarata, cry out *Uttamam! Wonderful!* in their different tongues.

After Salya’s brother is killed, many of his followers, wanting revenge and armed with diverse weapons, with ringing battle cries proclaiming their families, homelands and names, charge Abhimanyu; some of them on rathas, some on horses, some on elephants, while others run at him on foot. All of them are fierce warriors and they rush the son of Arjuna with the loud hum of arrows, the deep rumble of chariot-wheels, fierce whoops, shouts and yells, roars, twanging bowstrings, and the slaps of their palms, crying, *Today you will not escape us alive!*

Smiling, down those who wounded him earlier. With wonderful astras, diverse, beautiful and swifter than sight, Abhimanyu the shura fights them almost gently, using astras that he has received from Krishna and Arjuna, just as they would have.

With no thought for the great burden he has assumed, untouched by any fear, he looses his missiles in an endless stream. Such is his speed that no one can see any interval between his bending his bow, aiming and loosing his arrows; from every side, one only sees his vibrating bow drawn in a circle, like a blazing disc of the autumn sun. The twang of his bow and the slap of his palms, O Bhaarata, resound like thunder clouds.

Modest, reverential to his elders, ah, so handsome, yet ferocious and passionate in war, Abhimanyu, out of regard for these hostile heroes, merely skirmishes with them. However, beginning gently, Rajan, he soon grows fierce, like the Sun in autumn after the monsoon. Like the Sun himself blazing forth his rays, his battle rage growing by the moment, Abhimanyu soon unleashes thousands of golden-winged shafts. In the very sight of Drona, he covers the chariot-division of the Kaurava army with diverse astras—the Kshurupra, sharp as razors, the Vatsadantas, with heads like the calf’s tooth, the Vipatha, a long, heavy and inflexible missile, the Naracha Ardhachandrabhai, its head a half-moon, Anjalikas with broad-heads.

Harried unbearably by Abhimanyu your army once more turns its back on the fray and runs.”””

CANTO 36

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'My heart, O Sanjaya, is agitated by both shame and delight, on hearing how Subhadra's son singly curbs my son's army. Once more tell me in detail about the youthful Abhimanyu's exploits which appear to be so like Skanda's battle of old with the Asura host.'

Sanjaya says, 'I will describe to you the fearful encounter, between the radiant prince fighting alone against countless adversaries. Mounted on his chariot, Abhimanyu, with absolute daring, shoots a thick swarm of shafts at your warriors, parantapas all, full of great valour. Charging them with astounding speed, like a circle of fire, he strikes Drona, Karna, Kripa, Salya, and Drona's son, Kritavarman of the Bhoja vamsa, Brihadbala, Duryodhana, Somadatta, mighty Sakuni and various other kings, princes and their troops. As he rages around slaughtering the enemy with his remarkable weapons, Abhimanyu mahatejasvin seems, O Bhaarata, to be everywhere at once.

Seeing this, your soldiers tremble with fear, Drona, his eyes alight with joy, rides up to Kripa and says to him in Duryodhana's hearing, "There comes the youthful Abhimanyu at the head of the Parthas, enthralling his

friends, and king Yudhishtira, Nakula, Sahadeva, Bhimasena, his other kinsmen, and all the rest who watch the battle as spectators, taking no part in it. I do not consider any archer on earth to be Abhimanyu's equal. If he wants, he can destroy this vast army by himself. It seems that for some reason, he does not wish it."

It is as if his words eviscerate your son. Duryodhana's eyes turn red and Drona looks at him with a faint and mocking smile. Duryodhana, his very heart on fire, says to Karna, Balhika, Dusasana, Salya and the other leading maharathas of his army, "The Acharaya of the entire Kshatriya varna, the first among all Brahmagyanis, does not want to kill this son of Arjuna. No one in battle can escape the Acharya with his life, not even the Great Destroyer himself, if Drona fights him as an enemy. What, then, to say of any mortal?

I tell you that Abhimanyu is the son of Arjuna, and Arjuna is the Acharya's beloved sishya. It is for this that Drona protects this youth, for their disciples and their sons are always dear to men of dharma, why, dearer than their own sons! Protected by Drona, the callow son of Arjuna regards himself as valorous. He is only a fool to entertain such a high opinion of himself. Ah, kill this foolish brat without delay!"

Goaded by the Kuru king, the already shamed and incensed warriors charge Abhimanyu all together. Dusasana, in particular, that tiger of the Kurus, assures Duryodhana, "Rajan, I say to you that I will kill this prince before the very eyes of the Pandavas and the Panchalas. I will consume Subhadra's son today, like Rahu swallowing Surya."

Once more addressing the Kuru king loudly, Dusasana says, "When the two vain Krishnas hear that I have killed their precious Abhimanyu, they will quit their lives and leave this world of men. Hearing of their death, the other sons of Pandu and all their friends and kinsmen will not last another day from despair. It is plain to me that if we kill this one Abhimanyu, we will kill all your enemies and victory shall be yours. Wish me well, Rajan, and I will despatch this prince swiftly to his dead sires!"

Saying this, your excited Dusasana gives a shattering roar and charges Abhimanyu, covering him with dark arrows. Abhimanyu retaliates in wrath with twenty-six keen shafts. The battle between Dusasana, who is like an infuriated elephant, and Abhimanyu is wild and savage. Both maharathas, they wheel around each other in circles, one to the left and the other to the right. While, with their panavas, mridangas, dundubhis, krakachas, great

anakas, bheris and jharjaras, your army makes deafening din, mingled with deep roars, like the very sea!'"

CANTO 37

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu, lacerated by arrows, says smilingly to Dusasana, "It is my good fortune that I see before me the vain, cruel Kshatriya, who has abandoned dharma and lustily shouts his own praises. In the Kuru sabha, in the hearing of king Dhritarashtra, you humiliated and angered Yudhishtira Dharmaraja with your vile conduct and words. Relying on deceit at the game of dice and Sakuni's skill at cheating, and maddened by low success, you taunted great Bhima repeatedly!

You are about to reap the fruits of your arrogance that you dared anger those illustrious ones. O evil-hearted one, you are about to be punished for all your sins—for stealing what does not belong to you, for your haughty wrathfulness, your hatred of peace, your avarice, your ignorance, your enmity towards your kinsmen, for the injustice and persecution you have meted out to them, for depriving my sires, these fierce bowmen, of their kingdom and for your always vicious nature and temper.

I will punish you with my arrows today, wretched Dusasana, in the sight of your whole army. Today, I will unburden myself of the rage which I carry against you and free myself of the debt I owe the angry Krishna and my father Arjuna, who always looks for an opportunity to punish you. Kaurava,

today I will free myself of the debt I owe my uncle Bhima. You will not escape me with your life today, if you do not run away from the battle."

Mahabaho Abhimanyu, razer of his enemies, invokes a shaft endued with the splendour of Yama, Agni or Vayu, an astra that will send Dusasana to the next world. Flashing straight at Dusasana's chest, the arrow strikes his shoulder-joint and plunges into his body up to its very wings. His bow drawn to its fullest stretch, Abhimanyu strikes him with twenty-five arrows more, all like fire. Struck deep and in agony, Dusasana sighs, sits down abruptly in his chariot and faints.

His charioteer swiftly bears him away senseless from the field. At this, the Pandavas, the five sons of Draupadi, Virata, the Panchalas and the Kekayas roar their approval and the elated Pandava troops blow their conches and beat their drums. Seeing Abhimanyu's spectacular feat they laugh aloud in exhilaration, especially to watch the proud and violent Dusasana humbled. The mighty sons of Draupadi, who fly banners with the images of Yama, Maruta, Sakra and the twin Aswins, Satyaki, Chekitana, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, the Kekayas, Dhrishtaketu, the Matsyas, Panchalas, the Srinjayas and the Pandavas led by Yudhishtira, are all overjoyed. They dash forward now to pierce Drona's chakravyuha, to shatter it. A dreadful battle breaks out at its rim between all these fierce heroes, all bent on victory.

Duryodhana turns to Karna and says, "Look where valiant Dusasana, who until now burned our enemies like the Sun himself, has succumbed to Abhimanyu. Look where the Pandavas, filled with war lust, come hunting us like a pride of lions to rescue Abhimanyu. Karna, do something!"

Always sensitive to Duryodhana's least concern, Karna is quick to blaze up in anger and lashes the invincible Abhimanyu with stinging torrents of arrows. Now roused, gallant Karna, as if in contempt of his young adversary, also strikes the radiant youth's followers with countless exceptional shafts. But the high-souled Abhimanyu has set his sights on Drona, and he unleashes a flurry of seventy-three arrows at Karna, drawing fonts of blood from that hero.

No maharatha of your army succeeds in obstructing Abhimanyu's charge towards Drona; indeed, Arjuna's son, Indra's grandson, brings havoc to them all, even the greatest of them. But recovering in a moment, great Karna, most honoured of all bowmen, scathes Abhimanyu with hundreds of

fiery shafts, consuming the young warrior's most formidable astras; Karna bars Abhimanyu's path to Drona.

He bleeds from Karna's awesome archery, but Abhimanyu, the godlike, feels no twinge of pain! He serenely continues to break many great Kaurava heroes' bows in their hands, and also holds Karna at bay. With serpentine narachas, shot from his bow drawn into a circle, Abhimanyu destroys Karna's royal chatra, cuts slivers from his standard, and grievously hurts his sarathy and horses, ah, smiling all the while.

In froth, Karna picks up another bow and looses five immaculate arrows at Abhimanyu, who receives them fearlessly. In a wink, with a single arrow, the scintillating youth breaks both Karna's bow and flagstaff, so they fall onto the ground. Seeing Karna beset, his younger brother drawing his bow with great force, charges Subhadra's overweening son. The Parthas and their followers raise loud cheers and blow their conches and beat their drums again to celebrate the heroism of the peerless, indomitable Abhimanyu.'"

CANTO 38

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Roaring, bow in hand, its string stretched full, Karna's younger brother sets himself between the two illustrious warriors. He pierces invincible Abhimanyu with ten shafts, and his chatra, standard, charioteer and horses, smiling the while. Seeing Abhimanyu, who fights with superhuman prowess even like his father and grandfather, wounded, the warriors of your army are delighted. But with a dazzling smile, Abhimanyu bends his bow and with one winged arrow cuts off his adversary's head and drops it onto the ground.

Seeing his brother defeated and slain like a karnikara tree shaken and flung down by the wind from a mountain top, Karna is stricken. Abhimanyu unleashes such a ferocious volley at him that he has to turn away from the battle; immediately, Abhimanyu attacks the other great bowmen and again demolishes the enemy elephants, cavalry, chariots and infantry. With Karna fleeing the carnage on his swift ratha, the Kaurava vyuha is shattered.

Abhimanyu's shafts shroud the sky like dark locust swarms, Rajan, and one can see nothing. All your warrior flee; other than the lone Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus. Abhimanyu, Purusharishabha, blows his conch and falls on the Bharata host like a burning brand thrown into the midst of dry

grass. Gleefully, he begins to consume his enemies, charging at will through the Kaurava host. Piercing deep into their vyuha, he mangles chariots, elephants, horses and men with cataracts of shining arrows; he strews the field with headless trunks and trunkless heads. The Kaurava warriors turn tail, running down their comrades.

Arrows, loosed in an endless downpour, miraculous arrows past counting, annihilate maharathas, elephants and horses. Severed arms, decked with angadas and other golden ornaments, hands cased in leathern gloves, arrows, bows, bodies and heads adorned with chariot-rings and garlands of flowers, lie in their thousands on Kurukshetra. Covered over with upaskaras, adhishthanas, akshas, broken wheels and yokes, in thousands upon thousands, and with arrows, bows, swords, fallen standards, shields everywhere, and with the bodies of slain Kshatriyas, horses and elephants, the battlefield is quickly impassable.

Deafening is the noise the princes make, as they call out to one another while Abhimanyu slaughters them, and cowards quail at it. The din, O lord of the Bharatas, fills all the points of the compass. Abhimanyu tears into the Kaurava troops, cutting down the greatest maharathas, horses and elephants and consuming his enemies truly like a fire in the midst of a heap of dry grass. Past count are the men and beasts he kills; as he dashes everywhere at will through the heart of the Kaurava army. Surrounded by our troops and covered with dust, none of us can catch a glimpse of him as he flies joyfully killing horses, elephants and warriors, with no moment's pause. Corpses fall like rain before dreadful, inexorable Abhimanyu of sixteen summers.

Soon after, we see him flare out of the press, still burning his enemies like the meridian sun. Equal to Vasava himself in war, Abhimanyu in the midst of Duryodhana's army is beyond being merely glorious.'"

CANTO 39

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'When Abhimanyu, a mere child in years, raised in luxury's lap, proud of the strength of his arms, a wizard at war, absolutely heroic by nature, the perpetuator of his race, and heedless of his life, pierces the Kaurava army with his chariot yoked to three-years old spirited horses, does any maharatha of Yudhishtira's army follow him?'

Sanjaya says, 'Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Sikhandin, Satyaki, Nakula and Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, Drupada, Kekaya, Dhrishtaketu, and the Matsya warriors all stream fiercely behind him. Abhimanyu's sires, along with uncles, all maharathas, arrayed in battle order, come thundering in his wake, along the very path that he creates. Seeing them come in fearsome tide, your troops back away from the fight.

It is then that your son-in-law, Jayadratha of the Sindhus, his brief time of glory come, faces the Parthas and all their followers, standing at the fateful moment between them and Abhimanyu, and holding them all at bay! Like a lone elephant appeared in a bloody marsh, Vriddhakshatra's formidable son invokes great devastras to arrest the charge of the Pandavas.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Sanjaya, the burden of Jayadratha must have been heavy, for he faced the angry Pandavas by himself, even as they stormed forward to the rescue of their beloved prince. Surely, his might and heroism are more than wonderful. Tell me about that noble Kshatriya's prowess, and how he accomplishes the incredible feat.

What dana has he given, what libations has he poured onto the sacred fire, what sacrifices has he performed, what tapasya has he undergone, that he now succeeds in holding up all the Parthas single-handed?'

Sanjaya says, 'Once, when Jayadratha tried to abduct Draupadi in the forest, Bhimasena crushed and humiliated him savagely. Utterly shamed, Jayadratha went into a deep forest and performed the most arduous tapasya. He restrained his senses, endured hunger, thirst and heat, and he emaciated his body until his veins stood out like blue snakes through his skin. Chanting the eternal mantras of the Vedas, he worshipped Mahadeva.

Finally, the illustrious Siva, who is always kindly towards his devotees, appeared in a dream and said to Jayadratha, "Ask for the boon you want. I am pleased with you, Jayadratha! What do you wish for?"

Bowing down to the Lord with folded hands, Jayadratha said, "Grant that, alone on a single chariot, I once vanquish all the sons of Pandu together, for all their terrible tejas and prowess."

This, O Bhaarata, was the boon he asked for. Mahadeva said to him, "I grant you your boon. Other than Arjuna, you will one day defeat the other four sons of Pandu in battle."

Jayadratha said to the Devadeva, "Tataasthu!" and awoke, O Rajan, from his sleep.

It was because of that boon and also through the power of his devastras that Jayadratha single-handedly arrests the entire Pandava force. The virile twanging of his bowstring and the slaps of his palms as he looses his missiles fill the enemy Kshatriyas with uncanny fear; and they delight your troops. Seeing Jayadratha's astonishing feat, the emboldened Kshatriyas of your army ride back into battle against Yudhishtira's forces.'"

CANTO 40

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'You ask me, Rajan, about the prowess of Jayadratha of the Sindhus. I will describe in detail how he opposes the Pandavas.

Great horses of the Sindhu breed, well-trained, fast as the wind and obedient to the commands of his sarathy, are harnessed to his chariot, which looks like a cloud palace in the sky. His flag that bears the device of a large silver boar is striking to behold. He shines like the moon in the firmament with his white chatra and banners, and he is fanned with yak-tails—all the emblems of sovereignty. Pearls, diamonds, rubies and gold deck his iron chariot rails and it glitters like the starry sky. Drawing his ample bow and shooting a fusillade of missiles, quick as thinking, he blocks the breach that Abhimanyu made in the chakravyuha. He pierces Satyaki with three arrows, Vrikodara with eight, Dhrishtadyumna with sixty, Drupada with five, and Sikhandin with ten.

He then draws blood from the Kaikeyas with twenty-five keen bolts. Jayadratha strikes each of the five sons of Draupadi with three arrows; he wounds Yudhishtira with seventy; pierces the other heroes of the Pandava army with thick showers of shafts: ah, a feat altogether wonderful. Rajan,

then with a gleaming arrow, Yudhishtira breaks Jayadratha's bow with a smile. However, in the twinkling of an eye, the Sindhu takes up another bow and pierces Yudhishtira with ten sharp barbs and each of the others with three.

Amazed by Jayadratha's newfound dexterity, Bhima cleaves his bow, and knocks down his standard and royal parasol with three wedge-headed shafts. Jayadratha sweeps up another bow, strings it in a flash and fells Bhima's flag, bow and horses, forcing him to abandon his useless chariot. Bhima leaps onto Satyaki's ratha like a lion bounding onto a mountain. Seeing this, your troops applaud Jayadratha, and shout, "Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Indeed, they and all beings repeatedly applaud the feat of the Sindhu king who, single-handedly, holds all the Pandavas together at bay. Jayadratha bestrides and fills the path that Abhimanyu made for the Pandavas by slaughtering so many warriors and elephants. Indeed, with great effort do the mighty Matsyas, Panchalas, Kaikeyas and the Pandavas themselves manage to draw near Jayadratha; but none of them can subdue him. Jayadratha, using Mahadeva's boon, holds up every one of your enemies who tries to break into Drona's chakravyuha.'"

CANTO 41

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, effectively halts the onrush Pandavas and the battle between them is marvellous and dreadful. First, the invincible Abhimanyu breaks into the Kaurava array and shakes it like a makara agitating the ocean. Then the principal warriors of the Kaurava army attack him in turns, each according to his rank and precedence. Fierce and bloody is the contention between these powerful maharathas on the one side and Abhimanyu alone on the other.

Surrounded on all sides by the enemy with massed chariots, the splendid prince kills Vrishasena's sarathy and demolishes his bow. He excoriates Vrishasena's horses with a brace of unerring shafts, and those horses swift as the wind bolt, bearing a helpless Vrishasena from the battle. Abhimanyu's charioteer escapes from the thick melee, whisking his young hero away to another part of the field The numerous maharathas who watch this feat are all filled with admiration and exclaim, "Uttamam! Wonderful!"

Seeing the lion Abhimanyu furiously mowing down the Kauravas like some force of nature, Vasatiya charges him and falls upon him. He pierces Abhimanyu with sixty golden-winged shafts and cries, "As long as I am alive, you will not escape with your life."

Although Vasatiya wears an iron kavacha, Abhimanyu blows his heart apart with a single arrow, and that Kshatriya falls dead out of his chariot. Incensed at this, many bulls among Kshatriyas besiege your grandson all together, Rajan, to try and overpower him. Stretching bows of diverse kinds, they assail him and another fierce battle ensues. A vengeful Abhimanyu shreds their bows and arrows, their limbs, and plucks off their heads decked with ear-rings and crowns of flowers. He lops off their arms adorned with various golden ornaments, which still hold swords, spiked maces and battle-axes in fingers cased in leather gloves.

The earth is strewn with garlands, ornaments, fine cloaks, fallen standards, coats of mail, shields, golden chains, diadems, parasols, yak-tails; with upaskaras, adhishthanas, dandakas, banduras, with crushed akshas, broken wheels, and yokes, numbering thousands; with anukarshas, banners, charioteers, horses; and also with broken chariots and felled elephants. The hallowed field spread over so liberally with slain Kshatriya shuras, rulers of different kingdoms, all come here for victory, presents a fearful sight.

When Abhimanyu angrily rides across Kurukshetra, everywhere at will, his very form becomes invisible. One sees only his coat of mail, glimmering with gold, his ornaments, bow and arrows. Indeed, he razes the enemy like the sun himself in his blazing effulgence, and no one can even look at him so bright is he.'"

CANTO 42

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu at war resembles the Destroyer, Rudra himself claiming the lives of all creatures upon the advent of the Pralaya. His prowess like his grandsire Indra's, that prince is magnificent, ineffable! He pierces the enemy ranks like Yama and seizes Satvasravas like an angry tiger seizing a deer. Seeing this, many Maharathas, wielding all kinds of weapons, rush at him, calling out, "I will go first! Let me strike first!"

Just as a whale in the sea catches a shoal of small fish with great ease, so does Abhimanyu consume that whole division of Kshatriyas. Like rivers that never retreat as they approach the sea, none among the charging Kshatriyas draw back when they reach Abhimanyu. That legion reels like a boat tossed on the ocean where a mighty tempest rages, its crew panic-stricken by the violence of the wind.

Great Rukmaratha, son of Salya of the Madras, roars, "Kshatriyas, have no fear! When I am here, what is Abhimanyu? I will take him alive."

Riding his beautiful and well-equipped chariot, Rukmaratha dashes at Abhimanyu and bloodies him with three shafts that whistle into his torso, three into the right arm and three the left. Arjuna's son, however, breaks

Rukmaratha's bow, and in a blink cuts off his arms and his head with its beautiful eyes and high-arched brows. Seeing Rukmaratha, who vowed to either kill Abhimanyu or take him alive, die gorily, a hundred of his friends, each one a heroic Kshatriya, flying gold adorned pennants, join the battle. These maharathas, stretching their bows that are full six cubits long, surround Abhimanyu and loose tornadoes of arrows at him.

Seeing him besieged by all those great princes, Duryodhana rejoices and considers Abhimanyu already a guest in Yama's halls. The princes shroud Abhimanyu with dense gusts of golden missiles, making him well nigh invisible. We quickly see Abhimanyu with his standard and his chariot covered over with barbs like a great tree with flights of locusts. His blood flowing, his ire rising, he responds like an elephant goaded with an ankusha.

O Bhaarata, he invokes the Gandharvastra and the illusions it creates. Arjuna received this astra from the Gandharva Tumburu and others through tapasya and yagnas; he gave it to his son. Now unleashing it at his enemies Abhimanyu bewilders them. He is a circle of fire and we see him sometimes as one prince, sometimes as a hundred and sometimes as a thousand. Confounding his massed adversaries with the magic illusions of that weapon, he forges ahead on his ratha and vivisects the enemy kings, sending hosts of spirits soaring into the next world while here their bodies fall onto the ground tike tops that spin no more, many cut into a hundred raw sections. He destroys their bows, horses, charioteers, standards, why, their very legions while time seems to stand still for him. He kills the hundred princes like five-year old mango-trees on the point of bearing fruit, swept down by a tempest.

Seeing Abhimanyu single-handedly massacre all these youthful princes, brought up in every luxury and resembling angry snakes, along with their rathikas, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, fear and blind rage grip Duryodhana and the shocked Kuru king rushes roaring at Abhimanyu. The incendiary duel between them lasts only a short while, before your son, harried past endurance by the resplendent Abhimanyu, is obliged to turn away from the fight.'"

CANTO 43

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'What you tell me, O Suta, about the battle between the lustrous Abhimanyu fighting alone against so many enemies, seems wonderful, why, incredible. However, I do not regard such feats as unbelievable marvels in those who have dharma for their refuge. After Duryodhana is beaten back and a hundred princes are slain, what do the warriors of my army do next against Abhimanyu?'

Sanjaya says, 'Their mouths become dry, their eyes restless; sweat covers their bodies, their hair stand on ends and they are ready to quit the field in despair. Abandoning their wounded brothers, fathers, sons, friends, and kinsmen they flee, urging their horses and elephants to their utmost speed. Seeing them broken and in full flight, Drona, Aswatthaman, Brihadbala, Kripa, Duryodhana, Karna, Kritavarman and Subala's son Sakuni come swarming to quell the invincible Abhimanyu. But your grandson, Rajan, routs all of them and only one warrior, Duryodhana's son, the noble Lakshmana, accomplished tejasvin, fearless now because his is both proud and callow, takes the field against Abhimanyu. Anxious for his son, Duryodhana turns back to follow him, as do other maharathas.

Like dark thunderheads inundating a mountain-breast with rain, all of them lash arrow showers over Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu sweeps over them the dry wind in the sky that blows in every direction scattering cloud masses. Then, like one infuriated elephant fighting another, he engages your grandson, the handsome, brave and strapping Lakshmana, who stands near his father with his bow stretched, like a prince of the Yakshas; Lakshmana who strikes Abhimanyu through his arms and his chest with robust shafts that drink his blood.

Abhimanyu Mahabaho is like a snake beaten with a stick. He cries to Lakshmana, "Look well on this world, for you will soon go to the other one. In front of all your kinsmen, I will dispatch you to Yama's realm."

He looses a broad-headed astra that resembles a snake just emerged from its slough, and dissevers Lakshmana's beautiful head, graced with a strong and noble nose, fine eye-brows and handsome curls, and with sparkling kundalas. Seeing Lakshmana killed, your troops cry out in shock and grief.

Blood leaping into his eyes to see his precious son die, Duryodhana howls long and echoingly truly like some dreadful demon, and screams at his Kshatriyas, *Kill him!*

Six maharathas—Drona, Kripa, Karna, Aswatthaman, Brihadbala and Kritavarman, son of Hridika, surround Abhimanyu. He drills each of them with his burning arrows, and beats them off like a lion might a pack of dogs. The incandescent son of Arjuna falls upon the vast forces of Jayadratha with redoubled ferocity. With their elephant-division, the Kalingas, the Nishadas and the valiant son of Kratha, all clad in gleaming mail, encircle him and block his way ahead. Another pitched battle breaks out and tameless, invincible Abhimanyu quickly melts those forces; he is at them like a hurricane.

Kratha's son showers him with deadly fire, while many other rathikas led by Drona, who returns to the field, rush at him, discharging their violent fusillades at the meridian prince. Containing their assault with some disdain, Abhimanyu looses a flash flood of arrows at Kratha's son, cutting down all his barbs, breaking his bow, severing his arms and then his head with its golden coronet. Seeing Kratha's noble, mighty and famed son, master of astras, die in the incarnadine blasts of Abhimanyu's unworldly shafts, your other maharathas quickly ride away from this terrible prince of tender years.'"

CANTO 44

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'While young and invincible Abhimanyu, who never flees a battle, strikes deep into our vyuha, so effortlessly, and achieves feats more than worthy of his lineage, which of my heroes stand up to him?'

Sanjaya answers, 'Once he breaks into the chakravyuha, Abhimanyu brings bloody mayhem to your forces and all your heroes and the kings that fight for your son turn away from Arjuna's prince, for he fights like a god and they cannot bear him. Then it is that the six maharathas surround him again—Drona, Kripa, Karna, Aswatthaman, Brihadbala and Hridika's son Kritavarman of the Yadavas.

The other warriors harry Yudhishtira, to support Jayadratha who single-handedly holds up the Pandavas, Many powerful Kshatriyas draw their six cubit long bows and shower arrows on him like rain. Abhimanyu paralyses all these great archers. He strikes Drona with fifty arrows, Brihadbala with twenty, Kritavarman with eighty, and Kripa with sixty shafts. Abhimanyu draws his bow into a circle and stabs Aswatthaman with ten gold fledged barbs, and Karna with a keen bright, bearded arrow shot with great force.

Cutting down Kripa's horses and both his Parshni charioteers, mighty Abhimanyu bloodies Kripa's chest with ten searing shafts. In the very sight of your heroic sons, he overwhelms the brave Vrindaraka, the pride of the Kurus. While Arjuna's incredible son mows down your greatest warriors, one after another, Aswatthaman strikes him with twenty-five small and clever barbs. Abhimanyu turns on Drona's son with a sizzling volley and Aswatthaman responds with sixty fierce darts. But Abhimanyu stands immovable as the Mainaka mountain.

Mahatejasvin Abhimanyu looses seventy-three gold-winged shafts in a wink at Aswatthaman so he staggers in his ratha. Drona rides to his son's rescue, striking Abhimanyu with a hundred arrows, while Aswatthaman also pierces him with sixty. From another side, Karna strikes him with twenty-two broad-headed shafts; Kritavarman with fourteen; Brihadbala with fifty and Saradwata's son, Kripa, with ten. Abhimanyu, majestic dancer in his chariot, makes each of them a home for ten missiles from his implacable bow.

Brihadbala, king of the Kosalas, drills a slender barbed shaft into Abhimanyu's chest; in a flash, that superlative prince cuts down his antagonist's horses, standard, bow and charioteer. Brihadbala seizes up a great sword and, leaping down from his ruined chariot, runs at Abhimanyu to hew his head off. With one inexorable shining shaft, Abhimanyu find Brihadbala's heart, and that great Kshatriya falls dead without a sound. Seeing this, ten thousand illustrious Kshatriyas break away from the fray and flee, cursing Duryodhana.

Having killed Brihadbala, Abhimanyu courses around the field, sowing death all around him.'"

CANTO 45

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna's dazzling son again strikes Karna with a heavy barbed bolt, then quick as the mind with fifty more. Now Duryodhana pierces Abhimanyu with a relucent clutch of shafts. Covered all over by now with arrows, Abhimanyu presents a striking appearance; mad with rage, he bathes Karna in blood so that he, too, mangled by that astounding prince's archery, wears a burnished look; and both of them resemble a couple of flowering kinsukas. Without a moment's pause, amazing Abhimanyu kills six of Karna's bravest warriors, with their horses and charioteers, and shatters their chariots.

Fear lays no hand on that luminous sixteen-year-old god among men and, never pausing, he shoots the six maharathas with ten more shafts each. With six unerring barbs, he strikes off the head of the youthful Aswaketu, son of the Magadha king, in the same moment killing his four horses and charioteer; no, never pausing, he despatches the Bhoja prince of Martikavata, whose banner has an elephant emblazoned on it. Roaring like several lions, so the field echoes with his strong and youthful voice, Abhimanyu blows like a desert storm of death on Kurukshetra; like a lion in a cattle pen is he.

Dusasana's son scathes Abhimanyu's horses with four shafts, his sarathy with one and Abhimanyu himself with ten; Abhimanyu plunges two smoking barbs into his enemy's body. Red-eyed, he cries, "Your father has fled battle like a coward. It is well that you are not like him. But you will not escape me alive today."

And Abhimanyu looses a long polished arrow at his enemy, but Drona's son cuts it down from a side with three light-like bolts.

Letting Aswatthama alone, Abhimanyu turns on Salya and shreds his chest with nine fierce barbs, vulture-feathered. The riverine arrows from his uncanny weapon break Salya's bow, kill both his Parshni charioteers, and bloody Salya himself, forcing him to quit his chariot and mount another. Tireless Abhimanyu, unchained, kills five maharathas in a blur—Satrunjaya, Chandraketu, Mahamegba, Suvarchas and Suryabhasa; he strikes Sakuni hard making him lurch in his chariot. Subala's evil son drills Abhimanyu with three barbs and says to Duryodhana, "We must attack him all together, or this boy will kill us all today. Rajan, take counsel with Drona and Kripa and think of how this horrible prince can be killed."

Karna asks Drona, "Abhimanyu crushes us all as he pleases. Tell us how we can stop him."

Drona says to all his maharathas, "You have all seen him close, this magnificent youth. Have you found any weakness in him? He careens everywhere among us all, but have any of us seen the faintest frailty in him? Ah, we can only gaze at the unearthly swiftness of this incomparable young lion, while he slaughters us, and gaze on in wonder.

We see his chariot fly among us like a streak of lightning; we see his bow always drawn in a circle; but so quickly does he aim his arrows and shoot them that it seems time is his servant. Ah, this dreadful son of Subhadra delights me, even while he razes our army, and afflicts my very prana, for he is so entirely wonderful. Our greatest maharathas are flabbergasted and I myself enchanted by the skills of Abhimanyu. Truly, I see no flaw in him, no chink to pierce so we might bring him down.

There is no difference between this youth and his father; if anything his son exceeds Arjuna! Look how he fills all the points of the horizon with his mighty shafts."

Still bleeding from Abhimanyu's arrows, Karna says between clenched teeth, "I am sorely wounded by this boy, and I fight on only because I am a

true warrior. I fear that my injuries are grave, for the force of his arrows is like none I have ever known, and I fear my wounds weaken my heart."

The Acharya tells Karna, with a smile, "Abhimanyu is young, his prowess is great. His kavacha is impenetrable because I myself taught his father how to wear his coat of mail. This young parantapa surely knows that subtle science completely. Yet with shafts well shot, you can destroy his bow, bowstring, the reins of his horses, the steeds themselves and his two Parshni charioteers.

O Karna, mighty archer, do this if you can and make him turn his back on the fight; and then strike him from behind. With his bow in hand, the very Devas and the Asuras together cannot conquer Abhimanyu. If you want to kill him, first deprive him of his chariot and divest him of his bow."

Not hesitating a moment, Karna cleaves Abhimanyu's bow in his hands, even as that prince continues to vigorously burn his enemies; Kritavarman of the Bhojas kills his horses and Kripa his two Parshni charioteers. After breaking his bow, the six maharathas fall ruthlessly on the now chariot less youth, unleashing a black storm of arrows at him. Bowless and his chariot useless, but always the pure Kshatriya who never knows fear, Abhimanyu takes up a sword and shield and leaps high into the air. He hangs there, using the arcane Kausika way, going freely through the sky like Garuda, prince of all birds!

With thoughts like *He will fall upon my sword!* the maharathas, their gazes now turned up, continue to loose their arrows at the suspended prince, always wary of him striking down at them. They draw blood from Arjuna's son turned into the ultimate embodiment of a warrior.

Then, with a perfect shaft, mighty Drona breaks Abhimanyu's sword at its jewelled hilt; at the same moment Karna shatters his shield in shards. Abhimanyu falls from a height but lands unhurt on his feet. Undaunted, with never a thought for his life, he pulls a wheel free from his ratha and holding it aloft, runs roaring at the Acharya.

Ah, this world has hardly ever seen any sight equal to Abhimanyu at that moment, covered in dust, but his body shining so brightly through it, with the chariot-wheel in his hands like Krishna's very Sudarshana, and still full of fierce valour. His clothes dyed red with the blood flowing from his countless wounds, his brow knit and formidable with deep furrows, still roaring like a pride of young lions, lord Abhimanyu of immeasurable tejas,

is magnificent, splendid, my king, glorious past telling or imagining on heartless Kurukshetra.'"

CANTO 46

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Abhimanyu, the joy of Krishna's sister, Abhimanyu the Atiratha, flaunting his wheel like the Sudarshana, is so beautiful; he is like a second Janardana. With his lambent locks flying in the wind, his body alight, and that strangest weapon, so dazzling now in his hands, the very Devas are blinded by that prince and cannot look at his splendour.

Seeing him with the chariot wheel, the unnerved maharathas tremble and, somehow, all together, cut that wheel into a hundred pieces. Peerless Abhimanyu takes up a great mace and runs at Aswatthaman. Seeing the gada aloft, and looking like Indra's Vajra, Aswatthaman, tiger among men, jumps out of his chariot and runs three loping stride to escape that blazing prince. Abhimanyu, like a flame burning brightest just before it is put out, kills Aswathaman's horses and Parshni charioteers with dreadful strokes of his mace.

Pierced all over with arrows, looking like some ethereal porcupine, he smashes Subala's son Kalikeya's head like a red melon; never stopping, never doubting himself, he fells Kalikeya's seventy-seven Gandhara followers with his supernatural mace. Next, he slaughters ten rathikas of the

Brahma-Vasatiya vamsa, and then ten massive elephants! Flying then at Dusasana's son, he smashes his chariot along with its horses and pounds them down into the earth.

The indomitable son of Dusasana takes up his own gada and rushes at Abhimanyu, roaring, *Stop! Wait!* The cousins, the two young Kshatriyas heroes, begin to swing their maces at each other wildly, landing sickening blows. Both have a single thought; both *are* a single thought—to kill the other. They fight like the three-eyed Mahadeva and the Asura Andhaka in days of old. Finally, at the same instant, both land thunderous blows on each other and both fall at once onto the earth, like two uprooted yupastambas, sacrificial stakes raised in honour of Indra.

But it has been a day as long as several lives for Arjuna's matchless son. Dusasana's son, enhancer of the fame of the Kurus, is first to rise. Even as Abhimanyu begins to haul himself onto his feet, Dusasana's son swings an awful blow of his mace down squarely on the crown of noble Abhimanyu's head, shattering it. With a soft sigh, Parantapa Abhimanyu, sixteen years old, who has killed so many thousands of your greatest warriors by himself, falls dead on sacred Kurukshetra, the hint of a smile still on his bloody lips.

Thus, Rajan, many join together to finally kill this one hero, who by himself razes a vast portion of your army, like an elephant trampling lotus-stalks in a lake. And as he lies dead on the field, Abhimanyu looks like a wild elephant slain by hunters. Your troops surround the fallen Kshatriya who now resembles a raging summer conflagration extinguished after consuming a whole forest; or like a tempest divested of its fury after devastating mountain crests; like the Sun arriving at the western hills after having consumed the Bharata army; or like Soma swallowed by Rahu; or like the Ocean dried of water.

The maharathas of your army gaze at Abhimanyu whose face still has the splendour of the full moon and whose lashes black as the feathers of the raven made his eyes luminous and beautiful, Abhimanyu now lying prone on the bare earth. They are filled with joy and roar in relief and triumph again and again.

Indeed, Rajan, your troops are in transports of joy, while tears fall fast from the eyes of the Pandava heroes. Seeing Abhimanyu lying on the field of battle, like the moon fallen from the sky, diverse beings of the air lament, "Alas, he who fought alone, like an army himself, lies dead on the

battlefield, murdered by six mighty maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army, led by Drona and Karna. This killing was not a deed of dharma."

Upon fall of that transplendent prince among the countless corpses he has strewn her with, the earth looks like the star-filled sky with the moon now among the fainter lights. Bhumi assumes a beautiful aspect, covered with wavelets of blood, scattered with innumerable arrows with wings of gold and spread over with the noble heads of Kshatriyas, wearing ear-rings, variegated turbans of great value, with banners, yak-tails, beautiful cloths, priceless jewel-encrusted weapons, with the bright ornaments of chariots, horses, men, elephants; sharp and well-tempered swords looking like snakes freed from their sloughs, bows, broken arrows, spears, swords, kampanas and all kinds of weapons.

The ground in many places is impassable because of the horses that lie upon her dead or dying, all weltering in blood, with their riders lying near them, felled by Subhadra's son. Kurukshetra wears a grim and terrible aspect, with iron hooks and elephants big as hills, with shields, swords and standards, lying everywhere, all cut down by Abhimanyu. Superb chariots deprived of their horses, charioteers and maharathas lie all around in death's final attitudes, some crushed flat by elephants. Ample corpses of foot-soldiers with diverse weapons lie on the bloody ground and the indescribable sight fills all faint hearts with terror.

Seeing Abhimanyu, splendent as the sun or the moon, fallen on the ground, your troops rejoice, while the Pandavas are grief-stricken. When youthful Abhimanyu of sixteen summers falls, the Pandava legions all flee in shock from the very presence of Yudhishtira. Seeing his army breaking up, Yudhishtira addresses his warriors, "The heroic Abhimanyu was killed without retreating from battle, and he has certainly risen into swarga. So stand and fear not, for we shall yet vanquish our enemies."

Endued with great energy and lustre, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, the best of Kshatriyas, attempts to put heart into his stricken men.

He says, "Arjuna's son has given up his life after killing countless enemies princes who were like snakes of virulent poison in battle. Razing ten thousand warriors, Abhimanyu who was like Krishna or Arjuna himself, has assuredly gained the realm of Indra. He destroyed chariots, horses, men and elephants, thousands of them, and was not content with what he did. He fought as no other Kshatriya ever has, and died in battle. We should not

grieve so for him for he has attained the bright regions of the righteous, realms that men acquire only through great punya karma.”””

CANTO 47

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'And thus, on that momentous day, after killing one of their greatest warriors, after suffering untold losses and injuries at his hands, we return to our camp in the evening, covered in blood. Under the unwavering gaze of our enemy, we slowly leave the battleground, in a stupor for such have been our losses.

The wonderful twilight hour arrives. We hear inauspicious howls of jackals and the Sun, now turned the pale-red of the filaments of a lotus, sinks low on the horizon, having reached the western mountains of Astama. Surya takes with him the brilliance of our swords, arrows, blades, chariot-railings, shields and ornaments. Colouring sky and earth with the same hue, the Sun assumes his favourite form of fire.

Kurukshetra, spread over with the motionless bodies of innumerable dead elephants, looks like the crests of cloud-capped hills riven by thunder, and lying all around are their standards, hooks, and riders fallen from their backs. The earth presents an amazing spectacle with great chariots smashed to pieces, and their warriors, charioteers, ornaments, horses, standards and banners all destroyed, many past recognition. The great rathas look like living creatures whose lives the enemy has taken with his shafts. The field

of battle wears a fierce and awful aspect with the legion horses and riders all lying dead, with costly trappings and coverlets of varied kinds torn and scattered about as if by some terrible storm; and tongues, teeth, entrails and eyes of men and beasts falling out of their proper places. Men wearing fine coats of mail, ornaments, bright robes and weapons, lie with dead horses, elephants and broken chariots on bare ground this twilight, although they deserve to sleep on costly beds and sheets.

Dogs, jackals, crows, cranes and other scavenging birds, and wolves, hyenas, ravens, diverse tribes of Rakshasas and sinister hosts of Pisachas arrive on the field of horror; they tear away the skins of the corpses and suck up their fat, blood and marrow, and then begin to feast greedily on their flesh and the vilest among them on all the secretions of rotted corpses. The Rakshasas laugh horribly and sing aloud, dragging dead bodies away in thousands, preventing noble Kshatriyas from having their last rites performed with honour and sanctity. The kali yuga has arrived.

A horrible river flows across the field of death, like the Vaitarani itself. Its waters are blood; chariots are its rafts; elephants its large rocks and the heads of dead men its smaller stones. It is soggy with the loosened flesh of slain steeds, elephants and men. The diverse kinds of beautiful weapons are the garlands floating on it or lying on its banks. The terrible river flows fierce through the heart of the field, bearing its dreadful cargo to the regions of the dead.

Hosts of Pisachas, their forms horrible and repugnant, rejoice as they drink and eat from that scarlet rill; wild dogs, jackals and scavenging birds, vultures, crows and the rest, partake of the same grisly feast, their ghoulish carnival. The warriors, whom death has spared on this day, gaze numbly at the field and its ghastly river, and before their eyes corpses seem to rise up and dance! Then, all those who have survived the apocalyptic day, slowly leave the field, for their eyes fill when they see Abhimanyu, who was like Sakra himself, lying there, his ornaments broken and fallen around him. Dead Abhimanyu looks like a sacrificial fire on an altar no longer fed with ghee.'"

CANTO 48

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After the slaying of Abhimanyu, all the Pandava warriors leave their rathas, take off their armour, throw aside their bows, and sit surrounding Yudhishtira, all of them plunged in untold grief, their hearts fixed on one thought—dead Abhimanyu.

Upon the fall of his meteoric nephew, Yudhishtira is unmanned by sorrow and laments aloud. "Alas, Abhimanyu pierced the chakravyuha that Drona formed against me. He put so many mighty bowmen to flight, all of them masters of weapons and well-nigh invincible. He stormed our implacable enemy Dusasana and, striking him senseless, forced him to flee the field. Alas, that gallant son of Arjuna, having crossed the vast sea of Drona's army, is now a guest in Yama's halls, killed by the same Dusasana's son. Ah, how will I face Arjuna, and the blessed Subhadra who has lost her favourite son? How will I break this tragic news to Krishna and Dhananjaya? What hollow words will I speak to them? With what voice?

Wanting victory at any cost, it is I who has done this great evil to Subhadra, Kesava and Arjuna. He who is greedy never sees his own faults. Covetousness springs from folly. Honey-gatherers do not see the fall before them; and I am like them. Alas, we set our prince who was still a child in

the van of our army, while he should instead have been cossetted with fine food, carriages and chariots, rich beds and ornaments. How could our child of tender years, unskilled in battle, ride with any hope into such grave danger? Like a noble steed of proud spirit, he sacrificed himself instead of refusing to do what I asked.

Alas, today we too will lay ourselves down on the bare earth, blasted by the glances of grief that the angry Arjuna will cast on us. The very Devas applaud the feats of Arjuna, for he is mighty, handsome, liberal, intelligent, modest, forgiving, a shura who is respectful to his elders and superiors, who is heroic, beloved and devoted to truth—Arjuna of glorious achievements. This Kshatriya slew the Nivatakavachas and the Kalakeyas, Indra's enemies in Hiranyapura. In the twinkling of an eye he slew the Paulomas with all their followers. Yet he grants mercy to even his most inveterate enemies, if they but ask!

And it is his son that we could not protect from danger today. The Dhartarashtras, endued though they might be with great power and strength, will rue this day! For when he hears of Abhimanyu's death, Arjuna exterminate the Kauravas in wrath; and then, foolish Duryodhana, who has vile counsellors, who is the destroyer of his own race and friends, will give up his life in anguish. Seeing this son of Indra's son, with no remote rival in splendour and prowess, lying lifeless on the field, neither victory, sovereignty, immortality, nor living with the very Devas, can anymore fetch me the least delight!"""

CANTO 49

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'While Kunti's son Yudhishtira thus laments, the Maharishi Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa comes to him. Worshipping him duly, and offering him a seat, the grief-stricken Yudhishtira says, "Mahamuni, while he fought alone, magnificently, several great maharathas surrounded Abhimanyu and killed him treacherously. He was but a child and he fought gloriously against a whole army. I asked him to open a passage for us and he broke into Drona's chakravyuha. We wanted to follow him but Jayadratha, with Siva's boon, barred our way. A dharma yuddha is fought fairly and against an equal adversary. But here Abhimanyu was besieged by an entire army. Ah, my heart is broken when I think that I sent that child to his death, and tears leak from my eyes, and I have no peace of mind."

The illustrious Vyasa says to the distraught, shattered Yudhishtira, "Wise Yudhishtira, men like you, who are masters of yourselves and of all knowledge, never allow any calamity to overwhelm them. Having killed countless enemies, Abhimanyu has risen into swarga. Indeed, though young in years, he fought like a grown and seasoned warrior. Yudhishtira, let alone

men, Death takes all Devas, Danavas and Gandharvas, without exception, and his law is inviolable."

Yudhishtira says, "Alas, these lords of earth that lie on the bare earth, slain in the midst of their forces, were all men of great prowess and valour. Some had the strength of ten thousand elephants while others were gifted with the impetuosity and force of the wind. They have all perished in battle, slain by men of their own varna.

They possessed great skills, energy and strength. Alas, the wise Kshatriyas who took daily to the field, always in the hope that they would conquer, now lie dead on Kurukshetra. The meaning of the word Death has today been amply revealed, for almost all these great lords of the earth are dead. These Kshatriyas lie motionless, bereft of vanity, having succumbed to their enemies. Many princes, themselves full of wrath, have been consumed by the fire of their enemies' fury.

A great doubt possesses me—from where comes Death? Whose son is Death? What is Death? Why does Death take away all beings? Pitamaha, O you who are like a god, tell me this."

Vyasa says, "Rajan, let me tell you this ancient story about the origin of Death that Narada once told Akampana, whilst that king suffered great and unbearable grief because his son had died. By listening to this most excellent tale, you will be freed from sorrow and the touch of affection's attachment. Listen well to this Itihasa, for it lengthens one's life, kills grief and bestows health. It is sacred, destroys hosts of enemies and is the most auspicious of all auspicious things. Indeed, this Itihasa is even like the study of the Vedas, Rajan, and every morning the best of kings, who wish for long-lived children and their own weal, should listen to it.

In olden days, there was a great and fearless king named Akampana. Once, on the battlefield, enemies surrounded and overpowered him. He had a son called Hari, equal to Narayana himself in strength. Hari was exceptionally handsome, a master of astras, gifted with great intelligence, and was like Sakra himself in battle. Surrounded by countless enemies, he shot thousands of astras at the warriors and elephants that hemmed him in. When he had achieved the most difficult feats in that battle, Yudhishtira, they finally killed him.

Performing the obsequies for his son, king Akampana purified himself. However, he continued to grieve for his Hari day and night and could regain

neither happiness nor peace of mind. Learning of his grief, the Devarishi Narada came to him.

Seeing Narada, the related everything that had happened—his defeat at the hands of his enemies and the killing of his son. Akampana said, "My son was endued with great energy, and equalled Indra or Vishnu himself in splendour. Alas they slew him, who had displayed his prowess on the field against countless enemies! O illustrious one, who is this Death? What is the measure of his energy, strength and prowess? O greatest of intelligent men, I truly wish to hear all this.'

The boon-giving lord Narada said, 'Listen, Rajan, to this long Itihasa which will destroy your grief! In the beginning, the Pitamaha Brahma created all creatures. Invested with mighty energy, he saw that his creation showed no signs of decay. So Brahma began to reflect upon the destruction of the universe but failed to find any method to achieve it. He then became angry and from his anger a fire sprang from the sky. The fire spread in all directions consuming everything in the universe, and flames filled all swarga, akasa and bhumi.

Thus Brahma began to consume the whole universe and to destroy his creatures, mobile and unmoving, terrifying all with his wrath. Then Hara, who is also called Sthanu or Siva, with matted locks on his head, the Lord of all Rakshasas and Asuras, the night-rangers, appealed to the divine Brahma, the Lord of the Devas. When Sthanu fell at Brahma's feet for the good of all creatures, the Supreme Deva said to the Mahayogin blazing with splendour, "What wish of yours can I grant, O you who deserve to have all your wishes fulfilled? O you who have been born of our wish, we will do anything that will please you! Tell me, Sthanu, what is your desire?"'"

CANTO 50

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Siva replied, 'O Lord, you took great pains to create and nourish creatures of diverse kinds. However, you now destroy them with your fire. I am filled with pity. O illustrious one, be merciful.'

Brahma said, 'I have no wish to destroy the universe. I only want the good of the Earth, and this is why anger has possessed me. Bhumidevi suffers because of the heavy burden of creatures, and constantly urges me to destroy them. But I could not find the means to put an end to this infinite creation. At this, anger maddened me.'

Rudra said, 'Be merciful, O Lord of the universe; do not annihilate all living beings with your wrath. Let no more creatures, immobile and unmoving, perish. Through your grace, let the three-fold universe, the Future, the Past, and the Present, continue to exist. A fire has sprung from your wrath and even now it consumes rocks, trees, rivers and all kinds of plants and trees. Indeed, the fire devours all the universe and reduces it to ashes.

Be merciful, O Illustrious! Do not give way to anger. This is the boon I seek. Your rage destroys everything that belongs even to you; appease your wrath and quench it in your own self. Look on your creatures with

compassion and do good for them. Ensure that creatures with life and the power of generation do not cease to exist.

O Creator of the worlds, you have appointed me their Protector. Let not the mobile and the unmoving universe be destroyed. You are naturally inclined to grace, and it is for this that I plead with you.'

Narada continues, "Hearing what Mahadeva said, Brahma withdrew the fire of his wrath into himself and contained it there—for the weal of the world and all its creatures. Extinguishing the fire, the divine Benefactor of the world, the great Master, declared the dharma of procreation and emancipation. And while the Supreme Deity exterminated the fire born of his wrath, there emerged through the portals of his diverse senses, a young woman, dark, red and tawny, her tongue, face and eyes crimson, and decked with two brilliant ear-rings and diverse other scintillating ornaments. Issuing out of his body, she smilingly looked at the two Lords of the universe and then set out for the southern quarter.

Then Brahma, regulator of creation and destruction, named her Mrityu, and said to her, 'Slay these creatures of mine! You have been born of my wrath which I nourished for the destruction of the universe. Kill all creatures, be they fools or and seers, at my command. By doing this, you will benefit yourself.'

The lotus-devi, called Death, reflected deeply and then wept aloud and piteously in a melodious voice. The Pitamaha caught the tears she shed in his two hands.'"

CANTO 51

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'The compassionate young Devi repressed her sorrow and, bending with humility like a vine, with her hands folded, asked the Lord of creation, "O Lord of words, how can I, being a woman, and created by you, do what you ask when I know that it is cruel and evil? I greatly fear adharma, I fear sin. O divine Lord, be merciful. Sons, friends, brothers, fathers and husbands are always dear; if I kill them, I fear that their kin will seek to do me harm.

The thought of the tears that will fall from the eyes of grief-stricken and weeping ones, fills me with dread! I seek your protection, O greatest of Devas, I will not go to Yama's abode. O boon-giving one, with bowed head and folded hands, I beg your clemency. Pitamaha of the worlds, I beg just this one wish from you—with your leave, I want to perform tapasya. Grant me this boon, O Divine One, O Master, if you allow me, I will go to the great asrama of Dhenuka! I will undergo the severest tapasya there and worship only you. I will not be able, O Devadeva, to take the precious prana of living creatures weeping in sorrow. Protect me from sin!'

Brahma said, 'Mrityu, you have been born for achieving the destruction of creatures. Go, kill all living creatures, you need not have any scruples. It

must be so. It cannot be otherwise. Do as I say and no one in the world will find fault with you.'

But she was still afraid. Looking into Brahma's face, she stood silently with joined hands. Wanting to do good to all beings, she could not bring herself to set her heart upon their destruction. Brahma also remained silent. And then, soon, the Pitamaha became pleased with himself and smiled looking upon all his creation. Thereupon, living beings were enlivened and continued to breathe as before, untouched by untimely death. When the invincible and illustrious Lord shook off his wrath, the dark and kindly girl left the presence of the wisest Deity.

Leaving Brahma, without having to destroy all creatures, Mrityu quickly went to the asrama called Dhenuka where she performed fierce tapasya and observed the sternest, most austere vratas. She stood there on one leg for sixteen billions of years, and another fifty billions, through pity for living creatures and from her wish to do them good, all the time restraining her senses from their favourite objects.

And once again, Rajan, she stood there on one leg for twenty-one times ten billions of years. And then she wandered for ten times ten thousand billions of years with the creatures of the Earth. Next, going to the sacred Nanda full of cool and pure water, she spent eight thousand years in those waters and performed a great tapasya there as well; at Nanda, she cleansed herself of all her sins.

Then, keeping her vow, she went first of all to the sacred Kausiki. Living only upon air and water, she practised tapasya there. She then went to Panchaganga and after that to Vetasa, where, by different kinds of especial austerities, that pure kanya emaciated her own body. Then she visited Ganga and from there went to great Meru, where she remained motionless like a stone, suspending her breath. Then at the summit of Himavat, where the Devas had performed their yagna in the most ancient days, the auspicious and compassionate girl remained for a billion of years standing on just her toe. Going then to Pushkara, Gokarna, Naimisa and Malaya, she emaciated her body further, practising austerities which satisfied her heart.

Without acknowledging any other God, with steady devotion only to the Pitamaha, she lived and delighted Brahma in every way.

At last, gratified with her, his heart softened and full of delight, the unchangeable Creator of the worlds said to that maiden. 'O Mrityu, why do

you perform so severe a tapasya?'

Mrityu replied, 'Living beings exist in health and do not injure one another even through words. I will not be able to kill them. O Lord, I want just this boon from you. I fear sin, and this is why I am engaged in tapasya. Most blessed one, undertake to remove my fears for ever. I am a woman, in distress, and innocent. I beg you, be my protector.'

To her, the divine Brahma, knower of the past, the present and the future, said, 'You will commit no sin, O Mrityu, by killing these creatures. My words can never prove false, O amiable one! Therefore, auspicious girl, kill these creatures of the four kinds. Eternal dharma will always be yours. Yama, the Regent of the world, and the various diseases will become your helpmates. I myself and all the Devas will grant you boons, so that, freed from sin and perfectly cleansed, you will even acquire glory.'

Thus addressed, Rajan, Mrityu, joining her hands and bowing down to him, once more said, 'If, O Lord, this cannot be achieved without me, then I bow my head to your command. But I beg you, listen once more to what I say. Let covetousness, wrath, malice, jealousy, quarrel, folly and shamelessness and other violent passions rend the bodies of all embodied creatures.'

Brahma said, 'O Mrityu, it will be as you say. Meanwhile, do away with living beings appropriately and sin will not be yours, nor will I seek to injure you. Your tear drops that are in my hands will now become diseases, springing from living creatures themselves. They will kill men; and if men are killed, do not fear, for sin will not be yours. Be devoted to dharma, observe your duty, and casting off both desire and anger, take the lives of these mortal beings. This will be your eternal virtue. Sin will destroy men of evil ways. By doing my bidding you will cleanse yourself. It will be your dharma to sink them in their sins. Therefore, cast off both kama and krodha, and kill these beings endued with life.'

Seeing that Brahma persistently called her Death, she feared to do otherwise. In terror of his curse, she said, 'Yes!' Helpless not to obey, casting off desire and wrath, she began to take the lives of living creatures when the time came for their death.

It is only the living that die. Disease spring from living creatures themselves and is an abnormal condition as it causes them distress and pain. So do not indulge in fruitless grief for anyone after they are dead. The senses, after death, go with them to the other world. Achieving their

respective functions, they return once more with each individual jiva when the spirit is reborn.

Thus all creatures, including the very Devas, are subject to death; they too are mortal. The awful wind, omnipresent and with infinite energy, with its terrible howl and great strength irresistibly drives the bodies of living creatures. It will not demonstrate active energy, nor will it suspend its functions; but do this naturally. Even all the Devas have the appellation of mortals attached to them.

Therefore, lion among kings, do not grieve, for your son is passing his days in perpetual happiness in swarga for he has attained those delightful regions that are reserved for Kshatriyas. Casting off all sorrows, he has gained the companionship of great souls of dharma. The Creator himself has ordained Death for all beings and when their hour comes, they are destroyed. The death of all beings arises from the creatures themselves for they are responsible for their own deaths.

Death does not kill anyone, armed with her bludgeon! Therefore, those who are wise truly know death to be inevitable because Brahma himself has ordained it. So never grieve for those who are dead; and knowing that the Supreme God has ordained this death, cast off your grief for your dead son!'

Vyasa continues, "Hearing these profound words of advice from Narada, king Akampana said to his friend, 'O illustrious Maharishi, after hearing this Itihasa from you, my grief is gone and I am contented. I am grateful to you and I worship you.'

Hearing this, the Devarishi Narada of immeasurable soul left for the Nandana vana.

The frequent recital of this story to others, and listening to it, is said to be purifying. It leads to fame and heaven, is worthy of approbation, and also enhances the life-span. Now that you have heard this tale, cast off your grief, Yudhishtira. Reflect on the duties of a Kshatriya, and the high state of punya that can be attained by heroes. Abhimanyu, the maharathin the mahatejasvin, has attained swarga after killing numberless enemies in full view of all the mighty archers. He has fallen on the battle field, struck with sword, mace, dart and bow. Sprung from Soma Deva, he has returned into the lunar essence, cleansed of all his impurities.

Therefore, O Pandava, you and your brothers should muster all your courage and without allowing yourselves to be stupefied by sorrow, take the

field again, inflamed with fury for battle.”””

CANTO 52

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing of the origin of Mrityu and her strange deeds, Yudhishtira humbly addresses Vyasa once more. He says, "There were many kings of dharma in blessed countries, their prowess equal to that of Indra himself. They were rajarishis, O Muni, who were sinless and spoke only truth. Once more, tell me of their feats in ancient times so that I am consoled. What was the extent of the gifts they made at yagnas? Who were these mahatmans, these royal sages of dharma? Tell me all, O illustrious one!"

Vyasa replies, "There was a king named Switya. He had a son called Srinjaya. The Rishis Narada and Parvata were his friends. One day, the two munis came to visit Srinjaya in his palace. Duly worshipped by Srinjaya, they were pleased with him, and continued to stay happily with him. Once, as Srinjaya was seated at his ease with the two rishis, his beautiful daughter came to him, smiling sweetly, and greeted him with reverence. Srinjaya blessed the delightful girl.

Seeing her, Parvata smilingly asked Srinjaya, 'Whose daughter is this girl of restless glances, who has every auspicious mark? Is she the

splendour of Surya, or the flame of Agni? Or is she Sri, Hri, Kirti, Dhriti, Pushti or Siddhi, and the lambency of Soma?'

King Srinjaya answered, 'O illustrious one, this girl is my daughter. She seeks my blessings.'

Then Narada asked king Srinjaya, 'If, Rajan, you wish for great fortune for yourself, give your daughter to me as a wife.'

Delighted with the Rishi's proposal, Srinjaya said to Narada, 'I give her to you.'

At this, the other Rishi, Parvata, indignantly said to Narada 'I had in my heart chosen this girl first, but you have taken her as your wife. O Brahmana, you will not go to swarga.'

Narada replied, 'For a man to be a husband he must first give his heart and seek consent. This is followed by the solemn commitments by both parties, and the actual gift is made by the sprinkling of holy water and the recital of the mantras ordained for the taking of the bride's hand. These have been declared as the indications by which one becomes a husband. Even this ceremonial is not all. Above all is the pradakshina of seven paces by the bride circumambulating the groom. Without these your marriage is not complete. You have cursed me, and you will also not go to heaven without me.'

Having cursed each other the two Rishis continued to live there in the palace.

Meanwhile, king Srinjaya, who wanted a son, purified himself and scrupulously entertained the Brahmanas to the very best of his power, with food and clothing, and saw to their every other need and comfort. After some time, those greatest of Brahmanas became pleased with the king and wished a son for him. Together they went to Narada and said to him, 'Give this king a son of the kind he wants.'

Narada replied to them, saying, 'Tathaastu, so be it.'

Then the Devarishi said to Srinjaya, 'O Rajarishi, the Brahmanas are pleased and they wish you a son! Ask them for the boon; tell them what manner of son you want.'

With joined hands, the king asked for a son with every accomplishment, famous, of glorious feats, of great tejas and a parantapa who would vanquish all his enemies. And he further asked that the urine, the excrement, the phlegm and the sweat of that child should be gold! And in due time the king had a son born to him, who came to be named

Suvarnashthivin and because of the boon, the child began to increase his father's wealth beyond all calculation.

King Srinjaya had all the objects of his desire to be wrought of gold. His houses, walls, forts, the houses of all Brahmanas within his dominions, and his beds, vehicles, plates, all manners of pots, cups, the palace that he owned, and all implements, utensils, and weapons were made of gold. And in time his fame increased.

Then some thieves heard of the prince and banded together and sought to harm the king. Some among them said, 'Let us seize the king's son for he is his father's gold mine.'

They broke into the king's palace and forcibly abducted prince Suvarnashthivin and made off with him to the forest. There those fools, urged by greed, but not knowing what to with the prince, killed him and cut his body into pieces. They did not see any gold inside him. When the prince was dead, all the rest of the gold, got through the Rishi's boon, also vanished. The thieves began to fight among themselves and killed each other, and with them perished that most wonderful prince. Those evil men plunged down into the most unimaginable and awful hell.

Seeing his son killed, king Srinjaya, in deep sorrow, began to lament piteously. Seeing the king so grief-stricken on account of his son, the Devarishi Narada appeared before him.

Listen, Yudhishtira, to what Narada said to Srinjaya. 'Srinjaya, you will have to die with your desires unfulfilled, although we Brahmavadis live in your house. Even Avikshita's son Marutta had to die.

Annoyed with Brihaspati, Marutta had Samvatta perform his great yagnas! The illustrious lord Mahadeva himself had given wealth in the shape of a golden plateau of Himavat to that royal sage. With that wealth, king Marutta performed various yagnas so that afterwards different groups of gods, the creators of the universe, with Indra himself in their company and with Brihaspati at their head, used to visit him.

All the carpets and furnishings of his yagnasala were made of gold. At his yagnas, the Munis all ate food as they pleased, food that was clean and to their taste. The milk, curds, ghee, honey and other kinds of victuals, were the very best; the robes and ornaments were enviably costly; and the Brahmanas who were masters of the Vedas were gratified.

The very Devas would serve the food in king Marutta's palace, while the Viswedevas were his courtiers. Those dwelling in swarga were happy

with the libations of clarified butter and they, in their turn, increased the powerful ruler's wealth of crops with abundant rains. He always contributed to the satisfaction and joy of the Rishis, the Pitris and the Devas, by practising Brahmacharya, studying the Vedas, performing obsequial rites and giving all kinds of gifts.

Such was his immense store of wealth and gold that it was difficult to give away. And he did, in fact, give all his untold wealth away in dakshina to the Brahmanas. Sakra himself used to wish him well. He made his subjects happy by always living in dharma, and he ultimately went to those eternal realms of bliss, which he acquired through his inexhaustible punya.

With his children, counsellors, wives, descendants and kinsmen, king Marutta, in his youth, ruled his kingdom for a thousand years. When such a king died, Srinjaya, who was your superior in the four cardinal virtues—tapasya, truth, compassion and liberality—and who, being superior to you, was far greater than your son? Do not grieve saying, "O Swaitya!", for your son who performed no yagnas nor gave any dakshina at a sacrifice.'

CANTO 53

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, it is said that King Suhotra also fell prey to death. He was the greatest of Kshatriyas and invincible in battle. The very Devas would come to visit him. Acquiring his kingdom through dharma, he always sought the advice of his Ritwijas, and other domestic priests and Brahmanas and followed their behests. Virtuous and liberal, familiar with the duty of protecting his subjects, king Suhotra performed yagnas, subjugated his enemies and wished to increase his wealth. He worshipped the Devas by the ordinances of the Shastras, and defeated his enemies with his astras. He brought joy to all that lived within his domains through his pure and majestic deeds.

He ruled the earth, freeing her from Mlecchas and forest-brigands. The Deva of the clouds showered gold upon him all the year around. In those times out of mind, the rivers in his kingdom flowed liquid gold and it was available to everyone. The Devas blessed his kingdom with a large number of crocodiles, crabs and fish of different species and countless objects of desire, all made of gold.

The artificial lakes in the king's dominions each measured full two yojanas. Looking at the thousands of dwarfs, humpbacks, alligators,

makaras and tortoises, all made of gold, king Suhotra wondered greatly. He performed a yagna at Kurujangala and gave away the unlimited wealth of gold to Brahmanas before the completion of the sacrifice. After he had performed a thousand Aswamedha yagnas, a hundred Rajasuya yagnas, many sacred Kshatriya yagnas, at all of which he gave lavish gifts to Brahmanas, and after countless daily rituals performed for specific wants, the king ultimately obtained a most desirable end.

When, O Srinjaya, the life of such a king who was superior to you in the four cardinal virtues, had to come to an end, and who, being superior to you, was thus far greater than your son, you should not grieve saying, "Oh Swaitya, Oh, Swaitya!" for your son performed no sacrifice and made no sacrificial dakshina.'

CANTO 54

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'The heroic king Paurava too, O Srinjaya, fell prey to death. This king gave away a thousand times a thousand horses that were all perfectly white. Countless learned Brahmanas, all versed in the principles of Siksha, one of the six Vedangas, and Akshara, the letters of the original alphabet, came from different kingdoms to the Aswamedha yagna that royal sage performed. The king gave priceless gifts to these Brahmanas, purified by the Vedas, by gyana, and by vratas, men of liberal and gracious countenances—fine robes, houses, excellent beds, carpets, carriages and draft-cattle, and actors, dancers and singers who were marvellous exponents of their respective arts, and always entertained them.

At each of his yagnas, in due time, he gave away as sacrificial gifts ten thousand elephants of golden magnificence, with ichor trickling down their bodies, and chariots made of gold with wonderful standards and banners. He also gave away a thousand times a thousand maidens decked with ornaments of gold, chariots, horses and elephants for riding, and mansions, fields, hundreds of thousand of kine and thousands of cowherds—all decked out in gold. They who are acquainted with ancient history, sing this song about the yagna at which king Paurava gave away cows with calves with

golden horns and silver hooves, brass milking pots, female slaves, male slaves, asses, camels and sheep, all countless in number, diverse kinds of gems and varied hill-like mounds of food.

Countless yagnas the king of the Angas successively performed, in the order of their merit, and according to his varna dharma, so many auspicious yagnas which yielded every possible object of desire. O Srinjaya, when such a king died, who was better that you in respect of the four cardinal virtues, and who being superior to you, was far greater than your son, you should not lament, "Oh, Swaitya, Oh, Swaitya!" and grieve for your son who performed no yagnas and gave away no dana.'

CANTO 55

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'Usinara's son Sibi, too, O Srinjaya, fell prey to death. That king had, as it were, cast a leathern girdle around the Earth, making Bhumi with her mountains, islands, seas and forests resound with the clatter of his chariot. The Parantapa, king Sibi always slew his greatest enemies. He performed many yagnas and gave away gifts in profusion to the Brahmanas. That king of great prowess and intelligence had acquired enormous wealth. In battle, he won the praise of all Kshatriyas. He subjugated the whole world and performed many Aswamedha yagnas, without any impediment, giving away as sacrificial dakshina a thousand crores of golden nishkas and so many elephants, horses, deer, sheep and other animals, and hills of grain, earning him untold punya.

King Sibi also gave away the sacred Earth of diverse kinds of soil to the Brahmanas as dakshina. Indeed, Usinara's son Sibi gave away as many kine as the number of rain-drops that fall on the earth, the number of stars in the firmament, the number of sand-grains on the bed of Ganga, or the number of rocks that constitute the mountain called Meru, the number of gems or fish in the ocean.

The Creator himself had not met with and will not meet in the present or the future, another king who could bear the burdens that king Sibi carried. Many were the sacrifices with every kind of ritual that Sibi performed. In his yagnas, the sacrificial stakes, the carpets, the mansions, the walls and the arches, were all made of gold. Delicious and pure food and drink were served in profusion to the Brahmanas who went there in numbers past all count. With delicacies of every description laid out, one heard nothing but pleasing words like *Give away* and *Take*, being spoken there. Milk and curds were collected in lakes. In his yagnasala, there were rivers of drink and white hills of food. *Bathe, drink and eat as you like!* These were the only words heard there.

Gratified with his righteous karma, Rudra granted Sibi a boon, saying, "As you give away, let your wealth, devotion, fame, dharma, the love that all creatures bear you, and the heaven you attain, all be inexhaustible."

Having obtained these boons, even Sibi, when the time came, left this world for swarga. When, O Srinjaya, he who was superior to and far superior to your son had to die, you should not lament, crying, "Oh, Swaitya, Oh, Swaitya!", and grieve for your son who performed no sacrifice and gave no sacrificial gift.'

CANTO 56

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'Srinjaya, Rama, the son of Dasaratha, fell prey to death. His subjects were as much delighted in him, as a father is with the children of his loins. He possessed great tejas and was a home to countless virtues. Of unfading glory, at his father's command, Rama, the elder brother of Lakshmana lived for fourteen years in exile in the forest, with his wife. In Janasthana, that Bharatarishabha slew fourteen thousand Rakshasas for the protection of the munis of the vana.

The Rakshasa called Ravana who, beguiling both him and Lakshmana, abducted his wife Sita, the princess of Videha. Like the three-eyed Mahadeva killing the Asura Andhaka in the olden days, Rama in wrath slew Ravana, the offender of Pulastya's race, with all his kinsmen and followers, Ravana whom even the Devas and the Asuras together could not quell, the evil Ravana who was as a thorn to the Devas and the Brahmanas.

Because of his loving nurture of his subjects, the very Devas worshipped Rama. Filling all the Earth with his achievements, even the Devarishis lauded him. Compassionate to all beings, that king, after conquering different realms and protecting his subjects virtuously, performed a great yagna without hindrance. The lord Rama also performed

a hundred Aswamedha yagnas and the mahayagna called Jaruthya. With libations of ghrita he pleased Indra. Through all these, Rama conquered hunger and thirst and all the diseases to which living creatures are subject. He possessed every accomplishment and blazed with his own tejas. Indeed, Rama, the son of Dasaratha, by far outshone all other living creatures.

When Rama ruled his kingdom, the Rishis, the Devas, and Manushyas, all lived together on the Earth, and their lives were never as full and wonderful as during Ramarajya. All life's sacred and mighty breaths, Prana, Apana, Samana, and the others, performed their functions blemishlessly. All luminous bodies shone brighter, and no calamity ever came near. All his subjects had long lives, and none died in their youth.

The dwellers of heaven were highly pleased for they received, according to the vidhis of the four Vedas, libations of clarified butter and other offerings of food made by men. Rama's realm was free from flies, gnats and other pernicious insects; and there were no beasts of prey or poisonous reptiles. There was no adharma; no one was covetous, and none ignorant. The subjects of all the four varnas engaged in acts of dharma and other worthy deeds.

When the Rakshasas in Janasthana obstructed the flow of offerings to the Pitris and the worship of the Devas, Lord Rama killed them. Men were each blessed with a thousand children, and their life-span was a thousand years. Elders had never to perform sraddhas of those younger than them. Youthful in form, with a dark-blue complexion and reddish eyes, Rama had the tread of a mighty elephant in musth. He had a lion's shoulders, untold strength, his arms reached down to his knees, and were great and handsome, and all creatures loved him. Rama ruled his kingdom for eleven thousand years and his subjects always uttered his name.

While Rama ruled his kingdom, the world was full of divine beauty and joy. Having established his own dynasty on earth, consisting of eight royal houses of the Suryavamsa, finally Rama ascended into swarga taking with him, his four kinds of subjects, all the species, men, beasts, birds, insects and plants of every kind.

O Srinjaya, even he who was vastly superior to you in the four cardinal virtues and superior to your son, died. You should not lament, crying, 'Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!' for your son performed no yagna and gave no sacrificial dakshina.'

CANTO 57

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, we hear that even king Bhagiratha died. He caused the Bhagiratha ghats of the Ganga, so named after him, to be covered with flights of steps made of gold. Surpassing all kings and all princes, he gave the Brahmanas a thousand times a thousand girls decked in ornaments of gold, riding on chariots yoked to four horses, and with a hundred kine behind each chariot, with many goats and sheep behind each cow. King Bhagiratha gave away vast gifts at his yagnas for which an immense gathering of men assembled.

The Ganga was aggrieved by her burden, so she said "Protect Me," and sat down in his lap because of which she, like the Apsara Urvasi, came to be regarded as his daughter and was named Bhagirathi after him. Having become the king's daughter, she became like a son, and thus the means of salvation to his deceased ancestors.

Soft-spoken Gandharvas of celestial splendour, gratified, sang all this in the hearing of the Rishis, the Devas and the Manavas. Thus, O Srinjaya, did the Devi, the ocean-going Ganga choose for her father king Bhagiratha, descendant of Ikshvaku, and performer of yagnas who gave lavish gifts to Brahmanas. The very Devas with Indra at their head always attended his

sacrifices. The Devas used to facilitate his yagnas in every way by removing all impediments to them, in order to take their shares of the havis.

Possessed of great punya, Bhagiratha gave the Brahmanas whatever they wanted, wherever they wanted, without requiring them to move. There was nothing which he would withhold from Brahmanas. Every one received from him everything they wished for. Finally, the king ascended to the world of Brahma, through the grace of the Brahmanas. For the very object on which the Rishis who subsisted on the rays of the Sun would wait upon the Sun and the Deity of the Sun, they used to wait upon the lord Bhagiratha, the ornament of the three worlds.

O Srinjaya, when he who was superior to you as regards the four cardinal virtues, and who, being superior to you, was far superior to your son, had to die, you should not grieve, crying, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" for your son performed no yagnas and gave no sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 58

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'Dilipa, the son of Havila, O Srinjaya, we hear, also fell a victim to death. Brahmanas, vested with the knowledge of Truth, devoted to the performance of yagnas, blessed with children and many grandchildren, were present during his hundreds of yagnas. King Dilipa, after performing his yagnas, gave away this very Earth filled with her treasures to those Brahmanas. At Dilipa's yagnas, the roads were all paved with gold and the very Devas, with Indra at their head, would come to visit him, equating him to Dharma himself.

The upper and lower rings of his sacrificial stake were of gold. Eating the Raga-khandavas at his yagnas, many were seen to lie down on the very streets, sated. It was exceedingly wonderful to see that while crossing water, the wheels of his chariot never sank but skimmed upon the water's surface. This never happened to other kings, Even those who witnessed king Dilipa, the indomitable, always truthful in speech, give away lavish gifts at his yagnas, ascended into swarga.

In Khattanga, the home of Dilipa, one always heard these five sounds—the sound of Vedic chanting, the twang of bows, and cries of *Drink! Enjoy!* and *Eat!*

O Srinjaya, when even he, who was superior to you in the four cardinal virtues, and therefore far superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, “Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!” and grieve for your son who performed no yagnas and gave no sacrificial gifts.’

CANTO 59

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada continued, 'Mandhatri, the son of Yuvanaswa, O Srinjaya, fell prey to death. That king vanquished the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas. The Aswin twins brought him out of his father's belly with magical surgery.

Once upon a time, king Yuvanaswa while hunting deer in the forest became thirsty and his horses were exhausted. Attracted by a wreath of smoke, which turned out to be from a yagna fire, Yuvanaswa went and drank the sacred ghrita that he found lying there. The king, thereupon, conceived. Seeing that Yuvanaswa was advanced with child, the physicians of the Devas, the twin Aswini Kumaras, extracted the child from the king's belly.

Seeing the child of celestial splendour lying on the lap of his father, the Devas said to each other, "What sustenance will support this child?"

At this Vasava said, 'Let the child suck my fingers.'

At which, from the fingers of Indra there issued milk sweet as nectar. And since Indra, from compassion, said, "He will draw his sustenance from me", and showed him that kindness, the Deva named the child Mandhatri. Springs of milk and divine ghee fell into the mouth of Yuvanasva's son

from the hand of Indra. The boy grew up sucking nourishment from Indra's fingers. In twelve days he grew to twelve cubits in height and acquired prodigious abilities and prowess.

He conquered the whole of this Earth in a single day. Virtuous, intelligent, heroic, devoted to truth and a master of his passions, Mandhatri with his bow vanquished Sudhanwan, Jaya, Suna, Vrihadratha and Nriga. The lands lying between the mountain Udaya where the Sun rises and the Astama where it sets, are known to this day as the dominion of Mandhatri.

Rajan, after performing a hundred Aswamedha yagnas as well as a hundred Rajasuya yagnas, he gave away to Brahmanas, Rohita fish made of gold that were ten yojanas long and one yojana wide. Others, who came to his yagnas and contributed to their success, ate the mountains of savoury food of diverse kinds, but after he had entertained the Brahmanas. The vast quantities of food, drink, and mountains of rice, looked incredible and delightful where they were piled. Rivers and lakes of ghee, with different kinds of soup for their base, curds for their froth and liquid honey for their water, were beautiful to behold and, wafting honey and milk, encircled mountains of solid viands.

Devas, Asuras, Manushas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Pakshis, and many Brahmanas, accomplished in the Vedas and their angas, and innumerable great Rishis came to Mandhatri's yagnas. No one among those present was illiterate or less than learned.

King Mandhatri, having bestowed the Earth confined by the seas and full of wealth upon the Brahmanas, vanished like the Sun at night. Filling all the points of the compass with his fame, he left for the regions of great souls of dharma. When he, O Srinjaya, who excelled you in the four cardinal virtues and who was thus far superior to your son, had to die, you should not grieve, crying, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" for him who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 60

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, Yayati, the son of Nahusha, was also a victim of Mrityu. He performed a hundred Rajasuyas, a hundred Aswamedha yagnas, a thousand Pundarikas, a hundred Vajapeyas, a thousand Atiratras, innumerable Chaturmasyas, various Agnishtomas and many other kinds of yagnas, at all of which he gave away lavish dakshina and dana to great Brahmanas. Having counted it first, he gifted to Brahmanas all the wealth that existed on the Earth and was in the possession of Mlecchas and other Brahmana-haters.

When the Devas and the Asuras were arrayed for battle, king Yayati went to the Devas' help. He divided the Earth into four parts and gave it away to four great ones. Having performed various yagnas and virtuously fathered admirable offspring upon his wives Devayani, the daughter of Usanas, and Sarmishta, king Yayati, like a Deva, like a second Vasava, roamed through the Nandana vana at his own pleasure.

When Yayati, profound master of all the Vedas, found that indulging his passions did not satisfy him, he, with his wives, retired into the forest, saying, "Even all the paddy, wheat, gold, animals and women there is on

Earth is not sufficient to satisfy one man. Considering this, one should cultivate contentment.”

Thus abandoning all his desires and attaining true peace and satisfaction, the lord Yayati, installed his son on his throne and retired into the forest.

When he, O Srinjaya, who was superior to you in respect of the four cardinal virtues, and therefore far superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, “Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!”, and grieve for your son who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.’

CANTO 61

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada continued, 'Nabhaga's son Ambarisha, O Srinjaya, we know, fell prey to death. Alone he battled a thousand kings, a thousand times. These enemies, all masters of weapons and desperately wanting victory, attacked him from all sides, with fierce war cries. With the measureless strength, vigour and skill he had acquired through long abhyasa, and his awesome astras, he destroyed his enemies' royal chatras, weapons, standards and chariots and dispelled his own apprehensions.

Throwing off their armour, these men begged him for mercy. They sought his protection, saying, "We yield ourselves to you!"

Reducing them to subjection and conquering the whole Earth, he performed a hundred yagnas of the best kind, according to the rites ordained in the shastras. At these yagnas, people of all varnas ate his pure and delicious fare and they worshipped the Brahmanas and thus greatly pleased them. The Munis ate delectable sweet-meats, purikas, puras, apupas, sashkalis and large karambhas, prithumridwikas, and diverse kinds of other dainties, and drank various kinds of soups, maireyaka, and ate ragakhandavas, and every sort of confectionary, well-prepared, soft and

fragrant, as well having as nectarine ghee, honey, milk, water, sweet curds, and many kinds of exotic and succulent fruits and roots.

Those accustomed to wine, drank so many different kinds of intoxicating drinks for their pleasure, and sang and played their musical instruments. Eager revellers by the thousands, intoxicated with drink, danced and merrily sang hymns in praise of Ambarisha; while others, unable to stand, fell down. At these yagnas, king Ambarisha gave, as sacrificial gifts, the kingdoms of hundreds and thousands of kings to the ten million priests he engaged. After he had performed various yagnas the king gave to the Brahmanas, as dakshina, a number of princes and kings whose coronal locks had been washed in the sacred bath, all wearing golden armour, all having white chatras spread over their heads, all seated on golden chariots, all attired in rich robes and having large trains of followers, and all bearing their sceptres and bringing their treasuries.

Seeing this, the Maharishis were highly gratified, and said, "No one in the past has done, and none in future will be able to do, what king Ambarisha of unequalled munificence, does now."

When he, O Srinjaya, who was superior to you in the four cardinal virtues, and therefore far superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" and grieve for him who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 62

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, we hear that king Sasabindu, too, fell prey to death. He was a handsome man of great ability and intelligence and he performed a host of yagnas. The noble king had one hundred thousand wives from each of whom were born a thousand able sons. Proficient in the Vedas, these princes performed millions of yagnas, and many mahayagnas. They wore golden armour and were superlative archers. Every one of them performed Aswamedha yagnas.

Sasabindu at his own Aswamedha yagna gave away as dakshina all these sons of his to the Brahmanas! Behind each of these princes were hundreds upon hundreds of chariots, elephants and gorgeous maidens decked in ornaments of gold. With each maiden were a hundred elephants; with each elephant, a hundred chariots; with each chariot a hundred horses wearing garlands of gold. With each of these horses were a thousand kine; and with each cow were fifty goats. Such was the limitless wealth that the most blessed Sasabindu gave away to the Brahmanas.

The king caused as many sacrificial stakes of gold to be made for his great Aswamedha yagna as were ordained, and he doubled that number of the sacrificial stakes of wood in other yagnas. There were mountains of

food and drink some two yojanas high. Upon the completion of his yagna, thirteen such mountains of food and drink remained untouched. His kingdom was free from evil and full of contented, well-fed and perfectly happy people.

Having ruled for many long years, Sasabindu finally ascended to swarga. When he, O Srinjaya, who was superior to you in respect of the four cardinal virtues and therefore, far superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, “Oh, Swaitya! Oh Swaitya!”, and grieve for him who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.’

CANTO 63

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, Gaya, the son of Amartarayas, we know, fell a victim to death. He, for a hundred years, ate nothing but the leftovers of the libations of ghee poured into the sacrificial fire. Gratified with his proof of great devotion Agni offered to grant him a boon.

Gaya said, "I wish to have a complete knowledge of the Vedas through tapasya, through the practice of brahmacharya, by observing vratas and niyamas, and through the grace of my superiors. I also want to acquire inexhaustible wealth through practice of the duties of my swadharma and without injury to others. I also wish to be able to make gifts to Brahmanas with veneration. Let me also beget sons upon wives belonging to my own varna and not upon others. Let me be able to give away food with devotion. Let my heart always delight in dharma. O Agni, supreme cleanser, let no impediment overtake me while I am engaged in sacred karma for the attainment of punya."

Saying "Tathaastu", Agni disappeared.

King Gaya got all he had asked for and also subdued his enemies in fair battle. Then, for a full hundred years, he performed a myriad yagnas with generous gifts to the Brahmanas, as well as the vratas called chaturmasyas

and many others. Every year, for a century, the king gave the Brahmanas one hundred and sixty thousand kine, ten thousand horses and one crore of gold nishkas—upon rising after the completion of his yagnas. Further, he gave away as Nakshatra-dakshinas under every constellation, the gifts ordained for each of these occasions. Indeed, the king performed his many yagnas like another Soma or Angiras.

At his great Aswamedha yagna, king Gaya made a golden Earth and gave it away to the Brahmanas. His sacrificial stakes were past all calculation in value, being of gold, encrusted with such jewels and gems as fascinated and delighted all beings. Willing to fulfil every wish, Gaya gave those sacred stakes of sacrifice to delighted Brahmanas and other deserving men. He gratified all the different species of beings dwelling in the ocean, the forest, the islands, the rivers, male and female, the tanks, pools and lakes, the towns, the provinces and even in swarga, with the wealth and food distributed at his yagnas. And they all said, "No other yagna can measure up to this one of Gaya's."

The sacrificial altar of Gaya was thirty yojanas long, twenty-six yojanas wide, and twenty yojanas high. It was made entirely of gold and studded with pearls, diamonds and other precious stones. He also gave away this vedi, along with fine clothes and ornaments to the Brahmanas, as well as other gifts of the kind laid down in the shastras. Upon the completion of the yagna twenty-five hillocks of food remained untouched, and many lakes and several beautifully flowing rivulets of exquisite drink, besides many heaps of fine clothes and ornaments. Due to the merit of the great yagna, Gaya came to be renowned through the three worlds. It is because of Gaya's mahayagna that the eternal Pipal tree and the sacred Brahmasaras came into existence.

O Srinjaya, when he, who was superior to you in respect of the four cardinal virtues and, therefore, greatly superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" and grieve for him who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 64

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'Great Rantideva, too, we hear, met with death. The noble king had two hundred thousand cooks to prepare and distribute unmatched food, raw as well as cooked, dishes like amrita, to the Brahmanas who came to his palace as atithis, day and night. He gave away his wealth acquired through deeds of dharma to great Brahmanas. Having studied the Vedas, he quelled his enemies in dharma yuddha. Being of strict vows and always engaged in the performance of yagnas, countless animals, wanting to attain swarga, came to Rantideva of their own accord to become his yagnapasus, his sacrificial beasts.

So large was the number of animal yagnas in the Agnihotra that the secretions flowing from his kitchens from the heaps of skins deposited there, created a veritable river which so came to be called the Charmanwati.

He incessantly gave away thousands of nishkas of bright gold to Brahmanas, saying gently, lovingly, "I give you nishkas. I give you nishkas."

After gifting in a single day one crore of such coins, he thought that he had given away very little and would give more. Who else is there that would be able to give as much as him?

The king gave away wealth, thinking, "If I do not give wealth to the Brahmanas, I will experience great and eternal grief."

For a hundred years, every fortnight, he gave thousands of Brahmanas a golden bull each, followed by a hundred cows and eight hundred pieces of nishkas. All that was needed for his Agnihotra and other yagnas—karukas, water-pots, plates, bedsteads, carpets, carriages, mansions, houses, diverse kinds of trees and various kinds of viands—he gave away to the Rishis.

Whatever utensils and other possessions Rantideva had were of gold. Those who in ancient times saw the phenomenal affluence of Rantideva, sing this song, "We have not seen such treasures even in the abode of Kubera; what then to say of mortal men?"

People wonderingly said, "Undoubtedly, the kingdom of Rantideva is made of sacred Svarna, of gold!"

On such nights, when guests assembled in Rantideva's palace, he sacrificed twenty-thousand and one kine to feed them. Yet the royal cook, adorned with bejewelled earrings, had to cry out, "Drink as much soup as you like, for there is not as much of meat today as on other days."

Rantideva gave away even the gold that remained with him, and was his due, to the Brahmanas during one of his yagnas. In his very presence, the Devas would come down to take the libations of clarified butter poured into the fire for them, and the Pitris the food that was offered to them in Sraddhas. Rantideva was wont to fulfill all the wishes of all true and great Brahmanas.

When he, O Srinjaya, who was superior to you in the four cardinal virtues and, so, vastly superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" and grieve for him who performed no yagna and gave no dakshina or sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 65

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, Dushyanta's son Bharata, we know, fell a victim to death. While only a boy living in the vana, he achieved feats no other could. He was so strong that he would bring down snow-white lions, with great fangs and talons, and drag them around like little cats. He would tame tigers also, which were fiercer and more ferocious than the lions. Seizing other mighty beasts of prey, even great elephants, dyed with red arsenic and spotted with other liquid minerals, by their tusks, he would fetch them to their knees or force them to bolt from him. He would drag the mightiest of bison by their horns; he was a master of prides of hundreds of proud lions, and powerful srimaras, horned rhinoceros, and other beasts. He would bind them by their throats, beat them within an inch of their lives and then let them go.

For his feats the regenerate rishis with whom he lived, called him Sarvadamana—the controller of all. Finally, Sakuntala, his mother, forbade him to torment animals in this way.

Gifted with great ability, he performed a hundred Aswamedha yagnas on the banks of the Yamuna, three hundred on the banks of Saraswati, and four hundred on the banks of the Ganga. Having performed these sacrifices,

he yet again performed a thousand Aswamedha yagnas and a hundred Rajasuyas, great yagnas in which his gifts to the Brahmanas were more than bounteous. Other yagnas, such as the Agnishtoma, the Atiratra, the Uktha and the Viswajit, he performed, together with thousands and thousands of Vajapeyas, without any impediment, and gratified the Brahmanas with vast gifts of wealth.

The renowned Bharata gave ten thousand billions of coins, made of the purest gold, to Kanwa, who had raised his mother Sakuntala as his own daughter.

The Devas with Indra at their head, accompanied by the Brahmanas, came to his yagna, to set up his sacrificial stake made entirely of gold and measuring a hundred vyamas in width. Bharata, the noblest soul, vanquisher of all his enemies, the king never defeated by anyone, gave away millions and millions of beautifully caparisoned horses, elephants, chariots, decked with gold and exceptional gemstones of all kinds as well as camels, goats, sheep, and slaves, both male and female, and wealth, grain, milch cows with calves, villages, fields, and different kinds of robes, to the Brahmanas.

O Srinjaya, when Bharata, who was superior to you in respect of the four cardinal virtues and who was far superior to your son, had to die, you should not cry, "Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!" and grieve for your son who performed no yagna and gave no sacrificial gifts.'

CANTO 66

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Narada said, 'O Srinjaya, Vena's son, king Prithu, we know, fell prey to death. In the Rajasuya yagna that he performed, the maharishis installed him as emperor of the world. He vanquished all and his achievements became known throughout the three worlds. For this, he came to be called Prithu, the celebrated. And because he protected all the people from injury, he became a true Kshatriya. Seeing Vena's son Prithu, all his subjects said, "We are pleased with him!"

Due to the love of his subjects, he came to be called a Rajan. During the time of Prithu, the Earth, without being cultivated, yielded crops in plenty, and cows yielded milk whenever they were touched. Every lotus was full of honey, the kusa blades were all of gold, pleasant to the touch, and otherwise delightful so that the subjects of Prithu made clothes and their beds from these grasses.

His subjects lived on fruits, which were all soft and sweet like Amrita, and none of them had ever to starve. All men were joyful, hale and robust, with all their wishes granted and with nothing to fear. They dwelt as they liked upon trees or in caves. His dominions were not divided into provinces and towns and the people lived happily and as they pleased.

When king Prithu stepped into the sea, the waves stood still. The very mountains used to yield him openings so that he might pass through them. The flagpole of his chariot never broke. Once, the tall trees of the forest, the mountains, the Devas, the Asuras, Manushas, the Nagas, the seven Rishis, the Apsaras, and the Pitris, all came to Prithu, who was seated at his ease and said to him, "You are our emperor. You are our king. You are our protector and father. You are our Lord. Therefore, O Rajan, give us the boons that we wish so that we may have gratification and joy forever."

Prithu, the son of Vena, replied, "Tathaastu".

Then taking up his bow, the Ajagava, and some dreadful astras the like of which did not exist other than with him, he reflected for a moment. He then addressed the Earth, saying, 'Come quickly, O Bhumi! Yield to them the milk they wish for. From that, blessed be you, I will give them the food they want.'

The Earth said, "You may, Shura, regard me as your daughter." And she became Prithvi.

Prithu answered, "Tathaastu"! And then the Rajarishi, his passions under perfect control, made arrangements for milking the Earth. Then the entire assembly of living beings began to milk the Earth. First of all, the tall trees of the forest rose to milk her. The Earth, full of love, stood there wanting a calf, someone to milk her, and vessels to hold the milk. The blossoming Sala tree became the calf, the Pipal became the milkman, buds became the milk and the auspicious Nyagrodha became the vessel.

Next, the mountains milked her. The Eastern mountain Udaya, where the Sun rises, became the calf; the prince of mountains, Meru, the one to milk her; the diverse gems and herbs became the milk; and the stones became the vessels to hold that milk.

Next, one of the Devas milked her, and all things that bestow tejas and urjas became the coveted milk.

The Asuras then milked the Earth, having wine for their milk and using an unbaked pot for their vessel. During this milking, Dvimurdha milked her and Virochana became the calf.

The Manavas milked the Earth for cultivation and crops. The self-created Manu became their calf and Prithu himself the milker.

Next, the Nagas milked the Earth, getting poison as milk and using a vessel made of a gourd. Dhritarashtra was the one to milk and Takshaka the calf.

The seven Rishis, who could create everything by their decree, milked the Earth, getting the Vedas as their milk. Brihaspati became the one to milk her; the Chhandas were the vessel and the excellent Soma, the calf.

The Yakshas, milking the Earth, got the power to disappear at will like the milk in an unbaked pot. Vaisravana Kubera was the one to milk her and Vrishadhvaja their calf.

The Gandharvas and the Apsaras milked all fragrant perfumes in a vessel made of a lotus-leaf. Chitraratha became their calf, and the powerful Viswaruchi the one to milk Bhumi.

The Pitris milked the Earth, getting Swaha as their milk in a vessel of silver. Yama, the son of Vivaswat, became their calf and the Destroyer Antaka the one to milk her.

Thus, the assembly of great creatures milked the Earth and all got as milk what each desired. The calves and vessels they employed exist to this day and will always exist. The powerful Prithu, the son of Vena, performed many and diverse yagnas, and gratified the desires of all creatures by gifts of whatever they wanted. He had golden images of everything found on Earth to be made and gifted them to the Brahmanas at his great Aswamedha yagna. The king caused six and sixty thousand elephants to be made of gold as well as this whole Earth to be adorned with jewels, gems and gold and gave her away as dakshina to the Brahmanas.

O Srinjaya when Prithu, who was superior to you in the four cardinal virtues and who, therefore, was far superior to your son, died, you should not, cry, “Oh, Swaitya! Oh, Swaitya!” and grieve for your son who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts.’”

CANTO 67

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Narada said, 'Even Jamadagni's son Maharishi Rama, the shura worshipped by all other heroes, he of great fame, will die, without being content with length of his life. Rooting out all evils from the Earth, he ushered in the primeval Satya Yuga. He obtained unrivalled prosperity, and no one could see any fault in him.

The Kshatriyas killed his father and stole his calf, and without any boast, he slew the invincible Kartavirya, whom no enemy had ever bested. With his bow, he killed sixty-four times ten thousand Kshatriyas. In that awesome carnage were included fourteen thousand Brahmana-hating Kshatriyas of the Dantakura country. He massacred a thousand Haihayas with his short club, a thousand with his sword and a thousand by hanging them. Enraged at the murder of his father, the wise Rama killed great warriors and scattered their corpses on the battlefield, with their chariots, horses and elephants.

Rama slaughtered ten thousand Kshatriyas with his Parasu, his battle-axe, because he could not brook their arrogant ways and talk. When many great Brahmanas called out the name of Rama of Bhrigu's race, the valiant son of Jamadagni continued against the Kashmiras, the Daradas, the Kuntis,

the Kshudrakas, the Malavas, the Angas, the Vangas, the Kalingas, the Videhas, the Tamraliptakas, the Rakshovahas, the Vitahotras, the Trigartas, the Martikavatas, by the thousands, and slew them all with his astras.

Moving from kingdom to kingdom, province to province, he razed thousands of crores of Kshatriyas. Creating a deluge of blood and filling many lakes with gore as red as indragopakas or the wild fruit bandujiva and subjugating all the eighteen Dwipas of the Earth, he performed a hundred mahayagnas of great punya, all of which he completed and gave profuse dakshina to the Brahmanas.

The sacrificial altar, eighteen nalas high made entirely of gold, and wrought according to the injunctions of the shastra, full of different kinds of jewels, gems, and adorned with hundreds of standards, Kasyapa accepted as the sacrificial dakshina along with this Earth full of her animals, domestic and wild, that Rama, the son of Jamadagni, offered him. Rama also gave him many thousand prodigious elephants, all caparisoned in gold. Indeed, freeing the Earth from all thieves and brigands and filling her with honest and gracious men, Rama gave her away to Kasyapa at his great Aswamedha yagna.

Again, after he had divested the Earth of Kshatriyas twenty-one times and after performing hundreds of yagnas, that puissant Rama gave away this Bhumi to the Brahmanas. And it was Kasyapa who then accepted the Earth with her seven islands from him. Then Kasyapa said to Rama, "I command you to leave this world."

At Kasyapa's word, in obedience to the Brahmana, Rama used his arrows to make the very ocean stand aside, and going to the best of mountains called Mahendra, lived there. Even that enhancer of the fame of the Bhrigus, possessed of numberless virtues, the famed and splendid son of Jamadagni, incalculably superior to your son, will die. Do not, therefore, grieve for your prince who performed no yagna and made no sacrificial gifts. All these men, superior to you in the four cardinal virtues and also a hundred other merits, all these greatest of great men, have died, O Srinjaya, and they who are like them will also die.'"

CANTO 68

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Vyasa says, 'Hearing this sacred itihasa of sixteen kings, which can increase the listener's life, king Srinjaya remained silent. The illustrious Rishi Narada then said to the silently seated king, "O you of great majesty, have you heard these tales and understood their purport? Or, are they lost on you like a Sraddha performed by a Muni with a Sudra wife?"

Srinjaya then replied with joined hands, "O Tapodhana, after listening to these great and laudable itihasas of ancient rajarishis, all of whom performed great yagnas with lavish dakshinas to the Brahmanas, wonder has scattered all my grief, like the rays of the sun dispelling darkness. I have been cleansed of my sins, and feel no pain now. Tell me, what I should do next."

Narada said, "It is through good fortune that your grief has been dispelled. Ask any boon that you wish for and it will be granted. I never make false promises nor ever speak an untruth."

Srinjaya said, "O holy one, I am happy that you are gratified with me, for nothing is unattainable here for those with whom you are pleased."

Narada said, “I will bring back your son, whom the brigands senselessly killed like an animal slaughtered in a yagna. I will fetch him back from terrible hell.”

Then Srinjaya’s wonderful and magnificent son appeared, that prince resembling the son of Kubera himself, restored by the gratified Rishi to the bereaved father. King Srinjaya, united again with his son, was overjoyed. Srinjaya’s son had not fulfilled the purusharthas of his life. He had performed no yagnas or given away any generous gifts upon their completion and had sired no children. He had done nothing brave and had perished miserably and not in battle. This was why he could be brought back to life.

As for Abhimanyu, he was valiant and heroic. He had fulfilled the purposes of life, for the brave son of Subhadra annihilated his enemies by the thousands before he left the world, dying on the field of battle. Your son has found even those inaccessible realms that only brahmacharya, gyana, a profound knowledge of the shastras, and the greatest of yagnas bestow.

Men of knowledge always desire swarga through their deeds of dharma. Those who live in swarga never prefer this world to it. Thus, it is not easy to bring back into this world Arjuna’s son slain in battle and now dwelling in heaven; for he has no great purpose that he did not accomplish here. Your son has attained that eternal goal that yogins achieve with eyes shut in dhyana, or performers of great yagnas, or those possessed of great punya. After death, gaining a new body, he shines forth in glory like a king, with his own immortal lustre. Indeed, he has regained his own and true body of Soma rasa that all munis want.

He does not deserve your grief. Knowing this, be quiet, and slay your enemies. O sinless one, bear this with fortitude for it is the living that stand in need of our grief, and not those who have attained to paradise. Rajan, the sins increase of those for whom the living grieve. Therefore, the wise should abandon grief and strive for the good of the dead. The living man should think of the joy, the glory and the happiness of the dead.

Knowing this, the wise never indulge in grief, for grief is painful. Understand this to be the truth. Rise up! Strive to achieve your purpose. Do not grieve. You have heard of the origin of Death, and her unprecedented tapasya, and also of her impartiality towards all creatures. You have heard that prosperity is unstable and fleeting, and how the dead son of Srinjaya

was revived. O wise and learned king, do not grieve. Peace be upon you. I go now, farewell!'

Having said this, the holy Vyasa, most eloquent of men, wisest of the wise, whose complexion is like that of the clouded sky, disappears before their eyes. Yudhishtira, with tejas equal to that of Indra himself, derives consolation from what he has heard about the merit and prosperity that accrued from the yagnas performed by those great kings of old, all of whom had acquired wealth by righteous means. The Dharmaraja lauds and worships those illustrious ones in his heart and is freed from grief.

However, with a melancholy heart he asks himself, "What will we tell Arjuna?""

CANTO 69

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When that terrible day, so full of slaughtering, comes to an end with the sunset, soothing twilight spreads itself over earth and sky. The troops of both the armies, Bharatarishabha, retire to their tents. And now the victorious vanara-bannered Arjuna makes his way back towards the Pandava camp on his triumphal chariot, after annihilating a great host of Samsaptakas with his devastras.

As he rides back, suddenly his heart clenches in a knot of grief and tears choke him. His voice low, he asks Krishna, "Why is my heart afraid, O Kesava, and why does my speech falter? I see evil omens and my limbs feel weak. Thoughts of terrible disaster fill my mind. I see everywhere, many kinds of omens and portents, which tell of some terrible tragedy. Is everything well with my brother the king, and all his companions?"

Krishna says, "It is evident that everything is well with your brother and his companions. Do not grieve; some trifling evil might have transpired."

The two shuras, Krishna and Arjuna, worship the twilight sandhya, and continue discussing the day's battle, which had claimed so many Kshatriya lives and during which they had achieved so many extraordinary feats. Finally, they arrive at the Pandava encampment.

Arjuna notices the joyless and melancholy air that hangs over the camp, a stricken pall, and again the pang of fear clutches at his heart. Trembling, he says to Krishna, “Janardana, no one blows the auspicious trumpets today, mingling its blasts with the beat of drums and the boom of conches. I hear no sweet vinanadam or the victorious slapping of palms. Our bards do not sing the auspicious songs of eulogy.

Ah, look how our warriors all turn away from me, with their heads hung down. They do not as usual tell me of the feats they have achieved. Madhava, is all well with my brothers today? Seeing our men all plunged in grief, I have no peace. Does all fare well with the lord of the Panchalas, with Virata, with all our warriors, O you of unfading glory? Alas, Subhadra’s son, ever cheerful, does not come out today with his brothers, smiling radiantly to receive me as he always does.”

Krishna and Arjuna enter their own quarter of the camp and find the Pandavas all plunged in deep sorrow. Seeing his brothers and sons sitting with their heads hung down, in complete silence, Arjuna is quickly distraught, full of awful fear.

Not seeing Abhimanyu there, Arjuna says, “I see that all your faces are pale, and I do not see Abhimanyu. He does not come running to embrace and welcome me as he always does. I heard that Drona formed the chakravyuha today. None among you save my son could break into that formation. I taught him myself, but I did not teach him how to break out of it again. Ah, did you make my boy enter that vyuha?

Did Subhadra’s mighty son go alone into the enemy’s midst? Did he kill countless maharathas there and finally fall to countless enemies combined against him? Oh, tell me how that indomitable hero of mighty arms and red eyes, born into our vamsa like a lion upon the mountain breast, Abhimanyu equal Vishnu himself, perished on the field of battle?”

Moment by moment certainty of the tragedy seizes Arjuna. His voice rises, and he cries desperately, “What warrior, whom Death deprived of his reason, dared kill Subhadra’s beloved son, he who was the favourite of Draupadi and Krishna, the child whom Kunti loved most? He was equal to Krishna himself in prowess, learning and dignity; how has he been slain on the field of war? If I do not see the favourite son of the daughter of the Vrishnis, whom I loved more than my life, I will not live another moment but kill myself!”

No one makes any reply, and like one caught in a deepening nightmare, Arjuna continues, biting his lip, speaking to himself as much as to the others.

"With locks ending in soft curls, of tender years, with eyes like those of a young gazelle, with a tread like that of an elephant in musth, tall like a young Sala tree, of sweet speech, ah, such sweet smiles, quiet, ever obedient to his elders, though so young, always conducting himself like one of mature years, of untold courage and energy, his eyes like lotus-petals, always kind to those who loved him, self-restrained, never doing anything mean, always grateful, learned and wise far beyond his years, a great master of astras, never fleeing from battle, instead always delighting in fight and striking fear into his enemies, ever engaged in his kinsmen's welfare, wishing victory to his sires, never striking first, perfectly fearless in war—if I do not see that son of mine, I will follow him even now to the land of Yama."

Arjuna continues truly like a man in a dreadful dream, "He was a maharatha among maharathas; he was one and a half times the warrior I am. Of tender years, of mighty arms, so very dear to Pradyumna, Kesava and myself—if I do not see my son I must leave you and go to Yama's world.

With a beautiful nose and lofty brow, with startling, brilliant eyes, and arched lips—oh, if I do not see that face, what peace can my heart have? His voice melodious as the voice of the male kokila, enchanting and sweet as the soft, deep sounds of the vina—without hearing his voice, what peace can my heart have?

His beauty is unrivalled, rare even among the Devas. Without casting my eyes on that form, what peace can my heart have? Accomplished in greeting his elders with reverence, and always obedient to the behests of his sires—alas, if I do not see him, what peace can my heart have?

Brave in battle, accustomed to every luxury, deserving of the softest bed—alas, he sleeps today on the bare earth, as if there is none to take care of him, although he is first of those who have protectors. He was attended on by the most beautiful women, in his bed; alas, mangled with arrows, inauspicious jackals, prowling the field, will attend to him today. He who was once roused from his slumbers by singers, bards and panegyrists—alas, today he will be awakened by discordant cries of beasts of prey.

His handsome face that eminently deserves to be shaded by a royal chatra—alas, the dust of the battlefield will soil it today. O my child,

unfortunate that I am, death forcibly takes you away from me, who was never sated with looking at you. Today you will illumine the palace of Yama, mansion of delight, which is always the goal of men of dharma, and your brilliance will add to is lustre. Without doubt, Yama, Varuna, Indra and Kubera, finding you their favourite guest, even now make much of you, O my heroic son."

Thus lamenting like a merchant whose vessel has sunk, grief-stricken Arjuna asks Yudhishtira, "O, Kurusthama, has he ascended into Swarga after facing their fiercest warriors in battle and slaughtering the enemy? Ah, while he single-handedly fought the greatest maharathas, countless in number, his heart must have turned towards me seeking help. While set upon by Karna, Drona, Kripa and the others with arrows of every kind, with glittering heads, my son must have repeatedly thought, 'My father will be my rescuer in this peril.'

Even while he thought of me and grieved, I feel sure that savage warriors must have felled him. Or, perhaps, as he was my son, the nephew of Krishna and born to Subhadra, he would not have uttered any lamentation. But oh, my heart is made of the adamant of the Vajra, since it does not break even though I do not see that mighty-armed shura with the red eyes.

How could these cruel maharathas shoot their deep-piercing arrows at my son of such tender years, the child who was Krishna's nephew? Every evening the noble-hearted prince would rush out to greet me when I rode home; where is he today? Terrible certainty grips me that he lies slain and bathed in his own blood on naked ground. Ah, making this bhumi beautiful with his body, my child surely lies like the sun fallen from the sky.

I grieve for Subhadra, who, when she hears of her fearless son's death in battle, will end her own life in sorrow. Missing Abhimanyu, what will she say to me? What will Draupadi say to me? Ravaged by grief as they are, what will I say to them? Surely, my heart is made of the adamantine essence of the very Vajra, since it does not break in a thousand pieces at the sight of my weeping daughter-in-law Uttaraa, impaled on her grief.

I did indeed hear the leonine shouts of the Dhritarashtras swelling with pride. Krishna also heard Yuyutsu censuring the Kshatriyas of the Dhritarashtra army saying, 'Maharathas, why do you rejoice when, unable to vanquish Arjuna, you have killed only a child? Why, having done what is intolerable to Kesava and Arjuna, why do you roar like lions in joy, when in

truth it is the hour for sorrow that is come? The fruits of this horrible sin of yours will overtake you swiftly. Heinous is the crime you have perpetrated. How long can it take to bear its fruits?'

Rebuking them in these words, the noble son of Dhritarashtra by his Vaisya wife rode away, flinging aside his weapons, seized by rage and grief. O Krishna, why did you not tell me all this during the battle? I would have consumed all those heartless, bestial maharathas."

Krishna consoles the stricken Arjuna, whose eyes are bathed in tears, "Do not yield so to grief. This is the way of all brave heroes, and especially of Kshatriyas, whose dharma is battle. O Mahabuddhi, such is the goal the authors of our shastras ordain for fearless warriors in war. Death is certain for Kshatriyas who do not retreat. There is no doubt that Abhimanyu has ascended to those lofty realms that are reserved for men of the highest dharma. Bharatarishabha, all brave men wish to die in battle, facing their enemies.

As for Abhimanyu, he killed so many maharathas, before meeting with a death coveted by Kshatriyas. Do not grieve, Naravyaghra, our lawgivers of old have declared the death in battle to be the eternal punya of the Kshatriyas. Best of the Bharatas, your brothers are all forlorn, as is the king, and our friends, to see you plunged in despair. You must not sharpen their grief but comfort them by being calm and brave yourself."

Controlling himself somewhat, Arjuna, his voice still choking, says to Yudhishtira and his brothers, "Lord of the earth, tell me now how my heroic Abhimanyu fought, that shura of eyes like lotus-petals. You will see me annihilate my son's killers with their elephants, chariots, horses and all their followers and kinsmen.

Yet, my great brothers, you are all masters of arms, and you were all armed in battle. How then was Subhadra's son slain, even if it were Vajradhari Indra himself whom he fought?

Alas, if I had known that Pandavas and the Panchalas would not be able to protect my son in war, I myself would have done so. You were mounted on your chariots; you held your bows and loosed your arrows. Alas, how could the enemy kill Abhimanyu, and bring a great carnage to your ranks?

Ah, you have neither manliness nor prowess, since they killed Abhimanyu before your very eyes. Or I should blame myself, because knowing that you all are weak, cowardly and irresolute, I went away! Are your coats of mail and weapons only ornaments to embellish your bodies,

and were you given words only to make fine speeches in sabhas, that you failed to protect my son, despite being clad in mail, fully armed and although you gave me your solemn word that you would safeguard my son?"

Arjuna suddenly sits down, his fists clenched around his great bow and fine sword. Indeed, no one can even look at him at that time, for he is like Death himself, repeatedly drawing deep breaths. None of his friends or kinsmen venture to look at or speak to Arjuna, as he sits there, with tears streaming down his face. No one dares address him, save Krishna or Yudhishtira. These two he reveres so much that they are free to speak to him under any circumstances, and at any time.

At last, in that deep and terrible silence, slowly, Yudhishtira speaks to Arjuna.'

CANTO 70

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

'Yudhishtira says, "Mahabaho, after you rode to face the Samsaptakas, Drona did everything he could to capture me. However, we resisted the Acharya at the head of his vyuha, deploying our own forces in a powerful formation. Contained by a large number of our warriors, and I too was well protected, the infuriated Drona began to assail us with his devastras, burning up whole legions of common soldiers. We could not even look at his army, far less face it in battle.

It was then that all of us asked Abhimanyu to break Drona's vyuha! And he unquestioningly sought to fulfil our wish, dreadful though the task was. The brilliant child plunged into the chakravyuha even like Garuda into the sea. As for us, we followed Abhimanyu close, but then suddenly the wretched Jayadratha barred our way, using the boon he had from Siva. Why, by himself the vile Saindhava held all of us at bay!

And then six maharathas, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Aswatthaman, the king of the Kosalas and Kritavarman, surrounded Abhimanyu. Having encircled the child, the six, who proved more than he could contain after all the fighting and killing he had done, shattered his chariot. Abhimanyu battled on foot but finally, by great mischance, Dusasana's son struck him dead.

During the day, Abhimanyu killed many thousands of men, horses and elephants; he destroyed eight thousand chariots and nine hundred elephants more, two thousand Kshatriya princes, and a vast number of warriors, all heroes if unknown to fame, and sent king Brihadbala also to heaven. Finally, through dark misfortune, your glorious son met his death.

Arjuna, that he died alone within the treacherous chakravyuha only makes our grief sharper than it might be otherwise." Yudhishtira's voice is a hoarse whisper now, "My brother, it was thus that your magnificent son, that tiger among all men, ascended to swarga!"

Arjuna moans, "Oh my son!" and heaving a great sigh, keels over on his side, swooning in agony he cannot endure. Their faces dark with sorrow, all the Pandava warriors stand around the unconscious Dhananjaya, and stare mutely at one another.

When Arjuna regains his senses, he awakes in rage that is terrible to see. Sighs like a great serpent's hisses issue from his trembling body; he draws deep shuddering breaths and tears flow in a rill down his face. He casts manic glances around him, eyes darting everywhere, like a madman, like one possessed.

In a truly dreadful voice, Arjuna says, very quietly, "I swear that tomorrow I will kill Jayadratha. If he does not forsake the Dhritarashtras from fear of death, or come to beg for our protection, or for Krishna's protection, or yours, Rajan, I will surely kill him tomorrow.

Forgetting his friendship for me, eager only to please Dhritarashtra's son, the wretch caused the death of my precious child. And tomorrow I will kill the sinner Jayadratha. Whoever faces me in battle tomorrow to protect the vile Saindhava, be it not Drona or Kripa—I will smother them with my arrows. I will kill them if they stand in my way!

O Purusharishabhas, if I do not achieve this in tomorrow's battle, let me not attain the heaven reserved for men of dharma. Why, if I do not kill Jayadratha tomorrow, let me find those hellish realms that sinners do who kill their mothers, or their fathers, or violate their guru's beds, the most vile and evil men, they who are envious of righteous men, they who speak ill of others or appropriate wealth entrusted to their care, betrayers of trusts, who speak ill of their dead wives, or who have slain Brahmanas, or sacred kine, or they who eat payasa, meat or other delicacies without having first dedicated them to the Devas. May those narakas become mine to which men who insult Brahmanas devoted to the study of the Vedas go, or speak

harshly to other men worthy of respect, or to their very gurus—if I do not kill Jayadratha tomorrow!

The end that becomes theirs who lay their feet on Brahmanas or sacred fire, those who cast phlegm, excreta and urine into pure water—may even such an end be mine if I do not kill Jayadratha!

Let me find the end which is his who bathes naked in water, or his who does not hospitably entertain a guest, or he who takes bribes, speaks falsehoods and deceives and cheats others, or who offends against his own soul, or who falsely praises others, or of those low sinners who eat fine sweets in the sight of servants, sons, wives and dependents without sharing them—if I do not kill Jayadratha tomorrow!

The end of the cruel brute who does not support an obedient sishya of dharma but casts him off; the end of him who, without giving the offerings in Sraddhas to deserving neighbours, gives them instead to those who do not deserve them in the least; the end which is his who drinks wine, or insults those who are worthy of respect; or one who is ungrateful, or speaks ill of his brothers—let that end swiftly be mine if I do not kill Jayadratha!

I vow that I will immediately attain to the end of all the sinners whom I have mentioned, and also those whom I have not named, if after this night, I do not slay Jayadratha tomorrow.

And listen now to another oath of mine! If tomorrow's Sun sets without my killing that wretch, then even here will I enter a blazing fire and immolate myself! You Asuras, Devas and Manushas, you Pakshis and Nagas, you Pitris and all you Rakshasas, you Maharishis and Devarishis, O all you mobile and immobile creatures—not all of you together will succeed in protecting my enemy from me tomorrow! Even if he enters the Patalas, or rises into Akasa, or runs to the Devas in Swarga, or to the realms of the Daityas, upon the expiration of this night, I will yet with a hundred arrows, sever the head of Abhimanyu's enemy!"

Having said this, Arjuna begins to stretch the Gandiva mightily with both his arms. Echoing beyond Arjuna's voice the sound of the great bow rises and touches the very heavens. After Arjuna swears his oath, Krishna, filled with wrath, blows his conch the Panchajanya, while Arjuna blows the Devadatta. At the reverberant booming of the great Panchajanya, the rulers of the cardinal and the subsidiary points, the nether regions, why, the Lords of the whole universe tremble, as if it is the end of the Yuga. After Arjuna

Mahatman has sworn his solemn oath, the sound of thousands of musical instruments and lionish warriors' roars arise from the Pandava camp.'"

CANTO 71

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana's spies quickly come to inform their masters of the cause of the great uproar raised by the Pandavas. Jayadratha is overwhelmed by terror, and feels as if he is sinking in a vortex of black despair. He sits plunged in thought for a time, numb, then slowly rises and comes into the assembly of the Dhartarashtra kings. He stands mute for a while in that conclave of those gods among men, and then breathes, "He whom Indra sired in Pandu's soil has sworn to send me to Yamaloka tomorrow! May fortune smile on you, I will return to my home for I have no wish to die. O Kshatriyarishabhas, protect me with your weapons, for Arjuna seeks to kill me. Make me fearless! Drona, Duryodhana, Kripa, Karna, Salya, Balhika, Dusasana and all you others can protect a man from Yama himself. When Phalguna alone threatens me, will these the lords of the earth not join together and protect me?

Great is my fear after hearing the Pandavas shouting loud in joy. My limbs, Bhumipalas, have turned weak like a dying man's. The Gandeevi has sworn to kill me. And that is why the Pandavas are roaring in joy at a time when they should weep! Let alone the rulers of men, the very Devas, Gandharvas, the Asuras, the Uragas and the Rakshasas cannot thwart

Arjuna when he has sworn to kill me. And so, you bulls among men, blessed be you, give me leave to depart the Kuru camp for I have no wish to die. Even Arjuna cannot take my life if he does not find me here!"

Thus does the terrified Jayadratha babble in fear, but Duryodhana, always looking to achieve his own ends over everything else, says, "Do not fear, Naravyaghra! Who will dare seek to kill you when you are in the midst of all these Kshatriya tigers? Vikartana's son, Karna, Chitrasena, Vivimsati, Bhurisravas, Sala, Salya, the invincible Vrishasena, Purumitra, Jaya, Bhoja, Sudakshina of the Kambojas, Satyavrata, the Mahabaho Vikarna, Durmukha, Dusasana, Subahu of the Kalingas, and I myself, with weapons raised, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, Drona, Drona's son, and Subala's son Sakuni—all these and many other kings, with their armies, will protect you on all sides. Let the fever of fear in your heart be dispelled.

You are yourself one of the greatest maharathas. O splendid Jayadratha, you are a shura, a magnificent hero. And being what you are, how can you see any cause for fear? My own eleven akshauhinis will fight just to protect you tomorrow. O king of the Sindhus, let your fears be dispelled!"

Comforted somewhat by your son, the king of the Sindhus, along with Duryodhana, goes then to meet Drona, the senapati of the Kuru army. Touching Drona's feet with reverence and taking his seat with humility, Jayadratha earnestly asks the Acharya, "Illustrious one, tell me the difference between Arjuna and myself in striking a target from a distance, in the firmness of our grips, and the force of shooting our arrows. O Acharya, I want to know accurately the difference as bowmen between Arjuna and myself! I beg you, tell me this truthfully, for only you can."

Drona says, "O son I have given both Arjuna and you the same measure of instruction. However, through yoga and because of the hard life that Arjuna has led, he is superior to you. But for no reason should you be afraid of Partha. For have no doubt that I will protect you from what you fear. The very Devas cannot prevail over him whom my arms protect. Tomorrow I will form a vyuha that Partha will not succeed in piercing!

So have no fear and observe your swadharma. O maharatha, walk in the path of your fathers and grandfathers. Having studied the Vedas, you have poured libations, according to the laws, into fire. You have performed many yagnas. Death cannot be an object of terror for you. For if you die, you will acquire the great good fortune which evil men cannot attain and you will

gain all those felicitous regions in heaven that only the might of arms can bestow!

The Kauravas, the Pandavas, the Vrishnis and other men, and also my son and I, are all mortal and short-lived. Think of this. One after another, all of us, killed by Kaala which is all powerful, will go to the other world, carrying only our deeds with us—the same regions that munis acquire through severe penances and heroic Kshatriyas who observe their swadharma."

Thus, Bharadwaja's son consoles the king of the Sindhus. Banishing his fear of Partha, he sets his heart on the battle to follow. Then, Rajan, your troops also feel great delight and one hears the loud sounds of musical instruments, mingled with lusty roars."'

CANTO 72

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After Partha vows to kill Jayadratha, Krishna says to Arjuna, "With only your brother's consent and without consulting me, you have sworn to kill the Saindhava. You have been rash to swear this oath and taken a great burden upon yourself. Alas, how will we escape the ridicule of all men? I sent some spies into Duryodhana's camp and my men report that after you vowed to kill the king of the Sindhus, the Dhartarashtras heard our loud roaring, mingled with the sounds of our musical instruments. This terrified them and their well-wishers, and they thought these tigerish shouts could not be without good reason and waited to see what would ensue.

O Mahabaho, a clamour has arisen among the Kauravas, their elephants, horses and foot-soldiers; and we hear the terrible rattle of their chariots. After hearing of the death of Abhimanyu, they fear that you, Arjuna, will set out in the very night, raging for battle!

The Kaurava king waits ready for battle. While preparing themselves, O you of eyes like lotus-petals, they learnt of the vow that you swore to kill Jayadratha. All Duryodhana's counsellors became faint-hearted and frightened like little animals. Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus and the

Sauviras, was overwhelmed by fear and hastily called his closest advisors for a consultation.

After consulting them, he went to the assembly of the allied kings and there said to Duryodhana, "Arjuna thinks of me as his son's killer and will challenge me to battle tomorrow. In the midst of his army, he has sworn to kill me. The very Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Uragas and Rakshasas cannot frustrate Arjuna's solemn vow. So protect me. Do not let Dhananjaya set his foot on your head, and find his mark, which is my life! Make every arrangement to safeguard me; otherwise, if you think you cannot save me from Arjuna on the field, give me leave to return to my kingdom."

Seeing Jayadratha so terrified, an unhappy Duryodhana sat with his head hung down and reflecting in silence. Seeing the Kuru king distraught, Jayadratha slowly says, "I do not see any archer here who can match Arjuna in war. Who, even if it were Satakratu himself, can stand against Arjuna who has Krishna for his sarathy, and wields the Gandiva? I hear that Partha fought Lord Maheswara himself once on the mountains of Himavat. At Indra's behest, from a single chariot he slew a thousand Danavas of Hiranyapura.

And now that the clever Vasudeva is his ally, I feel certain that Arjuna can destroy the three worlds including their very gods. I beseech you that you either grant me permission to leave Kurukshetra or ensure that the high-souled and heroic Drona with his son will assuredly protect me. I await your pleasure."

O Arjuna, hearing Jayadratha's pitiful plea, Duryodhana also added his voice to humbly beseech Drona to protect the Saindhava. And they have indeed taken every measure in their power to protect Jayadratha. They have deployed all their chariots and cavalry. Karna, Bhurisravas, Drona's son Aswatthaman, the invincible Vrishasena, Kripa, and Salya of the Madras—these six will be in Jayadratha's van. Drona will form a vyuha half of which will be a Sakata, a cart, and half a Padma, a lotus. In the midst of the leaves of that lotus will be a needle-mouthed formation, a suchimukha vyuha. At the eye of the needle, Jayadratha will take his stand, protected by those six greatest Kuru maharathas!

In the use of the bow, and every other weapon, in the ability to kill their enemies, in sheer prowess, and also in lineage, these six maharathas are

well nigh without equal. Without first vanquishing these six, you will not be able to reach Jayadratha.

Think, O Arjuna, of the individual prowess of each of the six. When united they cannot be vanquished easily, if at all! And so, for our benefit and our success, we should once again take counsel with our well-wishers, who are familiar with strategy!'"

CANTO 73

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Arjuna says, 'The prowess of the six maharathas of Dhritarashtra's army whose united might you think so highly of, I believe is not equal to even half of mine! You will see, O Madhusudana, how I destroy their weapons and render them impotent, when I confront them on my way to kill Jayadratha! In the very sight of Drona and all his men, I will behead the king of the Sindhus, and Duryodhana's whole army will weep and lament.

Even if the Siddhas, the Rudras, the Vasus, with the Aswins, the Maruts, with Indra at their head, the Viswadevas with the other Gods, the Pitris, the Gandharvas, Garuda, the Ocean, the Mountains, the Firmament, Heaven, Earth, the cardinal and subsidiary points of the compass and the regents of those points, all the beasts that are domestic and all that are wild, in fact if all the mobile and the unmoving beings together become the protectors of Jayadratha, O Krishna, you will see me kill him tomorrow with my arrows! I swear by Truth; I touch my weapons and swear by them that I will, at the very outset, face the mighty Drona, who has become the protector of the sinner Jayadratha. Duryodhana believes that this game of war hinges upon

Drona. And even so, hewing my way through the very van that Drona himself commands, I will strike at Jayadratha!

Tomorrow you will see the great Acharya blown away by my arrows like the summits of a hill struck by thunder. Blood will flow in rills from the breasts of fallen men, elephants and horses, eviscerated by my showers of shafts falling heavily upon them. The astras shot from the Gandiva, fleet as the mind or the wind, will claim the lives of thousands upon thousands of men, elephants and steeds.

In tomorrow's battle, all men shall see the awesome astras that I have acquired from Yama, Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Rudra. You will witness how my Brahmastra nullifies the weapons of all those who come to protect Jayadratha.

O Krishna, tomorrow you will see the Earth strewn with the heads of kings cut off cleanly by my shafts! Tomorrow I will gratify all the thirst and hunger of all the ravening Rakshasas that stalk Kurukshetra. I will mow down the enemy and gladden my friends, and finally I will cut the head of the ruler of the Sindhus from his throat.

He is a vile and heinous sinner; he has not behaved like a relative; he is born in a sinful country and when I kill him, it will plunge dark grief through all that are his own. Krishna, tomorrow you will see the wretched Jayadratha, who was raised in every luxury, die from my inexorable arrows!

Tomorrow, Krishna, I will do that which will make Duryodhana believe that there is no bowman in the world who is Arjuna's equal. My Gandiva is a celestial bow. I, Arjuna, am the warrior. You, O Hrishikesa, are the charioteer. What can come between me and my prey, who is there that I cannot vanquish? Through your grace, O Holy one, what is there that I cannot achieve in battle? Knowing well that my power is irresistible, why, O Krishna, do you still rebuke me?

As Lakshmi is ever present in Soma, as water is ever present in the ocean, know, O Janardana, that I always accomplish what I have sworn to do. Do not think lightly of my weapons. Do not think lightly of my great bow. Do not think lightly of the might of my arms. Do not think lightly of your Dhananjaya. I will go into battle in such heart that I shall not lose but surely prevail. When I have vowed it, know that Jayadratha has already been slain. Truly, in the Brahmana is truth; in men of dharma is humility; in yagna is prosperity, and always in Narayana is victory!"

Having said these words to Krishna, having said all this to himself, as well, in a deep voice Arjuna once more addresses the Lord Kesava, saying, “Krishna, yet the task before us is grave and not easy, and you must prepare our chariot by the hour of dawn. We must ride forth at break of day and conquer!”’

CANTO 74

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Stricken with sorrow and frequently sighing like two snakes, Krishna and Arjuna both get no sleep that night. Realising that Nara and Narayana are in wrath, the Devas along with Vasava grow anxious and think, "What will come of this?"

Fierce dry winds, foreboding danger, begin to blow, howling, and a headless trunk and a mace appear on the disc of the sun. And although the sky is cloudless, there are frequent peals of thunder, and flashes of lightning. The earth with her mountains, rivers and forests, shake; and the seas, the habitation of makaras, swell in agitation and crash against their shores. And the rivers flow back towards their sources, opposite to their normal course. The lips of chariot-warriors, horses, men and elephants, begin to tremble unaccountably. The animals on the field began to spray urine and dung and utter loud cries, to the delight of Rakshasas and pisachas, and foretelling a great exodus of men to the domain of Yama. Seeing these omens that make the hair stand on end, and hearing of the fierce vow of mighty Arjuna, all your warriors, Bharatarishabha, are desperately agitated.

Arjuna, the mighty-armed son of Indra, says to Krishna, “O Madhava, go and comfort your sister Subhadra, her daughter-in-law Uttaraa and her companions. Speak soothing words to her, words of deep truth and solace.”

Krishna reluctantly makes his way to Arjuna’s tent, and begins to console his sister grieving at the death of her son. Krishna says, “O you of Vrishni’s vamsa, do not grieve, you and Uttaraa, for your son. All creatures have but one end ordained by Time. The end your son has met is the most desirable one for any Kshatriya of proud lineage. Do not grieve, for by good fortune your maharatha of great intelligence, of prowess equal to that of his father, has met with an end that all Kshatriyas covet.

After vanquishing numberless enemies and sending them to Yama’s land, he himself has gone to the eternal realms of men of dharma, worlds that grant the realisation of every wish. Your son has attained the end which men of dharma attain only through tapasya, brahm, knowledge of the shastras and gyana. The mother, the wife, the daughter and a kinsman of such Kshatriyas, O Subhadra, do not grieve for a son who has obtained the supreme end.

The evil king of the Sindhus, my beautiful sister, the murderer of a child, will, with all his friends and kinsmen, find the fruit of his arrogance before the end of this day. Even if he enters Indra’s domain he will not escape Arjuna. Tomorrow you will hear that his head has been cut from his neck to roll dismally on the hem of Samantapanchaka!

Abandon your sorrow and do not grieve, for your valiant son has attained the end that men of dharma who observe the svadharma of a Kshatriya fervently wish for. Your splendid, magnificent Abhimanyu has attained swarga. Drive away this fever of sorrow. Comfort your daughter-in-law, O queen, that, obedient to his fathers and his mother’s kinsmen, the heroic Abhimanyu has slain thousands upon thousands of his enemies before dying a great Kshatriya’s death in the field of war. Do not grieve too much, O Kshatriya woman!

Drive away your grief, gentle Subhadra, for tomorrow will bring great tidings. Arjuna will accomplish what he has sworn to do. It cannot be otherwise, for your husband never fails to do as he has sworn. Even if all Manavas, Nagas, Pisachas, Rakshasas, great Avians, and all the Devas and the Asuras come to help the king of the Sindhus, Jayadratha will still die tomorrow.”””

CANTO 75

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'But Subhadra cannot control her terrible grief and wails, "Oh, my son, of prowess equal to your father, O my child, how could you die? Alas, how does your face like a blue lotus, with its perfect teeth and brilliant eyes, look now covered over with battle's dust?

You were so entirely brave, your head so handsome, your neck, arms, your deep chest, your low flat belly, your splendid limbs decked with ornaments, your beautiful sparkling eyes! All creatures looked upon you as the rising moon, and now you have been mutilated, my perfect child, and fallen on the yawning field of death. Alas, your bed was always overlaid with the whitest and costliest sheets; you who deserved every luxury, how do you sleep today on the bare earth, your body mangled with arrows?

The mighty Kshatriya, whom the most beautiful women waited on, has now fallen on the field, to pass his time in the company of jackals! He whom vabdhis and magadhis daily hymned at dawn is today greeted by the savage cries and growls of Rakshasas and beasts of prey.

O my precious son, who killed you, and how, when you had the Pandavas and all the Panchalas for your protectors? Oh my son, O sinless one, I am not yet satisfied with looking at you. Wretched as I am, it is plain

that I will have to go to Yama's realm now for my eyes have not seen enough of you. When will I cast my gaze again on your face with its lotus-like eyes and shining locks, the smooth radiant face from which endearing words and the most delicate fragrance constantly issued?

Fie on the strength of Bhimasena, on the archery of Partha, on the prowess of the Vrishni heroes and the might of the Panchalas! Shame on the Kaikeyas, the Chedis, the Matsyas and the Srinjayas, who could not protect you, O my shuravira! I see the Earth as being empty and hollow today, and made of just sorrow and despair. My eyes hurt and stream tears that they do not see my Abhimanyu. You were Krishna's sister's son, the son of the wielder of Gandiva, and yourself an incomparable hero and an atiratha. Alas, how will I look at you dead!

O Kshatriya, to me you were like a treasure that is briefly won and lost in a dream. Oh, everything human is as fleeting as a bubble of water on this river of time. Your young wife is overwhelmed by grief at the evil that has befallen you. And how will I, who am like a cow without her calf, comfort her? O my sweet prince, you have so untimely fled from me, even as your greatness was about to flower and bear wondrous fruit. Oh my son, can you see how my heart is breaking over and over for just a glimpse of your face! Ah, there is no doubt that not the wisest can fathom the inexorable ways of Death, since despite having Krishna for your protector you were killed as if you were quite helpless.

O son, let that end be yours which is theirs that perform yagnas, who are Brahmanas of purified souls, those who have practised brahmacharya, have bathed in all the sacred tirthas, who are grateful and charitable and devoted to the service of their gurus, and those who have given sacrificial dakshina in profusion. The end that is theirs who are intrepid and fearless in battle, or theirs who have fallen most heroically in war, after slaying their enemies—O my Abhimanyu, let that end be yours!

The auspicious end which is theirs who have given away a thousand cows, or theirs who have given lavish dana in yagnas, or theirs who give away houses and mansions, the end which is theirs who give away gems and jewels to deserving Brahmanas, or theirs who are punishers of crime—O, let that end be yours.

The end that Munis of rigid vows attain through brahmacharya, or that which women who remain faithful to one husband, attain—O son, let that end be yours.

The eternal end which kings get by their good deeds, or by those men who have cleansed themselves by leading all the four varnasramas one after another, and by duly observing their dharma, the end of men who are compassionate to the poor and the distressed, or those who equitably divide sweets among themselves and their dependants, or those who are never given to deceit and evil—O my son, let that end be yours!

O child, the end of those who observe chaste vows, or who are virtuous, devoted to the service of their gurus, or those who have never sent away a guest without entertaining them—let that end be yours.

O son, let the end of those who succeed in adversity and of those who have the most difficult trait of preserving the equanimity of their souls, however much they are burnt by the fires of grief, let that end be yours.

O son, let that end be yours which is theirs who are always devoted to the service of their fathers and mothers, or theirs who are exclusively devoted to their own wives.

O son, let that end be yours which those wise men attain who restrain themselves from the wives of others and seek the companionship of only their own wives in season.

O son, let that end be yours which is theirs that look upon all creatures with an eye of peace, or theirs that never give pain to others, or theirs that always forgive.

O son, let that end be yours which is theirs who abstain from honey, meat, wine, pride and falsehood.

Let that goal be yours which they attain who are modest, acquainted with all the shastras, content with knowledge, and have their passions under control."

While the stricken Subhadra thus laments, wildly, Draupadi accompanied by Virata's daughter Uttaraa, comes to her. All of them, in great sorrow, weep copiously and indulge in heart-rending expressions of grief. Quite lost to reason through sorrow, they faint and fall onto the earth. Then Krishna the lotus-eyed one, who stands ready with water, himself deeply affected, sprinkles water over his weeping, unconscious and trembling sister, pierced through her very heart. When she comes to her senses, he attempts to comfort her again, and the others as well.

"Grieve not, Subhadra! O Panchali, console Uttaraa! Abhimanyu, bull among Kshatriyas, has found the most laudable end for himself. O Sumukhi, you of the beautiful face, may all the other men yet alive in our

race obtain the end which Abhimanyu of great fame has. We, with all our friends, together only wish to achieve in this war the feats which your son, the atiratha, achieved by himself! So do not grieve for that hero with no remote equal."

Finally, having somewhat consoled his sister, and Draupadi and Uttaraa, through his presence and grace as much as by what he says, Krishna, returns to Arjuna. Saluting the kings, friends and Arjuna himself, Kesava enters the inner apartments of Arjuna's palatial tent while the other kings return to their own tents.'"

CANTO 76

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Lord Kesava, of eyes like lotus petals, enters the sprawling tent, Arjuna's unrivalled mansion on Kurukshetra; he touches water, and lays out on the auspicious and even floor for Arjuna an excellent bed of kusa grasses, which are the colour of lapis lazuli. And arranging his majestic weapons around the bed, duly adorns it with garlands of flowers, fried paddy, perfumes and other auspicious things. After Partha also touches water, gentle and attentive attendants bring the nightly yagna offerings for the three-eyed Lord Mahadeva. With a serene soul, Arjuna smears Krishna with perfumes and offers him the sacred nightly offering adorned with flowers.

With a faint smile, Govinda says to Arjuna, "Bless you, Partha, lie down and sleep. I will leave you now."

Seeing that doorkeepers and well-armed guards are in their places, Krishna, followed by Daruka his charioteer, goes to his own tent. There the illustrious one of eyes like lotus petals lies on his white bed and thinks of different ways to dispel Partha's grief and anxiety and enhance his confidence and greatness. Then he, the Supreme Lord of all, Vishnu of

universal fame, who always does what is for Arjuna's weal, immerses himself in yoga and dhyana.

Everyone else in the Pandava camp, Rajan, is awake, thinking, "Burning with grief at the death of his son, the Gandivi has swiftly vowed to kill the Saindhava. But how will Arjuna Parantapa accomplish his rash vow? He has sworn a difficult oath, for Jayadratha is invested with great prowess and great protection too. Oh, may Arjuna succeed in fulfilling his dire vow that he swore while he was in the grip of searing grief!

The sons of Dhritarashtra are all mighty warriors and their forces are countless. Duryodhana has assigned all of them to be just Jayadratha's protectors tomorrow. Oh, let Dhananjaya return to our encampment tomorrow after slaying the king of the Sindhus. Let him fulfil his vow. If he fails, he will surely enter the fire and immolate himself, for he never swears a false oath. If Arjuna dies, how will Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, who has reposed all his hopes of victory in Arjuna, succeed in recovering his kingdom? If we have all acquired any punya, if we have ever poured libations of ghrita into fire, let Savyasachin benefit from our punya and vanquish all his enemies!"

Speaking thus amongst themselves, and deeply anxious for the morrow, the Pandava warriors pass that long night.

In the heart of the night, Krishna awakes, remembers Arjuna's vow, and says softly, but in a terrible voice, to his charioteer, "Daruka, grief-stricken at his son's death, Arjuna has vowed, that before tomorrow's sun sets he will kill Jayadratha or take his own life. Hearing this, Duryodhana will surely take counsel with his advisors about how Partha can be prevented from fulfilling his vow. His several akshauhinis will all protect Jayadratha. Drona, too, with his son Aswatthaman, will stand watch over the Saindhava. And even Indra himself, the thousand-eyed scourge of the pride of the Daityas and Danavas, will hardly be able to kill one whom great Drona protects. And if Arjuna does not do as he has sworn he must take his own life. I mean to help Kunti's son to kill Jayadratha before the sun sets.

My wives, my kinsmen, my relatives, none among these are dearer to me than Arjuna. Daruka, I will not be able to look upon an Earth without Arjuna in it for even a single moment. I say to you, the Earth shall not be without Arjuna for I will raze them all, with their horses and elephants, by putting forth my might for Partha's sake. I will kill them all along with Karna and Duryodhana. Tomorrow let the three worlds witness my prowess

when I join the fray for Arjuna’s sake, and thousands of kings and hundreds of princes, with their horses, chariots and elephants, flee the battle or die from fear of me.

Daruka, you will see my wrath for I will decimate the army of kings, and the three worlds with the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Nagas and the Rakshasas, will know me as a true friend of Savyasachin. Those who hate him hate me. Those who follow him, follow me. You are intelligent, Daruka, so know that Arjuna is half of myself.

When morning comes after this night ends, you, Daruka, must equip my chariot with the Kaumodaki, my Sudarshana Chakra, my Saringa and my astras, and everything else I might need, and then you must follow me discreetly into battle. O Suta, make room upon my chariot for my standard and for heroic Garuda thereon, who adorns my chatra. Yoke my horses Balahaka, Meghapushpa, Saibya and Sugriva, after having them cased in golden mail of the splendour of the Sun and Fire; and then put on your own armour and remain in the chariot vigilantly waiting.

When you hear the blast of my Panchajanya blowing the shrill Rishabha note, fly to me. In a single day, Daruka, I will dispel the wrath and the many sorrows of my cousin, the son of my aunt. I will do everything in my power to see that Arjuna kills Jayadratha in the very sight of the Dhartarashtras. Why, Daruka, I say to you that I will ensure that Dhananjaya will surely kill everyone he wants to.”

Daruka says, “He, whose charioteer, O Naravyaghra, you become is certain to be victorious. Indeed, from where can defeat come to him? As for myself, I will do as you have commanded. This night will bring in its wake an auspicious morning for Arjuna’s triumph and glory.’”’

CANTO 77

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Kunti's son, Dhananjaya of inconceivable prowess, also lies thinking of ways to accomplish his vow. He recollects the mantras Vyasa had taught him and chanting them silently is soon lulled into sleep. To the Kshatriya of the Hanuman banner, his heart burning with grief even in slumber, Krishna of the Garuda banner appears in a dream. Arjuna Dharmatma always rises and advances a few steps to greet Krishna in bhakti whenever he sees him. And now in his dream as well he rises and offers Govinda a seat, while he keeps standing himself.

Krishna Mahatejasvin says to Kunti's son, "Let not your heart grieve, O Partha. Time is immutable and it forces all creatures into its inevitable course. Greatest of men, why do you grieve? Grief should never be indulged in, for it is an impediment to action. Fulfil your karma; accomplish what you have sworn to do. Dhananjaya, the grief that makes a man abandon all effort is an enemy of the warrior. By giving in to sorrow, a Kshatriya pleases his enemies and saddens his friends, while he himself is weakened. It does not become you to grieve."

The unvanquished Vijaya of deep learning says, "Grave is the vow that I have sworn, to kill Jayadratha. And tomorrow I will slay the evil one, my

son's murderer. This is my solemn vow, Kesava! To frustrate me, the Dhartarashtras will keep Jayadratha at their rear, protected by all their maharathas.

Their army consists of the remnants of eleven akshauhinis of troops, still difficult to vanquish. Surrounded as he will be by all of them and by all their great maharathas besides, how will we even catch a glimpse of the vile Saindhava? O Krishna, I may not be able to fulfil my oath! And if I fail, how can I continue to live, Kesava? Ah, I fear that I will not succeed in keeping the impossible vow that I have sworn, demented as I was by Abhimanyu's death. And this is what makes me grieve.

Besides, at this time of the year, Krishna, the Sun sets early!"

Hearing this, the cause of Arjuna's grief and anxiety, Krishna gently touches water with his fingers and sits with his face turned to the east. The lotus-leaf-eyed One says to his cousin who has sworn to kill Jayadratha the next day, "Partha, there is an inexorable, supreme astra called the Pasupata. With it, the Lord Maheswara once slew all the Daityas! If you meditate upon that final weapon now, you will be able to kill Jayadratha tomorrow. If you do not know that Pasupatastra, worship Maheswara, who has the Bull for his mark. Think of the Mahadeva in your heart and fix your mind on him in dhyana, Arjuna. You are his devotee and through his grace, you will have that invaluable weapon."

Hearing Krishna's words, Arjuna now touches water and sits on the ground in deep dhyana, his thought fixed on the Lord Bhava. It is the auspicious Brahmamuhurta when Arjuna meditates on Siva. Arjuna sees himself journeying through the sky with Krishna, and travelling with the speed of the mind to the sacred foot of Himavat and the Manimat mountain replete with many brilliant gemstones, Manimat frequented by Siddhas and Charanas.

Krishna seems to hold his left arm as they course along, and Arjuna sees many wonderful sights there. Dharmatma Arjuna then finds himself at the White mountain of the north, Sweta, where, in the pleasure-gardens of Kubera, he sees the crystalline exquisite lake, the Bindusaras festooned with lotuses. He also sees the Ganga, greatest of rivers, brimful of pellucid water. Flying on, he arrives at the Mandara mountains covered with unearthly and awesome trees that are always laden with flowers and fruit.

Fine stones lie strewn everywhere in this place; all of them are the finest lucent crystals. Lions, tigers and diverse animals abound here, some truly

exotic and found nowhere else, as do auspicious asramas of Munis, which echo with the sweet songs of brightly plumed birds, and also the transcendent songs of Kinnaras. Many golden and silver peaks grace this wondrous realm, and different magical herbs and plants illumine it; and Mandara trees with their gorgeous loads of flowers.

Then Arjuna comes to the mountain called Kala that looks like a great mound of antimony, and its summit Brahmatunga, and flying on, comes to many sparkling rivers and peopled realms, inhabited by men as well as unearthly beings. He comes to Satasringa, and the vana called Sharyati and sees the sacred Horse-head, the realm of Atharvana. He sees that prince of mountains called Vrishadansa, and the great Mandara, graced by Apsaras and Kinnaras.

Wandering on that mountain, Arjuna and Krishna see a place where exquisite fountains plash, a place shimmering with the rarest gold of the gods, lambent like the Moon, and with many shining cities and towns. In this fabulous zone of dreams, he also comes upon uncanny seas of marvellous shapes and diverse mines of untold wealth. And going through the sky, and over the earth, he arrives at the place known as Vishnupada. Like an arrow shot from a bow does Arjuna fly through the vaults of these skies of dream, with Krishna beside him, while below them indescribable landscapes unfold.

Soon Partha sees a mountain whose splendour equals that of the stars, the constellations, or fire. And at the summit of this lone and towering massif, he sees the Great God whose mount and emblem is the Bull. Arjuna sees Lord Siva who is always at tapasya, Mahadeva whose lustre is like that of a thousand suns fused, ah, ablaze with his own effulgence. Siva sits with trident in hand, matted jata upon his awesome head, his complexion white as snow or moonbeams, and wearing bark and deerskin.

Of tejas past telling, Maheswara's body seems to be alight with a thousand mystic eyes. He is seated with Parvati, with many creatures of fantastic and brilliant forms around him, his ganas, while his attendants sing and play musical instruments, full of joy, laughing and dancing in bliss, moving about and stretching their arms as if in waking trance, and often shouting aloud in primeval ecstasy. Divine fragrances perfume that place, and Rishis who worship the Brahman, worship Siva here with exceptional hymns of unfading glory—the God who is the Pasupati, the Lord and Protector of all creatures, who wields the great bow called the Pinaka.

Seeing Rudra, Krishna Mahatman and Arjuna prostrate and touch the earth with their heads, uttering the eternal words of the Veda. Krishna worships with speech, thought, intellect, and by what he does, the God who is the first source of the universe, himself uncreated, the Supreme Lord of unfading glory, who is the highest cause of the mind, who is Akasa and Vayu, who is the cause of all the luminous bodies in the universe, who is the cause of rain, and the Supreme, Primordial Essence of the Earth, who is the object of the adoration of the Devas, the Danavas, the Yakshas, and Manushas; who is the supreme Brahman that Yogins see and the refuge of those who know the Shastras, who is the Creator of all mobile and unmoving creatures and their Destroyer too; who is the Wrath that burns everything at the end of the Yuga; who is the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul; who is Sakra and Surya, and the origin of all the gunas.

Krishna seeks the protection of that Bhava, whom men of knowledge, wanting to attain to that which is called the sukshma and the adhyatma, seek; that Uncreated One who is the Soul of all causes. Arjuna also repeatedly worships the Great God, knowing that He is the Origin of all beings, the Cause of the past, the future and the present.

Seeing those two, Nara and Narayana, arrive, Bhava Anandatman, He of blissful soul, smilingly says, "Welcome greatest of men! Arise and let the tiredness of your journey leave you. What, O heroes, do you wish for? Tell me quickly, what brings you here? I will grant everything you want and do everything that will benefit you besides."

At these words of Siva, Krishna and Arjuna rise and then, with joined hands, the immaculate twain, both of great wisdom, praise that noblest Deity with a most resonant and excellent hymn. Krishna and Arjuna say, "We bow to Bhava, to Sarva, to Rudra, to the boon-giving Siva. We bow to the Pasupati, Lord of all creatures endued with life, to the Deva who is Ugra, fierce, to Him who is called Kapardin!

We bow to Mahadeva, to Bhimasankara, to Tryambaka, to Him who is Satchitananda. We bow to Isana, to Him who is the destroyer of Daksha's yagna.

We salute the slayer of Andhaka, the father of Kumara, to He who is Nilakantha, and the First Creator.

Our salutations to the wielder of the Pinaka, to Him who is worthy of the offering of libations of ghrita, to Him who is Truth, to Him who is All-

pervading, to Him who is unvanquished, to Him who has luculent blue jata, to Him who is armed with the Trisula, to Him of celestial vision!

Our greetings to him who is Hotri, to Him who protects all, to Him who has three eyes, to Him who is disease, to Him whose hiranyaretas fell into Agni, to Him who is inconceivable, to him who is the Lord of Ambika, to Him who is adored by all the Devas!

Our salutations to Him who has the Bull for his mark, to Him who is bold, to Him who has matted dreadlocks, to Him who is a Brahmachari, to Him who stands as an ascetic in water, to him who is devoted to the Brahman, who is the Brahman, to Him who has never been conquered, to Him who is the Soul of the universe, to Him who is the Creator of the universe, to Him who lives pervading the whole universe!

We bow to You who are the object of the reverence of all, to You who are the Original Cause of all creatures, to You who are called Brahmachakra, to Sarva, Sankara, and Siva! We bow to You, the Lord of all great beings!

We bow to You who have a thousand heads, to You who have a thousand arms, to You who are called Death, to You who have a thousand eyes and a thousand feet, to You whose great deeds are innumerable!

We bow to You, Hiranyavarna, whose complexion is of gold, to You who are cased in golden kavacha, to You who are always compassionate to your devotees!

O Lord, let our wish be granted."

Having adored Mahadeva thus, Krishna and Arjuna then begin to further gratify Him to have the great Pasupatastra from the God of gods.'"

CANTO 78

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Partha, with a full soul and joined hands, his eyes wide with wonder, gazes at the God with the bull for his mount, He who is the home of all tejas. Partha sees the offerings that he makes every night to Krishna lying before the Three-eyed Deity. The son of Pandu worships both Krishna and Sarva in his heart, and says to Siva, "Lord, I wish to have the Pasupatastra from you."

Siva smilingly says to Vasudeva and Arjuna, "Welcome Purushottamas! I know what you want and the reason why you have come here. I will give you what you wish for. Parantapas, there is a lake full of amrita, not far from this place. In it, I left my celestial bow and astra, with which I once slew all the enemies of the Devas. Krishna, go and fetch that divine bow with the arrow fixed to it."

Hearing what Siva says, Vasudeva and Arjuna answer, "Tathaastu, so be it."

Accompanied by all the ganas of Siva, the two heroes set out for the unearthly lake replete with countless heavenly wonders, the sacred lake that can grant every object of desire. Reaching the lake, the Rishis Nara and Narayana, who are Arjuna and Krishna, go fearlessly up to the water bright

as the disc of the sun, and see within it a great and terrible snake and yet another enormous, which has a thousand heads, the effulgence of fire and spews flames from all its jaws. Krishna and Partha touch the water, join their hands together, and approach the snakes, bowing in their minds to the God Siva. As they approach, the amazing Nagas, who know the Vedas, chant the hundred hymns of the Veda that praise Lord Rudra, bowing all the while with their devout souls to Bhava of immeasurable power.

Then, all at once, from their worship of Siva, the two awesome serpents abandon their snake-forms and assume the shapes of an enemy-destroying bow and arrow! Gratefully, Krishna and Arjuna seize the bow and arrow of blinding refulgence and bring them back to the illustrious Mahadeva. Now, from one side of Siva's body a Brahmacharin of tawny eyes emerges, who seems to be the very refuge of asceticism. Of blue throat and red jata, he is invested with untold might. Taking up the great bow effortlessly, the Brahmacharin places his feet in alidha, the archer's stance, fixes the brilliant arrow to the bowstring, and begins to stretch the bow.

Watching the way the Brahmacharin stands, holds the bow and draws back the string, and listening to the mantras that Siva recites, Arjuna instantly masters what he watches and hears. The mighty Brahmacharin unleashes the arrow to the same lake from which it was brought and, with a cry, flings the bow into that lake. Arjuna remembers the boon that Siva granted him in the vana when He came as a Kirata; he recalls the Vision of Himself that Siva showed him in the vana and knows that Bhava is pleased with him. Silently, Arjuna prays, "May all this bear fruit."

Understanding this to be his wish, Bhava blesses him with power over the Pasupatastra and the accomplishment of his vow to kill Jayadratha.

Thus having again obtained the Pasupata from the Devadeva, the invincible Arjuna, his hair standing on end, regards his vow as being already fulfilled. Full of joy, Arjuna and Krishna worship Mahadeva by bowing their heads deeply. Then, permitted by Bhava, the two shuras instantly return to their camp on Kurukshetra, in a transport of delight. Their joy is as great as that of Indra and Vishnu when those two Gods, wanting to slay Jambha, had Siva's blessing to kill the great Asura.

All this, Rajan, transpires in Arjuna's dream and Krishna's dhyana.'"

CANTO 79

Abhimanyu-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Krishna and Daruka pass the night in conversation until day dawns. Paniswanikas, Magadhas, Madhuparkikas and Sutas come to sing Yudhishtira's praises, as they do daily, and greet him with music and dance, while sweet-voiced singers sing melodious songs of praise for the Kuru vamsa. Skilled musicians play on mridangas, jharjharas, bheris, panavas, anakas, gomukhas, adambaras, sankhas, loud dundubhis and diverse other instruments. All this joyous sound, deep as the roar of clouds, touches the very heavens and they awaken Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, who lies asleep on his luxurious bed, from his slumber.

The king rises from his bed and proceeds to perform his morning ablutions. A hundred and eight freshly bathed young servants, all attired in white, approach the king with many golden jars filled to the brim with the purest water. Sitting at his ease on a royal throne, wearing a thin cloth, the king bathes in several kinds of water made fragrant with sandalwood and purified with mantras. Strong and well-trained servants wash and rub his shining body with water soaked with diverse kinds of medicinal herbs. He then washes himself with adhivasha water rendered fragrant by various

exquisite scents. Yudhishtira ties a long cloth as white as the feathers of the swan, and kept loose before him, around his head to dry the water.

He smears his body with sandalwood-paste, drapes wildflower garlands around his majestic person, puts on clean clothes, and the Mahabaho sits facing the east, his hands joined together and silently says his morning prayers. Then with great humility, he enters the chamber in which the sacred fire is kept. He worships the agni by feeding it pieces of fine wood and with libations of ghee sanctified with mantras. He comes out and enters a second chamber, where many learned Brahmanas, all deep knowers of the Vedas, all self-restrained, purified by the study of the Vedas and by keeping vratas, are gathered after they have taken the ritual bath upon on the completion of the yagnas they have performed.

There are a thousand worshippers of the Sun, as well as eight thousand others of the same varna. The mighty-armed Yudhishtira presents them with honey, clarified butter, auspicious fruits of the best kind, a nishka of gold each, a hundred horses decked with ornaments, costly robes and other such gifts that they like, and in return receives their blessings in clear and distinguished voices. Yudhishtira also gives them gifts of cows that yield milk whenever touched, along with calves with their horns covered with gold and their hooves with silver; after which he circumambulates them in pradakshina. Now looking at and touching auspicious swastika symbols, which increase good fortune, nandyavartas made of gold, flower garlands, water-pots, the sacred fire, vessels full of sun-dried rice, other auspicious offerings, the yellow pigment prepared from the urine of the cow, auspicious and well-adorned virgins, curds, clarified butter, honey, auspicious birds and diverse other things held sacred, he finally comes into the outer chamber.

The attendants waiting in that chamber bring a wonderful round throne of gold, encrusted with pearls and lapis lazuli and overlaid with a priceless rug over which is spread another cloth of the finest loom. This seat is the handiwork of the Viswakarman himself. When the Dharmaraja takes his place, the servants bring him all his invaluable, bright ornaments, which Yudhishtira puts on; and his magnificence is such as to sharpen the envy of his enemies.

The servants fan him with white golden-handled yak-tails luminous like the Moon and Yudhishtira is resplendent like a mass of clouds charged with lightning. Bards begin to sing his praises and panegyrists utter his eulogies;

and other singers sing to the delighter of Kuru’s vamsa, and their voices swell harmoniously and resonantly.

We then hear the rumble of chariot-wheels and the drumming of horses’ hooves; and the noise mingles with the chiming of great elephants’ bells, the blare of conches and the tread of numberless men, and the very Earth seems to tremble. One of the guards in charge of the doors, sheathed in armour, youthful in years, wearing brilliant ear-rings, and with his sword strapped to his side, enters the private apartment, kneels on the ground and, bending his head, salutes the Dharmaraja who deserves all worship. The young guardsman announces that Hrishikesa is waiting to enter.

Yudhishtira orders his servitors, “Get ready an excellent throne and prepare an arghya for him.”

Krishna of Vrishni’s race is welcomed warmly and seated on the fine throne. Greeting Madhava with the customary enquiries of welcome, Yudhishtira worships Krishna fervently.’”

CANTO 80

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya continues, 'Then the royal son of Kunti asks Krishna, "Have you spent the night happily, Madhusudana? Are all your faculties clear, O you of unfading glory?"

Krishna makes similar enquiries of Yudhishtira. Then the guardsman comes again and says that the other Kshatriya warriors are waiting to be announced. Commanded by the king, the man announces a roll of heroes, which consists of Virata, Bhimasena, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Dhrishtaketu, the ruler of the Chedis, the Maharathas Drupada and Sikhandin, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, Chekitana, the king of the Kalikayas, Yuyutsu of Kuru's race, Uttamaujas of the Panchalas, Yudhamanyu, Subahu, and the five sons of Draupadi. These and many other Kshatriyas, approach Yudhsihtira Mahatman, that bull among Kshatriyas, and greeting him, sit down on the rich seats provided for them. Krishna and Satyaki sit together on the same wide throne.

Then in the hearing of them all, Yudhishtira addresses the lotus-eyed slayer of Madhu, and says humbly, "Relying on you alone, do we, like the Deva of a thousand eyes, seek victory in battle and eternal happiness. You are aware, O Krishna, of how we were deprived of our kingdom, of our

exile at the hands of the enemy, and our various sorrows in exile. O Lord of all, you who are compassionate to those who are devoted to you, the happiness and the very existence of all of us rest solely and entirely on you!

O you of Vrishni's vamsa, do that by which my heart will ever find its rest in you! Also do that, O Lord, by which Arjuna may fulfil his vow. Rescue us today from the sea of grief and rage that confronts us. Madhava, become today a ship for us who wish to cross the dreadful sea. The great maharatha who wants to kill the enemy in battle cannot do what his sarathy can, if the charioteer will exert himself subtly!

Janardana, you always save the Vrishnis from all danger and calamities, and you must save us from this looming distress! Sankhachakragadadhara, become a boat to rescue the sons of Pandu sunk in the fathomless Kuru-sagara.

I bow to you, O God of the lord of the gods, O you who are eternal, O supreme Destroyer, O Vishnu, O Jishnu, O Hari, O Krishna, O Vaikuntha, O best of friends! Narada described you as that ancient and best of Rishis called Narayana, who grants boons, who wields the Saranga, and who is the greatest of all Rishis. O Madhava, prove his words true!"

Krishna, most eloquent of all speakers, replies to Yudhishtira in a voice deep as that of clouds charged with rain, "In all the worlds, including Devaloka, there is no archer equal to Dhananjaya. Mahatejasvin, mahadhanurvan, of great prowess and untold genius, celebrated in battle, always fierce, Arjuna is the greatest of all men. Youthful in years, bull-necked and of long arms, he is endowed with measureless strength. His tread like a lion or a bull's, and divinely handsome he will kill all your enemies for you today.

As for myself, I will do what I can to help Arjuna consume the legions of Dhritarashtra's son like a great forest fire. This very day, Arjuna will despatch vile Jayadratha, sinner and murderer of Subhadra's son down the road from which no traveller returns. Today vultures, kites, ravening jackals and other carnivores will feed on the Saindhava's flesh. Yudhishtira, even if all the gods with Indra become his protectors today, Jayadratha will still leave this world for Yamaloka. And having slain the king of the Sindhus, Jishnu will return triumphantly to you in the evening. Dispel your grief and your heart's fever, Rajan, and be graced with calm and felicity."""

CANTO 81

ABHIMANYU-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'While Yudhishtira, Krishna and the others thus converse together, Arjuna enters the auspicious chamber to meet Bharatottama Yudhishtira and also his friends and well-wishers. Solemnly, reverently he salutes his king and brother. Rising, Yudhishtira greets Arjuna with great affection, embracing him and sniffing the top of his head, blessing him warmly.

Smiling, Yudhishtira says, "Judging by your bright and cheerful countenance and from the fact that Krishna is well pleased with you, Arjuna, it is plain that complete and absolute victory awaits you in battle today!"

Now Arjuna says, "Be you blessed, Rajan, through Kesava's grace I have seen something entirely marvellous in the night."

To reassure his brothers and friends, Arjuna relates his dream of the night, and everything about his meeting with the three-eyed Lord Siva. All that listen are filled with amazement; they bend down and touch the earth with their heads to worship Mahadeva whose emblem is the Bull, and cry, "Uttamam! Wonderful!"

Then, at the command of the Dharmaputra, their hearts filled with fury against the enemy the Pandava warriors set out towards the battlefield. Saluting the king, Satyaki, Krishna and Arjuna, set out from Yudhishtira's tent; and Arjuna and Krishna ride together on the same chariot to Arjuna's tent. Arriving, Hrishikesa, like a professional charioteer, begins to prepare Arjuna's ratha, which flies the mark of the prince of the Vanaras. The wonderful chariot with the radiance of molten gold, whose rumble is like the deep roar of thunderheads, shines like the morning sun. Soon enough, Krishna, now wearing armour, comes to inform Partha, who has finished his morning prayers, that his chariot is ready. Arjuna Kiritin, clad in golden mail, his bow and magical quivers in hand, circumambulates the chariot in grave pradakshina.

Now his Brahmanas, mature in tapasya, gyana and years, always engaged in the performance of pujas and yagnas, with passions ever restrained, adore and bless Arjuna. He climbs into his great ratha, which has already been sanctified with mantras to give him victory in battle; he mounts his chariot like Surya Deva ascending the Eastern mountain. Arjuna, the greatest of all maharathas, is truly like the blazing Sun God upon the breast of Meru.

Arjuna, Satyaki and Krishna mount the chariot, like the twin Aswins riding the same chariot with Indra when they attended Saryati's yagna. Govinda, greatest of maharathas, takes the horses' reins even like Matali took the reins of Indra's steeds when he rode to slay Vritra. Mounted on that best of chariots with his two friends, Partha rides out to kill the king of the Sindhus; he goes forth like Soma rising into the sky with Budha and Sukra, to destroy the darkness of night, or like Indra going forth with Varuna and Surya to the great battle against the Asuras when the Daityas abducted Brihaspati's wife Tara.

Bards and musicians sing the praises of heroic Arjuna, as he rides forth to the sound of musical instruments and auspicious hymns of good omen. The sonorous voices of the vabdhis and magadhis uttering resonant blessings for victory and wishing for a triumphant day, mingling with the sounds of the musical instruments, are deeply gratifying to those Kshatriyas. An auspicious and fragrant breeze blows from behind Partha, vitalising him and enervating his enemies. And many propitious omens of various kinds appear, indicating victory for the Pandavas and defeat for your warriors!

Seeing these portents of victory, Arjuna says to the great archer Satyaki, now in his own chariot on the right, “Yuyudhana! Look at all the auspicious omens around us. I will surely have victory today, O bull of Sini’s vamsa. I will ride straight to where Jayadratha waits, fully expecting me to send him to Yamaloka. Satyaki, today it is as much your duty to protect Yudhishtira from Drona as it is mine to ride out and kill the Saindhava. You must guard him as I myself would. I do not see anyone in the world who can vanquish you, for you are Krishna’s equal in battle. The king of the Devas himself cannot defeat you. Reposing this burden on you, and on maharatha Pradyumna, I can hunt Jayadratha down with no anxiety shadowing my heart.

O Satwata, dearest friend, have no fear for me. You must wholeheartedly protect the king. Where this Krishna Mahabaho is, and where I am, together, not the slightest danger can ever befall either him or me.”

Satyaki, the Parantapa replies, “Tathaastu!” He then rides to where Yudhishtira is.’”

CANTO 82

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA

"Dhritarashtra says, 'On the day after Abhimanyu was killed, what did the grief-stricken Pandavas do? Who among my warriors gave them battle? Knowing, as they did, the awesome prowess Arjuna, tell me how the Kauravas, having committed such a heinous crime, could remain unafraid? How could they venture even to look at him as Arjuna Naravyaghra advanced upon them like all-destroying Death himself in fury, burning with grief at the murder of his son? Seeing the maharatha with the image of Hanuman on his banner, grieving for his dead son and brandishing his awesome bow, what did my warriors do? What, O Sanjaya, has happened to Duryodhana?

A great sorrow overwhelms us today and I no longer hear any sounds of joy. The enchanting strains of music and celebration that we once heard from Jayadratha's palace here are alas all fallen silent.

In Duryodhana's camp, we no more hear the sounds of countless vabdhis and magadhis singing my sons' praises nor the songs of musicians or the chiming of dancers' anklets. Earlier, such sounds would fall incessantly upon my ears. Alas, as they are plunged in grief, I do not any longer hear these merry noises. Previously, Sanjaya, while sitting in the

home of Somadatta, who is devoted to truth, I would always hear such delightful sounds. Alas, how destitute of punya I am, for I hear the palaces of my sons today echoing instead with the sounds of grief and lamentations, and none full of the old life, energy and joy. In the mansions of Vivimsati, Durmukha, Chitrasena, Vikarna and my other sons, I do not hear a single sound of cheer, which they were filled with in the past.

The great archer Drona's son Aswatthaman, who is the refuge of my sons and upon whom Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and a large number of disciples waited, who takes pleasure day and night, in talk, in debate and animated disputation, in the stirring music of different instruments and in various kinds of delightful songs, whom many among the Kurus, the Pandavas and the Satwatas worship—alas, his home is utterly silent today, and no singers sing there or dancers ply their sublime art.

Alas, we no longer hear the clamour of boisterous celebrations that echo in the camp of Vinda and Anuvinda every evening. Today in the camp of the Kaikeyas, we do not hear any songs or hand clapping in which their soldiers, at their music, dance and revelry, daily indulged.

Ah, we no longer hear the reverberant chanting of priests proficient in the performance of yagnas, men who are repositories of pujas, who wait upon Somadatta's son, Bhurisravas. The virile twanging of bowstrings, the sounds of Vedic chanting, the whistling of spears and the humming strokes of swords; the rumble of chariot-wheels, all of which were heard unceasingly in the abode of Drona: we hear none of these from there today. Sanjaya, today we no longer hear the swell of music from diverse kingdoms, or the rhythms and harmonies of musical instruments, which never failed to fill Drona's great and sacred home.

When Janardana of unfading glory came from Upaplavya out of his compassion for every living creature, seeking peace, O Suta, I said to the evil Duryodhana, "My son, use Krishna as the means to arrive at an amicable understanding with the Pandavas. I think it is time to make peace, so do as I say. If you spurn Krishna, who now begs you for peace and entreats you for my welfare, you will never find victory."

But Duryodhana refused Krishna, the bull among all the bowmen of Dasarha's race, Krishna who sought Duryodhana's own good. And by doing this, my foolish son embraced disaster and tragedy. Seized by Death himself, my evil-hearted prince would not obey me but followed Dusasana and Karna instead, into the jaws of doom. I did not approve of the game of

dice. Nor did Vidura, Jayadratha, Bhishma, Salya, Bhurisravas, Purumitra, Jaya, Aswatthaman, Kripa or Drona, O Sanjaya! If my son had paid heed to their counsel, he would then have lived for ever in happiness and peace with his kinsmen and friends.

I said to Duryodhana: Charming and delightful in their speech, always saying what is pleasing to their kinsmen, high-born, loved by all, and wise, the sons of Pandu are sure to find success and felicity. The man, who keeps his eye on dharma always, and in all places, will find happiness and he will win great rewards and blessings after his death. The Pandavas are noble and accomplished; they are able and deserve to enjoy half the Earth. The Earth girthed by the seven seas, is as much their ancestral possession as it is of the Kurus. Once they win back sovereignty, the Pandavas will never deviate from the path of dharma.

O child, I have kinsmen to whom the Pandavas will always listen: Salya, Somadatta, the Dharmatman Bhishma, Drona, Vikarna, Balhika, Kripa, and many others among the Bharatas who are illustrious and revered because of their years. If they speak to them on your behalf, the Pandavas will surely do what they ask. Do you think, for a moment, that anyone who is with them will counsel them otherwise? Krishna will never abandon the path of dharma and the Pandavas are all obedient to him. My words of dharma, too, those Kshatriyas will never disobey, for the Pandavas are all righteous men.

Piteously lamenting, Suta, I spoke to my son. Fool that he is, his heart full of darkness, he did not listen to me! I believe that all this is the malignant and inescapable influence of Kaala! Where Vrikodara and Arjuna are, the Vrishni hero Satyaki, Uttamaujas of the Panchalas, the invincible Yudhamanyu, the irrepressible Dhrishtadyumna, the unvanquished Sikhandin, the Asmakas, the Kekayas, Kshatradharman of the Somakas, the ruler of the Chedis, Chekitana, Vibhu, the son of the lord of the Kasis, the sons of Draupadi, Virata, the mighty maharatha Drupada, the Purushavyaghras Nakula and Sahadeva and, most of all, the slayer of Madhu, Krishna himself, is—who is there in this world, or even the next, that can fight them and expect to live?

Who else is there who would dare resist these my formidable enemies when they summon their devastras in war, save the witless Duryodhana, Karna, Sakuni the son of Subala, and Dusasana their base fourth? For I do not see a fifth who is so blind and senseless! They who have Vishnu himself

driving their chariot, clad in armour and reins in his divine hands; they who have Arjuna for their warrior—they can never find defeat!

Does Duryodhana not remember my pleas and implorations now, when it is too late? You say that the invincible Bhishma has been cut down. Surely now, my sons grimly recall the prophetic words uttered by the far-seeing Vidura, and lament their folly! Seeing his army overwhelmed by Sini's grandson Satyaki and Arjuna, and seeing their countless empty chariots, my sons surely shed bitter tears today. Ah! Sanjaya, terrible Arjuna will devour my troops even like a raging fire fanned by the gusting wind consumes a heap of dry grass at the close of winter.

Sanjaya, you are a most accomplished narrator. Tell me everything that transpires in the evening after they committed the great wrong to Partha. When Abhimanyu was killed, what was their state of mind? After having grievously offended the Gandivi, my warriors cannot face him in battle. What measures do Duryodhana and Karna decide to take to contain Arjuna? What do Dusasana and Subala's son do? O Sanjaya, what has overtaken all my sons is surely because of the sins of Duryodhana, who walks the way of avarice, whose heart and mind are full of evil, whose judgment anger perverts, who blindly covets sovereignty, who is foolish besides and his reason lost to greed and anger. Tell me, O Sanjaya, what does Duryodhana do now? Are the preparations he makes and the plans he has shortsighted or well-judged?'"

CANTO 83

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'I will tell you everything, as I saw it with my own eyes. Listen carefully, for your own guilt in this war is great. Just as an embankment is useless after the waters of the field have drained away, Rajan, your lamentations now are useless! Bharatarishabha, do not grieve. Wonderful and terrible are the decrees of Time the Destroyer, and they cannot be violated. Do not lament, for this is not a recent development. If you had restrained both Yudhishtira and your sons from the game of dice, this calamity would never have overwhelmed you. Again, if you had stopped both the sides who were inflamed by anger, this tragedy would never have occurred.

Indeed, if you had once urged the Kurus to kill the wayward Duryodhana, this disaster would never have come to you, and the Pandavas, the Panchalas, the Vrishnis and the other kings would have never had cause to blame you. Again, if you had done your duty as a father, shown Duryodhana the path of dharma, and led him to tread the way of righteousness, this misfortune would never have beset you.

You are the wisest man on earth. Forsaking sanatana dharma, how could you follow the counsels of Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni? Therefore,

Rajan, these your lamentations are in truth wedded to worldly wealth, and seem to me to be like honey mixed with poison. Time was when Krishna himself did not regard Yudhishtira or Drona, as much as he respected you. However, when, he found you to have fallen from Rajadharma, Krishna has ceased to look upon you with respect.

Your sons spoke harshly, vilely, to the sons of Pritha, and you sat silent. Nemesis for that grave sin of omission has now overwhelmed you, O Anagha, and your kingdom is in danger.

At best, you will find the shame and bitterness of ruling over a world bestowed upon you by the Pandavas. It is the virtuous Pandus who added to the kingdom and also the fame that the Kurus enjoy. These achievements, however, became fruitless and barren for them when they encountered your greed, for you deprived them of even their ancestral kingdom.

Now, Rajan, when the war has begun, you absolve yourself of all wrongdoing and censure your sons, pointing out their various faults. And this is not becoming. While they fight, Kshatriyas leave off care for their very lives, and plunge fearlessly into the Pandavas' vyuhas. Why, who but the Kauravas would dare fight and army which Krishna, Arjuna, Satyaki and Vrikodara lead? Which mortal archer is there that would dare fight them who have Arjuna for their warrior, Krishna for their adviser and Satyaki and Vrikodara for their protectors? Only your sons and their allies.

The friendly kings, full of heroism and always conscious of Kshatriya dharma, do all that they can, taking their lives in their hands. So now listen to everything that transpires in the savage war between the Naravyaghras, the Kurus and the Pandavas.'"

CANTO 84

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When the night ends and dawn breaks, Drona begins to array his akshauhinis for the battle of the momentous day. One hears diverse sounds, of enraged shuras' voices raised in shouts and roars, all of them eager to be at the enemy and spill blood. Some stretch their bows some strum their bowstrings and some draw deep breaths. And many of them roar in challenge, "Where is Dhananjaya?"

Many warriors throw their glinting swords high into the air and then catch them again, and brandish them, naked blades the colour of the sky, keenly honed, and with beautifully wrought hilts. One sees thousands of brave warriors, their skills perfected through years of practice, swordsmen and bowmen, all keened for battle. Some whirl their great maces decked with bells, smeared with sandalwood paste encrusted with gold and diamonds, and challengingly demand that the sons of Pandu come forth to fight. Other warriors with massive bodies and arms like pillars, intoxicated with the pride of their strength, obscure the sky with their spiked clubs that resemble a forest of great stakes raised in honour of Indra.

Still others, heroes all, wear gorgeous vanamalas, and armed with various other kinds of weapons, takes their positions across the field of fate,

and they also roar, "Where is Arjuna? Where is Govinda? Where is proud Bhima? Where are their allies?"

Drona blows his conch, and urging his horses to great speed, moves everywhere with amazing celerity as he deploys all his divisions. When all the troops, every man of them ardent for battle, have taken their stations, Drona says to Jayadratha, "Somadatta's son Bhurisravas, maharatha Karna, Aswatthaman, Salya, Vrishasena and Kripa, with a hundred thousand horsemen, sixty thousand chariots, four and ten thousand elephants in musth, one and twenty thousand foot-soldiers clad in mail, will be positioned behind me to a distance of twelve krosas. You will be behind all of these. When the very gods with Vasava at their head will not be able to attack you where you are, what can the Pandavas do? Take comfort, Jayadratha, O king of the Sindhus."

Thus does Drona comfort Jayadratha who then himself moves to the place Drona indicates, surrounded by many Gandhara warriors and with many mail-clad foot-soldiers armed with paasas, nooses, all ready give their all in battle. Jayadratha's well-trained chariot-horses are all decked with chamari yak-tails and ornaments of gold. Seven thousand such horses and three thousand other steeds of the Sindhu breed go with him.

Your son Durmarshana, eager for combat, stations himself at the head of all the Kaurava troops today, along with a thousand five hundred infuriated elephants of awesome size, covered in mail, and all ridden by well-trained mahamatras. Your two other sons, Dusasana and Vikarna, take up their positions among the vanguard.

The vyuha that Drona forms- part sakata and part a circle is full forty-eight miles long and twenty wide, front to rear. Drona arrays that great formation with countless heroic kings, in a sea of chariots, horses, elephants and foot-soldiers. Behind the sakata vyuha, the formidable cart, is yet another impregnable legion in the form of a lotus, a Padma vyuha. And buried deep that lotus is another dense vyuha, the suchimukha, the needle formation.

Having formed his mighty vyuha thus, Drona takes up his own station. The mouth of the needle is held by the great archer Kritavarman. Next to Kritavarman, stands the ruler of the Kambojas and Jalasandha, and then Duryodhana and Karna. Behind them thousands of dauntless Kshatriyas stand ready for fierce battle, specifically position to protect the eye of the

most crucial suchimukha. Behind them all, Rajan, surrounded by a teeming force, is Jayadratha at the far end of the needle.

At the head of the Sakata, is Drona, barring the way into it; behind him the chief of the Bhojas protects Bharadwaja's son. Clad in white armour, with a superb helmet, broad chested and with mighty arms, Drona stands tall, stretching his great bow, like the Death himself in wrath. Seeing Drona's chariot graced with a beautiful standard, bearing red sacrificial altar and a black deerskin, the Kauravas are filled with joy.

Seeing the awesome vyuha Drona forms, which resembles the ocean itself in agitation, the Siddhas and the Charanas in the sky are filled with wonder and all beings think that the vast formation would devour the very Earth with her mountains, seas and forests, Bhumi abounding with life and creatures and everything else she bears. And seeing the mighty and wonderful sakata, packed dense with chariots, foot-soldiers, horses and elephants, trumpeting dreadfully, and hearing its great clamour, which could rive the hearts of his enemies, Duryodhana exults!'"

CANTO 85

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After the akshauhinis of the Kuru army are thus arrayed, a tumult arises from the beating of drums and mridangas, the roars and fierce shouts and the sound of different musical instruments, the blowing of conches. The awful uproar makes one's hair stand on end as the Bharata heroes eager for battle, slowly advance. Then the hour called Rudra sets in and Arjuna makes his appearance.

Many thousands of ravens and crows, O Bhaarata, sport in front of Arjuna's chariot. Various animals, giving terrible cries and inauspicious jackals begin to scream and howl on our right, as we went forward into battle. Thousands of blazing meteors fall out of a clear sky with loud noises, and all the Earth trembles on the dreadful occasion. Dry winds blow in all directions, peals of thunder crack the sky, driving gravel and gusts of little pebbles ahead of him, as Kunti's son comes to begin the days' battle.

Nakula's son Satanika, and Dhrishtadyumna, the two wise and expert warriors, array the Pandava legions into an attacking vyuha. Accompanied by a thousand chariots, a hundred elephants, three thousand Kshatriyas, and ten thousand foot-soldiers, which cover the length of fifteen hundred bows, your son Durmarshana takes up his position at the very van of all the troops,

and says, “Like the continent resisting the surging sea, I will today contain the wielder of Gandiva, that irresistible Parantapa in battle today. Today let everyone witness the raging Dhananjaya collide with me, like one stone mountain against another. You maharathas eager for battle, stay back and watch me fight all the Pandavas by myself, watch me enhance my honour and fame today!”

Your noble son, the daring archer says this and stands there prepared and full of valour, surrounded by many other great bowmen.

Then, like an angry Yama, or Vajradhari Indra himself, or like Death’s irresistible self armed with his cudgel and urged on by Time, or like unruffled Mahadeva armed with his trident, or like Varuna with his paasa, or the blazing fire which consumes all creation at the end of the Yuga, the slayer of the Nivatakavachas, inflamed with rage and swelling with might, the ever-victorious Vijaya, clad in mail, armed with a sword, wearing a golden coronet, adorned with garlands of white flowers, attired in white robes, his arms decked with beautiful angadas and ears with brilliant kundalas, faithful to dharma and determined to fulfil his great vow, incomparable Arjuna mounts his incomparable chariot.

The incarnate Nara, with Narayana for his sarathy, holding his Gandiva, shines as brilliantly on Kurukshetra as the risen sun. Setting his ratha, Rajan, at the very van of his army, where densest showers of arrows will fall, Dhananjaya blows an echoing, deafening gives a blast on his conch the Devadatta. Then Krishna, too, fearlessly blows with his great Panchajanya —peal after peal of booming thunder. And all your warriors quail and tremble at the massive twin sound, their hearts feel faint within them and their hair stands on end.

Just as the sound of the thunder fills living creatures with fright, even so does the chasmal booming of those conches terrify your warriors; and all their animals helplessly urinate and excrete. All your army with its animals is filled with dread, Rajan, and the limbs of your fighting men turn weak. Some among them even faint.

And then the Hanuman in his terrifying aspect on Arjuna’s banner, his mouth agape, as well all the fierce spirits and creatures that surround him give vent to the most fearful and macabre sounds, further dismaying your men. But then Drona and the other maharathas of your army collect themselves, raise their conches, horns and anakas and blow resoundingly on them, and the other fighting men follow suit beating drums, clashing

cymbals together, and letting out great cheers and loud yells and roars, so that the wave of terror blows away and they are emboldened again. Sounds of other instruments fill earth and sky and further defiant roaring and the loud clapping of hands and armpits. Your maharathas roar leonine challenges at their adversaries and your army is again filled with exhilaration. As that tumult rises, an uproar that raises fear in the hearts of the timid, Arjuna, the son of Pakasasana, filled with great delight, says to him of Dasarha's race, "Urge the horses, O Hrishikesa, to where Durmarshana stands. I will cut our way through his elephant legion and break into the enemy army."

Krishna flicks his reins over his gandharva horses' necks and flashes ahead at Durmarshana. Fierce and tremendous is the encounter that erupts there between one and the many, a savage encounter that destroys chariots, elephants and men. Like a cloud lashing down torrential rain on a mountain breast, Arjuna inundates his enemies with thick showers of shafts. Showing great lightness of hand, the opposing maharathas swiftly envelop Krishna and Dhananjaya in clouds of arrows.

Quickly incensed, Mahabaho Partha begins to slough off great chariot-warriors' heads at his supreme will; he strews the field with noble and handsome heads, decked with earrings and turbans, their lips bitten through, and the eyes upon their faces still dark with anger. Ah, the scattered heads are resplendent like lotuses clipped off their stems, lying everywhere.

Golden coats of mail dyed with gore lie all over the field, looking like cloud masses charged with lightning. The sound, Rajan, of severed heads falling onto the earth resembles the falling of ripened palmyra fruit. In weird pageant, headless trunks arise, some holding bows in hand and some with naked swords upraised in the very act of striking. Those valiant warriors, who swarm forward to have great Arjuna's life, never know when he strikes their heads off!

Then, quickly, the horrific and magnificent field is scattered by the absolute and sublime genius of Arjuna's incredible archery with not just the heads of great warriors but also those of horses and the trunks of elephants, while Kurukshetra rings with their screams, as well the arms, legs and other limbs of both Kshatriyas and their beasts of war. Bloody chaos sweeps your army, O king.

"This one is Partha!"

"Where is Partha? Here is Partha!"

Obsessed with just the single thought of Arjuna, these cries rise from your army. Deprived by Time of their reason and very senses, they see the whole world as being full of just Partha, innumerable Arjunas everywhere. And striking out and loosing their arrows at one another, many of your men perish. Why, some kill themselves in their delirium! With woeful cries, many heroes, not in their right minds, covered with blood and in agony, lay themselves down, calling out piteously to their friends and kinsmen.

Arms, bearing short arrows, or lances, or darts, or swords, or battle-axes, or pointed stakes, or scimitars, or bows, or spears, or other shafts, or maces, and cased in armour, and adorned with angadas and other ornaments, arms that look like large snakes, that resemble thick clubs, hacked off from trunks with mighty weapons leap from their owners, jerk and thrash about with great force, as if in separate rage of their own. Every last man who attacks Partha perishes, body pierced with the fatal shafts of that transcendent shura. While he seems to dance in his ratha, fleeting everywhere, and his bow seems always drawn in a magic circle, no adversary can find the minutest chance to strike him. The speed with which he draws, fits them to his bow, and looses them is inscrutable, a single uninterrupted blur, and fills all his enemies with wonder.

Phalguna strikes elephants and elephant-riders, horses and horsemen, rathikas and their charioteers. There is no one among his enemies, whether facing him, trying to shoot him down from a distance, or wheeling about, whom the son of Pandu does not kill. Even as the sun rising in the sky destroys a thick darkness does Arjuna annihilate Durmarshana's elephant-legion with his uncanny missiles fletched with kanka plumes.

Swiftly, the field that your troops occupy looks like the earth strewn with grey hills at the hour of the pralaya. Just as no creatures can gaze at the midday sun, Dhananjaya's enemies cannot look upon the face of Arjuna tejasvin ablaze. Stricken by Partha's arrow storms, your troops break and flee the dreadful Kshatriya.

Like a towering wind dispersing a bank of clouds, Partha rides at the Kaurava army and puts it to bloody rout, and truly none of them can even look at him as he razes them at will. Whipping and spurring their horses to greater speed, prodding them with their bows to fly faster, with threatening growls and roars at the helpless creatures, their eyes wild and full of fear, your cavalry, chariot-warriors, and your foot-soldiers as well, beset by Arjuna, flee in every direction.

Others, who ride elephants, lumber away from him by digging their sharp hooks and goads cruelly into the sides of their great mounts. Such bedlam grips the field, such panic, that many who seek to escape him run straight at Arjuna instead and are consumed by him. Awful fright, confusion and dismay seize your men entirely.'"

CANTO 86

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'When the van of my army is slaughtered by the Kiritin and falls apart and flees, who are the heroes that stand up to him? Do any of them actually fight Arjuna, or do they all abandon courage and run back into the sakata vyuha, to hide behind the fearless Drona, that immovable wall?'

Sanjaya replies, "When Indra's son breaks like a gale of death upon the frontline of your army, Rajan, many Kshatriyas are killed or run. Not one can even look at Arjuna's alight, let alone fight him.

But then, your son Dusasana, Rajan, who has watched the rout, and your men dying and fleeing, is filled with wrath and he dashes straight at Arjuna. Your fierce son, wearing a shimmering coat of golden mail, his head covered by a turban, surrounds the rampaging Partha with his own formidable elephant legion, a force that looks as if it can devour the very world. The Earth, the points of compass and the sky seem to be entirely filled with the sound of the elephant's bells, the blare of conches, the twanging of bowstrings and the deep grunts and bellows of the tuskers.

Now a pitched and ferocious battle ensues. Seeing the angry beasts, with trunks extended, thundering down on him, like winged mountains

urged on with goads, Dhananjaya throws back his head and gives a shattering lion's roar. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, he begins to decimate the elephant legion. Like a makara plunging into a surging ocean, Arjuna wades into the elephant-host.

The Vijaya is like the apocalyptic Sun that rises infracting every law of direction and hour on the day of the pralaya. In moments, at his unearthly archery, men and elephants alike have their spirits broken and are deranged by the elemental force they come up against, the cosmic tempest that is Kunti's son. The sound of horses' hooves, the maddening rattle of chariot-wheels, the shouts of warriors, the twanging bowstrings, the cacophony of diverse musical instruments, and most of all the blare of the Panchajanya and the Devadatta and the deafening twang of the Gandiva serves to dement your forces even further.

And Savyasachin shreds men and elephants with his arrow that are like snakes of virulent poison, every one of them claiming a Kaurava life, man's or beast's. Thousands and thousands of deadly shafts flare from the Gandiva spraying blood everywhere, desiccating your elephant legion. Countless great grey beasts fall, shaking the sacred field, their screams echoing in the vaults of the sky; they fall like the mountain of old when Indra sheared their golden wings.

Some hulking beasts he shoots savagely through their mouths, others through their round temporal lobes, and the elephants cry out like cranes as they die. And now, Arjuna begins to clip the heads from the necks of the warriors mounted on the elephants with unerring arrows like lopping lotus flowers from their stalks. The heads shining with earrings, continually falling onto the earth, resemble a multitude of lotuses that Partha offers to his gods. While numberless elephants blunder across the field, one sees warriors hanging from their backs, stripped of armour, grievously wounded, painted in blood as if in a picture.

In some cases, he kills two or three warriors with a single arrow plumed with beautiful feathers and they plunge down to the ground. And so many elephants excoriated by long shafts, continue to fall, vomiting blood, and their riders tumble from their backs. Partha destroys standards, bows, bowstrings, yokes and shafts of the chariot-warriors that oppose him. And still no one can discern when Arjuna draws his arrows, when he fixes them to his bowstring, when he draws back the string or when he shoots them.

All that they see is Partha seemingly dancing on his ratha with his bow always drawn to a circle.

Elephants fall like ranges of hills, one after the other, gored deep, immediately as they are struck, and the blood they vomit seeps across the field of dharma. In the midst of that great carnage, one continues to see innumerable headless trunks standing upright, though their arms have also been dissevered and lie about with bows in grasp, their fingers are cased in leather, some holding swords, and adorned with striking angadas and other golden ornaments.

Kurukshetra is copiously strewn with innumerable upaskaras, adhishthanas, shafts, crowns, crushed chariot-wheels, broken akshas and yokes, warriors armed with shields, bows, wildflower garlands, different sparkling ornaments, fine robes and broken standards. The Earth there assumes a most surreal aspect from the slain elephants, horses and the fallen Kshatriyas. And absolutely routed by Arjuna, Dusasana's forces turn tail. Himself direly injured and in great pain, and now stricken with such terror as he never expected, Dusasana also flees the battle and seeks shelter in the sakata vyuha behind Drona.'"

CANTO 87

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After annihilating Dusasana's forces, Arjuna, never pausing, sweeps on towards Drona, for his quarry Jayadratha lies beyond the Acharya and is still far. Nearing Drona at the lip of the sakata vyuha, at Krishna's behest, Arjuna folds his hands to his old master and says, "Wish me well, O Brahmana, and bless me, saying Swasti. Through your grace, I would pierce this unassailable vyuha. I tell you truly, O sinless one, you are like my father to me, or Yudhishtira, or even Krishna. Maharishi, I deserve your blessing and protection even as Aswatthaman does. And with your blessing, I want to kill Jayadratha the Saindhava today. O lord, see that my vow is accomplished."

The Acharya, smiling, replies, "Arjuna, you will not be able to strike at Jayadratha without first vanquishing me."

With this, still smiling, in a flash Drona covers Arjuna, his ratha, horses, standard and charioteer with a great burst of arrows. Arjuna cuts down the flurry of shafts, and strikes his master with nine thought-swift arrows. Drona, too, cuts down Partha's arrows in flight, and pierces both Krishna and Arjuna with clutches of venomous bolts like fire.

Then, while Arjuna is still thinking of destroying Drona's bow with his arrows, the great Brahmana, quicker than thinking, breaks the Pandava's bowstring, and draws blood from him, his horses and sarathy, and cuts slivers from his flagstaff, still with the superior smile on his lips.

Arjuna restrings his bow in a blink and shrugging off his initial hesitation unleashes a storm of six hundred blinding shafts at Drona, as if they were just a single barb; next moment, he looses another seven hundred searing arrows, and then another thousand, all in the space of a wish. He is still not done and follows these with a full ten thousand light like blazing thunderbolts, razing so many warriors of Drona's stolid vyuha, and horses and elephants as well. Maharathas fall out of their great chariots, their horses, standards, weapons and lives lost.

Elephants founder like mountain peaks, or cloud masses, or like towering palaces, loosened, dispersed and incinerated by thunder, wind and fire. Struck by Arjuna's arrows, thousands of horses collapse like swans upon the breast of Himavat struck down by the force of a sudden flashflood. Like the Sun that rises at the end of the Yuga drying up the oceans with his rays turned murderous, the son of Pandu obliterates a vast number of chariot-warriors, cavalry, elephants and foot-soldiers.

Then, like clouds covering that fulminant Sun, the Drona-cloud covers the Pandava-sun with lashing arrow showers; Drona obscures the thick swath of shafts with which Arjuna covers the great Kuru Kshatriyas of the sakata vyuha. The Acharya strikes Dhananjaya deep through his breast with a long shaft unleashed with awful ferocity, an arrow that will take the life of any adversary. Great Arjuna trembles at the force of that barb, his limbs feel faint; he shakes like a mountain during an earthquake.

But only for a moment, after which Indra's son, like whom there is no warrior, in heaven or earth, is back to himself and strikes his forbidding teacher with a volley of golden-winged missiles. Drona, unperturbed, strikes Krishna with five bolts, Arjuna with seventy-three and his standard with three. Having the better of his disciple, in a wink Drona mantles Arjuna, his chariot and sarathy entirely in a dense cloud of arrows. We see the shafts of Bharadwaja's son fly and fall in unbroken lines and his bow present the wonderful aspect of being incessantly drawn to a circle. His vicious projectiles, winged with kanka feathers, fall with the least pause on Dhananjaya and Vasudeva.

Krishna watches the soaring battle between Arjuna and Drona for a short time, then says to his warrior, “Partha we must not waste time here for Jayadratha awaits. You must ride past Drona and on towards your quarry.”

Partha replies, “As you will, O Krishna!”

Now they keep Drona to their right and ride swiftly past him, which Arjuna continues to inundate with his arrows. Drona cries to Arjuna, “Where are you going, O Pandava! Is it not true that you never stop fighting until you have defeated your enemy?”

Arjuna answers, “You are my guru and not my enemy. I am your sishya and, so, like your son. There is no man in this world that can vanquish you in battle.”

With this Arjuna flares on, cleaving your army, bringing death with him. The noble Panchala princes, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, follow him to protect his chariot wheels.

Rajan, they find themselves facing Jaya and Kritavarman of the Satwata vamsa, and the king of the Kambojas, and Srutayus, who have ten thousand maharathas between them. Clad in glittering mail, a master of all the different forms of warfare, prepared to lose his life, the mighty and brave Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, the Vasatis, the Mavellakas, the Lalithyas, the Kaikeyas, the Madrakas, the Narayana Gopalas and the various tribes of the Kambojas whom Karna once vanquished, all swarm recklessly at the speeding Arjuna, who comes among them in fury like the great leader of an elephant herd, eager to crush them all, to consume their entire army.

A savage battle erupts between all those heroes on the one side and Arjuna on the other, making one’s hair stand on end. Like a whole host of powerful specifics resisting a raging disease, they combine to stop the inexorable Pandava flaring ahead to have Jayadratha’s life.’”

CANTO 88

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Drona swiftly turns his chariot and rides after Arjuna, whom the others attempt to hold in some check. But the son of Pandu is like an army of dread plagues by himself and the arrows that blaze from his Gandiva like rays from the Sun razing those that come in his way. He cuts down warhorses, mauls chariots and riders, brings down elephants, cuts down royal chatras and shatters the wheels of countless rathas. Soon, your men, bloodied, their nerve broken, flee from the irresistible, unearthly storm that is Dhananjaya.

Thus does the furious contention between the massed Kuru warriors and Arjuna unfold, a gory dream in another dimension of pure war, which is shrouded in arrows and where the resplendent Vijaya harries his enemies with inspired perfect archery. Steadfastly devoted to dharma and determined to fulfill his vow, he attacks Drona who has flashed up on his ratha drawn by red horses. The Acharya strikes his disciple with twenty-five immaculate shafts that can eviscerate an enemy; Arjuna cuts them all down. Partha quickly invokes the Brahmastra and confounds Drona's deadly fusillades.

And now we witness Drona's supernal genius unbridled, for Arjuna, putting forth his own, cannot pierce the Acharya with a single shaft. Like a

mass of clouds letting fall torrents of rain, Drona lashes down a ceaseless cascade of vicious barbs on the Partha-mountain. Tejasvin Arjuna receives his master's downpour by invoking the shielding Brahmastra and truncates Drona's searing shafts with his own.

The dreadful Brahmana, aroused, strikes Swetavahana with twenty-five arrows and Vasudeva with seventy, barbs that pierce their torsos and arms. Partha serenely contains his invincible Acharya, who rages like the fire at the end of the Yuga.

Nimbly avoiding Drona's brilliant and brutal onslaught, Arjuna begins to slaughter the Bhoja host. Turning away from Drona who stands immovable like the Mainaka mountain, Arjuna rides between Kritavarman and Sudakshina the Kamboja king. Kritavarman, lord of the Bhojas, calmly strikes Partha with ten scorching shafts, kanka-feathered, but Arjuna stuns the Satwata shura with a hundred and three arrows shots in the space of a thought.

Recovering quickly, the Bhojaraja, with a laugh like rolling thunder, strikes Arjuna and Krishna with twenty-five arrows each. Arjuna breaks Kritavarman's bow and stabs him with twenty-one arrows like blazing flames or angry snakes of virulent poison. Kritavarman seizes up another bow and pierces Arjuna's chest, O Bhaarata, with ten arrows swift as light; Partha bloodies his powerful antagonist's breast with nine shafts shot in a neat circle.

Again, Krishna sees his Kshatriya held up by Kritavarman, who is a Satwata fighting for Duryodhana, and cries, "Show Kritavarman no mercy! Do not think of your kinship with him. Kill him, Arjuna!"

Abandoning affection and restraint, Arjuna staggers Kritavarman with some archery for which the Bhoja has no response; Krishna dashes ahead past Kritavarman towards the Kambojas. In red-eyed fury, Kritavarman turns his frustration and ire on the two Panchala princes who guard Arjuna's rear as they follow him everywhere. The Bhoja hero strikes Yudhamanyu with three violent barbs and Uttamaujas with four. The heroic brothers instantly pierce him deep with ten shafts each, and break his bow and cut down his standard as well. Roaring, Kritavarman, son of Hridika, sweeps up another bow and rives the bows of both brothers and covers them with his scathing arrows. Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, quick as thinking, take up fresh bows and loose twin ferocious invectives of shafts at the Satwata.

Arjuna forges ahead, piercing deeper into the enemy army, while the Panchala princes occupy Kritavarman, who holds them up. Swetavahana attacks the akshauhinis drawn up against him but does not kill Kritavarman although he is within reach. Seeing Partha's violent progress the brave king Srutayudha rushes at him, brandishing his big bow and strikes Partha with three arrows, Janardana with seventy and Partha's standard with a razor-headed barb. Arjuna retaliates in fury, piercing his antagonist deep with ninety straight shafts, like a mahout a mighty elephant with his ankush.

Srutayudha, undimmed, finds Arjuna with seventy-seven thunderbolts but Arjuna breaks his bow, shreds his quiver, and in wrath strikes him deep through his chest with seven heavy shafts. An incensed Srutayudha takes up another bow and drills Vasava' son with nine barbs, his arms and chest. Laughing all the while, the Pandava unleashes a gale of thousands of arrows, killing his horses and charioteer. Never pausing, Arjuna bores his antagonist with seventy arrows. Leaping down from his useless chariot, valiant Srutayudha rushes roaring at Arjuna with his mace raised high.

The heroic king Srutayudha is the son of Varuna and Parnasa, the mighty river of cool, limpid waters. His mother, Rajan, once begged Varuna, "Let my son never be killed on earth."

Varuna, well pleased with her, had promised, "I will give him an ayudha, by which your son will not be killed on the ground by any enemy. No man can have immortality, O greatest of rivers, for everyone who is born must inevitably die. This child, however, will always be invincible in war through the power of this weapon. Let the fear in your heart be dispelled."

Varuna then gave Srutayudha, with mantras, a mace, and with his gada, Srutayudha became invincible on earth. However, the illustrious Lord of the waters had also said to him, "This mace should not be cast at anyone who is not actually fighting. If flung at such a one, it will fly back and fall on you, O brilliant, and take your life!"

And now, his hour to die come, Srutayudha violates that injunction. He casts his lethal mace at Krishna, who receives it upon his dark and tremendous shoulder. Like the wind failing to shake the Vindhya mountains, it has no impact on the Avatara. Instead, the occult gada flies back and fells Srutayudha himself, like a powerful spell consuming the sorcerer. Your troops see Srutayudha slain by his own mace and cries of dismay rise from your ranks.

The river Devi Parnasa's beloved son falls with his head and body shattered before the eyes of all the archers, he falls, resplendent, like a tall pipal tree with spreading branches broken by the wind. Seeing Srutayudha perish, panic grips your warriors and they flee.

Brave Sudakshina, son of the king of the Kambojas, now attacks the flashing Arjuna. Partha looses seven arrows at him that pass right through his body and burrow into the ground behind him. Though spouting blood, Sudakshina strikes Arjuna back with ten kanka-feathered shafts, Krishna with three, and Partha again with five. Arjuna severs his bow, lops off this standard and pierces him with two wedge-headed arrows.

Sudakshina stabs Partha again with three sizzling arrows, and gives an echoing roar. He looses a dread iron astra at the Pandava, a weapon decked with little bells, which blazes like a meteor, giving off sparks of fire, strikes the Vijaya squarely and fells him to his chariot floor!

Recovering in a moment, great Arjuna, now licking the corners of his mouth in anger, shoots a dazzle of fourteen barbs, drawing fonts of blood from his enemy, his horses, and charioteer, breaking his standard and bow into shards. With no instant's pause, Partha pulverises Sudakshina's chariot and then looses a mighty arrow, which blows Sudakshina's heart to shreds. With a sigh, the valiant Kamboja prince, his armour ruined, his limbs turned weak, his crown and angadas come loose, falls head first from his ratha, and his spirit departs his mangled body.

Like a beautiful Karnikara tree in the spring with handsome branches lying uprooted by the wind on a mountaintop, Sudakshina of the Kambojas lies on the bare ground lifeless, instead of on the costliest bed, wearing precious ornaments. Handsome, with coppery eyes and on his head a garland of gold, and radiant like a fire, even in death the mighty-armed Sudakshina is splendent as some wonderful mountain.

Seeing Srutayudha and Sudakshina slain, your warriors yet again take to their heels in terror.'"

CANTO 89

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, "After he kills Sudakshina and Srutayudha, and when they recover their courage, your legions set on Arjuna more fiercely than ever. The Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis and the Vasatis loose storms of weapons of every kind at the Kiritin, but Arjuna responds with an awesome volley of six hundred arrows, unleashed in a moment, sprayed in all directions. Struck by panic by his archery the likes of which they have never imagined let alone seen before, your men take flight from this dreadful god come hunting them, like little animals from a great tiger.

However, they soon rally and once more surround Partha, who continues to massacre his enemies at imperious and terrifying ease; arrows flare in a constant stream from the Gandiva, hewing off heads and warriors' arms until there is no inch of the field that is not strewn with these grisly ornaments of death. The flights of crows, vultures and ravens that hover over Kurukshetra form an eerie canopy in the sky.

Seeing their men decimated, Srutayus and Achyutayus are full of belligerence and continue to fight Dhananjaya in wrath. Mighty, strong, proud, heroic, of noble lineage, the two archers, Rajan, anxious to win great fame and victory for your son, by extinguishing the elemental Arjuna,

envelop him with arrows from his right and left. A thousand deadly shafts they lash down on Arjuna like two thunderheads filling a lake. Maharatha Srutayus suddenly strikes Dhananjaya with a fell spear and, deeply wounded, Arjuna Parantapa faints, to Krishna's puzzlement.

Immediately, as if to pour acid into his wound, Achyutayus from the other flank drives another javelin into Partha. In excruciating agony, Arjuna totters in the chariot and clutches at his flagstaff to support himself. And all the fighting men give a great jubilant roar, thinking that the Pandava they dread has been killed.

Krishna, grieved to see Partha swoon, soothes him with divine, comforting words. Srutayus and Achyutayus do not cease their onslaught; wheeling around the son of Indra, they mantle the Pandava's chariot with a tempest of missiles so completely that the ratha, its warrior and sarathy and its horses vanish from view. Even the banner of snarling Hanuman cannot be seen anymore.

Meanwhile, Arjuna slowly regains his senses, like someone returning from the very land of the dead. Seeing his ratha with Vasudeva overwhelmed by arrows and finding his two antagonists before him like two blazing fires, Partha the paladin invokes the Indrastra. Thousands of arrows flame forth from it, cutting down their volley in the sky and striking both their heads from their necks in scarlet bursts and they fall like two great trees brought down by the wind. This done, Arjuna ploughs on through the dense enemy, encountering many great warriors, besting them all. Shock sweeps through your ranks at the deaths of Srutayus and Achyutayus; your men stand as if they have seen the ocean dried up. Arjuna effortlessly despatches fifty maharathas who followed the two slain princes, and plunges on strewing the field with corpses of numberless great warriors. Seeing Srutayus and Achyutayus die, O Bhaarata, their sons Niyatayus and Dirghayus charge Arjuna, covering him in a gale of diverse weapons. Invincible Partha Arjuna, in an incarnadine moment, sends both princes to Yama. Arjuna thunders on through the helpless Kuru army like some elephant trampling his way through a red lake of lotuses.

Then thousands of Angas surround Arjuna with their elephant-force. Urged on by Duryodhana, many kings of the west and the south, and many others led by the king of the Kalingas also encircle Arjuna with their great elephants. But Arjuna today is a god on Kurukshetra, and more quickly than I can tell you, Rajan, the field of death is bestrewn with thousands of heads

and arms more, all richly ornamented, all struck off by the arrows than radiate endlessly from the magical Gandiva. The severed heads look like golden stones entwined by snakes. Arms lopped off from the elephant riders fall to the ground like birds dropping from trees; while the elephants, pierced by thousands of arrows and flowing blood from their wounds, look like hills in the monsoon with melted red chalk streaming down their sides.

Different kinds of Mlecchas, all variously ugly, wearing garish attire, armed with many strange and crude weapons, sit on the backs of elephants bathed in blood, while others look weirdly resplendent, as they lie prone on the field, having been killed by Arjuna. Thousands of elephants and their riders, and those on foot that urged them forward, all struck by Partha's bolts, vomit blood, scream in agony, and either fall or run in all directions.

Many of the huge beasts, terrified, lumber away from the fearsome Kshatriya and crush their own men, including countless warriors fierce as poisonous snakes. Many terrible Yavanas, Paradas, Sakas, Balhikas and Mlecchas born of the cow belonging to Vasishta, with fierce eyes, accomplished in war and looking like Yamadutas, all of them experts of the mayic powers of the Asuras, many Darvabhisaras, Daradas, Pundras in thousands of bands, and together forming a force that is beyond count, shower their missiles all together over Arjuna aflame.

The wild and skilled Mlecchas pound Arjuna with their arrows. Arjuna fluidly shoots lethal torments of shafts from the Gandiva, barbs like locust swarms which cast a deathly shadow over the Dhartarashtra troops, and mow down almost all the Mlecchas, whose heads are completely shaved or half-shaved or covered with matted locks, who are unclean in all their ways and have crooked faces.

The remaining hill dwellers flee.

In dark glees, ravens, kankas and wolves lap up the blood of elephants, horses and their Mleccha-riders lying upon the field, all felled by the Partha's burning volleys. Partha lets flow a bubbling river of blood; the slain foot-soldiers, horses, chariots and elephants are its banks; the showers of arrows, its rafts; the hair of the dead its moss and weeds and the fingers cut off from warriors' hands its little fishes—ah, river as awful as Death itself at the end of the Yuga. The bloody river flows towards the realm of Yama with the bodies of dead elephants floating on it and slowing its current.

The Earth covered with the blood of Kshatriyas, elephants, horses and their riders, has become a crimson lake, like one formed by Indra's torrential rains when they cover lands both high and low. The Kshatriya bull despatches six thousand horsemen and a thousand of the greatest rathikas into the jaws of death. Thousands of elephants, pierced all over by his arrows, lie prostrate on the field, like hills struck down by thunder and lightning.

Arjuna hurtles across Kurukshetra, an elephant in musth trampling a forest of reeds, killing horse riders, ratha-warriors and elephants with supreme ease. Just as a wind fuels a conflagration that devours a dense forest of trees, creepers, plants, dry wood and grass, Dhananjaya's fire, with shafts for its flames and fanned on by the Krishna-wind, hungrily consumes the forest of your warriors. Emptying chariots in carmine flurries, covering the ground everywhere he goes with corpses, Dhananjaya truly seems to dance, bow in hand, among teeming legions of enemies, flooding the earth with blood with his thunderous shafts.

Energized by all the killing he does, he penetrates deeper into the Bharata host and confronts Srutayudha, king the Ambashtas. Arjuna slaughters his horses with a slew of kanka-feathered arrows; he breaks that king's bow in his hands with a single unerring shaft.

The briefly shaken Ambashtha king picks up a great mace and rushes at Arjuna's chariot and strikes Krishna a stunning blow. Arjuna's eyes turn red and he looses a vicious flight of gold-winged barbs at the Ambashtha, shrouding that hero in a small cloud, shimmering. Arjuna shatters that king's mace with another clutch of arrows, smashing the heavy weapon into dust. Quick as thinking, that king hefts another gada and, undaunted, storming the Pandava's ratha, rains a flurry of heavy blows on both Krishna and Arjuna.

Next moment, Arjuna hacks his opponent's massive arms off at their shoulders with two wedge-headed short arrows, spraying blood in the air. With another shaft, he removes Srutayudha's head from his neck in a bright ruddy blast. That Kshatriya falls like a stake raised to Indra with its ropes cut.

Hundreds of elephants and chariots beyond count surround the battling Pandava and he becomes invisible like the Sun hidden by dark clouds.'"

CANTO 90

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna, his heart set just on killing Jayadratha, furrows deep into the Bharata host, decimating the invincible akshauhinis of both Drona and the Bhojas; he kills prince Sudakshina of the Kambojas, as well as the valiant Srutayudha. Relentlessly he razes the Kuru army and panic takes your forces like a fever.

Seeing his army mown down at the Vijaya's will, Duryodhana rides up to Drona and cries, "Arjuna has already humbled our great army, Acharya; he has already cloven through your sakata vyuha. He brings such carnage to us, you must tell us what to do to stop him! Bless you, Acharya! You are our only refuge; do what you must to see that the Pandava does not kill Jayadratha. Like a raging fire consuming heaps of dry grass and straw, the Dhananjaya conflagration, fanned by the wind of his wrath, devours my troops.

Seeing the son of Kunti burning his way so easily through our legions, the maharathas who guard Jayadratha are full of doubt if they can stop Partha. All the kings say that Arjuna could never defeat Drona. But Pandu's son stormed disdainfully through your vyuha, most splendid one. Ah, my army must be weak indeed, why, even as if I have no warriors of any worth.

O most splendid, blessed Drona, I know that in your heart, you are devoted to the Pandavas, and that is why Arjuna has his way with us. I also seek to please you, Acharya, with everything in my power, and I cannot think of what more I can do. But you seem to disregard all that I do for you. Ah Drona, we are devoted to you but your favour lies only with the Pandavas, although you receive your livelihood from us! I did not know until now that you are a razor hidden in honey. If you had not assured that we would contain, no, even humiliate the Pandavas, I would never have prevented Jayadratha from returning to his own country. I am a fool to expect protection from you.

I assured Jayadratha that he would be safe with us and now I see him being offered up as a yagnapasu, a sacrificial animal to Yama. Any man might escape from death's very jaws, but there will be no escape for Jayadratha once he is within Dhananjaya's reach.

O you of the red horses, do whatever you must to save Jayadratha! I am deranged with anxiety. Pay no heed to my raving at you; I beg you protect the Saindhava from dreadful Arjuna!"

Drona replies, "I do not find fault with what you say. Duryodhana, I tell you truly that you are as dear to me as Aswatthaman. So do what I tell you now, Rajan! Of all charioteers, Krishna is the greatest and his horses are the best of their great pedigree. Arjuna's chariot flashes through the small gap in our forces. Do you not see the countless arrows the Kiritin unleashes from his great Gandiva that fall full two miles behind his ratha as he flies ahead, and every shaft taking a life?

I am old now, child; I cannot ride as swiftly as Pandu's son. Besides, the entire Pandava army is now close upon our van.

Arjuna has left Yudhishtira by himself, and this is my chance to seize their king, as I vowed I would before all our Kshatriyas. I cannot leave the entrance to our vyuha, and so you must fight Phalguna!

Riding with the best support, you can match Arjuna, who is alone and who only is your equal in lineage and achievements. Do not be afraid, go and fight him. You are the sovereign of the world, a great king, a famed Kshatriya and a master of quelling your enemies. O heroic subduer of enemy cities, ride swiftly and face Kunti's son yourself!"

Duryodhana says, "O Acharya, how can I fight Arjuna who passed even you, who are our greatest warrior by far? The lord of the Devas, armed with the Vajra, can be vanquished in battle but not Arjuna Purandara. He has

defeated Hridika's son Kritavarman of the Bhojas and you, who are equal to a Deva. He has killed Sudakshina and king Srutayudha; he has killed both Srutayus and Achyutayus and numberless Mlecchas. How can I challenge this invincible son of Pandu, who is like an all-consuming fire? How can you think I am fit to fight Arjuna today? Ah, I am dependent on you like a slave. Protect my honour and my fame, O Drona!"

Drona says, "You rightly say, O scion of Kuru, that Dhananjaya is irresistible. Yet, today I will ensure that you will face him and contain him. Let all the archers in the world witness the wonderful feat of Arjuna being held in check by you in the very presence of Krishna. I will sheath your body in my golden kavacha in a way that no weapon will so much as graze your skin! Even if the three worlds with the Asuras, the Devas, the Yakshas, the Uragas and the Rakshasas, together with all Manavas, take the field against you today, you will still have no cause to fear them. Neither Krishna nor Arjuna, nor any other warrior, will be able to pierce your armour. Cased in this armour, ride swiftly against Arjuna today. He will not resist you!"

Then Drona, the one who knows Brahma the best, touches water, utters some powerful secret Mantras, and quickly fastens his own remarkable kavacha around Duryodhana's, astonishing everyone there, and ensuring the your son will be invincible.

Drona says, "Let the Vedas, Brahman, and the Brahmanas bless you. Let all the greater Nagas bless you, O Bhaarata!

Let Yayati, Nahusha, Dhundhumara, Bhagiratha and the other Rajarishis watch over you and do what benefits you.

Let blessings be upon you from creatures that have but one leg, and from those having many legs and from creatures that have no legs.

Let Swaha, Swadha and Sachi all be with you and help you. O sinless one, let Lakshmi, Arundhati, Asita, Devala, Viswamitra, Angiras, Vasishta and Kasyapa do what is favourable to you.

Let Dhatri, the Lord of the worlds, the points of the compass, the Lokapalas, the regents of those cardinal points, and the six-faced Kartikeya all be benign toward you.

Rajan, let the divine Vivaswat help you completely. Let the four elephants, the Diggajas of the four quarters, Bhumi, Akasa, the Navagraha, the Lord Sesha, the greatest Naga, who is below the Earth and holds her on his head, give you what fetches you weal!

O son of Gandhari, once upon a time, an Asura named Vritra, displaying his prowess, defeated the best of the Devas in battle. Those inhabitants of swarga, led by Indra and numbering thousands upon thousands, their bodies lacerated, sapped of their vitality and strength, and in terror of Vritrasura, went to Brahma and sought his protection.

The gods said, 'O best and foremost of Devas, Vritra has crushed us in battle. Be our refuge now; rescue us from this great dread.'

Addressing Vishnu beside him and the Devas led by Indra, Brahma said to the unhappy ones, these words filled with truth. 'Indeed, I will always protect the gods led by Indra, and the Brahmanas too. The tejas of Tvashtri from which Vritra has been created is invincible. Having in olden days performed tapasya for a million years, Tvashtri then created Vritra with the leave of Maheswara. This mighty enemy of yours has vanquished you through the grace of Mahadeva Siva. You must go to Sankara's abode to see him. Once you behold him, you will be able to defeat Vritra. So go without delay to the mountains of Mandara where the origin of tapasya, the destroyer of Daksha's yagna, the wielder of the Pinaka, the Lord of all creatures, the slayer of the Asura Bhaganetra, lives.'

The Devas flew to Mandara with Brahma, and saw there that mass of energy and light, that Supreme God endued with the splendour of a million suns. Seeing the Devas, Maheswara welcomed them and enquired what he could do for them. Said He, *The sight of a radiant person can never be fruitless. Let the fruition of your desires proceed from this.*

The dwellers of swarga replied, 'Vritra has deprived us of our tejas and strength. Be the refuge of the swargavasis. Look, O Lord, at our bodies battered and bruised by his blows. We seek your protection. Be our refuge, O Maheswara!'

The God of Devas, called Sarva, said, 'Devas, you well know how this originated from the fervid wish and tapasya of Tvashtri the divine artificer, whose son is Vritra. It is surely my dharma to help you dwellers of heaven. O Indra, take this lustrous armour from my body and, O king of the Devas, put it on while chanting these mantras in your mind.'

And the boon-giving Siva gave Indra the armour with the mantras to be chanted by the wearer. Protected by the armour, Indra went to battle against the army of Vritra and although they cast all kinds of astras at him, the joints of Siva's armour could not be breached. Then Indra slew Vritra, and later he gave Angiras the kavacha, whose joints are made of mantras.

Angiras passed on those mantras to his son Brihaspati, who indeed has knowledge of all mantras. Brihaspati imparted that knowledge to the very intelligent Agnivesya. Agnivesya passed it down to me, and it is with those same mantras, O Duryodhana, best of kings, that I fasten this armour onto your body."

Saying this, Drona, that bull among acharyas, says again to your magnificent son, "Rajan, I sheath your body in this divine, joining its links with the Brahma mantras, even as in olden days Brahma himself fastened this kavacha to Indra's body during the Devasura yuddha sparked by the abduction of Tara. Here, I do now swathe you in the same ancient armour."

Having thus fastened the impenetrable armour onto Duryodhana with the arcane mantras of Brahma, Drona sends the king to battle Arjuna. Now wearing the armour of the Mahatman Acharya, Duryodhana rides at Arjuna's ratha with a thousand mighty war-maddened elephants, a hundred thousand horses and many maharathas. He storms forth to the sound of conches, drums and other instruments, going even like Virochana's son Bali of yore. Then, O Bhaarata, seeing the Kuru king himself go forth a fathomless ocean, a deafening uproar of joy arises among your troops.'"

CANTO 91

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After Duryodhana sallies forth to hunt down Partha and Krishna, who have penetrated deep into the Kaurava army, the Pandavas, accompanied by the Somakas, charge Drona with loud shouts. A ferocious battle erupts between the Kurus and the Pandavas at the portal to the sakata vyuha, the sight of which fills all onlookers with awe and makes their hair stand on end. Rajan, the sun is in the meridian and the encounter between the two forces is truly such that we have never seen or heard of its like before.

Led by Dhrishtadyumna, the Parthas all in immaculate battle array cover Drona's legions with heavy showers of arrows. We, too, with the maharatha Drona leading us, envelop the Pandava forces under Prishata's son Dhrishtadyumna, with our missiles.

The two hosts, massed with rathas, are past magnificent, like two immense clouds in the summer sky, driven at each other by opposing winds. Locking in bloody battle, they fight wildly, recklessly, like the Ganga and Yamuna swollen with rainwater during the monsoon hurtling into confluence. Their myriad weapons are like the winds that blow before them; their legions are packed dense with elephants, horses and chariots and the

maces the warriors wield their lightning that charges the awesome dark cloud formed by the Kuru host, whirled on by the Drona-tempest, and pouring incessant shafts: lashing torrents of rain that seek to quench the blazing Pandava-fire.

Like a spinning, blasting summer typhoon agitating the ocean, Drona blows at the Pandava host. The Pandavas rush towards the Acharya with terrific energy, to breach his vyuha, like a driving flood dashing against a strong embankment, to sweep it away. But Drona resists the furious Pandavas, Panchalas and Kekayas like a mountain stopping the fiercest tide. Quickly, many other avid and great kings of your army attack the Pandavas from all sides.

Then, rallying the Pandavas, Naravyaghra Dhrishtadyumna repeatedly attacks Drona, fervently trying to pierce his stolid defences. Indeed, as Drona showers his arrows on Prishata's son, so does he on Drona. With blades and swords for the winds that blow before it, richly furnished with arrows, spears and sabres, with the bowstring its lightning, and its twang its thunderclaps, the Dhrishtadyumna-cloud decants on all sides, killing many Kaurava maharathas and large number of horses, and swamps the hostile akshauhinis with his ceaseless gales of arrows.

Dhrishtadyumna stops Drona in his tracks, as the Brahmana attempts to scythe through the chariot-divisions of the Pandavas, felling their rathikas with his extraordinary thunderbolts. Although Drona struggles valiantly, his army, on encountering the fire-prince Dhrishtadyumna is truncated into three columns. One of these retreats towards Kritavarman, the Bhoja king; another towards Jalasandha; and the third, savagely set upon by the Pandavas, retreats towards Drona himself.

Drona repeatedly rallies his troops but every time Dhrishtadyumna splits them again. And the Pandavas and the Srinjayas massacre the Dhartarashtra army divided into three, like many beasts of prey a herd of cattle left unprotected by its herdsmen in a forest. Such is the slaughtering that it is as if Death himself swoops down to swallow Drona's warriors after Dhrishtadyumna first stuns them. As famine, pestilence and robbers destroy the kingdom of a weak or evil king, the Pandavas consume your army. The rays of the sun reflected by the warriors' weapons and the pall of dust raised by the fighting men blind and sting the eyes of all.

Seeing the Kaurava forces rent in three parts by Dhrishtadyumna and then butchered by the Pandavas, Drona, stirred to great wrath, begins to

denude the Panchalas with his elemental astras of fire, water and wind. The Brahmana burns like the fire at the end of the Yuga. He shatters chariots, strikes down elephants, steeds and foot-soldiers, each with just a single missile. No warrior in the Pandava army can withstand Drona's grievous archery.

Scorched by the sun and blasted by the astras of Drona, the Pandava akshauhinis reel and give way on abysmal Kurukshetra. And your host, too, ravaged by Dhrishtadyumna, seems to burst into flames all around like a dry forest on fire. While both Drona and Dhrishtadyumna decimate the two vast hosts, killing untold numbers, the maharathas, the great warriors of both armies, in utter disregard for their lives, continue to fight manfully everywhere. Neither in your army, nor in that of the enemy, O Bharatarishabha, is there a single warrior who flees that hellish carnage through fear.

The brothers Vivimsati and Chitrasena and the maharatha Vikarna surround Bhimasena, while Vinda, Anuvinda of Avanti and Kshemadhurti of marvellous skill support your three sons who engage the incomparable Bhimasena.

The noble and energetic king Balhika, with his troops, fights the sons of Draupadi. Saibya, lord of the Govasanas, with a thousand of his best warriors, faces the son of the great warrior king of the Kasis and resists him. Salya, king of the Madras, surrounds Dharmaraja Yudhishtira with his legion, gentle Yudhishtira who today is a blazing fire on the abysmal harrowing field. Brave and choleric Dusasana, ably supported by his own akshauhini, as always in fury, his brow knit darkly, rides against the matchless Satyaki.

Rajan, I led my own troops, all in armour, well armed and supported by four hundred of the finest bowmen, to fight Chekitana.

Sakuni with seven hundred Gandhara warriors armed with bows, darts and swords, faces Sahadeva the son of Madri. The two great archers, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, fight Virata, king of the Matsyas, with no care for their lives, fighting for their friend Duryodhana. King Balhika furiously confronts the mighty Sikhandin, son of Yajnasena. The lord of Avanti, with the Sauviras and the cruel Prabhadrakas fend off the rampaging Dhrishtadyumna of the Panchalas.

The fierce-faced Rakshasa Alambusha rushes, fangs bared, at the feral and heroic Ghatotkacha, Bhima's son who comes like Death into battle. The

maharatha Kuntibhoja, with a large force, attacks the horrible Alambusha. Thus, O Bhaarata, hundreds of separate duels break out between the warriors of your army and theirs.

Meanwhile, Rajan, Jayadratha remains at the rear of the Kuru army protected by so many great archers and maharathas; among them is Kripa whose chariot wheels are guarded by Aswatthaman on his right, and Karna the Sutaputra on the left. Behind Jayadratha, protecting his rear, is a small host of heroes led by Kripa, Somadatta's son, Vrishasena, Sala and the invincible Salya, who are all masters of every aspect of warfare. After making these arrangements for the protection of Jayadratha, the Kuru army continues the tremendous battle against the Pandavas.'"

CANTO 92

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Listen further to that astounding encounter between the Kurus and the Pandavas. Flying straight at Drona, who stands at the lip of his great vyuha, the Pandavas put forth all their might to break into the fortress like formations. Drona and his legions fight staunchly, in rage and inspiration to keep them at bay.

Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, fighting for your son, unleash ten torrid shafts at Virata and a terrific battle ensues between them. Blood sprays in the sunlight and flows like water during that contention that resembles an encounter in the forest between a lion and a pair of wild elephants in musth.

The powerful son of Yajnasena strikes king Balhika with excruciating arrows piercing his innards, and Balhika drills Drupada's son with nine coruscating shafts fletched with golden wings. Indescribably brutal is the duel between those two, one that swells the delight of the brave and makes the timid wilt in terror. The dark deluges of arrows they loose over each other shroud the sky and all the points of the compass, so that darkness falls on Kurukshetra and nothing can be seen.

Saibya, king of the Govasanas, leads his fearless and wild men against the prince of the Kasis, and they lock in battle like two bull elephants.

The belligerent king of the Balhikas is glorious indeed, as he faces all five of Draupadi's sons; their unrestrained encounter is like that of the battle between the mind and the five senses! Loosing torrents of arrows from all sides Draupadi's warrior princes are like the objects of the senses constantly besieging the body.

Your son Dusasana strikes Satyaki deeply with nine keen bolts so the Vrishni almost swoons. Recovering quickly, Satyaki stabs your son deep with ten kanka-feather winged shafts. Lacerating each other, their blood flying, the two look as splendid as two kinsukas in bloom.

Mauled by the arrows of Kuntibhoja, an angry Alambusha also looks like a beautiful flowering kinsuka. The pale Rakshasa, fighting at the head of your army, begins to roar most horribly and gashes Kuntibhoja with a squall of wooden barbs. The two resemble Sakra and the Asura Jambha of old.

The two sons of Madri meanwhile find Sakuni, whom they most loathe, and a violent, hate-filled encounter erupts between them; the twins fetch carnage to Sakuni's Gandhara troops.

The fire of the Pandava's wrath, which you kindled, which Karna stoked and your sons fanned into a conflagration, blazes now as if it will surely consume the entire world. Forced to turn his back on the fight against Nakula and Sahadeva, so ferocious is their onslaught on him, Sakuni stands briefly bemused, not knowing what to do. Seeing him turn back, the fearsome twins again lash down their arrows on him like two thunderheads upon a dimmed mountain. Subala's son, overwhelmed, sorely wounded by countless powerful shafts, turns his chariot and flees towards Drona for refuge!

Magnificent, black Ghatotkacha dashes towards the vile Alambusha with gusto and the duel between the two Rakshasas is like the one between Rama and Ravana of old.

Having struck Salya of the Madras with all of five hundred arrows in a dazzle of bowmanship, Yudhishtira pierces him deep with seven more. The duel between them swells to breathtaking proportions, and is like the one between the Asura Sambara and Indra of the Devas in olden days.

Your sons Vivimsati, Chitrasena and Vikarna, at the head of a large force, skirmish with Bhimasena.'"

CANTO 93

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'The Pandavas wildly beset the Kauravas who have been divided into three divisions. With blood-curdling roars, Bhimasena rushes against the mighty-armed Jalasandha; Yudhishtira leads his legions against Kritavarman; and Dhrishtadyumna tears into Drona, Rajan, and his arrows flaring at the Brahmana like sunrays.

Now the individual duels cease and a great and general battle begins between all the archers of the Kuru and the Pandava armies, every man of them bright-eyed with battle lust, and an unprecedented bloodbath ensues. Great Drona looses a dense swarm of missiles at Dhrishtadyumna and his legions, and a gasp goes up from both armies. In a moment, which seems to occur in another dimension of time, Drona's virulent shafts sever the heads of some thousands of fighting men and they roll in macabre pageant on the battlefield, which then resembles a forest of ghoulish lotuses.

Fine robes, ornaments, weapons, standards and coats of mail are strewn on the ground everywhere amidst every division of the armies. Coats of golden mail, dyed with blood, appear like clouds charged with lightning.

Other mighty maharathas, drawing great swords measuring full six cubits long, shoot down elephants, horses and men. In that frightful melee,

one sees swords, shields, bows, heads and coats of mail lying scattered all around; one sees innumerable headless trunks rise up weirdly, Rajan, in the midst of the horrific battle and vultures, kankas, jackals and swarms of other carnivores rending at the flesh of fallen men, horses and elephants, drinking their blood, or dragging them by their hair, or licking up their marrow through bones bitten through, or hauling whole corpses and severed limbs, or rolling their heads on the ground.

Masters of war, seeking only fame, fight at the ends of their strength and skills. Many warriors wheel across the field, displaying various incredible maneuvers of swordsmen. The noblest men butcher one another in frenzy, with swords, darts, lances, spears, axes, maces, spiked clubs and other uncommon weapons, why they strangle each other with bare hands until tongues loll out blue, eyes roll up in their sockets and fierce spirits finally quit their manly bodies.

Maharathas fight other chariot-warriors, horsemen against horsemen, elephants other elephants and foot-soldiers fall upon foot-soldiers. The elephants present the most dramatic and gory spectacle, maddened and trumpeting shrilly, as they gore each other viciously in the manner they do in sporting arenas.

All mercy and dharma have departed Kurukshetra, on this fourth day of the kali yuga of wrath unleashed, and the greatest warriors fight like senseless beasts rather than highborn heroes. Dhrishtadyumna horses are entangled with those of Drona. Those steeds fleet as the wind, the former's white as doves and the latter's red as blood, are still so beautiful, even at the grim heart of darkness; they are like stunning clouds charged with lightning.

O Bhaarata, abruptly Prishasta's son parantapa Dhrishtadyumna sees Drona again, and in froth, flings down his bow and engages him the most difficult kind of combat—hand-to-hand, with sword and shield. Seizing the shaft of Drona's ratha, he vaults onto it, sometimes leaping onto the middle of the yoke, sometimes on its joints and sometimes just behind the horses.

And as the fire-prince moves nimbly from place to place, even upon the very back of Drona's red horses, Drona finds no opportunity or opening to strike at him. All of us watch this in amazement! Indeed, Dhrishtadyumna's sudden attack is like the strike of a hunting hawk in the forest.

Recovering from his initial surprise, Drona first smashes Dhrishtadyumna's shield, emblazoned with a hundred moons, next his sword with ten more shafts, and finally with four and sixty arrows, kills his

horses. With a few broad-headed shafts, the Brahmana fells the Panchala prince's standard, his royal chatra and then kills both his Parshni charioteers. The terrible Acharya now draws his bowstring to his ear and looses a fatal arrow straight at Dhrishtadyumna standing on his horses' necks, even like Indra casting his Vajra at an enemy.

Even as the deadly shaft flies to claim the life of the prince born to kill the grand Drona, Satyaki from a side cuts it in slivers with fourteen perfect arrows. The bull of the Sinis saves the prince of the Panchalas whom the greatest of acharyas had seized like a deer held by a lion in its jaws. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna saved, Drona in fury shoots twenty-six arrows at Satyaki, to which now the emboldened, relieved Panchala, having leapt gratefully off Drona's chariot horses, replies with precisely twenty-six of his own that thud squarely into Drona's chest in a neat round clump, even while the Brahmana turns to slaughtering the Srinjayas.

All the Panchala maharathas, agog to see the inspired Satyaki vanquish the Kuru Acharya and senapati, quickly converge and whisk their own prince Dhrishtadyumna away from immediate danger.'"

CANTO 94

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, after Satyaki saves Dhrishtadyumna's life, what does Drona do against that Naravyaghra Satyaki, the grandson of Sini?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Like a mighty Naga, with wrath for his venom, his stretched bow his yawning jaws, his sharp shafts his fangs, his eyes red as copper from the frenzy of battle, and breathing hard, Drona, his red chargers seeming to soar into the sky to scale a mountain top, turns viciously on Satyaki, covering the Vrishni who has deprived him of his most precious prey with a tempest of golden-winged arrows.

Seeing the irresistible Drona cloudburst, with the rumble of chariot-wheels its roar, the twanging of its always bent bow its thunderclaps, long arrows its lightning-flashes, the Brahmana's fury its gale winds and flying at him upon the horses that are the hurricane that impel it, Satyaki coolly rushes ahead to meet it, smilingly saying to his charioteer, 'O Suta, whip the horses to fly at this Brahmana fallen from his swadharma, this refuge of Dhritarashtra's son, the dispeller of the Kuru king's sorrows and fear, the acharya of all the princes, the warrior always so proud of his skill.'

At which, Satyaki's superb silver horses, with the speed of the wind, hurtle directly towards Drona. The two Parantapas collide, and each rains down thousands of arrows at the other, shafts that fill the firmament and obscure the ten points of the compass. Like two clouds are they, which empty themselves over the Earth at summer's end. The sun becomes invisible, the very wind ceases to blow and an endless thick pall of gloom descends on the battlefield, so that, blinded, all the other warriors on Kurukshetra are forced to stop fighting.

The thunder of the fusillades of the awesome twain is no less than that of Indra's Vajra striking. Pierced all over with long shafts, O Bhaarata, both look as if they are covered by nests of snakes. Brave warriors hear the incessant twanging of their bows and the sounds that their palms make, and to them it is just like the crash of thunder falling upon mountaintops.

The rathas of both warriors, their horses and their charioteers pierced by barbs of golden wings, are beautiful to behold. Fierce and incessant is the downpour of bright straight arrows, splendent like snakes freshly freed from their sloughs. Their canopies and their standards are shredded; their glorious bodies are bathed in blood, but spurred by the single thought of victory, they continue to strike each other with deadly shafts. With blood flowing down their limbs, they resemble a pair of elephants in musth, ichor streaming from lust rent temples.

The roars, shouts and other cries of the soldiers, the blast of conches and the beat of drums all cease, Rajan, for no one make the slightest sound. All the akshauhinis fall silent, and all their warriors stop fighting and become spectators of that single duel. Maharathas, elephant riders, horsemen and foot-soldiers surround these two bulls among men and witness their duel with unwinking eyes. The elephant-divisions, the horse-divisions, and the chariot-akshauhinis, all stand still in their ranks, like figures in a painting of war. Adorned with gems and gold, studded profusely with pearls and corals, with flags waving, with coats of shining golden mail, with triumphal banners and richly caparisoned elephants, with fine cloaks and robes, with bright and sharp weapons glinting, with the heads of horses ornamented with chamaras, yak-tails and with gold and silver, with wildflower garlands draped around the frontal lobes of elephants and shimmering rings round their tusks—the Kuru and Pandava armies look like a vast gathering of cloud banks at the close of summer, decked with

rows of cranes and myriads of fire-flies under them and embellished with rainbows and flashes of lightning.

Riveted, our men as well as those of Yudhishtira watch the battle between Satyaki and the noble Drona, as do the Devas led by Brahma, Soma, the Siddhas, the Charanas, the Vidyadharas, and the great Nagas, from their invisible wondrous vimanas in the sky. All that watch are wonderstruck by the two lions among men who dash forward and fall back, striking at each other all the while.

Both of untold prowess and skill, Drona and Satyaki put their astounding genius at battle on display, and draw gushing fonts of blood from each other, always as if in sport! Satyaki cuts down a rash of Drona's powerful missiles in flight, and next moment breaks the Acharya's bow in his hands. In the twinkling of an eye, Bharadwaja's son sweeps up another and strings it, but Satyaki cleaves that one too.

Drona picks up another bow in a wink, but no sooner does he string it than Satyaki splits it; and this happens a full nine and seven times!

Watching Satyaki fight, Drona thinks, "Such prodigious archery that this greatest of the Satwatas shows may be found in Rama and Arjuna, in Kartavirya and the Purushavyaghra Bhishma! But hardly in anyone else."

In his heart he applauds the prowess of Satyaki. Seeing the Vrishni prodigy's dexterity as being equal to that of Vasava himself, Drona, greatest of all masters of weapons, is deeply stirred and gratified. So, too, are the Devas above with Indra at their head, for they have never seen another archer of such brilliance and light like swiftness of hand as Satyaki although they, the Siddhas and the Charanas are acquainted with Drona's feats.

Finally, Drona, that scourge of Kshatriyas, strings a fresh bow and launches an astra of profound maya at Satyaki. The Vrishni hero baffles that recondite weapon with a hermetic astra of his own; and then he continues to lash Drona with his arrow storms. In truth, Rajan, I have no words with which to describe the superhuman skill and unworldly feats of the two heroes, one old and the other still young. I have never before seen such a duel, which all the most knowing among both your warriors and the Pandavas' cheer and applaud. Satyaki and Drona both summon the exact same astras at the very same moments, and when they themselves become aware of this, they fight with somewhat diminished fury, as if

acknowledging each other's unequalled greatness. It seems their spirits turn mild for a moment.

Then, Rajan, his wrath returning, Drona begins to invoke the most potent devastras to kill Satyaki. Seeing the dreadful foe-slaughtering Agneyastra, Satyaki invokes the Varuna. Seeing them both now summon celestial weapons, loud cries of alarm are heard and the very birds of the sky cease to fly through it. The two astras flare out at each other at the same moment and locking on high are extinguished against each other, falling away in embers and a drizzle.

Just at this time, the sun begins to sink toward the western horizon. Anxious for Satyaki, Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Nakula, and Sahadeva charge Drona bringing the Matsyas and the Salweya troops with them. At which, thousands of Kuru princes led by Dusasana at their head, rally to protect Drona who is now surrounded by his enemies. Another pitched and tumultuous battle breaks out. The earth is quickly covered with a thick skin of dust and showers of arrows shot by both sides; and nothing is visible anymore. The battle rages on complete disregard of life and limb, of kinship and friendship.'"

CANTO 95

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The sun moves into his downward course towards the summit of the Asta hills, Surya turns cool, the sky is covered with dust, and the day begins to fade fast. As for the soldiers, some rest, some fight, some return to the field they have let in fear, now to vie again for victory. As the great war burns on behind them, Arjuna and Krishna fly on towards Jayadratha. With his irresistible arrows, Arjuna creates a path through the enemy forces, wide enough for his chariot and Krishna plunges his ratha along that narrow way. Awesome is the Parthasarathy's skill, quicksilver, as he flashes expertly along the narrowest openings. Your troops give way to Krishna blazing with lustre.

Arjuna's arrows, each one engraved with his name, some of bamboo, others of iron, of long range, flame from his Gandiva like the yuga fire, every last one claiming an enemy life, drinking the blood of living men and their beasts, killing scavengers and birds of prey and ill omen as well, who rend at the noble blood and swill thirstily from the river of gore flowing on Kurukshetra. Standing tall and erect upon his chariot, Arjuna shoots his arrows full two miles ahead of him, and his chariot driven by his divine

sarathy arrives where he aims even as the shafts pierce and dispatch his enemies!

Hrishikesa drives his ratha, yoked to gandharva horses swift as Garuda or the wind, with such speed that the whole universe marvels to watch him. Indeed, Rajan, the chariot of Surya himself, or those of Rudra or Vaisravana, have never gone as fast. No chariot has ever before been driven with such speed in war, as Arjuna's moving with the swiftness of a wish cherished in the mind. However, as Krishna and Arjuna race along through the enemy ranks, the superb horses begin to tire. Hunger and thirst afflict them as do the countless barbs that have pierced their sides along their careen. Yet, the wonderful beasts prance as they flash along flying over slain enemies' bodies, over dead horses, over broken chariots and even the massive corpses of fallen elephants.

Rajan, the two heroic brothers of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda at the head of their forces, notice that Arjuna's horses are tired, challenge him and strike him with sixty-four sizzling shafts, Janardana with seventy, and their four horses with a hundred. Infuriated, Arjuna, with his knowledge of the marmas of the body, pierces them with nine perfectly aimed barbs, striking them deep through the most critical and painful parts of their bodies. Roaring like two tigers, the brothers drown Krishna and Arjuna in a flood of arrows.

With two wedge-headed arrows Arjuna Swetavahana of the white steeds seamlessly breaks Vinda and Anuvinda's wonderful bows, and cuts down their standards bright as gold. The Avantis seize up fresh bows and resume their onslaught but great Partha easily frustrates their fire upon him. Never pausing he kills their horses, their charioteers, the two rathikas that protect their backs and the others that follow them.

Next, with another broad-headed arrow, sharp as a razor, he severs the older brother's head and Vinda falls out of his ratha like a tree broken by the wind. His eyes turning crimson to see his precious brother die, Anuvinda abandons all restraint, leaps down from his horseless chariot, mace raised high, and rushes towards Arjuna to wreak vengeance on him. He strikes Krishna on his brow, but the Avatara stands unmoved as the Mainaka mountain. In a blur of six arrows, Arjuna cuts away his legs, his arms and head and blows his wide chest apart, and Anuvinda falls onto the hallowed field like a riven hillock.

Seeing both the brothers dead, their followers, mad with grief, attack Arjuna, shooting hundreds of arrows in frenzy. Arjuna, resplendent as a fire consuming a forest at the end of winter, consumes them all in a few moments. He trundles over the fallen troops with some difficulty, shining bright like the rising sun destroying the clouds that had hidden it. Fear fills the Kauravas but seeing that he is tired and that Jayadratha is still far away, they recover quickly and surround him, shouting and roaring.

Arjuna says softly to Krishna, "Our horses are injured and tired and Jayadratha is still far away. Tell me, O Krishna, wisest of men, what should we do now? With you for their vision, the Pandavas will vanquish their enemies. I think that we should unyoke the horses and draw out luck the arrows that are stuck in them."

Kesava replies, "I too think the same, O Partha."

Arjuna then says, "I will hold the enemy forces at bay, O Kesava, while you tend to the horses."

Alighting from his chariot, Dhananjaya takes up his Gandiva, and stands fearlessly there like an immovable hill. Seeing him stand alone on the ground, the Kuru Kshatriyas, scenting victory, roar louder and surround him with a number of chariots; all of them stretch their bows and shower arrows over him. Filled with battle lust, they brandish their weapons and entirely shroud Partha with their shafts like clouds shrouding the sun. The great warriors rush impetuously at him like angry elephants attacking a lion.

And now the might of Partha that we witness is more extraordinary than ever, as he stands alone holding those countless warriors at bay. Cutting down his enemies' multitudinous shafts, he covers them all with a maelstrom of fire. The banks of shafts colliding in the sky sets the azure vaults ablaze, cascading rivers of sparks down on the field below. The air on Kurukshetra is steamy with the hot breath of Kshatriyas covered in blood, and their horses' heaving breath, and the gasping trumpeting elephants; that great crush of warriors and their beasts resounds with yells, shout, neighing, and wild roars.

That impassable, limitless, surging and implacable ocean of chariots has arrows for its tide, standards for its eddies, elephants for its crocodiles, foot-soldiers for its countless fishes, the blare of conches and the beat of drums for its roar, rathas for its surging waves, helmets for its tortoises, chatras and banners for its froth, and the bodies of slain elephants for its submarine

rocks. With his arrows, Partha contains the advance of this sea like a continent.

Now Krishna says to Arjuna, “There is no well here on the field, O Arjuna, for our horses to drink from. They do not want a bath but thirst for water to drink.”

Arjuna cheerfully replies, “Here it is!” And he pierces the earth with an astra and creates a wonderful lake from which the horses can drink! Swans glide on the magic lake, ducks and chakravakas; and it is wide, full of crystalline water with the finest of full-blown lotuses, and teeming with all kinds of fish. Fathomless, it is the resort of many a Rishi; and the Devarishi Narada comes there to look at Arjuna’s lake of wonder. And Partha, who is capable of achieving marvels even like the celestial artificer Tvashtri himself, creates a hall of arrows there, arrows its beams and rafters, arrows its pillars, and arrows for its roof.

Smiling in joy, Krishna cries, “Uttamam! Wonderful!””

CANTO 96

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After the noble son of Kunti creates the lake, even while holding off the enemy, after he creates the hall of arrows, Krishna alights from the chariot and unyokes the horses lacerated by arrows. Watching this extraordinary sight, the Siddhas, the Charanas and all the Kuru warriors, too, applaud loudly.

The maharathas ranged against Arjuna cannot defend themselves against him, even when he fights on foot. It is wonderful to see that although myriads of chariots, elephants and horses attack him, Partha does not flinch but battles on as if he has juts begun his day of war, and prevails over all his enemies. The hostile kings shoot a solid swath of arrows at him, but the son of Vasava, in no anxiety whatever, seems to receive the hundreds of arrows, maces and lances cast at him as the ocean does the hundreds and hundreds of rivers flowing into it, even gladly.

Mahabaho Partha serenely receives all the weapons that the greatest of the enemy warriors loose at him in utmost fury. Fighting from the ground, he still confounds all the kings massed against him on their chariots—like that one fault, avarice, destroying a host of accomplishments!

The Kauravas, Rajan, applaud the astonishing prowess of Partha and Vasudeva, saying, "What more wonderful thing has ever been seen in this world, or will ever be than this that Partha and Govinda, in the very thick battle, have unyoked their horses? These maharathas inspire us with their energy and unshakeable assurance!"

Then Krishna, of eyes like lotus-petals, smiling as if he is in the midst of a group of women and not armed enemies, leads the horses into the hall of arrows, in the very sight of all your troops, and there takes away their fatigue, pain, their trembling and heals their wounds. At his ease, he plucks out the arrows that stick in them and, rubbing them down with his tender hands, makes them trot around slowly and coaxes them to drink. After quenching their thirst and removing their tiredness and pain, he once more carefully yokes them to the wonderful chariot. This done, Sauri, greatest of all living men, mahatejasvin Krishna, mounts the ratha again along with Arjuna and they ride back into battle, swifter then ever.

Seeing the chariot of the two Krishnas fly back into the war, its horses now refreshed, the Kauravas are crestfallen. They sigh, O Rajan, like snakes whose fangs have been pulled out, and say, "Oh, shame, shame on us! Partha and Krishna storm our ranks again slaughtering our troops even like boys playing with a toy. Shame on us that, despite all our best efforts, they vanquish us with such ease and disdain."

Other warriors cry, "O brave Kauravas, kill Krishna and the Kiritin! For their horses have drunk and been refreshed and they fly closer to Jayadratha every moment, decimating us on their way."

Some great lords, Rajan, having seen the never before witnessed sight at the very heart of a war, say among themselves, "Alas, through Duryodhana's sins, king Dhritarashtra's warriors, the other mighty Kshatriyas, and the very Earth has been plunged into calamity and are being destroyed. But ah, Duryodhana still does not understand it."

Thus speak many redoubtable Kshatriyas. Others, O Bhaarata, say, "Jayadratha has already been despatched to Yama. Let the small-minded Duryodhana, with diminished resources, prepare for the funeral obsequies of the Saindhava, his brother-in-law."

Meanwhile, Arjuna sees the sun rapidly westering and Krishna urges his heartened steeds to still greater speed. The Kuru warriors cannot impede his progress at all, as Partha furrows a bloody trail through them, menacing them all like a lion a herd of deer, killing thousands on his inexorable way,

drawing nearer a quailing Jayadratha with each moment as he races the Sun to the horizon.

Krishna now whips his fabulous horses and blows a reverberant blast on his Panchajanya the colour of clouds. So swiftly do the gandharva horses fly along now that they overtake Arjuna's arrows!

Seeing danger draw nearer, many Dhartarashtra kings and other Kshatriyas group together and surround Arjuna in some frenzy. Thus confronted by them all, Arjuna has to stop for a moment and now Duryodhana races up and catches up with his lustrous cousin. Seeing the chariot whose rumble is the roar of thunderheads, the ratha that flies the terrible standard bearing Hanuman animated upon it, howling and roaring terribly at them, your forces are quickly unnerved. And when the sun is almost entirely shrouded by the dust that the armies raise, the Kuru warriors, wounded and bleeding from awesome Arjuna's onslaught can no longer bear to even look at the two blindingly splendid Krishnas.'"

CANTO 97

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Rajan! I watch Vasudeva and Dhananjaya penetrate deep into our forces, after overrunning many akshauhinis, with their captains running away in fear. A little later, however, the Maharathas, filled with excitement and shame, and spurred on by their innate valour, regain their composure and begin to defy Arjuna again. However, the men who now ride against Arjuna do not return, like the rivers that never return from the ocean. Seeing this, many ignoble Kshatriyas incur sin and hell by turning their backs and running away, like atheists turning away from the Vedas.

Blasting their way through the squadron of Kuru chariots, the two bulls among men finally issue out of it, looking like the Sun and the Moon freed from the jaws of Rahu. The two Krishnas, their tiredness dispelled come through the great host of enemies like two fish passing through a strong net. Truly, they look like Yuga-suns risen in the sky, like men who have escaped from a raging conflagration, or like two fish emerging from the jaws of a makara. And they agitate the Kuru host like a pair of antediluvian makaras agitating the ocean.

While Partha and Krishna were in the midst of Drona's division, your warriors and sons thought that they would never emerge from it. However, now seeing them blithely dash out of its confines, they no longer have hopes for Jayadratha's life. They had thought that the two Krishnas would never be able to escape Drona and Hridika's son Kritavarman. Frustrating their hopes, the two Parantapas, Rajan, slice through Drona's division, and also the impenetrable Bhoja akshauhini. Seeing them, lick their way through the formidable akshauhinis like two blazing fires, your men despair and no longer hope to save Jayadratha's life. Then the intrepid Krishna and Dhananjaya begin to discuss among themselves how they could kill Jayadratha.

Arjuna says, "Six of the very greatest maharathas among the Dhartarashtras have set Jayadratha in their midst. But today, if I only see him, he will not escape me even if Indra with all the Devas become his protectors."

Thus, do the two Krishnas talk, O Mahabaho, while constantly looking for Jayadratha. Hearing them, for they speak freely and aloud, your sons set up a loud outcry. These two Krishna look like a pair of thirsty thunderous elephants, refreshed by drinking water after having crossed a desert. Beyond death and above decay, they look like two merchants who have crossed a mountainous country infested with tigers, lions and wild elephants. Indeed, seeing them free of Drona and Kritavarman and the dreadful light on Partha and Krishna's face, your warriors set up a loud bewailing from all sides.

Having shaken off Drona who is like a deadly poisonous snake or a great fire, as well as the other lords of the Earth, Partha and Krishna are like two blazing suns. Indeed, free of Drona's ocean-like division, they are full of joy like men who have safely crossed the vast deep itself. Free from the dense showers of shafts from the Drona and Kritavarman and their legions, Kesava and Arjuna look like Indra and Agni, or Suns of blinding effulgence. Pierced by the arrows of Bharadwaja's son, and their dark bodies dripping blood, they are as glorious as two mountains covered with flowering karnikaras.

Having crossed the vast lake, of which Drona is the crocodile, numberless arrows the fierce water-snakes and makaras, and great Kshatriyas the deep waters; having emerged out of the cloud of Drona's astras, whose thunder is the twanging of bows and the lightning the flashes

of maces and swords, Partha and Krishna are like the Sun and Moon liberated from an engulfing darkness.

Crossing the field which Drona's arms had barred, all beings regard the dark splendid twain as men who have forded the five rivers—the Satadru, the Vipasa, the Ravi, the Chandrabhaga and the Vitasta—, with the ocean for their sixth, all in spate during the monsoon, and full of crocodiles. Wanting to kill Jayadratha who is no longer far from them, the two heroes look like two tigers waiting to fall upon a ruru deer. Their very faces make your warriors, Rajan, think of Jayadratha as one already dead.

Krishna and Arjuna together, with red eyes, are bursting with excitement and joy, and give vent to a battery of jubilant shouts and roars at their first sight of Jayadratha. Indeed, Rajan, the splendour then of Krishna, standing with reins in hand, and of Partha armed with his bow, is like that of Surya or Agni. Free from Drona's restraint, their joy at sight of Jayadratha not far off is like that of two fierce hawks at the sight of a piece of flesh; and even like a pair of hunting hawks do they swoop down on the hapless Saindhava.

But seeing Hrishikesa and Dhananjaya rout Drona's divisions, your valiant son, the king Duryodhana, whose mystic armour Drona has fastened to his majestic form with Brahma's own mantras, dashes forward in a single chariot to protect Jayadratha. He overtakes Krishna and Partha and wheels back to face Kesava of the lotus-like eyes. Seeing this incredible happening, your troops joyfully blow on horns and conches and beat a hundred thousand drums and utter deafening roars to match. Those who stand like burning fires around Jayadratha as his final guardians are also filled with joy on seeing your son.

Seeing Duryodhana confront them, now with his followers rallied behind him, Krishna speaks softly to Arjuna.'

CANTO 98

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

'Krishna says, "Look Arjuna, how wonderfully Duryodhana overtook us! There is no maharatha equal to him. He is a great bowman and can shoot his arrows to a great distance. He is a master warrior, almost invincible in battle, and knows all the different arts of war. Raised in luxury, he is held in great esteem by even the most renowned maharathas. Partha, he has always hated the Pandavas and it is best that you fight him now. For upon him rests, even as on a stake at dice, victory or defeat. Arjuna, expend the venom of your wrath which you have nurtured so long against Duryodhana. He is the root of all the wrongs the Pandavas have suffered and he is now within reach of your arrows. Trust your prowess.

Why has Duryodhana come to do battle with you? Fortune has brought him to you; Dhananjaya, kill him. He was born into a great palace, and he has never known want or deprivation. O bull among men, he also does not know your true might in battle. When there is none in the three worlds of the Devas, the Asuras and Manushyas who can vanquish you in battle, what can one Duryodhana do? Partha, now that he is within range of your ratha, kill him as Purandara slew Vritra.

Duryodhana has always tried to harm you. He cheated Yudhishtira at dice, and this prince with a sinful soul has sinned in many ways against the Dharmaraja. Arjuna, have no scruple, and kill this evil, wrathful and cruel man who is the very embodiment of avarice. Remember the theft of your kingdom through vile deceit; think of your exile in the forest; remember the shame of Draupadi; and remembering all that, put forth your strength and kill this most evil prince.

He has come to bar your way to Jayadratha. Providence has fetched him to you and he is within range of your arrows. He knows that he will have to fight you and today all your purposes, even those that you have not thought of, will be crowned with success. Arjuna, destroy this wretch of his race, the son of Dhritarashtra, even as Indra did of old the Asura Jambha at the Devasura yuddha. If you kill Duryodhana, you can then easily pierce through this headless army. Cut the very root of this evil one, and perform the avabhrita snana, the final cleansing bath of this war, with his blood."

Having heard Krishna out, Arjuna says, "Tathaastu! I will do what you say. Ignore everything else and ride at Duryodhana. I will cut off the head of this devil, who has enjoyed our kingdom for too long without a qualm. Will I not succeed, O Kesava, in avenging myself against this sinner who had Draupadi dragged by her hair into the Kuru sabha when she was in her period and had done no wrong herself?"

Speaking thus among themselves, the two Krishnas are filled with exultation; they urge their great white steeds towards Duryodhana. As for your son, Bharatarishabha, as he nears Partha and Krishna, he feels no fear, even though the occasion is charged to inspire dread. The Kshatriyas of your army applaud him for his daring; indeed, the entire Kuru host roars in exhilaration to watch their king dash forward to bar Arjuna and Krishna's way.

Held up by your son with his bow upraised, Arjuna is furious, and Duryodhana, too, is no less in fury. All the fierce Kshatriyas stop to watch their duel. Duryodhana, Arjuna and Krishna, all eager for the fight, roar and the three of them together raise their conches to their lips and blow resounding blasts on them. Hearing the deep boom of the Panchajanya and the Devadatta drown Duryodhana's lesser sankha, dread quickly seizes your warriors, who are certain that your son will die; they regard him already as a libation poured into the mouth of the sacred fire.

Your warriors cry in fear, "The king is slain! Our king is slain!"

But Duryodhana roars at them, “Dispel your fears! I will send the two Krishnas to Yama.” Feeling certain of victory, wearing Bramha’s magic kavacha, he further cries to Arjuna, “If, Partha, you are truly Pandu’s son loose all your weapons, of this world and unworldly, at me. Let me see your much vaunted manliness today that wins the praise of so many great Kshatriyas.”””

CANTO 99

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Roaring out his challenge, Duryodhana strikes Arjuna with three lethal shafts that can excoriate an enemy; with four more, he pierces his enemy's four horses; and with another ten searing missiles he bloodies Krishna's chest and shoots the whip out of the Blue One's hands.

Partha, calm as ever, swift as ever, looses fourteen searing barbs at Duryodhana, stone-whetted and beautifully fletched with shining feathers. They fly true to their mark but every one of them glances harmlessly off the armour that Duryodhana wears. In some surprise, Arjuna shoots another nine and five keen arrows at his hated enemy. But these, too, glance mildly off Duryodhana's kavacha.

Krishna says to Arjuna, "Ah, this is passing strange, even as if mountains moved! Your arrows, O Partha, have turned weak. Has your Gandiva lost its power? Tell me, have the might of your grip and the power of your arms grown womanish? Will this not to be your last meeting with Duryodhana? For I am amazed to watch your terrible shafts fall soft as flowers on Duryodhana. What misfortune is this that your astras filled with

the power of thunder and which never fail to pierce an enemy now glance so kindly off this sinner?"

Arjuna replies, "Krishna, I feel certain that Drona has wrapped Duryodhana in his own armour, his ancient kavacha which has the powers of the three worlds, whose secret only the Acharya knows, and which he once shared with me. None of my weapons can pierce this armour; not Indra can pierce it with his Vajra.

But you know all this too well, Krishna! Then why do you berate and provoke me? You know everything that has ever happened in all the worlds, in the past, the present, and what is in the womb of future. Madhusudana, no one knows all this as you do! Duryodhana wearing Drona's armour is fearless in battle. Yet, he does not know what one wearing this kavacha should do for he wears it only like a woman.

Watch now, Janardana, the might of my arms and of my bow. Even though he wears this greatest coat of mail, I will still vanquish Duryodhana. Brahma himself gave this golden armour to Angiras, who gave it to Brihaspati. Purandara had this kavacha from Brihaspati, and Indra once showed it to me with the mantras to be chanted while putting it on. Krishna, though this armour is divine, though Brahma himself created it, it will still not protect the wretched Duryodhana from my arrows."

Saying this, Arjuna invokes an inexorable astra with potent mantras and fits it to his bowstring. But even as he draws back the string of the Gandiva, from a long way off Aswatthaman burns up Arjuna's weapon in his very hand with another astra of untold power. Seeing Aswatthaman, the Brahmavadi, consume his occult weapon from a distance, a stricken Arjuna Swetavahana says to Kesava, "Janardana, I cannot use this astra twice, for if I do it will turn itself on me and kill me and all our troops."

Meanwhile, Rajan, Duryodhana pierces each of the Krishnas with nine barbs like venom-spitting serpents, and then showers down a veritable storm of other shafts over them. Your warriors exult to see this and blow on conches and horns and beat deafening rhythms on their drums; and their roaring fills earth and sky. A fuming Partha, licking the corners of his mouth, closely examines his enemy's body but sees no part that is not covered by the impenetrable armour.

Nothing else for it, the Vijaya in a savage flash kills his adversary's horses, his two Parshni charioteers, and then cleaves Duryodhana's bow and cuts away his leather finger guards, with a perfect incredible volley. The

Pandava shatters the Kaurava's chariot next and, having cut away his gloves, strikes him agonisingly through his fingers and palms!

Seeing Duryodhana stricken by Arjuna's canny brilliance, seeing him with his chariot ruined and his bow broken and wringing his hands in pain, a host of Kuru warriors rush to rescue him and surround Arjuna's chariot with thousands of rathas, elephants and horses, and also with teeming legions of foot-soldiers, so that they can no longer be seen.

Dauntless, serene Partha begins to massacre the maharathas, other warriors and elephants, in their hundreds, striking off limbs and heads at his mighty will, so they fall thick and fast on the field. Slain, or in the very moment of being killed, they all fail to reach Arjuna's chariot which stands motionless full two miles from the besieging force on every side.

Now Krishna says urgently to his warrior of light, "Draw your bow forcefully, Partha, and raze the enemy as swiftly as you can, and I will blow my conch!"

Arjuna then draws his bow Gandiva to the fullest stretch and begins to decimate the enemy horribly, in a tide of blood. Meanwhile, his face covered with dust, Krishna raises his Panchajanya to his lips and blows reverberantly on it so all Kurukshetra shakes at the sound. From the thunderous twanging of the Gandiva and the awful blast of the Panchajanya, the Kuru warriors all around, their bodies turning weak, all fall down on the ground.

Arjuna's chariot, suddenly freed from the encircling press, flashes ahead like a bright cloud driven by the wind. Seeing Arjuna flare at them, the protectors of Jayadratha and their followers, all maharathas and mighty bowmen, are shaken and shout aloud. They unleash tempests of arrows at the lone chariot descending so swiftly upon them, and fill the field of the great hunt with the whistling of their arrows, the blare of their conches and other fierce noises—all this in as much fear as wrath!

Hearing the awful uproar that your troops raise, Krishna and Arjuna blow their conches, Rajan, and the twin sound seems to fill all the Earth, with her mountains, seas, islands and the nether worlds. The blast echoes through all the points of the compass, and is echoed back by both the armies. Your maharathas are at first terrified to see Krishna and Dhananjaya but they soon recover and continue to fight. The sight of the two most blessed Krishnas charging towards them is a wonderful one!'"

CANTO 100

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When your greatest warriors finally see those greatest of all the heroes of the Vrishni–Andhaka and the Kuru races, they lose no time, each striving to be the first, in engaging them in battle. On their great rattling chariots, decked with gold, spread with tiger-skins, resembling blazing fires and drawn by mettlesome steeds, they charge, illumining the ten points of the compass, brandishing their bows, the backs of whose staves are chased with dazzling gold. With terrible roars, eight great chariot-warriors, Bhurisravas, Sala, Karna, Vrishasena, Jayadratha, Kripa, Salya and Aswatthaman attack as if they will devour the sky and illuminate the world around in their splendid chariots, adorned with golden moons.

Fighting inspired, on the edge of madness even, they envelop Arjuna on every side with eight gales of fire. Their shining chariots, which rumble like thunderheads, are drawn by the very best horses of different species bred in diverse countries, some in mountainous realms, some in the land of rivers, and some in that of the Sindhus. And other Kuru maharathas converge on Arjuna's chariot to protect your son Duryodhana.

These great warriors, Rajan, take up their conches and blow them, filling the sky, the earth and her seas, with their booming blare. Then Vasudeva blows his Panchajanya and Dhananjaya his Devadatta, those best of all conches on Earth. The blast of the Devadatta fills the world, the sky and the ten cardinal points; and the Panchajanya, surpassing all sounds, fills the highest heaven and the deepest earth. The awesome and appalling clamour persists, filling the timid with fear and the brave with excitement.

Thousands of great maharathas, matchless bowmen, kings from diverse realms, some fighting for the Kuru cause and other for the Pandavas, beat drums, jharjharas, cymbals and mridangas. And the Kuru heroes, filled with rage, for they cannot stand the blasting of Arjuna and Krishna's unworldly conches, also blow great conches, while their troops roar behind them in support.

Though being urged forward by the blare of conches, the chariot-warriors, elephants and horses of the Kuru army are yet full of fear, and indeed, O lord, they look ill. The booming conches of Krishna and Arjuna agitate the Kuru host and their bravest warriors seem to be like the very heavens fallen down through some vast convulsion of nature. The stunning din, Rajan, resounds all around and affrights your troops as if this is some critical moment and event at the end of the Yuga terrifying all living creatures.

Then Duryodhana and the eight great maharathas chosen to protect Jayadratha all surround Arjuna. Aswatthaman strikes Krishna with three and seventy shafts, and Arjuna with three broad-headed ones, and their standard and four horses with five others. Seeing Krishna injured, a furious Arjuna looses a hundred arrows at Drona's son. Then piercing Karna with ten arrows and Vrishasena with three, Dhananjaya destroys Salya's bow with arrows fitted to its string. Salya takes up another bow and stabs the son of Pandu with a blistering barb, while Bhurisravas cuts him sharp with three stone-whetted shafts, golden-winged.

Karna strikes Arjuna with thirty-two arrows and Vrishasena with seven. Jayadratha himself pierces Arjuna with three and seventy shafts and Kripa with ten. The king of the Madras also lacerates Arjuna with ten shafts and the son of Drona first with sixty arrows, and again with five arrows; Aswatthaman makes Krishna a home for twenty more of his scathing barbs. Unruffled, Arjuna of the white steeds, displaying supernal dexterity, and

speed that is past believing, strikes Karna with a dozen shafts, Vrishasena with three, and Partha breaks Salya's bow at the grip.

Shooting the son of Somadatta with three arrows and Salya with ten, he strikes Kripa with five and twenty thunderbolts, Jayadratha with a hundred, and Drona's son with seventy: all in what seems, what is, a single moment. A battling, wrathful Bhurisravas cracks the goad in Krishna's hand, and bloodies Arjuna with three and twenty shafts. Dhananjaya retaliates with a flashflood of missiles, hundreds and hundreds of arrows, like a tempest tearing at some masses of clouds.'"

CANTO 101

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says almost abstractedly, 'Describe to me, O Sanjaya, the beautiful and resplendent standards which both the Parthas and our warriors fly.'

Sanjaya says, 'Then listen, Rajan, as I describe to you the banners that blaze on that field of death like fire and are flaunted there. They are made entirely of gold thread, or chased with strings of gold, and look like the fulvid Mount Meru. Attached to them all around are the most striking banners of different colours. Fluttering in the wind, seeming to float on the breeze, the banners of the maharathas are like exquisite women dancing in an arena of pleasure; they are magnificent like the rainbow.

Arjuna's standard, with the image of Hanuman on its main flag, the great Vanara his face snarling and a lion's tail, and also adorned with many other banners, all with strange and dreadful spirits animated upon them, which cry out and roar and screech chillingly, terrifies the Kuru host.

The lion-tail pennant atop Aswatthaman's ratha shines with the lustre of the rising sun. Decked with gold, wondrous like the rainbow, it floats and flaps in the wind high above, inspiring the greatest Kuru warriors.

The standard of Adhiratha's son Karna bears the motif of a golden elephant-rope and seems to fill the entire sky. Adorned with banners of gold and garlands, it appears to dance upon his chariot when the wind shakes it.

Kripa, son of Gotama, and the first Acharya of the Pandavas, the Brahmana given to tapasya, has for his emblem a superb bull and Kripa looks as glorious as Mahadeva the destroyer of the Tripura with his bull.

Vrishasena's pennant is always in the van of the army and his emblem is a peacock calling out, made of gold and embellished with jewels and gems. Rajan, it glows like the ratha of Skanda the celestial Senapati. Shining with his brilliant mayura and with a beautiful golden ploughshare, Vrishasena looks resplendent on his chariot, like a great flame.

Salya, the ruler of the Madras, has on his standard-top an image like Annalakshmi, the Goddess of corn, lovely and bountiful. Salya's standard also shows a huge silver elephant with golden peacocks on every side. His great presence graces your army like the immense white elephant Airavata adorning the host of the celestial king.

A silver boar adorns the top of Jayadratha's flagstaff, which is wound about with golden chains, and shimmers like white crystal and glorious as Surya in the battle between the Devas and the Asuras of long ago.

The standard of Somadatta's son, who is devoted to yagnas, bears the sign of a golden sacrificial stake, shining like the sun or the moon and it glitters like the lofty yupastamba erected in the greatest of sacrifices, the Rajasuya.

On king Duryodhana's towering standard chased with gold is a great black elephant encrusted with glittering jewels. Tinkling with the sound of a hundred bells, it waves on top of his chariot and, Rajan, your son, that bull among the Kurus, looks magnificent.

These nine excellent standards stand tallest among your divisions. The tenth great banner is Arjuna's, with the terrific Vanara and with it Arjuna looks like Himavat with a blazing fire on his summit.

These mighty chariot-warriors, all parantapas, take up their wonderful, bright and colossal bows to face Arjuna. Partha, too, achiever of celestial feats, raises his incomparable, enemy-destroying Gandiva—all because of your evil policy, Rajan. And because of you, so many royal warriors, rulers of men from different kingdoms called to arms by your sons, will be slain in battle and with them countless noble, blameless horses and elephants.

The maharathas led by Duryodhana on one side and the bull of the Pandavas on the other, utter loud shouts and roars and begin the encounter. And astounding and unearthly is the feat that Arjuna, with Krishna for his charioteer, achieves there by battling all your great warriors single-handed. Resplendent is the mighty-armed hero as he stretches his Gandiva, determined to vanquish all your maharathas in order to kill Jayadratha.

In a supernatural shimmer of archery, Arjuna casts a mantle of arrows, thousands upon thousands of deadly arrows, over your forces so that they become invisible. On their part, they respond with a haze of shafts loosed from every side. Seeing Arjuna engulfed, obscured, your troops set up a loud cheer.'"

CANTO 102

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, once Arjuna has Jayadratha in sight, what do Krishna and he do?'

Sanjaya says, 'It is late afternoon of the momentous day, Rajan, in the battle between the Panchalas and the Kurus, when Drona becomes the wager for which each side fights to win or lose. Intent on killing the Acharya, the Panchalas, roaring all together besiege him with multitudinous volleys. Fierce, dreadful and extraordinary as the battle of yore between the Devas and the Asuras is the encounter between the forces of Drupada and his inveterate enemy, the meridian son of Bharadwaja.

All the Panchalas with the Pandavas, finding Drona's chariot within reach, unleash many great astras in their feverish attempt to breach and destroy his vyuha. Chariot-warriors ride slowly, purposefully Drona's ratha, making the earth tremble, and loosing rivers of arrows at the master.

Brihadkshatra, the Kaikeya maharatha, attacks Drona incessantly with heavy shafts forceful as thunderbolts. The famed Kshemadhurti quickly comes between Brihadkshatra and Drona, firing scathes of razor-headed barbs at Kshemadhurti. Seeing this, the mighty Dhrishtaketu, bull among the Chedis, also swiftly assails Kshemadhurti, quite as Mahendra did the

Asura Sambara. Seeing him dash forward, like the Yama himself with mouth agape, the mighty Viradhanwan confronts him.

Meanwhile, resolved to win the war by himself, Drona rides at Yudhishtira. Your son, the gifted, fearless Vikarna, confronts the marauding, potent Nakula. Parantapa Durmukha covers the onrushing Sahadeva with thousands of light-swift barbs. The heroic Vyaghradatta manfully faces Satyaki the Naravyaghra, making him repeatedly tremble with bolts like fire. Bhurisravas, son of Somadatta, stands firm against the five maharatha sons of Draupadi, he also lashes them with gales of arrows.

The sinister and powerful maharatha, the Rakshasa Alambusha, Rishyasringa's fierce son of awful mien, confronts the charging Bhimasena. That encounter between manusha and rakshasa, Rajan, resembles the mythic battle of old between Rama and Ravana.

Yudhishtira, lord of the Bharatas, strikes Drona with ninety perfectly aimed arrows in all his vital organs. The enraged Drona bloodies the Dharmaraja's chest with five and twenty excruciating shafts. In sight of all the archers, Drona looses twenty arrows at Ajatasatru's horses, charioteer and standard, but Yudhishtira, truly a majestic Kshatriya at war today, cuts them all down in flight.

Further incensed, Drona breaks Yudhishtira's bow in his hands and covers the Dharmaputra with a thousand barbs shot in a moment. Seeing the king engulfed by Drona's dark torrent, men of both armies believe that the Pandava is either dead or has fled the battle. Many Pandava warriors cry out in despair, "Oh, the Brahmana has killed our king!"

In some strife, Yudhishtira puts down the bow that Drona broke and takes up another, stronger and of exceptional brightness. Now, raising his won archery, he quite easily burns up Drona's dense tirades in the air. Rajan, the son of Dharma is altogether breathtaking to watch and, having consumed all Drona's shafts, a red-eyed Yudhishtira invokes a great astra that can rive Yudhishtira mountain. With a golden shaft, eight bells attached to it, of awesome appearance and entirely terrible, the mighty Yudhishtira raises his bow with this weapon fitted to it and gives such a roar that all the living tremble at it.

Seeing the astra that Yudhishtira holds aloft, all creatures, in accord, pray, "May Drona be saved!"

Loosed by the king, that missile like a snake just freed from its slough, flies at Drona, illumining the sky and all the directions cardinal and

subsidiary, like a Nagina with a fiery mouth. Watching the Nagastra flare towards him, Drona the master invokes the Brahmastra, which flies at Yudhishtira's chariot blowing the Nagastra to dust on its way. Yudhishtira

Quicker than thinking, Yudhishtira summons his own Brahmastra and the two great ayudhas extinguish each other in the sky. Not pausing, Ajatasatru pierces Drona deep with five immaculate shafts and, with a sixth razor-faced arrow, he breaks Drona's great bow.

With a growl, Drona, the Kshatriya-grinder, flings aside his broken bow and hurls a mace like a thunderbolt at Yudhishtira. Instantly the Pandava snatches up a mace of his own and casts it at his master's gada. The two mighty weapons explode against each other showering an effusion of sparks all around Yudhishtira. His rage mounting by the moment, Drona kills Yudhishtira's horses, with four unerring deadly barbs, and with another broad-headed shaft, he breaks the king's regal bow, which is like a stake erected to worship Indra.

With another arrow, he cuts down Yudhishtira's banner and with three more, he injures the Pandava himself. Yudhishtira leaps down from his ratha and stands weaponless and with his arms raised, helpless.

O Bharatarishabha, seeing Yudhishtira without a chariot and unarmed, Drona startles his enemies, why both armies, by cleaving to the base vow he had sworn to Duryodhana and, violating every dharma of war, continues to shoot deadly showers of arrows at the Dharmaraja and charges towards him like a lion bounding at a deer.

Cries of *Oh*! and *Alas*! arise from the Pandava army.

Many cry, "Bharadwaja's son has killed our king!"

O Bhaarata, these and other loud wails go up from the Pandava forces. But before Drona can reach his brother, Sahadeva dashes up on his chariot and, mounting it with alacrity, Yudhishtira flees the field, escaping the dangerous Brahmana, who is left howling in frustration.'"

CANTO 103

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Kshemadhurti strikes the valorous Brihadkshatra in his chest with several arrows, and the advancing prince of the Kaikeyas strikes him back with ninety deadly straight barbs. The Kshemadhurti smashes Brihadkshatra's bow with a broad-tipped shaft and immediately stabs him deep with another longer arrow, drawing a gush of blood. Great Brihadkshatra takes up another bow and, smiling at his enemy, kills maharatha Kshemadhurti's horses, charioteer and ruins his chariot, in a flurry. Then, with another wedge-headed shafts, he cleanly dissevers his royal antagonist head, with its sparkling ear-rings, and graced with wavy locks and a crown; the noble head rolls onto the ground, shimmering like a star fallen from the sky. Having slain his enemy, the triumphant Brihadkshatra falls upon your troops with great ferocity.

The seasoned Viradhanwan flies to check Dhrishtaketu who rides intently against Drona. The two heroes lash each other with thousands of arrows. Those two Naravyaghras fight like two leaders of elephant herds in the deep jungle, both determined to kill the other, or two angry tigers in a mountain-cave, and their duel is one to be seen, O Rajan, breathtaking it is.

The very Siddhas and the Charanas, in great numbers, gaze down at it raptly.

Then, with a rumbling laugh, Viradhanwan shatters Dhrishtaketu's bow with a thick and heavy arrow. Throwing down the broken bow, the king of the Chedis seizes an iron spear, its head of gold, and casts it with immense force at Viradhanwan's chariot. The lance strikes Viradhanwan squarely through his heart he falls dead, his blood spraying from both his breast and back.

After the fall of the Trigarta maharatha, the Pandavas break right through your army. Your son Durmukha looses sixty slender shafts at Sahadeva, and roars out an echoing challenge. Sahadeva, unmoved, indeed smiling, drills your son, his cousin, with a squall of arrows, flinging him back against his flagstaff. The mighty Sahadeva, roused, never pausing, gores Durmukha with nine powerful barbs, then cuts down his proud standard and fells his four horses. As his cousin stands stunned, Madri's son now beheads his sarathy, and in the same instant breaks your prince's bows in his hands grown weak.

Still not desisting, Sahadeva pierces Durmukha himself with a sizzle of five molten arrows, at which your son jumps down from his horseless chariot, and clambers onto Niramitra, prince of the Trigartas', ratha. Sahadeva kills Niramitra in the very midst of his army with a thick arrow; that prince falls headless from his chariot, plunging your army in grief. Slaying him, the mighty-armed Sahadeva looks as glorious as Dasaratha's son Rama, after he killed the feral and mighty Rakshasa Khara. O Rajan, seeing maharatha Niramitra die, loud cries of lamentation rise among the Trigarta warriors.

Nakula, in a moment, amazingly vanquishes your son, the large eyed Vikarna.

With a cloud of arrows, Vyaghradatta makes Satyaki and his horses, charioteer and standard invisible in the midst of his forces. However, Sini's mighty grandson cuts down all those missiles, and in a great scarlet eruption kills Vyaghradatta along with his horses, charioteer, felling his standard as well. At the fall of that prince, the Magadhas, fighting vigorously, surround Satyaki from all sides, covering him with their arrows and spears by the thousands, as also with mallets, thick clubs and keen lances. The invincible Satyaki, bull among men, with the greatest ease, laughing, vanquishes and annihilates almost all of them. A small remnant escapes from the field.

Seeing this, your army, already distressed by Yuyudhana's fearsome shafts, breaks apart, my lord!

After slaughtering your troops, Satyaki raises his bow high and shakes it in triumph and he is resplendent. Your army shrinks from the radiant Vrishni hero and none dare approach him. Then a fuming Drona, rolling his eyes, charges the uncontainable Satyaki.'"

CANTO 104

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says 'The illustrious son of Somadatta strikes each of the sons of Draupadi, all great archers, with five arrows, and then seven more. Badly wounded by that fierce shura, they are dazed and for a while do not know what to do. Then Satanika, Nakula's son, strikes Somadatta's son with two searing shafts and gives a ringing roar. At once, his other brothers also resume battle and draw copious spurts of blood from Somadatta's son, each with three arrows.

That Kshatriya shoots five terrific barbs, piercing each son of Draupadi viciously. The five brothers surround him and bloody him savagely with their arrows. Arjuna's son by Draupadi despatches Saumadatti's four horses to the land of Yama, while Bhimasena's son destroys his bow, and with a loud shout transfixes his enemy with razorine barbs. The son of Yudhishtira fells his standard, while Nakula's son kills his charioteer from his ratha.

Now Sahadeva's son sees that the enemy is on the point of leaving the field and cuts off his head with a crescent-tipped shaft. The head of that illustrious warrior, decked with earrings of gold, falls on the ground and adorns the field like the burning sun that rises at the end of the Yuga. Seeing

this, your troops, O Rajan, are overcome by stark terror and run in all directions.

The Rakshasa Alambusha, Rishyasringa's son, fights the mighty Bhimasena in frenzy; their contention is like Ravana's son Indrajit's encounter with Lakshmana. Seeing the Rakshasa fight the human warrior, all are enthralled and wonderstruck. An amused Bhima wounds the fiend with nine heavy arrows making the Rakshasa scream in the most hideous way. He charges Bhima with all his followers. Alambusha strikes Bhima with five thunderbolts and quickly destroys thirty rathas that support him. He blasts another four hundred of Bhima's rathas all the while lacerating Bhimasena himself with a barrage of barbarous winged missiles.

Ah, the mighty Bhima, struck deeply by the Rakshasa, swoons and sits down on the deck of his ratha. However, the son of Vayu recovers quickly and leaping up, crimson-eyed with rage, draws his tremendous bow and strikes Alambusha in every part of his body, with arrows like thunder. And the Rakshasa, who resembles a great mass of antimony, looks resplendent, O Rajan, indeed like a flowering kinsuka in full bloom.

While being struck by the shafts that fly from Bhima's bow, the Rakshasa remembers the slaying of his brother Baka by the titanic Pandava. Assuming an awful, monstrous form, he says to Bhima, "Fight a little longer, Pandava, and behold my prowess today! Evil-hearted one, the best of Rakshasas, the mighty Baka was my brother. It is true that you killed him but that was when I was away."

Saying this, Alambusha makes himself invisible with maya, and covers Bhimasena with a black storm of arrows. But Bhima, O Rajan, covers the very sky with a tremendous fusillade and forces Alambusha back to his chariot. But, next moment, the Rakshasa uses sorcery again to dive deep underground, and then once more soars high into the sky.

Alambusha assumes myriad uncanny forms, now becoming tiny and then enormous, filling earth and sky with his dreadful roaring. From above he chants many dark spells so thousands of fell arrow showers flare down on Bhima and his men, as well as kunapas, lances, spiked maces, short barbs, scimitars, swords and bolts of thunder. These eerie weapons raze Bhima's troops as well as countless elephants, horses and foot-soldiers.

Another river of blood flows, with rathas for its eddies, elephants its crocodiles, the chatras of maharathas its swans, and the flesh and marrow of animals, its mire and severed human arms its snakes. Hordes of Rakshasas,

pisachas and other blood-drinkers and flesh-eaters stalk the banks of the darkling river and carry away numberless Chedis, Panchalas and Srinjayas.

Seeing Alambusha haunt the field so fearlessly, and his dark prowess, the Pandavas are full anxious; while joy fills the hearts of your troops. Amongst your army turned irrevocably to evil, hair raising sounds of musical instruments blares cacophonously, which the Pandavas cannot bear even as a snake cannot bear the clap of human palms.

Bhima, the son of the Wind-god, his eyes red as copper with rage, with glances that like fire consumes everything, invokes the astra called Tvashtri, like the divine artificer himself doing so, and millions of arrows flash out from his ratha in every direction. Bhima aroused puts your dense legions to rout, mowing them down all around him. The Tvashtrastra dissolves the maya with which Alambusha has mantled Kurukshetra; it direly wound the Rakshasa himself.

Struck violently through every part of his body, Alambusha abandons the fight and takes refuge with Drona's akshauhini. At the defeat of that prince of the Rakshasas by the noble Bhima, the Pandavas fill every point of the compass with leonine roars and joyously worship the mighty son of Marut, even like the Maruts worshipping Sakra after the defeat of Prahlada in the ancient war between Deva and Asura.'"

CANTO 105

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After escaping from Bhima, Alambusha fights fearfully in another part of the field, where he confronts Hidimbi's son Ghatotkacha, and harries him viciously with a spate of flaming arrows. A horrific duel breaks out between those two lions among Rakshasas. As Indra and Sambara did in olden days, they fight with deep sorcery, spells of maya, and their battle resembles that between Rama and Ravana on Lanka!

Ghatotkacha strikes Alambusha through his chest with twenty exceptionally long arrows, and repeatedly roars like a tiger. Also roaring shatteringly, and smiling to show curved fangs, Alambusha strikes back viciously. Quickly, both mighty Rakshasas, in mounting frenzy, use their powers of maya in a duel of sorcery, but neither gains any advantage so equally matched are they. Each a powerful mayavi, they create a hundred sinister spells, and bewilder the other.

Seeing Alambusha dissolve all Ghatotkacha's conjurations with his own spectres, the Pandavas are anxious and many of their foremost maharathas surround him in a protective cordon. Bhimasena and others all attack Alambusha and, hemming him in from all sides with their rathas, rain astras on him, like men in a forest cornering an elephant with blazing brands.

Annulling their arrow storms with his maya shakti, Alambusha frees himself from that press of chariots like an elephant escaping a forest fire. Drawing his terrible bow whose twang resembles Indra's Vajra striking, he pierces Bhima with twenty-five sizzling shafts, Ghatotkacha with five, Yudhishtira with three, Sahadeva with seven, Nakula with three and seventy, and each of the five sons of Draupadi with five arrows, and gives a weird and bloodcurdling scream.

Bhimasena strikes him square with arrows with the power of the wind, Sahadeva with five, Yudhishtira with a hundred, Nakula with three and Ghatotkacha with five hundred. Alambusha, unmoved, returns their fire, goring Ghatotkacha with seventy wicked barbs, and pale devil gives another horrible bellow shakes the Earth, O Rajan, with her mountains, forests, trees and waters.

Deeply wounded by those maharathas, Alambusha pierces with five arrows each, and then he swiftly covers Ghatotkacha with countless sable-hued missiles, fletched with wings of gold and whetted on stone. Every barb burns into Ghatotkacha, like angry snakes a mountain summit.

The anxious Pandavas and Ghatotkacha continue to pour on their firetides, from every side. Wounded by the Pandavas, Alambusha mortal as he is, soon does not know what to do and his chariot in flames and he himself flows blood from a thousand wounds. Seeing this, Bhima's terrific son sees the time come to kill Alambusha. He leaps out of his own ratha and, rushing up to Alambusha's ratha, which now resembles a burnt mountain peak or a broken heap of antimony, seizes his dreadful enemy, snatching him down from it like Garuda snatching up a snake in his talons.

Ghatotkacha lifts Alambusha high with his mighty hands, whirls him round over his head, so like his awesome father Bhima does his enemies, and smashes him down onto the hard ground so his body is blown apart like an earthen pot flung against a rock. Such an eruption of flesh and blood, O Rajan! Roar after roar of triumph erupts from the triumphant son of Bhima, in absolute frenzy, drenched with his enemy's blood and spattered with pieces of his flesh from head to foot, and your troops tremble, whimper like small boys and many sully themselves. Alambusha, so terrible and indomitable a moment ago, lies like a tall sala tree uprooted and shattered by a wrathful wind.

Upon the slaughtering of the wanderer of the night, the Parthas are ecstatic, give vent to a vast chorus of roars, and wave their bright scarves

and other cloths in the air. Your brave warriors, however, see the mighty Alambusha, prince of the Rakshasas, lying like a crushed mountain, and cry out and howl in shock and defeat. Many curious ones go up to look closely at the shattered body lying like some great piece of charcoal, no longer able to burn.

Ghatotkacha roars reverberantly like Vasava after slaying the Asura Bala. His sires and other kinsmen applaud him for felling the Rakshasa, like an alambusha fruit, and he celebrates with his friends, and there arises a loud tumult in the Pandava army of conches and arrows being rattled together. Hearing that noise the enraged Kauravas shout back in anger, filling the whole world with echoing tumult.'"

CANTO 106

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, Sanjaya, how Satyaki Yuyudhana battles Drona so valiantly. I feel a great curiosity to hear about it.'

Sanjaya says, "Listen, O wise one, to an account of the hair-raising battle between Drona and the Pandavas led by Yuyudhana. Seeing the Kuru army slaughtered by Satyaki, Drona himself attacks the brilliant Vrishni hero. Satyaki swiftly assails him with blistering ferocity with five and twenty short and savage barbs. Drona pierces Satyaki, with five perfect golden-winged shafts, which plunge through his resilient mail, and drinking his blood, enter the earth behind him like hissing serpents.

Like an elephant prodded hard with a goad, an inflamed Satyaki gores Drona with fifty long shafts that are like flames. Drona responds with fervid volleys, wounding Yuyudhana direly so the Satwata's radiant face suddenly shows anxiety, while Drona continues to loose his tide of burning arrows. Seeing Satyaki stagger in his chariot and even lower his bow, your sons and troops, O Rajan, exult and roar repeatedly.

Some way off, Yudhishtira hears that celebrant uproar and sees Satyaki in danger. He cries to all his soldiers, 'Drona is about to devour Satyaki

even as Rahu does the Sun. Ride swiftly, you must save our Yuyudhana from the dreadful Acharya."

Yudhishtira cries to Dhrishtadyumna, "Why do you linger, Dhrishtadyumna? Don't you see the great peril that has already arisen from Drona? He toys with Satyaki like a cruel boy does with a bird tied with a string. Fly all of you, with Bhima, to Satyaki. I will follow with my men. Satyaki is in the very jaws of death. Do not waste a moment but go and snatch him away from the murderous Brahmana!"

And not hesitating a moment himself, Yudhishtira, with his troops behind him, charges towards Drona. Bless you, my king, but the Pandavas and the Srinjayas attack Drona all together, surrounding him, and unleash torrents of arrows at him, winged with kanka and peacock feathers shimmering in the gloom.

The Acharya receives them smiling, even like a householder welcoming honoured guests with seats and water! And he satisfies them amply with his extravagant hospitality of arrows. And none of them can even gaze at him, who is like the thousand-rayed Surya at midday who scorches all those great bowmen with lavish banks of arrows, like the Sun burning everything below him with his rays.

Struck like ten deadly storms by Drona, the Pandavas and the Srinjayas find no protector, like elephants sunk in a quagmire. And indeed the mighty arrows of the Brahmana Drona are like the scalding rays of the sun blasting everything around. In moments, he has slain five and twenty of Dhrishtadyumna's Panchala maharathas, as all the Pandava and Panchala legions are helpless onlookers. He continues to raze their greatest warriors like children before him.

After slaughtering a hundred Kekaya warriors and routing their army, Drona stands, Rajan, like Yama with maw agape, still hungry. The Brahmana vanquishes the Panchalas, the Srinjayas, the Matsyas and the Kekayas. Millions of living men suddenly breathing no more because the dreadful Acharya has hewn off their heads or blown their hearts to shreds. Their teeming troops invaded by his arrows cry out pitifully like the denizens of a forest engulfed by a conflagration. But Satyaki is rescued.

Above, riveted, the Devas, Gandharvas, and the Pitris say, "Look, the Panchalas and the Pandavas, with all their troops, are running away from Bharadwaja's son."

As Drona annihilates the Somakas, none venture to stand up to him and none succeed in wounding him in the least. While the Brahmana turned from his swadharma calmly butchers maharathas, past all count by now, Yudhishtira suddenly hears a faint tone of the great Panchajanya that Krishna blows. Such bedlam reigns on Kurukshetra, as the heroic protectors of Jayadratha fight Arjuna, and while the Dhartarashtras roar and shout before the great ratha of the two Krishna surging toward the Saindhava, that even the virile twang of the of the Gandiva is inaudible.

Yudhishtira feels faint, thinking, “Ah, Arjuna fares darkly! For I do not hear the Panchajanya anymore and the Kauravas roar so lustily and gleefully!”

Stricken with anxiety, a dazed Yudhishtira says to Satyaki, “O Yuyudhana, the time for that sanatana dharma which the mahatmans of old said that friends must do for their friends has come. Satyaki, none among all my warriors is a greater well-wisher of ours than you. Only one who is always courteous, obedient and valorous beyond all common measure should be entrusted with a grave mission in times of trouble. As Krishna is ever the refuge of the Pandavas, so are you, who are equal to him in prowess and affection.

And so I will lay a burden on you knowing that you will not frustrate my purpose. Arjuna is your brother, friend and acharya, O bull among men, so go to his help now when he is in distress, O Satwata. Mahatman, you are devoted to truth. You are a great Kshatriya. You are the dispeller of the fears of friends and celebrated in the world for your deeds and as one who is always truthful. Satyaki, he who casts away his body while fighting for friends is equal to him who gives away the Earth to Brahmanas. We have heard of many kings who are in heaven for giving away this Earth as dakshina to Brahmanas, with due rites. I beg you with folded hands, that you too attain the rewards of giving away the very Earth to Brahmanas, or something even higher, by incurring danger to yourself for Arjuna’s sake.

Krishna, the dispeller of the fears of his friends, is ever willing to sacrifice himself for them. You, Satyaki, are another such. None but a hero can help another hero by fighting valorously in battle purely for fame. An ordinary man cannot do this. And now there is none but you who can protect Arjuna. Once, while lauding your many great feats, Arjuna gave me much pleasure by recounting them repeatedly. He said of you that you are

gifted with unearthly dexterity of hand, and that you are a master of every manner of warfare, that you are a man of great abilities and great deeds.

My brother said, “Satyaki is endued with great wisdom, he knows every weapon thoroughly, is a true hero, and is never baffled in battle. With his powerful neck and broad chest, with mighty arms and wide face, with awesome strength and prowess, Satyaki is a maharatha among maharathas and he is the noblest of men. Yuyudhana is my disciple and my friend; I am dear to him and he is dear to me. Becoming my ally, Sini’s grandson will crush the Kauravas.

Even if Krishna, Rama, and Aniruddha, the mighty Pradyumna, Gada, Sarana, Samba, with all the Vrishnis, arm themselves to fight for us, I will only appoint Satyaki, tiger among men, Satyaki of unfazed prowess, to the task, for there is none equal to him.”

This is what Dhananjaya told me in the Dwaita vana while extolling your merits in an assembly of Rishis. It is only appropriate that you now live up to Arjuna’s expectation, as well as Bhima’s and mine! When we were on our way back from the various tirthas, I witnessed your reverence for Arjuna in Dwaraka. While we were at Upaplavya, I saw no one else who showed us as much affection as you did. You are of noble lineage and bear us both respect and love. And so, O Vrishni hero, out of your love and regard for Arjuna, who is your friend and your guru, you must do what is demanded in this critical hour by, O great bowman, your friendship, your genius, your noble lineage and truthfulness.

O Satyaki of Madhu’s vamsa, Duryodhana wearing Drona’s armour has gone in pursuit of Arjuna! The other great Kaurava maharathas already hunt Arjuna and I hear a great tumult in the vicinity of Arjuna’s ratha. Satyaki, you must ride there like the wind for your guru is in mortal peril. Bhimasena and the rest of us will resist Drona with all our forces, if he advances against you.

Ah, look where the Kaurava troops are fleeing the battle, wailing as they run. Like the ocean at full tide agitated by a mighty tempest, Arjuna stirs the Dhartarashtra host. Look at the cloud of dust that rises and spreads across the field from the men and rathas that dash about. Ah, look where the Sindhu–Sauviras, armed with spikes, lances surround Arjuna with their horsemen.

Arjuna will never be able to kill Jayadratha without first vanquishing this host of ferocious fighters for every man of them will lay down his life

for the Saindhava king before allowing Partha near him. Look at the invincible Dhartarashtra force stationed there bristling with arrows, spears, their tall standards, and teeming with cavalry and elephants. Listen to the beat of their drums and the blare of their conches, their tremendous roars, and the earthshaking rumble of their chariot-wheels. Listen to the deep grunts and trumpeting of their elephants, the heavy tread of their foot-soldiers, and the hoof-beats of their charging horses, al of which make Bhumi devi herself tremble.

Facing Arjuna is Jayadratha's akshauhini, and behind him is Drona's. The enemy is so great in numbers that it would dismay the Lord of the Devas himself. Plunged in the midst of this fathomless host, Arjuna could well lose his life. And if he is killed, how can I live on? Oh Satyaki, is this calamity to befall me when you are alive? The son of Pandu is dark-blue in colour, young in years, with wavy locks and exceptionally handsome. Vigorous in battle and familiar with every kind of warfare, the mighty-armed Arjuna penetrated the Bharata host at sunrise. The day is about to end, Satyaki, and I do not know whether he lives or not. The vast Kuru host is like the ocean and Arjuna has breached it on his own, the army which even the gods cannot overcome. My mind is clouded and Drona attacks my forces with irresistible might! You see, O Mahabaho, how the Acharya fights.

You are discerning when several tasks present themselves at once. And it must be you who take this critical task upon yourself, none other. I am certain that going to the embattled Arjuna's help and rescuing him must be our first priority. I have no fear for Krishna of Dasarha's race because he is the Protector and the Lord of the Universe. When this Naravyaghra can vanquish the three worlds assembled together, what need be said of this insignificant Dhritarashtra host? But Krishna is sworn not to fight.

Arjuna however, Satyaki, faces the most in today's battle and may lose his life. This is what fills me with dread and grief. So go to him, mighty, Satyaki, for men like you should follow men like him, at a time like this, sent forth by one like me.

Among the greatest of the Vrishni vamsa, we regard two as Atirathas. They are the mighty-armed Pradyumna and yourself, O Satyaki great renown. In the mastery of weapons, you are equal to Narayana himself, and in strength to Sankarshana. O Naravyaghra, in courage you are equal to Dhananjaya, and exceed Bhishma and Drona and all the other greatest

warriors. The wise say of you, 'There is nothing that Satyaki cannot accomplish.'

So accede to the wishes of all of us here, of myself and of Arjuna. It would not be dharma, O Mahabaho, to refuse what we ask of you today. Reckless of your very life, ride into battle like the great hero you are. The scions of Dasarha's race never care to protect their lives in war by avoiding the most dangerous battle, or fighting from behind breast-works, or fleeing an encounter—Dasarhas never adopt the ways of cowards.

The virtuous Arjuna is your superior, and Krishna is superior to both of you. And I also say to you that I am the superior of your superiors and Arjuna agrees with me in this matter. Go then to Arjuna and, at my behest, penetrate the army of Dhritarashtra's evil son. Challenge the great maharathas who protect Jayadratha and accomplish, O Satyaki, feats you are worthy of!"'"

CANTO 107

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing these warm and loving words from Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, Satyaki, the Sini bull, says, "O you of unfading glory, I have heard you well, and what you say to me is just, delights my heart and inspires me to earn fame and honour for myself by fighting Arjuna's grave cause.

At a time like this, it is high dharma and ineluctable fate that you find me, who am devoted to you, to command at your will, as you would Arjuna himself. As for myself, I am always prepared to give my life for Arjuna, without a thought!

Lord, at your command what is there I would not do in battle let alone to Dhritarashtra's weakling army? At your command, I would go into battle against the three worlds, with the Devas, the Asuras and Manushyas massed together. Why, for your sake today I will raze Duryodhana's entire army. I vow to you, O Yudhishtira, king of kings, that I will fight my way to Arjuna and return to you only after Jayadratha is dead.

Yet, Rajan, I must also tell you of what both Krishna and Arjuna said repeatedly to me before all our warriors.

Arjuna said, “Today, O Satyaki, noble and determined in battle, protect my brother the king with your very life until I kill Jayadratha! By entrusting Yudhishtira’s safety to you, or to maharatha Pradyumna, I can hunt Jayadratha down with an easy heart. You know that Drona is the greatest warrior among the Kurus. You also know the vow he has sworn to take Yudhishtira alive, which he is well capable of doing. So I charge you with his protection while I go today to kill Jayadratha.

Ensure that Drona does not succeed in seizing Yudhishtira for if that happens I will not be able to kill Jayadratha, and grief will break my heart and take my very life from me. If Drona takes my brother, we will have to return to the forest and my killing Jayadratha will be of no avail. Therefore, Mahabaho Satyaki, for my sake as well as for the success of my enterprise and my honour, protect the king today at all costs!’

You see, Rajan, Arjuna has left you to me to defend for he is in constant fear of Drona. O Dharmaraja, I myself daily see that there is none, save Rukmini’s son Pradyumna, who can match Drona in battle. I am also regarded to be a match for the Brahmana. Great Yudhishtira, I find myself torn between two choices: I must either obey my master Arjuna or ride after him, leaving your side, thus obeying you and disregarding what his command!

Once he corners you, Maharajan, Acharya Drona will toy with you as a child with a little bird. If Krishna’s son Pradyumna, flying the Makara on his banner were here, I could entrust you to him, for he would protect you like Arjuna himself. But I do not see him here and if I leave you who will protect you from Drona?

Rajan, do not be anxious on Arjuna’s account for no burden can vanquish him. All his opponents together, the Sauvirakas and the Sindhava–Pauravas warriors, those from the north and those from the south, and those led by Karna, whom I regard as the greatest maharatha—all these together do not constitute even a sixteenth part of Arjuna. The very Earth rising up against him, with the Devas, the Asuras, and Manushyas, with all the tribes of Rakshasas with the Kinnaras, the great Nagas, and in fact, all the mobile and the immobile beings massed together, would be no match for Arjuna. Know this, Rajan, and dispel your fears on Arjuna’s account.

Wherever the two potent and inexorable Krishnas are, no obstacle can prevent them from accomplishing their mission. Think of their celestial power, their mastery over weapons, their resourcefulness, their fury in

battle, their gratitude and the compassion of your brother. And think also, Rajan, of the mighty prowess of Drona, if I leave to ride out to Arjuna. The Acharya is eager to seize you for he is proud and determine to fulfill his vow, O Bhaarata!

Think first of your own safety. Who will watch over you in my absence and to whom can I entrust your protection so that I can go to Arjuna? I say to that I will not ride after Arjuna without first ensuring that you will be safe. Employ your great intelligence, O Yudhishtira Mahabuddhi; reflect on this from every angle, and then command me after deciding what is for your greatest good!"

Yudhishtira says, "It is as you say, Mahabaho! However, for all that, my heart is uneasy on Arjuna's account. I will take the greatest precaution in protecting myself; so, at my command, go without delay to Arjuna. Weighing my own safety against Arjuna's dire need, my judgment tells me that your going to Arjuna's side is the first need of the hour. Therefore, Satyaki, prepare to ride to Arjuna.

The mighty Bhima as well as Prishata's son Dhrishtadyumna, with all his brothers, our other mighty kings, and the sons of Draupadi will not fail to protect me. The five Kekaya brothers, and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, Virata, Drupada, and the maharatha Sikhandin, the powerful Dhrishtaketu, Kuntibhoja, Nakula and Sahadeva, the Panchalas, the Srinjayas—all of them are with me and I will be safe in their midst. Not Drona at the head of his troops, or even Kritavarman, will succeed in defeating us or harming me.

Parantapa Dhrishtadyumna will contain the raging Drona even like the continent the sea, and however he fights, Drona will never overcome our troops. Dhrishtadyumna sprang from the fire clad in mail, armed with bow, arrows and sword, and wearing unworldly ornaments; he was born just to kill Drona. Go, O grandson of Sini, with an easy heart; do not be anxious on my account. Dhrishtadyumna can always defy Drona in battle.'"

CANTO 108

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Satyaki still fears the censure of Arjuna if he leaves the king. However, he is certain that he will be called a coward if he disobeys Yudhishtira, and says to himself, "Let no one say that I am afraid of riding out to help Arjuna."

Reflecting repeatedly on this, that invincible Vrishni hero says to Yudhishtira, "If you think that these arrangements will suffice to keep you safe, I will do your bidding and follow Arjuna. I tell you truly that there is no one in the three worlds who is dearer to me than he, and I will follow in his wake because you command me to and because there is nothing that I will not do for you.

O best of men, the commands of my guru always weigh with me, but yours are still more important. Your brothers, Krishna and Arjuna, always do what pleases you. I too accept your command, and I will ride out for Arjuna's sake, cleaving my way through this impenetrable host of Drona, like a fish through the sea, to where Jayadratha, supported by his troops, hides in fear of Arjuna, protected by the maharathas Aswatthaman, Karna and Kripa.

O Rajan, the distance from here to where Partha forging ahead to kill Jayadratha is three yojanas, I will follow in his trail with a brave heart, and support him until Jayadratha dies. Who goes into battle without the command of his superiors? Dharmaraja, who will not fight if you command him, as I have been? I know the place where I must go, teeming as this ocean-like enemy does with ploughshares, darts, maces, shields, scimitars, swords, lances and the most potent shafts, this ocean that I will agitate today.

The enemy's elephant legion consists of a thousand elephants of the formidable Anjana breed, ridden by Mlecchas who love battle and are accomplished fighters. These musth-maddened elephants that shed their juice of rut like rain from dark clouds never retreat if goaded forward by the warriors upon their backs. They cannot be vanquished unless one kills them.

Rajan, the chariot-warriors you see, also numbering thousands, are all of royal lineage and maharathas all. They are called Rukmarathas and are all impressive warriors who fight from rathas as well as from elephant-back. They are masters of weapons as also of hand-to-hand combat. Skilled mace-fighters, they are also masters of the art of close combat, and are equally adroit with scimitars, sword, and shield.

They are brave, learned and animated by an intense spirit of rivalry and every day they vanquish a vast number of men in battle. Karna commands them and they are devoted to Dusasana; even Krishna lauds them as great maharathas. Always solicitous of Karna's welfare, they are ever obedient to him. It is at Karna's command that, after turning back from their pursuit of Arjuna, fresh as when they began and with no trace of tiredness, these heroes, wearing impenetrable armour and armed with exceptional bows, certainly wait for me, as Duryodhana also wants. I will crush them in battle for you, Yudhishtira, and then follow in Arjuna's trail.

Rajan, Kiratas ride these other seven hundred elephants that you see, all covered in armour and with ornaments, which the king of the Kiratas, fearing for his life, gifted to Arjuna together with many servitors. They were once in your employ. Behold the vicissitudes that time brings, for they now fight against you. Kiratas are sprung from the race of Agni, and they are all expert elephant warriors and they and their beast are well nigh impossible to defeat. Arjuna once quelled them all in battle and, never having forgotten the shame of that, they now stand in wait for me, under

Duryodhana's command. These Kiratas, too, I will kill with my arrows and follow Arjuna as he nears Jayadratha to have the wretched Saindhava's life.

Those other hulking elephants of impenetrable hides have sprung from the race of the great elephant sire Arjuna. Caparisoned entirely in gold, with ichor running down from their rent temples and mouth, they resemble Airavata himself and are even more formidable in battle. They have come from the northern hills, and fierce bandits of mighty limbs and sinews ride them, wearing steel coats of mail. These men are great warriors, brigands though they are.

Among them are men born of the cow, the ape, diverse other creatures, as well as of humans. Look how they appear at a distance to be of a smoky hue, these terrible Mlecchas, sinners all who hail from the fastnesses of Himavat.

With these and countless great Kshatriyas, as well as Kripa and Drona, foremost of maharathas, and Karna, also, to protect him, Jayadratha thinks lightly of the Pandavas. Impelled by fate, he regards himself already crowned with success. These whom I have named will soon be within reach of my arrows. They will not escape me, O son of Kunti, even if they acquire the speed of the mind. Duryodhana, the prince who depends upon the abilities of others, regards them highly, but I say to you that when my arrows cover these warriors they will find destruction.

These other chariot-warriors with golden standards, O Rajan, whom you see, are the Kambojas. They are brave and skilled, and devoted to the astra shastra, the science of weaponry. They are close knit, firmly united and constitute a full akshauhini of furious warriors, O Bhaarata; and are on the alert, with their eyes on me and wait well protected by the Kuru heroes. I will destroy them all, like fire consuming a bale of straw.

Therefore, O Rajan, let our attendants prepare my ratha and equip it well with bows, swords, spears, arrows, quivers, every other kind of weapon and all else that I will need to take dreadful war against our enemies.

Let my chariot be furnished with weapons five times more than what acharyas of military science direct, for I will have to encounter the Kambojas and the Kiratas who are armed with diverse, and both of whom are like serpents of virulent poison, accomplished in war, and fiercely loyal to Duryodhana who has always treated them well. I will also have to fight the Sakas who are as powerful as Sakra himself, and are ferocious and

difficult to extinguish as a burning forest fire. Yudhishtira, I will face many indomitable warriors today; and for this let renowned horses of the best breed with auspicious markings be yoked to my ratha, after grooming them and slaking their thirst."

Yudhishtira ensures that quivers full of arrows, all manner of weapons, and everything else that he might need are placed in Satyaki's ratha. The attendants give his four superb horses water to drink and feed them; and then after they are walked, bathed and adorned with golden chains, and the arrows stuck in them drawn out, these well-trained, fleet, docile, steeds of golden complexion are yoked again to Satyaki's ratha.

Then a tall standard with the symbol of a lion with a golden mane is mounted on the ratha embellished with gold, which carries a heavy load of weapons, and flies banners of the hue of white clouds. Then, Daruka's younger brother, who is the charioteer and the dear friend of Satyaki, comes and reports to him that the ratha is ready: like Matali reporting to Vasava himself.

Having bathed and purified himself with every auspicious ceremony, Satyaki gives nishkas of gold to a thousand Snataka Brahmanas who shower their blessings on him. With these, the radiantly handsome Satyaki, hero worthy of our worship, drinks two jars of rich, invigorating kairata and honey, and ah, he is resplendent and rolls reddened eyes in some intoxication. He touches a brazen mirror and is filled with great joy, his energy doubled, and he looks truly like a blazing fire.

Picking up his bow and strapping a quiver full of arrows across his lion's shoulders, putting on his shimmering mail and sparkling, priceless ornaments, Yuyudhana has the Rishis perform for him the profound rites of propitiation. Fair lovely young virgins honour him by showering fried paddy over him, daubing him with delicate perfume and draping vanamalas over his rippling body.

Then, with folded hands, he worships the feet of Yudhishtira, and Yudhishtira nuzzles and sniffs the top of his head in deep affection. Finally, Satyaki mounts his grand chariot. His horses, good natured, strong, swift as the wind and invincible, belong to the Sindhu breed, and bear him forward on that triumphal ratha.

Bhimasena, too, honoured by Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, reverentially salutes the king and sets out with Satyaki. Watching those two warriors advance to engage your army, your troops all stand waiting for them, with

Drona at their head. When Satyaki sees Bhima cased in mail and following him, he salutes him and with every limb filled with joy, says, “O Bhima, do you protect the king for that is your first duty and I will cleave my way through this host whose hour has come. Whether now or later, the king’s protection is your highest dharma. You know my ability and you wish me well, so return, O Bhima!”

Bhima replies, “Go then, and achieve your purpose, O best of men. I will protect the king.”

Satyaki replies, “Go back, O Bhima! As for me, I am certain to succeed, for today all my merits are obedient to my wishes. Indeed, the omens all around tell me that I shall be victorious. After the noble Arjuna kills the sinner Jayadratha, I will embrace Dharmaraja Yudhishtira.”

Saying these words to Bhima and releasing him with an embrace, the illustrious Satyaki eyes your troops like a tiger eyeing a herd of deer. Seeing his dreadful gaze, your troops tremble. And then, Satyaki dashes forward in his ratha and bursts upon your army like some dreadful plague.’”

CANTO 109

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, when Satyaki attacks your troops, Yudhishtira and his forces follow him to get at Drona's ratha. The indomitable Dhrishtadyumna, the son of the Panchala king, and king Vasudana both loudly exhort the Pandava host, crying, "Come, let us be at the enemy so that Satyaki can pass easily through the Kaurava host. For many maharathas will put forth their might to vanquish him."

At this, the mighty maharathas of the Pandava army fall wildly on their enemies saying, "We will crush those that try to stop Satyaki."

Then one hears a loud pandemonium near Satyaki's ratha. Your son's host, overwhelmed by Yuyudhana's tempestuous onslaught, turns tail and runs from the terrible Yadava. With such archery as we have not yet seen, Sini's grandson truncates the united Kuru army into a hundred portions, and then straightaway beheads seven great maharathas in stunned van of Drona's vyuha. With banks of lustrous, flaming shafts, he dispatches hundreds of heroes and kings of diverse realms.

At one moment he pierces a hundred warriors with a single arrow, and at others one great maharatha with a hundred arrows. Even like Rudra devouring living beings at yuganta, Satyaki the Vrishni slaughters elephant-

riders and chariot-warriors, horses and horsemen. Quickly, none among your troops dares face Satyaki, who shows blinding lightness of hand and covers them with storm clouds of fire. Panic-stricken, ravaged by the Kshatriya of long arms, all your bravest run away on seeing that radiant Kshatriya come hunting them like a god. His energy dazes them, and they see a thousand Satyakis everywhere, all come to take their lives.

The field is a horrible work of art with demolished chariots, their broken seats and wheels, with fallen canopies, standards, anukarshas, banners, with helmets decked with gold, human arms smeared with sandalwood-paste and adorned with angadas, with human thighs that resemble the trunks of elephants or the tapering bodies of great pythons, and with faces handsome as the Moon and twinkling with the kundalas of large-eyed warriors, lying all across Kurukshetra where Satyaki the Yadava holds sway.

The Earth is littered with the huge bodies of fallen elephants, cut up in diverse ways, like a plain strewn with hills. Carved by Satyaki, the carcasses of dead horses, of handsome breed and build, look striking in their traces made of burnished gold hung with rows of pearls. After razing your various troops, Satyaki of the Satwata vamsa breaches your army's ranks, agitating and routing them as he flies along unobstructed, following the very trail that Arjuna blazed.

Then Drona confronts him and, facing the son of Bharadwaja, rage flares up in Satyaki, and at first, like a tidal wave flashing past an ineffectual embankment he sweeps past the great Brahmana. Doubling back, Drona strikes him deep with five shafts like bolts of lightning. Satyaki, pausing, lacerates the Acharya with seven stone-whetted arrows, fletched with golden wings and the feathers of the kanka and peacock. Drona draws blood from the Yadava, his horses and charioteer, with six thunderous missiles.

Beside himself now, and roaring like a full pride of lions, maharatha Satyaki stabs the Brahmana with three volleys of ten, six and eight barbs, which lance agony through the Kaurava Senapati. Never pausing, glorious Yuyudhana drills Drona with ten more shafts, his charioteer with one and his four horses with four; and with another thick shafts strikes Drona's standard. Drona, his eyes crimson, envelops Satyaki, his ratha, horses, charioteer, and standard, with a locust swarm of dark arrows. Fearless Satyaki responds in kind, shrouding the Acharya in a blizzard of arrows.

Now Drona says to the Yadava, "Your master Arjuna avoids fighting me like a coward. He passed me by in fear. If you do not do the same, O

grandson of Sini, you will not escape with your life!"

It is as if Drona himself tells Satyaki what he should wisely do. Satyaki says to the towering Brahmana, "I follow in Arjuna's wake at the command of Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. Bless you, O Brahmana, much as I would love to continue this battle, I will lose time if I fight you. A sishya must always follow his guru, and if Arjuna rode past you, I will do the same. Farewell, O Drona!"

Saying this, Satyaki quickly dodges past Drona and says to his sarathy, "Drona will try everything he can to stop us so go carefully and cleverly, O Suta. There you see the splendid Avanti horde and next to them the mighty army of the Southerners, and beside that, the great host of the Balhikas. Next to the Balhikas stands majestic Karna, with his powerful forces.

Suta, all these forces are dissimilar, but on the battlefield, they depend on one another for support and protection and fight as one. So guide your horses towards the open space between these divisions at a moderate speed, and aim for the place where the Balhikas stand with diverse weapons, and the countless Southerners led by the Sutaputra's division presents a serried array of elephants, cavalry and rathas and foot-soldiers from various kingdoms."

They ride on and Satyaki says again, "Now fly through the gap between those two divisions towards the Karna's fierce and mighty host!"

A wrathful Drona, however, pursues him closely, loosing countless arrows after the Vrishni shura, but the most blessed Satyaki rides on and finds no need to turn back to face the Brahmana. Smiting the great host of Karna with hurricanes of arrows, Satyaki penetrates into the vast and limitless army of the Bharatas, who flee at his advent.

A fuming incensed Kritavarman rushes up to contain Satyaki, but in a flash the inspired Yuyudhana strikes Kritavarman with six shafts and kills his four horses with four more. He unerringly finds Kritavarman's chest with four more arrows, and, all in the space of a wish, drills him with another sixteen of ferocious velocity. Kritavarman cannot bear this and, drawing his bowstring to his ear, plunges a calf-toothed astra, serpentine and swift as the wind, into Satyaki's breast drawing a geyser of blood. That weapon of beautiful feathers pierces Yuyudhana's golden kavacha, bores its way through his body and enters the ground behind him, dyed in blood.

O Rajan, heartened to see his adversary stagger in his chariot, Kritavarman unleashes a clutch of stormy arrows, and desiccates Satyaki's

great bow with keen barbs fitted. In exhilaration, roaring, Kritavarman adorns Satyaki's chest with a bunch of ten thudding shafts.

Satyaki, his bow broken, hurls a spear at Kritavarman's right arm, and quickly taking up and drawing a stronger bow, he unleashes a dense cloud of fire, thousands of shafts loosed in the twinkling of an eye, and entirely shrouds Kritavarman and his ratha. With no instant's pause, he decapitates his enemy's sarathy with a wedge-headed missile so the suta falls dead from his seat. Kritavarman's horses bolt and the distraught hero is forced to take their reins and control them himself.

Yet undaunted, and bow in hand, heroic Kritavarman stands upon his chariot ready for battle again. Seeing this feat, his troops cheer deafeningly and, after drawing a few moments' breath, Kritavarman guides his fine horses and resumes fighting. Devoid of fear, he strikes fear into his enemies.

However, by this time, Satyaki has left him behind. A thwarted, frustrated Kritavarman does not pursue him anymore but instead charges Bhimasena. Blasting his scarlet way out of the legion of the Bhojas, Satyaki swoops down on the mighty Kamboja akshauhini. Many maharathas challenge him all together, and Satyaki cannot advance at all.

Meanwhile, Drona, having regrouped and arrayed his troops again, gives charge of them to Kritavarman of the Bhojas, and rides after Satyaki. Seeing Drona pursue Yuyudhana once more, the greatest Pandava warriors combine to thwart the Acharya. The Panchalas, led by Bhimasena, challenge Hridika's son Kritavarman. He displays his prowess, and holds them all up; faced with his prodigious archery, they still fight back with some vigour.

Kritavarman violently attacks his enemies' horses and elephants. However, though sorely beset by him, his valiant foemen stand firm like high-born warriors they are, resolved to vanquish the entire Bhoja akshauhini, for fame and honour.'"

CANTO 110

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, our army too can boast of many outstanding attributes. Our forces are regarded as being equally superior, equally well arrayed, and equally numerous! We always treat our soldiers well, and they are always devoted to us. They are beyond count and their skill is exceptional and proven. Our men are neither too old nor very young, nor are they overly lean or corpulent. They are energetic, well built and strong, and free from disease.

They are all sheathed in excellent mail, well-armed and subject themselves to stern disciplines and arduous training. My fighters are adept in mounting and alighting from the backs of elephants, in marching, advancing, retreating, and striking with the utmost effectiveness. They have been often tested in managing elephants, horses and riding chariots. Our warriors are recruited only after passing stringent tests, and not merely because of their lineage, or from favoritism or nepotism. They are not a rabble come of their own accord, nor have they been admitted into my army without handsome payment.

My army consists of well-born and honourable men, who are contented, well fed, and obedient. They are generously rewarded and are all famed and

intelligent. They are, besides, led and protected by many of our foremost advisers and other men of dharma, all of whom are the best of men, and are like the very regents of the world. They are also led by innumerable rulers of the world, seeking to please us and who have, out of sheer goodwill and friendship, allied themselves to us with their forces and followers.

Indeed, our army is like the vast ocean filled with the waters of countless rivers flowing from all directions. It has a plenitude of horses and chariots, which, though wingless, fly like the very birds of the air. We also have an abundance of war elephants in musth. Sanjaya, only destiny can destroy such an army.

Ocean-like, the vast numbers of warriors are its interminable waters, the horses and other animals its terrible waves, the numberless swords, maces, darts, arrows and lances are the oars plied on this ocean, and the abundant standards, ornaments and the pearls and gems of the warriors represent the lotuses that adorn it, and the running horses and elephants, the winds that agitate it into fury.

Drona is the fathomless cavern of that ocean, Kritavarman its vortex, Jalasandha its mighty makara, and Karna the Moon that makes it swell in tide with pride and energy.

When Arjuna, the Pandava bull on his single chariot, has battled his way so swiftly and with such aplomb through my oceanic army, and when Satyaki has also followed him, I do not, O Sanjaya, nurture any hope that these two will leave the smallest remnant of my legions alive. Seeing that these two mahatejasvins have scythed their way through the packed van and heart of my forces, and seeing that now Jayadratha is also within reach of the shafts from the Gandiva, what measures do the Kauravas, driven by rough fate, now adopt?

What has become of my sons during this intense battle? Ah, I believe that Death himself has overcome the massed Kurus. Their prowess no longer appears to be what it once was. Krishna and Arjuna have both breached the Kuru host unharmed. There is none in our army, O Sanjaya, who is capable of resisting them. We recruited so many of our great maharathas after a careful evaluation. We honour them with the remuneration each deserves and others with accolades. There is no one among my legions who is not rewarded and each receives his assigned payment and rations according to the extent and nature of his services. Sanjaya, there is none in my army who is unskilled in battle, none who

receives payment less than what he deserves, none who does not receive any wage at all. I have acknowledged the soldiers to the best of my ability with gifts, honours and position. My sons, my kinsmen and my friends behave in the same manner towards them. Yet, Arjuna and Satyaki's mere approach has vanquished them. What can this be but Destiny ranged against us?

The protected and those who protect them all go the same way! Seeing Arjuna arrive where Jayadratha is secreted, what measures does my foolish son adopt? Seeing Satyaki also furrow a bloody path into the Kuru host, what does Duryodhana think appropriate to do? Seeing these two maharathas, who are invincible to all weapons, breach my host, what decision do my warriors take?

For myself, I must believe that the sight of both Krishna and now Satyaki engaged in Arjuna's cause, and mowing their gory way through my teeming ranks, fills my sons with shock and grief. I fear that they must be saddened and benumbed to watch their greatest maharathas flee in all directions, that they must truly despair of vanquishing the enemy. I fear they themselves must now think only of escaping with their lives.

Surely, my sons must be heartbroken to watch their thousands upon thousands of cavalry, elephants, chariots and heroic warriors run from the battle in abject fear. Surely, Duryodhana's heart must bleed to watch his great war-elephants excoriated by Arjuna's fiery tides of arrows, and turn tail, while others fall dead all around them shaking the earth.

I feel sure that, seeing Satyaki and Arjuna deprive horses of riders and warriors of rathas, and seeing Madhava and Partha rout and kill vast numbers of horses, my sons are stricken by grief.

I am certain, that seeing whole divisions of foot-soldiers flee in all directions, my sons, despairing of success, are grief-stricken.

Seeing those two heroes pass through Drona's vyuha, unvanquished, in mere moments, I am sure that my sons are full of grief.

I am shocked and aghast, O Sanjaya, to hear that Krishna and Dhananjaya, heroes of unfading glory, and Satyaki, as well, have penetrated my host. After maharatha Satyaki storms through the Bhojas, what do the Kauravas do? Tell me also, Sanjaya, about the battle where Drona disconcerts the Pandavas. Drona is imbued with immense power; he is the foremost of all warriors, and unconquerable in battle. How did the

Panchalas quell this great bowman in the fight? The Panchalas and Drona are sworn enemies in Arjuna's quest for victory.

O Sanjaya, you are an eloquent raconteur; tell me everything that Arjuna does to bring death to Jayadratha.'

Sanjaya says, 'O Bharatarishabha, you should not indulge in such lamentations like an ordinary man, when you are overwhelmed by a calamity that is the result of your own sins. Years ago, many of your wise well-wishers, including Vidura, told you, 'Do not, O king, abandon the sons of Pandu.'

But at that time, you paid no heed to what they said and the man who ignores the advice of well-wishers will weep when he falls into great despair. O Rajan, he of Dasarha's vamsa came to beg you to make peace. For all that, Krishna of universal fame, could not get you to listen to his plea and the Lord of all the worlds himself realised your worthlessness, your jealousy of the Pandavas, and understood your malicious intentions towards them.

He calmly heard out your delirious protestation and then caused the flame of war to blaze forth among the Kurus. This enormous destruction has overtaken you solely because of your own guilt. It is not correct to impute the fault to Duryodhana because no merit can be attributed to you either in the beginning, the middle, or at the end in the unfolding of events. This bitter defeat is entirely due to you. Therefore, knowing as you do the truth about this world, quieten yourself and hear about the apocalyptic war on Kurukshetra, the Mahabharata yuddha that is even akin to the Devasura yuddha of time out of mind.

After the scintillating Satyaki pierces deep into your army, the Parthas led by Bhimasena also attack your troops. However, the maharatha Kritavarman, by himself, resists the Pandavas who take the furious offensive against your host. As the continent resists the surging sea, even so does Kritavarman, son of Hridika, resist the Pandava legions and he displays such wonderful skill that the united Parthas cannot defeat him.

Then the mighty-armed Bhima strikes Kritavarman with three dreadful shafts and blows his conch resoundingly, gladdening the hearts of all the Pandavas. Sahadeva strikes the Bhoja with twenty arrows, Yudhishtira with five, Nakula with a hundred, the sons of Draupadi with three and seventy, Ghatotkacha with seven, Virata and Drupada and Dhrishtadyumna each

with five spiteful shafts, and Sikhandin, first with five, and again with twenty-five brutal barbs.

Seamlessly, Kritavarman strikes every one of those maharathas with five arrows, and Bhima with seven. He fells Bhima's chariot from his chariot, breaks his bow in his hands and quickly gores him with seventy barbs through his massive chest. Deeply wounded, the mighty Bhima trembles on his ratha like a mountain in an earthquake.

Seeing Bhima in danger, the Parthas led by Yudhishtira surround Kritavarman in fury, covering him in fire to protect Vayu's son. The Vayuputra recovers swiftly casts a steely spear with a golden shaft at Kritavarman's ratha. That fierce spear hurled so powerfully from Bhima's hands is like a snake freed from its slough and blazes as it flies at Kritavarman. Seeing the dart invested with the brilliance of the Yuga-fire coursing towards him, Kritavarman slices it in two as it falls onto the ground, still burning, like a meteor from the sky, illumining the ten points of the compass.

Seeing his occult lance cut down, Bhima roars in anger and, sweeping up another stronger bow, its twang like thunder, bloodies Kritavarman's chest with five throbbing shafts.

All this, Rajan, is the result of your evil policy!

Kritavarman, king of the Bhojas, lacerated in every limb by Bhimasena, is resplendent like a red asoka tree covered with flowers. Roaring himself like a hunt of lions, he plunges three fervent shafts into Bhima, and slashes every maharatha ranged against him, with three passionate barbs. They strike him back with seven arrows.

Then, with a razor-tipped shaft, the battling Bhoja breaks Sikhandin's bow, but the Panchala quickly takes up a sword and a bright shield adorned with gold and a hundred moons; whirling the sword in his hands, he flings it like a dagger at Kritavarman's ratha, riving his bow with a mighty astra fitted to it, so it falls onto the earth like a star come loose from the sky, burning briefly there before dying out.

The other maharathas also cover Kritavarman with their stern shafts; upon which, casting aside the broken bow, he takes up another and strikes each of the Pandavas with three shafts like streaks of lightning. He strikes Sikhandin first with three, and then with five shafts. The illustrious Sikhandin takes up another bow, and responds with a barrage of fleet barbs fitted with heads like tortoise nails. Inflamed, Kritavarman rushes recklessly

at the powerful Sikhandin, son of Yajnasena, who was the cause of a great fall in the battlefield. He dashes at Drupada's son like a tiger at an elephant.

The two parantapas, who resemble a couple of wild elephants or two blazing fires, clash in a shower of arrows. They use their best bows and shoot their arrows in hundreds, like twin suns shedding their rays and they shine in glory like two suns appearing at the end of the Yuga.

Kritavarman pierces Sikhandin first with three and seventy shafts and again with seven. Deeply wounded, Sikhandin sits down in his ratha in shock and pain, drops his bow and arrows, and faints. Seeing this, your troops hail Kritavarman and wave their bright cloaks and scarves in the air. Sikhandin's charioteer quickly takes him out of the battle.

Watching this, the Parthas encircle Kritavarman with their rathas. The maharatha Kritavarman then demonstrates a feat of great wonder there, as, by himself, he holds all the Pandavas and their followers at bay. He vanquishes the Chedis, the Panchalas, the Srinjayas, and the Kekayas. The Pandava forces scatter; they cannot bear the flaming Kritavarman. Having defeated the sons of Pandu led by Bhimasena himself, the son of Hridika shines forth like Agni himself on Kurukshetra, and all the Pandava maharathas, soundly beaten by the Bhoja's torrents of arrows, cannot find the heart to face him.'"

CANTO 111

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After Kritavarman, the noble son of Hridika, routs the enemy and humiliates the Parthas, your troops are jubilant. Hearing the uproar from your army, Sini's grandson Satyaki, protector of the Pandavas when they sink in that fathomless sea of distress in this awful war, quickly turns back and attacks Kritavarman who covers him with a torment of arrows. Satyaki looses a wide-tipped shaft at the Bhoja and follows this with four more terrific arrows, which kill his horses and destroy his bow. He inundates Kritavarman's charioteer and the warriors who protect his back with a deluge of shafts. They cannot withstand the lustrous Vrishni, and fall apart. The incomparable shura Yuyudhana quickly turns his chariot around and continues on his way towards his master Arjuna.

Now listen, O Rajan, to what Satyaki does to your army. After fording the sea that is Drona's division, and triumphant after vanquishing Kritavarman, he says to his charioteer, "Go with care but fearlessly."

However, he then sees your thronging army of rathas, cavalry, elephants and foot-soldiers, and says again to his sarathy, "This great legion, dark as clouds that you see on the left of Drona's vyuha, consists of a vast contingent of elephants led by Rukmaratha, and is difficult to subdue.

Positioned there by Duryodhana, these warriors belong to the country of the Trigartas, are of princely birth, are great bowmen, skilled in battle, and they are all illustrious maharathas, with their standards decked with gold. All of them are prepared to die fighting. These heroes seek battle with me, so drive your horses at them swiftly! I will fight the Trigartas in the very sight of Bharadwaja's son."

His sarathy, Daruka's brother, always obedient to Satyaki, cracks his whip over his superlative steeds, white as silver or the kunda flower, swift as the mind, and the shining ratha that flies a flag bright as the sun, flies towards the elephant legion of great Rukmaratha. The elephants surround that chariot, and their riders lash down all manner of arrows over the raiding Satyaki.

Satyaki, shooting up at them, covers them in a storm-cloud of radiant fire, shredding the great beasts' flesh, felling many outright, felling their riders from their backs, all in a moment, a violent dream. Their caparisons and blankets coming loose, their very tusks cloven, their huge bodies covered in blood, their round temples split open, the flapping ears, great faces and trunks sliced in slivers, their shrill screams echoing across the grim field, the mastodons lumber away in terror from this dread god come hunting them.

The Satwata ablaze mangles the grey beasts with arrows long as spears, with calf-tooth-headed bolts, broad-headed shafts, anjalikas, razor-faced and crescent-tipped barbs, and they flee from him in perfect terror, spraying urine and dung as they go. Some of them limp away as quickly as they can for the fearsome warrior has lamed them, some just fall, and others, fleeing, are pale with tears flowing down their faces. Stricken by mighty Yuyudhana with astras that are like the sun or fire, the elephant division bolts in all directions.

When Satyaki has put Rukmaratha's elephant legion to flight, when he has slaughtered so many of the beasts, the mighty Jalasandha nonchalantly lumbers up on his elephant to confront Satyaki's ratha drawn by white horses. Wearing a golden angadas, with kundala and kirita, armed with a huge curved sword, smeared with red sandalwood-paste, his brow wreathed with a shining chain of gold, his breast covered with a brilliant kavacha, his neck also adorned with a golden chain, Jalasandha, Kshatriya of sinless soul, enthroned upon the neck of his outsized elephant, shaking his gold-inlaid bow, is as glorious as a cloud charged with lightning.

As the continent checks the surging sea, Satyaki checks the Magadha king's Jalasandha's exceptional elephant that bears down on him in fury. Finding his elephant hesitate against Satyaki's tirade of arrows, Jalasandha's eyes turn red and he strikes Yuyudhana through his chest with an angry volley. Shooting down at his adversary, the Magadhan shatters Satyaki's bow in his hands, and then drills five more serpentine shafts down into the Yadava's body.

Ah, Rajan, it is wonderful to see how the mighty-armed Satyaki hardly winces though struck so violently. Seizing up a fresh bow, and actually smiling, he makes a mess of blood on Jalasandha's wide chest with sixty shafts loosed up at his in a blink, then breaks his bow at its very grip with another razor-headed shaft, and strikes him hard with three more barbs that thud into his breast again like a single shaft.

Jalasandha flings aside his bow and hurls a terrible lance at Satyaki, which passes right through his left arm and enters the earth, like a hissing snake of gigantic proportion. Heedless of his gaping wound, the invincible Satyaki drives another thirty keen arrows deep into Jalasandha's body already covered in blood. Jalasandha takes up his sword and a large bull's hide shield embellished with a hundred moons, whirls the great blade round and casts it like summer lightning at the Satwata, demolishing his bow. The occult sword then lies upon the earth like a circle of fire.

A wrathful Satyaki takes up another bow big as a sala-offshoot, the sound of its bowstring like Indra's Vajra; drawing it in a circle he strikes Jalasandha with a heavy, ferocious arrow, stunning the Magadhan. Next moment, with two razor-sharp, crescent-headed shafts he cleanly hews off Jalasandha's ornamented arms like spiked maces at their shoulders, so they fall from the elephant's back like two thick squirming five-headed snakes falling from a mountain cliff. With a third razorine shaft Satyaki severs his antagonist's great head, with shining perfect teeth and sparkling earrings, in a carmine blast. The macabre trunk still astride the elephant dyes Jalasandha's hulking beast with gushing blood.

Rajan, Yuyudhana quickly fells the wooden warrior's frame and its rider's throne-like seat from that beast's lofty back, so that, bathed in his master's blood, Jalasandha's elephant suffers the costly seat to hang from his back, and wounded terribly by Satyaki's arrows, in absolute anguish, he blunders across the field trampling Jalasandha's own ranks to pulp, all the while trumpeting wildly in pain.

At the sight of Jalasandha slain by the Vrishni bull, wails of woe arise among your troops; and your warriors, turning their faces, flee in all directions, despairing entirely of success. Meanwhile, Drona advances again on Satyaki, on his red chargers. Many other Kuru warriors, seeing Satyaki swollen with rage and pride, furiously follow Drona. Then commences a battle, O Rajan, between the Kurus and Drona on one side and Satyaki on the other, that is yet another like the one of old between the Devas and the Asuras.'"

CANTO 112

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'O king, shooting clouds of arrows, all these seasoned warriors cautiously advance on Satyaki. Drona strikes him with seven and seventy shafts, Durmarshana with a dozen, Dusasana with ten and Vikarna pierces him through his side as well as his chest with thirty keen kanka-feathered arrows.

Durmukha strikes him with ten shafts, Dusasana with eight, Chitrasena with two; Duryodhana and many other heroes also draw blood from Sini's sublime grandson with their dense fire. Though they surround him and lash him with their arrows, Satyaki the magnificent makes the bodies of every last one a home for his robust missiles.

He pierces Drona savagely with three, Dusasana with nine, Vikarna with five and twenty, Chitrasena with seven, Durmarshana with a dozen, Vivimsati with eight, Satyavrata with nine, and Vijaya with ten sinewy barbs. After striking Rukmangada also, Satyaki, shaking his bow, swiftly attacks Duryodhana and, in the sight of all that teem there, draws deep fonts of blood from your son. A relucent duel breaks out between the two and, each renders the other invisible with thick arrow shrouds.

Injured by the Kuru king, and blood flowing freely down his body, Satyaki soon looks like a sandalwood tree bleeding its ruddy juices. Your son too, struck often by Yuyudhana, is conspicuous, like a stake set up at a yagna, decked with gold. Then, with an imperious smile, Satyaki breaks Duryodhana's bow and strikes him with a flurry of arrows, past counting.

But Duryodhana is far from ready to concede defeat. Snatching up a fresh bow, he gashes the Vrishni hero with a hundred shafts shot like one. Stabbed deep by your mighty son's barbs, Satyaki blazes up in dreadful anger. He launches such an intense assault on your son that your other maharathas, fearing for his life, rush in to pour down opaque gales of missiles, mantling the menacing Vrishni with their fierce fire.

Satyaki pierces each of them first with five arrows, and again with seven more. He strikes Duryodhana with eight scorching arrows and serenely breaks your son's massive bow that frightens all enemies. With a few arrows more, he fells the king's standard adorned with the jewelled black elephant; and with another four arrows kills Duryodhana's four horses and then his charioteer with a razor-faced shaft. Elated by his success, Satyaki strikes Duryodhana deep with some slender missiles that pierce into his very vitals.

Rajan, wounded by Satyaki's great shafts, Duryodhana leaps out of his ratha and runs to mount Chitrasena's chariot, and arms himself with another bow. Seeing Satyaki overwhelm Duryodhana, indeed like Rahu swallowing the Moon, cries of woe arise from every part of the Kuru host. Hearing that great lament, maharatha Kritavarman quickly rides up to where Satyaki, the puissant Madhava, rules the war. Shaking his bow, crying to his charioteer, "Go! Fly at Satyaki!" comes the dauntless Kritavarman.

Seeing Kritavarman racing towards him like Death himself with jaws agape, Satyaki says to his sarathy, "Look where Kritavarman comes dashing at us. Ride to meet his charge, O Suta!"

His horses spurred to their greatest speed, Satyaki meets the king of the Bhojas, Kritavarman first among all bowmen. The two naravyaghras, both inflamed with rage, and like fire, encounter each other like two raging tigers. Kritavarman strikes Satyaki first with six and twenty whetted and keen arrows, and his sarathy with five; he stabs Satyaki's four superb steeds of the Sindhu breed with four cruel shafts. Flying a standard decked with gold, and wearing golden mail, and his arrows all golden-winged,

Kritavarman, shaking his formidable bow, stops the storming Satyaki in his tracks.

Satyaki is by now more than eager to arrive at Arjuna's side. He raises his archery and plunges eight truly dreadful shafts into Kritavarman, wounding him so fiercely that invincible warrior begins to tremble like a hill during an earthquake. Fluidly, Satyaki strikes Kritavarman's four horses with three and sixty keen missiles and his sarathy with seven; he then aims another astra of golden wings that emits flames and resembles an angry snake, or the rod of Yama himself, and pierces Kritavarman with it. The flaming ayudha burns through Kritavarman's effulgent armour, his body, and enters the ground behind him.

Gravely wounded now and bathed in blood, Kritavarman, the lion-toothed hero of untold prowess, that bull among men, drops his bow and arrows and falls on his knees in his ratha. Having stopped Kritavarman who is like the thousand-armed Kartaviryarjuna of old, or the Ocean himself of immeasurable might, Satyaki dashes on once more. Mowing easily through Kritavarman's division bristling with swords, darts and bows, and thick with elephants, horses and rathas, and out of the ground mired in the blood shed by hundreds and hundreds of the best Kshatriyas, the bull of the Sinis forges on like Indra through the fell Asura legions.

Meanwhile, Kritavarman recovers, and taking up another huge bow, remains where he is, giving up his chase of Satyaki and fighting the Pandavas instead.'"

CANTO 113

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'As Satyaki storms through the Kuru host, Drona engulfs him with a dense bank of arrows. Another pitched battle erupts between them before all the troops, even like that between Bali and Vasava in days of old.

Drona strikes Yuyudhana's forehead with three shimmering iron quarrels that are like snakes of virulent poison and Sini's grandson briefly looks like a mountain with three peaks. Drona continues to pour fire over him, shafts that roar like Indra's Vajra.

Satyaki strikes back with two beautifully winged arrows, after he cuts down all Drona's shafts in flight. Drona sees his young adversary's dexterity, and with a smile, looses thirty arrows at him in a wink, and now showing even greater speed of hand than Satyaki, in two blurred instants he strikes him first with fifty shafts and then with a hundred more. These deadly shafts spume from Drona's ratha like angry snakes boring through an anthill.

And Satyaki, not outdone, covers the Brahmana's ratha with thousands of blood-drinking missiles. None that watch the duel can mark any

difference between the skills of the Acharya and the Satwata; both bulls among men, they appear to be perfectly equal.

A fiery Satyaki strikes Drona and his standard with nine straight arrows, and in Drona's sight, he berates his suta with a hundred shafts. Drona pierces Satyaki's charioteer with seventy barbs, and each of his four horses with three; with a single flawless missile he cuts down Drona's proud standard, and with another broad-headed arrow, streaked with gold, he shatters his bow.

His rage mounting by the moment, Satyaki hefts a heavy mace and hurls it like lightning at Bharadwaja's son. However, Drona smashes it to dust with an imperious volley. Satyaki picks up another bow, drills Drona with a clutch of strident shafts, and gives a deafening shout. Drona cannot bear that roar and he launches a golden-shafted lance, charged with an astra, at the Vrishni hero. But the lethal weapon passes through Satyaki's ratha never touching Sini's grandson, and plunges into the earth, and is extinguished with a loud report.

Satyaki ravages the Acharya with a still more fervid volley, drawing geysers of blood from the Brahmana, and especially his right arm. Invincible Drona once more severs Yuyudhana's great bow with one of his favoured crescent-tipped shafts and also gores his sarathy with such ferocity that the suta collapses briefly on his chariot-head.

O Rajan, what Satyaki does next is surely superhuman, for he snatches up the reins from his supine charioteer's hands, and continues to battle great Drona while guiding his own horses! Indeed, he strikes the Brahmana with a hundred arrows, and rejoices at his own marvelous feat, which even his enemies applaud. Drona unleashes five ferocious barbs at his brilliant antagonist; they pierce his armour and drink his blood.

Resorting to cunning, Satyaki looses a squall of arrows directly at Drona, absorbing him, but with a single shaft in its midst beheads the Brahmana's sarathy; Drona's already lacerated horses panic, and their reins hanging loose, careen wildly across the field, dragging the Brahmana's bright chariot in wide circles, like an unrestrained sun in chaotic motion. All the kings and princes of the Kaurava host cry out, "Quick, seize Drona's horses!"

And leaving Satyaki, all the Kuru maharathas rush towards Drona's ratha. Your troops see this and think that they are fleeing from Satyaki and yet again their spirits plummet. Meanwhile, borne far away from Satyaki by

his maddened horses, Drona, in some resignation, returns to the mouth of his vyuha. There he finds that the Pandavas and Panchalas have smashed the great cart formation; he makes no further attempt to follow Yuyudhana but employs himself in rallying his broken vyuha. Turning on the Pandava and the Panchala legions, the Drona fire, blazing up in wrath, remains there consuming all around him with dreadful astras never used against common soldiers. He burns like the uncommon Sun that rises at the end of the Yuga.'"

CANTO 114

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'O Kurusthama, after vanquishing Drona and other warriors of your army that Hridika's son Kritavarman leads, Satyaki, the Sini bull, jocularly tells his charioteer, "O Suta, Kesava and Phalguna have already consumed our enemies, and in vanquishing them, we are merely the apparent instrument. Already slain by Nararishabha Arjuna, the son of Indra, we have but slain the dead."

Satyaki presses on, continuing to raze the Kaurava ranks all around him, arrowing on like a hawk in search of prey. Although the Kuru warriors still attack him from all sides, they cannot stop him from surging ahead, borne by his horses white as the moon or a conch, like the sun of a thousand rays. Indeed, O Bhaarata, no one can oppose the irresistible Satyaki of valour equal to that of the thousand-eyed Indra, and looking like the autumnal sun in the sky.

Then the great king maharatha Sudarshana rides at the racing Satyaki and attempts to stop him. Another calescent duel breaks out, which both your warriors and the Somakas acclaim as being like the one between Vritra and Vasava. Sudarshana looses hundreds of arrows at Satyaki from a

distance, while cutting down the handful of shafts that Yuyudhana blazes at him.

But consummate Satyaki easily thwarts Sudarshana's volleys, and enraged by his enemy's disdain, fierce Sudarshana draws his bow into a circle and unleashes three exceptional astras of fire at the Vrishni hero. These burn through Satyaki's kavacha and pass through his body, momentarily fetching him up. In a flash, Sudarshana plunges four burning shafts into Satyaki's silver steeds.

But the Vrishni is as powerful as Indra himself, and, unperturbed, he slaughters Sudarshana's horses in four scarlet explosions and roars like four tigers. Next moment, he hacks off Sudarshana's sarathy's head and then, with a razor-faced arrow like the Yuga-fire, strikes off Sudarshana's own head radiant as the full moon, indeed again like Indra once did the head of the mighty Bala in that battle of long ago.

Satyaki, karmayogin, noble bull of the Yadus, is exultant after he kills prince Sudarshana and shines on Kurukshetra like the king of the Devas himself. Not pausing, he flares on along Arjuna's trail, thwarting all your troops with firetides of arrows, and filling all with amazement as he goes. All the greatest warriors gathered there, even his enemies, applaud his amazing feats, for he consumes all that come within the reach of his arrows, like a sweeping forest fire fanned by the wind.'"

CANTO 115

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Having killed Sudarshana, Satyaki speaks again to his charioteer, "We have forded the impassible ocean of Drona's vyuha, teeming with rathas, horsemen and elephants, whose waves are arrows and darts, its fishes swords and scimitars and its makaras maces, the great sea that roars with the songs of astras and the thunder of diverse weapons colliding, the ocean of terror, death and blood which resounds with the noise of conches and drums, whose touch is unbearable, and whose shores fierce Rakshasas and carnivores infest.

I think, beloved Suta, that now we can easily cross what remains of the vyuha, which is like a poor stream of willow water. Urge your horses on without reserve or fear, for I feel certain that I am very near Arjuna. Yes, having vanquished the invincible Drona and his legions, and the mighty Kritavarman, I do believe I cannot be too distant from my master Arjuna.

I never feel fear even if I see countless enemies before me. To me they are like a heap of straw and dry grass to a blazing conflagration in the forest. This is the path by which Arjuna Kiritin, the greatest of the Pandavas, has gone and numberless corpses of foot-soldiers and horses, chariot-warriors and elephants have rendered the earth uneven. Look at the

Kaurava army running away, routed by the noblest warrior. Look, Suta, at the brown dust the fleeing chariots, elephants and horses raise.

Yes, I am very near to the Swetavahana, Arjuna who has Krishna for his sarathy. Ah, listen! The sweet thunder of the Gandiva! From the omens I see all around me, I am certain that Arjuna will kill Jayadratha before the sun sets.

Without tiring our horses, now guide them slowly to where the warriors led by Duryodhana, their hands cased in leather gauntlets stand; and there, where the Kambojas of fierce deeds and the Yavanas with their marvellous bows; and towards the Sakas and Daradas and Barbaras and Tamraliptakas, and countless other Mlecchas, armed with diverse strange weapons. All these, with vile Duryodhana at their head, wait with their faces turned towards me, excited at the prospect of doing battle against me.

Suta, think of us as already having passed through this fierce fastness, having slain all these legions with their chariots, elephants, horses and footsoldiers."

His charioteer replies, "O you of Vrishni's vamsa, I too have no fear. Why, O indomitable one, if you face Jamadagni's son Parasurama himself in anger, or Drona, best of maharathas, or the king of the Madras, fear will not enter my heart, as long as I have the shade of your protection.

Parantapa, you have already decimated countless invincible Kambojas, invincible in battle, as many intrepid Yavanas, including Sakas, Daradas, Tamraliptakas, and many other Mlecchas armed with their myriad weapons. Never have I experienced fear in any battle. Why will I then be afraid in this miserable fray?

O you who are blessed with long life, by which route should I take you to where Dhananjaya is? With whom are you angry, and who are they that will run away from battle, when they see you demonstrate the prowess of the Destroyer himself as he appears at the end of the Yuga? O Mahabaho, who are they of whom king Vaivaswata is thinking today?"

Satyaki replies, "Like Vasava destroying the Danavas I will slay these Kamboja warriors with shaved heads and fulfil my vow. Take me there and causing a great carnage among them, I will join Arjuna. The Kauravas, with Duryodhana at their head, will see my prowess today, when I exterminate this legion of Mlecchas of shaved heads and put the whole Kaurava army to the greatest grief. Today, hearing the loud wails of the Kaurava host,

mangled and broken by me in battle, Duryodhana will suffer the grief he deserves.

Today I will show my guru, the noble Swetavahana, my skill with weapons that I acquired from him. When he sees thousands of mighty warriors slain by my arrows, king Duryodhana will be plunged into great grief. The Kauravas will behold the bow in my hands to resemble a circle of fire when, light-handed, I stretch the bowstring to loose multitudes of missiles. Seeing the incessant slaughter of his troops, their bodies covered with blood and pierced all over with my arrows, Duryodhana will be filled with sorrow. While I kill the foremost Kuru warriors today, he will see not one but two Arjunas. Seeing me dispatch thousands of kings in battle, intolerable pain will fill his body and heart. Slaying those thousands of kings today, I will show my love and devotion to the noble sons of Pandu. And the Kauravas will know the measure of my might and energy, and my gratitude to the Pandavas."

The charioteer then urges his coursers of the hue of the moon to their utmost speed. The excellent steeds, swift as the wind or thought, fly forward as if to devour the very skies, and bear Satyaki to where the Yavanas are stationed. The numerous Yavanas, expert archers all, envelop the charging Satyaki with showers of arrows. The wrathful Satyaki, Rajan, destroys all their shafts and other weapons; with hosts of arrows, winged with gold and vulture's feathers he dismembers the Yavanas, striking off their heads and arms so they fall like eerie hail. Many of his shafts pass through their iron or brass coats of mail, and stick in the earth. The Mlecchas perish in hundreds; his arrows flowing in spate, a torrid river from his bow drawn to its fullest stretch, he fells five, six, seven, or eight Yavanas at a time.

Satyaki massacres thousands of Kambojas, Sakas, and Barbaras, and the great carnage makes the earth impassable with a horrible sludge of flesh and blood.

The battlefield looks exotic like a sky covered with coppery clouds, with the strewn helmets of the Mlecchas and their shaven heads, which with their long beards look like featherless birds; and the field is also covered even more thickly with headless trunks dyed in blood. Slaughtered by Satyaki, whose touch is like that of Indra's thunder, the dead Yavanas sprawl everywhere, cover the earth with their dead. The small living remnant of those warriors, Rajan, and their spirit broken, face to face with

death, they whips their horses and flee in all directions, overwhelmed by the terror of Satyaki.

Thus, the insuperable Satyaki routs the invincible Kamboja host as well as the Yavana army and the large force of the Sakas, and crowned with victory, cries to his charioteer, “On! Fly!”

Seeing his indescribable feats in this battle, never achieved by anyone before, the Charanas and the Gandharvas in the sky applaud him. Indeed, O king, the Charanas, and your warriors, seeing Satyaki flying to help Arjuna, are filled with delight at his heroism.’”

CANTO 116

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Having vanquished the Yavanas and the Kambojas, Satyaki, most magnificent maharatha, courses on towards Arjuna, blasting his way through your terrified troops, decimating them on every side at his great will. Brandishing his glorious bow, which many moons adorn, he forges on irresistibly.

Golden angadas deck his arms; his helmet is adorned with gold; his body is covered in golden mail and his standard and bow too are embellished with gold, so that he shines like the summit of Meru. So lustrous is he, with the bow always bent into a circle, that he does resemble a second Surya in autumn. Yuyudhana, with his mighty shoulders, tread and lion's gaze, looks like a bull in a cow-pen in the midst of your troops.

Your warriors surround him again, Sini's grandson who stands so tall and proud, radiant in his chariot, like some incomparable tusker with rent temples. Indeed, after he ploughs through Drona's division, and the unfordable Bhoja division; after he wades through the sea of Jalasandha's troops as well as the host of the Kambojas; after he escapes Kritavarman the makara, after he traverses the entire oceanic Kuru host, once more many infuriated chariot-warriors of your army attack the Yadava. Duryodhana,

Chitrasena, Dusasana, Vivimsati, Sauna, Duhsaha, the youthful Durdharshana, Kratha, and many other great warriors, all difficult to defeat, wrathfully chase Satyaki as he dashes on, nearer and nearer Arjuna with each moment.

Then, O Sire, loud is the uproar that arises among your troops, like that of the ocean at full tide when lashed into fury by a tempest. Seeing all those warriors dashing at him, Satyaki smilingly says to his charioteer, "Drive slowly, Suta. Swollen with rage and pride, and swarming with elephants, horsemen, rathas and foot-soldiers, rushes towards me, filling the ten points of the compass with deep rumble of its chariots and making the earth, the sky, and the very seas to tremble.

This sea of troops, O Suta, will I contend with in a great battle, like the continent resisting the ocean risen to its height at full moon. Watch my prowess, O friend, which is equal to that of Indra himself for I will devour this hostile force with my arrows. Look at the foot-soldiers, horsemen, chariot-warriors, and elephants I slew in thousands, their bodies pierced by my fiery arrows."

While he speaks to his charioteer, the enemy host breaks upon the unassailable Satyaki. They come with a deafening din, and roars of *Kill him!* fill the field of dharma. Satyaki kills three hundred horsemen and four hundred elephants of those brave warriors in less time than it takes to tell. The exchange of arrows between the enemy bowmen and Satyaki is yet again comparable to that between the Devas and the Asuras in the days of old. Carnage rules the field; Yuyudhana's astras are like venomous snakes, not one failing to find its target and he shrouds them with his missiles in an unearthly cloudburst.

The surging sea of troops, seething with chariots rathas, elephants, cavalry and foot-soldiers, which are its waves, is stilled as soon as it comes upon the Satyaki Dwipa. Such slaughtering does he bring to them, that in no time they break ranks and flee, utterly shattered, in a daze, trembling as if struck by the icy winds of winter.

We see no foot-soldier or chariot-warrior or elephant or horseman or a horse that Yuyudhana's arrows do not strike. Not even Arjuna, O Rajan, has brought such carnage there as the dauntless Satyaki!

Then Duryodhana strikes Satyaki's charioteer with three keen arrows, his four horses with four, and Satyaki himself first with three and again with eight. Dusasana pierces him with sixteen, Sakuni with five and twenty

arrows, Chitrasena with five; Dusasana drills fifteen thunderbolts into his chest. The Vrishni never flinches but proudly wounds each of them with three arrows. Yet, fiercely wounded, by enemy shafts, maharatha, mahatejasvin Satyaki flits all over the battlefield with the speed of a hawk.

He demolishes Sakuni's bow and shreds his leathern gloves, bloodies Duryodhana's chest with three shafts, Chitrasena with a hundred arrows, Duhsaha with ten, and Dusasana with twenty. Your brother-in-law Sakuni takes up another bow and strikes Satyaki first with eight arrows and again with five; Dusasana wounds him with three, Durmukha with a dozen, Duryodhana with three and seventy and then his charioteer with three keening barbs.

Satyaki excoriates each of those maharathas with five blazing shafts. He swiftly strikes Duryodhana's charioteer with a broad-headed shaft, and drops him dead on the field. At this your son's horses bolt, bearing Duryodhana madly away from the field of battle, quick as the wind. Seeing this, your other sons and warriors flee in their hundreds. Satyaki unleashes burning arrow storms after the fleeing enemy, golden-winged and shimmering.

Thus routing all your legions, thousands and thousands of men, Satyaki again courses on towards Arjuna's ratha. If truth be told, Dhritarashtra, your troops worship Satyaki, when they see him loose his gales of arrows, even while protecting his charioteer and himself. They have never before seen archery like this, or valour!'"

CANTO 117

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Seeing Satyaki fight his way towards Arjuna, smashing the large force as he went, Sanjaya, what do my shameless sons do? When he who is equal to Savyasachin himself confronts them, how can these wretches, face to face with death, feel any eagerness to fight? What do all those Kshatriyas, routed in battle, then do? Yet, how can Satyaki of renown pass through our ranks when my sons still live? Tell me all this, O Sanjaya, for I am astonished to hear about this encounter between a single hero and the many maharathas.

O Suta, fate has surely turned against my sons, that one warrior of the Satwata vamsa has killed so many mighty maharathas. Alas, my army is no match for even this one Satyaki inflamed. Let all the Pandavas hang up their weapons. Vanquishing Drona himself, Satyaki will kill all my sons, like a great lion hunting little animals. So many maharathas, Kritavarman the first among them, all fighting vigorously, cannot stop Yuyudhana. The Vrishni will surely slay my sons. Truly, Arjuna himself does not fight as the renowned Satyaki does!'

Sanjaya replies, 'All this, O Rajan, is the consequence of your evil counsels and the sins of Duryodhana. Listen attentively to what I say.

At the command of your son, the Samsaptakas now rally once more, all determined to fight to the death. Three thousand archers led by Duryodhana, with a number of Sakas, Kambojas, Balhikas, Yavanas, Paradas, Kalingas, Tanganas, Ambashtas, Pisachas, Barbaras and mountain-men—inflamed with rage and armed with stones—all rush in frenzy at Satyaki, like insects into a blazing fire. Five hundred other warriors also charge Yuyudhana. Another mighty contingent of a thousand chariots, a hundred maharathas, a thousand elephants, two thousand Kshatriyas and countless foot-soldiers also attack him. Dusasana urges all these warriors on, crying, "Surround Satyaki and cut him down like a dog!"

And then still more grand and wonderful is the fight that we see from Sini's grandson, as he fights alone against these innumerable enemies. He kills the entire body of maharathas, the elephant force, all the horsemen and the Mlecchas. Like the autumn sky spangled with stars, the battlefield is strewn with chariot-wheels his mighty weapons break apart with volleys of innumerable akshas; and reduce beautifully wrought chariot-shafts to fragments; like the star-strewn autumn sky is Kurukshetra with felled elephants and fallen standards, with coats of mail and shields scattered all around, with garlands and ornaments and fine cloaks and anukarshas, O great King!

Many hilly elephants, born of the race of Anjana or Vamana or of other noble lines, so many immense tuskers lie there on the ground, unbreathing, and their eyes shut forever. Satyaki kills the great horses of the Vanayu, the Malaya, the Kamboja and the Balhika breeds: in thousands. He razes hundreds of thousands of foot-soldiers, born in various kingdoms and belonging to diverse nations.

Even while all these men and beasts are being slaughtered, Dusasana exhorts the virile Mleccha brigands, "You warriors who know no dharma, fight now as savagely as you can! Why do you retreat? This is just one man, cut him to pieces and feed on his flesh!"

But they ignore him and just run. Now Dusasana turns to the mountain men, the wild stone-fighters, saying, "You are masters of fighting with stones and slingshots, while Satyaki knows nothing of this way of battle. So stop this Vrishni. The Kauravas also know nothing of your method of fighting. If you rush fearlessly at Satyaki, he will be helpless against you."

Those mountain-dwelling Kshatriyas, all masters at the unusual art of fighting with stones, run towards Satyaki like ministers towards a king, with

stones big as elephants' heads raised in their hands. Others, urged by your son, and wanting to kill Yuyudhana, surround him, also armed with rocks. Satyaki pulverizes the heavy cascade of rocks and stones they fling so expertly at him; he kills many of the mountain Kshatriyas, while the shattering rock fragments pierce others in hundreds blowing heads asunder, smashing open brawny chests, and countless more fall dead. Next moment, he hacks off the arms of five hundred stone-throwers, so scarlet geysers spray from their armpits, while their hands still clasp great rocks.

Never pausing, growing more fierce by the moment, Satyaki kills a thousand mountain men next, and then a whole hundred thousand, all of them never coming near him, all with their rough weapons raised above their heads, even as he strikes off those heads. It is an exceptional and incredible feat that the Yadava on fire accomplished quick as seeing.

The hordes of stone-throwers continue to rush at Satyaki in waves, for they are numerous, and he continues to kill them as they come. Many Daradas, Tanganas, Khasas, Lampakas and Pulindas fling swords and lances at him for what they believe to be a safe distance. Satyaki carves all these in flight, the rocks exploding with loud reports, which frighten horses, and elephants that flee yet again, while bedlam reigns with Satyaki its dreadful heart. The shattering fragments continue to sting and kill countless men and beasts, even as if cobras are stinging them.

The small remnant of the elephants that attacked Satyaki also flees from the Vrishni's ratha, covered with blood, their heads and frontal lobes split open. While he annihilates your legions in an unprecedented carnage, a loud and deep wailing rises from your troops, even as if the Earth herself bellowed in agony, or the sea at full tide.

Hearing the great and dismal sound, Drona says to his charioteer, "O Suta, Satyaki fights like Yama himself enraged and annihilates our forces. Ride to where this great tumult has arisen. I have no doubt that Yuyudhana decimates the mountain men who fight with rocks and stone. And look where our maharathas also flee everywhere in terror of the Yadava. Look where they fall, the wounded and the dead, while the charioteers cannot restrain their horses."

His sarathy tells Drona, the greatest of wielders of weapons, "O you who are blessed with length of days, look at the Kaurava troops flee and all our warriors, routed by one hero, run in all directions. And here, the Panchalas and the Pandavas, united, converge on you from every side to

have your life. You must decide which of these should have your first attention? Should we stay here to face the advancing Pandavas or should we find Satyaki who is so far from us?"

Even as his charioteer says this to Drona, Satyaki suddenly appears in hot pursuit of a large number of rathikas who are fleeing from him towards Drona's army. Some other chariot-warriors, Dusasana's troops, all panic-stricken, also fly towards Drona's ratha.'"

CANTO 118

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Dusasana's chariot near his, Drona asks him, "Why are all these rathas fleeing? Is the king not well? Is Jayadratha still alive? You are a prince, a king's brother, a maharatha. Why do you run away from battle? Hand the throne over to your brother and become the Prince Regent. You once told Draupadi, "We have won you at dice; you are our slave. Do not limit yourself to your husbands; set aside your chastity and take these robes to the king, my brother Duryodhana. Your husbands are all good as dead; they are as worthless as grains of sesame without their kernels."

And now you run away from battle? Having provoked such fierce enmity with the Panchalas and the Pandavas, why are you afraid to fight a lone Satyaki? When you took up the dice in the Kuru sabha, could you not divine that one day they would transform themselves into fierce arrows? It was you that abused the Pandavas. You are the cause of Draupadi's torment. Where is your pride now, your insolence and your brag? After stirring their wrath, now why do you run away from the Pandavas who are like terrible snakes of virulent poison?

As a brave brother of Suyodhana, you should protect the routed, panic-stricken Kaurava army with your might, instead of running like a common coward. With this dastardliness you will increase the joy of your enemies. O Parantapa, when you who are the leader of your host, flee like this, who else will stay to fight? When you, its refuge, are frightened, who in our army will not be afraid?

You run in terror from just one Satwata warrior. Kaurava, what will you do when you face Arjuna the Gandivi in battle, or Bhima, or Madri's twins? Satyaki's arrows from which you flee in terror are hardly equal to Arjuna's astras, which are like the Sun or Fire.

If you are bent on escape, let us declare peace and hand over the sovereignty of the Earth to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. Make peace with the Pandavas before Arjuna's astras like thunderbolts enter your body. Before the noble Parthas kill your hundred brothers and wrest the Earth from you by force, make peace with the Pandavas. Before king Yudhishtira is truly enraged, and Krishna, who delights in battle, also, make peace with the sons of Pandu.

Before the Mahabaho Bhima blasts his terrible way through our vast army and seizes your brothers like a lion seizes lambs, Dusasana, make peace with the Pandavas.

Bhishma once said to your brother Duryodhana, 'The Pandavas are unconquerable in war, so make peace with them.'

Your evil brother did not listen to him. So now set your heart firmly on war and fight the Pandavas with all your might, fearless for your life. Go, coward, fly to where Satyaki is. Without you, O Bhaarata, this host will melt away. For your own sake, fly and fight the indomitable Satyaki."

Thus addressed by Drona, your son Dusasana, his heart burning with shame, says not a word in reply, feigning not to have heard him. However, taking a large force of brave Mlecchas with him, Dusasana rides at Satyaki, burning like the yuga-fire on Kurukshetra, and engages him in a pitched battle. Heartened by this, Drona turns back to attack the Pandavas and the Panchalas again.

Loudly announcing himself, that he is the great and invincible Drona, son of Bharadwaja, he plunged straight into the midst of the enemy, and begins to decimate their forces, killing thousands and thousands of fighting men. He brings another dreadful carnage to the Pandavas, the Panchalas, and the Matsyas.

The illustrious Viraketu, another son of Drupada, faces Drona boldly and strikes the Brahmana with five sizzling barbs, sticks another deep into his flagstaff and rakes his sarathy with another seven. It is an amazing sight, Rajan, to watch Drona exert himself vigorously and yet not be able to approach, let alone vanquish that Panchala prince!

The other Panchalas swoop down to surround the beleaguered Acharya, and they lash him with dense smoking gusts of fiery shafts, with whistling spears flung from all around and other powerful missiles. Cutting all these down with his own banks of astras, like the wind driving away masses of clouds in the sky, Drona is magnificent. Then he looses an astra blazing like Surya or Agni at Viraketu; the shafts of fire flames its way right through that prince and burns into the ground behind him, simmering blood. Viraketu falls dead from his ratha like a champaka tree uprooted by the wind.

The Panchalas all rush in rage at Drona—Chitraketu, Sudhanwan, Chitravarman and Chitraratha, covering him with a wrath of arrows to avenge their slain brother. Struck from all sides by these royal maharathas, the Brahmana bull summons all his energy and anger.

Drona rakes them with a hurricane of fire from his bow drawn into a circle, and they are dazed and have no reply to this awesome onslaught. Then the angry Brahmana, his lips curled in a grim smile, kills their horses and charioteers, he shatters their rathas; and before they even realise what is happening, with his favourite crescent-headed arrows he plucks their handsome heads from their throats like flowers from their stems. The Panchala princes fall out of their chariots even like the Danavas of old during the Devasura yuddha.

Roaring, Drona raises his golden-backed bow high and shakes it in triumph. He has killed five sons of his great enemy Drupada.

An anguished Dhrishtadyumna sheds tears for his brothers, who were like gods among the Panchalas; losing all control of himself, he wildly attacks Drona. So violent is the assault that a great and fearful cry goes up from your troops, for they are certain that the fire-prince, the Pandava Senapati, will have the Brahmana's life.

But Drona, smiling all the while, continues to battle, triumphant and unperturbed. Blood leaping into his eyes, Dhrishtadyumna drills a rash of terrific shafts into Drona's chest and the Acharya faints in his ratha. Seeing him swooned, Dhrishtadyumna flings down his bow and, seizing up a

sword, leaps off his own chariot and running forward mounts Drona's ratha, intent on having the Brahmana's head for his trophy.

Meanwhile, Drona regains his senses, snatches up his bow and unleashes a scathing volley of special short barbs meant just for such a duel at close range at Dhrishtadyumna, wounding him deep and sharply. Dhrishtadyumna finding himself thwarted, jumps down again from Drona's chariot, runs back to his own, and again picking up a great bow once more covers Drona with savage fire.

The two duel like Indra and Prahlada once did for the sovereignty of the three worlds. Their chariots wheel and flash everywhere and torrents of arrows issue from both, cover earth, sky and all the directions, and also drawing copious blood from each other. Watching, the rest of the greatest Kshatriyas, O Rajan, and all the other warriors as well marvel at the unworldly skills of the two.

The hopeful Panchalas exclaim, "Drona fights Dhrishtadyumna who was born to kill him. The Brahmana's end is here!"

But then, like a man plucking a ripe fruit from a tree, Drona takes the head of Dhrishtadyumna's charioteer from his neck with a crescent-tipped shaft; the Panchala's horses bolt, leaving Drona to annihilate the Panchalas and the Srinjayas. After slaughtering so many of these, Drona resumes his lordly station at the heart of his own vyuha. And the Pandavas, my lord, do not venture to challenge him.'"

CANTO 119

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, Rajan, Dusasana attacks Satyaki with some vehemence. He strikes the Vrishni first with sixty arrows and then with sixteen, but fails to shake the shura who stands immovable as the Mainaka mountain. Leading a large group of rathas from various kingdoms, Dusasana fills the field with his roars deep as rumbling clouds.

Seeing the Kaurava come to battle, the mighty Satyaki flashes straight at him, covering him with arrows. Those in the van of Dusasana army all flee in terror and only your son, Rajan, remains and faces the irradiant Vrishni hero fearlessly. He pierces Satyaki's horses with aggressive shafts, his charioteer with three, and Satyaki himself with a hundred and roars yet again, challengingly. An incensed Satyaki quickly shrouds Dusasana's ratha, sarathy, banner and your son himself in a cloud of shafts, making him invisible. Yuyudhana is like a spider entangling an insect in its web.

Watching this, Duryodhana despatches a legion of Trigartas at Satyaki's ratha to bolster Dusasana. Three thousand fierce Trigarta maharathas, seasoned warriors all, surround Satyaki with their chariots, resolved to engage him and vowing not to retreat. In a trice Satyaki shoots down five

hundred of their leading warriors. They fall from their rathas like tall trees from mountaintops, uprooted by a tempest.

O Rajan, Kurukshetra, strewn with mangled elephants, dead horses decked in trappings of gold and torn to shreds by Satyaki's arrows, weltering in blood and littered with fallen standards, presents a striking appearance, like a ghastly garden overgrown with flowering kinsukas. Slaughtered by Satyaki, your soldiers can find no refuge; they are as elephants sunk in mire. And all of them turn back in haste towards Drona's ratha, like mighty snakes making for their holes from fear of the hunting prince of birds. After killing those five hundred, Satyaki again makes his majestic way towards Arjuna.

As he goes, Dusasana strikes him with nine fine shafts. Turning, Satyaki pierces Dusasana with five golden-winged vulture-feathered arrows. Dusasana, smiling, shoots back three bolts, followed by another five, to which Satyaki replies with five of his own that smash your son's bow in his hands; and a smiling Yuyudhana rides on towards Arjuna. An incensed Dusasana hurls an iron spear, which Satyaki destroys with kanka-feathered shafts.

Rajan, your son takes up another bow, rakes Satyaki with a clutch of arrows and gives a lion's roar. Satyaki, aroused, turns back and plunges five arrows that burst into flames, and then eight more thick iron shafts. Dusasana, bestirred by Drona's censure, heroically lacerates the Yadava with twenty stinging shafts.

Yuyudhana, roaring now, finds Dusasana's chest with three vicious barbs; next moment, he kills Satyaki's horses. With another broad-headed arrow he cleaves your son's bow, and with five more slim missiles, shreds his leather gauntlet. Satyaki, master of weapons, severs Dusasana's standard and the wooden shafts of his chariot and kills both his Parshni charioteers in crimson eruptions.

Left without a bow, a ratha, horses and charioteer, Dusasana is rescued by the lord of the Trigartas on his ratha. O Bhaarata, Satyaki pursues him briefly and has him at his mercy, but does not kill him for he remembers the vow that Bhima swore in the Kuru sabha that he would kill all hundred of your sons. Thus, having vanquished and shamed Dusasana, Satyaki again courses ahead in Arjuna's trail.'"

CANTO 120

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, are there no mighty maharathas in my army who can stop or defy Satyaki as he scythes his way towards Arjuna? Why, the Yadava's exploits are like those of Indra himself when he fought the Danavas! Perhaps, the path Satyaki rode was not defended? But no, the truth is that he has superior prowess and skills and by himself annihilates countless of our warriors. Tell me how this grandson of Sini, all alone, cleaves through the vast force facing him?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Rajan, the fierce effort and the uproar of your army, which teems with numberless chariots, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, resembles what one sees at the end of the yuga. When your army assembles daily, it seems to me that one has never seen another such a vast gathering of men and beasts on Earth. The Devas and the Charanas who watch from above say, "This muster will be the last of its kind on Bhumi."

Truly, never has such a vyuha been formed in the past as the one that Drona has on this day of Jayadratha's killing. The din made by the vast multitude of soldiers meeting each other in battle is no less than that of the ocean lashed into fury by the tempest. In your host, as well as that of the

Pandavas, are hundreds of thousands of kings. The sound these inflamed heroes of fierce deeds make while battling each other is hair-raising.

Now Bhimasena, Dhrishtadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira all cry variously, "Forward! Charge! Strike! For Krishna and Arjuna have broken into the enemy army! Do whatever we must so that they easily find Jayadratha's ratha."

Dhrishtadyumna says, "If Satyaki and Arjuna are killed, the Kurus will achieve their objective and we will be defeated. All of you unite quickly and agitate their oceanic army, like impetuous winds stirring the very deep."

And responding to their great commanders' call, the Pandava warriors surge forward in tide and, heedless of their own lives, smother the Kauravas. All of them are not merely prepared but even eager to die for their friends and lords, at either the point or the edge of the sword, expecting swarga as a reward. So also, do your warriors too crave fame and stand ready, determined to fight to the end, to kill or be killed.

In the midst of this fierce and horrible battle, Satyaki, after besting all his opponents, drives on towards Arjuna. The glare of the sun reflects from the bright armour of the warriors and dazzles all the combatants. Duryodhana, too, Rajan, pierces the mighty army of the noble Pandavas and fights dreadfully there, bringing great and dire butchery with him."

Dhritarashtra asks, 'Duryodhana must be hard-pressed while fighting the Pandava army. I hope he does not turn his back on the battle, O Suta! The contention between him and the Pandava army seems to me to be a most unequal one. Besides, Duryodhana has been raised in great luxury, in wealth and possessions and now he is a king of men. Encountering so many alone, I truly hope he does not turn back from the fight.'

Sanjaya replies, 'Listen to me, Rajan, as I describe your son's wonderful feats. Duryodhana agitates the Pandava army like an elephant stirring a bank of lotus-stalks in a lake. Seeing their forces being mown down at will by your son, the Panchalas led by Bhimasena rush at him. Duryodhana pierces Bhimasena with ten arrows, each of the twins with three, Yudhishtira with seven, Virata and Drupada with six, Sikhandin with a hundred, Dhrishtadyumna with twenty arrows and he strikes each of the five sons of Draupadi with three.

With his astras, meanwhile, he slaughters hundreds of lesser warriors, and elephants and many other maharathas, too, like an angry Yama. His bow appears to be drawn to a circle, whether while aiming or loosing his

shafts. Indeed, his formidable bow, inlaid with gold, is always seen as a circle, while he destroys his enemies with it.

Then, Yudhishtira, with a brace of broad-tipped arrows, rives your son's bow and with another ten exceptional shafts strikes your son lustily. However, on touching Duryodhana's armour, Yudhishtira's arrows shatter into dust. The Parthas, filled with delight, surround Yudhishtira, like the Devas and the great Rishis in olden days surrounding Sakra when he killed Vritra. Taking up another bow, your son roars at Yudhishtira, "Stop and fight me!" and attacks him.

Seeing Duryodhana charge headlong at Yudhishtira, the Panchalas, hope of victory surging in their hearts, eagerly rush forward to meet his charge. However, Drona intercepts the onrushing Panchalas, like a mountain looming in the path of a mass of wind driven, rain-charged clouds. Brutal, O king, the ensuing bloodletting, why, like the sport of Rudra at the end of the Yuga.

Then, above every other sound in the general bedlam, there arises a spine-chilling uproar from where Arjuna is fighting.

Thus, O Mahabaho, the battle develops between Arjuna and your archers, the contention between Satyaki and your men at the heart of your army, and thus continues the bloodshed between Drona and his antagonists at the lip of his vyuha. Thus, indeed, O lord of the world, the carnage on this Earth continues, with Arjuna and Drona and Satyaki, all afire.'"

CANTO 121

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Beyond noon, O Rajan, another dreadful battle, marked by roars and bellows, deep as those of thunderheads, ensues between Drona and the Somakas. Drona, keened for a bloodbath, advances against the Pandavas. The pot-born magnificent son of Bharadwaja, always serving your cause, cuts down many leading enemy warriors, why, even as if he sports in battle.

Then the mighty maharatha of the Kaikeyas, irresistible Brihadkshatra, the eldest of five brothers, challenges him. Like a great cloud mass emptying itself over Gandhamadana, he lashes torrents of arrows down on Drona. Drona looses five and ten stone-whetted, golden-winged barbs at Brihadkshatra but the Kekaya prince shatter them all in flight. Drona, the Brahmana bull shoots eight whistling shafts at him; these, too, Brihadkshatra cuts down.

Your troops are filled with amazement at the prince's feat. Applauding Brihadkshatra himself, Drona invokes the Brahmastra and looses that celestial ayudha at the Kekaya prince, who, quicker than thinking, extinguishes it with a Brahmastra of his own. Immediately, he strikes the surprised Acharya with a terrific volley of sixty glittering shafts. Drona,

provoked, unleashes a formidable missile at his adversary, a bolt of lightning that plunges through Brihadkshatra's armour, his body and flies on like a black cobra, hissing into the earth behind him.

Pain screaming through his every nerve, filled with rage and rolling his handsome eyes, Brihadkshatra drills Drona with seventy arrows; with another, he gores the Brahmana's sarathy through his very vitals. Lifting his archery, Drona now shoots so ferociously at the Kekaya prince that Brihadkshatra staggers in his chariot, his limbs turning weak.

In a flash, Drona kills his horses, his sarathy, cuts down that brave prince's standard and regal chatra. And then, as Brihadkshatra stands helpless, shocked by the raging Brahmana's tirade, Drona serenely blows his heart to shreds with another perfect arrow and that radiant hero falls dead.

Seeing Brihadkshatra die, Dhrishtaketu, son of the Kaikeya maharatha Sisupala whom Krishna killed at Yudhishtira's Rajasuya yagna, cries to his charioteer, "Suta, take me to where Drona stands, slaughtering the Kaikeya and the Panchala hosts!"

His charioteer turns his fleet of Kamboja horses towards Drona, and Dhrishtaketu, king of the Chedis, swelling with fury and prowess, flies at the dreadful Brahmana, like an insect towards a blazing fire to be consumed. And like a man rousing a tiger from sleep, he rakes Drona, his red chargers, his ratha and standard first with a burst of sixty shafts and again with many others. Drona the tiger responds with a razor-faced arrow winged with vulture feathers, neatly bisecting Dhrishtaketu's bow. The Chedi picks up another bow and draws blood from Drona with a flurry of shafts winged with the shiny feathers of kankas and peacocks.

Drona kills Dhrishtaketu's noble horses, strikes off his sarathy's head and wounds him direly with another five and twenty robust arrows. Dhrishtaketu jumps down from his ratha with a mace and hurls it at Drona like an angry naga. Seeing the heavy gada, hard as adamant and inlaid with gold, fly towards him like Death, Drona smashes it to dust with a thousands shafts loosed in the heart of an instant; the earth echoes with the report of that weapon being blown apart.

Now the wrathful and fearless Dhrishtaketu hurls a spear embellished with gold at the Brahmana. Drona slices the lance into slivers with five breathtaking shafts; and it falls onto the ground like a serpent mangled by Garuda. Not pausing, Drona looses another keen barb that cleaves the Chedi

king's kavacha, his muscled chest and dives into the earth behind him like a swan into a lake overgrown with lotuses. And Sisupala's son keels over, dead. As a hungry blue jay seizes and devours a little insect so does Drona take the life of Dhrishtaketu.

When Dhrishtaketu dies, his enraged son, a considerable warrior himself, attacks Drona. Him Drona smilingly despatches to Yamaloka, like a great tiger in the deep vana killing a fawn.

While the Pandavas, O Bhaarata, are thus being thinned, the heroic son of Jarasandha charges Drona and covers the Acharya with such an opacity of arrows that the Brahmana is briefly invisible, like the sun hidden by black clouds. Then Drona, the scourge of the Kshatriyas, looses a hundred thousand deadly shafts at the gifted prince and kills him in the very sight of all the other great archers.

Truly, Drona is like Yama the Destroyer, jaws agape, swallowing every warrior who dares confront him. Once again roaring out his own name and his lineage in ringing proclamation and challenge, the Brahmana who has abandoned is swadharma and is far more terrible than any Kshatriya, swathes the Pandava host with millions of arrows. Each of these is engraved with his name and they massacre men, elephants and horses in thousands like the Asuras were once slain by Sakra; the Panchalas begin to tremble like a herd of cattle beset with winter's cold.

Indeed, an awful bewailing arises from the terrified Panchalas, scorched by the sun above and made ashes by Drona below. Benumbed by Drona, the greatest Panchala maharathas feel like men whose thighs have been seized by makaras.

Then, Rajan, the Chedis, the Srinjayas, the Kasis and the Kosalas band together and, with great heart attack Drona all together, roaring to one another to embolden themselves, "Drona is slain! Drona is dead!"

These Naravyaghras fall upon the illustrious Drona, bent on sending the fulminant Brahmana to Yama. But the implacable Drona annihilates those brave warriors, especially the greatest ones among the Chedis; and, struck brutally by Drona's shafts, the Panchalas quail.

They call loudly to Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna, crying, "This Brahmana has performed the most terrible tapasya and acquired great punya, for now, inflamed by rage, he consumes the greatest Kshatriyas. A Kshatriya's dharma is battle; a Brahmana's, mahatapasya. A Brahmana galvanized by tapasya and gyana can make ashes of anything with just his

angry gaze. Here countless great Kshatriyas, O Bhaarata, have been blasted by the fire of Drona's astras. The illustrious Drona has abandoned all restraint and devours our troops as he pleases, while none can stand before him."

At this, Kshatradharman, Dhrishtadyumna's mighty son, severs Drona's bow in his hands with a crescent-tipped shaft such as the Acharya himself favours. Drona, bane of the Kshatriyas, is further incensed, and takes up another bright bow and in a blur transfixes Kshatradharman to his flagstaff with an arrow through his heart.

Now the Pandava troops quake with fear. The redoubtable Chekitana falls upon Drona and bloodies his torso with ten fulvid arrows; he pierces Drona's charioteer with four shafts and his chestnut horses with another four. The Acharya ablaze pierces Chekitana's right arm with sixteen arrows, his standard with another sixteen, and his charioteer with seven. With his charioteer killed, Chekitana's horses bolt, dragging his chariot with them, and filling the Panchalas and the Pandavas with more panic yet. And dominating, resplendent, terrifying Drona routs the united forces of the Panchalas and the Srinjayas all around him. Ah, Raja, he is beyond being merely magnificent.

The venerable Drona, full five and eighty years of age, dark in complexion and with pure white hair, dashes all over the battlefield like a youth of sixteen. Rajan, his enemies look upon him as none else than Vajradhari Indra himself come to hunt them.

Then the mighty-armed and intelligent Drupada says, "This vile and dreadful Brahmana is killing noble Kshatriyas like a hungry tiger killing small animals. The sinful Duryodhana will surely find the most vicious hell for himself in the next world. It is through his greed that countless great Kshatriyas lie dead the field like mangled bulls, weltering in their own blood and becoming food for dogs and jackals."

Saying this, O Rajan, Drupada, the lord of an akshauhini, sets the Parthas at its head, and rides with great speed towards Drona.'"

CANTO 122

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When the Pandava army is set upon from all sides, the Parthas, the Panchalas and the Somakas retreat to a great distance. O Bhaarata, during this harrowing battle, reminiscent of the pralaya at yuga's end, Drona, straddling the field, repeatedly roars, shaking earth and sky and continues to obliterate the Panchalas and the Pandavas.

And when Yudhishtira can find no succour in his extreme distress, he begins to wonder how the war can ever be won as long as the Brahmana, his old Acharya, is alive. Looking around him desperately for Arjuna, Yudhishtira sees neither him nor Krishna. Not finding the Naravyaghra who flies Hanuman on his banner and not hearing the twang of the Gandiva, and not seeing Satyaki anywhere either, the Dharmaraja loses all peace of mind.

Yudhishtira, fearing the world's censure, begins to think of Satyaki. "I sent the brilliant Satyaki, dispeller of the fears of friends, to follow Arjuna. Earlier I had only one source of anxiety, but now I have two. I should have some tidings of both Satyaki and Dhananjaya by now. Having sent Satyaki to follow Arjuna, whom can I now send to follow Satyaki? If I try to find intelligence only of my brother without enquiring after Satyaki, the world will reproach me. They will say, 'Yudhishtira Dharmaputra seeks only his

brother and leaves Satyaki of Vrishni's vamsa, the hero of unfailing prowess, to his fate!'

Fearing as I do the reproach of the world, I will send Bhimasena to find the noble Yuyudhana. The love I bear for the invincible Satwata is no less than the love I have for Arjuna, the Parantapa. Ah, I fear I have set the delighter of the Sinis a task more difficult than he can accomplish on his own. Yet, either at a friend's request or for honour, he has pierced deep into the Bharata army like a great Makara into the ocean. Loud is the outcry I hear from enemy heroes, fighting together against him. They appear to be too many for him and I must think quickly of rescuing him.

Bhimasena should go to the two mighty maharathas. There is nothing on earth that Vrikodara cannot face and if he fights with resolve, he is a match for all the archers in the world and with the might of his arms he can stand by himself against all his enemies. It is relying on the strength of arms of noble Bhima in the wilds that we returned from our exile and have never been vanquished in battle.

If Bhimasena joins Satyaki, both Satyaki and Arjuna will find great and real support, and I will be anxious for them anymore. Both of them are masters of weapons and Krishna protects them both. Yet, I will allay my own anxiety and send Bhima after Arjuna and Satyaki. No one can then accuse me of being carless of Yuyudhana's life."

Making up his mind, Yudhishtira tells his charioteer, "Drive me to Bhima."

His sarathy does as he is told. Typically, once he sees Bhima before him, Yudhishtira is filled with remorse, and begins to press Bhima with diverse solicitations. Finally he says, "O Bhima, I do not see Arjuna's standard—he who on a single ratha vanquished all the Devas, the Gandharvas and Asuras!"

Bhimasena replies, "Never before have I seen or heard you so agitated. Indeed, in the past, when we were stricken with grief, it was you who were our comforter. O King of kings, stop your prevarication and command me what I should do, for there is nothing that I cannot do for you. O Kurusathama! Do not be unhappy."

Then, with a sorrowful face and his eyes bathed in tears, and sighing like a cobra, Yudhishtira says to Bhimasena, "We hear the repeated blasts on Panchajanya that Krishna wrathfully blows. Ah, I fear they are telling us that your brother Arjuna lies dead on the field and that Krishna is fighting.

Our Arjuna, to whom we always turn when in trouble even as the Devas to thousand-eyed Indra, has fought his way deep into the Kuru army on his quest for Jayadratha. I know this, my Bhima, but he has not returned.

Dark in complexion, youthful in years, with wavy locks, exceedingly handsome, broad of chest and with long arms, with the tread of an angry elephant, with eyes like chakras the colour of burnished copper, the mightiest maharatha, this brother of yours, Arjuna, always terrifies his enemies. This is the cause of my grief, Parantapa! My pain increases like a fire fed with libations of ghee, because of Arjuna, as well as for Satyaki. I am dazed with sorrow for I do not see his banner emblazoned with great Hanuman.

Oh, I have no doubt that he has been killed and that it is Krishna who now fights. Know also, Bhima, that I fear that the other tiger among men, the mighty Satyaki, is also slain. Alas! Satyaki followed in the wake of Arjuna out of his great love. Without seeing Satyaki, too, I am benumbed by grief.

O Kaunteya, if you think it your dharma to obey me, you must rush to Arjuna and Satyaki. O you who know dharma well, remember that I am your eldest brother. You should consider Satyaki dearer to you than Arjuna himself. Satyaki went forth after Arjuna for my sake, following a trail that only the noblest men can tread. Now you must follow after Yuyudhana and upon finding the two Krishnas and Satyaki of the Satwata vamsa, safe, send me a message, O son of Pandu, beloved Bhima, by giving a loud roar."

CANTO 123

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

Bhima replies, "The two Krishnas have gone in the ratha which once carried Brahma, Isana, Indra and Varuna to battle, so they can be in no danger. However, to obey your command, my brother, look, I too ride after them! Do not be anxious. As soon as I meet those Naravyaghras, I will send you the message you want with a roar of joy.'"

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhima prepares to set out and repeatedly entrusts Yudhishtira's care to Dhrishtadyumna and other friends, saying, "You know how Drona is always looking to seize Yudhishtira by any means. Indeed, O son of Drupada, I should never set my riding out to help Arjuna and Satyaki above my duty to protect the king. But because he has himself commanded me to go, I cannot disobey him. I will go where Jayadratha, the wretched king of the Sindhus waits in the suchimukha vyuha, at the point of death. In truth, I should only do what Arjuna and Satyaki asked me to, and remain here beside Yudhishtira. But, my dearest friend Dhrishtadyumna, I am helpless and entrust my brother's care to you. You must protect him at any cost. Of all tasks, this is your highest duty today."

To this, Dhrishtadyumna replies, "I will do as you wish. Go, O son of Kunti, without anxiety of any kind. Without killing me, Drona will never

harm or take Yudhishtira. And Drona fears me more than any other warrior for he knows that his death is written at my hands."

Thus entrusting Yudhishtira to Dhrishtadyumna and saluting his elder brother, Bhimasena rides forth in search of Arjuna. Before he leaves, Yudhishtira embraces Bhimasena and sniffs his head affectionately and blesses him, for it is well known that Bhima has always been his favourite brother. After worshipping a number of Brahmanas, circumambulating them in pradakshina; after gratifying them with many gifts; after touching the eight kinds of auspicious articles and drinking potent kairataka honey, Bhimasena, the shura of all shuras, the corners of whose eyes have turned red with intoxication, feels that his natural, boundless strength has doubled.

The Brahmanas perform propitiatory ceremonies for him, various omens indicating success greet him; and seeing all this, he already feels the delight of anticipated victory. Favourable winds begin to blow to predict his success. Then, Mahabaho Bhimasena, foremost of maharathas, strongest man on earth, decked with earrings and angadas, and his hands cased in leather gauntlets, mounts his excellent ratha. His priceless armour made of black steel inlaid with gold, looks like a cloud charged with lightning. Yellow, red, black and white robes gracefully cover his great body. Also wearing a coloured cuirass that protects his neck, Bhimasena is as resplendent as a cloud ornamented with a rainbow.

Just as Bhimasena is on the point of setting out, we hear the fierce blasts of Panchajanya again, which can fill the three worlds with fear. Yudhishtira says to Bhima, "The Vrishni hero blows his conch again and fills the earth and sky with its thunder. Surely, Arjuna has fallen and Krishna now fights the Kurus. I am certain that Kunti, Draupadi and Subhadra, with their relatives and friends, have all seen inauspicious omens today. So fly to Arjuna, my brother, for all the world seems empty to my eyes that long to see Dhananjaya and Satyaki."

Bhima puts on his leather gloves, takes up his bow, calls for the drums to be beaten, blows his conch with great force and roaring like ten lions, pulls on his bowstring, shaking the field and making his enemies' hearts tremble. Assuming a dreadful form, he rides out in his great chariot yoked to horses of the finest breed, gifted with the speed of the wind or thought, their reins held by Visoka and whinnying furiously as they dash ahead into the fray.

Losing a gale of arrows, powerful as his father the Wind, be quickly begins to raze the enemy vyuha, while the valiant Panchalas and the Somakas follow him, like the Devas following Maghavat.

The brothers Dusasana, Chitrasena, Kundabhedin, Vivimsati, Durmukha, Duhsaha, Sala, Vinda, Anuvinda, Sumukha, Dirghabahu, Sudarshana, Suhasta, Sushena, Dirghalochana, Abhaya, Raudrakarman, Suvarman and Durvimochana surround him and these resplendent shuras attack him with their troops. Bhima is at them with the wild imperiousness of a lion hunting herds of deer. They loose devastras and other incandescent arrows that cover him like clouds shrouding the sun.

Blasting them out of his way, truly like some towering gale of his father Vayu, Bhima attacks Drona's elephant-force and covers them with fire. In no time, the Vayuputra demolishes that division and those that remain alive bolt in all directions. Like animals in the forest terrified at the roar of a Sarabha, the elephants all run, with frightful cries. Racing along, Bhima comes upon Drona's main host.

The Acharya checks his advance, like the continent resisting the surging sea and, smiling, strikes Bhimasena on his forehead with a shaft whereupon he looks like the sun with his rays streaming up. Drona thinks that Bhima will show him reverence as Arjuna had, and says to him, "Mighty Bhimasena, you cannot enter my vyuha without vanquishing me! Krishna, with your brother, went into my army with my consent, but you will never succeed."

Bhima, enraged, his eyes the colour of blood, red or burnished copper, replies roughly, "O wretch of a Brahmana, it cannot be that Arjuna entered this host with your consent. He is invisible and can break into an army commanded by Sakra himself. If he offered you reverence, it was only because he respects you. But know, O Drona, that I am not compassionate like Arjuna. I am Bhimasena your enemy.

We regarded you as our father, Acharya, and ourselves as your sons and so we were always humble before you. However, when you speak to us as you do today, and fight us with devastras, all that is a thing of the past. You regard yourself as our enemy, so let it be as you wish. I am Bhima and I will now show you the force of my enmity!"

And Bhima whirls a great mace, like Yama himself twirling his danda, and hurls it at Drona like lightning. Drona leaps out of his chariot in the nick of time and Bhima's massive gada shatters the Brahmana's ratha,

killing his horses and sarathy in an explosion of wood and blood. Then Bhima destroys countless Kuru warriors, truly like a tempest felling trees. Your sons once more surround him while Drona, mounting another chariot, returns to the mouth of his vyuha and remains there, recovering himself, waiting for Bhima to come to him again.

The infuriated Bhima covers the chariot-division before him with showers of arrows, with force not yet seen on the field. Your sons, the maharathas, fight back manfully. Dusasana casts an iron spear at his cousin; Bhima divides it neatly, marvellously along its length as it flies towards him. With three immaculate shafts he kills your sons Kundabhedin, Sushena and Dirghanetra; he beheads your heroic son Vrindaraka, pride of the Kurus. He next despatches your sons Abhaya, Raudrakarman and Durvimochana.

Your other princes then surround Bhima, and shower fulminations of arrows over him, like lashing rain upon the mountain breast at summer's end. And like the mountain does Bhima receive those heavy salvos. Bhima feels no pain and smiling awfully sends your sons Vinda, Anuvinda and Suvarman to Yama. He does not pause and blows your son Sudarshana's chest apart, killing him instantly.

The titanic Pandava trains his wrath on the rathas of your army, and within moments overwhelms them with his fury and they flee in all directions. Like a herd of frightened deer, your sons terrified by Bhimasena, all turn and flee from their dreadful cousin. He, however, goes coursing after their vast legion and careening everywhere as he belabours your warriors from every side. Your best soldiers spur their horses, as swiftly as they can go, away from the force of nature that is Bhima come hunting them.

Stupendous Bhimasena gives roar after shattering roar, slaps his armpits like peals of thunder, further deranging your rathikas, and flares on towards Drona's main vyuha, trampling over the corpses with which he has scattered the field.'"

CANTO 124

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After Bhima mows down the chariot-division, Drona, smiling, shrouds him in a downpour of arrows to stop his furious progress. However, Bhimasena confounds your army with his powers of maya and absorbs the Acharya's fusillade, while your sons attack him again. Inspired by your princes, many kings, all great archers, rush to surround him.

Bhima grins fearsomely, gives a great roar and casts a mace at them like a thunderflash, like Indra's very Vajra. Blazing with splendour, emitting streaks of lightning, that mace fills the whole world with a deafening sound and overwhelms your soldiers. It terrifies your sons and your other warriors flee again in alarm, with loud cries. Many foot-soldiers fall where they stand at the unbearable sound made by the fierce gada; many maharathas fall out of their chariots.

The occult and magical mace flies everywhere, killing hundreds; it flies back into Bhima's hands and he casts it, again and again. Slaughtered by Bhimasena's great gada, once given him by Mayaa Danava, all your warriors run away in fear, like deer attacked by a monstrous tiger. The colossal Bhima demolishes the enemy, blasting his way through their ranks

in a furrow of blood. He tears his way through your army like Garuda of the beautiful feathers.

Rajan, while Bhimasena, the great leader of chariot-divisions, brings bloody carnage to your troops, Drona rushes at him again and stops him still with a supernatural volley of shining arrows; Bharadwaja's son roars in triumph and fear seizes the Pandavas. Yet another feverish duel develops between Drona and Bhima, this one also like the Devasura yuddha of yore.

Drona's luciferous astras consume brave Pandava warriors, thousands of them. Losing all control of himself, with a roar like none heard before during this war, Bhima shuts his eyes, leaps down from his chariot and runs straight at Drona's ratha, ignoring all the arrows that pierce him on his mad way like a massive bull might the rain that falls upon him.

Staggering Bhima seizes Drona's ratha by the shaft, and lifts it above his head and flings it down smashing it into shards. However, Drona nimbly jumps out of his chariot just before Bhima seizes it, and running with some celerity, quickly mounts another chariot and with his sarathy whipping his horses to great speed, the Acharya retreats, mildly dazed by Bhima, to defend the entrance to his vyuha again. Who has ever thought of a feat like the one Bhima performs, let alone seen such a thing?

Bhima quickly remounts his ratha and once more advances imperiously towards your son's army, defying all the enemy warriors like a mountain a surging sea. As he forges on, he destroys the Kshatriyas before him like a tornado uprooting rows of trees.

Bhimasena now erupts on the Bhoja troops led by Kritavarman, and flattens them. He affrights them with the very sound of clapping his huge hands; he overwhelms them like a tiger a herd of cattle. Blasting through the Bhoja division, with blood spraying all around him as he goes, and through the Kambojas as well as countless tribes of Mlecchas, he sees some way ahead of him the splendid Satyaki, fighting like an army by himself! Bhimasena flashes on relentlessly, anxious now to catch sight of Arjuna.

After he effortlessly blows his way through all your warriors, in scarcely any time at all, the gale that is Bhimasena finally sights Arjuna, fighting fervidly to reach and kill Jayadratha. And seeing his brother, Bhima gives the roar that Yudhishtira wanted of him; he roars and roars as the greatest thunderheads do during the monsoon, exhilarating his own forces and making his enemies' blood run cold.

At the heart of the raging battle, Arjuna and Krishna hear those awesome roars, and they reply with roars of their own, elated and eager to lay eyes on Vrikodara. Then, they resume their hot charge to discover Jayadratha, for their time is short. Far away, Yudhishtira clearly hears Bhima's roars and then in delight he hears Arjuna and Krishna roaring as well. In a moment, all Yudhishtira's anxiety leaves him and, a smile wreathing his noble face, he repeatedly prays for Dhananjaya's success.

While Bhima continues to bellow out his roars, to make certain that his brother has heard him above the bedlam of the war, Yudhishtira happily says to himself, "Bhima my brother, you have indeed sent me the message I asked for. You have indeed fulfilled the wish of your brother. Those who have you for their enemy can never be victorious!

It is our great good fortune that Arjuna Savyasachin is still alive and the heroic Satyaki as well.

It is my great good fortune that I hear both Vasudeva and Dhananjaya roaring as they do. Arjuna, who vanquished Sakra himself in battle and gratified Agni in the Khandava vana, still lives and my hope surges high within me again that we shall yet win this horrible war.

A benign providence has kept Arjuna Parantapa, on whose might we rely, alive.

Truly, it is kindly fate smiling on our cause that Partha, who vanquished the Nivatakavachas, whom the gods themselves could not kill, still lives.

It is through good fortune that Dhananjaya, who crushed all the Kauravas come to seize Virata's kine outside the Matsya king's city, still lives.

Ah, the Partha who slew fourteen thousand Kalakeyas, still lives—through sheer good fortune and against all likelihood.

It is because of great destiny that the Vijaya, who for Duryodhana's sake vanquished Chitraratha, the Gandharva king in the forest, still lives.

Only providence has kept my Arjuna, always dear to me, who wears the kirita and golden garlands, who is Swetavahana of the white steeds, with Krishna himself for his sarathy, alive.

Ah, I am still anxious. Will Arjuna, burning with grief over the death of his son, succeed in his most difficult mission to kill Jayadratha? After he fulfills his vow, protected by Vasudeva, will I see Arjuna again before the sun sets?

Will the killing of Jayadratha, who is devoted to Duryodhana, break our enemies' spirit? Will they make peace with us when Jayadratha dies? Seeing his brothers all killed by Bhimasena, will he make peace with us? Seeing other great warriors lying prone on the ground in the piquant postures of death, will the dark-hearted and obdurate Suyodhana give way to remorse? Will our enmity not cease with the single sacrifice of Bhishma? Will Duryodhana make peace with us to save the remnants of what is still left to him and us?"

Diverse reflections of this kind pass through the mind of Yudhishtira, who is overwhelmed with compassion. Meanwhile, the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas continues to rage.'"

CANTO 125

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'While mighty Bhimasena roars repeatedly and loud as thunder, which of our heroes surround him? I do not know of a warrior in the three worlds, Sanjaya, who can face an angry Bhimasena armed with a gada and resembling Death himself. Not even Sakra himself can stand against our Bhima, who can destroy a ratha with a ratha and an elephant with an elephant.

Who among those devoted to Duryodhana dares to do battle with an incensed Bhimasena, ardently engaged in slaughtering my sons, like a forest fire consuming dry leaves and grass? Who are they that encircle Bhima after seeing him slay my sons one after another like Yama himself? I do not fear Arjuna, Krishna, Satyaki or the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna as much as I do Bhima. Tell me, O Sanjaya, who are the heroes that attack the conflagration that is Bhima, who devours my sons?'

Sanjaya says, 'While maharatha Bhimasena roars and roars, the great Karna cannot bear it and rushes at him with a shout. Karna bends his bow forcefully, reveals his vehement prowess, and stops Bhima's rampage like a lone great tree withstanding a hurricane. And Bhima, finding Vikartana's

son before him, flares up in wrath and charges at him, unleashing a thick torrent of arrows at the Sutaputra.

Karna serenely faces all these thunderbolts and shoots as many back at Bhima. All the other warriors, maharathas and horsemen, tremble when they hear the resounding twanging of the bowstrings of those two. Indeed, to all the great Kshatriyas there the dreadful bellowing of Bhimasena seems to fill all the earth and the sky, so both quake with it. All around him, bows clasped in the hands of warriors drop from their hands turned weak by the Pandava's terrific yells and roars. And horses and elephants, O Rajan, spray urine and dung in fear.

Various fearsome evil omens make their appearance. The sky swarms with dark flights of vultures and kankas during the remarkable duel between Bhima and Karna. Then Karna strikes Bhima with twenty arrows and quickly pierces his charioteer also with five. Mighty Bhima, with a smile, looses four and sixty sizzling shafts at Karna. Karna responds, O Rajan, with four flaming astras, which Bhima adroitly smashes into fragments. Now Karna covers him with dense showers of arrows, and Bhima breaks Karna's bow and strikes the Suta's son with ten perfect arrows.

Maharatha Karna, of terrible deeds, takes up another bow and stringing it quickly, strikes Bhima savagely with countless cruel barbs. A livid Bhima drills three straight and vigorous shafts into Karna's chest. O Bharatarishabha, with these barbs protruding from his breast, Karna looks as stunning as a mountain with three peaks; blood begins to flow from his wounds like rills of red chalk flowing down the mountain.

Wounded and bleeding, Karna is a little distraught. He strikes Bhima with one shaft of exceptional force, then assails him with hundreds, why, thousands of quicksilver barbs. Suddenly shrouded in Karna's torrid arrows, Bhima, unperturbed, almost playfully severs Karna's bowstring; then, with a broad-headed arrow, he strikes off Karna's charioteer's head in a red burst and, next moment, kills the Sutaputra's four horses. Karna, his pride sorely wounded, is forced to jump down from his chariot and hastily mount Vrishasena's ratha.

And after vanquishing Karna, the roar that erupts from Bhima is louder than any gone before; it is like booming thunder. Hearing that roar, Yudhishtira is elated knowing that Bhimasena has defeated Karna. The warriors of the Pandava army also blow their conches from all sides and your warriors, hearing this noise, shout and roar back defiantly, and sound

their horns and conches. Arjuna pulls resonantly on the bowstring of the Gandiva and Krishna blows the Panchajanya. Yet, drowning all these sounds, all Kurukshetra hears the bellowing of Bhima, O Sire!

Karna and Bhima loose storms of flawless arrows at each other. While the son of Radha shoots his arrows calmly, the son of Pandu does so with great force.'"

CANTO 126

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After routing your army, Arjuna and Bhimasena go after Jayadratha, while your son Duryodhana rides to Drona astride his single ratha, thinking on the way about what he must say and do. His ratha endued with the speed of the wind, flies along towards Drona. His eyes red with anger, your son tells the Acharya, "O Parantapa, Arjuna, Bhimasena, the invincible Satyaki and many other maharathas have put our troops to rout and are nearing Jayadratha by the moment.

O bestower of honours, how have both Satyaki and Bhima bested you? Foremost of Brahmanas, your defeat at the hands of Satyaki, Arjuna, and of Bhimasena is like the ocean drying up: incredible to us all. All our warriors blame you and ask loudly, 'How has Drona, the greatest master of the astra shastra, been vanquished?'

When three maharathas have vanquished you in succession, it seems that I will surely lose this war. Acharya, tell me now what you have to say on what awaits us since what has happened is past and irretrievable. Think now of what remains and say quickly what we should do next to save Jayadratha's life."

Drona replies, "I have reflected upon this, Duryodhana, and listen to what I have to say. As yet only three great maharathas among the Pandavas have overwhelmed us. We have as much to fear from those behind these three, as we have to dread those that have gone ahead. Where Krishna and Dhananjaya are, our fear must be greatest. They have attacked the Bharata army, both on the front and now from behind. Surely, now protecting Jayadratha is our main task. The Sindhu is terrified of Arjuna and deserves our protection. And now the fearless Satyaki and Bhima both hunt Jayadratha. And all this is the result of the game of dice that Sakuni contrived.

Nothing of final worth was won or lost in the Kuru sabha during the game of dice. But this sport that we are engaged in now will fetch real victory or defeat. The apparently innocent die, which Sakuni cast in the Kuru sabha, have turned into deadly arrows that claim millions of lives. Today, O Rajan, Kshatriya warriors are the dice players, their lethal arrows are the long dice, and the wager is Jayadratha's life.

There is only one thing for us to do: without care for our lives, we must fight to save him from Arjuna. Today the game has become real; and here on Kurukshetra, where our greatest warriors guard Jayadratha, is where we will find final victory or defeat. So, ride with all speed to support the maharathas who are already engaged in saving his life. I myself will stay here and direct other assistance to you, while holding up the joint advance of the Pandavas and the Srinjayas."

At the Acharya's command, Duryodhana flies with his legions towards Jayadratha, now determined to accomplish the difficult task of saving him. Meanwhile, the two guardians of Arjuna's chariot-wheels, the Panchala princes Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, are attempting to rejoin Arjuna by skirting around the Kuru array. You may remember, O Dhritarashtra, that earlier, while Arjuna penetrated into your host, Kritavarman stopped the Panchala brothers. Now, seeing them go around his army, Duryodhana loses no time in engaging them in fierce battle.

Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, both known to be great maharathas, stretch their bows and attack Duryodhana fiercely. Yudhamanyu strikes Duryodhana with twenty arrows, and his horses with four shafts. But, with a single arrow, Duryodhana demolishes Yudhamanyu's standard, with another his bow, and finally with a wedge-headed arrow, fells Yudhamanyu's charioteer from his niche, stunning but not killing him. Again, he rakes

Duryodhana's horses with four more arrows, and then, in ferocious inspiration, plunges thirty barbs in a blink straight into your son's chest.

Equally animated, Uttamaujas kills Duryodhana's sarathy with gold-embellished arrows. Duryodhana in rage brutally kills Uttamaujas' four horses and his two Parshni charioteers. Uttamaujas quickly jumps down from his useless ratha and clambers onto his brother Yudhamanyu's chariot. Red-eyed, he kills Duryodhana's horses.

Yudhamanyu immediately severs Duryodhana's bow and shreds his leather shooting gloves. Your son, the bull among men, leaps down roaring from his ratha with a great mace in his hand and rushes headlong at the Panchala princes. Seeing him come at them, like Yama himself with his cudgel, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas hastily jump out of their ratha.

Then Duryodhana, wrath incarnate, pulverizes the chariot in frenzy; with manic blow after dreadful blow he makes a pulp of blood and bone of the horses and their charioteer. Continuing to vent his blind fury, he shatters the gold-inlaid wooden ratha into fragments, which he then drives down into the earth with an uncontrolled barrage of blows. Finally spent, Duryodhana, his eyes still red as plums, climbs onto Salya's nearby chariot.

Meanwhile, those two Panchala maharathas also mount two other chariots and drive on towards Arjuna.'"

CANTO 127

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'At the chaotic heart of the general pandemonium, Karna and Bhima duel again, like two great wild elephants in rut in the heart of a wild jungle.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me about the duel between Bhima and Karna, as they fight not far from Arjuna's chariot. Earlier Bhimasena defeated Karna, so how does the mighty Karna now fight Bhima? How does Bhima fight the Suta's son, whom so many say is the greatest maharatha on earth? Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, having prevailed over Bhishma and Drona, does not fear anybody more than he does Karna; indeed, he passes sleepless nights from fear thinking of him.

So say, O Sanjaya, how Bhima faces great Karna, who is always devoted to Brahmanas and never flees a battle? Karna now knows that he is the Pandavas' brother, and feels kindly towards them. He also remembers the solemn word he gave Kunti that he would not kill any of her sons other than Arjuna. Then how will he vanquish mighty Bhima? As for Bhima, he only remembers all that the Suta's son inflicted on him, his brothers and their beloved Panchali. Tell me how he fights Karna.

My son Duryodhana has put his faith most of all in Karna to overcome all the Pandavas in this war. How does Radheya, in whom my wretched son rests his hope of victory, fight Bhimasena of terrible deeds?

How does Bhima fight the Sutaputra, relying upon whom my sons chose to fight this war against the maharatha sons of Pandu? Burning within himself to recall all the indignity and injuries that Karna has heaped upon the Pandavas, how does Bhima contend with him?

How, indeed, does Bhima face Karna in single combat, Karna is endowed with such valour that he subjugated all this Earth on a single ratha, for Duryodhana's sake? How does Bhima fight this son of a Suta, who was born wearing blazing golden kundalas like drops of the fiery sun?

You are a masterly narrator, O Sanjaya! Tell me, therefore, in detail, how the duel unfolds between these two incomparable heroes; tell me who among them is victorious?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Maharatha Bhimasena is anxious to leave Karna behind him and join Krishna and Dhananjaya. However, the Sutaputra lashes him with relentless flights of arrows, and holds him up. The mighty son of Adhiratha, his face handsome, radiant as a full-blown lotus, and lit up with a smile, challenges Bhimasena to fight him again.

Karna says, "O Bhima, I did not in my dreams ever think that you were a coward who would show his back to a battle. But why else do you run from me in such haste to find Arjuna? O delighter of the Pandavas, this is not becoming of a son of Kunti. Stay and show me your valour, if indeed you are at all valiant. Come, loose your fiercest arrows at me!"

Bhimasena, expectedly, is cut to the quick by Karna's sneering challenge; growling, he turns his chariot around and rushes fuming at Karna. Bhima Parantapa, Pandu's choleric son who has killed so many of your princes, my lord, looses a windstorm of arrows like his father Vayu at the calm Sutaputra. The titanic Vayuputra now wants to kill Karna as quickly as he can.

O Rajan, Karna, with the tread of a royal elephant, effortlessly cuts down Bhima's frenetic torrents with just a handful of astras. With his superior knowledge of the art of war, Karna takes on the aspect of a great Acharya. He seems to mock and even toy with Bhimasena with his light-swift, feather-light touch, as the infuriated Pandava fights with great prowess but little finesse or restraint. Bhima seethes at Karna's amusement,

which the many brave warriors gathered all around to watch this duel, witness.

Roaring and his eyes bulging, Bhima strikes Karna through his chest with a tempestuous clutch of calf-toothed barbs. He pierces the Suta's son, who now wears rainbow-hued armour after Indra took the golden kavacha he was born with, with three and seventy powerful shot arrows of beautiful feathers; he strikes Karna's horses sheathed in golden armour, each with five stormy barbs.

Then, in the twinkling of the eye, Karna raises his archery to a supernal level, covering Bhima, his chariot, his horses and sarathy with a network of arrows as delicate and perfect as it is violent. Next moment, with untold ferocity, the Sutaputra pierces the Pandava's impenetrable armour with sixty-four lethal barbs that plunge deep into the hulking Bhimasena's massive body.

Briefly startled, Mahabaho Vrikodara entirely disregards the onslaught, for he who once drank Nagamrita feels no pain whatever at being struck deep by Karna's missiles like serpents of virulent venom. Never flinching, Bhima rakes Karna with thirty-two flat-headed shafts, loosed with indescribable force. Mighty Karna shrugs off these arrows with the greatest disdain and again envelops Bhima in a cloud of fire.

In truth, Karna, who is beyond compare and who knows that Bhima is his brother, fights Bhima with mildness, while Bhima, his heart burning with remembering old wrongs, fights with utmost ferocity. Further incensed by Karna's cool manner, his maddening, almost tender smile for which he does not know the cause, wrathful Bhimasena unleashes a swarm of arrows at his enemy that plummet down on him like hunting falcons. Golden-winged and keen, Bhima's shafts cover the superior son of Radha like a flight of insects covering a roaring fire, and are all consumed.

Karna, still languidly, returns Bhima's fire, shaft for shaft, and Bhima cuts all these arrows down with a slew of broad-headed thunderbolts, before they can reach him. Karna, son of Vikartana, chastiser of foes, again swathes Bhimasena with some more intense volleys, indeed, now so profusely that the Pandava begins to resemble a porcupine with its quills erect.

Like the sun containing his own rays, Bhima remains unmoved by the dense clusters of golden-winged, stone-whetted barbs that protrude from

him all over. With all his limbs bathed in blood, Bhimasena looks resplendent as an asoka tree in spring, bearing its flowery burden.

But he cannot countenance what Karna does, still playfully, and, rolling his eyes in rage, he strikes Karna with twenty-five great and long shafts, with all his might. At which, Karna looks like a white mountain with countless snakes hanging from its sides. And once more, Bhimasena, endowed with the skill of a Deva, pierces the undaunted Sutaputra, always ready to lay down his life for honour, with fourteen more stinging shafts.

As Karna receives these, Bhima, now smiling to himself and exerting himself truly to the fullest, breaks Karna's bow, kills his horses, his sarathy and ruptures the Sutaputra's chest with a host of elongated arrows brilliant as the sun. Those winged shafts pierce through Karna's body and into the earth, like rays of the sun piercing through the clouds.

Stricken by these arrows and with his bow destroyed, the haughty Karna's face turns red and, in considerable pain, he takes to another ratha and rides briefly away.'"

CANTO 128

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Sanjaya, what does Duryodhana say when he sees Karna, upon whom my sons have reposed all their hopes of victory, turn away from the field? How did the mighty Bhima, arrogant of his prowess, fight on? What does Karna do after he faces Bhimasena in that fiery encounter?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Mounting another ratha that is swiftly prepared for him, Karna comes storming back to confront Bhima again; he comes with the fury of the ocean stirred by a tempest; now he comes in rage. Seeing the Sutaputra like that, his brow dark and his face set grim, your sons, Rajan, consider Bhimasena as having been already poured as a libation on the Karna fire.

Furiously pulling on his bowstring and making terrifying sounds with his palms, Karna sends scathing volleys of shafts of dire intent at Bhimasena's chariot. And once more, a pitched and awful duel erupts between the two. Both equally stirred now, both great mahabahos intent on killing the other, they glare at each other as if to consume the other with their very gaze. Their eyes are red as roses and both breathe fiercely, like a couple of snakes.

Like two fighting or two angry Sarabhas, they set upon each other, drawing gushes of blood, mangling each other. Bhima again recalls all that he endured during the game of dice, during his exile in the vana and in Virata's city; he remembers how your sons robbed the Pandavas of their kingdom full of riches; dark images of all their sufferings of the past fourteen years and before, flash before his eyes: all the numerous wrongs inflicted on his brothers and himself and Panchali by you and Karna.

Bhima remembers how you conspired to immolate Kunti and her sons in the house of lac; most of all he remembers the torment of Draupadi in the Kuru sabha. He recalls clearly, as if it were happening again before his eyes, how the bestial Dusasana dragged a wailing Panchali into the hallowed Kuru court, and what Karna said to her then rings in his ears as if all the war around them has fallen hushed: "Take another husband, for your husbands are all dead! The sons of Pritha have sunk into hell and are like sesame seeds without kernels."

Awesome Bhimasena also remembers everything your sons said to the pure Draupadi, telling her that she was now their slave and they would enjoy her as one. Bhima recalls the harsh words that Karna spoke to the sons of Pandu when, attired in deer-skins, they were about to be banished to the vana; he recalls the coarse and unbridled joy that your wrathful, envious and foolish son showed, when he himself was prosperous and the sons of Pritha were plunged in distress. The virtuous Bhima, terrible Parantapa, remembers these and indeed all the sorrows he has suffered since his very childhood, and he is beside himself in a moment, utterly reckless of his very life. He sees Karna before him and Vrikodara, wolf-belly, wants to devour him at once!

Bhima draws his gold inlaid, redoubtable bow and that tiger of Bharata's vamsa, utterly reckless of his life, bears down on Karna, covering him with shining storms of arrows, obscuring the sun. A smiling Karna destroys Bhimasena's arrow showers and pierces him with nine keen formidable bolts. Struck by these like an elephant prodded viciously with a hook, Bhima yet continues to rush at him like an angry elephant.

Blowing his conch then, whose blast is like the sound of a hundred trumpets, Karna turns his fire on Bhima's legion of elephants, horses, chariots and foot-soldiers, agitating them, like a tempest the sea. Bhima undeterred continues to attack the Suta's son with a ceaseless tirade. Now Karna artfully entangles his snow-white horses with Bhima's coloured like

black bears of the Himalaya, and still envelops him with his shining river of arrows.

Seeing the traces of Bhimasena's steeds snarled with those of Karna's, loud shouts arise from your troops. Tangled together, the eight horses look like white and black clouds blown together in the sky. Watching both the heroes in their frenzied duel, the maharathas of your army begin to tremble, as the battlefield, liberally strewn all around with the corpses of men and beasts, is quickly as dreadful as Yama's dark and horrible realms.

The greatest maharathas of your army look upon that terrible duel, like spectators watching some gory sport in an arena, and they see that neither awesome warrior has any advantage over his adversary. They only see the clash of mighty weapons, all this, Rajan, I remind you again, is the fruit of the evil policy of you and your sons.

Both slayers of their foes, both gifted with wonderful strength and skill, they continue to assail each other in absolute ferocity, filling the air and sky with their arrows, razing one another's troops all around. Ah, past glorious is the duel between Karna and Bhima; the sky is alight with the lustre of their arrows like meteors, arrows that are like flights of cranes in the autumn sky.

Krishna and Arjuna also see the fearsome contention between Karna and Bhima, and think that Bhima might be in danger. All around Karna and Bhima, the arrows they loose at each other fell thousands of elephants, horses and men—bloody mayhem rules the field. Blood blows in streams, corpses cover the earth darkly.'"

CANTO 129

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Bhimasena is surely an archer of great skill if he succeeds in balking Karna, who is a greater warrior than anyone. Sanjaya, tell me why Karna, who can challenge the very Devas, with the Yakshas and Asuras, let alone men, could not vanquish Bhima. Tell me more about their duel, for I now believe that either could kill the other.

It is relying upon great Karna that Duryodhana went to war against the Pandavas and Krishna and the Satwatas. But hearing how Bhima repeatedly defeats Karna, I feel faint, O Suta; why, I fear that the Kauravas are already as good as slain because of my son's sins.'

I fear that Karna will not succeed in overcoming the sons of Pritha. In all the battles that Karna fought the sons of Pandu, they have invariably defeated him. Ah, I do believe now that not the Devas led by Indra can quell these Pandavas. Alas that my evil son Duryodhana does not know this. Having vilely robbed Yudhishtira, who is like Kubera himself, of his kingdom and his wealth, my son of little intelligence is like a honey gatherer climbing a tree overhanging a cliff. He still does not see the fall that lies ahead.

Steeped in deceit, he regards the treasures that are not rightfully his belonging to him forever; and in his delusion, he continues to provoke and insult the Pandavas and dharma itself. Sanjaya, I too am a crude soul and ruled by my blind love for my children. I also showed no scruple when I betrayed Pandu's noble sons who observe dharma. Yudhishtira, with great foresight, always wants peace but my sons foolishly think of him as being weak and despise him.

And with all the sufferings and shame they have endured at our hands, the mighty-armed Bhimasena fights Karna. Tell me, Sanjaya, how Bhima and Karna do battle, each intent on killing the other.'

Sanjaya replies, 'Then listen, Rajan, to how the battle develops between Karna and Bhima. By now in considerable rage, Karna, son of Vikartana, lifts his archery and powerfully strikes Bhima with thirty golden arrows; no longer does the Sutaputra fight with any mildness. But the wild and raging Bhima breaks Karna's bow with three exquisite arrows; with a wedge-headed shaft he fells Karna's sarathy from his seat.

In a smooth blur, Karna seizes up a magnificent spear, adorned with gold and lapis lazuli, a thing of beauty but one that is most of all a missile of death. Like Indra casting down his Vajra, Karna hurls that spear at Bhima with force enough to kill the Pandava, and then the Sutaputra roars like a pride of lions! Your sons are exultant to hear that roar; they believe Bhima will die.

However, for all his bulk, Bhima strikes down Karna's spear bright as the sun or fire, deadly as a snake that has just shed its old skin, with seven arrows too swift to see. With no moment's pause, Bhima unleashes a sizzle of splendid arrows, all golden-winged and peacock-feathered, all of which are like Yama's danda.

Mahatejasvin Karna takes up another intimidating bow, its back inlaid with gold, and, stretching it, looses a barrage of arrows at Bhima, who cuts them all down with nine true barbs and he also roars like ten lions. Roaring, and bellowing at each other like two bulls for a cow in season, or like two tigers for the same meat, they continue to loose rivers of arrows at each other, always seeking a fatal lacuna through which they can kill the other.

At times they stand still and glare at each other like bulls pawing the earth, resting briefly. Then, again, the gales of arrows from bows drawn round.

They do their utmost, Rajan, their worst; they scorch each other always with blazing anger and hatred in their eyes, for, they are pure warriors, absorbed in battle, and in the moment all else is forgotten, indeed ceases to exist. Sometimes laughing at each other, at others taunting and mocking each other, and occasionally blowing their conches, they continue to duel upon the very edge of life and death.

Then Bhima breaks Karna's bow at the grip again, and sends his white horses to Yama in a crimson flurry; he fells the Sutaputra's sarathy as well. Finding himself without horses or charioteer and bleeding freely from al his limbs, Karna is plunged into swift anxiety and does not know what to do.

Seeing Karna, dearer to him than his brothers, stricken and helpless, Duryodhana blazes up in anger and commands his brother Durjaya, "Look where the beast Bhima is about to devour the son of Radha. Kill that beardless Pandava, and put heart into Karna!"

Crying "Tathaastu!" Durjaya rushes at Bhima and strikes him with nine searing shafts, his horses with eight, his charioteer with six, his standard with three, and Bhima once more with seven. Turning away from Karna with a terrible growl, red-eyed Bhima plunges a lethal volley into Durjaya's body, striking all his vital organs at once, and that brave son of yours falls, dying in agony. Seeing this, Karna, with tears flowing down his great face, circumambulates Durjaya, who, adorned with regal ornaments, lies on the earth, writhing like a snake in death's last throes.

Having destroyed Karna's chariot, Bhima, grinning awfully, covers him with arrows and makes him look like a sataghni with numberless spikes on it. Yet, Atiratha Karna, though pierced all over direly, makes no attempt to escape the preening Bhima.'"

CANTO 130

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The chariot-less Karna, yet again comprehensively beaten by Bhima, mounts another ratha and flies at the Pandava again. Like elephants goring each other with tusks, they strike one another with arrows shot from bows drawn to the fullest stretch. Karna scathes Bhimasena with a scorching volley, roars, then bloodies the Pandava's brawny breast.

Bhima, in return, first rakes Karna with ten deadly straight arrows and then again with twenty. Karna pierces Bhima with nine arrows and takes a substantial shard from his standard with a flat-headed shaft. The Pandava responds quick as light with three and sixty arrows, like a mahout stabbing an elephant with his goad, or a rider whipping his horse.

Bleeding profusely, Karna begins to lick the corners of his mouth, and his eyes turn redder than ever. Beside himself by now, Karna looses an extreme missile, now in deadly earnest to have his brother's life. The shaft flares from his bow, passes through Bhima, and plunges deep into the earth. Bhima, whose eyes can turn no redder, suddenly hurls a huge and heavy six-sided gilded mace, measuring full four cubits in length, and kills all four of Karna's horses.

With two razor-faced arrows, he cuts down Karna's standard and with another savage volley, kills his enemy's charioteer. Yet again, Karna must leap down from his ratha and stands bared on the ground, drawing his bow. But now the prowess that we see from Radha's son is wondrous in the extreme, as he continues to hold off the chariot-mounted Bhima.

Seeing that Karna has lost his chariot again, Duryodhana cries to his brother, "The animal Bhima has deprived Radheya of his ratha again. Take your chariot to him, my brother. Fly!"

Durmukha rushes up to support Karna and envelops Bhima with his arrows. Bhima is delighted to see your son and begins to lick the corners of his mouth. Then, even as he fends off Karna's incessant fire, he whirls his chariot round and dashes straight at Durmukha and in a flash, Rajan, slaughters him with nine irresistible shafts. Bhima, triumphant on his ratha is like the blazing sun. Seeing Durmukha sprawled dead, his powerful body blown apart by Bhima, Karna lowers his bow, stops the duel momentarily, and weeps.

Circumambulating the fallen Durmukha and leaving him there, the heroic Karna begins to draw long, hot breaths and stands dazed, not knowing what to do. Seizing the opportunity, Bhimasena strikes him deep with fourteen long barbs, vulture-feathered. Those blood-drinking shafts of golden wings, infused with great power, illuminate the ten directions of the sky as they blaze into Karna, pass right through him, drink his blood and bore their glittering way into the earth behind him.

Karna shoots back fourteen golden arrows, which pass through Bhima's right arm and dive into the earth like birds a grove of trees. Sticking in the ground, those shafts shine like the rays of the sun while he sinks towards the Asta mountains of sunset. Bhima's arm spouts blood like a mountain stream of water. Bhima, never unnerved, strikes Karna with three shafts imbued with the impetuosity of Garuda and then his charioteer with seven.

O Rajan, wounded by Bhima's might, Karna finally loses heart and that illustrious warrior abandons the battle, borne away by his fleet horses. Roaring in triumph, Atiratha Bhimasena continues to stretch his bow and radiates arrows, sowing death all around him. Like a great fire he blazes, gloriously.'"

CANTO 131

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Ah, I do believe now that destiny is supreme. Fie on men's prowess and striving, which is all in vain if Adhiratha's son Karna cannot vanquish Bhimasena, despite fighting so resolutely. Karna boasts that he can vanquish all the Parthas with Krishna. I often hear Duryodhana maintain that he has not seen another warrior like Karna in the world!

Indeed, Sanjaya, the wretched Duryodhana often told me, "Karna is no Sutaputra but a mighty Kshatriya, an unyielding archer who never feels fatigue. If I have the Vasusena for my ally, the very Devas cannot vanquish me, what then need be said of the sons of Pandu?"

So tell me what Duryodhana says when he sees Karna defeated, and flee the field like a snake that has lost its venom. Alas, mindlessly Duryodhana sends Durmukha, who has no experience of battle, alone to face Bhima, like an insect into a great fire.

O Sanjaya, even Aswatthaman, Salya and Kripa, united together, cannot stand up to Bhimasena. Even they know the terrible might of Bhima, equal to that of ten thousand elephants; they know he is endowed with the tejas of Vayu himself, as well as his brutal intentions. Why did they provoke the

savage hero of cruel deeds; why did they stoke the fire of that Kshatriya who, when roused, is like Yama himself at the end of the Yuga? And then only the dauntless Karna dared fight Bhima by himself. Ah, no one can quell this son of Pandu who routed Karna in battle like Purandara vanquishing an Asura.

Who is there that can face dreadful Bhima and hope to live? Bhima who ploughs his bloody way through my army by himself, after brushing aside even Drona, Bhima who rides in quest of his brother Arjuna? Indeed who in my army, O Sanjaya, will dare to face titanic Bhimasena? Who among the Asuras will venture to face the great Indra with his thunderbolt, the Vajra, in his hand?

A man may return from the land of the dead, but no one can return alive after doing battle with Bhimasena Vayuputra! These men of little strength who senselessly rush into battle against the wrathful Bhima are truly like insects flying into a blazing fire. When I think of the gruesome oath that this Pandava swore in the Kuru sabha on the day of the game of dice that he would kill all my hundred sons, and when I hear about how he put mighty Karna to flight, I have no doubt that Duryodhana and his brothers are terrified to fight Bhima.

My evil son repeatedly bragged in our court, "Karna, Dusasana and I together will vanquish the Pandavas in battle." After seeing Bhima rout Karna thrice and deprive him of his chariot, Duryodhana is now consumed by grief not only because Draupadi rejected his suit but also to see Bhimasena butcher his brothers in battle, one after the other, as a result of his own heinous crimes.

Who that values his life will ride against Panduputra Bhima, when he straddles the field like Yama himself, burning with wrath and armed with terrible astras? A man may escape from the very jaws of the Badava fire, but I am convinced that no one can escape from Bhima. Indeed, neither Partha nor the Panchalas, nor Kesava, nor Satyaki, all excited with battle lust, shows the least care for their lives. O Suta, the lives of all my sons are in danger.'

Sanjaya replies, 'O Kaurava, you who now grieve like this after hearing of the carnage your enemies bring to your army are yourself the real root of this destruction of the world! Obedient to the sinful counsels of your sons, it is you who have yourself provoked this ghastly war. Though your well-wishers repeatedly advised you against this enormous folly, you were like a

sick man who is fated to die and will not accept the only medicine that can save his life. O Rajan, best of men, having drunk the most virulent poison, now you must accept its consequences.

Your warriors all fight to the best of their abilities, putting their lives at risk. Yet, sitting here, you speak ill of them. But now listen to me and I will describe to you how the war for truth rages on.

Seeing Karna defeated by Bhimasena, five of your sons, Durmarshana, Duhsaha, Durmada, Durdhara and Jaya, all clad in beautiful armour, surround Bhimasena and shroud him with their shafts like locust swarms. Bhimasena stands smiling before these princes of celestial handsomeness. Karna dashes into battle again, losing torrents of golden-winged shafts, so that Bhima turns to face Karna, although your sons are attacking him.

Your sons continue to cover Bhimasena with showers of precise shafts. But then, with an earth-shaking roar, Bhima unleashes twenty-five lethal arrows from his massive bow and sends your five sons, with their horses and charioteers to Yama, their blood spraying in the westering sun. They fall from their rathas along with their charioteers, like large trees uprooted by a hurricane because of the weight of their variegated flowers.

And wonderful is Bhima's grisly feat for he achieves it even as he battles Karna. Attacked from every side by Bhima wheeling around him, a shocked Karna can only gaze at the massive Pandava in some disbelief that he is such an archer as well. Bhimasena, too, with eyes crimson, glowers at Karna, while stretching his awesome bow.'"

CANTO 132

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing your sons lying dead on the field, a surge of fresh rage fills Karna. He no longer cares for his life for he considers himself responsible for the death of your sons, slain before his eyes by Bhima. Bhimasena, meanwhile, always sees images from the past of the sufferings of the Pandavas and Panchali before his mind's eye. Full of rancour, he continues to loose flaming, unerring arrows at the Sutaputra.

Smiling, or still sneering, Karna rakes Bhima first with five arrows and again with seventy razor-sharp ones with golden wings. Brushing aside the cascade of barbs that Karna pours over him, Bhima strikes him with a hundred perfect arrows, followed by five more which plunge deep into his body, and finally, with a wedge-headed arrow, he severs his bow. The dispirited Karna takes up another bow and envelops Bhimasena with some luminous archery. But indomitable Bhima gives a dreadful laugh, which rocks the field and, easily cutting down Karna's shafts in flight, yet again kills his horses, charioteer, and, with reverberant twang of his bowstring breaks great Karna's golden-backed bow once more.

Karna leaps down from his chariot with a mace in his hand that he hurls furiously at Bhima. In full view of all your troops, Rajan, Bhima blows that

gada into powder with a thought-swift volley, and immediately looses a thousand arrows at Karna. Karna cuts them all down, then cuts away Bhima's armour, disjointing it neatly with some perfect shafts, and then strikes Bhima's body with twenty-five vicious short arrows.

All this, Rajan, occurs as if time has paused for the two heroes; it takes one's breath away. His fury always mounting, Bhima looses nine intense barbs at Karna, piercing his armour and his right arm and then flashing on down into the earth. Shrouded with showers of shafts from Bhimasena's bow, Karna yet again escapes by running away on foot.

Seeing this, Duryodhana tells his brothers, "Fly! Protect Karna from every side. Surround Bhima and kill him."

Your sons Chitra, Upachitra, Charuchitra, Sarasan, Chitrayudha and Chitravarman charge Bhimasena, shooting a solid swath of arrows at him. And now Bhima, showing himself to be truly the son of Vayu; Bhima who is only half-human, kills these six sons of yours, Rajan, with a single incredible arrow! And now, Karna, tears springing to his eyes again, ruefully remembers what Vidura said in dire warning fourteen years ago.

Mounting yet another ratha, Karna sweeps back into battle, to face Bhima again. The two duel feverishly, covering one another with clouds of golden missiles; they both look splendid like two cloud masses pierced by the rays of the sun.

Now Bhima cuts away Karna's armour with six and thirty flat-headed arrows shot with utmost force. The mighty-armed Karna gores Bhima with fifty immaculate barbs and, smeared with red sandalwood paste and streaming blood from all their limbs, the two resemble the newly risen sun and bronze moon. Their armour cut away, their bared bodies covered in blood, Karna and Bhima look like a couple of snakes just freed from their sloughs.

The two Naravyaghras maul each other with their shafts, like two tigers tearing into one another with fangs and talons. Circling each other in their rathas, they cover each other in ceaseless fire, drawing blood, slicing off shreds of flesh, roaring like two mythic tigers, bellowing like two massive bulls battling over a cow in season. Indeed, they are two lions from bygone times, their eyes crimson as they battle like Indra and Virochana's son Prahlada.

Bhima, thunderhead charged with lightning, mantles Karna, the mountain, with a downpour of a thousand harsh kanaka-feathered arrows.

Your sons watch Bhima incredulously, for they had never imagined their cousin was such a bowman; Arjuna watches him in delight, as do Krishna and Satyaki and Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas. Your sons are awed; they are all dismayed for it seems that the dreadful Pandava will indeed keep the vow that he swore.'"

CANTO 133

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing the twang of Bhimasena's bow and the sound of his palms striking each other, Karna cannot bear what he sees and experiences, no more than a maddened wild elephant can the trumpeting of a rival. Turning away for a moment from Bhimasena, Karna looks with deep sorrow at the corpses of your sons whom Bhimasena has killed. Drawing hot, long breaths, he once more takes up arms against the second son of Pandu, the son of the Wind.

Eyes burning like copper, and sighing in fury like a mighty snake, Karna, as he shoots his arrows, is as resplendent as his natural father, Surya Deva, radiating his rays. Vrikodara, bristling with the shining shafts shot from Karna's bow, looks like a plant reflecting the rays of the sun. The beautiful shafts fitted with peacock-feathers penetrate every part of Bhima's majestic body, like birds entering a tree to roost there. Karna's golden winged arrows, falling incessantly, resemble an infinite flight of cranes. So numerous are they, that they seem to issue not from his bow alone but from his standard, his royal parasol, the shaft, yoke and base of his ratha! Karna shoots his sky-ranging golden shafts fitted with vulture feathers so he fills the sky with them.

Seeing him so galvanised with fury and now rushing towards him like Yama himself, Bhima still neither wavers nor feels the least trace of fear. Instead, becoming utterly reckless of his life, he strikes Karna with nine meridian missiles and stops Karna's onrush. He strikes the radiant Sutaputra, the Suryaputra, with twenty more brutal arrows. Indeed, swiftly he shrouds Karna with as many arrows as his antagonist did him a moment ago.

Seeing the prowess of Bhimasena, your warriors, as well as the Charanas on high, are filled with joy and applaud him. O Rajan, Bhurisravas, Kripa, Aswatthaman, Salya of the Madras, Uttamaujas, Yudhamanyu, Kesava, and Arjuna, all these great maharathas, among both the Kurus and the Pandavas, loudly cheer Bhima, crying, "Uttamam! Wonderful!" and they shout aloud and roar in exhilaration, friend and foe alike, for they are all noble Kshatriyas and master warriors and recognise the extraordinary archery of Bhimasena the Pandava against his redoubtable adversary.

When this pandemonium breaks out, Duryodhana tells all the kings and princes and particularly his brothers, "Bless you all, mighty ones! Ride swiftly to Karna's rescue, or Bhima will have his life today."

At this, seven of his brothers, Rajan, rush forward and surround Bhimasena, enveloping him with torrents of arrows; they assail Vrikodara like the seven planets afflicting the moon at the hour of the Pralaya. But the son of Kunti kills them all in a moment with seven luminous shafts. His lustrous shafts pass cleanly, lethally through their bodies, taking their lives with them, and soar up into the sky like birds of superb, now incarnadine plumage.

Your seven sons whom Bhima kills are Satrunjaya, Satrusaha, Chitra, Chitrayudha, Dridha, Chitrasena and Vikarna. But Bhimasena grieves bitterly for Vikarna who was dear to him. And he says in grief, his bloodshot eyes glimmering with tears, "It is only for the oath I swore that I would kill all of you in this war, O Vikarna, that I have taken your life. O Shura, you came to fight to discharge your dharma as a Kshatriya. Otherwise, you alone among your brother always wished us well, Kaurava, and you especially loved Yudhishtira. I have kept my vow as a Kshatriya and I should not grieve but my heart does grieve, for you were noble and illustrious, my cousin!"

Having killed those seven princes, O Rajan, before Karna's very eyes, Bhimasena again gives a fulminant roar, which informs Yudhishtira at a distance that victory is his. Indeed, hearing Bhima's tremendous shout, Yudhishtira feels joy course through him in the midst of the gory battle and he responds with loud conches booming and batteries of drums being beaten. Elated to hear his brother Vrikodara's echoing message across the field, Yudhishtira, emboldened, launches an attack against Drona.

Duryodhana on the other hand, seeing one and thirty of your sons, his brothers slain, recollects the wise words of Vidura and in some anguish he thinks, "Vidura's prophecy is being realised!"

Thinking this, Duryodhana is benumbed. All that your foolish and black-hearted son, with Karna at his side, said to the princess of Panchala during the game of dice, after having Draupadi hauled roughly into the Kuru sabha, all the harsh, coarse words that Karna said to Panchali, in your presence, O Dhritarashtra, and what was said to the sons of Pandu, returns to haunt Duryodhana and paralyses him.

O Draupadi, the Pandavas are lost and have sunk into eternal hell, so choose other husbands for yourself!

Alas, my king, the bitter fruit of all that now manifests itself. On that day your despicable sons said so many vile things, calling the noble Pandavas sesame seeds without kernels. Today, Bhimasena spews forth the fire of wrath, which he has restrained for thirteen years, and massacres your haughty sons. Oh Rajan, despite his repeated pleas, his many lamentations, Vidura failed to persuade you towards peace.

O King of the Bharatas, now reap the harvest of all that you and your sons have sown. You are mature, patient, and entirely capable of foreseeing the consequences of all deeds. So it truly seems that your refusal to follow the sage counsel of your well-wishers is the result of fate. Ah, do not grieve, O Naravyaghra! All this is your fault. In my opinion, you are yourself the cause of the destruction of your sons.

Vikarna has fallen, as has Chitrasena of great prowess. Many other maharathas and the greatest among your sons have also fallen. Yes, whichever of your sons Bhima found within range, he killed in a trice. It is for you, to narrate this horrific war to you, day after day, that I had to see our vyuha annihilated by Pandu's son Bhima!'"

CANTO 134

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

“Dhritarashtra says, ‘O Sanjaya, I do believe that it is my evil rule that is responsible for the terrible consequences that now overtake us. I have so far thought only about the past, but what should I do now? I am calm again, so tell me how this slaughter of Kshatriyas continues.’

Sanjaya replies, ‘Rajan, Karna and Bhima continue to discharge arrows at each other like two rain-charged clouds. The shafts winged with gold, whetted on stone and marked with Bhima’s name, strike Karna and pierce his body, as if piercing into his very life. Similarly, Bhima is shrouded by Karna’s arrows in their hundreds and thousands, each one a venomous serpent. With their arrows falling on all sides, an agitation like that of the very ocean is created among the troops. The arrows Bhima shoots from his grand bow kill countless men of your army. Bestrewn with fallen elephants and horses, and the corpses of men, Kurukshetra is like a field of trees broken by a tornado. Mown down on every side by Bhima’s arrows, your warriors flee, screaming, “Ah, what is this?”

The army of the Sindhus, the Sauviras and the Kauravas are afflicted by the shafts of both Karna and Bhima, and withdraw to a great distance. The

remnant of these brave soldiers, with their steeds and elephants killed, flee in all directions away from both Karna and Bhima, crying out, “Truly, the Devas are confounding us for the sake of the Pandavas, for the arrows shot by both Bhima and Karna are razing our forces!”

Your frightened troops run away beyond the range of Karna and Bhima’s arrows and stand at a safe distance to watch the blazing duel. While, on Kurukshetra another river of terror flows, a river that makes heroes exult and cowards quail, a river flowing the blood of elephants, horses and men. The Earth, O Bhaarata, is weirdly resplendent covered with the lifeless forms of men, elephants and horses along with their ornaments, with flagstaffs and the bases of chariots, with broken rathas and wheels and akshas and kuveras, with bows inlaid with gold, and gold-winged arrows in millions shot by Karna and Bhima, with countless javelins, spears, swords, battleaxes, with maces and clubs all adorned with gold, with standards of diverse shapes, with darts and spiked cudgels, and with beautiful sataghnis.

The field of war looks like the sky scattered with stars, being strewn all over with earrings, necklaces of gold, bracelets loosened from wrists, rings, precious gems worn on diadems and crowns, helmets, golden ornaments of diverse kinds, coats of mail, leather gauntlets, elephants’ ropes, broken chatras, Yak-tail fans, with the shredded bodies of elephants, horses and men, with blood-dyed arrows, and with diverse other objects, lying loosened from their true and living places.

Watching the inconceivable feats of those two warriors, the Charanas and the Siddhas above are full of amazement. Like a great fire, fanned by the wind, courses through a heap of dry grass, Karna engages fiercely with Bhima. Both of them shoot down countless standards and rathas, slay horses, elephants, and men: like a pair of fighting elephants trampling a forest of reeds. Your host looks like a mass of clouds, Rajan, and great is the scarlet carnage Karna and Bhima cause.’”

CANTO 135

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Rajan, Karna pierces Bhima with three arrows and deluges him with a relentless downpour of shafts. The mighty-armed Bhimasena stands unmoved like a mountain. In return, he rakes Karna's ear with a barbed arrow rubbed with oil and Karna's large and exquisite kundala falls from his lobe like a star from the sky.

Smiling in mockery, Vrikodara stabs Karna through his chest with another broad-headed arrow, and swiftly follows these with ten long shafts, which strike Karna's brow and pierce it like snakes entering an anthill. With these shafts protruding from his forehead, the Suta's son looks quite stunning, as if with a chaplet of blue lotuses encircling his lofty brow.

Hurt deep, Karna lurches, supports himself on the kuxara of his ratha, and shuts his eyes in a brief swoon. He soon regains consciousness and, with his face and body bathed in blood, he seems to lose all restraint and rushes roaring and wild-eyed at Bhima, unleashing a hundred vulture-winged shafts at him.

Bhima, however, ignores this tirade of shafts and looses his own scathing volley at Karna. The suddenly energised Karna strikes Bhima with nine arrows through his torso. Both Naravyaghras, roaring and growling

like two tremendous tigers, continue to belabour each other with endless banks of arrows. They seek to unnerve each other by sudden bursts of thunderous hand clapping, and with uncanny missiles rarely used or seen. Then Bhima severs Karna's bow with a razor-faced arrow, and gives a bloodcurdling roar.

Throwing away the broken bow, the Suta's son seizes up another stronger one. Karna's body blazes with strange effulgence as he looks in anger at the slaughter of the Kuru, the Sauvira, and the Sindhu Kshatriyas, seeing coats of mail, standards, discarded weapons as well as the lifeless forms of elephants, foot-soldiers, horsemen and rathikas lying all around, covering the Earth. Stretching his fresh bow into a circle, he eyes Bhima wrathfully and begins to unleash his anger at him, looking like the autumn sun dazzling at mid-day.

None that watch him can see when he draws an arrow from his quiver, fits it to his bowstring, draws the string back and looses his shaft; Karna's archery is like a river in spate, his bow always drawn in a ring of fire and arrows flowing in tide from it all around him, covering the sky and dimming the sun. Karna's volleys are like flights of thousands of cranes in the sky, like locust swarms, why like a single ubiquitous missile that never stops. A raging Karna swathes Bhima with his vulture-feathered, golden-winged barbs.

And your sons, O Bhaarata, and their troops see the strength, energy, prowess and fortitude of Bhima, for with scant regard for the arrows pouring down on him, continues to attack Karna like a raging sea. Bhima stretches his bow and shoots his arrows with such ferocious speed that it seems like a second bow of Indra, his weapon also incessantly drawn to a circle. The golden shafts issuing from it form a continuous line in the sky and appear like a bright garland of gold.

Bhimasena marvellously cuts down Karna's torrents in the air, and sparks cascade down onto the field below. The sun is shrouded, the wind ceases to blow, and nothing can be seen.

Then, both atirathas raise their archery so that the very sky seems to catch fire: a conflagration on high! Karna, straining himself, unleashes a volley of golden-winged scintillating barbs at Bhima in rage, but Bhima truncates every one of them into three neat slivers and roars in jubilation.

Pandu's tremendous son afire harries his enemy with his own savage streaks of lightning. Their leather gauntlets slapping against their

bowstrings, their clapping palms, their terrible roaring, the deep rumble of their chariot-wheels and the deafening twang of their bowstrings all create absolute pandemonium. All the other warriors stop fighting and stand rooted, with eyes peeled, to watch this duel that exceeds all duels. The Devarishis, Siddhas and Gandharvas applaud them, saying, “Uttamam! Wonderful!” The tribes of Vidyadharas rain flowers on them.

Cutting down Karna’s incendiary shafts, Bhima lacerates his opponent with a handful of arrows. Karna, also, confounds most of Bhimasena’s fire on him; he plunges nine long barbs deep into the great Pandava’s vast body. Bhima, unmoved, replies with his own shafts that rake Karna sorely.

Suddenly, Bhima unleashes an astra like Yama’s danda, why, like Yama himself at Karna, who with a superior smile smashes it into shards in flight with three light-like arrows. Bhima, roaring louder than ever so Kurukshetra trembles, again looses a firetide of barbs that Karna serenely douses in the air. Next moment, he shreds Bhima’s quivers so the arrows fall out of them; he breaks his bow and severs the reins of his horse. Inspired, Karna kills Bhima’s horses and gouges his charioteer deep with five arrows like streak lightning.

Visoka the sarathy falls out of his chariot, takes to his heels and finds refuge in Yudhamanyu’s ratha. Now, smiling broadly, Karna, burning like the yuga fire, fells Bhima’s flagstaff and banner.

Deprived of his bow, Bhima Mahabaho seizes up a curved dart, such as rathikas use and, whirling it round in his hand, hurls it like a meteor at Karna’s ratha. Karna shatters it with ten exact arrows. Bhima picks up a shield decked with gold and a sword, but again Karna, still smiling, calmly smashes that shield into fragments with a sizzle of shafts.

In a flash a desperate Bhima flings his sword at Karna breaking his bow in his hands so it hangs limp. Cool as ever, Karna takes up another dreadful bow and unleashes a gale of a thousand arrows at the Pandava. Struck by many of these shafts, Bhima gives an agonised cry and hops about in pain. At once, Karna’s soft heart melts in sorrow for his enemy who he knows is his brother.

Now sensing victory, Karna beguiles Bhima by concealing himself on the floor of his ratha. Bhima darts forward and seizes Karna’s flagstaff from the ground and stands firm waiting to haul Karna out of his ratha. All the Kurus and the Charanas above applaud Bhima, who means to lay hold of Karna like Garuda snatching up a snake. His bow destroyed, his ratha

ruined, Bhima stands unflinching and resolute, true to Kshatriya dharma, fearless for his life, still wanting just battle.

A livid Karna now advances against Bhima in his chariot; they rush at each other, roaring out challenges, roaring like thunderheads at the close of summer. The passage-at-arms that then takes place between the two lions among men does indeed again resemble that of old between the Devas and the Danavas.

However, Bhima's store of weapons is soon exhausted, and he is forced to turn back while Karna pursues him. Seeing the elephants that Arjuna killed lying near, the unarmed Bhimasena runs into their hilly midst, for Karna cannot follow him there in his chariot. And lo, the son of Pritha and Vayu actually hefts a great elephant that Arjuna slew and he waits there even like his half-brother Hanuman with the peak of Gandhamadana!

But Karna with unearthly archery shreds that great carcass in Bhima's hands. Bhima flings the pieces of flesh at his enemy, and then laying hands on anything he can find, chariot-wheels and dead horses, hurls all these at Karna. Karna carves and smashes everything that Bhima flings at him. But Bhima rushes straight at the brother he does not know, taking Karna by surprise. Bhima raises his great fists imbued with the power of thunder and then suddenly remembers that Arjuna has sworn to kill the Sutaputra and he spares Karna's life.

Karna, beside himself, now gashes Bhima with fierce bursts of arrows and finally the Pandava collapses under the onslaught and the Sutaputra has him squarely in his sights; he can kill Bhima now. Karna's rage cools quickly; he remembers his word given to Kunti that he would not kill any of her sons other than Arjuna; he remembers that the vulnerable magnificent Kshatriya now at his mercy is his brother. Instead of taking Bhima's life, he rides up to him and repeatedly prods him with the tip of his bow.

Hissing like a snake, Bhima snatches the bow from Karna's hands and strikes him a stunning blow on the head with it! Struck by Bhimasena, Karna's rage blazes up again and, his eyes burning red once more, he says to Bhima, "Beardless eunuch, ignorant fool, and glutton! You are no archer, so don't dare fight me again. You are like an overgrown child, a lout and a laggard in battle!

Pandava wretch, you should be in either a kitchen or a dining hall, not on a battlefield. Bhima, you should pass your days in the vana eating roots and flowers, keeping vratas and doing tapasya, for as a warrior you are

nothing. Great is the difference between battle and the life of a muni. O Vrikodara, you are suited to a life in the forest since battle does not suit you at all.

Otherwise, glutton, you are fit to order cooks, servants and slaves, as you did in Virata's palace and reprove them when you do not like your dinner! O dimwitted one, take sannyasa and gather fruits for your insatiable appetite. Go into the forest, O son of Kunti, for you are fit to fight a war. Employ yourself in plucking fruits and roots, or in waiting upon guests, for battle does not suit you at all."

Rajan, I believe that Karna's harsh words reflect all the wrongs done to him in his youth, the shame of being spurned as a Sutaputra. As Bhima stands helpless before him, he prods Vrikodara yet again with his bow, and, laughing loudly, says again to the red-faced Pandava, "Well, if fight you must, pick on your equals not Karna! For you now see what happens to those that dare face me in battle. Go, great lout, to where the two Krishnas are so that they protect you. Or go home, for, child that you are, what place do you have on this field of heroes?"

But Bhimasena laughs in Karna's face, and says in the hearing of all, "Evil spirit, I have repeatedly beaten you! And yet you continue to boast? In this world the ancients have witnessed the victory and defeat of Indra himself. Lowborn fellow, son of a Suta, fight me with bare arms if you dare and I will kill you before all these kings even as I did the giant Kichaka."

But the intelligent Karna refuses to be provoked into such folly before all the maharathas. Instead, having deprived Bhima of his chariot and having humiliated him, Karna mocks him again in the hearing of Krishna and the noble Arjuna. Then, incited by Kesava, Arjuna looses a blazing volley of arrows from the Gandiva at Karna, golden shafts that plunge into Karna's regal frame like cranes into the Krauncha mountains. Partha drives Karna away from the imperiled Bhima. His bow broken by Bhima, and now raked by Arjuna's terrific arrows, Karna quickly rides away from Bhima on his great ratha.

Bhimasena mounts Satyaki's chariot and they hurtle after Arjuna Savyasachin. In fury Arjuna looses a dreadful astra at Karna, a missile like Yama danda, which flashes at the Sutaputra like Garuda flying at a great snake. The shafts would have killed Karna, but in that moment, from a fair distance, Aswatthaman cuts it in two, saving the Suryaputra's life. Flaring

up in anger, Arjuna strikes Drona's son with sixty-four arrows, and roars at him, "Do not run away, O Aswatthaman, but stay a moment and fight me."

But, scathed by Arjuna's shafts, Drona's son quickly finds refuge in a dense division of the Kaurava army, full of maddened elephants and teeming with rathas. Pulling on the bowstring of the Gandiva, drowning every other sound on the field, Arjuna follows the hastily retreating Aswatthaman, frightening him with his shafts. As he goes after Drona's son, Partha razes hosts of men, elephants and horses with his arrows fletched with the feathers of kankas and peacocks.'"

CANTO 136

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Day by day, O Sanjaya, my once radiant glory is being tarnished. Untold numbers of my army have perished. Ah, all this is from the reversal of fortune that time inexorably brings. Arjuna, stirred by the death of his son, has broken through my legions, which Drona's son and Karna protect and which the very gods could hardly breach.

United with the two of blazing tejas, Krishna and Bhima, as well as the bull of the Sinis, Satyaki, Arjuna's powers have increased manifold. Ever since I heard of Dhananjaya's success, grief, like fire burning dry grass, consumes my heart. I see that an evil destiny has descended upon all the kings of the Earth, and Jayadratha of the Sindhus among them. Having done the Kiritin grievous wrong, if Jayadratha comes within Arjuna's reach, he will not escape with his life. Why, I already infer from the way the war swings against us, that the Saindhava, my son-in-law, is already slain.

However, relate to me exactly how the battle rages on, for you are a gifted narrator, O Sanjaya; describe to me further how the Vrishni hero Satyaki fights. He entered my vast force alone, resolutely for Arjuna's sake, indeed like an elephant plunging into a lake overgrown with lotuses.'

Sanjaya replies, 'Seeing Bhima fight on though sorely wounded by Karna's shafts, Satyaki follows him on his ratha, drawn by silver horses, roaring like the clouds at the close of summer and blazing like the autumn sun, and begins to slaughter your son's army with his formidable bow. None of your maharathas can check his progress; indeed they tremble to see him ride at them.

Then a warrior king Alambusha, who never leaves a battle, rushes at Satyaki, greatest of the Sinis. The battle between them is one that defies description. All your warriors, and the enemy, too, stop fighting and become mere spectators of the duel between these two ornaments of war. Alambusha shoots ten arrows at Satyaki, which that bull of Sini's race destroys with his own shafts before they reach him.

Once more, Alambusha draws his bowstring to his ear and, with the force of fire or the wind, strikes Satyaki with three beautifully winged arrows that burn like fire and pierce Yuyudhana's kavacha and bore into his body. He next strikes Satyaki's four white horses, each with a vicious barb. Satyaki, endued with tejas and urjas like Kesava himself, looses four shafts to slaughter Alambusha's horses. With a broad-headed arrow, he strikes off Alambusha's head, handsome as the full moon and fierce as the Yuga-fire.

Having slain the descendant of a long line of kings, the Yadu bull forges on in Arjuna's wake, killing countless enemy warriors at will as he goes. Indeed, the Vrishni hero destroys your forces like a hurricane dispersing masses of clouds. Wherever this lion among men wants to go, his resplendent Sindhu horses, white as milk of the kunda snow, take him.

Then all the leaders of your various akshauhinis surround Satyaki and inundate him with arrows. Dusasana in particular attacks the Yadava fiercely. Satyaki, however, is undaunted and swiftly checks them all with fire tides from his impressive bow. Turning on Dusasana, he kills your son's horses. Watching him, Arjuna and Krishna are filled with joy.'"

CANTO 137

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Then the great archers of the Trigarta country, their banners woven with golden thread, surround the mighty-armed Satyaki, who has accomplished everything that was required of him, indeed far more, and now attacks Dusasana and his legion to lend Arjuna his support. They blockade him from all sides with a multitude of rathas and cover him with a barrage of arrows. The peerless, radiant Satyaki, having blasted his way through the Bharata army, which is like a shoreless sea, which is filled with the sound of twanging bowstrings, which bristles with swords, darts and maces, by himself vanquishes those fifty Trigarta princes.

Ah, Sini's grandson is past being merely wonderful, and so swift, effortless and light are his movements that he flits in moments from west to east, north to south, back to east to west again, as well as the other subsidiary directions, and the shura seems to dance all over the battlefield, as if he is a hundred warriors in his single self. Finding Satyaki with tread of a lion, the Trigarta warriors cannot withstand his dexterity and flee towards a greater division of their own countrymen.

Next the valiant Surasenas try to stop Satyaki, covering him with dark arrow showers. The noble Satyaki quells them in no time and then dashes

against the Kalingas and, smashing his way through their mighty legions, he finally reaches Dhananjaya! Like a tired swimmer arriving ashore, the very sight of Dhananjaya, tiger among men, comforts the brilliant Satyaki.

Seeing him approach, Krishna says to Arjuna, “Here comes the grandson of Sini, following in your wake. Satyaki is your disciple and friend, and he has consumed the Kaurava warriors like straw to find you. Past all count are those that he has slain on his way here. This Satyaki comes to you, O Arjuna, after vanquishing Drona himself and Kritavarman of the Bhojas with his arrows!

Intent on achieving Yudhishtira’s weal, the brave and irresistible Yuyudhana comes to you after killing countless maharathas!

Having achieved the most difficult feats in the midst of the Kaurava troops, the dashing Satyaki has come to gaze on you, O son of Pandu!

Having, from a single ratha, fought and defeated so many mighty maharathas, with Drona himself at their head, does Satyaki come to you, O Partha!

Sent by Yudhishtira, Satyaki comes to you, Arjuna, after razing a vast portion of the Kaurava army all on his own. Invincible in battle, Satyaki, whom no Kaurava warrior can match, flies to join you after decimating Duryodhana’s vast legions. Look where he comes like a lion charging out of a herd of cattle.

Having strewn the earth with the heads of thousands of kings, all handsome as full-blown lotuses, does our Yuyudhana come to meet you, O Partha, after vanquishing Duryodhana himself and his brothers, and having killed Jalasandha. Having let flow a gruesome river of blood on Kurukshetra, mired with a sludge of corpses of men and beasts, ruins of rathas, look where he flashes towards you in joy!”

But Arjuna shows no great joy. He says somberly to Krishna, “I am hardly pleased to see Satyaki arrive here! I do not know how my brother Yudhishtira is. Now that he is separated from Satyaki, I doubt that he is alive. Satyaki should have protected the king. Why then, O Krishna, has he left Yudhishtira to follow in my wake, leaving the king at Drona’s mercy?

I have not yet killed Jayadratha and look where Bhurisravas now attacks Satyaki. I must now protect Satyaki as well while the sun sinks lower in the sky by the moment and I have yet to kill Jayadratha. As for Satyaki, he is weary; he has exhausted his astras, and his horses and his charioteer are

worn out, O Madhava! Bhurisravas, on the other hand, is not tired and he has supporters behind him. How will Satyaki defeat him?

Having crossed the very ocean of war by himself, will this bull among the Sinis not succumb? Bhurisravas is beyond doubt among the greatest Kuru warriors. Will fortune favour Satyaki against this mighty hero? O Kesava, I think Yudhishtira has erred in his judgement to send Satyaki out here to us. Forgetting his fear of the Acharya, he has sent away Satyaki from his side. Like a sky-ranging hawk after a peace of meat, Drona is always waiting for an opportunity to seize my brother. Is the king free from danger, Krishna?"'"

CANTO 138

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Satyaki, the invincible Satwata, riding to join Arjuna, Bhurisravas swiftly advances on him and says, "It is fate that has brought you within my grasp and today I will fulfil my long-cherished wish. If you do not flee from battle, you will not escape me with your life. And by killing you who are so proud of your valour, I will gladden Duryodhana's heart. Krishna and Arjuna will see you lying dead on the field riddled with my arrows.

Hearing that I have killed you will disgrace Yudhishtira, who sent you here. Arjuna will see my prowess when he sees you lying dead on the earth, covered in blood. I have always wanted to face you in a battle, like the one between Sakra and Bali during the Devasura yuddha of old. Today, Satwata, you will feel my prowess! And then you will understand the true measure of my might and manliness.

Slain by me, Yuyudhana, you will find yourself in Yamaloka, even as Ravana's son Indrajit did when Lakshmana killed him. Today, Krishna, Partha and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira will watch you die and, grief-stricken, they will concede this war. Killing you today, O Madhava, I will bring joy

to the wives of all those whom you have killed. Now that you are in my sight like a deer before a lion, you will not escape with your life.”

Hearing this, Satyaki, O Rajan, laughs, “O Kurusattama, I am not frightened by my enemies’ arrows and I hardly fear your words! Only he who can vanquish me at arms can kill me, and such a one will always be victorious. What use your long-winded vainglorious bragging, O Bhurisravas? Let me see your deeds not tire of your empty threats, which are like autumn cloud that fetch no rain.

Listening to you, O Kshatriya, and your hollow roars, I can only laugh. Let us fight like men and have between us the duel that you have so long wanted. My heart also longs for this battle; let us not delay! And I solemnly swear, O wretched Bhurisravas, that I will not leave this place without killing you.”

And those bulls among men, both excited and charged with old animosity, unleash fiery storms of arrows at each other. Somadatta’s son Bhurisravas, who has been resting while Satyaki fought his way through the entire Kuru host, draws first blood. He plunges ten pugnacious shafts into Satyaki’s body, and then covers the tired Yadava in a haze of arrows.

Satyaki, summoning deep resources, invokes an astra, which quells Bhurisravas’ arrow storm before it can fall on him. And then, we watch those two shuras, enhancers of the fame and honour of the Kuru and Vrishni vamsas, fight a duel that lights up the swiftly dimming sky. They mangle each other with utmost rancour and ferocity. Quickly, blood spurts richly from both in this fresh game of death, with their lives for the wager.

Like wild tigers, like great tuskers, leaders of their clans, the two heroes battle, both ardent for either victory or death, while Kurukshetra echoes with their yells and roars, while all the Dhartarashtra army watches them transfixed, the other maharathas delighted by the sublime duel. Then each one kills the other’s horses and destroys the other’s bow, and now they fight with swords ringing together with sparks flying brightly at each dreadful stroke.

Having taken up two great and handsome shields and two shining blue swords, they stalk each other in circles, and in parallel lines, then suddenly fly at each other striking out with fabulous skill and strength. Both master swordsmen, they put their lofty skills on display. They wheel about, make side-thrusts, rush forward abruptly, and spring high into the air to strike one another, both intent on having the other’s life. And having lashed out with

their blades and parried the other's strokes, they pause to rest, their gazes locked like other blades all the while.

Truly like superb dancers they are, and all the other fighting men around them their awed audience. After a brief moment's pause, the wonderful exhibition of prowess erupts again and they carve each other's beautiful shields emblazoned with a hundred moons into pieces, until both shields are useless strips, which they fling away, and their swords have been broken as well. And then they rush at each other to wrestle with bare hands.

Both wide-chested and long-armed, both equally magnificent wrestlers, they grapple. They strike each other stupendous blows and seize one another by the throat, with their arms hard as iron that resemble spiked maces. Their skills and prowess, their speed and ferocity enthrall those that watch.

Loud and fearful are their roars, yes, like thunder falling upon the mountain breast. Like two elephants goring each other with their tusks, or like two bulls locking horns, the two most illustrious Kuru and the Satwata heroes at times struggle with brawny arms entwined, at other butt heads, intertwine massive legs, now slapping their armpits in bravado, sometimes clawing each other with their nails, sometimes clasping each other in tight holds, or twining their legs round each other's waists, at others rolling on the ground locked together, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating, sometimes rising up to their full height, and at other leaping into the air and then colliding thunderously.

Indeed, they employ all the thirty different kinds of expert tactics that characterise such encounters between masters of the art of wrestling.

When Satyaki exhausts his weapons during his duel with Bhurisravas, Krishna says to Arjuna, "Look at Satyaki, best of all archers, fighting without a chariot. He has scythed through the Bharata host, following in your wake, O son of Pandu! He has fought all the Bharata maharathas and, now in exhaustion, meets the mighty Bhurisravas, the giver of bounteous dakshina at yagnas."

The formidable Bhurisravas, excited with wrath, vigorously strikes Satyaki, Rajan, like an infuriated elephant dashing against another, blow after staggering blow. The two battle on, with Krishna and Arjuna watching.

Then Krishna says urgently to Arjuna, "Look where Satyaki, tiger of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, is succumbing to Somadatta's son. Exhausted

after his superhuman exploits, he has now lost his ratha. Arjuna, you must protect your devoted sishya otherwise Bhurisravas, of countless yagnas, will have his life. Mahabaho, you must hurry!"

But Arjuna says quite cheerfully to Krishna, "The bull of the Kurus and the best of the Vrishnis sport wonderfully with each other, like a crazed elephant and a mighty lion in the forest!"

Just then, loud cries ring out from the troops, O Bharatarishabha, for suddenly Bhurisravas unleashes a flurry of thunderous blows to Satyaki's head and face and fells him to the ground. And like a lion dragging an elephant, the mighty Bhurisravas, giver of lavish dakshina at yagnas, roughly drags the supine Satyaki around as he likes, roaring in glee as he humiliates the noble Yadava before your troops.

Then Bhurisravas draws another sword from its sheath, seizes Satyaki by his hair of his head and, setting his foot upon his chest, draws his arm back to cut the Vrishni's head, its earrings glittering, from his trunk. But, fighting to save his life, Satyaki whirls his head around a few times and with it Bhurisravas's arm that grasps his hair, even like a potter wheel being whirled along with the staff.

Seeing Bhurisravas coarsely drag Satyaki along the ground, Krishna says again to Arjuna, "Bhurisravas is about to kill Yuyudhana. The very name Satyaki means the invincible one, and that name will be proven false is the wretched Bhurisravas kills my kinsman, your disciple."

At this, Arjuna mentally salutes Bhurisravas, thinking, "I am pleased that Bhurisravas, enhancer of the fame of the Kurus, is dragging Satyaki across the ground, as if in sport, without killing him."

Silently admiring his kinsman, the Kuru tiger, Arjuna replies to Krishna, "My eyes are fixed on the Sindhus, and I cannot, O Madhava, see Satyaki. Yet, for his sake and for yours, I will achieve an impossible feat."

Then, in obedience to his Lord and charioteer, Krishna the Avatara, Arjuna, although he truly cannot see Satyaki, in a blur looses a blind shaft from the Gandiva, which, like a meteor falling from the sky, hacks off Bhurisravas's bejewelled arm with the sword in its hand in a bloody eruption.'"

CANTO 139

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Severed by the unseen Arjuna's sudden shaft, Bhurisravas's angada-decked arm, still grasping the sword, which was raised to hew off Satyaki's head, falls onto the ground like a five-headed snake. The Kuru warrior turns around in shock and wrathfully reproves the son of Pandu.

Bhurisravas says, "O son of Kunti, what is this cruel and heartless thing you have done, for without engaging me in battle, you cut off my arm in stealth? Will you not have to say to Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, 'I killed Bhurisravas while he fought another battle?'

Were you not taught the astra shastra by the noble Indra, by Rudra, by Drona, and by Kripa? In this world, you know the dharma of war better than anyone else does. How then have you cut off the arm of a warrior who was not fighting you? Dharma requires that one should never strike those who are unaware, those that are afraid, those who are without a chariot, those who beg for life or protection, or those who are suffering. How then, O Partha, have you done this heinous, sinful and cowardly thing that only the most lowborn, ignoble and evil wretch would do?

Dhananjaya, an upright man can easily achieve a noble feat, while a dishonourable sinful deed he can do only with great pain to himself.

A man quickly adopts the behaviour of those with whom he moves. This is surely seen in you, O Arjuna! Being of royal lineage and born especially into Kuru's race, you have forgotten the dharma of a Kshatriya, although you are known for your purity and keep stern vratas. I have no doubt that you have done this vile thing, for Satyaki's sake, at Krishna's word. Who other than a friend of Krishna's would inflict such an injury upon one who was unaware of you and fighting another battle? The Vrishnis and the Andhakas are base Kshatriyas, always engaged in sinful deeds, and are, by nature, given to disreputable conduct. Why, O noble Arjuna, have you taken them to be your models?"

Arjuna replies, "My lord Bhurisravas, it is evident from all the senseless words you utter, that with the decrepitude of the body one's intellect also becomes feeble. Although you know Hrishikesa and me well, how is it that you rebuke us like this? Knowing as I do the dharma of war and conversant as I am with the meaning of all the scriptures, I would never commit a sin in battle. You of all men know this well, and you still reproach me.

The Kshatriyas fight their foes, surrounded by their own followers, their brothers, sires, sons, relatives, kinsmen, companions, and friends. They fight, relying on the strength of their leaders. Why then should I not protect Satyaki, my disciple and dear kinsman, who is fighting for our sake without caring for his life? Invincible in battle, Satyaki is like my very right hand. In war one should not look out only for oneself, but also protect those that fight for one's cause, risking their very lives.

This is what ensures that the king is protected in the press of battle. If I had not intervened when I saw Satyaki on the point of being killed, I would have been responsible for his death and would have grievously sinned for my negligence! You know all this, then why are you angry with me for saving Satyaki?

Again, you reprimand me, O king, saying, 'Though I was fighting another, you cut off my arm without challenging me first.'

In this matter, my answer is that I erred in my judgement. Sometimes adjusting my armour; sometimes riding on my ratha, sometimes drawing my bowstring, I am at war with my enemies in the midst of a host resembling the vast deep, full of rathas, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers and echoing with fierce shouts and roars. Among friends and enemies

engaged with one another, how can you say that the Satwata warrior was fighting only one warrior? Having fought many and vanquished many maharathas, Satyaki is tired, wounded and disheartened.

It is under such circumstances, and while you yourself had returned freshly to battle, that you vanquished the mighty Yuyudhana and sought to display your superiority. You were about to behead him with your sword and I could not stand by and watch that with indifference, for Satyaki is my friend and my sishya and as dear to me as my brothers. You should rather rebuke yourself that you did not take care to defend yourself while attacking another. Indeed, O Shura, I ask how, if you were in my place, how you would have behaved towards someone who depends on you as Satyaki does on me?"

Thus addressed by Arjuna, the mighty-armed and illustrious Bhurisravas, who bears the device of the sacrificial stake on his banner, leaves Satyaki, and decides to die according to the vow of praya, to starve and, here, to bleed to death. A Kshatriya distinguished by many righteous deeds, he spreads with a bed of arrows for himself with his left hand, and looking to ascend into Brahmaloka, he relinquishes his senses to the care of the deities that preside over them. Fixing his gaze on the sun, setting his cleansed heart on the moon, and meditating on the mantras in the great Upanishad, Bhurisravas sits down on the bed of arrows, yokes himself in yoga, and stops speaking.

Seeing this, your entire army, led by your sons, begins to curse Krishna and Dhananjaya and to laud Bhurisravas, bull among men. Though roundly censured, the two Krishnas speak not a word distasteful to the dying hero. Bhurisravas, also, although thus lauded, feels no joy.

Then Arjuna cannot bear to listen to the curses of your sons, and what Bhurisravas said to him. Without anger and only grief in his heart, as if to remind them all, Arjuna says, "All the kings know my solemn vow that no one will succeed in killing anybody from our army within range of my bow. Knowing this, Bhurisravas, it is not appropriate, without properly understanding the laws of dharma, for one to censure others. That I have cut off your arm while you, well armed in battle, were on the point of slaying the unarmed Satyaki is not at all contrary to dharma. But what righteous man is there that would applaud the slaughter of Abhimanyu, a mere child, unarmed, deprived of his ratha, and without his armour by six maharathas uniting against him while he stood helpless?"

Hearing this, Bhurisravas of dazzling effulgence, touches the ground with his left palm—for the right one has been lost—and remains silent, with his head hanging down.

Then Arjuna says, "O eldest brother of Sala, the love I have for you is equal to what I bear Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula, or Sahadeva. I now say to you, as does the illustrious Krishna: *Go, O sire, to the realm of the righteous, and join Sibi, the son of Usinara, there!*'

Krishna says, "You have constantly performed yagnas and agnihotras. Go straight into my pure realms that blaze with endless splendour, which the greatest deities, even Brahma, wish for, become equal to me, borne on the back of Garuda."

Meanwhile, Satyaki rises to his feet and, his eyes burning, draws his sword to cut off the noble, sinless head of Bhurisravas, who now sits in yoga with his senses withdrawn from battle, blood gushing from where Arjuna hacked away his right arm. All the maharathas cry out to Satyaki to stop: Krishna and Arjuna, as well as Bhima, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, Aswatthaman, Kripa, Karna, Vrishasena and even Jayadratha. Even the other troops, watching aghast, forbid him. But Satyaki hews off Bhirusravas's head in a crimson blast even as that great Kuru sits in praya, lost in dhyana to free his soul from his body. Cries of outrage fill Kurukshetra.

The Siddhas, the Charanas, and all the fighting men, as also the Devas witness the slaying of Bhurisravas even as he sits with his eyes shut and his senses withdrawn in deep dhyana, and all of them laud that great Kuru.

Your soldiers argue the matter. "It is not Satyaki's fault; what was fated has happened. We must not yield to wrath, for anger is the root of men's sorrow. Brahma ordained that Satyaki would kill Bhurisravas in battle and there is no point in our judging what inevitably transpired."

Satyaki rages, "You sinful Kaurava wretches! You wear the outward garment of dharma, and tell me sanctimoniously that I should not have killed Bhurisravas. But where did this dharma of yours go when you slew that child, Subhadra's son Abhimanyu, while he was unarmed?

Once in a mood of pride, I vowed that I would kill anyone who flings me down alive in battle and kicks me, even if that enemy should take praya or even sannyasa. While I still struggled against Bhurisravas to stay alive, you thought me dead. This was your folly. O you Kuru bulls, the death of Bhurisravas at my hand is just and in accord with dharma!

I would have killed him anyway, but Arjuna deprived me of my glory by cutting off his arm out of his love for me and his vow to protect all that fight for Yudhishtira. Indeed, what is ordained must come to pass. Everything is destiny; fate has slain Bhurisravas in the press of battle. What sin have I committed?

Once upon a time, Valmiki sang this verse: 'You say, O Vanara, that women should not be killed. However, in all the ages, men should always and without fail do whatever brings pain to his enemies.'"

After Satyaki speaks in his ringing voice, none among the Pandavas and the Kauravas, O Rajan, say anything. However, in their hearts they are with Bhurisravas because no one there approves of Yuyudhana killing one who was like a Rishi made holy by countless yagnas, Bhurisravas who gave away incalculable gold during all his sacrifices, and who was purified beyond all common measure by the holiest mantras. The head of that hero, graced with rich blue locks and eyes red as those of a pigeon, now looks like the head of a horse decapitated at an Aswamedha yagna and placed on the sacrificial altar. Sanctified by his prowess and by the death he obtains at the edge of a weapon, the boon-giving Bhurisravas, worthy of every boon, casts off his body and ascends into swarga, sanctifying the exalted realms with his high punya.'"

CANTO 140

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Having crossed the ocean of the Kaurava army, unvanquished even by Drona, Karna, Vikarna or Kritavarman, to keep his word given to Yudhishtira, how was it that the heroic Satyaki was humiliated by Bhurisravas and flung down on the ground and almost killed?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Listen, Rajan, to the antecedents of Sini's grandson Bhurisravas. Maharishi Atri had a son called Soma, the Moon, and Soma's son was called Budha. Budha had one son, of the splendour of Indra, called Pururavas. Pururavas had a son called Ayus whose son was Nahusha. Nahusha's son was Yayati, a Rajarishi equal to a Deva. Yayati and his wife Devayani's eldest son was Yadu. In Yadu's race was born a prince of the name of Devamidha, whose son Sura was acclaimed in the three worlds. Sura's son was the greatest of men, the celebrated Vasudeva. Sura himself was the equal of Kartavirya in battle. Sini was born into Sura's vamsa, equal to Sura in tejas!

About this time, Rajan, there occurred the swayamvara of the noble Devaka's daughter Devaki, to which all the great Kshatriyas of the world came. During that swayamvara, Sini vanquished all the others and, for

Vasudeva's sake, swept the princess Devaki into his chariot. Seeing Devaki in Sini's ratha, that bull among men, the mahatejasvin Somadatta could not bear the sight and he challenged Sini to a match of wrestling, which lasted half a day and was stunning and wonderful to witness. During the wrestling, Sini threw Somadatta down on the earth. Lifting up his sword and seizing him by the hair, Sini kicked his adversary before the many thousands of kings who stood as spectators all around. Finally, out of compassion, Sini spared Somadatta's life, saying in contempt, "Live!"

Humiliated by Sini, Somadatta worshipped Mahadeva for his blessings so he could avenge himself on Sini. Mahadeva, the great Lord of all boon-giving deities, was pleased with him and asked him what boon he wished. The royal Somadatta asked for his boon: "I want a son, O Divine Lord, who will strike Sini's son down in the midst of thousands of kings and kick him with his foot."

Mahadeva Siva said, "Tathaastu! So be it," and vanished from Somadatta's sight. It was from Siva's boon that the most noble and benign Bhurisravas was born as Somadatta's son. And that is also why Bhurisravas was able to fling down Sini's grandson Satyaki in battle and kick him before the eyes of the whole army.

This is the story, Rajan, and indeed, other than for Siva's boon, not the greatest of warriors can conquer the Satwata hero Yuyudhana in battle. The Vrishni heroes are all superlative archers, and masters, besides, in every other form of warfare. They are conquerors of the very Devas, the Danavas and the Gandharvas. They are never nonplussed and always fight, relying upon their own prowess and are never dependent on others. There is no one in this world equal to the Vrishnis. None, O Bharatarishabha, has been, is, or will be equal in might to the Vrishnis. They never show disrespect to their relatives and they are always obedient to the commands of their elders. When the very Devas, Asuras, Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Uragas and the Rakshasas cannot vanquish the Vrishni heroes in battle, what need be said of men?

They never covet the possessions of those whom they help in distress. Devoted to the Brahmanas and truthful in speech, they never display any pride although they are wealthy. The Vrishnis regard even the strong as weak and rescue them from their troubles. Always devoted to the Devas, they are self-restrained, charitable, and free from pride. This is why the abilities of the Vrishnis are never questioned. A man may uproot the

mountains of Meru or swim across the ocean, but no one can defeat the Vrishnis. I believe I have cleared all your doubts, Rajan. However, O king of the Kurus, remember that all that is happening is due to your evil policy!'"

CANTO 141

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'After the great Kuru warrior Bhurisravas is killed, under these extraordinary circumstances, tell me, Sanjaya, how the battle progresses.'

Sanjaya replies, 'After Bhurisravas left for the next world, Bhaarata, Mahabaho Arjuna says to Krishna, "Urge the horses, Lord, to greater speed to take me to Jayadratha, for the sun sinks swiftly towards the Asta hills. O Naravyaghra, I have yet to fulfil my vow and many maharathas still protect Jayadratha. Ah, we must fly, Krishna, racing the sun to the horizon for I must kill the Saindhava before Surya Deva sets."

Flicking his reins and whip, Krishna, greatest of all sarathies, spurs his silver horses, white as moonbeams, towards Jayadratha's chariot. At once, many great Kuru rathikas like Duryodhana, Karna, Vrishasena and, now, Jayadratha himself dash forward to stop Arjuna's careen. Finally, Arjuna sees Jayadratha before him, and glares at him fearfully, as if to burn him up with his very gaze.

Duryodhana quickly tells Karna, "O son of Vikartana, the critical hour is upon us. Now show us your true prowess, beloved friend, and ensure that Arjuna does not kill Jayadratha! The day is about to end, so cover the

Pandava with clouds of arrows and slow him down! If we can protect Jayadratha until the sun sets, Arjuna would have failed to fulfil his oath, and he will take his own life by immolating himself, and then victory will be ours! For Arjuna's brothers, with all their followers, will hardly last a few moments in a world without him. And upon the death of Pandu's sons, we will enjoy the whole Earth, Karna, with her mountains, waters and forests, and without any thorn in our sides and no limit to our power!

Arjuna swore his oath in anger at his son's death; he became fate's victim for he took leave in his grief of his judgement. Karna, I have no doubt that fate favoured us at that moment, for Pandu's son, the Kiritin swore his vow to kill Jayadratha only for his own destruction.

How, when you, my great Karna, are alive, will Arjuna succeed in killing the Saindhava before the sun sets behind the Asta hills? How will he kill him when Salya of the Madras and the illustrious Kripa protect Jayadratha? How will Arjuna, who is being led to his death by fate, even reach Jayadratha when Aswatthaman, Dusasana and I protect him? Many are the heroes among us who are engaged in this battle and the sun hangs low in the sky and plummets towards the sunset mountain.

Partha will not even come near Jayadratha. So, Karna, summon your greatest determination and resolution, along with me and our other brave maharathas like Drona's son, the king of the Madras and Kripa, and resist Arjuna with all your might."

Karna replies, "Deeply has my body been injured by mighty Bhimasena, who is more of an archer that I had dreamt. I am still in battle because it is ordained that I should be here. Pain wracks my every limb from Bhima's arrows. Yet, for you I will fight with all my might. My life itself is for you and I will do everything in my power to ensure that Arjuna, greatest of the sons of Pandu, does not succeed in killing Jayadratha.

As long as I am able to fight, the ambidextrous Savyasachin, who looses his arrows with equal facility with both his hands, will not reach the king of the Sindhus. Kurusathama, all that one who bears you the great love that I do, and is always concerned for your welfare, I will do. As for victory, that depends on destiny. I will exert myself to my utmost for Jayadratha's sake and for yours. Victory, however, is dependent on fate.

Fear not, Naravyaghra, I will fight Arjuna today for you as I have never fought before. Yet, fate and fate alone will decide who wins or loses. O king

of the Kurus, let all our troops witness today the fierce battle between me and Arjuna, which will make their very hair stand on end."

While Karna and your son are thus speaking together, Arjuna begins to slaughter your host again, hewing off the great arms of helpless heroes, arms like spiked clubs or the trunks of elephants. He cuts off heads, as well as actual trunks of elephants, beheads horses, and carves up the akshas of rathas all around, as well as blood-dyed horsemen armed with spears and javelins. From horses and the best of elephants, standards, royal parasols, bows, yak-tails and heads fall thick and fast on all sides. Consuming your army like a wind-fanned great fire a heap of dry grass, the invincible Arjuna covers the earth with blood, and swiftly reaches Jayadratha.

Protected by Bhimasena and Satyaki, Arjuna looks as glorious as Agni himself. Seeing Arjuna thus ablaze, the mightiest bowmen of your army, bulls among men, endowed with great energy, cannot face him at all. Then the maharathas Duryodhana, Karna, Vrishasena, Salya and Aswatthaman set Jayadratha behind them and surround Krishna and the Kiritin, who dances wildly on his ratha to the savage, reverberant music of the Gandiva's bowstring and the slap of his palms against that incomparable weapon.

Arjuna is like Death himself, with open maw, come hunting the trembling Sindhu king. The sun turns red in the sky and, wanting it to set quickly, the Kaurava warriors bend their bows with arms that resemble the tapering bodies of Nagas and cover Partha with hundreds of arrows like the very rays of the setting sun. That peerless one, however, dissects every shaft into two, three, or eight slivers, and gashes the bowmen with his raking shafts.

Aswatthaman, who flies a lion's tail on his banner, charges at Arjuna, striking him with ten whistling barbs and Krishna with seven and barring Arjuna's way to Jayadratha. Quickly, many Kurus hem Arjuna in with a mass of rathas. Stretching their bows to the fullest and shooting countless arrows, they shield Jayadratha from the Pandava, at your son's command.

And now we witness glorious Arjuna's unearthly genius; we witness the might of the Gandiva and see how his magical twin quivers well inexhaustibly with arrows. Confounding the high weapons of Aswatthaman and Kripa, he pierces all the warriors that surround him with nine bolts of thunder each. Drona's son pierces him with five and twenty arrows, Vrishasena with seven, Duryodhana with twenty, Karma and Salya with

three each. And all of them roar at him and, shaking their bows, hem him in closer still and continue to strike him frequently.

They draw their rathas up in serried ranks around Arjuna and, willing the sun to set quickly, those great maharathas of the Kaurava army roar awfully at Arjuna and lash him with dense gusts of arrows. These intrepid, mighty warriors, their arms like maces, loose devastras at the battling Dhananjaya.

But the relucent Arjuna shatters all their missiles, mundane and unworldly; breaking through the encirclement of chariots he rides straight at Jayadratha. Then Karna appears as if out of nowhere, and stops Arjuna with a towering gale of arrows, in the very sight of Bhimasena and Satyaki. Arjuna cuts these arrows down and strikes Karna, before all the troops, with ten steaming shafts. Satyaki drills the Sutaputra with three stinging barbs. Bhimasena pierces him with three arrows, and Arjuna, again, with seven.

An unfazed Karna, fighting for his beloved Duryodhana to save Jayadratha's life, unleashes sixty terrific arrows, each, at Arjuna, Bhima and Satyaki. In moments, the battle between the lone Karna and his three adversaries swells to momentous proportions. Karna's skill that we then see is wondrous, as, mad with battle lust, he singly resists those three matchless maharathas.

Then Arjuna looses a torrid volley at Karna, piercing him through every limb. Bathed in blood, the Suta's son gores Arjuna with fifty lofty arrows. Arjuna breaks his bow and bloodies his chest with shafts. Seeing how the sun plunges towards the sunset mountain, Arjuna unleashes a devastra at Karna, to kill him with that single missile incandescent as the very sun. It flies inexorably towards Karna and the Dhartarashtras hold their breath for they are certain he will die. But then, from a side Drona's son Aswatthaman bisects that flaming astra and it falls tamely to the ground.

Karna takes up another bow and envelops Arjuna with a swath of thousands of arrows. Like the wind dispersing a locust swarm, Arjuna shoots them all down and covers Karna with his own arrow storms. Karna, destroyer of armies, shreds these in flight and returns Arjuna's fire, shaft for shaft. Roaring at each other like two mighty bulls, those incomparable maharathas obscure the sky with clouds of arrows. Each made invisible by the other's rain of shafts, they continue their transcendent duel, often shouting taunts at each other.

Ah, Rajan, surely unearthly is the duel between Karna and Arjuna, for each is a match of the other and they put forth their best skills and strength. All the others around stand disbelieving of what they see, lowering their own weapons and gazing at the luculent contention. Applauded by Siddhas, Charanas and Pannagas, the two fight at the limits of their prowess, entirely absorbed, each bent on killing the other.

Then Duryodhana says to his maharathas, “Do everything you can to protect Karna, for Vrisha has sworn that he will not rest until he has killed Arjuna.”

With the sun plunging down every moment, Arjuna kills Karna’s horses and with a broad-headed arrow, he fells Karna’s charioteer from his niche in the ratha. Before Duryodhana’s eyes, Arjuna Swetavahana shrouds Karna in a blizzard of arrows, overwhelming him so he stands helpless and stunned. Seeing this, Aswatthaman dashes up and, mounting Drona’s son’s chariot the two continue to assail Arjuna.

Salya of the Madras pierces Arjuna with thirty arrows while Kripacharya strikes Krishna with twenty telling shafts and Partha with a dozen. Still from a fair distance, joining the battle to save his life, Jayadratha now shoots the two Krishnas with four barbs each; Vrishasena also rakes them both with seven shafts. Radiant Arjuna lacerates them all in return—Aswatthaman with four and sixty tremendous arrows, Salya with a hundred, Jayadratha with ten flat-headed ones, Vrishasena with three and Saradwata’s son with twenty. The lustrous Dhananjaya throws back his head and roars.

Intent on stopping the Pandava from fulfilling his vow, your warriors swarm at him from all sides. And now, terrifying the Dhartarashtras, Arjuna invokes the great Varunastra, which radiates an awesome tide of fluid arrows all around his chariot. Well aware of what is at stake and that they need only contain the godly Pandava for a brief while before the sun sets, the Kauravas withstand his occult flashflood and continue to advance upon him.

Arjuna Kiritin remains serene and intent on his single purpose; arrows of all sorts, high and plain, continue to flare from the Gandiva, darkening all the field, all the directions.

The sky, dense with shafts, is ablaze with meteors and on the ghastly ground innumerable crows alight from the sky to perch on fresh corpses, picking out eyes and swallowing them whole before setting their black

beaks to work on noble steaming flesh. And Arjuna continues to provide a grisly feast for these and other birds and beasts of carrion with the Gandiva, why, like Mahadeva slaying the Asuras with his Pinaka with the tawny string. So many great Kuru maharathas, riding their best horses and elephants the inescapable Pandava sends to Yama.

Then a host of kings, taking up heavy maces and clubs of iron and swords and darts and different kinds of powerful weapons of terrible forms, rush suddenly at Partha. Bending the Gandiva Arjuna consumes them all, now uncanny laughter bubbling up in him as if at some great intuition of success; he never ceases devouring your troops with their rathas, elephants, foot-soldiers and supporting bowmen and swell the population of Yama's domain.'"

CANTO 142

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya continues, 'Hearing the twang of Dhananjaya's bow, which is like the beckoning of Death himself, or the frightful peal of Indra's thunder, your army, Rajan, is like an ocean swept by a tempest of mountainous waves that surges up at the Yuganta. Krishna pilots Arjuna's ratha across Kurukshetra so that he seems to be in a hundred places at once, and from a hundred places apparently do his tides of arrows flare sowing death in every shaft. A hundred Gandivas afire appear all around, all bent in a constant circle, all spewing relentless, ceaseless waves of flame.

Arjuna invokes the Aindrastra, lancing terror through your legions. A hundred thousand flaming arrows issue from that fulminant celestial weapon and fetch fresh carnage to your army; so brilliant is that astra that no one can bear to look at it and then death comes for them in the twinkling of an eye. Arjuna traverses Kurukshetra at will, driven by his sarathy the Avatara, his prowess on full display, scattering the darkness that the Kauravas caused with their arrows, which no other can disperse even in imagination. But Arjuna, with his elemental devastras, summoned with ringing mantras, dispels the sinister Kaurava darkness as Surya Deva does the night when he rises over it.

Arjuna evaporates the lives of your warriors like the summer sun the waters of tanks and lakes. He mantles your legions with his shafts like the sun does the earth with his rays. With other precise arrows he enters and breaks the hearts of great enemies, even like beloved friends! He consumes your akshauhinis as a blazing fire does swarms of insects.

Devouring the lives of his enemies and their fame, Partha rides like Death embodied over Kurukshetra. He severs crowned heads, massive arms adorned with angadas, and long-lobed noble ears with earrings. He hacks away the arms of elephant-riders clutching spears to cast at him; those of horsemen with javelins clasped to fling at him; those of foot-soldiers with shields to stop his arrows; those of maharathas with mighty bows; and those of charioteers and mahouts with whips and goads. He is scintillating, a conflagration burning your army with incessant flames.

For all their resolve, the hostile Kauravas cannot even look at Arjuna, greatest of all warriors, the shura equal to Indra, the greatest bull among men. One sees him everywhere at the same time, dancing on his ratha, with no moment's pause in his apocalyptic rant of lucific astras. Ah, my lord, he is handsome, he is beautiful, and he is godly: the Kiritin like some banks of massed thunderheads adorned with many rainbows, for he is in so many places at once, in this hour that he was born for, that he learnt and suffered for.

Arjuna's immaculate inundation of devastras sees many great warriors shrink in fright, as he makes an unfordable morass upon the field of dharma and death. Strewn with elephants whose trunks or tusks have been severed, with horses that have lost hooves and heads, with rathas smashed in smithereens, eviscerated warriors with entrails hanging out, and others with legs hacked off, with corpses of men and besats lying, either still forever or convulsed in death's last throes, the vast field of Kurukshetra, which Arjuna bestraddles, resembles the coveted arena of Death, increasing the terror of the timid, or the sporting ground of Rudra when he devastated all creatures in time out of mind.

Parts of the field, strewn with the trunks of elephants cut off with razor-headed arrows, look as if scattered with thick snakes. Portions covered with the dissevered heads of warriors, look as if spread with garlands of lotuses. Variegated with beautiful head-gear, crowns, keyuras, angadas and ratha-rings with coats of mail decked with gold and with the trappings and other

ornaments of elephants and horses, and scattered over with hundreds of coronets lying everywhere, the Earth looks beautiful like a new bride!

Arjuna has a gory river flow, like the Vaitarani itself and affrights the timid. The marrow and fat of men and animals forms its mire, blood its current, and limbs and bones fill it and moment by moment it grows fathomless in depth. The hairs of the dead, men and beasts, are its moss, weeds; heads and arms form the rocks and stones on its shores, and standards, and banners that brightly colour its appearance deck it. Royal parasols and bows are its wavelets and it abounds with the vast corpses of dead elephants and teems with rathas that float like countless rafts on its surface.

The carcasses of countless horses forms its banks and it is impassable because of the wheels, yokes, shafts, akshas and kuveras of rathas, and from spears, swords, darts, battle-axes and snake-like arrows. Ravens and kankas are its crocodiles, jackals, its terrible makaras, and fierce vultures, its sharks. It ripples and rings with the howls of jackals. It abounds with capering bhutas and pisachas, and thousands of other dreadful spirits that feed and drink blood from the numberless corpses of warriors that float upon it.

Seeing Arjuna's astounding prowess, the Vijaya whose visage resembles that of Yama himself, panic like never before. He obliterates all that comes before him; he seems to reveal himself truly now for what he is. His body is full of blinding light and none can even gaze upon him let alone face him in battle.

Intent on having Jayadratha's life before the sun sets, the Savyasachin demolishes all the great maharathas before him, stunning them with archery possibly never seen in this age of men. Dhananjaya, with Krishna for his charioteer, continues to blaze across Kurukshetra like streak lightning on the ground. His arrows, hundreds of thousands of them, cover the field in a cupola of endless death, his Gandiva always bent in an inscrutable circle of flames. And then blasting his bloody way through all the maharathas and other warriors arrayed in thousands before him, he finally arrives at where the terror-stricken Jayadratha is, and drills him with four and sixty deadly straight, light-swift shafts.

The Kuru warriors freeze, every one of them by now, those not dead, bleeding from Partha's arrows; they despair for Jayadratha's life. And maharatha Arjuna, greatest of victorious men, his astras blazing like pralaya

fire, saturates your army with kabandhas, headless trunks of men, and fetches absolute havoc to your legions consisting of four kinds of forces.

He gashes Aswatthama with fifty thunderbolts, Vrishasena with three, mildly strikes Kripa with nine, Salya with sixteen and Karna with two and thirty. He plunges another sixty-four barbs deep into Jayadratha and gives a bloodcurdling roar. But now, actually faced with his shining hunter, Jayadratha's fear leaves him! Rage takes the place of terror, and, the Sindhu king who bears the emblem of the Varaha on his banner roars like a great tiger himself and unleashes a gale of arrows, vulture-feathered and hissing like venomous serpents, at Arjuna.

The Saindhava strikes Govinda with three shafts, Arjuna with six, Arjuna's horses with eight and his standard with one. Arjuna, unmoved, the hungry tiger, hacks away Jayadratha's sarathy's head with a wedge-tipped shaft and fells his flame like standard with another.

Meanwhile, the sun perches on the brim of the Asta mountains and Krishna tells Arjuna, "Look, Partha, they have set Jayadratha in the midst of six mighty maharathas and he waits there in fear. Bull among men, you will not be able to kill him without vanquishing the six. I will use my yoga shakti to hide the sun so everyone thinks Surya has set. They will all rejoice, thinking that, having failed to keep your vow, you will immolate yourself. Jayadratha will emerge from hiding and you must shoot him dead. Though it will seem as if night has fallen, know that the sun will not have set and kill the Saindhava!"

Arjuna replies, "Tathaastu. So be it!"

Then Krishna, the Mahatapasvin, creates darkness through his cosmic Yoga. Your warriors, O Rajan, think the sun has set and are ecstatic; they throw their heads back, including Jayadratha, gaze skywards, where the stars have appeared on high and cry out in celebration that Arjuna must now take his own life. Krishna says fiercely to Arjuna, "Look how the wretched Jayadratha look up at the sky and has lost his fear of you. Kill him now, Bhaarata. Cut off his head and fulfil your vow!"

Arjuna, in a fearsome blur, shining himself like the sun that has not truly set, strikes Kripa with twenty arrows, Karna with fifty, Salya and Duryodhana each with six, Vrishasena with eight and Jayadratha himself with sixty. Finding that he attacks them even after the sun has set, and like a great fire with its tongues of flame extended, the protectors of Jayadratha are perplexed. But they return his fire swiftly with torrents of arrows.

Shrouded by their mantle of shafts, and raging, Arjuna raises his prodigious archery and creating a mesh, a great net of intertwined flaming arrows, casts it over the Kuru maharathas. Having never seen the like of this, your warriors abandon Jayadratha in fear and flee in all directions, with no two heroes going the same way.

The prowess that Arjuna now displays is uncanny, unseen ever before and will never again be witnessed. Like Rudra himself slaughtering all creatures during the pralaya, Dhananjaya butchers elephants and elephant-riders, horses and horse-riders, maharathas and charioteers. I do not see, Rajan, a single elephant, horse or warrior that is not struck with Partha's arrows. Their vision blurred by dust and darkness, your warriors cannot distinguish one another in the sudden night, and strange blackness envelops their senses and mind as well.

Urged by fate, and with their bodies cut open and lacerated by Arjuna's arrows, they begin to wander like men in a dream, to limp and fall down. Some among them are paralysed and some deathly pale. During the ensuing carnage, Arjuna the Pandava showers, drenches the earth with rills of gore, while the air clears marvellously with the blood that sprays everywhere absorbing all the raised dust and a sudden gusting wind blowing the rest away. So deep is the river of blood that the wheels of chariots are mired almost fully and thousands of terror-stricken elephants thunder about in all directions, their limbs mangled, their riders slain, trumpeting horribly and trampling your own ranks as they go.

Horses without riders and foot-soldiers, too, as well as your great warriors, Rajan, all struck by Dhananjaya's arrows, flee in abject fear, abandoning the field, their hair dishevelled, their armour cut away and blood pouring from their wounds. Some stand frozen as if crocodiles from the macabre red river have seized their legs, while some others hide behind and under the bodies of dead elephants.

Routing your army thus, Rajan, Arjuna savagely attacks the six maharatha protectors of the Sindhu king—Karna, Aswatthaman, Kripa, Salya, Vrishasena and Duryodhana. So quicksilver is his archery that in a wink he shatters Karna's and Vrishasena's bows, and fells Salya's charioteer. With dreadful storms of shafts he deeply wounds Kripa and his nephew Aswatthaman.

All of them stricken, Arjuna invokes a mahastra of the splendour of Indra's Vajra, a great weapon that he has always worshipped with incense

and garlands of flowers. He summons it with the most recondite mantras and affixes it to the Gandiva and we hear loud cries from the sky for that astra is bright and fiery as the sun himself.

Krishna says again to Arjuna, “Quick, Partha, cut Jayadratha’s head from his neck! The sun is about to set behind the Asta mountain, so listen to what I say to you now. Jayadratha’s father Vriddhakshatra is famed the world over. It was after a long time and tapasya that Jayadratha, the Parantapa, was born to him.

At his birth, an asariri, a disembodied voice deep as rumbling clouds said to Vriddhakshatra, ‘Among men in this world, in respect of blood, conduct, self-restraint and the other qualities, your son will become worthy of the two races of the Sun and the Moon. He will become one of the greatest Kshatriyas of all and will always be worshipped by heroes. However, one day in battle, a bull among all Kshatriyas, the greatest one in the world will cut off his head.’

Hearing what the asariri said, Vriddhakshatra reflected for a long while. Overwhelmed by his love for his son, he summoned all his kinsmen and said, ‘The head of the man who causes my son’s head to fall on the earth will burst asunder like a melon in a hundred pieces!’

Having said this, Vriddhakshatra installed Jayadratha on the throne and retired to the vana to devote himself to tapasya. Endowed with great tejas, Arjuna, he is still engaged in the observance of the austerest of penances outside this very Samantapanchaka. So, after you take Jayadratha’s head, you must with the great Pasupastra ensure that the head does not fall onto the ground but flies on with the arrow and falls into Vriddhakshatra’s lap! For if Jayadratha’s head falls onto the ground, have no doubt that your own head will burst apart in a hundred pieces. O son of Indra, there is nothing in this world that you cannot achieve. So do this now.”

Hearing this, Arjuna licks the corners of his mouth and looses the arrow he has charged with Siva’s astra, which has always been worshipped with incense and garlands. The ultimate ayudha, with which once Mahadeva torched the Tripura from the sky, takes Jayadratha’s head from his neck in a crimson eruption, like a hawk snatching a small bird from a tree. Arjuna follows this by shooting a dozen more shafts in a blur, arrows that carry the severed head through the sky, out to the far limits of Samantapanchaka, where your son-in-law’s father, mahatejasvin Vriddhakshatra, is at his sandhya vandana, his evening worship.

Adorned with thick black hair, with sparkling kundalas, Jayadratha's bleeding head falls perfectly into Vriddhakshatra's lap, where he sits in padmasana at his twilight prayer. So deep is his dhyana that at first Vriddhakshatra does not even notice. He duly completes his worship and then slowly rises to his feet. His son's head now falls onto the earth and Vriddhakshatra's own head blows apart in a hundred pieces of flesh bone and brain, for it is he himself who has at last made his son's head fall onto the earth! And all that learn of this wonderful, terrible feat of Arjuna laud both the Krishnas.

Rajan, after the Kiritin kills the Saindhava, Krishna withdraws the darkness, the false night that fell over Kurukshetra through his maya. As all the stars that peeped out from on high vanish, your sons and their men see that they were deceived and the sun has not yet set. And that, O Dhritarashtra, is how Arjuna kills Jayadratha and keeps his vow to avenge the death of Abhimanyu. On that day, amongst them, Arjuna, Satyaki and great Bhima slaughter eight whole akshauhinis of your army! Seeing Jayadratha killed, tears fall from the eyes of your sons that remain alive, Duryodhana weeps the most bitterly.

After Arjuna kills Jayadratha, Krishna blows a clarion blast on his Panchajanya and Arjuna raises the Devadatta to his lips and blows resoundingly on his conch. And, as if to send the message of triumph not merely to Yudhishtira but into the very heavens, Bhima fills Kurukshetra with a battery of dreadful roars drowning every other sound on the filed of dharma. Yudhishtira Dharmaputra hears these sounds across the field and knows that Arjuna has killed Jayadratha. Exultantly he has his own troops sound conches and horns and beat on drums.

And the excited, elated Yudhishtira charges at Drona to do battle with him.

By now the sun has actually set, and a most horrifying battle breaks out, by night's darkness, between Drona and the Somakas, descended from the moon. Jubilant after the killing of Jayadratha, the Pandava maharathas now attack Drona to kill him; why, they fight intoxicated with success. Having kept his vow, a celebrant Arjuna also engages many of your great chariot-warriors and now, with the great burden, upon which the very outcome of the war hinged, lifted from his shoulders, he destroys your ranks like truly the Devaputra that he is. He razes your legions like the Devas mowing down the Danavas, like the sun scattering darkness.'"

CANTO 143

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, O Sanjaya, what my warriors did after Arjuna killed the heroic Jayadratha?'

Sanjaya replies, 'After Arjuna, O sire, kills Jayadratha, an angry Kripa, son of Saradwat, confronts Arjuna and envelops him with a barrage of arrows, while a furious Aswatthaman attacks him from the rear. A tiring Arjuna bleeds from the many wounds these two maharathas inflict on him and is in considerable pain. Yet, he does not want to kill his guru, Kripa or the son of his other acharya, Drona, so he treats the encounter like some exalted lesson in archery, and instruction even.

Thwarting both Aswatthaman and Kripa, he covers both in his arrows storms, but his shafts are mild and none loosed to take either of their lives. Yet, they injure Kripa and Aswatthaman fiercely, coursing pain through their bodies while avoiding all the vital marmas that, pierced, could kill them. So swift and so many are the arrows that Arjuna unleashes that Kripa faints in his ratha. His sarathy thinks that Arjuna has killed the old Acharya and whisks him away from the field. At this, Aswatthaman also flees in fear!

Seeing his guru Kripa swoon and fall, Arjuna is overcome by great grief. His face tearful and his voice full of anguish, he says, "Vidura clearly foresaw all this long ago in his mind. When Duryodhana was born, Vidura said to Dhritarashtra, 'Have this demon born into the noble house of Kuru killed. Otherwise, unimaginable calamity will overtake the greatest Kurus.'

Ah, how true Vidura's warning has proved. It is because of Duryodhana that I see my precious Acharya Kripa lying fallen to my arrows. Fie on this unholy Kshatriya dharma! Shame on my much vaunted might and prowess! Who else will fight a Brahmana who is also his guru? Kripa is the son of a Rishi; he is my Acharya; he is also Drona's great friend and brother-in-law. Alas, now he lies sprawled on his ratha, dying from my arrows.

Krishna, I had no wish to kill him, yet that is what I have done. My heart breaks to see him like this. Even if he wounded me sorely with his arrows, I should have only looked fondly at that warrior of dazzling splendour and never attacked him in return. And now, I have sent him, my first teacher, whom I always loved and revered to Yama. I say to you Krishna, this causes me more agony that even Abhimanyu's death. Ah, look at the plight I have reduced him to; look where he lies so pitiable and dying in his chariot.

Kshatriyas who acquire knowledge from their gurus and then gift them with the dakshina that they desire, attain to Godhead. On the other hand, the lowest of men, evil ones who learn from their acharyas and then do them harm: such men go straight to naraka. And I have no doubt that I will find hell for myself having done this ghastly thing today. I have horribly wounded my Acharya Kripa with ruthless showers of arrows. While I was learning the astra shastra at his feet, Kripa once told me, 'Do not, O you of Kuru's vamsa, ever strike your acharya.'

I have not obeyed that grave command of my righteous and noble guru; on the contrary today I have struck the same Kripa, my sacred master with cruel arrows and felled him. Oh, I bow to this worshipful son of Gotama, to this inexorable shura. And everlasting shame be on me for what I have done."

While Arjuna is crying in remorse at having wounded Kripa, he thinks mortally, Karna sees that Jayadratha has been slain and rushes in fury at the victorious Pandava who has kept his vow. Seeing this, the two Panchala princes, Uttamaujas and Yudhamanyu, and Satyaki attack Karna.

Arjuna now wipes his tears and, smiling wanly at Krishna, says, “Here comes Karna, viciously attacking Satyaki. No doubt, he is incensed at the death of Bhurisravas, and the manner in which Yuyudhana killed him. Take my steeds there, O Janardana, so that Karna does not make the Satwata follow in the wake of Bhurisravas.”

Krishna says, “Satyaki by himself is a match for Karna. How much more he will be with the two sons of Drupada beside him. For the time being, it is not wise for you to fight Karna. He has with him a blazing spear, like a meteor, a shakti that Indra gave him when Karna gave Sakra his golden kavacha. Parantapa, he has kept it to use against you, worshipping it with reverence. Let Karna ride against Satyaki. I know when this evil man’s hour will come, and then you will dispatch him from this world, you and no one else, Arjuna.”

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Tell me, O Sanjaya, about the battle between Karna and Satyaki, after the fall of Bhurisravas and Jayadratha. Satyaki was without a ratha; so whose chariot does he mount? How did the guardians of the wheels of Arjuna’s ratha, the two Panchala princes, fight?’

Sanjaya says, ‘I will describe to you all that happens. Listen patiently, my lord, to the consequences of your own evil conduct. Before the battle, Krishna knew in his heart that Bhurisravas, who flew a banner with the insignia of a sacrificial stake, would vanquish the heroic Satyaki. Rajan, Krishna knows both the past and the future. It was for this that, the previous night, he summoned his sarathy Daruka, and said to him, “Keep my ratha ready tomorrow and wait until you hear me blow the rishabha svara on the Panchajanya.”

Neither the Devas, nor the Gandharvas, nor the Yakshas, nor the Uragas, nor the Rakshasas, nor Manushyas can ever conquer the two Krishnas. The Devas with the Pitamaha Brahma at their head, and also the Siddhas, know the incomparable prowess of these two. But listen now to the battle as it unfolds in grim reality, as if upon the edge of Yamaloka.

Seeing Satyaki without a ratha and facing Karna ready for battle, Krishna blows his conch long and loud in the rishabha note. Daruka hears what he has been waiting for, and comes flying to Krishna on his unearthly ratha with the golden standard. With Krishna’s leave, Satyaki climbs into the deva ratha, driven by Daruka, which is like Surya or Agni in splendour. To that chariot are yoked the greatest of all - Saibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Balahaka, all caparisoned in gold. These unearthly steeds fly anywhere

at will, and now bearing Satyaki, they fly at Karna, while Yuyudhana looses a fresh torrent of shafts at the Sutaputra.

Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas leave Dhananjaya's side and ride to help Satyaki. The duel between Karna and Satyaki is another that has hardly ever been seen on earth or in heaven, not between Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Uragas, or Rakshasas. Yet again, both great armies stop fighting to watch the stunning encounter; they are as awed by the superhuman skills of the two archers as they are by Daruka's wizardly chariotry, as he flies across Kurukshetra, his unearthly horses obedient to his very thought, in the most incredible manoeuvres.

The Devas, the Gandharvas and the Danavas in the sky watch the battle between Karna and Satyaki, never blinking.

The two maharathas fight one another, each for the cause of their friends. Karna, looking like a Deva now, and the brilliant Satyaki cover each other with scathing interminable volleys. Karna still has the brutal slaying of his friend Jalasandha, whom Satyaki despatched, before his eyes, and he fights the Vrishni hero in absolute rage.

Full of grief for all the Kuru maharathas that Satyaki has killed on this day, Karna glowers at Yuyudhana as if to burn him up with his eyes. The dense swarms of steaming arrows he unleashes at Sini's grandson never pause. Sinuous and powerful as two mighty tigers, the two Naravyaghras maul each other in fury.

Satyaki drills slender iron shafts into Karna's every limb, and then he fells Karna's charioteer from his ratha with a flat-headed shaft. He kills Karna's four white horses, smashes Karna's standard into a hundred pieces with a hundred arrows, and yet again Karna finds himself without a chariot in Duryodhana's sight.

All your warriors, O Rajan, are quickly dispirited. Then Karna's son Vrishasena, Salya of the Madras, and Aswatthaman surround Satyaki and a smoking fray ensues and one can see nothing anymore. When Satyaki deprives the heroic Karna of his ratha, cries of *Oh!* and *Alas!* arise from your troops. Satyaki continues to rake the already weakened Sutaputra, until Duryodhana dashes up and helps his precious friend into his chariot. Karna is distraught, hissing and sighing like a serpent now, ashamed when he thinks of how he boldly swore that he would make your son undisputed king of the world.

After he destroys Karna's ratha, the self-restrained Satyaki stops himself from killing either the Sutaputra or your sons led by Dusasana, O king, for he honours Arjuna's oath that he would kill Karna and Bhima's that he would kill all your princes. He only wrecks their chariots and wounds them sorely with his radiant archery, weakening but not killing them.

However, although all these maharathas led by Karna tried concertedly to slay the Vrishni hero, Yuyudhana shames them all. Using just one bow, he crushes Aswatthaman, Kritavarman and other maharathas, as well as hundreds of great Kshatriyas. He fights Yudhishtira Dharmaraja's cause and to attain to Swarga, and truly Parantapa Satyaki is no less than either of the two Krishnas in tejas. Always smiling, for he, the pure Kshatriya, delights in war, he puts all your troops to rout, O best of men! I say to you with conviction that, in this world, there are only three truly matchless archers—Krishna, Arjuna, and Satyaki. There is no fourth.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Riding the invincible ratha of Krishna, with Daruka for charioteer, Satyaki, proud of the might of his arms and equal in battle to Krishna himself, destroys Karna's ratha. Did Satyaki ride any other chariot after his battle with Karna was over? I want to know this, Sanjaya, O most gifted narrator. Truly, I believe Satyaki is endowed with enormous, superhuman prowess. Tell me everything, Sanjaya!'

Sanjaya says, 'Hear, O Rajan, what transpires on the dharmakshetra. Daruka's younger brother brings out another chariot for the battling Satyaki. It has shafts attached by chains of iron, it has gold in profusion and bands of silk; it is adorned with a thousand stars and festooned with bright banners; this ratha flies the figure of a great lion on its standard, and yoked to it are horses fleet as the wind and wearing trappings of gold; and the rumble of its wheels are like thunderheads sounding. Mounting the fresh chariot, Satyaki besieges your troops again, while Daruka goes to Krishna's side.

A new ratha is also fetched for Karna, to which are yoked pedigreed horses white as milk, caparisoned in gold. Its kaksha and standard are wrought from gold. Furnished with colourful banners and a profusion of weapons of every kind, this excellent ratha has a superb sarathy as well. Mounting that chariot, Karna also mounts an unrestrained assault on his enemies.

I have now told you all that you asked me. However, Rajan, listen once more to the extent of the horrible destruction that your evil plotting caused. Bhimasena has killed thirty-one of your sons. Led by Durmukha, they were

all masters of weapons. Satyaki and Arjuna also have slain hundreds of great heroes and Bhimasena more than either of them, and so has Bhagadatta. Still, the carnage begun by your evil ways is far from over.'"

CANTO 144

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me now what Bhima did, Sanjaya, at this stage of the war. Indeed, tell me everything!'

Sanjaya replies, 'After Bhimasena loses his ratha, Karna cuts him deep with his words like arrows, as Bhima stands helpless before him. Karna's acerbic words still burning him, Bhima says to Arjuna in some anger, "In your very hearing, Dhananjaya, Karna repeatedly mocked saying, 'Eunuch, fool, glutton, you are no warrior. Why have you come to fight, when you cannot bear the heat of battle? Take yourself where you belong, you overgrown child, to a kitchen or a dining table.'

I will kill any man who dares speak to me like that, Arjuna, and Karna said all this and more. You know the vows that we swore together in the Kuru sabha. Remember them now and let us fulfill both our oaths!"

Hearing this, Arjuna rides near Karna and tells him, "O false Karna, son of a Suta, you always brag and praise yourself. O evil one, listen to what I have to say to you. Heroes in battle meet with either victory or defeat, both of which are uncertain. It is no different even for Indra. Your ratha smashed by Satyaki and standing in a daze, exposed before Yuyudhana, you were on

the point of death. But Satyaki remembered that I have sworn to kill you and to honour my oath he spared your life.

It is true that you deprived my brother Bhimasena of his ratha in fair battle. But the manner in which you taunted and abused him then was a shameful sin. No man of dharma ever humiliates an enemy after vanquishing him in battle. Your heart and mind are small, Sutaputra, as is your wisdom, and that is why you boast so loudly and speak so vilely.

Then again, the abuse that you have heaped on my brother Bhima, who is a great Kshatriya warrior and devoted to dharma, is neither true nor acceptable. In plain sight of all the troops, of Krishna, and me, how many times Bhima defeated you in battle and left you stranded without a chariot. He never once abused you, Karna. Since you have spoken harshly to Vrikodara many times, and since you were one of the six who combined to kill Abhimanyu, while I was far away, I say to you, Sutaputra, that you will find the reward for your crimes this very day. It was to call death to you, evil one, coward, that you severed Abhimanyu's bow from behind. And for that, O you of small wit, I will kill you, along with all your followers, your forces and your beasts of war.

Finish everything that you still need to do in this world, because a great misfortune will soon overtake you. I will first kill your son Vrishasena before your eyes. Then, all the other kings that ride against me I will despatch to Yama. This I swear, laying my hand on this Gandiva. You are a fool, Karna, unwise and full of vanity. I tell you that Duryodhana will soon see you lying dead on this field as carrion for vultures and jackals, and that evil prince will lament bitterly."

When Arjuna swears to kill Karna's son, a great uproar arises among the maharathas. At that very moment, when pandemonium reigns all around, the sun enters the Asta mountain.

Krishna, in the van of army, embraces Arjuna who has fulfilled his vow, and says to him, "By great good fortune, O Jishnu, you have accomplished your great vow and Vriddhakshatra has also died along with his son. Had Kumara, the Deva Senapati himself, encountered the Dhartarashtra forces, I have no doubt that he would not have prevailed. Naravyaghra, I cannot think of a single warrior in the three worlds other than you who can fight this oceanic army.

So many great maharathas of untold prowess, some equal or even superior to you, are united under Duryodhana's command. Yet, clad in

armour, they cannot face you in battle when you are roused. Your tejas and urjas are equal to those of Rudra or Yama himself. No one else could have shown the prowess and genius in war that you, by yourself and alone, have done today.

And so, Arjuna, will I truly applaud and embrace you again after you kill the evil Karna and all his followers, yes, I will glorify you when you have vanquished this, your greatest, enemy."

Arjuna replies, "It is through your grace, O Madhava, that I have fulfilled my vow that even the gods might have found difficult to accomplish. And my victory is no matter of wonder for those who have you, O Krishna, for their Lord. Through your grace, Yudhishtira will regain the whole world. All this is because of your power, O Vrishni. This is your victory, O Lord! Our victory is in truth only yours; our fortune is in your care and we are your servants, O Madhusudana."

Krishna smiles slightly, and slowly drives the horses and, as they traverse the battlefield full of brutal sights, he points them out to Arjuna saying, "Having fought for victory or great fame so many heroic kings lie on the earth, struck by your arrows, their weapons and ornaments scattered, their horses, chariots and elephants mangled and their armour cloven, all of them having attained to the final sorrow. Some of them are still alive, in agony, and some dead. But look, Arjuna, even the dead still seem alive for their lustre and greatness.

Look at the field covered over with their golden-winged arrows, with their numberless other weapons, and with their dead animals. The earth is resplendent with coats of mail and necklaces of gems, with severed heads gleaming with earrings, and helmets and crowns shining with great jewels, and garlands of flowers, and kanthasutras, angadas, collars of gold and with diverse other beautiful ornaments. Strewn with anuskaras and quivers, with standards and banners, with upaskaras and adhishthanas, with shafts and crests of chariots, with broken wheels and beautiful akshas in profusion, with yokes and trappings of horses, with belts and bows and arrows, with elephants, their housings, with spiked maces and hooks of iron, with darts and short arrows, with spears and pikes, with kundas and clubs, with sataghnis and bhushandis, with scimitars and axes, with short and heavy clubs and mallets, with maces and kunapas, with whips decked with gold, with the bells and diverse other ornaments of elephants, and with rich robes,

all loosened from the bodies of men and animals, the earth shines brilliantly, like the autumn sky strewn with planets and stars.

The lords of the earth, slain for the sake of earth, lie asleep on the earth clasping her like a wife. Like mountains flowing streams of liquid chalk through their caves and fissures, these elephants big as mountains, which look like Airavata himself, flow profuse streams of blood through the wounds in their bodies.

See, O Shura, where some of these vast creatures, struck by hundreds of arrows, lie spamming in death's last throes, their eyes full of pain and grief. Look where countless horses lie, their golden caparisons stained with scarlet.

Look, O Partha, at these empty chariots, which once resembled celestial vimanas of vapoury forms in the evening sky, now lying on the ground, with standards, banners, akshas and yokes cut into pieces, with broken shafts and crests, and with their warriors and charioteers slain and flung out of them. Foot-soldiers, also, holding bows and shields and slain in hundreds of thousands, lie everywhere, bathed in blood, clasping the earth with every limb and their long hair undone and smeared with dust.

Look, O Mahabaho, at all the warriors who lie unmoving, their bodies mutilated by your astras. Look at Kurukshetra scattered with yak-tails and fans, parasols, standards, steeds, chariots and elephants with diverse kinds of rich blankets, and the cut away reins of horses, and exquisite garments and the costly varuthas of the rathas. The field appears as if it is spread over with embroidered tapestry.

Many warriors fallen from the backs of elephants look like lions struck down by thunder and fallen from mountaintops. Lying among their horses and their bows, horsemen and foot-soldiers welter in blood. Ah, look how fearful this earth is to gaze upon, covered over with multitudes of slain elephants, horses, maharathas, and mired with blood, fat, and rotten flesh, on which wild dogs and wolves and pisachas and diverse fell wanderers of the night feed and around which they dance in sinister glee!

Only you, O Arjuna, or Indra himself, could have accomplished such a feat and fetched such carnage."

Thus showing the Kiritin the grisly field of devastation, Krishna raises his Panchajanya and blows triumphal thunder on it and the joyful soldiers of the Pandava army respond by blowing their conches too. And Janardana

drives his chariot swiftly towards Yudhishtira Ajatasatru and brings him news of the killing of Jayadratha.'"

CANTO 145

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After Arjuna kills Jayadratha, Krishna drives to Yudhishtira, worships him with a glad heart and says, "Through good fortune, Rajan, your prosperity increases and you have killed your enemy. By great good luck, your brother has fulfilled his vow."

Yudhishtira, the subjugator of hostile towns, is overjoyed and climbs down from his ratha! His eyes fill with tears of joy and he embraces the two Krishnas and then, wiping his bright and lotus-like face, he says to Kesava and Arjuna, "Mighty Maharathas, it is destiny that I see both of you now after you have accomplished your mission. It is indeed great good fortune that you have killed the sinner Jayadratha.

You Krishnas have filled me with untellable joy, and plunged our enemies into an ocean of grief. You are the sovereign Lord of all the worlds, Krishna, O Madhusudana! In the three worlds, there is nothing that those who have you for their lord and master cannot achieve.

Through your grace, O Govinda, we will conquer our enemies, as Indra did the Danavas in olden times. Be it the conquest of the world, or be it the conquest of the three worlds, everything is assured for those with whom

you are pleased. They can be stained by no sin, nor can they meet with defeat in battle, O Lord of all the gods!

It is through your grace, Hrishikesa, that Indra became the king of the Devas. It is through your benevolence that he won the sovereignty of the three worlds on the field of battle. It is through your kindness, O Devadeva, that he gained immortality and enjoys the eternal regions of bliss. Having slain thousands of Daityas with powers acquired by your grace did Indra win lordship over the Devas.

It is through your grace, Hrishikesa, that the mobile and immobile universe, without swerving from its ordained course, is engaged in prayers and homa. In the beginning, this universe, enveloped in darkness, was one vast expanse of water, the Ekarnava. Through your grace, O Mahabaho, the universe became manifest! You are the Creator of all the worlds, you are the Supreme Soul, and you are immutable.

Those who see you, O Hrishikesa, are never mystified. You are the Supreme God, you are the God of the gods, and you are Ananta. Those who seek refuge with you, O Lord of the Devas, are never lost. Without beginning and without death, you are Divine; you are the Creator of all the brahmandas, and Absolute. Those who are devoted to you, O Hrishikesa, always tide over every difficulty. You are Supreme, the Ancient One, the Divine Being, and that which is the Highest of the high. He who attains your Supreme Self obtains the highest felicity.

You are sung in the four Vedas and the four Vedas sing of you. By seeking your protection, O noblest one, I will enjoy unrivalled prosperity. You are the Supreme God, you are the God of the highest gods, you are the lord of winged creatures, and the lord of all humans. You are the Supreme Lord of everything. I bow to you, O Best of beings!

You are the Lord, the Lord of lords, O Omnipotent One! Prosperity to you, O Madhava! O you of the louts eyes, O Universal Soul, You are the origin of all things.

He, who is a friend of Arjuna or is devoted to Arjuna's welfare, finds you who are the Guru of Dhananjaya and attain ultimate bliss."

Thus addressed by him, Kesava and Arjuna cheerfully say to Yudhishtira, "The fire of your wrath has consumed the sinful Jayadratha, O puissant one. Although the Dhartarashtra host is vast and swells in pride, yet it daily faces death and diminution; the Kaurava host is being annihilated. It is because of your wrath that the Kauravas are being

destroyed. Having angered you, most gentle and patient soul, who can kill with just your gaze, the evil Duryodhana with all his friends and kinsmen will have to lay down his life in battle. Already slain because of your ire, and struck down by the gods themselves, the invincible Bhishma, Pitamaha of the Kurus, now lies on a bed of arrows.

O Parantapa, victory in battle is impossible, and death waits for those who have you for their enemy. Kingdom, life, dear ones, children, and all kinds of bliss will soon be lost by him with whom you are angry. I look upon the Kauravas as having already lost their sons and kinsmen, when you, who observe, why, embody Rajadharma, are wroth with them."

Then Bhima, O king, and Satyaki, both lacerated and bleeding by arrows past count, come and pay their salutations to Yudhishtira. Those two mighty bowmen then sit on the ground surrounded by the Panchalas. Seeing the two heroes brimming with joy and waiting with folded hands, Yudhishtira embraces them both and cries, "It is through good fortune that I see you both before me, O Shuras, see you after you have escaped with your lives from the raging sea of enemy legions, the sea in which Drona is an invincible crocodile and Kritavarman, the son of Hridika, a ravening shark. It is destiny that you two have vanquished all the greatest kings of the earth.

It is by good fortune that I see both of you victorious in battle. It is by good fortune that you have defeated Drona as well as the mighty Kritavarman. It is by providence that you have defeated Karna in battle with your barbed shafts. It is by good fortune that Salya was forced away from the field by you both, O you bulls among men. By good fortune, I see you both returned from battle safe, you who are the greatest of all maharathas and masters of war!

It is my good fortune that I see you heroes again, who have forded that sea of enemy troops at my command, you who went into battle to honour me! You are true and pure Kshatriya heroes who revel in battle. You are dear to me like my own life. Ah, it is through great good fortune that I see you both again alive!'

Having said this, Yudhishtira embraces Satyaki and Bhima, the Naravyaghras, again, and tears of joy flow down his noble face. Then, the entire Pandava army is full of good cheer and a tide of joy surges through all the warriors. All of them are once more determined to give battle and win this war to end all wars.'"

CANTO 146

JAYADRATHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Upon the fall, O Rajan, of Jayadratha, your son Duryodhana, his face bedewed with tears, breathing hot sighs like a snake whose fangs have been drawn, this offender against the whole world, experiences bitter sorrow. Seeing the terrible slaughter of his troops that Arjuna, Bhimasena and Satyaki have wrought, he becomes pale and dejected. He begins to believe that no warrior on earth can compare with Arjuna.

"Neither Drona, Karna, Aswatthaman, nor Kripa can stand up to Arjuna when he is provoked," Duryodhana says to himself, "After defeating all the maharathas of my army, Arjuna has kept his vow and killed Jayadratha. No one can resist him and the Pandavas have almost exterminated my once vast army. Ah, no one can protect my army, no, not even Purandara himself. He, upon whom I relied most in this war, Karna, has been defeated and Jayadratha slain. I believed so much in Karna's prowess that I thought of even Krishna, who came to me to sue for peace, as being but a straw in gale; and now, Karna has been vanquished in battle."

Grieving thus, his dark and powerful spirit all but broken, Duryodhana comes to see Drona. He informs the Acharya of the immense slaughtering

of the Kurus, the victory of his enemies, and the grim catastrophe that faces the Dhartarashtras.

Duryodhana says fervidly, “Look, Acharya, at this vast carnage of kings. Setting the invincible Bhishma at our head, I came to war. Having cut the Pitamaha down, Sikhandin, his aspirations fulfilled, leads his troops, surrounded by all the Panchalas and seeking another triumph. Another disciple of yours, the invincible Savyasachin, decimated seven akshauhinis of troops and has despatched Jayadratha to Yama. How, Acharya, will I ever free myself of the debt that I owe those allies of mine who, fighting this war for my sake, have lost their lives? Ah, those lords of the earth now lie prone and lifeless upon the earth, having lost their kingdoms, possessions and prosperity.

Alas, it is true that I am a coward! Having caused such a massacre of my friends, I dare not believe that I can purify myself with even a hundred Aswamedha yagnas. I am covetous, sinful and a transgressor of dharma. Because of my greed and envy, and nothing else, these lords of the earth, in their quest for victory, have gone to Yama’s halls. Why, in presence of all these kings, does the kindly Earth not yield me a hole through which I can sink, for I am the greatest sinner ever and the sole fomenter of this horrible war between cousins? Alas, what will the Pitamaha of bloodshot eyes, the invincible shura who has conquered the other world, say to me in the midst of all the great kings when he meets me?

There lies the mighty bowman Jalasandha, killed by Satyaki. How proudly he came to fight, ready to lay his life down for me. Looking at the dead king Kambojas, as well as Alambusha and so many, many other allies of mine, all slain, what reason can I have to continue living? Ah, all of them died savage deaths, even as they put forth their great valour to vanquish my enemies.

Acharya, today I will give my all in battle to free myself from the debt that I owe them and then gratify them with oblations of water by going to the Yamuna. O greatest of warriors, I tell you truly and swear by all the punya I have ever done, by the prowess and skill that I possess, and on my sons’ heads, that I will kill all the Panchalas along with the Pandavas, and find peace of mind, or, killed by them in battle I will go to the realms where my friends and allies have gone while fighting my cause during this war.

Seeing that we are not able to protect them, our allies that still live no longer wish to stand by us, Mahabaho, and they now regard the Pandavas as

being preferable to us. And you, Acharya, have fetched doom upon us by showing your favourite sishya Arjuna softness and leniency in battle. This is why all these heroes, who endeavoured to secure victory for us, have been slain. It seems that only Karna now truly wishes us victory. A man of weak understanding, who without properly examining another, accepts him for a friend, and enlists him in matters that require true friends for their achievement, is certain to suffer disappointment. You, upon whom I so relied, have brought dreadful disappointment and defeat to me, O Drona.

I am inordinately covetous, sinful, crooked, and avaricious! Alas, Dussala's husband Jayadratha has been killed, and Somadatta's son Bhurisravas of great tejas, and the Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Sibis, and the Vasatis. And I myself mean to leave this world today and join those bulls among men, whom Arjuna slaughtered while they fought for me. With them gone, I have no wish to live on. O Acharya of the sons of Pandu, let me have your leave to die fighting.'""

CANTO 147

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'After Savyasachin kills the king of the Sindhus, after the death of Bhurisravas, what was the state of mind of our army? After Duryodhana passionately addressed Drona in the midst of the Kurus, what did the Acharya say to him? Tell me, Sanjaya!'

Sanjaya says, 'Loud wails arise among your troops, O Bhaarata, after the killing of Bhurisravas and Jayadratha. Now all of them show scant regard for the command and policy of Duryodhana, based on which hundreds of great maharathas have died.

As for Drona, he listens to what your son says and is full of grief. Reflecting for a short while, Rajan, he says in anguish, "Duryodhana, why do you pierce me so with your wordy shafts? I have already told you that no one can defeat Arjuna in battle. Protected by Kiritin, Sikhandin cut Bhishma down. This feat by itself, O Kuruttama, should have convinced you of the invincible prowess of Arjuna. For myself, I was certain on that day, seeing Bhishma, whom the Devas and the Danavas could not vanquish, felled, that this Bharata army is doomed. After the fall of Bhishma, whom we all looked upon as the greatest Kshatriya in the three worlds, whom else can we rely upon now?

The loaded dice that Sakuni spun in the Kuru sabha were not dice but keen arrows that would claim countless lives. The same arrows, unleashed now by Jaya, are now decimating us. Though Vidura said this even then, you did not understand him or chose not to. With tears in his eyes, he begged you to make peace with the Pandavas, but you did not listen to him. The calamity that he foretold has come to pass.

This horrible carnage, Duryodhana, is the result of your defiance of Vidura's sage counsel. The foolish man who disregards the precious advice of true and trusted friends, and follows only his own lusts, falls swiftly into deep trouble and distress. O son of Gandhari, you had Draupadi dragged into the Kuru court before us all, while she was in her period and wore but a single cloth. How did you dare do this to one as pure as her, she who owns every virtue, she who was born from the sacred fire?

Yet, know Duryodhana that all this is as nothing, for in the next world you will be visited with retribution before which this carnage will seem pale. Beating the Pandavas at dice by deceit, you sent them into the forest, wearing deerskins. Which other Brahmana in this world, other then I, would seek to harm the sons of Pandu, Kshatriyas of dharma, who are like my own sons. In the Kuru sabha, with your father Dhritarashtra's approval, you, with Sakuni for your collaborator, provoked the ire of the Pandavas. Together with Dusasana, Karna then fanned that wrath. Disdaining Vidura's wisdom, you repeatedly stoked that fire yourself.

With great determination and resolve, all of you surrounded Arjuna, to save Jayadratha. Why, then, have you all been vanquished and why has Jayadratha been killed? Why, when you, Karna, Kripa, Salya and Aswatthaman are alive, O Kauravya, has the king of the Sindhus been killed? All the mighty kings who fight this war for you spared no effort to save his life; how was Jayadratha beheaded in their very midst? Relying on me, Jayadratha thought he would be saved from Arjuna. He did not find the rescue he expected.

Suyodhana, I too do not see any safety for myself. Until I succeed in killing the Panchalas with Sikhandin, I always feel like one sinking deeper in the mire that is the fire prince Dhrishtadyumna. Having failed to save Jayadratha's life, why do you pierce me with your words like arrows of fire, when you plainly see that I too burn with grief?

No more do you see Kurukshetra adorned with the golden standards of Bhishma, who knew no tiredness in battle, whom no warrior could face.

How, then, can you have any hope for victory? When the king of the Sindhus and Bhurisravas have been slain in the very midst of so many mighty maharathas, do you still not see how this war must inevitably end?

Kripa, well nigh impossible to defeat, is still alive, Rajan! He did not follow Jayadratha out of this world, and I applaud him. When I saw Bhishma himself, whom not the Devas led by Indra, could vanquish in battle, felled before your very eyes, I thought that the Earth had abandoned you.

Look where the troops of the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, united, come rushing at me. To bring you victory, I swear that I will not remove my armour until I have killed all the Panchalas. Rajan, go and tell my son Aswatthaman that even at the risk of his life he must attack the Somakas without let.

Say to him and yourself follow what I tell you now: Observe all the teachings you have received from your father. Be firm in deeds of humility, in self-restraint, in satya and dharma. Observe dharma, artha, and kama, but, most of all, you must always follow the way of dharma. You must always gratify the Brahmanas with gifts. All of them deserve your worship. You must never do anything to hurt them. They are like flames. As for myself, I will break into the enemy army, O Parantapa, for a great battle, for you have pierced me with words sharper than arrows. If you can, Suyodhana, go and protect the troops. Both the Kurus and the Srinjayas are full of rage. They will fight even during the night."

Saying this to Duryodhana, Drona rides against the Pandavas. He, the Brahmana warrior, goes forth to eclipse the tejas of the Kshatriya like the sun dimming the light of the stars.'"

CANTO 148

Jayadratha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana, a being of absolute rage now, sets his heart on battle: to kill or be slain. He says to Karna, "Look how the Kiritin son of Pandu, with only Krishna going with him, penetrated three vyuhas of Drona, formations that the Devas themselves could not pierce and, in the very sight of the illustrious Acharya and all our other maharathas, killed Jayadratha.

Look, Karna, at the countless great kings lying dead on the earth, killed by Arjuna, like a host of little creatures by a single great lion, despite Drona and I doing our utmost to stop Arjuna. The son of Indra has reduced my army to a small remnant of what it was. How could Arjuna have kept his impossible vow unless Drona himself allowed it? Ah, truly, Arjuna always was and still is exceedingly dear to our illustrious Acharya! And for this he allowed Arjuna into the great Sakata vyuha, without properly fighting him.

My friend, look at my misfortune! Having first assured Jayadratha of his protection, Drona let Arjuna into our army like a tiger into a calf-pen. If the Brahmana had allowed Jayadratha to return to his kingdom, as the Saindhava so dearly wanted to, this day's unimaginable carnage would never have occurred and our army would not have been reduced to a mere

fraction of its great size. Ah, I was a fool to believe Drona when he swore to protect Jayadratha! I should have let Dussala's husband return to his kingdom. And for my foolishness, today so many of my brothers, led by mighty Chitrasena, have perished before our very eyes."

Karna says, "Do not blame the Acharya, for he is giving his all in battle, and without a care for his very life. If Arjuna broke into our army, no fault attaches to Drona. Arjuna is a great maharatha, and he is young compared to the Acharya; the Pandava is renowned for his speed. Armed with devastras and mounted on his ratha that flies the Hanuman banner, with the reins of his horses in the hands of Krishna, cased in impenetrable armour and wielding the celestial Gandiva, Arjuna bested Drona, who is old now. There is nothing to wonder at this and certainly nothing to blame Drona for. He has not betrayed you in any way, only that his age slows him and tires him quickly, and, most of all, Arjuna has Krishna for his sarathy!

For myself, I believe that whatever Fate had ordained will come to pass, for while Arjuna swept his way deep into our vyuhas and slew Jayadratha, Drona, for all his prowess, could not vanquish the Pandavas and take Yudhishtira captive. Despite all our concerted efforts, despite all of us giving our all in battle, Arjuna yet succeeded in killing Jayadratha and fulfilling his impossible vow. Surely, this could only have happened because Fate did not smile on us.

Duryodhana, the truth is that we have always tried to harm the Pandavas, resorting to both deceit and strength. Whatever a man crossed by Fate attempts is undone by Fate, however the man himself may strive to achieve his end. Whatever a persevering man should do, he must do fearlessly, without caring for the outcome of his exertions. Success and failure depend on destiny!

We have wronged the sons of Pandu. We first tried to poison them, and then immolate them in the house of lac. Finally, we vanquished them deceitfully at the game of dice; we humiliated them and banished them to the forest. Fate seemed to be with us at that time and now seems to have turned against us. It appears, Duryodhana, that now you must reverse the present course of fate as well as fight the Pandavas. Fight resolutely, fight with all your might and valour and only then can you still possibly prevail. Fight without doubt and fear and the side which excels the other will triumph.

The Pandavas have used no superior intelligence or strategy in this war, and neither have your methods been inferior or wanting. I say to you again that inscrutable Fate alone decides the outcome of all karma, wise or unwise. Fate, ever intent on its own purposes, is awake when all else sleeps. Vast was your army, and your warriors numberless, when the battle began. Though their host was smaller, it would seem that their warriors were more effective in battle and we find ourselves terribly reduced. I fear it is the work of Fate that has frustrated our efforts."

Rajan, while Karna and Duryodhana thus confer, the Pandava akshauhini comes into view, eager for fight. Another fevered battle breaks out between your legions and theirs, with chariots, horsemen and elephants flying at each other.

Remember, O Dhritarashtra, that your evil policy towards the Pandavas is the single root and cause of all this bloodshed!'"

CANTO 149

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva

"Sanjaya says, 'Your elephant force, Rajan, burgeoning with might, fights everywhere, prevailing over the Pandava forces. Determined either to find the next world or to triumph, the Panchalas and the Kauravas fight for admission into the swelling domains of Yama. Fearless warriors face valiant rivals, drawing geysers of blood with arrows, spears and darts and despatch one another to Yama's abode in thick streams. Dreadful and savage is the battle between the maharathas who cause blood to flow furiously across Kurukshetra.

Infuriated elephants gore each another deep with great curved tusks. Horsemen, seeking glory, cut one another down in the terrific melee with lances, arrows and battle-axes. Foot-soldiers too, in hundreds, repeatedly attack one another with resolute ferocity! So great is the bedlam, that the Panchalas and the Kurus can only be distinguished from the tribal, family and personal names they shout as battle cries. Horrible and relentless is the carnage everywhere, and darkness mantles the field of death for by now the sun has set. Deranged with wrath at the slaying of Jayadratha, and more than willing to lay down his life, Duryodhana charges straight into the midst of the Pandavas. Filling the earth with the rumble of his chariot-wheels and

making Bhumi tremble, your son and his forces attack the Pandava host headlong and terrific is the battle between the two forces and blood runs in frothing streams on the ground.

Like the meridian sun that burns everything with his rays at midday, the blazing Suyodhana scathes the enemy forces with relentless flights of arrows so that the Pandavas cannot even look at him. Indeed, so terribly and gloriously does he fight, that the sons of Pandu and their legions despair of defeating the Kauravas and, slaughtered by your lustrous son, his tides of gold-winged arrowheads ablaze, the Panchalas flee in all directions.

Duryodhana mows down the Pandava legions as he pleases, heads and severed arms falling like rain onto the gory ground. Truly, Rajan, none among the Pandavas has achieved the feats that Duryodhana now does on the darkling field. He ravages the enemy like great Surya and Vayu wilting a pool of lotuses with their searing rays and arid winds.

He strikes the Panchalas and Bhimasena with ten shafts, each of the sons of Madri with three, Virata and Drupada each with six, Sikhandin with a hundred, Dhrishtadyumna with seventy, Yudhishtira with seven, Satwata with five, each of the five sons of Draupadi with three, Ghatotkacha also with many barbs, and the Kaikeyas and the Chedis with innumerable keen arrows, and then roars like a mythic lion from time out of mind. Annihilating hundreds of other warriors as well as elephants and horses with his fierce shafts, he is like Rudra devouring the creatures at the pralaya.

Then Yudhishtira rives his bow in three with two immaculate broad-headed arrows. He strikes Duryodhana with ten potent shafts loosed in an unbroken line that pass clean through Duryodhana's limbs and pierce the earth behind him. The Pandava troops surround Yudhishtira, as the Devas did Purandara when he killed Vritra.

Another mighty shaft from Yudhishtira fells Suyodhana onto his knees in his great ratha. Thereupon, the Panchala troops roar in jubilation, "Duryodhana is slain!"

Now we hear a great and wild buzzing of countless arrows, like many swarms of bees, O Bhaarata, and Drona appears, holding up the enemy with a firestorm of arrows that light up the early night. Meanwhile, Duryodhana recovers, seizes up a fresh bow and charges Yudhishtira, roaring, "Stop and fight!" Sensing victory, the Panchalas charge Drona, who, unruffled, implacable, has rushed to the rescue of your son and now beats back the

Panchalas and decimates their troops spraying blood copiously everywhere. Yet another pitched and lethal battle erupts and rills of blood flow glimmering in the soft and dreadful dark.'"

CANTO 150

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When the mighty Drona breaks through the Pandava ranks and rides his ratha all over the battlefield, how do the Pandavas stop him? Who protects the right wheel and who the left wheel of his chariot as he slaughters the enemy? Who are the brave warriors who follow him and protect his back? Who are those who confront the maharatha? When that the greatest of all warriors, dancing in his chariot scythes his way into the Pandava host, his enemies must feel an unseasonable cold in their very bones. They must tremble like cattle exposed to wintry blasts. How does the bull among rathikas, who consumes all the Panchala troops like a raging conflagration, meet his death?'

Sanjaya says, "After killing Jayadratha at the twilight hour, Arjuna meets Yudhishtira and Satyaki, and then rides at Drona, as do Yudhishtira and Bhimasena, each with an akshauhini of troops. The intelligent Nakula, the invincible Sahadeva, and Dhrishtadyumna, with their divisions, Virata, and the king of the Salwas with a large force, also advance against Drona. Dhrishtadyumna's father, king Drupada, leads the Panchalas against the Acharya as do the sons of Draupadi and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha with his feral army. The Prabhadraka–Panchalas, too, six thousand strong and all

great fighters led by Sikhandin, advance against Drona. Other leading Kshatriyas and maharathas among the Pandavas unite and take the field against Drona.

As these heroic warriors, O Bharatarishabha, fly into battle, the night by now is pitch dark, increasing the terrors of the timid. During this hour of darkness, Rajan, numberless warriors, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers die and jackals howling all around create great fear with their blazing mouths and predatory owls with lamp like eyes perch on the standards of the Kauravas and hoot abysmally, foretelling further murdering.

A grim and resounding uproar arises everywhere from the troops, mingling with the loud beating of drums and cymbals clashing, deep grunts of elephants, neighing of horses, and stamping of horses' hooves and a truly dreadful battle ensues between Drona and all the Srinjayas. The world is enveloped in utter darkness; the sky is obscured by the dust raised by the combatants and nothing can be seen. The blood of men, horses and elephants flow freely together with palls of dust and disappears into the thirsty earth and all of us are overwhelmed by dejection and panic.

During this grimmest night, we hear weapons clashing, which sound like a burning forest of bamboos upon a mountain. With the sounds of drums like mridangas, anakas, vallakis and patahas, with the shouting and neighing, horrific pandemonium rules the dark. No one can tell friend from foe and madness possesses all in the night. The showers of blood everywhere quickly settle the dust arisen, O Bharatarishabha, and the golden coats of mail and the bright ornaments of the warriors glint some light through the gloom.

When the blood-drenched dust settles, the air clears and the Bharata host adorned with gems and gold and wielding spears and standards looks like the sky strewn with dim twinkling stars. Kurukshetra resounds with the howls of jackals, the cawing of crows, the grunts of elephants, and the shouts, roars and screams of warriors. All these sounds mingle into a hair-raising din and fill all the points of the compass like the report of Indra's thunder.

At dead of night, the Bharata host is illumined by the angadas, earrings, cuirasses, and the other weapons of the fighting men. The elephants and chariots, adorned with gold, look like clouds charged with lightning. Swords, arrows, maces, scimitars, clubs, lances and axes, as they fall, are dazzling flashes of fire. Duryodhana is the gust of wind that is the precursor

of the two tempestuous armies. Chariots and elephants are its dry clouds and the loud noise of drums and other instruments form the peals of its thunder and the bright standards and bows its lightning flashes.

Drona and the Pandavas are its rainclouds, while swords, darts and maces are its thunder, arrows are its downpour, and ceaseless flights of every other kind of weapon are its blasting winds. Hot are these deadly storms that blow, or agonisingly cold, as they claim lives past all count. There is nothing that can protect the warriors from death's night gale. Brave men who still lust after battle enter into the frightful fray on this dread night that echoes with horrifying sounds, which sharpen the fears of the timid and swell the joy of heroes.

As the war at night swells, the Pandus and the Srinjayas unite and attack Drona. However, Rajan, all who advance against the illustrious Drona are either forced to turn back or despatched to the halls of Yama. Indeed, on this appalling night, Drona by himself cuts down thousands of elephants, tens of thousands of chariots, and millions of foot-soldiers and horses.'"

CANTO 151

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'As the invincible Drona Mahatejasvin, his wrath stirred by Jayadratha's death, wreaks havoc upon the Srinjayas, what do my sons and the rest of you feel? After the death of Jayadratha and of the great Bhurisravas, and after the Acharya says what he did to my recalcitrant Duryodhana, when that maharatha Brahmana breaks viciously on the Panchalas by night, scattering them, what does Arjuna do? What does Duryodhana think that he should do now? Who follows the boon-giving hero, the foremost of Brahmana warriors, and stands behind him while he fights so dreadfully, like all the spirits of darkness embodied, and who fights in his van? Ah, Suta, as you speak I can feel upon my very skin the fear and devastation that Drona brings to the Pandava host; I feel them tremble like cows under a wintry sky.

After he breaks into the midst of the Panchala forces, how does this Parantapa, the Naravyaghra, meet with his death? When on that night all the troops unite and all the great Pandava maharathas combine and Drona still rules the dark disdainfully, imperiously, which of our best warriors stand and face him?

You also say that my troops are either being slain or huddle together, and that my maharathas have lost their chariots having had them shattered by the sons of Pandu. While the Pandavas fetch terror and death to our forces, how do they withstand those shuras in the gruesome dark? You say that the Pandavas are heartened and full of hope for victory, while my troops are dejected and panic-stricken. How, O Sanjaya, do you perceive this distinction between the Kurus and the advancing Parthas? Tell me all, old friend, and in every detail.'

Sanjaya says, 'As the red and black night deepens, Rajan, the Pandavas and the Somakas all attack Drona. As if he sees through the dark as clearly as by daylight, Drona kills all the Kaikeyas and the sons of Dhrishtadyumna, as well as many other maharathas. At this, king Sibi, master archer, challenges the heroic son of Bharadwaja, and seeing this great hero riding at him, maharatha Drona strikes him with ten thick iron barbs. Sibi drills Drona with thirty arrows, fitted with kanka feathers; smiling fiercely, he fells Drona's charioteer with a broad-headed shaft. Drona kills the illustrious Sibi's horses and his charioteer and, quicker than it takes to tell, hacks off Sibi's head, with its crown and helmet.

Duryodhana sends a charioteer out to Drona and as soon as this sarathy takes up the Brahmana's reins, the Acharya resumes his savage decimation of his enemies.

Full of rage at Bhima having slain his father, the Kalinga king, supported by his troops, attacks Bhimasena. He first strikes Bhima with five arrows and again with seven more; rakes Bhima's sarathy Visoka with three perfect shafts and cuts a wedge from his proud standard with another. Roaring, Vrikodara leaps off his chariot straight onto his adversary's ratha, kills the Kalinga with his bare hands, tears him limb from limb, and strews black Kurukshetra with the pieces of his body!

Karna, the brother of the slain prince and others cannot bear to watch the brutal deed and looses narachas like venomous serpents at the giant Pandava. Jumping down from Kalinga's ratha, Bhima, covered in gore, runs to the chariot of Dhruva, the brother of the king whom he has just dismembered, and strikes that Kalinga prince a single blow with his fist that shatters his royal head like a melon and Dhruva dies.

Bhimasena, now roaring like a king lion in great fury, runs to the chariot of Jayarata, and dragging Jayarata down onto the ground with his left hand, kills him with a slap of his right, which blasts his head off his neck and

inundates Bhima with his blood as well. All this he does before Karna's eyes and Karna casts a golden spear like a gash of lightning at him. But, smiling hideously, the Pandava seizes the golden lance and hurls it back at Karna! In the very nick of time, Sakuni divides that lance before it can reach Karna.

Having killed these three Kalingas, Bhima returns to his own chariot in some satisfaction, dripping scarlet, and charges your troops again, mowing them down before him like Yama himself enraged. Your sons steel themselves to stand firm against the advent of the horrible apparition and cover the hulking Pandava with ceaseless showers of arrows.

Grinning fiendishly, Bhima unleashes a gust of arrows at Durmada's charioteer and horses, sending them in a wink to Yama. Durmada quickly mounts Dushkarna's chariot and together they charge Bhima, even like Varuna and Surya rushing against Taraka, that best of Daityas. They pierce Bhima with a hundred arrows. However, in the very sight of Karna, Aswatthaman, Duryodhana, Kripa, Somadatta and Balhika, Bhima stamps his great foot with such violence that the wheels of Dushkarna's ratha sink into the earth. In a flash, Bhima is upon them, striking them wildly with inexorable blows of his prodigious fists, beating both into a pulp of blood, bone and flesh so they are a single mangled corpse. Horrified wails arise from your watching troops.

Their kings look at Bhima and say, "That is Rudra who fights from Bhima's body. This is Rudra come among the Dhartarashtras." And deranged by the titan's awful ferocity, they all flee in all directions whipping their horses to their greatest speed. Indeed, no two of them can be seen fleeing together such is their absolute panic in the hellish night.

Many kings applaud Vrikodara when he brings bloody havoc to your army in the night. His eyes as beautiful as full-blown lotuses, he goes to Yudhishtira and pays his respects to his brother. Nakula and Sahadeva, Drupada, Virata, the Kaikeyas, and Yudhishtira are overjoyed and honour Vrikodara just as the Devas did Mahadeva after he had killed Andhaka.

Then your sons, all equal to the sons of Varuna, and fulminant with wrath, ride with the awesome Drona and a large force of chariots, foot-soldiers, and elephants, and they surround Bhima, intent on putting an end to him. On this terrible night, Rajan, when everything is enveloped in darkness as if by a black thunderhead, another dreadful battle erupts

between those illustrious warriors, an unbridled contention that pleases the ravening hearts of wolves, crows and vultures.'"

CANTO 152

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'After Satyaki kills his son Bhurisravas, while he sat in praya, an outraged Somadatta says to Yuyudhana, "Why, O Satwata, have you abandoned the Kshatriya dharma that the great Gods ordained and taken to the ways of base bandits? Why would one who observes Kshatriya dharma and possesses wisdom strike a man who turns his back on battle, or one who has become helpless, or one who has laid down his weapons, or one who begs for quarter? Two among the Vrishnis are reputed to be the best of great maharathas—Pradyumna of mighty tejas and you, Satyaki! Why then did you act so cruelly and sinfully towards one who sat on praya and who had, besides, his arm hewn off by Partha?

Now reap the fruit of what you did to my son, sinner! For I mean to cut your head off with a winged and powerful astra. I swear by my two sons who are dear to me and by all my deeds of punya, that if I do not kill you before this night passes, you who are so proud of your heroism, with your sons and younger brothers, unless Pritha's son Arjuna protects you, then let me sink into terrible hell, O wretch of the Vrishnis!"

Saying this, and demented with grief, the mighty Somadatta blows his conch and gives a leonine roar. Satyaki, with eyes like lotus-petals and teeth

like a lion's, says angrily to Somadatta, "O you of Kuru's race, whether fighting you, or any other, no trace of fear enters my heart. Even if you fight me protected by all your troops, I will have no complaint! I always observe Kshatriya dharma and you cannot frighten me with brave, brash words or with insults. If you want to fight me today, strike me with arrows and I will do the same.

Your son, the maharatha Bhurisravas, Rajan, I have slain; and Sala, and Vrishasena, I have vanquished. And I will kill you as well today with all your sons and kinsmen. Fight with resolve for you, Kaurava, are endowed with great strength. Yet Somadatta, you are already dead for you fight against mahatejasvin Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, of the drum banner, in whom there is always charity, self-restraint, purity of heart, compassion, modesty, intelligence, forgiveness, and all else that is indestructible. You will die along with Karna and Subala's son Sakuni. I swear by Krishna's feet and by all my punya that I will kill you and your sons. You will save yourself only if you flee from battle.

After addressing each other thus, their eyes red with fury, the two great Kshatriyas begin to fight with arrows. Then with a thousand rathas and ten thousand horsemen, Duryodhana casts a defensive circle around Somadatta, as does Sakuni armed with every kind of astra and supported by his sons, grandsons and brothers: why, a power to equal Indra's. Your brother-in-law, Rajan, young in years and his body hard as the Vajra, and canny and wise, has a hundred thousand brave horsemen with him with which force he defends Somadatta. Protected by these powerful ones, Somadatta shrouds Satyaki with clouds of arrows.

Seeing Satyaki so besieged, Dhrishtadyumna rushes up to protect him with a large force, and the two vast legions collide with a sound like that of many oceans lashed into fury by tearing hurricanes. Somadatta pierces Satyaki with nine arrows; Yuyudhana strikes him back also with nine shafts of such power that Somadatta staggers and sits down abruptly in his chariot, fainted. His sarathy whisks him away from the battle. Drona sees this and arrives swiftly to face the Yadu hero.

Seeing the Acharya attack him, many Pandava warriors led by Yudhishtira come to Satyaki's rescue. Then commences a battle between Drona and the Pandavas, like that between Bali and the Devas for the sovereignty of the three worlds. Drona covers the Pandava host with a barrage of arrows and sharply wounds Yudhishtira. He strikes Satyaki with

ten barbed shafts, Dhrishtadyumna with twenty, Bhimasena with nine, Nakula with five, Sahadeva with eight, Sikhandin with a hundred, and each of the five sons of Draupadi with five. Next, he shoots Virata with eight arrows, Drupada with ten, Yudhamanyu with three and Uttamaujas with six. And piercing many other warriors, he rushes towards Yudhishtira whose troops run in all directions wailing.

Seeing Drona slaughter his forces, an incensed Arjuna quickly rides up to contain the Acharya. Now Yudhishtira's army rallies to support him and, again, the fierce battle between Drona and the Pandavas ensues. Drona, supported by your sons, begins to consume the Pandava host like a fire devouring a heap of cotton. He is radiant like the sun at dead of night, and like a blazing fire he looses his ray-like arrows without any moment's lapse from his bow, which is always drawn into a circle. Like the sun he scorches everything around him and consumes his enemies, and there is none in that army who can stop him.

Drona's shafts hack away the heads of all who venture to confront him before burrowing into the earth. Butchered by the illustrious Brahmana, the Pandava host once more turns tail and flees in the very presence of Arjuna. Seeing the rout that Drona perpetrates, at Arjuna's instance, Krishna guides his ratha harnessed to horses white as silver, or milk, or the kunda flower, or the moon, towards Drona's chariot. Bhimasena, too, seeing Phalguna ride at Drona, says to his charioteer, "Take me towards Drona's legion."

Visoka urges his horses down Arjuna's wake. Seeing the two brothers ride towards Drona's akshauhini, the greatest maharathas among the Panchalas, the Srinjayas, the Matsyas, the Chedis, the Karushas, the Kosalas, and the Kaikeyas, all follow them. Then, Rajan, a hair-raising battle breaks out as two mighty squadrons of rathas led by Arjuna and Bhima attack your host; the former on the right and the latter in the van. Seeing them dimly in the night lit by flaming astras, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki rush to support them.

The two hosts come together with a sound that is like the noise made by many seas lashed into fury by many tempests. Spying Satyaki in the battle, Aswatthaman, wroth at the killing of Bhurisravas, rides furiously against him. However, Bhimasena's Rakshasa son, the towering Ghatotkacha, riding on a massive chariot of black iron covered with bear-skins, which is twelve thousand cubits tall and wide, swoops down on Drona's son, coming like another night himself.

The eerie creatures yoked to it are neither horses nor elephants, but strange beasts big as elephants. On its lofty flagstaff is perched a prince of vultures with outstretched wings and outspread talons, with glaring, unwinking eyes, and shrieking dreadfully. The immense ratha is festooned with red flags, decked with the entrails of various animals and fitted with eight wheels. Riding on it, is a full akshauhini of the most ferile and macabre Rakshasas armed with spears, great clubs, rocks and trees, all surrounding their prince Ghatotkacha.

Seeing Ghatotkacha come to battle at night, the time when his kind are at their strongest, the enemy kings are struck with fear. He, the prince of Rakshasas, looms like some great black hill of terrible aspect, altogether frightful, with terrible fangs bared and his visage fierce, with arrowhead-like ears and high cheek-bones, stiff hair rising straight up from his head, glittering eyes, a sunken belly, a blazing mouth yawned wide as a chasm, and a crown on his head, darkly splendid, and waves of terror sweep your son's army even like the current of the Ganga agitated by the wind.

At his dreadful roars, elephants spray urine and dung and the kings tremble. Then the Rakshasas, whose day is night, cover the field with a shower of stones, with wheeling chakras, bhundis, darts, lances, spears, sataghnis and axes. Rajan, all your sons and Karna flee from that ghastly phalanx. Only Drona's proud son Aswatthaman, ever arrogant of his valour, stands fearlessly and quickly dispels the mayic illusions that Ghatotkacha creates.

His rage mounting, Ghatotkacha looses a tirade of arrows at Aswatthaman, which pass through his body, emerging dyed with his blood and streak into the earth like snakes into an anthill. However, an inspired Aswatthaman does not flinch but wounds Ghatotkacha deeply in all his marmas with ten arrows that lance agony through the great Rakshasas so he throws back his head and howls abysmally. Bhima's son takes up a chakra with a thousand spokes and an edge sharp as a razor, shining like the rising sun and adorned with diamonds, and hurls it at Aswatthaman. As the wheel flies spinning towards Drona's son, he shatters it into fragments with a tremendous volley and it falls onto the earth, like the cherished hopes of an ill-fated man.

Ghatotkacha swiftly mantles Aswatthaman with a torrent of thunderbolts, even like Rahu swallowing the Sun. Meanwhile, Ghatotkacha's splendid son Anjanaparvan, looking like a mass of shining

antimony, checks the Brahmana warrior like Meru, king of the mountains, checking the coursing wind. Beleaguered and bleeding profusely from the recalescent arrows of Bhimasena's grandson, Aswatthaman looks like Sumeru receiving a lashing of rain from a mighty cloud.

By the moment battle fury mounts in Aswatthaman, who is no less than Rudra, of whom he is often called an amsa, or Upendra in prowess, and with one shaft he smashes Anjanaparvan's standard, with two more kills his two charioteers, and with three others, his trivenuka. Next, with a single astounding shaft he destroys his bow and slaughters his horses with four more thick barbs. His ratha rendered useless, Anjanaparvan picks up a sword engraved with golden stars but Aswatthaman breaks it in two in his hands with a single arrow.

Hidimba's grandson hefts a gold-chased mace and, whirling it over his head casts it like fell lightning at Aswatthama, who calmly smashes it into dust even as it flares at him. Now, Anjanaparvan flies up high into the air, snatching up some trees as he goes! Roaring like a thunderhead from above, he hurls the trees down over Aswatthaman like thunderbolts. Adroitly avoiding these, Drona's son covers Anjanaparvan, the mayavi hanging in the sky, with an upward storm of shafts.

The Rakshasa descends again on to his gold-decked chariot, still looking like a high and beautiful hill of antimony running rillets of blood. And finally, Aswatthaman kills Anjanaparvan, cased in a heavy iron coat of mail, even like Mahadeva killed the Asura Andhaka in olden days. Seeing his mighty son slain, Ghatotkacha's roars erupt like peals of thunder across dark Kurukshetra; he rides up to Drona's son who now consumes the Pandava troops like a raging forest-fire, and cries: "Stop and fight me, O son of Drona! You will not escape me alive! I will kill you today like Agni's son did Krauncha."

Aswatthaman replies, "Go, child, and fight others, O you who have the power of a Deva. It is not proper, O son of Hidimbi, that I should have battle with one who is like a son to me. I have no grudge against you! Yet, when one's ire is roused, one may even kill one's own self."

Ghatotkacha, stricken at the death of his son, and his eyes red as copper, tells Aswatthaman, "Am I a coward, O son of Drona, that you try, like some vulgar fellow, to frighten me with this talk? Your words do not become you. I have been sired by Bhima in the celebrated Kuru vamsa and I am a son of the Pandavas, the heroes who never retreat from battle. I am also the king of

the Rakshasas, equal to the ten-headed Ravana in prowess. Stop, Stop, O son of Drona! Brahmana, I will remove your very wish for battle and you will not escape me alive today!"

With that, Ghatotkacha, son of Bhima, attacks Aswatthaman like a lion a prince of elephants. He unleashes a gale of arrows of the measure of akshas at the Brahmana bull among maharathas. Aswatthaman consummately cuts down the furious shafts before they can reach him. The night sky is lit up bright with the astras the two loose at each other, and the sparks that flow down in cascades from the unearthly weapons locked together are like vast swarms of fireflies.

Ghatotkacha uses fluent sorcery, maya, against Drona's son, who, however, is particularly adept at dispelling such illusions and proud of his prowess at this. Ghatotkacha quickly makes himself invisible with maya and again suddenly assumes the towering form of a great mountain appeared out of nowhere, crowded with cliffs, trees and fountains from which spears, lances, swords and heavy clubs flow in a cataract. Aswatthaman remains unmoved and invokes the Vajrastra, imbued with the force of thunder, which blasts the mayic mountain into the stuff of dreams of which it is made.

Now the Rakshasa becomes a mass of deep blue clouds in the sky, decked with a rainbow, and begins to hurl down storms of stones and rocks on Drona's son. Then summoning the Vayavyastra, Aswatthaman blows away the sorcerous cloud mass. Seamlessly, he turns his attention back to the ground and the battlefield plunged in night and now using every devastra at his command, without the least restraint, covers all the points of the compass with his flaming arrows and, in moments, kills a hundred thousand maharathas.

He sees Ghatotkacha riding fearlessly at him, with bent bow and a large cohort of tigerish Rakshasas, some riding elephants, some on dark chariots and some on enormous horses, all followers of the son of Hidimbi, their faces fearsome, their heads and necks great and outlandish. These Rakshasas are from the strains of both Paulastyas and Yatudhanas, their powers equal to that of Indra, and they carry large and exotic weapons and wear diverse kinds of mail not seen among human warriors. So terrible are they and so obviously hard to quell, and swollen with rage, that Duryodhana looks at them and is plunged into swift dejection.

Aswatthaman tells him, “Stop, O Duryodhana! You need have no fear. Stand aside with your brothers and these lords of earth, powerful as Indra. I swear that I will kill all your enemies and you will not face defeat. Meanwhile, reassure your troops of this.”

Duryodhana replies, “I do not find what you say surprising for your heart is great, O son of Drona, and your love for us greater.”

Then he says to Sakuni, “Arjuna fights supported by a hundred thousand maharathas of untold valour. Ride against him, Matulan, with sixty thousand rathas, while Karna, Vrishasena, Kripa, Nila, Kritavarman, the sons of Purumitra, Dusasana, Nikumbha, Kundabhedin, Puranjaya, Dridharatha, Hemakampana, Salya, Aruni, Indrasena, Sanjaya, Vijaya, Jaya, Purakrathin, Jayavarman, Sudarshana, and the Northerners will follow you with sixty thousand foot-soldiers. O my uncle, kill Bhima, the twins and Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, as Indra did the Asuras. You are my hope of victory. Drona’s son has already grievously wounded them, mauling all their limbs; so now kill the sons of Kunti, O Sakuni, like Kartikeya slaying the Asuras.”

Sakuni hears this and, without hesitating a moment, rides forth to have the Pandavas’ lives, filling your son’s heart with delight. Meanwhile, Rajan, a fearsome battle is underway between the Rakshasas and Aswatthaman, truly like that between Sakra and Prahlada in days of yore. A raging Ghatotkacha strikes Drona’s son in the chest with ten powerful shafts, fierce as poison or fire, and Aswatthaman trembles on his ratha like a tall tree shaken by a storm. With a broad-headed arrow, Bhima’s son severs the bright bow in Aswatthaman’s hands.

Aswatthaman sweeps up another mighty bow and looses an occult, spreading torrent of shafts at all the Rakshasas. These shafts draw gushes of blood from the great Rakshasa legion and they are like a herd of elephants harried by a pride of lions. Drona’s son overwhelms Ghatotkacha’s Rakshasas with their horses, charioteers and elephants, and blazes forth like Agni consuming all the living at the end of the Yuga.

With astras of recondite fire, he incinerates a full akshauhini of Rakshasa troops, and looks as magnificent as the divine Maheswara in Swarga after the Lord torched the triad city of Tripura from the sky. Aswatthaman shines forth on dark Kurukshetra like the apocalypse of the pralaya after it has cremated every creature.

A wild Ghatotkacha roars at his vast Rakshasa force, "Slay the son of Drona!"

Their fangs curved and bright like diamonds, their faces great and frightful, their mouths agape with long tongues lolling out, and their eyes burning in the darkness like ominous slitted flames, the night-rangers fill the world with their devastating roars; armed with strange and glinting weapons, they rush headlong at Aswatthaman, attacking him ferociously with thousands of sleek lances, sataghnis, spiked maces, asanis, axes, scimitars, maces, short arrows, heavy clubs, thick spears, swords, polished kampanas, kunapas, hulas, strange keening rockets, stones, vats of hot oil, thunas of black iron, and massive mallets, all dreadful and eerie.

Seeing this downpour of weapons fall upon the head of Drona's son, your warriors are shaken. Aswatthaman, however, nervelessly destroys the entire lot of ayudhas, looming in magnificence like a golden cloud rising by dark. Never pausing, he yet again razes entire hordes of the demons. The skill that Aswatthaman displays is wondrous, my lord, incomparable.

Alone and unsupported, an expert with great and mighty weapons, he consumes the seething Rakshasa army with his blazing astras in the very presence of Ghatotkacha, so they turn into pillars of ashes, which the wind scatters. Drona's son is irradiant in the night as the Samvartaka fire.

Indeed, Rajan, there is no warrior among all the thousands of great kings and Kshatriyas on that chasmal field that can face Aswatthaman as he devours the Pandava host as he pleases, none except Bhima's son Ghatotkacha. His coppery eyes by now rolling in wrath, biting his lips until they bleed, Ghatotkacha says in deathly quiet to his sarathy, "Take me to the son of Drona."

Riding on the formidable chariot that flies banners of victory, Bhima's son by Hidimbi rides again at Aswatthaman ablaze. With a roar to drown all gone before, he whirls a grave asani, an iron mace of celestial craft fitted with eight golden bells, and flings it like a thunder flash at Drona's son. But in a blink, Aswatthaman leaps high in his chariot, seizes the lethal weapon in his hands and casts it right back at the Brahmana! Now Ghatotkacha hurls himself out of his ratha and the incandescent asani explodes on his massive chariot, turning it to a heap of ashes along with its horses, charioteers and standard, and then lies still smouldering on the ground before subsiding in a reverberant susurrus.

Everyone applauds this feat of Drona's son. Ghatotkacha now runs to Dhrishtadyumna's chariot, takes up a bow as great as that of Indra himself, and shoots again at Aswatthaman. Dhrishtadyumna, too, pierces Aswatthaman's chest with many gold-winged shafts, all vicious as serpents. Drona's son retaliates with burning arrows by the thousands, which Ghatotkacha and Dhrishtadyumna repel with their own shafts of fire. The battle that swells between Ghatotkacha and Aswatthaman is awesome, terrible and it enthralls all the warriors around them, O Bharatarishabha!

Then, with thousands of rathas, three hundred elephants, and six thousand horsemen, Bhimasena arrives there. With unflagging zeal, Aswatthaman continues to fight Ghatotkacha and Dhrishtadyumna with his forces. Wondrous, past describing is the genius that Drona's son displays; why, one might well say that no one else could match his valour. In the flash of an eye, he slaughters a full akshauhini of Rakshasa troops with horses, charioteers, rathas and elephants, in the presence of Bhimasena, Ghatotkacha, Dhrishtadyumna, the twins, Yudhishtira, Arjuna and Krishna.

Struck deep by Aswatthaman's arrows, elephants fall on elephants like crestless mountains. Strewn all around with the still convulsing trunks of elephants lopped off, Kurukshetra looks as if it is overspread with writhing snakes. The field is resplendent with golden staves and royal parasols, like the sky at the end of the Yuga, shining with planets, stars, and many moons and suns. He lets flow a river of the blood of elephants, horses and warriors. Tall standards are its great frogs; drums its large tortoises; white royal parasols its rows of swans; yak-tails its kankas, vultures, and crocodiles; weapons its fish; elephants the rocks on its banks; horses, its sharks; chariots, its broad and shifting banks; and banners, its rows of fine trees. With arrows for its smaller fish, the frightful river has spears, darts and swords for snakes; marrow and flesh for its mire, and trunkless bodies floating on it for its rafts. It is choked with the hair of men and beasts, which are its moss and it filled the timid with fear. We see bloody waves on its surface and it is frightful because of the corpses of foot-soldiers that fill it. Yama's world is the ocean towards which this river flows.

After killing the Rakshasas, Aswatthaman now turns his supernatural archery on Ghatotkacha. He also lacerates the mighty Parthas, Vrikodara, the sons of Dhrishtadyumna and hacks away the head of Suratha, one of Drupada's sons. He kills Suratha's younger brother Satrunjaya, and then Valanika, followed by Jayanika and Jaya. He beheads Prishadhra with a

roar, and next the proud Chandrasena and, with ten exact arrows, despatches Kuntibhoja's ten sons.

Then, Rajan, he sends Srutayus to Yama, the Lord of Death. Now Aswatthaman, the terrible, affixes a devastra to his bowstring, draws it to his ear and unleashes that celestial weapon, like the very Yama danda, the rod of death, at Ghatotkacha. The astra blasts through Ghatotkacha's chest and bores into the ground behind him. Bhima's son collapses in his chariot.

Believing him dead, maharatha Dhrishtadyumna spirits him away and sets him on another chariot. And, Rajan, Yudhishtira's chariot legion flees the battle from Drona's invincible son, who throws back his head and gives a triumphant roar that shakes the earth, while all your sons and your army cry out his name and hail his feat. The earth, strewn all around with the fallen, hilly bodies of dead rakshasas, mangled and shredded by thousands of arrows, presents the face of an indescribable nightmare. The Siddhas, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Nagas, Pitris, black ravens, large numbers of pisachas, bhutas, Apsaras and Devas, all laud Aswatthaman, the son of Drona.'"

CANTO 153

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'On finding the sons of Drupada, Kuntibhoja and the Rakshasas, in their thousands, killed by Aswatthaman, Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki converge on him together, determined to stop him.

Somadatta sees Satyaki and rage surges up again in him and he looses a cataract of arrows at Yuyudhana. A bloody and thrilling battle breaks out again between your army and the enemy, Seeing Satyaki beset, Bhima attacks the Kaurava hero Somadatta, raking him with ten searing arrows. Somadatta replies with hundred frenzied shafts.

Then an angry Satyaki looses ten razor like thunderbolts at the grand old warrior, grieving over the death of his son Bhurisravas—Somadatta blessed with every estimable virtue, who is even like Yayati, the son of Nahusha. Yuyudhana strikes him again with seven excruciating shafts, while Bhimasena casts a dreadful adamantine parigha at the ancient. Satyaki gores Somadatta's chest with an exceptional astra fierce as fire. The parigha and the fire shaft, both strike him at once and fell the heroic Somadatta.

Seeing his son fallen into a swoon, Balhika rushes at Satyaki, covering him with arrows as a cloud does a mountain during the monsoon. Bhima, defending Satyaki, strikes the illustrious Bahlika with nine arrows, at which the mighty-armed son of Pratipa casts a javelin like Indra's Vajra at Bhima's great chest. Struck squarely, mighty Bhima trembles on his ratha and faints for a moment.

Recovering quickly, with a shattering roar, the titanic Pandava hurls a mace at Balhika, which strikes his head off in a scarlet explosion and that aged shura falls like an old and great tree struck by lightning. Upon his death, your sons Nagadatta, Dridharatha, Virabahu, Ayobhuja, Dridha, Suhasta, Viragas, Pramatha and Ugrayayin, each equal in prowess to Dasaratha's son Rama, rush at Bhima, their bows streaming deadly fire. Seeing them, Bhimasena's eyes light up and with nine marvellous arrows, loosed in a single moment, he kills them all, either taking their heads or blowing their hearts to shreds.

After killing your nine sons, Bhima shrouds Karna's favourite son in a swathe of arrows. The vaunted Vrikaratha, Karna's brother, strikes Bhima with a slew of powerful shafts but growling, the mighty Pandava takes his head from his neck with a wide-headed arrow. Next, O Bhaarata, he slays seven maharathas of Sakuni's forces, and strikes Satachandra down and rides over him with his chariot, crushing him into the earth. Unable to bear watching this savagery, Sakuni's brothers, five mighty Kshatriyas, Gavaksha, Sarabha, Vibhu, Subhaga and Bhanudatta rush at Bhimasena showering arrows at him. A calm Bhima gladly kills all five with five heavy shafts. Seeing those heroes killed, many other great Kshatriyas feel the touch of fear upon them and waver.

Showing uncommon fury, now Yudhishtira attacks your troops and begins to raze them as he pleases, in full view of Drona and your sons. He despatches the Ambashtas, the Malavas, the brave Trigartas, the Sibis, the Abhishahas, the Surasenas, the Bahlikas and the Vasatis, turning the earth soggy with flesh and blood. Turning in another direction, with ferocity so unexpected of the Ajatasatru, he sends the Yaudheyas and a large host of the Madrakas to Yama.

Now a loud tumult arises around Yudhishtira's chariot, and we hear roars and cries of, "Kill!" "Hack him to pieces!" "Seize him!"

Seeing the Dharmaraja raze your troops, Drona, urged on by your desperate son, unleashes the Vayavyastra at Yudhishtira. But the son of

Pandu counters the astra of the Wind with his own weapon of Vayu. Inflamed by this, Drona looses a clutch of unearthly astras at the Dharmaputra—the Varuna astra, the Yamya astra, the Agneya astra, the Tvashtra astra and the Savitra astra. But amazingly the gentle Yudhishtira, now turned into a pure Kshatriya warrior, easily negates every unworldly weapon that his Acharya aims at him.

Drona, determined to keep his vow to Duryodhana, invokes the Aindra and the Prajapatya astras to kill the son of Dharma. However, Kuruttama Yudhishtira, with the gait of an elephant or lion, of broad chest, large red eyes and endowed with tejas hardly less than that of Drona, summons the Mahendrastra to confound all Drona's celestial ayudhas. The Mahendra extinguishes Drona's entire volley. A livid Drona, his eyes aflame to kill the Pandava, his disciple, summons the Brahmastra so the dark filed is suddenly illumined as if by another blinding sun and all that watch are terror-stricken.

Seeing the Brahmastra invoked, Yudhishtira summons his own Brahmastra and the two great weapons extinguish each other. All the great maharathas there applaud both Drona and Yudhishtira.

In frustration, in great rage, his eyes turning the colour of copper, Drona turns away from Yudhishtira and begins to annihilate Drupada's akshauhini with the Vayavyastra. Before the very eyes of Bhimasena and Arjuna, the Panchala forces flee from the Acharya. Arjuna and Bhima check the flight of their troops and attack the enemy with two large divisions of rathas. Arjuna assails the right and Bhima the left, and they confront Bharadwaja's son with two veritable tornadoes of arrows. The Kaikeyas, the Srinjayas, and the vigorous Panchalas again follow the two brothers, Rajan, as do the Matsyas and the Satwatas.

And now Arjuna Kiritin brings such devastation to your army, already besieged by exhaustion and sleep, that they break ranks and flee. Drona and Duryodhana try to rally them but they cannot check their troops in their flight.'"

CANTO 154

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Looking at the vast, seething army of the Pandavas your son Duryodhana now thinks it impossible to withstand the enemy. He says to Karna, "Loyal friend, the hour has come when your friends need you most. O Karna, save us! Our army is encircled by the Panchalas, the Kaikeyas, the Matsyas, and their maharathas, all full of rage and like hissing snakes. There, the Pandavas, sure of victory, shout for joy. The teeming chariot-force of the Panchalas is now as powerful as Indra himself."

Karna replies, "If Purandara himself comes here to save Arjuna, I will vanquish even the Deva king before I kill that son of Pandu. Believe me that this is the truth. Be of good cheer, O Bhaarata! I will kill Arjuna and all the Panchalas and bring you victory even as Pavaka's son gave Vasava. I will achieve whatever you need to win this war.

Among all the Pandavas, Arjuna is most powerful and I will use Indra's shakti against him. Upon his death, his brothers will either surrender themselves to you or retire once more to the forest. As long as I am alive, O Kauravya, never yield to grief or despair. I will vanquish the united forces of the Pandavas, the Panchalas, the Kaikeyas, and the Vrishnis. I will make

porcupines of them with my arrows and I will give you the Earth and everything in it."

At this, Kripa, who is near enough to hear what Karna says, tells him with a sardonic smile, "Your speech is fair indeed, Karna! If fine words could fetch victory, surely with you for his protector, this Bharatarishabha Duryodhana would be thought to have abundant protection. But you boast so much in the presence of the Kuru king, but we seldom see you prove yourself with deeds to match.

Many times we have seen you fight the sons of Pandu, and on every occasion, O Suta's son, they have beaten you soundly. When the Gandharvas captured Duryodhana, all the men fought except you, who were the first to run away. Outside Virata's city, Arjuna defeated all the Kauravas including you and your younger brother. You are no match for even one of the sons of Pandu in battle; how can you expect to vanquish all of them together led by Krishna?

Karna, you brag too much! Sutaputra, good men, men of true worth, do not talk they prove themselves with their deeds. You, on the other hand, are always thundering like the dry clouds of autumn, and you have shown yourself to be a man of no substance. Sadly, Duryodhana does not seem to understand this.

You rant and roar, Karna, as long as you do not see Arjuna. And, as soon as you see him near, you fall silent. Indeed, you roar as long as you are out of range of Arjuna's arrows and your bragging is stanched the moment Partha's thunderbolts strike you. Kshatriyas prove themselves by their feats of arms; Brahmanas, by their wise and sacred speech; Arjuna proves himself with his bow, but Karna only by the castles he builds in the air.

Fool, who is there that can stand up to Pandu's son Partha who pleases Rudra himself?"

Thus railed at by Saradwat's son, Karna answers, "Heroes always boom like the clouds of the monsoon, and just like seeds planted in fertile soil, quickly sprout. I do not see any fault in heroes who accept great loads on their shoulders before making boastful speeches on the field of battle. When a man mentally resolves to bear a burden, Destiny itself helps him in its execution. Wishing in my heart to accept a great responsibility, I am always firm and resolved. If before killing the sons of Pandu with Krishna and Satwatas, I do proclaim what I will do, what is it to you, O Brahmana? True

heroes never roar fruitlessly like autumn clouds. Conscious of their own might, only the wise dare tell of it.

In my heart I am determined to vanquish Krishna and Partha today! It is for this that I declare myself, O son of Gotama! Now behold the fruit of my roars, Brahmana. Slaying the son of Pandu with all their followers, Krishna and the Satwatas, I will bestow this whole Earth on Duryodhana without a thorn in it."

Kripa replies, "I do not give much credence, Sutaputra, to your delirious boasting, for they are mere words not deeds. You always deprecate the two Krishnas and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. But Karna, Yudhishtira will have victory for he has the two Krishnas on his side. I tell you, the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, Manavas, the Nagas, and the Garudas cannot defeat Krishna and Arjuna.

Yudhishtira Dharmaputra is devoted to the Brahmanas, truthful in speech and self-controlled. He reveres the Pitris and the Devas, is devoted to the practice of satya and dharma, is a master of weapons, possesses great intelligence, and he is also grateful. His brothers are endowed with great strength and are masters of war. They are devoted to the service of their elders, possess wisdom and fame, and practise dharma. Their kinsmen are all powerful as Indra and great warriors, and they are all exceptionally devoted to the Pandavas. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, Janamejaya, the son of Durmukha, Chandrasena, Madrasena, Kritavarman, Dhruva, Dhara, Vasuchandra, Sutejana, the sons of Drupada, and Drupada himself, all maharathas and owners of devastras, and the king of the Matsyas with his younger brothers, all fight resolutely for Yudhishtira's cause.

Gajanika, Virabhadra, Sudarshana, Srutadhwaja, Balanika, Jayanika, Jayapirya, Vijaya, Labhalaksha, Jayaswa, Kamaratha, the handsome brothers of Virata, and the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, the five sons of Draupadi and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha all fight for the Pandavas. The sons of Pandu cannot be destroyed. Why, Bhima and Phalguna with their cosmic weapons can annihilate the entire universe, with the Devas, Asuras, and Manavas, with all the tribes of Yakshas and Rakshasas and with all the Gajas and Nagas, and all other creatures.

As for Yudhishtira, he can consume the whole world with just an angry look from his pure eyes. How, Karna, can you vanquish these enemies for whom Krishna of immeasurable might has donned armour? This intention

of yours, Sutaputra, is just your folly, that you dare contend with Sauri himself, who is the Lord of the universe."

Karna replies, smiling, "O Brahmana, whatever you say about the Pandavas is true. All the virtues you see in them, and many more besides, can be found in the sons of Pandu. It is true also that even the Devas led by Vasava, the Daityas, the Yakshas, and the Rakshasas cannot vanquish the Parthas. For all that, I, Karna, will defeat the Parthas using the inexorable astra given me by Indra. With that shakti, I will kill Arjuna and when he dies, all his brothers, and Krishna too will never enjoy sovereignty over the Earth, not without Arjuna. They will all perish. And then, this Bhumi, with her seas, will belong undisputedly to Suyodhana.

In this world, one can achieve anything one wants, as long as one plans carefully for it. This I know well, and that is why I venture to proclaim what I will do, O Kripa. As for you, you are old, a Brahmana by birth, and no Kshatriya. You bear too much love for the Pandavas and that is why you repeatedly belittle me. I have been patient, but if you speak mockingly to me again, I will cut out your tongue, O wretch!

You want to praise the Pandavas to frighten all our troops and the Kauravas. Listen to what I say now. Duryodhana, Drona, Sakuni, Durmukha, Jaya, Dusasana, Vrishasena, Salya, you, Somadatta, Drona's son and Vivimsati—all these maharathas are here with us, clad in armour. Which enemy, even if he has the power of Indra, can vanquish you all? All that I have named are great warriors, knowers of dharma, and have earned their place in Swarga. They can match the very gods in battle, and they have taken the field to kill the Pandavas for Duryodhana's sake.

I regard victory and defeat to depend on destiny, even in the case of the greatest maharathas. When Mahabaho Bhishma himself lies pierced with a hundred arrows, and Vikarna, Jayadratha, Bhurisravas, Jaya, Jalasandha, Sudakshina, Sala the great, Bhagadatta mahatejasvin and many others equal to them, heroes all and mightier than the Pandavas, lie on Kurukshetra, killed by the Pandavas, what can you think, O wretched Brahmana, except that all this is the result of destiny?

As for the enemies of Duryodhana, whom you so adore, their brave warriors, too, have been slaughtered in thousands. The armies of both the Kurus and the Pandavas diminish with every passing moment; I do not see in this the prowess of the Pandavas! For Duryodhana's sake, O lowest of

men, I will challenge the sons of Pandu with all my heart and all my might. As for victory, that depends on destiny.”””

CANTO 155

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Aswatthaman is at hand and, hearing his uncle Kripa spoken to so harshly and contemptuously by Karna, Drona's son draws his sword and, in the very presence of Duryodhana, rushes roaring at Karna.

Aswatthaman says, "Vile of men, Kripa speaks of the virtues that Arjuna truly has. And you dare rebuke him from being evil-minded and malicious. Your pride and insolence make you brag without a sane care for any of the world's great bowmen! Where was your great prowess when, after chasing you away like a dog, the Gandivi slew Jayadratha in your very sight? Vainly, O wretch of a Suta, do you carry in your mind the hope of beating him who once fought Mahadeva himself.

The very Devas and the Asuras united, and with Indra at their head, failed to vanquish Arjuna, with only Krishna for his ally. How then do you, Sutaputra, hope to defeat the greatest shura in the world, the unconquered Arjuna? But look now, vile Karna, what I, Aswatthaman, do to you today. Lowest of men, dimwitted, evil-minded Karna, I will cut your head from your neck!"

And Aswatthaman rushes furiously at Karna but Duryodhana and Kripa seize him together and firmly restrain him.

Then Karna says, “This dark-hearted dog of a Brahmana thinks he is great and boasts of his strength. Set him free, Duryodhana, and let him feel the might of Karna.”

Aswatthaman replies, “Son of a Suta, O you with an evil mind, we may pardon you, but Phalguna will quell your rising pride.”

Duryodhana intervenes and says, “Aswatthaman, control your anger. You must forgive, Anagha, and not be angry with Karna. Upon you, him, Kripa, Drona, Salya and Sakuni a great burden rests. Drive away your wrath, O best of Brahmanas! Look where all the Pandava troops advance to attack Karna. Indeed, here they come, challenging us all.”

Pacified by the king, Aswatthaman, the noble son of Drona, suppresses his fury and forgives Karna. Then the quiet and mild Acharya Kripa says to Karna, “Dark-hearted Sutaputra, we forgive you, but Arjuna will quell your pride.”

Meanwhile, the Pandavas and the Panchalas charge your army unitedly, with reverberant roars. Mahatejasvin Karna maharatha, leading many great Kuru warriors and looking like Indra in the midst of the Devas, waits, his bow drawn. As if each battle that erupts is more frightful and deafening than the ones gone before, so is the one that now breaks out between the Pandavas and the Panchalas and Karna and his forces.

The enemy warriors roar, *There stands Kana in his ratha!* and *Evil one, come fight us now!* Others, with eyes bulging in rage, cry, “Let our great Kshatriyas kill this arrogant wretch of little discernment, this son of a Suta. He must not live. This sinner is the Pandavas’ worst enemy. Loyal to Duryodhana, he is the root of all these evils that we have seen on Kurukshetra. Kill him!”

With these and other cries, and exhorted by Yudhishtira, many great Pandava and Panchala maharathas rush at Karna, unleashing a cataract of arrows at him. But the Sutaputra is supremely unmoved; no trace of fear lays its fingers on his heart and a mocking smile curves his fine lips. Seeing that sea of troops, Karna, like Death himself, begins to mow them down with clouds of arrows.

The Pandavas respond with arrows from their lakhs of bows; they fight Radha’s son as the Daityas of old fighting with Indra. Indeed, so evenly

matched are the two vast forces that the gory, magnificent contention between them is like the Devasura yuddha of old.

Karna's archery is wonderful, for not all his enemies combining against him can find a home in his body for a single arrow. He cut down all the barbs that streak at him in flight and responds by severing royal parasols, smashing chariots and killing enemy horses—all with arrows that bear his name upon them, every one. Harried by Karna so they quickly lose all assurance, the Pandava Kshatriyas begin to wander across the field like a herd of cattle stricken by bitter cold.

Struck by Karna's transcendent, godlike volleys, countless horses, elephants and maharathas fall dead and yet again the entire field is strewn with the severed heads and limbs of noble Kshatriyas. With the dead, the dying, and the wailing of wounded warriors, Kurukshetra by night truly resembles Yama's realm.

Duryodhana watches Karna at his splendid best, goes to Aswatthaman and tells him proudly, "Look where Karna torments and routs all the enemies massed against him! Why, he overwhelms them as Kartikeya did against the Asura host. And look where Arjuna now rides to kill him. Aswatthaman, my friend, you must protect Karna!"

Aswatthaman, Kripa, Salya and the great maharatha Kritavarman, son of Hridika, all ride against against Partha dashing towards them like Sakra against the Daitya host. They go gladly to support the heroic Karna. However, Rajan, Arjuna surrounded by the Panchalas presses on against Karna, like Purandara against the Asura Vritra.'

Dhritarashtra asks, 'Finding Phalguna advancing like Rudra himself, as he appears at the end of the Yuga, what does Karna do? Maharatha Karna, son of Vikartana, has always challenged Partha and always maintained that he can defeat the invincible Arjuna. What then, O Suta, does he do when he is suddenly face to face with his inveterate enemy?'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Arjuna rushing towards him like an elephant towards a rival elephant, Karna stands fearlessly up to him. Partha covers Karna with showers of shafts with wings of gold, and Karna envelops Vijaya with his arrows. Clouds of golden-winged, uncanny barbs they exchange, until, his rage boiling up, Karna strikes Arjuna with three deadly missiles. Arjuna can hardly bear to watch his adversary's virtuosity and looses a swath of thirty shafts at him, all with burning heads.

Arjuna strikes Karna through his left wrist with another long arrow, smiling, and forcing Karna to drop his bow. But Karna recovers in a flash, picks up his bow again and once more covers Arjuna with gales of wondrous fire, now showing his true unearthly skill. Not to be outdone, Dhananjaya cuts down Karna's arrow storms with his own.

Approaching each other quite close, these two greatest of all archers, fighting for honour, fighting at the outer limits of their incomparable prowess, continue to shoot at each other in an astounding display of genius, which makes one's hair stand on end.

Arjuna, inspired by his antagonist's prowess and swiftness of hand, lifts his archery and breaks Karna's bow at the very grip, kills his four horses with a scathe of wedge-headed shafts, and decapitates Karna's charioteer. As Karna stands vulnerable, Partha drills him with deadly volleys, so blood spouts from the golden Sutaputra. Karna leaps down from his useless ratha and quickly finds sanctuary in Kripa's chariot. Seeing Karna beaten again, your warriors run in all directions.

Duryodhana roars to them to stop. "Shuras, do not turn your backs on the battle. You bulls among Kshatriyas, stop! I will kill Partha myself, and all the Panchalas. When I fight the Gandivi today, he will see that my prowess is as that of Rudra at the end of the yuga. Today the Pandavas will find my arrows among them like locust swarms, like the torrents of rain that fall at summer's end.

Today I will put the proud Arjuna to rout and remove your fear of him. Arjuna will not withstand me today, brave heroes, even as the ocean can only dash helplessly against the continents."

His eyes red, Suyodhana rides at Arjuna, taking a teeming host with him. Seeing this, Kripa tells Aswatthaman, "Look, where Duryodhana, made mad by anger, goes to fight Arjuna, like an insect flying into a blazing fire. Stop him before this great king loses his life, in our very sight. He will certainly die if comes within range of Partha's arrows. My son, stop the king before Arjuna's astras make ashes of him. While we are still here and alive, it is a crime for the king to go into battle himself as if he has no one to fight for him. And if he engages Arjuna, his life will be good as lost!"

Aswatthaman rides quickly to the canny Duryodhana and says to him, "When I who love you am alive, O son of Gandhari, you must not go into battle yourself! Do not be anxious about vanquishing Arjuna, for I will stop

him for you. Stay here, O Suyodhana, and watch me fight the son of Pandu."

Duryodhana replies, "Drona always protects the sons of Pandu, as if they are his own sons. You, also, either do not put forth your true prowess against the Pandavas or it is my fate that your awesome might wanes as soon as you are faced with Kunti's sons. Perhaps, you bear Yudhishtira or Draupadi some exceptional love for otherwise I cannot fathom why you do not fight the Pandavas as you do our other enemies.

Ah, shame on me for my bottomless greed, for whose sake all my dearest friends, who dearly want to please me, find themselves vanquished and shamed on the field and plunged into great grief! But you, Aswatthaman, who are Mahadeva's very equal and can destroy the enemy, will not do it. O son of my Acharya, I beg you, be pleased with me and vanquish my enemies!

Neither the Devas nor the Danavas can stand your astras, O son of Drona. For my sake, for all our sakes, kill the Panchalas and the Somakas with all their followers. The rest, with your protection, we ourselves will slay. Look, O Brahmana, where the famed Somakas and the Panchalas blaze among my troops like a great forest fire. Douse them, Aswatthaman, as only you can, and the Kalikeyas; otherwise, led by Arjuna, they will annihilate us all.

O Aswatthaman, Parantapa, ride there in haste. Whether you achieve it now or later, you must accomplish this feat and fetch us victory. The Rishis have all said that you have been born for the destruction of the Panchalas and that you will remove them from this world. It will be as they have predicted. O Naravyaghra, fulfil your destiny and kill the Panchalas with all their forces. When even the Devas with Indra at their head cannot face your astras, what can these Parthas and Panchalas do?

I speak truly when I say that the Pandavas united with the Somakas are no match for you. Ride, O Mahabaho! Do not delay another instant for look, where stricken by Arjuna's tides of arrows, our army breaks up and flees. Use your celestial tejas, my friend, for you can bring ruin to the enemy by yourself!"""

CANTO 156

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

“Sanjaya says, ‘After Duryodhana speaks to him, Aswatthaman the insuperable is determined to annihilate the enemy. He tells your son, “It is as you say, O Kuruttama! The Pandavas are always dear to both my father and to me just as both of us are precious to them. But not in battle. We fight fearlessly, to the best of our abilities, and reckless of our lives. Karna, Salya, Kripa, Kritavarman and I could destroy the Pandava host in the twinkling of an eye just as the Pandavas could destroy the Kaurava host, if we were not here.

We fight the Pandavas to the best of our might, and they too fight us with their best strengths. Power, encountering power, is neutralised, O Bhaarata! I say to you, the Pandava army cannot be overcome as long as the sons of Pandu themselves are alive. The Pandavas are born with unworldly prowess and they are fighting in their own interest. Why, Duryodhana, should they not be able to kill your troops?

However, you are covetous and deceitful, Rajan, beyond all measure. You are vainglorious and suspicious of everything, which is why you suspect even us. I also think that you are evil, mean-spirited, selfish, why,

an embodiment of sin, that you question us after everything that we do for you, day after harrowing day.

As for myself, I fight with determination for your sake, always prepared to lay down my life for you. I will return to battle now, O Kuruttama, and will fight and kill a great host of your enemy. I will do battle with the Panchalas, the Somakas, the Kaikeyas, and the Pandavas as well, only to please you. Seared by my arrows today, the Chedis, the Panchalas and the Somakas will scatter like a herd of cattle hunted by a lion. Today, seeing my prowess, the Dharmaputra with all the Somakas will find the whole world filled with Aswatthamans. Yudhishtira will be heartbroken to watch me slaughter the Panchalas and Somakas.

I will, O Bhaarata, slay all who dare come near me and no one will escape me alive today."

Saying this to your son, the mahabaho Aswatthaman charges the enemy, his arrows flaring in all directions. He cries to the Panchalas and the Kaikeyas, "Great maharathas, strike me! Show me your prowess."

At this, all the enemy warriors shower their shafts upon Drona's son. Easily cutting down all their arrows, Aswatthaman kills ten brave warriors among them, in the very sight of Dhrishtadyumna and the sons of Pandu. The Panchalas and the Somakas abandon the fight and flee. Dhrishtadyumna rides into the fray surrounded by a hundred unflinching maharathas in their chariots, the rattle of whose wheels is like the thunder of rain-charged clouds.

Looking at this, Dhrishtadyumna says to Aswatthaman, "O foolish son of Drona, of what use is killing common warriors? If you are a hero, then fight me. I will kill you, wretched Brahman. Stop and fight me for a moment without fleeing."

He shoots the Acharya's son countless savage barbs, which fly in an unbroken line and pierce Aswatthaman's body like honey bees entering a flowering tree. Deeply wounded and swelling with rage like a snake trodden upon, Aswatthaman, astra in hand, says, "Dhrishtadyumna, stop for a moment and I will send you straight to Yama!"

With astonishing dexterity, bending his arrows in flight at impossible trajectories, he covers Dhrishtadyumna from every side with a cascade of gold-winged shafts. Dhrishtadyumna says, "You know nothing of my birth, evil Brahmana, or of my vow. I will not kill you today when Drona himself

is still alive. After this night passes and day dawns, I will first kill your father and then send you to your ancestors. This is my purpose today.

So, until then display the hatred you bear towards the Parthas, and the devotion you cherish for the Kurus. Come morning and you shall not escape me with your life. The Brahmana who abandons his svadharma and takes to the dharma of a Kshatriya can be killed by any Kshatriya, O lowest of men. So I will break no law by killing both your father and you."

So harshly does Dhrishtadyumna speak, as if to a servant, insulting the finest of Brahmanas, that, mustering all his choler, Aswatthaman answers him, saying, "Stop! Stop and fight, you Panchala wretch!" And he glares at him as if to burn him up with his eyes.

Sighing with rage like a snake, Aswatthaman looses a scorching volley at Dhrishtadyumna, striking him squarely and drawing blood. Dhrishtadyumna hardly winces but returns the fire with his own torrid salvo. The two are matched so evenly that no arrow separates them, one from the other. The duel escalates and each one kills hundreds of the other's common soldiers on every side even as they fight one another. Such is that marvellous contention between Drona's son and Dhrishtadyumna that the Siddhas, Charanas and other sky-ranging beings applaud them from above.

Filling the sky and all the points of the compass with veritable cloudbursts and covering the dim stars therewith, the two great warriors continue to duel and none can see them or where their arrows fly, land or claim countless lives in pitch darkness. As if dancing with their bows drawn into circles, intently trying to kill each other, those mahabahos fight so remarkably that even the greatest maharathas around them tremble in wonder, while others are terrified. Indeed, loud cheers and handclapping breaks out among both armies and every true warrior is filled with elation to watch that duel among duels. We hear loud shouts and so many combatants blow their conches, and begin to sound thousands of musical instruments.

This duel blazes equally but for a brief while. Then, darting forward suddenly, Aswatthaman cleaves Dhrishtadyumna's bow, standard, royal parasol, and kills his two Parshni charioteers, the principal sarathy, and his four horses. Roaring aloud, he then massacres the unprotected Panchalas in thousands! The Pandava host quakes with fear, for Drona's son is no less than Indra himself in the night.

In the very sight of Dhrishtadyumna and Arjuna, Aswatthaman slays a hundred Panchalas that face him with a hundred arrows, including three

maharathas with three thunderbolts. The Panchalas and the Srinjayas turn tail with their banners torn. Having vanquished his enemies, Drona's son give a roar like stormclouds thundering at summer's end. He is as resplendent as the blazing fire at the end of the Yuga, after it has consumed all living creatures. Cheered deafeningly by all the Kauravas after he kills thousands of enemies, the valiant Aswatthaman shines in splendour, like the king of the Devas himself after vanquishing his enemies.'"

CANTO 157

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Now Yudhishtira and Bhimasena besiege Aswatthaman. Seeing this, Duryodhana and Drona ride against the Pandavas and a tumultuary battle ensues, to make the timorous tremble. A furious Yudhishtira despatches vast numbers of Ambashtas, Malavas, Vangas, Sibis and Trigartas to the land of the dead. Bhima, too, mauls the Abhishahas, the Surasenas and other mighty Kshatriyas, and makes the earth a swamp of blood.

Then, Rajan, Kiritin Swetavahana sends the Yaudheyas, the Madrakas, the Malavas and the Mountain-men to the regions of Yama. Struck by arrows shot with terrific force, elephants fall onto the earth like twin-peaked hills. Strewn with the lopped-off trunks of elephants that still writhe in convulsions, the field again looks as if covered with wriggling snakes. Kurukshetra is horribly magnificent, covered with the fallen golden chatras of kings; it looks like the firmament at the end of the Yuga, spangled with suns, moons and stars beyond count.

At this very time, there is an uproar near Drona's chariot, in which one can hear the words, "Kill!", "Strike!", "Hack!", "Pierce!", "Cut him to pieces!" Drona swiftly summons the Vayavyastra and begins to decimate

the enemies that surround him, like a mighty tornado destroying gathering masses of clouds, and the Panchalas run away from fear, while Bhimasena and the noble Partha look on. However, they soon check the flight of their troops and lead a large force of chariots against the equally vast force of Drona. Arjuna attacking the right and Vrikodara the left, they lash Bharadwaja's son with two heavy torrents of arrows.

The maharathas among the Srinjayas and the Panchalas, with the Matsyas and the Somakas, Rajan, follow the two against Drona. While, many maharathas loyal to your son, bringing a great host with them, rush forward to support Drona. However, swiftly slaughtered by Arjuna and overcome by the turgid darkness, your Bharata host falls apart. Your son and Drona try to rally them but to no avail. Indeed, razed mercilessly by the arrows of the incomparable Arjuna, your army takes to its heels in all directions in that hour when the world is plunged in night. Abandoning the animals and chariots they ride, many great kings flee, Rajan, overwhelmed with fear of the hunting Kiritin.'"

CANTO 158

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Finding Somadatta brandishing his massive bow, Satyaki tells his charioteer, "Drive me towards Somadatta. I tell you truly, O Suta, I will not return from battle today without killing that worst of the Kurus, the son of Balhika."

The sarathy whips his fleet horses of the Sindhu breed, white as conch shells, and strong, so they fly at Somadatta, bearing Satyaki towards him even as the steeds of Indra bore him in the olden days against the Danavas. Seeing the Satwata hero coming like a storm, Somadatta turns fearlessly turns towards him and shrouds Yuyudhana in a cloudburst of shafts.

Satyaki, who knows no fear ever, returns Somadatta's calescent fire, and two gales of flaming shafts light up the thick darkness of Kurukshetra. Somadatta strikes Satyaki's chest with sixty shafts, while Satyaki draws blood all over Somadatta's body with arrows like streaks of lightning. Lacerated by each other the two look magnificent, like a couple of flowering kinsukas in spring. Dyed all over with blood, those illustrious warriors of the Kuru and the Vrishni races glare at each other as if they will ignite the darkness and each other with their eyes.

Riding on their chariots, these maharathas of terrible countenances circle each other, glowering like two baleful planets. Their bodies torn all over by arrows that still protrude from them, Rajan, they are like two porcupines. Pierced with countless golden-winged shafts, the two warriors glitter like a pair of tall trees covered with fireflies. Their bodies bright with the blazing arrows planted in them, the two maharathas look like two angry elephants caparisoned with burning torches. Then, Rajan, all at once, with a crescent-tipped arrow, Somadatta cleaves Satyaki's bow and, with dazzling swiftness, strikes him with thirty thunder flashes loosed quick as a thought.

Satyaki snatches up another bow, pierces Somadatta with five iron shafts and, with another broad-headed arrow smilingly rives his golden standard. Somadatta drills Satyaki with five and twenty shafts and in rage, with a razor-faced arrow, Satyaki breaks Somadatta's bow and savages him with a hundred straight gold-winged barbs, reducing him to the state of a snake without fangs.

However, Somadatta picks up another bow and looses banks and banks of arrows at Satyaki, who responds in kind. Somadatta continues to assail Satyaki without let. Then Bhima joins the fight to support Satyaki and gashes Somadatta with ten arrows and the great Kuru strikes back with many fanged shafts of his own properly inflamed Satyaki aims a terrible parigha at Somadatta's chest, an astra with a golden shaft and hard as the Vajra itself. However, smiling the while, Somadatta slices the dreadful astra as it flashes toward him, and riven in two, it falls to the earth like some mountain peak cloven by lightning.

With a broad-headed arrow, Yuyudhana severs Somadatta's bow again, and with another five arrows, cuts the leather gauntlet that covers his fingers into shreds. Never pausing, he cuts down Somadatta's four great horses, and with another immaculate shaft, beheads his sarathy. He now draws a stone-whetted, oil-slicked, gold-winged and occult arrow, a most exceptional shaft, and unleashes it at his hated enemy with such ferocity that it ignites into blinding light and flame as it falls like a hawk upon the old Kuru warrior, plunges into his chest, blows his heart into pieces and maharatha Somadatta, the hitherto invincible Kuru Kshatriya, falls dead without a murmur.

Seeing maharatha Somadatta killed, your warriors attack Satyaki with a force of rathas. Meanwhile, the Pandavas also, Rajan, with all the Prabhadrakas, and a large legion, tear into Drona's army. Yudhishtira leads

this attack and puts Drona's forces to rout, killing hundreds of brave soldiers in his Acharya's very presence. Drona rushes in to defend his troops and strikes Yudhishtira deep with seven keen arrows. Yudhishtira responds by goring his master with five whistling shafts. Bleeding profusely, Drona licks the corners of his mouth and cuts down Yudhishtira's standard and breaks the bow in his hands.

Quicker than seeing, when speed is of the essence, Yudhishtira sweeps up another bow and covers Drona, his horses, charioteer, standard, and grand chariot with a thousand arrows! And all are spellbound with amazement, for they can hardly believe that this is the gentle, patient Dharmaraja they are watching.

Wounded and in great pain, Drona, the bull among Brahmanas, sits down for a while on the floor of his chariot. Then, recovering, sighing like a snake and full of rage, the Acharya invokes the Vayavyastra. However, Yudhishtira calmly summons a weapon of the Wind himself and nullifies Drona's astra; in the same moment, he breaks the Acharya's bow in two. Drona takes up another bow, which Yudhishtira again breaks.

Now Krishna says to Yudhishtira, speaking into his heart from afar, "Listen to me, O Mahabaho. Do not fight Drona anymore for he means to take you his captive. He who has been born to kill Drona will slay him; that task is not yours. Leave the Acharya and fight Duryodhana, for kings should battle kings, and not others. Surround yourself with elephants, horses and chariots and come where Dhananjaya and I, and Naravyaghra Bhima are fighting the Kurus with but a small force."

Yudhishtira reflects for a moment and then goes to that part of the field where Bhima, fighting in fury, is slaughtering your troops like Death himself with maw agape. Making the earth resound with the rumble of his chariot, like the roar of thunderheads at the end of summer, Yudhishtira forms the flank of Bhima's forces. Meanwhile, Drona, too, in the horrible night, turns away and begins to destroy his most detested enemies, the Panchalas.'"

CANTO 159

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'While the dreadful war is being fought, when the world is enveloped in darkness and dust, the warriors on the field cannot see each other; they battle with sheer instinct and by calling out names to discern friend from foe. O Bharatarishabha, during this unmentionable carnage of maharathas, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, Drona, Karna, Kripa, Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki wreak havoc on one another's troops. The common soldiers of both armies, demoralised all around by these great maharathas in the hour of darkness, break and flee in all directions. Even as they run, they are massacred and thousands of leading maharathas slaughter one another, while they are blind in the dark and full of fear.

All this is the result of the evil counsels of your son. Indeed, at the hour when the world is shrouded in darkness, all creatures, even the greatest Kshatriyas, are overcome with panic, and quite lose their minds.'

Dhritarashtra asks, 'What is the state of mind of the troops when, in the dark, all of you are sapped of your courage and sorely pressed by the Pandavas? O Sanjaya, when everything is swathed in darkness how do the Pandava and my troops become visible again?'

Sanjaya replies, 'Drona somehow masses again in a compact array the remnants of the army of the Kauravas, under their leaders. He sets himself in the van, Salya at the rear, Aswatthaman and Sakuni on the right and the left flanks. Duryodhana on this most dreadful night busies himself with protecting all his legions. The king, your son, puts heart into the foot-soldiers, Rajan, and tells them, "Lay aside your weapons and take up torches and lamps in your hands instead. Let the maharathas alone continue to fight."

The foot-soldiers gladly take up burning lamps and the Devas, Rishis, Gandharvas, Deva-rishis, the diverse tribes of Vidyadharas and Apsaras, Nagas, Yakshas, Uragas, Kinnaras, looking on from the heavens, also joyfully take up blazing celestial lanterns. We see many wondrous floating lamps, filled with sweet-scented oil, fall from the Regents of the principal and the subsidiary directions. For Duryodhana's sake, we see many come down especially from Narada and Parvata, lighting up the stagnant darkness so full of death. Now arrayed in a compact vyuha, the Kaurava army looks dazzling with the light of the marvellous lamps shining on their costly ornaments and the Devastras blazing as they are shot or hurled. On each chariot five lamps are set, three on each maddened elephant and on each horse one large lamp. Thus, the Kuru warriors light up the field and the army, revealing now the true extent of the massacre that has occurred by darkness.

Set in their places quickly, these lamps light up your army wonderfully. All the great Kshatriyas, made radiant by the foot-soldiers with oilfed lamps in their hands, are as handsome as clouds in the night sky illumined by flashes of lightning. When the Kuru host has been thus lit up, Drona, of the effulgence of fire, scorching everything around, looks as radiant Rajan, in his golden armour as the midday sun. The light of the lamps reflects from the golden ornaments, the bright cuirasses, the bows and the other polished weapons of the warriors, from their maces twined with strings, from the bright parighas, their chariots, arrows and javelins, as they fly in scintillating arcs and streaks.

The royal parasols, yak-tails, swords, blazing brands and necklaces of gold, as they are whirled or moved, mirror the lamplight and the spectacle of Kurukshetra is now entirely beautiful. Your army burns with soft splendour that no artist has beheld or captured. Ornaments, beautifully

wrought weapons, red with blood and whirled by heroes, create a glowing effulgence like dim flashes of lightning in the sky at the end of summer.

The faces of warriors, impetuously pursuing foes to strike them down and themselves trembling in the ardour of battle, are altogether breathtaking. As the sun is fierce when a forest is on fire, in the same manner, the terrible night grows in grandeur both from the fighting and the now lamplit host.

Seeing our army illuminated, the Parthas too with great alacrity exhort the foot-soldiers throughout their army to imitate what ours have done. On each elephant, they place seven lamps; on each chariot, ten; and on the back of each horse, two; and on the flanks and rear of their rathas as well as on their flagpoles, they place multiple lamps. Also, on the flanks of their army, at the rear, in the van, all around and within, they light numberless lamps. And now, both armies are strangely and gloriously lit up in the fleeting night of all horrors.

Throughout your army, foot-soldiers carrying lamps mingle with elephants and chariots and cavalry. The army of Pandu's son is also illuminated by foot-soldiers with blazing torches in their hands. The twin hosts are refulgent as fire and sun when they burn together. As more and more lamps are lit, the splendour of both armies seems to illumine not just the field of war but the very sky and all the directions. Both armies are clearly visible and distinguishable from each other.

Awakened by the light that reaches into the sky, the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Rishis, other Mahatapasvins and the Apsaras all gather directly above Kurukshetra. Thronged with Devas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Maharishis, Apsaras, and the spirits of slain warriors about to enter the celestial realms, the battlefield looks like a second Swarga. Teeming with chariots, horses and elephants, by now brilliantly illumined with a million lamps, with wild warriors either lying in the poses of death or wandering bemused across the field like madmen, and horses slain or roaming dazed, the immense hosts resemble the vyuhas of the Devas and the Asuras in days of old when they fought.

The dense swish of shafts form the fierce winds; great rathas, the clouds; the neighing and trumpeting of horses and elephants, the thunder; the lash of arrows landing and the spraying, gushing blood of warriors and animals is the flood of the tempestuous nocturnal encounter between all those godlike men.

In the very midst of the battle, the greatest of Brahmanas, the noble Aswatthaman, scorching the Pandavas with flames from his bow, is the midday sun at the end of the season of rains, burning everything with his fierce rays.'"

CANTO 160

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'When the battlefield which had been plunged in darkness is illumined, great warriors, maharathas, again attack each other ferociously. With so many thousands of lamps burning all around and with the unearthly lanterns of the Devas and the Gandharvas now set on golden stands decked with jewels, and fed with fragrant oil, Kurukshetra, O Bhaarata, is wonderfully resplendent, bright as the earth lit by the lesser flames of the pralaya! With every side scintillating with lamps, of this world and the one above, the field of death looks like a forest covered over by fireflies on a monsoon evening.

At your son's command, maharathas engage with other maharathas, elephants with elephants, horsemen with horsemen, all filled with joy on this fiercest night. Terrible and now plainly visible is the war between the Kaurava army and that of the Pandavas without the sun above.

Then Arjuna begins to annihilate the Kaurava ranks with unprecedented ferocity and swiftness, weakening the position of all the kings who fight for you.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'When the invincible Arjuna breaks into the ranks of my son's army, what is the state of their minds? Indeed, what do our

soldiers feel and think? What steps does Duryodhana take to contain Partha?

Who challenges the Kiritin? When Swetavahana breaks into our army, who protects Drona? Who guards the right wheel, who the left wheel and who the rear of Drona's ratha? Who are they that fight in his van? The mighty Drona battles his way into the midst of the Panchalas, dancing on his ratha, and shatters a huge number of Panchala chariots with his arrows; alas, how does the Acharya meet with his death?

You always speak of my enemies as cool, unvanquished, cheerful and swelling with might. However, you do not speak of my men in such words. On the other hand, you describe them to be dead, pale, and beaten, and you speak of my maharathas as always deprived of their chariots in all the battles they fight!'

Sanjaya replies, 'Understanding the wishes of Drona who is determined to give his all in the war at night, Duryodhana says to his brothers Vikarna, Chitrasena, Suparsva, Durdharsha, Dirghabahu, and all the men who follow them, "You heroes of great valour, fight with resolve and protect Drona's rear. Kritavarman will protect his right and Sala his left flanks."

Saying this, your son sets these brothers of his in the van of his forces, and then himself advances with the remnant of the Trigarta maharathas, saying, "The Acharya is merciful! The Pandavas fight with great resolution, so unite and protect him well. Drona is mighty; he is endued with great agility and valour. He can vanquish the very Devas; what need then be said of the Pandavas and the Somakas? All of you, however, must remain united and support the invincible Acharya against the dangerous maharatha Dhrishtadyumna. Other than Drupada's fire-born prince, I do not see the man among all the Pandava warriors who can vanquish Drona. And so, we must, with all our souls, guard the son of Bharadwaja against the Panchala prince.

Protected by us, Drona will massacre the Somakas and the Srinjayas, one after another. After the slaughter of all the Srinjayas at the head of the Pandava army, Aswatthaman will kill Dhrishtadyumna, and Karna will vanquish Arjuna maharatha. As for Bhimasena and the other sons of Pandu, I myself will kill them all. After that, our army will easily raze what remains of the Pandava forces. It is all plain to me now. And when we have won the war, my victory will last forever, and I will rule the earth unopposed, with all of you beside me.

I have given you the reasons. Now go forth, taking courage in both hands and, at all costs, protect Acharya Drona.”

Saying this, Duryodhana charges headlong into the fray with his best troops around and behind him. The two armies collide again, each side intent on securing victory. Arjuna continues to inflict heavy losses on the Kauravas, and now the massed Kauravas begin to trouble Arjuna with diverse kinds of weapons.

Aswatthaman attacks Drupada of the Panchalas, while Drona covers Srinjaya with multitudes of deadly straight shafts. And as the Pandava and the Panchala troops on the one side and the Kaurava troops on the other, O Bhaarata, are engaged in butchering each other, absolute bedlam and bloody mayhem hold sway over lamplit Kurukshetra, field of truth. The war by night is more brutal than it has ever been. Great spirits of darkness crowd the field, unseen.’”

CANTO 161

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'During the ghastly bloodbath by night, Yudhishtira exhorts the Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Somakas to destroy men, rathas and elephants without mercy, and cries to them, "Attack Drona! Kill the Acharya!"

At this command, Rajan, the Panchalas and the Somakas rush at Drona with terrifying roars. We, on our part, are equally energised, and roaring dreadfully in return, rush to confront the enemy to the utmost limits of our prowess, courage and might.

Kritavarman, son of Hridika, challenges Yudhishtira, as the Dharmaraja charges towards Drona, like an infuriated elephant against another. The great Kuru warrior Bhuri bars the way of Satyaki, who comes flying into the thick of battle, spraying arrows all around with incredible power and swiftness. Karna faces Sahadeva, as Madri's brilliant son rides at Drona, and Duryodhana himself faces the stupendous Bhimasena, riding on his chariot like the Great Destroyer.

Sakuni, son of Subala, stands firm against maharatha Nakula, who is an adept at every kind of battle. Kripa, son of Saradwat, sets himself in the way of Sikhandin, while Dusasana contends vigorously with Prativindhya

whose chariot is yoked to steeds coloured like peacocks, their skins glistening marvellously by the now glaring lamplight! Aswatthaman defies Ghatotkacha, master of maya, a hundred different kinds of sorcery and illusion. Vrishasena quells the mighty Drupada with his troops as the Panchala king aims to cut Drona down. Salya, king of the Madras, holds up Virata, as the Matsya king also rushes towards Drona. Chitrasena forcefully holds up Nakula's son Satanika with a thousand shafts, as that prince also rides at Drona. Alambusha, the Rakshasa prince, defies Arjuna, and Dhrishtadyumna gladly contains Drona as the seemingly demented Acharya devours the Pandava forces with devastras, making no distinction between great warrior and common foot-soldier.

As for the maharathas of the Pandavas who advance against Drona, other maharathas of your army attack them ferociously. Elephant riders meet elephant riders in this frightful battle by lamplight, and grind each other down in their thousands. In the dead of night, as bright horses charge each other recklessly, they look like winged hills. Horsemen encounter horsemen, armed with lances, darts and swords and give vent to loud roars. Vast numbers of bold foot-soldiers slaughter one another, with corpses heaping up, with maces, short clubs and diverse other weapons.

Kritavarman fights Yudhishtira in rage, like a continent, a great dwipa, resisting the surging sea. Yudhishtira first pierces Kritavarman with five arrows and then with twenty more, and roars, "Stop! Stop and fight."

Kritavarman breaks Yudhishtira's bow with a wedge-headed arrow and draws blood from him with seven more. Yudhishtira picks up a fresh bow and gashes his adversary's arms and chest with ten arrows, making him tremble and retort with seven veritable thunderbolts. At which, Yudhishtira demolishes his bow, shreds his leather gauntlet and pierces him fiercely with five long shafts that rip through his gold-inlaid armour, his body and dive into the ground like snakes into an ant-hill.

In a wink, Kritavarman takes up another bow and blasts the son of Pandu first with sixty arrows and then with ten more. Yudhishtira puts down his bow and casts a serpentine javelin that passes through Kritavarman's right arm and into the earth. Taking up his formidable bow again Yudhishtira covers Kritavarman in a lashing downpour of exact barbs, making him cry out in pain.

In swift rage, the mighty Bhoja kills Yudhishtira's horses and charioteer and makes a wreck of his chariot. The Pandava hefts a sword and shield

only to have them instantly shattered by the maharatha of the Madhu vamsa. Yudhishtira sweeps up a spear with a golden staff and hurls it like light at the illustrious son of Hridika; smiling arrogantly, Kritavarman neatly slices the missile along its length as it flashes at him.

He then shrouds Yudhishtira with a hundred arrows and, utterly roused by now, disjoints the Dharmaputra's golden armour so it falls from his body like a cluster of stars from the sky. His chariot in shambles, his armour cut away and bleeding from Kritavarman's hail of arrows, Yudhishtira quickly retreats from battle. Having vanquished the Dharmaputra, the mighty Kritavarman returns to once more protect the right wheel of Drona's chariot.'"

CANTO 162

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Bhuri, Rajan, stands in the way of Sini's grandson Satyaki who comes charging like an elephant towards a lake full of water. An angry Satyaki makes five springs of blood spurt from Bhuri's body. The Kuru warrior retaliates with great speed and pierces splendid Satyaki with ten arrows through his chest. Drawing their bows to their fullest stretch and with eyes red, these two begin to maul each other. Their cascades of lethal arrows are like rays of the sun; their duel is as if Death has taken two forms to do battle against himself. For a while, the battle is perfectly even. Until, with a terrible smile, Satyaki breaks Bhuri's bow and plunges nine arrows deep into his breast, and gives a terrible roar.

Bhuri quickly picks up another bow and strikes the Satwata with three light like barbs, and then, he also smiling, splits his antagonist's bow a wide-headed shaft. Beside himself, Satyaki flings a mighty javelin right into Bhuri's heart, and that great Kuru warrior, covered in blood, falls dead out of his chariot, like the sun from the sky when he sets.

Seeing Bhuri slain, Aswatthaman charges Satyaki recklessly. He shouts, "Stop! Stop and fight!" at Yuyudhana and covers him with a blistering flight of arrows, like clouds lashing Meru's crown with a torrential rain.

Seeing the grim Aswatthaman rush towards Satyaki, Ghatotkacha gives a roar that makes all of Kurukshetra cringe; he says to Drona's son in the most dreadful voice, "Stop, O son of Drona! You will not escape me with your life and I will kill you like the six-faced Karttikeya did the Asura Mahisha. Stay and fight me, for today I will purge your heart of all desire for battle."

And the coppery-eyed Rakshasa, Bhima's tremendous son, attacks Aswatthaman like a prince of elephants, unleashing indescribable shafts at him, each the size of a chariot's axle-rod! Quicker than thinking, Aswatthaman smashes those massive arrows into dust and pierces Ghatotkacha deep with hundreds of keen barbs.

The handsome Rakshasa resembles an incredible porcupine with quills all erect! Unmoved, Bhima's son looses a terrific tirade of shafts at Aswatthaman, missiles that fly roaring like thunder at Drona's son, crashing into the Brahmana's shining body, making him stagger in his ratha. Ghatotkacha does not pause but looses volley after volley of different arrows over Aswatthaman; some have razor like heads; others are crescent-tipped; some have elongated points; some are frog-faced; other have heads like boar's ears; some are barbed, and there are others as well.

Drona's son remains immaculately calm throughout this onslaught and with hands moving quicker than thoughts, like the wind scattering large cloud masses, he consumes every shaft shot by Ghatotkacha, common and strange, with the handful of devastras that he invokes. And when Ghatotkacha also discharges his own unworldly astras, the dark sky is lit up by other suns where his astras and Aswatthaman's fuse and hang until falling away in showers of sparks. Ah, the firmament is exquisitely lit up, as if with a swarm of fireflies at twilight.

Aswatthaman fills all the points of the compass with his arrows and envelops Ghatotkacha in his storm of shafts—for the sake of your sons. The duel that develops between the two is like the one of yore between Indra and Prahlada. Ghatotkacha pierces Aswatthaman's chest with ten arrows that burn like the yuga fire, and the Brahmana trembles like a tall tree shaken by the wind. He supports himself briefly by clinging to his flagstaff, then collapses. There is an outcry of woe from yours troops who think him slain, while the Panchalas and the Srinjayas shout in glee.

However, maharatha Aswatthaman recovers quickly and, drawing his bowstring to his ear in a blur, looses a torrid astra at Ghatotkacha, a shaft

like Yama's danda. The arrow with golden wings ploughs right through the Rakshasa's chest and enters the earth behind him. Gored savagely through, spouting blood, the prince of Rakshasas sits down in his ratha and his eyes glaze over. Seeing this, his charioteer spirits him away from the field. Having wounded Ghatotkacha grievously and driven him from the fray, Aswatthaman gives a ringing roar of triumph. Your sons and all your warriors cheer him deafeningly, O Bhaarata, and Aswatthaman's body blazes like the midday sun.

Looking at Bhimasena who battles like ten maharathas in front of Drona's chariot, Duryodhana strikes him with a fierce and heartfelt volley of utmost hatred. Bhima pierces him in return with nine arrows and Duryodhana strikes back with twenty. Quickly mantled over by each other's arrows, the two magnificent maharathas look like the sun and the moon covered by clouds in the sky. Then Duryodhana pierces Bhima deeply with five gold-winged thunderbolts and roars, "Stop! Stop and fight!"

In a flash, Bhima shatters Suyodhana's bow, cuts down his standard and strikes him in a dazzle with full ninety barbs. Duryodhana takes up an even more formidable bow and returns his cousin's fire so that blood flowers sprout all over the Pandava's vast body, in full view of all the other maharathas. Destroying many of Duryodhana's shafts in flight, Bhima pierces him with five and twenty short, heavy arrows. Duryodhana smashes Bhimasena's bow with a razor-faced arrow and pierces him with ten more.

Bhimasena snatches up another bow and rakes your son with seven violent shafts. Displaying great lightness of hand, Suyodhana cuts Bhima's bow in two. The second, third, fourth and the fifth bows that Bhima picks up, also, Suyodhana demolishes. Indeed, Rajan, full of self-assurance and feverish eagerness to kill the cousin whom he has always detested the most, your son breaks every bow that Bhima picks up immediately as he does so.

Finding his bows repeatedly broken, Bhima hurls an iron spear at Duryodhana, hard as diamonds, which ignites in the air as it flies at your son, which resembles Yama's sister Mrityu. Before all the watching warriors, Suyodhana cuts the lance into three pieces, even as it flares at him through the sky straight as the parting in a woman's hair. Bhima now picks up a heavy mace alight, and casts it like doom at Duryodhana's chariot and that weapon kills your son's horses, charioteer and blows his chariot apart.

Now afraid of dreadful Bhima, your son uses the anima siddhi to make himself little and hastily climbs into the illustrious Nandaka's chariot. In the

half-light of the lamplit night, Bhima thinks he has killed Duryodhana and gives an earthshaking triumphant roar, challenging the Kaurava host. Your warriors also believe their king dead, and dismal cries echo across Kurukshetra.

Yudhishtira hears Bhima's repeated roaring and the howls of your terrified warriors, Yudhishtira also thinks that Duryodhana has been killed, and rushes to Bhima. The Panchalas, the Srinjayas, the Matsyas, the Kaikeyas, and the Chedis turn their chariots and charge Drona all together, and another horrible battle erupts between Drona and the enemy, during which thousands on both sides die scarlet deaths.'"

CANTO 163

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna, son of Vikartana, Rajan, faces the mighty maharatha Sahadeva, who is closing in dangerously on Drona. In a flash, Sahadeva strikes Karna with nine sizzling arrows and then another nine in a blink. Karna returns his fire with a full hundred storming shafts; he severs Sahadeva's bowstring. Sahadeva takes up another bow and strikes Karna squarely with twenty arrows, a wonderful feat. Karna, roused, despatches Sahadeva's horses with a flock of perfect arrows and his sarathy with a single wedge-headed one. Without a ratha, Sahadeva picks up a sword and shield, which Karna shatters with a lofty smile.

Sahadeva flings a heavy mace of power at Karna, a dread weapon adorned with gold; Karna demolishes that, too, with a rash of incredible arrows. His mace shattered, Sahadeva casts a whistling spear at Karna, which that greatest bowman slices in two along its length. Madri's red-eyed son leaps down from his chariot, pulls a wheel free from his ruined ratha and hurls it spinning at the brother he does not know. Karna, still with the mocking, maddening smile, looses a thousand arrows in a moment and smashes that chariot wheel flying at him like Death's very chakra.

In a frenzy, the desperate Sahadeva pulls off the yokes, shafts and other parts of his chariot, the traces of his horses, and casts all these like deadly weapons at the Sutaputra. Karna disdainfully shoots them all down. Now Sahadeva picks up whatever he finds lying around him—the limbs of elephants, horses and even dead men—and hurls these at his enemy. Karna's speed artistry as he shreds all these in flight is amazing to behold, my lord. Deprived of all his weapons and fairly mangled by Karna's barrage of shafts, Sahadeva quits the unequal duel and leaves the field.

Karna pursues him for a while and, with the same smile, now turned so mysterious, mocks him, "Kshatriya, do not fight your superiors. Seek out your equals to do battle with, O son of Madri! Listen to me, what I say is for your own good!"

Karna then prods Sahadeva with the tip of his bow, and says, "Look where your great brother Arjuna fights so resolutely against the Kurus. Go to him or, if you prefer, go back home!" And he laughs at Sahadeva, a sound more cruel than any arrow.

Thus, Karna, when he could have done so, does not kill Madri's son, remembering his word given to Kunti before the war. Instead, he now rides away against the troops of the king of the Panchalas. A dispirited Sahadeva, wounded equally by Karna's arrows and by his words, is humiliated, crestfallen, even wishes for death, proud Kshatriya that he is. He sadly climbs into the Panchala prince Janamejaya's chariot.'"

CANTO 164

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Salya, king of the Madras, holds up Virata and his troops, with clouds of missiles as they advance to attack Drona. The duel between Salya and Madra is like the one between Bala and Vasava of old. Salya strikes Virata, who commands a large akshauhini, with a hundred immaculate shafts. Virata, in return, pierces him first with nine sharp arrows, then with three and seventy, and again with a hundred. Salya kills the four horses yoked to Virata's chariot and cuts down his royal parasol and standard.

Virata jumps down from his useless ratha and, standing on the ground, continues to loose storms of arrows at Salya with undimmed ferocity. Seeing his brother exposed on the ground, Satanika rides swiftly to rescue him. With a flurry of lethal barbs, Salya sends the advancing Satanika to Yama. At the fall of Satanika, his brother Virata climbs into the fallen hero's chariot, and his prowess fuelled, doubled by his rage, glares his eyes wide at Salya and mantles the Madra and his ratha with a cloudburst of arrows.

But the mighty Salya responds in strength and strikes Virata squarely through his chest with a hundred slender shafts, forcing the Matsya king to sit down in a swoon. His charioteer quickly takes his king away from the

field, and, its spirit broken, the vast Matsya force flees, pursued, O Bhaarata, by the thousands of arrows that Salya, that ornament of battle, shoots after them. Seeing their troops run, Krishna and Arjuna come dashing up to confront Salya.

Now, Rajan, the Rakshasa prince Alambusha appears, looming on an altogether macabre and wondrous chariot of black iron, harnessed to eight awful pisachas with equine faces, flying blood-red banners, festooned with wildflower garlands, covered with bear-skins and mounted with a lofty standard atop over which a fierce-looking and incessantly shrieking vulture with spotted wings and gaping eyes perches. The Rakshasa looks like a heap of antimony; and he stands up to the advancing Arjuna like Meru withstanding a tempest, and rains down showers of arrows on Arjuna's head. Ah, pitched and intense is the ensuing battle between the Rakshasa and the human warrior; it fills all that watch with awe and it adds to the glee of the vultures, crows, ravens, owls, kanakas and jackals that patrol death's abysmal field.

Arjuna strikes Alambusha with six bolts of lightning and cuts off his standard with ten more. He beheads his strange demon sarathy in a burst of slimy green blood, severs his weirdly shining bow in his hands and kills the equine pisachas with four occult barbs. Alambusha takes up another sinister bow, but that too Arjuna rives. Bharatarishabha, Partha strikes that vile prince of Rakshasas with four such formidable shafts that Alambusha takes to his heels.

Having vanquished the fiend of darkness, Arjuna rides swiftly towards Drona, on his way slaughtering innumerable men, elephants and horses that fall like trees laid low by a storm, while the remaining soldiers run away like a frightened herd of deer.'"

CANTO 165

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Your son Chitrasena, O Bhaarata, confronts Nakula's son Satanika who is consuming your army with his missiles. Satanika strikes Chitrasena with five arrows and your prince responds with ten whetted shafts. Chitrasena gashes Satanika with nine bolts, at which the son of Nakula responds with a fusillade of arrows that rip Chitrasena's armour from his body: a wonderful feat. Without his armour, your son looks remarkable, like a snake that has just cast off his slough. Satanika cuts down the struggling Chitrasena's standard, and then breaks his bow.

The beleaguered Chitrasena seizes up another powerful dhanusha and plunges countless arrows at Satanika. His fury mounting, Satanika kills Chitrasena's horses and his charioteer, at which his powerful opponent jumps down from his ratha and drills Satanika with five and twenty arrows. Satanika destroys Chitrasena's gold-decked bow with a crescent-tipped arrow. Deprived of his bow, chariot, horses and charioteer, Chitrasena quickly runs to Kritavarman's chariot and climbs aboard.

Karna's son Vrishasena leads his legion against maharatha Drupada, spraying multitudinous arrows at the Panchala king, who is closing rapidly

on Drona. Yajnasena challenges the son of Karna and plunges sixty barbs into his arms and chest. The doughty Vrishasena responds with astounding speed and draws spouts of blood from Drupada's chest. These two, as well, with each other's arrows protruding from their bodies, look startlingly like a couple of huge porcupines with quills erect. Bathed in blood from wounds taken from golden-winged arrows, they are especially striking during their wrathful duel. Indeed, the spectacle they present is as that of a pair of radiant Kalpa vrikshas or of two kinsukas laden with blood flowers.

Vrishasena strikes Drupada with nine arrows, then with seventy more and again with another three. Loosing a gale of arrows, Karna's son, Rajan, makes a resplendent spectacle. An inflamed Drupada splits Vrishasena's bow in two with a broad-headed arrow. Vrishasena picks up another gold chased bow, invokes a great astra and, taking careful aim at Drupada, while he ignores the slew of barbs that the Panchala king looses at him, unleashes the blazing thing at the Acharya, filling all the Somakas with fear. The astras plunge straight through Yagnasena's chest and he collapses onto the floor of his chariot. His sarathy whisks him away from the field. Seeing the great Panchala maharatha leave the battle in a faint, the Kaurava army fervidly attacks Drupada's troops.

The lamps fallen from the hands of slain warriors light up the earth all around so Kurukshetra looks even like the firmament lit by stars and planets. The ground sparkles with the angadas of fallen heroes, like a great cloud mass during the monsoon, in which streaks of lightning flash. From fear of Karna's son, the Panchalas flee on all sides, as the Danavas did from terror of Indra during the great Devasura yuddha.

Thus stricken by Vrishasena, the Panchalas and the Somakas, illumined by lamps, present an unusual and arresting sight. Having vanquished them, Vrishasena looks like the sun, O Bharata, when he reaches his zenith. Among all those thousands of kings on your side and theirs, the valiant Vrishasena seems to be the only resplendent luminary. Having vanquished many heroes and all the great maharathas among the Somakas, Karna's son races on towards the Pandava king Yudhishtira.

Your son Dusasana rides against the mighty Prativindhya, who charges at Drona who unabatedly devours the enemy troops with his devastras. The duel that erupts between them is like the contention between Mercury and Venus, Budha and Sukra, in a cloudless sky. Dusasana pierces Prativindhya, who is accomplishing fierce feats, with three arrows shot straight into his

forehead. Gushing blood from the wounds Prativindhya looks like a three crested hill with streams of red chalk flowing down.

Prativindhya strikes back in fury, first piercing Dusasana with three arrows and again with seven. Now your son achieves a difficult feat. He first fells Prativindhya's horses with a dense volley, then, with one broad-headed shaft, kills his sarathy and then cuts down his standard. Dusasana then smashes Prativindhya's chariot under him into a thousand pieces, shreds his banner, his quivers, bowstrings and the traces of his ratha.

Deprived of his chariot, the virtuous Prativindhya stands, bow in hand, and contends with your son, shooting an opacity of arrows at him, until Dusasana, showing marvellous dexterity, breaks his adversary's bow and then lacerates him with ten brutal arrows. Seeing Prativindhya's plight, his brothers, maharathas all, come dashing forward with a large force to protect him. Prativindhya climbs onto Sutasoma's splendid chariot and, taking up another bow, continues to shoot at your son. A strong force of your warriors arrives swiftly to support Dusasana.

Another dreadful battle ensues between your troops and theirs, O Bhaarata, at the midnight hour, and swells the population of Yama's domain.'"

CANTO 166

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Roaring "Stop! Stop!" Subala's son Sakuni in sudden fury attacks Nakula, who is decimating your forces.

Bows drawn in circles, both show the same measure of skill, lashing each other with arrows. Soon, these two also resemble strange porcupines. Their armour cut away and each bathed in blood, they resemble two beautiful and brilliant Kalpa vrikshas, or flowering kinsukas, or Salmali trees with prickly thorns on them.

Eyes red and bulging with rage, they cast sidelong glowers at each other, as if to kill the other with their gazes. Then, with a fiendish grin, Sakuni pierces Nakula's chest with a barbed arrow and Madri's son swoons in his chariot. Sakuni roars as loud as the clouds at the end of summer.

Nakula recovers quickly and attacks his vile enemy again, now like the Destroyer himself with jaws agape; Nakula drills him first with sixty arrows and again with a hundred long shafts right through his chest. He breaks Sakuni's bow, and fells his haughty standard. He plunges an arrow shot with all his might deep into Sakuni's thigh and drops him onto the floor of his chariot, clasping his flagstaff like an amorous man his mistress.

Seeing your brother-in-law felled and fainted, his charioteer quickly rides away from the van of the battle. At this, the Parthas and all their followers give a loud and triumphal shout.

Nakula, the Parantapa, says to his sarathy, “Take me towards the forces that Drona commands.” The man does as he is commanded. Seeing Nakula ride against Drona, Kripa rides to stop him but a smiling Sikhandin pierces Kripa with nine arrows from a flank. Turning, Kripa strikes Sikhandin first with five arrows, and then with twenty more. The duel that breaks out between the two is hair-raising, my lord, even like the one between Sambara and the king of the Devas in the war of antiquity between the Devas and the Asuras.

Both maharathas cover the heavens with their missiles, like clouds at the end of summer. The night is full of terror and evokes all sorts of fears in the warriors. Then Sikhandin splits Kripa’s large bow with a crescent-headed arrow and ravages him with a flurry of other shafts. The infuriated Kripa casts a polished golden spear at the Panchala prince, which Sikhandin shatters in flight with ten immaculate arrows.

Kripa takes up a fresh bow and looses such a rage of arrows at the prince who was once a princess that Sikhandin collapses onto the floor of his ratha. Kripa continues to strafe him with many more shafts, trying to kill him, but his charioteer bears Sikhandin away to safety.

The Panchalas and the Somakas see the mighty maharatha son of Yajnasena retreat from battle, and rush to his rescue, while your sons surround Kripa, best of Brahmanas, with a large force to support him. Another ferocious battle ensues; a great tumult arises, full of roars and screams, and the thunder of horses’ hooves and lumbering elephants, filling the hour past midnight like massed thunderheads. The earth trembles with the tread of running foot-soldiers, why like a woman shaking with fear.

Maharathas dash manically at one another, in their thousands, slaughtering numberless common soldiers as they go. Great elephants, with ichor flowing down their bodies, rush at other mastodons, and fight furiously with trunks and curved, glinting tusks that are soon dyed in red. Horsemen and foot-soldiers, too, fight without any vestige of restraint or sanity.

In the heart of night, the sound of troops attacking and retreating is deafening and bizarre. The blazing lamps placed on chariots, elephants and horses are like meteors fallen from the sky and smouldering still. Lit by

these, the night, O lord of the Bharatas, is a strangest day. As the sun dispels the darkness of every night, do the blazing lamps the turgid darkness of the war.

Indeed, the sky, the earth, the cardinal and the subsidiary points of the world, enveloped by dust and darkness, are all illuminated by the lamplight, which is increased many times over by being reflected by splendid weapons, coats of mail and the jewels of famed Kshatriyas. Yet, during the tumultuary war at night, few of the fighters, O Bhaarata, can distinguish ally from enemy and father kills son, son kills father, friend slays friend, relatives slay relatives, uncles kill sisters' sons, countless warriors kill other warriors of their own side.

Absolute brutal chaos and madness rule everywhere, and all that appears to matter is to kill or be killed, regardless of who kills and who is slain.'"

CANTO 167

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Dhrishtadyumna, fire-prince of the Panchalas faces Drona in this night. His formidable bow raised and repeatedly twanging its string, Drupada's meridian son, supported by his own troops and those of the Pandavas, charges toward Drona's gold-bedecked ratha. Seeing the great Acharya thus assailed, your son resolutely protects Drona on all sides and the two hosts collide again in vast numbers, even like two awesome seas lashed into fury by a tempest surging into each other, with all their marine creatures frantically agitated.

Dhrishtadyumna pierces Drona's torso with five arrows and gives a roar of triumph. Drona strikes his most feared enemy with five and twenty arrows and, with another broad-headed shaft, severs his bright bow. Dhrishtadyumna casts aside his broken bow, bites his lip in rage and, picking up another awesome weapon, drawing its string to his ear in a flash, looses an astra that can have Drona's life. The missile illuminates the whole army like another sun. Seeing the incandescent astra, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Danavas pray: "May Drona live!"

At that moment, from a far flank, Karna, showing godlike genius, shatters the fulminant astra into a dozen pieces even as it flies inexorable

towards the Acharya; extinguished, the astra falls onto the earth like a snake that has lost its fangs and venom. Karna inundates Dhrishtadyumna with a torrent of arrows. Maharatha Aswatthaman strikes him with five singing barbs, Drona with another five, Salya with nine, Dusasana with three, Duryodhana with twenty and Sakuni with five of his own. Thus, seven mighty maharathas come quickly to Drona's rescue and vigorously assault the burning prince of the Panchalas.

He, however, draws blood from every one of them: Drona, Karna, Drona's son and your son with three arrows each. Their roaring, Rajan, all this while, is truly horrible, as they combine to wildly beset Dhrishtadyumna. Then Drumasena wounds the fire-prince deep with a gold-winged shaft, and again with another three, shouting, "Stop! Stop and fight me!"

Dhrishtadyumna strikes back with three deadly accurate arrows, fletched with wings of gold and shining slick with oil; with another crescent-headed arrow he blasts Drumasena's head from his neck, and its earrings sparkle red as the grisly thing falls onto the ground, a final cry frozen on its lips curled in fury still. The head of that hero falls like a ripe palmyra fruit blown from its stalk by a powerful gust of wind.

Dhrishtadyumna, the irradiant, sprays fire all around him despatching thousands to Yamaloka; with a wedge headed arrow he splits Karna's bow in two. Karna cannot abide this; he is like a wild lion that has its tail cut off! He takes up another bow, and with eyes red as plums and breathing hard, envelops mighty Dhrishtadyumna with riptides of arrows. Seeing Karna in this mood, your six other maharathas quickly surround the prince of the Panchalas, determined to kill him.

Seeing their Senapati facing the six greatest warriors of your army, all your troops consider him as being already delivered into the jaws of death. But then, Satyaki of the Dasarha vamsa arrives to support the embattled Dhrishtadyumna; the Satwata hero comes loosing a tide of arrows before him. Karna greets him with ten arrows. Before the watching maharathas, Satyaki responds with ten thunderbolts and cries tauntingly, "Do not run away again, Karna! Stay and fight me."

And once more, the blazing duel that ensues between mighty Satyaki and the redoubtable Karna resembles, O Rajan, that between Bali and Vasava in the days of old. Satyaki, bull among Kshatriyas, terrifies all your warriors with the rumble of his ratha, and he strikes the lotus-eyed Karna

deep with countless arrows. Making the earth shudder with the twang of his bow, the majestic Sutaputra covers the relucent Satyaki with a barrage of long, barbed, tall-toothed and razor-headed arrows and diverse other missiles. Satyaki of the Vrishnis also shrouds Karna in a mantle of fire.

For a time, that duel is magnificent and equal. Then, your sons, keeping Karna at their head, shoot at Satyaki from every side. Fending them all off, including Karna, with his own astras, Satyaki abruptly strikes the valiant Vrishasena through his chest so that he falls down in his chariot, casting aside his bow.

Believing his son, the maharatha Vrishasena, dead, shock plunges through Karna and he attacks Satyaki in reckless frenzy. Satyaki serenely pierces Karna with many strong shafts. He first strikes the Sutaputra with ten arrows, then Vrishasena, who has arisen again, with five, and finally shreds the leather gloves and severs the bows of both father and son. Stringing fresh bows, father and son assail Satyaki from two sides and lacerate him with countless arrows.

During the course of the war by night that kills so many heroes, we hear the loud twang of the Gandiva, O Rajan, over every other sound. Hearing the rumble of Arjuna's ratha as well as reverberant Gandiva, Karna tells Duryodhana, "Arjuna strums his great bow after slaughtering our leading warriors, so many great archers among the Kauravas, and, indeed much of our entire army. The thunder you hear is the rumble of his ratha. It is plain that this son of Pandu tonight achieves feats truly worthy of him and that he will swiftly raze all our forces.

Many of our troops already flee and no one dares stand up to Arjuna as he scatters our legions as the mighty wind may a rising mass of clouds. Encountering Arjuna, our soldiers all capsize like small skiffs on the raging ocean. You hear the wails, Duryodhana, of our best warriors as they run from the field, or fall to the arrows loosed in great waves from the Gandiva.

Listen, O tiger among maharathas, to the sound of drums and cymbals being beaten near Arjuna's ratha at dead of night like the deep roll of thunder in the sky. Listen to the screams of wounded soldiers and the tremendous roars and victorious shouts around Arjuna's chariot.

However, here Satyaki, the greatest of the Satwata vamsa, holds us all up. If Yuyudhana can be brought down, we might conquer all our enemies. Also, Dhrishtadyumna battles Acharya Drona, and many of our best rathikas encircle those two. If we can kill Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna,

victory will certainly be ours. So let us surround these two shuras even as we did Abhimanyu in the chakravyuha and kill them both. Arjuna already turns his chariot toward Drona's chariot, for he knows that Satyaki holds up so many of our Kuru maharathas. Let another goodly number of our greatest warriors ride to prevent Partha from coming to the beleaguered Satyaki's rescue. And let those that remain attack Satyaki all together, putting forth their fiercest prowess so that Yuyudhana of Madhu's race is despatched swiftly to Yama's abode."

Duryodhana concurs with Karna's view and, like the illustrious Indra requesting Vishnu, says to his uncle Sakuni, "Matulan, ride against Arjuna with ten thousand elephants and ten thousand chariots. Dusasana, Durvishaha, Subahu and Dushpradharshana will follow you with an akshauhini of foot-soldiers. Kill the two Krishnas; kill Yudhishtira, Nakula, Sahadeva and Bhima. My hope of victory rests in you, as that of the gods on their lord Indra. O Sakuni, slay the sons of Kunti, like Kartikeya slaying the Asuras."

Clad in armour and taking your sons and a large host with him, Sakuni rides against the Parthas to have their lives. Another great and general battle begins between the warriors of your army and the enemy. When Subala's son Sakuni advances against the Pandavas, Karna leads a teeming force against Satyaki, unleashing a gale of arrows. Your warriors all combine and surround Satyaki. Then, Bharatarishabha, Drona advances against Dhrishtadyumna's ratha and fights a wonderful and bloody night battle against the Panchalas.'"

CANTO 168

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'All the indomitable kings of your army besiege Satyaki's ratha in fury, to put an end to his lustrous and terrible exploits. Mounted on their fine chariots decked with gold and encrusted with jewels, and accompanied by cavalry and elephants, they surround the Satwata hero and, roaring an earthshaking challenge at him, cover him with their arrows. Even as they come at him, Sini's grandson snips off countless heads even as if he were plucking flowers from their stems. With his razor-faced arrows, he hacks away the trunks of so many elephants, the necks of numerous horses and the arms of countless warriors, wearing sparkling angadas.

The field of dreadful dharma is covered over by fallen chamaras and white chatras, O Bhaarata, and resembles the sky with stars in it. The screams of the host slaughtered by Satyaki is as awful as those of shrieking ghosts in hell. The world is filled by the horrible uproar and the night becomes still more brutal and appalling. Seeing Yuyudhana desiccate your army, hearing the incredible bloodcurdling din at dead of night, your mighty Duryodhana cries to his sarathy, "Ride to where this dreadful sound comes from."

Duryodhana, master archer, rides at Satyaki, who greets him with a dozen blood-drinking arrows shot from his bow drawn to its fullest stretch. A maddened Duryodhana gashes Yuyudhana with ten shafts like streaks of lightning. Meanwhile, the battle that rages between the Panchalas and your troops presents an exceptionally wonderful sight. Satyaki bores Duryodhana's brawny breast with eighty arrows, then despatches his horses to Yama's realm and fells his charioteer from his ratha.

Your son, Rajan, remains standing on his immobile chariot and looses a brilliant arrow storm at Satyaki, the Satwata cuts down with luculent skill. Then, with a broad-headed shaft, Satyaki breaks your son's formidable bow. Deprived of both his ratha and bow, Suyodhana, powerful ruler of men, quickly mounts Kritavarman's bright chariot and rides away. After Duryodhana's retreat, Satyaki harries and routs your army all around.

Meanwhile, surrounding Arjuna on all sides with thousands of rathas, elephants and horses, Sakuni lays violent siege to the glorious Pandava. Many of the Kuru maharathas loose devastras of great power at Arjuna. Indeed, these Kshatriyas fight Arjuna, accepting the certitude of death. An inspired Arjuna single-handedly arrests the progress of the thousands of chariots, elephants and horses; he is awesome, he is a god on the darkling field, and he forces them all to turn back. His eyes glittering coppery with rage, Sakuni strikes Arjuna powerfully with twenty shafts, drawing fonts of blood; with another hundred vicious barbs, he halts the sweeping advance of Partha's great chariot.

Arjuna first strikes Sakuni with twenty arrows and then each of the maharathas who ride with him with three. Stopping all of them with his scintillating volleys, Arjuna razes your army's warriors at will, with arrows shot with the force of striking thunder. Strewn with corpses of man and beasts, and arrows cut down, the earth looks as if it is covered with morbid yet fascinating flowers. Spread over with the heads of Kshatriyas, heads wearing crowns, their faces with noble noses, noble ears with beautiful earrings, lower lips bitten through in rage and pain, and staring eyes; covered by these heads graced with rich collars and crowned with gemstones, and lips that spoke sweet, eloquent words when life was in them, the earth looks splendent as if with hillocks covered with champaka flowers.

Having perpetrated this carnage, Arjuna pierces Sakuni once more, strikes his son Uluka with an arrow, and gives a roar that fills the world. He

smashes Sakuni's bow and sends his four horses to Yama's realm. Sakuni, O Bharatarishabha, jumps down from his chariot and clambers into Uluka's ratha. Riding on the same chariot, the maharatha father and son shower arrows over Partha like twin clouds lashing a mountain with rain. Arjuna rakes both with ferocious shafts and scuttles your troops so violently that they run in their thousands. Like a vast cloud mass dispersed on all sides by an irresistible wind, your army runs in all directions, in full view of their commanders. In the sinister night, many abandon the beasts they are riding; others urge their horses to their greatest speed and flee. Having put your forces to complete rout, Krishna and Arjuna sound their conches echoingly.

Dhrishtadyumna stabs Drona with three arrows, and severs the Acharya's bowstring. Throwing down that bow, Drona, the Kshatriya grinder, takes up another and, quicker than seeing, strikes Dhrishtadyumna with five arrows, and his charioteer with another five. Holding the Brahmana up, Dhrishtadyumna begins to destroy the Kaurava host like Maghavat annihilating the Asura army. He lets flow a ghastly, frothing river of blood, which glimmers in the lamplight. It runs between the two hosts, and bears away men, horses and elephants on its current! It resembles, O Rajan, the Vaitarani that flows down to the domain of Yama.

Harrying and decimating your army, the valiant Dhrishtadyumna blazes with tejas as Indra in the midst of the Devas. Then Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin blow their great conchs, as do the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, and Bhima as well. Thus, O Dhritarashtra, do these inexorable maharathas vanquish thousands of your illustrious kings before the eyes of Duryodhana, Karna, Drona and Aswatthaman!'"

CANTO 169

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing his army being massacred by the illustrious enemy maharathas, your son, O Rajan, rides up in fury to Karna and Drona and says to them, "You two started this battle in resentment, after Arjuna killed Jayadratha. And now you watch with indifference as the Pandavas decimate my army although you are both entirely able to vanquish them. If you intend to abandon me now, you should have warned me before we went to war.

'Together we will vanquish the sons of Pandu,' is what you said to me then. Listening to you, I went to war. If you had said otherwise, I would never have provoked hostilities with the Parthas, this dreadful battle that is killing our heroes past all count. If I do not deserve to be abandoned by you two, then fight as you truly can, O you bulls among men!"

Prodded by the shrewd Duryodhana with his goad of words, Karna and Drona attack the enemy again, like two snakes prodded with sticks. These two greatest maharathas in the world rush forward against the Parthas led by Satyaki and others. And uniting, the Parthas, with all their troops advance against these two shuras, who now repeatedly roar their ringing challenges at the Pandava forces.

Great Drona, master of all weapons, pierces Satyaki, bull of the Sinis, with ten arrows while Karna strikes him with ten, your son with seven, Vrishasena with ten, and Sakuni with seven. They join the unbreachable wall of Kauravas built around the Satwata. Seeing Drona mow down the Pandava army with his astras, the Somakas cover him from every side with dense showers of arrows. Drona continues to annihilate the Pandava Kshatriyas around him, Rajan, as the sun destroys darkness with his rays.

We then hear an uproar among the Panchalas, who call out pitifully to one another, while Drona the Brahmana butchers them. Some abandoning sons, some fathers, some brothers, some uncles, some their sister's sons, some other relatives and kinsmen, all run to save their own lives. Many are so panic-stricken that they run straight at Drona himself. Ah, past all count are the common Pandava soldiers and great Kshatriyas that the incendiary Acharya sends to Yama. Set upon in the night by the blazing master, the Pandava host flings down its weapon and runs from the terrible Acharya in full view of Bhimasena, Arjuna, Krishna, the twins, Yudhishtira and Dhrishtadyumna.

The world being plunged in darkness, one might otherwise see nothing; but by the light of the lamps from the Kaurava troops, one sees the flight of the enemy. Drona and Karna pursue your legions, killing countless men from behind with ruthless volleys of arrows and devastras too.

Seeing the Panchalas thus butchered, Krishna tells Arjuna and the rest of the Pandavas, "Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki, with the Panchalas, have confronted Drona and Karna. But they have been soundly beaten and the Brahmana and the Sutaputra have put our vast forces to flight and not all our persuasions will fetch the men back to fight.

Yet have no fear, O sons of Pandu, for the two Krishnas will now descend upon Drona and Karna like doom!"

Krishna sees Bhima riding up, and says again to Arjuna, to put heart into him, "There comes Bhima, leading the Somakas and the Pandavas, to confront Drona and Karna. O Pandava, fight now for the morale of all your troops, supported by Bhima and the rest of the many maharathas we have with us!"

The two Naravyaghras, the two Krishnas, ride to the van of their forces and advance on Drona and Karna. Now, Yudhishtira's army returns to the battle again, to the place where Drona and Karna are decimating their forces. Another horrific battle erupts between the two hosts, like two oceans

swollen at moonrise and surging into each other in tide. And now, the warriors of your army throw away the burning lamps they hold and, with the world plunged in darkness again, they rush at the Pandava soldiers again, guided only by the names they call out.

We hear the names that the kings fighting there proclaim, O Rajan, as if they are being announced at a swayamvara. Suddenly, a grim silence spreads over the field and lasts for a moment. Then, once more, we hear the bedlam raised by the roars and cries of the fighting men, both victors and vanquished. The heroes rush to where they see lamps still burning, like insects to a blazing fire. One by one, the lamps all die down and, as the Pandavas and the Kauravas wage bloodthirsty war between them, the darkness of the night thickens around them.'"

CANTO 170

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna, slayer of enemy Kshatriyas, sees Dhrishtadyumna and strikes him powerfully through his chest with ten excoriating arrows. Dhrishtadyumna swiftly returns Karna's fire with five searing arrows and shouts, "Halt! Stop and fight!"

They shroud each other in arrow clouds shot from bows drawn into circles. Then Karna kills Dhrishtadyumna's four horses; Karna destroys his enemy's best bow and, with a broad-headed shaft, fells the Panchala prince's sarathy from his niche in the chariot. Dhrishtadyumna jumps down from his chariot with a mace in hand. Though continuously gashed by Karna's arrows, he runs at him, clubs his horses so their heads are crushed, and then running back climbs nimbly into Arjuna's chariot. From there, Dhrishtadyumna wants to continue his duel with Karna but Yudhishtira stops him.

Mahatejasvin Karna, whose leonine roars mingling with the resounding twang of his bow, pauses, raises his conch to his lips and blows a blast on it like age-ending thunder. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna beaten, the Panchalas and the Somakas, mighty maharathas all, attack Karna all together, intent on killing him and with no care for their lives. Meanwhile, Karna's charioteer

has great Sindhu horses, white as moonbeams and fleet as thoughts, attached to his ratha.

Karna resumes battle with great energy, harrying the Panchala maharathas with a torrent of blazing arrows. The Panchala soldiers flee in terror, like some little does frightened by a lion. O Rajan, we see horsemen fall from their horses all around, elephant-riders from their elephants and maharathas from their chariots, all slain by Karna's supernal archery. In this battle being fought surely in a zone of hell, Karna lops off the arms of fleeing warriors with razor-faced shafts, their heads decked with chariot-rings, the thighs of others that are seated on elephants, or on horseback, or stand upon the earth. So sharp are his arrows that many of these fleeing maharathas do not realise for a while that they have lost their limbs or their mounts.

Killed by the Sutaputra's terrible shafts, the Panchalas and the Srinjayas are so seized by fear that they begin to see Karna everywhere; they imagine that the wind stirring a blade of grass for that awesome, superhuman maharatha. Why, they lose their wits to the extent that they see Karna in the forms of their friends and comrades and flee from them in terror. Karna pursues the broken and retreating army, his arrows flaring everywhere as he mows down the hapless enemy at his great will.

Others run away when Drona just looks at them. Seeing his army turn tail, Yudhishtira thinks it would be advisable for them all to retreat, and says to Arjuna, "Look where mighty Karna stands like Rudra himself with his Pinaka. In the dead of night, look how he scorches everything around him like Surya himself. All we hear are the helpless screams of those whom Karna tears apart with his arrows. So swiftly does he aim and loose his shafts that it appears to be an unbroken movement. He will annihilate all our friends, so quickly do whatever you must to kill Karna, for his time may have come."

Hearing this, Partha says to Krishna, "The Dharmaputra is frightened today by Karna's great skill. His legions repeatedly overwhelm ours and our men are fleeing. The rest of our army is already in shreds from the Acharya's arrows. Slaughtered and terrified by these two, we cannot seem to make a stand against them. I see Karna ride fearlessly everywhere and our best maharathas fleeing from him.

He unleashes his fervid tirade as he likes and I cannot bear to watch this anymore than a trodden-upon serpent. O tiger of Vrishni's vamsa, let us ride

at mighty Karna. I will either kill him, or let him kill me."

Krishna says, "Naravyaghra, this superhuman warrior rides across the field at will sowing death all around him, and he is like Indra himself. Arjuna, no one can challenge the Sutaputra other than you or Ghatotkacha. I do not think that the time has come for you to face the Suta's son. He still has the astra given him by Indra, which he has kept carefully to use against you. It has now assumed a terrible form.

Ghatotkacha is devoted to you and wishes to serve you, so let the great Rakshasa ride against Karna. Bhima is his father and Ghatotkacha is as powerful as a Deva. He has the astras of the Devas as well as those used by Rakshasas."

They send for Ghatotkacha and he appears before them, Rajan, clad in black armour and armed with a sword, a bow and arrows. Saluting Krishna and Arjuna, he proudly says, "Here I am, command me!"

Krishna says to Hidimbi's Rakshasa son of the blazing mouth and fiery eyes, his body the hue of clouds, "Listen, O Ghatotkacha, to what I have to say. The time has come for you, and none else, to display your prowess. Become the raft in this battle to save the sinking Pandavas. You have a myriad of weapons, and many kinds of Rakshasa maya. Look where Karna decimates the Pandava army as if it were a herd of cattle before him. Karna, mahabuddhi, mahatejasvin, consumes our greatest Kshatriyas in the flames of his astras as if offering them as havis to the gods.

The Pandava warriors cannot withstand him; burnt and shredded by the Sutaputra's arrows, the Panchalas also run from him like deer chased by a lion. You are the only one who can face him in battle, Ghatotkacha. Your time for glory has come. O Mahabaho, do what is worthy of your mother's race, as well as that of your sires. Men wish for sons to be delivered by them from strife. You must rescue your kinsmen tonight, Ghatotkacha, at this hour of your great strength.

Fathers wish for sons in order to accomplish their own objectives. Sons are the source of everything good, and are expected to save their fathers both here and in the hereafter. Illustrious you are and your might is dreadful and unrivalled; there is no one to equal you in battle. Become tonight the ship in which the Pandavas, whom the terrible Karna routs with his astras, and who are sinking in the Dhartarashtra ocean, safely come ashore. By night, all Rakshasas are infused with limitless powers, great might and untold courage. At this hour, they turn into invincible warriors of matchless

valour. Using your maya shakti and all your astras, slay Karna in this heart of the night. The Parthas, with Dhrishtadyumna, will then easily do away with Drona."

Arjuna adds, "Ghatotkacha, the long-armed Satyaki, Bhimasena and you are, in my judgment, our greatest warriors. Go and fight Karna tonight in single combat. Satyaki will protect your rear and, with his help, kill the brave Karna, as Indra did, with Skanda's, the Deva senapati's help, the Asura Taraka."

Ghatotkacha replies, "I am a match for Karna, and for Drona, O Bhaarata, or for any great Kshatriya maharatha. This night I will fight such a duel with the Suta's son that it will be spoken of as long as the world lasts. Tonight, I will spare neither the brave nor the timid, nor even those who, with joined hands, pray for quarter. Following Rakshasa dharma, I will kill all that come before me."

Saying these words, Hidimbi's Parantapa son, does not tarry a moment but rushes at Karna, attacking him with such ferocity that your troops are terrified. The Sutaputra, the Naravyaghra, smilingly meets the Rakshasa warrior of the blazing mouth and wild flaming locks down to his shoulders. And there is no doubt, O tiger among kings, that the battle between Karna and Ghatotkacha resembles the one between Indra and Prahlada in the old days.'"

CANTO 171

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the mighty-armed Ghatotkacha attack Karna's chariot in frenzy, Duryodhana says to Dusasana, "Stop the dangerous Rakshasa! Take a strong force with you and ride to Karna's help. Put forth all your prowess, my brother, and ensure that the terrible demon does kill Karna out of our heedlessness."

Meanwhile, Jatasura's mighty son, Alambusha, comes to Duryodhana and says, "O Suyodhana, I seek consent to go into battle. I mean to kill your celebrated enemies, the mighty Pandavas and all their followers. The despicable sons of Pritha killed my father Jatasura, greatest of all Rakshasas, by using some occult mantras. O king of men, I wish to worship my dead sire by offering him the blood of his enemies, and their flesh as tarpana and pinda! It is only just that you allow me this."

Duryodhana is delighted and says to that vile and powerful one, "I can vanquish my enemies with the might of Drona, Karna and others. However, you may, O Rakshasa, go and kill the monstrous Ghatotkacha, this Rakshasa who is always devoted to the Pandavas and now kills our elephants, horses and maharathas from the sky. Go, O Alambusha, and send Bhima's bestial son to Yamaloka."

Saying, “Tathaastu, so be it,” Alambusha roars an echoing challenge to Ghatotkacha and attacks him furiously with diverse kinds of missiles. However, Hidimbi and Bhima’s prodigious son blows in indescribable fury at Alambusha, Karna and the vast Kuru host like some unprecedented tempest banishing a mass of clouds. Seeing the power of Ghatotkacha’s maya, his dreadful sorcery, Alambusha strikes Ghatotkacha with a slew of different kinds of arrows; he then ravages the Pandava army with many strange and sinister astras, which consume whole legions with dark fires, in the twinkling of an eye. The Pandava troops break and flee from the tameless Rakshasa.

Mangled by Ghatotkacha’s missiles, your troops also flee in their thousands, throwing down their torches as they go. Alambusha strikes Bhimasena’s rampaging son with countless volleys. Ghatotkacha shatters Alambusha’s chariot, kills his weird sarathy and incinerates all his weapons, then laughing frightfully, Bhima’s son unleashes a cataract of seething barbs down on Karna, Alambusha and all the Kurus, like a cloudburst over the mountains of Meru. Hunted mercilessly by the staggering Ghatotkacha, unearthly panic and terror seize the Kuru host of the four kinds of forces, and in their haste to flee the awful Rakshasa, who is sometimes in the air and at others on the ground, your soldiers push, shove, trample and ride over one another in absolute pandemonium.

Without a chariot or a charioteer, Alambusha leaps at Ghatotkacha and fetches him several blows like thunder with his fists. Ghatotkacha trembles like a mountain with its trees, creepers and grasses struck by an earthquake; his eyes the colour of sunset, he raises his own arm like a spiked mace and strikes Jatasura’s son a stupendous blow that fells him onto the ground. He kneels on his back and grinds Alambusha into the earth. Alambusha frees himself and, springing up, attacks Ghatotkacha wildly, trips him and throws him down. Now he kneels on the supine son of Bhima and batters him in fury.

Awful and bloodcurdling is the hand-to-hand battle between the two Rakshasas, their fangs glinting in the night. They fight like Indra and Virochana’s son Bali; now they begin to use maya, dark sorcery, as they fight. Turning into fire and water, then into Garuda and Takshaka, then into a cloud and a tempest, and after that into thunder and a mountain, then two elephants and then Rahu and the Sun, they employ a hundred different kinds of illusions to kill each other.

Alambusha and Ghatotkacha strike each other with clubs, maces, lances, mallets, axes, short cudgels and crags. Riding on horseback or on elephants, fighting on foot or from chariots, the great Rakshasas, both gifted with ample powers of magic, fight on bewildering and mystifying those that watch them. Then, Ghatotkacha leaps down again from his ratha in a flash, like a hunting hawk, gives a horrible roar and, seizing the gigantic Alambusha, he flings him down on the earth, like Vishnu slaying the Asura Maya. With a gleaming stroke of a magnificent curved and serrated scimitar, he hews off his ferile enemy's head in an eruption of gore, even as Alambusha is still roaring hideously. The head roars on even after its has been cut from its neck.

Holding the blood-dyed head by its long red hair, Ghatotkacha runs to Duryodhana's chariot and, with a smile, flings Alambusha's frightful head down at your son's feet. With a roar deep as clouds during the rains, he says to Duryodhana, "Here is the head of your monster on whom you relied! I will bring you your precious Karna's head next, and then take yours, vile Duryodhana! One who observes dharma, artha and kama never visits a king, a Brahmana, or a woman with empty hands. Take this head as my tribute to you, O king of evil. And live happily still, until I bring you Karna's head."

Duryodhana stands frozen in shock, and Ghatotkacha lopes away into the night, mounts his chariot and rides straight at Karna, loosing a hundred arrows at his head. A duel breaks out between the two that is altogether wonderful and well nigh indescribable.'"

CANTO 172

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me about this battle in the middle of the night between Karna and Ghatotkacha. Describe the form of the Rakshasa to me. What kind of chariot does he ride and what is the nature of his horses and his weapons? How big are his horses, the standard on his chariot and his bow? What kind of armour and what type of casque does he wear? Describe all this to me, O Sanjaya, for you are a marvellous narrator!'

Sanjaya says, 'The gigantic Ghatotkacha has eyes the colour of blood, a face the colour of copper; his belly is low and sunken and the bristles on his body all point upwards. His head is green, his ears are like arrowheads, his cheekbones are high, and his mouth is wide, extending from ear to ear. His teeth are sharp, with four of them high and curved fangs; his tongue is long and his lips are heavy, both coppery. His brows are long and thick, his nose is heavy, his body is blue and his neck is red. Tall as a hill, he is terrible to behold and has strength to match his massive frame. By the standards of men he might be called ugly, yet he is striking, O king. His limbs are as tough as tree-trunks or rocks; the hair on his head is tied up in topknot of a

fearful shape. His hips are large and his navel is deep. Although he is enormous, he is muscular and lithe.

The ornaments on his arms are both dark and bright, rough and beautiful. He wears heavy angadas and a corselet on his torso like a circle of fire upon the breast of a mountain. On his head is a brilliant golden crown, exquisitely wrought, and rising over his lofty brow in an arch. His earrings are as bright as the morning sun, and his garlands are made of gold and also scintillating. Apart from the cuirass, he wears a great and heavy coat of polished brass armour of great effulgence.

His chariot is decked with a hundred tinkling bells, and on his flagstaff flutter numerous blood-red banners. Of prodigious proportions, and of the measure of a nalwa, the ratha is covered with bearskins. Carrying all kinds of mighty weapons, it has a tree-tall standard, eight wheels, is adorned with every kind of wildflower garland, and its rumble is like the roar of the clouds. His horses are immense, of unknowable breed; they are like infuriated elephants and they have red eyes that shine in the night; of utterly terrible appearance, they are variegated in hue and, for all their bulk, are gifted with great speed as well as strength. Untiring, with long manes and neighing repeatedly in voices that horrify, they bear the Rakshasa hero into battle. A rakshasa of sinister eyes, with a fiery mouth and earrings like circles of flame, is his charioteer, holding reins bright as the rays of the sun in his claw like yet elegant hands. With this charioteer, Ghatotkacha comes to battle, like Surya with his legless sarathy Aruna.

He looks like a small mountain encircled by a mighty cloud; the standard he flies seems actually to scrape the skies. A carnivorous vulture, its feathers also the hue of blood, perches on top of the flagstaff. Bhima's son comes into battle drawing his bow with a sound like Indra's Vajra; his bowstring is hard as diamonds and sparkles; his bow is twelve cubits long and one cubit wide. Filling all the points of the sky with missiles the length of the aksha of a chariot, the Rakshasa attacks Karna, on this night that has already destroyed so many heroes.

The Rakshasa stands looming and erect, proudly on his chariot, and his bow roars as he stretches it. O Bhaarata, your troops tremble like an agitated sea when they see Hidimbi's son ride toward them. However, Karna gazes calmly at the fearsome apparition advancing wrathfully on him. A smile curving his haughty lips, the Sutaputra stands unmoved and does battle with the monstrous one, at close quarters, like one great tusker

against another, or a hilly bull against another lord of a great herd. The duel between the two cannot be described as being any less than that between the one of yore between Indra and Sambara.

Each wields a formidable bow, its twanging like thunder, and lays unbridled siege to the other with arrows of untold power. The shafts shot from the bows drawn to their fullest stretch, pierce brazen armour and draw geysers of blood. With these, with spears as long as akshas, they maul each other like tigers with fang and talon. Ah, searing one another with arrow storms they are peerless, resplendent.

Their limbs pierced and gashed, bathed in blood, they look like two hills of chalk, with crimson rillets running down their breasts. Neither can make the other flinch, Rajan. For a long while, the duel by night between Kara and Ghatotkacha is even, nothing separates the twain.

The reverberations of Ghatotkacha's bow fill both friends and foes with fear. Karna cannot prevail over the Rakshasa with common arrows and he invoke devastras and discharges these at Ghatotkacha; at which, Ghatotkacha promptly begins to uses maya, the sorcery of illusions. He appears as if surrounded by a teeming akshauhini of frightful Rakshasas armed with lances, great rocks, hillocks and cudgels. Seeing Ghatotkacha himself advance towards Karna with a mighty and bizarre weapon raised in his hands, like the Destroyer himself armed with his club, all the kings there pierced through with fear and panic.

Terrified by Ghatotkacha's horrible roars, the elephants spray urine and dung, and all the warriors tremble with fright. Then a thick rain of rocks and stones falls everywhere, flung incessantly by all the Rakshasas, for their strength swells many times at the midnight hour. Iron wheels, bhusundis, strange darts, lances, spears, sataghnis and axes also fall in torrent. At this, all the kings of your army, as well as your sons and the rest of their soldiers flee. Only one stands unmoved, a grim smile still curving his handsome lips; Karna stands quite unmoved, like a god upon dark Kurukshetra.

Why, he dispels every illusion of dread that Ghatotkacha creates. Seeing his sorcery dispersed, an infuriated Ghatotkacha once more aims deadly astras at the radiant Sutaputra. These bolts of lightning, fire, wind and water plough right through Karna's body and, covered in blood, flash into the ground hissing like angry snakes. The Suta's son looses ten excruciating barbs at Ghatotkacha, which plunge into his very marmas. Agony screams through the Rakshasa's blood, yet never wavering, he summons an

unworldly chakra from patala, thousand spoked, sharper than razors, brilliant as the morning sun, shimmering with dark and resonant gemstones, and he hurls that wheel of death at Karna.

But Karna blows the wheel of death, spinning at him like a hurricane, into dust with his superhuman archery; the dazzling and eerie chakra falls as powder on to the ground, dashed like the hopes and plans of an unfortunate man.

His fury mounting by the moment, Ghatotkacha envelops Karna with lashing showers of shafts, like Rahu covering the Sun. However, invested with the skill of Rudra or of Indra's younger brother or of Indra, Karna shrouds Ghatotkacha's chariot in a darkness of arrows. Ghatotkacha whirls a golden mace and casts it ardently at Karna, who demolishes that exceptional weapon as well.

The titanic Rakshasa flies up into the sky and, roaring deep like a mass of thunderheads, rains down a shower of occult golden trees, their leaves like swords, over the Sutaputra. Karna desiccates these and strikes the mayavi poised above him so that now his blood rains down over the Sutaputra's ratha; ah, Radha's son is truly like Surya piercing ominous cloud with his ineluctable rays. Slaughtering Ghatotkacha's horses, smashing his chariot into a hundred pieces, Karna assaults him with arrows like streak lightning, blinding astras.

Quickly, Ghatotkacha is so covered by Karna's shafts that stick quivering in his body that nowhere upon him can even two finger widths of space be found that are arrowless. The Rakshasa resembles the most astounding porcupine with quills erect. So entirely is he covered with arrows that we no longer see Ghatotkacha or his dead horses, his broken chariot or even his lofty standard with the sinister vulture on top.

Ghatotkacha repels and destroys Karna's devastras with his own astras. Showers of dark shafts fall from an invisible source in the sky, O Bhaarata, and he assumes a terrifying form that chills the blood of the Kauravas. With maya, he assumes many ferocious and grim heads and faces, and he consumes all Karna's devastras. Then, all of a sudden, the enormous Rakshasa, bleeding from a hundred wounds on his body, lays down on the field, as if life has left him. Thinking him dead, the Kauravas erupt in joy.

However, next moment, Ghatotkacha appears everywhere! He runs all across Kurukshetra, changing shapes every moment, until he again looms over the field in a giant form with a hundred heads and a hundred bellies,

and looking like the Mainaka Mountain. He next becomes minuscule, about the measure of a thumb, and flits about on the ground and through the air. He burrows down into the earth, then soars up into the sky, then dives down into the pools and lakes of blood, dyeing himself in scarlet.

We see him near us one moment, then far away the next. With his maya, we see him blaze across earth and sky and all the directions, and then again standing mountainous wearing his brazen armour on a massive golden chariot. His pendulous kundalas waving about, the Rakshasa comes right up to Karna's chariot and fearlessly says to the Sutaputra, "Stop a while, O Suta's son. Where will you go tonight? You will not escape me alive. For tonight, I mean to quench forever your consuming thirst for battle by killing you, O Karna!"

Saying this and laughing like thunder, the coppery-eyed Ghatotkacha once more soars steeply up into the sky, from where he lashes down a downpour of arrows over Karna, all of them big as akshas, the axlerods of chariots. The unruffled Karna fluently destroys the heavy cascade before it comes anywhere near him.

Ghatotkacha uses maya again and makes himself invisible. Then he turns into a mountain with many summits and covered with tall trees. From that black mountain, streams of spears, swords and clubs issue incessantly. Karna remains unmoved and, still smiling, invokes a great devastra, which consumes the barrage of weapons and blows the mountain of illusion apart.

Ghatotkacha turns himself into a blue cloud with a glimmering rainbow in the sky and begins to pelt the Suta's son with a storm of hard stones. Vikartana's son Karna, also called Vrisha, the greatest of all men that know of weapons, invokes a Vayavyastra and destroys the cloud. Ghatotkacha casts down another weapon like a bolt of lightning at him; Karna douses this with a weapon of water. The mighty son of Bhimasena laughs uproariously, shaking earth and sky; he conjures up an all-powerful illusion against the mighty Karna.

Karna sees Ghatotkacha advance wildly on him, surrounded by a host of Rakshasas who resemble lions and tigers and infuriated elephants; some ride on elephants, some on chariots, and some on horseback; all are armed with diverse, uncanny weapons and clad in diverse kinds of armour and wear sundry kinds of ornaments. Seeing Ghatotkacha with his fiends like Indra surrounded by the Maruts, Karna gives him violent battle.

Ghatotkacha pierces Karna with five arrows and gives a roar that again terrifies all the kings and maharathas. He looses an Anjalikastra and shatters the bow in Karna's hands, as well as all the shafts that the Sutaputra has shot at him. Karna takes up another bow as big and mighty as Indra's dhanusha, draws its bowstring back powerfully and unleashes a lethal volley of golden-winged arrows at the sky-ranging Rakshasas. Ravaged by these shafts, the host of wide-chested Rakshasas is as agitated as a herd of wild elephants chased by a kingly lion. Karna devours all the Rakshasas in the air and upon the ground, along with their elephants and other extraordinary mounts; the Sutaputra, Suryaputra looks like apocalyptic Agni burning all creatures at the pralaya.

Having destroyed the Rakshasa army, the Suta's son is as resplendent as the Lord Maheswara when he once razed the triad city of the Asuras, the Tripura in the sky. Among the thousands of kings on the Pandava side, O sire, there is not one who can match Karna then, save Ghatotkacha, prince of Rakshasas, invested with unearthly strength and who, inflamed with battlelust and fury, looks like Yama himself. The Rakshasa's eyes seem to spew flames, even like burning drops of oil from two blazing brands. Striking palm against palm like thunderclaps, biting his lower lip, we see the Rakshasa again mounted on a chariot wrought from maya to which are yoked a number of macabre fanged green donkeys, which as big as elephants and have the faces of Pisachas.

He says to his charioteer, "Take me to the Suta's son."

Riding at Karna again on his fearful ratha, Ghatotkacha hurls an asani of Rudra's workmanship, dreadful and furnished with eight wheels at the Suta's son. Throwing down his bow, Karna jumps down onto the ground, seizes the asani in his hands and hurls it back at Ghatotkacha. The Rakshasa also leaps out of his chariot before the dreadfully blazing weapon burns the dark chariot to ashes in a flash of fire, taking with it horses, charioteer and standard, and then plunges down into the earth and deep into its very bowels, filling even the Devas with wonder. All who see Karna's incredible feat applaud him.

Karna climbs back into his ratha and once more unleashes a tirade of arrows. Indeed, O Maharajan, there is none among all living creatures who could have done what Karna does during his battle with Bhima's awesome son. Struck by Karna's missiles, like a mountain lashed by torrents of rain, Ghatotkacha vanishes again from the field with maya.

Fighting with sorcery, the great Rakshasa destroys Karna's lustrous devastras with his maya. Karna is not intimidated but battles on splendidly. The mighty son of Bhimasena divides his body into many sorcerous forms, frightening all the maharathas of the Kuru army. There bound onto the field of war lions, tigers, hyenas, snakes with fiery tongues, and birds with iron beaks.

Whenever Karna strikes him deep with mighty arrows and astras, the Rakshasa, looming large as Himavat, vanishes using his maya. Immediately, many Rakshasas, Pisachas, Yatudhanas, teeming wolf packs, and leopards of frightful aspect rush towards Karna to devour him. They run at the Suta's son, with fierce roars and howls to frighten him. Karna strikes each of the mayic beasts and apparitions with golden-winged arrows that drink their unnatural blood; finally, with a Gandharvastra he dissipates all the Rakshasa's illusions.

Karna never pauses but looses a brutal volley at Ghatotkacha's freshly appeared horses so they buckle and fall before the Rakshasa's eyes, their bodies mangled, their backs torn open by the Sutaputra's virile shafts. Seeing his maya dispelled, Hidimbi's son vanishes again, warning Karna, "I will be back soon to kill you, Sutaputra!"'

CANTO 173

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'As Karna and Ghatotkacha battle luciferously, the valiant and grotesque Rakshasa appears on the field, leading a large force of fiends, and approaches Duryodhana. Thousands of sinister Rakshasas, of diverse forms and endowed with great heroism, come with him. He has come because of his old animosity for the Pandavas. Bhima had killed all his kinsmen—the great Baka, who ate Brahmanas, as well as the powerful Kirmira—and his friend Hidimba.

Alayudha has waited for a long time, brooding over his old enmity. Learning now that a nocturnal battle rages, he arrives like an angry elephant or a provoked snake, driven by the wish to kill Bhima.

The awful Alayudha says to Duryodhana, "You know how Bhima killed my kinsmen, Baka, Kirmira and Hidimba. He deflowered the virgin Hidimbi, dishonoring us Rakshasas. I am here to kill Bhima with all his followers, horses, chariots and elephants, as well as the son of Hidimbi and his warriors. I will slaughter all the sons of Kunti today, and Krishna and all that walk before them. I will devour them with all their followers. Command all your troops to desist from battle for we will fight the Pandavas."

Duryodhana, surrounded by his brothers, is delighted! He tells the Rakshasas, "I will place you in the van of army but my own troops will not stand by as spectators for their enmity has not cooled."

Alayudha, bull among Rakshasas, saying, "Tathaastu, so be it!" to the king, and sweeps at Bhima with his horrible army. He has a blazing form, and rides a chariot bright as the sun and very like Ghatotkacha's ratha. The rumble of Alayudha's huge chariot is as deep as Ghatotkacha's and it too is covered with bearskins and measures a full nalwa. His horses, like those of Ghatotkacha, are swift as thoughts, are as big as elephants, have faces like pisachas and bray like donkeys. They live on warm flesh and blood, and a hundred of these gigantic creatures are yoked to Alayudha's black chariot. Truly, Rajan, the sound of Alayudha's chariot is just as loud as Ghatotkacha's and his bowstring too is hard and strong as diamonds. His arrows, winged with gold and whetted on stone, are as big as Ghatotkacha's, measuring as much as an aksha.

Alayudha is as mighty-armed as Ghatotkacha, and the banner of his ratha is fiery and has the splendour of the sun, and like Ghatotkacha's, vultures and great ravens perch on it. In form, he is more handsome than Ghatotkacha, and his face blazes in wrath. With dazzling angadas, shining coronet and wildflower garlands, a glittering helmet, a great curved sword, a mace, bhusundis, short clubs, ploughshare weapons and bows and arrows, his skin black, and thick and hard as an elephant's, riding on the magnificent chariot, the dreadful Alayudha looks indeed like some great storm cloud gashed by flashes of lightning.

The greatest Pandava kings and maharathas joyfully ride forward to meet Alayudha the Rakshasa's onrush. Yet another battle that makes one's hair stand on end breaks out between the demons and the Pandava forces, at dead of night.'"

CANTO 174

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'The advent of Alayudha puts heart into your sons; also knowing that Duryodhana himself leads them now, they are in high spirits, like men wanting to cross the ocean when they find a raft. The surviving kings and maharathas of the Kuru army regard themselves having obtained a new lease of life and all of them accord a respectful welcome to Alayudha, who is such a vile Rakshasa that Bhishma would never have allowed him near his army as long as he had command. But now, the Kali yuga has risen over the world and this is the war at night, the soul of darkness.

The preternatural battle between Karna and Ghatotkacha's Rakshasa, which though savage and horrible is yet magnificent, holds the Panchalas and all the other Kshatriyas who watch it spellbound in irresistible fascination. Meanwhile, your soldiers, though protected on all sides by Drona, Aswatthaman, Kripa and the others, are all seized by absolute terror and we hear loud wails everywhere, dismal cries of "All is lost!"

Having watched his unimaginable feats on Kurukshetra, your warriors are all frantic with fear of Ghatotkacha, frightened out of their very wits. Your troops give up all hope of Karna surviving the duel with Bhima's son.

Seeing his precious Karna in grave distress, Duryodhana summons Alayudha and says to him, “Look where Karna battles Hidimbi’s son by himself. Look at the corpses of the thousand great kings that lie askew upon the ground, all slain by Bhima’s monstrous son with his dark and bright astras; ah, look where they lie like trees struck by lightning or uprooted by an elephant in rage. If you agree, mighty Alayudha, from this moment, among all my warriors, let it become your sole mission to slay Bhima’s horrible son. My friend, you must see that Ghatotkacha does not take Karna’s life on this night, using his maya shakti, or our cause will be lost and the war. And all who have died for our sake will have sacrificed their lives in vain. Grave and great is the mission with which I entrust you, noble Alayudha; I know you will not disappoint me.”

Alayudha says “Tathaastu—so be it,” and attacks Ghatotkacha. Turning away from Karna, Ghatotkacha greets Alayudha with a terrific volley. An epic battle ensues between the two night rangers. Karna turns his attention to Bhima, riding his chariot of solar effulgence. Bheema sees Alayudha locked in battle with Ghatotkacha and, troubled like the great bull of a herd facing a lion, Vrikodara ignores Karna charging at him and dashes instead at Alayudha, covering him with gusts of arrows.

At this, Alayudha abandons Ghatotkacha and turns to face Bhima. Bhima, the Rakshasa slayer, lays violent siege to him and Alayudha too shrouds the Pandava in clouds of arrows. All Alayudha’s dreadful Rakshasas turn on Bhima, for it is him that they have come to kill and avenge Hidimba, Kirmira, Baka and the others that the son of Pandu despatched. Bhima Mahabaho strikes each fiend deep with five scalding arrows at which they scream horribly and flee.

Seeing Bhima drive away his Rakshasas like some dogs, Alayudha assails the Pandava ever more fiercely. Bhimasena also shoots back at him with great violence, but the Rakshasa cuts down Vrikodara’s shafts in flight and some he even catches with his hands. Bhima pauses, gazes for a long moment at his enemy and casts a mace like a thunderbolt at him. Alayudha smashes that weapon with a mace of his own.

Kunti’s son again unleashes squalls of arrows at the Rakshasa prince and Alayudha cuts these down with his own arrow storms. Seeing their lord Alayudha contain Bhima by himself, the Rakshasas who fled in fear return to battle and begin to slaughter Bhima’s elephants; they also harry the

Panchalas, the Srinjayas and the horses of Bhima's army, considerably disconcerting them.

Watching the battle between Bhima and Alayudha, Krishna says to Arjuna, "Bhima is succumbing to this prince of Rakshasas. We must leave everything else and protect Bhima. Let Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, along with the sons of Draupadi, ride against Karna. Let Nakula, Sahadeva and Satyaki kill Alayudha's Rakshasas! As for you, O Mahabaho, face this akshauhini led by Drona for great is the danger that threatens us now."

At Krishna's command, the Pandava and Panchala maharathas ride against Karna and the Rakshasas that fight for the Kurus.

Alayudha draws his bow into a circle and looses some astras like venom spitting cobras at Bhima, breaking his bow. The mighty Rakshasa kills Bhima's horses and charioteer, so Bhima leaps down from his ratha. With an echoing roar, Vrikodara casts a mace heavy as a hill at his adversary. Alayudha shatters that gada with one of his own and the report deafens all the war by night; the Rakshasa gives a bloodcurdling roar. Bhimasena seizes up another massive mace, and the battle that now erupts between the human prince and the Rakshasa makes brave men tremble.

They swing their maces at each other with such violence that the very earth trembles and both are covered in brilliant showers of sparks. When the maces shatter, they cast them aside and fight with bare arms and fists: with blows that echo like spring thunder. In frenzy they fight, soon with chariot wheel, yokes, akshas, adhishthanas, upaskaras, and indeed with anything that comes to hand. Both are covered in blood and present such a magnificent spectacle, O Rajan!

Then, Krishna sends Hidimbi's son Ghatotkacha to protect Bhimasena.'"

CANTO 175

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Bhima sorely tried and wounded by Alayudha, Krishna rids to Ghatotkacha and says to him, "O Mahabaho, look where the Rakshasa violently besets Bhima in front of all the troops and you. Leave Karna for now and kill Alayudha. You can despatch Karna later."

Ghatotkacha immediately abandons his duel with Karna and confronts Alayudha. The battle between them is intolerably ferocious, O Bhaarata. Meanwhile, the mighty Yuyudhana, with Nakula and Sahadeva, looses a firetide of blazing shafts at Alayudha's terrible-looking and heroic Rakshasas. Spraying arrows all around him Arjuna Kiritin claims the lives of many great Kshatriyas.

Karna continues to harangue so many kings and maharathas amongst the Panchalas led by Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin and others. Bhima rushes at Karna, covering the Sutaputra with a tempest of arrows. Having slain Alayudha's Rakshasas, Nakula, Sahadeva and Satyaki ride at Karna, while the Panchalas confront Drona.

The raging Alayudha strikes Ghatotkacha on his head with a huge parigha, making him swoon and forces him to sit in his chariot, where he

remains still. Bhima's son recovers soon and hurls a golden gada, with a hundred little bells, at his enemy with untold force. This mace of power kills Alayudha's steeds, his charioteer, and shatters his loud ratha. Using sorcery, Alayudha jumps down from his smashed chariot and decants a copious shower of blood. The sky appears overspread with a mass of black clouds adorned with flashes of lightning. We hear a booming thunderstorm with the strangest peals of thunder on high, all created by Alayudha's maya.

Ghatotkacha soars up from his chariot and dispels this threatening illusion. Alayudha now rains down a storm of smooth hard pebbles over Ghatotkacha, who blows the stones into smithereens with his astras. The two inundate each other with cascades and cataracts of iron parighas, spears, maces, short clubs, mallets, pinakas, swords, lances, long spears, kampanas, keen shafts, both long and flat-headed arrows, quoits, battle-axes, ayogudas, short-arrows, weapons with heads like those of cattle and ulukhalas.

Tearing up great sami, pilu, karira, champaka, ingudi, badari, the flowering kovidara, the arimeda, plaksha, banyan and peepul trees, they batter each other with these; they tear mountain peaks and hurl these at each other and large crags and balls of iron. Kurukshetra quakes with the sound of these weapons crashing against each other and the battle between Alayudha and Bhima's son is like the one between Vali and Sugriva, the two Vanara princes of old.

They hew and smite each other with other missiles, with countless powerful spells, and with glinting swords curved like half moons. The two titanic Rakshasas pause often to wrestle and strike one another with their bare hands, as blood and sweat run profusely down their great bodies; they seize each other by their locks of wild hair. Finally, Ghatotkacha darts low and bodily hefts Alayudha over his head. Whirling him around, he dashes that Rakshasa down onto the ground so Alayudha briefly faints. Before he awakes, Ghatotkacha, quick as light cuts his grisly head from its thick neck with a sweeping arc of his great sword. Hidimbi's half-human son throws back his head and roar after echoing roar erupts from him.

The Pandavas and Panchalas also roar out their relief and exhilaration at seeing the great Alayudha slain; they blow ten thousand conches and beat a thousand batteries of drums. Lamps are lit again everywhere. Victory clearly belongs to the Pandavas and the grim night is bright and magnificent with the din of celebration that your enemies raise. Once more, Ghatotkacha

lopes up to Duryodhana's chariot and flings Alayudha's still warm and bleeding head down at his feet.

Duryodhana is stricken with dread for his troops. Alayudha had come to Duryodhana on his own, wanting to avenge his kinsmen whom Bhima had killed, and Duryodhana had rejoiced thinking that this great demon would surely kill his most hated cousin. Suyodhana had thought that Bhima's death would break the spirits of the other sons of Pandu and that victory would then be his. Besides, with Bhima killed, he had thought that his own brothers' lives would be safe.

Now with Alayudha killed by Ghatotkacha, Duryodhana hangs his head and feels instead that Bhima's vow is already as good as fulfilled and he, Duryodhana, and his brothers are as good as slain by Pandu's second son who blows everywhere on Kurukshetra, irresistibly as a hurricane of his father Vayu the Wind.'"

CANTO 176

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'After killing Alayudha, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha is overjoyed and, standing in front of the army, he gives all kinds of shouts and roars. Hearing these inhuman sounds that make elephants tremble, a great fear, O Rajan, lays hold of your warriors. Karna, apparently unmoved, attacks the Panchalas. He draws blood from Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin with ten strong and perfect arrows, each; with a flurry of other powerful barbs, he makes Yudhamanyu, Uttamaujas and even the great Satyaki shudder as the shafts crash into their great bodies. These warriors, too, draw their bows into circles and shoot at Karna from all sides.

During the war by night, the twanging of their bowstrings and the rumble of their chariot-wheels are loud and deep as the thunder of clouds massed at the end of summer. Their arrows are streaks of lightning; they are the driving deadly rain. Standing immovable like a hill, a prince of the mountains, Parantapa Karna cuts down every arrow shot at him. With speed that defies imagination, he strikes his enemies viciously with javelins flung with the force of thunder and with arrows that have golden wings.

He destroys the standards of some maharathas and mauls the bodies of others, deprives some of their charioteers, and some of their horses. Unable

to withstand the Suryaputra, thousands flee from him and seek refuge with Yudhishtira's force.

Seeing them thus broken and fleeing, Ghatotkacha who has just killed Alayudha, gives a roar more dreadful than any heard before, and rushes towards Karna unleashing a torrent of savage shafts, big as axle rods. Locking quickly into another frenetic duel, both loose barbed bolts, cloth-yard shafts, frog-faced arrows, nalikas, dandas, asanis, arrows with heads like the calf's tooth or the boar's ear, broad-headed arrows, those pointed like bulls' horns, and others with heads like razors. All these have golden wings and as they fly through the air they seem to drape a garland of unworldly lotuses around the throat of the sky.

Evenly matched, they loose blazing devastras at each other and astra consumes astra lighting up the night sky with many small suns. No one can see the slightest difference between the two, in speed or prowess, and the scintillating duel between the son of Surya and the son of Bhima presents a breathtaking spectacle even like the contention between the Sun and Rahu in the firmament.

Rajan, when Ghatotkacha finds that he cannot prevail over Karna, he invokes an astra with which he first kills Karna's horses and then his charioteer, after which he vanishes.'

Dhritarashtra asks, 'When the Rakshasa, fighting deceitfully, vanishes, tell me, O Sanjaya, what the warriors of my army think.'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the Rakshasa disappear, all the Kauravas cry, "The Rakshasa will reappear as suddenly as he has disappeared and he will kill Karna."

Karna Mahabuddhi is aware of the danger and covers all the directions with dense showers of shafts darkening earth and sky so everything becomes invisible. So great is the lightness of hand Karna displays that no one can discern when he touches his quiver, when he fits his arrows to his bowstring and when he aims and shoots them. The whole sky is shrouded by his shafts.

In the sky, the Rakshasa creates a profound and deadly illusion of maya in the firmament. We see above us what appears to be a mass of red clouds blazing like fire. From this cloud issue flashes of lightning, and many burning brands, O Kuru king! Frightful roars also emanate from there, like the sound of thousands of drums beaten at once. From it fall, all around, countless golden-winged shafts, darts, lances, weighty clubs, battle-axes,

scimitars washed with oil, axes with blazing edges, short spears, long spears with keen points, spiked maces emitting strange bright rays of light, beautiful maces of iron, others of solid gold and twined about with silver string and sataghnis. Huge crags fall from it, and thousands of thunderbolts with deafening reports, and hundreds of chakras and razor sharp blades, brilliant as the fire.

Karna's missiles cannot destroy all that thick and blazing deluge. Loud is the sound of falling horses killed by the wizardly weapons pouring down, mighty elephants struck with thunder, and great maharathas slain. Ravaged by Ghatotkacha, Duryodhana's host wanders demented and in agony all over the battlefield. With piteous cries, even as those of women, your host drifts lost and aimless, on the point of being annihilated.

Only their leaders, great Kshatriyas noble of heart, do not turn their faces from the battle but stand steadfast waiting for death. Seeing the carnage Ghatotkacha fetches upon their host, terror and dismay grip your sons. Hundreds of jackal packs, with tongues blazing like fire and terrible voices, begin to howl, further petrifying the Kaurava warriors. The Rakshasas that tread air on high, with fiery tongues and burning mouths, fangs like thick needles and forms big as hills, lash down arrows over your hapless forces. Struck by shafts, darts, lances, maces and spiked clubs, by thunderbolts, pinakas, asanis, chakras and sataghnis, the Kaurava troops are on the very verge of complete collapse and surrender. The maya Rakshasas further assail them with sthunas made of black iron and twined about with strings of jute.

All your combatants are in a nightmarish stupor. The bravest warriors have their weapons broken, or their heads hewn off, or limbs fractured and fall like grass being mown, while falling rocks crush horses, elephants and rathas. The Yatudhanas of terrible forms that Ghatotkacha creates with maya spare neither those who are terrified nor those who cry for mercy. During the brutal carnage of Kuru heroes, and the extermination of majestic Kshatriyas brought on by Death himself, the Kaurava warriors break ranks and flee all together, crying, "Fly, you Kauravas! All is lost! The Devas with Indra at their head are killing us for the sake of the Pandavas!"

And at this horrible juncture, there is not a soul that can rescue the Bharata troops. During the mayhem, no one can distinguish friend from foe; all run any way they can from the horror with which Ghatotkacha visits them in that very soul of darkness. All your warriors and soldiers having

fled, Kurukshetra seems eerily empty as if no living man is anywhere near the gruesome field of fate.

We see only Karna, Rajan, shining by himself, drowning in the awful shower of weapons that falls incessantly from above.

Karna covers the sky with his missiles, resisting the unworldly sorcery of the Rakshasa. In truth, we see that he is endowed with deep humility, which enables him to achieve the most difficult and noble feats; Karna remains calm, unmoved by the horrors that flare down from the sky. All the Saindhavas and Balhikas are frightened and look just to Karna for protection. They worship him in their thoughts, while Ghatotkacha continues to wreak havoc upon them.

Ghatotkacha casts down a sataghni of a hundred fire, fitted with scything chakras, and kills Karna's four horses simultaneously and they fall dead on their knees. Jumping down from his horseless chariot and seeing the Kauravas run away, and finding his own devastra nullified by the Rakshasa's maya, Karna still remains calm and turns his thought inward in dhyana to reflect on what he should do next.

Watching Karna and the infernal Rakshasa maya that Ghatotkacha uses, all the Kauravas and your sons cry out in despair, "Karna, kill the Rakshasa with your shakti or he will kill us all tonight! What will Bhima and Arjuna do to us? Slay this wretched Rakshasa or he will consume us all. Only those who escape from this monster tonight will live to fight the Parthas. Karna, you must use the shakti you had from Indra and slay Ghatotkacha. Karna, there is no other way. You must kill Bhima's dreadful son or we will lose everything within the hour."

Karna seeing the Rakshasa ablaze at dead of night, and the Kuru army struck with terror; hears the piteous entreaties of the Kauravas and knows he has no choice but to use Indra's shakti. Quivering all over his mighty form like some mythic lion, magnificent Karna summons Indra's shakti, which he has kept so carefully and worshipped for years so that, when the time came, he could kill Arjuna with it. But now, he summons the awesome weapon that looks like the very tongue of Death lolling out to drink copious blood, or Yama's sister Mrityu herself descended on dark Kurukshetra being laid waste by Ghatotkacha.

Karna invokes that burning weapon called Naikartana and casts it at Bhima's son. Seeing that inexorable shakti in the Sutaputra's hands, Ghatotkacha in a flash assumes a body as big as the foot of the Vindhya

mountain! Bhima’s Rakshasa son tries to flee. Seeing that apocalyptic shakti all creatures, visible and hidden, human, divine and all the rest, on the ground and in the air, cry out in fear.

Fierce winds begin to blow, and thunderclaps resound as if to break the very sky into shards. Indra’s fulminant shakti consumes all of Ghatotkacha’s mighty maya in a wink. It then courses straight through the Rakshasa’s massive breast, flares on upwards and flies into a constellation deep in the heavens, leaving a flaring trail in its wake! Sky shaking roars erupt from great Ghatotkacha and he keels over dead. Indra’s shakti claims the life of Bhima and Hidimbi’s son who had razed so many great heroes, both human and demonic, who had by himself devoured a vast portion of your army by night.

Rajan, listen to a final astounding feat that Ghatotkacha accomplishes even as he falls dead. He shines like a sun and having assumed a form as great as the Vindhya mountain, falls in death upon a teeming akshauhini of your army, crushing thousands of your men with his stupendous body. Even as life quits him, out of his fathomless love for the Pandavas, he obliterates a full akshauhini of your troops.

A bedlam of triumphant sounds erupts from your sons and their forces —lion’s roars, blaring conches, the thunder of drums and cymbals. Unbridled is the joy of the Kauravas when they see Ghatotkacha’s maya cloven and the Rakshasa himself slain. Idolised, worshipped, eulogised by the Kurus even as Sakra had been by the Maruts after he slew Vritra, a smiling Karna climbs into your son Duryodhana’s chariot and, watched by all, joins the Kuru host.’”

CANTO 177

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, the Pandavas are pierced through by savage grief when they see Ghatotkacha die; they see him lying on Kurukshetra like a cloven mountain and weep bitter tears. But Krishna seems in a transport of delight! He roars as jubilantly as the Kauravas and embraces Arjuna fervently. Tying up his horses, he leaps down from his chariot and dances in ecstasy, still giving vent to joyous shouts and roars. He embraces Arjuna yet again, and repeatedly slapping his own armpits, the Krishna Mahabuddhi climbs back onto his ratha and continues to roar in some unnatural rapture.

The Pandavas and their troops are shocked to watch this display.

His heart bursting with grief, Arjuna cries at Krishna in anguish, "Madhusudana, how are you so delighted at this hour of tragedy when Bhima's precious son has died? Our troops flee in all direction to see Ghatotkacha slain and we too are filled with anxiety. Yet, you are so full of joy! There must be some great cause for your celebration, Krishna. If it is not a secret, you must share the reason for your strange delight with me. Tell me why you appear to have lost your very mind and rejoice when the rest of us grieve. Ah, you terrify me, Krishna, for looking at your levity I

feel as if Meru has moved from his proper place or as if the ocean has dried up!"

Krishna replies, "Great is the joy I feel. Listen to me, Dhananjaya, and what I say to you will dispel your sorrow and infuse delight into your heart as well. Understand clearly what has happened—Karna has used his inexorable astra against Ghatotkacha and for that Karna is already as good as dead. Hear me well, O Pandava. There is no man in this world, including you, who could have vanquished Karna, who straddled Kurukshetra like Kartikeya himself, in battle as long as he had Indra's shakti with him.

He would have been invincible anyway, but through good fortune the kavacha and kundalas that he was born with were both taken from him. Now, again through fate, his infallible astra has also been lost to him. You do not know who Karna is. I say to you that, wearing his golden armour and earrings, Karna could vanquish the three worlds by himself and the very gods. Not Indra, Varuna or Yama could withstand mighty Karna. If this bull among men had his natural armour and earrings, neither you, bending the Gandiva, nor I with my Sudarshana chakra, could kill him.

For your weal, your father Indra took Karna's golden kavacha and kundalas away from him. And even knowing the reason why Indra went to him as a Brahmana to ask him for these as a gift at the hour of his noonday prayer, the noble Karna cut them from his body and gave them away. And for that is he known as Vaikartana.

Now having exhausted the shakti he had from Indra in exchange for the armour and earrings, Karna is like a virulent serpent that has lost his venom; he is like an inextinguishable fire whose flames have turned mild. As long as he had Indra's astra, which he kept just to kill you, Karna always knew that you were as good as dead!"

Krishna pauses, then continues gravely, "But listen well to me Arjuna, even without his kavacha, kundalas and the shakti of Sakra, there is no man on earth, or any warrior in heaven, who can kill great Karna other than you. It is because he is devoted to Brahmanas, is always truthful in speech, engages himself in tapasya, observes his vratas and is kind even to his enemies, that Karna is called Vrisha. He is heroism embodied; there is no archer in the world like Karna; his bow is always ready and he is the lion in the jungle that takes his pride from great lords of elephants. Karna is he who strips the greatest maharathas of their pride on the filed of battle. He blazes like the midday sun at his zenith, at whom no one can gaze.

Fighting all the most illustrious warriors of your army, O Naravyaghra, Karna, shooting his arrows, looks like the autumn sun with his thousand rays. The Sutaputra is like a great cloud that rains devastras. Not the Devas can quell him; he could carve them up so their divine flesh and blood fell copiously onto the earth. But deprived of his armour and his earrings, and now without the astra given him by Vasava, Karna is like a mere mortal and no longer like a god.

You will find an opportunity to kill him when his chariot-wheels sink into the earth. You must not hesitate or let pity rule at that moment. I will give you a sign when the moment arrives and you must act instantly and kill this hero like whom there is no other.

The vanquisher of Bala himself, Indra wielding his Vajra, cannot kill invincible Karna while he stands with a weapon in his hand. Indeed, Arjuna, for your benefit, using different stratagems I have killed, one after the other, Jarasandha, Sisupala of the Chedis and the mahabaho Nishada Ekalavya. Other great Rakshasas among which Hidimba, Kirmira, Baka were the greatest, as well as Alayudha, grinder of hostile troops, and Ghatotkacha, crusher of his foes and warrior of fierce deeds, have all been killed.'"

CANTO 178

GHATOTKACHA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

'Arjuna asks, "How, O Janardana, for our sake, and by what stratagems, were these lords of the earth, Jarasandha and the others, killed?"

Krishna says, "If Jarasandha, Sisupala of the Chedis, and Ekalavya, the peerless son of the Nishada king, had not been slain, they would have become terrible. Duryodhana would have had these maharathas to fight for him. They have always been hostile to us, and they would all have supported the Kauravas. They were all heroes and mighty archers, accomplished in weaponry and resolute. Like Devas they would have protected Dhritarashtra's sons. Indeed, if Karna, Jarasandha, Sisupala and Ekalavya had been with Duryodhana, he would have conquered the whole world.

Listen, Dhananjaya, to how they were killed. Without using strategy, the very gods could not have slain them. Each of them, O Partha, could fight the entire celestial host protected by the Lokapalas, regents of the world.

Once, when Balarama attacked him, a livid Jarasandha hurled a gada that could destroy any creature at our city from his own city of Girivraja. With the splendour of fire, the mace flew towards us dividing the sky like

the line on her head that parts the tresses of a woman; it blazed at us like Sakra's Vajra. Seeing the mace fly at us, Rohini's son Balarama loosed the astra called Sthunakarna at Jarasandha's mace. Its vigour destroyed by the energy of Balarama's weapon, that mace fell onto the earth, splitting her open with its force and making the very mountains tremble.

There once lived a terrible Rakshasa called Jara, gifted with great powers. She joined together the infant Jarasandha, who had been born as a child cloven in two halves. For this, that mighty king was called Jarasandha, joined by Jara. Jarasandha's mace, when it plunged down into the earth along with the Sthunakarnastra, killed Jara in her subterranean cave home and her son and kinsmen. Later, it was in your presence and mine that Bhima killed Jarasandha by tearing his body along its length, where once the Rakshasi Jara had joined it. If Jarasandha had stood armed with his mace, the very Devas led by Indra could not have quelled him.

O best of men, It was for your sake that Drona, whom Ekalavya worshipped from afar as his Acharya, asked for the Nishada's thumb as his guru dakshina. Ekalavya was no less an archer than Rama of Ayodhya himself! With all his digits, he too was invincible even to the Devas, the Danavas, the Rakshasas and the Uragas all together. Even without his thumb, he was far greater than any mere mortal. I killed Ekalavya on another field of battle, to protect you, Arjuna.

I killed Sisupala, king of the Chedis, before your very eyes during the Rajasuya yagna. Him, also, the Devas and the Asuras together could not overwhelm. I was born to kill him, as well as the other enemies of the Devas, and so were you. O Naravyaghra, for the weal of the world Bhimasena killed Hidimba, Baka and Kirmira. All these Rakshasas were as powerful as Ravana and all of them were destroyers of Brahmanas and yagnas.

Ghatotkacha killed Alayudha who possessed awesome powers of maya. And Ghatotkacha I sacrificed through strategy, using Karna and his astra. If Karna had not killed Ghatotkacha, I myself would have had to kill Bhima's son. I did not kill him earlier, only for your sake. Much as he loved you and your brothers, the Rakshasa was inimical to Brahmanas and yagnas and he had to be slain. He would have grown altogether too powerful in this world if he had been left alive.

O sinless one, with Ghatotkacha's death Indra's shakti can no longer be used against you. I have come to this world to establish dharma and I will

kill all those who are destroyers of dharma, for I have sworn a solemn vow to establish righteousness on earth. Wherever the Vedas, truth, self-restraint, purity, dharma, modesty, prosperity, wisdom and forgiveness need to be maintained, there I will always be.

Now you have no need to fear great Karna, for I will tell you how and when to kill him. And Bhima will kill Duryodhana. I will also tell you how that final death shall be achieved. Meanwhile, listen, the uproar of the hostile army swells by the moment. Your troops are fleeing on all sides. Having killed Ghatotkacha, the triumphant Kauravas are mowing down your troops at will. Ah, look where Drona, the terrible Brahmana, devours our men with blazing astras, burning whole legion to ashes.”””

CANTO 179

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When Karna had an astra with which he could kill any one warrior, why did he not use it against Arjuna? If he had killed Partha with the Naikartana, all the Srinjayas and the Pandavas would have been as good as dead. If Arjuna had died, nothing could have stood between us and victory. Arjuna had sworn a vow that he would never refuse to accept a challenge to fight. The Sutaputra's son should have challenged Dhananjaya and killed him with Indra's Naikartana. Oh, why did he not do this? Truly, my son Suyodhana is without both intelligence and proper counsellors!

When the wretched sinner is constantly confounded by the enemy, how can he ever hope to defeat them? Ah, how cunningly Krishna had Karna use the one weapon that could have won the war for us against Ghatotkacha! Why, he snatched it right out of Karna's hands like a fruit from the withered hand of a cripple.

In a fight between a boar and a dog, upon the death of either, the hunter is the one profited. So, too, Krishna is the one benefited by the battle between Karna and Hidimba's son. If Ghatotkacha had killed Karna, that would have been a great gain for the Pandavas. If, as has happened, Karna

killed Ghatotkacha, that also would have favoured the sons of Pandu for then the Naikartana would have been lost anyway.

Krishna is the only real lion among all men and, in his great wisdom, he saw this clearly and had Karna kill Ghatotkacha with Indra's astra, while shielding Arjuna from the Suta's son. How canny this Yadava is, Sanjaya—he contrived a subtle battle that he could not lose!'

Sanjaya says, 'Knowing that Karna had Indra's astra and that he was saving it to kill Arjuna, Krishna knowingly sent Ghatotkacha into battle against the Suryaputra, for he also knew that Karna would be obliged to exhaust the Naikartana against Bhima's mighty son.

Rajan, do not forget that all this is the fruit of your evil rule! We would certainly have achieved victory, O Kuruttama, if Krishna had not saved Arjuna's life by sacrificing Ghatotkacha's. Karna would have consumed Arjuna along with his horses, standard, and chariot, if the Master, the Lord of yogins, Krishna had not saved him. Without Krishna's grace upon him, Arjuna would have been blasted like a tree struck by lightning.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'My son is addicted to violence, his advisers are foolish and he is vain about his own intelligence of which he has dire little. It is for this that the only weapon with which Arjuna could be killed has been lost to us. O Sanjaya, why did Duryodhana not command Karna to cast the fatal astra at Dhananjaya? O son of Gavalgana, you who are so wise, why did you also forget to remind Karna of what he should have done?'

Sanjaya says, 'Indeed, O Rajan, this was the subject of deliberation between Duryodhana, Sakuni, Dusasana and me every single night. We would tell Karna, "Forget every other warrior, O Karna, and kill Arjuna. With Arjuna slain, we can keep the Pandavas and the Panchalas for your slaves. If at Partha's death, Krishna exalts another son of Pandu in his place, we must kill Krishna himself. Krishna is the very root of the great Pandava tree, and Arjuna is its trunk. The other sons of Pritha are its branches, while the Panchalas are just its leaves.

The Pandavas have Krishna for their protection, Krishna for their might and Krishna for their Lord. Indeed, Krishna is their essential support even as the Moon is of the constellations. Therefore, O Sutaputra, ignore the leaves, branches and trunk, and kill Krishna who is everywhere and is always the root and foundation of the Pandavas."

If Karna had killed the dark lion of the Dasarha vamsa, the delighter of the Yadavas, there is no doubt that all the world would have belonged just to you and your sons. Have no doubt that if this illustrious Krishna could be slain, Rajan, all this Bhumi, with her mountains and forests would have accepted your sovereignty.

Although we would rise every morning resolved to eliminate the Lord of the very gods, Hrishikesa of immeasurable tejas, uncannily once the fighting began, we would forget our resolve. Kesava always protected Arjuna and never allowed Arjuna to face Karna as long as the Suta's son had Indra's astra. Indeed, Krishna would always turn his chariot away from Karna and set some other great maharatha to fight him, intent on making Karna use his Naikartana, intent on saving Arjuna's life. O Rajan, when the noble Krishna protected Arjuna thus from Karna, how would Arjuna, greatest of all warriors, not protect Krishna? I have reflected deeply on all this and concluded that there is no one in the three worlds who can even dream of vanquishing this Parantapa, Janardana Krishna, the hero who wields the Sudarshana Chakra!

Why, Satyaki, the invincible tiger among maharathas asked Krishna, "Janardana, Karna is resolved to kill Arjuna with Indra's weapon. Why, then, does he not do so?"

Vasudeva replied, "Dusasana, Karna, Sakuni and Jayadratha, all led by Duryodhana, have frequently discussed this very matter. They would say to the Sutaputra, 'O Karna, matchless bowman, O you of immeasurable prowess, O foremost of all victors in battle, you must not even think of casting this astra at anyone other than Kunti's son Dhananjaya. He is the greatest among the enemy; he is like Vasava amongst the Devas. If he dies, all the other Pandavas and the Srinjayas will be broken in spirit and might, even as the Devas without Agni to fuel and feed them!'

Karna agreed to this, saying 'Tathaastu—so be it!'

O Satyaki, bull of the Sinis, the wish to kill the Gandivi was always in Karna's heart. However, I would subtly bewilder and distract his mind and he would forget to cast the Naikartana at Arjuna! As long as I could not remove the dire threat to Phalguna's life, I had neither sleep nor joy in my heart. But today, seeing the Naikartana spent against Ghatotkacha, I know that Dhananjaya has been saved from the jaws of Death.

Satyaki, I do not view my father, my mother, my brothers, you, or my own life as being as precious as Arjuna's. If there is anything more valuable

than the sovereignty of the three worlds, I do not want to have it without Dhananjaya to share it with me. That is why, Yuyudhana, that seeing Arjuna saved from Karna's astra and a certain death, I am in a transport of delight. And this is the reason I sent Ghatotkacha into battle against Karna. No one else could defy the Sutaputra at night. Only Ghatotkacha could try Karna so gravely that he would be forced to use the Naikartana against Bhima's son."

This is what Devaki's son Krishna, who is for ever devoted to Arjuna, told Satyaki.'"

CANTO 180

Ghatotkacha-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'I see clearly that what Karna, Duryodhana and Sakuni and you did was against the dictates of all good sense and strategy. Indeed, when you knew that the astra could always slay only one warrior, and that it could not be either contained or confounded by the very Devas led by Vasava, why then, O Sanjaya, did Karna not cast it against Arjuna or Krishna whenever he fought them earlier?'

Sanjaya says, 'As I told you, Rajan, we would return from battle every day and all of us would confer about this very thing, and we would say to Karna, "Tomorrow morning, Karna, you must cast the Naikartana against either Arjuna or Krishna."

However, when the morning came, either through fate or Krishna's subtle power, both Karna and the rest of us would completely forget this resolve. Surely, fate reigns supreme, for Karna did not kill either Krishna or Arjuna, although he faced them repeatedly on the field. I have no doubt that the gods themselves clouded his mind, and destiny conspired against us that time and again, whenever he had ample opportunity, he did not yet cast the astra against either of the two Krishnas!'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Destiny, your own lack of understanding, and Krishna destroyed you! Indra's astra is gone, having effected the death of Ghatotkacha who was as insignificant as a straw. To my mind, through this single act of folly, Karna, my sons and all the other kings have already entered the halls of Yama.

Tell me now how the battle continues between the Kurus and the Pandavas after the fall of Hidimbi's son Ghatotkacha. How do the Srinjaya and the Panchalas fight great Drona? How do the Pandus and Srinjayas defy the battling Acharya when he attacks them in fury, agitated at the death of Bhurisravas and Jayadratha, reckless of his own life and like some tiger from antique times or Rudra himself with jaws agape? What do Aswatthaman, Karna, Kripa and the others led by Duryodhana do to protect the Acharya?

Tell me, O Sanjaya, how my warriors contain Dhananjaya and Vrikodara who are intent on killing Drona. Frantic as they are with anger, how do they fight the battle by night, for some have been moved to wrath by the death of Jayadratha, and others at the death of Ghatotkacha, and both sides cannot abide their loss?'

Sanjaya says, 'After Karna kills Ghatotkacha, your troops are exuberant and roar and shout with joy. In the darkness, they fall wildly upon the Pandava troops and begin to slaughter them. Yudhishtira is crestfallen to see this; besides, Ghatotkacha was always his most favourite nephew.

He tells Bhimasena, "I am dazed by my child Ghatotkacha's death. Bhima, Mahabaho, go and confront Dhritarashtra's army. Lead our men into battle, for my head spins and my body is weak with grief."

Having said this to Bhima, Yudhishtira sits down in his ratha with a tearful face, sighing repeatedly and utterly afraid and dejected by Karna's awesome archery. Seeing him suffering, Krishna consoles him, "O son of Kunti, do not grieve so much. It does not become you, as it may an ordinary man. Arise, fight and bear the heavy burden that is your! If you, our king and lord, are plunged in gloom, how will we win this war?"

Yudhishtira wipes his eyes, and says to Krishna, "O mighty one, the golden path of dharma is not unknown to me. The dire consequences of Brahmahatya, killing a Brahmana, visit those who forget the services he receives at another's hands. Janardana, while we lived in the forest, Hidimbi's noble son Ghatotkacha, although he was then a mere child, did us so many services!

When he learnt that Arjuna had gone to acquire the devastras, Ghatotkacha came to me in the Kamyaka vana and lived with us until Dhananjaya returned. When we journeyed through inaccessible regions of the world, he carried the tired Draupadi on his back. The feats he achieved on the war showed that he was a great and unequalled warrior. Ah, that noble child accomplished so many difficult tasks for my sake. My love for Ghatotkacha is twice that I bear for Sahadeva. The Rakshasa mahabaho was devoted to me; I was dear to him and he was precious to me. This is why I am numb with grief, burning with it.

Look, O Madhava, where our troops are being routed and butchered by the Kauravas. Look where now, in this abysmal night, Drona and Karna fight in earnest. Look as the Pandava host being crushed this night, like some light woods by two musth maddened elephants. Listen to the terrible celebrant roaring of Drona, Karna and Duryodhana, even as they annihilate our hapless fighting men.

How, O Krishna, when we Pandavas are still alive and you as well, could the Sutaputra kill Bhima's son? Karna fetched untold carnage to our legions and then, as if to crown his dreadful achievements, he slew our precious nephew in the very presence of Arjuna. Arjuna was far away when the evil Dhartarashtras killed Abhimanyu; at that time, Jayadratha used his boon from Lord Siva to keep the rest of us from breaking into the chakravyuha.

Drona and his son Aswatthaman perpetrated that dastardly deed. The Acharya himself told Karna how to kill Abhimanyu. While Abhimanyu fought with his sword, it was the Acharya himself who destroyed the weapon. And while he was in lonely distress, Kritavarman ruthlessly killed his horses and his Parshni charioteers. And then other Kaurava maharathas brought down our splendid child like a throng of huntsmen a golden stag.

For his small enough offence, O Krishna, Arjuna killed Jayadratha. I found no great joy in that killing. If it is our dharma to kill our enemies, then Drona and Karna should have died first. O Lord, these two are the root of Duryodhana's confidence and of all our sorrows. Arjuna should have despatched Drona or Karna to Yama, instead he chose to kill the insignificant Jayadratha, whose role in Abhimanyu's death was hardly direct."

Suddenly, a great rage takes hold of Yudhishtira. His frame shudders in anger, his eyes turn red as plums, and he says, "Bhima now fights against

Drona's legion. So I will myself fight and kill the Suta's son. Yes, Karna shall die at my hands today!"

Yudhishtira raises his bow, blows resoundingly on his conch and dashes at Karna. Leading a combined force of Panchalas and Prabhadrakas numbering a thousand rathas, three hundred elephants and five thousand horses, Sikhandin swiftly follows the wake of the king. Now, with some heart restored, the mail-clad Panchalas and the Pandavas led by Yudhishtira all beat their drums and blow their conchs.

Krishna says urgently to Arjuna, "Look where Yudhishtira, beside himself with grief and anger, rides against Karna. You must not allow him to do this or his life will be in danger!"

And Krishna also rides quick as the wind after the distraught Dharmaraja, who by now has gone some way.

In his mind's eye, Vyasa sees Yudhishtira, deranged by grief, rushing recklessly at Karna. Vyasa appears before the eldest Pandava and says, "Through Krishna's wisdom and good fortune, Arjuna still lives. Krishna kept him from facing the Sutaputra in single combat when Karna still had his Naikartana that he had kept to use against your brother. If Karna had killed Arjuna, then truly great would your grief have been, O Yudhishtira.

O bestower of honours, it is your great good fortune that Ghatotkacha has sacrificed himself for Arjuna's sake. Why, Death himself has taken Ghatotkacha using the Vasava astra as merely an instrument. It is for your good, O Pandava, that the Rakshasa has died. Do not yield to anger, and do not grieve, Yudhishtira. This war is war to end all others and a new and evil age has risen over the earth. Unite with your brothers and all the illustrious kings that are with you and dharma, and fight the Kauravas!

O Naravyaghra, on the fifth day from today, the earth will be yours, so set your mind on dharma. Set aside this mad sorrow and rage. With a serene heart, practise karunya to all creatures, and tapasya, daana, kshama and dharma. Jaya is where dharma is."

Having said these words to the son of Pandu, Vyasa vanishes before Yudhishtira's eyes.'"

CANTO 181

DRONA-VADHA PARVA

"Sanjaya says, 'His holy grandsire, the profound Maharishi, arrests Yudhishtira's insane careen; the Dharmaputra's blind fury leaves him and he stops himself from riding ahead to fight the dangerous Karna, the older brother he does not know. However, grief still wracks the Pandava king from of the death of Ghatotkacha.

Yudhishtira looks at Bhima containing your still vast army; he turns to Dhrishtadyumna and says, "Ride against the pot-born Drona! O Parantapa, you were born a full-grown youth from the sacred fire, wearing armour and armed with a sword, bow and arrows. You were born to kill Drona! So go confidently into battle; you need have no fear. Let Janamejaya, Sikhandin, Durmukha's son and Yasodhara attack Drona from every side. Let Nakula, Sahadeva, the sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas, Drupada, and Virata with their sons and brothers, Satyaki, the Kaikeyas, the Pandavas and Dhananjaya all attack him together. Let all our maharathas, all our elephants, our cavalry and foot-soldiers join forces to bring down the implacable Acharya who burns up the very night!"

Thus commanded by the illustrious son of Pandu, all of them launch a combined attack against Drona, determined to put an end to the Brahmana

ablaze. Drona, however, meets their onslaught with such a fusillade of arrows and astras! He hold them all up. Anxious for Drona's life, Duryodhana rushes to his support with all his forces, might and resolve. A general battle now breaks out between the Kurus and the Pandavas, all of them shouting and roaring at one another.

By now, the animals of both armies as well as the warriors are all exhausted. The greatest maharathas find they can hardly keep their eyes open or move their limbs, and feel helpless and worn. This horrific night of nine hours appears to have no end. While they mutilate and slaughter one another in droves by darkness, and while sleep sits heavy on their eyelids, it is past midnight. All the Kshatriyas are miserable and the soldiers of both armies have no weapons or arrows left. Yet, the warriors of both the armies do not quit the fight; they keep their svadharma and, summoning the very dregs of the reserves of strength they still possess, battle on.

Others, blind with sleep, lay aside their weapons and lie down, some on the backs of elephants, some on chariots, some on horseback and some on the ground. And when they fall into helpless slumber, other warriors who are awake despatch them to Yama's abode. Others, senseless with fatigue, and in a waking dream, kill their own comrades as well as their enemies. Indeed, they fight giving vent to weird cries and exclamations. Many warriors of our army who still want battle stand half awake but unable to fight on, their eyes half shut. However, some exceptional Kshatriyas, during the terrible night, although exhausted and being dragged down by drowsiness, continue to glide superbly across the field killing one another. Many among the enemy, stupefied by slumber, are slain without their being aware of the strokes and barbs that send them into eternity.

Seeing this state of the troops, Arjuna cries out in a loud voice, "All of you, and your animals, are exhausted; you are plunged in darkness and dust and sleep overcomes you all. So let us all agree to call a halt to the battle and sleep awhile. When the moon rises, Kurus and Pandavas, awake again and do battle once more to find victory or heaven."

The tired men of both armies gladly agree. The Kaurava troops shout all together, "O Karna, O Duryodhana, stop the fighting. The Pandava army has ceased to attack us."

At Arjuna's word, the Pandava army as well as yours, O Bhaarata, refrain from battle. Indeed, the Devas and the noble Rishis all applaud Partha's noble thought and all the worn out Kshatriyas lie down to sleep

like some sea subsiding among all the corpses that are strewn everywhere, of man and beast. Your army blesses Arjuna, "In you, great Arjuna, the Vedas and all the astras truly dwell together. In you are intelligence and supernal ability. In you are dharma and compassion for all creatures, O sinless Partha. And since you have comforted us, we wish you well, O Dhananjaya. Let prosperity be yours. May you soon have, O hero, all that is dear to your heart!"

Blessing him thus, the great Kuru maharathas fall silent and sleep comes swiftly over them. Many lie down to sleep with their weapons—maces, swords, battleaxes, lances and with their armour still strapped on. Elephants, heavy with sleep, make the earth cool with their breath that passes through their snake-like trunks stained with dust. Surely, the great elephants, as they breathe on the ground, and sleep standing, look as serene and beautiful as hills scattered across the field of battle over which giant snakes hiss.

Horses in trappings of gold and with manes entwined with their yokes and stamping their hooves, make the ground uneven. Thus, every warrior sleeps there with the animal they ride. The slumbering host, plunged in unconsciousness, looks like a wonderful picture drawn on canvas by the most gifted artists.

The more youthful Kshatriyas, their kundalas gleaming softly, their limbs lacerated by arrows and swords, have laid themselves down on the round heads of their elephants, and look as if they lie in the embraces of beautiful women.

Then, the Moon, the delighter of the eye and lord of the lotuses, white as the fair cheeks of a virgin, rises in the East, adorning the direction presided over by Indra. Indeed, like a lion of the Udaya hills, its rays his mane of brilliant yellow, he issues out of his cave in the east, shredding the blackness of the night. The lover of all lotuses and lilies in the world, bright as the body of Mahadeva's Bull, full-arched and radiant as Kama's bow, enticing as the smile on the lips of a bashful bride, Soma Deva begins to bloom in the firmament.

Soon, however, the divine lord with the hare for his sign shows himself more fully, shedding brighter rays. Soma Deva gradually emanates a bright halo of far-reaching light with the splendour of amber-gold. Quickly, his lustre, dispelling the darkness entirely, spreads over all the quarters, the sky and the earth. The world is illuminated and the unspeakable darkness that

had hidden everything melts away. When the world is lit up in silver, among creatures that wander the night some continue to roam while others retire to their hides, caves and holes.

The sea of troops, Rajan, is awakened by the light of the Moon and they arise like a great lake of lotuses blossoming or like the ocean surging up in tide at moonrise. Then, Rajan, the war commences again on earth, for the destruction of the race of warriors, between men who wish to attain heaven.'"

CANTO 182

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'An excited and rested Duryodhana approaches Drona and, to encourage him and provoke his ire, says to him, "You should have shown no mercy to our enemies while they were downcast after Ghatotkacha's death and exhausted, especially when they are all deadly archers. To satisfy your noble wish, Acharya, we showed them misplaced kindness by allowing a cessation in a battle we were winning. Having rested and slept, the Pandavas are stronger now.

As for ourselves, we loose energy and strength in every way, hour by hour, while the Pandavas, whom you so lovingly protect, gain ground and success. All the Devastras and Brahmastras dwell in you. I say to you, O Drona, if you put forth your true prowess, neither the Pandavas nor we, nor any other bowmen in the world are a match for you on the field of battle.

O Mahamuni, you are a consummate master of every manner of weapon and warfare, the teacher of us all. With your devastras, you can destroy the three worlds with the Devas, the Asuras and the Gandharvas. The Pandavas are all afraid of you and yet, time and again, you spare them, remembering fondly that they were your students. Or, perhaps, this is all because of my ill luck and the stars turning against me."

Thus chided by your son, Drona wrathfully tells Duryodhana, “Although I am old, Suyodhana, I still exert myself to the utmost in this war. All these men are hardly acquainted with the weapons of which I do indeed possess mastery. So, if, from a desire for victory, I become responsible for the death of such common soldiers, there can be no more ignoble deed. However, now, O Kaurava, I will at your evil command, do what you have in your dark heart, be it good or bad. It will not be otherwise. Duryodhana, I will not remove my kavacha from my body until I have killed all the Panchalas. I swear this to you.

You think that Kunti’s son Arjuna is worn out by the war? Listen to me carefully, and I will truly tell you about his prowess. If Savyasachin is truly roused, not the Gandharvas, the Yakshas or the Rakshasas can hope to stand up to him. In the Khandava vana, he encountered the Lord Indra himself in battle. Arjuna confounded a raging Indra with his arrows. He killed the Yakshas, Nagas, Daityas, and all rest, so proud of their might in that forest when it burned, so none escaped.

And when you went to mock the Pandavas in the forest and were humiliated and taken captive by Chitrasena and his people, it was Arjuna that vanquished the Gandharvas and set you free, while the unearthly ones had you bound firmly in a net. This is the hero who quelled the Nivatakavachas, who not the Devas could resist or conquer in battle.

Naravyaghra Partha vanquished the thousands of Danavas who dwelt in Hiranyapura. How can you be so foolish to imagine for a moment that mere human warriors can withstand him? You saw with your own eyes, Duryodhana, how Arjuna razed your army on his way to kill Jayadratha. Is your mind so clouded with darkness that you have forgotten that so quickly?”

Duryodhana replies in anger to hear Arjuna being extolled, “Dusasana, Karna, Sakuni, and I will divide this Bharata army into two akshauhinis. We will take one host with us and kill Arjuna today.”

Drona laughs and says sardonically, “My blessings go with you! But which Kshatriya among you will kill this bull among all Kshatriyas, the immortal bearer of the Gandiva, the hero who blazes forth with divine tejas? Not Kubera, Lord of treasures, not Indra or Yama, not the Asuras, the Uragas and the Rakshasas can face an armed Arjuna in battle. Only fools will speak such nonsense as you just have, Duryodhana! Who can return with his life after facing Arjuna in battle? As for you, you are sinful, cruel

and suspicious of everyone. You are always ready to rebuke even those who risk their lives to fight for you.

Yes, go and give battle to the son of Kunti, for you are a well-born Kshatriya who seeks combat. But why cause all these other unoffending Kshatriyas to be slain? You are the root of this enmity and this war, so go and fight Arjuna yourself. Your uncle Sakuni has wisdom and observes Kshatriya dharma. Let Sakuni the great gambler take the field against Arjuna. He is skilled in dice, wedded to deception, addicted to gambling, and a master of cunning and subterfuge. Surely, this great man will vanquish the Pandavas in battle!

With Karna in your company, you often boasted foolishly in the hearing of Dhritarashtra, "O father, we three, Karna, Dusasana and I will kill all the sons of Pandu in battle."

We heard this brag of yours at every conclave in the Kuru sabha. Do what you said you would now; show that your boasts were neither hollow nor idle. Look, there before you is your mortal enemy, Arjuna, son of Pandu. Observe Kshatriya dharma and fight him. Your death at the hands of the Vijaya shall be worthy of our every praise. You have practised charity, you have eaten everything that you ever wished, you have gained as much wealth as you wanted, more than any other man, and you leave no debts. You have done all that a prince should do. So have no regrets or fears. Go and fight the son of Pandu."

Then, the battle begins.'"

CANTO 183

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'When three yaamas of the night have worn away, Rajan, the battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas resumes and both sides are exhilarant, born warriors that they are! Soon after, Surya's sarathy, the legless Aruna, weakening the splendour of the moon, appears upon the Udaya mountain, turning the sky a coppery hue. The east is soon lit with the crimson rays of the Sun, who, rising, resembles a circular plate of gold. All the warriors of the Kuru and the Pandava armies alight from their chariots, horses and palanquins, stand with joined hands, facing Surya Deva, and recite the Gayatri Mantra appropriate to greet the first sandhya of the day, the golden dawn.

The Kuru army is divided into two parts. Drona, with Duryodhana going before him with one of the hosts, advances with the other one against the Somakas, the Pandavas and the Panchalas. Seeing the Kuru army thus divided, Krishna says to Arjuna, "Keep your cousins to your left, and the division commanded by Drona to your right."

Arjuna moves to the left of the mighty Drona and Karna. Understanding Krishna's intention, Bhimasena says to Partha who is at the van of the army, "Arjuna, Bibhatsu, listen to me. The time has come to fulfil the purpose for

which Kshatriya women bear sons. If you fight for victory now, you will demean your birth. The moment has come to pay the debt you owe Truth, Prosperity, Virtue and Fame. O greatest of warriors, keep this akshauhini to your left and destroy it."

When Bhima and Krishna urge him on, Arjuna truly puts his unrivalled prowess on display and, dominating Drona and Karna, begins to raze the Kaurava forces all around him. Many great Kshatriyas among the Kurus do their best but cannot stop the Kiritin as he sweeps over them like a raging conflagration, consuming them all. Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni shoot tremendous volleys at Kunti's son. Defending himself with light like swiftness, he cuts down every arrow loosed at him, and then strikes each of the three with ten deep barbs.

The dust and thick arrow showers darken the sky as if night has returned, and a great din arises everywhere. The sky, the earth and all the directions are obscured. Blinded by the swirling dust, and yet again no one can tell friend from foe, ally from enemy. Once more, the kings and warriors loudly call out their own names, and fight the war for dharma by instinct and approximation.

Maharathas losing their chariots run headlong into one another and are tangled together in chaos. Their horses killed and charioteers slain, many remain petrified, sitting or standing perfectly still to save their lives. Dead horses and their riders lie on felled elephants as if stretched out on mountain summits.

Drona then rides away from the general melee towards the north and takes up his station there, like a smokeless fire, resplendent, magnificent and blazing with energy. Seeing him, the Pandava troops tremble; they turn pale and falter on the field, O Bhaarata. From seeming like an elephant in rut, the enemy loses its nerve entirely, terrified as the Danavas when they fought Vasava. Some among them are broken in spirit, while other, bolder ones are enraged. Others are filled with wonder, and some, though they would try, are unequal to the challenge of the refulgent Acharya. Some of the Pandava kings wring their hands, and some are beside themselves with anger and bite through their lips in that wrath. A few brandish their weapons, others rub their arms; and some who possess truly great tejas and whose souls are under complete control, attack Drona. The domineering Brahmana mauls the Panchalas in particular with arrows mundane and

unworldly; mangled, burnt and bleeding, and in agony, they yet continue to contend with him.

Then Drupada and Virata take the field against Drona who by now rages unchecked all across Kurukshetra sowing death wherever he rides like some storm of another furious world. Drupada's three grandsons also ride against Drona, as do the mighty Chedi archers. Seeing them come, in a flash, Drona beheads all three Panchala princes, who are no remote match for him. He next routs the Chedis, the Kaikeyas, the Srinjayas and all the Matsyas.

In rage past enduring, Drupada and Virata unleash gales and hurricanes of arrows at the dreadful Brahmana. The scourge of the Kshatriyas swathes both Drupada and Virata with harrowing gusts of shafts, and they, also, strike him back ardently. Drona, roused, looses two of his favoured crescent-tipped shafts and breaks both Drupada and Virata's bows at the same moment.

Virata flings ten spears at Drona, desperate to have his life, while Drupada, great Kshatriya, casts a blazing astra of iron and gold inlaid with lapis lazuli, a weapon like a gleaming serpent, at him. Drona cuts all these weapons down with a lordly and serene display of superhuman archery. Next moment, with a long roar, with two perfect arrows, he sends both those great and aged kings to the world of Yama, cutting one's head from his throat and blowing the other's heart to shreds. A terrible wail rises from the armies of the Panchalas and the Matsyas.

Dhrishtadyumna watches Drona kill his father Drupada, his own sons, and Virata; he watches him slaughter the Kaikeyas, the Chedis, the Matsyas and the Panchalas; he sees him kill Drupada's three grandsons and the fire-prince is filled with grief and swears an oath in rage before all the maharathas: "Let me lose all the punya of all the dharma that I have done, as well as my Kshatriya and Brahma tejas if Drona escapes me today with his life, or if he succeeds in vanquishing me!"

With this, taking his own division with him, the Panchala prince rides at Drona. The Panchalas then fall upon Drona from one side and Arjuna from the other. Duryodhana, his brothers, Karna and Sakuni defend Drona against the attack and, though the Panchalas fight with fury and vigour, your sons and their allies prevent the dead Drupada's sons and warriors from so much as catching a proper look at the Acharya.

Bhimasena is furious with Dhrishtadyumna and berates him, "What Kshatriya is the warrior born into great Drupada's vamsa, and who is

besides the greatest warrior of all born from the fire, who can only look at his enemy standing before him? What true man, who has seen his father and his son slain before his eyes, and who has sworn to have revenge on their killer, stands listless and helpless before his enemy? There stands Drona like a fire blazing high with its own energy and, with his bows and arrows for fuel, consumes all our Kshatriyas that come before him like mere straws. Why, he will annihilate all the Pandava army by himself in a brief hour if he is not extinguished.

If you will not fight, be spectators and watch me as I fight Drona. I do not fear this vile Brahmana. I do not revere him."

With this, the fuming Vrikodara rips into Drona's vyuha and begins to decimate that host. In a moment, Dhrishtadyumna follows Bhima and quickly the two of them engage Drona in a fiery battle as the sun rises and bathes the holy field of Kurukshetra in dawn's light. By first light of day, we see the enormity of the night's carnage—the rathas entangled with one another, and the dead scattered in their thousands and thousands, men and beasts, all over the field. And again, the war resumes between the two armies, more bloodthirsty than ever. Some, while riding towards another part of the field are waylaid and butchered; others, who are fleeing, are struck in their backs, or through their sides like beasts on a hunt.

The general engagement, the war from which every vestige of a dharma yuddha has fled, continues to rage as the morning sun rises higher.'"

CANTO 184

Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'The warriors, however, Rajan, do pause briefly to worship the thousand-rayed Aditya, as he ascends the field of battle on this morning. When they have paid their daily homage to God of day, they fight again exactly as they did by night.

Bharatarishabha, horsemen fight maharathas, elephants confront horsemen, foot-soldiers battle elephants and horsemen other horsemen. Sometimes united and sometimes separately, the warriors lay into each other, and many, having fought through the night and slept only briefly, are tired, weak with hunger and thirsty and they fall unconscious. The uproar made by the blare of conches, the beating of drums, the trumpeting of elephants and the twanging of bowstrings drawn and released with force, reaches the very heavens.

So, too, is the clangour of charging infantry, weapons falling, horses neighing, chariots thundering along, and the roaring, shouting and yelling of the warriors earthshaking; it, too, swells by the moment and echoes in the realms of the gods. The screams, groans and wails of pain, of falling and fallen foot-soldiers, rathikas and elephants multiply by the moment; they wash across the field in a piteous, horrifying wave.

Men and animals fall like leaves in autumn blown down by a strong wind. Hurled from Kshatriyas' hands at other warriors and elephants, we see swords heaping themselves on the ground, many bloody, like heaps of cloth on a washing ghat. The sound of falling swords resembles that of clothes being beaten to wash them well. Rajan, though we should now be inured to the horror after the grisly night, the battle by daylight continues to be appalling.

A river runs again towards the land of the dead. The blood of elephants, horses and men are its current, weapons its fish in profusion, blood and flesh its mire, the cries of grief and pain its roar, and proud banners cut down and other bloodied cloths are its froth.

Pierced all over by arrows and spears, elephants and horses stand perfectly motionless on Kurukshetra, worn out with exertion, spent with the grim toil of the night, and utterly exhausted so they cannot move. With their arms in graceful attitudes, their beautiful coats of mail, with their turbaned and crowned heads decked with sparkling kundalas, even on this ghastly morning the warriors bearing the instruments of war look magnificent.

Meanwhile, the chariots find passage across the field difficult indeed, for all the dead, the dying and the scavenging carnivores that cover the ground of death. Stricken by arrows and worn out by their exertions, steeds of the noblest breed and high mettle, of gigantic size and strength, tremble with effort as they attempt to draw the chariots whose wheels have been mired deep in the blood swamped earth. Terror and only terror holds every warriors of both armies in its cold, benumbing clasp, O Bhaarata, with the exception of only Drona and Arjuna. These two become the refuge, the saviours of the warriors of their respective legions. Others who encounter these two are swiftly sent to Yama's abode.

Entwined, enmeshed, even like the great bodies of unimaginable and violent lovers in the throes of lethal lust, the armies of the Kurus and the Panchalas are no longer distinguishable. During this carnage where Kshatriyas turn Kurukshetra into an endless smasana, a cremation ground, nothing and no one is plainly visible—not Karna, Drona, Arjuna, Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, the twins, the Panchala fire-prince, Satyaki, Dusasana, Drona's son, Duryodhana, Subala's son, Kripa, Salya, Kritavarman, all the great others, nor the earth, nor the points of the compass, nor I, can be seen as clouds of dusts shroud all the heroes, their chariots and beats and the thousands of foot-soldiers.

As the war burgeons by the moment, it seems that another night has fallen over the filed for the pall of dust that rises and billows, and the swarms of arrows and other weapons, which cover the sky, hiding the sun. You cannot tell Kaurava from Panchala, or Panchala from Pandava; all is a single haze, which rings hellishly with roars and screams. The warriors, possessed absolutely by the spirit of murdering, by now kill friend and enemy alike, making no more distinction, for to kill is all that matters regardless of who kills and who is slain.

Then, suddenly, strong winds arise and, blowing powerfully from all directions like the breath of a many faced God, blows away the single vast cloud of dust. Now there is a unique rain of blood everywhere, Rajan! Elephants, horses, maharathas and foot-soldiers, all bathed in crimson, look as wondrous as the celestial forest of Parijata flowers.

The four Kaurava maharathas Duryodhana, Karna, Drona and Dusasana attack the Pandava host with renewed ferocity. Duryodhana and his brothers fight Nakula and Sahadeva, while Karna battles Vrikodara Bhima, Arjuna confronts Drona, and all the troops from every side stand still and gaze at these scintillating duels. Why, even the maharathas of both armies pause and quietly watch the superhuman engagement between those greatest among all Kshatriyas.

The interminable and deadly rain of arrows and other weapons pours on. The great maharathas, bulls among all men, riding their chariots of solar effulgence, still look as stunning as dark and golden clouds in the autumn sky. Avid for blood, thirsty for revenge and killing, this handful of the greatest warriors on earth engage one another like infuriated leaders of elephant herds.

In truth, Rajan, death does not ever come until its hour is come, and not all the warriors on Kurukshetra perish all together in the battle. Strewn with lopped off arms, legs, heads with dazzling earrings, bows and arrows, lances, swords, battleaxes, nalihas, razor-headed arrows, cloth-yard shafts, darts, diverse kinds of exquisite armour, splendid rathas broken into pieces, slain elephants, other huge chariots without standards broken like cities, yet others being dragged here and there by frightened horses without a charioteer to control them, by hosts of grandly adorned warriors of immeasurable courage, fallen chamaras and coats of mail and standards, scattered ornaments, robes and fragrant bloodied garlands, chains of gold, diadems, crowns, helmets, rows of bells, jewels worn on breasts, cuirasses,

collars, and with gems that adorn coronets, the field of battle looks as marvellous as the endless firmament spangled with countless stars.

Now there ensues a duel between a furious Duryodhana, voracious for revenge, and Nakula full of the same hunger. Madri's son shoots hundreds of arrows at your son on his right, and is loudly cheered by the Pandava soldiers. Duryodhana responds with vehemence and passion. Nakula wheels away to the left, and now attacks your son from that side. However, your son is not to be bested on this day and, with incandescent archery, forces Nakula to turn back. All the troops applaud Suyodhana's feat, while Nakula recalls every indignity of the past and roars at your incensed son, "Stop! Stop and fight, you wretched sinner!""

CANTO 185

Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'An angry Dusasana pushes fiercely towards Sahadeva, making the earth shiver with the speed of his chariot. But, in a flash, with a wedge-headed arrow, Sahadeva strikes off the head of your son's sarathy, helmet and all. So swiftly does Sahadeva do this that neither Dusasana nor any of the troops even notices that the charioteer has been decapitated, until their reins hanging loose, Dusasana's horses careen wildly away.

Being a master charioteer himself, Dusasana quickly takes the reins up himself and fetches the horses under control. Friend and foe alike acclaim his feat, for now driving the chariot himself, he moves effortlessly and fearlessly across the field, attacking Sahadeva again. Sahadeva pierces your son's horses now with a volley of vicious arrows and, flowing blood, whinnying in pain, they bolt once more, for as soon as Dusasana picks up his bow to fight Sahadeva he loses control of his agonised steeds again.

The relentless Sahadeva drills him with a score of hate-filled arrows. Karna comes dashing to rescue your son, when, taking careful aim, Bhima strikes the Sutaputra deep through his arms and chest with three shafts like thunderbolts shot from his bow drawn into a circle. Struck by these arrows

like a snake with a stick, Karna stops and faces Bhimasena in wrath, unleashing a terrific volley of slender deadly shafts at him.

Another fervid duel breaks out between Bhima and Karna, both roaring like bulls and their eyes dilated with rage. Both find themselves too close to each other and cannot shoot their arrows with any freedom. Thereupon, they fight with maces and Bhimasena quickly smashes the kuvara of Karna's ratha, a feat to watch. Then Karna hurls his gada in fury at Bhima's chariot; Bhima strikes it aside with his own mace. Bhima sweeps up another mace and hurls it with titanic force at Karna; Karna shoots the heavy thing with an astonishing golden-winged volley, which turns the massive gada right back at Bhima, like a snake charmed by mantras! The mace strikes Bhima's immense flagpole, which breaks, falls and strikes his charioteer senseless.

His brows knit, Bhima, with the greatest care, rives Karna's standards, his bow and shreds his leather gauntlet. Radheya takes up another gold-decked bow and in a blur kills Bhima's horses the colour of bears, and his two charioteers. Bhima quickly jumps into Nakula's chariot like a lion bounding down a mountain summit.

Meanwhile, Drona and Arjuna, the two greatest maharathas, Acharya and sishya, duel, stunning all that watch with their mastery over the astras, the sureness of their aim, and with the manoeuvres of their chariots. Watching that battle, the like of which they have never seen, the other warriors stop fighting and stand with hair standing on end, quivering with equal parts of awe and fear.

Both Arjuna and his master display immaculate tactics, while trying always to keep the adversary to his right. The plane on which these two make sublime war is such that all the other maharathas can only gaze in wonder. That duel is like one between a pair of eagles in the sky fighting over a piece of meat. Whatever Drona does to have the better of his favourite pupil, Arjuna matches.

When Drona can find no edge over his younger rival with common shafts or lesser astras, the Brahmana invokes into the Aindra, the Tvashtra, the Vayavya and the Yamya astras. No sooner do these issue from Drona's bow, Dhananjaya extinguishes them with his own astras. At this, Drona looses the very greatest astras at Arjuna, but even these Partha nullifies. Seeing Arjuna negate all his weapons, even the highest celestial ones, Drona applauds his disciple in his heart and is full of secret joy.

Since the days when Arjuna was his pupil, the Acharya has regarded himself as the greatest master of weapons in the world. Now, equalled by his sishya in the midst of all those most illustrious and discerning warriors on earth, Drona continues to attack and to defend himself energetically, marvelling all the while at the genius of his opponent.

We plainly see the Devas, Gandharvas in their thousands, Rishis and bodies of Siddhas, everywhere in the sky. Filled with these as well as with Apsaras, Yakshas and Rakshasas, it once more seems as if gathering clouds fill the vaults of the firmament. We hear a reverberant asariri, a disembodied voice from above, repeatedly sweep through the sky, end to end, full of praise for the mighty Drona and the noble Partha.

From the flames and lustre of the astras that Drona and Partha loose at each other, all creation seems to blaze with light, and the Siddhas and the Rishis on high say, "This is not a Manava, an Asura, a Rakshasa, a Deva or a Gandharva yuddha. Without doubt, this is a transcendent Brahma yuddha!"

And indeed so it is, the unmatched, spectacular contention, the like of which we have never even heard before let alone seen. As we all stand transfixed, now the Acharya prevails over Arjuna, and then the son of Pandu over Drona, and no one can find any difference between them. Only if Rudra, dividing himself into two parts fought against himself, could there be a battle to match this one. The astra shastra, focused, embodied, dwells in the Acharya on one side; so, too, does it, on the other, in the resplendent and profound Arjuna, along with deep substance. Virata, heroism, in one place, dwells absolutely in Drona; on the other side, heroism and strength are in the son of Pandu. Neither of these warriors can be challenged by enemies in battle. It is the opinion of all the invisible and visible beings, who watch the sacred conflict, that either of them can destroy the very universe with all the gods, if they wish.

Drona now invokes the Brahmastra against Arjuna and the all invisible ones above and below, and the Earth with her mountains and waters and trees tremble. Howling winds begin to blow, the seas rise up, and the warriors of the Kuru and Pandava armies, as well as all other living creatures are struck through with fear, when Drona raises that astra. Arjuna, O king, summons his own Brahmastra and like two other suns risen into the bright sky, their weapons extinguish each other. All agitated Nature is pacified again.

Finally, acknowledging that neither can vanquish the other, the two armies engage each other, generally, once more. Widespread havoc occupies Kurukshetra again. And mayhem, pandemonium and darkness engulf the battlefield all around. The sky is obscured with dark swarms of arrows, as if with masses of heavy clouds, and the creatures that fly through the air can no longer find a passage through the element.'"

CANTO 186

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'During the carnage of men, horses and elephants, Dusasana, O Rajan, meets Dhrishtadyumna in battle. Dusasana ravages the fire-prince mounted on his golden chariot; in fury, Dhrishtadyumna covers your son, his chariot, horses and sarathy in an opacity of arrows so they become invisible. Dusasana is forced to turn away from the Pandava senapati and Dhrishtadyumna forges on toward his main enemy, Drona, the one he must kill. As he goes, he showers arrows all around him, claiming a thousand lives each moment.

Kritavarman, with three of his Bhoja brothers, challenges dead Drupada's son, but Nakula and Sahadeva, who are following Dhrishtadyumna while he makes his way like a blazing fire towards Drona, are at hand to keep these heroes at bay. All of them, fighting now on the very brink of death, attack one another in perfect fury, determined to kill or be killed. Of pure souls and pure conduct, and with swarga in mind, they fight according to the noble tenets of dharma. Of impeccable lineage, unstained deeds and gifted with great intelligence, these lords of men fight righteously and with Kshatriya dharma, using no vile weapons that might be regarded as unfair.

None of them use either cruelly barbed arrows, those called nalikas, poisoned ones, those with heads made of horns, those with many pointed heads, ones made of the bones of bulls and elephants, those having two heads, ones with rusty heads, or those that do not fly straight. All of them use simple and direct weapons and wish to win both fame and heaven and the region of great blessedness, by fighting justly. Yet, the battle between the four warriors of your army and the three from the Pandava side is fearsome, O king.

Meanwhile, Dhrishtadyumna seeing Nakula and Sahadeva successfully contain your mighty maharathas, surges on toward Drona. Held up by the tigerish twins of Madri, your warriors fight them like the wind assailing two mountains.

Seeing the Panchala fire-prince ride like another wind at Drona and the four heroes of his own army obstructed by the twins, Duryodhana dashes against the dangerous Dhrishtadyumna, loosing thunderous volleys of blood-drinking arrows at him. At which, Satyaki rides up, quick as a wish, to stop him. These two Naravyaghras, descendants of Kuru and Madhu, fall wildly upon each other. Then the strangest thing, Rajan—both recall with pleasure and affection the days of their boyhood, when they had been loving friends and, even as they fight savagely, they look at each other with some love and smile repeatedly!

Indeed, so moved is your son that, with tears standing in his eyes, guilt and sorrow laying their touch upon his heart, he says to his ever dear Satyaki, "Shame on anger, my precious friend, and shame on revenge! Shame on Kshatriya dharma and shame on valour and prowess, for today you aim your astras at me and I also loose my shafts at you. In those days when we were young, you were dearer to me than life itself, and you felt the same for me. Alas, where have that love and those childhood memories gone now? They mean nothing on this field of war. Alas, O Satwata, moved by greed and hatred, we are here today fighting each other to kill or die!"

Hearing this, Satyaki draws a clutch of sharp arrows from his quiver, and replies with a smile, "This is no sabha, O prince, nor the home of our Acharya, where we once played together."

Duryodhana says, "Where have those games of our childhood gone, O bull of Sini's race, and how has this battle come upon us now? It seems that the influence of Time is irresistible. Urged though we are by the desire for

wealth, what use is the wealth for which you and I meet to fight, moved only by avarice."

Satyaki replies, "This has always been the way of the Kshatriyas that they must fight even against their acharyas. If I am dear to you, Suyodhana my friend, then kill me quickly. Let me find the realm of the righteous by your hand. Nothing would make me happier. I cannot bear this loving talk. Put forth your best valour and let us do battle like the Kshatriyas that we are. For to speak of the past and our friendship is far more cruel than to fight with arrows."

With this, and not without tears in his own eyes, Satyaki rides at Duryodhana with his bow raised. Seeing him come, your son cascades a blithe shower of deadly shafts on his old and beloved friend, and a pitched and mighty duel breaks out between those scions of the races of Kuru and Madhu, like one between an elephant and a lion. Drawing his bow round, Duryodhana strikes the invincible Satyaki with a blizzard of vicious shafts and Yuyudhana of the Satwatas responds with first fifty, then with twenty, and once more with ten keening arrows.

Duryodhana, still smiling, his eyes still moist, rakes Satyaki with thirty arrows shot from his bowstring drawn to his ear; then, with a razor-headed arrow, he breaks Satyaki's bow. Quicker than thinking, Sini's grandson picks up another bow and covers Duryodhana with a marvellous unbroken straight line of burning barbs. With wonderful skill, Suyodhana cuts every shafts into pieces, at which your army cheers him loudly.

Duryodhana lacerates Satyaki with three and seventy shafts, with wings of gold, dipped in oil and shot from his bow drawn to its fullest stretch. In a flash, the explosive Yuyudhana cleaves your son's bow in his hands and gores him with a hundred barbs, which draw fonts of blood from Duryodhana and course agony through his body. Duryodhana swiftly seeks refuge in another chariot. Having rested awhile, he rides once more against Satyaki, shooting blazing salvos of arrows at the Satwata hero's chariot. Always smiling, Rajan, Satyaki continues to pour an endless river of arrows at his childhood friend, his enemy.

The immaculate shafts of both Kshatriyas meet in the sky, in small explosions and fall broken on every side, sounding like a raging fire consuming a great forest. The thousands of arrows that they both shoot densely cover earth and sky. Then, Karna sees that Satyaki is surely beginning to prevail over Duryodhana and rides up swiftly to rescue your

son. However, Bhima is quick to see this and races up to cut Karna off. He unleashes powerful heavy volleys at the Sutaputra who, with great grace and ease, cuts down Bhima's wall of fire, severs his bow, and maims his charioteer.

Bhima hefts a mace and, running headlong at Karna, smashes his bow, standard, one of his chariot wheels and his charioteer with a flurry of sickening blows like thunder. But Karna stands on his broken chariot, immovable as Meru, the king of all mountains. His horses continue to draw his wonderful ratha with only a single wheel, even like Surya's one-wheeled chariot, drawn by the Sun God's seven celestial steeds.

Karna finds Bhima's irrepressible prowess intolerable; he continues to fight the titan with storms of arrows and diverse astras as well. An incited Bhima matches Karna's shaft for shaft, astra for astra.

Then the battle spreads, when Yudhishtira says to all the leading warriors among the Panchalas and the Matsyas, "Those who are our very life, who are our heads, who are powerful bulls among men are all fighting the Dhartarashtras. How then do you all stand here, as if stupefied and deprived of your very senses? Fly to those great maharathas of my army. Drive out your fears and fight. Hold your Kshatriya dharma high, for with that, regardless of victory or death, you will attain swarga. If you prove to be victors, you will perform great yagnas with lavish dakshina to the Brahmanas. If, instead, you are killed, you will become equals to the Devas, and win many realms of felicity and bliss."

Thus exhorted by the king, the rest of the maharathas of the Pandava army charge into battle, the Panchalas attacking Drona from one side, while Bhimasena leads the others from another.

Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva are the most ardent and active warriors for the Pandavas. They also read the battle the best at this time. They cry to Arjuna, "Dhananjaya, brother, drive the Kurus away from Drona's side. If the Acharya loses his defenders, then the Panchalas can kill him."

At this, Partha rides swiftly against the Kauravas, while Drona continues to battle the Panchalas led by Dhrishtadyumna. On the fifth day of Drona's command, O Bhaarata, Bharadwaja's implacable son slaughters the enemy with unearthly archery and inhuman ruthlessness.'"

CANTO 187

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Drona razes the Panchala legions even as Indra did the Danavas of old. Though he sends gales of fire and wind swirling at them, and countless numbers of their troops are consumed by the matchless, apparently deranged Acharya, the great Pandava maharathas remain unmoved and continue to advance and to fight. In fact, Rajan, the Panchalas and the Srinjayas rush all together at Drona with fierce yells and surround the dreadful Brahmana. He, however, burns and mows them down at will.

Seeing the lustrous Drona putting the Panchalas to rout with unworldly astras, to which they have no defence, fear grips the hearts of the Pandavas and they despair of having victory and tell one another, "Ah, it is plain that Drona will consume us with his astras like a forest fire does a heap of straw in spring. We have no one who can so much as look at him in battle. Arjuna is possibly the only one who can face this apocalyptic Brahmana, and he will not fight him, for he does not consider it dharma to fight his Acharya."

Finding the sons of Kunti sorely pressed, bleeding and now truly frightened, from Drona's many fires, the omniscient Krishna says to Arjuna and his brothers, "Not the Devas with Vasava at their head can vanquish

this Brahmana in battle. He can only be killed if he were to lay down his weapons himself. You must set aside your lofty dharma, you sons of Pandu, and use some cunning stratagem to kill Drona. Otherwise, from the golden ratha, the Brahmana will kill us all."

He pauses and, seeing he has their attention, says quietly, "Drona loves his son more than his life. I think if Aswatthaman were to die, Drona would abandon the war and lay down his weapons. So, let someone go and tell the Acharya that his son Aswatthaman has been killed."

Arjuna looks at Krishna in some shock and does not approve of this counsel. The others, seeing the havoc from hell that Drona sows all around him, and knowing very well that the war would indeed be swiftly lost if he was not stopped, quickly concur with Krishna. Yudhishtira thinks a long while and then, unwillingly, accepts what Krishna says. Rajan, then Mahabaho Bhima armed with his mace goes and kills a dangerous elephant whose name is also Aswatthaman and which belongs to his own army, to Indravarman, the king of the Malavas.

Riding upto Drona, with some reluctance in his heart and shame, Bhima begins to roar aloud, "Aswatthaman has been killed. Aswatthaman is dead!"

Bhima proclaims this white lie for it is not the Acharya's son who has died. Drona hears what Bhima says and feels all his limbs turn weak as if they have dissolved like sand in water. Then, he remembers the invincible prowess of his son and quickly concludes that Bhima is lying. Strength floods back into his mighty body. He knows that his son wears a secret jewel that makes him invincible to his enemies; Drona knows that his beloved Aswatthaman could not be dead.

Drona bears down hotly on Dhrishtadyumna, who he wants to kill above all else, for he knows that the Panchala prince is destined to kill him, indeed born just for that. He covers Dhrishtadyumna with a thousand keen kanka-feathered arrows. At this, full twenty thousand powerful Panchala maharathas inundate him with their barbs even as he dashes across Kurukshetra as he likes leaving spasming corpses all around him.

Completely shrouded by Panchala arrows, we no longer see the Acharya; he is as the sun hidden by rainclouds during the monsoon.

But no Panchala arrow finds its home in Drona's body, for he invokes the Brahmastra to protect himself and to ravage them. Drona is like a smokeless, blazing fire and he is invested with celestial grandeur as he slaughters the Somakas. He fells heads and cuts off massive arms like

spiked maces decked with golden ornaments; these fall in a veritable rain. Massacred by Bharadwaja's meridian son, the Panchala Kshatriyas fall everywhere like trees uprooted by a tempest.

Yet again, the field of death becomes impassable for fallen elephants and horses, O Bhaarata, and the thick sludge of flesh and blood. Having killed all twenty thousand Panchala maharathas, Drona shines forth gloriously, truly like a smokeless fire. The inexorable son of Bharadwaja then beheads Vasudana with a broad-headed arrow, and then he kills five hundred Matsyas, six thousand elephants and ten thousand horsemen, in less time than it takes me to tell you of it.

Seeing Drona annihilating the very race of Kshatriyas on chasmic Kurukshetra deeper than death, the Rishis Viswamitra, Jamadagni, Bharadwaja, Gautama, Vasishta, Kasyapa, Atri, and the Srikatas, the Prisnis, Garga, the Balakhilyas, the Marichis, the descendants of Bhrigu and Angiras, and diverse other sages of subtle forms, gather there quickly, with Agni, the bearer of sacrificial libations at their head. They want to fetch Drona to Brahma, the Grandsire. They say to Drona, the ornament of battle, "You are fighting sinfully, without dharma. The hour of your death has come, O Brahmana. Lay down your weapons, Drona. Look, we are here and, after seeing us, you must no longer perpetrate such cruel violence.

You are well versed in the Vedas and their angas. You are devoted to dharma, especially because you are a Brahmana. Such brutal deeds do not become you. Lay down your weapons, drive away the film of darkness that blinds your heart and your eyes and cleave fast again to the sanatana dharma. The time that you had to spend in this world of men is now full.

You have consumed ordinary soldiers with the Brahmastra, burnt men who know nothing of the divine weapons to ashes. What you have done, O Muni, is in no way dharma. O blessed Drona, put aside your weapons without delay, and do not remain an hour longer on earth. Sin no more! You have done enough grievous harm."

Drona hears what the great Rishis say; he remembers again what Bhima had declared, that Aswatthaman was dead; he sees Dhrishtadyumna advancing upon him and a great pang, verily of death, clenches his heart. Burning with grief and plunged into sudden dejection, while he burned with energy and wrath a moment ago, Drona rides up to the one man that he trusts completely. He goes to the always truthful Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and asks him if his son Aswatthaman has indeed been killed.

Drona firmly believes that Yudhishtira would never tell a lie, not for the sovereignty over the three worlds. This is why he asks the question of Yudhishtira and nobody else. He had always looked for and found perfect truth in Yudhishtira from that Pandava's very boyhood.

Meanwhile, Krishna, knower of all things, is anxious for he knows that the indomitable Acharya can indeed devour all the Pandavas with his astras; he knows that Drona cannot be killed unless he lays down his weapons. Addressing Yudhishtira he says, "If Drona fights as he does now for half a day more, he will have exterminated all your army and ourselves. Save us, Yudhishtira, from the terrible Brahmana. In dire circumstances, falsehood is advocated if it saves lives. There is no sin in a lie spoken to women, or in marriages, or to save kings, or to rescue a Brahmana's life."

Bhima says, "As soon as I heard of the only way by which Drona can be slain, I killed a mighty elephant, like the elephant of Sakra himself, which belonged to Indravarman, the king of the Malavas, a great beast that stood within our army. I then went to Drona and told him, 'Aswatthaman has been killed, O Brahmana. Lay down your weapons and stop fighting!'

However, the Acharya does not believe that I spoke the truth. If you want to save us all and win this war, Yudhishtira, do as Krishna says and tell Drona that Aswatthaman, the son of Saradwat's daughter, is indeed dead. The Brahmana bull will never doubt what you say to him, for it is known that you are the most truthful one in all the worlds."

Hearing what Bhima says, persuaded by what Krishna also says, and bowing also to inevitable destiny, Yudhishtira decides to go along with what they want him to do. Yet, fearing to tell an outright lie Yudhishtira clearly says that Aswatthaman is dead, but adds under his breath, "the elephant Aswatthaman". Until that moment, Yudhishtira's chariot and horses were always suspended at a height of four fingers' breadth from the ground, for his immaculate dharma and honesty. No sooner does he tell this white lie than his ratha and steeds descend and then on ride along the earth as any other man's! When Yudhishtira says that his son is dead, Drona's already faltering spirit breaks. Having heard what the unworldly Rishis said to him, he suddenly sees himself as a most heinous sinner, and particularly against the noble Pandavas who always trod the path of dharma. At this critical juncture, he sees Dhrishtadyumna drawn dangerously close to him, and finds that his arms have grown weak and that he can no longer fight as he did before.'"

CANTO 188

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Dhrishtadyumna sees Drona stricken before him and charges at him with doubled celerity. As we know, king Drupada received Dhrishtadyumna from Agni Deva at a great yagna, and the fire-prince was born for Drupada to have revenge against Drona who had humiliated him. Dhrishtadyumna had been born just to kill Drona.

Wanting to kill Drona, to accomplish the final purpose of his birth, the Panchala prince picks up an unearthly bow, a weapon with few rivals. He fits an arrow on it, a shaft like a serpent of the most virulent venom, and that arrows glow with a fierce flame within the circle of his bow, and is like the splendent autumn sun within a radiant disc. Seeing Prishata's son bend that blazing bow, all the troops think that the last hour of the world has come.

Seeing the arrow aimed at him, Drona, son of Bharadwaja, also thinks that the last moment of his body has come. The Acharya prepares to parry the shaft. However, his astras, O Rajan, no longer appear at his bidding, although he has not exhausted them despite shooting them ceaselessly for four days and one night. Yet, when the third part of the fifth day is past, his shafts are all exhausted. Seeing that his arrows have all been spent, broken

with grief believing that his son is dead and finding that the Devastras no longer appear at his bidding, he is overcome by a wish rising from the very depths of his being to lay aside his weapons as the Rishis asked him to.

Though still full of great tejas, he cannot fight as before. But, being the master he is and tameless, he takes up another celestial bow given him by Angiras, and some arrows that are like a Brahmana's curse; with his last vestiges of strength, the Acharya continues to battle Dhrishtadyumna!

Suddenly renewed, like a flame that blazes most brightly before it dies, Drona covers the Panchala prince with a steaming fusillade, which strike his adversary heavily, drawing fonts of blood from Dhrishtadyumna. Drona shatters the Panchala prince's shafts into dust; he cuts down the Pandava senapati's standard, severs his bow and beheads his sarathy: all in a flash. Dhrishtadyumna, still smiling, takes up another bow and drills a long violent shaft deep into Drona's torso.

Deeply wounded by that staggering shaft, losing his self-possession, Drona roars dreadfully and again rives Dhrishtadyumna's bow. As the Panchala prince seizes up more bows, the Acharya, apparently undimmed, destroys all of them, Rajan, leaving him only his mace and sword. He strikes the enraged, roaring Dhrishtadyumna with nine shafts such as would kill any enemy. But maharatha Dhrishtadyumna, of immeasurable soul, invokes the protective Brahmastra, and with light like speed and adroitness entangles his own horses with the Brahmana's, steeds red and dove coloured. Their whinnying is like the raging of stormclouds during the season of rains, and their shimmering skins flash like lightning.

The unrelenting Dvija shatters the shaft-joints, the wheel-joints, and all the other joints of Dhrishtadyumna's chariot so it collapses under that hero. Deprived of his bow, ratha, horses and sarathy, Dhrishtadyumna, in great distress, grasps up a mace. In a wink, Drona splits that weapon into slivers just before it is hurled at him. Dhrishtadyumna, Naravyaghra, picks up a gleaming sword and a bright shield decked with a hundred moons. Despite every reversal, the Panchala prince remains absorbed in his single intention: to kill Acharya Drona.

At times sheltering low in his chariot, at others leaping onto his chariot-head, the fire-prince remains in constant motion, brandishing his sword and whirling his bright shield, perhaps foolishly, still wanting to achieve his impossible task of despatching the Brahmana, who has him at his mercy. Now he leaps onto the very yoke of Drona's ratha, then dives under his

chestnut horses and hides himself briefly beneath their haunches. With such mercurial speed does he move, that the troops all around break into spontaneous applause. And indeed, O Dhritarashtra, he is an incredible marvel to watch darting about as quickly as the very mind, denying Drona any opportunity to strike him down. Both of them strangely resemble, in their different roles, hawks flying after a piece of flesh or a smaller bird—both are hawk and both are quarry.

Expertly now, Drona spears his antagonist's white horses, one after another, without touching his own red ones tangled with them. Dhrishtadyumna's horses die, freeing Drona's red horses from the traces of Dhrishtadyumna's chariot. Seeing his horses killed, Dhrishtadyumna, the best of all swordsmen, springs at Drona with his sword, even like Vinata's son Garuda swooping upon a snake. The appearance, Rajan, of Dhrishtadyumna resembles Vishnu's when he was on the point of slaying Hiranyakasipu. He performs many elegant flourishes with his sword, including the well-known twenty-one different kinds of movements. With sword and shield in hand, he wheels about whirling his sword above his head, makes side thrusts, rushes forward, runs sideways, leaps high, attacks his antagonist's flanks, retreats, closes with his enemy, and presses him hard. Having practised them thoroughly, he also shows the manoeuvres called the Bharata, the Kausika and the Satwata, as he prepares to kill Drona. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna's striking display as he charges about the field, sword and shield in hand, all the warriors, as well as the Devas assembled there, are full of wonder.

Drona shoots a thousand arrows in the thick of the fray and destroys Dhrishtadyumna's sword as well as his shield of a hundred moons. The arrows that Drona uses are special short ones, used only in close combat. No one other than Kripa, Partha, Aswatthaman, Karna, Pradyumna and Yuyudhana own or know how to use these; Abhimanyu also had such arrows. Now the Acharya wants to kill his helpless disciple, who is like his own son, and affixes a deathly shaft to his bowstring. Just then, from a way off, the splendid Satyaki shatters that lethal arrow with ten whistling barbs, in the very sight of your son and the noble Karna, and rescues Dhrishtadyumna who would not otherwise have escaped with his life.

Krishna and Arjuna cry joyfully, "Uttamam! Uttamam!" and loudly applaud Satyaki of unfading glory, who continually destroys the devastras

of all the enemy maharathas. Then Kesava and Dhananjaya charge towards the Kurus.

Dhananjaya says, “Look Krishna, how Satyaki, the joy of the Madhu vamsa, sports before the Acharya and the other maharathas and gladdens the twins, Bhima, Yudhishtira and me. With skill acquired through long abhyasa and deep humility, Yuyudhana toys with these mightiest warriors.”

All the troops and the Siddhas in the sky look at the invincible grandson of Sini, are filled with joy and wonder and laud him, saying, “Wonderful, Wonderful!” Indeed, Rajan, all the warriors of both armies show their appreciation of the Satwata hero’s stunning feats.’”

CANTO 189

Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing what Satyaki does, an angry Duryodhana and others quickly surround him. Kripa and Karna join them, loosing towering gales of arrows at the Satwata hero. Swiftly, Yudhishtira, the twin sons of Madri and the stupendous Bhimasena arrive to support Satyaki. Karna, Kripa, Duryodhana and many others attack Satyaki viciously, all of them at once. But Yuyudhana is equal to them all; he cuts down all their arrows and incinerates the devastras that flare at him from all around.

So bloody and brutal is the war now that Kurukshetra resembles a scene from antiquity when Rudra, filled with rage, destroyed all creatures. Human arms, heads, royal parasols cut down, and yak-tails are seen lying in heaps on the field of dharma where dharma itself has all but perished. The earth is strewn thickly with broken wheels and rathas, massive arms lopped off from trunks and brave horsemen deprived abruptly of their lives, many of them headless. Thousands of valiant men, mangled by cruel shafts and lances, roll and writhe on the ground in agony, in the spasms of death. What doubt can there be, Rajan, that the Mahabharata yuddha fought on Kurukshetra is like the Devasura yuddha of old fought on the filed of swarga?

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira says to his warriors, “O Maharathas, attack Drona the pot-born with all your might! Look where Dhrishtadyumna, the heroic son of Prishata, is doing his utmost to slay the son of Bharadwaja. Looking at him, I feel certain that he will not fail today. But the Acharya is formidable and you must support him if he is to succeed. So unite and fight Drona!”

At Yudhishtira’s command, the maharathas of the Srinjayas all rush forward feverishly to attack the still battling son of Bharadwaja; he sees them come at him and knows that his end is near. He does not pause but continues to fight back like some deranged god. Suddenly, the earth trembles unaccountably, fierce winds blow, meteors fall in showers out of the sky, seemingly issuing from the Sun, blazing fiercely, foreboding great terrors; the omens send waves of terror and panic through your army.

The weapons of Drona seem to blaze more lividly than ever; the chariots on the field rumble louder and the horses all seem to weep. Drona, then, appears to rapidly lose his tejas and his left eye and hand begin to twitch. He sees Dhrishtadyumna before him again and, he hears the words of the Devarishis echo in his mind, saying that the time had come for him to leave the world. Drona feels a tide of despair and resolves to give up his life but after burning fiercely again in battle.

Surrounded on all sides by the troops of Drupada’s son, Drona begins to range across the field, massacring countless Kshatriyas with his astras. After he first annihilates four and twenty thousand Kshatriyas, he despatches another hundred thousand, with his unearthly ayudhas. He stands upon Kurukshetra like a smokeless fire and, then, decides that he will exterminate the very Kshatriya race with the Brahmastra.

The mighty Bhima races up to help Dhrishtadyumna who, without a chariot or weapons, still defiantly assails Drona with his bare hands and with whatever he can retrieve from the bloody mire around his feet. Bhima takes the Panchala prince into his ratha and says to him, “Only you can kill the dreadful Brahmana. The task of killing him rests with you; Dhrishtadyumna, hurry or he will finish us all!”

Dhrishtadyumna quickly seizes up a fresh, marvellous bow and once more covers Drona with a tornado of arrows. Both invoke the Brahmastra and many other Devastras. Gradually Dhrishtadyumna destroys and somewhat depletes the arsenal of Bharadwaja’s son; having done this, the

Panchala prince begins to mow down the Vasatis, the Sibis, the Balhikas and the Kurus, all those who are protecting Drona.

The incandescent Acharya continues to summon and unleash fusillades of elemental arrows on all sides, while Dhrishtadyumna too is resplendent as the sun with his millions of rays. Then, once more, Drona breaks the bow in the Panchala prince's hands and bores him deep with fierce clutches of shafts that pierce his very marmas and fling him back in Bhima's ratha.

At this, Rajan, Bhima loses his temper completely. Besides himself with fury, the Vayuputra leaps out of his chariot, seizes Drona's red horses by their bits, and cries reverberantly to the Acharya, "If the vilest wretches among Brahmanas, discontented with their swadharma but well-versed in the use of arms, did not fight, the Kshatriya varna would not have been exterminated. Refraining from injury to all creatures, non-violence, the highest of all virtues and the Brahmana is the root of that virtue. As for you, you are the greatest of all knowers of the Brahman. These Mlecchas and other warriors are all engaged in their own swadharma and are motivated by ignorance and folly, and by the desire for wealth for their sons and wives. But you, O despicable and lowly Brahmana, commit genocide for the sake of an only son. Are you not ashamed? Unknown to you, Aswatthaman for whom you have taken up weapons, and for whom you live, lies dead today on the field. Yudhishtira himself has told you this, and do you still doubt it?"

With such fervour does the great son of the Wind speak that the already heartsick Drona lays down his bow and all his other weapons as well. The invincible Brahmana says aloud in his lion's voice, "O Karna, Karna maharatha, O Kripa, O Duryodhana, I say to you again, be careful how you fight the Pandavas otherwise they will kill you all. As for myself, I am laying down my weapons now. My time has come."

And then he repeatedly, dementedly calls out Aswatthaman's name in absolute grief. Having finally laid down his weapons, he sits on the floor of his chariot, and takes up a Yogic posture to reassure all the warriors, why all living creatures and to dispel their abject terror of him. Seeing his chance, Dhrishtadyumna gathers all his strength and courage. Laying aside his own bow and grasping up a sword, he lean down from Bhima's ratha and runs towards Drona. All men, all the unearthly ones who watch from the sky cry out in distress.

Drona, having abandoned his weapons, is in a supremely tranquil state. Having called out the name of his son, he fixes his mind in dhyana, concentrating on attaining Yoga, communion with the Brahman. Endued with great radiance by years of tapasya, he fixes his heart on that Supreme, Ancient and Eternal Being, the Lord Vishnu. Bending his head down, thrusting his chest out a little, closing his eyes, yoking himself now to the sattva guna, giving his heart and soul up to the most profound meditation, focused on the Pranava, the single syllable AUM that is the Brahman, the ultimate, his heart flying like an arrow toward the puissant and indestructible God of gods, with great punya acquired through tapasya, the Acharya of the Kurus and the Pandavas soars into Swarga, which even the pious find so difficult to attain.

When Drona's spirit ascends into Swarga, the sky is lit by two suns, until the soul of Bharadwaja's incomparable son dims and vanishes. We hear strange cries of joy from the delighted celestial ones above, Devarishi, Gandharva, Charana, Apsara, Vidyadhara, Deva and others as well.

When Drona leaves his body thus, Dhrishtadyumna stands beside him, unconscious of what has happened. Only we five among men, Arjuna, Aswatthaman, Krishna, Yudhishtira and I see the noble Drona engrossed in Yoga ascend to the highest realm of blessedness. Nobody else, O Rajan, sees the lustre or magnificence of the wise Drona, devoted to Yoga, when he leaves this world. Indeed, all present know nothing of it, or that, after setting aside his weapons, Drona has attained to supreme Brahmaloka, a region mysterious to the very gods, in the company of the greatest Rishis, leaving his body lacerated by arrows and bathed in blood.

Dhrishtadyumna knows nothing of it either and he roughly seizes the Acharya's lifeless body and, coarsely dragging it around on the floor of the golden chariot, hacks off the Acharya's head with his sword in an eruption of blood, while the already departed one makes no sound. Having beheaded him, Dhrishtadyumna gives a tremendous shout of joy, and whirls his sword around in triumph.

Dark of complexion, with white locks hanging down to his ears, that Brahmana of five and eighty years ranged over the battlefield with the vigour of a youth of sixteen: only for your sake, O Rajan! Before Dhrishtadyumna has his way with Drona, Arjuna cries to him, "Take the Acharya alive, do not kill him. He should not be slain!"

All the troops also cried out similar pleas; Arjuna, in particular, melts with pity, and cries out repeatedly. However, Dhrishtadyumna disregards all those cries and kills Drona on the floor of his ratha. Covered with the Brahmana's blood, Dhrishtadyumna jumps down from the chariot, red as the sun and as fierce. This is how your troops and the Pandavas' witness Drona killed in the battle. Though we five saw how Drona, called by the Sages of Swarga, attained to a transcendent realm before Dhrishtadyumna apparently slew him, fulfilling his destiny.

Then the exultant Panchala fire-prince flings down Drona's leonine, majestic head, flowing blood from its throat, before the warriors of your army, roaring terribly all the while. Your soldiers flee in all directions.

Meanwhile, Drona courses up through the firmament along the path of the stars. Through the grace of the Rishi Krishna Dwaipayana, the son of Satyavati, I was a witness, Rajan, to the true circumstances of the death of Bharadwaja's great son. I saw the illustrious one going, after he ascended the sky, like a smokeless brand of blinding splendour.

Shocked and panic-stricken by the death of Drona, the Kurus, the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, all run from the battle. As your army breaks up and flees, many are killed and many wounded. Your warriors seem as if they have lost all will to continue fighting; they seem already vanquished, dead, and fear rips through them. The Kurus think of themselves as having lost both worlds and lose all self-control.

The kings of your army seek out Drona's body, Rajan, on the field covered over with thousands of headless trunks, and they cannot find it. With Drona slain, the Pandavas celebrate, twanging their bows, blowing their conches and beating their drums. Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna embrace each other in the midst of the Pandava host and Bhima says, "I will embrace you again, O son of Prishata, as a senapati who has won the war, when the wretch of a Suta's son Karna, and the other wretch Duryodhana have been slain!"

After he says this, Bhimasena, in a transport of joy, makes the earth tremble by deafeningly slapping his cavernous armpits. Terrified by that sound, the remainder of your troops run from the battlefield, forgetting Kshatriya dharma and intent on saving their lives. The Pandavas, O king, are overjoyed, for, a short while ago, it had truly seemed that Drona by himself would annihilate them and win the war by himself.'"

CANTO 190

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Upon the fall of Drona the Kurus, beaten, broken, wounded and now leaderless, are listless, desperate and sapped of all will and energy to continue the battle. They mourn with loud wailing and lamentations and, seeing their enemies, the Pandavas, prevail over them all around, cutting them down at will, they quake with fear. Their eyes fill with tears, their hearts are afraid, and they become melancholic and gather forlorn around your son. Covered with dust and grime, they cast glazed and vacant looks all around, and with their very breaths choked with terror, they resemble the Daityas after the fall of Hiranyaksha in the olden days.

Surrounded by them, as if by small terrified animals, Duryodhana cannot bear to remain in their sorry midst and moves away. Hungry, thirsty and scorched by the sun, your warriors, O Bhaarata, are entirely demoralised. For them the fall of Bharadwaja's son Drona is as if the sun fell onto the earth, or the ocean dried up, or Meru was moved from his true place, or Indra vanquished and slain. Losing all composure and dignity they scatter with anxiety lending them great celerity.

Sakuni, king of the Gandharas, watches Drona of the golden chariot killed, and he too runs away with the maharathas of his division, with even

greater speed than any of the others. Even Karna flees in shock, taking with him his own vast division, with all its standards flapping in the hot wind that blows across Kurukshetra.

Salya of the Madras casts vacant looks all around him; he, too, escapes with his akshauhini, with all his chariots, elephants and horses.

Saradwat's son, Kripa, too, flees crying aloud, "Alas! Alas!" at the fall of his brother-in-law, and takes with him his akshauhini of elephants and foot-soldiers, the greater part of which have by now been killed.

Kritavarman also takes flight, borne by his swift horses, and surrounded by the remnants of his Bhoja, Kalinga, Aratta, and Balhika troops.

Uluka, O Rajan, seeing Drona slain, is terror-stricken and runs away, with his teeming cohort of foot-soldiers.

Handsome, youthful and reputed for his bravery, Dusasana, also, turns his back on the battle with alacrity, surrounded by his elephant division.

Vrishasena also flees at the sight of Drona's beheading, along with his ten thousand chariots and three thousand elephants.

With his elephants, horses, chariots and foot-soldiers, even your otherwise fearless son, the mighty Duryodhana also rides away in panic, Rajan, as do the remnants of the Samsaptakas whom Arjuna has not yet slaughtered. Seeing Drona die, Susarman flees.

Riding on their elephants, chariots and horses, all the warriors of the Kaurava army run from the field of battle; some call out to their fathers to flee, some to their brothers, some to their uncles, some to their sons and some to their friends. Others cry out to their brothers in arms, their sisters' sons or other kinsmen, and everyone bolts in all directions. With dishevelled hair, and clothes come loose, they all run so that no two men can bee seen to be fleeing together with any composure. It is every man for himself and each of them believes that the war is lost and the Kuru army has been entirely destroyed. Others among your troops flee, Rajan, throwing off their armour so they can go faster.

A very few of the warriors and soldiers cry out to the others, "Stop! Do not run!" And then they themselves flee. Abandoning their fine chariots, and their bright ornaments flashing, they flee on horseback or on foot.

Only Drona's son Aswatthaman, like a great crocodile swimming against the current of a river, does not run but bears down on his enemies instead. A fierce battle breaks out between him and the many warriors led by Sikhandin, the Prabhadrakas, the Panchalas, the Chedis and the

Kaikeyas. Even while cutting down vast numbers of the enemy, this Brahmana hero, with the tread of an infuriated elephant, sees the Kaurava host running from battle, bent just upon escape.

Aswatthaman rides up to Duryodhana and says, “Why, O Bhaarata, do our men flee as if in some great dread? Why do you not rally them? Rajan, you seem dazed and not yourself. Which of our maharathas has been killed that our men flee in such terror? O Kaurava, Karna himself leads those who run away. Never before have I seen such a sight. What dire evil has befallen your troops, O Suyodhana?”

Duryodhana cannot bear to tell him. Your son seems to sink deeper into an ocean of grief, like a foundering boat; he looks at Aswatthaman and tears flow down his face. Full of shame, your son finally says, “Blessed are you that you ask before any other why our army runs like frightened boys.”

Then, Saradwat’s son Kripa, in great anguish, tells Drona’s son how his father had been killed. He says, “We set Drona, greatest of all maharathas, at the head of our troops and began to fight the Panchalas. The Kurus and the Somakas closed with each other with a roar as of spring thunder and we fought closely, with swords and bare hands. As the battle progressed, the Dhartarashtras were being swiftly thinned and, seeing this, your august father was filled with rage and invoked a Brahmastra, which incinerated thousands of the enemy, great warriors and common soldiers alike. Any man of the Pandavas, Kaikeyas, Matsyas or Panchalas, O Aswatthaman, who came near Drona’s ratha, died. With his Brahmastra, Drona sent a thousand maharathas and two thousand elephants to the land of Yama.

Dark, with gray locks hanging down to his ears, and full five and eighty years old, the aged Drona would ride into battle like a youth of sixteen. While he razed the enemy troops and slew so many of their kings and maharathas, the Panchalas, though desperate to have revenge on him, ran from the fight in disorder. Invoking Devastras and unleashing them without discrimination, Drona burned like the sun. Your father, radiating arrows as Surya does his rays, was like the star at his zenith at whom no one can gaze. He scorched his enemies; he incinerated them or sapped them of their energy and will.

Seeing Drona devour their troops, Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘Truly, not Indra who slew great Vritrasura can vanquish this Brahman in battle. O you sons of Pandu, set aside your dharma and look for victory, otherwise Drona of the golden chariot will slaughter all of you this very day. We must use

stratagem against him for only thus can he be killed. I believe that if he hears that Aswatthaman is dead he will not fight on. Only if Drona lays down his weapons can he be killed. Someone must say to him that his son had been slain. That will break his heart and his will not only to fight but to live.'

Arjuna did not approve of what Krishna said but the others all agreed, even Yudhishtira although after struggling with his conscience. Then, Bhimasena killed a great elephant called Aswatthaman, which belonged to the Malava lord Indravarman; his heart full of shame, he then went to your sire and said, 'Aswatthaman has been killed.'

But your father did not believe Bhima and he asked Yudhishtira is this was true. Afraid of telling a lie, but knowing that the war would be lost otherwise, and wanting victory, Yudhishtira said to the Acharya, 'He for whom you wield weapons, he for whom you live, your beloved son Aswatthaman has been slain. He lies unbreathing on the ground like a young lion killed in his prime.'

Knowing well the consequences of telling a lie, Yudhishtira added under his breath 'the elephant Aswatthaman'. Hearing this from the Dharmarajan, whom he did not doubt for a moment, the stricken Drona wailed aloud, his limbs turned weak and he did not fight as he did before. Seeing him almost senseless with shock and anxiety, Drupada's son, the cruel Dhrishtadyumna, rushed towards him.

Seeing the prince who had been born to kill him, Drona, knower of all things, knower of fate and its inexorable ways, cast aside his weapons and sat down in his chariot in praya. Dhrishtadyumna bounded onto that ratha, seized Drona by the hair with his left hand and, ignoring the loud admonitions of all the heroes around him, struck off the Acharya's head with his sword.

'Drona must not be killed!' These were the words that echoed from all sides. Arjuna, too, jumped down from his chariot and ran towards Prishata's son with arms upraised and repeatedly cried to him, 'O you who know the ways of dharma, do not kill the Acharya but take him alive!'

Though the Kauravas and Arjuna forbade him, Dhrishtadyumna brutally killed your father even as he sat with his eyes shut in dhyana. And now, our terrified troops run in all directions as if they have themselves been beheaded. Aswatthaman, Anagha, I and my brothers are also plunged in grief and fear, and we are also fleeing the field."

When he hears this, Aswatthaman’s hisses like a serpent trodden upon; rage like a fire fed with ample fuel blazes up in him. He wrings his hands, grinds his teeth, breathes like a snake and his eyes turn red as blood.’”

CANTO 191

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When he hears about how his father Drona was killed, what does Aswatthaman say, O Sanjaya? He in whom the Manava, Varuna, Agneya, Brahma, Aindra and Narayana astras reside always, what does he say when he hears that Dhrishtadyumna has, sinfully and eschewing dharma killed the virtuous Acharya in battle?

Having learnt the astra shastra, the science of weapons, from Parasurama himself, including all the Devastras, Drona had imparted all his knowledge to his son, wanting to see him invested with all the accomplishments of a great warrior. In this world, there is only one person, and none else, whom even the greatest men wish to see become superior to themselves and that is the son.

All the noblest, greatest teachers have this characteristic and they impart all the mysteries of their science to either their sons or devoted disciples whom they think of as being their own sons. Becoming his father's disciple, and obtaining all those mysteries in every nuance and detail, Aswatthaman became a veritable second Drona. Aswatthaman is equal to Karna in the knowledge of weapons, to Purandara in war, to Kartavirya in might,

Brihaspati in gyana, a mountain in fortitude, in tejas to Agni, in depth to an ocean, and in wrath and virulence to the venom of a great serpent.

He is the best of all maharathas in war, accomplished and indefatigable. In speed, he is equal to the wind and he tears about in the thick of a battle, like Yama in a rage. The very Earth shakes when he shoots his arrows. With prowess that cannot be confounded, this Brahmana hero is remorseless as well.

Purified by the Vedas and by his vratas, he is a perfect master of the science of arms, why, even like Dasaratha's son Rama. Like the ocean, he is imperturbable.

Hearing that Dhrishtadyumna has killed his father Drona, with adharma, what did Aswatthaman say? Even as Yagnasena's son was born to become the slayer of Drona, so too was Aswatthaman born to avenge his father's death and to kill Dhrishtadyumna. What does Aswatthaman say, hearing that the ruthless Dhrishtadyumna has beheaded his sire, the Acharya?'"

CANTO 192

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says. 'Aswatthaman is filled with grief and rage in equal parts, O Rajan, on hearing how Dhrishtadyumna slaughtered his father like some animal. His body blazes forth with wrath like that of the Destroyer while he consumes all the creatures at the end of the Yuga. Repeatedly wiping his tears, and breathing hot sighs in anger, he says to Duryodhana, "Ah, Yudhishtira is the greatest hypocrite that he bears the standard of dharma, always sanctimoniously preaches the virtue of truth but then lies so vilely himself. No one could have vanquished my father unless he first set his weapons down and he would have consumed the Pandavas and their entire army with the fires of his astras. Now, he has been killed by a lie and in the most treacherous and cowardly way even while he sat in praya. So this is the great dharma of Dharma's own son!

Men who fight a war must inevitably find either victory or defeat. Death in battle is always commended and the sages have declared that the death of a warrior fighting in the cause of dharma is never to be mourned. My father met with a noble death and he has, beyond doubt, found the loftiest realm of felicity. I should not mourn him. But the utter shame of being crudely seized by his white hair before all the troops, even as he fought a dhama

yuddha, burns and rends the very core of my heart. If my father could thus be seized by his silver locks and be beheaded while he sat in dhyana, why then should any sonless man ever want to have a son?

Moved by lust, wrath, folly, hatred or levity, men perpetrate deeds of grave adharma and humiliate the noblest souls. The cruel and evil son of Prishata has committed this unforgivable sin but he forgot that this Aswatthaman is not dead but alive! He will pay with his life, and savagely, for what he did to Drona; the lying Yudhishtira will pay for the lie he told my father that made him lay down his weapons. Drona trusted Yudhishtira absolutely and the Pandava betrayed his trust to have his life and win this war.

This very day, the earth will drink the blood of this false Dharmaraja. Besides this, I swear by the Truth, O Kauravya, as also by all my religious karma, that I will not continue to live unless I annihilate all the Panchalas for what their prince did to my father. I swear that I will kill the sinner Dhrishtadyumna, even as brutally as he did my father. Let the means be any, mild or violent, but I will not rest in peace until I have wrought the destruction of all the Panchalas.

O Kaurava, Naravyaghra, men wish for sons so that they may be saved from great fears both here and in the hereafter. Yet, my father met a disgraceful death, like a friendless creature, although I, his son and disciple, am alive, and like a mountain in strength. Shame on my devastras, fie on my weaponry, shame on my prowess, for Drona, although he had a son in me, had his gray locks seized by the Panchala and his head hewn off!

O Duryodhana, king of the Bharatas, I will now do what will free me from the debt I owe my sire who has left this world. A superior man never praises himself. But I cannot bear the sinful slaying of my father and today I will speak of my prowess. Let the Pandavas, with Krishna among them, behold my tejas today as I consume all their troops even as Rudra does when the yuga ends.

Not the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Asuras, the Uragas, the Rakshasas, nor all the greatest Manavas shall contain me in battle today. There is none in the world to equal Arjuna or me in the knowledge of weapons. Today I will break into the Pandava army, shining like the Sun himself with his blazing rays, and I will incinerate the enemy with my devastras. Endless arrows will spume forth from my bow and devour them all. Today the warriors of our army will see all the points of the compass, O Rajan,

obscured by my arrows, as if with dark torrents of rain. Today I will mow them all down like a great tempest does trees, great and small, that stand in its way. Not Arjuna, Janardana, Bhimasena, Nakula, Sahadeva, Yudhishtira, Drupada's evil son Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin or Satyaki possess the astras that I have, for my father gave me more than he did any of them.

Once, assuming the form of a Brahmana, Narayana himself came to my father and, after bowing down to him, my father made his offerings to Him. Taking them in his own hands, the divine Lord offered to give him a boon. My father asked for the supreme weapon, the Narayanastra.

The Devadeva said to my sire, 'No man will ever be your equal in battle. However, O Brahmana, you must never use this weapon lightly or in haste, for it never returns without destroying the enemy at whom you loose it. There is no one whom it cannot slay! Indeed, the Narayanastra would consume even the immortals. Therefore, it should be used only after the greatest deliberation and to serve the gravest cause. This astra, O Parantapa, should never be cast against men who abandon their chariots or weapons in battle, at those who seek quarter or those that concede defeat. Also, he who seeks to injure the Immortal One with it will himself be severely afflicted by this supreme weapon!'

My sire humbly received the Narayanastra. Then Lord Narayana said to me, 'With this Narayanastra, you will also be able to unleash other astras beyond count in battle and blaze with tejas.'

Having said these words, the divine Lord vanished before our eyes and ascended into Swarga. This is the tale of how I came to possess the ineluctable Narayanastra. Today, I will put it to good use and annihilate the Pandavas, the Panchalas, the Matsyas and the Kaikeyas, even as Sachi's lord razed the Asuras. My arrows, O Bhaarata, will fall upon my enemies in the very forms that I wish them to assume; they shall be without count or end and they will not cease falling upon the enemy until their last warrior is dead. I am a Parantapa, O Duryodhana, a blazing scourge of my enemies, and today you will see me destroy the Pandavas and all who fight their cause. As for that cur of the Panchalas, Dhrishtadyumna, who is an offender of friends, Brahmanas and of his own Acharya, who is a deceitful and ignoble wretch, he will not escape me with his life today."

Hearing what Aswatthaman says, the Kuru army takes heart and rallies. Many great warriors are delighted and blow their gigantic conches; the troops beat their drums and dindimas by the thousands. The earth resounds

with the hooves of charging horses and the racing wheels of chariots; the sky echoes with the great sounds. Hearing this uproar, deep as rolling thunder, the Pandava maharathas take counsel together.

Meanwhile, after he has spoken, Drona's son, O Bhaarata, touches holy water and invokes the devastra called the Narayana.'"

CANTO 193

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'No sooner does Aswatthaman invoke the Narayanastra than violent winds begin to blow with lashing showers of rain, and we hear peals of thunder although there is not a cloud in the sky. The earth trembles and the seas swell up in great agitation. The rivers begin to run back towards their sources in terror; mountain peaks cleave themselves and giant crags come loose of their own accord and crash down sheer precipices; diverse beasts of the earth all run in panic, keeping the Pandavas ever to their right.

Darkness sets in. The sun is obscured and all manner of birds of prey and beasts of carrion alight on the field in joy of a further fresh feast to come. The Devas, the Danavas and the Gandharvas, Rajan, are all petrified. Seeing this tremendous upheaval in nature, all the men begin to cry out loudly to one another about its cause. A terrible wave of anguish, both bodily and spiritual, courses through all the kings and maharathas when Drona's son summons the Narayanastra.'

Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, tell me what strategy the Pandavas adopt to protect Dhrishtadyumna when they see the Kauravas advance

again into battle, rallied by Drona's son seared by grief at the murder of his sire?'

Sanjaya continues, 'Having seen the Dhartarashtras turn tail earlier, and now finding them prepared for a furious battle, Yudhishtira asks Arjuna, "Dhananjaya, after Dhrishtadyumna slew the Acharya even as Indra did Vritrasura, the Kurus' spirit was broken and they fled in fear. Some kings dashed away on chariots along uneven paths without Parshni drivers, without standards, banners, chatras and with their kuvaras broken, and all their weapons awry.

Others, losing their wits with fear, whipped and kicked their horses and fled in frenzy. Many, riding on chariots with broken yokes, wheels and akshas, flew in absolute fear. Several on horseback were borne away, almost unseated and clinging on for dear life. Some warriors were dislodged from their lofty seats and transfixed by arrows to the necks of their elephants, while the great creatures lumbered away in equal terror. Elephants, mangled with hundred of barbs, trod on other fighting men, crushing them to pulp.

Having lost their weapons and armour, great fighting men fell down upon the earth from their chariots and animals. Chariot-wheels cut others in two, or they were crushed by horses. Others, calling loudly after their sires and sons, also fled in fear, without recognising one another, all their courage and energy gone from shock and grief at the death of Drona. Some, setting their dead sons, fathers, friends and brothers on their chariots and taking off their armour, were seen dementedly washing them with water. After the slaying of Drona, the Kuru army had fallen into utter despair and chaos and scattered in every direction. Who, then, has rallied it now? Tell me, Arjuna, if you know.

We hear neighing horses and trumpeting elephants, their cries resounding once more with the rumble of chariot-wheels. These fierce sounds from the Kuru ocean swell in tide and make my troops tremble. This spine-chilling uproar that we now hear, it would seem, will swallow the three worlds with Indra at their head. Why, I feel as if the Vajradhari himself makes this terrible din. Arjuna, I feel certain that Indra himself comes to fight us at the fall of Acharya Drona; I do fear that the gods themselves have taken the field against us and will fight for the Kauravas.

My hair stands on end; our greatest maharathas are all full of anxiety. O Dhananjaya, tell me who rallies the Kurus against us that they return to battle so fiercely and full of courage again?"

His eyes full of angry tears, Arjuna replies with some passion, “He, relying upon whose tejas, the Kauravas are determined to accomplish fierce deeds, and blow their conches in blaring challenge; who roars so loudly, having rallied the Dhartarashtras after the fall of the Acharya; who is endued with modesty, possesses mighty weapons, has the tread of an enraged elephant, a face like a tiger’s, always accomplishes fierce deeds and dispels the fears of the Kurus; he upon whose birth Drona gave away a thousand heads of the finest cattle to the worthiest Brahmanas; he, Rajan, who bellows like Nandin himself is Aswatthaman.

As soon as he was born, this hero neighed like Indra’s steed Ucchaisravas and made the three worlds tremble at the sound. Hearing that sound, an asariri spoke resonantly out of the sky and called him Aswatthaman, the horse-voiced. Aswatthaman is the shura who roars today as if he means to end the world.

Drupada’s son Dhrishtadyumna took Drona’s life brutally today, hacking off his head while the Acharya sat in praya. He killed him as if he was never his guru. Because Dhrishtadyumna seized his father, our Acharya, by his hair, the proud Aswatthaman will never forgive him.

You told your Acharya a lie for the sake of a kingdom! Although you know dharma better than anyone, yet you committed this grave sin. Your infamy will resound through the three worlds for the death of great Drona, and it shall be eternal, Yudhishtira, even as Rama’s is because of the way in which he slew Vali the Vanara, treacherously.

Of you Drona thought, ‘The son of Pandu possesses every virtue; besides, he is my sishya. He will never lie to me.’

And believing this he never doubted you when you told him that Aswatthaman was dead. You added ‘the elephant’ under your breath, but what you swore to your Acharya was still a lie and a terrible sin. Believing what you said, our Acharya laid down his weapons and grew indifferent to the war. His heart was broken and he was senseless with grief. He sat down on the floor of his ratha, shut his eyes and gave himself up to dhyana.

And it was at such a time that a sishya, Dhrishtadyumna, abandoning dharma, killed his own acharya. Having caused to lay down his weapons with your lie and thus be savagely killed, now protect Dhrishtadyumna if you can, with all your allies and counsellors. All of us together will not be able to protect Drupada’s son today from the grief and wrath of Drona’s son Aswatthaman.

Aswatthaman is no mere mortal warrior; the knowing say that he is an amsa of Siva himself. This superhuman Brahmana, who is given to showing affection and friendship towards all, is in the grip of righteous anger and no one will save us from his ire today. Aswatthaman will consume us all for the manner in which we slew his great father.

Although I cried repeatedly at the very top of my voice to save the Acharya's life, yet ignoring me and abandoning dharma, a sishya, Dhrishtadyumna, took the life of his own acharya in the vilest, most brutal manner imaginable. All of us have passed the greater part of our lives and the days that remain to us are limited. This sin that we have committed will darken the rest of our lives. For the deep love he bore towards us, he was like a father to us. According to the dictates of the scriptures too, he is a sire to us for he was our guru. Yet we killed our acharya for the sake of a short-lived, meaningless kingdom.

Dhritarashtra, Rajan, gave Bhishma and Drona all the Earth, and what is more precious, all his children. Though thus honoured by our uncle, our enemy, and though he had gained untold wealth from him, the Acharya still loved us as his own children. Of unfading tejas and prowess, Drona was killed only because, persuaded by your lie to him, he set aside his weapons. As long as he fought, he was invincible and not even Indra could kill him. Our Acharya was venerable in years and always devoted to our welfare. Yet sinners that we are, we had no scruple in sending him to his death. The sin that we have committed is inconceivably heinous and cowardly, for moved by the desire of enjoying the pleasures of sovereignty, we have murdered great Drona.

My Acharya always believed of me that, because of my love for him, I would gladly abandon my father, brothers, children, wife and life itself for his sake. And yet, moved by the lust for a kingdom, I did not intervene when he was about to be killed. I did not stop Dhrishtadyumna with an arrow when I well could have. For this crime, Rajan, I am overwhelmed with shame and I have already plunged into hell. For the sake of a kingdom, I caused the death of one who was a Brahmana, who was venerable in years, who was my Acharya, who had laid down his weapons, and who was at the time devoted, like a great ascetic, to yoga.

Ah, death has become preferable to me over life!"""

CANTO 194

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing what Arjuna says, the maharathas present there say not a single word to him, O Rajan, good or bad.

Then, an angry Bhimasena, his brow dark, upbraids Arjuna sharply, "You preach the truths of dharma like a sannyasi living in the vana or a Brahmana of rigid vratas and his senses under complete control. But a man is called a Kshatriya because he saves others from danger and harm. Being such, he must save himself from hurt and injury as well. Showing forgiveness towards the three that are good—the Devas, the Brahmanas and an Acharya—a Kshatriya, by performing his svadharma, soon wins the earth and also piety, fame and prosperity. O perpetuator of your race, you possess every attribute of a Kshatriya. Therefore, it does not look well for you to speak like an ignorant lout. O son of Kunti, your prowess is as that of Sachi's lord, Sakra himself. You do not break the bounds of dharma, like the ocean that never transgresses its continents. Who is there that will not worship you, seeing that you seek dharma, having abandoned the anger you cherished for thirteen years?

Fortunately, today your heart follows the path of dharma. O you of unfading glory, providentially, your intellect is disposed towards

compassion. However, though you are inclined to tread the path of dharma, your kingdom was taken from you most sinfully. Dragging Draupadi to the Kuru sabha, your enemies insulted and shamed her. Clad in barks of trees and skins of animals, all of us were banished to the vana. Though we did not deserve it, our enemies compelled us to endure our exile for thirteen years. O sinless one, you have forgiven all these circumstances, every one of which demands the demonstration of our anger. Wedded as you are to Kshatriya dharma, you quietly bore these trials and tribulations.

I, however, remember all those sins committed against us and I came here with you for revenge. But when I see that you are so indifferent, why, I myself will kill these low wretches that stripped us of our kingdom. You once said, 'We will fight the war to the utmost of our abilities.'

Today, you reproach us and you now seek dharma. So what you said earlier must be untrue. We are already stricken with fear and you sow doubt and weakness in the very core of our hearts with your words, O Parantapa, like one pouring acid into open wounds. My heart is breaking to listen to you preach. You are virtuous, Arjuna, but you do not know what dharma truly consists of, since you laud neither yourself nor us, though all of us are worthy of praise for our deeds on the field of battle.

When Krishna himself told us how to kill Drona, how can you praise the son of Drona, a warrior who does not measure up to even a sixteenth part of yourself, Dhananjaya? Do you not feel ashamed confessing your own faults like some weakling?

I can rend asunder this earth in anger, or split the very mountains with my gada decked with gold. Like a tempest of my natural sire, I can tear down trees tall as hills. Partha, with my arrows, I can rout all the Devas with Indra at their head, together with all the Rakshasas, the Asuras, the Uragas and Manushas. Knowing me, your brother, to be such, O bull among men, it is not fitting that you should entertain any fear about Drona's son. Otherwise, stand here with all these heroes, Bibhatsu, while, alone and unsupported, armed with my gada, I vanquish this fellow of no great worth in a duel."

When Bhima has finished, Dhrishtadyumna rounds on Arjuna, and says in a tone as terrible as the one Hiranyakashyapu used when he once addressed Vishnu, "O Bibhatsu, the sages have ordained that assisting in yagnas, performance of yagnas, teaching, giving away alms, receiving gifts, and study to be the six duties of Brahmanas. To which of these six duties

was Drona, whom I have slain, devoted? Fallen from the dharma of his own varna and practising those of the Kshatriya varna, this doer of evil deeds burned us and our common soldiers with his devastras. Professing himself to be a Brahmana, he used irresistible maya against us as well.

Today he has been killed with maya, an illusion. O Partha, what is reprehensible in this? If Drona's griefstricken and enraged son roars threats at us after I punished Drona, what do you lose by it? I myself believe that, after rallying the Kauravas back to battle, Aswatthaman, who roars so loudly, will find himself unable to protect them and will be the cause of their being killed instead.

You know dharma well. Why then do you say that I am a slayer of my Acharya? It is for this very task that I was born as a son to the king of the Panchalas, having sprung from a yagna fire. How, O Dhananjaya, can you call him a Brahmana or Kshatriya, to whom, while waging war, all actions, righteous and utterly sinful, are the same? O best of men, why should he who, losing his mind in anger, used the Brahmastra to kill even those who knew nothing of the astras, our common troops, not be killed by any means?

He who lives by sin is considered by men of dharma to be like poison. Knowing this, why do you, Arjuna, who know all the truths of dharma, reproach me?

I seized and killed the ruthless and cruel maharatha. I have done nothing that is worthy of reproach. Why then, O Bibhatsu, do you not congratulate me? O Partha, I cut off the terrible head of Drona that was like the blazing sun, virulent poison or the all-destroying Yuga fire. Why do you not approve a deed that is worthy of the highest praise? He has killed only my father and kinsmen and not those of anyone else. I say that by having only beheaded him, the fever of my heart has not cooled. My heart is in anguish that I did not fling Drona's head among the Nishadas, like that of Jayadratha!

I have heard, O Arjuna, that one incurs sin by not killing one's enemies. The dharma of a Kshatriya is to slay or be slain. Drona was my enemy. I have killed him in battle, O Pandava, exactly as you killed the brave Bhagadatta, who was your friend. Having cut down your own grandsire Bhishma in battle, you still speak of dharma! How, after that, do you dare say I sinned by killing my wretched and inveterate enemy?

Because of our relationship, O Partha, I cannot raise my head in your presence and am like a prostrate elephant with a ladder against his body for helping puny creatures to climb on its back. So do not reproach me, it does not become you.

For the sake of my sister Draupadi and her children, and no other reason, I forgive you what you have dared say to me today. It is well known that my enmity with the Acharya has come down from sire to son. Everybody in this world knows it. You sons of Pandu, husbands of my sister, are you not acquainted with it? The eldest son of Pandu has not lied. I myself, O Arjuna, have not sinned. The wretched Drona was a hater of his disciples. Stop whining like a witless boy and fight now. Victory will be yours.”””

CANTO 195

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Dhritarashtra says, 'The illustrious Drona, who had studied the Vedas with all their angas; he in whom the entire science of arms and modesty dwelt; the Brahmana through whose grace so many of the greatest still achieve superhuman feats that the very gods perform with difficulty—alas, when the Maharishi Bharadwaja's invincible son was humiliated and beheaded by the base and sinful Dhrishtadyumna, slayer of his own Acharya while all men watched, was there no Kshatriya who felt called upon to display his anger? Shame on the Kshatriya varna and fie on wrath itself!

Tell me, O Sanjaya, what the sons of Pritha, and all the other royal archers of the world, say to the prince of Panchala after he murdered his guru Drona.'

Sanjaya replies, 'All that are present there remain perfectly silent, O Rajan, when they hear what Drupada's dishonest son says. Arjuna, however, casting oblique glances at Dhrishtadyumna, seems to reproach him with tears and sighs, which say, "Shame! Shame!", while Yudhishtira, Bhima, the twins, Krishna and the others stand there saying nothing.

But Satyaki says clearly, "Is there no man here who will at once kill this sinful creature, this lowest of men, who speaks so evilly? The Pandavas all condemn you for your sinful deed, like Brahmanas condemning a Chandala. Having committed such a heinous crime, and incurring the censure of all honest men, are you not ashamed to open your mouth and speak in the midst of such an honourable gathering of Kshatriyas? Despicable wretch, why did your head not burst apart into a hundred pieces when you were about to slay your own Acharya? Why does your tongue not spilt into slivers when you now defend what you did? Why does your sin not strike you down even now, vile Dhrishtadyumna?

You not only commit an unmentionable sin but you applaud and congratulate yourself in the midst of noble men. Panchala, I swear that you incur the censure of the Parthas, all the Andhakas and the Vrishnis. Having perpetrated atrocity, you still loudly declare your rancour and hatred for the one that taught you everything you know. And for this you deserve death at our hands. You should not be left alive for even a moment. Who other than you, O filthy wretch, would dare seize our great Acharya by his silver locks as he sat in yoga and cut his head from his neck?

Having got you for part of their great vamsa, vile man, your ancestors for seven generations and your descendants for seven generations, deprived of honour and fame, have sunk into hell. You dare charge Arjuna, bull among men, with the killing of Bhishma. But the truth is that Bhishma sought and brought about his own fall, for no other could bring him down. And in truth, wretched Panchala, it is your own brother Sikhandin, greatest of sinners, who was the cause of Bhishma's fall.

I say that there are no greater sinners in this world than the sons of the Panchala king. Your father created Sikhandin for Bhishma's destruction, and you to kill Drona in the most depraved manner. As for Arjuna, he only protected Sikhandin while your brother shot Bhishma down with his arrows because the noble Bhishma would not defend himself against one whom he regarded to be a woman.

Having you, whom all righteous men condemn, and your eunuch brother born into their clan, the Panchalas have fallen from dharma and, stained with malice, have all become haters of friends and acharyas. Dhrishtadyumna, if you say what you have again in my presence, I will then smash your head with my mace that is like Indra's Vajra.

Anyone who so much as looks at you, O Brahmana slayer, marked with the guilt of the direst sin of Brahmahatya, must look up at the sun to purify himself for having set eyes on such a sinner. You dog of a Panchala, evil man, do you feel no shame casting aspersions first on my guru Arjuna and then on my guru's guru the great Drona himself?

Stop, and have done, you lowly thing! Bear but one stroke of my mace and I myself will bear many blow of yours."

Harshly rebuked by the Satwata hero, Prishata's son Dhrishtadyumna, filled with rage, says to Satyaki with a superior, mocking smile, "I have heard you, O you of Madhu's race, but I forgive you. Being a sinner and an adharmi yourself, you now wish to censure honest men of dharma? The quality of forgiveness is acclaimed in the world while sin like yours deserves none. He who has a sinful soul regards the forgiving man as being weak. You are evil in your conduct, your soul is dark with sin, and you are wedded to adharma. You are culpable in every way, from the tips of your toes to the ends of your hair. And you, base Satwata, still speak ill of others?

What can be more sinful than what you did when you murdered the armless Bhurisravas, while he sat in praya, and you were unleashing devastras. Yes, Drona had laid aside his weapons and I killed him. Crooked hypocrite, what did I do that was wrong? How can you, O foolish Satyaki, blame me for what I did, when you did exactly the same, and that, too, after Arjuna saved your worthless life by cutting off Bhurisarvas' arm? This valiant Kuru enemy of yours displayed his prowess by throwing you down onto the earth and stamping on you with his foot. Why did you not kill him then, and show your manliness? No, vile Satyaki, you killed great Bhurisravas only after Arjuna had hewn away his arm and when he sat in dhyana.

And now you dare preach dharma to me? When Drona was annihilating the forces of the Pandavas, I fought him with thousands of arrows. But having yourself behaved like a Chandala and become worthy of censure, how do you now reproach me so harshly? You are the evil one and not I, O wretch of the Vrishni vamsa! You are the home of all sins, so it is better that you remain silent and not point your crooked finger at me again in blame.

Don't dare speak to me again. This is the reply I give you with my lips. But if, from folly, you say anything more, I will send you to Yama before you have finished talking.

Through dharma alone, O fool, one cannot vanquish great enemies. If you have forgotten, listen to all the adharma the Kurus committed against the sons of Pandu, which caused this war. Pandu's son Yudhishtira Dharmaraja was deceived with rank adharma at the game of dice. O Satyaki, the sons of Dhritarashtra and the sinner Karna coarsely humiliated my sister Draupadi in the hallowed Kuru sabha. The Pandavas, with Panchali, were then exiled and robbed of their all, O foolish Satwata. Was that, according to you, dharma?

With cunning, the enemy deprived us of a valuable ally, Salya of the Madras. Subhadra's son was trapped in the chakravyuha by your great Acharya and cut down by six maharathas. Do you call that dharma, O Yuyudhana, fool?

On our side, it was though adharma that Bhishma, the Kuru grandsire, was brought down and with adharma that you slew Bhurisravas. This is how both the enemy, as well as the Pandavas, have fought this war. They are all valiant and mighty; they are all knowers of dharma; yet, they have all sinned in order to have victory in this ghastly war. O glib Satwata, true dharma and adharma as well are difficult to comprehend, and vary according to circumstances.

I say to you, stop this talk now and now fight the Kauravas, without turning back to the home of your fathers!"

Dhrishtadyumna speaks with contempt and vituperation, and the radiant Satyaki begins to tremble from head to foot in anger. His eyes turn the hue of copper. Sighing like a snake, he leaves his bow in his ratha, grasps his mace and rushes at the prince of the Panchalas, and cries, "I will not speak to you anymore, but kill you as you deserve!"

Seeing Satyaki rushing at the Panchala prince, like one Yama at another, Bhima, urged by Krishna, jumps down from his chariot and clasps Yuyudhana firmly in his mighty arms. Satyaki, who is strong himself, still manages to take five steps forward, dragging Bhima with him. Then, Bhima plants his massive feet firmly and stops the bull of Sini's race at the sixth step.

With Bhima restraining the red-eyed Satwata, Sahadeva leaps down from his chariot, and mollifies Satyaki, "O Naravyaghra, we have no friends dearer to us than the Andhakas, the Vrishnis and the Panchalas. So, also, the Andhakas and the Vrishnis, particularly Krishna, have no friends dearer to them than us. The Panchalas, too, even if they comb the whole world to the

confines of the sea, have no friends dearer to them than the Pandavas and the Vrishnis. You are such a friend to this prince Dhrishtadyumna; and he is a similar friend to you. You all are to us even as we are to you. Knowing dharma as you do, think now of the dharma that you owe your friends. Restrain your anger and be calm, O best of Sini's race! Forgive Dhrishtadyumna, and let him also forgive you. We, too, will forgive all that has been said in anger. What is there, Yuyudhana, that is better than forgiveness?"

Even as Sahadeva is attempting to pacify the furious Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, smiling arrogantly, says, "O Bhima, release Sini's grandson who is so proud of his prowess in battle. Let him come to me like the wind assailing the mountains and I will quell his anger and lust of battle. I will have his life with my arrows.

Look, where the Kauravas advance on us. After killing this fool Satyaki, I will burn all Duryodhana's troops with my astras, or let Arjuna do so if he chooses to. But now I mean to cut this vile Satwata's head from his neck. He thinks I am like the armless Bhurisravas. He will find he is sadly mistaken. Either I will kill him or he will kill me today."

Satyaki wriggles like an angry snake to get free from Bhima's clasp. Both Dhrishtadyumna and he bellow at each other like a pair of bulls. Finally, Krishna and Yudhishtira, with some effort, succeed in calming the two. Having placated those maharathas, whose eyes had turned the colour of blood, all the Kshatriyas of the Pandava army take the field against the Kaurava warriors to do battle again.'"

CANTO 196

Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Then Drona's son Aswatthaman inflicts great carnage among his enemies like the Destroyer himself at the end of the Yuga. Killing them with banks of broad-headed missiles, he soon heaps a mountain of dead on the battlefield. The banners of chariots form its trees; weapons are its pointed peaks; lifeless elephants are its large boulders; dead horses and their riders are its Kimpurushas, half man and half equine; bows are its creepers and plants; and it resounds with the cries of birds of prey and carrion, its feathered population, and the spirits that walk there are its Yakshas.

Aswatthaman repeats his dreadful vow in the hearing of your son Duryodhana: "Since Kunti's son Yudhishtira, who wears only the false outer garb of dharma, lied to my father, who fought righteously, to lay aside his weapons and be slain, I will, in his very sight, destroy his entire army and then kill Dhrishtadyumna, sinful prince of the Panchalas. Rally your troops, O Suyodhana, for I swear to you that I will annihilate them all if they dare face me in battle!"

Dispelling the fears of his men with a booming bellow, your son gathers his troops. The battle between the Kurus and Pandavas resembles two seas

in high tide surging into each other. The Kauravas are now emboldened by Drona's son, and the Pandus and the Panchalas are inspired by Drona's death. Indescribable mayhem and bloodshed rule Kurukshetra again and all who fight have battle lust and no trace of fear coursing through them.

Truly, Maharajan, the collision between the Kurus and the Pandavas is like one mountain striking another, or an ocean another ocean.

Full of spirit and bravado, the Kuru and the Pandava warriors beat thousands of drums and the ear-splitting bedlam that arises from the troops resembles that of the Kshirasagara when it was churned in days of old by the Devas and the Danavas when they sought the Amrita.

And now Aswatthaman invokes the Narayanastra and unleashes it at the Pandava and Panchala host. Thousands of serpentine arrows with blazing mouths appear in the sky, and rain down on the Pandavas. Like rays of the sun, in a moment these shafts shroud all the directions of the sky and engulf all the enemy legions. Innumerable iron balls appear like resplendent luminaries in the clear firmament. Sataghnis, some with four and some with two wheels, innumerable maces, and discs with edges sharp as razors and shining like lightning, also appear from the Narayanastra. Seeing all the sky covered by these uncanny weapons, O Bharatarishabha, the Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Srinjayas are absolutely terror-stricken. Most of all, wherever the Pandava maharathas offer resistance to the awesome astra of the Lord Vishnu, it only increases in power and ferocity. Devoured everywhere by the Narayanastra, as a heap of dry grass by some raging forest fire in summer, the Pandava warriors have no answer to Aswatthaman's ultimate ayudha and it consumes them rabidly on all sides.

Yudhishtira watches his men being incinerated and mown down in their thousands every moment, standing stupefied or flying blindly in all directions, and Arjuna doing nothing to stop the carnage, a panic-stricken Yudhishtira cries, "Dhrishtadyumna, escape with your Panchala troops! Satyaki, run with the Vrishnis and the Andhakas. Krishna will save himself. He can counsel the whole world so what need to tell him what he should do? We will not fight any more. This is my command.

As for myself, my brothers and I will climb onto a funeral pyre. Having crossed the Bhishma and the Drona oceans in this war, can I sink with all my followers in a cow's hoof print that is Drona's son? Let what Duryodhana wants be crowned with success today, for today I have killed our Acharya, who always loved us well, Drona who had the child

Abhimanyu slaughtered by six maharathas and a host of warriors besides in the chakravyuha; the Acharya who sat indifferent with his son in the Kuru sabha, without answering Draupadi when she was dragged into that ancient court of dharma and asked him for truth and justice; Drona who wrapped an impenetrable kavacha around Duryodhana when Dhritarashtra's son wanted to kill Arjuna and sent him to protect Jayadratha; Drona who did not hesitate to turn Satyajit and his warriors into ashes with the Brahmastra while they protected my life; the Acharya, who, while we were being wrongfully exiled from our kingdom, gladly told us to go into the vana although our friends all asked him not to take sides with the Kauravas. Alas, it is this great friend of ours that has been slain! And for his sake today, I will, with my brothers and friends, lay down my life."

When Kunti's son, Yudhishtira says this with some fervour, Krishna makes a sign to the troops not to flee and says, "Be quick and lay down your weapons, all of you, and alight from your chariots. This is the only way, declared by the Lord Narayana himself, to render his great astra powerless. All of you come down onto the ground from your elephants, horses and chariots. If you stand weaponless on the earth, this astra will not touch you, while if you seek to fight it, it will only grow stronger and more devastating. The Narayanastra does not kill those who throw down their weapons and alight from their rathas, while those who even think of resisting it will be consumed, even if they seek refuge in the deepest Patala."

At what Krishna says, all the warriors of the Pandava army fling down their weapons and drive out every thought of violence from their hearts. But seeing this, Bhimasena roars, "No one should lay down his weapons here. I will face and extinguish Aswatthaman's astra. With this golden mace of mine, I will range across the field and quell the Narayanastra on my own!

There is no man here equal to me in strength, even as there is no luminary in the firmament equal to the Sun. Look at these arms of mine like the trunks of mighty elephants, which can tear down the very peaks of Himavat. I possess the might of a thousand elephants. I have no peer for strength among men, even as Indra has none among the Devas. Let all men witness today the might of these arms and my chest as I smash down Aswatthaman's Narayanastra. If there is no one else who can face this weapon, I, Bhima, do so alone before all the Kurus and the Pandavas. O

Arjuna, Bibhatsu, if you lay the Gandiva aside, a stain will attach to you like the one on the Moon."

Arjuna says, "Bhima, I have vowed that my Gandiva will not be used against the Narayanastra, cows and Brahmanas."

Hearing this, Bhima, roaring, riding his chariot of solar effulgence, whose rumble is like that of massed thunderheads, dashes off alone against Aswatthaman. With awesome prowess and lightness of hand, in the twinkling of an eye he covers Drona's wrathful son in a cloud of arrows. Smiling at Bhima's folly, Aswatthaman looses a storm of astras at him, each blazing like a small sun. Shrouded by these shafts that vomit fire and resemble snakes with mouth afire, as if covered with sparks of gold, Bhimasena looks like a mountain in the evening burning with many fires in the dry summer.

The Narayanastra now focuses it fury on just Bhimasena and, by the moment, swells in ferocity like a fire fanned by an angry wind. Watching this, further dread and panic seize the hearts of all the Pandava warriors other than Bhima. All the others, to the last man, throw down their weapons and alight from their mounts and chariots; now, that the rest supplicate themselves before it, the fulminant astra rages just at Bhima.

A great lament goes up from the Pandavas, for the dreadful Narayanastra swiftly overwhelms the defiant son of the Wind.'"

CANTO 197

DRONA-VADHA PARVA CONTINUED

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Bhimasena overwhelmed and being set on fire by the Narayanastra, Arjuna envelops him with a Varuna astra to douse its flames. So swiftly does Arjuna do this that no one can see the watery cupola that covers Vrikodara. Still enveloped by Aswatthaman's Narayanastra, Bhima, his horses, charioteer and ratha are like a great flame at the heart of a raging fire.

Even as at close of night, O Rajan, all the luminaries drop towards the Asta hill, the fiery arrows of Aswatthaman all fall on just Bhimasena's ratha, and he, his chariot, horses, and charioteer seem to be on fire. As the Yuga fire consumes the entire universe with all its creatures when Pralaya comes and finally re-enters the mouth of the Creator, even so does Aswatthaman's astra enter the body of the fearless and brash Bhimasena.

Just as one cannot see a fire if it falls into the sun or the sun if it enters into Agni, no one can see the blinding energy that suffuses Bhima's body. Seeing the astra invading Bhima, and seeing Drona's son swelling with tejas, and being without an opponent to face him; seeing that all the warriors of the Pandava army have laid down their weapons and that all the maharathas of the Yudhishtira's army have turned their faces from the

enemy, Arjuna and Krishna, leap out of their chariot and run towards Bhima; using maya shakti, they dive straight into the fires of the Narayanastra. The flames of the Lord's own weapon does not burn for, unlike Bhima, they have laid down their weapons, and also because of the Varuna astra and their own tejas.

Then, to pacify the Narayanastra, ancient Nara and Narayana forcibly lay hold of Bhima and wrest all his weapons away from him, at which the son of Vayu begins to roar in anger like a pride of lions being attacked! As he resists Krishna and Arjuna, the terrific astra grows even more ferocious.

Krishna says to Bhima in an irresistible voice, "How is it, O son of Pandu, that after being warned by us, you still continue to fight? If the Kurus could be vanquished now, while the Narayanastra hangs above us like the pralaya, we and all our maharathas would surely have fought as well. Look, all the warriors of your army have left their chariots. And you must do the same if you do not want to die!"

Krishna's tone will brook no refusal, and Bhima allows him to be hauled out of his flaming chariot, his eyes still crimson with rage, and sighing like some unimaginable serpent. As soon as he is pulled out of his chariot and made to lay down his weapons, the Narayanastra is pacified and grows cool. It drifts away in the sky, now a clear azure again, from above Kurukshetra.

All the directions and points of the firmament, cardinal and subsidiary, became clear. Sweet breezes begin to blow and the birds and animals are all calm again. The horses, elephants as well as all the warriors are enlivened once more, O ruler of men. Indeed, when the dreadful urjas of the Narayanastra is stilled, Bhima shines resplendent as the morning sun! With the passing of the threat from the Narayanastra, the remnant of the Pandava army once more stands ready to fight your sons.

Duryodhana says urgently to Aswatthaman, "Quick, use this astra again, for the Panchalas have taken up their weapons again and stand ready for battle!"

Aswatthaman sighs and says sadly, "The Narayanastra, O king, cannot be brought back and used again. If it is summoned again, it will have the life of the one that invokes it. Krishna knew the only way in which the Lord's own astra could be overcome, and he saved them all. But defeat and death are the same, Duryodhana. In fact, defeat is worse than death. Look at the enemy, vanquished and forced to lay down their weapons and prostrate

before our Narayanastra. They are full of shame and even look as if they have lost their lives!" Duryodhana says, "Aswatthaman, if this weapon cannot be used twice, let these murderers of their Acharya be slain with other weapons! In you all the Devastras dwell, even as they do in the three-eyed Siva of immeasurable tejas. Even a raging Purandara cannot escape you."'

Dhritarashtra says, 'After Drona was killed with deceit and the Narayana weapon foiled, what does Drona's son, incited by Duryodhana, do, when he finds the Parthas ready for battle again and leading their troops at our army?'

Sanjaya says, 'Aswatthaman thinks of how his father was killed and rage fills him again. Casting aside all fear, flying the device of a lion's tail on his banner, he rides furiously at Dhrishtadyumna. Racing towards him, he pierces the Panchala prince with five and twenty small thunderbolts. Dhrishtadyumna retaliates with sixty-four searing shafts that rake Drona's son, strikes his charioteer with twenty golden-winged arrows whetted on stone, and his four horses with four long keen barbs that make them whinny in pain.

Repeatedly striking Aswatthaman with endless flights of arrows, and making the earth tremble with his thunderous shouts, a murderous Dhrishtadyumna appears intent on taking the lives of all the creatures of the world. Making death itself his only goal, the mighty son of Drupada, a great master of weapons and gifted with unerring aim, charges Drona's son pouring a deluge of arrows upon his head.

A roaring covers the angry Panchala prince with endless volleys. Always remembering the killing of his father, he pierces Drupada's son with lightning bolts and cuts down Dhrishtadyumna's standard and breaks his bow with two perfect shafts with razor heads. Never pausing his assault, he deprives his adversary of his horses, charioteer and chariot, and envelops all his followers with dense showers of sizzling shafts. Mauled by Aswatthaman, the Panchala troops, Rajan, flee.

Finding the troops turning away from battle and Dhrishtadyumna in dire trouble, Satyaki dashes at Aswatthaman and drills him first with eight straight, slender arrows and again stabs the roaring Brahman with twenty shafts of diverse kinds. Yuyudhana is a blur of fluid movement, as he then pierces Aswatthaman's sarathy with four barbs and his horses with another four. Without a moment's pause, displaying wonderful adroitness, he breaks

Aswatthaman's bow and standard, and then shatters his gold-decked chariot, killing his horses as well in the same insant. Finally, he plunges thirty violent barbs into Aswatthaman's chest.

Beset by the resplendent Satyaki, bleeding profusely from his arrows, the mighty Aswatthaman founders, he does not know what to do. Seeing Drona's son in grave peril, Duryodhana, Kripa, Karna and others begin to cascade arrows over the radiant Satwata hero. They besiege Satyaki from every direction; Duryodhana pierces him with twenty stunning shafts, Acharya Kripa with three, Kritavarman with ten, Karna with fifty, Dusasana with a hundred and Vrishasena with seven. However, the marvellous Satyaki whirling around in his ratha, quickly demolishes the chariots of all these great heroes and they have to run from him on foot.

Meanwhile, Aswatthaman regains consciousness and, sighing repeatedly in pain and grief, thinks of what he should do. Mounting another chariot, he challenges Satyaki, shooting hundreds of arrows at the Satwata. Seeing him come to battle again, Satyaki, quick as a thought, destroys his ratha again and forces him to turn back. The Pandavas blow their conches with great force and give tremendous shouts. Having deprived Aswatthaman of his chariot, the invincible, scintillant Satyaki kills three thousand great maharathas of Vrishasena's akshauhini, slaughters fifteen thousand elephants of Kripa's division and fifty thousand horsemen of Sakuni's army.

Aswatthaman, riding another chariot and beside himself with rage at Satyaki, sets upon him, determined to kill him. Satyaki, nemesis of his enemies, instantly gores him with diverse kinds of arrows, fiercer than he had used earlier. Although deeply injured by these variegated shafts that Yuyudhana shoots, Aswatthaman still says, with his superior smile, to his enemy, "O grandson of Sini, I know your affection for Dhrishtadyumna, killer of his Acharya, but you will not be able to save him or yourself from me. I swear to you, Satyaki, by truth and by my tapasya, that I will know no peace until I kill all the Panchalas. You may unite the Pandava and Vrishni forces together and attack me, but I will still rid the world of the Somakas."

Saying this, the son of Drona shoots an astra with the effulgence of the sun at Satyaki, just as Indra in days of old cast his Vajra at the Asura Vritra. That astra flashes right through Yuyudhana's armour, passes through his body and dives into the earth like a hissing snake into its hole. Like an elephant deeply struck with a hook, the Satwata hero is bathed in the blood

that gushes from his yawning wound. His bow, with an arrow fitted to its string, comes loose from his mighty grasp and he sits down weakly on the floor of his chariot, while the blood continues to flow copiously, covering his magnificent body. Quickly, his sarathy whisks him away from the deadly Aswatthaman.

Immediately, Aswatthaman turns and strikes Dhrishtadyumna right between his eyebrows with another perfect arrow. Already sorely wounded, the Panchala prince, senapati of Yudhishtira army is flung back against his flagstaff and clutches onto it to prevent himself from falling. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna in distress and danger, like a weakened elephant attacked by a great lion, five Pandava maharathas—Kiritin, Bhimasena, Brihadkshatra of the Puru vamsa, a youthful prince of the Chedis and Sudarshana, lord of the Malavas, rush to defend him.

In moments, they surround Aswatthaman and, advancing twenty paces, all of them strike him simultaneously with five and twenty arrows. Pivoting on his heels, Drona's son cuts all twenty-five blistering shafts down with five and twenty barbs of his own that are like virulent snakes; so swift is he that he appears to achieve this feat in the heart of a single instant. Aswatthaman then draws seven fonts of blood from the Paurava prince, three from the Malavas' chieftain, one from Partha, and six from Vrikodara, once more, it seems, at the same moment.

Now Rajan, those maharathas attack Drona's son, both united and separately, with storms of arrows whetted on stone and fletched with wings of gold. The youthful prince of the Chedis drills him with twenty barbs and Arjuna pierces him with three. Aswatthaman strikes Arjuna with six arrows, Krishna with six, Bhima with five, and each of the other two, the Malava and the Paurava, with two arrows. Then gouging Bhima's charioteer with six thunderbolts, Aswatthaman destroys Bhimasena's bow and standard with another two heavy, precise shafts of iron. Drona's stalwart son covers Arjuna once more with a dense and furious volley, and the Brahmana hero gives a deep and echoing shout.

Aswatthaman covers the earth, the sky, all the directions, cardinal and subsidiary, with his arrows so they are shrouded in darkness. Fierce is his tejas and his skill equal to Indra's; with three exact arrow he hacks off Sudarshana's arms like yupastambas and his head. He shatters the Paurava's chariot, then lops off his sandalwood seared arms and noble young head as well. Next moment, with a blaze of burning shafts he sends the mighty

Chedi prince, dark as a blue lotus, to Yama, along with his charioteer and horses.

Seeing the Malava lord, the scion of Puru and the youthful prince of the Chedis killed in front of his eyes by Aswatthaman, rage blazes up in Bhima and he swathes Drona’s son with hundreds of serpentine narachas. But Aswatthaman destroys these showers of fiery shafts and strikes Bhima deep with his own thundering missiles. The dauntless Bhima rives Aswatthaman’s bow with a wedge-headed arrow and pierces him deep with a smoking iron barb, heavy as a mace.

Throwing away his broken bow, Aswatthaman takes up another and rakes Bhima again with countless shafts. Locking into a duel, the two scathe each other with gales of arrows, like two masses of rain-clouds. Gold-winged arrows, whetted on stone and engraved with Bhima’s name cover Drona’s son, and thousands of powerful shafts shot by Drona’s son enfold Bhima. Though wounded and bleeding profusely, it is wonderful that Bhima feels no pain, O Rajan!

Mahabaho Bhimasena looses ten shimmering gold-decked arrows up into the sky, from where they fall squarely on Aswatthaman, truly like streaks of lightning. Aswatthaman shuts his eyes and supports himself by gripping his flagstaff. He recovers his composure in a moment and, bathed in blood, musters all his valour and strength and races towards Bhimasena’s chariot. From his bow drawn to its fullest stretch, he unleashes a hundred electrifying arrows at the hulking Pandava. Bhima merely shakes these off and responds with another burning volley.

As the battle continues, Drona’s raging, magnificent son once more cleaves Bhimasena’s bow in his hands and then gores his chest with a clutch of vicious shafts. The imperturbable Vrikodara merely picks up another bow and gashes Aswatthaman deep with five smouldering shafts. Once more, shooting ceaselessly at each other the two red-eyed heroes completely swathe one another with their banks upon banks of formidable missiles. Attempting to frighten each other by roaring and slapping their armpits echoingly, they fight on and there is nothing to choose between them.

Bending his massive bow, chased with gold, Aswatthaman gazes steadily at Bhima who continues to inundate him with shafts of fire, and, shooting back at Bhima, Drona’s son looks like the meridian sun radiating his rays on an autumn day. So quicksilver is Aswatthaman’s archery that no

one can distinguish when he pulls an arrow from his quiver, when he fixes it to his bowstring, when he draws back the string, and when he looses his shaft. His bow, Rajan, seems always to be drawn into a circle of fire. And the terrible golden shafts, in their hundreds of thousands course like a river through the sky, like a swarm of locusts at Bhima's chariot.

We then see, O Bhaarata, an extraordinary demonstration of Bhimasena's skill, his strength, energy and spirit, for he shrugs off the riptides of Aswatthaman's arrows as if they were no more than gentle rain falling on him. Bhima, awesome, dreadful Bhima lets loose a typhoon of arrows at Drona's son, even as his father Vayu does at sea. Bhima's prodigious golden-backed bow also appears drawn into a constant circle; it is as lustrous as another bow of Indra and, spewing forth arrows past counting, shrouds Aswatthaman, that jewel of the war, so no one can see him or his chariot anymore. So thick and dense are their volleys that the very wind finds it difficult to flow through them.

Aswatthaman looses countless golden arrows, their points slick with oil, at Bhima. Bhimasena truncates each one into three segments before they can reach him. Bhima, with a roar, covers Drona's son in fierce rash of shafts. Aswatthaman shatters these in flight, then breaks Bhima's bow and pierces him with burning volleys.

Bhima casts a spear like a gash of lightning at the Brahmana; he divides it along its length as it flies burning at him.

Vrikodara the terrible takes up another massive bow and covers Aswatthaman in fire; Aswatthaman strikes Bhima's sarathy through his brow with a lean shaft and the charioteers swoons, drops his reins and his panicked horses bolt before all the watching warriors. Seeing Bhima borne helplessly from the field, the undefeated Aswatthaman blows a deep and echoing blast on his huge conch and all the Panchalas abandon Dhrishtadyumna and flee. Drona's son, unleashing torrid gusts of arrows pursues the fleeing Panchalas and cuts them down as he likes. Screaming, dying in droves, they never look back but continue their flight, and now many of the Pandava warriors join them.

Seeing the Panchala force broken and running, as also his own men, Arjuna quickly takes the field against Aswatthaman. The troops rally behind Krishna and Arjuna and remain on the field. Supported by the Somakas and the Matsyas, Arjuna lays dreadful siege to the Kauravas and stops them in their tracks.

The two Krishna ride up to Aswatthaman, and Arjuna says to him, "Now show me your prowess, your knowledge of the astras and your manliness, as well as your love for the Dhartarashtras and your hatred for us. Show me your fortitude and determination. I say to you that I will quell your pride today. Come now and face this Dhananjaya, who burns like the Yuga fire and Rudra himself, with Krishna for his sarathy. You have shown us your hubris in battle, Aswatthaman, but I will quell your arrogance."

Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, Aswatthaman is noble, mighty and worthy of our respect. He loves Dhananjaya dearly and the noble Arjuna loves him in return. Partha has never addressed Drona's son in this way before. Why then did the son of Kunti speak so roughly to his friend?'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the death of the youthful prince of the Chedis, of Brihadkshatra of the Puru vamsa, and of Sudarshana, the lord of the Malavas, who were all great warriors, and watching the defeat of Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki and Bhima, Arjuna feels great sorrow. He is also touched to the quick by what Yudhishtira said to him. Most of all, all the wrongs of the past rise up in Arjuna in tide, and with it, suddenly, wrath the like of which he had never felt before. This was why he rounded on Aswatthaman, who is indeed worthy of our regard, and spoke in rage to him, like any lowborn man, in a crude, indecent, bitter, and harsh manner. Hearing those coarse and cruel words so unexpectedly from Arjuna, Aswatthaman is furious and especially with Krishna, whom he blames for influencing Arjuna and the Pandavas and for the death of his father.

Standing resolute in his chariot, Aswatthaman touches water and invokes the Agneyastra, which the very gods cannot resist. Aiming the weapon of the Fire god at Arjuna and indeed all his enemies, he breathes a mantra into the ayudha incandescent as smokeless fire and looses it at the Pandavas and their allies. It spumes up into the sky and, hanging there, erupts into thousands of flaming missiles that flare down crackling over Arjuna's chariot. Many of these fly at that ratha in uncanny trajectories, from every side. Meteors blaze down from the firmament and a thick gloom descends the Pandava host and envelops all the directions.

Rakshasas and Pisachas, thronging together, utter fierce cries. Inauspicious winds blow like simooms of the desert and the sun no longer exudes any warmth; a dreadful chill falls on Kurukshetra. Ravens caw raucously everywhere, and strange crimson clouds shower a rain of blood from the sky. Birds, beasts, kine and rishis with souls under perfect control,

all grow distraught. The Panchamahabhutas, the very elements, appear to be in upheaval; the sun seems to spin like a top and the entire universe, scorched by the heat of the weapon of fire, to be in a fever.

Seared by the fiery energy of that astra, great elephants and other beasts of the world lose their wits in terror and dash about, panting and desperate for salvation from the weapon made of the flames that consume the world when the yuga ends. Seas, lakes, river, pools and tanks begin to steam and bubble, and the fish and other creatures living in them are scalded and perish in agony. From all the points of the sky, from the highest firmament and from the very bowels of earth, cataracts of fiery arrows erupt out of the ground, as if released with the force of Garuda or Vayu himself. Struck and burnt to cinders by these, the enemy warriors are made ashes like trees devoured by a raging conflagration.

The biggest elephants, leviathans, are incinerated by the Agneyastra and fall in great mounds of whispering ashes, while others of their kind thunder about everywhere in absolute panic, trumpeting in terror. Everywhere, thousands of horses and chariots burn like the tops of trees in a forest-fire. Indeed, O Bhaarata, it is as if the divine lord Agni has come down to burn the Pandava army, like the Samvarta fire consuming everything at the end of the Yuga.

Your soldiers, Rajan, are elated and give vent to loud shouts. Sensing victory, your troops blow thousands of conches and trumpets as they watch the Pandava army being devoured by the flames of the astra of fire. Darkness and smoke wrap the world and neither any part of the Pandava army nor Arjuna can be seen at all. The war has not yet seen the like of this weapon which Drona's son unleashes.

Then, Arjuna invokes the Brahmastra, which belongs to the Lotus-born Brahma himself and which can confound every other astra. Within a moment, all the darkness is dispelled, cool winds begin to blow, and all the directions of the sky become clear and bright; and now the wondrous and dreadful sight of a full akshauhini of the Pandava army having being turned to ashes becomes visible. Some of the dead men, chariots and beasts of war stand as pillars formed of ash, like the most delicate sculptures, while all the rest have been entirely consumed and lie in grey heaps or blow in the dry wind that sweeps Kurukshetra.

Emerged from the darkness, we see Krishna and Arjuna again, like the Sun and the Moon. And, Rajan, there is not a wound, not even the merest

scratch of burn upon them from Aswatthaman's astra. The ratha, which strikes such terror into your warriors' hearts, shines resplendent on the field, its great banner with Hanuman flapping free in the wind, its gandharva horses white and shining like great lotuses, and with all the mighty astras in it untouched and still unsummoned by the invincible Dhananjaya.

Now the remnant of the Pandava host erupts in joyful sounds, with roars and laughter of great relief, with booming conches and drumrolls. Both hosts had thought that Krishna and Arjuna had perished, but finding them alive and shine forth again after the darkness has been dispelled, all the Pandavas are filled with absolute joy, and the Kauravas with wonder.

Unharmed and cheerful, the two heroes blow their wonderful conches, the Panchajanya and the Devadatta, and Kurukshetra trembles in delight at their melodious thunder. Your troops, however, are crestfallen, as is Aswatthaman who had also believed that he had slain the two Krishnas. For a moment, my lord, he reflects on what has happened and he is filled with dismay and lancing anxiety; he breathes long, hot sighs and is plunged into an abyss of dejection.

Aswatthaman flings aside his bow, alights from his chariot, cries in utter despair, "Shame, O shame! Everything is lost, everything is a lie, all is adharma!" and like one gone mad he runs away from the battle, waving his arms wildly.

On the way, he meets the impeccant Krishna Dwaipayana, Maharishi Vyasa dark as thunderheads, compiler of the Vedas, home of the Shastras, the abode of Saraswati. Seeing him standing in his path, Aswatthaman prostrates before him and, in a voice choked with grief and frustration, asks, "O Sire, Mahamuni, is this an illusion or a whim of the Agneyastra? I do not know how my astra proved ineffectual. What flaw was there in its invocation? Is this my fault, something supernatural, or have the two Krishnas achieved victory over Nature herself and Agni that they are still alive?

Ah, it seems that Kaala is irresistible. The Agneyastra that I unleashed at the Pandava army, the Asuras, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Rakshasas, Uragas, Yakshas, Pakshis and Manavas cannot ever hope to confound, the blazing ayudha which must devour all that stand before it, was doused after killing just one akshauhini of troops. Why did it not kill Kesava and Arjuna, both of whom are human? O Holy one, O Mahamuni, answer me truly and in detail."

Vyasa replies, “What you ask is grave and significant, so listen well to what I have to tell you. He who is called Narayana is older than the very oldest ones. To fulfil a great mission in the world, the Creator of the universe was once born as the son of Dharma. He undertook the most arduous tapasya, the atikatora, upon the Himavat mountan.

Imbued with infinite tejas, and like fire or the sun in splendour, he stood there with arms raised to the skies. His eyes like lotus-petals, he emaciated himself there for sixty-six thousand years, subsisting all the while only on air. When this was over, he resumed his tapasya, now of another king, and this time for twice as many years as the first. He filled the space between earth and heaven with his boundless energy. When, through those tapasyas, he became like Brahma himself, he then beheld the Master, the Origin, and the Guardian of the Universe, the Lord of all the gods, the Supreme Deity, who it is well nigh impossible to gaze upon, who is more minute than the most minute thing, and greater than the greatest; who is called Rudra, who is the Lord of all the Superior Ones, who is called Hara and Sambhu, who wears matted jata on his head, who is the infuser of life into every living being, who is the First Cause of all things, mobile and unmoving; who is irresistible and of frightful aspect, who is fierce in anger and the Final Great Soul, who is the All-destroyer, and whose heart is as vast, loving and merciful as all eternity; who wields the celestial bow, the Pinaka, and wears two inexhaustible quivers, who wears golden kavacha and whose energy is infinite; who holds a blazing Trisula, the battle axe, a mace and a huge sword; whose eyebrows are fair, whose locks are always matted, who wields the heavy cudgel, who has the Moon on his brow, who is clad in tiger-skin; who is decked with beautiful angadas, who has snakes for his sacred thread, and who is surrounded by diverse creatures of the universe and by numerous ghosts and spirits; who is the One, who is the abode of ascetic austerities, and who is adored by those of venerable age; who is Water, Heaven, Sky, Earth, Sun, Moon, Wind and Fire, and who is the measure of the duration of the universe.

Sinners can never obtain a sight of the Un-born One, the slayer of all haters of Brahmanas, the giver of Mukti. Only Brahmanas of dharma, when cleansed of all their sins and freed from the control of grief, see him with their mind’s eye. As a result of his two unequalled tapasyas, Narayana obtained a sight of the Unfading One, Siva the embodiment of dharma, the Adorable One, the Being whose Form is the universe. Seeing that Supreme

Abode of all splendour, the God with a garland of akshas around his neck, Narayana Vasudeva, his soul gratified, was filled with rapture, and he sought to express it through words, with his heart, understanding and body. Narayana worshipped the Divine Lord Siva, the First Cause of the universe, the giver of boons, the Puissant One who is always at love with the fair-limbed Parvati, the Noblest Being surrounded by large bands of bhutas, pramathas, the Unborn Aja, the Supreme Lord, the Embodiment of the Unmanifest Brahman, the Essence of all causes, the One of unfading power and glory.

Having saluted Rudra, destroyer of the Asura Andhaka, the lotus-eyed Narayana, his heart full of love, began to praise the Three-eyed One: 'O Adorable one, O First of all the gods, Creator of the Prajapatis who are the regents of the world, who having entered the Earth, your first work, O Lord, protected it once, all, all have sprung from you.

The Devas, Asuras, Nagas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Manavas, Pakshis, Gandharvas, Yakshas and all other creatures, along with the entire universe, we know, have all sprung from you.

Everything done to worship and propitiate Indra, Yama, Varuna, Kubera, the Pitris, Tvashtri and Soma, is really offered to you.

Form and light, sound and sky, wind and touch, taste and water, scent and earth, time, Brahma himself, the Vedas, the Brahmanas and all these moving beings have sprung from you.

Vapours rising from diverse bodies of water, become raindrops, which falling upon the earth, are separated from one another. When the time of the Mahapralaya, the Universal Dissolution comes, these individual water drops, separated from one another, once more unite together and make the Earth one vast expanse of water. Thus observing the origin and the destruction of all things, the learned man understands your Oneness.

You have created everything—the two birds Iswara and Jiva, four Aswatthas with their wordy branches the Vedas, the seven guardians, which are constituted by the five Panchamahabhutas, the elements, the heart, the understanding, and the ten senses that constitute the body. But you are separate from and independent of them.

The Past, the Future, and the Present, over each of which none can have any sway, are from you, as also the seven worlds and this universe. I am your devoted adorer, Lord, be kind to me. Do not injure me by causing evil thoughts to enter my heart.

You are the Soul of souls, incapable of being known. He who knows you as the Universal Seed, attains Brahman. Wishing to offer you reverence, I do praise you, endeavoring to ascertain your true nature,

O you whom the very gods cannot fathom, I worship you fervently, so grant me the boons I want that are difficult to acquire. Do not hide yourself in your maya.'

The blue-throated God of inconceivable Soul, the wielder of the Pinaka, the divine Lord forever praised by the Rishis, then gave boons to the deserving Narayana.

Mahadeva said, 'O Narayana, through my grace, you will be of immeasurable might and soul among Manushas, Devas and Gandharvas. Neither Devas, Asuras, great Uragas, Pisachas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Manavas, Garudas, Nagas, nor any creature in the Universe will ever be able to withstand you. None among even the Devas will be able to vanquish you in war. Through my grace, no one will ever be able to cause you the least injury, not even with the Vajra or with any weapon that is wet or dry, or with anything mobile or unmoving. You will even be superior to me if you ever go to battle against me.'

This is how Narayana acquired boons in the past. Even that Narayana now walks the Earth as Krishna, beguiling the universe with his maya. From Narayana's tapasya a great Muni of the name of Nara was born, and he was equal to Narayana himself. Know that Arjuna is none other than that same Nara. These two Rishis, said to be older than the oldest gods, are born in every Yuga to serve the mysterious purposes and designs of the universe. You, too, O you of great heart, have been born as an amsa of Rudra, by virtue of all your punya of past lives and as a result of your stern and lofty tapasya, and you are endowed with Rudra's own energy and wrath. You were, in a former life, imbued with great wisdom and were equal to a Deva.

Thinking of the universe as consisting only of Mahadeva Siva, you once emaciated yourself through diverse vratas from a wish to gratify this God. Assuming the form of a very superior person who blazes fourth with splendour, you worshipped the Great God with mantras, with homa, and with offerings. Thus adored by you in your past life, Siva was gratified with you, and granted you many boons, everything that your heart wanted. Like Kesava's and Arjuna's, your punya karma and tapasya were also exalted and superior. Like them, in your worship, you have, in every Yuga, worshipped Mahadeva as Linga, his phallic form.

Krishna is that devoted worshipper of Rudra who has sprung from Rudra himself. Kesava always worships the Lord Siva, believing his sacred Linga to be the origin of the universe. That supreme knowledge, which allows him to see the identity of Brahman with the universe, as well as that other trikaalagyana by which he sees the Past, the Present and the Future, the near and the remote, as if all are before his divine eyes, dwell in dark Krishna. The Devas, the Siddhas and the great Rishis worship Krishna to acquire that highest object in the universe, which is Siva Mahadeva. Krishna is the creator of everything. The Eternal Krishna must be worshipped with sacrifices. The Lord Kesava always worships Siva as Linga as the origin of all creatures. The God, with the bull for his mark, cherishes greater regard for Krishna than for anyone else."

Having heard what Vyasa says, Aswatthaman bows to Rudra and now looks upon Krishna as worthy of the highest reverence. Having fetched his soul under complete control, he is filled with bliss, the marks of which communion with Brahman appear on his body. Bowing to the great Rishi, Aswatthaman turns back to the unhappy Kuru army and withdraws them from the field for the night. The Pandavas also, Rajan, follow.

Having fought for five days and caused immeasurable carnage, thus does great Drona, the Brahmana who knew the Veda in its entirety, leaves this world and attains to Brahmaloka!'"

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Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Dhritarashtra says, 'After the killing of Atiratha Drona by Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna, what do my sons and the Pandavas do?'

Sanjaya says, 'After the rout of the Kuru army and the death of Drona, Arjuna, who saw something wonderful during the great battle, asks his grandsire Vyasa, who arrives in Kurukshetra during his wanderings.

Arjuna says, "O Maharishi, while I loosed a river of arrows at the enemy, I always saw before me, always going before my chariot, a shining, resplendent being, one who had the effulgence of fire. Wherever he went with his spear raised, all the enemy warriors fell before him. While everyone thought that I vanquished the enemy, in truth they died at the hands of this mysterious being. I merely followed I his wake and only put down those that he had already destroyed.

Holy one, tell me who is this greatest one that I saw, armed with a spear, and shining like the Sun himself in tejas? He did not touch the earth with his feet, nor did he cast his spear even once. Yet, through his energy, thousands of spears, why, millions of spears issued out of the single one that he held."

Vyasa replies, “Arjuna, you have seen Sankara, the First Cause[1] from which the Prajapatis have sprung; you saw the omnipotent One of infinite tejas, He who is the embodiment of Swarga, Bhumi and Akasa, the Divine Lord, the protector of the universe, the great Master, the giver of boons, who is also called Isana. O Arjuna, seek the protection of this boon-giving Deity, the Lord of the universe. He is called Mahadeva, the Supreme Deity, of Supreme Soul, the One and only Lord, with matted jata, Siva the abode of auspiciousness. With three eyes and mighty arms, with his locks tied in the shape of a crown, and his body clad in skins, He is called Rudra.

This Lord of the universe, the Supreme God, is also called Hara and Sthanu. He is the Best of every being in the universe; He cannot be vanquished, He is the delighter of the akhanda and its Supreme Sovereign. He is the First Cause, the light and refuge of the universe, and ever victorious. He is the Soul and the Creator of the Brahmanda with the Brahmanda for his form, and He possesses eternal fame.

The Lord of the universe and its great Ruler, this powerful One, is also the master of all karma, of every deed. Also called Sambhu, He is Self-born; He is the Lord of all creatures and the Origin of the Past, the Future and the Present.

He is Yoga and the Lord of Yoga; He is called Sarva, and is the King of all the worlds. He is superior to everything. The best of everything in the universe, and the highest of all, He is also called Paramesthin.

The Ordainer of the three worlds, He is their sole refuge. Invincible, He is the protector of the universe, and the cause of birth, decay and death. The Soul of knowledge, incapable of being grasped by knowledge, and the highest of all knowledge, He is unknowable.

Through his grace, He gives his worshippers the blessings they desire. This Lord has for his companions celestial beings, Ganas, of various forms, some of whom are dwarfs, some have matted locks, some are bald, some have short necks, some protuberant bellies, some huge bodies, some long ears and some possess great strength. All of them, O Partha, have deformed faces and mouths and legs and wear strange attire. These Siva Ganas are his nearest, greatest followers and they worship this Supreme God called Mahadeva.

It is this same Siva, O son, who, through his kindness and love, rides in front of you. Partha, who other than the divine Maheswara, the greatest of all archers, can even in imagination venture to vanquish a host led by

maharathas like Aswatthaman, Karna and Kripa? No one can face the warrior who has Maheswara going before him. There is no being in the three worlds that is equal to Rudra. The very scent of an enraged Mahadeva causes men in battle, to tremble and fall senseless and in their thousands. It is for this that the Devas in Swarga worship and bow to Him. The men in this world and these other men of pious conduct, that devoutly worship the boon-giving, divine and auspicious Siva, find happiness here and attain to the highest state in the hereafter.

O son of Kunti, bow down to Him who is peace, to Him who is called Rudra or Nilakanta, to Him who is the Subtlest and of great refulgence and is also Kapardin, the skull-bearer.

Bow down to him who is terrible, who has tawny eyes, who is boon-giving; bow to the Great Ordainer of red locks and righteous conduct; to Him who always performs and enables auspicious deeds; to Him who is the final object of desire; to Him who is called Sthanu; who is called Purusha; who has tawny hair; who is without fear, who is subtler than all that is sukshma and of absolute radiance; bow to Him who is Light and the giver of light; who is the embodiment of all sacred tirthas and waters; to He who is the God of gods, and who is also endued with great impetuosity.

Bow down to him who is of manifest form; who is called Sarva; who wears truly agreeable attire; who wears a wonderful crown, who is handsomeness itself; who has the mountains for his dwelling; who is Peace; who is the Protector; who wears valkala, tree bark; he whose arms are decked with ornaments of gold; who is Ugra, fierce, who is the Lord of all the directions; he who is the Lord of the clouds and of all created beings: He who is the Lord of all trees and of all kine, He whose body is shrouded by trees.

Bow down to him who is the celestial Senapati; who inspires all thought; who holds the yagna ladle in his hand; who is ablaze; who wields the great bow; who is Rama's very self; who has diverse forms; who is the Lord of the universe; who is attired in munja grass; who has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand arms, and a thousand legs.

O son of Kunti, seek the protection of this boon-giving Lord of the universe, the Lord of Uma, the God with three eyes, the destroyer of Daksha's sacrifice, the Guardian of all created things, who is always blissful, the Protector of all beings, the God of unfading glory; the One with jata; the Mover of all superior beings, the One whose navel is like that of a

bull and who has the bull for his symbol; the one who is proud like the bull, who is the Lord of bulls; who is represented by the horns of the bull; and who is the Bull of bulls: He who has the image of the bull on his banner.

Seek the protection of him who is liberal to all the righteous; who can be approached only through Yoga; and whose eyes are like those of a bull; who owns the highest weapons: who has Vishnu himself for his astra; who is the embodiment of dharma; who is called Maheswara; who is of infinite belly and body; who sits on a leopard's skin; who is the Lord of the worlds; who is devoted to Brahman and who loves Brahmanas; who is armed with a trident; who is boon-giving; who wields the sword and the shield and who is the Auspicious One, who wields the bow called Pinaka, who gave away his battle axe to Parasurama, and who is the Protector and Lord of the universe.

I place myself in the hands of this divine Lord, the grantor of protection, the God clad in deer-skins.

Salutations to this Lord of the celestials who has Vaisravana for his friend.

Salutations to Him of great vows; to Him who has the mightiest archers for his companions; to Him who himself wields the bow; to the God with whom the bow is a favourite weapon; who is himself the shaft shot by the bow; who is the bowstring and the bow; who is the Acharya of acharyas who teach the use of the bow.

Salutations to the God whose weapons are fierce and who is the greatest of all the gods.

Salutations to Him of diverse forms, to him who is surrounded by many bowmen.

Salutations to Him who is called Sthanu and who has an immense host of great archers for companions.

Salutations to Him who destroyed the triple city of Tripura.

Salutations to Him who slew the Asura Bhaga.

Salutations to Him who is the Lord of trees and of men.

Salutations to Him who is the Lord of the Devas, the Mothers, and of those tribes of spirits known as Ganas.

Salutations to Him who is the Lord of kine and of sacrifices.

Salutations to Him who is the Lord of the waters and the Lord of the gods, who broke Surya's teeth, who has three eyes, who is the grantor of

boons; who is called Hara, who is blue-throated, and who is of golden dreadlocks.

I will now tell you, as best I know, all the divine deeds of Mahadeva of Supreme Wisdom. If Mahadeva becomes angry, neither the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas or the Rakshasas, even if they hide themselves in the deepest oceans, can find peace.

In olden days, Brahma's son, the Prajapati Daksha undertook a great sacrifice and insulted Siva by not inviting him to attend, not offering him a share in the havis. Daksha's daughter, Rudra's wife Sati, killed herself at her father's yagna and Mahadeva destroyed the sacrifice in wrath. He was truly fearsome on that occasion and roared most horribly and shouted in anger so earth and sky shook. The Devas were terrified then. Indeed, at Mahadeva's fury, Yagna himself fled and the gods were beside themselves for fear at the twanging of Mahadeva's bow and the sound of his palms.

The Devas and Asuras fled all together. All the waters, great and small rose up in agitation and the Earth trembled. The mountains split, all the points of the sky wavered, and the Nagas were petrified. The universe was enveloped in a thick darkness and could no longer be seen. The splendour of all the stars and of the Sun grew dim. The Rishis, filled with fear, were distraught and, wanting to save themselves as well as all creatures, performed propitiatory rites, with Surya being given the principal oblation to eat. Smilingly, Sankara approached him and tore out his teeth.

The humbled gods then fled as one. Once more, Mahadeva aimed a shower of arrows like the flames of the pralaya at the Devas, astras like densely smoking fire, or clouds with lightning. Seeing the luciferous volley, all the Devas prostrated again to Maheswara, and to Him a substantial share in yagnas. In fright, the gods, O prince, sought Rudra's protection. His wrath having been dispelled, for He is easily pleased, the great God then restored the yagna. The gods that had fled came back, but to this day they are afraid of Maheswara.

Once, the great and valiant Asuras had three cities in the sky, the Tripura. Each of these was vast and wonderful. One was made of iron, another of silver, and the third of gold. The golden city belonged to Kamalaksha, the silver city to Tarakaksha, and the third, made of iron, to Vidyunmalin. With all his weapons, Indra Maghavat Indra could not breach or make any impression on those triad cities. Troubled by the Asuras, the Devas sought the protection of Rudra.

Approaching Siva, all the gods with Indra at their head, pleaded, ‘These terrible dwellers of the Tripura have blessings from Brahma. Filled with pride because of these boons, they are wreaking havoc upon the universe. O Devadeva, no one save you can stop them. O Mahadeva, slay these enemies of the Devas. O Rudra, creatures sacrificed in every yagna will then be yours.’

Thus implored by the gods, Siva was moved by the desire to help them. He agreed and said, ‘I will overthrow the Asuras.’

Then Hara made the two mountains Gandhamadana and Vindhya the two poles of his chariot; He made the Earth with her oceans and forests his ratha. The three-eyed Lord made Sesha, that prince of snakes, the aksha, of that chariot. That God of gods, the wielder of Pinaka, then made the Moon and the Sun his two chariot wheels, and the Lord made Elapatra and Pushpadanta, the two pins of its yoke. Mahadeva made the Malaya mountains the yoke, and the great Takshaka, the rope that bound the yoke to the poles, and the ganas about him the traces of the horses.

Maheswara made the four Vedas his four horses and made the Vedangas the bridle-bits. Mahadeva made Gayatri and Savitri the reins, Om the whip, and Brahma was the charioteer. Making the Mandara mountains his great bow, Vasuki the bowstring, Vishnu his awesome astra, Agni the arrow-head, and Vayu the two wings of that missile, Yama the feathers in its tail, lightning its whetting stone, and Meru his standard, Siva, riding on that magnificent chariot which was wrought from all the celestial forces, went forth to destroy the Tripura, the three sky cities of the Asuras.

O Partha, then Sthanu of incalculable prowess, worshipped by the Devas and by Rishis, He of untold tapodhana, formed an unrivalled vyuha named after Himself, and stood unmoving for a thousand years. Finally, when the three cities came together in the firmament, the Lord Mahadeva struck them through with his that awesome astra of three knots. The Danavas could not look at the shaft made of the Yuga-fire and composed of Vishnu and Soma.

When the Tripura began to burn, the Devi Parvati went there to see the sight. She had on her lap a child with a bald head with five clumps of hair on it. The Goddess asked the Devas who the child was. Sakra, through malice, tried to strike that child with his thunderbolt. The divine lord Mahadeva, for the child was none other than He, smilingly paralysed the arm of the enraged Indra. Sakra, with all the celestials, flew went to the

Lord Brahma of unfading glory and, bowing their heads to him, they said to him with joined hands, ‘Some wonderful Being, O Brahma, lies on the lap of Parvati, in the form of a child. We saw but did not pay him reverence and he has vanquished us all. We ask you, Pitamaha, who the child may be, who, without fighting, has with the greatest ease vanquished us all with Purandara at our head.’

Hearing this, Brahma the greatest of all the Gods, knower of the Brahman, reflected for a moment and knew that boy of immeasurable energy was none other the divine Sambhu. He said to all the Devas with Indra at their head, ‘That child is the divine Hara, Lord of the mobile and unmoving universe. There is nothing superior to Maheswara. That Being of immeasurable splendour whom you all saw with Uma, the Divine Lord, had assumed the form of a child for Uma’s sake. Let us all go to him. That illustrious One is the Supreme Sovereign of the worlds. O Devas, you could not recognise the Master of the universe!’

All the Devas with the Grandsire went to that child, of the radiance of the morning Sun. Beholding Maheswara, and knowing that he is the Supreme Being, the Pitamaha Brahma worshipped him: ‘You are Sacrifice, O Lord, you are the stay and refuge of the universe. You are Bhava, you are Mahadeva, you are the abode of all things and you are the highest refuge. This whole universe, with its mobile and rooted beings is pervaded by you. O Holy One, O Lord of the past and the future, O Lord of the world, O Protector of the universe, show your mercy to Indra whom you have paralysed.’

Hearing these words of the Lotus-born Brahma, Maheswara was gratified; He laughed aloud, a wondrous sound so full of grace. The Devas then eulogised both Uma and Rudra and paid them great reverence. Indra’s arm was free again when The Greatest God Maheswara, the destroyer of Daksha’s sacrifice, the Divine Lord with the Bull for his emblem, grew benign towards Indra and his Devas.

He is Rudra, He is Siva, He is Agni, He is Sarva, and He has knowledge of everything. He is Indra, He is Vayu, He is the Aswin twins, and He is the lighting. He is Bhava, He is Parjanya, He is Mahadeva, He is sinless. He is the Moon, He is Isana, He is Surya, He is Varuna. He is Kala, he is Antaka, He is Mrityu, He is Yama.

He is the day, and He is the night. He is the fortnight, He is the month, He is the seasons. He is the morning and evening sandhyas, He is the year.

He is Dhatri, He is Vidhatri, He is the Soul of the universe, and He is the doer of all karma in the universe. Though bodiless, He is also the Great God embodied. Endowed with the Splendour beyond all splendour, He is worshipped and praised by all the gods. He is One, He is Many; He is a hundred, a thousand and beyond all count.

Brahmanas versed in the Vedas say that He has two forms, the terrible, Ugra, and the auspicious, Siva. These two forms, again, are multifarious. His auspicious forms are water, light, and the moon. Whatever is most recondite and mysterious in the several angas of the Vedas, in the Upanishads, in the Puranas, and in the Atmavidyas, the sciences that deal with the Soul, dwells the Lord Maheswara.

O Arjuna, Mahadeva is Aja, Un-born. All the attributes of this God not even I can begin to enumerate, not if I were to describe them with out pause for a thousand years. Even to those who are afflicted by all the evil planets, even to those who are stained with every sin, this great Protector grants salvation, if only they seek him, and He becomes pleased with them. He grants and takes away life, health, prosperity, wealth and all the diverse kinds of objects of desire.

The prosperity seen in Indra and other gods is his. He is ever engaged in the good and evil of men in this world. As a result of his supremacy, He can always have whatever He wishes for. He is called Maheswara and is the Lord of even the Supreme ones. In many forms, of many kinds, He pervades the universe. The mouth of that God is in the deepest ocean. It is well-known that, assuming the form of a mare's head, this mouth drinks the sacrificial libation in the form of water.

This Siva always dwells in smasanas, burning ghats. Men worship this Supreme Lord in that place where none but the courageous can go. Many are the blazing and terrible forms of this God that men speak of and worship in the world. Many also are the true names of this Deity in all the worlds. These names are based upon his supremacy, his omnipotence, and his divine and unequalled deeds. In the Vedas, the marvellous and sacred hymn called the Sata Rudriya has been sung in honour of this great God, the infinite Rudra.

This God is the Lord of all wishes that are human and heavenly. He is omnipotent, and He is the supreme master. Indeed, He pervades the infinite universe. The Brahmanas and the Munis describe him as the First-born of

all creatures. He is the First of all the gods; from his mouth was born Vayu the wind.

Since he always protects the creatures of the universe and plays with them, and since he is the Lord of all creatures, he called Pasupati.

Since his Linga is always in the observance of the vow of Brahmacharya, and since He always gladdens the world, He is called Maheswara. The Rishis, the Devas, the Gandharvas and Apsaras ever worship his Lingam, which stand eternally upright. This worship pleases Maheswara and makes him joyful.

With regard to the past, the future, and the present, Siva has many forms, and for that he is known as Bahurupa. Possessing one eye, he blazes forth in effulgence; He is otherwise known to have infinite eyes on every part of his body.

Since He possesses the worlds He is called Sarva.

Since his form is like that of smoke He is called Dhurjjati.

Since the Viswedevas dwell in him, He is called Viswarupa.

Since three Goddesses, Heaven, Water and Earth adore and depend on the Lord of the universe, he is called Tryambaka.

Since he always increases all kinds of wealth and wishes the good of mankind in all their actions, He is called Siva, the Auspicious One.

He has a thousand eyes, ten thousand eyes, and they gaze in all directions. And because He protects this vast universe, He is called Mahadeva.

Since He is Great and Ancient and is the Source of life and of its continuance, and since his Lingam is everlasting, He is called Sthanu.

Since the rays of the Sun and the Moon that appear in the world are spoken of as the hair on the Three-eyed One, He is called Vyomakesa.

Since, from Kalpa to Kalpa, He destroys every Brahma, Indra, Varuna, Yama, Kubera, and the rest, He is called Hara.

Since, He is the Past, the Future and the Present, and everything in the universe, and since He is the Origin of the past, the future, and the present, He is for that reason called Bhava.

Kapi means Supreme, and Vrisha is said to mean righteousness. The illustrious God of gods, is hence called Vrishakapi.

Since Maheswara, with his two eyes shut in dhyana, created through sheer force of will a third eye on his forehead, He is called Trinetra.

Whatever sickness there is in the bodies of living creatures and whatever health is in them represent that God. He is the Wind, the vital airs called Prana, Apana and the others in the bodies of all creatures, including those that are diseased. Those who worship any image of the Sivalinga, always obtains great felicity.

He is fiery below his waist, and the upper half of his body that is cool and auspicious is Soma the Moon. So too, half his Soul is Agni and the other half Soma. His auspicious form, full of tejas, blazes more brightly that than the forms of all the gods together. Among men, his burning and dreadful form is called Agni. With his cool and auspicious form, He practises Brahmacharya.

With the other terrible form He is the Supreme Lord who devours everything. Since He burns, since he is fierce, since he is endued with great prowess and devours flesh, blood and marrow, he is called Rudra.

O Partha, this is the Deity called Mahadeva, armed with the Pinaka, whom you saw going before your chariot and killing your enemies. After you vowed to kill the king of the Sindhus, O sinless one, Krishna showed you this God, in your dream, sitting on the top of Kailasa, the holiest mountain. This illustrious God goes before you in battle. It is He who gave you the weapons with which you brought carnage to the Danavas.

O Arjuna, I have now told you of the Sata-Rudriya, contained in the Veda, which is the hymn that describes and praises the God of gods, and enumerates some of his endless names, each one a potent and holy mantra. This hymn of four divisions, with which every objective is achieved, is perfectly sacred, destroys all sins removes all stains and destroys all sorrows and all fears. Men that always listen to this Sata-Rudriya, Siva's hundred names, will vanquish all their enemies and be highly regarded in the land of Rudra.

The person who always attentively reads or listens to this auspicious account of how Siva went before Arjuna's chariot and annihilated his enemies, and devoutly worships that illustrious Lord of the universe, will obtain all the objects of his desire as a result of the Three-eyed God being pleased with him. Go and fight, O son of Kunti! Defeat is not for you, who have Krishna on your side for your advisor and protector."

O Bhaarata, having spoken thus to Arjuna, Maharishi Vyasa, the son of Parasara, vanishes and returns to his asrama from whence he had come.'

[1]This passage is based on Siva's sacred names, each a holy mantra, found in the Sata Raudriya and the Koti Rudra.

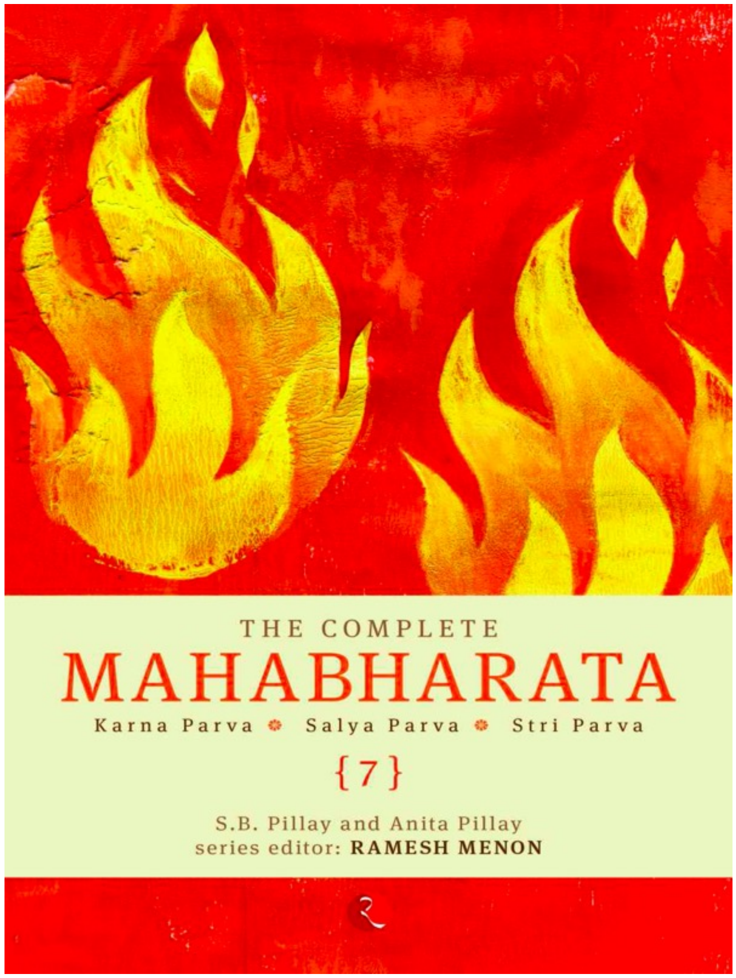
CANTO 199

Drona-vadha Parva continued

"Sanjaya says, 'Having fought savagely for five days, Rajan, the Brahmana Drona fell and ascended into blessed Brahmaloka.

The very benefits that accrue from a study of the Vedas arise from a study of this Drona Parva. The great feats of the most intrepid and majestic Kshatriyas have been described here. He who reads or listens to the recitation of this Parva every day is freed from the most heinous sins and the most atrocious crimes. Brahmanas will always obtain the fruits of yagnas from here. From this Parva, Kshatriyas will have victory in the fiercest battles. The other varnas, Vaisyas and Sudras, can acquire desirable sons and grandsons and all objects of desire!'"

The End of Drona Parva


THE COMPLETE
MAHABHARATA
Karna Parva Salya Parva Stri Parva
{7}
S.B. Pillay and Anita Pillay
series editor: RAMESH MENON

THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Karna Parva
Salya Parva
Sauptika Parva
Stri Parva

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Volume 7

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In loving memory of
S.B. Pillay (1951–2014)

Contents

A Brief Introduction

The last complete version of the Mahabharata to be written in India in English prose was the translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli in the late 19th century. He wrote it between 1883 and 1896. To the best of my knowledge, it still remains the only full English prose rendering of the epic by any Indian.

More than a hundred years have passed since Ganguli achieved his monumental task. Despite its closeness to the original Sanskrit and its undeniable power, in more than a hundred years the language and style of the Ganguli translation have inevitably become archaic.

It seemed a shame that this most magnificent of epics, a national treasure, an indisputable classic of world literature, believed by many to be the greatest of all books ever written, is not available in complete form to the Indian (or any) reader in modern, literary and easily accessible English: as retold by Indian writers.

So we, a group of Indian writers and editors, warmly and patiently supported by our publisher Rupa Publications India, undertook a line-by-line retelling of the complete Mahabharata, for the contemporary and future reader. Our aim has not been to write a scholarly translation of the great epic, but an eminently readable one, without vitiating either the spirit or the poetry of the original, and without reducing its length.

This is not a translation from the Sanskrit but based almost entirely on the Ganguli text, and he himself did use more than one Sanskrit version for his work. However, as will be obvious, the style of this new rendering is very much our own, and our hope is to bring as much of the majesty and enchantment of this awesome epic to you as is possible in English.

Ramesh Menon
Series Editor

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my old friend Ramesh Menon, who brought me to this project. And to Kadambari Mishra, who proofread this volume.

Karna Parva

CANTO 1

AUM! Having bowed down to Narayana, to the foremost of Purushas, Nara, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of *Jaya*!

Vaisampayana said, "After Drona's death, O Rajan, Duryodhana leads the anxious maharathas of the Kaurava army to Aswatthaman. They lament Drona's loss and sit around the son of Sharadvata's daughter, listless and grieving. Comforted for a little while by readings from the scriptures, the royal warriors leave for their respective camps at nightfall. However, Karna, Suyodhana, Dusasana and Sakuni find no rest in their tents when they consider the immense slaughter. They pass a sleepless night in Duryodhana's tent, reflecting upon the sufferings they had inflicted upon the noble Pandavas.

Once they had dragged a distraught Draupadi after the game of dice into the Kuru sabha. Now, their hearts filled with anxiety, they bitterly regret what they did. Thinking of the grief they had caused the Pandavas after the game of dice, they spend the night, O Bhaarata, in sorrow as if it were a hundred years long. When morning finally comes, they mechanically perform the customary and obligatory rituals. This comforts them to some extent and soon they deploy their troops, and prepare themselves for battle.

They ordain Karna as their senapati. They tie the auspicious thread around his wrists, have many leading Brahmanas pray for their victory and give them gifts of vessels full of curd, ghee, akshata, gold coins, jewels,

gemstones, costly garments and kine. They arrange for heralds, musicians and panegyrists to recite hymns of victory.

The Pandavas, too, Rajan, perform their morning ceremonies and issue from their camp, intent on battle. Soon, yet again, a bloody clash of arms begins between the Kurus and the Pandavas, each bent on annihilating the other, and this lasts full two days. Finally, after he had brought huge carnage to his enemies, Arjuna kills Karna before the Kauravas. Sanjaya returns to Hastinapura and relates all that had happened at Kurujangala to Dhritarashtra."

Janamejaya said, "The venerable Dhritarashtra, son of Ambika, was already grief-stricken at the fall of Bhishma, Drona and the other maharathas. O greatest of Brahmanas, how could he bear now to hear of the death of Karna who was Duryodhana's dearest friend and greatest source of strength? How did he receive the news of the death of the warrior on whom his own hopes of his sons' victory had rested?

Ah, when the blind king did not quit his life even after hearing of Karna's death, it must truly be difficult for men to die even under the most extreme grief! Indeed, Brahmana, it must have been agonising for the king, for he had also to bear the grief of the fall of Bhishma, of Bahlika, Drona, Somadatta and Bhurisrava, as well as of other friends, and his sons and grandsons.

Tell me all the details of the war as they actually happened. I am always eager to hear of the great achievements of my ancestors!"

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, “After Karna is killed, O Rajan, Sanjaya, the unhappy son of Gavalgana, sets out that night for Nagapura, on horses fleet as the wind. In deep anxiety, he reaches Dhritarashtra’s palace in Hastinapura, now empty of kinsmen and friends. Finding the king dispirited, he greets and salutes him with joined hands and bent head, and with a sorrowful face, says, ‘I am Sanjaya, O lord of Earth! Are you not happy? I hope you are not stricken by the loss? Remember, you spurned the sage counsel of Vidura, Bhishma and Krishna. I trust you feel no regret now? Rama, Narada, Kanwa and others also offered you wise counsel in the sabha. I hope you feel no pain now, when you remember how you disregarded them? I hope you feel no hurt, when you think of the slaughter of Bhishma, Drona and so many others—friends who were always concerned about your welfare?’

Dhritarashtra draws a long hot breath, and replies, ‘When I heard, O Sanjaya, of the fall of Bhishma, the valiant son of Ganga, the warrior with all devastras, and the greatest archer alive, my heart felt great pain and anguish. That shura of great tejas, born of the Vasus themselves slew ten thousand enemy maharathas every day; Bhrigu’s son Parasurama had given him greatest astras, when the Bhargava taught him archery when he was a boy; alas, Yajnasena’s son Sikhandi cut that matchless Kshatriya down with the Pandavas.

My heart is full of anguish after I heard how Dhrishtadyumna vilely killed the heroic Drona, through whose grace all the royal sons of Kunti, as well as so many other lords of earth, became maharathas. After Bhishma, there was no other archer like Acharya Drona.

No, no one in the world could equal Bhishma and Drona in the knowledge and use of the four kinds of weapons. Alas, hearing of the death of these two, my heart is indeed agonised with grief.

What did my army do when they heard of the death of Drona, who had no equal in the three worlds in the knowledge of weaponry? After Arjuna despatched the mighty force of the Samsaptakas to Yama, after Krishna rendered Aswatthaman's Narayanastra harmless and Arjuna routed the Kaurava divisions, what did my army do? I feel sure that after Drona's death my troops ran away sunken in an ocean of grief, like mariners shipwrecked on the bosom of the vast and fathomless deep.

What, O Sanjaya, was the colour of the faces of Duryodhana, Karna, Kritavarman of the Bhojas, Salya of the Madras, and of my remaining sons, and of the others, when the Kuru divisions fled the field? Tell me about all this as it happened, O son of Gavalgana, and describe to me the skill the Pandavas and my warriors demonstrated!'

Sanjaya says, 'O sire, do not feel any pain when you hear all that has happened to the Kauravas through your wrongdoing. The wise never feels any pain at what fate brings. Since Destiny is unconquerable, one may or may not attain human purposes. Hence, he who is wise never feels regret or pain on the acquisition or the loss of the objects he desires and cherishes.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I do not feel great grief, O Sanjaya. I regard all this to be the result of Destiny. Tell me all that you wish!'"

CANTO 3

"Sanjaya says, 'Upon the fall of Acharya Drona, your sons are pale and dazed. Although armed, O Rajan, they hang down their heads in grief and stand silent without looking at one another. Seeing this, your already agitated troops vacantly gaze up into the sky as if for hope from on high. The weapons of many soldiers, dyed with blood, fall from their hands; though many still grasp their weapons, from their despondent stances, they resemble meteors fallen from the sky.

Duryodhana finds your army standing paralysed and listless and says to them, "I challenged the Pandavas and embarked on this war relying upon the might of your arms! Now, at the death of Drona, the prospect of victory appears bleak. In war, all warriors may die and meet with either victory or death. What then is strange in Drona's death? So, fight resolutely!

Look how the noble Karna ranges all over Kurukshetra and uses his devastras. That coward Dhananjaya, the son of Kunti, always flees from him in fear, like a small deer at the sight of a lion!

Karna reduced the mighty Bhimasena, strong as ten thousand elephants, to a sorry plight without any divine help. He slew the terrible Ghatotkacha, master of devastras, mayavi of a thousand illusions, and gave a deafening shout of triumph. Today you will see the vast strength and energy of great Karna of unerring aim. Let the sons of Pandu today confront both Aswatthaman and Karna with prowess like that of Vishnu and Vasava!

All of you are singly capable of slaying the sons of Pandu and all their troops. How much more then will you be able to accomplish when you are united. Be not dejected. With your great prowess and mastery of weapons, you will prevail today!”

Your son Duryodhana and his brothers proclaim Karna the senapati of the Kuru army. Taking command, the shura Karna, so staunch in battle, gives vent to a simhanada, a reverberating lion’s roar, and leads the fight against the enemy. He causes a great carnage among the Srinjayas, the Panchalas, the Kekayas and the Videhas. From his bow issues a dense flight of arrows, like a swarm of bees with their wings brushing. After he decimates the energetic Panchala and Pandava forces and thousands of their warriors, Arjuna finally kills him!’”

CANTO 4

Vaisampayana said, “Hearing this, Rajan, Dhritarashtra experiences the uttermost fierceness of grief and thinks of Suyodhana as being already dead. In his agitation, he faints like an elephant that has swooned. At this, the women of the royal household begin to weep aloud and their wails seem to fill the whole world. Approaching the king, queen Gandhari and the other Bharata women also swoon. Sanjaya comforts these stricken women, who tremble like a plantain grove in a high wind.

Vidura sprinkles water over the blind king and comforts his brother whose vision is limited to only gyana. Slowly restored to consciousness, the king remains silent for some time even as one who has lost his reason; then, after drawing long breaths, he censures his own sons and lauds the Pandavas. He blames himself and Sakuni, son of Subala, and his mighty frame begins to tremble and shake. Finally controlling himself somewhat, the king once more questions his suta, Sanjaya.

‘I have listened to you, Sanjaya. Has my son Duryodhana already gone to Yama’s world, despairing of success? Tell me truly, Sanjaya, all the details even if you have to repeat them!’

Sanjaya replies, ‘The maharatha Karna, Rajan, along with his sons, brothers, and other mighty and loyal suta archers is dead. Bhimasena killed Dusasana and then drank his blood on the field in triumph!’”

CANTO 5

Vaisampayana said, “Hearing this, Ambika’s son Dhritarashtra, in great agitation, tells Sanjaya, ‘Through the evil rule of my imprudent son Vikartana’s son Karna has been killed. This news cuts into the very core of my heart. Oh, I want to cross this sea of grief. Remove my doubts and tell me quickly the names of those who are still alive and those who are dead among the Kurus and the Pandavas.’

Sanjaya says, ‘Rajan, on the tenth day of the war, they brought down Shantanu’s son, the invincible Bhishma, after he slaughtered untold numbers of Srinjayas and Panchalas.

The mighty Drona of the golden chariot is also dead, after he butchered the Panchala divisions.

Karna is slain after he slaughtered half of those who survived the carnage that Bhishma and the illustrious Drona had wreaked.

They have also killed the powerful Vivimsati, O Rajan, who decimated hundreds of Anarta warriors.

The two great and mighty princes of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, achieved the most difficult exploits before going to Yama’s abode.

After consuming eleven akshauhinis with his missiles, Arjuna killed your son-in-law Jayadratha, tejasvin Kshatriya and the ruler of ten kingdoms. Arjuna also killed the fearless Ambashta king Srutayus, and

Sudakshina, who led thousands of superb elephants, as well as the inviolable king Paurava and his forces.

Savyasachi annihilated the Abhishahas, those fiercest warriors, along with the Sibis, greatest of maharathas, and the Kalingas. He also sent the fierce, fanatical and indomitable Narayana Gopas of Gokula to Yama, and many thousands of Srenis and Samsaptakas. Your two brothers-in-law, the great warrior princes Vrishaka and Achala met with similar fates at the hands of Dhananjaya.

The belligerent Arjuna killed the virtuous king of the Kiratas, Bhagadatta, devoted to Kshatriya dharma and the respected and dear friend of Indra, along with his troops from the lowlands on the sea coast.

Partha also slew that lord of the earth Srutayus, who always had a deep-rooted antipathy for the Pandavas, and not before he reminded him of that hatred.

O sire, with the slaughter of his son Abhimanyu in mind and his own vow, a vengeful Dhananjaya slew Karna's son, the vital and accomplished Vrishasena, in the very sight of Karna. He slew Karna, Radha's son of the Suta varna, and his maharatha brothers, as well as the Kaikeyas, the Malavas, the Madrakas, the fierce Dravidas, the Yaudheyas, the Lalittyas, the Kshudrakas, the Usinaras, the Tundikeras, the Savitriputras, the Easterners, the Northerners, the Westerners and the Southerners.

Also despatched were armies of foot soldiers, thousands upon thousands of cavalry, teeming squadrons of rathas, and many great elephants. The tireless Partha massacred so many noble, richly attired, and armed Kshatriyas, all veteran warriors. Other shuras, immeasurably powerful and always eager to kill their enemies, met with a similar fate at the hands of Indra's son.

Subhadra's son Abhimanyu killed the indomitable and ever obedient son of Duryodhana and Dusasana's brave son after fierce battles. He despatched the ruler of the Kosalas to Yamaloka, as well as the mighty Jayatsena, the son of Jarasandha and the prince of the Magadhas, in brutal encounters. He also killed the intrepid younger brother of Salya of the Madras, a radiantly handsome warrior who fought with sword and shield.

Rajan, Satyaki extinguished your kinsman, Somadatta's son, the celebrated Bhurisrava in a duel.

Sahadeva killed Salya's intrepid son Rukmaratha, who was the son of his maternal uncle and thus his brother as well.

The old king Bhagiratha and Brihatkshatra, king of the Kaikeyas, both awesome warriors, are also dead.

Nakula, who darts about the field with the speed of a hawk, slew the strapping and most intelligent son of Bhagadatta.

Bhimasena, Rajan, killed your ferocious and invincible princes—Dusasana, master of weapons, and the brilliant Chitrasena. Seething with the memories of the many wrongs that Duryodhana inflicted upon him, and honouring his own vow, Vrikodara sorrowfully killed even your son of dharma, Vikarna, who fought like a true Kshatriya despite losing his chariot and weapons.

Bhima annihilated your grandsire, the powerful Bahlika, and all his troops. He beat your mighty sons Durmukha and Dussaha to death with his mace. He despatched, in a great duel, your counsellor, the energetic Vrishavarman of the Suta varna, as well as king Shalva, great maharatha and master of powerful astras.

Oghavat and Vrishanta, O Rajan, who fought the war savagely for your sake, have both gone to Yama's abode. So too has maharatha Kshemadhurti, whom Bhimasena crushed with his mace.

Durmarshana, Durvisaha and maharatha Durjaya, after performing the most difficult and astounding feats in battle, and the two daring brothers Kalinga and Vrishaka have been sent to Yama's halls.

The war saw the annihilation of the Vasatis, numbering two thousand, all great fighters, as well as of the adept Surasena warriors.

Satyaki accounted for the mighty king Jalasandha after that hero had caused an immense carnage.

Ghatotkacha killed Alayudha, the other prince of Rakshasas, who rode a chariot harnessed to monstrous asses.

Rajan, so far in the battle, we have lost these and thousands of other kings and their forces. This is my answer to the questions you asked. And the devastation that took place when Arjuna and Karna fought was even as when Mahendra killed Vritra, when Rama slew Ravana; even as when Krishna slew Naraka or Mura; as when the incomparable Parasurama of Bhrigu's vamsa killed the Kartavirya with all his kinsmen and friends, after fighting a bloody battle that is celebrated through the three worlds; even as when Skanda killed the Asura Mahisha, and Rudra slew the Asura Andhaka—even so has Arjuna, in single combat, killed that greatest of all bowmen Karna, with all his kinsmen.

Karna was indeed invincible in battle and upon him the Dhartarashtras placed their hopes of victory. He was also a major cause of the hostility with the Pandavas for what he said in the Kuru sabha during the game of dice and after.

Pandu's third son Arjuna has accomplished what always seemed impossible. He has killed Suryaputra Karna, who the god themselves dared not face in battle. Thus, even as your well-meaning friends warned you, the disaster they predicted and the great destruction have now come about. O Rajan, for the hollow sinful happiness of your covetous sons, you have heaped these evils on their heads and millions of Kshatriyas have perished. Dhritarashtra, the fruit of these evils is now manifest.'"

CANTO 6

"Dhritarashtra says, 'You have, O son, mentioned the names of those of my allies whom the Pandavas have killed. Now tell me the names of those among the Pandavas whom my forces slew.'

Sanjaya says, 'Bhishma decimated the veteran Kuntis warriors, irrepressible and valorous in battle, along with all their kinsmen and advisers, as well as the Narayanas, the Balabhadras and thousands of other Kshatriyas, all devoted to the Pandavas' cause.

Rajan, six of our leading maharathas led by Dusasana's son were finally able to surround and murder that resplendent shura, Abhimanyu, who, though a boy in years, was still equal to Arjuna, Kesava or Baladeva in war. He was an extraordinarily gifted warrior, and brought a hardly credible slaughter to our forces. He lost his chariot, but that heroic son of Subhadra continued to fight until the end, true to his Kshatriya dharma. Because they could not subdue Arjuna, they murdered his son to break his heart. This was the most dastardly deed of the entire war.

The destroyer of the Patachchatras, the handsome son of Ambashta, leading a large force, fought heroically and caused a great slaughter of our army until he encountered Duryodhana's son Lakshmana, who despatched him to Yama's realm. Your grandson also accounted for Sikhandi's valiant son Kshatradeva.

Fighting with great skill, Dusasana slew the fierce maharatha Brihanta.

Drona killed Satyajit, who was well-nigh the equal of the diadem-decked Arjuna in tejas and power, and the Acharya killed so many other mighty and seasoned archers among the Panchalas, as well as the two majestic kings, Virata and Drupada. He killed the two indomitable kings Manimat and Dandadhara, who fought us with tigerish courage, and maharatha Ansumat, lord of the Bhojas at the head of his army. He also felled the brothers Rochamana, who were like two brilliant planets ranging the field.

Similar was the fate of the vigorous king of the Magadhas, slayer of hostile warriors armed with the most potent astras, and Vasudana too, who now sleep on the battlefield after causing great carnage—Drona despatched both to Yama.

Drona also sent Purujit and Kuntibhoja, the two uncles of Arjuna, Mitravarman the Panchala prince, Satyadhriti of the Matsyas, the great Madiraswa, the powerful Suryadatta, as well as the valorous Srenimat to the regions of the dead.

The Acharya also slew the two shuras Suchitra and Chitravarman, father and son and both mighty warriors, as well as that lord of earth Suketu, son of Sishupala, who had strewn the field of dharma with the corpses of so many of our Kshatriyas.

Drona fought like a god and the Brahmana decimated these and countless other maharathas.

Samudrasena snuffed life from Chitrasena, the ruler of the seacoast, and his son, O Bhaarata, while Aswatthaman did the same to Nila and Vyaghradatta, two other mighty rulers of seaside countries.

Vikarna raced across the field on his ratha with uncanny speed and great nimbleness and he beheaded Chitrayudha and Chitrayodhin, who were slaughtering our forces.

Kaikeya killed his own brother, the king of the Kaikeyas, who was equal to Vrikodara himself in battle and who led the Kaikeya legions.

Your son Durmukha killed Janamejaya of the hill country, gifted with prodigious strength and an expert mace warrior.

Many other great and able kings, who fought for the Pandavas, have all gone to Yama's abode after achieving impossible deeds. Vasudana's son shot dead Abhibhu of the Kasis, riding at the head of his numerous host.

Our Kshatriyas killed the most skilful Yudhamanyu, and the powerful Uttamaujas, who between them had destroyed thousands of our most valiant

warriors.

Vardhakshemi, O Rajan, who was like the ocean at full tide, exhausted all his astras in battle, and finally found undisturbed peace.

Bahlika slew Senabindu, the foremost of Sutas, after he had wasted many enemies in battle.

Dhrishtaketu, O Rajan, the greatest maharatha among the Chedis, also, laid down his life after many a heroic deed on the field.

The daring veteran Satyadhriti, Virata's son Sankha and the mighty Uttara, after they had slaughtered our troops and accomplished the most noteworthy feats, have repaired to Yama's abode.

As you desired, I have now listed the Pandava maharathas that we killed on the field of Kurukshetra.'"

CANTO 7

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When all my great warriors, O Sanjaya, have perished, I have no hope that those who remain will survive. When Bhishma and Drona are dead, what use is life to me any longer? I cannot bear the death of Radha's son Karna, that ornament of battle, the might of whose arms was as great as that of ten thousand elephants. O best of Sutas, tell me now, who yet remain alive in my army. It seems to me that all those who are still alive must be as good as dead.'

Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, the shura Aswatthaman, to whom his father Drona imparted many devastras of the four kinds, still stands on the field. The noble son of Drona, as great a master of weapons as his sire, stands ready to battle for you.

Kritavarman, of the Anarta country, the son of Hridika, the greatest of the Satwatas, the lord of the Bhojas, great maharatha, is still alive and ready for battle.

Artayana's intrepid son, the invincible Salya, perhaps the most formidable Kshatriya who still remains alive on your side, he who was forced to abandon his own sister's sons, to keep his solemn word, still contends manfully. He who promised Yudhishtira that he would dispirit Karna, who is Sakra's very equal, also straddles Kurukshetra yet.

Subala, king of the Gandharas, with his forces of Ajaneyas, Saindhavas, Kambojas, Vanayus, mountaineers and dwellers of riparian regions, remains

on the field, still eager to fight for you.

With his massive and wondrous bow, Sharadvata's son Kripa Gautama, Acharya, mahabaho, who fights with a myriad of weapons in different astonishing ways, still stands on the battlefield yet eager for fight.

The son of the Kalinga king, riding a sizeable chariot drawn by large horses and flying a proud standard, is still on the field, O Kurudvaha, battling for your cause.

Your son, the Kurusrestha Purumitra, Rajan, rides his ratha with the effulgence of fire, and remains upon Kurukshetra like the sun shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky.

The vigorous Duryodhana, at the head of an elephant force and accompanied by many great warriors, stands on his golden chariot, always prepared to engage in war. In the midst of many kings, that great shura, with the majesty of a lotus, is resplendent in his beautiful armour, like a fire with little smoke or the sun freshly emerged from behind dark clouds.

So, too, do your sons Sushena, armed with splendid sword and shield, and the heroic Satyasena, fight on, along with Chitrasena, their hearts full of undimmed excitement.

Those modest but powerful Bharata princes, Chitrayudha, Srutavarman, Jaya, Dala, Satyavrata and Dussala live to fight the war.

The courageous ruler of the Kaitavyas, who fearlessly wheels across the field and slays his enemies at will, leads his foot-soldiers, cavalry, elephants and chariots, determined yet to win your cause.

The proud and great Srutayus, Srutayudha, Chitrangada and Chitravarman, who always strike so effectively, continue to fight.

The sons of Karna, the noble Satyasandha and his two brothers, experts in the use of the most powerful astras and so exceptionally adroit, both fight on for your sake, leading large and unassailable forces.

Accompanied by all these Kshatriyas and by many of his finest and intrepid fighters, O Rajan, Duryodhana yet stands tall on Kurukshetra, in the midst of his elephant division, like a second Indra, always confident of victory!'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You have named all the great warriors who are still alive, both in my army as well as the enemy's. From what you have said, I can plainly infer whom victory will favour.'

Having learnt that only a small portion of his army survives and that almost all his great warriors are dead, Dhritarashtra's hearts is convulsed

with grief and he swoons again. When he returns somewhat to his senses, he tells Sanjaya, ‘Wait with me for a moment, O son! My heart is greatly disturbed after hearing of this calamity. I am stupefied and my limbs are paralysed!’

Saying this, Dhritarashtra, the son of Ambika, again falls down on the earth, in a dead faint.”

CANTO 8

Janamejaya asked, "O Maharishi, what did the king say after he heard of the slaughter of Karna and his sons, and when he had been comforted a little? Poignant must have been his grief. Tell me everything."

Vaisampayana replied, "King Dhritarashtra absorbed the fact that great Karna, who was like the impossible clouding of the intellect of the wise Shukra, was dead. His loss was like the defeat of Indra by his enemies, or the fall of the resplendent Surya from the firmament, or the unbelievable drying up of the inexhaustible waters of the ocean. His death was like the destruction of the earth, the firmament and the waters, or like the futility of both dharma and adharma.

Dhritarashtra realised that his army was annihilated. He knew that very soon the other warriors as enduring as Karna would meet with a similar fate as the Sutaputra. He burned with grief, sighed like a snake, and with all his limbs almost palsied, he lamented weakly and aloud.

He says, 'O Sanjaya, the valiant son of Adhiratha was powerful like the lion or the elephant; he had a bull's thick neck, eyes, walk and bellow. With limbs as hard as the Vajra, that young man like a rampant rishabha never stepped back from a fight even if his opponent be Indra Deva himself! At the sound of his bowstring, slapping palms and at the hiss of his relentless torrent of arrows, men, horses, chariots and elephants fled before him. Duryodhana provoked hostilities with the mighty sons of Pandu relying

upon Karna, the Mahabaho, the slayer of akshauhinis of enemies, that warrior of unfading glory. How did Partha kill Karna, the greatest of maharathas, that unconquerable Naravyaghra?

He always relied on the might of his own arms and astras and had scant regard for Kesava, Dhananjaya, the Vrishnis, and all other enemies. Often he used to boast to the avaricious, kingdom coveting, foolish and spoilt Duryodhana, "Alone, I will fell the two invincible Krishnas from their great chariot, the wielder of Saranga and the wielder of Gandiva!"

He conquered so many mighty enemies—the Gandharas, the Madrakas, the Matsyas, the Trigartas, the Tanganas, the Khasas, the Panchalas, the Videhas, the Kulindas, the Kasi-kosalas, the Suhmas, the Angas, the Nishadhas, the Pundras, the Kichakas, the Vatsas, the Kalingas, the Taralas, the Asmakas and the Rishikas. Subduing all these brave vamsas with his keen arrows fletched with kanka feathers, great Radheya made all of them pay tribute to us to enhance the honour and power of Duryodhana. Alas, how did the sons of Pandu manage to kill that Vrisha, the warrior son of Vikartana, that leader of armies, that unrivalled master of devastras?

Among horses, Ucchaisravas is the best; among Yakshas, Vaisravana is the leader; among the Devas, Indra is the lord; among warriors, Karna was the foremost. In the three worlds, there is no one to match any of these. Unvanquished by even the mightiest of kings, he subjugated the whole world for Duryodhana's aggrandisement.

Why, the ruler of Magadha, after he had honoured and conciliated Karna and made him a friend, challenged all the Kshatriyas of the world, other than the Kauravas and the Yadavas, to battle! Now, to hear that Savyasachi has killed Karna in single combat, I am plunged in an ocean of grief like a broken ship, and sinking without a raft in the fathomless deep.

O Sanjaya, my heart must be made of something harder than the Vajra of adamant since I am not dead from such anguish. Who else in this world, save my wretched self, would not yield up his life after the defeat and humiliation of my kinsmen, friends and allies? Ah, give me poison to drink or fire to burn myself with or push me off the summit of a mountain, for I cannot bear this intolerable burden of grief!'"

CANTO 9

"Sanjaya says, 'The world considers you the equal of Nahusha's son Yayati in appearance, birth, fame, asceticism and learning. Indeed, in erudition you are, O Rajan, like a most accomplished and successful Maharishi. Summon your courage. Do not yield to grief.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'I believe that fate is supreme and all hard work fruitless since even Karna, who was like a sala tree, has met his end in battle. After he put Yudhishtira's army and hordes of Panchala chariot-warriors to the sword, after he scorched all the directions with his scathing volley of arrows and confounded the Parthas in battle like the Vajradhari confounding the Asuras, alas, the enemy killed that maharatha, like a tempest uprooting a mighty tree.

Like a drowning man unable to see the end of the ocean, I cannot see the end of my sorrows. My anxieties increased when I heard of Karna's death and Phalguna's victory and I no longer wish to live. Indeed, Sanjaya, the killing of Karna is hardly credible. This heart of mine must surely be made of adamant, since it did not burst into a thousand pieces when I heard of his death. Without doubt, before my birth the gods ordained an inordinately long life for me.

Fie, O Sanjaya, on this life that is devoid of friends and kinsmen. Brought today to this sorry plight, fool that I am, I will have to live miserably, pitied by all. Once the whole world feted me, how can I now

live, after my enemies have brought me down? I have gone from pain to greater sorrow and misfortune because of the deaths of Bhishma, Drona and now the noble Karna.

Sanjaya, now that they have killed Karna, I do not think that anyone from my army will escape alive. He was the great raft for my sons to cross the sea of this war. And that shura, after he ravaged his enemies, is now dead. Of what use is life to me without that Nararishabha? The son of Adhiratha struck down by arrows fell from his chariot like a mountain-peak split by a thunderbolt! Bathed in blood, he lies adorning the earth, like an elephant killed by another infuriated prince of tuskers. Alas, Arjuna has killed that pride of all archers, Karna, he who was the strength of the Dhartarashtras and a source of utmost fear to the sons of Pandu. He was an unequalled warrior, a mighty, mighty archer, the dispeller of my sons' fears, and alas, now he lies on the earth, lifeless, like a mountain struck down by Indra.

Now, the fulfilment of Duryodhana's wishes is as travel is to one who is lame, or the gratification of the poor man's desires, or stray drops of water to one who is thirsty. We plan in a certain way but all our most careful schemes end so differently from what we thought. Alas, destiny is all powerful and we cannot go against time.

Was my son Dusasana killed while running away from the battle, humiliated, unhappy in spirit and bereft of his manliness? Sanjaya, I hope that he did no cowardly deed? Did he not meet with his death like the other Kshatriyas who have fallen?

The foolish Duryodhana did not accept Yudhishtira's constant sage advice against the impropriety of war. When Bhishma begged for a drink as he lay on his deathbed of arrows, the illustrious Partha pierced the surface of the earth and created a jet of water. Bhishma then told Duryodhana, "Make peace with the Pandavas. When these hostilities cease, true peace will be yours. Let the war between you and your cousins end with me. Enjoy the earth in brotherliness with the sons of Pandu."

My son must certainly repent today, for what the wise Devavrata predicted then has now come to pass.

Sanjaya, now I have no counsellors and sons and am miserable like a bird that has lost its wings. Often children at play capture a bird and cut off its wings and merrily release it. But the bird can no longer fly. I too have become like a bird shorn of its wings. Weak, without any resources, without

kinsmen and friends, unhappy and overpowered by enemies, which way shall I turn? Karna who vanquished all the Kambojas, the Ambashthas, the Kaikeyas, the Gandharas and the Videhas and subjugated the whole earth for the glory of Duryodhana—alas, the powerful Pandavas have killed him.

When Kiritin slew Karna, tell me, Sanjaya, which warriors remained with him on the field? I hope he did not die alone, abandoned by his friends? With powerful arrows, Sikhandi felled Pitamaha Bhishma, who did nothing to defend himself against the attack of that androgynous prince. Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna slew the mighty Drona, who had laid aside his weapons and sat immersed in dhyana. I have heard that both Bhishma and Drona were killed mainly through deceit.

Truly, Indra himself could not have slain Bhishma and Drona in a fair fight. So, too, how could Death touch that shura Karna, surely equal to Indra himself, while he still had his many devastras? Purandara had given Karna the inexorable shakti of the splendour of lightning in exchange for the Sutaputra's kundalas; in his quiver, amid sandalwood dust, nestled that serpent-mouthed devastra, fitted with goodly wings, that ayudha that could destroy any enemy. From Jamadagni's son Parasurama, Karna had acquired the dread Brahmastra to fend off all the enemy maharathas led by Bhishma and Drona. Remember, he saved Drona and his warriors from Subhadra's son Abhimanyu and, in a trice, shattered the chariot of the invincible Bhimasena of the strength of ten thousand elephants and the speed of the wind, and then laughed at Bhima.

Karna vanquished Sahadeva as well and destroyed his ratha but did not kill him out of compassion and for the word he gave Kunti. He used Shakra's astra and slew Ghatotkacha, who fought with a thousand different sorceries. In fact, his prowess filled Dhananjaya with so much fear that for a long time he avoided facing him in a duel. Alas, how could they kill that Karna, that greatest Kshatriya of all?

How could his enemies best him unless either his ratha was destroyed, his bow riven and his astras exhausted? Who could vanquish that tiger among men, ah, the impetuous Karna, who brandished his formidable bow and unleased tides of arrows at his enemies? Surely, his bow must have broken, or his ratha must have sunk into the ground, or his astras were exhausted, since you tell me that the great Karna is dead. I do not see how else he could have been slain.

That noblest warrior who swore the grave oath, "I will not wash my feet until I kill Arjuna", he from fear of whom that bull among men, Dharmarajan Yudhishtira, had no sleep in the wilderness every night of thirteen years, that matchless maharatha of unearthly prowess—how did he meet his end?

My son forcibly dragged Panchali, the wife of the Pandavas, into our court, relying upon Karna's valour, and there in the midst of that conclave, in the very sight of the Pandavas and in the presence of the Kurus, called the princess of Panchala the wife of slaves. Karna, shura of the Suta varna, said to Draupadi, "O exquisite dark one, all your husbands are now like sesame seeds without kernels; they are men no more, so seek some other husband for yourself!" He said more in the heat of rage and pride; he forced her to listen to other taunts and vile abuse. How was that choleric, wild and bravest hero slain by the enemy?

He said to Duryodhana, "If Bhishma, who boasts of his prowess in war, or Drona, who is insuperable in a fight, do not kill the sons of Kunti out of their affection and favour, I will kill them all for you, my friend. Let the fever of your heart be dispelled!"

He also assured us, "What will Arjuna's Gandiva and his two inexhaustible quivers do to my astra, smeared with cool sandalwood paste, when it courses flaming through the sky?"

Alas, how did Arjuna kill that warrior with shoulders as broad as a bull's?

Sanjaya, he brushed off the fierce touch of the arrows shot from the Gandiva; and, yes, he said to Panchali, "You have no husbands now" and glared at the Pandavas. He was so confident of his own prowess that he had no fear of them or of even of Janardana. When I thought that he could not meet with death even at the hands of the very Devas led by Vasava, attacking him in fury, what then need I say of the Pandavas?

No one could face the son of Adhiratha when he put on his gauntlets and strummed his bowstring. I could believe that the earth could be without the splendour of the sun, the moon, or of fire, but not that Karna, greatest of all warriors, is slain. My foolish and evil-minded son decided to flaunt Krishna's sage advice to make peace with the Pandavas only because Duryodhana relied on Karna and his brother Dusasana to win the war for him. He surely will lament now, seeing how both the bull-shouldered Karna and Dusasana have died.

What did Duryodhana say when he saw Savyasachi and the Pandavas victorious and Vikartana's son killed? That son of mine must surely rue the slaying of Durmarshana and Vrishasena and the headlong flight of his kings, maharathas and all his forces from the field.

With his army dispirited, what did the unruly, proud and foolish Duryodhana, whose passions are always his master, say? Though his friends dissuaded him, he provoked such a horrific carnage as this age has not seen and suffered such an untold loss of his friends, followers and kinsmen in the war. Therefore, what did Duryodhana say?

What did Duryodhana say when he watched Bhimasena kill his brother and then drink his blood? My son, with the ruler of the Gandharvas, once proclaimed, "Karna will kill Arjuna in battle!"

What did Sakuni, the son of Subala, who was ecstatic after he cheated the son of Pandu at the game of dice, say when he saw Karna slain?

What did that mighty maharatha among the Satwatas, that great archer Kritavarman, the son of Hridika, say when he saw Vaikartana slain?

Sanjaya, what did the youthful Aswatthaman, Drona's handsome, intelligent and celebrated son, to whom Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas who wish to acquire the science of weaponry look for instruction, say when he saw Karna slain?

What did Sharadvata's son Kripa of Gautama's race, that best of maharathikas, that Acharya of the astra shastra, say when he saw Karna slain?

What did that king of the Madras, the mighty leader of the Madra warriors, maharatha Salya of the Sauvira vamsa, that ornament of gatherings of noble men and the greatest among warriors say when he saw Karna killed?

What did all the other Kshatriyas, those invincible lords of earth that came to fight, say when they saw Vaikartana slain?

After the fall of the shura Drona, that tiger among maharathas, bull among men, who now led our army of many akshauhinis? Tell me, Sanjaya, how they prevailed upon the great and proud Salya, king of the Madras, to become Karna's sarathy. Who guarded his right wheel, who his left wheel, and who protected his rear in battle? Who were the Kshatriyas who did not desert Karna, and who were those mean-spirited warriors that fled? How, in the midst of all our troops, was maharatha Karna killed? How did the Pandavas assail him with their torrents of arrows?

O Suta, tell me also how his mighty devastra, with the serpentine head, was rendered impotent. Ah, for certain I see no way by which even a small part of my now dwindled and miserable army can be saved when its greatest leaders have fallen.

When I have heard of the downfall of Bhishma and Drona, who were always ready to lay down their lives for my sake, what use have I now in living? Yet, I still cannot fathom how the Pandavas could kill Karna, the might of whose arms equalled that of ten thousand elephants.

Now, tell me, Sanjaya, all that transpired after the death of Maharatha Drona between the Kaurava warriors and their enemies. Tell me, also, how the sons of Kunti fought the battle with Karna, and how that parantapa found his end!'"

CANTO 10

"Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, after the fall of Drona, the vast army of the Kauravas flees but his son, maharatha Aswatthaman, holds firm. Partha, too, marshals his own troops and remains on the battlefield with his brothers. Seeing his own army running away, your son Duryodhana rallies them with great courage and fortitude and, relying just on his own might, fights the triumphal Pandavas for a long time.

When twilight comes, he orders his troops to disengage and to withdraw to their own encampment. There the Kauravas sit like the Devas on luxurious couches overlaid with rich coverlets and on deeply cushioned chairs and ample beds, and hold consultation about the future.

Duryodhana asks his greatest and closest commanders, "Give me your advice without delay! Under these circumstances, what do you think is essential and what is most urgent for us to do?"

In reply, those Naravyaghras, seated on their thrones, all declare without hesitation their wish to fight on. Observing their eagerness to pour their lives out as libations into the battle-fire, and seeing the king's face radiant as the morning sun at this, the Acharya's most intelligent son, Aswatthaman, says, "Enthusiasm, opportunity, skill and strategy—these are the means by which the learned declare that any end can be achieved. However, we have to rely on destiny. Those towering warriors that fought on our side, maharathas equal to the Devas, possessed strategy, devotion,

and were accomplished and loyal. They all met with death. Yet we should not despair. If all these methods are properly applied, we can yet make even destiny favour us.

O Bhaarata, all of us should make Karna, endued with every accomplishment, our senapati! He is powerful; he is a conqueror, accomplished in weaponry and unassailable in battle. Irresistible as Yama himself, if we make Karna our senapati, we can surely vanquish our enemies in battle!"

Aswatthaman's words fill Duryodhana with joy and he immediately consigns his hopes and expectations upon Karna: that he would be the one to vanquish the Pandavas after the fall of Bhishma and Drona. Comforted again, he grows calm, his confidence quickly renewed, and says affectionately and respectfully to Karna, "I know your true ability and the great love you bear me! For all that, Mahabaho, let me share with you some of my concerns so that you can do what you think is needed, gifted as you are with great insight.

My two great generals, the Atirathas Bhishma and Drona, have both fallen. Now you be my senapati, for you are mightier than them! Both those great ones were advanced in years and were, besides, partial to Arjuna and the Pandavas. Yet, I respected them depending on your final assurance. Bhishma considered the sons of Pandu as his grandchildren and spared them for ten successive days. When you had laid aside your weapons, Phalguna used Sikhandi as a shield and felled the valiant Bhishma in a great duel.

After that indomitable warrior took to his bed of arrows, it was on your advice, O Naravyaghra, that we made Drona our senapati. He, too, spared the sons of Pritha because he was their Acharya. And Dhrishtadyumna killed that venerable Brahmana, his own master, in the most vile and horrible manner.

I do not see another warrior equal to you; not even those great men who have been killed in the war. I have no doubt that only you are capable of securing us victory! In the past, today, and tomorrow, too, you have only my welfare at heart. So, like the true leader you are, it is appropriate that you bear this burden. Take charge now as our senapati, and like the Devasenapati, Lord Skanda of unfading prowess, lead this Dhartarashtra host!

Like Mahendra slaying the Danavas, destroy the enemy forces. Seeing you fight, the Pandavas and the Panchalas will turn tail like the Danavas at the sight of Vishnu. Lead this vast host! When you stand ready on the battlefield, the vile Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Srinjayas will all flee with their allies. You will consume our enemies as the midday sun might any darkness!"

Your son, Rajan, still entertains hope in his heart that although Bhishma and Drona had failed, Karna will vanquish the Pandavas. He says, "O Sutaputra, Partha is afraid to fight you!"

Karna says, "I have, O son of Gandhari, said before in your presence, 'I will vanquish all the Pandavas with their sons and Janardana too!'

Calm yourself, O Rajan, I am willing to become your senapati. And I regard the Pandavas as already defeated!"

Duryodhana and all the other kings rise to honour Karna with command of the army, as the Devas once did for Skanda. They seat him at ease on a throne made of udumbara wood and overlaid with silken cloth, and invest him with the command according to the prescribed rites. They use golden and earthen jars filled to the brim with holy water sanctified with mantras, and ivory tusks and rhinoceros and bovid horns, use other vessels encrusted with jewels and gems, and fragrant herbs and plants and other auspicious things. He is bathed upon his throne, after which the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and goodly Sudras eulogize him.

After the ceremony, Karna gifts niskas, kine and other riches to many leading Brahmanas to have their blessings. The panegyrists and the Brahmanas bless him, saying, "Vanquish the Parthas and Govinda with all their followers. O Radheya, slay the Parthas and the Panchalas, as the rising sun destroys darkness with his fierce rays! They will not be able to withstand you in battle, even as the Danavas failed before Indra. Arjuna and Kesava will not be able to even look at your astras, like owls unable to gaze at the rays of the sun."

Karna, installed as senapati, is truly radiant like a second Surya. Standing amongst your sons, he looks magnificent like Skanda surrounded by the Devas in the war with Taraka. Urged on by Death, your prince Duryodhana now regards himself as having already accomplished his purpose and achieved victory.

Karna orders the troops to be deployed at dawn.'"

CANTO 11

"Dhritarashtra says, 'After the events which lead to Karna assuming command of the army and which culminate with his orders to the troops to be ready at the hour of sunrise, tell me, O Sanjaya, what does the Sutaputra do the next morning?'

Sanjaya says, 'As commanded by Karna, your sons, Bharatarishabha, order the troops to be woken with joyful music. Well before dawn, a loud clamour of "Fall in! Take up your positions!" arises among your troops. The sound of elephants and war chariots being readied, of foot-soldiers putting on their armour and of the warriors shouting to one another, is tremendous and reaches into the very heavens. Then Karna arrives in his chariot drawn by chargers of the hue of cranes, splendid like the irradiant sun, flying a white standard with the device of an elephants' girth rope and festooned with pennants tied with many bows, a hundred quivers, gadas, shataghnis, rows of bells, darts, lances and spears, and blowing his conch! He holds aloft his gold inlaid bow. When they see that resplendent, awe-inspiring golden maharatha, no one among the Kauravas, O sire, anymore grieves the loss of Bhishma or Drona or any other warrior.

Hurrying his warriors with blasts of his conch, Karna arrays the still vast army of the Kauravas in the makara vyuha, and leads them against the Pandavas. He stations himself at the tip of the snout of the crocodile. Its two

eyes are the bold Sakuni and the mighty Uluka. At its head is Aswatthaman and its neck is created by Duryodhana's remaining brothers.

At the heart of the beast of war is Duryodhana supported by a large force. Kritavarman at the head of the invincible Narayana warriors, the Gopalas, forms its left foreleg. Gautama's indomitable son Kripa, surrounded by the mighty Trigartas who still live, and by the Dravidas forms the bent, clawed, right foreleg. Salya, with a large force raised in the country of the Madras, forms the left hind leg of the reptile. The upright Sushena at the head of a thousand chariots and three hundred elephants forms the right hind leg. The two royal brothers of brilliant tejas, Chitra and Chitrasena, with another large force, make up the thick, long and tapering tail of the makara.

Seeing great Karna come forth to give battle, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, says, "Look, O Arjuna, how Karna arrays the Dhartarashtra army for war, protected by Kshatriyas and maharathas. They have lost their greatest warriors and those that remain, mahabaho, are like straw. Only one great archer remains, the Sutaputra. He is indestructible. None in the three worlds with their mobile and immobile beings, not the Devas, Asuras and Gandharvas, and the Kinnaras and Nagas can vanquish him. If you kill Karna today, victory will be ours, Phalguna. Pluck out this thorn that has been planted in my heart for twelve years, my brother. Choose the vyuha that you wish to deploy." Arjuna chooses to deploy the Pandava forces in the chandrakala vyuha of the half moon. On the left wing is Bhimasena and on the right Dhrishtadyumna. Arjuna sets himself in the middle with Yudhishtira. Nakula and Sahadeva are behind them and the two Panchala princes, Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, protect Arjuna's chariot wheels; they do not leave him for a moment. The remaining valourous commanders, their armour shining in the dawn light, stand in the positions assigned to them in the array, according to the measure of their vigour and resolution. O Bhaarata, the Pandavas and the mighty bowmen in their great vyuha, are soon ready for battle.

Looking at your army arrayed in Karna's makara vyuha, Duryodhana and all his brothers regard the Pandavas as already conquered. And Yudhishtira is equally convinced that the Pandavas' vyuha will overwhelm Karna and the Dhartarashtras. Both armies loudly blow conches and beat kettle-drums, tabors, cymbals, dindimas and jharjharas. Ferocious warriors let out loud exultant roars and shouts which can be heard over the noise of

neighing horses and trumpeting elephants and the fierce clatter of chariot-wheels. O Bhaarata, in the Kaurava army, seeing magnificent Karna at the head of their vyuha, no man even thinks of the loss of Drona anymore.

Both armies teem with joyous men, eager for battle and eager to decimate each other without delay. The two shuras, Karna and Yudhishtira, wound up with wrath at sight of each other, ride through their divisions, each resolved to triumph. The two armies, as they advance to meet each other, seem to prance with enthusiasm. From the wings, warriors seeking individual combat, issue in bursts. Then, conches resound and the general battle commences, O Rajan, between warriors, elephants, cavalry and chariots, all bent on either killing or dying in the attempt.'"

CANTO 12

"Sanjaya says, 'The two vast armies, bursting with exultant warriors, horses and elephants, splendid like the Deva and the Asura armies, clash in thunder and begin to hack and mow down each other. Leonine warriors strike off the heads of other combatants—with crescent-tipped and broad-headed shafts, razor-faced arrows, axes, and curved and straight swords. Each noble head strewn on the field is lustrous like the full moon or the sun and fragrant like the lotus. The lopped off, long and massive arms, holding weapons and wearing bracelets, shine as they fall upon the earth and writhe, the arms with their red palms and fingers looking as if the ground is strewn with fierce five-headed snakes killed by Garuda.

Struck down by their enemies, brave men plunge down from elephant back, chariots and horses, like the inhabitants of heaven falling from their celestial vimanas upon the exhaustion of their punya. They massacre each other in their hundreds with heavy gadas, spiked clubs and short bludgeons; their hands, feet, weapons and rathas are all desiccated. In the turbulent melee, chariots, elephants, horsemen and foot-soldiers all cause bloody carnage.

As the battle spreads and swells savagely, terrible Vrikodara leads the Parthas against us. That force consists of Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the five sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas, Satyaki and Chekitana with the Dravida men, the Pandyas, the Cholas, and the Keralas at the head of a

mighty army. They are all exceptionally tall warriors with broad chests, long arms and large eyes. Their battledresses of diverse colours, they use powdered scents, wear ornaments, have red teeth, and are as strong as infuriated elephants. Armed with swords and nooses, they are powerful enough to restrain mighty elephants, never desert each other, are bound companions in life and death, carry bows and quivers of wondrous craft, and are pleasing in their speech. Satyaki leads the foot-soldiers to the Andhra tribe who have mighty physiques and terrific energy.

Other dauntless warriors such as the Chedis, the Panchalas, the Kaikeyas, the Karushas, the Kosalas, the Kanchis, and the Magadhas, also rush forward. Their chariots, cavalry and elephants, all of the best kind, and their brutal foot soldiers, all keened by the notes of diverse instruments, seem to dance and laugh as they plunge wildly ahead. In the midst of that vast force comes Vrikodara, titanic Bhima, riding on the neck of an elephant and surrounded by many other great elephant-warriors. His immense elephant is resplendent, like a stone-built mansion on the summit of the Udaya mountain crowned by the rising sun. Its wonderful armour of iron, studded with costly gemstones, is as glorious as the autum sky alight with stars. With a lance in his outstretched arm, a beautiful crown on his brow, and splendid as the meridian sun in autumn, Bhima begins to raze his enemies at his great and gory pleasure.

Kshemadhurti, the king of the Kulutas, riding an elephant himself, eagerly challenges a most willing Bhima. The encounter is like two hills topped with trees, fighting with utmost atavism. They strike each other with their spears brilliant like sun rays, and utter earthshaking roars. They circle each other on their elephants, and then attack with their bows and stir up the soldiers around with their deafening shouts and slaps on their armpits and the whizzing of arrows like bee swarms. Both are doughty and masterly beyond description and their elephants lumber about nimbly with upturned trunks and with banners floating wide on the wind.

Each rives the other’s bow, then seize up fresh bows and shoot showers of gleaming arrows and fling spears like two masses of clouds in the monsoon. Then, Kshemadhurti suddenly casts a spear at Bhimasena and pierces him through the chest and follows this with six more javelins and gives an echoing shout of victory. Bhimasena blazes up with wrath and, with those spears sticking out of his body, he is glorious like a cloud-covered sun with his rays issuing through the interstices of the canopy.

He hurls a dazzling iron spear at his antagonist, which the king of the Kulutas destroys with ten arrows and then strikes Bhima with a flurry of sixty smoking shafts. Bhima takes up a bow whose twang is like thunder, and with a truly paralysing yell, wounds Kshemadhurti's elephant with a spate of such vicious barbs that the wounded beast breaks its restraints and runs chased by Bhima's fierce leviathan: like one mass of wind-driven clouds pursuing another cloud in a tempest.

Finally, the valiant Kshemadhurti fetches his own tusker under control and looses a slew of arrows at his pursuer. He rives Bhima's bow with a razor-headed arrow and draws blood from Vrikodara's elephant as well; the enraged Kshemadhurti strikes both Bhima and his elephant with several long shafts through every vital part.

O Bhaarata, Bhima's massive beast's knees buckle and it falls with a booming bellow, but quick as a thought, Bhima leaps off its back, flies at his enemy and brings Kshemadhurti's grey beast down with a flurry of thunderous mace blows. Kshemadhurti also leaps off his dead war animal and, sword in hand, rushes in fury at Bhima. Quicker than seeing, Bhima looses a lethal volley at his noble adversary and Kshemadhurti falls dead right beside his elephant like a lion struck by a thunderbolt beside a thunder-cloven hill.

Seeing the celebrated king of the Kulutas killed, your troops, O Bharatarishabha, run away in panic.'"

CANTO 13

"Sanjaya says, 'By now, the general battle is joined in earnest and Pravira Karna, powerful and audacious, begins to raze the Pandava army with his deadly fire and the Pandavas, too, O Rajan, retaliate in kind. Karna's cloth-yard shafts, polished and bright as the rays of the sun, bring dreadful devastation to the Pandava army and their elephants struck by Karna's relentless tirade, give vent to dismal bellows and flee.

Nakula attacks Karna with alacrity and valour, while Bhimasena assails Drona's son and Satyaki lays siege to the Kaikeya princes Vinda and Anuvinda. King Chitrasena stands firm against the advancing Srutakarman; Prativindhya faces Chitra, who uses a wonderful bow and flies a striking standard; Duryodhana charges Yudhishtira and Dhananjaya launches his onslaught once more against the seething Samsaptakas horde.

In that slaughter of great Kshatriyas, Dhrishtadyumna advances against Kripa; the invincible Sikhandi closes with Kritavarman; Srutakirti encounters Salya and Madri's son, and the valiant Sahadeva confronts your son Dusasana. The two Kaikeya princes and Satyaki shroud each other with bursts of brilliant arrows, fighting like two rival elephants goring each other in the forest; Satyaki's chest is lacerated while the brothers have their own marmas pierced by Yuyudhana's relucent arrows.

The war swells all around, with roars and cries of anguish, and blood spraying lavishly in the sun. Satyaki maharatha Saurin destroys the great

war bows of the Kekaya princes; they seize up other bows in a flash and envelop the brilliant Satwata with gales of thunderbolts, even as all three wheel like triad winds across Kurukshetra. The brothers' potent golden shafts, fletched with kanka and peacock feathers, illuminate the field which has turned darkling from the dense profusion of arrows shot all around. This fervid contention lasts a while, with Satyaki and the heroic brothers often shattering one another's bows and cutting down each others' shafts in flight. Until, finally, the invincible Satwata prince hews off Anuvinda's head with a razor like arrow in a scarlet eruption. Anuvinda's severed head, its great golden kundalas sparkling and stained red, falls like the head of the Asura Sambara slain in the great Devasura yuddha of old, and fills all the Kaikeyas with grief.

Seeing the end of his beloved and fierce brother, Vinda strings another bow and, wheeling in a circle in his ratha, attacks the grandson of Sini from every side. He draws blood fonts from Satyaki with sixty arrows fitted with golden wings and whetted on stone, and shouts, "Stay and fight!"

Swift as thoughts he strikes Satyaki with thousands of arrows. Bleeding from his limbs, Yuyudhana looks resplendent, O Rajan, like a flowering kinsuka. Yet undaunted, the Satwata hero responds with five and twenty searing shafts, bathing the Kaikaya prince in blood. The two maharathas swiftly kill one another's sarathy and horses, then break one another's bows and then leaping down from their chariots, close with each other on foot to fight with swords drawn. Both have massive arms and flaunt awesome swords and shields decked with a hundred moons, like the mighty Jambha and Sakra in the war between the Devas and the Asuras, long ago.

They circle, gauging each other every electric moment, and watching for the slightest chance to strike a killing blow. As the duel progresses, each has his shield destroyed by the other; they continue to circle warily until, finally, Satyaki sees his momentary chance and, with a slashing sidestroke, cleaves Vinda clean in two, his blade bisecting the Kaikeya prince's body just above the waist, felling him like a hill split by a thunderbolt.

Satyaki clambers into Yudhamanyu's chariot and escapes. Later, after he has mounted another fully equipped ratha, he wildly attacks the large Kaikeya force and brings such wrath and death to them that they flee the field in absolute panic.'"

CANTO 14

"Sanjaya says, 'A pugnacious Srutakarman, O Rajan, strikes Chitrasena, at the head of his forces, with fifty keening arrows; Chitrasena responds quick as light, driving nine perfect barbs into his attacker's body and five into his sarathy. Srutakarman plunges a single immaculate arrow into a vital marma on Chitrasena's body, and that prince collapses onto his chariot seat. Never pausing, Srutakarman covers his insensible adversary with ninety arrows.

Chitrasena recovers consciousness, leaps up, splits his antagonist's bow with broad-headed shafts and pierces him with seven vicious thunderbolts. Srutakarman picks up another heavy, gold inlaid bow and, with a great wave of fire, turns Chitrasena's body into an amazing sight with arrows protruding from every inch of him. The youthful king, wearing beautiful garlands and these arrows as well as ornaments, looks like a remarkable youth in the midst of a noble congregation!

But, unmoved, Chitrasena drills a dreadful thick shaft straight into Srutakarman's chest, shouting, "Halt! Fight!" Srutakarman spurts a geyser of blood like a mountain a spring of liquid red chalk. Bathed and dyed in blood, that shura too glows like a kinsuka in full bloom.

Red-eyed Srutakarman cleaves his adversary's bow in his hands. He strikes him with three hundred arrows shot in such a blur that Chitrasena is obscured by that dark, wide-winged swath. Finally, with another broad-

headed and sharp-edged shaft, Srutakarman decapitates his enemy and Chitrasena's blazing head falls onto the earth like the moon come loose from the firmament.

Seeing their king slain, Chitrasena's troops recklessly charge Srutakarman. However, he tears into them, unleashing his arrow gales like an infuriated Yama at the time of the pralaya at yuga's end. Slaughtered by your grandson Srutakarman, they scatter and bolt like elephants scorched by a forest conflagration, and are pursued hotly by that shura, resplendent on his ratha.

Prativindhya, O Bhaarata, launches an assault on Chitra with five arrows, strikes his charioteer with three and his standard with one. Chitra defends, piercing his adversary in the arms and chest with nine broad-headed arrows with golden wings and fletched with kanka and peacock feathers. Prativindhya destroys his opponent's bow and deeply injures him, upon which Chitra casts an irresistible dart with golden bells at him, which flares at him like a burning meteor.

Prativindhya, however, easily truncates that missile into three slivers, and it explodes with a thunderclap, creating fear in all creatures as if it was the end of the yuga. Chitra takes up a massive gada finished with gold filigree work and hurls it expertly, killing Prativindhya's horses and sarathy, and crushing his ratha, all at once. Prativindhya jumps down from his ratha and flings a fiery spear with golden staff at Chitra. The noble Chitra catches it in his hand even as it flashes at him, and flings it back at Prativindhya. That powerful and occult lance plunges through Prativindhya's right arm and burrows down into the ground behind him, illumining that field like a blast of lightning.

A livid Prativindhya now casts another golden missile at Chitra; this astra crashes through Chitra's kavacha, through his great heart, blowing it to shreds, killing him instantly, then darts deep into the earth like a mighty snake into its hole. Chitra lies there lifeless, his massive arms that resemble iron clubs, outspread in death's final, poignant attitude.

Your most veteran warriors attack Prativindhya in stormy retaliation, impetuously from all sides. Shooting diverse kinds of shafts and sataghnis decked with rows of bells, they soon cover him like masses of clouds covering the sun. But gallant Prativindhya consumes them with his arrows, like the Vajradhari himself routing the Asura host. Your army, O Rajan, runs in all directions like cloud masses scattered by the wind.

Meanwhile, only Drona's son remains standing and singly charges the mighty Bhimasena. At once, a pitched duel erupts between them like the one between Vritra and Vasava in the battle between the Devas and the Asuras long ago.'"

CANTO 15

"Sanjaya says, 'Drona's vigorous son Aswatthaman, displaying unworldly dexterity, strikes Bhima with a scathing arrow, numbing him briefly, and then quicker than imagination, pierces all his vital marmas with ninety more shafts. Pierced all over, Bhimasena resembles the sun with his rays of light.

Imperturbable, Vrikodara, who feels no pain or pays it no mind, envelops Aswatthaman with a full thousand squally shafts, and lets out an earth-shaking simhanada. Aswatthaman coolly cuts down Bhima's tornado with his own recalescent volley and smilingly strikes the Pandava on his brow with a cloth-yard shaft, which the Pandava titan bears on his forehead even as the proud rhinoceros does his horn! With a grin, Bhima adorns Aswatthaman's brow with three arrows, so that the Brahmana resembles a triad peaked mountain washed with red rain in the monsoon presenting quite an extraordinary sight.

They continue to lash each other with hundreds of arrows, but neither can shake the other, like the wind failing to sway or torrents of rain failing to move a mountain. The two are resplendent on their magnificent rathas, like two apocalyptic suns arisen for the destruction of the world at yuga's end, their arrows the rays of the consuming sun as they scorch each other. With utmost expertise and care, they endeavour to match each other's feats and prowl the field of yawning death like two mythic tigers. Invincible and

fearsome, the arrows are their fangs and the bows their mouths, and under the shroud of arrows, they hide like the sun and the moon in the firmament enveloped by masses of clouds. However, soon the two warriors break out of the dark mantle and blaze forth like Mars and Mercury freed from clouds that obscured them.

During the battle, Aswatthaman manoeuvres to place Vrikodara on his right and looses hundreds of vicious arrows at him. Bhima cannot brook his enemy's brief triumph and from that very station on Aswatthaman's right, unleashes his own torrid arrow storms at Drona's punitive son. Their chariots wheel, turn, advance and retreat strategically, and the battle between these two lions among men is a sight to behold. Racing along different courses, they circle and move with supernatural agility, as they continue to strike each other with arrows shot from bows drawn to their fullest stretch.

Determined to kill each other, they first try to demolish the other's chariot. Aswatthaman invokes many astras in this attempt, which Bhima nullifies with his own. The colliding astras illuminate all the directions of the sky and the troops all around. Covered with flights of arrows and clashing astras, the heavens assume an awesome sight, O Rajan, like at the time of pralaya, with colliding planets and meteors beyond count falling alight.

Great fires, with leaping sparks and towering flames, begin to consume both armies. Siddhas who arrive there, O Rajan, say, "O Lord, this war is the greatest ever and no battle fought so far measures even a sixteenth part of this one. A war like this will never occur again. Both these warriors, the Brahmana and the Kshatriya, are gifted with knowledge, possess courage and are both fierce in their attitudes. Tremendous is the might of Bhima, and wonderful is the skill of Aswatthaman. How great is their energy and how amazing their genius. The two awe-inspiring ones straddle the field like two universe-destroying Yamas at the end of the yuga. These two Naravyaghras are born like two Rudras or two Suryas."

One hears all the time such words from the Siddhas present there and a deep roar arises from the assembled Devas in the sky. The dense throng of Siddhas and Charanas are filled with wonder on seeing the inconceivable feats of the two warriors and, along with the Devas and the great Rishis, they laud them both saying, "Wonderful, O Mahabaho Aswatthaman! Excellent, O magnificent Bhima!"

Meanwhile, the two shuras ceaselessly inflict gashing injuries on each other; they glare and roll their eyes red with rage; their lips quiver; they grind their teeth and bite their lips in the intensity of their fury. They shower each other endlessly with arrows and their weapons flash as if the two of them, maharathas both, are two great thunderheads that rain arrows and unleash jagged streaks of lightning.

Thus they battle on, tireless, shredding each other's standards, raking each other's charioteers and chargers. Then, Rajan, each invokes an astra and looses it at the other; both strike home, like twin thunderclaps, and Bhima and Aswatthaman faint at the same instant, at the head of their troops. They fall senseless in the chariots and their sarathies whisk them away from the field.'"

CANTO 16

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Describe to me, O Sanjaya, Arjuna's contention with the Samsaptakas and the other lords of the earth, as well as his duel with Aswatthaman. Narrate to me also, the battle between the other kings and the Pandavas.'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen, O Rajan, and I will tell you about the battle between our heroic warriors and the enemy—ah, the encounter which destroyed bodies, sins and lives. The indomitable Partha penetrates deep into the still vast Samsaptaka forces and agitates it like a tempest stirring the fathomless deep. He beheads brave warriors with faces splendid as the full moon, with beautiful eyes, brows and teeth. Soon the earth is strewn with heads like lotuses, plucked from their stalks.

He also severs muscular, massive arms, smeared with sandalwood paste and other perfumes; he cuts away hands that grasp weapons, wear leather gloves, and look like five-headed snakes. He destroys horses, riders, charioteers, flags, bows and arrows and arms that wear jewels, and despatches maharathas, elephants, horses and horsemen to Yama's realm.

Throngs of enemy warriors, roaring like bulls mad with excitement for a cow in season, attack Arjuna with loud cries and cover him with their arrows. The hair raising encounter is like the battle between the Daityas and Vajradhari Indra during the conquest of the three worlds. Defending himself masterfully against his enemies' livid storms, Arjuna massacres them like

the inexorable wind destroying massed thunderheads. The fearsome Arjuna, called Jaya, shatters squadrons of derelict chariots, which he earlier deprived of poles, wheels, axles, wooden fences, and whose warriors, horses and charioteers he had already killed and whose weapons, quivers and standards he had desiccated.

He fights like a thousand maharathas and his feats fill all with wonder. Crowds of Siddhas, Devarishis and Charanas applaud him and sound celestial kettle-drums and shower unearthly blooms down upon the heads of Kesava and Arjuna. An asariri, an incorporeal voice, says, "These two heroes, Krishna and Arjuna, own the beauty of the moon, the splendour of fire, the force of the wind and the radiance of the sun. Riding the same ratha, they are invincible like Brahma and Isana. These two shuras, the greatest of all beings, are Nara and Narayana!"

Aswatthaman, O Bhaarata, sees Arjuna's astounding exploits and so with equal parts of care and resolution, takes the field against him. Unleashing a gale of shafts, he then holds an arrow in his hand, pauses and hails the Pandava. Smiling, Drona's son says to Arjuna, "If, O shura, you regard me a worthy guest who has arrived before you, give me your wholehearted hospitality of battle."

Thus challenged, Arjuna considers himself honoured, and asks Krishna, "I need to annihilate the Samsaptakas, but Drona's son summons me to battle again. Tell me, O Madhava, which dharma should I attend to first? Possibly, if you think it proper, I should first provide the Acharya's son with the services of hospitality."

Without hesitation, Krishna drives Partha towards Aswatthaman's ratha, even like Vayu bearing Indra to the yagna. Saluting Drona's son, Kesava tells him, "O Aswatthaman, don't lose a moment, but both give and take. The time has come for dependents to repay their obligations to their masters. The contention between Brahmanas is subtle but the consequences of disputes between Kshatriyas are palpable, and bring either victory or defeat. To have the excellent rewards of hospitality which, from folly, you solicit from Partha, fight now the son of Pandu."

At this, the great Brahmana warrior says, "Tathaastu!" and strikes Kesava with sixty shafts and Arjuna with three. Arjuna destroys Aswatthaman's bow with three arrows and Drona's son picks up a more formidable bow. Stringing it in the twinkling of an eye, he rakes Arjuna with a thousand and Krishna with three hundred arrows. Then, my lord, he

looses an unimaginable flood of arrows, in millions, past all count, and he stuns Arjuna. These unworldly missiles issue from the quivers, the bow, the bowstring, the fingers, the arms, the hands, the chest, the face, the nose, the eyes, the ears, the heads, the limbs, the pores, the armour, the chariot and the standard, of that Brahmavadi. Piercing Madhava and the son of Pandu with that fury of uncanny barbs, Drona's son, full with joy, roars like ten thunderclouds.

Hearing that roar, Arjuna says to Kesava of unfading glory, "Look, O Madhava, at this animosity of the Acharaya's son towards me. He thinks that if he covers us with a tide of countless arrows, we will die. But I will disappoint him and show him my prowess."

Arjuna, the Bharatasattama, splits every arrow of Aswatthaman's into three slivers; he dispels the Brahmana's darkness of arrows like the sun destroying a black fog. Immediately, he turns his attention back to the Samsaptakas, and once more harries them and their horses, charioteers, rathas, elephants, standards and foot-soldiers with his fierce fires. Arjuna's thunderbolts shroud all—spectators, foot-soldiers, chariot-warriors, horsemen and elephants. Shot from Gandiva, his winged arrows of myriad kinds slaughter elephants, horses and men, those right before him as well as those two yojanas away.

Elephants with ichor flowing down their faces in excitement, have their trunks severed by his broad-headed shafts, and fall down like great trees cut down with an axe, wailing dreadfully. They fall with their riders, like mountains that Indra has blasted with his Vajra. With his arrows, Dhananjaya demolishes splendid, well-equipped chariots into dust, so they appear to dissolve as vapour into the evening sky. The Vijaya, his Gandiva bent in a circle of flames, inundates his enemies with riptides of arrows; he massacres maharathas, horsemen and foot-soldiers. Arjuna is like the sun of the apocalypse that rises at the end of the yuga and he vaporises the immense Samsaptaka ocean with his arrows.

Then again, seamlessly, Arjuna switches his attention back to Aswatthaman and drills him with incandescent shafts, like sun flares, even like Indra striking the mountain of old with his Vajra. The dauntless and by now properly incensed Aswatthaman does not waver but closes, instead, on Arjuna, unleashing his own tremendous arrow storms. But Arjuna demolishes Aswatthaman's fusillades and indignantly offers him, the

supposed “desirable guest”, quivers upon inexhaustible quivers of arrows, like a most charitable man offering everything in his house to a guest.

Leaving the Samsaptakas, the son of Pandu hastens towards Drona’s son like a host abandoning undeserving guests to attend to a more worthy one.’”

CANTO 17

"Sanjaya says, 'The battle between Arjuna and Aswatthaman resembles the one in the sky between Shukra and Brihaspati, both trying to enter the same constellation. Wounding each other with burning arrows, the two terrify the world like two planets that have strayed from their orbit and shoot their rays at each other. Arjuna stabs Aswatthaman with a shaft between his eyebrows, while the Brahmana gashes the two Krishnas with hundreds of arrows, which dazzle like so many slivers of the sun at the end of the yuga.

When Krishna briefly appears to be stunned, Arjuna shoots an astra from which issue multitudes of shafts from all sides. He strikes Aswatthaman with innumerable shafts, each like the thunder or fire or the sceptre of Death. The ferocious, mighty Aswatthaman retaliates with a multitude of arrows shot with such force that Yama himself would have felt their pain. Arjuna blankets him, his horses, charioteer and standard with twice as many arrows fitted with wide wings.

Yet again, he then turns to assail the Samsaptakas and demolishes their bows, quivers, bowstrings and hacks off the arms and hands that tightly grasp weapons, and destroys chatras, standards, horses, chariot shafts, robes, garlands, ornaments, armour, handsome shields and ruins the beautiful heads of his relentless enemies. He destroys well-equipped rathas, chargers and elephants, as well as the Kshatriyas who ride in them. With

crescent-tipped, razor-faced arrows, Arjuna snips away human heads that resemble lotuses from their throats, heads as bright as the sun, or the full moon in beauty and which glitter with crowns, and they fall endlessly onto the earth.

The seasoned Kalinga, Vanga and the Nishada elephant warriors, riding on their splendid beasts, which are as grand as the leviathans of Indra, come charging against Arjuna. Partha cuts off the giant animals' limbs and trunks and destroys their riders, the standards and banners, upon which those beasts fall like mountain summits riven by thunderbolts.

With that elephant force annihilated, Kiriti turns back to target the son of his Acharya with arrows that shine like the newly risen sun, and shrouds him with these as the wind shrouds the sun with cloud masses. Aswatthaman, however, brilliantly negates Arjuna's arrows with his own, and strikes both Arjuna and Krishna and gives a roar like that of thunder at summer's end. Deeply wounded, Arjuna swiftly dispels the darkness Aswatthaman's arrows bring, and pierces his adversary and his army with shining tides of shafts.

No one can see when Savyasachi picks up his arrows, when he aims them, and when he shoots them. All that is seen are the elephants, horses, foot-soldiers and maharathas, struck and falling dead. Drona's son looses ten great missiles, which flare from his bow as a single one. Shot with huge force, five of these strike Arjuna and the other five Krishna, and bathe them in blood as Kubera and Indra were once. A gasp goes up from all that watch for they are convinced that Aswatthaman, complete master of the astra shastra, has killed the two Krishnas.

Krishna, in some pain, asks Arjuna, "Why do you spare Aswatthaman? Kill him! Because if you do not he will cause you great sorrow, like some untreated disease."

"Tathaastu—So be it!" Arjuna of unfading glory replies.

Arjuna begins to carve Aswatthaman's splendid body with his arrows. He pierces his antagonist's massive sandalwood paste smeared arms, his chest, head, and his muscled thighs with shafts fitted with heads like goats' ears, and shot with untold force from the Gandiva. He cuts away the traces of Aswatthaman's chargers and gashes the steeds themselves so that, wild-eyed with pain, they bolt from the field. Bleeding from a hundred wounds, Drona's most intelligent son reflects for some time and ruefully realises that he can never hope for victory against Krishna and Dhananjaya;

Aswatthaman decides not to go back and renew the duel. He calms his horses, comforts himself a little and joins Karna's teeming division, his proud hopes belied and the armoury in his ratha almost exhausted.

After his runaway horses bolt with Aswatthaman, rather as incantations and medicaments remove a disease from the body, Krishna and Arjuna ride again at the Samsaptakas, on their ratha with its kapi-dhvaja floating wide on the breeze and with a rumble as of thunderheads.'"

CANTO 18

"Sanjaya says, 'They hear the sound of a fierce battle towards the northern part of Kurukshetra where Dandadhara, the lord of the Magadhas, wreaks havoc among the chariots, elephants, cavalry and foot-soldiers of the Pandava army. Krishna turns his chariot yoked to Gandharva horses fleet as Garuda, and says to Arjuna, "That is Dandadhara with his dangerous and matchless elephant, and he himself is not inferior to Bhagadatta himself. Kill him first, before we fight the Samsaptakas."

Krishna takes Partha to where Dandadhara, unrivalled in wielding the elephant-hook, just as the headless planet Ketu is peerless among all the navagrahas, is annihilating the Pandava host like some awesome comet destroying the very earth. Riding his indomitable and brutal mastodon, Dandadhara razes thousands of chariots, horses, elephants and men with his torrid arrow banks.

The Magadhan's rampaging elephant legion tramples thousands of soldiers along with their horses and charioteers, crushing them to pulp. His own greatest beast also ranges across the field like a wheel of Death. Dandadhara shoots down men clad in armour along with their horses and foot-soldiers, and his elephants stamp them into the ground with their great legs, making a gory mess all around.

Arjuna, on his great ratha, races towards that prince of elephants standing in the midst of the Magadhan force with thousands of chariots,

horses and other elephants; the whole place resounds with the clashing of innumerable cymbals, batteries of drums being pounded, booming conches, the awful clatter of chariot-wheels, the twanging of bowstrings, and with the echoing of striking palms.

Dandadhara straightaway strikes Arjuna with a dozen sizzling arrows, Krishna with sixteen and each of their horses with three, and then gives an echoing shout of triumph and laughs uproariously. Arjuna shatters Dandadhara's bow, his magnificent standard, then the traces of his hulking beast and the footmen that protect the animal. The lord of Girivraja's eyes turn red as plums; his elephant's temples have now split open and the juice of musth flows freely down them; the creature's linga hangs forth in wild erection. Dandadhara flings a volley of javelins at Dhananjaya.

Even as he does this, Arjuna, with three razor-headed arrows, hews off his enemy's arms at their shoulders, each like an elephant's trunk, and then his moon like head. He swathes the elephant covered in burnished armour with golden arrows, and it looks resplendent like a mountain in the night with its herbs and trees on fire. Trumpeting echoingly in pain, the beast staggers, totters and finally falls with its hastikas still on its neck, like a riven hillock.

Dandadhara's younger brother Danda advances in grief and rage against Krishna and Dhananjaya, determined to kill them; Danda comes on his snow white tusker caparisoned with gold, and big as a Himalayan peak. Danda strikes Krishna with three whetted spears bright as sun rays, and Arjuna with five, and gives a roar. Arjuna responds with a ringing roar of his own and, in a wink, cuts off Danda's arms as well with razor-headed arrows; the sandalwood paste smeared arms, wearing angadas and grasping lances, fall at the same moment from the elephant's back like two mighty snakes of great beauty falling from a mountain summit.

With a crescent-headed arrow, Kiriti beheads Danda and his head falls on the earth from the elephant's back, covered in blood, resplendent as if it is the sun fallen from the Asta mountain in the western quarter.

Partha turns to his enemy's elephant and fells it with a fusillade of dazzling arrows, with a reverberant sound like a Himalayan summit cloven by thunder. Savyasachi, never pausing, annihilates all the other invincible Magadhan elephants, which could turn the course of a war.

The vast hostile force breaks and the elephants, rathas, horses and men, in dense throng, break upon one another and die on the chasmic field of

death and truth. His own troops mob Arjuna like the Devas surrounding a victorious Purandara, and they say, "O Shura, it is destiny that you slew this ferocious enemy who terrified us like Yama himself. If you had not saved us from his fear, our foes would now have felt that delight that we now feel at their death, O Parantapa."

Hearing these and other words of praise from friends and allies, Arjuna properly and gladly salutes them and, his heart cheerful, forges on to once more attack the Samsaptakas.'"

CANTO 19

"Sanjaya says, 'Wheeling around, like the planet Mercury, Buddha in the ellipse of its orbit, Arjuna slaughters vast numbers of the Samsaptakas. His arrows, some of which are wedge-headed, some razor-edged, some crescent-tipped, and some with calf's tooth heads, strike men, horses, and elephants, O Bhaarata, who then falter, stagger, collapse and die. The son of Pandu destroys horses, charioteers, standards, bows, shafts and cuts off hands grasping weapons and the heads of heroic warriors opposing him.

Like bulls competing for a cow in season, thousands of valiant Kshatriyas close in on Arjuna. The bloodcurdling battle that ensues is like the encounter between the Daityas and Vajradhari during the war for the three worlds.

The son of Ugrayudha drills Partha with three arrows like three venomous snakes but Partha cut off his head in a scarlet blast. Their fury mounting, the enemy warriors attack Arjuna from every side with all manner of astras, like the clouds that the Maruts drive to shroud the Himavat at summer's end. Arjuna defends himself magnificently; he kills a host of his enemies with perfect arrows; he destroys the Trivenus, their horses, chariots, charioteers and weapons.

Kurukshetra appears like the luxurious mansions of the rich which elements have ruined. Elephants, their vital organs pierced with shafts like

thunderbolts, fall like palaces struck by lightning falling from mountain cliffs. Arjuna's arrows mow down teeming troops of cavalry and they present an appalling sight, their entrails hanging out, gruesome and bathed in blood. Like Mahendra smiting down the Danavas does Partha smite enemies past all count, with his shafts whetted on stone, and which are like smoking venom in their deadliness. The bravest warriors lie dead on the field, wearing fine armour, ornaments and armed with diverse kinds of weapons, now their chariots shattered and their once proud standards felled. Noble men, of dharma and great gyana, ascend into swarga while their bodies lie on blood spattered earth, unbreathing.

Your various commanders lead their divisions and rush toward Arjuna. Warriors on their rathas, horses and elephants, and foot soldiers attack him with diverse weapons. However, Arjuna stops them in their tracks with a torrent of arrows. We then see him cross that raftless ocean formed by horses, foot soldiers, elephants and chariots, where mighty weapons are its waves, where his own mighty weapons are its bridge.

Then Krishna says to Arjuna, "Why, O sinless one, do you sport in this manner? Finish these Samsaptakas and then make haste to kill Karna."

Arjuna says, "So be it."

He tears into the remnant of the Samsaptakas with his astras, and decimates them like Indra destroying the Daityas. No one can discern when Arjuna takes out his arrows, when he aims them or when he shoots them. Govinda himself, O Bhaarata, thinks it wonderful. The white shafts of Arjuna plunge into the enemy force like swans diving into a lake.

Krishna looks at the enormous carnage on Kurukshetra, and says, "Here, O Partha, is this colossal destruction of the Bharatas and other kings of the earth, and all this is solely because of Duryodhana.

Look, O Bhaarata, at these golden bows of so many mighty archers and these belts and quivers loosened from their bodies.

Behold these straight shafts fitted with wings of gold, and these long arrows smeared with oil looking like snakes freed from their sloughs.

See these abandoned, beautiful gold embellished spears, and these suits of armour cut from the bodies of the warriors.

Look at these golden spears, these darts, and these heavy gadas chased with gold filigree and tied with cords of hemp. Look at these gilded swords and battle-axes, these spiked clubs, these short arrows, these bhusundis, these kanapas; look at these abandoned iron kuntas, and these heavy

mushalas. These warriors must have fought so vigorously with all these different weapons, and though they are now dead, they still seem to be alive.

Behold, O slayer of enemies, the field of battle strewn with the bodies of thousands of Kshatriyas, their limbs crushed with maces, and heads split with mushalas; or whom elephants, horses or chariots have trodden upon; look at all the dreadfully mangled corpses of elephants and horses, bathed in streams of blood. Magnificent sandalwood-paste-smeared arms and hands wearing angadas, leather guards, keyuras, and other ornaments lie scattered across on the earth along with severed thighs that look like elephant trunks and with heads adorned with earrings and helmets and turbans set with great gemstones, which look so striking.

Look at those beautiful broken rathas with golden bells, the long quivers and stunning standards and banners of different kinds, the big conches, lying flecked with blood, the innumerable horses coloured in blood and those perfectly white yak-tails. Look at those elephants with tongues lolling out and lying on the field like hills with their dead warriors, their rich coverlets and blankets, the bells loosened and broken into pieces from the beasts as they fell; the fallen hooks with grips set with stones of lapis lazuli. Look at the ornamental yokes for horses, the diamond studded cuirasses, the rich golden tassels of the cavalry pennants, the motley horse caparisons and housings and ranku skins set with brilliant gems and inlaid with gold, all fallen on the ground.

Look, Partha, at the great solitaire diamonds that adorned the crowns of kings, their exquisite necklaces of gold, and their sovereign chatra, yak-tails and chamaras all fallen, all ruined.

Behold the earth strewn with heads flaunting finely trimmed manly beards, with earrings bright as the stars, each like a moon. This bhumi reminds me of a lake with a dense overgrowth of lilies and lotuses.

Behold the earth, brilliant like the full moon and strewn with myriad stars as in the autumn firmament. O Arjuna, these victories that you have achieved today are indeed worthy of you or of Indra, the king of the Devas himself in heaven."

Thus does Krishna show Arjuna the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

As they return towards their camp, they hear the blare of conches, the beat of cymbals, drums and patahas, the clatter of chariot wheels, the neighing of horses, the trumpeting of elephants, and the fierce clash of

conflict from Duryodhana's army. Krishna is wonderstruck to see that great warrior Pandya charge into that force on his ratha fleet as the wind and destroying elephants, horses and men like Yama slaughtering those whose lives have been exhausted. Defending himself against his enemies, Pandya kills them like Sakra destroying the Danavas.'"

CANTO 20

"Dhritarashtra says, 'You have never mentioned until now the name of that shura Pandya, famous for his feats, O Sanjaya. Tell me today in detail of his ability, skill, spirit, energy, the measure of his might and his pride.'

Sanjaya says, 'You consider Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Aswatthaman, Karna, Arjuna and Krishna as being the greatest of maharathas. Know, however, that Pandya regards himself superior to all of them. Indeed, that great king, that finest warrior, never thought of anyone among the kings to be his equal, not even Karna, Bhishma, Vasudeva or Arjuna. Filled with rage like the Destroyer himself, Pandya now massacres Karna's forces swelling with chariots, cavalry and seasoned warriors. Pandya's whirlwind of arrows spins them around as if on a potter's wheel.

Like the wind dispersing some clouds, like the splitter of mountains striking asunder parvatas with his Vajra, Pandya scatters and destroys the enemy cavalry, chariots, charioteers and standards; he fells elephants with their riders, as well as the foot-soldiers who protect those beasts. He mauls the Pulindas, the Khasas, the Bahlikas, the Nishadas, the Andhakas, the Tanganas, the Dravidas and the Bhojas, all mighty warriors, unyielding and of stoic fortitude. He divests them of their weapons and coats of mail, and then deprives them of their lives.

Aswatthaman sees Pandya on his spree of killing, seemingly dancing, a small Pandava in his chariot, as he razes the Dhartarashtra host before him. Aswatthaman rides up to confront that hero on the rampage, and tells him sweetly, "O Rajan, with your eyes like lotus petals, your noble birth, and your great learning, you are justly celebrated for your might and prowess for you do resemble Indra himself. Stretching your great bow with your massive arms, you look like a great thunderhead lashing your enemies with your torrential rain of arrows.

O Pandya, I do not see anyone other than myself who can match you in battle. Singlehandedly, you mow down chariots, elephants, foot-soldiers and cavalry, like some awful lion hunting herds of deer in the forest. You look magnificent, Rajan, like a crop-destroying autumn thundershower, and the heavens and the earth resound with the rumble of your chariot wheels. But now fight me, O Shura, shoot your arrows that are like snakes of virulent poison at me. Come, fight me as the Asura Andhaka once did the three-eyed Rudra!"

Pandya replies, "Tathaastu!"

Drona's son calls out, "Then strike!" and attacks him viciously. Quicker than thinking, Pandya Malayadhwaja pierces Aswatthaman deep with a barbed arrow. The Brahmana, smiling, gashes Pandya with a volley like flames, and other large and heavy shafts, all of which he shoots with ten subtly different kinds of speed and motion. Pandya, however, destroys all those arrows with nine shafts of his own, and with four others he kills Aswatthaman's four horses. Without a moment's pause he breaks the Brahmana's splendid stretched bowstring with another astonishing arrow.

Drona's son strings his bow in a flash, while his men yoke new horses to his ratha. He looses thousands of arrows at his enemy, filling all the sky and the ten cardinal points with them. Pandya knows that Aswatthaman's arrows are inexhaustible, yet that bull among men cuts them down and immediately kills the two protectors of his adversary's chariot wheels. Drawing his bow into a circle, Drona's son shoots so many arrows that in a mere eighth part of a day, he uses up eight large cartloads of shafts. Aswatthaman is like a furious Destroyer, or rather like an insane Destroyer of the Destroyer, as he lashes the enemy with a frenzy, a pralaya of arrows. Negating with that unendurable torrent from the Aswatthaman-cloud with a Vayavyastra, the exultant Pandya-wind gives a long and resounding roar.

Aswatthaman's response is to demolish Pandya's standard with the device of the Malaya Mountain, smeared with sandalwood paste and other perfumed unguents and kill his four horses in a blink. He next kills his enemy's charioteer with a single perfect shaft and, with a crescent-tipped arrow, breaks Pandya's bow whose twang was like spring thunder in his massive hands, and shatters his ratha into fragments. He stops his redoubtable enemy in his tracks, but Drona's son does not kill the Malayaraja so that he can have the pleasure of battling against him for some more time!

Meanwhile, Karna attacks the large elephant force of the Pandavas and annihilates it. Destroying the chariots of maharathas, he strikes elephants, horses and warriors, O Bhaarata, with tide upon tide of relentless arrows.

Aswatthaman resumes his duel with the great maharatha Pandya. Suddenly, a looming and riderless war elephant with enormous tusks, and maddened by Aswatthaman's arrows, charges Pandya. Seeing that prince of elephants, which is like a cloven mountain summit, Pandya does a most astonishing thing. He is an expert elephant warrior and, with a single bound leaps onto the neck of the demented beast, even like a lion springing with a roar onto the top of a mountain. He strikes the elephant masterfully with the ankush, taming it almost instantly, and in the same moment casts a golden spear bright as a ray of the sun at Aswatthaman, and then a roar of sheer joy and triumph erupts from him, echoing across all Kurukshetra.

Repeatedly shouting in excitement, "You are dead, you are dead!" Pandya flings his lance to destroy Aswatthaman's golden diadem studded with priceless gemstones—diamonds of the rarest kind—and padded with excellent cloth and festooned with strings of pearls, coronet which shines like the sun, the moon, the planets and fire. The crown falls from Aswatthaman's head and breaks apart into fragments.

Aswatthaman, enraged like a kicked serpent, picks up four and ten lethal shafts each like Yama's danda. With five of them, he severs the four feet and the trunk of his adversary's elephant; with three, the two arms and the head of king Pandya, and with six more he kills the six mighty and radiant maharathas who follow the Malaya king. Pandya's long and well-rounded arms, smeared with fragrant sandalwood paste, and adorned with gold, pearls and diamonds fall upon the earth and writhe like a pair of snakes killed by Garuda. His head, its face bright as the full moon, with a prominent nose and large eyes, copper red with rage, its ears adorned with

resonant kundalas, fall onto the ground, luminous as the moon between two bright constellations.

Aswatthaman cuts up the king and his elephant into ten pieces as if they are yagna butter being divided into ten portions for ten deities. Thus Aswatthaman makes an end of mighty king Pandya, after that hero had annihilated countless horses, men and elephants and offered them as food to Rakshasas. Pandya dies like a blazing fire in a crematorium, extinguished with water after it has received libation of numberless dead.

Your son, the king, O Rajan, accompanied by his brothers, approaches Aswatthaman, the complete master of the astra shastra, with great respect, like Indra, the lord of the Devas joyfully worshipping Vishnu after the Lord came as the Vamana and subdued the Asura Bali.'"

CANTO 21

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'After Pandya is killed and that shura Karna destroys the enemy, O Sanjaya, what does Pandu's son Arjuna do? The eternal Sankara made Partha invincible and I greatly fear Dhananjaya. Tell me, O Sanjaya, all that Arjuna accomplishes.'

Sanjaya says, 'After Pandya's death, Krishna quickly says to Arjuna, "I do not see Yudhishtira and it appears that the other Pandavas have retreated. If only the Parthas had returned, we could have broken this vast enemy force. Here, in accordance with Aswatthaman's strategy, Karna razes the Srinjayas' cavalry, chariot-warriors and elephant division."

Partha understands the grave danger to Yudhishtira, and says to Krishna, "Whip the horses, O Hrishikesha!" and the chariot leaps forward.

Karna leads the Kurus and Bhimasena the Pandavas, and once more they fearlessly close with each other and another violent battle ensues that swells the population of Yama's kingdom. With bows and arrows, spiked clubs and swords, lances and axes, short clubs, bhushundis, darts, rapiers, battle-axes, maces, spears, polished kuntas, short shafts and hooks, Kurukshetra is again liberally strewn with corpses. Filling the welkin, the cardinal points of the compass, the subsidiary ones, the firmament, and the earth, with the thick buzz of arrows, the twanging of bowstrings, the sound of slapping palms and the rumble of chariot wheels, they fall upon each other madly, blindly.

Encouraged by the uproar, Kshatriyas fight Kshatriyas, anxious to end this long and harrowing war, either in victory or in death. The sound of bowstrings and bows, the trumpeting of elephants and the cries of foot-soldiers and dying men ring out everywhere in hideous cacophony. At the sound of flying arrows and the diverse shouts and roars of brave warriors, the common troops become pale with fear, and many even swoon.

The Sutaputra annihilates a vast number of his enemy troops, including twenty shining Panchala maharathas, with their horses, charioteers, and standards. Then many leading Pandava warriors wheel around and encompass him. Karna troubles that hostile force with showers of astras like the leader of an elephant herd plunging into a lake blooming with lotuses and full of swans. Radheya penetrates the enemy ranks, flourishes his bow, and begins to decapitate them with his arrows like snipping flowers off their stalks; and not one among them needs the touch of a second arrow from him. The shields and coats of mail smashed and cut away fall in a hail on the earth.

Like a charioteer whipping his horses, Karna with arrows that pierce armour and bodies like butter, takes the life that quickens them; he surely finds the wrist guards of his enemies who are perceivable only by their bowstrings. Like a whole pride of lions hunting herds of deer, Karna brings down the Pandus, Srinjayas and Panchalas that come within range of his arrows.

Dhrishtadyumna, prince of the Panchalas, O Rajan, and the sons of Draupadi, Madri's twins and Yuyudhana unite against Karna. While the other great warriors recklessly fall on one another with maces, short clubs and spiked bludgeons; they leap high into the air and utter loud shouts of challenge. They die, gushing blood from their limbs, and with their brains and eyes torn out. As they lie there dead, with faces shining like pomegranates, their beautiful mouths filled with blood, they appear to be still alive.

Others, in that vast ocean of war, mangled, dissected, truncated, slain with battle-axes, short arrows, hooks, spears and lances, fall gory and lifeless, like sandalwood trees cut down and oozing their cool blood-red sap onto the receiving earth.

Warriors now long past any count, horsemen and foot-soldiers lie on Kurukshetra, with arms hewn off by razor-faced, wedge-headed or crescent-tipped arrows, their faces and limbs like crushed lotuses and faded

wildflower garlands. Horses, and tuskers with their trunks cut off, continue to fall like hills and mountains, and perish in their thousands. Broken chariots, standards, royal parasols lie strewn all over the battlefield. The beautiful shapes of elephants, horses and men, O Rajan, resemble clothes fouled with filth, and are repulsive to look at.'"

CANTO 22

"Sanjaya says, 'Your son orders his elephant warriors to move against Dhrishtadyumna, determined to finish him. Many men skilled in the use of war elephants, the Easterners, the Southerners, the Angas, the Vangas, the Pundras, the Magadhas, the Tamraliptakas, the Mekalas, the Koshalas, the Madras, the Dasharnas and the Nishadas join the Kalingas, O Bhaarata, to attack the Panchala forces with spears and arrows.

Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna shoots back at those fearsome elephants that their riders goad forward with their heels, toes and hooks. He strikes each of those beasts, huge as the hills with ten, eight, or six keen barbs. Seeing those elephants surround the prince of the Panchalas, like clouds that cover the sun, the Pandus and the Panchala warriors hurry to his rescue, and with loud shouts, assail those elephants furiously.

They begin the dance of the Kshatriyas to the music of their bowstrings and the warriors keep time with the sound of their slapping palms. Nakula and Sahadeva, the sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas, Satyaki, Sikhandi and Chekitana vigorously attack those elephants from every side. The Mleccha hastikas prod the elephants until they are infuriated and drag down men, horses and chariots with their trunks and crush them underfoot. They gore many with the points of their tusks, and some they raise aloft and dash down on the ground; others they lift on their tusks and crash down, lancing fear through the enemy.

Satyaki shoots a long arrow with great force at the elephant of the king of the Vangas, pierces its heart and it drops dead. The Vanga king is now exposed and the Satwata hero despatches him even as he leaps off his felled beast's back.

Meanwhile, with three arrows shot with great care, Sahadeva strikes Pundra's elephant, as it charges him like a moving mountain, and takes away its standard, hastikas, armour and life. Sahadeva then moves to fight the king of the Angas.

However, his twin Nakula pre-empts Sahadeva and engages the Anga king, pierces him with three long arrows, each like the rod of Yama, and his enemy's elephant with a hundred arrows. The king casts a full eight hundred javelins at Nakula that coruscate like the rays of the sun but all of which Madri's son of unearthly handsomeness splits into three slivers. Then, with a crescent-tipped arrow, Nakula cuts off Anga's head, felling him from his beast.

On the death of their king, the Anga fighters all charge Nakula on their elephants covered in golden armour, which look like blazing mountains, their banners fluttering in the breeze. The Mekalas, Utkalas, Kalingas, Nishadas and Tamraliptakas support them. However, the Pandus, the Panchalas and the Somakas rush to Nakula's rescue.

A fierce battle breaks out between the maharathas and the elephant-warriors; the former attack with their arrows while the latter hurl lances by the thousands. The Pandava shafts strike the frontal lobes, limbs, tusks and adornments of the elephants and split and mangle them. With four and sixty flashing arrows, Sahadeva kills eight elephants which fall with their riders. Nakula, too, that delighter of his race, bending his outstanding bow with great vigour, kills many elephants with his unerring shafts.

Then Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna and the sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas and Sikhandi cascade arrows on those massive beasts, and the hilly creatures collapse like a mountain being blown apart by many gashes of lightning and thunder. The leaders of the Pandava maharathas, after killing those elephants, cast their gazes balefully on the enemy army, which promptly flees like a river that has broken its banks.

Now, having put your army to flight, those great warriors who fight for Pandu's son turn on Karna and attack him savagely.'"

CANTO 23

"Sanjaya says, 'While Sahadeva is savaging your army, O Rajan, Dusasana confronts him, cousin against cousin. Such a duel ensues between them that all the maharathas present shout and wave their bright scarves. Your son strikes the mighty Sahadeva's chest with three thudding arrows; Dusasana responds in a blur, first with one golden shaft, then with seventy more, and strikes Sahadeva's sarathy with another three.

Dusasana rives Sahadeva's bow and drills him with three and seventy arrows across his arms and chest. Sahadeva picks up a sword, whirls it around and hurls it at your son's chariot; that sword of great power destroys Dusasana's bow and then falls onto the earth like a snake from the sky.

The valiant Sahadeva sweeps up another bow and looses a shaft bright as Yama's danda at Dusasana, which, with his keen sword, your prince cuts in two as it flies towards him. Your son spins his sharp sword and launches it at his enemy even as he quickly picks up another bow and arrow. However, with the greatest ease, Sahadeva knocks that sword to the ground. Next, O Bhaarata, Dusasana shoots sixty-four whistling shafts at Sahadeva's chariot, which also Madri's sage son easily consumes with five shafts of his own, and then looses a veritable storm of arrows at Dusasana.

Your son cuts down each of Sahadeva's arrows and the very earth resounds with his fierce shout!

Dusasana strikes Sahadeva and his charioteer with nine thunderbolts. A furious Sahadeva fits a fearful shaft like the Destroyer himself to his bowstring and, drawing his bow into a circle, unleashes that missile at your son. The astra plunges right through Dusasana's kavacha, his great body and flashes into the earth. Your son, that great maharatha, collapses onto the floor of his chariot and his brave sarathy spirits away from the deadly field, thought Sahadeva rakes him all the while with burning shafts.

After he vanquishes Dusasana, Sahadeva turns his attention to Duryodhana's division and attacks it ferociously. Indeed, O Bhaarata, as an angry man crushes a swarm of ants underfoot, that son of Pandu destroys the Kaurava host.'"

CANTO 24

"Sanjaya says, 'A rampaging Karna checks Nakula as he attacks and routs the Kaurava divisions. With a superior smile, Nakula tells Karna, "It has taken a long time, wretch, but through the will of the gods we finally meet on the battlefield. You are the root of all these evils and this horrible war, and you are the reason why so many men have died and are still dying. I will kill you today and dispel the fever of my heart."

Karna replies soberly, as befits a prince and an archer, "Strike me, O Shura, we want to see your mettle. Like a true Kshatriya, boast only after you achieve something in battle. Fight me to the best of your ability and I promise to quash your pride."

The Sutaputra scathes Nakula with three and seventy shafts; Madri's beautiful son responds with eighty narachas like venomous snakes. Karna breaks his antagonist's bow with one inexorable arrow and draws blood from him with thirty more. These pass through his armour and drink his blood like nagas drinking water after burrowing through the earth.

Nakula takes up another formidable golden bow, pierces Karna with twenty arrows, his sarathy with three, and cleaves his bow with a razor-headed shaft. Then, with a smile, he gashes the disarmed Karna with three hundred searing barbs. Seeing Nakula overwhelm Karna, O Rajan, all the maharathas present, and the Devas in the heavens, are filled with great wonder.

Karna takes up another bow and pierces Nakula's right shoulder with five arrows. Nakula, dauntless, rakes Karna with seven shafts and, again, Rajan, cracks one of the horns of his bow. But the awesome Suryaputra seizes up a fresh bow and now fills the firmament with his arrows. Nakula destroys them all with his own shafts which crowd the sky as if with myriads of fireflies. Indeed, the sky quickly seems to swarm with locust flights, dark with the hundreds of arrows that the magnificent twain cover it with.

Golden arrows flow in a continuous stream like rows of cranes winging through the air. With the sky so full of arrows, which hide even the sun, no bird ranging the air can fly down to the earth. The two noble warriors are luminous, like two suns at the end of the yuga.

Karna's gales decimate the Somakas, while Nakula spreads death through your warriors, tossing your legions about at will like a tempest some fleecy clouds. The two armies retreat beyond the range of the astras of the mighty twosome, and are soon mere spectators of their scintillating duel.

Now freely using their Devastras, O Rajan, they set the field alight with their luculent archery. Nakula's shafts, fletched with kanka and peacock feathers, and Karna's, seem to float in the firmament and to create a vast vault of arrows, making both warriors invisible, yes, truly like the clouds shrouding the sun and the moon.

The son of Adhiratha's arrows, shot with great force from every side, have little effect on Nakula, like the clouds on the sun. Karna, smiling haughtily, looses a barrage of shafts, thousands upon thousands of them, so that a cupola of arrows seems to rest on Kurukshetra, like clouds casting a shadow. Yet again, he shatters the noble Nakula's bow, and in a scarlet flash, despatches his sarathy and four horses to Yama's land.

Karna pulverises the ratha, standard, gada, sword and shield adorned with a hundred moons, and brutally beheads the protectors of Nakula's chariot wheels, so Madri's son suddenly finds himself standing on bare ground armed with just a spiked club. He raises that cudgel above his head with a defiant roar but Karna blasts it into dust with a flurry of arrows. Seeing his adversary weaponless, Karna lacerates him with a hundred shafts, but with great and almost loving care, so he does not wound him grievously.

His attack forces the mighty Nakula to withdraw in great confusion. Laughing repeatedly, Radheya pursues him and pulls Nakula up with his great bow, stopping Madri's son by restraining him with bow and string around his neck. The son of Pandu looks like the moon in the firmament within a halo of light, or a white cloud girdled by Indra's dhanusha.

Karna says, "Look how vain were your earlier boasts, Nakula. Dare you repeat them now, boy? O Pandava, fight your equals and not those that are immeasurably superior to you. O child, little one, do not feel humiliated but go back home, or go to Krishna and Arjuna."

With this, Karna removes his bow from around Nakula's throat and turns away from him—for the oath he had sworn to Kunti, as well as because his dharma forbade him from killing an already helpless enemy. In terrible shame, Nakula takes himself to Yudhishtira's chariot and, his head hung, climbs into it, burning with humiliation and sighing like a snake caught in a jar.

After he vanquishes Nakula, Karna rides against the Panchalas, his chariot flying many gorgeous pennants and drawn by horses white as the moon.

There is a great uproar among the Pandavas when they see the new Kaurava senapati assail the Panchala chariot divisions. Rolling all over the battlefield like a racing wheel, the Suta's son fetches great carnage there, just when the sun has reached his meridian. We see many Panchala warriors without horses, chariots with broken wheels, axles and with torn standards and pennants.

Numerous elephants wander deranged over the field torn by arrows, as if they have been scalded in a forest fire. Others with their round temples split open, bathed in blood, or with trunks lopped off, or with their armour cut away, or their tails severed, fall screaming in pain, all struck by the terrible Karna. Other elephants, terrified by the shafts and lances of Radheya, stampede and run at him, like insects toward a blazing fire, and he fells them without mercy. Other leviathans gore each other in frenzy and bleed like mountains with red rivulets running down their breasts. Horses of the best breed, without their armoured breastplates, their ornaments of silver, brass and gold, their trappings, bridle-bits, yak-tails, saddle-cloths and saddles fallen from their backs, and with their heroic riders all slain, dash wild-eyed and directionless everywhere across Kurukshetra.

We see, O Bhaarata, so many horsemen, although wearing armour and helmets, stabbed and gored with lances and swords, with some limbs hacked away, or killed or being killed, or trembling horribly with fear. We see gold embellished chariots, yoked to fleet horses being hauled directionless, for their charioteers are dead. Some of these have their axles and poles broken, others their wheels, flagpoles or their shafts.

Karna's firestorms of arrows incinerate many maharathas who wander about without their chariots, turning them to ash pillars. Many lie lifeless on the field weaponless, while some still clasp their weapons in dead hands. Elephants, studded with clusters of jewels like stars, adorned with rows of beautiful bells, and decked with different coloured variegated banners, lumbering about, their riders and their very minds and hearts and senses lost. Karna's arrows dissever heads and arms, bisect torsos and other limbs, and these lie scattered everywhere—some twitching, other writhing and yet other still.

The Pandava warriors meet with a great and brutal disaster at the hands of Karna. He slaughters the Srinjayas, as they blindly ride against him, like insects swarming at a blazing fire. Soon, as that maharatha is mowing down the Pandava legions, the Kshatriyas try to avoid him as if he is the very yuga fire. Those of the Panchala maharathas, who survive the slaughter, run. Karna pursues those broken and fleeing warriors and looses his arrows at them even as the sun, dispeller of darkness, scorches all beings at high noon.'"

CANTO 25

"Sanjaya says, 'Shouting "Stop and fight me!" Prince Uluka confronts your son Yuyutsu, who fights for the Pandavas, as that prince razes your son's vast army.

Yuyutsu responds with a winged arrow that strikes Uluka with great force. A bristling Uluka rives your son's bow with a razor-headed arrow and pierces him with a barbed shaft. His eyes red as roses, Yuyutsu picks up another formidable bow and first drills Uluka with sixty arrows, then injures his charioteer before turning his attention back to the prince. Uluka lacerates Yuyutsu with twenty golden arrows, and cuts down his lofty golden standard, and drops it in front of his chariot.

Now quite beside himself with rage, Uluka bloodies your prince's torso with five stunning shafts; Yuyutsu recovers quickly, O Bharatasattama, and decapitates Yuyutsu's charioteer with a broad-headed arrow slick with oil. He targets his four horses and then rakes Yuyutsu himself with five more arrows, forcing your son to find another chariot. After he bests Yuyutsu in that short duel, Uluka speeds away towards the Panchalas and the Srinjayas and tears into them with his stormy missiles.

Meanwhile, your son Srutakarman deprives the maharatha Satanika of his horses, charioteer and chariot in the twinkling of an eye. However, Srutakarman remains standing on his broken ratha and hurls a great mace at your son smashing his chariot, horses and charioteer into pieces and bloody

pulp. Both Kuru-Praviras, having lost their chariots, retreat from the encounter, glaring at each other. While your son mounts Vivingsu's ratha, Satanika quickly climbs into Prativindhya's.

Sakuni strikes Sutasoma with raging flurries of arrows, but fails to shake the latter. Sutasoma envelops Sakuni, his father's enemy, with thousands of sizzling barbs. However, Sakuni, that seasoned warrior and master in all kinds of warfare, destroys all those shafts before they reach him, and strikes Sutasoma squarely with three more. He then swiftly destroys his opponent's horses and standard and kills his charioteer, drawing a shout of wonder from those who watch.

Sutasoma leaps down from his chariot, takes up another bow and a firm stance, and shrouds Sakuni's chariot with a tempest of golden-winged shafts. The illustrious son of Subala sees those showers of arrows fly towards him like a locust swarm; unmoved, he stands firm and cuts the lot down. The warriors all around, as well as the Siddhas in the firmament, all applaud this wonderful feat of Sutasoma fighting the chariot-mounted Sakuni on foot.

Sakuni destroys his adversary's bow and quivers. Sutasoma draws a sword of the hue of the blue lotus with an ivory grip, roars, and whirls it overhead as he circles a wary Sakuni who knows that the sword is as deadly as the rod of death. Brandishing that blade, Sutasoma displays, O Rajan, all the fourteen different kinds of manoeuvres. He wheels, whirls, makes side-thrusts, springs forward and leaps high, treads air, and flails forward and upwards.

Sakuni looses a clutch of arrows at his antagonist, who cuts them all down with his astonishing blade. Thwarted, Subala's son once more angrily unleashes a volley like serpents at the prince. With celerity and skill that equal Garuda's, Sutasoma cuts all these down as well with his marvellous blade. Then, with a most special shaft, Sakuni breaks that bright and magical sword in two, even as Sutasoma dances with it. Maharatha Sutasoma dances back six steps and hurls the half of the sword in his grasp, decked with gold and gemstones, at his enemy and rives Sakuni's bow.

Immediately, Sutasoma runs to the great chariot of Srutakirti for refuge. Sakuni takes up another massive invincible bow, and now turns towards the Pandava army.

A roar of alarm arises in that part of the army when they see the son of Subala on his chariot, fearlessly attacking the Pandava host. The onlookers

watch him mow down those large and proud divisions, bristling with heroes and their weapons, just as the chief of the Devas once razed the Daitya army.'"

CANTO 26

"Sanjaya says, 'Kripa, O Bhaarata, faces Dhrishtadyumna, like a Sarabha in the forest facing a proud lion. Held up by Kripa, Prishata's son Dhrishtadyumna cannot advance at all. Suddenly, all are afraid that Dhrishtadyumna's end is at hand. Maharathas and horsemen are dispirited and say, "Undoubtedly, Sharadvata's mighty son is burning to avenge Drona's death. Will Dhrishtadyumna escape the ire of Kripa? How will this vast army escape this danger? Will this fearsome Brahmana not kill all of us? His appearance is like that of the Destroyer himself, and he will fight like another Drona today. This awesome Acharya is invincible in battle and today the usually mild one is full of rare fury."

As Dhrishtadyumna and Kripa face each other, warriors of both armies exclaim similar fears. Drawing a deep breath of rage, Kripa begins to target all Dhrishtadyumna's vital marmas, while the Panchala stands dazed, not knowing what to do.

His charioteer tells him, "All is not well with you, O son of Prishata. Never before have I seen you so overcome and dismayed in battle. It is fortunate that the great Brahmana's arrows do not all find their mark. I will turn the chariot around, like a river turned back by the sea. I do not think that you can face the Brahmana today; he appears to have destroyed your assurance."

Dhrishtadyumna slowly replies, “My mind is numb, perspiration covers my limbs, my body trembles and my hair stands on end. Avoid a duel with the Brahmana and drive me to Arjuna. I promise you, Suta, if you take me safely to either Arjuna or Bhimasena, I will see that you prosper.”

The charioteer whips the horses and drives to where the mighty Bhimasena is battling your troops. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna’s chariot break away, Kripa gives chase and shoots hundreds of shafts at it, repeatedly blowing his conch, much like Indra pursuing the Danava Namuchi.

The invincible Sikhandi, the cause of Bhishma’s death, confronts Hridika’s son Kritavarman who wears a broad smile as he fights him. Sikhandi strikes the maharatha of the Hridikas with five keen broad-headed shafts in his shoulder-joint. Kritavarman first responds by piercing his enemy with sixty winged arrows and then with a single barb he smilingly breaks his bow. A livid Sikhandi picks up another bow, and shouting, “Wait, Wait!” looses ninety golden winged shafts, shot with great force but they merely glance off Kritavarman’s armour. Seeing this, Sikhandi splits Kritavarman’s bow with a razor-headed arrow and excoriates his enemy’s powerful frame with eighty arrows. Kritavarman bleeds from his limbs like a jar with holes in it leaking its contents. Covered in blood, the Bhoja king looks rather stunning, like a mountain, O Rajan, streaked with streams of fluid red chalk after a heavy rain.

The powerful Kritavarman takes up another bow and pierces Sikhandi’s shoulder. With his shafts sticking out from his shoulder-joint, Sikhandi looks like some majestic tree with spreading branches and twigs. Having wounded each other, the two resemble a pair of bulls that have gored each other. Determined to finish each other, the two maharathas circle each other a thousand times in their chariots.

Then Kritavarman shoots the son of Prishata with seventy shafts with wings of gold and whetted on stone, and a final dreadful arrow that almost fells the Panchala prince. Sikhandi staggers and supports himself by holding on to his flagstaff and gasps for breath. His charioteer whisks him away from the fight. After this defeat, O Rajan, the badly beaten Pandava army flees en masse from the field.’”

CANTO 27

"Sanjaya says, 'Swetavahana, O Rajan, overwhelms your army like the wind blowing away cotton heaps. The Trigartas, the Sibis, the Kauravas, the Salwas, the Samsaptakas and the Narayanas bear the fury of his onslaught. Satyasena, Chandradeva, Mitradeva, Satrunjaya, Susruta's son, Chitrasena, Mitravarman and Susarman, king of the Trigartas, surrounded by his brothers and sons, all mighty archers and famed at arms, abruptly counter-attack, shooting a solid swath of arrows at Arjuna, like a fierce flash flood of water rushing towards the ocean.

However, those warriors, in their hundreds of thousands, dissipate when they reach Arjuna, like snakes at the sight of Garuda. Though mowed down, they continue to fall on the son of Pandu like insects helplessly drawn to a blazing fire. Satyasena strikes Arjuna with three arrows, Mitradeva with three and sixty, Chandradeva with seven, Mitravarman with three and seventy arrows, Susruta's son with seven, Satrunjaya with twenty, and Susharman with nine. Thus beset by so many warriors, Arjuna retaliates radiantly; he pierces the son of Susruta with seven arrows, Satyasena with three, Satrunjaya with twenty, Chandradeva with eight, Mitradeva with a hundred, Srutasena with three, Mitravarman with nine, and Susarman with eight.

Dhananjaya kills king Satrunjaya with a burst of whetted arrows, beheads Susruta's son, and without a moment's pause, despatches

Chandradeva too. He continues fighting the other maharathas vigorously and stops them with five arrows each.

A spirited Satyasena hurls a formidable javelin at Krishna and utters a loud shout of triumph as the iron-tipped missile with a golden shaft passes through the left arm of the noble Madhava and dives into the earth. Krishna's whip and reins fall down from his hands. Seeing Vasudana's arm bleed, Arjuna's eyes turn crimson, and he says to his divine sarathy, "O Mahabaho, take the chariot to Satyasena, I mean to send him to Yama."

Kesava quickly picks up the whip and the reins and brings the chariot to face Satyasena's ratha. An angry Dhananjaya cannot countenance the Lord of the Universe being wounded; in a flash, he severs Satayasena's head from his throat with a wedge-headed arrow, and the large head decked with earrings falls spraying blood to the ground before all the army. Arjuna turns next on Chitravarman, despatches him with a slew of deadly shafts and then his suta with a keen calf-toothed barb. Still infuriated at seeing Krishna bleed, the mighty Partha mows down thousands of the Samsaptakas. He cuts off illustrious Mitrasena's head with a razor-headed arrow with wings of silver, and strikes Susharman through his shoulder.

The Samsaptakas themselves are now incensed and surround Dhananjaya and attack him with roars that resound all across the field. Maharatha Jishnu, of immeasurable soul and powerful like Sakra himself, is further roused and invokes the Aindrastra. From that single missile, thousands of arrows issue endlessly. Kurukshetra resounds with a din of breaking chariots and their standards, quivers, arrows, horses, spears, swords, maces, spiked clubs, darts, lances, axes, and sataghnis with wheels.

Heads decked with diadems, necklaces, angadas and keyuras, O Bhaarata, and gorgets, cuirasses, coats of mail, chatras and chamaras, lie scattered on the yawning field of absolute violence. Heads adorned with earrings, with beautiful eyes, each like a full moon, look like stars in the firmament. Bodies beyond all count of slain warriors lie on the ground, adorned with sandalwood paste, garlands of flowers and rich, fine robes. Kurukshetra looks like the heavens teeming with vapoury forms.

As Arjuna continually kills his enemies and strikes down elephants and horses with his lucific volleys, the battlefield soon becomes impassable with the bodies of slain princes, Kshatriyas of great prowess, and fallen elephants and horses, and there is no room for the wheels of Arjuna's chariot to move. My lord, it is as if the wheels themselves have stopped in

fright at the thought of moving through that bloody mire. However, then, his horses, endued with the speed of the mind or the wind, with a great effort again haul the magnificent ratha forward.

Thus does Pandu's son put your army to savage rout, and your troops turn tail without leaving even the least remnant to face the inexorable enemy. Pritha's son Arjuna is magnificent as a great smokeless fire.'"

CANTO 28

"Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana, O Rajan, fearlessly rounds on Yudhishtira, as the Dharmaraja devours your army with his missiles. Yudhishtira whirls around to face your son, as that maharatha comes charging recklessly towards him, roaring, "Stop, stop!"

Duryodhana replies with nine sharp arrows that pierce Yudhishtira and then gore his charioteer as well. Yudhishtira retaliates first with three and ten whistling arrows with wings of gold loosed at Duryodhana; with four more heavy shafts, he kills his four horses and with a fifth, beheads his charioteer. With the sixth arrow he drops the Kuru king's standard to the ground, with the seventh rives his bow, and with the eighth cleaves his sword. With yet another five arrows, Yudhishtira severely wounds Duryodhana, drawing fonts of blood from his cousin.

Duryodhana jumps down from his chariot and stands on the ground alone and in great peril. Karna, Aswatthaman, Kripa and others rush to defend him. Yudhishtira leads the Pandavas to confront them and a ferocious battle breaks out. They blow thousands of horns and conches and a din of a million voices arises as the Panchalas clash with the Kauravas; men, elephants and rathikas fight with no thought but to kill or die. The myriad duelling pairs of maharathas and animals, all using diverse kinds of weapons, present a resplendent sight as these Kshatriyas flit everywhere,

with great skill and energy, observing noble Kshatriya dharma again under Karna's command, after Drona's death.

However, soon enough, the battle degenerates into an atavistic encounter of madmen, in which the combatants show no ruth or temperance. The chariot-warriors target elephants; elephants gore horses and horsemen with their tusks, or seize and fling them down with great force so their bodies are blown apart; horsemen surround lone horses and massacre them; they attack elephants as these great beasts wander over the field, and slaughter them from behind. Many mighty tuskers, struck by cunning foot-soldiers with fierce spears, scream in pain and stampede, trampling their own troops as well as the enemy.

Some of the more intrepid and powerful foot-soldiers are able to kill many elephant-warriors and their beasts. Others astride massive elephants chase down the foot-soldiers, who run from them but are overtaken and gored and crushed to pulp beneath stupendous feet; yet others are seized in long curling trunks and flung high into the air and impaled deftly, horribly, on curved tusks. The elephants trap the other foot-soldiers adroitly under their stupendous feet and then roll them awfully along the ground until they are reduced to shapeless lengths of crushed flesh, bone and gore. Some the elephants seize with their trunks, whirl them around like fans and fling them far to their deaths.

Many elephants that confront other elephants are torn with spears, lances and darts—their cheeks, temporal lobes and between their tusks; while the bellies of others are slashed open so hot entrails and faeces fall out, and they sink dead onto their knees with dismal sighs and bellows.

In that dreadful battle, horsemen impale foot-soldiers with their lances and pin them down to the ground, where they writhe and die crying out piteously. Elephants attack chariot-warriors, and plucking them out of their rathas, hurl them down with great force, shattering their bodies. Cloth-yard shafts find their mark and kill some hulking mastodons, which collapse like mountain peaks struck by thunderbolts. Individual combatants pummel each other with their fists or, seizing each other by their hair, drag each other around before one is flung down and slain. Enemies push each other down violently and then set their feet on their enemy's chests and behead them. Some frenzied soldiers kick already dead men, some decapitate a falling enemy, while many run living ones through with spears and glinting blades.

In that atrocious melee, O Bhaarata, fighting men use all means, fair and foul, to prevail brutally over their foes. Some strike each other down slyly from behind, against all tenets of a dharma yuddha. In that macabre dimension of the general engagement, thousands of headless trunks stand upright on the grisly field for long moments before toppling over. Weapons and coats of mail, drenched with gore, look glorious, like starched cloth dyed gorgeous crimson.

The battle is like the tumultuary current of the Ganga in spate, as it seems to fill the whole universe with its uproar. In the manic grip of absolute bloodlust, the warriors fail to distinguish friend from enemy, as kings bent on victory cut down anyone they can reach, enemies and comrades alike. With broken chariots, fallen elephants, horses and dead men covering the bloody ground, Kurukshetra, field of truth, field of death, is soon impassable on all sides.

Karna slaughters the Panchalas while Dhananjaya decimates the Trigartas and Bhimasena annihilates the Kurus and all their elephant divisions. Thus, both the Kuru and Pandava troops destroy each other in the sole attempt to win great fame, as the sun passes his zenith in mid heaven.'"

CANTO 29

"Dhritarashtra says, 'I have heard from you, O Sanjaya, incidents of great poignancy and unbearable grief as well as of the losses that my sons have sustained. From what you say about the manner in which they fought the battle, it is my certain conviction that the Kauravas are doomed. Duryodhana lost his chariot in his duel with Yudhishtira, so how did his battle with the Dharmaraja continue? Tell me now about the battle which was fought in the afternoon? Tell me all in detail, for you are a skilled raconteur, O Sanjaya.'

Sanjaya says, 'When both armies engage each other in battle, your son Duryodhana, O Rajan, riding another chariot and seething like a poisonous snake, tells his charioteer, "Fly to where the royal son of Pandu clad in mail shines under the royal chatra held over his head."

Seeing him come, Yudhishtira, looking like an angry elephant, urges his own charioteer, "Ride straight at Suyodhana."

Then those two cousins, invincible maharathas both, meet again to fight and maul each other with arrows. Duryodhana splits Yudhishtira's bow; the Pandava, his eyes turning red, takes up another and destroys Duryodhana's bow and standard. Beside themselves with fury, they shower storms of shafts at each other; they are like a pair of angry lions or two raging bulls.

They circle each other, always probing to find a weakness and wound the other grievously. Bleeding and stuck with shafts shot from bows drawn

to their fullest stretch, the two look brilliant, like flowering kinsukas. They repeatedly give vent to tigerish roars and make echoing sounds with their palms and pull lustily on their bowstrings to make them twang loudly and blow their conches with great gusto.

Yudhishtira sees a momentary opening and gores your son’s chest with three thunderous shafts. Your royal son strikes back with five golden winged barbs and also flings a fierce spear like a blazing brand. As it flares towards him with a loud crackle, Yudhishtira cuts it into three slivers, and then drills Duryodhana with five arrows. The great and occult spear falls tamely, extinguished.

Your son seamlessly unleashes nine razorine arrows at Yudhishtira. Deeply struck, his blood spouting from those wounds, Yudhishtira, unmoved, looses a flashing missile at Suyodhana, which passes right through his body and leaves him dazed. Recovering swiftly, the incensed Duryodhana rushes at Yudhishtira, brandishing a mace even like Yama with his bludgeon, to kill his cousin, to have done with this endless war!

Yudhishtira casts a lance like a streak of lightning at Duryodhana, felling him in a dead faint. But then, Bhima remembers his own vow and says to Yudhishtira, “You must not kill him, O Rajan, for I have sworn to kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra.” Yudhishtira restrains himself and allows your son to live when he could have had his life.

At this time, Kritavarman arrives there and finds your royal son Duryodhana lying unconscious and in great distress and danger. Bhima takes up his mace, adorned with gold and flaxen strings, and attacks him. A tumultuous battle breaks out between your troops and the enemy that afternoon, O Rajan, and death rules Kurukshetra.’”

CANTO 30

"Sanjaya says, 'Your warriors led by Karna return to the battle which is indeed like the Devasura yuddha of old. Spurred on by the pandemonium created by the elephants, men, chariots, horses and conches, the maharathas, foot-soldiers, horsemen and elephant-warriors advance against the enemy and all lay into one another with every kind of weapon. Yet again the earth is littered with human heads that wear beautiful diadems and earrings, with faces that have strong teeth, fair faces and dark, handsome eyes and large noses—faces which resemble the lotus, the sun, or the moon.

Thousands upon thousands of elephants, men and horses lie dead, killed with spiked clubs, short bludgeons, darts, lances, hooks, bhusundis and maces. The blood that they shed forms another ghastly river on the battlefield and, with the boundless corpses of warriors and animals lying thickly everywhere, with their pallid faces and gaping wounds, the whole place looks like the domain of Yama, king of the dead, at the time of the pralaya at yuga's end.

O Kurusreshta, your troops and your sons who resemble the Devaputras, with a host of invincible warriors that shine with fierce beauty, ride against Satyaki, bull of Sini's race, with a great rumble and a roar as loud as that of the vast deep, like the army of the Asuras or that of the Devas. Karna, Suryaputra, like the king of the Devas himself in strength

and even like the younger brother of Indra, strikes Satyaki with arrows brilliant like the rays of the sun. Yuyudhana envelops Karna, his chariot, chargers and charioteer with a myriad of arrows like poisonous snakes.

Many atirathas of your army with elephants, chariots and foot-soldiers rush to support Karna, when they see him beset by Satyaki. However, the Pandava warriors led by the sons of Drupada swiftly rout that force vast as the ocean and cause a fearful carnage of men, chariots, steeds and elephants.

Meanwhile, the two shuras, Arjuna and Kesava, say their daily prayers, duly worship the Lord Bhava and join the battle against your troops, determined to exterminate them. The Kurus look fearfully at their chariot as it comes thundering at them, drawn by white horses, with banners floating in the wind and with a rumble like the roar of the clouds. Arjuna bends the Gandiva and, as if dancing on his chariot, fills the firmament and all the directions with a pralaya of arrows, not leaving the smallest space empty. Like the tempest scatters clouds, the son of Pandu smashes countless chariots that are magnificent as deva rathas, and sends as many war elephants, numberless horsemen with their horses, hastikas, charioteers and foot-soldiers to Yama's realm.

Duryodhana stands against that unassailable maharatha and veritable Yama, and strikes him with some perfect shafts. Arjuna demolishes your son's bow and standard, kills his sarathy and horses with seven thunder flashes, and with an eighth shaft cuts down his royal parasol so it falls in shame to the ground.

Seeing his chance, Arjuna unleashes a deadly devastra at his cousin, but intrepid Duryodhana slices it into seven pieces. Tireless Dhanajaya splits Aswatthaman's bow and kills his four horses, and he also rives the bows of Kripa and Dusasana, and destroys Kritavarman's bow as well as his standard and slaughters his horses.

Arjuna turns his attention to Karna, who is forced to leave Satyaki and defend himself. He finds Krishna with twenty arrows and Arjuna first with three telling barbs and then repeatedly with many dense volleys. Karna feels no fatigue despite fighting furiously, without let, like an enraged Indra. Meanwhile, Satyaki races up and drills Karna first with nine and ninety blinding arrows, and again with a hundred.

All the leading warriors among the Parthas—Yudhamanyu, Sikhandi, the sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas, and Uttamaujas, Yuyutsu, Madri's

twins and Dhrishtadyumna—surround Karna. The divisions of the Chedis, the Karushas, the Matsyas, Kaikeyas, the mighty Chekitana and Dharmarajan Yudhishtira, all with chariots, horses, elephants and valiant foot-soldiers, arrive and all together deluge Karna with different kinds of astras, shouting insults at him, both desperate and determined to kill him.

But the meridian Karna disperses his assailants with his astras like the tornado uprooting trees that stand in its way. Inflamed, he destroys chariot-warriors, elephants and riders, cavalry, and large bands of Pandavas foot-soldiers, who flee the field, devoid of weapons and with limbs torn and mangled. Then a smiling Arjuna thwarts Karna with his own astras which cover the sky, the earth, and all the points of the compass with cataracts of arrows. Arjuna's missiles fall like heavy clubs, spiked bludgeons, sataghnis and thunderbolts. Without mercy, he annihilates the Kaurava force—infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants; those that survive his transcendent onslaught wander dazed and helpless across death's field, giving vent to piteous wails. Great hosts of horses, men and elephants perish there or are grievously wounded and run away in fear.

While your warriors are thus engaged in a desperate battle, the sun enters the Asta. Darkness falls, and because of the deepening night and also the thick pall of dust, we can no longer discern what transpires between the two forces, who kills or who is slain. Dreading another night engagement, the Kaurava maharathas retire from the field with all their men. Seeing this, the Parthas are heartened that they have won the day, and they also withdraw from horrific Kurukshetra and return to their encampment. As they go, they mock and jeer at their enemies with diverse atonal sounds on their musical instruments, even as they loudly shout and sing the praises of Krishna and Arjuna.

After those shuras have withdrawn their army, all the troops and all the kings shower blessings upon the Pandavas as those sinless men retire to their tents with some joy in their hearts.

And now the rakshasas, pisachas, jackals and hyenas and every other kind of scavengers and carnivores, swarm onto the horrible field in droves after waiting all day as slavering onlookers to the carnage that has been like the bloody sport of Rudra himself gone berserk. With ravening appetites, with growls and grunts, and the sounds of flesh being torn from bone, bone being cracked and blood being quaffed in absolute glee, they fall greedily to the ample feast before them.'"

CANTO 31

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Apparently Arjuna massacred all of you at will. Indeed, it appears that the Destroyer himself would not escape if Arjuna took up arms against Him. Single-handed, Partha attacked Bhadra and gratified Agni. Alone, he subjugated the whole world, vanquished all its kings, and made them pay him tribute. Unaided, with his celestial bow, he slew the Nivatakavachas, and contended with Mahadeva who appeared before him in the guise of a hunter. By himself, he protected the Bharatas, and pleased Bhava. I say that the Kurus deserve praise for standing up to such a warrior. Tell me now, O Suta, what Duryodhana and the others did next.'

Sanjaya says, 'Struck by Arjuna's arrows, wounded and brought down from their chariots, divested of armour and deprived of weapons, their beasts slain, beaten by their enemies and burning with grief, the vain Kauravas enter their tents and once more take counsel together. They look like snakes with fangs drawn, venom removed and trodden upon.

Karna, sighing like an angry snake, wringing his hands, says to Duryodhana, "Arjuna is always careful, determined, and masterful and has great intelligence. Moreover, he has Krishna advising him with the proper course of action at the apt time. Today, he surprised us with that sudden storm of astras. Tomorrow, king of the world, I will frustrate all his designs."

Duryodhana says, “Tathaastu” and gives leave to his commanders and allies to retire to their own tents.

The night passes and, come the dawn, they ready themselves for battle again and sally forth in some good heart. They see Yudhishtira Dharmarajan’s invincible vyuha that he has formed with great care, exactly as prescribed by Brihaspati and Usanas. Duryodhana thinks of the mahatejasvin Karna, the paraviraha with the neck of a bull, equal to Purandara himself in battle, the Maruts in might and Kartavirya in energy and prowess. The heart of not just your son but those of all his troops turn to that hero, the Sutaputra, as one’s heart turns naturally to a dear friend in a time of grave danger and crisis.’

Dhritarashtra asks, ‘What does Duryodhana do next, O Suta, when all thoughts are turned towards Karna? Do my troops look at Radheya like men afflicted with cold turning their faces towards the sun? When the battle begins, does Karna fight manfully and how do the Pandavas counter him? Ah, mahabaho Karna, whose might equals that of Sakra or Vishnu, could indeed single-handedly destroy the Parthas and the Srinjayas. It was relying on Karna’s superhuman prowess that Duryodhana decided to go to war against the sons of Pandu. Now, seeing Yudhishtira dominate Duryodhana, Arjuna raze our legions and watching all the Pandavas display their great might, what does maharatha Karna do?

Alas that the foolish Duryodhana, relying on Karna, hopes to vanquish the Parthas, their sons and Krishna himself in battle. Ah, it is a thing of great grief that Karna, with all his strength and astras and unworldly genius, could not overcome the Pandavas. Sanjaya, without doubt, Fate is supreme and inexorable, and now the evil end of that game of dice has truly arrived! O Suta, in my dotage I have to endure, like so many burning arrows, these heart-rending sorrows brought down on us by all Duryodhna’s vile deeds.

Subala’s son Sakuni is reputed to be a clever and wise man, and Karna and Duryodhana are closer than brothers. When this is so, why is it that I hear only of the repeated defeats and deaths of my sons and their allies? There is truly no one that can face the Pandavas in battle. They break into my army like men into helpless women. Sanjaya, Sanjaya, only fate is supreme.’

Sanjaya says, ‘Rajan, think now of all your own sins—the game of dice that you allowed and encouraged, and all the other crimes that you acquiesced in and abetted, things that possibly most men have by now

forgotten. Yet, one should not dwell too much on the past since time and its terrible faults cannot be called back. What you hoped to acquire and achieve through your heinous crimes against your brothers' sons has not come to pass but rather its very reverse has, and the horrors of this most dreadful war of all—because, Rajan, you did not consider dharma when you chose to betray your nephews. Later, again, your heart full of dark greed, you chose to go to war against the Pandavas disregarding all the wise counsel you received that warned you of the dangerous folly of that course.

The carnage that we now witness on Kurukshetra, of our greatest Kshatriyas, is nothing but the natural fruit of the many grave sins and sufferings you inflicted on the sons of Pandu. But the time to rue all that is past now; so do not grieve, O Bharatarishabha. Listen again in detail to the progress of the gruesome war.

After all the others have left for their tents the previous night, Karna comes alone to Duryodhana and says, "Tomorrow, I will fight Pandu's illustrious son Arjuna. Either I will kill him, or he will kill me. For many reasons, and inscrutable fate as well, we two have not yet faced each other in a duel to death. Listen now, O Rajan, to what I say to you. Tomorrow I will not return from battle without killing Arjuna.

Now that our army has lost its greatest warriors, Partha will surely come to contend with me, and especially because I have spent the astra that his father Sakra gave me. The power of my devastras is equal to that of Arjuna's astras. O Bhaarata, Savyasachi was never my equal in speed, dexterity, in the range of arrows we command, in marksmanship, in physical strength, in courage, in the knowledge of astras, or in prowess.

My bow, the Vijaya, is the greatest weapon of its kind. Viswakarman, the celestial artificer, made it to please Indra. At its sound, the Daityas saw the ten points emptied and were defeated. Sakra gave that famed bow to Bhrigu's son Rama, who then gave it to me. With that bow, I will contend with the mighty-armed Arjuna, foremost of victorious warriors, even like Indra fighting the Daityas massed against him. This formidable Vijaya, the gift of Parasurama, is superior to the Gandiva for it was with this bow that the Bhargava subjugated Bhumi, three times seven over, and made lakes of Kshatriya blood to avenge his father Jamadagni. And tomorrow, O Duryodhana, I will bring rare joy to you and your friends by killing Arjuna with it. So let your mind be at rest, my beloved friend, and sleep in peace."

And the next morning, while the two armies are being arrayed, Karna comes again to Duryodhana. He says, "Today, you, your sons and grandsons will reign supreme over the whole earth with her mountains, forest and islands, without an enemy left to oppose you. There is nothing that I cannot achieve, especially since my purpose is to please you, just as a Rishi zealously devoted to dharma and with his soul under control cannot fail to achieve success. Arjuna will not be able to contain me in battle, even as a tree cannot bear the flames of a great fire.

However, I must tell you in what respect I am inferior to Arjuna. The string of his bow is celestial, and his two quivers are inexhaustible. His charioteer is Govinda and I have no sarathy like him. The Gandiva cannot be broken in battle. But Iam the elder Vijaya. So, with regard to our bows, I am superior to Arjuna.

Listen now to those matters in which Partha is superior to me. His charioteer is he of the Dasharha vamsa, Krishna whom all the worlds adore. His golden devaratha, which Agni gave him, is invincible, and his white gandharva horses have the speed of the mind. His celestial standard, the kapi-dhvaja with the image of the shining Hanuman, is awe-inspiring, and Krishna, who is the Creator of the universe, protects his chariot. Though inferior to Arjuna in these things, I still want to fight him.

This Salya, the ornament of royal courts, is Krishna's equal as a sarathy. If he becomes my charioteer, victory will certainly be yours. Let the invincible Salya be my sarathy. Let a number of carriages carry my long shafts as well as those that are fletched with vulture feathers. Let a number of goodly chariots, O Rajan, with excellent horses yoked, always follow me. And today I will prove better than Arjuna.

Salya is also superior to Krishna in another way. Both are masters of horses but there is no one equal to the king of the Madras in might of his arms. Just as there is no one to match me in archery, no one is Salya's equal in the knowledge of horses. If Salya agrees to be my sarathy, I will surely become Partha's superior; why, the very gods with Vasava at their head will not dare attack my ratha. And thus, I will vanquish Arjuna.

If you do what I ask, Duryodhana, you will see today, O Bhaarata, what Karna can achieve in battle. The very Devas and Asuras will not stand against me, so what need be said then of the sons of Pandu, who are mere men?"

After listening to Karna, your son salutes Radheya, and answers him with a happy heart, “O Karna, accomplish all that you say. Equipped with the best quivers and horses, a legion of chariots will follow you to battle. Let as many carriages that you wish bear your long shafts and vulture-feathered arrows. We, as well as all the kings, will follow you in battle.”

Your royal son then approaches the king of the Madras to persuade him to be Karna’s sarathy.”

CANTO 32

"Sanjaya says, 'Your son, O Rajan, humbly approaches maharatha Salya, king of the Madras, and affectionately says, "O you of true vows, O you of great good fortune, O shura who instils fear in hostile troops, you have heard Karna. I want to beseech you before all these great kings, bowing my head in humility, out of your love for me, to be Karna's sarathy. With you for his charioteer, Karna will vanquish my enemies. You are Krishna's equal and there is no one else who can take the reins of Karna's horses. Protect Karna then in all ways like Brahma does Maheswara and Krishna does Arjuna.

Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, you, the valiant king of the Bhojas, Subala's son Sakuni, Drona's son Aswatthaman and I, are now the backbone of our army. And so did we divide the Pandava army into different parts that each one of us was responsible to battle. Bhishma and the noble Drona accounted not only for their charges but some part of mine as well. Those two aged Naravyaghras achieved the most impossible feats and the enemy killed them only through deceit. Many other great warriors of our army have also attained swarga, casting off their lives after displaying untold heroism on the field of battle.

O Rajan, the Parthas who were fewer than us at first, have reduced the greater portion of my army and they outnumber us now. You must tell us

what we should do now. But, ah, great Salya do whatever we must to prevent the sons of Kunti from entirely exterminating what remains.

The Pandavas have slaughtered my bravest warriors. Only mahabaho Karna and you, who are the greatest maharathas in the world, remain, who are devoted to our cause. O Naravyaghra, Karna is determined to fight Arjuna today. My hopes of victory rest on him. There is no one else in the world other than you who can be the charioteer for Karna as Krishna is for Partha. With Kesava's guidance and protection, you see what Partha has achieved. Arjuna was never before so successful in battle, but here, united with Krishna, his prowess has increased beyond belief. Day after day, he has razed this vast army of Dhritarashtra, until only a mere fraction of it remains, under Karna's command and yours.

Mighty Salya, join forces with Karna today and, together, destroy the enemy. Karna is the greatest maharatha and you are the greatest sarathy. With you as his charioteer, Karna would be invincible even against Sakra leading the Devas, let alone the paltry Pandavas.

I beg you, do not doubt what I say. Even as Surya and Aruna together destroy the darkness, you must unite with Karna and kill Arjuna this day. Let the maharathas of the enemy flee at the sight of you both, radiant as two suns risen on the horizon. O Salya, even as darkness is dispelled at the sight of Surya and Aruna, let the Pandavas with the Panchalas and Srinjayas perish on seeing you and Karna."

But Salya is livid to listen to what Duryodhana says! His brow furrows into three deep crevasses, he repeatedly waves his arms and, rolling his bulging eyes red with anger, that Kshatriya of the massive arms and proud of his lineage, wealth, knowledge and strength, says, "You insult me, son of Gandhari, or surely you are suspicious of my loyalty, since you brazenly ask me, Salya, to be a sarathy to another.

You may regard Karna to be my superior and laud him but I do not consider Radheya to be my equal. O lord of the earth, assign to me a greater part of the enemy and I will destroy that portion in battle and then return home. Or, if you wish, I will fight the enemy single-handed and then watch my prowess!

Kurusattama, men like us never accept any assignment while stung and brooding over an insult. Do not entertain doubts about me and never humiliate me as you have done. Look at my two arms, strong as the Vajra. Behold my wonderful bow, and these arrows in my quivers that resemble

virulent snakes. Look at my ratha to which are yoked horses swift as the wind. Duryodhana, look at my golden gada tied up with hemp cords. I can split open the earth, smash down the mountains in my wrath, and dry up the oceans with my oorjas. When you know that I, a great Kshatriya, can put the enemy to rout on my own, why do you seek to make the charioteer of a lowborn Sutaputra?

It is a sin that you even think of assigning such a base and menial task to me! Being Karna's immeasurable superior, I will not obey the commands of a lowly man, and a sinner besides. I came to fight of my own will and out of love for you. Now if you ask me, a great Kshatriya, to obey an evil, lowly Sutaputra, you will surely incur the sin of confusing the superior with the inferior.

Brahma created the Brahmanas from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. As a result of the mixing of these four varnas, O Bhaarata, new ones have been created, which consist of those born of men of superior varnas marrying women of inferior varnas, as well as those born of women of higher castes marrying beneath themselves. According to the shastras, the Kshatriyas are established on the earth as the protectors of the other classes, and they acquire and distribute wealth; the Brahmanas assist at yagnas, teach and accept pure dakshina; the Vaishyas are occupied in agriculture, animal husbandry and giving dakshina; Sudras have been ordained to be the servants of the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas.

So also, the Sutas are the servants of Kshatriyas, and not the other way around! Listen to me, Anagha. I am born into a race of Rajarishis, royal sages, and my coronal locks have undergone the sacred bath. I am also acknowledged the world over as a great maharatha. I deserve the worship and the praises that vabdhis and magadhis render and sing. Being all this, I cannot stoop to be the suta of a suta's son in battle. I will never fight again after being subjected to such a humiliation. Allow me, O son of Gandhari, to return home."

Saying this, an angry Salya stands up quickly and begins to stalk out of that gathering of kings. However, your son, from affection and great regard, stops him and in a sweet and conciliatory manner, tries to pacify him, "Without doubt, O Salya, what you say is true, but I beg you listen to what I have in mind. Karna is not superior to you, nor am I suspicious of you, Rajan. The noble king of the Madras will never do anything wrong and is

rightly called Artayani or the descendant of those who always told the truth. O giver of honours, you are called Salya since you are like a barbed arrow to your enemies. O giver of large dakshina at yagnas, may you achieve all that you have said that you will accomplish.

Neither the son of Radha nor I am superior to you in valour that I would ask you to be Karna's charioteer. However, just as Karna is superior to Arjuna as a warrior, the world regards your expertise in managing horses to be better if not twice that of Krishna's."

Salya takes pause and replies, "I am gratified, Duryodhana, that you acknowledge in front of all these troops that I am superior to Devaki's son. For this I will do what you ask and become Karna's sarathy when he engages Partha in battle. However, let Vikartana's son understand that I will say whatever I please to him."

O Bhaarata, your son and Karna readily accept what Salya wants, both of them saying, "Tathaastu!"

CANTO 33

'Duryodhana says, "Listen, O king of the Madras, as I tell you in detail about the battle long ago between the Devas and the Asuras as it was related by Maharishi Markandeya to my father. That was a great battle indeed of which the evil Taraka was the cause. We know that the Devas defeated the Daityas and, after their defeat, the three sons of Taraka, named Tarakaksha, Kamalaksha and Vidyunmalin, performed a tapasya of unprecedented severity and kept the most lofty and austere vratas. They emaciated their bodies through harsh penance and because of their self-restraint, atonement, vows and contemplation, Pitamaha Brahma was pleased with them and granted them boons. Together they prayed to Him for the boon of immunity from death, from all beings and forever. The divine Lord and Master of the worlds said to them, 'There is no boon that can confer immorality. So ask me for some other boon that you want.'

The three brothers conferred among themselves long and finally, bowing to Brahma, said, 'O Pitamaha, give us this boon. We will dwell in three sky cities and, with your blessings, roam safely over the earth. After a thousand years, our three cities and we will come together as one. That greatest of gods who can pierce the three cities at that time, with a single shaft, will, O Lord, destroy us.'

Saying, 'Tathaastu—so be it', Brahma left them and returned to his own lofty world.

Filled with joy at having obtained those boons, the three sons of Taraka asked the peerless Asura Mayaa, who is to the Daityas and Danavas what Viswakarman is to the Devas, and whom all the Asuras worship, to create their triad cities for them.

Mayaa wrought, with the vast power he had through his own tapasya, three cities without parallel. One was made of gold and was set in swarga; the second was created with silver and remained aloft in the sky, and the third was made from black iron upon the earth. These, together, cities of every marvel, were called the Tripura and they orbited one another synchronously.

Each city had houses, mansions, lofty walls and porches, and measured a hundred yojanas in width and a hundred in length. Though full of lordly palaces set close to each other, yet the streets were wide and spacious and adorned with mansions and grand gateways. The beautiful city of gold belonged to the illustrious Tarakaksha, the silver city to Kamalaksha, and the iron one to Vidyunmalin. Those three Daitya kings soon assailed the three worlds with their power, and continued to reign from the sanctuary of their Tripura, and, in their swelling hubris, began to ask, 'Who is this Creator?'

To these greatest of Asuras, who had no equal, flocked millions of proud and flesh-eating Danavas whom the Devas had once vanquished and driven into exile; now they streamed into the three cities and Taraka's sons welcomed their magnificent people, who had endured untold hardship hiding from the hunting Devas in deserts and mountain caves and other hidden fastnesses; they welcomed their people with opulent mansions and great wealth. Indeed, Mayaa himself fulfilled all their needs and they lived fearlessly in luxury and grandeur, relying upon him. Whenever any Asura living in the triple cities desired anything, Mayaa fulfilled his wish through his powers.

Tarakaksha had a heroic and mighty son named Hari. He underwent the most austere of tapasyas and gratified the Grandsire. Hari prayed for a boon of him, saying, 'Grant us a lake in our city, such that when persons slain by weapons are immersed in it, they emerge alive and with redoubled strength.'

With Brahma's boon, Hari, son of Tarakaksha, created a lake in his city that revived the dead. In whatever manner a Daitya died, as soon as they immersed him in that lake, he was reborn in his old form and appearance.

Thus restoring their dead, the Daityas began to visit the three worlds with grief and oppression. Because these enemies of the gods sustained no diminution in battle, they became greedy and arrogant, and savagely, recklessly, brought destruction to cities and towns across the universe.

Filled with pride at the boons they had received, they now hunted the Devas and their followers everywhere, wreaking violent revenge on the lords of light for the privation and torment they themselves had suffered. The demons roamed at will through sacred vanas and other realms dear to the Devas, through the peaceful sacred asramas of Rishis, and brought havoc and desecration with them wherever they went, with no regard or respect for anybody.

While the demons persecuted the three worlds, Sakra led the Maruts against them in their cities and cast his Vajra at them from every side. However, through Brahma's blessing, the three cities, the Tripura, were inviolable and Indra could make no dint on any of them nor harm any of the Asuras that lived in them in the least.

Indra and the Devas went to the Grandsire Brahma, to complain to him about the depredations of the Asuras. They told him all about the violence of the Asuras and, bowing before him, asked the divine Pitamaha of the worlds how Tripura, the triple city, could be destroyed.

The illustrious four-faced Deity heard Indra and reassured the Devas, 'He who causes you sorrow offends me too. All Asuras are evil and have always hated the Devas. I am impartial to all beings but it is my law that we must kill those who do not follow dharma. You can destroy Tripura only if you strike all the three cities with a single astra. No one except the great Lord Siva can achieve this. You Adityas should go and beseech Rudra, to become your warrior and he will destroy the Asuras and their cities for you.'

At this, Sakra and the Devas led by Brahma, sought the protection of Sankara, Vrishavahana, Bhava without compare with all their hearts and souls, while chanting the eternal words of the Vedas. They praised that dispeller of all fears, that Universal and Supreme Soul, the One whose Soul pervades all and worshipped him with a stern and most demanding tapasya. And when the Devas had perfectly stilled their bodies, minds and hearts in penance, they saw Umapati Siva as a mass of glory, which has no remote equal in the universe, that Source of everything, that sinless, taintless Self.

They saw that Deity, the Mahatman whose diverse forms they had individually conceived and imagined in their own hearts, and they were all filled with bliss and absolute wonder, as well as some trepidation. Beholding that Unborn one, Vishveswara, the embodiment of all creatures, the Devas and the Maharishis, the Devas all prostrated before blazing Mahadeva and touched the earth with their brows.

He greeted them lovingly, saying, 'Welcome, O Devas!' and raising them up, the lustrous Sankara smilingly asked, 'Tell us the object of your tapasya and your coming here.'

At this, the trembling Devas were somewhat comforted and said, 'Our salutations to you, O Lord, our salutations a thousand times! Our reverences and greetings to you who are the source of all the Devas, O Pinakin who are full of wrath. We give our salutations to you who once destroyed the yagna of Daksha Prajapati and to you who are adored by all the lords of creatures.

Our salutations to you who are always praised, to you who deserve to be praised, to you who are Death's self.

Our salutations to you who are red, to you who are fierce and are blue-throated Nilakantha.

Our salutations to you, O Sulin, who cannot be baffled, O lotus-eyed Kamalaksha.

Our salutations to you who fight with the greatest of weapons, to you who deserve all praise; to you who are pure, to you who are destruction itself, to you Sarvatapana and are irresistible.

Our salutations to you who are the Brahman, to you who lead the life of a brahmachari; to you who are Isana, who are immeasurable, to you who are the Great and Subtle Controller, to you who are clad in tattered deerskin, and who are always engaged in tapasya.

Salutations to you who are tawny, to you who observe the most impossible vratas, to you who wear animal skins; to you who are the sire of Kumara, to you who wield the very greatest of weapons; to you who destroy the afflictions of all that seek your shelter.

Salutations to you who destroy all haters of Brahmanas, to you who are the lord of all trees, the lord of all men, the lord of all kine, and always the lord of yagnas.

Salutations to you who are always at the head of armies; to you, O Trilochana, to you O Mahashaktimaya.

We devote ourselves to you in thought, word and deed. Be gracious to us, most kindly Lord.'

Gratified by their worship, the Holy One reassured them, saying, 'Let your fears be dispelled. Tell me, what can I do for you?'"

CANTO 34

'Duryodhana continued, "O Salya, after that Mahatman Siva dispelled the fears of the multitude of Pitris, Devas and Rishis, Brahma greeted Sankara, and said for the benefit of the universe, 'Through your favour, O Lord, the dominance of all creatures is mine. I gave a great boon to the Danavas. Only you, O Lord of the Past and the Future, can destroy those evil spirits who show no regard for anyone and are the enemies of these Devas. The Devas seek your protection and beg you to show them kindness. Slay the Danavas, O Trisulin, and through your grace, let the universe be restored to peace and joy. O Trilokapati, we all seek refuge in you.'

Sthanu said, 'All your enemies will be slain. However, I will not kill them by myself. The enemies of the Devas possess great power. Therefore, all of you united together can destroy your enemies and you shall have half my might as well. Unity is great strength.'

The Devas replied, 'We have experienced their power and we think that the Danavas have twice our energy and might.'

The Holy One said, 'The sinful Asuras, who have transgressed dharma and persecuted you, shall be destroyed. With half of my energy and power, we will kill all these enemies of yours.'

The Devas pleaded, 'O Maheswara, we will not be able to bear half of your oorjas. On the other hand, with half of our combined power, you can

kill our enemies.'

The Holy One said, 'If you truly cannot support half of my power, then, using half of your combined strength, I will kill them.'

The Devas acquiesced, 'Tathaastu.'

Sankara took half their combined energies unto himself and became superior in prowess to all in the universe and so came to be called Mahadeva. Mahadeva then said, 'With my bow and astra, I will burn your enemies from my chariot. Therefore, O Devas, see to my chariot, bow and astras even now, so that I may, this very day, cast the Asuras down.'

The gods said, 'O Someswara, we will gather what we need from the three worlds and have Viswakarman create an unequalled chariot for you.'

Soon, the fashioning of that chariot began and the Devas made Vishnu, Soma and Hutasana the astras for Sankara to use. Agni became the staff, Soma the arrowhead and Vishnu the point, O Rajan, of that greatest of arrows.

The Devi Bhumi, with her great cities, towns, mountains, forests, islands and the homes of different creatures, herself became the chariot.

The Mandara Mountain was its axle, and the great river Ganga, its jangha; and the points of the compass, cardinal and subsidiary, were the adornments of the unparalleled ratha.

The constellations were its shaft; the Krita yuga became its yoke; Vasuki, that best of Nagas, was the kuvara of that ratha. The Himavat and Vindhya mountains were its apaskara and adhishthana; and the Udaya and the Asta mountains the wheels of that ratha.

They made the Ocean, the abode of the Danavas, its other axle and the Saptarishi, the seven Sages, became the protectors of the chariot's wheels. Ganga, Saraswati, Sindhu and the Sky were its dhura; all the other rivers and all the waters of the world were the bonds which held the several limbs of that chariot together.

Day and Night and the other divisions of time, the kaalas and kaasthas and the rest, and the Seasons, became its amukarsha. The planets and the stars became its great railing; Dharma, Artha and Kama, united together, were its trivenu. The herbs and the creepers, decked with flowers and fruits, formed its bells.

The Sun and the Moon formed the other two wheels of that great ratha. Day and Night became its auspicious wings on the right and left. The ten foremost Nagas, with Dhritarashtra at their head, formed the other shaft of

that chariot; the Sky was made its other yoke, and the clouds of the pralaya, Samvartaka and Balahaka, were the leathern strings of the yoke.

The two Sandhyas, Dhritri, Medha, Sthiti and Sannati, and the firmament spangled with planets and stars, were the skins used to cover that chariot.

The Lokapalas—Indra, Varuna, Yama and Kubera—were the steeds of that chariot. Kalaprishtha, Nahusha, Karkotaka, Dhananjaya and the other Nagas became the ropes that tied the mane of the steeds. The cardinal and the subsidiary directions became the reins of the horses yoked to that chariot. The Vedic sound Vashat became the goad, and the Gayatri was the string attached to that goad.

The four auspicious days were the traces of the horses, and the Pitris presiding over them were made the hooks and pins.

Karma, dharma, tapasya and artha were the chords of that chariot. Manas, the Mind, became the ground upon which that chariot stood, and Speech the tracks upon which it was to ride.

Beautiful banners of various hues floated in the air. With lightning and Indra's bow attached to it, that blazing chariot shone with fierce light.

That space of time which, once of yore, had been fixed as a Year during the noble Isana's mahayagna, was made the bow, and the goddess Savitri became the thundering twang of the bowstring. They made a celestial suit of armour, encrusted with priceless gemstones from across the universe, impenetrable and effulgent from the wheel of Time. That golden mountain Meru was the flagstaff, and the clouds streaked with flashes of lightning became its banners.

Thus equipped, that chariot shone like a blazing fire in the midst of priests officiating at a vast yagna. Beholding that chariot equipped with the energies of the entire universe united together in one place filled the gods with wonder. At last, they came and said to the illustrious Lord Sarveswara that the chariot was ready.

After the Devas had wrought that best of chariots, O Naravyaghra, to destroy the Asuras, Sankara placed upon it his own devastras. Making the sky its flagstaff, he placed upon it his Bull Nandin. The Brahmana's rod, the rod of Death, Rudra's rod and Fever became the protectors of the sides of that chariot and stood with faces turned outwards. Atharvan and Angirasa became the protectors of the chariot-wheels of that illustrious warrior.

The Rigveda, the Samaveda and the Puranas stood at the head of that chariot. The Itihasas and the Yajurveda became the protectors of the cosmic ratha's rear. All the sacred vaks and all the vigyanas stood around it, as well as all the holiest, most potent mantras and the Vedic sound of Vashat and Pranava, the syllable AUM, standing in the van of that chariot, rendered it magnificent and ineffable.

Having made the Year adorned with the six seasons his bow, Siva made his own shadow the irrefragable string of that dhanusha. The illustrious Rudra is Death's self. The Year became his bow; Kala Ratri, the Death-night, therefore, which is Rudra's shadow, became the indestructible string of that bow. The universe consists of Agni, Soma and of Vishnu. Vishnu is the Soul of the holy Bhava of immeasurable tejas. So Vishnu, Agni and Soma became the arrow and because of this the touch of that bowstring became unbearable to the Asuras.

Then the Lord Sankara infused into that arrow his own irresistible and universal wrath, the unbearable fire of anger, born of the fury of Bhrigu and Angirasa. He called forth Nila Rohita, dreadful deity robed in skins, refulgent as ten thousand suns, and shrouded by the fire of super-abundant energy, ablaze with splendour that cannot be described.

To humiliate even those who are difficult to discomfit, that ever-victorious One, that slayer of all haters of Brahman, who is also called Hara, that rescuer of those of dharma and destroyer of the unrighteous, was splendour itself, the first Light of all things. The illustrious Sthanu was accompanied by many beings of fearsome might and forms with the speed of the mind who could erase all foes, as if with all the fourteen faculties of the Soul awake about him. With his limbs for their refuge, this entire universe of mobile and unmoving creatures that were present there, O Rajan, was completely wonderful and presented a transcendent, most incredible spectacle, an unprecedented appearance.

Seeing his chariot fully prepared and equipped, the illustrious Rudra put on his armour and picked up his bow and that celestial astra born of Soma and Vishnu and Agni. The gods then commanded that foremost of Devas, Vayu, to breathe all his fragrance over that most powerful Deity. The Maharishis, the Gandharvas, the throngs of Devas and the different tribes of Apsaras worshipped, sang and danced as that boon-giving Lord, armed with sword, bow and arrow, ascended the chariot.

Smiling, he asked the Devas, 'Who will drive my ratha?'

The Devas answered him, saying, ‘Whoever you appoint, O Maheswara, will become your sarathy!’

Siva replied, ‘Think quickly and make him my sarathy who is better than me!’

Hearing this, the Devas rushed to Brahma and said, ‘We have accomplished everything that you ordered us to do to put an end to the Danavas. Rudra is happy with us and we have created a ratha of cosmic parts and equipped it with wonderful weapons. The Pinaka wielding Hara is ready to ride forth and battle the Danavas.

The four Vedas are its steeds; the earth with her mountains is the chariot and the stars are the adornments of that ratha. However, we do not know who is to be made the sarathy since he must be superior to all these. O Pitamaha, that ratha is equal to you, and Hara is its warrior. His armour, astras and bow are ready. Other than you we can find none who is fit to be his sarathy. You have every accomplishment and are superior to all the Devas. For our victory and the destruction of our enemies, mount the chariot, O Brahma, and take up the reins of those wondrous steeds. Earlier, you assured us that you would help us. It is only appropriate, O Lord, that you now keep the word you gave us.’

The Devas bowed their heads to the Grandsire and sought to induce him to accept being the charioteer and to please Trilokapati.

Brahma said, ‘All that you have said, O Devas, is true. I will hold the reins of the steeds for the Kapardin when he rides forth into battle.’

Thus, the gods made the Creator of the worlds, the Grandsire Brahma the sarathy of the noble Isana. They all worshipped him as he prepared to ascend the chariot; the horses, gifted with the speed of the wind, bowed their heads to the chariot that was Bhumi Devi. Scintillant with his own tejas, Brahma took the reins and the whip and said to Sthanu Mahadeva, ‘Ascend the chariot, Lord.’

Siva climbed into the chariot, taking with him the ultimate astra made of Vishnu, Soma and Agni, which caused the enemy to tremble. The Maharishis, the Gandharvas, the Devas, and the diverse tribes of Apsaras worshipped Sureshwara. Resplendent, the boon-giving Lord, armed with sword, astra and bow, stood on the chariot causing the three worlds to blaze forth with his own effulgence.

The great Lord Mahadeva once more said to the Devas with Indra at their head, ‘Do not fear nor doubt my ability to destroy the Asuras. Know

that this astra has already killed them.'

The Devas said, 'It is true! The Asuras have already been slain.'

Indeed, the Devas were certain that the divine Lord's words were true, and they were exceedingly happy. Then that Lord of the Devas drove off upon that incomparable chariot, O Rajan, with all the gods in attendance and worshipped all the while by his Ganas that always wait upon him. Others, too, who live on meat, who were invincible in battle, and who danced in joy, ran wildly on all sides, shouting jubilantly and raucously at one another. Rishis of great good fortune, Tapasvins endued with the highest qualities, as well as the Devas, wished Him success.

When Mahadeva rode into war, the entire universe and all the Devas were full of rare bliss, O Rajan. The Rishis present worshipped him with hymns and enhanced his glory. Millions upon millions of Gandharvas played upon all kinds of musical instruments at the hour of his setting out.

With Brahma, Vishweswara set out to fight the Asuras, and He smilingly said, 'Uttamam, Uttamam! Fly, O Deva, to where the Daityas are. Today you will see the might of my arms when I slay them.'

Brahma whipped those horses, swift as the wind or thought, which all the worlds revered, and they seemed to devour the skies as they sped towards the Daityas and the Danavas' triple city of Tripura, taking Bhava the Illustrious into battle for the Devas. During that flight, his Bull bellowed, filling all the points of the sky. Just hearing that sound like no other, many of the descendants and followers of Taraka, those enemies of the gods, breathed their last, while others stood unmoved and ready for battle.

Then, suddenly, Sthanu, armed with his trident, erupted in wild wrath, terrifying all the living and the three worlds to tremble. Frightful portents appeared as he aimed that universal astra and the Earth chariot seemed to sink down because of the weight of Soma, Agni and Vishnu that were the shaft, as well as the weight of Brahma, Rudra himself and his bow. At this, Narayana issued out of the head of the astra, assumed the form of a bull and raised up that tremendous ratha. Meanwhile, the chariot had sunk low and the enemy began to shout triumphantly at seeing this. Incensed and more terrible than terror, Mahadeva standing on the head of his bull and on the back of his steeds began roaring so it seemed the very galaxies spun away from the places in the chasmal firmament.

Standing there and eyeing the Danava city, Rudra ablaze cut off the teats of the horses and split the hooves of the bull! From that day, all bulls and cows have cloven hooves and, O Rajan, horses came to be without teats.

Sarva strung his bow and aimed that astra beyond all astras, with which he had united the Pasupatastra, which is his own weapon, and waited in fathomless dhyana. And as Rudra stood waiting, his bow and its missile at the ready, the three cities spun together into confluence and became a single city. Tumultuous was the joy of the Devas, and along with the Siddhas and the Maharishis, they shouted 'Jaya!', and hailed Maheswara.

As soon as the Tripura appeared as one before that God, he drew his bowstring to his ear and unleased the astra shaft which contained the might of the whole universe at the triad city. His aim was unerring and that astra plunged burning into the Tripura and Mayaa Danava's cities of marvel fell out of the sky down towards the Earth. The screams and roars of the Asuras filled all the directions. Siva, now a Spirit of pure and absolute wrath, torched the three cities, incinerating all the Asuras inside them, and flung them into the Western ocean. Thus did Maheswara burn the Tripura in rage, and made ashes the Danavas for the good of the three worlds.

Trilochana then quenched the fire born of his own wrath, the fire of the apocalyptic astra, saying, 'Do not reduce the three worlds to ashes.'

Thus were restored the Devas, the Rishis and the three worlds to their natural state, and they all gave praise to the unrivalled Sthanu. With their objective accomplished, the Devas led by Brahma, returned to their homes after paying profound obeisance to and with the leave of Rudra.

Thus, Maheswara, Lord of both the Devas and the Asuras, did what was for the benefit of all the worlds.

Ah, great Salya, even as Pitamaha Brahma, Creator of the worlds, that Supreme Deity of unfading glory, became Rudra's charioteer when Siva consumed the Tripura, will you take the reins of the horses of the noble Karna, when he rides out today to kill Arjuna and win this war?

There is not the slightest doubt, O Naravyaghra, that you are superior to Krishna, to Karna, and to Phalguna. In battle, Karna is like Rudra, while you are like Brahma in strategy. Together you can vanquish my enemies even if they are like the Asuras of the Tripura. You must help Karna, O Salya, so that he can raze the Pandava troops and kill Swetavahana, who has Krishna for his sarathy. Karna, our kingdom, our victory, and we,

depend on you, O Salya of the Madras. I beseech you again, take up the reins of Karna's wonderful horses, and become his sarathy!"

When Duryodhana sees that Salya still hesitates, he says, "Listen to another ancient tale, which a virtuous Brahmana once related in the presence of my father. When you hear these words full of dharma, O Salya, do what you must without any scruple or hesitation.

Jamadagni of severe tapasya was born in the race of the Bhrigus. His son born with great tejas and every virtue was the celebrated Rama. In order to acquire astras, he practised stern penance with a cheerful soul, observed all vows, kept his senses under control, and gratified the God Mahadeva. Because of his devotion and tranquillity of heart, Siva was pleased with him and, knowing the desire he cherished in his heart, showed himself to Rama and said, 'O Rama, I bless you. I am pleased with you and I know what you want. Make your soul pure and I will give you all that you desire as well as all the devastras. These astras, O son of Bhrigu, will make ashes of a man who does not know how to use them or who does not deserve them.'

When the son of Jamadagni heard the Trisulin, he bowed and said, 'O Lord, give me, who am always devoted to you, the astras whenever you think me fit to have them.'

With further stringent tapasya and by restraining his senses, observing vratas, through worship, offerings, and with yagnas and homa performed with mantras, Rama worshipped Sarva for many long years. At last, pleased with the noble Rama, Mahadeva described him in the presence of his divine spouse Uma as one who possessed many virtues: 'This Rama, of determined vratas, is always devoted to me.'

Happy with Rama of the Bhrigus, the Lord Sankara thus repeatedly proclaimed his virtues in the presence of Devas and the Rishis, O Salya. Meanwhile, the Daityas grew in strength and, blinded by pride and folly, they imposed themselves on the Devas. The Devas united and strove to destroy their demonic enemies but to little effect. They sought out Umapati Maheswara and began to serve him with devotion, pleading, 'Kill our enemies, O Lord.'

Sankara promised the Devas that their enemies would be destroyed and summoned Rama, the descendant of Bhrigu, and said to him, 'O Rama, kill all these enemies of the Devas, for me and for the good of all the worlds.'

At this, Rama asked the boon-giving Trilochana, 'What strength have I, O Lord? I have no astras to destroy the Danavas, who are accomplished

warriors and invincible in battle.'

Maheswara replied, 'You go at my command, so you will slay these enemies. Vanquish them all and you will acquire numerous virtues.'

Rama accepted the Lord's command, performed propitiatory rites for his success, and went forth against the Danavas. He said to those mighty enemies of the Devas, by now completely possessed by folly and pride, 'You Daityas, who are fierce in battle, Mahadeva has sent me to defeat you.'

A battle began and the delighter of the Bhargavas massacred the Daityas with strokes of his axe reminiscent of the Vajradhari; he went back to Mahadeva bearing on his body many wounds acquired during the battle, which were instantly healed at Sthanu's touch. Pleased by his feat, the lustrous God gave diverse kinds of boons to Rama. Satisfied with Rama, the trident-wielding Mahadeva said, 'The pain that you have suffered from the injuries on your body is evidence of the superhuman feats that you have achieved, O delighter of the Bhrigus. Now receive from me the devastras that you desired.'

After he had obtained all the devastras and the boons that he had wanted, Rama bowed low to Siva and, with the leave of Mahadeva, that Maharishi went his way.

This is the story the Brahmana once narrated in the presence of my father. O Salya, tiger among kings. You know that the same Rama, the Bhargava, gladly imparted the entire astra shastra to our noble Karna. If Karna had any fault, Rama would never have given him his devastras.

Listen further to me now, mighty Madra. I do not believe that Karna is from the Suta varna. He must be the son of a Deva, born into the Kshatriya varna. Perhaps he was abandoned in his infancy so that his varna would stand revealed by his noble lineaments and accomplishments. No, by no means could this Karna have been born a Suta. Born wearing a golden kavacha and kundalas, this mighty maharatha with long arms, who resembles Surya himself, could not have been born to a common woman no more than a tiger could be born to a doe.

Each of his arms is like the trunk of a prince of elephants. Behold his chest so broad and able to resist the weapons of every foe. Karna cannot be an ordinary man. Endued with such great valour, this disciple of Parasurama Bhargava, O Rajan, is a noble being, at the very least a Kshatriya and I think even a Devaputra, the son of some great god.'

CANTO 35

'Duryodhana continues, "This was how Brahma, Grandsire of all the worlds, became the charioteer of Rudra the warrior. The charioteer, O king of the Madras, should be superior to the warrior on the chariot. Therefore, take the reins of Karna's chariot. The Devas once chose Brahma because they felt that he was greater than Sankara. So, as you are Karna's superior, we now choose you, and you must take charge of Karna's ratha."

Salya says, 'O Bhaarata, I have heard this celestial itihasa of how Brahma was Bhava's charioteer, and how the Asuras were all destroyed with one astra. Krishna, too, must already know the story, for he knows the past and the future, in their every detail, which is why he became Partha's sarathy. If Karna somehow succeeds in killing Arjuna, it will force Krishna to take up arms himself in the war. If he does, that bearer of the sankha, chakra and gada will consume your army. There is no one who can remotely stand up to that illustrious one of Vrishni's vamsa if he comes to fight."'

"Sanjaya says, 'To the king of the Madras, your mahabaho son replies, "Do not think disparagingly of Vaikartana; he is the greatest of all warriors and knows all our Shastras. The Pandava troops flee in terror from the twang of his bow and the sound of his palms losing his arrows. You have seen how he killed Ghatotkacha, the master of maya. Why, all these days Arjuna was afraid to confront Karna. Radheya even beat the mighty

Bhimasena with the horn of his bow, and harshly called him ‘Fool’ and ‘Glutton’. Madri’s two brave sons also he defeated, though, for some unknown reason, he did not take their lives when they stood helpless before him.

Karna vanquished the heroic Satyaki, lord of the Satwatas and best of all the Vrishni warriors; he shattered Yuyudhana’s chariot. Repeatedly he had the better of the Srinjayas led by Dhrishtadyumna. Karna is a great maharatha who, when roused, can contain even Purandara armed with his thunderbolt in battle.

You, too, Salya, are a master of every weapon as well as of all the branches of learning. There is no one on earth who is your equal. Irresistible to your enemies you are like a savage dart, and it is for this that they call you Salya. The Satwatas jointly could not get the better of you, so how is Krishna superior to you? Just as Krishna will bear the burden of the Pandava troops after Partha is dead, you will shoulder the responsibility of this great Kaurava army if Karna dies in battle.

And hear me, O sire, for your sake I would willingly follow my dead brothers and the other heroic kings of the earth!”

Salya says, “O son of Gandhari, I am happy to hear you say before our troops that I am superior to the son of Devaki! And so I accept what you ask of me. I will take the reins of the celebrated Vaikartana’s ratha when he rides against Arjuna. Yet, I have one inviolable condition. We must have a solemn compact between us: I must be allowed to say whatever I wish to him, while we ride in battle.”

Your son, O Rajan, says, “Tathaastu!” in the presence of all the Kshatriyas; Duryodhana is delighted that he has prevailed on Salya to be Karna’s sarathy, and he embraces Karna in joy. All the bards and panegyrists present eulogise your son, who, his eyes shining, says again to Karna, “Finish all the Parthas even like Indra slaying the Danavas!”

Though Salya finally agrees to be Karna’s sarathy, Karna says to Duryodhana, “The king of the Madras does not appear to be very happy to accept this role. O Rajan, speak to him again in sweet words.”

At this, Duryodhana, prince of great wisdom and diplomacy, speaks again to Salya in his deep voice, which seems to fills all Kurukshetra. “O Salya, Karna feels that he should fight Arjuna today and kill him. I ask you humbly again to guide Karna’s horses in battle. Just as Krishna is Partha’s

mentor and protector, so must you counsel and protect Radheya from every danger today."

Now Salya embraces your son and joyfully answers him, "If this is what you want, O handsome and royal son of Gandhari, I will do everything I can, with all my heart, to make you happy. I will bear the burden of all that you have decided, but both of you must pardon me for anything I might say to Karna while I am his sarathy, be it agreeable or disagreeable, for I will speak only for his good."

Karna says in his humblest tone, "O king of the Madras, may you always be engaged in our welfare as Brahma is for Isana, or Keshava for Partha."

Salya says, "The honourable never indulge in four kinds of conduct—self-rebuke, self-praise, speaking ill of others and adulation of others. However, learned one, what I now say to instil confidence in you may be construed as being self-adulation. Yet, listen carefully when I tell you that I am fit to be the sarathy of even Indra, and am a match for Matali himself in watchfulness, in managing horses and in anticipating and avoiding danger in a battle. When you engage Partha, I will drive your ratha; so dispel your anxiety, O Sutaputra."'

CANTO 36

Duryodhana says, "O Karna, Salya, king of the Madras, who is superior to Krishna, will be your sarathy, as Matali is the charioteer of Indra, king of the Devas. With you as the warrior on that chariot and Salya as its sarathy, that ratha will certainly vanquish the Parthas."

When all is being finally prepared for the morning's battle, O Bhaarata, Duryodhana says again, "O Salya, take the reins of Karna's ratha. With your protection, the son of Radha will vanquish Dhananjaya."

Salya, answers, "Tathaastu."

Salya approaches the chariot and Karna cheerfully says to him, "O Sarathy, prepare the chariot for me."

Salya duly equips his ratha, the best of its kind, which resembles a vapour mansion in the sky, and fetches it to Karna, saying, "I bless you. May victory be yours."

Maharatha Karna duly worships the ratha, which a priest conversant with Brahman has sanctified, circumambulates it in pradakshina, fervently worships the Surya Deva and says to Salya, "Ascend the ratha now, great Salya."

The mighty Salya climbs into Karna's invincible and wonderful chariot, like a lion springing up a mountain summit. Karna follows him. Mounted on the ratha, the two shuras dazzle like Surya and Agni sitting together on a

cloud in the sky. The vabdhis and magadhis eulogise those two heroes, like Ritwiks and Sadasyas worshipping Indra and Agni with hymns at a yagna.

Karna is like the sun on the Mandara Mountains, riding on a mass of lightning charged clouds; a halo of brilliant lustre encircles him, his arrows are like sunrays. Ah, the son of Surya is glorious to behold as he stands on his ratha stretching his formidable bow.

Duryodhana says, “O son of Adhiratha, O Shura, I had always believed that those two mighty maharathas, Drona and Bhishma, would kill Arjuna and Bhimasena. Like a second Vajradhari, go forth, my precious friend, and achieve that which they could not accomplish. Either seize Dharmaraja Yudhishtira or slay Dhananjaya, Bhimasena and the twin sons of Madri. Bless you and let victory be yours. Set out, O Naravyaghra, and reduce the Pandava troop to ashes!”

Then, thousands of conches and tens of thousands of drums sound together and the sound they make is like that of massed thunderheads in the sky. Karna then tells Salya, “Whip the horses forward, Mahabaho, so that I can destroy Dhananjaya, Bhimasena, the twins and Yudhishtira. Arjuna will feel the true might of my arms today when I unleash my arrows fletched with kanka feathers in tides, and annihilate the Pandavas and give victory to Duryodhana!”

Salya says, “O Suta’s son, why do you underestimate the sons of Pandu, all of whom are mighty warriors, great archers, and have mastery over every weapon? They are unrelenting, invincible, enjoy great good fortune and can inspire fear in the heart of Indra himself. When you hear the twang of the Gandiva, which is like the peal of thunder, you will find yourself less able to so facilely brag. When you are faced with the Dharmaputra and the twins and their canopy arrows in the sky; when you face the other invincible warriors of the Pandava army lashing and mowing down our forces with arrow storms, you will feel less inclined to boast, O Karna.”

Ignoring what Salya says, Karna only roars, “Ride Salya, let us be at them!”’

CANTO 37

"Sanjaya says, 'When the Kauravas see mighty Karna take up his station and ready for battle, they let out loud shouts of delight from every side. With the clash of cymbals and the sound of drums, with the whizzing of arrows and the roars of the fierce warriors, all your troops are ready to fight till death. The Earth trembles and a great sound emerges from her very bowels and it seems as if the seven great planets including the Sun are set for combat. We see meteor showers and all the quarters seem to be on fire.

We hear thunder from a cloudless sky, fierce winds begin to blow, and animals and birds in ever larger numbers pass your army to their right, foreboding a great calamity. When Karna sets out, his horses stumble and fall to their knees; a frightful shower of bones falls from the sky and the weapons of the Kuru warriors seem to be ablaze; their standards tremble; and their animals, O Rajan, shed copious tears.

These and many other dreadful portents appear, indicating ruin for the Kurus. Lulled by fate, none of the commanders and men in the Kaurava army notice these omens, but seeing Karna set out, wish him victory and regard the Pandavas as having already been defeated.

Vaikartana, as he rides on his chariot, reflects on the death of Bhishma and Drona, and on the mighty feats of Partha and burning with self-conceit and pride, and breathing long and hard in simmering anger, tells Salya,

“Fighting from my ratha and armed with my bow, I would challenge a furious Indra himself armed with the Vajra. Seeing those great warriors, even the flawless and invincible Bhishma and Drona, the equal of Indra and Vishnu, those crushers of chariots, horses and elephants slaughtered by the enemy, O Salya, do not be anxious for I am not afraid.

The Acharya was a master of mighty astras and the foremost of Brahmanas, yet why did he not kill all our enemies, when he saw them destroy the mightiest of our kings and their charioteers, elephants and chariots? Remembering that Drona in battle, I tell you truly, that there is no one among you, other than me, who can match this Arjuna advancing towards us, this Kshatriya who resembles Death himself in his fiercest form. Drona acquired his skills through inborn might, practice and bravery; he possessed the greatest of astras and was a master strategist. When even he had to succumb to death, I regard all the others in our army to already be in death’s very jaws.

Even upon deep reflection, I do not find anything in this world that is permanent or anything that is fated which can be changed through human effort. When the Acharya himself was killed, who then can be certain that he will live until today’s sunset? I have no doubt that not astras, strength, skill, achievements, or cleverness can fetch man any happiness. Only what is fated will come to pass.

In energy, Drona was equal to Agni or the Sun, in prowess he resembled Vishnu or Purandara; in strategy he was equal to Brihaspati or Usana. Yet, irresistible as he was, astras could not protect him. When our women and children lament and weep, when the enemy has laid our valour low, I know, O Salya, that it is I who must now fight. So ride, O great Madra, at the enemy army. There is no one other than me who can face the Pandava army that has Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Arjuna, Satyaki and the twins among them.

Come, fly at the Panchalas, the Pandavas and the Srinjayas. I will either kill them all, or follow Drona’s path into Yama’s presence. Do not think that I will not break into the very heart of those warriors. Wise or ignorant, when a person’s time has run out, the Destroyer has no favourites; no one can escape him, and I too will not escape my destiny.

Duryodhana loves me and is always concerned about my welfare, and for his sake I will not hesitate to cast away my life’s breath and this body that are so dear. Rama gave me this great ratha covered with tiger skins, its

axle silent, and furnished with a golden seat and a trivenu made of silver, and yoked to these splendid horses. Look Salya, at these wonderful bows, these standards, these maces, these shafts of fierce shapes, this blazing sword, this mighty astra, this white conch of the loud and ferocious blare.

Riding in this chariot, whose wheels rumble deep as thunder, with white horses yoked to it, and with these superb quivers, I will put forth all my might to kill Arjuna, that bull among maharathas. If Death himself, that universal destroyer, were to protect him vigilantly, I will still meet him in battle and either kill him or leave this world of sorrow for Yamaloka. If Yama, Varuna, Kubera, and Vasava, with all their forces come here united and protect the son of Pandu, I will still vanquish all of them."

Hearing Karna's bravado and his great delight at the prospect of battle, the valiant king of the Madras laughs aloud in derision and, in order to temper his arrogance, says, "Forbear, forbear, O Karna, from your bragging. In your transports of delight, you have said things that you should never say. Where is Dhananjaya, that foremost of men, and where are you, O lowest of men? Who else save Arjuna could abduct the younger sister of Krishna, that greatest of all beings, by storming the home of the Yadus, which the younger brother of Indra protected and one that resembled Devaloka?

What man but Arjuna, who is as powerful as Indra, could challenge Bhava, the Lord of Lords, the Creator of the worlds, to battle when a dispute arose over the slaughter of an animal in the forest?

To please Agni, Vijaya slaughtered Asuras, Devas, great Nagas, Pisachas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, men and birds, and offered Hutasana the food he wished for in the Khandava vana.

Do you remember, Karna, how Phalguna killed throngs of celestial Gandharvas, with arrows that flashed like the sun, and freed Dhritarashtra's son? Indeed, do you remember that occasion, when you were the first to flee, when the Pandavas freed the foolish sons of Dhritarashtra after they were beset and captured by those rangers of the skies, Chitraratha and his Gandharvas?

Do you remember the battle when Virata's kine were stolen, and Arjuna single-handedly routed the Kauravas, who had far superior numbers, as well as Drona, Aswatthaman and Bhishma in their ranks? Why, O Sutaputra, did you not vanquish Arjuna then?

But fortunately, another great battle will now take place for you to die at Partha's hands. If you do not flee in fear, know that as soon as the battle begins, you will be killed."

While Salya is heartily engaged in deflating Karna with these rough words, while simultaneously singing his adversary's praises, an incensed Karna says, "Yes, yes, it may be so! However, why do you praise Arjuna so? A battle is about to take place between us and only if he kills me can your lofty praises be regarded as being deserved."

The king of the Madras replies, "Let it be so," and says no more.

A determined Karna says, "Ride at them!" That great maharatha, his white steeds yoked to his chariot covered with tiger skins and with Salya for his charioteer, wildly attacks his enemies, slaying great numbers of them, like the sun destroying the darkness of night. Indeed, he rides with a joyous heart and, breaking upon the Pandava army, immediately looks for Dhananjaya.'"

CANTO 38

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna gladdens the hearts of his soldiers when he sets out for battle and tells every Pandava soldier that he meets, "I will give whatever wealth he asks for to him who will point out the noble Dhananjaya to me today. If he is not satisfied, I will further give him a cartload of jewels and gemstones. If he is still not satisfied, I will give him a hundred heads of cows and as many vessels of brass for milking them. I will give him a hundred fine villages and a number of long haired, black eyed damsels and a chariot yoked to white mules.

If all this does not yet satisfy the one who points out Arjuna to me, I will give him another magnificent golden chariot yoked to six bulls as big as elephants. I will give him another hundred fair damsels, decked with ornaments and with collars of gold, all of them accomplished in singing and dancing.

If that man is still dissatisfied, I will give him a hundred elephants, a hundred villages, a hundred chariots, and ten thousand fine horses, fat, docile, well trained and with many excellent qualities, all able to draw chariots. I will then give him four hundred cows, each with golden horns and a calf.

If he is still not satisfied, I will give him a yet more valuable gift of five hundred horses in trappings of gold and decked with jewelled ornaments. In

addition, I will give him eighteen other docile horses, a bright golden chariot with priceless ornaments and pulled by Kamboja steeds.

If that still does not satisfy the man who discovers Arjuna for me, I will give him six hundred trained elephants born on the western shores of the ocean, with golden chains around their necks and in gold caparison.

If that does not satisfy him, I will give him an even more valuable gift of fourteen wealthy, populated Vaishya villages, situated in the proximity of forests and rivers, free from all danger, well furnished with other luxuries and fit for kings. I will also give him a hundred young and nubile female slaves from the country of the Magadhas, all wearing the finest golden necklaces.

If that man is still not sated, I will make him an even more valuable gift, which he himself could not but want. I will give him, if he desires them, my sons, wives and all things of pleasure and enjoyment that I possess. Indeed, I will also give him all the wealth left by Kesava and Arjuna, after I kill them!"

When he has said all this, Karna blows his wonderful conch, sea-born and its boom honeyed and reverberant. Duryodhana, with all his followers, is elated to listen to Karna, to hear the assurance in his voice. The sounds of cymbals, drums, the trumpeting of elephants, along with those of diverse musical instruments, arise among the Kaurava troops along with their shouts of exultation.

However, even while the Kaurava troops are full of joy, Salya, king of the Madras, laughs scornfully, and derides the maharatha son of Radha, who, even as he is about to plunge into the ocean of battle, is bragging so vainly.'"

CANTO 39

'Salya says, "O Sutaputra, you will see Dhananjaya today without any trouble, so you need not give away a golden chariot with six bulls as big as elephants. You are foolishly offering to give away wealth as if you are Kubera, the Lord of treasures, and you do not see the sin that attaches to gifts made to the undeserving. Instead, you should perform many yagnas with that wealth. And as far as your foolish intention to kill Krishna and Arjuna, who has heard of a jackal hunting down a pair of lions?

You seek to do what is well beyond you because you have no friends to warn you that you are about to fall into a blazing fire. You cannot discriminate between what you should do and what you should not. Without doubt, your end is near for no man that wants to continue living will speak as you do, insanely, like the worst fool. Your endeavour is like that of a man who wants to cross the vast ocean with just his two arms and, besides, after having tied a heavy stone to his neck; or like that of one who wants to leap off a mountaintop and hopes to live.

For your own good, I suggest that you fight Arjuna from within the relative safety of your vyuha, and with the help and protection of all your warriors. My advice is only for the good of Duryodhana and not from any ill will towards you. Listen to me if you have any wish to preserve your life."

Karna replies, “I seek out Arjuna relying only on the might of my arms. You, Salya, are an enemy with the face of a friend and all you want to do is put fear into me. No man will deter me from my resolve, not even the Vajradhari himself; so what can a mere mortal do?”

Salya says, “You will lament your encounter with Partha when that mahabaho drills you with his arrows fletched with kanka feathers and shot with all his might. When Savyasachi burns your army and gashes you with his arrows loosed from the Gandiva, you will repent your folly. Even as a child lying in its mother’s lap wants to seize the moon, do you seek naively to vanquish the resplendent Arjuna in his chariot. Why, you are like a fool who would thrust his own body into a trident!

Your challenge, O Suta’s son, is like that of a frisky little deer calling an angry lion to fight! You dare contend with the greatest Kshatriya of all, even like a little fox in the forest, with its belly full, challenging his great maned king.

You, O Karna, are like a rabbit challenging an elephant with tusks big as plough-shafts, with rent cheeks and rut juices flowing out of its mouth; you face a certain death when you encounter Arjuna.

In your folly in wanting to fight Partha, you are like an idiot poking at a virulent black cobra inside its hole.

You are more than stupid, Sutaputra, to discount Arjuna, that narasimha, and to shout out to him like a jackal howling at an angry lion. When you challenge Dhananjaya, Karna, you are like a snake that seeks its own destruction by challenging Vinata’s son, the fierce Garuda, with his splendid plumage.

You are as one who, despite having no raft, wants to cross the savage ocean, receptacle of all waters, with its mountainous waves, when the moon is waxing.

O Karna, your battle with Arjuna will be as one between a little calf meeting a great charging bull, his neck thick as a drum and his horns sharp as arrows.

Like a frog croaking at a mighty cloud lashing down torrents of rain, you croak at Arjuna who is like a Parjanya among men.

You are like a dog, Karna, which barks at a forest-roaming tiger from within the safety of his master’s house when you snarl at Dhananjaya, that tiger among men.

A jackal, Karna, living in the forest among rabbits, thinks it is a lion until he actually sees one. You, too, consider yourself a lion for you do not yet see that Naravyaghra Arjuna. You will think yourself to be a lion until you see the two Krishnas riding on the same chariot like Surya and Chandra. As long as you do not hear the twang of the Gandiva, you can continue to say what you please.

When you see Partha and hear the rumble of his ratha and the twang of his bow resound around the ten cardinal points of the sky, and when he roars at you like a tiger, Sutaputra, you will turn into a jackal. You were always a jackal, and Dhananjaya always a lion. O fool, it is your envy and hatred for truly great warriors that makes you a jackal. As a mouse and a chariot are to each other in strength, or a dog and a tiger, a fox and a lion, or a hare and an elephant, as falsehood and truth, as poison and nectar, even so are you and Partha known to all by your different deeds.'"

CANTO 40

"Sanjaya says, 'Salya's word barbs now infuriate Karna and, losing his temper, he responds in fury, saying, "The qualities of men of dharma, O Salya, are known only to those who are themselves noble. When you are far from being exemplary yourself, how can you be a judge of worth? The mighty astras of Arjuna, his wrath, his tejas, his bow, his shafts and his abilities I know very well. You also do not know, as well as I do, the greatness of Krishna, that bull among the lords of Earth.

However, it is knowing my own prowess as well as that of Pandu's son, that I challenge him to battle. I am no insect flying into a fire. I have this blood-drinking astra, O Salya, which lies alone within a quiver in a bed of sandalwood dust, and which I have worshipped for many years. It is like a venomous serpent and it can consume whole aksauhinis of men, horses and elephants. It can pierce any armour and make ashes of flesh and bones, and if I am provoked, I may unleash it even against the mighty Meru.

I tell you, Salya, that I will use that astra only against Phalguna or Krishna. And that would be a worthy feat, since, of all the shuras in the Vrishni race, it is Krishna in whom Prosperity resides and among the Pandavas it is Partha in whom Victory always dwells. Both Naravyaghras, riding the same chariot, will advance against me to do battle. And today, you will see the nobility of my lineage. You will see, Salya, the two dark cousins, one the son of the other's aunt, and the other the son of the other's

uncle, both invincible warriors, impaled by my one astra, like two pearls on a single string.

Arjuna's Gandiva and his kapi-dhvaja, Krishna's chakra and his garuda-dhvaja, create fear only among the timid. In me, O Madraka, they cause only delight.

You are a fool, base Salya, of evil disposition, and unskilled in the strategy for great wars. You are either raving because terror grips you, or you praise them for some reason unknown to me. Today, I will first kill those two, and then kill you with all your kinsmen! Born in a sinful country you are ignoble, mean and a wretch among Kshatriyas. Being a friend and ally, why do you, like an enemy, try to frighten me by singing the praises of the two Krishnas? Either they will kill me today or I will kill them. Knowing my own might as I do, I have no fear of them. Why, I will single-handedly kill a thousand Vasudevas and hundreds of Phalgunas.

Hold your tongue, O you who are born in the sinful country of the Madrakas. Hear from me, O Salya, what the people, young and old, men and women and travellers, say about the evil Madrakas. Brahmanas have also been speaking of these same things in the courts of kings.

The Madraka is always a hater of friends and there is no friendship in him. He is mean in speech, is the lowest of humankind, a base one, always untruthful and crooked. It is said that until their death, the Madrakas are evil. Among them, the father, son, mother, mother-in-law, brother, grandson, and other kinsmen, companions, strangers, slaves, male and female mix lasciviously together in their homes. Their women mingle freely with men, known and strangers. Their conduct is without dharma and they subsist on fried and powdered corn and fish in their homes; they drink heady spirits, eat beef, speak coarsely and laugh and cry with no restraint or dignity. They sing incoherent songs, are always lustful and say whatever they please, with no thought. How then can virtue have any meaning for the Madrakas, who are arrogant and notorious for all kinds of venal and mortal sins?

No one should befriend or provoke enmity with a Madraka. They are the dregs, the dirt of humanity, and all their deeds of friendship are impure as gandharakas or the libations poured in a yagna in which the king is himself the sacrificer and priest. Then, again, it is truly seen that wise men treat a person bitten by a poisonous scorpion, with these words: 'Just as a Brahmana who assists at the religious ceremonies of a Sudra, or as one who

hates Brahmanas always suffers degradation does one who makes an alliance with the Madrakas becomes debased. As there is no friendship among the Madrakas, so, O scorpion, your poison is as nought.'

With these mantras from the Atharvan, I have duly performed the rite of exorcism. Knowing this, O learned, wretched one, hold your tongue, or listen to something further that I have to say. The intoxicated Madraka women throw off their clothes and dance naked, while their unattached women are promiscuous and utterly depraved in their behaviour. You are the child of one of those women; how can you be fit to declare the dharma of men? Yes, you are the son of one of those sinful and shameless women, who live and answer every lust and call of nature like camels and asses; how are you fit to discourse on the duties of men? When you ask a Madraka woman for a little vinegar, she scratches her hips and says cruelly, "Let no man ask me for any vinegar that is so dear to me. I will give him my son or my husband, but I will not give him any vinegar."

We are told on good authority that young Madraka maidens are without any shame, hirsute, gluttonous and filthy and carnal to the core. Many others and I, too, can vouch for these and many other similar qualities in them. How then would the Madrakas and the Sindhu-Sauviras know anything of dharma, being born, as they are, in a sinful country, being Mlecchas in their practices, and being entirely careless of all dharma?

We are told that the highest duty of a Kshatriya is to die in battle, lauded by men of dharma. That I should lay down my life in this war is my foremost wish, for I seek swarga through death. I am also the dearest friend of Duryodhana. Why, I live for him and whatever wealth I have is also his. As for you, O you who are born in a sinful country, it is evident that you are under the influence of the Pandavas, since your behaviour towards us in everything is as that of an enemy. Like a man of dharma whom atheists cannot lead astray, hundreds of men like you cannot dissuade me from this battle.

Like a deer, bathed in perspiration, you are at liberty to weep or thirst. You cannot frighten me for I observe Kshatriya dharma. I recall what my Acharya Bhargava Rama once described to me about the death in battle of those lions among men, the Kshatriyas he slew, those unrelenting heroes.

I am determined to follow the example of Pururavas, to rescue the Kauravas and to kill our enemies. I do not know of a man in the three

worlds who can turn me away from my resolve. So do not even try, O Salya. Or do you rave and rant so only from fear?

Wretched Madraka, I do not kill you even now and present your carcass as an offering to scavengers and carnivores only from my regard for Duryodhana, and to avoid any blame. But, know, that if you speak to me as you have again, I will crush your head with my gada.

I say to you again, Salya, the people of this world will today see or hear either that the two Krishnas have killed Karna or that Karna has killed the two Krishnas!"

Having said these words, the son of Radha, O Rajan, once more fearlessly commands the king of the Madras, "On! Fly at the enemy."'

CANTO 41

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing, O Rajan, what Karna says, Salya responds with some heat, "I was born in the race of men who performed great yagnas, who never retreated from battle, who were kings whose coronal locks underwent the sacred bath. I too am devoted to the practice of dharma. You, O Vrisha, seem to be drunk. Still, from friendship, I will try and cure of your vainglorious intoxication. Listen, stupid wretch, to this story of a crow and then do what you like.

I do not recall any fault of mine for which you wish to kill me. It is my duty to make you aware of what is good for you and what is not, for I know both, and as I am now your sarathy and have Duryodhana's welfare at heart. I know what ground is level and what is uneven; I know the strength and weakness of the warrior on my chariot; I know at all times the fatigue and fitness of my horses and my warrior.

I have a thorough knowledge of the weapons you possess; I can decipher the cries of animals and birds; what would be heavy for the horses to carry and what would be exceedingly heavy for them; I know about the extraction of arrows and the healing of wounds, which astras counteract which other astras, the many battle tactics, and the meaning of all kinds of omens and portents. As the sarathy of this ratha, I am a master of my craft, and so I will narrate this story for you.

There once lived, on the other side of the ocean, a Vaishya who owned an abundance of wealth and corn. He performed yagnas, gave liberal dakshina, was peaceful, devoted to the duties of his own varna, and was pure in habits and mind. He had many sons whom he loved, and was kind to all creatures. He lived fearlessly in the dominions of a king of dharma. A crow lived in his home, as well, eating the leavings of the food set before the Vaishya's well-behaved young children. The children always gave the crow meat, curds, rice payasa, honey and butter. Thus well fed, the crow became arrogant and disrespected all birds that were equal or even superior to him.

It so happened that once some happy swans, of swift flight, which could fly anywhere at will and equal to Garuda himself in the range and speed of their aerial journeys, crossed the ocean and came to the Vaishya's dwelling. Seeing the swans, the Vaishya boys said to the crow, 'O ranger of the skies, you are superior to all winged creatures.'

The crow, in his folly and arrogance, was deceived by what the callow children said and believed them. Proud of the remains of the children's food upon which he fed, the crow alighted in the midst of those swans, and then challenged one among them whom he thought was their leader, saying, 'Let us compete in flight.'

Hearing the raving crow, the assembled swans, those great birds born with vast speed and endurance, began to laugh. They asked the crow. 'Our home is the Manasa Lake. We navigate the whole earth, and among winged creatures, we are famed for the distances we traverse. Foolish crow, how can you challenge a swan? How will you keep up with us?'

The crow, true to the stupidity of his species, repeatedly mocked what the swan said and finally boasted, 'I will fly showing you a hundred and one different kinds of flight, a fresh one for every hundred yojanas. I will soar up, swoop down, whirl around, fly straight, and fly swiftly, and then gently and steadily. I will show you all the diverse kinds of flight. I will display all these and you shall all witness my prowess and my genius.

With one of these different kinds of flight, I will now rise into the sky. You decide which of these ways in which you want me fly and then match me in that particular style. You must match me in all the different kinds of flight through the sky where there is no support.'

Listen, O Radheya, to what one of the swans said to the foolish, ungainly crow. 'You, O crow, will doubtless demonstrate the hundred and

one different kinds of flight. I, however, will fly in just one kind of flight that all other birds know, for I do not know any other. As for you, O bird with red eyes, fly in any manner that you like.'

At this, the other crows that had assembled there laughed aloud, cawing, 'How will the swan with just one kind of flight compete with a hundred different kinds?'

Then the swan and the crow rose into the sky, challenging each other. The swan who could fly gracefully anywhere, at will, flew using a single kind of wing beat, while the awkward crow chose a hundred different kinds of flights. The swan and the crow flew, each one praising himself. Seeing the crow fly in hundred different ways, the other crows were delighted and cawed raucously. The swans laughed, mocking the clumsy crows. The other crows joined the first one now, all of them flying in many ways, up and down, slowly then quickly, and in all kinds of acrobatic foolish manouvers, cawing victoriously all the while. The swan, however, with his single regal kind of flight, began to cut through the skies. For a moment, O Karna, he seemed to fall behind, and, seeing this, the crows, cried, 'The swan is losing!'

Hearing this, the soaring swan flew westwards, now with great speed, towards the ocean, the home of the makaras. The crow quickly grew frantic at not seeing any island or trees on which he could alight and perch, when he grew tired, upon that vast expanse of water. The ocean, being the home of countless creatures and hundreds of monsters, is indeed more terrifying than the air. Karna, nothing can exceed it in depth and men know that the waters of the ocean are as limitless as space and the crow swiftly lost his arrogance, terror filling him instead.

The swan, having traversed a great distance in a moment, looked back at the crow, and did not have the heart to leave him behind. Turning back, he flew to the struggling black bird, and hung on the air waiting for the crow to fly up to him.

The exhausted crow somehow found the strength, before he fell into the sea and sank, to fly up to the gracefully hovering swan. The swan felt that he must rescue the foolish bird, and said, 'You repeatedly spoke of the hundred different kind of flight you would show us but this one is mysterious indeed! You skim the waves with your wings and beak, almost as if you mean to dive into the water. What is the name of this kind of flight, O crow? Come, come, quickly, crow, I am waiting for you.'

Stricken, and unable to rise above the ocean, the humbled, frightened crow cried, in despair to the swan, 'Ah, we are mere crows that wander here and there, cawing as we go. O swan, I seek your protection, I place my life in your care. Oh, carry me to the shores of this dreadful ocean with your wings and beak!'

With that, the crow fell into the sea and struggled desperately in the water to stay afloat. Moved to pity, the swan said to the dying crow, 'Remember now, O crow, what you said in praise of yourself. You claimed that you could fly through the sky in a hundred and one different ways and were thus superior to me. Alas, why then are you tired and fallen into the sea?'

All his arrogance gone, the piteous crow looked up at the swan, and replied weakly, 'Proud of the leftovers upon which I fed, I imagined myself, O swan, to be the equal of Garuda and felt contempt for all other crows and many other birds far greater than me. I now seek your protection and place my life in your care. Oh swan, take me to the shores of some island. If I ever return safely to my own country, I will never again belittle anyone. Rescue me now from death by drowning!"

Without a word, the swan plucked up the crow with his feet, adroitly set the wet, trembling and miserably cawing creature on his back, and flying up as gracefully and strongly as ever, flew back to the island from where they had flown out. Setting the crow down on dry land and having comforted him, the swan, fleet as the mind, rose up into the sky and continued on his way.

O Sutaputra, it was thus that the swan humbled the crow that lived on the food that the Vaishya's children fed him. The crow, on his part, entirely cast off his pride born out of his wild delusions, and took to living a life of peace and quiet, and never bragged again in all his days.

Just as that crow, who lived upon the remains of the food eaten by the Vaishya children, slighted his equals and superiors, so do you, O Karna, who feed on the scraps from the table of the sons of Dhritarashtra, denigrate your equals and superiors. Why did you not kill Partha at Virata's city when you had the protection of Drona, Aswatthaman, Kripa, Bhishma and the other Kauravas? Arjuna routed you all like a lion chasing away a pack of jackals. What became of your prowess then? Seeing Savyasachi kill your brother in front of all the Kuru heroes, you fled. Again, when the Gandharvas attacked you beside the Dvaitya Lake, Sutaputra, you deserted

the Kurus and were the first to run. Finally, it was Partha who vanquished the Gandharvas led by Chitrasena and freed Duryodhana and his wife.

Rama himself spoke of the great prowess of both Arjuna and Krishna before the kings in the Kuru court. You have frequently heard Drona and Bhishma, in the presence of all the kings, say that the two Krishnas are invincible. I have spoken only about those matters in which Dhananjaya is superior to you as the Brahmana is superior to all created beings. Soon you will meet the son of Vasudeva and the son of Kunti and Pandu riding on their great ratha. As the crow in the story, acting with intelligence, sought the protection of the swan, you too had best seek their protection.

O Karna, you will not speak so proudly or confidently when you actually face Vasudeva and Dhananjaya. When Partha quells your pride with his arrow storms, you will realise the difference between you and him. Those two are celebrated among the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas. You are only like a firefly among men, Karna, so do not speak foolishly or even think disrespectfully of those two resplendent luminaries. Krishna and Arjuna are radiant like Surya and Chandra. O learned Sutaputra, do not think insolently of Achyuta and Arjuna. Those two noble ones are lions among men, so desist from your tawdry boasting.”””

CANTO 42

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna remains unconvinced by Salya. He says, "I know only too well what and who Krishna and Arjuna are. I know the Saurin's skill in managing chariots, and the might of Arjuna's astras. You, Salya, have not experienced them in battle. Knowing what they are, I will still fight the two Krishnas, those two greatest of men and warriors.

However, the curse of Parasurama Bhargava, that best of Rishis, that Avatara, haunts me today. When I was young, I lived disguised as a Brahmana with Rama, wanting to acquire the devastras from him. One day, Indra, who wanted to help Arjuna by weakening me, assumed the form of a vicious insect, and came and bit almost through my thigh while my Acharya slept with his head in my lap. The creature drew a pool of thick blood from me. I was in agony but, not wanting to disturb Rama's slumber, I did not move my leg. When he awoke, the Bhargava, the Kshatriya slayer, saw what had happened and how I had endured the pain.

He said grimly, 'You are not a Brahmana. Tell me truly who you are.'

I confessed that I was a Suta. The Maharishi's eyes turned crimson, and he cursed me in rage, 'Because, O Suta, you have acquired this final weapon, this Brahmastra, from me through deceit, at the time when you need it most, when the hour of your death comes, you will forget the mantra to summon it. Brahma surely cannot dwell in one who is not a Brahmana.

And it is true that I had forgotten that astra and its mantra during this war. Today it has returned to me. Among the Bharatas, Arjuna, who is the ultimate Kshatriya, has already and will further annihilate many of our greatest warriors. But have no doubt that I, Karna, will kill that fiercest and most dangerous shura, that savage archer whose tejas is unbearable, that Vijaya who always achieves his ends.

Strangely, I have my greatest astra back today and with it I will consume vast numbers of the enemy and Arjuna along with them. The immeasurable Ocean, that Lord of all the waters, surges with fierce impetuosity and engulfs innumerable beings. The Continent, however, holds him at bay. Today, while Arjuna ceaselessly shoots his tides of arrows, making each one a killer and destroys my warriors, I will contain him as the Continent does the Ocean.

Salya, O Madraka, today you shall witness the greatest duel of this war, why, the very reason for which all this carnage has taken place—the duel between great Arjuna and me, a battle that will eclipse every other contention, even the most ferocious one between the Devas and the Asuras combined.

That son of Pandu is inordinately proud and today he will face me with his great and extraordinary astras. And today, I will set all his weapons at naught and vanquish him with my own. I will scathe Dhananjaya with my arrows, scorching him as the Sun does his enemies. I will extinguish the great son of Kunti like the great torrent of rain from the sky, which puts out a blazing fire that threatens the whole Earth.

With my wide-headed shafts, I will still the son of Kunti, who is like a slippery and fearsome serpent; who is like a conflagration that flares up in wrath and always consumes its foes. As Himavat withstands fierce, devastating Vayu, the wind god, I will, without moving, contain the raging Dhananjaya. Yes, O Salya, this momentous day I will face the greatest archer in the world, the rampaging and invincible maharatha Arjuna, who once conquered all this Earth for his brother to perform the Rajasuya yagna. And Salya, who else but me will fight Savyasachi, who has vanquished everybody, including the very gods in the land of Khandava? Arjuna is proud; his astras strike deep; he has unearthly dexterity; he knows how to control horses; he singly harries vast hosts; and he is an Atiratha among atirathas.

Yet, today, I will strike his head from his neck with my arrows and this greatest of men will lie dead on this Kurukshetra.

O Salya, always keeping death or victory before me, I will fight Dhananjaya today. When I myself will gladly speak of the prowess of Phalguna in the midst of any grand gathering of Kshatriyas, why do you, fool that you are, hold forth to me about Phalguna's abilities? You are a doer of unpleasant works, a cruel and mean man, and an unforgiving critic of one who is forgiving. I can kill a hundred like you, but I forgive you. You are a man of sinful deeds and, like a fool, you have rebuked me and attempted to undermine me for the sake of Pandu's son.

Crooked as you are, you have said all this to me who am sincere and straightforward. Cursed are you that wound your friends. The critical hour is upon us, wretched Salya, for Duryodhana himself has come to battle and I am determined to see his purposes achieved. You, however, are behaving in a manner from which it is plain that you have no friendship for him, but great affection for his enemies, your nephews among them!

A friend is one who shows affection, makes his friend happy and makes himself agreeable; who protects the other and honours him, and who rejoices in the joys of his friend. I have all these attributes, and Duryodhana knows this well. On the other hand, he that subtly undermines, fetches doubt and sorrow to his friends and allies, wronging them in diverse ways, is no friend but a deadly enemy clasped to our very hearts.

All these villainous attributes are in you and you will discover all qualities of true friendship in me. For the sake of Duryodhana, for the sake of doing what is agreeable to you, for the sake of victory, for the sake of myself, and for the sake of God himself, I will fight today to the ends of my prowess; I will fight both Partha and Vasudeva. Witness today my feats. Behold today my Brahmastra and other devastras, as well as those that are not divine but deadly still.

Today is the day of fate on which Arjuna, tameless hero, will find death at my hands even as an enraged tusker in musth is killed by another. I will cast the Brahmastra at mighty Partha today, and he will not escape it."

But now, suddenly, a shadow of doubt clouds his magnificent face, a rictus of anguish briefly convulses his noble features. Karna whispers as if to himself, "But ah, if only the wheels of my ratha do not sink into the Earth in battle today."

Next moment, he is himself again and says, “Know this, O Salya, that I would not be frightened of Yama armed with his rod; or Varuna with his noose; or Kubera with his mace; or the lord of them all, Vasava, armed with his Vajra; or, for that matter, I will not fear any enemy of heaven or earth who may attack me. Then, why would I fear Partha or Janardana?”

Now, again, he bites his lip and falls silent as another memory stirs in him. Much more softly, confessionally, Karna says, “Once, while practising with my bow Vijaya in a solitary forest, I accidently killed a calf of a Brahmana’s homa cow with one of my arrows. The Brahmana cursed me saying, ‘Since you have carelessly killed the calf of my homa cow, the wheel of your ratha will sink into the earth when you are battling your greatest adversary and fear will enter your heart.’

Ever since, when I remember the curse of that Brahmana, I feel afraid. The kings of the Soma vamsa, the Lunar race, who are lords of other people’s weal and woe, offered to give that Brahmana a thousand cows and six hundred bulls. But, with even such a gift, O Salya, the Brahmana would not be gratified and withdraw his curse. I offered him seven hundred elephants with large tusks and many hundred slaves, male and female, and yet the Brahmana would not relent. I next took to him fourteen thousand black cows, each with a white calf, but he would not forgive me and take back his curse.

I then offered him an opulent mansion, full of every object of desire, and whatever wealth I had, with due worship, but he refused to accept it. He then said, ‘That which, O Suta, I have said will come to pass. It cannot be otherwise. If I withdrew my curse and turned myself into a liar, many creatures would die from my sin and their deaths would all be upon my head. For that, for the preservation of dharma I never speak a word of untruth. Do not, ever again, destroy the means of a Brahmana’s support. There is no one in the world who can prevent what I have said from happening. Accept my curse with humility, and let that be your atonement for the sin of having slain a blameless calf.’

Although you have chosen to rebuke me, still for friendship’s sake, Salya, I have disclosed all this to you. Hold your tongue now and listen further to what I say.”

CANTO 43

"Sanjaya says, 'Thus silencing the king of the Madras, Karna continues, "says, you cannot frighten me with your stories of crows and swans. If Indra with all his Devas came to fight me, I would not be afraid; then how will I fear Arjuna and Krishna? You may unnerve another man with your words, but not this Karna.

Your heart is crooked and dark, Salya, and you are a base man that you have said all the bitter things you have to me, and not a word of praise or encouragement. Karna was not born, O Madraka, to be afraid of battle. I was born to flaunt my valour and to achieve glory for myself. After what you have dared say to me, you remain alive because of my friendship for you, my affection, and because you are an ally, Salya.

What I must do today for Duryodhana is crucial and he depends on me. That is why you are still alive. Earlier, I agreed to allow you to say what you pleased while you are my sarathy. I will keep my word and you will live, O Madraka. Although, I can vanquish my enemies without the help of a thousand Salyas. I believe that he who harms a friend is the worst sinner. It is for this that you are still alive.'"

CANTO 44

"Salya says, 'Your ravings, O Karna, are with regard to the enemy. As for myself, I can vanquish him without the help of a thousand Karnas.'

Karna, twice as roughly, says, "Listen closely, O king of the Madras, to what I once heard told in Dhritarashtra's court where sage Brahmanas would narrate the tales of different lands and of many kings of ancient times. A venerable Brahmana once said this about the Bahikas and Madrakas.

The Brahmana said, 'One should always avoid the Bahikas, for those impure people are beyond the very pale of dharma. They live away from the Himavat, the Ganga, Saraswati, Yamuna, Kurukshetra, and the Sindhu and its five tributaries. Once, as a youth, I lived among them when I was on a secret mission and so their conduct is well known to me. I remember that a slaughterhouse for kine and a hall for storing intoxicating spirits always distinguished the entrances to the homes of the Bahika kings.

There is a town called Sakala, a river named Apaga, and a clan of the Bahikas known as the Jarttikas. The Jarttikas constantly drink a strong liquor called Gauda, and eat fried barley with it. They also eat beef with garlic, cakes of flour mixed with meat, and boiled rice that is bought from others. They have no dharma whatever or even any idea of it. Their women, intoxicated with drink, laugh and dance naked outside the walls of the

houses in the cities, without wearing so much as garlands, singing the most obscene songs that are as musical as the bray of the ass or the bleat of the camel.

In intercourse, they are without any restraint, and in all other matters, as well, they do exactly as they like. Maddened with drink, they call out to one another, using many foul and endearing epithets. Addressing many drunken exclamations to their husbands and lords, the fallen women among the Bahikas, without observing restrictions even on the most sacred days, give themselves up to lewd dancing.'

One Bahika, who had lived among those arrogant women, who also happened to live for some days in Kurujangala, burst out sadly at this, saying, 'Alas, my ample Bahika woman, wearing the sheerest robe, through which her great breasts with their outthrust nipples show clear, even now prepares for bed and she thinks of me, while I am in this bland foreign land! Oh, when will I cross the Sutlej and the delightful Iravati, and arrive in my own country? When will I see those lush, beautiful women with blazing circlets of red arsenic on their foreheads, with streaks of jet-black kohl lining their eyes, and dancing naked and uttering wild and lascivious cries?

When will I be happy again in the company of those always drunken women, gyrating to the frenzied beat of drums and conches sweet as the cries of asses, camels and mules? When will I be among those sweet wanton wenches, and eating cakes of flour and meat and balls of pounded barley mixed with skimmed milk, and in the forests, with verdant paths lined by sami and pilu and karira trees? When will I again be among my own countrymen, muster some strength in numbers and fall upon unsuspecting wayfarers on the wild roads, and snatch away their robes and gold and beat them repeatedly to my heart's content!'

The Brahmana said, 'Listen to him! What sane man is there that would willingly dwell, for even a moment, amongst the Bahikas so fallen and wicked, and so completely depraved in their ways?'

This is how that Brahmana described those base Bahikas, a sixth of whose punya and paapa is yours, O Salya, for you are their king. That pious Brahmana then once more spoke at further length about those subjects of yours.

Listen to what he said. 'In the large and populous town of Sakala, a Rakshasa woman used to sing on every fourteenth day of the dark fortnight, accompanied by a drum: "When will I next sing the songs of the Bahikas in

this Sakala town, having gorged myself on beef and drunk the Gauda liquor? When will I again, decked in ornaments, and with those ample maidens and women, gorge myself on mutton, pork and beef and the meat of fowls, asses and camels? For they who do not eat flesh live in vain!"

And this was what, O Salya, the young and old, among the inhabitants of Sakala, drunk out of their minds, sing and cry. How can there be dharma among such a people?

I must yet tell you of what another Brahmana said in the Kuru court: 'There where forests of pilus stand, and those five rivers, the Satadru, the Vipasa, the Iravati, the Chandrabhaga, and the Vitasa flow with the Sindhu being the sixth, there in those regions removed from the Himavat, are the countries called the Arattas.

Those lands are without any virtue and religion. No one should go there. The Devas, the Pitris and the Brahmanas never accept dakshina from the fallen, or those begotten by Sudras on women of other castes, or from the Bahikas, who never perform yagnas and are lustful and blasphemous.'

That learned Brahmana went on to add, 'Without any feelings of revulsion, the Bahikas eat from wooden vessels, earthen plates and vessels that have been licked by dogs and that are stained with pounded barley and other corn. The Bahikas drink the milk of sheep and camels and asses and eat curds and other preparations made from those different milks. Those degraded people number many bastards among them. There is no food and no milk that they will not consume. The Aratta-Bahikas are steeped in ignorance and should be avoided.'

You may know this, O Salya, but I will still tell you about what yet another Brahmana said to me in the Kuru court, 'How can one go to heaven, having drunk milk in the town called Yugandhara, and stayed in the place called Achyutasthala, and bathed in the spot called Bhutilaya? There where the five rivers flow just after issuing from the mountains, there among the Aratta-Bahikas, no respectable person should dwell even for two days.

There are two Pisachas named Bahi and Hika in the river Vipasa. The Bahikas are the offspring of those two Pisachas. They are not creatures made by Brahma. Being of such dark and unknown origin, how can they be conversant with the duties ordained in the shastras? The Karashakas, the Mahishakas, the Kalingas, the Keralas, the Karkotakas, the Virakas, and other peoples of no religion, also, one should always avoid.'

This is what a Rakshasa woman of gigantic hips told a Brahmana who once went to that country to bathe in a sacred tirtha and passed a single night there. That land is known by the name of Aratta. The people living there are called the Bahikas. Only the lowest of Brahmanas live there from very early times. They are without the Vedas, without gyana, without yagna and without the power to assist at another's yagnas. They are all fallen and many among them have been begotten by Sudras upon other men's women. The gods never accept any offerings from them. The Prasthalas, the Madras, the Gandharas, the Arattas, those called Khasas, the Vasatis, the Sindhus and the Sauviras are almost as blameworthy as the Bahikas in their practices."

CANTO 45

'Karna continues, "You know all this, O Salya, but I still want to tell you what another Brahmana said, who once came to our house as a guest, so listen carefully. He watched our practices, was exceedingly happy, and said, 'I dwelt for a long time on a peak of the Himavat quite alone. Since then, I have travelled in various countries and seen the practices of different religions. Never, however, have I seen all the people of a country live without dharma.

All the races I have met will admit that the only true religion is the one that those who know the Vedas have expounded. Travelling through various countries, where different religions were observed, I at last came to the land of the Bahikas. There I heard that a Bahika would at first become a Brahmana, then a Kshatriya, after that a Vaishya, then a Sudra, and finally an Ambatta, a barber. Having become a barber, he would then again become a Brahmana.

Returning to the status of a Brahmana, he would yet again become a slave. When one person in a family becomes a Brahmana, all the others renounce the path of dharma and do as they like. The Gandharas, the Madrakas, and the foolish Bahikas are such people. Having travelled through the entire world I have heard of these practices, which is the dharma only among the Bahikas."

You should know all this, O Salya. But let me share the ugly root of all this venality of the Bahikas with you. Once upon a time, robbers from Aratta abducted a chaste woman. They raped her horribly so she cursed them, 'Since you have sinfully violated a helpless unwed girl, the women of your families will all become unchaste. You lowest of men, never will you escape from the consequences of this dreadful sin.'

It is for this, O Salya, that the sisters' sons of the Arattas, and not their own sons, become their heirs. The Kauravas with the Panchalas, the Salwas, the Matsyas, the Naimishas, the Koshalas, the Kasapaundras, the Kalingas, the Magadhas, and the Chedis who are all highly blessed, know what sanatana dharma is. Even the vilest ones of these countries know what dharma is. The Bahikas, however, live without dharma or any knowledge of it.

Beginning with the Matsyas, the people of the Kuru and the Panchala countries, the Naimishas, as well and the other honourable people, the pious among all races, know the eternal truths of dharma. This cannot be said of the Madrakas and the crooked-hearted race that dwells in the country of the five rivers.

Knowing all these things, O Salya, hold your tongue on things connected with dharma. You are the protector and king of such people and you share a sixth part of their paapa and punya. Or perhaps, you only share in their sins, for you never protect them. In the olden days, when sanatana dharma was revered in all lands, Brahma saw the ways of the people of the country of the five rivers, and condemned them. Why even in the Krita yuga, he censured the wayward conduct of those evil people whom Sudras had fathered on others' wives. When all other people observed the dharma of their respective varnas, the Pitamaha found fault with these men, even in that purest age.

You should know all this, O Salya, so let me tell you what a Rakshasa named Kalmashapada, while drowning in a tank, said. He said, 'Cowardice is a Kshatriya's dirt, while the non-observance of vratas is a Brahmana's dirt. The Bahikas are the scum of the Earth, and the Madra women the scum of the whole female sex.'

A king rescued the sinking Rakshasa and questioned him. Listen to his answer: 'The Mlecchas are the dirt of humankind; the oilmen are the dirt of the Mlecchas; eunuchs are the dirt of oilmen; those who use Kshatriyas to perform the priestly ministrations at their yagnas are the dirt of eunuchs.

The sin of those who have the last-named for their priests, and of the Madrakas, will be yours if you abandon me.'

The Rakshasa declared that this was the formula that should be used for curing a person possessed by a Rakshasa or one killed by a poison. The Panchalas observe the duties enjoined in the Vedas; the Kauravas observe truth; the Matsyas and the Surasenas perform yagnas, the Easterners follow the practices of the Sudras; the Southerners are fallen; the Bahikas are thieves; the Saurashtras are ill begotten bastards. They who are ungrateful, are thieves, drunkards, commit adultery with the wives of their Acharyas, are harsh in their speech, slaughter cows, wander during the night out of home from lust and wear other people's ornaments—what sin is there that they do not incur? Shame on the Arattas and the people of the country of the five rivers!

The Panchalas, Kauravas, Naimishas, Matsyas—all these know what dharma is. The old men among the Northerners, Angas and Magadhas, without themselves knowing what virtue is, follow the practices of the pious. Many gods, including Agni, dwell in the East. The Pitris dwell in the South and Yama of righteous deeds presides over them. The mighty Varuna protects the West and rules over the other Devas there. The divine Soma, along with the Brahmanas, rules the North.

The Rakshasas and Pisachas protect that best of mountains, the Himavat. The Guhyakas, O Maharajan, guard the mountains of Gandhamadana. Without doubt, Vishnu, otherwise called Janardana, protects all creatures. However, the Bahikas have no patrons among the Devas.

The Magadhas read omens and signs; the Kosalas understand what they see; the Kurus and the Panchalas comprehend everything even from a half-uttered speech; the Salwas cannot comprehend the whole until it is fully told. The Mountaineers, such as the Sibis, are stupid. The Yavanas are omniscient, the Suras particularly so. The Mlecchas are wedded to the creations of their own fancy, which other people cannot understand. The Bahikas resent beneficial counsel and the Madrakas are not like any of these.

O Salya, you are like that. So stay quiet and listen! The Madrakas are regarded as the scum of every nation so the Madra woman is called the filth of all womankind. The Madrakas constantly drink of spirits, violate the beds of their Acharyas, destroy unborn embryos through abortion, rob

others of their wealth—ah, there is no sin that they do not have! Fie on the Arattas and the people of the country of the five rivers. Knowing all this, O Salya, hold your tongue and do not preach dharma to me. Do not force me to kill you before I kill Krishna and Arjuna."

Salya replies, "The abandonment of the ill and the sale of wives and children are, O Karna, prevalent amongst the Angas, whose king you are. Remember the faults of yours that Bhishma enumerated during the discussion about the Rathas and Atirathas, and quell your wrath. Do not be angry. Brahmanas or Kshatriyas as well as Vaishyas and Sudras, O Karna, can be found everywhere; so too chaste women and admirable vratas. Everywhere men take delight in jesting with men and wounding one another. Lustful men also are found everywhere.

Everyone, on every occasion, is skillful in speaking of the faults of others. No one, however, knows his own faults, or knowing them, feels shame. Everywhere you see kings devoted to their respective religions, and employed in correcting the wicked. One can also find virtuous men everywhere. So, it cannot be, O Karna, that all the people of a country are sinful. There are men in many countries that surpass the very Devas in their conduct."

Then Duryodhana stops Karna and Salya from continuing their duel with words that is heating up by the moment. He speaks to the son of Radha as a friend, and begs Salya with joined hands. Karna, O sire, refrains from saying anything more and Salya too falls silent and faces the enemy. Smiling once more, Karna urges Salya, saying, "Onwards! Fly at the Pandava army!"""

CANTO 46

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna, O Bharatarishabha, deploys his troops in a counter-array after seeing Dhrishtadyumna's invincible battle vyuha. Next moment, with a roar as of ten lions, he attacks. The rumble of his chariot and the loud din of musical instruments shake the earth, while that Pravira trembles with pent-up rage. He makes an immense slaughter of the Pandava forces like Maghavat annihilating the Asura host. He strikes Yudhishtira with countless arrows, while keeping him to his right.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'How, O Sanjaya, did Karna marshal his forces to counter the Pandavas' vyuha with all those invincible bowmen led by Dhristadyumna and Bhimasena? Who leads the wings of our army? How are the warriors stationed? How does that dreadful battle erupt? Where is Arjuna when Karna attacks Yudhishtira? Who can dare attack Yudhishtira in the presence of Arjuna who once singly slew all the fell beings of the Khandava vana! Who other than Karna would dare fight him?'

Sanjaya replies, 'I will tell you of the battle formations, of Arjuna's strategy and the manner of his attack, and how both sides fought the battle led by their respective kings. Kripa, the violent Magadhas, and Kritavarman of the Satwata vamsa take up their positions on the right wing. Sakuni, his son the maharatha Uluka, leading fearless Gandhara horsemen armed with bright lances, and many veteran mountaineers, numerous as flights of locusts and grim like Pisachas, protect the right of your army.

On the left flank of the Kaurava army are your sons and thirty-four thousand unrelenting Samsaptaka maharathas, mad with battle lust and all eager to kill Krishna and Arjuna. On their left are the Kambojas, Sakas, at Karna's command, with rathas, horsemen and foot-soldiers, also threatening Arjuna and the mighty Keshava. At the head of this army stands Senapati Karna, clad in beautiful armour, wearing angadas and garlands, to defend the centre. With his sons around him, that shura shines resplendent as he repeatedly draws his bowstring.

Dusasana, effulgent as the sun or fire, with tawny eyes and rough handsome features, rides on the neck of a huge elephant, leading many troops; he is stationed at the rear of the army and gradually makes his way forward to join the fray. Behind him comes Duryodhana himself, O Rajan, protected by his brothers riding on majestic horses and cased in beautiful mail, and the united Madrakas and the Kekayas of furious energy. He looks like Indra of a hundred sacrifices surrounded by the celestials.

Aswatthaman and the other chariot-warriors, and many vicious elephants shedding temporal secretions like the very clouds and ridden by brash and brave Mlecchas, follow behind. Decked with triumphal standards and blazing weapons, those huge creatures, ridden by warriors skilled in fighting from elephant back, look like verdant hills. Many thousands of inexorable warriors, armed with axes and swords, guard the feet of those elephants. The Kaurava vyuha, filled by horsemen, chariot-warriors and elephants, is as striking as a vyuha of the Devas or of the Asuras.

That immense array, wonderfully formed by the norms of Brihaspati, seems to dance as it advances and strikes terror into the hearts of its enemies. Like bank after bank of clouds scudding into the sky during the monsoon, foot soldiers, equestrians, car-warriors and elephants, all agog for battle, begin to issue from the wings of the Kaurava vyuha. Yudhishtira sees Karna at the head of the enemy troops, and says to Arjuna, "Look Dhananjaya at Karna's mighty vyuha with its countless wings. Ensure that this vast force does not overwhelm us."

Arjuna replies with folded hands, "Everything will be done just as you desire, O Bhaarata. I will target their leading warriors and destroy the enemy."

Yudhishtira says, "Then attack Radheya, while Bhimasena does Suyodhana, Nakula fights Virshasena, Sahadeva contends with Sakuni, Satanika faces Dusasana, Satyaki battles Kritavarman, and Pandya does

Aswatthaman. I myself will face Kripa. Let the sons of Draupadi and Sikhandi contend with the rest of the Dhartarashtras, while the other warriors of our army assail the rest."

Arjuna says, "Tathaastu," duly issues instructions, and Krishna and he forge on to the head of the army, riding the primeval ratha which once belonged to Brahma and for which Agni Deva, who derives his effulgence from Brahma, became the steeds, the chariot which had successively borne Brahma, Ishana, Indra and Varuna.

Seeing that wondrous chariot advance, Salya says again to Karna, "There comes the invincible chariot, with white horses yoked to it with Krishna for its charioteer, even like the inevitable fruit of karma. There comes the son of Kunti, of whom you have been asking, slaughtering our men as he does. From the pandemonium, the roars and screams, there is no doubt that it is the noble Vasudeva and Dhananjaya who ride at us.

Look there at the cloud of dust that rises into the sky and overspreads it like a canopy. The whole Earth, O Karna, seems to tremble, cut deep by the rims of Arjuna's chariot wheels. Violent winds blow on both sides of your army and carnivores howl, and make other fearful cries. Look, O Karna, where the awful and portentous Ketu of vapoury form has appeared and covers the Sun, making one's hair stand on end. Look, where all kinds of wild beasts in seething packs, mighty wolves and tigers, look up in awe and fear at the Sun.

Look where the crows and vultures have gathered in their thousands, sitting with faces towards one another, as if in conversation. The coloured yak-tails attached to your chariot wave restlessly and your standard trembles. See your beautiful horses, with their great limbs, and swift like soaring birds, also quiver in alarm.

From all these portents, it is certain that great Kshatriyas and kings, in hundreds and thousands, will lay down their lives today. The hair-raising boom of conches, the battering of drums and the clash of cymbals, O son of Radha, resound on all sides, as well as the dense whizzing of diverse kinds of arrows, and the din of chariots, horses and men. Listen also, O Karna, to the deafening twang from the bowstrings of noble warriors. Ah, look, Karna, how Arjuna's banners fitted with rows of bells, and decked with golden moons and stars, blaze on his ratha, like flashes of lightning in a mass of clouds, as they flutter in the wind. Hear those other banners as they snap and crackle in the wind. The noble Panchala maharathas, with their

bright flags and standards, are glorious, O Karna, like the very Devas on their unearthly chariots.

Behold the heroic son of Kunti, the unconquered Bibhatsu, flying his splendid and fearful kapi-dhvaja on his ratha, which attracts the gaze of all the warriors and strikes terror into his enemies; see where it advances to destroy our forces. Krishna, with his chakra, gada, Saranga, Panchajanya and his burning ruby, the Kaustubha—ah, he is transplendent as he comes urging those white horses fleet as the wind.

Hark! There twangs Savyasachi's Gandiva, and his arrow-storms that flare at us in tides and raze our forces on every side. Already, the earth is strewn with the heads of brave kings, with faces handsome as the full moon, with their large and coppery eyes of nobility, which see the world no more. Look where seasoned warriors, with raised weapons, fall with their arms hewn off, arms that look like spiked iron maces with other weapons in their grasp, and smeared with the finest pastes and perfumes.

Horses with eyes, tongues and entrails gouged out, lie prostrate along with their dead riders. Lifeless elephants big as mountain summits, mangled by Partha, fall like rows of hills. Ghostly chariots, their royal riders slain, collapse like the celestial chariots of the Devas whose punya is exhausted.

Look, look, Karna, where Arjuna Kiritin churns our army as a mighty maned lion might a herd of cattle. There the Pandava warriors massacre our kings and vast numbers of elephants, horses, chariot-warriors and foot-soldiers of your army. Partha, shrouded by friends, foes, weapons and dust, is not to be seen, even like the Sun covered by clouds. Only the top of his standard is visible and the twang of his bowstring can be heard.

Karna, today you will see Shwetavahana, whom you have been seeking, with Krishna for his sarathy, the two Naravyaghra of red eyes, annihilate us all in battle. If, O Radheya, you succeed in killing him, who has Keshava for his charioteer and the Gandiva for his bow, then truly, truly you deserve to be our king." Challenged by the Samsaptakas, Arjuna now turns towards them and makes an immense slaughter of their ranks.

Seeing this, Karna in a froth, says, "Behold O Salya, how the furious Samsaptakas assail Partha from all sides and like the Sun shrouded by clouds, he is no longer visible. Plunged into that ocean of warriors, Arjuna is sure to perish."

Salya replies, "Who can kill Varuna with water, or quench Agni with fuel? Who is there that can seize the Wind, or drain the Ocean? Your

wanting to vanquish Arjuna is no different. The Devas and Asuras, united and led by Indra himself, cannot quell Arjuna.

Of course, Karna, you can always satisfy your vanity by bragging that you can kill Partha; but vast is the chasm between your hot hollow words and the accomplishment of the deed, for Vijaya is invincible. Why don't you turn your mind to any other less impossible task, one that you can achieve? Only he who can lift up this Earth in his two arms, burn all its creatures in anger, or cast the Devas down from swarga, can vanquish Arjuna Parantapa.

Now turn your gaze to mahabaho Bhima, the other son of Kunti, who knows no exhaustion, standing there glowing and resplendent, like another Meru. With anger blazing in him and longing for revenge, Bhima mahatejasvin has taken the field today seeking victory, and his mind is aflame thinking of all the indignities that were heaped on him, his brothers and Panchali dearer to him than his life.

And look where the most noble and pure Dharmaraja Yudhishtira stands, that subjugator of hostile cities, equally invincible in battle.

Look now at those two Naravyaghras, sons of the twin Aswini Kumaras: Nakula and Sahadeva, each insuperable in battle.

Yonder are the five sons of Draupadi with the features of Panchala princes. All of them, equal to Arjuna, and burning for battle and victory.

Beyond them stand the sons of Drupada, with Dhristadyumna at their head, surging with pride and energy: heroes endowed with untold tejas and valour.

And look where radiant, magnificent Satyaki, most celebrated Satwata, irresistible as Indra, advances against us, like an angry destroyer."

While those two lions among men speak together thus, the two armies flow into each other with an earthshaking report, like the currents of the Ganga and Yamuna flowing into each other in a flashflood.'

CANTO 47

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When the two armies clashed in their battle formations, O Sanjaya, how did Partha destroy the Samsaptakas, and how did Karna assail the Pandavas? I am eager to know about all that happened in detail, and you are a skilled raconteur.'

Sanjaya says, 'This war is the result of the evil policy of your son. Arjuna arrays his troops in a vyuha to counter your vast force deployed by Karna.

The teeming Pandava army under Dhrishtadyumna, with its many divisions of horsemen, elephants, infantry and chariots, looks magnificent indeed. The son of Prishata, his ratha drawn by horses white as doves, is splendid like the Sun or the Moon, and armed with his bow, he is glorious like Death embodied. The sons of Draupadi, endued with the prowess of tigers, brandish exceptional weapons as they stand by the side of their mother's brother like the stars appearing with the Moon.

Seeing the Samsaptakas standing in battle formation, Arjuna tears into them with fusillades of fire from the Gandiva. The Samsaptakas fight back manfully: either to kill Partha or die in the attempt. That engagement between the fiery band of shuras, with infantry, cavalry and infuriated elephants and the Kiritin is swiftly comparable to the one between Arjuna and the Nivatakavachas. Dhananjaya destroys chariots, horses, elephants and foot-soldiers with his endless tirades, as well as standards, bows,

swords, discs and battle-axes, and hacks away arms upraised with weapons in their grasp. He exterminates thousands and thousands of his sworn enemies in mere moments.

Seeing Partha's ratha caught in that deep vortex of warriors, the Samsaptakas utter loud shouts and roar like tigers. Partha, however, like Rudra in rage slaughtering all living beings, first mows down all his enemies immediately before him, and then cuts down those that stand further off, and, finally, those who are on his right and behind him.

Meanwhile, the encounter between the Panchalas, the Chedis and the Srinjayas with your troops is torrid and bloody. Kripa, Kritavarman, Sakuni, and their battle-hardened veteran fighting men ferociously engage the Kosalas, the Kasis, the Matsyas, the Karusas, the Kaikeyas and the Surasenas, all themselves valiant in the extreme. The ensuing carnage fetches the destruction of body, life and sins, and leads to fame, heaven, and virtue, for the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Sudra heroes who are embroiled in it.

O Bharatarishabha, at this same time, Duryodhana with his brothers, and many other Kuru heroes and many Madraka maharathas, all protect Karna while he takes fire to the Pandavas, the Panchalas, the Chedis and Satyaki. Karna destroys that immense division with his arrows, killing numberless chariot-warriors, and Yudhishtira soon finds himself hard pressed by the meridian Sutaputra. Calm as ever, the Dharmaraja destroys the armour and weapons, and mangles the bodies of thousands of his enemies and sends them to swarga and eternal fame and brings joy to his friends.

Thus, O Rajan, that battle between the Kurus and the Srinjayas that decimates so many men, horses and chariots, is like the war long ago, between the Devas and the Asuras.'"

CANTO 48

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me, O Sanjaya, how, after a bloody slaughter of the Pandava troops, Karna strikes at Yudhishtira. Which leading warrior among the Parthas withstood his attack? Whom did Karna have to overcome before he could reach Yudhishtira?'

Sanjaya says, 'Finding Dhrishtadyumna leading the Parthas and prepared for battle, Karna charges them recklessly. Like swans rushing towards the sea, the Panchalas, equally eager for battle, surge out against that noble warrior advancing toward them. The blare of thousands of conches, piercing the heart, and the fierce sound of thousands of battle drums arise from both armies. The sound also of diverse musical instruments and the general rumpus made by elephants, horses and chariots, and the deafening shouts of warriors is quite unbearable.

It is as if the whole earth with her mountains, trees, oceans and the entire sky covered with wind-tossed clouds, and the whole firmament with the sun, the moon and the stars, trembled with that sound. All who hear that noise are terribly disturbed, while the weak among them fall dead. Then Karna, excited with battle lust, invokes his astras and begins to hack into the Pandava army like Maghavat smiting the army of the Asuras.

Swiftly penetrating the Pandava host, Karna kills seven and seventy of the Prabhadrakas and five and twenty Panchalas. With many inexorable cloth-yard shafts fitted with wings of gold, he then slaughters the Chedis in

thousands. While he achieves these superhuman feats, throngs of Panchala chariots, O Bhaarata, quickly surround him. Karna looses five irresistible shafts and kills Bhanudeva, Chitrasena, Senabindu, Tapana and Surasena, five famed Panchala warriors, and loud cries of dismay go up from the Panchala host.

Ten Panchala maharathas surround Karna and them, too, Karna kills in moments. His two invincible sons, Sushena and Satyasena, who protect his chariot wheels, fight heedless of their very lives while his eldest son, the mighty maharatha Vrishasena, protects his father's back.

Now Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the five sons of Draupadi, Vrikodara, Janamejaya, Sikhandi, Nakula and Sahadeva and many other formidable Prabhadraka, Chedi, Kaikeya, Panchala and Matsya warriors attack Radheya all together inundating him with him different kinds of astras. Karna's sons and many other warriors of your army fight back powerfully in his defence. Sushena, with a loud shout, breaks Bhimasena's bow with a broad-headed arrow and pierces him with seven cloth-yard shafts in the chest. The dreaded Vrikodara, quite dancing with rage on his chariot, sweeps up another immense bow, strings it in a flash, smashes Sushena's bow and pierces him with ten arrows. And in a wink, he rakes Karna with seventy more.

With ten other arrows, Bhima then fells Bhanusena, another son of Karna, with his horses, charioteer, weapons, and standard, in the very sight of the prince's friends. He removes his head beautiful as the moon with a razor-headed arrow, like a lotus plucked from its stalk, and, never pausing, resumes demolishing your troops.

He destroys the bows of Kripa and Kritavarman, and puts them to flight. He gores Dusasana with three solid iron arrows and Sakuni with six, and shatters the chariots of Uluka and his brother Patatri. Shouting "You are dead!" at Sushena, Bhima fits an arrow to his bowstring, but Karna, quicker than thinking, truncates that shaft and strikes Bhima himself with three barbs. Bhima losses another perfect barb at Sushena, but Karna cleaves that one, too, in flight.

Incensed by now, and wanting to save his son, Karna plunges seventy-three arrows into Bhima in a blur. Now, with a superb bow, Sushena lacerates Nakula's breast and arms with five sizzling barbs. Nakula strikes him back with twenty sturdy shafts and gives such a roar that it frightens even Karna.

However, Sushena pierces Nakula with ten arrows and breaks his bow as well. Beside himself at this, Nakula takes up another bow and retaliates with nine searing shafts. He, O Rajan, shrouds all the quarters with showers of arrows, kills Sushena's charioteer, stabs Sushena deep with three shafts and, with three other broad-headed arrows, breaks his wonderful bow into three pieces.

Red-eyed, Sushena seizes up a fresh bow and bores sixty arrows into Nakula and seven into Sahadeva. The battle rages intensely between them, yes, my lord, even like that between the Devas and the Asuras.

Satyaki kills Vrishasena's charioteer, rives his bow with a wedge-headed shaft, and gashes his horses with another seven. He first destroys his flagpole and then wounds Vrishasena with three cruel barbs through his chest. Vrishasena staggers and almost swoons for a moment, but quickly recovers and, then armed with a sword and shield, attacks Yuyudhana with virile ferocity. But Satyaki, with ten arrows with heads like a boar's ears, knocks his sword and shield out of his grasp. Seeing Vrishasena's plight, Dusasana dashes up to his rescue, taking him into his own chariot, and bearing him away like the wind to the edge of the field where he finds him another ratha. Vrishasena rejoins the battle and strikes the five sons of Draupadi with seventy, Yuyudhana with five, Bhimasena with four and sixty, Sahadeva with five, Nakula with thirty, Satanika with seven, Sikhandi with ten, and Yudhishtira with a hundred fuming arrows. That formidable archer, the son of Karna, continues to assail these and many other fearsome warriors and to protect Karna from the rear.

Meanwhile, Satyaki, with iron quarrels, first destroys Dusasana's charioteer, horses and ratha and then strikes him in the forehead with ten shafts. The Kuru prince gains another ratha and once more begins to fight the Pandavas, from within Karna's aksauhini. Then Dhristadyumna finds Karna with ten arrows, the sons of Draupadi pierce him with three and seventy, and Yuyudhana with seven, Bhimasena with four and sixty arrows and Sahadeva with seven; Nakula drills him with thirty shafts, Satanika with seven, the heroic Sikhandi with ten and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira with a hundred.

They and other valiant warriors, O Rajan, all wanting swift victory, begin to all target Karna. He, manoeuvres his ratha with astonishing adroitness, and strikes every one of those warriors with ten arrows each. We then witness the wonderful, supernal nimbleness of the noble Karna and the

power of his astras. No one can distinguish when he draws his arrows, when he aims them, and when he shoots them. All we see are his enemies falling dead. The sky, the earth, and all the quarters are entirely shrouded with his lethal arrows and are uncannily resplendent as if covered with red clouds.

The valiant, most elegant son of Radha strikes each of his assailants with thrice as many arrows as each of them had struck him with. And once more piercing each of them, and their horses, charioteer, chariot, and flagpoles with ten arrows, he gives a loud roar and deftly flits his way between his attackers. After crushing those mighty bowmen with gales of arrows, Radheya penetrates, unresisted, into the midst of Yudhishtira's aksauhini, destroys thirty chariots of the ruthless Chedis, and injures Yudhishtira himself with a punishing, dangerous volley.

At this, many Pandava warriors, O Rajan, with Sikhandi and Satyaki, rush to Yudhishtira's rescue and surround Karna. All the greatest archers of your army resolutely protect Karna. Then the sound of various musical instruments rises up, O Rajan, and the leonine shouts of heroic warriors rend the sky. The Kurus under Karna and the Pandavas under Yudhishtira once more fearlessly face each other.' "

CANTO 49

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna, leading a force of a thousand chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry, pierces the Pandava host and, marvellously fending off thousands of missiles unleashed at him, attacks Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. He cuts off the heads, arms and thighs of his enemies, and drops them dead on the earth, and the survivors flee in panic.

Satyaki leads a determined charge of the Dravida, the Andhaka, and the Nishada foot-soldiers against Karna. However, Radheya hews off the arms and heads of hundreds, thousands and, soon enough, tens of thousands of these warriors and they fall continuously onto the earth, like a forest of sala trees cut down with countless axes. Karna, called Vaikartana, moves purposefully on the field like the Destroyer himself, while the Pandus and the Panchalas try to obstruct him, ineffectually, rather as those that try to stop a great epidemic with drugs and mantras. Karna races towards Yudhishtira, mowing down all before him.

Finally, the Pandus, the Panchalas and the Kekayas spring to the Dharmarajan's defence, and Karna finds himself checked, like Death that cannot touch those who are conversant with the Brahman. Then Yudhishtira, his eyes red with fury, says, "O Karna, Karna, O conceited Sutaputra, obedient to the wishes of Duryodhana, you have always tried to oppose us and to challenge Phalguna. Show us your might today, your

energy, and all the hatred that you bear the sons of Pandu. Today, I will purge you of your very desire for war."

Yudhishtira, O Rajan, pierces Karna with ten solid iron shafts, golden-winged, while Karna in return contemptuously strikes Yudhishtira with ten arrows with heads like the calf's tooth. Yudhishtira blazes up in anger like a fire fuelled by butter, and, bending his formidable golden bow to its fullest stretch, he shoots a whetted arrow that can pierce the very hills and is as fatal as the rod of Yama; a missile that flies with a sound like a thunderclap and sorely injures Karna deep in his left side. Stricken by the violence of that shaft, Karna's limbs seem to turn to water and he falls in a swoon in his chariot, his bow dropping from his hand.

Seeing Karna fall, the colour drains from the faces of the Dhartarashtra army and cries of dismay are heard. The Pandavas, on the other hand, watch the success of their king, and leonine shouts and a bedlam of cries of joy arise from their ranks.

However, Karna almost immediately recovers his senses, raises his formidable gold-chased bow, the Vijaya, and looses a veritable tempest of arrows at Yudhishtira, apparently determined to kill him at once. With two razor-headed arrows, he kills the Panchala princes Chandradeva and Dandadhara, splendent like the constellation Punarvasu by the side of the moon, who stand beside Yudhishtira's chariot to protect his two wheels and flanks. With a roar, Yudhishtira gores Karna with thirty arrows, Sushena and Satyasena with three, and all the others who protect Karna, each with another three immaculate barbs. The son of Adhiratha then laughs aloud and, brandishing his bow, inflicts a deep wound on the Pandava king's body with a flat-headed arrow, and then, in a blur, pierces him with sixty shafts more and gives an echoing roar of triumph.

In some panic to save Yudhishtira from the vicious and indomitable Sutaputra, a host of formidable Pandava warriors attack Karna. The Panchala prince Janamejaya finds Karna with some telling volleys, while Satyaki, Chekitana, Yuyutsu, Sikhandi, the sons of Draupadi, the Prabhadrakas, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, Bhimasena, Shishupala and the Karushas, the Matsyas, the Suras, the Kaikeyas, the Kasis and the Kosalas, all these redoubtable warriors, together assail Radha's recalescent son. Armed with different kinds of arrows and diverse astras, leading a mixed force that consists of chariots, elephants and cavalry, they surround the mighty Karna.

Thus set upon from on all sides by those Pandava warriors, Karna invokes the Brahmastra, filling all the points of the sky with arrows past count and imagination. Then, like a wind-fanned fire, which has burning arrows for its flame tongues, the ineluctable Sutaputra rides unhindered across the field as he pleases, burning the vast forest of Pandavas troops at his blazing will.

Karna, incomparable archer, unleashes some powerful astras and laughing, first destroys Yudhishtira's bow and, then, in the blink of an eye, cuts away his golden, jewel-encrusted armour. It falls away shimmering wonderfully, leaving Yudhishtira exposed.

The bleeding son of Pritha wrathfully hurls an iron javelin at Adhiratha's son; Karna fluently cuts it into pieces as it courses at him. Yudhishtira, roused, pierces Karna with four lances through his arms, brow and chest, drawing fonts of blood, and roars repeatedly. The livid Karna, hissing like some great Naga, cuts down his antagonist's standard and gashes the Pandava with three flat-headed arrows. He also blows apart Yudhishtira's quivers and then smashes his chariot.

The Dharmaraja moves to another ratha, to which are yoked his favourite battle horses, white as ivory and with black tails, and turns his face and begins to beat a retreat. His Parshni charioteer killed, Yudhishtira is crestfallen, desperate and cannot face Karna anymore. Radheya pursues Yudhishtira, and, in an amazing gesture, cleanses himself by touching his unknowing brother on the shoulder with his hand, the palm of which bears the auspicious signs of the thunderbolt, the chatra, the hook, the fish, the tortoise, and the conch shell. Karna can now easily seize Yudhishtira and make him his captive, but then he remembers his vow to Kunti.

Salya shouts urgently to him, "Karna, do not seize Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. As soon as you take hold of him, he will reduce both you and me to ashes, such is his punya."

Karna, O Rajan, laughs in mockery and says sneeringly to the helpless Yudhishtira, "How can you, born of a noble race and who observe Kshatriya dharma, flee the battlefield in fear, to save your life? I do not think that you know Kshatriya dharma. Endued with Brahma-shakti, you are indeed devoted to the study of the Vedas and the performance of yagnas. But do not, O son of Kunti, fight Kshatriyas or approach true warriors again! Do not disparage Kshatriyas and never again take any part in great

battles or wars. You may speak as you have done to others, my lord, but not shuras like Karna! You have seen today what the consequence are.

Go back to your tent, O son of Kunti, or go to Keshava and Arjuna. O Rajan, Karna will never kill one like you."

Saying this, the mighty Karna lets Yudhishtira go, and wades into the Pandava army like the Vajradhari slaughtering an Asura host. Seizing the opportunity, Yudhishtira does indeed flee, along with the Chedis, the Pandavas, the Panchalas, and Satyaki, the sons of Draupadi, the Suras and the twin sons of Madri. Seeing the aksauhini of Yudhishtira in flight, Karna is absolutely enthused and pursues the retreating force with all the Kuru warriors.

The din of battle-drums, conches and cymbals, the twang of bows, and loud shouts of joy arise from the Dhartarashtra troops.

Meanwhile, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, O Kurunandana, riding on Srutakirti's ratha, feels the full extent of Karna's prowess. He is filled with biter royal rage on seeing his troops slaughtered, and, losing control over himself, yells at his warriors, "Kill these enemies! Why are you like passive women?"

At the king's command, Bhimasena leads the Pandava maharathas against your sons. The shouts of the warriors of both armies, combined with the noise of the chariots, elephants, horses, foot soldiers and the clash of weapons, is tremendous, as they begin to tear into one another in the dreadful encounter. Their showers of shafts cast a shadow like that of clouds over Kurukshetra, as they cut down banners, standards, royal parasols, horses, charioteers and weapons.

Kshatriya kings, deprived of life and limb collapse like mountain-summits, as do elephants with their riders, falling lifeless like mountains struck by thunder. Thousands of horses with their armour and fine caparisons all torn, fall dead along with their heroic riders. Maharathas with weapons loosened from their grasp die; great phalanxes of foot soldiers die in their thousands.

The earth is strewn with the heads of heroic warriors with large and staring coppery eyes, and faces reflecting the intoxication of battle, yet handsome, beautiful as the lotus or the moon. The sounds of music and song are heard from the sky and on the earth, from choruses of apsaras riding on their devarathas, as they continually greet the newly arrived heroes above, those killed in war in hundreds of thousands. They are then

seated in the heavenly chariots and flown towards Indra's domain. Witnessing with their own eyes these wonderful sights and wanting to join these fortunate ones in swarga, the living Kshatriyas joyfully slay one another.

Maharathas, other rathikas, foot soldiers, cavalry and elephants confront each other wildly and fight magnificently.

Indeed, the carnage is immense and the battlefield is covered over with the dust that the troops raise. Enemies slay enemies and friends kill friends in the blind, mad pall of darkness. They drag one another by their hair, bite, and tear each other with their nails, strike with clenched fists, and fight with bare arms in that fiercest of all wars that consumes both lives and sins.

As the battle continues, another frothing river of blood runs from the bodies of slain men, horses and elephants, and that current carries away numbers of dead elephants and steeds. It is mired with torn flesh and it is horrific. Yet, compelled by the desire for victory, some warriors ford the bloody river, some remain on the bank on which they are, some plunge into its depths; some sink in it, while some swim through it, their armour, clothes and weapons all bloody.

Some deranged by all the horrors they have seen bathe in it, some drink the blood, O Bharatarishabha. Chariots, horses, men, elephants, weapons, ornaments, robes, armour and warriors, the earth, the sky, the firmament, and all the points of the compass turn red. With the stench, touch, taste, and the crimson sight of the flowing blood and its rushing sound, almost all the survivors are plunged in dejection.

The Pandava heroes, with Bhimasena and Satyaki, once more assail your already beaten army and force them to flee the field. Indeed, your army with its chariots, cavalry, elephants and soldiers, is no longer a compact array, as they break ranks and run in all directions with riven armour, with weapons and bows loose in their nerveless hands, with the enemy close on their heels—like a herd of frightened elephants in the forest harried by a large pride of lions.'"

CANTO 50

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing the Pandava warriors rout your host, Duryodhana attempts to retrain your fleeing soldiers, O Bharatarishabha, but in vain. Then, one of the wings of your army and its further wing, as well as Sakuni and his well-armed troops rally the Kauravas against Bhimasena. Finding the Dhartarashtra army with all its kings fleeing, Karna tells Salya, "Drive towards Bhima's chariot."

The king of the Madras urges the magnificent white horses towards Vrikodara's ratha to join the battle. Seeing him, a livid Bhima says to Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna, "Go and protect Yudhishtira who has escaped great peril before my very eyes. Evil Karna cut away his armour and had him at his mercy. Either today I will end Karna's life, or he will kill me. I entrust the king to you as a sacred pledge and you must protect him at all costs."

With that, Bhima rides straight at Karna, his roars resounding all around. Seeing him come, Salya tells Karna, "Here comes the vengeful Bhima to take his resentment of years on you. I have never before seen him look as he does now, not when Abhimanyu or Ghatotkacha were killed. He looks like the all-destroying fire at the end of the yuga, and seems as if he can consume the three worlds."

By this time, Vrikodara reaches Karna's chariot and Karna, laughing blithely, says to Salya, "What you say about Bhima, my lord Salya, is no

doubt true. He is brave, full of anger, reckless and stronger than anyone else is. While living disguised in the city of Virata, he secretly killed Kichaka and all his relatives with his bare hands to protect Draupadi. Today, he comes wearing armour, insensate with wrath and ready to battle even Yama armed with his gada.

I have always cherished the desire that one day I will either kill Arjuna or Arjuna will kill me. That aspiration of mine will be fulfilled today. If I kill Bhima or destroy his ratha, Partha will come to fight me. And that will please me, so decide quickly whatever you think we should do."

Salya says, "O Mahabaho, face mighty Bhimasena first and then you will find Phalguna. I suspect that the longing which you have cherished for so many years in your heart will be fulfilled today."

Karna says again, "Either I will kill Arjuna or he will kill me. Prepare for battle and take me to Vrikodara."

Rajan, Salya swiftly drives the chariot to where Bhima is decimating your army with torrents of polished shafts. Then, to the blare of trumpets and the peal of drums, Bhima and Karna clash and a stunning duel erupts, one that leaves them both covered in a thousand gaping wounds, all their limbs lacerated and covered in blood. Finally, Bhima, ablaze with wrath, fixes an arrow to his bow, a weapon that can pierce mountains and, drawing the bowstring to his ear, looses it at Karna with all his enormous force. Thundering, that shaft passes right through Karna like a thunderbolt piercing a mountain.

Struck through, spouting blood, your Senapati, O Kuruvarya, buckles and faints in his chariot. Seeing this, Salya spirits him away from the battlefield, and now Bhimasena begins in earnest to massacre the vast Dhartarashtra army like Indra routing the Danavas.'"

CANTO 51

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Bhima accomplished an exceedingly difficult feat, O Sanjaya, when he caused the mighty-armed Karna to measure his length on the platform of his chariot. Duryodhana would often tell me that only Karna was capable of killing the Pandavas and the Srinjayas. Now seeing him felled, what does my son do?'

Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Karna driven off the field, your son, O Rajan, says to his brothers, "Fly with my blessings, and protect Radheya who is plunged into a fathomless sea of calamity."

At this command, his brothers Srutarvan, Durddhara, Kratha, Vivitsu, Vikata, Soma, Nishangin, Kavashin, Pasin, Nanda, Upanandaka, Duspradharsha, Subahu, Vatavega, Suvarchasas, Dhanurgraha, Durmada, Jalasandha, Sala and Saha, at the head of a teeming chariot force, all in fury, charge Bhimasena like insects flying into a forest fire, and surround him. They shoot showers of arrows of different kinds from every side at him. In a flash, Bhima mows down fifty of their leading maharathas and five hundred warriors ranged against him. With a broad-headed arrow, he decapitates your son Vivitsu, his face like the full moon and adorned with earrings and headgear.

His vengeful brothers fall upon Bhima, who, with two more arrows, kills Vikata and Saha, who resemble two Devas and they fall like a pair of tempest-uprooted trees. Without pausing a moment, Bhima dispatches

Kratha to Yama, with a long needle-like arrow through his throat. Cries of rage and woe ring out from your other sons.

Mighty Bhima next kills Nanda and Upananda, at which your sons, terrified out of their wits, all turn tail and flee helter-skelter for they see in Bhimasena, the Pandava, the Destroyer himself at the end of the yuga.

Seeing your sons slaughtered, an anguished Karna again urges his steeds, white as swans, towards Bhimasena at frenetic speed. The duel between Karna and Bhima is the fiercest yet, and dreadful and deafening. I too, O Rajan, was most curious to watch the battle between them.

Bhima and Karna loose relentless torments of winged arrows to engulf each other. They are both sorely wounded and bleeding copiously, until Karna destroys Bhima's bow with a broad-headed arrow. An incensed Bhima picks up a fearsome golden parigha, wound with hempen cords and which resembles Death's bludgeon, and hurls it at Radheya with a roar. It flies true with a tremendous peal of thunder. Karna smashes that spiked mace into fragments with a marvel of arrows as it flies towards him.

Bhima, grasping his bow more tightly, shoots Karna with volleys of viciously sharp darts; their duel is a pair of massive lions locked in a death struggle.

Karna draws his bowstring to his very ear and drills Bhimasena with three terrible shafts like fire. Deeply struck, Bhima yet responds with a fearful shaft of his own, which passes through Karna's armour and body and enters the earth like a snake into an anthill. Karna trembles with the pain that plunges through his body; he shows some agitation. But recovering quickly, he retaliates with five and twenty shafts, followed by blizzards more, none of which miss Bhima. Seizing the moment, the rampant Sutaputra cuts down Bhima's flagstaff, kills his charioteer, rives his bow, and at last destroys his ratha.

Lord of the Bharatas, mahabaho Bhima, who is like his father Vayu in prowess, picks up a gada, jumps down from his chariot in a towering rage and begins to savagely butcher your troops, smashing heads, limbs, spraying blood, brains and flesh everywhere. He puts to rout seven hundred war elephants with tusks as big as plough-shafts. With his titanic strength and intimate knowledge of the marmas of an elephant, he strikes them on their temples and frontal lobes, their eyes and the parts above their gums causing the terror-sicken animals to turn tail and run from the monstrous human.

However, their hastikas manage to bring them back and to surround Bhimasena once more, like clouds covering the sun. But then, Bhima of supernatural strength now smashes down those beasts along with their hastikas, weapons and standards, before turning his attention to Sakuni's two and fifty elephants and killing these as well.

Bhima gone wild, Bhima drenched in the blood of man and beast, irresistible, elemental Bhima, a spectre of death runs amok, roaring like a hundred lions on Kurukshetra, ravages your army, destroying a century of chariots and several hundreds of foot-soldiers in the absolute bedlam and mayhem that he brings in his mad wrath.

Scorched by the sun as well as by the wild Bhima, your army begins to shrink like a piece of leather spread over a fire. Your troops, O Bharatarishabha, filled with fear of Bhimasena, flee in all directions. Then, five hundred maharathas, all cased in fine armour, rush towards Bhima with loud shouts, shooting thick showers of arrows. Like Vishnu destroying the Asuras, Bhima annihilates all those brave warriors with his mace, with their charioteers, chariots, banners and weapons. Sakuni unleashes three thousand of his feared horsemen, all armed to the teeth, at Bhima. That Paraviraha smashes them all down with his swinging gada, spraying the air and strewing the ground with blood, heads, limbs, brain, bone and marrow. After exterminating the Gandhara horsemen, he mounts another ratha and rides after Karna.

Meanwhile, O Rajan, Karna engages Yudhishtira in another duel, covering him with thick arrow showers; he kills the eldest Pandava's sarathy and pursues Yudhishtira as he tries to escape, loosing sizzling volleys of kanka-feathered arrows after him.

Bhima comes up on them and covers the entire sky and Karna with torrents of arrows. Radheya whirls around and, leaving Yudhishtira, attacks Bhima hotly. Satyaki joins the fight and, setting himself beside Bhima's chariot, also begins to shoot at Karna. Doubly afflicted, Karna still attacks Bhima with undimmed ferocity. Resplendent those two are, and fierce and grim, as they loose flights of shimmering shafts at each other that resemble shining cranes.

Their thousands of arrows, O Rajan, obscure the rays of the sun, the points of the sky, cardinal and subsidiary. Why, even as Surya lazes at his zenith at midday, over Kurukshetra a great dimness falls. Seeing Sakuni, Kritavarman, Aswatthaman, Karna and Kripa engage the Pandavas, the

Kauravas rally and return to the fight. The reverberation of the ensuing battle is as that of seas roaring when it rains.

The sun has reached the meridian and the two armies battle in furious exuberance—very likely, a battle such as we have not yet seen, even though both armies have been vastly denuded and the war has aged. The sound of battle is loud and deep as not one but of several oceans that crash into one another. Indeed, they appear no more to be two armies but a single one, intent on obliterating itself.

A desperate battle ensues between the Kurus and the Pandavas, both driven by the desire to win immortal fame. A great pandemonium of voices is incessantly heard, O Bhaarata, and as I listen to them call each another names and ridicule and deride each other about their ancestry or about their ways and conduct, I feel certain that their lives have run out and a terrible fear grips my heart about the dire consequences that must necessarily follow. The carnage continues, O Rajan, as the Pandavas and the Kauravas, mighty maharathas all, maul and carve one another.'"

CANTO 52

"Sanjaya says, 'Pure and complete hatred filling their every fibre, those Kshatriyas massacre each other. Squadrons of chariots and divisions of cavalry, infantry and elephants clash in mortal combat. We see maces rise and fall, drawing geysers of blood and brain; spiked bludgeons do the same; we watch lances and short arrows fly to their marks, and astras flare at each other.

Storms of vicious arrows fly like locust clouds. Elephants gore each other horribly, while horsemen, chariot-warriors and foot-soldiers confront one another and kill and die, while each moment Kurukshetra becomes a more horrific spectacle, until one cannot bear to look at the grisly field. The earth, covered with blood, is like a vast plain infested by the red coccinella of the monsoon; she resembles a beautiful maiden attired in white virginal robes dyed deep scarlet.

Flesh and blood are the golden ornaments of the spectral field. Everywhere other macabre adornments lie thickly strewn—severed heads, trunks, arms, thighs, and earrings and other ornaments displaced from the bodies of warriors, O Bhaarata, and the collars, cuirasses and mangled bodies of brave archers, coats of mail and banners.

Elephants gore other tuskers and, bathed in blood, the huge creatures are stunning to behold, like moving hills shining with metals and with streams of liquid chalk running down their breasts. Lances hurled by

horsemen or held by enemy warriors are snatched out of the air by these beasts who then twist and break them like twigs. Many of the great ones, who have lost their armour in the battle, look like mountains divested of clouds at the advent of winter; those pierced with gold winged arrows are as gorgeous as mountains whose summits are lit up with blazing brands.

Some of these stricken leviathans fall head first, like winged mountains of yore with their wings sheared away. Others roar strangely, like lions, while some trumpet and scream in almost human voices, and run here and there in agony and panic.

Horses in golden trappings with cruel arrows and spears protruding from them run in all directions; many fall down and writhe in agony. Men too, struck down, fall uttering cries of pain, O Rajan; many seeing their sires, grandsires, relatives and others, retreating, call out their well-known names and the names of their races. The chopped off arms of warriors, smeared with sandalwood paste and decked with golden ornaments, writhe on the ground, falling down and springing up, or dart forward like five-headed snakes, like little standards of gold drenched in blood.

The battle spreads out and rages on; hardly anyone anymore knows whom they fight or kill in the dementia that holds them all in its grip. A cloud of blood-flecked dust darkens the field and the warriors can no longer distinguish friends from enemies. Yet again, a mighty river fed by countless bloody rillets begins to flow, the heads of men its rocks and the hair of noble warriors its floating weeds and moss. Bones form the fishes of the ghastly river; bows, arrows and maces are its little floating rafts, while flesh and blood are the mire of the frothing current that flows from Kurukshetra to Yamaloka.

Many plunge into those crimson streams and perish, coursing fear through the timid and fetching exhilaration to brave Kshatriyas. Various carnivores, O Naravyaghra, roar and yell hideously turning the once allowed field of dharma into a precinct in the domain of the king of the dead. Innumerable headless trunks rise up everywhere, with naked necks, and fearsome creatures, gorging on flesh and drinking fat and blood, O Bhaarata, dance on the banks of that second Vaitarani. Crows, vultures and cranes, gorged with flesh, fat and marrow and other scavengers move about everywhere in glee.

There are warriors who cast off all fear and observing Kshatriya dharma, fearlessly continue to fight. Indeed, on that horrible field where

arrows and spears beyond all count fly through the air, above the ground crowded with scavengers and carnivores both earthly and otherwise, brave and noble warriors fight on fearlessly, with lances and battle-axes, displaying their prowess and declaring their names and their lineage, ah, as if their eyes have seen no carnage.

As the battle rages on, the numbers of the Kaurava army dwindle and it flounders like a ship on the bosom of a stormy ocean.'"

CANTO 53

"Sanjaya says, 'The loud twang of the Gandiva, O Rajan, is heard above the din of battle, as the son of Pandu fights the Samsaptakas, the Kosalas and the Narayana forces. The determined Samsaptakas unleash a barrage of arrows at Arjuna, which he shrugs off and plunges into the thick of the enemy ranks and slaughters many of their foremost maharathas. Shooting his whetted arrows fletched with kanka feathers in waves, Partha comes face to face with Susarman, king of the Trigartas.

Susarman strikes Partha with ten shafts and Janardana with three in his right arm. Next, with a broad-headed arrow, he pierces Arjuna's kapi-dhvaja, made by Tvashtri, the celestial artificer himself, whereupon the huge image of that great Vanara fluttering on it begins to utter loud and fierce sounds and roars, and your troops freeze in fear. As it stands immobilized, your army looks like the Chitraratha forest laden with flowers of various kinds.

They soon recover their senses, O Kurudvaha, and begin to drench Arjuna with showers of arrows. They surround his magnificent ratha, and assail him with crazed roars although all the while he continues to mow them down. They attack his horses, his chariot-wheels, his chariot-shaft, and every other part of his ratha with great force. Some of them clutch Kesava's massive arms, while some seize Partha himself with glee as he

stands tall upon his chariot, but the two Krishnas shrug their assailants off as an angry elephant shakes off riders from his back.

Finding himself cornered by these maharathas and Krishna under attack, Arjuna is filled with rage and mows down a large number of the enemy with special arrows used in close encounters.

He says to Krishna, "Behold, O Mahabaho, these countless Samsaptakas yet trying to accomplish a fearful task although they are slaughtered in their thousands! O Yadusrestha, there is no one on earth but I who can withstand such an attack on his chariot."

Saying this, he blows his conch; Krishna follows him and the combined blast fills the heavens and terrifies the Samsaptakas who begin to waver. Then that Paravirahan, greatest of heroes, paralyses the Samsaptakas as he repeatedly invokes the Nagastra and they are forced to stand motionless, O Rajan, as if turned to stone. Now Arjuna slaughters the motionless warriors like Indra long ago slaying the Daityas in the battle with Taraka.

The Nagastra binds their lower limbs with writhing snakes so that they cannot move a step. Seeing his army paralysed, the mighty Susarman invokes the Sauparnastra and numberless birds fly down and devour those snakes or chase them away. Freed from that astra, the Samsaptaka forces look like the sun emerging from behind clouds and shedding light again. Once more, they shoot their arrows and cast their spears and axes at Arjuna's chariot. Arjuna cuts down their every volley and fusillade, and he continues to slaughter them.

Then, Susarman plunges a perfect arrow directly into Arjuna's chest and immediately drills three more shafts into Partha closely around the first one. With a gasp of pain, his blood spurting from the four wounds, great Arjuna sits down on the platform of his ratha. All the troops cry out in alarm, "Partha is slain!"

The blare of conchs, the pounding of drums, the sound of diverse musical instruments, and loud shouts of triumph and lament envelop the battlefield. However, Arjuna quickly recovers and invokes the Aindrastra. Thousands of arrows issue from this single weapon and, screaming forth in all directions, kill kings, elephants, horses and warriors in thousands, creating a great fear in the hearts of the Samsaptakas and Gopalas, O Bhaarata. Not a warrior among them can stand up to Arjuna, and he destroys your troops, as he likes. All your foremost maharathas can do nothing to contain the unparalleled Dhananjaya, as he first kills ten

thousand fighting men, then a further seventeen thousand warriors and three thousand elephants, and he stands resplendent like an intense and smokeless fire.

Then the Samsaptakas once again encircle the Pandava, and the battle between them is an unprecedented bloodbath.'"

CANTO 54

"Sanjaya says, 'Kritavarman, Kripa, Aswatthaman, Karna, Uluka, Sakuni, Duryodhana himself and his brothers, O Bhaarata, find the Kuru army like a ship wrecked on the raging ocean; in abject fear of Arjuna and unable to stand together, they still attempt to rescue the rapidly sinking craft of your forces; for a short while, a fierce battle rages.

Kripa shoots dark locust swarms of arrows and envelops the Srinjayas. A vengeful Sikhandi pours a cataract of arrows over that bull of a Brahmana, which Kripa, master of astras, renders tame, and he wounds Sikhandi deep with ten of his own scathing shafts. A breathless exchange of arrows follows and, finally, the twice-born Kripa demolishes Sikhandi's ratha, his horses and charioteer and forces him to leap out of his chariot.

Sikhandi picks up a sword and shield and rushes at the Acharya, and though Kripa strikes him with a flurry of thought-swift arrows, it is wonderful to see Sikhandi battle on undeterred. Noticing Sikhandi at bay, his brother Dhrishtadyumna flies to his rescue but Kritavarman cuts him off. Aswatthaman bars Yudhishtira's way as he, with his son and troops dashes towards Kripa's chariot. Your son Duryodhana holds up Nakula and Sahadeva as those maharathas come charging in. Karna holds off Bhimasena, the Karushas, the Kaikeyas and the Srinjayas.

Meanwhile, Kripa unleashes fire tides at Sikhandi, as if he wants to incinerate him. However, whirling his sword around, the Panchala prince

strikes down all Kripa's livid golden arrows; Kripa demolishes Sikhandi's shield emblazoned with a hundred moons. This draws loud applause from your troops. His shield shattered, Sikhandi is at Kripa's mercy but, sword in hand, still attacks the Brahmana, like a sick man running towards the jaws of Death. Then, Chitraketu's noble son Suketu, seeing Sikhandi in dire straits, rushes to his defence and swathes Kripa in countless iron-tipped missiles. Seeing his chance, Sikhandi, O Kurusattama, makes good his escape.

Suketu and the son of Gautama are soon engaged in a deadly duel and, in a fierce exchange, the prince breaks Kripa's bow and badly injures his sarathy. An enraged Kripa picks up a fresh bow and rakes Suketu with thirty barbs through all his vital marmas, making that prince sway on his ratha like a tree trembling during an earthquake. Next moment, with a razor-headed arrow, Kripa strikes off Suketu's head adorned with a pair of blazing earrings and a helmet and it falls like a piece of meat from the claws of a hawk. Upon the fall of Suketu, his frightened troops flee from the terrible Kripa.

Meanwhile, the mighty Dhrishtadyumna challenges Kritavarman, "Stop and fight, O Bhoja!"

The two are soon at each other like two hawks fighting over a piece of meat. Dhrishtadyumna strikes Kritavarman through his chest with nine arrows, drawing spouts of blood from the Bhojaraja. Undeterred, Kritavarman mantles his assailant, his steeds and his chariot with such an opacity of arrows that he makes him invisible. An incensed Dhrishtadyumna, with all those golden arrows stuck in him, is magnificent to look at, and retaliates with a deluge of fire, which Kritavarman douses as it falls on him from the sky.

Dhrishtadyumna dispatches Kritavarman's charioteer to Yama, and having thus vanquished his mighty antagonist, begins to lay into the Kaurava forces. Your warriors, too, O Rajan, charge towards Dhrishtadyumna, uttering leonine roars and the battle is fully joined once more.'"

CANTO 55

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing that Satyaki and the sons of Draupadi protect Yudhishtira, Aswatthaman moves determinedly against him, loosing a riptide of golden-winged shafts as he flies at Yudhishtira. A master of all kinds of weapons, he fills all the sky with devastras and soon Yudhishtira is engulfed in a vast expanse of arrows. Covered over with that cupola of golden arrows, the firmament presents a striking spectacle, O Kurudvaha, as if a canopy embroidered with gold has been spread there and casts a shadow, as that of clouds. It is wondrous to behold, even with the carnage continuing without let all around, and not one creature of the air could fly through it. The shining dome comprehensively contains Satyaki, Yudhishtira, and all the other Pandava warriors.

The maharathas of the Pandava army are filled with wonder and cannot so much as look at Aswatthaman, who blazes like the sun. While Drona's terrible son is slaughtering the Pandava troops, for this is no benign covering of golden astras, Yudhishtira, the sons of Draupadi, Satyaki, and the Panchala warriors unite and, quite forgetting their fear of death, surge forward against him. The seven warriors all assail him violently, supported by many other Kshatriyas from every side. Hissing like a serpent, Aswatthaman responds with slews of arrows that find them all, bringing agony. He destroys Srutakirti's bow; that prince takes up another and gashes Drona's son with a light-like volley.

Aswatthaman continues to consume the Pandava troops, with relentless tides of fire. Smiling, he breaks Yudhishtira's bow and plunges three keen shafts into the Dharmaraja. Yudhishtira picks up another formidable bow and, quick as the mind, drills the Brahmana with seventy arrows through his arms and chest.

Satyaki flashes up and, with a roar, bisects Aswatthaman's bow with a crescent-tipped arrow. Aswatthaman fells Satyaki's charioteer with a spear and, taking up another bow, swathes him with countless arrows. Satyaki's horses without a charioteer run free on the battlefield. The Pandava warriors led by Yudhishtira sweep in and attack Drona's son with great violence.

Aswatthaman, finding himself under attack, unleashes firestorms of astras to consume the Pandava troops as a fire in the forest does dry grass and straw. The Pandava army is stricken, threatened like the mouth of a river by a whale, and all that watch Aswatthaman's prowess consider the Pandavas to be already dead.

A raging Yudhishtira cries to Drona's son, "O Naravyaghra, you have neither affection nor gratitude, since you want to kill today. The duties of a Brahmana are tapasya, dakshina and study. Only a Kshatriya should bend a bow, and you have reduced yourself to being a Brahmana only in name. Do whatever you can, Aswatthaman, but I will still vanquish the Kauravas in your very sight. You are a wretch amongst Brahmanas."

Aswatthaman smiles and reflects but without saying anything, he covers Yudhishtira with a shower of arrows like the Destroyer engaged in annihilating the creatures at yuga's end. Yudhishtira quickly retreats from the spot, abandoning his large aksauhini and Aswatthaman also does, O Rajan. Yudhishtira, avoiding the son of Drona, assails your army, determined to annihilate it.'"

CANTO 56

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, Vikartana stands firm against Bhimasena supported by the Panchalas, the Chedis and the Kaikeyas, covers him with arrows, and kills many of the enemy's maharathas. Bhimasena avoids Karna and rides against the Kaurava troops like a blazing fire towards a heap of dry grass, leaving the Sutaputra to contend with the mighty bowmen amongst the Panchalas, the Kaikeyas, and the Srinjayas, in their thousands. Indeed, while Partha and Vrikodara are exterminating the Samsaptakas and the Kauravas, Karna is decimating the Panchalas. It is because of your evil policy, O Rajan, that all these Kshatriyas are annihilated in the war.

A stirred Duryodhana wounds Nakula and his four horses, and knocks down Sahadeva's golden standard. The Pandava princes retaliate and strike your son with a myriad of shafts and, the battle quickly igniting, the twins lose their bows. Duryodhana's bow, O Bhaarata, seems always drawn into a circle and arrows appear to issue ceaselessly from it. Shrouded by Duryodhana's shafts, the Pandava princes cease to shine brightly, like the sun and the moon shrouded by masses of clouds, and all that we see is one uniform expanse of the work of the Destroyer himself, at he appears at the end of the yuga.

Seeing this remarkable exhibition by your son, all the maharathas consider the sons of Madri to have entered the presence of Death.

Dhrishtadyumna, Senapati of the Pandava army, sees Duryodhana on the verge of overwhelming the twins and flies to their rescue loosing a great wave of arrows before him as he comes. Your son, that Bharatarishabha, turns his attention to the Panchala prince, and they are quickly entangled in a duel of razor-faced arrows. Dhrishtadyumna quickly finds his bow broken and leather gloves cut to shreds. Standing resplendent on his ratha with red eyes and bleeding from his many wounds, he seizes up another bow, O Kurudvaha and, with godlike force, looses five and ten cloth-yard shafts fletched with kanka and peacock feathers at Duryodhana. These arrows that resemble hissing snakes blast right through the golden armour of your son and, passing through his body, enter the earth.

Deeply wounded and weak from his gaping, flowing wounds, your son looks like a beautiful and gigantic kinsuka in the spring. He shatters Dhrishtadyumna's bow again and strikes him with ten arrows between his brows. Those polished shafts adorn Dhrishtadyumna's face like a number of bees sipping honey from a full-blown lotus! Dhrishtadyumna's response, with a new golden bow, is to kill Duryodhana's four horses and sarathy and to destroy his chariot, the upashkara, the chatra, his spear, sword, mace, and his beautiful standard bearing the device of an elephant worked in rare jewels.

Duryodhana's brothers race up to rescue their defenseless older brother and, before Dhrishtadyumna's very eyes, Durdhara plucks him onto his ratha and bears him away from the battle.

Meanwhile, wanting to rescue Duryodhana, Karna bears down on the fierce Dhrishtadyumna, Drona's slayer. However, Satyaki, who is pursuing him, strikes your son with a lucific volley of arrows, like an elephant pursuing a rival and stabbing him in his hindquarters with his tusks. A fierce battle breaks out between those two noble warriors, while both armies look on.

Meanwhile, when the sun had climbed again to his zenith[1], Karna attacks the Panchalas and an immense slaughter of elephants, horses and men takes place on both sides. The Panchalas, O Rajan, anticipating victory, fly at Karna like birds towards a home tree. A frothing Karna begins to decimate them with a dark plague of arrows, singling out their commanders Vyaghraketu, Susharman, Chitra, Ugrayudha, Jaya, Sukla, Rochamana and the invincible Singhasena who surround him with their chariots and

inundate him with their arrows. He seriously injures those eight warriors and goes to slay many thousands of other seasoned fighters.

Karna kills Jishnu, Jishnukarman, Devapi, Chitra, Chitrayudha, Hari, Singhaketu, Rochamana, the famed maharatha Salabha, although the Chedi warriors bloody him. Karna's archery causes a great agitation on the field, as so many elephants run in fear and others, lethally wounded, utter cries of distress and fall like mountains struck by thunderbolts. The corpses of elephants, horses, men and ruined chariots are strewn along the path of Karna's chariot. Neither Bhishma nor Drona, nor any other warrior of your army has ever achieved such feats as Karna achieves on this day. As a lion chases a herd of terrified deer, Karna rides fearlessly among the Panchalas and brings murderous havoc to the maharathas that oppose him.

Even as fire burns everything it touches, the Karnagni burns all the Srinjayas who face him. Shouting out his own name as a battle cry, Karna single-handedly kills many leading warriors among the Chedis and the Panchalas. Looking at his unworldly archery, O Bhaarata, I thought that not a single Panchala would escape him, as the Sutaputra demolishes them almost contemptuously.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira dashes up to help the Panchalas, along with Dhrishtadyumna, the sons of Draupadi, and hundreds of his warriors, and surround Karna. Sikhandi, Sahadeva, Nakula, Nakula's son, Janamejaya, Satyaki, and innumerable Prabhadrakas are quite magnificent as they ride behind Dhrishtadyumna. Like Garuda swooping down upon a writhing nest of snakes, Karna, unaided, calmly, splendidly, faces all those Chedis, Panchalas and Pandavas, and the battle between them is as atrocious as the Devasura yuddha of old. Like the sun dispelling surrounding darkness, Karna, fearless and by himself, stands alone and godlike, contending with all those renowned archers who shoot ceaselessly at him and inundate him with a sea of weapons.

While Karna engages the Pandavas, Bhimasena imposing as the lord Yama, is employed in butchering the Kurus, who include the Bahlikas, the Kaikeyas, the Matsyas, the Vasatas, the Madras and Saindhavas. The elephants, in their hundreds, which Bhima kills with his cloth-yard shafts, fall with their dead riders and make the earth tremble. Horses with their riders dead, foot-soldiers pierced with arrows and vomiting blood, thousands of chariot-warriors mangled by Bhima's gales of shafts, litter the

battlefield. Mauled and terrified by Bhimasena, Duryodhana's army stands stunned and numb, like the ocean during a calm day in autumn.

Stripped of its pride, your son's mighty army loses its splendour and Bhima continues to make a rill of their blood. While Bhima on the rampage annihilates the Kurus, a rabid Karna wades into the Pandava aksauhini.

As that incomparably brutal battle continues without pause or let, the onlookers can only marvel, inured to its horror from which an uncanny magnificence emerges, and Arjuna, after killing another host of Samsaptakas, says to Krishna, "The Samsaptaka rathikas' spirit is broken and they run from me like deer from the roar of a lion. I have dispersed the vast force of the Srinjayas as well.

Look where Karna's banner with the device of the elephant's rope is in the midst of Yudhishtira's aksauhini, where he wreaks great havoc. No other maharatha of our army can contain peerless Karna. O Krishna, I want you to avoid all the other warriors and take me to the Sutaputra, but, as always, I put my faith in your wisdom, and you must do as you please."

Krishna smiles and says, "Kill the Kauravas, O son of Pandu, without delay!"

That ratha, flying the kapi-dhvaja and harnessed to pure white horses in golden trappings, urged by Krishna, penetrates your vast force with a clatter like a battery of thunder on high, like a deva-ratha fleeting through the firmament. With blood red eyes, the two Krishnas are fearsome and magnificent, like the twin Ashvinis invoked during a yagna. Those Naravyaghras are reminiscent of two elephants in a forest, enraged by the claps of hunters.

Like Yama with his paasa, they fall upon your army. To check them, your son once more unleashes the Samsaptakas, with a thousand chariots, three hundred elephants, fourteen thousand horses, and two hundred thousand foot-soldiers—all unerring bowmen, courageous and expert warriors—against the Pandavas. They make little impression as, assuming a form like that of Death himself, Arjuna slaughters them. He fills the sky with a deadly and relucent torrent of golden shafts that fall ceaselessly on them. The sound of Partha's palms slapping his bowstring make us feel that the earth, or the vault of the sky, or all the points of the firmament, or the several oceans, or the mountains have broken apart.

Arjuna kills ten thousand Samsaptaka Kshatriyas, and goes on to savage the farther wing of the Samsaptakas supported by the Kambojas. Like

Vasava ravaging the Danavas, he hacks off the limbs and heads of elephants, horses, chariot-warriors and foot soldiers and they fall onto the earth, like trees in a hurricane.

The younger brother of Sudakshina, the king of the Kambojas, attempts to stop him but quicker than seeing Arjuna severs his arms at the shoulders and then his handsome head, felling him from his ratha, his body bathed in blood, like the thunder-riven summit of a mountain of red arsenic, like a column of gold or like a summit of the golden Sumeru. Now, O Rajan, a pitched battle commences and another great carnage follows as warriors of the Kamboja, the Yavana, and the Saka races die in lakes of blood, turning the indescribable field into a single crimson expanse.

While Savyasachi is exterminating the wings of the Samsaptakas, Aswatthaman rides up, shaking his formidable bow, to challenge him. With his mouth wide open and eyes red with rage the mighty Brahmana warrior looks like Death himself, gada in hand at the end of the yuga. He penetrates the Pandava army and, falling on both Krishna and Dhananjaya, shrouds and stupefies them with his arrows. The universe of mobile and immobile beings utters cries of dismay, thinking the two Krishnas slain.

Crowds of Siddhas and Charanas arrive from everywhere, praying silently, fervently, "Let good befall all the worlds!"

Never before, O Rajan, have I seen Aswatthaman fight as he now does the two Krishnas. The sound of his bow is like a roaring lion and its string flashes like lightning. No one can stand up to him and, Arjuna himself feels that he has met his match and his assurance and vigour appear to drain from him. Krishna is incensed and draws hot deep breaths. O Rajan, he seems to burn both Aswatthaman and Phalguna with his gaze as he looks repeatedly from one to the other.

He then says tightly, "This, O Partha, is exceedingly strange that Drona's son surpasses you today! Where is your tejas and the might of your arms? Do you not still have the Gandiva in your hands, and do you not ride on own your chariot now? Have your hands suffered some injury? Otherwise, why is it that I see the son of Drona prevail over you today? Do not spare your enemy, thinking that he is the son of your Acharya, O Bharatarishabha. This is not the time for sentiment."

In a blur, Arjuna draws fourteen flat-headed arrows and destroys Aswatthaman's bow, standard, parasol, banners, chariot, spear and mace. He then strikes Drona's son through his shoulder with a clutch of calf-

toothed arrows. Aswatthaman swoons and supports himself by clinging to his flagstaff; but he then falls in a dead faint, gushing blood from his wounds and his sarathy whisks him away from Arjuna.

Arjuna turns back to your troops and resumes slaughtering them in thousands, in Duryodhana's very sight.

Thus, O Rajan, because of your evil policy, unimaginable carnage continues, as the two armies massacre each other. Within moments, Partha overwhelms the Samsaptakas; Vrikodara, the Kurus; while Vasusena overruns the Panchalas. Great and skilled warriors fall and many headless trunks weirdly rise all around, for the will to battle has not left them. O Kurudhvaha, in great pain from his wounds, Yudhishtira retreats some two kosas from the field of battle and rests for some time.'"

[1] The sequence of time here is unclear.

CANTO 57

"Sanjaya says, 'Then, going up to Karna, Duryodhana says to him and to Salya, as well as the other commanders, "This wonderful occasion, when the gates of heaven are wide open, has arrived on its own. Happy are those Kshatriyas, O Karna, who find such an opportunity to kill the Pandavas in battle and win this wide earth, or die and win the blessed realms kept for heroes."

Hearing these words, the warriors present utter loud joyful shouts, and beat their drums and blow their musical instruments. Gladdening them further, Aswatthaman adds, "Dhrishtadyumna murdered my father before everyone, after Drona had laid aside his weapons. In revenge and for the sake of my friend, I swear today that I will not remove my armour without killing Dhrishtadyumna. If I fail to keep this my vow, let me not find swarga. I vow that I will crush Arjuna, Bhimasena, or any other who faces me today in battle."

Another general battle breaks out between the Kaurava and the Pandava armies. The clash of the chariot divisions, O Bhaarata, is savage and bloody and the destruction of life in the van of the Kurus and the Srinjayas resembles the pralaya. Various celestial beings, including the Devas along with Apsaras, appear on high to watch the battle. The Apsaras shower unworldly garlands down on those Kshatriyas, as well as different kinds of heavenly perfumes, and with sparling gemstones. Soft winds carry the

sweet scents to all the leading warriors and inspire them so that they kill one another with greater gusto.

Strewn with celestial flowers, golden arrows, and with the bodies of so many celebrated warriors, the battlefield is as wondrous as the heavens, strewn with stars past count. The applause from the sky, the sound of musical instruments and the furious passage-at-arms distinguished by the virile twanging of bows, the clatter of chariot wheels and the roars and screams of warriors makes the uproar on Kurukshetra, dharmakshetra, deafening.'"

CANTO 58

"Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, with Arjuna, Karna and Bhimasena fighting in fury and beside themselves, such a battle rages between those lords of earth.

After besting Aswatthaman and other maharathas, Arjuna says to Krishna, "Look, O Mahabaho, the Pandavas flee while Karna razes our famed warriors. However, I see neither the Dharmarajan nor the standard of his son. The third part of the day still remains, Janardana, and no one among the Dhartarashtras challenges me for a fight. I am anxious, Lord, so drive to where Yudhishtira is. Once I know that he is safe and well with our younger brothers, we will return to fight the enemy again."

Krishna drives the chariot to where Yudhishtira and the powerful Srinjaya rathikas are fighting the enemy and making a dreadful slaughter. As they go, he says to Arjuna, "Look, Partha, at this bloody carnage of the Kshatriyas on earth, and all for the sake of one man—the evil Duryodhana. Look at the gold-backed bows of the slain warriors and their costly quivers dislodged from their shoulders. Look at the straight gold-winged arrows, at the oiled cloth-yard shafts that look like snakes that have recently shed their skin.

Look at the rare and magnificent swords with ivory hilts, and engraved with gold; look at the millions of broken and fallen gold embossed shields. Look at those golden lances and spears, and those huge maces with gold

filigree and those gilded scimitars, those axes with golden embellishments, and the heads of some battle-axes fallen off from their golden hafts. Look at those iron kuntas, those short heavy clubs, those huge bludgeons with spiked heads, those fallen chakras, all so beautifully wrought and all for this blood-drenched war. All these warriors now lying lifeless came energetically to battle armed with different weapons and even now seem alive.

Look at the thousands upon thousands of handsome, noble warriors lying on the field, with limbs severed and crushed, or heads broken, or torn and mangled by elephants, horses and chariots. Kurukshetra is mantled with arrows, spears, swords, axes, scimitars, spiked maces, lances, iron kuntas, the corpses of men, horses and elephants, all hacked down and lying in streams of blood, all their rich and complex lives lost.

Bhumi Devi is stunning to behold, even as she was meant to be on this day, O Bhaarata, with fallen arms smeared with sandalwood paste, wearing golden angadas, keyuras and leather gauntlets, with hewn off thighs like elephants' trunks, with fallen heads, decked with costly gemstones and earrings, and with dead heroes with large and noble eyes. Why, Kurukshetra resembles a vedi, an altar cluttered with extinguished fires, with headless trunks smeared with blood as if in anointment, with severed limbs like sacrificial offerings.

Look at those exquisite chariots with rows of golden bells shattered, and those dead horses with arrows protruding from their magnificent bodies. Look at the skeletons of the chariots, their quivers, banners, the various standards; look at these giant white conches of maharathas, now stained in red and littered all over the field. Look at those elephants, big as hills, lying dead with innocent tongues lolling out, the dead horses decked with triumphal banners. Look at the housings of the elephants, and the skins and rich varied cloths, all torn and bloodied.

Look at those rows of bells broken when the great tuskers fell; look at those strong goads set with stones of lapis lazuli now lying forlorn on the ground. Look at those whips also decorated with gold and jewels, so many still in the grasp of dead horsemen, and those horse coverings of ranku deerskins.

Behold the sad jewels from the crowns of kings and their ample golden necklaces, the fallen royal parasols and yak-tail fans. Ah, look at the earth,

mired with blood, strewn with the faces of heroes, luminous as the moon and the stars.

Look at the wounded warriors in whom life is not yet extinct and who wail in pain and sorrow. Casting aside their weapons, look where their kinsmen tend to them, hopelessly, weeping inconsolably. And look again upon those warriors, who despite all this, are still afire with wrath and the mad impulse to fight and win victory after already killing thousands of living men, their own kind; look where they yet ride and run headlong against their enemies, their bloodlust undimmed.

Look at those who run here and there in frenzy, fetching water for fallen comrades, while others breathe their last. The brave ones return with water and, seeing their relatives lifeless now, fling down the water and run away, shouting wildly to one another, demented by sorrow. And elsewhere, look, Arjuna, many have died after having slaked their dying thirst, while others die even while drinking. Others, though loving towards their fallen kin, desert them and, entirely in the grip of the dread spirit of war, charge madly at the enemy. Others bite their lips and, with brows knit, stand still and survey the entirely ghastly and absolutely beautiful battlefield."

Thus showing Arjuna the field of battle, Krishna rides on towards Yudhishtira and Arjuna, seeing his brother the king, and repeatedly cries to his divine sarathy, "Ride on, Krishna! Ride on!"

Krishna says to Arjuna, "Look at those kings rushing towards Yudhishtira. Behold Karna, like a blazing fire on the field of war. Look there, where the mighty Bhima rides into battle. Look where the greatest Panchala, Srinjaya and Pandava warriors under Dhrishtadyumna follow Bhima. And look, the enemy's vast host is broken once more. O Arjuna, look where Karna wild as Death and like Indra in prowess, tries to rally the fleeing Kauravas. There goes Drona's son, greatest of all Brahmana warriors, and maharatha Dhrishtadyumna rushes to confront him with the Srinjayas close behind."

Thus does the immortal Krishna describe what is before them to Arjuna. Then, O king, there erupts another torrid and devastating battle. Loud shouts and roars ring out as the two hosts clash, O Rajan, with death their goal.

And thus, as a result of your evil policy, unimaginable destruction has set in on the earth, O Bhumipala, of both your warriors and those of the enemy.'"

CANTO 59

"Sanjaya says, 'Karna leading the Kurus and Yudhishtira the Parthas, meet again in a battle that rapidly swells the population of Yama's kingdom. Rivers of blood run again on Kurukshetra, O Bhaarata, and only a small remnant of the heroic Samsaptakas survive. Dhrishtadyumna, the Pandavas and their maharathas all converge on and target Karna; and he, by himself, like a mountain receiving a cataract of water, faces them confidently.

In a hair-raising battle, great Karna repulses all those maharathas. Dhrishtadyumna pierces Radheya with a powerful shaft and shouts, "Wait! Wait and fight."

The supreme warrior Karna, filled with rage, shakes his formidable bow, the Vijaya, and destroys Dhrishtadyumna's bow as well as his arrows that resemble snakes of virulent poison. He then strikes the Panchala deep with nine burning arrows, which, O Bhaarata, plunge through Dhrishtadyumna's golden armour and, washed in blood, are bright as cochineal. The Panchala throws aside his broken bow, sweeps up another and looses a volley of serpentine venomous narachas at Karna. Karna retaliates with a lovely, lethal golden arrow that resembles a second rod of death. This ineluctable shaft flies straight to claim Dhrishtadyumna's life, but, in the nick of time, from a distant flank, and displaying astounding

skill, Satyaki cuts down that shaft that would otherwise have surely claimed the Panchala prince, the Pandava senapati's life.

With a mythic tiger's roar, Karna turns and unleashes a livid fusillade at the Satwata. He gores Satyaki with seven cloth-yard shafts but the blithe Yuyudhana coolly responds with a shimmering swath of golden arrows. All over, the horrible and beautiful battle rages on; it is both fearsome and entirely wonderful to behold.

Meanwhile, Aswatthaman joins battle with Dhrishtadyumna, roaring, "Stop! Wait, O Brahmana, you will not escape me alive today."

They blast towering volleys at each other. Just as Drona knew that the son of Prishata would be the cause of his death, so too now does Dhrishtadyumna, seeing Drona's son before him, know that Aswatthaman will be the death of him. However, he remembers that no weapon can kill him in battle and so rushes at Aswatthaman fearlessly, like Death running at the Destroyer at pralaya at yuga's end.

And Drona's heroic son, drawing deep breaths, charges straight back at the Panchala prince, both of them filled with untold rage and hatred. Aswatthaman says to Dhrishtadyumna, "O Panchala wretch, I will send you to Yama today. The sin that you committed when you slew Drona will fill you with regret today, if you fight me without Partha's protection, or if you do not flee, O fool!"

Dhrishtadyumna replies, "This sword of mine which answered your sire in battle, will today answer you as well. If I could kill Drona, why can't I kill you who are only a Brahmana in name?"

Dhrishtadyumna pierces Drona's son with a slender, needle sharp arrow. The duel blossoms and they mantle each other with thousands of arrows so that neither the sky nor the points of the compass, or they themselves, can be seen.

Karna, too, O Rajan, holds at bay the Panchalas, the Pandavas, the five sons of Draupadi, Yudhamanyu and the mighty Satyaki and is the radiant cynosure of all eyes.

Dhrishtadyumna rives Aswatthaman's formidable bow and destroys all his venomous arrows, but in a flash, the mighty Brahmana responds by breaking the Panchala's bow, spear, mace, standard, and killing his horses, his charioteer, and shattering his chariot. Dhrishtadyumna seizes up a great sword and a blazing shield decked with a hundred moons. In the twinkling

of an eye, before Dhrishtadyumna can alight from his ratha, Aswatthaman smashes these weapons also into dust.

However, despite putting forth all his prowess and skill, when Aswatthaman still cannot, O Bharatasrestha, actually kill the injured and helpless Dhrishtadyumna with arrows, he flings down his bow and, taking up his blue sword, swoops down on his enemy, like Garuda on a large snake.

Seeing this, Krishna tells Arjuna, "Look, Partha, how Aswatthaman races toward Dhrishtadyumna's chariot. Hurry! You must rescue Drupada's son, who is in the very jaws of death."

Krishna urges the white horses towards Aswatthaman and, seeing Arjuna come, Drona's son does his best to finish Dhrishtadyumna. Seeing him, sword in hand, try to haul Dhrishtadyumna down, mighty Partha looses a burst of golden arrows from the Gandiva at the Brahmana, drawing copious jets of blood and forcing him to leave the Panchala prince. Aswatthaman quickly mounts his chariot and, seizing up his own bow, shoots back fiercely at Arjuna.

Meanwhile, Sahadeva darts up, pulls Dhrishtadyumna into his chariot, leaving Arjuna to deal with Drona's son. Aswatthaman strikes Arjuna through his arms and chest, and Partha responds with a long shaft like another Yamadanda, which plunges deep into the Brahmana hero's shoulder. Aswatthaman collapses from the sheer violence of that shaft and he sits down on the floor of his ratha.

At this, filled with rage, Karna roars again and again and shakes his great bow, the Vijaya, and repeatedly eyes Arjuna, wanting single combat with him. Aswatthaman's sarathy, seeing him senseless, swiftly bears him away from the field.

Seeing Dhrishtadyumna rescued and Aswatthaman stricken, the Panchalas and the other Pandava warriors, O king, sensing victory, give loud shouts and thousands of sweet instruments are sounded. Arjuna says to Krishna, "I fervently wish to fight the Samsaptakas."

Krishna turns his wonderful steeds and the marvellous ratha, flying many banners, and whose speed is as that of the wind or the mind, flashes forward.'"

CANTO 60

"Sanjaya says, 'As the ratha flares forward, Krishna points Yudhishtira out to Arjuna, and says: "There is your brother, hard pressed and fighting desperately against the mighty Dhartarashtra archers but the indomitable Panchalas are flying to his rescue. Yonder, Duryodhana, king of the world, accompanied by his brothers, leads a large chariot force of seasoned warriors in pursuit of Yudhishtira, like desperate men after a priceless gemstone. Armed to the teeth, bearing astras whose touch is as fatal as that of poisonous snakes, they are intent on killing him. And look, Satyaki and Bhima thwart Duryodhana and the Kauravas are again nonplussed, like the Daityas whom Sakra and Agni petrified when the Demon tried to steal the Amrita.

The vast ratha divisions of the Kuru army again surge towards Yudhishtira like a flashflood rushing towards the ocean in the monsoon. Those mighty bowmen give resounding shouts, blow their conches, and shake their bows as they charge forward. Attacked viciously by Duryodhana, Yudhishtira is already in the jaws of death and is a libation already poured on the yagna fire.

Duryodhana's army is in full battle array and Indra himself would find it difficult to escape once he comes within the range of their arrows. Who can withstand Duryodhana, who in his anger resembles Yama himself, and shoots his relentless showers of arrows with such awesome force? The

power of Duryodhana's shafts, like Drona's, Aswatthaman's, Kripa's or Karna's can bring down the very mountains. Karna always frightens Yudhishtira, as we saw when your brother turned his back on the battlefield. Then Yudhishtira had the support of other maharathas but he is isolated and he is weak from his constant fasting. He has great Brahmana-shakti, but alas, not much of Kshatriya might.

Karna's assault has put him in grave peril and I fear, O Partha, that Yudhishtira Dharmaputra might well have fallen. Indeed, from the fact that the wrathful Bhimasena does not respond to the victorious roars and blowing of conches of the Dhartarashtra forces, O Bharatarishabha, I fear that the king is dead. Look where Karna urges the mighty Dhartarashtra chariot-warriors armed with the astras Sthunakarna, Indrasjaha and Pasupata, with maces and other weapons, towards Pritha's son. The king must be grievously wounded and weakened, for the Panchalas and the Pandava forces fly like the wind to rescue him, rather like strong men rushing to save a man sinking in a bottomless sea.

His standard is no longer visible and Karna has probably struck it down. Partha, in the very sight of the twins, and of Satyaki, Sikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna, Bhima, Satanika, and of all the Panchalas and the Chedis, Karna is destroying the Pandava divisions with his incendiary arrows, like an elephant trampling a bank of lotuses. Look, look, Arjuna, the rathikas of our army retreat and our elephant divisions, too, are in flight with dismal cries of distress. Karna's great standard, with the device of the elephant's rope, moves freely all over the battlefield. There, Radheya is now attacking Bhimasena's legions, shooting hundreds of arrows as he slaughters our army at will. Ah, he destroys the Panchala maharathas even as Indra once did the Daityas.

Look Partha, Karna has defeated the Panchalas, the Pandus, and the Srinjayas, and looks around, I believe, seeking you. Ah, as he draws his majestic bow, Karna looks as splendid and handsome as Indra in the midst of the Devas, after vanquishing his enemies. And seeing the indomitable prowess of Karna, the Kauravas roar lustily, lancing fear through the Pandus and the Srinjayas. Karna himself addresses his troops and says, 'Bless you Kauravas! Unite and attack with such speed that no Srinjaya escapes alive. We follow behind you.'

With his great chatra of a hundred ribs resembling the full moon held over his head, O Bhaarata, Karna looks like the Udaya hills bathed in

moonlight. Arjuna, he is looking for you and he will surely come here swiftly. Behold him, as he shakes his formidable bow and shoots his arrows like serpents. Ah, look, he has seen your kapi-dhvaja and turns in this direction. Yes, great, great Karna comes looking for his own death, like an insect drawn into the mouth of a lamp.

A noble mahatejasvin, entirely fearless, his only concern has always been for Duryodhana; his loyalty is absolute, and, of evil mind, he detests you and your brothers. Seeing Karna alone and unsupported, Duryodhana resolutely turns towards him, along with his chariot-force, to protect his friend whom he loves more than anyone. Put forth your prowess now, Arjuna, kill that evil one along with all his allies, and win fame, kingdom and happiness. Both of you are gifted with incomparable might and are equally famed; so when you fight him, O Partha, like a Deva and a Danava in the Devasura yuddha of old, let all the Kauravas see your true strength and Duryodhana will not be able to do anything. Remember that you are a purified soul, Bharatarishabha, and that the son of Radha harbours animosity towards the virtuous Yudhishtira. Succeed, O son of Kunti, in what you need to achieve. Set your heart on dharma and ride against that senapati of chariot-warriors, O Pravira, and his mighty five hundred maharathas, five thousand elephants, and twice as many horses, and innumerable foot-soldiers, that are all united and protect one another, and advance against you even now.

Show yourself to Karna and attack him swiftly! I see his standard flying towards Dhrishtadyumna's ratha. He is attacking the Panchalas and will wipe them out. But there are some good tidings as well, Partha, for I think Yudhishtira Dharmaraja lives! Look, Bhimasena has returned and now leads the army with the Srinjayas and Satyaki to support him. Bhima and the noble Panchalas are slaughtering the Kauravas, O Kaunteya, and Duryodhana's troops are running helter-skelter from battle with blood streaming from their wounds. Bathed in blood, the Bhaarata army presents a dejecting sight, as of the earth with its crops destroyed.

Yellow, red, black and white banners, adorned with stars, moons, suns as well as many chatras, O Arjuna, lie scattered everywhere as well as standards of gold, silver, brass and copper. Elephants, horses and chariot-warriors, lie dead all over the field, slain by the dauntless Panchalas and the mighty Bhimasena.

Through their sheer valour, the Panchalas slaughter the Dhartarashtras, like angry lions attacking elephants. If unarmed, they snatch the weapons of their enemies and strike off their heads and arms. The Panchala chariots, elephants and cavalry charge the Kauravas and the vast Dhartarashtra force, like swift swans leaving the Manasa Lake and flying to the Ganga. The heroic Kripa, Karna and other commanders defend their positions doughtily but the Panchala shuras led by Dhrishtadyumna wreak havoc among the Dhartarashtra army already sinking under Bhima's prodigious assault.

The greater part of the Dhartarashtra army is panic-stricken as their elephants, scourged by Bhima's cloth-yard arrows, either fall like mountain summits riven by Indra's Vajra or run wildly from battle, crushing their own ranks. Do you hear Bhimasena's deafening shouts and roars of victory, Arjuna? And there comes the prince of the Nishadas on his wonderful elephants, like Yama with his bludgeon, to meet the son of Pandu in battle. Look! Bhima has cut off the roaring prince's arms at the shoulders, his spear still in his grasp, with ten bright cloth-yard shafts.

And now Bhima turns his violent attention to the other elephants that look like masses of blue clouds and are ridden by skillful hastikas. See how they strike Vrikodara with multiple darts and javelins. But look how he dispatches them with his arrows, seven at a time, and cuts down their triumphal standards and slaughters the rest with ten shafts. The triumphal shouts of the Dhartarashtras have all died in their throats, now that they have encountered Bhima, who is equal to Purandara himself. Bhimasena by himself holds full three aksauhini of Duryodhana's soldiers at bay."

Bhimasena, O Bhaarata, achieves impossible feats of grand valour and Arjuna finishes off the remnants of your army and routs the mighty Samsaptakas, yet again, so they flee in all directions. Many among them, who fall and become the guests of Indra in his hallowed halls, attain happiness. Arjuna Naravyaghra, with his deadly, unerring volleys, every shaft among them a killer, continues to annihilate the Dhartarashtra host of the four kinds of forces.'"

CANTO 61

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When Bhima was battling our elephant legions, and the Pandus and the Srinjayas were slaughtering my troops, when the morale of my vast army was low, what did the Kauravas do, O Sanjaya?'

Sanjaya says, 'Duryodhana confronts Bhima, as Karna rallies the troops and then counter-attacks the Pandava chariot-warriors who brace themselves to meet his charge. Bhimasena, Satyaki, Sikhandi, Janamejaya, Dhrishtadyumna, the Prabhadrakas and the Panchalas, sensing an opportunity, charge in from every side to support the Pandavas. Your maharathas, O Naravyaghra, join battle and the two armies with their chariots, elephants, cavalry, and large bodies of foot-soldiers, meet in a tremendous melee.

Sikhandi fights Karna, Dhrishtadyumna clashes with your son Dusasana and his large force; Nakula struggles against Vrishasena, while Yudhishtira battles Chitrasena. Sahadeva engages Uluka, Satyaki combats Sakuni, and the sons of Draupadi take on the other Kauravas. Aswatthaman combats Arjuna, Kripa engages Yudhamanyu, while Kritavarman fights Uttamaujas. A lone and unsupported Bhimasena takes on the Kuru divisions led by your sons.

Sikhandi, the slayer of Bhishma, holds Karna in check with his winged shafts and the Sutaputra, his lips trembling in rage, hits him with three

arrows between his eyebrows. The duel heats up and in an exchange of arrows, Karna kills his opponent's horses, charioteer, and then destroys his standard. A livid Sikhandi jumps down from his chariot and hurls a dart which Karna knocks down and quickly follows up with more arrows which badly wound Sikhandi, forcing him to retreat. Karna, unhindered, goes on to scatter the Pandava troops like a strong wind disperses a heap of cotton.

Meanwhile, Dhrishtadyumna and Dusasana engage in a bloody combat of their own where they strike and maul each other. An irate Dhrishtadyumna even splits Dusasana's bow, earning a loud shout of applause from all the troops but your son takes up another bow and blocks Dhrishtadyumna with showers of arrows. The soldiers as well as the Siddhas and the Apsaras are wonderstruck at this amazing ability of your son, to defy the mighty Dhrishtadyumna, like a lion holding a huge elephant at bay. Many Panchala chariot-warriors, elephants and cavalry, O Dhritarashtra, come to his rescue and surround your son. The resultant battle is as frightful, like the destruction at pralaya at yuga's end.

Vrishasena, fighting by the side of his father, Karna, duels with Nakula in which they injure each other in an exchange of thousands of arrows. However, their divisions run away and Karna who was following, tries to dissuade them while Nakula turns his attention against the Kauravas. Vrishasena, avoiding Nakula, goes to protect his father's chariot-wheel.

Sahadeva fights an angry Uluka and kills his four horses and his charioteer. Uluka manages to escape and finds refuge among the division of the Trigartas.

Satyaki engages Sakuni in an uneven contest in which he easily cuts down his banner, injures his charioteer and kills his horses. Although Sakuni responds and pierces Satyaki's armour and then destroys his golden standard, he prudently takes shelter in his son Uluka's chariot that drives him away with great speed from the battlefield. Satyaki, Rajan, turns his attention to your army and decimates them mercilessly.

Yudhamanyu severs Kripa's bow who picks up a new one and shoots down Yudhamanyu's standard, charioteer and umbrella forcing him to retreat, driving his ratha himself.

Uttamaujas sends a scathing volley of arrows at Kritavarman and a bloody battle ensues, O Rajan, such as I have never seen before. Kritavarman ultimately injures his opponent severely in the chest, and he collapses, forcing his charioteer to flee with him to safety.

Your son Duryodhana stands firm against Bhimasena until the latter destroys his horses, charioteer, ratha and standard, forcing him to retreat, which delights the Pandava troops. At this, the whole Kuru army charge Bhimasena determined to kill him and the din of battle is frightful, Rajan.

Dusasana and Sakuni arrive with a large elephant force and attack Bhima with small arrows. Vrikodara responds spiritedly, forces Duryodhana to retreat and quickly confronts that elephant force with his Devastras like Indra against the Asuras. Covered all over with gold mesh and varied gemstones, the elephants are spectacular like clouds charged with lightning. Bhima's shafts cover the sky like myriads of insects blanketing a fire, and he quickly decimates them. The elephants stampede and some with their hearts pierced, collapse with their warriors clad in their studded finery. The earth is refulgent, as if someone has strewn it with broken mountains and exhausted planets. Bhimasena's arrows injure the elephants in their temples, frontal globes, limbs and trunks, and they are like mountains with liquid metals running down their sides as they flee in their hundreds. All that we can see are Bhima's two arms, like two mighty serpents, smeared with sandalwood paste and other unguents, continually drawing the bow. The elephants hearing the sound of his bowstring and his striking palms that sound like the peal of thunder, run away in fear ejecting urine and dung. Bhima's feats are reminiscent of Rudra destroying all beings.'"

CANTO 62

"Sanjaya says, 'Riding on his magnificent ratha yoked to white horses, with Narayana himself as the sarathy, Arjuna appears on the scene like a tempest, agitating your army. Meanwhile, a rampaging Duryodhana leads half his troops and surrounds Yudhishtira; the two Kshatriyas cover each other with their razor-headed arrows. The Kaurava troops try to seize Yudhishtira but the Pandavas send Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, and a full aksauhini of troops to his rescue. Brushing aside your chariot-warriors, Bhimasena also races up to save the cornered king. However, shooting furious volleys of shafts, Karna single-handedly holds them up. Though they fight with great valour and determination, they cannot overwhelm Karna.

Sahadeva invokes a devastra and rakes Duryodhana with twenty arrows. Seeing the Kuru king covered in blood, like an elephant with split temples, a furious Karna comes rushing in, summons his astras and routs Yudhishtira and Dhrishtadyumna's troops. Cascades of his shafts fall together, one so quickly behind the other that they collide, ignite and a conflagration blazes in the sky. His arms smeared with red sandalwood paste and adorned with jewels and gold, Karna looses with unearthly force and fills the ten directions of the sky with arrows, each one piercing an enemy warrior. Yudhishtira is sorely injured yet he strikes back at Karna with fifty fierce barbs.

The dreadful battle continues into the darkness of night, O Bharatarishabha, and loud cries of distress arise from your troops, as lethal arrows fitted with kanka feathers, swords and clubs annihilate them. Wherever Dharmaputra Yudhishtira casts his eyes in anger, there your army breaks. An enraged Karna attacks him, shooting cloth-yard shafts and crescent-tipped arrows and shafts with calf tooth heads. They shoot vigorously at each other until Karna strikes the royal son of Pandu squarely through his chest with three heavy arrows and forces him to sit down on the platform of his ratha. Yudhishtira tells his sarathy to turn away from the duel.

At this, all the Dhartarashtras, with their king, start shouting, "Seize him! Seize him!" and pursue Yudhishtira. Seventeen hundred Kekaya troops join some of the Panchala forces and stop the Dhartarashtras. During that pitched battle, those two awesome warriors, Duryodhana and Bhima, come face to face and duel.'"

CANTO 63

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, Karna takes the offensive against the chariot-warriors and archers of the Kaikeyas that face him and unleashes howling gales of deadly arrows at them. He despatches full five hundred of them to Yamaloka. Those warriors suffer grievous losses and, finding the son of Radha irresistible, take refuge with Bhimasena's troops. Karna again rides after Yudhishtira, who, almost insensible from his wounds, is driving slowly towards the Pandava encampment flanked by Nakula and Sahadeva. He shoots the king with three lethal arrows but Yudhishtira strikes back. Madri's twin sons, who protect Yudhishtira's flanks, sweep down on Karna and fire volleys of arrows at him. Karna first quells them and goes on to kill Yudhishtira's horses, knocks down his diadem, destroys Nakula's horses and immobilises his chariot. The brothers are compelled to find refuge in Sahadeva's ratha.

Seeing his nephews hard pressed, Salya says to Karna, "You intend to fight Phalguna today so why do you waste time on Yudhishtira? You will be an object of derision and mirth when you finally encounter Partha, wounded, your astras and arrows exhausted, your armour weakened, and your charioteer and horses fatigued."

Ignoring Salya, Karna continues to assail Yudhishtira and also targets the twins. He forces Yudhishtira to turn back and face him and prepares with great resolution to make an end of him. Now Salya laughingly tells

Karna, "Duryodhana has always thought you a better warrior than Partha; what will you gain if you kill Yudhishtira? You can hear the boom of Krishna's conch as well as the twang of Arjuna's bow. Look how he devours our troops and strikes down our chariot-warriors with his arrows. How ably Yudhamanyu, Uttamaujas, Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna support him!

And look where Bhimasena has the better of Duryodhana. Do something quickly so that he does not kill the king today in front of us all. Go and rescue the king from dire peril. What will you gain by killing the sons of Madri or Yudhishtira if Bhima kills Duryodhana?"

At Salya's urging, O Kuvalayesa, and seeing Bhima about to overpower Duryodhana, Karna turns away from Yudhishtira and the twins, and rushes to rescue your son. This enables Yudhishtira to retreat on Sahadeva's ratha, his body torn and lacerated, and accompanied by his twin brothers. He alights from the chariot at the Pandava camp and immediately sits down on his couch. While they extract the arrows from his body, the sorrowful royal son of Pandu says to his two brothers, "Go back now and support Bhima."

Using another chariot, Nakula and Sahadeva race away towards Bhima and take their places by his side.'"

CANTO 64

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, leading a large chariot-force, O Rajan, Aswatthaman confronts Arjuna on the field. Like the continent dares the surging ocean, Partha and Krishna defy that raging warrior as he envelops them with his missiles to the amazement of all the maharathas present. Arjuna conjures up a devastra, but Aswatthaman neutralises it, as well as all the other astras that Arjuna looses at him. The son of Drona is like Yama himself as he envelops the sky with volleys of lethal arrows. He wounds Krishna's right arm but Arjuna strikes back, kills Aswatthaman's horses and destroys a number of his maharathas.

The battle between them is bloody and takes a fearful toll of horses, charioteers, riders and elephants, and soon another river of blood flows there. Seeing Partha rampant on the field, Aswatthaman shakes his formidable bow and shoots at him from every side, bloodying him. With a sizzling volley, Arjuna destroys his opponent's bow. Picking up a vicious spiked mace, Aswatthaman hurls it at Arjuna, but, smiling, Partha demolishes it like a thunderbolt splitting a mountain. To overpower Arjuna, a livid Aswatthaman invokes an Aindrastra, and a deluge of arrows falls from the sky. Arjuna negates it with his own Aindrastra that blankets Aswatthaman's chariot with arrows. The battle continues as both warriors launch powerful astras until Aswatthaman is wounded and his charioteer dead. Then, in a wonderful demonstration of skill, he guides his horses

himself and fights Arjuna at the same time, until his adversary severs his reins and his horses bolt.

Meanwhile, with loud yells, the Pandavas charge your troops from all sides, loosing deadly storms of arrows at them. They repeatedly rout the vast Dhartarashtra host, O Rajan, in the very presence of your sons, and Sakuni and Karna! The Sutaputra roars, "Stop! Stop!" but to no avail.

Seeing the Dhartarashtra army run, the Pandavas let out shouts of triumph.

Duryodhana says urgently to Karna, "Look how despite your presence our army is beset by the Pandavas! O Mahabaho, thousands of our warriors look to you for guidance. You must rally them!' Karna replies with a smile, "You will see my prowess and the energy of my astras, O Naradeva! Today, I will annihilate the Panchalas and the Pandavas."

Picking up his magnificent bow, the Vijaya, Karna strings and strums it repeatedly. Reassuring his terrified troops, he launches the Bhargavastra, which releases millions and millions of blazing arrows fletched with kanka and peacock feathers and shrouds the entire Pandava army. Soon, loud wails of despair arise and the earth trembles with falling elephants, horses, chariots and soldiers killed in their thousands. Karna stands triumphant, glorious like a smokeless fire, while the stricken Panchalas and the Chedis run wildly all over the field and cry for Arjuna and Krishna to rescue them like the spirits of the dead calling for Yama.

Hearing their cries for help Arjuna tells Krishna, "Behold, O Mahabaho, the power of the dreadful Bhargavastra! I fear that no one can contain it. Karna is like the Destroyer himself. Look how he repeatedly casts angry glances at me, and I feel that I may not escape him. A living man may meet with either victory or defeat. However, to the man who is dead, O Hrishikesha, even death is victory. How can he who is dead, face defeat?"

Krishna replies, "Karna has severely wounded Yudhishtira. Go and comfort him first, O Partha, before you face Karna."

Arjuna agrees, and they drive away avoiding the battle, hoping that, meanwhile, Karna will become fatigued. They fail to find Yudhishtira anywhere. Arjuna rides on after he fights and defeats Aswatthaman, the shura that even the Vajradhari himself may have found hard to subdue.'"

CANTO 65

"Sanjaya says, 'After he bests Aswatthaman, Arjuna surveys his own troops and applauds the efforts of his warriors. This raises their morale and the maharathas continue to fight with vigour. Not seeing his brother Yudhishtira, he goes to Bhima and asks him, "Tell me, where is the king?"

Bhima replies, "Gravely wounded by Karna, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira left the field. I doubt whether he still lives."

Arjuna says, "Go quickly, Bhima, and find out! He has surely retreated to our camp. Remember, despite the grievous injuries he sustained in the fierce fight with Drona, he remained on the battlefield until we killed the Acharya. Our brother was in great danger in today's battle, so go now and ascertain his condition; I will stay here and hold off our enemies!"

Bhima replies, "O Arjuna, it is best if you go. If I leave now, my enemies will accuse me of fleeing the battle!"

Arjuna says, "The Samsaptakas confront my aksauhini! I cannot leave this place without overcoming them."

Bhimasena assures Arjuna, "I can contain the Samsaptakas on my own. So go, O Kurupravira!"

Although Arjuna feels that his brother Bhima may be taking too much upon himself, he nevertheless says, "Urge the horses on, O Hrishikesha, and let us leave this sea of troops. I want to see king Ajatasatru!"

As he is about to drive away, Krishna says, “The task is not difficult for you, Bhima. We are going, so destroy the Samsaptakas!”

Then, after leaving Bhima in charge of the army and telling him to raze the Samsaptakas, Krishna drives his ratha yoked to horses swift as Garuda at great speed in search of the king. They find Yudhishtira resting on his bed and, alighting from their chariot, they touch his feet. Seeing him safe, the two Krishnas are overjoyed, like the twin Ashvinis on seeing Vasava. A smile breaks out on Yudhishtira’s careworn, anguished face, and the king embraces and congratulates them both like Vivasvat complimenting the twin Ashvinis, or like Brihaspati felicitating Sankara and Vishnu after they slew the mighty Asura Jambha. He assumes that Karna has been killed and is filled with indescribable delight and speaks to them in a voice choked with joy.’”

CANTO 66

"Sanjaya continues 'Yudhishtira says to the two Krishnas, "Welcome, Devakiputra and Dhananjaya! The sight of you both, O Achyuta and Arjuna, fills me with joy. I see that, without being wounded, you two have slain the maharatha Karna! In war, he was like a serpent of virulent poison. He was accomplished in the use of all weapons and as the senapati of the Dhartarashtras, he was their invincible armour and protector. Those great archers Vrishasena and Sushena always guarded his back in battle.

He was energetic and invincible, and he learnt the astra shastra from Parasurama Bhargava. He led the Dhartarashtras and was their saviour. Unequalled, he always wished for Duryodhana's good and for this he was ever willing and eager to persecute us. As a maharatha, he had no equal in all the worlds. He was invincible in battle even to Vasava and the Devas. In tejas and oorjas, he was equal to Agni and Vayu. He was unfathomable as the Patalas, and this enhancer of the joys of friends was like Yama himself to his enemies.

It is only through good fortune that you could kill Karna, and you have now come to me like a pair of Devas after overcoming an Asura!

Today, I fought a great battle with that shura who was like Rudra exterminating all living beings. He cut down my standard, killed my horses and two Parshni charioteers; he destroyed my ratha in the very sight of

Yuyudhana, Dhrishtadyumna, Nakula and Sahadeva, the heroic Sikhandi, as also the sons of Draupadi, and all the Panchalas. Having mastered those innumerable enemies, Karna mahatejasvin then subdued me, O Mahabaho, although I fought resolutely.

He pursued me, overwhelmed all my protectors and addressed coarse, harsh words to me. That I am still alive, O Dhananjaya, is only due to the prowess of Bhimasena. What more need I say? I cannot bear the humiliation I experienced today. For thirteen years, O Dhananjaya, through fear of Karna, I had no sleep at night or any peace during the day. Filled with hatred of the Sutaputra, I burned within myself, O Dhananjaya.

Like the bird baddhrinasa I fled Karna, thinking that the time for my own death had come. All my time I spent thinking how I could kill Karna in battle. Awake or asleep, the fear of Karna possessed me and the universe appeared to me to be full of just him. He vanquished me in battle but left me alive. After Karna humiliated me today, of what use is my life or my kingdom? At his hands today, I experienced what I never suffered during this war at the hands of Bhishma, Kripa or Drona.

So, O Kuntiputra, tell me in detail how you killed Karna! He was equal to Sakra himself in war, to Yama in prowess and to Rama in weaponry. He was a mighty chariot-warrior, a master of all modes of warfare, the greatest of all archers, and a man among all men! Dhritarashtra and his son always worshipped him and they were convinced that Karna would be your death, O Bharatarishabha. How then did you kill Karna who was keenly seeking you on the battlefield? Does he lie on the bare ground, slain by your keen arrows fitted with kanka feathers? Ah, you have accomplished a great deed for me today!

Have you really slain that sinful wretch who always hated and opposed you and who, in his arrogance, was looking everywhere for you on the battlefield, and offering a magnificent chariot made of gold along with a number of elephants, bulls and horses to anyone who would point you out?

Have you really killed that sinner who, intoxicated with pride about his valour, would brag incessantly in the Kuru sabha and who was exceedingly dear to Suyodhana? Does he lie on the field today, his limbs mangled with your shafts and all steeped in blood? Have Duryodhana's two arms at last been broken? Does his foolish boast, 'I will kill Phalguna!' in the midst of the kings to gladden Duryodhana, remain unfulfilled?

O son of Indra, have you killed that foolish Karna, that Sutaputra who swore an oath that he would not wash his feet as long as Arjuna lived?

In the Kuru sabha, vile Karna had said to Panchali, ‘Why don’t you abandon the Pandavas, who have lost their power, and are weak and fallen?’

Tell me, does the foolish and sinful Karna who vowed that he would not return from battle without killing Krishna and Partha, lie dead on the field, his body pierced with arrows? You know about the battle between the Srinjayas and the Kauravas in which I was brought to this plight. Have you slain that Karna today?

O Savyasachi, have you today, with your relucent shafts from the Gandiva, cut his resplendent head from his neck? When he mauled me with his dreadful shafts, I prayed fervently that you would kill him. Have you answered my prayer, Arjuna?

Counting on Karna’s protection, the vain Suyodhana disdained us. Have you today destroyed that refuge of our evil cousin?

Have you slain the Sutaputra of unbridled wrath, who once, in the presence of the Kauravas and in the midst of the Kuru court, called us sesame seeds without kernels?

Have you killed the malignant Sutaputra, who laughingly told Dusasana to forcibly drag Yajnasena’s daughter into the Kuru sabha after Sakuni had won her in game of dice?

Have you today slain that witless Karna who rudely upbraided that our Pitama Bhishma, for counting him as only half a maharatha during the enumeration of rathas and atirathas?

Today, finally, you have extinguished, O Phalguna, the fire in my heart that was born of revenge and fanned by the wind of humiliation. Tell me how you made an end of Karna in battle. The news of Karna’s death is more agreeable to me than I can tell you. Tell me, therefore, how he was killed. Like the divine Vishnu waiting for the arrival of Indra with the news of Vritra’s death, I have waited so long for you, O shura!”””

CANTO 67

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna of infinite tejas says to Yudhishtira, "O foremost of kings, while I was battling the Samsaptakas today, Drona's son Aswatthaman suddenly surrounded me with the Kaurava troops and attacked me. I killed full five hundred of their rathikas, before Aswatthaman rushed at me like a prince of elephants against a lion. That Kurupravira raked Krishna and me with arrows like poison or fire. He exhausted thousands of arrows from the eight carts, each drawn by eight bullocks, which bore his shafts. He shot them all at me, with skill, force and determination, all from his bowstring stretched to his very ear, and they were like a black raincloud of the monsoon.

So quickly did he charge about that we could not discern from which direction he shot his arrows, nor could we see when he took up his shafts and when he loosed them from his bow drawn into a circle. He pierced both Krishna and me with five blazing arrows each. I struck back at him with all my prowess and soon he resembled a porcupine with my barbs. He and his troops were bathed in blood and he took refuge with Karna's chariot division.

Seeing his troops overwhelmed and escape with his elephant force and cavalry, Karna attacked me with many seasoned rathikas. I killed them all and, then avoiding Karna, I have flown here to see you, for both Krishna and I feared for your life. All the Panchalas are terrified at the very sight of

Karna, like cattle at the scent of a lion. The Prabhadrakas, too, are like men who have entered the open jaws of Death when they approach him. He has already despatched to Yama's abode full seventeen hundreds of those unfortunate rathikas.

You also encountered Aswatthaman, who took his toll of you before Kana attacked you. I hoped that you were not dead but had retreated to our camp to rest, but I had to see you for myself. I have seen the great Bhargavastra of Karna, which he unleashed against us. There is now no other warrior among the Srinjayas who can resist the mighty Sutaputra.

Let Sini's grandson Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna be the protectors of my chariot-wheels, while Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas guard my rear. Then, come and watch me fight Karna, O Bhaarata, like Sakra fighting Vritra. Look there, the Prabhadrakas attack Karna and six thousand princes sacrifice themselves in battle to attain swarga. If I do not kill Karna today, with all his kin, then let that end be mine, which is his who does not fulfil an oath he has sworn.

I beg you bless me so that victory be mine in battle. Yonder, the Dhartarashtras are about to overwhelm Bhima. I will, O lion among kings, slay the Suta's son and his troops and, indeed, all our enemies!"""

CANTO 68

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing that the mighty Karna is still alive, already hurting from Karna's arrows, Yudhishtira flashes angrily at Arjuna, "Your army has been routed and set to flight in a way that is scarcely honourable! You were afraid, and you betrayed Kunti when you deserted Bhima. And now you have come here without killing Karna? In the Dwaitavana, Arjuna, you swore to me that you would kill Karna from a single chariot. Why then have you come here after avoiding Karna and deserting Bhima? If you had confessed to me then that you would not be able to face Karna in battle, we could have thought of other ways to deal with him.

You have not kept your solemn word, Arjuna. You have flung us down in the midst of our enemies and shattered us. I have always looked to you for great things and benefits. I have always blessed you. But today you have belied all my expectations, and I am like a man waiting for fruit from a tree that he has nourished but getting only flowers from it. Like a fishhook hidden within a piece of meat, or poison in food, you promised us the kingdom only to betray us in the end.

For these thirteen years, O Dhananjaya, like seeds sown in earth expecting the seasonal showers that the gods send, we have lived in hope relying on you.

O foolish one, a voice from the skies told Pritha on the seventh day after your birth, 'This son of yours will have the prowess of Vasava himself and will overcome all his enemies! Gifted with superior tejas, he will vanquish all the Devas and other beings at Khandava. He will subjugate the Madras, the Kalingas, and the Kaikeyas and he will slay the Kurus. There will be no archer superior to him and no being will ever be able to defeat him. With his senses under control, and having mastered all the branches of knowledge, this son of yours, by merely desiring it, will bring all the world under his sway.

Your noble son, O Kunti, will be as handsome as Soma, quick as Vayu, patient as Meru, forgiving as Bhumi, will rival Surya in splendour, Kubera in prosperity, Sakra in courage and Vishnu in might. Like Aditi's son Vishnu, he will be famous for destroying his enemies and serving his friends. He will, besides, be the founder of a vamsa!'

This was what the voice said from the sky on the summit of the Satasringa Mountains, in the hearing of many Rishis and Munis. However, all that has not come to pass. Alas, it only shows that even the gods may speak untruths.

I have also heard words of praise about you from many of the great Rishis, so I never expected that Suyodhana would find such success and prosperity, or that you would be afraid of Karna. You ride upon a wonderful chariot that the celestial artificer Tvashtri wrought with axles that do not creak and which flies the kapi-dhvaja. Your sword hangs from your belt of gold and silk; your bow the Gandiva is full six cubits long; and you have Kesava as your sarathy. Why, then, are you terrified of Karna and why do you run from battle, Partha? O evil one, if you had given your bow to Krishna and become his sarathy, he would by now have killed the fierce Karna like Sakra, the lord of the Maruts, destroying the Asura Vritra with his Vajra.

If you cannot stand up to the fierce son of Radha today, as he lords it over the field of battle, give your Gandiva to some other king, who is your superior in the knowledge and use of great weapons. And then the world will not find us unhappy, bereft of our sons, wives and kingdom, and sunk, O son of Pandu, in a fathomless hell of misery.

It would have been better for you if you had never been born to Kunti, or been aborted in the fifth month of her pregnancy, O Kshatriya, rather than to escape like this from battle! Shame on your Gandiva, shame on the

might of your arms, shame on your inexhaustible quivers, shame on your kapi-dhvaja and shame on your chariot that was Agni's gift to you!"'"

CANTO 69

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna flies into a rage listening to Yudhishtira; livid, he draws his sword to kill him. Krishna quickly intervenes and says, "Why, Partha, do you draw your sword when there is no one here you have to fight? The mighty Bhimasena has the Dhartarashtras at his mercy. You came from the battlefront to see the king. Now that you have found that Yudhishtira is well, why this madness at a time when you should rejoice? I ask you, O son, of Kunti, why do you grasp that formidable sword in anger?"

Looking at Yudhishtira and breathing like an angry serpent, Arjuna says to Krishna, "It is my secret vow that I will sever the head of the man who says to me 'Give your Gandiva to another man.'

This king spoke these words in your presence, O Krishna! I dare not forgive him, especially one who does not allow the slightest fall from dharma. Slaying this Purusavara, I will honour my vow. It is for this that I drew the sword, O Yadusrestha. I will kill the king and pay my debt to truth and dispel my grief and fever. O Janardana, yet, you tell what you think is proper. You know all the past and future of this universe. I will do whatever you tell me."

Krishna says, "Shame, shame! Arjuna, you have yielded to anger at such a time? No one who knows dharma would do what you are doing today! The man who flouts dharma, or does what seems to be dharma but

which the shastras condemn, is the worst of men. You do not know the laws of the Rishis, based on the dictates of dharma. The man who is unacquainted with these rulings will be baffled and stupefied, O Partha, even as you are now confused in discriminating between right and wrong.

What should be done and what should not can be ascertained only through the scriptures. You, however, do not know the scriptures and so you are ignorant about dharma. You do not even know, Partha, that the killing of living beings is a sin and abstention from injury to even animals is the highest virtue. One may even speak an untruth, but one should never kill. How then, O Narottama, could you wish to kill your eldest brother, this Dharmaraja, who knows all about dharma? The laws of dharma never permit the killing of a man not engaged in battle, an enemy who has turned his back on a battle, one who escapes from a battle, one who seeks protection, joins his hands, yields himself up or is without a chariot. All these exist now in Yudhishtira.

Foolishly you swore this secret vow of yours, O Partha, which now drives you toward a heinous act. Why do you rush towards your revered brother to kill him, without resolving the most subtle and difficult way of dharma? I will explain this particular mystery of dharma that Bhishma, Yudhishtira, Vidura, and the renowned Kunti have laid on. Listen carefully, Dhananjaya!

One who speaks truth follows dharma and there is nothing higher than that. The essential attributes of truth in pravritti, conduct, is exceedingly difficult to understand. In diverse situations, truth when spoken may become false, and falsehood become truth. One may lie where there is a threat to life, where there is a threat to one's entire property, in marriage, when enjoying a woman and for the sake of a Brahmana. The above five kinds of falsehood have been declared to be sinless. On these occasions, falsehood becomes truth and truth falsehood.

Only a fool practises truth without knowing the real difference between truth and falsehood. One can be conversant with dharma only when one is able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. There is little wonder therefore that, even when he perpetrates a cruel deed, a wise man may obtain great merit as Valaka did when he killed the blind beast. Similarly, there is little wonder that a foolish and ignorant man, from a desire to win punya, commits great sin as Kausika did by living among the rivers."

Arjuna asks, "Holy one, tell me about Valaka and about Kausika living among rivers."

Vasudeva says, "There lived a hunter named Valaka. He killed animals as a means of livelihood for his family and not from any desire to kill for pleasure. Devoted to the duties of his varna and always speaking the truth, he never harboured any malice and supported his parents and other dependents. One day, despite searching long for an animal to hunt with perseverance and care, he found none. Finally, he saw a blind beast of prey, whose sense of smell replaced the defect of his eyes, drinking water. Although he had never seen such an animal before, he killed it immediately and a shower of divine petals fell on him from the skies. A wonderful Deva ratha, filled with the songs of Apsaras and the music of their instruments, came from heaven to take away the hunter.

It emerged that the blind beast that the hunter had killed had practised great tapasya, had obtained a boon and was indiscriminately killing all the creatures of the forest. It was for this reason that the Swayambhu, Brahma, had made him blind. Valaka went to heaven as he had killed that animal which had resolved to slay all creatures. Dharma, O Arjuna, is difficult to understand.

There lived a Rishi named Kausika who had little knowledge of the scriptures, far from any village, at the confluence of many rivers. He took an oath, saying, 'I will always speak the truth.'

He then became celebrated, O Dhananjaya, as a speaker of only truth. Once, some people escaping from robbers entered Kausika's vana. Soon the robbers came in search of them and asked Kausika, that speaker of truth, 'O holy one, where have the fugitives we are hunting for, gone? If you have seen them, tell us in the name of Truth.'

Kausika told them the truth, saying, 'Those men have entered this wood.'

Partha, Kausika told them the truth and those cruel bandits searched out the men in hiding and slew them all. Ignorant of the subtleties of dharma, Kausika committed a great sin by telling the truth and, as a result, he went to hell, just as a foolish and ignorant man, unacquainted with the subtleties of morality, goes to hell when he fails to ask mature persons for answers to his doubts.

You must have discrimination to distinguish virtue from sin. Sometimes, one may acquire that high and unattainable knowledge through

the exercise of reason, while many feel that the scriptures lay down what dharma is. I do not contradict this, although the shastras do not provide for every contingency. Thus, they laid down the main principles of morality: that which is not offensive to religion. Dharma protects and preserves the people, so it is the conclusion of the Rishis that whatever conserves, is dharma.

Arjuna, I have told you the signs and indications of dharma. Knowing this now, you decide whether you want to kill Yudhishtira or not."

Arjuna says, "O Kesava, what you say is both intelligent and wise. You are like our parent, and you are our final refuge. Nothing is unknown to you in the three worlds, and you are conversant with the canons of dharma. You know my vow that I will instantly kill the man who tells me, 'Partha, give your Gandiva to someone braver than you.'

Bhima has also taken a similar oath that whoever calls him 'tularak' he will kill that person there and then. Yudhishtira has repeatedly said 'Give your bow to someone else' to me in your presence. O Pravira, if I kill him, I will not be able to live in this world for another moment. I have sinned for entertaining the thought of killing my king through folly and the loss of my discrimination. O Dharmatman, tell me how I can keep my vow, known throughout the world, and at the same time ensure that both Yudhishtira and I live."

Krishna says, "The king was fatigued, grieving, and Karna's arrows lacerated him, even while he left the battle. He laboured under a burden of sorrow when he spoke harshly to you in anger. He knows that no one can face the wretched Karna other than you. It was for this, O Arjuna, that the king provoked you: so that you would kill Karna. The wager in the game of today's battle is the ever alert and invincible Karna. The Dharmarajan reasoned that if Karna is killed today, the Kauravas would inevitably be defeated. For this he does not deserve death.

I agree, Arjuna, that you should keep your vow. I will tell you how, without actually killing Yudhishtira, he may yet be considered dead. As long as a respected man continues to receive respect, one may say that he is alive in the world of men. If, however, such a man meets with dishonour, one may consider him dead even though he lives. Dharmaputra Yudhishtira has always had your respect, as well as that Bhima and that of the twins, as well as of all Kshatriyas and venerable men. So, show him disrespect in some trifling matter. Address Yudhishtira as 'you' when the usual form of

addressing him is ‘your honour’ or ‘your majesty’, and this insult will in effect kill him without depriving him of his life. Both Atharvan and Angiras have declared this way to be the best in such a situation.

Men who desire good should always act in this manner without any scruple. Conversant with dharma as you are, address Yudhishtira Dharmaraja in the manner I have indicated. He will never regard this death at your hands as an offence. After you address him in this manner, you must then touch his feet and speak words of respect to him, and soothe his wounded honour. Your brother is wise, serene and will never be angry with you. Freed from falsehood as well as from fratricide, Arjuna, you can happily go forth to face Karna!”””

CANTO 70

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna lauds Krishna's advice and then accosts Dharmaraja Yudhishtira in harsh language the like of which he has never used before.

Arjuna says, "O Rajan, do not upbraid me when you are resting a full two krosas away from the battle. Bhima, who is fighting alone against some of the greatest warriors in the world, has a right to scold me for he has routed his enemies, killed many kings and maharathas, great elephants, heroic horsemen, countless brave warriors, and in addition, has killed another thousand hill elephants and ten thousand Kamboja mountaineers. He accomplishes the most difficult feats, the like of which you can never hope to achieve.

Fighting on foot with his gada, sword, bow and broken parts of his chariots, he has destroyed numberless horsemen, chariots and elephants. Mighty as Kubera and Yama, and powerful as Indra, he kills many enemies with his feet and his bare hands and destroys hostile armies single-handedly. Such a Bhimasena has the right to reproach me, but not you who uses friends for protection. Bhima is now in the midst of the Dhartarashtra forces, holding their foremost chariot-warriors, elephants, cavalry and foot-soldiers at bay, slaughtering them all the while. That Paraviraha has the right to rebuke me, not you.

He annihilates the Kalingas, the Vangas, the Angas, the Nishadas, and the Magadhas, and vast numbers of elephants that look like masses of blue clouds. Riding on a worthy chariot and brandishing his bow, holding his arrows in his other hand, he unleashes arrows like thunderstorms over his enemies. I have seen eight hundred elephants that Bhima slew, lying mangled and lifeless. That hero may indeed speak harsh words to me.

The learned say that the Brahmana's strength lies in speech, and that the Kshatriya's strength is in his arms. You, O Bhaarata, are strong in words, especially heartless ones, and think that I am like you. I always strive to do you good with my soul, life and my family. Yet you wound me with words more terrible than arrows, and it is evident that we can expect no happiness from you. Lying on Draupadi's bed you dare insult me, although I have slain the mightiest of maharathas for your sake. You are indifferent and cruel, O Bhaarata, and I have never received any joy or love from you.

It was for your benefit that our Pitama Bhishma, that Dharmatman, told you how he could be killed and Drupada's son, the noble Sikhandi, achieved it with my protection. I am not at all happy to think that you will be restored as king for you are addicted to gambling. You sinned grievously against us all, including Panchali; you gambled us away as only the vilest of men do, and you now want to vanquish your enemies with our help? You heard from Sahadeva about the great evils of gambling and yet you did not abandon the depraved game of dice. That was the reason that all of us are now in this hell.

Since you began gambling, none of us has had any joy from you. O son of Pandu, you brought this calamity down our heads and you now dare speak harshly to me? You are the reason why millions of brave and noble men lie dead and wounded on this horrible Kurukshetra, the wounded among them crying out piteously. It was because of you that the Kauravas became offenders and are now being destroyed. Great warriors of both sides, from the nations of the north, the west, the east, and the south maim and kill one another, after incomparable feats on the battlefield. It was you who gambled away our kingdom. All our misfortunes arose from you, O Rajan! Do not provoke us now with the cruel goad of your vicious words."

After he speaks thus in the most harsh and bitter tone to his eldest brother, and thereby commits a sin, Arjuna, who is innately calm, wise and who never wanders from the path of dharma, is terribly dejected, remorseful and, breathing heavily, draws his sword. Seeing this, Krishna asks him,

“What is this? Do you again unsheath your sword, blue as the sky? Tell me why, Partha.”

In great sorrow Arjuna says to Kesava, “I will kill myself for this evil thing that I have done.”

Krishna, best of all men of dharma, says to Dhananjaya, “Why are you dejected for saying what you did to the king? O Pravira, the tenets of dharma do not sanction your intention to take our own life. If, from fear of committing sin, you had slain the Dharmarajan today, what would have been your remorse and what would you not have done then?

Dharma is subtle, inscrutable and transcendent, O Bhaarata, especially to the ignorant. Listen while I explain it to you. By destroying your own self, you will sink into a more horrible hell than if you had killed your brother. If you want to expiate your sin and punish yourself, now proclaim your own greatness and merit. You will then, O Partha, have slain yourself.”

Arjuna understands the import of what Krishna says. “I will do so, O Krishna.”

He lowers his bow and says to Yudhishtira, “Listen, O Rajan, there is no other archer like me, other than Pinakadhari Rudra, who also holds me in high esteem. I can destroy this universe of mobile and immobile creatures in the blink of an eye. I vanquished the whole world with all its sovereign kings, and brought them to your subjection. The Rajasuya yagna that you performed and completed with dakshina and the celestial palace that you own are both due to my prowess. I bear the scars on my hands of sharp arrows and of a great bow and on the soles of both my feet, the imprint of rathas. No one can vanquish a hero like me in battle.

Nations from the north, the west, the east and the south, have been struck down and destroyed, and only a small remnant of the Samsaptakas remain. By myself I have slain half of the enemy army. I slaughtered the Bhaarata host that was like the army of the Devas and it now lies on the field as carrion for scavengers. I only fight those who have powerful astras and know how to use them, and this is reason why I have not reduced the three worlds to ashes.

Be of good cheer now, for, riding forth upon my fearsome and victorious chariot, Krishna will soon go forth and surely kill the Sutaputra. Either I will make the Suta’s mother childless today, or Karna will end the life of one of Kunti’s sons. I vow that I will not take off my armour until I have killed Karna.”

Saying these words to Yudhishtira, Partha throws down his weapons and his bow, quickly thrusts his sword back into its sheath and, his head hung in shame, and with folded hands, says abjectly to his brother and king, "Be of good cheer, O Rajan, and forgive me! You will soon understand why I have said all this to you and sinned. I bow down to you, O Dharmaputra."

Arjuna says again, "This task cannot be delayed and will be accomplished soon. Karna comes towards me and I will meet him. I will first go and help Bhima before I kill the Suta's son. I assure you of this and devote my life to your cause. Know this for the truth, O Rajan."

Saying this, Arjuna of blazing splendour touches the king's feet and rises to go and return to battle.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira listens to these harsh words of his brother Phalguna, rises up from his bed and, his heart full of sorrow, says, "Partha, it is indeed because I sinned during the game of dice that this calamity has overwhelmed you. So, strike off my head, because I am the worst of men, and the exterminator of my race. I am evil, an idle fool and a coward. I am cruel and one who reviles the old. Obedience to a brutal man like me will gain you nothing.

Wretch that I am, I will this very day retire into the forest and may you live happily without me. A eunuch that I am, what will I do with sovereignty? The noble Bhimasena is fit to be king; let him ascend the throne. I cannot bear your harsh and angry words, most of all because they are true. After you have slighted me in this manner, O Arjuna, I have no use for my life."

Saying this, the king suddenly leaves his bed, truly intending to retire into the jungle and take sannyasa. Now, Krishna prostrates before him, and says, "O Rajan, you are aware of the celebrated vow of Arjuna, who is a man of dharma. He had sworn to kill anyone who would ask him to give up his Gandiva to another. You, unfortunately, said those words to him. And it was at my instance, O Bhumipala, that Partha insulted you—so he would not violate his vow, for to insult a superior is considered to be as good as killing him. O Rajan, you must forgive me. I bow my head to you for this transgression, for both Arjuna and I are committed to maintain dharma. Both of us throw ourselves at your mercy. The earth will today drink the blood of the despicable son of Radha. I swear to you that we will kill the Sutaputra. I, Krishna, swear to you that he whose death you desire will lose his life today."

In great anguish, Yudhishtira raises the prostrate Hrishikesha up and, with folded hands, says quickly, "It is as you say! I have been guilty of a sin and, O Govinda, you have awakened and saved me. O Madhava, O Achyuta, you have rescued both Arjuna and me from a sea of death. Indeed, today, our relatives, our allies and we have sailed over an ocean of grief on the raft of your intelligence. With you, O Achyuta, we are never without a protector and saviour."""

CANTO 71

"Sanjaya says, 'When he hears the delight in Yudhishtira's voice, Krishna, Yadusreshta, turns to Arjuna who stands downcast after speaking so harshly to his brother. Krishna says smilingly to him, "If you are heartbroken after saying a few harsh words to your brother, what would your condition have been, O Partha, if in pursuit of dharma you had killed the son of Dharma with your sword?

Dharma is so inscrutable, especially to men who are of insufficient understanding. Without doubt, your grief would have been unbearable from your fear of sin and you would have sunk into a most dreadful hell if you had actually killed your brother. I want you to make this Mahatman, this Kurudhvaha, happy. After the Dharmarajan has been gratified with your devotion, we will go forth to fight the Suta's son. Kill Karna today and you will give Yudhishtira great happiness, O Mahabaho, and the greatest purpose of your life will have been achieved."

Then Arjuna, O Rajan, in shame, touches king Yudhishtira's feet with his head and repeatedly says, "Be pleased with me. Forgive me all that I said to keep dharma and from fear of sinning."

Seeing Dhananjaya prostrate and weeping at his feet, Yudhishtira lifts up his brother and embraces him. They weep together for a long while, until they are freed from grief and become calm and cheerful again. Then embracing Arjuna once more with great love, and sniffing the top of his

head, a happy Yudhishtira praises his brother and says, “Mahabaho, in the very sight of all the troops, Karna destroyed my armour, standard, bow, spear, horses and arrows. Thinking of my humiliation and seeing his feats in battle, Phalguna, I feel weak with grief. My very life holds no meaning for me any longer. If you do not kill him today, I will cast away my life’s breath. What use have I for my wretched life?”

Arjuna says, “Rajan, I swear by Truth, by your grace, by Bhima, and by the twins, that today I will either kill Karna or be killed by him. I touch my weapons to sanctify my oath.”

Arjuna then says to Krishna, “With your help, O Govinda, I will kill Karna today.”

Kesava replies, “You can, O Pravira, indeed kill the mighty Karna. I have been thinking how we can best achieve this.”

Krishna says again to Yudhishtira, “O Dharmaputra, you must comfort Arjuna and command him to kill the Suta’s son. We heard that you had been gravely wounded by Karna, and we came here to ascertain your health. Fortunately, you are alive and were not taken captive. Comfort Arjuna, and bless him that he may prevail.”

Yudhishtira says, “Come here, Arjuna, and embrace me, my brother. You have given me good advice and said what you needed to, and I have forgiven you. I command you, Dhananjaya, go forth and kill Karna. Do not be angry for the harsh words that I spoke to you.”

Arjuna prostrates before his brother and fervently seizes his feet. The king raises him, hugs him closely, sniffs his head again, and says, “O Dhananjaya, O Mahabaho, you have honoured me. Go forth and win greatness and victory.”

Arjuna says, “Today, I will kill Radheya, who is proud of his might, along with all his kinsmen and followers. I vow that he, who bent his bow and wounded you with his arrows, will taste the bitter fruit of what he did. After killing Karna, I will return to pay you my homage and walk behind you. This I vow that I will not return from the battle without killing Karna. Truly do I swear this by touching your feet!”

Yudhishtira says joyfully to the Kiritin, “Go and obtain everlasting fame, victory, the destruction of your enemies and then live your life as you wish. Let the gods grant you prosperity, and may you have and enjoy anything you wish for in the measure that you desire. Now go quickly into

battle, and kill Karna, even as Purandara slew Vritra for his own aggrandisement.”’”

CANTO 72

"Sanjaya says, 'After he has calmed Yudhishtira and brought some hope and cheer to his heart, Arjuna says to Krishna, "Let my chariot be prepared afresh and furnished with all manner of weapons. The horses are fit and have been trained well. Deck them in their trappings and yoke them to my chariot. Let us go swiftly, Krishna, and fight the Suta's son."

At this, Krishna commands Daruka, "Do everything that Arjuna has asked."

After Daruka yokes the horses to the amazing chariot covered with tiger-skins and readies it for battle, Arjuna takes Yudhishtira's leave and blessing and, after the Brahmanas perform propitiatory rites and utter their blessings over him, he climbs onto his ratha. Great Arjuna, with Krishna for his sarathy, drives off to confront Karna. Seeing him go in such splendour, all those watching regard Karna as already slain.

All the cardinal points of earth and sky, O Rajan, become serene. Kingfishers, parrots and herons wheel around the son of Pandu and a large flight of rare, beautiful and auspicious birds, called pungs, arrive and fly around him with joyous cries that make Arjuna go faster. The prospect of fresh flesh to feast on fetches fearsome kankas, vultures, cranes, hawks and ravens, and they fly in advance of his chariot, an auspicious omen foreboding the decimation of the enemy army and the killing of Karna. As

Arjuna flies along, he perspires profusely as his anxiety about how he can fulfil his vow increases.

Krishna notices this and says, "O Gandivi, no one but you could have vanquished all the maharathas whom you have slain with your bow. We have seen many heroes, each gifted with Sakra's very prowess, attain the other world after encountering you in battle. Who other than you, O Vibho, would still be alive after facing Drona, Bhishma, Bhagadatta, Vinda, Anuvinda of Avanti, Sudakshina, the chief of the Kambojas, the mighty Srutayudha and Achyutayudha in battle? You have devastras, great power and skill and you are never confounded in battle. You also have humility that is born of knowledge. You always strike unerringly, with perfect aim, and have immaculate presence of mind in battle. Truly, you can destroy all the mobile and immobile creatures, including the very Devas and the Gandharvas.

On this earth, there is no human warrior who can face you in battle. Amongst all the invincible Kshatriyas and even among the gods, I have not seen or heard of any archer who is your equal. Brahma himself created the great bow Gandiva that you wield. And for this as well, there is no man who is your peer, O Partha.

However, I must caution and warn you about the duel into which we are riding: do not underestimate Karna, that ornament of war! Karna is a maharatha, a mighty, proud and accomplished warrior. He is a master of every aspect of the astra shastra; he knows better than anyone exactly what is needed with regard to time and place. I will be brief, O son of Pandu.

I regard Karna as being at least your equal, and possibly, your superior. Only with the greatest care and resolve can you vanquish mighty Karna. In energy, he is equal to Agni, in speed, he is equal to tameless Vayu, in wrath he is like Yama. Endowed with inordinate prowess, he resembles a lion in the formation of his body. He is exceptionally radiant and handsome; he is eight ratnis tall, with magnificent arms and a deep chest. He is invincible. He is sensitive. He is not only a hero, Arjuna; Karna is the greatest of all heroes.

With every endowment of a warrior, he is a dispeller of the fears of friends. He wants the good of Dhritarashtra's son, and he has always hated the sons of Pandu. That is why I think that no man of flesh and blood, other than you, why, not even the Devas with Vasava at their head, can kill Radheya. And so, Arjuna, kill him today.

He is the inveterate enemy of the Pandavas and his hatred for you is not out of any consideration of his own interests. So kill Karna, that first among maharathas; fulfil the final purpose of your birth and prove your love for Yudhishtira.

Truly, I know, O Partha, that even the Devas and Asuras cannot resist your prowess. From overweening pride, the evil Sutaputra is always dismissive of the sons of Pandu. Kill him today, Dhananjaya, he who is the root of all the other sinners and depending on whom, the wretched Duryodhana regards himself as invincible.

Slay that Naravyaghra, the proud Karna, who has a sword for his tongue, a bow for his mouth, and arrows for his teeth. I know your abilities well; so kill Karna like a lion killing an elephant. O Partha, slay Vaikartana, because of whom Duryodhana is dismissive of you.”””

CANTO 73

"Sanjaya says, 'Once more, as they ride into battle, Krishna says to Arjuna, "Today is the seventeenth day, O Bhaarata, of this unspeakable massacre of men, elephants and horses, which has so reduced your vast army. The Kauravas, too, O Partha, have nearly all been slain. Under your lead, these lords of the earth, these Srinjayas, and the Pandava troops, yet hold their ground on the battlefield. Also, under your guidance, the Panchalas, the Matsyas, the Karushas, and the Chedis have fetched great destruction to your enemies.

Who is there that can vanquish the assembled Kauravas in battle? On the other hand, who is there that can vanquish the mighty Pandava maharathas that you lead? You alone can subdue the three worlds, consisting of the Devas, the Asuras and the Manavas, united together. What need I say then of the Kaurava army? Save you, O Naravyaghra, no one, not even if he resembled Vasava himself in prowess, could have vanquished king Bhagadatta. Partha, all the lords of earth, united together, cannot stand up to this vast force that you command.

It is because of your protection that Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandi succeeded in bringing down Drona and Bhishma. Otherwise, who could have vanquished those two maharathas, both of whom were equals of Indra himself?

Other than you, O Naravyaghra, which man in this world can defeat those fierce lords of aksauhinis, the invincible Vaikartana, Kripa, Aswatthaman, and Duryodhana himself, all masters of weapons and united. You have annihilated innumerable fierce Kshatriyas, hailing from diverse provinces, as well as teeming divisions of soldiers, their horses, chariots and elephants. Vast numbers of diverse Kshatriya clans, like the Govasas, the Dasamiyas, the Vasatis, the Easterners, the Vatadhanas, and the Bhojas who are very sensitive of their honour, along with their cavalry and elephants, have met with destruction at your hands and Bhima's.

The extraordinarily ferocious Tusharas, Yavanas, Khasas, Darvabhisaras, Daradas, Sakas, Kamathas, Ramathas, Tanganas, Andhrakas, Pulindas and the Kiratas, the mighty and powerful Mlecchas, the mountaineers, and the races from the seaside, all hardened soldiers armed with gadas, fight for Duryodhana. And only you have their measure, O Paraviraha!

Who could dare advance against the vast and swollen Dhartarashtra force arrayed in battle order? With your protection, the Pandavas penetrated into the enemy host shrouded with dust and resembling a swollen sea, and decimated it. Seven days have elapsed since Abhimanyu killed Jayatsena, the mighty ruler of the Magadhas, in battle. After that, Bhimasena with his mace massacred Jayatsena's ten thousand war elephants, and hundreds of other war tuskers as well, and countless rathikas in an awesome demonstration of his might. Thus, O Partha, during the progress of this horrific war, the Kaurava forces encountered Bhimasena and you, and departed for the realm of Yama.

The Pandavas overran the van of the Kaurava army, but with his fiery fusillades of arrows, Bhishma shrouded the Chedis, the Panchalas, the Karushas, the Matsyas, and the Kaikeyas and massacred them. He filled the sky with gold-winged, deadly shafts, and slew thousands of rathikas, one hundred thousand other warriors and mighty elephants, in all slaughtering the Pandava host for ten days without let. He assumed the form of Rudra or of Upendra and, fighting singlehandedly, inflicted a great carnage among the Pandava, the Chedi, the Panchala and the Kaikeya divisions in the evil Suyodhana's cause.

Every day, Bhishma rose over Kurukshetra like the sun during the pralaya. With your protection, Sikhandi felled that Naravyaghra. It is

because he made you his enemy, that the Pitamaha now lies on a bed of arrows, even like Vritra when he made Vasava his enemy.

The savage Drona also slaughtered our army for five days. With his impenetrable vyuhas, riding against which many maharathas lost their lives, he protected Jayadratha for a good while. The son of Bharadwaja, fierce as Yama himself, caused an unprecedented carnage during the war at night; he consumed warriors past count with his astras until he finally met his end at the hands of Dhrishtadyumna. If, on that day, you had not contained the enemy's entire chariot division that Karna led, we could never have killed Drona. Which other Kshatriya, save you, could have achieved such incredible feats as you did and on the day you killed Jayadratha? Killing so many valorous kings, facing the teeming Kaurava host by yourself, you found your way to Jayadratha and killed him. Everyone speaks of what you did as being awesome and incomparable. I, however, do not regard it so; you are a great maharatha and you did what you had sworn you would.

If all these assembled enemy Kshatriyas can stay alive against you even for a day, I would regard them to be truly mighty. With the death of Bhishma and Drona, the Dhartarashtra host, O Partha, with all its foremost warriors slain, with its horses, chariots, and elephants dead, has lost all its heroes and looks like the firmament bereft of the sun, the moon and the stars. This prodigious enemy host has been shorn of its splendour today, even as the dark Asura host in the old days, after Sakra ruined its magnificence.

Only five great chariot-warriors remain—Aswatthaman, Kritavarman, Karna, Salya and Kripa. Kill them all today, O Naravyaghra, and make a gift of the earth, with all her islands, cities, waters, and the Patalas and the sky above to Yudhishtira. Destroy finally this army as Vishnu in the days long ago slaying the Daityas and the Danavas, and bestow Bhumi on the king as Hari gave the three worlds to Sakra.

Let the Panchalas rejoice today that their enemies are dead, like the Devas rejoicing after Vishnu decimated the Danavas. Even if you do not kill your Acharyas, those great men Drona and Kripa, out of your respect for them, or Aswatthaman out of compassion, or Kritavarman because of the honour that you bear for your mother's kinsman, or your uncle Salya, the ruler of the Madras out of affection, do not spare Karna today but kill that evil one who cherishes the fiercest hatred for you. This is your highest duty and there is nothing in it that would be against dharma.

I approve of it, and there is no blemish in the deed. Karna was the cause of the attempt made to immolate your mother and all of you at night in the palace of lac, and of Suyodhana's behaviour towards you after that game of dice. Suyodhana has always depended upon Karna as his main strength, and has been bold enough to try to injure even me. It is his firm belief that Karna will annihilate all the Prithas in battle. Though he knows very well how mighty you are, O Kuntiputra, he has still chosen to go to war with you, relying entirely on Karna.

Karna always maintains, 'I will vanquish the Parthas and that maharatha Vasudeva of the Dasarhas.'

Always extolling Duryodhana, Karna has successfully had his way in the Kuru sabha. Kill him today, for in all the injuries and humiliations inflicted upon you, Karna has ever been the leader.

Six mighty and ruthless maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army killed your heroic son Abhimanyu, whose eyes were like those of a bull. He fought against Drona, Aswatthaman, Kripa and other great Kshatriyas; he deprived elephants of their riders and maharathas of their chariots. Abhimanyu, that spreader of the fame of both the Kurus and the Vrishnis, shot down horsemen and foot-soldiers, and routed their divisions; he quelled many mighty chariot-warriors, and sent innumerable men, horses and elephants to Yama.

I swear to you, O friend, that my body burns at the thought that while the noble son of Subhadra was consuming the enemy army with his arrows, Karna was plotting to bring him down through base treachery. Unable to face Abhimanyu, Karna, bathed in blood and nearly unconscious, was forced to draw deep breaths of rage and to turn his back on the battle. Demoralised, afraid, stunned and exhausted from his wounds, finally, at the clever Drona's instructions, Karna broke Abhimanyu's bow from behind him. Then five great maharathas slew that unarmed child with dark storms of arrows. At Abhimanyu's death, even his enemies grieved, except the evil Karna and Suyodhana who laughed with joy.

Do you remember the vile words that Karna said to Draupadi in the Kuru court, in the presence of the Pandavas and Kurus, 'The Pandavas, O Draupadi, are dead! They have sunk into eternal hell, O you of the large hips.

Choose other lords for yourself now, O you of the sweet voice. Enter the palace of Dhritarashtra as a serving woman, O you of curving eye-

lashes, for your husbands are no more living men.

O Panchali, the Pandavas will not be of any use to you anymore, since you are the wife of men who are now slaves and so are you also a slave! Today Duryodhana is the only king on earth; all other kings of the world will abide by whatever he says. Look how all the sons of Pandu have fallen! Dhritarashtra's son has overwhelmed them and they can only look mutely and helplessly at one another. It is plain that they are all sesame seeds without kernels, and have sunk into hell. They will have to serve Duryodhana, that king of kings, as his slaves.'

These were the foul words that that wretched Karna then spoke in your hearing, O Bhaarata. Quench the fire of those words with your arrows today, and all the other wrongs that evil one has done to you, along with his life.

Let Karna feel the touch of the arrows from the Gandiva and remember the words of Bhishma and Drona.

Let your deadly cloth-yard shafts, effulgent like lightning, pierce Karna's limbs, plunge into his vital organs, drink his blood and despatch him to Yama's abode.

Let all the kings of the earth, sorrowful and uttering wails of sorrow, watch Karna fall from his chariot, slain by your arrows.

Let his kinsmen, with sorrowful hearts and faces, see Karna stretching his length on the ground, dipped in gore, unbreathing, and with his weapons loosened from his grasp.

Let the lofty standard of Adhiratha's son, bearing the device of the elephant's rope, fall fluttering onto the earth, cut down by your broad-headed arrows.

Let Salya flee in terror, abandoning his gold-decked chariot, shattered by hundreds of your shafts, upon seeing its warrior and horses killed.

Let your enemy Suyodhana, beholding Adhiratha's son slain, despair of both his kingdom and his life.

O Partha, there stands Karna, equal to Indra or perhaps even Sankara in tejas, razing your troops with his endless rivers of arrows. There the Panchalas, though being massacred, yet stand firm in the cause of the Pandavas. Know, O Arjuna, that Karna by himself prevails over the Panchalas, the five sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the sons of Dhrishtadyumna, Satanika, the son of Nakula, Nakula himself, Sahadeva, Durmukha, Janamejaya, Sudharman and Satyaki!

Hear the loud uproar your allies the Panchalas make, as his arrows rake them. The Panchalas are neither afraid nor do they run from the battle. Those mighty bowmen were utterly fearless of death even when they faced Bhishma who enveloped the Pandava army with a great cloud of arrows.

They always earnestly attempted to vanquish their great enemy, the invincible Drona, that Acharya of all archers, that shura who haughtily massacred his enemies in battle. They have never turned their backs on Karna although he is decimating them in their hundreds as they charge him, like a blazing fire incinerating swarms of insects. You must, O Kaunteya, become a raft and rescue those brave warriors who have resolved to lay down their lives for their allies, and drown in the Karna ocean.

That awesome astra that Karna had from Maharishi Parasurama has been used, consuming our troops with its unworldly energy. Karna's arrows, flying thick as swarms of black bees, are still mowing down your troops. Our men who do not have their souls under control, cannot resist Karna's firetides of arrows; the Panchalas, O Bhaarata, flee in all directions.

And look there, Bhima, in a towering rage, at the head of the Srinjayas, gives battle to Karna, although gashed and bleeding from the Sutaputra's shafts. If left alone, Karna will exterminate the Pandavas, the Srinjayas and the Panchalas, like an untreated disease whose germ has invaded the body.

Other than you, Arjuna, I see no one in Yudhishtira's army who can hope to return alive after meeting Karna in battle. Kill him today with your keen shafts, O Bharatarishabha; fulfil your vow, and win great fame. Truly, O Paraviraha, only you and no one else can vanquish the Kaurava host led by Karna. Achieve this great feat now. Kill Atiratha Karna, attain your objective and, crowned with success, become joyful, O Arjuna!"""

CANTO 74

"Sanjaya says, 'Listening to Krishna, all Arjuna's gloom and doubts are dispelled. He rubs the Gandiva's string, stretches it, and holds up the great bow, ready to kill Karna. Arjuna says, "With you to protect me, O Govinda, you who know the past and the future, and who are pleased with me, victory is sure to be mine today. When I can destroy the three worlds with your help, what challenge does Karna pose? I see the Panchala army fleeing, O Janardana, and Karna ranges fearlessly across the field. I also see Karna's Bhargavastra flying everywhere, like Shakra's Vajra.

This is the battle in which I will kill Karna, the battle of which all men will speak as long as the Earth lasts. Today, arrows loosed from the Gandiva will drink Karna's blood and life, and take him to Yama.

Today, Dhritarashtra will curse his own foolish decision to install the undeserving Duryodhana on the throne.

Today will divest Dhritarashtra of sovereignty, happiness, prosperity, kingdom, city and sons.

I tell you truly, O Krishna, that today, after I kill Karna, Duryodhana will despair of both life and kingdom.

Today, when he sees me kill Karna as Indra once did Vritrasura, Duryodhana will recall your efforts to bring peace, which he then mocked.

Today, let Sakuni know that my arrows are the dice, my Gandiva the box for casting them, and my chariot, the chequered cloth.

O Govinda, I will dispel Yudhishtira's long sleeplessness when I kill Karna. After this day, my brother will be cheerful and happy for ever. Today, I will unleash an inexorable arrow that will take Karna's life.

Karna vowed, O Krishna, 'I will not wash my feet until I slay Phalguna.'

I will prove his vow false, O Madhava, and fell him lifeless from his chariot, and the earth will drink the blood of him who in battle brings certain doom to all other men in this world.

With Dhritarashtra's approval, the Sutaputra boasted, 'You have no husband now, O Draupadi!'

My arrows will prove him false. They will drink his life-blood like angry serpents. Cloth-yard shafts, bright as lightning and shot from the Gandiva, will send Karna on his last journey. Today the son of Radha will repent those cruel words that he said to the princess of Panchala in the Kuru sabha. They who were then like sesame seeds without kernels, will today again become seeds with kernel after the fall of the wretched Vaikartana.

Karna bragged to the sons of Dhritarashtra, 'I will save you from the sons of Pandu!' My arrows will prove his assurance false.

Today, in the very sight of all the warriors, I will kill Karna who said, 'I will slay all the Panchalas with their sons.'

Today, O Madhusudana, I will kill Karna, and the panic-stricken Dhartarashtras with their king will flee in all directions, like deer from a lion. Then Duryodhana will repent for everything he has said and done, with his sons and relatives.

O Krishna, seeing Karna slain, Dhritarashtra, that weak man of wrath, will know me to be the foremost of all archers. I will make that king along with his sons, grandsons, counsellors and servants shelterless today.

Cranes, vultures and other birds of carrion, O Keshava, will dance over the limbs of Karna that my arrows will cut into pieces today.

Today, Madhusudana, before the eyes of all the great bowmen, I will behead the evil Sutaputra, and sever all his limbs with keen vipathas and razor-faced arrows.

Today, I will make the Dharmaraja Yudhishtira happy so that he will cast off the great pain and sorrow that he has borne in his heart all these heavy years, when I kill the son of Radha, with all his kinsmen.

Today, I will annihilate Karna's soldiers with astras like fire or the poison of a serpent. Today I will spread the earth with the bodies of kings

cased in their golden armour. O Krishna, I will desiccate the bodies and cut off the heads of Abhimanyu's cowardly killers.

Today, I will either make a gift of the earth, taken back from the Dhartarashtras, to my brother, or perhaps you will walk the Earth without an Arjuna.

Today, O Krishna, when I kill Karna, like Maghavat slaying Sambara, I will free myself from the debt I owe all archers, to my own wrath, to the Kurus, to my arrows, and to this Gandiva. That death will free me from the grief that I, too, have carried for thirteen years. After I have killed the Suta's son, let our allies, the mighty chariot-warriors of the Somakas, consider their task accomplished.

I do not know, O Madhava, what the measure of Satyaki's joy will be after I kill Karna and win victory for our side. I will destroy the Sutaputra and his maharatha son, and bring joy to Bhima, the twins and Satyaki and pay my debt to the Panchalas, Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandi!

Today, let everyone see an angry Dhananjaya annihilate the Kauravas and the Suta's son. There is no one as powerful as me in the world. There is no one who can equal me in wrath or compassion. With my bow and with my strength, I can vanquish the Asuras, the Devas and all other beings united. Know, Krishna, that my prowess is higher than the highest. Alone, I will attack all the Kurus and the Bahlikas and with the fire of the astras from my Gandiva, I will burn them like a heap of dry grass at the close of winter. My palms bear the scars of arrows beyond count and of this great bow. On each of the soles of my feet are the marks of a chariot and a standard. There is no one who can defeat me in battle."

After saying this to that Varapurusha Krishna, Arjuna with blood red eyes, rides into battle, to support Bhima and to cut Karna's head from his trunk.'"

CANTO 75

"Dhritarashtra says, 'What happened in that dreadful and fathomless battle of Kurukshetra, between the warriors of my army and the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, when Dhananjaya took the field, O Sanjaya?'

Sanjaya says, 'The combined divisions of the Pandava army, swelling with pride and prowess, their tall standards flying, march to the beating of drums and blasts from other instruments, like masses of clouds thundering at the close of summer. The battle that ensues is like a baneful, unseasonable shower, cruel and destructive. Huge elephants are its clouds; weapons are the water they shed; the peal of musical instruments, the rattle of chariot-wheels, and the noise of their palms clapping and slapping against bowstrings are their roar; weapons decked with gold form the flashes of lightning; arrows and swords and astras are the lashing, lethal torrents of rain. The incessant strokes of swords, the impetuous flow of blood in streams and the great carnage of warriors renders the encounter brutal past describing.

In the general mayhem, chariot-warriors, horsemen, elephants and foot-soldiers fight, singly or jointly and send one another to Yama's presence. Partha, with clouds of arrows, despatches enemy chariots, charioteers, cavalry, horses, elephants and foot-soldiers to the realm of Yama. Kripa and Sikhandi face each other; Satyaki battles Duryodhana; Srutasravas engages

Aswatthaman, and Yudhamanyu duels with Chitrasena. The Srinjaya maharatha Uttamaujas fights Karna's son Sushena, while Sahadeva battles Sakuni, king of the Gandharas, like a hungry lion against a mighty bull.

The youthful son of Nakula, Satanika, and Karna's young son Vrishasena, shoot torments of arrows at each other. Madri's son Nakula assails Kritavarman, while Dhrishtadyumna, king of the Panchalas and Senapati of the Pandavas, attacks Karna, king of Anga and Senapati of the Kauravas, with all his forces. Dusasana, leading a large force of Samsaptakas, fiercely attacks the formidable Bhima.

The daring Uttamaujas, fighting vigorously, decapitates Karna's son Sushena and the head falls down on the ground with an uncanny and loud sound. A stricken Karna destroys Uttamaujas' horses, chariot and his flag in terrible fury. Uttamaujas turns on Kripa and kills his horses and the warriors who guard his flanks, and then quickly takes refuge in Sikhandi's chariot. Finding Kripa without a chariot, Sikhandi hesitates to shoot at him, allowing Aswatthaman to ride up quickly and to shield him with his own chariot, and to rescue him.

Meanwhile, Vayuputra Bhima, his golden mail shining and slick with blood, truly begins to burn your son's troops with his arrows, like the mid-day sun burning all the world at the height of summer.'"

CANTO 76

"Sanjaya says, 'During the savage melee, enemies surround Bhima who, fighting alone, says to his sarathy, "Ride into the midst of the Dhartarashtra army as fast as these horses will take us. I mean to send all these enemies to Yama."

The charioteer whips the horses and they race recklessly to where Bhima wants to fight your army. A seething host of Kaurava troops, with elephants, chariots, cavalry and foot soldiers attack Bhima's splendid ratha but he easily repels their barrages of arrows and spears, and mows them down with his golden arrows. The Kshatriyas, the elephants, the chariots, the horses and the foot soldiers, whom Bhima's arrows strike set up a deep and echoing bewailing, O Rajan, like the sound made when a mountain is cloven by lightning, they attack Bhima from every side, like new-fledged birds flying towards a tree, but they cannot withstand him at all. Like Death with jaws agape, who devours all creatures at the end of the yuga, he consumes them. Like masses of clouds that a tempest scatters, the mangled and burnt Bhaarata host breaks and flees in all directions.

Mighty Bhimasena once more cheerfully says to his charioteer, "Ascertain, O Suta, whether those assembled chariots and standards that advance towards me, are ours or the enemy's, for I cannot distinguish them. Let me not kill our own troops.

O Visoka, seeing these hostile warriors, chariots and their standards that surround me, I am concerned about the king's injury and also because Arjuna has not yet returned to battle. I am worried that Dharmaputra Yudhishtira may have left this world, leaving me in the midst of the enemy. I do not know whether Arjuna and he are still alive. Yet, though anxiety and sorrow tear at my heart, I will destroy these hostile troops and rejoice with you today. Inspect all my quivers and tell me, O Suta, how many arrows I still have left and of what sort."

Visoka says, "You have sixty thousand iron arrows, ten thousand razor-faced shafts and an equal number of broad-headed ones left, O Shura. Of cloth-yard shafts you have two thousand, and of pradaras you still have three thousand. Why, your remaining astras amount to more than a cartload drawn by six bullocks. Shoot them and hurl them, for of gadas, swords, lances, scimitars, javelins, spears and other weapons used in close combat, you have thousands upon thousands. Have no fear that your weapons will be exhausted."

Bhima says, "O Suta, today my arrows sped fiercely from my bow will shroud everything and turn Kurukshetra into the domain of Death! All Kshatriyas, including the youngest, will discover whether Bhimasena has succumbed in battle or if he has subdued all the Kurus. Today, the world will applaud all my feats as I will singly overthrow the lot of them, or let them strike me down.

Let the Devas who aid good deeds, bless me. Let that Paraviraha, Arjuna, join me now like Sakra, who when duly invoked, comes quickly to a yagna. Look, O Visoka, my brother is coming! The Bhaarata standards flee, along with their elephants, horses and foot-soldiers. Savyasachi has them on the run with his thunderbolt shafts fitted with wings of gold and peacock feathers. Ah, chariots, horses and elephants run in panic with loud cries, crushing their own foot-soldiers. Arjuna is here and the Kaurava army is in full flight!"

Visoka asks, "Are you deaf, O great Bhima, that you do not hear the twang of Partha's yawning Gandiva stretched in wrath? All your wishes have come true for I can see the kapi-dhvaja in the midst of the enemy's elephant force terrifying the enemy's divisions. Why, even I am struck with fear when I look at that dreadful banner. Behold, the Gandiva's string flashes repeatedly like lightning amid blue clouds. Look, Arjuna's beautiful diadem sparkles brilliantly and the precious jewel on it blazes like the sun,

and beside him is his white sankha, the Devadatta, with the blare like thunder.

And right beside Arjuna is Janardana, reins in hand, and they scythe through the enemy army. Look at Krishna's effulgent chakra, its nave hard as adamant, and its edge sharp as a razor, and which the Yadus worship.

Look where massive elephants and their hastikas, pierced and split open by his arrows, their trunks like trees, struck by the Kiritin, fall onto the earth, like hills riven by thunder.

And behold Krishna's sankha, the Panchajanya, so utterly beautiful and of the hue of the moon, and the blazing red mani, the Kaustubha, on his breast and his triumphal, exotic vanamala. What doubt is there that it is none other than Arjuna flying towards us, decimating the hostile army on his ratha drawn by cloud white gandharva horses and driven by Krishna? Look how your younger brother, the Vijaya, whose prowess is Indra's own, annihilates enemy chariots, horses and legions of foot-soldiers.

Behold, they fall like a forest uprooted by a storm stirred by Garuda's wings. Ah, look, mighty Bhima! Arjuna cuts down four hundred chariot-warriors with their horses and charioteers, seven hundred elephants, innumerable foot-soldiers and horsemen, and he flies toward us like the great constellation of Chitra. O Pandava, your enemies are being exterminated and all your wishes are coming true. Long may you live and your power ever increase!"

Bhima says, "O Visoka, you delight me with what you say and I will give you four and ten populous villages, a hundred female slaves and twenty chariots!"""

CANTO 77

"Sanjaya says, 'Hearing the rumble of their chariots and the shouts of the enemy warriors, Arjuna says, "Let our steeds fly more swiftly still, O Govinda!"

Krishna replies, "I am going as swiftly as I can to where Bhima is."

They race towards the heart of the battle, even like the Vajradhari flying at the Asura Jambha. The fearsome Kshatriyas of the Kaurava army, supported by a large force of chariots, cavalry, elephants and foot-soldiers all move against Arjuna, and make the earth resound with their chariot wheels, the thunder of their horses' hooves, and the great susurrus of their arrows. Such a battle erupts between them, reminiscent of the encounter between the Asuras and Vishnu for mastery of the three worlds.

Alone, Partha destroys the mighty astras they loose at him; he cuts off their heads and arms with his razor-faced, crescent-tipped and wedge-headed arrows. Chattras, yak-tail chamaras, flagstaffs, horses, chariots, thick bands of foot-soldiers and elephants, all fall before his searing onslaught. Elephants, caparisoned in gold, with triumphal standards and ferocious warriors on their backs, are resplendent as arrows with golden wings strike them; they are like so many mountains ablaze with light. Dhananjaya cuts a path through the enemy to Karna, a makara in that ocean of men. Your army, O Rajan, do their best to stop Partha, leaving all fear of

death and the resultant din is like that made by the ocean when lashed into fury by the tempest.

Arjuna, however, routs them and despatches to Yama's abode—thousands of chariot-warriors, elephants and horses. He kills four hundred maharathas and as the arrows from his bow strike them, they seem to vanish one after another from their chariots. The Kaurava army founders and escapes from Arjuna and the uproar from your men sounds like a surging sea breaking upon a rocky shore.

Arjuna now turns his attention to Karna's division and the sound with which he faces his enemy is like that which Garuda made in the olden days when swooping down for serpents. Bhimasena hears the sound with joy, and he is eager to catch sight of his radiant. The valiant son of Vayudeva falls on your troops, entirely reckless of his life. Your stricken army, O Rajan, reels like a wrecked ship in the embrace of the sea. Displaying his lightness of hands, Bhima mangles your forces with his fierce arrows, and despatches vast numbers to Yamaloka. Your warriors, O Bhaarata, quake with fear on seeing the superhuman fury of Bhima, who is like Rudra at the end of the yuga.

Duryodhana quickly marshals his men and commanders, O Bharatarishabha, and attacks Bhima, for if Bhima falls, he knows that they could then easily kill the other Pandavas. Exhorted and encouraged by your son, they renew their assault on him with showers of arrows. They surround him with innumerable elephants, soldiers, chariots and cavalry. Vrikodara is handsome and luminous like the full moon within his coronet and surrounded by the stars. His enemies attack him viciously, their eyes red with wrath, determined to kill him in any way they can.

Bhima flashes out of the press like a fish coming escaping from a net and covers that mighty host with torrents of arrows. He kills ten thousand advancing elephants, two hundred thousand foot-soldiers, five thousand horses and a hundred rathikas.

Bhima lets flow a river of blood, whose eddies are chariots, elephants the crocodiles that fill it, men its large fish, horses its sharks; the hair of dead men and animals form its plants and moss, arms lopped off from trunks are its water snakes. Thighs constitute its gravel, marrow its mire, the floating heads its rocks and countless jewels and gems float along with the current on crowns, armlets, earrings and other ornaments. Bows and arrows are the rafts by which men seek to cross that frightful river, and maces and

spiked bludgeons are its serpents. Royal white parasols and flags are the swans, headgear its foam, necklaces its lotuses, and floating dust forms its froth.

Noble men cross the gory river with ease while the timid stand frozen on its ghastly banks. Warriors are its swimming, wading crocodiles and it flows straight towards the kingdom of Yama.

Wherever dreadful Bhima goes he slaughters the enemy in their thousands, quick as thinking, easy as breathing. Seeing Bhima on the rampage, Duryodhana says to Sakuni, “Uncle, stop the mighty Bhimasena quickly! The fate of the Pandava army and the result of this war both depend on him.”

The doughty son of Subala takes up the challenge and, surrounded by his brothers, attempts to contain the fearsome Bhima, like the continent resisting the ocean. He pierces the left side of Bhima’s chest with a sizzling volley of cloth-yard shafts fitted with golden wings. The fierce arrows, O Rajan, fletched with kanka and peacock feathers, pass through Bhima’s armour and sink deep into his body. Bhima strikes back with a single deadly shaft, also decked with gold, but the nimble Sakuni cuts it into seven pieces as it courses towards him. This enrages Bhima, who destroys Sakuni’s bow with some ease. Sakuni seizes up another bow and shoots six and ten wedge-headed arrows at him, two of which strike Bhima; one destroys his standard, two his regal parasol and the remaining four pierce his horses.

A red-eyed, furious Bhima flings an iron javelin with a golden shaft and restless as the tongue of a serpent at Sakuni’s chariot, but the Gandhara catches it in flight and hurls it back, and it ploughs right through Bhima’s left arm to strike the earth like a shaft of lightning from the sky. The Dhartarashtras set up a loud and jubilant roar and begin to fight wildly, reckless now of their lives. Bhima cannot bear that triumphant shout and, snatching up another bow, in a moment, smothers the enemy soldiers with his arrows.

He kills Sakuni’s four horses, his charioteer, and destroys his standard. Abandoning his useless chariot, Sakuni jumps down onto the ground, his eyes blood-red, breathing heavily, and shoots dense dark swaths of arrows at Bhima. Bhima wards off these shafts, rives Sakuni’s bow and deeply pierces his powerful antagonist with flights of burning arrows that make him collapse, almost lifeless. An anxious Duryodhana sweeps his uncle into his own chariot from under Bhimasena’s nose and rides away like the wind.

Seeing the king himself retreat, his troops turn their faces from battle and flee from Bhimasena in terror.

Bhima chases them remorselessly, shooting thousands of arrows after them. Slaughtered by Bhima, the retreating Dhartarashtras find refuge with Karna, O Bharatarishabha, and stand relieved, supporting one another like shipwrecked mariners when finding an island. They take courage once more and prepare to renew the war for everything.'"

CANTO 78

"Dhritarashtra says, 'When Bhimasena breached our ranks, what, O Sanjaya, did Duryodhana and Subala's son Sakuni say? What did Karna, the Paraviraha, the warriors of my army, Kripa, Kritavarman, and Drona's son Aswatthaman say? I think that the prowess of Bhimasena Panduputra is past wonderful, since singlehandedly he fought off all the warriors of my army. Did Karna keep his vow? He, O Sanjaya, is the prosperity, the armour, the fame and the very hope for life of the Kurus. Seeing the terrible Bhimasena rout our army, what did Karna, son of Adhiratha and Radha, do? What did they do, my insuperable sons, the other kings and the maharathas of our army? Tell me all this, O Sanjaya, for you are a skilled narrator indeed!'

Sanjaya says, 'In the afternoon, O Rajan, the intrepid Karna attacks the Somakas in the very sight of Bhimasena who meanwhile decimates the Dhartarashtra troops. Seeing Bhima mercilessly pound his army, Senapati Karna tells Salya, "Drive me to the Panchalas!"

Salya urges the white chargers, fleet as thought, towards where the Chedis, the Panchalas and the Karushas are, and penetrating that mighty host, confidently drives the chariot to where Karna wants to go. Finding the chariot cased in tiger skins and looking like a cloud, rolling into their midst with a sound like the peal of thunder or of a mountain splitting into fragments, the Pandus and the Panchalas are terrified. Karna looses

hundreds upon hundreds of arrows from his bowstring drawn to his ear and ravages the Pandava army.

In counter attack, many great archers and maharathas of the Pandava army, including Sikhandi, Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva, the five sons of Draupadi, and Satyaki surround and pour showers of arrows upon him, intent on finishing him. Satyaki strikes him with twenty shafts in the shoulder-joint, Sikhandi with five and twenty shafts, Dhrishtadyumna finds him with seven, the sons of Draupadi with four and sixty, Sahadeva with seven and Nakula with a hundred and a raging Bhimasena drills him in the torso with ninety perfect barbs.

Karna, laughing in scorn, and drawing his wonderful bow in a circle, slashes each of them with five arrows. He destroys Satyaki's bow and battle flag, O Bharatarishabha, and bloodies his chest, and next pierces Bhimasena. With flat-headed arrows, he next cuts off Sahadeva's standard and gashes his sarathy. In the twinkling of an eye, he deprives the five sons of Draupadi of their chariots, shattering them.

I saw the exceptionally wonderful feat, O Bhaarata, of the valiant Karna, fighting alone and unsupported, holding off all those bowmen who do their utmost to overpower him. With lethally accurate archery he forces those maharathas back and then begins to massacre the Panchalas and many rathikas among the Chedis, gratifying all the Devas, the Siddhas, the Charanas and the great bowmen among the Dhartarashtras.

Then Karna achieves an extraordinary feat, as he sets the Pandava troops to flight, so they scatter in all directions screaming in panic. All the Pandavas united together cannot contain him, and like a cataract breaking against a mountain, the Pandava army is shattered when it meets Karna. That shura tirelessly cuts off the arms and heads of his redoubtable enemies, their ears decked with resonant kundalas. Swords with hilts of ivory, battle flags, spears, horses, elephants and chariots of diverse kinds Karna destroys in a myriad of ways, but strictly observes Kshatriya dharma.

The earth soon becomes impassable and mired with flesh, blood and detritus. The thick darkness caused by Karna's devastras makes it impossible for the combatants to distinguish friends from enemies. The mighty Pandava maharathas, O Rajan, fight valiantly but Karna repeatedly savages them, like an angry lion a herd of deer in a forest or like a wolf hunting smaller animals. The Dhartarashtra archers further beset them, uttering dreadful roars as they retreat. An overjoyed Duryodhana orders

diverse drums and musical instruments to be beaten and blown in all parts of the army.

Though beaten, the great Panchala archers return heroically to the fight, but to no avail as the son of Radha continues to rout them. He kills twenty Panchala rathikas and more than a hundred Chedi warriors and empties the platforms of chariots, the backs of horses and the necks of elephants of their warriors and looks resplendent like Death himself at the end of the yuga. The heroism that the Panchalas display is remarkable, for they refuse to back down from that impossible assault.

Duryodhana, Dusasana, Kripa, Aswatthaman, Kritavarman, Sakuni, and the two sons of Karna slaughter the Pandava warriors in hundreds of thousands. So, too, the Pandava heroes Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi and the five sons of Draupadi decimate your host. Thus, even as a great slaughter takes place among the Pandavas everywhere on the field, your army also suffers great loss at the hands of the mighty Bhima and other Pandava heroes.'"

CANTO 79

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, O Rajan, Arjuna catches a glimpse of Karna as he continues to destroy the four kinds of enemy forces. The Sutaputra causes a tawny river of blood to flow, choked with flesh, bones and marrow of heroic warriors, where human heads are its rocks and elephants and horses form its banks, and which resounds with the cries of ravens and vultures. White parasols are its swans or rafts and as that river runs, it bears away Kshatriyas like trees along its current. Necklaces form a bouquet of lotuses, helmets are its foam, bows and arrows are its fish; and the crowns of mangled men float on its surface. Shields and armour are its eddies, and chariots are the rafts with which it teems. While men wanting victory easily cross it, cowards find it unfordable.

Arjuna says, "There, O Krishna, the standard of Karna is visible where he is locked in battle with Bhimasena and the others. Look, Duryodhana with the sovereign white parasol held over his head, fights alongside him as they put the Panchalas to flight. There Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman shield Duryodhana, while Karna protects them all. Salya, expert charioteer, looks so dashing as he guides Karna's ratha. Take me there, O Krishna, for I will not return without killing Karna. Quickly now, Govinda, for otherwise he will annihilate all the maharathas of the Parthas and the Srinjayas in my very sight."

Krishna drives his chariot swiftly towards Karna to begin the duel between Arjuna and the Suta's son, and the Pandava troops are all reassured. The rumble of Arjuna's ratha as it flashes forward is like the tremendous sound of Vasava's thunder. Seeing Shwetavahana and Krishna advance under the kapi-dhvaja, Salya tells Karna, "There he comes, the one after whom you were asking, brandishing his Gandiva and massacring our greatest warriors. Fight him today Karna, and if you can kill him great will be our gain and advantage. Judging by his mien, Partha will not battle anybody other than you, especially when you have Vrikodara cornered.

Learning that Yudhishtira has suffered at your hands, and seeing the plight of Sikhandi, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, the five sons of Draupadi, Yudhamanyu, Uttamaujas and Nakula and Sahadeva, Arjuna comes straight toward you, avoiding all the other warriors. Accept his challenge, O Karna, for there is no one else among us who can stand up to the two Krishnas in battle. He is alone and there is no one to protect either his flanks or his rear. You are the equal of Bhishma, Drona, Aswatthaman and Kripa, so accept his challenge and kill Savyasachi who darts at us like a serpent flicking its tongue, a roaring bull, or a tiger in the forest.

There, those kings, those maharathas of the Dhartarashtra army, back away from him in fear. Only you can dispel the fears of our fleeing warriors who now all look to you as their refuge in this battle. Muster your great prowess, O Naravyaghra, and let us ride against the Krishnas."

Karna says mildly, "You now seem to have regained your composure and seem to be well disposed towards me again. Do not, O Mahabaho, entertain any fear of Dhananjaya. Today, you will see my might and skill, and single-handedly I will destroy the great Pandava army and those two Krishnas as well. Victory in battle is uncertain so I vow that I will not return from the field today without killing them and achieving my purpose, or dying and sleeping forever on this Kurukshetra."

Salya says, "All great maharathas, O Karna, swear that Arjuna, even when he is alone, is invincible. Now, when he has Krishna's protection, who can match him?"

Karna says, "As far as I know, such a great maharatha has never been born on earth! So, judge my prowess as I contend with that same Partha in battle. This prince of Kuru's line, this foremost of maharathas, drives into war borne on white horses. Perhaps he will send me to Yama today. And if Karna dies, the war will be lost and all our army wiped out.

Arjuna's two arms are massive, scarred, they never falter or perspire. Great are his skills and lightness of hand and he is aggressive past imagining when he fights. Indeed, there is no warrior equal to this prince. He can unleash a thousand arrows as if they are one. Fitting them to his bowstring quicker than the eye can see, he can unerringly find a target that is two yojanas away. Which warrior can equal Arjuna?

This Atiratha, with Krishna, pleased Agni deva in the Khandava vana. It was there that the noble Krishna obtained his chakra, and Savyasachi his bow, the Gandiva. It was there that invincible Mahabaho also acquired his chariot yoked to white horses, his two celestial and inexhaustible quivers, and many devastras. In the realm of Indra he received his conch, the Devadatta, and slew innumerable Daityas and all the Kalakeyas. Who is there on earth that is superior to Arjuna?

Mahadeva himself once fought the noble Arjuna and pleased him. The Pandava gratified the Lord Siva and had the awesome Pasupatastra from him, which can destroy the three worlds. The Regents of the world, the Lokapalas, all gifted him their astras of immeasurable energy, with which he destroyed the Kalakhanjas. In Virata's city, fighting from a single chariot, he defeated all of us. He wrested back Virata's great herd and, for a trophy, took parts of their capes from all our greatest maharathas, and gifted them to the princess Uttaraa.

O Salya, I think of myself as being the bravest man in the world today that I dare challenge the very greatest of Kshatriyas, Arjuna Parantapa, who is gifted with such tejas and with every virtue. And besides, Krishna, who is the unrivalled Narayana himself, that noble Vasudeva, that ever-victorious Vishnu, armed with the sankha, chakra and gada, whose attributes the entire world cannot finish narrating in ten thousand years of the gods, protects the awesome Pandava.

Seeing the two Krishnas together on the same chariot, both fear and courage enter my heart together. Partha is the greatest of all archers, while Narayana is unrivalled if he uses his chakra. The mountains of Himavat may be moved from their places but not the two Krishnas. Both the praviras possess untold proficiency in the use of astras, both are Atirathas, and their bodies are as hard as adamant. Who else but I, O Salya, would dare ride into a battle against Phalguna and Vasudeva?

Salya, my long cherished desire for a duel with the third son of Pandu will soon be satisfied. Soon a fierce and matchless battle will occur, in

which either I will overwhelm the two Krishnas or they will conquer me."

Paraviraha Karna then lets out some deep roars like those of thunderheads, as he drives up to your son and salutes him respectfully. He then addresses Suyodhana, as well as all the assembled warriors including Kripa and the Bhoja king Kritavarman, the ruler of the Gandharas with his son, the Acharyas of his own younger brothers, and all the foot-soldiers and horsemen and elephant-riders.

He says, "Attack Achyuta and Arjuna. Seal all the gaps in our forces through which they might escape. Wear them down, wound them sorely, and then I will finish them with some ease."

The assembled warriors readily acquiesce and swiftly set about executing the plan. They begin to shoot Dhananjaya with innumerable arrows but Arjuna meets their attack like an ocean receiving all rivers and their tributaries. Such is the speed with which he shoots his arrows that his enemies cannot discern when he draws the bowstring and when he looses his shafts. All that one can see are men, horses and elephants falling dead. Like men with infected eyes who cannot look at the sun, the Kauravas are unable to gaze at Jaya who is like the all-destroying sun that rises at the end of the yuga, with arrows for its rays, and the Gandiva, always drawn into a circle of flames for its glorious disc. Partha, effortlessly, marvellously, cuts down every enemy arrow shot at him, and quicker than the mind kills the bowmen who shot them. Smiling and radiant, dark Arjuna negates the missiles of his enemies and consumes your troops, O Vibho, like the blazing Sun drying up the land between the months of Jyeshta and Ashadha.

Ah, with consummate ease, he wards off the most ferocious volleys of Kripa, Kritavarman, Duryodhana and Aswatthaman, who attack him with veritable torrents of arrows.

Aswatthaman and Dhananjaya exchange some torrid fire, during which Krishna, the four white horses and the kapi-dhvaja are struck, while Arjuna destroys his adversary's full drawn bow, decapitates his charioteer, his four horses, his standard and finally fells him from his chariot. Aswatthaman, enraged, takes up another priceless bow, chased with gold and studded with diamonds, bright as the body of Takshaka, and which indeed resembles a mighty Naga caught from the foot of a mountain. Stringing that bow as he stands on the ground now, Drona's terrific, stalwart son unleashes a towering gale of shafts, which draws copious blood from his great adversaries whom he strikes from close range. Then Kripa, Bhoja and your

son Duryodhana, from the van of your army, envelop Savyasachi with further showers of shafts, which are like clouds shrouding the sun.

But, with prowess equal to that of the thousand-armed Kartavirya of old, Arjuna strikes back, quick as lightning, and destroys Kripa's bow, his standard, and kills his horses and charioteer, like the Vajradhari in days of yore assailing the Asura Bali. Thousands of Arjuna's arrows engulf Kripa, just as Ganga's son Bhishma found himself beset by the same Kiritin on the fatal day of his fall.

Arjuna kills Kritavarman's handsome horses and destroys his standard. He then begins to rapidly eradicate the elephants of the enemy, its chariots with their horses, charioteers, bows and flags. Thereupon, your vast army breaks into a hundred parts like an embankment washed away by rushing waters. Now, Krishna manoeuvres Arjuna's chariot so he places all his enemies on his right, and races away at great speed like Indra flying to kill Vritra. Sikhandi, Satyaki and the twins bar their enemies from chasing Dhananjaya, and give vent to tigerish roars.

The Kuru Kshatriyas and the Srinjayas fall upon each other with immaculate arrows shot with great force, and the conflict between them is like the one between the Asuras and the Devas in the elder days. Elephant-warriors, horsemen and rathikas, fighting for victory or death and heaven, fall on the field. All the directions of the sky, cardinal and subsidiary, are enveloped in gloom from their great gusts of arrows and the very light of the sun is entirely shrouded.'"

CANTO 80

"Sanjaya says, 'O Rajan, in an attempt to rescue Bhima, who is under critical attack by the Kuru warriors, Arjuna turns his attention from Karna's troops and begins to thin the enemy ranks opposing Bhima. Successive fusillades of Arjuna's broad, flat-headed and razor-sharp shafts fall incessantly from the sky like dense flights of birds, and he is like the very Destroyer to the Kurus as he mangles their bodies and cuts off their heads, his every arrow finding a target among them. Like the great Vaitarani, which separates the regions of the living from those of the dead, the field grows ugly, horrible, uneven and impassable from the blood and debris of the battle.

Arjuna kills four hundred highly trained and fierce elephants, with warriors cased in golden mail and grim hastikas on their backs, and they fall like populated mountain crests. Like the sun piercing through clouds, Arjuna's chariot passes through the dense mass of dead tuskers with copious secretions flowing down their bodies. Heaps of dead leviathans, horses, broken chariots and lifeless warriors stripped of their weapons and armour, litter the trail he blazes on the field of horror.

The twang of the Gandiva is the peal of thunder in the sky. Varied kinds of fatal astras that resemble burning brands, meteors and thunderbolts, shot from the Gandiva, burn your army like a forest of bamboo on a mountain in the night. Crushed, burnt, maimed, massacred and thrown into absolute

disorder, they break and run, and are like a fleet of boats on a tempest-lashed ocean. The Kuru army that had assailed Bhimasena till then abandon him and escape with their lives.

After he routs the Kurus, the unvanquished Arjuna rides up to Bhimasena, to inform him that Yudhishtira's wounds have been treated and dressed and to reassure him that their brother is well.

Leaving Bhimasena, Dhananjaya moves once more against his enemies, making the earth and the sky, O Bhaarata, resound with the rumble of his chariot. Ten of Dusasana's sons, all daring warriors wearing golden armour, surround and attack Arjuna with stretched bows, almost dancing on their chariots, like hunters cornering an elephant with burning brands. Krishna manoeuvres the chariot to place all of them to his right, expecting Arjuna to quickly send them all to Yamaloka. Seeing Arjuna's chariot moving away, they rush towards him. Partha first destroys their battle flags, horses, bows and, then, with some flat-headed arrows, he cuts off their heads with bitten lips and eyes blood-red with battle lust, like striking the blooms of a corsage of lotuses. Having killed those ten Kaurava princes, Arjuna's chariot rolls inexorably on.'"

CANTO 81

"Sanjaya says, 'Ninety Kaurava chariot-warriors charge Arjuna as he advances under his kapi-dhvaja, his ratha harnessed to those fleetest of horses decked with golden ornaments and covered with pearl filigree. Those Naravyaghras attempt to surround Arjuna. Krishna ignores them and makes for Karna's chariot, chased by those ninety Samsaptakas, shooting storms of shafts at him. They force Arjuna to stop, and quick as thinking kill all his ninety assailants along with their charioteers, and they fall dead like Siddhas falling down with their vimanas from heaven upon the exhaustion of their punya.

Next, a large force of Kauravas, with chariots, elephants and horsemen, fearlessly besiege Phalguna, shower him with spears, maces, throwing swords and thousands of arrows and stop his progress. However, like the sun destroying the darkness with his rays, he arrests their attack on him, killing many, until an army of Mlecchas, riding thirteen hundred excited elephants, under your son Duryodhana, falls on Partha from a flank. They harry him with barbed arrows, nalikas, cloth-yard shafts, javelins, kampanas and short arrows, some of which the elephants hurl with their trunks.

Phalguna stops them in their tracks and blasts that elephant force like Indra striking mountains with thunderbolts. His gold-winged arrows excoriate the elephants decked with golden necklaces and they fall dead, like mountains ablaze with volcanic fires. O Rajan, we hear the thunderous

twang of the Gandiva, above the pandemonium of shouts and screams of dying men, elephants and horses. Slashed elephants, horses and chariots, with their riders dead, flee on all sides. So prodigious is Arjuna that, fighting alone, he razes horsemen, elephants and chariot-warriors in thousands, indeed all that attacked him from every side.

Seeing the still great Kaurava army corner Phalguna, Bhima turns away from the small force he had been fighting, and dashes up to support his brother, and he demolishes those that remain alive with his gada. Without let, in frenzied brutality, Bhima's awesome, magical gada flies and falls incessantly on men, elephants and horses cased in steel armour and strikes them down, spraying the air with jets of crimson. Biting the earth with their teeth, and bathed in blood, with the crowns of their heads and bows and lower limbs crushed, they fall and become food for the waiting carrion eaters. Covered with blood, flesh, marrow and pieces of bone, Bhima's occult mace is like the night of death, difficult to look at. Bhima prowls the battlefield in rage with that mace and massacres ten thousand horses and numberless foot-soldiers, while your troops think that Yama himself, armed with his bludgeon, is in their midst.

He next breaks into the enemy's elephant division, like a makara into the ocean and, within a short time, despatches it to Yama's abode. Elephants in their spiked body armour, with their hastikas and standards, fall everywhere like winged mountains. After he destroys the elephants, the mighty Bhimasena once more follows Arjuna on his chariot.

Arjuna, finding your great army harried, slaughtered, on the verge of flight, and standing paralysed, sends relentless torments of arrows at it and men, horses, chariots and elephants die, emitting loud screams. The remnants huddle together and turn tail to flee. The battle, however, continues between the Kurus and the mighty Pandavas and there is not a single chariot-warrior, horseman, elephant-warrior, horse or elephant that is unscathed. The soldiers, bathed in blood, their armour riddled with arrows, blaze like a forest of flowering asokas.

Seeing Savyasachi's valour, the Kauravas despair for Karna's life and they flee the field, deserting their Sutaputra Senapati, even while calling desperately for his help. Arjuna pursues them, hundreds of arrows flaring from the Gandiva and swelling the morale of the Pandava warriors under Bhimasena.

Your sons, O Rajan, then ride towards Karna's chariot, sinking, as they seem to be, in a fathomless sea, where Karna is the sole island of safety for them. Your sons, like serpents defanged, and driven by fear of the noble Arjuna, take shelter with him, like those who seek the protection of dharma from fear of death.

Karna, always unafraid, reassures them, "Do not fear! Come to me!"

Looking at your shattered army, Karna stretches his bow, draws deep breaths and prepares himself to kill Arjuna and have revenge and victory. Bending his formidable bow into a circle, he once more assails the Panchalas in the very sight of Savyasachi. Soon, many kings of the enemy army counterattack and pour their arrows on him like a deluge upon a mountain. However, Karna fights for his friends and his arrows kill many Panchalas and they scream as they are struck, just before dying.'"

CANTO 82

"Sanjaya says, 'While Shwetavahana puts the Kurus to flight, O Rajan, Karna decimates the Panchalas with his powerful, ineluctable arrows, truly like a tempest chasing massed clouds across the sky. He fells Janamejaya's charioteer with broad-faced shafts called anjalikas and then kills his horses. He rakes both Satanika and Sutasoma with many broad-headed arrows and shatters their bows. He drills Dhrishtadyumna with six arrows and, not losing a moment, kills his horses. He kills Satyaki's horses and then despatches Visoka, son of the king of the Kaikeyas.

At this, Ugrakarman, commander of the Kaikeya division, shoots Karna's son Prasena with a score of arrows, making him tremble; but, with three crescent-tipped arrows, Karna cuts off the arms and the head of his son's assailant and fells him from his chariot like a sala tree with its branches lopped off.

Prasena, fairly dancing upon his chariot, covers Satyaki, fighting on foot without his chariot, with a slew of arrows; Satyaki kills him with a single shaft that bursts his heart apart. Karna, red-eyed seeing this, tells Satyaki, "You are dead, O grandson of Sini!" and shoots a deadly arrow at him. However, Sikhandi cuts it down in flight and strikes Karna with three arrows of his own. Karna shatters Sikhandi's bow, rends his banner, strikes him with another six arrows and finally beheads Dhrishtadyumna's son in

his fury. He seamlessly follows this up by wounding Sutasoma deep with a long shaft.

Seeing the fierce battle progress and the death of Dhrishtadyumna's son, Krishna says, "The Panchalas are being slaughtered, Partha. We must stop the terrible Karna."

Arjuna smiles in anticipation and they ride again towards Karna's chariot. Stretching and fiercely strumming his bow, he creates a darkness with his arrows and destroys large numbers of men, horses and chariots that come in his way, as the echoes of the Gandiva's bowstring reach up into the sky. Birds no longer finding room in their own element, take shelter in mountain caverns. The magnificent Kiritin, holding his full-drawn bow, falls upon the enemy forces while Bhimasena protects his rear. Those two princes drive furiously towards Karna, demolishing their enemies along the way.

Meanwhile, Karna also covers the sky with his shafts. He mows down a vast number of chariot-warriors, horses and elephants, and grinds down the Somakas. Soon Uttamaujas, Janamejaya, an enraged Yudhamanyu and Sikhandi, uniting with Dhrishtadyumna, attack Vaikartana with loud shouts and roars, but they make no impact on him, like the objects of the senses failing to entice a man of purified soul from abstinence. He quickly smashes their bows, horses, charioteers and banners, and strikes each of them with five arrows and then gives a booming roar of triumph himself.

While he razes his enemies, everybody is terrified and they think that the earth, with her mountains and trees, might split at the twang of Karna's bow, the mighty Vijaya, which resembles Indra's dhanusha. The son of Adhiratha is like the sun within his corona, resplendent with blazing rays. He carves Sikhandi with a dozen keen barbs, Uttamaujas with half a dozen, Yudhamanyu with three, and Janamejaya and Dhrishtadyumna with three each. O Rajan, those five powerful maharathas stand as if frozen, beaten by the Suta's son even as the objects of the senses are by a man with a purified soul.

The five sons of Draupadi quickly ride up with other rathikas and rescue their uncles who are sinking in the Karna ocean, like shipwrecked merchants being rescued from the real ocean. Satyaki cuts down Karna's ceaseless cataract of arrows, and strikes the Sutaputra with a clutch of scathing shafts; he then plunges eight heavy iron arrows into Duryodhana's majestic body. Kripa, the Bhoja lord Kritavarman, your son and Karna

strike back at the brilliant Satyaki. However, with shafts flowing incessantly from his bow stretched to its fullest, Satyaki is as irresistible as the meridian sun in the autumn sky; he stops those four warriors like the king of the Daityas battling the Lokapalas, the Regents of the four quarters.

Soon some Panchala maharathas come to his support, like the Maruts protecting Sakra in battle.

The battle that now breaks out again resembles the Devasura yuddha of old. Wounded, bleeding rathikas, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers stagger about with arrows protruding, or utter wails of final distress and fall dead. Your younger son Dusasana fearlessly attacks Bhima who happily turns on him like a lion springing towards a large ruru deer. The battle between them is fierce as the one between Sambara and Sakra in the days of old. They lacerate each other with arrows shot with great force; they are like two bull elephants in musth with ichor streaming down their bodies, goring each other near a she-elephant in season. Vrikodara destroys your son's bow and standard with another winged arrow, he pierces his antagonist's forehead and then decapitates his charioteer.

Dusasana retaliates with a fresh bow, gashing Bhimasena with a dozen virile shafts. Holding his horses' reins himself, he yet pours torrents of arrows over Bhima. Dusasana then unleashes a fulgurous astra, bright as the sun, and decked with gold, diamonds, and other precious gems, irresistible as Indra's Vajra. That blazing weapon finds Vrikodara and he collapses with languid limbs and outstretched arms, as if dead upon his chariot. But, he soon recovers and begins to roar like a whole pride of lions.'"

CANTO 83

"Sanjaya says, 'Prince Dusasana fights intensely and rives Bhima's bow with a perfect arrow; with six more shafts he pierces his charioteer and then finds Bhima himself, first with nine and then with many more barbs, all shot with ferocious power. Bhimasena casts a deadly spear at your son, who, seeing it fly at him like a burning brand, cuts it down with ten arrows. Dusasana drills Bhima deep with a single violent shaft, which plunges deep into the great Pandava's body, drawing a spout of blood and applause and cheers from your troops.

A livid Bhima says levelly, "You have hit me swift and deep, vile Dusasana. Now endure a blow from my gada."

Titanic Vrikodara picks up his great mace and says, "O evil one, today I will drink your blood on this battlefield."

Dusasana flings a short spear like death itself at Bhima, who whirls his gada around and hurls it like lightning at his most loathed enemy, who tried to strip the precious Panchali naked in the Kuru sabha. That mace breaks Dusasana's fiery spear, flares on to strike him on his head and flings him ten bow lengths from his chariot. Dusasana finds all his horses, his chariot pulverised, his armour, ornaments, attire and garlands all broken or askew, and himself writhing in agony on the ground. Bhimasena, perspiring like an elephant with thick juices trickling down his body, standing on the battlefield amidst many great warriors of the Kuru army, again remembers

all the vile deeds of hostility and the humiliation that your sons heaped on the Pandavas. He clearly remembers how Panchali was hauled into the Kuru court by her tresses, how Dusasana tried to strip her of her single garment in the midst of that august and ancient court, even while she was in her period, and all, all the other wrongs inflicted on that peerless princess while her husbands sat with their faces turned away. His wrath flares up like a fire fed with libations of ghrita.

He addresses Karna, Suyodhana, Kripa, Aswatthaman and Kritavarman in a ringing voice, "Today I will make an end of this beast Dusasana. Let all your warriors protect him if they can."

Bhima suddenly springs at Dusasana like a lion rushing towards a mighty elephant, and attacks him before the eyes of Suyodhana and Karna. He jumps down from his chariot and, with bloodshot gaze fixed on his fallen enemy, draws his sword. Trembling with rage, he sets his foot upon the throat of Dusasana, and ripping open the breast of his supine, bends down and drinks his warm blood as if it was amrita to him. He then throws him down, cuts his head off and, keeping the vow he swore in the Kuru sabha, again sips his enemy's blood, little by little, as if there was nothing to rival its taste in any of the worlds.

Then he looks at him with wrathful eyes and says, "I find the taste of my enemy's blood to be superior to that of my mother's milk, honey, ghee, or the finest wine made from honey. It is better than the purest water, milk, the best curd, or all kinds of drink in this world, sweeter than amrita."

Once more, looking at Dusasana's dead body he laughs softly and says, "What more can I do to you? Death has rescued you from me."

Rajan, those who see Bhimasena stalk the battlefield filled with joy and drink his enemy's blood, either fall down in terror or their weapons drop from their nerveless fingers. Many cry out feebly and look at Bhima in horror. Indeed, all those that stand around Bhima and see him drink Dusasana's blood, flee with Chitrasena, overwhelmed by fear, and saying to one another, "This is no human being! This Bhima has to be a Rakshasa!"

Then the Panchala prince Yudhamanyu, at the head of his troops, pursues the fleeing Chitrasena and pierces him with seven keen arrows shot swiftly, one after another. Chitrasena, like a trampled serpent repeatedly darting out its tongue and ready to use its venom, turns back and shoots his pursuer with three shafts and his charioteer with six. Then, in a flash, with a shaft fitted with large wings and an exceptionally sharp point, and shot with

great care from his bow drawn to its fullest stretch, Yudhamanyu decapitates Chitrasena. Upon the fall of his brother Chitrasena, a raging Karna puts the Pandava host to flight until Nakula attacks and stops him.

After killing the vindictive Dusasana in full view of Karna, Bhima drinks some more of his blood, and gifted with stentorian lungs, shouts, "O wretch, here, I drink your life-blood from your throat. Abuse us again as you once did, crying, 'Beast, beast!'

We will dance and repeat the words of those who once called us 'beast'. We remember our sleep at the Pramanakoti palace, the mixing of deadly poison in our food, the bites of black cobras and the setting fire to the house of lac. We cannot forget our suffering—the theft of our kingdom at a game of dice, our exile in the woods, the cruel seizure of Draupadi's shining tresses, the sting of arrows and the cuts of weapons in battle and all our other miseries. We endured all other kinds of hurts in Virata's palace through the evil counsels of Sakuni, Duryodhana, Karna and you. We were never allowed a moment's peace or happiness, and it was the evil designs of Dhritarashtra and his son that was the cause of all our suffering."

Drenched in blood flowing from his wounds, the victorious Vrikodara, his face red and filled with great anger, then says to Krishna and Arjuna, "Praviras, what I had vowed to do to Dusasana in battle, I have accomplished today. I will soon accomplish my other vow and kill that second beast, Duryodhana, in this yagna of war. Only after I stamp on his evil head in the presence of the Kauravas, will I find peace."

Then, filled with great joy, Bhima finds happy release in loud roars, just as the mighty and the noble Indra of a thousand eyes roared after slaying Vritrasura.'"

CANTO 84

"Sanjaya says, 'After the killing of Dusasana, O Rajan, ten of your sons, Nishangin, Kavachin, Pasin, Dundadhara, Dhanurgraha, Alolupa, Saha, Shanda, Vatavega and Suvarchasas, great maharathas who have never retreated from battle, and now wanting revenge, shroud mahabaho Bhima, red-eyed with rage, his lips bloody, like the raging Destroyer, with arrows. But with ten broad-headed shafts, fitted with golden wings and shot with great force, Bhima despatches those ten Bharata princes to Yamaloka.

Seeing your ten sons slain in a flash, your army breaks and flees, despite Karna's presence, overwhelmed with terror of the Pandavas. A great fear enters Karna's heart on watching Bhima's might like Yama's himself. Salya understands Karna's state of mind, and consoles him, "This is not the time for grief, O son of Radha. These kings are all running from fear of Bhimasena. Duryodhana is stricken after seeing Bhima kill Dusasana and drink his blood. Kripa and others, and those of the king's brothers that are still alive, their hearts heavy, their rage dimmed by sorrow, surround Duryodhana to comfort him, while Dhananjaya and the Pandavas advance against you for battle. So, collect yourself and face Arjuna with courage.

Dhritarashtra has given you the entire responsibility for this war. O Mahabaho, bear that burden to the best of your prowess and ability. In victory there will be great fame, while in defeat heaven is certain. Look,

Karna, your son Vrishasena sees the stupor that has come over you and bears down on the Pandavas.”

Hearing what Salya says, Karna rides furiously towards Vrikodara, who meanwhile decimates your troops with his mace, like Yama wielding his danda. Nakula attacks Vrishasena like the victorious Maghavat rushing against the Asura Jambha and destroys his proud standard decked with gems; he then splits his bow with a golden strap attached to it. Wanting to avenge Dusasana, Vrishasena snatches up another bow and strikes fiercely back at Nakula. The duel rages and Nakula and Vrishasena harry each other with the many devastras they possess.

From rage as well as from his own brilliance and the natural energy of his weapons, Vrishasena blazes like a fire fed with libations of ghee. He kills Nakula’s beautiful white horses of the Vanayu breed, decked with trappings of gold. Nakula jumps down from his ratha and, taking up a bright shield decked with golden moons and a sword blue as the sky, he wheels across the field like a great bird, performing diverse exquisite movements through the air. He kills many warriors, horses and elephants and they fall on the earth like animals being sacrificed in an Aswamedha yagna. Nakula singly kills two thousand seasoned warriors from diverse realms with their bodies smeared with fragrant sandalwood paste.

Karna’s son suddenly attacks Nakula again and pierces him from every side with countless arrows, determined to have his life. Nakula strikes back and, with the support of his brother Bhima, spreads terror through the field, and as if in sport, slaughters warriors, horses and elephants. The duel continues with both shuras stalking each other like hawks with outstretched wings to snatch a piece of meat. Negating his antagonist’s showers of arrows, Nakula wheels about in different intricate movements until Vrishasena demolishes his shield adorned with a thousand jewel stars.

Not losing a moment, he rives Nakula’s polished blue sword, keen as a serpent’s poison, even while Madri’s son whirls it over his head. Vrishasena stabs his enemy deep in his chest with some slim shafts and earns the applause of those that watch the duel. Bleeding from Vrishasena’s attack, the noble Nakula runs to Bhimasena’s chariot and jumps onto it like a lion springing upon a mountain summit.

The heroic Vrishasena attacks the two sons of Pandu with a relentless gale of arrows and, quickly, many other Kuru warriors join him. Bhima and Arjuna, burning with wrath like two fires fed with libations of ghrita,

retaliate powerfully and pour a scathing volley of arrows over Vrishasena and the other warriors around him.

Bhima tells Phalguna, “The son of Karna has Nakula in dire peril. Let us move against him.”

Seeing them, Nakula says, “Kill him quickly.”

Hearing this, Krishna precipitately drives the formidable Arjuna, his kapi-dhvaja flapping in the wind, towards Vrishasena.’”

CANTO 85

"Sanjaya says, 'Learning that Nakula is in dire straits, wounded, without his ratha, bow, arrows and sword, the five sons of Drupada, the five sons of Draupadi and Satyaki dash to his rescue in their rathas driven by expert charioteers, harnessed to wind-swift horses, and with banners streaming. They destroy your elephants, chariots, men and cavalry with shafts that resemble formidable serpents. Seeing this turn of affairs, the Kaurava maharathas Kritavarman, Kripa, Aswatthaman, Duryodhana, Sakuni's son, Vrika, Kratha and Devavridha swiftly counter attack, their chariots steaming forward with a sound deep as the booming of elephants or clouds, and hold them up. However, the prince of the Kulindas, and his elephants that look like mountains and newly formed clouds, advance with impetuous speed against the Kaurava heroes.

Well-equipped and covered with golden armour, the elephants born in Himalayan regions and which only accomplished and willing warriors ride are like clouds in the sky charged with lightning. They vigorously assail Kripa who brings down the prince from his elephant. The younger brother of the prince besieges Kripa with a dense flight of bright iron spears and loud shouts, but Sakuni cuts off his head even as it still roars. Seeing the fall of the Kulindas, the mighty chariot-warriors of your army, blow their conches with joy, and charge their enemies.

A fierce battle ensues between the Kurus and the Pandavas supported by the Srinjayas. Arrows, javelins, swords, maces and battle-axes fly and fall thickly and chariot-warriors, horses, elephants and foot-soldiers die in their hundreds. Kurukshetra takes on the aspect of the sky where fierce winds billow from all sides, and masses of clouds charged with lightning peal with incessant thunder. Kritavarman of the Bhojas shoots down the huge elephants, rathikas, innumerable foot-soldiers, horsemen and Satanika's horse. Aswatthaman also kills three hulking elephants carrying all kinds of weapons, ridden by masterly warriors, and adorned with lofty standards, and they fall like cliffs riven by thunder.

The third brother of the Kulinda chief bloodies Duryodhana with a sear of arrows through his chest, but your son strikes back at him and his elephant with a plethora of whetted shafts. The elephant with the prince on his back falls with blood leaking from every part of his body, like a mountain of red chalk with red streams running down its breast, split by thunder in the monsoon. The Kulinda prince saves himself in the nick of time, and mounting another elephant, battles the king of the Krathas who fights from his chariot. Both are struck deep and while the prince with his elephant falls like a thunderstruck hill, the king struck by the prince's arrows shot from the back of his elephant, falls with his shattered ratha, like a mighty tree uprooted by a tempest.

The Kaurava warrior Vrika deeply wounds that mountain prince from the Himavat as he fights from his elephant. However, his great beast quickly crushes Vrika underfoot, his chariot and horses and impetuously attacks Babhru's son, the prince of the Magadhas, who already wounded, collapses. The Kulinda prince, on his magnificent fighting elephant, attacks Sakuni until the king of the Gandharas cuts his head off.

About this time, Satanika drills elephants, horses and chariot-warriors, and large bands of foot soldiers with a dazzle of arrows, and they fall paralysed and broken like serpents beaten by a storm stirred by Garuda's wings. Then a Kulinda warrior from the Kaurava army shoots Nakula's son Satanika with a score of shafts but Satanika beheads him.

Vrishasena pierces Satanika, Arjuna and Bhima, Nakula and Janardana with iron quarrels. Seeing his superhuman effort, the Kauravas are filled with joy and applaud him while those conversant with Dhananjaya's prowess regard Vrishasena as a libation already poured on the fire of war. The Kiritin, seeing Nakula deprived of his horses and Janardana slashed

with arrows, attacks Vrishasena who stands in front of Karna. Karna's son gashes Partha with an arrow and gives a loud shout of triumph as Namuchi did in the olden days after having wounded Indra. He finds Partha and Krishna repeatedly with his formidable arrows.

An annoyed Arjuna decides to put an end to the brilliant prince. His brow furrowed and eyes red in wrath, that Pravira, who could kill Yama himself if the latter stood against him, laughs terribly and says to Karna and all the other Kaurava heroes fighting under Duryodhana and Aswatthaman, "Today, O Karna, in your very presence, I will despatch the fierce Vrishasena to Yamaloka! Everyone knows that all of you together slew my son, when he was alone in his chariot. I, however, will kill your son before all of you. Let all the Kaurava maharathas protect him if they can.

And after that, I, Arjuna, will kill you, Karna, O fool! You are the root of this enmity and this war and you have become proud as a result of Duryodhana's patronage. I will kill you and Bhimasena will kill this wretch among men, this Duryodhana, through whose evil rule this battle born of a game of dice germinated."

Arjuna strums the string of his bow, takes aim at Vrishasena, and with awful force, O Rajan, looses ten arrows that pierce Vrishasena through all his vital organs. With four razor-headed arrows he breaks his bow, cuts away his two arms and his head, dropping him onto the ground from his chariot like a flowering sala tree falling from a mountain summit. Seeing his son die, a wild and inconsolable Karna rushes up on his chariot against Partha, wanting instant revenge.'"

CANTO 86

"Sanjaya says, 'The unassailable Karna, whom even the Devas cannot match, charges at Krishna and Arjuna with a deep roar like the surging sea. Krishna says, "Here comes Karna to fight you, Dhananjaya, with his sarathy Salya driving his chariot that looks like a Deva-ratha, harnessed to white horses, streaming with banners and festooned with rows of bells. Look at his battle flag with the device of the elephant's rope that is like Indra's bow which divides the firmament with a rainbow. He comes shooting showers of arrows like the clouds pouring torrents of rain. He comes to win the war for Duryodhana.

There the king of the Madras, the royal Salya, standing at the head of his chariot, guides his horses of immeasurable energy. Hear the roll of their drums and the fierce blast of their conches. Hear, O son of Pandu, the shouts and roars that come from every side and the terrifying twang of Karna's bow, the Vijaya stretched with such force that it drowns every other sound. Look, the mighty chariot-warriors of the Panchalas with their followers give way before him, escaping like a herd of deer at the sight of an angry lion.

You must kill the Suta's son for no one else can withstand his shafts. I know that you can subdue the three worlds with all their mobile and immobile creatures including the very Devas and Gandharvas. What can be said about battling the great Isana Mahadeva, the three-eyed Sarva

Kapardin? However, you pleased that god of gods himself in battle: Siva, that Deva called Sthanu, who is the source of bliss for all beings. All the other Devas have also given you their blessings, through the grace of that Devadeva, the Deity armed with the trident.

Slay Karna today, like Indra killing the Asura Namuchi. Let prosperity ever be with you, O Partha, and may you find victory in battle."

Arjuna says, "My victory, O Krishna, is already assured, for you, O Madhusudana, who are the master of all the worlds, are pleased with me. Urge the horses forward, Hrishikesha! Today I will not return from battle without slaying Karna. You will see him killed, cut to pieces with my arrows, or you will see me, Govinda, killed by Karna. The battle that will transfix the three worlds is at hand and as long as the earth exists, men will speak of it."

Saying this to the indefatigable Krishna, Arjuna moves against Karna like an elephant against a rival. Once more he says to Krishna, "Urge the horses, O Hrishikesha, for time flies!"

Kesava wishes him victory, gives free rein to the horses, fleet as thought, and in moments they are face to face with Karna.'"

CANTO 87

"Sanjaya says, 'Burning with rage at Vrishasena's death, his eyes the colour of copper and shedding tears of grief, Karna prepares to face Dhananjaya, having challenged him to battle. The two chariots yoked to white horses, shining with solar effulgence and covered with tiger-skins, when they come together, look like two suns in the sky. All that watch are wonderstruck when they look at these two warriors who resemble Indra and Virochana's son Bali, as they prepare for the battle for the conquest of the three worlds. All look on in awe as the two maharathas flare at each other with rumbling chariot-wheels, the twang of their bows, the sound of their palms, the whizz of arrows, and loud roars, their battle flags, Karna's bearing the elephant's rope and Partha's the kapi-dhvaja, flying in the wind.

Seeing them, O Bhaarata, all the kings shout aloud and repeatedly cheer them while thousands of warriors slap their armpits and wave their garments in the air. The Kauravas beat their drums and blow their numberless conches to encourage Karna, while the field also resounds with the blare of Pandava trumpets and conches in support of Dhananjaya. The resultant tumult and uproar are deafening, unbearable.

The two Naravyaghras and Atirathas, standing on their chariots, are an awesome sight. They are very alike, exceedingly handsome and are both armed with formidable bows that seem to flash like lightning, fine quivers stocked with arrows, spears and a wealth of astras, and fly a lofty standard

each. Both wear armour with swords hanging from their belts; their horses shine dazzling white and both blow on superb conches. Both are great warriors and while one has Krishna for his sarathy, the other has Salya. Both wear garlands of gold, have yak-tails chamaras and white chattras. With their magnificent limbs smeared with red sandalwood paste and their bulging red eyes, they are like infuriated bulls. Both are broad necked like the lion, broad chested, with long arms, and powerful past telling. Each wants to kill the other and they challenge each other, O Rajan, like humped bulls in a cow-pen, like infuriated elephants over a female, like angry mountains, like infant serpents of virulent poison or the all destroying Yama. Full of fury for each other like Indra and Vritra, they are like the sun and the moon in splendour.

Born of celestial fathers, they resemble Devas in beauty and tejas. Full of wrath, they are like two mighty planets sprung up for the destruction of the world at the pralaya at yuga's end. Indeed, they look like the sun and the moon arisen of their own accord on the field of battle. Both powerful warriors glory in their own might as they ready for war.

The troops, O Rajan, filled with great joy at the imminent duel between the two Naravyaghras, Karna and Arjuna, avidly speculate who will be victorious. Both bear every weapon, both are seasoned warriors, both have conquered the world once and they resemble the Asura Sambara and the Deva Indra. They are equal to Dasaratha's son Rama in battle, Vishnu in splendour and Bhava in fathomless might. The bands of Siddhas and Charanas who come to witness the battle look down from their vimanas and are amazed.

The Dhartarashtras support the noble Karna, while the Pandavas under Dhrishtadyumna support Arjuna and thus the two armies cease their fighting and become anxious, rooted spectators. For Karna and Arjuna, like two mighty comets of awesome appearance, either victory or defeat is certain as they face each other in this momentous duel to the death.

Then, O Bharatarishabha, differences and disputes arise in the firmament, among the unearthly beings gathered there, over Karna and Arjuna. All the men and creatures of this world, and all the Devas, Danavas, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Nagas and the Rakshasas, adopt different sides. The sky with all the stars is anxious on Karna's account, while the wide earth worries about Partha, like a mother for her son.

The rivers, the seas, the mountains, the trees, the deciduous plants and herbs take the part of the Kiritin Arjuna, while the Asuras, Yatudhanas, the Guhyakas, the ravens and other birds of the sky are with Karna.

All the gems, precious jewels, the four Vedas and the Puranas, the Upavedas, the Upanishads, with all their mysteries and compilations, Vasuki, Chitrasena, Takshaka and Upatakshaka, all the mountains, all the offspring of Kadru with their children, all the great poisonous serpents, and the Nagas take Arjuna's side as do Airavata and his children, the offspring of Surabhi and Vaisali, and the Bhogins.

The smaller serpents all side with Karna.

Wolves, wild stags and all kinds of auspicious animals and birds wish victory for Arjuna as do the Vasus, the Maruts, the Sadhyas, the Rudras, the Viswedevas, the Ashwinis, and Agni, Indra, Soma, Pavana and the ten directions of the sky.

All the Adityas, the Vaishyas, the Sudras, the Sutas, and those of mixed castes, all favour Karna. The Devas, with the Pitris, and all who are numbered with them and their followers, Yama, Vaisravana and Varuna are with Arjuna as are the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Yagnas, and Dakshinas. The Pretas and Pishacas, most carnivores and birds of prey, the Rakshasas with all the monsters of the sea, the wild dogs and the jackals are for Karna.

The different tribes of Devarishis, Rishis and Rajarishis are for the son of Pandu as are the Gandharvas led by Tumburu.

With the offspring of Pradha and Mauni, the several kinds of Gandharvas, Apsaras, and many wise Rishis, riding on wolves, stags, elephants, horses, chariots, clouds, the wind, and on foot come there to witness the duel between Karna and Arjuna. The Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Nagas, the Yakshas, the Pakshis, the great Maharishis versed in the Vedas, the Pitris that subsist upon dakshina called svadha, Tapasya, the Vigyanas and the Divyausadha come, O Rajan, and take up stations in the sky, making a great noise.

Brahman, with the Dvijas, Maharishis, and the Lords of creatures, and Bhava himself on his chariot, appears in that part of the sky. Seeing the two noble ones, Karna and Dhananjaya, about to fight, Indra himself says, "Let Arjuna vanquish Karna."

Surya Deva, however, says, "Let my son Karna slay Arjuna, and emerge victorious in this battle!" while Vasava says again, "Let my son triumph

over Karna!"

Thus, Surya Deva and Indra, the two foremost of the Devas, who are present, adopt opposing views and dispute with each other.

The Devas and the Asuras adopt opposite sides and the three worlds with the Devarishis, the Devas and all other beings, tremble at the sight both above and below. The Devas favour Partha, while the Asuras prefer Karna. All beings are committed and involved in what the result of the duel will be, all without exception siding with either the Kuru or the Pandava hero.

The gods urge Brahman, the Self-born Lord of Creation, who is also present, and say, "O Deva, let these two lions among men have equal success. Let not the vast universe be destroyed by this encounter between Karna and Arjuna. O Svayambhu, say that these two will meet with equal success."

Indra Maghavat bows to the Grandsire and says, "You once said that the two Krishnas will always triumph. Let it now be as you then said. Be pleased with me, O Holy One!"

At this, Brahma and Rudra say to the king of the Devas, "The victory of the noble Vijaya, of the ambidextrous Savyasachi is certain. He gratified Agni in the forest of Khandava and he came to swarga and rendered assistance to you, O Sakra. Karna is on the side of the Danavas and it is appropriate that he should meet with defeat and satisfy the intentions of the Devas.

O lord of the Devas, one's own svadharma must always be important. The noble Phalguna, who is devoted to truth and dharma, will always be victorious. He who has pleased the Holy God with the Bull for his mount, he who has Vishnu, Lord of the universe, for his sarathy—how will he not be victorious?

Partha is a mahatejasvin warrior, a master of arms and has accumulated great punya. He is a master of the entire science of weaponry. Indeed, he possesses every accomplishment. He will be victorious, and that will accomplish the purposes of the Devas. Because of his greatness, Partha can go against destiny itself, favourable or unfavourable, and when he does so, a great destruction of beings takes place. When the two Krishnas are angry, they show little regard for anything. These two are Nara and Narayana, the two ancient and best of Rishis, the Creators of all that is real and unreal, and there is no one to rule over them.

They are perfectly fearless, destroyers of all enemies and rulers over all. In swarga or among Manavas, there is no one equal to either of them. The three worlds with the Devarishis and the Charanas support them. All the Devas and, indeed, all beings follow them. The entire universe exists because of the power of these two.

Let Karna, that Bharatarishabha, obtain the greatest of the regions of bliss here. Let him have identity with the Vasus or the Maruts. Let him, with Drona and Bhishma, be worshipped in swarga, for Vikartana's son is brave and is a peerless shura. Let victory, however, belong to the two Krishnas."

After Brahma and Isana, the greatest of the Devas speak, Indra, deity of a thousand eyes, with reverence to their words, salutes all beings and says, "You have heard what the two Devas have said for the benefit of the universe. What they say will come to pass, so remain calm, remain tranquil."

When they hear these words of Indra, O Rajan, all beings, high and low, are filled with wonder and applaud that Deva. The Devas then shower down diverse kinds of fragrant flowers from the sky and blow their trumpets, and they wait along with the Danavas and the Gandharvas to witness the incomparable duel on Kurukshetra between those two lions among men.

Many maharathas draw near Vasudeva and Arjuna, as well as Salya and Karna, and sound their conches. And then the dreadful battle begins, as they challenge each other like Sakra and Sambara. Their bright flags flutter on their chariots, like the planets Rahu and Ketu in the firmament at the time of the pralaya at yuga's end. The elephant's rope on Karna's banner looks like a great serpent and, embroidered with jewels and resonant gemstones, is extraordinary and resembles the bow of Indra. Partha's kapi-dhvaja with Hanuman's jaws agape is terrifying to look at, like the sun showing his formidable teeth.

The impetuous Vanara, impatient for battle, flies out from his banner, and falls upon Karna's standard and attacks it with teeth and nails, like Garuda pouncing on a serpent. The elephant's rope, decorated with rows of little bells, hard as iron, and which resembles Yama danda or Varuna's paasa, angrily closes with the Vanara and, as predicted during the game of dice, their standards first duel and the horses neigh furiously at each other. The lotus-eyed Krishna and Salya shoot keen glares at each other, with Salya turning his gaze away first; and so it is with Karna, too, as he locks gazes with Arjuna and is the first to avert his eyes.

Then the Suta's son smilingly says to Salya, "If Partha kills me in battle today, tell me truly, friend, what will you do after that?"

Salya says, "If, O Karna, Swetavahana kills you in battle today, I myself, on a single chariot, will kill both Madhava and Phalguna."

Arjuna asks Krishna the same question, but Krishna replies with an inscrutable smile, "The Sun may fall down from his place, the Earth may split into a thousand pieces; Fire may become cold, but Karna will not be able to kill you, O Dhananjaya! And if this impossible thing were to happen, know then that the destruction of the universe is at hand. As for myself, I will tear both Karna and Salya to shreds with my bare hands."

Arjuna smiles at the tireless Krishna, saying, "Salya and Karna, united together, are not a match for me alone, O Janardana! You will see me cut Karna with his proud standard and banners to pieces, along with Salya and his chariot, horses, parasol, armour, spears, shafts and bow, like a tusker trampling a sapling into dust in the forest. Today will see Karna's wives widowed and indeed they must have seen signs of the coming evil in their dreams last night! I cannot restrain my wrath when I remember how this vain fool of little foresight laughed at us and abused us repeatedly in the vilest way when he saw Panchali dragged into the Kuru sabha.

Today, O Govinda, you will see me crush Karna like an infuriated elephant does a tree with its load of flowers. Today, O Madhusudana, you will hear these sweet words after Karna's fall: 'Destiny, O you of Vrishni's race, has decreed victory for you!'

You will comfort Abhimanyu's mother today with a lighter heart for having avenged yourself on the enemy. Today you will joyously comfort your aunt Kunti. Today you will, O Madhava, comfort Draupadi of the tearful face and Dharmaraja Yudhishtira with words sweet as nectar.""

CANTO 88

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, the sky, filled with Devas, Nagas, Asuras, Siddhas, Yakshas and with large bands of Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Asuras, Maharishis, Rajarishis, Gauda of bright plumage, assumes a wonderful aspect. All men on the battlefield see the wonderful Devas congregate in the sky, which resounds with the sound of musical instruments, song, adulatory hymns, laughter, dance and various other enchanting sights and sounds.

Then the carnage begins, as both the Kaurava and the Pandava warriors, filled with exhilaration, wade into each other and the battlefield resounds with the sound of trumpets, drums, the blare of conches and loud roars. The ground is soon heaped with lifeless bodies crimson with gore, and looks quite stunning as men, horses, elephants, chariots and weapons, fall to maces, swords, javelins and rapiers. The battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas resembles the one between the Devas and the Asuras, of long ago.

Dhananjaya and Karna, their superb armour shimmering, shroud the ten points of the sky and the army opposing them with storms of arrows. Darkness falls on the field, and neither your warriors nor the enemy can any longer see anything. From fear, all the warriors seek the protection of either Karna or Arjuna like rays of light spread out in the sky converging towards either the sun or the moon. The two Atirathas negate each other's astras, like the east and the west winds blowing into each other, and dazzle like the

sun and moon to disperse the darkness caused by the arrow clouds that cover the sky.

They exhort their troops not to flee and the warriors of both armies stand their ground, encircling those two awesome warriors, like the Devas and the Asuras standing around Vasava and Sambara. The men encourage the two heroes with loud shouts, with the sounds of drums and other instruments, like thundering clouds greeting Surya and Chandra. The two armies are the haloes around the sun or the moon.

Arjuna and Karna draw their great bows into complete circles and shoot thousands of arrows like the rays of the two unendurable suns that rise at pralaya at the end of the yuga to destroy the entire universe with its all mobile and unmoving creatures.

Both are invincible, both are redoubtable and both are eager to show their skill and finish the other. Karna and Arjuna close fearlessly with each other, like Indra and Jambhasura. Invoking the mightiest of astras, the two formidable archers slay countless men, horses and elephants, while striking each other at the same time. O Rajan! The troops of both the Kurus and the Pandavas flee like animals in the forest when a lion sets upon them. Then the five maharathas Duryodhana, Kritavarman, Sakuni, Kripa and Aswatthaman the son of Sharadvata's daughter pierce Dhananjaya and Kesava with scathing, accurate shafts. Arjuna destroys all their bows, quivers, horses, elephants, and their chariots with their charioteers, gashes every one of them with perfect arrows, and strikes Karna with a dozen.

A hundred chariots, a hundred elephants, and a number of Saka, Tukhara and Yavana horsemen, and some of the foremost Kamboja warriors launch a murderous attack on Arjuna; he, in a blur, strikes down his attackers along with their horses, elephants and chariots. This evokes applause from the sky as the Devas blow their trumpets and sing praises of Arjuna. Gentle breezes waft down showers of unearthly blooms, fragrant and auspicious on Arjuna's head. All witnesses of that encounter, Devas, Manavas and, indeed, all beings, are awestruck.

Only Arjuna and Karna feel neither pain nor wonder. Then Aswatthaman, suddenly seizing Duryodhana's hand, says, "Be satisfied, O Duryodhana! Make peace with the Pandavas. There is no need to fight on. Shame on war! The Acharya, a master of the mightiest of astras and like Brahma himself, is dead. My uncle Kripa and I are chiranjivis but other great warriors like Bhishma have also fallen. Rule the kingdom forever,

sharing it with the sons of Pandu. I can persuade Dhananjaya and Janardana to stop the war. Yudhishtira is always concerned about the welfare of all and Vrikodara and the twins will obey him. Peace between you and the Pandavas will benefit everybody. Let the kings who are still alive go back to their homes and let the troops leave in peace.

If you do not listen to me, Duryodhana, you will only suffer further grief in this war. You and the universe have seen what Arjuna of the diadem and garlands can achieve. Neither Indra, Yama, Prachetas, Kubera or the Yakshas can match him. And if you consider Dhananjaya's punya, it is much greater than his prowess. He will never differ with me and he will always agree with you. Be gratified, O Suyodhana, for the benefit of all the universe. You have always honoured me and I, too, bear a great friendship for you. This is why I say what I do to you now.

I will dissuade Karna from fighting, provided you want peace. Discerning persons say that there are four kinds of friends—those who are naturally so, those who are made through conciliation, those who become friends through wealth, and lastly those who are made by subjugation and the exercise of power. You possess all these elements with regard to the Pandavas and they are your cousins and natural friends. Acquire them again as firm friends through conciliation. If they agree to befriend you, I suggest, O Maharajan, that you do what I say."

Duryodhana reflects for a while and, then drawing a deep breath, says sadly, "It is as you have said, O my dear friend. But what the evil-hearted Vrikodara said after killing Dusasana still burns in my heart. You also heard him, so how can there be peace? Arjuna will not be able to quell Karna in battle, even as a tempest that is weakened when it meets the mighty mountains of Meru. Further, the sons of Pritha have little trust in me thinking of my many hostile deeds towards them. Nor, O Aswatthaman, should you now tell me, 'Let Karna abandon the war!' Arjuna is exhausted today and Karna will soon slay him."

Your son turns to his own troops, and says, "Why do you stand here like spectators? Go, attack your enemies and butcher them!"""

CANTO 89

"Sanjaya says, 'And when the blare of conches and the peal of drums are deafening, Karna and Arjuna meet each other in battle, O king, all because of your son's evil heart. Like two infuriated Himalayan elephants, with full-grown tusks, fighting each other for the sake of a she-elephant in season, like a mass of clouds encountering another, those two warriors, both unleashing torrents of arrows, fight, their bows twanging loudly, the wheels of their chariots rumbling and clattering like thunder and lighting. They duel like two mountains, both with lofty cliffs and abounding with trees, creepers, herbs and both teeming with wild beasts that are native to them, moving ever towards each other for fiercer fight.

The duel swells like the one between Indra and Bali in days gone by. No one else can endure what the two shuras, their charioteers and animals suffer as they are wounded and spray blood from all over. Like two lakes full of varied kinds of lotuses, fish and tortoises, and echoing with the sound of different birds that the wind stirs when they approach each other, the chariots of the two warriors advance with fluttering banners. Both resemble the great and powerful Indra, and they strike each other with arrows that resemble his Vajra, and the battle is like the one between that Deva and the Asura Vritra.

Both the armies on the field in their full regalia and those looking down from the sky quake with fear to witness the contention between Arjuna and

Karna. Others among the spectators, filled with joy, utter loud shouts, raise their arms, waving their hands or pieces of cloth, when Arjuna charges Karna, like one elephant rushing at another.

The Somakas shout, "Be quick, O Arjuna! Cut off his head and, with that, kill Duryodhana's last hope for the kingdom."

Similarly, many of our warriors cry to Karna, "Fly, fly, O Karna, and kill Arjuna with your inexorable arrows. And then banish the sons of Pritha to the forests forever."

Karna strikes Partha with ten mighty shafts and Arjuna retaliates with ten long shafts that plunge deep into Karna's body. They mangle each other with arrows past count, all the while wary and keened to catch the least lapse in the other.

Rubbing the string of the Gandiva, Arjuna launches showers of cloth-yard shafts, nalikas and arrows with heads like boar's ears and razors, anjalikas, and crescent-tipped arrows at Karna. These spread across the sky and, falling in a storm, riddle Karna's chariot like flights of birds dropping into a tree at dusk with lowered heads, to roost for the night. But, O Rajan, all those showers of arrows that Arjuna, with furrowed brow and angry glances, looses at Karna, the Sutaputra easily destroys with his own tremendous volleys.

The son of Indra then shoots a fiery Agneyastra, which covers earth and sky with its blazing lustre, and the very course of the sun, as it spumes up and falls in blinding incandescence. The robes of all the warriors and soldiers take fire and they scatter. We hear loud crackling, as if a forest of bamboos is on fire. Karna invokes a Varunastra to quench it. In a trice, an uncanny cloud envelops Kurukshetra in unnatural darkness. The cloud, whose extremities look like mountains, spreads out on every side and pouring down a deluge of water, floods the earth and puts out Arjuna's conflagration. Nothing but darkness prevails.

Arjuna unleashes a Vayavyastra, which disperses the clouds of Karna's Varunastra. The indomitable Dhananjaya invokes an Aindrastra, which is like the Vajra in energy and ferocity. Immediately, razor-headed arrows, anjalikas, crescent-tipped shafts, nalikas, cloth-yard shafts and arrows with heads like the boar's ear, issue in tide from the Gandiva, in thousands, with the force of thunder. Fletched with vulture's feathers, these shafts strike limbs, horses, bows, yokes, wheels, and Karna's standard, piercing all like serpents frightened by Garuda burrowing into the earth.

Struck all over and bathed in blood, the noble Karna, his eyes rolling in anger, bends his bow and, with a twang as loud as the roar of the sea, launches the Bhargavastra, which extinguishes Partha's showers of shafts from his Aindrastra. After he puts down Partha's astra, Karna destroys chariots, elephants, foot-soldiers and many great warriors of the Pandava army with immaculate and fierce arrows. The stricken Panchalas and the Somakas, O Rajan, unite and assail the Suta's son with keen barbs from every side. Karna cuts all these down, and ravages the Panchala warriors, elephants and the horses, killing many.

As he routs his opponents, Karna is irradiant as a god, like a golden cloud lashing down torrents of deadly rain. Your warriors see the true valour of mighty Karna, and believe that he has vanquished the two Krishnas; they clap loudly and break into loud shouts of victory.

Seeing Karna foil Dhananjaya's astra, Bhima, the choleric son of Vayu, his eyes blazing, wrings his hands in rage and, drawing deep breaths, says, "How, O Jishnu, can this wretched Sutaputra, fallen from dharma, kill so many great Panchala warriors, in your sight? Till now the very gods or the Kalakeyas could not conquer you. Sthanu himself blessed you. How could this Suta's son pierce you with ten shafts that common rathikas use? It is amazing how he frustrates your astras.

Remember the suffering of Panchali, and the vile abuse that this evil son of a Suta heaped on us, when he called us, 'Sesame seeds without kernels!'

Remember all that, O Savyasachi, and swiftly dispatch the wretched Karna. Why are you so tame and indifferent, Arjuna? Use that same prowess with which you vanquished all the creatures and fed Agni at Khandava, to kill this wretch. And I, too, will use my mace to crush him."

Krishna adds to this, "How is it, Kiritin, that Karna succeeds in negating your astras? Don't you see the Kauravas standing behind Karna rejoice even now and shout for joy seeing you fail? Use that devotion with which, yuga after yuga, you have destroyed those who use darkness for their weapons, as well as Kshatriyas, and Asuras born of pride, to kill Karna today. Use my Sudarsana chakra, keen as a razor, to strike off his head, as Sakra did the head of Namuchi with his Vajra. Summon your dhyana, which once so pleased Mahadeva disguised as a hunter, O Shura, and slay the Sutaputra with all his followers.

After killing Karna, bestow the earth and all her seas, towns, villages and wealth, free from all enemies, upon Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. Through

that deed, O Partha, you will also win unrivalled and eternal fame."

Thus exhorted by Bhima and Krishna, Arjuna recalls everything that he, his brothers and the precious Draupadi had suffered, and remembers the very reason for which he had come into this world. He says to Krishna, "With your leave, as well as of Brahma, Bhava, and of all those who are Brahmavadis, I will now invoke a great astra for the good of the world and kill the Suta's son."

Arjuna bows to Brahma and raises the irresistible Brahmastra which he can invoke with his mind and looses it at Karna. Karna quite effortlessly renders that awesome weapon impotent and continues to lash arrows and many fires over Arjuna. An angry Bhima blazes with wrath and asks Arjuna, "Men say that you are a master of the Brahmastra, which inexorably consumes all enemies. But you, O my brother, seem to use another weapon with the same name."

Arjuna releases a second Brahmastra from the Gandiva, which envelops everything around, above and below with arrows that are like fire serpents and blaze like the sun's rays. From this astra, issue hundreds of arrows with golden wings with the effulgence of the yuga fire, as well as battle-axes, chakras and cloth-yard shafts in thousands, killing enemy warriors all around. The severed heads of some fall naked on the field, spouting blood at their necks and terrifying their comrades. The Kiritin wounds, maims and kills the warriors of Duryodhana's army at will with his death-dealing shafts that spew from his second Brahmastra.

Karna responds with thousands of arrows that fall upon the son of Pandu in torrents. Karna finds Bhimasena, Krishna and Arjuna, each with three terrible shafts and lets out an echoing roar of triumph. Arjuna cannot bear to see Karna's arrows gash Bhima and Krishna, and shoots eight and ten arrows in a flash at the Sutaputra. Piercing Karna's beautiful standard with one, he strikes Salya with four and Karna himself with three. With ten other elegant shafts he cuts away the Kaurava warrior Sabhapati's arms and head, kills his horses, charioteer, rives his bow and standard, and fells him, clad in golden armour, from his chariot like a sala tree cut down with an axe.

He once more rakes Karna with a dense volleys of arrows, and massacres four hundred elephants, eight thousand chariot-warriors, a thousand horses with their riders, and another eight thousand foot-soldiers. Partha envelops Karna, his sarathy, chariot, horses and standard in a cloud

of arrows. The Kauravas cry out for help, pleading, “O Karna, kill the son of Pandu quickly or he will annihilate us all!”

Karna unleashes a tornado of shining shafts, which spins countless Pandavas and Panchalas into Yamaloka. Thus, the two invincible warriors strike down their enemies and lacerate each other, with mighty astras.

His wounds treated with salves and mantras that expert apothecaries have applied, his golden armour strapped on again, Yudhishtira arrives to witness the duel between Arjuna and Karna. Seeing the Dharmaputra come like the full moon emerging in the sky from the jaws of Rahu, a surge of delight courses through the Pandava army. The onlookers, both terrestrial and celestial, stand motionless.

As the two shuras, Karna and Arjuna, lacerate each other with their fire shafts, the sounds of their bowstrings and striking palms is resounding and their flying arrows also make a deafening, incessant noise.

Suddenly, Arjuna’s bowstring, stretched with immense force, breaks with a loud report. Seizing the chance, Karna strikes Partha with a hundred small arrows, keen and steeped in oil, winged with bird feathers and like serpents freed from their sloughs. He finds Krishna with sixty shafts and then Phalguna again with eight more. He inundates Bhima with thousands of iron barbs, pierces Krishna, Arjuna’s standard, and fells many among the Somakas who follow Partha. However, he is swiftly shrouded in return with showers of straight shafts like masses of clouds hiding the sun.

Yet, the Suta’s son stuns the warriors who assail him with his unearthly prowess, cuts down all the astras they shoot at him, destroys their chariots, kills horses and elephants and many of their foremost warriors, like an angry lion a pack of dogs. The loss of lives among the Panchalas and the Kauravas at the hands of Karna and Dhananjaya is incredible, appalling. Your troops think that Karna has subdued the two Krishnas and victory is theirs and clap furiously, and shout aloud in celebration.

In the face of Karna’s attack, and furious at being struck by his assailant’s arrows, Arjuna strings his great bow in the twinkling of an eye and lays ardent siege to the Kauravas. He strums his bowstring, claps his hands and causes darkness to fall over Kurukshetra with another astra. He pierces Karna and Salya and all the Kurus. As the sky is now dark from the astra, the very birds are unable to fly through it and a fragrant wind blows. Laughing, Partha strikes Salya’s armour with ten arrows and then pierces Karna first with a dozen and again with seven shafts. The whistling winged

arrows shot with untellable force from Partha's bow draw spouts of blood from Karna, as he stands magnificent on his ratha, his body bathed in blood, and resplendent like Rudra at the time of pralaya, sporting in the smasana, the burning ground, at noon or dusk.

Karna responds with three arrows which he plunges deep into Dhananjaya's body, then looses five more blazing golden arrows at Krishna, which pass through his armour and body like five serpents, enter the earth, bathe in the waters of the Bhogavati in the Patalas, and then fly back to Karna! Those shafts are in reality five mighty serpents that had chosen the side of Takshaka's son Aswasena, whose mother Arjuna had killed in the Khandava vana. With ten flat-headed arrows, shot with terrific force, Arjuna truncates each of the five serpents into three, and drops them dead on the earth.

Seeing Krishna wounded and bleeding from those serpents, Arjuna blazes up in fury like fire in a heap of dry grass. He blasts Karna through all his vital marmas with sizzling shafts shot from the new bowstring stretched to his ear. Karna trembles in pain, summons all his courage and is just able to stand upright. A belligerent Dhananjaya fills the sky with showers of arrows and soon the very splendour of the sun, and Karna's chariot, O Rajan, all become dim as if a thick forest enfolds them. Savyasachi, that Paraviraha, decimates two thousand Kuru warriors, with their chariots and horses, as well as the maharathas who protect Karna's chariot-wheels, his wings, his van and rear and those who constitute the very pick of Duryodhana's chariot-force.

Your sons and the Kauravas that are still alive flee, deserting Karna and abandoning their dying and wounded, and their wailing sons and sires. Finding himself alone and the field around him empty, Karna, far from becoming agitated, O Bhaarata, attacks Arjuna with renewed vigour and greater force.'"

CANTO 90

"Sanjaya says, 'The shattered divisions of the Kaurava army look on helpless from a distance as Arjuna's astra, swelling with energy, flies around like a bolt of lightning and consumes them. With showers of deadly astras winged with gold that he had from Parasurama, and which are as powerful as Atharvan rites, Karna blows Arjuna's astra apart and wounds him as well. The duel continues and they gash each other like two fierce elephants. Karna and Partha make the sky one vast expanse of arrows without any space in between and the sun is obscured. In the transcendent battle, which swings one way and then the other, each tries to probe the other's weakness; all the other warriors on Kurukshetra are riveted while those in the sky applaud both Karna and Arjuna.

Many shout words of encouragement like, "Excellent, O Karna!" and some cry, "Uttamam, O Arjuna!"

While the duel rages, the serpent Aswasena, who is hostile to Arjuna, has made his way up from patala to the surface of the earth. He had escaped the conflagration at Khandava, and dived down into darkling patala. The serpent had not forgotten that Arjuna killed his mother and he now rises from the nether world with great speed and, upon seeing the battle between Karna and Arjuna, thinks the time ripe to settle an old score. He darts into Karna's quiver and takes the form of an arrow.

Karna and Partha make the sky one dense mass of arrows, filling the Kauravas and the Somakas with fear for they cannot see anything. Finally, having exhausted themselves, those Naravyaghras, those two greatest archers in the world, stand still and gaze numbly at each other. Now many Apsaras in the sky then fan them with palm leaves and sprinkle fragrant sandal-water over them while Sakra and Surya, using their spectral hands, gently stroke their faces.

When he finds that he cannot prevail over Partha and that his wounds have weakened him terribly, Karna decides to use that lone shaft which lies enveloped in sandal dust in a golden quiver. He has saved the serpent-mouthed and fiery astra to kill Arjuna. He fixes that lethal shaft to his bowstring, and stretching it to his ear, unleashes it at Partha, aiming to behead him. All the surroundings and the sky seem to take apocalyptic flames as meteors and thunderbolts fall everywhere. When that serpent in the form of an arrow is fitted to the bowstring of the Vijaya, the Lokapalas, including Sakra, set up loud lamentations.

Karna does not know that the serpent Aswasena has entered his arrow using yogic power. Seeing Vaikartana aim that arrow, the noble ruler of the Madras says urgently, "This arrow, O Karna, will not succeed in striking off Arjuna's head. Look for another astra."

At this, the Sutaputra, with eyes burning with wrath, says, "O Salya, Karna never aims an arrow twice. Men like me are never crooked warriors.'

Taking careful aim, Karna shoots that arrow which he has cherished for long years, O Rajan, and cries to his rival, "You are dead, O Phalguna!"

Sped from Karna's majestic bow, the arrow, brilliant like the sun, leaves the string with a dreadful echo and burns a line across the sky as if to divide it, like a woman dividing the tresses on her head. Seeing that serpent in the form of an arrow blazing across in the sky, Krishna quickly and easily presses down with his feet and forces the chariot to sink about a cubit into the ground. At this, his horses, white as the rays of the moon and caparisoned in gold, buckle at their knees and prostrate on the earth. There is loud applause and shout from the sky for Vasudeva, and countless celestial voices are heard crying his praises and unearthly flowers shower down upon him.

For what Krishna does, the arrow which Karna had shot with such care merely knocks off Arjuna's coronet from his head, the kirita celebrated throughout the earth, the sky, the waters and the heavens. The Svayambhu

himself had wrought that splendid diadem, bright as the sun, the moon, fire or a planet, and adorned it with gold, pearls, rubies, emeralds and diamonds. As priceless as it looks and is, it strikes terror into the hearts of enemies, makes its wearer content, and exudes a divine fragrance. Indra himself had given that ornament to his son when Arjuna went forth to fight the Kalakeyas in Devaloka.

That crown could not be broken by even the greatest among the Devas, not by Rudra, Varuna, Kubera, Yama's paasa, Indra's Vajra and even the most powerful astra of all. Yet, Karna now smashes it into pieces with his serpentine shaft. A great roar arises in all the worlds, O Bhaarata, as if a supernatural disturbance of the very elements has agitated the earth, the sky, the heavens and the waters. Hearing that tremendous noise, the strongest men reel where they stand. Bereft of his kirita, the dark and youthful Partha looks like a blue mountain with a soaring peak. Arjuna binds his locks with a white cloth, and stands perfectly unmoved, like the Udaya hill illumined by the rays of the rising sun.

The astra like fire that Karna shoots with Arjuna's deadly enemy, Aswasena the serpent, in it, breaks Partha's crown, flies back to Karna and asks to be launched once more at the Pandava.

Karna sees him but does not know him, and the serpent says, "You shot me, O Karna, without seeing me. That was the reason that I could not strike off Arjuna's head. Look at me well and quickly shoot me again. This time I will kill your enemy who is also mine."

Karna says, "Who are you that possess such a fierce form?"

Aswasena replies, "I am one whose mother Arjuna killed and for that he is my sworn enemy. If the Vajradhari himself protects Partha, I would still send him to Pitriloka, where Yama rules. Do not ignore me and I will slay your enemy. Do not hesitate, loose me at him once more."

Karna replies, "O Sarpa, Karna never relies on another's might for victory. Even if I have to kill a hundred Arjunas, I will still not shoot the same shaft twice. I will use my other astras and I will finish Partha. Be you content and go away."

Aswasena, that prince of serpents, is enraged, and assuming the form of an arrow, flies forth on his own to attempt to kill Partha, to fulfil the wish that has obsessed him for so long. Krishna says to Partha, "Slay that great Naga who bears you such hatred and enmity."

Arjuna asks, "Who is this serpent who flies at me, as if into the mouth of Garuda?"

Krishna replies, "While you were in the Khandava satisfying Agni's hunger, this serpent was in the sky, his body ensconced within his mother's. Thinking that it was only a single serpent, you killed the mother. He has never forgotten what you did, and comes to seek revenge today, O Shura, even like a meteor falling from the sky!"

In a blink, turning to face the serpent in the sky as it flies towards him, Arjuna kills Aswasena with six arrows and he falls in six writhing pieces onto the earth. After this, the Lord Krishna himself, O Rajan, raises the chariot out of the ground with his mighty arms.

Glancing obliquely at Dhananjaya, Karna strikes Krishna with ten whetted shafts fletched with peacock feathers. Arjuna strikes back from his bow drawn to his ear, first piercing Karna with a dozen arrows with tips like the boar's ear, and next with a cloth-yard shaft, virulent as a snake. The arrow pierces Karna's armour, drinks his blood and enters the earth, its wings drenched in scarlet. Provoked himself like a serpent prodded with a stick, Karna shoots a host of arrows that rake both Janardana and Arjuna, and lets out a triumphant roar.

However, the son of Pandu, whose is Indra's equal, pierces Karna with hundreds of arrows even as Indra had Balasura long ago. He shoots ninety arrows, each like the rod of Death at Karna, who is deeply wounded and trembles like a mountain split by thunder.

Dhananjaya knocks down Karna's helmet of pure gold, studded with costly gems and precious diamonds, as well as his earrings. Arjuna shatters his priceless and bright armour that many great armourers working for a long time had forged with great care. After stripping him of his armour, Partha strikes Karna with four powerfully shot arrows and inflicts such pain on him, which a man direly sick with diseases of bile, phlegm, wind and fever experiences. Never pausing, Arjuna pierces Karna's very vitals with many carefully aimed arrows shot with great force. Bleeding profusely from Partha's onslaught, Karna looks majestic, like a mountain of red chalk with streams of red liquid running down its breast.

Arjuna never stops but, standing like the son of Agni piercing the Krauncha Mountain, bloodies Karna's torso with scores of unerring iron shafts with wings of gold and each one like the Yama danda. Karna drops his bow and his quiver and, in unendurable agony, stands reeling and in

great distress. Arjuna, always observant of Kshatriya dharma, does not want to take advantage when his enemy is in such distress, but Krishna says, "Why, O son of Pandu, are you so tardy? The truly wise never spare their enemies even for a moment, however weak they may be. He who is learned earns both punya and kirti when he kills his enemies, even when they are in distress.

Karna has always been your enemy and he is the greatest of warriors. If you do not kill him now, when he recovers, the Sutaputra will attack you with redoubled vigour and ferocity. So kill him now, as Indra did the Asura Namuchi."

Arjuna says, "So be it, O Krishna!" He salutes the Purushottaman Janardana, and drills Karna with several volleys. Partha covers Karna, his chariot and horses with calf-toothed arrows; putting forth all his prowess, he shrouds all the points of the sky with golden-winged barbs. Adhiratha's broad-chested son, with these arrows sticking out of his body, stands glorious like an asoka, a palasa or a salmali tree bowed down with its load of flowers, or like a mountain overgrown with a forest of sandalwood trees or flowering karnikaras.

Karna, too, now somewhat recovered, repeatedly shoots showers of arrows at Arjuna, and looks like the glorious sun coursing towards the Asta hills, his arrows like the sun's crimson rays. However, the stronger Arjuna's arrows destroy his shafts in the sky.

Karna recovers his self-assurance and finds Partha and Krishna with half a dozen arrows. Dhananjaya gets ready to unleash a mighty devastra, which burns like fire and flies with a sound that resembles the peal of Indra's Vajra. The hour of Karna's death has come and Kaala, Time, comes to him invisibly to warn him and reminds him of the Brahmana's curse, "The earth swallows your chariot-wheel!"

Indeed, O Purushottama, when death came, Karna forgets the mantra for the great Brahmastra that the illustrious Bhargava had given him, while the earth suddenly opens a deep cleft and traps his chariot's left wheel. Karna's chariot tilts steeply and is stuck in that spot like a sacred tree with its load of flowers standing upon an elevated platform. Seeing his chariot immobilised by the Brahmana's curse, and finding Parasurama's devastra inaccessible to him, and Partha burn up his awesome serpent-mouthed astra, Karna is filled with dejection.

He waves his arms in frustration, and begins to rail at dharma, “Men of dharma always claim that it protects those who follow its path and so we always endeavour, to the best of our ability and knowledge, to cleave to the truth. That very dharma now destroys us instead of protecting us who are devoted to it. Ah, dharma does not always protect its worshippers.”

Meanwhile Arjuna’s arrows rake him, his horses and charioteer, and Karna is frantic. The arrows crash into all his vital organs and he no longer cares what he does but repeatedly curses dharma. He then pierces Krishna in the arm with three arrows, and Partha, too, with seven. Arjuna responds and shoots seventeen thunderbolts, straight, fierce, splendid as Agni and deadly as Indra’s Vajra, which plummet right through Karna’s body into the earth. Trembling with shock, Karna now displays his awesome valour and, with a mighty effort, steadies himself and, remembering its mantra, invokes the Brahmastra.

Seeing the Brahmastra, Arjuna invokes the Aindrastra with the proper mantras, infusing the Gandiva, its string, and his arrows, also, with other mantras, he lets loose a solid swath of arrows even like Purandara pouring down rain in torrents. Those numberless arrows flare out of Partha’s chariot, but Karna destroys them before they reach his ratha.

Krishna says to Arjuna, “Use your astras, Partha! The son of Radha will confound your other shafts.”

Karna now fixes the Brahmastra to his string and shoots it, shrouding all the points of the sky with arrows, and striking Partha with many. Karna follows this up with a slew of searing shafts, and breaks Arjuna’s bowstring, eleven times in quick succession, while each time Arjuna tries to replace it. Karna, who can shoot a thousand arrows in a single moment, does not know that Partha’s bow has a hundred strings. So quickly does Arjuna replace each broken string that Karna could not mark when it was broken and when replaced.

Briefly, Karna appears to have the advantage as he dominates Arjuna with his astras. Seeing Karna begin to dominate Arjuna, Krishna says, “Use your greater astras before he kills you, Partha!”

At this, Arjuna invokes other greater devastras with their mantras. First he summons the astra that is hard like adamant, burns like fire, is as venomous as a serpent and unites the Raudrastra with it. At this very moment, O Rajan, the earth swallows one of the wheels of Karna’s ratha. Alighting quickly from his chariot, Karna seizes the sunken wheel with his

massive arms and endeavours to lift it up with a great effort. Karna exerts immense strength, and the very earth, which has his wheel in her clasp, is raised up four fingers' breadth, with her seven islands and her hills and waters and forests.

Radheya sheds tears of anger, and says to Arjuna, "Partha, Partha, wait a moment until I free my sunken wheel. You see the left wheel of my chariot is stuck in the earth. Do not shoot at me now, for only cowards would do such a vile thing. Brave warriors who follow Kshatriya dharma never attack any opponent with dishevelled hair, those who have turned their faces from battle, a Brahmana, or one who folds his hands in supplication, one who yields himself up or begs for quarter, one who has put down his weapon, or whose arrows are exhausted, or whose armour is undone, or an enemy whose weapon has fallen down or been broken.

You are the bravest man in the world and a man of dharma, O Pandava! You well know the dharma for battle. So, Dhananjaya, allow me a moment to extricate my wheel from the ground. It is not just for you to attack me while you are on your ratha and I stand helpless on the ground. I have no fear that either Krishna or you, who are born into the Kshatriya varna and are a perpetuator of a noble race will forget the tenets of dharma. Give me a moment, O son of Pandu!"""

CANTO 91

"Sanjaya says, 'But it is Krishna who responds to Karna in a terrible voice, "It is good fortune, indeed, O Radheya, that you remember dharma today! It is only when they themselves are in distress that those who do not live by dharma, complain about fate.

Suyodhana, Dusasana, Sakuni and you, Karna, were responsible for dragging Draupadi, clad in a single cloth, into the Kuru sabha. What happened on that day to the dharma you now speak of?

When in that ancient and noble court, Sakuni, an adept in dice, took everything he owned from Yudhishtira by cheating, where was this dharma of yours?

When prompted by you, Duryodhana served Bhimasena poisoned food and then tried to kill him by pushing him into a river full of venomous snakes, where was this great virtue of yours?

When the agreed period of exile in the woods was over, as well as the thirteenth year, you did not make over their kingdom to the Pandavas. Where was this dharma of yours then?

You plotted to set fire to the house of lac at Varanavrata in order to immolate Kunti and the sleeping Pandavas. Where then, Radheya, was the dharma you speak of today?

You laughed at Panchali when Dusasana hauled her by her hair into the Kuru sabha, and she stood there scantily clad and in shame because she was

in her season. Where, O Karna, was this dharma of yours then?

When innocent Draupadi was dragged out from the women's apartments by the bestial Dusasana, you did not protest. Where, O son of Radha, had this dharma of yours gone then?

You addressed the princess Draupadi, whose gait is as dignified as that of the elephant, in shameful words. Karna, you said, "The Pandavas, O Krishnaa, are lost. They have sunk into eternal hell. You must choose another husband for yourself!" You looked on at that tragic, terrible scene with delight. Where then, O Karna, had your dharma gone?

Coveting their kingdom and relying on the king of the Gandharas, you enticed the Pandavas to an unequal game of dice. Where was your dharma then?

When so many maharathas surrounded Abhimanyu, who was a mere boy, and slew him brutally, where, Karna, was your dharma then?

If the dharma that you now speak of was not with you on those occasions, what is the use of prating about dharma now? You want that dharma be observed now, O Suta, but you will not escape alive. Like Nala, whom Pushkara vanquished at dice, but who regained his kingdom through skill, the Pandavas, who are free from deceit, will regain their kingdom through the strength of their arms, supported by all their friends. After they annihilate all their powerful enemies, they and the Somakas will have their kingdom back. The Dhartarashtras will meet with destruction at the hands of the sons of Pandu who are, indeed, always protected by dharma!"

Hearing this from Krishna, O Bhaarata, Karna hangs his head in shame and makes no reply. With lips white with anger, he raises his bow and continues to fight Arjuna with undimmed energy and skill.

Then Krishna says to Arjuna, "O Mahabaho, strike Karna with a devastra, and make an end to him."

Arjuna vividly remembers all the incidents that Krishna described and blazes up in rage so that flames seem to emanate from all the pores of his body. Seeing that uncanny sight, Karna invokes the Brahmastra and again inundates arrows upon Dhananjaya, while he tries again to extricate his chariot wheel from the rut that holds it so fast. Arjuna, also, responds with a Brahmastra and pours a cataract of arrows over Karna. He then shoots another favourite astra of his, the burning Agneya, at Karna, which the Sutaputra douses with a Varunastra; yet again, the clouds of the astra of the

Lord cover Kurukshetra over in clouds and darkness falls over the field of death.

Arjuna scatters the clouds of the weapon of water with a Vayavyastra of the wind. Karna takes up an arrow of fire and, as he fixes that shaft to his bowstring, the earth shudders with all her mountains, waters and forests; violent sandstorms blow and the air is thick with blinding dust. Wails of lament, O Bhaarata, arise among the gods in the sky when they see the astra that Karna has set to his great bow and the Pandavas despair and prepare for greater sorrow. Karna looses the astra effulgent as Sakra's Vajra, and it ploughs right through Partha's chest like some mighty Naga going through an anthill.

The noble Arjuna reels on his ratha; he trembles like the prince of all mountains in an earthquake; his grasp on his bow is loosened and the Gandiva drops from his hand. Seeing his chance, Karna jumps down again from his chariot to try and draw out the wheel that is stuck so firmly in the ground. He seizes the wheel with both his mighty arms and attempts to lift it out; despite his godly strength, and as destiny would have it, he fails again.

Meanwhile, Arjuna recovers his senses and invokes an astra called the Anjalika, lethal as the rod of Death. Krishna says to Arjuna in a tone that will not be resisted, "Cut Karna's head from his body before he can free his chariot."

While Karna is still striving to free the stuck wheel, Arjuna shoots a razor-headed, shining arrow and cuts down Karna's standard bearing the device of a priceless elephant's rope, adorned with gold, pearls, rubies, emeralds and diamonds. That standard celebrated all over the world always boosted the morale of your troops and filled the enemy with fear. With that standard, falls the fame, pride, hope of victory, and everything else precious, as also the hearts of the Kurus, and cries of woe arise from the Kuru army. They, O Bhaarata, are convinced that Karna is as good as dead.

Partha now takes out the Anjalikastra from his quiver, astra brilliant as the disc of the sun. The unearthly weapon in the shape of an arrow measures three cubits and six feet in length. It is irresistible as Rakshasas are in the night, resembles the Pinaka or the Sudarshana Chakra, and is so devastating and vicious that not the Devas and Asuras can withstand it. Seeing the Anjalika in Partha's hand, the entire universe trembles and the greatest Rishis cry in alarm, "Peace be upon the universe!"

Arjuna affixes the astra to the Gandiva, unites it with another powerful astra and, drawing his bow into a circle, quickly prays, "If I have ever performed tapasya, gratified my elders and superiors, and listened to the counsels of my well-wishers, let this shaft destroy the body and heart of my enemy. Let that Truth and this weapon that I have worshipped slay my enemy Karna and take him into the presence of Yama."

Then Arjuna looses that great and shining arrow, effective as a rite prescribed in the Atharvan of Angiras, which even Yama cannot endure in battle, at Karna. The ayudha endowed with the energy of the sun causes all the points of the sky to blaze up with light. The Anjalikastra, made into an ineluctable weapon with mantras, flashes at Karna bent over his chariot wheel and strikes his head off like Indra striking off the head of Vritra with his Vajra. Karna's headless trunk and his head fall onto the earth like the bloody disc of the sun slipping from the Asta hills.

Indeed, that head abandons the magnificent body with great reluctance, like a householder leaving his commodious home filled with great wealth. His life fled, the tall and splendid body of Karna, with blood gushing from its every wound, spraying copiously from its severed throat, crumbles like the thunder-riven summit of a mountain of red chalk with crimson streams running down its sides after a heavy rain.

Then, O Rajan, the assembled armies witness a wonderful sight: from the fallen Karna's naked throat, a tremendous light shoots up through the sky into the sun.

Seeing Arjuna kill great Karna, the Pandavas erupt in celebration, loudly blowing their conches, and Krishna and Dhananjaya also embrace each other in joy. The Somakas, seeing Karna dead and lying headless on the field, utter rapturous shouts while the other troops of the Pandava army blow their trumpets and wave their arms and garments. They ecstatically applaud Partha, O Rajan, while others dance and embrace one another, and cheer deafeningly and they say with some fervour, "Through our good fortune, Karna is now stretched out on the earth, headless, and mangled by Arjuna's arrows."

Karna's severed head looks like a mountain top loosened in a tempest, a doused yagna fire, or like the sun after it has reached the Asta hills. The Karna-sun, with arrows for its rays, after it had scorched the hostile army, has at last set. Just as the setting sun takes away all his rays with him, Arjuna's astra beheaded Karna, taking his life breath with it. Karna dies, O

Rajan, at high noon of that day. The handsome Karna, with a face like a lotus of a thousand petals and whose feats were like those of the thousand-eyed Indra, lies on the battlefield like the thousand-rayed sun at the close of day.

Seeing Karna lying dead on the ground, pierced with arrows and bathed in blood, Salya, king of the Madras, drives his chariot away. After the fall of their peerless Senapati, the Kauravas, fear lancing through them, flee the battlefield, frequently casting their eyes at Arjuna's lofty and triumphal standard.'"

CANTO 92

"Sanjaya says, 'Salya drives Karna's chariot away after Karna's death. His eyes bathed in tears and sighing repeatedly, the very picture of despair, Duryodhana takes stock of his army, now deprived of Radheya, and sees how his troops have been denuded, with its chariots, horses and elephants. Wanting to look at heroic Karna bloodied and stretched out on the earth like the sun fallen from the skies, the warriors come there and stand surrounding that fallen pravira. Some show joy, some fear, some sorrow, some wonder, and some give themselves up to great grief, according to their natures. Others among the Kauravas, hearing that Dhananjaya has killed Karna, flee in fear like a herd of cows in panic at losing its dominant bull.

Bhima is celebrant and shakes the sky with his dreadful and tremendous shouts of joy; he slaps his armpits, jumps up and down, and dances, his antics further terrifying the Dhartarashtras. The Somakas and the Srinjayas loudly blow their conches and all the Kshatriyas who are with the Pandavas embrace one another in joy, knowing that the Sutaputra is dead.

It was after a dreadful duel that Arjuna was able to defeat Karna, like a lion overwhelming an elephant, and to accomplish his vow and to finally lay to rest his long enmity towards Karna.

A stunned Salya quickly reaches Duryodhana, and says with tears flowing down his face, "The elephant force, the cavalry, and the best of

your chariot-warriors are dead and your host now looks like Yamaloka. Never before, O Bhaarata, has a battle been fought like the one between Karna and Arjuna today. Karna attacked the two Krishnas and the enemy forces powerfully, but fate favoured Partha today. It appears that Destiny is with the Pandavas and abandoning us, for many of our maharathas have died trying to gain victory for you. Great, brave kings who in energy, courage and might were equal to Kubera, Yama, Vasava or Varuna, and well-nigh immortal, have fallen trying to fulfil your aspirations. Do not grieve, O Bhaarata, for this is Destiny. Comfort yourself. Success cannot be always attained."

Duryodhana hears this and almost swoons; he sighs repeatedly as now, the hour of nemesis arrived, he reflects with a sorrowful heart on his own evil doings.'"

CANTO 93

"Dhritarashtra says, 'What was the state of the Kuru and the Srinjaya armies on that awful day, as it fled from the battlefield, crushed and scorched after the duel on Kurukshetra between Karna and Arjuna?'

Sanjaya says, 'Listen, O Rajan, to the horrific carnage of men, elephants and horses in that battle. When Arjuna lets out a loud roar after Karna's fall, a great terror enters the hearts of your sons and there is no warrior in your army ready to rally your troops or to take charge of them. Karna, their refuge, slain, they are like merchants whose vessels have been wrecked upon the fathomless sea that they wish to cross. After the killing of the Suta's son, the Kauravas, terrified, lacerated, without a leader and desperately seeking protection, are like a herd of elephants chased by lions.

They flee like bulls with broken horns or serpents with broken fangs. Their leading warriors slain, their troops flung into confusion, bloodied and mangled, your sons flee in panic. Dropping their weapons and their armour undone, no longer knowing which way to run, and witless with fear, they flee blindly in all directions.

"It is me that Arjuna is after!" every Kaurava thinks and, then, turning white as ghosts in terror, many fall down even as they run. Maharathas try to escape, some on horses, some on chariots, some on elephants, and some on foot, and the resulting stampede tramples many men. After the fall of the

Suta's son, your warriors are like men without protection in a forest full of wild predators and brigands, like elephants without riders and men without weapons.

Seeing his troops run in fear in their thousands from Bhimasena again on the rampage, Duryodhana cries wildly to his charioteer, "This Partha will not vanquish me with the bow. Slow my horses and stay behind the troops. If I fight from the rear of my army, the son of Kunti will not overwhelm me even as the ocean cannot breach the continent. I will kill Arjuna, Krishna, the proud Bhima and the rest of my enemies, and free myself from the debt I owe my Karna."

At this, his charioteer slows down his magnificent ratha. Then twenty-five foot-soldiers of your army, without chariots, cavalry and elephants, prepare to battle Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna, who surround them with the four kinds of forces and begin their ruthless onslaught. Some among them challenge the two Kshatriyas by name, and observing the laws of a dharma yuddha, and relying upon the might of his arms, Bhima gets down from his chariot and prepares to fight his enemies on foot. Taking up his massive golden mace, he bludgeons them like Maheswara Himself armed with his gada.

Reckless of their lives by now, the seasoned Kaurava foot-soldiers rush at Bhima on foot like insects towards a blazing fire, and perish like living beings on beholding the Great Destroyer. Like a tornado of his natural father the Wind, mighty Bhima single-handedly annihilates all those twenty-five thousand warriors and, dripping with their blood once more joins Dhrishtadyumna on his chariot.

Arjuna takes on the remnant of the Kaurava chariot-force, while the twin sons of Madri and Satyaki attack the Gandhara legion, slaughter his cavalry and elephants and then bear down on their king Sakuni. Meanwhile, Dhananjaya pulls like thunder on the bowstring of his celebrated Gandiva as he faces your remaining chariot-force. Seeing Partha on his chariot with white horses and Krishna for its sarathy, your troops run from him in terror. Equally do they flee, seeing Dhrishtadyumna with Bhimasena riding with him on his familiar and formidable chariot, whose lofty standard is made of the trunk of a kovidara.

After swiftly putting the king of the Gandharas to flight, Nakula, Sahadeva and Satyaki rejoin the main Pandava force. Chekitana, Sikhandi and the five sons of Draupadi, O Rajan, decimate your vast army, blow their

conches and pursue your troops who are in full flight, like bulls chasing away defeated challengers. Arjuna is quick to attack the part of your chariot-force that still stands on the field, and shrouds them in a deadly cloud of arrows. The dust raised darkens the landscape, and nothing can any longer be seen and again your troops flee in abject terror.

When the Kuru army is thus being mowed down, Duryodhana comes rushing to their rescue and challenges all the Pandavas to battle, even as the Asura Bali in olden days challenging the Devas. A pitched battle breaks out with the Pandava warriors who unite to cover your fearless son with invective and missiles, but Duryodhana, alone and unsupported, and full of untold grief and rage at Karna's death, slaughters his enemies in their thousands.

He succeeds in rallying his troops, which have not fled too far and cries to them, "I do not see a place on earth where you can be safe from the Pandavas! What use is there then in fleeing like cowards? The Pandavas now have only a small force and the two Krishnas are sorely wounded. If all of us stand and fight, victory will surely be ours, but if we shamefully run, the Pandavas will pursue us and kill us all. It is better that we should die bravely in battle for that will lead to swarga. Fight by the Kshatriya's dharma. He that is dead knows no misery and enjoys eternal bliss thereafter.

Listen, all you Kshatriyas assembled here! When Yama the destroyer spares neither the brave nor the coward, who that knows Kshatriya dharma as we do, would be foolish enough not to fight? Would you place yourselves under the power of an angry enemy like Bhimasena? It is disgraceful for you to abandon the dharma of your ancestors. There is no greater sin for a Kshatriya than to turn his face away from battle. There is no more blessed path to heaven, O Kauravas, than the dharma of war. Slain in battle, you will find yourselves instantly in swarga, enjoying every felicity and bliss."

Even as your son delivers this inspiring speech, the savagely beset Kaurava warriors flee in all directions.'"

CANTO 94

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing your son attempt to rally the troops, Salya, with fear writ large on his face and his heart numb with grief, says to Duryodhana, "Look at this horrible battlefield, O Shura, strewn richly with dead men, horses and elephants, past all count. Dead elephants big as mountains, their vital organs pierced with cruel arrows, their armour and caparisons dislodged, lie like hills split by thunder, their bodies bathed in blood. Fallen horses, mangled with shafts, moaning and neighing in pain, vomit blood, some biting the earth and rolling their stark eyes. Elsewhere, the carnage is too awful to look at, with horsemen, rathikas and elephant-warriors fallen from their animals, dead or dying, lying immersed in the river of blood that flows, which is like the great Vaitarani in the domain of Yama.

The earth looks as if she is strewn with blazing planets fallen from the sky, or like the nocturnal firmament itself shining with planets of serene light. The shafts sped from the arms of Karna and Arjuna pierced elephants, horses and men and, quickly stilling their lives, entered the earth like serpents sliding into their holes with bent heads. Fine chariots shattered along with their warriors, weapons and proud standards, lie about piquantly, as if in bizarre sorrow. Spiked maces with golden bells, battle-axes, lances, heavy clubs, mallets, unsheathed swords and maces covered with cloth of gold, lie abandoned on the ground. Golden bows and arrows fitted with

golden wings, bright naked swords of superb temper, aureate lances, scimitars, royal parasols, chamara fans, conches, bright caparisons of elephants, standards, chariot fences, heavy necklaces, brilliant crowns, and yak-tails lie scattered everywhere, O Rajan.

Garlands, luminous with corals and pearls, chaplets for the head, bracelets for both the wrist and the upper arms, collars for the neck with threads of gold, diverse kinds of priceless diamonds, rubies and pearls, bodies raised and cared for in great luxury, and heads handsome and lambent as the moon, also lie broken and severed across the grim field. Abandoning their bodies, their robes and all kinds of pleasures, along with the ability to enjoy them, acquiring great punya for the devotion they showed to the svadharma of their varna, the heroic Kshatriyas have gone in blazes of glory to the realms of bliss.

Turn back, O Duryodhana! Let the troops retire. O king, retreat towards our camp. Look, the sun hangs low in the sky. Ah, remember that you are the cause of all this brutal destruction!"

Salya, with his heart bursting with grief, chokes and cannot go on. Duryodhana, however, is a man who has lost his very mind from grief. Tears flow incessantly from his eyes, and his white lips utter only one name, over and over. Your son weeps for the Suta's son, crying, "Karna! Oh Karna!"

Aswatthaman and all the kings repeatedly try to comfort Duryodhana, and then they retire towards their camp, frequently looking back at the lofty standard of Arjuna that seems to be on fire with his fame. At that hour, when everything around looks so resplendent, the features of the Kauravas, all of whom have resolved to kill or die, are unrecognisable for the blood, still flowing and caked, covers them. They cannot see the earth, drenched and covered with a patina with blood flowing from the bodies of men, horses and elephants, so she looks like a courtesan attired in crimson robes and floral garlands and ornaments of gold, O Rajan! Filled with grief at the death of Karna, they all lament loudly, crying, "Alas, Karna! Alas, Karna!"

The sun turns crimson, sinking, and all of them return to their camp. Karna, though, lies dead on hallowed Kurukshetra, still shining like the sun at his zenith, his body pierced by gold-winged shafts dyed in blood, shot from the Gandiva. It seems as if illustrious Surya Deva, ever kindly to his worshippers, has lovingly touched the gore drenched body of his child, and left, crimson with grief, to the ocean for a bath. The throngs of Devas and

Rishis, who came to witness the battle, entertain the same thought and leave for their respective homes. The crowd of other beings also return to their abodes both in swarga and bhumi. The Kuru warriors, too, having witnessed that duel without comparison between Arjuna and Karna, retire to their camp, filled with the rarest wonder and in their hearts applauding what they had seen.

Though slain in that duel, his armour gone, neither Karna's lustre nor magnificence abandon him, even in death. Everyone who sees his body feels that it looks like molten gold. He seems to be alive and radiant like fire or the sun. All the warriors, O king, are awestruck and frightened at the sight of Karna lying dead on the battlefield, like small animals at the sight of the great lion. Why, though dead, that Naravyaghra seems about to bellow out his commands; so little in him seems changed. His body clad in regal attire, and his severed head with its mighty neck, the Sutaputra's face resembles the full moon in majesty. Wearing ornaments and angadas made of bright gold, Vaikartana, though slain, lies like a gigantic tree, like a heap of pure gold, or like a blazing fire extinguished by the water of Partha's arrows. Arjuna's prowess stilled that Naravyaghra along with his sons, and he left the world, taking away with him his incomparable nobility, lustre and glory, which he had earned always in fair fight on earth.

He scorched the Pandavas and the Panchalas with the energy of his astras; his storms of incendiary arrows had burnt the enemy's divisions to ashes and, after heating the universe like the thousand-rayed Surya, Karna left the world, with his sons and followers. Thus died that shura who was a refuge to all that who came to him for help, like a kalpa vriksha is a haven to swarms of birds. He always said, "Take" but never, "I cannot give, for I have not."

All men of dharma always regarded him as one of their own. Such a warrior was Vrisha who fell in single combat with Arjuna Parantapa. All the wealth of that noble warrior had been dedicated to Brahmanas. There was nothing, not even his life that he would not give away to holy Brahmanas. He was always the favourite of his queens, exceptionally liberal, and a mighty Atiratha. Burnt by Partha's astras, he attained the highest end. He, relying upon whom your son had gone to war, has attained swarga, taking with him the last hope of victory, the happiness, and the sanctuary of the Kauravas.

When Karna falls, rivers stand still, the sun sets with a pale hue, the planet Mercury assumes the colour of fire and moves through the firmament in a strange orbit, why, the very sky seems torn in two. The earth utters abysmal and sorrowful rumblings from her very core; dread and violent winds begin to blow. All the points of the horizon, covered with smoke, seem to be on fire. The oceans are agitated and howl awfully. The mountains with their forests begin to quake, and all living creatures, O Rajan, feel great anguish.

Jupiter enters the nakshatra Rohini and assumes the colour of the moon or the sun. Upon the fall of Karna, the entire battlefield is alight with spirit fires while darkness envelops the sky. The earth trembles again and again, meteors fall from the sky and Rakshasas and other wanderers of the night celebrate. When Arjuna's Anjalikastra takes off Karna's head with the face as luminous and handsome as the moon, all beings in swarga, akasa and bhumi cry in lamentation.

After his victory over Karna, Arjuna, the favourite of the Devas, the Gandharvas, and Manavas, is magnificent in his tejas, as Indra was after his conquest of Vritra. The two Krishnas ride on their chariot with its rumble like the roar of thunderheads, and brilliance like the meridian sun in an autumn sky. The ratha flies banners and a standard with the great Vanara and other spirits, the banner incessantly creating bloodcurdling sounds, that chariot among chariots whose effulgence resembles that of Himalayan snow, the moon, the conch or crystal, and whose horses are like Indra's own.

The two paravirahas, Arjuna and Kesava, mahatejasvins whose ornaments of gold, pearls, rubies, diamonds and corals glow and sparkle, even being flecked with blood, wheel fearless and swift as the wind triumphantly across all Kurukshetra, and they look like Vishnu and Vasava mounted on the same chariot. With the twang of the Gandiva and the slaps of their palms, they continue to massacre the Kurus at will. Then Arjuna of the kapi-dhvaja and Krishna of the garuda-dhvaja raise their unearthly conches white as moonbeams and chased with gold, and setting them to their lips, blow a single note together, which fills the earth, the sky and the heavens, and pierce the hearts of their enemies with that sound.

O Kuruvarya, the forests, mountains, rivers and the sky reverberate with the sound of their conches which puts all the Kauravas in a panic, fills your son's army with fright, and gladdens Yudhishtira. As soon as the Kauravas

hear the blast of those conches, all of them leave the field with alacrity, deserting Salya and Duryodhana. Then diverse beings unite and, together, congratulate Krishna and Arjuna. Pierced with Karna's arrows, Achyuta and Dhananjaya are glorious like the many-rayed moon and sun risen, after dispelling darkness. Removing the countless arrows stuck in them, the two mighty ones, with well-wishers and friends around them, happily enter their own camp, like the lords Vasava and Vishnu when invoked by sacrificial priests.

Upon the death of Karna, the Devas, Gandharvas, Manushas, Charanas, Maharishis, Yakshas, and great Nagas worship Krishna and Arjuna with great reverence and wish them victory in all things. The two heroes receive all their friends, each according to his age, and rejoice with them their incomparable feats, like Indra and Vishnu after the overthrow of Bali.'"

CANTO 95

"Sanjaya says, 'Upon the fall of Karna, the defeated Kaurava army runs looking for places to hide. Their kings and commanders too, O Bhaarata, are anxious to withdraw their troops and your son is unable to check their flight. Duryodhana understands this and, acting on Salya's advice, withdraws the army. Kritavarman leads the remaining part of your Narayana troops and quickly retreats towards the encampment followed by Sakuni and one thousand Gandharas. Kripa, at the head of his large elephant force that resembles a mass of clouds, and Aswatthaman, drawing deep angry breaths at the Pandavas' victory, do the same. Susarman leads the Samsaptakas, which is still a large force despite their considerable decimation, back to their camp.

Mourning the loss of everything, Duryodhana withdraws, his heart broken, and a prey to many desperate thoughts. Salya drives Karna's chariot without its standard sorrowfully towards the camp. The other maharathas of the Kaurava army, though still numerous but afraid and filled with shame and almost deprived of their minds, quickly melt away, some applauding Arjuna, some Karna. Amongst those thousands of warriors of your army, there is not a man who still has any wish for war but all of them only long for their homes. The Kauravas despair of life, kingdom, wives and wealth. Recognising the need to console and guide them with care, your son,

himself full of grief, is nevertheless determined to rest them for the night and fight on the next day.

His warriors, O Rajan, accept his orders with bent heads and retire from the battlefield shattered and with pale faces.'"

CANTO 96

"Sanjaya says, 'After Karna is slain and the Kaurava troops run, Krishna joyfully embraces Partha and exults, "From this day men will always speak in the same breath of the death of both Vritra and Karna. Indra, the Deva king, killed Vritra with his Vajra and Karna you killed with your Gandiva. Go, O son of Kunti, and tell Yudhishtira Dharmaputra about your prowess that has made you famous throughout the three worlds. When he knows that you have killed Karna and accomplished that which you have been trying to for a long time, you will be freed from the debt you owe your king and brother. During your duel, he came once to watch, but he could not stay long because of his grievous injuries and returned to his tent."

Partha says, "So be it!" and they then turn the ratha back.

Krishna addresses the soldiers, and says, "Bless you all. Stand firm, be wary and face the enemy!"

To Dhrishtadyumna, Yudhamanyu, the twin sons of Madri, Vrikodara and Yuyudhana, he says, "Great Kshatriyas, be vigilant and hold your positions until we return after we inform the king of Karna's death."

They then set out for the king's tent and find Yudhishtira, that tiger among kings, resting on a comfortable bed of gold. With great joy, they touch the Dharmarajan's feet. Seeing their joy and the extraordinary wounds on their bodies, Yudhishtira knows that the son of Radha is dead

and rises quickly from his bed, repeatedly embraces Krishna and Arjuna and then asks Krishna how Karna died.

A smiling Vasudeva, with joined palms, tells Yudhishtira exactly how Karna was killed. "It is through good fortune that Arjuna, Bhima, Madri's two sons, and you are all safe, in this war where great shuras have died. The Suta's son Karna, the mighty Vaikartana, is dead, so do whatever should be done next. Destiny has ordained your victory, and your reputation grows in stature. The earth today drank the blood of the Sutaputra, that wretch among men, who laughed at Draupadi when they won her at the game of dice.

Come and look, Bharatarishabha, your enemy lies today on bare ground, pierced all over with this Partha's arrows. O Mahabaho, now rule with love and care this earth that is free of all your enemies, and enjoy with us all the benefits that accrue!"

With inexpressible joy, Yudhishtira salutes Krishna in return and says, "Good fortune, great fortune! It is not surprising, Devakinandana, that Partha should achieve superhuman feats when he has you for his sarathy."

Yudhishtira takes Krishna's right arm adorned with angadas, and says, "Narada told me that you two are the ancient Nara and Narayana, those ancient Maharishis who are the protectors and preservers of dharma. The sagacious Krishna Dwaipayana, the most blessed Vyasa has also repeatedly told me this Deva Purana. O Krishna, it is through your power that Dhananjaya has vanquished all his enemies. We were certain of victory from the day you agreed to become Partha's sarathy."

Dharmaputra Yudhishtira mounts his majestic chariot, harnessed to ivory white horses with black tails and fleet as thought, and with a troop of Pandava soldiers for his escort, sets out, conversing pleasantly with Krishna and Arjuna, to survey the battlefield where so much has happened. He sees Karna lying on Kurukshetra, pierced all over with arrows like a kadamba flower with filaments all around its body, and with thousands of golden lamps filled with perfumed oil illuminating him.

Seeing Karna with his son dead from the shafts shot from the Gandiva, at first Yudhishtira cannot believe his eyes and then, knowing his own long dread has in truth finally ended, lauds the Naravyaghras Madhava and Phalguna, and says, "O Govinda, today my brothers and I have become kings of the earth, because you are our Lord and our Protector. When the vile Duryodhana learns of the slaying of Karna, the ignoble son of

Dhritarashtra will despair about his life and kingdom. Through your grace, O Krishna, we have achieved our ends. Through good fortune, victory has been yours, O Govinda! Through great good fortune, we have annihilated the enemy. Through destiny, Arjuna has been crowned with victory. We passed thirteen years in exile and great sorrow. O Mahabaho, now through your grace, we will sleep happily this night."

In this way, O Rajan, does Dharmaraja Yudhishtira praise Krishna and Arjuna.

Seeing Karna and his son dead, Yudhishtira regards himself as being reborn. The warriors and commanders of the Pandava army, all filled with joy, approach Yudhishtira and congratulate him. Nakula, Sahadeva, Vrikodara, Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, and others among the Pandus, the Panchalas, and the Srinjayas, seasoned warriors, great shuras and praviras salute the son of Kunti at his victory over Karna. Extolling Yudhishtira, they shower their praise over the two Krishnas. Then, celebrating their great victory, those great maharathas all turn back towards their own encampment.

Thus, O Rajan, did this profound carnage come to pass because of your evil policy! Ah, why do you grieve now?' says Sanjaya."

Vaisampayana said, "The Kuru king Dhritarashtra, on hearing the evil tidings, fell on the ground from his throne. Similarly, the farsighted queen Gandhari also collapsed, weeping and lamenting the death of Karna. Vidura and Sanjaya both raised up the fallen monarch and began to console him. Similarly, the royal Kuru women helped Gandhari up and comforted her as best they could. Thinking destiny to be ineluctable and all-powerful, that blind Rajarishi Dhritarashtra, ravaged by deathly grief, seemed he might leave his body. His heart filled with anxiety and sorrow, the king, however, did not swoon again. Comforted, he remained still and silent, sunk deep in some abyss of despair.

He who reads an account of this great battle, which is like a yagna, between the noble Arjuna and Adhiratha's son Karna, or those who listen to an account of that duel, both obtain, O Bhaarata, the rewards of a great yagna properly performed. The learned say that the holy and the eternal Vishnu is Yagna, as well as each of those other Devas—Agni, Vayu, Soma and Surya. Therefore, he that listens to or recites this Parva without malice will be happy and attain every region of bliss. Filled with devotion, men of dharma always read this sacred and first of Samhitas. They that do, rejoice,

obtain wealth, every felicity and great fame, and gain the favour of Vishnu Narayana, that foremost of Purushas, of the illustrious Brahma, and of Bhava Mahadeva.

A Brahmana who reads it obtains the benefits of having studied all the Vedas; a Kshatriya gains strength and victory in battle; Vaishyas acquire immense wealth, and Sudras have health, happiness and freedom from disease. Then, again, the illustrious Vishnu is eternal and since it is that Deva who has been glorified in this Parva, the man reading or listening to it will be blissful and acquire all the objects of his heart's desire.

These words of the great Rishi Vyasa can never be untrue! The punya that a person earns from listening to the recitation of the Karna Parva is equal to his who makes gifts of the finest cows with their calves continuously for a whole year."

The End of Karna Parva

Salya Parva

CANTO 97

Janamejaya said, “O Maharishi, what do the remnants of the beaten Kaurava army do after Arjuna kills Karna? What strategy does Suyodhana adopt towards the rampaging Pandavas? Tell me in detail for I am eager to listen to the great exploits of my ancestors.”

Vaisampayana said, “O Bharatasattama, reduced by grief and despair, Dhritarashtra’s son Suyodhana staggers back to his camp with the remnants of his army, lamenting, ‘Alas, oh Karna!’ His commanders try to comfort him with advice from the Shastras but he finds no peace of mind. He contemplates his destiny and the need to perpetuate his sovereignty and firmly resolves to continue the war. Making Salya his senapati, he leads his remaining forces to battle.

Another terrible battle erupts between the Kurus and the Pandavas, like the one of long ago between the Devas and the Asuras. In the massacre that follows, Yudhishtira finally kills Salya at midday. With all his friends and kinsmen dead, Duryodhana flees the field and hides at the bottom of a lake. Bhimasena surrounds the lake with many maharathas, challenges Duryodhana and, after forcing him to come out and confront him, uses his great strength to kill him.

Only three Kuru maharathas—Aswatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman—are still alive after Duryodhana’s death. Burning with revenge, they slaughter the Panchala troops in a stealthy night attack. The next morning,

Sanjaya the Suta sets out from the camp and reaches Hastinapura, sombre and sorrowing; his limbs trembling, he enters the palace of the king. He weeps and wails, 'Alas, Rajan! Alas, the death of that noble king has ruined all of us. Alas, Kaala is all powerful and unpredictable, for the Pandavas have killed all our allies whose combined might was equal to that of Sakra himself.'

All the people who watch Sanjaya come back to the city in distress, O Janamejaya, they weep loudly and lament.

When the city hears of Duryodhana's death, the citizens are like a people demented. A deeply agitated Sanjaya enters Dhritarashtra's palace and finds him seated, surrounded by Gandhari, Vidura, his grieving daughters-in-law, kinsmen, friends and other well-wishers. In a voice choked with tears, he says, 'I am Sanjaya. I bow to you, O Bharatarishabha. Salya, the king of the Madras and our senapati, is dead. So, too, are Sakuni the gamester, and his son Uluka. Also annihilated are the Samsaptakas, the Kambojas, the Sakas, the Mlecchas, the Yavanas the Mountaineers, along with the Easterners, the Southerners, the Northerners and the Westerners. All the kings and all the princes are dead. Bhima has killed Duryodhana in the manner he vowed to. Suyodhana now lies in the dust, with his thighs and manhood smashed and covered in blood.

Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, Uttamaujas and Yudhamanyu along with the Prabhadrakas, the Panchalas, and the Chedis died in the war. Also ended are the lives of the five sons of Draupadi, and Karna's son, Vrishasena. All the troops that you mobilised, all the elephants as well as all the chariot-warriors and all the horses, have fallen. Very few are left alive. The influence of Kaala is such that because of the feud between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the world now consists only of women.

Only seven of the Pandava forces still live—the five Pandava brothers, Krishna and Satyaki. On your side, Kurudvaha, only three survive—Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman. Fate has used Duryodhana and his hatred for the Pandavas as the means to destroy the world.'

Hearing this, Dhritarashtra swoons. Vidura, Gandhari, the royal Kuru family and the entire royal household all fall on the ground, some senseless and others raving deliriously. Finally, slowly and with difficulty, Dhritarashtra regains his wits and, with trembling limbs and sorrowful heart, he looks around and says, 'O wise Vidura, you are now my only support for I am destitute with no sons left alive.'

He faints again and revives only when they sprinkle cold water on him and fan him. He remains silent, sighing heavily like a snake imprisoned in a jar. Seeing his king suffer, Sanjaya also weeps loudly. All the royal women too, including the renowned Gandhari, do the same. After a long while, during which Dhritarashtra repeatedly revives and swoons, he tells Vidura, 'Let Gandhari, the women and all these friends, retire to their homes and chambers. My mind is greatly unsettled.'

A trembling Vidura dismisses the women, O Janamejaya. Then Sanjaya looks sadly at Dhritarashtra, who is wracked with sobs, and with joined hands, comforts him with kind words."

CANTO 98

Vaisampayana said, "After the royal women leave, King Dhritarashtra, the son of Ambika, plunged into grief greater than what he has ever suffered, begins to lament, exhaling audibly and flailing his arms. He says, 'Alas, Sanjaya, dreadful is your news. You tell me that the Pandavas are all safe while my sons are dead. Alas, my hard heart must be made of the essence of adamant, since it does not break when I think of my sons, their age, and the games they played in their childhood. Although, being blind, I have never seen them, I loved them more than my life. I attended on their lives and rejoiced at their growth from childhood to youth and then to early manhood.

Hearing now that they lie dead, grief overwhelms me. Ah, come to me, Duryodhana! I am blind, old and defenceless, and without you what will become of me? Why have you abandoned all your allies, your kinsmen and friends and lie pitifully dead on bare ground. Where is your compassion, your love and your regard for me?

How did the Parthas kill you when you were invincible? When I wake up in the mornings, who will now lovingly and respectfully call me, "O Father," or "O Maharajan," or "O Jagatguro," and affectionately embrace me with love in his eyes, and seek my orders, saying, "Command me, O Kurudvaha."

Speak to me in that sweet voice once more! O my dearest son, I heard you say, "This wide earth is as much ours as it is of Pritha's son. Bhagadatta, Kripa, Salya, the two princes of Avanti, Jayadratha, Bhurisrava, Sala, Somadatta, Bahlika, Aswatthaman, Kritavarman, Brihadbala, Sakuni and many thousands of Mlecchas, Sakas and Yavanas have taken up arms for my sake. Sudakshina the king of the Kambojas, and the king of the Trigartas, Pitamaha Bhishma, the Acharyas Drona and Kripa, Srutayus, Ayutayus, Satayus, Jalasandha, Rishyasringa's son, the Rakshasas Alayudha and Alambusa, Subala, these and countless other kings were ready to cast away their lives in this great war. O Naravyaghra, I will fight, with their support and with my brothers around me, against all the Parthas, the Panchalas, the Chedis, Draupadi's sons, Satyaki, Kuntibhoja and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha.

Each of my allies can repel any Pandava attack. Why, Karna and I alone are a match for them. All my ally kings are eager to avenge the wrongs of the Pandavas and to accept my sovereignty. Moreover, Krishna has assured me that he will not put on armour or use weapons against us, Rajan."

Listening to what Duryodhana so often told me, I believed that the Pandavas would be defeated in this war. Now that the enemy has killed my sons and all the shuras who fought gallantly for us, what can I believe but that this must be destiny?

When Pitamaha Bhishma fell at the hands of Sikhandi, like a lion brought down by a jackal, what can it be but destiny?

When the Pandavas could quell Drona Acharya, that master of all weaponry, what can it be but fate?

When the enemy could kill Bhurisrava, Somadatta, Bahlika, Jayadratha and Bhagadatta, who were masters in fighting from elephant back, what can it be but providence?

When they could destroy Sudakshina, Jalasandha, as well as Srutayus and Ayutayus, what can it be but fate?

When the Pandavas could defeat and kill maharatha Pandya, what can it be but destiny?

When the enemy could kill Brihadbala, the king of the Magadhas, the valiant Ugrayudha, the two princes of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, the king of the Trigartas, as well as numberless Samsaptakas, what can it be but fate?

When the Pandavas could kill king Alambusa, the Rakshasas Alayudha and Rishyasringa's son, what can it be but destiny?

When the enemy could massacre the Narayanas, as well as the Gopalas, fighters that were invincible in battle, and many thousands of Mlecchas, what can it be but fate?

When the Pandavas could slay Sakuni and his son Uluka, what can it be but fate?

When the war claimed innumerable Kshatriyas, all-powerful as Sakra himself, when the war claimed great warriors from so many different kingdoms, Sanjaya, what can this be but destiny?

It must be fate that killed my valiant sons and grandsons, as well as my friends and brethren.

Without doubt, man is subject to destiny. I am an unfortunate whose children are all dead. Old as I am, how can I now submit to my enemies? As I am without relatives and kinsmen, I will take sannyasa and seek exile in the vana. How will I be able to stand the triumphant shouts of Bhimasena, who by himself butchered my hundred sons? He will now frequently refer to the killing of Duryodhana in my hearing and I, burning with grief and sorrow, will not be able to suffer his savage words.'

Dhritarashtra alternately swoons and weeps, thinking about the death of his sons. Overwhelmed, he once more enquires of his charioteer Sanjaya about the details of the battle.

Dhritarashtra asks, 'Whom did my warriors choose as their senapati, after Bhishma, Drona and Karna had fallen? The Pandavas have killed all our generals: Bhishma, Drona and now the valiant Karna. Long before this war started, the noble Vidura told me that Duryodhana would be the cause of the decimation of the population of the earth. I am a fool not to have seen the truth of his prediction. Fate decreed then that I would ignore his words. The results of that evil course are now clear to behold.

Explain once more to me, O son of Gavalgana, who led our army after Karna's fall? Who were the Kshatriyas who challenged Arjuna and Vasudeva? Who protected Salya's flanks and his rear on the battlefield? How could the Pandavas kill the powerful Salya as well as Duryodhana, when all of you were present?

Tell me all the details of the destruction of the Kauravas and of my son Duryodhana. Tell me how Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the five sons of Draupadi, and all the Panchalas with their followers died. Tell me how the

five Pandavas, Kripa, Kritavarman, Aswatthaman and the two Satwatas, Krishna and Satyaki, escaped with their lives. You are a skilled narrator, Sanjaya, so tell me everything.'"

CANTO 99

"Sanjaya says, 'Hear, O Rajan, of the great slaughter of the Kurus and the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war. The enemy repeatedly routs your troops after Arjuna kills Karna, but they return to fight each time. A great fear enters the hearts of your sons as they hear Partha rejoice with shouts of triumph. There is no warrior in your army to stand firm and to galvanise the Kaurava troops. They look like shipwrecked merchants adrift without a raft upon the fathomless ocean. They retire as dusk falls, disheartened and demoralised. Finding their commanders dead, your sons flee in fear, bloodied and without weapons or armour. In panic, they even strike each other, afraid that Arjuna and Bhima may be hunting them down."

Many great maharathas flee, some on horses, some on chariots, and some on elephants leaving their foot soldiers to their fate. The melee results in broken chariots, slain elephants, horsemen and the massacre of foot soldiers.

"I will take up my post at the rear of the army, where Arjuna will be unable to either surround me or to attack me directly. Today, I will kill Arjuna, Krishna, Bhima and the rest of my enemies, and free myself from the debt I owe Karna. Quick, whip the horses, Suta," Duryodhana commands his charioteer.

Elsewhere on the battlefield, many of your warriors who had lost their elephants, horses or chariots along with another twenty-five thousand foot soldiers, march to the battlefront. Leading four kinds of forces, Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna encircle and cut down your soldiers, despite vigorous resistance. Many challenge the two by name and attempt to attack them. Since the rules of fair combat require that one should not fight from a chariot when the opponents are on foot, an enraged Bhima leaps down from his chariot. Effortlessly wielding his heavy iron gada stamped with gold, he fells all your warriors with crushing blows that spray blood everywhere, even like the Destroyer at the end of the yuga, before he joins Dhrishtadyumna.

A powerful force led by Madri's twin sons and Satyaki engages Sakuni's large cavalry in a fierce battle and easily decimates it.

Meanwhile, drawing his celebrated Gandiva, Arjuna scythes into the Kauravas' chariot-division. Your troops run on seeing Arjuna's ratha, driven by Krishna, racing towards them. A division of twenty-five thousand foot-soldiers unsupported by chariots and cavalry, tries to surround Arjuna but Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna annihilate them in no time. The sight of Dhrishtadyumna on a chariot with a lofty Kovidara flagstaff and drawn by horses white as doves, fills your troops with terror.

Satyaki, Nakula and Sahadeva pursue Sakuni, while Chekitana and the five sons of Draupadi blow their conches after destroying a large cohort of your troops. Arjuna notices some of your men still holding their ground, and shrouds them with a barrage of arrows. The dust of battle envelops the scene, and nothing is visible. Soon, darkness falls and your troops flee in disarray.

Seeing his army broken, O Kurupravira, Duryodhana attacks friend and foe alike in fury at Karna' death. He challenges all the Pandavas, like the Asura Bali challenging the Devas in battle long ago. The Pandavas upbraid him and try to subdue him but he fearlessly holds them off in a mighty exhibition of skill. Some way off, he sees some of his battered troops in panic. He rallies them saying, "I do not see where you can find shelter from the Pandavas. What use then in flight? The Pandava army is greatly reduced and the two Krishnas are exhausted. If all of us make a stand here, we will surely prevail, while if you break ranks, the Pandavas will overrun you.

Death is welcome if it is in battle and by Kshatriya dharma, for it bestows eternal happiness in the other world. Listen to me, all you

Kshatriyas. It is better to submit to the power of an angry Bhimasena than to abandon your Kshatriya dharma. You Kauravas, there is no better path to swarga than a dharma yuddha. A warrior acquires in a day regions of bliss in the other world that would otherwise take long years to obtain."

At this, the Kshatriya maharathas, led by Duryodhana, once more charge the Pandavas firmly resolved to fight to the last. A ferocious battle erupts again, like the one between the Devas and the Asuras.'"

CANTO 100

"Sanjaya says, 'The stricken Kaurava army, with its broken chariots and dead warriors, elephants and foot-soldiers, Rajan, looks like Rudra's playground. After the retreat of your grief-stricken son Duryodhana, Partha mows down thousands of hapless Kshatriyas. Their screams fill the Kaurava command with despair.

The venerable Acharya Kripa says angrily, "Listen to me, Duryodhana. Having committed oneself to the path of war, he who observes Kshatriya dharma must be prepared to fight his father, sons and close relatives. One earns great punya if one dies in battle and great sin if one flees. The life of a man aspiring to live by Kshatriya dharma is exceptionally difficult.

Let me give you some advice, O Kurupravira. After the fall of Bhishma, Drona, Karna and Jayadratha, after the death of your brothers and your son Lakshmana, our hopes of retaining sovereignty are all but over. We are alive only to mourn their deaths.

Even while they lived, we could never have hoped to vanquish Arjuna. With Krishna for his eyes, even the Devas cannot defeat him. The sight of his kapi-dhvaja, lofty as Indra's stambha, fills the vast Kaurava army with stark fear. Our hearts fail hearing Bhima's leonine roars, the blare of the Panchajanya and the twang of the Gandiva. Moving like lightning and blinding our eyes, Arjuna's golden bow is a circle of fire that shoots forth bolts of light as he shakes it. His white horses are marvellous as the moon

and they fly as if devouring the skies. With their reins in Krishna's hands, they bear Arjuna to battle like the wind driving cloud masses. He raged through your great army like a conflagration consuming dry grass in the forest in winter. Magnificent as Indra, Dhananjaya is like the four-tusked Airavata when he assails us. Those maharathas, the two Krishnas, are beyond being awesome.

Today is the seventeenth day of this dreadful war, O Bhaarata, and Arjuna has your army reeling like a tempest-tossed boat on the bosom of the sea. Where was Karna, where was Drona, where was Kritavarman, where were Dusasana and your other brothers, where was I, where were you, when Arjuna killed Jayadratha? What then is there for us to do now? The very twang of the Gandiva robs us of our courage, so who remains among your warriors who can stop Arjuna and his devastras?

Your army without a senapati is like a night without the moon, or like a dried up river bed that elephants have dug up with their tusks. Like a great flame in a heap of grass, Arjuna will easily incinerate your headless army.

The valour of Satyaki and Bhima can split the mountains or dry up all the oceans. Bhima will soon accomplish the vow that he swore in the sabha. You have committed many unpardonable wrongs against the Pandavas and the results of your evil deeds have now come to haunt you. You and the sparse remnants of your army, O Suyodhana, are both in mortal danger. Save yourself, for everyone else alive depends upon you. Without your asylum, everything is over.

The strategy advocated by Brihaspati is that he who is losing should seek peace and reconciliation, while he who is winning should opt to fight. Our army is now lesser and weaker than the Pandava army, and so wisdom lies in making peace. He who does not know what is good for him, or knowingly disregards it, will soon lose his kingdom and never achieve anything worthwhile in this world. If submission to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira is the price to pay for retaining our sovereignty, it is preferable to complete defeat at his hands. They will allow you to continue as king if Vidura and Krishna ask Yudhishtira to.

None of them can deny Dhritarashtra anything. I have no ulterior motives and my advice is only for your benefit. If you do not listen to me now, Rajan, you will remember my words when you are taking your last breath."

The venerable Acharya, Kripa son of Saradwat, is in tears by now and he almost swoons.'"

CANTO 101

"Sanjaya says, 'Breathing heavily, Duryodhana silently listens to Kripacharya. He thinks a while and says, "You have said to me whatever a friend is duty bound to say. You have fought for me without a thought for your life. The world has seen you penetrate into the midst of the Pandava divisions and fight their maharathas valiantly. However, O Mahabaho, like bitter medicine that ill pleases a dying man, your valuable and reasonable advice does not please me.

In the past, we took away Yudhishtira's kingdom by defeating him at a game of dice, so why should he trust me now? We deceived Krishna when he came to us as an envoy for the Parthas. Why then, O Maharishi, should he believe me now? He will never forget that we once dragged the princess Draupadi, weeping piteously, into the sabha and that we deprived Yudhishtira of his kingdom.

Today we have confirmed with our own eyes the popular belief that the two Krishnas share the same heart. From the time he heard of the death of his sister's son, Abhimanyu, Krishna has passed his nights in grief. We have offended him greatly so why should he forgive us? Arjuna, too, is bitter after we killed Abhimanyu, so why should he give me a care?

Bhima swore a terrible oath. He may die but he will never break that vow. Madri's twins breathe animosity towards us, and in battle, they resemble a pair of Yamas.

Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandi have drawn their blades against me so why will they, O best of Brahmanas, desire my good.

Dusasana viciously hauled princess Draupadi into the Kuru sabha, when she was in her season and clad in a single cloth. Burning for revenge, she, born for a yagna fire, performs the most stringent tapasya for the success of her husbands and for my destruction. She sleeps every day on bare ground, intending to do so until the end of the war. Remembering the near naked Draupadi in distress, who will now dissuade the Pandavas from war?

Abandoning all pride, Krishna's sister Subhadra serves Draupadi as her sakhi. It is later than you think, O Kripa—everything is ablaze and no one can put out that fire. Once we killed Abhimanyu, peace with the Pandavas became impossible.

I enjoyed ruling over all this earth, by myself. How can I now reign at the pleasure of the Pandavas? I once shone like the sun over the heads of all the kings of the world. How can I now walk behind Yudhishtira like a wretched slave? I cannot accept your mild and benign counsel, for this is not the time for peace.

I regard fighting the dharma yuddha to be good policy. This is not the time to act like a eunuch. I have performed many yagnas and given generous dakshina to Brahmanas; I have listened to countless Vedic recitations, and I have helped anyone who came to me in distress. I have conquered foreign lands, stamped on the heads of my enemies, ruled my own kingdom wisely, and enjoyed diverse pleasures. My servants are all well looked after and I have fulfilled all my desires. Acharya, how will I now humble myself before the Pandavas?

I have pursued dharma, artha and kama. I have paid my debt to the Pitris and to Kshatriya dharma. Certainly, there is no happiness left for me here. My honour means more to me than my kingdom or my life.

Fame is all that one should acquire in this world and one can have it only through war. For a Kshatriya to die at home in his bed is shameful and sinful. Only the man who, after performing yagnas, casts away his body in the forest or in battle wins glory. He is no man who dies miserably, weeping in pain, afflicted by disease and decay, and in the midst of crying relatives. Abandoning all objects of enjoyment, I will now, through dharma yuddha, go to the realms of Sakra and find the companionship of others who have attained that highest end.

Beyond doubt, swarga is the habitation of warriors of dharma-neeti, who never retreat from battle, who are gifted with intelligence and devoted to truth, who perform yagnas, and who have been sanctified in the final yagna of war. The different tribes of Apsaras will undoubtedly smile at them, while their Pitris in swarga, seeing them worshipped in the sabha of the Devas, will rejoice. We should walk down the path, which the Devas and our venerable Pitamaha, our Acharya Drona, Jayadratha, Karna and Dusasana have all taken.

So many brave kings who fought for me in this war now lie dead on the battlefield. They discharged their Kshatriya dharma in battle, after performing yagnas as ordained in the Shastras, and now live in bliss in Indra's abode. They paved the way to that blessed region, a road that will be difficult to travel on because of the throngs of warriors that hurry along it to reach that goal. I remember with gratitude the efforts of those heroes and desire to pay off the debt I owe them, instead of fixing my heart upon my kingdom.

If I save my own life after causing the death of my kith and kin, the world will censure me. What kind of sovereignty can I enjoy without relatives, friends and well-wishers, and yielding to the son of Pandu? I, who have lorded over the Earth, must now acquire Heaven though fair fight. It cannot be otherwise."

All the assembled Kshatriyas signify their approval by applauding and cheering the king.

Without grieving about their defeat and filled with enthusiasm, they decide to display their courage and fight on. They are delighted at the prospect of battle and, after they groom their animals, withdraw to their tents for the night. They bathe in the red waters of the Saraswati on the sacred and beautiful tableland at the foot of Himavat, and quench their thirst with that water. Their spirits now raised, and urged by fate, they wait and rest, giving courage to one another.'"

CANTO 102

"Sanjaya says, 'Happy at the prospect of battle Rajan, Salya, Chitrasena, Sakuni, Aswatthaman, Kripa, Kritavarman, Sushena, Aristasena, Dhritasena, Jayatsena and all the kings and their warriors, spend the night at the foot of Himavat. It is for the first time, after Karna's death, that your sons find peace in the mountains. Now determined to fight, they salute the king and request him in the presence of Salya to name another senapati and assure him that they will conquer their enemies under that new General.

Duryodhana drives up to that seasoned warrior Aswatthaman. He has muscular limbs, a full head of hair, sweet speech, eyes like the petals of a full-blown lotus, a face with the dignity of Meru, and a neck with three lines like those of a conch shell. His arms are massive and well joined; he has a broad and deep chest, and his neck, eyes, tread, and voice are like those of Mahadeva's bull Nandin. In speed and strength, he is like Garuda or Vayu. Radiant like the sun, he rivals Usanas in intelligence and the moon in beauty, form and countenance. His body, made as if from a number of golden lotuses, consists of strong joints, powerful thighs, waist, hips, and elegant fingers and fingernails. Apparently, the Creator made him with care after collecting all the beautiful and goodly attributes in creation.

Drona's son bears every auspicious mark; he is clever; he is an ocean of learning and invincible in battle. He knows, in all its details, the astra

shastra, the science of weaponry consisting of four padas and ten angas. He has complete knowledge of the four Vedas as well as of the fifth, the Akhyanas. After worshipping Trilochana and observing many vratas, his father Drona, who possessed great punya and who was not born of a woman, begot him upon a wife also not born of a woman.

Your son Suyodhana says to him, “Today you are our greatest strength. Tell us who is to be our senapati who will lead us to victory against the Pandavas.”

Aswatthaman says, “Let Salya be our senapati. In ancestry, in ability, in energy, in fame, in beauty of person, and in every other accomplishment, he is our superior. Grateful for the services rendered to him, he fights for us abandoning the sons of his own sister. He leads a large army of his own, and is like a second Kartikeya, the Deva-Senapati. If he leads us, we will be victorious as the Devas were when Kartikeya was their leader.”

All the kings surround Salya, loudly acclaim him as their senapati, and wish him victory. Alighting from his ratha, Duryodhana joins his palms and, addressing Salya, that rival of Drona and Bhishma in war, says, “The time has come for everyone to distinguish between true and fair weather friends. When you lead our army into battle, the Pandavas, Panchalas and their allies will be demoralised.”

Salya says, “I will do all that you expect of me. Everything that I possess—my life breath, my kingdom, and my wealth—is at your service.”

Duryodhana says, “I offer you the leadership of my army, Uncle. Protect us and lead us just as Kartikeya commanded the Devasena. Obliterate our enemies in battle even as Indra killed the Danavas.””

CANTO 103

"Sanjaya continues, 'Salya asks Duryodhana, "Why do you consider the two Krishnas to be the greatest of maharathas? Why, even together they cannot equal me! When roused, I can confront the whole world, with all the Devas, Asuras and Manavas. I accept your offer to command your army. I assure you that I will form such a vyuha that our enemies will not be able to overrun us and then I will vanquish the Parthas and the Somakas."

Without losing any time, Duryodhana pours sanctified water over Salya, performs the rites ordained in the Shastras and invests him with the command of the Kaurava army. Loud shouts arise from the now optimistic Kaurava and Madrakas warriors who beat and blow diverse musical instruments.

They shout, "Victory and long life to you, Rajan! With your support, let the Dhartarashtras rule the wide earth. You can vanquish the three worlds with all their Manavas, Devas and Asuras. The Somakas and Srinjayas are only mortal!"

Hearing their praise, Salya experiences the joy that only men with pure souls can feel. He says, "Today I will either annihilate all the Panchalas and the Pandavas, or die on the field and go to swarga. The Pandavas, Krishna, Satyaki, the sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, all the Prabhadrakas, Parthas, all the Siddhas and the Charanas and the entire

world will see my prowess, the might of my bow, my dexterity, the strength of my arms and the wealth of astras that I possess. Whatever tactics they adopt will be of no avail to them and I will put an end to the Pandava maharathas today. I will surpass Drona, Bhishma and Karna, and I will fulfil your wishes and make you happy."

After they see Salya receive command of the army, no one among your troops, O Bharatarishabha, any longer grieves over Karna's death. They are happy and consider the Parthas as already defeated and slain. Your troops sleep contentedly that night in their newfound peace.

Hearing the shouts of your army, Yudhishtira tells Krishna in the hearing of all the Kshatriyas, "Salya, king of the Madras, the great archer whom all the warriors highly regard, O Madhava, has been made the Kuru senapati. Tell us what we must do now."

Krishna says, "I know Salya intimately, O Bhaarata. He is a formidable, renowned and seasoned warrior, and knows all the modes of warfare. Why, I think he is equal to Bhishma, Drona or Karna, or perhaps, superior to them all. I can think of no warrior who can match Salya in battle. Strong as a lion or an elephant, he will range fearlessly on the field like Rudra at the end of the yuga. Only you, O Yudhishtira, can vanquish him. Kill him quickly just as Vasava did the Asura Namuchi. He is well nigh invincible and only upon his fall will you be able to overrun the Dhartarashtra army.

Do not show him any compassion, thinking that he is your maternal uncle; only observe Kshatriya dharma. You have crossed the fathomless oceans that were Bhishma, Drona and Karna, so do not drown now with your followers in the print of a cow's hoof that Salya is. Display in battle all the power of your tapasya and your Kshatriya tejas and kill the Madra king."

Krishna withdraws to his tent for the evening, with the Pandavas' salutations. Yudhishtira dismisses his brothers and the Somakas, and retires for the night in some contentment, knowing that Karna is no more. He is like an elephant from whose body its keepers have plucked out a thousand spears and arrows. All the great archers and maharathas of the Panchalas and the Pandavas, happy at the fall of Karna, sleep peacefully that night, their fears dispelled.'"

CANTO 104

"Sanjaya says, 'Next morning, king Duryodhana exhorts his warriors as they prepare for war. They put on armour and ready the elephants and chariots. The sound of musical instruments reverberates in the camp and swells the martial fever of the soldiers. Soon, the Kaurava maharathas form themselves in battle array and, with their divisions, stand ready for war under the command of Salya.

All your commanders, with Kripa, Kritavarman, Aswatthaman, Salya, Sakuni and the remaining kings, meet your son and take counsel on their strategy. They decide that anyone who fights the Pandavas alone and unsupported, or he who deserts a comrade, they will consider stained with the five grave and all the minor sins. They then sally forth to fight.

Similarly, the Pandava troops come out in battle array to face the Kauravas. O Bharatasattama, the noise of the advancing army with its chariots and elephants sounds like the agitated ocean breaking on rocky shores.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'You have told me about the fall of Bhishma, Drona and of Karna. Tell me now, Sanjaya, how Yudhishtira killed Salya and how Bhimasena killed my son Duryodhana.'

Sanjaya says, 'I will describe the last battle to you, Rajan, which caused such great destruction of human lives and those of elephants and horses. Your sons had strong hopes that, although Bhishma, Drona and Karna had

fallen, the Parthas would meet their conqueror in Salya. Your son Duryodhana draws comfort from the thought that in Salya he has finally found a protector, a victor.

A grand vyuha Salya forms, in every aspect. His very presence inspires your sons with confidence. Mounted upon his chariot, brandishing his mighty bow and leading Karna's sons and the brave Madrakas on the left flank of his vyuha, Salya comes into battle. He positions Kritavarman and Kripa on the right flank, as well as the Sakas and the Yavanas. Aswatthaman defends his rear and the Kambojas, while Duryodhana and the Kuru warriors march in the centre along with Sakuni and Uluka. Throwing a rough ring around the troops are Trigartas, a large force of cavalry, and other troops.

The Pandava archers divide themselves into three segments. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi and Satyaki dash ahead and strike swiftly while Yudhishtira and his troops try to corner Salya. Arjuna selects Kritavarman and the Samsaptakas for himself, Bhimasena and his Somaka maharathas attack Kripa, while the two sons of Madri and their troops charge Sakuni and Uluka. Your warriors, thousands upon thousands of them, armed with diverse weapons and filled with battle lust, rush at the Pandavas.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'When the battle commences, what, Sanjaya, was the strength of each of the armies?'

Sanjaya says, 'O Bharatarishabha, eleven thousand chariots, ten thousand seven hundred elephants, two hundred thousand cavalry and three million foot soldiers is the strength of your army, while six thousand rathas, six thousand elephants, ten thousand cavalry, and one million foot soldiers are all that remain of the Pandava forces.

The Kauravas and the Pandavas come to war on another dawn, determined to make an end of each other. And a pitched and bloody battle breaks out between them.'"

CANTO 105

"Sanjaya says, 'The encounter between the Kurus and the Srinjayas, Rajan, is as dreadful as the one between the Devas and the Asuras. Great chaos holds sway as warriors on elephants and chariots kill each other with spears, lances and cloth-yard shafts, while foot soldiers are trampled underfoot. The battlefield presents a stunning sight, like a flowering forest with hundreds of headless trunks and chatras and yak-tail fans. The earth resounds with the tramp and shouts of soldiers, the rumble of chariots, the grunts of elephants, the booming of drums, the blasting of conches and the blare of other instruments. In the resultant confusion, nothing is clear. Littered with mangled heads and crimson with blood, the earth looks as if in bloom with golden lotuses. The thudding of falling heads sounds like falling fruits of palmyra trees. The lopped off thighs of warriors like elephant trunks, arms like tusks smeared with sandalwood paste and wearing costly keyuras, jerk and writhe in strange frenzy.

A river of blood forms again on the field, flowing towards the nether world, carrying with it broken chariots, standards and banners, severed limbs and other body parts, arms, armour and armaments, and dead elephants and horses. Filled with all manner of debris, Kurukshetra looks as if it is covered by swarms of chakravakas, trivenus and dandas. The sight, while it exhilarates the brave, fills the timid with fear.

That savage battle, in which no quarter is asked for or shown, results in an appalling devastation of all the four kinds of forces. Many warriors loudly call out for help from their relatives and friends—in vain, as those called upon turn away in fear.

Arjuna and Bhima shatter your still sizeable army and make your soldiers collapse like drunken women. They blow their conches and give echoing roars of triumph. Hearing this, Yudhishtira leads Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, and the two fierce and invincible sons of Madri, to assail Salya and your legions. Loud cries of distress arise from your troops, as your commanders try to hold the troops together. For all that, they cannot rally your men, who break ranks and run, whipping their horses and elephants, deserting their relatives and comrades, worried only about their own safety.'"

CANTO 106

"Sanjaya says, 'Finding his army fleeing, Salya tells his charioteer, "Quick, take me to where Dharmaputra Yudhishtira fights under the sovereign white chatra held over his head! I will show them what I can do and the Parthas will not stand up to me."

Falling upon the Pandava host, Salya stops it like the continent checking the surging sea. The fleeing Kauravas seeing the turnaround, return to battle with new impetus, and another bloody engagement results.

Nakula and Karna's son Chitrasena assail each other with relentless flights of arrows. Equally matched, they carefully look for the other's weaknesses. Rending Nakula's bow at the grip, Chitrasena first buries three golden arrows in his forehead and then fells his horses, his standard and charioteer. Picking up a sword, Nakula charges his antagonist like a lion, while his opponent continues to shoot at him. Deflecting the arrows with his shield, he reaches Chitrasena's chariot and in full view of the troops, hacks off Chitrasena's handsome, diadem-decked head with a swing of his blade. All the maharathas present give loud cries of praise and approval.

Meanwhile, seeing their brother killed, Sushena and Satyasena, the two other sons of Karna, sweep on Nakula, like a pair of tigers attacking an elephant in the deep forest. Though wounded by their arrows, the Pandava swiftly climbs into another chariot, takes up a new bow and stands ready, like a furious Yama. The two brothers, O Bhaarata, smash his new ratha but

Nakula retaliates by killing Satyasena's four horses and ruins his bow. The intense battle continues, with each destroying the other's bow a number of times, and injuring each other severely with well-aimed arrows. Finally, Nakula picks up a bright spear, with a golden shaft steeped in oil, which resembles a female serpent incessantly flicking its tongue. He hurls it at Satyasena, and it plunges cleanly through that prince's chest and drops him dead from his chariot.

Insensate with rage, Satyasena's brother Sushena destroys Nakula's chariot and covers him in a solid swath of arrows. Seeing Nakula in trouble, Sutasoma, his son by Draupadi, races up to rescue his father. Like a lion springing onto a mountaintop, Nakula leaps into Sutasoma's chariot and again engages Sushena. With a crescent-headed shaft, he decapitates his opponent; like a lofty tree on the bank of a river, undermined by the current, Karna's son collapses. Your demoralised army streams away from the field, O Bharatarishabha, until Salya arrives on the scene.

With tigerish roars and strumming his bow, Salya rallies his forces. He fills your troops with courage, and they flock to him once more and stand ready to face the enemy. Also roaring and loosing cataracts of arrows that fill the air with a thick buzzing as of swarms of black bees, Yudhishtira, Satyaki, Bhima and the twins launch a vicious attack on your troops and another bloody battle ensues.

After razing many Samsaptakas, Arjuna, his kapi-dhvaja flapping in the wind, turns on another wing of the Kaurava army. Along with Dhrishtadyumna and his warriors, they launch a combined attack, shooting tirades of arrows. Utterly overwhelmed, the Kaurava army is petrified, not knowing which way to turn. Soon after, they lose their leading warriors, then waver and fall apart, and the Pandava warriors decimate them.

Similarly, your sons also slaughter the Pandava soldiers in their thousands. The two armies, like two streams in the monsoon, agitate and massacre each other and a great fear enters the hearts of your warriors, Rajan, as well as those of the Pandavas.'"

CANTO 107

"Sanjaya says, 'A terrible bloodletting occurs on Kurukshetra, as Kaurava and Pandava soldiers maul each other. Warriors flee, elephants trumpet in pain, foot-soldiers scream, horses run wildly in panic, and another carnage follows. The battle begins at about the hour of sunrise and, slowly but surely, the Pandavas led by Yudhishtira gain ascendancy as the Kuru army weakens and grows frantic like a herd of deer frightened by a forest fire.

Seeing his army struggle helplessly like a cow sunk in a quagmire, Salya rushes to their rescue and the Pandavas turn to face his attack. They see various portents and omen on the field as the earth with her mountains trembles and groans and bright meteors flash through the sky and crash into the ground. Deer, bison and birds in large numbers escape from dreadful Kurukshetra, with your army to their right. The planets Venus and Mars, in conjunction with Mercury, appear behind the Pandavas and in front of the Kauravas. Glowing flames issue from the points of astras, dazzling warriors' eyes. Crows and owls perch upon the heads of the combatants and on their flagpoles.

A fierce skirmish breaks out as, mustering all their strength, the Kauravas charge the Pandava army. An ebullient Salya pours dense showers of arrows over Yudhishtira, like the thousand-eyed Indra lashing the earth with torrential rain. He wounds Bhima, the five sons of Draupadi,

Dhristadyumna, the two sons of Madri, Satyaki and Sikhandi, each with ten gold winged arrows. In endless swarms, Salya's shafts fall like thunderbolts from the clouds, and maim and kill elephants, horses, and warriors. He decimates the Prabhadrakas and the Somakas and yells in exultation. The Pandava army is in a panic and looks to Yudhishtira for protection.

With another downpour of arrows, Salya strafes Yudhishtira who, with some startling archery of his own, checks the Madra as an ankush does an infuriated elephant. Then Salya drills an arrow like a snake right through Yudhishtira and into the earth. This enrages the Pandavas, and Bhima, Sahadeva, Nakula and the five sons of Draupadi target Salya with their sizzling shafts. Racing to support him, come Kritavarman, Kripa Uluka, Sakuni, Ashwatthaman and all your sons. A hail of shafts from Kritavarman's bow stops Bhimasena in his tracks.

A rampaging Kripa rakes Dhrishtadyumna with multiple arrows while Sakuni confronts the sons of Draupadi, and Aswatthaman faces the twins. Duryodhana confronts Krishna and Arjuna and strikes them both with several shafts. Hundreds of individual duels break out between your men and the enemy on different parts of the field. Kritavarman, king of the Bhojas, kills Bhimasena's brown horses, forcing Bhima to jump down from his chariot and fight on foot with his mace.

Salya kills Sahadeva's horses and his opponent retaliates by killing Sahadeva's son with his sword. A cautious duel unfolds between Kripacharya and Dhrishtadyumna while Aswatthaman calmly bloodies each of Draupadi five sons with ten arrows, two for each prince. Bhima mounts a fresh chariot but Kritavarman kills his horses again, once more forcing him to spring down from his chariot and to rush at Kritavarman with his awful gada. Kritavarman escapes narrowly with his life.

Salya massacres many Somakas and Pandava troops and lacerates Yudhishtira with many barbs. Bhima, biting his lower lip in anger, attacks Salya with his iron mace with which he has destroyed elephants, horses and enemy soldiers. It resembles Yama's bludgeon, and wrapped in a cloth of gold, glows like a meteor. Terrible as a she-snake, it is hard as the Vajra, and, smeared with sandalwood paste and other liniments it is like a desirable woman. Greased with marrow, fat and blood, it produces harsh sounds from the bells attached to it, filling the enemy troops with terror. That weapon, as famed all over the world as Indra's Vajra, can rive mountain summits.

This is the gada with which once Bhima challenged an enraged Kubera, Maheswara's friend and Lord of Alaka and the Nine treasures, on Kailasa. Once, when Bhima went to Gandhamadana to fetch saugandhika flowers for Draupadi, he used it to kill a host of proud and mighty Guhyakas gifted with powers of maya. Hefting his hexagonal mace, Bhima rushes at Salya and, with a blow, smashes down his four horses to the ground.

Salya flings a javelin into Bhima's massive chest and gives a shout of triumph as it pierces the titan's armour and lodges in his body. However, calmly drawing the spear from his body, Vrikodara skewers Salya's charioteer with it. Salya jumps down from his chariot and gazes bleakly at Bhima, dumfounded by the Pandava's feat. Salya also takes up his mace and speculatively eyes his enemy. Witnessing Bhima's fearsome exploit, the Parthas are jubilant and applaud the indefatigable son of Vayu.'"

CANTO 108

"Sanjaya says, 'With his charioteer dead, Salya stands still on the field like the blazing yuga-fire; like the Kailasa Mountain with its formidable crest; like Vasava with his Vajra; like Mahadeva with his trisula. The sound from thousands of conches, trumpets, and exultant shouts and roars inspire the warriors. The watching combatants of both armies applaud them, and say, "Wonderful! Other than Salya or Balarama there is no one who can match Bhima in a gada yuddha. And only Bhima can dare to face Salya, the illustrious king of the Madras, in a mace fight."

Evenly matched as they are, they warily circle each other with frequent leaps into the air, bellowing like bulls. Salya's mace with a resplendent cloth of gold wound around it, looks like a sheet of fire, while Bhima's gada flashes like lightning in the midst of clouds. When the two maces clash, sparks fly like showers of embers, and appear to set the sky ablaze. Like two gigantic elephants locking tusks and goring each other, they begin to pound each other. Soon they are bathed in blood and look like two flowering Kinsukas.

The sound of the blows from their maces resounds like successive peals of thunder. They stop momentarily to catch their breath before they close again and belabour each other. Finally, battered and exhausted, they both fall down at the same moment. Seeing this, the warriors of both armies exclaim in concern and apprehension.

Sweeping in on his chariot, Kripa arrives just in time and takes Salya to safety. Still reeling as if drunk, Bhimasena staggers up and, with uplifted mace, shouts a deep challenge to Salya to return and face him.

To the sound of musical and booming drums, Duryodhana leads your warriors against the Pandavas. He singles out Chekitana from the enemy forces, and impales him on a spear through his chest, killing him on the terrace of his chariot, spouting blood from his wound. Seeing him fall, the Pandava maharathas ride around your divisions and pour continuous torrents of arrows upon them. In the fight that follows, Salya leads Kripa, Kritavarman and Sakuni against Yudhishtira, while Duryodhana confronts Dhrishtadyumna. Your son sends three thousand chariots under Aswatthaman to contain Arjuna. All the men fight fearlessly, determined to win at any cost and, indeed, they succeed in penetrating the Pandava army like swans swimming into a large lake. A dust storm engulfs that fierce and bloody battle, turning everything invisible. The identities of the soldiers can be established only when their names are called aloud by their enemies. During that dreadful battle, not one man among either your warriors or those of the enemy takes a step back.

Spurting, spraying blood soon disperses the dusty darkness and the warriors vie with each other to display their skills, trying to attain swarga and even Brahmaloka through dharma yuddha. They fight either to repay their hire, or to fulfil the objectives of their friends and allies. Invoking and loosing all kinds of astras, maharathas shout encouragements to each other.

The fevered duel between Salya and Yudhishtira and their exchange of arrows leaves both wounded. Also struck by multiple arrows are Salya's side riders Chandrasena and Drumasena. When Salya finds his two wingmen killed, he first kills twenty-five Chedi warriors and then strikes Satyaki, Bhimasena and Madri's twin sons with numerous shafts.

While Salya thus charges about on the field, Yudhishtira shoots many serpentine shafts at him and knocks down his adversary's standard. An enraged Salya looses a scathing volley and his arrows pierce Satyaki, Bhimasena, Madri's twins, and, most of all, draw blood from Yudhishtira. Spreading a net of arrows across Yudhishtira's chest, Salya then mantles him with searing shafts, like a mass of rising clouds. Yudhishtira is sorely wounded and feels weak and powerless, just as the Asura Jambha had when facing Indra, the slayer of Vritra.'"

CANTO 109

"Sanjaya says, 'Seeing Dharmarajan Yudhishtira stricken, Satyaki, Bhimasena and Madri's twins try to blockade Salya with their chariots, shooting storms of shafts at him. But the towering Madra repels their combined onslaught. From above, the watching Siddhas and the Rishis applaud delightedly and declare it a remarkable sight and feat.

Anxious for Yudhishtira, Bhima and Satyaki strafe the irresistible Salya with flurries of arrows and soon Nakula and Sahadeva join the attack. Salya defends himself resolutely against those maharathas, and shoots at each of them from his formidable bow. He splits Sahadeva's bow and pierces him with a hot clutch of shafts. Hastily stringing another bow, Sahadeva gashes his great maternal uncle with five blazing arrows. The duel between the Pandavas and Salya intensifies and soon Salya is bleeding profusely: a mountain of red chalk with crimson streams running down its breast.

As the battle progresses in frenzy, Satyaki, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva assail Salya with arrows, lances, darts and every other possible weapon, but with little success. With two recondite arrows, Salya even destroys the Satagni that Yudhishtira casts at him and gives a deafening yell of triumph. O Bhaarata, he comprehensively outdoes the Pandavas and they just cannot withstand him. Spellbound by Salya's prowess, Duryodhana is convinced that the Pandavas, the Panchalas, and the Srinjayas are as good as dead.

Yudhishtira finally succeeds in killing one of the Salya's side riders. Salya responds with a torrid swath of barbs, which cover all the Pandava troops. Yudhishtira is in a quandary and wonders, "Truly, how will what Krishna said come true? I pray that Salya does not annihilate my army."

With chariots, elephants and horses, the Pandavas renew their attack on Salya. However, that Paraviraha easily dissipates their showers of arrows and astras. He scathes them with a burst of gold-winged shafts that flies up like a swarm of locusts and falls like swarms of hunting eagles. The Devas and the Gandharvas are wonderstruck to see Salya's arrows cast a heavy gloom over the field, and beset the Pandava host. Salya pounds the Pandava warriors with his shafts shot from every side, envelops king Yudhishtira and repeatedly lets out echoing simhanadas.

The Pandava maharathas flounder against his incredibly violent onslaught. Some, however, like Bhima and king Yudhishtira, manage to hold their ground against him.'"

CANTO 110

"Sanjaya says, 'Meanwhile, with a solid swath of arrows, Aswatthaman and his warriors target Arjuna but the Pandava maharathas strike back to defend him. Blanketing your troops with flaring showers of golden arrows, Arjuna turns them into strange porcupines with his quills sticking out of them, but they respond vigorously, and fill his chariot with their shafts and missiles. The Kaurava troops are excited to see the unprecedented success that your warriors achieve against Arjuna. Soon, his chariot blazes as if with hundreds of torches, and it resembles a Devaratha fallen from heaven.

Arjuna retaliates with flaming volleys of arrows inscribed with his name and shot with unearthly precision, and quickly the Kaurava warriors feel that he is everywhere. The blazing Partha-fire, fanned by the loud twang of the Gandiva, consumes your troops like dry fuel. Broken chariots, piles of arms and armaments, dead warriors and body parts, diadems, crowns, and assorted jewellery litter the path of Partha's ratha. Rapidly, the track mired with blood and flesh becomes impassable, O Kurudvaha, like Rudra's playground.

Like the apocalyptic Agni at the end of the yuga, Partha destroys two thousand chariots. His banners streaming on his chariot, Aswatthaman attempts to stop Arjuna and those two Naravyaghras, both regarded as the foremost maharathas of the time, clash and their intense duel carries on for

a long time. The son of Drona strikes both Arjuna and Krishna with gold-winged arrows shot with great force. Though he had initially shown some regard for his Acharya's son, now with a little smile, Arjuna stretches his bow Gandiva into a circle and shatters his adversary's chariot, kills his horses and charioteer, and almost casually sinks three arrows into him.

Aswatthaman remains standing on his crippled chariot and in quick succession, flings two heavy maces with iron-spikes, and decked with cloth of gold, at the Vijaya; Arjuna smashes those gadas flying towards him into fragments, riving the hearts, as it were, of the Kaurava commanders. He slashes his fierce opponent with three more arrows; though grievously hurt, Drona's stoic son shows no sign of fear or anxiety.

Aswatthaman next targets Suratha, the Panchala maharatha, and strikes him deep. Riding on his peerless chariot, Suratha valiantly charges Aswatthaman and, drawing his great bow to its fullest, burns him with arrows like tongues of fire. Aswatthaman, incensed and furrowing his brow into three lines and licking the corners of his mouth, glares at Suratha in rage and then shoots a cloth-yard shaft, which passes through the heart of the Panchala and burrows into the earth. Suratha falls dead like a mountain summit split by lightning.

Quickly commandeering the chariot of his slain foe, Aswatthaman supported by the Samsaptakas renews his assault on Arjuna. That battle between them, at the hour of noon, with Partha fighting alone, kills thousands of your men. Similar to the battle between Indra and the vast host of the Asuras in the eldest days, their duel is wonderful to witness.'"

CANTO 111

"Sanjaya says, 'Using arrows and spears, Duryodhana and Dhrishtadyumna are involved in a brutal contention in which both are severely wounded. Duryodhana's brothers, with a large force, come charging up to help him. They surround Dhrishtadyumna, but in an astounding display of skill, the Panchala fire prince staves off those Atirathas.

Sikhandi leads the Prabhadrakas against the two Kuru warriors, Kritavarman and the great Kripacharya, in a lethal attack.

Meanwhile, with his relentless torrent of arrows from all sides, Salya inflicts heavy losses among Satyaki's and Vrikodara's forces. With patience and great strength, he simultaneously takes on Nakula and Sahadeva, each of whom is skilled like the Destroyer. Salya's shafts mangle the Pandava maharathas, as they fail to find anyone to protect them. Nakula sees Yudhishtira hard pressed by Salya, and flies to confront his uncle and they duel savagely bloodying each other with arrows and darts. Then Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Satyaki, and Sahadeva, all furiously engage Salya but, in another astonishing exhibition of archery, he holds the four maharathas at bay.

Switching to another ratha and noticing that the Pandavas are making no headway against Salya, Satyaki rides up to face him. Salya turns to receive his charge and the duel between Satyaki and Salya is fierce and

awesome, like the one in the olden days between the Asura Sambara and Indra. Soon the twins join the battle against their maternal uncle. In the general melee, there is copious bloodshed and the scene is reminiscent of a confrontation between snarling lions over a kill. Blanketed with dense showers of arrows fletched with kanka and peacock feathers, there is darkness all around as if cast by a passing cloud. However, their golden winged and glimmering serpentine shafts light up the sky as if it is on fire. Salya's feat is all the more incredible since he fights alone and yet manages to hold up and denude the Pandava forces, while he prowls the battlefield like Sakra when he destroyed the Asuras, long ago.'"

CANTO 112

"Sanjaya says, 'Your troops under Salya, Rajan, once more savagely assail the Parthas. Although dreadfully beset, your fierce warriors not only hold their own against the enemy, but also put them to flight despite Bhima's best efforts to rally them. A furious Arjuna envelops Kripa, Kritavarman and their troops with a hurricane of arrows. Sahadeva overwhelms Sakuni and his troops, while Nakula tries to burn Salya's flanks. Meanwhile, Draupadi's five sons confront various commanders of the Kuru army and Sikhandi fights Aswatthaman. Armed with his mace, Bhima confronts Duryodhana, and Yudhishtira leads his men against Salya. Another vicious encounter erupts between all these, none of whom has ever turned his back on a battle.

Truly, my king, Salya achieves a remarkable feat when he contains and desiccates the Pandava army by himself. Like the planet Saturn near the moon, he skirmishes with Yudhishtira. Using arrows that are like venomous nagas, he assails Yudhishtira and Bhima, shrouding them with gales of arrows and earning the applause of all the soldiers. The mangled Pandava troops take to their heels despite Yudhishtira's cries to them to stop. He is incensed and attacks Salya, resolved to either win the day or meet with death.

He summons all his brothers and Krishna and says to them, "Bhishma, Drona, Karna and the other kings who fought for the Kauravas have all

perished in this war. You have all done your best courageously and accomplished the tasks given to you. Only my task to kill Salya remains unfulfilled. I am determined to kill him today so listen to what I want you all to do for me, to help me succeed.

Nakula and Sahadeva whom even Vasava cannot defeat will protect my flanks. I am confident that all three of us will adhere to our Kshatriya dharma and fight our maternal uncle. Today, either Salya or I will survive.

Prepare my chariot according to the astra shastra and pack it with arms in a measure larger than Salya's. Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna will protect my flanks, Arjuna will secure my rear, and Bhima will safeguard my front today. And I will surely be superior and better prepared than Salya in my duel with him."

All Yudhishtira's warriors accept his strategy and, once he has prepared himself, he rides against Salya and boosts the flagging spirits of the Panchalas, the Somakas and the Matsyas. Blowing conches and beating drums, the Panchalas charge, uttering loud shouts. The earth resounds with the noise of the elephants' bells as Duryodhana and Salya meet the attack. Demonstrating the full range of the archery that Drona had taught him, Salya shoots volley after blinding volley at Yudhishtira.

Like a couple of tigers fighting over a kill, Salya and Yudhishtira, both seasoned warriors with great battle skills, maul each other. Bhima confronts Duryodhana while the Panchala prince Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, and Madri's twin sons engage Sakuni and the other Kuru fighters.

Remember, it is because of your evil policy, Rajan, that yet another bloody battle erupts between your warriors and those of the enemy.

Aiming an arrow at Bhima's beautiful, gold-decked standard, festooned with silver bells, Duryodhana knocks it down before splitting Bhima's beautiful bow shaped like an elephant's trunk. Bhima responds with a barb that pierces your son's chest so he swoons on the terrace of his chariot. Then with a razor-faced shaft, Bhima beheads Duryodhana's charioteer and his horses run away wildly, dragging the chariot behind them, and Aswatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman rush forward to rescue your son.

Seeing this, your troops are frantic, and loud cries arise from the Kuru army. Seizing the opportunity, Arjuna draws his bow and begins to annihilate them. An energized Yudhishtira dashes forward to confront Salya, the Dharmaputra's horses white as ivory and fleet as thought. It is surprising to see the mild and soft Yudhishtira change into someone fierce

as, with glaring eyes and his body trembling in rage, he decimates thousands of enemy warriors. He is relentless as he wades into the enemy forces, Rajan, like thunder splitting mountains. Felling chariots, horses, charioteers, standards and rathikas in large numbers, Yudhishtira seems to sport on the field. The rampaging and suddenly violent Pandava king troubles all your warriors and, after he empties the field on all sides with his arrows, he turns his attention on Salya.

Salya races forward eagerly to meet him and both of them roar and blow their conches in challenge as they close and swathe each other with dark swarms of arrows. Quickly covered in blood, they look like salmali and kinsuka trees in bloom. O Bhaarata, no one can tell who will prevail: whether Yudhishtira will kill Salya and rule the earth, or if Salya will slay the Dharmaputra and gift the earth to Duryodhana.

Yudhishtira sets his foe to his right during that battle and they shoot a hundred immaculate arrows at each other, quicker than the mind. They lose a bow each in the encounter, but Yudhishtira gains ascendancy when he kills Salya's four horses, his two Parshni charioteers and finally fells the Madra king's standard. At this, the Kaurava army breaks ranks and flees.

Seeing Salya's plight, Aswatthaman darts in and removes him to safety, followed by Yudhishtira's dreadful roar of triumph. Salya climbs into another chariot that is ready and fully equipped with weapons.'"

CANTO 113

"Sanjaya continues, 'Now wielding a stronger bow, Salya strikes Yudhishtira squarely and lets out a simhanada as he unleashes vicious flights of deadly arrows at the enemy's other Kshatriyas. He rakes Satyaki, Bhima, Sahadeva and Yudhishtira with his shafts and mows down countless enemy archers and soldiers. Soon the earth is scattered with dead warriors like a sacrificial altar strewn with blades of Kusa grass.

The Pandus, the Panchalas, and the Somakas, led by Bhimasena, Satyaki, and Madri's twins all strike Salya with winged arrows and Yudhishtira buries one in the centre of his chest with huge force. Seeing Salya at bay, Duryodhana sends a thousand armoured troops and chariot-warriors to protect him. Salya now quickly takes the attack to Yudhishtira and the two shuras cover each other with oiled arrows loosed from bowstrings pulled to their ears. They carefully look for each other's weaknesses, and then shoot to draw blood, to wound grievously. The sound of their bowstrings reverberate all over the field. They stalk each other like two young tigers in the deep forest fighting over a prey; swelling with the pride of their own strength, they bloody each other like a couple of infuriated tuskers.

Struck through the chest with a fiery arrow, Yudhishtira responds with a perfect blazing shaft that burns into Salya's breast. The duel intensifies with powerful flurries of arrows exchanged, until the Dharmaputra has his bow

broken. Weeping up another more formidable one, Yudhishtira drills Salya with ten terrific shafts. Salya cuts away the golden armour of both Yudhishtira and Bhima, slashes Yudhishtira's arms and rives his bow again, and draws fonts of blood from his charioteer and his horses. The Madra then turns on the Pandava troops and begins to massacre them.

Finding his brother cornered, Bhima rushes to his defence and shatters Salya's bow and deeply wounds that king with a brace of tremendous shafts. He severs the head of Salya's sarathy, kills his horses, and covers the lord of the Madras with a hundred keening barbs. Sahadeva follows his brother and savagely attacks Salya, so their combined assault leaves him dazed. His armour ruined by Bhima, an enraged Salya picks up a sword and a shield decked with stars and jumps down from his ratha.

He hacks the axle rod of Nakula's chariot and runs headlong towards Yudhishtira, like Yama himself in wrath. Dhristadyumna, Sikhandi, Draupadi's five sons and Satyaki rush to defend the Dharmaraja.

Bhima demolishes Salya's magnificent shield, and breaks his sword at the hilt with a deep and echoing roar. All the Pandava maharathas are delighted, and they laugh, utter fierce roars and blow their moon white conches. Miserable and covered with sweat and blood, your warriors are benumbed, lifeless. Despite the attack by the Pandava warriors led by Bhimasena, Salya continues his charge towards Yudhishtira, like a lion hunting a deer. Without horses or charioteer, Yudhishtira finds himself in dire straits when Salya appears before him. He grimly remembers Krishna telling him that Salya's death was his task and picks up a bright golden spear embossed with radiant gemstones.

Rolling his eyes, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira of the pure soul, glares at Salya, his heart filled with rage. His very gaze should have reduced the king of the Madras to ashes but, strangely Rajan, that does not happen. He hurls that candescent spear at Salya with all his might, the long dart, which, like a Brahmana's curse, nothing can stop. It flares through the air like a comet falling from the skies at the end of the yuga.

The sons of Pandu have always worshipped this astra with perfumes, garlands, and the rarest offerings of food and drink. The weapon is like the Samvartaka fire, as powerful as a dark curse pronounced according to the Atharvan of Angirasa. Forged for Rudra himself with great care by the celestial artificer, Tvashtri, it is inexorable and can destroy the bodies and

very prana any enemy, why, even the earth, the sky, all the water bodies, all haters of Brahma and creatures of every kind.

Yudhishtira now infuses it with powerful mantras and casts it at Salya like a bolt of lightning, just as, long ago, Rudra unleashed his own astra to kill Andhaka. His always gentle eyes unaccustomedly aflame, Yudhishtira roars, "Die, wretched Salya!"

With a yell, Salya tries to catch the lance as it flies at him, even as a fire leaps up to catch a jet of clarified butter poured on it. But the long, flaming astra plunges through his fair and wide chest and into the earth. Covered in the blood that spurts from his nostrils, eyes, ears, mouth, and that which flows from his wound, he looks like the Krauncha Mountain when Skanda pierced it. His armour destroyed, the illustrious Salya, strong as Indra's elephant, falls onto the earth, his arms outstretched, his face turned towards Dharmaputra Yudhishtira. Like a beloved wife advancing to receive her dear lord, the earth seems to rise a little in love to receive him, as he dies embracing her with all his limbs.

Slain in a dharma yuddha, Salya is like a large yagna fire extinguished on the sacrificial hearth. Though spread-eagled without his weapons and standard, and though the astra has pierced his very heart, beauty and radiance do not abandon the lifeless king of the Madras.

Yudhishtira now takes up his bow, splendid as Indra's, and begins to raze his enemies like Garuda killing serpents. With transcendent showers of arrows, he routs your troops who, overcome by panic, begin to attack one another with their eyes shut in terror. With blood gushing from their bodies, they lose their weapons and fall in their thousands.

Upon the fall of Salya, his youthful younger brother, a maharatha of almost equal accomplishment, takes the field against Yudhishtira. Determined to pay the last dues of his brother, that Madra Kshatriya lashes the Pandava king with numberless shafts. Yudhishtira destroys his opponent's bow and standard with an arrow of fire and decapitates him. O Rajan, I saw that head adorned with earrings fall from the chariot like a jiva falling from swarga after exhausting his punya. On his death, the Kurus wail aloud and run from the Pandavas.

Satyaki chases the fleeing Kauravas but encounters Kritavarman, who comes fearlessly to the rescue of your beaten army. These two illustrious heroes of Vrishni's race confront each other like furious lions. They shoot multitudes of arrows at each other and at the end of the exchange,

Kritavarman finds himself without his chariot, horses and his two Parshni drivers. Seeing him in danger, Kripa rescues him in his chariot. Duryodhana's entire army melts away once more.

A dust cloud shrouds the army from view. However, it is evident that the greater portion of your army has perished and that the survivors are trying to escape. Soon, the cloud of dust settles as the blood from the battle drenches it. Seeing from his vantage point that his army is broken, Duryodhana defies the advancing Parthas alone. He covers all of them—Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, and their chariot-warriors—with his arrows and the enemy dare not close with him, as mortals fear to approach Yama. In a fresh chariot, Kritavarman rides up to support him. With six broad-headed arrows shot with great force, Yudhishtira kills his four horses, and wounds him deep. Ashwatthaman rescues Kritavarman, and whisks him away from Yudhishtira. Kripa, left to face Yudhishtira, rakes him and his horses with his masterly shafts. Thus, here and there, the fire of battle still glows.

O Bhaarata, all this is a result of you and your son's evil policy. After the death of Salya at Kurukshetra, the Parthas, filled with great joy, blow their conches, beat their drums and applaud Yudhishtira, just as the celestials once greeted Indra after he defeated Vritra in time out of mind.'"

CANTO 114

"Sanjaya says, 'After the death of Salya, Rajan, his chariot-warriors numbering seventeen hundred take to the field with great determination. Riding an elephant big as a hill, with a royal parasol unfurled over his head, and fanned with yak-tails, Duryodhana tries to stop the Madraka warriors, crying, "Stop. Do not go any further."

They pay him no heed and, pulling loudly on their bowstrings, attack the Pandava host. Hearing that Yudhishtira has killed Salya and was himself wounded by the Madraka maharatha, Arjuna races up to the spot, where, along with Bhima, the two sons of Madri, Satyaki, the five sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the Panchalas and the Somakas, throw a defensive ring around the Dharmaputra. Like makaras agitating the ocean, they urge each other on, jostling one another's chariots.

The enemy shouts, "Where are king Yudhishtira and the Pandavas? Where are Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Sikhandi, and the sons of Draupadi?"

Provoked, the warrior sons of Draupadi begin to cut down the Madraka soldiers. Your warriors, O Bhaarata, though forbidden by your son, continue to attack the Pandavas. Then Sakuni says to Duryodhana, "How is it that we stand impotent while the Madraka host is being slaughtered before our eyes? The understanding was that all of us should fight unitedly. Why then do you allow our enemies to kill our troops?"

Duryodhana says, “Though I expressly forbade it, they do not obey me. Together, they have penetrated the Pandava host.”

Sakuni says, “In battle, brave warriors are often carried away by their rage and do not obey their commanders. Do not be angry with them and this is not the time to stand indifferently by. Let all of us go forth together and, with our chariots, horses and elephants, try to rescue the heroic Madra soldiers. With care, Rajan, we can protect one another.”

The Kauravas agree with Sakuni and Duryodhana leads a large force to support the Madraka warriors, making loud shouts and causing the earth to resound with that noise.

Meanwhile, the Pandavas have adopted the vyuha called Madhyama. In the hand-to-hand fighting that follows, and before Duryodhana and his army could come to their rescue, the Madraka warriors perish. Broken chariots, dead men and lifeless horses cover the earth. Panic-stricken horses, still harnessed to rathas, careen wildly everywhere with their rathikas, dead and a few alive, while steeds drag broken or wheel less chariots, hampered by their traces. We see headless forms rise all around and meteor showers come flaring down from the sun.

Then the Partha army sees the advancing Kurus and, scenting final victory, turn to face them. They ride swiftly, shaking their bows, the sound of their charge mingling with the blare of their conches and their battle cries. Demoralised by the annihilation of the Madraka forces and the death of their heroic king Salya, Duryodhana’s troops once more turn their back on the battle in fear.’”

CANTO 115

"Sanjaya says, 'Upon the fall of Salya, your disheartened and frightened troops look vainly for a leader. Defeated by Yudhishtira, they flee the field at midday.

No one among your troops is prepared either to rally the army or to stand firm. We once again experience that fear and that grief that we felt upon the fall of Bhishma, Drona and Karna. The surviving Kuru army, confused, bewildered and in despair, is easily cut down by the enemy. Two thousand experienced war elephants thunder away, urged on by their hastikas with hooks and feet. Seeing them attempt to escape, the Panchalas and the Pandavas pursue them hotly with loud shouts of triumph.

They say to one another, "Today Yudhishtira has vanquished his enemies. Today Duryodhana has lost his splendour and kingship. Today, king Dhritarashtra will lie prostrate on the earth, and feel the most terrible anguish on hearing of the death of his sons. Let him know the power and great might of Kunti's son, and recollect Vidura's advice and censure himself. Let him, from this day on, wait upon the Parthas as their slave and experience the grief that they have felt for so long.

Let king Dhritarashtra know today the greatness of Krishna. Let him hear today the terrible twang of Arjuna's bow in battle, know the strength of all his astras and the might of his arms.

Today, king Dhritarashtra will recognize the awesome strength of the unrivalled Bhima when he slaughters Duryodhana, just as Indra once killed the Asura Bali.

When he hears of the death of Salya, the invincible king of the Madras, he will know the prowess of Yudhishtira. After they kill Sakuni and all the Gandharas, he will know the strength of the two sons of Madri.

Why should victory not be theirs, who have in their ranks king Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Satyaki, Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna, the two sons of Madri, the five sons of Draupadi, and Sikhandi?

Why should victory not be theirs who enjoy the protection of Krishna, Guardian of the Universe?

Why should victory not be theirs whom dharma protects? Who else but Yudhishtira, who has Krishna, the refuge of dharma for his protector, can vanquish Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Salya and hundreds of other kings?"

The Srinjayas ruthlessly pursue your shattered troops while Arjuna moves against the enemy chariot-division, and Satyaki and the two sons of Madri corner Sakuni.

Finding his troops running away in fear of Bhimasena, Duryodhana wryly tells his charioteer, "Look at the remains of my once vast host pursued by the Pandavas and the pall of dust that hangs over the battlefield. Arjuna, standing there with his great bow, bars my way. Drive carefully and take me to the rear of the army so that just as the ocean cannot overrun its continents, Dhananjaya will not be able to overpower me. If I stay and fight the Pandavas, my army will rally and return to battle with vigour."

Duryodhana's sarathy carefully guides his horses to where his master wants to position himself.

Twenty-one thousand foot-soldiers, without the help of elephants, cavalry and chariot-warriors, still stand ready for battle and prepared to lay down their lives. Bhimasena and Dhrishtadyumna besiege them with the four kinds of forces. Your foot-soldiers surround Bhima with fierce yells and the slapping of armpits. They shoot at him from all sides and block all the efforts of the Pandava forces to rescue him. Finally overcome with fury, Bhima alights from his chariot and charges them on foot, wielding his massive gada and roaring like a thundercloud. Like Yama armed with his club, the raging Bhima smashes down every last foot soldier. They fall, covered in blood, like stands of flowering karnikaras laid low by a tempest of Vayu, and present an awful and piteous sight. After annihilating that

division of twenty-one thousand, Bhima rejoins Dhrishtadyumna to continue fighting from his chariot.

Yudhishtira's forces fail to contain or hem Duryodhana in. His ability to hold them off proves prodigious. Addressing his army, which has not fled too far, he says again to them, “There is no place where the Pandavas will not pursue and kill you. Of what use then is flight? The army of the Pandavas is small and the two Krishnas are sorely wounded. If all of us make a united stand, victory can still be ours. Listen to me, noble Kshatriyas. When Yama always takes heroes and cowards alike, what man who calls himself a Kshatriya will not fight? Death in battle according to Kshatriya dharma will lead to happiness. If we die, we will enjoy great felicity in the other world. O Kauravas, there is no better path to heaven than that offered by battle.”

The Kuru commanders applaud his words and once more take the field against the Pandavas. Led by Arjuna, the Parthas arrayed in battle order and sensing imminent victory, charge them. The two sons of Madri and Satyaki attack Sakuni, and the other Pandava shuras charge your army with final ferocity.’”

CANTO 116

"Sanjaya says, 'The fleeing Kuru army turns and makes a stand and Salwa, king of the Mlecchas, leads the attack against the Pandava force. He rides a hulking elephant oozing ichor, big as Indradeva's Airavata. Bred from a high and noble strain, this beast is well trained; it can trample enemy troops to a pulp and is held in high esteem by Duryodhana. Seated on that magnificent elephant, Salwa attacks the Pandavas with fearsome shafts that resemble Indra's Vajra.

Neither the Kauravas nor the Pandavas see any weakness in his defences, as he decimates the enemy warriors with his arrows. The Pandavas, the Somakas, and the Srinjayas see that massive elephant thundering down at them and run in terror, crushing their own ranks as they do. All the warriors of your army blow their conches in triumph.

Dhrishtadyumna, the senapati of the Pandava and Srinjaya forces, hears the Kaurava shouts of joy and the blare of their conches, and rides to block the elephant's charge. Seeing Dhrishtadyumna racing towards him, Salwa quickly turns his great beast to confront him. His opponent sinks three flaming arrows into the elephant's lofty forehead and then five more. Blood streaming, the beast trumpets in pain and runs wildly, but Salwa manages to control it with hooks and goads and to turn back and charge his opponent. A terrified Dhrishtadyumna jumps out of his chariot just in time, and the mastodon crushes his gold-decked chariot with its horses and charioteer,

and lifting it up into the air with his trunk, dashes it to the ground. Seeing this, Bhima, Sikhandi and Satyaki dash up and with some quicksilver archery manage to stop the advancing beast. Meanwhile, Salwa continues to rain down his arrows and soon puts the attacking Pandava maharathas to flight. The Panchalas, Srinjayas, and the Matsyas, who bear the brunt of his assault, finally surround the animal.

Dhrishtadyumna pounds the elephant with his great mace and splits open the elephant's head; with a dismal cry, it falls like a mountain crumbling in an earthquake. Even as the leviathan falls, Satyaki decapitates king Salwa with a broad-headed shaft. Like a mountaintop struck by Indra's Vajra, Salwa falls dead with his magnificent animal.'"

CANTO 117

"Sanjaya says, 'After the death of the heroic Salwa, your army is like a great tree broken by the force of a tempest, and only Kritavarman fights on. The Kuru warriors, who had earlier fled, rally and come back on seeing the Satwata warrior stand firm like a hill pierced with arrows, and another bloody contention takes place between the two armies. Encouraged and resolute, the Kauravas give vent to roars that seem to reach into the very heavens and now the Panchalas are afraid.

Storming the battlefield, Satyaki despatches king Kshemakirti to Yamaloka with seven shafts that pierce his body deep and strike off his head. Kritavarman immediately challenges him and a furious duel ensues between the two heroes of the Vrishni-Andhaka vamsa. Manoeuvring their chariots in different tracks, the son of Hridika and the bull of Sini's race soon strike each other with showers of arrows that soar into the sky like locust swarms and fall like gashes of lightning. Soon Satyaki has his bow destroyed and Kritavarman loses his charioteer, horses and his standard. They continue to bloody each other with javelins and arrows. The Kaurava troops see the great Kritavarman without his chariot and cornered by Satyaki. Kripacharya comes charging in and spirits Kritavarman away from the press of battle and mortal peril.

The Kuru army once more retreats from the field. The enemy, however, does not see this, for a dust cloud shrouds the Kaurava forces. Only

Duryodhana, who singly counterattacks the victorious Pandava army, is still fighting. Fearlessly, he assails all the Pandus—Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the Panchalas, the Kaikeyas, the Somakas, and the sons of Draupadi. Your son is like a blazing yagna fire sanctified with mantras. His foes make no impression on him, like living beings who cannot approach the Great Destroyer. Then Kritavarman returns to the field riding another chariot.'"

CANTO 118

"Sanjaya says, 'King Duryodhana, riding on his chariot and filled with the courage of despair, stands resolute on the field, like the valorous Rudra himself. The arrows he shoots completely cover the earth and there is not a man among the Pandavas, not a horse, an elephant, or a chariot that his arrows did not find. Your son's prowess is wonderful, and even a united Pandava army cannot contain him. His shafts find all the Pandava shuras—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Sahadeva, Nakula, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki and the sons of Draupadi. They target him from all sides but Duryodhana does not waver. His quickness, skill and prowess amaze the watching troops.

Meanwhile, the Dhartarashtras who had not fled too far unite and surge back to support Suyodhana against the Pandavas. The noise made by them is like the roar of the ocean in the season of rains. Arrows shroud the sky and the fighting men can barely see each other. Aswatthaman and Bhimasena, their forearms scarred from their bowstrings, duel ferociously, frightening the whole universe.

With a shout, Sakuni attacks Yudhishtira and kills his four horses, as the Pandava troops tremble. Sahadeva rescues his brother and the Dharmaraja soon returns on another chariot to renew his battle with Sakuni. Fervid is their fight and wonderful to behold; it wins the applause of the Siddhas and the Charanas.

Shooting showers of arrows from all sides, Sakuni's son Uluka and Nakula duel and these two evenly matched maharathas also fight ferociously. Magnificent like Sakra battling the Asura Bala, Satyaki battles Kritavarman.

Duryodhana splits Dhrishtadyumna's bow and slashes him with his sharp arrows. Dhrishtadyumna takes up another formidable bow and the battle between them intensifies, O Bharatarishabha, like a contention between two wild and infuriated elephants with ichor trickling down their limbs.

Acharya Kripa fights Draupadi's five sons, engaging them like a man battling his five senses. Both sides show no mercy and the battle between them is awe-inspiring.

The general conflict, O Rajan, is appalling with many bloody duels. A dense cloud of dust raised by the chariots and the horses hangs over the battlefield and the wind carries it from place to place. It dims the sun and covers the earth and all the warriors become invisible. Shortly, when the ground is soaked with the blood of the combatants, the cloud of dust disappears and everything becomes visible. I can once more clearly see the different brutal single combats around me and hear the strange sound of thousands of flying arrows, like that made by a vast forest of burning bamboo.'"

CANTO 119

Sanjaya says, 'Despite the setbacks suffered by your army at the hands of the Pandavas, your sons manage to gather your maharathas and they continue to battle the enemy, disregarding the darkness everywhere. Savagely they fight, using guesswork and by identifying the enemy from the names they shout. The devastation is immense.

First turning on Kripacharya and then on Kritavarman, Yudhishtira kills the Bhoja's four horses. Rescuing him from the battlefield, Aswatthaman drives Kritavarman away in his chariot while Kripa easily holds his own against his old pupil. Duryodhana sends reinforcements of seven hundred chariots to join the attack on Yudhishtira and these maharathas surround and rain arrows over him. Sikhandi sees Yudhishtira hemmed in and leads a squadron of Pandava chariots to his rescue.

In a fearful bloodbath, Sikhandi's forces butcher the seven hundred enemy chariot-warriors of the Kuru army. Awful portents appear on the field, presaging the destruction of the world. The earth, with her mountains and forests, quakes violently. Meteors like blazing brands fall from the sky, Rajan, as if from the sun. A hurricane springs up, whipping away rocks and stones along its fringes. The elephants shed copious tears and tremble with fear.

Disregarding all these omens, the fighting Kshatriyas consult one another and stand prepared on the sacred field of Kurukshetra, just ready to

find swarga. Then Sakuni says, "Advance the enemy from the front. I will attack the Pandavas from behind."

The remaining Madraka warriors, followed by others, surge forward with enthusiasm and shout out their defiance. The invincible Pandavas shake their bows and greet the Madrakas with searing volleys of arrows. This disheartens Duryodhana's troops and, once more, they waver.

Then, O Bharatarishabha, the full contingent of ten thousand Madraka lancers led by Sakuni makes a surprise attack on the Pandava's from their rear, and puts them to flight. Yudhishtira, who is watching the battle from a slight remove, says to Sahadeva, "Look, the son of Subala attacks our rear and is slaughtering our forces. Take Draupadi's sons, all our elephants and cavalry and some three thousand foot-soldiers, and hold him while I lead the Panchalas against his chariot force."

Seven hundred war elephants, five thousand cavalry, and three thousand foot-soldiers, led by Sahadeva and the sons of Draupadi, ambush Sakuni who is attacking the Pandava forces from the rear. The Pandava cavalry penetrates Sakuni's division and overruns his chariot-warriors. These horsemen combine with their elephant division and overwhelm the enemy host with a great barrage of arrows.

Rajan, this terrible battle, also, is the consequence of your evil designs.

The twang of bowstrings is no longer heard, for all the maharathas stand as mere spectators. The opponents are evenly matched and the lances and javelins they furiously hurl at each other fly like locust swarms or meteor showers through the sky and present a beautiful spectacle. Again, a dust cloud covers the troops and a thick gloom falls on the battlefield. We see many of those brave warriors move away while others fall down on the earth, vomiting blood. Wounded horses, with limbs streaming blood, fall in their thousands. Many fighting men stagger about wounded and deranged, or, their weapons lost, weakly wrestle with each other. Thousands of dead warriors in blood-stained armour and still clutching weapons, elephant-riders, horses and horsemen, and foot-soldiers litter the earth and lie huddled together in that gory carnage. The battlefield is impassable and no warrior can take his horse or chariot forward in any direction for any distance.

After fighting for a while, Sakuni retires from the battle with his remaining six thousand cavalry. The Pandava maharathas, still determined to lay down their lives, say, "When we can no longer fight here on chariots,

how much less will it be possible to fight on elephants. Let chariots move against chariots, and elephants against elephants. Sakuni has left with his Gandharas and is unlikely to come again to fight."

The sons of Draupadi lead the elephant division to join Dhrishtadyumna's forces, while Sahadeva joins Yudhishtira. Then suddenly, Sakuni erupts out of nowhere and falls upon the Panchala prince's division, and another vicious and bloody skirmish follows. In the hair-raising bloodletting, close relatives strike each other and fight like hawks fighting over pieces of meat. The noise of neighing horses, of shouting men, and of spears striking home and swords clashing is thunderous.

Rajan, all this is the result of your evil policy.

Finally, overcome with exhaustion, parched with thirst, spent with rage, their animals fatigued and they themselves wounded, your men turn away from the mayhem. Many maddened by the scent of blood kill friend and foe alike. Wolves and jackals howl and scream. Your army suffers great losses.

Bodies of men and horses are scattered over the earth and cover it with rillets of blood. When the deafening noise of war somewhat subsides, Sakuni once more attacks the main host of the Pandavas with his remaining cavalry and yet again a crimson conflict breaks out.'"

CANTO 120

"Sanjaya continues, 'Subala's son Sakuni leads his remaining seven hundred horsemen to attack the Pandavas. Looking around for their king, they identify him, standing under a large sovereign parasol, splendid like the full moon and surrounded by his mail-clad warriors.

Sakuni moves to meet Duryodhana standing amidst his chariot-force, and cheerfully says, "Destroy the Pandavas chariot divisions. I have overcome his cavalry but Yudhishtira himself cannot be slain unless one is ready to lay down one's life. After we annihilate his chariot force, we will overwhelm his elephants, foot-soldiers and the rest!"

Encouraged by this news and eager for victory, your warriors jubilantly forge ahead, with war cries and shaking their bows, to attack the Pandava army. Once more, we hear the fierce twanging of bowstrings and the slapping of palms and the rush of arrows. Seeing them come, Arjuna says, "O Krishna, delve into this sea of troops and I will end this war today, the eighteenth of this mahayuddha. Duryodhana's once oceanic army is now so small that it resembles the mark of a cow's hoof. Look at the horrible course of Destiny! If we had made peace after Bhishma's fall, everything would have been well. Indeed, there was no reason why the war should have continued after our Pitama fell. Bhishma pleaded for sanity even then but the foolish Duryodhana would not listen to him.

When Drona, that great Brahmana, fell and when we killed Karna and his sons and only a small remnant of the Kaurava army was left alive, the madness and slaughter still continued! Why, even after the death of Srutayush, of Jalasandha of Puru's race, of king Srutayudha, after the fall of Bhurisrava, of Salya, and of the Avanti heroes, the killing did not cease. After the death of Jayadratha, of the Rakshasa Alayudha, of Bahlika, and of Somadatta, the war went on. Even after the fall of the heroic Bhagadatta, of Sudakshina the Kamboja lord, and of Dusasana, the battle did not stop. Despite the death of their great kings, each a ruler of vast lands, even after Bhimasena destroyed a full aksauhini of troops, O Krishna, the war did not end because of the folly and the greed of the Dhartarashtras.

What king born into a noble race, a vamsa especially like that of Kuru, other than the foolish Duryodhana, would continue this dreadful and fruitless war? Which sane and wise man, capable of discriminating good from evil, would wage war, knowing his enemy to be superior to him in merit, strength, and courage? How could he listen to the counsels of another and ignore your wise words to make peace with the Pandavas? What specific can be palatable to that man today, who disregarded the Pitamaha, Drona and Vidura, when they urged him not to make war?

How can he accept good advice, Janardana, when he insolently disregarded his own aged sire as well as his own well-meaning mother when they sought to give him sage advice? It is evident from his conduct and policy that Duryodhana was born to exterminate his very race.

It is my opinion that he still does not intend to give us back our kingdom. The noble Vidura warned me of this many times and said, "As long as Dhritarashtra lives, that evil man will never give us justice. You can vanquish Duryodhana only in battle!"

When Duryodhana was born, many Rishis foretold that he would become the cause of the extermination of all Kshatriya kind. I will decimate all his warriors today and Duryodhana will have to fight us alone for his own destruction. Only thus will this war end.

I have come to this conclusion after much thought of my own, reflection on everything Vidura said, and taking into account the evil deeds of the vile Duryodhana, who has no trace of nobility in him. Ride through the Kaurava army, O Purushottama, for I will finish Duryodhana and his army today and do what will benefit Yudhishtira."

Reins in hand and resplendent on his wonderful ratha, Krishna rides deep into the enemy ranks. His white horses seem to cavort, as the ratha rolls forward and thousands of gold-winged arrows, steeped in oil, polished by the hands of expert smiths, and marked with Arjuna's name, issue from it and cover the sky. Struck by these shafts, the Kauravas wilt like elephants when hunters chase them with burning brands, and they fall like dying locusts. Like a roaring fire that consumes forests full of dry trees and creepers, Arjuna incinerates your son's troops. No armour can keep out his gold-winged arrows shot with superhuman accuracy and force. He does not need to shoot a second arrow at anyone. Like the Vajradhari striking down the Daityas, Arjuna destroys the enemy's chariot-warrior division.'"

CANTO 121

"Sanjaya says, 'The Kaurava forces, O Kurudvaha, turn tail, deserting their relatives and comrades, unable to face Dhananjaya and his Gandiva. However, after they slake their thirst, some indomitable warriors groom their animals, change their armour, comfort their injured kinsmen and take them to the camp and, obedient to your son's command, once more advance against the Pandavas.

They attack Dhrishtadyumna's forces amidst the Pandava divisions, as well as Sikhandi, Satanika and the son of Nakula. Then your son joins the attack and looses dense swarms of arrows at the Panchala prince. In a fiery duel between the two, Duryodhana loses his four horses and charioteer and he has to run to Sikhandi's division for safety.

With the Kaurava chariot division destroyed, their three thousand elephants surround the five Pandavas. Arjuna takes to the great beasts and every polished shaft he unleashes claims an elephant's life. Taking up his formidable gada, Bhima jumps down from his chariot, like Yama with his cudgel, and rushes at the hulking beasts. Seeing him come with mace aloft, your soldiers are terrified. The elephants run in panic with cries of pain, their temporal globes split open by his flying, uncanny gada, all their grand limbs bathed in blood; and they collapse like the wingless mountains of old. Yudhishtira and the two sons of Madri join the horrible fray and massacre the elephant-warriors with arrows fletched with vulture's feathers.

After routing the Kuru king and seeing him flee on horseback, Dhrishtadyumna sees the Pandavas still surrounded by the Kaurava elephants. He arrives quickly to give them support.

Meanwhile, Ashwatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman, are worried not at seeing Duryodhana in that havoc, and fear that he is dead. With sorrowful faces, they enquire about him until some men tell them that he has taken refuge with Sakuni. Other Kshatriyas there say, “Do look if he is still alive. But what need have we for Duryodhana? You fight all united. What will the king do for you?”

Other Kshatriyas, who have lost many of their relatives and who are still targeted by the arrows of the enemy, say, “Let us deal with these forces that confront us. Look, the Pandavas are coming at us after despatching our elephants!”

Aswatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman scythe through Dhrishtadyumna’s force and meet up with Sakuni in search of Duryodhana. Meanwhile, the Pandavas, led by Dhrishtadyumna, attack our troops. Although I had only two kinds of forces left, I, too, decide to risk my life, join the five leaders of our army and put my troops at Kripa’s disposal. We are immediately attacked by Arjuna but we launch a fierce onslaught on Dhrishtadyumna’s division. However, he is indomitable and forces us to retreat.

It is then that Satyaki attacks me with four hundred chariots. I had managed to escape from Dhrishtadyumna only because his horses were tired, but now I fell among Satyaki’s forces even as a sinner falls into hell. A brief but brutal skirmish ensues, and I lose my armour and Satyaki captures me when I fall insensible on the ground.

Then, within a short while, Bhima with his mace and Arjuna with his arrows destroy our elephant force. The bodies of the dead beasts, big as hills, entirely clog the field until the mighty Bhima drags them away bodily and makes a path for the Pandavas’ rathas to roll out.

Ashwatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman, not finding Duryodhana among the chariot-division, continue to search for your royal son and join Sakuni, anxious to catch a glimpse of the king after that horrific carnage of the great and noble elephants.’”

CANTO 122

"Sanjaya says, 'Arjuna and Bhimasena between them destroy your army and elephant-division, O Bhaarata. Your remaining sons, Durmarshana, Srutanta, Jaitra, Bhurivala, Ravi, Jayatsena, Sujata, Durvisaha, Durvimochana, Dushpradharsha and Srutarvan, join forces to counter Bhima. All of them, equally brave and able warriors, surround him from all sides and wildly assail him.

Mounted once more on his chariot, a berserk Bhimasena first decapitates Durmarshana with a razor-headed arrow and, in quick succession, kills Srutanta and Jayatsena. Srutarvan shoots Bhima with a hundred arrows winged with vulture feathers but, indifferent to his attack, Bhima strikes down Jaitra, Ravi and Bhurivala. With another broad-headed shaft, he kills Durvimochana and then sends Dushpradharsha and Sujata to Yamaloka. Seeing your other son, Durvishaha, rushing towards him, Bhima cuts him down in full view of all the bowmen. With so many of his brothers dead, Srutavan attacks Bhima with his formidable golden bow, in anger and despair. He breaks Bhima's bow and wounds him, but in the savage battle that follows, like the one between Vasava and the Asura Jambha long ago, Bhima beheads him.

Upon his fall, your troops, though terrified, still maintain their siege on Bhimasena and attempt to surround him. Like Indra smiting the Asuras, he destroys five hundred maharathas and kills seven hundred elephants, ten

thousand foot-soldiers and eight hundred horses. After killing most of your sons, Bhima is satisfied that he has accomplished the purpose of his birth. He then slaps his armpits and terrifies the huge elephants with that awful sound. By now, your army, Rajan, which has lost a countless number of men, is completely demoralised.'"

CANTO 123

"Sanjaya says, 'Only two of your sons still live, Duryodhana and Sudarsana, who are leading the Kaurava cavalry.

Krishna tells Arjuna, "Many of our kinsmen and allies are dead but our enemy has suffered greater losses. Here comes Satyaki with Sanjaya as his captive. Both Nakula and Sahadeva are exhausted, and Dhrishtadyumna, after decimating Duryodhana's troops, leads the Prabhadrakas. Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman have left Duryodhana's side and taken up their positions elsewhere. There, Partha, is Duryodhana at the head of his cavalry, with the royal chatra held over his head and casting keen glances all around. He has created a new vyuha with the remnants of his army.

Having slain a large number of your troops, he wears a proud look as if he believes that he has vanquished the Pandavas. Destroy his troops and then he will certainly come to battle himself. The sinful Duryodhana should never escape and you must try and kill him."

Arjuna replies, "Bhima has killed almost all the sons of Dhritarashtra. Only these two are alive and they also, Krishna, will die today! Bhishma lies on his bed of arrows and Drona, Karna, Salya and Jayadratha are dead. Barely five hundred horsemen of Sakuni's troops and two hundred chariots remain. A hundred formidable elephants and about three thousand foot soldiers are still alive on the field. There remain Aswatthaman, Kripa, the king of the Trigartas, Uluka, Kritavarman and a few others from

Duryodhana's army. Truly, there may be no escape from death for anybody on earth, but look, Duryodhana is still alive!'"

Today Yudhishtira will be free of all his enemies. I will win back all the possessions that the evil Sakuni took from us at the game of dice."

The chariot driven by Krishna moves towards Duryodhana's division and, together with Bhimasena and Sahadeva, they launch an attack on him. Seeing this, Sakuni and Susarman fly up to obstruct them while your son Sudarsana confronts Bhimasena, and Duryodhana, on horseback, confronts Sahadeva.

Duryodhana strikes Sahadeva in the head with a spear forcing him to sit down on the terrace of his chariot, his blood streaming and sighing like a snake. Regaining his senses, Sahadeva gets up and strikes back at Duryodhana with a towering gale of arrows. Arjuna first mows down the Kaurava cavalry, then takes on the Trigartha chariot-warriors led by Satyakarman. He destroys his adversary's ratha before he casually strikes his head off in a scarlet burst. Next, like a hungry lion pouncing on a deer in the forest, he kills Satyeshu.

Venting an anger nurtured over so many long years, Arjuna attacks Susarman, the lord of Prashthala, with a hundred arrows and kills all his horses. Then, with a thin smile, Partha buries an arrow like Yama's danda into Susarman's heart and, at last, the king of the Trigartas dies. Not pausing a moment, Arjuna despatches that Samsaptaka's five and thirty sons, maharathas all, and all of dead Susarman's warriors that still remain alive.

A raging Bhima beheads your son Sudarsana with a razor-faced arrow. The dead prince's followers surround Bhima and rain arrows over him but he kills them all, O Bharatarishabha, snarling like a mythic lion out of lost times. Soon there is a general battle as many Kaurava commanders charge up and engage Bhima and his men. Thousands die on both sides. The rills of blood flow again, though they are so much thinner than they were earlier.'"

CANTO 124

"Sanjaya says, 'During the mayhem of that battle, Sakuni attacks Sahadeva while Uluka does Bhima and they target each other with their golden arrows fletched with kanka and peacock feathers and sped from bow strings drawn to their ears. Bhima and Sahadeva cover the sky with their arrows, covering the sun; when the arrows fall on enemy ranks, blood gushes free everywhere. Dead horses, riders and the other detritus of battle clog the zones of battle across the field. The earth presents another fearsome sight where headless and bleeding bodies rise up and seem to dance as carnivores of diverse kinds swarm Kurukshetra to feast. Full of heart now, the Pandavas despatch the Kauravas in dense throngs to Yama.

Meanwhile, Sakuni stuns Sahadeva again with another spear to his head, driving him onto his knees on the terrace of his chariot. Bhima lets out a shattering roar to see this and sets about the whole Kuru army with his cloth-yard shafts. All Sakuni's soldiers with their horses and elephants flee in terror of Vayu's son.

King Duryodhana tries to stop them, roaring, "Stop, you cowards without Kshatriya dharma! Fight! What use of flight? The warrior who dies without turning his back on battle will have fame in this world and enjoy realms of bliss in the next!"

Hearing this ringing exhortation, Sakuni's warriors turn back against the Pandavas, with a sound like that of an angry sea. Meanwhile, Rajan,

Sahadeva recovers and a duel between him and Sakuni develops. Sakuni dares to face both Nakula and Bhimasena and his son Uluka comes swiftly to support his father. The battle between the three Kshatriyas becomes feverish as they decant showers of arrows on each other. Until, with a broad-headed arrow, Sahadeva decapitates Uluka and he falls out of his chariot, his naked throat spouting blood. Drawing deep breaths, his eyes red and teary, Sakuni bitterly remembers what Vidura once said in warning, and renews his attack on Sahadeva, who promptly breaks the Gandhara king's bow in his hands. At this, Sakuni hurls, in quick succession, a formidable sword, a fearsome mace, and finally a vicious dart at Madri's stormy son. Sahadeva destroys all these with utmost ease as they fly towards him.

Seeing his son killed and his attack repulsed, Sakuni and all your troops take to their heels with Sahadeva and the Pandava forces in hot pursuit.

Sahadeva soon catches up with Sakuni fleeing with the Gandhara cavalry. Aware that killing Sakuni was his task, Sahadeva strings his bow and drawing it with great force, rakes the gambler with arrows fletched with vulture feathers. Sahadeva says, "Observe Kshatriya dharma and fight me. How you enjoyed gambling with the ivory dice, Sakuni. Now reap the fruits of your evil deed just as the others have. Only the wretch, your nephew Duryodhana, and you are still alive. And now I will take your head like plucking a fruit from a tree with a stick!"

Sahadeva rushes wildly at Sakuni to consume him with his anger; forcefully drawing his bow, he wounds Sakuni and his horses and cuts down his royal parasol, standard and cleaves his bow. Sakuni raises a golden lance to fling at Sahadeva. However, with three wedge-headed arrows, in a single moment, Madri's son breaks that uplifted weapon as well as hacks away both Sakuni's rounded arms and lets out a simhanada. Then, with another flat-headed shaft with wings of gold, Sahadeva cuts the vile gambler's head from his neck in a scarlet flash and drops his body onto the earth. Thus is that clever, scheming, ruthless head, which was the source, the font of the Kuru's evil policy, finally removed. Seeing Sakuni lying headless and bleeding on the ground, your warriors are paralysed with fear, and run in all directions.

The Pandavas, O Bhaarata, are delighted at their success. Rejoicing with Kesava among them, they blow their conches and bring cheer to their troops. They hail and congratulate Sahadeva with joy and say, "It is fate that has allowed you to kill the evil Sakuni and his son today!"""

CANTO 125

HRADA-PRAVESA PARVA

"Sanjaya says, 'After the slaying of Sakuni and his son, his soldiers, O Rajan, mad with rage, launch a suicidal attack on the Pandavas. They come up against Arjuna and Bhimasena who have ridden hard to bring reinforcements for Sahadeva. Arjuna serenely cuts down all the weapons with which they shower him and makes short work of them, every last man of them, with his Gandiva. Gathering his remaining chariot force, which still numbers many hundreds, his elephants, cavalry and foot soldiers, Duryodhana sends them against Dhrishtadyumna's forces. With no one to lead or protect them, they are easy prey for the Pandavas who repulse their attack, while inflicting heavy losses on them.

The dust of battle completely obscures the sky as the Pandus and the Srinjayas annihilate all your akshauhinis.

Finally, among the thousands of noble kings on your side, only a severely wounded Duryodhana remains alive. Stupefied, he sees the earth empty of his troops and contemplates retreat from the battlefield while the Pandavas, filled with joy, loudly celebrate their success.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me the strength of the Pandavas troops at that time. What does my only surviving son, the wicked Duryodhana, do when he sees his army exterminated?'

Sanjaya says, ‘Of the mighty Pandava host led by Dhrishtadyumna, only two thousand chariots, seven hundred elephants, five thousand horses, and ten thousand foot-soldiers remain. Very few warriors from the eleven akshauhinis of the Kaurava army are left alive on that eighteenth day of the Great War.

Duryodhana abandons his horse, which indeed dies under him from exhaustion, and taking his gada, escapes eastwards on foot, towards the Dwaipayana lake. As he goes, the whole world spins around him and he remembers the dire warnings of the wise and virtuous Vidura, who, with clairvoyant vision, foresaw this great carnage of Kshatriyas on Kurukshetra. His heart burning with grief, Suyodhana takes refuge in the depths of the lake, submerging himself.

The Pandavas led by Dhrishtadyumna try to cut him off and attack his small escort. Arjuna stands glorious on his chariot, as he picks them off with a flurry of arrows from the Gandiva.

After the annihilation of Sakuni and his forces, your army is like a large forest laid low by Vayu himself. Save Aswatthaman, Kritavarman, Kripacharya, and your son Duryodhana, not another maharatha remains alive.

Seeing me, Dhrishtadyumna laughingly asks Satyaki, “What is the use of capturing him and keeping him alive?”

Satyaki raises his sword to kill me, but just then, Vyasa, the Island-born Maharishi Dwaipayana arrives there and says, “Let Sanjaya go. Do not kill him!”

At once Satyaki joins his palms together in reverence, and sets me free saying, “Peace, Sanjaya. You are free to go.”

I then take off my armour, surrender my weapons, and with my limbs bathed in blood, set out for the city. After I travel some two yojanas, I see Duryodhana, wounded, bleeding and standing with mace in hand. His eyes are full of tears and he looks blankly at me without recognition. I, too, was overwhelmed and for a little while could not speak a word. Then I tell him about my capture, and my release through the intervention of Vyasa. He composes himself, inquires about his brothers and his troops. Since I had witnessed everything, I tell him that his brothers are all dead and his troops exterminated. I tell the king that the Rishi Vyasa had confirmed that we now have only three maharathas left alive.

Sighing deeply, your son touches me with his hand and says, "Except you, Sanjaya, everyone else from my army is dead, while the Pandava and their allies are alive. Without friends, sons and brothers, seeing my kingdom taken by the Pandavas, who would want to live on? Tell my father, the blind king Dhritarashtra that, though badly wounded, I have escaped alive from this dreadful war and have entered the depths of Dwaipayana lake to rest and heal myself in its sacral waters."

With these words, he walks into the lake and using his power of illusion, charms the waters to make space for him and disappears. Soon after, I see Kripacharya, Aswatthaman and Kritavarman drive up, wounded and weary, on their tired animals. They greet me saying, "You are fortunate, Sanjaya, to be alive. Is Duryodhana also alive?"

I then tell them that the king was alive and everything that Duryodhana had said to me. I point out the lake that the king had entered. At this Aswatthaman cries, "The king does not know that we are still alive! With him among us, we can still fight our enemies."

Those maharathas stand there and lament until they see the Pandavas approaching. Then Kripa takes me up on his magnificent chariot and we drive to the Kuru camp. The sun has already set and the troops guarding the outposts of the camp weep on learning of the death of all your sons and the destruction of the whole army. Then the old men, whose responsibility it was to look after the women of the royal household, take the weeping princesses to Hastinapura. They rend their bodies with their nails, strike their heads with their hands, beat their breasts and, untying their hair, sob, wail aloud and shriek dementedly. Their ceaseless cries, like those of a flock of female ospreys, overwhelm the earth with the sound of their sorrow.

The friends of Duryodhana strike camp and set out for the city, taking the women of the royal household with them. Others take their wives and worldly possessions on mule carts, and hurry towards the city. Those very delicate women, O Rajan, who have never bared themselves to even the sun, find themselves now exposed to the gaze of the common people. The people, filled with panic and fear of Bhima and the Parthas, flee towards the city.

A grief-stricken Yuyutsu, the son of Dhritarashtra's Vaishya wife, thinks about what he should do in this crisis. He thinks, "Duryodhana and eleven akshauhinis of troops have been defeated by the Pandavas. All his brothers

and all the Kauravas, led by Bhishma and Drona, have perished. Destiny has ordained that only I should survive. The entire Kuru camp, including the women of the royal household, enervated, lord less, and deranged with grief, is running like a herd of deer. Ah, no one has seen such a sight ever before. I think that the time has come when I, too, should take refuge in the city with them."

He presents himself before Yudhishtira and Krishna to seek their permission; the compassionate king embraces him affectionately and lets him go. He leaves to supervise the journey of the women of the royal Kuru household to the city. Just as the sun sets, Yuyutsu enters the city of Hastinapura with the widowed, weeping women.

He sees the wise Vidura, who had just left Dhritarashtra, sitting with tearful eyes and his heart a stone of grief. He bows to him and stands waiting, as Vidura, the dharmatma, says, "It is fortunate, son, that you are still alive after the great carnage of the Kurus. But tell me why you have come without king Duryodhana?"

Yuyutsu replies, "After the fall of Sakuni, my lord, with all his kinsmen and friends, Suyodhana escaped on foot towards the east while all the rest in the Kaurava encampment, and the royal women under escort, fled to the city. To protect these people, I myself set out for Hastinapura with Yudhishtira and Kesava's leave."

Vidura lauds Yuyutsu and says, "You have acted very properly under the circumstances and maintained the honour of your race. You are now, in every sense, the sole staff of the blind king bereft of foresight. Afflicted by calamity, buffeted by Destiny, and despite all good advice, he continues to pursue his evil designs. Rest here today. Tomorrow you may return to Yudhishtira."

Vidura returns to the sorrowing palace of the king, which has lost all its magnificence; comfort, lustre and every happiness seems to have deserted it. It is empty and in utter disorder. Seeing this, Vidura's grief increases and sighing deeply, he enters the once hallowed halls.

Yuyutsu passes that night in untold sorrow and finds no joy at the praises of the vabdhis and magadhis that greet him in the morning. He can only think about the complete and unthinkable destruction of the Bharatas at each other's hands.'"

CANTO 126

"Dhritarashtra says, 'After the Pandavas kill all the Kaurava troops, what do those survivors of my army do—Kritavarman, Kripa and Aswatthaman and my evil son Duryodhana?'

Sanjaya says, 'After the noble Kshatriya women flee and the Kaurava camp becomes empty, the surviving three maharathas grow anxious about the safety of the king. As they drive anxiously towards the lake, they can hear the shouts of the victorious Pandavas. Meanwhile, Yudhishtira and his brothers prowl the battlefield in search of Duryodhana. They fail to find him since he has already ensconced himself at the bottom of the lake. The Pandavas search for him until their mounts are tired, and then retire to their camp for the night.

When all is quiet, Kripa, Aswatthaman and Kritavarman slowly approach the lake where the king lies hidden and resting within the waters, and say, "Arise, O Rajan, and join us in our fight against Yudhishtira! We will either find victory and rule the earth, or die and find swarga for ourselves. The Pandavas have suffered heavy losses, and the survivors have grievous wounds. They will not be able to stand up to you, especially when we are there to support you."

Duryodhana says, "It is my good fortune that I see you shuras return alive from this vicious war. Your exhortations are not surprising, for your hearts are noble and your devotion to me is great. We are all tired and

wounded while the Pandavas are swelling with triumph. Let us not be peremptory but rest for this one night and tomorrow go forth and finish the enemy."

Aswatthaman replies, "Bless you, Duryodhana. Arise and we will yet vanquish the enemy. I swear by all my punya, by all the dakshina I have given and by dharma itself, that I will kill the Somakas today! Let no rewards that come from performing yagnas accrue to me, if I do not kill the Pandavas this night. I swear that I will not take off my armour without slaying all the Panchalas."

While they are thus conversing, some hunters who regularly supply Bhima with wild game come there to slake their thirst. As they sit on the banks of the lake, they hear every word of that conversation between Duryodhana and the three maharathas. They realise that the king is hiding in the depths of the lake, unwilling to fight. A little while earlier, they met Yudhishtira searching for the Kaurava king, and he had asked them about his cousin's whereabouts. The hunters decide to tell the Pandavas about Duryodhana's location and are sure that the Dharmaraja would reward them generously.

The hunters make their way to where the Pandavas are resting in their camp. The Pandavas' spies and soldiers had made a futile search of the surroundings and reported that they could find no trace of Duryodhana. Yudhishtira is worried when the hunters arrive with their news. Though they are not allowed to see the king, they tell Bhima whatever they have seen and heard at the lake. Vrikodara, O Rajan, rewards them bounteously and rushes to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, saying, "The vetalas have discovered Duryodhana. He has hidden himself in the Dwaipayana lake with sorcery."

Led by Krishna, Yudhishtira, the Pandavas and the Panchalas hurry to the lake, shouting, "The evil son of Dhritarashtra has been found!"

The noise made by their chariots touches the heavens. Although their animals are tired, all of them, Arjuna, Bhimasena, the two sons of Madri, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, Uttamaujas, Yudhamanyu, Satyaki, the five sons of Draupadi, and the other Panchalas who are still alive, with all their elephants and foot-soldiers, come to the lake. The lake is wide as a small sea and its waters are cool and transparent. Your son Duryodhana rests submerged and invisible in it, armed with his mace.

Hearing the noise of the Pandavas' approach, Kritavarman, Kripa and Aswatthaman say to Duryodhana, "The jubilant Pandavas are coming! We

must leave this place for now."

Duryodhana submerges again with his mayic powers, and remains hidden within. The three maharathas led by Kripa sorrowfully take his leave, and go some distance away and sit down under the shade of a banyan tree, exhausted and anxious about how the king would deal with the sons of Pandu.

Kripa and the others free the horses from their chariots and rest, hidden, under the spreading tree.'"

CANTO 127

"Sanjaya says, 'No sooner have the three maharathas left, that the Pandavas reach lake Dwaipayana. Yudhishtira says to Krishna, "Look, Dhritarashtra's son has cast a devamaya over the lake and has hidden himself beneath its waters. But, Madhava, even if Indra comes to help him, I will still kill Duryodhana today."

Krishna says, "One who uses maya should be killed with maya. Use your own powers, O Bhaarata, and dispel Duryodhana's illusion that makes the water seem like solid ground. This is how Indra himself killed the Daityas and the Danavas. The noble Vishnu captured Bali and killed the great Asuras Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakasipu and Vritra using maya shakti. Rama killed the Rakshasa Ravana of Pulastya's race and his relatives and followers, with the powers of sorcery.

The Devas used maya long ago, to kill Danavas, Rakshasas and the two Daityas, Taraka and Viprachitti, as well as and the Asuras Vatapi, Ilwala, Trisiras, Sunda and Upasunda. Indra rules as the lord of heaven, with the help of his maya shakti. Yudhishtira, you must also use maya today to kill your evil cousin."

Yudhishtira taunts your son hidden in the lake, "O Suyodhana, coward, you now hide in these waters after you have caused the destruction of your own race and of all Kshatriya kind! Where is your sense of honour? I never

thought you were a coward but I am convinced today that your renown as a great hero is unfounded.

Come out and fight, if you are a Kshatriya. How can you, a scion of the Kuru race, hide in the depths of this lake after running away from battle? Flight is not the way of men of dharma, nor does it lead to swarga.

How can you hide now after causing and witnessing the slaughter of your sons, brothers, uncles, relatives, other kinsmen and your dearest friends and allies?

You have boasted in the hearing of all men about your courage, but you are no Kshatriya! If you are a man of the slightest dharma, how can you even think of saving your own life after being the cause of the extermination of all your brothers and your entire army?

Relying on Karna and Sakuni, you considered yourself immortal. You were a fool who did not understand himself. After committing such grievous sins as you have, causing a carnage such as this world has not seen before, how can you hide now? You must come out and fight. Where is that manliness of yours, Suyodhana, which nobody could deny, and where is the pride that you so cherish? Where is your great prowess as a warrior?

Come and fight as the Kshatriya dharma dictates. Either rule the world after defeating us, or lie dead on the ground as food for scavengers. This is your highest dharma, as laid down by the illustrious Brahma himself. Be a king and conduct yourself as the shastras say that all Kshatriyas, even the least, let alone a great king like you, must, O Maharatha!"

From beneath the water, in a ghostly voice, Duryodhana says, "It should be no surprise, Yudhishtira, that fear enters the hearts of all beings. However, I did not flee for fear of my life or from grief. I had no chariot, my arrows were exhausted, my Parshni charioteers were dead and I was alone, without a single soldier to stand by me in battle. I was also exhausted and wanted a little rest. You too, O son of Kunti, rest a while and, when I rise from this lake, I will certainly fight all of you."

Yudhishtira replies, "We need no rest. We have been searching for you for a long time, so come out and give us battle. Either kill us or die!"

Duryodhana says in a choking voice, "My brothers, for whose sake I wanted sovereignty, are all dead and there are no great Kshatriyas left alive. I am like a widowed woman who has no wish to enjoy this barren earth. Yet, I still hope to vanquish you and curb the pride of the Panchalas and the Pandavas. Further, there is no longer any need for battle when Drona and

Karna are dead and our Pitamaha Bhishma has fallen. Who wants to rule a kingdom without friends and allies? So, this desolate earth now exists for you. I will put on deerskin and take sannyasa in the forest. You can rule this earth as you please, without kings, without warriors, bereft of wealth, and without any glory or grandeur."

Hearing these poignant words of grief, the illustrious Yudhishtira says with unusual harshness, "Do not rave, Suyodhana, from within the waters. I am like Sakuni now, and your words do not evoke any compassion in me. Accepting a gift is not the duty laid down for a Kshatriya. Moreover, how can you give me the earth that you no longer own? Why did you not offer this gift when, observing the laws of dharma and wishing the welfare of our race, we begged you only for our share? Then you said you would not give me even as much land as could be covered by the point of a needle.

You will not escape me with your life! I will rule this earth only after vanquishing you in battle. Either kill us and rule the earth, or die and go to swarga.

If both of us are alive after this war, then all beings will remain in doubt about who was the final victor. Your life, fool, now depends upon me. If I like, I might allow you to live, but you do not deserve that. In the past you tried to kill us with fire, water, serpents and other kinds of poison. You wronged us by stealing our kingdom, with your savage words in the Kuru sabha, and most of all by humiliating Draupadi. And today, for these reasons, O wretched Duryodhana, your life is forfeit. Come out of the water and fight us!"

In this way, O Rajan, those Praviras, the Pandavas, flushed with victory, repeatedly rebuke and mock Duryodhana.'"

CANTO 128

Gada-yuddha Parva

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, how does Duryodhana, who is so choleric by nature, react when admonished? He is used to receiving the respect due to a king. You saw with your own eyes, how the whole earth, with her Mlecchas and nomadic tribes, depend upon him. He regrets the need to take shelter of any kind, even from the sun. Now, without any supporters, what reply does he give to the bitter and repeated taunts of the Pandavas?'

Sanjaya replies, 'When Duryodhana hears Yudhishtira's angry words of rebuke, from under the lake, he is unhappy. Sighing deeply, he flexes his arms and says, "You Parthas now have friends, chariots and animals. However, I am alone, without horses or even a charioteer, so how can I challenge you? Will you fight me one at a time, for it is not Kshatriya dharma for all of you to attack me together? I have not the least fear of either you, or Bhima, or Arjuna, or Vasudeva, or the twins, or Yuyudhana, or all the Panchalas, or all your other troops. Singly, I can match you all.

Remember, for all Kshatriyas, fame depends on dharma. Like the year that gradually meets the seasons, one by one, I will rise from this lake and destroy all you Pandavas. Thus I will free myself from the obligation I owe Bahlika, Drona, Bhishma, Karna, Jayadratha, Bhagadatta, Salya,

Bhurisrava, Sakuni, to my sons, my friends and well-wishers, kinsmen and to the many illustrious Kshatriyas who have died for me."

Yudhishtira replies, "It is fortunate, O Suyodhana, that you know Kshatriya dharma and are ready to battle all of us. Choose your weapon and fight any one of us. The rest of us will not participate."

Duryodhana says, "You are a brave man to allow me to select any one of you to fight. The gada that I hold in my hand is my choice of weapon. Any one of you may come forward and fight me on foot. We have seen many exciting single combats fought from chariots. Let this be a duel with maces, and so suitably modify the rules for the purpose. O Yudhishtira, with my mace I will vanquish you, all your younger brothers, as well as all the Panchalas, the Srinjayas and your other troops. I do not fear even Sakra himself."

Yudhishtira says, "Get up, O Mahabaho, and fight us one at a time with your gada. Fight cautiously, for today you will lose your life, even if Indradeva becomes your ally."

Goaded beyond endurance, your son can no longer stomach Yudhishtira's taunts and, with a long and heavy sigh, rises with great force from within the lake. Shining in his effulgence, he emerges like a mountain oozing water, shouldering his adamantine golden mace and his body bathed in blood. Seeing him, the Panchalas and the Pandavas rejoice. Duryodhana sees this as an insult, rolls his eyes in wrath, contracts his brow into three furrows and, repeatedly biting his lower lip, he challenges the Parthas to battle in his deep voice, "You Pandavas will suffer for your taunts. I will send you and the Panchalas to Yamaloka today. Fight me one at a time, for it is not Kshatriya dharma to attack a lone warrior without armour, who is fatigued, covered in water, injured, without a chariot, horses and troops. Let the Devas be the judge of dharma and adharma."

Yudhishtira says, "How is it, O Duryodhana, that you did not have this knowledge when many of you shuras together killed a lone Abhimanyu? All beings when in trouble forget dharma and then think that the gates of the other world are closed. Put on your armour and tie up your locks. Take anything else that you need. I also agree that if you can kill any one of us five Pandavas in a duel, you shall then be king again. Except for your life, tell us what other boon you want."

Then your son, O Rajan, dons gilded armour with a casque and stands glorious as a golden cliff. He then tells the Pandavas, "I am ready to fight

any one among you—Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva or you, O Bharatarishabha—with a gada and I will certainly win. Today with my gada wrapped in a cloth of gold, I will finally end these interminable hostilities when I kill all of you one by one. It is not proper for me to boast about my prowess but within this very hour, I will prove these words either true or false. Let any one among you take up the mace and fight me.”””

CANTO 129

"Sanjaya says, 'While Duryodhana, O Rajan, repeatedly boasts in this manner, an angry Krishna tells Yudhishtira, "You have made a reckless promise by agreeing to make him king if he kills one of us. I do not see the man in the world today, why not even a Deva, who can defeat Duryodhana in a duel with the gada. None of you can match him in a fair fight. Duryodhana has always wanted to kill Bhima and has practised with the gada upon an iron statue for the last thirteen years. At this moment, I do not see anyone who can match him, except possibly Bhima, and he has not practiced enough. You have once again gambled everything on a wretched game of chance, like the one you lost to Sakuni.

Your oath, Yudhishtira, has placed our enemy in a strong position and made your own untenable. Who relinquishes sovereignty when it is within his grasp, and when he has but one enemy to vanquish? How then, O Bhaarata, can you offer him a choice of weapons and the kingdom to the victor? Without a doubt, the offspring of Pandu and Kunti are born to live in exile in the vana, as sannyasis."

Bhima says reassuringly, "O Madhusudana, do not despair. However difficult, I will end these hostilities today when I kill Suyodhana. My mace is one and a half times heavier than Duryodhana's and I will challenge him to fight me. Why, I could quell the three worlds, including the very Devas, with my gada, even if they come armed with every kind of weapon."

Vasudeva is pleased and lauds him, saying, "Dharmaputra Yudhishtira will undoubtedly win back his kingdom after you slay all his enemies, O Mahabaho. You have already killed all the sons of Dhritarashtra and innumerable kings, princes and elephants. You have obliterated the Kalingas, the Magadhas, the Kauravas, the Westerners and the Gandharas. You will certainly accomplish your vow and break all Duryodhana's bones. Gift the earth with her oceans to Yudhishtira, even as Vishnu once conferred the sovereignty of three worlds upon the Lord of Sachi. Remember to fight him with care for he possesses both skill and strength and always revels in a fight."

Satyaki, Yudhishtira, the Panchalas and the Pandavas all applaud these words. Bhima responds, "Today I will purge my heart of the anger that I nurse in my bosom against Suyodhana. Like Arjuna who set fire to the Khandava forest, I will today pluck out the barb that lies buried in my heart for so long. O Vibho, today he will abandon his life's breath, his prosperity and his kingdom, and I will recover your crown for you. Today Dhritarashtra will hear of his son's death and remember all the wrongs the Kauravas have inflicted on us at Sakuni's instigation."

With this, Bhima stands ready for battle, like Sakra challenging Vritra. Your son springs like a lion to face him for he has no fear, no worry, no pain, and no anxiety. Bhima tells him, "Remember all those wrongs that king Dhritarashtra and you have visited on us. Recollect what happened at Varanavata. Recall how Draupadi, while in her season, was humiliated in the Kuru sabha and how Sakuni, through his machinations, cheated Yudhishtira at dice. Face now, O evil one, the consequences of these actions, as well as of the other wrongs that you inflicted on us. It is because of you that the illustrious lord of the Bharatas, the son of Ganga, our Pitamaha, lies dying on a bed of arrows; and Drona, Karna and Salya are dead along with Sakuni the root of this horrific war. We have exterminated your brothers, your sons and all your troops. The battle has taken the lives of other great kings, many shuras and Kshatriyas, as well as the wretch Dusasana who dragged Draupadi into the Kuru court by her open hair.

O you exterminator of your race, you vilest among men, now you alone remain alive. I will kill you today, destroy your pride, your hopes of sovereignty, and have my revenge for all your sins against us."

Duryodhana replies, "What is the use of words? Fight, O Vrikodara, and I will beat the very desire for battle out of you. Do you not see me standing

here to fight you with the gada? In a fair fight, not even Purandara can vanquish me when I wield this formidable mace.

So far, you could not do me the slightest injury. I, however, forced you to live in the forest, to work as another's servants, and to conceal yourselves in disguises. We have killed many of your friends and allies. Our losses are equal. So if I lose this duel, it would indeed be remarkable. Perhaps, Kaala will be the cause if such a miracle were to occur.

I have never been defeated in a fair fight. If you vanquish me by deceit, your infamy will last forever. Do not bellow fruitlessly, Bhima, but show me what you can do."

The Pandavas with the Srinjayas, both sensing victory, applaud the contestants. Like men goading an infuriated elephant with clapping of hands, all of them then encourage king Duryodhana with accolades and cheers. The elephants begin to trumpet and the horses to neigh. The weapons of the Pandavas blaze forth of their own accord.'"

CANTO 130

"Sanjaya says, 'Just as their duel is about to begin, Balarama arrives there. His banner bears the device of the palmyra tree and his weapon is the plough, the halayudha.'

Balarama looks at Krishna, the Pandavas, and at Duryodhana and Bhima armed with maces, and says, "I set out in the month of Pushya and have come back in Sravana. Two and forty days have passed since I left home and I am eager, O Madhava, to watch this duel." Yudhishtira warmly embraces Balarama and welcomes him respectfully, as do the two illustrious Krishnas. Similarly, the two sons of Madri and the five sons of Draupadi, and the other kings reverentially salute Rohini's mighty son.'

Baladeva embraces the Pandavas and the Srinjayas, and all of them greet and welcome him. He snuffles the heads of Krishna and Satyaki and they greet him joyfully, like Indra and Upendra worshipping Brahma, lord of the Devas. Then the Dharmaputra says, "Witness, O Rama, this clash between the two cousins."

Clad in brilliant blue robes, the fair, handsome and powerful elder brother of Kesava sits down among them. He is like the moon in the firmament, surrounded by multitudes of stars. Then, O Rajan, ensues that duel to bring to a conclusion the enmity that had raged for so long.'"

CANTO 131

Janamejaya said, "On the eve of the great battle of Mahabharata, lord Balarama left Dwaraka accompanied by many of the Vrishnis and telling Krishna, 'I am leaving and will help neither the son of Dhritarashtra nor the sons of Pandu.'

O Brahmana, tell me in detail how Rama happened to arrive there in time to witness the duel."

Vaisampayana said, "O Mahabaho, after the noble Pandavas began living in Upaplavya, they send Krishna to Dhritarashtra to sue for peace. Krishna met Dhritarashtra in Hastinapura and spoke to him gravely about what would be beneficial for all concerned. However, the king, as I told you before, did not listen to him. Krishna returned to the Pandava camp, and said to them, 'It was Fate that forced the Kauravas to disregard my advice. We go to war, O sons of Pandu, in this month of Pushya.'

Later, while the Pandavas and the Kauravas muster their armies, Balarama suggests to his brother Krishna that they side with the Kurus. Krishna however, refuses and an angry Balarama, accompanied by all the Yadavas, sets out in Maitra, on a pilgrimage to the Saraswati accompanied by all the Yadavas. The Bhoja chief Kritavarman joins Duryodhana while Krishna and Yuyudhana take the side of the Pandavas.

Rama leaves from Dwaraka, carrying all things necessary for a pilgrimage, including the sacred fire, priests, hundreds of leading

Brahmanas, gold, silver, robes, horses, elephants, chariots, mules, camels, cattle and other draft animals, for a tirtha-yatra to the sacred waters of the Saraswati.

He sets out towards the Saraswati, O Bharatarishabha, and visits all the sacred places, the tirthas, along her course. He distributes varied wealth and gifts in large measure in diverse countries to the needy, the old and to children. At his command, men at different points along the journey store food and drink in large quantities. Balarama gives Brahmanas and Kshatriyas everywhere whatever they desire—costly garments, fine bedsteads and coverlets. Wherever his party journeys, they leave happy and satisfied people and their path is like swarga itself. That Yadusreshta gives away thousands of milch cattle in excellent trappings, with their horns cased in gold; many horses of different breeds he gives, many carriages and chariots, and many beautiful slaves. The noble Rama gives away wealth as he travels along the Saraswati visiting various tirthas, until he finally reaches Kurukshetra."

Janamejaya said, "Tell me, O Purushottama, the features, the origin, and the merits of the many tirthas on the Saraswati and the rules to be observed while visiting these."

Vaisampayana said, "O Rajan, I will describe to you in detail, the features and the origin of all the various tirthas. Baladeva and his followers first visit Prabhasa where Soma the Lord of the constellations found a cure for phthisis, a wasting disease he acquired through a curse. He regained his lustre and energy, and now illuminates the universe. The tirtha is therefore called Prabhasa."

Janamejaya asked, "O Mahamuni, how did the adorable Soma contract consumption? How did he regain his tejas after bathing in that sacred water?"

Vaisampayana said, "Daksha Prajapati had seven and twenty daughters, unrivalled in beauty whom he gave in marriage to Soma. These daughters were associated with the constellations that help men in calculating time. The most beautiful was Rohini and an enraptured Soma lived exclusively with her. His other wives complained to their father Daksha and threatened to leave Soma and to perform tapasya.

Daksha advised Soma to treat all his wives equally and then told his daughters to return to their husband. However, Chandrama continued to live exclusively with Rohini and the other wives complained again to Daksha,

who once more warned Soma to behave equally towards all his wives or face his curse.'

This too had no effect on Soma and an angry Daksha cursed Soma with the disease of phthisis. Soon, the Lord of the stars began to slowly waste away. He performed many yagnas but could not free himself from that curse. As a result, trees and plants failed to grow without the nourishment of moonlight; their sap and juices dried up, they become tasteless and lost their potency; indeed, soon all living creatures began to decay. The Devas learned of the reason for Soma's decline, rushed to Daksha and pleaded with him to take back his curse for all living beings, trees and plants were withering away and the gods, too, were starving. They request him to forgive Soma for the world was turning into a vast desert.

Daksha told the Devas, 'I cannot revoke my curse. However, if henceforth Sasin treats all his wives equally and bathes in that tirtha where the Saraswati mingles with the western Ocean, and there worships Mahadeva, he will shine forth once more. Nevertheless, for half the month Soma will wane every day, and for the other half he will wax. At that time, he will regain his former lambency and beauty.'

At this command of the Devarishi Daksha, Soma visited the Prabhasa tirtha on the Saraswati and bathed there on the day of the new moon, and regained his cool rays and once more illumined the worlds. The Devas went to Prabhasa and escorted Soma to Daksha.

Daksha was pleased and once more said to him, 'Do not, O son, disrespect women, and never ignore Brahmanas. Go now and conscientiously obey my commands.'

Soma went back to his own abode and all creatures, filled with joy, continued to live as before.

This is the story of Chandrama and the curse that he suffered, and how Prabhasa became the greatest of all tirthas. On every day of the new moon, O Rajan, Soma bathes in this tirtha and regains his effulgence.

Next, Baladeva spends one night at the tirtha called Chamasodbheda, duly performs his ablutions and gives away many costly gifts.

He then visits Udapana where the Saraswati disappears and flows through the bowels of the earth."

CANTO 132

Vaisampayana said, "At the next tirtha called Udapana, Baladeva gives away his wealth as dakshina, worships the Brahmanas, bathes there and is filled with ananda, bliss. It was here that the two brothers of the illustrious Rishi Trita cast him into a hole and incurred his curse. It was also there that the Rishi drank the Soma rasa."

Janamejaya said, "Tell me the story of Maharishi Trita and the origin of Udapana."

Vaisampayana continued, "In a former yuga, there lived three brothers called Ekata, Dwita and Trita, all three Mahrishis with tejas like the sun's. They had progeny, punya from their tapasya, and acquired the privilege of attaining swarga after death.

Their sire Gautama, who was devoted to dharma, was pleased with them for their tapasya, vratas and niyati and found great joy in them. Gautama, after a long life, finally left for a transcendent realm. The kings who conducted yagnas and were the Yajamanas of Gautama continued to respect his sons after his death. Amongst the three, Trita, through his actions and study of the Vedas, became the foremost; all the Rishis and Munis began to look up to him even as they had his father Gautama.

His two brothers Ekata and Dwita were avaricious for wealth and decided to perform a yagna. They took Trita with them and collected the necessary sacrificial cows and other animals from their Yajamanas for their

yagna. They travelled east with Trita leading the way and with Ekata and Dwita following with the animals. Seeing that large herd of kine, they became greedy and decided to appropriate them without giving a share to Trita.

They said, 'Trita is skilled in assisting at yagnas, is devoted to the Vedas, and is capable of earning more cows on his own. So let us take this herd with us and leave Trita to his own devices.'

When night fell, they were frightened to see a wolf barring their way and ran away in fright. Trita fell into a fathomless well on the bank of the nearby Saraswati. He shouted in panic but his two brothers, although they heard his cries, deserted him, partly from fear of the wolf and partly out of greed for the cows.

Trita, O Rajan, thought that he had plunged into hell as a sinner. He was afraid to die since he had not earned the punya of drinking Somarasa. A wise man, he began to plan how he could achieve this from the depths of the well. He noticed a creeper growing in the deep hole although the pit was dry. Using the power of his imagination, the sage conjured up water and a yagna fire there. He imagined himself the Hotri and the creeper to be the Soma plant. He then mentally recited the Riks, the Yayuses and the Samans that were necessary for the performance of a yagna and converted the pebbles lying at the bottom of the well into grains of sugar. Then, in his mind, he performed his ablutions, conceived the water to be the ghee allotted to the Devas, their respective shares of the yagna offerings, and drank the Soma. Then he began to make a reverberantly loud noise.

The sound he made after performing the yagna penetrated swarga and Trita completed that yagna in the manner laid down by worshippers of the Brahman. His yagna agitated the whole of Devaloka and no one knew the cause. Brihaspati, the Acharya of the Devas, heard that sound and told the Devas, 'Trita is performing a yagna. We must go there, Devas. He has acquired great punya and, if angered, he can even create other Devas.'

All the Devas hurried to where Trita was performing the yagna, greeted him and said, 'We have come for our share in your offerings.'

Trita duly apportions them their shares with proper mantras and the gratified Devas gave him all the boons he desired. He begged that they rescue him from the well and asked that all those who bathe in that well receive the end that persons who have drunk Soma rasa attain.

At these words, the river Saraswati appeared within that well and raised Trita to the surface where the Devas blessed him, saying 'Tathaastu—so be it,' and returned to Devaloka.

Trita went back to his own home and cursed his two brothers, saying, 'Since you deserted me, you will suffer for your sin and roam the forest as wolves. Your offspring will become leopards, bears and apes.'

Baladeva bathes in the waters of Udapana, gives away wealth and worships many Brahmanas. He then moves on to Vinasana, another tirtha along the Saraswati."

CANTO 133

Vaisampayana said, “Then Baladeva, O Bharatasattama, visits the place where the Saraswati once again becomes invisible. The Rishis named this tirtha Vinasana because of her dislike for Sudras and Abhiras. After he bathes in that tirtha, Baladeva next visits Subhumika.

This Tirtha, appropriately named Subhumika, is the resort of Brahma and many fair and beautiful Apsaras sport innocently here. Every month, the Devas and the Gandharvas visit this place and sacred and auspicious flowers rain on them.

Baladeva bathes in that tirtha, and sees shadows of Devas, Gandharvas, and Rakshasas there. He distributes more of his wealth to the Brahmanas, and enjoys the songs and music of those gods on earth.

The son of Rohini then moves on to the tirtha inhabited by Viswavasu, a great punyavan, and his Gandharvas who pass their time in dance and song. Here Baladeva gives away all kinds of riches to the Brahmanas, as well as goats, sheep, kine, mules, camels, gold and silver.

Baladeva next visits the tirtha eponymously called Gargasrota. It was here that the venerable Garga, his soul cleansed by tapasya, acquired knowledge of Kaala, of astronomy, and the meaning of all portents. Rishis came here to acquire knowledge of Kaala from Garga. Smeared with white sandalwood paste, Balarama duly gives away wealth to many sannyasis and Brahmanas.

He the visits a gigantic pipal tree called Mohasankha, on the bank of the Saraswati. Tall as Meru and visited by Rishis, this vriksha is famous throughout the world as a sacred tirtha. Yakshas, Vidyadharas, and immensely strong Rakshasas, Pisachas and Siddhas, in their thousands, live here. All of them, abandoning other kinds of food, observe vratas and niyamas, eat only seasonal fruits from that tree for their sustenance, and wander unseen by men, in separate bands. Baladeva gives away as dakshina, milch cows, vessels of copper, iron, and other diverse kinds of gifts. He worships the Brahmanas who bless him in return.

He then goes to the Dwaita Lake, where he bathes in its waters, and pays his reverences to the Brahmanas and gives them generous dakshina. He travels along the southern bank of the Saraswati and visits Nagadhanwana tirtha, the abode of the Nagaraja Vasuki. Vasuki was once installed there with all due rites by the Devas and there is no fear of snakes here. Fourteen thousand Rishis live here permanently and Baladeva duly gives away dakshina to them.

He then sets out eastward and visits, one after another, thousands of famed tirthas along the way. He bathes at all these tirthas, observes upavasas and other vratas as directed by the Rishis. Here, too, he distributes wealth generously, salutes the Rishis, and once more sets out to reach the spot where the Saraswati turns in an easterly direction. The great river changes her course here for a darsana of the noble Rishis dwelling in the forest of Naimisa, and viewing the spectacle, Balarama is filled with wonder."

Janamejaya said, "Why, O best of Adharyus, does the Saraswati bend her course there in an easterly direction?"

Vaisampayana said, "In the Krita yuga, O Rajan, the Rishis dwelling in Naimisa performed a mahayagna extending for twelve years after which they set out to visit the tirthas. Because of the large number of the Rishis, the tirthas on the southern bank of the Saraswati all turned into towns and cities. Those Brahmanas, in order to enjoy the punya of tirthas, began dwelling on the bank of the river up to Samantapanchaka. The river was stunning to behold with blazing homa fires, and the whole region resounded with loud Vedic recitations, as those Rishis poured libations of ghee. Also present were Balakhilyas, Asmakuttas, Dantolakhalinas, Samprakshanas and other Rishis and Munis who were observing diverse kinds of vratas.

They sanctified and beautified the place with their presence, like the Devas adorning the heavenly stream Mandakini.

However, those Rishis failed to find sufficient room to live on the banks of the golden river. The Saraswati saw that large body of Rishis despairing for the want of a broad tirtha where they could perform their rites. Then, in a wonderful gesture, she turned her course to form those great pools and tanks at Naimisa so that Rishis could perform even Mahayagnas there; then she flowed again in a westerly direction. A wonderstruck Rama bathed in those tirthas and duly gifted away wealth and other gifts to the Brahmanas. Blessed by those regenerate ones, he then set out from that greatest of all tirthas on the Saraswati called Sapta-Saraswat, where the great ascetic Mankanaka had successfully performed his most profound tapasya.

Numerous birds have their nests there and it is full of Badari, Inguda, Kshamarya, Plaksha, Aswattha, Vibhitaka, Kakkola, Palasa, Karira, Pilu, and other kinds of trees. Forests of Karushakas, Bilwas, Amratakas, Atimuktas, Kashandas, Parijatas and banana plantations adorn it. Various groups of Rishis, some called Vaneyas, live there, and it reverberates with the chanting of the Vedas, and swarms with varied kinds of animals and is the favourite abode of men without malice and devoted to dharma.”

CANTO 134

Janamejaya said, “O Maharishi, tell me about the tirtha Sapta-Saraswat. Who was Rishi Mankanaka? What were his vratas and how did he fulfil them?”

Vaisampayana replied, “Rajan, seven Saraswatis cover this universe and she appears wherever persons of great tejas summon her. The seven forms of the Saraswati are Suprava, Kanchanakshi, Visala, Manorama, Oghavati, Surenu and Vimalodaka. Once, Brahma performed a great yagna to bring prosperity to everyone. The yagnashala resounded with the recitation of sacred hymns and the chanting of the Vedas by many Dvijas conversant with dharma and artha. Gandharvas sang and Apsaras danced and played upon many celestial instruments all the while. The wealth of provisions procured for that yagna satisfied even the Devas and filled them with wonder.

Then the Rishis, O Rajan, said, ‘This yagna cannot be said to possess great merit, since that foremost of rivers, Saraswati, is not present here.’

Hearing this, the divine Brahma joyfully thought of Saraswati and summoned her to Pushkara and she appeared there as Suprava, gratifying all the Munis.

At another time, many Munis gathered in Naimisa to discuss the Vedas. They thought of Saraswati and that foremost of rivers came there as Kanchanakshi.

Again, while king Gaya was engaged in the performance of a great yagna at Gaya, Saraswati, too, was invited. She appeared and the Rishis gathered there named her Visala.

Auddalaka performed a yagna on the sacred plain north of Kosala. Before he began his yagna, he thought of Saraswati, and she, sacred river, appeared there and the Rishis called her Manorama.

Again, while the noble Kuru was conducting a yagna at Kurukshetra, Vasishta, who was assisting him, summoned Saraswati and she appeared as Oghavati.

A yagna was once performed at the source of the Ganga by Daksha and Saraswati appeared there as the fast-flowing Surenu.

Once, while Brahma was engaged in a yagna in the sacred forest on the Himavat Mountains, he summoned Saraswati, and she appeared there, too, as Vimalodaka.

Baladeva finally visits the Sapta-Saraswat tirtha where all these seven forms of Saraswati manifested together.

I will now tell you about the great Rishi Mankanaka, the son of Vayu Deva and Sukanya, who led the life of a Brahmachari from his childhood. Once while bathing, he saw a beautiful woman sporting naked in the river. At this sight, the Rishi could not control himself and ejaculated into the Saraswati. He scooped up his sperm and placed it within an earthen pot where the fluid separated into seven parts. From those seven portions, the seven Rishis, Vayuvega, Vayuhan, Vayumandala, Vayujata, Vayuretas and Vayuchakra of great tejas were born. From them sprang the nine and forty Maruts.

Once Mankanaka cut his hand on a blade of Kusa grass and vegetable juice came out of the wound instead of red blood. Seeing this, the overjoyed Rishi danced about in that place in seemingly mad ecstasy. All mobile and immobile beings who witnessed this began to dance too, stupefied by his energy. The Devas with Brahma at their head, and all the Tapasvin Maharishis, went to Mahadeva, and told him of the strange antics of Rishi Mankanaka and implored him to stop the Rishi.

Mahadeva went to Mankanaka, and asked, ‘What is the cause for such joy, O Maharishi, that an ascetic like you walking along the path of dharma, should act in this strange way?’

The Rishi replied, ‘Why, do you not see, O Brahmana, that vegetable juice is flowing from my wound? Seeing this I am dancing in great joy.’

Laughing at the Rishi confused by excitement, the Devadeva said, ‘I do not wonder at this at all. Behold!’

Saying this, Mahadeva cut his thumb with the nail of one of his fingers, and ashes, white as snow, came pouring out of that wound. Seeing this, the Rishi was mortified, O Rajan, and understood that it was Mahadeva and fell at his feet. Filled with wonder, he said, ‘I know that you are none other than Rudra, that great and Supreme Being. O Sulin, you are the refuge of this universe of Devas and Asuras, which you create. At the universal destruction, the Mahapralaya, everything will once more enter you. Even the Devas cannot know you so how then can I? Brahma and the Devas worship you, O sinless one. It is through your grace that the Devas pass their time in joy and perfect fearlessness.’

Then the Rishi bowed and said, ‘I pray that this ludicrous lack of gravity that I displayed, O Deva, does not destroy my punya.’

Mahadeva cheerfully said, ‘Let your punya increase a thousand fold, O Brahmana, through my grace. Also, I will always dwell with you in this asrama. For the man who worships me in this tirtha Sapta-Saraswat, nothing will be unattainable here or hereafter. Without doubt, such a one will go to the blessed realm called Saraswat in heaven after dying.’”

CANTO 135

Vaisampayana said, “Baladeva worships the Munis living at Mankanaka, duly distributes large dakshinas to the Brahmanas, and after spending one night there and receiving their blessings, he sets out for other tirthas.

He visits Usanas at the Kapalamochana tirtha. The noble Kavi Sukra performed his tapasya there and meditated upon the war between the Daityas, the Danavas, and the Devas. The whole science of politics and morals, named after him, appeared embodied to him by inward light. Baladeva arrives at that holy tirtha, and duly gives dakshina to the Brahmanas there.”

Janamejaya then asked, “Tell me about the tirtha called Kapalamochana.”

Vaisampayana said, “Once upon a time, the noble Dasarathaputra Rama lived for some time in the forest of Dandaka to rid it of Rakshasas. At Janasthana, he cut off the head of an evil Rakshasa, which fell from the sky into the deep forest and on to the thigh of the Rishi Mahodara while he was wandering through the vana. The head fell on his thigh and stuck there. In great pain and with putrid matter flowing from his thigh, Mahodara yet visited all the tirthas on earth, went to all the rivers and to the ocean and, not finding any relief, he spoke of his sufferings to many Rishis. They suggested that he visit the tirtha Usanas on the Saraswati, for it was an

excellent place to attain success in tapasya. Accordingly, he came and bathed in its currents and the Rakshasa's head left his thigh, fell into the water and was lost. Mahodara, freed from the Rakshasa's head, returned to his asrama with cleansed soul and with all his sins washed away. He spoke of what happened to other Rishis and they named the tirtha Kapalamochana. The great Rishi Mahodara returned once more to that tirtha, drank its water and acquired great punya. Here, too, Baladeva worships the Brahmanas, gives them much wealth, and then travels to the next tirtha, Rushangu.

Here, O Bhaarata, was where the great Muni Viswamitra, who was earlier a Kshatriya, became a Brahmana, and Arshtishena once undertook the most austere of tapasyas. That tirtha, capable of granting every wish, has always been the home of Munis and Brahmanas. Baladeva visits the place where Rushangu, in an earlier time, cast off his body.

Rushangu was an old Brahmana, always engrossed in tapasya. Endued with great punya, he reflected for a long while and decided to cast off his body. He then summoned all his sons and told them to take him to a place where water was abundant. They took him to a tirtha on the Saraswati. He bathed there with due rites, and then cheerfully said to all his waiting sons, 'He who casts off his body on the northern bank of the Saraswati while mentally chanting sacred mantras, will never again suffer death.'

Baladeva bathes in that tirtha and gives away considerable wealth to the Brahmanas. His next destination is the tirtha where the Grandsire once created the mountains called Lokaloka. Here, through austere tapasya, that foremost of Rishis, Arshtishena of rigid vratas, the royal sage Sindhudwipa, and the great Rishi Devapi, and the illustrious Muni Viswamitra of great tejas acquired true Brahmanatva."

CANTO 136

Janamejaya said, “Why did Arshtishena undergo the austerest of tapasyas? I am curious to know how Sindhudwipa, Devapi and Viswamitra acquired the status of Brahmanas.”

Vaisampayana said, “In the Krita age, O Rajan, there lived a regenerate Rishi called Arshtishena. Despite living for many years in his Acharya’s house, and studying assiduously, he could not master any branch of knowledge or the Vedas. In great disappointment, he performed a very austere yagna, and just by his tapasya, he acquired the complete understanding of the Vedas. In gratitude, he bestowed three boons on that place. He said, ‘From this day, a man who bathes in this tirtha will obtain all the great benefits of an Aswamedha yagna. No one will have any need to fear snakes and wild beasts here. Even small exertions will result in great results here.’

With these words, mahatejasvin Arshtishena ascended into swarga.

In that very tirtha, in the Krita yuga, Devapi and Kusika’s son Sindhudwipa, O Rajan, acquired the lofty condition of Brahmatva after performing an arduous tapasya. There also lived a celebrated Kshatriya called Gadhi, the King of Kausika, who became a great Rishi and went to swarga after he set his son Viswamitra on his throne. However, despite his best efforts, he could not protect his kingdom. Once he took his four kinds of forces to meet a threat from some Rakshasas in his kingdom.

On the way, Viswamitra reached the asylum of Vasishta. His troops, O Rajan, caused great mischief there and when the Brahmana saw the extensive destruction of his vana, he became angry. He commanded his own homa cow to create a number of terrible Savaras. The cow obediently created a horde of frightful men who confronted the army of Viswamitra, and caused a great carnage among them.

A determined Viswamitra sat in tapasya in this very tirtha, and began to emaciate his own body through vratas and fasts prescribed for Rishis. He lived on water, air and the fallen leaves of trees and slept on bare ground. The Devas made repeated attempts to stop him but Viswamitra never veered from his vows. Because of his tapasya and great devotion, he became like the Sun himself in effulgence.

Pleased, Brahma agreed to grant Viswamitra's boon to make him a Brahmana. The illustrious Viswamitra then wandered the earth like a Deva, giving away all kinds of wealth at that tirtha.

Balarama also gives as dakshina the best kinds of milch cows, carts, beds, ornaments, food and drink to many Brahmanas, after having duly worshipped them."

CANTO 137

Vaisampayana said, “The Yadusreshta then goes on to the asrama of Vaka which resounded with the chanting of the Vedas. It was here that the great Sage Dalvyavaka, in great anger, once poured Vichitravirya’s son Dhritarashtra’s kingdom as a libation on the yagna fire.

Once upon a time, the Rishis living in the Naimisa forest performed a yagna extending for twelve years. During the course of that yagna, after the completion of an exalted ritual called Viswajit, the Rishis set out for the country of the Panchalas to ask the king for one and twenty strong and healthy calves as dakshina for their yagna. Sage Dalvyavaka, however, offered them his own animals and said that he would go and ask the great king for some more.

Vaka then went to Dhritarashtra and begged some animals from him. The king was in an ill temper for some of his cattle had died without any apparent cause, and angrily offered him his dead animals. The Rishi resented the words spoken to him in the sabha and decided to teach the king a lesson. He cut the flesh from the dead animals, and fed those pieces as libations in a yagna fire he built on the tirtha of the Saraswati.

When that fierce yagna began, according to the due rites, the kingdom of Dhritarashtra, O Rajan, began to waste away, like a large forest cut down with axes. Overtaken by calamities, the kingdom began to lose its prosperity and very life. Seeing his kingdom thus afflicted, the king

consulted the Brahmanas, but to no avail. He then asked his counsellors what he should do and they reminded him of the way he had behaved towards Vaka.

They said, ‘The Muni Dalyavaka is pouring your kingdom as a libation on the yagna fire using the flesh of the dead animals you gave him. Go, O king, and pacify that Rishi by the side of lake on the bank of the Saraswati.’

The king went to the bank of the Saraswati, fell at Vaka’s feet and touching them with his head, joined his hands and said, ‘Forgive my offence! I am a senseless fool, a greedy wretch. You are my sanctuary and protector. Forgive me.’

Feeling compassion for him, Vaka forgot his angry feelings, poured libations on the yagna fire, freed the kingdom from all calamities, and pleased at heart, returned to the Naimisa vana. King Dhritarashtra also returned to his own capital, once again prosperous.

Brihaspati, too, held a yagna at that tirtha for the prosperity of the Devas, and poured libations of flesh on the sacrificial fire and destroyed the Asuras.

After offering ample dakshina with due rites there, of horses, elephants, carts with mules yoked to them, jewels of great value, immense wealth, and much corn to the Brahmanas, Balarama leaves for the tirtha called Yayata.

Here King Yayati once performed a yagna and, seeing his nobility and his immutable devotion, the Devi Saraswati gave the Brahmanas invited to the yagna everything that each one of them cherished in his heart. The Devas, the Gandharvas and the Manavas were overjoyed and filled with wonder at the profusion of wealth at that yagna. The Brahmanas thought that the king had made the dakshinas and happily praised and blessed him.

The noble Baladeva, distinguished by his devotion to dharma and generosity, next visits the tirtha called Vasishtapavaha where the current is very swift.”

CANTO 138

Janamejaya said, "Why is the current so rapid at Vasishtapavaha? Tell me the cause of the dispute between Vasishta and Viswamitra?"

Vaisampayana replied, "A great enmity arose between Viswamitra and Vasishta, O Bhaarata, due to their differences over tapasya practices. Vasishta lived at the tirtha called Sthanu on the eastern bank, so called because Mahadeva once practised the austerest tapasya here. On the opposite bank was the asrama of Viswamitra, where the Devas once installed Skanda as their senapati.

The two sages, Viswamitra and Vasishta, challenged each other daily, each claiming the superiority of their respective forms of tapasya. Viswamitra burned with jealousy at the evidence of Vasishta's tejas and decided that he would cause the river Saraswati to bring Vasishta to him through the force of her current and then kill him.

Rishi Viswamitra concentrated on the river Saraswati and soon she became exceedingly agitated. She appeared before him, pale and trembling and with joined hands, ready to do his bidding.

He said, 'Bring Vasishta here at once so that I may kill him. Do not be afraid.'

Knowing the unrivalled prowess of Vasishta, she went to him and informed him of Viswamitra's command. She stood in terror of both of them and shook with fear thinking of the grievous curse that either of them

might pronounce on her. Seeing her pale and anxious, the Dharmatma Vasishta, told her, 'O Devi, bear me away with your rapid current, otherwise Viswamitra will curse you. Have no fear.'

Hearing these words of that compassionate Rishi, Saraswati began to consider what course would be best for her to follow. 'Vasishta showed me great compassion so it is proper for me that I should serve him.'

She saw Vasishta engaged in silent recitation of mantras on her bank and saw Kusika's son Viswamitra also engaged in homa and felt that she had found the perfect opportunity. She used her swift current to wash away one of her banks and bore Vasishta away. While being swept away, Vasishta praised her saying: 'From the Grandsire's lake you were born, O Saraswati and your waters fill this whole universe as your waters charge the clouds, and through you, we exercise our faculties of thought. You are Pushti, Dyuti, Kirti, Siddhi and Uma. You are Vak, and you are Svaha. You dwell in all creatures, in four forms.'

Saraswati speedily bore him towards Viswamitra's asrama and reported the arrival of Vasishta to him. While an angry Viswamitra was looking for a weapon, Saraswati, fearful of witnessing and aiding in a Brahmahatya, once more carried Vasishta away to her eastern bank. She thus obeyed the orders of both, although she deceived Viswamitra in the process. The vindictive Viswamitra cursed Saraswati, 'Since, O Devi, you have gone away after deceiving me, let your waters change into blood that Rakshasas relish.'

Cursed by Viswamitra, Saraswati flowed for a whole year with her waters mixed with blood. Great sorrow filled the Devas, the Gandharvas, and the Apsaras, seeing the golden river reduced to that plight. For this reason, O Rajan, they call the tirtha Vasishtapravaha."

CANTO 139

Vaisampayana said, "Cursed by Viswamitra, O Bhaarata, the river Saraswati flowed with blood in her current, attracting many Rakshasas who came happily to drink the blood and to sing, dance and celebrate there, like souls who have attained heaven. After some time, some Maharishis, who were abroad on a yatra to bathe in all the tirthas, arrived there and saw the water of the Saraswati mixed with blood and innumerable Rakshasas drinking from it.

They learnt from her about the curse that had reduced her to that state. Then all those Brahmanas invoked Mahadeva, that Lord of the universe and protector of all creatures, with tapasya, vratas, fasts and diverse kinds of abstinences and painful observances, and finally cleansed and freed the divine Saraswati, through the grace of Siva.

Finding the water of Saraswati purified, the Rakshasas living there pleaded to the compassionate Rishis, 'All of us are hungry. We have swerved from eternal virtue but it is not out of our free will that we are sinful. Through the absence of your grace and through our own evil deeds, as well as through the sexual sins of our women, our paapa increased and we have become Brahma-Rakshasas. Among Vaisyas, Sudras and Kshatriyas, those who hate and injure Brahmanas became Rakshasas. O best of Brahmanas, we beg you to help us.'

At this, the Rishis requested the great river to provide relief for those Rakshasas and she created a new distributary called Aruna. Bathing in it, the Rakshasas cast off their bodies and rose into heaven. Hearing of this, Indradeva of a hundred yagnas bathed at that tirtha and was cleansed of a grievous sin."

Janamejaya asked, "What was Indra's sin and how was he cleansed by bathing in that tirtha?"

Vaisampayana said, "The Asura Namuchi, from fear of Indra, once entered a ray of the sun. Indra lulled him into a false sense of security and assured Namuchi, saying, 'O foremost of Asuras, I swear that I will not kill you with anything that is wet or with anything that is dry. I will not kill you in the night or during the day.'

However, lord Indra one day conjured up a fog at twilight to cut off Namuchi's head using foam for his weapon. The severed head of Namuchi thereupon pursued Indra from behind, shouting, 'O slayer of a friend, O wretch.'

Chased relentlessly by that head, Indra went to Brahma and sorrowfully informed him of what had happened. The Supreme Lord said, 'Perform a yagna with due vratas at the sacred confluence of the Saraswati and Aruna. Distribute dakshina generously and you will be freed of your sin.'

Accordingly, Sakra performed various yagnas there, gave away great dakshina and plunged into the Aruna. He then became free from the sin and returned to swarga with a joyful heart. The head of Namuchi also fell into that stream and the Asura obtained many eternal regions that granted every wish.

Baladeva bathes in that tirtha, and gives away many kinds of dakshina and obtains great punya. He then moves on to the great tirtha of Soma.

In olden days, Soma himself performed the Rajasuya yagna there, in which Atri, that noble and wise Brahmana, was the Hotri. Upon the conclusion of that yagna, a great battle took place between the Devas and the Danavas, the Daityas and the Rakshasas. Skanda commanded the army of the Devas and slew the Asura Taraka. In that tirtha there is a mighty Aswattha tree under which Skanda resides forever."

CANTO 140

Janamejaya said, "You have described the merits of the river Saraswati, O best of Brahmanas. You must now tell me how the Devas invested Skanda with the command of the Devasena. Describe the actual rites that were performed, and how the Deva Senapati made a great carnage of the Daityas."

Vaisampayana said, "Once, long ago, Maheswara spilled his seed into a blazing fire. However, Agni could not bear its tremendous energy and, at Brahma's instructions, Agni cast it into the river Ganga. Ganga, too, was unable to contain it and cast it onto the beautiful breast of Himavat where the Devas worshipped. Agni's son began to grow there, overwhelming all the worlds with his tejas. Meanwhile, the six Krittikas seeing the child of fiery splendour lying on the heath and wanting a son flew down from the sky and adopted him.

The adorable Skanda understood the state of the minds of his multiple mothers, assumed six mouths and allowed all of them to suckle him. The beautiful Krittikas were wonderstruck. Since the river Ganga had cast the child onto the summit of Himavat, that mountain was stunningly transformed, O Kurusrestha, and from then on began producing gold. The energetic child was called Gangeya or Kartikeya. At first, he acquired the high ascetic powers of a Rishi. Gifted with self-restraint, asceticism and great tejas, Kartikeya grew up into a handsome man like Soma, loved and

praised by Gandharvas and Rishis. Thousands of beautiful Apsaras admired him and danced before him. The foremost of all rivers, Ganga, waited upon him and the Earth held the child in her lap, while Brihaspati performed his jatakarma, the postnatal rites. The Vedas, assuming a fourfold form, approached the child with joined hands. The Astra Shastra, the science of arms, with its four divisions and all the astras and all kinds of weapons, came to him.

One day, this child of great lustre saw Mahadeva seated with Uma and a crowd of unearthly beings, ganas with emaciated bodies and ugly features, surrounding them. The faces of some were like those of tigers, lions, bears, cats and makaras. Others had the features of scorpions, elephants, camels, owls, vultures, jackals, cranes, pigeons and kurus. Many among them had bodies like those of dogs, porcupines, iguanas, goats, sheep and cows. Some resembled mountains and some oceans, and some carried chakras and gadas as weapons. Many looked like masses of antimony and others like white mountains. Also present were the seven Matris, the Sadhyas, the Viswedevas, the Maruts, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Siddhas, the Danavas, the self-born Brahma with his sons, Vishnu and Sakra. All had gone there to see that child of unfading glory. Many Devas and Gandharvas, led by Narada and other Devarishis and Siddhas led by Brihaspati, and the fathers of the universe, the Prajapatis, Lokapalas, the Yamas and the Dharmas, were all present there.

The child approached Maheswara. Seeing the boy coming, Siva, Uma, Ganga and Agni each expected that he would come and honour them first. Understanding that this was the expectation of those four, the child used his Yogic powers and divided himself into four different forms. The three forms that stood behind him were Sakha, Visakha and Naigameya and they marched on towards the four Divine Ones who sat expectantly. The form called Skanda went towards Rudra; Visakha went to Uma, Sakha, which is Kartikeya's Vayu form, walked towards Agni, and Naigameya, that child of fiery splendour towards Ganga.

It was wonderful to see all those radiant forms, identical in appearance, walk calmly towards the four Divinities. All the present Devas, Danavas and Rakshasas, made a loud noise of appreciation at the wonderful sight. Then Rudra, the goddess Uma, Agni, and Ganga, all bowed to Brahma, the Lord of the Universe, and said, 'You must grant to this youth, for our

happiness, some kind of sovereignty that is suitable for him and which he desires.'

At this, the revered Pitamaha thought of the charge that he might possibly bestow upon Skanda. He had already distributed to the Devas all kinds of wealth over which the Devas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Pretas, Bhutas, Yakshas, Garudas and Nagas have dominion. After he had reflected for a moment, O Bhaarata, he conferred upon Kartikeya the status of Deva Senapati and ordered all the Devas and other formless beings to wait upon him.

The Devas led by Brahma took that youth with them to a place on the bank of the sacred and divine Saraswati, flowing down from Himavat, the river which at Samantapanchaka is celebrated throughout the three worlds. There, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the others sat down with satisfied and happy hearts for the investiture of Kartikeya."

CANTO 141

Vaisampayana continued, "After all articles as laid down in the shastras for the ceremony of investiture were collected, Brihaspati poured libations on the blazing fire. Himavat brought a richly decorated throne and seated Kartikeya on it while the Devas brought all kinds of auspicious offerings, with the rites and mantras that were necessary for the ceremony. The various Devas—Indra, Vishnu, Surya, Chandramas, Dhatri, Vidhatri, Vayu, Agni, Pushan, Bhaga, Aryaman, Ansa, Vivaswat, Rudra, Mitra, the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, the twelve Adityas, the twin Ashvinis, the Viswedevas, the Maruts, the Saddhyas, the Pitris, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Pannagas, innumerable Devarishis, the Vaikhanasas, the Balakhilyas, those Rishis that subsist only on air and those that subsist on sunlight—all attended the ceremony.

Also present were the descendants of Bhrigu and Angiras, many high-souled Yatis, all the Vidyadharas, all Rishis and Munis, the Grandsire, Pulastya, Maharishi Pulaha, Angiras, Kasyapa, Atri, Marichi, Bhrigu, Kratu, Hara, Prachetas, Manu, Daksha, the Seasons, the Planets, and all the luminaries.

In attendance O Rajan, were all the rivers in their embodied forms, the eternal Vedas, the Seas, the diverse tirthas, the Earth, the Sky and the Firmament. All the trees, Aditi the mother of the Devas, Hri, Sri, Swaha,

Saraswati, Uma, Sachi, Sinivali, Anumati, Kuhu, the Day of the new moon, the Day of the full Moon, the wives of the denizens of heaven, were present there.

Himavat, Vindhya, Meru, Airavata with all his followers, the Divisions of time called Kala, Kashta, the Fortnight, the Seasons, Night and Day, the prince of horses Ucchaisravas, Vasuki the king of the Snakes, Aruna, Garuda, the Trees, the deciduous herbs, and the divine Deva Dharma—all came there. Also in attendance were Kala, Yama, Mrityu, and the followers of Yama.

I do not mention the other divinities who arrived there to witness Kartikeya's installation ceremony, for they were past enumeration. They brought with them all necessary and every auspicious requisite and offering needed for the ceremony.

Filled with joy, the Devas poured upon Skanda's head the sacred water of the Saraswati from golden jars, and made that noble youth the Senapati of the Deva forces. Pitamaha Brahma, and Kasyapa of great tejas, and all the others poured water upon Skanda just as the Devas had once poured water on the head of Varuna, at his investiture as the Lord of seas. A pleased Brahma appointed four mighty companions for Skanda, who were swift like the wind, who were Mahatapasvins, and gifted with great tejas. These were Nandisena, Lohitaksha, Ghantakarna and Kumudamalin.

Lord Sthanu gave Skanda a companion who had the power to create a hundred mayic illusions, and endued with might and energy that he could increase at will. In fact, in the great battle between the Devas and the Asuras, this one, with his bare hands, slew fourteen million fierce Daityas.

The Devas then handed charge of the measureless Devasena, invincible and capable of destroying forces powerful as Vishnu, to the six-headed Sanmukha. Thereupon the Devas and all else present hailed him, shouting, 'Jaya Skanda!'

Yama gave him two companions, Unmatha and Pramatha, both of whom resembled Death and possessed great energy and splendour. Surya gave him Subhraja and Bhaswara: Soma gave him Mani and Sumani; both huge like the summits of the Kailasa Mountain and always decked with white garlands and smeared with white unguents.

Agni gave him Jwalajihbha and Jyoti while Ansa gave him five ferocious and powerful companions, Parigha, Vata, Bhima, Dahati and Dahana. Vasava gave him Utkrosa and Panchaka, who were armed

respectively with a thunderbolt and a cudgel. They slew innumerable enemies of Sakra.

Vishnu gave Skanda three companions—Chakra, Vikrama and the mighty Sankrama while the Ashvinis, O Bharatarishabha, gave him Vardhana and Nandana who was the master of all the sciences. The illustrious Dhatri gave him Kunda, Kusuma, Kumuda, Damvara and Adamvara.

Tvashtri gave him two powerful warriors as companions—Chakra and Anuchakra. The lord Mitra presented him with two celebrated and handsome companions, Suvrata and Satyasandha, both Tapasvins, learned, and able to granting boons.

Vidhatri presented him with the noble Suprabha and Subhakarman while Pushan gave him Panitraka and Kalika, both masters of maya. Vayu gave him Bala and Atibala, while Varuna gave him Ghasa and Atighasa, all powerful warriors with gaping mouths.

Himavat gave him two companions, Suvarchas and Ativarchas while Meru gave him Kanchana and Meghamalin. Manu gave him Sthira and Atisthira while Vindhya gave him Uschrita and Agnisringa.

The Ocean gave him two mighty companions named Sangraha and Vigraha, both armed with maces. The beautiful Parvati gave him Unmada, Pushpadanta and Sankukarna while Vasuki, the king of the snakes, gifted him two Nagas named Jaya and Mahajaya. Similarly, the Saddhyas, the Rudras, the Vasus, the Pitris, the Seas, the Rivers, and the Mountains, all gave him commanders of forces armed with lances and battle-axes, all of them wearing diverse kinds of ornaments.

Listen now to the other warrior companions that Skanda received. They were Sankukarna, Nilkumbha, Padmai, Kumuda, Ananta, Dwadasabhuja, Krishna, Upakrishnaka, Ghranasravas, Kapiskandha, Kanchanaksha, Jalandhama, Akshasantarjana, Kunadika, Tamobhrakrit, Ekaksha, Dwadasaksha, Ekajata, Sahasravahu, Vikata, Vyaghraksha, Kshitikampana, Punyanaman, Sunaman, Suvaktra, Priyadarsana, Parisruta and Kokonada.

He also obtained the services of Priyamalyanulepana, Ajodara, Gajasiras, Skandhaksha, Satalochana, Jwalajibha, Karala, Sitakesa, Jati, Hari, Krishnakesa, Jatadhara, Chaturdanshtra, Ashtajihva, Meghananda, Prithusravas, Vidyutaksha, Dhanurvaktra, Jathara, Marutasana, Udaraksha, Rathaksha, Vajranabha, Vasurprabha, Samudravega, Sailakampin, Vrisha, Meshapravaha, Nanda, Upadanka, Dhumra, Sweta, Kalinga, Siddhartha,

Varada, Priyaka, Nanda, Gonanda, Ananda, Pramoda, Swastika, Dhruvaka, Kshemavaha, Subala, Siddhapatra, Govraja, Kanakapida, Gayana and Hasana.

Some other of his companions were Bana, Khadga, Vaitali, Atitali, Kathaka, Vatika, Hansaja, Pakshadigdhanga, Samudronmadana, Ranotkata, Prashasa, Swetasiddha, Nandaka, Kalakantha, Prabhasa, Kumbhandaka, Kalakaksha, Sita, Bhutalonmathana, Yajnavaha, Pravaha, Devajali, Somapa, Majjala, Kratha, Tuhara, Chitradeva, Madhura, Suprasada, Kiritin, Vatsala, Madhuvarna, Kalasodara. The others were Dharmada, Manma, Thakara, Suchivaktra, Swetavaktra, Suvaktra, Charuvaktra, Pandura, Dandavahu, Suvahu, Rajas, Kokilaka, Achala, Kanakaksha, Valakarakshaka, Sancharaka, Kokanada, Gridhrapatra, Jamvuka, Lohajvaktra, Javana, Kumbhavaktra, Kumbhaka, Mundagriva, Krishnaujas, Hansavaktra, Chandrabha, Panikurchas, Samvuka, Panchavaktra, Sikshaka, Chasavaktra, Jamvuka, Kharvaktra and Kunchaka.

Besides these, the Grandsire gave him many other noble and strong companions, devoted to tapasya and deferential to Brahmanas. Some of them were very young in years, some mere youths, while some were old. Thousands upon thousands of similar companions joined Kartikeya, all different in their looks and appearance. I will describe them to you, O Janamejaya.

Some had faces like those of tortoises, others like cockerels, dogs, wolves, hares, owls, asses, camels and hogs. Some had human faces and some like those of sheep or jackals. Some were dreadful and had faces like those of makaras and porpoises. Some had faces like those of cats others like stinging flies, mongooses, owls and the crow. Some faces were like those of mice, peacocks, fish, goats, sheep and buffaloes. The faces of some were like bears while others resembled tigers, leopards, lions, elephants, crocodiles, rhinocerii, wolves, cows, mules, camels, cats, while some resembled Garuda.

Some possessed protruberant stomachs, great legs and other limbs, while others had eyes like stars. The faces of some were like those of pigeons and bulls and others like those of kokilas, hawks, tittiras, lizards, snakes and porcupines.

Indeed, some had frightful and some very agreeable faces; some wore snakes for their clothes. The faces as also the noses of some resembled those of cows while some tapered like the bodies of snakes. Some had large

limbs, bulging stomachs, while others were very lean, attenuated; some had large limbs but gaunt bellies while the necks of some were very short and their ears very large.

Some were clad in white robes and others in snake skin, elephant skin or deer skin. The mouths of some were on their shoulders, some on their stomachs, some on their backs, some on their cheeks, some on their calves, some on their flanks, and many on other parts of their bodies. The faces of many leaders of troops were like those of insects and worms while the mouths of many were like those of beasts of prey.

Some sported multiple arms and heads while the arms of some resembled trees, and the heads of some were on their loins. Many amongst them had their abodes on diverse kinds of plants and trees. Some were clad in rags, some in diverse kinds of bones, some were diversely attired, and some wore garlands and liniments. Dressed so variously, some had skins for their robes. Some had headgear; the brows of some were furrowed into lines; the necks of some bore marks like those on conch shells, some were possessed of great effulgence.

Some wore diadems, some grew five tufts of hair on their heads, some had two, some three, and some seven, and the hair of some was as hard as iron wires. Some had feathers on their heads, some had heads that were perfectly bald, some had matted locks while the faces of some were covered with hair.

Some were dark complexioned, and the faces of some had no flesh on them. Some had very long backs, and some had no stomachs. The backs of some were large while those of others were short and squat. The arms of some were long while those of some were short. Some were dwarfs, some were hunchbacks, and some had short hips. The heads of some were like those of elephants, some had noses like those of tortoises, and some like wolves. Some had long lips and some had frightful faces facing downwards. Some had monstrously large teeth, some tiny ones, and some had only four teeth.

Thousands among them, O Rajan, were exceedingly terrible like infuriated elephants. Some had symmetrical limbs and possessed great splendour, and were adorned with ornaments. Some had yellow eyes, some had ears like arrows, some had noses like ghariyals, O Bhaarata, while some had broad teeth, some pendulous lips, and many had green hair. They possessed all kinds of feet, lips, teeth, arms, and heads.

Clad in varied kinds of skins, they spoke diverse kinds of languages. Skilled in all provincial dialects, the dominant ones conversed with one another and joyously gambolled about, cutting capers around Kartikeya.

The eyes of some were yellow, the throats of some blue, the ears of some long, and the stomachs of some were like masses of antimony. The eyes of some were white, the necks of some red, some had eyes of a tawny hue and many were dark in colour or of many colours. Several had ornaments on their persons that looked like yak-tails, some bore white streaks on their bodies, some red streaks; many were vari-coloured, while some had golden complexions, and some were brilliant like peacocks.

These noble companions in arms delighted in battle, and all of them were invincible to even the foremost ones amongst the Devas. They had great strength, speed and great impetuosity and had various kinds of dreadful and magical weapons in their hands. Some wielded Sataghnis and Chakras, some carried heavy and short clubs, some brandished swords, mallets and bludgeons, while many gigantic ones wielded lances, scimitars, maces, bhusundis and spears. Some came from Devaloka, some from the aerial realms, and some from the regions of the earth and all of them were quick like the wind. Commanded by the Devas, those brave and mighty ones became the companions and confederates of Kartikeya.

At the installation of Kartikeya, these motley and powerful warriors, all wearing rows of tinkling bells danced around him in joy. These and many millions of mighty others, O Rajan, came to join the noble and illustrious Kartikeya and stood surrounding him."

CANTO 142

Vaisampayana said, "I will now list the names of these auspicious ones: the many mothers, who also became the companions of Kumara. They were Prabhavati, Vishalakshi, Palita, Gonasi, Shrimati, Bahula, Bahuputrika, Apsujata, Gopali, Brihadambalika, Jayavati, Malatika, Dhruvaratna, Bhayankari, Vasudama, Sudama, Vishoka, Nandini, Ekachuda, Mahachuda, Chakranemi, Uttejani, Jayatsena, Kamalakshi, Shobhana, Shatrunjaya, Shalabhi, Khari, Madhavi, Shubhavaktra, Tirthanemi and Gitapriya.

They included Kalyani, Kadrula, Amitashana, Meghasvana, Bhogavati, Subhru, Kanakavati, Alatakshi, Viryavati, Vidyujjihva, Padmavati, Sunakshatra, Kandara, Bahuyojana, Santanika, Kamala, Mahabala, Sudama, Bahudama, Suprabha, Yashasvini, Nrityapriya, Shatolukhalamekhala, Shataghanta, Shatananda, Bhagananda, Bhamini, Vapushmati, Chandrashita, Bhadrakali, Samkarika, Nishkutika, Bhrama, Chatvaravasini, Sumangala, Svastimati, Vriddhikama, Jayapriya, Dhanada, Suprasada, Bhavada, Jaleshvari, Edi and Bhedi.

They were Samedi, Vetalajanani, Kanduti, Kalika, Devamitra, Lambasi, Ketaki, Chitrasena, Bala, Kukkutika, Shankhanika, Jarjarika, Kundarika, Kokalika, Kandara, Shatodari, Utkrathini, Jarena, Mahavega, Kankana, Manojava, Kantakini, Praghasa, Putana, Khashaya, Churvyuti, Vama, Kroshanatha, Taditprabha, Mandodari, Tunda, Kotara, Meghavasini,

Subhaga, Lambini, Lamba, Vasuchuda, Vikatthani, Urdhvavenidhara, Pingakshi, Lohamekhala, Prithuvaktra, Madhurika, Madhukumbha, Pakshalika, Manthanika and Jarayu.

And also there were Jarjaranana, Khyata, Dahadaha, Dhamadhama, Khandakhanda, Pushana, Manikundala, Amogha, Lambapayodhara, Venuvinadhara, Pingakshi, Lohamekhala, Shasholukamukhi, Krishna, Kharajangha, Mahajava, Shishumaramukhi, Shveta, Lohitakshi, Vibhishana, Jatalika, Kamachari, Dirghajihva, Balotkata, Kaledika, Vamanika, Mukuta, Lohitakshi, Mahakaya, and Haripindi. Ekakshara, Sukusuma, Krishnakarni, Kshurakarni, Chatushkarni, Karnapravarana, Chatushpathaniketa, Gokarni, Mahishanana, Kharakarni, Mahakarni, Bherisvanamahasvana, Shankhakumbhasvana, Bhangada, Gana, Sugana, Bhiti, Kamada, Chatushpatharata, Bhutirtha, Anyagochara, Pashuda, Vittada, Sukhada, Mahayasha, Payoda, Gomahishada, Suvishana, Pratishtha, Supratishtha, Rochamana, Surochana, Naukarni, Mukhakarni, Sasira, Stherika, Ekachakra, Megharava, Meghamala and Virochana.

These and thousands of other matrikas, O Bharatarishabha, of diverse forms, became the followers of Kartikeya. Some had long nails, large teeth, and protruding lips while others were youthful, lean, with sweet features. Others had green eyes, some were tawny, and many had golden complexions. Many of them were dark like thunderclouds or smoke, while others were brilliant like the morning sun. Many wore their tresses long, and were clad in robes of white and wore ornaments. They had the merit of punya and could assume any form at will.

They could grant boons and travel wherever at will and were always cheerful. Physically very strong, some of them were like Yama, some like Rudra, several were like Soma, some like Kubera, some like Varuna, some like Indra, and some like Agni. Many had the temperament of Vayu, some of Kumara, some of Brahma, some of Vishnu, several of Surya, and many of Varaha.

They were charming and delightful to look at and beautiful like Apsaras. Their voices resembled the kokila and they were prosperous like Kubera. They were brilliant like fire, and in battle, they were ferocious like Sakra and filled their enemies with terror. Able to assume any form at will, they were swift like the wind and their prowess was inconceivable.

They lived on trees, open plains, crossings of four roads, in caves, crematoriums, mountains and springs. Wearing various kinds of ornaments,

clothes, and speaking myriad languages, these and many other tribes of mothers, all of whom could strike fear into enemies, followed Kartikeya at the command of the chief of the Devas.

Indra, the conqueror of Paka, gave Kartikeya a banner effulgent as the morning sun and a blazing spear adorned with large bells, to fight the enemies of the Devas.

Siva gave him a vast and invincible army named Dhananjaya, exceedingly fierce, armed with all kinds of weapons and endued with great energy attained through tapasya. Protecting it were thirty thousand warriors, each powerful like Rudra.

Vishnu gave him a garland that enhanced the might of the wearer. Uma gave him two pieces of brilliant cloth. Ganga gave Kumara a celestial water-pot, born from amrita, and Brihaspati gave him a sacred staff. Garuda gifted him his favourite son, a peacock of beautiful feathers. Aruna gave him a cockerel with sharp talons while Varuna gave him a very potent snake. The Lord Brahma gifted him with a black deerskin and blessed him to have victory in all battles.

Skanda stood like a magnificent flame and like the autumnal sky bespangled with planets and stars, at the head of the awesome and terrible Devasena. Much to the joy of all the Devas, he marched his army out while the gathering of Devas and different beings beat their drums, blew their conches, and played loudly their patahas, jharjharas, krikachas, cow-horns, adambaras, gomukhas and dindimas. Led by Vasava, the Devas praised Kumara while the Gandharvas and Apsaras sang and danced.

Pleased by their attentions and love, Skanda swore to destroy all their enemies and the illustrious Devas considered all their enemies to be already dead and a loud sound of joy arose from all those assembled there.

Skanda then set out with that incomparable army to destroy the Daityas and to protect the inhabitants of swarga. Accompanying Kartikeya, in the van of his army, O Rajan, were Karma, Vijaya, Dharma, Siddhi, Samriddhi, Dhairya, and the Shastras in their embodied forms.

Seeing the army advance against them, all the Daityas, Rakshasas and Danavas fled in terror hotly pursued by the Devas. A wrathful Skanda repeatedly hurled the terrible spear that Agnideva had given him. It fell like a comet from the sky and millions of blazing individual darts issued from it. O Bharatarishabha, with his energy like a fire fed with libations of ghee, it was like the pralaya.

Finally, Skanda killed Taraka, the hitherto invincible Asura who was leading a hundred thousand dreaded Daityas as well as Mahisha at the head of eight Daitya padmas. He next destroyed Tripada and a thousand Ajutas and Hradodara, protected by ten nikharvas of Daityas. The followers of Kumara danced, jumped and laughed in joy as they killed thousands of Daityas. Some demons were incinerated, others died of sheer fright. Thus, Kartikeya slew the innumerable enemies of the Devas.

Skanda chased Bali's son, the great Bana, to the Krauncha Mountain, so called because the sound it produced resembled the cry of a crane. Kartikeya struck the mountain with Agni's astra and the apes, elephants, leopards, bears, sharabhas, lions, birds and snakes living there ran everywhere in fear and frenzy. Other forests on it rang with the cries of hundreds upon hundreds of wild beasts. The shock of Skanda's spear frightened the Vidyadharas dwelling on its summits who soared into the air, making the Kinnaras anxious. The Daityas came out of that blazing mountain, in their hundreds of thousands, all clad in beautiful ornaments and garlands.

Kumara's followers massacred them all. A raging Skanda killed Bali's son Bana along with his younger brother, just as Indra had killed Vritra long ago. He pierced the Krauncha Mountain with his inexorable lance, dividing his own self sometimes into many Kartikeyas and sometimes uniting himself into one. Such was the glory and prowess of Skanda that his lance, repeatedly hurled from his hand, came back to him repeatedly, quicker than thoughts.

They beat drums, blew conches and the celestial women rained floral showers to celebrate the successful attack on Krauncha Mountain and the killing of Chanda's son. Auspicious breezes blew bearing unworldly scents. The Gandharvas and great Rishis sang hymns in Skanda's praise. While some referred to him as Sanat Kumara, the powerful eldest son of Brahma, Some spoke of him as the son of Maheswara, and some as Agni's son. Some again described him as the son of Uma or of the Krittikas or of Ganga. Hundreds of thousands spoke of that Lord of yogis of blazing form and great might, as the son of any of them.

I have thus told you, O Rajan, everything about the installation of Kartikeya as the Deva Senapati and how he destroyed the enemies of the gods. Listen now to the history of the greatest of tirthas on the Saraswati. That foremost of tirthas, O monarch, after Kartikeya had killed the enemies

of the Devas became a second heaven. The puissant son of Agni gave each of the Devas diverse kinds of dominion and affluence and finally the sovereignty of the three worlds. This was how the Devas installed that adorable exterminator of the Daityas as their senapati.

Taijasa is the other tirtha where in the olden days the Devas created Varuna as the Lord of the waters. After bathing in that tirtha and worshipping Skanda, Balarama gives the Brahmanas gold, clothes, ornaments, and other things as dakshina. He spends one night happily there, praising that foremost of tirthas and worshipping its waters.

I have now told you everything that you wanted to know, and how the divine Skanda was elevated by the assembled gods to be their protector and general."

CANTO 143

Janamejaya said, “By listening to your narration of the installation of Skanda and the destruction of the Daityas, I deem myself cleansed. Now I am curious to know how long ago the Devas invested Varuna with Lordship over the waters at this tirtha.”

Vaisampayana replied, “In the Krita yuga, the Devas approached Varuna and said, ‘As Sakra, the Lord of the celestials, always protects us from every danger, will you be the Lord of the rivers? You dwell in the Ocean, the home of makaras. This Ocean and the Lord of rivers will then be under your control and you will then wax and wane with Soma.’

Varuna agreed and all the Devas assembled and performed the rites laid down in the Shastras to make him Lord of the waters. Just as Sakra protects the Devas, Varuna began to protect the seas and lakes and rivers and other reservoirs of water.

Bathing in that tirtha and distributing dakshina generously, the wise Baladeva, the slayer of Pralamba, then travelled to Agnitirtha, the place where Agni, the eater of ghee, had once disappeared from view. Then, the panic-stricken Devas approached Brahma and begged him to quickly find Agni lest all creatures perish. All the Devas, led by Indra and Brihaspati, finally found him hiding in the Sami vana. The fact was that Agni was trying to hide from Bhrigu. Cursed by Brahmarishi Bhrigu, Agni became an eater of everything.

Balarama bathes there and then visits Brahmayoni where, long ago, Brahma and all the Devas bathed after the Pitamaha performed his acts of creation. He also goes to Kaubera tirtha where the great Ailavila, after severe tapasya, once acquired all the treasures of the worlds, which magically came to him of their own accord. Baladeva bathes in these tirthas and gives dakshina to the Brahmanas he finds there.

Balarama also saw the wonderful vana where, aeons ago, the noble Kubera, Lord of the Yakshas, performed tapasya and gained many boons, including lordship over all treasures, the friendship of Lord Rudra, the status of a Deva, the regency over all of the North, and a son named Nakakubara. The Maruts then invested him duly with his sovereignty as the Lokapala of the northern direction. He also acquired the utterly marvellous Pushpaka Vimana for his celestial chariot, fleet as thought, as also all the affluence of a Deva.

Balarama bathes in that tirtha and gives away great wealth.”

CANTO 144

Vaisampayana said, "Balarama leaves for Vadarapachana tirtha where all kinds of creatures, flowers and fruits of every kind are always abundant and where many Rishis and Siddhas live. It was here that the beautiful daughter of Bharadwaja, a Brahmacharini named Sruvavati, practised severe tapasya in order to woo Indradeva. She observed many exceedingly difficult vratas until Indra was impressed and he came to that hermitage in the form of Maharishi Vasishta. Sruvavati reverently welcomed him, O Bhaarata, according to the rites observed for Maharishis. She said, 'O adorable Maharishi, tell me how I may serve you. However, I will not give you my hand, for I am courting Sakra, the lord of the three worlds, with stern vrata and tapasya.'

The illustrious Sakra smiled, and said, 'I know that you practise strict tapasya, O beautiful Devi, and I know the desire in your heart. Know that with tapasya one can obtain everything that belongs to the Devas, and all the regions of blessedness. Men who cast off their bodies after practising austere tapasya become Devas. I request you now to boil these five jujubes.'

The purpose of the task was to test her devotion. Sruvavati cleansed herself, and began to cook. Time went by and the day began to wane, but the jujubes showed no signs of cooking. With all her fuel consumed and seeing the fire about to die, she began to use her limbs as fuel and soon Agni consumed her feet. Instead of pain, she felt joy as if she had dipped

them in cool water. Seeing this, Indra was pleased and revealed his real form. He told her that he was pleased with her devotion and that he would grant her wish.

He invited her to live with him in swarga and declared, ‘This hermitage will become the greatest tirtha in the world, capable of cleansing every sin, and will hereafter be known as Vadarapachana.’

In this very tirtha, seven Rishis on one occasion left Arundhati, the wife of one of them, when they were on their way to Himavat to gather fruit and roots for their sustenance. However, a twelve-year drought fell upon the land, forcing the Rishis to continue to live on Himavat. Meanwhile Arundhati devoted herself to tapasya. Seeing this, a highly pleased Mahadeva visited her in the form of a Brahmana, and said, ‘I desire alms, O auspicious one.’

The beautiful Arundhati confessed that her store of food was exhausted, and offered jujubes instead. Mahadeva accepted and asked her to cook the jujubes, and while Arundhati did so, Mahadeva expounded on various subjects, sacred and otherwise. The twelve years of drought passed as if it were a single day, without food, and in cooking and listening to Mahadeva’s discourses. Then the seven Rishis returned and Mahadeva, highly pleased with Arundhati, appeared in his own form and said, ‘I am happy with your tapasya and vratas.’

He then told the seven Rishis, ‘The punya that this Devi has earned is much greater than what you have found on the breast of Himavat. Her tapasya was exceedingly austere, for she passed twelve years in cooking, fasting all the while.’

Addressing Arundhati, Siva then said, ‘Ask me for any boon, O auspicious one.’

She replied, ‘If you are gratified with me, then let this place be named Vadarapachana tirtha and let it be the favourite resort of Siddhas and Devarishis. Let him who observes a fast and remains here for three nights after cleansing himself, obtain the fruit of a twelve years’ fast.’

Mahadeva answered her, saying, ‘Tathaastu—Let it be so,’ and returned to swarga.

The Rishis were wonder-struck at the sight of Mahadeva and on finding the chaste Arundhati healthy and so capable of bearing hunger and thirst.

O Sruvavati, this is how Arundhati, like you, acquired punya in the olden days, for my sake. However, you have practised more severe

penances so I will grant you a special and superior varam. Whomsoever stays in this tirtha for just one night and bathes here with soul fixed in dhyana, will after death, obtain many regions of blessedness that are otherwise most difficult to acquire. Having given this blessing to Sruvavati, the thousand-eyed Sakra then went back to swarga in a shower of celestial flowers of divine fragrance. Everyone heard the sound of kettledrums and smelt the auspicious and perfumed breezes. Casting off her body, the auspicious Sruvavati became the spouse of Indra."

Janamejaya asked, "Who was the mother of Sruvavati and how was she reared, O Brahmana?"

Vaisampayana said, "Unable to control himself, Maharishi Bharadwaja once ejaculated his vital seed at the sight of the large-eyed Apsara, Ghritachi. He kept his seed in a cup made of the leaves of a tree and the girl Sruvavati was born in it. Having performed the usual post-natal rites, the tapasvin Maharishi named her Sruvavati, after the leaf cup in which she was born. She lived in his asrama, while Bharadwaja roamed the forests of Himavat.

Yadusreshta Baladeva bathes in that tirtha and after he gives away generous dakshina to many Brahmanas, leaves for the tirtha of Sakta."

CANTO 145

Vaisampayana said, “The mighty Yadu lord bathes at Indra’s tirtha and gives away wealth and gemstones to Brahmanas. Here, Indra, the chief of the Devas, once performed a hundred unstinted Aswamedha Yagnas with the assistance of knowledgeable Brahmanas and gave away enormous wealth to Brihaspati and generous dakshina to the Brahmanas. Having duly completed those hundred yagnas, they named Indra, Satakratu and that auspicious and sacred tirtha, able to purify every sin, Indra-tirtha.

Baladeva next worships at that auspicious tirtha named after Rama of Bhrigu’s race. That Brahmana of great punya repeatedly subjugated the earth and killed all the leading Kshatriyas of the world. With the help of his Acharya, the Mahamuni Kasyapa, Rama performed a Vajapeya yagna and a hundred Aswamedha yagnas at that tirtha. There Parasurama gifted his Acharya the whole earth with her oceans as dakshina, the yagna fee. The Brahmanas also received diverse kinds of gems, kine, elephants, female slaves, sheep and goats.

Baladeva next calls at the Yamuna tirtha and worships the Rishis there. Endued with great effulgence, Varuna, the son of Aditi, once performed the Rajasuya yagna here, as well as the Mahayagna, after subjugating Devas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas. With the start of that great yagna, a battle broke out between the Devas and the Danavas filling the three worlds with terror

and, after the completion of his Rajasuya yagna, a terrible war broke out among the Kshatriyas.

Blessed by the great Rishis, Balarama then visits the tirtha called Aditya. It was here that, after performing a yagna, Suryadeva obtained the sovereignty of all luminous bodies in the universe and acquired his great energy. There, at that tirtha, reside all the Devas including Vasava, the Viswedevas, the Maruts, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the Island-born Vyasa, Suka, Madhusudhana, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Pisachas, and thousands of others with great punya. Indeed, Vishnu, after killing the Asuras Madhu and Kaitabha, performed his ablutions here. Maharishi Vyasa and Rishi Asita-Devala obtained profound yogic powers and achieved great felicity after bathing here."

CANTO 146

Vaisampayana said, "In that tirtha named Aditya, there lived a virtuous Rishi named Asita-Devala, observing his svadharma. He led a life of purity and self-restraint and never injured anyone. He maintained an equal behaviour towards all beings, in word, deed, and thought. He was like Yama, impartial and free from anger. He viewed censure and praise, gold and a heap of pebbles, as the same. He daily worshipped all the Devas, his guests, and Brahmanas who came to him. He always practised the vow of Brahmacharya and was devoted to dharma.

Once, the great Yogi, Rishi Jaigisavya, came to Devala's hermitage to complete his tapasya. While he lived at the asrama, Devala always kept a kindly eye on the Rishi and never neglected him. Once however, Devala lost sight of Jaigisavya and he reappeared at dinnertime, as a Sannyasi soliciting alms. Devala showed him great honour and worshipped his guest in the manner prescribed, for many years. Inevitably, one day a thought occurred to the noble Devala. 'I have spent many years in worshipping this Rishi but this idle fellow has yet to speak a single word to me and is like a block of wood.'

With this thought in mind, the blessed Devala went to the shores of the ocean, journeying through the sky, taking his earthen kamandalu with him. When he arrived at the coast, Devala saw Jaigisavya already there before

him and wondered at how the Rishi could reach the ocean and perform his ablutions before his own arrival.

After completing his ablutions and purifying himself, he recited silently the sacred mantras before returning to his asrama, taking with him his earthen vessel filled with water. As he entered his own hermitage, he saw Jaigisavya already seated there. Having seen that Sannyasi complete his ablutions in the sea before his own arrival, and now seeing him back at his asrama before his own return, he was astounded. Then Devala used mantras and soared into the sky, to ascertain who the Sannyasi really was. There he saw crowds of sky-ranging Siddhas rapt in meditation reverentially worship Jaigisavya. This sight filled Devala with anger.

He saw Jaigisavya set out, in quick succession, for swarga, to Pitriloka, to the region of Yama and to the abode of Soma. He saw him fly to the blessed regions of the performers of certain rigid yagnas. From there he visited the land of the Agnihotris and then to the realm of those Rishis who perform the Darsa and the Paurnamasa Yagnas. Devala then saw him go from where men performed yagnas by killing animals to that pure world which the Devas worship. Jaigisavya next visited the place where people perform the Chaturmasya and other similar yagnas, and from there to where the performers of the Agnishtoma yagna, lived. Devala then saw his guest fly to the refuge of those Rishis who perform the Yagna called Agnishutta and then to the worlds of those wise men who perform the Vajapeya, the Rajasuya and the Pundarika yagnas. He then saw him in the regions of those foremost of men who perform the Aswamedha yagna, and where they sacrifice human beings in yagnas.

Devala saw Jaigisavya visit those who perform the Sautramani yagna in which the flesh of all living animals is offered. He saw Jaigisavya where they perform Dadasaha and other similar yagnas. He saw his guest visit the region of Mitravaruna and then in that of the Adityas. He saw his guest pass through the regions of the Rudras, the Vasus and Brihaspati and soar into the blessed region called Goloka, and to those of the Brahmasatris. He also saw him flit to those realms reserved for women who are chaste and devoted to their husbands. At this point, Devala lost sight of Jaigisavya, who vanished from his sight.

Devala now reflected upon the power of Jaigisavya, the excellence of his vratas and upon the unrivalled success of his yoga. Then, with joined

hands and in a reverential spirit, he asked those great Siddhas living in the regions of the Brahmasatris where Jaigisavya had gone.

The Siddhas told him that Jaigisavya had gone to Brahmaloka, the eternal world of Brahma. Devala tried to soar aloft to follow him but he fell back down. The Siddhas then told him that he was not competent to follow Jaigisavya to the abode of Brahma. Hearing this, Devala descended from one region to another in due order, until he reached his own asrama.

As soon as he entered his home, he saw Jaigisavya seated there, in quietude. Devala understood Jaigisavya's power derived through the yoga of tapasya, and approaching that great Rishi, with deep humility, said, 'I desire Moksha and emancipation, O Maharishi.'

Jaigisavya gave him lessons and taught him the Yoga Shastra and the Sanatana Dharma. The great Rishi understood that Devala was firmly resolved, and performed all the ordained steps for his admission into that religion. All creatures, with the Pitris, seeing Devala determined to adopt the religion of Moksha, began to weep, saying, 'Alas, who will now give us food?'

Hearing these lamentations of all these beings, Devala thought about renouncing his desire for Moksha. At this, all kinds of sacred fruits and roots, O Bhaarata, and flowers and deciduous herbs, in thousands, began to weep, saying, 'The wicked-hearted and mean Devala will, without doubt, once more pluck and cut us. Alas, having once assured all creatures of his perfect harmlessness, he sees not the wrong that he meditates to do.'

At this, Devala began to reflect about which among the two, Moksha or Grihasta, would be better for him. He abandoned Grihasta for Moksha and obtained the ultimate goal. The Devas led by Brihaspati applauded Jaigisavya and his tapasya.

Then Maharishi Narada told the Devas, 'There is no tapasya in Jaigisavya since he filled Devala with wonder.'

The Devas were shocked at Narada's frightful words, and said, 'No, there is no one superior or even equal to this noble Jaigisavya in force of energy, in tapasya or in yoga.'

Such was the power of Jaigisavya and Devala. This is the place and the tirtha of those two noble Rishis. Balarama bathes there, gives generous dakshina to Brahmanas, earns great punya and then leaves for the tirtha of Soma."

CANTO 147

Vaisampayana said, “There, at Soma tirtha, O Rajan, where the Lord of stars had once performed the Rajasuya yagna, a great war took place of which Tarakasura was the cause. Balarama bathes there and, after distributing dakshina, visits the tirtha of Sarasvata Muni, where, long ago during a drought extending for twelve years, the sage Sarasvata had taught the Vedas to many great Brahmanas.”

Janamejaya asked, “Why did the Rishi Sarasvata teach the Vedas during the twelve year drought?”

Vaisampayana said, “Long ago, there lived a Maharishi of great punya named Dadhicha who led the life of a Brahmachari. His mahatapasya was such that even the offer of every kind of reward could not distract him. This frightened Sakra so much that he sent the Apsara Alambusa to tempt him. Seeing the beautiful Apsara, Dadhicha involuntarily ejaculated into the river, where Saraswati secured his seed with care in her womb. In time, a child was born and she took it with her to the Rishi.

Seeing the Rishi Dadhicha in a gathering, Saraswati handed over the child and said, ‘O Maharishi, this is your son from your seed which you ejaculated at the sight of the Apsara Alambusa, and which I held in my womb through my devotion for you, knowing that your tejas would not be destroyed. Accept this innocent child as your own.’

Dadhicha accepted the child and, feeling great love, held his son in a close embrace for some time. Pleased with Saraswati, Maharishi Dadhicha gave her a boon, saying, 'The Viswedevas, the Rishis, all the tribes of the Gandharvas and the Apsaras, will henceforth, O blessed one, derive great happiness from oblations of your water.'

He then praised her saying, 'You were born long ago, O most blessed one, from Brahma's lake created from his mind, and all Mahatapasvins know you. You have done me great good. The world will henceforth know your child as Sarasvata. He will create new worlds and, during a drought, which will last for twelve years, Sarasvata will teach the Vedas to many great Brahmanas. O blessed Saraswati, through my grace you will always be the greatest of all sacred rivers.'

The River Saraswati went away in great joy, taking the child with her.

Meanwhile, during the war between the Devas and the Danavas, Sakra searched the three worlds in vain for astras to kill the Asuras. He then said to the Devas, 'I cannot kill the Asuras without the bones of Dadhicha. O Devas, go to that great Rishi and request him for his bones.'

Indra was always jealous of Dadhicha's great tejas. The offspring of Maharishi Bhrigu, the son of Lord Brahma, he was born after great tapasya and was the strongest man in the world and tall like the king of the mountains. At the request of the Devas, Rishi Dadhicha unhesitatingly gave up his life and obtained in exchange, many regions of inexhaustible merit. Using his bones, Sakra made thunderbolts, chakras and heavy gadas. With the thunderbolt born of Brahma energy, and infused with mantras, Indra hurled it and slew nine and ninety mighty Daityas.

Then, after a long time, there came a dreadful drought that lasted twelve years, during which, the Rishis and Maharishis went away in order to stay alive. Seeing this, the sage Sarasvata also wanted to leave but the river Saraswati assured him that she would always provide him with food in the form of large fish. He stayed and offered oblations of food to other Rishis and the Devas and thus continued to support both himself and the Devas.

After that period of drought, the Rishis asked each other for instructions on the Vedas, which they had forgotten while wandering in search of sustenance. Indeed, there was no one among them who could understand the scriptures anymore. It so happened that one of them saw Maharishi Sarasvata reading the Vedas with undivided attention. He reported this to the others, as well as about Sarasvata's unrivalled splendour and god-like

mien. All the Maharishis went to him and asked him to teach them. He agreed but the Rishis felt that he was too young to be their teacher.

At this he said, ‘I must act in such a way that my religious punya does not suffer a diminution. He who teaches improperly, and he who learns improperly, are both lost in no time and will come to hate each other. It is not upon years, or decrepitude, or wealth, or the number of relatives that Rishis stake their claim to punya. Only he among us who is capable of reading and understanding the Vedas is truly great.’

Hearing this, those Munis became his disciples and obtained from him the knowledge of the Vedas. Though only a boy, sixty thousand Munis became his sishyas and each brought a handful of grass and offered it to him.

The mighty son of Rohini, and elder brother of Kesava, gives away wealth at that tirtha as dakshina, then joyfully continues his yatra to another place where once there lived an old unmarried woman, who undertook an unprecedented tapasya.”

CANTO 148

Janamejaya said, “O Maharishi, why did that maiden undertake such a severe tapasya and what was her vrata? Tell me the story, for I am intrigued.”

Vaisampayana said, “There was a Rishi of great tejas named Kuni-Garga who, after practising severe tapasya, created a beautiful daughter entirely through his will. Looking at her, an overjoyed Maharishi Kuni-Garga abandoned his body and rose into swarga. That wonderful maiden, with eyes like lotus petals, began to practise a most severe tapasya. She worshipped the Pitris and the Devas with vratas for a long time and refused to marry, for she did not see a husband who could be worthy of her.

In her devotion, she continued happily to emaciate her body, with austere penance in that solitary forest. Only when she became very old and unable to move even a single step without help, did she wish to depart to the other world.

Seeing her about to cast off her body, Narada said to her, ‘O sinless one, great has been your tapasya but you cannot obtain the realms of blessedness for you have not cleansed yourself through marriage.’

Hearing this, the old woman went to a conclave of Rishis and said, ‘I will give half of the punya from my tapasya to anyone who accepts my hand in marriage.’

Galava’s son, a Rishi named Sringavat, accepted her proposal, with the understanding that he would live with her for only one night. She agreed, and Sringavat duly poured libations on the fire according to the Shastras and married her. On that night, she became a ravishing young woman, robed in deva-vastra, ornaments and garlands and smeared with celestial liniments and perfumes. Seeing her aglow with beauty, Sringavat very happily spent one night with her.

In the morning, she said to him, ‘Our agreement, O Brahmana, has been fulfilled, and I will now leave you. He who passes one night with concentration in this tirtha after having gratified the Devas with oblations of water, will henceforth obtain that punya which is his who observes the vratas of Brahmacharya for eight and fifty years.’

With these words, that chaste woman departed for swarga.

Rishi Sringavat, her husband, became unhappy remembering her beauty and accepted with difficulty the fruits of half her tapasya. Infatuated by her and moved by sorrow, he cast off his body as well and followed her out of this world.

It was while he is at this tirtha that Baladeva hears of the killing of Salya. After giving dakshina to the Brahmanas there, he grieves for the dead Maharatha.”

CANTO 149

Vaisampayana continued, “After Balarama leaves Samantapanchaka, he learns from various Rishis about the outcome of the war at Kurukshetra. They say, ‘O Rama, this Samantapanchaka is said to be the eternal northern altar of Brahma, the Lord of all beings. Here, in the olden days, the Devas performed a great yagna. Maharishi Kuru of great tejas cultivated this field for many years and so was it called the field of Kuru or Kurukshetra.’

Balarama asks, ‘Why did the noble Kuru cultivate this field?’

The Rishis replied, ‘In fact, in the olden days, Sakra, coming down from swarga, asked Kuru this very question. Kuru replied, saying, “O you of a hundred yagnas, those who die upon this plain shall ascend to regions of blessedness after being cleansed of their sins.”

The lord Sakra ridiculed this and went back to swarga. However, without being in the least dejected, the royal sage Kuru continued to till the soil. Indeed, Sakra always received the same reply whenever he came to check, and always ridiculed the Rajarishi. Seeing the king till the soil with unflagging perseverance, Sakra summoned the Devas and informed them of the monarch’s occupation. The Devas were concerned that if by merely dying at Kurukshetra men could go to Devaloka without performing any yagnas to the Devas, it would endanger their very existence. They exhorted Sakra to stop Kuru by granting him a boon.

Sakra went back to Kuru and said, “Do not toil any more, O king. I assure you that those who starve themselves to death, with all their senses awake, and those who die here in battle, will enjoy swarga.”

King Kuru accepted and Sakra, with a joyful heart, returned to his heaven. Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara, all the Devas, and the sacred Rishis duly sanctioned this word given by Sakra. They agreed that there would be no more sacred place on earth than Kurukshetra, and men who performed tapasya here would go to Brahma’s very loka after death. Further, men of punya, who gave away their wealth here, would have their wealth doubled and those who lived here in expectation of good would never have to visit the land of Yama. Kings who perform great yagnas here would dwell in swarga as long as earth herself lasted.

Listen, O Baladeva, to the hymn that Sakra himself composed and sang here. ‘The very dust of Kurukshetra, borne away by the wind, shall cleanse evil souls and take them to heaven.’

Kurukshetra is the name given to the space between the Tarantuka and the Arantuka and the lakes of Rama and Shamachakra. Samantapanchaka is the northern sacrificial altar of Brahma, the Lord of all creatures; great Devas, Brahmanas and kings like Nriga and others, after performing costly yagnas here, died and went straight to heaven. Auspicious, sacred and much regarded by the Devas, this tirtha possesses all divine attributes. This is why Kshatriyas killed in battle here obtain the sacred realms of eternal blessedness.”

CANTO 150

Vaisampayana said, “Baladeva visits Kurukshetra, O Janamejaya, gives away wealth there before going on to a large and beautiful asrama overgrown with madhuka and mango trees, and full of plakshas and nyagrodhas and with many bilwas and excellent jackfruit and arjuna trees. Delighted to see that asrama with so many marks of sacredness, Baladeva asked the Rishis whose it was.

Those Rishis told him, ‘Long ago, Vishnudeva sat in austere tapasya here and performed all the eternal yagnas. Here, a maiden, the noble Sandilya’s beautiful and chaste daughter, who was self-restrained and observed Brahmacharya dharma, who kept austere vratas, performed severe tapasya that women are usually unable to, finally went to swarga, worshipped by the Devas and Brahmanas.’

Baladeva goes to that asrama, performs all the rites and ceremonies of the evening twilight on the side of Himavat, and then begins his ascent of the mountain. Soon he sees the glory of the river Saraswati, as well as the tirtha called Plakshaprasravana.

He bathes and distributes dakshina at another wonderful tirtha called Karavapana and spends a night there with the Rishis before visiting the sacred asrama of the Mitra-Varunas. He then visits that place on the Yamuna where, long ago, Indra, Agni and Aryaman found great happiness. He bathes there and sits down to listen to the discourse between the Rishis

and the Siddhas. Maharishi Narada, covered with matted locks and attired in golden rays, holding a golden danda and a kamandalu, arrives here. Accomplished in song and dance and adored by Devas and Brahmanas, Narada carries a beautiful tortoise-shell Veena. Rama respectfully receives the Devarishi who was a renowned provoker of quarrels, and asks him about the details of the war.

Narada relates everything about the awful extermination of the Kurus and says, 'Already, Bhishma, Drona and the lord of the Sindhus have fallen. Vikartana's son Karna along with his sons is no more. Bhurisrava and Salya are dead. These and many other kings and shuras who fought for Duryodhana have all fallen. In Duryodhana's army, only Kripa, Kritavarman and Ashwatthaman remain alive but they have run away in fear. A grieving Duryodhana has sought refuge in the depths of the Dwaipayana Lake. The Pandavas and Krishna have found him and provoked him to fight Bhima. Their terrible duel with gadas, O Balarama, will take place today. Go quickly, if you wish to witness that fight between your two disciples.'

Rama bade a respectful farewell to the Brahmanas. Having listened to the discourse of the sages about the great merits of tirthas, Balarama sang this verse in their midst:

'Where else is such happiness as a home by the Saraswati?
Where else is such punya as in a home by the Saraswati?
Men have gone to heaven, after reaching her.
All should ever remember her.
Saraswati is the most sacred of rivers.
She always bestows the greatest happiness on men.
Men, after reaching the Saraswati, will not have to grieve for their sins either here or hereafter.'

He orders his attendants to return to Dwaraka, and descends from the Plakshaprasravana asrama. Repeatedly looking with joy at the Saraswati, Baladeva then drives swiftly in a ratha to witness the final duel between his two disciples.

O Janamejaya, this was how that terrible battle took place."

CANTO 151

"King Dhritarashtra, in great sorrow, asks, 'Seeing Balarama arrive just as the gada yuddha was about to begin, O Sanjaya, what does my son do?'

Sanjaya says, 'Your valiant son Duryodhana is overjoyed to see Baladeva. Yudhishtira stands up to receive Rama, and happily offers him a seat and enquires after his welfare. Rama replies, "I have heard Rishis say that Kurukshetra is a most sacred place, equal to swarga itself, and adored by Devas, Rishis and noble Brahmanas. I say that we repair at once to Samantapanchaka, which the Devas consider the northern Yagnavedi of Brahma, the Lord of all beings. He who dies in battle at that eternal and most sacred of places is sure to find swarga."

With his great gada and tread of an infuriated elephant, Duryodhana strides towards Samantapanchaka, surrounded by Yudhishtira and the Pandavas. The Devas in the sky and the Charanas applaud him. The blare of conches, the loud percussion of drums and the roars of Kshatriyas fill the sky. Moving westward, they reach the sacred tirtha on the southern side of the Saraswati and spread out. The ground there is firm and not sandy and they choose this spot for the final encounter.

Clad in armour and hefting his own great mace, Bhima, O Rajan, assumes the stance of the Garuda. Wearing helmet and armour made of gold, licking the corners of his mouth, his eyes red, and breathing hard,

Duryodhana dazzles like the golden Sumeru. Shaking his mace, your son looks at Bhima and dares him like an elephant challenging a rival.

Evenly matched, both are Baladeva's disciples and masters at fighting with the gada. Accomplished like Varuna, powerful like Vasudeva, Rama, or Ravana, they are like Maya and Vasava or Madhu and Kaitabha or Sunda and Upasunda, or Vali and Sugriva or like Kala and Mrityu. Both consider the other a worthy opponent and they stand ready, like two suns at the hour of the pralaya.

Duryodhana now says to Yudhishtira standing with his brothers, Krishna and Balarama, "Sit with the Kaikeyas and the Srinjayas and the high-souled Panchalas and watch my duel with Bhima."

That group of kings and warriors sits down, resplendent like an assembly of Devas in swarga. The handsome elder brother of Kesava, Mahabaho Baladeva, clad in blue robes, sits in the middle and looks like the full moon. All those around him salute him respectfully. Meanwhile, those two shuras, both invincible at mace fighting, close with each other and, goading one another with offensive and bitter words, like Sakra and Vritra of old, begin their battle to death."

CANTO 152

Vaisampayana said, “Sanjaya says, ‘At the outset, O Janamejaya, a fierce wordy encounter takes place between the two shuras.’ A grieving King Dhritarashtra says, “Oh, I pity the man who meets such an end. My son was sovereign of the whole world, with kings and eleven chamus of troops under his command. Alas, now he is a lone warrior fighting on foot with his mace. My poor son, who was the protector of the universe, is now himself without protection. This is Destiny! Alas, O Sanjaya, great is the grief that my son must have felt.’ Having said this Dhritarashtra falls silent with sorrow.

Sanjaya says, ‘Duryodhana roars a challenge and provokes Bhima to fight. At once, awful portents appear; a fierce wind begins to blow, driving showers of hard pebbles before it. A pall of dust hangs on the ground and a thick gloom envelops everything. Thunderbolts fall, hundreds of meteors crash into the earth with blasting force, Rahu swallows the sun and the earth, and the forests and trees shake violently. More hot winds blow and the summits of mountains crumble. Wild animals run in all directions, while jackals with blazing mouths howl everywhere, making one’s hair stand on end. The four quarters seems ablaze and many sinister beasts of ill omen appear all around. The water in the wells there swells up of its own accord and disembodied voices, asariris, whisper, chatter, growl and moan from everywhere.

Looking at these portents, Bhima says to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, "This evil Suyodhana cannot vanquish me. Like Arjuna burning down the Khandava forest, today I will exhaust the wrath that I have carried in my heart for such a long time, and I will also pluck out the burning dart that lies buried in your heart. I will kill this evil wretch and drape the garland of fame around your neck. He will never enter Hastinapura again.

They set snakes on us when we were asleep, attempted to poison our food, to drown us at Pramanakoti on the Ganga and burn us alive while we were in the house of lac. They humiliated us in the great Kuru sabha, robbed us of all our possessions, and forced us into exile and a last year of ajnatavasa. I will settle all our debts today.

The life of this evil son of Dhritarashtra has run its course and reached its end. After today, he will never again look at his father and mother; he will never again look at a woman's beauty. Today, this disgraceful scion of Santanu's line will lie on the bare earth, unbreathing and without his prosperity and kingdom. Today Dhritarashtra will hear of the death of his son, and remember Sakuni's atrocities against us."

The mighty Bhima shoulders his mace and stands ready, like Sakra facing the Asura Vritra. He hisses at Duryodhana, "Remember Varanavata, where you humiliated Draupadi, while in her season, before all the Kuru sabha. Remember how you and Sakuni cheated Yudhishtira in that game of dice. We will never forget our suffering in exile in the forest and subsequently living concealed as servants in Virata's city. I will have my revenge for all that today, vile cousin!

It is my good fortune that you stand before me at last. It is for your sake that Bhishma Pitamaha, struck down by Sikhandi, lies on a bed of arrows. Drona, Karna, Salya and Sakuni, the root of this enmity and the Great War, are all dead. We have killed the wretched Pratikamin, who seized Draupadi's tresses and all your brothers. You are responsible for the death of all these and numberless other kings. And now at last it is your time to die and I will kill you today with this mace of mine."

Duryodhana answers him fearlessly, "As usual, you brag. Fight, Vrikodara, and I will quench your thirst for war. Vermin that you are, know that you cannot frighten me. I have been waiting for this opportunity a long time. Today, fate has brought you within the reach of my gada. Stop bragging and do your worst."

The Somakas and other kings present there all applaud, and boost Duryodhana's morale. He stands ready, like an angry elephant, bristling for fight. Bhima hefts his gada and closes with Duryodhana.'"

CANTO 153

"Sanjaya says, 'A confident Duryodhana stalks Bhima and they meet like two bulls locking horns. They spar and their maces collide like thunderbolts. Their duel, like the one between Indra and Prahlada, is hair raising. The Devas, Gandharvas and all the other spectators marvel at the two and no one can be sure who will ultimately triumph.

They brandish their gadas, heavy and lethal like Yama's Danda or Indra's Vajra, and circle each other warily, seeking an opening to strike. Bhima whirls his weapon, producing a loud and appalling sound and presents an amazing sight as he shuffles his feet and prances about, alternately advancing and retreating, dealing and warding off blows with terrific facility. He attacks, feinting right and left, using every subtle and challenging ploy to draw his enemy forward while cleverly avoiding his blows by ducking under them or jumping high over Suyodhana's lightning swings.

He smashes his adversary standing toe to toe with him, and then strikes him with an unexpected backswing as he dances away from him, so amazingly light on his great feet. Both masters of the mace, Bhima and Duryodhana fight long and tirelessly, whirling about on the field, striking and avoiding each other's blows before the transfixed onlookers both on the ground and in the sky.

Duryodhana adopts the right mandala, while Bhima prefers the left. Bhima circles like an immense lion, most warily, O Rajan, but suddenly Duryodhana darts forward like a cobra and strikes him a staggering blow on his side. Bhima attempts to counterattack, but Duryodhana nimbly dodges his blow and strikes him yet again like thunder. The blow is so swift and awesome that it generates a flash of flame and a sickening sound as it lands. To all appearances, Suyodhana is gaining the upper hand. A great fear enters the hearts of the Pandus and the Somakas, as they mark the violence of the very wind that Duryodhana's whirling mace creates.

Displaying titanic prowess, the two shuras strike and both draw blood. The duel intensifies as the day closes under the gaze of thousands of those that watch, holding their breath. The two prodigious maces ring against each other deafeningly and sparks fly copiously, even as when two thunderbolts might collide. Ah, indescribable is the prowess and skill of the two cousins who so despise each other, and so alike are they in the battle of maces.

Bhima recovers quickly from your son's initial blows and beats back his opponent with a flurry of mace strokes so that Duryodhana is taken unawares and is briefly baffled and dazed. Flaring up then in rage, he pivots on his left foot and rising to his full height, strikes Bhima on the head with full, tremendous force. Astonished to see that his opponent neither flinches nor takes a step back, all that watch rise as a man and give him a standing ovation.

Bhima now hurls his golden gada at Duryodhana but your prince uses the manoeuvre called Kausika, leaps up high and strikes the hurtling gada down into the ground like a sparking lightning bolt. Without a moment's pause, Duryodhana rushes at Bhima and crashes a staggering blow squarely into his great chest, winding him. The anxiously watching Somakas and the Pandavas grow more and more alarmed, for Duryodhana appears to gain the advantage with each blow and moment.

Bhima snatches up his mace and runs furiously at Duryodhana, whirling his weapon and he now strikes his enemy in the ribs, knocking him sideways and onto his knees. A cry of dismay rises from the throats of the Srinjayas. This revives Duryodhana and, seething with rage at his humiliation, he staggers to his feet and, breathing like a mighty snake, burns Bhima with murderous glances. He gathers himself and crashes a thunderous swing of his right into Bhima's brow. Though blood spurts from

that wound and through his nose, Bhima stands unmoved like a mountain. Swinging his own gada, he fetches Duryodhana a blow that fells him senseless to the ground.

Like a large flower laden sala tree in the forest, uprooted by the violence of a storm, Duryodhana lies sprawled and unmoving. The Pandavas are ecstatic and shout their elation. However, Suyodhana recovers all too soon and, rising like an elephant from a lake, and seemingly quite unaffected, he circles, feints and, with great finesse, plunges forward and deals his titanic cousin a quite murderous blow. Bhima feels his legs turn to water and measures his length on the field.

The ferocity of this last blow fractures Bhima's coat of mail and Duryodhana lets out a yell of victory. There is a great uproar from Devas and Apsaras watching from the sky and a fragrant shower of unearthly blooms rains down on the two mighty, mighty adversaries. Seeing Bhima prostrate and unconscious on the earth and his coat of mail split open, stark terror grips the hearts of the Pandavas. However, Bhima also quickly recovers, wipes his bloodied face and, rising again with rolling eyes, steadies himself with some effort.' "

CANTO 154

"Sanjaya says, 'Watching keenly the duel between those two magnificent and peerless shuras of the Kuru vamsa, Arjuna asks Krishna, "Between these two, who, in your opinion, is the superior?"

Krishna replies, "They had the same master Balarama, received the same training, but Bhima is more powerful, while Duryodhana has the greater skill and has practised more. In a fair fight, Bhima can never win. However, if he uses guile, he can vanquish Duryodhana just as the Devas destroyed the Asuras through trickery. We know that Sakra vanquished Virochana and that Indra robbed Vritra of his energy, all through deception. Bhima must do the same. During the game of dice, Bhima vowed to break Suyodhana's thighs, which he lasciviously bared and called Draupadi to sit on, with his mace. Let him accomplish that now. The way to kill the Kuru king, who is full of deceit himself, is only through deceit.

It is again through Yudhishtira's foolishness that we find ourselves in danger once more. After achieving great success by killing Bhishma and the other Kurus, we had almost won the war and attained the end we sought. The noble, naïve Dharmaraja's folly has now set the outcome of the war entirely upon the result of this duel between Suyodhana and Bhima. Long ago, Usanas advised, 'One must always be wary of the survivors of a beaten army who are cornered and fight with their last strength, desperately. For they are urgently motivated and have nothing to lose.'

Even Sakra, O Arjuna, would find it difficult to stand before the desperate fury of those who have abandoned all hope. We routed Suyodhana and his army and, despairing of retaining his kingdom, he ran away to hide in the depths of a lake. What sensible man would challenge such a person to single combat? I am not sure that Duryodhana will not succeed in snatching back the kingdom that he has already lost to us. For full thirteen years, he practised with the gada with great resolution. Look how he leaps and feints and then strikes like a naga, effortlessly, in this duel. If Bhima does not kill him through guile, he will surely remain king."

Understanding the import of what Krishna says, Arjuna catches Bhima's eye and slaps his own left thigh. Bhima, too, immediately understands that signal and begins to look for an opportunity to fulfil his old vow. He knows full well that to strike an opponent below the waist is forbidden in a gada yuddha of dharma; he also knows what is at stake and that he will never prevail over Duryodhana without breaking the law of mace fighting. He circles Duryodhana with his uplifted mace, and shows many kinds of manoeuvres, like the Yomaka, and shifts his mandala from right to left and back again. Sometimes he uses the movement called Gomutraka, to confuse his terrible adversary.

Your son, O Rajan, who is a past master in the art of using the gada, shuffles skilfully to keep his enemy always in front of him. Whirling their frightful gadas smeared with sandalwood paste and other perfumed unguents, the two shuras circle each other like two Garudas wanting to snatch the same snake for their meal. No one appears to gain any advantage and their colliding gadas make peals of thunder.

Finally, fatigue overpowers them both, and they rest for a while before renewing their savage, outrageous encounter. Resuming after a brief rest, they find each other repeatedly with their flashing, stormy mace strokes and all their upper limbs are battered and bruised. Covered with blood from head to foot, they look like a pair of Kinsukas on the breast of Himavat.

And now Bhima sets in motion his devious plan. He deliberately leaves an opening for Duryodhana to strike at him. The befuddled and prevailing Suyodhana is deceived, for he grows more confident of victory by the moment and steps forward with a grim smile—to end it all and claim victory and kingship. Bhima craftily flings his mace at him and your son, O Bhaarata, sidesteps and the weapon passes harmlessly by. Seizing the opportunity, Duryodhana quickly strikes him cleanly with great power. The

blow stuns Bhima and he bleeds copiously. Duryodhana does not suspect that a trap has been laid for him; he overestimates the damage his blow has done and goes forward to put an end to his detested cousin, to end it all.

Brave Bhima, meanwhile, braces himself, grits his teeth, summons up his last strength, and suddenly appears unhurt to his opponent and ready to return the blow. Completely deceived, Duryodhana pauses. This moment allows Bhima another few moments to recoup his strength. He catches his breath, picks up his mace and attacks Duryodhana with renewed vigour. Seeing him come, your surprised son decides to use the manoeuvre called Avasthana to meet his charge. This requires him to leap up into the air and, anticipating this perfectly, Bhima gives a triumphant yell and hurls his gada like lightning directly at his thighs even as he leaps. That wondrous and heavy mace hurled by Bhima infused with the force of the wind and thunder crashes into Duryodhana's thighs, breaks them both and smashes his manhood as well.

Your son Duryodhana falls, making the very earth echo with the sound. Fierce winds with thunder and lightning begin to blow, showers of dust fall and the earth, with her trees and plants and mountains, begins to tremble. Meteors in their thousands flare down from the sky, along with lashing showers of blood, all sent by Indra Maghavat. The Yakshas, the Rakshasas, and the Pisachas set up a huge commotion in the sky. At their terrifying yowls and screams, thousands of animals and birds, the surviving horses, elephants and soldiers of the Pandava army let out shrill cries. Conches blare and the peal of drums and cymbals are resounding as the thunder of the apocalypse. A vast and booming roar rises and echoes from within the bowels of the earth.

Upon the fall of your son, O Bharatarishabha, headless and frightful beings, with many legs and arms, begin to dance everywhere. Women seem to take the appearance of men, and men that of women, and even armed warriors begin to tremble. Blood gushes up and breaks the banks of lakes and spumes up in geysers from deep wells, while rivers change their directions and rush back towards their sources. Seeing these portents, anxiety fills the hearts of the Panchalas and the Pandavas. The Devas, Gandharvas, Siddhas, and the Charanas return to their homes, applauding the wonderful duel between your sons, the gada yuddha to end all mace fights, the duel like which even the Great War has seen no other.' "

CANTO 155

"Sanjaya says, 'The Pandavas and the Somakas are overjoyed to see Duryodhana lying on the earth like a sala tree uprooted by a storm. Approaching Duryodhana, Bhima taunts him, "Wretch, you laughed at the disrobed Draupadi in the sabha and called her a cow. You bared your thigh and asked her to come and sit on it. Now suffer the consequence of what you did."

Bhima kicks the head of his fallen foe with his left foot. Eyes red with fury, he says, "They who danced and mocked, calling us, 'Cow, cow!' We will now dance and call them, 'Cow, cow.' We have no guile, no fire, no guile at dice, and no deception. We only trust the might of our arms to defeat our enemies."

An exultant Vrikodara once more says deliberately to Yudhishtira, Krishna, Srinjaya, Arjuna and the two sons of Madri, "Those Dhartarashtras who dragged a pleading Draupadi into the sabha and disrobed her, have now been killed by the might of Pandavas and through the tapasya of Draupadi. King Dhritarashtra's base sons, who called us 'sesame seeds without kernels', and all their relatives and followers, are now dead. The consequence of our deeds matters little; we may go to heaven or fall into hell."

Jubilantly brandishing his mace, he again kicks the prostrate Duryodhana's head with his left foot. The Somaka Kshatriyas, seeing

Bhima's shameful act, do not approve at all. King Yudhishtira tells him, "You have exhausted your hostility towards Duryodhana and accomplished your vow by a fair or an unfair deed. Stop. Do not kick his head, Bhima. Do not do such an ignoble thing. Remember, Duryodhana is our brother, a king of the Kurus, and commanded eleven Akshauhinis. You should not touch a king and a kinsman with your foot. His brothers, sons, and his kinsmen are dead; his friends and counsellors are gone and his troops exterminated. He is ruined. We have defeated him in battle and in every respect; he deserves our pity and not our abuse.

'Bhima is a man of dharma', people used to say of you. Why then, O Bhima, do you insult the fallen king in this way?"

Yudhishtira, emotional with grief, his voice choked with tears, walks up to Duryodhana and says, "O lord, you should not give way to anger or grieve for yourself. Without doubt, you suffer the dreadful consequences of your sins. Undoubtedly, the Creator has ordained this end for us. O Kurupravira, it was your avarice, pride and folly that brought you to this sorry end. You are the cause of the deaths of your companions, brothers, sires, sons, grandsons and others, and now you too are mortally wounded. All this is the effect of Fate. You deserve no pity, but your death, O Anagha one, is enviable. It is we who are to be pitied in every respect, for now we have a miserable existence ahead of us, without friends and kinsmen. Alas, how will I face the sorrowing widows of my brothers, sons and grandsons! You depart from this world for swarga while we continue to suffer the most poignant grief and can expect only naraka as our reward. The grieving wives of Dhritarashtra's sons and grandsons, those widows crushed by sorrow, will curse us all."

At this point, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira breaks down and sobs helplessly.'"

CANTO 156

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Suta, seeing Bhima strike Duryodhana down treacherously, what does Baladeva do, who is an acknowledged master of mace fighting and familiar with all its rules?'

Sanjaya says, 'The Yadusreshta Rama, greatest wielder of the mace, is livid. Raising his arms, he says in an anguished voice, "Shame on Bhima! The rules of gada yuddha combat are clear that no combatant should target any part below the navel. It is a shameful thing that this ignorant wretch Bhima struck Suyodhana a blow below the navel."

An incensed Balarama, looking like the gigantic Kailasa Mountain, rushes towards Bhima with his halayudha, his ploughshare weapon, raised. Just as quickly, Krishna restrains him in his mighty arms. The two great warriors of the Yadu's race are striking; one dark in complexion and the other fair, like the sun and the moon in the evening sky. To pacify his angry brother, Kesava says, "There are six kinds of situations that a person may be faced with: one's own success, one's friend's success, one friends' friend's success, the failures of one's enemy, the failures of one's enemy's friends, and the failures of one's enemy's friends' friends. When one's oneself or one's friends meet with reverses, one should then realise that one's fall is at hand and should look for a suitable remedy.

The Pandavas are our natural friends for they are the children of our own father's sister. It is one's dharma to accomplish one's vratas. Bhima

vowed in the midst of the sabha that he would break the thighs of Duryodhana with his gada. Moreover, Maharishi Maitreya once cursed Duryodhana, saying, ‘Bhima will break your thighs with his mace.’

I cannot fault Bhima. Do not give way to wrath, Baladeva. Our births and the attraction of our hearts are the basis of our relationship.”

Hearing Krishna’s words, the noble Baladeva says, “Dharma is practised sincerely by the good but is always the victim of two things—the desire for Artha, by those who covet it, and the desire for Kama by those that are wedded to it. Whoever follows all three—Dharma, Artha and Kama—without injuring Dharma and Artha, or Dharma and Kama, or Kama and Artha, will always find great happiness. Now, as a result of Dharma suffering at the hands of Bhima, this harmony has been disturbed, Govinda, whatever you may say.”

Krishna replies, “You are known as someone free from anger and devoted to Dharma. Calm yourself and do not give way to wrath. Know that the Kali yuga is at hand. Remember also the vow that this son of Pandu made. Accept that he has now paid the debt he owed his hostility and has fulfilled his vow.”

Balarama does not appreciate Krishna’s argument and his anger still burns. He then tells the assembled warriors, “Having unfairly killed the noble Suyodhana, Bhima will henceforth be known in the world as a false warrior, while the noble Suyodhana is a true Kshatriya and will find eternal blessedness. Dhritarashtra’s royal son, so foully struck down, fully prepared himself for the yagna of war. He undertook the initiatory ceremonies on the battlefield and finally poured away his life as a libation. Duryodhana has thus fairly completed his yagna and his final ablution is the attainment of glory.”

Rohini’s son, Balarama, magnificent like the crest of a white cloud, ascends his chariot and drives away to Dwaravati leaving the Panchalas, Vrishnis and the Pandavas, mortified. Krishna approaches a dejected and worried Yudhishtira, who is in a quandary about what to do, and says, “O Dharmarajan, you know the tenets of Kshatriya dharma; why do you allow Bhima to kick the head of the fallen Duryodhana?”

Yudhishtira answers, “I do not approve of Bhima’s angry deed, O Krishna, nor do I rejoice at this extermination of my race. However, remember the sons of Dhritarashtra cheated us of our kingdom, exiled us, and heaped many indignities on our heads. Bhima has not forgotten all that

or their many cruel words. This is why I allowed him, after killing Duryodhana, a man enslaved by his passions, to gratify his desire, even if it was adharma."

Krishna listens to Yudhishtira and mildly says, "So be it then."

He secretly, knowingly, approves of what Bhima did to bring Duryodhana down, not only because he has a soft corner for him but because he knows that, otherwise, everything would have been lost. Moreover, it was Krishna himself who told Arjuna the only way in which Bhima could prevail. His heart is full of joy and pride at their victory, as he respectfully salutes Yudhishtira with joined hands. He says, "The earth is today yours, O Rajan, to enjoy in peace. Rule over her and observe the duties of Kshatriya dharma. He who was the cause of this war with his deceit and sins lies on the ground. You have no enemies left alive and the earth with her forests and mountains is once more yours."

Yudhishtira says, "It is because we always followed Krishna's advice that we rule the earth again. Destiny has allowed you to redeem your promise to your mother and to your wrath and blessed you with victory."""

CANTO 157

"Dhritarashtra asks, 'O Sanjaya, what do the Pandavas and the Srinjayas do after Bhima strikes Duryodhana down?'

Sanjaya says, 'The Pandavas, Panchalas, Srinjayas and Krishna are jubilant, and their shouts reverberate all over the battlefield. Some stretch their bows; others strum their bowstrings. Some blow their cavernous conches; others beat their drums. It is as if the earth is unable to bear the rapture of those rejoicing warriors.

Many Kshatriyas repeatedly congratulate Bhima saying, "Your achievement in defeating Duryodhana is truly amazing. You were like Indra in his war against Vritra. No other warrior could have achieved as much. Destiny gave you victory and allowed you to quaff the blood of Dusasana, like a lion drinking the blood of a buffalo. Fate has made you Yudhishtira's instrument of revenge. O Bhima, your fame has spread over the whole world. We applaud you now just as bards and eulogists lauded Sakra after he vanquished Vritra."

Then the rejoicing warriors switch to abusing Duryodhana. Krishna intervenes and tells them, "O Kshatriyas, it is not proper to abuse a beaten foe with such cruel talk. This evil man is already half dead. Wise friends like Vidura, Drona, Kripa and Sanjaya begged him to give the sons of Pandu their paternal share in the kingdom, but he laughed at them. This wretch is no longer fit to be either friend or foe. What is the use in wasting

your breath upon one who is now just a piece of wood? Mount your chariots, and let us leave this place. Fate has already accounted for him and his counsellors, his kinsmen and friends."

Hearing Krishna's rebukes, king Duryodhana tries to get up. He raises himself on his two arms, and glares venomously at Vasudeva. Indeed, his posture resembles that of a snake shorn of its tail. Ignoring his unbearable pain, Duryodhana bitterly hisses at Krishna, "O son of Kamsa's slave, you are the most shameless one. Have you forgotten that Bhima treacherously struck me on my thighs and manhood, against all the rules of gada yuddha? You are responsible, for it was you who told Bhima to do it. Do you think that I did not notice you telling Arjuna what you did?

It was you, cowherd, who caused the death of thousands of kings through various forms of deceit, including the fall of our Pitamaha by confronting him with Sikhandi. You tricked our Acharya into believing that his son Ashwatthaman was dead while it was actually an elephant with the same name and Drona laid down his weapons. Then again, when he was about to be killed by the vile Dhrishtadyumna, you did not stop the Panchala prince.

You forced Karna to use the Shakti that he had from Sakra against Ghatotkacha, the weapon he had saved for Arjuna, the one your precious Partha would not have escaped. You encouraged Satyaki to kill Bhurisrava, who had lost an arm and while he sat in dhyana observing the Praya vrata. Karna almost killed Arjuna with a shaft in which the snake Aswasena had hidden himself, but you foiled his attempt. When Karna's chariot wheel sank into the ground and he was helpless as he attempted to free it, you told Arjuna to kill him. You would never have won this war if you had fought Karna, Bhishma, Drona and me by fair means. Vile Krishna, you employed the most crooked and evil methods to cause the death of many great kings who observed Kshatriya dharma."

Krishna says, "O son of Gandhari, you, your brothers, sons, kinsmen, friends, and followers are dead only because you chose a path that was not of Dharma. Your evil ways and deeds were the cause of Bhishma, Drona and Karna's deaths. Remember, I implored you to give the Pandavas their paternal inheritance, but you listened to Sakuni instead and your own envy and greed, and refused. You tried to poison Bhima and to immolate all the Pandavas and their mother in the palace of lac.

Once, you urged the evil Jayadratha to abduct Draupadi when the Pandavas were out hunting near the Trinabindu asrama. Then, when you dishonoured her in front of the sabha, you more than earned your death at Bhima's hands.

You used the clever Sakuni to cheat Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, who was a novice at dice. For that, you deserve to die.

You and your warriors surrounded Abhimanyu, who was only a child and alone, and treacherously cut him down. For that, wretch, you deserve to die.

The truth, Duryodhana, is that it was you who perpetrated all these foul deeds of adharma, and not us. You never listened to the counsels of Brihaspati and Usanas. You never honoured the aged and you never sought or listened to anybody's advice at all unless it suited your purposes. Enslaved by ungovernable greed and avarice, you committed countless sins of every kind. And now you suffer the consequences of everything you did, despite being warned time and again by those who wished you well."

Duryodhana replies, "I have studied, given dakshina, ruled this wide earth, trampled over my enemies and enjoyed all pleasures and gratifications worthy of the Devas. Who is more fortunate than I am? Death in battle, the end that all Kshatriyas who observe their svadharma desire, is now mine. With all my well-wishers, and my younger brothers, I am going to swarga. But you, O Varapurusha, will continue to live in this unhappy world, your goals unfulfilled and torn by grief."

A thick shower of fragrant flowers falls from the sky on Duryodhana while the Gandharvas play enchanting musical instruments and the Apsaras and the Siddhas sing the glory of king Duryodhana. A redolent breeze mildly blows and the sky becomes clear and blue like lapis lazuli. Vasudeva and the Pandavas see with consternation the acclaim and worship that Duryodhana receives. Hearing invisible voices say that the deaths of Bhishma, Drona, Karna and Bhurisrava were achieved through adharma, the Pandavas are anxious and aggrieved.

Then Krishna says in a deep and mighty voice, "All these Maharathas were accomplished in the use of weapons, and considered Atirathas in the world. Even the very Regents of the Earth, let alone you, could never have killed them in a fair fight. Therefore, for your good, for your kingdom, I repeatedly used my powers of illusion to effect their deaths in battle.

You should not take it to heart that you killed your enemy by deceit. When one has numerous enemies to quell, it becomes necessary to deal with them through wiles. The Devas used the same strategy to overpower the Asuras and, since, all are now free to adopt their policy, just as we did successfully. Let us retire for the night and rest our horses, elephants and chariots."

The Pandavas and the Panchalas are relieved, and shout their approval. All of them blow their conches and Krishna blows a long, echoing blast on the Panchajanya, Bharatarishabha, happy at the sight of Duryodhana struck down in battle.'"

CANTO 158

"Sanjaya says, 'The Pandavas, followed by Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandi, the five sons of Draupadi and all the kings return to their tents, their spirits now revived. The Parthas enter Duryodhana's palatial tent, shorn now of its splendours, shabby without its lord and resembling an arena after the spectators have left. It contains only women, eunuchs and a few aged counsellors.

Krishna then tells Arjuna, "Take your Gandiva and your two inexhaustible quivers and alight. I will dismount after you, O Bharatasattama."

Arjuna obeys and, as soon as Krishna also steps down, the kapidhwaja, which flew on the top of the chariot and which Drona and Karna had tried in vain to burn with their Devastras, spontaneously takes fire along with the ratha and the Gandharva horses! All these burn down of their own accord.

The Pandavas are amazed to see the magnificent chariot reduced to ashes, and Arjuna, O Rajan, salutes Krishna respectfully and, with bowed head and joined hands, says, "O Govinda, will you tell me why this ratha has been consumed by fire?"

Krishna says, "O Arjuna, the energy of the Brahmastra and other astras had already destroyed the ratha. It did not become ashes only because I sat in it. Now that your purpose has been achieved and I have abandoned it, the ratha is needed no more and has become ashes."

Then, with a little pride, the divine Krishna embraces Yudhishtira, and says, “Destiny has ordained your victory over your enemies, O son of Kunti. It is good fortune that allowed Arjuna, Bhima, the two sons of Madri and yourself to escape with your lives from this war that has claimed so many millions of lives and washed the world in their blood. Now complete what you need to do.

After I arrived at Upaplavya, you approached me with Arjuna and offered me the customary arghya of honey, and said, ‘This Dhananjaya, O Krishna, is your brother and friend. You must protect him from all danger.’

I answered you saying, ‘Tathaastu—so be it.’

I have kept my word and a victorious Arjuna with his brothers has survived this dreadful war unscathed.”

An emotional Yudhishtira replies, “Who else but you, O Mahabaho, including the Vajradhari himself, could have withstood the Brahmastras loosed by Drona and Karna? It was through your grace that we vanquished the Samsaptakas and Arjuna could meet the fiercest challenges and find victory. At Upaplavya, Maharishi Krishna-Dwaipayana assured me that wherever you are there is dharma, and that victory is always with you.”

Then, shouting in exultation, they enter your camp, O Dhritarashtra, and plunder it, looting the war chest of its vast store of gold, silver, jewels, gems, pearls and many costly ornaments, as well as innumerable slaves.

Krishna suggests that it would not be auspicious to remain in the enemy camp that night and the Pandavas and Satyaki, without any enemies left, accompany him and return for that night to their camp on the banks of the sacred stream Oghavati.

Krishna asks Daruka to have his horses, Saibai, Sugriva, Meghapuspa and Balahaka yoked to his chariot, and drives swiftly to Dhritarashtra in Hastinapura. The Pandavas ask him to comfort the helpless Gandhari who has lost all her sons.’”

CANTO 159

Janamejaya said, “Why does Dharmaputra Yudhishtira send Krishna to Gandhari? Krishna first went to the Kauravas to broker peace between them and the Pandavas. He failed and the result was the battle of Kurukshetra, which resulted in the destruction of the Kauravas and their forces and a famous victory for the sons of Pandu. Why then, O foremost of all Adharyus, does Krishna once again go to Hastinapura? It must have been an important mission for Krishna to make the journey himself.”

Vaisampayana said, “The reason is that Yudhishtira fears what the blessed Gandhari, who possesses immense powers through her tapasya, might do when she learns how her son Duryodhana was struck down by Bhima who flouted the strict laws of a gada yuddha. He knew that she could consume the three worlds with her anger. By sending Krishna ahead, he hoped that Gandhari would be comforted and her rage cooled somewhat before Yudhishtira’s own arrival.

He wonders, ‘How will Gandhari endure her grief when she hears her son, who always fought fairly with the mace, was slain unfairly by us?’

Filled with fear and grief, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira pleads, ‘Through your grace, O Govinda, my kingdom is now free. This is something that we could never imagine. As in that war of long ago between the Devas and Asuras you supported the Devas, you helped us in in our great battle. By agreeing to be Arjuna’s charioteer, you protected us and enabled us to win

this war. For our sake, O Krishna, you have endured harsh words, blows of the mace, and injuries from arrows and spears. Our efforts have not been in vain, and we have finally succeeded in killing Duryodhana. Now do whatever is needful so that we do not lose what we have so painfully won.

Although victory is ours, O Krishna, our heart trembles with fear and doubt. We fear the pure Gandhari's wrath. That blessed queen, with her many austere tapasyas, has the power to reduce us to ashes when she hears of the deaths of her sons and grandsons. You must go there, O Madhava, and pacify Gandhari. You are eternal, the Creator and the Destroyer and the First Cause of all the worlds, and surely you can pacify that great queen in her terrible grief and rage. Our grandsire, the holy Krishna-Dwaipayana, will also be there. O Mahabaho, you must dispel the anger of Gandhari.'

As soon as Daruka gets his ratha ready, Krishna rides swiftly for Hastinapura and seeks audience with Dhritarashtra. He finds Maharishi Vyasa already there. Touching the feet of both Vyasa and Dhritarashtra, he respectfully salutes Gandhari also. He then seizes Dhritarashtra by the hand and begins to weep. After a while, he composes himself, washes his eyes and his face, and says eloquently to Dhritarashtra, 'You know, O Bhaarata, the past and the future and are familiar with the course of Kaala. Out of regard for you, the Pandavas tried to prevent the destruction of their race and the general extermination of Kshatriyas. Yudhishtira and his brothers always tried to live in peace with all.

They went into exile after their defeat at the game of dice and even had to live in lowly disguise, and suffered many indignities. On the eve of battle, I came and in the presence of so many great and noble men begged you for only five villages. Alas, Kaala and greed ensured that you did not grant my request.

You have now become responsible for the extermination of the very Kshatriya varna. Bhishma, Somadatta, Bahlika, Kripa, Drona, his son, and the wise Vidura always advocated peace, but you never listened to them. Alas, it seems that Kaala confounds everybody, O Bhaarata, even you.

Indeed, Fate is supreme, so do not, O wise one, impute any fault to the Pandavas. Judged by the laws of dharma, intellect or affection, they have done no wrong. You know that all this is your own fault, so do not cherish any ill will towards the sons of Pandu. Race, descent, the final tarpana, and everything else that one looks for in our offspring now depend on the Pandavas, for both you and Gandhari. Both of you should not harbour

malice towards them. Reflect upon what I have told you, think of your own transgressions, and cherish affection towards the Pandavas.

You know Yudhishtira's devotion and his affection for you. He has not found any peace of mind after these needless deaths of his enemies. He grieves for you and for Gandhari. Overwhelmed with shame and distress, he dares not come before you because he knows what you suffer on account of your children.'

Krishna then says to the sorrowing Gandhari, 'O daughter of Subala, you of stern vratas, listen to me. O auspicious one, there is no woman like you in the world. You will remember the wise words that you spoke in the sabha in my presence, but which your sons did not obey. You told Duryodhana then, "Listen, O foolish prince, victory will go only where dharma is."

Your words have now come true. Knowing all this, do not grieve or think of cursing the Pandavas. O Bhadre, because of the strength of your tapasya, you have the power to burn up the whole world with your eyes that you have kept bound in virtue for so long.'

Gandhari says quietly, 'It is as you say, O Kesava. My grieving heart was shaken by untold fury but, hearing what you say, it is calmed. Now, you and the sons of Pandu are the only remaining sanctuary for my blind old king Dhritarashtra.'

Gandhari covers her face and begins to sob loudly. Lord Krishna comforts her with kindly words. Then, suddenly, in his sacred heart, he sees a great evil that Drona's son Ashwatthaman is contemplating. He rises in haste, after touching Vyasa's feet, and says to Dhritarashtra, 'I take your leave, O Bharatasattama. Do not grieve. I leave you so suddenly because I fear that the son of Drona is contemplating doing something unspeakably evil to destroy the Pandavas this very night.'

Both Gandhari and Dhritarashtra say, 'Go quickly, O Kesava, and protect the Pandavas. We hope to see you again soon.'

After he leaves, the noble Vyasa comforts the broken Dhritarashtra.

Having achieved what he came for, Krishna drives like the wind from Hastinapura and arrives at the Pandava camp. There he reports the success of his mission."

CANTO 160

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Kicked in the head, his thighs broken, prostrate on the ground, what, O Sanjaya, does my exceedingly proud son then say?'

Sanjaya says, 'I and our other subjects come in droves to where your son lies dying. King Duryodhana, O monarch, covered with dust, gathers up his flowing locks with painful effort and begins to sigh like a snake which has had its back broken. Filled with rage, with tears flowing fast from his eyes, he glares at me. He strikes his arms against the earth for a while like an enraged elephant and, shaking his loose locks, and gnashing his teeth, he begins to censure Yudhishtira. Breathing heavily, he tells me, "Alas, I who led eleven chamus of troops and had for my protectors Santanu's son Bhishma, the Maharatha Karna, Gotama's son Kripa, Sakuni, Drona, that foremost among all wielders of arms, Ashwatthaman, the heroic Salya and Kritavarman, alas, I have come to this sorry plight. It seems that Kaala is irresistible and no one can conquer or escape Time. Inform my friends who are still alive, how Bhima struck me down sinfully. Bhurisrava, Bhishma and Drona also suffered grievous adharma from the cruel Pandavas, for which, surely, they will incur the condemnation of all righteous men.

What pleasure can a man of dharma enjoy at having gained victory by sinful means? Who again would approve of a Kshatriya fighting through vile perfidy? How can that wretch Vrikodara rejoice after the manner in

which he struck me down? How could he lay his foot on my head when I lay with my thighs and my very manhood broken? Is such a man worthy of honour?

O Sanjaya, tell my suffering parents that I have performed yagnas, supported a vast number of servants, ruled the world with her seas, subdued my enemies, gifted wealth to my kinsmen, made my friends happy and defied all my enemies. I conquered hostile kingdoms and enslaved great kings. I was always generous towards all whom I loved. Who is there more fortunate than I am?

I have attended to the three purusharthas—Dharma, Artha and Kama. I have studied the Vedas and given dakshina according to the laws. By observing the duties of my svadharma, I have earned many realms of blessedness in the hereafter. Fate ensured that I was never defeated in battle and subjected to anyone's overlordship. Fate ensured that I fought valiantly and did nothing dishonourable or against my Kshatriya dharma. Who can be more fortunate than I can?

Yet now, only after my fall, has fate abandoned me. I have found the death that all noble Kshatriyas wish for. I have been killed vilely, sinfully, with a low stroke of the wretched Bhima's mace, for he could never have prevailed against me otherwise. Tell the blessed Ashwatthaman, Kritavarman of the Satwata vamsa, and Saradwat's son Kripa, that they should never trust the Pandavas, who have perpetrated these many crimes of adharma."

After this, your royal son tells our messengers, "Bhima has killed me treacherously. I who was sovereign of all the world am now like a destitute, a vagrant, and I will follow in the wake of Drona, Karna, Salya, Vrishasena, Sakuni, Jalasandha, king Bhagadatta, of Somadatta's son, Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, of all my brothers led by Dusasana, of Dusasana's proud son, of my own son Lakshmana, and the millions of others who fought for me and have already attained swarga.

Alas, how will my sister Dussala, stricken by sorrow, bear the news of the death of her brothers and her husband? Alas, what will be the plight of the old king, my father, my mother Gandhari, and his daughters-in-law and grand-daughters-in-law? Without doubt, the beautiful and large-eyed mother of Lakshmana, now that she has lost her son and husband, will soon meet with her death. If Charvaka, the mendicant devotee who is a master of speech, learns everything, that blessed man will certainly avenge himself

for my death. By dying upon the sacred field of Samantapanchaka, celebrated over the three worlds, I myself will surely gain many eternal regions of honour, felicity and bliss."

Hearing these lamentations of the king, thousands of grieving men flee in all directions. The whole earth, with her forests and seas, with all her mobile and immobile creatures, begins to tremble violently, and to emit deep roars from her very entrails. All the points of the compass turn dismal and murky. The messengers find Ashwatthaman and report to him all that had transpired after which they return, thoughtful and grief-stricken.'"

CANTO 161

"Sanjaya says, 'After the messengers convey word of the fall of Duryodhana to the remaining severely wounded Maharathas of the Kaurava army, Kripa and Kritavarman ride quickly to the spot. They see Duryodhana lying on the ground like a sala tree laid low by a tempest, covered in blood, in agony and weltering on the bare ground. He is surrounded by many ravening carnivores, like wealth-coveting dependants around a king lying in state. His forehead contracted into furrows of rage, he rolls his eyes in anger and growls at the beasts. Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman alight from their chariots and run towards the king.

A tearful Ashwatthaman says, "O Naravyaghra, truly there is nothing stable in the world of men, since you, the king of the world, now lie on the bare earth covered with dust. Where are Dusasana or the maharatha Karna, or your many friends? Ah, the ways of time and Yama are truly inscrutable. Look at the reverses that Kaala inflicts. Where is your vast army, your pure white canopy and your yak-tail fan, O Rajan?"

Hearing this from the sorrowing Ashwatthaman, your son first consoles him and, shedding tears of grief afresh, says, "This liability of all living creatures to death is ordained by the Creator himself—that death has now come to me, who reigned over the entire earth. I never turned my back on battle, whatever calamities overtook me, and always lived in courage and perseverance. Fate decreed that I should die at the hands of evil men and

through deception. My friends, it is great good fortune that you have escaped alive from this great slaughter.

Do not grieve for me. If the Vedas are any authority, I have certainly acquired many eternal regions. I am not ignorant of the glory of Krishna of immeasurable energy. He did not cause me to deviate from the proper observance of Kshatriya dharma. You have striven hard for my success but Destiny will always prevail."

Duryodhana, with eyes laved with tears, falls silent, his body wracked with pain. Seeing him thus, Drona's son flares up in anger like the fire of the pralaya. He takes Duryodhana's hand and, in a voice hoarse with tears, says, "My father was killed by those wretches through a base deceit. Yet, that does not burn me as keenly as your distress. Listen to the vow that I swear, by Truth, by all my acts of piety, and by my religious merits: today, in the very presence of Krishna, I will despatch all the Panchalas to Yamaloka. Allow me, Rajan, to fulfil my oath."

Duryodhana is pleased to hear these words and asks Aswatthaman to bring a pot full of water. Receiving the vessel, your son tells Kripa, "O blessed Brahmana, let Ashwatthaman be installed as our Senapati. Those learned in the scriptures say that at the command of the king, even a Brahmana may fight, especially one who has adopted the ways of a Kshatriya."

At the king's command, Kripa, the son of Saraswat, installs Ashwatthaman as senapati. He embraces the king and leaves, the ten points resounding with his leonine roars. Duryodhana, covered in blood, passes that fearful night there in agony while the grieving Maharathas leave the battlefield, their hearts unbearably heavy, and reflect anxiously and earnestly on what they should do next.'"

The End of Salya Parva

Sauptika Parva

CANTO 1

AUM! Having bowed down unto Narayana, and Nara the most exalted of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, must the spirit of *Jaya* be invoked!

Sanjaya says, 'Then, those three heroes, Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman, go together towards the south. At the hour of sunset they arrive at a place near the Kuru encampment. Letting their animals loose, they are taken with fear. Seeing a forest they enter it stealthily. They set themselves down at no great distance from the Kuru camp. Lacerated and wounded deep by many savage weapons, they breathe long and hot sighs, thinking of the Pandavas. Then, hearing the loud celebrations of the victorious Pandavas, they fear a pursuit and quickly flee towards the east. Having gone for some way, their animals become tired and they themselves are thirsty. Overpowered by wrath and vindictiveness, those great bowmen cannot bear what has transpired; they burn with grief at the terrible end of Duryodhana. They rest for a while.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Bhima's feat, O Sanjaya, seems incredible to me, since my son whom he brutally felled had the strength of ten thousand elephants. In manhood's prime and possessed of an adamantine body, no one could kill Suyodhana. Alas, even that son of mine was struck down by the Pandava.

Without doubt, O Sanjaya, my heart is made of stone, since it does not break not into a thousand pieces even after hearing of the slaughter of my hundred sons. Alas, what will be the plight of myself and my wife, an old couple now destitute of children? I dare not dwell in the dominions of Pandu's son! Having been the sire of a king and a king myself, how shall I pass my days as a slave obedient to the commands of Pandu's son? Having laid my command over all the Earth and having stood over the heads of all, how shall I live now as a slave in wretchedness? How shall I, O Sanjaya, endure the fire-like mockery of Bhima who has single-handedly slain a full hundred sons of mine? The words of the high-souled Vidura have come true! Alas, Sanjaya, that my son did not pay heed to those words.

However, tell me, what did Kritavarman, Kripa and Drona's son do after my son Duryodhana had been treacherously struck down?'

Sanjaya says, 'They have not gone far, O king, when they stop, for they see a dense forest. Having rested a little while, they enter that great forest, riding in their chariots drawn by excellent steeds whose thirst has now been assuaged. That forest abounds with all manner of animals, and with all kinds of birds. And it is dense, with great trees and entwining creepers and infested by numerous predators. Spangled with many bodies of water and adorned with various kinds of flowers, it has many lakes overgrown with blue lotuses.

Having entered that dense forest, they cast their eyes about and see a gigantic banyan tree with thousands of branches. Repairing to the shade of that tree, those maharathas, O king, those foremost of men, see that is the greatest tree in that forest. Alighting from their chariots and unyoking their horses, they cleanse themselves duly and say their evening prayers.

The Sun reaches the Asta Mountain, and Night, the mother of the universe, arrives. The firmament, strewn with planets and stars, shines like an ornamented piece of brocade and is wondrous to behold. The denizens of night begin to howl and utter their myriad cries at will, while they that walk the day fall asleep. Awful becomes the noise of the night-wandering animals. The carnivores are full of glee, and the night, as it deepens, grows dreadful.

At that sinister hour, Kritavarman, Kripa and Drona's son sit together under that mighty banyan, and they begin to give expression to their sorrow about the destruction that had overtaken both the Kurus and the Pandavas. Heavy with sleep, exhausted, they lay themselves down on the bare earth.

Blood from their congealing wounds still drips onto the earth; arrows still protrude from their magnificent bodies. Kripa and Kritavarman quickly fall asleep. However deserving of happiness and undeserving of torment, they lie stretched on the bare ground. Indeed, O monarch, those two who had always slept on luxurious beds now sleep restlessly, like vagrants, on rough earth, afflicted by toil, grief, and their slumber nightmared.

Drona's son, however, O Bhaarata, yielded to the influence of wrath and reverence, cannot sleep, but lies there breathing like a trodden upon snake. Burning with rage, that hero of mighty arms casts his eyes on every side of that terrible forest. As he surveys that vana, teeming with many creatures of night, the great warrior sees in the branches of the lofty, sprawling banyan a covering of crows, thousands of the dark birds roosting in the night, most with their wings tucked under shiny wings. Each perched close to its neighbour, those crows sleep at ease, O Kauravya.

Suddenly, as he gazes raptly at the sleeping crows, Ashwatthaman sees an owl of terrible aspect make its appearance there. Of gigantic body, with green eyes and tawny plumage, its beak is huge and its talons are like swords. And the speed with which it comes resembles that of Garuda. Uttering soft cries, that awesome owl glides towards the branches of that banyan tree. That tawny ranger of the sky, that slayer of crows, alights softly on one of the branches of the banyan and, now with horrible cries, kills a great number of his sleeping enemies. He tears the wings off some and bites off the heads of others; with his razor-like talons he breaks the legs of many. With uncanny strength and speed, that great and ghastly owl kills some hundreds of crows in mere moments, while Aswatthaman watches him from below, entranced.

In time too short to tell, such is the onslaught of the owl, the ground covered by the spreading branches of the banyan is thickly strewn and heaped on every side with dead crows. Soon, no crow remains alive, and the owl is filled with delight; its great lens-like eyes shine like those of a slayer of foes after having prevailed over his enemies at his pleasure.

Seeing that ferocious deed perpetrated in the night by the owl, Drona's son begins to reflect on it; he considers it a sign to himself and is quickened to follow the owl's murderous example. He says to himself, "This owl teaches me a lesson in battle. I am bent upon the destruction of the enemy, and the time for the deed has come! I cannot kill the victorious Pandavas for they are too mighty. Yet, while I was in Duryodhana's presence, I swore

that I would kill them. It would seem that I have pledged myself to a suicidal venture, like an insect essaying into a blazing fire. If I were to fight them fairly, I shall, without doubt, have to lay down my life. By an act of guile, however, success may still be mine and a great destruction overtake my foes!

Men in general, as also those versed in the scriptures, always laud means which are certain over those which are uncertain. Whatever of censure and evil repute this act may provoke ought to be incurred by the man that observes the way of the Kshatriya. The Pandavas of uncleansed souls have, at every step, perpetrated ugly and sinful deeds that were also full of guile.

In this regard, certain ancient verses, full of truth, are heard, sung by enlightened men of dharma, who sang them after a careful consideration of the demands of justice.

These say: 'The enemy's force, even when exhausted, or wounded with weapons, or engaged in eating, or when leaving the field, or when resting within their camp, should be smitten! They should be dealt with in the same way when afflicted with sleep in the dead of night, or when bereft of their commanders, or when broken with wounds and grief, or when under an erroneous impression of safety.'"

Having reflected in this way, the valiant son of Drona forms the resolution of killing the sleeping Pandavas during the night and the Panchalas as well. Having decided upon this evil plan and pledging himself repeatedly to its execution, he wakes both his uncle Kripa and Kritavarman, lord of the Bhojas. Awakened from sleep, those two illustrious and mighty ones hear Ashwatthaman's vile scheme. Filled with shame, both of them give him no reply. Having reflected for a short while, Ashwatthaman says with tears in his eyes, "King Duryodhana, that one hero of great might, for whose sake we waged war with the Pandavas, has been slain! Deserted and alone, though he was the lord of eleven akshauhinis of troops, that Kshatriya of unstained prowess has been struck down by Bhimasena and a number of wretches banded together in battle. Vrikodara has perpetrated another vile and vicious deed - for he kicked the head of a king whose locks were given the sacred coronal bath.

The Panchalas roar and give vent to jubilant cries and raucous laughter. Filled with joy, they blow their conches and beat their drums. Listen, do you hear the pealing of their drums, the blare of their conches, borne by the

winds, frightful to the ear, and filling all the cardinal points of the world. Loud also is the din made by their neighing steeds and grunting elephants and roaring warriors. That deafening noise made by the rejoicing warriors as they march to their quarters, as also the clatter of their chariot-wheels comes to us from the east. So great has been the havoc wrought by the Pandavas on the Dhartarashtras that we three are the only survivors of that carnage.

Some of us were endowed with the might of a hundred elephants, and some were masters of all weapons. Yet have they been slain by the sons of Pandu. I regard this to be an instance of the reversals brought about by Time. And truly, what I say is the end to which such an act leads! Truly, although the Pandavas have achieved such difficult feats, even this should be the result of those exploits. If your wisdom has not been driven out by shock and grief, then say what is proper for us to do in this grave matter."

CANTO 2

Kripa says, “We have heard all that you have said, O mighty one. Listen, however, to a few words of mine. All men are subject to and governed by two forces, Destiny and Exertion. There is nothing higher than these two. Our actions do not become successful in consequence of destiny alone, nor by exertion alone, O best of men. Success springs from the union of the two. All purposes, high and low, depend on a union of these two. In the whole world, it is through these two that men are seen to act as also to abstain from action.

What result is produced by clouds pouring rain upon a mountain? What results are not produced by them pouring upon a cultivated field? Exertion, where destiny is not auspicious, and absence of exertion where destiny is auspicious - both these are fruitless. What I have said about the union of the two is the truth. If the rains properly moisten a well-tilled field, the seeds yield a fine harvest. Human success is also of this nature.

Sometimes, destiny, having settled a course of events, acts of itself without waiting for exertion. For all that, the wise, aided by skill, have recourse to effort. All the purposes of human actions, O bull among men, are accomplished through those two coming together. Influenced by these two, men are seen to strive or be quiescent. Recourse may be had to exertion. But exertion succeeds through destiny. It is in consequence also of destiny that one who sets himself to work, depending on exertion, attains to

success. The exertion, however, of even a competent man, even when well directed, when it is without the concurrence of destiny is seen in the world to be fruitless. Those, therefore, among men, that are idle and without intelligence, disapprove of exertion. This, however, is not the opinion of the wise.

Generally, any action performed is not seen to be unproductive of fruit in the world. The absence of action, again, is seen to result in grave misery. A man obtaining something of itself, without having exerted himself in any way, as also one not obtaining anything even after exertion, is not found. One who is busy in action is capable of supporting life. He, on the other hand, that is idle, never gains happiness. In this world of men it is generally seen that they that are addicted to action are always inspired by the desire of earning good. If one devoted to action succeeds in gaining his object or fails to acquire the fruit of his deeds does not become censurable in any respect. If anyone in the world is seen to luxuriously enjoy the fruits of action without doing anything, he is generally seen to incur ridicule and become an object of hatred. He who, disregarding this rule about karma, lives otherwise, is said to do an injury to himself. This is the opinion of those that are endowed with intelligence.

Efforts become unproductive of fruits in consequence of these two reasons: destiny without exertion and exertion without destiny. Without exertion, no deed in this world becomes successful. Devoted to action and endowed with skill, that man, however, who, having bowed down to the gods, seeks the accomplishment of his objects, is never lost. The same is the case with one who, desirous of success, properly waits upon the aged, asks them what is for his good, and obeys their beneficial counsels. Men approved by the old should always be solicited for counsel, while one has recourse to exertion. These men are the infallible root of means, and success is dependent on means. He who applies his efforts after listening to the words of the old soon reaps abundant fruits from those efforts. That man who, without reverence and respect for wise elders, seeks the accomplishment of his purposes, being moved by passion, anger, fear, and avarice, soon loses his prosperity.

This Duryodhana, stained by covetousness and bereft of foresight, without taking counsel, foolishly embarked on an ill-considered enterprise. Disregarding all his well-wishers and taking counsel with only the wicked, though repeatedly dissuaded, he waged war with the Pandavas who are his

superiors in all good qualities. From the beginning, he was evil. He could not restrain himself. He did not do the bidding of friends. For all that, he now burns in grief and calamity.

As for me, since I followed that sinful wretch, this great catastrophe has overtaken me. It has scorched my understanding. Plunged in reflection, I fail to see where my salvation lies.

A man that is himself perplexed should ask counsel of his friends. In such friends he has his understanding, his humility, and his prosperity. One's deeds should have their root in them. That should be done which intelligent friends, having settled by their understanding, do counsel. Let us, therefore, repair to Dhritarashtra and Gandhari and the high-souled Vidura and ask them what we should do. They will tell us what is for our weal. We should do what they say. Even this is my certain resolution. Those men whose actions do not succeed even after exerting themselves, should beyond doubt be regarded as being afflicted by destiny."'

CANTO 3

Sanjaya says, 'Hearing these words of Kripa that were auspicious and fraught with dharma and artha both, Aswatthaman, O monarch, is overwhelmed by sorrow. Burning with grief as if in a fire, he forms an evil resolution and then addresses them both, saying, "The faculty of understanding is different in different men. Each man, however, is pleased with own understanding. Every man regards himself more intelligent than others. Everyone respects his own understanding and accords it great praise. Every man's own wisdom is with each a subject of praise. Everyone speaks ill of the wisdom of others, and well of his own, in all instances. Men whose judgements agree with respect to any unattained object, even though there be a variety of considerations, become gratified with and applaud one another. The judgements, again, of the same men, overwhelmed with reverses through the influence of time, become opposed to one another. More particularly, in consequence of the diversity of human intellects, judgements necessarily differ when minds are clouded.

As a skillful physician, having duly diagnosed a disease, prescribes a medicine by using his intelligence to effect a cure, even so men, for the accomplishment of their deeds, use their intelligence, aided by their own wisdom. What they do is again disapproved by others. A man, in youth, is affected by one kind of understanding. In middle age, the same does not prevail with him, and in the time of age, another kind of understanding

becomes agreeable to him. When fallen into grave distress or when visited by great prosperity, the understanding of a person, O lord of the Bhojas, is seen to be much afflicted. In one and the same man, through want of wisdom, the understanding becomes different at different times. That understanding which at one time is acceptable becomes the reverse of that at another.

Having resolved, however, according to one's wisdom, that resolution which is best should be endeavoured to be accomplished. Such resolution, therefore, should force him to put forth exertion. All men, O lord of the Bhojas, begin their enterprises joyfully, even those that lead to death, in the belief that they can achieve what they set out to do. All men, relying on their own judgements and wisdom, endeavour to accomplish diverse purposes, feeling them to be beneficial. The resolution that has possessed my mind today because of our dire calamity, as something that can dispel my grief - I will now disclose that resolve to both of you.

The Creator, having formed his creatures, assigned unto each his dharma. As regards the different varnas, he gave each a portion of excellence. To Brahmanas he gave that foremost of all things, the Veda. To the Kshatriya he gave superior energy. To the Vaishya he gave skill, and to the Sudra he gave the duty of serving the three other varnas. Hence, a Brahmana without self-restraint is to be censured. A Kshatriya without energy is base. A Vaishya without skill deserves condemnation, as also a Sudra who is bereft of humility.

I am born into a revered and high family of Brahmanas. Through ill-fortune, however, I am wedded to Kshatriya ways. If, conversant as I am with Kshatriya dharma, I now adopt the ways of a Brahmana and achieve a high object, that course would not be consistent with honour. I wield an excellent bow and superior astras in battle. If I do not avenge the slaughter of my father, how will I dare show my face or open my mouth in the midst of men? Paying regard to Kshatriya dharma, therefore, without hesitation, I will walk in the steps of my high-souled sire and my fallen king.

Having removed their armour and flushed with victory, the Panchalas will sleep unsuspiciously tonight, exhausted by the toil of battle. While they sleep at their ease in their camp, I will launch a terrible attack on them, taking them unawares. Like Maghavat slaughtering the Danavas, I will attack as they sleep and, putting forth my utmost prowess, kill them all like a blazing fire consuming a heap of dry grass. I will kill them all and their

king Dhrishtadyumna. And having done so, I shall find peace of mind, O best of men.

Why, I will go amongst them with dreadful carnage even like Rudra with his Pinaka in rage among living creatures when the age ends. Having slain all the Panchalas tonight, I will then, in joy, attack the sons of Pandu, taking their lives one after another. Strewing the earth with the bodies of all the Panchalas, I will pay the debt I owe to my ruthlessly murdered sire. Yes, this very night I will make the Panchalas follow in the wake, hard to tread, of Duryodhana and Karna and Bhishma, and Jayadratha of the Sindhus. Putting forth my might, I shall tonight grind to a pulp the head, like that of an animal, of Dhrishtadyumna, the king of the Panchalas! I shall tonight, O son of Gautama, kill the sleeping sons of the Panchalas and the Pandavas.

Having exterminated the Panchalas tonight, while they lie sunk in sleep, I shall, O you of great intelligence, find great happiness and regard myself to have done my duty."

CANTO 4

Kripa said, "Through good fortune, O you of unfading glory, your heart is set today on vengeance. The wielder of the thunder himself will not succeed in dissuading you today. However, both of us will accompany you in the morning. Put off your armour and take down your standard; rest now and sleep this night. I shall accompany you, as also Kritavarman of the Sattvata vamsa, both clad in mail and riding our chariots, while you ride forth against the foe. United with us tomorrow, you shall indeed kill the enemy, the Panchalas with all their followers, in the press of battle, putting forth your awesome might, O greatest of maharathas. If you put forth your true prowess, you will certainly achieve the feat you have in mind.

Rest, therefore, this night. You have kept awake for many a night. Having rested and slept, and refreshed, O giver of honours, encounter the foe in battle. Then shall you certainly prevail and kill the enemy. No one, not even Vasava amongst the gods, would venture to attempt to vanquish you when you bear the foremost of weapons, O first of maharathas. Who is there that would, even if he be Indra himself, fight Drona's son, when great Aswatthaman comes into battle accompanied by Kripa and protected by Kritavarman? Having rested and slept this night and shaken off fatigue, we shall slay the enemy tomorrow morning.

You are a master of the devastras. I also am so, without doubt. This hero of Sattvata's race is a mighty bowman, always a master of battle. The three of us together, O son, shall indeed succeed in destroying our assembled enemies in battle by putting forth our might. And great shall be our happiness then! Dispelling your anxieties, rest for this night and sleep happily. Armed with bows, clad in mail and well able to scorch our foemen, Kritavarman and I will follow you, O best of men, while you ride your chariot against the enemy.

Riding to their camp and proclaiming your name in battle, you will then make a great slaughter of the foe. Tomorrow morning, in broad daylight, having caused a carnage among them, you will sport like Sakra after the decimation of great Asuras. You can truly vanquish the army of the Panchalas in battle, even like the slayer of the Danavas vanquishing the Danava host in wrath. United with me in battle and protected by Kritavarman, not the Vajradhari himself could withstand you.

Neither I, O son, nor Kritavarman, will ever retreat from battle without having razed the Pandavas from this world. Having slain the choleric Panchalas along with the Pandavas, we shall come away in triumph, or slain by them we shall find Swarga for ourselves. With every means in our power, we two will help you in battle tomorrow morning. O Mahabaho, I tell you the truth, O sinless one."

When Kripa speaks these wise words to his nephew, the son of Drona, his eyes turning red with rage, answers his uncle, O king, saying, "Where can a man afflicted by defeat, or he that is under the sway of fury, or one whose heart is always engaged in evolving schemes for the acquisition of wealth, or one that is under the power of lust, find sleep? All these four are present in me. Any one of these, singly, would destroy sleep. How great is the grief of that man whose heart is always thinking of the slaughter of his sire! My heart now burns day and night, and I have no peace. In particular, you have both seen the way in which my father was murdered by those sinners. The thought of that murder roils my very entrails.

How can one like me live for even a moment after hearing the Panchalas proclaim that they have slain my father? I cannot bear the thought of living without having killed Dhrishtadyumna. Indeed, I must kill him and all his supporters. Who is there so stone-hearted that would not burn after having heard the lamentations that I have heard of the king lying with his thighs and manhood broken? Who is there so destitute of

compassion whose eyes would not fill with tears after hearing the anguished words Suyodhana spoke in his anguished state?

They whose side I took have been vanquished. The thought of this enhances my sorrow as a surge of tide swells the sea.

Protected as they are by Krishna and Arjuna, I regard them, O uncle, to be irresistible by Indra himself. Yet, I am unable to restrain this rising wrath in my heart. I do not see the man in this world that can assuage this rage of mine. The messengers informed me of the defeat of my friends and the victory of the Pandavas. That burns my heart.

However, once I have butchered my enemies in their sleep, I shall find rest and live without anxiety."

CANTO 5

Kripa says, "A man who is bereft of intelligence and who does not have his passions under control, cannot, even if he waits dutifully upon his superiors, understand all the considerations of dharma. This is my firm opinion. Similarly, an intelligent person who does not practise humility fails to understand the settled conclusions of righteousness. A brave man, if he is without understanding, fails to know his duty even if he waits all his life upon a Rishi, even as a wooden ladle cannot taste the flavourful food in which it may lie immersed. The wise man, however, by waiting upon a learned person for even a moment, succeeds in knowing his dharma, like the tongue tasting fine food as soon as it comes into contact with it.

That man who is endued with intelligence, who waits upon his superiors, and who has his passions under control, succeeds in knowing all the laws of dharma and never disputes with what is accepted by all. An ungovernable, irreverent, and evil soul perpetrates sin in seeking his well-being by disregarding destiny.

Well-wishers seek to restrain a friend from sin. He who suffers himself to be dissuaded succeeds in winning prosperity. He that does otherwise reaps misery. As a man of a distraught mind is restrained by soothing words, even so should a friend be restrained by his well-wishers. He that suffers himself to be so restrained never becomes a prey to grief. When a wise friend is about to commit a sin, well-wishers possessed of wisdom

repeatedly and to the extent of their power endeavour to restrain him. Setting your heart on what is truly beneficial, and restraining yourself by your own self, do my bidding, O son, so that you may not have to repent afterwards.

In this world, the killing of sleeping men is not lauded, according to the dictates of dharma. The same is the case with men that have laid down their arms and alighted from their chariots and horses. They also must not be killed who say 'We are yours!' and they that surrender themselves, and they whose locks are dishevelled, and they whose horses have been killed under them or whose chariots have been broken. All the Panchalas will sleep tonight, divesting themselves of armour. Trustfully sunk in sleep, they will be as dead men. That crooked-minded man who would mortally attack them then, it is plain, would sink into a deep and limitless sea of hell without a raft save himself. In this world you are celebrated as the foremost of all men who know and use weapons. You have not yet committed even a minute trespass against dharma. When the sun rises tomorrow and light discovers all things, you, like a second sun in effulgence, will conquer the enemy in battle. But what you plan to do tonight, ah, this sin so impossible in one like you, will look like a glaring red spot upon a white sheet. This is my firm opinion."

Aswatthaman says, "Without doubt, it is even as you say, O Matulan my uncle. The Pandavas, however, have already shattered the bridge of dharma into a hundred pieces. In the very sight of all the kings, before your eyes also, Dhrishtadyumna murdered my father after my sire had laid down his weapons. Karna, also, that greatest maharatha, was slain by Arjuna after the wheel of his ratha had sunk into the earth and he was plunged into distress. Shantanu's son Bhishma, after he had laid down his weapons, on seeing Sikhandi, Arjuna cut down mercilessly, his own grandsire. So, also, the mighty bowman Bhurisrava, while he sat in the prayavrata on the field of battle, Satyaki slew, disregarding the cries of protest of all the kings.

And now, Duryodhana, too, having encountered Bhima in battle with the mace, hath been slain unrighteously by the sinful Vrikodara in the very sight of all the lords of earth. The king was all alone in the midst of a number of mighty maharathas standing around him. Under such circumstances was that tiger among men slain by the wretched Bhima. Those lamentations that I have heard, of the king lying prostrate on the

earth with his thighs broken, and from the messengers circulating the news, excoriate my very heart and I am in unbearable agony.

Such are the sinful Panchalas, who have broken all the bounds of virtue. Why do you not censure them who have transgressed all dharma? Having slain the Panchalas, those murderers of my sire, in the night when they are buried in sleep, I care not if I am born as a worm or a winged insect in my next life. That which I have resolved is hurrying me towards its accomplishment. Then how can I have sleep and happiness? That man is not yet born in the world, nor will be, who will succeed in making me change this resolution that I have formed for the Panchalas' destruction."

Sanjaya continues, 'Having said these words, O monarch, the valiant son of Drona yokes his steeds to his chariot and makes to set out towards his enemies. Kripa and Kritavarman, those great souls, say to him, "Why do you yoke your horses to your chariot? Upon what business are you bent? We are determined to come with you tomorrow, O bull among men! We sympathise with you in weal and woe. It does not become you to mistrust us."

Remembering the killing of his father, a raging Aswatthaman tells them again what he has decided to do. "When, having slain hundreds of thousands of warriors with his arrows, my great father had laid down his weapons, he was ruthlessly killed by Dhrishtadyumna. I will kill that murderer today when he has taken off his armour. With sin I will kill Drupada's sinful son tonight. I have decided to kill Dhrishtadyumna like an animal, so the Panchala prince will not attain to realms earned by warriors nobly slain in battle. Put on your coats of mail even now, take up your bows and swords, and wait for me here, you best of maharathas and parantapas."

Having said this, Aswatthaman sets out for the enemy's camp. And now, both Kripa, O king, and Kritavarman follow him and, as they go, the three shine like sacrificial fires fed with libations of ghee. They ride, O lord, towards the camp of the Panchalas within which all are asleep. Coming to the gate, Drona's son, that maharatha, stops.'

CANTO 6

Dhritarashtra says, “Seeing Drona’s son stop at the gate of the encampment, what, O Sanjaya, do Kripa and Kritavarman do? Tell me this!”

Sanjaya says, “Calling Kritavarman, as also the mighty Kripa, Drona’s son, aflame with rage, approaches the gate of the camp. Suddenly he sees there a gigantic being, whose very sight could make one’s hair stand on end; he has the effulgence of the Sun or the Moon, and stands guarding the entrance. Round his loins is a tiger-skin dripping blood, and he has a black deer’s hide for his upper garment. For his sacred thread, he wears a great snake. His many arms are long and massive and he holds many kinds of uplifted weapons.

He wears another thick serpent on his upper arm as an angada and his mouth seems to be full of spewing flames. His great teeth make his face terrible to behold. His maw is open and dreadful. His face is adorned with thousands of beautiful eyes. His body I cannot begin to describe, as also his attire. The very mountains, upon beholding this one, would split into fragments. Blazing flames then issue from his mouth and nose and ears and all thousands of eyes. From those flames hundreds and thousands of Hrishikesas issue, armed with conches and discs and maces.

Looking at that extraordinary Being, who would strike terror into the whole world, Drona’s son, feeling no fear, covers him with showers of

devastras. That Being devours them all, even like the Badava fire devouring the waters of the ocean. Seeing his arrow showers prove fruitless, Aswatthaman casts a long spear at the Being, ablaze. That sorcerous lance with the blinding tip the Being consumes like a meteor falling into the Sun.

Without pausing, Aswatthaman draws a wonderful blue sword the colour of the sky and with a golden hilt. It unsheathes like a glimmering serpent emerging from its hole. Drona's son casts that blade at the Being like a bolt of lightning. Striking the great one, the sword vanishes like a mongoose into its lair. His rage mounting, Aswatthaman hurls a mace afire, long as a sacrificial stake for Indra, at the astounding one. That too the Being calmly swallows.

At last, when all his weapons are exhausted Aswatthaman, casting his eyes around, sees the whole sky crowded with images of Janardana. Seeing that wondrous sight, Drona's son recollects the words of Kripa and, turning pale, says, "He that does not listen to the benign counsel of wise friends is obliged to repent, even as I do now, fool that I am for disregarding my two well-wishers. That fool who, ignoring the way of the scriptures, seeks to slay his enemies, falls from the path of dharma and is lost in the trackless wilderness of sin. One should not cast weapons upon kine, Brahmanas, kings, women, friends, one's mother, one's preceptor, a weak man, an idiot, a blind man, a sleeping man, a terrified man, one just arisen from sleep, an intoxicated person, a mad man and one that is heedless. The sages of old always inculcated this truth into men. I have ignored the eternal way of the shastras, essayed along a dark way, and fallen into terrible distress. The wise have said it to be a calamity when one falls back through fear from a great feat after having set out to achieve it. By putting forth only my skill and might, I cannot achieve that which I have vowed to do.

Human exertion is never regarded more efficacious than destiny. If any human action that is commenced does not succeed through destiny, the actor becomes as one who, falling from the path of righteousness, is lost in the wilderness of sin. The sages speak of defeat as foolishness when, having set out upon a course, one swerves from it through fear. Because of the wickedness of my essay, this calamity has come upon me, otherwise Drona's son would never had been forced to hold back from battle.

Again, this Being, whom I see before me, is most wonderful! He stands there like the upraised rod of divine chastisement. Even after reflecting deeply, I cannot recognise who he is. Without doubt, he is the terrible fruit

of my sinful determination. He stands here to baffle that dark resolve. It truly seems that destiny has ordained that I fail in my evil resolve. It is not for me to exert myself to accomplish my purpose unless destiny turns favourable to me. So, at this hour, I shall seek the protection of the puissant Mahadeva! He will dispel this dreadful danda of divine punishment that bars my way. I will seek the shelter of that God, that source of everything beneficial, the Lord of Uma, the Kapardin who wears a garland of human skulls, that plucker-out of Bhaga's eyes, who is also called Rudra and Hara. In tapasya and prowess, He far surpasses all the gods. I shall, therefore, seek the protection of Girisha armed with the trident."'

CANTO 7

Sanjaya says, 'Having decided to invoke Rudra's blessing, Drona's son alights from his chariot and stands with folded hands and head bent in worship of Mahadeva Siva, the Supreme God. And he says, "I seek the protection of Him called Ugra, Sthanu, Shiva, Rudra, Sarva, Ishana, Ishvara, Girisha; and of that boon-giving God who is the Creator and Lord of the universe; of Him whose throat is blue, who is Aja, Unborn, who is called Sankara, who destroyed the sacrifice of Daksha, and who is called Hara; of Him whose form is the universe, who has three eyes, who is possessed of multifarious forms, and who is the Lord of Uma; of Him who dwells in smasanas, who swells with energy, who is the Lord of diverse tribes of ghostly beings, and who is the possessor of undecaying prosperity and power; of Him who wields the skull-topped club, who is called Rudra, who bears matted locks on his head, and who is a Brahmachari. Purifying my soul that is so difficult to make clean, and possessed as I am of little tejas, I adore the Destroyer of Tripura, the triple city, and offer myself as the sacrificial animal. Hymned you have been, deserving are you of hymns, and I hymn your glory!

Your purposes are never obstructed. You wear skins upon your body; you have red hair on your head; you are blue-throated; you are unbearable; you are irresistible! You are pure; you are the Creator of Brahma; you are Brahma; you are a brahmachari; you are an observer of vratas; you are

devoted to tapasya; you are infinite; you are the refuge of all tapasvins; you are multiform; you are the leader of diverse tribes of bhutas and pretas; you are three-eyed; you are fond of those wild beings called ganas; you are always seen by Kubera, the Lord of treasures; you are dear to Gauri's heart; you are the sire of Kumara; you are tawny; your vehicle is the most excellent bull; you are clothed in subtle attire; you are most fierce; you are eager to adore Uma; you are higher than all that is high; you are higher than everything; there is nothing higher than you; you are the first wielder of weapons; you are immeasurable, and you are the protector of all the quarters; you are cased in golden armour; you are divine; you have the moon as an ornament on your head!

With dhyana, I seek your protection, O God of gods! I hereby make an offering to you, the purest of the pure, of this my body, composed of the five elements, to overcome the dreadful distress that has overtaken me and to attain success in the enterprise I have in my heart!"

Knowing this to be his resolution from his desire to accomplish his purpose, a golden altar appears before the mahatman son of Drona. Upon the altar, O king, appears a blazing fire, filling all the points of the compass, cardinal and subsidiary, with its splendour. Many mighty beings, also, with flaming mouths and eyes, of many feet, heads, and arms, adorned with angadas set with gems, with uplifted arms, and looking like elephants and mountains, appear there. Their faces resemble those of hares and boars and camels and horses and jackals and cows and bears and cats and tigers and leopards and crows and apes and parrots. And the faces of some are like those of mighty snakes, and others have faces like those of ducks. And all of them are endowed with great effulgence. And the faces of some are like those of woodpeckers and jays, O Bhaarata, and of tortoises and crocodiles and porpoises and sharks and whales, and of lions and cranes and pigeons and elephants and stags.

Some have faces like those of ravens and hawks, some have ears on their hands; some have a thousand eyes, some large bellies, and some are so attenuated that they have no flesh, O Bhaarata! And some, O king, have no heads, and some have faces like those of bears. The eyes of some are like fire, and some have fiery complexions. The hair on the heads and bodies of some blaze and some have four arms, and some, O king, have faces like those of sheep and goats. The colour of some is like that of conches, and some have faces that resemble sankhas, and the ears of some are like conch

shells, some wear garlands made of conches, and the voices of some resemble the boom of conches.

Some have matted jata on their heads, and some five tufts of hair, and some are quite bald. Some have lean bellies; some have four teeth, some have four tongues, some have ears straight as arrows and some wear diadems on their brows. Some have strings of grass on their bodies, O monarch, and some curly hair. Some have turbans made of cloth, some have coronets, some have beautiful faces, and some are adorned with ornaments. Some wear ornaments made of lotuses, and some are decked all over with flowers. Their numbers are hundreds of thousands.

Some are armed with sataghnis, some with thunder, and some have mushalas in their hands. Some bear bhushundis, some carry nooses, and some have maces in their hands, O Bhaarata. On the backs of some are slung quivers brimming with exquisite arrows, and all of them are fierce in battle. Some have standards with banners and bells, and some are armed with battle-axes. Some have large nooses in their upraised arms, and some carry clubs and bludgeons. Some have stout posts in their hands, some have curved scimitars, and some have snakes with hoods erect for their coronets. Some have large snakes wound around their upper arms for angadas, and some have stunningly beautiful ornaments on their persons. Some are begrimed with dust and dirt, some smutted with mire, and all of them are attired in white robes and garments. The limbs of some are blue, while others have limbs that are tawny. And some there are that are beardless.

Those beings, called Ganas, possessed of golden complexions, and filled always with joy, play upon drums and horns and cymbals and jharjharas and anakas and gomukhas. And some sing and some dance about uttering loud cries, and some leap forward and cut capers and leap around and sideways. Endowed with great fleetness, they run about most fiercely, the hair on their heads waving in the air, like huge elephants infuriated with musth and frequently uttering loud roars. Terrible, and of frightful mien, and armed with lances and battle-axes, they wear robes of diverse hues and beautiful garlands and fragrant liniments. Adorned with angadas, bracelets decked with great gems, and with upraised arms, they are all imbued with great courage. Capable of forcibly slaying all foes, they are irresistible in prowess. Drinkers of blood and fat and other animal matter, they live on the flesh and entrails of animals.

Some have their matted locks tied in tall tufts above their heads. Some have single tufts on their heads; some have rings on their ears; and some have bellies like earthen pots used for cooking. Some are of very short statures, and some are awesomely tall and ferocious. Some have grim features, some have pendulous lips, and the genitals of some are incredibly long. Some wear costly and diverse kinds of crowns upon their heads; and some have bald pates, and the heads of others are covered over with thick jata.

They are such that they can bring the firmament with the sun, moon and stars, down onto the earth, and exterminate the four orders of created things. They know not what it is to fear, and can endure the frowns of Hara. They always do as they please, and are the lords of the lords of the three worlds. Always engaged in merry sport, they are thorough masters of speech and are perfectly free from pride. Having obtained the eight kinds of divine attributes, they are never elated with pride. The divine Hara is always filled with wonder at their feats. They are devout worshippers of Mahadeva. Adored by them in thought, word, and deed, the Great God protects these worshippers of his, looking upon them, in thought, word, and deed as children of his own loins.

Full of wild rage, they always drink the blood and fat of all haters of Brahman. They also always drink Soma rasa that is imbued with four kinds of taste. Having adored the trident-bearing God with Vedic mantras, with brahmacharya, with tapasya, and with self-restraint they have obtained the companionship of Bhava. The divine Maheswara, that lord of the past, the present, and the future, as also Parvati, eats with those diverse tribes of mighty beings that partake of their own nature.

Causing the universe to resound with the peal of diverse kinds of instruments, with raucous laughter, with loud sounds and shrieks and leonine roars, they approach Aswatthaman. Uttering the praises of Mahadeva and spreading blinding light all around, desirous of enhancing the honour of Aswatthaman and the glory of the Mahatman Hara, and wanting to ascertain the extent of Aswatthaman’s tejas, and also of beholding the slaughter during the hour of sleep, armed with terrible and fierce bludgeons and fiery chakras and battle-axes, that crowd of strange beings, of terrible forms, come from every side. They inspire the three worlds with dread at their sight.

The mighty Aswatthaman, however, sees them and feels no fear. Drona’s son, armed with bow, and with fingers cased in fences made of iguana skins, offers up himself as a sacrificial beast to Mahadeva. Bows are the fuel, and sharp shafts are the ladles, and his own soul possessed of great might is the libation, O Bhaarata, in that act of sacrifice. The valiant and wrathful son of Drona, with propitiating mantras, offers up his own soul as the yagnapasu. Having with fierce rites adored Rudra of fierce deeds, Aswatthaman, with folded hands, says these words to that Greatest God.

Aswatthaman says, “Sprung from Angirasa’s line, I am about to pour my soul, O Siva, as a libation on this fire. Accept, O Lord, this yagnapasu! In this hour of distress, O Soul of the universe, I offer up my own self as the sacrificial victim, from devotion to you and with my heart focused in dhyana. All creatures are in you and you are in all creatures. An assemblage of all transcendent attributes occurs in you! O Lord, you are the refuge of all creatures. I wait as a libation for you, since I am unable to vanquish my foes. Accept me, O Rudra.”

Having said these words, Drona’s son ascends that sacrificial altar on which a fire blazed brightly, offers himself up as the sacrifice and enters that fire.

Beholding him stand immovable amidst the towering flames, with upraised arms, the divine Mahadeva appears there Himself and smilingly says, “With truth, purity, sincerity, resignation, ascetic austerities, vows, forgiveness, devotion, patience, thought, and word, I have been duly adored by Krishna of pure deeds. For this there is none dearer to me than Krishna. To honour him and at his word I have protected the Panchalas and shown you diverse kinds of maya. By protecting the Panchalas I have honoured him. They have, however, been marked by time. The span of their lives has run out.”

Having said these words to Aswatthaman, the divine Mahadeva enters Aswatthaman’s body, after giving him a great and polished sword. Filled by that divine being, Drona’s son blazes up with tejas. From that energy derived from the Godhead, he becomes all-powerful in battle. Many invisible beings and rakshasas go along his right and his left as he sets out, like the Lord Mahadeva himself, to enter the camp of his enemies.’

CANTO 8

Dhritarashtra says, ‘While Drona’s son, that mighty warrior, went towards the Panchala camp, do Kripa and Bhoja stop from fear? I hope those two maharathas, checked by vulgar guards, do not flee from thinking their opponents to be irresistible? Or, have they, after grinding down the camp, the Somakas, and the Pandavas, followed, while still engaged in battle, the glorious path along which Duryodhana has gone?

Are those heroes, slain by the Panchalas, sleeping on the bare earth? Did they achieve any great feats? Tell me all this, O Sanjaya!’

Sanjaya says, ‘When the noble son of Drona rushes into the camp, Kripa and Kritavarman wait at the gate. Seeing them ready to exert themselves, Aswatthaman is filled with joy, and addressing them in a whisper, O king, says, “If you both put forth your might, you can kill all the Kshatriyas in the world! What need I say, then, of this paltry remnant of the Pandava army, particularly when it is plunged in sleep? I shall enter the camp and careen there like Yama. I am sure that you two will ensure that no man escapes you with life.”

Saying this, the son of Drona enters the vast camp of the Parthas; casting off all fear, he goes in through a place where there is no door. The mighty-armed hero, having entered the camp, pads very softly towards the sprawling tent of Dhrishtadyumna.

Having achieved great feats in the war, the Panchala princes are exhausted. They now sleep deeply, all together in the same tent, next to one another, confident of their safety. Entering Dhrishtadyumna's chamber, O Bhaarata, Drona's son sees the prince of the Panchalas asleep before him on his bed. He lies on a beautiful sheet of silk upon an opulent and luxurious bedstead. Fine garlands of flowers are strewn upon that bed and it is perfumed with powdered dhupa. Aswatthaman, O king, awakens the fire-born prince, sleeping trustfully and fearlessly, with a savage kick. Feeling that kick, the prince, irresistible in battle and of immeasurable soul, starts awakes with a cry and sees Drona's son standing over him. As he rises from his bed with a growl, the mighty Aswatthaman seizes him by his long hair and thrusts him down onto the ground with powerful hands.

From fear as also from being still sleepy, Dhrishtadyumna can summon no strength to repel his violent assailant. He can only writhe and roar like some animal, O king, while Aswatthaman repeatedly kicks both his throat and chest in frenzy. Drona's son attempts to kill the Panchala prince like some lowly beast. Dhrishtadyumna rakes Drona's son weakly with his nails, and says in a whisper, "O Son of my Guru, kill me with a weapon, do not tarry. O best of men, let me find the regions of the righteous!"

Having said this much, Dhrishtadyumna falls silent. Never pausing in his bestial attack on the Panchala prince, Drona's son hisses, "O wretch of your race, there is no heaven for those that kill their Gurus. And for that crime, evil Panchala, you do not deserve to be killed by any noble weapon!"

Saying this, Aswatthaman, smoking with rage, renews his assault with his feet, kicking all the vital parts of his supine victim, and kills his enemy like a lion killing a fallen elephant.

At the screams of that hero while he was being kicked to death, his wives and guards that are in his tent all awaken, O king! Seeing someone crushing the prince with superhuman force, they regard the assailant to be some preternatural being and remain hushed, uttering no cry or sound from sheer terror. Having horribly despatched Dhristadyumna to Yama, Aswatthaman of great energy strides out and climbs onto his beautiful chariot. Indeed, coming out of Dhrishtadyumna's abode, O king, Aswatthaman causes all the sky to resound with his roars, and then drives on his ratha to other parts of the camp to continue his spree of murdering.

After Drona's son has gone, the women and all the guards set up a loud wailing. Seeing their king slain, all the wives of Dhrishtadyumna sob

hysterically. At that wailing of theirs many mighty Kshatriyas, awaking, put on their armour and come to ask after the cause of that lamentation. Those women, terrified at the sight of the predatory Aswatthaman, beg the men to pursue him.

They say, “Whether he is a Rakshasa or a man we do not know! Having slain the Panchala king, he stays there on his chariot. Look!”

Those Panchala warriors run out and surround Drona’s son. In less time than it takes to tell, Aswatthaman invokes the Raudrastra and turns them all into mounds of ashes. Having killed Dhrishtadyumna and all his followers, Drona’s son sees Uttamaujas asleep on his bed. Again attacking him with his foot, brutally kicking his throat and chest, Drona’s son kills that great hero also, while that prince writhes in agony and his eyes bulge from their sockets.

Running up and believing his brother to have been slain by a Rakshasa, Yudhamanyu swiftly strikes Drona’s son in the chest with his mace. Rushing towards him, Aswatthaman seizes him and brings him down to the ground and kills him also like an animal, while that warrior utters loud screams.

Having killed Yudhamanyu, Aswatthaman finds all the other Panchala maharathas and, waking them from sound sleep, kills them all like animals being slaughtered at a dark sacrifice. Then taking up the sword Rudra gave him he embarks on a rampage of murder, running down all the paths of the camp and beheading, slitting the throats of and driving his blade into the hearts of all the sleeping warriors he finds. Mad with bloodlust he kills not only men with that inexorable blade but all the horses and elephants that he comes upon. Covered all over with blood, dripping with the gore of man and beast, he seems then to be Death himself commissioned by Time to fetch carnage to the world.

Making his enemies tremble by the repeated blows of his sword, Aswatthaman is bathed in blood. Covered with gore and wielding his blazing sword, as he careered about in battle, his form grows more ghastly and superhuman in appearance with each moment. Those who wake from sleep, O Kaurava, are stunned by the awful sounds they hear all around. Seeing Drona’s son, they look at each other’s faces and mutely tremble. Believing him to be a particularly horrible Rakshasa, those brave Kshatriyas shut their eyes in terror.

Drona's son rages through the Panchala camp like Yama himself, and then he sees the sons of Draupadi and the remaining Somakas. Alarmed by the noise, and learning that Dhrishtadyumna had been slain, those mighty warriors, the sons of Draupadi armed with bows fearlessly pour their shafts over Drona's son. Awakened by their noise, the Prabhadrakas, with Sikhandi at their head, attack Aswatthaman with their arrows. Drona's son gives a bloodcurdling roar and turns, now wanting to kill these maharathas before him.

Remembering his father's death, Aswatthaman blazes up in fresh rage. Leaping down from the terrace of his chariot, he rushes furiously at his enemies. Taking up his bright shield with a thousand moons emblazoned and his massive celestial sword decked with gold, the mighty Brahmana warrior charges the sons of Draupadi and begins to lay about him with his weapon.

That tiger among men strikes Prativindhya through his belly, killing him instantly. The valiant Sutasoma pierces Aswatthaman with a lance, and rushes at him with his sword raised high. Aswatthaman cuts off Sutasoma's arm with the sword in its hand, and plunges his blade deep into his side. Sutasoma falls dead. Nakula's son, the valiant Satanika, hefts a chariot-wheel in both his hands and strikes Aswatthaman a blow like thunder across his chest, hurling the wheel at him. The Brahmana spirit of darkness sets violently on Satanika, felling him to the ground and then cutting his head from his throat with a clean stroke of his sword.

Hefting a spiked cudgel, Srutakarman rushes at Aswatthaman and strikes him a fell blow on the left side of his head. Aswatthaman strikes Srutakarman across his face, truncating his features, and that son of Panchali also falls dead. At this, the heroic Srutakirti, maharatha, comes running up and covers Drona's dreadful son with a storm of arrows. Stanching that gale of shafts with his shield, Aswatthaman cuts off Srutakirti's handsome, why, beautiful head from his neck with its ornate earrings now glinting with blood and blood spouting copiously from his naked throat.

The slayer of Bhishma, the mighty Sikhandi, with all the Prabhadrakas, attack Aswatthaman from every side with weapons of every kind. Sikhandi strikes Aswatthaman with an arrow squarely between his brows. Blazing up in fury, Drona's son dashes up to Sikhandi and with a single stroke of Rudra's sword cuts him in two cleaving him from his head down to the fork

of his legs. His wrath unabated, he rushes at the other Prabhadrakas as well as what remains of Virata’s forces.

One after another, he kills them all in the sinister night, the sons, the grandsons, and all the followers of Drupada. Master swordsman that he is, he runs like a storm of death everywhere across that camp hewing down mighty warriors like tender saplings with Mahadeva’s ineluctable blade.

The warriors in the Pandava camp see that Death-Night in her embodied form, a black image, mouth bloody and bloody eyes, wearing crimson garlands and smeared with crimson unguents, attired in a single piece of red cloth, with a noose in hand, and resembling an old crone, chanting a dismal note and standing full before their eyes, and about to lead away men and horses and elephants all tied with a stout rope. She seems to take away diverse kinds of spirits, with dishevelled hair and tied together with that one black rope, as also, O king, many mighty maharathas divested of their weapons.

In the days before this, O sire, the foremost warriors of the Pandava camp would see in their dreams that figure leading away the sleeping warriors and Drona’s son smiting them from behind! The Pandava soldiers saw that hag and Drona’s son in their dreams every night from the day when the battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas first began. Afflicted before by these nightmares, now they find themselves actually ravaged by Aswatthaman who terrifies them all with his frightful roars.

Afflicted by Destiny, the brave men of the Pandava camp now remember the sight they had seen in their dreams, and see their nightmare turn into ghastly reality, even as they die.

At the chilling noises that erupt in the dark, thousands of Pandava bowmen awake from their slumber. Aswatthaman hacks off the legs of some, and divides the hips of others, and pierces some in their flanks, cavorting everywhere like the Destroyer himself let loose by Time. The Earth, O lord, was soon covered with corpses of men crushed into formlessness or trodden down by frightened elephants and horses and with others that roar in panic or agony.

Many cry out, “What is this?” “Who is this?” “What is this noise?” “Who is doing this?”

While they give vent to such shrieks, Drona’s son becomes their Destroyer. He despatches all those Pandus and Srinjayas, who are without armour and unarmed, to Yama.

Awakened by the reigning bedlam, others wake from dark dreams, in fear, still full of sleep and numb; they all vanish from this world so swiftly under the relentless assault of Drona's raging son. Many find their legs paralysed, so they could not run from him, while others do not escape for their bodies have lost all energy and they cannot move. Rills of blood glisten under the stars. As pandemonium rules the grisly night, others, in the grip of utter madness and blind fright, flail out and kill one another.

Drona's son again mounts his chariot of the rumbling wheels, takes up his bow once more and sends a few hundred more men to their deaths. Others awaken, and he kills them before they can come near him and they too are bound by the Kaalaratri crone with her rope. Aswatthaman flares across that camp and many more dazed men he crushes and truncates beneath his chariot, all the while loosing fusillades of arrows around him, each shaft claiming a life. Then again, with that beautiful shield of his, adorned with a thousand moons, and with that sword which was of the colour of the evening sky, he rages among his enemies. Like an elephant trampling a lake, Drona's irresistible son storms about in the Pandava camp.

Awakened by the mayhem, O king, many other warriors rise sleepily and affrighted, and run in all directions to escape the great calamity that is upon them. Many shriek harshly while others cry out incoherent exclamations. Most cannot get to their armour or weapons. Their long hair loose, they now fail to recognise one another and cannot tell friend from foe.

Some just fall flat on the ground from exhaustion even as they get up; others wander here and there like men still inside a horrific dream. Elephants and horses, breaking their tethers, spray excreta and urine in stark fear. Others huddle together, as if that might save them from the terror that sweeps the night. Amongst these, some lay themselves down on the earth, and the rampaging horses and elephants crush them to death.

While the camp is in this state, O king, Rakshasas utter abysmal roars of joy, filling all the quarters with their demonic voices! Hearing their warriors' wails, more elephants and horses break their tethers and stampede everywhere in panic crushing hundreds of their own men. The dust those animals raise makes the night doubly dark. When that thick gloom sets in, all the warriors in the camp became perfectly stupefied; sires do not recognise their sons, brothers do not know their brothers. Elephants attack riderless elephants, and horses other steeds without horsemen in the frenetic

night; they pound and trample to gory pulp men that come in their way. Black chaos rules and the warriors run madly at their own comrades, making blood, limbs and heads fly everywhere. Men hack their comrades into pieces in the ominous gloom.

Leaving the gates they watched, and the outposts they guarded, panic-stricken sentries flee blindly, not knowing where they went. These kill one another, the slayers, O lord, not recognising the slain. Afflicted by Fate, they cry out for their sires and sons. While they flee, abandoning their friends and relatives, they call out to one another, crying out their families and names. Others just scream and fall senseless onto the ground. And Drona's avenging son swoops down and puts the lot to sword.

Other Kshatriyas, while their fellows are being slaughtered, lose their courage entirely and, in the grip of fear, try to make good their escape from the camp of death. They pass through the gates standing ajar and Kripa and Kritavarman cut them all down. Without weapons and armour, and with hair loosened, they fall on the ground, fold their hands and, trembling and sobbing, beg for their lives. However, the two Kuru warriors at the gates give them no quarter but kill them like animals on a hunt. None amongst those that escape from the camp escapes Kripa and Kritavarman.

And then, to please Drona's son, those two set the Pandava camp on fire in three places, barring the way of those that would make a run for their lives. When the camp is ablaze, Aswatthaman, that delighter of his sires, runs amok as he pleases, sword in hand and hacking down his enemies with supernatural skill. Some of his braver enemies run towards him and some run from him anyway they can. That tremendous Brahmana kills them all, regardless. His anger far from subdued, only burning higher, Drona's valiant son fells some of the enemy, cutting them in halves with his sword as if they are sesame stalks. The Earth, O bull of Bharata's race, is strewn all around with the fallen bodies of the best men and horses and elephants, while their various screams and cries mingle eerily in the darkness and the light of the fires lit by Kripa and Kritavarman.

When thousands have fallen, innumerable headless trunks rise briefly in a macabre dance and fall again, blood spuming from their naked necks. Aswatthaman, O Bhaarata, hacks off arms adorned with angadas and holding weapons in their fists, and heads, and thighs like trunks of elephants, and hands, and feet. The illustrious son of Drona mangles the backs of some, and now those left alive seek only to flee from the wild and

tameless Brahmana. And he, on his rampage, hacks some of them in two at the waist, he lops off the ears of others, and takes some arms off at their shoulders, and thrusts down the heads of some into their trunks, even after the favoured fashion of Bhima.

As Aswatthaman rages on in this way, like some demon of the pit, covered entirely in blood, only his eyes staring white, butchering thousands of men, the night deepens and grows ever more ghoulish. The earth, scattered over with thousands of corpses, of men and beasts, is too dreadful to even look at, while screams and death rattles continue to ring out all around. Cut down by the wrathful son of Drona, his enemies fall onto that earth, where now yakshas and rakshasas teem, that camp frightful with broken chariots and dead steeds and elephants.

Some call out to their brothers, some to their sires, and some to their sons. And some say, "The Dhartarashtras could never do in battle what these evil Rakshasas are doing to us during the hour of sleep! It is only because the Parthas are not here that this horrible carnage is happening. That son of Kunti, who has Janardana for his protector, cannot be vanquished by the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas or the Rakshasas. Devoted to Brahman, truthful in speech, self-restrained, and compassionate towards all creatures, Arjuna would never kill anyone who is asleep, or one that is unprepared, or one that has set aside his weapons or one who has joined his hands in supplication, or one who is retreating, or one whose hair is undone. Ah, these are demons of the vilest kind who perpetrate such terrible deeds upon us."

Uttering such words, many lay themselves down in helplessness.

The din of the cries and groans of men and their beasts dies down quickly. The earth being drenched with blood, O king, the thick and frightful cloud of dust soon disappears. Thousands of men, crawling feebly in agony, overwhelmed with anxiety and overcome by despair, are swiftly slain by Aswatthaman like Rudra during the pralaya. Many who lay themselves down on the ground clasping one another, and many who seek to flee, and others who seek to hide, and those who offer some resistance in battle, are all slain by the savage son of Drona. Burnt by the flames of Kripa and Kritavarman and slaughtered by Aswatthaman, the men lose their minds and kill one another in madness.

Before half the night is over, the son of Drona, O monarch, sends that remaining host of the Panchalas and Pandavas to Yama's abode.

That night of horror, so deadly for the men and beasts in that camp, fills all the fiendish rangers of the dark with glee. Many rakshasas and pisachas of various tribes can be seen gorging upon human flesh and quaffing the blood that lies spilt on the ground. They are fierce, tawny in hue, sinister, of adamantine teeth, and dyed in gore. With matted locks on their heads, their thighs are long and massive; endowed with five feet, their bellies are large and protruberant. Their fingers are set backwards. Of harsh temper and ugly features, their voices are raucous and fearsome. They have rows of tinkling bells tied to their bodies. Possessed of blue throats, they are frightful to behold. Cruel and terrible without exception, and without abhorrence for anything, they come there with their children and wives. Indeed, diverse are the forms seen there of the flesh-eating, blood-drinking rakshasas that come to feed at Aswatthaman's massacre. Lustily drinking the blood that runs in streams, they are full of joy and begin to dance in separate bands.

"This is ambrosial!" "This is pure!" "This is sweet!" they cry in feral elation.

Other carnivores, having gorged upon fat and marrow and bones and blood, begin to feed on the more delicate parts of corpses. Others, drinking the fat that flowed in streams, run naked over the field. Possessed of diverse kinds of faces, other predators and scavengers of ferocity, that live upon dead flesh, arrive there in their thousands. More grim and gigantic rakshasas, of fell deeds, swarm there in bands as numerous. Other ghostly beings, filled with joy and gorged to satiety, O king, are also seen in the midst of that zone of hell.

When finally day dawns, Aswatthaman wants to leave the camp. He is covered over in blood, dripping with it, and his sword is clutched so fiercely in his grasp that it seems that his hand and that awful blade have become one. Having walked that path that warriors of dharma never approach let alone tread, Aswatthaman looks like the Fire at the end of the Yuga after it has consumed all creatures, leaving only ashes. Having done what he had sworn, having trodden the left-handed, untrodden way, Drona's son, O lord, forgets his grief over the killing of his sire. When he leaves the camp of the Pandavas and the Panchalas, he leaves it as still as it had been when he entered it; only now all its inmates sleep in death, their bodies ravaged by beasts and birds of carrion, by foul rakshasas, pisachas and other filthy beasts and spirits.

After the nocturnal slaughter, when all is quiet again, Aswatthaman issues from the camp in dark triumph, meets Kripa and Kritavarman and, full of black joy, tells them in detail of what he has done. Those two, in return, devoted as they are to his good, give him the agreeable intelligence of how they had also slaughtered thousands of Panchalas and Srinjayas at the gates. Even thus does that night prove terrible to the Somakas who had been heedless and buried in sleep. The course of time, without doubt, is irresistible. Those who had exterminated us are themselves decimated.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'Why is it that that maharatha son of Drona did not achieve such a feat before, although he had resolutely exerted himself to bestow victory upon Duryodhana? For what reason did that great bowman do this after the slaying of my wretched son? Tell me this!'

Sanjaya says, 'Through fear of the Parthas, O son of Kuru's race, Aswatthaman could not achieve this feat then. It was owing to the absence of the Parthas and the intelligent Kesava, as also of Satyaki, that Drona's son could do what he did. Who is there, the lord Indra unexcepted, who could do what Aswatthaman did in the night in the presence of those heroes? Besides, O king, Aswatthaman succeeded only because the men were all asleep. Having brought great slaughter to the Pandava forces by night, those three maharatahas, Aswatthaman, Kripa and Kritavarman, meet together, embrace, and exclaim, "Great fortune!"

In joy Aswatthaman says, "All the Panchalas have been slain, as also all the sons of Draupadi. All the Somakas also, as well as all that remained of the Matsyas I have slaughtered. Crowned with success, let us at once bring this news to Duryodhana. If he is still alive, we must give him this joyful news!"'

CANTO 9

Sanjaya says, 'Having killed all the Panchalas and the sons of Draupadi, the three Kuru heroes come together to the place where Duryodhana lies, struck down by Bhima. They see that the king is still alive. Jumping down from their chariots, they surround your son, who lies there in agony, his thighs and manhood smashed. He lies in a swoon of pain, his life about to ebb away. He is vomiting blood from time to time, and his eyes are turned down to the earth.

A number of carnivores of terrible forms surround him close, wolves and hyenas; they wait for life to leave his body and then feed on it. He keeps them at bay with difficulty. He writhes upon the earth. Seeing him there, bathed in his own blood, the three heroes who are the sole survivors of his army, Aswatthaman and Kripa and Kritavarman, are besieged by grief and sit surrounding him. With those three maharathas, covered with blood and breathing in hot sighs, around him the Kuru king looks like a sacrificial altar surrounded by three fires. The three warriors weep unrestrainedly seeing that once great king lying there like that. Wiping the blood from his face with their hands, they utter piteous lamentations in the hearing of Duryodhana who lies dying on the bare earth.

Kripa says, "There is nothing that destiny cannot bring to pass! Look where king Suyodhana, who was the lord of eleven akshauhinis now lies on the ground, struck down by his enemies and covered in blood. Look where

the mace adorned with gold, which he so loved, lies beside him, still resplendent. In no battle did that mace abandon this Kshatriya. Even now, when he is about to ascend into heaven, that weapon does not leave the illustrious hero; why, it lies beside him faithfully even like a loving wife by the side of her lord in his bedchamber. Ah, look at the reversal that Time brings. This Parantapa, this scorcher of his enemies, who used to walk at the head of all the crowned kings of the world, now eats the dust of the earth. He who once struck down countless foes and made them lie on bare ground, alas, that king of the Kurus himself lies today on the bare ground, struck down by his enemy. He to whom hundreds of kings used to bow down in fear, lies today on the field of battle, surrounded by beasts of prey. Once, great Brahmanas waited upon this lord for the wealth he gave so bounteously. Today, wretched wolves and hyenas wait upon him to feast upon his body!"'

Sanjaya continues, 'Looking at that king of Kuru's vamsa lying on the ground, Aswatthaman, with tears streaming down his face caked with blood, O best of the Bhaaratas, utters these piteous lamentations: "O Rajavyaghra, tiger among kings, all the people said that you were the foremost of all bowmen. They also said that in mace fights you, a disciple of Sankarshana, were like the Lord of treasures Kubera himself. How then, O sinless one, could Bhima find any weakness in you? You were always mighty and possessed of genius at the mace. Bhima, on the other hand, O king, is a base and evil fiend.

Without doubt, O Suyodhana, O greatest king, Time in this world is more mighty than everything else, for here we see even you struck down by Bhimasena in battle. Ah, how could the base Vrikodara strike you down and so sinfully, you who know all about dharma? Yes, beyond doubt, Time is irresistible. Having summoned you to a fair fight, Bhimasena struck you below the waist, which is forbidden, for there was no other way in which he could have prevailed over you. Fie on Yudhishtira who tolerated your crowned head being stamped on by Bhima's foot in contempt. As long as this world lasts, in every battle warriors will damn Vrikodara for what he did. O great Suyodhana, O king, there is no shred of doubt that you were struck down sinfully.

The mighty Rama of Yadu's race always said that Duryodhana has no equal with the mace. In every sabha he would proudly boast of your prowess and say, 'Duryodhana of the Kuru vamsa is a worthy disciple of

mine!' My lord, you have attained to that end which great rishis have declared to be the high reward of a Kshatriya slain in battle with his face turned towards his enemy. And so I do not, O bull among men, grieve for you, O peerless Suyodhana. I grieve only for your mother Gandhari and your sire, childless as they now are. Wracked with sorrow, they will have to wander over the earth, begging for their food. Fie on Krishna of the Vrishnis, and on the evil-minded Arjuna. They regard themselves as being great knowers of dharma, yet both of them stood by indifferent while you were being treacherously slain.

How will the other Pandavas, shameless though they are, O king, speak of the manner in which they have accomplished your death? You are most fortunate, O son of Gandhari, for you have died on the field of battle, O bull among men, while facing the enemy squarely, even while outnumbered and alone. Alas, what will be the plight of Gandhari, who is now childless, and who has lost all her kinsmen and relatives? What will be the plight of the blind king, your father?

Shame be on Kritavarman, on myself, as also on maharatha Kripa, since we have not yet ascended into Swarga with you, most regal one, before us. Fie on us, lowest of men, since we do not follow you that were the granter of all wishes, the protector of all men, and the benefactor of all your subjects. Through your power, the homes of Kripa, of myself, and of my father, along with those of all our dependants, O tiger among men, are full of wealth. Through your grace, have we, with our friends and relatives, performed many great yagnas with a profusion of dana and dakshina to Brahmanas. Where will sinners such as ourselves now go, since you have left us for Swarga, taking with you all the kings of the earth?

Since we three, O king, do not follow you that are about to obtain the highest end, it is for this that we lament, O great one. Deprived of your companionship, bereft of wealth, our memories painfully dwelling upon your prosperity, alas, what will be our lot since we do not go with you? Without doubt, O Lord of Kuru's race, we shall have to wander across the earth in grief. Deprived of you, O king, where can we find peace and where happiness?

Going from this world, O monarch, and meeting those mighty warriors that have gone before you, show your regard for them at my request, one after another, according to the order of their eminence and years. Having offered worship to your guru, my father Drona, that foremost of all wielders

of bows, tell him, O king, that I have killed Dhrishtadyumna. Embrace king Balhika, maharatha, as also the king of the Sindhus, and Somadatta, Bhurisrava, and all the other great kings. I beg you, embrace them all for me and ask after their welfare."'

Sanjaya continues, 'Having said these words to the king deprived of his senses and lying broken, Aswatthaman once more casts his eyes on him and says, "If, O Duryodhana, you have any life in you still, listen to some words that will bring you pleasure. On the side of the Pandavas, only seven are alive, and among the Dhartarashtras, only we three. The seven on their side are the five brothers and Krishna and Satyaki; on our side, we three are Kripa, Kritavarman and me. All the sons of Draupadi have been slain, as also all the children of Dhrishtadyumna. All the Panchalas too have been slain, as also those that remains alive of the Matsyas, O Bhaarata.

Behold the vengeance we have taken for what they did. The Pandavas are now childless. While they were buried in sleep, we killed all the men and animals in their camp. Stealthily entering their sleeping camp in the night, O king, I have killed the sinner Dhrishtadyumna as one kills an animal."

Listening to this, which still brings joy to his heart, Duryodhana opens his eyes and says, "That which neither Ganga's son, nor Karna, nor your father, could achieve, has at last been done by you today, O mighty Aswatthaman, along with Kripa and the Bhoja. You have killed the wretched Dhrishtadyumna who was the Senapati of the Pandava forces, and you have killed Sikhandi. For what you have done I regard myself equal to Maghavat himself. May every good befall you three. Let all prosperity be yours. All of us will meet again in Swarga!"

Saying this, the high-souled king of the Kurus falls silent. Casting off his grief for all his slain kinsmen, he then gives up his prana, his life-breath. His soul ascends into sacred heaven, while his only his body remains on earth. Even thus, O Dhritarashtra, great king, your son Duryodhana breathed his last, his body broken but not his spirit. Having first provoked the war, he was at last slain by his enemies. The three heroes repeatedly embrace the king and gaze on him for long as if they cannot tear their eyes away. They then climb into their chariots.

Having heard those piteous lamentations of Drona's son, I came away at early dawn towards the city. Even thus the armies of the Kurus and Pandavas have been destroyed. Great and terrible has been that carnage, O

king, caused by your evil policy. After your son ascended into heaven, I was afflicted with grief and the spiritual sight which the Rishi gave me has left my heart and my eyes!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing of his son's death, Dhritarashtra breathes long and hot sighs, and is plunged in great anxiety."

CANTO 10

Vaisampayana said, “After that night has passed, Dhrishtadyumna’s sarathy brings word to Yudhishtira of the great slaughter of the night.

The charioteer says, ‘The sons of Draupadi, O king, have been slain with all the sons of Drupada himself, while they were heedless and trustfully asleep in their camp. During the night, O Dharmaraja, your camp has been razed by the cruel Kritavarman, and Kripa, the son of Gautama, and the sinful Aswatthaman. Killing thousands of men and elephants and horses with lances and darts and battle-axes, those men have entirely exterminated your army. While your forces were being slaughtered like a forest cut down with axes, a loud bewailing was heard rising from your camp. I am the sole survivor, O lord, of that vast force. I, O virtuous Yudhishtira, escaped with some difficulty from Kritavarman when he was momentarily distracted.’

Hearing these evil tidings, Kunti’s son Yudhishtira falls down on the earth, grief having its way with him at the loss of his sons. Coming up quickly, Satyaki takes the king in his arms. Bhimasena and Arjuna and the two sons of Madri also stretch out their arms to hold their brother. Having recovered his senses, the son of Kunti laments in searing grief, his words rendered indistinct by sorrow:

‘Alas, having vanquished the enemy, we have ourselves been vanquished in the end! The course of events is difficult to be ascertained even by men endowed with spiritual sight. The vanquished have become victorious. We ourselves, again, while victorious, are vanquished. Having slain brothers and friends and sires and sons and well-wishers, and kinsmen, and counsellors, and having quelled them all, we ourselves are at last defeated. Misery looks like prosperity and prosperity seems to wear the face of misery. This our victory has assumed now the shape of defeat. Our victory has ended in defeat. Having won the war, I must now grieve as a tormented wretch. How then can I regard ours as a victory? In reality, I have been doubly defeated by the enemy. They for whose sake we have incurred the sin of victory by slaying our kinsmen and friends, alas, they, after victory had crowned them, have been slain by defeated enemies that were heedful.

Alas, through heedlessness have they been butchered that had escaped from even Karna, who had barbed arrows and nalikas for his teeth, the sword for his tongue, the bow for his gaping mouth, and the twang of his bowstring and the sound of his palms for his roars; that always wrathful Karna who never retreated from battle, and who was a very lion among all men!

Alas, those princes that succeeded in crossing, by boats that were their weapons, the great Drona-ocean having chariots for its deep lakes, showers of arrows for its waves, the ornaments of warriors for its gems, chariot horses for its animals, darts and swords for its fish, elephants for its crocodiles, bows for its whirlpools, mighty weapons for its foam, and the signal of battle for its moonrise, making it swell with energy, and the twang of the bowstring and the slapping sound of palms for its roar - alas, even those princes have been murdered out of heedlessness.

There is, in this world, no more powerful cause of death, as regards men, than carelessness. Prosperity abandons a careless man from every side, and every kind of misery overtakes him.

The tall standard that stood on his ratha was the wreath of smoke that infallibly indicated the Bhishma-fire. Arrows were its flames, and wrath was the wind that fanned it. The twang of his formidable bow and the sound of his palms were the roar of that fire. Armour and diverse kinds of weapons were the homa libations that were poured into it. The vast enemy army was the heap of dry forest-grass that fire set into. Alas, even they that

had endured that fierce fire, whose terrible energy was the mighty weapons in Bhishma's hand, have at last fallen through heedlessness.

A heedless person can never acquire knowledge, asceticism, prosperity, or renown. Indra found great happiness after killing all his foes heedfully. Behold the survivors among our enemies have, through our heedlessness, slain so many sons and grandsons of kings, each of whom was like another Indra himself. Alas, they have perished like merchants with rich freight drowning through carelessness in a shallow stream after having crossed the great ocean. They whose bodies now lie on the bare ground, slain by those vengeful villains, have without doubt ascended into heaven.

I grieve, however, for the princess Krishnaa. Ah, she will be plunged today in an ocean of grief. Hearing of the slaughter of her brothers and sons and her venerable sire, the king of the Panchalas, without doubt she will fall senseless onto the earth. Her body wracked by grief, she will not rise again. Unable to bear the pain of such various affliction, and worthy as she is of happiness, alas, what will be her plight? Cut to the quick by the slaughter of her sons and brothers, she will be like one scorched by fire.'

Having indulged in these lamentations, that king of Kuru's race then addresses Nakula, saying, 'Go and bring the unfortunate princess Draupadi here along with all her maternal relations.' Obedient as always to the king who equalled Yama himself in righteousness, Nakula goes swiftly on his chariot to the chambers of Draupadi where that princess lived with all the wives of the Panchala king. Having despatched the son of Madri, Yudhishtira, crushed by grief, with tears in his eyes and accompanied by his companions, goes to the field on which his sons had battled and which still teems with diverse kinds of creatures, blood-drinkers and flesh-eaters. Entering that cursed field abounding with fierce sights, the king sees his sons, well-wishers and friends all lying on the ground, covered with blood, their bodies mangled, and heads separated from their trunks. Seeing them like that, Yudhishtira, foremost of righteous men, is stricken through by grief. That lord of the Kurus breaks out into loud sobs and falls unconscious on the earth. And so do all his followers."

CANTO 11

Vaisampayana said, "Seeing his sons, grandsons, and friends all slain in battle, the king's soul is unhinged by mighty grief, O Janamejaya! Recollecting those sons and grandsons and brothers and allies, a profound sorrow takes possession of the illustrious sovereign. Senseless and trembling, his eyes are bathed in tears. His friends then, themselves filled with horror, begin to comfort him.

At this time, Nakula, skilled in running errands, arrives there on his chariot of solar refulgence, accompanied by the princess Krishnaa in dreadful distress. She has been living in Upaplavya all this while. Hearing the heartrending news about the slaughter of all her sons, she becomes uncontrollably agitated. Trembling like a plantain tree shaken by the wind, the princess Draupadi arrives in the presence of Yudhishtira, and falls down before him. Her face, adorned with eyes like full-blown lotuses, is darkened by sorrow like the Sun himself when shrouded by clouds.

Seeing her prostrate on the earth, the wrathful Vrikodara of inexorable prowess runs forward and sweeps her up in his arms in a tight embrace. Comforted by Bhimasena, that dark and most beautiful woman on earth begins to weep and, addressing the eldest son of Pandu with his brothers, says, "O great king, having won the whole world through good fortune, you shall enjoy her after the slaughter of your valiant sons in the observance of Kshatriya dharma.

Through good fortune, O son of Pritha, you are joyful at the thought of having won the Earth. By good fortune, your thoughts do not dwell on Subhadra's son whose tread resembled that of a great elephant. By good fortune, you do not, like me while I remained in Upaplavya, recollect your heroic sons slaughtered in the observance of Kshatriya dharma. O son of Pritha, hearing of the murder of those sleeping heroes by Drona's sinful son, grief burns me as if I were in the midst of a fire. If Drona's son is not made to reap the fruit of this sin; if, putting forth your prowess in battle, you do not take the life of that wretch, along with the lives of his followers, then listen to me, you Pandavas, I will sit here in praya until life leaves this body of mine!'

Having said these words, the hapless Panchali, daughter of Yajnasena, sits on the ground beside the eldest son of Pandu, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja. The Rajarishi Yudhishtira, of righteous soul, seeing his beloved queen sit in praya, says to her, 'O auspicious one, O you who know dharma well, all your sons and brothers have righteously met with noble deaths. It does not become you to grieve for them. As for Drona's son, he has fled to a distant forest, O beautiful princess. How will you be assured that we have killed him even if we do?'

Draupadi answers, 'I have heard that Drona's son has a gem embedded in his head, a stone with which he was born. I want to see that jewel brought to me after the slaughter of that vile man in battle. Setting that stone on your head, O king, I will be able to endure living. This is my resolve.'

Saying this to the royal son of Pandu, the beautiful Krishnaa approaches Bhimasena and says gravely, desperately, to him, 'Remember the dharma of a Kshatriya, O Bhima, and come to my rescue. Kill the sinner Aswatthaman as Maghavat did Sambara. There is no one in this world who is equal to you in prowess. It is known throughout the world how, when a great calamity befell us at Varanavata, you became the refuge of all the Parthas. When, again, Hidimba saw us in the deep jungle, it was you who saved us from the Rakshasa. Like Maghavat rescuing his queen Sachi, the daughter of Puloma, you saved me in Virata's city from being ravished. Even like those great feats, O Bhima, that you achieved in the past, now kill, O Parantapa, the son of Drona and then be you joyful.'

Hearing these and the other piteous pleas and wails of the princess, Bhima cannot bear them. He mounts his great chariot, makes Nakula his

sarathy and sets out at once to kill Aswatthaman. As he goes he pulls violently on his bowstring so the horses fly. Bhima sweeps along on the trail of Drona's son's chariot."

CANTO 12

Vaisampayana said, "After the irresistible Bhimasena has set out, Krishna, that bull of the Yaduvamsa, of eyes like lotus-petals, says to Yudhishtira, 'O son of Pandu, your impetuous brother, spurred by grief at the slaughter of his sons, rides alone to kill the Acharya's son. O Bharatarishabha, of all your brothers, Bhima is dearest to you. He is in great danger, why do you not bestir yourself? The astra called the Brahmashira, which Drona imparted to his son, can consume the whole world. The illustrious Drona once gave Arjuna the same weapon. Aswatthaman could not bear that and begged his father to give it to him as well. Unwillingly, Drona taught his son the mantras to invoke and unleash the Brahmashira. Drona knew the restlessness and ruthlessness, when moved, of his son.

Knowing every nuance of dharma, when he gave that astra to Aswatthaman he said, "Even when overtaken by the greatest peril, my child, in the thick of battle, you must never use this weapon, particularly against human beings." A little later, he said again sadly, "O bull among men, you will not, it seems, walk the path of dharma."

Hearing those bitter words, the dark and proud Aswatthaman, despairing of obtaining every kind of prosperity, went forth in grief to wander over the earth.

Then, O king of the Kurus, while you were living in the forest, O Bhaarata, he came to Dwaraka and stayed there, worshipped by the

Vrishnis. One day, after he began living in Dwaraka, he came to me, by himself, when I was also alone on the sea-coast, and there smilingly said to me, "O Krishna, that weapon called Brahmashira, worshipped by the Devas and Gandharvas, which my father, the Acharya of the Bharatas, received from Agastya after performing the austerest tapasya, is now with me, O Dasharha, as much as it is with Drona. O foremost one of Yadu's race, in exchange for that celestial weapon, give me your Sudarshana Chakra!"

When he begged me for my Chakra with folded hands and in the humblest tone, I said to him, "All the Devas, Danavas, Gandharvas, Manushyas, Garudas and Nagas together do not have even a hundredth part of my tejas. I have this Saringa, this Chakra, and this Kaumodaki. I will give you whichever among these you want from me. Without giving me the Brahmashira that you want to give me, take from among these weapons of mine whichever you can wield in battle."

When I said this to him, as if challenging me, he asked for my Chakra. "Take it," said I to him, at which he rose suddenly and seized the Chakra with his left hand. However, he could not move the weapon from where it lay. He then made to seize it with his right hand. Taking a firm grip on the Sudarshana and putting forth all his strength, he failed to budge it. At this, Drona's son was filled with grief and frustration. After he tried again, he sat down exhausted, giving up, O Bhaarata.

When he withdrew from his purpose, I said, "He who is always regarded as the best of all men, that wielder of the Gandiva, the warrior who has white steeds yoked unto his chariot, upon whose flag Hanuman sits, the Kshatriya who pleased Siva himself in a hand to hand encounter, that Phalguna than whom I have no dearer friend on earth, that friend to whom there is nothing that I cannot give including my very wives and children, that dear friend Arjuna of unstained deeds never said to me, O Brahmana, what you have done.

That son whom I obtained through tapasya and perfect brahmacharya for twelve years on the breast of Himavat, that son of mine Pradyumna of great energy and an amsa of Sanatkumara himself, begotten by me upon my wife Rukmini who had kept vows as austere as mine - even he never asked for my Sudarshana Chakra, which you of little understanding have done.

Rama of unrivalled might never said such words to me. Neither Gada nor Samba ever asked of me what you have done. No one among the other greatest maharathas of the Vrishni and the Andhaka vamsas who live in

Dwaraka ever asked of me what you have done. You are the son of the Acharya of the Bharatas; you are held in high esteem by all the Yadavas. Let me ask you, O best of warriors, against whom would you fight using this weapon?"

Drona's son replied, "After offering worship to you, O Krishna, it was my intention to fight you, O you of unfading glory. It was for this, O Krishna that I asked for the Sudarshana which is adored by the Devas and Danavas. If I had your Chakra, I would then become invincible. Having failed, O Kesava, in obtaining my unattainable wish, I am about to leave you, O Govinda. Bless me, O Krishna. This terrible weapon is wielded by you that are the first of all terrible persons. Unrivalled are you for having this weapon!

There is none else in this world that can own it but you, O Lord."

Having said these words to me, the son of Drona left Dwaraka, taking with him many pairs of fine horses, much wealth and diverse kinds of gems. He is wrathful, wicked, restless, and savagely cruel. He has the Brahmashira. Vrikodara must be protected from him!'"

CANTO 13

Vaisampayana said, “Having said these words, Krishna mounts his chariot furnished with every kind of powerful weapon. Two pairs of the finest steeds of the Kamboja breed, adorned with garlands of gold, are yoked to it. The colour of that best of rathas is of the morning sun. On the right is yoked the steed known as Shaibya; on the left is Sugriva; the Parshni is borne by two others called Meghapushpa and Balahaka. A celestial standard adorns that chariot; it is decked with gold and incomparable jewels and Viwakarman, the divine Artificer, had created it. Standing tall like the Maya of Vishnu himself, upon that standard is Vinata’s son Garuda, shining with great splendour. Indeed, that enemy of snakes perches on the standard-top of Kesava who is Truth embodied.

After Krishna, Arjuna of irresistible feats and Yudhishtira, king of the Kurus, ascend the same ratha. Seated on that chariot, by the side of him of Dasharha’s race, who wields the bow Saringa, the two sons of Pandu look exceedingly handsome, like the twin Aswinis seated by the side of Vasava. Then, he of Dasharha’s vamsa urges those majestic steeds endowed with the fleetness of the wind, to fly after Bhima. And so they do, with the chariot bearing the immortal Krishna and the two sons of Pandu. They course ahead with a deafening roar of hooves and wheels, swiftly as birds flying through the air.

Going at that speed, they soon catch up with Bhima. Although they meet that Vayuputra, they fail to stop him in his mad careen as, full of wrath, he rides fiercely after Drona's dangerous son. In the very sight of those illustrious bowmen, Bhima flies towards the bank of the river of heaven, Ganga brought down to earth of old by Bhagiratha. He sees the high-souled, illustrious, dark-skinned and island-born Vyasa sitting near the edge of the water in the midst of many rishis. And he also sees Drona's son of evil sitting beside them, covered with dust, attired in a piece of cloth made of kusa grass, and smeared all over with ghee. Mahabaho Bhimasena, the son of Kunti, seizes up his bow with a shaft fixed to it, rushes at Aswatthaman, and roars, 'I have come to kill you, you dog!'

Seeing that terrible titan come towards him, bow in hand, and the two brothers on Janardana's chariot, Aswatthaman becomes afraid and thinks his hour has come. That Brahmana of staunch soul instantly invokes the Brahmashira given him by his father. He pulls up a blade of grass with his left hand. In distress, he infuses that blade of grass with the proper mantras and turns it into the Brahmashira. Unable to stand the arrows of the Pandavas and the presence of those wielders of devastras, in wrath Aswatthaman cries out a dreadful curse: 'For the destruction of all the Pandavas!'

Having said these words, O tiger among kings, the fallen son of Drona unleashes that weapon which stuns all the worlds. A fire erupts in the blade of grass, which seems as if it will consume Swarga, Bhumi and Patala like the all-destroying Yama at the end of the yuga."

CANTO 14

Vaisampayana said, "Knowing Aswatttman's intention at once, Krishna says to Arjuna, 'Pandava, summon the Brahmashira that your Acharya gave you. Partha, to protect yourself and your brothers loose that weapon which can contain every other astra.'

Arjuna leaps down from the chariot with his Gandiva and the astra fitted to its string. Silently wishing weal upon his Guru's son and then upon himself and his brothers, that parantapa bows to all the Devas and all his superiors, and unleashes the four-headed weapon of Brahma, thinking of the welfare of all the worlds and saying, 'Let Aswatthaman's weapon be quelled by mine!'

That astra blazes up in apocalyptic flames, like those of the pralaya that appear at the end of the yuga. So, too, the astra shot by Drona's son of fierce energy blazes up with white flames within a great sphere of fire.

Thunderclaps echo deafeningly; thousands of meteors fall from the sky; and all living creatures quake with dread. The entire firmament seems to resound with dreadful noise and assumes a terrible aspect with those flames. The Earth, with her mountains and waters and trees, trembles.

And then seeing the two mahastras scorching the three worlds, the two great rishis, Narada, who is the soul of every creature, and Vyasa, the grandsire of all the Bharata princes, show themselves there. The two rishis seek to pacify the two heroes Aswatthaman and Dhananjaya. Knowers of

all dharma and wanting the welfare of all creatures, those two sages of limitless tejas stand in the very midst of the two blazing weapons, themselves immune to every astra, themselves like two flames of the pralaya. The two whom no living creature can resist, whom all the Devas and Danavas always adore, becalm those two world-destroying weapons, indeed saving all of creation.

The two rishis say, 'The maharathas who have fallen into this battle are masters of every kind of weapon. Yet, never before did they loose such an astra at men. What act of rashness is this, you heroes?'"

CANTO 15

Vaisampayana said, "At the very sight, O tiger among men, of those two rishis possessed of splendour like that of Agni, Arjuna quickly resolves to withdraw his great astra. Folding his hands, he addresses the rishis, saying, 'I invoked this weapon, saying, "Let it nullify Aswatthaman's Brahmashira!" If I withdraw this high weapon, Drona's sinful son will consume us all with his astra. You two are like Devas. You must devise some means by which our welfare as also that of the three worlds may be secured.'

Saying this, Dhananjaya withdraws his astra. The withdrawal of the Bramashira by the gods themselves is exceedingly difficult. Not excepting the great Indra himself, there was nobody save the son of Pandu who could withdraw that high weapon once it had been unleashed. That astra was born of Brahmatejas, and no man whose soul was not pure could call it back; only a true brahmachari could. For, if one who has not practised the vow of brahmacharya attempts to bring it back after having shot it, it strikes off his own head and destroys him. Arjuna is a brahmachari and an observer of vratas. Having obtained that unobtainable weapon, he had never used it even when plunged in the gravest danger. Observant of the vow of truth, possessed of great heroism, leading the life of a brahmachari, the son of Pandu is submissive and obedient to all his superiors. It was for this that he succeeds in withdrawing his Brahmashira.

However, Drona's son, even upon seeing those two rishis standing before him, finds he cannot call back his astra loosed in dark fury. His heart downcast, Aswatthaman says to the Dwaipayana, the island-born Vyasa, 'Threatened by a great danger, and wanting to protect my life, I invoked the astra because I was afraid of Bhimasena, O Muni. This Bhima of false ways acted sinfully, O holy one, when he slew the son of Dhritarashtra in battle. It is for this, O Dvija, that, of uncleansed soul as I am, I invoked and loosed the Brahmashira. I dare not, however, withdraw it now. Having inspired this irresistible weapon with the energy of agni, I unleashed it for the destruction of the Pandavas. And so, indeed, will my Brahmashira destroy all the Pandavas. O Mahamuni, I have in wrath done this sinful thing.'

Vyasa says, 'Pritha's son Dhananjaya knew the astra called the Brahmashira. Neither from wrath, nor to kill you in battle, did he summon this weapon. Arjuna used it now only to contain your astra. He has withdrawn it. Having got even the Brahmashira through your father's instructions, the mighty-armed Dhananjaya did not fall away from Kshatriya dharma. Arjuna is possessed of such patience, and such honesty. He is a master of every weapon. Why do you seek to destroy such a one and all his brothers? That land where a Brahmashira is destroyed by another lofty weapon suffers a drought for twelve years, for the clouds do not rain a drop of water there for that time. For this reason, the mighty-armed son of Pandu, although he had the power, would not from compassion for living creatures consume your weapon with his.

The Pandavas should be protected; you should be protected; the kingdom also should be protected. Therefore, O you of mighty arms, withdraw this devastra of yours. Dispel the wrath from your heart and let the Pandavas be safe. The Rajarishi Yudhishtira never wishes to win victory by committing any sin. Give these Pandavas that gemstone which is embedded in your head. Taking that, the Pandavas will in return grant you your life.'

Drona's son says, 'This my jewel is more valuable than all the wealth that has ever been earned by the Pandavas and the Kauravas. If this gem is worn, the wearer ceases to have any fear from weapons or of disease or hunger. He has no fear of Devas and Danavas and Nagas. His apprehensions of Rakshasas as also from thieves and bandits will cease. Even these are the virtues of this gem of mine. I cannot part with it. However, O holy one, I must do what you ask of me. Here is this gemstone.

Here is my self. But this blade of grass infused with the Brahmashira must fall into the wombs of the Pandava women, for this weapon is lofty and cannot be frustrated. O Maharishi, having loosed it, I find I cannot withdraw it. It will make barren the wombs of all the Pandava women and there shall, as I said, be an end of the Pandavas. As for your other commands, O holy Vyasa, I shall obey them.'

Vyasa says, 'Do that then. Do not, however, entertain any other purpose, O sinless one. Casting this weapon into the wombs of the Pandava women, stop yourself with that.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Listening to Vyasa, Drona's son directs that weapon into the wombs of the Pandava women."

CANTO 16

Vaisampayana said, “Knowing what the sinner Aswatthaman has done, Krishna, blithe as ever, says to him, ‘A certain Brahmana of pious vows, seeing Virata’s daughter, who is now Arjuna’s daughter-in-law, in Upaplavya, said, “While the Kuru line will become extinct, a son will be born to you. And he will pass through death to live, and for this reason be called Parikshit, the tested one.” The words of that holy man shall come true: I say to you, the Pandavas shall have a son called Parikshit and he shall live!’

Aswatthaman replies in fury to Krishna, ‘You say this, O Kesava, from your partiality for the Pandavas, but it shall not happen. O you of eyes like lotus-petals, my words cannot but be fulfilled. Invoked by me, this weapon of mine shall fall on the foetus that nestles in the womb of Virata’s daughter Uttaraa and destroy that child which, Krishna, you want to protect.’

Krishna says, ‘The fall of this mighty weapon will not be fruitless. The embryo will die. But being dead, it will live again and have a long life. As for you, all wise men know you for a coward and a sinful wretch. You always sinned and now you have turned to murdering unborn children. And for this, O Aswatthaman, you must reap the harvest of your sins. For three thousand years you will wander over this earth, without a companion and without being able to speak to anyone. Alone and without anybody by your side, you will wander through diverse countries, O wretch, and you shall

have no place in the midst of men. The stench of pus and blood will emanate from you, and inaccessible forests and dreary moors shall be your abode. You will wander over the earth, O sinful soul, with the weight of all diseases upon you, the agony of every pestilence.

Meanwhile, the heroic Parikshit, attaining to age and a knowledge of the Vedas and the practice of pious vratas, will acquire all weapons from Kripa, the son of Sharadvata. Having gained a knowledge of all the devastras, and observant of every Kshatriya duty, that righteous-souled king shall rule the earth for sixty years. More, that boy will become the mighty-armed king of the Kurus, and be known by the name Parikshit, before your very eyes, O evil one. Though burnt by your weapon's fire, I shall revive him. O lowest of men, behold the tejas of my tapasya and my truth.'

Vyasa says, 'Since, disregarding us, you have decided to do this cruel thing, and your conduct is such although you are a high Brahmana by birth, therefore, what Devaki's son has said will be realized, for you have adopted Kshatriya usages!'

Aswatthaman says, 'With you among all men, O holy one, I will live. And let the words of this illustrious and foremost of men become true!'"

Vaisampayana continued, 'Then, having made over his precious gem to the Pandavas, Aswatthaman makes his forlorn way into the deeper forest. The Pandavas who have killed and punished all their enemies set Krishna and the island-born Vyasa and the great Narada at their head and, taking the gem that was born with Aswatthaman, return quickly to Draupadi who sits in prayopavesa, the fast unto death on Kurukshetra.

Borne by their steeds swift as birds, those tigers among men return with him of Dasharha's vamsa to their camp. Alighting from their chariots, those maharathas, themselves stricken with grief, see Panchali in deep, implacable mourning. Approaching the princess, the Pandavas with Kesava sit around her.

Urged by Yudhishtira, the mighty Bhimasena gives Aswatthaman's unworldly jewel to Draupadi, and says, 'This gem, O precious queen, is yours. The killer of your sons has been vanquished. Rise now, casting off your sorrow, and recollect the dharma of a Kshatriya queen. O you of black eyes, when Vasudeva was about to set out from Upaplavya on his mission of peace, you cried out, O tender one, to Madhusudana, "I have no husbands! I have no sons, nor brothers! Nor are you alive, O Govinda, since the king wishes for peace!" You spoke even those bitter words to Krishna,

that greatest of all men. Now recollect those words of yours that were so becoming of a Kshatriya queen.

The wretched Duryodhana, that obstacle to our sovereignty, has been killed. I have drunk the blood of Dusasana. We have paid the debt we owed to our enemy. No one will be able to censure us any longer. Having vanquished Drona's son, we have set him free for the sake of his being a Brahmana and for the respect that should be shown to our dead Acharya. His fame and honour have been destroyed, O Devi, only his body remains alive. He has been divested of his precious jewel and his is bereft of his weapons.'

Draupadi says, 'I only wanted to avenge the terrible injury that he did to us. The Guru's son is as worthy of my reverence as the Acharya himself. Let the king bind this gem to his head, O Bhaarata!'

Then, for Draupadi's sake and thinking of it as a gift from Drona, Yudhishtira sets the jewel on his head. He looks as radiant and regal as a mountain with the moon above it. Though stricken with grief at the death of her sons, the princess Draupadi, of great strength of mind, abandons her vow of praya.

Now Yudhishtira turns to address Krishna."

CANTO 17

Vaisampayana said, "In great grief at the slaughter in the night of his sons and the Panchalas, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira says to him of Dasharha's vamsa, 'How, O Krishna, could my sons, all of whom were mighty warriors, be killed by the sinner Aswatthaman of no extraordinary skill in battle? How could Drona's son slay the sons of Drupada, all of whom were such great maharathas? How could he kill the fire-born Dhrishtadyumna, before whom Drona himself could not stand? What deed did the Acharya's son do, O bull among men, so that he slew all our men by himself?'

The Holy One says, 'Drona's son sought the help of the eternal Mahadeva, highest of all the Gods. It was with Siva's help that he could do what he did. If Mahadeva be gratified he can bestow even immortality. Girisha can give such valour as will succeed in containing Indra himself. I know Mahadeva truly, O bull of the Bharata vamsa! I know of his various deeds of old. He, O Bhaarata, is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all creatures. This entire universe exists and moves through his power.

The puissant Grandsire Brahma, wanting to create living creatures, met Rudra and the Pitamaha asked him, "Lord, create living creatures!" Thus implored, Rudra of the tawny jata, said, "Tathaastu! So be it." Saying that, he plunged into the waters and performed a long tapasya, for he was aware of the flaws that all creatures would have. Having waited in expectation of

Rudra for a very long time, Brahma, through a fiat of his will, invoked another being into existence, to make him the Creator of all kinds of living things. Beholding Girisha immersed in the waters, this second being said to his father, “If there be no being born before me, I will create living creatures!” His sire replied to him, “There is no other first-born being besides you. This Sthanu has plunged into the water. Go and create living creatures, without any anxiety.”

That being then created many living creatures, Daksha the first, who in turn created all these creatures of four kinds. As soon, however, as they were created, they ran, O king, towards their sire, afflicted with hunger and meaning to devour him. The second being whom Brahma had created ran to him for protection from his own offspring. And he said unto the Grandsire, “Illustrious One, protect me from these, and let these creatures be given other food to live on!”

Brahma gave herbs and plants to be their food, and to those that were strong and predatory, he gave the weaker creatures to be their means of sustenance. Their means of living having been thus given, the newly-created creatures all went away where they wanted, and multiplied through sexual union, each with their respective species.

After the creatures had multiplied and the Grandsire had become well pleased, the First-born Siva rose from the water and beheld living creation. He saw that diverse kinds of creatures had been created and that they had multiplied through their own energy. At this sight, Rudra became incensed and caused his great Linga to disappear into the bowels of the Earth.

The unfading Brahma, soothing him softly, said, “O Siva, what were you doing so long within the water? For what reason have you caused your organ of generation to disappear into the bowels of the Earth?”

The Lord of the universe wrathfully answered the lord Brahma, “Someone else has created all these creatures! What purpose then would be served by this Linga of mine? With my tapasya, O Brahma, I have created food for all these creatures. These herbs and plants will also multiply like those that will subsist upon them!”

Having said these words, Bhava went away, in cheerlessness and rage, to the foot of the Menjavat Mountains to practise yet more severe austerities.’”

CANTO 18

"Krishna continues, 'After the Krita-yuga had elapsed, the Devas wanted to perform a Yagna and made preparations according to the directions laid down in the Vedas. They collected ghrita and the other requisites. And they not only devised what the requisites of their sacrifice should be, but also determined those amongst themselves that should have a share in the sacrificial offerings.

Not knowing Rudra truly, the Devas, O king, assigned no share for the divine Sthanu. Seeing that the gods assigned to him no share in the sacrificial offerings, Sthanu, clad in black deer skin, wanted to destroy that sacrifice and, with that object in mind, he wrought a bow. There are four kinds of Sacrifices: the loka Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of special rites, the eternal domestic Sacrifice, and the Sacrifice consisting of the gratification derived by man from his enjoyment of the five elements and their compounds. It is from these four kinds of Sacrifice that the universe has sprung. Kapardin created his bow using the first and the fourth kinds of Sacrifices. The length of that bow was five cubits. The sacred "Vashat", O Bhaarata, was made its string. The four parts of which a Sacrifice consists became the adornments of that bow.

Then Mahadeva, filled with rage and taking up that bow, went to the place where the Devas were engaged in their Yagna. Seeing the unfading Rudra arrive there attired as a brahmachari and armed with that bow, the

Goddess Earth quailed with fear and the very mountains began to tremble. The wind ceased to move, and fire itself, though fed, did not blaze forth. The stars in the firmament, in anxiety, began to wander in erratic courses. The Sun's splendour dimmed. The disc of the Moon lost its beauty. The entire firmament was enveloped in thick gloom. Overwhelmed by fear, the Devas did not know what to do. Their Yagna lost its splendour. Indeed, the mighty gods were all terrified.

Rudra in fury pierced the embodiment of Sacrifice, Yagna, with a fierce shaft through its heart. The embodied form of Sacrifice assumed the shape of a deer and fled into the sky from there with Agni, god of fire. Approaching Swarga in that form, he blazed forth in beauty. Rudra, however, O Yudhishtira, pursued him through the sky. After Yagna fled, the Devas lost their lustre. Why, losing their very senses, the gods were stupefied.

In rage, the three-eyed Mahadeva broke the arms of Savitri, and plucked out the eyes of Bhaga and the teeth of Pushana. The gods then fled, as also all the several parts of Sacrifice. Some amongst them, reeling as they sought to flee, fell down unconscious. The blue-throated Rudra laughed aloud and, whirling the horn of his bow, paralysed them. The Devas then uttered a great cry. At their command, the string of Siva's bow broke. The string having broken, the bow became stretched into a staff. The gods approached the bowless Mahadeva, with the embodied form of Sacrifice, sought his mercy and endeavoured to pacify him.

Being ever easily pacified, the Great God plucked out his wrath and flung it into the water, O king. That wrath, assuming the form of fire, Badava, is always engaged in consuming that fluid element. He gave Savitri his arms, Bhaga his eyes, and Pushana his teeth. And he also restored the Sacrifices themselves, O Pandava. The world became safe and calm once more. The gods assigned to Mahadeva all the libations of ghrita as the share of the Great Deity. O king, when Mahadeva was angry, the whole world was dreadfully agitated; when he became calm everything was safe and calm again.

Mahadeva Siva of fathomless power was worshipped and gratified by Aswatthaman. It was for this that Drona's sons could singly kill all your sons, those maharathas. It was for this that he could put to sword many other heroes, including the Panchalas, with all their followers. Do not suffer your mind to dwell on it. It was not Drona's son who accomplished what

happened. It was done through the grace of Mahadeva Siva. Compose yourself and do now what should next be done.'"

The end of Sauptika Parva

Stri Parva

CANTO 1

JALAPRADANIKA-PARVA

AUM! Having bowed down unto Narayana and Nara, the foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of *Jaya*

Janamejaya said, "After Duryodhana and all the other warriors have fallen, what, O Muni, does king Dhritarashtra do when he hears the news? What does the Mahatman, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira, do? What do the three survivors of the Kuru army—Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman—do? I have heard everything about the feats of Aswatthaman. Tell me what happens after that mutual denunciation of curses. Tell me all that Sanjaya says to the blind old king."

Vaisampayana said, "After he has lost his century of sons, Dhritarashtra, grief-stricken, cheerless, and looking like a tree shorn of its branches, is overwhelmed by anxiety and cannot speak.

Possessed of great wisdom, Sanjaya, approaching the king, says to him, 'Why do you grieve, O Rajan? Grief does not serve any purpose. Eight and ten Akshauhinis of warriors have been slain. The earth has been desolated, and is almost empty now. Kings of diverse realms, hailing from diverse lands, united with your son and have all laid down their lives. Now let the obsequial rites of your sires, sons, grandsons, kinsmen, friends and preceptors be performed.'

Vaisampayana continued, “Having lost all his sons and counsellors and all his friends, king Dhritarashtra of great energy suddenly falls on the earth like a tree uprooted by the wind.

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Destitute as I am of sons and counsellors and all my friends, I will have to wander in sorrow over the earth. What need have I now of life itself, left as I am without kinsmen and friends and resembling an aged bird shorn of its wings? Shorn of kingdom, deprived of kinsmen, and without eyes, I cannot, O you of great wisdom, shine any longer over the earth, for I am like a luminary shorn of its splendour. I did not follow the counsels of friends of Jamadagni’s son, of the Devarishi Narada, and of the island-born Vyasa, when they offered it to me.

In the midst of the Kuru court, Krishna said to me, for my good, “Declare a truce to all hostilities, O king! Let your son take the whole kingdom. Give but five villages to the Pandavas.”

Fool that I was, I did not follow even His advice and, for that, today I repent so bitterly. I did not listen to the righteous counsels of Bhishma. Alas, having heard of the slaughter of Duryodhana, whose roars were as deep as those of a bull, having heard also of the death of Dusasana and the killing of Karna and the setting of the Drona-sun, my heart yet does not break into pieces. I do not, O Sanjaya, remember any evil deed of mine in the past, whose consequences I am suffering so sharply today. Without doubt, I committed great sins in my past lives, for which the Supreme Ordainer has set me to endure such a terrible measure of grief. This destruction of all my kinsmen, this extermination of all my well-wishers and friends, in this my dotage, has come upon me through the force of Destiny. What other man is there on earth who is more afflicted than me? Since it is so, let the Pandavas see me this very day, firmly resolved to betake myself to the long way that leads to the regions of Brahma!’

While Dhritarashtra indulges in such demented lamentation, Sanjaya says to him, ‘Cast off your grief, O monarch. You have heard the conclusions of the Vedas and the contents of diverse scriptures and holy writ from the lips of the old. You have heard what the sages said to king Sanjaya when he was stricken with grief at the death of his son. When your son caught the pride that is born of youth, you did not accept the wise counsels offered to you by your well-wishers. Greedy for benefit, you did not do what would truly have benefited you. Like an over sharpened sword your own intelligence has wounded you.

You did generally pay court to those that were of evil conduct and deeds. Your son had Dusasana for his counsellor, and the vile Karna, and the equally wicked Sakuni and Chitrasena of foolish understanding, and Salya, too. Your Suyodhana made the whole world his enemy. O Bhaarata, he did not pay any heed to the words of Bhishma, the Pitamaha of the Kurus, nor to Gandhari and Vidura, to Drona, O king, or Kripa the son of Sharadvata, to the mighty-armed Krishna, to the intelligent Narada, to many other great Rishis, or to Vyasa himself of immeasurable tejas. Though possessed of great prowess, your son was of little intelligence, proud, always eager for battle, evil, ungovernable and discontented.

You are possessed of learning and intelligence and are always truthful. They that are as righteous and as intelligent as you, are never overwhelmed by grief. None of your son's confederates regarded dharma. War was the one word on their lips. For this the very Kshatriya varna has been exterminated and the fame of your enemies enhanced. You had the position of an elder and counsellor, why, of a king of kings, but not a word of salutary advice did you utter. Unfit as you were for the task, you did not hold the scales of justice evenly.

Every person should, from the very outset, adopt a righteous course of action that he may not have, in the end, to repent. Through blind love and favour for your evil son, O king, you did what was agreeable to Duryodhana. You are obliged to repent for that now, but it does not become you to give way to grief. The man whose eyes are directed towards only the honey hanging on the tree growing over a cliff, without being once directed to the fall, meets with destruction through his greed. Such a man is obliged to repent even as you do now.

The man who indulges in grief never wins wealth. By grieving one loses the fruits one desires. Grief is again an obstacle to the acquisition of objects dear to us. The man who gives way to grief loses even his salvation. The man who shrouds a burning coal within the folds of his clothes and is burnt by the fire that is kindled by it, must be pronounced only a fool if he grieves over his injuries. You and your son fanned the Partha-fire with your harsh words, and with your covetousness acting as the ghrita caused that fire to blaze into consuming flames. When that fire blazed forth your sons fell into it like insects and perished. However, it does not befit you now to grieve for them now that they have all been burnt in the fire of the enemy's astras.

The tear-stained face, O king, which you now wear is not approved by the scriptures or praised by the wise. These tears, like sparks of fire, burn the dead for whom they are shed. Kill your grief with your intelligence, and pick yourself up with the strength of your own self!' Thus does the noble Sanjaya comfort his blind king Dhritarashtra. Then, the wisest Vidura addresses the king."

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, “Listen, O Janamejaya, to the nectar-like words that Vidura says to the son of Vichitravirya and by which he gladdens that bull among men.

Vidura said, ‘Rise, O king! Why are you stretched out on the earth? Pick yourself up. Rajan, even this is the final end of all living creatures. Everything massed together ends in destruction; everything that grows high is sure to fall down. Union is certain to end in separation; life is sure to end in death. The Destroyer, O Bhaarata, takes both the hero and the coward. Why then, O bull amongst kings, should not Kshatriyas engage in battle? He that does not fight is seen to apparently escape with life. When, however, his time comes he cannot escape death. As regards living creatures, they do not exist at first. They exist in the period that intervenes. In the end, they once more are no more. What matter of grief then is there in this? The man that indulges in grief does not succeed in meeting with the dead. By indulging in grief, one does not himself die. When the course of the world is such, why do you indulge in sorrow?

Death drags away all creatures, even the gods. There is none dear or hateful to death, O best of the Kurus! As the wind tears off the tops of all blades of grass, even so, O bull of Bharata’s race, death masters all creatures. All creatures are like members of a caravan bound for the same destination. When death will encounter all, it matters little whom he meets

with first. It does not become you to grieve for those that have been slain in battle. If the scriptures are any authority, all of them must have obtained the highest end. All of them were versed in the Vedas; all of them had observed stern vows. Facing the foe all of them have met with death. What matter of sorrow is there in this? Invisible they had been before their births. Having come from that unknown region, they have once more become invisible. They are not yours, nor are you theirs.

What grief then is there in their vanishment? If slain, one wins heaven. By slaying, fame is won. Both these, with respect to us, are productive of great merit. Battle, therefore, is not bootless. No doubt, Indra will contrive for them realms that will grant their every wish and more. These, O bull among men, become the guests of Indra. Men cannot, by sacrifices with profuse gifts, through ascetic penances and by learning, go so quickly to swarga as Kshatriyas slain in battle.

Into the bodies of enemy heroes, which were the sacrificial fire, they poured their libations of arrows. And they, in turn, had to endure the flaming arrows with which their enemies scathed them. I tell you, O king, that in this world there is not a better road to heaven than battle for a Kshatriya. They were all high-souled Kshatriyas; possessed of great courage, they were ornaments of grand sabhas. They have attained a lofty state of blessedness. They are not men for whom we should grieve. Comfort yourself and cease to grieve, O Purusharishabha. It does not befit you to suffer yourself to be overwhelmed by sorrow and to abandon all your duties.

There are thousands of mothers, fathers, sons and wives in this world. Whose are they, and whose are we? From day to day, thousands of causes spring up for sorrowing and thousands of reasons for fear. These affect the ignorant but are nothing to him that is wise. There is none dear or hateful to Time, O best of the Kurus! Time is indifferent to none. All are equally hauled along by Time. Time causes all creatures to grow, and it is Time that destroys everything. When all else is asleep, Time is awake. Time is irresistible.

Youth, beauty, life, possessions, health, and the companionship of friends are all unstable. He that is wise will never covet any of these. It does not become you to grieve for what is universal. By indulging in grief, a man may himself perish, but grief itself, by being indulged in, never becomes lighter. If you feel your grief to be heavy, stand up to it by not indulging it.

Even this is the specific for grief—that one should not give in to it. By dwelling on it, one cannot lessen it; it only grows with indulgence. Upon the advent of evil or upon the bereavement of something that is dear, only they that are of little intelligence suffer their minds to be afflicted by grief. There is neither dharma, artha nor kama in that on which your heart dwells.

The indulgence in grief is the certain means of losing one's objectives. Through it, one falls away from the three great purusharthas, the ends of life. They that are without contentment are stupefied on the accession of vicissitudes that depend upon the possession of wealth. They, however, that are wise are unaffected by such losses and gains. One should kill mental grief with wisdom, just as physical grief is by medicine. Wisdom has this power. They, however, that are foolish, can never find peace of mind.

The karmas of a former life closely follow a man, insomuch that they lie by him when he lies down, stand by him when he stands, and run with him when he runs. In those conditions of life in which one does well or ill, one enjoys or suffers the fruit thereof in similar conditions. In those forms in which one performs particular actions, one enjoys or suffers the fruits thereof in similar forms. One's own self is one's own friend, as, indeed, one's own self is one's own enemy. One's own self is the witness of one's deeds, good and evil. From good deeds springs a state of happiness, from sinful karma comes suffering. One always finds the fruit of one's actions. One never enjoys or suffers weal or woe that is not the fruit of one's own deeds. Intelligent men like you, O king, never allow themselves to sink in sinful enormities that are contrary to wisdom and that strike at the very root of virtue and happiness.'"

CANTO 3

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O you of great wisdom, you have dispelled my grief with your luminous wisdom! But I wish to hear you speak again. How, indeed, do those that are wise free themselves from the mind's grief born of the advent of evils and the loss of objects that are dear?'

Vidura says, 'He that is wise finds peace by subduing both grief and joy through means by which one may escape from grief and joy. All those things about which we are anxious, O bull among men, are ephemeral. The world is like a plantain tree, without enduring strength. Since the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, all, divested of their anxieties, sleep finally on the funeral pyre, with bodies bereft of flesh and full of bare bones and shrivelled sinews, who amongst them will the survivors look upon as possessed of distinguishing marks by which the attributes of birth and beauty may be ascertained? When all are equal in death, why should human beings, whose understandings are always deceived by the things of this world, covet one another's rank and position?

The learned say that the bodies of men are like houses. In time these are destroyed. There is one Being, however, that is eternal. As a person, casting off one set of clothes, whether old or new, puts on another, even such is the case with the bodies of all embodied beings. O son of Vichitravirya, creatures obtain weal or woe as the fruit of their own karma. Through their

actions they find heaven, O Bhaarata, or bliss, or hell and woe. Whether able or unable, they have to bear their burdens which are the result of their own deeds.

As amongst earthen pots some break while still on the potter's wheel, some while partially shaped, some as soon as brought into shape, some after being removed from the wheel, some whilst being removed, some after removal, some while wet, some while dry, some while being burnt, some while being removed from the kiln, some after removal therefrom, and some while being used, even such is the case with the bodies of embodied creatures. Some are destroyed while yet in the womb, some after coming out of the womb, some on the day after, some on the expiration of a fortnight or of a month, some on the expiration of a year or of two years, some in youth, some in middle age, and some when old. Creatures are born or destroyed according to their karma in previous lives. When such is the course of the world, why do you indulge in grief?

As men, while swimming in sport on the water, sometimes dive and sometimes emerge, O king, even so creatures sink and emerge in life's stream. They that are of little wisdom suffer or meet with destruction as the result of their own actions. They, however, that are wise, observant of virtue, and desirous of doing good to all living creatures, they, acquainted with the real nature of the appearance and disappearance of creatures in this world, attain at last to the highest end.'"

CANTO 4

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O most eloquent of men, how may the wilderness of this world be known? I wish to hear this. Tell me of it.'

Vidura said, 'I will describe to you all that creatures do from their very conception. At first, the jiva lives in the admixture of blood and the vital fluid. Then it grows, little by little. Then, on the expiry of the fifth month, it assumes form. It next becomes a foetus with all its limbs complete, and lives in a very impure place, covered by flesh and blood. Then, through the action of the wind, its lower limbs are turned upward and the head comes downward. Arriving in this posture at the mouth of the uterus, it suffers manifold woes. In consequence of the contractions of the uterus, the creature then comes out of it, endowed with the results of all his previous karma. He then encounters in this world other evils that rush towards him. Calamities proceed towards him like dogs at the scent of meat. Next, diverse diseases approach him while he is enchained by his previous actions.

Bound by the chains of the senses and women and wealth and other sweet things of life, diverse evil practices also approach him then, O king. Seized by these, he never finds happiness. In that season, he does not obtain the fruit of his actions, right or wrong. They, however, that set their hearts on dhyana, succeed in protecting their souls. The man governed by his

senses does not know that death has come to his door. At last, dragged away by Yamadutas, the messengers of the Destroyer, he meets with death at the appointed time. Agitated by his senses, for whatever good and evil has been done at the outset and having enjoyed or suffered the fruits of these, he once more becomes indifferent to his acts of self-destruction.

Alas, the world is deluded, and covetousness brings it under its dominion. Deprived of understanding by greed, wrath and fear, one knows not one's own self. Filled with joy at one's own respectability of birth, one is seen to traduce those that are not high-born. Swollen also with pride of wealth, one is seen to condemn the poor. One regards others to be ignorant fools, but seldom takes an account of oneself. One attributes faults to others but is never keen to punish oneself. Since the wise and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the highborn and the lowborn, the honoured and the dishonoured, all go to the place of the dead and sleep there, freed from every anxiety, with bodies divested of flesh and full only of bones united by dried-up tendons, who amongst them would the survivors look upon as distinguished above the others and by what signs would they ascertain the attributes of birth and beauty?

When all, stretched after the same fashion, sleep on the bare ground, why then should men, taking leave of their senses, wish to deceive one another? He that, looking at this saying in the scriptures with his own eyes or hearing it from others, practises virtue in this unstable world of life and adheres to it from an early age, attains to the highest end. Learning all this, he that adheres to Truth, O king, succeeds in crossing all paths.'"

CANTO 5

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Tell me in detail everything about the ways of that intelligence by which this wilderness of karma may be safely crossed.'

Vidura says, 'Having bowed down to the Self-Born, I will tell you how the great sages speak of the wilderness of life. A certain Brahmana, living in the great world, once found himself in a large inaccessible forest that teemed with beasts of prey. It abounded on every side with lions and other animals that looked big as elephants, all of which were roaring aloud. Such was the aspect of that forest that Yama himself would take fright at it. Beholding the forest, the heart of the Brahmana was exceedingly agitated. His hair stood on end, and other signs of fear manifested themselves on his person, O scorcher of foes.

Inside the forest, he began to run here and there, casting his terrified eyes everywhere to find someone whose shelter he might seek. Yes, desperate to avoid those terrible creatures, he ran in fright. However, he could not distance himself from them. He then saw that the terrible forest was covered over by a great net and that a frightful woman stood there, her arms outstretched. That jungle was also encompassed by many five-headed snakes of dreadful forms, tall as cliffs and their hoods touching the very heavens.

Within that vana was a pit whose mouth was covered with many hard and unyielding creepers and plants. During his panicked flight, the Brahmana fell into that hidden pit. He became entangled in those clusters of creepers that were interwoven with one another, and hung there like the large fruit of a jack tree hanging by its stalk. He continued to hang there, feet up and head down. While he was in that posture, diverse other calamities overtook him. He saw a great and mighty snake within the pit. He also saw a gigantic elephant near its mouth. That elephant, dark in complexion, had six faces and twelve feet. And the animal gradually approached that pit covered with creepers and trees. About the twigs of the greatest tree that stood at the lip of the pit, flew many bees of frightful forms, drinking the honey gathered in their comb about which they swarmed in dense numbers.

The honey fell from the honeycomb in many jets. The one who hung in the pit continually drank those ambrosial jets but his thirst was never quenched but only grew. Unsatiated with repeated draughts, the Brahmana wanted more and more. Even then, O king, he did not become indifferent to life. Even there, the man continued to hope to live on. A number of black and white rats were eating away the roots of that tree. There was fear from the beasts of prey, from that fierce woman on the hem of that forest, from that snake at the bottom of the pit, from that elephant near its top, from the fall of the tree through the action of the rats, and lastly from those bees buzzing about to taste the honey.

In that plight he continued to dwell, quite deprived of his senses, in that wilderness, and never at any time losing the hope of prolonging his life.’”

CANTO 6

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Alas, great was the distress of that Brahmana and very painful his life! Tell me, O first of speakers, whence was his attachment to life and whence his happiness? Where is that region, so unfavourable to the practice of virtue, in which that man resides? Oh, tell me how will that man be freed from all those great terrors? Tell me all this. We shall then exert ourselves properly to save him. My compassion has been greatly moved by the difficulties that lie in the way of his rescue.'

Vidura says, 'They that are conversant, O monarch, with the Moskhadharma, the religion of Moksha, cite this as a simile. Understanding this properly, a man may attain to bliss in the regions hereafter. That which is described as the wilderness is the great world. The inaccessible forest within it is the limited sphere of one's own life. Those that have been mentioned as beasts of prey are the diseases to which we are subject. The woman of gigantic proportions who dwells in the forest is identified by the wise with decrepitude which destroys beauty. That which has been spoken of as the pit is the body of embodied creatures. The great snake at the bottom of that pit is time, the destroyer of all embodied creatures. It is, indeed, the universal destroyer. The creepers growing in that pit and attached to whose spreading stems the man hangs down is the desire for life which is cherished by every creature. The six-faced elephant, O king, which comes towards the tree standing at the mouth of the pit is spoken of as the

year. Its six faces are the seasons and its twelve feet are the twelve months. The rats and the snakes that gnaw at the roots of the tree are said to be days and nights that continually lessen the lifespans of all creatures. Those that have been described as bees are our desires. The numerous jets that are dropping honey are the pleasures derived from the gratification of our desires and to which men are seen to be powerfully addicted. The wise know life's course to be even such. Through that knowledge they succeed in tearing off its bonds.'"

CANTO 7

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Excellent is this parable that you have related! Indeed, you are a knower of the truth. Having listened to your nectar like words, I want to hear more.'

Vidura says, 'Listen to me, O king, I shall once more discourse in detail on the means which enable the wise to free themselves from the ties of the world. As a person, O king, who has to travel a long way is sometimes obliged to halt when tired, even so, O Bhaarata, they that are of little intelligence, travelling along the long way of life, have to make frequent halts in the shape of repeated births into diverse wombs. The wise, however, are free from that obligation. For this, men conversant with the scriptures describe life's course as a long way. The wise also call life's round with all its difficulties a forest.

Creatures, O bull of Bharata's race, whether mobile or immobile, have to repeatedly return to the world. The wise alone escape. The diseases, mental and physical, to which mortals are subject, whether visible or invisible, are spoken of as beasts of prey by the wise. Men are always afflicted and impeded by them. Then, again, the fierce predators, represented by their own actions in life, ever cause anxiety to them that are of little intelligence. If anyone somehow escapes from diseases, decrepitude—that destroyer of beauty—overwhelms him after. Plunged in a slough by the objects of the different senses—sound and form and taste and touch and

scent—man remains there without anything to rescue him thence. Meanwhile, the years, the seasons, the months, the fortnights, the days, and the nights, coming one after another, gradually despoil him of beauty and lessen the lifespan allotted to him. These are all messengers of death. They, however, that are of little understanding know them not to be such. The wise say that all jivas are governed by the Ordainer through their actions.

The body of a creature is called the chariot. The living principle is the sarathy of that ratha. The senses are said to be the steeds. Our acts and the understanding are the traces. He who follows after those running horses has to come repeatedly to this world in a round of rebirths. He, however, who, being self-restrained, stops them by his understanding does not have to return. They that are not bewildered while wandering in this wheel of life that does truly revolve like an actual wheel, do not in reality wander in a round of rebirths.

He that is wise should certainly take care to prevent the obligation of rebirth. One should not be indifferent to this, for indifference may subject us to it repeatedly. The man, O king, who has restrained his senses and subdued anger and greed, who is contented, and truthful in speech, succeeds in gaining peace. This body is called the chariot of Yama. Those of little intelligence are perplexed by it. Such men, O king, obtain that which you have done. The loss of kingdom, of friends, and of children, O Bhaarata, and other calamities such as these, overtake him who is still under the influence of desire. He that is wise should apply the medicament of intelligence to all great griefs. Indeed, obtaining the specific of wisdom, which is truly efficacious and is also almost unattainable, the man of restrained soul would kill that serious sickness called sorrow. Neither prowess, nor wealth, nor friends, nor well-wishers can cure a man of his grief so effectually as keeping a self-restrained soul. Therefore, observant of the great dharma of abstention from causing all injuries, or friendship for all creatures, be of pious conduct, O Bhaarata!

Self-restraint, renunciation and heedfulness are the three steeds of Brahma. He who rides on the chariot of his soul, to which these steeds are yoked with the help of traces furnished by good conduct, and drives it, casting off all fear of death, flies, O king, to the worlds of Brahma. That man who gives to all creatures an assurance of his harmlessness, goes to the highest of worlds, the blessed realm of Vishnu. The fruit that one obtains by an assurance unto all creatures of his harmlessness cannot be obtained by a

thousand sacrifices or by daily fasts. Amongst all things there is certainly nothing dearer than the self. Death is certainly feared and abhorred by all creatures, O Bhaarata! Therefore, compassion must certainly be shown to all.

Endowed with diverse kinds of errors, entangled by the net of their own intelligence, both they that are wicked and the good wander repeatedly on the earth. They, however, that are wise and endued with subtle sight, attain to union with the Supreme Brahman.'"

CANTO 8

Vaisampayana said, “Even after hearing what Vidura says, Dhritarashtra, king of the Kurus, afflicted with grief on account of the death of his sons, yet again falls senseless to the ground. Seeing him fall down in that state, his friends, as also the island-born Vyasa, and Vidura, and Sanjaya, and other well-wishers, and the attendants who waited at his gates and who enjoyed his confidence, sprinkle cool water over his body, fan him with palm leaves and gently massage him with their hands. For a long while they comfort the king in that condition. Recovering his senses after a time, Dhritarashtra weeps for a long while, thinking only of the death of his sons.

He says, ‘Fie on the human condition! Fie on the human body! The woes that are suffered in this life frequently arise from the very state of humanity. Alas, O lord, great is the grief, like poison or fire, that one suffers at the loss of sons, of wealth, of kinsmen and relatives. That grief causes our limbs to burn and our wisdom to be destroyed. Overwhelmed with that grief, a person regards death to be preferable to living on. This calamity that has overtaken me through ill-fortune is even like that. It will not, I see, end except with my life itself. O best of regenerate ones, I shall put an end to my life this very day.’ Having said these words to his high-souled sire, that foremost of all men conversant with Brahman, Dhritarashtra, overwhelmed

again with grief, falls deathly silent. Hearing what his son, the blind king, says, the puissant Vyasa speaks to him once more.

Vyasa says, 'O Mahabaho Dhritarashtra, listen to what I say. You are possessed of learning, you have great intelligence, and you, mighty one, are skilled in understanding dharma. Nothing of that which should be known is unknown to you, O Parantapa! Without doubt, you know the instability of all things doomed to die. When the world of life is unstable, when this world itself is not eternal, when life is sure to end in death, why then, O Bhaarata, do you grieve? Before your very eyes, O king, a concatenation of events brought about by Time, making your son the cause, resulted in this war. This destruction of the Kurus was inevitable. Why then do you grieve for those heroes that have attained to the highest end? Mahabaho, the Mahatman Vidura knew everything. With all his might he endeavoured to bring about peace. It is my opinion that the course marked out by Destiny cannot be controlled by anyone, even if one struggles for all eternity. I directly heard the course that was settled upon by the gods. I will relate it to you, so that peace of mind may be yours.

Once, I went to the court of Indra. There I beheld all the denizens of heaven assembled together. There were, O sinless one, all the Devarishis also, with Narada at their head. There, O monarch, I saw also the Earth, Bhumi Devi in her embodied form. She had gone to the Devas for the accomplishment of a mission. Approaching the gods, she said, "You have already promised that which you all should do for me, O blessed ones, while you were in Brahma's abode. Let that be accomplished soon."

Hearing these words of hers, Vishnu, the adored of all the worlds, smilingly addressed her in the midst of the heavenly conclave, saying, "The eldest of the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, who is known by the name of Duryodhana, will accomplish what you desire. Through that king, your purpose will be achieved. For his sake, many kings will assemble together on the field of Kuru, and slay one another with great weapons. And, O Devi, your burden will be lightened in battle. Go quickly to your own place and continue to bear the weight of creatures, O beauteous one!"

From this you will understand, O king, that your son Duryodhana, born in Gandhari's womb, was an amsa of Kali, sprung for the very purpose of causing a universal slaughter. He was vindictive, restless, wrathful, and never satisfied. Through the influence of Destiny his brothers also became like him. Sakuni became his maternal uncle and Karna his great friend.

Many other kings were born on earth to help in the task of destruction, in order to lighten the burden of the earth. As the king is, so do his subjects become. If the king be righteous, even adharma in his dominions assumes the form of dharma. Servants, without doubt, are affected by the merits and defects of their masters. And your sons, O king, having acquired a bad father, have all been destroyed.

Conversant with the truth, Narada knew all this. Through their own sins, your sons have been destroyed, O king. Do not grieve for them. There is no cause for grief. The Pandavas have not, O Bhaarata, the least fault in what has happened. Your sons were all of evil souls. It is they that caused this carnage on earth. Be you blessed.

Narada told Yudhishtira of all this in his court during the Rajasuya yagna, saying, "The Pandavas and the Kauravas, encountering each other, will meet with destruction. Do that, O son of Kunti, which you should!"

At these words of Narada, the Pandavas became filled with grief. I have told you an eternal secret of the gods. This will destroy your grief and restore to you a love of your life, and cause you to cherish affection for the Pandavas, for all that has happened has been due to what was ordained by the gods. O Mahabaho, I learnt all this some time ago. I also spoke of it to Yudhishtira Dharmaraja on the occasion of his greatest of sacrifices, the Rajasuya. When I secretly told him of all this, Dharma's son did his best to preserve peace with the Kauravas. That, however, which was ordained by the gods proved too powerful to be frustrated by him. The fiat the Destroyer can never be foiled by creatures of this world, mobile and unmoving.

You are devoted to virtue and possessed of superior intelligence, O Bhaarata. You know that which is the way and that which is not the way of all creatures. If Yudhishtira learns that you burn with grief and frequently faint, he will cast off his very life. He is always compassionate and possessed of wisdom. His kindness extends even to all the inferior creatures. How is it possible, O king, that he will not show compassion to you? At my command, and knowing that what is ordained is inevitable, as also from kindness to the Pandavas, continue to endure your life, Bhaarata! If you live, your fame will spread in the world. You will be able to acquire a true knowledge of all dharma and find many years to gain punya for yourself.

This grief for the death of your sons that has arisen in your heart like a blazing fire must be extinguished with the sacral water of wisdom!'"

Vaisampayana continued, “Hearing these words of Vyasa of immeasurable tejas, and reflecting upon them for a while, Dhritarashtra says, ‘O best of enlightened ones, I am tormented by a vast load of grief. My senses repeatedly forsake me and I am unable to pick myself up. However, hearing what you say about what was ordained by the gods, I shall not think of casting off my life and I shall live and act without indulging this searing grief.’

Hearing these words from Dhritarashtra, O monarch, Satyavati’s son Vyasa vanishes from there.”

CANTO 9

Janamejaya said, "After the holy Vyasa vanished, what, O Maharishi, did king Dhritarashtra do? What also did the Kuru king, the Mahatman son of Dharma, do? What did those three, Kripa, Kritavarman and Aswatthaman do? I have heard of the feats of Aswatthaman and the mutual pronouncement of curses. Tell me what happened next and what Sanjaya next said to the old king Dhritarashtra."

Vaisampayana said, "After Duryodhana has been killed and all the troops slaughtered in the night, Sanjaya, deprived of his spiritual sight, comes back to Dhritarashtra.

Sanjaya says, 'The kings of diverse peoples, who came from different realms, have all, O king, gone to the lands of the dead, along with your sons. Your son, who was constantly implored for peace but who always wished to end his enmity with the Pandavas by killing them in war, has caused the very world as we knew her to be destroyed. Do you, O Rajan, have the obsequial rites for your sons and grandsons and sires to be performed in proper order.'

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these terrible words from Sanjaya, the king falls onto the earth and lies motionless like a dead man. Vidura says to the prostrate king, the very same words he had said before 'Rise, O king, why do you lie on the ground? Do not grieve, O bull of Bharata's race! Even this, O lord of the earth, is the final end of all creatures. At first,

all creatures do not exist. Then, they are alive. At the end, they once more cease to be. What cause for sorrow is there in all this? By indulging grief, one cannot fetch back the dead. By indulging in grief, one cannot die oneself. When such is the course of the world, why do you, of all men, so indulge grief? One may die without having fought a battle. Some also escape alive after fighting a war. When one's time comes, O Rajan, one cannot escape. Time takes away all creatures, of every kind.

There is none dear or hateful to Time, O best of the Kurus. As the wind tears off the ends of all blades of grass, even so Time brings all creatures under its influence. All creatures are like members of the same caravan bound for the same destination. What cause of sorrow is there if Time meets with one a little earlier than with another? Those, O king, that have fallen in battle and for whom you grieve, are not really objects of grief, since all those illustrious ones have found swarga. With sacrifices with profuse gifts, through tapasya, and even through knowledge, men cannot so easily repair to heaven as Kshatriyas by dying courageously in battle. All those heroes were conversant with the Vedas; all of them were observant of vows; all of them have perished, facing the enemy in battle. What cause then is there for grieving?

They poured their libations of arrows into the bodies of their brave foes as into a fire. Foremost among men, they bore in return the arrow libations poured upon themselves. I tell you, O Rajan, that there is no better way to heaven for a Kshatriya than through battle. All of them were high-souled Kshatriyas; all of them were heroes and ornaments of royal sabhas. They have attained to a high state of blessedness. One should not grieve for them. Do you comfort yourself, and do not grieve, O bull among men! It does not become you to suffer yourself to be overwhelmed by sorrow and abandon all karma.'"

CANTO 10

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of Vidura, that bull of Bharata vamsa, Dhritarashtra, orders his chariot to be yoked. He says again, 'Bring Gandhari here without delay, and all the royal Bharata women. Bring Kunti also, as well as all the other ladies who are with her. Having said these words to Vidura, knower of all dharma, Dhritarashtra of righteous soul, well-nigh deprived of his senses by sorrow, climbs into his arrived chariot. Gandhari, stricken with grief at the death of her sons, accompanied by Kunti and the other ladies of the royal household, comes at the command of her lord to where Dhritarashtra waits for her. Beside themselves with sorrow, they come all together to the king. As they meet, they accost each other and utter loud wails of woe. Vidura, who by now has become more grief-stricken than those regal women, comforts them. Setting them on the chariots that stand ready for them, he sets out with them from the city of the elephant. As they go, piercing cries ring out from every Kuru house. The whole city, including the children, are pierced through with anguish.

Those proud, exquisite royal women, whom not the gods themselves had ever set eyes on, are now bereft of their lords and seen by the common people. With their beautiful tresses all dishevelled and their ornaments cast aside, those women, each wearing just a single piece of cloth, go forth in untold grief. Indeed, they issue from their palaces resembling white

mountains, like a dappled herd of deer from their mountain caves after the fall of their king stag. The royal women emerge in successive bevies, O king, and, unhinged with grief, dash here and there as if in panic, somewhat like a herd of fillies in a circus pen.

Seizing each other by the hand, they utter loud cries after their sons and brothers and sires. They seem to enact the scene that takes place during the pralaya at the end of the yuga. Weeping and crying and running here and there, and unhinged by grief, they do not know what to do. Those women, who once felt the blush of modesty in the presence of even companions of their own sex, now feel no trace of shame, though scantily clad, in appearing before their mothers-in-law. Once they would comfort each other while afflicted with even slight discomfort. Now, overcome by grief, they refrain from even casting their eyes at each other.

Surrounded by those thousands of wailing women, the king cheerlessly issues out of the city and goes swiftly towards the field of war. Artisans and traders and Vaishyas and all kinds of mechanics, issuing out of the city, follow the king. Shattered by the absolute destruction that has overtaken the Kurus, the royal women set up a bewailing that seems to pierce all the worlds. All creatures that heard that terrible cry think that the hour of the pralaya has come when all things would be consumed by the fire that arises at the end of the yuga. The citizens of Hastinapura also, devoted to the house of Kuru, their hearts filled with anxiety, set up a piercing cry, O king, that was as loud as that uttered by the royal women.”

CANTO 11

Vaisampayana said, “Dhritarashtra has not gone for more than two krosas when he comes upon the three maharathas, Sharadvata’s son Kripa, Drona’s son Aswatthaman, and Kritavarman the Bhoja. As soon as they see the blind and mighty king, the three heroes sigh in grief and address him in voices choked with tears, ‘Your royal son, O king, having achieved the most difficult feats, has, with all his followers, gone to the world of Indra. We are the only three rathikas of Duryodhana’s army that have escaped with our lives. All the others, O bull of Bharata’s race, have perished.’

Having said these words to Dhritarashtra, Kripa says to the grief-stricken Gandhari, ‘Your sons died while achieving feats worthy of heroic Kshatriyas, while fearlessly fighting and striking down large numbers of the enemy. Without doubt, having found those bright worlds that are attainable only through the use of weapons, they have assumed resplendent forms and sport there like gods.

Amongst those heroes there was not one that turned back from battle. Every one of them has fallen at the end or the edge of weapons. None of them folded his hands, begging for quarter. Death in battle at the end or edge of weapons has been said by the ancients to be the highest end that a Kshatriya can obtain. Thus, O queen, it does not befit you to grieve for any

of them. Their enemies the Pandavas also, O Gandhari, have not been more fortunate. Listen to what we, led by Aswatthaman, have done to them.

Learning that your son had been killed treacherously by Bhima, we slaughtered the Pandavas' men, entering their camp while it lay buried in sleep. All the Panchalas have been slain. Indeed, all the sons of Drupada, as also all the sons of Draupadi, have been slaughtered. Having caused this carnage of the sons of our foes, we now fly from the Pandavas themselves, for we three cannot stand against them in battle. The Pandavas are all irresistible heroes and mighty bowmen. They will soon catch up with us and, filled with rage at the slaughter of their sons, will have their revenge on us.

Having done what we did, O queen, we dare not tarry. Grant us leave, O Maharani! It does not become you to set your heart on sorrow. O Dhritarashtra, you also give us leave to fly from here. O mighty king, summon all your fortitude and observe the dharma of a Kshatriya in its highest form.'

Having said these words to the king, and circumambulating him in pradakshina, Kripa, Kritavarman and Drona's son, O Bhaarata, hardly able to tear their eyes away from Dhritarashtra of great wisdom, urge their horses towards the banks of the Ganga. Riding away, those maharathas, with hearts plunged in grief and agitation, now take one another's leave and go their separate ways.

Sharadvata's son Kripa rides to Hastinapura; Hridika's son Kritavarman flies to his own kingdom; while the son of Drona sets for the asrama of Maharishi Vyasa. Even thus, those heroes, who had brought dreadful grief to the Pandavas, ride away before the sun rises higher, repeatedly casting backward glances at one another, and all of them full of fear.

It is after this, O Rajan, that the sons of Pandu encounter the son of Drona and, putting forth their prowess, vanquish him, as I have already told you."

CANTO 12

Vaisampayana said, “After all the warriors had been slaughtered, king Yudhishtira the just hears that his uncle Dhritarashtra has set out from the city called after the elephant. Ravaged by grief on account of the death of his sons, Yudhishtira, O king, accompanied by his brothers, sets out to meet with his uncle, equally full of sorrow at the death of his hundred sons. The son of Kunti is followed by the high-souled and heroic Krishna of Dasarha’s race, and by Yuyudhana, as also by Yuyutsu. The princess Draupadi, also, burning with grief, and accompanied by those Panchala ladies that are with her, sorrowfully follows her lord.

Yudhishtira sees near the banks of the Ganga, O king, the crowd of Bharata women crying like a flock of bereaved she-ospreys. The king is soon surrounded by those thousands of royal women who, with arms raised up in sorrow, indulge in loud lamentations and give vent to all kinds of incoherent words, both agreeable and distasteful.

They cry where, indeed, is that righteousness of the king, where is his truth and compassion, for he has slain sires and brothers and preceptors and sons and friends?

‘How, O mighty-armed one, has your heart become tranquil after causing Drona, your grandsire Bhishma, and Jayadratha to be slaughtered? What need have you of sovereignty, after having seen your sires and

brothers, O Yudhishtira, and the irresistible Abhimanyu and the sons of Draupadi massacred?'

Passing by those weeping, screaming women, Yudhishtira comes and touches the feet of his eldest uncle. Having saluted their sire according to custom, those parantapas, the Pandavas, announce themselves to him, each uttering his own name. Dhritarashtra reluctantly embraces the eldest son of Pandu, who was the cause of that great carnage. Having embraced the Dharmaraja and spoken a few weak words of comfort to him, O Bhaarata, the dark-souled Dhritarashtra seeks Bhima, like a fire ready to consume everything that would approach it. Indeed, that fire of his wrath, fanned by the wind of his grief, seems to be ready to consume the Bhima-forest.

However, knowing Dhritarashtra's evil intentions toward Bhima, Krishna pulls away the real Bhima, and presents an iron statue of the second son of Pandu to the old king. Indeed, with sure prescience of what the blind king would attempt to do, Krishna had kept that contrivance ready. Seizing the iron Bhima in his awesomely strong arms, king Dhritarashtra, strong as ten thousand elephants, clasps it so ferociously that the iron image breaks into pieces. Such is his effort that his own chest is bruised and he begins to vomit blood. Covered with his own blood, the king falls down on the ground like a parijata tree topped with its flowery burden.

His wise charioteer Sanjaya, son of Gavalgana, lifts up the monarch and, soothing and comforting him, says, 'Do not do such a thing!'

His fury exhausted, the demented king returns to his senses. He is suddenly wracked with guilt and sorrow, and begins to weep aloud, saying, 'Alas, oh Bhima, alas, oh Bhima! What have I done?'

Seeing the aged king's fury has left him and that he is genuinely stricken at the thought that he has killed Bhima, Krishna says softly, 'Do not grieve, O Dhritarashtra, for you have not killed Bhimasena. That was an iron statue, O king, which you shattered. I knew that you were full of rage and drew Bhima away from you and the jaws of Death.

O tiger among kings, there is none equal to you in strength of body. What man is there, O Mahabaho, that could endure the might of your arms? Indeed, even as no one can escape alive from an encounter with Yama himself, even so none can come out safely from your angry embrace. It was for this that the iron image of Bhima, which Duryodhana had fashioned and upon which he daily rained blows of his mace, was kept ready. Through grief for the death of your sons, your mind has fallen away from dharma. It

is for this, O great king, that you seek to kill Bhimasena, though killing Bhima would do you no good. Your sons would not come back to life even if you killed Pandu's second son.

I say you must yourself condemn what we all saw you attempt to do and not set your heart on grief!'"

CANTO 13

Vaisampayana said, “Some maid-servants then come to the king to bathe him. After he had been duly bathed, Krishna speaks to him again,’ O king, you have read the Vedas and many other Shastras. You have heard all the ancient Puranas and Itihasas, and know everything about the Rajadharma, the duty of kings. You are learned, possessed of great wisdom, and indifferent to strength and weakness. Why then do you harbour such anger when all that has overtaken you is the result of your own fault? I spoke to you before the battle. Both Bhishma and Drona, O Bhaarata, did the same, as also did Vidura and Sanjaya. However, then you did not follow our advice. Indeed, though we repeatedly exhorted you to do the right thing, you would not listen to us, even while knowing that the Pandavas were superior to you and yours, O Kauravya, in strength and courage.

That king who can see his own faults and knows the signs and the distinctions of place and time, finds great prosperity. That king, however, who, though wisely counselled by well-wishers, does not accept what they say, good or bad, meets with great distress and is obliged to grieve because of the evil policy he pursues. Do you now live a different life, O Bhaarata. You did not keep your mind under restraint, but suffered yourself to be ruled by Duryodhana. That which has come upon you is the result of your own sins. Why then do you seek to kill Bhima?

Recollect your own crimes, and curb your anger now. Bhima has justly killed the wretch who, from hubris, had Panchali dragged roughly into the Kuru sabha; this revenge properly belonged to Bhima and he swore an oath that he would have revenge. Look clearly at your own evil deeds as also at those of your evil son. The sons of Pandu are perfectly innocent. Yet have they been treated most cruelly by you and by Suyodhana.'

Vaisampayana continued, "After he has been told the stark truth by Krishna, king Dhritarashtra replies to Devaki's son, 'Mahabaho, it is even as you say; everything you say is perfectly true. It was a father's excessive love that made me fall away from dharma. By good fortune, you protected that tiger among men, the mighty Bhima, and he did not come into my embrace when I was full of anger. But now, the fever of my wrath has passed. O Madhava, I am eager to embrace that hero, the second son of Pandu. When all the kings that went to war are dead, when my children are gone, my welfare and happiness depend upon the sons of Pandu.'

Saying this, the old king embraces those mighty princes, Bhima and Dhananjaya, and the two sons of Madri, and he weeps as he does this and comforts and blesses them."

CANTO 14

Vaisampayana said, “Commanded by Dhritarashtra, those bulls of Kuru’s race, the Pandava brothers, accompanied by Krishna, now come to meet Gandhari. The faultless Gandhari, tormented by the death of her hundred sons, remembers that Yudhishtira had slain all his enemies, and wants to curse him. Understanding her evil intent towards the Pandavas, Vyasa addresses himself to the task of preventing the chaste queen of great powers from harming the Pandavas. Having cleansed himself with the sacred and fresh water of the Ganga, the Maharishi, who can go anywhere he pleases by merely willing it, comes quick as a thought to where Gandhari is, with darkness in her heart.

Appearing out of nowhere, seeing clearly into the queen’s heart, Vyasa mahatapasvin says to his daughter-in-law, ‘Do not curse the sons of Pandu! On the other hand, show them your forgiveness. You are strong and pure and you must not be angry with the blameless Pandavas. Set your heart on peace. Restrain the curse you are about to pronounce. Listen to my advice. Avid for victory, your son said to you every day of the eighteen days of the war, “O mother, bless me that I win this war!” Implored every day by Duryodhana, you would always say to him, “Victory lies where dharma is!”

O Gandhari, I do not remember anything that you ever said having ever been proven false. And neither were the words you said to Duryodhana false. You are always engaged in doing good to all men, why, to all

creatures. Having successfully crossed the dreadful sea of the war on Kurukshetra, the Pandavas have surely won victory as well as increased their own dharma. Once you always observed the practice of forgiveness. Why would you not observe it now? Subdue the sin in your heart, O you who know all about dharma.

There is victory where dharma is. Remembering your own righteousness and the words you yourself spoke; restrain your anger, O Gandhari! Do not sin, O you that are beautiful in speech.'

Gandhari says, 'Holy one, I do not have any ill will towards the Pandavas, nor do I wish that they should die. However, out of grief for the death of my sons, my heart is agitated. I know that I should protect the Pandavas with as much care as Kunti herself does, and that Dhritarashtra should also do the same. The very race of Kshatriyas has perished through the sins of Duryodhana and of Sakuni, and through the deeds of Karna and Dusasana. In this matter, not the slightest blame can attach to Arjuna or to Pritha's son Vrikodara, or to Nakula or Sahadeva, or to Yudhishtira himself.

Swollen with arrogance and pride, the Kauravas have fallen in battle, along with many others who came to fight for them. But one thing that Bhima did, in your very presence, Krishna, roils me. Vrikodara challenged Duryodhana to a duel with maces and, discovering during the fight that my son was clearly his superior, Bhima struck him below the waist smashing his thighs and his manhood and only thus killing him. This is what stirs my anger. How can great Kshatriyas cast aside dharma for the sake of their lives, the dharma of even war laid down by the great Mahatamans of old?'"

CANTO 15

Vaisampayana said, “Bhima hears what Gandhari says and grows afraid. Nervously, he attempts to pacify her. ‘Whatever I did, whether dharma or adharma, I did through fear and to protect my life. It becomes you to forgive me, O my mother. Your mighty son could not be killed by anyone in a fair fight with maces. It was for this that I did what I was forced to. Duryodhana himself once vanquished Yudhishtira with treachery, at dice. He was always vindictive and deceitful towards us. This was why I killed him treacherously.

By then your son was the sole living maharatha on his side. If he had killed me during the mace fight, my brothers and I would have lost our kingdom yet again. That is why I killed him as I did. You know all that your son said to Panchali while she, in her period, wore just a single cloth. Without killing Suyodhana, we could never peacefully rule the whole world with her seas. It was for this that I did what I had to.

Your son inflicted many wrongs on us. In the midst of the Kuru sabha he bared his left thigh up to his very manhood and asked Draupadi to go and sit there. For that, he deserved death at our hands even then. However, at the command of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, we suffered ourselves to be restrained by the compact that had been made. But how could we ever forget or forgive what Duryodhana said and did on that day?

Great were our privations and sufferings in the forest. Remembering all this, I did what I had to, to kill Duryodhana. With his death, we have ended the enmity that simmered for so many years. Yudhishtira has his rightful kingdom back and we have been freed from hatred and anger that burned us for so long. But your son was invincible with the mace and there was no way that I or anyone could kill him in a duel with maces.'

Gandhari says, 'Since you praise my son so for his skill in battle, he did not deserve such a death. However, he did do all that you say. But Bhima, when Vrishasena had killed Nakula's horses, O Bhaarata, you drank my son Dusasana's blood on the field. What you did was cruel and unforgivable and suited to only the basest of men. It was an evil thing you did, O Vrikodara!'

Bhima replies, humbly, 'It is a sin to drink the blood of even a rank stranger, what then need be said about quaffing the blood of one's own self? For one's brother is, verily, one's self; there is no difference between the one and the other. However, the blood did not, O mother, pass down my lips and teeth. Karna knew this. Only my hands were smeared with Dusasana's blood. Seeing Nakula deprived of his horses by Vrishasena, I struck dread into the hearts of your rejoicing sons.

When Dusasana seized Draupadi's hair on the day of the game of dice, and hauled her into the Kuru sabha, I swore a hot oath in rage that I would drink Dusasana's blood one day in battle. If I did not at least appear to fulfil my oath, I would swerve from Kshatriya dharma. It was for this, O queen, that I set my lips to his blood after killing him, but the blood never passed down my throat. O Gandhari, do not impute that sin to me. When you did not restrain your own sons in the past, how can you now blame us, who are innocent?'

Gandhari says, 'Unvanquished by anyone, you have slain a hundred sons of this old man. Oh, why did you not spare, O child, even one son of this old couple deprived of kingdom, perhaps one whose offences were lighter? Why did you not leave even one crutch for this blind couple? O child, although you live unharmed, having killed all my children, yet no grief would have been mine if you had adopted the path of dharma while killing them.'

Still wrathful at the slaughter of all her sons and grandsons, now Gandhari asks after Yudhishtira, saying, 'Where is the king?'

Trembling and with folded hands, Yudhishtira approaches her and says softly, 'Here is Yudhishtira, O devi, the cruel slayer of your sons! I deserve

your curses, for I am the cause of this great destruction. Oh, curse me! I no longer have any need for life, for kingdom, or for wealth. Having caused my friends and kin to be killed, I have proved myself to be a great fool and a hater of near and dear ones.'

To Yudhishtira who says this, and who is overcome with fear and stands in her presence, Gandhari, drawing long sighs, says nothing. Conversant with the laws of dharma, the Kuru queen, possessed of great foresight, directs her eyes, from within the folds of the cloth that cover them, to the tip of Yudhishtira's toe, even as the prince, with his body bent forwards, is about to fall at her feet. At this glance, the king, whose toenails had all been clear and fine, feels a sharp pain on this thumb toe and finds it has been burnt ashen! Seeing this, Arjuna quickly darts behind Krishna and the other sons of Pandu become pale and restive with fear. Then, having cast off her wrath, Gandhari comforts the Pandavas as a mother should.

With her leave, those heroes of broad chests then go together to present themselves before their own mother. Seeing her sons after a long time, Kunti, who had constantly been filled with anxiety on their account, covers her face with her cloth and begins to weep. Having cried for some time, with her sons, Pritha sees the wounds and scars of many weapons on their bodies. She then repeatedly embraces and strokes each of her sons, and full of sorrow, breaks into tears again, along with Draupadi who has lost all her sons and whom she sees lying on the bare earth, lamenting piteously.

Draupadi says, 'O venerable devi, where have all your grandsons, with Abhimanyu among them, gone? Seeing you in such distress, why do they not hurry to come before you? Ah, having lost my sons, what need have I of a kingdom?'

Raising up the grief-stricken princess of Panchala, Pritha begins to comfort that queen of the large eyes. Then Kunti, accompanied by the princess of Panchala and followed by her sons, comes toward the grief-stricken Gandhari. Seeing the illustrious Kunti with her daughter-in-law, Gandhari addresses her, saying, 'Do not, O daughter, grieve so. Look, I too am as stricken with grief as you. I feel certain this universal carnage has been brought about by the irresistible course of Time. Inevitable as it was, this horrible slaughter has not been caused by the voluntary agency of men. Even that has come to pass which Vidura of great wisdom foretold after Krishna's embassy for peace had failed. Do not, therefore, grieve over a thing that was inevitable, especially after its occurrence. Having fallen

bravely in battle, they should not be grieved for. I am in the same plight as you. If you yield so to grief, who then will comfort us? Ah, through my negligence, this foremost of races has been destroyed.'"

CANTO 16

STRI-VILAPA-PARVA

Vaisampayana said, "Having said these words, Gandhari falls silent. She remains at a slight remove from the grisly field of war, but with her spiritual eye, sees clearly the carnage everywhere, and particularly the slaughter of the Kurus. Always devoted to her lord, that most blessed queen had always practised stern vratas. Undergoing the severest penances, she was always truthful in her speech. Through a boon granted her by Vyasa, she is possessed of spiritual knowledge and power. Piteous are the lamentations in which that great queen then indulges.

Endowed with vast intelligence, the Kuru queen sees, from a distance, but as if from near, that horrifying field of battle, full of wonderful and macabre sights. Scattered all over with bones and hair, and covered with streams of blood, Kurukshetra is strewn with thousands upon thousands of corpses on every side. Covered with the blood of elephants, horses, rathikas and other kinds of warriors, it teems with headless trunks and trunkless heads. And it resounds with the cries of elephants and horses and men and women; it abounds with jackals and cranes and ravens and kankas and crows. And it is the sporting ground of rakshasas that live on human flesh. It swarms with ospreys and vultures and resounds with the inauspicious howls of jackals and the cackling of hyena packs.

Then king Dhritarashtra, at the command of Vyasa, and all the sons of Pandu with Yudhishtira at their head, along with Krishna and all the royal Kuru women, comes onto that field of battle. The regal women see their slain brothers and sons and sires and husbands lying on the ground, and being devoured by beasts of prey and wolves and ravens and crows and pretas and pisachas and rakshasas and diverse other wanderers of the night. Seeing that horrific field and its dreadful sights past all dark imagination, Kurukshetra whose spectacle resembles the sights seen on the sporting ground of Rudra, the women give vent to piercing shrieks and quickly alight from their fine carriages and chariots.

Witnessing sights the like of which they had never before seen or could imagine, some of the Bharata ladies feel their limbs turn to water and fall to the ground. Others are so horrified that they faint. Indeed, the Panchala and the Kuru women are plunged into unutterable distress. Hearing the cries of those women pierce the sky all around, Gandhari speaks to Krishna of the lotus-eyes, foremost among all men.

Full of grief, she says, 'Look, O lotus-eyed Madhava, upon these daughters-in-law of mine! Deprived of their lords, their hair loose and wild, they utter cries of woe like a flight of she-ospreys. Seeing the corpses past all count, they dementedly call out to their great dead Bharata lords. They run from their husbands to their sons and then to their slain sires and brothers.

Ah, look Krishna, the field is covered with the mothers of heroes, all of whom have lost their sons. Look where the wives of dead heroes swarm, flinging themselves across the remains and bodies of their husbands and crying inconsolably. Look where the field of battle is adorned with those tigers among men, Bhishma and Karna and Abhimanyu and Drona and Drupada and Salya, as if with still smouldering fires.

Look where Kurukshetra is adorned with the golden coats of mail and with the priceless gemstones of the greatest warriors, and with their angadas, and keyuras and garlands. The field of death strewn with spears and spiked clubs hurled by heroic hands, and swords and diverse kinds of bows and numberless arrows.

And beasts of prey and carrion stand around, sporting, or lie down where they please, some having fed so they can eat no more and others still tearing meat from the bones of noble men. Yes, even such is ghastly Kurukshetra, and my heart and all my limbs burn to witness this spectacle

with mystic sight. Krishna, I feel as if the five elements themselves, the panchamahabhutas of which all creation is made, have been destroyed in the destruction of the Panchalas and the Kurus.

Fierce vultures and other vicious birds, in thousands, drag blood-dyed corpses and, seizing them by their armour, devour them, tearing away chunks of flesh. Who could have imagined the deaths, all together, in a few days, of such heroes as Jayadratha, Karna, Drona, Bhishma and Abhimanyu? Alas, though they were invincible, yet they have been killed, Madhusudana, and vultures, kankas, ravens, kites, dogs and jackals feast upon them.

There, those tigers among men that fought on Duryodhana's side, who took the field in wrath, now lie unmoving like fires that have burned down. All of them are worthy of sleeping on soft and clean beds. But, alas, plunged into calamity, they sleep today on the bare ground, never to awaken again. Once gifted vabdhis and magadhis would sing their praises; now they listen to the cries of jackals. Illustrious heroes who once slept on costly beds with their limbs smeared with sandalwood paste and powdered aloe, alas, they now sleep in the dust. These vultures and wolves and ravens that rend their flesh have now become their ornaments. With ominous and fierce cries, the birds and beasts of carrion drag those magnificent bodies this way and that, fighting over them, ravens gobbling down their eyeballs.

These Kshatriyas, who always delighted in battle, wear smiles and grimaces on their handsome faces, while their hands still clutch keen shafts, tempered swords and bright maces, as if life has not yet left them. Countless magnificent Kshatriyas, of noble bodies and features, wearing golden garlands, lie on the coarse ground as if asleep. And then, the beasts of carrion, the scavengers, find them and tear them apart in moments, making off with grand limbs.

Other warriors, with massive arms, sleep with maces clasped to them, as if those are their beloved wives. Others, still cased in armour, continue to hold brilliant weapons in their hands. And these the jackals and hyenas avoid, Krishna, fearing that they are still alive, for so they seem. But others, whom the carnivores drag away and dismember have their golden garlands broken and the broken pieces glitter like drops of the sun on bloody ground.

Ah look, where thousands of savage wolves actually haul away the dead by thick and heavy golden necklaces. Many, whom bards well-trained to their work once used, with their hymns and eulogies of grave import, to

delight every morning, are now surrounded by mourning women, stricken with grief and sobbing hysterically around them, O tiger of Vrishni's race! The faces of those beautiful women, O Kesava, though pale with shock and sorrow, look resplendent still, like an assemblage of red lotuses. The Kuru women have stopped weeping, with their companions. They are all filled with anxiety. Overwhelmed with sorrow, they run here and there, beside themselves. And yet, their faces, stained with tears and suffused with anger and fear, shine like the morning sun or gold or burnished copper.

Hearing one another's incoherent lamentations, wails of woe bursting forth from every side, the Kuru women cannot decipher what exactly they are crying out. Some of them, drawing long sighs and crying out shrilly and repeatedly, are so stricken that they give up their very lives. Many of them, seeing the corpses of their sons, husbands, or fathers, wail loudly and without let. Others strike their heads with their own soft hands.

Strewn over with severed heads and hands and other limbs, and often raked together into large piles, the earth is awesome with these signs of havoc and heroism. The women see headless trunks of great majesty, and so many heads cut from their necks that they swoon in large numbers and lie unmoving for a long time.

Uniting heads with trunks in despair, those women, mindless with grief, discover that they are mistaken in their pairings, cry out, "This head does not belong to this body!" and weep more bitterly still. Others, putting together arms and hands, thighs and feet, severed by arrows or swords, then fall senseless to look at the restored bodies.

Some amongst the Bharata women look at the bodies of their lords, bodies that have been mangled by animals and birds and their heads torn off, and do not recognise them. Others look at their brothers, sires, sons, and husbands slain by foes, strike themselves repeatedly, heads, breasts and arms, while their loud bewailing never pauses, O Krishna. Miry with flesh and blood, the earth in parts is impassable with arms still holding swords in their grasp, and with heads adorned with sparkling earrings. Looking at the field strewn with their brothers and fathers, and sons, those faultless women, who have never before suffered the least distress, are now plunged into chasmal dismay.

Look, O Janardana, at the bevies of Dhritarashtra's daughters-in-law, who look like herds of exquisite fillies adorned with excellent mane. What,

O Kesava, can be a sadder spectacle for me than this one presented by these lovely women who have assumed such a pitiable aspect?

Without doubt, I must have committed great sins in my past lives, since I am now looking at my sons and grandsons and brothers all slaughtered by their enemies. Even as she laments thus to Krishna, her subtle gaze wanders farther afield, beyond Kurukshetra, and alights upon her son Duryodhana."

CANTO 17

Vaisampayana said, "Seeing Duryodhana lying dead and covered in blood, Gandhari suddenly falls to the ground in a dead faint, like an uprooted plantain tree. She soon regains her senses and begins to weep, repeatedly wailing aloud. Going to him, that queen takes him in her arms and laments loudly and piteously.

Stricken with grief, and agitated, the Kuru queen exclaims, 'Alas, O my son! Alas, O son!'

Burning with sorrow, she drenches her son's broken corpse with her hot tears. Duryodhana lies unmoving, his massive chest and great shoulders now still forever, adorned still with bloodied garlands.'

Still addressing Krishna who stands beside her, Gandhari continues, 'O puissant one who have exterminated this race, O you of Vrishni's vamsa, this foremost of kings, my son, said to me, "O mother, wish me victory in this war!" Tiger among men, I knew that a great calamity was upon us and replied to him, "Where dharma is, there victory shall be. And since, my son, your heart is set on war, you will attain to those blessed realms that Kshatriyas find and sport there like a god."

These were the words that I then said to him. I did not then grieve for my son. However, I grieve for the helpless Dhritarashtra bereaved of all his friends and kinsmen. Look, O Madhava, where my son, that greatest of

warriors, wrathful, skilled in weapons, and irresistible in battle, sleeps in the dust on the bed of Kshatriyas. Look at the reverses brought about by Time.

This scorcher of his foes who once walked at the head of all the crowned kings of the world now sleeps in the dust. Beyond doubt, my heroic Duryodhana, when he sleeps on that bed which is the hero's, has attained the most unattainable end. Inauspicious jackals now delight that prince asleep on the Kshatriya hero's bed, Suyodhana who was once delighted by the most beautiful women sitting around him. He who was once encircled by kings vying with one another to please him, alas, he, slain and lying on the ground, is now encircled by vultures. He who was formerly fanned with beautiful chamaras by exquisite women is now fanned by birds of carrion with their wings. Ah, how he sleeps on the bare ground, this mighty-armed prince, slain by Bhimasena in battle, like an elephant killed by a lion.

Look at my Duryodhana, O Krishna, lying on the naked earth, covered with blood, killed by Bhimasena with his mace. This mahabaho who gathered eleven akshauhinis of troops, O Kesava, has, through his own evil policy, now been killed. Alas, there that great bowman and mighty warrior sleeps, struck down by Bhimasena, like a tiger slain by a lion.

Having disregarded Vidura, as also his own father, this reckless, foolish and evil prince has succumbed to death because he ignored his elders. He who had ruled the earth without a rival for thirteen years, alas, that prince, that son of mine, sleeps today on the bare ground, felled by his enemies. Not long ago, O Krishna, I saw the earth, full of elephants and kine and horses, and ruled by my Duryodhana. Today, O you of mighty arms, I see her ruled by another, and destitute of elephants and kine and horses. What need have I, O Krishna, of my life?

Look again upon this sight that is more painful than the death of my son —the sight of these beautiful royal women weeping beside their slain heroes. Look, O Krishna, at the mother of Lakshmana, that princess of large hips, with her tresses loose, that beloved wife of Duryodhana, she who looks yet like a golden vedi. How she of unmatched beauty and intelligence once made love in the mighty embrace of her lord. Oh, why does my heart not break into a hundred pieces at the sight of my son and grandson slain in battle?

Ah, my son's wife now sniffs the head of her heroic son covered in blood. And now, she moves back to her lord and so sadly and tenderly

strokes his magnificent form with her fair hand. And thus, she moves from one to the other, heartbroken by the deaths of both. Now she casts her teary gaze on one, and then the other. Look, O Madhava, striking her head with her hands, she falls upon the breast of her heroic lord, the king of the Kurus. Her complexion is like that of the filaments of the lotus, and even in her bitter grief, she is still lovely as a lotus. The unfortunate princess now strokes the face of her son and now that of her lord. If the shastras and the srutis be true, this slain king has attained those realms of blessedness that one wins only through the use of weapons!'"

CANTO 18

"Gandhari says, 'Behold, O Madhava, all my hundred sons, who never tired in battle, have been killed by Bhima with his mace in battle. Yet, what grieves me more today is that these, my daughters-in-law, of tender years, deprived of their husbands and their sons and with their hair unkempt and loose, wander this deathly field of war today like women that have lost their very minds. They who once walked only on the terraces of godly mansions with their feet adorned with many ornaments, now, in great affliction of heart, tread this hard earth, mired with blood and flesh, with those same tender feet. Reeling in sorrow, they roam here and there like drunken women, driving away vultures and jackals and crows by waving their slender arms and screaming shrilly.

Ah, look, where that royal one of faultless limbs looks at this scene of carnage and falls down as if felled with an axe of grief. When I look at Duryodhana's wife, my dead grandson Lakshmana's mother, I feel as if someone tears my heart within my chest into shreds with cruel, burning nails. These beautiful regal women, some dark and some fair, their limbs and arms so slender and their forms so womanly—some see their brothers, some their husbands, and some their sons, lying on the rude earth drenched in blood—themselves fall down, seizing the arms of their precious and beloved dead.

Listen, O unvanquished one, to the ringing wails of the elderly women and those of middle age at the gruesome sight of the field of war. Look where they support themselves weakly against broken chariots and the bodies of dead elephants and horses. Look, O Krishna, where one of them has picked up the severed head of a kinsman, and holds it in her hands with tears streaming down her face. I believe, O sinless one, that both they and I of little understanding must have committed great sins in our past lives, since, O Janardana, all our men have been slain by Yudhishtira Dharmaraja.

Whatever we do, good and bad, always bears fruit! Behold, O Madhava, the young women of beautiful breasts and bellies, well-born, modest, with long, black eye-lashes and tresses as dark on their heads, blessed with sweet voices, graceful as swans, now deranged by grief, swoon and fall uttering cries shrill as flights of cranes. Look, O lotus-eyed hero, their lovely faces like full-blown lotuses, are scorched by the sun. Alas, O Vasudeva, the wives of my proud sons who were as strong as great elephants in musth, are now exposed to the gaze of the common people.

Look, O Govinda, at the shields decked with a hundred moons, the standards of solar effulgence, the golden coats of mail, the collars and cuirasses made of gold and the helmets of my sons, scattered on the earth, are still as splendid as sacrificial fires over which libations of ghrita have been poured. There Dusasana sleeps, felled by Bhima, and the blood of all his limbs quaffed by that parantapa. Look at that other son of mine, O Madhava, slain by Bhima with his mace, impelled by Draupadi and the recollection of his pain at the time of the game of dice. Addressing the dice-won princess of Panchala in the midst of the Kuru sabha, Dusasana, wanting to please his elder brother as also Karna, said to Draupadi, "You are now the wife of a slave! Panchali, enter our harem now, with Sahadeva, Nakula and Arjuna!"

At that time, O Krishna, I said to Duryodhana, "O my son, rid yourself of the envious, deceitful and wrathful Sakuni. Know that your uncle, my brother, is entirely evil and addicted to violence. Send him away from you at once and make peace with the Pandavas. O you of little intelligence, do you not think of Bhimasena filled with anger? You pierce him with vicious words even like an elephant being burned with brands of fire."

But he ignored me and continued to spew his wordy venom at them, like a snake spitting its poison at a great bull. That Dusasana now sleeps on bare ground, his massive arms outstretched, slain by Bhimasena like an

elephant brought down by a lion. Ah, what a horrible thing Bhima did when he drank my son’s blood on Kurukshetra.’ ”

CANTO 19

"Gandhari says, 'There, O Madhava, my son Vikarna, always lauded by the wise, lies on bare ground, slain by Bhima and mangled horribly. Lifeless he lies, Krishna, among dead elephants like the moon in the autumn sky surrounded by blue clouds. Vultures feed with difficulty on his broad palm, cased in its leathern glove, and scarred by constant wielding of the bow. His helpless young wife tries ceaselessly to drive the vile birds away, but to no avail. The youthful, brave and handsome Vikarna, O bull among men, raised in luxury and deserving of every kind of weal, now sleeps in the dust, O Madhava! Though all his vital parts have been pierced with clothyard shafts and bearded arrows and nalikas, yet the magnificence and beauty of his form has not deserted him.

There, my son Durmukha, that slayer of large bands of foes, sleeps, with his face towards the enemy, slain by the inexorable Bhimasena keeping his vow that he would singly kill all my hundred sons. Ah, look where jackals have eaten away my son Durmukha's face, O Krishna; what they have left so far looks even more splendid like the moon of the seventh day of the bright fortnight. Krishna, Krishna, how could they bear to kill that son of mine of incomparable beauty and make him lie in the dust? O compassionate one, how could they kill Durmukha, before whom no foe could stand?

O Lord of all, cast your eyes again upon that other son of Dhritarashtra—Chitrasena, also brutally slain and lying on the ground, that hero who was the model of all bowmen?

Look at all the young women who sit, side by side with the ravening vultures and jackals, around his majestic form adorned with blood-stained wreaths and garlands. Their loud wailing mingling with the yowls and growls of the jackals and the cackling of hyenas is piteous but, ah, also strangely wonderful, and I know not why!

Youthful and handsome, and always waited upon and served by the most beautiful women, my son Vivimsati sleeps there, stained with dust. His armour has been pierced with many arrows. Slain by Bhima in the midst of the general carnage, my heroic Vivimsati is now surrounded and waited upon by vultures. Having penetrated the ranks of the Pandava army, that Kshatriya now lies on the bed of a hero, on the bed of an exalted Kshatriya.

Look, O Krishna, at his startlingly handsome face, a smile still playing on it, with its hooked fine nose and arched thick eyebrows, and resembling the luminous moon himself. Yes, in days gone by, large numbers of the most beautiful women used to wait upon him, like thousands of apsaras upon a gandharva at his sport.

Who, again, could endure my son Duhsaha, that parantapa, that hero, that ornament of sabhas, that irresistible warrior, that resister of all enemies?

Covered with arrows and the blood they have drawn, Duhsaha's body looks resplendent, like a mountain overgrown with flowering karnikaras. With his garland of gold and his bright armour, Duhsaha, though dead, is lustrous yet, like a white mountain of fire!'"

CANTO 20

"Gandhari says, 'He whose strength and courage were regarded, O Kesava, as one and half times superior to those of his sire and you, he who resembled a fierce and proud lion, he who, without a follower, alone pierced the impenetrable array of my son, he who proved to be the death of many, alas, he now sleeps there, having succumbed to death. I see, O Krishna, the splendour of that son of Arjuna, of that hero of immeasurable tejas, Abhimanyu, has not been dimmed even in death. There, the daughter of Virata, the daughter-in-law of the wielder of the Gandiva, that girl of flawless beauty weeps pitiably at the sight of her young dead husband. That young Uttaraa approaching her slain lord, and tenderly strokes his broken body, his noble face.

Once, drunk with honeyed wines, this most intelligent and exquisite girl would shyly, passionately embrace her youthful husband, and kiss the face of Subhadra's son, that face like a full-blown lotus, the head supported on a neck adorned with three lines like those of a conch-shell. Taking hold of her lord's golden coat of mail, that young woman now gazes through eyes that stream tears at the blood-dyed body of her dead husband.

Looking at Abhimanyu, Uttaraa says to you, O Krishna, "O lotus-eyed one, this hero whose eyes so resembled yours, has been killed. In might and energy, and prowess also, he was your equal, O sinless one. He resembled you in beauty. Yet he sleeps on the ground, slain by the enemy."

Addressing her own lord, the princess says again, “You were raised in every luxury. You used to sleep on soft skins of the ranku deer. Ah, does your body not feel pain today lying thus on bare ground? Your massive arms like elephant’s trunks, adorned with golden angadas, outstretched, your arms covered with skin hardened by the frequent drawing of the bowstring, you sleep, O lord, in peace, as if exhausted with the toil of too much exertion in the training halls. Alas, why do you not speak to me that am weeping before you? I do not remember ever having offended you. Why then do you not speak to me? Once you would call lovingly to me even when you saw me at a distance.

Beloved Abhimanyu, where will you go now, leaving behind you the revered Subhadra, these your sires that resemble the very gods, and my wretched self, all wracked with grief?”

Look, O Krishna, gathering the blood-dyed locks of her lord with her petal soft hands and placing his head on her lap, the beautiful Uttaraa speaks to him as if he were alive. She says, “How could those great maharathas kill you in the midst of battle, you that are Krishna’s sister’s son, and the son of the Gandivi? Oh, fie on those warriors of evil deeds, Kripa and Karna and Jayadratha and Drona and Drona’s son, who vilely banded together and took your life. What was the state of mind of those unrivalled maharathas, when they surrounded you like a tiger on a hunt, O my love of such tender years, and slaughtered you to my break my heart?

How could you, O Kshatriya, who had so many protectors, be killed so helplessly in the very sight of the Pandavas and the Panchalas? Looking at you, O hero, cut down in battle by many vile men fighting together, how is that tiger among men, that son of Pandu, your father, able to bear the burden of life? Neither the acquisition of a vast kingdom nor the defeat of their enemies can make the Parthas bereft of you, O my lotus-eyed one, joyful.

As for me, through virtue and self-restraint, I will very soon join you in those realms of bliss which you have acquired through the use of weapons. Protect me, O Kshatriya, when I arrive in those realms. One cannot die until one’s hour comes, since, wretched that I am, I still draw breath after seeing you slain in battle. Having gone away to the world of the Pitris, who else, like me, do you now speak to, O tiger among men, in sweet words mingled with smiles? I have no doubt that you will agitate the hearts of the apsaras in heaven, with your great beauty and your soft words and wondrous smiles.

Having attained the worlds kept for men of righteous deeds, you are now united, O son of Subhadra, with the apsaras. While sporting with them, at least at times think of my loving deeds towards you. It seems that your union with me in this world was ordained for only six fleeting months, for in the seventh, O Abhimanyu, you lost your very life."

O Krishna, even as Uttaraa laments in this manner the ladies of the royal house of Matsya lead away the stricken princess, deprived of all her purposes. Pulling away the afflicted Uttaraa, themselves even more afflicted than that girl, those women weep and utter loud wails at the sight of the slain Virata. Mangled with the weapons of Drona, prostrate on the ground, and covered with blood, Virata is surrounded by screeching vultures and howling jackals and crowing ravens. Those black-eyed women approach the prostrate form of the Matsya king, over which carnivores, beasts and birds, utter cries of joy, and attempt to turn the body, what is left of that great king, over. Weak with grief, they cannot do so. Scorched by the sun, and worn with exertion and toil, their faces have become pale. Look also, O Madhava, at those other young boys besides Abhimanyu—Uttara Kumara, Sudakshina prince of the Kambojas, and the handsome Lakshmana—all lying dead on the field of war.'"

CANTO 21

"Gandhari says, 'Look now where the mighty Karna, that greatest of all bowmen, lies on the ground. In battle he was like a blazing fire. However, the fire that was Karna was consumed by the Arjuna fire. Look where Vikartana's son Karna, after having slain so many atirathas, has himself been laid low on the field, and lies drenched in blood. Choleric, sensitive and a mahatejasvin, he was twice as mighty as any other atiratha. Slain by the wielder of the Gandiva, that incomparable hero now sleeps on the ground, even like another sun.

From fear of the Pandavas, my maharatha sons set great, great Karna at their head while going into battle, like a herd of elephants do their leader, the greatest tusker among them. Alas, like a tiger slain by a lion, or an elephant by another infuriated elephant, that awesome warrior was killed by Savyasachi. Gathered together, Karna's wives, their hair loose and their faces covered with the dust of Kurukshetra, sit wailing and beating their breasts around that noblest of men, that fallen hero.

Thoughts of Karna would haunt Yudhishtira for thirteen years, filling him with dreadful anxiety and robbing him of sleep. Karna was the warrior that the Dharmaraja feared most because he knew that Karna was the one warrior my sons had who could indeed have killed Arjuna. Invincible against all enemies, like Maghavat himself in battle, Karna was like the Badava fire of the pralaya itself, and immovable as Himavat.

That hero became the protector of Dhritarashtra’s son, O Madhava! Alas, deprived of life, he also now lies on the bare ground, like a tree felled by the wind. Look where Karna’s wife, his son Vrishasena’s mother, flings herself again and again on the ground, crying out his name. Listen, she exclaims, “Your guru Bhargava’s curse has surely pursued you, O my lord. And when your chariot wheel was sunk into the ground, the vicious Arjuna cut your magnificent head from your body with his astra. Ah even the greatest skill and might are nothing against what fate wills, for surely otherwise no one could have killed you.”

That woman, the mother of Sushena, cries out piercingly and falls finally in a dead faint for she cannot bear to look at the great Karna prostrate on the ground, his waist still encircled by a wide golden belt. Oh, how grievous it is to look at how scavenging beasts and birds of carrion have reduced that grand and lustrous body into small pieces with fang and claw.

The sight is not gladdening, Krishna, like that of the moon on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight. Falling onto the earth, the hapless woman recovers her senses, rises again, and yet again falls down in a swoon. Grief has its way with her not only on account of her lord having been slain but also on account of the death of her son. Ah, look how she comes and lovingly sniffs Karna’s dead face even like an animal of the wild might do with her mate whom she finds killed by some predator!’”

CANTO 22

"Gandhari says, 'Slain by Bhimasena, look where the lord of Avanti lies, with vultures, jackals and crows feeding on that hero. Though he once had many friends, he now lies now perfectly friendless and alone. Look, Madhusudana, he lies on a Kshtariya's bed after having killed numberless enemies; he lies covered in blood. Jackals, kankas and other carnivores drag him here and there competing for mouthfulls of his flesh. Ah, behold the reversals brought about by Time. Gathered together, his wives also sit around him and wail aloud in grief.

Look at Pratipa's son Balhika, that mighty bowman possessed of great ojas, slain with a broad-headed shaft and lying on the ground like a sleeping tiger. Though dead, his face is still lustrous as a full moon risen on the fifteenth day of the bright fortnight. And there, burning with grief on account of the death of his son, and wanting to keep the vow he swore, Indra's son Arjuna slew the son of Vriddhakshatra. Look upon that Jayadratha who, though protected by the illustrious Drona, was killed by Partha, after Arjuna stormed through eleven akshauhinis of troops. Inauspicious vultures, O Janardana, now feed upon Jayadratha, the lord of the Sindhu-Sauviras, once so full of pride and vigour.

Though his devoted wives seek to protect his corpse, look, Krishna, the carnivores drag his body away into the nearby woods. The Kamboja and

Yavana wives of that mighty-armed lord of the Sindhus and the Sauviras wait upon him to protect him from the feral scavengers.

When, O Janardana, Jayadratha, along with the Kekayas, attempted to ravish Draupadi, he deserved to be slain by the Pandavas. However, out of regard for my daughter Dussala, they set him free. Why, Krishna, did they not show some pity once more for Dussala? That daughter of mine, of tender years, is now crying in dreadful grief. She strikes her body with her own hands and curses the Pandavas. What, O Krishna, can be a greater sorrow to me than that my daughter of tender years should be a widow and all my daughters-in-law should become husbandless?

Ah, look where Dussala, having cast off her grief and fears, runs here and there, dementedly, in search of the head of her husband. He who held up all the Pandavas, save Arjuna, when they wanted to rescue Abhimanyu trapped inside the Chakravyuha, himself succumbed to death. His wives, with faces as beautiful as the moon, now sob, sitting around that irresistible hero who was like an infuriated elephant in battle.'"

CANTO 23

"Gandhari says, 'And there lies Salya, the maternal uncle of Nakula, slain in battle, O lord, by the pious and virtuous Yudhishtira. Everywhere, Salya would boast that he was your equal. Now, that maharatha, king of the Madras, lies dead. When he agreed to be Karna's sarathy, he did his best, as I have heard, to dampen Karna's confidence and sap his vitality to give the Pandavas victory. Alas, behold the smooth face of Salya, lambent as the moon and adorned with eyes like the petals of the lotus, eaten away by crows. There, the tongue of that king, of the complexion of molten gold, has been plucked out of his mouth and is being devoured by birds of carrion.

The women of the royal house of Madra, sobbing and wailing aloud, sit around the body of that king, that ornament of sabhas, now slain by Yudhishtira. Krishna, those women sit around Salya like she-elephants in their season around their great tusker sunk in a swamp. Look at the brave Salya, that giver of protection, foremost of warriors, stretched out on the final bed of Kshatriyas, his body mangled with shafts.

And there, king Bhagadatta of great prowess, the ruler of a mountain kingdom, the foremost of all wielders of the ankusha, the elephant-hook, lies on the ground, his life leaked out of his massive frame. Look at the garland of gold that he still wears on his head, which is still so splendent. Though his body is being eaten away by beasts of prey, that garland still

adorns the glossy locks on his head. Fierce was the battle that took place between this king and Partha, even like that between Sakra and the Asura Vritra. This mighty-armed one, having fought Dhananjaya, son of Pritha, and having reduced him to dire straits, was at last slain by his antagonist.

And there, he who had no equal on earth in heroism and prowess, that achiever of dread and incomparable feats in battle, the incomparable Bhishma, lies. Behold the son of Santanu, O Krishna, that warrior of solar refulgence, stretched on the earth, like the Sun himself fallen from the firmament at the end of the yuga. Having scorched his foes with the fire of his weapons in battle, that valiant warrior, that sun among men, O Kesava, has set like the real sun at dusk. Behold that hero, O Krishna, who in his knowledge of dharma was equal to Devapi himself, now lying on a bed of arrows, ah, so perfectly worthy of Kshatriyas. Having spread his exceptional bed of barbed and unbarbed arrows, that aged hero lies on it like the divine Skanda in his clump of heath. Indeed, the son of Ganga lies, resting his head on that excellent pillow of three arrows given him by the wielder of the Gandiva.

To obey the command of his sire Santanu, this illustrious one drew his vital seed up into his body and kept immaculate brahmacharya. Unrivalled in battle, that son of Santanu now lies there, O Madhava. Of righteous soul and a knower of every dharma through his knowledge of both this world and the next, Bhishma, though mortal, still bears his life in his broken body and breathes like an immortal god upon the earth. When Santanu's son lies on his bed of arrows today, it seems that no other man remains alive on earth that owns learning and prowess competent to achieve great feats in battle. Truthful in speech, this virtuous hero, solicited by the Pandavas, told them the means by which they could achieve his death. Alas, he who revived the line of Kuru that had become extinct, that illustrious one possessed of great intelligence, has left the world with all the Kurus in his company. Of whom, O Madhava, will the Kurus ask of dharma and karma after that bull among men, Devavrata, who is like a god, will have left us for swarga?

And behold Drona, that foremost of Brahmanas, that Acharya of Arjuna, of Satyaki, and of the Kurus, lying dead on the ground. Endued with unearthly tejas, Drona was as conversant with the four kinds of astras as the king of the Devas or Shukra of Bhrigu's race. Through his grace, Bibhatsu the son of Pandu has achieved the most impossible feats. Deprived

of life, that Brahmana now lies on the ground. Finally, the astras refused to come at his bidding. Setting him at their head, the Kauravas challenged the Pandavas; at last, that greatest of bowmen was mangled by weapons. As he careered in battle, scorching his foes in every direction, his course resembled that of a blazing conflagration. Alas, deprived of life, he now lies on the ground like an extinguished fire.

The handle of the bow is yet in his grasp. The leathern fences, O Madhava, still encase his fingers. Though slain, he still looks as if he is alive. The four Vedas, and all the different kinds of weapons, O Krishna, did not abandon that hero even as these never leave the Lord Prajapati himself. His auspicious feet, deserving of every adoration and adored indeed by bards and eulogists and worshipped by disciples, are now gnawed away and taken by jackals. Senseless with grief, Kripi woefully attends on Drona who has been slain by Drupada's son.

Look at that stricken Brahmana woman fallen upon the earth, with her hair in disarray, her face downcast and weeping softly. Alas, she attends in inexpressible sorrow upon her lifeless lord. Many brahmacharis, with matted jata on their heads, also attend on the body of Drona that is still cased in armour rent through with the virile shafts of Dhrishtadyumna. The illustrious and delicate Kripi, forlorn and cheerless, attempts weakly to perform the last rites on the body of her great husband slain in battle.

Now look where the Samavedis have set Drona's sacred body on a strange pyre, and set it alight with all due rites, and are singing the three great Samans. Those brahmacharis, with matted locks on their heads, have piled the funeral pyre of that incomparable Brahmana with bows and arrows and chariot-boxes, O Madhava! That Mahatejasvin Acharya is consumed by the very fuel of war. And all those brahmacharis at once chant the Samans and weep. Having consumed Drona on that fire, like a fire within a fire, those twice-born disciples of his now go toward the banks of the Ganga, walking along the left side of the pyre and having placed Kripi at their head.'"

CANTO 24

"Gandhari says, 'Behold the son of Somadatta, who was killed by Yuyudhana, being pecked at and torn apart by a swarm of predatory birds. Burning with grief at the death of his son, Somadatta, as he lies on the field himself seems to censure the great bowman Satyaki.

There, the mother of Bhurisrava, that faultless woman, overcome with grief, addresses her dead lord Somadatta, "It is your good fortune, O king, that you do not see this terrible carnage of the Bharatas, this extermination of the Kurus, this sight that resembles the scenes that come to pass at the end of the yuga. Through good fortune, you do not see your heroic son, who bore the device of the sacrificial stake on his banner and who performed numerous sacrifices with profuse gifts to all, lying slain on the field of battle. By good fortune, you do not hear the wails of woe uttered by your daughters-in-law, like the screams of a flight of cranes on the bosom of the sea. Bereaved of both husbands and sons, those young women run here and there, in madness, each clad in a single piece of raiment and each with her black tresses all dishevelled. By good fortune, you do not see your son, that tiger among men, without one of his arms, overthrown by Arjuna, and now being devoured by beasts of prey. By good fortune, you do not see today your son slain in battle, and Bhurisrava deprived of life, and your widowed daughters-in-law plunged into grief. Indeed, it is your good fortune that you do not see the golden chattra of that illustrious warrior who had the

sacrificial stake for the device on his banner, torn and broken on the terrace of his chariot. Ah, the black-eyed wives of Bhurisrava indulge in piteous lamentations, surrounding their lord slain by the ruthless Satyaki. Afflicted with grief on account of the slaughter of their lords, those women, weeping copiously, fall on the earth with their faces towards the ground, and now slowly approach you, O Krishna!

'Alas, why did Arjuna of pure deeds commit such a sin, for he struck off the arm of a great, great warrior, who was brave and devoted to the performance of sacrifices, when Bhurisrava was not watching him? And Satyaki committed an even worse sin, for he took the life of a man of restrained soul while our lord had laid down his weapons and sat in prayavrata. Alas, O righteous one, you lie on the ground, slain unfairly by two enemies."

Even thus, O Madhava, do those wives of Bhurisrava cry out to you in their grief. And look, those wives of that tameless warrior, all of slender waists, now take that lopped off arm of their husband onto their laps and sob without restraint.

"Here is that arm which used to invade the girdles, fondle the deep bosoms, and touch the navel, the thighs, and the hips, of fair women, and loosen the ties of the undergarments they wore! Here is that arm which slew foes and dispelled the fears of friends, which gave thousands of kine and exterminated Kshatriyas in battle. In the presence of Vasudeva himself, Arjuna of unstained deeds hacked it off while you fought Satyaki and had that Vrishni at your mercy. What, indeed, will you, O Janardana, say of this great feat of Arjuna while speaking of it in the midst of royal sabhas? What will the diadem-decked Arjuna himself say of it?'"

Censuring you in this way, that most gracious woman has finally fallen silent. Bhurisrava's other wives lament with her as if she were their daughter-in-law.

And there lies the mighty Sakuni, the lord of the Gandharas, slain by Sahadeva. Once, he would be fanned by golden handled chamara whisks, and now birds of carrion fan him with their wings. He was a mayavi, a master sorcerer who could assume a hundred different forms at will; all his maya has been burnt up by the son of Pandu. An expert dice-player, and an expert cheat at the game, it was he who vanquished the naïve Yudhishtira in the Kuru sabha and won his vast kingdom for Duryodhana using his formidable guile. However, now, Pandu's son has won Sakuni's life-breaths.

Look, Krishna, at the swarming numbers of vultures, kites and crows that crowd around my dead brother's corpse.

That expert dice player acquired his expertise, it would seem, for the destruction of my sons; he was the one who kindled the fire of enmity between my sons and the sons of Pandu. He was indeed the key enducer to the slaughter of all these millions of Kshatriyas. And he, too, that evil one, has attained many realms of bliss through the valour he showed on the field of war, and he too died a Kshatriya's death. Madhusudana, knowing my brother, my fear is that he will succeed in fomenting dissensions even in those worlds of felicity, between my children, all of whom are confiding and all too trusting and candid!'"

CANTO 25

"Gandhari says, 'Behold that irresistible ruler of the Kambojas, that bull-necked hero, lying in the dust, O Madhava, though he deserves to be stretched out at his ease on the finest Kamboja blankets. His stricken wife weeps bitterly at the sight of his blood-stained arms, which were once smeared with sandalwood paste. That beautiful woman says, "Even now, adorned with beautiful palms and graceful fingers, these two arms of yours resemble spiked maces, coming within whose clasp, joy never left me for a moment. What will be my end now, O ruler of men, when I am deprived of you?"

Blessed with a melodious voice, the Kamboja queen weeps helplessly and her fine frame quivers with emotion. Look, Krishna, at that bevy of royal women there. Although tired and worn out with the heat, yet beauty does not leave their forms; they are like the unfading garlands the Devas wear that the sun cannot scorch or fade. Behold, O Madhusudana, the heroic ruler of the Kalingas lying the ground with his mighty arms adorned with golden angadas. Behold, O Janardana, those Magadha ladies sobbing helplessly as they stand around Jayatsena, the king of the Magadhas. The yet charming and melodious wails of those long-eyed and sweet-voiced girls, O Krishna, pierce my heart with grief. With all their ornaments put away, and wailing loudly in sorrow, alas, those Magadhan queens who

should be lying in sweet languor on costly beds, now lie tearing their hair on bare ground.

And there, those other women, surrounding their lord, the ruler of the Kosalas, prince Brihadbala, also beat their breasts and lament around the body of their lord. Look where they draw out the terrible arrows with which the mighty Abhimanyu pierced their husband and king; look where, one after the other, they fall onto the ground fainting in grief. The faces of those exquisite women, Krishna, look like faded lotuses.

There, the brave sons of Dhrishtadyumna, of tender years and all adorned with garlands of gold and beautiful angadas, lie, slain by Drona. Like insects on a blazing fire, they have all been incinerated by falling upon Drona, whose chariot was the chamber of fire, having the bow for its flame and shafts and spears and maces for its fuel. Similarly, the five Kekaya brothers, of great courage, and also adorned with beautiful angadas, are lying on the ground, cut down by Drona and with their faces turned towards that hero. Their coats of mail, of the splendour of molten gold, and their tall standards and chariots and garlands, all made of the same metal, shed a bright light on the earth like so many fires.

Look, O Madhava, at king Drupada overthrown in battle by Drona, like a mighty elephant in the forest slain by a great lion. The bright sovereign parasol, white in hue of the king of the Panchalas, shines, O lotus-eyed one, like the moon in the autumn sky. The daughters-in-law and the wives of the old king, afflicted with grief, having burnt his body on a pyre, walk slowly along, keeping the pyre to their right.

And there more women, mindless with sorrow, take away the brave and great Dhrishtaketu, that bull among the Chedis, slain by Drona. This scourge of his enemies, O slayer of Madhu, this great bowman, having baffled many weapons of Drona before the Acharya killed him, now lies there, like a tree uprooted by a mountain wind. Alas, that valiant king of the Chedis, that maharatha Dhrishtaketu, after having slain thousands of foes, lies himself slain. Hrishikesha, the wives of the lord of the Chedis sit around his body, still glowing with black locks and ornate earrings, though torn apart by vultures and ravens. Those best among women set the remains of the prostrate form of the heroic Dhrishtaketu, born of the Dasharha race, on their laps, and sob.

And nearby, look, O Krishna, at Dhrishtaketu's beautiful son, also cut down ruthlessly by Drona with his astras. He never deserted his father while

they battled their enemies together. Mark, O Krishna, not even in death does he abandon his heroic sire. And even thus, my son's son, that slayer of hostile heroes, the mighty-armed Lakshmana, has followed his father Duryodhana out of this world.

Behold, O Kesava, the two brothers of Avanti, Vinda and Anuvinda, lying there on the field, like two blossoming sala trees in the spring uprooted by a tempest. Clad in golden armour and adorned with angadas of gold, they are still armed with swords and bows. Their eyes like those of a bull, and decked with bright garlands, both of them are stretched out lifeless on the field. The Pandavas, O Krishna, and you, are surely invincible, for they and you have escaped from Drona, from Bhishma, from Karna son of Vikartana, from Kripa, from Duryodhana, from the son of Drona, from the maharatha, from Somadatta, from Vikarna, and from the bold Kritavarman.

Ah, look at the reversals brought about by Time! Those bulls among men who could slay the very celestials have themselves been slain. Without doubt, there is nothing too difficult for destiny to bring about, since even these men, these heroes, have been slain by Kshatriya warriors.

Even when you returned before the war to Upaplavya, having failed in your mission to make peace, I knew that my sons all endowed with great prowess were already dead. Santanu's son and the wise Vidura told me then, "Cease to harbour love for your sons!"

What those wise ones then said has not proved vain, for very soon my sons have all been killed and consumed into ashes!'

Vaisampayana continued, "Having said all this, Gandhari is suddenly overwhelmed by sorrow and falls senseless to the ground. Then, rising slowly, and filled once more with the wild wrath of a grief-stricken mother and woman, her heart in turmoil, Gandhari now blames Krishna for everything, for the entire carnage on Kurukshetra.

Gandhari says, 'The Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras, O Krishna, have both been massacred. Whilst they were being exterminated, O Janardana, why were you indifferent to them? You could have prevented the carnage, for nothing is beyond you and your Yadavas. You had the eloquence, and you had the power to effect peace between the warring cousins. Since, Madhusudana, you were deliberately indifferent to this universal slaughter, Mahabaho, you must pay for what you did. By the little punya that I have acquired through waiting dutifully on my husband, by that merit so difficult to attain, I will curse you, O you who wield the discus and the mace.

Since you were indifferent to the fate of the Kurus and the Pandavas, whilst they slew each other, O Govinda, you shall be the slayer of your own kinsmen! In the thirty-sixth year from this one, O Krishna, after causing the slaughter of all your own kinsmen and friends and sons, you will perish in a base and dishonourable manner in the wilderness. The women of your race, deprived of their sons, kinsmen, and friends, shall weep and lament even as these women of the Bharata vamsa do today!'

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing this curse, with a faint smile the Mahatman Krishna says to the venerable Gandhari, 'There is none in the world, save myself, who can possibly exterminate the Vrishnis, for they bear my blood in them and will overrun the earth if they are left alive. I know this well, and indeed I myself will happily make an end to them when the time comes. By cursing me, O Gandhari, you have helped my very cause, O you of the most exalted vratas. Not the Devas, the Danavas or men can kill the haughty Vrishnis. And therefore, the Yadavas must fall by one another's hands.'

The Pandavas are stunned to listen to what Krishna says. Their faces are drained of blood and strange fear courses through their hearts and bodies. Uncanny hopelessness fills them."

CANTO 26

"The Holy One says, 'Arise, arise, O Gandhari, do not set your heart on grief. It is through your own fault that this vast carnage has taken place. Your son Duryodhana was evil, envious and arrogant. By lauding his sinful deeds, you make good of evil. Ruthless and cruel, he was the embodiment of hatred and enmity, and disobedient to the injunctions of the old. Why do you wish to ascribe your own faults to me? Dead or lost, the person that grieves for what has already occurred finds more grief. By indulging in grief, one increases it two-fold.

A Brahmana woman bears children for the practice of austerities; the cow brings forth calves for bearing burdens; the mare brings forth her young for acquiring speed of motion; the Sudra woman bears a child for adding to the number of servitors; the Vaishya woman for adding to the number of keepers of cattle. A Kshatriya princess like you, however, brings forth sons for making war and being killed!'

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words from Krishna, which are disagreeable to her, Gandhari, with heart roiled by grief, remains silent. The Rajarishi Dhritarashtra, however, restraining the grief that arises from folly, says to Yudhishtira, 'If, O son of Pandu, you know it, tell me the number of those that have fallen in this war, as also of those that have escaped with their lives!'

Yudhishtira answers, ‘One billion, six hundred and sixty million and twenty thousand men have fallen in this war. Of the heroes that have escaped, the number is two hundred and forty thousand and one hundred and sixty-five.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Tell me, O mighty-armed, for you know all things, to what ends have those foremost of men attained.’

Yudhishtira say, ‘Those warriors of true prowess that gladly cast off their bodies in fierce battle have all attained regions like those of Indra. Knowing death to be inevitable, they that have encountered it unhappily have attained the companionship of the Gandharvas. Those warriors that have fallen at the edge of weapons, while turning away from the field or begging for quarter, have attained the world of the Guhyakas. Those high-souled warriors who, observant of Kshatriya dharma and regarding flight from battle to be shameful, have fallen, mangled by keen weapons, while advancing unarmed against fighting foes, have all assumed bright forms and attained the regions of Brahma. The remaining, that have randomly met with death on the field of battle, have attained the realm of the Uttara-Kurus.’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Through what power of knowledge, O son, do you see these things like a great tapasvin? Tell me this, O Mahabaho, if you think that I can listen to it without impropriety!’

Yudhishtira says, ‘While at your command I wandered in the forest, I obtained this boon during our tirtha yatra to sacred fords and other holy places and shrines. I met with the Devarishi Lomasa and had from him the boon of spiritual vision. Thus did I gain second sight through the power of knowledge!’

Dhritarashtra says, ‘Our dead must be cremated, with due rites, the bodies of both the friendless and the slain that have friends. What shall we do with those that have none to look after them and that have no sacred fires? The duties and obligations that await us are many. Who are those whose last rites we should perform? O Yudhishtira, will they find realms of blessedness by the merit of their karma, they whose bodies are now being torn apart by vultures and jackals?’

Vaisampayana continued, “Thus addressed, Kunti’s son Yudhishtira of great wisdom commands Sudharma, the priest of the Kauravas, and Dhaumya, and Sanjaya of the Suta varna, and Vidura of profound wisdom, and Yuyutsu of Kuru’s race, and all his servants led by Indrasena, and all

the other Sutas that are with him and says, ‘Have the funeral rites of the slain, numbering thousands, to be duly performed, so that nobody may perish for want of men to take care of them.’

At this command of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, Vidura, Sanjaya, Sudharma, Dhaumya, Indrasena and others collect sandalwood, aloe and other kinds of wood used for cremations, as also ghee, oil, perfumes and costly silken robes and other kinds of cloth, and large heaps of dry wood, and broken chariots and diverse kinds of weapons, cause funeral pyres to be heaped and set alight and then, without haste but with grave dignity, burn, with all the proper rites the slain kings in appropriate order.

They duly cremate upon those fires that blaze forth with libations of clarified butter poured over them in torrents, the bodies of Duryodhana and his hundred brothers, of Salya, and king Bhurisrava; of king Jayadratha and Abhimanyu, O Bhaarata; of Dusasana’s son and Lakshmana and king Dhrishtaketu; of Brihanta and Somadatta and the hundreds of Srinjayas; of king Kshemadhanva and Virata and Drupada; of Sikhandi prince of the Panchalas, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata’s race; of the valiant Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas; of the ruler of the Kosalas, the sons of Draupadi, and Sakuni the son of Subala; of Achala and Vrishaka, and king Bhagadatta; of Karna and his son of great wrath; of those great bowmen, the Kekaya princes, and those mighty warriors, the Trigartas; of Ghatotkacha the prince of rakshasas, and the brother of Baka, of Alambusha, the foremost of night rangers, and king Jalasandha; and of hundreds and thousands of other kings.

The Pitri-medha rites in honour of some of the illustrious dead are performed there, while some sing Samans, and some utter ululating lamentations for the dead. With the loud noise of Samans and Riks, and the lamentations of the women, all living creatures are quite stupefied that night. The funeral fires, smokeless and blazing brightly amid the surrounding darkness, look like luminous planets in the firmament enveloped by clouds. Those among the dead that had come from diverse realms and were utterly friendless are piled together in thousands of heaps and, at the command of Yudhishtira, are burned by Vidura through a large number of servitors, men acting calmly and influenced by goodwill and affection, on pyres of dry wood. Having caused the last rites of all the great slain to be performed, the Kuru king Yudhishtira, setting Dhritarashtra before him, goes towards the river Ganga.”

CANTO 27

Vaisampayana says, "Arrived at the auspicious Ganga full of sacred water, of many great pools along her course, adorned with high banks and broad shores, and having a vast bed, they cast off their ornaments, upper garments, and belts and girdles. The Kuru women, crying and afflicted by fanged grief, offer oblations of water to their sires and grandsons and brothers and kinsmen and sons and revered elders and husbands. Conversant with their duties, they also perform the tarpana, the water-rite, in honour of their friends. While those wives of heroes perform this rite in honour of their heroic lords, the access to the stream turns mild and easy, although these magical paths disappear afterwards. The shores of the stream, though crowded with those wives of heroes, look as broad as the ocean and present a spectacle of gloom and doom.

Then, suddenly, Kunti, O king, in a sudden paroxysm of grief, tearfully says to her sons in a low voice, 'That hero and great bowman, that leader of leaders of chariot divisions, that warrior distinguished by every mark of a Kshatriya, who has been slain by Arjuna in battle; that warrior whom, O sons of Pandu, you sent into the next world, that Suta's child born of Radha, that hero who shone in the midst of his forces like the lord Surya himself, who battled against all of you and your followers, who looked resplendent as he commanded the vast force of Duryodhana, who had no equal on earth for tejas; that hero who preferred glory to life, that utterly fearless warrior

firm in truth and never tired by any exertion, was your eldest brother. Offer tarpana to that eldest brother of yours who was in truth born of me by the God of day; offer oblations of holy water to dead Karna!

Ah, that most tragic hero was born with a pair of earrings and clad in golden armour, and was like Surya himself in splendour!'

It is as if their mother has pierced each of the Pandavas with terrible astras. They either stand benumbed or collapse onto the earth in shock. Then that tiger among men, the great Yudhishtira, sighing like a snake, desperately asks Kunti, 'That Karna, who was like an ocean, having shafts for his billows, his tall standard for his vortex, his own mighty arms for a pair of vast makaras, his massive chariot for his deep lake, and the sound of his palms for his tempestuous roar, and whose impetuosity none could withstand save Dhananjaya—were you the mother of that matchless one? How was that son, resembling a very Deva, born of you?

The prowess of his arms scorched all of us. How, mother, could you conceal him like one hiding a fire within the folds of her cloth? His might of arms was always worshipped by the Dhartarashtras, even as we always worship the might of the wielder of the Gandiva! How was that foremost of mighty men, that first of maharathas, who endured the united force of all lords of earth in battle, how was he a son of yours? Was that greatest of all wielders of weapons our eldest brother? How did you bring forth that child of wonderful splendour? Ah, mother, we have been undone by what you kept hidden from us!

The grief I now feel at Karna's death is a hundred times sharper than what I felt at the death of Abhimanyu and the sons of Draupadi, and the destruction of the Panchalas and the Kurus. Thinking of Karna, it is as if my whole body is on fire. There is nothing we could not have attained, including everything that is in swarga. Alas, this horrible carnage, which has completely destroyed the Kurus, would never have happened if only we had known this secret that you kept!'

Lamenting thus, Yudhishtira breaks into loud sobs; he weeps like a small child. Finally, collecting himself, he offers tarpana to his elder brother, Karna, whom he had never known. All the royal women that throng the banks of the river send up a loud, piercing cry of grief. Yudhishtira has all the wives and other members of Karna's family to be brought before him. Along with them, the Dharmaraja properly performs the water-rites in

honour of his elder brother. Having completed the ceremony, the king, with all his senses and mind agitated, comes out from the waters of Ganga."

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{8}

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In memory of
Padmanabha Vijai Pillai

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PART I

Rajadharmanusasana Parva

CANTO 1

AUM! Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, the foremost of Purushas, and to Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Vaisampayana said, "After offering oblations of water to all their friends and kinsmen, the sons of Pandu, Vidura, Dhritarashtra, and all the Bhaarata women continue to dwell on the banks of the sacred stream, Bhagirathi. They spend the month of mourning outside the Kuru city. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja performs the water-rites, and many great Rishis arrive to see the monarch. Among them are the island-born Vyasa, Narada, Devala, Devasthana and Kanwa, all accompanied by their best disciples.

Many other Munis, wise and expert in the Vedas, Grihastas and Snatakas, also come to meet the Kuru king. Yudhishtira duly worships the Maharishis and seats them on precious carpets. They accept the worship suitable for this period of mourning and impurity, and thousands of them sit in due order around the king. They offer consolation and comfort to the grieving Yudhishtira, king of kings, whose heart is racked by anguish.

After greeting Vyasa and the Rishis, Narada addresses Yudhishtira, the son of Dharma. 'Through the might of your arms and by the grace of Madhava you have righteously won this whole earth, and by your good fortune you have emerged alive from this dreadful war. Observant as you are of the Kshatriya dharma, do you not rejoice, O son of Pandu? Now that you have killed all your enemies and won this victory, will you not gratify your friends, O Rajan? I hope grief does not still afflict you.'

Yudhishtira replies, ‘I have indeed subjugated the whole world, through the might of Krishna’s arms, the grace of the Brahmanas and the strength of Bhima and Arjuna. However, this heavy sorrow is always in my heart, that through my greed I have caused this fearsome carnage of my kinsmen.

Having caused the death of Subhadra’s precious son, and of the sons of Draupadi, O holy one, this victory appears to me to be a defeat. What will my sister-in-law, Subhadra of Vrishni’s race, say to me? What will the people of Dwaraka have to say to Krishna when he returns from here? Again, the thought of Draupadi, who has always been considerate of us, and is now bereaved of her sons and kinsmen, causes me relentless pain.

There is another subject, O Narada, about which I will speak to you. It afflicts me that Kunti kept from us a great and terrible secret: that Karna—strong as ten thousand elephants, Maharatha unrivalled in this world, of leonine pride and gait, of vast intelligence and boundless compassion, whose generosity and liberality were legend—was her son. Born secretly to her, Karna, who kept many high vratas, who was the refuge of the Dhartarashtras, who was sensitive about his honour, whose prowess was irresistible, who was ever ready to repay every injury and always wrathful in battle, who vanquished us in repeated encounters, who was quicksilver in the use of weapons, conversant with every kind of warfare, possessed of great skill and endowed with wonderful valour—was thus, our own brother.

Only while we were offering oblations of water to the dead did Kunti speak of him as the son of Surya. She had placed that glorious infant in a basket made of light wood and committed him to the current of the Ganga. He whom the world regarded as a Suta’s child born of Radha was really the first son of Kunti—our eldest brother by blood. Alas, by coveting the kingdom I have caused my brother to be killed. It is this that burns my limbs, like fire a heap of cotton.

Arjuna of the white steeds did not know Karna for a brother. Neither I nor Bhima, nor the twins, knew him for such. However, he, the great archer, knew we were his brothers. We learnt that our mother Kunti went to him and said, “You are my son! You must make peace with your brothers and join their side in battle.”

The illustrious Karna refused. He said to our mother, “I cannot desert Duryodhana! It would be dishonourable, cruel and ungrateful of me. If I yield to your wishes and make peace with Yudhishtira, people will say that I

am afraid of Arjuna Swetavahana. After I have vanquished Arjuna and Krishna in battle, I will make peace with Dharma's son."

Kunti said again to her magnificent son, "Fight Arjuna, then, but spare my other four princes."

With folded hands, Karna told his trembling mother, "If I ever hold your four other sons' lives in my hands, I will not kill them. Have no doubt, O Devi, that you will continue to have five sons. If Arjuna kills Karna, you will have five. If, on the other hand, I kill Arjuna, you will still have five—including me!"

Wanting the good of us Pandavas, our mother said to him, "Go then, O Karna, do good to your brothers whose weal you always seek."

And with that, Kunti took his leave and returned home.

Arjuna has slain this hero, a brother by a brother! Neither Kunti nor Karna ever disclosed their secret, O lord. And so did Arjuna kill in battle that greatest of Kshatriya bowmen. Only later, Dvijottama, did I learn that he was my brother. Why, I learnt from Kunti that he was the first-born, the eldest among us. How my hearts burns knowing that I caused my brother's death! If I had both Karna and Arjuna on my side, I could have vanquished Krishna himself.

While the evil sons of Dhritarashtra tormented me in the midst of the Kuru sabha, my suddenly risen anger cooled in a moment at the sight of Karna. During that game of dice, even while listening to Karna's harsh and bitter words, uttered from his desire to please Duryodhana, my wrath cooled at the sight of Karna's feet. It seemed to me that Karna's feet resembled the feet of our mother, Kunti! I reflected on this strange likeness for a long time, but I could not fathom it.

Muni, why did the earth swallow the wheels of his chariot during the battle? Why was my brother cursed? You must tell me. I must hear everything from you, O holy one. You know everything in this world, even the past and the future!'"

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, "Thus questioned, the Rishi Narada discloses the manner in which Karna, whom people believed to be a Suta's son, had been cursed.

Narada says, 'It is just as you say, O Bhaarata! Mahabaho, no one could resist either Karna or Arjuna in battle. Listen to me carefully, for what I am about to tell you is unknown even to the gods. Long ago, a question arose about how all the Kshatriyas could be given an opportunity to attain Swarga by dying in battle.

For this, Kunti conceived a child, Karna, in her maidenhood, a son capable of provoking a vast and general war. Endowed with tameless energy, this child came to have the status of a Suta. He acquired the science of weapons from Dronacharya, the foremost descendant of Angirasa's vamsa.

The young man burned with envy seeing the might of Bhimasena, the quickness of Arjuna at archery, your intelligence, Yudhishtira, the humility of the twins, the lifelong friendship between Vasudeva and the Gandivi, and the affection of the people for all of you. Early in life, he had made friends with Duryodhana, partly by accident and partly due to his own nature and the hatred he bore you.

Seeing that Dhananjaya was superior to everyone in the astra shastra, Karna one day approached Drona in private and said to him, "You love us, your pupils, as much as you do your son. I want to acquire the Brahmastra, with all its mantras and the power of withdrawing it, for I want to fight

Arjuna. I pray that through your grace all the masters of weaponry will regard me as a Maharatha."

Drona, from partiality for Arjuna, as well as from his knowledge that Karna had evil in him, replied, "Only a Brahmana who has duly observed all his vows, or a Kshatriya who has practised austere penances, may have the Brahmastra, no other man."

Hearing this, Karna paid Drona obeisance, took his leave and went to Parasurama who lived on the Mahendra mountain. Approaching Rama, he bowed and said, "I am a Brahmana of Bhrigu's vamsa."

This pleased Rama and he welcomed him so kindly, and with such honour, that Karna was overjoyed. While living on the Mahendra mountain, which resembled heaven itself, Karna met and mingled with many Gandharvas, Yakshas and Devas, and duly acquired all their astras, becoming a favourite of the celestial ones and the great Asuras and Rakshasas, too.

One day, O Partha, while Surya's son roved alone along the sea-coast near this asrama, armed with bow and sword, he accidentally slew the homa cow of a learned Brahmavadi who was performing his daily Agnihotra puja.

Karna tried repeatedly to pacify the Brahmana saying, "O holy one, I killed your cow unintentionally, forgive me for what I did!"

But, filled with wrath, the Brahmana cursed him, crying, "Base wretch, you deserve to be killed. Let the fruit of this deed be yours, evil one: that while fighting him whom you are always challenging, and for whose sake you strive so much every day, the earth will swallow the wheels of your chariot. And while you are dazed and helpless, your enemy will cut off your head! Leave me now, vile man. Just as you have heedlessly killed my cow, your enemy too will kill you whilst you are distracted!"

Karna still sought to gratify that foremost of Brahmanas by offering him cattle, wealth and precious gems. The Brahmana, however, said, "Nothing can deflect my curse. Go away or remain here, as you please." Hanging his head in sorrow, Karna returned apprehensively to Rama, pondering what had happened.'"

CANTO 3

"Narada continues, 'Parasurama, tiger of Bhrigu's race, was well pleased with the might of Karna's arms, his affection for him, his self-restraint, and his attention to the needs of his guru. Rama of great tapasya joyfully taught his tapasvi sishya everything about the Brahmastra, along with the mantras for loosing and withdrawing it.

Having acquired this knowledge, and endowed with wonderful prowess, Karna devoted himself with great enthusiasm to the science of weapons, spending his days happily in Bhrigu's asrama. One day, while roaming with Karna in the vicinity of his hermitage, Rama suddenly felt exhausted by the rigorous fasts he had kept. The son of Jamadagni affectionately and familiarly set his head down on Karna's lap and slept soundly.

While his guru was sleeping, a large and frightful insect, which lived on phlegm and fat and flesh and blood, and whose bite was agonizing, dug its teeth into Karna's thigh. Afraid of waking his guru, Karna could neither pluck out and fling away nor kill that insect. O Bhaarata, though it pierced deep into his thigh with its fangs, the son of Surya allowed it to have its way, lest his acharya should awake.

Karna bore the intolerable pain with heroic patience, and continued to hold Bhargava Rama's head on his lap, without making the slightest movement. When finally Karna's blood flowed onto the face of Rama of great tejas, the Bhargava awoke and said in some alarm, "Alas, I have been sullied! What have you done? Tell me the truth without fear!"

Karna told him about the insect's bite and Parasurama beheld the creature, which resembled a minute boar with eight feet, vicious teeth and needle-like bristles. Called Alarka, its limbs had shrunk with fear. As soon as the mighty-armed son of Jamadagni cast his eyes upon it, the creature gave up its life, melting into the very blood which it had drawn.

Then in the sky they saw a Rakshasa of terrible form, dark in hue, with a red neck, who could assume any form at will. Staying upon the clouds, his object fulfilled, the Rakshasa, with folded hands, addressed Rama, "O Mahatapasvin, you have rescued me from the hell I was in. Blessed are you! I adore you. You have saved me!"

Rama asked him, "Who are you, and why did you fall into hell? Tell me."

The Rakshasa said, "Once I was a great Asura called Dansa. In the Krita yuga, O sire, I was of the same age as Bhrigu. I ravished that sage's beloved wife, and in anger your ancestor cursed me, 'Subsisting on urine, fat and phlegm, you will lead a hellish life!' I fell down onto the earth in the form of a hideous insect.'

I asked him, 'When, O Brahmana, will this curse end?'

Bhrigu replied, 'This curse will end through Rama of my race.' Since then I have been living the life of an unclean soul. Righteous one, you have rescued me from that sinful life."

With these words, the great Rakshasa bowed to Rama and vanished. Now Rama turned in wrath on Karna: "Fool, no Brahmana could endure such agony. Your patience is that of a Kshatriya. Tell me the real truth about yourself and who you are."

Karna, fearing a curse and wanting to mollify his master, replied, "O Bhargava, know me for a Sutaputra. People call me Radheya Karna, the son of Radha. I came here in all humility, only from a desire to acquire your astras from you. A revered guru in the Vedas and other branches of knowledge is like one's father, and it was for this that I told you that I was a Brahmana, one of your own varna."

To the unhappy and trembling Karna, prostrate with folded hands upon the earth, Jamadagnya, smiling though his anger, said, "Since you are not a Brahmana and have been false, and since you came here from your greed for weapons, O wretch, know that when you are engaged in battle with a warrior equal to yourself, and death is upon you, this Brahmastra will fade from your memory, and will not appear at your bidding. However, on earth,

no Kshatriya will be your equal in battle. Go now! This is no place for a liar like you."

Humbly taking his dismissal, Karna came away. Arriving then before Duryodhana, he said, "I have mastered all the astras!"""

CANTO 4

"Narada says, 'Having thus obtained weapons from Parasurama of Bhrigu's race, Karna began to pass his days pleasurably in the company of Duryodhana.

About this time, Chitrangada, the ruler of the country of the Kalingas, held a swayamvara for his daughter in his opulent capital city of Rajapura. Hundreds of kings travelled there to try and win the hand of the princess. Hearing of the contest, Duryodhana too went to the city in his golden chariot, taking Karna with him.

Among those assembled were Sisupala, Jarasandha, Bhishmaka, Vakra, Kapotaroman, Nila, Rukmi of great prowess, Sringa the ruler of the kingdom of women, Asoka, Satadhanwan and the heroic king of the Bhojas. Besides these, O Yudhishtira, many others from the countries of the south, many master warriors of the Mlechcha tribes, and many rulers from the east and the north also came there. With their manly, glowing bodies, adorned with splendid golden angadas, all of them were like tigers.

After the kings had all taken their seats, the maiden princess, accompanied by her nursemaid and a guard of eunuchs, entered the arena. As she circled the arena, the names of each of the kings present were recited to her as she approached each one.

When the fair princess passed over Duryodhana, the son of Dhritarashtra of Kuru's vamsa could not brook her rejection. Disregarding all the kings, he commanded the princess to stop. Intoxicated with the pride of power, and relying upon Bhishma and Drona, Duryodhana abducted the

young woman, forcing her into his chariot. Karna, great hero, riding his own chariot, armed with a sword, clad in mail, and with his fingers cased in leather fingerlets, rode just behind Duryodhana.

There was an uproar among the kings, all of whom gathered ready for battle. They shouted “Put on your mail! Let the chariots be made ready!”

Enraged, they pursued Karna and Duryodhana, showering arrows down on them like masses of clouds pouring rain upon two hills. Karna kept cutting down all their bows and arrows with sure, single shafts of his own. Some of the Kshatriyas became bowless; some rushed on, bows in hand; some were on the point of shooting their arrows, and some flew after the two, armed with spears and maces.

The dexterous Karna, foremost of all bowmen, crushed them all. He killed many of their charioteers until, vanquished, those lords of the earth turned away crestfallen from the battle. Protected by Karna, Duryodhana forged on with a joyful heart, bringing the princess home with him to Hastinapura.’”

CANTO 5

"Narada continues, 'Hearing of Karna's legendary might, the king of the Magadhas, Jarasandha, challenged him to single combat. A fierce battle took place between them and both masters of the devastras attacked each other with diverse unearthly missiles. Finally, when they had exhausted their arrows, broken their bows and swords and lost their chariots, the two Mahayoddhas fought with bare hands.

Karna quickly prevailed and could have severed into two his antagonist's body, once united by Jara. Finding himself in mortal danger, Jarasandha gladly made peace with Karna: "Enough! I submit."

Out of friendship he then gifted Karna the town of Malini. Until then, Karna, tiger among men and scourge of all foes, had been king only of the Angas, but from then onwards, the Parantapa began to rule over Champa too, which, as you know, had the approval of Duryodhana.

Thus Karna became famed on earth for the valour of his arms. When, for your sake, Indra, king of the Devas, tricked him with divya maya and begged him for the kundala and kavacha with which he was born, Karna gave away those precious talismans that safeguarded his life. Once Karna had been deprived of his earrings and divested of his natural armour, Arjuna was able to kill him in Krishna's presence.

A Brahmana's curse; the curse of the illustrious Parasurama; the boon granted to Kunti; the illusion with which Indra deceived him; his humiliation by Bhishma, who mockingly called him an ardharatha, half a chariot-warrior, at the naming of Rathas and Atirathas; the undermining of

his confidence by the sharp-tongued Salya; Krishna's strategy; and lastly, the devastras which Arjuna had received from Rudra, Indra, Yama, Varuna, Kubera, Drona and the illustrious Kripa: for these many reasons the wielder of the Gandiva succeeded in killing Vikartana's magnificent son, Karna, resplendent as Surya himself.

Ah, your brother had been cursed and beguiled by many. Yet, because he has fallen in battle you should not grieve for him, Naravyaghra!'"

CANTO 6

Vaisampayana said, "Having said these words, the Devarishi Narada falls silent. Filled with sorrow, Rajarishi Yudhishtira plunges into deep dejection. Seeing him sighing like a snake, unmanned by sorrow and sobbing, Kunti, herself quite deranged with grief, tries to console him.

She says gravely and gently, 'Mahabaho, Yudhishtira, it does not become you to mourn like this. You of great wisdom, kill this sorrow of yours, and listen to me. Before the war, I told Karna that you are his brother. Surya Deva also appeared to him in a dream and again in my presence, and counselled him like a well-wisher solicitous of his good. But neither Surya nor I could change his mind or sway his loyalty away from Duryodhana. It was fate that made him your inveterate enemy, bent upon doing you all harm and I, too, gave up trying to reason with him.'

Yudhishtira is like a smouldering fire, overcome with anxiety and despair, to think of his dead sons, grandsons, kinsmen and friends, and most of all of Karna. Tears burning his eyes, he says to his mother, 'This great tragedy has overtaken us because you kept your secret from me!'

Then, in his terrible sorrow, that mighty king of dharma of blazing tejas, curses all the women of the world: 'From now on, no woman will succeed in keeping a secret!'

Again, the king thinks of his slain sons and grandsons and other kinsmen and friends and is plunged in intolerable woe. The wisest of kings resembles a fire covered with smoke, as despair overpowers him."

CANTO 7

Vaisampayana said, "With a troubled and sorrowful heart, Dharmatma Yudhishtira begins to grieve for the mighty Maharatha, Karna.

Sighing repeatedly, he says to his brother, 'O Arjuna, had we been beggars in the cities of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, this miserable end would not be ours that we have achieved by exterminating our kinsmen. Our enemies, the Kurus, have attained Swarga by purifying themselves in battle, while we who are guilty of slaughtering our kinsmen have lost all the purusharthas, and have no right to the fruits of dharma.

A curse on the famous might, valour and wrath of Kshatriyas! It is on account of these that tragedy has overtaken us. Blessed are forgiveness, self-restraint, purity, renunciation and humility, abstention from causing injury, and truthfulness of speech on all occasions, such as Rishis and Munis practise. Full of pride and arrogance, we have fallen into this plight from greed, recklessness and a desire to enjoy the fruits of power.

Looking at our kinsmen slain on the field of battle, such is our grief that not even sovereignty over the three worlds will make us happy. Alas, for worldly reasons we sinfully slew those noble lords who did not deserve to die at our hands; we are alive, but deprived of friends and stripped of the very meaning of life. Like a pack of dogs fighting over a piece of meat, we have been overtaken by a great disaster. And that piece of meat means nothing to us. It is fit to be thrown away.

They who have been slain did not deserve to die, not for the sake of mountains of gold or all the horses and kine in the entire world. Filled with

envy and greed, and swayed by anger and pleasure, all of them are now dead and gone to Yamaloka.

Fathers practise asceticism and brahmacharya, truth and renunciation, in the hope of getting sons blessed with every kind of prosperity. So, too, with fasts, sacrifices, vows, sacred rites and auspicious ceremonies, mothers conceive and carry their offspring, anxiously hoping for a safe delivery and wondering, “Will they be born safely, grow in might and be honoured on earth? Will they be able to give us happiness in this world and the next?”

Alas, those mothers have had to abandon all their expectations now that their sons, glorying in youth and resplendent with ornaments, have been slain. Without having enjoyed the pleasures of this world, without having paid the debts they owed to their parents and to the gods, they have gone to Yamaloka. Alas, O my mother, those kings have been slain at just the time when their parents expected to reap the fruits of their might and wealth.

They were always governed by envy and greed for earthly pleasures, and slaves to rage and desire. Because of their evil deeds, they could never enjoy the fruits of victory. I believe that all the Panchalas and the Kurus that have fallen in this battle, those slain as well as those who slew them, have perished without reaching Swarga as they should have in the normal course. The people regard us as the cause of the destruction of the world, although it was the sons of Dhritarashtra who were actually responsible. Duryodhana was always cunning, always evil and deceitful. Although we never offended him, he always treated us perfidiously. Yet, we have not vanquished them, nor have they vanquished us. The Dhartarashtras could not enjoy this earth, their costly gemstones and well-filled treasury, or their vast territories, women or music. They did not heed the counsels of ministers, their friends and men learned in the scriptures. Their hatred for us consumed them and denied them happiness and contentment. Seeing our prosperity, Duryodhana became envious, growing pale and emaciated, and Sakuni reported this to King Dhritarashtra. As a doting father, Dhritarashtra tolerated his vile policy, disregarding the advice of Vidura and Ganga’s noble son Bhishma to restrain his wicked and covetous son Duryodhana, who was entirely governed by his passions. The king has met with destruction, just like me.

Beyond doubt, Suyodhana has tarnished his blazing fame by causing the death of his brothers and bringing terrible grief to his parents. What other Kshatriya would use such language against his kinsmen as he did, in the presence of Panchali? Because of our evil star, Duryodhana, our very race

has perished. We have killed those whom we should not have slain, and thereby incurred the censure of the world. Having installed this sinner as king, Dhritarashtra grieves today. We have slain our heroic foes and taken their possessions and kingdom. It has pacified our anger but, ah, my grief stupefies me!

O Dhananjaya, we can only make amends by auspicious deeds, by confessing to all that we have sinned, by repentance, by alms-giving, by penances, by journeys to tirthas after renouncing everything, by constant meditation on the shastras. Of all these, the Srutis aver that he who practises renunciation escapes from birth and death, and attains Brahman. So, O Arjuna, with your leave, I will go to the forest, casting off all worldly attachments, adopting mauna, and practising Gyana Yoga, the path of wisdom.

The Srutis declare, and I have seen with my eyes, that a man with worldly desires can never find any kind of punya. I have myself committed this sin which, as the Srutis have said, causes the cycle of samsara. Abandoning my entire kingdom, and my worldy possessions, I shall go to the forest, escaping from the ties of the world, freed from grief and attachment.

I beg you, O Kurusthama, rule this earth, to which you have restored peace, and which you have divested of all evil, for I have no need for kingdom or for pleasure.'

Having said these words, Yudhishtira stops. His younger brother Arjuna then addresses him in the following words."

CANTO 8

Vaisampayana said, "Like one unwilling to forgive an insult, the tejasvin Arjuna, betraying some fierceness but smiling the while, says gravely, 'It grieves me to see the distress that urges you to abandon this great prosperity which you have gained after such a superhuman victory. Having killed your enemies, and having conquered the world legitimately through adherence to your svadharma, why should you abandon everything through fickleness of heart?

Where on earth has an impotent or an irresolute man ever acquired sovereignty? Why then did you, in blind rage, kill all the kings of the world? He who aspires to live like a sannyasi will not want to enjoy the good things of the world. Poor and stripped of his wealth, he can never win fame or acquire sons and possess great and noble animals. O king, if you abandon this vast kingdom and live like a wretched mendicant, what will the world say of you?

Why do you want to renounce your wealth and power, and lead the life of a sadhu; you, born a king? Having conquered the whole world, do you really wish from folly to live in the forest, abandoning all things of artha and kama?

If you take vanavasa, in your absence evil men will destroy yagnas, and the stain of that desecration will certainly be yours. King Nahusha, having committed many base sins in a state of poverty, gave up his mendicancy and proclaimed that poverty is for vanaprasthas.

Making no provision for the morrow is a practice for Rishis, as you know. Kshatriya dharma depends entirely on wealth, and one who robs another of wealth, robs him of his dharma as well. Who among us, O king, would forgive such robbery if it is practised against him? A poor man, even if he is only an onlooker, is falsely accused of a crime. Poverty is a sin and it is wrong for you to applaud it.

The fallen man, O king, also grieves like a poor man. I do not see the difference between them. All kinds of punya and karma flow from the possession of great wealth, all religious performances, all pleasures, and Swarga itself! Without wealth, a man cannot find the means of sustaining existence. The karma of a man of small wit, a fool who allows himself to be stripped of his wealth, is dried up like shallow streams in the summer. He who has wealth has friends and relatives, and we regard him as a worthy and accomplished man in the world. On the other hand, if a man without wealth wants to achieve any purpose, he meets with failure.

Wealth attracts wealth, as tame elephants entice wild ones into captivity. Religious acts, pleasures, joy, courage, wrath, learning and dignity, all these proceed from wealth, O king! From wealth one acquires family honour, and increases one's religious merit. He who is without wealth has neither this world, nor the next, O best of men. He cannot perform deeds of dharma, for these spring from wealth like rivers from a mountain.

He who has few possessions in terms of horses and cows, servants and guests is truly leaner than an emaciated man. Judge truly, O king, by the conduct of the Devas and the Danavas who forever wish to slaughter their kinsmen, the Asuras. If one did not regard as righteous the appropriation of wealth belonging to others, how would kings practise their dharma on this earth?

The sages have in the Vedas laid down this injunction: that kings should live reciting the three Vedas every day, seek to acquire wealth, and carefully perform sacrifices with the wealth thus acquired.

When the gods have obtained footing in Swarga and won their prosperity through great battles, what fault can there be in such strife? The Devas act in this way, and the eternal precepts of the Vedas sanction it.

To learn, teach, sacrifice and assist at others' yagnas, these are our principal duties. The wealth that kings plunder becomes the means of their prosperity, and that has never been obtained without some injury to others. The reason why kings conquer this world is to acquire riches, and that

appropriated wealth becomes as much theirs as the riches claimed by sons of their sires. The Rajarishis who have gone to Swarga have declared this to be the royal dharma, for, like water flowing forth from a replete reservoir, wealth runs in every direction from the treasuries of kings.

This earth which once belonged to king Dilipa, Nahusha, Ambarisha and Mandhatri, now belongs to you! You should perform a great yagna, O Rajan, making generous gifts of every kind, spending a vast quantity of the earth's produce, or else the sins of this kingdom will be upon you. The subjects whose king performs an Asvamedha yagna with bountiful gifts, all become purified of sin and sanctified by attending the ablutions at the end of the yagna.

Vishwarupa Mahadeva, in a great sacrifice requiring libations of all kinds of flesh, poured all creatures as sacrificial offerings into the fire and then his own self. Eternal is this auspicious path, for one can never destroy its fruits. This is the great path called Dasaratha, and if you abandon it, O Rajan, what other course will you take?'"

CANTO 9

"Yudhishtira says, 'For a little while, O Arjuna, if you were to concentrate your attention and fix your mind and inner hearing on your antaratma, you would approve of what I am about to say. Abandoning all worldly possessions and pleasures, I will follow the path of dharma—but I will not tread the path that you recommend. Regardless of whether you ask me or not, I will show you the only path that is auspicious and that one should walk.

Renouncing the pleasures and activities of the world of men, I will perform mahatapasya, living on fruit and roots in the forest and wandering with the animals that have their home there. Performing yagnas, pouring libations into the sacred fire at the proper times, morning and evening, I will reduce my body through starvation and, with matted hair, covering myself with skins, enduring cold, wind, heat, hunger, thirst and toil, I will emaciate myself with tapasya as laid down in our shastras.

I will daily listen to the clear strains of the free and joyful birds and animals living in the forest, charming to the heart and the ear. I will enjoy the fragrance of flower-laden trees and creepers, and the varied fruits that grow in the forest. I will spend my time in the company of its many excellent sannyasis. I will not do the slightest injury to any living creature anywhere.

Leading a reclusive life and devoting myself to contemplation, I will live upon ripe and unripe fruits and gratify the Pitris and the Devas with offerings of wild fruits, spring water and grateful hymns. Observing in this

way the austere regulations of a forest life, I will pass my days calmly awaiting death or, living alone in silence, with my head shaved clean. I will obtain my food by begging fruit each day of only one tree.

Smearing my body with ashes, and finding shelter in abandoned houses, or lying at the foot of trees, I will cast off all things, dear or hateful. Aloof from both grief and joy, regarding with equanimity censure and applause, hope and affliction, and prevailing over all the works of maya, I will live in detachment: following mauna vrata, assuming the outward form of a blind and deaf idiot, living in contentment and deriving happiness from my own soul. Without doing the least injury to any of the four kinds of moving and unmoving creatures, I will behave equally towards all, be they conscious of dharma or merely following the dictates of their senses.

I will not jeer or frown at anybody and, restraining all my senses, always be of cheerful aspect. Asking no one for directions, I will journey along any path that I happen to meet, taking no note of the country or the points of the compass or looking behind me, divesting myself of desire and anger, turning my gaze inwards and casting off pride of soul and body.

Nature always walks ahead; thus, food and drink will somehow come. I will not think of those pairs of opposites that stand in the way of such a life. If I fail to find pure food in a small measure in one house, I will go to other homes. I shall go to seven houses in succession to satisfy my hunger. When the smoke from a house no longer issues forth, its hearth-fires having been extinguished; when husking-rods have been kept aside, and all the inmates have eaten; when mendicants and guests cease to wander, I will go and beg for alms at two, three or five houses at the most.

I will wander over the earth having broken the bonds of desire and, preserving equanimity in success and failure, become a tapasvin, and behave as one who is neither fond of life nor at the point of death: viewing both with equal indifference.

If a man strikes off one of my arms, and another smears the other arm with sandal-wood paste, I will not wish either evil to the one nor good to the other. The only acts I perform will be to open and shut my eyes and take as much food and drink as will barely sustain life in my body. Without ever being attached to action, and always restraining the functions of the senses, I will give up all desires and cleanse the soul of every impurity. Freed from all attachments and tearing off all bonds, I will live free as the wind and enjoy everlasting contentment.

Impelled by desire, and from ignorance, I have committed great sins. Many grihastas performing both auspicious and inauspicious acts are yoked to the wheel of karma, maintaining their wives, children and kinsmen, all bound to them in relations of cause and effect. When they die they take upon themselves all the effects of their sins, for none but the actual doer is burdened with the consequences of his deeds. Bound by karma, men come into this ever-turning wheel of life, are born again and again, and, being born, meet their fellow men.

He is sure to find happiness who abandons the worldly course of life, which is really a fleeting illusion, though it seems eternal, and is afflicted by birth, death, decrepitude, disease and pain. When the very Devas and great Rishis, who understand the law of karma, fall down from heaven or from their positions of eminence, who would wish to have even heavenly prosperity? Insignificant kings, having found success through diverse means, often slay another king through some contrivance.

Through reflection this nectar of wisdom has come to me and, having attained it, I want to find a permanent, eternal and unchangeable place for myself. By adopting this fearless path of life, I will make an end to this physical frame that is subject to birth, death, decrepitude, disease and pain.'"

CANTO 10

"Bhimasena says, 'Your understanding, Rajan, has become blind to the truth, like that of a foolish and hollow chanter of the Vedas. If you criticize the dharma of kings and want to lead a life of idleness, O Bharatarishabha, you had no reason to destroy the Dhartarashtras.

Do we not find in the Kshatriyas forgiveness and compassion, pity and mercy? If we had known that this was your intention, we would have never taken up arms or slain a single man. We would have subsisted on alms until death took us, and this terrible war between the rulers of the earth would have never been fought.

The learned have said that this mobile and immobile world is the object of enjoyment for the strong, and that the Kshatriya's duty is to eliminate all who stand in the way of the one assuming the sovereignty of the earth. Accordingly, we killed all those who stood as enemies of our kingdom, so that by adherence to our dharma we now rule this earth. Govern it righteously, O Yudhisthtira.

To refuse the kingdom now is to be like the man who, having dug a well, stops his work before finding water and comes up covered in mud; or, like the man who, having climbed up a tall tree and taken the honey, dies before tasting it. It is to be like one who, having set out on a long journey, turns back in despair short of his destination; or like one who, having slain all his enemies, O Pandava, falls by his own hand. It is to be like the hungry man who, having obtained food, refuses to eat it, or like a man under the

influence of kama who, having obtained a woman reciprocating his passion, refuses to take her.

We follow you, O king of feeble understanding, because you are our eldest brother, and you have made us objects of censure. We are all maharathas, accomplished in knowledge and endowed with great energy, yet we are obedient to the words of a eunuch, as though we were entirely helpless. We are the refuge of the helpless but, when the people see us like this, they will think we are impotent.

Consider what I say. The shastras decree that only in times of distress should aged and weak kings, or those defeated by enemies, adopt a life of renunciation. Men of wisdom, therefore, will not applaud renunciation as the dharma of a Kshatriya but regard that course of life as a loss of virtue.

How can the true Kshatriyas condemn these duties? Indeed, if these obligations be blameworthy, why should Ishwara not be censured? It is only the poor and non-believers who support this interpretation of the Vedas, that a Kshatriya should take sannyasa. In reality, a Kshatriya who adopts the life of a sannyasi fails to support life by his prowess and exertions, and thereby fails in his dharma.

Only that man who cannot support his sons and grandsons and worship the Devas, Rishis, Atithis and Pitris, can happily lead the life of a solitary hermit in the forest. Just as the deer, boars and birds, though they lead a forest life, cannot attain heaven, able Kshatriyas who fail to exert their power cannot attain Swarga by becoming sannyasis. There are other ways for them to seek religious merit.

If anyone were to gain success from renunciation, then mountains and trees would surely have it, for are all Brahmacharins who lead such lives, injuring no one and remaining always aloof from worldliness. If it be the truth that a man's success depends upon his own lot in life and not upon that of others, then, as a Kshatriya, you should take yourself to a life of action.

If they who only fill their own stomachs could attain success, then all aquatic creatures would be successful, for they have no one to support but themselves. Look, the world moves on, with every creature in it employed in karma proper to its nature. And so, you must adopt a life of action, for the man of inaction can never prosper.'"

CANTO 11

"Arjuna says, 'In this regard, O Bharatarishabha, an itihasa is told of a discourse between certain sannyasis and Sakra. A number of well-born Brahmana youths, foolish and immature, abandoning their homes, left for vanavasa. Thinking that this would be a virtuous path, these rich youths wanted to live as Brahmacharins, and abandoned their brothers and parents. It so happened that Indra felt pity for them and, assuming the form of a golden bird, the holy Sakra addressed them, saying, "Men who perform yagnas and share the leftover sacrificial food acquire great punya and their lives are praiseworthy. Having accomplished their purushartha, these virtuous men attain the highest end."

The Rishis said, "Look, this bird lauds those who subsist upon the leftovers (avasesha) of yagnas, and tells us this because we live upon such leftovers."

The bird replied, "I do not praise you. You are filthy and impure, and living on refuse renders you vile, for you do not subsist upon the remnants of sacrifice."

The Rishis said, "We regard this course of our life to be blessed. Tell us, O bird, what is good for us. Your words inspire us."

The bird said, "If you do not lose faith in me by fighting against your better selves, I will advise you on what is true and beneficial."

The Rishis said, "We will listen to your words, for the different paths are all known to you, O Dharmatman, and we are ready to obey your commands. Instruct us."

The bird said, “Among quadrupeds, the cow is the foremost; among metals, gold; among words, mantras; and among those who walk on two legs, Brahmanas. These mantras regulate all the rites of a Brahmana’s life, beginning with those concerning gyana and the period after it, and ending with those concerning death and cremation. The Vedic rites are his foremost sacrifice and his path to Swarga. If it were not so, how could those in quest of heaven find what they seek through mantras?

He who, in this world, worships his soul, firmly regarding it to be a particular Deva, gains success consistent with the nature of that God. The seasons measured by fortnights lead to the sun, the moon, or the stars. Depending upon the action, these three kinds of success, are desired by every man.

The grihasta’s life is superior and sacred and is called the domain for the cultivation of success. What paths do these men take that are against action? Foolish and destitute, they incur sin because they live by abandoning the eternal paths of the Devas, Rishis and Brahmanas and taking instead to the paths disapproved of by the Srutis.

There is a law in the mantras which says, ‘O Sacrificer, perform the sacrifice represented by gifts of valuable things. I will give you happiness in the form of sons, kine and Swarga!’ To live thus in accordance with the shastras is said to be the highest tapas of the tapasvin. And so you should perform yagnas and tapasya in the form of gifts. The due performance of these eternal duties—the worship of the Devas, the study of the Vedas, the gratification of the Pitris, and respectful services to the gurus—are called mahatapasya.

By performing these arduous penances, the Devas have obtained the highest glory and power. And I tell you to bear the burden of the duties of the grihasta. Without doubt, tapasya is the foremost of all things and is the root of all creatures; however, it is to be practised by leading the life of a grihasta, upon which everything depends.

They who eat the leftovers of feasts, after duly apportioning the food morning and evening among kinsmen, attain ends that are hard indeed to achieve. They are called eaters of the remnants of feasts who eat after having served Sadasyas, Devas, Rishis and kinsmen.

Thus, those who observe their svadharma, who keep difficult vratas and are truthful in speech become objects of great respect in the world, with their own faith exceptionally strengthened. Free from pride, these achievers

of the most strenuous feats go to Swarga and live for endless time in the realms of Sakra."'

Arjuna continues 'Hearing those words, beneficial and full of righteousness, those Rishis abandoned the path of renunciation, saying, "There is nothing in it," and became grihastas. Therefore, O Dharmarajan, calling to your aid that same ananta gyana, rule the wide world that is now free of your enemies.'"

CANTO 12

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of Arjuna, O Parantapa, the mighty-armed and broad-chested Nakula, bronzed of skin, wise and moderate in speech, looked at the king, the foremost of all dharma purushas, and spoke, appealing to his brother's heart.

Nakula said, 'The very gods have established their fires in the region called Visakha-yupa, O Rajan, so you know that the Devas themselves depend upon the fruits of action. The Pitris that support life by dispensing rain on earth even to all disbelievers, by observing the laws of Ishwara as declared in the Vedas, are engaged in karma. Those who reject the declaration of the Vedas recommending action are godless, while the man who follows the path of the Devas attains, O Bhaarata, the highest realms of heaven.

The grihasta's life, all men acquainted with Vedic truths say, is superior to all the other modes of life. Knowing this, the man who restrains his soul, O Rajan, and gives away his righteously acquired wealth in yagnas to Brahmanas well versed in the Vedas is regarded as the true renouncer. However, he who disregards the life of a grihasta, the source of much happiness, and attempts to leap to the next asrama of life, that of a sannyasi, moves in darkness.

The man who roves the world homeless, O Kaunteya, a mendicant who has the foot of a tree for his shelter, who observes the mauna vrata, never cooks for himself, and seeks to restrain all the functions of his senses, is actually a man who has given up the vows of a sannyasi. The Brahmana

who, disregarding anger and joy, and especially deceit, employs all his time in the study of the Vedas, is actually turning away from the observance of the vows of a sannyasi.

The four different varnasramas were at one time weighed in the balance. The wise have said that when grihasta was placed on one side of the scale, it required the three others to be placed on the other to counterbalance it. Observing the result of this examination, and seeing further that domesticity alone contains both heaven and pleasure, grihastasrama became the way of the greatest Rishis and the refuge of all men conversant with the ways of the world.

Therefore, O Bharatarishabha, he who adopts the way of the grihasta, thinking it to be his duty, and relinquishing all desire for the fruits thereof, is a real sannyasi, and not the man of clouded understanding who goes into the vana abandoning his home and its surroundings. A man who, in the garb of dharma, fails to vanquish his desires even as a vanaprastha, is bound by grim Yama with his deadly noose round the sinner's neck.

The karma that is performed from vanity is said to be unproductive, while the karma done from a spirit of renunciation always bears abundant fruit. Tranquillity, self-restraint, fortitude, truth, purity, simplicity, sacrifice, perseverance and righteousness are regarded as virtues recommended by the greatest Rishis. The deeds of a grihasta, it is said, are intended for Pitris, Devas and Sadasyas.

In this varnasrama alone, O Rajan, are the three-fold aims of dharma, artha and kama to be attained. The renouncer who unswervingly adheres to this mode of life, in which one is free to perform all karma, does not encounter ruin either here or hereafter.

The sinless Ishwara created living beings with the intention that they would adore him through yagnas, which include generous gifts. Creepers, trees, leaf-shedding herbs, animals that are clean and ghrita were created to be the ingredients of the yagna. For a grihasta, the performance of a yagna is fraught with impediments. That is why this asrama is said to be exceedingly difficult, well-nigh unattainable. Grihastas who possess wealth and corn and animals but do not perform yagnas earn eternal sin, O Rajan.

Amongst Rishis, there are some that regard the study of the Vedas to be a sacrifice, and others that regard dhyana to be a great sacrifice which they perform in their minds. O Rajan, the very gods covet the companionship of

a regenerate man who, as a result of treading the path of dhyana, has become equal to Brahman.

By refusing to spend for yagnas the diverse kinds of wealth that you have taken from your enemies, you are only displaying your want of faith. I have never seen a king in the observance of grihastasrama renounce his wealth in any way but the Rajasuya, the Aswamedha, and other kinds of great sacrifices. Like Sakra, the king of the Devas, O Rajan, perform these other sacrifices that are praised by the Brahmanas.

The king through whose heedlessness subjects are plundered by robbers, and who does not offer protection to those whom he is called upon to rule, is said to be the very embodiment of the demon Kali. If, without giving away horses, kine and female slaves, elephants adorned with trappings, and villages, populous lands, fields, and houses to Brahmanas, we take vanavasa with our hearts harbouring unfriendly feeling towards relatives, we will become such Kalis among Kshatriyas. Kshatriyas who do not practise charity and give protection to others incur great sin. Sorrow is their portion hereafter, not bliss.

If, O lord, you take to a wandering life without performing mahayagnas and the due rites in honour of your deceased ancestors, without bathing in sacred tirthas, you will meet with destruction like a small cloud separated from a mass and shredded by the winds. You will fall away from both worlds and have to be born as a Pisacha.

A man becomes a true sannyasi by casting off every internal and external attachment, not merely by abandoning his home to live in the forest. A Brahmana who lives observing these laws in which there are no impediments does not fall from this or the other world. Observing one's svadharma, duties respected by the ancients and practised by the best of men, who would grieve for having slain prosperous enemies in war, like Sakra razing the armies of the Daityas?

Having observed the Kshatriya dharma and subjugated the world through your prowess, O Rajan, and having made gifts to those who know the Vedas, you can go to realms higher than heaven. It does not become you, O Kaunteya, to indulge in grief.'"

CANTO 13

"Sahadeva says, 'O Bhaarata, one does not attain felicity by renouncing all external objects, or by discarding mental attachments. Let our enemies enjoy the religious merit and happiness that come to one who has cast off worldly things but whose mind still covets them! On the other hand, let our friends enjoy the religious merit and happiness that come to him who rules the earth, having relinquished all internal attachments.

The word *mama*—mine—is Yama, Death's self; while the opposite, *na-mama*—not mine—is eternal Brahman's. Brahman and Yama, O Rajan, entering invisibly into every soul, cause all creatures to act. If this entity that is called Atman is never subject to destruction, then destroying the bodies of living men cannot make one guilty of murder. If, on the other hand, the Atman and the body of a being are born or destroyed together, then the rites and deeds prescribed by the shastras would be futile.

Therefore, driving away all doubts about the immortality of the Atman, the man of intelligence should adopt that path which the men of dharma of ancient times have ever trodden. Life is certainly fruitless for a king who, having acquired the entire earth with its mobile and immobile creatures, does not enjoy it. As for the vanaprastha who lives upon wild fruits and roots, but whose attachment to things of the earth has not ceased, such a one, O king, lives within the jaws of death.

Look, O Bhaarata, the hearts and the outward forms of all creatures are but manifestations of yourself. They who look upon all creatures as their

own selves escape the great fear of destruction. You are my father and my protector; you are my brother, my elder and guru. So, O lord of the earth, forgive these confused and sorrowful utterances of a grief-stricken one, which I have spoken out of my love for you.'"

CANTO 14

Vaisampayana said, “When Kunti’s son, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, remains silent after listening to his brothers tell these truths of the Vedas, the noble, beautiful and large-eyed Draupadi speaks to that bull among kings, seated like the leader of a herd of elephants in the midst of his brothers, themselves like so many lions and tigers.

Expecting loving regard always from her husbands, especially from Yudhishtira, she is always treated with affection and indulgence by the king. Conversant with her wifely duties and observant of them in practice, this wide-hipped princess, casting her eyes on her lord, wanting his attention, speaks in pointed but sweet words.

‘O Kaunteya, your brothers dry their palates with laments like the chataka bird, but you do not make them happy. Gladden with seemly words the hearts of your brothers who are like great tuskers in musth, these heroes who have drunk the cup of misery. Why, O king, while living beside the Dwaita lake, did you reassure your brothers who were with you, suffering cold, wind and sun?

Why did you say to them, “Rushing into battle for victory, we will kill Duryodhana and enjoy the earth that can grant every wish. Depriving great Maharathas of their chariots, slaying huge elephants, and strewing the field of battle with the bodies of great warriors, horsemen and heroes, you, Parantapas, will perform mahayagnas of diverse kinds with gifts in profusion. All these sufferings of exile in the forest will end in happiness.”

Having once said these words to your brothers, O foremost of all men of dharma, why do you now dismay us with this new resolve? Just as there can be no fish in a dry swamp, no eunuch can ever have children or enjoy wealth. A Kshatriya, or a ruler without the power to punish, can neither shine nor enjoy the earth, nor can his subjects ever have happiness.

Friendship for all creatures, charity, study of the Vedas, penances—these constitute the duties of a Brahmana and not of a Kshatriya, O best of kings! Restraining the evil, cherishing the honest and never retreating from battle—these are the highest duties of kings. He is said to be conversant with dharma in whom both forgiveness and anger exist, giving and taking, terrors and fearlessness, and chastisement and reward. It was not through study, or gift, or sannyasa that you have acquired the earth. You have vanquished and slain the force of the enemy, ready to burst upon you with all its might, an army abounding with elephants, horses and chariots, strong with three kinds of strength, and protected by Drona, Karna, Aswatthaman and Kripa!

This is why I ask you to enjoy the earth. Once, O king, you conquered the realm called Jambu, with all her populous kingdoms, as well as Kraunchadwipa to the west of the great Meru, equal to Jambudwipa, Sakadwipa to the east of the great Meru, equal to Kraunchadwipa, Bhadraswa on the north of the great Meru, equal to Sakadwipa, O Purushavyaghra!

You even penetrated the ocean and captured other realms, islands surrounded by the sea and containing many densely peopled provinces. O Bhaarata, having achieved such immeasurable feats, and having obtained through them the adoration of the Brahmanas, how is it that your soul is not gratified? Seeing your brothers, O Bhaarata, these heroes swelling with strength and resembling bulls or mighty elephants in musth, why don't you speak words to them that will bring joy to their hearts?

All of you are like Devas, able to resist any foe and able to scorch your enemies. Had only one of you become my husband, my happiness would have been immense, O Naravyaghra. What can I say when all five of you are my husbands and care for me as the five senses inspire the physical frame? The words of my mother-in-law, who has great knowledge and great foresight, cannot be untrue. "O princess of Panchala," she said to me, "Yudhishtira will always keep you happy."

I see, O Dharmaraja, that having slain thousands of powerful kings, you are about to render this achievement futile through your folly. They whose eldest brother has lost his mind now all have to follow him in madness. Through your madness, O king, all the Pandavas are about to lose their minds.

Had your brothers been in their senses, O Rajan, they would have imprisoned you with all unbelievers and taken upon themselves the sovereignty of the earth. One who from dullness of intellect does as you now want to do, can never succeed in winning prosperity. The man who treads the path of madness should be treated with incense and kohl, with drugs infused through the nose, and with other medicaments.

O best of the Bhaaratas, I am the worst of all my sex, since I want to live on even though I am bereaved of my children. You should not disregard my words or those of your brothers who are trying to dissuade you from your deranged purpose. Indeed, by abandoning all the earth, you urge adversity and danger upon yourself.

Shine, O Rajan, like those two great kings, Mandhatri and Ambarisha, admired in their time by all the lords of earth. Protecting your subjects righteously, govern Bhumi Devi, this Goddess Earth, with her mountains and forests and islands. Do not become downcast, O king; worship the gods with many sacrifices, fight your enemies and make gifts of wealth, apparel and other objects of enjoyment to Brahmanas, O best of all kings.'"

CANTO 15

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of Yajnasena's daughter, Arjuna speaks once more, showing proper regard for his mighty-armed eldest brother of unfading glory.

Arjuna says, 'The man armed with the rod of punishment, the Neeti danda, governs and protects all his subjects with it. This authority is awake when everything else is asleep. For this reason, the wise have characterized the rod of chastisement to be dharma itself. It protects dharma and artha. It is identified with purusharthas, and protects grain and wealth. Knowing this, O learned one, take up the rod of punishment and observe the course of the world.

One class of sinful men desist from doing evil through fear of the danda in the king's hands, another from fear of Yama's danda, another from fear of the next world and yet another from fear of society. Thus, O Rajan, in this world, everything depends on the punitive danda, and there is a class of men for whom the only restraining force from devouring one another is that rod. If it did not protect people, they would have sunk into the darkness of hell.

The wise thus named the rod of chastisement, because it restrains the ungovernable and punishes the wicked. One should punish Brahmanas by oral censure; Kshatriyas, by giving them only as much food as necessary to support life; Vaisyas, by the imposition of fines and forfeitures of property, while for Sudras there is no punishment.

Under the name of danda we have established laws in the world to keep men aware of their duties and for the protection of property. Wherever dark-skinned and red-eyed punishment stands ready to tackle every offender, and the king is a Dharmaraja, the subjects never forget themselves. The Brahmacharin and the grihasta, the rishi and the sannyasi, all walk in their respective ways through fear of punishment alone.

He who is without the restraint of fear never performs a sacrifice or gives anything away, never adheres to any commitment or covenant. Without achieving the most difficult feats and without killing, as a fisherman kills fish, no man can obtain great prosperity. Without bloodshed, no man has been able to achieve fame in this world or acquire wealth or subjects.

By the killing of Vritra, Indra himself became the Great. Men offer their worship much more to those of the gods who are given to taking life. Rudra, Skanda, Sakra, Agni, Varuna, Kaala, Mrityu, Vayu, Kubera, Surya, the Vasus, the Maruts, the Sadhyas, and the Viswadevas, O Bhaarata, are all death-dealers. Humbled by their prowess, everybody bends to these gods, never to Brahma, Dhatri or Pushan.

Only a few men who are noble of disposition worship gods who are self-restrained, peaceful and equally disposed towards all creatures. I do not perceive any creature in this world that supports life without doing any injury to others. Animals live upon animals, the stronger upon the weaker. The mongoose devours mice; the cat devours the mongoose; the dog devours the cat; the dog again is devoured by the spotted leopard. Behold, all things in turn are devoured by Yama, the Destroyer, when he comes! The gods have wrought this universe, moving and motionless, as food for living creatures, and the true gyani is never confused by this.

It is appropriate for you, O Maharajan, to be what you were born to be. Only a foolish Kshatriya, restraining anger and joy, takes refuge in the vana. The very sannyasis cannot support their lives without killing creatures. In water, on earth, and in fruits, swarm innumerable creatures, and it is not true that one does not kill them.

What higher dharma is there than supporting one's life? There are many creatures so minute that their existence can only be guessed at, and the mere falling of one's eyelids destroys them. There are men who, subduing anger and pride, take to an ascetic course of life and, leaving village and towns,

become hermits in the forest. Arriving there, they become confused and adopt the grihasta's life once more.

One sees other grihasthas tilling the soil, uprooting herbs, felling trees, killing birds and animals, performing yagnas, and finally attaining Swarga. O Kaunteya, I have no doubt that the deeds of all creatures are crowned with success only when the policy of punishment is properly applied. If one were to abolish punishment from the world, all creatures would soon be destroyed.

Like fish in the water, stronger animals prey on the weaker. Remember the truth declared long ago by Brahma himself that punishment, properly applied, sustains all beings. Look, the very fires, when almost extinguished, blaze up again, in fright, when blown upon. Such is the fear of force or discipline. If there were no danda, the good could not be distinguished from the bad, the whole world would be enveloped in darkness and all things would be plunged in chaos.

Even those who are breakers of laws, who are atheists and scoff at the Vedas, become disposed to observe laws and restrictions from fear of punishment. Everyone in this world is kept straight by fear of danda. A man who is by nature pure and righteous is scarce.

Yielding to fear of punishment, man becomes disposed to observe rules and restraints. Danda was ordained by the Creator himself for protecting dharma and artha, for the happiness of all the four orders, and for making them righteous and humble. If punishment could not inspire fear, then ravens and beasts of prey would have devoured all other animals, men and the sacrificial ghrita.

If discipline did not uphold and protect, nobody would have studied the Vedas, nobody would have milked a cow, and no maiden would have married. If discipline and fear of punishment did not uphold and protect, destruction and chaos would have set in on every side, all barriers would have been swept away, and the very idea of property would have disappeared. People could then never duly perform annual sacrifices with large gifts, and no one, to whatever mode of life he might belong, would observe the duties of their particular varnasrama declared in the shastras, no one would have succeeded in acquiring knowledge.

Even if yoked, camels, oxen, horses, mules or donkeys, would not draw chariots and carriages, without the application of the danda; on danda

depend all creatures. The learned, therefore, say that punishment is the root of everything, and upon it rests this world and the heaven that men desire.

Wherever enemy-destroying punishment is well applied, no sin, no deception and no evil is seen. If the danda of punishment is not upraised, the dog will lick the sacrificial butter and the crow will fly away with the first yagna offering.

Whether through dharma or adharma, this kingdom is now ours, and our duty is to abandon grief, to enjoy it and perform yagnas. Men who are fortunate, living with their beloved wives and children, eat good food, wear rich attire, and cheerfully acquire virtue. All our karma, without doubt, is dependent on wealth, which is again dependent on danda.

Understand, therefore, the importance of discipline. One declares duties only for the maintenance of the relations of the world. There are two things here: abstention from injury, and injury prompted by dharma; the second, being superior as dharma, may be done without fault.

There is no deed that is wholly meritorious, nor any that is wholly evil, since in all karma something exists of both right and wrong. Animals are castrated, their horns cut off, and they are made to bear burdens, tethered and beaten.

In this samsara of no substance, this cruel world, rotten with sin and full of pain, O Rajan, maintain the ancient customs of men. Perform yagnas, give alms, protect your subjects, and practise dharma. Slay your enemies, O Kaunteya, and protect your friends. Do not be sorrowful, Rajan, while killing your enemies, for you will not incur the slightest sin. He who takes up a weapon to cut down an armed foe advancing against him, does not incur the sin of murder, for it is the fury of the advancing enemy that provokes the wrath of the slayer.

The inner soul of every creature can never be slain. When the Atman is incapable of being slain, how then can one be slain by another? As a man enters a new house, even so creatures enter successive bodies, abandoning forms that are worn out, acquiring new forms. Those who can see the truth view death as being this repeated transformation.'"

CANTO 16

Vaisampayana said, "After Arjuna's speech, Bhimasena, passionate and energetic, mustering all his patience, says to his eldest brother, 'O Rajan, you know all about dharma, nothing is unknown to you. We always try to emulate your conduct, but alas, we cannot.

I tried to restrain myself from saying anything. But my anguish compels me to speak. Listen to me, O ruler of men. Because of your confusion, everything we have is in danger, and we are made unhappy and weak. How is it that you, the ruler of the world, familiar with every branch of knowledge, have let sorrow cloud your understanding like a coward?

You know the paths of dharma and adharma of the world, as well as the future and the present. So, O puissant one, I will tell you why you should assume sovereignty. Listen to me.

There are two kinds of diseases, physical and mental, each linked to the other, and neither of them exists independently. Mental sickness springs from physical ailment, the physical from the mental: this is the truth. He who feels regret because of past physical or mental grief finds yet more sorrow in sorrow, and suffers twice over.

Cold, heat and wind are the three attributes of the body, and their existence in harmony is the sign of good health. If one of the three prevails over the rest, there are remedies laid down for it. Cold checks heat, and heat checks cold.

Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three attributes of the mind. The existence of these three in harmony is the sign of mental health. If one of

these prevails over the rest, there are remedies prescribed.

Grief checks joy, and joy checks grief; one man living in the present, enjoying bliss, wants to remember his past sorrows, while another, living in present sorrow, wants to recollect his past happiness. You, however, were never made sad by misfortune or glad by fortune. So, you should not use your memory now to make yourself sad during times of bliss, or glad during times of sorrow. Perhaps Destiny is all-powerful, or perhaps it is because of your nature that you are so afflicted.

But how is it that you do not remember the sight of Draupadi being dragged before the sabha barely clad while in her period, or our expulsion from Hastinapura and our vanavasa wearing deerskins and living in the great forests?

Why have you forgotten the woes inflicted on us by Jatasura, the battle with Chitrasena, and what we suffered at the hands of the Sindhu king; how Kichaka kicked Draupadi during our ajnatavasa? Parantapa, another fierce battle, like that which you fought against Bhishma and Drona, now lies before you, but this one will have to be fought with your mind alone, without arrows, friends, relatives or kinsmen.

If you give up your life before winning this battle, you will have to be reborn to fight these same enemies again. So, fight that battle this very day, O Bharatarishabha. Disregard the concerns of your body, use your own ability, identify your mind's foe and conquer it. I cannot imagine what your condition will be if you do not succeed in this battle; whereas, by winning it, you will attain the great end of life. Apply your intellect to this, ascertain the right and the wrong paths, follow the course that your father did before you, and rule your kingdom with dharma.

By good fortune, the sinful Duryodhana and all his followers are dead, and Draupadi has braided her hair again. With due ceremonies and lavish gifts, perform the Aswamedha yagna. The tejasvin Krishna and we are your servants, O son of Pritha!'"

CANTO 17

"Yudhishtira says, 'Discontentment, heedless attachment to earthly goods, the absence of tranquillity, power, folly, vanity and anxiety: all these affect you, and so you covet sovereignty, O Bhima. Try to be happy freed from desire, prevailing over joy and grief and attaining tranquillity. The peerless king who will rule this unbounded earth will nevertheless have but one stomach. Why then do you applaud this course of life?

One's desires, O Bharatarishabha, cannot be fulfilled in a day, or in many months. Desire can never be gratified, cannot, indeed, be exhausted in the course of one's whole life. Fire, when fed with fuel, blazes forth; otherwise, it is extinguished. So you should extinguish with a little food the fire in your stomach when it appears. He who is ignorant seeks endless food for his belly. Conquer your stomach first and you will then be able to conquer the earth.

Once you conquer and win the earth, it will be for your permanent good. You applaud desires and enjoyments and prosperity, but those who have renounced all enjoyments and have reduced their bodies through penance, attain regions of supreme happiness. The acquisition and preservation of a kingdom involves both dharma and adharma. The desire for them exists in you. Free yourself from your great burdens, and adopt renunciation.

To appease his hunger, the tiger slaughters many other animals. From greed, other weaker beasts, scavengers, live off the tiger's prey. If kings

practise renunciation while enjoying worldly possessions and pleasures, they can never have contentment, and a loss of understanding is noticeable in them. However, those who subsist on leaves of trees, or use two stones only or their teeth for husking their grain, or live upon water or air alone, succeed in conquering Naraka. Between the king who rules this unbounded earth, and the man who regards equally stone pebbles and gold, it is the latter who attains his purusharthas, not the former.

So, depend upon that which is the eternal refuge of joy both here and hereafter, and stop wishing and hoping and being attached to your wants. Those who have given up desire and enjoyment never grieve, while you yearn for pleasures to come, and mourn them as they go. It is only after discarding desire and its gratification that you will succeed in liberating yourself from hypocrisy.

There are two well-known paths for us: the path of the Pitris and the path of the Devas. They who perform yagnas take the Pitri-patha, while those who are for moksha, go by the path of the gods. Casting off their bodies, the great Rishis attain realms that are above the power of Yama; they do this through brahmacharya, tapasya and the study of the Vedas.

The knowing call worldly enjoyments bonds, bandhana, as well as karma. Liberated from those two sins—bondage and action—man attains the highest end. One has heard of Janaka, freed from the duality of opposites, liberated from desire and enjoyment, observant of the religion of moksha, singing a verse: "My treasures are immense, yet I have nothing! If fire again destroys the whole of Mithila and reduces it to ashes, nothing of mine will be burnt!"

Like a man on the hill-top looking down upon men on the plain below, he who has ascended to the summit of gyana sees people pining for things that do not call for grief. He who, casting his eyes on visible things, really sees them, is said to have true vision and understanding, because of the knowledge he has gained of unknown and incomprehensible things.

Men who know the words of sages are cleansed souls, and those who have attained a state of Brahman, succeed in obtaining great honour. When one understands that creatures of infinite diversity are all one and the same, and that they spring from the same essence, one attains Brahman.

Those who reach this highest condition attain the supreme and blissful end, not they who are without gyana, or who are of small and narrow

minds, or are bereft of understanding, or are without tapasya. Indeed, everything rests on the trained understanding!'"

CANTO 18

Vaisampayana said, “When Yudhishtira falls silent, Arjuna, moved by what the king said, and afire with sorrow and grief, once more addresses his eldest brother. ‘People tell this old story, O Bhaarata, about the discourse between the ruler of the Videhas and his queen. It relates to the words which his grief-stricken spouse said to her lord when, abandoning his kingdom, he resolved to lead the life of a sannyasi. Casting off wealth, children, wives and precious possessions of various kinds, the established path for acquiring religious merit and the sacred agni itself, King Janaka shaved his head and put on the garb of a sannyasi.

His wife found him without wealth, observing the vows of a mendicant, resolved to abstain from inflicting any kind of injury on others. Free from vanity of every kind, he was prepared to subsist upon a handful of barley fallen from the stalk and obtained by gathering the grains from crevices in the field.

Approaching her lord at a time when no one was with him, the queen, endowed with great strength of mind, fearlessly and in anger uttered to him these words full of reason: “Why have you adopted the life of a sannyasi, abandoning your kingdom full of wealth and corn? A handful of fallen barley cannot be proper for you. Your resolution does not suit your karma, O Rajan, for you are abandoning your great kingdom but coveting instead a handful of grain. With this handful of barley, how will you gratify your athithis, the Devas, Rishis and Pitris? Your labour is pointless. Alas,

abandoned by all of them, you intend to lead the life of a wandering mendicant, O king, having cast off all action!

Until now, you were the supporter of thousands of Brahmanas versed in the three Vedas, and of many others besides. How can you now want to beg them for your own food, renouncing your blazing prosperity, and looking around like a dog for its meagre pickings? Today, your mother has lost a son and your wife, the princess of Kosala, is a widow. These helpless Kshatriyas, expectant of fruit and religious merit, depend upon you, and have all their hopes set on you. By killing their hope, to what regions will you go, O king, especially when moksha is uncertain and creatures are dependent on karma? Sinful as you are, you have neither this world nor the other, for you wish to live abandoning your wife.

Why do you lead a life of a sannyasi, abstaining from your karma, abandoning garlands and perfumes and ornaments and robes of different kinds? Once you were a large and sacred lake for all creatures, a mighty tree worthy of adoration and granting its shelter to all. Alas, how can you wait upon and worship others? If even an elephant desists from all work, packs of carnivores and innumerable worms would devour it. What then can be said of you in this state?

How can your heart be set on a mode of life which recommends an earthen pot and a triple-headed stick, forces one to abandon his very clothes and permits the acceptance of only a handful of barley? You say that your kingdom and a handful of barley are the same to you; why then do you abandon the first? If, again, a handful of barley becomes an object of attachment with you, then your original resolution of renouncing everything fails.

If you live up to your resolution of renouncing everything, what am I to you and you to me, and what is your grace to me? If you want to be happy, then rule this earth! Those who wish for happiness, but are poor, destitute and abandoned by friends, may adopt renunciation. But he who imitates such men by giving up palatial mansions, beds and chariots, robes and ornaments, does so improperly indeed! One always accepts gifts made by others, another always gives gifts. You know the difference between the two, but who, indeed, of these two should be considered the superior? If a gift be made to one who always accepts gifts, or is proud, that gift becomes useless, like clarified butter poured upon a forest fire. As a fire, O Rajan,

never dies till it has consumed all that has been cast into it, even so a beggar can never be silenced until he receives alms.

In this world, the food that is given by a charitable man is the sure support of the pious. If, therefore, the king does not give food, where will the pious go who seek salvation? Those who have food in their houses are grihastas, and they support sannyasis. Since life flows from food, the giver of food is the giver of life. Leaving the life of a grihasta, the sannyasis depend upon the very varna from where they come. By doing so, these self-restrained men acquire and enjoy fame and power.

A man does not become a sannyasi by merely renouncing his possessions, or adopting a life dependent on charity. Only he who renounces the possessions and pleasures of the world with a sincere mind is a true sannyasi. Unattached at heart, though attached in outward appearance, standing aloof from the world, having broken all his bonds, and regarding friend and foe equally, such a man, O king, is regarded to be free!

Having shaved their heads clean and putting on the ochre robe, men may be seen to adopt vanaprastha, but in fact they are bound by many ties and ever on the lookout for useless wealth. Those who, after casting off the three Vedas, their natural occupations and their children, adopt a life of mendicancy by taking up the triple-headed crutch and the brown robe, are really fools.

Understand, O Rajan, that without having shed anger and other faults, adopting the ochre robe is only to earn sustenance. Those with clean-shaven heads who have set up the banner of virtue have just this objective in life. Therefore, O king, keeping your passions under control, do you win regions of bliss hereafter by supporting the truly pious amongst men of matted locks or clean-shaven heads, naked or clad in rags, skins or ochre robes. Who is there more virtuous than he who maintains his sacred fire, who performs sacrifices with gifts of animals and dakshina, and who practises charity day and night?"'

Arjuna continues, 'We regard King Janaka to be a gyani in this world. Even he became confused, in this matter of the meaning of dharma. Do not yield to bewilderment! This is the way that those who practise charity observe the duties of grihasta. By abstaining from violence of all kinds, by casting off desire and wrath, by being engaged in protecting all creatures, by observing the excellent dharma of dana and, lastly, by cherishing superiors and the elderly, we will succeed in attaining the regions of

happiness to which we aspire. By duly gratifying gods, guests, and all creatures, by worshipping Brahmanas, and by truthfulness of speech, we will certainly attain realms of bliss.'"

CANTO 19

"Yudhishtira says, 'I am conversant with both the Vedas and the scriptures that lead to the attainment of Brahman. In the Vedas there are principles of both kinds—those that instill action and those that teach renunciation of karma. The shastras are confusing but I know their well-reasoned conclusions and the truth that is in the mantras. You know only weapons and the ways of Kshatriyas, and do not truly understand the meaning of the scriptures.

If you knew your dharma, you would understand that even one with the clearest insight into the meaning of the scriptures and the truths of religion, should not address such words to me. However, whatever you said out of brotherly love was proper. I am thankful to you for that, O Arjuna!

No one in the three worlds is equal to you in all the ways of battle and in the diverse skills of the way of karma. You can surely speak of the subtleties connected with these subjects, nuances that are impenetrable to others. But, O Dhananjaya, it is not fitting for you to doubt my intelligence. You know the science of war, but you have never waited upon the aged and do not know the decisions arrived at by those who have studied the subject both in brief and at length. Even intelligent men seeking salvation arrive at the conclusion that between tapasya while living in the world, sannyasa and the knowledge of Brahman, the second is superior to the first, and the third to the second.

To think that there is nothing superior to wealth is an error, and I will convince you of it, so that wealth may not again appear to you in that light.

One sees all men of dharma devoted to sannyasa and the study of the Vedas. Since they have the merit of tapasya, the Rishis have many eternal regions reserved for them. Others possessed of tranquillity of soul, having no enemies, and dwelling in the vana, have gained Swarga through tapasya and study of the Vedas. By restraining desire for worldly possessions, and casting off that darkness born of folly, pious men go northward by luminous paths to the realms kept for practisers of tyaga.

The lunar regions, the path of the south that leads to regions of light, are kept for men devoted to action. Those who are subject to samsara, to birth and death, attain these. However, the end which those who desire salvation have before their eyes is indescribable. Yoga is the best means for attaining it.

I cannot explain it easily to you. The gyanis live, reflecting on the scriptures from a desire to identify what is unreal. But they are often led astray in the belief that the object of their search exists in this and that. Having mastered the Vedas, the Aranyakas, and the other scriptures, they miss the Real, like men failing to find solid timber in an uprooted banana plant.

Some of them, disbelieving in its unity, regard the Atman that dwells in this physical frame, consisting of the five elements, to be possessed of the attributes of desire and aversion and others. Incapable of being seen by the eye, exceedingly subtle and inexpressible through words, the Atman revolves in a round of re-births among the creatures of the earth, keeping before it that which is the root of karma.

Having made the Atman, which is the spring of every kind of blessedness, advance towards itself, having restrained all desires of the mind, and having cast off all kinds of action, one may become perfectly independent and happy. When such a path trodden by the righteous exists and it is attainable through gyana why, O Arjuna, do you laud wealth which is full of every kind of calamity?

Men of olden times who were conversant with the shastras, who were always engaged in distributing gifts, sacrifice and action, were of this opinion, O Bhaarata! There are some fools who, accomplished in the science of debate, deny the existence of the Atman, based on the strength of their convictions of a previous life. It is very difficult to make them accept this truth about final emancipation and moksha.

Those wicked men, though possessed of great learning, travel all over the world making empty speeches in assemblies and courts, and deprecating the true doctrine of Mukti. O Partha, who else will succeed in understanding that which we do not understand? Indeed, since these men cannot understand the true meaning of the scriptures, they cannot know those wise and pious men who are truly great and who know the shastras deeply.

O son of Kunti, men who know the truth obtain Brahman through asceticism and intelligence, and great happiness by renunciation.'"

CANTO 20

Vaisampayana said, “After Yudhishtira stops, the great Rishi Devasthana says eloquently and reasonably to the king, ‘Phalguna told you that there is nothing superior to wealth. I will discuss this subject with you. Listen to me with undivided attention.

O Ajatasatru, you have righteously won the earth. Having won her, it does not become you, O king, to abandon her without cause. Four asramas of life are indicated in the Vedas, which you will duly pass through, one after another. At present, you should perform great sacrifices with lavish gifts. Among the very Rishis, some engage themselves in the tapasya represented by Vedic study, and some in that presented by gyana. O Bhaarata, you must know that action possesses these very sannyasis.

The Vaikhanasas preach that the man who does not seek wealth is superior to him that seeks it. I believe that he who follows this principle makes a grave mistake. Men collect diverse things for performing yagnas, simply because the Vedas require it. Tainted by his lack of understanding, he who gives away wealth to the undeserving, rather than to the deserving, does not know that he incurs the very sin of killing an unborn.

The exercise of the dharma of daana after discerning the deserving from the undeserving is not easy. The Supreme Ordainer created wealth for sacrifice, and created man to husband this wealth, and to perform sacrifice. For this reason the whole of one’s wealth should be applied to yagnas. Pleasure would be a natural consequence.

Possessed of prodigious energy, Indra, by performing diverse yagnas with lavish gifts, surpassed all the Devas. Becoming their king, he shines in Swarga. Everything should be applied to sacrifices.

Clad in deer-skin, the high-souled Mahadeva, having poured his own self as a religious offering in the yagna called Sarva, became the first among the gods and, surpassing all creatures in the universe, shines in radiant glory.

King Marutta, the son of Avikshit, with his enormous wealth vanquished Sakra himself, the lord of the Devas. In the great sacrifice he performed, all the vessels were of gold, and Sree herself came to it. You have heard that the great king Harischandra, having performed yagnas, earned great merit and great happiness. Though a mortal man, he vanquished Sakra with his wealth. For this reason everything should be applied to sacrifice.'"

CANTO 21

"Devasthana says, 'Let me tell you in this context an old story about the sermon Brihaspati gave Indra at his request.

Brihaspati said, "Contentment is the highest heaven, the highest bliss, and there is nothing higher than it. When a man withdraws from all his desires, like a tortoise drawing in all it limbs, the natural splendour of his Soul soon shows itself. When one does not fear any creature or frighten any creature, when one conquers one's desire and aversion, then they say one sees one's Soul. When one seeks to injure nobody and cherishes no desire, in word and thought, they say one attains Brahman."

Thus, O Kuntiputra, men obtain corresponding fruits, whatever religion they follow. Awaken yourself to this thought, O Bhaarata! Some praise quietude, others action, while there are others who extol contemplation, and others again who advocate both quiescence and action.

Some praise sacrifice, others, renunciation; some praise charity, others, acceptance; and some, abandoning everything, live in silent meditation. Some praise sovereignty and the cherishing of subjects, after enslaving and killing foes, while some are for passing their days in seclusion. Observing all this, the learned conclude that only that religion which consists in not injuring any creature is worthy of the approval of the righteous. Abstention from injury, truthfulness of speech, justice, compassion, self-restraint, having children by one's own wives, good nature, modesty, patience—the practice of all these is the best religion, as told by Swayambhuva Manu himself. O son of Kunti, observe this dharma with care.

The Kshatriya who, conversant with the truths of Rajadharma, the royal dharma, takes sovereignty upon himself, restraining his soul at all times, regarding as equal that which is dear and that which is not, and subsisting upon the remains of sacrificial feasts, who restrains the wicked and cherishes the righteous, who obliges his subjects to tread the path of virtue and who himself treads that path, who at last hands over his crown to his son and retires to the forest as a sannyasi, to subsist on the produce of the wilderness and to live according to the laws of the Vedas, having cast off all idleness, is sure to obtain the most excellent fruits in both this world and the next, for he conducts himself in conformity with the well-known duties of kings.

The Moksha of which you speak is exceedingly difficult to gain, and its pursuit involves countless difficulties. Those who observe their svadharma and practise charity and ascetic penances, who are compassionate, free from desire and anger, and who engage in ruling their subjects with righteousness, protecting cows and Brahmanas, attain a lofty end. The Rudras with the Vasus, the Adityas, the Sadhyas and hosts of kings adopt this dharma, O Parantapa, and by practising it with care, they reach Swarga.'"

CANTO 22

Vaisampayana said, "After this, Arjuna once more says to his eldest brother, King Yudhishtira, of unfading glory but of doleful heart, 'O Vidheyajala, having through the practice of Kshatriya dharma obtained sovereignty that is so difficult to acquire, and having conquered all your enemies, why do you burn in grief?

Rajan, for Kshatriyas, death in battle is regarded as more meritorious than the performance of all the diverse sacrifices. The shastras that lay down the dharma of Kshatriyas declare that tapasya and renunciation are the dharma of Brahmanas. Even this is the law for the two varnas in the next world. Indeed, O powerful one, death in battle is for Kshatriyas; their dharma is exceedingly fierce and always connected with the use of weapons, and the shastras decree that when the time comes, they should perish by weapons in the battlefield.

The life of even a Brahmana, O king, who lives in the observance of the Kshatriya dharma, cannot be faulted, for Kshatriyas also spring from Brahmanas. Neither renunciation, nor sacrifice, nor penances, nor dependence on the wealth of others is for Kshatriyas. You, Bharatarishabha, know all your duties and, as a wise king skilled in all karma, can distinguish what is right and what is wrong. Cast off this gloom brought about by repentance, and with a strong will, prepare yourself for action!

The heart, especially of a Kshatriya, is as hard as the vajra. Through the exercise of the Kshatriya dharma, you have vanquished your enemies and acquired an empire, which is now peaceful. Now conquer your soul, O ruler

of men, engage yourself in the performance of sacrifices and in the practice of charity.

Indra himself, though a Brahmana, became a Kshatriya in his actions and battled with his sinful kinsfolk, eight hundred and ten times. His actions were commendable and worthy of praise, and as a result, he became the king of the Devas. Perform sacrifices with lavish gifts, just as Indra did, O Rajan, and liberate yourself from your fever.

Do not, Bharatarishabha, grieve like this for what is past. The slain men have attained Swarga, purified by weapons in accordance to the laws of the Kshatriya dharma. That which has happened, had to happen, and Destiny, O Purushavyaghra, cannot be resisted.'"

CANTO 23

Vaisampayana said, "Thus addressed by the wavy-haired Arjuna, Yudhishtira remains silent. Then the island-born Vyasa says, 'The words of Arjuna, O amiable Yudhishtira, are true. The highest dharma, as declared by the scriptures, depends on the dharma of a grihasta. You know all your duties, so practise the dharma of grihasta that is prescribed for you.

A life of retirement in the forest, casting off garhapatya, is not for you. The Devas, Pitris, athithis and dasas, all depend for their sustenance upon a man leading the life of a grihasta; you should support all of them, O lord of the earth! Men leading domestic lives support birds and animals and various other creatures; so is grihasta superior to all the other asramas, and is the most difficult of all the four stages of life.

Live this most difficult life of a grihasta then, O Kaunteya, as you know all the Vedas well and have earned great ascetic merit. You must bear like an ox the burden of your ancestral kingdom, O Rajan.

To obtain success Brahmanas should strive to the best of their ability after tapasya, tyaga, kshama, gyana, sannyasa, keeping the senses under control, dhyana, living in solitude, contentment and knowledge of Brahman.

Let me now remind you of the duties of Kshatriyas, which you already know. As we are told, sacrifice, learning, exertion, ambition, wielding the danda, fierceness, protection of subjects, knowledge of the Vedas, practice of all kinds of penance, goodness of conduct, acquisition of wealth, and gifts to deserving persons—it is these, well performed and acquired by Kshatriyas, that secure for them both this world and the next.

Amongst these, O son of Kunti, wielding the rod of punishment is the foremost. Strength must always abide in a Kshatriya, and upon strength depends punishment. These duties that I have mentioned are, O king, the principal ones for Kshatriyas and contribute greatly to their success.

Brihaspati, in this connection, sang this verse: "Like a snake devouring a mouse, the earth devours a king who prefers peace and a Brahmana who prefers the life of a grihasta."

One again hears that only by wielding the rod of chastisement did the Rajarishi Sudyumna find the highest success, like Daksha himself, the son of Prachetas.'

Yudhishtira then asks, 'O holy one, by what deeds did Sudyumna, the lord of the earth, obtain the highest success? I want to hear the story of this king.'

Vyasa replies, 'There were two brothers—Sankha and Likhita, of high austerities. The brothers had separate houses, both of which were beautiful. Situated on the bank of the Bahuda river, these dwellings were always adorned with trees laden with flowers and fruits. One day, Likhita visited his brother Sankha when he was not at home. Arriving at the hermitage of his brother, Likhita plucked many ripe fruits and began to eat them without any qualms of conscience. While he was still eating, Sankha returned home.

Sankha asked his brother, "From where have you plucked these fruits, and why are you eating them?"

Approaching his elder brother and greeting him, Likhita smilingly replied, "I have plucked them from here."

Filled with great rage, Sankha told him, "You have committed theft by taking these fruits without permission. Go to the king and confess what you have done. Tell him that you have committed an offence by taking what was not given to you and, let him, observing his Kshatriya dharma, punish you as a thief."

The highly blessed Likhita of rigid vows, at the command of his brother, went to King Sudyumna. Hearing from his gate-keepers that Likhita had come, Sudyumna, with his counsellors, received the sage. Meeting him, the king said to that noble one conversant with dharma, "Tell me, O revered one, the reason for your visit. You may consider it done!"

The Rishi said to Sudyumna, "Promise first that you will grant what I ask. And you must keep your word. O bull among men, I ate some fruits

that my elder brother had not given me. Do you, O Rajan, punish me for it without delay.”

Sudyumna answered, “If the king be regarded as competent to wield the rod of danda, he should be regarded as equally competent to pardon. O Anuvrata, consider yourself pardoned. Tell me now what other wishes you have, and I will certainly do what you want.”

Vyasa continues, ‘Thus honoured by the high-souled king, the Maharishi Likhita did not ask any other favour. Then the ruler of the earth commanded that both his hands be cut off and, after bearing the punishment, the Rishi went away. Returning to his brother Sankha, Likhita, in great affection, said, “You must now pardon this wretch, whom you have punished as he deserved.”

Sankha said, “I am not angry with you, nor have you injured me, O foremost of all persons, O true knower of dharma. Your virtue, however, had suffered a setback. I have rescued you from that plight. Go without delay to the Bahuda river, gratify the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitris with offerings of water, and never again set your heart on paapa.”

Obeying Sankha, Likhita performed his rites in the sacred stream and was about to begin the water-rite when two hands, like two lotuses in beauty, appeared at the extremities of his stumps. Filled with wonder, he came back to his brother and showed him the two hands. Sankha explained, “I accomplished this through my tapasya, so do not be surprised. Providence has been the instrument here.”

Likhita then asked, “O you of great splendour, when such was the power of your tapasya, why did you not purify me at first?”

Sankha replied, “I could not do otherwise, for I am not your punisher. The king who punished you has himself been purified, like you, along with the Pitris!”

Vyasa continues, ‘This king, O eldest son of Pandu, became renowned for this deed and gained the highest success, like the lord Daksha himself! Even this is the dharma of Kshatriyas, the ruling of subjects. Any other path, O monarch, would be regarded as a wrong one for them. Do not give way to grief. O best of all men, conversant with dharma, listen to the beneficial words of your brother. Wielding the danda, O Rajan, is the duty of kings, not shaving the head!’”

CANTO 24

Vaisampayana said, "Once more the great sage Krishna-Dwaipayana tells Ajatasatru, the son of Kunti, 'Let these great Maharathas of abundant energy of mind, your brothers, O Yudhishtira, obtain the wishes that they cherished during your vanavasa. Rule the earth, O son of Pritha, like another Yayati, the son of Nahusha.

Misery was yours while you lived in the forest as ascetics. That misery has ended, O Purushavyaghra. Enjoy happiness, therefore, for some years. Then, O Bhaarata, having earned and enjoyed dharma, artha and kama for a goodly period with your brothers, you may seek vanavasa.

Be freed first from the debt you owe to sannyasis, to the Pitris, and to the Devas. Later, O son of Kunti, you can practise all the other asramas that follow the grihasta. Perform the yagnas of Sarvamedha and Aswamedha, O Rajan, and you will attain Swarga hereafter. Include your brothers also in great yagnas, with plentiful gifts for Brahmanas, and you will acquire great fame.

There is a saying, O Naravyaghra, to which you should hearken, for by living according to it, Kuruttama, you will not swerve from dharma. Only those men, Yudhishtira, who act like robbers are able to influence kings to follow the career of war and victory. The king who, guided by considerations of place and time and moved by an understanding of the scriptures, pardons even a number of robbers, incurs no paapa. The king who, realizing his tribute of a sixth, fails to protect his kingdom, acquires a fourth part of the sins of his kingdom.

Listen to how a king will not deviate from dharma. By violating the scriptures one incurs sin, while by obeying them one may live fearlessly. Guided by an understanding based upon the scriptures and disregarding lust and anger, the king who behaves impartially, like a father towards all his subjects, never incurs sin, O you of great splendour! If, due to misfortune, a king fails to do his duty, such failure will not be called a transgression. By force and policy the king should put down his enemies. He must not suffer sin to be perpetrated in his kingdom but should cause dharma to be practised.

Brave and honourable men who are virtuous, erudite Brahmanas who have mastered Vedic texts and rites, and men of wealth, should especially be protected. In judging legal suits and in carrying out religious activities, only the most learned men should be employed.

A prudent king will never repose his confidence upon one individual, however accomplished. The king who does not protect his subjects, whose passions are ungovernable, who is full of vanity, who is arrogant and malicious, is a culpable and tyrannical king. If his subjects perish from want of protection and the gods punish them, if robbers ruin them, the sin of all this besmirches the king himself. There is no sin, O Yudhishtira, in undertaking a task wholeheartedly, after full deliberation and consultation with capable advisors. Our tasks fail or succeed through destiny. If the king makes an effort, sin would not touch him.

I will tell you, O tiger among kings, the story of an ancient monarch called Hayagriva, heroic and of unstained deeds, who was defeated and killed after having himself slain a large number of enemies in battle, while he had no follower by his side. He did all that was necessary to keep his enemies in check and to protect all his subjects. Hayagriva acquired great fame from the battles he fought. Grieviously injured by robbers whom he boldly faced, the Mahatman Hayagriva, ever attentive to his dharma, lost his life in battle and, having achieved the object of his life, now enjoys great bliss in Swarga.

The bow was his sacrificial stake and the bowstring was the rope to bind victims. Arrows constituted the smaller ladle and the sword the large one, and blood was the clarified butter that he poured onto the sacrifice of battle. His chariot was the altar, the wrath he felt in battle was the fire, and the four excellent steeds yoked to his ratha were the four Hotris.

Having poured upon that sacrificial fire first his enemies as offerings, and then his own life-breath at the completion of the sacrifice, this bold lion among kings, Hayagriva, was freed from sin, and now sports in Devaloka. The high-souled and self-renouncing Hayagriva of potent mind, the performer of yagnas, protected his kingdom through good governance and intelligence, and filled all the worlds with his fame. He received merit from the performance of sacrifices and every kind of punya connected with human affairs. He wielded the danda, the rod of punishment, and ruled the earth with vigour and without pride. For this the virtuous Hayagriva, practising renunciation actuated by his faith, and full of gratitude, left this world and won the regions that are reserved for the intelligent and the wise, for those that follow the approved customs and conduct and are always prepared to die in battle.

Having studied the Vedas as well as other scriptures, having ruled his kingdom ably and caused all the four varnas to adhere to their respective dharmas, Hayagriva now rejoices in Devaloka. Having won many battles, cherished his subjects, drunk the soma rasa in sacrifices and gratified the foremost of Brahmanas with gifts, and having judiciously wielded the rod of chastisement over those under his sway, this king, at last, casting away his life in battle, dwells happily in heaven.

His life was worthy of every praise, and learned and honest men extol it. Crowned with success, this Mahatman, a king of virtuous deeds, won Swarga and acquired the realms reserved for great heroes.'"

CANTO 25

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing the words of the island-born Rishi and seeing Dhananjaya angry, Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, salutes Vyasa and says, 'This earthly sovereignty and its enjoyment fail to give any joy to my heart. On the other hand, this poignant grief at the loss of my kinsmen is eating away its core. Hearing the lamentations of these women who have lost their heroic husbands and children, I fail to find peace, O sage!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Thus addressed, the virtuous Vyasa, foremost of all men conversant with Yoga, possessed of great wisdom and intimately acquainted with the Vedas, says to Yudhisthira, 'No man can acquire anything by his own actions, neither through sacrifices and worship, nor by giving anything to a fellow man. Man acquires everything in the course of Time, as intended by Brahma. If Time is unfavourable, men cannot by mere intelligence or study of the scriptures acquire any earthly possession, while sometimes an ignorant fool succeeds in winning wealth. Time is the effective way for the accomplishment of all karma.

During times of adversity, neither science, nor prayers, nor medicaments, yield any result. In times of prosperity, however, those very things, properly applied, become successful and bear fruit. By Time the winds blow violently, the clouds become rain-charged, tanks become adorned with lotuses of different kinds, and trees in the forest become decked with flowers. By Time nights become dark or lit, and the moon becomes full. If the Time has not come, trees do not bear flowers and fruits,

the currents of rivers do not gather force, and birds, snakes, deer, elephants and other animals never become excited.

If the Time has not come, women do not conceive. It is with Time that winter and summer and the monsoon come. If the Time for it has not come, no one is born and no one dies; the infant does not acquire power of speech and the child does not grow to youth. It is with Time that the seed sown puts forth its sprouts.

If the Time has not come, the sun does not appear above the horizon nor does it repair to the Asta hills; the moon does not wax or wane, nor the ocean, with its high billows, rise and ebb. In this connection one remembers the old story told, O Yudhishtira, by King Senajit in grief. The irresistible course of Time affects all mortals; all earthly things, ripened by Time, come to perish.

Some men, O king, slay others, and others again slay the slayers. This is the language of the world. In reality, no one slays and no one is slain: it is only a matter of perception. The truth is that, as ordained, the birth and death of all creatures must come to pass and are a result of their very nature.

Upon the loss of one's wealth or the death of one's wife, son or father, one cries out saying "Alas, what grief!" and dwelling upon this sorrow always enhances it. Why do you, like a foolish man, indulge in grief? Why do you grieve for them who are beyond grief? Indulgence increases grief, just as fear grows if one yields to it.

This body, or anything on this earth, is not mine, for the things of this earth belong as much to others as to me. The wise, seeing this, do not allow themselves to be deluded, for there are thousands of causes for sorrow, and hundreds of causes for joy. These daily affect the ignorant, but not the wise. These, in course of time become objects of affection or aversion and, appearing as bliss or sorrow, revolve as if on a wheel and affect all living creatures. There is only sorrow in this world but no happiness, and it is for this reason that only sorrow is felt.

Indeed, sorrow springs from the affliction called desire, and happiness springs from the affliction called sorrow. Sorrow comes after happiness, and happiness after sorrow, and one does not always suffer sorrow or always enjoy happiness. Happiness always ends in sorrow, and sometimes proceeds from sorrow itself. He, therefore, who desires eternal happiness, must abandon both. Since sorrow must arise upon the cessation of happiness, and happiness upon the conclusion of sorrow, one should cast off like a snake-

bitten limb that from which one experiences sorrow or heart-burning, that which it nurtures or which is the root of one's anxiety.

Be it happiness or sorrow, be it agreeable or disagreeable, whatever comes should be borne with an unaffected heart. O agreeable one, if you abstain in even a slight measure from doing what is pleasing to your wives and children, you will then know who is whose, and for what reason. Those who are very stupid or those who are masters of their souls enjoy happiness here, while those who occupy an intermediate place suffer misery. This, O Yudhishtira, is what was said by Senajit of great wisdom, the king who knew what is good and bad in this world, with dharma, and with happiness and misery.

A man can never be happy if other people's sorrows affect him. There is no end to grief, and it arises from happiness itself. Happiness and misery, prosperity and adversity, gain and loss, death and life, in their turn, affect all creatures. For this reason the wise man with an unagitated soul will neither be elated with joy nor be depressed with sorrow. To engage in battle is the yagna for a king; a due observance of the science of punishment is his yoga; and the gift of wealth in sacrifices, in the form of dakshina, is his renunciation. All these should be regarded as acts that sanctify him.

By governing the kingdom with intelligence and policy, casting off pride, performing sacrifices, and looking at everything and all persons with kindness and impartiality, a high-souled king sports in Devaloka after death. By winning wars, protecting his kingdom, drinking the soma rasa, improving the lot of his subjects, judiciously wielding the danda, and casting off his body at last in battle, a king enjoys happiness in Swarga.

Having studied all the Vedas and the other scriptures, having protected the kingdom and caused all four varnas to adhere to their respective duties, a king becomes sanctified and finally finds and dwells in Swarga. He is the best of kings whose conduct is applauded by the inhabitants of cities and country, counsellors and friends even after his death.'"

CANTO 26

Vaisampayana said, “Now the noble Yudhishtira reasons with Arjuna, saying, ‘You think, O Partha, that there is nothing superior to wealth, and that the poor man can neither have heaven, nor happiness, nor the fulfillment of his wishes. This is not true, for we see many men crowned with success through sacrifice in the shape of Vedic study, while many sages have with tapasya acquired Swarga.

O Dhananjaya, the gods regard as Brahmanas those who observe the practices of the Rishis by adopting brahmacharya, and who become knowers of dharma. O son of Pandu, you should always regard as truly virtuous those Rishis devoted to the study of the Vedas and those devoted to the pursuit of true knowledge.

All our actions depend upon those who devote themselves to the acquisition of gyana. O Bhaarata, we know this to be the opinion of the Vaikhanasas, and that the Ajas, the Prishnis, the Sikatas, the Arunas, and the Kitavas have all gone to heaven through the merit of Vedic study. O Dhananjaya, the Vedas prescribe that it is through battle, by studying the scriptures, by sacrifices, and by the restraint of passion, all arduous duties, that one goes to heaven by Dakshinayana, the southern path of the sun, which, as I told you, belongs to such men. Those who devote themselves to Yoga travel by Uttarayana, the northern path, to eternal and bright regions.

Of the two, those conversant with the Puranas laud the northern path. You should know that one acquires heaven through serenity, and that from tranquillity springs great happiness. There is nothing higher than serenity.

For the Yogin who has controlled anger and joy, contentment is his triumph. In this connection, one quotes the discourse by Yayati. Listening to this discourse, one may succeed in withdrawing all desires, like a tortoise drawing all his limbs into his shell.

When one does not fear anything, and no one and nothing is afraid of one, when one cherishes no desire, when one bears no hate, then one attains the state of Brahman. When one does not sin against any creature, in act, thought or word, one attains Brahman. When one has controlled one's pride and folly, and has withdrawn oneself from all attachments, it is then that the pious man of shining soul becomes fit for attaining salvation and the annihilation of separate existence.

Listen now to me with concentrated attention, O son of Pritha. Some desire virtue, some good conduct, and some wealth. One may desire wealth as a means for acquiring virtue, but it would be better to abandon such desires, since there are many hazards attached to wealth and consequently, to the religious deeds that one performs with wealth, as we have seen with our own eyes. You must understand that he who desires wealth will find it very difficult to abandon it later. Good deeds are very rare in those who amass riches, for wealth can never be acquired without injuring others and, when obtained, it brings numerous troubles.

A man of narrow heart, and without remorse, tempted by even a little wealth, will commit acts of aggression towards others, unconscious all the while of the sin of Brahmahatya that he incurs by his karma. After acquiring wealth with so much difficulty, such men will burn with grief if they have to give a portion of it to their servants, grief equal to what they would feel if they were actually robbed by thieves. If one does not part with one's wealth, disgrace becomes one's lot, while he who has no wealth never becomes the subject of censure.

Withdrawn from all attachments, such a man can become happy in all respects by supporting life upon what little he may obtain as alms. The acquisition of wealth cannot give anyone happiness. In this connection those who know the ancient scriptures recite certain verses relating to sacrifices.

The Creator created wealth for the sake of sacrifices, and created man for protecting that wealth and performing yagnas. For this, all wealth should be applied to yagnas, and it is not proper to spend it for the gratification of desire or enjoyment.

Understand, O son of Kunti, you that are the foremost of all wealthy persons, that the Creator confers wealth upon mortals for the sake of yagnas. It is for this that the wise think that wealth does not belong to anybody on earth. One should perform yagnas with it and give it away with a trustful heart. One should gift away what one has acquired, and not waste or spend it in gratifying one's desires or for enjoyment. What use is there in amassing more and more wealth when such proper objects exist on which to spend it?

Men of little understanding who give away wealth to those who have swerved from the duties of their order, have to subsist hereafter for a hundred years on excrement and dirt. Men give to the undeserving and not to the deserving, unable to discriminate between the two. For this reason the practice of the virtue of charity is difficult, and even when acquired, these two faults connected with wealth remain.'"

CANTO 27

"Yudhishtira says, 'Grief does not forsake my wretched self as a result of the deaths in battle of young Abhimanyu, the sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, King Drupada, Vasusena who knew dharma well, the royal Dhrishtaketu, and of numerous other kings hailing from diverse lands. I am a slayer of kinsmen, inordinately covetous of kingdom and an exterminator of my own race.

Alas, I have cut down in battle, through lust of sovereignty, this Ganga's son upon whose breast and limbs I used to play as a boy. It lacerated my heart to see Sikhandin assailing our grandfather, a lion among men, to see him trembling and reeling from Partha's shafts like thunderbolts, and to watch his tall form, pierced all over with blazing arrows, turn weak like an aged lion. It stunned me to see this destroyer of hostile chariots collapse like a mountain summit and fall in his own ratha with his face turned towards the east.

This Kurusthama who, bow and shafts in hand, waged a fierce battle for many days with Rama himself of Bhrigu's line, on the field sanctified by Kuru, this son of Ganga, this hero who, at Varanasi, in order to take brides for Hastinapura, challenged to battle on a single ratha the assembled Kshatriyas of the world, and who burnt that irresistible and foremost of kings, Ugrayudha, with the energy of his weapons—alas, I caused this Kshatriya to be slain in battle.

This hero, knowing full well that Sikhandin, prince of Panchala, was his nemesis, nevertheless refrained from killing him with his arrows. Alas,

Arjuna slew that magnanimous warrior. O best of sages, my heart burned at that moment when I saw our Pitamaha stretched out on the earth and covered in blood. Alas, for lust of a kingdom, I am now the slayer of reverend elders, a perfect fool for causing the death of one who protected and nurtured us when we were children. All for the sake of a sovereignty that will last but a few days.

I approached our guru, the great archer Drona, adored by all the kings, and gave him false news of the death of his son. The memory of this sears my limbs. The Acharya said to me, "Tell me truly, O king, whether my son still lives." Expecting truth from me, the Brahmana asked me of all others but I lied to him, though silently, saying the word 'elephant'. I am culpable for coveting the kingdom and murdering my revered elders, for, throwing off the mantle of truth which everyone believed me to wear, I told my guru on the battlefield that we had killed Aswatthaman when, in fact, we had only slain an elephant of that name.

To what hell will I go, having perpetrated such ignominious deeds? I also caused my eldest brother Karna to be slain, that awesome warrior who never retreated from battle. Who is there more sinful than I? Through greed I caused the adolescent Abhimanyu, that Kshatriya who resembled a lion born in the hills, to break into the chakra vyuha that Drona himself protected. I am like one guilty of infanticide. Since then I have not been able to look in the face Arjuna or the lotus-eyed Krishna. I grieve also for Draupadi, bereft of her five sons like the earth bereft of her five mountains. I am a great offender, a great sinner and a destroyer of the earth.

Without rising from this seat that I now occupy, I will starve myself to death. I, the killer of my guru and exterminator of my race, will sit here in the observance of the Praya vrata, in order that I may not be reborn in any of the other order of beings. I will forgo food and drink and, without moving from this place, O great ascetic, I will dry up my precious life-breaths. I beg you humbly to grant me leave to do this and thereafter go wherever you please. Let everyone grant me leave to cast off this body of mine.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Restraining Pritha's son, who uttered these words stricken by sorrow on account of his kinsmen's deaths, Vyasa, the best of Rishis, says to him, 'This cannot be! It does not become you, O monarch, to indulge in such an excess of grief. I will repeat what I have said earlier. All this is Destiny, O mighty one. Without doubt, all creatures that

are born display at first a combination of diverse materials and forces which at the end, dissolve. Like bubbles in the water they rise and disappear.

All things held together are sure to crumble, and all things that rise must fall. Union ends in dissolution, and life ends in death. Idleness, though temporarily agreeable, ends in misery and skilfull labour, though temporarily distressing, ends in happiness. Affluence, prosperity, modesty, contentment and fame dwell in labour and skill, not in idleness.

Friends are not competent to bestow happiness, nor foes competent to inflict misery. Similarly, wisdom does not bring wealth, nor does wealth bring happiness. Since the Maker has created you, O son of Kunti, to engage yourself in karma, and success springs from karma, it is not fitting for you to avoid karma, O king.'"

CANTO 28

Vaisampayana said, “Vyasa then dispels the grief of the eldest son of Pandu who, burning with sorrow on account of the slaughter of his kinsmen, has resolved to kill himself.

Vyasa says, ‘O Purushavyaghra, let me tell you the old story known as Asma’s discourse. Listen to it, O Yudhishtira! Janaka, the ruler of the Videhas, once filled with sorrow and grief, questioned a wise Brahmana named Asma to alleviate his anguish.

Janaka asked, “How should a man who wishes his own good behave upon occasions such as the accession and destruction of both kinsmen and wealth?”

Asma replied, “Immediately after the formation of a man’s body, joys and grief attach themselves to it. Either of the two can overtake the man, and whichever does, quickly robs him of his reason like the wind driving away gathering clouds.

In times of prosperity, one thinks, ‘I am of high birth! I can do whatever I like! I am not an ordinary man!’ His mind becomes soaked with such triple vanity. Addicted to earthly enjoyments, he begins to waste the wealth accumulated by his ancestors. Impoverished in the course of time, he regards it as laudable even to appropriate what belongs to others. Like a hunter piercing a deer with his shafts, the king then punishes this wicked robber of the possessions of others, this transgressor of law and rule. Such men scarcely live beyond twenty or thirty years, and never attain a full human span of a hundred years.

Carefully observing the behaviour of all creatures, a king should, by the exercise of his intelligence, apply remedies to allay the great sorrows of his subjects. The causes of all mental sorrow are two—delusion of the mind and accumulation of suffering; no third cause exists. All these diverse sorrows, and those arising from attachment to worldly pleasures that overtake man, are as follows.

Age and Death, like a pair of wolves, devour all creatures, strong or weak, short or tall. No man can escape decay and death, not even the conqueror of the entire earth circled by the sea. Whether it is happiness or sorrow that comes upon creatures, it should be enjoyed or borne without elation or dejection, since there is no method of escape. The evils of life, O king, can overtake one in early, middle or old age. They can never be avoided, while the sources of bliss that one covets never come. The absence of what is agreeable, the presence of what is disagreeable, good and evil, bliss and sorrow, follow Destiny. The birth of creatures and their death, their gain and loss, are all pre-ordained.

Even as scent, colour, taste and touch spring naturally, happiness and misery arise from what is pre-ordained. Fine seats, beds and vehicles, luxuries, drinks and food, come and go in the course of time. Even physicians fall ill, the strong become weak, and they who enjoy prosperity lose all and become indigent. The course of Time is indeed marvellous. High birth, health, beauty, prosperity and objects of enjoyment, all are gained through Destiny. The poor, although they may not desire it, have many children, while one sees the affluent to be childless. Astonishing is the course of Destiny. The evils caused by disease, fire, water, weapons, hunger, poison, fever, falls from high places and death overtake a man according to the Destiny under which he is born.

One sees that in this world somebody without sinning suffers diverse ills, while another, having sinned, is not weighed down by calamity. One in the enjoyment of wealth perishes in his youth, while one who is poor drags on existence for a hundred years, worn down by decrepitude. One born to an ignoble race may have a very long life, while one sprung from a noble line may perish as quickly as an insect. In this world, it is common for people in affluent circumstances to have no appetite, while the poor can digest chips of wood.

Impelled by destiny, the man with an evil soul, discontented with his condition, commits sins, saying, "I am the doer," which he regards as being

all for his good. The wise censure hunting, dice, women, wine, fighting, but we see many men possessed of extensive knowledge of the scriptures to be addicted to them. Objects, whether coveted or otherwise, come upon creatures as a result of Time's course, for one can trace no other cause. Who makes and who supports air, space, fire, moon, sun, day, night, the luminous bodies in the firmament, rivers and mountains? Cold, heat and rain come one after another in the course of Time. Just so is the case with the happiness and misery of mankind.

Neither medicines nor mantras can rescue the man assailed by age or overtaken by death. Just as two logs of wood floating on the great ocean come together and separate again, creatures come together and, when the time comes, part. Time acts equally towards men who are rich and enjoy the pleasures of song and dance in the company of women, and towards helpless men who live upon food that others give them.

In this world one contracts a thousand kinds of relationships, such as mother and father, son and wife. In reality, however, whose are they and whose are we? No one can belong to us, nor can we belong to another. Our union here with wives and kinsfolk and well-wishers is like that of travellers at a road-side inn.

Where am I? Where shall go? Who am I? How did I come here? For what and for whom do I grieve? Reflecting on these questions, one obtains tranquillity. Life and its conditions are constantly revolving like a wheel, and the companionship of those who are dear is transitory. The union with brother, mother, father and friend is like that of ways-farers at a sarai.

Men of knowledge perceive the unseen next world, as if with physical eyes. Without disregarding the scriptures, one desirous of knowledge should have faith. One possessed of knowledge should perform the rites laid down in respect of the Pitris and the Devas, practise all religious duties, perform sacrifices, judiciously pursue dharma, artha and kama.

Alas, no one understands that the world is sinking on the ocean of Time that is immensely deep and infested with the great crocodiles called decrepitude and death. We see many physicians become themselves afflicted, with all the members of their families, although they have carefully studied the science of medicine. Taking bitter and diverse kinds of oily medicaments no more allows them to escape death than the continents can escape being submerged in the ocean.

We see age overcoming men well-versed in the arts of chemistry, notwithstanding chemical compounds applied judiciously, even like elephants breaking down trees. So, too, we see men of tapasya, devoted to study of the Vedas, practising charity, and frequently performing sacrifices, fail to escape decrepitude and death. For all creatures that have taken birth, neither years, nor months, nor fortnights, nor days, nor nights that have once passed, ever return. In due course, man, whose existence is transitory, is forced inevitably by Time onto this broad path that every creature perforce has to tread.

Whether the body springs from the creature or the creature springs from the body, one's union with wives and friends is truly like that of transients at a wayfarers' lodgings. No one can obtain a lasting companionship with another. One cannot obtain such companionship with one's own body: how then can it be had with anyone else? Where, O king, is your father today, and where your grandfather? You do not see them, O sinless one, and they do not see you!

No person can see either heaven or hell. The scriptures, however, are the eyes of the virtuous. Frame your conduct, O king, according to the scriptures. With pure heart, one should first practise the vow of brahmacharya, then have children, and then perform sacrifices, to pay the debt one owes to the manes, the gods and men.

A wise man, after having first kept the vow of brahmacharya, should perform yagnas and have children and, after casting off all anxieties of his heart, should pay court to heaven, this world, and his own soul. The king bent upon the practice of dharma, who strives judiciously to acquire Heaven and earth, and who takes only his share of earthly goods, wins a reputation that spreads over all the worlds and among all creatures, mobile and immobile."

The ruler of the Videhas, of clear understanding, having heard these wise words, became free from grief and, taking Asma's leave, returned to his home. O Yudhishtira of unfading glory, cast off your sorrow and rise up. You are equal to Sakra himself. Suffer your soul to be happy: you have won the earth in the exercise of Kshatriya dharma, so enjoy her, O son of Kunti. Do not disregard my words.'"

CANTO 29

Vaisampayana said, “Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, best of kings, remains silent. Pandu’s son Arjuna says to Krishna, ‘This Parantapa, Dharma’s son, burns with grief on account of his slaughtered kinsfolk. Comfort him again, O Madhava. All of us have fallen into great danger. You, Mahabaho, must dispel his grief.’”

Vaisampayana continued, “The lotus-eyed Govinda of eternal glory turns his face towards the king. Yudhishtira cannot possibly disregard Kesava, for from their earliest years Govinda was dearer to him than even Arjuna.

Taking the king’s hand, smeared with sandalwood-paste and looking like a column of marble, the mighty-armed Saurin begins to speak, gladdening the hearts of all who listen to him. His face, adorned with beautiful teeth and eyes, glows like a full-blown lotus at sunrise.

Vasudeva says, ‘Do not, Purushavyaghra, indulge in grief that emaciates your body. Those slain in this battle cannot be brought back. These Kshatriyas, O king, who have fallen in this great war are like objects in one’s dreams that vanish when one awakes. All of them were heroes and ornaments of battle.

We vanquished them while they rushed at us, their enemies. They were all slain facing us, none had wounds in their backs from fleeing battle. They all fought with heroes and, after having cast off their life-breath in the great war, ascended into heaven, sanctified by weapons.

It is not right to grieve for them. All of them, cleaving to the Kshatriya dharma, possessed of valour, perfectly conversant with the Vedas and their angas, have attained the blissful end reserved for heroes. Set aside your grief for them after hearing the stories of ancient days about the high-souled lords of the earth who departed from this world.

There is an old story about the discourse of Narada with Srinjaya who was grief-stricken at the death of his son. Narada said, "You, I and all creatures, O Srinjaya, are subject to happiness and misery, and will have to die. Then what cause is there for sorrow? Listen to me with attention as I recite the great blessedness of some ancient kings. Listening to the story of these noble lords of the earth, you will cast off your grief and abate your sorrow.

As I recite their charming and delightful tales to you in detail, the malignant stars will be propitiated and the span of your life will increase.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that there was a king of the name of Marutta who was the son of Avikshit, and that even he fell prey to death. The gods, with Indra and Varuna and Brihaspati at their head, came to the sacrifice, called Viswasrij, performed by this great monarch. Challenging Sakra, the lord of the Devas, Marutta vanquished him in battle.

From a desire to earn Indra's favour, the learned Brihaspati had refused to officiate at Marutta's sacrifice. Thereupon Samvarta, the younger brother of Brihaspati, acceded to the king's request to be his chief Ritvik. During the rule of Marutta the earth yielded crops without being tilled and was embellished with diverse kinds of ornaments. At the sacrifice of this king, the Viswadevas sat as courtiers, the Maruts were the distributors of food and gifts and the high-souled Sadhyas were also present.

During this sacrifice of Marutta, the Maruts drank soma. The sacrificial gifts the king made surpassed in value those ever made by the Devas, the Gandharvas and all men. When even Marutta, O Srinjaya, who surpassed you in religious merit, knowledge, renunciation and affluence, and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, of another king named Suhotra, the son of Atithi, who too, fell a prey to death. During his rule, Maghavat showered gold for one whole year upon his kingdom. Obtaining this king for her lord, the earth became in reality, and not merely in name, Vasumati.

Indra showered upon the rivers, during the sway of this sovereign, golden tortoises, crabs, alligators, sharks and porpoises. Beholding these

golden fish, sharks and tortoises in hundreds and thousands, Atithi's son became filled with wonder. Collecting the vast wealth of gold that covered the earth, Suhotra performed a sacrifice at Kurujangala and gave it away to Brahmanas.

When this King Suhotra, O Srinjaya, who surpassed you in the four attributes of tapasya, gyana, vairagya and dhana, and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son. Your son never performed a sacrifice and never made gifts. Knowing this, pacify your mind and do not give away to grief.

We also hear, O Srinjaya, that Brihadratha, the king of the Angas, fell prey to death. He gave away a hundred thousand horses and a hundred thousand maidens, adorned with golden ornaments, as dakshina at a yagna that he performed. A hundred thousand elephants also of the best breed he gave away as gifts at another yagna that he performed.

He also gave away as sacrificial charity a hundred million bulls, adorned with golden chains, accompanied by untold thousands of cows. While the king of Anga performed his sacrifice by the hill called Vishnupada, Indra became intoxicated with the soma he drank, and the Brahmanas with the gifts they received.

During the yagnas, O monarch, numbering hundreds, that this king performed in the days of old, the gifts he made far surpassed those ever made by the Devas, the Gandharvas and Manavas. No other man born, or that will ever be born, will give away so much wealth as did the king of the Angas during the seven sacrifices he performed, each of which was marked by the consecration of soma.

When, O Srinjaya, this Brihadratha, who was your superior in the four attributes and who was purer than your son, also fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear also, O Srinjaya, that Sibi, the son of Usinara, fell prey to death. This king swayed the whole earth as one does the leather shield in his hand. Riding on a single chariot that proved victorious in every battle, King Sibi subjugated every other monarch and caused the earth to resound with the rattle of his wheels.

Usinara's son Sibi gave away in a sacrifice all the cows and horses he had, both domesticated and wild. The Creator himself thought that no one among the kings of the past or the future had or would have the ability to bear the burden, as this Usinara's son Sibi did, that foremost of kings, that

hero who possessed skill equal to that of Indra. Do not, therefore, grieve for your son who never performed any sacrifice or made any gift when indeed, Sibi, who was far superior to you in the four attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that the high-souled Bharata also, the son of Dushyanta and Sakuntala, who had a vast and well-filled treasury, fell prey to death. Devoting three hundred horses to the gods on the banks of the Yamuna, twenty on the banks of the Saraswati, and fourteen on the banks of the Ganga, that king of great tejas, of the olden days, performed a thousand Aswamedhas and a hundred Rajasuyas.

None among the kings of the earth can match the great deeds of Bharata, just as no man can, by the might of his arms, soar into the sky. Erecting numerous sacrificial altars, he gave away innumerable horses and untold wealth to the Rishi Kanwa. When even he, O Srinjaya, who was far superior to you in the four attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Rama, the son of Dasaratha, also fell prey to death. He always cherished his subjects as if they were his own sons. In his dominions there were no widows and no one who was helpless. Indeed, in ruling his kingdom Rama was always like his father Dasaratha. The clouds, yielding showers seasonably, caused crops to grow in plenitude. During his rule, food was always abundant in his kingdom. No death occurred by drowning or by fire.

As long as Rama ruled, there was no fear in his kingdom of any disease. Every man lived for a thousand years, blessed with a thousand children. During Ramarajya, all men were whole and all men had their wishes fulfilled. When even the women did not quarrel, then what can be said of the men? During his rule his subjects were virtuous, contented, their desires satisfied, fearless, free and wedded to the vow of truth.

The trees bore flowers and fruit perennially, and met with no injury. Every cow yielded milk filling a drona to the brim. Having dwelt in the observance of severe tapasya for fourteen years in the forest, Rama performed ten Aswamedhas of great splendour to which he invited everyone. Young and dark, handsome, with reddened eyes, he looked like the leader of an elephant herd, with great and mighty arms stretching down to his knees and with shoulders like those of a lion.

Ascending the throne of Ayodhya, he ruled for ten thousand and ten hundred years. When Rama, O Srinjaya, who excelled you by far in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that King Bhagiratha also died. During one of the sacrifices of this king, intoxicated with the soma he had drunk, Indra, the adorable chastiser of Paka and king of the Devas, put forth the might of his arms and vanquished many thousands of Asuras.

At one of the sacrifices he performed, King Bhagiratha gave away a million maidens adorned with ornaments of gold. Each of these maidens sat on a chariot attached to four pedigreed steeds. With each chariot were a hundred elephants, all of the finest breed and decked with chains of gold. Behind each elephant were a thousand horses, and behind each one a thousand cows and behind each cow a thousand goats and sheep.

The river-goddess Ganga, earlier known as Bhagirathi, sat upon the lap of this king who dwelt near her stream, and since then came to be called Urvasi, 'one who sits on the lap'. The triple-coursed Ganga had agreed to be the daughter of Bhagiratha of Ikshvaku's race, the monarch always engaged in the performance of sacrifices with gifts in profusion to Brahmanas.

When he, O Srinjaya, who transcended you in respect of the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that the Mahatman Dilipa also fell prey to death. The Brahmanas love to recite his innumerable deeds. During one of his great sacrifices this king, with his heart fully assenting, gave away the entire earth, abounding with wealth, to the Brahmanas. At each sacrifice performed by him, the chief priest received as sacrificial fee a thousand elephants made of gold.

At one of his yagnas, the stake set up for slaughtering the victims was made of gold and exceedingly beautiful. Discharging the duties assigned to them, the gods having Sakra for their lord, used to seek the protection of this king. Upon this shining golden stake, decked with a ring, six thousand Devas and Gandharvas danced in joy, and Viswavasu himself in their midst played a raga on his vina. Such was Viswavasu's music that every creature, whatever he might be, thought that the great Gandharva was playing to him alone.

No other monarch could imitate this achievement of King Dilipa. The elephants of this king, intoxicated and adorned with trappings of gold, would be found lying down on the roads. The men who succeeded in obtaining even a sight of the Rajarishi Dilipa, went to heaven, as he was ever truthful in speech and his bow could withstand a hundred foes equal in energy to a hundred Anantas.

These three sounds never ceased in Dilipa's abode—the chanting of the Vedas, the twanging of bows, and cries of 'Let it be given!' When he, O Srinjaya, who transcended you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

Yuvanaswa's son Mandhatri also, O Sanjaya, we hear, fell prey to death. The Maruts extracted this child from his father's stomach through one side. Sprung from a quantity of clarified butter sanctified by mantras that had by mistake been quaffed by his father instead of his mother, Mandhatri had been gestated in the belly of Yuvanaswa.

This most prosperous king, Mandhatri, conquered the three worlds. Seeing this child of celestial beauty lying on the lap of his father, the gods asked one another, 'From whom shall this child suckle?'

Then Indra came forward, saying, 'He shall have it even from me!' The chief of the deities therefore named the child Mandhatri. For the nourishment of that great child, the finger of Indra, placed in his mouth, began to yield a jet of milk. Sucking Indra's finger, he grew into a powerful youth in a hundred days. In twelve days he looked like one of twelve years.

The whole earth in one day came under the sway of this high-souled, virtuous and brave king who resembled Indra himself for his prowess in battle. He vanquished King Angada, Marutta, Asita, Gaya and Brihadratha of the Angas. When Mandhatri fought in battle with Angada, the gods thought that the firmament was breaking apart with the twanging of his bow, and the whole earth from where Surya rises to where he sets was his field.

Having performed a hundred Aswamedhas and a hundred Rajasuyas, he gave the Brahmanas many Rohita fish. These fish were each ten yojanas in length and one in breadth. The other varnas divided among themselves those that remained after gratifying the Brahmanas.

When he, O Srinjaya, who transcended you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Yayati, the son of Nahusha, also fell prey to death.

Having subjugated the whole world with its seas, he journeyed through it, decking it with successive sacrificial altars; with throws of a heavy piece of wood, he measured the intervals between the altars. Indeed, he reached the very shores of the sea as he went performing great sacrifices on those altars along his way.

Having performed a thousand yagnas and a hundred Vajapeyas, he gratified the foremost of Brahmanas with three mountains of gold. Having slain many Daityas and Danavas in battle, Nahusha's son Yayati divided the earth among his children. At last, discarding his other sons, headed by Yadu and Drahyu, he installed his youngest son Puru on his throne and then entered the forest with his wife.

When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Ambarisha also, the son of Nabhaga, fell a prey to death. The subjects regarded this protector of the world and foremost of kings as the embodiment of dharma.

During one of his sacrifices, this sovereign assigned to the Brahmanas, to wait upon them, a million kings who had themselves performed thousands of sacrifices each. Men of piety praised Ambarisha, the son of Nabhaga, saying that such feats had never been achieved before, nor would their like be achieved in the future. These hundreds upon hundreds and thousands upon thousands of kings, that had at the command of Ambarisha waited at his sacrifices upon the presiding Brahmanas, became, through Ambarisha's punya, crowned with the fruits of the Aswamedha and followed their lord by the southern-path to regions of brightness and bliss.

When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead child.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Sasabindu also, the son of Chitrasena, fell prey to death. This Rajarishi had a hundred thousand wives, and a million consorts, and sons by them, all of whom used to wear golden armour and were excellent bowmen. Each of these princes married a hundred princesses, and each princess brought a hundred elephants as her dower. With each of these elephants were a hundred chariots. With each chariot

were a hundred steeds, all of good breed and all decked with trappings of gold. With each steed were a hundred cattle, and with each cow were a hundred sheep and goats.

This countless wealth Sasabindu gave away, at a horse-sacrifice, to the Brahmanas. When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead child.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Gaya also, the son of Amurtarayas, fell a prey to death. For a hundred years, this king subsisted upon the remains of sacrificial food. Pleased with such devotion, Agni wanted to give him boons. The boons solicited by Gaya were, 'Let my wealth be inexhaustible, even if I give endlessly. Let my regard for dharma exist for ever. Let my heart take pleasure in Truth forever, through your grace, O consumer of sacrificial offerings.'

We hear that King Gaya obtained all these wishes from Agni. On days of the new moon, on those of the full moon, and on every fourth month, for a thousand years, Gaya repeatedly performed the Aswamedha. During this period he gave away a hundred thousand cattle and hundreds of mules to Brahmanas at the completion of every sacrifice.

This bull among men gratified the Devas with soma, the Brahmanas with wealth, the Pitris with Swadha, and the women with the satisfaction of all their wishes. During his great Horse-sacrifice, Gaya caused a golden ground to be made, measuring a hundred cubits in length and fifty in breadth, and gave it away as the sacrificial fee. This foremost of men, Gaya, the son of Amurtarayas, gave away as many cows as there are grains of sand in the Ganga river.

When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes, and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that Sankriti's son Rantideva also fell a prey to death. Having undergone the austerest of penances and worshipped Sakra with great reverence, he solicited these boons from him: 'Let us have abundant food and numerous guests. Let not my faith sustain any diminution, and let me not have to ask anyone for anything.'

The animals, both domesticated and wild, slaughtered at his sacrifice, used to come of their own accord to the high-souled Rantideva of rigid vows and great fame. The secretions that flowed from the skins of the

animals slaughtered in his sacrifices produced a mighty and celebrated river which to this day is known by the name of Charmanwati. King Rantideva would make gifts to the Brahmanas in an extensive enclosure.

When the king said, ‘I give you a hundred nishkas!’ the Brahmanas rejected what was offered. When, however, the king would say, ‘I give a thousand nishkas!’ they accepted. All the vessels and plates in Rantideva’s palace, all the jugs and pots, the pans, plates and cups, were of gold. On nights when guests lived in Rantideva’s abode, twenty-thousand and one hundred cattle had to be slaughtered. Yet even on such occasions, the cooks, decked in earrings, used to boast to those who sat down to eat: ‘There is abundant soup, take as much as you wish; but we do not have as much meat today as we used to.’

When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that the high-souled Sagara also fell a prey to death. He was of Ikshvaku’s race, a tiger among men, and of superhuman prowess. Sixty-thousand sons used to walk behind him, like ten thousand stars waiting upon the moon in the cloudless firmament of autumn. His sway extended over the whole of this earth. He gratified the gods by performing a thousand Horse-sacrifices. He gave away to deserving Brahmanas palatial mansions with columns and other parts made of gold, containing costly beds and bevies of beautiful women with eyes like lotus petals, and diverse other kinds of precious objects. At his command, the Brahmanas divided these gifts among themselves.

Through anger this king caused the earth to be excavated, whereupon she came to have the ocean on her bosom, and for this, the ocean has come to be named Sagara after him. When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

We hear, O Srinjaya, that king Prithu, the son of Vena, also fell prey to death. The great Rishis, assembling together in the great forest, installed him in the sovereignty of the earth. And because it was thought that he would advance all mankind, he was called Prithu, the advancer. And because he protected people from injuries—Kshata, he was called a Kshatriya.

Seeing Prithu, the son of Vena, all the creatures of the earth exclaimed, 'We are now attached to him!' From this circumstance of the devotion of all creatures to him, he came to be called a Raja—one who can inspire attachment. The earth, during his sway, yielded crops without being tilled, every leaf that the trees had bore honey, and every cow yielded a large jugful of milk. All men were healthy, all their wishes granted. They had no fear of any kind. They used to live as they pleased, in fields or in houses.

When Prithu wanted to go over the sea, the waters became solid. The rivers also never swelled up when he had to cross them but remained perfectly calm. The flag on his chariot moved unobstructed everywhere. King Prithu, during one of his grand Aswamedha Yagnas, gave away to the Brahmanas twenty-one mountains of gold, each measuring three nalwas. When he, O Srinjaya, who far surpassed you in the four principal attributes and who was purer than your son, fell prey to death, do not grieve for your dead son.

What, O Srinjaya, are you reflecting in silence? It seems, O king, that you do not hear my words. If you have not heard them, then my discourse has been a fruitless rhapsody, like medicine or a diet to a person on the point of death."

Srinjaya said, "I am listening O Narada, to your discourse of excellent import and perfumed like a garland of flowers, this discourse upon the conduct of Rajarishis of wondrous deeds and great fame that can certainly dispel grief. Your discourse, O Maharishi, has not been a fruitless rhapsody. The very sight of you has freed me from grief. Like one never replete from drinking nectar, I am not satiated with your words. If you of true vision, O lord, can show grace towards this man burning with grief on account of the death of his son, then this son, through your grace, is sure to be revived and to rejoin me once more in this life."

Narada said, "I will give back your son bereft of life named Suvarnashthivin, whom Parvata gave you. Splendid as gold, this child shall live a thousand years."""

CANTO 30

"Yudhishtira asks, 'How did the son of Srinjaya become Suvarnashthivin? Why did Parvata give Srinjaya this child and why did he die? When the lives of all men in those days extended for a thousand years, why did Srinjaya's son die in infancy? Or was he Suvarnashthivin, gold-secreter, only in name? How did he come to be so? I want to know all.'

Krishna replies, 'I will tell you, O king, the facts as they happened. There are two Rishis, the foremost ones in the world, named Narada and Parvata. Narada is the maternal uncle and Parvata is his sister's son. With cheerful hearts, the uncle Narada and the nephew Parvata, in the olden days, left heaven to ramble across the earth and to taste clarified butter and rice.

Both of them, possessed of great ascetic merit, wandered over the earth, subsisting on food eaten by men. Filled with joy and entertaining great affection for each other, they entered into a compact that whatever desire, good or bad, one of them entertained, he would disclose it to the other and, in the event of one of them doing otherwise, he would be subject to the other's curse.

Agreeing to this understanding, these two great Rishis, adored by all the worlds, went to King Srinjaya, the son of Sitya, and told him, "For your benefit, both of us will stay with you for a few days. O lord of the world, attend to all our wants."

The king, saying "So be it!" set himself to attend upon them hospitably. One day, the joyful Srinjaya introduced to these illustrious ascetics his fair

daughter, saying, "This is my daughter Sukumari, and she will wait upon you both. Bright as the filament of the lotus, she is beautiful and of faultless limbs, accomplished and of sweet manners."

"Very well," said the Rishis in reply, upon which the king instructed his daughter, "My child, attend upon these two Brahmanas as you would attend upon the gods or your father."

Saying, "Tathaastu," the virtuous Sukumari began to attend upon them in obedience to her father's behest. Her dutiful services and her unrivalled beauty very soon charmed Narada, and he began to cherish a tender flame towards her. This sentiment began to grow in the heart of the illustrious saint like the moon gradually waxing on the accession of the lit fortnight.

However, overwhelmed by shame, Narada could not disclose this growing ardour to his sister's son, the high-souled Parvata. Through his ascetic power, and also by Narada's behaviour, Parvata understood all. Inflamed with rage, he resolved to curse his love-afflicted uncle.

He said, "Having made a compact with me that whatever desire, good or bad, is cherished by either of us will be disclosed to the other, you have violated it. These were your own words. O Brahmana! I will curse you for this. You did not tell me that the charms of the maiden Sukumari have pierced your heart! You are a Brahmacharin, my guru, a Muni and a Brahmana. Yet you have broken the compact you made with me. I am angry and I will curse even you. Listen to me. This Sukumari will, without doubt, become your wife. From the time of your marriage, however, O Great One, both she and all men will see you as an ape, for your true features will disappear and you will have a monkey's face!"

Hearing this, Narada, filled with wrath, cursed his nephew Parvata in return, "Although you have ascetic merit and brahmacharya and truth and self-restraint, and although you are ever devoted to dharma, you will yet not be able to return to Swarga."

Thus in rage they cursed each other like two infuriated elephants. From that time the high-souled Parvata began to wander over the earth, respected as he deserved, O Bhaarata, for his own tejas. Narada, the greatest of Brahmanas, obtained with due rites the hand of Srinjaya's daughter, the faultless Sukumari.

But the princess saw Narada exactly as the curse had said. Indeed, just after the priests recited the last of the wedding mantras, Sukumari saw the celestial Rishi with the face of an ape. She, however, did not disregard her

husband; on the contrary, she dedicated her love to him. Indeed, the princess, chaste as she was, devoted herself entirely to her lord and did not in her heart desire anyone else for a husband, even among the Devas, Munis and Yakshas.

One day, the illustrious Parvata, in the course of his wanderings, entered a solitary forest, and saw Narada there. Saluting him, Parvata said, “Show your grace to me, O mighty one, by allowing me to return to heaven.” Seeing the unhappy Parvata kneeling before him with folded hands, Narada felt sorry and told him, “You cursed me first, saying, ‘Be an ape!’ After which, I cursed you from anger, saying, ‘From this day you will not live in heaven!’ It was not right of you to curse me, since you are like a son to me.”

The two sages then freed each other from their curses. Seeing her husband possessed of celestial form and blazing with beauty, Sukumari fled from him, thinking him to be somebody other than her lord. Seeing the beautiful princess flying from Narada, Parvata said to her, “This is indeed your husband. He is the illustrious and powerful Rishi Narada, the foremost of virtuous men. He is your husband of one soul with you. Do not have any doubt about this.”

Assured in diverse ways by the high Parvata and informed also of the curse, the princess regained her equanimity. Then Parvata ascended to heaven and Narada returned to his home.’

Krishna continues, ‘The illustrious Rishi Narada, who himself played a part in this matter, is here, O best of men. If you ask him he will tell you everything that happened.’”

CANTO 31

Vaisampayana said, "The royal son of Pandu then asks Narada, 'Holy one, I want to hear of the birth of the child whose excreta were gold.' Narada Muni begins to narrate everything about the child of the golden secretions.

Narada says, 'It is exactly as Kesava has said. Since you asked me I will now tell you the remaining part of this story. My sister's son, the Maharishi Parvata, and I once came to stay with Srinjaya, foremost of all victorious kings. He honoured us with all ceremony and gratified our every wish when we lived with him.

After the season of rain had passed, and when the time came for our own departure, Parvata raised this important and appropriate point with me: "We have dwelt in the abode of this king for some time, O Brahmana, and have been greatly honoured by him. Think of what we should give him in return."

I then told Parvata of blessed aspect, "Nephew, this concern becomes you, O you of great power, and all this depends upon you. Through your blessings let the king be made happy and let him obtain his wishes. Or, if you choose, let him be crowned with success through the ascetic merits of both of us."

At this, having summoned King Srinjaya, Parvata said to him, "You have gratified us exceedingly, Rajan, with your sincere hospitality. Think of a gift you would like. Let it be such that it may not imply enmity to the

gods or destruction to men. Accept then, O king, a boon, for we think you deserve one."

Srinjaya replied, "If I have satisfied you both, then I have gained my object, for this is itself my greatest gain and I regard this as the realization of all my desires."

Parvata once again said, "Ask us, Rajan, for the fulfillment of that wish which you have cherished in your heart for a long time."

Srinjaya answered, "I desire a son who will be heroic and possessed of great energy, firm in his vows and of long life, highly blessed and possessed of splendour equal to that of Indra himself."

Parvata said, "Your desire will be fulfilled, but your child will not be long-lived, for your wish for such a son is also for prevailing over Indra. Your son will be known by the name of Suvarnashthivin. He will have splendour like Indra, but take care to protect him always from that Deva."

Hearing these words of Parvata Mahatman, Srinjaya began to beg the Rishis to change his boon, saying, "Let my son be long-lived, O Muni, through your tapasya."

Parvata remained silent, being partial to Indra. Seeing the king very sad I told him, "Think of me, O king, in your distress and I promise to come when you do. Do not grieve, O lord of earth! I will give you back your beloved child, even if he is dead, in his living form."

With that, both of us left his presence to go our different ways, and Srinjaya to his palace. In due course, the Rajarishi Srinjaya became the father of a son of great ability who blazed with tejas. The child grew up like a large lotus in a lake, and became Suvarnashthivin in reality as in name.

This extraordinary child, O Kuruttama, soon became widely known over the world. Indra also came to know that he was the fruit of Parvata's boon. Fearing humiliation at the hands of the child when he grew up, the slayer of Bala and Vritra began to watch closely for any lapses by the prince.

He commanded his Vajra, standing before him in embodied form, "Go, powerful one, and, assuming the form of a tiger, kill this prince. When grown up, this child of Srinjaya may, as Parvata prophesied, humiliate me through his achievements." The Vajra, razer of hostile towns, began from that day to continually watch for any lapse from the prince.

Meanwhile, Srinjaya was filled with joy having got a child whose splendour resembled that of Indra himself. The king, accompanied by his

wives, and the other women of his household, began living in the midst of a forest. One day, on the shores of the Bhagirathi, the boy, accompanied by his nurse, was playing, running about here and there. Though only five years of age, his prowess, even then, resembled that of a mighty elephant.

While playing, the child met a powerful tiger that came upon him suddenly. The infant prince trembled violently as the tiger attacked him, and fell lifeless on the earth. His nursemaid gave vent to loud cries of grief.

Having slain the prince, the tiger, through Indra's powers of maya, vanished. Hearing the screams of the nurse, the king ran to the spot in great anxiety, and saw his son drained of blood, lying dead on the ground like the moon fallen from the firmament. Taking the boy covered with blood up onto his lap, the grief-stricken king began to lament piteously. The royal women rushed wailing to King Srinjaya.

The king thought of me with concentrated attention. Knowing that the king was thinking of me, I appeared before him. Stricken as the king was, I told him all those stories, Rajan, that this hero of Yadu's race has already related to you. With Indra's leave, I brought Srinjaya's child back to life.

That which is ordained must come to pass, it is impossible that it should be otherwise. After this, Prince Suvarnashthivin of great fame and energy began to delight the hearts of his parents. Of great prowess, he ascended the throne after his father's death, and ruled for one thousand and one hundred years. He worshipped the gods with many great sacrifices distinguished by lavish gifts. Possessed of great splendour, he gratified the Devas and the Pitris.

He had many sons, all of whom multiplied the race, and after many years he met with a natural death. O best of men, dispel this grief born in your heart, as Kesava and Vyasa of austere penances have counselled you to. Rise up, Rajan, and bear the burden of this your ancestral kingdom; perform high and great sacrifices so that you may obtain hereafter whatever regions you desire!'"

CANTO 32

Vaisampayana said, "To king Yudhishtira, who still remained speechless and plunged in grief, the island-born Maharishi Vyasa, knower of dharma, says again, 'O you of eyes like lotus petals, the protection of subjects is the dharma of kings. Those who are always observant of dharma regard it to be all-powerful. Do, therefore, O Rajan, walk in the steps of your ancestors.

For Brahmanas, tapasya is a duty, as laid down by the eternal law of the Vedas. Tapasya, therefore, Bharatarishabha, constitutes the eternal duty of Brahmanas.

A Kshatriya is the protector of all in respect of their dharma. The man who, obsessed by earthly possessions, breaks wholesome restraints and offends social harmony must be punished with a strong hand. Such a brutish man who seeks to offend authority, be he an attendant, a son or even a sage, should by every means be chastised, or even killed, along with all men of similar sinful natures.

The king who conducts himself in any other manner incurs sin. He who does not protect dharma when someone disregards it is himself a transgressor of righteousness. The Kauravas were transgressors of dharma and you have slain them along with their followers. Since you have been observant of your svadharma, why then, Pandava, do you indulge in such grief?

The king must kill those who deserve death, make gifts to persons deserving of charity, and protect his subjects according to the law.'

Yudhishtira says, ‘I do not doubt the words that fall from your lips, O Mahatapasvin! Everything concerning niti and dharma is well known to you. I have, however, for the sake of kingdom, caused numbers to be slain. These savage and bloody deeds, O Brahmana, consume me!’

Vyasa asks, ‘Is the Paramatman the doer, or is man the doer? Is everything the result of chance in this world, or are the fruits that we enjoy or suffer the results of karma? If man is responsible for all karma, good or bad, being urged to do so by Brahman, the Supreme Being, then the fruits of these acts should be for Brahman himself. If a man cuts down a tree in forest with an axe, it is he who incurs the sin, not the axe.

Or, if one says that the axe being only the material cause, the consequence of the deed should attach to the animate agent and not to the inanimate tool, then the sin may be said to belong to the man who made the axe—but this can scarcely be true. If it is not reasonable, Kaunteya, that one man should incur the consequence of a thing done by another, then you should ascribe all responsibility to the Supreme Being.

If, again, man is himself the agent of all his actions, virtuous and sinful, then there is no Supreme Agent, and so, whatever you have done cannot bring evil consequences upon you. No one, O king, can ever turn away from what is destined. If, again, destiny be the result of the deeds of former lives, then no sin can be attached to one in this life, just as the sin of cutting down a tree cannot touch the maker of the axe.

If you think it is only chance that acts in the world, then such a vast war of destruction would never have happened, nor ever will. If you need to ascertain what is good and what is evil in the world, attend to the shastras. These scriptures have laid down that kings should stand with the danda uplifted in their hands. I think, Bhaarata, that karma, good and bad, continually revolves here as a wheel, and men obtain the fruits of their actions, good or evil.

One sinful deed proceeds from another. Therefore, Purushavyaghra, avoid all evil actions and do not set your heart upon grief. You should adhere to the duties, even if reproachable, of your own order. This self-destruction, Rajan, is not commendable in you. Atonements have been ordained for evil acts. He who is alive can perform them, but he who dies fails in their performance. Therefore, O Rajan, without laying down your life, perform these expiatory rites. If you do not perform them, you may have to repent in the next world.’”

CANTO 33

"Yudhishtira says, 'Sons and grandsons, brothers and fathers, fathers-in-law, acharyas, maternal uncles and grandfathers, many noble Kshatriyas, many relatives by marriage, friends, companions, sisters' sons, and kinsmen have fallen O grandfather, and many great men coming from diverse countries. I alone have caused all of them to be slain, from my desire for kingdom. Having slain many heroic kings devoted to dharma, all of whom had drunk soma during sacrifices, what end will I attain, O wisest of all sages?

My body is on fire, thinking that the earth is bereft of the many prosperous lions among kings who were enjoying great prosperity. Having witnessed this slaughter of kinsmen and millions of other men, I burn with grief, grandfather!

Oh, what will be the plight of those best of women deprived of their sons, of husbands, and of brothers? Reproaching the Pandavas and the Vrishnis as cruel murderers, these gaunt-faced women, plunged in grief, will throw themselves on the earth and, through sorrow, will cast off their life-breath, and go to the halls of Yama, O best of Brahmanas. I have no doubt of this!

The course of dharma is subtle, and it is plain that we will be stained with guilt for the deaths of these women. Having killed our kinsmen and friends and committed an inexpiable sin, we will fall into hell with our heads downwards.

So, O best of men, we will waste our limbs with the austerest of tapasyas. Tell me, O Pitamaha, what asrama of life I should adopt?'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these words of Yudhishtira, the island-born Rishi, having reflected keenly for some time, says, 'Remember the dharma of a Kshatriya, O Rajan, and do not give way to grief. All these Kshatriyas have fallen while engaged in performing their svadharma of pursuing greater prosperity and greater fame on earth, O Bharatarishabha. These great men, all of whom were mortal, have perished through the influence of Kaala, inexorable Time.

You were not their slayer, nor Bhima, nor Arjuna, nor the twins. It is Time that took away their lives according to the inviolable law of change. Kaala has neither mother, nor father, nor anybody to whom he is disposed to show any favour. He is the witness of the actions of all creatures, and it is he who has taken them away. This battle, O Bharatarishabha, was only an event that he created. He causes creatures to be slain through other creatures, and this is how he demonstrates his irresistible power.

Understand that Kaala in his dealings with creatures is dependent upon the bonds of action and is the witness of all karma, good and bad. It is Time that brings about the fruits of our deeds, whether bliss or sorrow. Think, O Mahabaho, of the deeds of these Kshatriyas who have fallen. Their karma was the cause of their destruction, and for that they perished.

Think also of your own karma, of adhering to vows with a calm soul, and also of how the Supreme Ordainer has forced you to do your karma—the slaughter of so many men. Just as a weapon made by a smith or carpenter is under the control of the one that handles it, and moves as he moves it, this universe, controlled by actions done in Time, moves as those actions move it.

Seeing that the births and deaths of creatures take place without any assignable cause and in perfect wantonness, grief and joy are entirely needless. Although this entanglement of your heart is a mere delusion, still, if it pleases you, O king, perform expiatory rites to purify yourself of your so-called sin.

It is heard, O Kaunteya, that the Devas and the Asuras, covetous of prosperity, fought each other. The Asuras were the elder, and the gods the younger, brothers. Fierce was the battle between them, lasting for thirty-two thousand years. Making the earth one vast sea of blood, the Devas slew the Daityas and gained possession of Swarga.

Having obtained possession of the earth, a large number of Brahmanas, conversant with the Vedas, armed themselves, and stupefied with pride, sided with the Danavas and helped them in the fight. They were known by the name of Salavrika and numbered eighty-eight thousand. But the Devas slew all of them. So these evil men who desire the extinction of dharma and who were promoting adharma deserved to be slain, just as the gods did the ferocious demons.

If by slaying a single individual a family can be saved, or, if by slaying a single family the whole kingdom can be saved, such an act of killing will not be a transgression. Sin, O king, sometimes assumes the form of virtue, and virtue sometimes assumes the form of sin. However, they who are learned know which is which.

Therefore, console yourself, O son of Pandu, for you are well versed in the shastras. You, O Bhaarata, have only followed the path that the gods formerly trod. Men like you never reach hell. Comfort your brothers and all your friends, O Parantapa.

He who deliberately sins and feels no shame, but continues transgressing as before, is called in the shastras a great sinner. There is no atonement for him, and his offences know no diminution. You are born into a noble race. Forced by the faults of others, you have most unwillingly fought this war and, having done so, you repent.

The great yagna, the Aswamedha, is the expiation for you. Make preparations for this sacrifice, O monarch, and you will be freed from your sins.

The divine chastiser of Paka, having vanquished his foes with the help of the Maruts, gradually performed a hundred sacrifices and became Satakratu. Freed from stain, possessed of Devaloka and having obtained many realms of bliss and prosperity, Sakra, surrounded by the Maruts, shines in beauty, and illumines all the quarters with his splendour. The Apsaras adore the lord of Sachi in the heavens. The Rishis and the other gods all worship him with reverence.

You have won the earth through your prowess. You have vanquished all the kings, O sinless one; through your power, go with your friends to their kingdom, O king, and install their brothers, sons or grandsons on their thrones. Behave with kindness towards even the children in the womb, make your subjects glad, and rule the earth. Install on their thrones the daughters of those who have no sons. Women are fond of pleasure and

power, and they will cast off their sorrows and become happy. Having comforted the whole empire in this way, O Bhaarata, please the gods with an Aswamedha yagna as the virtuous Indra did in earlier days.

It is not proper for us to grieve for the noble Kshatriyas who have fallen in battle. Struck by the power of the Destroyer, they have perished while observing their swadharma. You have discharged the duties of a Kshatriya and gained the earth without any thorn left in it.

Observe your swadharma, O Kaunteya, for then you will be able to enjoy happiness in the other world, O Bhaarata.'"

CANTOS 34–35

"Yudhishtira says, 'When does it become necessary for a man to perform penance? And what must he do to be freed from sin? Tell me, O Pitamaha.'

Vyasa says, 'If a man neglects to do what the Supreme Ordainer has ordained for him, or if he does what is forbidden to him, or if he behaves deceitfully, he is compelled to perform atonement rites.

The Brahmachari who forgets a vow; who rises from bed after sunrise, or goes to bed while the sun is setting; one who has rotten nails or black teeth; one whose younger brother weds first, or who weds before his elder brother; one who is guilty of killing a Brahmana; who speaks ill of others; who weds a younger sister before the older sister is married or weds an older sister after having married a younger one; who kills a Muni; who imparts knowledge of the Vedas to a person unworthy of it, or does not impart knowledge to one who is worthy of it; who takes many lives; who sells flesh; who has abandoned his sacred fire; who sells his knowledge of the Vedas; who slays his guru or a woman; who is born into a sinful family; who slaughters an animal wilfully; who sets fire to a dwelling house; who lives by deceit, or acts in opposition to his guru; one who has violated an agreement—they are all guilty of sins requiring expiation.

I will now mention other actions that are prohibited by both the world and the Vedas. Listen to me attentively.

The rejection of one's svadharma; the practice of the dharma of others; helping at the sacrifice or the religious rites of one unworthy of such

assistance; eating food that is forbidden; deserting one that craves protection; neglecting to maintain servants and dependants; selling salt and sweet and other similar substances; killing birds and animals; refusing, though competent, to procreate upon a soliciting woman; omitting to present daily gifts grass to cows and the like, or to give dakshina; humiliating a Brahmana—these are all actions that those conversant with dharma have proscribed.

The son who quarrels with his father, the man who violates the bed of his guru, one who neglects to produce offspring with his wedded wife, are all sinful, O Naravyaghra. I have now told you, in brief and in detail, those actions and omissions by which a man becomes liable to perform expiation. Listen now to the circumstances under which men, even after committing these deeds, do not become stained with sin.

If a Brahmana well acquainted with the Vedas takes up arms and rushes at you in battle in order to kill you, you can take his life. By such an act the slayer does not become guilty of Brahmahatya. There is a mantra in the Vedas, O Kaunteya, which lays this down, and I am telling you only of those practices that are sanctioned by the authority of the Vedas.

One who kills a Brahmana who has renounced his own dharma and who advances, weapon in hand, with intent to kill, does not truly become the slayer of a Brahmana. In such a case it is the anger of the slayer that proceeds against the wrath of the slain.

By drinking alcoholic stimulants, in ignorance or upon the advice of a virtuous physician when his life is at peril, a man should have the regenerating ceremonies performed once more in his case. All that I have told you about the eating of forbidden food can be cleansed by these expiatory rites.

Sexual congress with the guru's wife at the preceptor's command does not stain the disciple. The Rishi Uddalaka had his son Swetaketu begotten by a disciple. Sin does not stain one who commits theft for the sake of his acharya in a season of distress. One who takes to theft for his own enjoyment, however, becomes tarnished.

A man is not defiled by stealing from other than Brahmanas in a season of distress and for the sake of one's guru. Sin leaves untouched only one who steals under such circumstances without appropriating any portion to himself. A falsehood can be spoken for saving one's own life or that of

another, for the sake of one’s guru, for gratifying a woman, or for bringing about a marriage.

One’s vow of brahmacharya is not broken by having dreams that cause him to ejaculate. In such cases, the expiation laid down consists in the pouring of libations of clarified butter onto the sacred fire. If an elder brother dies or has renounced the world, the younger brother does not incur sin by marrying his brother’s wife. Solicited by a woman, one does not lose virtue through intimacy with her.

One should not kill or cause an animal to be slain, except in a sacrifice. Through the kindness manifested towards animals by the Creator himself in his laws they have become sacred, and fit for sacrifice. By making a gift in ignorance to an undeserving Brahmana one does not incur sin. The omission of charity towards a deserving man through ignorance does not lead to sin. By casting off an adulterous wife one does not incur sin, for by this, the woman herself can be purged while the husband avoids sin.

One who knows the true use of the soma juice, does not incur sin by selling it. By dismissing a servant who is incompetent to render service, sin will not touch you. I have now told you those actions by which one does not incur sin. I will now tell you how to do penance, in detail.’”

CANTO 36

"Vyasa says 'Through penance, religious rites, and gifts, O Bhaarata, a man can wash away his sins if he does not commit them again. By subsisting like a sannyasi upon one meal a day procured by begging, by doing all his work himself without a servant, by begging with a human skull in one hand and a khatvanga in another, by becoming a Brahmacharin and always ready for hard work, by casting off all malice, by sleeping on bare ground, by announcing his offence to the world—by doing all this for full twelve years, a man can cleanse himself from the sin of Brahmahatya, having slain a Brahmana.

By dying at the hands of a warrior of one's own will and on the advice of men learned in the shastras, or by throwing oneself down three times, head downwards, into a blazing fire, or by walking a hundred yojanas, all the while reciting the Vedas, or by giving away one's entire property to a Brahmana conversant with the Vedas, or at least so much as would secure to him a livelihood, or a house properly furnished, and by protecting cattle and Brahmanas, one can be cleansed of Brahmahatya, the sin of having slain a Brahmana.

Again, by living upon the scantiest food every day for six years, a man can be cleansed of this sin. By observing a more rigorous vow with regard to food one can be purified in three years. By living upon one meal a month, one can be cleansed in just a year. By observing, again, an absolute fast, one can be purified within a very short time.

There is no doubt, again, that an Aswamedha yagna purifies a man. Men guilty of having slain a Brahmana who succeed in taking the avabhrita snana, the final bath at the completion of the sacrifice, are washed clean of all their sins. This is an injunction of great authority in the Srutis. One becomes cleansed of the sin of having killed a Brahmana, and indeed of all one's sins, by dying in a battle undertaken for the sake of a Brahmana, or by giving away a hundred thousand cattle to those deserving of gifts.

One becomes cleansed of all one's sins by giving away twenty-five thousand Kapila cows, all of which have calved, or at the point of death by giving away a thousand cows with calves to poor but deserving persons.

The man, O king, who gives away a hundred steeds of the Kamboja breed to deserving Brahmanas, becomes freed from sin. The man, O Bharata, who gives to just one man all that he asks for, and who, having given it, does not speak of it to anyone, is freed from sin.

If a person who has once drunk alcohol drinks as expiation hot liquor, he sanctifies himself both here and hereafter. One frees oneself of all sins by jumping off the summit of a mountain or entering a blazing fire, or by going on an everlasting journey after renouncing the world. By performing the sacrifice laid down by Brihaspati, a Brahmana who drinks can succeed in attaining to Brahmaloka. Brahma himself has said that if a man, after having drunk, becomes humble, makes a gift of land and abstains from liquor ever after, he becomes sanctified and cleansed.

The man who has violated his acharya's bed should lie on a heated sheet of iron and, having cut off his manhood, should take sannyasa with eyes always turned upwards. By casting off one's body, one becomes purified of all evil acts.

Women become cleansed of all their sins by leading a regulated life for one year. The man who observes a very arduous vow, or gives away the whole of his wealth, or perishes in a battle fought for the sake of his guru, is purified of all his sins. One who lies to his guru or acts in opposition to him, becomes cleansed of that sin by doing something agreeable to his preceptor.

One who has deviated from the vow of Brahmacharya can be exorcised of the sin by wearing the hide of a cow for six months and observing the penances laid down in the case of the slaughter of a Brahmana. One who is guilty of adultery, or of theft, can become clean by observing rigid vratas for a year. When one steals another's property, one should, by every means

in his power, return the value of the stolen property and thereby be washed clean of the sin of theft.

The younger brother who has married before the marriage of the elder brother, and the elder brother whose younger brother has married before him, becomes pure by observing a severe vow, sincerely, for twelve nights. The younger brother, however, should marry again for rescuing his deceased ancestors. By such a second marriage, the first wife becomes cleansed and her husband himself will not incur sin by marrying her.

Men who know the scriptures declare that women may be cleansed of even the greatest sins by observing the vow of chaturmasya, all the while living upon scant and sattvik food. Men conversant with the shastras do not take into account the sins that women commit in their hearts. Whatever be their sins of this description, their menstrual course renders them clean, like a metal plate scoured with ash.

Plates made of the alloy of brass and copper made impure by a Sudra eating from them, or a vessel of the same metal that a cow has sniffed at, or that a Brahmana's Gandusha gargle has made unclean, can be cleansed by means of the ten purifying substances.

The shastras have laid down that a Brahmana should acquire and practise the full measure of dharma, and a Kshatriya should acquire and practise a measure of dharma less by a fourth part. So, a Vaisya should acquire a measure a quarter less than a Kshatriya's and a Sudra a fourth less than a Vaisya's. The heaviness or lightness of sins for purposes of expiation of each of the four varnas should be determined upon this principle.

Having killed a bird or an animal, or cut down living trees, a man should make known his sin and fast for three nights. For indulging in intercourse with one with whom it is prohibited, the expiation is to wander in wet clothes and to sleep on a bed of ashes. These, O king, are the atonements for sinful deeds, according to precedent, reason, the shastras and the laws.

A Brahmana can be cleansed of all his sins by reciting the Gayatri in a sacred place, while living upon frugal fare, casting off malice, abandoning anger and hate, remaining unmoved by praise and blame, and abstaining from speech. He should during the day-time be under the shelter of the sky and should lie down there even at night. Thrice during the day, and thrice during the night, he should plunge with his clothes into a stream or lake and perform his ablutions. Observing these rigid vows, he should abstain from

speech with women, Sudras and sinners. By observing such regulations a Brahmana is purified of all sins that he unconsciously commits.

A man obtains in the other world the fruits, good or bad, of his karma which the elements witness. Be it punya or be it paapa, according to the true measure that one acquires of either, one enjoys or suffers the consequences even in this world. Through gyana, tapasya and by dharma, one enhances one's happiness even here, or one can enhance one's misery by committing sins. One should, therefore, always do what is righteous and abstain altogether from deeds that are not.

I have now indicated how the sins that I have mentioned can be expiated. There is atonement for every sin except those that we call Mahapatakas or the most heinous sins.

As regards sins in respect of unclean food, improper speech and the like, they are of two kinds: those that one commits consciously and those committed unconsciously. All sins that one commits consciously are grave, while those that one commits unconsciously are trivial or light. There is expiation for both.

Indeed the observance of the above rules can wash away all sin. However, God lays down these laws only for believers and those who have faith in Him. They are not for atheists or those who have no faith, or those in whom pride and malice predominate. A man who wishes for prosperity both here and in the hereafter, O Purushavyaghra, should adopt righteous behaviour, listen to the counsels of righteous men and observe the dharma that the shastras have ordained for him.

So, for the reasons I have already given, O Rajan, you will be cleansed of all your sins, for you have slain your foes while discharging your dharma as a king and for the protection of your life and inheritance. However, if you still regard yourself as sinful, perform expiation. Do not cast away your life out of grief, in a manner unbecoming of a wise man.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Thus addressed by the holy Rishi, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, having reflected for a short while, says these words to the Muni."

CANTO 37

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what food is clean and what unclean, what gifts are praiseworthy, and who should be considered deserving or undeserving of them.'

Vyasa says, 'Let me relate to you the old discussion between the Rishis and Manu, the lord of creation. In the Krita yuga, an assembly of Rishis of high austerities approached the great and powerful Prajapati Manu while he was seated at his ease, and requested him to engage in a discourse on dharma, asking, "What food should be eaten, who is to be regarded as a person deserving gifts, what gifts should be made, how should a person study, and what penances should one perform, how and what deeds should be done and what deeds should not? O lord of creation, tell us everything about all this."

Thus addressed, the divine and swayambhuva Manu told them, "Listen to me as I explain the dharma in brief as well as in detail. The shastras have laid down that the following deeds and places are expiatory in lands in which they are not prohibited—silent recitation of sacred mantras, homa, fasts, knowledge of the self, sacred rivers and regions inhabited by men devoted to pious deeds.

Some mountains also are purifying, as also the eating of gold and bathing in water in which one has dipped gems and precious stones. Tirtha yatra, and eating sanctified butter will also, without doubt, speedily purify a man.

No man would ever be called wise if he is proud and, if he wishes to be long-lived, he should for three nights drink hot water as a tapasya for being proud. Refusal to take what is not given, charity, the study of scriptures, tapasya, abstention from injury, truth, freedom from anger, and worship of the gods by means of yagnas, are the characteristics of dharma.

That which is virtue may, according to time and place, become sin; thus, the appropriation of what belongs to others, untruth, and injury and killing, may under special circumstances, become virtues. Men capable of judging deeds consider them to be of two kinds—virtuous and sinful. From the worldly and the Vedic points of view again, punya and paapa are good or bad according to their consequences.

Virtue and sin, everything a man may or may not do, would be either action or inaction. Inaction, abstention from Vedic rites and adoption of a life of contemplation leads to freedom from rebirth while the consequences of action, the practice of Vedic rites, result in repeated death and rebirth.

From the worldly point of view, deeds that are evil lead to evil and those that are good fetch beneficial consequences. Therefore, punya and paapa are to be distinguished by the good and the evil character of their consequences.

Deeds that are apparently evil, when undertaken from considerations connected with the Devas, the shastras, life itself, and the means by which life is sustained, produce consequences that are good. When an action is undertaken from the expectation, however doubtful, that it will produce harm to some one in the future, or when an action is done whose consequence is visibly harmful, the shastras command penance.

When a deed is done from anger or clouded judgment, then expiation should be performed by inflicting pain on the body, guided by precedent, the shastras and reason. When, again, anything is done in order to please or displease the mind, the sin arising from it may be cleansed by sanctified food and recitation of mantras. The king who lays aside the danda in a particular instance should fast for one night. The priest who abstains from advising the king to inflict punishment in a particular case, should fast for three nights as expiation. The man who from grief attempts to commit suicide with weapons, should fast for three nights.

There is no expiation for those who cast off the duties and practices of their order and class, country and family, and who abandon their very religion. When an occasion for doubt arises respecting what should be done,

what ten persons versed in Vedic scriptures or three of those who frequently recite them may pronounce, should be regarded as the injunction of the shastras.

The bull, earth, little ants, worms generated in dirt and poison, should not be eaten by Brahmanas. They should not also eat fish that have no scales, and four-footed aquatic creratures like frogs and others, except the tortoise. Water-fowls called Bhasas, ducks, Suparnas, Chakravakas, diving ducks, cranes, crows, shags, vultures, hawks and owls. Also all four-footed animals that are carnivorous and that have sharp, long teeth, birds and animals with two teeth and those with four, the milk of the sheep, the she-ass, the she-camel, the newly-calved cow, woman and deer, should not be ingested by a Brahmana.

Besides this, food cooked by a woman who has recently given birth to a child, or food cooked by an unknown person should not be taken, nor should the milk of a cow that has recently calved. If a Brahmana takes food that a Kshatriya has cooked, it diminishes his tejas; if he takes the food provided by a Sudra, it dims his Brahmanic lustre; and if he takes the food provided by a goldsmith or a woman who has neither husband nor children, it lessens the span of his life. The food provided by a money-lender is equivalent to dirt, while that provided by a woman living by prostitution is equivalent to semen. The food provided by men who tolerate the infidelity of their wives, and by men whose spouses rule them, is also forbidden.

A Brahmana should not accept food given by a man selected for receiving gifts at a certain stage of a sacrifice; by one who does not enjoy his wealth or make any gifts; by one who sells soma, or who is a shoe-maker; by an unchaste woman, by a washerman, by a physician, by persons serving as watchmen, by a multitude of persons, by one who is pointed at by a whole village, by one deriving his income from dancing girls, by men married before their elder brothers, by professional singers and bards or by gamblers. He should refuse food which is brought with the left hand or which is stale, or mixed with alcohol, or has been already tasted, or that remains after a feast.

A Brahmana should not eat cakes, sugarcane, pot-herbs or rice boiled in sugared milk, if they have lost their taste, or fried barley powder and other kinds of fried grain mixed with curds if they are stale. Brahmanas leading a grihasta's life should not take rice boiled in sugared milk, food mixed with the tila seed, meat and cakes that one has not dedicated to the gods. He

should take his food after first gratifying the Devas, Rishis, Athitis, Pitris and household deities.

By living thus in his own house, a grihasta becomes like a Bhikshu who has renounced the world. A man of such conduct, living with his wives in domesticity, earns great religious merit. No one should make a gift for the sake of acquiring fame, or from fear of censure and the like, or to a benefactor.

A virtuous man would not give gifts to persons living by singing and dancing, to professional jesters, to a person who is intoxicated, to one who is insane, to a thief, to a slanderer, to an idiot, to an albino, to one who has a defective limb, to a dwarf, to an evil man, to one born in a low and evil family, or to one who has not been sanctified by the observance of vows.

No gift should be made to a Brahmana who has no knowledge of the Vedas, but only to a Srotriya. An improper gift and an improper acceptance produce evil consequences to both the giver and the receiver. Just as a man who seeks to cross the ocean with the help of a rock or a mass of catechu sinks along with his support, so too do the giver and the acceptor both sink together.

Just as a fire covered with wet fuel does not blaze up, the acceptor of a gift who is remiss in penance, study and piety, cannot confer any benefit upon the giver. Just as water in a human skull and milk in a bag made of dog-skin become unclean due to the uncleaness of the vessels in which they are kept, the Vedas too become fruitless in a man who is not of good conduct.

A man may give from compassion to a low Brahmana who is without mantras and vows, who is ignorant of the shastras and who harbours envy. One may, from compassion, give to a man who is poor or afflicted or ill. But he should not give in the belief that he would derive any spiritual benefit from it, or that he would earn any religious merit by it. There is no doubt that a gift made to Brahmana who is without knowledge of the Vedas becomes perfectly fruitless.

A Brahmana who has not studied the Vedas is like an elephant made of wood or an antelope made of leather, as all three are nothing but names. A Brahmana without mantras is like a eunuch with women, or a cow with another cow, or a featherless bird, all in vain. A gift to a Brahmana devoid of learning is like a grain without a kernel, a well without water, or offerings poured on ashes.

An unlearned Brahmana is an enemy to all and the destroyer of the food that is offered to the Devas and Pitris. A gift made to him goes for nothing, and is like a gift to a robber. He can never succeed in acquiring regions of bliss hereafter. I have now told you in brief, O Yudhishtira, all that Manu said on that occasion. All should listen to this great conversation O Bharatarishabha.'"'"

CANTO 38

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Maharishi, I wish to hear in detail what the dharma of kings is, and the dharma of all the four varnas. I wish also to hear, O great Brahmana, what conduct one should adopt in times of distress, and how one can subdue the world by treading the path of dharma. This discourse on atonement, dealing at the same time with the subject of fasts, excites great curiosity, and fills me with joy. The practice of punya and the discharge of Rajadharma are always inconsistent with each other. My mind is constantly confused thinking of how to reconcile the two.'

Then Vyasa, the maharishi who is the greatest master of the Vedas, looks at the Devarishi Narada and says, 'If you wish to hear of dharma in detail, ask Bhishma Pitamaha, Mahabaho. A profound knower of dharma and possessed of universal knowledge, the son of Bhagirathi will remove all your doubts on the difficult subject of duty.

The Devi, the celestial river of three courses, gave birth to him. He saw with his mortal eyes all the Devas with Indra at their head. Having gratified with his dutiful services the Devarishis with Brihaspati at their head, he acquired a knowledge of the dharma of kings, with its interpretations, from Usanas and Brihaspati who is the guru of all the celestial ones.

Having practised rigid vows, that Mahabaho acquired knowledge of all the Vedas and Vedangas from Vasishtha and from Chyavana of Bhrigu's race. In his youth he studied under the eldest-born son of the Pitamaha, Sanatkumara of blazing splendour, knower of the deepest truths of mental

and spiritual science. He learnt the duties in full of the Yatis from the lips of Markandeya, and obtained all weapons from Rama and Sakra.

Although he was born among human beings, his death is yet under his own control and will only come when he wills it. We hear that although childless, he has many realms of bliss hereafter. Maharishis of great merit were always his courtiers. Nothing in the world of objects that should be known is unknown to him. Profoundly knowledgeable about all duties and acquainted with all the subtle truths of morality, he will also discourse with you upon these. Go to him before he abandons his prana.'

Thus addressed, Kaunteya of great wisdom says to Satyavati's son Vyasa, 'Having caused a great and horrible slaughter of kinsmen, I have become an offender against all and a destroyer of the earth. Having caused Bhishma himself, that warrior who always fought fairly, to be slain by deceit, how shall I approach him to ask him about dharma?'

Moved by the desire to benefit all the four varnas, the noble and mighty-armed Krishna, lord of the Yaduvamsa race, again addresses the great king. 'It does not become you to show such obstinacy in grief. O best of kings, do what the holy Vyasa has said. The Brahmanas and your brothers of great tejas stand before you, Mahabaho, imploring you like men beseeching the deity of the clouds at the close of summer.

The unslain remnant of the assembled kings, and the people belonging to all the four orders of your kingdom of Kurujangala, O king, are here. For the sake of doing what is agreeable to these noble Brahmanas, in obedience to the command of Vyasa of immeasurable tejas, O Parantapa, and at our request, we who are your well-wishers and Draupadi's, do what we ask you, and what is beneficial to the world.'

Yudhishtira of eyes like lotus petals rises from his seat for the good of the whole world. The Naravyaghra of great fame, entreated by Krishna himself, by the island-born Vyasa, by Devasthana, by Jishnu, and many others, casts off his grief and anxiety. Fully aware of the declarations of the Srutis, with the science that treats the interpretation of these declarations and with all that men usually hear and all that deserves to be heard, the son of Pandu finds peace of mind and resolves upon what he should do next.

Surrounded by all of them, like the moon by the stars, and placing Dhritarashtra at the head of the train, Yudhishtira sets out for the city after offering worship to the Devas and thousands of Brahmanas. He ascends a new white chariot covered with blankets and deerskins, to which are yoked

sixteen white bullocks with auspicious marks, sanctified with Vedic mantras. Hymned by poets and bards, the king mounts the chariot, like Soma ascending his own ambrosial vehicle. His brother Bhima, of awesome powers, takes the reins. Arjuna holds a white sovereign parasol of great radiance over his head, as beautiful as a white cloud decked with stars. The two heroic sons of Madri, Nakula and Sahadeva, take up two yak-tails, white as the rays of the moon and adorned with gems, with which to fan the king.

Having ascended the chariot, the five brothers decked with ornaments, O Rajan, look like the five elements that permeate all things and beings. Riding another white ratha yoked to steeds fleet as thought, Yuyutsu follows behind the eldest son of Pandu.

Upon his own brilliant chariot of gold, yoked to Saibya and Sugriva, Krishna with Satyaki follows the Kurus. The eldest uncle of Pritha's son, O Bhaarata, accompanied by Gandhari, goes at the head of the train, upon a palanquin borne on the shoulders of men. The other women of the Kuru household, including Kunti and Krishna, journey in exquisite palanquins, headed by Vidura. Behind, follow a large number of chariots and elephants decked with ornaments, and foot-soldiers and horses.

The Dharmaputra travels towards Hastinapura accompanied by sweet-voiced balladeers and bards singing the king's praises. The progress of King Yudhishtira is majestic and beautiful, O Mahabhaho, beyond anything seen like it before on earth. During the regal progress of Pritha's son, the city and its streets are adorned with happy citizens who have come out to honour the king. Teeming with robust and cheerful men, the streets resound with the hum of innumerable voices. The highway along which the king passes is festooned with flowers and innumerable banners. The streets of the city are perfumed with incense, covered with powdered perfumes and flowers and fragrant plants, and adorned with garlands and wreaths. New metal jars, brimming with water, are kept at the door of every house, and groups of the loveliest young women gather there.

Accompanied by his friends, the son of Pandu, praised in speeches, enters the city through its profusely adorned gate."

CANTO 39

Vaisampayana said, “When the Pandavas enter the city, thousands and thousands of the citizens come out to watch them. The richly adorned squares and streets, swelling each moment with the crowds, are like the surge of ocean waves at the rise of the moon. The great mansions, Bhaarata, that stand on either side, decked with every ornament and full of women, seem to shake with their weight. With soft and modest voices they praise Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the two sons of Madri, saying, ‘You are worthy of all praise, blessed princess of Panchala, who waits by the side of these great men even as Gautami did by the side of the seven Rishis. Your karma and vows have borne fruit, O Princess Krishnaa!’

O Rajan, the women praise her in this manner, and as a result of these praises, and their talk among one another, and the shouts of joy by the men, the city is filled with a reverberant uproar. After passing through the streets in a stately manner, Yudhishtira enters the beautiful palace of the Kurus adorned with all manner of ornaments.

The people of the city and the provinces, approaching the palace, praise him: ‘Through good fortune you have vanquished your enemies, Parantapa, and recovered your kingdom through virtue and energy. Be our king for a hundred years, and protect your people virtuously as Indra protects the inhabitants of heaven!’

Thus praised and blessed at the palace-gate, and accepting the benedictions of the Brahmanas from every side, the king, graced with victory and the blessings of the people, enters the palace that resembles

Indra's own, and descends from his chariot. Entering the apartments, the blessed Yudhishtira worships the household gods, the kuladevas, with jewels, perfumes and garlands. He then comes out and sees a number of Brahmanas waiting with auspicious offerings in their hands, to pronounce blessings on him. Surrounded by them he appears like the full moon in the midst of the stars. Accompanied by his priest Dhaumya and his eldest uncle, he joyfully worships these Brahmanas with due rites, and gifts of sweets, gems, gold in profusion, cows, robes and other diverse things that they desire.

Then loud shouts of 'This is a blessed day!' fill the heavens, O Bhaarata. Sweet to the ear, the sacred sound is gratifying to the friends and well-wishers of the Pandavas. The king also hears these sounds, loud and clear like the calls of a flock of swans. He listens to these men familiar with the Vedas, whose speech is meaningful and rich with melodious words. Then, O Rajan, there is a roll of drums and a delightful fanfare of triumphal conches.

A little while later, when the Brahmanas become silent, a Rakshasa named Charvaka, who has disguised himself as a Brahmana, speaks. He is a friend of Duryodhana and stands there in the garb of a sannyasi. With a rosary, a tuft of hair on his head, and the triple staff in his hand, he stands proudly and fearlessly in the midst of all these Brahmanas, all devoted to penances and vows, who have come there in their thousands to bless the king. Charvaka the Rakshasa, wanting to do evil to the noble Pandavas, without consulting these Brahmanas, now tells the king, 'All these Brahmanas, making me their spokesman, say "Shame on you! You are an evil king. You are a slayer of kinsmen. What have you gained, O son of Kunti, by having exterminated your race? For having also slain your elders and guru it is proper for you to cast away your life."'

Hearing these words of that evil one, the Brahmanas present are deeply agitated and beak into a furious uproar. And all of them, including Yudhishtira, O Rajan, become speechless with shame and anxiety.

Yudhishtira says, 'I bow down to you and beg you humbly, to bear with me. It does not become you to shout at me. I will soon lay down my life.'

Then all the Brahmanas, O Rajan, cry loudly, 'These are not our words! Prosperity to you, O Rajan!'

These maharishis, all with knowledge of the Vedas and understanding rendered clear by tapasya, then penetrate the disguise of the speaker with

their spiritual insight and declare, 'This is the Rakshasa Charvaka, Duryodhana's friend disguised as a sannyasi, who seeks the good of his dead friend. We have not, O Dharmatman, joined him in what he says. Let your anxiety be dispelled and let prosperity be with you and your brothers.'

The Brahmanas, insensate with rage, then utter the deadly sound '*Hunn'*. Cleansed of all sins, they censure the sinful Rakshasa and slay him there with the very humkara. Consumed by the tejas of these Brahmavadis, Charvaka falls dead like a tree with all its roots and sprouts blasted by Vajra, the thunder of Indra. The Brahmanas go away, duly worshipped, having gladdened the king with their blessings. The royal son of Pandu and all his friends feel great happiness come over them."

CANTO 40

Vaisampayana said, “Now Devaki’s son Krishna, Janardana of universal knowledge, says to King Yudhishtira and his brothers, ‘For me, in this world, Brahmanas are always to be worshipped. They are Devas on earth who have poison in their speech, but are exceedingly easy to gratify.

Once, in the Krita yuga, O Rajan, a Rakshasa named Charvaka performed austere tapasya for many years in Badari, Mahabaho. Brahma repeatedly told him to ask for boons. Finally, the Rakshasa asked for a vara that he should be freed from fear of any being in the universe. The Prajapati granted the boon, subject to the condition that he should be careful to not offend Brahmanas.

Having obtained the boon, the sinful and mighty Rakshasa, violent and powerful, began to harrass the Devas. Persecuted by the might of the Rakshasa, the Devas went to Brahma, for help to kill Charvaka.

Brahma told them, “I have already arranged to bring about the Rakshasa’s death. There will be a king named Duryodhana among men, who will become the friend of this devil. Bound by affection for him, the Rakshasa will insult some holy Brahmanas. Stung by the wrong, the Brahmanas, whose power reposes in speech, will curse him in anger and he will die.”

It is that Rakshasa Charvaka, O Rajan, who lies there dead, slain by the chant of the Brahmanas. Do not, Bharatarishabha, give way to sorrow. Your kinsmen, who perished in the observance of Kshatriya dharma, have all

gone to Swarga. Attend to your duties now, and do not grieve. Kill your enemies, protect your subjects, and worship the Brahmanas.'"

CANTO 41

Vaisampayana said, “Yudhishtira, free from grief and the fever in his heart, sits down with his face turned eastwards, on a magnificent throne made of gold. On another blazing golden seat facing him sit the two Parantapas, Satyaki and Krishna. On either side of the king, Bhima and Arjuna sit on two other resplendent jewel-encrusted thrones. Pritha sits with Sahadeva and Nakula on a white throne of ivory decked with gold. Sudharman, Vidura, Dhaumya and the Kuru king Dhritarashtra, sit separately on other thrones that blaze with the radiance of fire. Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and the famed Gandhari, all sit around King Dhritarashtra.

Dharmaraja Yudhishtira first touches the beautiful white flowers, swastikas, vessels full of earth, gold, silver and gems placed before him. Then, led by the priest Dhaumya, his subjects approach him, bringing with them auspicious offerings: sacred earth, gold, many kinds of jewels and other things necessary for the performance of the coronation rites. There are golden pots brimming with water, copper, silver and earthen jars, flowers, fried paddy, Kusa grass, cow’s milk, sacrificial fuel of the wood of Sami, Pippala and Palasa, honey, clarified butter, sacrificial ladles made of Udumbara, and conches adorned with gold.

At the behest of Krishna, the priest Dhaumya constructs an altar according to the appropriate rules, gradually inclining towards the east and the north. He seats Yudhishtira with Krishnaa, the daughter of Drupada, on the resplendent throne called Sarvatobhadra, glowing golden, with feet

covered with tiger-skin. He pours offerings of ghrita onto the sacred fire, chanting the proper mantras.

Yudhishtira, rising from his seat, takes up the sanctified conch and pours the water it contains over his head. Again at the behest of Krishna, the Rajarishi Dhritarashtra and all the people do the same. The son of Pandu, thus bathed with the sanctified water of the conch, looks radiantly handsome. The beating of panavas, anakas and other drums follows, as King Yudhishtira the Just accepts the gifts his subjects offer him. As is his wont, he in turn bestows gifts lavishly on his people. He gives a thousand nishkas to the Brahmanas, all endowed with wisdom and gentle conduct from their study of the Vedas, and they chant special blessings over him.

Happy with their gifts, the Brahmanas wish him prosperity and victory and, with voices melodious as those of swans, praise him, saying, 'Yudhishtira Mahabaho, by good fortune victory is yours, son of Pandu, and you have recovered your position through your prowess. By good fortune the wielder of Gandiva, Bhimasena, yourself, O Rajan, and the two sons of Madri, are all here with us, having slain your enemies and escaped alive from a war which caused the death of so many heroes. O Bhaarata! Do attend without delay to those karmas that you should perform next.'

Thus these pious men worship king Yudhishtira and his brothers and friends, and install him on the throne of a vast kingdom, O Bhaarata!"

CANTO 42

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of encouragement and support from his subjects, Yudhishtira says to them, 'Truly blessed are the sons of Pandu, whose merits, true or false, the best of Brahmanas assembled together enumerate. Without doubt, we have gained your favour, since you so freely attribute all these qualities to us.

However, King Dhritarashtra is our father and our lord and, if you wish to please me, obey him always and do what he likes. I live for him alone, having killed all my kinsmen, and my dharma is to always serve him punctiliously. If you, like my friends, think I am deserving of your favour, I beg you all to behave towards Dhritarashtra as you used to before. He is our lord and the whole world, along with the Pandavas, belongs to him. You should always bear this in mind.'

He then dismisses the citizens and the people of the provinces, and appoints his puissant brother Bhimasena as Yuvaraja, the most intelligent Vidura as chief advisor and, to oversee the six-fold needs of the state, the mature and accomplished Sanjaya as director and supervisor of finances. He appoints Nakula to keep the register of the military forces, to give the soldiers food and payment and to supervise other affairs of the army. He appoints Phalguna to defend the kingdom against hostile forces and to punish evil-doers, and Dhaumya, that best of priests, to attend daily to the Brahmanas of the kingdom, all rites in honour of the Devas and other religious duties. Sahadeva's duty is to always remain by Yudhishtira's side

to protect him in all circumstances. The king also cheerfully employs others as he considers suitable.

Dharmarajan Yudhishtira commands Vidura and Yuyutsu, ‘You should always do everything that my royal father Dhritarashtra wishes with alacrity and attention and, after taking his permission, whatever needs to be done in respect of the citizens and the people of the provinces in your respective capacities.’”

CANTO 43

Vaisampayana said, "After this, the noble King Yudhishtira orders the Sraddha rites of each of his kinsmen slain in battle to be performed. King Dhritarashtra, for the good of his sons in the other world, gives away to the Brahmanas rich food, kine, vast wealth and many beautiful and costly gem-stones.

Yudhishtira and Draupadi distribute wealth for the sake of Drona, the great Karna, Dhrishtadyumna, Abhimanyu, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, son of Hidimba, Virata, and other well-wishers who had served the Pandavas loyally, as well as for Drupada and the five sons of Draupadi. For the benefit of each of them, the king gratifies thousands of Brahmanas with gifts of gold, jewels, cows and clothes.

He performs the Sraddha rite for the good of those in the next world, of all the kings who had died in battle without leaving kinsmen or friends behind. Further, for the souls of all his friends, he constructs halls for dispensing food, places for the distribution of water, and tanks to be dug in their names. Thus paying off the debt he owes them and avoiding censure in this world, the king is happy and continues to protect his people religiously.

He shows due honour, as before, to Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Vidura, to all the great Kauravas and all his officials. Full of kindness, the Kuru king honours and protects all the women who lost their heroic husbands and sons in the war. With great compassion, he extends his favour to the destitute, the blind and the helpless by giving them food, clothes and shelter. Free from

enemies and having conquered the whole world, Yudhishtira begins to live a life of happiness.”

CANTO 44

Vaisampayana said, “Having got back the kingdom, and after his coronation, the wise King Yudhishtira, with folded hands, says to the lotus-eyed Krishna of Dasarha’s vamsa, ‘O Madhava, through your grace, guidance, might, intelligence and prowess, I have won back my ancestral kingdom. I bow to you again and again, O Parantapa! You are the one and only Being, refuge of all worshippers, whom even the Rishis and Munis adore with innumerable names.

Salutations to you, O Prajapati, Creator of the Universe! You are the Atman of the Universe, which has sprung from you. You are Vishnu, you are Jishnu, you are Hari, you are Krishna, you are Vaikunta, and you are the best of all beings. As said in the Puranas, you have taken birth seven times in the womb of Aditi. It was you who took birth in the womb of Prishni.

The learned say that you are the three yugas. All your achievements are sacred. You are the lord of our senses. You are the great Lord worshipped in yagnas. You are called the Parama Hamsa. You are three-eyed Sambhu. You are One, though known as Vibhu and Damodara. You are the great Boar, you are Fire, you are the sun, you have the bull as your emblem on your banner, and you have Garuda also as your device.

You are, Parantapa, the Being who pervades every form in the universe, of irresistible power. You are the best of all things, you are fierce, you are the Senapati in battle, you are the Truth, you are the giver of food, and you are Guha the celestial Senapati. Unfading, you cause your enemies to fade and waste away.

You are the Brahmana of pure blood, as well as those who have sprung from mixed blood. You are great. You walk high, you are the mountains, and you are called Vrishadarbha and Vrishakapi. You are the Ocean, you are without attributes, you are the three peaks of Trikuta, you have three abodes, and you take human forms on earth, descending from Swarga.

You are the Emperor, you are Virat, and you are Swarat. You are the Lord of the Devas, and you are the cause for the birth of the universe. You are Almighty, you are existence in every form, and yet you are formless. You are Krishna, you are fire. You are the Creator, you are the father of the celestial physicians, you are the sage Kapila, and you are the Vamana. You are the Sacrifice embodied, you are Dhruva, you are Garuda, and you are Yajnasena.

You are Sikhandin, you are Nahusha, and you are Babhru. You are the constellation Punarvasu stretched across the sky. You are tawny in hue, you are the sacrifice known as Uktha, you are Sushena, you are the drum which resounds through all space. Light is the track of your chariot-wheels. You are the lotus of Prosperity, you are the cloud called Pushkara, and you are decked with garlands. You are opulent, you are powerful, you are the most subtle, and it is you whom the Vedas describe.

You are the Ocean, great receptacle of waters, you are Brahma, you are the sacred refuge, and you know the abodes of all. You are called Hiranyagarbha, you are the sacred mantras Swadha and Swaha, and you are Kesava. You are the cause of the birth of all, and you are its dissolution. In the beginning it is you who created the universe. It is under your control, O Creator! Salutations to you, wielder of the Saringa, the Sudarshana and the Kaumodaki!'

Thus praised in song by Yudhishtira Dharmatma in the midst of the Kuru sabha, the lotus-eyed Krishna is pleased. In turn, the greatest of the Yadavas then lauds the eldest son of Pandu with his own words of praise."

CANTO 45

Vaisampayana said, “The king dismisses all his subjects, and they return to their homes. Comforting his brothers, Yudhishtira, blazing in splendour, says to the awesome Bhima, Arjuna and the twins, ‘In the Great War, our enemies have lacerated your bodies with different kinds of weapons and you are exhausted, as grief and anger have scorched your hearts. Through my fault, you, Bharatarishabhas, have suffered the privations and miseries of vanavasa like common men. In delight and ease now enjoy your victory. Meet me in the morning after you have rested and regained your strength.’

Then Mahabaho Bhima Vrikodara, like Maghavat entering his own beautiful temple, enters the grand palace that Yudhishtira has assigned to him with the approval of Dhritarashtra, the palace of Duryodhana, consisting of many large mansions and spacious chambers adorned with gemstones of diverse kinds, and thronged with servants, male and female.

The peerless Arjuna, at the command of the king, is given the palace of Dusasana, in no way inferior to Duryodhana’s, consisting of many magnificent edifices, with a gateway of gold, abounding in wealth and full of attendants and servitors, both men and women.

The palace of Durmarshana, superior even to that of Dusasana, ornamented with gold and every kind of gem, looks like Kubera’s own mansion. King Yudhishtira gladly gives this to the sensitive Nakula, whom the ordeals of vanavasa had affected the most.

The best of palaces, which once belonged to Durmukha, is embellished with gold and contains a plenitude of beds and beautiful women with eyes like lotus-petals. The king gives this to Sahadeva, who was always considerate to him. Sahadeva is as delighted as the Lord of Treasures was upon obtaining Kailasa.

Yuyutsu, Vidura and Sanjaya, O Rajan, and Sudharman and Dhaumya return to the abodes they owned earlier.

Like a tiger entering his cave in the hills, the Purushavyaghra Saurin, accompanied by Satyaki, enters the palace of Arjuna. Feasting on meat and drink kept ready for them, the princes pass the night happily. Awakening in the morning with rested and satisfied hearts, they present themselves before Yudhishtira."

CANTO 46

Janamejaya said, "You must tell me, O learned Brahmana, what Mahabaho Yudhishtira does after he regains his kingdom and also, O Rishi, what the heroic Hrishikesa, the supreme master of the three worlds, does after the war."

Vaisampayana said, "Listen to me, O Rajan, as I narrate in detail what the Pandavas, led by Vasudeva, do after the war. Having won back his kingdom, Kunti's son Yudhishtira enjoins each of the four varnas to perform their respective svadharma. Pandu's eldest son gives a thousand noble Brahmanas of the Snataka order a thousand nishkas each. He then gratifies the servants who are dependent on him and the guests who visited him, including men who are undeserving and those who have heterodox views, by fulfilling their wishes.

He gives his priest Dhaumya kine in thousands and great wealth, gold, silver and robes of diverse kinds. Towards Kripa, O Rajan, he behaves in the way one should towards one's acharya. Observing his vows, he continues to honour Vidura greatly. This most charitable king gratifies everyone with gifts of food, drink, fine robes of diverse kinds, beds and seats. Having restored peace to his kingdom, he pays due honour to Yuyutsu and Dhritarashtra. Placing his kingdom at the disposal of Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Vidura, Yudhishtira continues to pass his days in peace.

After gratifying everyone, including the common citizens, O Bharatarishabha, Yudhishtira comes with folded palms into Vasudeva's presence where he sees Krishna, of the hue of a blue cloud, seated on a

large throne adorned with gold and gems. Wearing yellow robes of silk and decked with celestial ornaments, Krishna blazes with splendour like a jewel set in gold and, with the crimson Kaustubha ruby adorning his chest, he looks like the Udaya mountain that adorns the rising sun. No metaphor in the three worlds can remotely describe his beauty.

Approaching Him who is Vishnu incarnate, Yudhishtira sweetly and smilingly asks, 'O most intelligent one, have you passed the night happily? You of unfading glory, are all your faculties in their full vigour, and is your understanding luminous? We have got back our kingdom and the earth has come under our sway. Refuge of the three worlds, O you of the Three Steps, through your grace we are victorious and have won great fame without violating our svadharma!'

To Parantapa Yudhishtira who addresses him in this strain, the divine Krishna does not say a word, for he is in deep meditation."

CANTO 47

"Yudhishtira says, 'How wonderful is this, O you of immeasurable valour, that you are rapt in dhyana! O great refuge of the universe, is all right with the three worlds? When you withdraw yourself from the world into turiya, the fourth state, O bull among men, I am filled with wonder. You still the five life-breaths that move within the body and you focus your senses within your mind.

O Govinda, you concentrate both speech and mind within your understanding, and withdraw your senses into your Atman. Your body hair stands erect, your mind and understanding are both still, and you are as immobile now, O Madhava, as a wooden post. O illustrious Devadeva, you are as still as the flame of a lamp in a windless place, as unmoving as a stone.

I beg you as a favour to tell me the cause of your dhyana and dispel my doubts, unless it is a secret that I cannot share. You are the Creator and you are the Destroyer, you are destructible and you are indestructible. You are without beginning and you are without end, you are the first and the greatest of Beings. O Dharmatman, tell me the cause of your Yogic abstraction. I, your devoted worshipper, bow my head to you and ask your favour.'

Thus addressed, the illustrious younger brother of Vasava, recalling his mind, understanding and senses to their mundane sphere, says with a gentle smile, 'That Purushavyaghra Bhishma, who lies now on a bed of arrows and who is like a fire about to be extinguished, is thinking of me. So my

mind was turned on him, the twang of whose bowstring and the sound of whose palms being clapped together Indra himself was unable to bear.

I was thinking of him who, having vanquished in a trice all the assembled kings at the Swayamvara of the daughters of the king of Kasi, abducted the three princesses to marry his brother Vichitravirya. I was thinking of him who fought for twenty-three days with Parasurama himself, and whom even Rama of Bhrigu's race was unable to overcome. Collecting all his senses and concentrating his mind through his understanding, he sought my refuge. It was for this that I turned my mind upon him.

I was thinking of him whom Ganga conceived and brought forth, and whom Vasishtha took as a disciple. I was thinking of that hero of powerful energy and great intellect who possesses knowledge of all the celestial weapons and of the four Vedas with all their branches. O son of Pandu, I was thinking of him who is the favourite disciple of Parasurama, son of Jamadagni, and who is the greatest of all men who know dharma; of him, Bharatarishabha, who knows the Past, the Future, and the Present.

When that Naravyaghra, as a result of his achievements, ascends to Swarga, O son of Pritha, the earth will seem a moonless night. Therefore, Yudhishtira, humbly approach Ganga's son, the mighty Bhishma, and question him about what you wish to learn. Ask him, O lord of the earth, about the four branches of knowledge, about the sacrifices and rites laid down for the four varnas, about the four modes of life, and about all kingly duties. When Bhishma, that Kurusthama, disappears from the world, every kind of knowledge will be lost with him. This is why I urge you to go to him now.'

Hearing Krishna's precious advice, the righteous Yudhishtira, his voice choked with tears, answers Janardana, 'What you say, O Madhava, about the eminence of Bhishma is perfectly true and I have not the slightest doubt about it. Indeed, I have heard from noble Brahmanas of the holiness and the greatness of the illustrious Bhishma.

You, Parantapa, are the Creator of all the worlds and there can be no doubt about what you say. If your heart be inclined to show grace, O Madhava, then let us go together to Bhishma, with you leading us. When the divine Surya turns towards the north, Bhishma will leave this world for those regions of bliss that he has won. Before this transpires, that Kurusthama deserves to see you. If you grant my prayer, Bhishma will have

a glimpse of you, the first of the gods, destructible and indestructible. Indeed, O Lord, you are the infinite receptacle of Brahman.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these words of King Yudhishtira the Just, Krishna says to Satyaki who is sitting beside him, 'Let my chariot be yoked.' Satyaki quickly leaves Krishna's presence and, going out, commands Daruka, 'Let Krishna's chariot be made ready.'

Daruka swiftly yokes Krishna's ratha, the best of chariots, shining with gold, decked with emeralds, moon-gems, sun-gems, and furnished with golden wheels. Fleet as the wind, set with fantastic jewels, it is as beautiful as the morning sun. It has a radiant standard of Garuda flying, and is festooned with numerous other bright banners. It has yoked to it in trappings of gold, the best of steeds, swift as thought—Sugriva and Saibya, and two others. Having harnessed it, Daruka comes and, with folded hands, tells Krishna that his ratha awaits."

CANTO 48

Janamejaya said, "How did the grandsire of the Bhaaratas who lay on a bed of arrows cast off his body, and what kind of Yoga did he adopt for this?'

Vaisampayana said, "Listen, O king, with pure heart and concentrated attention, to how the Mahatman Bhishma cast off his body. As soon as the sun, passing the solstitial point, entered Uttarayana, his northerly course, Bhishma, with the power of dhyana, caused his atman to enter his Atman. Surrounded by many of the foremost of Brahmanas, that hero, his body pierced with innumerable arrows, blazed forth in lustrous beauty like Surya himself with his innumerable rays. Surrounded by Veda Vyasa, by the Devarishi Narada, by Devasthana, by Asmaka, Sumantu, by Jaimini, by the high-souled Paila, by Sandilya, by Devarata, by Maitreya of great intellect, by Asita and Vasishtha and the high-souled Kausika, by Harita and Lomasa and Atri's son of genius, by Brihaspati and Sukra and the Maharishi Chyavana, by Sanatkumara and Kapila and Valmiki and Tumburu and Kuru, by Maudgalya and Rama of Bhrigu's vamsa, and the great Muni Trinabindu, by Pippalada and Vayu and Samvarta and Pulaha and Katha, by Kasyapa and Pulastya and Kratu and Daksha and Parasara, by Marichi and Angiras and Kasmya and Gautama and the sage Galava, by Dhaumya and Vibhanda and Mandavya and Dhaumra and Krishnanubhautika, by Uluka, that foremost of Brahmanas, and the mighty Markandeya, by Bhaskari and Purana and Krishna and Suta, surrounded by these and many other highly blessed powerful sages, and possessed of faith and self-restraint and

tranquility of mind, the Kuru hero looked like the moon in the midst of the planets and the stars.

Stretched out on his bed of arrows, that Naravyaghra, Bhishma, with pure heart and palms joined, set his mind, thought and actions on Krishna. With a cheerful and strong voice he hymned the praises of the slayer of Madhu, the Master of Yoga with the lotus in his navel, the Lord of the universe, called Vishnu and Jishnu. With joined hands, that foremost of eloquent men, the puissant Bhishma of perfectly virtuous soul, praises Janardana.

Bhishma says, 'O Krishna, O foremost of Beings, be you pleased with these words that I utter, in brief and in detail, from my desire to hymn your praises. You are pure and purity's self. You transcend all. You are what people say to be THAT. You are the Supreme Lord. With my whole heart I seek your refuge, O universal Soul and Lord of all creatures!

You are without beginning and without end. You are the highest of the high and Brahman. Neither the Devas nor the Rishis know you. The divine Creator, called Narayana or Hari, alone knows you. Through Narayana, the Rishis, the Siddhas, the great Nagas, the Devas, and the celestial Rishis know a little of you. You are the highest of the high and know no deterioration. The Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Pannagas do not know who you are and whence you came. All the worlds and all created things live in you and enter you when the dissolution comes. Like gems strung together on a thread, all things that have attributes reside in you, the Supreme Lord. Having the universe for your work and for your limbs, this universe consisting of mind and matter resides in your eternal and all-pervading soul like a multitude of flowers strung together by a strong thread.

You are called Hari, of a thousand heads, a thousand feet, a thousand eyes, a thousand arms, a thousand crowns and a thousand faces of great splendour. You are called Narayana, divinity, and the refuge of the universe. You are the subtlest of the subtle, grossest of the gross, the heaviest of the heavy and the highest of the high. In the Vaks, the Anuvaks, the Nishads, and Upanishads, You are regarded as the Supreme Being of irresistible force. In the Samans also, whose declarations are always true, you are regarded as Truth's self.

You are of quadruple soul. You are displayed in only the understanding of all creatures. You are the Lord of those that are bound to you in faith. O

God, you are adored by the faithful with four excellent, high, and secret names. Penances are ever present in you. Performed by other creatures to gratify you, penances live in your form. You are the Universal Soul. You are of universal knowledge. You are the universe. You are omniscient. You are the Creator of all.

Like a couple of kindling sticks generating a blazing fire, you have been born of the divine Devaki and Vasudeva for the protection of dharma on earth. For eternal salvation, the devout worshipper, with mind withdrawn from all else and casting off all desires, beholds you, O Govinda, that are the Primal Soul, in his own soul. You transcend Surya in glory. You are beyond the ken of the senses and the understanding. O Lord of all creatures, I place myself in your hands. In the Puranas you have been spoken of as Purusha. On occasions of the commencement of yugas, you are said to be Brahma, while on occasions of universal dissolution you are spoken of as Sankarshana. Adorable you are, and therefore I worship you.

Though one, you have yet been born in innumerable forms. You have your passions under perfect control. Your devout worshippers, faithfully performing the rites laid down in the scriptures, sacrifice to you, O granter of every wish! You are called the sheath within which the universe lies. All created things live in you. Like swans and ducks swimming on the water, all the worlds that we see float in you. You are Truth. You are One and undecaying. You are Brahman, you are That which is beyond Mind and Matter.

You are without beginning, middle or end. Neither the Devas nor the Rishis know you. The Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Siddhas, the Rishis and the great Uragas always worship you with concentrated souls. You are the great panacea for all sorrow. You are without birth and death. You are divine. You are self-created. You are eternal. You are invisible and beyond ken. You are called Hari and Narayana, O puissant one. The Vedas declare you to be the Creator of the universe and the Lord of everything that exists in it. You are its Supreme protector. You know no deterioration and you are that which is called the highest. You are of the complexion of gold. You are the slayer of Asuras. Though One, Aditi brought you forth in twelve forms.

Salutations to you that are the soul of the sun! Salutations to you in your form of Soma, said to be the chief of all the regenerate ones, who gratifies with nectar the Devas in the lighted fortnight and the Pitris in the dark

fortnight. You are the One Being of transcendent effulgence dwelling on the other side of dense darkness. Knowing you, one ceases to have any fear of death. Salutations to you in that form which is an object of knowledge!

In the grand Uktha sacrifice, the Brahmanas adore you as the great Rik. In the great fire-sacrifice, they sing of you as the chief Adhvaryu. You are the soul of the Vedas. The Riks, the Yajus and the Samans are your abode. You are the five kinds of sanctified libations used in sacrifices. Salutations to you!

You are the seven mantras used in the Vedas. Salutations to you in your form of Sacrifice! Libations are poured on the Homa fire to the accompaniment of the seventeen monosyllabic sounds. You are the soul of the Homa. Salutations to you! You are that Purusha of whom the Vedas sing. Your name is Yajus. The Vedic metres are your limbs. The sacrifices laid down in the three Vedas are your three heads. The great sacrifice called Rathantara is your voice, expressive of gratification. Salutation to you in your form of sacred hymns!

You are the Rishi that appeared during the Mahayagna, lasting for a thousand years, performed by the creators of the universe. You are the great swan with wings of gold. Salutations to you in your form of the Swan! The Mulas, the roots with all kinds of affixes and suffixes are your limbs. The Sandhis are your joints. The consonants and the vowels are your ornaments. The Vedas have declared you to be the divine word. Salutations to you in your form of the Word!

Assuming the form of the Boar, Varaha whose limbs were constituted by sacrifice, you raised up the submerged earth for the benefit of the three worlds. Salutations to you in your form of infinite prowess! You sleep in Yoga on your serpent bed shaded by the thousand hoods of Anantasesha. Salutations to you in your form of Sleep!

You build the bridge for the good to cross the sea of samsara with Truth, with those means by which Mukti can be obtained, and with the means by which the senses may be controlled. Salutations to you in your form of Truth!

Men practising diverse creeds, actuated by desire for diverse fruits, worship you with diverse rites. Salutations to you in your form of Creed!

From you all things have sprung. It is you that excite with desire all embodied creatures. Salutations to you in your form of Excitement! The great Rishis seek your unmanifest self within the manifest. Called

Kshetrajna, you sit in Kshetra. Salutations to you in your form of Kshetra! You are always conscious and present in the self, and the Sankhyas still describe you as existing in the three states of wakefulness, dream and sound sleep. They further speak of you as possessed of sixteen attributes and representing the number seventeen. Salutations to your form as conceived by the Sankhyas! Casting off sleep, restraining breath, withdrawn into their own selves, Yogins of restrained senses behold you as eternal light. Salutations to you in your form of Yoga! Peaceful sannyasins, freed from fear of rebirth by the destruction of all their sins and merits, find you in liberation. Salutations to you in your form of Emancipation!

At the end of a thousand yugas, you assume the form of a blazing fire and consume all creatures. Salutations to you in your form of Fierceness! Having consumed all creatures and making the universe one vast expanse of water, you sleep on the waters in the form of a child. Salutations to you in your form as Maya! From the navel of the Self-born with eyes like lotus leaves, springs a lotus, on which is established this universe. Salutations to you in your form as Lotus!

You have a thousand heads. You pervade everything. You are of immeasurable soul. You have subjugated the four kinds of desire that are as vast as the four oceans. Salutations to you in your form of Yoga-nidra!

The clouds are in the hair of your head. The rivers flow in the several joints of your limbs. The four oceans are in your belly. Salutations to you in your form of Water! Birth and the change represented by death spring from you. All things, again, at the universal dissolution dissolve away in you. Salutations to your form as Cause! You sleep not in the night. You rest not by day. You observe the good and the evil actions of all. Salutations to you in your form of universal Witness! There is nothing, no deed, which you cannot do. You are, again, ever ready to accomplish actions that are righteous. Salutations to you in your form of Work, the form which is called Vaikuntha! In wrath you exterminated in battle twenty-one times the Kshatriyas who had trampled virtue and authority under their feet. Salutations to you in your form of Cruelty!

Dividing yourself into five portions you have become the five vital breaths that act within everybody and cause every living creature to move. Salutations to you in your form of Air! You appear in every yuga in the forms called month and season and half-year and year, and are the cause of both creation and dissolution. Salutations to you in your form of Time!

Brahmanas are your mouth, Kshatriyas are your two arms, Vaisyas are your stomach and thighs, and Sudras live in your feet. Salutations to you in your form of Caste!

Fire constitutes your mouth. The heavens are the crown of your head. The sky is your navel. The earth is your feet. The sun is your eye. The points of the compass are your ears. Salutations to you in your form of the Worlds! You are superior to Time. You are superior to Sacrifice. You are higher than the highest. Yourself without origin, you are the origin of the universe. Salutations to you in your form of the Universe! Men of the world, according to the attributes ascribed to you by the Vaiseshikas, regard you as the Protector of the world. Salutations to you in your form of Protector!

Assuming the forms of food, drink and fuel, you increase the humours and the life-breaths of creatures and uphold their existence. Salutations to you in your form of Life! To support the life-breaths you eat the four kinds of food. Assuming also the form of Agni within the belly, you digest that food. Salutations to you in your form of assimilating Heat!

Assuming the form of half-man and half-lion, Narasimha with tawny eyes and tawny mane, with teeth and claws for your weapons, you took the life of Hiranyakashyapu, the king of the Asuras. Salutations to you in your form of swelling Might! Neither the Devas, nor the Gandharvas, nor the Daityas, nor the Danavas, know you truly. Salutations to your form of exceeding Subtlety!

Assuming the form of the handsome, illustrious and puissant Ananta in the Patalas, you support the world. Salutations to your form of Might! You stupefy all creatures by the bonds of affection and love for the continuance of the creation. Salutations to you in your form of Stupefaction! Regarding that knowledge which is conversant with the five elements to be the true Self-knowledge, people approach you through knowledge! Salutations to you in your form of Knowledge! Your body is immeasurable. Your intellect and eyes encompass everything. You are infinite, being beyond all measures. Salutations to you in your form of Immensity!

You assumed the form of a recluse with a head of matted locks, a staff in your hand, a long belly and a begging bowl for your quiver. Salutations to you in your form of Brahma! You bear the trident, you are the lord of the celestials, you have three eyes, and you are high-souled. Your body is always smeared with ashes, and your linga is always turned upwards.

Salutations to you in your form of Rudra! The half-moon forms the ornament of your brow. You have snakes for the sacred thread circling your neck. You are armed with Pinaka and Trisula. Salutations to your form of Fierceness!

You are the soul of all creatures. You are the Creator and the Destroyer of all. You are without wrath, without enmity, without affection. Salutations to you in your form of Peace! Everything is in you. Everything is from you. You are Everything, Everywhere. You are ever the All. Salutations to you in your form of Everything! Salutations to you whose work is the universe, to you that are the soul of the universe, to you from whom has sprung the universe, to you that are the dissolution of all things, to you that are beyond the five elements that constitute all things!

Salutations to you that are the three worlds, to you that are above the three worlds! Salutations to you that are all the directions! You are all and you are the one receptacle of all. Salutations to you, O divine Lord, O Vishnu, and O eternal origin of all the worlds! You, O Hrishikesa, are the Creator, You are the Destroyer, and you are invincible. I cannot behold that heavenly form in which you are displayed in the Past, Present, and the Future. I can, however, behold truly your eternal form as manifest in your works.

You have filled heaven with your head, and the earth with your feet; with your prowess you have filled the three worlds. You are Eternal and you pervade everything in the universe. The directions are your arms, the sun is your eye, and prowess is your vital fluid. You are the lord of all creatures. You stand, shutting up the seven paths of the Wind whose energy is immeasurable. They are freed from all fears that worship you, O Govinda of unfading prowess, you that are clad in yellow robes of the colour of the Atasi flower. Even one genuflection to you, O Krishna, is equal to the completion of ten Horse-sacrifices. The man who has performed ten Horse-sacrifices is not freed from the obligation of rebirth. The man who bows to Krishna, however, escapes rebirth. They who have Krishna for their vow, they who think of Krishna in the night and upon rising from sleep, may be said to have Krishna for their body. Those people after death enter Krishna's self, even as libations of clarified butter sanctified with mantras enter the blazing fire.

Salutations to you that dispel the fear of hell, to you, O Vishnu, that are a boat unto those that flounder amid the waves of the ocean of worldly life!

Salutations to you, O God, that are the Brahmana's self, to you that are the benefactor of Brahmanas and kine, to you that are the benefactor of the universe, to you that are Krishna and Govinda! The two syllables Ha-ri constitute the monetary stock of those that sojourn through the wilderness of life, and the medicine that effectively cures all worldly predilections, besides being the means to alleviate sorrow and grief.

As truth is full of Vishnu, as the universe is full of Vishnu, as everything is full of Vishnu, so let my soul be full of Vishnu, and my sins be destroyed! I seek your protection, devoted to you, desirous of finding a happy end, O you of eyes like lotus petals. O best of gods, think of what will be for my good! Yourself without origin, O Vishnu, you are the origin of Knowledge and Penance. Thus are you praised! O Janardana, thus worshipped by me in the Sacrifice constituted by speech, be gratified with me, O God. The Vedas are devoted to Narayana. Penances are devoted to Narayana. The gods are devoted to Narayana. All is forever Narayana!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Having uttered these words, Bhishma, with mind concentrated upon Krishna, says, 'Salutations to Krishna!' and bows to him. Learning through his Yoga prowess of the devotion of Bhishma, Madhava, otherwise called Hari, entering his body, bestows upon him heavenly knowledge compassing the Past, the Present, and the Future, and then leaves. When Bhishma falls silent, those utterers of Brahman, the Brahmavadis that sat around him, with voices choked with tears, adored that high-souled great Lord of the Kurus in excellent speech. Those foremost of Brahmanas uttered the praises of Krishna also, that first of Beings, and continued in soft voices to laud Bhishma.

Learning of the devotion of Bhishma for him, that foremost of Beings Krishna climbs into his chariot. Kesava and Satyaki ride on one car. On another go those two illustrious Kshatriyas, Yudhishtira and Dhananjaya. Bhimasena and the twins ride on a third, while those bulls among men, Kripa and Yuyutsu, and that Parantapa, Sanjaya of the Suta varna, all ride their own rathas, each of which looks like a town. All of them, riding together, cause the earth to tremble with the rumble of their chariot-wheels.

Krishna, foremost of men, as he goes, cheerfully listens to the praises sung by the Brahmanas along the way. The slayer of Kesi with a glad heart salutes the people lining the streets with joined hands and bowed heads."

CANTO 49

Vaisampayana said, "Krishna, Yudhishtira and all their men, led by Kripa, along with the four Pandavas in their rathas like fortified cities decked with standards and banners, fly to Kurukshetra on their swift horses. They descend on the field where millions of noble Kshatriyas have cast away their lives, and which is now covered with hair, marrow and bones and with hillocks formed of the bodies and bones of elephants and horses, scattered with human heads and skulls like conch-shells. With thousands of funeral pyres and with armour and weapons lying in heaps, the vast plain looks like the drinking garden of the Destroyer himself, used and recently abandoned. The Maharathas travel quickly, viewing the battlefield haunted by throngs of Pisachas and Rakshasas.

On the way, the mighty-armed Kesava, delighter of all the Yadavas, speaks to Yudhishtira about the prowess of Jamadagni's son, Parasurama, 'There, at a distance, O Kaunteya, are the five lakes of Rama, where he offered oblations of Kshatriya blood to the souls of his ancestors! It was there that the mighty Rama, having freed the earth of Kshatriyas twenty-one times, finally ceased his grisly task.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have great doubts about what you say about Rama having extirpated the Kshatriyas twenty-one times. When Parasurama burnt the very Kshatriya seed, O Yadurishabha, how was it that the Kshatriya varna revived, how did the illustrious one exterminate the Kshatriya again and again, and how came it to rise yet again? In frightful chariot encounters he slew millions of Kshatriyas, and the earth was strewn with the corpses of

warriors. For what reason did Dharmatman Parasurama Bhargava extirpate the Kshatriyas, O tiger among the Yadus? Clear my doubts, O you of Vrishni's race, for you know all things.'"

Vaisampayana said, "The bird-bannered hero, puissant elder brother of Baladeva, then narrates in full everything that happened on earth and how it was again peopled with Kshatriyas."

CANTO 50

"Vasudeva says, 'Listen, O son of Kunti, to the story of Parasurama's birth, his vitality, and prowess, as I learnt it from some great Rishis. Listen to the tale of how Jamadagni's son slew millions of Kshatriyas and repeatedly slaughtered those who sprang up again in the different royal houses of Bharatavarsha.

Jadu had a son named Rajas, whose son King Balakaswa had an upright and virtuous son named Kusika. Resembling the thousand-eyed Indra on earth, Kusika underwent many maha-tapasyas in order to petition the Lord of the three worlds for a son. Seeing him engaged in the severest tapasyas and well able to father a son, the thousand-eyed Purandara himself inspired the king with his force. The great Lord of the three worlds, Indra, tamer of Paka, was himself born as Kusika's son, O Rajan, and was named Gadhi.

Gadhi had a daughter called Satyavati. The powerful Gadhi gave her as wife to Richika, a descendant of Bhrigu. Richika was pleased with her for the purity of her character. He cooked a sacrificial payasa of milk and rice for Gadhi to obtain a son.

Calling his wife, Richika said, "You must take this portion of the sanctified payasa for yourself, and your mother must have this other portion. A son will be born to her who will blaze with tejas and be a bull among Kshatriyas. Invincible to Kshatriyas on earth, he will be the slayer of the greatest of them. As for you, O blessed Satyavati, your portion of the food will give you a very wise son, an embodiment of tranquillity, a Mahatapasvin, and the best of Brahmanas."

Having said these words to his wife, the blessed Richika of Bhrigu's vamsa set his heart on tapasya, and left for the vana. About the same time, King Gadhi, who was on a pilgrimage to the holy tirthas, arrived with his queen at the asrama of Richika. Seeing them, Satyavati fetched the two portions of the sanctified payasa, and told her mother what her husband had said. But, in her eagerness and haste, O son of Kunti, the queen-mother mistakenly gave the portion intended for herself to her daughter, and ate the portion intended for Satyavati. Thus, Satyavati, her body blazing with lustre, conceived a child of terrible form, born to become the exterminator of the race of Kshatriyas.

Seeing a Brahmana child lying within her womb Richika, that tiger among the Bhrigus, said to his wife Satyavati of divine beauty, "Your mother has deceived you by substituting the sanctified payasas, O blessed lady. Your son will become a man of cruel deeds and vindictive heart. Your brother, born of your mother, will be a Brahmana devoted to maha-tapasya. Into the sanctified food intended for you I placed the seed of the supreme and universal Brahman, while into that intended for your mother I mixed all the essence of Kshatriya energy. Now, O Satyavati, that which I had intended will not happen. Your mother will have a Brahmana child, while to you will be born a son who will become a Kshatriya."

Hearing this, the blessed Satyavati prostrated herself and, setting her head at his feet said, trembling, "It does not become you, O holy one, to tell me that my son will be a wretch among Brahmanas."

Richika replied, "I did not intend this for you, Satyavati. You have conceived a son of fierce deeds only because of the substitution of the payasas." Satyavati pleaded, "Maharishi, when you can create other worlds if you wish, why not a child? It is only right to give me a son who will be righteous and devoted to peace."

Richika said, "When I have never lied, even in jest, how can I lie about such a solemn matter as preparing sanctified food with Vedic mantras, after lighting a holy fire? Destiny ordained it, I have ascertained that through my tapasya. All the descendants of your father will be possessed of Brahmanic dharma."

Satyavati then said, "Mahatapasvin, let our grandson be like that, but let me have a son of tranquil pursuits."

Richika said, "O you of the fairest complexion, there is no distinction between a son and a grandson. It will be as you wish. Tathaastu!"

Then Satyavati gave birth to Jamadagni, a son in Bhrigu's race who was of regulated vows and devoted to tapasya and other tranquil pursuits. Kusika's son Gadhi had a son named Viswamitra. Possessed of every attribute of a Brahmana, this son, though born a Kshatriya, was equal to a Brahmana.

Richika's son Jamadagni, ocean of penances, later had a son of fierce deeds who mastered the shastras, including the science of arms. Like a fire, this son was Parasurama, exterminator of the Kshatriyas. Having gratified Mahadeva on the mountains of Gandhamadana, he begged weapons of the Great Deva, especially his axe of fierce power. With that unrivalled weapon of fiery splendour and irresistible sharpness, he became invincible and without peer on earth.

Meanwhile, the mighty son of Kritaviryarjuna of the Kshatriya varna, ruler of the Haihayas, endowed with great tejas, most virtuous in conduct, and possessed of a thousand arms through the grace of the great Rishi Dattatreya, had subjugated the whole world in battle, the earth with her mountains and seven islands. He became a powerful Rajadhiraja and finally gave away the earth to Brahmanas at an Aswamedha yagna.

Once, asked by the hungry god of fire Agni, this Arjuna, the thousand-armed, gave alms to the deity. Springing from the point of his shafts, the fierce Agni consumed what was offered, and incinerated villages, towns, kingdoms and hamlets of cowherds. Then with the help of the powerful Kritavirya, Agni consumed mountains and great forests.

With the help of the king of the Haihayas, the god of fire made the wind to blaze forth as flames, and to burn the uninhabited but delightful asrama of the noble Apava. Possessed of great tejas himself, Apava, seeing his hermitage consumed by the powerful Kshatriya, cursed him in wrath, O Mahabaho, saying, "Since you have burnt my beautiful wood, O arrogant Arjuna, Parasurama will cut off your thousand arms."

The charitable and brave Arjuna, always devoted to peace and considerate towards Brahmanas, who granted protection to all varnas, did not take the curse of Mahatman Apava seriously. Nevertheless, as a result of that curse, his powerful sons, always haughty and cruel, became the indirect cause of his death. These princes, O Bharatarishabha, seized and brought away the calf of Jamadagni's homa cow, without the knowledge of Kritavirya of the Haihayas, which resulted in a dispute between the noble Jamadagni and the Haihayas. Jamadagni's son, the powerful Rama, filled

with wrath, hewed off the thousand arms of Arjuna and brought back his father's calf, which was wandering within the inner compound of the king's palace.

The foolish sons of Arjuna raided the asrama of the high-souled Jamadagni and struck off the Rishi's head with the points of their lances while the celebrated Parasurama was out fetching sacred fuel and grass. Inflamed with anger at the death of his father and burning for vengeance, Rama took up arms and vowed to free the earth of the very race of Kshatriyas. That tiger among the Bhrigus slaughtered all the sons and grandsons of Kritavirya. Massacring thousands of Haihayas in rage, he drenched the earth with blood and indeed stripped Bhumi of all her Kshatriyas. Filled then with remorse, he retired into the forest.

When some thousands of years had passed, the mighty Rama, wrathful by nature, had imputations of cowardice cast upon him by the grandson of Viswamitra and son of Raibya, a Maharishi called Paravasu. Raibya began saying in public, "O Rama, were not those righteous men, Pratardana and others, who were assembled at a yagna at the time of Yayati's fall, Kshatriyas by birth? Your vows, O Rama, are empty boasts among all people! You have taken to the mountains out of fear of Kshatriya heroes."

Parasurama, hearing these words of Paravasu, once more took up arms, and once more strewed the earth with thousands of Kshatriya corpses. However, some hundreds of Kshatriyas, whom he spared, multiplied in time and became mighty kings on earth. So Rama once again slaughtered them, not sparing even their offspring. Indeed, the earth was strewn again with the bodies of Kshatriya children, slain by Parasurama as soon as they were born.

Some Kshatriya women, however, succeeded in protecting their children from Rama's wrath. Having made the earth destitute of Kshatriyas twenty-one times, the powerful Bhargava, Parasurama, at the completion of an Aswamedha yagna, gave away the earth as a sacrificial gift to Kasyapa. In order to save the remaining Kshatriyas, Kasyapa pointed with his hand that still held the sacrificial ladle, and said, "O Maharishi, go to the shores of the southern ocean. It is not right, Rama, for you to dwell within my dominion." At these words, the Ocean instantly created for Jamadagni's son Parasurama, on his further shore, a realm called Surparaka.

Having accepted the earth as gift, O Rajan, Kasyapa gave it away to the Brahmanas of the world and entered the great forest. Then headstrong

Sudras and Vaisyas began to ravish the wives of Brahmanas, O Bharatarishabha. When anarchy sets in on earth, the weak are oppressed by the strong, and no man is master of his own property. Unprotected by virtuous Kshatriyas, and oppressed by evil men, Bhumi started rapidly sinking to the lowest depths. Seeing this, Maharishi Kasyapa held her on his lap—his uru; thus is the earth known as Urvi. The Devi Bhumi gratified Kasyapa and begged him for a king for her protection.

Bhudevi said, "I have concealed a few important Kshatriyas among the women, O Muni. They were born in the race of Haihayas. Let them, O Rishi, protect me. There is one raised among the bears in the Rikshavat mountains, Viduratha's son, and he is of Puru's race. The powerful Parasara, ever engaged in yagnas, through compassion has protected the son of Saudasa. Though born in one of the regenerate orders, yet like a Sudra he serves the Rishi and for that has been named Sarvakarman.

Another is the strong son of Sibi, named Gopati, reared in the forest among kine. Let him, O sage, protect me. Let Pratardana's mighty son Vatsa, raised among calves in a cowpen, protect me. The sage Gautama has concealed and protected Dadhivahana's grandson and Diviratha's son on the banks of the Ganga, where wolves and the mountains of Gridhrakuta have sheltered him. His name is Brihadratha, and he is endowed with tremendous energy and many great qualities.

The Ocean has protected and nurtured many Kshatriyas belonging to the Marutta vamsa, equal in strength to the lord of Maruts. We hear of these children of the Kshatriya varna dwelling in different places among artisans and goldsmiths. If they protect me I will surely be safe gain. Rama of great prowess has slain their fathers and grandfathers for my sake. It is my duty, O Maharishi, to see that someone duly performs their funeral rites. I do not wish that my present rulers protect me, for they are all sinful. O Maharishi, I beg you to do what will enable me to live as before."

Kasyapa sought out the powerful Kshatriyas whom the Devi had named, and installed them as kings to protect her. The Kshatriya races that now exist are the progeny of those princes. This is the answer to your question, O son of Pandu, of what happened long ago.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Conversing thus with Yudhishtira, the greatest Dharmatman, the noble Yadava hero rides in his fleet chariot, illumining all the points of the compass like divine Surya himself."

CANTO 51

Vaisampayana said, "King Yudhishtira, hearing of these feats of Parasurama, is filled with wonder and says to Janardana, 'O you of Vrishni's race, the prowess of the Dharmatman Rama, who in wrath freed the earth of Kshatriyas, is like that of Sakra himself. The fear of Parasurama has caused the scions of Kshatriyas to be raised in secrecy by the Ocean, kine, leopards, bears and apes. Worthy of every praise is this world of men, and fortunate are they who dwell in it, where a Brahmana has accomplished so awesome and dharmic a feat!'

Concluding their conversation, Krishna and Yudhishtira come to where the mighty son of Ganga lies on his bed of arrows, resembling in splendour the evening sun engulfed by its own rays. Many Rishis surround the Kurupravira, like the Devas of Swarga surrounding Indra of a hundred yagnas. The place where he lies, on the banks of the Oghavati river, is most sacred. Seeing him from a distance, Krishna, Dharma's royal son Yudhishtira, the four other Pandavas and the rest, led by Saradwat alight from their rathas and, controlling their restless minds and concentrating all their senses, approach the great Rishis.

Saluting the Maharishis headed by Vyasa, Govinda, Satyaki and the others approach the Ganga's son, and sit around him. Seeing Bhishma like a fire about to die out, Kesava addresses him sombrely.

Krishna says, 'Is your mind now as clear as before? I hope your understanding is not clouded, O greatest of eloquent men. I hope your limbs do not feel the pain of the arrows. The body becomes weak from mental

affliction too. As a result of the boon granted to you by your father, the righteous Santanu, your time of death depends on your own will, O puissant hero. I myself do not have the punya through which you obtained this boon. When the minutest pin inserted in the body produces pain, what need then be said, O Rajan, of the hundreds of arrows that have pierced you? Surely, pain does not afflict you. You know enough, Bhaarata, to instruct the very Devas about the birth and death of living creatures. O you of great gyana, you know everything of the past, the future and the present, as well as about death and the rewards of dharma, for you are an ocean of dharma and karma.

When you were a powerful ruler and, though sound of body, perfectly healthy and surrounded by female companions, I saw you cleave perfectly to brahmacharya. We have never heard of anyone else in the three worlds other than you, O Santanu's heroic son Bhishma of great tejas, who is so devoted to dharma, your sole pursuit, that, lying on a bed of arrows and at the point of death, you still have mastery over your own death through the power of your tapasya.

We have never heard of anyone as devoted as you to truth, to tapasya, to giving dakshina and dana, to the performances of yagnas, to the astra shastra, to the Vedas, to defending men seeking protection; of one who is so harmless to all, so pure in behaviour, so self-restrained, so bent upon the good of all creatures, and also as great a Maharathi as you. I have no doubt that, from a single ratha, you can vanquish the Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Yakshas and Rakshasas.

The Brahmanas always speak of you, Mahabaho Bhishma, as the ninth of the Vasus. Through your virtues, however, you have surpassed them all and are equal to Vasava himself. I know, O best of men, that you are celebrated for your prowess even among the gods. Among men on earth, we have never seen or heard of another possessed of such attributes as you, O greatest of men. You have surpassed the Devas themselves. With your power of tapasya you can create a universe of mobile and immobile creatures. Though your dharma and righteous deeds, you have acquired many blessed realms. Dispel now the grief of Pandu's eldest son, who burns with sorrow on account of the slaughter of his kinsmen.

You know well the dharma of the four varnas, and the four varnasramas. O son of Ganga, you know everything in the four branches of knowledge, in the four Hotras, and also the eternal dharma in Yoga and Sankhya

philosophy, the duties of the four varnas and the dharma consistent with their declared practices—all these, O Bhaarata, along with their interpretations. The dharma that has been laid down for those who spring from an intermingling of the four varnas, for particular countries, tribes and families, and what the Vedas and wise men declare, are well known to you. The Itihasas and the Puranas are all known to you. The shastras' treatment of dharma and practice is all in your mind.

None other than you, O bull among men, can remove the doubts that may arise in respect of these subjects of knowledge that one studies in the world. With your intelligence, O prince of men, rid Yudhishtira of his sorrow. Men possessed of such great and varied knowledge live just to comfort clouded minds.'"

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing what Krishna says, Bhishma, raising his head a little, says with folded hands, 'Salutations to you, O divine Krishna! You are the origin and the dissolution of all the worlds. You are the Creator and the Destroyer. You, O Hrishikesa, cannot be vanquished by anyone. The universe is your handiwork. You are the soul of the universe and the universe has sprung from you. Salutations to you! You are the end of all created things. You are above the five elements. Salutations to you who are the three worlds and also beyond the three worlds!

O Lord of Yogins, salutations to you who are the refuge of everything! O Best of beings, what you say about me has enabled me to behold your divine attributes as manifest in the three worlds. Govinda, I also see your eternal form. You stand barring the seven paths of the Wind of immeasurable energy. The sky is your head, and the earth your feet. The points of the compass are your two arms, the sun is your eye, and Sakra constitutes your prowess. Attired in yellow robes that resemble the hue of the atasi flower, you appear to us like a cloud charged with flashes of lightning. O best of Devas, think of what would be good for this insignificant self which is devoted to you, which seeks your protection, and which desires to find a blissful end.'

Krishna says, 'O bull among men, since your devotion to me is so great, I have shown my Virata Rupa to you. I do not, O greatest of kings, display this form of mine to anyone who is not entirely devoted to me, or to a devotee who is not sincere, or, who does not have a disciplined heart. You are devoted to me and always follow the path of dharma. Of pure heart, you

are always self-restrained and ever observant of tapasya and of charity. It is because of your tapasya that you are able to see me.

The regions from where there is no return are ready for you, O Bhishma. Fifty-six days still remain for you to live in this world O Kurusthama. You will then cast off your body and obtain the blessed reward of your karma. The Devas and Vasus, all in their fiery splendour, riding on their vimanas, await you invisibly until the moment the sun enters his northerly course. Subject to universal time, when the divine Surya turns to his Uttarayana, you, O greatest of men, will go to those realms from where no man of knowledge ever returns to this earth!

O Bhishma, when you leave this world, all true Knowledge will perish with you. It is for this that these men, assembled together, have approached you—to listen to your discourses on dharma. Do you, then, speak of dharma and Yoga to Yudhishtira, who is firm in truth but whose grief at the slaughter of his kinsmen has clouded his understanding. With your advice dispel his grief!'"

CANTO 52

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing these words of Krishna about dharma and artha, Bhishma answers him, 'Master of all the worlds, Mahabaho, Siva, Narayana, O you of unfading glory, I am filled with joy to hear you speak. But, Master of Speech, what words of instruction can I utter in your presence, especially when you have dealt with all of them? Whatever in either world is done, or should be done, proceeds from you, Deva! Only he who is competent to speak on the subject of Swarga in the presence of the Lord of the gods himself can discourse on dharma, kama, artha and moksha in your presence.

O slayer of Madhu, the pain of my arrow-wounds sorely agitates my mind; my limbs are weak, my understanding clouded. O Govinda, these shafts, like poison or fire, afflict me so that I no longer have the power of utterance. My strength is abandoning me and my life-breath is hurrying to leave me.

The very vitals of my body are afire. My understanding is hazy and my speech, from weakness, is becoming indistinct. How then can I venture to speak? Krishna, be gratified with me. I will say nothing, Mahabaho. Pardon my unwillingness. The very master of speech, Brihaspati, would hesitate to speak in your presence.

I can no longer distinguish the points of the compass, or the sky from the earth. Through your tejas, Madhava, I am barely alive. Do you, therefore, speak for the good of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, for you are the author of all laws. O Krishna, in the presence of you, the eternal Creator of

the universe, how can someone like me discourse on such subjects, a mere disciple in the presence of the acharya?'

Vasudeva says, 'Your words are worthy of you, Kurusthama, you who are endowed with consummate tejas, Mahatman of great patience who has grasped every subject. As for the pain of your arrow-wounds, receive this boon that I grant you, Bhishma, O powerful one, of my grace.

Discomfort, stupefaction, burning, pain, hunger and thirst will not overcome you, O son of Ganga! Your perceptions and memory, sinless one, will not be clouded and your understanding will not fail you. Your mind, Bhishma, undarkened by passion, will remain subject to the radiance of goodness, like the moon emerging from clouds. Your understanding will penetrate whatever subject you think of connected with karma, dharma or artha. Purushavyaghra, obtaining preternatural vision, you will succeed in seeing the four varnas of created things. With your powers of perception, Bhishma, all things in creation that you summon to mind will be as clear to you as fish in a limpid stream!'

Then the assembled Maharishis, with Vyasa among them, worship Krishna with hymns from the Riks, the Yajuses and the Samans. A heavenly shower of flowers of every season falls on the spot where Krishna sits, with Ganga's son and the son of Pandu. Celestial instruments of every kind play in the firmament, and the chorus of Apsaras begins to sing.

No evil and no portent of any evil can be seen here. A pure, auspicious breeze springs up, laden with every kind of fragrance. All the points of the compass become clear and quiet and all animals and birds begin to rove in peace. Soon, like a fire at the extremity of a great vana, the divine Surya of a thousand rays descends to the west. The Rishis then rise and salute Janardana, Bhishma and Yudhishtira. Upon this, Kesava and the sons of Pandu, along with Satyaki, Sanjaya and Saradwata's son Kripa, bow in reverence to the sages. Devoted to the practice of dharma, these Rishis, thus venerated by Kesava and others, return to their respective abodes, saying, 'We will return tomorrow.'

Krishna and the Pandavas, saluting Bhishma and circumambulating him, get into their handsome rathas. The heroes depart, accompanied by a host of chariots decked with golden kuvaras, mettlesome elephants looking like mountains, steeds fleet as Garudas and foot-soldiers armed with bows and other weapons. At great speed, the army travels in two divisions, one in the van and the other in the rear of the princes. The scene resembles the two

currents of the great Narmada at the point where it is divided by the Rikshavat mountains straddling it.

Gladdening the great host, the divine Chandramas rises before it in the firmament to moisten anew the terrestrial herbs and plants whose juices the sun had sucked up. Then Krishna, that bull of Yadu's race, and the sons of Pandu, entering the Kuru city whose splendour resembles that of the city of Indra itself, return to their respective mansions like tired lions seeking their caves."

CANTO 53

Vaisampayana said, "Madhava retires to bed and sleeps contentedly. Awaking when only half a yaama remains to usher in the day, he commences his meditation. Fixing all his senses, he meditates on the eternal Brahma.

Then a group of sweet-voiced men, versed in Stotras and the Puranas, begin to recite the praises of Vasudeva, the lord of all creatures and Creator of the universe. Others begin to chant melodious hymns, marking the beat by clapping their hands, while minstrels raise their voices in song. Thousands blow conch-shells and beat drums. The spacious mansion of Krishna, resounding with the delightful strains of vinas, panavas and bamboo flutes, seems to be laughing with music. In the palace of King Yudhishtira, too, are heard songs, musical instruments and harmonious voices expressing auspicious wishes.

Krishna performs his ablutions. Joining his hands, the Mahabaho of unfading glory silently recites his secret mantras and, kindling a fire, pours into it libations of clarified butter. Giving away a thousand cattle to a thousand Brahmanas accomplished in mastery of the four Vedas, he causes them to shower blessings upon him.

Then, touching diverse auspicious articles and viewing himself ceremonially in a clear mirror, Krishna says to Satyaki, 'Go, O descendant of Sini, to Yudhishtira's abode and ascertain whether that king of great tejas is ready to visit Bhishma.'

Satyaki hastens to the royal son of Pandu and says, 'The best of Krishna's chariots is ready, Rajan, for Janardana to go to see Ganga's son Bhishma. O Dharmarajan of great splendour, he awaits you. You must decide what to do now.'

Dharma's son Yudhishtira says, 'Arjuna, let my best chariot be made ready. Soldiers will not accompany us today, and we will go forth alone. We should not vex the greatest Dharmatman, Bhishma, with a large gathering. Since from today Ganga's son will speak of things that are great mysteries, O son of Kunti, let the guards stay back.'

Arjuna leaves and returns with the best chariot harnessed. Yudhishtira, the twins, Bhima and Arjuna, like the five elements, then go towards Krishna's abode. While the noble Pandavas are on their way, the sagacious Krishna, accompanied by the grandson of Sini, mounts his ratha. Exchanging salutions with one another from their chariots and enquiring whether the night had passed contentedly, they ride without stopping on their chariots which rumble like clouds. Daruka urges on Krishna's steeds—Balahaka, Meghapushpa, Saibya and Sugriva. Endowed with great strength and speed, they fly ahead, marking the earth with their hooves and devouring the very skies.

Traversing the sacred field of Kuru, the princes reach the spot where the powerful Bhishma lies on his bed of arrows, surrounded by the great Rishis, like Brahma himself in the midst of Devas. Krishna, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, the twins and Satyaki alight from their chariots and salute the Rishis by raising their right hands.

Yudhishtira, like Vasava walking towards Brahma, approaches Bhishma, surrounded by the Rishis like the moon thronged by stars. Overcome by apprehension, he timidly casts his eyes on the Mahabaho lying on his bed of arrows like the sun fallen from the sky."

CANTO 54

Janamejaya said, "Tell me, O Maharishi, what discourse results in that meeting after the battle, between the son of Santanu and Ganga, named Devavrata or Bhishma of unclouded glory, the Dharmatman of immense tejas lying on a hero's bed, firmly cleaving to truth, his passions under complete control, and the sons of Pandu sitting around him."

Vaisampayana replied, "Many Rishis and Siddhas, led by Narada, arrive at the spot where Bhishma lies on his bed of arrows. The surviving kings assembled by Yudhishtira—Dhritarashtra, Krishna, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins—approach Bhishma Pitamaha, who resembles the sun fallen from the sky, and lament for him.

Then Narada of godlike aspect, after reflecting for a short while, addresses the Pandavas and the surviving kings: 'The time, I think, has come for you to question Bhishma on dharma and artha, for he is like the sun on the point of setting, about to leave us. He is soon to give over his life's breath. All of you should therefore ask him to speak to you. He is acquainted with the varied dharma of all the four varnas. Old in years, he will attain high regions of bliss after abandoning his body. Request him immediately to clear the doubts that exist in your minds.'

The princes approach Bhishma, but are unable to ask him anything and gaze mutely at one another till Yudhishtira, addressing Krishna, says, 'There is none but you who can question the Pitamaha, O greatest of Yadu's race. You are the highest among us all and know every duty and usage. Do you, Madhava, therefore speak first.'

Illustrious Kesava, of undimmed glory, approaching the unconquerable Bhishma, asks him, 'Have you, O best of kings, passed the night happily? Has your understanding become clear? Does your knowledge, sinless one, shine in you with inward light? I hope your heart no longer feels pain, and your mind is no longer agitated.'

Bhishma answers, 'Through your grace, Vasudeva, the burning, stupefaction, fatigue, exhaustion, illness and pain I felt have all left me in a single day. O you of incomparable splendour, because of your boon I see as clearly as a fruit placed in my hands all the past, future and present. All the dharma declared in the Vedas, all those laid down in the Vedantas, the dharma that virtuous men of learning have declared, I see clearly and remember, O you of unfading glory!

I also know, Janardana, the duties and practices prevailing in different countries and among particular tribes and families. Everything relating to the four varnas of life has come back to my memory. I am also acquainted with the dharma of kingship. I will say whatever should be said at the right time, Krishna, as by your grace I have acquired a blessed understanding. Strengthened by meditating on you, I feel as if I have become a young man again. Your favour has made me competent to hold a discourse on what is beneficial for the world. Why do you not yourself speak to Pandu's son on all that is good, O holy one? Please explain this, O Madhava!'

Vasudeva says, 'Recognize, Kurusthama, that I am the root of fame and of everything that leads to good. All things, good or bad, proceed from me. Who on earth will be surprised if the moon is said to be of cool rays? Similarly, I who have a full measure of fame already, can scarcely add to it by being described as the most illustrious one. It is your fame that I am resolved to enhance, and it is for this that I have inspired you with such prescience.

O Bhishma, lord of the earth, as long as the earth lasts will your fame travel with undiminished lustre through all the worlds. Whatever you say to the inquiring son of Pandu will be regarded everywhere to be as authoritative as the declarations of the Vedas. He who conducts himself according to your dictates here will obtain henceforth the reward of every meritorious action.

A man's achievements live as long as his prestige lasts in the world. For this reason, Bhishma, I have imparted to you divine understanding, so that your glory will be enhanced on earth. The surviving kings are sitting around

you, eager to listen to your discourses on dharma and karma. Speak to them, O Bhaarata!

You are ripe in years and your life is consistent with the laws of the Srutis. You know well the duties of kings and every other aspect of dharma. No one has ever observed any transgression in you, from your very birth onwards. All the kings know that you have knowledge of all the sciences of dharma and karma. Like a father to his sons, advise them about the sanatana dharma.

You have always worshipped the Rishis and the Devas. You must talk about these in detail to men who wish to listen to your discourse on dharma and karma. A learned man should oblige, especially when asked by men of dharma. The Rishis have declared this a duty, O powerful one, and if you do not speak on these subjects, you will incur sin. Therefore, when your sons and grandsons ask you, O learned one, about the eternal duties of men, you must satisfy them, Bharatarishabha.'"

CANTO 55

Vaisampayana said, "Thus envigorated, Bhishma says, 'I will discourse on dharma. By your grace O Govinda, since you are the eternal atman of every being, my speech and mind have become steady. Let the Dharmatman Yudhishtira question me about dharma and karma, and I will be happy to speak on the subject.

Let the son of Pandu question me, the Rajarishi whose birth filled all the Vrishnis with joy, and who has no equal among all the Kurus, among all dharmatman and among men of great fame.

Let Yudhishtira Brahmacharya, who has intelligence, self-restraint, forgiveness, righteousness, mental vigour and energy, question me.

Let Yudhishtira, who by his good offices always honours his relatives, guests, servants and others who are dependent on him, ask me questions.

Let Yudhishtira, in whom are truth, charity, asceticism, heroism, peacefulness, cleverness and fearlessness, ask me questions.

Let Yudhishtira the Dharmatman, whom kama, artha or fear can never influence to commit sin, ask me questions.

Let the son of Pandu, who is ever devoted to truth, forgiveness, knowledge and cordiality, and who always makes gifts to the righteous, ask me questions.

Let Yudhishtira, who is always engaged in tapasya, the study of the Vedas and the practice of dharma and duty; who is ever tranquil and who has heard all the mysteries, ask me questions.'

Krishna says to Bhishma, ‘King Yudhishtira the Just, overcome with mortification at having caused a great slaughter, and fearing your curse, dares not come near you. Having pierced with arrows those who deserved his veneration, those who were devoted to him, his acharyas, relatives, kinsmen and those worthy of his highest regard, he cannot pluck up the courage to approach you.’

Bhishma says, ‘O Krishna, just as the dharma of the Brahmanas consists of practising charity, study and tapasya, the dharma of Kshatriyas is to kill or die in battle. A Kshatriya should slay all who engage with him in unjust battle—fathers, grandfathers, brothers, gurus, relatives and kinsmen. This is his declared dharma.

That Kshatriya who kills in battle his very acharyas if they happen to be sinful, covetous and disregardful of restraints and vows, O Kesava, is only doing his duty.

That Kshatriya who slays in battle the man who from covetousness disregards the eternal strictures of virtue, knows his duty.

That Kshatriya knows his duty who in battle makes the earth a lake of blood, with the hair of slain warriors like grass and straw floating on it, dead elephants for its rocks and banners for trees on its banks. A Kshatriya, when challenged, should always fight a battle, since a combat for dharma leads him to both Swarga and fame on earth, as Manu has said.’

Hearing Bhishma speak thus, Dharma’s son Yudhishtira, with great humility, approaches the Kurupravira and stands in his range of vision. He falls at the feet of Bhishma, who in return gladdens him with words of affection, lovingly nuzzling his head, and asks him to take a seat, saying, Do not fear, Kurusthama! Ask me anything, O child, without any anxiety.’”

CANTO 56

Vaisampayana said, “Bowing to Hrishikesha, saluting Bhishma and taking the permission of all the seniors assembled there, Yudhishtira begins to question his Pitamaha.

Yudhishtira says, ‘Men with knowledge of dharma and niti say that Rajadharma constitutes the highest science of dharma. I, too, think that the burden of these duties is exceedingly onerous. Tell us about the dharma of kings in detail, Pitamaha.

Rajadharma is the refuge of the whole world and, with artha and kama, is dependent on kingly duties. It is also clear that the practices that lead to moksha are equally dependent on them. Just as reins control the horse, the ankush or iron hook the elephant, Rajadharma is what keeps the world restrained and in check. If one does not grasp the dharma observed by Rajarishis, chaos will ensue on earth, and all will become confusion and anarchy.

As the rising sun dispels inauspicious darkness, so does Rajadharma prevent every kind of evil in this world. Therefore, O Pitamaha, for my sake, discuss the subject of this dharma first, for you are the greatest of all men that know dharma. O Parantapa, Vasudeva has declared you the wisest of men and so all of us expect to learn the highest knowledge from you.’

Bhishma says, ‘Bowing to Dharma who is Supreme, Krishna who is entirely Brahman and to the Brahmanas, I will discourse on the eternal duties of men. Listen to me, Yudhishtira, with concentration, while I

describe in precise detail the whole range of Rajadharma and other responsibilities that you wish to understand.

Firstly, O Kurusthama, the king, from a desire to please his subjects, should wait humbly upon the Devas and the Brahmanas, always abiding by the law. By worshipping them, the king pays off his debt to dharma and niti and receives the respect of his subjects.

You should always act promptly, Yudhishtira, for without timely action, mere destiny can never accomplish the objects cherished by kings. Effort and destiny are equal in their operation. Of the two, I regard action to be the superior, for destiny is contingent upon effort. Do not indulge in grief if what has begun at first ends disastrously, for you should then exert yourself on the same task with redoubled diligence. This is the great duty of kings.

There is nothing that contributes so much to the success of kings as Satya. The king devoted to Truth finds happiness both here and after death. For Rishis too, O Rajan, Truth is their greatest wealth. Similarly, there is nothing that inspires as much confidence in kings as Satya. The monarch who is possessed of every accomplishment and good conduct, who is self-restrained, humble and follows his dharma, who has his passions under control, who is personable and liberal, never loses prosperity.

By administering justice, by attending to three principles—concealment of his own weaknesses, discovery of the weaknesses of enemies and keeping his own counsel—and by the observance of straightforward conduct, the king obtains prosperity, O Kurusthama. If he is mild, everybody disregards him. On the other hand, if he becomes fierce, his subjects are troubled. Therefore, observe both kinds of policy.

Never punish the Brahmanas, for the Brahmana is the greatest of men on earth. The Dharmatman Manu sang two slokas in respect of your duties, which you should always bear in mind: “Fire has sprung from water, the Kshatriya from the Brahmana and iron from stone. The three—fire, Kshatriya and iron—can exert their force on every other thing, but when they come into contact with their respective progenitors, their force is neutralized.” When iron strikes stone, or fire combats water, or a Kshatriya cherishes enmity towards a Brahmana, all three become weak.

This being so, O Rajan, you will see that the Brahmanas are worthy of homage. Those who are the best among the Brahmanas are Devas on earth. Duly revered, they uphold the Vedas and the yagnas. But those who want to

gain such honour but are impediments to the three worlds, Purushavyaghra, should always be subdued by the might of your arms.

Listen with concentrated attention to the two slokas sung by the great Rishi Usanas, in the olden days. “The righteous Kshatriya, mindful of his dharma, should punish a Brahmana, even though he may be the very master of the Vedas, if he rushes to do battle with an uplifted weapon.” The Kshatriya who upholds dharma when someone transgresses it, does not thereby become a sinner, for the rage of the assailant justifies the wrath of the punisher. Subject to these restrictions, you should protect the Brahmanas. If they become offenders, you should exile them from your dominions. But even when they deserve punishment, you should show them compassion.

No corporal punishment is for them. If a Brahmana is guilty of Brahmahatya, or of violating the bed of his acharyas or other revered seniors, or of causing miscarriage, or of treason against the king, his punishment should be banishment from your dominions. Those who show respect towards the Brahmanas should be favoured with offices in the state.

No treasure is more valuable to kings than the selection and keeping of servants. Among the six kinds of citadels cited in the shastras, the ready service and love of subjects is the most impregnable. Therefore, the wise king should always show compassion towards the four varnas of his subjects. The king who is a Dharmatman and truthful will succeed in gratifying his people.

However, you must not always forgive everybody, for the king who is mild is regarded like an elephant that is no longer bellicose. In the shastras, Brihaspati has composed a sloka which was applicable to this in ancient times. Listen as I recite it: “If the king happens to be always forgiving, the lowest of men prevail over him, like the man who sits on the head of the elephant he guides.”

The king, therefore, should not always be lenient, nor should he always be fierce. He should be like the vernal sun—neither cold, nor hot enough to produce sweat. He should judge friends and foes by the direct evidence of the senses, by conjecture, by comparisons and by the canons of the shastras, O Rajan.

O you of great kindness, avoid all those evil practices that are called Vyasanas. While it is not essential for you never to indulge in them, do not

be attached to them, for everyone prevails over one who is addicted to these.

A king who has no love for his people fills them with anxiety. The king should always conduct himself towards his subjects as a mother towards her unborn child—as one who, for the good of her child, relinquishes those things that she herself most treasures.

For the sake of what will benefit his people, Kurusthama, a righteous king's behaviour towards them should always be as towards a cherished elder.

You should always be determined, O son of Pandu. The king who is possessed of fortitude and who is known to inflict punishment on wrong-doers has no cause of fear.

You should not indulge in jests with your servants, O foremost of speakers. Rajan, observe the drawbacks of such indulgence. If the master mingles too freely with them, they begin to disregard him and, forgetting their status, overstep that of the master. Ordered to do a job, they hesitate. They divulge the master's secrets. They ask for things that should not be asked for, and take the food intended for the master. They go to the extent of manifesting annoyance and seeking to outshine the master. They even seek to dominate the king by accepting bribes, practising deceit and obstructing state business. They cause the state to rot through abuses by falsification and forgeries.

They make love with the female guards of the palace and dress in the same style as their master. They become shameless enough to indulge in belching and the like, and expectorating in the very presence of their master. They do not fear to speak of him with levity before others. If the king becomes mild and disposed to jest, his servants, disregarding him, ride on horses and elephants and chariots as good as his. His counsellors, assembled in court, openly say to their sovereign, "This is beyond your capacity. This is a wrong course."

If the king becomes angry, they laugh. They are not contented even when favours are bestowed upon them, though they may express satisfaction for other reasons. They disclose the secret counsels of their master and talk about his evil deeds. Without the least anxiety, they annul the king's commands. If the king's jewels, or food, or the necessaries of his bath, or cosmetics are not forthcoming, the servants show no concern, even in his presence. Instead of taking what is rightfully theirs, they appropriate

what belongs to the king. They wish to sport with him as with a bird tied with a string, always giving people to understand that he is very intimate with them and loves them dearly. If the king is easy-going and disposed to jest, O Yudhishtira, these and many other evils spring from his demeanour.'"

CANTO 57

"Bhishma says, 'The king, O Yudhishtira, should always be ready for action. That ruler who, like a woman, is unfitted for exertion is not worthy of praise. In this connection, the holy Sanas quotes a sloka. Listen with attention, as I recite it to you: "Like a snake swallowing mice, the earth swallows these two—the king averse to battle, and the Brahmana excessively attached to wives and children." You should always bear this in mind, O Purushavyaghra.

Make peace with those enemies with whom you should make peace according to the laws, and wage war with whom you should wage war. Whether it is your guru or your friend, you should slay those who act inimically towards any of the seven limbs of your kingdom—the king, army, counsellors, friends, treasury, territory and forts.

There is an ancient sloka about the duty of kings, sung by King Marutta, which is in concord with Brihaspati's opinion. According to the shastras, there is punishment for even the acharya if he becomes haughty and disregardful of what should be done and what should not, and if he transgresses all restraints.

Jadu's wise son, King Sagara, out of benevolence towards his people, exiled his own eldest son Asamanjas. Asamanjas used to drown children in the Sarayu, for which his father repudiated him and sent him into exile. The Rishi Uddalaka cast off his favourite son Swetaketu, a mahatapasvin in his later years, because he used to deceive Brahmanas, after inviting them with promises of entertainment.

The eternal dharma of kings is the happiness of their subjects, observance of truth and sincerity of conduct. The king should not covet the riches of others, but rather, over time, distribute wealth. If he is proficient, truthful in speech and forgiving in temper, prosperity will always attend him. With his soul cleansed of vices, the king should be able to govern his anger, and all his decisions should be in conformity with the shastras. He should always pursue dharma, artha, kama and moksha judiciously, but conceal his counsel in respect of these.

No greater evil can befall the king than the disclosure of his counsel. Kings should protect the four varnas in the discharge of their dharma. It is their perpetual duty to prevent a confusion of dharmas in respect of the varnas. The king should not repose confidence in those other than his own servants, nor full confidence even in them.

He should, by his own judgement, use to advantage the merits and defects of the six essential requisites of sovereignty—peace with a stronger foe, war with one of equal strength, invading the dominions of one who is weaker, halting, seeking protection if weak in one's own citadel and sowing dissension among the chief officers of the enemy. The king who studies the lapses of his foes judiciously, pursues dharma, artha and kama, who sets clever spies to ascertain secrets and to wean away the officers of his enemies by gifts of wealth, deserves commendation.

The king should administer justice like Yama and amass wealth like Kubera. He should observe the merits and defects of his acquisitions and losses, as well as those of his own dominions. He should feed those who have not been fed and enquire after those who have been fed. He should be of sweet speech and speak with a smiling, not sour, countenance. He should always attend to his elders and repress procrastination. He should never covet what belongs to others, and should be careful to follow dharma in his conduct. He should never take wealth from dharmatmans but, instead, seize the wealth of those who do not follow dharma and give it to those who do.

The king should himself be skilful in taking strong action, but should also practise kindness. He should have his mind under control. He should dress magnificently, give gifts when required, have regular meals and be of good conduct. The king who desires prosperity should always have in his service men who are brave, devoted, incapable of being deceived by enemies, healthy, well-behaved, well-born and connected with families of impeccable conduct. They should be respectable, never insult others,

possess knowledge of all the sciences, be familiar with the world and its affairs, be unmindful of the future, always do their duties honestly and remain as steadfast as mountains.

There should be no difference between the king and them as regards the objects of enjoyment. The only distinction should consist in his sphere of influence and his power of passing orders. His demeanour towards them, before or after, should be the same. The king who behaves in this way never comes to grief.

His own servants and relatives soon eliminate the crooked and covetous king who suspects everybody and who taxes his subjects heavily. The king who follows dharma and sets about attracting the hearts of his people never succumbs when enemies attack him. Even if overcome, he soon regains his position.

If the king is not wrathful, not addicted to evil ways and not severe in his punishments, if he keeps his passions under control, he becomes an object of confidence to all, as the Himavat mountain is to all creatures.

He is the best of kings who is wise, charitable, personable, prompt in action, ready to take advantage of the lapses of foes, who knows what is bad for each of the four varnas of his subjects, who has his anger under control and is not short-tempered or vindictive, who is high-minded and engages in yagnas and other religious rites, who is not given to boasting and who vigorously accomplishes all work that he commences.

He is the best of kings in whose dominions men live fearlessly, like sons in the house of their father. He is the best of kings whose subjects do not have to hide their wealth and who know what is good and bad for them.

He is a king indeed whose subjects are engaged in their respective svadharmas and do not fear to die in the line of duty, whose people, duly protected, are of peaceful behaviour, docile, tractable, unwilling to be drawn into disputes, and inclined to liberality.

That king earns eternal merit in whose dominions there is no wickedness, dissimulation, deception and envy.

That king truly deserves to rule who honours knowledge, who is devoted to the shastras and the good of his people, who treads in the path of dharma and is liberal.

That king deserves to rule whose spies, counsels and deeds, accomplished and unaccomplished, remain unknown to his enemies.

O Bhaarata, Usanas of Bhrigu's race, sang the following verse in olden days in the narrative called Ramacharita, on the subject of Rajadharma: "One should first select a king in whose dominions one would prefer to live, only then seek a wife and acquire wealth. If there is no king, what will become of wife and acquisitions?"

There is no dharma more obligatory for those who seek to rule than the protection of subjects. The shelter the king grants to his subjects upholds the world.

Manu, the son of Prachetas, sang two verses respecting the duties of kings. Listen to them with attention: "These six men should be avoided like a leaky boat on the sea: an acharya who does not speak, a priest who has not studied the shastras, a king who does not ensure protection, a wife who says what is disagreeable, a cowherd who prefers to rove within the village and a barber who longs to go to the the vana."""

CANTO 58

"Bhishma says, 'Security of subjects, Yudhishtira, is the very essence of kingly duties. The divine Brihaspati does not applaud any duty as much as this one. The Mahatapasvi Kavi Usanas, the thousand-eyed Indra, Manu, the son of Prachetas, the divine Bharadwaja and the sage Gaurasiras, all devoted to Brahman and Brahmavadis, have composed treatises on the dharma of kings. All of them praise the duty of protection in respect of kings.

Yudhishtira, of eyes like lotus leaves and complexion of copper, listen to how you can fulfill the duty of safeguarding your subjects: by giving them their just dues without haughtiness, collecting taxes with consideration, never taking anything from them capriciously and without cause, selecting honest men for discharging administrative functions, seeking the good of the people, employing spies and servants, producing discord and disunion among the enemy by fair or unfair means; it requires adroitness in transacting business, heroism and truthfulness.

It also consists in inflicting corporal punishment and fines justly, never abandoning the honest, granting employment and shelter to men of respectable birth, storing what should be retained and keeping company with intelligent men.

It always includes the comfort of your troops, Yudhishtira, supervision of the people, steadiness in the transaction of business, filling of the treasury, absence of blind confidence in the guards of the city, fostering disloyalty among the citizens of a hostile town, supporting friends and allies

living in the midst of the enemy's country, distrusting and strictly watching the servants and officers of the state, personally observing the city, comforting the enemy with assurances, steadily observing the dictates of policy, remaining ready for action, never disregarding an enemy, and eliminating those who are evil.

Brihaspati has said that readiness for action is the root of Rajadharma. Listen to the verses he sang: "Amrita was obtained by toil, the Asuras were slain by effort, Indra himself obtained sovereignty in Swarga and on Bhumi by exerting himself. The hero of work is superior to the hero of speech. The heroes of speech gratify and worship the heroes of work."

An intelligent king who does not exert himself is like a snake without poison, always overcome by his enemies. A king, however strong, should not disregard an enemy, however weak. A spark can kindle a conflagration, and a particle of poison can kill. With only one kind of force, an enemy from within a fort can hold off the whole country of even a powerful and prosperous king.

The secret utterances of the king, the amassing of troops for seizing victory, the crooked purposes in his heart for accomplishing particular objects, and the wrong deeds he does or intends to do, should be concealed by putting on an appearance of frankness. He should act righteously in order to rule over his people. Men of crooked minds cannot bear the burden of an extensive empire. A ruler who is mild cannot acquire superior rank, which depends upon hard work.

A kingdom coveted by all like meat can never be protected by candour and simplicity. Therefore, Yudhishtira, a king should always conduct himself with both frankness and crookedness. If in protecting his subjects a king falls into danger, he earns great merit. This is what the conduct of kings should be. I have now told you only a portion of the duties of kings. Tell me, Kurusthama, what else you wish to know.'

The illustrious Vyasa, Devasthana, Aswa, Vasudeva, Kripa, Satyaki and Sanjaya, all happy and with faces resembling full-blown flowers, exclaim, 'Excellent! Excellent!' and hymn the praises of Bhishma Purushavyaghra.

Then Yudhishtira, with a sorrowful heart and in tears, gently touches Bhishma's feet and says, 'Pitamaha, tomorrow I will ask questions about which I have doubts, for today the sun, having sucked the moisture out of all terrestrial objects, is about to set.'

Kesava, Kripa, Yudhishtira and others, saluting the Brahmanas assembled there and circumambulating Ganga's great son, cheerfully climb into their chariots. All of them, strict observers of vows, then bathe in the current of the Drishadwati. They offer oblations of water to their ancestors, silently reciting the sacred mantras. After performing the evening pujas, these Parantapas enter the city of Hastinapura."

CANTO 59

Vaisampayana said, “Rising from their beds the next day and performing the morning pujas according to the shastras, the Pandavas and the Yadavas set out on their chariots, which resemble fortified towns, for the place where Bhishma lies. They ride to Kurukshetra, approach the sinless Bhishma and enquire whether the best of maharathas had passed the night happily. They then salute all the Rishis and, getting their blessings in return, the princes take their seats around Bhishma.

Then the Dharmarajan, Yudhishtira, after paying respects to Bhishma, says with joined hands, ‘Tell me O Bhaarata, when did the word Rajan—King—begin to be used on earth?

Parantapa, why does one man—the king, with hands, arms and neck like others, with understanding and senses like others, with a back, mouth, stomach, bones, marrow, flesh, blood and semen similar to those of the rest of the world, inhaling and exhaling like others, with life-breath and body like other men, resembling others in birth and death, subject to the same kinds of joy and grief, in fact, similar to all others in all attributes of humanity, come to govern the rest of the world containing many other men possessing equal intelligence and bravery?

Since when has one man ruled the wide world, teeming with brave, powerful and high-born men of dharma? Why do all men try to win his favour? Why is it that when this one man is delighted, the whole world is delighted, and if this one man is troubled, the whole world is troubled? I want to hear this in detail, Bharatarishabha! O greatest of speakers, tell me

fully, for there must be a serious reason for all this, since we see that the whole world bows down to a single man as to a Deva.'

Bhishma says, 'With concentrated attention on every detail, listen to how sovereignty first began in the Krita yuga. At first, there was no sovereignty, no king, no punishment and no punisher. All men used to protect one another righteously. However, with time they found this task to be irksome. Uncertainty began to assail their hearts; their perceptions became clouded and their virtue began to decline.

When this happened, they became covetous. Because men sought to possess objects they did not own, another passion called greed seized them. When they became subject to kama, another passion, krodha or anger, soon tainted them. Once subject to wrath, they lost all consideration of what they should do and what they should not. Unrestrained sexual indulgence set in. Men began to speak as they pleased. All distinctions disappeared between clean and unclean food, between virtue and vice. When this confusion set in amongst men, the Vedas disappeared.

Upon the disappearance of the Vedas, dharma was lost. When both the Vedas and dharma were lost, the Devas were filled with dread. Overcome with fear, they sought the protection of Brahma.

Having gratified the divine Grandfather of the universe, the Devas sorrowfully said to him with folded hands, "O Devadeva, greed and error have crept into the eternal Vedas in the world of men, and we are terror-stricken. Through the loss of the Vedas, men have lost dharma too, because of which we fear that we ourselves are about to descend to the level of humans.

Men used to pour libations and feed us, while we used to pour rain downwards. But with the cessation of all pious pujas among men, great distress threatens us. O Pitamaha, think of what will benefit us, so that the universe which your power created will not be destroyed."

Thus addressed, the Swayambhuva and divine Lord said to them, "I will think of what should be done for the good to all. Best of Devas, let your fears be dispelled!"

Brahma then composed by his own intelligence a treatise consisting of a hundred thousand chapters. He treated in it three subjects, dharma, artha and kama, and designated it as the triune aggregate. He treated a fourth subject called moksha with opposite meaning and attributes. In it he dealt with the attributes of sattwa, rajas and tamas and a fourth—nishkama

karma, the practice of dharma without hope of bliss or reward in this or the other world, which will lead to moksha, liberation.

He included another triple aggregate connected with punishment—conversation, growth and destruction—and in yet another an aggregate of six consisting of the hearts of men, place, time, means, overt deeds, alliances and causes. In it, Bharatarishabha, he laid down the religious rites prescribed in the three Vedas, knowledge and the actions necessary for the support of life—agriculture, trade and commerce, and the very extensive branch of learning called punitive legislation.

The treatise also dealt fully with the attributes of princes, behaviour towards counsellors, spies, secret agents envoys and agents of other kinds, of conciliation, fomenting discord, gifts and punishment, with toleration as the fifth one. He described in detail deliberation of all kinds, counsels for producing dissension, the errors of deliberation, the results of the success or failure of counsels, treaties of three kinds: bad, average and good, made through fear, good offices and gifts of wealth.

In it he also described in detail the four appropriate times for making journeys, three kinds of victory that one secures—righteously, by wealth, or by deceitful means, and also the three types of qualities—bad, average and good—of counsellors, kingdom, fort, army and treasury.

The treatise dealt in detail with the eight kinds of open punishment and the eight kinds of secret punishment. Chariots, elephants, horses, foot-soldiers, conscripted labourers and crews, the paid attendants of armies, guides taken from the country which is the theatre of war: these are the eight instruments, O Kauravya, of open punishment or forces acting openly.

The work also mentioned the three kinds of things—apparel, food and incantations—the use and administration of moveable and immoveable poisons, and delineated enemies, allies and neutrals.

Brahma discussed in the work, the diverse features of roads to be taken, depending on astrological configurations, the attributes of the soil on which to encamp, protection of oneself, superintendence of the construction of chariots and other machinery of war and their use, methods for protecting and improving men, elephants, chariots and horses, various kinds of battle formations, strategies and manoeuvres in war, planetary conjunctions foreboding evil and natural calamities such as earthquakes.

He wrote of skilful methods of warfare and retreat, knowledge of weapons and their proper upkeep, disorders of troops and how to be rid of

them, the means of inspiring the army with joy and confidence, of diseases, times of distress and danger, of how to guide the army in battle, the methods of sounding alarms and notifying orders, how to cause fear in the enemy by display of standards, the diverse methods of afflicting the enemy's kingdom by means of robbers, fierce wild tribes, fire-raisers, poisoners and forgers.

He discussed how to produce disunion among the chief officers of hostile armies by cutting down crops and plants, destroying the efficiency of the enemy's elephants by sounding alarms, and honouring those among the enemy's subjects who are well disposed towards the invader.

The work discussed the growth, harmony and waste of the seven essential requisites of sovereignty: the capacity for projected works, the means of accomplishing them, the methods of extending the kingdom, the means of winning over men dwelling in the enemy's territory, the punishment and destruction of those who are strong, the exact administration of justice, the extermination of evil, wrestling, shooting, discharging weapons, the methods of making gifts and of storing requisite provisions and diverse matters.

Brahma wrote on the subject of feeding the hungry and supervising those whom one has fed, gifts of wealth in season, freedom from the vices called Vyasanas, the attributes of kings, the qualifications of military officers, the sources of the aggregate of three and its merits and demerits, diverse kinds of evil intents, the behaviour of dependents, suspicion against all, the avoidance of negligence, the acquisition of coveted objects, the improvement of objects already acquired and the gifting of them to deserving men, and the expenditure of wealth for religious purposes, for acquiring objects of desire and for dispelling danger and distress.

In the work, O Kurusthama, the Swayambhuva mentions the four kinds of vices which the learned say are born of kama—hunting, gambling, drinking and sexual indulgence—and the six kinds of vices born of anger—rudeness of speech, fierceness, severity of chastisement, infliction of pain, frustrating one's own objects and suicide.

The treatise describes diverse kinds of machines and their action. It deals with devastation of the enemy's territories, attacks upon enemies, the destruction and removal of landmarks, the cutting down of large trees to deprive the enemy and his subjects of their refreshing shade, the siege of forts, the supervision of agriculture and other useful operations, the storage

of necessaries, the robes and attire for troops and the best means of manufacturing them, and the characteristics and uses of panavas, anakas, conches and drums.

The work duly deals, Yudhishtira, with the six kinds of articles—gems, animals, lands, robes, female slaves and gold—and the means of acquiring them for oneself or destroying them to injure the enemy, pacifying newly acquired territories, honouring the good, cultivating friendship with the learned, knowing the rules in respect of gifts and religious rites such as homa, and ceremonial touching of auspicious articles.

The work deals with how to pay attention to beautifying the body and the seventy-two actions laid down in medical works for the protection, exercise and improvement of the body, the manner of preparing and using food, piety of behaviour, the attainment of prosperity by following one path, truthfulness and sweetness in speech, observance of activities undertaken on festive occasions, social gatherings within and beyond the household, the open and secret actions of men in all places of meeting, the constant supervision of men's conduct, the immunity of Brahmanas from punishment, the reasonable infliction of punishment, and honours paid to dependents in consideration of kinship and merit. It also deals with the protection of subjects and the means of extending the kingdom, the counsels that a king who lives in the midst of a dozen kings should pursue in respect of the four kinds of enemies, the four kinds of allies and the four kinds of neutrals, and the practices of particular countries, tribes and families.

The work covers the subjects of dharma, artha, kama and moksha and lays down the desire for diverse kinds of wealth and the diverse means of its acquisition, the system of agriculture and other activities that form the chief source of revenue, various methods of producing and applying illusions and how one can render stagnant water foul. It describes the way, O Naravyaghra, by which men can be prevented from deviating from the path of dharma and honesty.

Having composed this highly beneficial treatise, the divine Lord cheerfully said to the deities led by Indra, "For the good of the world and for establishing dharma, artha and kama, I have composed this tract representing the very essense of speech. Assisted by punishment and dealing with rewards and punishments, this science will operate among men and will protect the world. Moreover, because men are led to the acquisition

of the objects of their existence by punishment, which in fact leads or governs everything, this science will be known in the three worlds as Dandaneeti—the science of punishment.

Containing the essence of all the attributes of the six gunas, this science will always be highly regarded by all noble men. I have dealt in it with dharma, artha, kama and moksha."

After this, the lord of Uma—the divine and multiform Siva of large eyes, the source of all blessings, first studied and mastered it. However, in view of the gradual decrease of the life-span of human beings, the divine Siva abridged this great shastra that Brahma had compiled. Mahatapasvin Indra, devoted to Brahma, received the abridged version called Vaisalakasha, consisting of ten thousand lessons.

The divine Indra abridged it further into a treatise consisting of five thousand lessons and called it Vahudantaka. Later the powerful and intelligent Brihaspati further abridged the work into a treatise consisting of three thousand lessons and called it Barhaspatya.

Finally, the famous and immeasurably wise acharya of Yoga-Kavi reduced it further into a work of a thousand lessons.

Thus did the Maharishis abridge the work for the benefit of the world, in view of the shortening life-span of men and their general decline. The gods, then, approaching the lord of creatures, Vishnu, said to him, "Indicate, O Deva, the one among mortals who deserves to have superiority over the rest."

The divine and powerful Narayana, reflecting a little, by an order of his will created a son to be born of his energy, named Virajas. However, the highly blessed Virajas did not desire sovereignty over the earth, as he was inclined to the life of a sannyasi. Virajas had a son named Krittimat who also renounced pleasure and enjoyment. Krittimat's son Kardama also practised severe tapasya, but his son Ananga was pious, a protector of living things, and fully conversant with the Dandaneeti.

Ananga had a son named Ativala, well versed in policy. However, after inheriting an extensive empire at the demise of his father, he became the slave of his passions. Mrityu had a daughter born of his mind, named Sunita, who was celebrated throughout the three worlds. She was married to Ativala and gave birth to a son named Vena. Vena, a slave of wrath and malice, became vicious and sinful in his conduct towards all creatures.

The Rishis, Brahmavadis, slew him with weapons of blades of Kusa infused with their mantras. They pierced the right thigh of Vena and from that thigh emerged a short-limbed man resembling a charred brand, with bloodshot eyes and black hair.

These Brahmavadis said to him, “Nishida, sit here!” From him have sprung the Nishadas—those evil tribes that have the hills and the forests for their abode, and the hundreds and thousands of others called Mlechchas, who live in the Vindhya mountains.

The great Rishis then pierced the right arm of Vena, from where sprang a man who was a second Indra in form. Clad in mail, armed with swords, bows and arrows and adept in the science of weapons, he knew the Vedas and their branches thoroughly. He knew all the laws of the Dandaneeti, O Rajan, in their embodied forms.

The son of Vena then, with joined hands, said to these Maharishis, “I have attained an understanding that is keen and conforms to dharma. Instruct me in what I should do with it. I will accomplish without hesitation any task that you indicate.”

The Devas and the Rishis who were present there said to Vena’s son, “Fearlessly accomplish all those tasks in which dharma resides. Disregard what is dear and what is not, look upon all men with an equal eye. Cast away kama, krodha, lobha and distinction and always follow the dictates of dharma, punishing with your own hands the man, whoever he may be, who deviates from the path of duty. Swear that you will in thought, word and deed, always maintain the religion of the Vedas on earth. Pledge that you will courageously maintain the dharma laid down in the Vedas with the aid of the Dandaneeti, and will never act capriciously. O mighty one, acknowledge that Brahmanas are exempt from punishment, and vow also that you will protect the world from an intermixture of the castes.”

Thus addressed, Vena’s son Prithu replied to the assembled deities headed by the Rishis, “I will always worship those bulls among men, the greatly blessed Brahmanas.”

These Brahmavadis then said to him, “Tathaastu! Let it be so!”

Then Sukra, the vast receptacle of Brahman, became his priest. The Balakhilyas became his counsellors and the Saraswatas his companions. The great and illustrious Rishi Garga became his astrologer.

Men believe the high declaration of the Srutis that Prithu is the eighth from Vishnu. Before that, two men named Suta and Magadha were born,

who became his bards and eulogists. Gratified, Prithu, the royal son of powerful Vena, gave to Suta the land lying on the sea-coast and to Magadha the country since known as Magadha.

We hear that the surface of the earth was once very uneven. It was Prithu who levelled it. In every Manvantara, the earth becomes uneven. Vena's son moved the rocky masses lying all around, O Rajan, with the horn of his bow. By this the hills and mountains became lofty.

Then Vishnu, the Devas of Indra, the Rishis, the Regents of the world and the Brahmanas assembled for the coronation of Prithu as the king of the world.

The earth herself, in her embodied form, came to him with a tribute of gems and jewels. Varuna, the lord of rivers, Himavat, the king of mountains and Sakra bestowed upon him inexhaustible wealth. The great Meru, the mountain of gold, gave him enormous masses of the precious metal. Divine Kubera, the lord of Yakshas and Rakshasas, gave him wealth, borne on the shoulders of human beings, enough to gratify the needs of dharma, artha and kama.

Millions of horses, chariots, elephants and men, O son of Pandu, sprang to life as soon as Vena's son Prithu thought of them.

Due to the protection promised by Prithu, neither old age, nor famine, nor calamity, nor disease on earth burdened mankind, nor fear of reptiles or thieves, or from any other quarter. When Prithu went to the sea, its water became solidified. The mountains gave him passage, and his standard was obstructed nowhere. He drew from the earth, like a milcher from a cow, seventeen kinds of crops for the food of Yakshas, Rakshasas, Nagas and other beings. That noble king caused all men to regard dharma as the best of all things and, because he gratified all the people, he was called Rajan, King; and because he also healed the wounds of Brahmanas, he earned the name of Kshatriya; and because the earth during his reign became celebrated for the practice of dharma, she came to be called Prithvi.

The eternal Vishnu himself, Bhaarata, confirmed his power, telling him, "No one, O Rajan, shall transcend you." As a result of the tapasya Prithu performed, the divine Vishnu entered his body. It is for this reason that the entire universe offers worship to Prithu and he is numbered among the gods.

Rajan, your kingdom should always be protected by the science of punishment, the Dandaneeti. By careful observation made through the

movements of your spies, you must also ensure its safety in such a way that no one will be able to injure it. All good deeds, Rajan, lead to the benefit of the king. The conduct of a king should be regulated by his own intelligence and also by the opportunities and means that offer themselves. What cause can there be for the multitude to live in obedience to one, save the divinity of the king?

At that time, a golden lotus emerged from Vishnu's brow and the goddess Sree was born of the lotus. She became the spouse of sagacious Dharma. Sree and Dharma had a son Artha and all three, Dharma, Artha and Sree, became established in sovereignty.

Upon the exhaustion of his punya, a man comes down from heaven to earth and takes birth as a king who knows the science of danda. Such a man is endowed with greatness and is really an amsa of Vishnu on earth. He acquires great acumen and obtains superiority over others. The Devas establish him, so no one can transcend him. It is for this reason that everybody acts in obedience to such a one, and that the world cannot command him. Good actions, Rajan, engender good. It is for this that the multitude obeys the king's commands, though he belongs to the same world and is possessed of similar limbs and organs as all men.

He who once beheld Prithu's amiable face became submissive to him, esteeming him as handsome, wealthy and highly favoured. It is because of the might of his sceptre that the practice of dharma and just behaviour became so visible on earth and Bhumi was overspread with virtue.

Yudhishtira, Brahma's treatise contained the histories of all past events, the origin of the Maharishis, the holy waters, the planets, stars and astronomy, the duties in respect of the four varnas of life, the four kinds of Homa, the characteristics of the four orders of men and the four branches of learning. Whatever objects there are on earth he included in it: the Itihasas, the Vedas, the science of Nyaya, tapasyas, gyana, abstention from injury to all beings, truth, falsehood and mahadharma. He fully described in it reverence towards the elderly, gifts, purity of behaviour, alacrity in exertion and compassion towards all men. There is no doubt in this. Since that time, O Rajan, the learned began to say that there is no difference between a Deva and a Rajan.

I have now told you everything about the greatness of kings. What subject, O king of the Bhaaratas, shall I speak of next?'"

CANTO 60

Vaisampayana said, “After this, Yudhishtira salutes his Pitamaha Bhishma, the son of Ganga, attentively with joined hands and asks again, ‘What are the general duties of the four varnas and the special duties of each varna? What mode of life should each varna adopt?

What duties are especially called Rajadharma? By what means does a kingdom grow, and what are the means by which the king himself advances? How also, O Bharatarishabha, do the citizens and the servants of the king progress? What sorts of forts, treasuries, punishments, allies, counsellors, priests and acharyas, should a king avoid? Whom should the king trust in different kinds of distress and danger? From what evils should the king guard himself firmly? Tell me all this, O Pitamaha!’

Bhishma says, ‘I make my obeisance to dharma, who is great, and to Krishna who is Brahman. Having bowed also to the Brahmanas assembled here, I will discuss duties that are ananta—eternal. Suppression of anger, truthfulness of speech, justice, forgiveness, legitimate fatherhood, purity of conduct, avoidance of quarrels, simplicity and care for dependants—these nine duties belong equally to all the four varnas.

I will now tell you the responsibilities which belong exclusively to Brahmanas. Self-restraint, O Rajan, the shastras declare to be the first duty of Brahmanas. Study of the Vedas and patience in undergoing tapasya are also their responsibility. By carrying out these two, they accomplish all the dharma laid down for them. If, while engaged in the observance of his svadharma, and without doing anything improper, a peaceful, learned

Brahmana acquires wealth, he should marry, procreate, practise charity and perform yagnas.

The wise declare that wealth thus obtained should be enjoyed by distributing it among deserving men and relatives. By his study of the Vedas, the Brahmana accomplishes all the pious work laid down for him. Whether or not he achieves anything else, if he devotes himself to the study of the Vedas, he becomes known as a Brahmana or friend of all creatures.

I will also tell you, Bhaarata, the dharma of a Kshatriya. A Kshatriya should give, not beg, should himself perform yagnas, but not officiate as a priest in the yagnas of others. He should never teach the Vedas but study them with the help of a Brahmana acharya. He should protect the people by exerting himself always to destroy robbers and evil-doers, and should demonstrate his prowess in battle.

Those among Kshatriya rulers who perform great yagnas, who are gyanis of the Vedas and who gain victory in battle, become foremost among those who acquire blessed realms in the hereafter through their punya. Men who know the ancient shastras do not applaud the warrior who returns unscathed from battle but, rather, declare him to be a paltry Kshatriya.

There is no higher duty for a Kshatriya than the suppression of brigands. Gifts, study and sacrifices bring prosperity to kings. Therefore, a king who desires to acquire punya should engage in battle. The king should ensure not only that all his subjects observe their respective duties, but also that they follow the dictates of dharma. If he only protects his subjects, whether or not he does anything else, he is considered to be one who has accomplished all meritorious deeds and is worthy of being called a Kshatriya, the greatest of men.

I will now tell you, Yudhishtira, what the eternal dharma of the Vaisya is. A Vaisya should give gifts, study the Vedas, perform sacrifices and acquire wealth by fair means. He should also protect and rear all domestic animals with proper care, like a father nurturing his sons. Anything else that he does will be inappropriate for him. By protecting his domestic animals, he will obtain great happiness, since the Creator, after fashioning these animals, bestowed their care upon the Vaisya. Upon the Brahmana and the Kshatriya he conferred the care of all living things.

I will tell you how the Vaisya is to earn the means of his sustenance. If he looks after six cattle for others, he can take the milk of one cow as his remuneration, and if he keeps a hundred cattle for others, he may take a

single pair as his fee. If he trades with others' wealth, he can take a seventh part of the profits as his share. One-seventh also is his share in the profits arising from the trade in horns, but he should take one-sixteenth if the trade is in hooves. If he engages in cultivation with seeds supplied by others, he can receive a seventh part of the yield. This should be his annual remuneration. A Vaisya should always be ready to tend cattle. If he is ready to do so, no one else should be employed for the task.

I will tell you, O Bhaarata, what the duties of a Sudra are. The Creator intended the Sudra to become the servant of the other three varnas, so the service of the three other classes is his duty, one that will obtain great happiness for him. He should wait upon the three other classes according to their order of seniority. A Sudra should never amass wealth, lest he make the members of the three superior classes subservient to him. By doing so, he will incur sin. With the king's permission, however, a Sudra may earn wealth for performing religious acts.

I will now tell you the profession he should follow and the means by which he can earn his livelihood. The shastras say that the three other varnas should certainly maintain the Sudras. Worn-out umbrellas, turbans, beds and seats, shoes and fans should be given to Sudra servants. The Munis should give the Sudra torn clothes no longer fit to wear. These are the latter's lawful acquisitions.

Dharmatman decrees that if the Sudra approaches anyone belonging to the three orders of Munis from the desire of doing menial service, the latter should assign him proper work. To the sonless Sudra, his master should offer the funeral cake. The weak and old among them should be looked after. The Sudra should never abandon his master, whatever the nature or degree of the distress into which the latter may fall. If the master loses his wealth, the Sudra servant should support him zealously. A Sudra cannot have any wealth that is his own, since whatever he possesses belongs lawfully to his master.

The shastras lay down yagna as a duty of the three other varnas—even for the Sudra, O Bhaarata! A Sudra, however, is not competent to utter swaha and swadha, or any other Vedic mantra. For this reason the Sudra, without observing the vows laid down in the Vedas, should worship the gods in minor sacrifices called Paka-yagnas. The dakshina of such sacrifices is the gift called Purnapatra. It is said that in days of old a Sudra named

Paijavana gave, in one of his yagnas, dakshina consisting of a hundred thousand Purnapatras, according to the law called Aindragni.

The Vedas prescribe yagnas as much for the Sudra as for the three other varnas. Of all yagnas, devotion is the best, since it is a high deity and cleanses all who perform yagnas. Then again, Brahmanas are the greatest of Devas to their respective Sudra attendants. They worship the gods in sacrifices, for the fruition of various wishes. The members of the three other varnas have all sprung from the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas are the gods of the very Devas. Whatever they say will be for your great good. Therefore, all kinds of yagnas naturally pertain to all the four varnas. The obligation is not optional and must be met. One should always worship as a god the Brahmana who knows the Riks, Yajuses and Samans. The Sudra, who is without Riks, Yajuses and Samans, has Prajapati for his god.

The shastras lay down mental sacrifice for all the varnas, O Bhaarata! It is not true that the gods and other Mahatmans do not wish to share the offerings in such sacrifices of even the Sudra. For this reason, it lays down for all the varnas the sacrifice that consists in devotion.

The Brahmana is the best of the gods. It is not true that they who belong to that varna cannot perform the sacrifices of the other orders. The fire called Vitana, though procured from Vaisyas and inspired with mantras, is still inferior. The Brahmana is the performer of the yagnas of the three other varnas. For this reason all the four orders are holy. All the varnas are related to each other by blood through the intermediate orders, as they have all sprung from Brahmanas. In ascertaining the priority of men in respect of their creation, it will appear that among all the orders, the first created was the Brahmana.

Originally, Saman was one; Yajus was one and Rik was one. In this connection, men who know ancient history sing a verse, O Rajan, in praise of a yagna performed by the Vaikhanasa Munis. Before or after sunrise, a person of subdued senses, with heart filled with devotion, pours libations on the sacrificial fire according to the law. Devotion is a mighty agent. With regard to homas again, the one called Skanna is the initial one, while that which is called Askanna is the last, but the greatest in point of merit.

Yagnas are multifarious, with different rites and fruits. The Brahmana who is devout, who is acquainted with all the shastras and possesses an understanding of them, is competent to perform yagnas. He who wishes to perform a sacrifice is regarded as righteous, even if he happens to be a thief,

a sinner or the worst of sinners, and the Rishis applaud such a man. Without doubt they are right.

Thus, in conclusion, all the varnas should always, and by every means in their power, perform yagnas to the best of their abilities, as there is no equal to sacrifice in the three worlds. They should be performed with hearts free from malice, aided by devotion which is sacrosanct.'"

CANTO 61

"Bhishma says, 'O Mahabaho, listen now to me as I name the four varnas and their respective dharmas—Vanaprastha, Bhaikshya, Garhasthya of great merit and Brahmacharya which Brahmanas adopt. Having performed all the dharmas of the stage called Garhasthya—and after undergoing the purificatory pujas necessary to ordain matted locks, following the rites of regeneration and those relating to the sacred fire and study of the Vedas—with soul cleansed and senses restrained, a man should retire, alone or with his wife, to the forest for Vanaprastha.

Having studied the shastras called Aranyakas, drawn up his vital fluid and retired from all worldly affairs, the virtuous Vanaprastha can then attain absorption with the infinite and eternal Atman. This is what the Munis, who have drawn up their vital fluid, suggest that a recluse should practise and perform.

It is well known that the Brahmana who aspires to attain mukti is competent to adopt the Bhaikshya varnasrama after the stage of Brahmacharya. The Brahmana possessed of learning, with no desire to better his situation, wandering without a fixed abode and sleeping wherever he finds himself when evening comes, subsisting on whatever food is obtained in charity, given to contemplation, practising self-restraint with senses under control, free of all craving, without either appetite or aversion, and regarding all beings equally, by adopting this varnasrama attains absorption with the eternal soul that knows no decay.

The man entering the Garhasthya varnasrama, after studying the Vedas, should accomplish all the religious duties laid out for him. He should have children and enjoy pleasures and comforts. He should meticulously perform all the dharma of this varna that sages applaud, which is extremely difficult to observe with purity.

He should be satisfied with his own wedded wife and never approach her except during her season. He should observe the laws of the shastras and not be cunning or deceitful. He should be abstemious in diet, devoted to the gods, grateful, mild-mannered, kind and forgiving. He should be of tranquil heart, tractable and attentive in making offerings to the Devas and the Pitris and always hospitable to Brahmanas. He should be free of pride, not confine his charity to any one sect, and devoutly perform the Vedic rites.

In this connection, the illustrious Maharishis cite an important verse sung by Narayana himself, endowed with mahatapasya. Listen to it: "By truth, simplicity, proper reverence towards guests, acquisition of dharma and artha, and relish of one's own wives, one should enjoy diverse kinds of happiness, both here and in the hereafter." The Maharishis have said that support of sons and wives and study of the Vedas form the dharma of those who lead this great varnasrama.

The Brahmana who, engaged in the performance of yagnas, duly goes through this mode of life and properly discharges its dharma, obtains blessed recompense in Swarga. Upon his death, the rewards he desired become eternal. Indeed, these wait upon him for eternity like menials ever on the alert to execute the commands of their master.

Attending to the Vedas, silently reciting the mantras obtained from his acharya, worshipping all the deities, dutifully serving his guru, with his own body smeared with clay and dirt, the man following the Brahmacharya varna should always observe rigid vows, O Yudhishtira, and, with senses under control, pay heed to the instruction he has received. Reflecting on the Vedas, discharging all the duties of dhyana and karma, he should live dutifully, waiting upon his acharya and always submissive to him. Disengaged from the six kinds of work, such as officiating in the sacrifices of others, never attached to any actions, showing neither favour nor disfavour to any one, doing good even to one's enemies—this is the dharma the shastras lay down for a Brahmacharin!'"

CANTO 62

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell us of those duties, in respect of men like ourselves, which are auspicious, produce future happiness, are benevolent, pleasant, agreeable and approved by all.'

Bhishma says, 'The other three orders do not adopt the four varnas that the shastras lay down for the Brahmana, O Bhaarata! I have already mentioned many deeds that lead to Swarga and are appropriate for the Kshatriya. These are not relevant to your present query, for the Vedas lay them down for those Kshatriyas inclined to ruthlessness.

The Brahmana who prefers the practices of Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, incurs censure in this world as a man of evil atman, and goes to Naraka in the next world. The names which men give to slaves, dogs, wolves and other beasts, O Pandava, are applied to the Brahmana who engages in pursuits improper for him.

The Brahmana who in all the four varnas is duly engaged in the six-fold deeds, of regulating the breath, contemplation and others, who performs all his duties and is tranquil, who has his passions under control, whose heart is pure and who is ever engaged in tapasya, who has no desire of bettering his prospects and who is charitable, receives inexhaustible regions of bliss in the other world. Everyone derives his own nature from his actions, through their circumstances, place, means and motives.

You should therefore, Rajan, regard the study of the Vedas, of such high merit, to be equal to the exertion of kingly power or the pursuits of agriculture, trade and hunting. The world is set going by Time, and the

course of Time settles its operations. Man performs all his karma, good, bad and indifferent, entirely under the influence of Time. Among the good deeds of a man's past life, those that exert the greatest influence on the next are liable to be exhausted. Men, however, are ever engaged in those actions to which their propensities lead. These propensities draw a living entity in diverse directions.'"

CANTO 63

"Bhishma says, 'Improper occupations for a Brahmana are drawing the bow-string, destroying foes, living off agriculture or trade, tending cattle or serving others for money. An intelligent Brahmana, leading a life of the grihasta, should perform the six Vedic deeds. One applauds the retirement of a Brahmana into the vana, after he has duly discharged all the garhapatyas.

A Brahmana should avoid service of the king, wealth obtained through agriculture, sustenance from trade, all kinds of crooked conduct, companionship with any but his wedded wives, and usury. The miserable Brahmana who falls away from his dharma and whose behaviour is impious becomes a Sudra, O Rajan.

The Brahmana who weds a Sudra woman or a dancer or a village servant, who becomes debased in conduct, or otherwise sins, becomes a Sudra. In that case, whether he recites the Vedas or not, he becomes equal to a Sudra, should be assigned a place among Sudras during feasts, and should be excluded from occasions of worshipping the gods. If one distributes food offered to the Devas and the Pitris to any Brahmanas who have transgressed due restraints, who have become impure or addicted to evil pursuits and cruel deeds, or who have fallen away from their legitimate dharma, the giver gets no punya.

For this reason, O Rajan, Brahma has laid down self-restraint, purity and simplicity as the dharma of a Brahmana. Besides these, he has also mentioned the duties of all the four varnas. For Brahma, one is truly a

Brahmana who is self-restrained, has drunk the soma in yagnas, is of good conduct, has compassion for all beings and powers of endurance, is frank and simple, mild and forgiving, free from cruelty or any desire to acquire wealth to raise his status.

Men wanting to acquire virtue, O Rajan, seek the assistance of Sudras, Vaisyas and Kshatriyas. Therefore, Vishnu never extends his grace to the members of these three varnas who are not dutiful in helping others to acquire virtue. If one does not please Vishnu, one loses the happiness of all men in Swarga—the merit arising from karma laid down for the four varnas, the declarations of the Vedas, all kinds of yagnas and all other religious deeds and duties in respect of the several varnasramas.

Listen now, O son of Pandu, to those dharmas that you should observe in the four varnasramas. The Kshatriya who wants the members of the three other varnas in his kingdom to adhere strictly to the respective duties of their varnas, should know these.

For a Sudra who wishes to hear shastras that are not forbidden to him, who has accomplished his dharma, who has fathered a son and between whom and the superior varna there is not much difference in purity of conduct, all the varnasramas are for him, except the observance of universal peacefulness and self-restraint, which are not necessary for him.

For a Sudra practising all these, and also for a Vaisya and a Kshatriya, O Rajan, Brahma has laid down the Bhikshu varnasrama. Having discharged the dharma of his varna and having also served his family, a Vaisya of venerable years, with the king's permission, may adopt another varnasrama.

Having studied the Vedas duly and the treatises on the duties of kings, O sinless one, having fathered children and performed other karma of a like nature; having taken the soma and ruled over and protected all his subjects righteously; having performed the Rajasuya, the Aswamedha yagna and other great yagnas; having invited learned Brahmanas for recitation of the shastras, and having made gifts to them according to their desires; having obtained victories, small or great, in battle; having placed on his throne his natural son or some Kshatriya of good birth for the protection of his subjects; having honoured the Pitris with due rites laid down for them; having devoutly worshipped the Devas by performing sacrifices and the Rishis by studying the Vedas; the Kshatriya who in old age desires another varnasrama, can adopt it by leaving the one which immediately precedes it. Thereby he is sure to obtain success in his tapasya.

A Kshatriya, to lead the life of a Rishi, may adopt the Bhikshu varnasrama, but he should never do so for the sake of enjoyment. Having left the Grihastasrama, he can adopt the Bhikshu varna by seeking alms just enough to support his existence. Life as a sannyasi is not obligatory upon the three varnas—Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudras. However, they can adopt it if they choose and, therefore, this varnasrama is open to the four orders.

Among men, the highest dharma is the one which the Kshatriyas practise. The whole world is subject to the might of their arms. The Vedas have declared that the observance of all the duties, principal and subordinate, of the three other varnas, depends on the duties of the Kshatriya. Know that just as the elephant's footprints encompass those of all other animals, the Kshatriya's duties engulf all the dharma of the other orders, in all circumstances.

Men who know the shastras say that the duties of the other three varnas afford small relief or protection and produce small rewards, while the responsibilities of the Kshatriya afford great relief and produce great rewards. Kingly duties, Rajadharma, are the foremost of all duties, for they protect all the varnas. Every kind of vairagya occurs in Rajadharma, O Rajan, and sannyasa is the eternal and the greatest of all virtues.

If the Dandaneeti, the science of punishment, disappears, the Vedas will disappear. All those shastras that inculcate the dharma of men will also be lost. Indeed, if one abandons the ancient dharma of the Kshatriyas, all the duties in respect of all the varnasramas will be lost.

One sees all kinds of renunciation in Rajadharma. In them occur all kinds of initiation, and connected with them are all kinds of learning and worldly conduct. As with animals, if the commoner slaughters them, it will destroy the virtue and religious actions of the slaughterers. Thus all other duties, deprived of the protection that Rajadharma gives, will fall prey to attack and destruction; anxious men will disregard the practices the Vedas lay down for them.'"

CANTO 64

"Bhishma says, 'The duties in respect of all the four varnasramas, those of Yatis, O Pandava, and the customs relating to the conduct of men in general, are included in Rajadharma, kingly duties, as part of the Kshatriya's dharma. If the functions of royalty are disturbed, evil will overtake all beings.

The duties of men are not obvious, as they have many interpretations. Misrepresented by many false systems, their eternal nature is sometimes violated. Those who pin their trust on the conclusions men have arrived at without really knowing the truths that dharma and the shastras declare, find themselves stranded and confused by creeds whose ultimate ends are unknown.

The dharma imposed upon the Kshatriya is clear, produces great happiness, as is evident from its results, is free from deceit and beneficial to all. The whole world, with all good actions, is subject to Rajadharma, Yudhishtira, since the shastras say that the responsibilities of the three varnas, Brahmanas and of those who have retired from the world, are included within those of the sacred varnasrama called Garhasthya.

I have told you how, in olden days, many brave kings had approached the Lord of all creatures, the divine and mighty Vishnu of great prowess, to resolve their doubts about the Dandaneeti. Mindful of the declarations of the shastras reinforced by examples, those kings waited upon Narayana, after having weighed each of their actions against the duties of each of the varnas. These gods, the Sadhyas, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Rudras, the

Viswas, the Maruts and the Siddhas, the first of Devas created in olden days, all observe the Kshatriya's dharma. I will now recite to you a history, rich in inferences, of both dharma and artha.

In olden days, when the Danavas had multiplied and swept away all barriers and distinctions, O Rajan, the powerful Mandhatri became king. He performed a great yagna from a desire to behold almighty Narayana, the God of gods without beginning, middle and end. At this yagna, he humbly worshipped the great Vishnu.

The Supreme Lord, assuming the form of Indra, showed himself to the monarch. Accompanied by many worthy kings, Mandhatri offered worship to the mighty god. An elevated discourse followed between this lion among kings and the illustrious Deva in Indra's form, regarding Vishnu of great effulgence.

Indra asked, "What is your object, O Mahatman, in seeking to behold that Ancient and First of Devas, Narayana of inconceivable tejas and infinite maya? Neither I, nor Brahma himself, can obtain a sight of the God of universal form. I will grant you any other wish of your heart, for you are the greatest of mortals: your soul abides in peace; you are devoted to dharma; you have your senses under control; and you are possessed of heroism. You are unflinching in wanting to do what is agreeable to the Devas. For your intelligence, devotion and high faith as well, I will grant you whatever boon you desire."

Mandhatri replied, "I bow my head to you, O divine Lord. Certainly I desire to see the foremost of Devas! Casting off all earthly longings, I wish to earn punya and to lead the most important varnasrama, the path of the good esteemed by all. By exercising the mahadharma of a Kshatriya, I have spread my fame and earned many realms of inexhaustible merit in the next world. I do not, however, know how to discharge the duties flowing from the first of Devas, which are the best in the world."

Indra said, "They who are not kings, however observant they may be of their duties, cannot easily attain the highest rewards of dharma. Kingly duties first flowed from the original God, while other dharma followed later from his body. Many were other responsibilities of the Vanaprasthasrama, which God later created, but the fruits of all these are exhaustible. Rajadharma, however, is esteemed above them since it subsumes all other duties. For this reason, the shastras consider the Kshatriya dharma to be the highest.

In olden days Vishnu, acting according to the Kshatriya dharma, forcibly suppressed and destroyed his foes and thereby afforded relief to the Devas and the Maharishis. If the divine Vishnu of inconceivable tejas had not slain all his enemies among the Asuras, then the Brahmanas as well as Brahma, the Creator of the world, would have been destroyed. The Kshatriya dharma and the responsibilities that first flowed from the Paramatman would all have been lost.

If the first and foremost of Devas had not by his prowess subjugated the earth's Asuras, they would have destroyed the Brahmanas and, as a consequence, all the dharma of the four varnas, the four varnasramas and the sanatana dharma. They were revived through the exercise of the Kshatriya dharma.

In every yuga, the dharma of Brahmanas in respect of attaining Brahman is prescribed first. However, since kingly duties protect all, we regard them as the most important. Death in battle, compassion for all beings, knowledge of the affairs of the world, protection of men from danger, relieving the distressed and the oppressed, all are part of the Kshatriya dharma that kings practise.

Men who disregard wholesome restraints, whom lust and wrath govern are kept from sin by the fear of kings. As a result, others who are docile men of dharma are able to perform all their responsibilities.

For this reason, we regard Kshatriya duties as righteous. Without doubt, all beings live happily in the world, protected by kings exercising the Kshatriya dharma, like children protected by their parents. The Kshatriya dharma is eternal and the greatest of all duties, and one regards it as the best in the world, as it embraces the protection of every being. Itself eternal, it leads to eternal mukti.'"

CANTO 65

'Indra said, "The Kshatriya dharma, possessing such energy, including in its application all other dharmas and being the greatest of all dharmas, should be observed by men who are like you, O Rajan, noble and always in quest of the good. If these duties are not properly discharged, ruin will overcome all living things. Kings who have compassion for all beings should regard the following to be the most important of their duties: reclaiming the land for cultivation and fertilizing it, performing great purificatory yagnas, protecting their subjects and disdaining beggary.

The best dharma, the Rishis and Munis say, is to give. Of all gifts, that of one's body in battle is the greatest. You have seen yourself how the rulers of the earth, ever observant of the Kshatriya dharma, having duly waited upon their acharyas and acquired great learning, in the end cast off their bodies in battle. The Kshatriya wanting to acquire punya, after having gone through the Brahmacharyasrama, should lead a life of a grihasta, which is always meritorious.

In adjudicating ordinary questions of right and wrong between his subjects, the king should be thoroughly impartial. The shastras declare that, to ensure that the varnas observe their respective duties, for the protection of all, for diverse schemes and stratagems and competence in accomplishing objectives, most important is the Kshatriya dharma, which includes all other duties within its scope.

The other varnas are able to observe their respective dharmas due to Rajadharma. For this reason, the former are said to be dependent upon the

latter in respect of the merit they produce. Those who disregard all wholesome restraints and are attached to the pursuit of worldly objects are brutes in nature. The exercise of kingly duties compels them to act righteously. These duties therefore, are of the greatest importance.

Every Brahmana who follows the three Vedas should observe the course of conduct prescribed for him, as well as the varnas that the scriptures lay down for his varna. If a Brahmana acts in any other way, he should be treated like a Sudra.

A Brahmana should follow the dharma of the four varnas and the rituals prescribed in the Vedas, beyond which he has no duties. A Kshatriya should not make any arrangement for the sustenance of a Brahmana who lives in any other way. His religious merit grows as a result of his actions. A Brahmana is like dharma's self and, if he is employed in deeds that are not appropriate for him, he deserves no respect and should not be trusted.

These are the duties that pertain to the several orders, and it is the responsibility of the Kshatriyas to protect them so that their observance can be improved. For these reasons, Rajadharma, I believe, is the most significant duty of heroes, who are foremost in practising it."

Mandhatri then asked, "What are the duties that should be performed by the several castes that have sprung up from Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and the Sudras, who reside in the dominions of Arya kings—the Yavanas, Kiratas, Gandharvas, Chinas, Savaras, Barbaras, Sakas, Tusharas, Kankas, Pathavas, Andhras, Madrakas, Paundras, Pulindas, Ramathas, Kambojas? What is the dharma of kings like us regarding the tribes who subsist by robbery? I want to hear about this. O illustrious Deva, instruct me since you are the friend of us Kshatriyas."

Indra said, "All the robber tribes should serve their mothers, fathers, their acharyas and other elders, as well as Rishis and Munis living in the vana and their kings. They should also follow the duties and rites prescribed in the Vedas. They should perform yagnas in honour of the Pitris, dig wells and dedicate them to universal service, give water to thirsty travellers, give away beds and make other appropriate gifts to Brahmanas.

Duties that every person of this class who desires his own prosperity should practise are truth, abstention from injury, suppression of wrath, support to Brahmanas and kinsmen by giving them their due, maintenance of wives and children, purity, peacefulness and presenting gifts to Brahmanas at yagnas of every kind. Such a person should also perform all

kinds of Paka-yagnas with costly gifts of food and wealth. These and similar duties the shastras lay down from olden days, for those of this class. The robber class should also perform all these actions which the shastras lay down for all others, O Rajan."

Mandhatri said, "In the world of men, such wicked men may be seen living in disguise among all the four varnas and in all the four varnasramas."

Indra said, "Upon the disappearance of Rajadharma and the Dandaneeti, all creatures are exceedingly afflicted by the tyranny of kings. After the end of this the Krita yuga, confusion will set in regarding the different varnas, and innumerable Bhikshus will appear with sectarian marks of different kinds. Disregarding the Puranas and the high truths of religion, men, driven by lust and anger, will deviate onto erroneous paths.

When Mahatmans restrain sinful men from evil deeds with the aid of Dandaneeti, which is paramount, eternal and the source of all, virtue becomes firmly established. Gifts, libations and offerings to the Pitris of any man who disrespects the ruler become fruitless. The very Devas do not disregard a Dharmarajan, who is truly an eternal god. The divine Lord of all, having created the universe, intended the Kshatriya to rule men's inclinations in respect of duties. I revere and worship one who employs his understanding to watch over the course of duties that men perform. Upon such supervision rests the Kshatriya dharma."'

Bhishma continues, 'Having uttered these words, the divine and mighty Narayana, in the form of Indra, accompanied by the Maruts, returned to his eternal abode of inexhaustible happiness. When such was the manner in which the virtuous practised duties in the olden days, which learned Mahatman can disregard the Kshatriya?

Like blind men lost on the way, living beings acting or abstaining in an unrighteous manner meet with destruction. O Naravyaghra, adhere to the circle of dharma the ancients first set going. I know you are capable of doing so.'"

CANTO 66

"Yudhishtira asks, 'You have spoken about the four varnasramas of human life. Please expand on them further, as I seek to know more.'

Bhishma replies, 'O Yudhishtira Mahabaho, you know all the duties that Dharmatman practise in this world just as well as I do. Listen, and I will explain to you the merit acquired by a king on account of the duties practised by those leading other varnasramas, O foremost of virtuous men. All the merit that belongs to men practising the obligations of the four varnasramas accrues to Dharmarajans. A king free of lust and hate, who rules with the aid of Dandaneeti and looks equally on all creatures, fulfils the objective of Bhaikshyasrama.

An adept ruler who makes gifts to deserving men on proper occasions, who knows how to favour and to punish, who conducts himself in all things according to the injunctions of the shastras, and who has tranquillity of soul, attains the object of Garhasthyasrama. The king who venerates those who deserve worship by giving them their due, completely fulfils the objective of Bhaikshyasrama.

The monarch who strives to rescue from distress his kinsmen, relatives and friends, O Yudhishtira, fulfils the objective of Vanaprasthasrama. The king who on every occasion honours the noblest among men and the best among Yatis, meets the objective of Vanaprasthasrama, as does the king who daily makes offerings to the Pitris and generous offerings to all living

beings. The king who subdues other kingdoms to protect the righteous, O Naravyagahra, also attains the object of the same mode of life.

For shielding all creatures, as well as properly defending his own kingdom, a king earns the merit of as many yagnas as the number of beings protected, and accordingly attains the objective of the Sannyasasrama.

The daily study of the Vedas, propitiation and worship of acharyas and services rendered to one's own guru, lead to attainment of the objective of the Brahmacharyasrama.

The king who silently recites his mantras every day and worships the Devas according to the law, O Naravyaghra, attains the objective of the Garhasthyasrama.

The king who engages in battle resolved to protect his kingdom or meet death, who is liberal to men leading Vanaprasthasrama and to Brahmanas versed in the three Vedas, attains the objective of the Vanaprasthasrama.

The king who is merciful towards all creatures and abstains from cruelty attains the objective of all the varnasramas. The king who shows compassion to the young and the old under every circumstance fulfils the objective of every varna, O Yudhishtira.

The king who affords relief to all oppressed people seeking his protection, who defends all creatures, mobile and immobile, and honours them as they deserve, attains the purpose of Garhasthyasrama.

Bestowing favours and inflicting punishment upon wives and brothers, older and younger, and upon sons and grandsons, are the Garhapatya of a king and constitute his best penances. By honouring those who are righteous and deserving of reverence, and by protecting those who have by their penances acquired knowledge of self, O Purushavyaghra, a king attains the purpose of the Garhasthyasrama.

The Garhapatya of a king, Bhaarata, lies in inviting to his home and feeding men who have taken themselves to Vanaprastha and other modes of life. The king who duly adheres to the duties laid down for him by the Creator obtains the blessed merits of all the varnas. The virtuous king is the greatest of men, and the learned say that such a king in effect accomplishes Vanaprastha and all the other varnasramas.

The king who duly honours the office or rank, the race or family, of veterans deserving of honour, it is said, O Kaunteya, lives in all the varnasramas. The king, by observing the duties of his country and those of his family, acquires the merits of all the modes of life. The king who on

proper occasions bestows upon men of dharma wealth or gifts of value, earns the merits of all the modes of life. The king who, while overcome with danger and fear, nevertheless keeps his eye on the duties of all men, earns the merits of all the varnas.

The king obtains a share of the merit earned under his protection by men of dharma in his realm. On the other hand, if kings do not protect the righteous within their dominions, Naravyaghra, they take upon themselves the sins of omission and commission. The men who assist kings in protecting their subjects also become equally entitled to a share of the merit earned by others, by virtue of the protection granted.

The learned say that the Garhasthya, which we have adopted, is superior to all the other varnas. In this respect, the conclusions are clear and hallowed. The man who regards all creatures as himself, who does no harm and has his anger under control, obtains great happiness both here and hereafter. A king can easily cross the ocean of samsara with kingly duties, urged on his fast boat by the breeze of gifts, with the shastras for its tackle and intelligence for the strength of its helmsman, kept afloat by the power of righteousness.

When he withdraws from every earthly object the feeling of desire in his heart, he is regarded as resting on his understanding alone. In this state, he soon attains Brahma. Becoming beatific by meditation, by restraining desire and other passions of the heart, O Naravyaghra, a king engaged in discharging the duty of protection will obtain great merit. Therefore, O Yudhishtira, work carefully to protect pious Brahmanas and those devoted to the study of the Vedas, as well as other men. Merely by exercising the duty of extending shelter, the king earns merit a hundred times greater than Munis can earn in their asramas within the vana.

I have now described the various duties of men, O eldest son of Pandu. You must adhere to Rajadharma that is eternal, which great men have practised since olden days. If you occupy yourself with concentration with the duty of protecting your subjects, Naravyaghra, you will obtain the merits of all the four varnasramas and of all the four varnas!'"

CANTO 67

"Yudhishtira asks, 'You have told me the dharma of the four varnasramas and the four varnas. Tell me now, O Pitamaha, the principal duties of a kingdom.'

Bhishma replies, 'The selection and coronation of a king is the first duty of a kingdom, as anarchy makes it weak and robbers soon come to infest it. In states racked by anarchy, righteousness cannot dwell and inhabitants destroy one another. It is the worst possible state for a kingdom.

The Srutis declare that in the coronation of a king, it is Indra himself who is crowned in the person of the king. A man who desires prosperity should worship the king as he would Indra. No one should dwell in kingdoms where anarchy prevails, because Agni does not convey to the Devas the libations that people there offer. If a powerful king desires to annex kingdoms weakened by anarchy, the people should go forward and receive the invader with respect, for this is consistent with wisdom. There is no evil greater than anarchy, but only if the powerful invader is inclined to equity will everything be set right, otherwise he could annihilate all.

The cow that cannot be easily milked has to endure great pain, whereas the cow lending itself to being easily milked does not suffer at all. The iron that bends easily does not need to be heated. The tree that bends easily does not suffer at the hands of the gardener. Guided by these instances, O Kshatriya, men should bend before the powerful. He who bows to a powerful man actually bends his head to Indra. For these reasons, men who wish for prosperity should elect and crown someone as their king.

Men who live in countries where anarchy prevails cannot enjoy their wealth and wives, because the lawless man derives great pleasure from robbing them. However, when others steal his own ill-gotten wealth, he wishes for a king. It is evident, therefore, that in times of anarchy, even evil men cannot be happy, because two evil men together may snatch away the wealth of a third, and many men banding together may in turn rob those two of their wealth. Such evil men could enslave those who are free, and forcibly abduct women. For these reasons, the Devas created kings to protect the people.

If there were no kings on earth to wield the Dandaneeti, the strong would then prey on the weak, as fish do in water. We have been told that in olden days of anarchy, men destroyed one another like stronger fish devouring weaker ones. We hear that a few among them then joined together to make certain compacts, saying, "We will cast off one who becomes harsh in speech or violent in temper, one who seduces or abducts other men's wives or who robs others of their wealth."

They made such an agreement to inspire confidence in all classes of people. However, after some time, they found the arrangement unsatisfactory and approached Pitamaha Brahma, saying, "Without a king, O divine lord, we are facing doom. Appoint someone as our king so that all of us will revere him and he will protect us."

The Pitamaha requested Manu but he did not assent, saying, "To govern a kingdom is exceedingly difficult, especially among men whose ways are always false and deceitful. I fear all sinful deeds."

The inhabitants of the earth then said to him, "Do not fear. Sins that men commit will affect only those who commit them, without tarnishing you in the least. To increase your treasury, we will give you a fiftieth part of our animals and precious metals, and a tenth part of our grain. When our maidens wish to marry, we will give you the most beautiful ones among them. Those among men who are foremost in the use of weapons, in riding and driving chariots will follow you as the Devas do Indra.

With your strength so enhanced, you will become invincible and powerful. As our king, you will protect us gladly, like Kubera protecting the Yakshas and the Rakshasas. A fourth part of the punya men will earn under your protection will be yours. Strengthened by the punya that you will so easily obtain, protect us, O Rajan, as he of a hundred yagnas protects the

gods. Like the sun scorching all with his rays, go and win victories. Crush the pride of your foes and let dharma always triumph in the world."

Thus addressed by the inhabitants of the earth, the tejasvi Manu of high lineage appeared, accompanied by a large force, blazing with power. Beholding the might of Manu, like the Devas perceiving the might of Indra, the inhabitants of the earth became quiet and set their minds to their respective duties. Manu then went through the world like a rain-charged cloud in its mission of beneficence, keeping evil in check and getting all to perform their respective dharma.

The men on earth who desire prosperity, Yudhishtira, should first choose and crown a king for the protection of all. Like disciples prostrating themselves in the presence of the acharya, or the Devas in the presence of Indra, all should humble themselves before the king. A ruler honoured by his own people becomes an object of respect for his enemies, while a king disappointing his people is overthrown, despised by his subjects.

Therefore, parasols, chariots, outward ornaments, meat, drink, mansions, seats, beds and all utensils for use and show, should be assigned to the king. By such means he will succeed in discharging his dharma as protector and become irresistible. He should speak with smiles and, addressed sweetly by others, should in turn address others amiably. Grateful to those who serve him, firmly devoted to those who deserve his respect, and with passions under control, he should give all their due. Looked after by others, he should look upon them mildly, sweetly and generously.'"

CANTO 68

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Why, O Bharatarishabha, have the Brahmanas said that the king, the ruler of men, is a god?'

Bhishma replies, 'There is an old story concerning this about a discussion between the wise Brihaspati and the intelligent king of Kosala, Vasumanas. The king, aware of the value of humility, ever devoted to the welfare of all and desirous of securing the happiness of men, duly observed the proper obsequies, circumambulating the great sage and bowing to him, and questioned the virtuous Brihaspati about the laws of a kingdom.

Vasumanas asked, "By what means do creatures grow, and what destroys them? O you of deep understanding, whom should they worship in order to find eternal happiness?"

Thus questioned by the Kosala king of infinite tejas, the wise Brihaspati conversed with him calmly about the respect that one should pay kings.

Brihaspati said, "The duties of all men, O sagacious one, can be seen to have their root in the king. It is only through fear of the king that men refrain from destroying one another. It is the king who brings peace on earth, through due observance of dharma, and by curtailing lawlessness and all kinds of lust. When he achieves this, he shines in glory.

O Rajan, if the sun and the moon do not rise, all creatures are unable to see one another in utter darkness, just as fish in shallow waters and birds in sanctuaries swim and rove without restraint, attacking and oppressing one another till they meet with extinction. Men, too, like a herd of cattle without

a herdsman to look after them, will sink into utter darkness and certain destruction if they have no king to protect them.

If the king did not exercise the duty of protection, the strong would by force appropriate the possessions of the weak and, if the latter refused to surrender them readily, take their very lives. Nobody then would be able to say of anything, ‘This is mine.’ Wives, sons, food, all kinds of property, would not exist. In the absence of royal protection, ruin would overtake everything: evil men would forcibly appropriate the carriages, robes, ornaments, precious stones and other kinds of property belonging to others, and all kinds of oppression would fall upon those who were righteous, forcing them to take to the path of adharma. Men would disregard or even injure their own aged parents, their very acharyas, guests and elders.

If the king did not offer protection, all those possessing wealth would have to encounter death, confinement and persecution, and the very idea of property would disappear. Everything would be destroyed prematurely, brigands would overrun the country and everybody would fall into hell.

If the king did not offer protection, all restrictions of marriage and intercourse due to consanguinity and other kinds of kinship would dissolve. All affairs relating to agriculture and trade would fall into confusion. Dharma would sink and be lost, and the three Vedas would disappear. Yagnas completed with gifts according to the law would no longer be performed; no marriage would take place, and society itself would cease to exist. If the king did not exercise the responsibility of protection, the very bulls would not cover cows, milk-jars would not be churned and people living by rearing cattle would be ruined. In the absence of royal protection, all creatures, howling and frantic through fear and anxiety, would meet their end in no time at all. No sacrifices extending for a year and completed with gifts according to the shastras would occur.

In the absence of royal protection, Brahmanas would never study the four Vedas or undergo austerities or be cleansed by knowledge and rigid vows, and the slayer of a man guilty of Brahmahatya would not obtain any reward, while the perpetrator would enjoy perfect immunity.

In the absence of royal protection, men would snatch others’ wealth, wholesome barriers would be swept away, everybody, terrified, would seek safety in flight and all kinds of injustice would set in. An intermixture of castes would take place and famine would ravage the kingdom.

Were the king to exercise the responsibility of royal protection, men everywhere could sleep at their ease without shutting up their houses and bolting and barring their doors. Nobody would hear evil talk, or fear actual attacks. Women decked with ornaments could confidently wander anywhere without male relatives to escort them. Men would adopt the path of dharma and serve one another because the king exercised his duty of protection. The members of the three varnasramas would be able to perform great yagnas and concentrate on acquiring learning. The Vedas protect the world that depends on farming and trade.

The king duly protects all people by following his principal dharma with the aid of a mighty force and, by taking a heavy load upon himself, enables his subjects to live in happiness. Who will not worship the king whose existence allows people to survive and in whose downfall they are ruined? Those who do what is agreeable and beneficial to the king, and who share the burden of royal duties that overawe every varna, conquer both this and the next world. He who even thinks of doing an injury to the king will certainly come to grief and go to hell hereafter.

No one should disregard the king by taking him for a mere man, for he is in truth a divinity in human form. The king assumes five different forms according to five different occasions. He becomes Agni, Aditya, Mrityu, Vaisravana and Yama. When, confronted by falsehood, he burns the offenders before him with his fierce energy, he assumes the form of Agni. When he scrutinizes through his spies the actions of all men and does what is necessary for the general good, he assumes the form of Aditya. He assumes the form of the Destroyer when in wrath he cuts down hundreds of evil men with their sons, grandsons and relatives. He assumes the form of Yama when he restrains the evil by inflicting severe punishments on them and favours the righteous by bestowing rewards upon them. He assumes the form of Kubera on earth, O Rajan, when he gratifies with profuse gifts those who have rendered him valuable service and confiscates the wealth and jewels of those who have offended him, when he bestows prosperity upon some and takes it from others.

No one who is clever, who is capable of work, who aspires to virtue and is free from malice, should ever spread evil reports about the king. No man by acting against the king can ever be happy, even if he happens to be the king’s son, brother, companion or one whom the king regards as his second self. Where Agni, assisted by Vayu, blazing forth among inflammable

things, may leave a remnant, the wrath of the king leaves nothing to the man who incurs it.

One should turn away at a distance from whatever belongs to the king, as though from death itself, else one will meet a speedy end like a deer at the touch of poison. The man of intelligence should protect as his own whatever belongs to the king, else he will sink senseless into a deep hell of eternal gloom and infamy.

Who will not worship a king whom such terms adorn as ‘delighter of the people’, ‘giver of happiness’, ‘possessor of prosperity’ and, most important of all, ‘healer of injuries’, ‘lord of earth’ and ‘protector of men’?

Therefore, one should always attach to the king a minister who is solicitous of his prosperity, who observes all wholesome restraints, who has his soul under control and is master of his passions, who has intelligence and memory, and who is adept in the transaction of business.

The king should duly honour a minister who is grateful, endowed with wisdom, large-hearted, loyal, possessed of mastery over his senses, virtuous and observant of the dictates of policy. He should entertain the man who is loyal, grateful, virtuous, possessed of self-control, brave, magnanimous in his deeds and competent to accomplish tasks without assistance.

Knowledge makes men proud, while the king makes men humble. The man whom the king chastises can never find happiness, while one whom the king favours, rejoices. The king is the heart of his people; he is their great refuge; he is their glory and their greatest happiness. O Rajan, men who are attached to the king succeed in conquering both this and the other world. Having governed the earth with the aid of self-restraint, truth and friendship, and having adored the Devas with great yagnas, the king, earning great glory, obtains an eternal abode in Swarga.”

Being thus instructed by Brihaspati, son of Angirasa, the heroic Vasumanas, ruler of Kosala, the best of kings, from then on, began to protect his subjects.’”

CANTO 69

"Yudhishtira asks, 'O Bhaarata, what other special duties remain for the king to discharge? How should he protect his kingdom and subdue his foes? How should he employ his spies? How should he inspire confidence in the four varnas of his subjects, his own servants, wives and sons?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Rajan, with attention to the diverse duties of kings, to the work which the king, or one who is in the position of a king, should first do. The king should first master himself, and only then seek to subdue his foes. How will a king who has not been able to conquer himself be able to conquer his enemies? The conquest of the five senses is regarded as the conquest of self, and the king who successfully subdues his senses is competent to resist his enemies.

He should place foot-soldiers within his own palace, in his forts, frontiers, towns, parks, pleasure gardens and also in all places he personally visits. He should employ as spies men who look like simpletons or appear to be blind and deaf. They should all be adroit men who have been thoroughly tested for their abilities, and who are able to endure hunger and thirst. With proper attention, the king should set his informers upon all his counsellors, friends and sons, as well as in his city, in the provinces and in the dominions of the chieftains under him.

His agents should be so employed that they do not know one another. He should also, O Bharatarishabha, discover the spies of his enemies by setting informers in shops, places of amusement where people congregate,

among beggars, in his pleasure gardens and parks, in meetings and conclaves of the learned, in the country, in public places, in places where he holds his own court and in the homes of the citizens. In this way the intelligent king will discover the agents his foes dispatch and will derive great benefit, O Pandava.

When the king, through a survey of his own, finds himself weak, he should, after consulting his counsellors, make peace with an enemy who is stronger. The wise king should quickly make peace with a foe, even when he knows that he is not weak, if any advantage can be derived from it. He should be engaged in protecting his kingdom righteously, and should make peace with those rulers who are accomplished, capable of great exertion, virtuous and honest.

When the king finds himself threatened with danger and on the verge of ruin, he should kill all offenders whom he had overlooked in the past and all those the people identify as being his enemies. A king should ignore men who can neither benefit nor injure him, or those who cannot rescue themselves from distress.

As regards military operations, a king who is confident of his own strength should, after first making arrangements for the protection of his own capital, march at the head of a large force, cheerfully and bravely, without declaring his destination. He should attack those who are without allies and friends, or those already at war with another and therefore careless of danger from another quarter, or those weaker than himself.

A king should not forever live in subjection to another more powerful. Though weak, he should resolve to undermine the stronger, while continuing to rule his own kingdom. He should subvert the stronger by means of weapons, fire, application of poison and fomenting discord among his counsellors and servants.

Brihaspati has said that an intelligent king should always avoid war for acquisition of territory. The wise king should acquire dominions by means of conciliation, gifts and stirring up dissension.

The king should take a sixth of the incomes of his subjects as tribute to meet the expenses of safeguarding them, O Kurusthama. For the protection of his subjects, he should also forcibly take away wealth, much or little as the case may be, from the ten kinds of offenders mentioned in the shastras. A king should certainly look upon his subjects as his own children. However, in determining their disputes, he should not exhibit emotion. To

hear complaints and responses of disputants in judicial suits, the king should always appoint wise men possessing knowledge of the affairs of the world, for the state in truth rests upon the proper administration of justice. The king should have honest and trustworthy men supervise his mines, salt, grain, ferries and elephant corps.

The king who always properly conducts the Dandaneeti earns great punya. Regulation of punishment is the lofty duty of kings and deserves acclaim. The king should be conversant with the Vedas and their branches, possess wisdom, engage in tapasya, be charitable and devoted in performing yagnas. All these traits should always be present in a king, for if he fails to administer justice he can attain neither Swarga nor fame.

If a stronger king attacks a weaker the latter, if intelligent, should seek refuge in a fort. Assembling his friends for consultation, he should devise proper means to defend himself. Adopting the policy of conciliation and sowing discord among his enemies, he should devise means to wage war with the assailant. He should set the inhabitants of the woods on the high roads and, if necessary, cause whole villages to be removed, transplanting all the inhabitants to minor towns or the outskirts of great cities. Reassuring his wealthy subjects and the principal officers of his army, he should cause the inhabitants of the open country to take refuge in forts that are well protected.

He should himself withdraw all stores of grain from the open country into his forts. If that becomes impossible, he should destroy them completely by fire. He should set men to destroy the enemy's crops by producing disunion among the enemy's subjects or else, if he fails to do so, he should have those crops destroyed by his own troops. He should demolish all the bridges over the rivers in his kingdom. He should empty the waters from all the tanks in his dominions or alternatively, have them poisoned.

Disregarding the duty of protecting his friends, in view of both present and future circumstances, he should seek the protection of another ruler who is the enemy of his enemy, and who may be strong enough to vanquish his rival on the field of battle. He should destroy all the smaller forts in his kingdom and cut down all the smaller trees and branches of the larger trees, but he should not touch even a leaf of the Chaitya tree.

He should raise outer ramparts round his forts with enclosures in them and fill his trenches with water, pointed stakes at their base and crocodiles

and sharks. He should keep small openings in his walls to enable sallies from his fort and make careful arrangements for their defence like that of the greater gates. At all his gates and on the ramparts of his forts he should place weapons and destructive engines such as the Sataghnis.

He should store wood for fuel and dig and repair wells for supply of water to the garrison. He should cause all houses made of grass and straw to be plastered over with mud and, if it is summer, withdraw to a place safe from fire all the stores of grass and straw. He should order all food to be cooked at night so that no fire is lit during the day except for the daily homa. Particular care should be taken of fires in smithies and dormitories, and fires kept within the houses of the inhabitants should be well covered. For the effectual protection of the city, he should proclaim that severe punishment will be meted out to anyone who lights fires during the day.

During such times, O greatest of men, you should drive out of the town all beggars, eunuchs, lunatics and mimes, for if you permit them to remain, evil will follow.

Into places of public resort, tirthas, assemblies and in the houses of the citizens, the king should send competent spies. He should cause wide roads to be constructed and order shops and places for the distribution of water to be opened at proper stations. Depots of diverse necessaries, arsenals, camps and quarters for soldiers, stables for horses and elephants, trenches, streets and bypaths, houses and gardens for retirement and pleasure, should be so ordered that their sites are concealed.

A king threatened by a hostile army should gather and store wealth, oil, fat, honey, clarified butter, medicines of all kinds, charcoal and fuel, grass and leaves, munja grass, arrows, poisoned arrows, weapons of every kind such as darts, swords, lances and others. He should especially keep ready drugs of every kind, roots and fruits, the four kinds of physicians, scribes, draftsmen, actors, dancers, athletes and men capable of assuming diverse disguises. He should decorate his capital and cheer all his subjects.

The king should lose no time in bringing under his control men of whom he has reason to be afraid, be they his servants, counsellors, citizens or neighbouring monarchs. When any assigned task of the king is performed, he should reward those who helped him to accomplish it with wealth, proportionate gifts and words of gratitude. The shastras say that a king pays off his debt when he oversets his enemy or slays him outright.

Listen to me as I recite the seven things a king should take care of. They are his own self, his counsellors, his treasury, his machinery for meteing out punishments, his friends, his provinces and his capital. He should take care to protect these seven limbs of his kingdom. The king who is conversant with the aggregate of six, the triple aggregate and the high aggregate of three, will succeed in winning the sovereignty of the whole earth.

Listen, O Yudhishtira, to what is termed 'the aggregate of six'. These are: ruling in peace after concluding a treaty with the foe, marching to battle, producing disunion among the enemy, concentrating forces for inspiring fear among his enemies, preparing for war with readiness for peace and alliance with others.

Listen now attentively to what is termed 'the triple aggregate'. They are: decreasing what is, maintaining it and increasing it. The 'high aggregate' of three consists of dharma, artha and kama. These should be pursued judiciously. With dharma, a king will succeed in ruling the earth for ever.

On this subject, Angirasa's son Brihaspati himself has sung the following two verses which you should hear: "Having discharged all his duties and protected the earth as well as his cities, a king will attain great happiness in Swarga. What is tapasya to the king who protects his people properly, and what need has he of yagnas? Such a king should be regarded as one who knows every dharma!"'

Yudhishtira says, 'There is the Dandaneeti, the Raja and the Praja. Tell me, O Pitamaha, what advantage they derive each from the other.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to me, O Bhaarata, as I expound in sacred and solemn words the great blessedness of the Dandaneeti. Dandaneeti forces all men to observe the svadharma of their varnas. Properly administered, it compels people to be virtuous.

Understand that men become truly happy when the four varnas attend to their respective duties, when they maintain all wholesome boundaries, when peace and happiness are brought to flow from Dandaneeti, when the people are freed from all fear, and the three higher varnas endeavour, according to their respective duties, to maintain harmony.

You should entertain no doubt about the question whether it is the king who makes the age, or the age that makes the king. The truth is that the king makes the age. When the king rules with a complete and strict reliance on

Dandaneeti, one says that the foremost of ages, called the Krita yuga prevails, where dharma rules and adharma does not exist.

The hearts of men belonging to all the four varnas take no pleasure in adharma. Assuredly, all men succeed in acquiring the objects they desire and preserving those acquired. All the Vedic rites become punya karma, all the seasons become delightful and free from evil, and the voices, enunciation and thinking of all men become clear and cheerful. Diseases disappear and all men become long-lived. Wives do not become widows and no one is a miser. The earth yields crops without being tilled, and herbs and plants grow in luxuriance. Trees, leaves, fruits and roots become vigorous and abundant. No evil is to be seen, and only dharma exists.

These are the characteristics, O Yudhishtira, of the Krita or Satya yuga. When the king relies upon only three parts of Dandaneeti, leaving out the fourth, the yuga called Treta sets in. A fourth part of adharma follows in the train of such observance of the great science by three-fourths. The earth yields crops only if tilled, and herbs and plants grow depending upon tillage.

When the king observes only a half of the great science, leaving out the other half, then the yuga that sets in is called Dwapara. Adharma follows in the train of such observance. The earth requires tillage, and yields crops by half.

When the king, abandoning the great science totally, oppresses his subjects by evil means of diverse kinds, one calls the yuga that sets in Kali. During the Kali yuga, adharma becomes pervasive and nothing of dharma is seen. The hearts of men of all the varnas fall away from their respective dharmas. Sudras live by adopting lives of mendicancy, and Brahmanas live by serving others. Men fail to acquire the objects they desire and preserve those already acquired.

Intermixture of the four varnas takes place. Vedic rites fail to produce fruit. All the seasons cease to be delightful and become laden with evil. The voices, enunciation and minds of men lose vigour. Diseases appear and men die prematurely. Wives become widows and one sees many cruel men. The clouds do not rain in season, and crops fail. When the king does not protect the subjects with proper attention to the great Dandaneeti, drought sets in.

The king is the creator of the Krita yuga, the Treta and the Dwapara. He is the cause of the fourth yuga called Kali. If he causes the Krita yuga, he attains everlasting Swarga. If he causes the Treta yuga, he acquires Swarga

for a period that is limited. If he causes the Dwapara, he attains to blessedness in Swarga according to the measure of his merits. By causing the Kali yuga, the king incurs a heavy load of sin. Tarnished by evil, he rots in hell for innumerable years and for the sins of his subjects, he himself incurs great sin and infamy.

Keeping the great science in mind, the learned Kshatriya should satisfy his Purusharthas and protect those he has already acquired. Dandaneeti, which establishes all men in the observance of their respective duties, which is the groundwork of all wholesome distinctions and which, if properly administered, truly upholds the world and sets it going, shields all men like a mother and father protecting their children. Understand, O Bharatarishabha, that the very lives of creatures depend upon it.

The highest merit a king can acquire is to acquaint himself with Dandaneeti and administer it properly. Therefore, O scion of Kuru, protect your subjects righteously with the aid of the great science. By doing so and ruling with dharma, you will surely attain blessedness in Swarga.'"

CANTO 70

"Yudhishtira asks, 'O Pitamaha, since you are familiar with every kind of conduct, tell me if, by adopting the way of Dandaneeti, a king can succeed in easily acquiring happiness in the end, both here and hereafter.'

Bhishma says, 'A king should observe these thirty-six virtues which are connected with thirty-six others. By attending to these qualities a dharmatman can certainly acquire great merit. The king should observe his dharma without anger or malice and adhere to kindness. He should have faith and acquire wealth without persecution and cruelty. He should pursue pleasure without attachment.

He should cheerfully utter agreeable words and be brave without bragging. He should be liberal, but should not make gifts to undeserving men. He should exercise his powers without cruelty, make alliances, avoid those who are evil, not behave with hostility towards friends, never employ as spies and secret agents men not devoted to him, and never try to accomplish his objectives by persecution.

He should never disclose his purposes before evil men and should speak of the merits of others, never of his own. He should take wealth from his subjects but not from those who are good, and should never employ or take the help of base, vile men.

He should not inflict punishment without careful enquiry, never disclose his counsels and give generously, but not to covetous men. He should repose confidence in others, but never in those who have injured him. He

should not be malicious. He should protect his wedded wives and not indulge too much in female companionship. He should take only wholesome food, not things that harm him.

He should be pure, and not be swayed by emotion. He should pay reverence humbly to those who deserve it and serve his acharyas and elders sincerely and meekly. He should worship the Devas without pride, seek prosperity, but never do anything that brings infamy.

He should be clever in business but always wait for the proper time. He should comfort men, never send them away with hollow words and, having shown favour to someone, he should not abandon him. He should not strike out in ignorance and, once having slain his foe, he should never indulge in remorse. He should display temper, but not without occasion. He should be mild, but never to those who have committed offences.

While ruling your kingdom, conduct yourself in this manner, if you wish to have prosperity. The king who behaves otherwise incurs great danger, while the king who observes all these virtues that I have mentioned, reaps many blessings on earth and great rewards in Swarga.'

Earnestly attending to these instructions of Santanu's son, the perspicacious king Yudhishtira, protected by Bhima and others, worships his Pitamaha and from that time on begins to rule according to his teachings."

CANTO 71

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, in what way should the king protect his subjects without causing grief and violating his dharma?'

Bhishma says, 'I will recite the eternal duties in brief, O Rajan, for if I were to list them in detail, I would never reach the end. You must revere learned Brahmanas who are devoted to their dharma, regular in worshipping the Devas, observe stringent vows and have other accomplishments, and employ them to officiate in your yagnas when they come to your abode.

With your priest accompanying you, you should rise when they approach, touch their feet in reverence and do everything else that is necessary. Performing these acts of piety and discharging other karma that are for your own good, you should, by giving them gifts, make them shower blessings on you for the success of your enterprises.

O Bhaarata, you should be sincere, wise and intelligent and adopt satya while avoiding kama and krodha. The foolish king who pursues artha without driving away kama and krodha fails to acquire dharma, and ultimately sacrifices artha as well. Never employ those who are covetous and foolish, in matters connected with kama and artha. You should always employ in all your work those who are not covetous and possess intelligence. Sullied by kama and krodha and unskilled in the transaction of business, foolish men, if vested with authority in matters of artha, always oppress the people by diverse methods which lead to mischief.

A king should fill his treasury with a sixth part, upon fair calculation, of the yield of the soil as his tribute, with fines and forfeitures imposed upon offenders, with levies according to the shastras upon merchants and traders, in return for the protection he grants them.

Realizing this just tribute and governing the kingdom properly, the king should meticulously work so that that his subjects do not feel the pressure of want. Men become deeply devoted to the king who discharges the duty of protection properly, who is endowed with charity, steady in the observance of dharma, vigilant and free from lust and anger.

Never seek to fill your treasury through adharma or from lobha, greed. The king who does not rule in accordance with the shastras fails to earn wealth and religious merit. The king who is mindful only of acquiring wealth can never acquire religious merit as well. The wealth that he acquires by such means is lavished on unworthy objects.

The avaricious king who, through folly, oppresses his subjects by levying taxes that the shastras do not sanction, wrongs his own self. Just as a man wanting milk cannot obtain any by cutting off the udders of his cow, a kingdom ruled by improper means never yields any profit for the king. As one who treats a milch cow with tenderness always gets milk from it, a king who rules his kingdom wisely reaps the rewards.

By protecting a kingdom properly and ruling it judiciously, a king will always obtain great wealth, O Yudhishtira. The earth well protected by the king yields crops and gold to ruler and ruled alike, like a gratified mother yielding milk to her child. Imitate the example of the gardener who waters his trees and plants and gathers only their produce, O Rajan, not of the charcoal-maker who uproots trees and plants and burns them for making coal. Thus, by discharging the duty of protection, you will be able to enjoy the earth forever.

If in attacking an enemy's kingdom your treasury is exhausted, you may refill it by taking wealth from all except Brahmanas. Do not let your heart be moved, even when you are in great distress, upon seeing wealthy Brahmanas. I need not speak then of what you should do when you are in affluence. You should give them wealth as they deserve and you can afford, and protect and comfort them on all occasions. Thereby you will gain regions after death that are most difficult to attain.

With such dharma you will gain fame that is great, pure and everlasting. Follow your dharma and shield your subjects from injury, O son of Pandu,

and you will have no feelings of regret or pain, since virtuous men regard protection and compassion to all creatures as the highest merit of a king.

The sin incurred by a king for failing for a single day to defend his subjects from fear is such that he has to suffer for it in hell for a thousand years, while the merit he earns by protecting them for a single day is reward in Swarga for ten thousand years. A king soon acquires, by this dharma, all the regions that men find who lead the Garhasthya, the Brahmacharya and the Vanaprastha varnasramas.

O son of Kunti, observe painstakingly the duty of protection and you will gain the reward of righteousness. No grief or pain will afflict you and you will obtain great prosperity in Swarga. It is impossible for men who are not kings to acquire punya like this. None other can earn such rewards. Because of your wisdom, you have gained a kingdom. So, safeguard your subjects through dharma, gratify Indra with offerings of soma and fulfill the desires of your friends and well-wishers.'"

CANTO 72

"Bhishma says, 'The king should appoint as his priest one who will protect the good and punish the evil, O Rajan. In this regard, there is told an old story about the discourse between Pururavas, the son of Aila, and Matariswan.

Pururavas asked Matariswan, "From where have the Brahmana and the three other varnas sprung, and why has the Brahmana become the foremost?"

Matariswan answered, "The Brahmana has sprung from the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriya from his two arms and the Vaisya from his two thighs. In order to wait upon these three varnas a fourth, the Sudra, sprang to life, created from the feet of Brahma.

Thus the Brahmana takes birth on earth as the lord of all creatures, his duty being the custody of the Vedas and the other shastras. Then, to rule the world, wield the Danda and protect all creatures, Brahma created the second varna, the Kshatriya. He created the Vaisya to support the two other varnas and his own by cultivation and trade and, finally, he ordained that the Sudra should serve the three other varnas as a menial."

Pururavas said, "Tell me truly, O god of winds, to whom does this earth rightly belong—to the Brahmana or to the Kshatriya?"

The god of winds said, "Everything that exists in the universe belongs to the Brahmana as a result of his birth and precedence according to the Dharmatmans. What the Brahmana eats is his own, the place he inhabits is

his own and what he gives away is his own. He deserves the veneration of all the other varnas, as he is the first-born and the foremost.

Just as a woman, in the absence of her husband, accepts his younger brother in his place, the earth, because of the refusal of the Brahmana, has accepted his next-born, the Kshatriya, for her lord. This is the first rule. In times of distress, however, there is an exception to this rule. If you seek to discharge the duties of the order and wish to obtain the highest place in Swarga, then give the Brahmana all the land you conquer, provided he possesses learning and virtue, knows his duties, observes penances, is satisfied with his svadharma and not greedy for wealth.

Wise and humble, the well-born Brahmana by his own perspicacity guides the king in every matter. By his sound counsels he brings prosperity to the king and instructs him in his dharma. As long as a wise king observes the dharma of his varna and is willing to listen to the advice of the Brahmana without pride, he is honoured and enjoys fame. The king's priest, therefore, has a share in the merit that the king acquires. When the king himself behaves thus, all his subjects, relying upon him, become virtuous in their behaviour, attentive to their duties and free from every fear.

The king obtains a fourth part of those righteous deeds which his subjects, properly defended by him, perform in his kingdom. The Devas, Manushyas, Pitris, Gandharvas, Uragas and Rakshasas, all depend upon the offerings made at yagnas for their support and subsistence. Yagna, therefore, depends upon the king and in a country without a king there can be no yagnas.

In the summer season, men seek comfort from the shade of trees, cool water and cool breezes, while in the winter they derive comfort from fire, warm clothes and the sun. The heart of man may find pleasure in sound, touch, taste, vision and scent, while the man who is afraid finds no pleasure in these things. Therefore, he who dispels the fears of men obtains great merit. There is no gift more valuable in the three worlds than the gift of life. The king is Indra. The king is Yama. The king is dharma. The king in different forms sustains and supports everything.'""

CANTO 73

"Bhishma says, 'With an eye on both punya and artha, whose considerations are often complex, the king should without delay appoint a learned priest who has thorough knowledge of the Vedas and other shastras. Those kings who have mahatmans as priests familiar with policy and who have similar qualities themselves, enjoy prosperity in every way. Both priest and king should have qualities worthy of respect and should observe vratas and tapasya. They will succeed in supporting and pleasing their praja, their Pitris and the Devas.

The shastras lay down that the Brahmana and Kshatriya should possess similar feelings and should be friends, as a result of which their subjects become happy. If they do not respect each other, destruction will overtake the people, for the shastras say that the Brahmana and the Kshatriya are the progenitors of all men.

In this connection, listen, Yudhishtira, to an old story about the discourse between Aila's son and Kasyapa.

Aila asked Kasyapa, "When the Brahmana forsakes the Kshatriya, or the Kshatriya abandons the Brahmana, who among them should be regarded superior, and upon whom should the other varnas rely and maintain themselves?"

Kasyapa answered, "Ruin overtakes the kingdom of the Kshatriya when the Brahmana and Kshatriya fall out, for when confusion prevails, thieves and brigands soon infest the kingdom and all good men regard the ruler as a Mlechcha, devoid of dharma. Neither their oxen nor their children thrive.

No one churns their pots of milk and no one performs yagnas. In kingdoms where Brahmanas abandon Kshatriyas, wealth does not increase, children do not study the Vedas or shastras or perform yagnas. The Kshatriyas who abandon Brahmanas become impure in blood and assume the nature of robbers.

The Brahmana and the Kshatriya are connected with each other naturally; each protects the other and each is responsible for the other's growth. When each helps the other, both attain great prosperity. If their friendship, existing from days of old, breaks, chaos sets in. No one who wants to cross the ocean of life succeeds in his task, like a small boat floating on the bosom of the sea.

The four varnas become confused and ruin overtakes all. If one protects the Brahmana who is like a tree, it showers gold and honey. If the Kshatriya does not protect him, the tree sheds tears and sorrow. In the absence of a Kshatriya ruler, if Brahmanas abandon the Vedas and the protection of the shastras, Indra does not bless them with rain, and all kinds of calamities ceaselessly afflict the kingdom.

When, having slain a woman or a Brahmana, a vile sinner does not face disgrace and shame in society and is not afraid of the king, danger threatens the Kshatriya king. As a result of the evils that sinful men perpetrate, Rudra, the god of vengeance, appears in the kingdom to destroy everyone, the honest and the evil alike, without distinction."

Aila then asked, "From where does Rudra spring, and what is his form? One sees creatures killing other creatures. Tell me everything, O Kasyapa!"

Kasyapa answered, "Rudra exists in the hearts of men and he destroys the bodies in which he dwells and also the bodies of others. Rudra is like atmospheric visitations and his form is like that of the god of winds."

Aila said, "Neither does the wind, by blowing, visibly kill men on all occasions, nor does the god of the clouds do so by rain or floods. On the other hand, one sees that men slay each other through lust and malice."

Kasyapa said, "Fire, blazing forth in one house, burns a whole quarter or an entire village. Similarly, this Deva stupefies the senses of a few men and soon that confusion touches all—the honest and the evil alike, without any distinction."

Aila asked, "If as a result of the sins committed by the evil, punishment touches all, the honest and the wicked alike, why should men, do good deeds? Why should they not wantonly sin?"

Kasyapa replied, “By avoiding all connection with the sinful, men become pure and untainted. However, if they are interpolated with the sinful, punishment will overtake them, just as fire consumes even wood that is wet, if it is stored with wood that is dry. The sinless, therefore, should never mingle with the sinful.”

Aila said, “The earth contains the honest and the evil, for whom the sun shines, the wind blows and water cleanses, equally.”

Kasyapa said, “Such indeed, is the course of this world, O Rajan! However, it is not so in the other world, where there is a great difference between the dharmatman and the sinner. The regions that good men acquire are full of honey, possessed of the splendour of gold or of a fire upon which one pours clarified butter, similar to the navel of ambrosia. The good man enjoys great happiness as death, old age and sorrow do not there exist. The place for the sinful is Naraka—hell, and it is full of sorrow, darkness and ceaseless pain. Sinking in infamy, the man of sin suffers with remorse in hell for many years.

Thus, as a result of disunion between Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, unbearable grief comes to afflict the people. Knowing this, a king should appoint an experienced and sagacious Brahmana priest. He should install the priest before even his own coronation, as laid down by the laws proclaiming the Brahmana as the best of all creatures.

Men who know the Vedas say that Brahma first created the Brahmana and invested in him all things that are good in this world and made him the rightful owner of all the best things that have flowed from the Creator, because of the precedence of his birth. Consequently, he is worthy of the respect and the worship of all creatures.

A king, however powerful, should bestow upon the Brahmana according to the dictates of the shastras, whatever is best, distinguished and above others. The Brahmana and the Kshatriya contribute to increasing each others’ wealth, prestige and power. Therefore kings should, above all, always worship the Brahmanas.”””

CANTO 74

"Bhishma says, 'The preservation and growth of the kingdom rest upon the king, while the protection and development of the king rest upon the king's priest. That kingdom enjoys true happiness where the Brahmana dispels the invisible fears of his subjects and the king dispels all their visible fears by the might of his arms. Listen to this old tale of the discussion between King Muchukunda and Vaisravana.

King Muchukunda, having subjugated the whole earth, went to Vaisravana, the lord of treasures and the lord of Alaka, to test his strength. King Vaisravana created by his ascetic power a large force of Rakshasas, who annihilated the forces of Muchukunda. Seeing the slaughter of his army, Muchukunda began to rebuke his own learned priest, Vasishtha. The Dharmatman Vasishtha sat in severe tapasya and, causing the Rakshasas to be slain, ascertained the true reason behind Muchukunda's action.

While his Rakshasas were being slaughtered, Vaisravana showed himself to Muchukunda and said to him "Many ancient kings, more powerful than you, aided by their priests, have approached me, but never like this. All of them, mighty and skilful warriors, regarded me as the granter of happiness and sorrow and came to me to offer worship. In truth, if you have might of arms, by all means, display it. But why, aided by a Brahmana's might, do you act so proudly?"

Muchukunda boldly replied in apt and just words: "The swayambhuva Brahma created the Brahmana and the Kshatriya and they have a common origin. If they applied their forces separately, they would never be able to

defend the world. He bestowed upon Brahmanas the power of tapasyas and mantras, and upon Kshatriyas the power of arms and weapons. Supported by both kinds of might, kings should protect their subjects. This is the reason why I am doing what I do. Why do you, O Lord of Alaka, then rebuke me?"

Vaisravana said to Muchukunda and his priest, "Understand that I neither bestow sovereignty upon anyone without Brahma's command, nor do I ever take it away! You are free to rule the whole world."

Muchukunda replied, "'Rajan, I want to enjoy sovereignty obtained by the might of my own arms, not as a vara from you!" Vaisravana, seeing the king fearless in the observance of Kshatriya duties, was filled with surprise.

King Muchukunda, devoted to Kshatriya dharma, continued to rule all the earth obtained by the might of his own arms. So the Dharmaraja who rules his kingdom, helped by and yielding precedence to the Brahmana, will succeed in subjugating the earth and achieving great fame. The Brahmana should perform his religious rites every day and the Kshatriya should always be armed. Between them they are the rightful owners of everything in the universe.'"

CANTO 75

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me O Pitamaha, about the conduct by which a king can make his people great and thereby earn regions of felicity in the other world.'

Bhishma says, 'The king should be liberal, perform yagnas, O Bhaarata, do tapasya, observe vows and remain devoted to the duty of guarding his subjects by following the path of dharma. He should honour all men of dharma by standing up when they come, and by giving them gifts.

If the king follows dharma, it is respected everywhere. Whatever work and other things the king likes, his subjects too like. To his enemies the king should always be like Death, with the Dandaneeti uplifted in his hands. He should exterminate bandits everywhere in his kingdom and never pardon anyone impulsively.

The king earns a fourth part of the punya that his subjects earn under his protection, O Bhaarata, and by protecting them, he obtains a fourth part of the merit that his subjects acquire through study, by giving gifts, by pouring libations and by worshipping the Devas. The king acquires a fourth part also of the sins that his subjects commit, if there is any distress in the kingdom arising from his neglect in discharging his duty. Some say that the king gains a half, and some say the full measure, of whatever sins he earns by becoming cruel and untruthful in speech.

Attend now to the means by which the king can be cleansed of such sins. If he fails to restore to a subject the wealth that thieves have stolen, he

should compensate the victim from his own treasury or, in case he is unable to do so, with wealth obtained from his dependants.

All the varnas should protect the property of a Brahmana, just as they would the Brahmana's son or his life. The man who offends Brahmanas should be exiled from the kingdom, for everything is saved by guarding the Brahmana's wealth. Through the grace of the Brahmana thus obtained, the king is crowned with success. Men seek the protection of an able king like creatures seeking relief from clouds or birds seeking refuge in a large tree. A cruel and covetous king with a lustful soul, always seeking the gratification of his desires, will never be able to protect his subjects.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I do not for a moment wish for the happiness that sovereignty bestows, or sovereignty for its own sake; I desire it for the punya I can acquire from it. It seems to me that the shastras attach no punya to sovereignty, hence I have no need for kingship. I will retire into the sacred vanas, lay aside the danda, subdue my senses and seek to acquire the merit of dharma by becoming a Rishi subsisting upon fruit and roots.'

Bhishma says, 'I know your heart, Yudhishtira, and how inoffensive your nature is. However, by inoffensiveness alone you will not succeed in ruling your kingdom. Your heart is inclined to mildness; you are compassionate, honourable, virtuous and full of mercy. People, therefore, do not regard you much.

Follow the example of your father and your Pitamaha. Kings should never adopt the conduct which you espouse. Do your duty and never be touched by anxiety or adopt such inoffensiveness, for by doing so you will not earn the merit of following your dharma, which arises from protecting your subjects.

The behaviour you wish to adopt, impelled by your own intelligence and wisdom, is not consistent with the blessings which your father Pandu or your mother Kunti prayed for to the Devas. Your father always prayed that you become courageous, mighty and truthful, while your mother Kunti prayed that you become high-minded and liberal.

The Pitris and the Devas always ask for the offerings with Swaha and Swadha in sraddhas and yagnas from children. Whether gifts, study, sacrifices and the protection of subjects are meritorious or sinful, you have been born to practise and perform them. O son of Kunti, the fame of those men who fail to bear the burdens placed on them and to which they are yoked in life, is tarnished.

When a properly trained horse can successfully bear a burden without falling down, why cannot a man like you? Success depends upon work and words, and one incurs no censure as long as one's deeds and words are proper. No one, be he a man virtuously following the Grihastasrama, or a king, or a Brahmacharin, has ever succeeded without failing at some time.

It is better to do some work which is good and in which there is small merit, for total abstention from karma is most sinful. When a high-born dharmatman becomes affluent, his king will obtain prosperity in all his affairs. A Dharmarajan, having obtained a kingdom, should seek to subdue some enemies by gifts, some by force and some by sweet words.

There is no one more virtuous than one upon whom noble and learned men rely, from fear of losing their means of sustenance, and upon whom they depend to live in contentment.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'What actions, O Pitamaha, lead to Swarga? What is the nature of the great happiness that one derives from them? What is the high prosperity that one can then obtain? Tell me all this, if you know.'

Bhishma says, 'Anyone amongst us who is able to give a moment of relief to someone afflicted with fear is worthy of Swarga. This is verily so, Yudhishtira; hence, gladly be the king of the Kurus, protect the good and slay the evil, gain Swarga.

Let your friends and all honest men derive their support from you, like creatures from the deity of the clouds and like birds from a large tree with delicious fruits. Men seek his protection who is dignified, courageous, capable of punishing, compassionate, with senses under control, affectionate towards all, equitable and just.'"

CANTO 76

"Yudhishtira asks, 'O Pitamaha, among Brahmanas some engage in duties proper to their varna, while others engage in other work. Tell me the difference between these two classes!'

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, the Brahmanas who are learned and magnanimous, and who look impartially upon all creatures, are equal to Brahma. They who know the Riks, the Yajuses and the Samans and who devote themselves to the practices of their order are equal to the very Devas. However, those among them who are not well-born, not devoted to the duties of their varna and take to evil practices, are like Sudras.

A virtuous king should realize tribute from, and press into public service without remuneration, Brahmanas who do not possess Vedic knowledge or their own fires for worship. Those who are employed in courts of justice for summoning people, who perform worship for others for a fee, who perform the yagnas of Vaisyas and Sudras, who officiate in yagnas on behalf of a whole village and who make voyages on the ocean—these five are regarded as Chandalas among Brahmanas.

Among the Brahmanas, those who become Ritwikas, Purohitas, counsellors, envoys and messengers, become equal to Kshatriyas. Those among them who ride horses, elephants, chariots or become foot-soldiers, become equal to Vaisyas.

If the king's treasury is not full, he can realize tribute from these, but should exclude the Brahmanas who, because of their conduct, are equal to the Devas or Brahma. The Vedas say that the king is the lord of the wealth

belonging to all the varnas, except Brahmanas. He can take the wealth of those Brahmanas who stray from their svadharma. But the king should never be indifferent towards those Brahmanas who do not observe their duties. For the sake of making his people virtuous, he should punish and separate them from their superiors.

The learned regard the king in whose territories a Brahmana becomes a thief, as responsible for the sin, O Rajan. Men who know the Vedas declare that if a Brahmana well versed in the Vedas, who observes vows but, through want of sustenance, becomes a thief, it is the duty of the king to provide for his support. If even after he has obtained provision for his support, the Brahmana does not abstain from theft, O Parantapa, he should be banished from the kingdom with all his kinsmen.'"

CANTO 77

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Bharatarishabha, of whose wealth is the king regarded to be the lord, and what conduct should he adopt?'

Bhishma says, 'The Vedas declare that the king is lord of the wealth that belongs to all men, except Brahmanas, and also of those Brahmanas who do not follow their dharma. The king should not spare such Brahmanas, and the sages say that this is the ancient custom of kings.

One regards the king in whose dominion a Brahmana becomes a thief, to be responsible for that misdeed, O Rajan, and to have become sinful and worthy of reproach on that account. Therefore, all kings who follow dharma provide Brahmanas with the means of sustenance.

There is an old story of what a king said to a Rakshasa when the latter was about to abduct him. Once a Rakshasa forcibly seized the king of the Kaikeyas who observed strict vratas and had mastered the Vedas while living in the forest.

The king said, "There is no thief in my territories, nor any evil person, nor any one who drinks alcohol. There is no one in my dominions who has not his sacred fire or who does not perform yagnas. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

There is no Brahmana in my realm who is not learned or who does not observe vows or who has not drunk soma. How then have you been able to possess my mind?

In my dominions, no one performs a sacrifice without completing it with dakshina, or studies the Vedas and does not observe vows. How then have you been able to possess my soul?

The Brahmanas in my kingdom teach, study, sacrifice, officiate at others' sacrifices, give and receive gifts. All of them observe these six sacred karmas and all are devoted to the performance of their swadharma. Venerated and provided for, they are mild and truthful in speech. How then have you been able to possess my atma?

The Kshatriyas in my kingdom are all devoted to their swadharma. They never beg but give, and are truthful and virtuous. They never teach but study, and perform sacrifices but never officiate at the yagnas of others. They protect the Brahmanas and never flee from battle. How then have you been able to possess my atma?

All the Vaisyas in my dominion follow their svadharma. With simplicity and without deceit, they derive their sustenance from farming, cattle-rearing and trade. They are all careful, observe all religious rites, keep admirable vratas and are truthful in speech. They give to atithis their due and are self-restrained, pure and close to their relatives and kinsmen. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

The Sudras in my kingdom observe their svadharma, humbly and duly serve and wait upon the other three varnas without entertaining any malice towards them. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

I support the helpless and the old, the weak, the ill and women without guardians, by supplying them with all the necessities of life. I have never destroyed any customs of families or of countries existing from ancient days. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

I protect and worship the Mahatapasvins in my kingdom and honour and entertain them with food. I never eat without feeding others from my table. I never go to other men's wives and never sport or recreate alone. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

No one in my kingdom who is not a Brahmacharin begs his food, and no one who leads the Bhikshu varnasrama wishes to be a Brahmacharin. No one who is not a Ritwij pours offerings of clarified butter upon the sacrificial fire. How then have you been able to possess my soul?

I never disregard the learned, the old or those who are engaged in tapasya. When the whole world sleeps, I keep awake and vigilant. How then have you been able to possess my heart?

My priest possesses knowledge of the Self. He is given to tapasya and is a man of dharma. Highly intelligent, he has absolute power over my kingdom. By gifts I aspire to acquire knowledge, and by truth and the protection of Brahmanas I aspire to attain regions of blessedness in Swarga. By service, I attach myself to my acharyas. I have no fear of Rakshasas.

In my kingdom there are no widows, no evil Brahmanas, no Brahmana who has deviated from his dharma, no deceitful men, no thief, no Brahmana who officiates in the yagnas of people for whom he should never officiate and no perpetrator of sinful deeds. I have no fear of Rakshasas. There is no space in my body, of even two fingers' breadth, that does not bear the scar of a weapon-wound. I always fight for the cause of dharma. How have you been able to possess my heart?

The people of my kingdom ever invoke blessings upon me, that I may be always able to protect cattle and Brahmanas and perform sacrifices. How then have you been able to possess me?"

The Rakshasa answered, "Since you observe your dharma under all circumstances, O king of the Kaikeyas, go back to your home. I set you free. Blessed are they who protect cattle, Brahmanas and all their subjects, for they have nothing to fear from Rakshasas and even less from sinful men. Those kings who support the Brahmanas, whose might depends upon that of the Brahmanas and whose subjects discharge the duties of hospitality, will always succeed in acquiring Swarga."

You should, therefore protect the Brahmanas. They will protect you in return. Their blessings will surely descend upon kings of dharma.

For the sake of dharma, Brahmanas who do not observe their swadharma should be punished and segregated into a distinct class from their superiors. A king who conducts himself in this way towards the people of his kingdom obtains prosperity here and lives in Swarga with Indra.'"

CANTO 78

"Yudhishtira asks, 'The shastras say that, in times of adversity, a Brahmana can support himself by doing the work of a Kshatriya. Can he, however, at any time support himself by doing the work of Vaisyas?'

Bhishma replies, 'When a Brahmana loses his means of support and falls into distress, he can certainly do the work of a Vaisya and derive his support from farming and keeping cattle, but only if he is not competent to perform Kshatriya dharma.'

Yudhishtira then inquires, 'If a Brahmana does the work of a Vaisya, O Bharatarishabha, what trade can he engage in without losing his prospect of Swarga?'

Bhishma responds, 'A Brahmana in all circumstances should avoid trading in wine, salt, sesamum seeds, animals with manes, bulls, honey, meat and cooked food, Yudhishtira, for by selling these he will go to Naraka.

A Brahmana, by selling a goat, incurs the sin of selling Agni Deva; by selling sheep, the sin of selling Indra, the god of rain; by selling a horse, the sin of selling Surya Deva; by selling cooked food, the sin of selling land; and by selling a cow, the sin of selling sacrifice and the soma rasa. Therefore a Brahmana should not sell these things. Good men do not approve the purchase of uncooked food by giving cooked food in exchange. Uncooked food, however, can be exchanged for cooked food, O Bhaarata.

“We will eat your cooked food if in exchange you cook these raw things that we give you,” is an acceptable arrangement bearing no sin.

Listen, Yudhishtira, I will tell you the age-old practice of men following approved customs. “I will give you this, and you will give me this in return.” Such barter is permissible. To take things by force, however, is sinful. This is the convention the Rishis and others followed and, without doubt, this is righteous.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘When all the varnas disregard their svadharma and take up arms against the king, of course the power of the king will decrease. How then can he become the protector and refuge of the people? Clear my doubt, Pitamaha, by explaining this to me in detail.’

Bhishma says, ‘All the varnas that the Brahmanas head should, on such occasions, seek their own good by gifts, tapasya, yagnas, peacefulness and self-restraint. Those who have Vedic strength should rise up on every side and like the Devas strengthening Indra, contribute by Vedic rites to enhance the strength of the king.

One says that the Brahmanas are the refuge of the king when his power wanes. A wise king seeks the enhancement of his power through that of the Brahmanas. When the king, crowned with victory, seeks the re-establishment of peace, all the varnas then take themselves to their swadharma. When bandits and thieves, breaking all restraints, spread devastation, all the varnas should take up arms. They incur no sin by doing so, O Yudhishtira!’

Yudhishtira says, ‘If all the Kshatriyas become hostile towards the Brahmanas, who then will protect the Brahmanas and their Vedas? What then should be the duty of the Brahmanas, and who will be their refuge?’

Bhishma says, ‘By penances, Brahmacharya, weapons and physical might, applied with or without the aid of deceit, they should subjugate the Kshatriyas. If the Kshatriya himself commits sins especially towards Brahmanas, the Vedas themselves will subdue them.

The Kshatriyas have sprung from the Brahmanas, fire from water, and iron from stone. The energy of fire, the Kshatriya and iron, are irresistible. But when these come into contact with the sources of their origin, their force becomes neutralized. When iron strikes stone, or fire battles with water, or the Kshatriya becomes hostile to the Brahmana, the strength of each of these three is destroyed. Thus, Yudhishtira, the strength and might

of Kshatriyas, however great and irresistible, become quelled as soon as they are directed against the Brahmanas.

When the energy of the Brahmanas turns mild, when Kshatriya energy turns feeble, when men misbehave towards the Brahmanas, those who engage in battle then without fear of death, in order to protect the Brahmanas, dharma and their own selves—these men, moved by righteous indignation and possessed of great strength of mind, will win high regions of bliss hereafter.

Everybody should take up arms for the sake of Brahmanas, because those brave men who fight for them attain a felicitous region in Swarga reserved for men who have always studied the Vedas attentively, who have performed the severest tapasya and who have, after fasting, cast their bodies into blazing fires.

The Brahmana, by taking up arms for the three varnas, does not incur sin, for people say there is no higher duty than casting away life under such circumstances. I bow to them, and blessed be they who so lay down their lives in seeking to destroy the enemies of Brahmanas. Let us attain the realm intended for them. Manu himself has said that these heroes go to Brahmaloka. Just as men become cleansed of all their sins by undergoing the final bath in an Aswamedha yagna, men who die at the edge of weapons while fighting evil are cleansed of their sins.

Dharma becomes adharma, and adharma becomes dharma, according to circumstances. Such is the power of place and time in determining the character of human actions. Friends of humanity, even if they have been cruel, have attained Swarga. Kshatriyas of dharma have attained blessed ends, even by sinning. By taking up arms on three occasions—to protect himself, to compel the other varnas to do their dharma and to punish brigands—the Brahmana does not incur sin.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'When robbers raise their heads and Kshatriyas become incompetent, and an inter-mixture of varnas begins as a result of chaos, what happens if some powerful man other than a Kshatriya tries to subdue these outlaws for the sake of protecting the people? Indeed, if this powerful man happens to be a Brahmana, a Vaisya or a Sudra, O best of kings, and if he is successful in protecting the people through dharma by applying the Dandaneeti, is he justified, or do the laws restrain him? It seems that others should take up weapons, when the Kshatriyas prove unworthy.'

Bhishma says, ‘Be he a Sudra or a member of any other varna, he who becomes a raft on a raftless current, or a means of crossing where there are none, certainly deserves respect in every way. He by whose aid helpless men whom brigands have oppressed and made wretched come to live happily, O Rajan, deserves to be lovingly revered by all as if he were a near kinsman.

O Kurusthama, he who dispels the fears of others always deserves respect. Of what use are bulls that do not bear burdens, cows that do not yield milk or a wife who is barren? Similarly, what need is there of a king who is not able to provide protection? Are not a Brahmana void of Vedic lore and a Kshatriya incapable of granting protection like an elephant made of wood, a deer made of leather, a man without wealth, a eunuch or a sterile field? Both of them are like a cloud that does not yield rain.

He who always protects the good and restrains the evil deserves to become a king and to rule the world.’”

CANTO 79

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me O Pitamaha, what should be the work and behaviour of men employed as priests in our yagnas, and what sort of men should they be?'

Bhishma says, 'The shastras decree that those Brahmanas who are eligible to act as priests should know the Chhandas, including the Samans, and all the rites prescribed in the Srutis, and be able to perform all religious karma and kriya that lead to the prosperity of the king.

They should be devoted and loyal, and should shower eulogies on their kings. They should also be friendly towards one another and treat everybody equally. They should be devoid of cruelty and truthful in speech. They should never be money-lenders and always be simple and sincere.

One who has a peaceful temperament, is without vanity, modest, charitable, self-restrained, contented, intelligent, knowledgeable, truthful, observant of vows, harmless to all creatures, without lust and malice, endowed with the three excellent qualities and devoid of envy, deserves the seat of Brahma himself. Men with such qualities make the best priests and deserve all respect.'

Yudhishtira says, 'There are Vedic texts about giving Dakshina at sacrifices, but there is no law which lays down how much should be given on such occasions. This law about Dakshina has not proceeded from motives connected with the distribution of wealth. The command of the law, because of the provision in cases of incapacity, is terrible and is blind to the ability of the sacrificer. The prescription of the Vedas is that one should

perform a sacrifice with devotion. But what can devotion do when the sacrificer is deceitful?'

Bhishma says, 'No one acquires punya by disregarding the Vedas, by deceit or falsehood. Do not ever think so. Dakshina is one of the limbs of sacrifice and contributes to the nourishment of the Vedas. A yagna without Dakshina can never lead to moksha. However, the worth of a single Purnapatra—two hundred and fifty-six handfuls of rice, is equal to that of any Dakshina, however lavish. Therefore, everyone belonging to the three varnas should perform yagnas.

The Vedas say that, to the Brahmanas, soma is like the king himself. One can sell it for performing sacrifices, but never for gaining a livelihood. Maharishis who agree on the dictates of dharma have declared that a yagna performed with the proceeds of the sale of soma serves to extend sacrifices. However, these three—man, sacrifice and soma—must be of good character. A man of bad character is neither for this nor for the other world. We have heard that the sacrifice great Brahmanas perform by wealth earned by excessive physical labour does not produce great punya.

The Vedas declare that tapasyas are higher than yagnas. Pay attention to me, O learned prince, while I tell you about tapasyas. The wise regard as penances not the emaciation of the body, but refraining from causing injury, truthfulness in speech, benevolence and compassion. Disregard of the Vedas, disobedience of the dictates of the shastras and violation of all wholesome restraints lead to self-destruction.

Listen, O son of Pritha, to what those who pour ten libations upon the fire ten times a day have laid down. For those who perform the sacrifice of tapasya, the Yoga they endeavour to effect with Brahma is their ladle; the heart is their clarified butter; and great knowledge constitutes their Pavitra. For them all kinds of crookedness mean death, and all kinds of sincerity are Brahma. This is the subject of knowledge which the rhapsodies of system-builders cannot affect.'"

CANTO 80

"Yudhishtira says, 'No man can accomplish even the most trifling work, O Pitamaha, without help. How then can a king manage, who has to rule a kingdom? What should be the conduct and the work of the king's minister? In whom should the king repose confidence, and in whom should he not?'

Bhishma says, 'Kings, O Rajan, have four kinds of friends: those who have the same objective, those who are devoted, those related by birth and those won over by gifts and kindness.

A Dharmatman who will serve only dharma is the fifth kind. With such a man, the king should never disclose his full intention, since it might not enlist his sympathy.

Kings who want success are obliged to adopt both kinds of paths—of dharma and of adharma. Of the four kinds of friends, the second and the third are best, but he should always regard the first and the fourth with suspicion. However, he should not trust any of the four with work that he is required to do himself.

The king should never be careless in the matter of watching his friends, as he could be overthrown. An evil man assumes the garb of honesty, and he who is good becomes dishonest. An enemy will become a friend and a friend an enemy, for a man cannot always be of the same mind. Who can trust him completely? A king should ensure that his chief works are carried out in his own presence. A complete reliance on his ministers will destroy both dharma and artha.

However, a want of trust in respect of everyone is worse than death. Trustfulness is premature death and dangerous. If one trusts another completely, it is said, one lives at the mercy of the trusted person. For this reason, everyone should be trusted and at the same time viewed with suspicion. This eternal rule of policy should always be kept in view.

One should always mistrust the man who is covetous of wealth, for the wise declare such a man to be one's enemy. A person whose joy knows no bounds upon seeing the elevation of the king, and who is made miserable by the king's downfall, is one of the best friends. You should trust completely one whose fall is linked to your own, as you would trust your own father. You should promote him to the best of your power when you are successful.

He who seeks to rescue you from harm in your religious rites will try to rescue you from harm in every other business. You should regard such a man as your best friend. They who wish you harm, on the other hand, are your enemies. One says that a friend filled with dread when calamity overtakes you and with joy when prosperity shines on you is like your own self. A handsome man, fair-complexioned, of excellent voice, liberal, benevolent and of good birth, cannot be such a friend.

An intelligent man with a good memory, who is clever in the transaction of business, who is by nature not cruel, never angry and never dissatisfied, whether given recognition or not, be he your priest, acharya or honoured friend, should always receive your regard, if he accepts the office of your counsellor and lives in your home. Such a man can be trusted with your most secret counsels and the true state of all your affairs, religious or pertaining to matters of business. You may confide in him as you would in your own father.

One task should be given to one man and not to two or three, because they may not tolerate each other and will generally disagree among themselves. Your leading minister should be one who achieves celebrity, observes all restraints, is never jealous of others, is able and competent, does no evil, never abandons dharma from lust, fear, greed or wrath, is clever in the transaction of business and possesses the gift of wise and weighty speech.

You should appoint as ministers to supervise all your affairs men of good birth and good conduct, liberal, not boastful, brave and respectable, learned and resourceful. They will work for your good and be of great help

to you if you honour them and reward them with wealth. Appointed to offices connected with revenue and other important matters, they will always bring great prosperity. Motivated by healthy rivalry, they will discharge all duties connected with profit, consulting with one another when necessary.

You should fear your kinsmen as you would death itself. A kinsman can never bear another relative's prosperity, just as a feudal chieftain cannot bear to see the prosperity of his overlord. None but a kinsman can feel joy at the destruction of a relative blessed with sincerity, mildness, liberality, modesty and truthfulness of speech.

No one, on the other hand, can be more pitiable than those who have no kin, for they are unhappy and easily overcome by enemies. Kinsmen are the refuge of one assailed by other men, for relatives will not tolerate seeing outsiders destroy a kinsman. When even his friends trouble a kinsman, any relative of the persecuted person would regard it as a personal injury.

In having kinfolk, therefore, there are both merits and faults. A man without relatives neither bestows favours nor humbles himself to anyone. One should, for this reason, always honour and respect one's kinsmen in words and deeds and give them agreeable offices, never injuring them in any way. Remaining sceptical at heart, one should behave towards them as if one completely trusted them. If one reflects upon their nature, it would seem that they have neither faults nor merits. One who mindfully conducts himself in this way will find even his enemies disarmed of hostility and converted into friends. One who always behaves thus to kinsmen and relatives and treats his friends and enemies accordingly, will win everlasting fame.'"

CANTO 81

"Yudhishtira says, 'If one does not gain influence over one's kinsmen and relatives by this method, they become enemies. How then should one conduct oneself so that the hearts of both friends and foes can be won?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to an old discourse between Krishna and the Devarishi Narada.

Once, Krishna told Narada, "Neither an illiterate and foolish friend, nor a learned friend of fickle soul, deserves to know one's secret counsels. Because of your friendship with me, let me tell you something, O Muni who can visit Swarga at will!

One should speak to another only if one is convinced of his intelligence. I never flatter my kinsmen by complimenting them on their prosperity. I give them half of what I have and forgive their evil words. As a man who wants to light a fire grinds a fire-stick, my kinsmen grind my heart with their cruel words. Indeed, O Maharishi, these burn my heart every day.

Might resides in Sankarshana, mildness in Gada and, as for Pradyumna, he surpasses even me in personal beauty. Although I have all these on my side, yet I am helpless, O Narada! Many others among the Andhakas and the Vrishnis possess great prosperity, power, enduring courage and perseverance. He who does not side with them meets with death, while he whom they support achieves everything.

Dissuaded in turns by both Ahuka and Akrura, I do not support either of them. What can be more painful for one than to have both Ahuka and

Akrura on his side or against him? I am like the mother of two brothers gambling against each other, invoking victory for both. Both afflict me, O Narada. Only you can tell me what is good for both my kinsmen and me."

Narada replied, "Calamities are of two kinds, O Krishna, external and internal. They arise, O Vrishni, from one's own actions or from the deeds of others. The calamity that has now overtaken you is an internal one and is born of your own actions. Baladeva and others of the Bhoja race are supporters of Akrura and have taken his side, either for the sake of wealth, or out of mere impulse, or moved by words, or by hate. As for you, you have given away to another the wealth that you have obtained. Though you have men who should be your friends, you have by your own actions brought calamity on your head. You cannot take back that wealth, just as one cannot swallow again the food one has vomited.

O Krishna, you cannot take back from Babhru and Ugrasena the kingdom you gave them, for fear of creating internal strife. Even if you succeed, it will be after much trouble and with great difficulty. A great slaughter and loss of wealth will ensue, perhaps even total annihilation. Use, then, a weapon that is not made of steel, that is very mild and yet capable of piercing all hearts. Sharpening and re-sharpening this weapon, correct the evil tongues of your kinsmen."

Krishna said, "What is this weapon, O Muni, which is not made of steel, which is mild, which still pierces all hearts and which I should use to correct the tongues of my kinsmen?"

Narada said, "Distributing food to the best of your power, forgiveness, sincerity, mildness and honour to whom honour is due—these constitute a weapon that is not made of steel. With soft words alone turn away the anger of kinsmen who say cruel things, and mollify their hearts, minds and slanderous tongues.

None other than a great man, accomplished, with a pure soul, who has friends, can bear such a heavy burden. Take up this great weight of governing the Vrishnis and bear it on your shoulders. All oxen can carry heavy loads on a level road, but only the strongest can sustain such burdens on a difficult road. From disunity will spring destruction and overtake all the Bhojas and the Vrishnis.

You, O Kesava, are the greatest among them. Work in such a manner that the Bhojas and the Vrishnis will not be destroyed. Naught but intelligence and forgiveness, restraint of the senses and liberality operate in

a wise man. Advancing one's own race is always praiseworthy, glorious and conducive to a long life. Therefore, Krishna, act in such a way that your clan will not be destroyed.

There is nothing, Lord, that you do not know of policy and the art of war. The Yadavas, the Kukuras, the Bhojas, the Andhakas and the Vrishnis all depend on you, Mahabaho, as do the worlds and all the regents of the worlds. The Rishis always pray for your success, O Madhava. You are the lord of all creatures. You know the past, the present and the future. You are the greatest among all the Yadavas, and they rely on you to live in happiness."'"

CANTO 82

"Bhishma says, 'I have told you what constitutes the first method. Listen now, Yudhishtira, to the second one. The king should always defend those who seek to advance his interests.

If someone who is paid or unpaid comes to tell you of the damage being done to your treasury by a minister who is embezzling its resources, you should grant him an audience in private and protect him from the accused minister, since officials guilty of misappropriation will seek to kill such informants. They who plunder the royal treasury combine together to oppose the man who seeks to protect it, and if you leave him defenceless he is sure to be finished.

Listen to an old story of what the sage Kalakavrikshiya once narrated to the king of Kosala. Once upon a time, the Rishi Kalakavrikshiya came to Kshemadarsin who had ascended the throne of the kingdom of Kosala. Wanting to examine the conduct of all the officers of Kshemadarsin, the Rishi, with a crow in a cage in his hand, repeatedly travelled through every part of the king's dominions, telling all men, "Study the corvine science. The crows tell me the present, the past and the future."

Proclaiming this in the kingdom, the sage, accompanied by a large number of men, began to observe the misdeeds of all the officers of the king. Having examined all the affairs of the kingdom and having learnt that all the officers of the king were guilty of wrongdoing, the Rishi of stern vows, with his crow, came to the king and said to him, "I know everything about your kingdom."

In the presence of the king, he said to his appointed minister that his crow had informed him that the minister had committed a crime in a particular place and that such and such men knew that he had plundered the royal treasury.

"My crow tells me this. Admit or prove the falsehood of the accusation quickly," he told the minister. The sage then proclaimed the names of other officers who had similarly been guilty of embezzlement, adding, "My crow never says anything that is false."

Thus accused and arraigned by the Muni, all the officers of the king, O Kurusthama, united and killed the crow while the sage slept at night. Seeing his crow pierced with a shaft within the cage, the Maharishi went to Kshemadarsin in the morning and said to him, "O king, I seek your protection. You are all-powerful and the master of the lives and wealth of all. With your permission, I will tell you what is good for you.

Grieved on your account, I have come to you, whom I regard as a friend, impelled by devotion and ready to serve you with my whole heart. You are being plundered of your wealth and I have come to you to disclose the truth without showing any consideration for the robbers. Like a rider who urges a good steed, I have come here to awaken you, whom I regard as a friend. A friend who is alive to his own interests and wants his own prosperity and growth, should forgive another who intrudes, urged by devotion and anger, for what is beneficial."

The king replied, "Why should I not listen to what you say, since I am not blind to what is for my good? I grant you permission, O Maharishi! Tell me what you please and I will certainly obey your instructions."

The Rishi said, "I have come to you compelled by my devotion, to tell you everything about your servants after ascertaining their merits and faults, and also the dangers you incur at their hands. Our ancient Rishis have described the plight of those who serve others. The condition of men who serve the king is painful and wretched, akin to associating with virulently poisonous snakes. Kings have many friends and also many enemies; so they who serve kings have to fear all of them, including the king himself, O Rajan.

A man serving the king cannot with impunity be guilty of negligence in doing the king's work, especially one who wants to win prosperity. His inattention can move the king to wrath and may bring down doom upon him.

One should learn to behave in the presence of the king as one would in the presence of a blazing fire. Prepared to lay down life itself at any moment, one should serve the king attentively, for he is all-powerful and master of the lives and the wealth of all, therefore like a venomous snake. One should always be afraid to speak evil before the king, to sit gloomily or in irreverent postures, to wait in attitudes of disrespect, to walk disdainfully or display insolent gestures and motions of the limbs. If the king becomes gratified, he can shower prosperity like God. If he becomes enraged, he can consume a man to the very roots, like a blazing fire.

Yama said this, O Rajan. Its truth is seen in the affairs of the world. By these precepts, I will now do that which will enhance your prosperity. Friends like us can give you the aid of their intelligence in times of peril. They have killed my crow for serving you. I cannot, however, blame you for this. Those who killed this bird do not love you.

Ascertain who your friends are and who your enemies. Do everything yourself without surrendering your intelligence to others. I have incurred the hostility of your servants, who are all embezzlers and do not desire the good of your subjects. Conspiring with those among them who have constant access to you, they covet your kingdom by planning your downfall. However, on account of unforeseen circumstances, their designs have not succeeded.

Through fear of these men, O Rajan, I will leave this kingdom for some other refuge. I have no worldly desire, yet these deceitful men have shot this shaft at my crow, despatching the bird to Yama's abode. I have seen this, O king, with eyes whose vision tapasya has rendered keen.

With the help of this single crow I have crossed your kingdom that is like a river abounding with alligators, sharks, crocodiles and whales. Indeed, with the help of the bird, I have passed through your dominions as if to a Himalayan valley, impenetrable and inaccessible because of fallen tree trunks, scattered rocks, thorny shrubs, lions, tigers and other beasts of prey.

The learned say that a region inaccessible on account of darkness can be passed through with the aid of a torch and a wide river can be crossed by a boat. No means, however, exist for penetrating or passing through the maze of kingly affairs.

Your kingdom is like an inaccessible forest enveloped in darkness. When you who are the lord cannot trust it, how then can I? Here you view

good and evil in the same light, so staying here cannot be safe. Here a Dharmatman meets with death, while a sinner incurs no danger.

Justice requires that you slay a man of adharma but never a Dharmatman. It is not proper for me to stay long in this kingdom, and a sensible man should leave it quickly. There is a river called Sita, O Rajan, where boats sink. Your kingdom is like that, for a net of ruin seems to have been cast over it.

You are like the fall from the tree that awaits collectors of honey, or like delectable food containing poison. Your nature now resembles that of dishonest men, not the good. You are like a pit abounding with snakes of virulent venom, or a river full of sweet water but exceedingly difficult to access, because of its steep banks overgrown with kariras and thorny canes.

You are like a swan surrounded by dogs, vultures and jackals. Grassy parasites, deriving their sustenance from a mighty tree, swell into luxuriant growth and finally overspread it completely. A forest conflagration breaks out and, catching these grassy plants first, consumes the lordly tree along with them. Your ministers, O Rajan, resemble those parasites of which I speak. Check and correct them.

You have nourished them, but conspiring against you, they are destroying your prosperity. Concealing from you the faults of your servants, I live in your palace in constant dread, like a man inhabiting a room with a snake, or like the lover of a hero's wife.

My object is to ascertain the conduct of the king who is my fellow-lodger. I want to know whether he has his passions under control, whether his servants are obedient to him, whether they love their king and whether he loves his subjects. It is to ascertain all this that I have come to you.

As food to a hungry person, you have become dear to me. However, I dislike your ministers as one whose thirst, once slaked, feels averse to drink. They find fault with me because I seek your good—there is no other cause for their hostility towards me. I do not have any hostile intentions towards them. I am engaged only in pointing out their faults. As one fears a wounded snake, one should fear an evil-hearted enemy."

The king said, "Dwell in my palace, O Brahmana! I will always treat you with respect and honour and venerate you. They who dislike you will not live with me. You may do whatever is necessary to those of whom you have spoken. Ensure that the Dandaneeti is wielded appropriately and that

everything is orderly in my kingdom. Please reflect upon all this and guide me so that I obtain prosperity."

The sage said, "Shut your eyes to their first offence—the slaughter of my crow, and gradually weaken them one by one. Prove their faults and then strike them, one after another. When many men are guilty of the same offence, they can, by acting together, soften the very sharpness of thorns.

In the case of those of your ministers whom you suspect work against you and disclose your secret counsels, I advise you to proceed with caution. As for us, we are Brahmanas, naturally compassionate and unwilling to cause pain to anyone. We desire your good and also the good of others, just as we wish our own.

I speak of myself, O Rajan! I am your friend. I am known as the Rishi Kalakavrikshiya and I always adhere to truth. Your father regarded me affectionately as his friend. When this kingdom was in distress during your father's reign, I performed many tapasyas to drive it away, abandoning every other karma. I tell you this from my affection for you, so that you may not repeat the fault of reposing confidence in undeserving men. You have gained a kingdom without trouble, so reflect upon everything connected with its welfare. You have ministers in your kingdom but why, O Rajan, should you be guilty of negligence?"

After this, the king of Kosala chose a minister from the Kshatriya varna and appointed him as his minister and the sage Kalakavrikshiya, bull among Brahmanas, as his Purohita. Following these changes, Kshemadarsin, the king of Kosala, subjugated the whole earth and acquired great fame. The Rishi Kalakavrikshiya worshipped the Devas with many grand yagnas performed for the king. Having benefited from the Rishi's counsels and conquered the earth, the king of Kosala ruled his kingdom exactly as the Rishi directed.'"

CANTO 83

"Yudhishtira asks, 'What should be the characteristics, O Pitamaha, of the legislators, the ministers of war, the courtiers, the warlords and the counsellors of a king?'

Bhishma says, 'You should have as your legislators men of modesty, self-restraint, truthfulness and sincerity, who have the courage to say what is proper. O son of Kunti, for ministers of war at times of distress, look for those who like you and will be always by your side, who are courageous, by nature Munis, and are learned and persevering.

You should have as courtiers those who are of noble birth and who, treated with honour, always put forth their utmost powers for you, O Bhaarata, and who will never abandon you in good or bad times, sickness or death. You should employ as officers of your army, noble men born in your kingdom, who are wise, handsome, learned, dignified and loyal to you. Men of low descent and covetous dispositions, who are cruel and shameless, will court you only as long as they stand to gain from you.

The king should appoint as ministers in all his affairs those who are of good birth and conduct, who are shrewd and pragmatic, not cruel, and who always seek the good of their master. Those whom you have won over with gifts of wealth, honours, public regard, and whom you can regard as men from whom you will benefit in all your affairs, should always be given a share of your happiness.

Those who are steadfast, learned, well-behaved, large-hearted and truthful in speech, and those who observe solemn pledges, will always be

attentive to your affairs and will never abandon you. On the other hand, you should always restrain those who are disreputable, profligate, immoral and inclined to evil.

When you have to choose between two parties, you should not side with one man and abandon the majority. However, when one man's accomplishments transcend all the others', you should abandon the many for him. Ability, self-discipline and devotion to work that brings fame should be regarded as marks of superiority.

You should employ as your counsellors those who honour all able men, who are never jealous of persons of merit, who do not abandon dharma from the urges of kama, bhaya, krodha or lobha, who are humble, truthful in speech and forgiving in temper, who have their soul under control, who have dignity and whom you have tried in every situation.

High descent, purity of blood, forgiveness, sagacity and purity of soul, bravery, gratefulness and truth, O son of Pritha, are marks of superiority and goodness. A wise man who conducts himself thus will disarm his enemies and convert them into friends.

A king who has his atman under restraint, who is wise and who wants prosperity, should carefully examine the merits and flaws of his ministers. A king who wants prosperity and to shine among his contemporaries, should have for ministers men connected with his trusted friends who are noble, born in his own kingdom, incorruptible, untarnished by adultery and similar vices, well-tested, who belong to good families, are descendants of former ministers and are learned and humble.

The king should employ five men to look after his affairs who are intelligent, not proud, who have a pleasant disposition, who are energetic, patient, forgiving, pure, loyal, firm, courageous, mature, responsible, free from deceit, capable of hard work, and whose merits and faults have been well tried. The king should employ in all affairs of the kingdom men who are wise in speech, heroic, resourceful, of noble origin, truthful, intelligent, free from cruelty, pragmatic and who desire the good of their sovereign.

One who is lethargic and abandoned by friends can never work with perseverance. Such a man, if employed, fails in almost every business. A minister who possesses little learning, even if noble and attentive to dharma, artha and kama, becomes incompetent to choose a proper course of action. Similarly, a man of low descent, even if learned, will always err in all actions requiring dexterity and foresight, like a blind man without a

guide. A man who is indecisive, even if intelligent and learned, and even if he has the means, cannot be successful for long. An evil-hearted man who is not learned will set his hand to work but will fail to foresee the results of his work.

A king, should never repose trust in a minister who is not devoted to him and should, therefore, never disclose his counsels to such. An evil minister, combining with the other ministers of the king, can ruin his master, like a fire helped by the wind consuming a tree by entering its entrails through holes in its trunk. Giving way to rage, a master can one day pull down a servant from his office or reprove him in harsh words, and restore him to power again. None but a servant devoted to the master will endure and forgive such treatment.

Ministers can sometimes become highly offended with their royal masters. The king should consult in all his affairs only one who can control his resentment from a desire of doing good to his master and sharing with the king his good and ill fortune.

The king should never consult one who is crooked, even if he is devoted to his master, is clever and possesses numerous virtues. He who is allied with foes, and who does not regard the interests of the king's subjects, should be considered an enemy. The king should not consult him, or anyone who is not learned, who is not pure, who is arrogant, who courts the king's enemies, or is boastful, hostile, wrathful and covetous.

The king should not consult one who is a stranger, even if he is devoted to him and greatly learned in his affairs, although he may honour him and employ him. Nor should he ever consult a man whose father had been unjustly banished by royal edict, even if the king may have subsequently bestowed honours upon him and employed him. The king should not consult a well-wisher whose property he had once confiscated for a slight transgression, even if he has every accomplishment.

He who is a wise man, intelligent and learned, who is born within the kingdom, who is pure and righteous in all his actions, deserves to be consulted by the king. One who is knowledgeable and judicious, who understands the dispositions of his friends and enemies, who is like a second self to the king, deserves to be consulted. One who is truthful in speech, modest and mild, who is contented and honoured, truthful and dignified, who hates evil and bad men, who knows policy and is pragmatic

and courageous, and who is a hereditary servant of the king, deserves to be consulted.

The king who wants to rule according to the dictates of Dandaneeti, O Rajan, should consult those who are competent to win over all men by conciliation, in whom the inhabitants of both the capital and the provinces repose confidence for their dharma, who are competent to fight and who know the rules of policy.

Thus, the king should honour and appoint as his ministers men who have such qualities, who discern the dispositions of all and want to achieve great deeds. Their number also should not be less than three. The king should employ ministers to observe the lapses of their masters, of themselves, of subjects and of the foes of their lord.

The kingdom has its root in the counsels of policy that flow from ministers, and its growth proceeds from the same source. Ministers should work in such a way that the enemies of their monarch will not detect his lapses. On the other hand, when their shortcomings become visible, they should be prosecuted. Like the tortoise protecting its limbs by withdrawing them into its shell, ministers should keep their own counsels and conceal their lapses. Those ministers of a kingdom who can conceal their counsels are wise.

Counsels constitute the armour of a king and the limbs of his subjects and officers. A kingdom has its roots in spies and secret agents and its strength in counsels of policy. If master and ministers depend on one another for support, subduing pride, anger, vanity and envy, they will all become happy.

A king should also consult ministers who are free from the five kinds of deceit. He should ascertain first the different opinions of the three among them whom he has consulted, and for all subsequent deliberations consult his priest, informing him of their opinions and his own. His guru should be a Brahmana well versed in all matters of dharma, artha and kama, and the king should, with collected mind, ask his opinion. When he arrives at a decision after deliberation with his priest, the king should then carry it out impartially.

They who know the conclusions of the science of consultation say that kings should always hold consultation in this manner. Having settled counsels in this way, they should then be reduced to practice, for then they will be able to win over all the subjects.

There should be no dwarfs, hump-backed men, no one of an emaciated constitution, no lame or blind men, no idiots, no women or eunuchs in the place where the king holds his consultations. Nothing should move there: before or behind, above or below, or in transverse directions. Getting up on a boat, or going to an open and bare space without grass or undergrowth, from where he can clearly see the surrounding land, the king should hold his consultations at the proper time, avoiding faults of speech and gesture.'"

CANTO 84

"Bhishma says, 'An ancient tale has been told, O Yudhishtira, about a conversation between Brihaspati and Indra.

Indra asked Brihaspati, "O Maharishi, what single act should a man accomplish to become famous and an object of regard for everyone?"

Brihaspati replied, "Only by agreeable and pleasant speech, O Indra, can a man become an object of regard for all, acquire great celebrity and give happiness to all. With this sole skill, one can always obtain everybody's love. Everyone dislikes the man who does not speak a word, whose face is always furrowed with frowns and who cannot make agreeable conversation. He who, upon meeting others, addresses them first and does so with a smile, will please everyone.

Even gifts, if not made with pleasant words, are like rice without curry and do not delight the recipients, O Sakra, whereas if someone even takes away the possessions of men with sweet words, they become reconciled to the robbery. A king, therefore, even when he wants to punish, should use kind words. Sweetness of speech never fails in its purpose and never pains any heart. A man of good deeds and agreeable and pleasing words has no equal."

Thereafter, Indra began to follow the advice of his guru. O son of Kunti, you too should practise this virtue.'"

CANTO 85

"Yudhishtira asks, 'O greatest of kings, by what method can a ruler obtain great blessings and eternal fame?'

Bhishma says, 'A king of cleansed soul, who attends to the duty of protecting his subjects, by conducting himself as a man of dharma will earn merit and fame, both here and hereafter.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O wise one, tell me how a king should behave and with whom, for I believe that the desirable virtues which you have already described in a man, cannot be found to exist in any single individual.'

Bhishma says, 'You are very intelligent, O Yudhishtira; it is just as you say. A man who has all these good qualities is very rare. To be brief, such good conduct in one possessing all the virtues mentioned, is most difficult to find even after diligent searching. I will however, tell you what kind of ministers you should appoint.

Four Brahmanas, learned in the Vedas, dignified, belonging to the Snataka order, of untainted behaviour; eight physically strong Kshatriyas, capable of wielding weapons; twenty-one wealthy Vaisyas and three humble Sudras of pure conduct, devoted to their daily duties, and one of the Suta caste, with knowledge of the Puranas and the eight cardinal virtues, should be your ministers.

Each one of them should be fifty years of age, possess a sense of dignity, be free from envy, familiar with the Srutis and the Smritis, humble, impartial, competent to make ready decisions in the midst of disputes, suggesting different courses of action, free from covetousness and from the

seven dreadful vices called Vyasanas. The king should consult with those eight ministers and lead them. He should then publish, for the information of the subjects in his kingdom, the results of such deliberation.

You should always watch over your subjects and never confiscate what they deposit with you, or appropriate disputed things. Such conduct will tarnish the administration of justice, and you and your state will incur sin, instilling fear in your subjects akin to what little birds feel at the sight of a hawk. Your kingdom will then sink like a boat wrecked at sea. If a king governs his subjects without dharma, fear will take possession of his heart and the door of Swarga will be closed to him.

A kingdom, O Bharatarishabha, has its root in dharma. The minister or the king's son occupying the seat of justice who works without dharma, and those officers who, having accepted charge, act unjustly, moved by self-interest, all go to hell, along with the king himself. Those helpless men whom the powerful oppress and who lament piteously and copiously, look to the king for protection. In cases of dispute between two parties, the decision should be based upon the evidence of witnesses. If one of the disputants has no witnesses and is helpless, the king should give the case his best consideration.

The king should punish offenders according to the measure of their offences. The wealthy should be punished with fines and confiscations; the poor, with loss of liberty. He should mete out corporal punishments to those who are evil. He should cherish all good men with praise and gifts of wealth.

He who plans the death of the king should be punished with death, to be effected by varied methods. The same should be the punishment of one who becomes guilty of arson, or theft, or co-habitation with women which may lead to a confusion of varnas. A king who inflicts punishments appropriately according to the dictates of Dandaneeti, incurs no sin by the deed, but earns eternal merit. The foolish king who inflicts punishments capriciously earns infamy in this world and sinks into hell hereafter.

A king should not punish a man for the fault of another. A man should be convicted or acquitted, purely based upon the criminal law. A king should never slay an envoy under any circumstances, else he will go to hell with all his ministers. The king who espouses the Kshatriya code, if he kills an envoy who is only faithfully delivering the message entrusted to him,

stains the reputation of his ancestors with a sin equal to the sin of killing a foetus.

An envoy should possess these seven accomplishments: he should be of a noble family, eloquent and of sweet speech, faithful in delivering the message with which he is charged, clever and possessing a good memory. The king's bodyguard and the governor of his capital or citadel should have similar qualities.

The king's minister should know the conclusions of the shastras and be competent in directing wars and making treaties. He should also be intelligent, possess courage, be modest and capable of keeping secrets. He should also be of high birth, with a strong mind and pure in conduct. If he possesses these qualities, he should be regarded as worthy.

The commander of the king's forces, his Senapati, should possesses similar accomplishments. He should also be an expert in different kinds of battle array and in the uses of war engines and weapons. He should be able to bear exposure to rain, cold, heat and wind and remain watchful of the movements of his enemies.

The king, O Rajan, should be able to lull his foes into a false sense of security. He should not however, himself trust anyone, including his own son. I have now, O sinless one, explained to you what the conclusions of the shastras are. The refusal to trust anyone is said to be one of the highest mysteries of the ways of a king.'"

CANTO 86

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, in what kind of city should the king himself dwell? Should he select an already made one or should he get one constructed?'

Bhishma replies, 'It is proper, O Bhaarata, to enquire about the conduct one should follow and the defences that one should adopt for the city in which a king lives. I will talk to you about it, referring especially to the defences of forts, so that you will know and do what is necessary.

Keeping his eye on the six different kinds of citadels, the king should build his cities abounding in every kind of necessity and comfort. The six kinds are: water-citadels, surrounded on all sides by a river, earth-citadels, built on plains fortified with high walls and encircled with trenches; hill-citadels, human-citadels, unfortified cities properly protected by guards and a loyal population, mud-citadels and forest-citadels.

Along with ministers and an army completely loyal to him, the king should have a citadel with impenetrable walls and a trench. It should be well provisioned with an abundant stock of rice and weapons, teem with elephants, horses and chariots and be inhabited by skilled men also versed in the mechanical arts.

The city should have a population that is virtuous and clever in business and consists of strong and energetic men and animals. Blazing with beauty and resounding with music and song, it should contain many open squares and rows of well-stocked shops.

The houses where many brave and wealthy men live are all spacious and echo with the chant of Vedic hymns; there are frequent festivities and celebrations and the inhabitants always worship the gods. Here all men follow dharma, peace prevails and no danger exists. Dwelling here, the king should employ himself in filling his treasury, increasing his forces, enhancing the number of his friends and establishing courts of justice.

He should check all abuses and evils in his cities and his provinces and employ himself in filling his arsenals with care, in collecting provisions of every kind and increasing his store of rice and other grain, and in strengthening his councils with wise men. He should further enhance his supplies of fuel, iron, chaff, charcoal, timber, horns, bones, bamboo, marrow, oils and ghee, fat, honey, medicines, flax, resinous exudations, weapons, shafts, leather catgut for bow-strings, canes, strings and cords made of munja grass and other plants and creepers.

He should also increase the number of tanks and wells with large quantities of water, and protect all shady fruit trees. He should entertain with honour and attention acharyas of different sciences, Ritwijas, other priests, mighty bowmen, architects, astronomers, astrologers, physicians, all wise and intelligent men who are self-restrained, clever, courageous, learned, noble, energetic of mind and capable of close application to all kinds of work. He should honour men of dharma and punish the unrighteous.

Working with determination, the king should set the several varnas to their respective duties. Ascertaining diligently through spies the outward behaviour and the state of mind of the inhabitants of his city and provinces, he should take necessary action based on what he learns.

The king should himself supervise his spies and advisors, his treasury and the agencies for inflicting punishments, for everything depends upon these. With spies acting as his eyes, the king should watch all that his enemies do and intend, as well as his friends and neutrals. He should then carefully plan his own course of action, honouring those who are loyal to him and punishing those who are hostile.

The king should worship the Devas in yagnas and distribute gifts without hurting anybody. He should protect his subjects, never doing anything to obstruct or thwart dharma, always supporting and protecting the helpless, the masterless, the old and widows.

The king should honour Rishis and give them gifts of clothes, vessels and food at appropriate times. The king should take care to inform the Munis who live within his dominions of his own condition, of all his actions and of the state of the kingdom, and should always behave with humility in their presence. When he sees noble Rishis or Munis of high birth and great learning who have abandoned all earthly goods, he should honour them with gifts of food, beds and seats.

Whatever the nature of the distress into which he may fall, he should confide in a Rishi, for even robbers trust such men of character. The king should place his wealth in charge of a Muni and should glean wisdom from him. He should not, however, always show favour to such men or pay homage to them on all occasions, as it might expose them to robbers.

From among those living in his own kingdom, he should select one sage as a friend. Similarly, he should choose another Muni who lives in the kingdom of his foe, as a friend. He should pick a third from among those dwelling in the vana and a fourth from the kingdoms paying tribute to him. He should show hospitality, bestow honours and give them the means for their sustenance.

He should behave towards the Rishis dwelling in the kingdoms of his enemies and in the forests, in the same way as towards those who live in his own kingdom. Engaged in tapasya and rigid vows, they will, if calamity befalls the king and he solicits their protection, grant him his wish.

I have now summarized for you the features of the city in which the king should dwell.'"

CANTO 87

"Yudhishtira asks 'I want to know how a kingdom can be consolidated and protected. Tell me all about this, O Bharatarishabha!'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to me with concentrated attention while I tell you how this can be done. A headman should be selected for each village, and over ten headmen there should be one supervisor, and over two such supervisors there should be one officer who controls twenty villages. Above him should be appointed men to oversee a hundred villages, and above them officers who control a thousand villages.

The headman should ascertain the characteristics of everyone in the village and also all the faults that need correction. He should report everything to the supervisor above him in charge of ten villages, who again, should report the same to the officer above him, in charge of twenty villages. This officer, in his turn, should report the conduct of all men within his dominion to the one above him who is in charge of hundred villages.

The village headman should have control over all the produce and property of the village. Every headman should contribute his share for the use of the lord of ten villages, and the latter should do the same to support the lord of twenty villages. The lord of a hundred villages should receive every honour from the king and should have for his support a populous, wealthy and large village. Such a village, so assigned to a lord of hundred villages, should be within the control of the lord of a thousand villages.

The lord of thousand villages should have a minor town for himself and he should enjoy the grain, gold and other produce from it. He should perform all the duties that pertain to it, such as conduct of wars and other internal affairs.

A virtuous minister should exercise strict supervision over the administration and mutual relations of officers. Again, in every town, there should be an officer to attend to all matters in his jurisdiction. Like some fearsome planet moving above all the stars below, this officer should be placed with comprehensive powers over all the officers subordinate to him. He should ascertain the conduct of those under him through his spies and protect the people from all deceitful men, those of murderous disposition or evil deeds, robbers and those possessed by demons.

Taking note of sales and purchases, the state of the roads, stocks of food and clothing and the profits of traders, the king should levy taxes on them. He should first ascertain the extent of production, the receipts and expenses of those engaged in trade, and the condition of the arts, and only then levy taxes upon the various artisans.

The king can levy high taxes, O Yudhishtira, but never such that will emasculate his people. He should levy no tax on a product without ascertaining the output and the amount of labour that has gone into it, for nobody will produce anything without a sufficient margin of profit. The king should thoughtfully levy taxes so that both he and the man who produces the article taxed share the profit.

The king should not, on account of greed, destroy his own foundations along with those of others. He should always avoid deeds which will make his people detest him, and try instead to win their approval. Subjects hate a ruler who is rapacious in the matter of taxes and levies. How can a king who becomes an object of hatred have prosperity? Such a ruler can never acquire any wealth.

An intelligent king should treat his kingdom like a calf. If you permit the calf to suckle, it grows strong and can carry heavy loads. If, on the other hand, O Yudhishtira, you milk the cow too much, the calf grows up weak and incapable of doing much work for the owner. Similarly, if you drain the kingdom, the subjects fail to prosper. The king who protects his kingdom himself, is considerate to his subjects in the matter of taxes and duties, and collects only what he can easily obtain, will achieve great success.

This should not lead to the king obtaining so much wealth that the entire kingdom becomes his treasury and his treasury becomes his bedchamber. If the inhabitants of the cities and the provinces are poor, the king should show them compassion to the best of his powers, whether they are dependent upon him or not.

The king should punish all bandits who infest the outskirts of his villages, protect his people and make them happy. The subjects then become partners in the king's welfare and feel exceedingly obliged to him.

To accumulate wealth in the first instance, the king should visit the prosperous areas of his kingdom, one after the other, and endeavour to alarm the people. He should tell them, "Calamity threatens us and there is a great danger from our enemies. However, there is every reason to hope that the danger will pass, for the enemy, like a bamboo that has flowered, will very soon meet his end. Many enemies of mine have combined with a large number of brigands to destroy our kingdom. In view of this imminent danger, I need your wealth to devise your protection. When the danger passes, I will return what I now take.

Remember, our enemies will not give back what they will forcibly take from you if unopposed, but will kill all your relatives, even your wives. You desire wealth only for the sake of your children and wives. I am glad at your prosperity and I entreat you as I would my own children, allow me to take from you what is within your power to give. I do not wish to trouble any one, but in times of calamity and danger, wealth should not be so dear to you and you should, like strong bulls, bear such burdens."

A king who understands the circumstances that change with time, should send his agents to collect taxes from his people with agreeable, sweet and complimentary words. He should point out to the Vaisyas of his realm the need for him to repair his fortifications and to meet the expenses of his establishment and other heads, alarm them with an impending foreign invasion and impress them with the need for protection which will allow them to live in peace. If he disregards them, they will abandon his dominions, take to the forests and become lost to him. He should therefore behave with leniency towards the Vaisyas, conciliate and protect them, give them a sense of security and always do what is agreeable to them, to ensure that they enjoy their possessions.

The king, O Bhaarata, should always work in such a way towards the Vaisyas that their productive powers can grow. Since the Vaisyas increase

the strength of a kingdom, improve its agriculture and develop its trade, a wise king should always gratify them. Acting with thoughtfulness and leniency, he should levy mild taxes upon them. It is always easy to behave with kindness towards the Vaisyas, as there is nothing more profitable for a kingdom.'"

CANTO 88

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what the king should do if, despite his great wealth, he desires more.'

Bhishma replies, 'A king who wants to earn religious merit should devote himself, to the best of his abilities, to the good of his subjects and protect them, taking existing circumstances into account. He should adopt all such measures in his dominions that he estimates will secure their mutual good.

A king should exploit his kingdom like a bee gathering honey from plants, without injuring the source. He should be like a dairy farmer, who milks his cow without injuring her udders, or starving her calf. In the matter of taxes, the king should work like the leech drawing blood mildly. He should conduct himself towards his subjects like a tigress carrying her cubs, touching them with her teeth but never piercing them. He should be like a mouse, which, despite having sharp and pointed teeth, nibbles the feet of sleeping animals in such a manner that they remain unaware of it.

A flourishing subject should be shorn little by little, the demand increased gradually until what is taken assumes a fair proportion. The king should enhance the burden of his subjects by degrees, like a man gradually increasing the load on a young bullock. If in the end he gently and carefully puts the harness on them, they will accept it without complaint.

Indeed, adequate measures should be employed for making the people obedient, for mere entreaties will not reduce them to subjection. Since it is impossible to behave equally towards all men, the common people should

be compelled to be obedient by appeasing their leaders. After using the leaders to bring about disunity among the people who bear the burden, the king should himself come forward to conciliate them. He will then be able to enjoy without trouble what he can extract from them.

The king should never enforce taxes unreasonably and on men unable to bear them. He should impose them progressively, at the proper time, formally and with conciliation. The methods that I tell you are legitimate means of Rajadharma, and are not considered deceitful.

He who wants to control horses by violent methods only makes them furious. Drinking shops, public women, pimps, actors, gamblers and keepers of gambling houses and others of this kind, who are sources of disorder to the state, should all be checked. Dwelling within the realm, they cause trouble and harm the better class of subjects.

Manu himself in the olden days has laid down the injunction that nothing should be asked of anyone when there is no distress. If all men were to abstain from work and take to demanding and begging, the world would certainly come to a stop.

The king alone is competent to control and regulate. Since the Srutis declare that the king who does not restrain his subjects earns a fourth part of the sins that they commit, due to the absence of royal protection, he should check his subjects who are sinful. The king who neglects to restrain them becomes sinful and earns a fourth part of their sins, just as he would otherwise have earned a fourth part of their merits. The evil that a man governed by passion will do will impoverish everyone. Such men, capable of anything, indulge in stimulants and meat, appropriate the wives and the wealth of other men, and set a bad example for others.

Those who do not live on alms may beg in times of distress. The king should observe true dharma and give gifts to them from compassion, but not from fear. Let there be neither beggars nor robbers in your kingdom. It is robbers, not virtuous men, who give alms to beggars, for such givers are not real benefactors of men.

Let the men who live in your dominions be such as advance the interests of others and bring them benefit, not such as exterminate them. The officers who take from subjects more than what is due, Rajan, should be punished and replaced by others who will collect only what is due.

Agriculture, rearing of cattle, trade and other work of similar nature should be popularized, based on the principle of the division of labour. If a

man engaged in agriculture, cattle-rearing or trade feels a sense of insecurity on account of thieves and tyrannical officers, the king will be disgraced. He should always honour his subjects who are rich and say to them, “Advance the interest of the people with me.”

In every kingdom, the wealthy are assets to the realm and without doubt constitute its foremost estate. He who is wise or courageous, wealthy or influential, righteous, engaged in penances, truthful in speech or gifted with intelligence, assists in protecting his fellow men.

For these reasons, O Rajan, love everyone and display the qualities of truth, sincerity, absence of anger and abstention from doing injury. You should wield the Dandaneeti and swell your treasury, support your forces and friends and thus consolidate your kingdom!’”

CANTO 89

"Bhishma says, 'Do not cut down the fruit trees in your dominions, Yudhishtira. Fruits and roots are the property of the Brahmanas. The sages have declared this to be a law of dharma. The surplus, after supporting the Brahmanas, should go to meet the needs of other people. Nobody should take anything by doing an injury to Brahmanas.

If a Brahmana wants to leave the kingdom because he has been unable to find any livelihood in it, the king should, with affection and respect, provide him the means of sustenance. If he still wants to leave, the king should call an assembly of Brahmanas and say, "If such a Brahmana leaves the kingdom, the people lose in him a friend, teacher and guru. In whom will my people then find an authority to guide them?" If even after this, he does not give up his intention to leave, the king should ask his forgiveness and say to him, "Forget the past."

This, O son of Kunti, is the eternal way of Rajadharma. The king should further tell him, "Indeed, O Brahmana, people say that only as much should be assigned to a Brahmana as will be just sufficient to maintain him. I do not accept this opinion, but think rather that a Brahmana should be given the means to procure even items of luxury, if he so wishes," and he should be requested to stay.

Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade provide all men with the means of livelihood. Knowledge of the Vedas however, provides them with the means to reach heaven. Therefore, one regards those who obstruct the study of the Vedas and Vedic practices as enemies of society. It is for their extermination

that Brahma created Kshatriyas. Subdue your foes, protect your subjects, worship the Devas in sacrifices and fight battles with courage, O Kurupravira!

A king should shield those who deserve protection, and he who does this is the best of rulers. The kings who do not exercise this duty live in vain.

For the benefit of his subjects, the king should always try to discover the behaviour and thoughts of all, through informers and secret agents. Look after your people, O Yudhishtira: protect others from your own, your own from others, others from others and your own from your own.

Wise men say that everything has its root in the self. The king should first protect himself and then the earth. The king should always reflect upon what his shortcomings are, what bad habits he is addicted to, and what the sources of his weakness and faults are. He should employ trusted agents to wander through the kingdom and ascertain whether his conduct of the previous day has met with the approbation of the people of the provinces, and whether or not he has earned a good name in his kingdom.

Among those who are wise and virtuous, Yudhishtira, you should not disregard those who never retreat from battle, those who do not live in your kingdom, those who are dependent on you, those who are independent of anyone, those who are your ministers and those who praise or blame you. No man can earn the good opinion of everybody in the world, since everyone has friends, foes and those who are neutrals.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'Among men equal in might of arms and accomplishments, how does one gain superiority over all the others and succeed in ruling over them?'

Bhishma replies, 'Creatures that are mobile devour things that are immobile; animals that have teeth devour those that have no teeth; poisonous snakes devour smaller ones of their own species. Similarly, among human beings too, the king who is strong preys upon weaker ones. He should always pay attention to his subjects and his enemies, or else they will fall upon him like vultures.

Take care, Yudhishtira, that the imposition of heavy taxes does not crush the traders in your kingdom. They buy diverse goods at varying prices, high and low, to sell, and in the course of their journeys have to seek repose in forests and inaccessible areas and undergo many privations.

Let not your farmers desert your kingdom due to oppression, for they, too, bear the burdens of the king and support the other inhabitants of your land. The gifts you make in this world support the Devas, Pitris, Manushyas, Nagas, Rakshasas, birds and animals. These are the methods of governing a kingdom and protecting its rulers. I will talk to you again on the subject, O son of Pandu!'"

CANTO 90

"Bhishma says, 'I will tell you now, O Yudhishtira, everything that Utathya of Angirasa's race, the leading authority on the Vedas, once told Yuvanaswa's son, King Mandhatri.

Utathya said, "One becomes a king in the interests of dharma and not to indulge in caprice. Understand this, O Rajan: the king is indeed the protector of the world. If he acts righteously, he attains the position of a Deva and goes to heaven, and if he does not, he sinks into hell. All creatures rely upon dharma, which in its turn, depends upon the monarch. The ruler, therefore, who upholds dharma is truly a king.

The king who is a Dharmatman and has every kind of grace is said to be an embodiment of virtue. If a king fails to punish adharma, the Devas desert his palace and he comes to be defamed among men. The efforts of men who observe their swadharma will always be crowned with success. For this reason, all men seek to obey the dictates of dharma, which is the root of prosperity. When one continues to sin, adharma increases greatly and righteousness comes to an end.

The scriptures lay down that when one does not restrain adharma, no one can claim the rights of property and say, 'This is mine and this is not mine.' Men cannot enjoy ownership of their wives, animals, fields and houses; the Devas receive no worship, the Pitris no offerings, the Atithis no hospitality; the Dvijas do not study the Vedas or observe great vratas, or perform yagnas. When one does not restrain adharma, the human mind becomes weak and confused, O Rajan, like the minds of wounded men.

The Rishis, with their eyes on both worlds, made the king the superior being, intending him to be the embodiment of dharma on earth. They called him Rajan—one in whom righteousness shines. The king in whom there is no dharma they call a Vrishala. Divine dharma or righteousness has another name, Vrisha, and he who weakens Vrisha is Vrishala. All creatures grow in the development of righteousness and decay with its decline. A king should, therefore, advance the cause of dharma, and should never permit it to deteriorate.

We call righteousness dharma because it fosters the acquisition and preservation of wealth—dhana. The Rishis have declared, O Rajan, that dharma restrains and limits all evil actions of men. The Swayambhuva Brahma created dharma for the advancement and growth of men. So a king must work according to the dictates of dharma—the greatest of all things, for the benefit of his subjects.

The best of men who rules his subjects righteously is called a king. Disregard kama and krodha, and observe the dictates of dharma. It is the greatest above all things, O Naravyaghra, that contribute to the prosperity of kings. Dharma, again, has sprung from the Brahmana. For this reason, one should always revere the Brahmana. You should humbly satisfy the wishes of Brahmanas, O Mandhatri. By neglecting to fulfill their wishes, the king draws danger to himself, because he fails to gain any more friends, while his enemies increase in number.

Once upon a time, Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, became enraged and left the Asura Bali—the son of Virochana, with whom she dwelt—because of his malice towards the Brahmanas, and went to Indra, the chief of the Devas. Seeing the goddess living with Indra, Bali was filled with vain regret. This is what comes of malice and pride. Wake up, O Mandhatri, so that the Devi of prosperity does not desert you in wrath!

The Srutis declare that Adharma fathered on Lakshmi Devi a son named Ahamkara, Pride. This Ahamkara led many amongst the Devas and the Asuras to ruin. Many Rajarishis also suffered destruction due to him. Wake up O Rajan! He who can conquer Ahamkara becomes a king, while he whom Ahamkara conquers becomes a slave. If you wish for a life of eternal happiness, live as a king who does not indulge in these two—Ahamkara and Adharma.

Abstain from becoming friends with one who is proud, dishonest, mocks faith, or is cold-blooded, and on no account keep company with

anyone who has all of these faults. Keep yourself aloof from ministers whom you have once punished, from women too, and stay away from mountains, uneven lands, inaccessible fastnesses, elephants, horses and poisonous snakes.

You should also give up wandering in the night, and avoid being stingy, vain, boastful or angry. Never have intercourse with those who are lewd or of ambiguous sex, unknown women, the wives of other men or virgins. When the king does not restrain vice, a confusion of castes follows and sinful Rakshasas, hermaphrodites, crippled children, or thick-tongued imbeciles and idiots begin to take birth even in respectable families.

Therefore the king should take particular care to act with dharma for the benefit of his subjects. If he acts thoughtlessly, great evil follows and adharma increases, causing a confusion of castes. Cold sets in during the summer months and disappears when its proper season comes. Drought, flood and pestilence afflict the people. Ominous stars arise, terrifying comets appear and other portents are seen, indicating destruction of the kingdom.

If the king does not take measures for his own safety and protect his subjects, the latter meet with destruction, followed by the king himself. Two men get together to snatch the wealth of a single individual, many join hands to rob them in turn, and men rape maidens. One says that such a state of affairs arises from the king's fault in abandoning dharma and being thoughtless, and consequently, all rights of property and dhana come to an end among men.'"

CANTO 91

'Utathya said, "If Indra, the Deva of the clouds, ensures rain at the right season, and if the king works with dharma, the prosperity that follows will bring happiness to his subjects. The washerman who does not know how to wash out the dirt from cloth without fading it is not skilled in his profession. The king becomes a Sudra, as among the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas or Vaisyas, one who has disregarded the proper duties of his varna can be compared to a washerman.

Menial service is for the Sudra; agriculture for the Vaisya; the Dandaneeti for the Kshatriya; and Brahmacharya, penances, mantras and truth for the Brahmana. The Kshatriya who knows how to correct the faults in the behaviour of the other varnas and to wash them clean like a washerman, is really their father and deserves to be their king.

The four yugas called Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali are all dependent on the conduct of the king, O Bharatarishabha, for it is he who constitutes the yuga. The four varnas, the Vedas and the dharma of the four varnasramas, all become confused and weakened when the king behaves carelessly. The three kinds of Agni, the three Vedas and yagnas with dakshina, all are lost when the king becomes heedless.

The king is the creator of all creatures and he is their destroyer. One regards the king who is a Dharmatman as the creator, and a sinful king as the destroyer. The king's wives, sons, kinsmen and friends all become unhappy and grieve when the king becomes neglectful. Elephants, horses,

cattle, camels, mules, asses and all other animals lose their vigour when the king becomes unrighteous.

Brahma created Shakti, which the king represents, O Mandhatri, in order to protect weakness. He who defends the weak wins heaven, while he who persecutes weakness goes to hell. Weakness is indeed a great being, for everything depends upon it.

All men worship the king and are the children of the king. If, therefore, the king takes the path of adharma, all men come to grief. One should regard as terrible the reproachful eye of the weak, the curse of a Muni and the bite of a deadly poisonous snake. Do not, therefore, make an enemy of the weak, or forget that the weak are always subject to humiliation. Make sure that the curse of the helpless does not turn you and your kinsmen to ashes. No children are born in a lineage which has been cursed by the weak, for they destroy the family to its very roots. Hence, do not earn the ill-will of the weak, for weakness is more powerful than even the greatest power and can even totally exterminate it.

If one who has been humiliated or beaten cries out in vain for help and fails to obtain a protector, divine punishment will overwhelm the king and destroy him. While you enjoy power, do not take wealth from the weak. Take care that the curses of the weak do not burn you like a blazing fire. The tears shed by men wronged through falsehood slay the children and livestock of those who have lied.

A sin does not produce immediate consequences. It is like a cow, and the sinner has to wait for milk till it calves. If the effects are not evident in the sinner himself, one notices it later in his progeny or descendants. When a weak person fails to find a protector, divine punishment falls on the king. When distress reduces all subjects of a king to penury and obliges them to live by begging like Brahmanas, it will bring destruction upon the king.

When all the officers of the king posted in the provinces unite and act unjustly, it is the king who becomes responsible for the great evil that will visit his kingdom. When his officers, by unfair means, or from kama or lobha, extort wealth from men who piteously solicit mercy, then a great destruction is sure to befall the king.

O Mandhatri, when a mighty tree first sprouts into life and grows large, numerous creatures come and seek its shelter. When, however, it is cut down or consumed in a fire, all those who took shelter become homeless.

When the subjects of a kingdom perform righteous deeds, carry out religious rites and applaud the good qualities of the king, the latter reaps the rewards. On the other hand, if they take to adharma, due to ignorance, the king will suffer. When you allow sinful men, known for their misdeeds, to move among the righteous without being punished, Kali then overpowers the rulers of those realms; while the king who punishes all evil men thrives in prosperity.

The king who pays proper honours to his ministers, employs them in matters of policy and in battles, enjoys the wide earth forever and his kingdom certainly thrives. The ruler who duly rewards all good work and words, earns great merit. Enjoyment of good things after sharing them with others, paying proper respect to the ministers and subjugating vain and powerful men, constitute the responsibility of a king.

Protecting all men by words and physically by deeds and pardoning no one who has committed an offence, be it even his own son, constitute the great obligation of the king. To share his possessions with those who are weak and thereby to increase their strength, to support them and protect the kingdom, to exterminate thieves and to conquer on the battlefield, embody the duty of the king.

Never to forgive anyone, however dear, if he has offended by deed or word, constitutes the mahadharma of the king. His duty is to protect those who seek shelter, as he would his own children, never to deprive anyone of the honours to which he is entitled, to worship the Devas with devotion in yagnas completed by gifts and to subdue lust and envy.

His duty is also to wipe the tears of the distressed, the helpless and the old and to make them rejoice, to praise friends, to weaken foes and to honour the good, and to observe with alacrity the obligations of truth. To make gifts of land, to entertain guests and to support dependants are also duties of the king.

The king who shows favours to the deserving and disciplines those who deserve punishment, earns great merit both here and hereafter. He is Yama himself, O Mandhatri, the Deva incarnate to all, because they expect everything from him. By controlling his senses he will acquire great wealth and by not subduing them, he incurs sin.

The duty of the king is to pay proper honours to Ritwijas, priests and gurus and to do good work for them. Yama governs all creatures with an even hand, without prejudice. The king should do the same in dealing with

all his subjects. It is said that the king resembles the thousand-eyed Indra in every respect, and that one should regard as righteous those whom Indra regards as such, O Bharatarishabha.

You should carefully cultivate forgiveness, intelligence, patience and love towards all creatures. You should also ascertain the strengths and weakness of men and learn to distinguish between right and wrong. Conduct yourself with propriety towards all, give gifts and say agreeable and sweet words. You should maintain the people of your city and the provinces in happiness.

A king who is not clever will never be able to protect his subjects. Sovereignty is a very happy burden to bear, but only a wise and courageous king who knows Dandaneeti can protect a kingdom. One who is without energy and intelligence, and who is not well versed in this great science, is incompetent to bear the burden of sovereignty.

Aided by handsome, learned and devoted ministers of noble birth, who are clever in business, you should examine the hearts and actions of all men, including the Rishis in the vana. If you conduct yourself in this manner, you will be able to learn the duties of all varnasramas. This will help you to observe your svadharma when you are in your country, or when you go to other lands.

Among dharma, artha and kama, dharma—virtue—is the greatest, and a dharmatman obtains great happiness both here and hereafter. If you treat men with respect, they will even, for the sake of the honour you give them, abandon their own wives and sons.

A king can win great prosperity by attracting good men to himself by such favours as gifts, sweet words, thoughtfulness and purity of behaviour. Do not, therefore, O Mandhatri, take these qualities and actions lightly.

The king should never be unconcerned about his own shortcomings or those of his enemies. He should act in such a way that his foes are not able to detect his lapses and he should attack them when theirs become evident. This is the way in which Indra, Yama, Varuna and all the Rajarishis have fought. Do you likewise, O Rajan, quickly adopt this behaviour and take the heavenly road which the Rajarishis followed. The Devas, the Rishis, the Pitris and the Gandharvas, of great tejas, sing the praises, both here and hereafter, of the king whose conduct accords with dharma.”’

Bhishma continues, ‘Mandhatri unhesitatingly did as Utathya directed and became the sole lord of the wide earth. Therefore, O Rajan, take the

path of dharma like Mandhatri. After ruling the earth, you will find a home in Swarga.'"

CANTO 92

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, how should a righteous king behave who wants to adhere to the path of dharma?'

Bhishma replies, 'An old story has been told of what the wise, all-knowing, mahatapasvin Rishi Vamadeva related long ago to the knowledgeable, courageous and chaste king, Vasumanas, who entreated him, "Guide me, O holy one, in morality, on how I should conduct myself, so that I do not fall away from the dharma prescribed for me."

The mahatapasvin Vamadeva said to the handsome golden-complexioned Vasumanas of great tejas, seated at his ease like Yayati, son of Nahusha, "Act with dharma, as there is nothing superior to righteousness. The kings who are righteous are able to conquer the whole world. The king who regards dharma to be the most effective means to accomplish his objectives, and who conducts himself according to the counsels of men of dharma, blazes forth with righteousness. The king who disregards dharma and works with brute force soon falls away from righteousness and loses both dharma and artha.

His subjects should slay that king with his entire family who acts on the advice of a vicious and sinful minister and thus destroys dharma. The ruler who is not competent to discharge his duties of Rajaneeti, whom caprice governs in all actions and who brags, very soon meets with destruction, even if he happens to be the ruler of all the earth.

On the other hand, the king who wants prosperity, who is free from malice, who has his senses under control and who is gifted with

intelligence, thrives and is prosperous, like the ocean swelling with the waters discharged into it by a hundred rivers. He should never regard himself as possessing enough virtue, pleasures, wealth, intelligence and friends.

Upon these depends the conduct of the world. By listening to these counsels, a king gains fame, achievements, prosperity and subjects. Devoted to dharma, the king who seeks wealth only by such means and who begins all his enterprises after reflecting on their objectives will obtain great prosperity. The king who is illiberal, without affection, who inflicts undue punishments on his subjects and is rash in his actions, soon meets with destruction. The king who is not intelligent fails to see his own faults. Covered with dishonour in this world, he sinks into hell hereafter.

If the king pays due honour to those who deserve it, gives gifts and, recognizing the value of sweet words, always uses them, his subjects will take on any calamities that might overcome him, as if these had fallen upon themselves.

The king who has no acharya to instruct him on the ways of dharma, who never asks others for advice and who seeks to acquire wealth as his fancy suggests, will not long enjoy happiness, while one who listens to the instructions of his gurus in matters of dharma, who supervises the affairs of his kingdom himself, and whom dharma guides in all his acquisitions, will possess happiness for a long time.'"

CANTO 93

'Vamadeva continued, "When a powerful king behaves with adharma towards the weak, others, including his descendents, emulate his conduct. The universal imitation of such a king soon brings destruction upon the kingdom.

While men in general will accept as a role model in conduct a king who observes his proper duties, his very kinsfolk will not tolerate a king who strays from dharma. The rash king who disregards the injunctions of the shastras and rules his kingdom high-handedly very soon meets with ruin.

The shastras say that the Kshatriya who does not follow the conduct observed traditionally by other Kshatriyas, victor or vanquished, fails in his dharma. Having captured in battle a royal foe who had done some favour to the conqueror in the past, if he, out of malice, does not pay him honour, he has failed in his Kshatriya dharma.

The king should display his power, live happily and do what is necessary in times of danger. Such a ruler becomes beloved of all and prosperity never abandons him. If you do a disservice to anyone, you should, when the opportunity arises, make amends and do him some favour.

He whom no one loves becomes an object of love if he does what is pleasant. Avoid empty words. You should do good to others without being asked, and never abandon dharma from kama or krodha. Do not reply harshly when someone questions you, or speak in an undignified manner. Never be in a hurry to do anything, or indulge in malice. This is how you can win over an enemy.

You should neither be overcome with joy when anything agreeable occurs, nor overwhelmed with sorrow when anything unpleasant happens. Never be grieved when you face financial distress, and always remember the dharma of doing good to your subjects. The kind king who does what is beneficial will succeed in all his endeavours and remain prosperous.

The king should always cherish the devoted servant who works for his benefit and refrains from doing anything to injure his master. He should appoint to all great affairs of his kingdom devoted men who have control over their senses, who are loyal, virtuous and competent. In addition, they should please the king and should never be thoughtless in looking after his interests. The king loses his prosperity if he appoints to important offices foolish men who are slaves to their senses, covetous, disreputable, deceitful, hypocritical, malicious, evil, ignorant, low-minded, or drunkards, gamblers, womanizers or addicted to shikar.

The king who first protects himself and then others who deserve protection, will have the satisfaction of finding his subjects growing in prosperity and will attain greatness. He should watch over the conduct and deeds of other kings, so that he can gain superiority over them through devoted secret agents. Having injured a powerful king, he should not develop a false sense of security by the great distance between them. Such an affronted king could very well fall upon him like a hawk swooping down upon its prey. A ruler who has consolidated his power and is confident of his own strength should attack a neighbour who is weaker than himself, never one who is stronger.

A king devoted to dharma, having acquired the sovereignty of the earth by his prowess, should protect his subjects righteously and destroy his enemies in battle. In this world, everything is destined for destruction, as nothing here is durable. But one who pays heed to five imperatives is the best of kings and will succeed in safeguarding and enlarging his kingdom. These five are defence of forts, administration of justice, conduct of war, consultations on questions of policy and keeping subjects happy.

It is impossible however, for one man alone to oversee all these matters. Handing over such supervision to his ministers, a king can rule the earth forever. The people want a liberal man as their king who shares all objects of enjoyment with others, who has a mild disposition, who is virtuous and who will never abandon his subjects.

People in the world obey one who accepts wise advice, abandoning his own opinions. The ruler who does not tolerate and attend to the advice of a well-wisher because it is contrary to his own views, and who does not follow the conduct of mighty and noble men, victor or vanquished, strays from the path of the Kshatriya dharma.

The king should always be careful to protect himself, from ministers whom he has earlier punished, from the arts of women, and while he is climbing mountains or entering inaccessible regions such as forests and wooded valleys. He should not ride untamed elephants or horses and should guard himself against poisonous reptiles.

The king who, abandoning his chief ministers, favours base men, soon falls into difficulties and never fulfills his plans. The weak-souled ruler who yields to the influence of anger and malice and does not love and honour his kinsmen who have noble qualities, lives on the very verge of destruction; while the king who attaches to himself accomplished men by showing them favour, even though he might not like them at heart, enjoys lasting fame.

Never impose taxes unseasonably. You should neither grieve if anything disagreeable occurs, nor rejoice exceedingly if anything agreeable happens. Try and accomplish good deeds. Ascertain who among the dependent kings is truly devoted to you, who is loyal to you from fear, and who among them has faults.

Even a powerful king should not trust a weak one, for in moments of inattentiveness the weak may assail the powerful like a flock of vultures seizing their prey. A sinful man seeks to injure his master even if the latter is sweet-tempered and possesses every virtue. Do not, therefore, place your confidence in such men. In declaring the mysteries of Rajaneeti, Nahusha's son Yayati said that a ruler should slay enemies who are contemptible.'"

CANTO 94

'Vamadeva said, "The king should win victories without battles. The wise do not speak highly of victories that wars achieve, O Rajan. Till a king's sovereignty is established, it is not proper for him to make any new conquests.

The authority of a king is established when his dominions are wide and abound with wealth, when he has a large number of officers and his subjects are loyal and contented. Even with a small force, a king can subjugate the very earth, if his soldiers are happy with pay and plunder and are competent to deceive foes. The power of the king is established when his subjects, whether of the cities or the provinces, have compassion for all creatures, are wealthy and possess grain.

When the king thinks that his power is greater than that of an enemy, he should intelligently set out to acquire the latter's territories and wealth. A king whose resources are increasing, who is compassionate to all creatures, who never loses time by procrastination and who is careful in protecting himself, makes progress indeed. The king who betrays his own innocent people injures himself like a man cutting down a forest with an axe. If he does not always attend to the task of slaying his foes, they will not diminish. The king who knows how to control his own temper will have no enemies. If he is wise, he will never do anything that good men disapprove. He will, on the other hand, always engage himself in work that will benefit him and others.

The king who, having accomplished all his duties, is happy in the approval of his own conscience, has never to incur the reproach of others nor feel any regrets. The monarch who observes such conduct towards men will subjugate both the worlds and enjoy the fruits of victory."'

Bhishma continues, 'King Vasumanas did as Vamadeva directed him. Without doubt, you, too, by following such advice will conquer both worlds.'"

CANTO 95

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, how should a Kshatriya who has conquered another Kshatriya in battle behave after the victory?'

Bhishma replies, 'The sovereign, with or without an army at his back, should enter the dominions of the king he has subjugated and say to all the people, "I am your king and I will always protect you. Give me just tribute or encounter me in battle."

If the people accept him as their king, there is no need to fight, for kings should only fight other kings. If men who are not Kshatriyas by birth show signs of hostility, he should restrain them by every means, as the shastras do not prescribe the practice of warfare for them. People of the other varnas sometimes do take up arms to resist the invader if they find that their Kshatriyas are unarmed, unprepared and afraid to protect them.'

Yudhishtira says 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, how a Kshatriya king should conduct himself in war against another Kshatriya king.'

Bhishma replies, 'A Kshatriya must not put on armour to fight another Kshatriya who is not clad in mail. He should engage him in single combat and stop when the opponent is disabled. If the enemy comes clad in mail, he should also put on mail. If the enemy advances with an army, he should, taking his own army, challenge him to battle.

If the enemy fights with deceit, he should be similarly met. If, on the other hand, he fights fairly, you should engage him by fair means. You should not ride on horseback against a war chariot, for only a Maharatha

should battle another Maharatha. You should not attack an unhorsed enemy, a vanquished opponent, one who has lost his chariot or weapons, or one who is frightened.

Neither poisoned nor barbed arrows should be used, as these are the weapons of the evil. You should fight righteously, without yielding to anger or wanting to kill. You should not slay a weak or wounded man; one who does not have an heir; one whose weapon has broken; one who is wounded; one whose bow-string has been cut; or one who has lost his ratha. You should send a wounded opponent to his own home or, if you bring him to your own, you should get skilful surgeons to attend to his wounds.

When, in a battle between kings who follow dharma, a righteous warrior is wounded and falls, you should have his wounds attended to and, when healed, you should set him free. This is the eternal duty and Manu, the son of the Swayambhuva Brahma, has said that battles should be fought fairly. The upright should always be righteous towards those who follow dharma, adhering to it without destroying it.

If a Kshatriya, whose duty is to fight nobly, wins a victory by adharma, he becomes sinful. A man of deceitful conduct in effect kills himself, for he practises evil. Even those who are iniquitous should be subdued only by fair means.

It is better to lay down your life in the observance of dharma, than to win victory by sin. O Rajan, sin when committed does not produce its effects immediately but overwhelms the sinner after eating away his roots and branches. A sinful man acquiring wealth by sinful means rejoices greatly, but in the process becomes wedded to sin. Thinking that dharma has no value, he jeers at men of upright conduct. Disbelieving in dharma, he meets in the end with destruction. Though enmeshed in Varuna's noose, he still regards himself immortal.

Like a large leather bag puffed up with wind, the sinner dissociates himself entirely from dharma. Soon, however, he disappears like a tree on the riverside washed away from its very roots. Then people compare him to an earthen pot broken on a stony surface and say that he deserved it. The king should, therefore, seek both victory and enrichment by just means.'"

CANTO 96

"Bhishma says, 'A king should never try to subjugate the earth through adharma, even if it makes him the supreme sovereign. Which king will rejoice after having won victory by unfair means? A victory achieved through adharma is uncertain and never leads to Swarga because, O Bharatarishabha, it weakens both the king and the country.

A warrior whose armour has fallen off, or who begs for quarter saying, "I am yours," or by joining his hands has surrendered, should simply be captured, never killed. If the troops of the invader vanquish a hostile king, the invader should not himself fight his vanquished enemy. On the other hand, he should bring him to his palace and for a whole year, try and persuade him to admit, "I am your slave!" Whether he says this or not, the vanquished enemy, by living for a year in the house of his victor, gains a new lease of life.

If a king brings by force a maiden from his vanquished foe's house, he should keep her for a year and ask her whether she will marry him or anyone else in his kingdom. If she does not agree, she should then be sent back. You should behave similarly in respect of all other kinds of wealth, such as slaves, that you acquire by force.

The king should never appropriate wealth confiscated from thieves or men awaiting execution. Cattle forcibly taken from the enemy should be given to Brahmanas so that they can drink their milk. Bulls taken from the enemy should be sent for agricultural work or returned to the enemy.

The shastras lay down that a king should fight only another king, and that one who is not a king should never strike a king. If a Brahmana desirous of peace fearlessly goes between two contending armies, both should immediately stop the battle. If any Kshatriya commits Brahmahatya or wounds a Brahmana, he breaks an eternal law and earns the contempt of his varna.

The Kshatriya who destroys dharma and transgresses all reasonable restrictions does not deserve to be considered a Kshatriya, and should be banished. A king who wants victory should never follow such conduct.

What gain can be greater than victory won fairly? It is good policy for the triumphant king to conciliate the frightened people of a kingdom recently conquered, be it with soothing words or with gifts. If he rules these conquered people roughly, they will leave the kingdom to side with his enemies and wait for a chance to strike back. Then in times of danger other discontented men, watching for such an opportunity, O Rajan, will promptly side with the king's foes.

An adversary should not be deceived through unfair means and in no case should he be wounded mortally in a fight. If a lesser king is happy, he too, will also regard life as great. That king, it is said, has his roots firm whose dominions are extensive and wealthy, whose subjects are loyal and whose servants and officers are all contented.

That king, it is said, knows the ways of the world, whose Ritwijas, priests, acharyas and others about him are well-versed in all shastras and in whose kingdom the deserving are honoured and duly respected. Indra thus won the sovereignty of the worlds, and earthly kings will gain the status of Indra if they conduct themselves in this way.

Similarly, King Pratardana, subjugating his foes in a great battle, took all their wealth, including their very grain and medicinal herbs, but left their land untouched. King Divodasa, however, after subjugating his enemies, brought away the very remnants of their sacrificial fires, their clarified butter intended for libations and their food. For taking what he should not have seized, he lost all the merit of his conquests.

King Nabhaga, after his conquests, gave away entire kingdoms, except the wealth of learned Brahmanas and Munis, along with their rulers, as sacrificial gifts to the Brahmanas. The conduct of all ancient kings was irreproachable, O Yudhishtira, and I completely approve of it. The king who

desires his own prosperity should seek to conquer through every kind of excellence but never by deceit or with pride.'"

CANTO 97

"Yudhishtira asks, 'There is no dharma more sinful than that of the Kshatriyas, for the king kills multitudes in wars. Tell me, O Bharatarishabha, by what deeds, then, can the king win realms of felicity?'

Bhishma says, 'Kings become purified by punishing the evil, by attracting and cherishing the good, through yagnas and charity. It is true that kings who desire victory cause suffering to many creatures, but after that they change and improve the conditions of all.

By the power of dana, yagnas and tapasya, they destroy their sins and their punya swells so as to enable them to do good to all. The farmer who weeds his paddy field takes up the blades of the paddy, as well as the weeds. His action, however, does not destroy the blades or paddy, but makes them grow more vigorously.

Those who wield weapons destroy many who deserve destruction, but that does not retard the growth and advancement of those who remain. One who protects the people from plunder, slaughter and affliction by brigands is regarded as the giver of wealth, life and food, and similar to one who performs a yagna yielding punya.

By thus worshipping the Devas, by unifying all yagnas whose dakshina is the dispelling of fear, the king enjoys every kind of happiness here and lives in Swarga hereafter.

One regards the king who lays down his life in battle for the sake of Brahmanas as the embodiment of a yagna with limitless gifts. If a king with his quivers full of arrows shoots them fearlessly at his enemies, the very

gods will not find anyone on earth superior to him. He will enjoy eternal realms of felicity, in which his wishes will be granted, equal in number to the shafts with which he pierced the bodies of his enemies.

The blood that flows from his body cleanses him of all his sins, along with the pain that he feels. Authorities on the shastras say that the pain a Kshatriya suffers in battle operates as penance to enhance his punya. Timid men of dharma stay in the rear and beg the Kshatriyas who have rushed into battle for their lives, as men solicit rain from clouds. Great becomes their merit if they protect these fearful men and go forward themselves to face the danger.

These timorous men can free themselves from fear only if they do what is proper and just, which is to appreciate such valorous deeds and always respect their defenders. There is a great difference between men apparently equal. Some rush into battle, amid its terrible din, against armed ranks of enemies. Indeed, the Kshatriya who charges hosts of enemies takes the road to Swarga.

He who feels dread seeks safety in flight and deserts his comrades in danger. Let not such wretches be born as Kshatriyas. The very Devas, with Indra at their head, send calamities to those who desert their comrades in battle and return without a wound. One should beat with sticks or pelt with stones, or roll in a mat of dry grass and burn to death, one who deserts his comrades to save his own life. One should kill like animals any among Kshatriyas who are guilty of such conduct.

It is sinful for a Kshatriya to die in bed, spitting phlegm and passing urine, uttering piteous cries. Men who know the shastras do not applaud the death of an uninjured Kshatriya. The death of a Kshatriya at home is not praiseworthy. They are heroes, and any action that is not heroic is sinful and inglorious. In disease, he may be heard to lament, "What misery! What agony! I must be a great sinner." With a face emaciated and a stench issuing from his body and clothes, the sick man plunges his relatives into grief. Coveting the condition of those who are healthy, such a man amidst his tortures repeatedly wishes for death. He who is a hero, dignified and proud, does not deserve such a dishonorable end.

A Kshatriya should die by the sword, surrounded by kinsmen and slaughtering his enemies in battle. Frenzied with battle lust, he fights furiously and does not feel the wounds his enemies inflict on him. If he

encounters death in battle, he earns that high punya filled with the fame and respect of the world due to him, and ultimately gains a place in Swarga.

The Kshatriya who does not show his back but fights with all his might at the forefront of the battle, utterly reckless of his very life, obtains the companionship of Indra. All Kshatriyas who die in the midst of their enemies without displaying shameful fear or despair earn admittance to the realms of eternal bliss.'"

CANTO 98

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, to what realms do Kshatriyas go who encounter death in battle?'

Bhishma, replies, 'There is an old story, O Yudhishtira, of a conversation which took place long ago, between Ambarisha and Indra. Ambarisha, the son of Nabhaga, went to Swarga and in those heavenly regions, so difficult to reach, he saw his own powerful general Sudeva in the company of Indra, in a celestial form blazing with every kind of energy and travelling in a very beautiful vimana. Seeing the prosperity of his Senapati and observing how he was journeying further up towards still loftier regions, the noble Ambarisha, filled with surprise, questioned Indra.

Ambarisha said, "Having ruled the whole earth bounded by the seas and wanting to earn punya, I practised all the dharma that the shastras declare are common to the four varnas. I practised with strict austerity the dharma of Brahmacharya. I waited with dutiful obedience upon my acharyas and other reverend elders and studied with due observances the Vedas and the shastras on Rajadharma. I gratified the Devas with many mahayagnas, Atithis with food and drink, the Pitris with offerings in Sraddhas and the Rishis with attentive study of the scriptures, after proper initiation into religious mysteries.

I duly observed the Kshatriya dharma according to the injunctions of the scriptures. I fearlessly faced hostile armies and won many victories in battle. This Sudeva, O Indra, was once the general leading my forces. It is true that he was a warrior of tranquil soul, but how has he exceeded me? He

never worshipped the Devas in mahayagnas or gratified the Brahmanas with frequent and costly gifts according to the laws. Why then has he succeeded in surpassing me?"

Indra replied, "Sudeva has often performed the great yagna of battle, like anyone who engages in battle. Every warrior wearing armour who advances against his foes in battle array becomes installed in the yagna. Indeed, such a man is indisputably regarded as the yajamana of the yagna of battle."

Ambarisha said, "What constitutes the libations in this yagna? What constitutes its liquid offerings? What is its dakshina? Who, again, are its Ritwijas? Tell me all this, O performer of a hundred yagnas."

Indra said, "Elephants constitute the Ritwijas of this sacrifice and horses are its Audharyus. The flesh of enemies constitutes its libations and blood is its liquid offering. Jackals, vultures, ravens and also arrows, constitute its Sadasyas as they drink the remnants left of the liquid offering in this yagna and eat the remnants of its offerings. Heaps of lances, spears, swords, darts and axes, blazing, sharp and well-tempered, constitute the ladles of the sacrificer. Straight and well-tempered arrows with keen points that can pierce the bodies of enemies, loosed from well-stretched bows, constitute its large double-mouthed ladles.

Swords kept in sheaths of tiger skin, with handles made of ivory and capable of cutting off the elephant's trunk, form the Sphises of this sacrifice. Strokes inflicted with blazing and keen lances, arrows, swords and axes, all made of hard iron, constitute its great wealth collected from illustrious people by agreement regarding the amount and period.

The blood that runs over the battlefield from the fury of an attack constitutes the final libation, full of great punya and capable of granting every wish, in the homa of this yagna. Cries that one hears in the front ranks such as 'Cut!' and 'Pierce!' constitute the Samans that its Vedic chanters sing in the abode of Yama. The front ranks of the enemy's battle array form the vessel to store its libations.

The herd of elephants, horses and men equipped with shields one regards as the Syenachita fire of the sacrifice. The headless trunks that rise up after thousands have been slaughtered constitute the octagonal stake, made of Khadira wood, for the Kshatriya who performs the sacrifice. The screams of elephants goaded with hooks constitute its Ida mantras. The

drums struck by palms forming the Vashats, O Rajan, are its Trisaman Udgatri.

When someone takes away the property of a Brahmana, the man who sacrifices his own body, so dear to him, in order to protect that property, thereby acquires the guna of a sacrifice with infinite gifts. The Kshatriya who, for the sake of his master, displays prowess at the van of the army and does not show his back through fear, earns those regions of felicity that are mine.

He who strews the altar of the battle yagna with swords cased in blue scabbards and severed arms resembling heavy bludgeons, will win regions of happiness like mine. The warrior who, intent upon victory, penetrates into the midst of the enemy's ranks without waiting for any help, succeeds in winning regions of bliss like mine.

The warrior who in battle creates a river of blood, terrible and difficult to cross, with kettle-drums for its frogs and tortoises, bones of heroes for its sands, blood and flesh for its marsh, swords and shields for its rafts, the hair of slain warriors for its floating weeds and moss, herds of horses, elephants and chariots for its bridges, standards and banners for its rushes, the bodies of slain elephants for its boats and huge alligators, swords and scimitars for its larger vessels, vultures, kankas and ravens for the rafts that float upon it, obtains regions of felicity like mine.

The warrior who creates such a river, difficult of passage even for those who possess courage and power, filling all timid men with dread, is said to complete the sacrifice by performing its final ablutions. The Kshatriya whose altar in such a yagna is strewn with the severed heads of enemies, horses and of elephants, obtains regions of happiness like mine.

The Rishis say that the warrior who regards the vanguard of the hostile army as his antapura, the front of his own army as the vessel for the sacrificial offering, the warriors standing to his south as his Sadasyas and those to his north as his Agnidhras, and who looks upon the hostile forces as his wedded wife, will attain all realms of happiness.

The open space between the two hosts drawn up for the battle constitutes the altar of such a sacrificer and the three Vedas are his three sacrificial fires. Upon this altar, aided by the chanting of the Vedas, he performs his yagna.

There is no doubt that the cowardly warrior who runs away from the fight in fear and is slain by the enemy sinks into hell, while the combatant

whose blood drenches the sacrificial altar already strewn with hair, flesh and bones is sure to attain Swarga.

The powerful warrior who, having slain the commander of the hostile army, mounts the ratha of his fallen antagonist, is regarded as possessing the power of Vishnu himself and the intelligence of Brihaspati, the guru of the Devas. He who can capture alive the commander of the hostile army, or his son, or some other honoured leader, will win regions of happiness like mine.

One should never grieve for a hero slain in battle. A slain hero, if nobody grieves for him, goes to Swarga and earns the respect of its habitants. Neither do men desire to dedicate food and drink for the hero's salvation, nor do they bathe after receiving the news of his death, nor go into mourning for him.

Listen to me as I enumerate the joys that are in store for such a man. The best of Apsaras, numbering thousands, rush out to receive the spirit of the slain hero, coveting him for their lord. The Kshatriya who does his duty in battle acquires the punya of tapasya and of dharma, since his conduct conforms to the sanatana dharma. Such a man gains the punya of all the four varnasramas.

You should not kill the aged, children or women; those who flee, one who holds a straw in his lips to indicate unconditional surrender, or one who says, 'I am yours.' After killing in battle Jambha, Vritra, Vala, Paka, Satamaya, Virochana, the irresistible Namuchi, Sambara of innumerable illusions, Viprachitti—all these sons of Diti and Danu and also Prahlada, I myself have become the Lord of the Devas."

King Ambarisha came to understand by these words of Indra how, by means of fighting battles, Kshatriyas can win the blissful regions of Swarga.'"

CANTO 99

"Bhishma says, 'Let me tell you the old story of the battle between King Pratardana and Janaka, the Dharmarajan of Mithila. Janaka, who knew the truth of everything, showed both Swarga and Naraka to his own warriors and gladdened them on the eve of the battle.

He told them, "Look, these are the regions of great splendour for those who fight fearlessly. Full of Gandharva girls, these realms are eternal and grant every wish. There, on the other side, are the regions of hell, intended for those who flee from battle. They will have to rot there for eternity in everlasting disgrace. Resolve, then, to cast away your very lives and conquer your enemies. Do not fall into inglorious hell. The laying down of life in battle is the happy door to heaven for Kshatriyas."

Thus addressed by their king, O subjugator of hostile towns, the warriors of Mithila vanquished their enemies in battle and gladdened him. Those who are resolute should take their stand in the forefront of battle. The maharathas should be placed in the midst of elephants, with the horsemen behind them. At their back should be the foot-soldiers, all clad in mail. The king who forms his battle vyuha in this manner will vanquish his enemy. O Yudhishtira, you should always adopt this vyuha formation.

Filled with rage, heroes want to earn punya in Swarga by fighting fairly. Like makaras agitating the ocean, they charge the ranks of the enemy, exhorting one another, so that they hearten even those among them who are slackening.

The victor should protect the newly conquered land from aggression. Rajan, you should not allow your troops to hound the vanquished foe too far, since the enemy who rallies after being routed is desperate for safety, and will assail pursuers ferociously. Another reason why you should not pursue the defeated enemy is that brave warriors do not strike at those who run away.

Creatures who are mobile devour things that are immobile; those that have teeth devour those that are toothless; the thirsty drink water; heroes devour cowards. Cowards ensure defeat though they have the same limbs, backs and stomachs as the victors. Those who are afraid join their hands and bend their heads before the courageous.

This world rests on the arms of Kshatriyas, like a son on those of his father. Hence, he who is a Kshatriya deserves respect under every circumstance. There is nothing higher in the three worlds than heroism. The heroic Kshatriya protects and cherishes all, and all things depend upon him.'"

CANTO 100

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, how kings who want victory, should lead their troops in battle, Bharatarishabha, even if they have to offend dharma slightly!'

Bhishma replies, 'Some say that one makes dharma secure by truth; some by upapatti or reasoning; some by good conduct, and some by the application of authority. I will now tell you what the method and strategy of authority are which produce immediate results.

Robbers who break all laws very often become destroyers of property and punya. Listen to me and I will tell you about the successful methods the shastras prescribe for resisting and restraining them. The king should be acquainted with both kinds of wisdom—straight and crooked—but never apply dishonest means to injure others, only to defend himself against the dangers that may overtake him. Enemies frequently undermine a king by sowing seeds of disunity among his ministers, troops, allies or subjects. The king, aware of such deception, may use deception to counter these foes.

You should manufacture and store in abundance armour made of leather for protecting the bodies of elephants and bulls, bones, thorns and keen-pointed weapons made of iron, coats of mail, yak-tails, sharp and well-tempered weapons, all kinds of yellow and red armour, banners and standards of diverse hues, sharp swords, lances, scimitars, battle-axes, as well as spears and shields. The weapons should all be properly whetted and the warriors filled with courage and resolution.

It is proper to start your campaign and move your troops in the month of Chaitra or Agrahayana, when crops ripen and water is not scarce. This time of year, O Bhaarata, is neither very cold nor very hot. If, however, the enemy is in trouble, troops should immediately be set in motion without waiting for a favourable season. These two are the best times to start a campaign to subjugate your enemies.

While moving your troops, you should take that road which has an abundance of water and grass, which is level and easy to march on. You should ascertain the route in advance, through skilful spies who have intimate knowledge of the adjoining terrain and forests. Kings who want victory should march their armies along good roads and not through forests like animals. In the van should be an akshauhini, a division of brave and strong men of noble birth.

Regarding forts, only those which have walls, a moat and a single entrance are favourable, because resistance can be offered from within them against invading armies.

Experienced warriors consider an area lying near a wood much better for pitching a camp than one under the open sky, so that the foot-soldiers are in a position which they can defend. Danger and distress can be warded off if they engage with the enemy as soon as it comes.

If the warriors fight keeping the Saptarishis behind them and take up their stand, immoveable as the hills, they will vanquish even irresistible foes. You should have the army in such a position that the wind will blow, and the sun and the planet Saturn shine, from behind them. As a force for ensuing victory, O Yudhishtira, the wind is superior to the sun, and the sun is superior to Sukra.

Warriors prefer for the operations of cavalry a region that is not miry, soggy, uneven or full of bricks and stone, while a field free from mire and holes is suitable for rathas. A region overgrown with bushes and large trees and one under water is appropriate for elephant-warriors, while an area that has many inaccessible spots, that is overgrown with large trees and groves of cane or is a mountainous or woody tract is well-suited for the operations of infantry.

One regards an army with a large infantry force as very strong, O Bhaarata, and one in which chariots and horsemen predominate as very effective on a clear and sunny day. An army in which foot-soldiers and elephants predominate is effective in the rainy season.

Having attended to these points about the character of various forces and the manner of marching, quartering and leading them, the king should turn his attention to the characteristics of place and time. He should set out on his expedition on an auspicious day, determined by the phases of the moon and the positions of stars and planets. This will ensure that if he leads his troops adroitly, he will gain victory.

No one should kill one who is asleep, thirsty, fatigued, disarmed or one who has his heart set on nirvana, one fleeing, one walking unsuspecting along a road, one drinking or eating, one deranged, one mortally wounded or severely weakened by his wounds, one who is unaware of the fight, one who is conducting a yagna, one who is an expert in some special art like mining, one who is in mourning, one who is out of the camp foraging, men who set up camps or are camp-followers, dwarapalakas of the king or his ministers, or those who do menial services for the chieftains of the army, or the overseers of such servants.

You should honour and double the pay of those warriors who break the ranks of enemies, or rally your retreating troops with food, drink and seats equal to your own. You should promote those among them who are chiefs of ten warriors to chiefs of a hundred, and the Kshatriya who is the chief of a hundred warriors, to chief of a thousand.

Gathering together your principal warriors, you should address them saying: "Let us swear to conquer, and never to desert one another. Let those who are afraid remain here, who will cause their chiefs to be slain by being cowardly in the cauldron of battle. Let such men come who will never break in battle or cause their own comrades to be slain, for they can protect themselves as well as their comrades and will certainly kill the enemy in a fight. The consequences of fleeing from battle are reproach and infamy, loss of wealth and death. He who flees from battle, who is shameless, who casts away his weapons or is captured by the enemy, will have to hear sharp words. Let such evil always befall the warriors of our enemies."

Those who flee from battle are the most despicable of men. They are a shame on earth and devoid of true manhood, here or hereafter. Bards sing the praises of victorious warriors who readily pursue their fleeing enemies with taunts. In battle, when an enemy tarnishes the fame of a man, the misery he feels is more painful than death itself.

Understand that victory is the root of punya and of every kind of happiness. Kshatriyas bear cheerfully that which cowards regard as the

highest pain. One should be resolved to fight on, regardless of life itself, determined to conquer or die and attain a blessed end in heaven."

Having sworn such an oath and prepared themselves to throw away life itself, Kshatriyas should valiantly charge the enemy's ranks. In the van you should place an akshauhini of men armed with swords and shields, and in the rear the ratha akshauhini. In between you should position other kinds of warriors. This should be the array for attack.

Battle-hardened veterans should fight in the van so that they can protect their comrades behind them. Those who are afraid should be solicitously cheered and encouraged. You should position the strongest and most courageous men in the van. You should keep the weaker men on the field without withdrawing them, at least to make the army appear larger to the enemy.

If your troops are few, you should draw them close together for the fight or, if their leader wants, the close vyuha can be extended. When a small number of troops fight with a greater army, you should form the Suchimukha vyuha, in which you draw up the warriors into a wedge-like formation.

When you engage a small force with a large one, the leader of the former should shake his men's hands and utter loud cries saying, "The enemy has broken! The enemy has broken!" Those who are strong should stand firm against the enemy and shout loudly to their comrades, "Fresh comrades have arrived! Fearlessly strike our foes!"

Those who are in advance of the rest should utter loud shouts and make all kinds of noises and blow and beat krakachas, cow-horns, drums, cymbals and kettle-drums.'"

CANTO 101

"Yudhishtira says, 'Of what temperament, behaviour and physique should warriors be, and how clad and armed so that they are fit for battle?'

Bhishma replies, 'Brave soldiers, when they engage in battle, use those weapons and chariots with which they are familiar.

The Gandharvas, the Sindhus and the Sauviras are brave and very strong and fight best with their swords and lances. Their armies are capable of vanquishing all forces. The Usinaras possess great strength and are skilled in all kinds of weapons. The Easterners are accomplished in fighting from elephant-back and also know how to fight unfairly. The Yavanas, the Kambojas and those who dwell around Mathura are skilled in fighting with bare hands, and the Southerners with swords.

It is well known that strong and courageous men are born in almost every country. Listen, and I will describe their distinguishing features. Those who have voices, eyes and bearings like those of the lion or the tiger, and those who have eyes like those of the pigeon or the snake, are all Kshatriya parantapas, while those who sound like the deer and have eyes like those of the leopard or the bull, are highly energetic. Those who have voices that resemble the sound of bells are excitable, malevolent and wrathful, while those who have voices deep as that of the clouds, visages angry or like those of camels' hooked noses and tongues, possess great speed and can shoot or hurl their weapons great distances.

Those who have bodies curved like a cat, thin hair and skin, possess great speed and are eager, near-invincible in battle, while some of those who have eyes closed like those of the iguana, a mild disposition and the speed and voice of a horse, can face all foes.

Those who are handsome, well-built with symmetrical frames, broad chests, who become angry upon hearing the enemy's drum or trumpet, who delight in affrays of every kind, who have grave eyes, eyes that bulge, or green eyes, or eyes like those of the mongoose, who have faces darkened with frowns, are all brave and will gladly give their lives in battle.

Those who have crooked eyes, broad foreheads and cheekbones not covered with flesh, arms strong as thunder-bolts and fingers bearing circular marks with arteries and nerves that are visible, will rush in with great speed when the clash of battle takes place. They then resemble infuriated elephants and become irresistible.

Those who have greenish hair ending in curls, flanks, cheeks and faces plump and fleshy, elevated shoulders, thick necks, fat calves, who have fearful visages and are fiery like Vasudeva's horse Sugriva, or like the offspring of Vinata's son Garuda, or have round heads, large mouths, faces like those of cats, shrill voices and quick tempers, who rush wildly into battle guided by its din, who are evil and full of haughtiness, who have fearsome faces and who live in the outlands, are all reckless of their lives and never retreat from battle.

You should keep such troops in the vanguard. They always slay their foes or die without turning back. Of wild conduct and outlandish manners, they regard soft speech as a sign of weakness. If treated mildly, they show contempt towards their king.'"

CANTO 102

"Yudhishtira says 'I would like to know the well-known signs, O Bharatarishabha, that portend the success of an army.'

Bhishma replies, 'I will tell you all the well-known indications that predict the success of an army. A learned astrologer and a wise priest see the future with the eye of celestial knowledge and can perform various auspicious karmas and expiatory rites, including homa and the silent recitation of mantras, to ward off calamities that unpropitious fate and the wrath of the Devas may have in store.

The army where the troops and animals are all happy and cheerful, Yudhishtira, is sure to win a decisive victory. The wind blows favourably behind such troops, rainbows appear in the sky, the clouds cast their shadows upon them and at times the sun shines upon them. Jackals, ravens and vultures become auspicious to them. When these show such regard to the army, great victories are sure to be won.

Their yagna fires blaze up with a pure splendour, the light going upwards and the smokeless flames slightly bending towards the south. The libations poured on it emit an agreeable fragrance; the conches and drums, blown and beaten, send forth sonorous peals, and the warriors are inspired with eagerness. These are indications of success.

If we see deer and other quadrupeds behind or to the left of those who have already set out for battle, or of those who are about to set out, we regard them as auspicious. If they appear to the right of the warriors when they are about to engage in battle, we regard it as an indication of success.

If, however, they make their appearance in front, it indicates disaster and defeat. If certain birds, swans, cranes, satapatras and chashas utter auspicious cries and all able-bodied warriors become lively, these are omens of success.

The vyuha, which blazes with splendour and becomes terrible to look at because of the reflection from its weapons, war-machines, armour, standards and the radiant faces of the warriors who stand within the formation, will always succeed in vanquishing its enemies. If they are of pure conduct, modest deportment and attend to one another with loving kindness, it as an indication of success to come.

If because of the agreeable commands and connections the warriors become grateful and patient, we can know this as the root of success. A crow on the left of a warrior engaged in battle and on the right of him who is about to engage in it, we regard as favourable; again, if it appears at his back, it indicates failure, while its appearance in front forebodes danger.

Even after enlisting a large army consisting of the four kinds of forces, you should strive to make peace, O Yudhishtira. Only if your efforts for peace fail should you engage in battle. The victory won by battle is inferior because it is dependent on luck or destiny.

When a large army breaks and the troops begin to flee, it is exceedingly difficult to check its flight. The spontaneity of the flight resembles that of a powerful current of water or of a frightened herd of deer. If a single division takes flight the rest will follow, because fear is contagious. Some armies have broken without adequate cause, while others break even when they are brave and skilled in battle.

A great army consisting of even brave soldiers is like a large herd of Ruru deer. Sometimes even fifty men, resolute and relying upon one another, confident and prepared to lay down their lives, succeed in routing enemies numerically far superior. Sometimes even five, six or seven great Maharathas, unyielding and standing close together, can vanquish large armies.

Armed conflict is never desirable if it can be avoided. You should first try the policy of conciliation, or causing internal dissension and giving gifts as bribes; battle should be the last resort. At the very sight of a hostile force, fear paralyses the timid, like the sight of a blazing bolt from heaven. They ask, “Oh, upon what will it fall?”

Once a battle is raging, sweat drenches the limbs of those who go to join it, and of those who are winning. The entire country where a war rages, with all its resident and floating population, O Rajan, is agitated and affected. The very marrow of living men scorched by the heat of action suffers intense pain.

So a king should on all occasions adopt conciliatory methods, mixing them with severity. Men always show a disposition to make peace when an enemy oppresses them. Send secret agents to create dissension among the allies of the enemy. Discord having been kindled, the enemy will want peace with the king who is more powerful than himself, whom he once sought to crush.

If the invader does not proceed in this manner, he can never completely conquer his foe. In dealing with the enemy, take care to hem him in from all sides. Forgiveness always comes to those who are good and never to those who are evil. Listen now, O Partha, to the uses of forgiveness and sternness. The fame of a king who displays clemency after a conquest spreads widely. The very enemies of a man who is of a forgiving disposition trust him, even when he commits a grave transgression.

Sambara has said that an enemy should be subjugated first and compassion shown afterwards, for a wooden pole, if made straight without the application of heat in the first instance, very soon assumes its former crookedness. However, men skilled in the shastras do not advocate this or regard it as an indication of good kingship. Rather, they say, an enemy should be subdued and disciplined as a father does a son, without anger and without destroying him.

If a king is cruel, O Yudhishtira, he becomes a universal object of hatred. If, on the other hand, he becomes mild, everybody disregards him. Do, therefore, practise both severity and mildness. Before striking, O Bhaarata, and while striking, utter sweet words; and having struck, show your enemies compassion and let them understand that you grieve for them.

After he has vanquished an army, the king should address the survivors and say, “I am not glad that my troops have slain so many of you. Alas, they did not listen to me, though I repeatedly dissuaded them. I wish that all your dead were all alive. They did not deserve such deaths. They were all good men and true, who did not retreat from battle. Such men are rare. I surely do not approve of those who have slain such kshatriyas in battle.”

Having spoken thus to the survivors of the vanquished enemy, the king should, in secret, honour those among his own troops who bravely slew the foe. To soothe the wounded slayers from their sufferings at the hand of the enemy, and to win them over, the king should even weep, seizing their hands affectionately. Thus, in all circumstances, the king should behave with conciliation.

A Dharmarajan who is fearless becomes trusted and beloved of all. Winning the people's faith, he succeeds in ruling over the earth as he pleases. If he wants to rule the earth, the king should abandon deceit, attempt to gain the trust of all and try to protect his subjects from fear.'"

CANTO 103

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, how should one behave towards an enemy who is mild, one who is fierce and towards one who has many allies and a large force?'

Bhishma replies, 'There is an old tale, Yudhishtira, of a conversation between Brihaspati and Indra which took place long ago. Once upon a time, Indra, the lord of the Devas, approached Brihaspati and, saluting him with folded palms, said, "How, O Maharishi, should I behave towards my enemies? How can I subdue them other than by killing them? In a war between two armies, either side can win. What should I do so that I do not lose this blazing wealth that I have won from my enemies, that scorches them?"

The wisest Brihaspati, skilled in dharma, artha, kama and rajadharma, replied, "One should never seek to subdue one's foes by force. Only boys, cruel and volatile by nature, pick an open fight. One who wants to destroy an enemy should not put him on his guard and should never exhibit anger, fear or joy, but should conceal these within oneself. Without actually trusting one's enemy, one should behave towards him as if one trusts him completely.

One should always speak sweetly to one's enemy and never do anything displeasing to him. One should abstain from pointless hostility and from insolent speech. Just as a fowler, carefully imitating the cries of the birds he wants to catch or kill, lures and captures them, a king should first lull his enemies and then strike them down, if he so chooses.

Having overcome one's enemies, one should not sleep at ease. A foe who is evil raises his head again, like a carelessly put out fire flaring up later. When either side can win, you should avoid a battle. Lull an enemy into a false sense of security and then overpower him and gain your objective.

Consult your ministers and intelligent men who understand statecraft. If you disregard and forget an enemy who has actually not been subdued at heart, he will lie in wait and strike at you at an opportune moment, especially when you take a false step. Such an enemy can employ his own trusted agents and by sowing dissension, neutralize your forces.

Feelings of hostility towards his enemies should be nourished in secret by a king, and at the same time he should collect definite information about his enemy and learn everything he can about him. He should undermine his adversary's forces by bribery, poisoning and fomenting discord.

A king should never be too friendly with his foes, but wait patiently for the right opportunity, so that he can strike at a time when he is least expected to, and then make his kill. He should never slay too large a number of the enemy's troops, although he must certainly ensure a decisive victory. He should neither do an injury to his enemy that would rankle in the latter's heart, nor cause needless hurt by insults or rudeness.

If the opportunity to strike comes, he should not let it slip. This is what a king who wants to annihilate his enemies should do, O Indra, because if such a chance is missed, it will never come again.

A king should consult his advisors and only break the strength of his enemy. However, he should neither try to accomplish this when the opportunity is unfavourable, nor persecute his enemy even when the opportunity is at hand. The king should work carefully, giving up kama, krodha and ahamkara and all the while continually watch for any lapses by his enemy.

Extreme mildness, harshness of punishments, idleness, and recklessness: these four faults, and the deceit of his enemy, will ruin a foolish ruler, O king of the Devas. The king who can eradicate these and counteract the cunning of his enemies will certainly succeed in vanquishing all.

When one minister can accomplish the king's secret project without any help, the king should consult him and no other. If many ministers are consulted, they will endeavour to pass the responsibility to one another and

even give publicity to a project which should have been kept secret. Only if there is a need to consult another should the king do so.

When the enemy is invisible, you should invoke the Brahmadanda divine punishment, upon them; when visible, the army consisting of four kinds of forces should be deployed on the field. The king should first try and create dissension, as well as use conciliation, depending upon the need of the moment.

At times the king should even abase himself before a powerful enemy. He should work carefully and seek to ensure the victor's destruction when the latter becomes careless. One should humble oneself before a more powerful king by prostrating oneself, with gifts of tribute and by uttering sweet words when the occasion demands, never doing anything to arouse the suspicions of a powerful enemy. The weaker ruler, under such circumstances, should carefully avoid every action that can awaken doubts.

A victorious king, again, should not trust his defeated enemy, for they who are vanquished always remain alert. Men of a restless nature find it hard to acquire wealth, Devaraja, so their very existence is dangerous. Kings should carefully ascertain who their friends are and who their enemies.

If a king is mild, people disregard him, but if he is fierce, he instills fear in them. Therefore, instead of being either fierce or mild, be both. As a rapid current ceaselessly eats away a high river-bank and causes large land-slips, carelessness and mistakes ruin a kingdom. Never attack many enemies at the same time. By adopting a policy of conciliation, giving gifts or creating dissension, O Purandara, you should subdue them one by one.

As for the rest, when they are few in number the victor should behave peacefully towards them. An intelligent king, even if he is able to do so, should not try to crush all his enemies at once. He should openly strike without hesitation only when he thinks he is superior to his enemy in many respects, when he has a large army packed with the six-fold forces, consisting of foot-soldiers, horses, elephants, rathas, war engines, treasure and traders following the camp, all loyal to him.

If the enemy is strong, adopting a strategy of conciliation towards him would be a mistake. On the other hand, you should plan to harass such enemies by secret means and not try to be mild in your conduct to him. Repeated expeditions would also be a blunder, for you would be risking the

loss of your crops, the poisoning of your wells and tanks, and suspicion in respect of the seven branches of administration.

On such occasions, you should apply diverse kinds of deception, various methods for setting your enemies against one another and different forms of misinformation. You should also ascertain, through trusted agents, what is happening in the cities and provinces of your enemies, Kings, after pursuing their enemies and entering their forts, O slayer of Bala and Vritra, should sack, pillage, plunder and simultaneously devise proper plans to safeguard their own cities and dominions.

Making gifts of wealth to them in private and confiscating their possessions publicly, proclaiming them as offenders punished for their misdeeds without injuring them physically, kings should send their agents to the cities and provinces of their enemies. At the same time, in their own cities, they should arrange for killing rites to be performed for the enemy, by means of powerful mantras through men who are accomplished, learned, authorities in the shastras and acquainted with the regulations of the sacred books."

Indra said, "O best of Munis, what are the signs of an evil person? Tell me how I am to identify a wicked man."

Brihaspati said, "An evil man is one who proclaims the faults of others behind their backs, who is consumed with envy at the accomplishments of others and who remains silent, reluctant to join in when someone proclaims the merits of others in his presence. Mere silence on such occasions is no indication of wickedness; however, an evil person at such times breathes heavily, bites his lips and shakes his head.

Such a man always mixes in society, speaks irrelevantly, never does what he promises when the eye of the man to whom he has made the pledge is not upon him, or even allude to the subject in his presence. He eats by himself and not with others at the same table and finds fault with the food set before him, saying, 'All is not right today, as on other days.' His disposition shows itself when he sits, lies down or rides.

Mourning on occasions of sorrow and rejoicing on occasions of joy are the signs of a friend, while the opposite behaviour indicates an enemy. Keep in mind, O ruler of the Devas, that the nature of evil men can never be concealed. I have now told you, O greatest of deities, what the signs of an evil man are. Now that you have heard the truths that the shastras lay down, follow them duly."

Purandara, when the opportunity came, conducted himself strictly according to the advice of Brihaspati and, determined to be victorious, the Parantapa successfully reduced all his enemies to subjection.'"

CANTO 104

"Yudhishtira says, 'What should a Dharmaraja do to acquire happiness whose own officers oppose him, whose treasury and army are no longer under his control and who has no wealth?'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, Yudhishtira, to the oft-told story of Kshemadarsin, the Kosala Rajan. Long ago, Kshemadarsin lost his power and fell into great distress.

He went to the Rishi Kalakavrikshiya and, saluting him humbly, asked, "What should a man like me do who deserves wealth but who has failed to recover his kingdom despite repeated efforts; what should I do other than commit suicide or theft, take sanctuary with others or resort to other such degrading actions? O Brahmana, tell me, for one like you, who knows dharma and is full of kindness, is the refuge of a man suffering from mental or physical illness.

I have heard that a man like me should give up his desires, abandon joy and sorrow, and he will find happiness after he has earned the plenitude of knowledge. I grieve for those who believe that worldly happiness is dependent on wealth, which after all vanishes like a dream. Those who can abandon vast riches achieve a difficult feat, because we are unable to give up even wealth which has been lost. I have lost all my prosperity and fallen into a miserable and joyless existence. Tell me, O Brahmana, what happiness I should still strive for."

The sage said, "You have already understood, it seems. You are wise and should do as your intellect tells you. You are right in your belief that all

that you see, as well as yourself and everything that you have, are evanescent, as am I and all that I have. Know, O Rajan, that those things which you regard as substantial, are in reality non-existent. The wise man knows this and is never troubled when confronted by sorrow.

Once you know what everyone should know, which is that whatever has happened and whatever will take place, all are unreal, you will be freed from adharma and its misery.

Whatever those who came before earned and acquired, and whatever those who succeeded them got, all have perished. Reflecting on this, who will yield to misery? Things that were are no more. Things that are will again not exist. Sorrow has no power to restore them. One should not, therefore, indulge in grief.

Where, is your father today, O Rajan, and where is your grandfather? You do not see them now, nor do they see you. If you think of your own instability, for whom then do you mourn? Reflect carefully and you will understand that it is certain that you will cease to exist. I, you, your friends, your enemies and indeed everything, will without any doubt cease to be. Those men who are now twenty or thirty years of age will all definitely die within the next hundred years.

If a man does not have the heart to give up his possessions, he should then endeavour to regard them as being not his own, and with that seek to do good. One should regard future acquisitions as well as those that have disappeared as being not one's own, of destiny as being all-powerful. Those who reason thus are wise, and the habit of seeing things like this an attribute of the good.

Many men who are equal or superior to you in intelligence and application, though deprived of wealth, are not only alive but are not kings. But unlike you, they are not unhappy. So, stop distressing yourself in this way. Are you not superior to these men, or at least equal to them in intelligence and hard work?"

The king said, "I won my kingdom and everything else with no great effort. However, all-powerful Time has swept it away as a river does sand, O Maharishi, and I am obliged to subsist on charity."

The Muni Kalakavrikshiya said, "Your frame of mind, based on the knowledge of reality, should be such that you never mourn for anything in life, O prince of Kosala, either in the past or the future. Your desire should

be to obtain only that which is attainable, and so to enjoy your present possessions, not to suffer for what is not there.

Be delighted, O Kosala Rajan, with whatever you easily win. Even if you become poor, do not grieve, but seek to preserve a pure character. Only a foolish man, when he loses his wealth, instead of being contented with his remaining possessions censures the Supreme Ordainer. Such a man regards others, however undeserving, as blessed. For this reason, they suffer more who are malicious, vain and filled with self-importance.

However, such vices do not tarnish you, O king, so endure the wealth of others although you are poor. The wise succeed in enjoying the riches of others, while prosperity deserts the man who envies others.

Men of dharma and wisdom who know the duties of Yoga renounce of their own accord material possessions, as well as sons and grandsons. Others who know earthly wealth to be unstable and unattainable, dependent as it is upon ceaseless action and effort, also renounce it. You appear to be wise; why then do you grieve and yearn for things undesirable and dependent on others?

You wish to know that frame of mind which would enable you to enjoy happiness despite the loss of your possessions. My advice is that you renounce all these objects of desire.

Objects that should be avoided appear attractive, while objects that should be pursued appear undesirable. Some lose their wealth in the pursuit of riches, while others regard wealth as the root of infinite happiness and pursue it avidly. Again, some delighted with wealth think nothing superior to it and a man, in his eagerness to acquire material goods, loses all the other purusharthas.

If a man loses his hard-earned and legitimate riches, he despairs, falls inert and gives up all hope of material possessions. Some noble men of dharma pursue virtue and renounce every kind of worldly pleasure, from a desire to win felicity in the other world.

Some men lay down life itself to amass riches, for they think life without affluence is useless. Look at their pitiable condition, their foolishness. When life is so short and uncertain, these men, moved by ignorance, set their eyes on wealth. Who would set his heart upon hoarding possessions when destruction is their end, upon life when death is its end, and upon union when separation is its end?

Sometimes a man renounces wealth, and sometimes wealth abandons a man. What wise man would mourn the loss of wealth? There are many others in the world who lose their worldly possessions and friends. Use your intelligence, O Rajan, and you will understand that the calamities which overtake men are all due to their own conduct.

The remedy is to restrain your senses, mind and speech, for if those become weak and inclined to evil, there is no man who can keep himself free from the temptation of external objects which always surround him. As no one can form an adequate idea of the past or foresee the future because of the mutability of time and place, a wise man like you who has such an ability should never grieve for union and separation, for good or evil.

A man of mild disposition such as you, mature and with a disciplined soul, observant of brahmacharya, never gives in to woe or becomes restless from a desire to acquire or a fear of losing anything of little value.

It is not proper for a man like you to adopt a deceitful life of begging, a life that is sinful, evil, cruel, which only a wretch deserves. Take refuge in the great vana and lead a life of happiness there, alone, subsisting upon fruit and roots, restraining your speech and soul and filled with compassion for all creatures. He is wise who cheerfully leads such a life in the forest, with great-tusked elephants for companions, with no human being by his side, contented with the produce of the wilderness.

A large lake, when it becomes turbid, also becomes clear by itself. Similarly, a wise man, when disturbed in such matters, will become tranquil on his own. I know that someone who has fallen into a plight such as yours can still live happily. When it is near-impossible for you to recover your wealth, and when you have no ministers and counsellors, such a path opens to you.

Do you hope to reap the benefits that destiny has in store for you?'"

CANTO 105

'The Rishi Kalakavrikshiya said, "On the other hand, O Kshatriya, if you think that you still have any ability, and if you want me to, listen attentively while I disclose to you in detail the strategy you can adopt to have vast riches and, indeed, to recover your kingdom, kingly power and great prosperity."

King Kshemadarsin replied, "Tell me, O holy one, what you want me to know. I am eager to listen and do whatever you say. Let my meeting with you today prove fruitful to my enterprise."

The sage said, "Renounce ahamkara, moha, krodha, sukha and bhaya; humble yourself and wait upon your very enemies with folded hands. Serve Janaka, the king of Mithila, by always doing pure and goodly deeds. Firmly devoted to truth, you will then gain the trust of everyone and become as that king's right hand, and the Rajarishi of Videha will certainly give you great wealth.

As a result, you will gain many valiant and resolute allies, pure as fire in their deeds and free from the seven principal faults. A man of disciplined soul, with his senses under control, who adheres to his karma, will raise himself and gladden others. Honoured by the intelligent and prosperous Janaka, you will certainly become the right hand of the king and enjoy the confidence of all.

Then muster a large force, consult able ministers, bring about dissension among your enemies, set them against one another and break them all, like one who breaks a hard bilwa fruit with another. Or, make peace with the

enemies of your opponent and destroy the latter's power. Arrange for your enemy to become addicted to such things as are not easily attainable—beautiful women, inordinately expensive clothes, beds, seats, carriages, mansions, birds and animals of diverse species, juices, perfumes and fruits, so that he ruins himself through indulgence.

You could either deal with your enemy thus, or show him indifference. One who wants to pursue a successful strategy should never alert the enemy to his intentions.

Follow the conduct that the wise approve of, enjoy every kind of pleasure in the dominions of your enemy, imitate the ways of the dog, the deer and the crow and behave with apparent friendship towards your enemies. Induce them to undertake tasks that are grand and difficult to accomplish. See, also, that they engage in hostilities with other powerful enemies.

Draw their attention to pleasant gardens and costly beds and seats; offer them objects of enjoyment and thereby drain your enemy's treasury. Advise him to perform sacrifices, make gifts and gratify Brahmanas to excess. Since they received the gifts through you, they will do good to you in return and perform tapasyas, Vedic yagnas to devour your foes like wolves. Without doubt, a dharmatman of virtuous deeds will earn realms of the highest felicity in Swarga.

If you cause the treasury of your enemies to be exhausted, every one of them can be subdued. The exchequer is the root of felicity in Swarga and victory on earth, and it is because of their treasuries that enemies enjoy such happiness. You should, by any means, drain their coffers.

Do not praise Parishrama or exertion in the presence of your enemies but speak highly of Vidhi or destiny. Without doubt, the man who relies too much on the worship of the Devas soon meets his destruction. Get your enemy to perform the great Viswajit yagna and by that strip him of all his possessions. Thus, your objective will be fulfilled.

You should then inform your enemy that the best men in his kingdom are being oppressed with levies to refill the exhausted coffers, and suggest some eminent Rishi who knows the duties of Yoga, who will then wean him away from his earthly possessions. Your enemy will then want to adopt renunciation and retire to the vana to seek mukti. You should then, with the help of drugs prepared by boiling potent poisonous herbs and plants with

artificial salts, kill the elephants, horses and men of your enemy's dominions.

These and many other well-devised schemes are available, all connected with fraudulence. An intelligent man can destroy the entire population of a hostile kingdom with poison."

CANTO 106

'King Kshemadarsin said, "I do not desire to live by deceit or fraud, O Brahmana, for I do not want wealth, however great, earned other than through dharma. When we began our discussion I explained that I will live in this world only by means that would benefit me but not lead to censure, and I will only do things that have no harmful consequences. I am incapable of following the strategy that you recommend. Indeed, your advice does not become you."

Rishi Kalakavrikshiya replied, "Your words prove, O Kshatriya, that you are truly a man of dharma in temperament and understanding. I will strive for the benefit of both you and Janaka, the ruler of Videhas. I will arrange a bond, eternal and unbreakable, between you and him.

Who is there that would not be glad to have a minister like you, born of a noble race, learned, who follows dharma, abstains from cruelty, is versed in the art of governance and knows how to pacify everyone? I say this because, though dispossessed of your kingdom and plunged into great misery, you still want to follow dharma. Janaka, who firmly adheres to truth, will come soon to my asrama. I have no doubt that he will do what I ask of him."

The sage then summoned Janaka and said to him, "Kshemadarsin is of royal birth. I know his very heart and soul are as pure as the surface of a mirror or the disc of the autumn moon. I have tested him in every way and I do not see any fault in him. You should be friends. Repose in him the same confidence that you have in me.

A king who is without a competent minister cannot rule his kingdom for even three days. The minister should be courageous and highly intelligent. With these two attributes you can conquer both the worlds. Understand, Janaka, that these two qualities are essential to rule a kingdom and Dharmarajans have no greater support than a minister who possesses them.

Kshemadarsin is of royal birth and walks the path of dharma. He who always has dharma in his mind is a valuable acquisition. If you treat him with honour, he will reduce all your foes to subjection. If he fights you, he will do what a Kshatriya should. Indeed, like his father and grandfathers, if he fights, it will be to conquer you, and it will then be your duty to fight him, observing the Kshatriya dharma.

However, listen to my advice and you will benefit if you employ him and refrain from fighting him in battle. Keep your eyes always on dharma and renounce greed, for it is inappropriate for you to abandon the duties of your varna from lust for battle.

Neither Jaya nor Parajaya, victory or defeat, are predictable. Remember, peace should be made with an enemy by giving him food and wealth. One can see victory and defeat in Kshemadarsin's own case. Those who seek to destroy an enemy are sometimes themselves destroyed."

King Janaka saluted and gave due honour to the Maharishi and replied, "You are immensely learned and wise and I have no hesitation in saying that your sincere advice is sure to be advantageous for us both."

King Janaka then addressed the prince of Kosala, "I have conquered the world through the Kshatriya dharma and with the help of Neeti. However, Rajan, you have conquered me with your qualities. If you remain by my side, I will honour you and you will live with me as a victor—a Praptajaya. I honour your intelligence and your prowess, and I will not slight you by saying that I have conquered you. Live with me in my home with honour, and as a victor."

Both kings then performed obsequies to Rishi Kalakavrikshiya and, with mutual trust, went to the capital of Mithila. King Janaka invited Kshemadarsin into his home and duly honoured him with water to wash his feet, honey, curds and the other customary offerings. King Janaka also gave him the hand of his own daughter, as well as all kinds of gems and jewels. The establishment of peace is the greatest dharma of kings, since victory and defeat are both uncertain.'"

CANTO 107

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have, O Pitamaha, described the path of dharma, the general conduct, the means of livelihood of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, and its consequences. You have also spoken about the duties of kings, of their treasuries and the means to fill them, and about conquest and victory.

You have explained the character of ministers, the measures that lead to the betterment of one's subjects, the characteristics of the six-fold limbs of a kingdom, the qualities of armies, how to identify evil, the marks of those who are good, the attributes of those who are equal, inferior or superior to oneself, how a king who desires progress should conduct himself towards his people, and the manner in which the weak should be protected and cherished.

You have discussed all these subjects and laid down instructions that are lucid and as prescribed in the sacred texts. You have also discussed what kings should do if they wish to conquer their enemies.

Tell me now, Pitamaha, how I should behave towards the multitude of noble Kshatriyas that gather round a king's court. I want to know how their number can be increased, how they can be made loyal to the king, and how they can subjugate their enemies and acquire friends. It seems to me that disunity alone can bring about their destruction.

I also think that it is difficult to keep a secret that concerns many men. I would like to hear about all this in detail, Parantapa. Tell me also how to prevent the nobles from becoming inimical towards the king.'

Bhishma replies, ‘Lobha and krodha, greed and anger, O Rajan, cause enmity between noblemen and kings. If the king yields to greed, the nobles become angry, and if each works with intent to weaken and harm the other, both are destroyed. The two sides war with each other; they employ spies, use ploys, physical force, adopt the strategy of conciliation, offer bribes, cause disssension, try to weaken each other, pillage and spread fear.

The noblemen of a kingdom, a close-knit body, will dissociate themselves from the king if he tries to take too much from them. Once distanced from the king, all of them become dissatisfied and, from fear, will side with the enemies of their ruler. If the Kshatriyas are not united amongst themselves, they will fall easy prey to ouside enemies and will be destroyed. The nobles should always work in concert; by their strength and prowess they can acquire wealth, and many outsiders will seek their alliance.

Men of knowledge laud those noblemen who are united with bonds of love. If they stand together, they will all prosper and, by their example, establish dharma in the kingdom. They become prosperous if they restrain their sons and brothers, if they teach them their dharma, and behave kindly towards all men who have disciplined their ahamkara through gyana.

The nobles become prosperous if they ensure that their spies are active, Mahabaho, if they formulate policy, fill their treasuries, show proper reverence to the wise, the courageous and the persevering, and display steady proficiency in work.

By being wealthy and resourceful, through their knowledge of the shastras, the arts and sciences, the aristocracy rescues the ignorant masses from suffering and danger. A show of anger by the king, disagreement, terror, punishment, persecution, oppression and executions, O chief of the Bhaaratas, speedily cause the nobility to break from him and side with his enemies.

The king should honour the leaders among the nobility, for Rajaneeti depends to a great extent on them. You should hold consultations with only those who are the leaders, Parantapa, and have secret agents to watch them. The king should not consult every member of the nobility, O Bhaarata, but work together with the leaders and do whatever is for the good of the entire Kshatriya varna.

When the nobility fall out or become disunited and leaderless, you should adopt other methods, for if they quarrel and act independently

without unity, their prosperity dwindles and they fall prey to all kinds of evil. Those among them who are learned and wise should quell a dispute as soon as it arises, because if the elders of a royal house look on with indifference, such quarrels will soon destroy them and disunite the entire varna of Kshatriyas.

Fears that arise from outside are of little consequence, Rajan, but protect yourself from all fears that arise from within, for this can cut your very roots in a single day. When men equal to one another in family and blood, provoked by the wrath and greed inherent in their nature, cease to speak with one another, it is an omen of imminent defeat and destruction.

It is not by employing courage, intelligence, beauty, or wealth that enemies destroy the nobility. It is only through conflict and bribery that they can be subjugated. For this reason, one says that unity is the greatest protection of the nobility.'"

CANTO 108

"Yudhishtira says, 'The path of dharma is long, O Bhaarata, and has many branches. Which are the most important duties that I must practise to earn the highest punya, both here and hereafter?'

Bhishma replies, 'I think that the worship of Mata, Pita and guru is most important. The man who attends to this duty here will acquire great fame and many regions of felicity hereafter. Yudhishtira, you should revere them and obey unhesitatingly whatever they command, be it consistent with dharma or not! One should never do what they forbid.

They are the three worlds, the three varnas, the three Vedas and the three sacred fires. The Pita, one's father, one says is the Garhapatya fire; the Mata, mother, the Dakshina fire, and the guru is that fire upon which you pour libations. These are pre-eminent and, if you attend attentively to these three fires, you will conquer the three worlds.

If one serves one's father steadfastly, one can cross this sea of samsara. If one serves one's mother in the same way, one can attain regions of felicity in the next. If one serves one's acharya with devotion, one can obtain the realm of Brahma. Behave properly towards these three, O Bhaarata, and you will gain great fame in the three worlds and be forever blessed.

Great will be your punya and reward. Never disobey them in any matter. Never eat before they eat, or eat anything that is better than what they eat. Never blame them for anything, and always serve them humbly. You can

earn fame, merit, honour and regions of felicity hereafter, if you perform these deeds of great punya.

All the worlds honour those who revere these three. On the other hand, those who disregard these three will fail to find any punya, fame or merit from his karma, either in this world or in the next.

All that I have given away in honour of these three has returned a hundredfold or a thousandfold to me. It is because of this punya, O Yudhishtira, that even now the three worlds are clearly before my eyes. One acharya is superior to ten Brahmanas learned in the Vedas, and one Upadhyaya superior to ten acharyas. The father, again, is superior to ten Upadhyayas, and the mother greater in importance than ten fathers or perhaps the whole world. It is said that no one deserves as much reverence as the mother.

In my opinion, however, the guru is worthy of greater reverence than the father or even the mother. The father and the mother are authors of one's being, O Bhaarata, but they only create the body. The life of the spirit, on the other hand, one receives from one's Acharya, and that is divine. It is subject to no decay and is immortal.

You should never injure your father and mother, however much they offend you, and one does not incur sin if one refrains from punishing a parent, even if punishment is deserved. Indeed, a parent who enjoys impunity does not tarnish the image of a king, and the Devas and the Rishis do not withhold their favours from men who strive to cherish reverently even sinful fathers.

One should regard as both father and mother those who favour us and impart to us true and immortal knowledge of the Vedas. The disciple in gratitude should never do anything that would injure the acharya.

Those who do not respect the acharyas who instruct them, and do not obey them dutifully in thought and deed, incur the sin of killing an unborn, and there is no greater sinner in this world. Gurus always show great affection for their shishyas, so the latter should show their acharyas equal reverence. He who wishes to earn this great punya, which has existed from ancient days, should revere and love his acharyas and cheerfully share with them every object of enjoyment.

He who makes his father happy pleases Prajapati himself, and he who pleases his mother gratifies the earth herself, but he who pleases his guru

gratifies Brahma by his karma. For this reason, the acharya is worthy of greater reverence than either the father or the mother.

If you worship your acharyas, the very Rishis and the Devas, together with the Pitris, all are pleased. The guru is worthy of the highest reverence and the shishya should never disregard him in any manner. Neither the mother nor the father deserves as much respect as the acharya. One should never insult the father, the mother or the guru, or find fault with anything they do.

The Devas and the great Rishis are pleased with one who behaves with reverence towards his gurus. Those who hurt in thought or deed their acharya, father or mother, incur the sin of killing a foetus in the womb, and there is no sinner in the world equal to them. The son of the father's loins and the mother's womb, raised by them, who does not support them in his turn when he comes of age, incurs the sin of killing an unborn child, and there is no greater sinner in the world than him. We have heard that these four, he who injures a friend, he who is ungrateful, he who kills a woman and he who kills his guru, will never be able to purify themselves.

I have now told you generally all that a man should do in this world. Besides these duties that I have indicated, there is nothing that will bring greater happiness. I have told you the essence of all dharma.'"

CANTO 109

"Yudhishtira says, 'You are wise, O Bhaarata, so tell me how one who wants to adhere to dharma should work. Truth and falsehood exist in all the worlds. Which of these two should a man of dharma accept? What is truth, what is falsehood and what is sanatana dharma? When can a man tell the truth and when an untruth?'

Bhishma replies, 'To speak the truth is consistent with dharma, because there is nothing higher than truth. I will now tell you that which men do not generally know. You should not speak the truth where falsehood can appear to be the truth. Then again, you should even lie where truth will appear to be false.

The ignorant man incurs sin when he tells a truth which is not connected to dharma. He who can distinguish truth from falsehood knows dharma. Even a disreputable, cruel man with an evil, impure soul, can earn great punya, like the hunter Valaka, who killed the blind beast that threatened to destroy all creatures.

It is extraordinary that even a Rishi, though foolish, who wanted to acquire punya by tapasya, could incur the sin of murder by telling the truth to a company of robbers and pointing out the place where certain innocent men were hid.

Again, an owl who did an evil deed and with his beak broke a thousand eggs on the banks of the Ganges, obtained great punya and went to Swarga, because the eggs were of a deadly poisonous she-serpent.

The question you have asked me is a complex one, and no one who discusses the subject can define dharma accurately. Brahma declared that whatever leads to the advancement and growth of all creatures is dharma. He declared that whatever restrains creatures from injuring one another is dharma.

Dharma is so called because it supports all creatures. Some say that dharma is in the Srutis, while others do not agree. I would not fault those who disagree, since the Srutis do not lay down every duty.

Sometimes brigands seek information to help them identify a victim to rob. It is one's duty never to answer such queries. If by one's silence, a victim can escape, one should remain silent. If, on the other hand, one's silence at a time when one must speak rouses suspicion, it would be better to tell a lie.

It is accepted that there is no sin if one can escape from evil men even by swearing a false oath. One should not give wealth to sinful men, for that affects even the giver. If a creditor desires to enslave a debtor unable to pay off his debt, the witnesses should all lie if the creditor summons them to establish the truth of the contract. When life is at risk, or on a matter of marriage, one can lie.

One who seeks dharma does not commit a sin by telling a lie if he says it to save the property of others, or for sake of dharma. One is liable to fulfill all promises to pay one's debts and, upon failure, the defaulter may be forcibly enslaved. If a man does not fulfill his responsibilities, he should certainly be punished with the Dandaneeti.

A deceitful man who fails in all the duties of his own varna will begin to adopt practices of Asuras and live dishonestly. You should never tolerate such men but kill them by any means, for they think there is nothing in this world higher than wealth. No one should eat with them, and you should regard them as inhuman evildoers—pisachas shut out from the grace of the gods. Since they do not perform yagnas or tapasya, stay away from their companionship for, if they lose their wealth, they will even perform that most wretched act, suicide. Among these evil men, there is no one to whom you can say, "This is your duty. Let your heart turn to it." Their strong belief is that there is nothing in this world equal to wealth. He who slays such a creature would incur no sin, for his own karma has killed him, and he is already dead.

He who swears to slay these mindless men should keep his vow. Such evil men are like the crow and the vulture, dependent on deceit for their living, and after the dissolution of their human bodies they are reborn as crows and vultures. You should behave towards others in the same manner as they behave towards you. You should deal with one who practises deceit with deceit, and treat an honest man honestly.'"

CANTO 110

"Yudhishtira says, 'We see men suffer almost continually on various counts. Tell me, O Pitamaha, in what way can one overcome all these travails?'

Bhishma replies, 'The Rishis who duly practise the dharma decreed by the scriptures for the several varnasramas surmount all their difficulties. Those who never practise deceit, who are disciplined and who are in control of their worldly desires, master all their troubles.

Those who do not respond even when provoked, who do not injure others though they are themselves hurt, who give but do not take, overcome all hardships. Those who are always hospitable to guests, who are not malicious, who regularly study the Vedas, overcome all their difficulties. Those who know their duties, behave appropriately towards their parents, who do not sleep during the day, master all their troubles. Those who do not commit any kind of sin in thought, word or deed, who practise ahimsa, overcome all tribulations.

Kings who are not influenced by moha and lobha, who do not levy oppressive taxes and protect their own dominions, overcome all problems. Those who go to their own wedded wives in season and do not seek the companionship of other women, who are honest and attentive to their Agnihotras, surmount all difficulties.

Those who are courageous and engage in battle by fair means, unmindful of death, overcome all troubles. Those who always adhere to truth in this world, even when life is at stake, and who are models for all

men to imitate, overcome all obstacles. Those who never deceive by their actions, whose words are always agreeable and whose wealth is always well spent, overcome all ills.

Those Brahmanas who study the Vedas only at hours intended for study and who practise tapasya with devotion, overcome all obstacles. Brahmanas who take to a life of celibacy and brahmacharya, who perform tapasya and whom learning, Vedic knowledge and proper vows have cleansed, overcome all travails.

Those who have controlled the gunas of rajas and tamas, are Dharmatmans who practise the quality of sattva, and they can overcome all pain and sorrow.

Those whom no creature fears, who do not themselves fear any, and look upon all creatures as their own selves, overcome all difficulties. Those bulls among men who are good, who are not envious of other people's prosperity and who are noble in their conduct, overcome all difficulties.

Those who bow to all the Devas and listen to the doctrines of all dharmas, have faith and tranquil souls, and overcome all troubles. Those who do not desire honour for themselves, who reward others, who bow down to those deserving of their worship, overcome all difficulties.

Those who perform sraddhas on the proper lunar days with pure minds for the sake of progeny are blessed with fine children. Those who restrain their own anger and pacify the wrath of others, who never lose their temper, overcome all difficulties. Those who abstain all their lives from honey, meat and intoxicants, overcome all grief.

Those who eat only in order to support life, who seek the companionship of women only for the sake of begetting children, and who open their lips only to speak the truth, overcome all difficulties. Those who worship with devotion Narayana, the Supreme Lord of all creatures and the origin and destruction of the universe, overcome all trials.

This Krishna here, of eyes red as the lotus, clad in yellow robes, this Mahabaho who is our well-wisher, brother, friend and relative, is Narayana of unfading glory. He covers all the worlds like a leather case, at his own pleasure. He is the powerful Lord of unimaginable Soul. He is Govinda, the greatest of all beings. This Krishna who always does what pleases and is beneficial to Vishnu and also to you, Yudhishtira, is the first and best of all beings, the irresistible one, the abode of eternal felicity.

Those who devoutly seek the refuge of Narayana, also called Hari, will overcome every obstacle. Those who read these verses about how to surmount difficulties, who recite them to others and speak of them, will surely overcome.

I have now, O sinless one, told you all those acts by which men can transcend all their woes and sorrows, both here and hereafter.'"

CANTO 111

"Yudhishtira says, 'Many men here who are not serene souls outwardly appear calm, while others who are really peaceful souls appear otherwise. How, O Pitamaha, can we distinguish between them?'

Bhishma replies, 'Let me relate, O Yudhishtira, a conversation between a tiger and a jackal.

Long ago, in a prosperous city called Purika, there was a king named Paurika. He was the worst of men, exceedingly cruel, who delighted in causing injury to others. On the expiry of his lifespan he died miserably and, as a result of the evil deeds of his human life, was reborn a jackal.

He, however, remembered his former prosperity and in grief, gave up meat even when others of his kind brought it to him. He became compassionate to all creatures, truthful in speech, firm in the observance of strict vratas, and ate only wind-fallen fruits from the trees. The jackal continued to live in the vast crematorium where he was born and never wished to change it for a better locality.

Unable to suffer the purity of his conduct, the other members of his species tried to make him change his resolve and told him with humility, "Though you dwell in this terrible smasana, you still want a lofty life. Isn't this a perversity, since you are by nature a carrion-eater? Be like us. All of us will give you food. Eat what is your natural diet, and abandon this virtuous conduct."

The jackal listened attentively and replied reasonably in these words of ahimsa, “I am of low birth, but it is conduct that determines varna, not varna that decides conduct. I wish to live in such a way that my fame will spread.

Although I dwell in this smasana, I observe my vratas according to dharma. One is the cause of one’s karma and the varnasrama one takes is not for religious deeds. If one who follows any varnasrama kills a Brahmana, will he not incur the sin of Brahmahatya? If, on the other hand, one gives away a cow, though one does not observe any particular varnasrama, will that pious gift yield no punya?

Motivated by selfish needs, you only want to fill your stomachs. You are confused and foolishly do not see the three sins that will be the final result. I do not want to adopt the life you lead, which is evil both here and hereafter and will surely lead to discontentment, temptation and loss of virtue.”

A renowned tiger happened to overhear this conversation and, finding the jackal to be a learned one of pure conduct, greeted him respectfully and said, “Righteous one, I know what you are. Come and share the duties of kingship with me as my minister. Enjoy whatever you wish and leave behind what you do not want. But let me tell you that tigers are known to be fierce. If you behave with mildness, you will reap the benefits.”

The jackal, flattered by these words of the mahatman among animals, hung his head a little and said humbly, “O king of beasts, I thank you for your kind words. Your wish to seek ministers of pure conduct, familiar with dharma and worldly affairs, does you credit. You cannot remain a great leader without a pious minister, or with an evil one who is on the lookout to destroy you.

You should regard the ministers who are devoted to you, who understand policy, who are independent, who want to crown you with victory, who are not greedy, who are free from deceit, wise, ever engaged in your welfare and have mental vitality, just as you look upon your acharyas or your parents.

But as I am perfectly happy with my present position, I do not want to change it for anything else. I do not covet luxury or the happiness associated with it.

My conduct will not agree with that of your old servants. If they are evil, they will produce discord between us. It is not desirable or praiseworthy to depend upon another. I am a Dharmatman and highly

blessed. I cannot show severity even to sinners. I have foresight and a capacity for great exertion and do not look at insignificant things. I possess great strength, follow dharma and never work fruitlessly. I have every object of enjoyment and am never satisfied with a little.

I have never served another and am unskilled in the matter. I live according to my pleasure in the vana. All those who dwell with kings have to endure great apprehension because of evil talk against them. Vanavasis pass their days fearlessly, without anxiety and contentedly in the observance of vratas, living on fruits and roots, with no fear that arises in the heart of one whom the king summons.

Reflect, and you will see that simple food and drink obtained without effort, and sumptuous food procured with fear, differ widely from each other. I am of the opinion that happiness prevails where there is no anxiety. Only a few among those who serve kings are justly punished for their offences. A large number of them are falsely accused and suffer death.

If you still appoint me as your minister, O king of beasts, I want to make a compact with you regarding your conduct towards me. You should always heed my advice, which will ever be for your good. You will not interfere later with the arrangements that you will make for me.

I will never consult your other ministers because, if I do, they will find various faults in me to put me down. I will meet you alone, in secrecy, and advise you. In all matters regarding your kinsmen, you will not seek my advice. After you have consulted me, you will not punish your other ministers later in rage, nor will you punish my followers and dependants."

To this the king of beasts answered, "Tathaastu, let it be so!" and showed him every respect. The jackal then became the minister of the tiger.

When they saw the jackal treated with respect and honour, the previous servants of the king conspired together and began to show their hatred towards him. These evil servants at first tried to gratify and win him over with friendly overtures so that he would permit the misappropriation and abuse of the property of others, which they had so long enjoyed.

When they were unable to do as they pleased, they began to lure him with sweet talk and large bribes, but the wise jackal showed no signs of yielding to these temptations. Then some of them colluded to destroy him, stole the well-dressed meat intended for the tiger and placed it secretly in the jackal's house. The jackal knew who had stolen the meat and who the conspirators were, but he did nothing because of his covenant with the king.

When he was made a minister, he had said, "You want my friendship, O Rajan, but you will not mistrust me without cause."

When the king of beasts, feeling hungry, came to eat, he did not see any meat for his dinner and roared, "Find the thief!"

His deceitful ministers reported to him that his learned minister, the jackal, who was so proud of his own wisdom, had stolen the meat. Hearing this, the tiger became filled with rage and ordered his jackal to be seized. Seeing their opportunity, the former ministers told the king, "The jackal is always ready to steal our food."

They spoke of the jackal robbing the king of his food and said, "Such then is he! What is there that he would not venture to do? He is not as you had heard. He is righteous in speech but he is sinful and has disguised himself by putting on the garb of dharma. For selfish reasons he has practised austerities in diet and vows. If you do not believe us, we will show you proof."

They then caused the meat to be discovered in the jackal's home and reported it to the king. Based on this evidence and the complaints of his old servants, the king ordered the jackal to be executed.

The venerable mother of the tiger heard of this and came to awaken his good sense with wise advice. "Son, you should not accept this deceitful accusation. Evil men, out of envy and rivalry, impute faults to an honest man, as they cannot endure his exploits and success.

They ascribe faults even to a Dharmatman engaged in tapasya. Even for a Muni in vanavasa, harmlessly practising his svadharma, friends, neutrals and foes spring up. They who are greedy hate those who are pure; the idle hate the active; the uneducated hate the learned; the poor hate the rich; the evil man hates the man of dharma; and the ugly hate the beautiful. Many among the learned, the ignorant, the rapacious and the deceitful, would falsely accuse an innocent one, even if the latter possessed the virtues and intelligence of Brihaspati.

If the meat has really been stolen from your house, remember, while you search for the thief, that the jackal never takes any meat that anyone gives him. We notice that evil men sometimes appear good, and the good sometimes appear evil. A thorough examination is absolutely necessary.

The sky appears to be the solid base of a vessel and the firefly a spark of actual fire. In reality however, the sky has no base and there is no fire in the

firefly. Ensure that there is close scrutiny, even of what appears to the eye, so that you don't regret it later.

It is not at all difficult, O son, for a master to put his servant to death. Forgiveness in the powerful, however, is always laudable and celebrated. You appointed the jackal as your prime minister and earned great fame among all our neighbouring jungle kings. A good minister cannot be found easily and, since the jackal is your well-wisher, you should support him.

The king who condemns an innocent one falsely accused by his enemies soon meets destruction at the hands of evil counsellors who influenced that decision."

After the tiger's mother had spoken, a good servant of the jackal, stepping out of the ranks of his foes, described how his enemies had fabricated the false accusation. The jackal's innocence was proved and the tiger acquitted and feted him, affectionately embracing him again and again.

The jackal, who knew Rajaneeti, however, burned with grief. He saluted the king of beasts and sought his permission to give up his life by observing the praya vrata. The tiger looked at the virtuous jackal, his eyes brimming with affection, and respectfully sought to dissuade him.

The jackal, seeing his master emotional, bowed to him and in a voice choked with tears, said, "You first honoured and later insulted me. Your conduct towards me is calculated to make me your enemy. It is not proper that I should stay with you any longer.

Servants who are discontented, who have been stripped of their office or deprived of their honour, who have been impoverished or whose enemies have ruined them through their master's anger, who have been weakened, who are rapacious, enraged, alarmed, deceived by their employers, whose property has been confiscated, who are proud and want to achieve great feats but do not have the means to earn wealth, and who burn with grief or rage due to some injury done to them, always hope for calamities to overcome their masters. Deceived, they leave their masters and become effective instruments in the hands of enemies.

You have insulted me and pulled me down from my place. How will you trust me again? How will I on my part continue to stay with you?

You thought me competent and gave me high office. However, you violated our compact and humiliated me. If you refer to someone as a Dharmatman, you should not then term him evil, if you want to maintain your steadfastness.

You no longer have any confidence in me, and this fills me with alarm and anxiety. Your suspicion and my fear will give our enemies opportunities to injure us, leaving your subjects uneasy and anxious.

Such a state of affairs has many faults, and the wise do not regard a situation as happy in which there is honour first and dishonour later. It is difficult to reunite two that you have separated, just as it is difficult to separate two who are united. If men reunite after separation, their conduct will not be affectionate.

There is no servant who does anything only to benefit his master. Service proceeds from the motive of doing good to the master, and also to oneself. One lives from selfish motives, because unselfish deeds or motives are rare, almost unknown. Kings whose hearts are restless and unquiet cannot acquire a true knowledge of men. Only one in a hundred can be found to be able or fearless. The prosperity of men and their fall, adversity and greatness, all proceed from weakness of understanding."

These conciliatory words of advice about dharma, kama and artha made the king happy. The intelligent jackal then left for the forest. Disregarding the entreaties of the king of beasts, he sat in praya, cast off his body and went to Swarga as the reward for his good karma on earth.'"

CANTO 112

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me in detail, O Dharmatman, what efforts a king must make to be happy.'

Bhishma replies, 'I will tell you the established truth about what a king should do in this world, and his dharma, so that he can be happy. Yudhishtira, a king should not behave like the camel in the story that I am about to relate to you!

There was, in the Krita yuga, a huge camel who could recollect all the events of his former life. He sat in tapasya and observed the most rigid vratas in the vana. This pleased the great Brahma so much that he granted him a boon.

The camel said, "Let my neck become long by your grace, O Holy One, so that I may be able to reach food that lies even at the end of a hundred yojanas."

The Mahatman, giver of boons said, "Tathaasthu!" and granted the wish.

Having obtained the boon, the camel returned to his own vana. The foolish animal, from the day of gaining the boon, became idle and did not go out to graze. One day, while the animal had extended his neck of a hundred yojanas and was grazing without any effort, a great storm arose. The camel, placing his head and a portion of the neck within the cave of a mountain, resolved to wait till the storm passed.

Meanwhile, it began to pour in torrents, inundating the whole terrain. A jackal, with his wife, drenched by the rain and shivering with cold, dragged

himself with difficulty towards the very same cave and ran into it for shelter. Living as he did upon meat, and famished and tired as he was, O Bharatarishabha, the jackal, seeing the camel's neck, began to eat as much of it as he could. The camel strove desperately to shorten it, but the jackal and his wife did not lose their hold. Within a short time the foolish camel was dead. Having eaten the camel's head and throat, the jackals came out of the cave after the storm had abated. Thus the stupid camel met its death, which followed in the train of idleness.

As for yourself, control your senses, avoiding idleness, and do everything in the world conscientiously. Manu himself has said that victory depends upon intelligence. All karma accomplished with your intelligence is regarded as the best; karma achieved with the help of arms is average; that attained by the use of feet is inferior, while work done by carrying loads is the lowest. If the king is clever in the transaction of business and restrains his senses, his kingdom will thrive.

Manu has also maintained that with intelligence an ambitious man can achieve victory. Sinless one, in this world those who listen to advice that is not generally known, who have allies and who act only after careful consideration, achieve all their goals and rule the earth.

Yudhishtira, you who are powerful as Indra himself, the wise men of ancient times who know the shastras have held this view and I, too, say the same to you: In this world, Rajan, think before you act!'"

CANTO 113

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Bharatarishabha, how a ruler who has won possession of a precious kingdom behaves towards a powerful enemy.'

Bhishma replies, 'Let me relate to you the old story of the conversation between the Ocean and the rivers.

Long ago, the eternal Ocean, the lord of rivers, the refuge of the foes of the Devas, asked all the rivers to clear a doubt that had arisen in his mind. "I see that all you rivers bring away along with your rapid currents large tree trunks, torn off with their roots and branches. However, you do not ever bring me the cane that grows on your banks, which is thin and not strong. Tell me, do you refuse to uproot it out of contempt, or because it is of no use to you? Indeed, why do you not wash away the stalks of cane uprooted from the banks where they grow?"

The Ganga river replied to the Ocean, the lord of all rivers, wisely and sensibly: "Trees stay in one place and do not yield the spot where they stand. As a result, they resist our currents and we are obliged to uproot them. The cane, seeing the swelling currents, behaves differently. It bends and after the flood has subsided, resumes its former posture. The cane knows the virtues of time and opportunity, kaala and avasara. It is docile and obedient, yields without being obstinate and inflexible, and so remains where it grows, without us carrying it away. The plants, trees and creepers that bend and rise before the force of wind and water have never to suffer the fate of being uprooted."

He who does not yield to the power of an enemy greater in might, and in a position to imprison or kill him, soon meets with destruction. The wise man who acts only after he has fully ascertained the relative strengths and weaknesses, the stamina and energy, of himself and his enemy, has never to suffer embarrassment. An intelligent man, when he finds his enemy to be more powerful than himself, should be like the cane. This is true wisdom.'"

CANTO 114

"Yudhishtira says, 'How should a learned and modest man behave, O Bhaarata, when an ignorant and conceited braggart assails him with harsh words in a gathering?'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, O lord of the earth, to what the shastras prescribe as the conduct of a mahatman when he is confronted in this world by abuse from unintelligent men. If he does not yield to anger, he is sure to take away the punya of all the good karma of the abuser. The sufferer in such a case transfers the paapa of all his own bad karma to the angry abuser. An intelligent man should disregard insulting language, which, after all, is merely like the screeching of a tittibha bird.

He who yields to hate, lives in vain. A fool can often be heard to say, "I addressed that respectable man in these words before an assembly of men," and to even boast of that vicious deed. He will add, "Abused by me, the man remained silent as if dead with shame."

A shameless man brags about something of which no one should boast. You must disregard such a wretch. The wise man should endure anything that fools say, for what can a vulgar fellow achieve by his praise or blame? He is like a crow that caws pointlessly in the vana.

If those who accuse others verbally could establish the charges by some means, then perhaps their words would be of some value. But empty words are as effective as those spoken by fools invoking death upon those they abuse.

Such a man only proclaims his own bastardy by his vile conduct; he is like a peacock that dances displaying its intimate body parts, which should properly be concealed. A man of pure conduct should never even speak with such sinful men, who have no scruples and say or do anything without shame.

He who speaks of someone's merits when his eyes are upon him, and speaks ill of him behind his back, is truly like a dog. Such a man loses prospect of bliss in Swarga as well as the fruits of any knowledge and dharma that he has earned. He who speaks ill of others behind their backs soon loses the punya earned from all his yagnas, libations and gifts made even to a hundred men.

A wise man should unhesitatingly avoid one who is sinful at heart and shunned by all honest men, just as he would avoid eating the flesh of a dog. The evil one who proclaims the faults of a Mahatman, actually demonstrates his own vile nature, just as a snake displays his hood when others excite it. The sensible man who seeks to rebut such a back-biter at his favourite work, is like a donkey sunk in a heap of ashes.

A man who always speaks ill of others should be avoided like a ferocious wolf, an infuriated elephant which trumpets in madness, or a rabid dog. Shame on the sinful, mean men who take to such a senseless path and abandoning all wholesome restraints and modesty, who always do what is injurious to others without care for their own welfare.

If an honest man wants to bandy words with such despicable men when they set out to humiliate him, you should advise him: "Do not allow yourself to be upset." Men of calm temperament never approve of an argument between a high and a low man. We know that an angry, slanderous, enraged man can slap another, pelt him with dirt, frighten him with snarls or grind his teeth at him. He who endures the complaints and abuse of evil men made in public, or who frequently reads these injunctions, never suffers any distress through verbal abuse.'"

CANTO 115

"Yudhishtira says, 'Wise Pitamaha, as you care for the future of our family, you must clear some other doubts that perplex me, apart from how to deal with evil men who speak maliciously about us. I want to ask you further about what would be beneficial to a kingdom and will produce happiness, benefits and advancement in the present and the future to the royal line, about beneficial food and drink, and about a healthy body.

How should a ruling king, surrounded by friends, ministers and servants, make his people happy? The king who becomes a victim of his baser passions falls into evil company, looks for debased companions, finds that all his noble, wellborn and moral servants have abandoned him, and so loses their good advice. Such a king never succeeds in gaining the objectives whose accomplishment depend upon having good men around him.

You are equal to Brihaspati himself in intelligence and must explain to me the Rajadharma, which is difficult to understand. You, Naravyaghra, are constantly striving to achieve the good of our vamsa and advise us about the dharma of Rajaneeti.

The learned Kshatri Vidura, too, gives us valuable instructions. I could pass my days in happiness like a man who has quaffed amrita, listening to your teachings that are so beneficial to us Kshatriyas and the kingdom.

Which class of servants can one regard as inferior and which competent? What type of retainers, of what birth, can help us discharge our Rajadharma? If the king chooses to work alone and without assistance, he

will never succeed in protecting his people. All noble men of high birth covet the power of sovereignty.'

Bhishma replies, 'The king, O Bhaarata, cannot rule his kingdom alone. Without retainers to help him, he cannot accomplish any goal. Even if he succeeds in gaining his objective, he cannot retain it alone. The king whose servitors are all knowledgeable and wise, devoted to the good of their master, of noble birth and of tranquil disposition, succeeds in enjoying the happiness of sovereignty.

That king enjoys the satisfaction of sovereignty whose ministers are of high birth, who cannot be lured away from him by bribes and other influences, who live with him and give him advice, who are wise, good, and have a knowledge of how matters are interrelated, who can provide for future events and contingencies, who have knowledge of the virtues of Time and never grieve for what is past. The king whose officials share with him his joys and sorrows, who are all faithful, strive to please him and direct their attention to the accomplishment of their master's objectives, enjoys the happiness that comes with sovereignty.

That king enjoys the true happiness of power whose subjects are always cheerful, distinguished and tread the path of dharma. He is the best of kings if contented and trustworthy men, experts in matters of finance, manage and supervise all the sources of his income. The king acquires wealth and great punya when incorruptible, trustworthy, devoted and generous servants supervise the replenishment of his granaries and stores.

The king who in his city administers justice lawfully and delivers criminal law in the manner of Sankha and Likhita, earns the punya of kingship. The king who binds his subjects to himself through kindness, who knows the Rajadharma, earns the punya of sovereignty.'"

CANTO 116

"Bhishma says, 'An ancient tale relevant to our subject has been told which good and wise men regard as an important precedent. I heard many Maharishis recount it in the asrama of Rama, the son of Jamadagni.

In a certain large vana, uninhabited by humans, there dwelt a Rishi who, with his senses under control, lived upon fruit and roots and observed rigid vratas. He was a most perspicacious man, of tranquil and pure soul, who always recited the Vedic mantras, observed strict laws and self-restraint and, with a heart cleansed by fasts, lived a life of kindness towards all creatures.

When he sat in tapasya, all the creatures that lived in the forest who knew of his goodness and wisdom would approach him with affection. Fierce lions and tigers, huge choleric elephants, leopards, rhinoceroses, bears and other fierce carnivores, blood-drinkers, came and conversed with the Rishi, who knew all their tongues. They would greet him courteously and depart. Indeed, they always did what pleased him and behaved towards him like disciples.

One domestic animal, a dog, lived there permanently. He had a heart like that of a human being, was devoted and exceedingly attached to the Rishi and never left him at any time. Weak and emaciated with fasts, he subsisted upon fruit, roots and water. He was tranquil and inoffensive in nature and always lay at the feet of the great sage because of the love he received.

One day, a vicious leopard of cruel intent, always on the lookout for prey, a veritable second Yama, arrived hungry and thirsty, with slavering jaws, his tail flicking from side to side, and eyed the dog for his prey.

When he saw the fierce beast coming, O Rajan, the dog, in fear of his life, said to the Rishi, "O Maharishi, this leopard is an enemy of all dogs and it wants to kill me. Save me from this beast, wise Mahabaho!"

The Rishi could read the thoughts of every animal and understood that the dog had ample cause for fear. Possessed of the six attributes and fluent in the voices of all creatures, the Rishi said, "You will have no fear of death from leopards any longer. Let your natural form disappear and become a leopard, my son!"

Instantly, the dog was transformed into a leopard with skin bright as gold, spots on his body and large fangs, and thereupon began to live in the vana fearlessly. Meanwhile, the predatory leopard, seeing before him an animal of his own species, lost all feelings of animosity towards it.

Some time later a fierce and hungry tiger visited the asrama and padded with open mouth towards the dog that the Rishi had transformed into a leopard. Seeing the hungry tiger, the transfigured leopard sought the Rishi's protection. The Rishi, who had great affection for the leopard because it lived with him, now changed him into a powerful tiger. The other tiger, when he saw a beast of his own species, Rajan, did him no injury.

In course of time, the dog, now turned into a powerful carnivore, gave up his former diet of fruit and roots. Indeed, from that time, Rajan, the transformed tiger lived upon the flesh of other animals of the forest, like a true king of beasts.'"

CANTO 117

"Bhishma says, 'The transfigured tiger, replete with the flesh of slain animals, slept easy. One day, as he lay in the yard, an infuriated elephant who looked like a great cloud, with rent cheeks, a lofty forehead, freckled with the dust of lotus filaments on his body, with long curved tusks and a trumpet deep as thunder, came to the asrama.

The tiger saw the enraged elephant approach him and, frantic with fear, sought the protection of the Rishi. The Rishi transformed the tiger into an elephant. The real elephant, when he saw one of his own kind, big as a mass of clouds, was scared away. The Rishi's elephant from then on frolicked in lakes overgrown with lotuses and wandered on their banks riddled with rabbit holes.

A considerable time elapsed in this way. One day, as he cheerfully strode along near the asrama, he was confronted by a maned mountain lion accustomed to killing elephants. When he saw the lion coming, the Rishi's elephant trembled with fear and sought the sage's protection. The Rishi transformed that prince of elephants into a lion. As the wild lion was of the same species, the Rishi's lion no longer feared him. On the other hand, the wild lion, seeing a stronger beast of his own kind before him, was intimidated.

The Rishi's lion began to live in the asrama within the forest, which the other animals no longer ventured to approach as they all feared for their lives. One day, a fierce Sarabha with eight legs and eyes on its forehead, who preyed on all other animals and petrified them with fear, came to that

asrama hunting the Rishi's lion. The Rishi transformed his lion into a fiercer and more powerful Sarabha, who quickly put the other to flight.

Thereafter it lived happily with the Rishi in the asrama and all the animals that dwelt in the forest were afraid of it. Their dread and desire to save their lives led them to flee the vana. The Sarabha blithely continued every day to kill animals for his food and became a carnivorous beast, as it no longer cared for the fruit and roots upon which it had once subsisted.

One day, that ungrateful creature who had first been a dog but who was now a Sarabha, thirsting for blood, wanted to kill the Rishi. The wise Rishi, through his ascetic power, understood the intentions of the beast and cursed him, "O dog, I first converted you into a leopard and then into a tiger. From a tiger I changed you into a bull elephant in musth, and then into a lion. From a mighty lion I transformed you into a Sarabha. I changed you into these diverse shapes out of affection for you. You never belonged by birth to any of these species. Since you now want to kill me, one who has done you no injury, O sinful one, become a dog again!"

Immediately, the low, foolish and wicked animal resumed his own natural form of a lowly dog.'"

CANTO 118

"Bhishma says, 'The dog, after he assumed his natural form, was very cast down. The Rishi reprimanded him and drove the sinful creature away from his asrama.

Guided by this precedent, an intelligent king should appoint servants fit for the office assigned to each and exercise proper supervision over them. He should first ascertain their truthfulness, purity, sincerity and general disposition, knowledge of the shastras, conduct, birth, self-restraint, compassion, strength, energy, dignity and forgiveness. A king should never appoint a minister without first evaluating him.

If a king gathers round him men of low birth, he will never be happy. A man of noble birth, even if unfairly persecuted by his royal master, will never try to injure him, while one of mean and low birth who becomes rich and powerful through his royal connection, will become his master's enemy even if only verbally rebuked.

A minister should be of high birth and strength; he should be forgiving, self-restrained, with his senses under control; he should not be greedy but contented with his just acquisitions, delight in the prosperity of his master and friends and know the requirements of time and place—kaala and avasara.

He should always recruit useful men who keep their lord's dharma in mind, remain attentive and faithful in the discharge of their svadharma, are masters in the strategy of war and peace, and are loved both by the citizens and the inhabitants of the provinces.

The minister should be a master of all kinds of vyuhas that can cleave and shatter his enemies' ranks, a general skilled in leading the army on the march, able to inspire his master's army with courage and to read signs and gestures, adept in the art of training elephants, confident of his own powers, free from pride and clever in the transaction of business.

He should always do what is right, follow svadharma, select noble friends, be sweet of speech, good-looking, with marked qualities of leadership, well-versed in policy, accomplished, energetic in action, active, ingenious, of a sweet temper, modest in appearance, patient, brave, rich, and adaptable to the requirements of time and place. The king who finds such a minister will never be humiliated or overpowered by anyone. Indeed, his kingdom will gradually spread over the earth like the light of the moon.

A king who knows the shastras, who recognizes the supremacy of dharma, who always protects his subjects and who has the following virtues, obtains the love of all. He should be patient, forgiving, pure in conduct, severe when required, believe in hard work, be respectful towards all his elders, know the shastras, remain ready to listen to those who are competent to instruct, to give advice and be able to judge correctly between conflicting courses of action suggested to him.

He should be intelligent, have a retentive memory, be just in action, self-restrained, sweet-spoken, forgiving even to enemies, practise personal charity and have perfect faith in God. He should be of pleasing aspect, ready to extend a helping hand to men in distress, be free from egoism, never without a wife, refrain from acting in haste, and appoint ministers who always seek his good.

He should always reward his ministers when they achieve anything singular. He should avoid idleness, attract men to himself by doing them good and cherish those devoted to him. He should always be cheerful and attentive to the wants of his servants, and never give way to anger. He should be magnanimous and wield the Dandaneeti justly. He should make all men around him follow dharma.

He should use spies for his eyes, to supervise his subjects' concerns and all matters connected with their dharma and artha. A king who has these hundred qualifications earns the love of all, so every ruler should strive to emulate him.

The king who wants his own advancement should never disregard his army and should enlist able warriors to help him protect his kingdom. If his

commanders are brave in battle, grateful, well versed in the shastras, if the foot-soldiers are familiar with the treatises on religion and dharma, if the elephant-warriors are fearless, if the Maharathas are skilled archers and can wield other weapons, he will conquer the whole world.

The king who strives to win over all men, who is ever eager for hard work, who has many friends and allies, becomes the greatest of rulers. A king who can bond all men to himself, will conquer the whole world, O Bhaarata, with just a thousand brave horsemen.'"

CANTO 119

"Bhishma says, 'The king who is guided by the moral of this dog's story and appoints his courtiers to offices for which they are fit, enjoys the happiness that comes with sovereignty. You should not praise and elevate a dog in a position above his competence because he will become intoxicated with pride. Ministers should be appointed to offices for which they are fit and should be suitably qualified for their occupations. The wise do not approve appointments of unworthy men.

The king who confers on his servitors offices for which each is competent will enjoy the happiness that comes with sovereignty. A Sarabha should occupy the position of a Sarabha; a lion should bristle with the might of a lion; a tiger should be a tiger, and a leopard should remain a leopard.

Ministers and servitors should be appointed to offices for which each is suitable according to the law. If you want to achieve success, never appoint them to situations higher than their deserving. The foolish king who, ignoring precedent, appoints servants to offices for which they are unfit, will not please his subjects.

A king who wants accomplished retainers should never appoint unintelligent, petty-minded men who cannot control their senses and who are of low birth. Men who are honest, of noble birth, brave, learned, devoid of malice and envy, lofty-minded, pure in conduct and clever in business matters, deserve to be appointed as ministers.

Humble men, prompt in discharging their duties, tranquil in disposition, pure in mind, with diverse natural abilities and who are above reproach

should be advisors to the king.

A lion should always have only a lion as a companion, otherwise the companion will earn all the advantages of the lion, and the lion, none. The lion that has only a pack of dogs for his associates will never benefit from such a friendship in accomplishing his dharma.

A king can succeed in subduing the whole world if he has for his ministers men of courage, wisdom, learning and high birth. Yudhishtira, kings should never keep counsellors who are not learned, sincere, wise and wealthy. Men who devote themselves to the service of their master are never hindered by any impediments, so kings should always speak to them in peaceful terms.

The king should look after his treasury with great care and always try to augment it, since therein lie his roots. Let your granary be filled with corn and increase your wealth; but let their supervision be entrusted to honest retainers.

Let your officers be always attentive to their work, acquire skill in battle and in managing horses. Yudhishtira, look after the interests of your kinsmen and friends, always be in their midst and seek the good of your city.

With this story of the dog, I have instructed you about your dharma towards your subjects. What else do you want to hear?'"

CANTO 120

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have, O Bhaarata, discoursed upon the many duties of Rajaneeti that wise men who knew the Rajadharma of old observed and passed down. You spoke in detail of those duties that they approved. Will you now give me a summary of all this, O Bharatarishabha, so that I can commit it firmly to memory?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, Rajan, to how the protection of all creatures, the greatest duty of the Kshatriya, is to be exercised. A king who knows his duties should assume many forms, like the peacock that puts forth plumes of diverse hues. Keenness, crookedness, truth and sincerity, are the qualities that should be present in him.

With thorough impartiality, he should practise the qualities of goodness, if he is to earn happiness. He must assume that particular hue or form which is suitable for the particular object he seeks to accomplish. A king who can adopt diverse forms will be able to carry out even the most subtle objectives. Dumb like the peacock in autumn, he should conceal his counsel. He should speak little and the little he speaks should be sweet. He should be attractive and well versed in the shastras.

He should always carefully guard those gates through which danger can overcome him, like men taking care of breaks in embankments through which the waters of large tanks can rush out and flood their fields and houses. He should seek the refuge of Mahatman Brahmanas, like men who seek the refuge of great rivers engendered by rainwater collected in mountain lakes.

The king who wishes to amass wealth should behave like religious hypocrites who wear a coronal lock. He should retain the danda of chastisement uplifted in his hands and levy taxes only after he has carefully examined the incomes and expenses of his subjects, as one selects a full-grown palmyra tree for drawing its juice.

He should behave equitably towards his own subjects, get his cavalry to trample the crops of his enemies, march against foes when his own wings have become strong and, most of all, understand his own weakness. He should proclaim the faults of his enemies, crush their supporters and collect wealth from outside like a man who plucks flowers from the vana. He should destroy the mightier kings who stand with uplifted heads like mountains, by placating the governors of their citadels and the garrisons, and by ambuscades and sudden attacks.

He should enter his nightly quarters alone and unseen, like the peacock in the rainy season, and enjoy within his inner apartments the companionship of his wives. He should protect himself, not take off his armour, and avoid the nets that spies and secret agents of his enemies spread for him. He should also win over the spies of his enemies, but kill them when an opportunity occurs.

Like the peacock, the king should kill his powerful and angry foes of crooked policy, destroy their forces and drive them away from their homes. Similarly, he should do what is good for himself and gather wisdom from everywhere, as the peacock collects insects from the forest.

A wise king should thus rule his kingdom and adopt a policy that is beneficial to him. He should exercise his own acumen, decide what to do, and then consult others to either abandon or confirm such decisions. The shastras are useful because they sharpen the intellect and help one to choose a proper course of action.

By the art of conciliation, a king should inspire confidence in the hearts of his enemies. He should display his own strength, form his own conclusions, and judge different courses of action in his own mind, using his intelligence. The king should be wise and well-versed in the arts of diplomacy; he must do what is necessary and avoid what is not.

A wise and intelligent man does not require advice or instruction. If, for instance, a man like Brihaspati is disgraced, he soon regains his natural disposition, like heated iron dipped in water. A king should accomplish all objectives, his own or those of others, in accordance with the shastras. A

king who knows to acquire wealth should always employ men who are of mild disposition, courageous, wise and powerful. When he sees his servitors employed in activities for which each is fit, he should work in harmony with all of them, like the several strings of a musical instrument tuned to their intended tones.

He should do good to all and never transgress the dictates of dharma. The king of whom everybody thinks, "He is mine," stands unshaken like a hill. When he adjudicates between litigants, he should not differentiate between whom he likes and dislikes, but uphold justice.

He should appoint to all his offices men who know the characters of particular families, of the masses of the people and of different countries; who are mild in speech; of middle age; who have no faults; who are devoted to good work; who are never careless; who are free from greed; who are learned and self-restrained; who are firm in virtue and always prepared to uphold the interests of both dharma and artha. Thus, when he has decided on his courses of action and their final objectives, he should proceed to achieve them carefully and, advised by his spies in all matters, he can live happily.

The king who never gives way to wrath and joy without sufficient cause, who supervises all his actions himself and personally controls his income and expenditure, will find great wealth in this world. It is said that the king who rewards his officers and subjects publicly for any good they do, who chastises those who deserve punishment, who protects himself and his kingdom from every evil, knows the dharma of Rajaneeti. Like the sun, who casts his rays upon everything below, the king should always look after his kingdom himself and, using his intelligence, supervise all his agents and officers.

The king should take wealth from his subjects at the proper time and never publicize what he does. Like an able man who milks his cow, he should milk his kingdom every day. As the bee collects honey from flowers, the king should draw wealth little by little from his kingdom and store it. After he has kept apart a sufficient portion, the remainder should be spent on the acquisition of punya and the gratification of kama. A sensible king who knows his dharma would never waste what he has stored, or disregard any wealth for its meagreness; he should never ignore enemies for their being powerless; he should exercise his own intelligence, be self-aware and never repose confidence in stupid men.

Steadiness, cleverness, self-restraint, intelligence, health, patience, bravery and attention to the demands of time and place: these eight qualities lead to the increase of wealth, be it small or great. A little fire, fed with clarified butter, may blaze forth into a conflagration. A single seed may produce a thousand trees. A king, therefore, even when he hears that his income and expenditure are great, should not disregard what appear to be small things. Just as an enemy, whether he happens to be a child, a young man, or an aged one, can kill a careless man, an insignificant enemy, when he becomes powerful, can exterminate a king. A king who is conscious of the requirements of time is the best of all rulers.

A strong or weak enemy can very soon out of malice destroy the reputation of a king, obstruct his acquisition of religious punya, and even deprive him of his vitality. Therefore, a king with a disciplined mind should never be heedless of his foes.

If a disciplined king desires riches and victory, he should, after he has evaluated his expenditure, income, savings and administration, make either peace or war. For this reason, the king should seek the help of a clever minister, because shrewdness weakens even a mighty protagonist; power that is increasing will be protected by astuteness; a growing enemy is weakened through cunning. Every action that is undertaken intelligently is praiseworthy.

A patient and impeccable king can satisfy all his wishes even with the support of a small force. However, the king who is vain and covetous, who surrounds himself with self-seeking flatterers, will never prosper in the least. For these reasons, the king should act with consideration when he taxes the wealth of his people, for if he continually oppresses them, he will be destroyed like a flash of lightning that blazes forth for only a moment.

Knowledge, tapasya, riches, indeed everything, can be earned through hard work. Parisrama, as it occurs in living creatures, is governed by intelligence, and one should regard it as the greatest of all things. In the human body live many intelligent entities of great energy, like Sakra, Vishnu and Saraswati. An intelligent man, therefore, should never disregard the body.

A greedy man can be dominated by constant gifts, as he is never satisfied with seizing the wealth of others. However, everyone becomes jealous in the matter of enjoying happiness. If a man becomes poor, he loses both dharma and kama, which are objects that artha can attain.

An envious man will try to take the wealth, the enjoyments, the sons and daughters and the affluence of others. We can see every kind of fault in covetous men, so the king should never take such a man for his minister or officer.

A wise king lacking proper agents should despatch even a low functionary to ascertain the disposition and actions of his enemies, in order to frustrate their efforts and designs. The trustful and noble king who seeks the advice of learned and virtuous Brahmanas, and who is protected by his ministers, will be able to keep all his vassals and chieftains under control.

Rajan, I have briefly spoken to you of all the duties laid down in the shastras. Attend to them intelligently, for the king who does so, in obedience to his acharya, will surely rule the whole world. The king who disregards the satisfaction that comes from following a plan, and depends upon what chance will bring, neither enjoys the happiness of kingship nor wins the regions of bliss hereafter.

A king who is vigilant and attentive to the requirements of war and peace will be able to destroy even enemies who are famed for their wealth, who are esteemed for their intelligence and good conduct, who are brave in battle, accomplished and hard-working.

A king should discover the consequences of different kinds of activities and procedures, and never depend upon destiny. One who sees defects in faultless men cannot become prosperous and famous. When two friends try to complete the same work, a wise man always commends the one who takes upon himself the heavier share. Practise this Rajadharma that I have told you, be determined to do your duty to protect all your subjects, and you will easily obtain the rewards of dharma.

All the regions of felicity in the hereafter depend upon dharma and punya!'"

CANTO 121

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, you have finished your discourse on Rajadharma. From what you have said it is clear that Neeti has a crucial position and is the key, for everything depends upon chastisement. It seems that Neeti possesses great energy, is omnipresent and is the greatest among the Devas, Rishis, high-souled Pitris, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Pisachas and Sadhyas, or any of the living beings in this world, including beasts and birds.

You have said that the entire universe, mobile and immobile, including Devas, Asuras and Manushyas, depends upon danda. I now want to know from you, O Bharatarishabha, who Neeti is truly, of what kind, of what form and disposition. Of what is he made, what is his origin, what are his features and his grandeur? How does he manage to remain eternally wakeful among living creatures, protecting this universe? Who is he, this supreme personage called Neeti? Upon what does Neeti depend, and what is his path?'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, Kurusthama, to who Neeti is and why he is also called Vyavahara, and why danda is that upon whom Vyavahara depends. Law, sometimes called Vyavahara, is that which upholds the dharma of a vigilant and alert king.

In olden days, Manu first declared this truth: "He who protects all creatures, the loved and the hateful equally, impartially wielding the Dandaneeti, is the embodiment of dharma."

Since Manu began with these words, they are known as the first words and represent the transcendent word of Brahma. Since it is with the Dandaneeti that we stop the misappropriation of people's possessions, we call it Vyavahara. The traiguna always rests on well-administered chastisement.

Danda is a great Deva. In form, he looks like a blazing fire. His complexion is dark like that of the petals of the blue lotus. He has four teeth, four arms, eight legs and many eyes. His ears are pointed like shafts and his hair stands upright. He has matted locks and two tongues. His face is the hue of copper and he is clad in a lion's skin. This irresistible deity assumes a fierce shape.

Danda moves in the world assuming the form of the sword, the bow, the mace, the dart, the trident, the mallet, the arrow, the bludgeon, the battle-axe, the discus, the noose, the heavy club, the rapier, the lance and in fact of every kind of weapon that exists on earth. Indeed, punishment moves on earth, piercing, cutting, smiting, lopping, dividing, striking, slaying and attacking his victims.

These, Yudhishtira, are some of the names which Danda bears: Sword, Sabre, Dharma, Fury, the Irresistible, the Parent of Prosperity, Victory, Punisher, Checker, the Eternal, the shastras, Brahmana, Mantra, Avenger, the Greatest of First Legislators, Judge, the everlasting God, the One whose course is irresistible, the Unceasing, the First-born, the individual without affections, the Soul of Rudra, the eldest Manu and the great Benefactor.

Dandaneeti is the holy Vishnu, the powerful Narayana, and because he always assumes a terrible form, he is called Mahapurusha. His wife Dharma is also known by the names of Brahmana's daughter, Lakshmi, Vriti, Saraswati, and Mother of the universe. Dandaneeti thus has many forms.

Blessing and curse, pleasure and pain, dharma and adharma, strength and weakness, fortune and misfortune, merit and demerit, virtue and vice, desire and aversion, season and month, night, day and hour, care and carelessness, joy and anger, peace and self-restraint, destiny and exertion, salvation and condemnation, fear and fearlessness, injury and ahimsa, tapasya, yagna and nirvritti, poison and healthy food, the beginning, the middle and the end, the result of all murderous deeds, insolence, insanity, arrogance, pride, patience, policy, disorder, powerlessness and power, respect, disrespect, decay and stability, humility, charity, timeliness and untimeliness, falsehood, wisdom, truth, belief, disbelief, impotence, trade,

profit, loss, success, defeat, ferocity, mildness, death, acquisition and loss, agreement and disagreement, that which should be done and that which should not, strength and weakness, malice and good-will, disgrace and honour, modesty, prosperity and adversity, energy, action, learning, eloquence, keenness of understanding: all these, Yudhishtira, are the multiple forms of the Dandaneeti in this world.

If the Law had not existed, all living creatures would have harassed or killed one another, for it is fear of punishment that restrains them. When the Dandaneeti protects subjects it enhances the might of their ruler, for Danda is the best refuge of all.

It quickly sets the world on the path of dharma, which depends upon satya and dwells in Brahmanas. Empowered by dharma, the greatest of Brahmanas become attached to the Vedas. From the Vedas the sacrifices flow which please the Devas. The gratified Devas then recommend the inhabitants of the earth to Indra, who gives them food in the form of rain, without which crops and vegetation would fail. The life of all creatures depends upon food which provides them with nourishment for growth.

For this purpose, Danda assumes among them the form of a Kshatriya ruler, who remains alert, protecting them, always vigilant and never failing.

Law has these other eight names—God, Man, Life, Power, Heart, the Lord of all creatures, the Atman of all things, and the Living Entity. God gave both wealth and the rod of chastisement to the strong king in the form of military forces which are a combination of five constituents: Dharma, Vyavahara, Dandaneeti, Ishwara and Prani.

Yudhishtira, the king should seek noble blood, wealthy ministers, knowledge, power in the form of strength of body and energy of mind, with the eight instruments—elephants, horses, chariots, foot-soldiers, boats, slaves as camp followers for doing other work, increase of population and cattle—and the other force which depends upon a well-filled treasury.

The army accoutered in mail and livery, with Maharathas, elephant-warriors, cavalry, infantry, officers and surgeons constitute the limbs. Beggars, principal judges, astrologers, priests who perform propitiatory and Atharvan rites, the treasury, allies, grain and all other requisites, composed of seven attributes and eight limbs, constitute the body of a kingdom. Law is another powerful limb of a kingdom and in the form of an army is the very creator of a kingdom. God himself has with great care sent Danda for the use of the Kshatriya, and this eternal universe is impartial Neeti's self.

There is nothing more worthy of respect by kings than Danda, by which the ways of dharma are defined. Brahma, for the protection of the world and for establishing the dharma of different individuals, created chastisement. The common law or Vyavahara, arising out of the dispute of litigants, has also sprung from Brahma.

When a suit, civil or criminal, is instituted, the king or those who work in the king's name must call for evidence and decide in favour of one or the other party. There follows danda or punishment. Principally characterized by a belief in either of the two parties, this Vyavahara is seen to bring about good. There is another kind of Vyavahara which has the Vedas for its soul and its cause. There is a third kind of Vyavahara, O tiger among kings—Kulachara, which deals with family customs consistent with the shastras.

Vyavahara, based on the belief that either of two litigant parties is right, is inherent in the king, and should be also known as Evidence. Although judgement and punishment are regulated by Evidence, yet one says it has its soul in Vyavahara, which is based upon Vedic precepts.

That Vyavahara which has the Vedas for its soul, is dharma or duty, and benefits all men who believe in it. Mahatmans have spoken of the Vyavahara as they have done of ordinary law.

The third kind of Vyavahara is also an acharya of men and also has its roots in the Veda, O Yudhishtira. It upholds the three worlds. It has Truth for its soul and produces prosperity. That which is Danda we have seen to be the eternal Vyavahara and is actually the Veda, dharma and duty.

That which is morality and duty is the path of dharma from the beginning, and is Pitamaha Brahma, the Lord of all creatures. Brahma is the Creator of the entire universe with the Devas, Asuras, Rakshasas, Manushyas, Nagas, and of every other entity. Hence the Vyavahara which is based on the belief that either of two litigant parties is right, also flows from Him.

For this reason Manu has laid down the following in respect of Vyavahara: Neither mother, nor father, nor brother, nor wife, nor priest, are above punishment by the king who rules strictly according to his dharma.'"

CANTO 122

"Bhishma says, 'An old story is told about great Vasuhoma, king of the Angas. He and his queen were always engaged in pious work and practised the most rigid tapasya.

He went to Munjaprishtha, held in high esteem by the Pitris and the Devarishis, where on the summit of Himavat, near the golden mountains of Meru, the great Brahmana Rama had sat under the shade of a renowned banyan tree, his hair matted in jata. Rishis of rigid vratas call Munjaprishtha the favourite haunt of Rudra.

King Vasuhoma lived there, acquired many spiritual powers, gained the esteem of the Brahmanas and came to be regarded as a Devarishi. One day, the great Parantapa King Mandhatri, the mighty friend of Indra, came to the mountain retreat and stood before Vasuhoma of austere tapasya in an attitude of humility.

Vasuhoma offered arghya to his guest and water to wash his feet, and enquired about the well-being of all seven limbs of his kingdom. He then asked his royal guest, who faithfully followed the practices of the ancient men of dharma, "What can I do for you, O Rajan?"

Mandhatri, the best of kings, highly gratified, answered the wise Vasuhoma seated at his ease, "You have studied all the doctrines of Brihaspati, Rajan, and those laid down by Usanas. I want to know what the origin of Neeti is. What was awake before Chastisement? What is said to be its end? How did Danda come to depend upon the Kshatriya? Tell me all

this, O you of great wisdom! I come to you as a shishya, acknowledge you as my guru and am ready to give you gurudakshina."

Vasuhoma said, "Listen, Mandhatri, to how Neeti, the upholder of the world, arose. The soul of dharma is eternal, ananta, and was created to uphold the appropriate governance of all creatures. We hear that, once upon a time, the Pitamaha of all the worlds, the divine Brahma, wanted to perform a sacrifice, but failed to find a priest whose competence equalled his own.

He then conceived such a priest in his head and held the embryo there for long years. After a thousand years had passed, the great God sneezed, and the embryo fell out of his head. The divine being that thus took birth from Brahma came to be called Kshupa, a great lord of creatures, who possessed enormous powers and became the priest at the yagna of the Mahatman Pitamaha.

When the yagna began, Brahma assumed the mild and peaceful aspect of a sacrificer and Chastisement, which had dwelt in his furious form, disappeared, causing great confusion among all creatures. There was no longer any distinction between what should be done and what should not, between clean and unclean food, and between what drink was permissible and what was not.

All creatures began to do violence to one another, and there were no restraints in the matter of the union of the sexes. All ideas of property ceased, all creatures began to rob and lawlessly take meat from one another. The strong began to kill the weak, and nobody had the slightest consideration for his neighbour.

The Pitamaha then worshipped the divine and eternal Vishnu, the great boon-giver and said, "Kesava, show mercy and remove this pervasive chaos."

Thus addressed, the best of gods, Vishnu, reflected long and created his own self in the form of Danda. From that form, which had Dharma for its legs, Goddess Saraswati created the Dandaneeti, the science of Punishment, which soon became celebrated the world over. Mahavishnu again reflected awhile and appointed some among the Devas as the lords or rulers of their respective varnas.

It was then that he made the divine Indra, the thousand-eyed, the king of the Devas; Yama, the son of Vivaswat, the lord of the Pitris; Kubera, the lord of treasures and of all the Rakshasas; Meru, the king of mountains; and

Sagara, the lord of rivers. He installed the powerful Varuna with the sovereignty of the waters and the Asuras, made Yama the lord of life and all living things and Agni the lord of all things possessed of energy.

He made the powerful Isana, Mahatman and eternal Mahadeva of three eyes, the lord of the Rudras; Vasishtha, the lord of the Brahmanas, and Jatavedas the chief of the Vasus; Surya, the lord of all luminous bodies, Chandramas, the king of stars and constellations, Ansumat, the lord of all herbs; and the mightiest of deities, Kumara or Skanda, of twelve arms, the chief of all the spirits and ghostly beings, the ganas that wait upon Mahadeva.

He made Kaala, Time, who possesses the seeds of both destruction and growth, the sovereign of all creatures and also of the four portions of Death—weapons, diseases, Yama and deeds and, lastly, of grief and joy. The Srutis declare, Rajan, that the supreme God Mahadeva, the Lord of Lords armed with his Sula, is the lord of the Rudras. The danda of punishment was given to Brahma's son Kshupa, the lord of all creatures and the best of all Dharmatmans.

On the completion of the yagna according to the prescribed rites, Mahadeva Brahma, with due reverence, gave Neeti, the protector of dharma, to Vishnu. Vishnu gave it to Angiras Maharishi, who in turn passed it down to Indra and Marichi. Marichi gave it to Bhrigu, who gave the Dandaneeti, meant for the protection of dharma, to all the Rishis. The Rishis gave it to the regents of the world and the Lokapalas gave it again to Kshupa. Kshupa then gave it to Manu, the son of Surya and Manu, the Deva of Sraddhas, gave it to his sons for the sake of true dharma and artha.

Chastisement, which is intended to restrain evil, should be applied with discrimination, always guided by dharma and not by caprice. Fines and forfeitures are meant to strike fear, and not to fill the king's treasury. Sentences of maiming a person's body or inflicting death or physical pain by various means, hurling from mountain-tops and banishment, should never be imposed for trivial causes. Surya's son Manu gave the Dandaneeti to his sons for the protection of the world. Danda in the hands of its successive bearers remains awake to protect all creatures.

Above, the divine Indra is awake with the Dandaneeti; below him, Agni of blazing flames; followed by Varuna, then Prajapati, then Vairagya, whose essence is restraint and discipline, after whom come Dharma, the son of

Brahma, the eternal Neeti, and then Tejas, always awake and employed in the work of protection.

After Tejas, come the herbs offered in yagnas to support the Devas and used as food and medicines; after the herbs, the mountains; after the mountains, all kinds of juices and their essences; after these, the Devi Niriti; after Niriti, the planets and the luminous bodies in heaven; after these, the Vedas; after the Vedas, the powerful Vishnu as Hayagriva; after him, the almighty and eternal Pitamaha Brahma. After Pitamaha, the divine and blessed Mahadeva; after Mahadeva, the Viswadevas; after them, the Maharishis; after the Rishis the divine soma; after soma, the Nitya Devas; after them, know that the Brahmanas are awake.

After the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas righteously protect all creatures. The Kshatriyas keep awake the eternal universe, which consist of mobile and immobile creatures, and Chastisement is awake among them. With magnificence akin to that of Pitamaha himself, Neeti keeps together and upholds everything. Kaala, O Bhaarata, is always awake, in the beginning, the middle and the end. The master of all the worlds, the lord of all creatures, the powerful and blessed Mahadeva, the Devadeva, is always awake. He is called by these names also—Kapardin, Sankara, Rudra, Bhava, Sthanu and Umapati, the lord of Uma. Thus, Danda also keeps awake in the beginning, the middle and the end. A king of dharma should rule justly, guided by the Dandaneeti."

He who listens to this teaching of Vasuhoma and conducts himself according to its spirit is sure to have all his wishes fulfilled. O Bharatarishabha, I have now, told you everything about Danda—the restrainer of the universe, which is governed by dharma.'"

CANTO 123

"Yudhishtira says, 'I want to hear, O Pitamaha, the generally accepted conclusions on the subject of dharma, artha, kama, their respective roots and outcomes. On which of these does the course of life depend? We sometimes observe them to mingle with one another and sometimes to exist separately, independent of one another.'

Bhishma replies, 'When men in this world endeavour with good intentions to earn artha with the help of dharma, then the three, dharma, artha and kama, will co-exist in a state of union in respect of time, cause and action.

Artha has its root in dharma and kama is the fruit of artha. All three again have their root in will. Will is concerned with objects. All objects, again, in their entirety, exist for gratifying kama. Upon these does the traiguna depend. Complete withdrawal from all objects is mukti.

Dharma is needed for the protection of the body, artha for the acquisition of dharma, and kama for the gratification of the senses. All three have the quality of rajas or passion.

If one seeks dharma, artha and kama for the sake of Swarga or other such rewards, they are remote because the rewards themselves are distant. When one seeks them for the sake of the Knowledge of the Self, the rewards are immediate. One should seek dharma only for achieving purity of soul; artha to devote to work undertaken without desire of any reward, and kama only to support the body.

One should not cast off dharma, artha and kama even mentally, until one has freed oneself through tapasya. The aim of the first three purusharthas is the fourth one, mukti, if only man can obtain it!

Actions, undertaken and completed even with intelligence, may or may not yield the expected results. Dharma is not always the root of artha, for things other than virtue lead to wealth, such as service and agriculture. There is also a contrary opinion, for some say that one acquires wealth through chance, or birth, or other like causes. In some instances, the attainment of artha produces evil, while others hold the view that artha spent on sacrifices has led to the acquisition of dharma.

Therefore a dullard, whose understanding ignorance has debased, can never acquire the highest aim of dharma and artha, which is mukti. Dharma is worthless if sought for reward; artha is impure if wealth is hoarded; but when purged of these impurities, they produce great results.

A discussion is said to have taken place long ago between Rishi Kamandaka and King Angaristha. One day, Angaristha saluted Kamandaka as he was comfortably seated and, taking advantage of a long-sought opportunity, asked him, "If a king impelled by lust and folly commits sins for which he later repents, through what actions, O Rishi, can he wash away those sins? If an ignorant man commits a sin in the belief that he is acting righteously, how will the king stop this sin from gaining currency among men?"

Kamandaka said, "The man who abandons dharma and artha and pursues only kama reaps the destruction of his intelligence. Heedlessness then follows, destroys both virtue and wealth, and leads to godlessness and inveterate wickedness of conduct.

If the king does not restrain such evil men of sinful conduct, all good subjects will live in fear of him, like the inmates of a room where a snake has hidden itself. The subjects, including Brahmanas and all pious men, will not follow such a king. As a result, he incurs great danger and ultimately the risk of death itself. Disgraced and insulted, he has to drag on a miserable existence equal to death.

Men learned in the shastras have indicated the following method for checking sin. The king should always dedicate himself to the study of the three Vedas, be devoted to dharma and make alliances of marriage with noble families. He should respect the Brahmanas, give them good offices and wait upon high-minded ones who possess the virtue of mercy. He

should perform ablutions, chant sacred mantras and thus pass his time righteously and happily.

Banishing all evil subjects from himself and his kingdom, he should seek the companionship of Dharmatmans. He should please all with his speech or good karma. He should tell everyone ‘I am yours,’ and proclaim the virtues of even his enemies. Thus, he will soon cleanse himself of his sins and win the high regard of all.

You should complete all the important duties your elders and gurus tell you to perform, and you will be certain to gain great benefits as a result of their blessings.”””

CANTO 124

"Yudhishtira says, 'Everyone on earth, O greatest of men, lauds conduct that conforms to dharma. However, I have grave doubts about this praise. If we are to understand this, I want to hear everything about the way in which virtuous behaviour can be acquired and what its characteristics are.'

Bhishma replies, 'Once, Duryodhana asked his father Dhritarashtra the same question, when he was afire with jealousy at the sight of you and your brothers' opulence in Indraprastha, and for the jeers he received when made to look a fool in your magnificent court, the Mayasabha. Listen to what happened then, O Bhaarata. When he had seen your grand sabha and your great prosperity, Duryodhana spoke of it to his father.

Dhritarashtra then asked his son and Karna, "Tell me, why do you grieve, Duryodhana? If there is adequate reason for your sorrow, I will try to advise you. O subjugator of hostile towns, you too have obtained great riches; all your brothers, friends and relatives are obedient to you and you also wear the best clothes, eat the richest food and ride the finest horses. Why, then, have you become pale and emaciated?"

Duryodhana said, "Tens of thousands of ascetic Snataka Brahmanas daily eat at Yudhishtira's palace from golden plates. When I see the great prosperity of my enemies, the sons of Pandu, Yudhishtira's splendid palace adorned with beautiful flowers and fruit, his horses of the Tittiri and the Kalmasha breeds, his diverse raiment and his wealth that equals that of Vaisravana himself, I burn with grief, father!"

Dhritarashtra said, “If you wish to become prosperous like Yudhishtira, or even richer, endeavour to be virtuous, my son, for then without doubt you can conquer the three worlds by conduct alone. There is nothing impossible that dharma cannot attain. Mandhatri conquered the whole world in course of one night, Janamejaya, in three and Nabhaga, in seven. All these kings possessed compassion and were men of dharma, and so won the earth with their virtue.”

Duryodhana said, “I want to hear, O Bhaarata, of that dharma by which the kings you named won the earth so swiftly.”

Dhritarashtra said, “Let me relate the story that Narada once recounted on the subject of dharma. Long ago, the Daitya Prahlada, by the punya of his karma, snatched from noble Indra his sovereignty and reduced the three worlds to subjection. Then Indra, Lord of the Devas, approached the wise Brihaspati with folded hands and said to the great Devaguru, ‘I want you to tell me what the source of happiness is.’

Brihaspati replied that the knowledge which leads to mukti is the source of the highest happiness. Indra then asked him again whether there was anything still higher.

Brihaspati said, ‘There is something still higher. The Mahatman Bhargava-Usanas will instruct you better. Go and ask him, O king of the Devas!’

Indra then went to the great Rishi Sukra Bhargava and obtained from him the knowledge of what would be of great good for him. After he had the permission of the Maharishi Bhargava, Indra again asked the Rishi whether there was any higher happiness to acquire than what the Muni had already taught him.

The omniscient Bhargava said, ‘The Mahatman Prahlada has better knowledge of this.’

Indra, the percipient vanquisher of Paka, was delighted and, assuming the form of a Brahmana, went to Prahlada and entreated him, ‘I want to know what causes happiness.’

Prahlada answered, ‘O Mahamuni, I have no time to instruct you for I am occupied in the task of ruling the three worlds.’

The Brahmana said, ‘Rajan, when you have leisure, I wish to receive instruction from you on what course of conduct produces happiness.’

At this King Prahlada was pleased and said, ‘Tathaasthu!’

He then found a favourable opportunity to impart to Indra the deep truths of knowledge. Indra duly showed to Prahlada the reverence expected from a sishya towards his guru and began with his whole heart to do what Prahlada wanted. Many a time he enquired, ‘Parantapa, how have you been able to win the sovereignty of the three worlds? Tell me, Dharmarajan, what those means are.’

Prahlada said, ‘I neither feel any pride in being a king, nor do I cherish any hostility towards Brahmanas. On the other hand, I accept and follow the guidance they give me on matters of policy, based upon the teachings of Sukra. With complete confidence they tell me whatever they wish and restrain me from sinful deeds or straying from dharma.

I am always obedient to the teachings of Sukra. I wait upon and serve the Brahmanas and my elders. I bear no malice to any creature; I am a Dharmatman. I have conquered wrath, and all my senses are under my control. These Munis who are my masters pour beneficial teachings on me like bees dropping honey into the cells of their comb. I taste the nectar these learned men let fall and, like the moon among the constellations, I live among those of my varna.

To listen to the teachings of Sukra from the lips of Brahmanas and to follow their advice, is like nectar on earth, like the clearest eye. In these consist the good of a man.’ So said Prahlada to the Brahmana by whom he was dutifully served.

‘Maharishi, I am gratified by your reverential behaviour towards me. You are blessed. Ask me for a boon and I will grant you whatever you wish for.’

Indra the Brahmana said, ‘If you are gratified with me, and if you wish to give me what I desire, I want then to acquire your dharma. This is the boon that I beg.’

At this, though he was pleased, Prahlada became filled with a great fear. Indeed, when Indra asked for his boon, the Daitya king guessed that the Brahmana could not be an ordinary man. Wondering, Prahlada at last said, ‘Tathaasthu. Let it be so!’

The Brahmana went away, but deep anxiety filled Prahlada, and he did not know what to do. While he sat brooding over the matter, a flame of light emerged from his body. It had a shadowy form of great splendour and huge proportions.

Prahlada asked the form, ‘Who are you?’

The form answered, ‘I am Neeti, the embodiment of your conduct. Cast off by you, I am leaving. I will henceforth, Rajan, dwell in that faultless and best of Brahmanas who has become your devoted disciple.’ The form disappeared and soon entered the body of Sakra.

After the disappearance of that form, another of similar shape issued from Prahlada’s body. The Daitya king addressed it, ‘Who are you?’

The form answered, ‘Know me, Prahlada, for the embodiment of Dharma. I will go where the greatest of Brahmanas is, for I reside where Neeti dwells.’

Upon the disappearance of Dharma, a third form, ablaze with splendour, came out of the body of the ascetic. Asked by Prahlada who he was, the magnificent form answered ‘Know, O Lord of the Daityas, that I am Satya. I will leave you, and follow the way of Dharma.’

After Truth had left Prahlada, in the wake of Dharma, another great one issued out of his body. Asked who he was by the Daitya king, the mighty being answered, ‘I am the embodiment of good deeds. Know, O Prahlada, that I live where Satya lives.’

After this one had left Prahlada, another being emerged, roaring loudly. Questioned by Prahlada, he answered, ‘Know that I am Might, and dwell where good deeds are.’ Then Might went away to where good deeds had gone.

After this, a Devi of great brilliance issued out of Prahlada’s body. The Daitya king asked her who she was, and she told him that she was Sree, the embodiment of prosperity, adding, ‘I dwelt in you, O hero, incapable of being obstructed! Cast off by you, I will follow Might.’

The noble Prahlada, stricken with fear, once more asked the goddess, ‘Where do you go, Devi, you who live amid lotuses? You are always devoted to truth and are the greatest of deities. Who is that best of Brahmanas who was my disciple? I want to know the truth.’

The goddess of prosperity said, ‘That Brahmana whom you instructed, O mighty one, was Indra, assuming the vow of Brahmacharya. He robbed you of the sovereignty that you had over the three worlds. Maharishi, it was by your conduct that you had reduced the three worlds to subjection. Knowing this, the king of the Devas robbed you of your Neeti. Righteousness, Truth, Good deeds, Might and Prosperity, O wise man, all have their root truly in Neeti, conduct.’”

Bhishma continues, ‘With these words, the goddess of prosperity went away like all the rest, Yudhishtira!

Duryodhana once more addressed his father, “Kurupravira, I want to know the truth about Neeti. Tell me how it can be acquired.”

Dhritarashtra told him, “The noble Prahlada revealed these to Indra. However I will tell you in brief how you can acquire Dharmaneeti. Abstention from injury by act, thought and word, towards all creatures, compassion and charity, constitute conduct that is worthy of praise.

You should never do anything which does not benefit others, or which makes you ashamed. On the other hand, you should do what will win praise in society. Kurusthama, I have now told you in brief what Dharmaneeti is. If men of evil conduct ever win prosperity, O King, they do not enjoy it for long and are exterminated by the root.

Now that you know all this, be of good conduct if you want to have prosperity greater than that of Yudhishtira.”

This even was what King Dhritarashtra said to his son. Act according to these instructions, son of Kunti, and you will surely find their reward.’”

CANTO 125

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have said, O Pitamaha, that Neeti is the primary requirement for any man. But tell me, what is hope, and from where does it arise? Only you can clear this grave doubt, which has risen in my mind. I had great hope that Suyodhana would do what was proper, even when the battle was about to begin.

Every man cherishes hope and when that hope is dashed, he feels grief almost equal to death. Fool that I am, Dhritarashtra's evil son destroyed the hope that I had nurtured. Look at the idiocy of my mind! I think that hope is larger than a mountain with all its trees, or perhaps it is vaster than the firmament itself, truly immeasurable. Hope is veritably difficult to fathom, and equally difficult to subdue. What else, Pitamaha, is as unconquerable as hope?'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, Yudhishtira, while I narrate to you the discussion between Sumitra and Rishabha that took place long ago.

A Rajarishi of the Haihaya vamsa, called Sumitra, went out to hunt. He pursued a deer, which he had struck with an arrow but could not kill. That strong deer ran ahead with the arrow sticking out of him, with the virile king in hot pursuit. The fleet animal quickly cleared a low ground and then a level plain, with the king, young, active, strong, armed with bow and sword and clad in mail, still in chase. Alone in the hunt, Sumitra followed the deer through the vana, crossing many rivers, streams, lakes and copses. The swift animal, struck by many shafts of the king, ran on through one

forest after another, showing itself now and then tantalizingly to the king as if in sport, and lessening the distance between itself and its pursuer.

At last, that Parantapa drew his sharpest and most terrible arrow, capable of piercing the very vitals of any creature, and fitted it to his bowstring. The great and mighty deer, as if mocking his pursuer's efforts, suddenly raced away and flew four yojanas out of range, and the magnificent shaft fell harmlessly to the ground. The deer entered a large vana, but the king still continued the chase.'"

CANTO 126

"Bhishma says, 'The king entered that great vana and came upon an asrama of Rishis. Exhausted by the chase, he sat down to rest. The Rishis, when they saw him armed with bow, worn out and hungry, approached him and duly honoured him. The king accepted the honours the Rishis offered and enquired about the progress of their tapasya. Having answered the king's questions, the Rishis endowed with the wealth of tapasya asked him what had led him to their asrama.

They said, "Blessed Rajan, what delightful pursuit brings you to this asrama on foot, armed with sword, bow and arrows? Tell us your vamsa and your name."

The king gave all the Brahmanas an account of himself, O Bhaarata, and said, "I am born into the race of the Haihayas, my name is Sumitra and I am the son of Mitra. I chase herds of deer and hunt them in thousands with my arrows.

Accompanied by a large force, my ministers and the women of my household, I came out on a hunt. I shot a deer with an arrow, but the animal, with the shaft stuck in his body, sped away. While chasing it, I have accidentally arrived in this vana and find myself in your presence, in this pitiable condition—shorn of all splendour, weary and disappointed. I am not at all sorry, august Rishis, at my present plight, being without the signs of royalty or far from my capital. However, I feel a poignant grief at my hope being dashed. Just as Himavat, prince of mountains, and Sagara, vast

receptacle of waters, cannot measure the extent of the sky, O Maharishis, I cannot measure the limits of hope.

You are endowed with the punya of tapasya and are infinitely wise; there is nothing unknown to you. You are also highly blessed. I beg you to resolve my quandary. Which of these two appears vaster to you—hope cherished by man, or the wide firmament? I want to know why hope is so unconquerable.

If the subject is not improper for you to discuss, then tell me without delay. I do not want to hear from you anything, Maharishis, that is a mystery that cannot be revealed, or is harmful to your tapasya, or not a worthy matter to speak of. Otherwise, I would like to hear of this, and in detail. Devoted to tapasya as you are, I beg you to instruct me.'"

CANTO 127

"Bhishma says, 'The Maharishi Rishabha, who sat in the midst of all the other Rishis, smiled a little and said, "Once, Sumitra, while I was on a tirtha yatra, I went to the delightful Badrikasrama, the beautiful hermitage of the sages Nara and Narayana, near the lake where the sacred Ganga rises and where the sage Aswasiras always reads the eternal Vedas. I performed my ablutions in that lake, offered, with due rites, oblations of water to the Pitris and the Devas and entered the asrama where the spirits of those two immortal Rishis, Nara and Narayana, always pass their time in true bliss.

I then went to another asrama not far away to make my home. While seated there I saw a very tall and emaciated Rishi named Tanu, clad in rags and skins, approaching me. Blessed with a wealth of tapasya, he was eight times taller than other men, Mahabaho, and I can say that I have never seen anyone like him. His body was as thin as one's little finger, his neck, arms, legs and hair extraordinary, with his head, ears and eyes, proportionate to his body. His speech and his movements were exceedingly feeble.

When I saw this emaciated Brahmana, Bharatarishabha, I was frightened and full of dread. I touched his feet, stood before him with joined hands, informed him of my name and family, my father's name, and then slowly sat down on a seat that he indicated. Then Dharmatman Tanu, in the midst of the Rishis living in that asrama, began to discuss the issues of dharma and artha, O Rajan.

While the discourse was going on, a king with eyes like lotus petals came to the asrama in a chariot drawn by fleet horses, accompanied by his forces and his women. He was the handsome and famed Viradyumna, who was unhappily looking for his missing son Bhuridyumna and had come there in the course of his search in the vana. He had urged himself on through that forest for days thinking, 'Surely I will find my son here! I will surely find my son here!'

Addressing the macilent Rishi Tanu he said, 'My noble son, my only child, is lost. I had great hopes of finding him, but with my hope being constantly dashed, I am on the point of death.'

When he heard this, the great Rishi Tanu remained for a short while with his head hanging down and sunk in dhyana. Seeing him thus engrossed, the king became exceedingly disturbed. In great grief, he asked slowly and softly, 'Devarishi, what is unconquerable and what is greater than hope? Tell me this, if there is no impropriety in my hearing it.'

The Rishi said, 'Your son has insulted a holy Maharishi through his ill-luck and foolishness. The Rishi asked your son for a golden jar and herbal bark, which he contemptuously refused to give. His conduct infuriated the Maharishi.'

Thus addressed, the king paid homage to that Rishi whom the whole world revered. Viradyumna sat there, spent with fatigue, as you are now. The Maharishi Tanu, in return, according to the rites vanavasis observed, offered the king water to wash his feet and the usual ingredients that make up the arghya. Then all the Rishis sat around him like the Saptarishis around Dhruva, and questioned the unvanquished king about the reason for his arrival at the asrama.'"

CANTO 128

"The king said again, 'I am a king called Viradyumna and my fame has spread in all directions. My son Bhuridyumna is lost and I have come to this forest in search of him, O noble Brahmanas. He is my only son, sinless ones, and of tender years. Since I cannot find him here, I wander everywhere in search of him.'

Rishi Tanu hung down his head again, remained perfectly silent and did not utter a single word. In the past, the king had not honoured Tanu and, in chagrin, the ascetic had practised austere tapasya for a long time, resolving that he would never accept any gift from either kings or members of any other varna, saying to himself, 'Hope agitates every man of foolish understanding. I will drive hope from my mind.' Such was his determination.

King Viradyumna once more questioned the Maharishi: 'What is the measure of the thinness of hope? What in this world is exceedingly difficult of acquisition? Tell me this, holy one, for you know dharma and artha well.'

The sage Tanu of the straw-lean body remembered all the past incidents about the King's neglect of him, and now brought them to the recollection of the king. He said, 'There is nothing, Rajan, that equals hope in flimsiness. I solicited many kings and found that nothing is as difficult to attain as an image that Hope sets before the mind.'

The king said, 'From your words, Brahmana, I understand what is thin and what is not. I understand also, how difficult it is to acquire the images set by hope before the mind. I regard your words as Sruti, but I have one

doubt in my mind. If it pleases you, and it is a subject that you can discuss without impropriety, explain it in detail to me. What is more slender than your body?'

The emaciated sage said, 'A contented supplicant is exceedingly difficult to meet. Perhaps there is no such person in the world. Rarer still is one who never disregards a supplicant. The hope that rests upon such men who, after swearing promises, do not render service to others to the best of their abilities and according to the supplicant's merit, is even leaner than my body.

The hope that rests upon an ungrateful man, or on one who is cruel, or an idle man, or one who injures others, is even slenderer than my body. The hope a father who has but one son cherishes of seeing him once more after he has been lost, is slenderer than even my body. The hope that old women entertain of giving birth to sons, Rajan, and that which rich men cherish, is even thinner than my body. The hope of marriage that springs up in the hearts of old maids when they hear anybody talk of it, is leaner than my body.'

Hearing these words, Rajan, King Viradyumna and the women of his household prostrated themselves before the great Brahmana and touched his feet with their bent heads.

The king said, 'By your grace, O holy one, I want to find my child. What you have said is true. There is no doubt of the verity of your words.'"

Rishabha continued, "The holy Tanu, foremost of Dharmatmans, smiled, and with his gyana and his tapasya caused the king's son to be brought to the place. The sage rebuked the king and then revealed himself to be Dharma Deva, the god of righteousness himself. After displaying his own wonderful and celestial form, he entered an adjacent vana, with heart freed from wrath and the desire of revenge.

I saw all this, Rajan, and heard the words I have said. Drive out your hope that is even slenderer than any mentioned by the sage."'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by the Dharmatman Rishabha, King Sumitra cast off the hope that was in his heart and which was slimmer than any of the kinds of hope the skeletal Rishi had indicated. You, too, O son of Kunti, pay heed to what I have said and be calm as Himavat. Overcome with distress, you have questioned me and heard my reply. Now that you have heard it, Rajan, you should dismiss your regrets!'"

CANTO 129

"Yudhishtira says, 'Like one who drinks amrita, I am never satiated listening to you speak. Just as a person who has knowledge of the Atman is never content with meditation, I am never satisfied after I drink the nectar of your discourse on dharma. Therefore, Pitamaha, speak again on dharma.'

Bhishma replies, 'Then let me tell you the old story of the discourse between Maharishi Gotama and the illustrious Yama. Gotama owned an extensive asrama on the Paripatra hills, where for sixty thousand years the sage sat in tapasya. One day, O Naravyaghra, the regent of the world, Yama, arrived there and saw him engaged in the most stern tapasya.

The Muni, understanding that it was Yama who had come, quickly saluted him and sat attentively with folded hands, awaiting his command. Lord Dharma in return saluted that bull among Brahmanas and enquired what he could do for him.

Gotama asked, "What does one do to liberate oneself from the debt one owes to one's mother and father? And how does one win regions of pure bliss that are so difficult to attain?"

Yama replied, "One should devote oneself to the dharma of satya, practise purity and tapasya ceaselessly, and worship one's mother and father. One should also perform Aswamedha yagnas, with gifts in plenty for Brahmanas. Through such deeds one wins many wonderful regions of felicity."'"

CANTO 130

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Bhaarata, what course of conduct should a king adopt who is without friends and troops, who has many enemies and an exhausted treasury? What should be his conduct when evil ministers surround him, when all his counsels are divulged, when he does not see his way clearly before him while he is attacking or subduing a hostile kingdom, or when, though weak, he is at war with a stronger ruler?

What should be the conduct of a king in whose kingdom affairs are ill-regulated, who disregards the requirements of place and time, who is unable to bring about peace and cause dissension among his enemies because he is oppressed? Should he seek to acquire wealth by evil means, or should he lay down his life and not seek artha?'

Bhishma replies, 'Though you know your dharma, O Bharatarishabha, you asked me a question that relates to a mystery about duty. This dharma is not something I would have spoken about had you not asked me. Dharma is very subtle, and one can understand it with the shastras.

Some men may become Dharmatmans when they practise the good deeds they remember having heard about. By clever and ingenious methods, the king can acquire wealth, or he may fail. Now, using your own intelligence, can you think of an answer to your question?

Listen, Bhaarata, to methods which have great punya, and which kings can use during times of distress, although I would not say that they conform to true dharma. If the king fills the treasury by oppression, this will bring

him to the verge of destruction. This is also the conclusion of all wise men who have deliberated upon the subject.

The kind of shastras one studies only gives one knowledge which it is capable of bestowing and is to his liking. Ignorance stunts the development of methods, while knowledge promotes ingenuity and becomes the source of great happiness.

Without any scruples or malice and with a pure heart, listen to these teachings. Through the decrease of the treasury, the king's forces diminish, so he should fill his coffers by any means possible, just as he would locate water in an arid wilderness. However, in conformity with the code of ethics that the ancients practised, the king should show compassion to his people, when this times arrives. This is the eternal dharma.

Under ordinary circumstances, for men who are able and competent, dharma is of one kind, while in times of misfortune one's duties are different. A king without wealth may acquire religious punya by tapasya and the like. Since life is much more important than punya, and one cannot support it without wealth, no punya should be sought which stands in the way of gaining wealth.

A weak king can never obtain just and proper means of sustenance or power through religious merit. Since he cannot, even by his best exertions, acquire power with the aid of punya, practices during times of misery can be condoned, even though the learned opine that they lead to sin.

When the time of trial is over, the Kshatriya should conduct himself in such a way that he does not destroy his punya. He should also work so that he will not have to succumb to his enemies. Even these are declared to be his dharma. He should not sink into despondency or seek to rescue from the peril of destruction his own punya or that of others. On the other hand, he must preserve himself. This is the well-established judgement on dharma.

There is this Sruti, which decides that Brahmanas who know dharma should have the expertise to perform. Similarly, the Kshatriya should be proficient in exertion, since might of arms is his greatest possession.

When a Kshatriya has no means of support, what should he take, other than what belongs to Munis and Brahmanas? Even a Brahmana in times of distress can officiate at the yagna of one for whom he should never officiate during ordinary times, and he may even eat forbidden food; so, also, there is no doubt that a Kshatriya in distress can take wealth from everyone, except Rishis and Brahmanas.

For one troubled by an enemy and trying to escape, what can be a forbidden recourse? For a man imprisoned within a dungeon who wants to escape, what outlet can be an improper one? For someone in difficulty, even a normally forbidden way out is permissible.

For a Kshatriya who is in distress because of an empty treasury and a weak army, neither a life of mendicancy nor the profession of a Vaisya or a Sudra has been prescribed. The profession ordained for a Kshatriya is the acquisition of wealth by battle and victory. He should never beg from a member of his own varna.

One who supports himself in ordinary times by following the practices primarily prescribed for him, can in times of distress follow alternative practices which the shastras have laid down. In times of travail, when a Kshatriya cannot follow his ordinary dharma, he may live by even unjust and improper means.

Brahmanas are seen do the same when their means of livelihood are destroyed. When they can conduct themselves in this manner, what doubt need there be in respect of Kshatriyas? One, indeed, accepts this. Without sinking into despondency and ruin, a Kshatriya may forcibly take what he can from rich men with a view to protecting the people in the longer term, for he is their defender and destroyer as well.

No one in this world, Rajan, can support life without injuring other creatures. Even the Muni who leads a solitary vanavasa is no exception. A Kshatriya should not rely upon destiny, especially he who wants to rule. The king and the kingdom should always mutually protect each other. This is an eternal duty. As the king protects the kingdom when it sinks into danger, by making use of all his possessions, the kingdom should also protect the king when he is in trouble.

Even as a last resort, the king should never give up his treasury, his weapons to punish evildoers, his army, the chieftains of his kingdom, his friends and allies, and other necessary institutions.

Men who have knowledge of dharma say that one must save one’s seeds by deducting them from one’s very food. This is a truth cited from the treatise of the Asura Sambara, well-known for his great powers of illusion: “Shame on that king whose kingdom languishes! Shame on the life of that man who, from want of means, goes to a foreign country for a living! The king’s roots are his treasury and army. His army has its roots in his treasury, and his religious punya is the root of all.”

One can never fill the treasury without oppressing others. How, then, can the army be kept without oppression? The king in times of distress incurs no fault when he persecutes his subjects to fill the treasury. To perform yagnas, many adharmic deeds are done, and a king whose object is to fill his treasury in times of misfortune incurs no fault by any of these, since otherwise evil is certain to befall both him and his kingdom.

Institutions which cause death and misery exist to collect wealth. An astute king must decide what his policy should be in times of distress. He should remember that animals and other things are necessary for yagnas, which one requires as sacrifices to purify the heart, and that yagnapasus, yagnas and purity of the heart are all essential for final mukti. Similarly, policy and danda exist for the treasury, which in turn exists for the army, while policy, treasury and army, all three exist to vanquish enemies and protect or enlarge the kingdom.

I will give you an example which illustrates the true ways of dharma. When a great tree is cut down for making a sacrificial stake, other trees that stand in its way have also to be felled. These, when they fall, in turn knock down others in their path. Similarly, one should eliminate those who stand in the way of a treasury being filled. I do not see how else success can be had.

Through wealth both worlds, this and the next, can be gained, as well as truth and punya. A man without wealth is more dead than alive. One should acquire wealth by any means for the performance of yagnas. The sin that attaches to an action done during times of hardship is not equal to that which attaches to the same deed done at other times.

You cannot possibly see both the acquisition of wealth and its abandonment in the same person, Rajan! I have never seen a rich man in the forest. All the wealth one sees in this world is attended by struggle. All contend with others, saying, “This must be mine! This will be mine!”

There is nothing more meritorious for a king than the possession of a kingdom. While in ordinary times it is sinful for a king to oppress his subjects with heavy taxes, in times of trouble it is quite different. Some acquire wealth through gifts and yagnas, some who prefer tapasya acquire it by penance, and some through their intelligence and ingenuity. A man without wealth is considered weak, while he who has wealth is regarded as powerful, for he can buy everything.

A king who has a well-filled treasury can accomplish anything and thus earn punya, gratify his kama, and gain this world and the next. One should, however, always fill the treasury with the help of dharma, not by practices that can pass for dharma in times of need and distress.'"

PART II

Apaddharmanusasana Parva

CANTO 131

"Yudhishtira says, 'What, besides this, should a weak and procrastinating king do, who shrinks from battle through anxiety for his friends' lives, who is timorous and lacking in discretion? What should that king do whose cities and kingdom his enemies have annexed and partitioned among themselves, who has lost his wealth, who from poverty cannot honour and win friends to his side, whose ministers are disunited or bought over by his adversaries, who is obliged to face his foes, whose army has declined, and whose heart is being agitated by a strong enemy?'

Bhishma replies, 'If the invader is principled and conversant with both dharma and artha, a king of the kind you have described should immediately sue for peace and negotiate for him to restore those parts of the kingdom that have been seized. If the invader is powerful and seeks victory through unprincipled means, the king should make peace with him abandoning a portion of his territories. If the invader is bent upon hostilities, the king should abandon his capital and all his possessions and make his escape. If he saves his life, he can hope for equivalent gains in the future. Which man, knowing his dharma, would sacrifice himself, his most precious possession, to encounter danger from which he can escape by abandoning his treasury and army? A king should protect the women of his household, but if they fall into the hands of the enemy, he should not be moved to risking his own capture to save them. As long as he can, he should never surrender his own person to the enemy.'

Yudhishtira says, ‘When his own people are dissatisfied with him, when invaders oppress him, when his treasury is empty, and when his secrets are divulged, what then should a king do?’

Bhishma says, ‘Under such circumstances, a king, should make peace, if his enemy is righteous. If he is not, the king should then show courage and try to drive the enemy out of his kingdom; or, fighting bravely, he should lay down his life and ascend to Swarga. A king can conquer the whole earth with the help of even a small force if it is loyal, spirited, and devoted to him. If he kills his enemies, he is sure to enjoy the earth, while, if he is killed in battle, he is sure to ascend to heaven. By laying down one’s life in battle, one obtains the companionship of Indra himself.’”

CANTO 132

"Yudhishtira says, 'When dharmic rule and practices for the good of the world disappear, when all the means and resources for supporting life fall into the hands of brigands, at such a calamitous time, how should a Brahmana survive, O Pitamaha, who from affection is unable to abandon his sons and grandsons?'

Bhishma replies, 'When such a time comes, the Brahmana should live by his knowledge. Everything in this world is for those who are good, and nothing for the evil. He who makes himself an instrument of acquisition, taking wealth from the evil and giving it to the good, is said to know the dharma of adversity. The king who wants to maintain his rule without driving his subjects to indignation and rebellion, can seize what the owner does not give voluntarily, saying, "This is mine!" This conduct of the wise man, blameworthy in ordinary times, does not deserve to be censured in times of necessity when cleansed by knowledge and power. They who always support themselves by force, prefer no other method of living. Those who are powerful, Yudhishtira, always live by their strength.

A king should practise what the ordinary shastras prescribe for times of distress without any exceptions. An intelligent king, however, should also do something more, such as levy more taxes upon the evil and punishable among his own subjects and upon the subjects of other kingdoms. At such times, the king should not oppress Ritwijas, Purohitas, Acharyas and Brahmanas, who are honoured and esteemed. Even during bad times, he will incur censure and sin if he afflicts them. This is the eternal eye, the

authority by which one should be guided in the world. By this, one judges whether a king is to be called good or evil.

One sees that many men in villages and towns bring accusations against one another from jealousy and anger. The king should never honour or punish anybody based on such reports. Slander should be neither spoken nor heard. When slanderous conversation takes place, one should close one's ears or walk right out, for such talk is characteristic of evil men, an indication of depravity. Conversely, those who speak of the virtues of others in assemblies of the good, are honest men.

Just as a pair of sweet-tempered bulls, governable and well-broken, bend their necks to the yoke and draw the cart willingly, the king should bear his burden in troubled times. Others say that a king at such times should conduct himself so as to gain a large number of allies. Some regard ancient usage as the highest indication of dharma. Others, such as those who favour the conduct of Sankha when his brother Likhita stole a few fruits from him, are of a different opinion, but not from malice or covetousness. One sees examples of Maharishis who are of the opinion that even acharyas, if given to evil practices, should be punished, although no authority has approved of such a proposition. The Devas can be left to punish men who are vile and guilty of evil practices.

The king who fills his treasury by fraudulent means certainly falls away from dharma. The code of morality should be followed which good men honour in every respect in affluent circumstances, and which every honest heart approves. He is said to be conversant with dharma who knows that it stands on four foundations, as elusive as the legs of the snake. Just like a hunter who tracks a shaft-struck deer by observing spots of blood on the ground, one should seek to discover the basis of dharma. A man should tread humbly along the ancient path trodden by the virtuous, as this was the dharma of the great Rajarishis of old, O Yudhishtira!'"

CANTO 133

"Bhishma says, 'The king should fill his coffers by drawing wealth from his own kingdom and from those of his enemies. From his treasury springs his punya, O son of Kunti, and from it extend the roots of his kingdom. For these reasons a king must fill his treasury, augment it and carefully husband it by reducing needless expenditure. This is the eternal practice. The treasury can neither be filled by pure and dharmic actions, nor by heartless cruelty. One should fill it by adopting a middle course. How can a weak king acquire a treasury? How can a king who has no treasury have strength? How can a weak man have a kingdom? From where can one without a kingdom obtain prosperity?

For a man of high rank, adversity is like death. For this reason the king should always increase his resources, army, allies and friends. Men do not heed a king with an empty treasury, and his servants will not show any zeal in his business if he pays them little. It is on account of his wealth that a king succeeds in obtaining great honour, as it covers up his sins like clothes that conceal parts of a female body that should not be exposed to view.

Those with whom the king has formerly quarrelled become jealous at the sight of his new affluence, and like dogs they once more take service under him. Though they only wait for an opportunity to destroy him, he takes to them as if nothing has happened. How, O Bhaarata, can such a king obtain happiness?

The king should strive to acquire greatness, and never bend down meekly. Exertion is manliness, He should rather break in adverse

conditions, take to vanavasa and live there with the wild animals, than bend before anyone or dwell among ministers and officers who behave like robbers, without restraints. Even the brigands of the forest can furnish a large number of fighters for the accomplishment of the fiercest of deeds. O Bhaarata!

If the king transgresses wholesome restraints, everyone becomes alarmed. The very robbers, strangers to compassion, dread such a king. For this reason, the king should always establish rules and restraints for the well-being of his people. The people welcome rules in respect of even trivial matters.

There are men who think that this world is nothing, and the future a mirage. One should never trust atheists of this type, even if secret doubts agitate his heart. If the brigands of the forest, while observing other dharma, commit depredations only to property, one can regard them as harmless, since they do not threaten the lives of thousands of people. Even brigands regard as evil actions like killing an enemy who is fleeing from battle, ingratitude, plundering the property of a Brahmana, depriving a man of the whole of his property, violating maidens, ravishing wives, having adulterous congress with other people's wives and occupying villages and towns as their lawful lords.

Certain kings strive to make peace in order to inspire confidence in the hearts of the bandits, only to destroy them after their ways have been studied. A king should never behave cruelly towards them, thinking that he is more powerful. Rather than exterminate the robbers outright, the king should bring their families, habitations and property under his control. Kings who do not seek to annihilate them need not fear for their own existence, while those who do have always to live with that apprehension.'"

CANTO 134

"Bhishma says, 'Men learned in the shastras declare that an intelligent Kshatriya knows his obvious dharma, the earning of punya and the acquisition of wealth. Subtle discussions on duty and on unseen consequences in respect of a future world should not stop him from performing those two duties. As it is useless to argue, upon seeing certain foot-prints on the ground, whether or not they are those of a wolf, so too is discussion on the nature of dharma and adharma.

Nobody in this world ever sees the fruits of dharma and adharma. A Kshatriya, therefore, should seek to acquire power. He who is powerful is master of everything. Wealth leads to the possession of an army. He who is powerful obtains intelligent advisers, while he who is without means is truly fallen. One regards too little of anything in the world as the unclean remnants of a feast. Even if a strong man performs many bad deeds, everybody is afraid to says or do anything to censure or check him.

Associating power with dharma and truth can rescue men from great peril. If one compares the two, power will appear to be superior, since dharma springs from and rests upon power, as all immobile things do upon the earth, as smoke depends for its motion upon the wind.

Dharma is dependent on the more powerful, as pleasure is contingent upon those who desire enjoyment. There is nothing that powerful men cannot do, and everything they do becomes pure. A powerless man committing evil actions can never escape, because men are alarmed by his conduct as at the appearance of a wolf. One fallen on hard times leads a life

of disgrace and sorrow, which is akin to death. The learned have said that when a man is abandoned by friends and companions as result of his sinful conduct, their taunts will pierce him and bring him to burn with grief.

Acharyas versed in the shastras have suggested that to expiate sin, one should study the three Vedas, wait upon and worship the Brahmanas, gratify all men by looks, words and acts, cast off meanness, marry into high families, proclaim the praises of others while confessing one's own worthlessness, recite mantras, perform the usual water-rites, be mild of demeanour and frugal of speech, perform austere yagnas, and seek the refuge of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. One who has committed evil deeds should do all this without resenting the reproaches of others. By following this course and by sharing his wealth with others, he will redeem himself in the regard of the world and come to enjoy different kinds of happiness here, and great rewards and punya in the next.'"

CANTO 135

"Bhishma says, 'An old story is told of a brigand who practised restraints in this world and so did not meet with destruction in the next. Once there lived a robber called Kayavya, born of a Kshatriya father and a Nishada mother, who practised Kshatriya dharma. Strong, intelligent, courageous, an expert in the shastras, he was devoid of cruelty. He was devoted to the Brahmanas, worshipped his elders and gurus with reverence and protected the Rishis in the observance of their practices. Though a brigand, he earned felicity in Swarga.

Morning and evening he used to chase deer and drive them to frenzy. He knew well all the practices of the Nishadas and the ways of all animals living in the forest. Well versed in the requirements of time and place, he roved over the mountains. His arrows never missed their aim, his weapons were powerful and he could vanquish hundreds of troops single-handedly. He worshipped his old, blind and deaf parents daily in the forest. He was hospitable to everyone who deserved the honour, entertained them with honey, meat, fruits, roots and other kinds of excellent food and did them many favours. He showed great respect for those Brahmanas who retired from the world for vanavasa, and often took meat for them when he killed deer. In the case of those unwilling, from fear of censure, to accept gifts from him because of his profession, he went to their homes before dawn and left meat at their doorstep.

One day the entire band of robbers, pitiless and unbridled as they were, moved to elect him as their leader. The robbers said, "You are familiar with

the requirements of place and time, wise and courageous, and committed to everything you undertake. Be our supreme leader, respected by us all, and we will do as you direct. Protect us as a father or mother would."

Kayavya replied, "Never kill a woman, a child, an ascetic or one who from fear abstains from a fight. Never seize women or bring them away with force. None of you should ever, amongst all creatures, kill a female.

Brahmanas should be always blessed, and you must fight for their good. Never sacrifice Truth. Never obstruct wedding ceremonies or destroy houses in which the Devas, the Pitris and Athitis are honoured.

Of all creatures, Brahmanas should be exempt from your plundering raids. You should worship them by giving away even all you have. He who incurs the wrath of the Brahmanas will fail to find a rescuer in the three worlds, if they wish to humiliate him. He who speaks ill of the Brahmanas and wishes for their destruction, himself meets with destruction like darkness at sunrise.

Living here, you will obtain the fruits of your valour, and troops will be sent against those who refuse to give us our dues. The danda of punishment is intended for evil, not for self-glorification. Those who oppress the good deserve death, and those who seek to increase their fortunes by attacking kingdoms in unscrupulous ways, very soon come to be regarded like vermin in a dead body. Those brigands whose conduct conform to the restraints prescribed by the shastras soon win salvation, though they lead a life spent in plunder."

By obeying all the commands of Kayavya and desisting from sin, the robbers obtained great prosperity, while, by doing good to the honest and restraining the robbers from evil deeds, Kayavya won great happiness in the next world. He who bears in mind this story of Kayavya will not fear the denizens of the forest, or any earthly creature, not even wicked men O Bhaarata! If such a man takes to vanavasa, he will be able to live there as secure as a king.'"

CANTO 136

"Bhishma says, 'Regarding how a king should fill his treasury, men who know the shastras cite the following verses that Brahma himself sang. One should never take the wealth of those who perform yagnas, or wealth dedicated to the gods. A Kshatriya should seize the wealth of those who never perform religious rites and yagnas and are regarded as equal to brigands. All the creatures who inhabit the earth, all the pleasures of sovereignty, and all the earth's wealth, belong to the Kshatriya alone, O Bhaarata. The Kshatriya should use this wealth for the upkeep of his army and for the performance of yagnas.

Men weed out creepers and plants that are not of any use and burn them as fuel to cook their food. Similarly the king should, by punishing the wicked, cherish the good. Men who know dharma say that one's wealth is useless if it is not used to feed with libations of ghrita the Devas, the Pitris, and men. A virtuous ruler, O Rajan, should confiscate such wealth so that a large number of good people can be gratified, but he should not hoard that wealth in his treasury. He who makes himself an instrument of acquisition by taking away wealth from the evil and giving it to the good is said to know the whole science of dharma.

A king should extend his conquests in the next world according to his ability, as gradually as vegetables are seen to grow. Like white ants who appear and multiply from no apparent cause, yagnas spring for no particular external reason. As one drives off flies, gnats and ants from the bodies of domestic cattle at the time of milking, one should drive away from the

kingdom those who are averse to performing yagnas. This is consistent with dharma. Just as soil becomes finer and finer with pounding between two stones, questions of morality, become finer and finer the more they are reflected on and discussed.'"

CANTO 137

"Bhishma says, 'One who provides for the future, and one who has presence of mind, both enjoy happiness, while the man of procrastination is lost. Listen attentively to an excellent story concerning these types.

In a lake that was not very deep and which abounded with fish, there lived three Sakula fishes, friends and constant companions. Amongst the three, one always planned ahead and liked to provide for the future, another had great presence of mind, while the third always put things off. One day some fishermen who came to the lake began to drain away its water to a lower ground through different outlets. Seeing the water of the lake gradually decreasing, the fish with foresight perceived the danger and addressed his two companions.

He said, "A great peril is about to overtake all the creatures who live in this lake. Let us speedily escape to some other place before our path is blocked. One who avoids a future evil through good planning will never incur serious danger. Listen to my advice and let us all depart." The lazy one among the three answered, "Well said, but it is my considered opinion there is no need for such haste." The fish with presence of mind said to his procrastinating companion, "When the actual time comes for action, I always come up with a plan."

Hearing the answers of his two companions, the prudent and intelligent fish immediately set out by a flowing current and reached another deep lake. The fishermen, when they saw that the lake had been drained, shut in the

remaining fish and, beating the residual water, began to catch numbers of fish, including the procrastinating Sakula, and to tie them as they were caught to a long string. The Sakula noted for his presence of mind thrust himself into the company of those that had been so tied and remained quietly among them, biting the string to give the appearance of having been caught. The fishermen, believing that all the fish attached to the string had been caught, removed them to deeper waters to wash them, at which point the quick Sakula left the string and darted away to safety. However the fish who had been procrastinating, foolish and bemused as he was, was unable to escape, and met with death.

Thus, like the procrastinating fish, anyone who, from want of intelligence, cannot divine the approach of danger, will meet with destruction. He who considers himself clever does not seek his own good at the appropriate time and thereby incurs great danger, like the Sakula fish with presence of mind. Only one who plans in advance, and one with presence of mind, can succeed. One who postpones his decisions meets with destruction.

The divisions of time are many, such as Kashtha, Kala, Muhurta, day, night, Lava, month, fortnight, the six seasons, Kalpa, and year. We call the divisions of the earth place, while Time we cannot see. The success of any object or purpose is achieved or not, according to the manner in which the mind is set to think of it. The man of forethought and the one with the presence of mind, the Rishis declare, in all treatises on dharma and artha and in those that deal with mukti, is foremost among men. He who acts after reflection and scrutiny, and who uses proper means to accomplish his objectives, will always achieve a great deal. However, those who work with due regard to time and place, win results better than the mere man of presence of mind.'"

CANTO 138–1

"Yudhishtira says, 'You say, O Bharatarishabha, that intelligence which provides for future contingencies and meets present emergencies is always superior, while procrastination brings about destruction. I ask you, Pitamaha, about that superior intelligence which will protect a king who knows the shastras, dharma and artha, and guard him from confusion even when he is surrounded by many enemies. I want you to tell me, O Kurupravira, everything that the shastras lay down about the manner in which a king should conduct himself when enemies assail him.

When a king is in trouble, a large number of his enemies, provoked by his past actions, will range themselves against him and try to vanquish him. How can a king, weak and alone, succeed in holding up his head when he is challenged from all sides by many powerful kings in league together? At such times, how does a king make friends and enemies, O Bharatarishabha, and how should he then behave towards both? When those he thought of as his friends become his enemies, what should a king do, if he wants happiness? With whom should he go to war, and with whom should he make peace? Even if he is strong, how should he behave in the midst of enemies? O Parantapa, this to me is the greatest of all questions regarding the discharge of Rajadharma. Few can hear the answer to this question, and none can answer it save Santanu's son. Firmly wedded to truth, with all your senses under control, O blessed one, reflect on this and speak to me!'

Bhishma replies, 'Yudhishtira, this question is certainly worthy of you. I am immensely happy to tell you all the duties generally known that one

should practice in times of distress, O Bhaarata. An enemy becomes a friend and a friend also becomes an enemy, for the course of human actions through the play of circumstances is very uncertain. Therefore, what should be done and what should not, whether one should either trust one's enemies or make war depend upon the requirements of time and place. One should exert oneself to make friends with intelligent and knowledgeable men who have one's welfare at heart. You should make peace with even your enemies, O Bhaarata, when your life cannot otherwise be saved. The foolish man who never makes peace with enemies will never gain or acquire any of those fruits for which others strive. He who makes peace with enemies and breaks even with friends, after a full consideration of the circumstances, obtains great benefits.

An old story is told of an exchange between a cat and a mouse under a banyan tree. In the midst of a great forest there was a huge banyan. Covered with many kinds of creepers, it was the resort of diverse birds. It had a large trunk from which numerous branches extended in all directions. Delightful to view, it afforded refreshing shade and was home to animals of many species. A wise mouse named Palita lived happily at the foot of the tree in a hole with a hundred outlets. On the branches of the tree lived a cat called Lomasa, contentedly devouring a large number of birds every day.

After some time, a Chandala came to the vana and built a hut there for himself. Every evening after sunset he spread his traps of leathern strings and, going back to his hut, slept happily till he re-visited his traps at dawn. Diverse animals fell into his nets every night, and it so happened that one day the cat, in a careless moment, got caught in the snare.

O you of great wisdom, the mouse Palita, seeing his enemy the cat thus caught in the net, came out of his hole and began to rove about fearlessly. While confidently wandering through the forest in search of food, the mouse caught sight of the meat spread there as lure. Getting up on the trap, the little animal began to eat the flesh. Laughing to himself, he even climbed over his old foe entangled helplessly in the net. Intent on eating the meat, oblivious to his own danger, he suddenly noticed the presence of a terrible enemy, none other than a coppery-eyed, restless mongoose named Harita. Living in underground holes, it resembled in form the flower of a reed. Attracted by the scent of the mouse, the animal hastened towards his prey, standing on his haunches with head upraised, licking the corners of his mouth with his tongue.

The mouse at the same moment beheld, sitting on the branch of the banyan tree, another arboreal enemy, the sharp-beaked nocturnal bird called Chandraka. When he realized that both the mongoose and the owl had seen him, Palita, surrounded by danger and filled with alarm for his safety, began to think, and made a great resolution: "At times of such peril, when death itself is staring me in the face and fear is all around, what should one do who wants his own good? I must try and save my life, warding off by every conceivable means even multiple dangers.

If I descend from this trap to the ground without measures for my safety, the mongoose will surely devour me. If I remain on this trap, the owl will certainly seize me. If, again, that cat manages to disentangle himself from the net, he too is certain to eat me up. But someone of my acumen should not lose his wits. I must use my intelligence and do my best to save my life. A person of wisdom and intelligence who knows the science of strategy never despairs, however great and terrible the danger that threatens him.

At present, I do not see any refuge other than this cat. He is an enemy, but himself in distress, so the service that I can do him is great. With three enemies trying to make me their prey, what should I do to save my life? I should now seek the protection of one of them, the cat. My plan should be to advise the cat for his good, so that I can escape from all three. Let me try to make this foolish creature understand his own interests in order to get him to make peace with me. When one's life is threatened, say those who profess knowledge of Neeti, one should even conciliate an enemy. It is better to have a learned person for an enemy than a fool for a friend. My life now rests entirely in the hands of my enemy the cat, and so I will now talk to him about his own liberation. Perhaps, at this moment, it would not be wrong to take him for an intelligent and learned foe."

The mouse, surrounded by enemies, pursued his reflections in this strain and, familiar with the science of artha and well acquainted with occasions when one should declare war or make peace, gently addressed the cat, saying, "I speak as a friend, O cat! Are you alive? I wish you to live! I wish for the good of us both. O amiable one, have no fear. You will live in happiness, and I will rescue you, if you do not kill me. There is an excellent plan I have thought of, by which you can escape, and which will benefit me as well. The mongoose and the owl are both waiting with evil intent, and my life is safe only as long as they do not attack me. There, that wretched

owl with restless glances and horrid cries is eyeing me from the branch of that tree, terrifying me.

Two good men can become friends in no time by just taking seven steps in a walk together. As you are wise, you are my friend and you need have no fear now. Without my help, O cat, you will not succeed in tearing the net. I will serve you by cutting the net, if you abstain from killing me. You have lived on this tree and I have lived at its foot for many long years together, as you know. The wise do not approve one whom nobody trusts, or one who never trusts another; both are unhappy. For this reason, let our love for each other increase, and let there be union among us both. Wise men do not approve of trying to do something when the moment for it has passed. This is the proper time for such an understanding between us. I wish that you survive, and you also want me to live. A man crosses a deep and large river on a piece of wood, each taking the other across. Similarly, our compact also will bring happiness to both of us, and we will rescue each other."

The mouse Palita waited expectantly for an answer, knowing that his suggestion was reasonable and beneficial to both.

CANTO 138–2

‘Hearing the suggestion of the mouse, framed in well-chosen words to make it acceptable, the cat, possessed of foresight and judgment of his own, answered him politely. Regarding the mouse kindly through eyes like lapis lazuli gemstones, the sharp-toothed Lomasa replied, “I am delighted with you, O amiable one! Bless you for wishing me to live! Do not hesitate to do what you think is helpful, as I am certainly in great danger, and you in possibly greater difficulties. Let us have an agreement between us, and I will do what is appropriate and necessary for the success of our efforts. If you rescue me, your service will not be forgotten. I will place myself in your hands, serve you devotedly like a disciple and always obey you.”

The mouse Palita, seeing that the cat was now completely under his influence, answered him with grave and judicious words. “You have spoken magnanimously, beyond my expectations. Listen to this plan I have hit upon to our mutual advantage. I will crouch beneath your body, as I am terrified of the mongoose. Save me, do not kill me, for I can rescue you. Protect me also from the owl, for that wretch, too, wishes to seize me for his prey. I swear by Truth that I will cut the net that entangles you, O friend!”

Lomasa gazed at Palita with delight and, now converted to cordiality, lauded him with exclamations of welcome. Losing no time, he said, “Come, quick! You are indeed blessed, a friend dear to me as breath, since through your grace I have almost got back my life. Tell me now whatever is in my power to do for you and I will do it. Let there be peace between us, O

friend! Once free from this danger, I and all my friends and relatives will do all that is agreeable and beneficial to you, and will always try to please and honour you for your services. One can one never become equal to the person who did the favour first, even with abundant service in return. One does it in return for help received, while the other acts without any such motive."

Bhishma continues, 'The mouse, once he convinced the cat of his own interests, crept under its breast as trustfully as if it had been the lap of his father or mother. Both Harita and Chandraka were shocked and amazed at this, and gave up all hope of catching the prey so close to them. They had strength, intelligence and enough cleverness to seize their prey, but realized they could not break the compact between the mouse and the cat, and went away to their respective homes.

Then the mouse Palita, who knew what to do when, began to gnaw through the strings of the net slowly, as he lay under the body of the cat, waiting for the opportune moment to finish his work. Distressed by the strings that entangled him, the cat grew impatient at the slow progress the mouse was making and, wishing to hurry him up, said, "O amiable one, how is it that you do not proceed faster with your work? Now that you have succeeded in your purpose, do you disregard me? O Parantapa, do cut these strings quickly, as the hunter will soon be here!"

The clever mouse, with his own interest in mind, replied in politic terms to the impatient cat, who was less acute, "Wait in silence, O amiable one, and drive away your fears. Speed is not essential. We know the requirements of time. It will not be wasted. A venture begun at an improper time cannot succeed, while one started at the right time will always produce splendid results. If I free you at an improper time, I will have to remain in great fear of you. So wait for the right one. Do not be impatient, friend, for I will cut the strings when I see the hunter approach, armed with his weapons, at the moment when both of us are terrified. Set free at that instant, you will scramble up the tree thinking of nothing save your safety and, as you flee in dread, I will enter my hole."

When he heard this, the cat, who was clever and persuasive, and indeed had expeditiously fulfilled his own part of the covenant, said to the recalcitrant mouse, "I rescued you promptly from a great danger, Alas, this is not the way for honest people to do business with their friends! They are happy to do their part, but it turns out otherwise. You should work for my

benefit more speedily. O you of great wisdom, do go a bit faster. If you are only waiting for time to slip away, because of our former hostility, know, evil one, that the consequence of your act will be to lessen your own life! If I have in the past unconsciously done you any wrong, I ask your forgiveness."

The wise mouse, who knew the scriptures, replied: "O cat, I have heard what you have to say in your own interest. Now listen to me as I tell you mine. A friendship based and maintained on fear should be sustained with great caution, like the hand of the snake-charmer from the fangs of the snake. He who does not protect himself after contracting an agreement with someone stronger, will find that it causes harm instead of good. Nobody is anybody's friend or well-wisher, for men become friends or enemies only from motives of self-interest. Interest attracts interest, just as tame elephants catch wild individuals of their species. After an act has been accomplished, the doer is barely remembered; therefore all acts should be so done that something remains to be completed. When I set you free, you will flee for your life without a thought to catch me, out of fear of the hunter. See, I have cut all the strings of this net. Only one remains; I will cut that also quickly. Be comforted, Lomasa!"

CANTO 138–3

'While the mouse and the cat were talking to each other, both in serious danger, the night gradually wore away, and a great dread pierced the heart of the cat. When at last morning came, the grim-visaged Chandala, Parigha, appeared on the scene, armed with weapons and accompanied by a pack of dogs. His aspect was fierce and frightful, exceedingly filthy, with black and tawny hair, large hips, long ears, and a large mouth extending from ear to ear. Seeing Parigha, who appeared veritably as an agent of Yama, the cat asked Palita, "What will you do now?" Palita rapidly cut the last string and freed the cat, who sped up the tall banyan tree, while the mouse darted into his own hole. The Chandala saw everything and, with his hopes frustrated, gathered up his nets and returned home.

Liberated from that great peril, and with his precious life intact, the cat, from the branches of the tree, addressed the mouse Palita in his hole: "You ran away so suddenly, without speaking to me. I hope you do not suspect me of any evil intentions. I am certainly grateful for the great service you have done me. Since you inspired me with trust and gave me my life, why don't you approach me now, so that we can enjoy the sweetness of friendship?

He who forgets his friends is a wicked person and will never find comrades in times of danger and need. You have honoured and served me to the best of your power, and it is now proper for you to enjoy the company of my poor self who has become your friend. Like disciples who revere

their guru, all my friends and kinsmen will honour and worship you, your friends and your kinsmen, for which grateful individual will not idolize his saviour?

Be the lord of both my body and home, be the disposer of all my wealth and possessions, be my honoured counsellor and rule me like a father. I swear by my life that you have no fear from us. In intelligence you are Usanas himself. By the power of your strategy you have given us our life and by the strength of your understanding you have conquered us."

Soothed by the comforting words of the cat, the mouse, who knew what was good for him, replied in sweet and sensible words: "I have heard you, Lomasa, so now listen to me. Friends should be well scrutinized, and enemies closely studied. In this world, even the learned regard a task like this as difficult, one depending upon acute intelligence. Friends assume the guise of enemies, and foes assume the guise of friends. When pacts of friendship are formed, it is difficult for the parties to understand whether the other parties are really moved by kama and krodha.

There is no such thing as a foe. There is no such thing as a friend. It is force of circumstances that creates friends and foes. He who thinks his own interests to be safe if another person lives, and endangered if he dies, regards him as a friend as long as their interests do not clash. There is no condition that deserves the permanent name either of friendship or hostility. Both friends and enemies arise from considerations of interest and gain.

Friendship changes to enmity in the course of time, and a foe also becomes a friend; self-interest is supreme. He who reposes blind trust in friends, and is always suspicious of enemies, without any guiding principle, will find his life unsafe. He who sets his heart upon affiliating with either friend or foe, without consideration of strategy, is regarded as unhinged. One should neither place trust in someone undeserving, nor too much faith in someone deserving. The danger that arises from blind confidence is that it cuts the very roots of him who reposes such assurance. Interest and advantage guide even a father, a mother, a son, a maternal uncle, a sister's son, or other relatives and kinsmen. One can even see a father and mother discard a dear son faced with disgrace. People take care of themselves; such is the efficacy of self-interest.

O wise one, someone who seeks his enemy's happiness immediately after being freed from danger will find escape very difficult. You came down from the tree-top to this very spot and, due to your limitations of

perception, did not notice the net spread here. How can one who fails to protect himself protect others? He is sure to ruin all his work. You tell me in sweet words that I am very dear to you. Listen, friend, to my analysis.

One becomes dear for a reason, and an enemy, too, for some adequate cause. The desire for gain, in some form or other, moves this whole world of creatures. Friendship between two brothers, love between husband and wife, depends upon selfishness. I do not know any kind of affection between men that does not rest upon some motive of self-interest. Sometimes we see blood brothers or husband and wife quarrel and reunite from natural affection; we also see this in men unrelated to each other. You cherish one for his liberality, another for his sweet words and a third for his religious deeds; all are dear to us for the purpose they serve.

The amity between us arose for a sufficient cause. That cause no longer exists. What reason is there for which I am so dear to you, other than your desire to make me your prey? You should know that I will not forget that Time erode these reasons. You seek your own interests, just as other wise men and I value our own welfare. The world rests upon the example of the wise, and I feel that this affection that you show me now is ill-timed. My self-interest makes me constant in both peace and war, themselves very unstable. The circumstances under which one makes peace or declares war change as quickly as clouds change their form.

This very day you were first my enemy, then my friend, and now once more you are an enemy. There was friendship between us as long as there was basis for its existence. Once it passed away, so did friendship. You are by nature my enemy, but circumstances made you my friend. That state of things has now passed and the old natural state of enmity has returned. As I understand this principle, why should I, for your sake, enter the net that is spread for me? Through your power, I was freed from a great danger. Through my power, you have been freed from a similar danger. Each of us has served the other through our individual abilities and freed the other from peril, and there is no need for us to come together again in friendly conversation.

We have both accomplished our objectives. I am weak and you are strong; I am your food and you are my eater. There cannot be a friendly union between us when we are situated so unequally. I understand your cunning, which is to praise me so that you can all the more easily eat me. You got entangled in the net while searching for food. You are freed, and

once again you feel the pangs of hunger. You can now have no further use for me except as a meal. I know you are hungry, and this is your dinner time; your gaze is upon me as you seek your prey. Acute from studying the shastras, you scheme in truth to eat me up today. You have sons and wives. Still you seek a friendly union with me, offer to treat me with affection and do me services. Friend, I cannot accept this proposal. If your dear spouse and loving children see me with you, they would cheerfully eat me up!

I will not, therefore, join you in friendship, for there is no longer any reason for such a union. If, indeed, you wish not to forget my help, think of what will be beneficial for me, and be satisfied. Which wise man would place himself in the power of an enemy who is not a distinguished dharmatma, who is in the pangs of hunger and on the look-out for a prey? Be happy, then. I will presently leave you. I am filled with alarm to see you even from a distance. I will not mix with you, so stop your attempts, Lomasa! If you think I have done you a service, follow then the rules of friendship when I happen to rove confidently or carelessly. Even that would be gratitude enough, coming from you.

Living near a strong and powerful person is never a good thing, even if the immediate danger has receded. I will always stand in fear of one more powerful than myself. If you do not seek your own interests, tell me what I can do for you, and I shall certainly give you everything—except my life. For protecting oneself one should even give up one's own children, kingdom, jewels and wealth. If one lives, one can recover all the affluence that one has lost. Men who protect and commit themselves only after proper consideration and assessment are never in danger. The weak always know him for an enemy who has greater strength. Their understanding, firm in the truths of the shastras, never loses its focus."'

CANTO 138–4

'Thus rebuked soundly by the mouse Palita, the cat blushed with shame, and said, "Truly, I swear to you that I consider injuring a friend to be detestable. I know you are wise and want to do me good. Guided by Artha, you say that there is cause for a breach between you and me. It does not become you, good friend, to take me for what I am not. I regard you as a great friend, for I owe you my life. I, too, am familiar with duties, and appreciate other people's merits. I am very grateful for services received, and I am committed to the service of friends, especially to you. For these reasons we should fraternize. At your command, I and all my kinsmen and relatives will lay down our very lives. Those who are learned and wise see abundant reason to place their trust in those of such mental disposition as us. So you, who know the truths of dharma, should not suspect me."

The mouse reflected a little, and said gravely, "You are exceedingly good, and I am glad to hear all that you have said. For all that, I cannot trust you. It is impossible for you, by such eulogies or by gifts of great wealth, to induce me to associate with you again. The wise never place themselves in the power of an enemy without sufficient reason. A weak person who has a pact with a stronger one, when both are threatened by enemies, should conduct himself carefully, and with considerations of expediency, when that common danger passes. After he has gained his objective, the weaker of the two parties should not again place confidence in the stronger. One should never trust someone who does not deserve to be trusted, nor should one

believe blindly another who merits trust. One should try to inspire others with confidence in oneself, but not repose confidence in enemies. Thus one should, under all circumstances, protect oneself.

One's possessions, children and all, are valuable so long as one is alive. In brief, the highest truth of all treatises on policy is mistrust. For this reason, mistrust of all produces the greatest good. If weak people mistrust their enemies, the latter, even if strong, will never get them under their power. O cat, someone like myself should always guard his life from someone like you. You too should protect your own life from the Chandala whose rage you have excited." The cat, frightened at the mention of the hunter, instantly left the branch of the tree and sped away. The wise mouse Palita, who who knew the truths of the shastras, having displayed his power of understanding, also left and entered another hole.'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus the mouse Palita, though weak and alone, through his intelligence baffled many powerful enemies. A wise man should make peace with a powerful enemy. The mouse and the cat owed their escape to their reliance upon each other's services. I have thus pointed out to you the course of Kshatriya duties at great length. Listen while I summarise it for you.

When two men who were once engaged in hostilities make peace with each other, it is certain that each of them desires to outwit the other. In such a case he who is wise by the power of his understanding, will get the better of the other. On the other hand, he who lacks wisdom will suffer, if he is careless, and will be over-come by the intelligent. It is necessary that one should appear to be fearless even when afraid, and appear to be trustful even while really mistrusting others. One who acts thus never stumbles or, if he stumbles, is not ruined. When the right time comes, one should make peace with an enemy, or wage war with even a friend. This is how one should conduct oneself, O Rajan, as the authorities on matters of peace and war have said.

Knowing this, O Rajan, one should bear in mind the truth of the shastras, and with all his wits about him, behave like one in fear before the cause of fear actually presents itself, and make peace with enemies. Such fear and alertness sharpen the intellect. If one behaves like a nervous man before the cause of fear is at hand, one is not panic-stricken when the cause is actually present. From the fear of someone who always behaves fearlessly, one sees very great fear arising. You should not advise anyone,

"Never be afraid." He who is afraid, spurred by the knowledge of his own weakness, seeks the counsel of wise and experienced men. For these reasons, one should appear to be fearless even when afraid, and seem to be trustful when one mistrusts others. But on the most important matters, one should not behave towards others with falsehood.

You have listened, O Yudhishtira, to the old story of the mouse and the cat that I have told. Act as required amidst your friends and kinsmen. Derive insight from this story. Learn the difference between a friend and an enemy, and the proper time for war and peace, and you will discover a means of escape when in danger. Make peace at a time of common danger with a powerful one, and think carefully about uniting with the enemy after the danger has passed. Indeed, having achieved your purpose, you should not trust the enemy again. This path of policy is consistent with the aggregate of three, O Rajan!

Guided by this Sruti, win prosperity by protecting your subjects once more, O son of Pandu. Seek the companionship of Brahmanas in all your work, as they constitute the great source of benefit both in this world and the next. They are teachers of dharma and are always grateful and, if worshipped, are sure to do you good. Therefore, O Rajan, you should venerate them and then you will duly obtain kingdom, great benefits, fame, achievement and progeny, in the proper order. This story of peace and war between the mouse and the cat, this history so persuasive and instructive, should remain always before his eyes when a king conducts himself in the midst of his enemies.'"

CANTO 139–1

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have stated, O Mahabaho, that one should not trust foes. But how can the king maintain himself if he does not trust anybody? You say that kings who trust others face greater danger. How can a king conquer his enemies without depending on others? Clear my doubts, for my mind has become confused by what you say about mistrust.'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, O Rajan, to the story of King Brahmadatta and a bird named Pujani who lived for a long time within the inner apartments of the king's palace at Kampilya. Like the bird Jivajivaka, Pujani could mimic the cries of all animals. Although a bird by birth, she had great knowledge and knew every truth.

While living there, she had a child of great splendor, at the very same time as the king and his queen also had a son. Pujani, who was grateful for the shelter of the king's roof, used to go every day to the shores of the ocean and bring back a couple of fruits for the nourishment of both her own nestling and the infant prince. One of the fruits she gave to her chick, the other to the prince. Every day she brought them, and every day she distributed them the same way. The fruits she brought were sweet as nectar and most nutritious. The infant prince derived great strength from Pujani's fruit.

One day the prince, while with his nurse, saw Pujani's chick. Getting down from the nurse's arms, he ran towards the little bird, the same age as himself, and, moved by childish impulse, began to play with it happily. At

last, picking up the bird in his hands, the prince stifled the chick's life. He went back to his nurse. When Pujani, who had been out in search of the usual fruits, returned to the palace and saw her young one lying dead on the ground, killed by the prince, she wept bitterly. With tears gushing down her cheeks, her heart burning with grief, she said, "Alas, nobody should live with a Kshatriya, or make friends with him, or associate with him. When they have a purpose to serve, they are courteous, and when that object has been served they discard you. The Kshatriyas do evil to all. They should never be trusted. Even after they inflict a wound, they try to pacify the injured, at no cost to themselves. I will exact my retribution from the cruel and ungrateful betrayer of my trust. He is guilty of a triple sin, because he took the life of one who was born on the same day as him, who was reared with him and ate with him, and who was dependent on him for protection."

With these words to herself, Pujani pierced the eyes of the prince with her talons, and, deriving some comfort from her act of reprisal, said again, "A sinful deed, perpetrated deliberately, harms the doer immediately, while those who avenge an injury do not lose their punya." O Rajan, if the consequences of a sinful deed are not visited upon the perpetrator himself, they will certainly be on his descendants.

When Brahmadatta saw his son blinded by Pujani, he understood what had happened, and said to Pujani. "We did you an injury, and you have avenged it. The account has been squared. Do not leave your home, O Pujani; continue to dwell here."

Pujani replied, "If anyone who causes an injury to another continues living with that other, his conduct will not be approved by the learned. In the circumstances, it is always better for him to leave his former place. One should never trust gentle assurances received from an injured party. The fool who trusts such assurances soon meets with death.

Animosity is not quickly cooled. The very sons and grandsons of men who have injured each other can encounter destruction, as enmity is handed down like an inheritance. As a result of their offspring being destroyed, they lose the next world also.

Among men who have injured one another, mistrust can be advantageous. One who has betrayed a confidence should never be trusted; one who does not deserve trust should not be trusted; nor should too much trust be placed in anyone, though he may be deserving of trust. The danger that arises from blind confidence brings wholesale destruction. While one

should seek to inspire others with confidence in oneself, one should not repose confidence in others.

One’s father and the mother are only the foremost of friends. The wife is merely a vessel for procreation. The son is only one’s seed. The brother is an enemy. A friend or companion requires to have his palms oiled, if he is to remain one. You alone enjoy or suffer your own happiness or misery.

It is not advisable to have real peace among men who have injured one another. The reasons for which I lived here no longer exist. The mind of one who has once injured another becomes naturally filled with mistrust, if he sees the injured one pay homage to him with gifts and honours. Such conduct, especially when displayed by those who are strong, always fills the weak with alarm.

An intelligent person should leave the place where he was first given respect, so as not to meet with dishonour and injury again, despite any subsequent honour that he might obtain from his enemy. I have dwelt in your home for a long time, esteemed by you. However, a cause for enmity has now arisen, and I should leave this place without any hesitation.”

CANTO 139–2

'Brahmadatta replied, "One who does an injury in return for an injury received, is not considered unjust. Indeed, the avenger only settles his account. Therefore, Pujani, continue to dwell here and do not leave this place."

Pujani said, "No friendship can be restored between one who has injured another and one who has inflicted an injury in return. The hearts of neither can forget what has happened."

Brahmadatta replied, "It is necessary for an injurer and the avenger of injury to get together. One has seen that upon such a union, mutual animosity cools and no fresh injury follows."

Pujani said, "That animosity can never die. The person injured should never trust his enemies and think, 'O, I have been soothed with assurances of goodwill.' In this world, men frequently meet with destruction because of misplaced confidence. We should no longer meet each other. Those who cannot be subjugated even by force and sharp weapons can be conquered by conciliation, as she-elephants are used to capture elephants."

Brahmadatta said, "Even if one inflicts deadly injury upon the other, affection and mutual trust arises naturally between them if they live together, as in the case of the Chandala and the dog. Among men who have injured one another, living together blunts the keenness of animosity. Indeed, it disappears quickly like water poured upon the leaf of a lotus."

Pujani said, "The learned know that enmity springs from five causes: woman, land, harsh words, natural incompatibility and injury. If the person

with whom hostility occurs is a liberal man, he should not be killed, particularly by a Kshatriya, openly or by covert means. In such a case, the man's fault should be properly weighed. When there is hostility even with a friend, no further confidence should be reposed in him. Enmity lies hidden like fire in wood and cannot be put out without consuming one of the parties outright. Like the Aurvya fire within the waters of the ocean, the fire of antipathy can never be extinguished with gifts of wealth, by display of prowess, by conciliation or by scriptural knowledge.

If one has injured a person, he should never be trusted again as a friend, even though one might later have lavished wealth and honours on him. The fact of the injury inflicted fills the injurer with fear. I never injured you, nor did you ever harm me, so I lived in your house. All that has changed, and I cannot trust you any more."

Brahmadatta said, "Time is responsible for all action. Karma is of diverse kinds, all of them proceeding from Time. Who, therefore, injures whom? Birth and death happen in the same way: creatures take birth and live as a result of Time, and it is also because of Time that they cease to live. We see some die all at once some die one at a time, and some live long lives. Like fire consuming fuel, Time consumes all creatures.

O Bird, I am not the cause of your sorrow, nor are you the cause of mine. It is Time that decides the happiness or misery of living creatures. So continue to live here at your pleasure, with affection for me and without fear of any injury from me. I have forgiven you for what you have done and you must forgive me too, Pujani!"

Pujani replied, "If Time to you is the cause of all actions, then of course nobody should cherish feelings of enmity towards anybody on earth. Why then do friends and kinsmen seek to avenge the slain? Why too did the Devas and the Asuras in ancient days attack one another in battle? If it is Time that causes happiness and misery, birth and death, why do physicians administer medicines to the sick? If it is Time that moulds everything, what is the need for medicines? Why do grief-stricken people, deprived of their senses, indulge in such delirious lamentions? If Time, according to you, is the cause of karma, how can men acquire punya by performing religious deeds?

Your son killed my child and, impelled by grief, I blinded him for it. I have by that action, Rajan, become liable to be killed by you. Men desire birds either to kill them for food, or keep in cages for their pleasure, and for

no other reason. Birds, again, from fear of being either killed or caged by men, seek safety in flight. Men who know the Vedas have said that death and imprisonment are both painful. Life is dear to all. Grief and pain make all creatures miserable. All creatures wish for happiness. Misery arises from various sources, Brahmadatta. Decrepitude is misery. Loss of wealth is misery. The proximity of anything disagreeable or evil is misery. Separation from friends and agreeable objects is misery. Misery arises from imprisonment and death. Misery arises from causes connected with women, and from other natural causes. The misery that arises from the death of children alters and afflicts all creatures tremendously.

Fools say there is no unhappiness in others' misery. Only he who has not felt any pain or sorrow himself can say so in the midst of men, not anyone who has felt distress or anguish himself. One who has experienced pangs of any kind of misery feels the misery of others as his own. What I have done to you, Rajan, and what you have done to me cannot be washed away by even a hundred years; there can be no reconciliation. As often as you happen to think of your son, your resentment towards me will become fresh.

If a man, after he avenges himself for an injury, wants to make peace with the injured, the two can never be properly reunited, even like the fragments of an earthen vessel. Men who know the shastras say that trust never produces happiness. Usanas himself sang two verses to Prahlada in ancient times: 'He who trusts the words of a foe, true or false, meets with death like a honey-gatherer falling into a pit covered with dry grass.'

We see antagonisms survive the very death of enemies, for men speak of the past enmities of their deceased fathers before their surviving children. Kings settle mutual animosities by conciliation but, when the opportunity comes, they shatter their enemies like earthen water-jars dashed upon stone. If the king wrongs someone, he should never trust him again, else he will have to suffer great misery."'

CANTO 139–3

'Brahmadatta said, "No man achieves anything by distrust of others. Nurturing fear obliges one to live like a corpse."

Pujani replied, "He whose feet are sore will certainly fall, however cautiously he tries to walk. Similarly, a man whose eyes have become sore by opening them against the wind will find wind very painful to them. He who sets foot on an evil path and persists in walking along it, without knowing his own strength, will soon lose his life. He who is lazy and tills his land disregarding the season of rain will never reap a harvest. He who eats every day food that is nutritious, be it bitter, sharp, palatable or sweet, will enjoy a long life, while he who ignores wholesome food and takes what is injurious, oblivious of its consequences, will soon meet with death.

Destiny and effort depend upon each other. Mahatmans achieve good and great feats, while eunuchs only pay court to Destiny. Be it harsh or mild, one's karma should be good. The unfortunate man of inaction is always overwhelmed by all sorts of calamity. One should use one's energy to do what is beneficial to oneself and abandon everything else. Knowledge, courage, cleverness, strength and patience are said to be one's natural friends, and wise men live in this world with the aid of these five. Houses, precious metals, land, wife and friends—these are secondary sources of good, the learned say, and can be obtained everywhere.

A wise man can be happy and will stand out everywhere. He never fills anybody with fear, or yields to fear even if frightened. The wealth that he

possesses at any time, however little, is certain to increase. Such a man acts with acumen and self-restraint and will win great fame.

Foolish men have to put up at home with quarrelsome wives who devour their flesh like the progeny of a crab eating up their mothers. There are men who, through deficiency of understanding, become disconsolate at the prospect of leaving home. They say to themselves, 'These are our friends! This is our country! Alas, how shall we leave these?' One should certainly leave the country of one's birth if it is afflicted by plague or famine. One should live in one's own country respected by all, or go to a foreign country and live there. For this reason I will go to some other region, as I no longer dare to live in this place, for I have done a great wrong to your child.

Rajan, one should abandon a bad wife, a bad son, a bad king, a bad friend, a bad alliance, and a bad country. One should not place any trust in a bad son, and what joy can one have in a bad wife? There can be no happiness in a bad kingdom, and in a bad country one cannot hope to obtain a livelihood. There can be no lasting companionship with a bad friend, for his attachment is very unreliable, and in a bad alliance, when there is no compulsion for it, there is disgrace. She is a wife indeed whose utterances are agreeable. He is a son who makes the father happy. He is a friend in whom one can trust. That certainly is one's country where one earns one's livelihood. He is a just ruler who does not oppress, who loves the poor and in whose territories there is no fear.

Wife, country, friends, son, kinsmen, and relatives—all these one can acquire if the king is accomplished and is virtuous. If the king is sinful, his subjects will meet with ruin as a result of his oppressions. The king is the root of one's triple aggregate—Dharma, Dana and Kama. He should carefully protect his subjects and take from them only a sixth share of their wealth, or else he is in truth a thief. The king who gives assurances of protection and does not fulfill them due to greed, takes upon himself the sins of all his subjects and ultimately sinks to hell, whereas he who protects all his subjects, is a universal benefactor.

Manu, the lord of all the creatures, has said that the king has seven attributes: he is Father, Mother, Guru, Protector, Fire, Vaisravana and Yama. One calls the king who shows compassion towards his people their father, and the subject who behaves falsely towards him will take birth in his next life as an animal or a bird. By nurturing them and caring for the poor, he

becomes a mother to his people. When he destroys evil, he comes to be regarded as Fire; when he restrains the sinful, one calls him Yama; when he gives gifts of wealth to those who are dear to him one regards him as Kuvera, the granter of wishes; when he gives instruction in morality and dharma, he becomes the Guru; and when he exercises the duty of defending his subjects he becomes the Protector.

The king who gladdens the people of his cities and provinces by his achievements in observing dharma is never deprived of his kingdom. The king who knows how to honour his subjects never suffers misery, here or hereafter. The king whose subjects are always anxious or overburdened with taxes and evils of all kinds will be defeated at the hands of his enemies, while he whose subjects grow like a large lotus in a lake will obtain every reward here, and will ultimately be honoured in Swarga. Hostility with one more powerful is never applauded, O Rajan. The king who incurs the hostility of one more powerful than himself loses both kingdom and happiness."

Having said these words to Brahmadatta, the bird left for the place she had chosen. I have narrated to you O foremost of kings, the discourse between Brahmadatta and Pujani. What else do you want to hear?'"

CANTO 140

"Yudhishtira asks, 'When both dharma and men decay due to the gradual decline of the Yuga, and when robbers overrun the world, how then, O Pitamaha, should a king behave?'

Bhishma replies, 'I will tell you, O Bhaarata, the policy the king should adopt at such times of distress, and how he should conduct himself, casting off compassion. There is often told an old story of a conversation between Bharadwaja and Satrunjaya. King Satrunjaya, the Maharathi ruler of the Sauviras, went to Bharadwaja and asked the Rishi about the truths of the science of Artha: "How can one acquire an object? How again, when acquired, can it be increased? How, when increased, can it be protected? And how, when protected, should it be used?"

The Maharishi set out a reasoned explanation of the science of Artha. He said, "The king should always have the rod of Dandaneeti raised in his hand. He should strike everyone with awe and thus rule all creatures. He should display his prowess and make no mistakes himself, but use his eyes to mark the lapses of his foes. Learned men with knowledge of truth applaud Punishment, or Danda. Hence, one says that of the four requisites of governance, Conciliation, Gift, Disunion and Punishment, Danda is the greatest.

All who seek refuge perish when one destroys the foundation that ensures protection. If one cuts away the roots of a tree, how can the branches live? A wise king should cut away the very roots of his enemies, and then win them over and bring their allies and partisans under his

control. When calamities occur, the king should lose no time, counsel wisely, display his prowess suitably, fight with ability and even retreat wisely. The king should exhibit humility in words, while at heart remaining sharp as a razor. He should give up kama and krodha and speak sweetly and mildly. When the occasion for a parley with an enemy comes, a king with foresight should make peace, but without blind trust. When the undertaking is over, he should quickly turn away from the new ally.

One should conciliate an enemy with sweet assurances as if he were a friend, but remain wary as though living in a room where there lurks a snake. He whose mind your intellect can dominate should be comforted by assurances given in the past, an evil one by promises of future benefit, and a wise man by present assistance. He who wants to achieve prosperity should join his hands together, make pledges, use sweet words, show reverence by bowing down his head, and shed tears. One should carry one's foe on one's shoulders so long as the time is unfavourable. Then, when the opportunity comes, one should shatter him like an earthen jar on a stone.

It is better, O Rajan, for a king to blaze up in a moment like a charcoal of ebony-wood rather than to smoulder and smoke like chaff for many years. One who has many purposes to serve should have no scruples dealing with even an ungrateful man. If one succeeds, one can enjoy happiness but, if unsuccessful, one loses esteem; therefore, while dealing with such men, one should always leave something unfinished.

A king should for his own good, imitate a cuckoo, a boar, the mountains of Meru, an empty chamber, an actor, and a devoted friend, He should diligently visit the homes of his enemies and, if calamities befall them, enquire about their well-being. Those who are idle will never be wealthy; nor will those who lack manliness and energy; nor those who are vain or fear unpopularity; nor those given to procrastination. The king should work in such a way that his enemy is unable to detect his shortcomings, while he can observe his enemy's weakness. He should imitate the tortoise who conceals its limbs and covers its own weakness. He should think of all matters connected with finance like a crane sitting patiently by the water's edge for hours together waiting for fish. He should demonstrate his skill like a lion. He should lie in wait like a wolf, and fall upon and strike his foes directly like an arrow.

He should be judicious in enjoying drink, dice, women, hunting and music, as addiction to these will produce evil. He should make bows with

bamboos and such; he should sleep cautiously like the deer, and seem blind or deaf when necessary. A wise king should show his prowess according to time and place, for if these are not favourable, all his skills will be futile. He should get down to work marking the timeliness of his action, reflect upon his own strength and weakness and improve his own strength in comparison to that of the enemy. The king who does not crush a foe defeated by military force provides for his own death like the crab when she conceives. A tree with beautiful blossoms may not be strong; one bearing fruits may be difficult to climb; and sometimes a tree with unripe fruits may appear like one with ripe fruits. These facts should not depress a king, for if he conducts himself as explained above, he will succeed against all foes.

The king should first strengthen the hopes of those who approach him as supplicants and then put obstacles in the way of their fulfillment. He should represent these obstacles as rare and the circumstances as the results of grave causes. As long as the occasion for fear does not actually occur, the king should make all his arrangements like one who is nervous. When the occasion for fear actually comes, he should strike fearlessly. No man can reap benefits without incurring danger. If he succeeds in preserving his life amidst peril, he is sure to earn great rewards.

A king should ascertain all future dangers when they are present and overcome them before they grow further; he should, even after vanquishing them, consider them unconquered. The abandonment of present happiness and the pursuit of future happiness is never the policy of an intelligent man. The king who, having made peace with an enemy, sleeps happily in tranquility, is like a man sleeping on the top of a tree who awakes only after a fall. When one lapses into difficulties, one should raise oneself by every means in one's power, mild or strong, and practise dharma only after one has recovered.

The king should always honour the foes of his enemies. He should employ as his own spies agents employed by his foes and ensure that his enemies do not discover them. He should use atheists and ascetics as spies and send them into his enemy's territories. Sinful thieves who offend the laws of dharma and who are thorns in the side of everyone enter gardens, places of amusement, places set up for giving drinking water to thirsty travelers, public inns, drinking spots, houses of ill fame, holy places and public assemblies. You should recognise them, arrest them and put them down. The king should not trust one who does not deserve to be trusted, nor

should he trust too much one who deserves trust, for danger springs from trust. No one should be trusted without prior scrutiny.

Having by persuasive methods created confidence in the enemy, the king should smite him when he makes a false step. The king should fear him who is without fear, and also those who should be feared. Fear that comes from a quarter one did not suspect can lead to total extermination. By attention, by taciturnity, by wearing the reddish garb, matted locks and skins of ascetics, one should lull one's enemy into confidence and then, when the opportunity comes, spring upon him like a wolf. A king who wants prosperity should not scruple to slay son, brother, father or friend, if any of them tries to thwart his plans. One's very guru deserves to be punished, if he happens to be arrogant, ignorant of what should be done and what should not, and one who treads the path of adharma.

Just as certain insects with their sharp mandibles can cut off all flowers and fruits of the trees on which they sit, the king should deceive his enemy with welcome, honours and gifts and then attack him and take everything from him. One cannot acquire great prosperity without stabbing the very vitals of others, without accomplishing many grim deeds and without slaughtering living creatures like a fisherman. There are no separate species of creatures called enemies or friends; they become that from force of circumstance.

The king should never be moved to allow his foe to escape, even if they plead piteously, as it is his dharma to destroy any who have done him an injury. A king who wants prosperity should take care to win over to himself as many men as he can, doing good to them. He should remain free from malice while dealing with his subjects, but judiciously control and punish the evil and disobedient. After seizing wealth he should say placating words. After striking off someone's head, he should grieve and shed tears. A king who wants to prosper should draw others to himself and bind them to his service by means of sweet words, honours and gifts. He should never engage in fruitless disputes or cross a river with the aid of his own two arms. To eat cow-horns is futile and not invigorating, for their taste is not pleasing and they break one's teeth.

The triple aggregate of dharma, artha and kama has three disadvantages, with three inseparable adjuncts. Pursuit of dharma stands as an impediment in the way of artha; artha stands in the way of dharma; and kama stands in the way of both. Carefully consider these adjuncts, and avoid the

disadvantages. The unpaid balance of a debt, the unextinguished remnant of a fire, and un-slain enemies: these grow and increase, and should therefore be completely put out and exterminated. Debt that grows, defeated foes and neglected ailments are certain to remain, unless totally eradicated, and will lead to a rout. All work should be done thoroughly and carefully, for even a minute thing like a thorn, if extracted clumsily, can lead to incurable gangrene.

A king should destroy a hostile kingdom by slaughtering its population, by tearing up roads and otherwise damaging them, and by burning and pulling down its houses. He should be far-sighted like a vulture, motionless like a crane, vigilant like a dog, valiant like a lion, wary like a crow, and like a snake sneak into the territories of his foes with ease and unconcern. A king should win over a hero by joining his palms, a coward by filling him with fear, and a covetous man by gifts of wealth, while, with an equal he should wage war. He should be alert to any opportunity to produce disunion among leaders of different sects and to conciliate those among them who are dear to him. He should protect his ministers from disunion and destruction.

If the king becomes mild, the people ignore him, but if he becomes stern, the people feel it as hardship. The rule is that he should be stern or mild as the occasion requires. He should treat the mild with mildness, and that may even destroy the fierce, for there is nothing that mildness cannot achieve. For this reason, one says that mildness is more effective than fierceness. The king, who is mild when the occasion requires mildness and stern when sternness is required, will accomplish all his objectives and defeat his foes.

Having incurred the animosity of a knowledgeable and wise man, one should not draw comfort from the conviction that one is at a distance from him. The arms of an intelligent injured man who seeks revenge, reach far. One should not try to cross what cannot really be traversed or snatch from an enemy something he will be able to recover, or dig for something that one will not succeed in unearthing. One should never strike someone whose head one cannot cut off. In times of trouble a king should follow this course of conduct that I have laid down. I have said all this for your own good and to instruct you on how you should bear yourself when enemies attack."

The king of the Sauviras listened to these words of the Brahmana who had spoken out of a desire to do him good, obeyed them cheerfully and as a

result he, his kinsmen and friends obtained great prosperity.'"

CANTO 141

"Yudhishtira asks, 'When Mahadharma decays and all disobey it, when dharma assumes a reverse form and becomes adharma; when all good restraints disappear, and all truths in respect of dharma are challenged and disputed; when kings and robbers oppress people; when men of all the four varnashramas become confused about their duties and all actions lose their merit; when, as a result of kama, lobha and ahankara, men have cause for fear from every direction; when all cease to trust one another, when they kill one another treacherously and deceive one another in their mutual dealings; when houses are burned down throughout the land; when the Brahmanas suffer; when the clouds do not bring a drop of rain; when everyone's hand is turned against his neighbor; when all the necessities of life fall under the control of robbers; when such a time of terrible distress sets in, by what means should a Brahmana maintain himself who is unwilling to give up compassion and his children? Tell me this, O Pitamaha. When sinfulness sweeps over the world, O Parantapa, how should the king live so that he will not stray from both dharma and artha?'

Bhishma replies, 'O Mahabaho, the peace and prosperity of subjects, sufficient and seasonal rain, disease, death and other fears, all depend on the king. I have no doubt, O Bharatarishabha, that the setting in of Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali yugas depend on the king's conduct. When such a season of misery as you describe sets in, the righteous should support life by their own judgment.

In this connection, a story has been told of the conversation between Viswamitra and a Chandala in a hamlet inhabited by Chandalas. Towards the end of Treta and the beginning of Dwapara yugas, a frightful drought extending over twelve years occurred, as intended by the Devas. At the end of Treta yuga and the commencement of Dwapara yuga, when the time came for many creatures to die of old age, Indra, the thousand-eyed deity of Swarga, sent no rain. The planet Brihaspati began to move in a retrograde course and Soma, abandoning his own orbit, receded towards the south. Not even a dew-drop could be seen, let alone clouds gathering together. The rivers all shrank into narrow rivulets, and as the Devas ordained, lakes, wells and springs everywhere lost their beauty and disappeared.

Water having become scarce, the places set up by charity for thirsty travellers became desolate. The Brahmanas abstained from sacrifices and recitation of the Vedas. They no longer uttered Vashats or performed propitiatory rites. Agriculture and cattle rearing were given up, markets and shops were abandoned and stakes for tethering sacrificial animals disappeared. People no longer collected articles for sacrifices, and all festivals and amusements perished. Heaps of bones lay scattered around and the air was filled with the shrill cries and yells of ferocious creatures. Cities and towns became empty of inhabitants. Villages and hamlets were burnt down. Some people were assailed by robbers, some by weapons, some by evil kings, and all began to flee in fear of one another. Temples and places of worship became desolate. The aged were forcibly turned out of their houses, and cattle—goats, sheep and buffaloes—fought for food and perished in large numbers. Brahmanas began to die on all sides, protection came to an end, and herbs and plants dried up. The earth, shorn of all her beauty, became ghastly and dreadful, like trees in a crematorium.

In that period of terror, when dharma was nowhere, O Yudhishtira, starving men lost their senses and began to eat one another. The very Rishis gave up their vows, abandoned their fires and deities, forsook vanavasa and began to wander about in search of food. The holy and wise Maharishi Viswamitra, leaving his wife and son in a place of shelter and abandoning his homa fire, wandered homeless and hungry, unmindful of clean and unclean food.

One day he came upon a hamlet in the midst of a vana, inhabited by savage hunters engaged in the slaughter of living creatures. The village abounded with broken earthen jars and pots, and dog-skins lay scattered

around. Bones and skulls of boars and asses were heaped up, clothes stripped from the dead lay strewn around, and huts were decorated with withered garlands and filled with sloughed-off snakeskins. The loud crowing of cocks and the dissonant bray of asses filled the air, while the inhabitants of the village disputed with one another harshly in discordant voices. Temples of Devas bearing images of owls and other birds resounded with the clang of iron bells, and packs of dogs lolled about.

Maharishi Viswamitra, moved by the pangs of hunger, entered the Chandalas' village in search of food and tried his best to find something to eat. Though he begged and begged, he failed to obtain meat, rice, fruit, root or any other kind of food. At last he exclaimed, "Alas, what misery has overtaken me!" and collapsed from weakness.

The sage began to reflect and asked himself, "What is best for me to do now?" The one thought that seized him was how to avoid immediate death. He found spread on the floor of a Chandala's hut a large piece of flesh, of a recently-killed dog. The sage reflected and decided to steal that meat, saying to himself, "When there is no other means to stay alive, theft is permitted, even for eminent men, and it will not detract from their fame. It is certain that, to save his life, even a Brahmana can do it. One should steal first from a low person, failing which one can steal from one's equal, or from even an eminent Dharmatman. Therefore at this time, when my life itself is ebbing away, I will steal this haunch of dog's meat. I see nothing wrong in such theft."

Maharishi Viswamitra resolved to do so, and lay down to sleep where the Chandalas lived. When the night had advanced and the whole Chandala village had fallen asleep, the holy Viswamitra stealthily got up and entered the hut. The Chandala who owned it, an ugly man with phlegm-covered eyes, was lying like one asleep. He called out in a hoarse and dissonant voice, "Who is undoing the latch? The village is asleep but I am awake. Whoever you are, you are about to die."

Filled with fear at these harsh words, his heart palpitating and his face crimson with shame at the attempted theft, the sage answered, "O you blessed with a long life, I am Viswamitra. I have come here oppressed by the pangs of hunger. Do not slay me, O you of righteous understanding, if your sight is clear."

Hearing these words of the Maharishi, the Chandala rose up in terror from his bed and approached him. Joining his palms reverently, his eyes

bathed in tears, he asked Kusika's son, "What are you doing here in the night, Brahmana?"

To conciliate the Chandala, Viswamitra said, "Famished as I am and about to die of starvation, I want to take that haunch of dog's meat. It is hunger that is urging me to this misdeed and it has made me sinful and shameless. My life-breath is fading, and hunger has destroyed my Vedic learning. I have lost my senses through weakness and have no scruple left about clean or unclean food. Although I know it is sinful, I still wish to take away that haunch of dog's meat. I wandered from house to house in your hamlet, and when I failed to obtain any alms, I decided upon this misdeed. Fire is the mouth of the Devas and is also their priest, and should take nothing that is not pure and clean. At times, however, the great Agni Deva becomes a consumer of everything. Understand that I have now in that respect become just like him."

The Chandala answered, "O Maharishi, listen to my words of truth about your duty and act so that your punya is not destroyed. The wise say that a dog is less clean than a jackal, and that the haunch of a dog is a much worse part of his body than any other. You have not discerned this, Maharishi, for this theft of unclean food belonging to a Chandala is inconsistent with dharma. You are blessed, look for some other means for preserving your life and let not your tapasyas suffer destruction as a result of your craving for dog's meat. Knowing the duties that the shastras have laid down, you should not do something that will result in confusion in your dharma. Do not cast off dharma, for you are its greatest observer."

Thus addressed, O Bharatarishabha, the famished Maharishi Viswamitra once more said, "It has been a long time since I ate anything, and I do not see any other means of staying alive. When one is facing death, one should preserve one's life by any means in one's power, not enquire into their character. Later, when one is able, one should seek to acquire punya. Kshatriyas should observe the practices of Indra, while it is the duty of Brahmanas to behave like Agni.

The Vedas are fire and, since they constitute my strength, I will eat even this unclean food to appease my hunger. That which preserves life should certainly be done without scruple, for life is better than death and, as long as there is life, one can acquire dharma. I am ready to eat this to save my life, knowing that this food is impure. Give me your permission. If I survive, I will acquire dharma and, by penances and knowledge, wipe out

the abomination of my present conduct, like the light of the firmament that can banish even the densest darkness."

The Chandala said, "By eating this food, someone like you cannot obtain long life, for it can neither give you strength nor the gratification offered by ambrosia. Pray seek some other kind of alms, and not this dog's meat which is defiled food for Munis."

Viswamitra replied, "During a famine like this, any other kind of meat cannot be easily obtained. Besides, O Chandala, I have no means to buy food, and I am ravenous. I can no longer move and am without any hope. I believe that in that piece of dog's meat I will find all the six kinds of taste."

The Chandala said, "The shastras prescribe only five kinds of five-clawed animals as clean food for Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. Do not hunger for this unclean food."

Viswamitra said, "The great Rishi Agastya, when hungry, ate the Asura Vatapi. I am in distress, I am hungry, and I will therefore eat that haunch of dog's meat."

The Chandala said, "Ask for some other alms, as it does not become you ever to do such a thing. If, however, it pleases you, you can take this piece of dog's meat."

Viswamitra said, "Those whom you call good are authorities on matters of duty. I am following their example. I now regard this dog's haunch to be better food than anything that is highly pure."

The Chandala said, "One can never regard the action of an adharmic person as an eternal practice. What is improper can never become proper. Do not deceive yourself into committing a sinful deed."

Viswamitra replied, "A Rishi cannot do anything sinful. In the present case, the deer and the dog to me are the same, both animals. I will, therefore, eat this dog's haunch."

The Chandala said, "In the case of the Rishi Agastya, he did as the Brahmanas requested him. Under those circumstances it could not be a sin. That in which there is no sin is dharma. Besides, one should by all means protect and preserve Brahmanas, who are the gurus of three other varnas."

Viswamitra said, "I am a Brahmana and my body is a very dear friend, worthy of the highest reverence from me. It is to sustain this body that I wish to take away that dog's haunch. So eager have I become that I no longer have any fear of you or your fierce brethren."

The Chandala said, “Men lay down their lives rather than eat impure food. They realise all their desires by conquering hunger. You too must conquer your craving and obtain those rewards.”

Viswamitra said, “I observe strict vows and my heart is set on peace. To preserve the root of all religious punya, I will eat food that is unclean. It is evident that one would regard such an action as righteous in a Rishi, while to someone of unclean soul the eating of dog’s flesh would appear sacreligious. Even if the conclusion at which I have arrived is wrong, and if I eat this dog’s meat I will not, as a result, become like you.”

The Chandala said, “I have decided that I must try my best to restrain you from this offence. A Brahmana by evil karma falls from his high state. It is for this that I am reproving you.”

Viswamitra retorted, “Cattle continue to drink, regardless of the croaking of the frogs. You can claim no knowledge about what is dharma and what is not, so don’t think too highly of yourself.”

The Chandala replied, “I am preaching to you only because I have become your friend. Do whatever is beneficial, do not be tempted into doing anything wicked.”

Viswamitra said, “If you are a friend who wishes my happiness, help me from this misery. If you willingly give me this dog’s haunch, I can consider myself saved by the aid of dharma and not by sin.”

The Chandala said, ‘I dare not gift you with this piece of meat, nor can I quietly suffer the theft of my own food. If I give you this meat and if you, a Brahmana, take it, both of us will sink into regions of sorrow in the next world.”

Viswamitra said, “If I commit this sinful deed today, I will certainly save my life which is sacred. After I save my life, I will practice dharma and cleanse my soul. Tell me which of these two is preferable, to die without food, or save my life by taking this food that is impure.”

The Chandala said: “In duties concerning one’s varna or varnasrama, one is the best judge of propriety or impropriety. You know which of these two actions is sinful. I think that he who would regard dog’s meat as clean food, would in matters of food abstain from nothing!”

Viswamitra replied, ‘In accepting an unclean gift, or in eating unclean food, there is sin. When, however, one’s life is in danger, there is no sin in accepting such a present or eating such food. Besides, the eating of impure

food that is not accompanied by slaughter and deception, is not a matter of much consequence, and will provoke only mild censure."

The Chandala said, "If this is your argument for eating unclean food, it is clear that you do not respect the morality of the Vedas and Arya. You have taught me by your example, O greatest of Brahmanas, that it is not a sin to disregard the distinction between food that is clean and unclean."

Viswamitra said, "It is not that a man incurs a grave sin by eating forbidden food. The precept that one becomes degraded by drinking wine is only in order to restrain men. Other strictures of the same type, whatever they be, in fact every sin, cannot destroy one's punya."

The Chandala said, "The learned man who takes dog's meat from an unworthy place, from an unclean wretch, from one who leads an evil life, commits an action contrary to that one calls good. As a result, he is certain to suffer the pangs of repentance."

The Chandala, having said these words to Kusika's son, fell silent. The wise Viswamitra, to save his life, then took away that haunch of dog's meat to the woods to eat with his wife. He resolved that he would first gratify the deities according to due rites and then eat the meat at his pleasure.

Lighting a fire according to the Brahma rites, the Maharishi began to cook the meat into sacrificial Charu, as the Aindragneya rites prescribe. He then began the ceremonies in honour of the Devas and the Pitris, O Bhaarata, divided the Charu into as many portions as were necessary according to the injunctions of the shastras, and invoked the Devas, with Indra at their head, to accept their shares.

Meanwhile, the chief of the celestials caused heavy rain to fall. The showers revived all the creatures and caused plants and herbs to grow once more. Viswamitra completed the rites in honour of the Devas and the Pitris and, having duly gratified them, ate the meat. Burning away all his sins later by his penances, the sage, after a long time, acquired the most wonderful ascetic success.

Even so should a Mahatman proceed who is knowledgeable and can devise means to preserve his own life when in trouble. By using his understanding thus, a man should survive to win punya and enjoy happiness and prosperity. For this reason, O son of Kunti, a learned man of cleansed soul should live and work in this world, relying upon his own intelligence to discriminate between dharma and adharma.'"

CANTO 142

"Yudhishtira says, 'If something so horrible can be commended that, like falsehood, should be held in aversion, then from what deeds should I desist? Why then shouldn't robbers be respected? I am stunned, my heart is sore, all the ties that bind me to dharma are loosened! I cannot calm my mind and venture to act as you suggest.'

Bhishma says, 'I am not instructing you about duty that I have learned from the Vedas alone. What I have told you is the result of wisdom and experience, the honey that the learned have gathered. Kings should gather wisdom from various sources. One cannot make his course through the world with the aid of a dharma that is one-sided. Duty must spring from understanding and from discovering the practices of those who are good, O son of Kuru. Attend to my words. Only kings who have superior intelligence can rule and expect victory. A weak-minded king can never display wisdom if he has not drawn any from the examples before him.

Dharma sometimes takes the shape of adharma, and vice versa. He who does not know this is baffled when confronted by an actual instance of the kind. Before the occasion arises, O Bhaarata, one should understand the circumstances under which dharma and its reverse become confused. Having acquired this knowledge, a wise king should act according to his judgment when the occasion comes. Ordinary people misunderstand what he does at such a time. Some possess true knowledge. Some have false knowledge. Truly ascertaining the nature of each kind of knowledge, a wise king derives understanding from those who are good.

Those who are breakers of dharma find fault with the shastras. Those who have no wealth find inconsistencies in the treatises on gaining wealth. Those who seek knowledge only for their livelihood, Rajan, are sinful, enemies of dharma. Evil men of immature understanding can never truly comprehend things, just as men who do not know the shastras are unable to be guided in all their actions by reason. They can only see the faults of the shastras and criticize them. Even if they understand the true meaning of the shastras, they will still proclaim that scriptural injunctions are unsound. Such men proclaim the superiority of their own knowledge by decrying the knowledge of others. They use words as weapons and arrows and speak as if they were real masters of their sciences. They are traders in learning and Rakshasas among men. Through such pretexts they abandon the dharma that good and wise men have established.

We hear that the contents of dharma are not to be understood by either discussion or one's own intelligence. Indra himself says that this is the opinion of the sage Brihaspati. Some are of the opinion that no text in the shastras has been laid down without a reason. Many, even if they properly understand the shastras, never act according to them. A class of wise men declares that dharma is nothing else but the approved course of the world. The man of true knowledge should find out for himself the dharma laid down for the good. If even a wise man speaks of morality under the influence of anger, confusion of understanding or ignorance, his efforts are in vain.

Discourses on morality are worthy of praise when made with the aid of an intelligence derived from the true letter and spirit of the shastras, not those made with the help of anything else. Even words from an ignorant man, if they carry sense, can be considered pious and wise. In olden days, Usanas revealed this incontrovertible truth to the Daityas, that shastras are not shastras if they cannot stand the test of reason. The possession or absence of knowledge that is mixed with doubts is the same thing. You should get rid of such knowledge, tearing it up from the roots. You should regard one who does not listen to my words as someone who has allowed himself to be misled.

Do you not see that you were created for the accomplishment of bold deeds? Look at me, dear child, how by performing the dharma of my varna, I have dispatched innumerable Kshatriyas to Swarga! There are some who are not pleased with me for this. Brahma created the goat, the horse and the

Kshatriya for the same purpose, to be useful. A Kshatriya therefore, should always seek the happiness of all creatures. The sin that attaches to killing a man who should not be killed is equal to that which is incurred by not killing one who deserves to be killed. This is the established order of things which a weak-minded king does not observes.

Therefore, a king should be severe in making all his subjects observe their respective duties. If this is not done, they will prowl like wolves, devouring one another. He is a wretch among Kshatriyas in whose territories robbers go about plundering the property of other people, like crows taking little fishes from water. Appoint high-born men who have Vedic knowledge as your ministers, govern the earth and protect your subjects righteously. The Kshatriya who is ignorant of customs and traditions and levies taxes upon his people improperly is a eunuch of his varna.

A king should be neither severe nor mild, and deserves praise if he rules righteously. He should be severe on occasions demanding severity, and mild when it is necessary to be so. Painful is the observance of Kshatriya dharma. Therefore, rule your kingdom as you are created for the accomplishment of great deeds and I have great love for you. The percipient Sakra has said that in times of distress the great duty of a king is to punish the evil and to protect the good.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, if there is any rule regarding Rajadharma which should under no circumstances be violated.'

Bhishma replies, 'One should always worship the Brahmanas venerated for their learning, devoted to penances and rich in conduct conformable to the injunctions of the Vedas. This indeed, is a great and sacred duty. Let your conduct towards the Brahmanas always be that which you observe towards Devas. The Brahmanas, if enraged, can inflict diverse kinds of wrong, O Rajan. If they are gratified, great fame will be yours. Satisfied, the Brahmanas are like nectar, and enraged, they are like poison.'"

CANTO 143

"Yudhishtira asks, 'O wise Pitamaha who knows all the shastras, tell me, what is the punya earned by one who shelters a petitioner seeking protection?'

Bhishma replies, 'It is worthy of you to ask such a question, for great is the punya, O Rajan, in cherishing such supplicants. Protecting such people, mahatmas of old, king Sivi and others, attained great happiness in Swarga. One hears of a pigeon who, in accordance with due rites, even fed his own flesh to an enemy who came as a supplicant.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How did this pigeon of old feed a foe with his own flesh, and what did he win in the end by such conduct?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen then, Rajan, to this excellent story that cleanses the listener of every sin. This very question, O son of Pritha, had been humbly put to Bhrigu's son Rama by Muchkunda, and to him the sage narrated the tale of how a pigeon won prosperity.

The sage said, "O Mahabaho Rajan, I will narrate to you a story about the truth connected with dharma artha and kama. A wicked fowler who resembled Yama the Destroyer himself used to wander through the great vana in the olden days. He was black as a raven, with bloodshot eyes, long legs, short feet, a large mouth and bulging cheeks. He had no friend, relative or kinsman, since all had cast him off for the exceedingly cruel life he led. Indeed, the wise should renounce from a distance a man of evil conduct, for he who injures himself cannot be expected to do good to

others. The heinous men who take the lives of other creatures are like poisonous snakes, a source of trouble to all creatures.

He went to the woods with his nets to trap birds and sell their meat, never understanding what a sinful life it was that he led. The evil wretch, stupefied by destiny, and preferring no other profession, lived in the forest for many long years in this manner with his wife, One day, as he was wandering through the vana intent on his business, a great storm arose that tossed the trees and seemed about to uproot them. In a moment dense clouds covered the sky, lit with flashes of lightning like a sea covered with merchants' boats and vessels. Then Indra Deva entered the cloud and in a moment the earth was flooded with torrential rain submerging all the forest paths.

The fowler, crazed with fear and trembling with cold, roved the vana looking for high ground but failed to find any. The force of the cloudburst had thrown down and killed many birds. Lions, bears and other animals, had taken shelter in whatever high ground they could find. Fear filled all the denizens of the forest because of that terrifying storm and, frightened and hungry, they roamed through the woods in packs small and large. The fowler, however, his limbs stiffened by cold, could neither stop where he was nor move on.

While in this state, he spied a she-pigeon lying on the ground, stiffened with cold. Though in the same predicament, the sinful wretch, through force of habit, picked her up and put her in a cage. Even when he himself was in trouble, he had no scruple in harming a fellow-creature. He then saw in the midst of that forest a lordly tree, blue as the clouds, the resort of a myriad birds seeking shade and shelter. It seemed that the Creator placed it there for the benefit of all creatures, like a good man in the world.

Soon the sky cleared and became spangled with hundreds of stars, like a magnificent lake smiling with blooming lilies. Turning his gaze up to the firmament rich with stars and clear of clouds, the fowler advanced, trembling with cold. Seeing that darkness had already fallen, and realizing that his home lay a great distance away, he resolved to pass the night under the shade of that tree. Bowing down to it with joined hands, he addressed that monarch of the forest, saying, 'I ask all the deities that have this tree for their resort to grant me shelter.' He then spread some leaves on the ground for a bed, and lay down, resting his head on a stone. Though overwhelmed with affliction, the man soon fell asleep."""

CANTO 144

"Bhishma says, 'In one of the branches of that tree, O Rajan, a pigeon with beautiful feathers lived for many years with his family. That morning his wife had gone out in search of food but had not returned. Disturbed that the night had come and his wife had not yet come back, the bird began to lament: "Ah, what a huge storm and harrowing downpour we have had today! Alas, you have not yet returned, dear wife! Why has she has not yet come back to us? Is everything right with my beloved spouse in the vana? Without her, my home seems empty! A householder's home, even if filled with sons and grandsons and daughters-in-law and servants, is empty without the housewife. One's house is not one's home; only one's wife is one's home. A house without the wife is a desolate wilderness.

If my dear wife of eyes fringed with red, of multicolored plumes and sweet voice, does not come back today, my life itself will become worthless. Of excellent vows, she never eats before I eat, never bathes before I bathe, never sits before I sit down, and never lies down before I lie down. She rejoices when I rejoice, and grieves when I am sad. When I am away she is downcast, and even when I am angry she continues to speak sweetly. Ever devoted to her lord and ever relying upon her husband, she always does what is agreeable and beneficial for him. Worthy of praise is he on earth who has such a spouse! That amiable creature knows that I am fatigued and hungry. Devoted to me and constant in her love, my celebrated spouse is surpassingly sweet-tempered and worships me ardently.

Even the foot of a tree is one’s home if one lives there in the company of one’s spouse; without her, even a palace is veritably a desolate wilderness. One’s spouse is one’s associate in all one’s deeds of dharma, artha and kama. When one sets out for a strange land, one’s wife is one’s trusted companion. One says that the wife is the richest possession of her husband. In this world the wife is one’s only associate in all the concerns of life, the best of medicines that one can have in sickness and sorrow. There is no friend like her. There is no refuge better than her. There is no better ally in the world than her in work undertaken for the acquisition of punya. He, who does not have in his home a wife who is chaste and of agreeable speech, should go to the vana. For such a man there is no difference between home and wilderness.”””

CANTO 145

"Bhishma says, 'Hearing these piteous lamentations of the pigeon on the tree, the she-pigeon that the fowler seized began to say to herself, "Whether I have any merit or not, truly there is no limit to my good fortune when my dear lord speaks thus of me. She is no wife with whom her lord is not content. In the case of women, if they gratify their lords, all the deities are also pleased. Since the marriage union takes place in the presence of fire, the husband is the wife's greatest deity. The wife with whom her husband is not pleased gets reduced to ashes, like a flowering creeper in a forest fire."

Having reflected thus, the kind she-pigeon, overcome with sorrow, and casting her eyes upon her lord from inside the cage where the fowler had imprisoned her, said to her grief-stricken husband, "Listen while I tell you how you can rescue me. This fowler lies here by your home, stricken with cold and hunger. Do him the duties of hospitality. The sin that one commits by Brahmahatya or by slaying a cow, the mother of the world, is equal to that which one incurs by allowing a supplicant to perish for want of help. You possess knowledge of self; therefore, follow the course that our swadharma has ordained for us. We have heard that the householder who practises dharma according to his abilities wins inexhaustible regions of bliss hereafter. You have sons and progeny; therefore do not be concerned about your own body and, for the sake of winning dharma and artha, offer worship to this fowler so that his heart will be pleased. Do not, O bird, indulge in any grief on my account. You may continue to live, taking other

wives!" So said the amiable she-bird, overcome with sorrow, gazing at her husband from within the fowler's cage where she had been immured.'"

CANTO 146

"Bhishma says, 'Hearing his wife's words, full of morality and reason, the pigeon was thrilled, and his eyes filled with tears of joy. He then, according to the rites laid down in the shastras, scrupulously honoured the fowler whose avocation was the slaughter of birds.

He addressed the fowler, "You are welcome today. Tell me what I can do for you. This is your home, so tell me your pleasure and what I can do for you. Do not fret. I ask you out of regard, for you have solicited shelter at our hands, and hospitality should be shown even to one's foe. Like the tree, which does not withdraw its shade even from one who approaches to cut it down, one should faithfully carry out the duties of hospitality to those who need shelter. Indeed, one is especially bound to do so if one happens to be a grihasta, leading a life of domesticity consisting of the five sacrifices. According to the shastras, if one blunders in performing the five sacrifices, he loses both this world and the next. Tell me then clearly and confidently what your wishes are, and I will accomplish them all."

The fowler replied, "I am stiff with cold. Let provision be made to warm me."

The bird gathered together a number of dry leaves on the ground and, taking a single leaf in his beak, speedily went to a spot where fire was kept, and returned with a little cinder. He then set fire to the dry leaves and, when they leapt into vigorous flames, invited his guest, "Come and warm your limbs trustfully and without fear." The fowler said, "Tathaasthu," and set to

warm himself. Recovering, he demanded of his winged host, “I am hungry. I want you to give me some food.”

The bird said, “I have no means to appease your hunger. We denizens of the woods always live upon what we get every day. Like the Munis of the vana we never hoard for the morrow.” Mentally deploring this method of living, the bird grew pale with shame and began to reflect silently on what he should do. Soon, however, his mind became clear. Addressing the slaughterer of his species, the bird said, “I will gratify you. Wait for a moment.”

He stoked the fire with the some dry leaves and, filled with joy, said to the fowler, “I heard in former days from Maharishis, Devas and Pitris that there is great punya in honouring a guest. O amiable one, be kind to me. I tell you truly that my heart is set upon gratifying you, my guest.” Having formed his resolution, the high-souled bird thrice circumambulated the fire with a smiling face and plunged into it directly. Seeing the bird enter the flames, the fowler began to upbraid himself, “Oh, what have I done! Alas, dark and terrible will be my sin, without doubt, as a result of my own deeds! I am exceedingly cruel and worthy of reproof!” Indeed, observing the bird lay down his life, the fowler, filled with remorse for his own actions, began to lament like you.’”

CANTO 147

"Bhishma says, 'The fowler, seeing the pigeon cast himself into the fire, was filled with compassion and began to reproach himself, "Alas, cruel and senseless that I am, what have I done! I am certainly a mean wretch! Great will be my sin for everlasting years!'

He went on repeating, "I am unworthy of any punya. My understanding is perverse, and I am sinful in all I do. Alas, I am a cruel wretch for discarding any kinds of honourable occupation and becoming a fowler. This high-souled pigeon, by laying down his own life, has taught me a grave lesson. Abandoning wives and sons, I will certainly give up this life that I held so dear. From this day, denying every comfort to my body, I will wear it out like a shallow tank in the season of summer. I will suffer hunger, thirst and penances and, reduced to emaciation, covered all over with visible veins, I will, by diverse methods practise such vows so as to be in touch with the other world. By giving up his body, the pigeon has shown the worship that one should pay to an atithi. From now on I will follow dharma —the highest refuge. Indeed, I will practise such dharma as the righteous pigeon, the greatest of all winged creatures, has shown me."

Having formed this resolution and said these words, the fowler, once a man of fierce deeds, proceeded to make a Mahaprasthana—a tour of the world from where there is no return, observing the most rigid vows. He threw away his stout staff, his sharp-pointed iron-stick, his nets, snares and his iron cage, and set at liberty the she-pigeon that he had captured.'"

CANTO 148

"Bhishma says, 'After the fowler had left, the she-pigeon, grieving for her husband, wept copiously and lamented, "I cannot, O dear lord, recollect a single instance of you having done me an injury! A widow, even if mother of many children, is still miserable without a husband, for she becomes helpless and an object of pity with her friends. You always cherished and honoured me with sweet, pleasant, charming and delightful words. I sported with you in valleys, in springs and on delightful tree-tops. You made me happy when we wandered through the skies but, dear lord, where are those joys now?

Limited are the gifts of a father, a brother and a son. The gifts that her husband alone makes to her are unlimited. Which woman would not, therefore, adore her lord? A woman has no protector like her lord, and no happiness like her lord. Abandoning all her wealth and possessions, a woman should take to her lord as her only refuge. Life here is of no use to me, now that I am separated from you. What chaste woman would venture to bear the burden of life when deprived of her lord?"

Filled with sorrow and lamenting piteously, the she-pigeon, devoted to her lord, threw herself onto the blazing fire. She saw her dead husband, adorned with bracelets, seated on a celestial carriage, adored by many Mahatmans and meritorious beings standing around him. Indeed, there he was in the firmament, decked with fine garlands, attired in splendid robes and adorned with every ornament. Around him were innumerable divine chariots ridden by beings who had acted meritoriously while in this world.

Seated on his own carriage, the bird ascended to heaven and, obtaining honours for his deeds in this world, continued to sport joyfully in the company of his wife.'"

CANTO 149

"Bhishma says, 'The fowler, O Rajan, was filled with sorrow at the sight of that pair of pigeons seated on their heavenly chariot and at his own misfortune, and began to reflect on how he could achieve the same consummation. He resolved to himself, "By austerities like those of the pigeon, I must attain just such a high end!" The fowler, who had lived by the slaughter of birds, set out on a journey without return. Living upon air alone, without any exertion, he cast off all desires in order to acquire Swarga.

After he had walked for some distance, he saw an extensive and delightful lake full of cool and pure water, blooming with lotuses and teeming with diverse waterfowl. The very sight of such a lake would slake the thirst of a man. The fowler, emaciated with fasts, without even glancing at the lake, gladly entered a vana he saw to be large and inhabited by beasts of prey. He wandered lacerated by prickles and pointed thorns and covered all over with blood, in that forest devoid of men but abounding with animals of diverse species. Some time later, a powerful wind caused a forest fire to break out from friction between mighty trees. The raging element, splendid as if it had been the end of the Yuga, began to consume that large forest of tall trees, thick bushes and creepers. With flames fanned by the wind and myriads of sparks flying about in all directions, the all-consuming deity began to burn that dense forest abounding with birds and beasts. The fowler, ready to die, ran with glad heart into the spreading conflagration and, consumed by fire, was cleansed of all his sins. The fever of his heart

dispelled, he beheld himself at last in heaven, shining in splendour like Indra in the midst of Yakshas, Gandharvas and men crowned with ascetic success.

Thus did the pigeon and his devoted spouse, along with the fowler, ascend to heaven for their meritorious deeds. The woman who follows her husband thus speedily ascends to heaven and shines there in splendour, like the she-pigeon of whom I have spoken.

This is the old story of the high-souled fowler and the pigeon and how they earned a highly meritorious end by their dharmic deeds. No evil befalls one who listens to this story or recites it daily, even if error invades his mind. O Yudhisthira, foremost of righteous persons, the protection of a supplicant is truly meritorious. Even the slayer of a cow, by practising this duty, maybe cleansed of sin, but one who slays a supplicant will never be purified. By listening to this sacred and sin-cleansing story, one becomes freed from distress and attains Swarga.'"

CANTO 150

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Bhaaratottama, when a man lacking judgment commits sin, how can he be purified?'

Bhishma replies, 'Let me narrate to you the old story, much-lauded by the Rishis, of what the Muni Indrota, the son of Sunaka, advised the valiant king Janamejaya. There was in days of yore a king of great energy called Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit. That lord of earth, Janamejaya, once from lack of judgment slew a Brahmana. At this, all the Brahmanas, together with his priests, abandoned him. Deserted by his subjects as well, and burning day and night with remorse, the king retired into the vana to undergo the most rigid tapasya in order to earn punya, to cleanse himself of the sin of Brahmahatya. He questioned many Brahmanas, and wandered from country to country over the whole earth.

One day, in course of his wanderings, he met Indrota, the son of Sunaka, of rigid vows and, approaching him, touched his feet in reverence. The sage, seeing the king before him, reproved him gravely, saying, "You have committed a great sin. You are guilty of foeticide. Why have you come here, and what is your business with us? Do not touch me at any cost! Go away, your presence does not give me any pleasure. You smell like blood and you look like a corpse. Though polluted, you seem to be pure, and though dead you move like a living man! Dead within, you are of defiled soul, for you are always intent upon sin. Though you sleep and wake, your life is miserable and useless, O Rajan. You have been created for ignoble and sinful deeds. Fathers wish for sons from a desire to obtain all kinds of

blessings, and in the hope that their sons will perform tapasyas and yagnas, worship the Devas and practise vairagya. Behold, the whole varna of your ancestors has fallen into hell as a result of your actions. All the hopes your ancestors placed on you have become fruitless. You live in vain, for you have treated with hatred and malice the Brahmanas, whom other men worship to obtain long life, fame and Swarga. Leaving this world when the time comes, you will have to fall headlong into hell, as a result of your sinful deeds, and remain in that posture for innumerable years, tortured by iron-beaked vultures and peacocks. Returning to this world, you will have to take birth in a lowly order of creatures. If you think, O Rajan, that this world is nothing and that the next world is the shadow of a shadow, the legions of Yama in hell will dispel your disbelief!"""

CANTO 151

"Bhishma continues, 'Janamejaya replied to the sage Indrota, "You rebuke one who deserves to be rebuked, you censure one deserving censure when you harangue me for my misdeeds. My actions have been sinful, but I implore you to be merciful towards me, since I burn with remorse as though in a blazing fire! Recalling my deeds makes me wretched. Truly, I am afraid of Yama. How can I bear to live without extracting that dart from my heart? O Saunaka, suppress your wrath, instruct me now.

I solemnly declare that I will once more show the same regard for Brahmanas as I did before. Let not my line become extinct and my race sink into the dust. Those who have wronged Brahmanas and thereby forfeited all claim to the respect of the world and to social interaction with their fellowmen, as decreed in the Vedas, should have no one to bear their names or continue their lineage. Utterly desolate, I reiterate my resolve. Protect me like sages who protect the poor without accepting gifts. Sinful men who abstain from sacrifices never attain heaven and have to pass their time in the pits of hell like the unclean Pullindas and Khasas. Ignorant that I am, grant me wisdom, like an Acharya to his shishya or a father to his son. Bless me, O Indrota, son of Sunaka!"

Saunaka replied, "It is no wonder that a man without wisdom does many improper deeds. Knowing this, a person of real understanding is never angry with mortals but grieves for others, being then beyond an

object of others’ regrets. One surveys all creatures in the world like a man on a mountain-top surveying people below.

He who becomes an object of censure, who dislikes good men and avoids them, will never obtain blessings and never understand the impropriety of his actions. You know the energy and the nobility of the Brahmanas, as the Vedas and other scriptures have laid down. Let your acts now gain you tranquillity of heart, and let Brahmanas be your refuge. If they cease to be angry with you, that will ensure your happiness in heaven. If you repent your sin, your vision will be clear and you will perceive dharma.”

Janamejaya said, “I repent my sins, and I will never again seek to tarnish my dharma. I desire to be cleansed. Bless me.”

Indrota said, “Drive out your arrogance and pride, Janamejaya, and show your regard for me! Employ yourself in the good of all creatures, and always remember the mandates of dharma. I do not reprove you from narrowness of mind or avarice. Listen now, with these Brahmanas here, to the words of truth that I speak. I ask for nothing but to instruct you in the ways of dharma. People will croak and bray and condemn me for what I am going to do. They will even call me sinful, and my kinsmen and friends will reject me. However, they will benefit from my utterance that will help them surmount the difficulties of life. Those possessed of wisdom will understand my motives.

These are my views, O child, regarding the Brahmanas. Listen to me, O Bhaarata, and act so that, through my efforts, they procure every blessing. Also pledge your word that you will never again injure the Brahmanas.”

Janamejaya replied, “I swear, even touching your feet, that I will never again, in thought, word, or deed, injure the Brahmanas.”’

CANTO 152

'Saunaka said, "As your heart has been greatly perturbed, I will speak to you about dharma. You are knowledgeable, powerful, and now, with a placid heart, of your own will in search of dharma. A king who is stern at first and compassionate later, and who acts for the good to all creatures, is certainly wonderful. People say that the king who commences with severity burns the whole world. You were earlier harsh, but now you turn your eyes to dharma. Forsaking luxurious food and articles that you have long enjoyed, you have taken to strict tapasya. All this, O Janamejaya, is certain to appear wonderful to kings who are sunk in sin.

That an affluent man should become liberal, or a wealthy one become an ascetic reluctant to spend wealth, is not a marvel. Such a man is little different from Agastya who was unwilling to create wealth in order to gratify his wife; the same cause that makes an affluent man charitable operates to make an ascetic careful of his wealth. An ill-judged action creates much misery, while one accomplished with the aid of discernment has beneficial results. Sacrifice, gift, compassion, the Vedas and truth: these five are purifying. The sixth is well-performed tapasya, salutary for kings. By conducting it properly, Janamejaya, you are certain to earn great merit and punya. It is said that visiting sacred places is also highly cleansing, as Yayati sang in the following verses: 'That mortal who would earn life and longevity should, after having performed sacrifices with devotion, renounce them and practise penances.'

The field of Kuru is held to be sacred, and the river Saraswati more so. The tirthas of the Saraswati are more sacred than Saraswati herself; and the tirtha called Prithudaka is more sacred than all the tirthas of the Saraswati. One who has bathed in Prithudaka and drunk its waters will not have a premature death to lament. You will regain life and acquire longevity if you go to Mahasaras, to all the tirthas designated by the name of Pushkara, to Prabhasa, to the northern lake Manasa and to Kalodaka. Lake Manasa is on the spot where the waters of the Saraswati and the Drisadwati mingle, and one with Vedic knowledge should bathe in these places.

Manu has said that charity is the best of all duties, and that renunciation is better than charity. In this connection there is a verse composed by Satyavat. One should act as a child, innocent, without either goodness or sin. In the true nature of all creatures in this world, there is neither misery nor happiness. That which is called misery and happiness is the result of a troubled imagination. This is also true of all living creatures. The lives are superior, of those who have taken to renunciation and abstained from action, both meritorious and sinful.

I will now tell you those actions best for a king. With your might and charity, conquer Swarga, O Rajan! He who possesses force and energy will attain dharma. Rule the earth for the Brahmanas and for happiness. You formerly used to condemn the Brahmanas, so gratify them now. Though they have denounced and deserted you, do still, guided by knowledge of self, solemnly pledge never to injure them. Engage in work that is suitable for you, and seek what is for your greatest good.

Amongst rulers, some are as cool as snow; some as fierce as fire; some become like a plough; and some like a thunder-bolt. He who wishes to prevent self-destruction should never mix with evil men for any reason, general or specific. For a sinful deed committed only once, one can cleanse oneself by repentance, and for one committed twice. by vowing never to commit it again. For such an action committed thrice, one can cleanse oneself by resolving to bear oneself righteously. By committing such a deed repeatedly, one can cleanse oneself by a pilgrimage to sacred places.

One who wants to obtain prosperity should do all that results in punya. Those who live amid fragrant odours, smell sweet, while those who live in amid foul odours, smell disgusting. One devoted to the practice of tapasya gets soon cleansed of all one’s sins. By worshipping the homa fire for a year, one stained by diverse sins becomes purified, and worshipping the fire

for three years cleanses one guilty of foeticide. One guilty of foeticide becomes cleansed at even a hundred yojanas from Mahasaras, or by setting out on the tirthas called Pushkara, Prabhasa, or Manasa in the north.

A slayer can be purified by saving from danger as many creatures of a particular species as those he has killed. Manu has said that by diving in water after thrice reciting the Aghamarshana mantras, one reaps the fruits of the final bath in an Aswamedha. Such an action soon cleanses one of all one's sins, and causes one to regain the esteem of the world. All creatures become docile to such a man, like the feeble-minded to those around them.

Once, long ago, the Devas and Asuras approached the celestial guru Brihaspati and humbly asked him, 'You know, O Maharishi, the rewards of dharma, and of those other deeds that lead to hell. Does not he to whom good and bad are the same, liberate himself from both punya and paapa? Tell us, Maharishi, what the fruits of dharma are and how a dharmatman drives out his sins.'

Brihaspati answered, 'If having committed a sin by mistake, one understands its nature and performs meritorious acts, one will cleanse oneself like dirty cloth washed clean by some saline substance. If one does not boast after committing a sin, but through faith, frees oneself from malice, one will acquire punya. He who hides the faults of good men, even when exposed, earns punya despite committing faults himself. As the sun rising in the morning disperses darkness, one dispels all ones sins by acting righteously.'"

Indrota, the son of Sunaka, said these words to king Janamejaya and personally assisted him in the performance of the Aswamedha yagna. The king, cleansed of his sins, regained his punya, shone with splendour like a blazing fire, and then entered his kingdom like Soma in his full form entering Swarga.'"

CANTO 153

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Have you, O Pitamaha, ever seen or heard of any mortal who was restored to life after death?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Rajan, to this story of the conversation between a vulture and a jackal which took place long ago in the forest of Naimisha. Once upon a time, a Brahmana, after great difficulties, obtained a son with beautiful, large eyes. The child died of infantile convulsions. Some of his grief-stricken kinsmen, lamenting aloud, picked up that boy of tender years, the sole wealth of his family, and took him to the crematorium. There they began to pass the child from one breast to another, clamouring more bitterly in grief as they recalled the beloved prattle of the child, heavy-hearted and unable to go leaving its body on the bare ground.

Hearing their cries, a vulture came there and told them: "Go away and do not tarry, you have to cast off but one child. Thousands of men and thousands of women are left here by relatives in the course of time. See, the whole universe is subject to happiness and sorrow. Union and disunion can be seen, turn by turn. Those who have come to the crematorium bringing the dead bodies of their kinsmen, and those who sit by those bodies from affection, themselves disappear from the world as a result of their own actions, when their allotted life-span run out. There is no need to linger in the crematorium, this horrible place full of vultures and jackals, abounding with skeletons and fearsome creatures. No one, friend or foe, having once succumbed to the power of Time, ever comes back. This is the fate of all creatures. In this world of mortals, every one that is born is sure to die. Who

will restore to life one who is dead and gone on the way, as ordained by the Yama? At this hour when men are about to close their daily toil, and the sun is retiring to the Asta hills, return to your homes and give up your attachment to the child."

Hearing these words of the vulture, the grief of the kinsmen seemed to abate and, placing the child on the bare ground, they prepared to go away. Assuring themselves of the fact that the child was indeed dead, and with no hope of seeing him again, they began to leave, with loud plaints. At this time a jackal, black as a raven, issued out of his hole and said to the departing kinsmen, "Surely you kinsmen of this dead child have no affection for him. The sun still shines in the sky, you fools! Indulge your feelings without fear. Many are the virtues of the hour, and this one may come back to life! Why do you spread a few blades of Kusa grass on the ground and with hearts of steel abandon this dear child to the crematorium? Surely you have no affection for this young child whose words, as soon as they left his lips, used to gladden you so greatly!

Look at the affection that even birds and beasts bear towards their offspring. They get no return for bringing up their young ones. Like the sacrifices of the Rishis that are never undertaken from a desire for recompense, the affection of animals, birds and insects does not result in any reward, either here or hereafter. Yet they cherish their young ones, who grow up and never cherish them in return in their old age. Are they not grieved when they do not see their little ones? Where, indeed, is affection to be seen in human beings, that they claim the influence of grief? Where would you go, leaving here this child who is the perpetuator of his race? Shed tears for him for awhile, and look at him lovingly a little longer, for objects so dear are difficult to abandon.

They are friends who wait by the side of one who is weak, of one who is prosecuted in a court of law, of one who is borne towards the crematorium. Life's breath is dear to all, and all feel the influence of affection. Behold the devotion exhibited by even those that belong to the intermediate species! How can you leave, casting off this boy with eyes large as the petals of the lotus, and handsome as a newly-married youth, washed clean and adorned with floral garlands?" Hearing these touching words of the jackal, the men turned back for the sake of the corpse.

The vulture now said, "Alas, you men of no strength of mind, why do you turn back at the bidding of a cruel and mean jackal of little

intelligence? Why do you mourn for that compound of five elements deserted by their presiding deities, no longer tenanted, motionless, and stiff as a piece of wood? Why do you not grieve for your own selves? Do you practice austere tapasya to cleanse yourselves from sin? Everything may be had by tapasya, what will your lamentations do? Ill-luck is born with the body, because of which this boy has died, plunging you into infinite grief. Wealth, cattle, gold, precious gems, children, all have their root in tapasya. Tapasya is the result of yoga.

Among animate beings, the measure of sorrow or joy depends on the actions of a previous life. Indeed, everyone comes into the world bringing with him his own measure of happiness and suffering. The son is not bound by the actions of the father, nor the father by those of the son. Bound by their own deeds, good and bad, all have to travel by this common road. Duly practise all the duties, and abstain from adharmic acts. Wait reverentially upon the Devas and the Brahmanas according to the directions of the shastras. Give up sorrow and unhappiness, and abstain from parental affection. Leave the child on this exposed ground, and go away without delay.

The doer alone enjoys the fruit of his actions, good or bad. What have kinsmen to do with it? Relatives abandon their deceased kinsman, however dear. Eyes bathed in tears, they go away and cease to display affection for the dead. Wise or ignorant, rich or poor, everyone with their good and bad karma succumbs to Time. What will you do by mourning for one who is dead? Time is the lord of all and, in obedience to his very nature, casts an equal eye on all things. In pride of youth, or in helpless infancy, bearing the weight of years, or lying in the mother's womb, everyone is subject to be assailed by Death. Such, indeed, is the course of the world."

The jackal said, "Alas, that light-brained vulture has diminished the affection cherished by your weeping selves, overwhelmed with sorrow for your deceased child. This is obvious because, convinced by his calm and well-expressed words, you go back to town, abandoning an affection so entrenched. Alas, I had supposed that the grief felt by men who loudly lament the death of a child, like cattle who miss their calves, would be great. Today, however, I understand what the measure of bereavement is of human beings on earth. Witnessing their great attachment, I had shed tears. It now seems that their affection is frail!

One must always strive to succeed with the help of destiny. Hard work, hope and destiny, together produce rewards. How can happiness be had from despondency? Objects of desire can be won by resolution. Why, then, do you go back so heartlessly? Where do you go, abandoning in the wilderness your own son, this perpetuator of the race of his fathers? Stay here till the sun sets and the evening twilight comes. You may then take away this boy with yourselves, or stay with him."

The vulture now said, "I am a full thousand years old today, but I have never seen a dead creature, male or female, or of ambiguous sex, revive after death. Some die in the womb, some soon after birth, some in infancy, some in youth and some in old age. The fortunes of all creatures, including even beasts and birds, are unpredictable. The life-span of all creatures, mobile and immobile, is fixed beforehand. Men who have lost spouses, children and dear ones go back to their homes every day with hearts filled with sorrow, leaving on this spot their innumerable friends and foes.

This lifeless body no longer has any animal heat in it and is as stiff as a piece of wood! Why, then, do you not depart, leaving the body of this child whose life has entered a new body? This affection is meaningless, and hugging the child is useless. He does not see with his eyes, or hear with his ears. Leave him here and go away without delay to your respective homes. My words may appear cruel but are rational and bear directly on the high religion of Moksha."

Addressed thus by the sagacious vulture in words efficacious in awakening understanding, the men resolved to leave the spot and prepared to turn their backs upon the crematorium. Grief increases twofold at the sight of its object, remembering the actions of that object when alive.

Just at that time the jackal came with quick steps and looked at the child lying in the sleep of death. The jackal said, "Why do you, at the vulture's bidding, leave this child of golden complexion, adorned with ornaments, and capable of making offering to his pitris? If you abandon him, your affection will not come to an end, nor will your piteous lamentations. On the other hand, your grief will certainly increase. We have heard the story of how Rama killed a Sudra named Samvuka to uphold dharma, and restored to life a Brahmana child who had died prematurely. There is a similar story of the son of the Rajarishi Sweta who died too early, but the king, devoted to dharma, succeeded in reviving his dead child. In your case, also, some sage or deity may be willing to grant your desire and show compassion to

you who are crying so piteously.” The men, grief-stricken and full of affection for the child, retraced their steps and, placing the child’s head on their laps, one after another, began to lament loudly.

Hearing their cries, the vulture, returned and said, “Why are you bathing this child with your tears? Why are you pressing him in this fashion with the touch of your palms? At the command of the grim king of justice the child has been sent to that sleep which knows no waking. Those who are endued with the punya of penances, who are wealthy and intelligent, in fact, all, succumb to death. This is the place intended for the dead. One sees relatives abandon thousands of kinsmen, young and old, and pass their nights and days in grief, rolling on the bare ground. Cease this fervor in exhibiting your sorrow. It is beyond belief that this child will come back to life. He will not get back his life at the jackal’s bidding. If a person once dies and takes leave of his body, it can never come to life again. Hundreds of jackals, by laying down their own lives, will not succeed in reviving this child in hundreds of years. Only if Rudra, or Kumara, or Brahman, or Vishnu, grant him a boon, can this child come back to life. The jackal, you, and all the kinsmen of this one, and I, with all our merits and sins, are on the same road. For this reason, the wise should avoid behaviour that displeases others, harsh speeches, inflicting pain on others, adultery, sin and falsehood. Carefully seek dharma, truth, good of others, justice, compassion for all creatures, sincerity and honesty. They incur sin who do not look after their mothers, fathers, kinsmen and friends when alive. What will you do by weeping for him, who does not see with his eyes, nor stir in the least, after death?”

Thus addressed, the men, overwhelmed with sorrow and burning with grief on account of their affection for the child, departed for their homes, leaving the body.

The jackal said, “Alas, terrible is the world of mortals, where no creature can escape! Every creature’s life-span is short, and beloved friends are always departing. It is full of vanity, falsehoods, accusations and evil reports. This dismal incident makes me dislike the world of men. Alas, shame on you, who thus turn back like foolish men at the vulture’s bidding, though you are burning with grief for this child. Heartless ones, how can you go away, casting off parental affection, upon hearing the words of a sinful vulture of uncleansed soul? Happiness is followed by misery, and misery by happiness. In this world, enveloped by both, neither of these

exists uninterruptedly. Men of little understanding, where do you go, casting off on the bare ground this child of such beauty, this son who is an ornament of your varna?

Truly, I cannot dispel the idea from my mind that this handsome child, blazing with beauty, is alive. He is not meant to die. I feel that you who are grief-stricken on his death will surely have good luck today. But you are concerned only for your own ease and trying to avoid possible inconvenience and discomfort. Where would you go, like fools, leaving this darling?"

Bhishma continued, 'Thus, O Rajan, the kinsmen of the deceased child, unable to decide upon what they should do, were persuaded to remain by the sinful and smooth-tongued jackal for his own purpose, the denizens of the crematorium who roamed there every night in quest of food.

The vulture said, "Dreadful is this spot, this wilderness resounding with the screech of owls and teeming with spirits, Yakshas and Rakshasas, terrible and ghastly like a mass of blue clouds. Give up the dead body and finish the funeral rites. Indeed, cast off the corpse and accomplish those rites before the sun sets and the points of the horizon are enveloped in gloom. Hawks are uttering their harsh cries, jackals are howling fiercely, lions are roaring. The sun is setting, the trees in the crematorium are turning dark from the blue smoke of the funeral pyres. The flesh-eating dwellers of this place are yelling in rage with hunger. Creatures of horrible forms that live in this frightful place, all those carnivorous animals of fearful visage that haunt this desert, will soon set upon you. This wilderness is terrifying. Danger will overpower you. Indeed, if you listen to these false and futile words of the jackal against your own good sense, all of you will surely be destroyed."

The jackal said, "Stay where you are! There is no fear, even in this desert, as long as the sun shines. Till the god of day sets, remain here with hope, engendered by your love. Lament as you please, unafraid, looking at this child with loving eyes. Frightful though this wilderness is, no danger will befall you. In reality it is an aspect of quiet and peace. It is here that the Pitris by their thousands took leave of the world. Wait as long as the sun shines. What are this vulture's words to you? If with benumbed intellect you accept the cruel vulture's harsh words, your child will never come back to life!"

The vulture then told those men that the sun had set. The jackal said it was not so. Both the vulture and the jackal felt the pangs of hunger, addressing the kinsmen of the dead child. Both of them had girded up their loins to accomplish their respective purposes. Exhausted with hunger and thirst, they thus disputed, taking recourse to the shastras. Moved by the words of the bird and the beast, sweet as nectar, wise and knowledgeable, the kinsmen at one moment wished to go away and at another to remain. Finally, moved by grief and sorrow, they waited, wailing bitterly, not knowing that the beast and the bird, skilled in accomplishing their own purposes, had only confused them by their words.

While the adroit bird and beast were thus disputing, and while the kinsmen of the dead child sat listening to them, the great god Sankara, urged by his divine spouse Uma, came there, his eyes moist with compassion. Addressing the kinsmen of the deceased child, the Deva said, "I am Sankara, giver of boons." With burdened hearts the men prostrated themselves before the great deity and said to him, "We have lost our only child, and all of us are at the point of death. We beg you to grant us life by granting life to this our son."

The Mahadeva, taking up a quantity of water in his hands granted to the dead child a life extending a hundred years. Then the ever-benevolent and illustrious wielder of the bow Pinaki granted a boon to both the jackal and the vulture which appeased their hunger. The men bowed to the Deva, filled with delight at their great good fortune, O Rajan, and left that spot in jubilation.

Through persistent hope, firm resolution and the grace of the great god, one can obtain the fruits of one's actions without delay. Witness the combination of circumstances and the resolve of those kinsmen: while they were crying with agonised hearts, their tears were wiped away. See, how within only a short time, through their persistence, they obtained the grace of Sankara and, their sorrows dispelled, were made happy. Indeed, O Bhaarata, those dejected kinsmen were filled with amazement and delight at the restoration of their child to life through Sankara's compassion. Casting off their grief, those Brahmanas, overjoyed, hastened back to their town with the restored child.

Behaviour like this has been ordained for all the four varnas. By listening to this auspicious story about dharma, artha, and mukti, a man obtains happiness both here and hereafter.'"

CANTO 154

"Yudhishtira says, 'What should a weak, worthless and light-brained man do, O Pitamaha, who from stupidity provokes, through insulting and boastful speeches, a powerful neighbour who can favour or punish, and is always ready for action, when the enemy advances against him in anger to exterminate him?'

Bhishma replies, 'Let me narrate, O Bhaarata, the old story of the discourse between Pavana and the lordly Salmali tree, growing on one of the heights of Himavat. Having grown for many centuries, the tree had stretched out his branches. His trunk was huge, its girth being four hundred cubits, and his myriad twigs and leaves cast a dense shade under which toil-worn elephants in rut used to rest, bathed in sweat, as did many animals of other species. Loaded with flowers and fruits, he was the abode of numberless parrots, male and female. Caravans of merchants and traders travelling along their routes, and munis living in the vana, used to rest under the shade of the delightful monarch of the forest.

One day, O Bharatarishabha, the sage Narada, seeing the wide-extending and innumerable branches of the tree and the circumference of his trunk, approached him and said, "You are delightful and charming, O Salmali, greatest of trees. I am always captivated by the sight of you, as enchanting birds of diverse kinds live on your branches, and elephants and other animals cheerfully dwell in your shade. Your limbs and trunk are gigantic, O wide-branched monarch of the forest. I never see any of them

broken by the god of the wind. Is it the case, child, that Pavana is pleased with you and is your friend, that he always protects you in this vana?

The illustrious Pavana with great speed and force moves from their sites the tallest and strongest trees, even mountain summits. The sacred bearer of perfumes, blowing whither he wants, dries up rivers, tanks and seas, down to the very nether regions. Pavana protects you out of friendship, for certain. This is why, though having countless branches, you still bear leaves and flowers. O king of the forest, your verdure is delightful since these winged creatures sport joyfully on your twigs and branches. During the season when you break into bloom, the sweet notes of all these denizens of your branches are heard separately singing melodious songs. Then, O Salmali, these elephants that are the ornaments of their species, bathed in sweat, approach you with cries of delight, and are happy here. Diverse other species of animals living in the vana embellish you further. You are beautiful like the mountains of Meru inhabited by creatures of every kind. Frequented also by rishis and others engaged in tapasya, and by Yatis devoted to contemplation, this place, I think, must resemble Swarga itself."'

CANTO 155

'Narada said, "Without doubt, O Salmali, the terrible and irresistible Vayu Deva always protects you out of amity, and a close intimacy exists between you and the Wind. It is as if you have told him, 'I am yours,' and for that reason Vayu Deva shields you. I do not think there is tree or mountain or mansion in this world that the Wind has not broken. Assuredly, you stand here with all your branches, twigs and leaves intact, simply because, for some reason, that Deva shelters you."

The Salmali said, "The Wind is neither my friend, nor mate, nor well-wisher, nor my great Ordainer, O Narada Muni, that he should protect me. My fierce energy and might, O Narada, are greater than the Wind's. In truth, the strength of the Wind comes up to about only an eighteenth part of mine. When he advances in rage, tearing up trees and mountains in his path, I curb his strength by putting forth mine. Indeed, the Wind that breaks many things has himself been repeatedly broken by me. This is why, O Devarishi, I am not afraid of him even when he comes in anger."

Narada said, "O Salmali, your protection seems to be thoroughly perverse. There is no doubt that there is nothing equal to the Wind in strength. Even Indra, Yama, or Vaisravana, the lord of the waters, is not equal in might to Vayu Deva, whereas you are only a tree! The illustrious Wind god is at all times the cause of any act performed by the creatures in this world, since it is he that is the giver of life. When that god exerts himself with propriety, he makes it possible for all living creatures to live at their ease. When he moves with anger, calamities sweep over the creatures

of the world. What can it be other than feeble understanding that induces you to not revere the Vayu Deva, the greatest in the universe, who deserves worship? You are worthless and of depraved perception. Indeed, you only indulge in meaningless bragging. You utter lies because your intellect is confused by anger and other evil passions.

O Salmali, I am certainly angry with you for speaking thus. I will myself report to Vayu Deva all your derogatory words. Chandanas, Syandanas, Salas, Saralas, Devadarus, Vetavas, Dhanwanas and other trees of good souls that are far stronger than you, have never uttered such invectives against the Deva as you of wicked understanding have done. All of them know the might of the Wind and their own, and these foremost of trees bow down their heads in respect to the deity. You, however, through folly, know not the infinite might of the Wind. I shall go to the Deva.”””

CANTO 156

"Bhishma continues, 'Narada, the greatest of all knowers of Brahma, reported to the Vayu Deva all that the Salmali had said about him.

Narada said, "There is a certain Salmali, a tree on the breast of Himavat, decked with branches and leaves spread wide around and with roots that extend deep into the earth. That tree has disparaged you and spoken many insulting words about you that are improper for me to repeat. I know that you, the foremost of all created things, are a superior and mighty entity, resembling in wrath the Destroyer himself."

Hearing these words of Narada, the Vayu Deva went to Salmali, and said to him in rage, "O Salmali, you have spoken spoken slightingly of me before Narada. Know that I am Vayu Deva, and I will certainly show you my power and might. You are no stranger to me, I know you well. It is only because the great Pitamaha, while he was creating the world, had for a time rested under you, that I have so far shown you grace. That is why you stand unharmed, O worst of trees, not because of your own might. You regard me lightly as if I were a common creature. I will show myself to you in such a way that you will not again affront me."

Bhishma continues, 'The Salmali laughed in derision and replied, "O Vayu Deva, you are angry with me! Do not hesitate to show me the extent of your might. Throw all your anger upon me. What will you do to me by giving way to wrath? Even if your strength had been your own, I would not

be afraid of you, as I am your superior in might. Those are not to be regarded as strong who possess physical strength alone."

The Vayu Deva left, saying, "Tomorrow I will test your strength."

When night fell, Salmali, calculating mentally the extent of the Wind's might, and realising his own self to be inferior to the Deva, said to himself, "All that I said to Narada is false. I am certainly inferior in might to the Wind, who is truly powerful. He is always mighty, as Narada said, and I am certainly weaker than other trees. But in astuteness no tree is my equal, so, relying upon my intelligence I will examine this fear that arises from the Wind. If all the other trees in the forest only relied upon the same kind of intelligence, surely no injury could result to them from Vayu Deva when he becomes angry. All of them, however, are devoid of understanding, and therefore do not know, as I do, why or how the Wind succeeds in shaking and tearing them up.""'

CANTO 157

"Bhishma says, 'Having settled this in his mind, Salmali sadly caused all his branches, principal and subsidiary, to be cut off. He cast off his branches and leaves and flowers, and in the morning the tree looked steadily at the Wind, as he came towards him. Filled with rage and breathing hard, the Wind advanced, felling large trees, towards the spot where the Salmali stood. When he saw him divested of top and branches and leaves and flowers, the Wind smiled exultantly and addressed the lord of the forest who earlier had such a gigantic appearance.

"O Salmali, I would have done to you in my anger precisely what you have done to yourself by lopping off all your branches. You are now divested of your proud top and flowers, and without your shoots and leaves. In consequence of your own evil counsels, you have been brought under my power."

Salmali felt great shame. He remembered the words of Narada and began to repent his folly. Similarly, O Naravyaghra, a weak and foolish man, if he provokes the enmity of a powerful one, is obliged to repent like the Salmali of fable. Even when of equal might, men do not suddenly commence hostilities with those who have injured them. On the other hand, O Rajan, they display their might by degrees.

A foolish man should never provoke the hostility of an intelligent one. In such cases the intelligence of the astute man is like fire penetrating a heap of dry grass. Intelligence is the most precious possession that one can have. Similarly, Rajan, a man can have nothing here more valuable than

might. One should therefore, overlook the wrongs which one of superior strength inflicts, just as one should would kindly overlook the actions of a child, an idiot, or a blind or deaf person.

The wisdom of this saying is witnessed in your case, O Parantapa. The eleven akshauhinis of Duryodhana, O you of great splendour, and the seven collected by you, were not in might equal to the single-handed mahatman, Arjuna. Therefore that illustrious Pandava, son of Paka's chastiser, routed and slew all the troops as he coursed the field of battle, relying on his own strength. I have told you of the duties of kings and the morality of duties in detail, Bhaarata. What else, Yudhishtira, do you wish to hear?'"

CANTO 158

"Yudhishtira says, 'I desire to hear in detail about the source of sin, O Bharatarishabha, and the foundation upon which it rests.'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen, Rajan: Lobha, greed alone, is the great destroyer. From lobha comes paapa and adharma, and they flow together and cause great misery. Covetousness is the source also of cunning and hypocrisy, which makes men sin in the world. Lobha causes anger, lust, loss of judgment, deception, pride, arrogance and malice, as well as vindictiveness, shamelessness, loss of prosperity, loss of virtue, anxiety, infamy, miserliness, cupidity, and partiality for every kind of impropriety. It causes conceit on account of birth, learning, beauty and wealth, as well as insensitivity, malevolence, mistrust, insincerity towards all, appropriation of other people's wealth, ravishment of other people's wives, harshness of speech, propensity to speak ill of others, ravening lust, gluttony, liability to premature death, malice, irresistible propensity for falsehood, unconquerable appetite for indulging in the passions, insatiable desire for gossip and slander, boastfulness, arrogance, neglect of duties, rashness, and perpetration of every kind of evil deed: all these proceed from lobha.

Men, whether infant, youth or adult, are unable to abandon covetousness. Such is the nature of greed that it never decays, even with the decay of life. Like the ocean that can never be filled, even by the constant discharge of innumerable rivers of immeasurable depth, covetousness is incapable of being gratified by any extent of acquisitions. However, a Muni should conquer this covetousness which is never gratified by acquisitions or

satiated by the accomplishment of desires, which is not known in its real nature by the gods, the Gandharvas, the Asuras, the great snakes—in fact, by all classes of beings, this irresistible passion and folly which lures the heart to the unrealities of the world. Pride, malice, slander, crookedness, and incapacity to bear other people's good, are vices, O Kurusthama, that are seen in men of uncleansed soul in the grip of greed. Even great learned men who bear in their minds all the voluminous shastras, and who are competent to dispel the doubts of others, show themselves in this respect to be weak-minded and undergo great misery in consequence of this passion.

Greedy men are wedded to envy and anger and are outside the pale of good behaviour. With crooked hearts they utter sweet speeches, like dark pits with mouths covered with grass. Being of low minds, they rob the world wearing the hypocritical cloak of religion and virtue. They use equivocation to create diverse schisms in religion and destroy the ways of dharma. When evil men under the domination of lobha apparently practise the duties of dharma, the desecrations committed by them soon become acceptable among men. Pride, anger, arrogance, self-importance, insensibility, outbursts of joy and sorrow, all these can be seen in men swayed by greed. Understand, they who remain under the influence of covetousness are evil.

I shall now tell you about those who are designated good and whose practices are pure. One regards as virtuous, O Bhaarata, those who have no fear of an obligation to return to this world after death, and no fear of the next world; they who are not addicted to animal food; who cherish salutary behaviour and practise self-restraint; for whom pleasure and pain are equal, who have truth for their refuge, who are compassionate and give, rather than take; who worship Pitris, Devas and Atithis; who are universal benefactors, always ready to work for the good of others; whose minds are staunch and who observe all the duties laid down in the shastras, who are devoted to the good of all, who can give their all and lay down their very lives for others!

These advocates of dharma are incapable of being forced away from the path of virtue. Their conduct, conforming to the model set by the dharmatman of old, cannot be otherwise. They are fearless, tranquil, mild and always adhere to the right path. Full of compassion, they are always worshipped by the good. They are free from pride, lust and anger, and are not attached to any worldly object. They observe excellent vows and are

always objects of regard. You should therefore, always wait upon them and seek instruction from them. They never aspire to virtue for the sake of wealth or fame, O Yudhishtira. They acquire it, rather, because it is a duty, like cherishing the body. Fear, wrath, restlessness and sorrow do not dwell in them. There is no mystery about them and they do not wear the outward garb of religion to mislead their fellowmen. They are perfectly contented, and make no error of judgment out of covetousness. They are devoted to truth and sincerity, and never fall from righteousness. You should always show regard for them, O son of Kunti!

They are neither delighted at any gain, nor pained at any loss. Free of attachment to anything, free of pride, they are wedded to goodness and look on everything equally. Gain and loss, happiness and sorrow, the agreeable and the disagreeable, life and death, are one in the eyes of these men of steady tread, engaged in the pursuit of divine knowledge, and devoted to the path of tranquillity and righteousness. Keep your senses under restraint, do not yield to imprudence, and always worship those Mahatmans who bear such love for dharma. Words cause good only through the favour of the Devas, O blessed one. Under different circumstances, they can produce evil consequences.'"

CANTO 159

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have said, O Pitamaha, that the foundation of all evil is lobha. I wish, O sire, to hear of ignorance, avidya, in detail.'

Bhishma replies, 'The man who commits sin through avidya, who does not know that his end is near and who always hates the virtuous, soon incurs infamy. Avidya is the source of misery through which one suffers hardship, incurs great danger, and sinks into hell.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Rajan, I desire to hear in full all the inseparable attributes of avidya: its origin, rise, place, growth, decay, root, course, time, cause and consequence. The misery that is felt in this world, is all born of ignorance.'

Bhishma replies, 'Attachment, hate, loss of judgment, joy, sorrow, vanity, lust, anger, pride, procrastination, idleness, desire, aversion, jealousy and all other sinful actions are known by their common name of avidya. Hear now, O Rajan, about its tendency, growth and other features about which you have enquired. These two, ignorance and covetousness, are the same. Both produce the same fruits and same faults, O Bhaarata! Avidya exists where lobha exists, and grows or shrinks along with lobha.

Manifold again is the course that it takes. Loss of judgment is the inseparable attribute and root of lobha. Eternity is ignorance's path and when avidya is apparent, the objects of covetousness are forfeited. From ignorance proceeds covetousness, and vice versa. Lobha should be shunned by all. Janaka, Yuvanaswa, Vrishadarbhi, Prasenajit and other kings attained

Swarga because they repressed Lobha. Therefore let it be seen that you are resolute in avoiding covetousness, O Kurusthama. Thus will you obtain happiness, both here and in the next world.'"

CANTO 160

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha, Mahatman, how can a person engaged in the study of the Vedas earn the highest happiness in heaven? According to the shastras, diverse kinds of action are considered in this world as productive of great punya. Tell me, what is regarded as great, both here and hereafter? The path of dharma is long and has innumerable branches, O Bhaarata! Amongst those, which are the few that should be preferred above others, according to you? Tell me about this, that is so inclusive and multifarious.'

Bhishma replies, 'I will tell you how you can attain great punya. Being wise, you will be as happy with the knowledge that I will impart to you as if you had drunk amrita. Each Maharishi has prescribed many rules of dharma, based upon his own wisdom, of which the highest is self-restraint. Among the ancients, those acquainted with truth have said that self-restraint leads to the highest punya, and that, for the Brahmana, it is his eternal duty, from which he obtains the rewards of his actions. In his case, the punya of self-restraint enhances tejas and surpasses charity, sacrifice and study of the Vedas.

Self-restraint is highly sacred; by it a man is cleansed of all his sins, is imbued with tejas and attains to the highest blessedness. Self-restraint, according to all dharmatman, is the highest of virtues in this world, O Narottama, and we have not heard of any other dharma that can equal it for acquiring the highest happiness both here and hereafter. The self-restrained man sleeps sweetly, wakes up happy, and moves through the world

contentedly, his mind always cheerful. The man who is without self-restraint suffers misery and brings upon himself many calamities, all born of his own faults. It is said that for all the four varnas, self-restraint is the best of vows.

I will now tell you those attributes whose sum total is called self-restraint. Forgiveness, patience, abstention from injury, impartiality, truth, sincerity, conquest of the senses, cleverness, mildness, modesty, steadiness, liberality, freedom from wrath, contentment, sweetness of speech, benevolence, freedom from malice: the union of all these is called self-restraint. It also includes, O son of Kuru, veneration for the guru and universal compassion. The self-restrained man avoids adulation and slander, depravity, infamy, false speech, lust, covetousness, pride, arrogance, self-glorification, fear, envy and disrespect. He never incurs disgrace and is free from envy. He is not gratified with small acquisitions; he is just like the ocean that can never be filled.

The man of self-restraint is never bound by attachments that arise from earthly connections or sentiments like, “I am yours, you are mine, They are in me, and I am in them.” Such a man, who adopts the practices of either cities or the vana, and who never indulges in slander or adulation, attains mukti. He is cheerful and of virtuous conduct, practises universal friendliness, has knowledge of the soul and, liberated from the diverse attachments of the earth, obtains great reward in the world. A man of excellent conduct, observant of duties, cheerful, learned and with knowledge of self, wins esteem here and attains to a high end hereafter.

All actions that one regards as good on earth, all those that dhartman practise, constitute the path of the Rishi possessed of knowledge. A good man never deviates from that path. Retiring from the world and taking to vanavasa, the learned man, having mastered his senses, who treads that path in quiet expectation of his death, is sure to attain to the state of Brahma. He who has no fear of any creature, and of whom no creature is afraid, has no fear to encounter after the dissolution of his body. He who exhausts his punya by actual enjoyment, rather than seeking to accumulate it, who views equally all creatures and practises a course of universal friendliness, attains Brahma. Just as the track of birds along the sky or of fowl over the surface of water cannot be discerned, the track of such a man does not attract notice.

For one who, abandoning home, adopts the dharma of moksha, many bright worlds wait to be enjoyed for eternity, O Rajan. By abandoning all actions, including in due course tapasya and the various branches of study, one becomes pure in one's desires and liberated from all restraints, a cheerful soul of pure heart, conversant with self, who then wins esteem in this world and at last attains Swarga. That eternal region of Brahman which springs from Vedic tapasya, and which is within hidden in a cave, can be won by only self-restraint. He who takes pleasure in true knowledge, who has become enlightened injures no creature, has no fear of coming back to this world, far less, any fear in respect of the others.

There is one fault in self-control, none other: that men regard one who has self-control as weak and unintelligent. Its merits are many, for by forgiveness, which is only another form of self-control, a man may easily acquire innumerable worlds. What need does he have for self-control who dwells in a forest? Similarly, O Bhaarata, of what use is vanavasa to one that has no self-control? Wherever a man of self-control dwells is a forest, even a sacred retreat.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these words of Bhishma, Yudhishtira is highly gratified, as if he had imbibed amrita. He asks the greatest of Dharmatmans again to speak, and the perpetuator of Kuru's race once more begins to discourse cheerfully."

CANTO 161

"Bhishma says, 'The wise say that tapasya is the root of all things. The foolish man who has not undergone tapasya does not get the rewards of even his own actions. The mighty Brahma created the entire universe by tapasya. The Rishis acquired the Vedas through the power of tapasya. It was with the aid of tapasya that Pitamaha created food, fruit and roots. It is by tapasya that rishis and munis with rapt souls see the three worlds. It is through tapasya that medicines and antidotes to injurious substances, and diverse processes, produce their intended results. The accomplishment of all purposes depends upon tapasya. Things apparently unattainable are sure to be won by tapasya. Without doubt the Rishis obtained their six-fold divine attributes through tapasya.

Tapasya, when properly practiced, cleanses one who drinks alcoholic stimulants, one who robs others, one guilty of foeticide and one who violates his acharya's bed. Penances are of many kinds and can be seen in many different guises. However, of all the tapasyas that can be practised by refraining from pleasure and enjoyment, abstaining from food is supreme. It is superior, Rajan, to even compassion, truthfulness of speech, gifts, and restraining the senses. There is no action more difficult to accomplish than gift. There is no mode of life that is superior to serving one's mother. There is no creature superior to those who know the three Vedas. Similarly, sannyasa constitutes the greatest tapasya. People keep their senses under control for the sake of dharma and Swarga. In respect of such control over the senses, and in the acquisition of dharma, there is no tapasya greater than

complete fasting. The Rishis, the Devas, humankind, beasts, birds, and all other creatures, mobile or inert, are all devoted to tapasyas, and whatever success they win is won through tapasya. Thus it was through tapasya that the Devas acquired their superiority The moon and stars too got their share of happiness through tapasya. Without doubt, the very status of godhead may be gained through tapasya.'"

CANTO 162

"Yudhishtira says, 'Brahmanas, Rishis, Pitris and the Devas all approve the dharma of truth. Tell me about truth, O Pitamaha! What are its characteristics, and how can it be acquired? How can one practice truth, and what can one gain by it?'

Bhishma replies, 'Confusion of duties of the four varnas is never approved. That which is called Truth always exists in a pure and pristine state in every one of the four varnas. With the righteous, Truth is always an eternal duty, and one should reverentially bow to it. Truth is the highest refuge of all, Truth is dharma; Truth is tapasya; Truth is Yoga; Truth is the eternal Brahman. Truth is said to be a yagna of a high order, upon which everything rests.

I will now tell you the forms of Truth and its characteristics, in due order, so that you may learn how it can be acquired. Truth, O Bhaarata, as it exists in the world, is of thirteen kinds. The forms that Truth assumes are impartiality, self-control, forgiveness, modesty, endurance, goodness, renunciation, contemplation, dignity, fortitude, compassion, and abstention from injury. These, O Rajan, are the thirteen forms of Truth.

Truth is immutable, eternal and permanent. It can be acquired through practices which do not militate against any of the other virtues, and through Yoga.

When desire, aversion, lust and wrath are shed, that trait which allows one to look upon oneself and one's foe, upon one's good and one's evil, with parity, is called impartiality.

Self-control consists in never coveting another man's possessions, in gravity and patience, a capacity to allay others' fears in respect to oneself, and immunity from maladies. One can acquire this through knowledge.

Devotion to the practice of charity and the observance of dharma constitutes goodwill, the sages say. One acquires universal goodwill by constant devotion to truth.

Forgiveness is that attribute which enables an esteemed and good man to endure both what is agreeable and disagreeable. One can acquire this virtue through the practice of truthfulness.

Modesty is that virtue by which an intelligent man, contented in mind and speech, achieves many good deeds and never incurs the censure of others. It can be acquired through the aid of dharma.

Endurance is that virtue which forgives for the sake of dharma and artha. It is a form of forgiveness which one acquires through patience, and its purpose is to attach people to oneself.

Sannyasa is the giving up of attachment and also of all earthly possessions. Only he who has given up anger and malice can achieve renunciation.

Goodness is that virtue by which one does what is beneficial to all creatures with alertness and care. It has no particular form and consists of divestment of all selfish attachments.

Fortitude is that virtue by which one remains tranquil in happiness and misery. The wise man, mindful of his own good, practises this virtue which teaches forgiveness and devotion to truth. He who casts off joy, fear and wrath, succeeds in acquiring fortitude. Abstention from injury to all creatures in thought, word and deed, kindness and charity, are the eternal duties of those who are good.

These thirteen attributes, though apparently distinct from one another, have but one and the same form, which is Truth. All these, O Bhaarata, support Truth and strengthen it. It is impossible, O Rajan, to enumerate the merits of Truth. It is for these reasons that the Brahmanas, the Pitris and the Devas acclaim Truth. There is no duty higher than Truth and no sin more heinous than untruth. Indeed, Truth is the very foundation of dharma. One should never destroy Truth. From Truth proceed gifts, and yagna with offerings, as well as the threefold Agnihotras, the Vedas, and everything else that leads to dharma. Once upon a time a thousand Awamedha yagnas

and Truth were weighed against each other in the balance. Truth weighed more than the thousand Aswamedha yagnas.'"

CANTO 163

"Yudhishtira says, 'O you of great wisdom, tell me about the source of anger, lust, sorrow, loss of judgment, inclination to do evil, jealousy, malice, pride, envy, slander, incapacity to bear the good of others, unkindness and fear. Tell me everything truly and in detail, O Bharatarishabha,'

Bhishma says, 'These thirteen vices are considered powerful enemies of all beings. These, O Rajan, approach and tempt men from every side. They goad and trouble a reckless man or one who is not in his senses. Indeed, as soon as they see a man, they attack him fiercely, like wolves leaping upon their prey. From these proceed all kinds of grief, all kinds of sin. Every mortal, O Purushottama, should know this. I will now tell you of their origin, of the objects upon which they rest, and the means of their destuction. Listen with undivided attention, O Rajan, as I tell you precisely and in detail about the origin of wrath.

Anger springs from greed, which is strengthened by others' faults. Through forgiveness it remains dormant and disappears.

Lust springs from resolution. Indulgence strengthens it. When the wise man resolutely turns away from it, it disappears and dies.

Envy is caused by anger and covetousness. It disappears through compassion for all creatures, knowledge of self, and disregard for all worldly objects. Envy also arises from seeing the faults of other people, but in intelligent men it vanishes with true knowledge.

Loss of judgment has its origin in ignorance, and grows from sinfulness of habit. When one who suffers from this fault begins to take pleasure in the society of wise men, this vice at once and immediately hides its head.

Men perceive conflicting shastras, O scion of Kuru. From this circumstance springs the desire for diverse kinds of action. When one gains true knowledge, this desire is allayed.

Grief in a living being is caused by affection intensified by separation. When one comes to understand that the dead will not return, it subsides.

Incapacity to bear others' good fortune proceeds from anger and greed. Through compassion for every creature and a disregard for all earthly objects, it gets extinguished.

Malice proceeds from abandonment of Truth and indulgence in evil. This vice, O child, disappears if one serves the wise and the good.

Pride arises from conceit of birth, learning and prosperity. However, when one truly knows these three, it instantly disappears.

Jealousy springs from hankering and fellowship with ignoble and ill-bred people. Wisdom eradicates it.

Slander takes its rise from errors of conduct and through offensive and hateful speech. It disappears, O Rajan, upon seeing the world as it is.

Hate is born when one who causes affliction is powerful and the injured one unable to avenge the injury. It subsides through kindness.

Compassion proceeds from the sight of helpless and miserable creatures, with which the world abounds. The sentiment disappears when one understands the strength of dharma.

Covetousness in all creatures spring from ignorance. It dissolves once the impermanence of all objects of enjoyment is perceived.

One says that tranquillity of the soul alone can subdue all these faults. The sons of Dhritarashtra suffered from all these thirteen faults, while you, who were always in search of truth, have conquered all these vices because of your regard for your elders.'"

CANTO 164

"Yudhishtira says, 'From my observation of good men, I know what compassion is. However, O Bhaarata, I do not know evil men, or the nature of their actions. People avoid cruel men as they avoid thorns, pitfalls and fire. It is evident, O Bhaarata, that they will burn both here and hereafter. Therefore, O Kurusthama, tell me what, in truth, are the acts of such men.'

Bhishma says, 'Evil men are irresistibly inclined towards wicked acts. They slander others and incur infamy themselves. They always feel themselves to be cheated of their due. A spiteful man brags of his own deeds of charity, sees others with malicious eyes and is very mean, deceitful and full of cunning. He never gives others their due. He is arrogant, boastful and keeps evil company. He cannot distinguish the merits and faults of others, fears and suspects all with whom he comes into contact and praises only his associates. He detests all Munis who have taken to vanavasa. He is stupid, discontented, a miser, and a liar. He is cruel, takes delight in injuring others, and is exceedingly covetous.

Such a person regards a virtuous and accomplished man as a pest. Thinking everyone else to be like himself, he trusts nobody. He proclaims the faults of other people, however unjustified. As for his own faults, he does not glance at them because of the advantage he reaps from them. He regards someone who does him good as a simpleton whom he has cleverly deceived. He is filled with regret if he has at any time made any gift of wealth, even to a benefactor. Such a heartless person will calmly eat and

drink all kinds of choice food by himself, in the presence of others who may be looking on longingly. He who dedicates the first portion of food to Brahmanas and shares what remains with friends and kinsmen, attains great happiness in the next world and infinite happiness here.

I have now, O chief of the Bhaaratas, told you the indications of an evil and malevolent man. Such a person should always be avoided by a wise man.'"

CANTO 165

"Bhishma says, 'O Bhaarata, wealth and knowledge should be given to poor Brahmanas who have been robbed of their wealth and who know all the Vedas and perform yagnas, in order to acquire the punya of dharma, so that they can discharge their obligations to Gurus and the Pitris, and pass their days in reciting and studying the shastras. To those Brahmanas who are not poor, only the dakshina need be given, while to those who have fallen from the status of Brahman due to their sinful deeds, uncooked food should be given outside the limits of the sacrificial altar.

The Brahmanas are the Vedas themselves and all yagnas with generous gifts. Their virtuous inclinations drive them to outdo one another in performing yagnas. The king should, therefore, make diverse costly gifts to them. The Brahmana who can provide for his family for three years or more deserves to drink the Soma. If despite the presence of a virtuous king on the throne, the yagna someone begins, especially a Brahmana, cannot be completed for want of only a fourth part of the estimated expenses, then the king should, to ensure the completion of that sacrifice, take away from his kinsmen the wealth of a Vaisya possessesing a large herd of cattle who is averse to sacrifices and abstains from quaffing Soma.

As the Sudra is not competent to perform a yagna, the king should take wealth away from him for this purpose. He should also, without any scruple, take away wealth from kinsmen who do not perform yagna though possessing a hundred head of cattle and also from him who abstains from yagna though possessing a thousand head of cattle. The king should

publicly confiscate the wealth of men who do not practise charity, for by doing so he earns great punya.

The Brahmana forced by want to go without six meals, according to the rules, can take without permission what he requires for a single meal, from the husking tub or field or garden or any other place of a man who cares only for today, without any thought of the morrow, even a man of low pursuits. He should however, on his own, inform the king of his action. If the king knows his duty, he will not inflict any punishment upon such a Brahmana, remembering that a Brahmana faces want and hunger only through the fault of the Kshatriya. Having ascertained a Brahmana's learning and behaviour, the king should make provision for him, and protect him as a father protects a son of his own body. On the expiry of every year, one should perform the Vaisvanara sacrifice.

They who know religion say that the practice of a prescribed alternative does not destroy dharma. The Viswedevas, the Sadhyas, the Brahmanas and Maharishis, fearing death in times of trouble, have no scruple in following any alternative provisions laid down in the shastras. However, one who takes the alternative while able to live according to the primary provision is regarded as an evil man who will never succeed in winning any felicity in Swarga.

A Brahmana who knows the Vedas should never vaunt his power and knowledge to the king. The power of a Brahmana will always be superior to that of a king, which is why a king cannot bear or resist the power of the Brahmanas. The Brahmana is said to be the creator, ruler, lawmaker and god. No word of abuse or sarcasm should be addressed to a Brahmana. The Kshatriya should solve all his difficulties with the aid of the might of his arms, the Vaisya and the Sudra by wealth, and the Brahmana by mantras and homa. None, a maiden or young woman, one unacquainted with mantras, an ignorant person, or one who is impure, is competent to pour libations on the yagna fire. If any of these do so, he or she is sure to fall into hell, along with him for whom they officiate. For this reason, none but a Brahmana with knowledge of the Vedas and skilled in all yagnas should pour sacrificial libations. They who know the shastras say that the man who, having kindled the yagna fire, does not give away the dedicated food as dakshina, is not the kindler of a yagna fire. One should, with his senses under control and with proper devotion, perform all the acts of punya. One should never worship the deities in yagnas in which dakshina is not given.

A sacrifice not concluded with dakshina, rather than producing punya, brings about the destruction of one's children, animals and Swarga. Such a yagna destroys also one's senses, fame and achievements, one's very life-span.

Those Brahmanas who lie with women in their season, or who never perform yagnas, or whose families have no members who are educated in the Vedas, are veritable Sudras. The Brahmana who, having married a Sudra girl, resides for twelve continuous years in a village which is supplied only by a single well, becomes a Sudra in action. The Brahmana who summons to his bed an unmarried maiden, or suffers a Sudra to sit upon the same carpet with him, thinking him worthy of respect, can be cleansed only if he sits on a bed of dry grass behind some Kshatriya or Vaisya and gives him respect in that way. Listen, O Rajan, to my words on this subject. The sin that a Brahmana commits in a single night by serving a member of a lower varna, or by sporting with him in the same spot or on the same bed, can only by cleansed by sitting for three continuous years on a bed of grass behind a Kshatriya or Vaisya.

A falsehood, spoken in jest, or to a woman, is not sinful, O Rajan, nor one on the occasion of marriage, or for the benefit of one's guru, or to save one's own life; these five kinds of falsehood are said not to be sinful. One can acquire useful knowledge from even a man of low pursuits, with devotion and reverence. One can take up gold, without any scruple, from even an unclean place. A woman who is the ornament of her sex is acceptable from even a vile varna. Amrita, if extracted from poison, can be quaffed; water, women, jewels and other valuables can never be impure or unclean, according to the shastras. Even a Vaisya can take up weapons for his own safety, for the benefit of Brahmanas and cattle and on occasions of transfusion of varna.

Drinking alcohol, Brahmahatya, and the violation of the Acharya's bed are sins that, if committed consciously, have no reparation except death. The same can be said of stealing gold or a Brahmana's property. By drinking alcohol, having sexual congress with someone prohibited, mingling with a degraded person or, for a person of any of the other three varnas, having congress with a Brahmani, one becomes inevitably sullied. By mixing with such a person for one whole year in such matters as officiating in yagnas and teaching sexual congress, one too becomes corrupted. One, however, does not become so by mixing with a fallen

person in such matters as riding on the same vehicle, sitting on the same seat, and eating in the same line.

Excluding the five grave sins mentioned above, all other sins have expiations prescribed for them by law, provided one does not indulge in them again. In the case of those who have been guilty of the first three of these five sins, drinking alcohol, Brahmahatya, and violation of the acharya's bed, there is no restriction on their surviving kinsmen about food and wearing ornaments, even if their funeral rites remain unperformed when they die. A Dharmatman should, in the observance of his dharma, discard his very friends and revered elders. In fact, until expiation is undertaken, the virtuous should not even talk with sinners.

A sinful man destroys his sin by acting virtuously afterwards and by tapasya. By calling a thief a thief, one incurs the sin of theft. By calling a man a thief who, however, is not a thief one incurs a sin twice the sin of theft. The maiden who suffers her virginity to be deflowered incurs three-fourths of the sin of killing a Brahmana, while the man who deflowers her incurs a sin equal to a fourth part of that of Brahmahatya.

By slandering or striking Brahmanas, one sinks in infamy for a hundred years, and by killing a Brahmana one sinks into hell for a thousand years. No one, therefore, should speak ill of a Brahmana or slay him. If a person strikes a Brahmana with a weapon, he will have to live in hell for as many years as the grains of dust that are soaked by the blood flowing from the wound. One guilty of foeticide becomes cleansed if he dies of wounds received in battle fought for the sake of cattle and Brahmanas. Casting himself on a blazing fire can also cleanse him.

A drinker of alcoholic liquors becomes cleansed by drinking hot alcohol. Burning his body with that hot drink, he gets cleansed through death in the other world. A Brahmana stained by such a sin obtains regions of felicity by such a course, not by any other. For violating the bed of a guru, the evil-souled and sinful wretch becomes cleansed by death from embracing a heated female figure of iron. Or, he could cut off his organ and testicles and, bearing them in his hands, he should go in a straight course towards the south-west and then end his life. He could also wash away his sin by dying in order to benefit a Brahmana, or by performing an Ashwamedha yagna or a cow-sacrifice or an Agnishtoma, and thus regain esteem both here and hereafter.

The slayer of a Brahmana should practise the vow of Brahmacharya for twelve years and devoting himself to tapasya and the life of a Muni, wander, holding all the while in his hands the skull of the slain, and proclaiming his sin to all. This is also the expiation provided for one who slays a pregnant woman, knowing her condition. The man who knowingly slays such a woman incurs double the sin that follows from Brahmanicide. A drinker of alcohol could regain his purity if he lived on frugal fare, practiced Brahmacharya vows, slept on the bare ground, performed for more than three years the sacrifice next to the Agnishtoma, and then gave away a thousand cattle with one bull.

For slaying a Vaisya one should perform such a sacrifice for two years and make a present of a hundred cattle with one bull, and for a Sudra, one should perform such a sacrifice for one year and make a present of a hundred cattle with one bull. For slaying a dog or bear or camel, one should perform the same penance laid down for the slaughter of a Sudra. For slaying a cat, a chasa, a frog, a crow, a reptile, or a rat, one says that, one incurs the sin of animal slaughter

O Rajan, I will now tell you of other kinds of expiations in their order. For all minor sins one should repent or practise some vow for one year. For congress with the wife of a Brahmana adept in the Vedas, one should for three years practise the vow of Brahmacharya, taking a little food at the fourth part of the day. For congress with any other woman who is not one's wife, one should undergo a similar penance for two years. For taking delight in a woman's company by sitting with her on the same spot or on the same seat, one should live only on water for three days to doing cleanse oneself. The same is laid down the same for one who defiles a blazing fire.

The shastras conclude that he who kills his father, mother or acharya, without adequate cause, is definitely disgraced, O Kurusthama. Only food and clothes should be given to a wife guilty of adultery or one confined in a prison. Indeed, the vows that the shastras lay down for a male guilty of adultery should also be applied to a woman. In the case of a woman who abandons her husband of a superior caste and has congress with a vile person of a lower varna, the king should cause her to be devoured by dogs in a public place, in the midst of a large concourse of spectators. A wise king should cause the male committing adultery under such circumstances to be placed upon a heated bed of iron and then, placing faggots underneath,

burn the sinner. The same punishment, O Rajan, is provided for a woman guilty of adultery.

The sinner who does not perform expiation within a year of the commission of the sin incurs paapa that is double of what attaches to the original sin. One who associates with such a person for two years must wander over the earth, devoting himself to tapasya and living upon alms. One associating with a sinner for four years should adopt such a mode of life for five years.

If a younger brother weds before his elder brother, then all three, the elder brother, the younger brother and his wife, become tainted. To cleanse themselves, they should either observe the vows prescribed for one who has neglected his sacrificial fire, or practise the vow of Chandrayana for a month, or some other painful vow. The younger brother should give his wife to his unmarried elder brother and afterwards, with his permission, take her back. By such means all three can be cleansed of their sin.

By slaying animals except a cow, the slayer is not stained. The learned know that man has dominion over all the lower animals. A sinner, holding in his hand a yak-tail and an earthen pot, should go about proclaiming his sin. He should every day beg only from seven families and live upon what he thus obtains. By doing this for twelve days he can be cleansed of his sin. He who is unable to carry in his hand the yak-tail while practising the vow should observe the vow of the sannyasi for a whole year. Among men such expiation is the best.

For those who are able to practise charity, the shastras lay down the practice of in all such cases. By giving away only one cow, those who have faith and dharma can cleanse themselves. One who eats or drinks the flesh, ordure or urine, of a dog, a boar, a man, a cock, or a camel must have his investiture of the sacred thread re-performed. If a soma-drinking Brahmana inhales the scent of alcohol from the mouth of one who has drunk it, he should drink warm water for three days or warm milk for the same period. Alternatively, drinking warm water for three days, he should live for that period upon air alone. These are the eternal injunctions laid down for the expiation of sin, especially for a Brahmana who has committed these offences through ignorance and want of judgment.'"

CANTO 166

Vaisampayana said, "Upon the completion of this speech, Nakula, an accomplished swordsman, questions the Kuru Pitamaha lying on his bed of arrows.

Nakula says, 'The bow, O Pitamaha, is regarded in this world as the foremost of weapons. I, however, prefer the sword, O Rajan, for when the bow is cut off or broken, when horses are dead or weakened, a good warrior, well-trained in swordsmanship, can protect himself with his sword. He can single-handedly withstand many bowmen, or adversaries armed with maces and darts. I have this doubt, and I am curious to know the truth. O Rajan, which is really the greatest weapon in battle? How and for what purpose was the sword created? Who was the first guru of the weapon? Tell me all this, O Pitamaha.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these words of the intelligent son of Madri, the virtuous Bhishma, the supreme master of the science of archery, as he lay stretched upon his bed of arrows, answers the high-souled adept Nakula, Drona's disciple, in profound and melodious words, displaying his considerable knowledge on the subject.

Bhishma says, 'Hear the truth, O son of Madri, about what you have asked me. Your question has caused my excited heart to send a flow of blood through my wounds like a hill of red chalk. In ancient times the universe was one vast expanse of water, motionless and skyless, and without this earth occupying any space in it. Enveloped in darkness and

intangible, its aspect was exceedingly awesome. In extent it was immeasurable, and utter silence reigned over all.

In his own proper time the Pitamaha of the universe took his birth. He then created the wind and fire, and the sun also of great energy. He also created the sky, the heavens, the nether regions, earth, the directions, the firmament with the moon and the stars, the constellations, the planets, the year, the seasons, the months, the two fortnights, lighted and dark, and the smaller divisions of time.

The divine Pitamaha, then, assuming a visible form, obtained by the power of his will some sons of great tejas. They are the sages Marichi, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vasishtha, Angiras, the mighty and powerful lord Rudra and Prachetas. The last begot Daksha, who in his turn had sixty daughters. Maharishis took away all these daughters with the object of fathering children upon them. From them sprang all the creatures of the universe, including the Devas, Pitris, Gandharvas, Apsaras, diverse kinds of Rakshasas, birds and animals and fishes, monkeys, great snakes and diverse species of fowl that range the air or sport on the water, as well as vegetables, and all oviparous or viviparous beings or those born of filth. Thus the whole universe of animate and inanimate creatures sprang into existence.

The universal Pitamaha, having thus summoned into existence all mobile and immobile creatures, then promulgated the eternal religion laid down in the Vedas. That was accepted by the Devas, with their Gurus, priests, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Maruts, the Aswins, Bhrigu, Atri, Angiras, the Siddhas, Kasyapa rich in penances, Vasishtha, Gautama, Agastya, Narada, Parvata, the Valikhilya Rishis, those other Rishis known under the names of Prabhasas, the Sikatas, the Ghritapas, the Somavayavyas, the Vaiswanaras, Marichipas, the Akrishtas, the Hansas, those born of Fire, the Vanaprasthas, and the Prasnis. All of them obeyed Brahman.

The foremost of the Danavas, however, yielding to wrath and covetousness in the night, and against the Pitamaha's commands, began to cause the destruction of dharma. They were Hiranyakasipu, Hiranyaksha, Virochana, Samvara, Viprachitti, Prahlada, Namuchi and Vali. These and many other Daityas and Danavas, transcending all restraints of duty and religion, sported and took delight in all kinds of evil deeds. Regarding themselves equal in point of birth with the Devas, they began to challenge

them and the sages of pure behaviour. They never did any good to the other creatures of the universe or showed compassion for any of them. Disregarding the three well-known means, they began to persecute and afflict all, wielding the rod of chastisement. Indeed, the greatest of Asuras, filled with pride, abandoned every friendly interaction with other creatures.

The divine Brahman, accompanied by the sages, went to a delightful summit of Himavat a hundred yojanas in area, adorned with diverse kinds of jewels and gems, upon whose surface the stars seemed to rest like so many lotuses on a lake. On that prince of mountains, overgrown with forests of flowering trees, the greatest of the gods, Brahman, remained to carry out the business of the world. After the lapse of a thousand years, the powerful god made arrangements for a grand yagna, according to the forms laid down in the scriptures. The sacrificial altar was arrayed with Rishis adept in performing all yagnas, with faggots of sacrificial fuel and blazing fires, and embellished with beautiful sacrificial plates and vessels all made of gold. All the chief gods took their seats on the platform which further scintillated with the presence of high regenerate Rishis.

I have heard from the Rishis that soon something very awful occurred in that sacrifice. A creature appeared whose splendour equalled that of the Moon himself, when he rises in the star-studded firmament. Tall, lean, and dark with gleaming, sharp teeth, scattering the flames around him, he seemed irresistible and possessed of surpassing energy. Seeing him materialize, the earth trembled and the Ocean became agitated with tall waves and terrifying eddies. Meteors foreboding catastrophe shot through the sky. Inauspicious winds began to blow, branches of trees came crashing down, and all the points of the compass became unquiet. Creatures began to quake with dread. Seeing the fearful agitation of the universe at the entity which had sprung from the sacrificial fire, the Pitamaha said to the great Rishis, the Devas, and the Gandharvas, "It was I who thought into existence this being of powerful tejas. His name is Asi, sword. I have created him for the protection of the world and the destruction of the enemies of the gods."

The being, abandoning the form he first assumed, then took the shape of a sword of great magnificence, highly polished and sharp-edged, which rose like the instrument of annihilation at the end of the Yuga. Then Brahma handed over that sharp weapon to the blue-throated Rudra, to enable him to put down irreligion and sin. At this, the divine Rudra of immeasurable soul, whose emblem on his banner is Nandi, the foremost of bulls, whom the

Maharishis praised, took up the sword and assumed a different shape. Putting forth four arms, he grew so tall that, though standing on the earth, he touched the very sun with his head. With eyes turned upwards and with every limb extended, he began to vomit flames of fire from his mouth. Assuming diverse colours in his complexion, turning from blue to white to red, wearing a black deer-skin studded with stars of gold, he bore on his forehead a third eye resembling the sun in splendour. His other two eyes, one of which was black and the other tawny, glittered brightly. The divine Mahadeva, the bearer of the Sula, lacerater of the eyes of Bhaga, took up the sword whose splendour resembled that of the all-destructive Yuga fire. Wielding an immense shield with three high bosses which looked like a mass of dark clouds adorned with flashes of lightning, he began to perform diverse transformations. Mighty and powerful, he began to whirl the sword in the sky, hungry for an encounter. Loud were the roars he uttered, and terrifying the bellow of his laughter. Indeed, O Bhaarata, Rudra's form was exceedingly fearsome.

The Danavas, hearing that Rudra had assumed the form in order to undertake fierce deeds, began to advance upon him exultantly with great velocity, showering huge rocks upon him as they came, blazing brands of wood, and several terrible weapons made of iron, each as sharp as a razor. The Danava host, however, witnessing the swelling might of the indestructible Rudra, soon began to tremble with fear. Although Rudra was alone and single-handed, he moved on the battle-field like quicksilver, sword in hand, so that the Asuras thought there were a thousand identical Rudras battling with them.

Tearing, piercing, afflicting, cutting, lopping off and grinding down, the Mahadeva moved among the masses of his foes like a forest fire raging through heaps of dry grass. The mighty Asuras, broken by the god whirling his sword, their arms, thighs and chests cut off and pierced, their heads severed from their trunks, began to fall down on the earth. Others among the Danavas, wounded by the strokes of the sword, broke and fled in all directions, inciting one another to escape. Some plunged into the bowels of the earth, others found cover under mountains, some went upwards and others dived into the depths of the sea.

As the dreadful and fierce battle progressed, the earth became mired with flesh and blood, and horrible sights were to be seen all around. Strewn with the fallen bodies of blood-drenched Danavas, the earth appeared

overspread with mountains covered with Kinsukas, or like a beautiful woman attired in crimson robes, intoxicated with alcohol. After the Danavas had been slain and Dharma re-established on earth, the auspicious Rudra cast off his terrifying form and assumed his own benevolent shape.

All the Rishis and celestials then worshipped the Deva of gods with loud acclamations and hailed his conquest. The divine Rudra, gave the sword, the protector of religion, dyed with the blood of Danavas, with due worship to Vishnu. He presented it to the divine Marichi, who gave it to all the Maharishis, who in turn passed it on to Vasava. Vasava presented it to the Regents of the world, O Yudhishtara, who gave that large sword to Manu, the son of Surya.

At the time they gave it to Manu, they said, “You are the lord of all men. Protect all creatures with this sword that contains religion within its womb, meting out punishment to those who have transgressed dharma for the sake of the body or the mind. They should be protected in conformity with the law, never according to caprice. Some should be punished with oral rebukes, fines and forfeitures. Loss of limb or death should never be inflicted for slight reasons. These punishments should be regarded as diverse forms of the sword, of which verbal censure is the first. These are the shapes that the sword assumes as a result of the transgressions of men under protection.”

In time, Manu installed his own son Kshupa as the sovereign of all creatures, and gave him the sword for their protection. From Kshupa, Ikshvaku took it, and Pururavas from Ikshvaku. From Pururavas, Ayus took it, and Nahusha from him. From Nahusha, Yayati took it, and Puru from Yayati. From Puru Amurtarya took it, and from him it descended to the royal Bhumisaya. From Bhumisaya to Dushmanta’s son Bhaarata. From Bhaarata, O Rajan, to righteous Ailavila. From Ailavila king Dhundumara took it and from Dhundumara Kamvoja took it, and from Kamvoja, Muchukunda. From Muchukunda Marutta took it, and from Marutta Raivata. From Raivata Yuvanaswa took it, and from Yuvanaswa Raghu. From Raghu the valiant Harinaswa took it. From Harinaswa Sunaka took the sword and from him the Dharmatman Usinara. From the last the Bhojas and the Yadavas took it and Sivi from the Yadus. From Sivi it descended to Pratardana. From Pratardana Ashtaka received it, and from Ashtaka by Prishadaswa. From Prishadaswa Bharadwaja received it, and from the last Drona. After Drona Kripa took it. From Kripa, you and your brothers

obtained that best of swords. The constellation under which the sword was born is Krittika. Agni is its deity, and Rohini is its Gotra. Rudra is its great acharya.

The sword has eight names, not generally known. Listen to me as I reveal them to you. If one mentions these, O son of Pandu, one can always win victory. The names then are Asi, Vaisasana, Khadga, Sharp-edged, Difficult of Acquisition, Sirgarbha, Victory, and Protector of Righteousness. Of all weapons, son of Madravati, the sword is the foremost. The Puranas truly declare that it was first wielded by Mahadeva. As regards the bow, again, Parantapa, it was Prithu who first created it. It was with the aid of this weapon that that son of Vena, while he governed the earth virtuously for many years, milked her of crops and grain in profusion. It becomes you, son of Madri, to regard what the Rishis have said, as conclusive proof. All men skilled in battle should worship the sword. I have now told you truly the first portion of your query, in detail, about the origin and creation of the sword, Bharatarishabha! One who listens to this excellent story of the origin of the sword will succeed in winning fame in this world and eternal felicity in the next.'"

CANTO 167

Vaisampayana said, “When Bhishma falls silent, Yudhishtira and the others return home. The king, addressing his brothers, with Vidura forming the fifth, says, ‘The course of the world rests upon dharma, artha, and kama. Among these three, which is the greatest, the second, and the last, in point of importance? For subduing the triple aggregate, upon which of the first three should the mind concentrate? It becomes you all to answer this question truthfully and cheerfully.’

The highly intelligent Vidura, familiar with the science of artha, with the course of the world and with truth, first speaks, recollecting the contents of the shastras. Vidura says, ‘Study of the various shastras, asceticism, gift, faith, performance of yagnas, forgiveness, sincerety of disposition, compassion, truth, self-restraint, these constitute benefits of dharma. Adopt dharma, never let your heart stray from it. Both dharma and artha have their roots in these, and all these are capable of being included in one term. It is by dharma that the Rishis have crossed sansara. It is upon dharma that the worlds depend for their existence, that the Devas attained their position of superiority. It is upon dharma that artha rests. The wise say that dharma, O Rajan, is highest in point of punya, artha is in the middle and kama is the lowest of the three. For this reason, one should live with restrained soul, paying attention primarily to dharma. One should also behave towards all creatures as towards oneself.’

After Vidura, Pritha’s son Arjuna, well skilled in the science of Artha, and conversant with the truths of both dharma and artha, urged on by the

drift of Yudhishtira's question, says, 'This world, O Rajan, is the field of action, and therefore one lauds action. Agriculture, trade, cattle-rearing and diverse arts constitute artha, which is the end of all such actions. The Srutis declare that without artha or dana, both dharma and moha cannot be won. Even men of uncleansed souls, if they have diverse kinds of Wealth, are able to perform the highest deeds of dharma and gratify desires apparently difficult to attain. The Sruti declares both dharma and moha to be the limbs of dana. Through artha, both dharma and objects of moha can be gained. Just as all creatures worship Brahman, even men of superior birth worship a wealthy man. Even those attired in deer-skins and bearing matted locks on their heads, self-restrained men who smear their bodies with mire, who have their senses under complete control, even shaven-headed Brahmacharins, and those who live separated from one another, cherish a need for wealth. The excellence of dana is attested by those attired in yellow robes, bearing long beards, graced with modesty, learned, contented, and freed from all attachments; those following the practices of their ancestors, and their respective duties and others desirous of heaven, believers and unbelievers, and rigid practitioners of the highest yoga. It is said that he who gives his dependants objects of enjoyment, and afflicts his foes with punishments truly possesses dana. Even this O best of intelligent men, is truly my opinion. However, listen now to these two speak.'

The two sons of Madri, Nakula and Sahadeva, then say, 'Sitting or lying, walking and standing, one should strive to acquire dana even by the most vigorous means. If one obtains dana, which is highly prized and difficult to acquire, one is certain to get all the objects of moha. The dana which is connected with dharma, and also the dharma which is connected with dana, is certainly like amrita. For this reason, our opinions are that one without wealth cannot gratify any moha; similarly, there can be no dana in one lacking dharma. He who is outside the pale of both dharma and dana, is therefore to the world an object of fear. For this reason, one should seek dana devotedly but without disregarding the requirements of dharma. They who believe this succeed in acquiring whatever they desire. One should first practise dharma; next acquire dana without sacrificing dharma; and then seek the gratification of moha, for this should be the last action of one who has been successful in acquiring wealth.'"

Vaisampayana continues, "The twin sons of the Aswins then fall silent, and Bhimasena begins to speak. 'One without moha never wishes for dana.

One without moha never wishes for dharma. One without moha never feels any wish. For this reason, moha is the greatest of all the three. It is under the influence of moha that the very Rishis devote themselves to tapasyas, subsisting upon fruits or living only upon roots or air. Similarly, others who have Vedic knowledge study the Vedas and their branches, or rites of faith and sacrifice, or on making or accepting gifts. Traders, agriculturists, keepers of cattle, artists, artisans, and those who are employed in rites of propitiation, all work from moha. There are some who dive into the depths of the ocean, induced by moha. Indeed the principle of moha takes various forms and pervades everything. A man outside the pale of moha never is, was, or will be, seen in this world.

This is the truth, O Rajan. Both dharma and artha are based upon moha. Just as butter represents the essence of curds, moha is the essence of artha and dharma. Oil is better than oil-seeds, ghee is better than sour milk, and flowers and fruits are better than wood. Similarly, moha is better than dharma and artha. As honeyed juice is extracted from flowers, so moha is extracted from these two. It is the parent of dharma and artha, and the soul of both. Without moha the Brahmanas would never receive sweets or wealth, without moha the diverse kinds of action evident in the world would never occur. For these reasons, moha is the best of the triple aggregate.

Attired in excellent robes, adorned with every ornament, and exhilarated with sweet wines, you approach beautiful damsels to sport with them. Moha, O Rajan, should be for us the greatest of the three. Reflecting upon the question to its very roots, this is the conclusion to which I have come. Do not hesitate to accept it, O Dharmaputra! My words, not hollow but loaded with dharma, will be acceptable to all good men. Dharma, artha, and moha should all be minded equally. He who devotes himself to only one of them is certainly not a superior man. He who devotes himself to only two of them, is average, but he who attends to all the three is the best of his species.' Having said these words briefly and comprehensively to the heroes, the wise Bhima, smeared with sandal-paste, adorned with beautiful garlands and ornaments, and surrounded by friends, falls silent.

Then king Yudhishtira the Just, that most learned of virtuous men, duly reflecting for a while upon the words spoken by everyone and considering them all to be false philosophy, says, 'Without doubt, all of you have settled conclusions in respect of the shastras, and all of you know what the authorities say. I have heard the words you have spoken with such certainty,

so listen now with concentrated attention to what I say. He who is not employed in punya or in paapa, he who does not attend to artha or dharma or moha, who is above all faults, who regards equally gold and a brickbat, becomes liberated from pleasure and pain and the need to accomplish his purposes. All creatures are subject to birth and death, and are liable to change and decay. Awakened repeatedly by the benefits and evils of existence, all of them applaud mukti. We do not know, however, what mukti is. The self-born and divine Brahma says that there is no mukti for one bound by ties of attachment and affection. The learned, however, seek Nirvana. For this reason, one should never regard anything as either agreeable or disagreeable. This view seems to be the best. No one in this world can do as he pleases. I work precisely as I am made to act. The great Ordainer, who makes all creatures proceed as He wills, is supreme. Understand that no one can, by his deeds, get what is unobtainable; whatever is to be, will be. And since he who has withdrawn himself from the triple aggregate can win mukti, it is clear that mukti produces the highest good.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Having heard these significant, reasonable and persuasive words of Yudhishtira, Bhima and others are filled with delight and joining their hands, bow to the Kuru prince and applaud him. Indeed, O Rajan, hearing the beautifully turned speech of the king, so agreeable to the heart, so well adorned with sweet syllables and devoid of discordance and dissonance, those foremost of men begin to applaud Yudhishtira enthusiastically. The high-souled son of Dharma, of great tejas, in turn praises his auditors. Then, once more, the king addresses the great soul, Gangaputra, questioning him about dharma."

CANTO 168

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha, you who are great in wisdom, I will ask you a question which I trust you will answer completely, O enhancer of the happiness of the Kurus. What kind of men are of gentle disposition? With whom can the most agreeable friendship exist? Tell us also who are always able to do good, now and later. I am of the opinion that neither immense wealth, nor relatives, nor kinsmen occupy the place of friends who wish us well. A friend who will listen to beneficial advice and will also do good, is exceedingly rare. O Mahatman, discourse fully on these topics.'

Bhishma replies, 'Listen to me, O Yudhishtira, as I tell you in detail of men with whom friendships may and may not be formed. You should avoid one who is covetous; one who is ruthless; one who has renounced the duties of his varna; one who is mean, cruel, or suspicious of all; one who is idle or procrastinates; one who is of a crooked disposition, who is an object of universal disgrace, who brings dishonour to his Guru; one of sinful practices, wedded to sin, addicted to the seven well-known vices; one of an evil soul, shameless, whose sight is always directed towards sin; one who is an atheist, a slanderer of the Vedas; one whose senses are not controlled, who transgresses all restraints, who gives free indulgence to lust; one who is untruthful, deceitful and a rogue; one who is foolish; one who is envious, whose conduct is bad, whose soul has not been cleansed; one who is a gambler, one who is deserted by all, and one who abandons or seeks to injure friends,

You should shun that wicked soul, O Bharatarishabha, who is never satisfied with what another may give him according to his means; who becomes angry on occasions that do not justify anger and wrangles without cause; who is restless of mind, a sinful person; who is never pleased with his friends, has no scruple in deserting well-meaning friends, and quarrels with friends when they do him a very slight injury or unintentionally inflict on him a wrong; one who speaks like a friend but acts like an enemy; a wretch of perverse perceptions who is always mindful of his self-interest but blind to his own good; one who never takes delight in what is good for himself or others.

Avoid one who drinks alcoholic liquors; one who is engaged in killing living creatures; one who hates others, is wrathful and without compassion; one who is pained at the sight of others' happiness; one who injures friends, is ungrateful and vile. Never form alliances of friendship with any of them, or with one who is always intent upon pointing out the faults of others.

Listen now to me as I specify those with whom alliances can be formed. Kings should accept those who are well-born, from good families, and perpetuators of their races; those possessed of agreeable qualities, eloquence and politeness of speech, varied knowledge and science; those who have accomplishments and merit, who have no faults; those who are free from covetousness and avarice; those who are never exhausted by hard work; those who are good to their friends, grateful, and firm in truth; those who have subdued their senses and are devoted to athletic and other exercises; those who are famous for forming alliances of friendship.

You should regard as persons worthy of friendship, O Rajan, those who are contented if one treats them according to the best of one's powers, who do not get angry on occasions that do not justify anger and are never displeased without sufficient cause; those who know well the science of Artha and who, even when annoyed, succeed in keeping their minds tranquil; those who devote themselves to the service of friends at personal sacrifice; those who are never estranged from friends but continue unchanged in their attachment like a blanket made of wool that retains its colour; those who never spurn anyone for being poor, who never dishonour young women by yielding to lust and loss of judgment; those who are trustworthy, who never point out the wrong way to friends; those who are devoted to the practice of dharma, who look equally on gold and brickbats; those who adhere with firmness to friends and well-wishers; and those who

muster their own people to accomplish the business of friends, disregarding their own dignity and status. Indeed, the dominions of a king who befriends such superior men will spread in every direction like the light of the lord of the stars.

Alliances should be formed with men who are experts in weaponry, who have subdued their anger, who are always strong in battle and are of high birth, good behaviour and varied accomplishments. Among the vicious men that I have mentioned, O Rajan, the vilest are those who are ungrateful and who injure friends. Everyone should avoid these men of evil conduct. That much is certain.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I want to hear in detail a description of those who are injurers of friends and ungrateful persons.'

Bhishma replies, 'I will narrate to you an old story of what happened in the country of the Mlecchas to the north. There was a certain Brahmana belonging to the middle country, without any Vedic learning, who entered a prosperous village of hunters to beg for alms. In that village lived a wealthy robber, conversant with the distinctive features of all the varnas, who was devoted to the Brahmanas, firm in truth, and always engaged in charity. Going to the den of that robber, the Brahmana begged for alms, including a house to live in and such necessities of life as would last a year. The robber also bestowed on him a piece of new cloth and a young widowed woman. The Brahmana, Gautama, was filled with delight and began to live happily in the spacious house which the robber chief assigned to him, accommodating as well the relatives and kinsmen of the female slave he had been given. In this way he lived for many years in that prosperous village of hunters.

Gautama also began assiduously to practise archery and every day, like the other robbers living there, went into the vana and slaughtered wild cranes and other living creatures in great numbers. Through his intimacy with the robbers he soon forgot compassion, grew adept at killing creatures and became like one of the band. Living happily in that robber village for many months, he slew large numbers of wild cranes.

One day a Brahmana came to the village, clad in rags and deer-skins, with matted locks on his head. Pure of conduct, he was proficient in his study of the Vedas, humble in his disposition, frugal of habit, devoted to Brahmanas, and observant of Brahmacharya vows. The Brahmana belonged to Gautama's native area and had been his dear friend. In the course of his

wanderings, he had come to the robber village where Gautama now lived. Since he never accepted food given by a Sudra, he began to search for the house of a Brahmana from where he could receive hospitality. Roving through the village infested with robber-families, he finally arrived at Gautama's house, just as he was returning home from the vana. Gautama was armed with bow and sword, carrying a load of slaughtered cranes, his body smeared with the blood that trickled down from the bag on his shoulders. The two friends met.

Recognising the man who had fallen away from the pure practices of the varna of his birth and now resembled a cannibal, the newly-arrived guest exploded: "What folly is this! You are a Brahmana, and the perpetuator of a Brahmana family. Born in a respectable family belonging to the middle country, how have you become a robber? Recollect, Muni, your famous kinsmen of earlier times, who were all well versed in the Vedas. Alas, born in their varna, you have become a stigma to it! Awaken yourself by your own exertions, O Muni, recollect the energy, the conduct, the learning, the self-restraint, the compassion that are yours, and abandon this present abode!"

Gautama answered him, great moved by the words of his well-meaning friend, "O Maharishi, I am poor and have no knowledge of the Vedas. Understand, O best of Brahmanas, that I abide here for the sake of wealth alone. However, today the sight of you is a blessing to me. We shall leave this place together tomorrow. Spend the night here with me."

The newly-arrived Brahmana, through compassion, passed the night there, but refrained from touching anything. Indeed, though hungry and invited repeatedly to eat, the guest refused to touch any food in that house.'"

CANTO 169

"Bhishma says, 'When the night had passed, O Bhaarata, and that best of Brahmanas had left, Gautama emerged from his house and walked towards the sea. On the way he fell in with some merchants setting out to voyage on the ocean, and with them he proceeded onwards. It so happened, O Rajan, that while the large merchant caravan was passing through a valley, an elephant in musth assailed it and killed almost everyone. Having escaped the peril somehow, the Brahmana fled northwards to save his life, not knowing where he was going. Parted from the caravan and far from where he started out, he began to wander alone in a forest like a Kimpurusha.

At last he came upon the road that led to the ocean, and on it he journeyed till he reached a forest abounding with flowering trees, inhabited by Yakshas and Kinnaras. Marvellous mango trees that put forth flowers and fruits throughout the year adorned that vana, in splendour like the very Nandana in Swarga. Salas, palmyras, tamalas with clusters of black aloes, and many venerable sandal trees also grew there. Upon that delightful tableland, fragrant with manifold perfumes, birds of various species poured forth their melodies. Winged creatures called Bharundas, with human faces, Bhulingas, and other birds belonging to mountainous regions and the sea, warbled sweetly.

Gautama made his way through the vana, absorbed in the mellifluous strains of birdsong. He came upon a level spot of land covered with golden sands, like Swarga itself in beauty. On the plot stood a towering and

graceful nyagrodha with a spherical crown with many branches extending like a cupola over the plain, each branch like the parent tree in beauty and size. The area beneath the magnificent tree was drenched with water perfumed with heady sandal.

So enchanting was the place that it seemed to him a garden in the sabha of Brahma himself. Gautama was entranced by this auspicious glade, like the home of a Deva, and sat down with a contended heart. O son of Kunti, a delicious breeze, laden with the perfume of many kinds of flowers, began to blow softly, cooling his limbs and filling him with bliss. Fanned by that redolent breeze, the Brahmana was overcome by a fine languor and fell asleep.

Meanwhile the sun set behind the Asta hills in the west and, with the advance of twilight, a marvellous bird, the foremost of its kind, returned from the realm of Brahma to that magical glade which was his home. Nadijangha was his name and he was a prince of cranes, the wise son of sage Kasyapa, and a dear friend of the Creator. He was also well known on earth by the name of Rajadharman. Indeed, he surpassed all in fame and wisdom. The child of a celestial maiden, herself possessed of great beauty and learning, he was like a Deva in splendour. Adorned with many ornaments as brilliant as the sun, Rajadharman blazed with beauty. Seeing that amazing bird, Gautama was filled with wonder. But, exhausted and ravaged as he was by hunger and thirst, the Brahmana could only stare at the bird with the thought of killing it for food.

Rajadharman said affectionately, in exquisite human speech, “Welcome, O Brahmana! It is my great good fortune that has brought you to my home. The sun has set, and twilight is here. You are today my dear and precious guest. Let me worship you according to the rites laid down in the shastras, and you can go where you want tomorrow morning.”””

CANTO 170

"Bhishma says, 'Hearing these sweet words, Gautama was astonished. Seized with great curiosity, he gazed fixedly at Rajadharman, who said, "O Brahmana, I am the son of Kasyapa by one of the daughters of the sage Daksha Prajapati. Welcome, O foremost of Brahmanas of great merit, you are my guest today."

After he offered him hospitality according to the rites laid down in the shastras, the crane made an excellent couch of the Sala flowers that lay all around. He also offered Gautama several large fish caught from the deep waters of the Bhagirathi, and offered his guest a blazing fire. After the Brahmana had eaten and was sated, the bird, possessed of tapodhana, the bounty of penances, began to fan him with his wings to drive away Gautama's fatigue.

Seeing his guest seated at his case, he questioned him about his ancestry. Gautama answered, "I am a Brahmana and my name is Gautama," and then fell silent. The bird made his guest a soft bed of tender leaves strewn with fragrant flowers. Gautama lay down on it, and was contented. The eloquent son of Kasyapa, who was like Yama himself in his knowledge of dharma, asked him about how and why he had come there. Gautama answered him, "I am very poor, O Mahatman. I want to go to the sea to earn wealth for myself."

The son of Kasyapa cheerfully told him: "Do not be anxious, you will succeed, O best of Brahmanas, and return home with much wealth. The sage Brihaspati has spoken of four means to acquire wealth: inheritance,

sudden luck or the favour of the Devas, by labour, and through the aid or kindness of friends. I have become your friend. I cherish kind feelings towards you, and I will exert myself to help you acquire wealth."

The night faded and morning came. Seeing his guest rise refreshed from bed, the crane said to him, "Go, friend, follow this very route and you are sure to succeed. At the distance of about three yojanas from this place, there is a strong and mighty king of the Rakshasas. His name is Virupaksha, and he is a friend of mine. Go to him, O Brahmanottama. At my request, Virupaksha will surely give you as much wealth as you want."

Thus, Yudhishtira, Gautama cheerfully set out from that place, eating to his fill, on the way, fruits sweet as amrita. Gazing at the sandal, aloe and birch trees that stood along the road and enjoying their refreshing shade, the Brahmana went along quickly till he reached the city of Meruvraja. It had lofty archways and high walls of stone, and was surrounded by a deep moat. Large rocks and engines of defence were kept ready on the ramparts. Gautama was announced to the intelligent Rakshasa as a guest sent to him by his friend the crane, and received very gladly.

O Yudhishtira, the king of the Rakshasas ordered his attendants, "Let Gautama be fetched here immediately." At the king's command, his men, quick as hawks, went from his splendid palace to the gate and accosted Gautama, "You may have heard of our king Virupaksha, of boundless courage. He is impatient to see you. Make haste, do not tarry."

The Brahmana forgot his toil, in his surprise, and ran with the messengers. He was awestruck by the great affluence of the city and filled with wonder. Soon he entered the king's palace in the company of the messengers, agog for a sight of the king of the Rakshasas.'"

CANTO 171

"Bhishma says, 'Gautama was led into a spacious apartment, and introduced to the king of the Rakshasas. Virupaksha welcomed him with the customary offerings and gave him an opulent seat to make him comfortable. The king asked him about his antecedents and his practices, his study of the Vedas and his observance of the Brahmacharya vow. The Brahmana, however, only stated his name and vamsa, without answering his other queries.

The king, seeing that his visitor was destitute of Brahmanic splendour and Vedic knowledge, went on to ask about his country of residence. He asked, "Where do you live, O blessed one, and to what vamsa does your wife belong? Speak truly, do not fear. Trust us without anxiety."

Gautama said, "I belong by birth to the middle country. I live in a village of hunters. I married a Sudra woman, a widow. This is the truth."

Bhishma continues, 'The king then began to reflect as to what he should do, and how he might acquire punya. He thought to himself, "This man is by birth a Brahmana and a friend of the high-souled Rajadharman who has sent him to me. I must do what is agreeable to my beloved friend. He is is my brother, a dear relative and a true friend of my heart.

On this day of this month of Kartika, a thousand of the foremost Brahmanas are to be entertained in my house. This Gautama also shall be entertained with them, and I shall give wealth to him too. This is a sacred day and Gautama has come here to me as a guest. The wealth that is to be given away to the Brahmanas is ready. What is there, then, to think about?"

Even as Virupaksha was pondering this, a thousand learned Brahmanas came to the palace, purified by baths, anointed with sandalwood paste and flowers, attired in long robes of linen. The Rakshasa king received the guests according to the rites laid down in the shastras. At his command, O best of the Bhaaratas, skins were spread out for them for them to sit upon. The royal servants placed mats of kusa grass on the ground.

Those thousand Dvijottamas, having been duly honoured by the king sat down on those kusasanas. The Rakshasa chief ritually worshipped his guests, as decreed by the shastras, with sesame seeds, green blades of grass and water. Those among them who were selected to represent the Viswedevas, the Pitris and the deities of fire, were smeared with sandal-paste and received flowers as well as other kinds of costly offerings. After such worship, every one of them looked as effulgent as the moon in the heavens.

Then bright and polished plates of gold, adorned with engravings, and filled with excellent food prepared with ghee and honey, were laid before those Brahmanas. Every year on the days of full moon of the months of Ashadha and Magha, a large number of Brahmanas would be honoured thus by the Rakshasa chief and fed the rarest delicacies they could desire.

On the day of the full moon in the month of Kartika, after the end of autumn, the king used to give to the Brahmanas diverse wealth—gold, silver, priceless jewels and gems, pearls, magnificent diamonds, lapis lazuli, deer-skins, and hides of the Ranku deer. Indeed, O Bhaarata, having piled up a heap of wealth of many kinds to distribute as Dakshina to his blessed guests, the mighty Virupaksha would say to those Brahmanottamas, "Take from these jewels and gems as much as you wish and can carry away." He also used to urge them, "Take these plates of gold and vessels which you have used for your meal and go your way, O foremost of Brahmanas."

Invited by the high-souled Rakshasa king, those bulls among Brahmanas took as much wealth as each desired. Worshipped with treasures and clothed in excellent robes, those best of Brahmanas were elated. Meanwhile Virupaksha restrained the Rakshasas that had come to his palace from diverse lands and said again to the thousand Brahmanas, "This one day, regenerate ones, have no fear from the Rakshasas here. Sport as you wish, then leave us quickly when your hearts are full."

The Brahmanas then, having taken all they wanted, streamed out of Virupaksha's city with celerity. Losing no time, Gautama also took a

sizeable quantity of gold and went his way. Carrying his burden with difficulty, he reached that same banyan under which he had met the crane. He sat himself down, exhausted and hungry.

While Gautama was resting there, O king, that best of birds Rajadharman came to him. Devoted to his friends, the marvellous krauncha gladdened Gautama by bidding him a warm welcome. Flapping his wings, he fanned his guest to dispel his fatigue. The wise crane worshipped Gautama, and made arrangements for his food.

Having eaten and refreshed himself, Gautama began to think, "Moved by greed and foolishness, I have taken this heavy load of bright gold. I have a long way to travel and no food to eat on my journey. How will I keep myself going?" He thought and thought, but could not devise how he would find any food to eat on his way home. Then, O Naravyaghra, a vile thought struck him, ungrateful as he was: "This prince of cranes, so large and amply fleshed, is here by my side. I will remain here quietly until I bag him, and then leave this spot and travel with great speed.""

CANTO 172

"Bhishma says, 'There, under that majestic banyan tree, the prince of birds had kindled and kept up a fire with high and blazing flames for the warmth and protection of his guest. On one side of the fire, the bird slept trustfully. The ungrateful and evil-souled wretch, with a flaming branch from that very fire, killed his sleeping host. He was delighted at having dispatched the crane, never thinking that he had committed a sin. Peeling off the feathers and skin, he roasted the flesh on the fire. Then, taking the cooked meat up with the gold he had brought, the Brahmana departed quickly from the glade of golden sand and the great nyagrodha tree.

The next day, the Rakshasa king Virupaksha, said to his son, "Alas, my son, I do not see Rajadharman, that best of birds, even today. Every morning he goes to the abode of Brahma to worship the Pitamaha, and never returns home without paying me a visit. Two mornings and two nights have passed without him visiting me and my mind is not at peace. Go and enquire after my friend.

Gautama, who came here, is without Vedic learning and Brahmanic tejas. He has found his way to the abode of my friend. I greatly fear that worst of Brahmanas has slain Rajadharman. I saw through him by the signs he showed of an evil mind and evil ways. Of cruel and grim visage, without compassion, that vile man is like a robber. This Gautama has gone to the abode of my friend, and my heart has grown very anxious. Fly, my son, to

Rajadharman's home and find out whether that pure-souled bird is still alive. Hurry!"

The prince, accompanied by other Rakshasas, set forth with great speed and, at the foot of the banyan, beheld the remains of Rajadharman. Sobbing with grief, the son of the Rakshasa king ran as fast as he could to seize Gautama. The Rakshasas did not have to go far before they caught the Brahmana and found on him the remains of Rajadharman, without wings, bones and feet. The Rakshasas hastened to Meruvraja with their captive. They showed the king the mutilated body of Rajadharman, and thrust the ungrateful sinner down at his feet.

Seeing the remains of his friend, the king, with his counsellors and priest, began to weep aloud. Indeed, the voices of lamentation were heard in his home and in the entire city of the Rakshasa king, as men, women, and children were plunged in grief. The king then said to his son, "Let this sinful wretch be slain, and let these Rakshasas here feast on his flesh. He is of sinful deeds, sinful habits, sinful soul, and inured to sin. You must kill this brute yourself."

Though commanded by their king, many fearsome Rakshasas of terrible prowess declared their unwillingness to eat the flesh of that sinner. Indeed, those wanderers of the night said to the king, "Let this vilest of men be given away to the cannibals of the forest." Bending their heads to their king, they told him, "It does not become you to give us this sinful wretch for our food." The king said, "Tathaastu! Let this ungrateful creature then be given to the man-eating brigands without delay."

The Rakshasas, armed with lances and battle-axes, hacked that vile wretch into pieces and gave his flesh away to the cannibals. However, even they refused to eat the flesh of that ungrateful man. For one who slays a Brahmana, drinks alcohol, who steals, or who has fallen away from a vow, there is expiation, O Rajan, but there is none for an ingrate. The cruel and heinous man who injures a friend will neither be eaten even by savage cannibals, nor even by the worms that feed on carrion.'"

CANTO 173

"Bhishma says, 'The Rakshasa king then had a funeral pyre made for the prince of cranes and adorned it with jewels, gems, perfumes and costly robes. Setting the body of the prince of birds upon it, the mighty chief of the Rakshasas had the obsequial rites of his friend performed according to the law.

Just then, the auspicious Devi Surabhi, the celestial cow and daughter of the sage Daksha, appeared in the sky above the place where the pyre had been set up. Her breasts were full of milk. From her mouth, O sinless king, froth mixed with milk fell upon Rajadharman's funeral pyre. At this, the prince of cranes revived and was whole again. Rising, he approached his friend, the king of the Rakshasas. The chief of the celestials himself also appeared in the city of Virupaksha. Indra said to the Rakshasa king, "How fortunate it is that you have revived the prince of cranes!" The lord of the Devas narrated to Virupaksha the story of the curse that Brahma had called upon Rajadharman, the best of birds.

Indra said, "Once upon a time, Rajan, this prince of cranes absented himself from Brahmaloka when his attendance was expected. In wrath the Pitamaha said, 'Since this vile krauncha has not presented himself today in my assembly, that wicked one will not die quickly so as to be able to leave the earth.' Because of the curse of Brahma, the prince of cranes, though slain by Gautama, has come back to life, through the virtue of the nectar with which his body was drenched."

After Indra had fallen silent, Rajadharman, bowing to the chief of the celestials, said, "O first of devas, if your heart is inclined graciously towards me, let my dear friend Gautama be restored to life!"

At this, O Narottama, Vasava sprinkled nectar over Gautama and restored him to life. Rajadharman, the prince of cranes, approached his friend Gautama, who still bore on his shoulders the load of gold that he had got from the king of the Rakshasas, embraced him joyfully and, dismissing the sinful Gautama, with his wealth, returned to his own home.

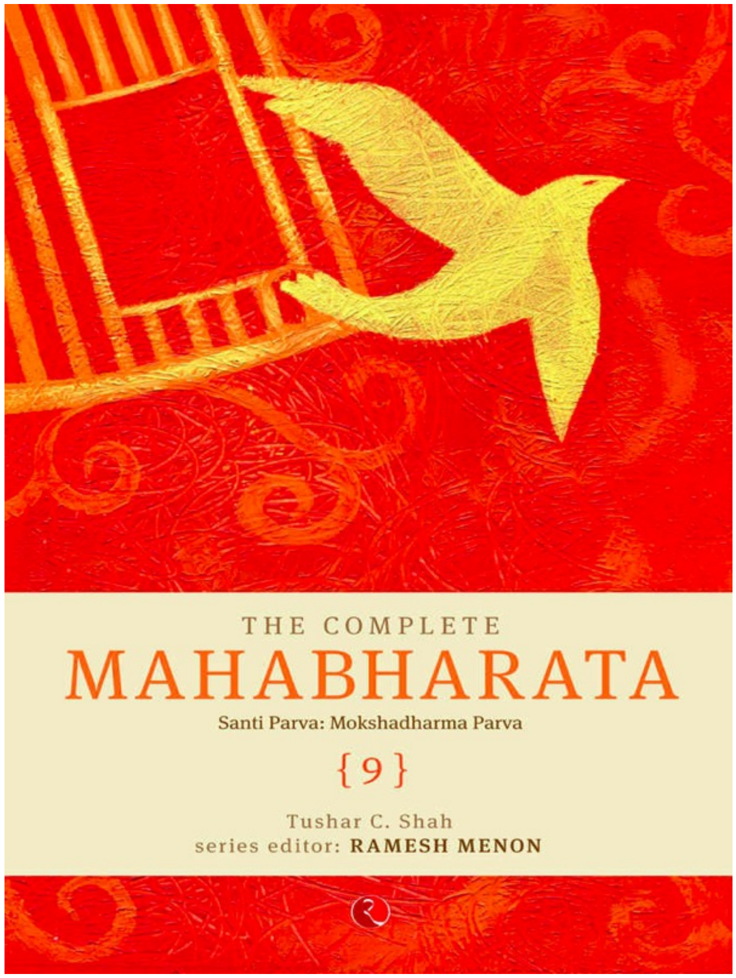
The next day, at the appointed time, he went to the Pitamaha, who honoured the high-souled bird with such attentions as are shown to a cherished guest. Gautama, too, returned to his home in the village of the hunters and sired many sinful children upon his Sudra wife. A dire curse was pronounced on him by the gods, that the ungrateful sinner should sink into a terrible hell for many years along with his children and wife.

This is the story that Narada once told me, Yudhishtira, and, recollecting the incidents of this weighty narrative, O Bharatarishabha, I have told you all its details. Whence can an ungrateful person derive repute? Where is his place? Whence can he derive happiness? An ingrate does not deserve to be trusted and can never escape a dire fate. He who injures a friend sinks into terrible and everlasting hell.

Everyone should be appreciative of friends and try to help them. Everything can be obtained from friends, honours and all kinds of objects of enjoyment. Through their efforts, one can escape from various kinds of danger and distress. A wise person should distinguish his friend with his best attentions. He should shun ungrateful men, for the shameless and sinful person who mistreats his friends is a wretch of his varna and the vilest of creatures.

I have thus told you, Yudhishtira, what the characteristics of that sinner are who is tainted by ingratitude and who harms his friend. What else do you want to hear?'"

Vaisampayana said, "O Janamejaya, hearing these words spoken by Bhishma, Yudhishtira is deeply gratified."


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Tushar C. Shah

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In memory of my beloved parents,
Mrs Pramodini C. Shah
and
Mr Chimanlal V. Shah.

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Mokshadharma Parva

CANTO 174

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha, you have spoken of the auspicious karma to be performed by men in distress, with regard to the Rajadharma, the dharma of kings. Now tell me the main duties of the four asramas, the stages of life.'

Bhishma says, 'Dharma has many doors. The observance of dharma can never be in vain. Duties or kartavyas have been laid down for every asrama of life. The fruits of these karmas are invisible here, being attained in the next world. The fruits, however, of tapasya directed towards realising the Atman are obtained in this world.

Whatever be the object to which one devotes oneself, that object, O Bhaarata, and nothing else, appears to one as the highest of acquisitions fraught with the greatest of blessings. When one reflects properly and one's heart is purified by such dhyana, one knows that the things of this world are as straw. Beyond doubt, one is then freed from attachment to all things mundane. When the flawed world, O Yudhishtira, is an illusion, every man of intelligence should surely strive for the emancipation of his Soul.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitama, through what means should one kill one's grief when one loses one's wealth, or when one's wife, son, or father, dies.'

Bhishma says, 'When one's wealth is lost, or one's wife, son or father dies, one says to oneself "Alas, this is a great sorrow!" But then one should, through dhyana, seek to quell that sorrow. The old story is told of the

discourse that a Brahmana friend of his, coming to Senajit's court, made to that king.

Seeing the king burning with sorrow because of the death of his son, the Brahmana said to the troubled sovereign, "Why are you so stricken? You have no intelligence. Yourself an object of grief, why do you grieve for others? Just some few days hence, others will grieve for you, and in their turn, others will grieve for them. You, me, and all who wait upon you, O king, shall all return to that place from where all of us have come."

Senajit said, "What is that buddhi, what is that tapasya, what is that dhyana, O Tapodhana, what is that gyana, and what is that vigyana, by acquiring which you do not yield to sorrow?"

The Brahmana said, "Behold, as a result of their various deeds, their karma, all creatures, the superior, the middling, and the inferior, are entangled in grief. I do not regard my own body to be mine; I regard the whole world as being mine. I again think that all this that I see is as much mine as it belongs to others. Because of this firm conviction, grief cannot approach me. Having acquired this understanding, I do not yield either to joy or to sorrow. As two pieces of driftwood floating on the ocean come together momentarily and again separate—even such is the union of living creatures in this world.

Sons, grandsons, relatives and dependants are all like this. One should never feel attachment or indeed affection for them, for separation from them is certain. Your son came from an invisible realm; he has returned thence. He did not know you and you did not know him. Who are you and for whom do you grieve? Grief arises from the sickness created by desire. Happiness again results from the disease of desire being cured. From joy also comes sorrow, and thus sorrow arises repeatedly. Sorrow follows joy, inevitably, and joy comes after sorrow. The joys and sorrows of human beings revolve on a wheel.

After joy, sorrow has come to you, and in time, you will again have happiness. No one suffers sorrow for ever, and no one enjoys happiness forever. The body is the refuge of both sorrow and happiness.

Whatever karma an embodied creature does with his body, he has to reap the fruit of those deeds in the body. Life begins with the coming into existence of the body. The two exist together, and the two perish together.

Men of tainted Souls, bound to things worldly by various bonds, meet with death like sandbanks dissolving in water. Woes of diverse kinds, born

of ignorance, act like grinders of oil-seeds, to punish all creatures for their attachments. These sorrows press them like oil-seeds in the great oil-press of the circle of births and rebirths. For the sake of his wife and others, a man commits many sins, but he suffers alone for them both in this and the next world. Attached to children, wives and relatives, all sink in the sea of grief, even like wild elephants in a marsh when their strength is gone. Indeed, upon the loss of wealth or a son or relatives, man suffers great distress; he burns with grief like a forest fire.

All this joy and grief, existence and non-existence, depends on destiny. One having friends as one destitute of friends, one having enemies as one without foes, one having wisdom as one of no wisdom—every one of these finds happiness through destiny.

Friends are not the cause of one's happiness. Enemies are not the cause of one's misery. Wisdom is not competent to bring an accession to wealth, nor is wealth able to bring an accession to joy. Intelligence is not the cause of wealth, nor is stupidity the cause of penury. Only he that is possessed of wisdom, and none else, understands the order of the world. Amongst the intelligent, the heroic, the foolish, the cowardly, the learned, the weak or the strong, happiness comes to him for whom it is ordained. Among the calf, the cowherd that owns her, and the thief, the cow belongs to him who drinks her milk.

They whose minds are quiescent, and they who have attained that state which lies beyond the sphere of the intellect, succeed in finding bliss. Only they that are between these two conditions suffer.

The wise delight in the two extremes but not in the states that are in between. The sages have said that the attainment of any of these two extremes constitutes happiness. Suffering consists of the states that are between the two.

They who have succeeded in attaining true felicity, which samadhi alone can confer, and who have become free from the pleasures and pains of this world, and who are without envy, are never agitated by either the acquisition of wealth or its loss. They who have not succeeded in acquiring the intelligence which leads to true bliss, but who have transcended folly and ignorance through a knowledge of the shastras, give way to excessive joy and excessive sorrow. Men without all notions of right or wrong, insensate with pride and with success over others, yield to transports of delight like the gods in heaven.

Such transport must surely end in misery. Idleness is misery; while genius in action is the cause of true joy. Affluence and prosperity dwell in one possessed of intelligence, but not in one that is idle. Be it happiness or be it sorrow, be it agreeable or be it disagreeable, what comes to one should be enjoyed or endured with an unconquered heart. Every day a thousand occasions for grief, and a hundred occasions for fear assail the man of ignorance and folly but not the man of wisdom. Sorrow can never touch the intelligent man who has acquired wisdom, who is mindful of the instructions of his elders and superiors, who is without envy, and who is self-restrained. Relying upon such wisdom, and protecting his heart from the influence of desire and the passions, should the man of wisdom live in this world. Sorrow cannot touch him who knows that Supreme Self, the Paramatman from which everything springs and into which everything disappears.

The very root of that for which grief is felt, or by which one is impelled to exertion, should be removed, even if it be a part of one's body. That object, whatever it may be, for which the idea of the self and ego is cherished, becomes a source of grief and torment.

Whatever objects, amongst things that are desired, are relinquished become sources of happiness. The man that pursues objects of desire meets with destruction in the course of his pursuit. Neither the happiness that is derived from a gratification of the senses nor that great rapture, which one may enjoy in swarga, approaches to even a sixteenth part of the bliss which arises from the destruction of all desire.

The deeds of a former life, right or wrong, visit, with their consequences, the wise and the foolish, the brave and the timid. It is even so that joy and sorrow, the agreeable and the disagreeable, continually revolve, as on a wheel, among living creatures. Relying on an understanding of this, the man of intelligence and wisdom lives at ease. A man should disregard all his desires, and never allow his anger to get the better of him. This anger springs up in the heart and grows there into vigour and luxuriance. This wrath that dwells in the bodies of men and is born in their minds is spoken of by the wise as death.

When a man succeeds in withdrawing all his desires like a tortoise withdrawing all its limbs, then his Soul, which is self-luminous, succeeds in looking into itself.

That object, whatever it may be, for which the idea of *mine* is nourished becomes a source of grief and suffering.

When a man himself feels no fear, and is feared by no one, when he nurtures no desire and no aversion, he attains the state of Brahman.

Casting off both truth and falsehood, grief and joy, fear and courage, the agreeable and the disagreeable, you can become a tranquil Soul. When a man abstains from doing wrong to any creature, in thought, word or deed, he attains the state of Brahman. True happiness is his who can cast off that thirst which the misguided cannot renounce; he finds bliss, which does not decay, and leaves desire that is a fatal sickness.

In this regard, O king, listen to what Pingala said about the manner in which she acquired eternal punya even at a most unfavourable time. A fallen woman, Pingala, having gone to the place of an assignation, was denied the company of her lover through an accident. Even at that time of great anguish, she succeeded in acquiring peace.

Pingala said, 'Alas, I have lived for long years and many lives, all the while overcome by frenzy, by the very side of that self in whom there is nothing but peace. Death has been at my door, yet until now I did not approach that essence of purity. Now I will cover this house of one column and nine doors with true knowledge. What woman is there that regards that Paramatman as her beloved lord, even when he comes near?

I am now awake. I have been roused from the sleep of ignorance. I am no longer influenced by desire. Human lovers, who are embodied forms of hell, will no longer deceive me by approaching me lustfully. Evil produces good through destiny or the deeds of a former life. Awakened now from the sleep of ignorance, I have discarded all desire for worldly things. I have acquired complete mastery over my senses. One freed from desire and hope rests in bliss. Freedom from every hope and desire is felicity. Having driven off desire and hope, this Pingala now rests in that freedom and bliss.' Thus spoke the Brahmana to King Senajit."

Bhishma continues, 'Convinced with this and other wisdom told him by the learned Brahmana, King Senajit cast off his grief, experienced delight again and became truly happy.'

CANTO 175

Yudhishtira says, 'Time, which destroys every created thing, passes swiftly. Tell me, O Pitama, what is that final human goal which should be sought?'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard, O king, the old itihasa of a discourse between a father and his son is often told. A certain Brahmana, who was devoted to the study of the Vedas, had a most intelligent son who was called Medhavin. One day, Medhavin, who knew the truths of the Mokshadharma, the religion of emancipation, as also the affairs of the world, spoke to his father thus.

The son said, "What should a wise man do, O father, seeing that human life passes away so very quickly? Tell me the successive course of duties that one should perform, as well as the fruits of each. Having listened to you, I wish to observe those karmas."

The father said, "O son, observing brahmacharya, a man should first study the Vedas. He should then wish for children and enter into the grihastasrama to save his ancestors. Setting up his fire next, he should seek to perform the prescribed sacrifices with their due rites. At last, he should enter the forest as a vanaprastha and devote himself to dhyana and tapasya."

The son said, "When the world is assailed on all sides, and when such irresistible things of deathly consequences fall upon it, how can you say this so calmly?"

His sire said, “How is the world assailed? What is that by which it is shrouded? What, again, are those irresistible things of mortal consequences that fall upon it? Why do you frighten me so?”

The son said, “Death is that by which the world is assailed. Decay encompasses it. The inexorable things that come and go are the days and nights, which continually lessen human life. When I know that death tarries for none but approaches every creature inexorably, how can I waste my time without covering myself in the kavacha of knowledge?

When each night lessens the allotted span of one’s life, the man of wisdom should regard the day to be fruitless. When death stalks ever closer, who is there that would, being like a fish in shallow water, feel happy? Death comes to a man before his desires have been gratified. Death snatches away a man while he is plucking flowers and when his heart is otherwise set, ah, death comes like a tigress bearing away a ram.

This very day, accomplish that which is for your good. Let not this death come to you. Death snatches away his victims before their deeds are accomplished. The actions of tomorrow should be done today, those of the afternoon in the forenoon. Death does not wait to see whether the tasks of its victim have all been achieved. Who knows that death will not come to him even today?

In one’s very prime, one should betake oneself to the practice of dharma. Life is transitory and brief. If virtue is practiced, fame here and felicity hereafter will be the consequences. Overwhelmed by ignorance, one is ready to exert oneself for sons and wives. Through virtuous or vicious acts, one aggrandises them. Like a tiger bearing away a sleeping deer, death snatches away the man addicted to the gratification of desire and engaged in the enjoyment of his wives, sons, his wealth and animals. Before he has been able to pluck the flowers on which he has set his heart, before he has gratified his desires, death bears him away in its jaws.

Death overpowers a man while he is still in the midst of the hollow pleasure that accrues from the gratification of desire, and while still thinking, ‘This has been done; this is to be done; this has been half-done.’ Death bears away the man, whatever his profession, attached to his field, his shop or his home, before he has obtained the fruit of his actions. Death bears away the weak, the strong, the brave, the timid, the foolish and the learned, before any of these enjoys the fruits of his work. When death,

decrepitude, disease and sorrow arising from diverse causes, all dwell in your body, how is it that you live as if you are perfectly hale?

As soon as a creature is born, decay and death pursue him to fetch his end. All existent things, mobile and immobile—chala and achala—are affected by these two. The attachment that one feels for villages and towns, in the midst of fellowmen, is the very maw of death. The forest, on the other hand, is the fold within which the senses may be penned. This is what the srutis declare. The attachment a man feels towards living in a village or town in the midst of men is like a rope that binds him fast. They that are good break that rope and attain mukti, while they that are wicked do not succeed in breaking the bonds of attachment.

He, who never injures living creatures by thought, word or deed, is never injured by the agencies that destroy life and property. Nothing can resist the messengers of death when they advance other than truth, which devours illusion and falsehood. In truth is immortality. For these reasons one should practice the Satyavrata, the vow of truth; one should devote oneself to a union with truth; one should accept truth for one's Veda; and restraining one's senses, one should vanquish death with truth.

Both immortality and death are planted in the body. One comes to death through ignorance and the loss of judgement; while immortality is achieved through truth. I will, therefore, abstain from injury and seek to achieve truth, and transgressing the sway of desire and wrath, regard pleasure and pain with an equal eye and, attaining peace, avoid death like an immortal.

Upon the advent of Uttarayana, when the sun will turn towards his northern course, restraining my senses, I will set myself to the performance of the Santi-yagna, the Brahma-yagna, the Manasa-yagna and the Karma-yagna. How can one like me worship his maker with animal sacrifices involving cruelty, or sacrifices of the body, such as only Pisachas, demons, can perform and such as yield fruit that are transitory?

That man whose words, thoughts, penances, renunciation and yoga dhyana, all rest upon Brahman, succeeds in earning the highest good. There is no eye that is equal to the eye of knowledge. There is no penance like that involved in truth. There is no sorrow equal to attachment. There is no happiness like renunciation. I have sprung from Brahman, through Brahman. I will devote myself to Brahman, even though I am childless. I shall return to Brahman. I do not need a son to save me.

A Brahmana can have no wealth comparable to the state of ekanta, being alone, through which he can regard everything with an equal eye, practice truthfulness, good conduct, patience, ahimsa, simplicity and avoid all rituals and visible sacrifices. What use have you, O Brahmana, of wealth or kinsmen and relatives, of wives, when you will have to die? Seek your Soul, which is concealed in a cave deep within you. Where are your grandsires now, and where your sire?"'

Bhishma continues, 'Do you also, O king, conduct yourself in the way in which the father in this story does, devoting himself to the Satyavrata, after having listened to his son.'

CANTO 176

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, whence and how joy and sorrow come to the rich, as also the poor, who live in the observance of different dharma and karma.'

Bhishma continues, 'Listen to the ancient tale of what was declared by Sampaka who had gained peace and achieved mukti for himself. Once, a Brahmana, rendered miserable by a bad wife, tattered clothes, and hunger, and living in the observance of the vow of renunciation, said this to me:

"Diverse kinds of sorrow and happiness overtake everyone, from the day of their birth into this world. If he could ascribe them to the action of destiny, he would not then feel either glad when happiness came or miserable when sorrow overtook him. Even though your mind is divested of desire, you bear a heavy burden. You do not seek to achieve moksha. Are you not successful in controlling your mind?

If you renounce home and possessions, you will taste true happiness. A person divested of everything, sleeps in happiness, and wakes in happiness. Complete poverty in this world is happiness. It is a great regimen; it is the source of blessings; it is freedom from danger. This foe-less path cannot be attained by those that cherish desire, and is easily attained by those that are free from desire. Casting my eyes on every part of the three worlds, I do not behold anyone who is equal to a poor man of pure conduct and without attachment to worldly things.

I weighed poverty and sovereignty in a balance. Poverty weighed heavier than sovereignty and seemed to possess greater punya. Between poverty and sovereignty there is this great distinction—that the sovereign, possessed of every affluence, is always agitated by anxiety and seems to live in the very jaws of death. However, the poor man, because of being without any wealth has freed himself from hope, and emancipated himself. Neither fire, nor foe, nor death nor robbers can get the better of him. The very gods applaud such a man who wanders the world at his sweet will, who lies down on bare ground with his arm for a pillow, and who is possessed of peace.

Affected by anger and lust, the man of affluence is stained by a wicked heart. He casts oblique glances and makes dry speeches. He becomes sinful, and his face is always darkened by frowns. Biting his lips, and excited with anger, he utters harsh and cruel words. If such a man desires to even make a gift of the whole world, who would like even to look at him?

Constant companionship with prosperity stupefies a person of weak judgement; why, it drives out his judgement like the wind blowing away autumn clouds. Companionship with prosperity induces him to think *I am handsome. I am rich. I am high-born. I meet with success in whatever I undertake. I am not an ordinary man!* These three intoxicate his very heart. With his heart deeply attached to worldly possessions, he wastes the wealth hoarded by his ancestors. Reduced to want, he then regards the appropriation of other people's wealth as being blameless. At this stage, when he transgresses all bounds of dharma and violates other men to appropriate the possessions of others from every side, the rulers of men attack him like hunters a deer in the forest. Such a man is then overwhelmed by many afflictions that originate in fire and weapons. Therefore, disregarding all worldly propensities, such as your desire for wives and children, together with all fleeting delusions, even as the body itself, one should, helped by one's intelligence, use the appropriate specifics to cure those painful afflictions.

Without renunciation, one can never attain happiness. Without vairagya one can never acquire what is one's highest good. Without renunciation, one can never sleep at ease. Therefore, renouncing everything, make happiness your own."

All this was told to me once in Hastinapura by a Brahmana about what Sampaka had sung in olden days. For this reason, I regard renunciation to

be the foremost of all things.’

CANTO 177

Yudhishtira says, 'If anyone who wants to give dana, dakshina or perform yagnas fails to find the necessary wealth for these, and thirst for wealth overwhelms him, what must he do?'

Bhishma says, 'He that regards all things, joy and sorrow, honour and insult, with an equal eye, who never exerts himself to gratify his desire for earthly possessions, who is always truthful in speech, who is free from all kinds of attachment, and who has no desire for action, is, O Bhaarata, a happy man. These five, the ancients say, are the means for the acquisition of perfect peace, of moksha. These are called swarga. These are the sanatana dharma, the true religion. These constitute the highest happiness.

Yudhishtira, hear the old story and song of Manki in this regard, when he found mukti! Desirous of wealth, Manki found that he was repeatedly doomed to disappointments. At last, selling a small remnant of his property he bought a pair of young bulls and a yoke to train them to plough the earth. One day, the two bulls were taken out to the fields. At the sight of a great camel that lay supine on the road, the bulls bolted towards the camel, and fell upon its neck. Enraged at this, the great camel sprang up and ran, carrying away the two helpless young bulls dangling on either side of its neck.

Seeing his bulls borne away by the mighty camel, and seeing that they were on the very point of death, Manki cried, "If wealth be not ordained by destiny, it can never be acquired by even a clever man exerting himself with

attention and confidence, and accomplishing with skill all that is needed towards that end. Before this, I have, through diverse means and with devotion, endeavoured to earn wealth. Ah, behold the misfortune brought by destiny to the property I had. My bulls are borne away, rising and falling, as the camel runs an uneven course. Alas, my precious bulls dangle on the camel's neck like a couple of gemstones.

This is surely the result of destiny. Exertion is futile against fate. Else, even if effort were admitted as being an agent in yielding fruit, a deeper investigation would discover destiny to be at its source. So, the man who wants happiness should renounce all attachment. The man without attachments or desires can sleep peacefully."

That was well said by Suka while going into the great forest from his father's asrama, renouncing everything.

Amongst these two, the one who gains the fruition of all his wishes, and the one who casts off every wish, the second, who renounces all, is superior to the first, even if the first acquires the fruition of all his desires, which would then multiply.

No one can ever attain the end of desire. Only he that is destitute of knowledge and judgement feels avid to protect his body and life. Forbear from every desire for action. O my Soul, which is possessed by lust, adopt serenity by freeing yourself from all attachments. Repeatedly, you have been deceived by desire and hope. How is it that you still do not free yourself from attachment? If I am not one that deserves destruction at your hands, if I am one with whom you should sport in delight, then, O my wealth-coveting Soul, do not induce me towards greed. You have repeatedly lost your hoarded wealth. O my wealth-coveting and foolish Soul, when will you succeed in freeing yourself from the desire for wealth?

Ah, shame on my foolishness! I have become a toy of yours. It is thus that one becomes a slave of others. No one born on earth did ever attain the end of desire, and no one that will be born will succeed in attaining it. Casting off all action, I have at last been roused from sleep. I am now awake. Without doubt, O desire, your heart is as hard as adamant, since though afflicted by a hundred distresses, you do not shatter in a hundred pieces. I know you, O want, and all those things that are dear to you. By not seeking what is dear to you, I shall know joy in my own self. O desire, I know your root. You spring from will. I will, therefore, avoid will and effort, and you will be destroyed along with all your roots.

The want for wealth can never fetch real happiness. If acquired, great is the anxiety that the acquirer feels. If lost after acquisition, that is felt as death. Lastly, regarding acquisition itself, it is so uncertain. Wealth cannot be got by even the surrender of one's person. What can be more painful than this? When acquired, one is never satisfied with its measure, but one continues to seek more of it. Like the sweet water of the Ganga, wealth only increases one's hankering. It has been my destruction, and I am now awakened. Do you, O desire, leave me. Let the need, which has taken refuge in this my body, this compound of five elements, go wherever it chooses and live happily wherever it likes. You all that are not of the Soul, I have no joy in you, for you follow the lead of desire and lust.

Abandoning all of you, I will take refuge in the quality of goodness, which is sattva. Beholding all creatures in my own body and my own mind, and devoting my reason to yoga, my life to the teachings of the wise, and my Soul to Brahman, I will rove happily through the world, without attachment and without losses or disasters of any kind visiting me, so that you, O desire, O moha, may never again plunge me into such sorrows. If I continue to be agitated by you, O want, I shall necessarily be without a path by which to effect my deliverance. You, O desire, are always the progenitor of thirst, of grief, fatigue and toil. I think the grief that one feels at the loss of wealth is sharp and keen, and far greater than any other. Relatives and friends disregard him that has lost his wealth.

With various kinds of humiliation that number in their thousands, there are many faults in property that are more painful still. On the other hand, the very small happiness that dwells in wealth is always mingled with pain and sorrow. Robbers kill, in the sight of all, the man who has wealth, or afflict him with various kinds of threats and danger, always filling him with dread. At last, after a long time, I have understood that the desire for wealth is fraught only with sorrow.

Whatever the object, O desire, upon which you set your heart, you force me to pursue it. You are without discernment or judgement. You are a fool. You are difficult to satisfy; indeed, you can never be gratified. You burn like fire, always demanding fresh fuel. You do not ask, while pursuing an object, whether it is easy or difficult to attain. You cannot be filled to the brim, being even like the patalas. You wish only to plunge me into sorrow.

From this day, O desire, I cannot live with you! I who felt despair once, at the loss of my property, have now attained the high state of perfect

freedom from attachment. At this moment, I no longer think of you and your train. I once felt great misery on your account. I do not now regard myself as being destitute of intelligence. Having adopted renunciation in consequence of the loss of my property, I can now rest, freed from every kind of fever. I cast you off, O desire, with all the passions of my heart. You will not again dwell with me or sport with me. I shall forgive them that will slander or speak ill of me. I shall not injure even when injured. If, from aversion, anyone speaks harshly of me, disregarding what they say, I will address them agreeably. In contentment of heart and with all my senses at ease, I will always live upon what fate gives me. I shall not contribute to the gratification of the wishes entertained by you that are my enemy.

Freedom from attachment, emancipation from desire; contentment, tranquillity, truth, self-restraint, forgiveness and universal compassion are the qualities that have now come to me. Therefore, let desire, greed, thirst and miserliness avoid me. I have now adopted the path of dharma. Having cast off desire and greed, great now is the joy surging in my heart. I will no longer yield to the influence of desire and no longer suffer like a man with an impure Soul. One is certain to obtain happiness according to the measure of the desires he is able to cast off. Truly, he who yields himself up to desire always suffers. Whatever passions linked to want are cast off by a man, all pertain to the Rajoguna, the quality of passion.

Sorrow, shamelessness and discontent all arise from desire and wealth. Like a man plunging in the hot summer into a cool lake, I have now entered into Brahman. I have abjured work. I have freed myself from grief. Pure happiness has now come to me. The felicity that results from the satisfaction of desire, or that other purer felicity which one enjoys in heaven, does not come to even a sixteenth part of that which arises upon the abandonment of all kinds of thirst. Killing the very principle of desire, which along with the body makes an aggregate of seven, and which is a bitter enemy, I have entered the immortal city of Brahman and shall pass my days there in happiness like a king!"

Relying upon such wisdom, Manki freed himself from attachments, casting off all desires and attaining Brahman, that abode of the ultimate felicity. Because of the loss of his two bulls, Manki attained immortality. Indeed, because he cut the very roots of desire, he attained perfect bliss.'

CANTO 178

Bhishma continues, 'In this matter, the old tale of the verses sung by Janaka, king of the Videhas, who had attained mukti, is also told. What the monarch said was, "Unlimited is my wealth. At the same time I have nothing, and if the whole of my kingdom, Mithila, be consumed in a conflagration, I shall incur no loss." The great Bodhya also spoke about freedom from attachments. Listen to what he said, Yudhishtira.

Once on a time, Yayati, the royal son of Nahusha, questioned the Rishi Bodhya who had, through the abandonment of desire, attained peace and had an intimate knowledge of the scriptures. The monarch said, "O you of great wisdom, instruct me about peace and emancipation. What is that intellect, relying on which, you succeed in wandering over the world in serenity and disengaged from all karma?"

Bodhya said, "I conduct myself according to the instructions of others but never instruct others myself. I will, however, mention the indications of those teachings. You may glean their spirit through reflection. My six preceptors are Pingala, the osprey, the snake, the bee in the forest, the maker of arrows and the maiden.

Hope is very potent in agitating the heart, O king. Freedom from hope is high felicity. Reducing hope to an absence of expectation, Pingala sleeps in peace. Beholding an osprey with meat in his beak, others that have not found any meat attack and destroy him. A certain osprey, by altogether abstaining from meat found felicity. To build a house for one's own self

produces sorrow and not happiness. The snake, taking up his dwelling in another creature's abode, lives in peace. Betaking themselves to mendicancy, ascetics live happily, without being injured by any creature, even like bees in the forest. A certain maker of arrows, while employed at his work, was so deeply attentive to it that he did not notice the king who passed by his side. When many are together, dispute ensues. Even when two live together, they are sure to converse. I, however, wander alone like the bracelet made of seashells on the wrist of the maiden in the story."

CANTO 179

Yudhishtira says, 'O you who know the ways of men, tell me with what conduct a man may succeed in this world, and be freed from grief. How also should a man conduct himself in this world so that he may attain an excellent end?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story of the discourse between Prahlada and the sage Ajagara. Once on a time, King Prahlada of great intelligence questioned a wandering Brahmana of untold wisdom, and a purified and tranquil Soul.

Prahlada said, "Freed from desire, with a cleansed Soul, possessed of humility and self-restraint, without desire for action, free from malice, agreeable in speech, endowed with dignity, intelligence and wisdom, you live in simplicity like a child. You never covet any kind of gain, and never grieve over any kind of loss. You are always contented, O Brahmana, and do not seem to regard anything in the world. While other men are being borne away upon the currents of desire and passion, you are perfectly indifferent to everything that has to do with dharma, artha and kama. You seem to be in a state of quietude that can never be disturbed. Disregarding all objects of the senses, you move about like an emancipated Soul, only witnessing all things but never taking part in any. What, O Muni, is your wisdom, what your learning, and what your conduct, because of which this becomes possible for you? Tell me this, if, O Brahmana, you think it will do me good."

The intelligent Brahmana, who knew well the dharma of the world, answered Prahlada in sweet words of grave import. “O king, the origin of creatures, their growth, decay and death, are traceable to no intelligible cause. It is for this that I do not indulge in either joy or sorrow. All the propensities that exist in the universe are seen to flow from the very natures of the creatures to which they inhere. All things in the universe depend on their respective natures. Hence, I am not delighted with anything. O Prahlada, all kinds of union have an inherent aptitude for disunion. All acquisitions are certain to end in loss. Hence, I never set my heart upon acquiring any object.

All things possessed of attributes are certain to meet with death. What then remains for one like me to do, who knows both the origin and the end of things? Of all things, large or small, born in the ocean of waters, the end I see. I see also the death, which is manifest, O King of Asuras, of all things, chala and achala, that belong to the earth. Best of Danavas, death comes in season to even the mightiest of winged creatures that range the sky. I see again that the luminous bodies, large and small, which move in the firmament, fall and are extinguished when their time comes.

Beholding all created things possessed of knowledge to be liable to death, and thinking all things to possess the same nature, I sleep in peace without any anxiety of heart. If I find without exertion a copious repast, I do not scruple to enjoy it. On the other hand, I pass many days together without eating anything. Sometimes people feed me with costly viands in profusion, at times with a small quantity, at others with even less, and sometimes I get no food whatever. I sometimes eat only a portion of a single grain, at times the dry sesame cakes from which the oil has been pressed out and I sometimes eat rice and other food of the richest kind.

At times, I sleep on an elevated bedstead of the most luxurious kind. At others, I sleep on bare ground. Sometimes my bed is made within a fine palace or mansion; at others in the wilderness. I am at times clad in rags, at other times in sackcloth, at yet others in raiment of fine texture, sometimes in deerskin, sometimes in robes of the costliest fabric. I never reject such enjoyments as are consistent with dharma and as I come by without effort. I do not, at the same time, strive to attain such objects as are difficult of acquisition.

The rigid vrata I have adopted is called Ajagara. That vow can secure immortality. It is auspicious and griefless. It is incomparable and pure. It is

consistent with the counsels of the wise. It is disapproved of by men of foolish intellects, who can never follow it. With a pure heart, I conduct myself according to it. My mind naturally never swerves from this vow. I have not swerved from the practices of my order. I am abstemious in everything.

I know the past and the present. Divested of fear, wrath and greed, and errors of judgement, I follow this vow with a pure heart. There are no restrictions in respect of food and drink and other objects of enjoyment for one practising this vow. As everything is dependent on destiny, there is no observance of considerations of time and place for one like me. The vow I follow contributes to true happiness of the heart. Those that are evil never observe it. I follow it with a pure mind.

Induced by greed, men pursue different kinds of wealth. If thwarted in the pursuit, they are plunged in sorrow. Reflecting properly upon all this with my intelligence, which has penetrated the truths of things, I follow this vow with a pure heart.

I have seen persons in distress seeking, for the acquisition of wealth, the shelter of men, good and bad. Devoted to serenity, and with my passions under control, I follow my vrata with a pure heart.

Seeing, with the help of truth, that joy and sorrow, gain and loss, attachment and renunciation, life and death, are all ordained by destiny, I follow this vow with a pure heart.

Rid of fear, attachment, errors of judgement and pride, imbued with wisdom, intelligence, intellect, and devoted to calm, and hearing that large snakes, without moving, enjoy the fruit that comes to them of itself, I follow their practice with a pure heart.

Without restrictions of any kind in respect of food and where I sleep, endowed by my very nature with self-restraint, abstemiousness, pure vows, truth and purity of conduct, and without any desire to store, for future use, the rewards of action, I follow, with a delighted and pure heart, this vow.

All causes of sorrow have fled from me once I had driven out desire. Having received an accession to light, I follow this vow with a pure heart to control my Soul which is thirsty and unrestrained, yet with proper culture, is able to depend upon itself without needing external objects to keep it engaged. Without paying any heed to the concerns towards which my heart, mind and words would like to lead me, and marking that the happiness

connected with these is both difficult of acquisition and fleeting in duration, I follow this vow with a pure heart.

Learned men possessed of great intelligence, wanting to proclaim their own feats, while establishing their own theories and censuring those of others, have said this and that on a subject which can never be settled by disputation. Foolish men fail to understand this vrata in a proper light. I, however, see it as destructive of ignorance. Regarding it also as being full of immortality and as a remedy against diverse kinds of evil, I wander among men, having subdued all faults and having freed myself from every thirst."

That Mahatman who, having freed himself from attachments and divested himself of fear, greed, foolishness and anger, follows this Ajagara vrata, or indulges in this sport, as it might be called, certainly succeeds in passing his days in great delight.'

CANTO 180

Yudhishtira says, ‘Which of these, O Bhishma, kinsmen, actions, wealth or wisdom should be the refuge of a man? Answer me this.’

Bhishma says, ‘Wisdom is the refuge of creatures. Wisdom is regarded as the highest of acquisitions. Wisdom is the highest felicity in the world. Wisdom is heaven in the estimation of the good and virtuous. It was through wisdom that Bali, Prahlada, Namuchi and Manki, when they lost their earthly prosperity, succeeded in acquiring felicity. What is there that is superior to wisdom? In this regard, the old story is told of the discourse between Indra and Kasyapa. Listen to it, O Yudhishtira.

Once upon a time, a prosperous Vaisya, in the enjoyment of prosperity, and proud of his affluence, ran down, by driving his chariot negligently, a Rishi’s son of rigid vows named Kasyapa, devoted to penances. Prostrate on the ground, the young man, in exceeding pain, gave way to his wrath; and under the influence of despair, resolved, “I shall cast off my life. A poor man has no need of life in this world.”

While the Brahmana lay in that state, silent and agitated, deprived of energy and on the point of death, Indra appeared on the scene in the form of a jackal and, addressing him, said, “All inferior creatures covet birth in the human race. Among men, again, the status of a Brahmana is much desired. You, O Kasyapa, are a human being. Amongst Manavas, you are again a Brahmana. Among Brahmanas, you are still one that knows the Vedas.

Having obtained that which is attainable with very great difficulty, it does not become you to give up your life from folly.

All kinds of worldly acquisitions are fraught with pride: that declaration of the srutis is perfectly true. You look the picture of contentment. In deciding to die, you make a most foolish and base resolve. O, they are crowned with success that have hands. I eagerly wish for the condition of those creatures that have hands. We covet hands as eagerly as you covet riches. There is no acquisition that is more valuable than the acquisition of hands. Behold, O Brahmana, I cannot extract this thorn that has entered my body, or crush these insects and worms that bite me constantly. They that have bestowed upon them two hands with ten fingers, succeed in removing or crushing the insects that bite their limbs. They succeed in constructing shelters for themselves from rain, cold and heat. They succeed also in enjoying excellent clothes, fine cooked food, comfortable beds and excellent habitations.

On this earth, they that have hands enjoy kine and other animals and cause them to carry burdens or haul their vehicles, and with the help of diverse means bring those animals under sway for their own purposes.

Those living creatures that are without tongues, that are helpless, of little strength, and without hands, bear the several kinds of misery I have told you of. By good fortune, O Brahmana, you are not like them. Through good fortune, you are not a jackal, a worm, a mouse, a frog or an animal of any other miserable species. With this measure of gain that you have won, you should, O Kasyapa, be contented. How happy, again, should you feel at the thought that amongst living creatures you are a superior Brahmana.

Ah, these worms and insects bite me incessantly. For want of hands I am unable to drive them off. Behold my miserable plight. I do not cast off my life because to do so is the greatest sin, and I am afraid that I might fall into a yet more miserable order of existence. This order of existence, that of a jackal, to which I now belong is tolerable. Miserable as it is, there are many kinds of existence below it that are still worse. By birth, some creatures become happier than others that are subject to great woe. But I never see that there is any order of being which can be said to be in the possession of perfect happiness.

Human beings, obtaining affluence, next wish for sovereignty. Having achieved sovereignty, their next wish is to become gods. Having won that, they then wish for the lordship of the celestials. If you become affluent, you

will never succeed in becoming a king—for you are a Brahmana by birth—nor in becoming a deity because, in truth, your status of Brahmanahood is equal if not superior to that of a Deva. If by any means, led away by the alluring prospect of heavenly bliss, you do become a god, you will then covet lordship over the gods.

In no condition will you be contented. Contentment does not result from acquiring desirable objects. Thirst is never slaked although there is a profusion of water. The thirst for acquisitions only blazes up with each fresh acquisition like a fire with new fuel fed into it. In you, there is grief. However, joy also dwells in you. Both happiness and misery dwell in you. Why then should you yield to grief? One should restrain, like birds in a cage, the very springs—the intellect and the senses—of all one's desires and actions.

There can be no cutting of a second head, nor of a third hand. That which does not exist can inspire no fear. One that is not acquainted with the enjoyment a certain object affords never feels desire for it. Desires arise from the actual experience of the pleasures that touch or sight, or hearing, give.

You have no idea of the taste of the wine called Varuni or of the meat of the birds called Ladwaka. There is no drink and no food more delicious than these. You have no idea also, O Kasyapa, of every other superior kind of drink and food that exists among men, for you have never tasted these. Without doubt, therefore, not to taste, not to see, should be the vow of a man if he is to win happiness. Creatures that have hands become strong and earn wealth. Men are reduced by other men to servitude, and are repeatedly afflicted at the hands of their own kind with imprisonment, death and other tortures. Although such is their condition, even they do not yield to grief but laugh, play and indulge in merriment.

Others, again, though imbued with might of arms, and possessed of knowledge and great energy of mind, follow censurable, sinful and miserable callings. They seek to change such professions for other pursuits that are more dignified but then they are bound by their own actions of a previous life and by the force of destiny.

The vilest man of the Pukkasa or the Chandala orders never wishes to cast off his life. He is quite contented with the order of his birth. Behold the illusion in this. Looking at those amongst your species that are without arms, or struck with palsy, or afflicted with other diseases, you can regard

yourself as very happy and possessed of valuable endowments amongst the members of your own species. If your regenerated body remains safe and sound, and free from disease, and all your limbs remain perfect, you are sure of never incurring any reproach amongst men. It would not become you, O Brahmana, to cast off your life even if any blame, founded on fact and bringing about your being excommunicated from your varna, attached to you. Arise, and practice virtue. It is not right that you should throw away your life.

If, O Dvija, you listen to me and place credence in my words, you will have the highest reward of the dharma set down in the Vedas. Set yourself to Vedic studies, duly maintain your sacred fire, and observe truth, self-restraint and charity. Never compare yourself boastfully with another. They, who, by devoting themselves to the study of the Vedas, become competent to perform sacrifices for themselves and others, have no need to indulge in any kind of regret or fear any kind of evil. They that are born under an auspicious constellation on an auspicious lunation and at an auspicious hour, and strive to perform sacrifices, practice charity, beget children and wish to pass their time gladly in such karma, eventually win very great happiness.

They, on the other hand, that are born under evil constellations, inauspicious asterisms and at evil hours, become destitute of sacrifices and progeny and at last fall into the Asura order. In my former life, I had much useless learning. I always sought after reasons and had little faith. I was a slanderer of the Vedas. I was without the four purusharthas, and was devoted to the empirical science of argumentation, which is based upon ocular or tangible proofs. I would utter bold, brash words based on plausible logic. Indeed, in assemblies, I always spoke of reason, and never of faith. I would speak irreverently of the declarations of the srutis and address Brahmanas in taunting, haughty tones. I was an unbeliever, sceptical of everything, and though ignorant, proud of my learning.

This state of a jackal that I have acquired in this life is the result, O Brahmana, of those sins of mine. If even after hundreds of days and nights that I am a jackal, I can once again become a man, I will pass my life in contentment, heedful of the true purposes of existence, and engaged in sacrifices and giving gifts. I will know what should be known, and avoid what should be avoided."

Thus addressed, the ascetic Kasyapa stood up, and said, “O, you are certainly possessed of knowledge and great intelligence. I am truly surprised by all this.”

With eyes whose vision was extended by knowledge, the Brahmana then beheld that being who had addressed him as Indra, king of the Devas and the lord of Sachi. Kasyapa then worshipped that god who has the best of steeds, Uchchaisravas, for his mount. Then, receiving Indra’s leave, the Brahmana returned to his abode.’

CANTO 181

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, if gifts, sacrifices, penances and dutiful services rendered to preceptors, yield wisdom and high rewards.'

Bhishma says, 'If the mind becomes affected by desire, anger and other evil passions, it then runs towards sin. If one's actions are stained by sin, one is obliged to dwell in painful hells. Sinful men are born in indigent circumstances and repeatedly suffer the pangs of famine, woe, fear and death. Those that are virtuous in their deeds, and possessed of faith, and that have their senses under control, are born as affluent men and repeatedly sport in festivities, swarga and joy.

Unbelievers, with their arms manacled, are sent to regions rendered inaccessible by carnivorous beasts and wild elephants, and full of terrors from snakes and brigands. What more needs be said of them? They, on the other hand, who have reverence for the gods and guests, who are liberal, who are fond of good and honest men, go, because of their actions of charity, along that happy way which belongs to those of cleansed Souls. They that have no reverence for virtue are as vile among men as seedless grains among corn or the gnat among winged creatures. That which is ordained due to the deeds of a past life pursues the doer even if he strives with all his might to leave it behind. It sleeps when he sleeps and does whatever else he does. Like his shadow it rests when he rests, goes forth when he goes, and acts when he acts. Whatever karma a man does he has

certainly to experience the fruits of it. Death hauls along all creatures who are inexorably destined to fall into the orders of existence they deserve, and who are surely liable to enjoy or suffer that which has been ordained as the fruit of their actions.

The deeds of a past life develop repercussions in their own time even as flowers and fruits, without extraneous effort of any kind, unfailingly appearing when their time arrives. After the consequences, as ordained, of the karma of a past life have been exhausted, through enjoyment or suffering, honour and disgrace, gain and loss, decay and growth, they cease to flow or appear. This occurs repeatedly. A creature while still in the mother's womb enjoys or suffers the happiness or the sorrow that has been ordained for him because of his own actions. In childhood, youth or old age, at whatever period of life one does something good or bad, the results thereof are sure to visit him in his next life at the very same time of his life. As a calf recognises and approaches its mother in the midst of even a thousand kine, even so the deeds of a past life recognise and visit the doer in his new life. Washed in water a dirty piece of cloth becomes clean. Similarly, men burning in repentance gain endless happiness through proper penances.

Those that can live in the forest and, by performing tapasya for a long time, wash themselves of their sins, succeed in acquiring the objects on which they set their hearts. As no one can mark the trail of birds in the sky or of fish in the water, similarly, the trail of those whose Souls have been cleansed by knowledge cannot be marked by anyone. There is no need of any more eloquence or any more reference to sinful deeds. Suffice it to say that one should, with proper judgement and as befits one best, do what is good for one's own weal. This is the means by which wisdom and high rewards can be achieved.'

CANTO 182

Yudhishtira says, 'Whence has this universe consisting of mobile and unmoving creatures been created? Whom does it go to when destruction sets in? Tell me this, Pitamaha. Indeed, by whom has this universe with its oceans, its firmament, its mountains, its clouds, its lands, its fire and its wind, been created? How were all objects created? Whence this division into separate orders of existence? Whence are their purity and impurity, and the ordinances about virtue and vice? Of what kind is the life of living creatures? Where do they go who die? Tell us everything about this and the other world.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story of the sacred words that Bhrigu said in reply to the questions of Bharadwaja. Beholding the Maharishi Bhrigu, blazing with energy and splendour, seated on the summit of Kailasa, Bharadwaja said to him, "By whom was this world with its ocean, its firmament, its mountains, its clouds, its lands, its fire and its wind, created? How were all creatures first created? Whence this distinction of castes? Whence the purity and the impurity of conduct, and whence the ordinances about virtue and vice for living creatures? Of what kind is the life of living creatures? Where do they go who die? It befits you to tell me everything about this and the other world."

Thus addressed by Bharadwaja, the illustrious and illumined Maharishi Bhrigu, who resembled Brahma himself, replied, "There is a primeval being, known to the great Rishis as Manasa. He is without

beginning and without end. Weapons cannot pierce that Divine Being. He is without decay and is immortal. He is said to be unmanifest. He is eternal, undecaying and unchangeable. Through Him are creatures born and through Him, they die. He first created a second Divine Being known by the name Mahat. Mahat created Chitta, consciousness. Chitta created Akasa. That puissant being is the holder of all created objects.

From Akasa was born Apah, water, and from Apah were born Agni and Vayu, fire and wind. Through the union of fire and wind was born Bhumi, the earth. Self-born Manasa then created a divine lotus pregnant with tejas, energy. From that lotus sprang Brahma, that ocean of Veda.

The srutis say that as soon as born, the Divine One uttered the words, 'I am He!' For this, He came to be called by the name of Chitta. He has all created things for his body and He is their creator. Five elements that we see are that Brahma of great energy. The mountains are His bones. The earth is His fat and flesh. The oceans are His blood. Space is His stomach. The wind is His breath. Fire is His energy. The rivers are His veins and arteries. Surya and soma, the sun and the moon, are His eyes. The firmament above is His head. The earth is His two feet. The cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon are His arms. Beyond doubt, He is unknowable and his Soul is inconceivable by even those crowned with the highest ascetic success.

The Divine Being, who pervades the whole universe, is also known by the name of Ananta, the infinite. He lives in consciousness, and cannot be known by those of impure Souls. Asked by you, I have now told you of Him who created consciousness to fetch into existence all created objects, and from whom this universe has sprung."

Bharadwaja said, "What is the extent of the firmament, of the cardinal points of the horizon, of the surface of this earth, and of the wind? Tell me of these."

Bhrigu said, "The sky you see above is infinite. It is the abode of Souls crowned with ascetic success and of Divine Beings. It is blissful, and consists of various regions. Its limits cannot be ascertained. The sun and the moon cannot see, above or below, beyond the range of their own rays. There, where the rays of the sun and the moon cannot reach, are luminaries which are self-effulgent and which possess splendour like that of the sun. Know this, O giver of honours, that, possessed of far-famed splendour, even these do not behold the limits of the firmament due to the inaccessibility and infinity of those boundaries. This space, which the very gods cannot

measure, is full of many blazing and self-luminous worlds each above the other.

Beyond the limits of land are oceans of water. Beyond water is darkness. Beyond darkness is water again, and beyond that is fire. Downwards, beneath the patalas, is water. Beneath water is the region that belongs to the great Nagas. Beyond that is sky once more, and beyond the sky is water again. Thus, there is water and sky alternately, without end. Even such are the limits of the divinity, water. The very gods are unable to ascertain limits of fire and wind and water. The nature of fire, wind, water and land is like that of space. They are distinguished through want of true knowledge. Sages read in diverse scriptures the limits that have been declared of the three worlds and the ocean. Who is there, however, that would set limits to what cannot be grasped by vision and what is inaccessible in its totality?

Even if it becomes possible to ascertain the limits of the firmament, which is the trail of the gods and beings, crowned with tapodhana, it can never be possible to set limits to that which is limitless and known as infinite, to that which corresponds with the name by which it is known—what has been called the high-Souled Manasa? When again his form is sometimes contracted and sometimes expanded, how can any except one that is equal to him, be able to comprehend his limits? From the lotus, of which I have already spoken, was first created the omniscient Lord Brahma, endued with form, of essence comprised of dharma, and the creator of all mobile and immobile things."

Bharadwaja said, "If Brahma sprang from the lotus, then it is the lotus that should be regarded as the first-born and not Brahma. Why, however, is Brahma said to be the first? Remove this doubt of mine."

Bhrigu said, "The earth it is that is called the lotus. It was created to give a seat unto that form of Manasa, which became Brahma. Reaching up to heaven itself, Sumeru became the pericarp of the lotus. Remaining within it, the puissant lord of the universe created all the worlds."

CANTO 183

Bharadwaja said, "Tell me, O best of Brahmanas, how the puissant Brahma, dwelling within Meru, created these diverse kinds of objects, great and small."

Bhrigu said, "The great Manasa, in his form of Brahma, created the diverse kinds of objects by fiat of will. For the protection then of all creatures, he first created water. Water is the life of all creatures, and it is water which enables their growth. If there were no water, all creatures would perish. The whole universe is pervaded by water. Earth, mountains, clouds and all things which have form, should all be known as transformations of water. They have all been made by that element solidifying in various degrees."

Bharadwaja said, "How did water first appear? How did fire and wind come into being? How was the earth created? I have great doubts on these matters."

Bhrigu said, "O Dvija, in very ancient times called the Brahma-kalpa, the Maharishis assembled together and felt this same doubt about the creation of the universe. Restraining speech, they remained unmoving, engaged in profound dhyana. Having renounced all food, they subsisted on air alone, and remained thus for a thousand celestial years. At the end of that time, certain words as sacred as those of the Vedas simultaneously reached the ears of them all.

Indeed, an asariri was heard in the firmament to say, “Formerly, there was only infinite space, perfectly motionless and immovable. With the sun, moon, stars and wind, it seemed to be asleep. Soon water sprang into existence like something darker within darkness. Next from the pressure of water arose the wind. As an empty vessel appears at first to be without any sound, but when filled with water, air appears and makes a great noise, even so, when infinite space was filled with water, the wind arose with a great noise, reverberating through the water. That wind, thus generated by the pressure of the ocean of water, still moves. Coming into space, its motion never ceases. Then, from the friction of wind and water, fire possessed of great might and blazing energy sprang into existence, with flames directed upwards. This fire dispelled the darkness that had covered space. Helped by the wind, fire drew space and water together. Indeed, combining with the wind, fire had form. While falling from the sky, the liquid portion of fire had form again and became what is known as the earth. The earth, or land, in which everything is born, is the origin of all kinds of taste, of all kinds of scent, of all kinds of liquids, and of all kinds of animals.”

CANTO 184

Bharadwaja said, “When the Mahatman Brahma has created millions of creatures, why is it that only these five elements that he created first, which pervade all the universe and which are great spirits, have come to have the name of elements applied to them exclusively?”

Bhrigu said, “All things that belong to the category of the infinite or the vast are called Mahat. Hence, these five elements are named Mahabhutas. Activity is wind. The sound that is heard is space. The heat that is within it is fire. The fluids occurring within it are water. Solidified matter, flesh and bones, are earth. The bodies of living creatures are thus made of the five primeval elements. All mobile and immobile objects are made of these five. The five senses also of living creatures partake of the five. The ear partakes of the properties of space; the nose of earth; the tongue of water; touch of wind; and the eyes of light, fire.”

Bharadwaja said, “If all mobile and immobile objects be composed of these five elements, why is it that in all immobile objects those elements are not visible? Trees do not appear to have any heat. They do not seem to have any motion. They are again made up of dense particles. The five elements are not noticeable in them. Trees do not hear; they do not see; they are not able to sense scent or taste. They have not also the perception of touch. How then can they be regarded as being composed of the five primeval elements? It seems to me that because of the absence of any liquid in them,

of any heat, earth, wind and space, trees cannot be regarded as compounds of the five primeval elements."

Bhrigu said, "Indeed, although possessed of density, trees have space within them. The creation of flowers and fruits is always taking place in them. They have heat within them because of which the leaf, bark, fruit and flower are seen to droop. They sicken and dry up. This shows they have perception of touch. Through the sound of wind and fire and thunder, their fruits and flowers fall. Sound is perceived through the ear. Trees have ears and do hear. A creeper winds around a tree and goes about all its sides. A blind thing cannot find its way. For this reason, it is evident that trees have vision. Then again, trees recover vigour and produce flowers in consequence of odours, good and bad, of the sacred perfume of diverse kinds of dhupas. It is plain that trees have scent. They drink water with their roots. They catch diseases of diverse kinds. The diseases again are cured by different specifics. It is evident that trees have perceptions of taste.

As one can suck up water through a bent lotus-stalk, trees also, with the help of the wind, drink through their roots. They are susceptible to pleasure and pain, and grow when cut or trimmed. From all these, I see that trees have life. They are not inanimate. Fire and wind cause the water sucked up by trees to be digested. According, again, to the quantity of the water taken up, the tree advances in growth and becomes moist. In the bodies of all mobile things, the five elements occur. In each, the proportions are different. It is because of the five elements that mobile objects can move their bodies. Skin, flesh, bones, marrow, veins and arteries, which exist together in the body, are made of earth. Energy, wrath, eyes, internal heat and heat that digests food—these five constitute the fire that occurs in all embodied creatures.

The ears, nostrils, mouth, heart and stomach—these five constitute the element of space that occurs in the bodies of living creatures. Phlegm, bile, sweat, fat, blood are the five kinds of water that occur in mobile bodies. Through the breath, called prana, a living creature is enabled to move. Through that called vyana, they create strength for action. That called apana moves downwards. That called samana dwells within the heart. Through that called udana one eructates and is enabled to speak because of its rising through the lungs, the throat and the mouth. These are the five kinds of wind that cause an embodied creature to live and move.

An embodied creature knows the properties of scent through the earth in him. From the water element, he perceives taste. From the fire, he perceives forms, and from the wind he has the perception of touch. Scent, touch, taste, vision and sound are regarded as the common properties of every mobile and unmoving being. I will first speak of the several kinds of scent. They are agreeable, disagreeable, sweet, pungent, far-going, varied, dry and indifferent. All these kinds of scent are founded in earth. Light is seen by the eyes and touch through the wind. Sound, touch, vision and taste are the properties of water. I will speak in detail now of the perception of taste.

Maharishis have spoken of diverse kinds of taste. They are sweet, salty, bitter, astringent, sour and pungent. These are the six kinds of taste that pertain to water. Light contributes to the vision of form. Form is of diverse kinds. Short, tall, thick, four-cornered, round, white, black, red, blue, yellow, reddish, hard, bright, smooth, oily, soft and terrible: these are the seventeen different kinds of form which constitute the property of light or vision.

The property of wind is touch. Touch is of various kinds: warm, cold, agreeable, disagreeable, indifferent, burning, mild, soft, light and heavy. Both sound and touch are the two properties of the wind, the Vayu Mahabhuta. These are the ten properties that pertain to wind.

Space has only one property—sound. I will now tell you the different kinds of sound. They are the seven original notes called shadja, rishabha, gandhara, mahdhyama, panchama, dhaivata and nishada. These are the seven kinds of the property that pertains to space. Sound inheres like the Supreme Being in all space though attached especially to drums and other instruments. Whatever sound is heard from drums, small and large, conches, clouds, chariots and animate and inanimate creatures, are all included in these seven kinds of sound. Thus, sound, which is the property of space, is of various kinds. The learned have said sound is born of space. When raised by the different kinds of touch, it may be heard. It cannot, however, be heard, when the different kinds of touch are inceptive.

The elements, merged with their counterparts in the body, increase and grow. Water, fire, wind are always awake in the bodies of living creatures. They are the roots of the body. Pervading the five life-breaths, they dwell in the body."

CANTO 185

Bharadwaja said, "How does bodily fire or heat dwell within the body? How also does the wind enter and cause the body to move and exert itself?"

Bhrigu said, "I will, O Dvija, speak to you of the course in which wind moves, and how, O sinless one, the mighty element causes the bodies of living creatures to move and exert themselves. Heat resides within the head and protects the body. The wind or breath called prana, dwelling within the head and the heat that is there, causes all kinds of exertion. Prana is the living creature, the universal Soul, the eternal being, and the mind, intellect and consciousness of all living creatures, as also all the objects of the senses. Thus, the living creature is, in every respect, caused by prana to move about and exert itself.

Due to the other breath called samana, every one of the senses is made to act as it does. The breath called apana, with recourse to the heat that is in the urethra and the abdominal intestines, moves and engages in excreting urine and faeces.

The single breath, which operates in these three, is called udana by those that know vigyana. The breath that operates, residing in all the joints of the body, is called vyana. There is heat in the bodies of living creatures, which is circulated all over the system by samana. Present thus in the body, that breath operates upon the different kinds of watery and other elementary substances and all bad humours. The heat, dwelling between apana and

prana, in the region of the navel, operates with the help of these two breaths, and digests all the food consumed by a living creature. There is a duct beginning from the mouth down to the anal canal. Its extremity is the anus. From this main duct numerous subsidiary ones branch out in the bodies of all living creatures. Due to the rush and flow of the several breaths named above, through these ducts, the breaths mingle together.

The heat that dwells in prana is called ushman. It is this heat that causes digestion in all creatures possessed of bodies. Prana, the bearer of a current of heat, descends from the head downwards to the extremity of the anal canal and then is sent upwards once more. Coming back to its seat in the head, it once more sends down the heat it bears. Below the navel is the region of digested matter. Above it is that for the food which is eaten. In the navel are all the forces of life that sustain the body. Urged by the ten kinds of breaths having prana for their first, the ducts, branching out from the heart, convey the fluids that food yields, upwards, downwards and in transverse directions.

The main passage leading from the mouth to the anus is the path by which yogins, vanquishers of fatigue, of perfect equanimity in joy and sorrow, and possessed of great patience, succeed in attaining Brahman by holding the Soul within the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain. Even thus is heat breathed in prana, apana and the other breaths in all embodied creatures. That heat is always burning there like a fire placed in a vessel."

CANTO 186

Bharadwaja said, "If it is the wind that keeps us alive, causes us to move and exert, to breathe and to speak, then it seems that life is worth little. If the animal heat, which digests all food, be of the nature of fire, and if it is fire which assists digestion by dissolving the food we eat, then life is worth little. When an animal dies, that which is called its life is never seen leaving it. Only the breath leaves it, and the internal heat becomes extinguished.

If life were nothing else than wind, or if life depended only on wind, then it could have been seen like the external sea of air, and when passing out it would have mingled with that air. If life depends upon air, and if it ended with the escape of that air from the body, it would then mingle with another portion of air that exists externally, like a portion of water escaping into the ocean and thereby only changing the place of its dwelling. If a portion of water were thrown into a well, or if the flame of a lamp be cast into a blazing fire, either of them, entering a homogeneous element, would lose its separate existence. If life were air it, also, when the animal died, would mingle with the great ocean of air outside.

How can we say that there is life in this animal body, which is made up of the five primal elements? If one of the elements disappear, the union of the other four becomes dissolved. The element of water dries up if food is not eaten. The element of air disappears if the breath is restrained. The

element of space disappears if the excretions cease. So, too, the element of fire becomes extinguished if food is not ingested like fuel.

The element of earth breaks into pieces because of diseases, wounds and other sufferings. If only one of the five becomes afflicted, the union is dissolved, and all the five depart in five different directions. When the body, which is a union of the elements, becomes separated into five ingredients, where does life go? What does it then know? What does it then hear? What does it then say?

This cow that is given away to a holy Brahmana, it is said, will save me in the other world. The animal, however, that is given away, itself dies. Whom then will this cow deliver? The taker of the cow in dakshina and the giver are both equal in being both subject to death. Both of them meet with extinction in this world. How then will they meet again? How will the person that has been eaten by birds, or that has been broken by a fall from a mountain, or that has been consumed by fire, regain life? The root of a tree that has been cut down does not grow again. Only the seeds put forth sprouts. Where is the person who having died comes back to some sort of new existence? Only seeds were originally created. All this universe is the result of seeds appearing, and sprouting in succession. They that die, die to perish. Only seeds result from seeds."

CANTO 187

Bhrigu said, “There is no destruction of the living creature, or of what is given, or of our other deeds. The creature that dies only goes into another form. The body alone dissolves away. The living creature, the jiva, although depending upon the body, does not meet with destruction when the body is destroyed. It is not seen after the destruction of the physical frame just as fire is not seen after the consumption of the fuel with which it was kindled.”

Bharadwaja said, “If there the living creature does not perish at death, I submit that fire itself is not seen after it consumes the fuel that ignited it. When the supply of fuel ends, the fire is extinguished, and, as far as I know, annihilated. That should surely be regarded to have met with destruction which no longer has any action, which furnishes no proof of its existence, and which no longer occupies any space.”

Bhrigu said, “It is true that upon its fuel being consumed, fire is no longer seen. It mingles with space because there is no longer any visible object in which to inhere, and hence it can no longer be perceived. Similarly, upon leaving the body, the jiva lives in ethereal space, and cannot be seen for it becomes extremely subtle, sukshma. It is fire or heat that sustains prana and the other breaths. Know that that heat is called life, the living agent. The heat which is the sustainer of the breaths is extinguished when suspiration ceases and the breaths no longer move in the body, enlivening it.

Upon the heat in the body being extinguished, the body itself loses animation. Falling, it is transformed into earth, for that is its ultimate destination. The breath that is in all mobile and immobile objects mingles with space, and the heat that is in them follows that breath. These three—space, air and fire—mingle. The other two elements, water and earth, exist together in the form of earth. There is wind where space is, and there is fire where wind is. They are formless, it should be known, and become endowed with form only in embodied creatures."

Bharadwaja said, "If in the physical bodies of all living creatures there exist heat, wind, earth, space and water, what, then, are the indications of a living agent? Tell me of these, O sinless one. I want to know the nature of the life that is in the bodies of living beings—bodies made up of the five primal elements, engaged in the five functions, endowed with the five senses and possessed of animation. Upon the dissolution of the body, that which is the living agent cannot be seen. If this body, composed of the five elements, were destitute of life, who or what then is that which suffers upon the appearance of either bodily or mental pain?

The living agent hears through the ears. Yet, O Maharishi, the same agent does not hear when its mind is preoccupied. It seems, therefore, that the living agent serves no purpose. Everything that the jiva sees acting in concert with the mind, the eye does not behold, even when it lies before it, if the mind were otherwise engaged. Then again, when it is under the influence of sleep, the living creature neither sees nor smells, hears nor speaks, nor experiences the perceptions of touch and taste. Who or what then is that which feels joy, becomes angry, gives way to sorrow and experiences tribulation? What is that which wishes, thinks, feels aversion and speaks?"

Bhrigu said, "The mind also is made of the five elements in common with the body. For this reason it is of no consequence with regard to the activities you speak of. Only the one internal Soul sustains the body. It is he that perceives smell, taste, sound, touch, form and other properties that exist in external nature. That Soul, pervading the body, is the witness of the actions of the mind imbued with five attributes and living within the body composed of the five elements. It is he who feels pleasure and pain and, when separated from him, the body no longer experiences them. In the absence of any perception of form or touch, when there is no heat in the fire

that resides within the body—indeed, when the animal heat becomes extinguished—the body, bereft of the Soul, meets with death.

The whole universe is composed of water. Water is the form of all embodied creatures. Therein lies the Soul, which is displayed in the mind. That Soul is the creator Brahma who exists in all things. When the Soul becomes endowed with gross attributes, it is called kshetrajna. When freed from those attributes, it is known as Paramatman. Know that Supreme Soul. He is inspired with universal benevolence. He resides in the body like a drop of water in a lotus. Know well the kshetrajna that has universal benevolence. Darkness, passion, goodness—tamas, rajas and sattva—are the attributes of the living agent.

The learned say that the Soul has consciousness and exists with the attributes of life. The Soul exerts and causes everything to act, to experience. Those who have a knowledge of the Soul say that it is different from life. It is the Supreme Soul that has created the seven worlds and sets them in motion. There is no death of the jiva when the dissolution of the body takes place. Men of no intelligence say that it dies. That is untrue. All that the jiva does is to go from one to another body. That which is called death is only the dissolution of the body. It is thus that the Soul, wrapped in diverse forms, migrates from form to form, unseen, unnoticed.

Those possessed of true knowledge see the Soul with their keen and subtle vision. The man of wisdom, living on frugal fare, and with heart cleansed of all sins, devoted to yoga dhyana, succeeds every night, before and after sleep, in seeing his Atman with the help of his Atman. With a contented heart, and with all actions, good and bad, abandoned, one can obtain infinite happiness by depending upon one's own Soul. The king, of fiery effulgence, dwelling within the mind is called the Atman. It is from that lord of everything that this creation has sprung. This is the conclusion arrived at in the enquiry into the origin of creatures and the Soul."

CANTO 188

Bhrigu said, "Brahma first created a few Brahmanas called Prajapatis, lords of creation. Possessed of splendour equal to that of the sun, they were created from the energy of the first-born Being. The puissant lord next created truth, duty, penance, purity, the eternal Vedas and all kinds of pious rituals, to enable creatures to attain heaven by practising them. After this, the Devas and the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Daityas, the Asuras, the great Nagas, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Sarpas, the Pisachas and Manavas with their four varnas—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras—and all the other orders of beings that exist, were created.

The complexion of the Brahmanas was white; the Kshatriyas obtained red; the Vaisyas got yellow; and the Sudras were given black."

Bharadwaja said, "If the distinction between the four varnas of human beings be made by means only of colour, then it seems that all the four orders have been mingled. Lust, wrath, fear, cupidity, grief, anxiety, hunger and toil, possess and prevail over all men. How can men be distinguished by the possession of attributes? The bodies of all men emit sweat, urine, faeces, phlegm, bile and blood. How then can men be distributed into varnas? Of mobile objects the number is infinite; the species also of immobile objects are innumerable. How, then, can objects of such great diversity be distributed into different classes?"

Bhrigu said, "There is really no distinction between the different orders. The whole world initially consisted of Brahmanas. Created equal by

Brahma, men have, due to their actions, become divided into different varnas. They that became fond of indulging desire and enjoying pleasures, possessed of the attributes of severity and anger gifted with courage, and unmindful of the duties of piety and worship, such Brahmanas endowed with the attribute of rajas, became Kshatriyas. Other Brahmanas, who disregarded the duties laid down for them, became possessed of both the attributes of sattva and rajas, and took to the professions of cattle-rearing and farming, became Vaisyas. Whereas the Brahmanas that became fond of untruth and violence, injuring other creatures, who were possessed by lust and greed, engaged in all kinds of sinful actions for a living, fell away from purity of conduct, and adhered to tamas, became Sudras. Separated by these occupations, Brahmanas, fallen from their own order, became members of the other three castes. All the four varnas, therefore, have always the right to the performance of all pious duties and sacrifices.

Even so were the four orders at first created equal by Brahma, who ordained for all of them the observances declared in the Vedas. Through greed alone, many fell away, and became possessed by ignorance. The Brahmanas are always devoted to the scriptures on the Brahman; and mindful of vows and restraints, are equal to grasping the concept of Brahman. Their penances, therefore, never go in vain. They amongst them are not Brahmanas that cannot understand that every created thing is the Supreme Brahman. These fallen ones, became members of diverse inferior varnas. Bereft of knowledge, and taking to an unrestrained and wayward course of conduct, they take birth as Pisachas, Rakshasas, Pretas and as individuals of diverse Mleccha tribes.

The Maharishis who at the beginning sprang into life through Brahma's will subsequently created, through their tapasya, men devoted to the svadharma ordained for them and attached to the rites laid down in the eternal Vedas. That other creation, however, which is eternal and undecaying, which is based upon Brahman and has sprung from the primeval being, and has its refuge in yoga, was a mental one."

CANTO 189

Bharadwaja said, "Through what actions does one become a Brahmana? By what, a Kshatriya? O Dvijottama, with what karma again does one become a Vaisya or a Sudra? Tell me this, O most eloquent."

Bhrigu said, "He is called a Brahmana who has been sanctified by such rites as those called jaata and the others; who is pure in behaviour; who is engaged in studying the Vedas; who is devoted to the six well-known karmas of ablutions every morning and evening, silent recitation of mantras, pouring libations on the sacrificial fire, worshipping the Devas, offering humble hospitality to guests, and offering food to the Viswedevas; who is properly observant of all pious deeds; who never takes food without having offered it first to the gods and his guests; who is filled with reverence for his guru; and who is always devoted to vows and truth. He is called a Brahmana in whom are truth, charity, non-violence, compassion, shame, benevolence and penance: satya, dana, ahimsa, karuna, lajja, vinamrata and tapasya.

He who is engaged in the profession of battle, who studies the Vedas, who gives dakshina to Brahmanas and accepts wealth from those he protects is called a Kshatriya.

He who earns fame from keeping cattle, who is employed in farming and acquiring wealth, who is pure in behaviour and attends to the study of the Vedas, is called a Vaisya.

He who takes pleasure in eating every kind of food, who does any kind of work, however vile, who is impure in his behaviour, who does not study the Vedas, and whose conduct is unclean, is said to be a Sudra. If these characteristics are seen in a Brahmana, and if they are not found in a Sudra, then such a Brahmana is no Brahmana, and such a Sudra is no Sudra.

By every means should lust and wrath be restrained. This, as also self-restraint, are the highest results of knowledge. The two passions, anger and lust, should be resisted with one's whole heart. They exist to destroy one's highest good. One should always protect one's prosperity from one's wrath, one's penances from pride, one's knowledge from honour and disgrace, and one's Soul from every error.

The intelligent person, O Dvija, who performs all his duties without desire for their fruit, whose entire body of wealth exists for charity, and who performs the daily homa, is the real tyagi, a true renouncer.

One should conduct oneself as a friend to all creatures, and abstain from all acts of injury. Refusing all gifts, one should, with the help of one's own intelligence, be a complete master of one's passions. One should abide in one's Soul where there can be no grief. One would then have no fear here and attain a fearless realm hereafter. One should live always devoted to tapasya, and with all passions completely restrained observe the vow of taciturnity. With the Soul concentrated on itself, one should live desirous of conquering the senses, and remain unattached in the midst of attachments.

All things that can be perceived by the senses are called manifest. All, however, that is unmanifest, beyond the ken of the senses, that can be ascertained only by the subtle senses, should be sought to be known.

If there is no faith, one will never succeed in attaining that subtle, spiritual sense. Therefore, one should hold oneself in faith. The mind should be united with prana, and prana should then be held within Brahman. By dissociating oneself from all attachments, one will find absorption into Brahman. There is no need to attend to any other thing. A Brahmana can easily attain Brahman by the path of renunciation. The indications of a Brahmana are purity, good conduct and compassion for all creatures."

CANTO 190

Bhrigu said, "Truth is Brahman; truth is japa; it is truth that creates all creatures. It is by truth that the whole universe is upheld; and it is with the help of satya that one ascends into swarga. Untruth is only another form of darkness. It is darkness that leads downwards. Those who are afflicted by tamas and covered by it, fail to behold the lustrous regions of heaven. It has been said that heaven is light and hell is darkness. The creatures that dwell in the universe may gain both heaven and hell. In this world also, truth and untruth lead to opposite courses of conduct and opposite indications, such as dharma and adharma, light and darkness, pleasure and pain. Amongst these, truth is dharma; dharma is light; and light is happiness. Similarly, asatya is adharma; adharma is tamas; and tamas is misery.

It is said that the wise notice how life is overwhelmed by sorrow, both physical and mental, and how happiness is sure to end in misery; this being so, they never let themselves be perplexed or stupefied. The wise man will strive to save himself from sorrow. The happiness of living creatures is unstable both here and hereafter. The joy of beings that are overwhelmed by darkness disappears like the splendour of the moon when afflicted by Rahu. For the sake of achieving happiness, both in this and the other world, the visible and the invisible fruits of action are specified in the Vedas. There is nothing more important than happiness among the rewards of the traiguna. Joy is desirable. It is an attribute of the Soul. Both dharma and artha are

sought for its sake. Virtue is its root; This, indeed, is its origin. All actions have for their end the attainment of kama."

Bharadwaja said, "You have said that happiness is the highest object. I do not comprehend this. This attribute of the Soul that you say is so desirable is not sought by the Rishis engaged in practices promising a higher reward. It is heard that the creator of the three worlds, the puissant Brahma, lives alone, observing the brahmacharya vrata. He never devotes himself to the pleasure to be had from the gratification of desire. In addition, Shiva, the Divine Master of the universe, the lord of Uma, reduced Kama, the deity of desire, to ashes. For this reason, kama or pleasure is not acceptable to the Mahatman. Nor does it appear to be a high aspect of the Soul. I cannot believe in what you, divine one, have said: that there is nothing higher than happiness. That there are two kinds of outcomes to our actions—that happiness springs from good deeds and sorrow from sinful ones is only a saying that is current in the world."

Bhrigu said, "From untruth springs darkness. Those overwhelmed by darkness pursue only adharma and not dharma. Subjugated by anger, covetousness, malice, falsehood and other evils, they never find sukha either here or hereafter. On the other hand, they are afflicted by various kinds of disease, pain and troubles. They are also tortured by death, imprisonment, diverse other griefs, and by sorrows attending on hunger, thirst and toil. They are furthermore pained by the numerous bodily discomforts that arise from rain, wind, burning heat and extreme cold. They are also overwhelmed by numerous mental sufferings caused by loss of wealth, separation from friends, as also by anguish caused by decrepitude and death. Those who are untouched by these diverse kinds of physical and mental afflictions, know what happiness is.

These evils are never found in swarga. There, delicious breezes blow. In heaven, there is also perpetual fragrance. In heaven there is no hunger, no thirst, no decay, no sin. In this world there is both joy and sorrow. In hell there is only misery. Therefore, happiness is the highest object of acquisition. The earth is the progenitrix of all creatures. Females partake of her nature. The male animal is like Prajapati himself. The vital seed, you must know, is the creative energy. In this way did Brahma ordain in days of old that the creation should continue. Each being, affected by his own actions, gains joy or sorrow."

CANTO 191

Bharadwaja said, "What is the effect of giving dakshina or dana? What of dharma? What of pravritti, conduct? What of penances? What of the study and recitation of the Vedas? And what of pouring libations on the fire?"

Bhrigu said, "By pouring libations on the sacred fire, sin is burnt. By study of the Vedas one finds blessed peace. By giving charity, one finds pleasure and the things of enjoyment. Through tapasya, one acquires blessed swarga. Dakshina is said to be of two kinds: gifts for the other world, and those for this. Whatever is given to the good attends the giver in the other world. Whatever is given to those that are not good yields fruit that are enjoyed here. The results of gifts are commensurate with the gifts themselves."

Bharadwaja said, "What dharma should be performed by whom? What are the characteristics of dharma? How many kinds of dharma are there? Tell me of these."

Bhrigu said, "Wise men engaged in the practice of their svadharma succeed in attaining heaven as their reward. By doing otherwise they become guilty of folly."

Bharadwaja said, "Tell me about the four asramas of life that were once ordained by Brahma, and the practices prescribed for each of them."

Bhrigu said, "In days of yore, to benefit the world, and for the protection of dharma, the divine Brahma indicated four asramas of life.

Amongst them, brahmacharya, living in the home of the guru is the first. He who is in this stage of life has his Soul cleansed by purity of conduct, Vedic rites, restraints, vows and humility. He should worship the morning and evening twilights, the sun, his own sacred fire, and the Devas. He should shun procrastination and idleness. He should purify his Soul by saluting his preceptor, by studying the Vedas, and by paying heed to his guru's instructions. He should perform his ablutions thrice: in the morning, noon and evening, during the three sandhyas. He should lead a life of celibacy, attend to his sacred fire, dutifully serve his guru, daily go out on a round of mendicancy to support himself; and give ungrudgingly to his guru the whole of what he receives as alms.

Willingly accomplishing everything that his master commands, he should be ready to receive such Vedic instruction as his preceptor may give him, as a favour to him. On this subject, a hymn that tells us that the Brahmana, who obtains his Veda by attending with reverence upon his preceptor, succeeds in attaining swarga and obtains the fruition of all his desires.

Grihastasrama, the domestic life, is the second. I will tell you about that asrama. Those who complete their tutelage in the guru's abode and return home, who are of pious conduct, who desire the fruits of a virtuous course of behaviour with their wives, have this asrama ordained for them. In it dharma, artha and kama are all gained since domesticity is suited for their cultivation. With wealth acquired by irreproachable actions, or with high efficacy gained in reciting the Vedas, or living upon such means as Rishis do, the householder should live this stage of his life.

With the produce of mountains and mines, or with wealth from the offerings made in sacrifices and on termination of vows and other observances, and those made unto Devas, should the grihastha lead his life. Grihastasrama is regarded as the root of all the others. They who live with their gurus, who lead lives of mendicancy, and others who live in the observance of vows and restraints, derive from this life of the householder the means they live upon, the offerings they make to the Pitris and the Devas, and, indeed, their entire support.

The third stage of life is called vanaprastha, the forest life. For those that lead it, there is no storing of wealth and possessions. Generally, these pious men subsist upon good food, and engaged in studying the Vedas, roam ceaselessly over the earth, journeying to tirthas and visiting diverse

lands. Standing up, advancing forward, sweet speeches uttered in sincerity, gifts given according to the measure of the giver's means, the offering of excellent food, seats and beds of the best kind, are some of the ways to show them respect. On this subject, there is a saying: If a guest turns away from a house with his expectations unfulfilled, he takes away the merits of the householder and leaves behind all his sins.

Then again in grihastasrama, the Devas are gratified with sacrifices and other religious rites; the Pitris by the performance of obsequial rites; the Rishis by the cultivation of Vedic knowledge, by listening to the instructions of preceptors, and by committing to memory the scriptures, and lastly, Brahma himself by begetting children.

On this subject, there are two hymns: One in the observance of this stage of life should speak to all creatures words of affection that are always agreeable to the ears. To give pain, to inflict mortifications and harsh words are all censurable. Insults, arrogance and deceit should also be avoided. Non-violence, truth and the absence of wrath yield the merit of tapasya in all the four stages of life.

In grihastasrama, these are allowed: the use and enjoyment of flower garlands, ornaments, robes, perfumed oils and liniments; the enjoyment of pleasures derived from music, dance and all sights and scenes that please the eyes; the enjoyment of various kinds of viands and drinks; the enjoyment of pleasures derived from sports and every kind of amusement, and the gratification of sexual desires. He, who, in the observance of the householder's life, seeks the acquisition of dharma, artha and kama, with the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas, enjoys great happiness here and at last attains the end that is kept for those who are virtuous and good.

Even the householder who observes the duties of his mode of life by following the practice of picking up fallen grains of corn from the cracks in fields and who abandons sensual pleasure and attachment to action, does not find it difficult to attain swarga."

CANTO 192

Bhrigu said, "Forest recluses seeking the acquisition of virtue go to sacred waters, rivers, springs, and undergo penances in secluded forests abounding in deer, bison, boars, tigers and wild elephants. They forsake all kinds of clothes, food and enjoyments for which people living in society have a taste. They subsist abstemiously upon wild herbs, fruits, roots and leaves of diverse kinds. The bare ground is their seat. They lie down on the plain earth, rocks, pebbles, gravel, sand or ashes. They cover their limbs with grass, animal skins and the bark of trees. They never shave their heads and beards or clip their nails. They perform their ablutions at regular intervals. They pour libations onto the ground, as also into the sacred fire at the proper time and without fail.

They never enjoy any rest until completing their daily gathering of the fuel for their homa fires and sacred grass, flowers for sacrifice and worship, and until they have swept, washed and rubbed clean their sacrificial altars. They bear, without the least regard, cold and heat, rain and wind, so that the their skin is rough, cracked all over; and from observing various kinds of rites and vows, their bodies become emaciated, skin and bones. Endowed with great patience and fortitude, they live, always in the sattva guna. He who, with a restrained Soul, observes such a course of life, originally ordained by enlightened Rishis, burns all his sins as in a fire and obtains regions of felicity that are most difficult to attain.

I will now describe the lives of the Parivrajakas. Liberated from attachment to the sacred fire, wealth, wife, children, fine clothes, seats, beds, and other such objects of enjoyment, and unshackled from the bonds of affection, they roam the world, regarding with an equal eye a clod of earth, a rock and a nugget of gold. They never set their hearts on the acquisition or enjoyment of dharma, artha and kama. They cast an equal eye on foes, friends and strangers. They never injure, in thought, word or deed, any creature, mobile or immobile. They have no homes. They range over hills and mountains, upon shores of rivers or seas, lie in the shade of trees, and among temples. They may go into towns or villages. However, they should not live for more than five nights in a town, while in a village their stay should never exceed one night. Entering a town or a village, they should, for sustenance, go only to the homes of Brahmanas of liberal deeds. They should never ask for any alms except what is given into the wooden bowls they carry. They should free themselves from lust, wrath, pride, greed, delusion, miserliness, deceit, slander, vanity and violence to living creatures.

On this subject, too, there are some hymns: One who observes the vow of mowna, and roves without giving any creature cause for fear is never given any fear himself by any creature. The learned one who performs the agnihotra not by kindling an external fire but with the fire that is his own body, indeed, who pours libations into his own mouth and on the fire that burns in his own body, succeeds in attaining numerous regions of grace because he feeds the fire with such libations obtained by a life of mendicancy. The Brahmana who observes this mode of life with moksha for its end, with a pure heart and with an intellect freed from resolution, attains Brahman like a tranquil ray of light that is not fed by any blazing fuel."

Bharadwaja said, "Beyond this world that we inhabit there is a world that we have heard of but never seen. I wish to know all about it. Tell me about that realm."

Bhrigu said, "Towards the north, on the other side of Himavat, which is sacred and has every merit, there is a realm that is sacred, blessed and most desirable. It is called Paraloka, the other world. Men who inhabit this world are virtuous, pious, of pure hearts, freed from greed and errors of judgement, and not subject to afflictions of any kind. That realm is, indeed, equal to swarga, for its exalted attributes. Death comes there at the proper

season. Diseases never touch its inhabitants. Nobody harbours any desire for the wives of other men; everyone is devoted to his own wife. These people do not afflict or kill one another, or covet one another's possessions. No sin occurs there, and no doubt arises.

The fruits of all good deeds are plainly manifest there. There some enjoy seats, drinks and food of the best kind, and live in palaces and mansions. Some, adorned with ornaments of gold, surround themselves with every object of enjoyment. Again, some eat very abstemiously, only to keep body and Soul together, while others, with great toil, seek to control their life-breaths.

Here, in this world that we inhabit, some men are devoted to dharma and some to adharma. Some are happy and some miserable; some are poor and some rich. Here toil, fear, delusion and painful hunger make their appearance. Here lust for wealth is also seen, a passion that deludes even the wise. Here diverse opinions prevail, broached by those that live in both punya and paapa. The learned one who knows all the opinions that may be divided into two kinds is never stained by sin. Deceit, with fraud, theft, slander, malice, oppression, violence, treachery, untruth and vices decreases the merit of the tapasya of those who perform penance. The wise person, on the other hand, avoids these sins, and finds the punya of his tapasya increased. Here there is much reflection about actions that are of dharma and ones that are of adharma. This realm that we inhabit is the field of actions, the karma-kshetra. Having done good and evil here, one finds rewards for one's good deeds and evil for sins.

Here Brahma himself, in the days of yore, and all the Devas with the Rishis, performed tapasya, became purified and attained Brahman. The northern portion of the earth is the most auspicious and sacred. Those belonging to this world that do deeds of dharma or show regard for yoga are born in the northern realm.

Others, of a different disposition, take their births in the intermediate species. Some, again, when their allotted life spans run out, become lost on earth. Engaged in feeding upon one another and stained by greed, lust and delusion, these men return to this very world, without being able to go to the northern blessed region, after dying. Intelligent men who observe brahmacharya and keep vratas, who listen with veneration to the instructions of preceptors, succeed in knowing the ends reserved for all kinds of men.

I have now told you in brief the course of duties ordained by Brahma. He, indeed, is said to be possessed of intelligence who knows what dharma is and what its opposite, in this world."'

Bhishma continue, 'Thus, O Rajan, did Bhrigu speak to Bharadwaja. The virtuous Bharadwaja became filled with wonder and worshipped Maharishi Bhrigu with deep reverence. Thus, I have described the origin of the universe to you in detail. What do you wish to hear next?'

CANTO 193

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, I believe that you know all things, O you who know dharma. I want to hear you discourse, O Anagha, on the ordinances about pravritti, conduct.'

Bhishma says, 'They that are of bad conduct, of sinful deeds, of wicked understanding and excessive rashness, are called evil men. They, however, that are called good are distinguished by the purity of their conduct and practices. They are good men who never answer calls of nature on the high roads, in cow-pens or in fields of paddy. After the defecation, one should perform one's ablutions in river water and gratify the gods with oblations of water. This is said to be the duty of all men.

Surya should be always worshipped. One should not sleep after sunrise. Morning and evening prayers prescribed in the scriptures should be recited while sitting with one's face turned towards the east at dawn and towards the west at dusk. Washing the five limbs, one should eat silently with the face turned towards the east. One should never disparage the food that one eats. One should eat food that is pure, well-prepared and tasty. After eating one should wash one's hands and rise. One should never go to sleep at night with wet feet. The Devarishi Narada said that these are indications of good conduct.

Every day one should circumambulate a sacred spot, a bull, a holy image, a cow-pen, a place where four roads meet, a pious Brahmana and a sacred tree. One should not make distinctions between one's guests and

servants and relatives in matters of food. Equality in this regard with servants is lauded. Eating twice a day, in the morning and evening, is an ordinance of the Devas. To eat again at any intermediate time is not allowed. He who eats like this acquires the punya of an upavasa, a fast.

At the hours appointed for homa, one should pour libations on the sacred fire. Without seeking the companionship of other men's wives, the wise man who seeks out his own wife in her season acquires the punya of brahmacharya. The leavings of a Brahmana's food are like amrita. They are like mother's milk. Men prize those leavings called vighasa. By eating them, virtuous men attain Brahman. He who pounds turf to clay to make sacrificial altars, he who cuts grass to make sacrificial fuel, he who uses only his fingers and nails, and not weapons of any kind to eat sanctified meat, he who always subsists on the remnants of a Brahmana's food, he who acts, induced by desire for the high reward, has not to live long in the world. One who has vowed to abstain from meat should not eat any meat even if it were sanctified with mantras from the Yajurveda. One should also avoid the flesh from the vertebral column of any animal and the flesh of animals not slain in sacrifices.

Whether at one's own home or in a strange land, one should never cause one's guest to go without food. One should offer alms received to one's elders. One should offer seats to one's elders and salute them with respect. By worshipping his elders, a man obtains a long life, fame and prosperity. One should never look at the sun at the moment of its rising, nor should one turn one's gaze towards a naked woman who is another man's wife. Congress with one's wife in her season is not sinful but it must always be done in privacy.

The heart of all sacred tirthas and shrines is the guru. The heart of all pure and cleansing things is fire. All deeds done by a pious person are laudable, including the touching of the hair of a cow's tail. Every time one meets with another, one should make polite enquiries after their health and well-being. The reverencing of Brahmanas every morning and evening is ordained. In the temples of gods, amidst cows, in performing the rites of dharma laid down for Brahmanas, in reading the Vedas, and in eating, the right hand should be raised. The worship of Brahmanas, morning and evening, with due rites, yields great punya. From such worship the stock-in-trade of the merchant becomes abundant as does the produce of the farmer.

Great also becomes the yield of all kinds of corn and the supply of all things that the senses can enjoy becomes copious.

When serving another person food, one should inquire, "Is it enough?" When pouring a drink, one should ask, "Will it satisfy you?", and when giving payasa, or the sugared gruel of barley, or milk with sesame or peas, one should ask, "Has it fallen?" After shaving, spitting, bathing and eating, people should worship Brahmanas with reverence. Such worship is sure to bestow longevity on sickly men. One should not pass urine with one's face turned towards the sun, nor should one look at one's own excreta. One should not lie on the same bed with a woman, or eat with her. In addressing elders, one should never use the familiar pronoun or take their names. This is not the case with those equal to or younger than one is in age.

The hearts of sinful men betray the sins committed by them. Those sinners that conceal their conscious sins from good men meet with destruction. Only fools seek to hide the sins that they commit knowingly. It is true that human beings do not see those sins but the gods always witness them. A sin concealed by another sin leads to fresh sins. An action of merit, again, if hidden by another deed of merit, increases the punya. The actions of a virtuous man always follow in the wake of virtue. A man devoid of intellect never thinks of the sins committed by him. Such sins, however, overtake the doer who has fallen away from the scriptures. As Rahu comes to Chandra at his proper time, these sins come to the foolish man.

Objects stored with expectation are scarcely enjoyed. Such hoarding is never lauded by the wise, for death waits for no one but snatches away his prey whether he is prepared or not. The wise have said that the dharma of all creatures is an attribute of the mind. For this reason, one should, in one's mind, think well of and wish good to all. One should practice virtue singly. In the practice of virtue, one has no need for the help of others. If one has the ordinances of the scriptures, what can an associate do? Dharma is the origin of humankind. Dharma is the ambrosia of the gods. After death, through their dharma, men enjoy eternal happiness.'

CANTO 194

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what and of what nature is that which is called Adhyatma and which is ordained for every person. O you who know Brahman, whence has this universe of mobile and unmoving things, been created? When universal destruction, the Pralaya, sets in, to whom does it go? Tell me of all this.'

Bhishma says 'Yudhishtira, I will speak of this Adhyatma that you ask about. It is most agreeable and yields great felicity. Great teachers have always revealed the truths about the creation and destruction of the universe. Knowing these truths, a man may find, even in this world, great satisfaction and prosperity. Such knowledge may also lead to the acquisition of great rewards and is highly beneficial to all creatures. Earth, air, space, water and light numbered as the fifth, are regarded as great spirits, Mahabhutas. These constitute both the origin and the destruction of all created things. Unto him from whom these great primal elements take their origin, they return repeatedly, severing themselves from all creatures into whose compositions they enter, even as the waves of the ocean subside into that from which they seem to rise. As the tortoise stretches its limbs and withdraws them again, so does the Supreme Soul create the universe and again withdraws it into Himself.

The creator imbues all created being with the five primal elements in different proportions. The living creature, however, does not see this through ignorance. Sound, the organs of hearing and all apertures—these

three spring from space, with Akasa as their progenitor. Touch, action, and skin are the triple attributes of Vayu, wind. Form, eye and digestion are the triad attributes of fire, Agni. Taste, all liquid secretions, and the tongue represent the three attributes of water, Apah. Scents, the nose and the body are the three properties of Bhumi, the earth. The great primal elements are five, the Panchamahabhutas. The mind, buddhi, is the sixth. The senses and the mind, O Bhaarata, are the sources of all the perceptions of a living creature. The seventh is called the manas, intellect; and the eighth is the Soul, the Atman.

The senses are for perceiving; the mind, unable to deal with perceptions, creates uncertainty. Awareness reduces all perceptions to certainty. The Soul exists as a witness, never acting itself. All that is above the two feet, all that is behind, and all that is above, are seen by the Soul. Know that the Soul pervades the entire being without any space being left untenanted. All men should know the senses, the mind and the intellect fully.

The three attributes called darkness, passion and goodness, or the gunas known as tamas, rajas and sattva exist, dependent on the senses, the mind and the intellect. Man, by apprehending with the help of his knowledge, the manner in which creatures come into and leave the world, is sure to gradually attain steadfast calm. The traigunas lead the awareness to worldly attachments. In this respect, the intellect is identical with the senses and the mind. Knowledge, therefore, is identical with the six: the five senses and the mind, and with the world perceived by them. When, however, the intellect is destroyed, the three gunas of tamas, rajas and sattva can no more lead to any action.

This universe, chala and achala, consists of that manas. It is from the mind that everything arises and it is into it that everything subsides. For this reason, the scriptures indicate that everything is a manifestation of manas. That by which one hears is the ear. That by which one smells is the nose and that through which one distinguishes the tastes is the tongue. Through the coat of skin that covers the body one has the perception of touch.

That which is called manas undergoes modifications. When the intellect desires anything, it comes to be called the mind. The foundations upon which the intellect rests are five, each serving a different purpose. These are the senses. The invisible principle, intelligence, rests upon them. The mind that exists in a living creature concerns itself with the three gunas

—sattva, rajas and tamas. Sometimes it finds joy and at other times, grief. Sometimes it becomes divested of both joy and misery. Even thus, wisdom exists in the minds of all men. Sometimes the intelligence, which is made up of the traiguna, transcends those three through yoga, communion with Brahman, like the lord of rivers, the ocean, transgressing the continents with tides of vast waves.

The intellect, which transcends the traigunas, exists in the mind in a pure state of unmodified existence: alone. The quality of darkness, however, which impels one to action, soon pursues it. At that time, the intellect sets all the senses to action. The properties of the three are even thus: joy dwells in goodness; sorrow in passion; delusion in darkness. All the states that exist of the mind are included in the three. I have now, O Bhaarata, told you about the course of the intellect. An intelligent man should subdue all his senses.

The three gunas are always attached to living creatures. Three kinds of intelligence also are seen in every creature—that which depends upon sattva, that upon rajas and that upon tamas. The sattva guna brings happiness; rajas produces sorrow; and if these two combine with the quality of tamas then neither happiness nor sorrow ensues but only delusion and error. Every state of happiness that appears in the body or the mind is said to be due to the sattva guna. A state of sorrow, disagreeable to oneself, is due to nothing but rajoguna. One should never think of it with fear. That state, again, which is allied to delusion and dark sin, from which one knows not what to do, which is unascertainable and unknown, belongs to the tamoguna.

Gladness, satisfaction, delight, happiness, peace of mind are the properties of sattva. Man sometimes obtains a measure of them. Discontent, heartache, grief, greed, anger, lust and vindictiveness are all indications of rajas. They are seen with or without adequate cause to make them spring up. Disgrace, delusion, sin, error, torpor, sleep and stupefaction, which overtake one through a surfeit of misfortune, are the various properties of tamas.

The one whose mind is far-reaching, able to extend in all directions, mistrustful of winning the objects it desires, and well restrained, is happy both here and hereafter. Mark the distinction between these two subtle things, the intellect and the Soul—manas and Atman. One of these, the intellect, puts forth qualities. The other, the Soul, does nothing of the kind.

Although a gnat and a fig may be seen together, each is distinct from the other. Similarly, intelligence and the Soul, though separate from each other, by their very natures, may always be seen to exist in a state of union. A fish and water exist in a state of union. Each is entirely different from the other. So it is with the intellect and the Soul.

The gunas do not know the Atman, but the Atman knows them all. The Soul is the spectator of the qualities and regards them all as proceeding from itself. The Soul, acting through the senses, the mind and intellect being the seventh, all of which are inactive and have no self-consciousness, discovers the objects amidst which it exists like a covered lamp revealing everything around it by shedding its rays through an opening in the covering. The mind creates all the qualities. The Soul only beholds them as a witness. Even such is the connection between the mind and Soul.

There is no refuge on which either the intellect or the Soul depends. The intellect creates the mind, but never the qualities. When through the mind the Soul sufficiently restrains the rays that emanate from the senses, it becomes manifest to the mind like a lamp burning within a vessel that envelops it.

He who renounces all mundane activities, practices tapasya, devotes himself to study the Atman, takes delight therein, and regards himself as the Soul of all creatures, acquires a high end. As a water bird, while moving over the water, is never drenched, even so does a person of wisdom move in the world among other creatures. Using one's intelligence, one should live and behave in the world after this fashion, without grief, without joy, with an equal eye for all, and without malice and envy. One living in this way succeeds in creating the qualities, rather than being affected by them, like a spider spins its web. The gunas should, indeed, be regarded as the threads of the spider's web.

Some say that for such men the gunas are not lost; some say that they are all lost. Those who say that they are not lost rely upon the revealed scriptures, the srutis, which do not contain any declaration to the contrary. They, on the other hand, who say that the gunas are all lost, rely on the smritis. Reflecting upon both these opinions, one should judge which of them is right. One should thus go beyond this hard and knotty question that can disturb the intellect with doubt, and thereby win happiness. When doubt is removed, one will no longer have to experience sorrow of any kind.

Men of vile hearts may through knowledge gain spiritual success even like men who plunge into a clear well-filled swift river to purify themselves of all dirt. He who has to cross a wide river does not feel happy at merely seeing the other shore. If by just looking at the other shore he could reach it in a boat, then he might become happy. The matter is otherwise with one who knows the truth. The mere knowledge of truth will bring him happiness. As soon as such knowledge begins to bear fruit, it may be regarded that he has reached the other shore. They, who know the Soul as free from all worldly objects and being but the One, find high and liberating knowledge.

By knowing the origin and the end of all creatures, and by reflecting upon this, a man gradually gains infinite happiness. He who has understood and reflects upon the idea that the traiguna are mortal and not eternal, casts them aside, and succeeds through yoga to behold the truth and obtain perfect felicity. The Soul cannot be seen unless the senses, which are absorbed by diverse objects and are difficult to control, are restrained. He who knows this is wise. What other indication is there of a wise man? With this knowledge, men of intelligence consider themselves to be crowned with final success. That which inspires the ignorant with fear can never inspire fear in men of knowledge. There is no higher end for anyone than mukti.

However, because of the excess or otherwise of good qualities, the sages say that differences exist with the degree of moksha. By acting without expecting any fruit for his deeds, a man succeeds by those very actions in annihilating his sins of a former lifetime. To the wise, the karma of a past life having been thus washed away and the karma of this life also regarding actions performed without expectation of reward, do not fetch any disagreeable consequence, such as immurement in hell. But how can action, if one continues to be engaged in karma, bring about mukti?

The sages censure a man who is ruled by lust, envy and other evil passions. Such vices hurl the jiva in his next life into diverse inferior orders of being. Mark closely the vicious people in this world who grieve so much over the loss of their possessions, sons, wives and others. Look also at those who are gifted with judgement and never grieve when cast into similar circumstances. Men conversant with both—gradual moksha and instant moksha—deserve to be called truly wise.’

CANTO 195

Bhishma says, 'I will now, O son of Pritha, tell you about the four kinds of yoga-dhyana. Gaining knowledge of these, the Maharishis attain eternal moksha even here, in this world. Maharishis gratified with knowledge, with hearts set upon mukti, and conversant with yoga, perform karma in such a manner that their dhyana might progress effectively. Liberated from the faults of the world, Yudhishtira, these never return to rebirth. Free from birth and death, they live in their original state, absorbed in the Brahman. Freed from the influence of all the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, joy and sorrow, and the rest, ever dwelling in their own pristine Soul, liberated from attachments, never accepting anything as gifts, they live in places free from the companionship of wives and children, without others with whom disputes may arise, places favourable to perfect peace of mind.

There, such a one, with speech restrained, sits like a block of wood, all his senses subdued, with his mind undividedly united through dhyana with the Paramatman. He has no perception of sound, none of touch; no perception of form, none of scent, and none of taste. Immersed in yoga, he abandons all things, and is rapt just in dhyana. Possessed of great energy of mind, he has no desire for anything that excites or stirs the five senses.

The wise man, withdrawing his five senses into the mind, should then fix the unstable mind with the five senses in the intellect. Possessed of patience, the yogin stills his constantly wandering mind, so that the five

portals to his body are sealed from all distracting worldly objects. In the firmament of the heart, he focuses his mind in meditation, making it independent of the body or any other refuge. I have spoken of the path of meditation as the first path, since the yogin has first to quell his senses and his mind and direct them singly to that path.

When thus restrained, the mind, which is the sixth sense, seeks to flash out like capricious lightning frolicking among the clouds. As a drop of water on a lotus leaf is unstable and moves about in all directions, even so is the yogin's mind when first turned to the path of dhyana. When focused for a while, the mind stays on that path. When it strays again onto the path of the wind, it becomes as flighty as the wind. The one adept with the ways of yoga-dhyana, is not discouraged by this. He ignores the loss of his effort and, with idleness and malice cast aside, he returns to direct his mind again to meditation.

When one yokes one's mind in yoga, in silence, one gains discrimination, knowledge and the power to avoid evil. Though annoyed by the flightiness of his mind, the seeker should constantly draw it back and fix it repeatedly in dhyana. The yogin should never despair, but seek his own good. As a heap of dust, ashes or burnt cowdung, when only partially wetted with water is not fully drenched, and, indeed, continues to dry again and must be incessantly watered before it gradually becomes soaked through, even so should the yogin strive to control his senses. He should withdraw them gradually. Then he succeeds in controlling them.

O Bhaarata, by directing one's mind and senses to the path of meditation, one succeeds in bringing them under perfect control through steadfast yoga. The bliss felt by a person who has succeeded in controlling his mind and senses is such that its like can never be found through exertion or destiny. United with such felicity, he continues to find deep bliss in meditation. Even in this way yogins attain nirvana.'

CANTO 196

Yudhishtira says, 'You have spoken on the four stages of life and their duties. You have also spoken of the dharma of kings. You have recounted many ancient tales of diverse kinds and dealing with diverse subjects. I have also heard from you, O you of great intelligence, many discourses about dharma. I have, however, one lingering question. I wish, O Bhaarata, to hear about the fruits that silent chanters of sacred mantras, the japis, acquire through their practice of japa. What are the fruits that have been indicated for such men? Which is the world to which they go after death? Also, O sinless one, tell me all the laws that have been laid down for japa. When the word japi is uttered, what shall I understand by it? Is such a man to be regarded as following the ordinances of samkhya, yoga or karma? Or does he observe the laws of yagna? What is the path of the japis called? You have, as I believe, universal knowledge. Tell me all this.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old itihasa of what transpired between Yama, Kaala and a certain Brahmana. Sages conversant with the means of attaining moksha have spoken of two paths: samkhya and yoga. Amongst these, in the first, otherwise called the Vedanta, renunciation has been preached with regard to silent japa. The declarations of the Vedas preach that abstention from rites is fraught with tranquillity, and is concerned directly with Brahman. Indeed, the two paths spoken of by sages bent on achieving their weal are such that both concern, as well as do not concern,

japa. I will explain the manner in which silent chanting is connected with each of the two paths and its cause.

In both samkhya and yoga, as in the case of japa, the senses must be subdued and the mind fixed in dhyana after withdrawing it from the outer world. Truth is also prescribed, keeping the sacred fire lit, living in solitude, penance, self-restraint, forgiveness, benevolence, abstemiousness in food, withdrawal from worldly attachments, silence and serenity. These constitute a yagna in deeds, in karma.

Listen now to the course that consists of abstention from karma. The manner in which the karma of the japi observing the vow of brahmacharya may cease, I will speak of presently. Such a man should conduct himself in every way according to what I have already said. Setting himself on the path of abstention, he should seek to extinguish his dependence on both the outer and the inner attachments. Sitting on kusa grass, with kusa in his hand, and binding his hair with kusa, he should surround himself with kusa and wear kusa as his raiment.

Bowing to all earthly concerns, he should take leave of them and never then think of them. Assuming equability with the help of his mind, he should fix his mind on the mind itself. Reciting the most sacred mother of all mantras, the Gayatri, he meditates with his intellect on Brahman alone. Afterwards, he leaves off even that, then becoming absorbed in the highest dhyana. This highest dhyana will come of itself because of the power of the Gayatri that he recites. Through tapasya, he attains purity of the Soul, self-restraint and the cessation of aversion and desire. Freed from attachment and delusion, above the influence of all the pairs of opposites—heat and cold, joy and sorrow and all the others—he never grieves and never suffers himself to be drawn towards worldly objects. He does not regard himself as the doer, or the enjoyer or sufferer of the results of his actions. He never, through selfishness, sets his mind on any object of desire.

Without being employed in the acquisition of wealth, he abstains also from disregarding or insulting others, but not from work. The work in which he is engrossed is that of meditation; he is devoted to meditation, and seeks meditation unalterably. Through meditation, he succeeds in bringing about concentrated dhyana, and then gradually leaves off meditation itself. In that state, he enjoys the felicity that attaches to the abandonment of all things. With complete control over desire, he casts off his life-breaths and enters into the Brahmic body. Alternatively, if he does not wish to enter into

the Brahmic body, he ascends into Brahmaloka and is never reborn. Having become tranquillity's self, and freed from every kind of trouble, depending upon his own intelligence, such a one succeeds in attaining that Soul which is pure, immortal and without any stain.'

CANTO 197

Yudhishtira says, 'You have said that japis find this very high end. Is this their only end or there is any other to which they aspire?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O mighty king, to the end that silent japis attain, and to the diverse kinds of hell into which they sink. The japi who does not at first conduct himself according to the prescribed method, and who cannot complete the ritual or course of discipline laid down, must sink into hell. The chanter who is without faith, who is not content with his work, and who takes no pleasure in it, finds hell for himself. They who follow the ritual with pride in their hearts, all go to hell. The reciter who insults and disregards others will find naraka. The man who betakes himself to silent chanting under the influence of tamas and from a desire for fruit, gains all the things upon which his heart becomes set.

The japi, whose heart is intent upon the attributes that go by the name of sattva, has to incur hell. The chanter who takes to recitation under the influence of attachments to earthly objects such as wealth, wives and others, obtains the objects upon which his heart is set. The reciter of evil intellect and uncleansed Soul, who sets himself to his work with an unstable mind, finds an unstable end or falls into naraka. The chanter who is unwise, foolish, stupefied or deluded falls into hell where he suffers fierce regrets. If a man of even firm heart, and resolved to complete the discipline, takes to japa, but fails to attain its culmination because he has freed himself from

attachments by a violent wrench without genuine conviction of their uselessness or harmful character, he too finds naraka.'

Yudhishtira says, 'After the japi acquires the essence of that which is Supreme, indescribable, inconceivable, which dwells in Pranava, the syllable AUM that is the subject of both japa and dhyana, indeed, when japis attain the state of Brahman, why is it that they still have to be born again in embodied forms?'

Bhishma says, 'As a result of the absence of true knowledge and wisdom, chanters fall into diverse hells. The discipline followed by japis is certainly a superior one. These, however, are its faults.'

CANTO 198

Yudhishtira says, 'Describe the hells to which a japi goes. I feel, O Pitamaha, a curiosity to know about them.'

Bhishma says, 'You have sprung from an amsa of Dharma Deva. You are by nature observant of dharma. Listen, O Anagha, with undivided attention, to these words that rest on dharma.

The realms that belong to the high-Souled Devas are of diverse aspects, colours, descriptions, which yield myriad fruits, and are of great excellence. The chariots again that move at the will of their riders, the beautiful mansions and halls, the various pleasure-gardens embellished with golden lotuses, the realms that belong to the four Lokapalas, Sukra, Brihaspati, the Maruts, Viswedevas, Sadhyas, Aswins, Rudras, Adityas, Vasus and other lords of swarga are spoken of as hells, when compared with the region of the Paramatman.

The realm of the Brahman is free from any fear, uncreated, the first and the last, without pain of any kind, without ignorance and delusion, without any agreeable or disagreeable element, beyond the reach of sattva, rajas and tamas. It is free from the five primal elements, the senses, mind and intellect. It is without the three distinctions between the knower, the known and knowing; free also from the four actions of seeing, hearing, thinking and knowing, without the four-fold causes of relative knowledge, without joy, sorrow and disease.

Time in his forms of past, present and future arises there for use at will. Kaala is not the ruler there. The supreme world is the ruler of time as also of heaven. The japi who becomes identified with his Soul by withdrawing everything into it goes there, he never has to feel any sorrow. This world is called Supreme. All the other realms of which I first spoke are hells. I have not told you of all the worlds that are called hells. Indeed, in comparison with the best of worlds, all the others are called hell.’

CANTO 199

Yudhishtira says, 'You referred to the dispute between Kaala, Mrityu, Yama, Ikshvaku and a Brahmana. Relate that story to me in full.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the Purana of what transpired between Surya's son Ikshvaku, a certain Brahmana, and Kaala and Mrityu. Listen to what happened, the conversation that took place between them, and the place where it transpired.

There was a certain Brahmana of great fame and pious conduct. He was a japi. Possessed of deep wisdom, he was well conversant with the six Angas of the Vedas. He was of the Kusika vamsa and the son of Pippalada. Through his tapasya, he acquired spiritual insight into the Angas. He lived at the foot of Himavat, and was devoted to the Vedas. Silently reciting the Gayatri mantra, he practiced severe austerities to attain Brahman. A thousand years passed while he was engaged in the observance of vows and fasts. The goddess of the Gayatri, she who is called Savitri, showed herself to him and said, "I am gratified with you."

Continuing to recite the sacred mantra, the Brahmana remained silent and spoke not a word to the Devi. The goddess felt compassion for him and became most gratified. The mother of the Vedas lauded the japa in which the Brahmana had been engaged. After finishing his chanting for the day, the Brahmana stood up and, with head bowed, prostrated himself before Devi Savitri's feet.

The exalted japi said, “Through great fortune, O Devi, you have become pleased with me and have shown yourself to me. If, indeed, you are gratified with me, the boon I ask is that my heart may take pleasure in being engrossed in japa.”

Savitri said, “What do you ask for, O Rishi? What wish of yours shall I accomplish? Tell me, O best of japis, and everything will be as you wish.”

The Brahmana replied, “Let my desire to continue my japa increase with each passing moment. Let also, O auspicious Devi, the absorption of my mind into samadhi be more complete.”

The goddess sweetly said, “Let it be as you wish.” Wanting to bless the Brahmana, the Devi said again to him, “You will not have to go to the hell where other great Brahmanas go. You will go into the realm of Brahman, which is uncreated and free from every fault. I will leave you now, but that which you have asked me shall come to pass. Continue chanting with a restrained Soul and rapt attention. The god Dharma will come to you in person. Kaala, Mrityu and Yama also will all approach you. There will be a dispute here, between them and you, on a question of dharma.”

With these words, the Devi Savitri returned to her own abode and the Brahmana continued his japa for a thousand celestial years. With anger restrained, bereft of malice, in control of himself, he passed his time firmly devoted to truth. Upon the completion of his observance, Dharma Deva, gratified with him, showed his person to the enlightened one.

Dharma said, “O Dvija, behold me, I am Dharma. I have come here to see you. You have won the reward of your long japa. I will tell you what the reward is. You have won all the realms of felicity that belong to either the gods or men. O virtuous Soul, you will ascend above all the realms of the Devas. O sannyasi, cast off your prana and go to whatever realm you please. By discarding your body you will win many worlds of bliss.”

The Brahmana said, “What have I to do with the worlds of bliss of which you speak? O Dharma, go wherever you please. I will not, O puissant lord, shed this body that is subject to great happiness and pain.”

Dharma said, “Dvijottama, your body must be cast aside. Ascend to swarga, O Brahmana! Or tell us what else would please you, sinless one.”

The Brahmana said, “I do not wish to dwell in heaven itself without this body of mine. Leave me, O Dharma. I have no desire to go to swarga without my own body.”

Dharma said, “Do not set your heart so on your body; discard it and be happy. Go into regions that are free from the Rajoguna and where you will never have to feel any pain or grief.”

The Brahmana said, “O highly blessed one, I find great bliss in japa. What need have I for the immortal lokas of which you speak? Indeed, O mighty Lord, I do not wish to go to swarga even with this body of mine.”

Dharma said, “If you do not wish to cast off your body, behold, O Dvija, here is Kaala, there is Mrityu, and Yama, who are all approaching you!”

After Dharma had said this, Vivaswat’s son Yama, Kaala and Mrityu, the three who snatch away all creatures from the earth, approached the Brahmana and addressed him thus.

Yama said, “I am Yama. I say unto you that a high reward awaits you for this excellent tapasya of yours, and for this pious conduct that you have observed.”

Kaala said, “You have won a high reward which is in proportion to the japa that you have completed. The time is come for you to ascend into swarga. I am Kaala and I have come to you.”

Mrityu said, “O you that are a knower of dharma, know me for Mrityu herself in her true form. I have come to you in person, urged by Kaala, to bear you away from here, O Brahmana.”

The Brahmana said, “Welcome to Surya’s son, to Kaala, to Mrityu and to Dharma! What can I do for you all?”

The Brahmana gave them padya, water to wash their feet, and the usual offerings of the arghya. He then said, “What can I do for you all? Everything I possess is at your disposal.”

Just at that time, King Ikshvaku, who had set out on a yatra to the holy tirthas and shrines, came to the place where the Devas were. The Rajarishi Ikshvaku bowed his head and paid homage to them; he enquired after the welfare of each one. The Brahmana gave the king a seat, as also padya to wash his feet, and arghya. He made the customary enquiries of courtesy, and said, “Welcome, O great sovereign. How may I serve you? For your wishes are my command.”

The king replied, “I am a king. You are a Brahmana under the vows of the six renowned dharmas. It is not my place to ask you for anything, but on the other hand, only proper I should be the one to give you whatever you

may need. Tell me how I may be of service to you, be it in kind or in wealth."

The Brahmana said, "There are two kinds of Brahmanas, O Rajan. Dharma is also of two kinds; he who is addicted to work, and the one that stays away from work do both live by their own dharmas. As regards myself, I do not accept gifts. Give gifts to them, O monarch, that are drawn to the way of karma and its fruits. I will not take anything from you. On the other hand, I ask you: what, indeed, shall I give you? Tell me, O outstanding king, and I will accomplish it with the help of my tapasya."

The king said, "I am a Kshatriya, a warrior. I do not know how to say the word 'give'. The only thing, O best among the reborn, that we can say by way of asking is: Give us battle!"

The Brahmana said, "You are content with the observance of the duties of your order, your svadharma. Similarly, I am content with the duties of mine, O regent. There is little difference between us. Do as you please!"

The king said, "Earlier you declared: 'I will give you all that is within my power.' I, therefore, ask you, O bestower of new life—give me the fruits of the japa that you have performed."

The Brahmana said, "You boast that your asking is always only for battle. Why then do you not seek battle with me?"

Ikshvaku said, "It is said that Brahmanas are armed with the thunder of speech, and Kshatriyas have the might of arms. Hence, learned Brahmana, we are now engaged in this battle of words."

The Brahmana said, "Let me once again impress upon you that all that is within my power along with all of my wealth is for your asking. Come, rid yourself of this hesitation."

The king said, "And I, too, repeat on my part: if, indeed, you wish to give me anything, then give me the fruits of your japa of the past thousand years."

The Brahmana said, "Take the highest fruit of my japa. Feel free to take half of the fruit. Indeed, why just half, O king? If you wish, do not hesitate to take all the fruits of my japa."

The king said, "I am grateful for your generosity and may a shower of blessings be upon you, but I have no need for the fruits of your japa, even though I asked for them. But before I leave, tell me more about these fruits."

The Brahmana said, “I am not aware of what fruits I may have won through my japa. With Dharma, Kaala, Yama and Mrityu as my witnesses, all I know is that I have now given those fruits to you.”

The king said, “What could I do with fruits that you have no knowledge of? If you do not tell me what the fruits are, let them be yours, for I have no wish for them. Undoubtedly, I would rather not accept such rewards, than possess them and remain ignorant of their worth.”

The Brahmana said, “Enough! Speak no more. I have given you the fruits of my japa. Let us now honour our words, O Rajarishi. As for my japa, I never undertook it in order to fulfil any specific desires. How then, O tiger among kings, should I have any knowledge of what the fruits are of the japa? You said, ‘Give!’ And I said, ‘I give!’ I will not betray my word. Keep the truth. Be calm. If you refuse to keep your word, O king, great sin will fall on you. Speaking falsely, O Parantapa, is not becoming of you.

Similarly, I dare not render false what I have said. I readily said, ‘I give!’ So, if you are firm in truth then accept my gift. After all, Maharajan, you did come here and ask me for the fruits of my japa. So take what I have offered, if you are honest. He who is addicted to deceit has no place in this world nor the next. Such a one fails to redeem his ancestors. How can he even succeed in doing any good to his unborn progeny?

The rewards of sacrifices and gifts, as also of fasts and religious observances, are not so effective in saving a man from evil and hell as the truth is, O bull among men, in both this and the next world. All the penances that you have undergone and all those that you will undergo in the future for hundreds and thousands of years do not possess an efficacy greater than that of truth.

Truth is the one undecaying Brahman. Truth is the one unfailing tapasya. Truth is the one undiminishing yagna. Truth is the one undeteriorating Veda. Truth is awake in the Vedas. The fruits attached to truth are said to be the highest. From Satya arise dharma and niyama. Everything rests on truth. Satya is the Vedas and their Angas. Truth is knowledge. Truth is the law. Truth is the observance of vows and fasts. Satya is the primeval AUM. Truth is the origin of creatures. Truth is their progeny. It is by truth that the wind moves. It is by truth that the sun gives heat. It is by truth that fire burns. It is on truth that heaven rests. Satya is parityaga, tapasya, the chanting of Samans. Satya is the Vedas and Saraswati.

It is said that once truth and all religious observances were placed on a pair of scales. When both were weighed, truth was seen to be heavier.

Satya and dharma stand side by side. Everything is enhanced through truth. Why, O king, would you wish to do something that is stained with untruth? Be rooted in satya. Do not act falsely, O monarch. Why would you go back on your word of 'Give me'?

If you refuse, O Rajan, to accept the fruits of my japa, you will wander in the world, fallen from dharma. He who does not give what he promised, as also the one who does not accept what he sought, are both guilty of deceit. Therefore, it is vital for you not to break your word."

The king said, "To fight and protect are the duties of Kshatriyas. It is said that Kshatriyas are givers of gifts. How then can I take anything from you as a gift?"

The Brahmana said, "I never insisted that you, O king, accept anything from me in the first place. I did not come to your house. In fact, you came to me asking for the fruits of my japa. Why do you not take them now?"

Lord Dharma said, "Be aware, both of you, that I am Dharma. Let there be no dispute between you. Let the Brahmana receive the reward for his gift, and let the king, too, obtain the merit of satya."

Now Swarga said, "Know, O great king, that I am heaven manifest in person. Let this dispute between you cease. You are both equal in merit or rewards earned."

The king said, "I have no use for heaven. Return, O Swarga, to where you have come from. If this learned Brahmana desires a remedy through you, then let him take the rewards that I have won by my deeds in life."

The Brahmana said, "In my youth, through ignorance, I did stretch out my hand for alms. Now, however, I recite the Gayatri, while observing vairagya. Why do you, O king, tempt me like this, I who have for a long time been in tapasya? I will myself do what my dharma is. I do not wish to have any share of the rewards won by you, O Kshatriya. I am devoted to tapasya and the study of the Vedas, and I have abstained from acceptance."

The king said, "If, O Brahmana, you really want to give me the rewards of your japa, then let half those rewards be mine. And you must take half the reward that I have won by my deeds. Brahmanas are engaged in the dharma of acceptance. Men born into the Kshatriya varna engage in the duty of giving. If you are not aware of the dharma laid down for both the varnas, let our fruits be equal. Or, if you do not wish to be my equal in

our rewards, take all the rewards that I may have won. Ah, take the punya I have won, if you wish to show me charity."

At this juncture, two ungraceful individuals came there. Each had his arm upon the other's shoulder; both were badly dressed. They said these words, "You owe me nothing. In fact, I really owe you. If we quarrel in this way, here is the king who rules over men. I say truly, you owe me nothing!"

"You speak falsely. I do owe you a debt!"

Both of them, waxing hot in debate, then addressed the king, saying, "See, O monarch, that neither of us may become stained with sin."

The one called Virupa said, "I owe my companion Vikrita, O king, the merits of the gift of a cow. I am willing to repay the debt. This Vikrita, however, refuses to take repayment."

Vikrita said, "This Virupa, O king, owes me nothing. He tells lies dressed in the garb of truth."

The king said, "Tell me, O Virupa, what is it that you owe your friend here? I am determined to hear you and then do what is proper."

Virupa said, "Listen carefully about the circumstances in detail, of how I owe my companion Vikrita, O ruler of men. Vikrita, in the past, for the sake of winning punya, O Anagha, gave away an auspicious cow to a Brahmana devoted to tapasya as also the study of the Vedas. Going to him, O king, I begged of him the reward of his devotions. With a pure heart, Vikrita made a gift to me of the reward.

Later on, to purify myself, I did some good deeds. I also bought two Kapila cows with calves, both of which yielded goodly quantities of milk. Next, according to the due rites and with proper devotion, I made a gift of the two cows to a poor Brahmana living by the unchha vrata. Since I accepted the gift from my companion, I now wish to give him twice the reward he gave me. O tiger among men, who between the two of us is innocent and who guilty in your eyes? Who performs due rites and with proper devotion? At odds about this, we have come to you, O great king. Whether you judge right or wrong, establish peace between both of us. If my companion does not wish to accept in return from me a gift equal to what he gave me, then you will have to judge patiently and set us both on the right path."

The king said, "Why do you not accept the payment that is owed to you? Do not delay, but accept what you know is your due."

Vikrita said, “This one says that he owes me. I say to him that what I gave him I gave away. He does not, therefore, owe me anything. Let him go wherever he wishes.”

The king said, “He is ready to give you; you, however, are unwilling to accept it. This does not seem proper to me. I think that you deserve punishment for this. There is little doubt in this.”

Vikrita said, “I made a gift to him, O Rajarishi! How can I take it back? If I am guilty in this, you pronounce the punishment, O puissant one.”

Virupa said, “If you refuse to accept when I am ready to give, this king will certainly punish you, for he is an upholder of nyaya.”

Vikrita said, “Upon his request I gave him what was mine. How will I now take that back? You may go away; please leave.”

The Brahmana said, “You have heard, O king, the words of these two. Do you accept without doubt what I have pledged to give you?”

The king said, “This matter is, indeed, as deep in importance as an abyss. How will this debate end? If I do not accept what has been given by this Brahmana, how do I avoid being stained with a great sin?”

The Rajarishi then said to the two supplicants, “Go away both of you; you have won your respective objects. I should see that the Rajadharma vested in me does not become futile. It is settled that kings should observe the dharma laid down for them. To my misfortune, however, the course of dharma prescribed for Brahmanas has possessed my wretched self.”

The Brahmana said, “Accept, O king! I owe you. You did ask, and I pledged to give you. If, however, you refuse to accept, I will undoubtedly curse you.”

The king said, “Fie on Rajadharma, for such a thankless resolution. I will, however, take what you give, only in order to render the two courses of dharmas as exact equals. Here is my hand, which was never before stretched out for the acceptance of gifts; it is now stretched out to receive as also to give. Give me what you owe me.”

The Brahmana said, “If I have won any fruits by chanting the Gayatri, accept them all.”

The king said, “These drops of water, behold, O best of Brahmanas, have fallen upon my hand. I also desire to give to you. Accept my gift. Let there be equality between us.”

Virupa said, "Know, O king, that we two are Kama and Krodha. Because of us, you have been provoked to act in this way. You have made a gift in return to the Brahmana. Let there be equality between you and this Dvija in respect of regions of grace in the next world. Vikrita really does not owe me anything. We appealed to you for your own sake. Kaala, Dharma, Mrityu and we two have examined everything about you in your very presence by creating this friction between you and the Brahmana. Go now, as you please, to the worlds of bliss which you have won through your deeds."'

Bhishma continues, 'I have now told you how japis obtain the fruits of their chanting and what, indeed, is their end—what is the place, and what are the worlds that a japi may attain. A japi of the Gayatri mantra goes to Brahma, to Agni, or enters Suryaloka. If he dallies there in his new energetic form, then stupefied by such attachment, he acquires the attributes of those particular realms. The same becomes the case with him if he goes to Soma, Vayu, Bhumi or Akasa. The fact is, he dwells in all these, with attachment, and displays the traits peculiar to those worlds.

If, however, he goes to these regions without any attachment, and is wary of the felicity he enjoys and wishes for that which is Supreme and Immutable, he then enters even that. As such, he attains the ambrosia of ambrosias, to a state free from desire and devoid of a separate consciousness. He becomes Brahman's very self, freed from the influence of opposites, happy, peaceful and without pain. Indeed, he attains that condition which is free from suffering, which is serenity's self, which is Brahman, the One from where there is no return.

He is freed from the four causes of apprehension, the six conditions, and the other sixteen attributes. Transcending the creator Brahma, he attains absorption into the One Supreme Soul. Or, if under the influence of attachments, he does not wish for such absorption, but desires to have a separate existence dependent on the supreme cause of everything, he then obtains everything for which he cherishes a wish. Alternatively, if he looks with distaste upon all realms of felicity, which have been previously called hells, then, bereft of desire and free from everything, he enjoys supreme grace and bliss even in those very worlds.

Thus, O monarch, I have told you about the goal attained by japis. I have told you everything. What else do you wish to hear?'

CANTO 200

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Bhishma, what reply was given by either the Brahmana or the king to Virupa after the conclusion of what he said. How did it end between those described by you? What was the dialogue between them, and what did they do there?'

Bhishma says, 'The Brahmana affirmed, "Let it be as you have said," and began his worship of Dharma, Yama, Kaala, Mrityu and Swarga, all of whom were worthy of adoration. He also worshipped all the eminent Brahmanas that had come there by bowing his head to them. Addressing the king next, he said, "Bestowed with the reward of my japa, O Rajarishi, attain a position of eminence. With your leave, I will set myself to my japa again. O mighty one, the Devi Savitri gave me a boon, saying, 'Let your devotion to japa be eternal.'

The king said, "If your success in japa has become fruitless because you have given away those fruits to me, and if your heart is set upon sadhana again, then, O learned Brahmana, let half your japa accrue to me and half remain with you, and let the reward of your japa be yours."

The Brahmana said, "You have made great efforts before all these persons to make me a partner in the rewards in store for you as the result of your own deeds. Let us then become equal in our rewards in the next life, and let us go to receive the end which is ours."

Knowing the determination with which they came there, Indra, the king of the Devas, appeared there, accompanied by the other Devas,

Lokapalas, and other regents of the world. The Sadhyas, Viswas, Mantras, diverse kinds of loud and sweet music, rivers, mountains, seas, sacred waters, penances, ordinances of yoga, Vedas, the sounds that accompany the singing of the Samans, Saraswati, Narada, Parvata, Viswavasu, the Hahas, the Huhus, the Gandharva Chitrasena with all the members of his family, the Nagas, Sadhyas, Munis, Prajapati, Devadeva, and the inconceivable thousand-headed Vishnu himself, arrived there. Drums and trumpets were beaten and blown in the heavens. Celestial flowers were showered down upon the high-Souled beings. Bands of apsaras danced all around. Swarga, in his embodied form, came there.

Addressing the Brahmana, he said, “You have achieved success. You are blessed.” Next he addressed the king, and said, “You also, O emperor, have achieved success.”

Later, with good done to each other, the Brahmana and the king withdrew their senses from the objects of the world. With the vital breaths prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana fixed in their hearts, they concentrated their minds in prana and apana united as one. They set the two united breaths in the abdomen, and directed their gazes to the tip of the nose and then immediately below the eyebrows. They next held the two breaths, with the help of the mind, in the point between the two eyebrows, bringing them there very gradually. With bodies perfectly still, they remained absorbed with fixed gaze. In control of their Souls, they raised it within the brain. Then piercing the crown of the divine Brahmana, a fiery flame of great splendour ascended into the sky. Loud exclamations of awe, uttered by all creatures, rent the air on all sides.

Its praises sung by all, that flame then entered Brahma’s Self. The Pitamaha stepped forward, and addressed the radiance that had assumed a form of tremendous height, with the words, “Welcome!” Furthermore, he said, “Verily, japis attain the same goal as do the yogins. The achievement by the yogin of his goal is an object directly visible to everyone here. As for japis, there is this distinction that they have the honour of Brahma coming forward to receive them after their departure from earth. Come merge yourself in me.”

Thus spoke Brahma and once more imparted consciousness into that towering lustre. The Brahmana, freed from all anxieties, entered the mouth of the creator. King Ikshvaku similarly entered the divine Pitamaha like the best of Brahmanas. The gathered Devas saluted the Self-born and said, “A

very superior goal is indeed ordained for japis. What we have seen you do is for japis. As for ourselves, we came here to witness it. You have made these two equal, given them equal honour, and bestowed upon them an equal goal. We have seen today the high goal reserved for both yogins and japis. Transcending all the worlds of bliss, these two can go wherever they wish."

Brahma said, "Even he who reads the great smriti like the Veda, as also he who reads the other auspicious smritis, Manu's and the rest, would, in this way, attain the same world with me. Also, the one who is devoted to yoga, will, undoubtedly acquire in this manner, after death, the lokas that are mine. I take my leave. All of you return to your homes in order to achieve your goals."'

Bhishma continues, 'With these words, Brahma disappeared. The assembled Devas returned to their respective abodes. All the Divine Beings honoured Dharma, and went happily, walking behind the great Deva.

These are the rewards of japis and this their attainment. I have described them to you as I myself heard them. What else, O king, do you wish to hear?'

CANTO 201

Yudhishtira says, 'What are the fruits of the yoga represented by knowledge of all the Vedas, and of the various observances and vows? How also may the Soul be known? Tell us this, O Bhishma.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the ancient narrative of the discourse between the lord of creatures, Manu, and Maharishi Brihaspati.

In days of old, the best of celestial Rishis, Brihaspati, who was a disciple of Manu, bowed to his preceptor and said, "What is the cause of the universe? From where have the laws about yagnas and other pious observances come? What are the fruits that the learned say are attached to knowledge? Tell me also truly, O illustrious one, what is that which the very Vedas have not been able to reveal? What are the fruits adored by eminent men well versed with the science of artha, the Vedas and mantras, through yagnas and plentiful gifts of kine? From where do those fruits arise? Where are they to be found?

Tell me also the itihasa of from where the earth, all earthly objects, wind, sky, aquatic creatures, water, heaven and the denizens of heaven, have come. Man tends to incline towards the object of which he seeks knowledge. I have no knowledge of the Ancient and Supreme One. How will I rescue myself from a false display of inclinations towards Him?

I have studied the Riks, all the Samanas, the Yajuses, Chhandas, Jyotisha-shastra, Nirukta, Vyakarana, Sankalpa and Siksha. However, I have no knowledge of the nature of the great creatures, the Panchamahabhutas,

which enter into the composition of everything. Tell me about all this in simple terms. Tell me what the fruits are of knowledge and those of sacrifices and other religious rites. Explain to me also how an embodied being departs from his body and how he acquires another body."

Manu said, "That which is agreeable to one is said to constitute one's happiness. Similarly, that which is disagreeable is said to constitute one's sorrow. 'By this I will obtain happiness and keep sorrow away'—from this sentiment flow all religious actions. The efforts to acquire knowledge, however, arise from a desire to avoid both happiness and sorrow. The laws about sacrifices and other observances, which occur in the Vedas, are all connected with desire. He, however, who liberates himself from desire, succeeds in attaining Brahman. One, who, out of a desire of winning happiness, seeks it in myriad ways and with diverse actions, falls into hell."

Brihaspati said, "Man's aspirations are concerned with the means to acquire happiness, and to avoid pain and sorrow. Such acquisition and avoidance again are accomplished through karma."

Manu said, "It is by liberating oneself from karma that one succeeds in attaining Brahman. The laws of karma are meant for that very end. These laws bind only those who are not free from desire. By liberating oneself from karma, one acquires the highest state. The desire for mukti leads one to religious rites and actions aimed at freedom from attachments and the purification of the Soul. By freeing oneself from karma, one achieves the highest goal, Brahman, which is far beyond the reward that karma bestows.

Creatures have all been created by manas and karma. These again are the two best paths adored by all. Outward actions yield fruits that are temporary as also eternal. To acquire the everlasting there is no other means than the relinquishment of fruits, by the mind. Just as the eye distinguishes light from darkness, so does awareness recognise and evade evil. Men avoid snakes, sharp kusa blades and dangerous pits, which cross their path. If some tread upon or fall into them, they do so through ignorance. Such is the superiority of knowledge over ignorance.

Mantras chanted duly, yagnas, dakshina, bhiksha and dhyana are the five karmas that are solely said to yield fruits. Karmas have the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas for their Soul. The Vedas say this. The Vedas consist of mantras. The mantras, therefore, have the same three attributes, since it is with mantras that karma is to be accomplished. The ritual also must be liable to the same three gunas.

The fruits of action depend upon the mind. The embodied creature enjoys the fruits. All excellent kinds of sound, form, taste, touch and scent, are the fruits of actions, attained in swarga. However, man, right here, acquires the fruits of knowledge before death.

The fruits of all actions are achieved through the body, and enjoyed in a state of physical existence. The body is, indeed, the framework to which both happiness as well as suffering inhere. Rewards of actions accomplished by means of words, are enjoyed in a state of spoken words. Similarly, the fruits of deeds accomplished by the mind are enjoyed in a state within the realms of the mind. Devoted to the fruits of karma, whether sattvika, rajasika or tamasika, a person receives rewards, good or bad, and accordingly shares their nature. Like fish swimming against a current of water, the karma of a past life comes to the doer. The embodied creature experiences happiness for his good karma, and suffering for his evil doings.

He from whom this universe has sprung; He by knowing whom persons of cleansed Souls transcend this world; He who has not been expressed by Vedic mantras and words—Him I will now indicate. Listen to me as I speak of the highest of the high.

Himself free from the several kinds of taste, scent, sound, touch and form, He is incapable of being grasped by the senses. Unmanifest, without colour, the One, He has created the five kinds of objects for His creatures. He is neither female nor male, nor of the neuter sex. He is neither existent, nor non-existent, nor both existent and non-existent. Only those acquainted with Brahman behold Him. He knows no direction.”

CANTO 202

Manu said, “From the eternal and unfailing one, first sprang space; from space came wind; from wind came light; from light came water; from water came the universe; and from the universe, all things that occur in it. The bodies of all earthly beings, after their demise, first enter into water, then into light or fire, then into the wind, and then into space.

Those who seek mukti need not return from ethereal space. They attain Brahman. Brahman is neither hot nor cold, neither mild nor harsh, neither sour nor astringent, neither sweet nor bitter. He is not attributed with sound, scent or form. He transcends all these and everything, and is without dimensions.

The skin perceives touch; the tongue, taste; the nose, scent; the ears, sounds; and the eyes, forms. Men unfamiliar with Adhyatma do not succeed in seeing what is above these. With the tongue withdrawn from tastes, the nose from scents, the ears from touch and the eyes from forms, one succeeds in beholding one’s own self as independent of the senses and the mind and, therefore, of the three gunas.

It is said, that which is the cause of the doer, the deed, that which is used for the deed, the place and the time of the deed, and the tendencies towards happiness and sorrow, is called the self or the Soul. That which pervades everything, which does everything in the form of living creatures, that which exists in the universe as the mantras declare, that which is the

cause of all, that which is the highest of the high, and that which is one without a second and does all things, is the cause. Everything else is effect.

It is seen that, in keeping with his actions, a man obtains results both good and evil, which though apparently incompatible with each other, still dwell together in harmony. Indeed, as the good and evil fruit born of their own actions abide in the bodies of creatures, so does knowledge reside in the body. As a burning lamp reveals objects before it, so do the five senses, like lamps set high on trees, discover their respective objects with the light of knowledge.

As the various ministers of a king gather to give him counsel, even so the five senses in the body willingly obey knowledge. Gyana is superior to all of them.

Like the flames of a fire, currents of the wind, rays of the sun and waters of the rivers, wax and wane repeatedly, even so the bodies of embodied creatures appear and disappear perennially.

As a man who cleaves a piece of wood with an axe does not find either smoke or fire in it, even so one cannot cut open the arms, feet and stomach of a person to behold the principle of knowledge, which, indeed, has nothing in common with the stomach and the limbs.

Just as one sees smoke and fire by rubbing together two pieces of wood, so does a person of well-directed intelligence, who unites the senses and the Soul through yoga, view the Supreme Soul, which, verily, exists in its own nature.

In a dream, one sees one's body lying on the ground as something apart from one's own self; likewise does a person, possessed of the five senses, the mind and the intellect, see his own body after death, and goes from one body into another.

The Soul is not subject to birth, growth, decay and death. By the laws of karma, the jiva, upon the demise of one body passes into another, unseen by others. None can see the form of the individual Soul, nor can it be felt by touch. With the senses, the Atman accomplishes no deeds. The senses do not approach the Soul. The Atman, however, controls them all. As anything placed in a blazing fire assumes a certain colour based on the light and heat that works upon it, without taking any other hue or attribute, even so the Soul's form is seen to take its appearance from the body it inhabits.

Likewise, man discards one body and enters another, unseen by all. Indeed, with his body cast to the Panchamahabhutas, he assumes a form

that is made of the same five elements. Upon his demise, the embodied creature enters space, wind, fire, water and earth in such a way that each particular element in his body mingles in tune with its correlate outside his body.

The senses, too, already engaged in diverse occupations and dependent on the five elements for their functions, enter the Panchamahabhutas. The ear derives its capacity from space; and the sense of scent from the earth. Form, which is the property of the eye, is the result of light or fire. Fire or heat is said to be the dependent cause of water. The tongue with taste for its attribute merges into water. The skin, which has touch for its quality, becomes lost in the wind whose nature it shares. The fivefold attributes, sound and the rest, dwell in the Panchamahabhutas. The fivefold objects of the senses, space and the others, dwell in the five senses. All these in turn, the fivefold attributes, the fivefold elements and the five senses follow the lead of the mind. The mind follows the lead of the intellect, which is guided by that which exists in its true and undefiled nature—the Paramatman.

The karmi in his new body receives the fruits of all the good and bad deeds done by him as also of all actions done by him in his past lives. All deeds done in this life and ones to come follow the mind like aquatic creatures that ride a friendly current. As a moving, restless thing draws attention to itself, as a minute object appears enlarged when seen through a magnifying glass, as a mirror shows a person his own face, even so the Soul though subtle and invisible becomes an object of the intellect's apprehension."

CANTO 203

Manu said, "Over time, manas united with the indriyas retains impressions received in the past. When the senses are all suspended from their functions, the Paramatman in the form of buddhi exists in its own true nature. When the jivatma completely disregards all the sense objects with regard to their simultaneity or contrarily gathers them from all directions and clings to them, he inevitably wanders around aimlessly. He is, therefore, the silent witness. Hence the embodied Soul has a distinct and independent existence.

Along with rajas, tamas and sattva there are also three states of awareness—jagrata awastha, swapna awastha and sushrupta awastha. The Soul has knowledge of the pleasures and pains, which are all opposites of these states, and share the nature of the traigunas. The Atman enters the senses like the wind that blows into a piece of burning wood. One cannot see the form of the Soul, nor can it be known by the sense of touch, or by the ear. It may, however, be seen with the help of the srutis and the instructions of the sages.

As regards the senses, the particular sense that grasps it, in turn, loses its existence as a sense. The senses cannot themselves apprehend their own forms by themselves. The Soul is omniscient inasmuch as it knows both the knower and the known. It witnesses all things. The omniscient Atman knows the senses without, but the senses are unable to know it. Nobody has seen the other side of the Himavat mountains, or of the moon. Yet it cannot

be said that these do not exist. Similarly, though never known by the senses, it cannot be said that the subtle Soul that dwells in all creatures, does not exist. We see the earth reflected on the moon's surface in the form of shadows, when the moon waxes and wanes. Yet they do not know that it is the earth that is so reflected there. Likewise is the knowledge of the Atman. That knowledge must come of itself.

The Soul depends upon itself. Sages and seers, who reflect on the formlessness of visible objects before birth and after death, behold with the help of intelligence, the formlessness of objects that have apparent forms. Likewise, although the sun's movement cannot be seen, yet, by watching it rise and set, men conclude that the sun has motion. Similarly, though the Atman is at a great distance from them, the wise behold the Soul with the help of the lamp of intelligence, and seek to merge the Panchamahabhutas in Brahman.

Verily, an end cannot be accomplished without the application of means. Fishermen cast nets to catch fish. Animals are captured with the help of other animals. Birds of prey are engaged to snare other birds. Elephants are taken by those who use elephants. In this way, the Soul may be apprehended by knowledge. We have heard that only a snake can see a snake's legs. Similarly, through knowledge one sees the subtle Soul abide within the gross body. Men cannot, through their senses, know the senses. Likewise, mere intellect at its highest cannot behold the Soul that is Supreme.

On the fifteenth day of the dark fortnight, when the moon becomes invisible, still, it cannot be averred that the moon is destroyed. Similar is the case with the Soul within the body—when liberated from the body, the Atman cannot be seen or known. As the moon shines anew when it ascends to another position in the sky—so does the Soul manifest itself once more when it acquires a new body. The eye can directly view all the birth, growth and disappearance of the moon. These phenomena, however, relate to the gross form of that luminary. The like are not the qualities of the Soul. The lunar disc, which reappears after the dark fortnight, is regarded as the same moon that had become invisible. Likewise, irrespective of the changes represented by birth, growth and age, a person is regarded as the same individual without any doubt of his identity.

It cannot be distinctly seen how Rahu approaches and leaves the moon. Similarly, it cannot be discerned how the Soul leaves one body and

enters another. Rahu is visible only when it exists with the sun or the moon. Likewise, the Atman becomes an object of perception only when it exists with the body. Separated from the sun or the moon, Rahu can no longer be seen. Similarly, liberated from the body, the Soul can no longer be seen. Although the moon disappears during the dark fortnight, it is not deserted by the constellations and the stars; the Atman also, though separated from the body, is not deserted by the fruits of its actions in that body."

CANTO 204

Manu said, "As in a dream where this gross body lies inactive and the subtle life-giving spirit detaches itself from the body, and enters into the state of deep slumber of death, the sukshma sarira with all the senses becomes inactive and the detached intellect remains awake. The same is the case with existence and non-existence.

As when water is clear, images reflected in it can be seen by the eye, likewise, if the senses be still and calm, the Soul can be seen by the intellect. If, however, the water is stirred, the person standing by it can no longer see the images. Similarly, if the senses are disturbed, the Soul can no longer be seen by the intellect. Ignorance creates delusion. Delusion affects the mind. When the mind becomes deluded, the five senses housed within it are compromised as well.

Surcharged with avidya, sunk in the swamp of worldly objects, one cannot enjoy the sweetness of contentment or peace. In such a state, undetached from its good and evil actions, the jiva returns repeatedly to the objects of the world. Because of sin, its thirst is never quenched. This thirst is satisfied only when its sin is destroyed. Because of the attachment to worldly things, which has a tendency to proliferate, one wishes for things other than the necessary, and hence fails to attain the Supreme Brahman.

From the destruction of all sinful deeds, knowledge arises in men. Upon the appearance of gyana, one's Soul can be witnessed in the intellect, like a reflection in a polished mirror. Misery is the outcome of unrestrained

senses, whereas restrained senses lead to happiness. Therefore, one should restrain one's mind with effort from objects sought by the senses.

Above the senses is the mind; above the mind is the intellect; above intellect is the Soul; above the Soul is the Supreme Brahman.

From the unmanifest has sprung the Soul; from the Soul has sprung the intellect; from the intellect has sprung the mind. When the mind becomes associated with the senses, it recognises sound and other objects of the senses. He who renounces such objects, and liberates himself from all things that arise from primordial matter, eventually enjoys immortality.

As when the sun rises, he spreads his rays and draws them into himself when he sets, so too, when the Atman enters the body, it obtains the fivefold sense-objects by energising them with the senses. When, however, he leaves the body, he is said to set by withdrawing the senses into himself. Repeatedly led along the path that is created by karma, he finds the fruits of his deeds in keeping with their nature. Desire itself for the objects of the senses is kept at bay from a person who does not seek them. The very principle of desire leaves him who has seen his Atman.

When the intellect, unencumbered from all attachments is fixed in the mind, it succeeds in attaining Brahman; for it is there that the mind with the intellect withdrawn can be extinguished. Brahman is not an object of touch, hearing, taste, sight, smell or any deductive inference from the known. Only the intellect in its purity can attain it. All objects that the mind apprehends through the senses can be withdrawn into the mind; the mind into the intellect; the intellect into the Soul, and the Atman into the Supreme Brahman. The senses cannot contribute to the success of the mind. The mind cannot apprehend the intellect. The intellect cannot seize the manifested Soul. The subtle Soul, however, sees them all."

CANTO 205

Manu said, "Upon the appearance of physical and mental sorrow, one is not able to practice yoga. As a remedy, it is advisable not to brood over such sorrow, for it becomes aggressive and increases in violence. One should relieve mental sorrow with wisdom, while physical sorrow should be cured with medicaments. Wisdom teaches this. In sadness, one should not behave like a child.

The wise should never cherish a desire for youth, beauty, longevity, health, accumulation of wealth and the companionship of those that are dear: all of which are transitory. One should not grieve alone for a sorrow that affects a whole community. Without grieving, one should, if one sees an opportunity, seek to apply a remedy. Undoubtedly, in life the measure of sorrow is much greater than that of happiness. To one who is content in life, death that is disagreeable comes due to his bewilderment. He who avoids both sorrow and happiness succeeds in attaining Brahman. The wise need never grieve. Worldly possessions bring about sorrow. There is no happiness in protecting them. They are, again, earned with toil and heartbreak. One should, therefore, ignore their loss.

Pure knowledge or Brahman is regarded by ignorance as existing in the diverse forms that are objects of knowledge. Know that the mind is only an attribute of knowledge. When the mind becomes united with the faculties of knowledge, then the intellect sets in. When intellect is unencumbered by actions and, withdrawn from outward objects, is focused

on the mind through dhyana or yoga, it attains Brahman, or samadhi. The intellect that flows from ignorance possessed of the senses and attributes runs towards external objects, like a river from a mountaintop flowing towards other lands.

When the intellect, withdrawn into the mind, succeeds in absorbing itself into contemplation that is free from attributes, it attains knowledge of Brahman like the touch of gold on a touchstone. The mind is the apprehender of the objects of the senses. It must first be extinguished before Brahman can be attained. Dependent upon the attributes of objects that are before it, the mind can never show that which is without attributes. With all the doors availed by the senses shut, the intellect should be drawn into the mind. In this state, when absorbed in meditation, it attains the knowledge of Brahman.

As the Panchamahabhutas become withdrawn into their subtle form called tanmatras on the destruction of the gunas they are known by, similarly buddhi may dwell in manas alone, with all senses withdrawn from their objects. Even when the intellect, though possessed of the quality of certainty, deliberates inwardly, it is nothing but the mind without anything superior to it. When consciousness, which attains excellence through contemplation, successfully identifies attributes with what are considered as their possessors, then can it cast off all aspects and attain the Brahman that is nirguna, without attributes.

There is no suitable indication to provide knowledge of the Avyakta Brahman, the unmanifest. What cannot be described, cannot be acquired by anyone. With a purified Soul, through penances, inferences, self-restraint, practices and observances prescribed for one’s varna, and through the Vedas, should one seek to approach the Supreme Brahman. Persons of clear vision besides seeing the Supreme within themselves, seek Him in even external forms by freeing themselves from the gunas.

From the absence of all attributes or because of its own nature, the Supreme, known as the Gneya, that which should be known, can never be apprehended by debate. When the intellect is rid of qualities, only then can it attain Brahman. Attached to attributes, it regresses from the Supreme. Indeed, such is the nature of the intellect that it rushes towards the gunas and moves among them like fire among fuel. In the state called sushupti, the five senses exist freed from their respective functions, just as the Supreme Brahman exists high above prakriti, freed from all its attributes. Embodied

creatures thus perform karma because of the gunas. When they abstain from doing so, they attain moksha. Yet others, through karma, go to swargaloka.

The living creature, primordial nature, intellect, objects of the senses, the senses, consciousness, conviction of personal identity, are all called creatures for they are subject to death. The original creation of all these flowed from the Supreme Brahman. Their second or succeeding creation is due to the action of pairs of opposite sexes and is confined to all things save the primal five, and is restrained by laws because of which the same species replicate themselves. With dharma living creatures find a high end, and from adharma, they earn a lowly and vile end. He who is not free from attachments encounters rebirth; while he who is liberated, attains knowledge or Brahman."

CANTO 206

Manu said, "When the fivefold attributes are united with the five senses and the mind, then Brahman is seen by the individual like a thread passing through a gem. Just as a thread may lie within gold, pearl, coral or any earthly thing, even so one's Soul, through one's own deeds, may live within a cow, a horse, a man, an elephant, a worm, an insect or any other creature. The good deeds an individual performs in a particular body bring rewards that he enjoys in that particular body. Soil, drenched with a specific liquid, supplies each different herb or plant that grows on it, with the specific nourishment needed for its growth. The intellect, whose course is witnessed by the Soul, is obliged to follow the path defined by the deeds of previous lives.

From knowledge springs desire. From desire springs resolution. From resolution flows action. From action proceed fruits, good and bad. Fruits, therefore, depend on karma as their cause. Actions have the intellect for their cause. The intellect has knowledge for its cause; and gyana has the Atman for its cause. The excellent result of the destruction of knowledge, fruits, intellect and actions, is called Brahmagyana. Magnificent and exalted is the self-existent essence, which yogis behold. Those devoid of wisdom, whose intellect is devoted to worldly possessions, never perceive that which exists in the Soul itself.

Water is superior to earth in extension; light is superior to water; wind is superior to light; space is superior to wind; the mind is superior to space;

the intellect is superior to the mind; time is superior to the intellect. The divine Vishnu, lord of this universe, is superior to Kaala. He is without beginning, middle and end. He is unchangeable. He transcends all sorrow. Vishnu has been called the Supreme Brahman. He is the refuge of the highest order. Rishis liberated from the power of Kaala, know Him and attain moksha. All that we perceive are displayed in the gunas. Nirguna, bereft of attributes, Brahman is superior to these.

Selfless action is the highest dharma, which is sure to lead to mukti. The Riks, Yajuses and Samans have the body for their refuge. They flow from the tip of the tongue. They cannot be acquired without effort and are subject to destruction. The knowledge of Brahman, however, cannot be acquired in this way, for without depending upon the body it depends upon the Knower, the Atman, which has the body for its refuge. Without beginning, middle or end, Brahman, unlike the Vedas, cannot be acquired through effort. The Riks, Yajuses and Samans, each have a beginning. Those that have a beginning have also an end. But Brahman is said to be without beginning. And because Brahman has neither beginning nor end, it is said to be infinite and unchangeable. Thus, Brahman transcends sorrow as also dvesha-advesha, and all the pairs of opposites.

Through unfavourable destiny, an inability to discover the proper means, and due to impediments of karma, mortals are unable to find the path by which Brahman may be reached. Because of attachment to worldly possessions, a vision of the joys of the highest heaven, and a desire for something other than Brahman, men fail to reach the Parabrahman. Others beholding worldly objects desire their possession and, as such, do not long for Brahman. How will one, attached to inferior qualities, gain knowledge of Him who is possessed of attributes that are superior? It is by inference that one can arrive at a knowledge of Him who transcends all this in aspects and form. By subtle intelligence alone can we know Him. We cannot describe Him in words. The mind is seized by the mind, the eye by the eye. By knowledge, the intellect is purified. Intellect may be employed to purify the mind. By the mind should the senses be controlled. When one achieves all this, one may attain the unchangeable Brahman. One who, through dhyana, becomes free from attachments, and is enriched by the possession of a discerning mind, successfully reaches Brahman, which is without desire and above all the gunas.

As the wind keeps away from the fire embedded within a piece of wood, even so persons agitated by desire for worldly possessions keep away from the Supreme. Upon renunciation of all earthly objects, the mind attains that which is higher than the intellect; while upon their separation, the mind acquires that which is below the intellect. He who engages in the destruction of earthly desires attains absorption into the body of Brahman.

Though the Soul is unmanifest, yet when adorned with gunas, its actions become manifest. Upon the dissolution of the body, it once more manifests in the form of a fresh body. The Soul is inactive. It exists, united with the senses that create either happiness or sorrow. Unified with all the senses and endowed with a body, it takes refuge in the Panchamahabhutas. Through want of power, however, it fails to function when deprived of force by the Supreme and changeless Brahman.

No one sees the end of the earth but knows that the end is imminent. Man, agitated by attachments, is surely led to his last refuge; as a ship tossed about at sea is finally blown by the wind to a safe harbour. The sun, with rays spread at dawn, attains a quality: Illuminator of the world. At dusk, however, with rays withdrawn, the sun once again becomes an object divested of attributes. Similarly, with all distinctions and attachments withdrawn, one who practices tapasya ultimately enters the indestructible Brahman, which is without gunas.

When one discerns him who is without birth, who is the highest refuge of dharma, who is self-born, from whom everything originates and to whom all things return, who is unchangeable, who is without beginning, middle and end, and who is certainty's self, the Supreme Brahman, then one attains moksha."

CANTO 207

Yudhishtira says, ‘Pitamaha, I wish to hear of the lotus-eyed indestructible one, who is the creator of everything, yet created by none. Who is called Vishnu, O lord of the Bharatas, since he pervades everything. Wisest, tell me in detail about him who is the origin of all creatures and unto whom all beings return, who cannot be vanquished by anyone, and is known as Narayana, Hrishikesa, Govinda and Kesava.’

Bhishma says, ‘I have heard of this from Jamadagni’s son Rama, from the Devarishi Narada, and from Krishna-Dwaipayana. Asita-Devala, O putra, Valmiki of austere tapasya, and Markandeya speak of Govinda as the most wonderful and Supreme Being. Kesava, O king of Bharata’s vamsa, is the divine and puissant lord of all. He is called Purusha, and pervades everything in multiple forms.

Listen now, Yudhishtira, to the attributes, which great Brahmanas say, are to be found in the exalted wielder of the saranga. Prince of men, I will also recount the deeds ascribed to Govinda, by men conversant with old itihasas. He is said to be the Soul of all creatures, the high-Souled one, and the best of all beings. He created by his will the five-fold elements, wind, light, water, space and earth.

The mighty lord of all things, the Divine One, the Supreme Being, created the earth, and lay down on the surface of the waters. While he floated upon the waters, the Supreme Being, refuge of every kind of energy and splendour, created Chitta, the first-born of beings in the universe. We

have heard that he created consciousness along with the mind. Consciousness, which is the refuge of all creation, upholds all creatures along with the past and the future. After the emergence of consciousness, an exceedingly beautiful lotus, with effulgence like the sun's, grew out of the navel of the Supreme Being floating on the waters. The illustrious and divine Brahma, the ancestor of all creatures, materialised within the lotus, illuminating all the cardinal points of the horizon with his lustre.

O Mahabaho, after the high-Souled Pitamaha materialized from the primeval lotus, a great Asura named Madhu appeared from the tamoguna, the attribute of darkness. In order to help Brahma, the lord of all beings, the Supreme Divinity, slew the fierce Asura who sought to kill Brahma. From this slaying of the Asura Madhu, O Putra, all the Devas, Danavas and Manavas came to call the king of all persons faithful to dharma, by the name Madhusudana.

Next, by his will, Brahma created seven sons with Daksha being the first. They were Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Daksha. The eldest born, Marichi, by a command of his will, fathered a son named Kasyapa, master of all realisers of Brahman. From his toe, even before the birth of Marichi, Brahma created another son, Daksha, who, O king of Bharata's vamsa, was the ancestor of creatures.

Unto Daksha were first born thirteen daughters, the eldest of whom was called Diti. Marichi's renowned son, the noble Kasyapa, married these thirteen daughters. The blessed Daksha next fathered ten more daughters. The progenitor of creatures, Prajapati Daksha, bestowed these upon Dharma, who became father of the Vasus, Rudras, Viswedevas, Sadhyas and the Maruts. Daksha next fathered twenty-seven other younger daughters. The luminous Soma became the husband of them all.

The other wives of Kasyapa gave birth to Gandharvas, Kimpurushas, horses, birds, kine, fish, trees and plants. Danu gave birth to the Danavas with Viprachitti for their first. Diti gave birth to all the Asuras of immense strength. Aditi gave birth to the Adityas. Amongst them Vishnu took birth as a dwarf. Also called Govinda, he became the first of them all. Through his prowess, the Danavas were vanquished, and the prosperity of the Devas increased.

Madhusudana created the day and the night, the morning and the evening, and the seasons in their order. After reflection, he also created the

clouds, and other immobile and moving beings. Possessed of boundless energy, he also created the Viswas and Bhumi with all that is upon her.

Later the divine and mighty Krishna, O Yudhishtira, created from his mouth a hundred outstanding Brahmanas. From his two arms, he created a hundred Kshatriyas, and from his thighs a hundred Vaisyas. Next, O bull of Bharata's race, Kesava created from his two feet a hundred Sudras.

Possessed of great ascetic merit, Madhusudana created the four varnas of men, and made Dhatri Brahma the lord and ruler of all creation. Of immeasurable radiance, Brahma also became an exponent of the knowledge of the Vedas. Additionally, Kesava made Virupaksha the ruler of the bhutas, pretas and of the goddesses called the Matrikas, the mothers. And he made Yama the ruler of the Pitris and of all sinful men. The Paramatman also made Kubera the lord of all treasures. He then created Varuna, the lord of waters and ruler of all aquatic creatures. The mighty Vishnu made Vasava king of all the Devas.

In those times, men lived as long as they chose to live, without any fear of Yama. Sexual congress, O lord of the Bharatas, was not necessary for perpetuating the species—offspring were begotten through will, from the mind. In the age that followed, Treta yuga, children were begotten by touch alone. Even in this age, humans were above the necessity of sexual congress. It was only in the next, Dwapara yuga, O king, that the practice of sexual congress came to prevail among men. In the Kali yuga, O regent, men have come to marry and live in couples.

I have now told you of the Supreme Lord of all creatures. He is also called the ruler of all and of everything. Listen to me now, O son of Kunti, as I speak to you about the sinful creatures of the earth.

Such men are born in the southern region and are called Andrakas, Guhas, Pulindas, Sabaras, Chuchukas and Madrakas. Those born in the northern realms are Yamas, Kambojas, Gandharas, Kiratas and Barbaras. All of them are sinful, and roam this earth, defined by practices similar to those of Chandalas, ravens and vultures. They did not exist on earth in the Krita yuga. They took root, O lord of Bharata's vamsa, and began to multiply from the Treta yuga onwards. Once the terrible yugasandhi conjoining the Treta and the Dwapara yugas dawned, the Kshatriyas confronted each other in battle.

Thus, O lord of Kuru's race, did the divine Krishna manifest this universe. The celestial observer of all the worlds, Rishi Narada, says that

Krishna is the Supreme God. Mahabaho of Bharata's vamsa, even Narada admits the supremacy and eternity of Krishna. Thus, O monarch, is Kesava of unconquerable valour. The lotus-eyed one is not a mere man. He is inconceivable.'

CANTO 208

Yudhishtira asks, 'Who were the first Prajapatis, O Bharatarishabha? What exalted Rishis are there in existence and where does each of them dwell?'

Bhishma says, 'Hear me, and I will tell you who the Prajapatis were and where these Rishis are said to abide on earth.

At first, there was one eternal, divine, Svayambhuva Brahma. The self-born Brahma fathered seven illustrious sons. They were Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and the eminent Vasishta who was equal to Brahma himself. These seven sons have been mentioned in the Puranas as seven Brahmanas, the Saptarishis. I will enumerate all the Prajapatis who came after these.

In Atri's race was born the eternal and divine Barhi, the ancient, who had tapasya for his origin. From Barhi, were born the ten Prachetasas. The ten Prachetasas had one son between them, Prajapati Daksha, known in the world as both Daksha and Kasyapa. Marichi also had one son called Kasyapa, also known by two names. Some call him Arishtanemi, and some, Kasyapa. Atri had another son, the handsome and princely Soma of tremendous tejas. He performed tapasya for a thousand celestial yugas. The divine Aryaman, and his sons, O Raja, have been described as ordainers of divine laws, and creators of all creatures.

Sasabindu had ten thousand wives. On each of them their lord fathered a thousand sons, and so they were ten hundred thousand. These sons

refused to regard anyone save themselves as Prajapatis. The ancient Brahmanas bestowed a title on the descendants of Sasabindu. In time, the extensive vamsa of Prajapati Sasabindu established the Vrishni vamsa. These that I have mentioned are noted as the illustrious Prajapatis.

I will now name the Devas that are the lords of the three worlds. Bhaga, Ansa, Aryaman, Mitra, Varna, Savitri, Dhatri, Vivaswat, Tvashtri, Pushan, Indra and Vishnu are the twelve Adityas, all born from Kasyapa. Nasatya and Dasra are the two Aswins. These two are the sons of the illustrious Martanda, the eighth in the lineage. These were called first the Devas and the two classes of Pitris.

Tvashtri had many sons. Amongst them were the handsome and famous Viswarupa, Ajaikapat, Ahi, Vardhana, Virupaksha and Raivata. Then there were Hara and Bahurupa, Tryambaka, Savitrya, Jayanta and Pinaki. The eight divine Vasus I have already named. These were seen as Devas at the time of Prajapati Manu. Amongst the Siddhas and Sadhyas, there were two classes based on conduct and youth. Of yore, Devas were considered to be of two classes, the Ribhus and the Maruts. Thus, I have specified the Viswas, the Devas and the Aswins. Amongst them, the Adityas are Kshatriyas, and the Maruts are Vaisyas. The two Aswins are said to be Sudras. The Devas born from Angirasa's line are Brahmanas. This is certain. So have I told you about the fourfold varnas among the Devas. One who rises before dawn and recites the names of these lords, is cleansed of all his sins whether committed intentionally, unwittingly, or born from his association with others.

Yavakrita, Raivya, Arvavasu, Paravasu, Aushija, Kashivat and Bala are the sons of Angiras. These, and Kanwa son of Rishi Medhatithi, Barhishada, and the renowned Saptarishis, all reside in the east. Unmucha, Vimucha, Svastyatreya, Pramucha, Idhmavaha, Dridhavrata and Mitravaruna's son Agastya, these twice-born Rishis all dwell in the south. Upangu, Karusha, Dhaumya, Parivyadha, the Maharishis Ekata, Dwita and Trita, Atri's son, the illustrious Saraswata, these divinities dwell in the west. Atreya, Vasishta, Maharishi Kasyapa, Gautama, Bharadwaja, Viswamitra, the son of Kusika, and Jamadagni, the son of Richika, these seven live in the north.

Thus have I told you about the Maharishis of fiery tejas who live in the different directions of the world. These blessed Souls are the witnesses of the universe, and creators of all the worlds. In this manner do they live in

their respective quarters. By reciting their names, one is cleansed of all one's sins. One who visits these places becomes purified of all his sins and succeeds in returning home in safety.'

CANTO 209

Yudhishtira says, 'O Bhishma of great wisdom and invincible valour in battle, I wish to hear in detail of Krishna who is immutable and omnipotent. Tell me truly everything about his tejas and the awesome feats he achieved in days of old. Why and to what end did the mighty one assume the form of an animal? I wish to know, O magnificent Kshatriya!'

Bhishma says, 'Once, while out hunting, I arrived at the hermitage of Markandeya. There I saw diverse classes of ascetics seated in their thousands. The Rishis honoured me by the offer of arghya, made from honey and curds. I accepted their worship, and reverentially saluted them in return. Maharishi Kasyapa narrated what I am about to recount there. Listen attentively to the excellent and charming tale.

In earlier days, innumerable invincible Danavas, filled with wrath and avarice, and hundreds of mighty Asuras drunk with might, became exceedingly jealous of the unrivalled prosperity of the Devas. Eventually, attacked and oppressed by the Danavas, the Devas and Devarishis, unable to find peace, fled in all directions. The denizens of heaven saw the earth sunk in sore distress. Overspread with mighty Danavas of terrible aspect, Bhumi seemed to be burdened with an insupportable weight. Cheerless and grief-stricken, she appeared to plunge down into the Patalas. Struck with fear, the Devas went to Brahma and said, "How will we continue to bear these depredations of the Danavas?"

The creator answered, “I have already ordained what is to be done in this matter. Endowed with boons, possessed of might and swollen with pride, these senseless wretches do not know that Vishnu of invisible form, the Devadeva who cannot be vanquished even by all the Devas together, has assumed the form of a boar. The Supreme Lord will plunge down to the place below the earth, where the wretches among Danavas dwell in their thousands, and he will kill them all.”

These words of Brahma brought immense joy to the magnificent Devas.

Very soon, the puissant Vishnu, manifested as Varaha, plunged into the patalas and charged the offspring of Danu and Diti. The very sight of the extraordinary creature confounded the Daityas and they stood transfixed. Then they rushed forward as one and surrounded the boar. Together they seized the beast. Full of rage, they tried to dismember the animal from every side. The mighty, horrible Danavas failed, O Rajan, to bring any harm to Varaha. They were filled with wonder and fear. All the thousands of enormous demons saw their last hour had come. And so, rapt in yoga with his Soul as his companion, the Devadeva began to emit tremendous roars, terrifying the Daityas and Danavas. All the worlds and the ten cardinal directions resounded with the roars and filled the living with abject fright. The very Devas, with Indra at their head, were petrified as the whole universe was stilled by that sound. It was a dreadful moment.

All mobile and immobile beings were benumbed by the awful sound. Terrified by the thunder, paralysed by the power of Vishnu, lifeless, the Danavas crumpled to the ground. With its hooves, the boar began to trample and rend asunder the flesh, fat and bones of the enemies of the Devas. Because of the tremendous roars, Vishnu came to be called Sanatana. He is also known as Padmanabha, the lotus-navelled; guru of yogins; preceptor and Supreme Lord of all creatures.

Soon, all the tribes of the Devas approached Brahma, the lord of the universe, and said, “What sort of noise is this, O mighty one? We do not understand it. By whose sound is the universe so petrified? Behold, the Devas and Danavas have all been rendered senseless by the terrible urjas of this sound.”

Meanwhile, O Mahabaho, the assembled Devas saw Vishnu in his Varaha rupa, and the Maharishis sang his praises.

Brahma said, “That is the Supreme Lord, creator of all beings, Soul of all creatures, guru of all yogins. Of immense body and infinite strength, he has slain all the Danavas, and arrived here. He is the Almighty, of immeasurable splendour, the great refuge of all blessings. He has achieved a most difficult feat, impossible of being accomplished by any other, and returned to his own sattvic nature. He is the lord and Soul of all beings, master of yoga, great ascetic. Listen, all of you. He is Krishna, the destroyer of all obstacles and impediments.

It is He from whose navel the primeval lotus emerged. He is the Paramatman, the Mahayogi; He is Brahma. Excellent Devas, there is no need for sorrow, fear or grief. He is the Ordainer. He is Brahman. He is all-devouring Kaala. He upholds the world. The roars that alarm you are of that divine one. Mahabaho, He is the object of universal worship. Immortal, lotus-eyed, He is the lord and origin of all beings.’

CANTO 210

Yudhishtira says, 'O Bhaarata, tell me about the lofty yoga through which I may obtain moksha. O eloquent one, I truly wish to know everything about this yoga.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to an old story of a guru and his sishya on the subject of moksha. There was a twice-born guru, a Maharishi. He was splendid in appearance. A Mahatman, he was firm in truth and a complete yogi.

Once, an outstanding sishya approached the guru with a desire to obtain what was for his highest good. With folded hands he stood before his master, then touched his guru's feet, and said, "If, O illustrious one, you are pleased with my worship, it befits you to answer some questions and doubts that I have. Who am I and who are you? Tell me this fully. Tell me also what Paramartha is. And when the material cause in all beings is identical, why do their births and death happen in such dissimilar ways? It is also appropriate for you, with your vast knowledge, to explain the purpose of the declarations in the Vedas about the difference of rites for different classes of men, the meaning of the injunctions of the smritis and the rulings which apply to all classes of men."

The guru said, "Listen, O my wise sishya. Answers to your question are not revealed in the very Vedas and this is the highest subject for thought or discourse. It is called Adhyatma and is the most valuable of all branches of learning and of all sacred institutes. Vasudeva is the supreme cause of the

universe. He is the origin of the Vedas, AUM. He is truth, knowledge, sacrifice, renunciation, self-restraint and dharma. Those who know the Vedas know him as all-pervading, immutable, eternal, omnipresent, creator and destroyer, the unmanifest Brahman."

Hear now the story of him who was born in Vrishni's vamsa. A Brahmana should hear of the greatness of Devadeva Vishnu of immeasurable tejas, from the lips of Brahmanas. A Kshatriya should hear it from other Kshatriyas. A Vaisya should hear it from Vaisyas, and a high-Souled Sudra should hear it from Sudras. You deserve to hear it. Listen now to the auspicious tale of Krishna, the most excellent of all legends.

Vasudeva is the wheel of Kaala, without beginning and without end. Existence and non-existence are the attributes by which his real nature is known. The universe revolves like a wheel depending upon the lord of all beings. O best of men, the Supreme Being Kesava, is said to be the indestructible, unmanifest, immortal, immutable Brahman. The highest of the high, without change or deterioration himself, he created the Pitris, Devas, Rishis, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Nagas, Asuras and Manavas. He also created the Vedas, the eternal duties and the customs of men.

After he reduces everything into non-existence, again, at the beginning of a new yuga, he creates Prakriti. As diverse phenomena of several seasons appear sequentially, similarly, beings come into existence at the beginning of every celestial yuga. With the beings that are born comes the knowledge of laws and duties, neeti and dharma, in order to regulate the world's course.

At the end of every celestial yuga when the Pralaya sets in, the Vedas and all other scriptures disappear along with the rest. By the grace of the self-born, the Maharishis by their tapasyas, first regain the lost Vedas and other shastras. Brahma first acquired the Vedas. The Devaguru Brihaspati initially received their branches, the Vedangas. Bhrigu's son Sukra was the first to acquire the science of neeti, which is so beneficial for the universe. The art of sangita, music, was acquired by Narada; that of the astra-shastra, by Bharadwaja; the history of the Devarishis by Gargya; that of Aushadha, by the dark-complexioned son of Atri. Diverse other Rishis, proclaimed sciences such as Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Samkhya, Patanjala and the rest.

Let that Brahman which the Rishis have indicated by arguments drawn from reason, by means of the Vedas, and by inferences drawn from the direct evidence of the senses, be adored. Neither the Devas nor the Rishis

were at first able to comprehend Brahman who is without beginning and who is the highest of the high. Only the divine creator of all things, the mighty Narayana, had knowledge of Brahman. The Rishis, the best among the Devas and the Asuras, and the ancient Rajarishis had the knowledge of the highest remedy for sorrow from Narayana. When primordial matter creates life through the action of the primal energy, the universe with all its potencies begins to flow from it. Just as one lamp can kindle thousands of other lamps, similarly, primordial matter creates thousands of living beings. And because of its infinity, primordial matter is never exhausted.

From the Unmanifest flows the awareness determined by deeds. Awareness creates consciousness. From consciousness ensues space. From space arises wind. From wind transpires heat. From heat results water, and water creates earth. These eight constitute the primordial Prakriti. The universe rests on them.

From these eight have originated the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action, the five objects of the initial five organs, and the one, mind, forming the sixteenth. The ears, the skin, the two eyes, the tongue and the nose are the five organs of knowledge. The two feet, the lower duct, the organ of generation, the two arms and speech, are the five organs of action. Sound, touch, form, taste and smell are the five objects of the senses, covering all the things.

The mind dwells upon all the senses and their objects. In the perception of taste, it is the mind that becomes the tongue, and in speech, it is the mind that becomes words. Provided with the different senses, it is the mind that becomes all the objects that exist within its preserve. These sixteen, existing in their respective forms, are known as Adityas. These worship him who creates all knowledge and dwells within the body.

Taste is the attribute of water; scent is the attribute of earth; hearing is the attribute of space; vision is the attribute of fire or light; and touch, the attribute of the wind. This is the case with all creatures at all times. The mind is said to be the attribute of existence.

Existence springs from Avyakta Prakriti, which rests in that which is the Soul of all existent beings. These existences, founded in the Supreme Divinity that is above Prakriti and is without any inclination for action, uphold the entire universe of the living and non-living. This sacred edifice of nine doors, the body, is endowed with all these existences. That which is

high above them—the Soul—dwells within it, pervading it. For this reason, it is called Purusha.

The Atman is without decay and not subject to death. It has knowledge of what is manifest and what is unmanifest. It is forever all-pervading, saguna—possessed of attributes—subtle, and the refuge of all existences and qualities. As a lamp discovers all objects great or small irrespective of its own size, likewise the Atman dwells in all creatures as the principle of knowledge regardless of the qualities or flaws of those beings. Urging the ear to hear what it hears, it is the Soul that hears. Similarly, employing the eye, the Atman sees. This body furnishes the means by which the Soul derives knowledge. The bodily organs are not the doers; the Atman is the doer of all deeds.

There is fire in wood, but it can never be seen by cutting open a log of wood. Similarly, the Soul dwells within the body, but it can never be seen by dissecting the body. The fire that dwells in wood may be seen by rubbing the wood with another piece of wood. In like manner, the Atman that dwells within the body may be seen by engaging proper means, of yoga. Water must exist in rivers. Rays of light are always attached to the sun. Likewise, the Soul has a body. This connection does not cease because of the constant succession of bodies that the Atman has to enter.

In a dream, the Soul, possessed with the fivefold senses, leaves the body and roams far and wide. Likewise, when death comes, the jiva with the senses in their subtle forms passes out of one body to enter another. The Jivatman is bound by its own previous deeds. Hence, compelled by its own karma of one state of existence, it attains another state. Indeed, it is led from one into another body by its own actions, which are inexorable in their results.

I will now tell you about the evolution of how the possessor of a human body, the jiva, leaves his body, enters another and then yet another; how, indeed, the entire range of beings exists as the result of their respective karmas of past and present lives.'

CANTO 211

Bhishma says, ‘All inert and mobile beings, distributed into four classes, are to be of unmanifest birth and unmanifest death. Since it exists only in the unmanifest Soul, the mind is said to possess the attributes of the Unmanifest.

As a vast tree is ensconced within a small seed of the aswattha flower and becomes visible only when it takes root, even so birth takes place from what is unmanifest. A lifeless piece of iron flies towards a magnet. Similarly, inclinations and propensities caused by natural instincts, all fly towards the Soul in a new life. Indeed, even as the propensities and possessions born of ignorance and delusion, and inanimate in nature, are united with the Soul when reborn, the other tendencies and ambitions of the Soul that have their gaze directed towards Brahman become united with the jiva, and at last with Brahman himself.

Once, neither earth nor sky, not heaven or matter, or the vital breaths, or virtue and vice, or anything else, existed, save the Atman. Nor have they any connection with even the Soul defiled by ignorance. The Soul is eternal. It is indestructible. It exists in every creature. It is the cause of the mind. It is nirguna, without attributes. The universe that we perceive has been declared in the Vedas to be due to ignorance or delusion. The Soul’s apprehensions of form are because of past desires. The Jivatman, bestowed with those causes, desires, is led to its being engaged in karma. These in

turn create more desires to end in further actions, and so on. Thus this vast wheel of existence revolves, without beginning and without end.

The unmanifest, awareness, along with the desires, is the hub of this wheel. The manifest, the body with the senses, constitutes its spokes; the perceptions and actions form its circumference. Propelled by the quality of rajas, the Soul presides over it—a witness to its revolutions. Like oilmen pressing oilseeds in their machine, the fruit born of ignorance affect the universe of creatures moistened by rajas, and grind it in the wheel. In the succession of existences, the living creature, seized by the idea of selfhood out of desire, engages itself in deeds. In the union of cause and effect, these actions again become new causes. Effects do not enter into causes. Nor do causes enter into effects. In the creation of effects, Kaala is the cause. The eight primordial essences, and their sixteen variations, exist in a state of union, as they are always presided over by the Soul.

As dust follows the wind that moves it, the Soul, divested of the body, yet bestowed with inclinations born of rajas, tamas and principles of causes constituted by the karmas of the past life, moves on following the direction that the Supreme Soul gives it. The Atman, however, is never touched by the inclinations and propensities. Nor are these touched by the Soul that is superior to them. The dust it bears never stains the wind, which is naturally pure. As the wind is separate from the dust, even so, the wise should know, is the connection between existence and the Soul. No one should take it that the Atman, due to its apparent union with the body, the senses, other propensities, beliefs and disbeliefs, is really bestowed with all these as its necessary and absolute gunas. On the other hand, the Soul should be taken as existing in its own nature."

Thus did the divine Rishi solve the doubt that vexed his sishya's mind. Despite all this, people depend upon means consisting of actions and scriptural rites to dispel grief and win happiness. Seeds scorched by fire do not sprout. Similarly, if everything that contributes to suffering be consumed by the fire of true knowledge, the Soul escapes the obligation of rebirth into the world.'

CANTO 212

Bhishma says, 'Persons engaged in activity regard the practice of karma highly. Similarly, those devoted to knowledge do not value anything other than gyana. Individuals fully conversant with the Vedas and depending upon their declarations are rare. Men of greater wisdom desire the path of abstention from actions as the better of the two. Such conduct, therefore, is laudable. The intelligence, which urges abstention from actions, is that by which one attains moksha.

Possessed of a body, a person, through folly, along with wrath, yearning and all the vasanas born of rajas and tamas, becomes attached to earthly objects. One, therefore, who desires to destroy one's connection with the body, should never indulge in any impure deed. On the other hand, one should create by one's actions a path to attain liberation, without wishing for welfare in the next world. As gold, when tainted with iron, loses its purity and fails to shine, even so knowledge existing with attachment to earthly objects and such other faults, fails to put forth its brilliance.

He who, influenced by greed, follows the dictates of desire and anger, and transgresses the path of dharma to turn to adharma, meets with complete destruction. One who is desirous of gaining the Atman should never follow, with excess of attachment, earthly possessions that are the objects of the senses. If one does so; anger, joy and sorrow arise from each other and make one miserable. When everyone's body is made up of the

five original elements as also of the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, whom will one adore and whom will one blame, and with what words? Only fools become attached to the objects of the senses. Because of folly, they do not know that their bodies are only transitory. As a house made of earth is plastered over with earth, even so this body, which is made of earth, is kept from death by food, which is only a produce of earth. Honey, oil, milk, butter, meat, salt, treacle, grains, fruits and roots are all variations of earth and water.

Recluses living in the wilderness, abandon all desire for rich, savoury food, and eat simple fare, only for sustenance. Similarly, a person who dwells in the wilderness of the material world should be ready for exertion and should eat for sustenance, like a patient taking medicine. A noble man who wishes to find peace, should restrain his senses and examine all earthly objects that he encounters, with the help of truth, purity, candour, renunciation, enlightenment, courage, forgiveness, fortitude, intelligence, reflection and austerities.

All creatures, dazzled, because of ignorance, by the gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, continually revolve as on a wheel. All faults, therefore, that are born of ignorance, should be closely examined and the idea of ahamkara that creates sorrow, with its origin in ignorance, should be avoided. The fivefold elements, the senses, the attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas, the three worlds with the Supreme Being himself, and karma, all rest on Chitta, consciousness.

As Kaala, under its own laws, always displays the phenomena of the seasons one after another, even so one should know that consciousness in all creatures is the inducer to action. Tamas from which proceeds Chitta creates delusions. It is darkness and is born of ignorance. To the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas are attached all the joys and sorrows of creatures. Listen now to the effects that spring from the attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Contentment, satisfaction derived from joy, certainty, intelligence and memory, are the results of the attributes of sattva. Desire, anger, error, greed, confusion, fear and fatigue, belong to the quality of rajas. Despair, grief, discontent, vanity, pride and wickedness, all belong to tamas. Examining the gravity or lightness of these and other faults that dwell in the jiva, one should reflect upon each of them to ascertain which of them exist,

which have become strong or weak, which have been driven off, and which remain.'

Yudhishtira says, 'What faults are discarded by persons who seek moksha? Who are they that are weakened by them? What are the faults that come repeatedly and cannot be got rid of? What, again, are regarded as weak, caused by perplexity and, therefore, permissible? What are the faults upon whose strength and weakness a wise man should reflect with the help of intelligence and reason? I am confused about these. Speak to me of them, O Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'He who has a pure Soul, and extracts all his faults by their roots, succeeds in finding moksha. As an axe made of steel cuts a steel chain and in the process breaks itself, likewise, the one with a purified soul, who destroys all the faults that spring from tamas and those that are born with the jiva upon rebirth, succeeds in dissolving his connection with the body and attains moksha.

The qualities that have their origin in rajas, those that spring from tamas, and ones defined by purity under sattva, constitute the seed from which all embodied creatures have grown. Among these, the sattva guna alone is the path by which those of cleansed souls succeed in attaining moksha. He who has a purified soul should, therefore, abandon all the qualities born of rajas and tamas. For, when the sattva guna becomes free of rajas and tamas, it becomes even more resplendent.

Some say that sacrifices and other rituals performed with the help of mantras, although they certainly contribute to the purification of the soul, are evil and cruel. This view is incorrect. On the contrary, such karmas and kriyas are the principle means to dissociate the Atman from all worldly attachments, and to find dispassion. All unrighteous actions, all deeds encumbered with earthly gains and all activities fuelled by desire are accomplished through the influence of the qualities of rajas.

Through qualities born of tamas, one performs all deeds charged with avarice and wrath. Because of the guna of tamas, one embraces sleep and idleness, and becomes addicted to all kinds of cruelty and carnal pleasures. He, however, who, possessed of faith and scriptural knowledge, is mindful of the sattva guna, attends only to all things good, and becomes gifted with moral beauty and is flawless.'

CANTO 213

Bhishma says, 'From rajas arises delusion or loss of judgement. Tamas, O Bharatarishabha, gives birth to wrath, lust, fear and pride. When all these are destroyed, one becomes pure. Invested with purity, one successfully gains knowledge of the Paramatman, which is changeless, resplendent, undecaying and all pervasive, has the Unmanifest for his refuge, and is the foremost of all the Devas.

Trapped in maya, men stray from knowledge, become foolhardy and yield to wrath. From wrath, they become subject to desire, which in turn creates lust, delusion, vanity, pride and selfishness. From such selfishness come forth various kinds of frenzied activity. From these actions arise diverse bonds of affection that lead only to sorrow, and from karma fertile with joy and sorrow accrues the accountability to birth and death.

Because of the onus of birth, the liability is incurred by a jiva within the womb, from conception. The jiva is defiled with excreta, urine, phlegm and blood generated there. Overwhelmed by desire, the jiva becomes bound by wrath, greed, lust and all the rest. It seeks, however, to escape those evils. In view of this, women are regarded as instrumental in setting the stream of creation flowing. By their nature, women are kshetra, and men are kshetrajna, with regard to the gunas. For this reason, wise men should not pursue women exclusively among other objects of the world. Indeed, women are like fearful mantra-shaktis. They bewilder the unwise. They are

steeped in the gunas of rajas. They are the eternal embodiment of the senses.

Because of the keen desire that men have for women, children are born from them. As one discards from one's body germs that are born there but are not part of oneself, likewise should one attend to one's children, who, though regarded as one's own, are not so in reality. From the vital seed as from sweat and other impurities, creatures are born from the body, influenced by the karma of previous lives or by the course of nature. Therefore, the wise should feel no concern for them.

The attribute of rajas rests on that of tamas. The trait of sattva rests on that of rajas. Ignorance that is unmanifest envelopes knowledge, and causes the phenomena of intelligence and consciousness. The knowledge that possesses qualities of Chitta and buddhi is said to be the seed of embodied souls. That, again, which is the seed of such knowledge is called the jiva. Because of karma and the principle of time, the soul goes through birth and repeated cycles of rebirth. As in a dream, the soul exhibits a body influenced by the mind, correspondingly, it attains in the mother's womb a body based upon attributes and dispositions of its past karmas. All the senses while it is still in the womb, are awakened by past deeds as the operative cause, and develop in consciousness because of the mind co-existing with attachments.

Because of the past awareness of sound that are awakened in it, the jiva, subjected to these influences, receives the organs of hearing. Similarly, from attachment to forms, its eyes are created, and from its longing after scent, its organ of smell. From impressions of touch, it acquires skin. Likewise the five breaths—prana, apana, vyana, udana and samana—which contribute to keep the body alive. Encased in a body with all organs fully developed according to past actions, the jiva is born with inherent physical and mental distress. Know that grief emerges from the moment of acceptance of the body into the womb. It swells with the idea of selfhood. From renunciation of these attachments, which are the cause of birth, grief meets with an end. He that is conversant with sorrow's end attains moksha.

Both the origin and the destruction of the senses rest in the rajoguna. The wise should act with proper inquiry and concentration empowered by the shastras. The senses of knowledge, even if they succeed in acquiring all their goals, never succeed in overwhelming the man who is without desire.

The embodied soul that overcomes its senses, escapes the obligation of rebirth.’

CANTO 214

Bhishma says, 'I will now tell you the means to conquer the senses as seen in the scriptures. O king, a man will attain the highest end with the help of such knowledge and by framing his conduct accordingly. Amongst all living creatures, man is said to be the foremost. Among men, those that are twice-born are pre-eminent, and conversant with the Vedas. These ones blessed are regarded as the souls of all living creatures. Indeed, the Brahmanas who know the Vedas are regarded as being divine and omniscient. They have become knowers of the Brahman. As a blind man, without a guide, encounters many difficulties on a road, so does one without knowledge encounter many obstacles in the world. For this reason, those that possess knowledge are regarded as superior to the rest. Individuals keen on gaining virtue practice diverse kinds of rites according to the dictates of the scriptures. They do not, however, succeed in attaining moksha; all that they gain are merits of which I will now tell you.

Purity of speech, body and mind; forgiveness, truth, steadiness and intelligence: those that observe both kinds of dharma display these sattvik qualities. That which is called brahmacharya is regarded as the means to acquire Brahman. It is the best of all dharmas. It is through the practice of brahmacharya that one obtains the highest end, mukti.

Brahmacharya is without any connection to the five vital breaths, mind, intellect, the five senses of perception and the five senses of action. Hence, it is free from all the perceptions of the senses. It is heard only as a

word, and its form, without being seen, can only be conceived. It is a state of existence that depends only on the mind. That sinless state should be attained through the intellect alone. He who practices it duly attains Brahman; he who practices it half-heartedly, attains the condition of the Devas; while he who practices it moderately is born among Brahmanas and, possessed of knowledge, attains greatness.

Brahmacharya is exceedingly difficult to practice. Let me tell you the means by which one may do so. The awakened person who is drawn to it should subdue the rajoguna of passion as soon as it begins to manifest itself or as soon as it becomes dominant. He that has taken a vow of celibacy should not speak with women. He should never cast his eyes on an undressed woman. The sight of women, under even indifferent circumstances, fills irresolute men with passion. If a celibate feels a desire for a woman rising in his heart, he should as an atonement observe the vow called krichara and also spend three days immersed in water. If desire comes during a dream, one should, diving into water, mentally repeat three times the three Riks in that immersion aghamarshana. The wise man who has taken this vow should, with a broad and enlightened mind, burn the sins in his mind which are all due to the guna of passion.

Just as the duct that bears away the refuse of the body is an intimate part of the body, so is the embodied Soul intimately connected with the body that confines it. The different kinds of fluids, coursing through the network of arteries, nourish the body's wind, bile, phlegm, blood, skin, flesh, intestines, bones, marrow—and the organism as a whole. There are ten principal ducts that assist the functions of the five senses. From the ten, branch out thousands of others that are microscopic. Like rivers filling the ocean in the proper season, all these passages replete with fluids nourish the body. Leading to the heart is the artery called manovaha; it draws from every part of the human body the sperm that is born of desire. Numerous other passages, which branch out from that principal one, extend into every part of the body and, bearing the element of heat, cause the sense of vision and the rest.

As butter is churned from milk, so do desires generated in the mind by the sight or thought of women, draw together the sperm that lies within the body. In the midst of even our dreams passion generated by imagination works on the mind, with the result that the manovaha ejects the sperm born of desire.

The great Devarishi Atri is well-versed in the subject of the generation of the sperm. The fluids that are yielded by food, the manovaha and the desire born of imagination: these three are the causes that create the sperm, which has Indra as its presiding deity. The passion that helps in the emission of this fluid is, therefore, called indriya.

Those who know that the path of vital seed is the cause of the sinful state of affairs called varnasamkarshana, the mixture of castes, are men of restrained passions. Their sins have been burnt, and they are never subjected to rebirth. He that performs karma only to sustain his body, who reduces with the help of the mind the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas into a state of uniformity, and brings his last dying breaths to the manovaha, escapes the obligation of rebirth.

The mind is sure to gain knowledge. The mind takes the form of all things. The minds of all Mahatmans, who attain success through meditation, become desireless, luminous and eternal. Therefore, to destroy the mind as mind, one should do only sinless deeds and disentangle oneself from the attributes of passion and darkness. Doing this, one is sure to attain a most desirable end. Knowledge ordinarily acquired in youth weakens with age. One, of ripe intellect, however, succeeds through the auspicious effects of past karmas in destroying his desires. Such a person, who transcends the bonds of the body and the senses like a traveller traversing a path full of obstacles, and destroys all faults that he sees, succeeds in tasting the nectar of moksha.'

CANTO 215

Bhishma says, 'Living creatures that grow attached to objects of the senses, which are always fraught with evil, become helpless. The Mahatmans, however, who are detached from sensual things, attain the highest. The man of intelligence, who sees the world overwhelmed with the evils of birth, death, decay, sorrow, disease and anxiety, should strive for the attainment of moksha. He should be pure in speech, thought and deed; he should be free from pride. Of peaceful soul and possessed of knowledge, he should lead a life of mendicancy, and pursue happiness without being attached to any worldly object. Yet, if attachment were seen to possess the mind because of compassion towards living creatures, he should, keeping in mind that the universe is the result of karma, show indifference to compassion itself.

Whatever good deeds are done, or whatever sin is committed, the doer reaps the consequences. Hence, one should, in speech, thought and deed, do only deeds that are pure and good. He succeeds in obtaining happiness who practices non-violence, truthfulness of speech, honesty towards all creatures, forgiveness and, always, heedfulness. Hence, exercising one's intelligence, one should dispose one's mind, by focusing on peace and goodwill towards all creatures. The man who regards the practice of such virtues as the highest dharma, conducive to the happiness of all creatures, and destroying all kinds of sorrow, possesses the highest knowledge, and succeeds in finding mukti.

One should never think of doing evil to others. One should not covet what is far beyond one's power to attain. One should not turn one's thoughts towards objects that are non-existent. One should, on the other hand, train one's mind towards knowledge with such persistent efforts that are sure to succeed. With the help of the affirmations of the srutis and with determined efforts calculated to bring success, knowledge is sure to flow. He who wants to speak amiable, kindly words or observe a law that is refined of all impurity, should utter only such truth as is not fraught with any malice or reprimand. He who is possessed of a sound heart should utter words that are not dishonest, not harsh, not cruel, not evil and not long-winded. The universe is bound in speech.

If inclined to renunciation then should one admit, with humility and a pure intellect, one's own evil actions. He who acts influenced by rajas of passion, finds much misery in this world and at last sinks into hell. One should, therefore, practice self-restraint in body, speech and mind. Ignorant persons bearing the burdens of the world are like robbers laden with their loot of scrambling sheep. The robbers are always wary of roads unfavourable to them due to the presence of the king's guard. Just as thieves have to discard their spoils if they wish for safety, so should one shed all actions dictated by passion and darkness in order to obtain bliss. Undoubtedly, a man who is without desire, free from the bonds of the world, content to live in solitude, moderate in diet, devoted to penances with the senses under control, who has burnt all his sorrows with his knowledge, who enjoys the practice of yoga, and has a purified soul, succeeds, as a result of his mind withdrawn into itself, in attaining Brahman or moksha.

One gifted with patience and a pure heart, should assuredly control his intellect. With the intellect disciplined, he should next control his mind, and then with the mind, overpower the objects of the senses. With the mind under control and the senses subdued, the senses will become luminous and gladly enter into Brahman. When one's senses are withdrawn into the mind, Brahman becomes manifested in it. Indeed, when the senses are destroyed, and the Soul returns to pure being, it is merged into Brahman. Remember, one should never make a display of one's mastery over yoga. Yet, one should always strive to restrain one's senses by practising the laws of yoga. Indeed, one engaged in the practice of yoga should live in a manner by which his conduct and demeanour may become pure.

Excluding one's yoga powers as a means to one's subsistence, one should rather live upon broken grains of corn, ripe beans, dry cakes of seeds, pot herbs, half-ripe barley, and the flour of fried pulses, fruits and roots, obtained as alms. Based upon time and place, one should according to one's inclinations observe, after proper examination, vows and rules about fasts. One should not suspend a course once begun. Like one slowly creating a fire, one should gradually extend a way of life that is prompted by knowledge. By doing so, Brahman gradually shines in one like the sun.

Ignorance, which has knowledge for its burial ground, extends its influence over all the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless slumber. Knowledge, borne by intellect, is repeatedly invaded by ignorance. The corrupt person fails to understand the Soul, thinking of it as being one with the three states while in reality it transcends them all. When, however, he succeeds in recognising the limits under which the two, union with the three states and separation from them, are manifested, it is then that he becomes divested of attachment and attains moksha. When such a realisation occurs, one transcends the effects of age, rises above the consequences of infirmity and death, and obtains Brahman which is eternal, deathless, immutable and undiminishing.'

CANTO 216

Bhishma says, 'The yogi who wishes to practice pure brahmacharya and who is affected by dreams of lust should whole-heartedly seek to renounce sleep. In dreams, the embodied soul, affected by the rajas and tamas, seems to possess another body and functions influenced by kama. Out of the earnestness for the acquisition of knowledge and focused meditation and communion, the yogi remains ever awake. Indeed, the yogi can keep himself always awake by devoting himself to gyana.

On this subject, it has been asked what this state is in which the jiva thinks itself surrounded with and engaged in sensual objects and actions.

It is true that the embodied being, with its senses in truth suspended, still thinks itself to be possessed of a body with all the senses of knowledge and action. In reply to the question, it is said that the master of yoga, Hari, comprehends truly how this transpires. The Maharishis say that the explanation offered by Hari is correct and consistent with reason. The learned say that it is due to the senses being worn out with fatigue that all creatures experience dreams. Though the senses are suspended, the mind never disappears or becomes inactive, and the mind gives rise to dreams. This is said by all to be the noted cause of dreams.

As the imagination of a man who is awake and engaged in actions, is confined to the creative power of the mind, likewise the impressions in a dream relate only to the mind. A person with desire and attachment has dreams based upon the impressions of countless forgotten lives of the past.

Nothing that impresses the mind once is ever lost, and the Soul, being aware of all those impressions, causes them to surface from obscurity.

Whichever among the three attributes of goodness, passion and darkness is fetched out by the influence of past actions and by whichever amongst them the mind is affected temporarily, its elements are subtly exhibited as images. After such images are projected, the particular aspect of goodness, passion or darkness that may have been brought by past actions rises in the mind and leads to its result of happiness or misery. Such images, with wind, bile and phlegm for their origins, and which men perceive through ignorance and from inclinations infused with passion and darkness, cannot be easily discarded. Whatever objects a person perceives in the waking state through the senses in a state of lucidity are seized by the mind in dreams while the senses are dimmed.

The mind exists unhindered in all things. This is due to the nature of the soul. The soul should be understood. All the elements and the phenomena they create exist in the soul. In the state called dreamless slumber, sushupti, the manifest human body that is the gateway of dreams, disappears in the mind. Occupying the body, the mind enters the manifest Soul upon which all existent and non-existent things depend, and is transformed into a wakeful witness with the certainty of realisation. Thus inherent in pure consciousness, the Soul of all things is regarded by the learned as transcending both consciousness and all things in the universe. The yogi who desires any of the divine attributes of knowledge, renunciation and the rest, should regard a pure mind to be identical with the object of his desire. All things rest in a pure mind or the Atman. This is the result attained by one who is engaged in tapasya. The yogi, however, who has crossed darkness or ignorance, becomes possessed of transcendent radiance. When ignorance has been transcended, the embodied Atman becomes Supreme Brahman, the cause of the universe.

The Adityas have penances and Vedic rites. Darkness or pride, which destroys the Devas, is the way of the Asuras. This, Brahman, which is said to have knowledge as its attribute, is difficult to attain by either the Adityas or the Asuras. It should be noted that the gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, belong to the Adityas and the Asuras. Sattva is the attribute of the Adityas, while the two others belong to the Asuras.

Brahman transcends all the gunas. It is pure knowledge. It is deathless. It is pure splendour. It is everlasting. Persons of cleansed souls who realise

Brahman attain the highest end. With knowledge one can indeed say this much with the help of reason and inference: Brahman which is indestructible can be comprehended only by withdrawing the senses and the mind from external objects into the Atman.'

CANTO 217

Bhishma says, 'He cannot be said to know Brahman who does not know the four states of dreams, dreamless slumber, Brahman as saguna, indicated by attributes, and Brahman as nirguna, transcending all attributes, as also what is Vyakta, manifest, and what is Avyakta, unmanifest, which Maharishi Narayana has described as tattvam. That which is manifest should be known as liable to death. That which is unmanifest transcends death.

Rishi Narayana has described the principle of pravritti, action. Upon it rests the whole universe with its mobile and immobile creatures.

The principle of nivritti, actlessness, again leads to the unmanifest and eternal Brahman. The creator Brahma has described the doctrine of pravritti. Pravritti implies rebirth or return. Nivritti, on the other hand, implies the highest end, liberation. The ascetic who wants to discriminate with accuracy between good and evil, who is always bent on understanding the nature of the Soul, and who devotes himself to nivritti, attains that highest end. He, who wishes to accomplish this, should know both Prakriti and Purusha of which I will now tell you.

That which is different from both Prakriti and Purusha, which transcends them both, and is distinguished from all beings, should be particularly known by the wise. Both Prakriti and Purusha are without beginning and without end. Both are beyond the grasp of their ken. Eternal

and indestructible, both are greater than the greatest of beings. In these, they are similar; there are points of dissimilarity between them.

Let me explain. Prakriti is filled with the traigunas. It is also engaged in creation. The true aspects of the kshetrajna Purusha is known to be different. Purusha is the apprehender of all the transformations of Prakriti but cannot himself be apprehended. He transcends all attributes. As regards Purusha and the Paramatman, both of them are unimaginable. And being without attributes by which they can be distinguished, both are prominent and apart from all else. Just as a man with his head circled by three folds of a cloth, a turban, is not identical with the turban he wears, the embodied Jivatman invested with the traigunas is not identical with those gunas.

Hence, these four subjects, which are covered by these fourfold studies, should be understood. One who understands this is never bewildered when drawing conclusions in his enquiry.

He that wants to attain high prosperity should become pure in mind, and taking to austere practices of the body and the senses, should devote himself to yoga without desire for their fruits. The universe is pervaded by yoga-shakti quietly circulating through every part of it and illumining it resplendently. The sun and the moon shine with splendour in the glory of the heart because of yoga-shakti.

The result of yoga is gyana, knowledge. Yoga is spoken of highly in the world. Whatever actions are destructive of passion and darkness establish yoga in its true character. Brahmacharya and ahimsa establish the yoga of the body, while restraining the mind and speech properly establish the yoga of the mind. The food obtained in alms from the twice-born is superior to all other food. By eating such food moderately, one's sins born of passion begin to fade. A yogi subsisting upon such food finds his senses gradually withdrawn from their objects. Hence, he should take only as much food as is strictly necessary for sustenance. It is also advisable that the knowledge that one gains gradually with one's mind devoted to yoga, should readily be garnered during one's last moments by a forcible stretch of power.

The embodied Jivatman divested of rajas does not immediately attain moksha but assumes a subtle form, a sukshma rupa with all the senses of perception, and moves about in space. When his mind becomes unaffected by actions, because of renunciation, he loses that subtle form and merges into Prakriti without, however, yet attaining Brahman. After the destruction

of this gross material body, one who thoughtfully escapes from all the three bodies—the gross, the subtle and the causal, succeeds in attaining moksha.

The birth and death of creatures always depend upon the cause constituted by avidya. When knowledge of Brahman arises, one needs no longer to pursue the jiva. Those, however, who accept what is the reverse of truth by believing the ego to be the self are men whose beliefs are accounted for during the birth and death of all beings. Such men never even dream of mukti.

Yogins who patiently support their bodies, renounce all external objects with the help of their intellect, and withdraw themselves from the world of senses, come to admire the senses for their subtlety. Some amongst them, with the mind cleansed by yoga, who journey in accord with the scriptures and reach the highest, succeed in knowing it with their intellect and abide in that which is the highest.

Some worship Brahman in images. Some worship Him as existing with attributes. Some repeatedly realise the highest divinity, which has been described to be like a flash of lightning and indestructible. Others, who have burnt their sins with tapasya, attain Brahman in the end. All Mahatmans attain the highest end. Mindful of the scriptures, one should observe the subtle attributes of the several forms of Brahman that are worshipped by men. The yogi who has transcended the necessity of depending on the body, who has cast aside all attachments, and whose mind is absorbed in yoga, is known as another embodiment of infinity, as the Supreme Divinity, or as that which is unmanifest. Men whose hearts are devoted to the acquisition of knowledge first succeed in freeing themselves from the world of mortals. Subsequently, by casting off attachments they enter into the nature of Brahman, and at last attain moksha, the highest end.

So have persons conversant with the Vedas spoken of the teaching that leads to the attainment of Brahman. All those who follow the path according to their ability and acumen, successfully find mukti. They, who succeed in acquiring the knowledge that cannot be shaken by doubt and scepticism and which makes its possessors free from all attachments, attain various high realms after death and at last find emancipation.

The pure-hearted who have imbibed contentment from knowledge, and have cast off all desires and attachments, gradually approach Brahman, which has the unmanifest for its sole attribute, which is divine, and without birth and death. With the realisation that Brahman dwells in their own

Souls, they become themselves eternal and have never again to be reborn. They reach the supreme state, which is indestructible and eternal, and so exist in bliss. The observation with regard to this world, samsara, is this: It exists in the case of the ignorant; it does not exist for the enlightened.

The whole universe, bound in desire, is spinning like a wheel. As the strands of a lotus-stalk spread into every part of the stalk, so do the strands of desire, which have neither beginning nor end, spread themselves over every part of the body. As a weaver drives his threads into a cloth with his shuttle, so does the shuttle of desire weave the threads that form the fabric of the universe. He who properly knows the characteristics of Prakriti, Shakti and Purusha, is freed from desire and attains moksha. The divine Rishi Narayana, the shelter of the universe, out of compassion for all creatures, clearly proclaimed these means to acquire immortality.'

CANTO 218

Yudhishtira says, ‘By following pravritti, O you that are skilled in all courses of conduct, did Janaka, the ruler of Mithila, adept in the way of moksha, succeed in attaining mukti, after casting off all worldly pleasures?’

Bhishma says, ‘Listen to an ancient story of the manner in which a particular ruler, thoroughly conversant with all the asramas, succeeded in achieving the highest bliss. There was a king in Mithila named Janadeva of Janaka’s race. He was ever engaged in deliberation upon the paths that might lead to the attainment of Brahman. One hundred acharyas always lived in his palace, to instruct him upon the diverse dharmas followed by people from various walks of life. Masterful in the Vedas, he was not convinced by the speculations of his teachers on the nature of the Soul, nor on their views of death and rebirth.

One day the son of the devi Kapila, a great ascetic called Panchasikha, who ranged over the whole world, arrived in Mithila. Endowed with true conclusions about all speculations about the diverse duties connected with renunciation, he was above all conflict, and unequivocal. He was regarded as the best of Rishis. Through his travels, he wanted to place within reach of all men the eternal bliss that is so difficult to attain. It seems that he went everywhere amazing the world, during the avatara of none other than the Maharishi whom the followers of the Samkhya faith called Kapila.

He was the most excellent of all the disciples of Asuri and was called Amara, the deathless. He had performed a silent japa that lasted a thousand years. He was firm in mind, and had completed all the rites and sacrifices as required in the scriptures that lead to the attainment of Brahman. He was fully conversant with the five sheaths that cover the Soul. He was devoted to the five karmas with which Brahma is worshipped, and possessed the five qualities of peace, self-restraint, non-violence, compassion and charity. Thus known as Panchasikha, he once approached a large assembly of Rishis of the Samkhya faith and enquired about the highest goal of human acquisition: was it the unmanifest or that upon which the five Purushas or Koshas rest?

In order to obtain knowledge of the Atman, Asuri had questioned his guru and, because of the teacher's instructions and of his own tapasya, Asuri understood the distinction between body and soul, and acquired divine insight. In that assembly of ascetics, Asuri gave his account of the Immutable One, and Indestructible Brahman that is seen in diverse forms.

Panchasikha became a disciple of Asuri. He lived on human milk. There was a certain Brahmani named Kapila, who was the wife of Asuri. She adopted Panchasikha as a son and he would suckle at her breasts. Consequently, he came to be known as the son of Kapila and his mind became fixed on Brahman. The Devarishi Narada who also told me about the omniscience of Panchasikha brought particulars of his birth and how he became the son of Kapila, to my knowledge. Conversant with all the asramas, Panchasikha acquired great knowledge. Next, he approached Janaka and, fully aware that the king had equal reverence for all his teachers, began to amaze the hundred acharyas with a presentation of his own opinion charged with abundant logic. Janaka, who witnessed the gifts of Panchasikha Kapileya, grew exceedingly attached to him. He abandoned his hundred teachers, and began to follow Kapileya exclusively.

Kapileya addressed Janaka, who sat with his head traditionally bowed and who was fully able to understand the sage's instructions on the transcendent tenet of moksha as explained in Samkhya treatises. Beginning with the sorrows of birth, he spoke of the burdens of religious deeds. Then he explained the hardships of all states of life right up to Brahmaloka, the sacred domain of the creator. He also spoke on maya for whose sake dharma and rituals are followed, and of their fruits, which are untrustworthy, destructible, fleeting, unsteady and uncertain.

Kapileya said, “Sceptics say that when death is evidently witnessed by all, those who maintain, out of their faith in the scriptures, that something distinct from the body, called the Atman, exists, are eventually defeated in argument. They also urge that one’s death means the extinction of one’s Atman, and that sorrow, age and disease imply the partial death of the Soul. Furthermore, he who maintains, in ignorance, that the Atman is distinct from the body and exists after the loss of the body, entertains an opinion that is illogical. If the non-existent were regarded as existing, then it may be said that the king, being regarded so, is in truth never liable to age or death. However, is he, on that account, to really be believed to be above age and death?

When the question is whether an object exists or does not exist, and when that whose existence is asserted reveals all the indications of non-existence, what is that upon which ordinary people rely in settling the affairs of life? Direct evidence is the root of both belief and the scriptures, bhakti and the shastras. The scriptures can be contradicted by direct evidence. As to faith, its evidences do not amount to much. Whatever be the subject, cease to reason basing your logic on belief alone. There is no jiva other than this body.

In a banyan seed inheres the capacity to yield leaves, flowers, fruits, roots and bark. From the grass and water that a cow consumes come milk and butter, substances whose nature is different from that of the creative causes. Elements of different kinds when allowed to decompose in water produce intoxicating liquors whose nature is quite different from that of the materials that produce them. Likewise, from the sperm is produced the body and its attributes, with the intellect, consciousness, mind and other possessions. Two pieces of wood, rubbed together, produce fire. The stone called suryakantam, meeting the rays of the sun, produces fire. Any metallic object, heated in fire, vapourises water when immersed in it. Similarly, the material body creates the mind and its attributes of perception, memory, imagination and the rest. As the magnet moves iron, similarly, the senses are controlled by the mind. So reason the sceptics.

The sceptics, however, are mistaken. For, the disappearance of only the vitalising force, when the body becomes lifeless, and not the simultaneous disappearance of the body on death, is evidence that the body is not the Soul but that the Soul is separate from the body, and outlives it. If, indeed, body and Soul had been one and the same, both would disappear at

the same time. Instead, the dead body may be seen for some time after the occurrence of death. Death, therefore, means the flight from the body of something that is other than the body. The entreaty of the divinities by the very men who deny the separate existence of the Soul is another good argument for the premise that the Soul is separate from the body and has an existence that is independent of a material state. The divinities to whom these men pray cannot be seen or touched. They are believed to exist in subtle forms. Truly, if a belief in divinities divested of material forms does not violate their logic, why should the existence of an immaterial Soul alone do their logic such harm?

Another argument against the sceptic is that his hypothesis implies a destruction of karma; for if body and Soul die together, the actions of this life would also perish: a conclusion to which no man can possibly come if he is to explain the inequalities witnessed in the universe. These examples, and material forms, cannot be the causes of the Jivatman, its sensory accompaniments of perception, memory and the like. The identity of immaterial existences with objects that are material cannot be comprehended. Hence, objects that are themselves material cannot by any means be causes for the creation of things immaterial.

There are individuals of the opinion that there is rebirth and that it is caused by ignorance, the desire for actions, greed, disdain and attachment to other vices. They say that avidya is the Atman. Actions constitute the seed that is sown in the soil. Desire is the water that causes the seed to sprout and grow—in this way they explain rebirth. They maintain that ignorance is ingrained in a subtle manner, and when one mortal body is destroyed, another body immediately generates the ego from it. Furthermore, that when this ego is consumed with the help of knowledge, the destruction of existence itself follows, and the person attains nirvana. This opinion also is erroneous. This is the doctrine of the Bouddhas, Buddhists.[1]

It may be asked that when the being that is thus reborn is a different one in its nature, birth and purposes connected with virtue and vice why should the ahamkara then be regarded to have any identity with the being that was? Indeed, the only inference that can be drawn is that the entire chain of existences of a particular being is not really a chain of connected links but separate existences in succession that are unconnected with one another. On the other hand, if the being that is the result of rebirth is really different from what it was in a previous birth, what satisfaction can come to

a person from the exercise of the virtue of charity or from the acquisition of knowledge or of asceticism, since the deeds performed by one are to accrue to another person in another birth without the performer himself being present to enjoy them?

Another result of this false doctrine would be that one in this life may be rendered miserable by the actions of another in a previous life, or having become miserable may again be rendered happy. However, by looking at what actually takes place in the world, a proper conclusion may be drawn with respect to the unseen. The separate consciousness that is the result of rebirth is, from what may be inferred from the Bouddha theory of life, different from the consciousness that had preceded it in a previous life. The manner, yet, in which the rise of a separate consciousness is explained by this theory, does not seem to be either consistent or reasonable.

The Chitta as it existed in the previous life was the very opposite of eternal; being only transitory, it extended as it did till death of the body. That which has an end cannot be taken as the cause for the creation of a second consciousness appearing after the occurrence of the end. If, again, the very loss of the previous Chitta were regarded as the cause of the creation of the second consciousness, then upon the death of a body, a second form would arise from the inert corpse. Once more, their doctrine of extinction of life, nirvana or sattva-samkshaya is exposed to the criticism that such extinction will become a recurring phenomenon like that of the seasons, the year, the yuga, heat, cold or objects that are agreeable or disagreeable.

If to avoid these criticisms, the followers of this doctrine assert the existence of a soul that is permanent and to which each new consciousness attaches; they expose themselves to the new charge that the permanent substance, overcome with age, and with death that brings about destruction, may in time be itself weakened and destroyed. If the supports of a mansion are weakened by time, the mansion itself is sure to finally fall down. The senses, mind, wind, blood, flesh, bones, successively meet with destruction and enter each into its own original cause. If again the existence of an eternal Soul is asserted to be changeless, the refuge of the intellect, consciousness and other attributes, and yet is dissociated from all these, such an assertion would be exposed to a serious protest, for then all that is usually done in the world would be meaningless, especially with reference to the attainment of the fruits of charity and other religious acts.

All the declarations in the srutis encouraging all the actions connected with the conduct of men in the world, would be equally unmeaning, for the Soul being dissociated from the intellect and the mind, there is no one to enjoy the fruits of good deeds and Vedic rites.

So, diverse kinds of speculations arise. Whether this opinion is right or the other is true, there is no conclusion to be reached from these disputes. Engaged in reflection on such opinions, careful persons follow meticulous lines of thought. The intellect of these, directed to specific theories, becomes absorbed with them until at last, it is entirely lost in them. Thus, all men are rendered miserable by all pursuits, good or bad. The Vedas lead them back to the right path, guide them along it, like mahouts their elephants. Many men, with weakened minds, desire objects that are filled with great happiness. These, however, have soon to meet with a much larger measure of sorrow, and then, forcibly torn from their heart's desires, they have to accept the might of death.

What use has one, who is destined to die and whose life is unstable, for relatives, friends, wives and other possessions? He who encounters death after he abandons all these, passes easily out of the world and has never to return. Earth, space, water, heat and wind always support and nourish the body. After such deliberation, how can one feel any affection for one's body? Indeed, the body, which is subject to death, has no joy in it."

After King Janadeva heard the faultless words of Panchasikha, unconnected with delusions arising from daunting sacrifices and other Vedic rituals, highly salutary, and regarding only the Atman, the king was filled with wonder, and prepared himself to address the Rishi once more.'

CANTO 219

Bhishma says, 'Janadeva of the race of Janaka, thus instructed by the great Rishi Panchasikha, once more questioned him on the subject of existence or non-existence after death.'

Janadeva said, "O illustrious one, if no one retains any knowledge after departing from this state of being, and if, indeed, this is true, where then is the difference between ignorance and knowledge? What do we gain then by knowledge and what do we lose by ignorance? Consider, O Dvijottama, that if moksha be such, then all religious actions and vows end only in annihilation. Of what avail would then the distinction be between heedfulness and heedlessness? If mukti means dissociation from all objects of pleasure or an association with objects that are not eternal, why then would men cherish a desire for action, or, resolved to action, continue to find ways for the accomplishment of desired ends? What is the truth of this?"

Bhishma continues, 'Seeing the king helplessly enveloped in thick darkness, and stupefied by failure, Panchasikha consoled him thus, "In moksha the achievement is not extinction. Nor is it any kind of existence that one can easily conceive. This that we see is a union of body, senses and mind. They exist independently and control one another. In this manner, they continue to function. The elements that constitute the body are water, space, wind, heat and earth. These come together forming the body

according to their own nature. They separate again in accordance with their own nature. The body is not one element.

Intellect, fire and breath, are all wind; these three are said to be organs of action. The senses, the objects of the senses, sound, form and the rest, the energy that dwells in those objects due to which they can be seen, the faculties lodged in the senses through which they succeed in perceiving them, the mind, prana, apana and the rest, the various fluids and impulses that are the results of the digestive organs, flow from the three.

Hearing, touch, taste, vision and scent, are the five senses. They derive their attributes from the mind, which, indeed, is their cause. The mind that exists as an aspect of Chitta has three states: pleasure, pain and the absence of both pleasure and pain. Sound, touch, form, taste, scent, and the objects to which they belong, until the moment of one's death are causes for the attainment of knowledge. Upon the senses, rest all actions that lead to nirvana, as also renunciation, which ushers one to the attainment of Brahman, along with the discovery of truth with regard to all subjects of enquiry.

The learned say that discovery of truth is the highest objective of existence, and that it is the root of moksha; and of intelligence, they say that it leads to moksha and Brahman. The person, who regards this union of perishable attributes called the body and the objects of the senses as the Soul, feels, because of such flawed knowledge, great misery that proves to be unending. Those, on the other hand, who regard all worldly objects as Anatman, not-Soul, and who on that account cease to have any affection or attachment for them, have never to suffer any sorrow, for sorrow, in their case stands in need of some foundation upon which to rest.

In this connection, there exists the unrivalled branch of knowledge that speaks of renunciation. It is called samyagradha. I will speak to you about it. Listen to it for the sake of your mukti.

Renunciation of actions is expressed for all persons who strive earnestly for moksha. Those who have not been taught correctly and subsequently think that serenity may be attained without renunciation have to bear a heavy burden of sorrow. Vedic sacrifices and other rites exist for the relinquishment of wealth and other possessions. For disavowal of all enjoyments, exist vows and fasts of diverse kinds. For renunciation of pleasure and happiness, exist tapasya and yoga. The renunciation, however, of everything or vairagya is the highest kind of abstinence. What I am about

to tell you is the one path pointed out by the learned in order to renounce everything. Those who tread the path succeed in driving off all sorrow, while those who deviate from it reap distress and suffering.

Before speaking of the five organs of knowledge, with the mind for the sixth, and all of which occupy the intellect, I will tell you of the five organs of action, which have strength for their sixth. The two hands define two organs of action. The two legs are the two limbs for movement. The sexual organ exists for both pleasure and the continuation of the species. The anal canal, leading down from the stomach, is the organ for the expulsion of waste. The organs of speech exist for the expression of sounds. Know that these five organs of action relate to the mind. These are the eleven organs of knowledge and of action, including the mind. One should quickly reject the mind with the intellect. For hearing, three causes must exist together, the ears, sound and the mind. The same is the case with the senses of touch, form, taste and smell. These fifteen are needed for the several kinds of perception.

Everyone, because of these, becomes aware of three separate aspects of those perceptions: a material organ, its particular function, and the mind from which that function works. Again, with regard to all perceptions of the mind, three qualities relate to goodness, passion and darkness. In them, function three kinds of consciousness, including all feelings and emotions. Rapture, satisfaction, joy, happiness and peace, which arise in the mind from any perceptible cause or without any apparent cause, belong to the sattva guna. Discontent, regret, grief, desire and spite, causeless or occasioned by a perceivable cause, are the signs of rajas. Misjudgement, confusion, distraction, dreams and lethargy, however caused, belong to the tamoguna.

Whatever state of consciousness exists, of either the body or the mind, united with joy or satisfaction, is from the sattva guna. Whatever state of consciousness exists united with any feeling of discontent or cheerlessness is from the rajoguna in the mind. Whatever state, either of the body or the mind, exists with error or distraction indicates tamas, which is incomprehensible and inexplicable.

The organ of hearing relies on space; it is to an extent space itself. Sound has that organ for its port. Sound, therefore, is a modification of space. On hearing sound, one may not immediately acquire knowledge of the ear and space. However, when sound is heard, the ear and space do not

long remain unknown. By destroying the ear, sound and space may be destroyed. In addition, by destroying the mind, all may be destroyed. The same is the case with the skin, the eyes, the tongue and the nose. They exist in touch, form, taste and smell. They constitute the faculty of perception and they are the mind. With each employed in its own function, all the five organs of action and five of knowledge exist together, and upon the union of the ten dwells the mind as the eleventh, and upon the mind, the intellect as the twelfth. If it were said that these twelve do not exist together, then the outcome would be death in dreamless slumber. However, as there is no death in dreamless slumber, it must be conceded that these twelve exist together as regards themselves but separately from the Soul.

The co-existence of these twelve with the Atman, which is referred to in conversation, is only a common form of speech for the ordinary purposes of the world. The dreamer, from the appearance of past sensual impressions, becomes conscious of his senses in their subtle forms, and equipped as he already is with the three attributes of goodness, passion and darkness he regards his senses as existing along with their respective objects and, so, acts and moves about with an imaginary body just as he does while awake. The dissociation of the soul from the intellect, and the mind from the senses, which quickly disappear without stability, and which the mind causes to arise only when influenced by darkness, is happiness that feeds off the tamoguna and is experienced only in this material body.

The bliss of moksha certainly differs from it. The same subtle, truth-concealing darkness seems to envelop the bliss of mukti, and the ecstasy awakened by the inspired teaching of the Vedas. In reality, moksha is unstained by darkness. Similar to what occurs in dreamless sleep, in moksha also, subjective and objective existences, from consciousness to objects of the senses, which have their origin in one's actions, are all eliminated. In some individuals overwhelmed by ignorance these exist, firmly grafted. To others who have transcended avidya, they never come at any time.

They who are enlightened about the aspects of Atman and anatman say that this sum of the senses, and the rest, is the kshetra, the field of karma. That prevailing element which remains, transcending the mind, is called kshetrajna, the knower of the field. When all creatures exist because of the known causes of ignorance, desire and actions, in addition to their primary nature of union between the Soul and body, which of these two is

destructible, and how can the Atman, which is said to be eternal, suffer destruction?

As when small rivers that merge into larger ones lose their forms and names, and the larger ones that flow into the ocean also lose their forms and names, likewise occurs the state of moksha. This being the case, when the Jivatman merges into the Paramatman, and all its attributes disappear, how can it be an object of distinctness?

One who is acquainted with the awareness directed towards the accomplishment of mukti and who heedfully seeks to know the evil fruits of his actions, never soils the Atman, even as a lotus leaf though dipped in water is never soaked by it.

When one becomes free from the myriad vigorous bonds, occasioned by affection for children and spouses, and love for sacrifices and other rituals; when one discards both joy and sorrow and transcends all attachments, one then attains the highest end and entering into Brahman loses one's individuality.

When one has understood the edicts of the srutis that lead to correct inferences about Brahman and has practiced the auspicious virtues which these and other scriptures impart, one may rest at ease, setting aside the fears of age and death.

When both punya and paapa disappear, and their fruits in the form of joy and sorrow are destroyed, men, unattached to everything, take refuge, at first, in the saguna Brahman invested with personality, and then, behold the nirguna, impersonal Brahma.

In the course of its descent under the influence of avidya, jiva lives within its body formed by karma just like the silkworm within its cocoon made of threads woven by itself. And like the silk-worm that abandons its cocoon, the jiva too abandons its body generated by its karma. Finally, its sorrows are destroyed like a clod of earth falling violently upon a rock. As the ruru discards its old horns or the snake sheds its skin and lives on, a detached person sheds all his sorrows. As a bird deserts a tree that is about to fall and flies to a new nest, the man freed from attachments casts off both joy and sorrow, and dissociates even from his subtle and subtler forms, his sukshma and linga sariras, attains the end which is filled with the highest weal. Your own ancestor Janaka, king of Mithila, who watched his city burn in a blaze, himself proclaimed, 'In this inferno nothing of mine is afire.'"

After King Janadeva listened to Panchasikha speak these words that could yield immortality, on careful reflection, he arrived at the truth, shed his sorrows, and lived on in the enjoyment of great bliss. He who reads this discourse, O king, and always reflects on it, is never pained by any calamity, and freed from sorrow attains moksha like Janadeva, the ruler of Mithila.’

CANTO 220

Yudhishtira says, ‘With what deeds does one acquire happiness, and what are the actions that bring woe? What also is that, O Bhaarata, by doing which one becomes free from fear and progresses here, in this world, crowned with success in the purusharthas?’

Bhishma says, ‘The ancients, who had their awareness directed to the srutis, highly approved the duty of samyama, restraint, for all the asramas generally, but especially so for the Brahmanas. Success in religious rites never occurs in the case of one that is not restrained. Religious rites, penance, truth, all these are founded in abstinence. Moderation enhances one’s energy. Abnegation is said to be sacred. The man of self-restraint becomes sinless and fearless and wins great rewards. A disciplined man sleeps happily and wakes happily. He lives happily in the world and his mind always remains cheerful. Every kind of excitement is quietly controlled through abstention. One who is not disciplined fails in a similar objective. The man of continence realises his innumerable enemies in the forms of lust, desire, wrath and the rest, as if these live in a separate body.

Like tigers and other predators, those lacking restraint always fill everyone with dread. To control these men, Brahma created the Kshatriyas and kings. In all the four asramas of life, the practice of abstinence is distinguished above all other virtues. The fruits of moderation are much greater than those obtainable in all the asramas of life together.

I will now tell you the traits of individuals who prize samyama highly. Their attributes are nobility, peace, contentment, faith, forgiveness, invariable simplicity, controlled speech, humility, reverence for elders and superiors, benevolence, compassion for all creatures, candour. They abstain from gossip, false and useless conversation, and from praising and insulting others. The self-restrained man becomes desirous of moksha. He quietly suffers current joys and grief, and is never exhilarated or depressed by anticipated ones. Without vindictiveness and all kinds of guile, he is unmoved by praise and blame, is well behaved, has good manners, is pure of heart, has firmness or fortitude and is a complete master of his passions.

Honoured in this world, such a man in the afterlife finds swarga. When with his help all creatures acquire what they cannot otherwise have, such a man rejoices and becomes happy. Devoted to universal benevolence, he never harbours animosity towards anyone. Peaceful like the ocean during low tide, wisdom fills his soul and he is ever cheerful. Possessed of intelligence, and worthy of universal reverence, the man of restraint never fears any creature and in return is feared by none. He, who never rejoices even at large attainments and never feels sorrow when overtaken by calamity, is possessed of contented wisdom. Such a man is said to be self-restrained. Indeed, such a man is said to be a being reborn, a true Dvija.

Versed with the scriptures and endowed with a pure soul, the man of abstinence, accomplishes all the actions done by the good, and enjoys their pure fruits. They, however, that have a wicked Soul never take to the path of benevolence, forgiveness, peace, contentment, sweetness of speech, truth, generosity and comfort. Their path consists of lust, wrath, greed, envy of others and boastfulness. The Brahmana should overcome lust and wrath, practice the vow of brahmacharya, achieve complete mastery of his senses, exert himself with endurance in the severest of penances, and observe the most rigid restraints. Thus he should live in this world, and calmly bide his time like one with a body but knowing fully that he is not subject to death.'

CANTO 221

Yudhishtira says, 'The three higher castes, who undertake sacrifices and other rituals, sometimes eat the remnants, of meat and wine, of sacrifices in honour of the Devas, in order to beget children and heaven. What, O Pitamaha, is the character of what they do?'

Bhishma says, 'Those who eat forbidden food regardless of the sacrifices and vows ordained in the Vedas are considered wayward men. They are deemed fallen. Those, on the other hand, who eat such food in the observance of Vedic sacrifices and vows, and induced by the desire of fruits in the shape of heaven and children, ascend to heaven but fall again on the exhaustion of their punya.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Common people say that fasting is tapasya. Is it really so, or is penance something else?'

Bhishma says, 'People do regard upavasa, fasting, measured by months or fortnights or days, as penance. In the opinion, however, of the wise, this is not tapasya. On the contrary, fasting is an impediment to the acquisition of the knowledge of the Soul. The renunciation of being the doer and the humility contained in the worship, and compassion for all creatures, constitute the highest tapasya, distinguished above all tapasyas.

He who undertakes such penance is regarded as one that is always fasting and always leads a life of brahmacharya. Such a Brahmana will become a Muni always, a Deva evermore, watchful forever, and engaged purely in the pursuit of dharma, even if he lives amidst a family. He will

remain a vegetarian always, and pure forever. He will always partake of amrita, and ever adore the gods and his guests. Indeed, he will be regarded as one who always subsists on vighasa, sacrificial remnants, forever devoted to the duty of hospitality, eternally full of faith, and one who invariably worships Devas and Athitis.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How is one engaged in such penance deemed as one that is daily fasting or as one that is ever devoted to the vow of brahmacharya, or as one that invariably subsists upon vighasa, or even as one that is always regardful of his guests?'

Bhishma says, 'He will be regarded as one that is always on a fast if he eats once in the day and once at night, at the fixed hours, without eating anything in the interval. With consistency of truth in his speech and a ceaseless adherence to wisdom, who approaches his wife only in her season and never at other times, such a Brahmana becomes a Brahmacharin. By never eating meat of animals not killed for sacrifice, he will be a strict vegetarian. Ever charitable he will be eternally pure, and by abstaining from sleep during the day, he will remain always alert. Know, O Yudhishtira, that the man who eats only after he has fed his servants and guests becomes an eater of ambrosia. The Brahmana who never eats until Devas and Athitis are fed wins heaven itself. He is said to subsist upon prasadam, who eats only what remains after the Devas, Pitris, Sevakas and Athitis have dined. Such men win numberless realms of heaven in the next life. To their homes come, with Brahma himself, the Devas and the apsaras. They who share their food with the Adityas and the Pitris pass their days in constant happiness with their sons and grandsons, and at last leaving off this body, attain a very high end.'

CANTO 222

Yudhishtira says, 'In this world, O Bhaarata, deeds good and bad attach themselves to man to yield fruits for enjoyment or suffering. Is man to be regarded as their doer or is he not to be regarded so? Doubt fills my mind. I wish to hear about this in detail from you, O Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'O Yudhishtira, listen to an old story of a dialogue between Prahlada and Indra. The king of the Daityas, Prahlada, was unattached to all worldly objects. His sins had been washed away. Of respectable parentage, he had great wisdom. Free from confusion and pride, ever observant of the sattva guna, and devoted to various vows, he accepted praise and blame equally. With self-restraint, he spent his time in a state of sunya. Conversant with the origin and the destruction of all created things, chala and achala, he was never angry at what displeased him and never rejoiced at the gains of what was agreeable. He knew what is supreme and what is not, among all things omniscient and omnipresent. He cast an equal eye upon gold and a clod of earth. Steadily engaged in the study of the Atman and the achievement of moksha, firm in knowledge, he arrived at fixed conclusions in respect of satya.

Once, as he sat withdrawn, with his senses subdued, Sakra approached him, and with a wish to awaken him, said these words, "O king, I see all those qualities permanently set in you by which a person wins the esteem of all. Your intellect seems to be like that of a child, free from attachment and

aversion. You know the Soul. What, do you think, is the best means by which a knowledge of the Atman may be attained?

You are now bound in chains, fallen from your erstwhile position, restrained by the power of your foes, and divested of prosperity. Your present circumstances inspire grief. Yet how is it, O Prahlada, that you do not lament? Is this due, O son of Diti, to the acquisition of wisdom or is it because of your resolve? Look at your miseries, O Prahlada, and yet you seem to be happy and peaceful."

Thus urged by Indra, the lord of the Daityas replied in these sweet words of great wisdom.

Prahlada said, "He who is unacquainted with the origin and the destruction of all created things is stupefied by his ignorance. He who knows these two things is never bewildered. All kinds of entities and non-entities come into being or cease because of their own svabhava, their innate nature. No manner of individual will is required for the creation of such phenomena. In the absence, therefore, of individual will, it is evident that no achiever exists for the creation of all this that we perceive. Although in reality the Jivatman or the Chitta never does anything, yet out of ignorance, a consciousness of anger overspreads itself over it. He, who regards himself as the doer of deeds good or bad, possesses a wisdom that is corrupt. Such a one, in my judgement, is unacquainted with the truth.

If, O Sakra, the jiva were really the doer, then all actions undertaken for his own benefit would certainly be crowned with success. None of those deeds would be defeated. Among even men who strive their utmost, the suspension of the undesired and the occurrence of what is desired are not to be found. What becomes then of individual will? In the case of some, we see that without any exertion on their part, what is not desired is suspended and what is desired is accomplished. This then must be the result of svabhava. Others, again, are seen to present extraordinary aspects, for, although of superior intelligence, they have to plead for their livelihood from others who are vulgar in their ways and of little intelligence.

Indeed, when all qualities, good or bad, enter a person, fated by innate nature, what ground is there for one to boast of one's superior possessions? All these flow from svabhava. This is my undoubted conclusion. Even moksha and knowledge of self, I believe, flow from the same source. In this world all fruits, good or bad, that attach themselves to jivas, are regarded as

the result of karma. I will now speak to you in depth on the subject of karma. Listen to me.

As a crow, while eating food, proclaims with its repeated cawing the presence of food to others of its species, likewise, all our actions only proclaim the indications of svabhava. He, who is acquainted with only the transformations of innate nature but not with the Atma-tattva that is supreme and exists by itself, feels bewilderment because of his ignorance. He, however, who understands the difference between Atma-tattva and her transformations, is never befuddled. All living things have their origin in Atma-tattva.

Having an assured conviction in this respect, one will never be affected by pride or arrogance. When I know what the origin is of all the laws of dharma, and when I am acquainted with the instability of all objects, it is impossible for me, O Sakra, to indulge in grief. All this is provided with an end. Without attachments, without pride, without desire and without hope, freed from all bonds, and dissociated from everything, I bide my time in great happiness, engaged as a witness to the appearance and disappearance of all created objects. For one who is wise, self-restrained, contented, without desire and hope, who beholds all things with the light of Atmagyana, no trouble or anxiety exists, O Sakra. I have no affection or aversion for either the Atman or its transformations. I do not see anyone as my enemy nor anyone as my own. I do not, O Indra, at any time crave either swarga, bhumi or Patala. It is not that there is no happiness in realising the Atman. However, as the Soul is dissociated from everything, it cannot enjoy bliss. Hence I desire nothing."

Sakra said, "Tell me the means, O Prahlada, by which this kind of wisdom may be attained and by which this kind of peace may be made one's own. I beg you."

Prahlada said, "With simplicity, with attention, with a purified Soul, with mastery over the passions, and with service to elders, O Sakra, a man succeeds in attaining moksha. Know this, however, that one acquires wisdom from the Atman, and that the acquisition of peace is also from the same source. Indeed, all that you perceive is due to the Atman."

Thus addressed by the lord of the Daityas, Indra was filled with awe, and praised these words, O king, with a joyous heart. The lord of the Trilokas then worshipped the lord of the Daityas, and took his leave to return to his own realm.'

CANTO 223

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what sort of intelligence may a king divested of prosperity and crushed by time's heavy blow adopt, in order to endure life on this earth.'

Bhishma says, 'Related to this is an old story of the conversation between Vasava and Virochana's son, Bali. One day, after Vasava had subjugated all the Asuras, he approached Brahma with folded hands, bowed to him and enquired after the whereabouts of Bali.

"Tell me, O Brahma, where I may now find the charitable Bali of boundless wealth? He was the god of wind. He was Varuna. He was Surya. He was Soma. He was Agni that used to warm all creatures. He became Apah for the use of all. I do not see him anywhere. Indeed, O Brahma, tell me where I may find Bali now. Once, he would illumine all the cardinal directions as Surya and thereafter set at dusk. Bereft of idleness, he would pour rain down upon all creatures at the proper season. I do not now see that Bali. Indeed, tell me, O Brahma, where I may find the king of the Asuras now."

Brahma said, "It is not becoming in you, O Maghavat, to enquire after Bali in this manner now. One should not, however, lie when another questions one. I will tell you the whereabouts of Bali. O lord of Sachi, Bali may now have taken his birth among camels, bulls, mules or horses, and as the best of his species, may now abide in Mahasunyata."

Sakra said, "If, O Brahma, I happen to meet Bali, should I kill him or spare him? Tell me what should I do?"

Brahma said, "Do not injure Bali, O Sakra, he does not deserve death. You should, on the other hand, seek instruction from him about dharma."

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by the divine creator, Indra roamed the earth, seated astride Airavata and escorted by an entourage of great splendour. He managed to meet Bali, who, as Brahma had said, abided in Mahasunyata, embodied in the form of an ass.'

Sakra said, "You are now, O Danava, born as an ass and subsist on chaff for food. This order of birth is surely a low one. Do you or do you not grieve for it? I see what I had never seen before—you brought under the might of your enemies, divested of prosperity and friends, and shorn of energy and prowess. Once, you journeyed through the lokas with your convoy of thousands of chariots and thousands of relatives. You blazed along, and seared everybody with your radiance; and you regarded us with scant regard. The Daityas looked up to you as their protector, for they lived under your reign. Through your power, the earth would yield crops without waiting for tillage. Today, however, I see you overtaken by this dire condition. Do you or do you not grieve over this?

Time was, when, with pride reflected in your face, you would divide your vast wealth among your kinsmen, on the eastern shores of the ocean. What was the state of your mind then? When, for many years, you shone with radiance, and frolicked, while thousands of apsaras danced before you. All of them were adorned with garlands of lotuses and all had companions bright as gold. What, O lord of Danavas, was the state of your mind then and what is it now?

You had a large canopy of gold, adorned with jewels and gems. As many as forty-two thousand Gandharvas, in those days, sang and played music before you. In your sacrifices, you had a great sceptre made entirely of gold. On such occasions, you would give away millions upon millions of kine. What, O Daitya, was the state of your mind then? Once, engaged in a sacrifice, you went around the very earth, in keeping with the custom of the hurling of the samya. What was the state of your mind then? No longer do I see that golden sceptre of yours, or the canopy of gemstones, nor all your followers and admirers. I see not also, O king of the Asuras, the garland that was given to you by Brahma."

Bali said, “You see not now, O Vasava, my sceptre, canopy or any followers or admirers. Nor do you see my garland, the gift from Brahma. Those precious possessions of mine are now buried in the darkness of a cave. When my time returns, you will surely see them once again. This conduct of yours, however, does not suit your position or fame. In your prosperity, you wish to mock my misery. Those who have acquired wisdom, and received contentment from it, who are of peaceful souls, and virtuous among all creatures, never grieve in misery, nor rejoice in happiness. Led, however, by a low intelligence, you indulge in glory, O Purandara. When you become like me you will not then regale yourself with such talk.”

CANTO 224

Bhishma says, 'Yet, laughing at Bali, who sighed like a snake, Indra said something more hurtful than before.

Sakra said, "You are now deserted by both kinsmen and friends. In view of this miserable plight that has overtaken you, do you or do you not grieve? Time was when all the worlds were under your reign and great was your joy. I ask, do you or do you not grieve now, for this fall of yours from glory and splendour?"

Bali said, "Considering all this to be transitory, and caused by the inexorable course of time, I do not, O Indra, indulge in grief. All things have an end. These bodies that creatures own, O Devaraja, are all evanescent. For this reason, Sakra, I do not grieve for this asinine form of mine. Nor is this form due to any fault of mine. The life force and the body come into existence together, because of their own nature. They grow and meet with death together. Having this form of existence now, I have not been permanently enslaved by it. Since I know this, I have no cause for sorrow. As the final resting place of all rivers is the ocean, even so the end of all embodied creatures is death. Those who know this well are never confused, O Vajradharin. Those, however, who are overwhelmed by passion and the loss of judgement, do not know this; those whose intellect is lost sink under the weight of misfortune.

A person who acquires a keen awareness succeeds in destroying all his sins. A sinless person acquires the sattva guna, and becomes joyous. They,

however, that deviate from the attribute of goodness, and find repeated births, are obliged to grieve and sorrow, led on by desire and the objects of the senses. Success or its reverse, in respect of the attainment of all objects of desire, life or death, the fruits of karma that are pleasure or pain, I neither abhor nor celebrate.

When one slays another, one kills only his body. The man who thinks that it is he who kills another is himself slain. Indeed, both of them are ignorant of the truth, he who kills and he who is killed. The man, O Maghavat, who brags about his manliness after he has vanquished or killed another, should know that he is not the doer but the action of which he boasts has been accomplished by a real actor who is different. When the question arises about who is it that causes the creation and destruction of all things in the world, it is generally regarded that a man who has himself been caused or created, is the cause of creation or destruction. Know, however, that the one, who is so regarded, has himself a creator.

Earth, light, space, water and wind—from these five do all creatures emerge. When I know this much, what sorrow can I feel for this change in my condition? One who is possessed of great wisdom, one who is bereft of knowledge, one who is strong, one who is without strength, one who owns personal beauty, and one who is uncomely, one who is fortunate and one who is unfortunate, are all swept away by Kaala. When I know that I have been vanquished by time, what sorrow can I feel for this change in my circumstances?

One who burns anything burns a thing that has been already burnt. One who kills, only slays a victim already slain. One who is destroyed has been already destroyed. A thing acquired by a person is that which has already arrived and intended for his acquisition. Time is like an ocean. There is no island in it. Where, indeed, is its other shore? Its boundary cannot be seen. Even upon profound deliberation, I do not foresee the end of this continuous stream that is the great ordainer of all things and is certainly divine. If I did not understand that it is Kaala that destroys all creatures, then, perhaps, I would have felt the emotions of joy, pride and wrath, O Sachindra. Tell me, have you come here to belittle me, now that you have ascertained that I bear the form of an ass that survives on chaff and passes his days in a lonely place remote from the habitations of men? If I wish, O Indra, even now I can assume various awful forms, seeing any of which you would beat a hasty retreat from my presence.

It is time that gives everything and again takes away everything. It is time that ordains all things. Do not, O Sakra, brag about your manliness. In days of yore, Purandara, at my wrath everything used to tremble. However, I am acquainted with the eternal attributes of all things in the world. Do you also know the truth? Do not suffer yourself to be filled with wonder. Affluence and its origin are not under one's control. Your mind seems to be like that of a child. It is the same as it was before. Open your eyes, O Maghavat, and adopt an understanding established on faith and truth. The Devas, Manushyas, Pitris, Gandharvas, Nagas and the Rakshasas, were all under my reign in days gone by. You know this, O Vasava. Their intellects stupefied by ignorance, all creatures used to flatter me, saying, 'Salutations to the cardinal place where Virochana's son Bali may now abide!'

O lord of Sachi, I do not at all grieve when I think of the honour that is no longer paid to me. I feel no sorrow for this fall of mine. My belief is firm that I will live obedient to the will and puissance of the Great Ordainer.

We see that one of noble birth, handsome and awarded with great prowess, lives in misery amidst his advisers and friends. This happens because it has been ordained to be so. Similarly, someone born in a humble vamsa, devoid of knowledge, with even a stain on his birth, is seen, O Sakra, to live in happiness amidst his fellow men. This, too, occurs because it has been so ordained. An auspicious and beautiful woman, O Sakra, is seen to pass her life in sorrow, while an unseemly woman with every inauspicious mark, is seen to pass her days in great happiness.

That we have now become so is not due to any deeds of ours, O Sakra. That you are now so is not due, O wielder of the thunderbolt, to anything you have done. No, you have nothing, O you of hundred sacrifices, because of which you now enjoy this affluence. Nor have I done anything by which I am presently divested of affluence. Affluence and dearth come one after another. I now see you ablaze with splendour, endued with prosperity, possessed of beauty, placed at the head of all the Devas, as you roar at me. This would never be but for the fact of time having ruined me. Indeed, if time had not turned against me I would have killed you today with just a blow of my fist even though you are armed with the vajra. But this is not the time for me to exercise my prowess. On the other hand, it is the time to adopt peace and calmness.

Kaala establishes all things. Time works upon all things and leads them to their final realisation. I was the worshipped lord of the Danavas.

Burning down everything in my way with my tejas, I would roar in pride. When Kaala has ruined even me, who is there whom he will not ruin? Earlier, O king of the Adityas, singly I endured the urjas of all the twelve Adityas with yourself amongst them. I used to vaporise water and then shower it down as rain. I would give both light and heat unto the three worlds. It was I that protected and it was I that would destroy. It was I that gave and it was I that took. It was I that used to bind and it was I that would set free.

In all the worlds, I was the one powerful master. The sovereign reign that I had, O king of the Devas, is no more. I am now ruined by the forces of time. Those things of old are no longer seen to shine in me. I am not the doer of actions that are apparently done by me. You are not the doer of your actions. None, O lord of Sachi, is the doer. It is Kaala, O Sakra, that protects or destroys all things.

Those who know the Vedas say that Kaala is Brahman. The fortnights and months are his body, which is invested with days and nights as its garments. The seasons are his senses. The year is his mouth. Some individuals of superior intelligence say that all this, the entire universe, should be conceived as being Brahman. The Vedas, however, teach that the five sheaths that cover the Soul should be regarded as Brahman. Brahman is like a vast ocean, deep and inaccessible. It has neither beginning nor end, and it is both immortal and mortal; it is the final mystery. Though it is nirguna, without attributes by itself, yet it enters all things that exist and so assumes the gunas, becoming saguna.

Men who know the truth regard Brahman as eternal. Through ignorance, Brahman causes the delusions of samsara to infuse the Atman, which is immaterial spirit with only pure knowledge for its single attribute. Samsara is not the essential quality of the Atman, for upon the dawning of knowledge of the true cause of everything, the very universe ceases to exist for the Soul.

Brahman in the form of Kaala is the refuge of all creatures. Where would you go transcending time? Time or Brahman cannot be avoided by running nor by remaining still; it flows on inexorably. All the five senses are incompetent to perceive Brahman. Some have said that Brahman is Prajapati; some say he is fire; some call him the seasons; some say he is the month; some call him the fortnight; some declare he is the days; some claim he is the hours; some state he is the morning; some say he is the noon; some

that he is the evening; and some declare he is the present moment. Thus diverse people speak diversely of Him who is One and singular.

Know that he is eternity, under whose reign all things exist. Many thousands of Indras have passed away, O Vasava, each of whom was possessed of great strength and prowess. You also, O lord of Sachi, will have to pass in the same manner. You, too, O Indra, who possess swelling might and are the monarch of the Adityas, when your hour comes, all-powerful Kaala will extinguish you. Time sweeps away all things. So, O Indra, do not boast and do not gloat. Time cannot be stilled by either you or me, nor by our ancestors. The regal prosperity that you have attained, which you think is beyond comparison, I once had. It is unsubstantial and unreal. Lakshmi does not dwell long in one place. Indeed, she had graced thousands of Indras before you, all of whom, again, were very superior to you. Restless as she is, deserting me she has now approached you, king of the Adityas. Do not, Sakra, be boastful again. It befits you to remain calm. Knowing you to be full of vanity, Sri will very soon desert you."

CANTO 225

Bhishma says, 'Thereafter, Sakra saw the Devi Lakshmi in her own embodied form that blazed in splendour issue out of the form of the venerable Bali. When the Deva saw the goddess in her fiery radiance, he addressed Bali in these words, with eyes agape in wonder.

Sakra said, "Ah! Who is this one, O Bali, resplendent with such opulence, with wondrous plumes of light over her head, adorned with golden bracelets on her arms, who exudes a halo of glory on all sides with her tejas? Who is she that issues out of your body?"

Bali said, "I know not whether she is an Asuri, an apsara or a Manavi. You may ask her yourself."

Indra said, "O you of sweet smiles, who are you that have such blinding radiance, and adorned with brilliant plumes of light, emerge from the body of Bali? I do not know you. O tell me your name. Who, indeed, are you that stands here as Maya herself, afire with your own splendour, after deserting the lord of the Daityas? O, tell me this!"

Sree said, "Virochana did not know me. His son Bali also knows me not. The learned called me Duhsaha, the unbearable. Some knew me by the name of Vidhitsa. I have other names too, O Vasava: Bhuti, Lakshmi and Sree. You know me not, O Sakra, nor do any among the Adityas know me."

Sakra said, "O auspicious Devi, why do you forsake Bali now, after you have abided in him for such a long time? Is it because of any actions of mine or is it due to anything that Bali has done?"

Sree said, "Neither the creator nor the ordainer rules me. It is time that moves me from one place to another. Do not, O Sakra, mock Bali."

Sakra said, "For what reason, O goddess adorned with refulgent plumes, do you desert Bali? Why also do you grace me? Tell me this, O you of sweet smiles."

Sree said, "I live in truth, in gifts, good vows, penances, prowess and in virtue. Bali fell from all these. Once, he was devoted to the Brahmanas. He was truthful and had controlled his passions. Lately, however, he began to cherish feelings of animosity towards the Brahmanas and handled ghrita with soiled hands. Once, he was always engaged in the performance of sacrifices. At last, blinded by ignorance and changed by time, he began to boast before one and all that his attachment towards me was endless. For these faults do I leave him and henceforth, O Sakra, I will dwell in you. You should bear me without neglect, with penances and valour."

Sakra said, "O you that lives amid lotuses, there is not a single one among Devas, Manavas and Pashus that can bear you forever."

Sree said, "Truly, O Purandara, there is none among Devas, Gandharvas, Asuras or Rakshasas that can bear me eternally."

Sakra said, "O benevolent Devi, tell me how I should conduct myself so that you may always abide in me. I will obey your command. It befits you to answer me truly."

Sree said, "O lord of the Adityas, I will tell you how you may enable me to abide in you always. Divide me into four parts according to the law laid down in the Vedas."

Sakra said, "I will assign the habitations according to their strength and power to bear you. As for myself, I will always take care, O Lakshmi, that I do not offend you in any way. Amongst men, the earth will bear a fourth part of yourself. I think she has the strength for that."

Sree said, "Here, I grant one quarter amsa of myself. Let it be established on Bhumi. Do you now find a home, O Sakra, for my second quarter."

Sakra said, "The waters perform various services to humans. Let the waters bear a fourth part of your person. They have the endurance to bear a portion of you."

Sree said, "I grant another quarter of mine that is to be established in Apah. Now, O Sakra, assign a proper abode to my third quarter."

Sakra said, “The Vedas, the Yagnas and the Devas are all established in Agni. He will bear your third quarter.”

Sree said, “I give my third quarter to be founded in Agni. Do you, O Sakra, now assign a proper dwelling for my last quarter.”

Sakra said, “They that are good among men, devoted to Brahmanas, and truthful in speech, may bear your fourth quarter. The good have the power to bear you.”

Sree said, “I give my fourth quarter to be placed among the good. My amsas thus assigned to different creations, do you, Indra, continue to protect me.”

Sakra said, “I have distributed you equally among different creations. Those that will offend you will be chastised by me.”

The king of the Daityas, Bali, forsaken by Sree, then said these words: “At present the sun shines as much in the east as in the west, and as much in the north as in the south. When, however, the sun withdraws himself from all sides and shines only upon the realm of Brahman situated in the heart of Sumeru, then will there be another great Devasura yuddha, a war between the Devas and the Asuras, and in that contention I will vanquish all of you.”

Sakra said, “Brahma has commanded never to kill you. It is for this reason, O Bali, that I do not cast my vajra at your head. Go wherever you wish, O lord of the Daityas. O great Asura, peace be upon you. The time will never come when the sun will shine from only the meridian. Brahma has already established the laws that regulate the sun’s motion. Giving light and heat to all creatures, he journeys ceaselessly. For six months, he travels in a northward course and for the other six in a southward direction. The sun travels these paths one after another, creating winter and summer for all creatures.”

Thus addressed by Indra, O Bhaarata, Bali went towards the south. Purandara travelled towards the north. The thousand-eyed Indra, who heard Bali speak with such humility, then flew up into the skies.’

CANTO 226

Bhishma says, ‘Yudhishtira, on this subject there is also an ancient story of the conversation between him of a hundred sacrifices and the Asura Namuchi. When Namuchi was seated bereft of prosperity but untroubled at heart, like the vast ocean in perfect stillness, Purandara said to him, “Fallen from your place, bound with ropes, brought under the rule of your enemies, and divested of prosperity, do you, O Namuchi, grieve or pass your days cheerfully?”

Namuchi answered, “By indulging in such sorrow as cannot be averted one only wastes one’s body and gladdens one’s foes. Then, again, no one can lighten another’s sorrow by taking any portion of it upon himself. For these reasons, O Sakra, I do not indulge in sorrow. All this that you see has but one end. Indulgence in sorrow destroys personal grace, prosperity and life, and virtue itself, O lord of the Devas. Doubtlessly, the wise should suppress the sorrow one experiences born of an improper attitude of mind and deliberate on that which yields the highest good, that which dwells in the heart. When one fixes one’s mind in this manner, verily, the result is that one’s objects are all accomplished.

There is one Ordainer, and no second. His control extends over the being that lies within the form. Controlled by the great Ordainer, I journey by his will like water that runs along a downward path. I know what is self and what is moksha, and as I am also aware that liberation is superior to the

jiva. I do not, however, strive for mukti. My actions that tend towards virtue or even towards vice, I do by His will.

One acquires things that are destined to be had. That which is to happen will happen. One must repeatedly endure such forms in which the Ordainer places one. There is no choice in the matter. He is never dismayed who, when he finds himself in any particular condition, accepts it as his destiny. Men are affected by pleasure and pain that come by turns in the course of time. There is no individual achievement in the matter of pleasure or pain to anyone. In this lies the misery: that he who abhors sorrow regards himself as the doer.

Amongst Rishis, Devas, Asuras, sannyasins and men who fully know the three Vedas, who is there whom anguish does not approach? Those, however, that are aware of the Atman and that which is anatman never fear sorrow. The wise one, steadfast like Himavat, never gives way to wrath, never suffers himself to be attached to the objects of the senses, never languishes in sorrow or rejoices in happiness. When overwhelmed by even great afflictions, such a one never gives way to grief. Indeed, he is a very superior man whom even great success cannot gladden, nor dire calamities afflict, who bears pleasure and pain, and that which is between them both, dispassionately. Into whatever state a man may fall, he should summon cheerfulness without yielding to sorrow. Surely, even so should one dispel one's mental grief, which if not dispelled is sure to fetch pain.

A conclave of sages engaged in the debate on dharma based upon the srutis and the smritis is not a goodly assembly; indeed, it does not deserve to be called an assembly of the wise, if upon entering it an evil man is not impaled by fear. Such a man is the best of his species who has delved into, enquired after dharma, and thereby gained success in behaving according to the conclusions to which he arrives. The actions of a wise man are not easily understood. A sage is never dismayed when calamities come upon him. Even if he falls from his position like Gautama in his dotage, he does not permit himself to be dismayed.

Through incantations, strength, energy, wisdom, prowess, conduct or the affluence of wealth—through any of these, can a person acquire that which has not been destined to become his? What sorrow then is there for not receiving that upon which one has set one's heart?

Before I was born, the powers that be had ordained what I am to do and to suffer. I only fulfil what was ordained for me. What then can death

do to me? One receives only what has been destined to become one's own. One goes where one was always meant to go. The sorrows and joys one draws for oneself are those that were always fated to be. He who knows this fully does not allow himself to be dismayed, and he who is contented under both happiness and sorrow is regarded as the most excellent of his species."

CANTO 227

Yudhishtira says, 'What, indeed, O monarch, is good for a man foundering in dire straits, when he has lost friends or his kingdom? In this world, O bull of Bharata's vamsa, you are the best of our gurus. So do I ask you this. It befits you to answer my question.'

Bhishma says, 'For one that has lost sons, wives, wealth and pleasures of every kind, and finds himself in dire straits—courage, viryata, is the highest good. Of the brave, the body is never weak. The refusal to indulge grief bears happiness within it, and health. A healthy body also helps acquire prosperity. The wise man, O sire, who stays with dharma, even when in distress, acquires prosperity, patience and perseverance; and achieves all his objectives. Yudhishtira, listen further to the ancient tale of the conversation between Bali and Vasava.

After the battle between the Devas and the Asuras, in which a large number of Daityas and Danavas fell, had ended, Bali became king. He was then deceived by Vishnu who once more established his reign over all the worlds. Indra of a hundred sacrifices was once more invested with the sovereignty of the Devas. After the rule of the Devas was re-established, and the four asramas of men restored, the three worlds once more swelled with prosperity, and the self-born became glad at heart. At that time, accompanied by the Rudras, Vasus, Adityas, Aswins, Devarishis, Gandharvas, Siddhas and other superior orders of beings, the mighty Indra,

seated in splendour astride Airavata, his four-tusked prince of elephants, ranged through all the worlds.

On one of his journeys, the wielder of the thunderbolt saw Bali within a mountain cave on the seashore, and he approached the prince of the Danavas. Although he saw the king of the Devas seated on the back of Airavata, surrounded by all the celestial ones, Bali showed no signs of sorrow or agitation. Indra also, noted that Bali remain unmoved and fearless. He addressed Bali from the back of his awesome elephant, and said, "How is it, O Daitya, that you are so calm? Is it because of your heroism or because you have waited with reverence upon your elders? Is it due to your mind that you have purified through tapasya? To whatever cause it may be due, this serenity is surely difficult to attain. Cast down from a position that was highest, you are now deprived of all your possessions, and brought under the sway of your foes. O son of Virochana, what is that which you have access to by which you do not grieve, although there is occasion for grief?

Once, when you ruled your own empire, unrivalled pleasures were yours. Now you are stripped of all your wealth and your supremacy. Tell us why you are so unmoved. You were before this, a very god, seated on the throne of your sire and grandsires. Even though you now find yourself stripped bare of all felicity by your enemies, why do you not grieve? You are bound in Varuna's noose and have been struck by my vajra. Your wives have been taken away from you, and your wealth too. Tell us why you do not grieve. Bereft of every prosperity and affluence, you do not grieve. This is indeed remarkable. Who else, O Mahabali, but you, could bear the burden of existence after being shorn of the sovereignty of the three worlds?"

Calmly hearing these and other cutting words from Indra, as he asserted his superiority over him, Bali fearlessly answered his questioner.

Bali said, "When calamity has already struck me, O Indra, what do you gain by your bluster now? Today I see you, O Purandara, stand before me with the thunderbolt raised in your hand. Once, however, you could not do this; now you have gained that power. Indeed, who other than you could utter such cruel words? He who, though able to punish, shows compassion towards a heroic foe vanquished and brought under his control, is truly a superior one. When two persons fight, victory in battle is uncertain. One of the two becomes victorious, and the other is vanquished.

O lord of the Devas, let this not be your demeanour. Do not imagine that you have become the sovereign of all creatures because you have conquered all with your might and prowess. That I have become so is not, O Sakra, the result of any deed of mine. That you have become so, O Vajradharin, is not the result of any action of yours. What I am now you will be in the future. Do not slight me, thinking that you have achieved an exceedingly difficult feat. A person obtains joy and sorrow, one following the other, in the course of time. You, Indra, have gained sovereignty over the universe because of time and not from any special merit in you. It is Kaala that leads me also on in his course. That very Kaala leads you as well. It is for this that I am not in your place today, and you are not in mine.

Dutiful services rendered to parents, reverential worship of Devas, due practice of any good quality, none of these can confer felicity or happiness on anyone. Neither knowledge nor penances, gifts or friends, or kinsmen can help one that is marked and tormented by time. Men are impotent to avert, by even a thousand means, an impending disaster. Intelligence and strength are useless against time. There is no rescuer of men that are plagued by Kaala's course.

That you, O Sakra, regarded yourself as the doer lies at the root of all sorrow. If the ostensible doer of an action were the real performer thereof, that doer then would not himself be the work of someone else, the Supreme Being. So, because the supposed doer is himself the creation of another, that other is the Brahman above whom there is nothing higher. With the help of time, I once vanquished you. Likewise, time has helped you vanquish me. Kaala is the mover of all animated beings. Kaala destroys all beings.

Indra, because your intelligence is unrefined you do not see how destruction inevitably awaits all things. Some, indeed, regard you highly, as one that has gained sovereignty of the universe. For all that, how can I who know the course of the world indulge in grief because I have been felled by time? How can I suffer my intellect to be overwhelmed, or succumb to the influence of grave error? Even when brought down by time, subjected to a calamity, how can my mind suffer itself to be destroyed like a wrecked vessel at sea? You, I, and all those who will in future become the lords of the Devas, shall have to go the way along which hundreds of Indras have gone before you. As it has destroyed me, when your hour matures, time will surely destroy you, who are now so invincible, and shine with unrivalled

splendour. In Kaala's wake, many thousands of Indras and Adityas have been swept tracelessly away, yuga after yuga. Time, indeed, is irresistible.

Now that you have arrived at your present position, you regard yourself highly, why, even as the creator of all beings, the divine and eternal Brahma. Many before you had attained this position of yours. With none did it prove stable or eternal. Due, albeit, to a foolish intellect, you alone regard it to be immutable and immortal. You trust in that which does not deserve to be trusted. You deem that eternal which is not permanent. O king of the Devas, it is he that is stupefied by Kaala that regards himself in this manner.

Foolishly, you regard your present regal prosperity to be yours. Know that it is never stable for you, any others or me. It belonged to innumerable great ones before you. Moving on, it has now become yours. It will stay with you, O Vasava, for some time and then prove its evanescence. As a cow abandons one drinking trough for another, fortune will surely desert you for someone else. So many sovereigns have gone before you that I will not venture to enumerate them.

In the future also, Purandara, countless sovereigns will rise after you. I do not see those rulers now that once enjoyed this earth with her trees, plants, jewels, living creatures, waters and mines. Prithu, Aila, Maya, Bhima, Naraka, Sambara, Aswagriva, Puloman, Swarbhanu, Prahlada, Namuchi, Daksha, Viprachitti, Virochana, Hrinisheva, Suhotra, Bhurihan, Pushavat, Vrisha, Satyepshu, Rishabha, Bahu, Kapilaswa, Virupaka, Vana, Kartaswara, Vahni, Viswadanshtra, Nairiti, Sankocha, Varitaksha, Varaha, Aswa, Ruchiprabha, Viswajit, Pratirupa, Vrishanda, Vishkara, Madhu, Hiranyakasipu, the Danava Kaitabha and many others that were Daityas, Danavas and Rakshasas, all these and many more unnamed, from remote and lost ages, great Daityas and extraordinary Danavas, whose names we have heard, as well as many excellent Daityas of earlier times, have departed, leaving this earth. All of them were vanquished by time. Kaala proved stronger than all of them.

They all worshipped the creator with hundreds of sacrifices. You are not the only one to do so. All of them were devoted to dharma and always performed great mahayagnas. Each one was able to range through the skies, and were heroes that never shrank from battle. Endowed with mighty physiques, they had arms that resembled heavy clubs. All of them were

masters of hundreds of illusions, and could assume any form they wished. We have never heard that any of them ever sustained a defeat in battle.

All were firm observers of the vow of truth, and all of them revelled as they wished. Devoted to the Vedas and Vedic rites, all of them possessed great wisdom. Invested with great prowess, all of them had acquired the highest prosperity and affluence. Still none of these high-Souled monarchs had the least tinge of pride of their sovereignty. They were all liberal, giving unto each what he deserved. All of them behaved kindly and justly towards all creatures.

They were the progeny of Daksha's daughters. Gifted with great strength, all of them were lords of creation. Each sparkled with such splendour that they illuminated everything around with their tejas. Alas, Kaala swept each of them away.

As for you, O Sakra, it is evident that after you have enjoyed your stay on the earth, when it is time for you to finally leave her, you will not be able to contain your grief. Shed this desire that you cherish for objects of affection and enjoyment. Shed this pride that is born of prosperity. If you do so, you will be able to bear the grief that attends the loss of sovereignty. When the hour of sorrow comes, do not yield to anguish. Likewise, at the hour of joy, do not rejoice. Disregard both past and future, and live contentedly with the present. If sleepless time did confront me, who have always been heedful of my duties, then, take heed and awaken, O Indra, and turn your heart to the ways of peace, for the same Kaala will very soon confront you.

You wound me with your words, and seem bent upon terrorising me. Finding me calm, you still regard yourself highly. Time first attacked me; it is even now stalking you. Kaala first vanquished me, and so were you able to defeat me, yet now you roar in hubris for what you did not yourself accomplish. Once, when I would become wrathful, what man on earth could stand up to me in battle? Time, however, is stronger. He has conquered me. It is for this reason, Vasava, that you are able to stand before me today.

The thousand celestial years, which are the measure of your reign, will end. You will fall then and your limbs will become as lustreless and miserable as mine are now, even though I am possessed of mighty tejas. I have fallen from the high place that belongs to the sovereign of the three worlds. You are now Indra in heaven. In this delightful world of living

beings, because of Kaala's course, you are now an object of universal adoration. Can you say by dint of which achievement of yours you have become Indra today and due to what means I have fallen from the position that was mine? Time is the one creator and destroyer. Nothing else is a cause in the universe of any effect. Decline, fall, sovereignty, happiness, misery, birth and death—when a wise man encounters any of these, he neither rejoices nor indulges in sorrow. You, O Indra, know me. I also, O Vasava, know you. Why then do you boast before me in this fashion? Why do you forget, shameless one, that it is Kaala that has made you what you are today?

You have seen my valour in those days. The energy and might that I displayed in my battles are enough proof of my heroism. The Adityas, the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Vasus and the Maruts, O lord of Sachi, I vanquished them all. You know it well, Sakra, that in the Great War between the Devas and the Asuras, how swiftly I routed all the assembled Devas with the fury of my assault. Mountains with their forests and denizens, I repeatedly hurled at your forces. Many were the mountain peaks with craggy edges that I broke on your head. Yet, now, what can I do? Time cannot be resisted. If this were not so, do not think that I would not have killed you, despite your vajra, with just one blow of my fist?

This present time, however, is not in my favour for the display of my prowess. The hour is such that I should adopt patience and tolerance of everything. Therefore, Sakra, do I tolerate your insolence. Know, however, that I am even less tolerant of insolence than you. Realise, that you boast before one who is surrounded by time's inferno and bound fast in Kaala's shackles. Look, there stands the dark one who cannot be resisted by the world. Of fierce form, he stands there, having restrained me like a dog bound in chains.

Gain and loss, happiness and sorrow, lust and anger, birth and death, captivity and release, all these one encounters in the course of time. Neither am I the doer nor are you. He is the doer who, indeed, is omnipotent. Time ripens me to be plucked like a fruit from a tree. One man finds happiness by some deeds. However, the very same deeds bring misery to another, all in the course of time. Versed as I am with the virtues of Kaala, it does not befit me to indulge in grief when it is Kaala that has ruined me. Therefore, Sakra, I do not grieve. Grief cannot do us any good. Mourning over it never

dispels one's dire condition. On the other hand, it destroys one's power. Hence, I do not grieve."

Thus addressed by the lord of the Daityas, He of a hundred sacrifices, the mighty and thousand-eyed chastiser of Paka, restrained his wrath and spoke calmly to Bali.

Sakra said, "Behold this upraised arm of mine, with the vajra, and the paasas of Varuna. Who is there that would not be afraid, including Yama himself who brings death to all beings? Your mind, however, so firm and so empowered with the vision of the truth, is not in the least disturbed. O you of invincible prowess, verily, you are unmoved today because of your fortitude.

When everything in this universe is seen to be fleeting, who would venture to repose confidence in either his body or the objects of his desires? Like yourself I, too, know that this universe is transient, and that it has been thrown into Kaala's invisible dreadful fire that burns endlessly. Everyone here is accosted by time. None among subtle or gross beings enjoys immunity from time's might. Everything simmers in Kaala's cauldron. Kaala has no master. It is ever watchful and always astir within itself. No one who has entered the realm of time can escape it. All embodied beings may pay no heed to it, but Kaala is ever vigilant as it stalks them. No one has ever averted time. Ancient, eternal and the embodiment of justice, time is uniform towards all living creatures. Kaala cannot be avoided, and there is no revering its course.

As a banker tallies his interest, time sums up its subtle divisions represented by kaalas, lavas, kashtas, kshanas, masas, divasas and ratras. Just as the current of a river washes away a tree whose roots it has reached, Kaala hunts and sweeps away him, who says, 'This I will do today, but this other task I will do tomorrow'. Time whisks us away and men exclaim, 'I saw him just a while ago. How did he die?' Wealth, comforts, rank, prosperity, all fall prey to Kaala who approaches every living creature and snatches his life away.

All things that proudly raise their heads high are destined to fall. That which exists is only an illusory form of the non-existent. Everything is transitory and unstable. Such conviction is, however, difficult to arrive at. Your intellect, so firm and endued with true vision, is unmoved. You do not, even mentally, realise what you were but some time ago. Time assails the universe, reshapes it within itself and sweeps away everything without

consideration for age. Yet, one who is hauled along by time is unaware of the noose thrown round his neck. Those given to jealousy, vanity, greed, lust, wrath, fear, desire, impulsiveness and pride, allow themselves to be traumatised by time. You, however, know the truth of existence. You are knowledgeable and empowered with wisdom and penance. You see time as clearly, as if it were an amla berry lying on the palm of your hand.

O son of Virochana, well versed are you with Kaala's conduct. You are adept in all the branches of knowledge. You have a purified soul and are a thorough master of your being. You are, for this, an object of affection with wise men. With your intelligence, you have fully comprehended the whole universe. Though you have enjoyed every kind of happiness, you remain unattached, and hence you have not been stained by anything. The gunas of passion and darkness do not tarnish you for you have conquered your senses. You rest only in your Atman, which is without both joy and sorrow. A friend to all creatures, without animosity, with your heart set upon peace, seeing you as you are, my heart turns merciful towards you. I do not wish to afflict an enlightened one like you with enslavement. Ahimsa is the highest dharma. I feel sympathy for you. These coils of Varuna, with which you have been bound, will loosen in due course from the misconduct of men. Blessed be you, O great Asura!

When the daughter-in-law will set the aged mother-in-law to work, when the son, through delusion, will command the father to work for him, when Sudras will have their feet washed by Brahmanas and fearlessly have sexual congress with women of twice-born families, when men will discharge their vital seed into forbidden wombs, when the refuse of houses will begin to be carried upon plates and vessels made of white brass, and when sacrificial offerings intended for the Devas will be carried upon forbidden platters, when the four asramas will transgress all limits, then these bonds of yours will begin to loosen, one by one. From me you need have no fear. Be at peace. Be happy. Be without sorrow. Let your heart be cheerful. Let no illness befall you."

With these words, Indra mounted Airavata, that prince of all elephants, and rode on.

With his conquest of the Asuras, the king of the Devas rejoiced and became the sole sovereign of all the Lokas. The Maharishis sang praises of the lord of all mobile and unmoving creatures. Agni once more began to bear the offerings of clarified butter poured into his visible form, and the

great Devendra took charge of the Amrita that was committed into his care. His praises sung by the best of Brahmanas engaged in sacrifices, the lord Indra, ablaze with splendour, his wrath pacified, and his heart appeased, became joyous as he returned to his swarga to pass his days in untold happiness.'

CANTO 228

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, the signs of the future greatness and the imminent downfall in a man.'

Bhishma says, 'The mind itself, blessed be you, indicates the fateful signs of one's future prosperity and subsequent fall. In this regard is an ancient tale of the conversation between Sree and Sakra. Listen to it, O Yudhishtira.

Maharishi Narada, of tejas as immeasurable as Brahman itself, bereft of sins, adept at seeing through the prosperity of his tapasya in both this and the other world, a peer of the Devarishis in Brahmaloka, roved as he pleased through the Trilokas. Once, at dawn, he wished to perform his ablutions, so he went to the Ganga river as she flowed through the Dhruva valley and he plunged into the stream. At the time, Indra too arrived at the very bank where Narada bathed. The Maharishi and the Deva finished their ablutions, completed their silent japas, and sat down to pass the hour as they recited and listened to the excellent stories narrated by the Devarishis, which describe many good and lofty deeds. Indeed, they sat with rapt attention, engaged in a pleasant discourse on ancient history.

While so engaged they saw the advent of the thousand rays of the sun as he rose. Once the fiery orb was in full view, both of them stood up and sang his praises. Suddenly, in a direction opposite to that of the rising star, they witnessed a resplendent object; it appeared to be a second star! They stood by, O Bhaarata, and watched as the magnificent object gradually

approached them. Astride Vishnu's chariot adorned with Garuda and Surya himself, the presence blazed forth with unrivalled splendour, and seemed to illumine the three worlds. The entity they saw was none other than the Devi Sree herself, attended by many apsaras of great beauty. Indeed, she resembled a large sun herself, her effulgence like that of fire. Embellished with ornaments that looked like veritable stars, she wore a garland of pearls.

Indra watched Goddess Padma as she alighted from her magnificent chariot, and approached the lord of the Trilokas and the celestial Rishi Narada. Followed by Narada, Maghavat also went towards her. With folded hands, he offered himself up to her, and worshipped her with unsurpassed reverence and sincerity. The adorations over, the king of the Devas addressed Sree.

Sakra said, "O you of sweet smiles, who are you, and what brings you here? O you of fair brows, from where do you come and where will you proceed, O auspicious Devi?"

Sree said, "In the three worlds full of felicitous seeds, all creatures, mobile and unmoving, strive with their whole hearts to be with me. I am Padma, I am Sree graced with lotuses, who emerged from the lotus that blooms at the touch of Surya's rays for the prosperity of all creatures. I am called Lakshmi, Bhuti and Sree, O slayer of Bala. I am Swaha, I am Swadha. I am Bhakti, I am Buddhi, I am Samriddhi, I am Jaya and I am Akshara. I am Kshama, I am Vijaya, I am Lakshmi. I am sraddha, I am bhagya, and I am smriti.

I dwell at the forefront of armies and on the standards of victorious, virtuous sovereigns, as in their homes, cities and dominions. I always reside, O vanquisher of Bala, with superior men, heroes breathless for victory and ambitious in battle. I also reside forever with those firmly attached to virtue, gifted with great intelligence, devoted to Brahma, truthful in speech, possessed of humility and generous. Once, I lived with the Asuras because by nature I am bound to truth and merit. But I see how the Asuras have assumed adverse traits, and so I have left them and wish to dwell in you."

Sakra said, "O you of fair face, from what conduct of the Asuras did you live with them? What did you see there that made you desert the Daityas and the Danavas, and come here?"

Sree said, "I attach myself steadfastly to those that are devoted to the duties of svadharma, to those that never lose patience, to those that take

pleasure in treading the path that leads to swarga. I always dwell with those that are distinguished for their generosity, for their study of the scriptures, for sacrifices and other scriptural rites, and for their worship of Pitris, Devas, Gurus, Agrajas, Sresthas and Atithis.

Once, the Danavas kept their dwellings clean, their women under control, poured havis on the sacrificial fire, waited dutifully on their gurus, restrained their passions, were obedient to the Brahmanas, and truthful in their speech. They were full of faith; they kept their anger under control; they practiced the virtue of charity; they never envied others; they looked after their friends, advisers and spouses; they were never envious. In those days, they never assaulted one another in anger. They were all contented and never felt pain at the sight of other people's affluence and prosperity. They were all charitable and never wasteful, of honourable conduct and gifted with compassion. They were excessively inclined to grace, possessed simplicity of behaviour and steadfastness in faith, and had their passions under perfect control. They kept their servants and counsellors contented. They were grateful and gifted with sweet speech. They served everyone in accord with his position and merit.

They were endowed with self-reproach. They were of rigid vows. They would perform their ablutions on every sacred day. They smeared themselves properly with perfumes and favourable pastes. They also adorned their persons appropriately. They were observant of fasts and penances, were trustful, and chanters of Vedic hymns. The sun never rose over them while they lay asleep. They never out-slept the moon. They always abstained from eating curd and pounded barley. Each morning they looked at ghrita and other auspicious things, and with senses withdrawn, they would recite the Vedas and worship Brahmanas with dakshina.

Their speech was always virtuous, and they never accepted gifts. Regularly they went to sleep by midnight and never slept during the day. They invariably took pleasure in showing compassion for the distressed, the helpless, the aged, the weak, the sick and women. They enjoyed all their possessions by sharing these with them. They would constantly pacify and comfort the agitated, the cheerless, the anxious, the terrified, the diseased, the weak, the starved, the robbed and the afflicted. They followed the dictates of dharma and never injured one another. They were ready and well disposed towards action of every kind.

They would serve and wait with reverence upon elders and the aged. They duly worshipped the Pitris, the Devas and Athitis, and ate their leftovers after gratifying them. They were firmly devoted to truth and penances. None amongst them ate singly, nor had congress with the wives of others. As for compassion, they behaved towards all creatures as towards their own selves. They never allowed the emission of the vital seed into empty space, into inferior animals, into forbidden wombs or on sacred days.

They were ever distinguished by the gifts they made, cleverness, simplicity, optimism, humility, friendliness and forgiveness. Moreover, O mighty one, traits such as truth, charity, penance, purity, compassion, soft speech and goodwill towards friends always inhered in them. Torpor, procrastination, fretfulness, envy, want of foresight, discontent, melancholy and greed never assailed them. Because the Danavas were distinguished for these sterling qualities, I stayed with them from the advent of creation, for many yugas together, for they are the first-born race of creation.

Times changed, and brought change to the character of the Danavas. I saw virtue and morality desert them and they came under the sway of lust and anger. Though themselves inferior in attainments, they began to cherish animosity towards elders and superiors, and while the elders with virtue and merit, discoursed on appropriate subjects in the midst of assemblies, the unworthy began to ridicule or even laugh at them. When revered elders entered, the younger men, seated at their ease, refused to adore the old ones by rising and saluting them with respect. In the presence of fathers, sons began to exercise power in matters that concerned the fathers alone. Those from a higher vamsa accepted employment with those from a lower clan, and proudly proclaimed the fact. Individuals that amassed great wealth with unrighteous deeds came to be held in esteem.

At nightfall, the Danavas would celebrate with loud cries and screams. Their sacrificial fires no longer blazed with bright and heavenward flames. Sons began to rule over fathers, and wives dominated husbands. Mothers, fathers, elders, teachers, guests and guides ceased to command respect. Their people no longer raised their children with affection and even deserted them. Without giving alms, nor reserving the fixed portion to offer the Devas, everyone ate as he pleased. Indeed, without tendering their wares to the Devas in sacrifices and without sharing them with the Pitris, Atithis and Agrajas, they shamelessly appropriated them for their own use.

Their cooks no longer professed any consideration for purity of mind, deed and word. They ate what had been left uncovered. Their corn lay scattered in the yards, exposed to crows and rats. Their milk remained uncovered, and they began to touch ghrita after eating with unwashed hands. Their spades, kitchen knives, baskets, dishes, cups and other utensils began to lie scattered in their homes. Housewives no more looked after these. They no longer attended to the repairs of their houses and walls. They tethered their animals and did not give them food and drink. They ignored children who only looked on, and without concern to feed their dependants, the Danavas ate what they had. They prepared payasa, krisara, dishes of meat, cakes and sashkuli, not for Devas and Atithis, but for themselves, and began to eat the flesh of animals not killed in sacrifices.

They continued to sleep even after the sun had risen. They made night of their mornings. Day and night, disputes and quarrels waxed in every house. The most disrespectable amongst them no longer showed any regard for those that deserved respect. Fallen from their defined duties, they ceased to revere those that took themselves to the forest to lead a life of peace and meditation. They intermixed castes freely. They ceased to attend to purity of person or mind. Learned Brahmanas ceased to command respect among them and the ones that disregarded the riks were not castigated; in fact, both were treated equally—those that merited respect and those that deserved none. Their servant girls became wicked in their ways, and began to wear necklaces of gold and other ornaments and fine clothes beyond their station. They would enter and leave their homes at their own free will. The Asuras started to derive great pleasure from sports and diversions in which their women were dressed as men and their men as women.

While the affluent amongst their ancestors had made gifts of wealth to deserving persons, the descendants of the Danavas, even though prosperous, began to repossess, to their eternal discredit, those very gifts. When faced with difficulties in the accomplishment of any task, and a friend sought the counsel of a friend, the supposed well-wisher for the petty satisfaction of doing so thwarted the intention.

Amongst even their better classes appeared traders intent upon taking the wealth of others. The Sudras amongst them have taken to the practice of tapasya. Some have begun to study without any proper schedule for work and food, while others persevere with rules that are hollow and useless.

Sishyas no more rendered obedience and service to Acharyas. Mentors in turn have come to treat disciples as friendly companions.

Fathers and mothers are worn out with work, and refrain from all festivity. Parents in old age, divested of power over their sons, are forced to beg food from their offspring. Even scholars of the Vedas, akin to the ocean itself in gravity of deportment, have taken to farming and other such pursuits, while the illiterate and the ignorant are fed at sraddhas.

Every morning, disciples, who once approached their teachers to enquire after and ascertain their duties, tasks, and instructions that awaited accomplishment, are now themselves waited upon by preceptors to discharge the functions. Daughters-in-law, in the presence of their husbands, mothers and fathers, rebuke and chastise servants and maids, and summon their husbands to rebuke them as well. Fathers, with great care, seek to keep sons in good humour, or through fear divide their wealth among children, and live their lives in woe and affliction. Even friends, who see the plight of victims that have suffered loss of wealth in fires or from robbers or by the king, indulge in laughter and mockery of the victim.

The Danavas have become ungrateful, agnostic, sinful and addicted to adulterous congress with even the spouses of their Acharyas. They have taken to consuming forbidden food, transgressed all bounds and restraints, and have lost the splendour that once distinguished them. Because of these and other indications of evil conduct and the very reversal of their past nature, I will not, O king of the Devas, dwell among them any longer. I have come to you of my own accord. Receive me with respect, O lord of Sachi.

Honoured by you, O king of the Devas, I will receive respect from all the other Devas. Wherever I reside, Jaya and the seven Devis, Apeksha, Shradha, Prajna, Tripti, Avajiti, Unnati and Kshama, who adore me, will live with me. The eighth Devi Jaya occupies the highest place amongst them, O scourge of Paka. All of us have deserted the Asuras and have come to your realms. We will henceforth reside among the Devas who are devoted to dharma and bhakti."

In order to please the Devi after she had spoken, Devarishi Narada and Vasava offered her a joyful welcome. Vayu Deva began to blow gently through heaven, bearing delicious fragrances that refreshed all creatures, and increased the felicity of each of the senses. All the Devas gathered in a

pure and desirable place and waited there in expectation to behold Maghavat seated with Lakshmi beside him.

Then the thousand-eyed lord of the Devas, accompanied by Sree and his friend the Maharishi, borne by a splendid chariot drawn by green horses, arrived at the gathering of the celestials, and they received him with honour. Maharishi Narada observed a sign, approved by Sree, that the wielder of the thunderbolt made, and accordingly welcomed the advent of the Devi and proclaimed it as exceedingly auspicious.

Heaven's firmament became clear and bright as it began to shower nectar from the region of the self-born Brahma. The unearthly kettledrums, though struck by none, began to beat of themselves, and all the cardinal points of the horizon seemed ablaze with glory. Indra began to pour rain upon crops that appeared according to their season. Not a soul deviated from the path of dharma. The earth was adorned with countless mines filled with jewels and gemstones; the chant of Vedic mantras and other melodious sounds swelled on the triumph of the Devas.

Humans endowed with firm minds, and all those who adhered to the auspicious path of dharma, began to enjoy Vedic and other religious rites and rituals. Manavas, Devas, Kinnaras, Yakshas and Rakshasas were all blessed with prosperity and joy. Not a flower, what need then be said of fruits, dropped untimely from a tree even if Pavana Deva shook it with force. All kine began to yield sweet milk, and no cruel, harsh words were anymore uttered by anyone.

Wishing for advancement, those who approach gatherings of Brahmanas and read this narrative of the glorification of Sree by all the Devas led by Indra, succeed in achieving great prosperity.

These then, O lord of the Kurus, are the best indications of prosperity and adversity. Urged by you, I have revealed all. It befits you to understand what I have said after careful reflection and conduct yourself according to the instructions conveyed herein.'

CANTO 229

Yudhishtira says, 'By what disposition, what course of duties, what knowledge, and what energy, does one attain Brahman, which is immutable and beyond the reach of primordial Prakriti?'

Bhishma says, 'One who is engaged in the practice of nivritti, who eats abstemiously, and has his senses under complete control, can attain Brahman which is immutable and above primeval nature. In this regard, listen to the old story, O Bhaarata, of the discourse between Jaigishavya and Asita. Long ago, Asita-Devala addressed the wise Jaigishavya who fully knew the truths of dharma and neeti.

Devala said, "You are not gladdened when praised. You do not give way to anger when blamed or censured. What, indeed, is your wisdom? From where have you got it? And what is the haven of that wisdom?"

Thus questioned by Devala, the pure Jaigishavya of austere tapasya replied with words of high import, fraught with perfect faith and profound sense.

Jaigishavya said, "O best of Rishis, I will tell you of that which is the highest, the supreme goal, and full of peace in the eyes of all who practice dharma. They, O Devala, who behave equally towards those that praise and those who blame them; they who conceal their own vows and good deeds; those who never indulge in recriminations, who never even mention what is good when it is calculated to injure; they who do not desire to return injury in retribution, are said to be men of wisdom.

They never grieve for what is yet to come but remain concerned only with what is before them and respond appropriately. Neither do they indulge in sorrow for the past nor recall it for reminiscence or nostalgia. Imbued with power and regulated minds, they do as they please, in a manner suitable, O Devala, with what needs to be done in respect of all things. Mature of knowledge, highly intelligent, serene with passions kept under restraint, they never inflict injury upon anyone in thought, word or deed. Bereft of envy, they are never pained at the sight of the prosperity of others. Such men never indulge in exaggerations in speech, or set themselves to praise others or speak ill of them. Neither are they ever affected by praise and blame of themselves.

They are calm in respect of all their desires, and engaged in the good of all creatures. They never give way to anger, indulge in transports of joy or injure any creature. Without emotional attachments, they live quite happily. They have no friends nor are they the friends of others. They have no enemies nor are they inimical toward other creatures. Indeed, men that can live in this way can pass their days for ever in happiness. O best of Dvijas, they who acquire a knowledge of the laws of niti and dharma, who observe these in practice, succeed in winning joy, while they who fall away from the path of dharma are afflicted by anxieties and sorrow.

I have now embarked upon the path of dharma. Decried by others, why must I become annoyed with them, or when praised by others, why should I be pleased? Let men obtain whatever objects they please from whatsoever pursuits in which they engage themselves. I am indifferent to acquisitions and losses. Praise and blame cannot contribute to my advancement or failure. He who has understood the truth becomes gratified with even disregard as if it were ambrosia. The man of wisdom is truly annoyed by regard, as if it were poison.

He who is freed from all faults sleeps fearlessly both here and hereafter even if insulted by others. On the other hand, he who insults him suffers destruction. Sages, who seek to attain the highest end, succeed in obtaining it by observing such conduct. He who has vanquished all his senses is regarded to have performed all the sacrifices. Such a one attains the highest condition, that of Brahman, which is eternal and which transcends the reach of primordial Prakriti. The very Devas, Gandharvas, Pisachas and Rakshasas, cannot reach the level of the one who has attained the highest end."

CANTO 230

Yudhishtira says, 'What man is there who is dear to all, who gladdens all persons, who is endowed with every merit and accomplishment?'

Bhishma says, 'Here let me recount the words of Kesava in reply to a question Ugrasena once asked him.'

Ugrasena said, "Everyone seem to be anxious to speak of the merits of Narada. I think the Devarishi must really be possessed of every kind of merit. I beseech you to tell me about this, O Krishna!"

Vasudeva said, "O king of the Kukuras, listen to me as I briefly mention some of the great qualities of Narada that I am acquainted with. Narada is as learned in the scriptures as he is good and pious in his conduct. Yet, he eschews pride, which makes one's blood run so hot. Hence he is worshipped everywhere. Discontent, wrath, levity and fear do not exist in Narada. He is courageous and free from procrastination. Hence he is worshipped everywhere.

Narada deserves the reverent worship of all. He never falls back from his words through desire or greed. Hence he is worshipped everywhere. He is fully conversant with the principles that lead to the knowledge of the Atman; he is disposed to peace, possessed of great energy, and is a master of his senses. He is free from guile, and is truthful in speech. Hence, he is worshipped with respect everywhere.

He is distinguished by energy, fame, intelligence, knowledge, humility, birth, penances and years. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped

with regard. He practices good behaviour. He clothes and houses himself adequately. He eats pure food. He adores all. He is pure in body and mind. He is silver-tongued. He is free from envy and malice. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

He is entirely employed in doing good to all. No sin dwells in Narada. He never rejoices at other people's misfortunes. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect. He always seeks to conquer earthly desires by listening to Vedic mantras and attending to the Puranas. He is a great renouncer and he never disregards anyone. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with regard.

He casts an equal eye on all; therefore, he has no one whom he loves and none that he hates. His words are ever delightful to the listener. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect. He is a scholar of the scriptures. His conversation is varied and enchanting. His knowledge and wisdom are vast. He is free from cupidity. He is also free from deception. He is large-hearted. He has conquered wrath and avarice. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect. He has never quarrelled with anyone over any subject connected with artha or kama, profit or pleasure. All faults have been torn asunder by him. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

His devotion to Brahman is firm. His Atman is blameless. He is well versed in the srutis. He is free from cruelty. He is beyond the influence of delusion or faults. Hence he is worshipped everywhere with respect. He is unattached to all objects of attachment. Yet he appears to be attached to everything. He is never for long subject to the influence of any doubt. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect. He yearns not for objects of artha and kama. He never glorifies himself. He is free from malice, mild in speech. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

He observes the hearts, different from one another, of all men, without judgement or condemnation. He is versed in all matters connected with the origin of things. He never disregards or shows hatred for any kind of science. He lives in accord with his own standards of dharma. He never suffers his time to pass away fruitlessly. His soul is under his control. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

He has toiled in matters that deserve exertion. He has earned knowledge and wisdom. He is never satiated with yoga. He is ever attentive. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect. He has never

to feel shame for any deficiency of his. He is always engaged by others to accomplish what is for their good. He never divulges the secrets of others. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

He never yields to transports of joy even when making valuable acquisitions. He is never pained at losses. His intellect is firm and stable. His Soul is unattached to all things. Hence, he is everywhere worshipped with respect.

Who, indeed, is there that will not love him who is so possessed of every merit and accomplishment, who is clever in all things, who is pure in body and mind, who is entirely auspicious, who is well-versed with the course of time and its advantages for particular deeds, and who is well-acquainted with all agreeable things?”

CANTO 231

Yudhishtira says, 'I want, O you of Kuru's race, to know about the origin and the end of all creatures. What is the nature of their deliberation and their actions? What are the divisions of time, and the allotted periods of life in the various yugas? I wish also to know in full the truth about the genesis and the conduct of the world; the origin of creatures into the world and the manner of their survival. Indeed, whence their creation and destruction? O best of virtuous persons, if you are inclined to favour us, then tell us about all this. Ever since I once heard you recount this excellent discourse of Bhrigu to the sage Bharadwaja, my intellect, purged of its ignorance, has become most attached to yoga and, withdrawn from worldly objects, rests upon heavenly purity. I ask you to repeat what you said. It becomes you to tell me this in detail.'

Bhishma replies, 'I will recite to you an old narrative of the divine Vyasa's reply to his son Suka's question. Listen to it.

After he studied the illimitable Upanishads and Vedas with all their Angas, Suka wanted to lead a life of brahmacharya. He, therefore, addressed the very same questions, and had his queries answered by his father who had removed through enquiry and contemplation all ambiguities with regard to the subject of the true import of dharma.'

Suka said, "It befits you to tell me who the creator is of all beings, as revealed by your knowledge of time, and what are the duties a Brahmana should accomplish."

In response to his son’s queries, the father, with his knowledge of both the past and future, conversant with all duties and endued with omniscience, so replied.

Vyasa said, “Only Brahman, which is without beginning and without end, unborn, of intense effulgence, beyond decay, immutable, indestructible, inconceivable, who transcends knowledge—exists before the creation. The Rishis who measured time have given names to particular portions. Fifteen winks of the eye make a kashtha. Thirty kashthas make a kaala. Thirty kaalas, with the tenth part of a kaala added, make a muhurta. Thirty muhurtas make up one day and a night. Thirty days and nights make a month, and twelve months make a year.

Persons conversant with mathematical science say that a year is made up of two ayanas that depend on the sun’s movement, the northern and the southern, uttarayana and dakshinayana. The sun makes the day and the night for the world. Night is for the sleep of living creatures, and the day is to engage in activity.

A month of human beings is equal to a day and night of the Pitris. The division of the time of the Pitris is thus: a bright fortnight of the days of men is one day for the Pitris to conduct their activities. And the dark fortnight is their night for sleep. A year of the humans is equal to a day and night of the Devas. The division with respect to the Devas consists in this: The half year in which the sun travels from the vernal to the autumnal equinox, uttarayana, is the day of the Devas, and the half year for which the sun travels in the southern direction, dakshinayana, is their night.

Calculating by the days and nights of Manavas, I will now speak of the day and night of Brahma and his years also. I will, in their right order, tell you the number of years that are, for different reasons and purposes, measured differently in respect of the Krita, Treta, Dwapara, and the Kali yugas.

Four thousand years of the Devas is the duration of the Krita yuga. The dawning of that epoch consists of four hundred years, as does its evening sandhya. The total duration, therefore, of the Krita yuga is four thousand and eight hundred years of the Devas. As regards the other yugas, the duration of each gradually decreases by a quarter in respect of both the substantive period along with the conjoining portion, and the conjoining portion itself. Hence, the duration of the Treta yuga is three thousand years and its dawning is for three hundred years and its evening for three

hundred. Likewise, the duration of the Dwapara is two thousand years, and its morning is two hundred years and its evening another two hundred years. The duration of the Kali yuga is one thousand years, and its morning is one hundred years, and its evening another hundred years.

These periods always sustain the never-ending, eternal worlds. They who are conversant with Brahman, O child, regard this as being the immutable Brahman.

In the Krita yuga all of dharma exists in its entirety, along with truth. No knowledge or object came to men of that age through immoral or forbidden means. In the other yugas, dharma, ordained in the Vedas, is seen to gradually decline, by a quarter part in each. Sinfulness grows out of theft, lies and deception. In the Krita yuga, all beings are free from disease and crowned with success in their achievements, and live for four hundred years. In the Treta yuga, the span of life decreases by a quarter. We have also heard that, in subsequent yugas, the words of the Vedas, the periods of life, the grace of Brahmanas and the fruits of Vedic rites, all steadily decrease.

The dharmas ordained for the Krita yuga is of one kind. Those for the Treta yuga are otherwise. Those for the Dwapara are different. And those for the Kali are again separate. This is in accordance with the decline that marks every succeeding yuga.

In the Krita yuga, tapasya occupies the first place. In the Treta, gyana is at the forefront. In the Dwapara, tyaga is said to be first, In the Kali yuga, dana is the only thing that has been prescribed.

The learned say that these twelve thousand years of the Devas constitute what is called a yuga. A thousand such yugas compose a single day of Brahma. A thousand yugas form Brahma's night as well. With the commencement of Brahma's day, the universe begins to awaken into life. During the period of the Pralaya and the universal dissolution, the creator sleeps in Yoganidra. When the period of slumber expires, he awakes.

That then which is Brahman's day extends for a thousand yugas. His nights also extend for a thousand yugas. They who know this are said to know day and night. At the end of his night, Brahma awakens and alters the indestructible Chitta to be overlaid with Avidya. He then causes consciousness to arise, wherefrom proceeds manas, the mind, which is identical with the manifest universe."

CANTO 232

Vyasa said, “Brahma is the effulgent seed from which the whole universe of two kinds of beings, the chala and the achala, has come. As he awakens at the dawn of his day, Brahma creates this universe with the help of Avidya. At first emerges Mahat. That Great Being is swiftly transformed into manas, which is the Soul of all the manifest. Manas overwhelms Chitta, pure consciousness, with Avidya and creates seven Great Spirits. Urged by the desire to create, manas begins to create diverse kinds of objects through modifications of itself.

First there comes from it Akasa, space. Know that its property is sound. From space arises the bearer of all scents, Vayu, the pure and mighty wind. It possesses the attribute of touch. From wind comes light endued with effulgence. Also called Sukram, it possesses the attribute of form. Light gives rise to Apah, water that has taste for its attribute. From water springs Bhumi, earth with scent for its quality. These Mahabhutas represent initial creation.

These, one after another, acquire the attributes of the immediately preceding elements from which they have sprung. Each has not only its own special aspect but each succeeding one has the qualities of all the preceding ones. Hence, space has only sound for its attribute. After space comes wind, which has both sound and touch for its qualities. From wind comes fire, which has sound, touch and form. From fire emerges water, which has sound, touch, form and taste for its attributes. From water is earth, which

has sound, touch, form, taste and scent for its features. If anyone who perceives scent in water, were to ignorantly infer it to belong to water, he would be in error. For scent is the attribute of earth though it may exist in a state of attachment with water as also with wind.

These seven entities, which possess diverse kinds of energy at first, existed separately from one another. They could not create objects without them coming together as one. As such, they form the constituent parts of the body, which are called limbs. Along with the limbs, the sum total, invested with form and sixteen constituent parts, becomes what is called the body. When the material body is so formed, the subtle Mahat, with the unexhausted residue of karma, enters the body. Next, the original creator of all beings divides himself with his maya and enters the subtle form to witness everything. And inasmuch as he is the original creator of all beings, he is called the lord of all beings.

He creates all beings mobile and immobile. In the avatara of Brahma, he creates the worlds of the Devas, the Rishis, the Pitris and Manushyas; as also the rivers, the seas, the oceans, the cardinal points of the horizon, countries and provinces, hills and mountains and large trees. Kinnaras, Rakshasas, Garudas, Pasus and Sarpas are also his creation. Indeed, he creates both kinds of existent things, those that are mobile and those that do not move; those that can and those that cannot be destroyed.

Of these creatures, each obtains the attributes, which it had during the previous creation; and each, verily, has the same qualities at every subsequent creation. Determined in respect of character by either violence or peace, mildness or fierceness, righteousness or unrighteousness, truthfulness or falsehood, each creature, at every new creation, acquires that guna which it had cherished before. It is due to this that the particular attribute attaches to it.

It is the Ordainer Himself who attaches variety to the great entities of space, earth and the others; to the objects of the senses, form and the rest, according to the size or scale of existent matter, and He appoints the relations of creatures with those multiform entities.

Amongst men who have devoted themselves to the science of phenomena, there are some who say that, in the creation of effects, exertion is supreme. Some scholars say that destiny is supreme, and some say that it is nature that is the operative. Others claim that actions flowing from both exertion and destiny create effects, helped by nature. Instead of regarding

any of these as singly competent for the creation of effects, they say that it is the union of the three that produces all effects.

In this, there are some who aver that such is the case, while others claim that such is not the case; some even say that both of these are not the case. These, of course, are the contentions of those that depend on actions with reference to objects. They, however, whose vision is directed to truth, regard Brahman as the cause.

Tapasya is the highest good for living creatures. The roots of penance are peace and self-restraint. Through tapasya, one obtains everything one wishes for. With penance, one attains the Being who creates the universe and hence oneself becomes the mighty Master of all beings. It is by tapasya that the Rishis are enabled to read the Vedas ceaselessly.

At the outset, the Svayambhu created the excellent Vedic sounds to emerge and flow from guru to sishya. From these sounds have sprung all kinds of karmas, the names of the Rishis, the varieties of form seen in existence; in fact, all of creation has its origin in the Vedas. Indeed, the Supreme Master of all beings, in the beginning, created all things from the words of the Vedas. The names of the Rishis, and all else that has been created, occur in the Vedas. Upon the expiration of his night, at the dawn of his day, the self-existent Brahma creates, from archetypes that existed before, all things that are, of course, perfectly made by Him.

In the Vedas the subject of the Soul's emancipation has been described, along with the ten means to achieve mukti: study of the Vedas, adoption of the grihastasrama, penances, the observance of duties common to all the asramas of life, sacrifices, performance of karmas that lead to pure fame, three kinds of meditation, and the kind of mukti known as siddhi. The incomprehensible Brahman, which has been declared in the words of the Vedas, and which has been indicated more clearly in the Upanishads by the seers, can be realised by gradually following these practices.

To a person who thinks he has a body, this consciousness of duality, fraught with pairs of opposites, is born only of the actions in which he is engaged. This consciousness of duality ceases during dreamless sleep or when moksha is attained. He, however, who has attained mukti, helped by his knowledge, forcibly rids himself of the consciousness of duality.

Two Brahmans should be noted, the Brahman represented by sound—the Vedas; and the other which is beyond the Vedas and is supreme. One

who realises the Brahman of sound succeeds in attaining the Parabrahman that is supreme.

The slaughter of animals is the sacrifice laid down for the Kshatriyas. The growing of corn is the sacrifice prescribed for the Vaisyas. Tapasya or worship of Brahman is the sacrifice ordained for the Brahmanas. Serving the three other varnas is the sacrifice ordained for the Sudras.

In the Krita yuga, the performance of sacrifices was not necessary; such performance became necessary in the Treta yuga. In the Dwapara yuga, sacrifices had begun to fall off, as they have done in the Kali yuga. In Krita yuga, men worshipped only one Brahman and looked upon the Riks, Samans, Yajuses, rites and sacrifices performed from motives of gain, as all different from the object of their worship, and practiced only yoga, achieved through tapasya.

In the Treta yuga, many mighty men appeared who ruled all mobile and immobile things. Though general, men were not naturally inclined to the practice of dharma, yet the great leaders forced them to such practice. Hence, the Vedas, sacrifices, distinctions between the several orders and the four modes of life, existed in a compact state. As a result, however, of the decrease in the span of life in the Dwapara yuga, all these fell away from that united condition.

In the Kali yuga, all the Vedas become so scarce that men may not even see them. Afflicted by iniquity, they suffer extermination along with the rites and sacrifices laid down in them. The dharma that is seen in the Krita yuga is now visible in such Brahmanas who are of pure souls and are devoted to tapasya and the study of the scriptures.

As regards the other yugas, it is seen that without abandoning the karmas and kriyas that are consistent with dharma, men who observe their svadharma, and know the ordinance of the Vedas, are led by the authority of the scriptures to perform yagnas, keep vratas, make pilgrimages to sacred tirthas and other holy places, in order to obtain punya. As during the rains numerous things burst forth into life, likewise many new kinds of religious observances are brought about in each yuga. As the same phenomena repeat with the seasons, even so, at each new creation identical attributes appear in each new Brahma and Hara. I spoke to you earlier of Kaala, which ordains this variety in the universe. It is Kaala that creates and swallows all creatures. All the innumerable creatures that exist have time for their

refuge. It is Kaala that assumes all those forms and Kaala that upholds them.

I have in this manner, O putra, answered your queries about creation, time, sacrifices, rites, the Vedas, the real doer in the universe, action and the results of action."

CANTO 233

Vyasa said, “I will now tell you how the Supreme Lord makes this material universe exceedingly subtle and merges everything into his Soul.

At the time of the Pralaya, a dozen Suryas and Agni come ablaze and the universe erupts in a vast apocalyptic inferno. Everything on earth disappears and merges into the element of which this world is composed. Bhumi, shorn of trees and herbs, resembles a tortoise shell. Apah, water, thereupon acquires gandha, the attribute of earth. When earth becomes shorn of its principal attribute, that element is on the verge of dissolution. Water then prevails and surges into mighty billows that give vent to awful roars and fills this vacuum as it moves about or even remains still.

Agni next adopts the aspect of water, which finds rest in fire. Dazzling flames dance all around as they envelop the sun. Indeed, space itself is ablaze in an immense conflagration.

Thereafter Vayu, wind, acquires the quality of Agni, heat, and extinguishes it. As a result, it obtains its own feature of sabda, sound, becomes awfully agitated and begins to traverse all the ten cardinal points of the horizon.

Akasa, space next subsumes the attribute of sound from wind; space smothers Vayu and enters into a phase of existence described as unheard or unuttered sound. Hereafter space is all that remains, as sound in its unmanifest state. Consequently, sound is absorbed by the mind, which is the

essence of all things manifest. Unmanifest manas withdraws all that it has manifested. This subtle withdrawal of Mahat's manifestations is called the Maha-pralaya.

Thereafter chandramas absorbs manas whereby all that remains are the attributes owned by Iswara. Chandramas is also called sankalpa, and in time, it is brought under Iswara's reign, as it has to perform the very difficult task of the annihilation of Chitta. When this is accomplished, the condition reached is said to be of mahagyana. Later, Kaala swallows this gyana, and as the sruti declares, is itself devoured by shakti. However, shakti is again absorbed by Kaala, which is eventually brought under her sway by vidya.

Iswara, the lord of vidya, then swallows unbeing itself into his Atman, which is the unmanifest and Supreme Brahman, eternal, and the highest of the high. In this manner, all creatures, great and minute, are withdrawn into Brahman.

Upon actual experience, conceived with the help of the shastras and as a subject of vigyana, have this truly been so declared by Mahayogins. Even so does the unmanifest Brahman repeatedly undergo the process of elaboration and withdrawal, creation and destruction, and likewise Brahma's day and night each consist of a thousand yugas."

CANTO 234

Vyasa said, "You asked me about the creation of all beings; I have narrated that to you in full. Listen to me now as I tell you what the duties are of a Brahmana. The rituals of all ceremonies for which dakshina, sacrificial fees, is enjoined, from the jatakarma to the jamavartana, depend for their performance upon a guru competent in the Vedas. Once the sishya has completed his studies at the guru's asrama and gained knowledge of the Vedas, he should return home with a thorough knowledge of all yagnas.

With his teacher's leave, he should adopt one of the four asramas of life and live in accordance with its duties until he leaves his body. He should either lead a life of a grihasta with wives and raise children, or live as a brahmacharin, or dwell in the forest with his guru, or practice the duties laid down for a yati.

A family life is said to be the root of all the other asramas of life. A self-restrained grihasta who has conquered all his attachments to worldly objects always attains the great aim of life. A Brahmana who begets children acquires knowledge of the Vedas, and performing sacrifices, pays off the three debts he owes. So cleansed by his actions, he should then enter the other asramas. He should settle in the place, which he ascertains to be the most sacred on earth, and strive towards fame and eminence.

The fame of Brahmanas increases through austere penances, mastery of the various branches of knowledge, sacrifices and through charity. A man enjoys endless regions of dharma in the next world as long as his deeds or

their memory lasts in this world. A Brahmana should teach, study, officiate at other people's sacrifices and offer sacrifices himself. He should not give away in vain nor accept others' gifts in vain. Sufficient wealth that may come from one who is assisted in a sacrifice, from a pupil, or from the kinsmen of a married daughter, should be spent in the performance of sacrifice or some other benign deed. A Brahmana should never enjoy such wealth singly. For a Brahmana who leads a domestic life there is no means save the acceptance of gifts for the sake of the Devas, Rishis, Pitris, his guru, the old, the sick or to appease hunger.

To those persecuted by unseen foes, or those who strive to the best of their power to acquire knowledge, one should make gifts from one's own possessions, including cooked food, more than one can fairly afford. To a man of punya there is nothing that cannot be given. The good and the wise deserve to have even the prince of steeds, Uchchaisravas, who belongs to Indra himself.

See how the noble King Satyasandha, humbly offered his own prana to save the life of a Brahmana, and ascended into heaven. Sankriti's son Rantideva merely gave lukewarm water to Vasishta, and gained swarga. Atri's son Indradamana gave wealth to a worthy Brahmana, and acquired diverse regions of felicity in the next world. Usinara's son Sibi, who gave away his own limbs and a dear son for the sake of a Brahmana, went directly into swargaloka from this world. Pratardana, the ruler of Kasi, gave away his very eyes to a Brahmana, and found great fame both here and hereafter.

King Devavridha donated a very beautiful and costly chatra, with eight golden ribs, and rose into heaven with all the people of his kingdom. Sankriti of Atri's vamsa imparted instruction to his disciples on the subject of the nirguna Brahman, and reached regions of great felicity. Valiant Ambarisha bestowed eleven arbudas upon the Brahmanas of kine, and so found swarga for himself, along with all his subjects. Savitri gave away her earrings, and King Janamejaya relinquished his own body; both found high regions of felicity. Yuvanaswa, the son of Vrishadarbha, who donated diverse kinds of gemstones, a fine mansion and many beautiful women, ascended into heaven. Nimi, the ruler of the Videhas, gave away his kingdom, Jamadagni's son Rama gave away the whole earth; and Gaya gave away the earth with all her towns and cities, unto the Brahmanas.

Once during a drought, Vasishta, resembling Brahma himself, kept alive all creatures with his energy and kindness. Karandhama's son Marutta bequeathed his daughter to Angiras, and swiftly ascended into heaven. Brahmadatta, the ruler of the Panchalas, donated two precious jewels called Nidhi and Sankha to prominent Brahmanas, and obtained many worlds of felicity.

King Mitrasaha gave his own wife Madayanti to Vasishta, and rose into swarga with his wife. Rajarishi Sahasrajit, of great fame, surrendered his life itself for the sake of a Brahmana, to gain regions of great felicity. King Satadyumna gave Mudgala a mansion made of gold and full of every object of comfort and luxury, and found swarga. The king of the Salwas, Dyutimat, gave Richika his entire kingdom and found heaven for himself. The Rajarishi Madiraswa bestowed his daughter upon Hiranyahasta, and obtained such regions as are held in esteem by the very Devas. Rajarishi Lomapada, bestowed his daughter Santa upon Rishyasringa, and acquired the fruition of all his wishes. King Prasenajit, of great tejas, gave a hundred thousand cows with calves, and acquired majestic realms of grace.

These and many others have, through dana and tapasya, gained swarga. Their fame will last as long as the earth herself will last. All of them have, through gifts, sacrifices and procreation, been rewarded with swargaloka."

CANTO 235

Vyasa said, "The knowledge called trayi which occurs in the Vedas and their Angas should be acquired. It is to be derived from the Riks, Samans and the vigyanas called Varna and Akshara. Besides these, there are the Yajuses and the Atharvans. In the six kinds of karma indicated in these, dwells the Divine Being. Atmagyanis who are adept in the revelations of the Vedas are attached to sattva guna, and highly blessed, succeed in understanding the origin and the end of all things.

A Brahmana should live in accordance with the dharma prescribed in the Vedas. He should perform all his karma as a good man of restrained soul. He should earn his livelihood without injuring any creature. Invested with the knowledge derived from the good and wise, he should control his passions and inherent propensities. Well-versed in the scriptures, he should practice the duties laid down for him, and live in this world guided by the sattva guna. Even as a householder, the Brahmana should observe the six karmas. Faithfully, he should worship the Devas in the five main sacrifices. Endowed with patience, never heedless, with self-control, proficient with duties, with a pure heart, divested of joy, pride and anger, the Brahmana should never sink into torpor. Charity, study of the Vedas, sacrifices, penances, modesty, openness and self-restraint—these enhance one's energy and destroy one's sins.

The wise man should be abstemious in his diet and should conquer his senses. Indeed, with lust and wrath subdued, and with his sins washed

away, he should strive to reach Brahman. He should worship Agni and Brahmanas, and bow to the Devas. He should avoid all kinds of inauspicious speech and all actions of violence and injury.

This preliminary course of conduct is recommended for a Brahmana. Subsequently, with gyana, he should engage himself in deeds, for in actions lies success. The Brahmana who is imbued with intelligence succeeds in crossing the river of life that is so difficult to navigate, being so furious and terrible with the five senses for its waters, passion as its source and wrath for its mire. He should always remain awake to the fact that Kaala stalks him as a constant threat. Time, who is the great astounder of all things, is armed with irresistible force, and issued from the almighty Ordainer himself.

Generated by the current of Prakriti, the universe is ceaselessly borne along the mighty river of time. Kaala, overspread with eddies constituted by the years, with the months for its waves and the seasons for its current, with the fortnights for its floating moss, and the rise and fall of the eyelids for its froth, with the days and the nights for its water, and desire and lust for its crocodiles, the Vedas and yagnas for its rafts, and dharma for its islands, with artha and kama for its springs, satya and mukti for its shores, benevolence for the trees that float along it, and the yugas for the lakes along its course—the mighty river of Kaala—with an origin as inconceivable as that of Brahman itself, ceaselessly bears away all beings created by the great Ordainer towards the abode of Yama.

The wise and patient successfully cross this awful river with the use of the rafts of knowledge and wisdom. What, however, can fools, bereft of similar vessels, do when thrown into this furious stream? Only the man of wisdom, and never the fool, succeeds in crossing this river. The astute behold from a distance the merits and faults of everything, and succeed in discerning what deserves to be embraced and what merits rejection. However, the unstable man, of little intellect, whose heart is full of desire and greed, is always full of doubt and he never succeeds in fording that river. Neither can the one who sits idly ever pass over it.

The man without the raft of wisdom, he who is weighed down with heavy faults, quickly sinks under the waters. Even a wise man, who is seized by the crocodile of desire, can never hope to make knowledge his lifeboat. The man of wisdom and intelligence should strive hard to cross

over the frothing stream of time, without sinking in it. Keeping himself afloat with wisdom, he becomes conversant with Brahman.

One born into a noble race, who abstains from the three duties of teaching, officiating at other's sacrifices and accepting gifts, and conducts only the three other functions: studying, sacrificing and giving, should strive to swim across the rushing current of time. Such a man is sure to gain the far shore in the boat of wisdom. One who is pure in conduct, is self-restrained and keeps good vratas, whose soul is under his control, and who is learned, surely finds success in this and the other world.

The Brahmana who lives as a householder should conquer anger and envy, practice the virtues already named, and worship the Devas in the five sacrifices. He should eat only after he feeds the Devas, Pitris and Athitis. He must conform to the duties that the righteous observe; he must perform karma with a mastered soul, and he should, without injuring any creature, stand firm by adopting a course that is above censure.

One who is skilled in the truths of the Vedas and the other branches of knowledge, whose behaviour is that of a well-guided soul, who is blessed with clear vision, who observes his svadharma, who never by his actions defiles a yagna, who attends to the observances set down in the scriptures, who is full of faith, who is self-restrained, who is wise, who is bereft of envy and malice, and who knows well the distinctions between dharma and adharma: he succeeds in surviving all his trials and tribulations.

The Brahmana, who has fortitude, is always heedful, self-restrained, aware of dharma, whose heart is under control, and who has transcended joy, pride and anger, will never languish in grief. This is the course of conduct ordained of old for a Brahmana. He should strive to acquire knowledge and perform all the scriptural rites. By living thus, he is sure to find success.

One who is bereft of clear vision does wrong even when he wishes to do right. Such a man exercises blind judgement, and performs outwardly virtuous deeds that become entangled in sin. Wanting to do what is right, he does what is wrong; wishing to do what is wrong he might do what is right. Such a man is a fool. Ignorant of the two kinds of karma, he must experience repeated rebirths and deaths."

CANTO 236

Vyasa said, “If mukti be desirable, then knowledge must be acquired. For a person who drifts along the course of Kaala, wisdom is the raft by which he can reach the shore. Sages invested with intelligence are able to guide the ignorant to cross the deadly river of life. The naïve, however, fail to save either themselves or others.

One who is free from desire, and all other faults, should attend to these twelve requirements of yoga: a comfortable place, proper actions, a keen interest, sacred articles for rituals, proper posture, worldly renunciation, faith, attentiveness, pure food, dispassion, mental alertness and introspection.

He, who wishes to obtain superior knowledge, needs, with the help of his intellect, to control his speech and his mind. He who wants to have peace, should, with the benefit of his wisdom, restrain his soul. Whether he becomes compassionate or cruel, whether he becomes conversant with all the Vedas or remains ignorant of the Riks, whether he turns to dharma and observes sacrifices or becomes the worst of sinners, whether he becomes eminent for prowess and wealth or plunges into misery, the man who directs his mind towards these twelve attributes, is certain to cross samsara, the arduous ocean of life.

Without mention of the results of the attainment of Brahman through yoga, it may be said that he who sets himself to only enquiring after the Atman transcends the necessity to observe the karmas ordained in the

Vedas. The body with the jiva within it is an excellent chariot. When sacrifices and religious rites are made its seat, embarrassment its shield, means and destruction its pole to make fast the yoke, the breath apana its wheel, prana its yoke, knowledge and the allotted span of existence its pillars to secure the steeds, heedfulness the beautiful clasp of the yoke, the assumption of good pravritti the rims of its wheels, vision, touch, scent, and hearing its four horses, wisdom its centre, all the scriptures its long whip, certain knowledge of the scriptural declarations its sarathy, the Soul its firmly-seated rider, faith and self-restraint its fore-runners, renunciation its inseparable companion following behind and bent upon doing it good, purity the path along which it goes, yoga or union with Brahman its goal—then may the ratha reach Brahman and shine there in effulgence.

I will now tell you the swift means to be adopted by one who would equip his chariot in such a fashion to pass through this wilderness of the world in order to reach the goal that is Brahman, which is above decay and death.

To fix the mind upon one thing at a time is called dharana. The yogin who observes proper vows and restraints, practices all seven kinds of dharana. There are, again, as many kinds of concentrations of the mind arising out of these upon subjects that are near or remote. Through these, the yogin gradually acquires mastery over earth, wind, space, water, fire, consciousness and intellect. After this, he gradually acquires a grasp of the unmanifest. I will now describe to you the gradual realisations of individuals engaged in yoga. I will also tell you of the nature of the success that attaches to yoga commenced by him who looks within himself.

The yogin, who follows his guru's instructions and abandons his material body, beholds his Soul display various forms due to its subtlety. To him in the first stage, the sky seems to be filled with a subtle substance akin to a foggy vapour. Such becomes the form of the Soul, which has been freed from the body. When this fog dissipates, a second, new form appears. Subsequently, the yogin beholds within himself the form of water. After the disappearance of water, fire displays itself. This gives way to the appearance of wind glowing as a well-tempered weapon. Gradually, the form displayed by wind turns to resemble the sheerest gossamer. Finally, after it has acquired whiteness, and the subtlety of air, the Brahmana's Soul attains the supreme pureness and subtlety of ethereal space. Let me tell you the outcome of these diverse conditions as they occur.

The yogin, who has achieved the conquest of the earth element, attains by such lordship to the power of creation. Like a second Prajapati endued with perfect composure, he can, from his own body, create all kinds of creatures. With only his toe, or with his hand or feet, he who has achieved mastery over the wind, can singly cause the very earth to tremble. Such is the attribute of the wind as declared in the sruti.

The yogin, who has achieved the lordship of space, can exist brightly in it, and disappear at will as he has attained oneness with the akasic element. With control over water, like Agastya, he can drain rivers, lakes and oceans, drinking them down. With mastery over fire, the yogin becomes so effulgent that his form cannot be looked at. He becomes visible only when he extinguishes his consciousness of individuality.

When the intellect, which is the soul of the five elements and of the consciousness of individuality, is conquered, the yogin attains omnipotence, and perfect knowledge. Consequently, the manifest merges into the unmanifest Paramatman from which the world emanates and becomes manifest.

Listen closely as I explain the science of the unmanifest. First, hear about all that is manifest as illustrated in the Samkhya philosophy. In both the yoga and the Samkhya systems, twenty-five subjects of knowledge have been treated in almost the same way. Listen to me as I mention their cardinal features.

That is said to be manifest, which owns the four attributes of birth, growth, decay and death. That which does not possess these is called unmanifest. The two Souls mentioned in the Vedas and the Vigyanas are based upon them. The first called Jivatma is imbued with the four qualities and it longs for the four purusharthas of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. This Soul is called manifest, and it is born of the unmanifest Supreme Soul. It is both intelligent and unintelligent. I have clearly told you about sattva and kshetrajna.

The Vedas say that both kinds of Soul become attached to objects of the senses. The doctrine of the Samkhyas state that one should keep oneself aloof or dissociated from objects of the senses. The yogin who is freed from attachment and pride, who transcends all the pairs of opposites, pleasure and pain, attraction and revulsion and the rest, who never gives way to anger or hatred, who never tells a lie; who, though slandered or struck, still shows friendship for the violator, who never thinks of doing harm to others,

and who restrains speech, actions and thought, and behaves uniformly towards all creatures, succeeds in approaching the presence of Brahman.

One who harbours no desire for earthly objects, who willingly accepts his lot, who depends on earthly objects just for his sustenance, who is free from avarice, who has driven out all grief, who has restrained his senses, who undertakes all necessary karmas, who ignores personal appearance and attire; whose senses are all collected for devotion to the true aims of life, whose purposes are never left unaccomplished, who bears himself with equal friendliness towards all creatures, who regards a clod of earth and a lump of gold with an equal eye, who is equally disposed towards friend and foe, who is patient; who accepts praise and blame equally, who is free from longing of all objects of desire, who practices brahmacharya, and who is firm and steadfast in all his vows and observances; who has no malice or envy for any creature in the universe, is in the eyes of the Samkhya system, a yogin who has attained moksha.

I will now speak about the ways and the means by which a person may gain mukti through yoga. He, who lives and acts after transcending the strength achieved through yoga, succeeds in gaining moksha. I have duly spoken to you on mukti according to the Samkhya doctrine and as rendered by the yoga system, which appear dissimilar if the speaker, be disposed to treat them as such; in reality, they are identical. Thus one can transcend all the pairs of opposites, and so attain Brahman."

CANTO 237

Vyasa said, "Tossed about in life's ocean, it is through dhyana that one seizes the raft of knowledge, and clings to it without foundering while trying to reach mukti."

Suka said, "What is that knowledge? Is it the learning by which, when ignorance is dispelled, truth becomes discovered? Or is it the course of duties consisting of the karma to be performed, with the help of which the object sought may be realised? Or still, is it the way of abstaining from actions, by which a realisation of the Atman is to be sought? Do you tell me what it is, so that with its help, birth and death may be avoided."

Vyasa said, "A fool believes that all this exists due to its own nature without any refuge or foundation. With such instruction, he fills the aspirations of his disciples, destroying with his sophistries the reasons a pupil might put forth to the contrary, and he never succeeds in attaining any truth. Others, who firmly believe that all cause inheres in the nature of things and not to a source, also fail to acquire any truth even by listening to Rishis who are competent to instruct them.

Those of little intelligence who abandon their speculations, by adopting either of these doctrines, those who regard nature as the only cause, never succeed in finding any benefit for themselves. This ignorant belief in Prakriti as being the creating and the sustaining cause brings about the destruction of the person who cherishes it. Listen now to the truth about these two doctrines that maintain that things exist by their own nature and

that they flow from their own nature, and how the two differ from other true philosophies that precede them.

Wise men apply themselves to farming and tillage to grow crops and vehicles for conveyance. They attend also to the laying of pleasure-gardens, to owning luxurious seats, carpets and houses, the construction of commodious mansions, and the preparation of medicines for diseases of every kind. Wisdom is the active component in the means that lead to the fruition of a man's purposes. Wisdom wins beneficial results. Wisdom enables kings to exercise and enjoy sovereignty. It is through wisdom that the high and the low among beings are distinguished. It is by wisdom that the superior and the inferior among created things are understood. Wisdom is the highest refuge of all things.

All the myriad creations have four kinds of birth. They are viviparous, oviparous, vegetative and those born of filth. Creatures that are mobile should be known to be superior to those that are inert. Intelligent energy must be regarded as being superior to unintelligent matter.

Mobile creatures are innumerable, and of two kinds: those that have many legs and those that have two. Bipedal humans are the superior of the two. Bipeds, again, are of two species, those that live on land and those that are otherwise. Of these, the ones that dwell on land are superior to the others. The superior ones eat diverse kinds of cooked food.

Land-living bipeds are of two kinds, the superior and the undistinguished. Of these, it is commonly, albeit incorrectly ceded, that the multitude are regarded as superior of the two from their observance of the duties of caste in contrast to the exalted who have transcended the needs of such distinctions. The undistinguished ones are said to be of two kinds, those that are conversant with duties, and those that are otherwise. Of these, the first are superior because of their discrimination in respect of what should be done and what should not.

Again, the ones conversant with duties are said to be of two kinds: those that know the Vedas and those that do not. Of these the first ones are superior, for the Vedas are said to dwell in them. Those that are acquainted with the Vedas are yet said to be of two kinds, those who discourse on the Vedas and those who do not. Of these, the previous, who are adept with the Vedas, their duties, their rites and the fruits of these duties and rites, are superior because they promulgate all of those. Indeed, all the Vedas with the duties laid down in them are said to flow from such men. Preceptors of the

Vedas are of two kinds: those who have knowledge of the Atman and those that do not. Of these, the first are superior because of their knowledge of the meaning of birth and death.

As for duties, they are, again, of two kinds, pravritti and nivritti. He who is conversant with duties is said to be omniscient or possessed of universal knowledge. Such a man is a renunciate. He is firm in the accomplishment of his objectives, truthful, pure, both outwardly and inwardly, and possessed of might. The Devas know him for a Brahmana who is devoted to the knowledge of Brahman and not him who is only conversant with the duties of pravritti. Such a man is versed in the Vedas and also earnestly devoted to the study of the Atman. They that have true knowledge behold their own Soul as existing both within and without. Such men, O child, are truly enlightened and are as Devas.

Upon these rests this world of beings, in them dwells this whole universe. There is nothing that is equal to their greatness. Transcending birth, death, distinctions and actions of every kind, they are the lords of the four kinds of creatures and are the equals of Brahma himself."

CANTO 238

Vyasa said, “These, then, are the obligatory karmas ordained for Brahmanas. The man of knowledge always attains success by performing the prescribed karmas. If no questions arise in respect of one’s efforts, then karmas and kriyas well performed are sure to lead to success. The query to which we refer is this: whether the karmas are obligatory or whether they are optional. As regards the inquiry about the true character of karma, it should be said that if deeds are ordained for man to induce knowledge by which alone Brahman or moksha is to be attained, then they should be regarded as mandatory. I will now discourse on them by the light of both experience and inferences. Listen well to me.

With respect to karma, some men say that exertion is their cause, others that necessity is their cause. Others, again, maintain that nature is the cause. Yet others say that actions are the result of both exertion and necessity, while there are those who maintain that actions flow from time, exertion and nature, all three. Some say that of the three, exertion, necessity and nature, one only and not the other two is the cause. Others are of the opinion that all the three combined are the cause. Then there are those engaged in the performance of karma who, with respect to all objects, say that they exist, and yet they do not exist; that they cannot be said to exist, yet they cannot be said not to exist. These then are the diverse views entertained by different men.

The yogins, however, behold Brahman to be the universal cause. The men of the Treta, Dwapara and Kali yugas are inspired with queries. Those, however, of the Krita yuga are devoted to tapasya, possess peaceful souls and observe dharma, all without effort. Notwithstanding their apparent diversity, they regard the Riks, the Samans and the Yajuses as one, and thus the Veda itself as one. They investigate desire and aversion, and worship only tapasya. Devoted to the practice of penances alone, steadfast in them and rigid in their observance, one obtains the fruition of all desires. With penance, one attains that by becoming which one creates the universe. With tapasya, one becomes the puissant master of all things.

Brahma is expounded in the declarations of the Vedas. For all that, Brahma is inconceivable by even those that are conversant with such declarations. Once more Brahman is affirmed in the Vedanta. Brahman, however, cannot be apprehended through karma.

The sacrifice ordained for Brahmanas consists in japa, for Kshatriyas in the slaughter of clean animals for the gratification of the Devas; for Vaisyas in the production of crops and the upkeep of domestic animals; and for Sudras in menial service to the three other varnas. He who observes his duties and studies the Vedas and other scriptures becomes a true Dvija, a twice-born one. Whether one performs any other karma or not, he who befriends all creatures becomes a Brahmana.

In the beginning of the Treta yuga, the Vedas, yagnas, the divisions of kulas and the asramas of life existed in their entirety. However, from the duration of life being decreased in Dwapara, those are overtaken by decline. In the Dwapara as also in the Kali yuga, the Vedas are overwhelmed by perplexity. Towards the close of Kali yuga, it is questionable if they ever become visible.

In that age of dark wrath, the duties of the respective varnas disappear, and men are afflicted by iniquity. The gracious attributes of kine, of the earth, of water, medicinal and edible herbs, all disappear. Through universal adharma, the Vedas vanish along with all the duties inculcated by them, as also the dharma of the four asramas of life. They who maintain their svadharma are direly afflicted, and all things, mobile and unmoving, change for the worse. As the showers of heaven cause all products of the earth to grow, likewise the Vedas, in every age, cause all the Angas to grow.

Without question, time assumes diverse forms. It has neither beginning nor end. It is time that makes all creatures and again devours

them. I have already spoken of it to you. Kaala is the origin of all creatures; it is that which makes them grow. Time is their destroyer, and it is their ruler. Subject to pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain, heat and cold, joy and sorrow and the rest, creatures of infinite variety rest on Kaala according to their own natures as ordained by the Supreme Brahman.'"

CANTO 239

Bhishma continues, 'Suka was delighted with these instructions of the Maharishi, his father, and he now asked a question that relates to the import of duties that lead to moksha.'

Suka said, "By what means do the wise, who know the Vedas, who perform sacrifices, who are endued with wisdom, and free from malice, succeed in attaining Brahman, which is incapable of being apprehended by either direct evidence or inference, and unlikely of being indicated by the Vedas? I beseech you; tell me by what means can Brahman be apprehended? Is it with tapasya, brahmacharya, sannyasa, gyana, the Samkhya philosophy, or by yoga? With what means may what kind of singleness of purpose be attained by men, with respect to both the mind and the senses? It befits you to elucidate all this to me."

Vyasa said, "No man ever attains success by means other than the acquisition of knowledge, the practice of penances, the subjugation of the senses and renunciation of everything. The five great entities represent the first creation of the Self-born. They have been substantially placed in the embodied creatures of the world.

The bodies of all embodied creatures are derived from earth. The humours are from water. Their eyes are derived from light. Prana, apana and the three other vital breaths have wind for their source. And, lastly, all orifices within them such as the nostrils, the cavities of the ear, and the others, are from akasa, space. In the feet of living beings is Vishnu. In their

arms is Indra. Within the stomach is Agni. In the ears are the cardinal points of the horizon representing the sense of hearing. In the tongue is speech, which is Saraswati Vakdevi. The ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose are the senses of knowing. These exist for the purposes of apprehension of their respective objects. Sound, touch, form, taste and scent are the objects of the five senses. These should always be regarded as being separate from or independent of the senses.

Like the charioteer setting his well-trained steeds along the paths he pleases, the mind sets the senses along directions it likes. The mind, in its turn, is employed by the knowledge seated in the heart. The mind is the lord of all these senses in using them in their functions, and guiding or restraining them. Similarly, knowledge is the lord of the mind in employing, and guiding or restraining it. The senses, the objects of the senses, the attributes of those objects represented by nature, knowledge, mind, the vital breaths and the jiva dwell in the bodies of all embodied creatures.

The body within which knowledge dwells has no real existence. The body, therefore, is not the refuge of knowledge. Prakriti, with its three attributes of goodness, passion and darkness is the refuge of knowledge, which exists only in the form of sound. The Soul also is not the refuge of knowledge. It is desire that creates knowledge; it, however, never creates the three gunas.

The wise man regards the Atman as surrounded by sixteen attributes. The Soul cannot be observed with the eye or with any or all of the senses. Transcending all, the Atman is visible only to the enlightened mind. Divested of the properties of sound, touch, form, without taste or scent, indestructible, without a material or subtle body and without senses, it is nevertheless perceived within the body. Unmanifest and supreme, it dwells in all mortal bodies.

Following the teachings of the guru and the Vedas, he who finds the Atman within himself hereafter becomes Brahman's very self. The wise regard a learned Brahmana, his disciples, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a chandala with an equal eye. Transcending all things, the Atman dwells in all creatures, chala and achala. Indeed, all things are pervaded by it. When a living creature beholds his own Soul in all things, and all things in his Soul, he attains Brahman. One occupies that much of the Supreme Soul as is commensurate with the measure of the acquisition of Brahman in one's own Soul.

He who can always realise the identity of all things with his own self certainly attains immortality. The very Devas are stupefied by the way of the pathless man who himself constitutes the Soul of all creatures, who is engaged in the good of all beings, and who desire to attain Brahman. Indeed, the path pursued by men of knowledge is as invisible as those of birds in flight or of fish in water.

Time, of its own power, cooks all entities within itself. No one, however, knows the Brahman in which Kaala, in its turn, is itself cooked. That of which I speak does not occur above, in the middle, below or in any other direction. It is an Absolute Entity, and not to be found in any one place. All these worlds are within it. There is nothing in these worlds that exists out of it. Even if one flies with the swiftness of an arrow, even if one goes with the speed of the mind itself, one would still not reach the end of That which is the cause of all this. That is so complete that there is nothing greater.

His hands and feet extend everywhere. His eyes, head and face are everywhere. His ears are all over the universe. He exists, overwhelming all things. That Brahman is smaller than the minutest part of an atom. That is the heart of all entities. Existing, without question, That is still imperceptible.

Immortal and mortal: these are the dual forms of existence of the Paramatman. In all mobile and immobile entities the existence it displays is mortal, while the presence it exhibits in pure Chaitanya is divine, immortal and without decay or destruction. Though the lord of all existence, chala and achala, albeit inactive and nirguna, enters, nevertheless, the familiar mansion of nine doors and becomes engaged in karma.

Sages who can perceive the other shore say that the Unborn or the Supreme Soul becomes invested with the attribute of action due to motion, pleasure, pain, variety of form and the nine other attributes. The immortal Soul, which is invested with the karma guna, is nothing other than the immortal and actless Brahman. A man of knowledge, who attains the deathless essence, gives up for good both life and birth."

CANTO 240

Vyasa said, "O Uttama putra, at your behest I have truly answered your question according to the doctrine of the Samkhya system. Hear me now explain all that should be done, for the same end, according to the yoga tradition.

The consolidation of the intellect, mind, senses and the all-pervading Atman is said to be knowledge of the highest kind. This vidya should be acquired through a guru by one of a calm disposition, who has mastered his senses, who is able to turn his focus on the Soul with dhyana, who enjoys such meditation, who is gifted with intelligence and who is pure in his actions.

One should try to acquire this knowledge by abandoning the five impediments of yoga known to the wise. Desire, anger, greed, fear and sleep are the five obstacles to yoga. With the help of a calm nature, anger can be conquered. Desire is overcome by renouncing all objectives. Patience and intelligent deliberation on worthy subjects will help forgo sleep. Fear can be avoided with watchfulness. With steady endurance, one should restrain one's organs of procreation and digestion from unworthy indulgence.

One should see to it that one's hands and feet are adequately protected. One must guard one's eyes and ears with the help of one's mind, and defend one's mind and speech by one's actions. One should shun pride by serving

the wise. Without delay, one should, by these means, subdue the impediments to yoga.

One should worship Agni and the Brahmanas, and bow one's head to the Devas. One must avoid all kinds of inauspicious talk, and words fraught with malice, and those that are painful to other minds.

Brahman is the effulgent seed of everything. It is, furthermore, the essence of that seed itself whence all this emanates. Brahman, with a glance of his eyes, became the Soul of this mobile and immobile universe, of all entities that took birth.

Meditation, study, gift, truth, modesty, simplicity, forgiveness, purity of body, and purity of conduct, subjugation of the senses: these enhance one's tejas, which duly destroys one's sins. With an impartial demeanour towards all creatures and by living in contentment upon what is acquired effortlessly, one receives the fruits of all one's objectives and obtains knowledge.

Cleansed of all sins, endowed with energy, abstemious in diet, with the senses, desire and wrath subdued, one should seek to attain Brahman. With inwardly focus, in the still hours of eventide or in those before dawn, one should firmly unite the senses that are withdrawn from all external objects and fix one's mind upon gyana. If even one of the five senses of a man is kept unrestrained, all his wisdom may escape as water seeps through a hole in a bag.

The mind, in the first instance, should be restrained by the yogin, just as a fisherman at the outset renders powerless the fish from which there is the greatest danger to his nets. With the mind subdued first, the yogin should then proceed to restrain his ears, eyes, tongue, nose and his sense of touch. Thus with the mind withdrawn from all objectives, the yogin should focus it on knowledge. Indeed, with the five senses subdued, the yati should fix them on the mind. When the senses and the mind become concentrated and steadfast in gyana, Brahman becomes perceptible like a towering fire or the sun. Indeed, he then sees in his self, in his Soul, like lightning in the sky. Everything then appears in it and it appears in everything from its infinitude.

The most learned Brahmanas, imbued with fortitude, and engaged in the weal of all creatures, succeed in perceiving it. Seated in solitude and immersed in the observance of austere vows, the yogin who conducts himself so for six months attains oneness with the Indestructible.

Death, life, the power to present varied aspects in the same person or body, celestial scents, sounds and sights, the most agreeable sensations of taste and touch, pleasurable sensations of coolness and warmth, parity with the wind, insight into the meaning of the scriptures and every work of profound truth, companionship of the apsaras—the yogin who acquires these through yoga, should disregard and merge them all in gyana.

Seated on a mountain summit, or at the foot of a significant tree, or in front of such a tree, with speech and the senses controlled, he should practice yoga after dusk, and at dawn. As a worldly man contemplates wealth and other valuable possessions, he should restrain all the senses within the heart and fix the mind on the eternal and the immortal. He should never become distracted during yoga, but devoutly restrain the restless mind from straying. With the senses and the mind thus withdrawn, the yogin should turn to empty mountain caves, consecrated temples and abandoned houses, for abodes to dwell in.

A yogin should not associate with another in either speech, action or thought. He must disregard one and all, eat abstemiously and look with an equal eye upon objects acquired or lost. He should behave equally towards the one that praises and one that censures him. He must not seek the good or the evil of one or the other. He should not rejoice at an acquisition or suffer anxiety when he meets with failure or loss. Of uniform behaviour towards all beings, he should remain unattached, as the wind.

To one whose mind is thus turned to itself, who leads a life of purity, and who casts an equal eye upon all things, indeed, to one who is ever engaged in such yoga for even six months, Brahman as Pranava, AUM, appears vividly.

Adequately aware of how men are afflicted by anxiety in pursuit of wealth and comfort, the yogin should view a clod of earth, a stone and a lump of gold with an equal eye. Indeed, he should abandon the pursuit of wealth with a keen aversion for it, and never suffer himself to be tempted or bewildered. Even if a seeker belongs to an inferior varna, or is a woman, both will surely attain the highest end if they follow the path indicated above.

He who has subdued his mind witnesses in his own self, with the help of his own intelligence, the Uncreated, Ancient, undeteriorating and eternal Brahman, which is subtler than the subtlest, and grosser than the most gross, which is moksha's self."'

Bhishma continues, ‘With confirmation from the lips of gurus and by their own deliberation upon these immaculate words of the Maharishi, the wise attain oneness with Brahman.’

CANTO 241

Suka said, “The declarations of the Vedas are twofold. They command, ‘Perform all karma’. They also say the reverse: ‘Renounce actions.’ I ask you, what do men attain with gyana and what do they achieve with karma? I desire to know this. Tell me about this. Indeed, these declarations about knowledge and actions are dissimilar and even contradictory.”

Thus addressed, the son of Parasara replied to his son, “I will clarify for you the two paths, the destructible and the indestructible, which depend respectively upon karma and gyana. Listen carefully, O child, as I tell you the goal attained with knowledge, and the other through actions. The difference between these two places is as great as the infinite sky. The question that you have asked me has given me such pain, as an atheistic discourse gives a man of faith. These are the two paths upon which the Vedas are established: the duties indicated by pravritti, and those based on nivritti.

By actions, a living creature is destroyed. With knowledge, however, he is emancipated. For this reason, yogins who perceive the other shore of the ocean of life never take to karma. Through karma, one is forced to be reborn, with a body composed of the sixteen elements. Through knowledge, however, one is transformed into that which is eternal, unmanifest and immutable.

Those that are of small intelligence laud actions, because of which they successively assume bodies in a ceaseless cycle of rebirths. Whereas

truly intelligent men of sharp perceptions of dharma never encourage karma, even as persons that depend for their drinking water upon running streams never favour wells and ponds.

The fruit that one gains from actions consists of pleasure and pain, of birth and death. With knowledge, one reaches where there is no occasion for grief; where one is freed from both birth and death; where one is not subject to decrepitude; where one transcends the state of conscious existence. Where there is Supreme Brahma, unmanifest, immutable, ever-existent, imperceptible, beyond pain, immortal and above destruction; where all become freed from the influence of duality, from the opposites like pleasure and pain and the rest, as also from aspirations. In such a stage, they view everything equally, become universal friends and devoted to the good of all creatures.

There is a wide gulf, my son, between one committed to gyana and one dedicated to karma. Know that the man of knowledge is indestructible; he remains eternally present like the moon that exists on the last day of the dark fortnight, invisible but undestroyed. The Maharishi Yagnavalkya in the Brihadaranayaka has said this more elaborately. For the man devoted to deeds, his transitory nature may be inferred from observing the new moon, which appears like a bent thread, a sliver in the firmament and is subject to wax and wane.

Know, O Suka, that he who performs actions is reborn with a body with eleven entities for its ingredients, along with a subtle form, with its own essences, which all together are sixteen. The Soul that takes refuge in the material form, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf, should be known as kshetrajna, which is eternal, and which through yoga, transcends both the mind and knowledge.

Tamas, rajas, and sattva are the attributes of knowledge. Knowledge is the aspect of the individual soul that abides within the body. The Jivatman, in turn, comes from the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. The body with the Soul is said to be the attribute of the jiva. The jiva animates and causes all bodies to live. Those acquainted with kshetra and kshetrajna declare that the creator of the seven worlds is above the jiva."

CANTO 242

Suka said, "I have now understood that there are two kinds of creation, one commencing with kshara, the mortal which is universal, and which is from the universal Soul. The other, consisting of the senses with their objects, is traceable to the power of knowledge. This last transcends the other and is regarded to be the best. I wish to hear once more of the course of dharma which runs in this world, regulated by Kaala, and based on which all good men frame their conduct.

In the Vedas are both kinds of declarations: perform karma and abstain from karma. How will I ascertain the propriety of one above the other? It befits you to explain this clearly. Now that I have gained, through your instructions, a thorough knowledge of the conduct of human beings, purified myself with the practice of dharma, and cleansed my intellect, I will discard my body and behold the indestructible Soul."

Vyasa said, "The course of conduct that was first established by Brahma was duly observed by the wise and pious, the Maharishis of ancient times. The great Rishis conquer all the worlds with the practice of brahmacharya. He who seeks good for himself with a focus on knowledge, who practices severe austerities in the forest and subsists on fruits and roots, attains Brahman. He who visits tirthas and other sacred places, practices universal benevolence, and goes on his rounds of mendicancy at the proper time to the huts of forest dwellers, achieves Brahman. Abstain from flattery

and do not belittle yourself to others, avoid both good and evil, live in the forest by yourself and appease hunger by any means that comes your way."

Suka said, "In the opinion of the graceless the proclamations of the Vedas with regard to karma are contradictory. When there is this conflict, how can such edicts be called scriptural? I want to hear about this: how can both be regarded as authoritative? How, indeed, can mukti be obtained without violating the directive about the obligatory character of karma?"

The son of Gandhavati, the Rishi Vyasa praised these words of his son, and answered his queries.'

Vyasa said, "The brahmacharin, the grihasta, the vanaprastha, and the sannyasin all reach the same transcendent goal with the due observance of the duties of their different modes of life. Alternatively, if he who is freed from desire and aversion ceaselessly practices all the four asramas of life according to their regulations, he is certainly qualified to attain Brahman. The four asramas constitute a flight of steps that is attached to Brahman. By climbing this stairway, one successfully reaches Brahman.

For the fourth part of his life, the brahmacharin, who knows the distinctions of duty, and is free from malice, should live with his guru or his guru's son. While he stays in his guru's house, he should sleep after his preceptor has retired to bed, and arise before the teacher awakens. All such duties as done by a disciple, as also those undertaken by a menial servant, should be accomplished by him. After he has finished his tasks, he should stand humbly by the side of the preceptor. Skilled in every kind of work, he should conduct himself like a menial, and attend to every kind of work for his guru.

With every task accomplished in its entirety, he should sit at the feet of his preceptor, and study eagerly. He should always behave with simplicity, avoid vile talk and be ready for his lessons at the summons of his teacher. With purity in body and mind, endued with cleverness and other virtues, he should speak but occasionally and in an appropriate manner. With his senses subdued, he should submissively look upon his guru.

He should never eat before his mentor has eaten, never drink before he has drunk; never sit before he has sat down; and never go to bed before his teacher has retired for the night. He should gently touch his preceptor's feet with upturned palms, the right foot with the right and the left with the left. Reverentially saluting the master, he should say to him, 'O illustrious one, teach me. I will undertake this work! O exalted one, this other work I have

already accomplished. O reborn one, I am ready to do whatever else you may be pleased to command.'

Once he has said all this, and has duly offered himself thus to the guru, he should complete whatever tasks his teacher needs accomplished, and inform the master once more of their completion.

Whatever scents or tastes the brahmacharin may abstain from during the life of brahmacharya; he may resume them upon his return from the guru's abode. This is consistent with the ordinance. All the customs elaborately laid down in the shastras for brahmacharins, he should practice regularly. He should, again, always be at the beck and call of his mentor.

After he has satisfied his teacher to the very best of his abilities, the disciple should move on to the other asramas in succession, and practice the dharma of each. And so, with a fourth part of his life passed in the study of the Vedas, observance of vows and fasts, the sishya should offer his guru-dakshina, take leave of his preceptor and return home to lead a life in grihastasrama.

He should marry in accordance with the customs, and carefully establish garhapatya, the domestic fire. He should observe all vows and fasts, become a true householder, and thus pass the second period of life."

CANTO 243

Vyasa said, "As regards the domestic life, four kinds of conduct have been prescribed by the learned. The first consists in keeping a store of grain sufficient to last for three years; the second of maintaining a stock to last for one year; the third consists of providing for the day without thinking of the morrow; and the fourth consists of collecting grain left behind in the fields by reapers, as done by pigeons. Of these, the shastras say, each succeeding one is superior in punya to that which precedes it.

A householder who observes the first kind of conduct may practice all the six established duties—sacrifice on his own account, sacrifice because of others, teach, study, bestow gifts and accept gifts. He who respects the second kind of conduct need practice only three of these duties—studying, giving and taking. He who follows the third kind of conduct should practice only two of the duties—learning and giving. The householder who adopts the fourth kind of domesticity should observe only one duty, imbibing the scriptures.

All the duties of the grihasta are exceedingly meritorious. The householder should never cook any food for only his own use, nor should he slaughter animals for food except in sacrifices. If it is an animal which the grihastha wishes to kill for food, or if it is a tree which he wants to cut down for fuel, he should do either deed in accordance with the ritual laid down in the Yajuses—for that much is the due of both animate and inanimate beings.

The householder should never sleep during the day, or the first part of the night, neither should he sleep during the last yaama of the night and be sure to awaken before dawn. He should never eat twice between morning and evening, and should never summon his wife to bed except in her season. In his house, no Brahmana should be suffered to remain unfed or go without being worshipped. He should always venerate such guests as are givers of sacrificial offerings, are cleansed by Vedic lore and the observance of excellent vratas, are high-born and conversant with the scriptures; who follow the duties of their svadharma, are self-restrained, mindful of all religious karmas and devoted to tapasya. The shastras ordain that what is offered to the Devas and the Pitris in sacrifices and religious rites is also meant for the service of guests like these.

In this asrama of life, the scriptures ordain that a share of food should be given to every creature irrespective of birth or character: to the one who for the sake of show grows his nails and beard, to one who from pride displays what his own religious practices are, to one who has abandoned his sacred fire and even to one who has injured his guru.

He who leads a grihasta's life should offer food to brahmacharins and sannyasins. The householder should eat vighasa, and thus partake of amrita every day. The grihastha who eats after relatives and servants have been fed eats vighasa. The food mixed with clarified butter that remains after the sacrificial offerings is called amrita.

He who has sex as a householder should be content with his own wife. He should be self-restrained, avoid malice and subdue his senses. He should never quarrel with his ritwik, purohita, acharya, his matulan—maternal uncle—guests and dependants, the aged or the young. He should avoid any dispute with those that are ailing, or with physicians, kinsmen, relatives, friends, parents, women from his paternal family, his brother, son, wife, daughter and his servants. With differences thus kept at bay, the householder becomes cleansed of all sins. By conquering the tendency for disputes, he conquers all the regions of felicity in the hereafter. There is no question about this.

A duly worshipped guru is able to lead one to the regions of Brahma. The adequately revered pita can lead a man to the realms of Prajapati. A guest is empowered to provide access to the region of Indra. The ritwik has influence over the world of the Devas. Female relatives of the paternal line have power over the domains of the apsaras, and relatives by blood, over

the realms of the Viswedevas. Relatives by marriage have power over the several quarters of the horizon, north, south, east, west and the intermediate rest, while the mother and the maternal uncle wield authority over the earth. The old, the young, the afflicted and the wasted have dominance over the sky. The eldest brother is like a father to all his younger brothers. The wife and the son are one's own body. One's menial servants are one's own shadow. The daughter is an object of great affection.

For these reasons, a householder imbued with wisdom, observant of dharma, and possessed of endurance, should bear, without attachment or anxiety of heart, every kind of annoyance and even censure from these last-named relatives. No virtuous householder should do anything, urged by considerations of wealth.

There are three courses of duty in respect of a life of domesticity. Of these, that which comes next in the order of specification is more meritorious than the preceding one. As regards the four principal modes of life also, the same rule of merit applies: the one that comes after is superior to the one preceding it. Hence, grihasta is superior to brahmacharya, vanaprastha is superior to domesticity, and sannyasa or complete renunciation is superior to the forest life. One desirous of prosperity should accomplish all such duties and rites as are ordained in the scriptures.

The kingdom grows in prosperity where these deserving people live—those who lead a family life according to the Kumbhadhanya method, ones who lead it in accordant with the Unchha path, and they who lead it in agreement with the Kapoti system.

He, who joyfully lives as a householder, succeeds in sanctifying ten generations of his ancestors and ten generations of his descendants. Furthermore, he obtains a goal that yields felicity equal to what occurs in the realms attained by great kings and emperors. Such is the goal that is ordained for those who have subdued their senses. Swarga is decreed in the Vedas for all high-souled householders, a heaven that is furnished with wonderful chariots that move at the will of the rider. For all grihastas of restrained minds, the regions of swarga constitute the high reward. The Self-born Brahma ordained that grihastasrama should be the very cause of heaven. Therefore, by gradually attaining the second asrama of life, a man finds happiness and respect in swargaloka.

After this comes the high and superior, third, asrama of life for those who want to disown their bodies. This asrama is superior to that of the

householders: the life of forest recluses, vanaprasthas who waste their bodies through diverse kinds of austerities into skeletons covered by dried, parchment-like skins. Listen as I tell you about vanaprastha.'"

CANTO 244

Bhishma says, 'Thus have the duties of domesticity, grihastasrama, been ordained by the wise. Listen now, O Yudhishtira, to what these duties are. The householder should gradually abandon the domestic life and enter the third asrama, which is so excellent. It is the stage in which wives attenuate themselves through severe austerities. It is the asrama practiced by those that live as forest recluses. Blessed be you, O son, listen to the dharma observed by those that lead this way of life in which occur the practices of all men and all the asramas. Listen, indeed, to the responsibilities of those that are denizens of sacred places and have resorted to this course after proper deliberation. And at the proper time.

Vyasa said to his son Suka, "When the householder has grandchildren, observes wrinkles on his body and grey hair on his head, he should retire into the forest. The third part of his life he should pass in the observance of the vanaprasthasrama. He should attend to the sacrificial fires to which he attended as a householder. Desirous of performing yagnas, he should worship the Devas in accordance with stipulated rituals. Keeping vratas and abstemious in diet, he should eat only once, in the sixth part of the day. He should be ever heedful, attend to his sacrificial fire, rear cows and tend to them dutifully. He should attend to all the rituals of a sacrifice.

He should live upon rice and wheat grown by himself, on various grains growing wild and belonging to none. He should eat what remains after guests have eaten. In this third stage of life, he should offer ghrita in

the five established sacrifices. Four methods have been ordained down for observance in the vanaprasthasrama. Some gather only what is needed for the day. Some collect stores to last for a month. Some store grain and other necessities sufficient to last for twelve years.

Forest recluses may act in these ways to honour guests and perform sacrifices. During the monsoons, they should expose themselves to rain and take to standing in water in autumn. During the summer, they must sit in the midst of four fires with the sun burning overhead. Throughout the year, however, they remain abstemious in diet. They sit and sleep on bare earth. They stand only on their toes. With no other means to provide seats or beds, they remain satisfied with the bare earth and small mats of grass. Preparatory to sacrifices, they perform their ablutions morning, noon and evening, during the three sandhyas.

Some amongst them use only teeth for cleaning grain, while others use only stones. A few drink very lightly boiled gruel of wheat or other grain, only during the bright fortnight, when the moon waxes, while there are many who take similar gruel only during the dark fortnight. Some eat only what comes their way without seeking it. Others duly adhere to the path followed by the Vaikhanasas who adopt rigid vows and survive only on roots, a few only upon fruits, and yet some others of them upon only flowers. Such men of wisdom and piety, the forest recluses embrace these and other diverse practices.

Based upon the Upanishads, the fourth asrama is called sannyasa. The customs laid down for it may be seen equally in all the asramas of life. This stage differs from the others and comes after domesticity and the forest life. In this very yuga, O putra, many learned Brahmanas conversant with the truths of all things, have been known to take to sannyasa. Agastya, the Saptarishis, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Vasishta, Narada, Kratu, Madhucchandas, Aghamarshana, Sankriti Sudivatandi who lived wherever he pleased, Ahovirya Kavya, Tandya, Medhatithi, Karmanirvaka and Sunyapala who once put in great effort to acquire ascetic powers, all faithfully followed sannyasa, and attained swarga.

Many Maharishis, O son, numerous ascetics known as Yayavaras, many Rishis of austere tapasya, and countless Brahmanas adopted vanaprastha. The Vaikhanasas, Balakhilyas, Saikatas, all of whom were used to realising the fruits of their penances immediately, adopted this mode of life and finally ascended into swargaloka. Freed from fear and not

counted among the stars and planets, these have become visible in the firmament as luminous bodies.

When the last part of life is arrived at, and one is weakened by advanced age and afflicted by disease, one should abandon the vanaprasthasrama and embrace sannyasa. He should conduct a sacrifice that can be completed in a single day, a yagna in which the dakshina should be all his possessions. In addition, he should perform his own sraddha. Withdrawn from every object, he should devote himself to his Atman, taking pleasure in himself and resting on his own self. He should establish all his sacrificial fires thereafter within himself, and renounce all kinds of ties and attachments.

If he fails to attain complete renunciation, he must perform such sacrifices and rites as are completed in a single day. Once sacrificial rites and the chanting of mantras result in yoga, he may then discontinue all outward rituals, and to the three inner fires that burn within himself, surrender mind and knowledge for the sake of moksha.

Without finding fault with his food, he should eat five or six morsels, duly offered to the five vital breaths, while reciting the mantras of the Yajurveda. Engaged in tapasya as a vanaprastha, one should keep one's head and face shaved, nails trimmed, cleanse oneself with karmas and kriyas, and only then pass into the fourth and final stage of life that is replete with great sacredness. The reborn person, who enters the fourth mode of life with a pledge of universal compassion to all creatures, achieves many regions of splendour hereafter and finally attains the Infinite.

Of excellent disposition and conduct, with sins all washed away, the person who realises the Atman never desires to indulge in any action for either this or the other world. Freed from anger and error, without anxiety and friendship, such a one lives in this world very uninterested in its concerns. A sannyasin should not feel reluctant to discharge the duties of yama and niyama. Such a sannyasin should live enthusiastically by the ordinances laid down for his asrama, and eschew Vedic study along with the sacred thread that is indicative of the varna of his birth. Devoted to dharma, with senses subdued, such a one possessed of Atmagyana unquestionably attains his ultimate goal.

The fourth asrama of life is the most superior one, and fraught with numerous high virtues. In merit, it transcends the three other stages of life,

and occupies the highest place. Pay heed to what I tell you about the duties of this sannyasasrama which is the high refuge of all."

CANTO 245

Suka said, “How should one who observes the ways of the best of asramas, and seeks to achieve that which is the highest, set his soul on yoga?”

Vyasa replied, “Once one has purified himself by progressing through the brahmacharya and grihastha asramas, one should fix one’s soul on yoga during vanaprastha. Listen carefully to what should be done to attain the highest object of acquisition. Once all the faults of the mind and heart are subdued with ease in the first three asramas, one should take to the most excellent and most eminent of all the asramas—sannyasa.

Now you pass your days in utter purity. The sannyasin practices yoga alone, without assistance or company, in order to acquire the highest object of acquisition.

He never turns back from mukti who practices yoga in solitude, perceives everything as a reflection of his own self, and never disregards anything since everything is pervaded by the universal Soul. Such a man, who does not maintain sacrificial fires or a fixed abode, should only ever enter a village to beg for his food. He should provide himself for the day without storing for the morrow. He should not eat more than once in a day and eat very little just to keep his body alive. He should take to tapasya, with his heart fixed on the Supreme Brahman.

The other characteristics of a religious mendicant are the human skull for a begging-bowl, trees for shade, and rags for clothing, habitual solitude,

and indifference to all creatures.

Just as panic-stricken elephants that have fallen into a well are unable to climb out from it, he from whose lips harsh words do not emerge in response to the ones he has received—such a one is fit to lead the life of a sannyasi, which has moksha for its goal.

The mendicant should never pay heed to the evil actions of any person. He should never listen to what is said in criticism of others. He should especially avoid speaking ill of a Brahmana. He should always say only what is agreeable to the Brahmanas. When anything offensive is said about himself, he should remain silent. Such silence, indeed, is the balm prescribed for him.

He who perceives himself to be in everything and everything to be in himself, and with the help of yoga-shakti withdraws his senses and mind, to even make a place teeming with thousands of men and things, appear to himself as perfectly solitary or unoccupied, is regarded by the Devas to be a true sannyasin.

Him the gods know for a Brahmana who clothes himself with whatever comes by the way, who subsists upon whatever he gets, and who sleeps on whatever ground he finds.

Him the gods know for a Brahmana who is afraid of company as of a snake; of the full measure of satisfaction from sweet viands and drinks as of hell; and of women as of a corpse.

Him the gods know for a Brahmana who is never glad when honoured and never angry when insulted, and who has pledged compassion to all creatures.

One in adherence of the last mode of life should not view death with sorrow. Nor should he view life with joy. He should only await his hour like a servant waiting for his master's summons.

He should purify his heart of all blemishes. He should purify his speech of all faults. He should cleanse himself of all sins.

As he has no foes, what fear can assail him? He who fears no creature and whom no creature fears, can have no fear from any quarter, freed as he is from misdeeds of every kind.

As the footprints of all other creatures are enclosed within those of elephants, likewise all ranks and eminence are absorbed within yoga. Similarly, every other duty and observance is supposed to be engulfed

within the one duty of non-violence. He lives an everlasting life of felicity who avoids injuring other creatures.

One who abstains from injury, who perceives all creatures equally, who is devoted to truth, who is endued with fortitude, who has mastered his senses and who grants protection to all beings, attains an end that is beyond compare.

The condition called death succeeds not in transcending such a person who is content with self-knowledge, who is free from fear, and who is divested of desire and expectancy. On the other hand, such a person succeeds in transcending death.

Him the gods know for a Brahmana who is freed from attachments of every kind, who is observant of penances, who lives like space which while holding everything is yet unattached to anything, who has nothing which he calls his own, who leads a life of solitude, and whose Soul is tranquil.

The Devas know him for a Brahmana whose life is for the practice of righteousness, whose righteousness is for the weal of those who wait dutifully upon him, and whose days and nights exist only for the acquisition of merit.

The gods know him for a Brahmana who is freed from desire, who never exerts himself for doing such actions as are done by worldly men, who never bows his head to anyone, who never flatters another and is free from attachments of every kind.

All creatures are pleased with happiness and filled with fear at the prospect of grief. The man of faith, therefore, who should feel distressed at the prospect of filling other creatures with grief, must abstain entirely from actions of every kind.

The gift of assurances of harmlessness to all creatures transcends in point of merit all other gifts. He who, at the outset, forswears the religion of injury, succeeds in attaining emancipation in which there is the assurance of harmlessness to all creatures.

He who refrains from partaking even the five or six mouthfuls that are laid down for the forest recluse, is said to be the navel of the world, and the refuge of the universe.

The mind and other senses, as also the actions good and bad, are all consigned to the sacrificial fire within. Such a man, who sacrifices in his own self, makes a liberation of his senses and mind into the fire that dwells within the limited space of his own heart. From his pouring of such a

libation into the sacrificial fire within his own self, the universe with all creatures including the very gods, becomes gratified.

They who comprehend the radiant jiva, the Soul that is enveloped in three sheaths, and has three attributes for its characteristics; to be Iswara partaking of that which is foremost, the nature of the Supreme Soul, become objects of great regard in all the worlds. The very gods, along with all human beings speak highly of their merits.

He who succeeds in perceiving in his Soul all the Vedas, space and the other objects of perception, the rituals that occur in scriptures, all those entities that are comprehensible in sound only and the superior nature of the Supreme Soul—is sought to be worshipped by the very deities as the foremost of all beings.

He who sees in his Soul, that foremost of beings which is not attached to the earth, which is immeasurable in even the infinite firmament, which is made of gold, which is born of the universe and resides within the universe, which is equipped with many arms, which has two wings like a bird, and which is rendered effulgent by many rays of light, is sought to be worshipped by the very gods as the foremost of all beings.

The very Devas worship him in whose intellect is set the wheel of Kaala, which is constantly revolving, which knows no decay, which swallows up the period of existence of every creature, which has the six seasons for its naves, which is equipped with twelve spokes consisting of the twelve months, which has excellent joints, and towards whose gaping mouth proceeds this universe ready to be devoured.

The Supreme Soul is the capacious unconsciousness of dreamless slumber. That unconsciousness is the body of the universe. It pervades all creation. Jiva, occupying a portion of that expansive unconsciousness gratifies the Devas. These last, being gratified, in turn gratify the open mouth of that unconsciousness. Endued with brilliance along with the principle of eternity, jiva is without a beginning. It acquires infinite regions of eternal happiness.

He of whom no creature is afraid, has never to fear any creature. He who never does anything censurable and who never derides another, is said to be a truly reborn person. Such a man succeeds in beholding the Supreme Soul.

He whose ignorance has been dispelled and whose sins have been washed away, never enjoys either here or hereafter the happiness that is

enjoyed by others but attains moksha. A person in the observance of the fourth mode of life wanders on the earth like one unconnected with everything. Such a one is freed from wrath and error. Such a one regards a clod of earth and lump of gold with an equal eye. Such a man never stores anything for his use. Such a one has no friends and foes. Such a one is utterly regardless of praise or blame, and of the agreeable and the disagreeable."

CANTO 246

Vyasa said, “The Jivatman is endued with all those elements that are qualifications of Prakriti. These do not know the Soul but the Soul knows them all. Like a good charioteer steers his strong, well-broken and brave steeds along his path the Soul acts with the help of the senses, having the mind for their sixth.

The objects of the senses are superior to the senses themselves. The mind is superior to those objects. The intellect is superior to the mind. The Soul, also called Mahat, is superior to the intellect. Superior to Mahat is the unmanifest, Prakriti. Superior to the unmanifest is Brahma. There is nothing superior to Brahma. That is the highest limit of excellence and the highest goal.

The Supreme Soul is concealed in every creature. It is not displayed for ordinary men to see. Only yogins with subtle vision witness the Supreme Soul with the help of their keen and subtle intellect.

Merging the senses having the mind for their sixth and all the objects of the senses into the inner Soul by the aid of the intellect, and reflecting upon the three states of consciousness; the object thought, the act of thinking and the thinker; and abstaining by contemplation from every kind of enjoyment, equipping his mind with the knowledge that he is Brahma’s self; appropriately laying aside all consciousness of power, and thereby making his Soul perfectly tranquil—the yogin obtains that to which immortality inheres.

That person, however, who happens to be the slave of all his senses and whose ideas of right and wrong have been confounded; already liable as he is to death, actually meets with death by such surrender of the self to the passions.

Destroying all desires, one should merge the mind into one's subtle intellect. Having done so, one is sure to become a second Kalanjara mountain.

By purifying his heart, the yogin transcends both righteousness and its reverse. By purifying his heart and by living in his own true nature, he attains the highest happiness. The indication of that purity of heart is the one who has experienced the state of unawareness of all one's surroundings which one experiences in dreamless slumber. The yogin who has attained that state lives like the steady flame of a lamp that burns in an enclosed place.

Becoming abstemious in diet, and having cleansed his heart, that yogin who connects his self to the Soul succeeds in beholding the self in the Soul.

This discourse, O son, intended for your instruction, is the essence of all the Vedas. The truths herein disclosed cannot be understood through inference alone or with mere study of the scriptures. One must understand it with the help of faith.

By churning the wealth contained in all the religious works and in all discourses based on truth, as also the ten thousand riks, this nectar has been raised. As butter from curds and fire from wood, even this has been raised for the sake of my son—this that constitutes the knowledge of all truly wise men.

This discourse, O son, replete with solid instruction, is intended for delivery to Snatakas. It should never be imparted to one who is not of a tranquil Soul, or one who is not self-restrained, or one who has not undergone penances.

It should not be communicated to one who is not conversant with the Vedas, one who does not humbly wait upon one's preceptor, one who is not free from malice, one who is not possessed of sincerity and candour, or one who is of reckless behaviour. It should never be communicated to one whose intellect has been consumed by the science of argumentation, or one that is vile or low.

To that person, however, who is possessed of fame, or who deserves applause for his virtues, or who is of a tranquil Soul, or possessed of ascetic merit, to such a Brahmana, to one's son or obedient disciple, this discourse containing the very essence of duties should be communicated, but on no account should it be imparted to others.

If any person makes a gift of the whole earth with all her treasures, to one conversant with truth, the gyani would still regard the gift of this knowledge to be very much superior to that gift.

I will now speak to you on a subject that is a greater mystery than this, a subject that is connected with the Soul, that transcends the ordinary understandings of human beings, that has been beheld by the foremost of Rishis, that has been treated in the Upanishads, and that forms the topic of your inquiry.

Tell me what, after this is in your mind? Tell me if you still have any queries? Listen, for here I am, O son, faces turned towards all directions. The sun and the moon are seated before you! On what indeed, can I once more speak to you?"

CANTO 247

Suka said, “O illustrious one, O foremost of Rishis, once again speak to me on Adhyatma more elaborately. Tell me what, indeed, is Adhyatma and where does it come from?’

Vyasa said, “Listen, O son, as I explain to you regarding Adhyatma with reference to human beings.

Earth, water, light, wind and space are the great entities that form the component parts of all creatures, and, though really one, are yet regarded different from one and others like the waves and the ocean.

Like a tortoise stretching out its limbs and withdrawing them again, these great entities, by dwelling in numberless small forms, undergo transformations called creation and destruction. This whole universe of mobile and immobile objects has for its component parts these five entities. Everything, in respect of its creation and destruction, is referable to this pancha tattva.

These five entities occur in all existent things. The creator of all things, however, has made an unequal distribution of those entities by placing them in different things in different proportions for serving different ends.”

Suka said, “How may one succeed in understanding this unequal distribution of the five great entities in the diverse things of the universe? Which amongst them are the senses and which the attributes? How may this be understood?”

Vyasa said, “I shall explain you this duly one after another. Listen intently to the subject as I elaborate how what I have said actually happens.

Sound, the sense of hearing, and all the cavities within the body—these three—have space for their origin. The vital breaths, the action of the limbs and touch form the attributes of the wind. Form, eyes and the digestive fire within the stomach, are originated by light. Taste, the tongue, and all the humours—these three—are from water. Scent, the nose and the body—these three—are the attributes of earth. These, then, as I have elucidated, are the variations of the five great entities with senses.

Touch is said to be the attribute of the wind; taste of water; form of light. Sound is said to have its origin in space, and scent is said to be the property of earth.

The mind, intellect and nature—these three—spring from their own previous states, and attaining at each rebirth a position higher than the attributes which form their respective objects, do not transcend those attributes.

As the tortoise stretches out its limbs and withdraws them once again within itself, even so the intellect creates the senses and once again withdraws them into itself.

The consciousness of personal identity that arises in respect of that which is above the soles of the feet and below the crown of the head, is principally because of the action of the intellect.

It is the intellect that is transformed into the five attributes of form, scent and the rest. Just as it is also transformed into the five senses with the mind for the sixth.

When the intellect is absent, where are the attributes?

In man there are five senses. The mind is called the sixth sense. The intellect is called the seventh. The Soul is the eighth.

The eyes and the other senses are for only receiving impressions of form, scent and all. The mind exists to question the accuracy of those impressions. The intellect settles those doubts.

The Soul is said only to witness every operation without mingling with them.

Rajas, tamas, and sattva—these three—arise from their own counterparts. These exist equal in all creatures, deities, human beings and all. These are called attributes and should be known by the actions they induce.

As regards those actions all such states in which one becomes conscious of oneself as united with cheerfulness or joy and which are tranquil and pure, should be known as due to the attribute of sattva.

All such states in either the body or the mind, as are united with sorrow, should be regarded as because of the influence of the attribute called rajas.

All such states again as exist with astonishment of the senses, the mind or the intellect whose cause is unascertainable, and which are incomprehensible by either reasons or inward light, should be known as ascribable to the action of tamas.

Delight, cheerfulness, joy, equanimity, contentment of heart, from any known cause or arising otherwise, are all effects of the attribute of sattva.

Pride, untruthfulness of speech, cupidity, bewilderment, vindictiveness, whether arising from any known cause or otherwise, are indications of the quality of rajas.

Stupefaction of judgement, heedlessness, sleep, lethargy and indolence, from whatever cause these may arise, are to be known as indications of the quality of tamas."

CANTO 248

Vyasa said, “The mind creates within itself numerous ideas of objects or existent things. The intellect settles which is which. The heart discriminates which is agreeable and which is disagreeable. These are the three forces that motivate actions.

The objects of the senses are superior to the senses. The mind is superior to those objects. The intellect is superior to the mind. The Soul is regarded as superior to the intellect. As regards the ordinary purposes of man, the intellect is his Soul.

When the intellect, of its own accord, forms ideas of objects within itself, it then comes to be called the mind. Out of the senses being different from one another both in respect of their objects and the manner of their operation, the intellect which is identical presents different aspects as a result of its different qualifications.

When it hears, it becomes the organ of hearing, and when it touches, it becomes the organ of touch. Similarly, when it sees, it becomes the organ of vision, and when it tastes, it becomes the organ of taste, and when it smells, it becomes the organ of scent.

It is the intellect that appears under different guises for different functions by adaptation. It is the qualifications of the intellect that are called the senses. Over them is placed as their presiding overseer, the invisible Soul.

Residing in the body, the intellect exists in the three states of sattva, rajas and tamas. Sometimes it obtains cheerfulness, sometimes it gives way to grief; and sometimes its condition becomes such that it is united with neither cheerfulness nor grief. The intellect, however, whose main function is to create entities, transcends those three states even as the ocean, that lord of the rivers, prevails against the mighty river currents that fall into it.

When the intellect craves for anything, it is known as the mind. The senses again, though apparently different, should all be taken as included within the aforementioned.

The senses, which are engaged in bearing impressions of form, scent and the rest, should all be subdued. When a particular sense becomes subservient to the manas, the intellect though in reality not different from that sense, enters the mind in the form of existent things. Also, this is what happens with the senses sequentially with reference to the ideas that are said to be apprehended by them.

All the three states—sattva, rajas and tamas—inhere to these three, the mind, intellect and consciousness, and like the spokes of a wheel acting out of their attachment to the circumference of the wheel, they follow the different objects that exist in the mind, intellect and consciousness.

The mind must make a lamp of the senses for dispelling the darkness that shuts out the knowledge of the Supreme Soul. This knowledge that is acquired by yogins specifically with the help of yoga, is acquired without any exceptional efforts by men that abstain from worldly objects.

The universe is of this nature, it is only a creation of the intellect. The man of knowledge, therefore, is never bewildered by attachment to things of this world. Such a man never grieves, never rejoices and is free from envy.

The Soul is incapable of being seen with the aid of the senses whose nature is to wander among all earthly objects of desire. Even righteous men, whose senses are pure, fail to behold the Soul, what then should be said of the wicked whose senses are impure?

When, however, a man, with the help of his mind, tightly holds their reins, it is then that his Soul discovers itself like an object in darkness appearing to the view due to the light of a lamp. Indeed, as all things become visible when darkness is dispelled, even the Soul becomes visible when the darkness that covers it is removed.

As an aquatic fowl, though moving on water, remains dry, similarly the emancipated yogin, is never soiled by the imperfections of the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Likewise, the wise man who enjoys all earthly objects without being attached to any of them, is never stained by faults of any kind that arise in the case of others from such enjoyment.

Having duly performed his duties in accordance with the preceding three stages of life he who finally avoids actions, and thereafter takes delight in the one really existent entity, the Soul; who has constituted himself the Soul of all created beings; and who succeeds in keeping himself aloof from the three attributes, gains an intellect and senses that are created by the Soul.

The qualities are incapable of apprehending the Soul. The Soul, however, apprehends them always. The Soul is the witness that beholds the qualities and duly calls them up into being. Note, this is the difference between the intellect and the Soul, both of which are exceedingly subtle. One of them creates the qualities. The other never creates them.

Though they are different from each other by nature, yet they are always united. The fish living in the water is different from the element in which it lives. But as the fish and the water forming its home are always united, likewise sattva and kshetrajna exist in a state of union.

The gnat born within a rotten fig is really not the fig but different from it. Nevertheless, as the gnat and the fig are seen to be united with each other, even so are sattva and kshetrajna.

As the blade in a clump of grass, though distinct from the clump, nevertheless exists in a state of union with it, even so these two, though different from each other, each existing in its own self, are to be seen in a state of constant union."

CANTO 249

Vyasa said, “The objects by which one is surrounded are created by the intellect. The Soul, without being connected with them, stands aloof, presiding over them. It is the intellect that creates all objects. The three primary qualities are continually being influenced for the creation of objects.

The kshetrajna or Soul, endued with energy, presides, over them all, without, however, mingling with them. The objects which the intellect creates partake of its own nature. Indeed, as the spider creates threads which partakes of its own material substance, the objects created by the intellect partake of the nature of the intellect.

Some maintain that the attributes, when driven away by yoga or knowledge, do not cease to exist. They say this because when once gone, the indications only of their return are not perceptible. But that is no evidence of their actual destruction.

Others say that when dispelled by knowledge, they are at once destroyed, never to return. Reflecting upon these two opinions properly, one should strive one’s best according to the way one deems to be proper. In this manner one should solely attain eminence and take refuge in one’s own Soul.

The Soul is without beginning and without end. Comprehending his Soul properly, man should move and act, without giving way to wrath, without indulging in joy, and always free from envy.

Severing by this means the knot that is in one's heart, the knot whose existence is out of the operation of the faculties of the intellect, which is hard to untie or cut, but which nevertheless can be destroyed with knowledge; one should live happily, without giving way to any grief, and with one's misgivings dispelled.

Know that they who mingle in the affairs of this world are as distressed in body and mind as persons ignorant of the art of swimming when they slip from the land and fall into a large and deep river. The man of learning, however, being conversant with the truth, is never distressed, for he feels like one walking over solid land.

Indeed, he who apprehends his Soul to be such, as presenting only the character of Chitta which has knowledge alone for its indication, is never distressed.

Indeed, in this manner, comprehending the origin and end of all creatures, and so apprehending their inequalities or distinctions, one succeeds in attaining high felicity. This knowledge is the possession of a Brahmana specially by virtue of his birth.

Knowledge of the Soul, and happiness like that which has been referred to, are each fully sufficient to lead to emancipation. By acquiring such knowledge one really becomes learned.

What else is the indication of a person of knowledge? Having acquired such knowledge, they that are wise among men regard themselves crowned with success and become emancipated.

Those things that become sources of fear to men destitute of knowledge do not become sources of fear to those that are endued with knowledge. There is no end higher than the eternal end which is obtained by a person possessed of knowledge.

One considers with aversion all earthly objects of enjoyment which are, of course, replete with faults of every kind. While another, watching others taking pleasure of such objects, is filled with sorrow. In this matter, however, those who know both the objects, regard, that which is fictitious and that which is not so, never indulge in sorrow and are truly happy.

That which one does without expectation of fruits destroys one's actions of a previous life. The actions, however, of such a person both of this and his previous life cannot lead to emancipation. On the other hand, such destruction of earlier deeds and such efforts of this life cannot lead to what is disagreeable, hell, even if the man of wisdom engages in actions."

CANTO 250

Suka said, “Let your reverence tell me of that which is the foremost of all duties, indeed, of that duty above which no higher one exists in this world.”

Vyasa said, “I shall now tell you of duties having a very ancient origin and laid down by the Rishis, duties that are distinguished above all others. Listen to me with undivided attention.

The senses that are maddening should carefully be restrained by the intellect like a father restraining his own inexperienced children liable to fall into diverse evil habits. The withdrawal of the mind and the senses from all unworthy objects and their due concentration upon worthy objects is the highest penance. That is the foremost of all duties. Indeed, that is said to be the highest duty.

Directing, with the help of the intellect, the senses having the mind for their sixth, and without, indeed, thinking of worldly objects which have the virtue of inspiring innumerable kinds of thought, one should live contented with one’s own self.

When the senses and the mind, withdrawn from the pastures among which they usually graze, come back for residing in their proper abode, it is then that you will witness in your own self the eternal and Supreme Soul.

Those exalted Brahmanas that are wise, succeed in perceiving that Supreme and Universal Soul which is akin to a blazing fire in effulgence.

As a large tree provided with numerous branches and possessed of many flowers and fruits does not know in which part it has flowers and in which it has fruits, likewise the Soul as adapted by birth and other attributes, does not know from where it has come and where it is to go.

There is, however, an inner self, which witnesses everything. One sees the Soul with the help of the lamp of knowledge. Witnessing, therefore, yourself with your own self, cease to regard your body as yourself and attain mukti.

Cleansed of all sins, like a snake that has cast off its skin, one attains high intelligence here and becomes free from every anxiety and the obligation of acquiring a new body in a subsequent birth.

Its current spreading in diverse directions, frightful is this river of life bearing the world onward in its course. The five senses are its crocodiles. The mind and its purposes are the shores. Cupidity and stupefaction of judgement are the grass and straw that float on it, covering its bosom.

Lust and wrath are the fierce reptiles that live in it. Truth forms the tirtha by its miry banks. Falsehood forms its surges, anger its mire. Rising from the unmanifest, rapid are its currents, which cannot be crossed by men of tainted Souls. With the help of the intellect do you cross that river with desires for its alligators.

The world and its concerns comprise the ocean towards which that river runs. Genus and species form its unfathomable depth that none can understand. One's birth, O child, is the source from which that stream takes its rise. Speech constitutes its eddies.

Difficult to cross, only men of learning and wisdom and intellect succeed in crossing it. Crossing it, you will succeed in freeing yourself from every attachment, acquiring a tranquil heart, knowing the self and becoming pure in every respect. Relying on a purged and elevated intellect, you will succeed in becoming Brahma's self.

Having dissociated yourself from every worldly attachment, having acquired a purified Soul and transcending every kind of sin, look you upon the world like a person looking from the mountain top upon creatures creeping below on the earth's surface.

Without giving way to wrath or joy, and without forming any cruel wish, you will succeed in beholding the origin and the destruction of all created objects. They that are endued with wisdom regard such an action to be the foremost of all things. Indeed, this act of crossing the river of life is

regarded by the foremost of righteous persons, by ascetics conversant with the truth, to be the highest of all actions that one can accomplish.

This knowledge of the all-pervading self is intended to be imparted to one's son. It should be inculcated to one who is of restrained senses, is honest in behaviour and who is docile or submissive. This knowledge of the self, of which I have just now spoken to you, O child, and the evidence of whose truth is furnished by the self itself, is a mystery—indeed, the greatest of all mysteries, and the very highest knowledge that one can attain.

Brahman has no sex—male, female or neuter. It is neither sorrow nor happiness. It has for its essence the past, the future and the present. Whatever one's sex, male or female, the person who attains the knowledge of Brahman has never to undergo rebirth. This duty of yoga is inculcated to attain exemption from rebirth.

These words that I have used for answering your question lead to emancipation in the same way as the myriad other opinions advanced by diverse sages that have addressed this subject. I have explicated the subject to you in the appropriate manner. Those opinions sometimes produce fruit and sometimes not.

The words, however, that I have used are of a different kind, for these are sure to lead to success. For this reason, O good child, a preceptor, when asked by a contented, meritorious and self-restrained son or disciple, should, with a delighted heart, instil, according to their true import, these instructions that I have imparted for the benefit of you, my son!"

CANTO 251

Vyasa said, "One should not show any affection for scents and tastes and other kinds of enjoyment. Nor should one accept ornaments and other articles contributing to the enjoyment of the senses of scent and taste. One should not covet honour and achievements and fame. Such is the behaviour of a Brahmana possessed of vision.

He who has studied all the Vedas, having waited dutifully on his guru and observed the vow of brahmacharya, he who knows all the Rik, Yajuses and Samans, is not a reborn person.

One who behaves towards all creatures as if one is their kinsman, and one who is acquainted with Brahman, is said to be conversant with all the Vedas.

One that is divested of desire being contented with knowledge of the Soul, never dies. It is by such a behaviour and such a frame of mind that one becomes a truly reborn person.

Having performed only various kinds of religious rites and diverse sacrifices completed with the gift of Dakshina, one does not acquire the status of a Brahmana if he is devoid of compassion and has not given up desire.

When one ceases to fear all creatures and when all creatures cease to fear one, when one never desires anything nor cherishes aversion for anything, then one is said to attain the status of a Brahmana. When one

abstains from injuring all creatures in thought, speech and action, then he is said to acquire the status of a Brahmana.

There is only one kind of bondage in this world, the bondage of desire, and no other. One that is freed from the bondage of desire attains the status of a Brahmana.

Freed from desire like the moon that has emerged from murky clouds, the man of wisdom, purged of all stains, lives in patient expectation of his time.

The one in whose mind all sorts of desire enter like diverse streams falling into the ocean without being able to enhance its limits by their load, succeeds in obtaining tranquillity, but not he who cherishes desire for all earthly objects.

Such a person becomes happy in consequence of the fruition of all his wishes, and not he who cherishes desire for earthly objects. The aspirer, even if he attains heaven, has to fall away from it.

The Vedas have truth for their recondite object. Truth has the subjugation of the senses for its concealed aspiration. The subjugation of the senses has charity for its ideal intent. Charity has penance for its mysterious goal. Penance has renunciation for its transcendental objective. Renunciation has happiness for its inner end. Happiness has heaven for its subtle aim. Heaven has tranquillity for its exquisite goal.

For the sake of contentment, you should wish to obtain a serene intellect which is a precious possession, being indicative of emancipation, and which, scorching grief and all purposes or doubts together with yearning, destroys them completely in the end.

One possessed of those six attributes, contentment, happiness, freedom from attachment, peacefulness, cheerfulness and freedom from envy, is sure to become full or complete.

They that, transcending all consciousness of the body, know the self which resides within the body and which is understood by only the wise with the aid of the six aforementioned entities, the Vedas and truth and the rest; when endowed with only the attribute of sattva, and with the aid also of the other three, instruction, meditation and yoga, succeed in attaining moksha.

The man of wisdom, by understanding the self which presides within the body, which is divested of the attributes of birth and death, which exists in its own nature, which being divested of attributes requires no action of

purification, and which is identical with Brahman, enjoys beatitude that knows no end.

The fulfilment that the man of wisdom gains by restraining his mind from wandering in all directions and fixing it wholly on the self is such that it cannot be attained by one through any other means.

He is said to be truly conversant with the Vedas who is conversant with that which satiates one whose stomach is empty, which pleases one who is penniless and which invigorates one whose limbs are withered.

Suspending his senses that have been duly restrained from unworthy indulgence, he who lives engaged in yoga-dhyana is a Brahmana. Such a person is distinguished above others. Such a person derives his joys from the self.

With regard to one who lives after having weakened desire and devoting himself to the highest subject of existence, it should be said that his happiness is continuously enhanced like the lunar disc in the lighted fortnight.

Like the sun dispelling darkness, felicity dispels the sorrows of that yogin who transcends both the gross and the subtle elements, as also mahat and the unmanifest.

Decrepitude and death cannot assail that Brahmana who has got beyond the sphere of actions, who has transcended the destruction of the gunas themselves, and who is no longer attached to worldly objects.

Indeed, when the yogin, freed from everything, lives in a state transcending both attachment and aversion, he is said to transcend even in this life his senses and all their objects.

That yogin, who having transcended Prakriti attains the highest cause, becomes freed from the obligation of rebirth because of his having attained that which is the highest."

CANTO 252

Vyasa said, “For a disciple wishes to enquire after emancipation after having transcended duality and accomplished the concerns of both profit and religion, an accomplished teacher should first recount all that has been said in the foregoing Canto, which is elaborate, on the subject of Adhyatma.

Space, wind, fire, water and earth counted as the fifth, and bhava, abhava and Kaala, exist in all living creatures having the five for their constituent ingredients.

Space is an unoccupied interval. The organs of hearing consist of space. One conversant with the science of entities endued with form should know that space has sound for its attribute.

The feet that assist movement have wind for their essence. The vital breaths are made of wind. The sense of touch, skin, has wind for its essence, and touch is the attribute of wind.

Heat, the digestive fire in the stomach, light that discovers all things, the warmth that is in the body, and vision counted as the fifth, are all of fire which has the form of diverse colours for its attribute.

Liquefied discharges, solubility and all kinds of fluids are of water. Blood, marrow and all else in the body that is cool, should be known to have water for their essence. The tongue is the sense of taste, and taste is regarded as the attribute of water.

All solid substances are of earth, as also bones, teeth, nails; facial, head and body hair, nerves, sinews and skin. The nose is called the sense of scent. The object of that sense, scent, should be known as the attribute of earth.

Each subsequent element possesses the attribute or attributes of the preceding one besides its own. In all living creatures again are the three supplementary entities, avidya, kama and karma.

In this way did the Rishis declare the five elements and the effects and attributes flowing from or belonging to them.

The mind forms the ninth in the count, and the intellect is regarded as the tenth. The Soul, which is infinite, is called the eleventh. It is regarded as all this and as the highest.

The mind has doubt for its essence. The intellect discriminates and causes certainty. The infinite Soul, becomes known as jiva invested with body, or Jivatman, through consequences derived from actions.

He who perceives the entire assemblage of living creatures to be unstained, though endowed with all these entities having time for their essence, has never to revert to actions affected by error."

CANTO 253

Vyasa said, “Those that are conversant with the scriptures discern, with the help of actions laid down in the scriptures, the Soul which is clothed in an exceedingly subtle body and which is dissociated from the gross body in which it resides.

As the rays of the sun that course in dense masses through every part of the firmament cannot be seen by the naked eye though their existence can be inferred by reason, similarly, existent beings freed from gross bodies and wandering in the universe are beyond the ken of human vision.

As the blazing reflection of the sun is seen in water, likewise the yogin observes the reflection of the self within gross bodies.

All those Souls as well, that are encased in subtle forms after being freed from the gross bodies in which they resided, are perceptible to yogins who have conquered their senses and are gifted with knowledge of the self. Indeed, aided by their own Souls, yogins behold those invisible beings.

Whether asleep or awake, during the day as in the night, they who apply themselves to yoga after dismissing all the creations of the mind and the rajas born of actions, as even the very power that yoga creates, succeed in keeping their linga form under complete control.

The jiva that dwells in such yogins, always endued with the seven subtle entities, mahat, consciousness, and the five tanmatras of the five elemental entities, roams in all regions of bliss, freed from decrepitude and

death. I say ‘always’, and ‘freed from death’ only in accordance with the common form of speech, for in reality, that linga form is terminable.

He, however, who without having been able to transcend them is under the influence of his mind and intellect; discriminates, even in his dreams, his own body from that of another and experiences even then both pleasure and pain.

Yes, in even his dreams he enjoys happiness and suffers misery; and yielding to wrath and cupidity, meets with calamities of various kinds.

In his dreams he acquires great wealth and feels highly gratified: accomplishes meritorious deeds, and sees, hears and all, as he does in his wakeful hours.

Wonderful it is to note that jiva, which has to lie within the uterus and amid much internal heat, and which has to pass a period of full ten months in that place, is not digested and reduced to destruction like food within the stomach.

Men overwhelmed by the qualities of rajas and tamas never succeed in seeing within the gross body: the jiva, the Soul which is a portion of the Supreme Soul of transcendent effulgence and which lies within the heart of every creature.

They take to the science of yoga for the purpose of obtaining knowledge of that self transcending the inanimate and gross body, the imperceptible linga body and the karana body that is not destroyed on the occasion of even the universal destruction.

Amongst the duties that have been laid down for the different modes of life including sannyasa, these to which I have referred, having yoga for their foremost, and which imply a cessation of every operation of the mind and the intellect, have been laid down by Sandilya in the Chandogya Upanishad.

Having fathomed the seven subtle entities,; the senses, the objects of the mind, mind, intellect, mahat, unmanifest or Prakriti, and Purusha, having comprehended also the supreme cause of the universe with the six attributes—omniscience, contentment, unlimited comprehension, independence, eternal wakefulness and omnipotence—and lastly, having understood that the universe is only a modification of avidya endued with the three qualities; guided by the scriptures, one witnesses divine Brahma.”

CANTO 254

Vyasa said, "There is a wonderful tree, called Desire, in the heart of a man. It is born of the seed called Error. Wrath and pride constitute its large trunk. The wish for action is the water-bearing trough at its base. Ignorance is the root of that tree, and heedlessness is the water that gives it sustenance.

Envy constitutes its leaves. The evil actions of past lives supply it with vigour. Loss of judgement and anxiety are its twigs; grief forms its large branches; and fear is its sprout. Thirst for diverse objects forms the creepers that twine round it on every side.

Excessively greedy men, bound in chains of iron, sitting around that fruit-yielding tree, sing its praises, in expectation of gaining its fruit. He who, unshackling those chains, cuts down that tree and seeks to terminate both sorrow and joy, succeeds in attaining the end of both. A fool who nourishes this tree by indulgence in the objects of the senses is destroyed by those very objects in which he indulges, like a poisonous pill, destroys the patient to whom it is administered.

A dexterous person, however, with the help of yoga, forcibly rips and cuts with the sword of samadhi, the far-reaching root of this tree. One who knows that the end of all actions undertaken from only the desire of fruit is rebirth or chains that bind, succeeds in transcending all sorrow.

The body is said to be a city. The intellect is said to be its mistress. The mind dwelling within the body is the minister, of that mistress, whose

essential function is to decide. The senses are the citizen that are employed by the mind to serve the mistress.

For encouraging these citizens, the mind displays a strong inclination for actions of diverse kinds. In the matter of these tasks, two great faults are visible, tamas and rajas.

Upon the fruits of these deeds rest those citizens along with the leaders of the city, the mind, intellect and consciousness. The two faults earlier mentioned, live upon the fruits of those actions that are accomplished by forbidden means.

This being the case, the intellect, which of itself is unconquerable by either rajas or tamas, descends to a state of equality with the mind by becoming as much tainted as the mind that serves it. In turn the senses, agitated by the stained mind, lose their own stability.

Thinking them to be beneficial, the objects that the intellect tries to acquire, ultimately generate grief and are destroyed. Having been destroyed, these objects, are recollected by the mind, and accordingly they afflict the mind even after they are lost.

The intellect is afflicted at the same time, for the mind is said to be different from the buddhi only when the manas is considered in respect of its chief function of receiving impressions about whose certainty it is no judge. In reality, however, the mind is identical with the intellect.

The rajas, productive of only sorrow and evil of every kind, that is in the intellect; then overwhelms the Soul which lies over the rajas-stained intellect, like an image upon a mirror.

It is the mind that first allies with rajas. Having done so, it seizes the Soul, the intellect and the senses—like a deceitful minister in conspiracy with a foe, seizes the king and the citizens, and hands them over to rajas with which it has forged an alliance."

CANTO 255

Bhishma says, 'Listen once again, O son, O sinless one, with feelings of great pride, to the words that fell from the lips of the island-born Rishi on the subject of the enumeration of the entities.

Like unto a blazing fire for having transcended all ignorance, the great Rishi said these words to his son who resembled a fire wrapped in smoke. Instructed by what he said, I also will again expound to you that knowledge which dispels ignorance.

The properties possessed by earth are immobility, weight, hardness, productiveness, scent, density, the capacity to absorb scents of all kinds, cohesion, habitableness and that attribute of the mind which is called patience.

The properties of water are coolness, taste, moisture, liquidity, softness, agreeableness, tongue, fluidity, the capacity to be congealed and the power to melt many earthly products.

The properties of fire are irresistible energy, inflammability, heat, the capacity to soften, light, sorrow, disease, speed, fury and invariably upward motion.

The properties of the wind are touch that is neither hot nor cool, the capacity to assist the organ of speech, independence of motion, strength, celerity, the power to assist all kinds of emission or discharge, the power to raise other objects, breaths inhaled and exhaled, life as the attribute of Chitta and birth, including death.

The properties of space are sound, extension, the capacity of being enclosed, the absence of refuge for resting upon—the absence of all necessity for such refuge, the status of being unmanifest, the capacity for accommodation, the incapacity for producing resistance, the material cause for producing the sense of hearing and the empty cavities of the human body.

These, as stated, are the fifty properties, that constitute the essence of the five elementary entities. Patience, reasoning or disputation, remembrance, forgetfulness or error, imagination, endurance, propensity towards good or evil, and restlessness—these are the properties of the mind. Destruction of both good and evil thoughts, dreamless sleep, perseverance, concentration, decision and ascertainment of all things resting upon direct evidence, constitute the five properties of the intellect.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How can the intellect be said to have five properties? How again, can the five senses be spoken of as properties of the five elementary entities? Please clarify, O Pitamaha, all this that seems to be very abstruse.'

Bhishma says, 'The intellect is said to possess altogether sixty properties, as it includes the five elements. All those properties exist in a state of union with the Soul.

The Vedas declare, O son, that the elements, their fifty properties together with the mind and the intellect and their fourteen properties are all created by Him who is above all deterioration. These seventy-one entities, therefore, are not eternal like the Soul.

The theories contradicting the revelation, that have in the previous Vedas been placed before you, O son; about the origin of the universe and its other incidents, are all defective in the eye of reason. Carefully attending, however, in this world to all that I have said to you about the Supreme Brahma, you should, after attaining the power that the knowledge of Brahma offers, seek to win tranquillity of heart.'

CANTO 256

Yudhishtira says, 'These once mighty lords of the earth now lie lifeless on the ground amidst their slain hosts. Every one of these great kings was as strong as ten thousand elephants.

Men of equal prowess killed them all; no one else in the world could have done so, for such was their tejas. They, who were also so wise, now lie dead on bare ground.

Of terrible prowess, all these kings are dead. I have a question: what gives rise to life and death? Who is it that dies? Is it the gross body, the subtle body or the soul? Why does death take away living beings? O Pitamaha, tell me this!'

Bhishma says, 'In the Krita yuga, O son, there was a king named Anukampaka. His enemies decimated his chariots, elephants, horses and men. His son, Hari, equal to Narayana in strength, was slain in that battle along with all his followers and troops. The vanquished, grief-stricken king took to a life of peace.

One day, while wandering aimlessly, he met the Rishi Narada to whom he narrated all that had happened. Narada then told him the following story to dispel his grief at his son's death.

Narada said, "Listen now, O Rajan, to an ancient tale, which I myself once heard.

When he first created the universe, Brahma created a large number of immortal beings. These multiplied vastly, and none of them or their progeny

was subject to death. Living creatures populated every inch of the universe. Choked with living beings, the three worlds became breathless. Brahma wondered how he should destroy the multiplying beings, but he could not find any solution to his quandary.

This enraged Brahma so much, O Rajan, that a fire leapt from his body, and burnt all the habitats of the universe. Indeed, the inferno scorched heaven and earth, the firmament and the whole universe along with all living beings, chala and achala.

Thereupon, the divine Sthanu, lord of the Vedas, was moved to pity and sought to appease Brahma. When Shiva approached Brahma, that blazing lord turned to him and said, 'You deserve my boons. I will grant whatever your heart desires.'

CANTO 257

Sthanu said, ‘Lord, I appeal to you on behalf of all created beings. Do not be angry with them, O Brahma! Look how the fire of your tejas consumes them all. I am filled with compassion at their plight. Have mercy on them, O lord of the universe.’

Brahma said, ‘Neither am I angry, nor is it my wish to destroy creation. I do this only to lighten the burden of the earth. Overburdened with creatures, Bhumi Devi beseeched me, Mahadeva, to destroy them, for otherwise she would sink beneath the waters and be lost. When even after deep deliberation, I could not find a way to help her, fury seized my heart.’

Shiva said, ‘Do not give way to fury, O lord of the Devas. Be pacified. Do not destroy these mortal and immortal beings. The lakes, grasses and herbs, immobile and mobile creatures face destruction. Your anger will denude the entire universe. Be calmed, O divine lord! O, you of dharma, this is the boon that I plead from you.

If you continue to destroy them, all these creatures will become extinct. So, be merciful, O Brahma, let these living beings and their progeny live on.

You made me Pasupati, the guardian of living creatures. I beseech you, O God of gods, to allow these beings to live on, on earth, in a cycle of births and deaths.’”

Narada continued, “Pacified by what Shiva said, Brahma grew calm. Withdrawing the apocalyptic fire into himself, Brahma now ordained that

all creatures would experience both birth and death.

Then, from the pores of Brahma's body, emerged a woman attired in robes of black and red and stood at his right. With black eyes and black palms, she wore wondrous earrings, and divine ornaments.

Both the great gods gazed upon her, O king, then Brahma greeted her and said, 'O Mrityu, slay these creatures of the universe. You are here because of my wrath and resolve to annihilate all creatures. Go forth, O Devi, kill them all without exception. At my command you will win great prosperity.'

At these words, Mrityu Devi, who wore a garland of lotuses, shed copious tears, which she held in her palms, O Rajan, and did not let them fall to the ground. Wishing the weal of mankind, she pleaded with Brahma."

CANTO 258

Narada said, "The large-eyed Devi composed herself and with joined hands and bending in humility like some exquisite vine, said to Brahma, 'How will a woman like me, who has emerged from you, accomplish such a terrible feat, which will fill all living creatures with dread? I fear to do anything that is unjust. Appoint such work for me as befits dharma. You see that I am frightened.

Oh, spare me. I will not be able to cut down infants, youths and the aged, who have done me no harm. O lord of all creatures, I beg you, show mercy. I cannot slay dear sons, beloved friends, brothers, mothers and fathers. If these die at my hands, their surviving relatives will surely curse me. Their tears will burn me for eternity. The prospect fills me with horror.

I seek your protection. All sinful creatures that I kill will sink into the infernal regions. I seek to appease you, O boon-giving lord! Extend your grace to me, puissant Brahma. I seek this boon for all the worlds. O lord of all the gods, grant me leave to perform severe tapasya.'

Brahma said, 'O Mrityu, I have assigned to you the task of destroying all creatures. Go, and set yourself to your task. Do not reflect upon what you must accomplish. This must be done. It cannot be otherwise. O sinless one, O Devi of faultless limbs, go forth and fulfil my command.'

Thus addressed, O Mahabaho, Mrityu humbly stood there in silence with her eyes turned towards the mighty lord of all creatures. Brahma exhorted her repeatedly, but the Devi seemed to be without life. Seeing her

so, the creator fell silent. Indeed, the Svayambhu became pleased with her. With a smile, the lord of all the worlds gazed upon the universe.

When Brahma subdued his wrath, Mrityu, without the promise to destroy the living, quickly left his side. She went, O king, to the sacred place called Dhenuka. There, the Devi stood upon one foot and practiced the severest austerities for fifteen billion years.

After her tapasya was over, Brahma of great energy once more said to her, 'Go forth and perform my bidding, O Mrityu!'

However, the Devi disregarded his command, and standing on one foot began another tapasya that lasted twenty billion years. Later, O son, she led a life in the forest with its denizens for another ten thousand billion years. Additionally, she passed twenty thousand years, subsisting just on air for sustenance. Furthermore, O monarch, she observed a mowna vrata of silence, standing in water for eight thousand years. Then, she went to the Kausiki river, where she passed her days with only water and air for sustenance.

Then, O king, the blessed Devi went to the Ganga and to the mountains of Meru. There, in order to do good to all living creatures, she stood as still as a block of wood. On the summit of Himavat, where the Devas perform great yagnas, Mrityu stood on her toes, in order to please Brahma, for another hundred billion years.

The creator and destroyer of the universe went to her and spoke to her once again, 'With what are you engaged, O daughter? Carry out my command.'

The Devi once more replied, 'I cannot slay living creatures, O lord! I want to please you so that I may be relieved of this horrible task.'

She was frightened at the prospect of sin and prayed she may not obey his command. Brahma silenced her, and repeated, 'No sin will accrue to you, O Mrityu. Go forth, O auspicious Devi, set yourself to your task. You cannot contravene what I have said, O gentle, amiable one. Eternal dharma will now take refuge in you. All the Devas and I will ever engage ourselves in the quest for your weal. I will grant all your other wishes.

Disease will afflict the living, and you will bear the blame for their death. You will become a male in all male beings, a female in all female beings, and a eunuch in all those of the third sex.'

When the Devi heard Brahma, she joined her hands to the exalted lord, and said, 'I cannot obey your command.'

Brahma said again, ‘Mrityu, O Death, go forth and destroy! I declare that what you do will incur no sin, O auspicious one. The tears still cradled in your palms will take the form of terrible diseases and they, too, will destroy men when their time comes. At the end of the lives of living beings, you will launch desire and wrath against them. Immeasurable punya will be yours. You will incur no paapa, for you are so compassionate in your nature. Doing what I say, you will only observe dharma. Go, set your heart upon the task at hand, and command Kama and Krodha to slay all the living.’

Now, Mrityu feared Brahma’s curse and answered, ‘As you wish!’ From that time, she sent desire and wrath at the last hours of living beings to end their life-breaths. Her tears are the diseases that afflict humankind. Therefore, knowing this as the cause behind death, one should never give way to sorrow.

Just as the senses disappear in dreamless sleep and return upon awakening, with the dissolution of their bodies, all the living go to the other world and from there return to this world through rebirth, O Rajasimha.

Wind, imbued with terrible energy, mighty prowess and deafening roars, operates as the breath in all living creatures. Upon their death, prana escapes from the old and enters myriad new bodies. Hence, they call Vayu the lord of the senses, distinguished above the other elements.

When their punya is exhausted, the Devas, without exception, are born as mortals on earth. Similarly, when mortal creatures acquire sufficient merit, they attain the status of Devas. Therefore, O lion among kings, do not grieve for your son. He has attained swarga and enjoys great happiness there.

It was thus, O emperor, that Brahma created Mrityu, and she smites all beings at their hour of death. Her tears turn into diseases, and snatch away all living beings in their final hour.”’

CANTO 259

Yudhishtira says, 'All men who live on earth have questions about the nature of dharma. What is this dharma? Where does it come from? Tell me this Pitamaha. Is it for use in this world or for the next? Or, is it for both here and the hereafter? I beseech you, tell me this!'

Bhishma says, 'The practice of sadachara—good conduct—the smritis, and the Vedas, are the three sources of dharma. Additionally, the learned say that the purpose behind an action is its fourth indication. The Rishis of antiquity have declared actions that are virtuous and divided them as superior or inferior, in point of merit. The laws of dharma are established for the conduct of the affairs of the world. In both the worlds, here and hereafter, dharma produces felicity and joy as its fruits.

Unable to acquire punya through subtle means, a sinner remains in sin. Some suggest that evildoers can never be free of their sins. In times of distress, one who even tells a lie acquires the merit of truthfulness, even as a man in a crisis, who performs an ignoble deed, gains the merit of virtue.

Good conduct is the refuge of dharma. It is an indication of honour. It is man's nature that he neither sees nor admits his own faults but notices and proclaims those of others. The thief spends his loot in actions of apparent virtue. In times of anarchy, he is happy to appropriate what belongs to others, but, when others rob him of his loot, he seeks their heads as punishment. Even when his indignation is at its highest, he secretly covets the wealth of those who are content with their own. When he is

himself the victim of a robbery, he boldly stands at the king's gate without any guilt in his heart for his own sins.

To speak the truth is dharma. There is nothing higher than honesty. Veracity upholds everything, and everything rests upon satya. On principle, even sinful and ferocious men, who swear to keep honour amongst themselves, band together to go about their criminal business. If they betray one another, they would surely bring destruction upon themselves.

One should never take what belongs to others. Powerful men regard this as an eternal obligation created by the weak, but when fate serves misfortune to these powerful men, they hail the injunction. Furthermore, they who surpass others in strength or prowess do not necessarily become happy. Therefore, it is best not do any wrong. He who conducts himself in this way has no fear of dishonest men, thieves or the king.

The man, who follows ahimsa, lives fearlessly, with a pure heart. A thief fears everybody, like a deer driven from the woods into the midst of a village. He thinks others to be as sinful as himself. The chaste man is always full of joy and has no need to see his own sinfulness in others.

Good men say charity is a noble duty. The wealthy call it an idea born from the needy. However, when misfortune leads the same rich men into poverty, then the practice of charity recommends itself to them. Therefore, wealth does not necessarily meet with happiness.

He who knows pain should never do unto others what he dislikes done to himself. What can the lover of another man's wife possibly say to a person guilty of the same transgression? An adulterer cannot forgive what he himself does when he sees his wife with her lover. How can he who himself breathes prevent another from doing so by committing murder? Whatever wishes one entertains for oneself, one should certainly cherish for another.

A rich man should relieve the wants of the needy with his surplus wealth. This is why the creator ordained trade and other fair means to increase one's wealth. One should faithfully walk the path that leads to the Devas; the performance of yagnas and giving dana is also laudable. The Rishis have said that the accomplishment of goals by just and agreeable means is dharma.

O Yudhishtira this is what you must bear in mind to distinguish both dharma and adharma.

Once Brahma created Nyaya, justice, with the power to hold the world together. Dharma is liable to numerous restraints in order to acquire honour, which depends upon many delicate considerations.

I have now recounted the indications of dharma to you, O pinnacle of Kuru's race. Never set your heart on any sinful deed.'

CANTO 260

Yudhishtira says, 'You say dharma depends on delicate considerations, seen in the conduct of the virtuous. That it is fraught with restraints from numerous actions, and that the Vedas contain explanations for these. Still, I believe that I have a certain insight to help me discriminate between right and wrong.

You have answered many questions of mine. Yet, there is one question left that I will ask. It is not prompted, O Pitama, by a desire for empty debate. It seems to be the nature of all embodied beings, to be born, exist and eventually die. Dharma and its reverse, therefore, cannot be ascertained, O Bhaarata, through the study of the scriptures alone. The burden of a wealthy man is of one kind, while that of the poor man is of another. In times of adversity, how can one ascertain his duty through the scriptures alone?

You claim that the actions of the good constitute rectitude. Even so, it is from their actions that one ascertains the good. The definition, therefore, is based on ambiguity, so that the meaning of, "conduct of the virtuous", remains unclear.

We know how an ordinary person commits dishonourable deeds yet achieves respectability. We also know how an extraordinary person may achieve virtue even while he commits ignoble deeds. Additionally, those who know the shastras well have furnished proof that the ordinances of the Vedas dwindle and disappear gradually in every successive age. The duties

in the Krita yuga are of one kind. Those in the Treta yuga are of another kind. In the Dwapara, they are quite different. And in the Kali age, they are entirely of another kind.

It seems, therefore, that dharma adapts to the nature and abilities of men in different yugas. When none of the declarations in the Vedas applies uniformly to all the ages, to say that the proclamations of the Vedas are true, is only a popular expression for the sake of general appeasement.

The claim that the smritis originate from the srutis is again very general and ambiguous. If the Vedas were the final authority on everything, then they would apply to the smritis also since they emanate from the srutis. When the srutis and the smritis contradict each other, how can either be authoritative? Yet we see wicked men in authority arrest certain courses of dharma, even discontinue them forever. Whether we know or do not, whether we can see it or not, the way of dharma is finer than the edge of a razor and grosser than even a mountain.

Dharma, in the form of sacrifices and rituals, at first appears as the romantic edifices of vapour seen in the distant sky. Under the scrutiny of the learned, it vanishes. Like small ponds or shallow aqueducts that quickly dry up, the eternal practices inculcated in the smritis weaken in the Kali yuga, and finally disappear.

In order to acquire honour, amongst evil men, those who perform tapasyas fraught with desire, are hypocrites who torment themselves falsely. It is the same with those who are urged by the wishes of others. Myriad others tread the same path, influenced by various selfish motives. Even so, such deeds, although accomplished under the influence of evil passions, are yet virtuous.

Fools say that dharma is an empty sound among the righteous. They ridicule such righteous men, and regard them as being mad. Then there are many great men, who abandon the duties of their own varna, to engage in the dharma of the Kshatriya varna. Therefore, no conduct can be universally lauded or condemned.

A certain course of conduct makes one man meritorious. The same way can deny merit to another man. Another man, who does as he pleases, remains unchanged. Thus, the conduct that acquires punyas for one man obstructs merit for another.

So, one may see how all courses of conduct appear to lose singleness of purpose and character. It seems, therefore, that only that which the

ancient Rishis called dharma remains true to this day; and through the dharma, as declared by them, the distinctions and limitations have become eternal.'

CANTO 261

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the ancient tale of the discourse on dharma, between Tuladhara and Jajali. There once lived a Brahmana named Jajali. He lived as a recluse in a forest, where he performed austere penances. Once, he went to the seashore to practice the most severe tapasya. He observed many vows, restraints and fasts; he clothed his body in rags and animal skins, matted locks adorned his head, his entire person was smeared with filth and clay. Thus, the sagacious Brahmana passed many years in silent dhyana. The twice-born Rishi was endowed with great tejas, O Rajan, and he lived in the sea. With a desire to see everything, he roamed through all the worlds with the speed of thought.

After he had seen all the earth, bounded by the ocean, adorned with rivers, lakes and woods, the hermit sat submerged in water, and began to ruminate thus: "In this world of animate and inanimate creatures there is none equal to me. Who can roam with me among the stars and planets in the firmament and also dwell within the waters?"

Unseen by the Rakshasas, the Pisachas said to him, "It does not befit you to speak so. There is a man named Tuladhara, who is a trader and has great wisdom and fame. Even he, O best of Dvijas, is not worthy of saying what you do."

Jajali replied, "I will see this famous Tuladhara who is so wise."

As soon as the Rishi spoke, the superhuman beings lifted him from the sea, and said, "O best of the twice-born, go along this road." Jajali travelled

with a heavy heart to Varanasi, where he met Tuladhara.'

Yudhishtira interrupts his grandsire, 'Describe to me Jajali's arduous feats, O Pitamaha, which helped him acquire such high success.'

Bhishma replies, 'Jajali practiced the severest austerities. He performed ablutions morning and evening. Carefully tending his fires, he studied the Vedas earnestly. Adept with the duties laid down for forest hermits, Jajali blazed with effulgence.

He continued to live in the forest, engaged all the while in tapasya. Yet, he never thought of himself as one who had acquired any punya by what he did, although in the monsoons, he slept under the open sky, in autumn, he sat in water and in summer, he exposed himself to the sun and the wind.

He slept on diverse kinds of painful beds and on the bare earth. Once, it rained incessantly on his head as he stood under the open sky. There were jungles that he had to traverse constantly. Exposure to the rains and the mud tangled the sinless Rishi's hair into a thick jata.

Once, the Mahayogi abstained entirely from food, lived just upon air and stood in the forest like a post of wood, never moving. A pair of Kulinga birds, O Bhaarata, took him for the stump of a tree and built their nest on his head. Filled with compassion, the Maharishi remained and endured the feathery couple, which happily lived among his matted locks, into which they placed blades of grass.

The rains passed and autumn came. The birds, taken with desire, mated on the sage's head and laid their eggs there. Although Jajali was aware of what the birds had done, he remained. Firmly resolved to acquire punya, he would not disturb, let alone injure any creature.

Each day, the birds flew to and from his head. Mighty king, they lived there happily. When in time, the eggs matured and young ones emerged, the hatchlings began to grow in that, nest, while Jajali stood still. The Dharmarishi nurtured the young ones, as he stood motionless and rapt in dhyana.

In course of time, the Muni saw the young birds sprout wings and, along with the parent birds, he was delighted. Together with their young ones, the parent birds continued to live in the Rishi's head, in perfect safety.

Jajali soon watched the young birds take to the air each evening, and return to his head without going too far, and he stood rooted to the place. At times, he observed them leave without their parents and return by

themselves. A while later, the young birds flew away in the morning, passed the whole day out of his sight, only to return to the nest in the evening, and Jajali never moved. Later, they left the nest for five days at a time, and returned on the sixth day. Jajali remained.

Later, when their strength was fully developed they left him and did not return for many days. Until at last, they flew away and did not return even after a month. It was then, O king, that Jajali finally moved from his place. When the birds had gone, Jajali wondered much, and thought that he had achieved ascetic success, and pride entered his heart. When the great yogi saw the birds leave after he had raised them on his head, he began to think highly of himself, and was filled with delight. He bathed in a stream, poured libations on the sacred fire, and worshipped the rising sun. Indeed, having encouraged the Kulinga birds to be born and grow on his head, Jajali began to slap his armpits and proclaim loudly to the sky, "I have won great punya!"

Then an asariri, an ethereal voice, rose in the sky and Jajali heard these words, "In point of dharma, O Jajali, you are not equal to Tuladhara of great wisdom, who lives in Varanasi.

Jajali was furious to hear the disembodied voice and wanted to meet Tuladhara. He ranged over the whole world, keeping a vow of silence, and slept wherever he found himself at nightfall. After a considerable while, he reached the city of Kasi, where he saw Tuladhara engaged in selling sundry essences and perfumes, ghrita, honey and oils. As soon as the trader saw the Brahmana, he joyfully stood up and worshipped the guest with proper salutations.

Tuladhara said, "O Brahmana, I knew that you were coming to me. O Dvijottama, listen to what I have to say. You lived on a low land near the seashore and performed severe tapasya, but you never felt that you had achieved dharma or punya. When you did at last attain ascetic success, some birds were born on your head and you took great care of the little creatures.

In time, the birds grew wings and flew away in search of food. Due to your giving shelter to the little sparrows, you began to feel a sense of pride, O Brahmana, thinking you had achieved great merit. Then, you heard a voice in the sky that spoke of me. These words filled you with anger, and brought you here. Tell me, what can I do for you, O best of Brahmanas?"

CANTO 262

Bhishma says 'Thus addressed by Tuladhara, Jajali said "You sell all kinds of extracts and scents, O Vaisya, as also bark, leaves, herbs, fruits and roots of various trees. How did you acquire your wisdom and certitude? Where has this knowledge come from? O you of great intelligence, tell me all this in detail."

Tuladhara of the Vaisya varna, who knew the truths of dharma and was graced with gyana, said, "O Jajali, I know dharma, which is eternal. With all its mysteries, it is nothing other than the ancient virtue that is known to all. It consists of universal compassion, and is fraught with beneficence to all creatures. The way of life, which relies on ahimsa towards all creatures or, in case of necessity, upon a minimum of such harm, is the highest dharma. I live according to that dharma, O Jajali.

My house is built with wood and grass cut by other people's hands. With the exception of wines, O enlightened Rishi, I purchase from other men lac, dye, the roots of lotus, its filaments, diverse kinds of fine perfumes and various lotions, to sell in fair trade.

He, O Jajali, who is ever the friend and always engaged in the good of all creatures, in thought, word and deed, knows godliness. I never solicit anyone, or desire anything. I never quarrel with anyone, nor cherish aversion for anyone. I consider all objects and creatures to be equal. Jajali, this is my vrata.

My scales are in perfect balance, for all creatures. I neither praise nor blame the actions of others. I view the diversity in the world, O Brahmana, like the array seen in the sky. Know, O Jajali, that I view all creatures with an equal eye.

Wisest of intelligent men, I see no difference between a clod of earth a piece of stone and a lump of gold. As the blind, the deaf and the ignorant are perfectly accustomed to the loss of their senses, in the same way am I conformed to my vows of abstinence from pleasures.

As they who are feeble, ailing, weak and starved, have no relish for amusements of any kind, similarly have I ceased to feel any zest for wealth, pleasure or luxuries.

When a man fears nothing and nothing fears him, when he cherishes no desire and has no aversion for anything, he attains Brahman. When a man does not sin, in thought, word or deed, towards any creature, he attains Brahman.

There is no past or future. There is no neeti or dharma. He who does not rouse fear acquires a state in which there is no fear. On the other hand, the man of harsh speech and violent temper, who is like death itself to all creatures, certainly attains a condition that abounds with fear.

I follow the practices of exalted, benevolent elders who with their children and grandchildren live in accord with the ordinance laid down in the shastra. He, who falls prey to the errors of the good and wise, entirely abandons the sanatana dharma recommended in the Vedas. The wise man or he who has subdued his senses, or he who has strength of mind, attains moksha. The learned man who restrains his senses, and practices dharma with a heart cleansed from the very craving for himsa, violence, is sure, O Jajali, to acquire the merit of dharma and the fruit of mukti.

Look upon worldly unions as pieces of driftwood that float along the river and briefly meet. And having briefly touched, they drift apart again. Grass, sticks and floating cakes of cowdung come together, and then part forever. He who no creature fears in the least is himself, O sannyasi, never frightened of any creature. While he, of whom every creature is afraid, as of a wolf, is himself filled with terror like creatures of the sea forced to leap onto the shore from fear of the roaring Badava fire.

This is how the practice of universal ahimsa has arisen. Man must follow it by every means within his power. Kings and men of wealth may seek to adopt it. It is sure to lead to bhagya and swarga as well. Because of

their ability to dispel the fears of others, the learned consider wealthy men and their followers to be outstanding. Men who seek ordinary happiness practice ahimsa for the sake of fame, while the truly skilled practice it to attain Brahman.

The path of ahimsa provides all the rewards one enjoys through tapasya, yagnas, dana, satya and the cultivation of gyana. He who assures protection to all creatures receives the boon of all sacrifices and wins fearlessness for himself as his reward. There is no dharma superior to ahimsa. He, of whom everybody is frightened, as one is of a snake within one's bedroom, never acquires any punya in this world or in the hereafter.

The very Devas are bewildered by the one who transcends all states, who himself constitutes the Soul of all creatures and looks upon all creatures as identical with his own self. Of all gifts, ahimsa is of the highest value. It is true, O Jajali believe me. One who takes to karma at first wins prosperity, but on the exhaustion of his punyas, he once more encounters adversity. Aware of the inevitable destruction of such gains, the wise do not praise karma.

There is no duty, O Jajali, without motive. Dharma, however, is most tenuous. They are in the Vedas for the sake of both Brahman and swargaloka. The subject of dharma has many secrets and mysteries. It is so subtle that it is almost impossible to understand fully. Amongst diverse conflicts in precepts, few men who observed the deeds of the virtuous have understood dharma.

Why do you not destroy those that geld bulls, bore their noses, and cause them to bear heavy burdens, bind them and put them under diverse kinds of restraint? Why indeed do you not eliminate men who eat the flesh of living creatures they have slain?

There are men that live by trafficking in living beings! They are seen to own humans as slaves. They strike, bind and otherwise subject them to restraints and torture. They make them labour day and night. These people are not ignorant of the pain that results from such torment. When they earn a living by such sins, what scruples need they feel in selling cadavers?

The Devas—Surya, Chandramas, Vayu, Brahma, Prana, Kratu and Yama—all dwell in living creatures. The goat is Agni. The sheep is Varuna. The horse is Surya. The earth is Virat. The cow and the calf are Soma. The man who sells these can never gain success.

Such being the case, O Dvija, what fault can attach to the sale of taila, ghrita, madhu or hanu. Many animals grow up in ease and comfort in places free from gnats and other insects. Still, there are men who persecute them in diverse ways, and lead them into marshes that abound with stinging insects, even though they are aware that their mothers bear them great love.

Many draft animals are laden with heavy burdens. Others, again, have to languish because of treatment not sanctioned by the scriptures. I believe that such himsa against animals amounts to foeticide. Men regard agriculture to be sinless, although it is surely fraught with cruelty. The iron-faced plough wounds the soil and the many creatures that live therein. Cast your eyes, O Jajali, on the bullocks yoked to the plough. In the srutis, kine are deemed as being not fit for slaughter. He perpetrates a great sin who slays a bull or a cow.

Once, many Rishis approached Nahusha, and said, “You have, O king, killed a cow which is declared in the scriptures to be like one’s mother. You have also slain a bull, which the shastras say is akin to Brahma himself. You have perpetrated an evil act, O Nahusha, and we are pained.”

To purify Nahusha, the Rishis divided his sin into a hundred and one parts, transformed the fragments into diseases and cast them among all creatures. Then, O Jajali, the blessed Rishis turned to Nahusha, who was guilty of foeticide, and said, “We will not be able to pour libations in your sacrifice.”

So spoke the Maharishis and Yatis, after they ascertained that king Nahusha was not intentionally guilty of the sin.

These, O Jajali, are some of the evil and dreadful practices that are current in this world. You perform them because men from ancient times have done so, and not because they agree with the dictates of your purified intellect. Guided by reason, one should practice what one considers dharma, instead of blindly following the practices of the world.

Listen now, O Jajali, to what my conduct is towards him that injures me and him that praises me. I regard both of them in the same light. I have none whom I like and none whom I dislike. The wise laud such a behaviour as consistent with dharma and the Yatis concur as well. The virtuous always observe it with sharp insight.”

CANTO 263

Jajali countered, “This course of dharma that you preach, O upholder of nyaya, shuts the door of swarga on all creatures and puts a stop to the very means of their subsistence. From agriculture comes food. That food offers nourishment even to you. It is the help of animals, crops and herbs, O trader, which enables humans to support their existence. From animals and food do sacrifices flow. Your doctrines seem laden with atheism. This world will come to an end if the means by which life is supported must be abandoned.”

Tuladhara replied, “I will tell you of the means of sustenance. I am not, O Brahmana, an atheist. I do not blame sacrifices. He is very rare who truly knows yagna. I bow to the yagna that is ordained for Brahmanas. I bow also to them that are conversant with that yagna.

Alas, the Brahmanas have abandoned the sacrifice ordained for them, and have taken to the performance of yagnas meant for Kshatriyas. Many believers, O enlightened one, that are covetous and fond of wealth, cannot understand the true meaning of the srutis, and proclaim falsehoods as being truth. They have introduced many kinds of sacrifices, and said, ‘This should be given away in this particular yagna, while that is to be offered in that other yagna. The first of these is laudable’, and so on. The outcome of all this, O Jajali, is the emergence of theft and other evils.

Be aware that only the sacrificial offering acquired through dharma can satisfy the Devas. There are abundant indications in the scriptures that

the worship of the gods may be accomplished with vows, libations poured on the sacred fire, recitations of the Vedas and with plants and herbs.

From their religious karmas and mere hollow rituals, sinful men have wicked offspring. To covetous men greedy children are born, and to the contented are born happy children.

If the performer of sacrifices and the priest-in-attendance wish for rewards from their yagnas, their children are visited with that stain. If, on the other hand, they do not wish to reap the rewards of the yagna, then their children become desireless. From sacrifices appear progeny like pure water from the firmament.

The libations poured on the yagna fire rise up to the sun. From the sun comes rain. From rain, crops grow. From food living creatures are born. Long ago, men of dharma, devoted to selfless sacrifices, obtained the fruition of all their wishes. The earth would yield crops without tillage and the blessing of Rishis sufficed to produce herbs and plants. Ancient men never conducted yagnas from a wish for their fruits, and never regarded themselves as beneficiaries. Those who somehow perform sacrifices, while questioning their efficacy, are born in their next lives as dishonest, wily and greedy men, obsessively covetous of wealth.

He, who with the help of false logic claims the authoritative scriptures as fraught with evil, is certain to enter into the realms of sin. Surely, O lord of Brahmanas, such a man, bereft of wisdom, possesses a sinful soul, and always remains here in this world of sin.

He, who regards those tasks the Vedas ordain to accomplish every day, as obligatory, and fears lest he fails to finish them, who considers all the essentials of yagnas identical with Brahman, and never views himself as the doer, is truly a Brahmana. If the duties of such a one remain incomplete, or hindered by unclean yagnapasus, even then, such actions are of superior efficacy. However, if such deeds are done from a craving for their fruit and their completion be obstructed, then atonement becomes necessary.

Those who, bereft of all desire for worldly wealth, renounce all provision for the future and covet mukti, while being free from envy, embrace dharma and samyama as their yagna. Men who know the distinction between body and soul, who are devoted to yoga, and meditate on Pranava, AUM, always, succeed in gratifying others.

The universal Brahman, which is the Soul of the Devas, dwells in him who realises Brahman. When such a man's hunger is satiated, all the gods,

O Jajali, are pleased. He who satisfies all his desires and no longer desires anything, and who is consummate in knowledge, gains eternal mukti, which to him is a source of perfect bliss.

Wise men are the refuge of dharma. They are virtuous men who are clear about their norms of conduct. He who owns such wisdom always sees everything in the universe to have sprung from his own self.

A few learned men, who faithfully strive to reach the other shore of this ocean of samsara, attain the world of Brahma, which is full of great blessings, most sacred and inhabited by the righteous. It is a world that is free from sorrow, upheaval and pain, a place from which there is no return.

Such men do not covet swarga. They do not worship Brahma in costly sacrifices. They walk the path of dharma. Ahimsa is paramount in their yagnas and no harm befalls any creature. These men know trees, herbs, fruits and roots as the only sacrificial offerings.

Greedy priests never officiate at the sacrifices of these simple enlightened men. Although all their duties are complete, they still perform sacrifices from a desire for the good of all creatures and offer their own selves as sacrificial offerings. This is why selfish priests officiate at the yagnas of only the misguided, who seek only swarga, without trying to gain moksha. Whereas those who are good forever seek to help others find freedom and bliss. In view of both these ways, O Jajali, I have come to embrace all creatures with an equal heart.

Endowed with wisdom, many peerless Brahmanas perform yagnas of two kinds; some lead to mukti from where there is no return, and others lead to regions of bliss from where there is a return. The sacrifices help them advance, O Maharishi, along paths taken by the Devas.

Those who sacrifice from a desire for reward, return from their goals, for further rewards; for the truly wise, who sacrifice selflessly, there is no return. Although both these kinds of yajamanas, sacrifice performers, O Jajali, travel along the path of the Devas, such is the difference between their final ends.

Because of the success achieved by such men of true dharma, their bulls willingly set their shoulders to the plough for tillage, and to the yoke to pull their carriages. Their cows yield milk from udders untouched by human hands. These men create sacrificial wood and other ritual needs simply by willing it, and perform various sacrifices replete with abundant gifts.

Those of such purified souls may slaughter a cow as a sacrificial offering. While others, who are not of that stature, should beware and perform yagnas only with herbs and plants, and not with animals.

Since renunciation has such punya, I stress on it when I speak to you. The Devas know him for a Brahmana who has given up all expectation of gains, who makes no effort to achieve worldly duties, who no longer serves anyone, who never utters the praises of others, and although his actions are weak, he is endowed with strength.

What, O Jajali, will be the fate of him who does not recite the Vedas, of the others, who do not perform proper yagnas, those who do not offer gifts to Brahmanas, and those who follow an avocation in which every kind of desire is indulged? Through perfect reverence for the dharma that is renunciation, one is sure to gain Brahman."

Jajali said, "I had never before, O son of a Vaisya, heard of these mystical and profound dharmas of ascetics who perform only mental sacrifices. It is for this reason that I inquire about them. The sages of old did not follow those doctrines of yoga. Hence, the yogins that succeeded them have not propounded them for general acceptance. If you say that men of brutish minds fail to achieve sacrifices beneficial to their soul, then, O Vaisya, how else will they achieve their happiness? Tell me this, O wise one. Great is my faith in your words."

Tuladhara replied, "At times, yagnas are not effective because of the absence of faith in the yajamana. Such men are not worthy of performing any sacrifice.

As for the faithful, only one thing, the cow, is enough to maintain all sacrifices through libations of clarified butter, milk, curds, and the hair at end of her tail, her horns and her hooves.

The Vedas declare that unmarried men should not perform sacrifices. Nevertheless, should it be necessary for an unmarried man to perform a yagna, then he must take sraddha, faith, as his wedded wife in order to make his offerings to the Devas. Through proper reverence in such sacrifices, he is sure to attain Brahman.

To the exclusion of all animals, which are certainly unclean as offerings in yagnas, the rice-ball is a worthy offering. All rivers are as sacred as the Saraswati, and all mountains are holy. O Jajali, do not wander needlessly on earth to visit sacred places; the Soul itself is a tirtha. He, who

observes these duties, and seeks to acquire merit within his ability, certainly acquires blessed regions hereafter."

Bhishma continues, 'These are the dharmas, O Yudhishtira, which Tuladhara praised: responsibilities that are consistent with reason, and always observed by those who are good and wise.'

CANTO 264

Tuladhara said, "Observe, O Jajali, who, amongst the good or the sinful, have adopted this path of dharma of which I have spoken. You will then clearly understand the truth. Look, amongst the hawks and other numerous birds that range in the sky, are the ones reared on your head! Look, O Brahmana, how the birds have contracted their wings and legs to enter their nests. Summon them, O enlightened one, for the birds you treated with affection display their love for you who are their father. Indeed, O Jajali, you are their father. Do summon your children."

Beckoned by Jajali, the birds responded joyfully to the voice of dharma, which ordains ahimsa towards all creatures. All deeds of ahimsa, performed towards any creature, become beneficial both here and hereafter. The deeds that involve harm to others destroy faith, and with faith destroyed, ruin follows the destroyer. The sacrifices of those who view acquisition and non-acquisition in the same light, who are invested with bhakti and are self-restrained, who are of peaceful minds, and perform yagnas from a sense of duty and not from a desire for benefits—men like these become worthy of reward.

Bhakti and sraddha towards Brahman is the daughter of Surya, O Dvija. She is the protector and she is the giver of good birth. Devotion is superior to the punya born of Vedic mantras and dhyana sraddha redeems an action vitiated by a defect of speech, and salvages a deed poisoned by a

defect of the mind. However, neither speech nor the mind can save a deed that is defiled through want of devotion.

Men who have experienced past events recall what Brahma said on this subject: after deliberation, the Devas concluded that the sacrificial offerings made by a man, who is pure but lacking in faith, and of another who is impure, hence unworthy of acceptance; of one who knows the Vedas but is miserly, and that of a moneylender who is generous, are worthy of equal approval.

Brahma, the Supreme Lord of all creatures, then told them that they had committed an error. He asserted that sraddha sanctifies the offerings of a liberal person, while the food of the faithless man is lost. The offering of a liberal usurer is acceptable but not that of a miser. Furthermore, there is only one person in the world, he who is faithless, unfit to make offerings to the Devas. This is also the opinion of men who understand dharma.

Faith is a purifier of sins, while the lack of faith is a high sin. As a snake sheds its slough, the man of belief casts off all his sin. Abstention with faith is the most sacred of all. He sanctifies himself who turns to sraddha and abstains from all faults of conduct. What need has such a one of tapasya, aachara or dridatha?

Every man has sraddha, which is of three kinds—as influenced by sattva, rajas and tamas. The way to recognise a man is through his belief. Those gifted with sattva and insights into the true import of righteousness have accordingly established the subject of dharma.

I have, because of my enquiries, gathered this knowledge from the Rishi Dharmadarsana. O wise one, take to faith, for you will then gain that which is superior. Know this, O Jajali, he who has faith in the srutis, and who follows their import, is certainly a man of dharma, and he who faithfully adheres to his own path is surely a superior man."

Soon, Tuladhara and Jajali, both gifted with great wisdom, who had acquired their punya through their good deeds ascended to swarga and revelled there in great happiness.

A great deal is told of Tuladhara, who understood ahimsa completely and hence proclaimed these eternal duties. The enlightened Jajali, O son of Kunti, heard these words of celebrated tejas, and became calm. In this manner, Tuladhara spoke many truths of grave import and illustrated them with examples. Tell me, O Bhaarata, what else do you wish to hear?'

CANTO 265

Bhishma says, 'There is an old story of what King Vichakhi said about karuna, compassion for all creatures. When the king witnessed the mangled body of a bull during a cow-sacrifice, heard the agonised bellows of the animal and saw the cruel Brahmanas that gathered there to assist in the rituals, the king shouted, "Jaya to all kine!"

He pronounced this blessing on the helpless animals, even at the time of slaughter. And Vichakhi further said, "Only those who are atheists and sceptics, bereft of intelligence, who transgress defined limits, who desire fame through sacrifices and religious rites, speak highly of the slaughter of animals in yagnas. Manu has lauded ahimsa in all actions.

Hence, guided by the shastras, with regard to himsa and ahimsa, one should practice the true course of dharma, which is most subtle. Ahimsa towards all creatures is the highest dharma.

The householder should ignore the rewards of Vedic rituals and give up his family life. He should embrace sannyasa, live near an inhabited place and observe rigid vows. Only selfish men wish for benefit of their actions.

Men do not eat defiled meat obtained from animals which are not killed in sacrifices. This practice is not worthy of praise, since all meat is tainted, including that of animals killed in yagnas.

Knaves have introduced wine, fish, honey, meat, alcohol and preparations of rice and sesame seeds. The use of these in sacrifices is not

sanctioned in the Vedas. The craving for these arises from pride, error of judgement and cupidity.

True Brahmanas realise the presence of Vishnu in every sacrifice. He should be worshipped with delicious payasa, and the leaves and flowers of trees described in the Vedas. All worthy actions and all which is held pure by eminent sages, are excellent oblations to the Supreme Deity and deserve his approval.'

Yudhishtira says, 'The body and all sorts of dangers and calamities are constantly at war, with each trying to destroy the other. How then is it possible for a non-violent man to refrain from harmful deeds in order to survive?'

Bhishma replies, 'One should, if possible, acquire merit and behave in such a way that one's body may not languish, suffer pain and invite death.'

CANTO 266

Yudhishtira says, 'You, O Pitamaha, are our highest guru for deeds that are difficult to accomplish. I ask, how should we judge an action to be either our obligation to perform or abstain from? Is it to be determined soon or in course of time?'

Bhishma answers, 'Listen to an ancient tale of what happened to Chirakarin of the Angirasa vamsa. May the man who reflects long before he performs a task, be twice blessed. Such a man certainly possesses great intelligence and never offends in any manner.

There was once a very wise man named Chirakarin, the son of Rishi Gautama. Everything he did was done after deep consideration. He was named Chirakarin because he deliberated for long upon everything; he would remain awake for a long time, sleep for a long time and take a long time to begin the tasks he was entrusted with. The blame of being an idle man adhered to him. Men of small minds and poor foresight regarded him a fool.

Once, Pitamaha Gautama saw his wife do a terrible thing. He was so furious that he ordered Chirakarin, "Slay this woman." The learned Gautama spoke these words without much thought, and departed for the vana.

Chirakarin took a long time to assent to his father's command, before saying, "So be it." Still, due to his very nature, and habit of never

embarking on any task without long reflection, he began to ponder upon the propriety or otherwise of his father's instruction.

How will I obey the command of my father and yet avoid killing my mother? How can I not drown in sin, like any evil man, in this situation where contradictory obligations pull me in opposite directions?

Obedience to the commands of the father is essential and constitutes the highest merit. The protection of the mother again is equally a clear duty. The status of a son is fraught with dependence. How will I avoid this sin? What can I do so that both responsibilities may be discharged? Who can kill a woman, especially his own mother, and remain happy? Who can disregard his own father and yet gain prosperity and fame?

The father places his own self within the mother's womb and is born as the son, so that he may continue his vocation, conduct, name and race. My parents have begotten me as their son. Since I know my origin, why should I not have this knowledge of my relationship with both of them?

The words spoken by the father during the initial rite after birth, and those at the time of the subsidiary rites settle the reverence due to him and confirm the respect paid to him.

Since it is the father who raises and educates his son, he is the son's primary elder and his highest dharma. The Vedas assertively stipulate that the son's supreme dharma is to follow the sire's instructions.

Unto the father, the son is only a source of joy. Whereas for the son, the father is everything. The body and all else that the son owns have the father alone as the provider. Hence, the wishes of the father should be obeyed without ever questioning them in the least. His very sins are cleansed of the man who obeys his pita.

The father provides sustenance, teaches the Vedas and imparts the knowledge of the world. He is the performer of such rites as garbhadhana and simantonnayana. He is dharma. He is swarga. He is the highest tapasya. Through his satisfaction, all the Devas are satisfied. The words spoken by the father turn to blessings for the son. His joyous speech washes away all the sins of the son. The flower falls away from the stalk. The fruit drops from the tree. However, the father, whatever be his distress, never abandons the son. These then are my views on the reverence due from the son to the father. To the son, the sire is not an ordinary being. I will now reflect upon what is due to the mother.

As much as firewood is essential to fire, in the same manner the mother is the main cause of this union of the Pancha Mahabutas within my body. She is as tinder to the bodies of all men. She is the panacea for all kinds of calamities. Her existence invests one with protection; whereas her absence robs one of all shelter.

The impoverished man who enters his house, with the words, “O mother!” need never indulge in sorrow. Nor will weakness ever assail him. Even if a man has sons and grandsons, and is a hundred years old, he still looks like a two-year-old child as long as his mother is alive. Able or disabled, lean or robust, the son is always protected by the mother. The teachings state that none other than the mother is the son’s guardian. In the event of her demise, the son becomes old; he is grief-stricken, and to him the world begins to look empty. There is no refuge, nor any defence, like the mother. There is no one as dear as the mother is.

Because she carried him in her womb, the mother is the son’s Dhatri. As the principal cause of his birth, she is his Janani. For nourishing his young limbs into growth, she is called Amba. For delivering a courageous child, she is known as Virasu. For nursing and looking after the son, she is named Sura.

The mother is one’s own body. What rational man is there who would kill his mother, to whose care alone belongs the reason why his own head did not lie by the street like a dry gourd?

When husband and wife procreate, both of them harbour the wish for a son; but its success depends more upon the mother than on the father.

The mother knows the family in which the son is born and the man who fathered him. From the moment of conception, the mother begins to show affection to her child and takes delight in him or her. Yet, the scriptures state that the offspring belongs to the father alone.

If married men, who are pledged to earn religious punya, seek congress outside their marriage, they cease to be worthy of respect. Because the husband supports his wife, he is called Bhartri, and, since he protects her, he is called Pati. When these two functions disappear from him, he ceases to be both Bhartri and Pati.

Then, again, a woman can commit no fault. The mantle of faults lies upon a man’s shoulders. By committing adultery, he becomes stained with guilt.

It has been said that the husband is the wife's highest goal, an idol of worship to her. My mother surrendered her sacred self to the one who came to her in the form and guise of her husband. Indeed, because of the natural weakness of their sex, and their liability to solicitation, women cannot be regarded as offenders. Conversely, the sinfulness is evident of Indra himself who, though guilty of committing brahmahatya, caused a third part of this sin to be cast upon the woman, at her request.

There is no question about my mother's innocence. She whom I have been commanded to kill is a woman. That woman, again, is my mother. She occupies, therefore, a place of greater reverence. The very beasts that are irrational know that the mother is not to be harmed. The father must be known to be a combination of all the Devas put together. To the mother attaches a union of all the mortal creatures and all the gods.

Because of his habit of long deliberations before initiating any action, Chirakarin pondered in this manner for a long while.

After many days of tapasya, and intense dhyana, Gautama returned home. Endowed with great wisdom, he came back convinced of the impropriety of the chastisement he had commanded to be inflicted upon his wife.

Burning with sorrow and shedding copious tears of repentance, he said, "The lord of the three worlds, Purandara, came to my asrama in the guise of a Brahmana seeking comfort. I welcomed him with words of reverence, with padya to wash his feet and arghya. I also granted him the rest that he sought. I further told him how I had found a protector in him.

I thought that such conduct on my part would encourage him to behave amicably towards me. On the contrary, he misbehaved himself, and my wife Ahalya, could not be regarded to have committed any fault on her part. It seems that while Indra was coursing through the sky, he had seen my wife and lost his good sense on seeing her extraordinary beauty.

Neither my wife nor I, not even Indra, can be held responsible for the offence. In fact, the blame really lies with my carelessness of not protecting her through my yoga shakti. The Rishis have said that all calamities spring from envy, which, in turn, arises from error of judgement. It is by such envy that I have been dragged from where I was and plunged into this sea of sin.

Alas, I have slain my wife. She is known as Vasita as she shares in her lord's calamities. And since she is under my care, she is known as Bhariya. Who can save me from this sin? In haste I ordered Chirakarin to kill my

wife. Even now, if he proves true to his name he may still deliver me from this guilt. Twice blessed be you, O Chirakaraka! If in this instance you have delayed accomplishing your task, then you are truly worthy of your name. Save your mother, yourself, as also me and my tapasya, from grave sin. Be really a Chirakaraka today! Ordinarily, you are judicious before you begin any activity. Let not your conduct be otherwise today. Be you a true Chirakaraka. Your mother awaited your arrival for a long time while she bore you in her womb. O Chirakaraka, let your introspective nature yield beneficial results today.

Perhaps in view of the sorrow it would cause me, my son Chirakaraka will delay doing my bidding today. Maybe, he deliberates on it, while bearing it in his heart. Perchance, he procrastinates, in view of the grief it would cause us both."

While steeped in such repentance, O king, Maharishi Gautama saw Chirakarin seated before him. The sight of his father's return overwhelmed Chirakarin with sorrow, as he cast away his weapon, bowed his head and began to pacify Gautama. When Gautama saw his son prostrate before him, and also saw his wife well-nigh petrified with shame, the Rishi was filled with great joy. From that time, the Maharishi Gautama never went anywhere to live away from his wife or his heedful son.

Having issued the order that his wife should be slain, Gautama had left his home to attend to some personal task. Since then his son had humbly stood by, with weapon in hand, ready to execute his mother.

Seeing his son prostrated at his feet, the Rishi thought that struck with fear, Chirakarin was seeking mercy for taking up a weapon to kill his own mother. Gautama held Chirakaraka in a close embrace, showered him with praise and affection, and blessed him saying, "May you live long!"

Joyful and satisfied with the turn of events, Gautama, O wise one, addressed his son with these words, "Blessed be you, O Chirakaraka! May you always be thoughtful of your actions. Because of your delay in accomplishing my bidding you have made me eternally happy today."

The king of Rishis then spoke of the merits of masters who reflect for a long time before setting their hands to any task. He said, "If it is the matter of the death of a friend, one should accomplish it after due deliberation. If it is about abandoning a project already begun, it should be left for after long consideration. A friendship that is time tested will last a long time. In giving way to wrath, haughtiness, pride, disputes, sinful

actions and doing unpleasant tasks he who exercises patience, deserves praise. When an offence is not clearly proved against a relative, a friend, a servant or a wife, he who reflects long before passing judgement is commendable."

Bhaarata, this is why Gautama was pleased with his son's delay in carrying out his order. He who never nurses his anger for long, and reflects patiently before discharging any action, does not ever repent. One should tolerantly wait upon the aged, and show them reverence. One should attend to one's duties submissively and ascertain them faithfully. He, who patiently pleases the learned, reverentially serves the good-natured, and persistently keeps his soul under control, succeeds in enjoying the respect of the world for a long time. One engaged in instructing others on the subject of dharma and svadharma, should, upon being questioned, calmly reflect before giving an answer so as to avoid any regret."

Rishi Gautama faithfully worshiped the Devas in his asrama, and finally ascended into swarga with his circumspect son.'

CANTO 267

Yudhishtira says, 'How, indeed, should the king protect his subjects without harming anybody? I ask you this, O Pitamaha; tell me, O best of good men.'

Bhishma replies, 'For this, listen to an old story of the conversation between Dyumatsena and King Satyavat.

I have heard that, once, when a few men were about to be executed at the behest of his father Dyumatsena, Prince Satyavat said certain words that had never been spoken before. He said, "Sometimes dharma assumes the form of paapa, and paapa assumes the form of dharma. Under no circumstances can the killing of men ever be considered good."

Dyumatsena replied, "If the sparing of ones that deserve to be slain be virtuous, if robbers be spared, O Satyavat, then all distinctions between virtue and vice would disappear. 'This is mine', 'That is not his': ideas like these will not prevail in the Kali yuga. The affairs of the world will come to a standstill. If you know of a way that the world may persist without punishment, then tell me about it."

Satyavat said, "The Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras should be placed under the control of the Brahmanas. If these three varnas were kept within the ambit of niti, then the lower classes will imitate them in their practices. Those who transgress the laws will be reported by the Brahmanas to the king, for punishment.

Without killing the offender, the king should dispense punishment as prescribed by the shastras. He must not neglect to thoroughly examine the nature of the crime and reflect on the science of niti.

By executing one guilty man, the king in truth kills a number of innocent persons as well. See, how with the death of a single robber, his wife, mother, father and children are all killed for they become deprived of the means of a livelihood. Hence, the king must deliberate deeply on the question of punishment.

Sometimes an evil man is seen to imbibe good conduct from a man of virtue. At times, good children are born to wicked men. The wicked, therefore, should not be torn up by their roots. Their extermination is not consistent with sanatana dharma.

A gentle reprimand may be given to correct their offences. Confiscation of their wealth, incarceration, even disfigurement may be meted out to punish them. However, their relatives should not be persecuted through the infliction of capital sentences on them. If in the presence of the purohita and others, they surrender to him, and swear, saying, "O Brahmana, we will never again commit any sinful deed," they would then deserve to be let off without any punishment. This is the edict of Brahma himself. Even a Brahmana should be punished for a crime. If great men transgress, then their chastisement should be proportionate to their greatness. Habitual offenders do not deserve any leniency as might be shown for their first offence."

Dyumatsena said, "As long as the laws are not broken, dharma prevails. If dire offenders were not punished with death, dharma would soon be destroyed. Men of old were governed with ease as they were honourable and not easily given to disputes and quarrels. They seldom gave way to anger, or, if they did so, they never yielded themselves wildly to wrath. In those days the mere crying of 'Fie!' at offenders was sufficient punishment, followed by the punishment represented by censures, penalties of fines and forfeitures. In this age, however, the punishment of death has become common. The measure of evil has increased to such an extent that even the penalty of death is no longer a deterrent.

The srutis declare that the robber has no affiliation towards the Manavas, Devas, Gandharvas or the Pitris. The habitual thief steals the ornaments of corpses from cemeteries, and clothes from men possessed by

spirits. It is foolish to make any covenant with such wretches or trust their word."

Satyavat said, "If you do not succeed in making honest men of such rogues by means other than execution, then uproot them through a sacrifice. Kings are ashamed when thieves and robbers multiply in their kingdoms; therefore, for the sake of their subjects' happiness and prosperity, they practice severe tapasya.

Fear of the king can make honest subjects. Good kings never execute the wicked for retribution. They are successful in ruling their subjects with the help of their own good conduct. If the king performs justly, the superior subjects imitate him, and in turn, are imitated by their subordinates. Men are so constituted that they imitate their superiors.

On the other hand, a corrupt king who tries to deter others from evil ways becomes an object of ridicule.

He, who, through arrogance or misjudgement, offends the king in any manner, should be detained by all means, so that he may not repeat the offence in future. The emperor should first control his own self if he wishes to check offences in others. If the need arises, even his erring friends and kin must be severely punished. In a kingdom where a dire criminal does not receive harsh justice, for sure, adharma increases, and dharma wanes.

Long ago, a learned Brahmana invested with clemency taught me this. My ancestors too, who were sworn to ahimsa, gave me similar instruction. They said, 'In the Krita yuga, kings must rule their subjects in an entirely harmless manner. In the Treta yuga, they should conduct themselves in ways that conform to dharma fallen away by a fourth from its full complement. In the Dwapara yuga, they must adapt to dharma fallen away by a half, and in the Kali yuga, they should adjust to dharma fallen away by three-fourths.

In the Kali yuga, due to evil kings and the nature of the epoch itself, fifteen parts of even the fourth portion of dharma disappears, leaving behind just a sixteenth portion.

If, O Satyavat, confusion sets in by adopting ahimsa, the king must then consider the human life-span, the strength of human beings and the nature of the prevailing yuga, before he metes out punishments.

Indeed, Manu, the son of Brahma, has shown compassion for human beings and indicated the path by which men may adhere to knowledge for the sake of mukti.'

CANTO 268

Yudhishtira says, 'You have already explained to me, O Pitamaha, how yoga dharma, may be adopted and practiced along with ahimsa. Tell me now about the dharma which leads to both bhoga and moksha, and which among these two is superior?'

Bhishma says, 'Both these paths are highly blessed. They are extremely difficult to accomplish, and yield great benefits. The two are practiced by the good. To answer your questions about their true meaning, I will tell you about the efficacy of both courses. Listen carefully, Yudhishtira, to the ancient tale of the discourse between Kapila and the cow.

I have heard that once when Lord Tvashtri visited the palace of King Nahusha, that king, for the sake of hospitality, was on the verge of killing a cow agreeably to the eternal precept of the Vedas.

Seeing the cow tied up for slaughter, Kapila, ever observant of the duties of sattva, exclaimed, "Alas, ye Vedas!" Suddenly, a Rishi named Syumarasmi, appeared there, through his yoga shakti, in the form of a cow. He turned to the Yati Kapila, and said, "Listen O Kapila! If the Vedas sanction the slaughter of living beings, then by what right does ahimsa deserve to be regarded as authoritative? There are men devoted to tapasya and invested with buddhi, with the srutis and gyana for their insight, who regard the tenets of the Vedas to be the words of Iswara himself. What can anybody say about the contents of the Vedas when they are the words of the

Paramatman, who is free from any desire for reward, who is beyond envy and aversion, who is addicted to nothing, and because of the instant fruition of all his wishes, for him, the word 'effort' does not even exist?"

Kapila said, "I do not criticise the Vedas. I have no wish to say anything derogatory about them. I have heard that the different dharmas established for the brahmacharin, the grihastha, the vanaprastha and the sannyasa asramas, all lead to the same goal. The four asramas have always been regarded as the Devayana marga. The relative superiority or inferiority of these are revealed in the nature of their individual objectives.

Know these and perform such karmas which will lead to swarga and other blessings, say the Vedas. At the same time, they also proclaim—do not perform any karma. If abstention from karma were meritorious, then their achievement must be reprehensible. When the scriptures take such a stand, the strength or weakness of particular declarations must be most difficult to ascertain. If you know of any dharma which is superior to ahimsa, and which depends upon direct evidence instead of that of the scriptures, do tell me about it."

Syumarasmi said, "The sruti that is constantly heard by us is that one should perform sacrifices with a wish to reach swarga. Depending on the benefits one wishes for, one makes appropriate preparations for the yagna. Goats, horses, cows, domestic and unfettered birds, herbs and plants, are some of the foods available to living creatures. Daily consumption of food is recommended in the Vedas. In addition, the sruti says that animals and grains are the limbs of a sacrifice, and that Brahma created them along with yagna, with instructions to the gods to perform sacrifices with their help. In all, seven domestic and seven wild animals are identified as fit for sacrifice. Instead of them all being equally fit to be yagnapasus, each succeeding one is inferior to each preceding one. The Vedas also declare that the whole universe, including Purusha, is appointed for sacrifice. Men of ancient times confirm this.

Is there a learned man who does not select, according to his own intelligence, individuals from among living creatures for sacrifice? The lesser animals, human beings, trees and herbs, all wish to attain heaven. The only means to fulfil their wishes is through sacrifice.

There are altogether seventeen angas of a yagna. These comprise deciduous herbs, animals, trees, creepers, clarified butter, milk, curds, meat, other approved articles of sacrifice, land, the cardinal directions, faith and

Kaala, which are thirteen. The Riks, Yajuses, Samans, the Yajamana and Agni, which should be known as the grihastha, bring the tally to nineteen.

The sruti declares that sacrifice is the root of the world and its course. Along with ghrita, milk, curds, cowdung, skin, the hair in her tail, horns and hooves, the cow alone is able to furnish all the needs of a sacrifice. Particular items among these, coupled with ritwijas and upaharas for the pujaris and Brahmanas are gathered by Yajamanas, sacrificers, to perform specific yagnas. We hear from the sruti that everything is created for sacrifices, and it is in this manner that men of ancient times performed sacrifices.

As regards he who conducts sacrifices more out of faith than for the sake of benefit, it is seen that he does not harm any creature nor bear himself with any hostility, nor does he set himself to achieve any worldly task. The things known as the limbs of sacrifice, and its other requirements, support each other when used according to the approved rituals.

I have seen Rishis who follow the Brahmanas regard the smritis into which the Vedas are introduced, as authoritative. The Brahmanas are the source and support of yagnas. The universe and sacrifice are interdependent.

The syllable AUM is the root of the Vedas. Every rite, therefore, should begin with the expression of that syllable of vast import. He who utters the sounds AUM, namas, swaha, svadha and vashat, and performs sacrifices and other rites, need not fear the afterlife in all the three worlds. So say the Vedas, and the best of Rishis.

He in whom abide the Riks, the Yajuses, the Samans and the inflections necessary for completing the rhythm of the Samans in accord with the rules of Vedic grammar, is indeed a Brahmana.

You know, O adorable Brahmana, about the benefits of Agnihotra, the Soma yagna, and other great yagnas. Hence, one should sacrifice and assist at other's sacrifices, without scruples of any kind. He who performs the Jyotishtoma yagna, and the rest that lead to swarga, acquires high rewards hereafter in the form of heavenly beatitude. This is certain, that those who do not perform sacrifices have neither this world, nor the next.

Those who know the revelations of the Vedas regard both kinds of explanations, the ones that urge actions and those that preach abstention, to be equally authoritative.”

CANTO 269

Kapila said, "Knowing that all the fruits of karma are terminable, Yatis embrace samyama and shanti, to attain Brahman through the path of knowledge. There is nothing in any of the worlds that can stop them, for, by mere exercise of their will, they achieve all their wishes.

They are freed from the influence of duality. They never bow down to anything or anyone. They are wise and above all the bonds of want. They are free from every sin. Pure and spotless, they live and roam blissfully wherever they will. Their minds are clear about all moral things and renunciation.

Devoted to Brahman, akin to Brahman, they have taken refuge in Brahman. Transcending sorrow, and freed from rajas, they have acquired the eternal. When the high goal is within reach, where is the need to live as a grihasta?"

Syumarasmi said, "If Brahman is the highest object of acquisition, if it truly is the highest end attained by renunciation, then the importance of the grihastasrama becomes evident. Because, without the grihastasrama no other asrama of life can ever become possible. Indeed, as all living creatures survive because of their dependence on their mothers, so do the three other asramas exist as a result of their dependence on the grihastasrama.

For the welfare of his family, the householder performs sacrifices, and practices penances. Hence, the roots of happiness lie within the domestic

life. All living beings consider procreation of children as a great source of joy. In any asrama other than the family life, this is impossible to achieve.

Every kind of grass and straw, all plants, herbs and crops that yield corn or grain, and others of the kind that grow on hills and mountains, have the grihastasrama as their source. The life of living beings depends upon these crops, and since nothing else other than life is seen in the universe, domesticity may be considered as the haven of the entire universe. Who then speaks the truth that says that domesticity cannot lead to moksha?

Only those who are destitute of faith, wisdom and insight, who are bereft of reputation, idle and toil-worn, who are miserable due to their past evil karma, and those who are ignorant, perceive the abundance of peace in a life of mendicancy. The eternal and clear Vedic distinctions are the causes that sustain the three worlds. The illustrious man of the highest order, who knows the Vedas, is worshipped from the moment he is born. Besides the garbhadhana, men of the enlightened varnas need Veda mantras to accomplish all their tasks in both this and the other world.

Veda mantras are necessary for cremation, to attain and nourish the next body, while gifting cows and other animals to help cross the river that divides the shores of prana from those of Yama, and for the ceremony of pinda dana to ancestors. Even the three classes of Pitris—the Archishmats, Barhishads and Kravyadas—approve of the need of mantras and their efficacy at the time of rites in honour of the deceased.

When the Vedas are so clear about this and it is evident that all human beings are indebted to the Pitris, Rishis and Devas, how then can anyone attain moksha? This false doctrine of ethereal existence called mukti, apparently dressed in colours of truth, but subversive of the real purport of the revelations of the Vedas, has been introduced by learned men robbed of prosperity and consumed by idleness.

A Brahmana who performs approved sacrifices is never seduced by sin. In fact, he attains high regions of felicity along with the animals he has slain in the sacrifices, and gratified by achieving his wishes, succeeds in pleasing the very animals. No one ever succeeds in attaining the Supreme through disregard of the Vedas, not with guile, or deception. On the contrary, one achieves Brahman through practising the rites prescribed in the Vedas."Kapila said, "If actions are obligatory, there are the Darsa, Paurnamasa, Agnihotra, Chaturmasya and others for the man of buddhi. They are full of eternal merit. Why then do something that involves cruelty?

Those who have taken to sannyasa, and know Brahman, succeed in paying their debts to the Devas, Rishis and Pitris. The very gods are unable to trace the path of the trackless person who appoints himself as the soul of all creatures and who looks upon all creatures as one.

Through the guru, one learns about how that which dwells within this body has a fourfold nature, with four doors and four mouths. Endowed with two arms, the organ of speech, a stomach and the organ of pleasure, even the gods are said to have four sensory doors. One should, therefore, strive one's best to keep the senses under control.

Men should not gamble, nor appropriate what belongs to another. They should not assist at the sacrifice of an ignoble person, nor yield to wrath and strike another with hands or feet. The wise man who conducts himself in this way is in control of his limbs.

He should not indulge in vociferous abuse or censure, nor speak words that are vain. He should forbear from duplicity and slander. He should be truthful, sparing in speech and always heedful. In this manner, one should be pure and restrained of speech.

He must not abstain from food entirely, nor should he eat too much. He should renounce greed, and always seek the company of the good. He should eat only as much as is needed for sustenance. Through such behaviour, one controls the stomach.

He should not lustfully take another wife, when he is already married, nor summon a woman to bed except in her season. He should be content with his own wife and not seek congress with other women. Through this manner, he controls his organ of pleasure.

A wise man, who has all these four senses under control, is truly enlightened.

Everything becomes useless to him whose sensory doors are not in check. What can the tapasya of such a man achieve? What can his sacrifices bring about? What can be accomplished by his body?

The Devas know him for a Brahmana who, with a serene heart, sheds his upper garment, sleeps on the bare ground, and makes his arm a pillow. The one who singly enjoys all the happiness that married couples enjoy, who is not distracted by the joys and sorrow of others, and remains focused in meditation, should be known as a Brahmana.

He who rightly understands all this as it exists in reality with its numerous transformations, and who knows what the end is of all created

things, is known by the gods for a Brahmana. He who does not fear any creature and whom no creature fears, who constitutes himself the soul of all creatures, should be known for a Brahmana.

Purity of heart is the true result of all pious deeds. Even when explained by gurus, foolish men bereft of such purity, are not able to gather what is required for the making of a Brahmana. These ignorant men wish for fruits of a different kind—swarga and its passing joys.

Unable to practice even a small part of the good conduct which has descended from time immemorial, which is eternal, and characterised by certainty, it enters as a thread into all our duties, which intelligent men from all modes of life embrace, and transform their individual dharma and penances into formidable weapons to destroy the ignorance and evils of worldliness. Actions that are eternal and fraught with the highest energy, which present visible gains, are considered by fools to be not sanctioned by the scriptures, and thus fruitless and deviations from the proper path.

In truth, however, such karmas are the very opposite of those that are seen in times of distress; it is the very core of heedfulness and is never affected by lust, wrath and other passions of the kind.

As to sacrifices—it is difficult to ascertain all their particulars. If determined, it is exceedingly hard to observe them in practice. If practiced, their fruits are terminable. Mark this well and walk the path of knowledge."

Syumarasmi said, "The Vedas acknowledge karma but also disapprove of it. Where is their authority when their statements contradict each other? Besides, renunciation of actions, yields great benefit. Both these have been indicated in the Vedas. Do speak to me on this subject, O Brahmana!"

Kapila replied, "Through the direct evidence of your senses, you are able to realise the benefits of yoga in this very life. What are the visible results of your actions in pursuit of other objects?"

Syumarasmi replied, "O Brahmana, I am Syumarasmi. I have come here to acquire knowledge. I have begun this conversation in artless candour out of a need for my own good, and not from a thirst for debate. The dark question has taken possession of my mind. O illustrious one, dispel the darkness.

You have said that those who embrace yoga, which leads to Brahman, realise its fruits through the direct evidence of their senses. What, indeed, is so realised by this direct evidence that you also pursue? I have avoided all sciences that have controversy for their sole objective, and studied the

Agamas with enough intensity to have mastered their true meaning. Through the Agamas, I understand the declarations of the Vedas. I also include all those vigyanas based on logic, which are aimed at revealing the real and inner meaning of the Vedas.

Without circumventing the duties laid down for his asrama, one should pursue the practices laid down in the Agamas, which are sure to meet with success. Because of the certainty of its conclusions, the success to which the Agamas leads may be said to be almost realisable by direct evidence. Just as passengers of a ship cannot be taken to the port of their will by being towed by another ship bound for a different port, similarly we can never cross the interminable river of birth and death by being bound to our past karmas.

Speak to me on this subject, O illustrious one! Teach me as a guru does his sishya. There is not a man who has completely renounced all worldly objects, who is perfectly content with himself, who has transcended sorrow, and is perfectly free from disease. No one has entirely abstained from activity of every kind, is free from the need for action or has an absolute distaste for companionship. Like us, even you are seen to give way to joy and indulge in despair, and like other beings, your senses have their functions and objects. Tell me, if we are to investigate happiness, where can pure felicity be found for the four varnas and four asramas, which have the same foundation for their tendencies?"

Kapila said, "Whichever shastras one may follow to perform one's duties, the niyamas, ordinances, laid down in it to rule one's actions never become fruitless. Whatever again the patha that one may tread, with yoga, one is sure to attain the highest only through observing dharma.

Knowledge helps the one who pursues it; even so, deviating from gyana is the cause for suffering. It is evident that you are knowledgeable and dissociated from worldly objects, but have any of you, at any time, acquired the knowledge with which everything is viewed as identical with the one Universal Soul?

There are men who lack proper awareness of the scriptures, and are only happy with debate. Because they are overwhelmed by thirst and aversion, they become slaves of pride and arrogance. These arrogant ignorers of the shastras, these mistaken depredators of Brahman, who do not fully understand the meaning of scriptural tenets, refuse to pursue shanti and samyama, peace and restraint. These men behold emptiness on every

side, and, if perchance they succeed in acquiring the power of knowledge, they never impart it for the benefit of others.

Yielded entirely of the tamoguna, they have tamas as their only refuge. One becomes prone to all the incidents of the nature, which one imbibes. Accordingly, for the one with tamas for his sanctuary, the passions of envy, lust, wrath, pride, falsehood, and vanity are constantly on the rise. Thinking in this strain and considering these faults, Yatis who seek the highest goal, abandon both good and evil, and take to yoga."

Syumarasmi said, "O Brahmana, all that I said in praise of action and renunciation, is agreeable to the scriptures. Nevertheless, it is true that, without proper realisation of the meaning of the scriptures, one does not feel inclined to abide by what they declare. Whatever conduct is consistent with dharma is proper with the shastras. Even the sruti confirms this. Similarly, whatever conduct is inconsistent with dharma, is in conflict with the scriptures. This too is affirmed by the sruti. It is certain that no one can do anything scriptural by transgressing the scriptures, and that which is against the Vedas is unscriptural. The sruti confirms this.

Many men, who believe only what directly appeals to their senses, witness only this world. They do not perceive what the scriptures declare as faults. Like us, they have to give way to sorrow. The objects of the senses with which men like you are concerned are the same ones by which other living creatures are affected. Yet, because of your knowledge of the Soul, and their ignorance of it, how vast is the difference between the two of you.

The four varnas, and the four asramas, with their different dharmas, seek the same single end, Akhanda-Ananda, Universal Bliss.

You possess unquestioned talents and abilities. By identifying a specific path, which is appropriate to reach the goal, and by speaking to me on the infinite Brahman, you have filled my soul with peace. As for us, because we are unable to comprehend the Atman, we are robbed of a proper grasp of reality. Our wisdom is concerned with things that are low, and we are enveloped in thick darkness. The path that you have indicated in order to attain moksha is exceedingly difficult to practice. Only a dispassionate yogi, who has discharged all his karmas, and brought his soul under perfect control, can transgress the declarations of the Vedas with regard to actions, and say that he has mukti. Still, for one who lives in the midst of relatives, this course of conduct is indeed difficult to follow.

If the practices of giving gifts, sacrifices, studying of the Vedas, begetting children, simplicity of conduct, do not bestow mukti on anyone—then fie on him who seeks it, and fie on moksha itself! It seems that the labour spent in its pursuit is fruitless.

One is accused of atheism if he disregards the directives of the Vedas. O illustrious one, I wish to hear about mukti as described in the Vedas after the declarations in favour of karma. Do you tell me the truth, O Brahmana. I sit at your feet as a disciple. Teach me, kindly! I wish to know as much about moksha as is known to you, O learned one."

CANTO 270

Kapila said, "Everyone accepts the authority of the Vedas. People never disregard them. Brahman is of two kinds—as represented by sound, sabdabrahman, and as supreme and intangible, nirguna Brahman. One who knows Brahman represented by sound succeeds in attaining Supreme Brahman. Beginning with garbhadhana, insemination, the body that the progenitor creates with the help of Vedic mantras is cleansed upon birth. Thereafter, its living entity is known as a Brahmana who becomes a vessel fit to receive knowledge of the Brahman. Know that the reward of actions is purity of heart, which leads to mukti.

The person who has gained it can only know whether purity of heart is acquired. The Vedas or inference can never know it. Those who do not cherish any expectation, who give away surplus wealth, who are not covetous, and are free from every kind of affection and aversion, believe that it is their dharma to perform sacrifices. Charity towards deserving persons is the right use of all wealth.

Long ago, there were many men who were never addicted to sinful ways; they performed the prescribed rites of the Veda, and easily achieved what they wished for. Gyana provided them with positive views, through which they did not give in to anger or envy, and helped them remain free from pride and malice. These men were true yogis of pure birth devoted to the good of all creatures. They lived as grihastas very faithful to their svadharma.

There were many kings as well, like Janaka, and many Brahmanas like Yajnavalkya, and others too—all equally blessed and endowed, and devoted to yoga. They were sincere and equal in their behaviour towards all beings. They were satisfied men, gifted with infallible knowledge, and the fruits of their dharma were plainly visible. With pure hearts and good conduct, these men duly observed all vows and believed in Brahman of both forms. Even in times of distress and hardship, they never flinched from their obligations to dharma. Together they performed meritorious deeds in which they found great happiness. And because they never erred, no need ever arose for them to perform any atonement.

Their reliance upon the true course of dharma invested them with irresistible tejas, and in order to earn punya, they ignored their own intelligence and chose to live by the dictates of the scriptures alone. In this way, they were never guilty of guile in the matter of performing deeds of dharma. Because of their undivided observance of the absolute precepts of the scriptures, they were never required to perform penances. There is no expiation for men who observe the edicts of the scriptures. The sruti declares that tapasya exists for only men that are weak and unable to follow the absolute requirements of the sacred law.

In olden days, there were many famed Brahmanas of profound knowledge of the Vedas, who were pure and of righteous conduct. They always worshipped Brahma in the sacrifices, and were free from greed. Gifted with great wisdom, they transcended all the bonds of life. With their yagnas, their vidya, their ethical karmas, their devoted study of the shastras, these men were free from lust and wrath, and they observed pious carriage and actions in the face of all difficulties.

Renowned as they were for performing the duties of their own varnas and asramas, purified as their souls were by their very nature, characterised as they were by thorough sincerity, devoted as they were to peace, and mindful as they were of their svadharma—these men were identical with infinite Brahman. Furthermore, the eternal sruti informs us about how the tapasya of exalted men become efficacious weapons for the destruction of all earthly yearnings.

The Brahmanas say that sadachara, good conduct, and its eternal unchangeable characteristics may be traced to the most ancient times. Even though good men may deviate from it in some situations, they eventually turn to it in times of distress. As it is identical with awareness—lust, wrath

and other evil passions can never prevail upon it. This is why, in days of old, in all humankind, there was no sin or transgression. Men, who were unable to practice good conduct in its entirety, subsequently distributed it into four divisions that correspond with the four asramas of life.

Good men who observe sadachara from all the four asramas, beginning with sannyasa, vanaprastha, grihasta and brahmacharya, all attain the highest goal of Brahman. As affirmed in the Vedas, countless Brahmanas have acquired ananta and now reside as shining stars and constellations across the firmament—as a result of renunciation. If such men are reborn, they are never tainted by residual sins accumulated from previous lives.

Indeed, the brahmacharin who has dutifully served his guru, devoted himself to yoga and realised the Atman, is truly a Brahmana. Who else would deserve to be called a Brahmana? Actions alone determine who is a Brahmana—deeds must be held accountable for the happiness or misery of a person. Once again, we hear from the sruti about men who conquer evil passions and acquire purity of heart. Of how they perceive everything to be Brahman, because of the infinity they attain and of the knowledge of Brahman that they acquire.

The duties for these chaste men who have moksha and brahmagyana as their sole aim are equally laid down for all the four varnas and the four asramas of life. Truly, Brahmanas of pure hearts and restrained Souls always acquire that knowledge. He who is content and his Soul is set on renunciation, is seen as the refuge of true knowledge.

Parityaga, in which there is wisdom that leads to moksha, is essential for a Brahmana. Since ages, times out of mind, it has passed down from guru to sishya. Nirvritti, abstention, sometimes exists mixed with the duties of other asramas, but whether it exists in that state or by itself, one practices it in keeping with the measure of one's spiritual maturity. Abstinence is of supreme benefit to everyone. Only the weak fail to practice it. The pure-hearted man who seeks to attain Brahman is rescued from the world of suffering."

Syumarasmi said, "Among those who have surrendered to joys of ownership, men who are charitable, others who perform sacrifices, some who study the Vedas, and even the sannyasin, O Brahmana, who indeed from these, acquires the highest place in swarga when they depart from this world? I ask you this, O Brahmana. Do you tell me truly."

Kapila replied, “The grihastas are certainly auspicious and acquire excellence of every kind. Still, they are unable to enjoy the felicity that attaches to parityaga. Even you must see this.”

Syumarasmi said, “You depend upon knowledge as the means for mukti. The grihastas have invested their faith in dharma. Even so, it is said that the goal of all the asramas of life is mukti. No difference, therefore, is distinguished between them with regard to either their superiority or inferiority. O illustrious one, please tell me then how this matter truly stands.”

Kapila said, “Karma only cleanses the body. Gyana, however, is the highest goal. When the heart is pure, and the bliss of Brahman abides in knowledge, then, benevolence, forgiveness, peace, compassion, truthfulness and candour, non-violence, absence of pride, modesty, renunciation and abstention from work are all naturally attained.

These form the path that lead to Brahman. By them, one attains the highest. To the wise, it becomes clear that the purification of the heart is attained by performing one’s svadharma. This, indeed, is the highest goal to be gained by Brahmanas.

He, who acquires knowledge of the Vedas, and the finer aspects of kriya, is well versed in the Vedas. Any other man is only as a bag of wind. He who understands the Vedas knows everything, for everything is established on them. Truly, the past, present and future all exist in the Vedas.

The one conclusion deducible from all the shastras is that this universe both exists and does not exist. To the gyani, all that is perceived is both satya and asatya. To him, all this is both the end and the middle. This truth rests upon all the Vedas, that when complete nirvritti occurs one receives what is sufficient.

Then again, the highest satisfaction follows and rests upon moksha, which is absolute, exists as the soul of all mortal and immortal things, is acclaimed as the Paramatman soul, and is the highest goal of gyana.

It is identical with all being, chala and achala, is complete, and is perfect felicity; it is without duality, and is the most excellent of all things. It is the Avyakta Brahman, as well as the cause from where the unmanifest has emerged, and is without decay of any kind.

The three causes of perfect joy are an ability to subdue the senses, forgiveness and abstention from activity, which is born from an absence of

desire. With the help of these three qualities, sages successfully reach the uncreated Brahman, which is the prime cause of the universe, is unchangeable and beyond destruction. I bow to that Brahman, which is identical with him who knows it.”

CANTO 271

Yudhishtira says, 'Bhaarata, the Vedas speak of dharma, labha and ananda. Tell me, even so, O Pitamaha, the attainment of which amongst these three is superior.'

Bhishma replies, 'There is an old tale about this, of the boon that Kundadhara once conferred upon one of his devotees. Listen to it.

Once upon a time, a poor Brahmana was in search of dharma. In order to perform sacrifices he constantly sought wealth for which he practiced austere tapasya. Committed to accomplish his purpose, he worshipped the Devas with great devotion, but he failed to acquire wealth by such worship. Hence, he reflected to himself, "Who is the Deva, hitherto neglected by men, who may be favourably disposed to reward me without delay?"

While calmly meditating in this manner, he beheld stationed before him the retainer of the Devas, the cloud-named Kundadhara.

As soon as he saw the mighty-armed being, the Brahmana's feelings of devotion were excited, and he said to himself, "This one will surely bestow prosperity upon me. Indeed, his form indicates as much. He lives in close proximity to the gods and other men do not yet worship him. He will verily give me abundant wealth, instantly."

The Brahmana, then, worshipped Kundadhara with dhupa, sugandha and malyadaman, garlands of flowers, of the most superior kind, and diverse other offerings.

Worshipped in this manner, Kundadhara was very pleased and spoke these favourable words to the Brahmana, "The wise have ordained redemption for he who is guilty of brahmahatya, who drinks alcohol, steals or neglects punya vratas. There is no atonement, however, for the man who is ungrateful.

Expectation has a child named sorrow. Ire is the child of envy. Cupidity is the child of deceit. Whereas ingratitude is barren and has no children."

After this, the Brahmana stretched out on a bed of kusa grass, and infused with the tejas of Kundadhara, he beheld all living beings in a dream. Indeed, because of his absence of passion, his penances and devotion, the chaste and celibate Brahmana witnessed that night the result of his devotion to Kundadhara.

Truly, O Yudhishtira, he saw the high-souled and resplendent Manibhadra stationed in the midst of the Devas, engaged in dispensing wisdom and instruction. The gods were engrossed in bestowing kingdoms and riches upon men, prompted by their good deeds, and in seizing them from men who declined from dharma.

Then, O bull of Bharata's race, Kundadhara bowed low, and prostrated himself on the ground before the Devas in the presence of all the Yakshas. At the behest of the Devas, Manibhadra addressed Kundadhara and said, "What does Kundadhara wish?"

Kundadhara replied, "If, indeed, the lords are pleased with me, that Brahmana there reverences me greatly and I pray for some favour being shown to him, something that may bring him happiness."

Hearing this, Manibhadra said, "Rise, O Kundadhara! Your boon is granted. Rejoice! If this Brahmana wishes for affluence, let as much wealth as he needs be given to him. At the behest of the Devas I will give him untold riches."

Kundadhara was aware of the fleeting nature of humankind, O Yudhishtira, so he decided to inspire the Brahmana towards tapasya.

Kundadhara said, "I do not, O giver of wealth, beg for prosperity on behalf of this Brahmana. I wish that you bestow another boon upon him. For this devotee of mine, I do not seek mountains of pearls and gems nor the whole earth with all her riches. I desire, however, that he should be virtuous. Let his heart find pleasure in goodness. Let him have purity. Let

dharma be the loftiest of all objectives with him. Such is the boon that meets with my approval."

Manibhadra replied, "The fruits of virtue are always sovereignty and happiness of diverse kinds. Ever freed from physical pain of every kind, let him enjoy such rewards."

Nevertheless, Kundadhara repeatedly pleaded for dharma alone for the Brahmana, and the Devas were greatly pleased with this.

Manibhadra said, "The gods are all pleased with you and the Brahmana, who will become a virtuous man, and his mind will be devoted to dharma."

Kundadhara was delighted, O Yudhishtira, with the fulfilment of his wish. The boon that he received was unattainable by anybody else.

The Brahmana saw, scattered around him, reams of delicate silks and other priceless things. With a total disregard for them, he came to loathe the world.

The Brahmana said, "When Kundadhara does not value good deeds, who else will? I had better go into the forest to lead a life of tapasya."

With an abhorrence for the world, and through the grace of the gods, the peerless Brahmana entered the jungle and began the austerest of penances.

Subsisting upon fruits and roots left over after serving the Devas and Atithis, the mind of the enlightened one, O monarch, was firmly set upon dharma. Gradually, the Brahmana renounced fruits and roots, and took to eating leaves for his food. Later, he forsook these as well and survived just on water, until at last he passed many years by living on air alone. All the while, his strength did not diminish. This seemed most marvellous. Devoted to dharma, and engaged in the severest austerities, he eventually acquired spiritual perception.

He then reflected to himself, "If someone pleases me, and I wish wealth upon him, my words will come true." His face sparkled with smiles, as he once more took to even stricter tapasya. Now that he had won even greater ascetic success, he thought that he could create the very highest objects, through sheer power of his will. "If I merely wish sovereignty upon someone I am pleased with, he will immediately become a king, for my wish will instantly come true."

While he was thinking in this way, Kundadhara, inspired by his friendship for the Brahmana and no less in his yoga shakti, materialised, O

Bhaarata, before his friend and devotee. Seeing him, the Brahmana offered the customary adorations. The Brahmana, however, soon felt some surprise, O king.

Turning to the Brahmana, Kundadhara said, “Through this excellent spiritual vision you have now realised, observe the end that is achieved by kings, and survey all the worlds besides.” From a distance, the Brahmana observed thousands of kings sunk in hell.

Kundadhara said, “You feel that even though you worshipped me with devotion, all you received in return is sorrow. Of what use and value is my boon to you? Look at the end for which men crave the satisfaction of carnal pleasures. The door of heaven is shut to them.”

The Brahmana witnessed many men living in this world, embracing lust, anger, cupidity, fear, pride, sleep, hesitation and idleness.’

Kundadhara said, “Human beings are enslaved with these vices. The gods are afraid of men. At the behest of the Devas, these vices mar and disconcert Manavas on every side. No man can become virtuous unless permitted by the Devas. It is with their consent that you are able to give away kingdoms and wealth through your tapasya.”

When the Brahmana heard this, he prostrated on the ground before Kundadhara, and said, “You have indeed opened my eyes. Unconscious of your great affection towards me, through the influence of desire and cupidity, I failed to show gratitude to you.”

Kundadhara embraced him and replied, “I forgive you.” And there and then, Kundadhara disappeared.

The Brahmana then ranged through all the worlds with the help of the yoga shakti bestowed on him through Kundadhara’s grace. One is able to sail through the skies and to fructify all one’s wishes and purposes, and finally reach the highest goal, with the energy gained from sattva and tapasya.

The Devas, Brahmanas, Yakshas, Charanas and Sajjanas, good men, always adore those that are virtuous but never those that are rich or given up to the indulgence of their desires. The gods are truly propitious to you since your mind is devoted to dharma. In wealth there may be some brief happiness but in dharma the measure of happiness is endless.’

CANTO 272

Yudhishtira says, ‘Amongst the myriad sacrifices, all of which are regarded to have but one object, the cleansing of the heart or the glory of God, tell me, O Pitamaha, which of these yagnas is assigned only for the sake of dharma and not for the acquisition of either heaven or prosperity?’

Bhishma says, ‘About this, Narada once spoke of a Brahmana who lived in the Unchha vrata to perform yagnas. Listen to that story.

Narada said, “In one of the superior kingdoms distinguished for virtue, there once lived a Brahmana who worshipped Vishnu in sacrifices and, devoted to penances, lived according to the Unchha vrata.

For his sustenance, he ate syamaka, suryaparni, suvarchala and other herbs that are bitter to the taste; but, because of his tapasya, they tasted sweet.

At peace with all the animals, he lived as a hermit in the forest, and gained ascetic success.

With roots and fruits, O scorcher of foes, he adored Vishnu in sacrifices that were intended to bestow swarga upon him.

The Brahmana’s name was Satya, and his wife was Pushkaradharini and her garments were made of fallen plumes of peacocks. She was pure-minded, and had liberated herself through many austere vows. A benevolent woman, she did not approve of her husband’s addiction to performing sacrifices that were cruel. Still, summoned as she was to take her rightful

seat by his side to perform a yagna, she tolerated his conduct lest she incur his curse. At the behest of her lord who was its hotri, she performed the yagna, unwillingly.

In the forest near the Brahmana's asrama, there lived a neighbour, the virtuous Parnada of Sukra's vamsa, in the form of a deer.

He addressed Satya, in a clear voice and said, "Your yagna will be most inappropriate if you perform a sacrifice in a manner which is defective in mantras and other rituals. I, therefore, ask you to slay and cut me into pieces as an offering for your sacrificial fire. Do this and you will ascend to swarga without any sin or guilt."

At once, Savitri, the presiding Goddess of the Sun, appeared in her embodied form and insisted that the Brahmana take heed of the deer's words. Despite her insistence, the Brahmana replied, "I will not kill this deer who lives with me as my neighbour."

Since Devi Savitri did not wish to see defects in the sacrifice, she acceded to the words of the Brahmana and entered the yagna to survey the nether world.

The deer joined his hands and once again pleaded with Satya to be cut into pieces and sacrificed. Nevertheless, Satya embraced him in friendship and told him to go his way. The deer obeyed him and went away. Hardly had he taken eight steps when he returned, and pleaded once more, "Indeed, slay me. For if you do, I will surely acquire dharma. Let me give you spiritual drishti, whereby you will witness the celestial apsaras and the beautiful rathas of the exalted Gandharvas."

Satya examined the sight at length with longing. He also noted the deer's willingness to be sacrificed, and thinking that swarga was attainable only through slaughter, he admired the deer's counsel.

It was Dharma himself who had become a deer that lived in those jungles for many years. He provided for the Brahmana's salvation and counselled him, saying that the slaughter of living creatures is not harmonious with the ordinances laid down for yagnas.

The great magnitude of the penances of Satya, whose mind had entertained the need for killing the deer, diminished vastly because of the very thought. Thus, himsa towards living creatures forms no part of a true yagna.

The illustrious Dharma at once assumed his real form and assisted Satya to perform the sacrifice. Thereafter, the Brahmana's inner nature was

as one with that of his wife Pushkaradharini.

Ahimsa is that dharma which is complete in respect of its rewards. The religion, however, of cruelty is beneficial only insofar as it leads to a terminable heaven. I have spoken to you of dharma, which, indeed, is the religion of those who speak of Brahman.'

CANTO 273

Yudhishtira says, 'By what means does a man become paapi, a sinner? How does he achieve punya, how does he attain parityaga, and how does he achieve moksha?'

Bhishma says, 'You are well aware of all dharma. Your question is only for affirmation of your own findings. Listen now about sin, virtue, renunciation and emancipation, to their very roots.

Upon the perception of any one of the five senses—form, taste, scent, sound and touch—desire, or aversion, as the case may be, responds to it at first. Accordingly, one performs various laborious tasks and actions. As in the case of pleasure, one struggles hard to experience it repeatedly. Gradually, attachment, aversion, greed and errors of judgement arise.

The mind of the man overwhelmed by greed and error, and who is affected by attachment and aversion, is never fixed on dharma. Instead, it turns to hypocrisy to perform good deeds. Indeed, with the help of deceit and deception it then seeks to acquire wealth and virtue, artha and dharma.

When a man succeeds, O son of Kuru's vamsa, in winning wealth with duplicity, his heart becomes fixed on such means of acquisition. He then begins to perform sinful deeds, unmindful of the admonitions of the wise and of well-wishers. He responds to them with answers plausibly consistent with reason and agreeable to the injunctions of the scriptures. Born of attachment and error, his sins rapidly increase, for he thinks, speaks, and acts sinfully.

His advent on the path of sin and his evil ways are marked by the virtuous. And, even as birds of similar species fly together, those with similar sinful traits embrace him as a friend. He does not succeed in winning happiness even here. Where then would he succeed in winning happiness hereafter? In this manner, he becomes a paapi, a sinner.

Listen now as I speak to you of the righteous man. As long as such a man seeks the good of others, he succeeds in winning well-being for himself. By practising duties that are fraught with other people's weal, he eventually attains a highly pleasant end.

He, who foresees the faults, mentioned earlier, who is adept in judging happiness and sorrow and how each is brought about, and who respectfully attends on those that are righteous, makes progress in achieving virtue. The mind of such a man takes delight in sattva, and he lives on, making dharma his support.

If he sets his heart on the acquisition of wealth, he desires only such wealth as may be gained through dharma. Surely, he nurtures the roots of only such things in which he sees punya. In this way, he becomes a man of dharma and acquires friends that are virtuous. With good friends, wealth and children acquired, he revels in happiness both here and in the hereafter.

Remember this, O Bhaarata, the mastery that a man attains over sound, touch, taste, form and scent, represent the fruits of dharma. Even though he gains these rewards, O Yudhishtira, he does not give in to joy; instead, guided by gyana, he takes to sannyasa, and ceases to indulge in gratifying the senses, whereby he succeeds in freeing himself from passion. Even so, he does not discard virtue or righteous actions. Once he realises the transitory nature of all the worlds, he strives to abandon even punya karma with its rewards of swarga and sukha, and endeavours to attain moksha. In time, he abandons all indulgence and sin, embraces renunciation, becomes chaste, and eventually does attain mukti.

O Bhaarata, I have now replied to your queries on papam, dharma, vairagya and moksha. You should, therefore, O Yudhishtira, adhere to sattva in all situations. Eternal will be the success, O son of Kunti, of you who respect dharma.'

CANTO 274

Yudhishtira says, 'You say, O Pitamaha, that mukti is to be won by certain means and not through others. I wish to know more about these methods, O Anagha.'

Bhishma says, 'O Rajarishi, your question about this subtle subject is worthy of you, for you always try to accomplish your goals through appropriate means. The image of a jar remains in the potter's mind as long as he is moulding it, and disappears once it is complete. Similarly, the cause, which urges men who regard dharma as the root of advancement and prosperity, ceases to function for those who seek mukti. The path to the eastern ocean is not the same as the one that leads to the western ocean. There is only one path that leads to moksha, and it is different from those that lead to earthly possessions. Listen, as I explain this in detail.

To overcome anger, one practices forgiveness and discards all ambition to uproot desire. To overcome sleep, embrace the sattva guna, and resist fear through awareness. To conquer prana, meditate upon the Atman.

Patience dispels desire, aversion and lust, whereas the study of truth eliminates error, ignorance and suspicion. In pursuit of knowledge, one should avoid insouciance and inquiry after things of no value.

Through frugal and easily digestible food, one should rid oneself of all disorders and diseases. With contentment, one should dispel greed and confusion, and all worldly concerns should be avoided by a knowledge of the truth.

Through benevolence, one should quell iniquity, and with love for all creatures, one should acquire virtue. One should avoid expectation with the observation that it is concerned with the future; and one should discard wealth by abandoning desire itself.

With the knowledge that the world is transitory, the wise should forgo affection. Through yoga, they should subdue hunger, with benevolence shun all ideas of self-importance, and by being content, banish all manner of craving. Procrastination must be overcome with timely action and uncertainty through confidence. With the help of taciturnity and courage, one should overcome every kind of fear.

Speech and the mind must be controlled by buddhi, which in turn is restrained with gyana. Gyana, again, is disciplined through awareness of the Atman, and finally the Paramatman masters the Atman. This last is attainable by those who are pure of actions and gifted with serenity of the Soul.

Discard desire, wrath, greed, fear, sleep, and silently practice meditation, study, charity, truth, modesty, candour, forgiveness, purity of heart and of food, and mastery over the senses. These are all favourable to yoga, and help increase one's energy, dispel sins, fulfil wishes and help gain inclusive knowledge.

When a man purifies his paapa, acquires tejas and mastery of his indriyas, he then proceeds to subdue kama and krodha, in order to attain Brahman.

Gyana, yoga, freedom from desire and wrath, absence of pride and haughtiness, freedom from anxiety and paucity of attachment to home and family, constitute the road to moksha. This path is gentle, delightful and pure. Similarly, to restrain speech, the body and the mind, from a lack of desire, also comprises the path to mukti.'

CANTO 275

Bhishma says, 'There is an ancient tale of a discourse on this subject that took place between Narada and Asita-Devala. Once upon a time, Narada queried the most intelligent of men, Devala, about the origin and the destruction of all creatures.

Narada said, "From where, O Brahmana, has this universe, been created? Whence again does the universal destruction come, and into whom does the universe merge? O Muni, explain this to me."

Asita-Devala said, "When the Paramatman wishes to exist in manifold forms he creates all beings, and the gyanis say that the materials from which he creates them are known as the five great essences, the Panchamahabhutas. Buddhi thereafter urges Kaala to create other objects from the five. He, who claims that there is anything else besides these, is wrong. Realise, O Narada, that these five are eternal, indestructible and without beginning or end. With Kaala as their sixth, Apah, Akasa, Prithvi, Vayu and Agni are naturally endowed with great tejas. Surely, there is nothing higher or superior to these in energy. No one can affirm the existence of anything else based on conclusions reached from the srutis or from arguments drawn from reason. If anyone does so, his assertion would be idle or vain.

Know that these six influence the cause of all effects. All of this, which you perceive, is called asat. These five, and time, along with the effects of past deeds, and ignorance, which form the eight eternal essences

are the causes of the birth and the destruction of all creatures. On their death, creatures return to the five Mahabhutas, and when they are born, they emerge from the very same source.

Indeed, his body is made of earth; his ear has its origin in space; his eye has light for its cause; his breath is of wind and his blood is of water. The eyes, nose, ears, skin and the tongue are the senses. These, the learned know, exist for the perception of the objects of the senses. Sight, sound, smell, touch and taste are the functions of the senses that are concerned with five objects in five ways. Realise their likeness in qualities, through the inference of reason.

Although form, scent, taste, touch and sound appear to be individually apprehended by the five senses in five different manners, in reality, it is the Soul that experiences them through the senses, which are inert by their very nature.

Chitta is superior to the five senses. Manas is higher than Chitta. Greater than manas is buddhi, and kshetrajna transcends buddhi.

At first, a living creature perceives different objects through the senses. With manas, he reflects over them, and with the help of buddhi, he arrives at a certitude of knowledge. Equipped with buddhi, he ascertains objects perceived through the senses. Men who know the science of Adhyatma consider the five indriyas, Chitta, manas and buddhi, as instruments of knowledge.

The hands, feet, the anal duct, generative organ and the mouth, form the five organs of action. The mouth is considered an organ of action because it contains the means of speech, and of eating. The feet are mediums of motion and the hands of conducting various activities. The anal duct and the penis are two organs that exist for a similar purpose—evacuation. The first is for excretion of faeces, the second for that of urine as also of the vital seed in times of mating.

Besides these, there is a sixth channel of action: physical energy. These then are the six instruments of kama according to the shastras. I have now identified all the organs of knowledge and action, and all the qualities of the five primal essences.

When the organs get fatigued, they cease to function and grow lethargic, and the entity within the body, falls asleep. Even so, the functions of the mind do not cease, and it continues to concern itself with its goals. This is known as the svapnavastha, the dream state.

In jagratavastha, the wakeful state, there are three aspects of the mind—those of sattva, rajas and tamas: goodness, passion and darkness. In svapnavastha too, the mind relates with the same three states. When these gunas connect with enjoyable actions, and appear in dreams, they meet with approval.

Happiness, success, knowledge and neutrality are the signs of sattva. The states that the living beings experience in their wakeful hours are replayed in their memory when they sleep and dream.

The passage of our impressions from wakefulness to dreams, and the reverse, become transparent in the state of consciousness known as sushupti, dreamless sleep, which is eternal, and desirable.

There are five means of gyana, and five of karma. Along with saririka shakti—physical energy—manas, buddhi, Chitta and the traigunas, they are seventeen. These seventeen, with avidya making eighteen, dwell in the body attached to the Jivatma that owns the body. When the Jivatma leaves the body, the eighteen cease to co-exist in the body. The eighteen attributes, along with the eternal entity, which abides in the body, and ruchira, digestion, bring the total to twenty, and form that which is known as the Panchamahabhutas, the combination of the five.

There is a being called Mahat, which, with the help of prana, supports this combination of the twenty qualities, and in the event of the destruction of the body, Vayu, wind, is the only element left with Mahat.

Every living being resolves into the five constituent elements once his merits and demerits are exhausted; and receives a new body based on the punya and paapa accumulated through his deeds in the previous one. As his elements result from avidya, kama and kriya, and moved by Kaala, like a man who changes houses in succession, he repeatedly migrates from one body to another. The wise who witness this migration, do not give in to sorrow at seeing death. Only the ignorant, who are erroneously attached to relationships, where none exists in reality, look at such physical transitions and mourn.

Jiva is no one's relative; there is none again who belongs to him. Ever alone, he creates his own body, happiness, and sorrow. He is never born, nor does he ever die. Freed from the bond of the body, he succeeds sometimes in gaining the highest end. Deprived of the body, liberated through the exhaustion of paapa and punya, jiva at last attains Brahman.

The Samkhya school advocates gyana, in order to exhaust paapa and punya. When jiva gains the condition of Brahman, the Rishis consider it to have attained its highest goal.”

CANTO 276

Yudhishtira says, ‘Cruel and sinful that we are, alas, we have slain brothers, fathers, grandsons, kinsmen, friends and sons. How, O Pitamaha, will we dispel this thirst for kingdom and wealth? Ah! Through this thirst have we perpetrated so many sinful deeds.’

Bhishma says, ‘Listen to this old story which narrates the reply of the ruler of the Videhas to the queries of Mandavya.

The king of the Videhas said, “I own nothing, yet I live in great happiness. If my entire kingdom of Mithila were to be reduced to ashes in a great fire, still I would lose nothing. Tangible possessions, however valuable, are a source of despair to the wise, while belongings of even little value fascinate the ignorant. All worldly joys and heavenly bliss do not measure up to even a sixteenth part of the felicity that attends the complete absence of desire.

Like the cow’s horns that grow as she ages, likewise the thirst for wealth increases with each new acquisition. Any object for which one feels an attachment turns into a source of pain when it is lost. Therefore, one should not cherish cupidity, for it leads to sorrow. One should abandon aspiration and utilise wealth for the purpose of dharma.

The wise man always sees himself in others and, since he has purified his soul as well as acquired success, he lets go of everything. Through discarding of truth, falsehood, grief, joy, the agreeable and disagreeable, fearlessness and fear, one meets peace and freedom from anxiety.

Foolish men find it difficult to discard the thirst for worldly objects. The thirst wanes not with the decay of the body, and is perceived as a fatal disease by the wise. He, who succeeds in shunning it, is sure to find felicity.

The man of dharma, who observes how his own behaviour has become bright as the moon and free from evil, succeeds in happily attaining great fame both here and in the hereafter."

The Brahmana was overjoyed with these words of the king, and appreciating them, Mandavya advanced along the path of moksha.'

CANTO 277

Yudhishtira says, ‘Kaala, the terror of all creatures, is running his course. What is the source of dharma after which one should strive? Tell me this, O Pitamaha.’

Bhishma says, ‘There is an ancient tale of a conversation between a father and his son. Listen to it, O Yudhishtira.

Once, O son of Pritha, a twice-born man devoted only to the study of the Vedas had a very intelligent son named Medhavin, who was a pandita on the subject of moksha dharma. The son one day asked a question of his father, who although ignorant of dharma, followed the precepts of the Vedas.’

The son said, “When the life span allotted to men is so short, O pita, what should a learned man do? Tell me this truly, O father, so that with your guidance, I may gain dharma.”

The father said, “After the study of the Vedas is completed as a brahmacharin, O son, one should, as a grihasta, aspire for children for the salvation of one’s ancestors. Later, after installing one’s sacred fire, and completing the customary yagnas, one should retire into the jungle to live in solitude as a vanaprastha. After this, one should become a sannyasi and calmly await death.”

The son said, “When the world is under attack and besieged on all sides; while such inescapable thunderbolts of fate fall in every direction, how can you speak so calmly?”

The father said, “What assails the world? What smothers it? What are the powerful calamities that fall on every side? Do you wish to frighten me with your words?”

The boy said, “Death storms the world. Decrepitude surrounds it. Days and nights constantly descend on it like thunderbolts. Why do you not take heed of these?

When I know that death waits for no one, how can I possibly wait for him, wrapped as I am in the ignorant pursuit of my petty concerns? Who can be happy in the knowledge that his life wears away with the passage of each night. Indeed, his position is similar to that of a fish that lives in shallow water, which evaporates each day.

As carefree as a man who casually plucks flowers, death strikes in the very midst of one’s tasks and ambitions. Hence, that which is kept for completion tomorrow should be done today, and that which one thinks of doing in the afternoon should be done in the morn. Death does not wait; it does not care if a man’s concerns are achieved or not. Therefore, do not delay, and attend to your needs today. Beware of Yama, from whom there is no escape, that he may not crush you before you finish your tasks. Can anyone be certain that death will not arrive this very day?

Life is uncertain and before one’s deeds are accomplished, Yama drags one away. One should, therefore, begin to embrace the sattva guna while one is still young. Through dharma, one is ensured eternal happiness both here and hereafter.

Overpowered by folly, man girds up his loins to slave on behalf of sons and wives. He satisfies these relatives through foul or fair means. Even such a man who is so devoted to his family—death seizes him, and makes off, like a tiger taking a sleeping deer. Even though man is busy fulfilling diverse wishes, and his desires remain unsatisfied, Yama seizes him and runs away as a she-wolf snatches a sheep.

‘This has been done’, ‘This remains to be done’, ‘This other is half done’, are words that one may say in one’s defence. However, death does not heed them, and hauls one away. Yama carries away the man who is yet to acquire the fruit of his labour. Yama claims the weak, the strong, the wise, the brave, the foolish, the learned, and him who has not yet realised his hopes.

From the moment a man is born, it is impossible for him to avoid death, decrepitude, disease, sorrow and their like. How, then, O father, can

you sit so relaxed? These two, decay and death, own all forms of life, chala and achala.

When Yama's soldiers are on the march, nothing except the power of truth can resist them. For in satya alone dwells immortality. The delight of being in the midst of men is the pasture of death. The sruti says that the forest is the true range for the Devas, while the joy one feels in the midst of men, is the cord that binds one in helplessness. Men of dharma cut this cord and escape. Whereas sinners fail to sever it.

He who practices ahimsa with fellow beings, through thought, word and deed, and does not deprive them of their means of sustenance, is never harmed by any creature. Therefore, one must exercise the vow of truth, be firmly honest and seek nothing but satya.

One must restrain one's senses and look upon all creatures equally, and overcome death with the help of dharma. Both immortality and death are founded in the body. Death is met from ignorance, and immortality is won by truth.

Once I transcend kama and krodha, and practice ahimsa, I will embrace dharma and happily avoid death like an immortal.

When the sun moves northwards, I will restrain my senses and perform the Santi yagna, the Brahma yagna and the yagnas of speech, mind and actions. How can I conduct a brutal Pasu yagna? Gifted as I am with wisdom, how can I, like a savage Pisacha, commit hatya for a yagna, in the manner of Kshatriyas? That, too, a yagna with temporary benefits? I am atmaja, self-born, O pita, and without taking recourse to procreation, I will rest in my own atmabhava. For my salvation, I have no need of children; I will perform the yagna of the Atman.

He who is moderate in words and thoughts, he who performs tapasya, keeps vairagya and engages in yoga, is sure to acquire everything through these. There is no perception equal to knowledge, nor a reward to match awareness, nor a sorrow like attachment and no happiness like renunciation.

For a Brahmana, there is no wealth like solitude, an equal view towards all creatures, veracity in speech, unwavering good conduct, total abandonment of chastisement, simplicity and the gradual abstention from all actions. What need have you with wealth, relatives, friends and wives? You are a Brahmana and you have Mrityu to meet. Seek within yourself. Where have your forefathers gone and your father too?"

The father paid heed to his son's words and conformed to their directions, O Rajan! You also must behave in the same manner, and devote yourself to dharma.'

CANTO 278

Yudhishtira says, 'Of what conduct must a man be, of what actions, of what kind of knowledge, and to what must he be devoted, in order to attain Brahman, which is immutable and transcends Prakriti?'

Bhishma says, 'He who worships the moksha dharma, is frugal with food, and the master of his senses, gains the realm which is changeless and transcends Prakriti. He should leave being a grihasta, evaluate gain and loss in the same light, restrain his senses, ignore all objects of need even when they are at hand, and embrace sannyasa.

Neither with the eye, nor with word, nor in thought, should he disparage another. He should speak no evil of any person either in or out of his hearing. He must abstain from himsa to any creature, and conduct himself observing the course of the sun. Born into this life, he should not dislike any creature. He should disregard opprobrious speeches, and never in arrogance deem himself superior to another. When provoked by another, he must still respond in agreeable words. Even when calumniated, he should not defame in return.

He should remain unbiased amidst fellow human beings. He must not visit many houses to collect alms, nor should he revisit the same houses. Even when abused by others, he should remain firm and refrain from addressing his abusers in unpleasant or obscene words. Instead, he must show compassion and abstain from himsa. He should be fearless, and control self-laudation.

The man of moderate senses should seek charity in a house where the food is already prepared, and the family has finished their meal and the dishes have been washed. He must content himself with only as much as is necessary for his sustenance. Even the smallest morsel that causes pleasure he should covet.

When he fails to get what he wants, he should not cherish discontent, nor be pleased with his gains. He should never wish for such things as yearned for by ordinary men, and never accept an invitation to dine at anybody's house. A man like him must shun gains even though they may be obtained with honour.

He should never find fault with the food placed before him, nor should he praise its merits. He must seek a bed and a seat away from populated places—a deserted house, the foot of a tree, a forest or a cave.

Without allowing his practices to be known by others, or concealing their real nature by appearing to adopt others, he should enter his own self. Through yoga and sannyasa, he must remain perfectly equable, constant and steadily fixed. He should not earn either merit or demerit through actions. He should be ever satisfied, joyous, fearless, always engaged in mantra japa, mowna, and wedded to sannyasa.

Aware of the cycle of birth and death of his body with the senses, and seeing how other beings appear and vanish, he should become free from want and learn to view everyone uniformly.

Subsisting frugally upon both cooked and uncooked food, he must subdue his senses, and gain peace of the self through the self. He should control the rising impulses of words, mind, wrath, envy, hunger and lust. He should devote himself to tapasya to purify his heart, and never allow censure to affect him.

He should come to accept a condition of neutrality to all creatures, and view praise and blame with indifference. This, indeed, is the holiest and the highest path of sannyasa. The venerable sannyasin should restrain his senses from all things and remain aloof from all attachments. He should never visit places already known to him, nor meet acquaintances from his earlier asramas of life.

A nomad, and friend to all creatures, he must devote himself to meditation of the Atman, and never mingle with grihastas and Munis. He should eat such food as he may receive without effort and design, and never allow pleasure to ensnare his heart. To the wise, sannyasa is the means for

the attainment of mukti. For the ignorant, the practice of these ways is exceedingly laborious.

The Rishi Harita declared all this to be the path by which moksha is achieved. He who leaves his home with an assurance of total ahimsa towards all creatures, gains many bright regions of eternal felicity.'

CANTO 279

Yudhishtira says, ‘O Pitamaha, all men speak of us as being highly fortunate. In truth, there is no one more wretched than we are. Though honoured by the world, O best of the Kurus, and while born among men, we were begotten by the very Devas, yet, when so much anguish has been our fate, it seems, O sublime lord, that the cause of all sorrow is to be born in an embodied form. Alas, when will we adopt sannyasa, which annihilates this anguish?

To never incur rebirth, Rishis, in addition to their rigid vows, must be freed from the five breaths, mind, intellect, desire, wrath, greed and fear. Furthermore, they should be free from the ten organs of knowledge and action, the five faults of yoga, and sleep—that constitute the main causes for binding man to repeated births—and from the five objects of the senses and the traigunas. Ah, Parantapa, when will we succeed in forsaking sovereignty to adopt a life of sannyasa?’

Bhishma says, ‘Everything, O great monarch, has an end. Everything has bounds assigned to it. Even rebirth, it is well known, has an end. In this world, there is nothing that is immutable.

You consider, O king, your affluence to be a fault in you. In our present subject of disquisition, this is not untrue. Still, you know dharma, and you have zeal. Therefore, it is certain that, in time, your sorrows will end.

The embodied jiva is not the author of his punya and paapa. He is enveloped by the darkness of avidya that is born of his merits and demerits.

As the wind charged with the dust of antimony acquires its efflorescence and assumes its hues, it tinges the cardinal points of the horizon with these. Likewise, the embodied jiva, though himself colourless, assumes a hue from the darkness that envelops it, and dappled with the fruits of action, travels from body to body. When jiva is able to dispel the darkness of avidya, immutable Brahman becomes visible in all His glory.

The sages say that karma is not the means to merge with eternal Brahman. You, and the rest, as well as the Devas, should worship those who have achieved moksha. All the great Rishis never stray from the path of Brahman.

In this regard, long ago, there is mention of a discourse given by Sukracharya, the guru of the Daityas. Listen attentively, O monarch, to the course of conduct that the Daitya Vritra followed after he was divested of all his prosperity. Depending only upon his intelligence, he did not indulge in sorrow, O Bhaarata.

Unto Vritra, Guru Usanas said, “I hope, O Danava, that you do not harbour any grief because of your defeat.”

Vritra said, “Certainly, with the help of truth and penance, I have understood the circumstances of birth and death of all living creatures, and have ceased to indulge in either sorrow or joy. Compelled by time, creatures sink helplessly into naraka, or some, as the sages say, find swarga. All of them pass their allotted periods in contentment, in heaven and hell. Once again, impelled by time, with some portion of their paapa and punya unexhausted, they are born and die several times. Chained by the bonds of desire, jivas pass through myriad species of intermediate life and helplessly fall into hell. In this manner, I have seen many creatures appear and disappear.

The lesson that the scriptures teach is that one’s acquisitions correspond to one’s actions. Creatures are born as men, animals or as gods, and then move on to hell. All creatures live a life that they deserve and subject to the laws of the destroyer, they meet with either happiness or misery, the agreeable or the disagreeable. Once the beings have done with enjoying the weal or suffering the agony that corresponds with their deeds, they always return through the old path, which is appraised by the touchstone of karma.”

Thereupon, Usanas addressed Vritra, who was speaking of the highest refuge of the creation, saying, “O intelligent Daitya, why, O putra, do you indulge in such foolish raptures?”

Vritra said, “My severe tapasya for want of victory are well known to all of you. My swollen pride, over the conquests of the diverse scents and myriad tastes that other creatures enjoy, afflicted the three worlds. Because of my invincibility, I feared no one and adorned with countless effulgent rays I ranged through the skies. I achieved great prosperity through my tapasya and lost it again with my own doings. Even so, I rely on my fortitude, and do not grieve for this change.

I once wished to fight the great Indra, and in the battle, I saw the illustrious Hari, mighty Narayana, who is also known as Vaikuntha, Purusha, Ananta, Sukla, Vishnu, Sanatana, Munjakesa, Harismasru and the pita of all creatures. Surely, there is still a residue of the rewards attached to my tapasya by which I saw the great Hari. It is because of this unexhausted remnant that I wish to ask you, O divine one, about the fruits of karma.

On which order of men has high Brahmana prosperity been bestowed? In what manner, again, does profuse prosperity decline? From whom do creatures emerge and live? Through whom again are their actions? What is the lofty fruit by attaining which a creature succeeds in living eternally as Brahman? Through what action or knowledge can this reward be achieved? It befits you, O learned Sukracharya, to explain these to me.”’

Bhishma says, ‘O lion among kings, let me refresh for you and your brothers what the sage Usanas once said to the prince of Danavas. O bull among men, listen carefully.’

CANTO 280

'Sukra Usanas said, "I bow to the divine, illustrious and puissant Being who holds this earth in the firmament in his arms. I will speak to you of the pre-eminence of Vishnu whose head, O best of the Danavas, is the infinite moksha."

While they were conversing with each other, Maharishi Sanatkumara arrived there to dispel their doubts. Worshipped by the prince of Asuras and by Usanas, the best of Rishis sat upon a bejewelled seat. After Sanatkumara was comfortably seated, Usanas said, "Discourse to this lord of the Danavas on the pre-eminence of Vishnu."

Hearing this, Sanatkumara spoke these words of grave import on the pre-eminence of Vishnu, to the king of the Danavas, "Listen, O Daitya, to everything about the greatness of Vishnu. Know this, O cremator of foes, that the entire universe rests upon Vishnu. O Mahabaho, it is he who creates all creatures, chala and achala. In course of time, it is he, again, who withdraws all things and it is he who once more casts them forth from himself.

Into Hari all things merge at the universal destruction and from Him everything emerges once again. Men possessed of scriptural lore cannot attain Him with such knowledge, nor can He be gained through penance, or sacrifices. The only means by which he can be attained is through controlling the senses. Not that yagnas are entirely useless towards such an end. For, he who relies on both external and internal karma, and on his

mind, can purify them with his own intellect. And such a one succeeds in enjoying infinity in this world.

As a goldsmith purifies the dross of his metal by repeatedly casting it into fire, likewise the jiva sanctifies himself through hundreds of births. Some may even be purified in just one life, by mighty efforts.

As one carefully wipes the stains off his body, before they coagulate, similarly he must vigorously wipe away his faults. By mixing only a few flowers with them, grains of sesame cannot be made to shed their own odour. It is only when the sesame seeds are mixed and perfumed with the help of a large quantity of flowers that they cast off their own odour and imbibe the fragrance of the flowers. Similarly, one cannot behold the Soul through just a little cleansing of the heart.

So, through the course of many lives, faults such as attachments to all our environs, are dispelled through the intellect, with the help of abundant sattva, and fervent tapasya.

Listen attentively now, O Danava, as I recount the means through which creatures attached to karmas and those unattached to them achieve the causes that lead to their individual states of mind. I will tell you the order in which creatures perform karma and how they forgo them.

The Supreme Lord creates all beings, mobile and unmoving. He is without beginning and without end. Unladen with attributes of any kind, He assumes features at will. He is the Universal Destroyer, the refuge of all things, the Supreme Ordainer and pure Chitta. In all creatures, He dwells as the mutable and the immutable. He quaffs this universe through his consuming rays.

Know that for His feet he has bhumi; His head is swarga; His arms, O Daitya, are the diks, cardinal points of the horizon; for His ears, He has Akasa; the light of His eyes is Surya; His mind is Chandramas; His intellect dwells always in gyana, and His tongue is formed of apava, water. O best of Danavas, the planets, the grahas, are in the midst of His brows. The stars and constellations are made from the light of His eyes.

O Danava, know also that the traigunas of rajas, tamas and sattva are his. He is the goal of all the asramas of life, and he it is who should be known as the fruit of all japas and yagnas. The highest and immutable, he is also the blessing of abstention from all karma. The Chchandas are the hair on his body, and akshara is his word. The diverse varnas and asramas are his refuge. He has numberless mouths. Dharma is planted in his heart.

He is Brahman, he is the highest dharma, he is sat and he is asat; he is sruti, he is the shastras, he is the yagna patra, he is the sixteen Ritwijas. He is all the yagnas, he is Brahma, he is Vishnu, he is the Aswins, and he is Purandara; he is Mitra, he is Varuna, he is Yama and he is Kubera, the lord of treasures.

Although the Ritwijas deem him as being separate and apart, they still perceive him as one and the same. Know that this entire universe is under the control of this one Divine Being. The Vedas, O prince of Daityas, view the unity in all creatures. When a being realises this oneness through true knowledge, he then attains Brahman.

The period of time for which one creation exists or for which it ceases to exist is called a kalpa. Living creatures exist for a thousand millions of such kalpas. Immobile creatures also exist for an equal period.

The period for which a particular creation exists may be likened to many thousands of lakes, O Daitya! Conceive a lake that is one yojana in width, one krosa in depth, and five hundred yojanas in length. Imagine many thousands of such lakes. Try to dry up the lakes by taking from them, only once a day, as much water as may be taken up on the end of a single hair. The number of days it would take to dry them up completely is the period of one creation from its inception to the time of its destruction.

The highest sruti, revelation, says that creatures have six spirit colours, black, brown, blue, red, yellow and white. These colours proceed from blend in various proportions of the three qualities of rajas, tamas and sattva.

Where tamas predominates, sattva falls and rajas remains where it is, the resulting colour is black. When tamas reigns as before, but when the relations between sattva and rajas are reversed, it creates brown.

When rajas predominates, sattva recedes and tamas remains steady, it creates blue. While rajas prevails as before and the proportion is reversed between sattva and tamas, the result is red, which is a more agreeable colour.

When sattva predominates, rajas diminishes and tamas holds fast, it forms yellow, which produces happiness. Whereas while sattva holds sway and the proportion between rajas and tamas is reversed, it brings forth the colour white, which is productive of immense felicity.

White is the excellent colour. It is pure as it is free from attachment and aversion. It is without sorrow, and free from the travail involved in pravritti. Hence, white, O prince of Danavas, leads to mukti.

It takes thousands of years for the jiva to achieve success. This success is identical to the one that the divine Indra declared on completion of his study of many spiritual treatises. The objective that creatures gain depends on their colour, which, in turn, depends on the nature of the prevalent time. The stages of existence through which the jiva must pass are not unlimited. They are fourteen hundreds of thousands in number. In these, the jiva ascends, remains and diminishes.

The end that a jiva of dark hue meets is very low, for he becomes addicted to wild deeds and because of his iniquity, he leads a life in hell. The learned say that the life of a jiva in such a state is measured by many thousands of kalpas. After living many hundred thousands of years in this condition, the jiva acquires a tan colour and is born as an ordinary creature, and he lives long years in absolute helplessness. With all the accompanying wretchedness endured, at last, his sins are exhausted and his mind sheds all attachments, to cherish renunciation.

When the jiva is endued with sattva, with the help of his buddhi, he dispels everything connected with tamas, and strives for his own welfare, due to which he acquires a red hue. Still, if he is unable to gain the sattva guna, he then acquires a blue colour and travels in a circle of rebirths in a world of inertia.

When the jiva acquires a human birth and is afflicted for the duration of one creation through the bonds of his own actions, he gains a yellow colour and becomes a Deva. In this state, he lives for a hundred creations, and leaves it to become a manava. Thus, the jiva exists for thousands of kalpas, as a Deva, in the yellow colour. As he is not yet liberated, he remains in hell, to enjoy or endure the fruits of his actions of past kalpas and wanders through nineteen thousand rounds of birth and death.

Know that the jiva is freed from the hell of duties as comprised by swarga or godhood. He evades the births corresponding to the other colours. The jiva revels for many long kalpas in the world of Devas before he declines and once again becomes human and lives so for a hundred and eight kalpas, until he regains the prominence of a Deva.

If, again, while a human being, he falls through evil deeds as represented by Kaala in the form of Kali, he then sinks to the dark colour and occupies the very lowest of all stages of existence.

I will tell you now, O lord of Asuras, how the jiva succeeds in effecting his mukti, his emancipation.

Wishful of moksha, the jiva relies upon seven hundred kinds of karmas, each one characterised by a predominance of the sattva guna, as he gradually flows through red, yellow and finally—white.

Here, the jiva travels through several sacred and blissful worlds that have the eight well-known domains of felicity beneath them, and pursues the effulgent form of existence, which is moksha's self. Know that these eight are identical to the sixty hundreds, which are only creations of the mind.

The highest goal for the man, who has the white hue, is the state of turiya, which transcends the three other modes of consciousness—wakefulness, dream and dreamless sleep.

The yogin, who cannot abandon the felicities gained through yoga-shakti, must dwell for a century of kalpas in auspiciousness and later in the four regions of mahar, jana, tapas and satya. This is also the ultimate aim of he who belongs to the sixth colour, who, though endowed with success, and has transcended all attachments and passions, is yet a failure.

Also, the eminent yogin who forgoes yoga, dwells in swarga for a century of kalpas with the unexhausted remnant of his past karma, along with the five senses of knowledge, mind and intellect, purged of all their stains.

At the end of this period, such a being must re-enter the world of humans where he receives great eminence. Turning back from the world of men, he proceeds to gain new forms of existence that grow in prominence. So engaged, he travels through seven regions, seven times, and because of his samadhi and enlightenment, his energy continues to increase.

The yogin who yearns for mukti suppresses the seven, and moves ahead freed from attachments. He sees these seven as a sure means of sorrow, and casts them aside to attain indestructible and infinite moksha. Some call it the region of Mahadeva; others call it that of Vishnu; some say it is of Brahma; and some of Sesha; there are a few, who say it is the realm of Nara; while others call it that of the refulgent Chitta; and some say it is realm of the all-pervading Parabrahman.

When the Mahapralaya, universal destruction, comes, men who have succeeded in completely consuming their gross, subtle and causal bodies, always enter into Brahman. All their senses that have action for their essence and are different from Brahman, also merge into Brahman.

When the time of total annihilation draws nigh, jivas who have acquired the condition of Devas and have residual fruits of karmas yet to enjoy or endure, in the subsequent kalpa, revert to their previous stages of life. This is because of the similarity of each successive kalpa to the previous one.

At the time of obliteration, jivas whose karmas are exhausted through enjoyment or suffering, are born among men in the subsequent kalpa. For without gyana, man cannot destroy his actions in even a hundred kalpas.

When a new creation emerges, all superior beings invested with similar powers and forms, return to their individual destinies, ascending and descending in precisely the same manner, as during the dissolved creation.

Let us now turn to the man who realises Brahman. As long as he continues to enjoy and endure the residual fruits of his karmas of previous kalpas, so long do all creatures and the two pure vigyanas abide in him. When his Chitta is purified with yoga, and he practices samyama, restraint, this perceptible universe appears to him as only his own fivefold senses. Enquiring with a fresh mind, this jiva attains a high and chaste end. Thereupon he gains a position, which knows no decay, and further attains eternal Brahman.

Thus, O you of great might, I have discoursed to you on the eminence of Narayana!"

Vritra said, "I can see how your words resonate perfectly with dharma. Indeed, when this is so, I have no cause for anguish. Through these words, O Mahamuni, I am now free from sorrow and sin of every kind. O illustrious Rishi, O holy one, I see how this wheel of Kaala, endowed with the infinite tejas of the most effulgent and eternal Vishnu, is set in motion. Eternal is the station, from which all kinds of creation spring. Vishnu is the Supreme Soul. He is the lord of Beings. In him this entire universe rests."'

Bhishma continues, 'With these words, O son of Kunti, Vritra released his pranas; uniting his soul with the Supreme Soul, he attained the highest eminence.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, whether this Krishna is the illustrious and puissant lord of whom Sanatkumara spoke to Vritra in days of old.'

Bhishma says, 'The highest Deva, endued with the six attributes is at the root. Staying there, the Supreme Soul, with His own energy, creates all these diverse existences. Know that this Krishna, who knows no

deterioration, is from His eighth amsa. Gifted with the highest intelligence, Kesava creates the three worlds with an eighth portion of His energy.

Coming immediately after Him who lies at the root, eternal Krishna changes at the end of each kalpa. Nevertheless, when the pralaya draws near, he who exists at the source, who is endowed with supreme might and puissance, rests on the primordial waters, the ekarnava, in the form of the potential seed of all things.

Kesava is the creator of the pure Soul who flows through all the worlds. Infinite and eternal, he fills all space and pervades all the universes. Limitless in every manner, he allows himself to be invested with avidya and awakened to Chitta—Kesava of the Supreme Soul creates all things. In him rests this wondrous universe in its entirety.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O you who knows the highest goal of knowledge, I think that Vritra saw beforehand the excellent end that awaited him. This is why he was happy and did not yield to sorrow.

He who is white of spiritual hue, born into a pure race, and a Sadhya, does not, O Anagha, return to the world in re-birth. Such a being, O Pitamaha, is freed from both hell and the condition of ordinary creatures.

Meanwhile, he who has acquired either the yellow or the red hue is at times overwhelmed by tamas and falls among the order of average beings. Whereas, we are exceedingly afflicted and attached to objects that produce sorrow, indifference or joy. Alas, what will be our end? Will it be the blue or the black, which is the lowest of all colours?'

Bhishma continues, 'You are Pandavas. Born into a flawless vamsa. You are of rigid vows. You have revelled in joy in the realms of the Devas—you will return to the world of men. You will live happily as long as this creation lasts, and at the next creation, you will all be admitted among the Devas. You will enjoy all kinds of felicities and at last be included among the Siddhas. Have no fears, and be of good cheer.'

CANTO 281

Yudhishtira says, 'How deeply did Vritra, that great devotee of Vishnu, worship dharma? The status occupied by Vishnu of immeasurable energy is most difficult to understand. How, O tiger among Kshatriyas, could Vritra, an Asura, comprehend it so well?

Although I have faithfully listened to you speak of Vritra's deeds, still, there is a portion of your discourse, which is unintelligible to me. Hence, my curiosity to question you once again.

How, indeed, O best of men, was Vritra, knower of the Upanishads and Vedanta, vanquished by Indra? O lord of the Bharatas, give me an answer. Tell me truly how Sakra vanquished Vritra. O Mahabaho, recount details of the battle, for my curiosity knows no bounds.'

Bhishma says, 'Once, Indra was travelling in his chariot in the company of the celestial army, when he saw the Asura Vritra standing right before him, like a mountain. He was a full five hundred yojanas tall, O chastiser of foes, and three hundred yojanas in girth.

Seeing Vritra in this form, Indra knew that it would be impossible for even the three worlds, united together, to vanquish him. At this, the Deva was struck through with fear and anxiety. Indeed, O king, the sudden sight of this gigantic form of his antagonist, paralysed Indra.

On the eve of the great battle between the Devas and the Asuras, there arose loud shouts from both sides; drums and other musical instruments began to beat and blow. Beholding Sakra positioned before him, O you of

Kuru's vamsa, Vritra felt neither awe nor fear, nor was he able to muster all his energies for the fight. Soon, the battle began between Indra, the lord of the Devas, and the exalted Vritra. The Trilokas trembled with terror. The entire sky was full of the swords, axes, lances, darts, spears and heavy clubs, rocks of diverse sizes, bows of loud twang, myriad celestial weapons, fires and burning brands, freely hurled by the warriors of both sides.

All the celestials led by Brahma, and all the highly blessed Rishis, arrived to witness the battle, seated on their best chariots. Even the Siddhas, O bull of Bharata's vamsa, and the Gandharvas, with the apsaras on their own beautiful rathas, gathered to see the epic war.

Vritra quickly overwhelmed the Lord of the Devas with a shower of rocks that darkened the sky. The enraged gods shattered this thick onslaught of rocks with a storm of their bright arrows. Next, Vritra stupefied Indra as he began to fight solely with maya, his astounding magical sorceries. When he of a hundred yagnas stood bewildered, Rishi Vasishta restored him to his senses by chanting somanas.

Vasishta said, "You are the Devapati, O slayer of Daityas and Asuras! The tejas of the Trilokas lives in you! Why, then, O Sakra, do you languish so? Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the lord of the universe, divine Soma, and all the Maharishis, are gathered, watching you. Do not, O Indra, yield to weakness, like an ordinary man. Stand firm in battle, and slay your foes, O king of the Devas!

See there, the master of all the worlds, the three-eyed Shiva, the adored of all the worlds, is watching you. Discard this stupor, O lord of the Devas. Look, the Devarishis, led by Brihaspati, praise you with divine hymns."

When Vasava was fetched out of his daze by Vasishta, his strength became greatly enhanced. The illustrious chastiser of Paka, took recourse to powerful yoga shakti, and with its help dispelled the illusions of Vritra.

Soon, Brihaspati, the son of Angiras, and the Maharishis, turned to Mahadeva, and for the benefit of the three worlds, urged him to destroy the great Asura. Thereupon, Shiva's tejas turned into a fierce jvara, a dire fever, and flared into Vritra of the Asuras.

Divine Vishnu next entered Indra's vajra. Brihaspati and Vasishta, and all the Maharishis, ran to Hara. Vasava, the bestower of boons, addressed him, saying, "Do not delay, O mighty one, slay Vritra at once!"

Maheswara said, “There, O Sakra, stands the illustrious Vritra, surrounded by a great force. He is the soul of the universe, and with his enormous powers of illusion, he can travel anywhere he wishes. This king of Asuras cannot be vanquished even by the three worlds united together.

With the help of yoga, slay him, O lord of the Devas. Do not underestimate him. For full sixty-thousand years, O Indra, Vritra practiced the severest tapasya to acquire prowess. Brahma gave him the boons he sought—the grandeur of yogins, extreme powers of maya, a surfeit of might, and superabundant energy. I impart to you my energy, O Vasava. The Danava has lost his composure. Kill him now with your vajra!”

Sakra said, “Before your eyes, and through your grace, O Mahadeva, I will slay this invincible son of Diti with my vajra.”

When the great Asura was overcome with the fever of Mahadeva’s tejas, the Devas and the Rishis were overjoyed and rent the air with loud cheers. Simultaneously, drums, deafening conches, kettle-drums and tabors began to beat and blow in their thousands. All the Asuras suddenly lost their memory. Gone, in a trice, were their magical powers. Seeing the enemy stricken, the Rishis and the Devas sang praises of Sakra and Isana, and urged Indra to destroy Vritra immediately.

Indra sat on his ratha, and the Rishis sang his glories. The form that Indra assumed was such that none could look at it without awe.’

CANTO 282

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O king, to the symptoms that appeared on Vritra's form when he was struck with fever. The heroic Asura's mouth spewed flames of fire, and he became pale. As his breath became hard and heavy, his body began to tremble. His hair stood on end. His memory, O Bhaarata, sprang out of his mouth in the form of a fierce, dreadful and inauspicious jackal. Fiery meteors fell on his right and left. Gridhras, kanakas and bakas uttered harsh cries, as they wheeled over Vritra's head.

Armed with his vajra, O Rajan, Indra looked hard at the Daitya whose violent fever was such that he yawned awfully and screamed inhuman cries of agony. Seeing the Asura in this state, Indra at once hurled his vajra that was endowed with such tejas that it resembled the fires of the Pralaya, and in a trice, the gigantic form of Vritra toppled down lifeless. When the Devas saw Vritra slain, they rent the sky all around, with loud and triumphant shouts, O bull of Bharata's vamsa.

With Vritra fallen, Maghavat entered swarga with his vajra still infused by Vishnu's tejas.

Suddenly, from the body of Vritra emerged a fierce and horrific being that filled all the worlds with terror. She was the sin of Brahmahatya, personified. Of horrendous teeth, she was dark, tawny and grotesque, O Bhaarata. With hair dishevelled, dreadful eyes, a garland of skulls round her neck, she was the epitome of a dark Atharvan spell. As she emerged from

Vritra's body, she was smeared with blood, and clad in rags and the bark of trees. In such a dreadful form, she sought the wielder of the thunderbolt.

Soon after, O you of Kuru's vamsa, Vritra's slayer, on a mission for the weal of the three worlds, was travelling again towards heaven. Seeing Indra, she seized the lord of the Devas and cleaved to him. With the sin of Brahmahatya fastened to his body, Indra was so filled with terror that he entered the fibres of a lotus-stalk and lived there for many long years. However, the Brahmahatya clung to him tighter, O son of Kuru, so that Indra lost all his lustre and energy. All his efforts to drive her away were in vain.

Devaspati at last presented himself before Brahma and worshipped him by bending his head low. Understanding that Sakra was possessed by the sin of Brahmahatya, Brahma began to reflect upon the means of freeing his supplicant.

Finally, Brahma turned to the Brahmahatya and, to pacify her, spoke to her in a sweet voice, "O amiable one, let the king of the Devas, who is a favourite of mine, be free from you. Tell me, what must I do for you to let him go? What wish of yours should I accomplish?'

Brahmahatya said, "When the creator of the trilokas is pleased with me, I regard my wishes already granted. Tell me where I shall dwell now. With a wish to preserve the worlds, it was you, O lord, who introduced this great law for the torment of the slayers of Brahmanas and Vritrasura was the son of a Brahmana and himself a Brahmana. Since you are happy with me, O Brahma, I will certainly leave Sakra. But grant me an abode to dwell in."

Brahma said, "So be it!" Indeed, Brahma found a way to release Indra from the clutches of the Brahmahatya. Next, Swayambhu summoned Agni, who appeared instantly and said, "O illustrious and divine lord, here I am. Tell me what needs to be done."

Brahma said, "I will divide this embodied sin of Brahmahatya into several portions. To free Sakra from her, you will take a fourth portion of the sin."

Agni said, "How will I be saved from her, O Brahma? You must show me the way. I wish to know the means of my own deliverance, O mighty lord."

Brahma said, "When the man who, under the sway of tamas, denies offering seeds, herbs and juices in your yagnas, your portion of

Brahmahatya will instantly leave you to go and possess him. O bearer of oblations, let the fever of your heart subside."

So addressed by Brahma, the conveyor of sacrificial offerings accepted his command, and a fourth of the sin entered him, O king.

Brahma next summoned the trees, the herbs and all kinds of grass to him, and entreated them to carry a fourth of the sin. Like Agni, they too, were agitated with the request and said, "How will we, O creator of all the worlds, be saved from this sin? It becomes you not to afflict us who already suffer from our own fates. O Brahma, we forever endure heat, cold and the rain driven by the winds, in addition to cutting and tearing at the hands of men. We are willing, O lord of the three worlds, to obey your command and take a fourth of this sin of Brahmahatya. Even so, let the means of our salvation be pointed out to us."

Brahma said, "The portion of the sin that you accept will possess the man who through stupefaction of judgement will cut or tear any of you during the days of Parva, festivals."

Hearing the divine Brahma, the trees, herbs and grasses worshipped the creator and left without further delay.

The lord of all the worlds then summoned the apsaras, O Bhaarata, and charming them with sweet words, said, "This sin, most excellent of women, has come out of Indra's person. At my request, will you take a fourth portion of her unto yourselves?"'

The apsaras said, "O lord of all the gods, we are entirely willing to obey you and accept a portion of this sin. But, O Almighty, think of the means by which we may be freed from the effects of this covenant."

Brahma said, "Let the fever of your hearts be dispelled. The portion of the sin that you take upon yourselves will instantly leave you to possess men who will seek intercourse with women in their menstrual season."

Thus addressed by Brahma, the diverse tribes of the apsaras repaired to their homes and began to revel in delight.

The creator of the Trilokas next beckoned the waters, which immediately came to him. They stood before Brahma, bowed and said, "We are here, O chastiser of foes, at your command. O puissant master of all the worlds, tell us what needs be done."

Brahma said, "This dreadful sin has taken possession of Indra, because he killed Vritra. I want you to take a fourth part of this Brahmahatya."

The waters said, “Let it be as you command, O master of all the worlds. It befits you, still, O mighty lord, to think of the means of our deliverance from the outcome we will face. You are the lord of all the Devas, and the supreme refuge of the universe. Who else is there to whom we may pray for our salvation?”

Brahma said, “To the dim-witted, who will consider you lightly, and cast into you phlegm, urine and excreta, will this sin immediately go and reside in them. In this manner, your salvation will be accomplished.”

Finally, O Yudhishtira, the sin of Brahmahatya left the king of the Devas, and went to the abodes that the Almighty arranged for her. This is how, O ruler of men, Indra was afflicted by that dreadful sin, and how he was rid of her.

With Brahma’s leave, Indra then resolved to perform an Asvamedha yagna, a horse sacrifice. I hear, O monarch, that it was through this sacrifice that Indra was finally cleansed of the paapa of Brahmahatya. Great was Vasava’s joy, O lord of the earth, when he slew thousands of foes and regained his prosperity.

From the blood of Vritra, O son of Pritha, were born high-crested roosters. For this reason, such fowl are unclean as food for the twice-born classes, and for ascetics. Under all circumstances, O king, you must fulfil what is agreeable to the Brahmanas, for these, Yudhishtira, are known as gods on earth.

It was in this way that Sakra engaged a combination of subtle intelligence and might to kill the mighty Asura Vritra. You too, O son of Kunti, one day, will be another Indra and a slayer of all your foes. Men, who will recite this sacred narrative of Vritra in the midst of Brahmanas on every Parva day, will never be stained by any sin. I have now narrated one of the greatest and most wonderful feats of Indra, that of killing Vritrasura. What else do you wish to hear?’

CANTO 283

Yudhishtira says, ‘O Pitamaha, you possess great wisdom and know every branch of learning. This very story of the downfall of Vritra, has given rise to a question in my mind. You say, O Rajan, that Vritra was first benumbed by fever, and subsequently slain by Vasava with the vajra. How did this fever, O wise one, arise? My lord, I wish to hear about the origin of this fever.’

Bhishma says, ‘Bhaarata, let me tell about the universally accepted cause of fever and also give you details of how it first came into existence.

In ancient times, the mountains of Meru had a summit named Savitri, which was endowed with great splendour and adorned with exquisite gemstones. The summit was immeasurable in extent and no one could reach it.

With the radiant daughter of the king of mountains by his side, the divine Mahadeva would luxuriate on this crest in all his magnificence, as if on a golden bed.

The great Devas, the Vasus, the Aswins, best of Vaidyas, and Vaisravana, lord of the Yakshas, with his abode on the summit of Kailasa and attended by many a Guhyaka, all waited upon Mahadeva. Maharishi Usanas, the best of Rishis with Sanatkumara as their leader, other celestial Devarishis headed by Angiras, the Gandharva Viswavasu, the Rishis Narada and Parvata, and the diverse tribes of apsaras arrived there to serve the master of the universe.

A pure and auspicious breeze, wafting various and heavenly fragrances, blew gently through the air and the trees were adorned with flowers of every season. A large number of Vidyadharas, Siddhas and Rishis, too, settled there to serve Mahadeva Pasupati, the lord of all creatures. Ghostly beings, dreadful Rakshasas and mighty Pisachas, mad with joy, and armed with countless weapons, trailed Shiva. Each one's tejas resembled a Pralaya fire.

Ablaze with his energy, armed with a fiery lance, glorious Nandiswara stood by at the will of Mahadeva. Even Ganga, born of all the sacred waters in the universe, waited in her embodied form, on the wondrous Devadeva. So adored by the Devarishis and the Devas, the magnificent Shiva of tejas, remained on the summit of Meru.

Soon, Prajapati Daksha began a yagna, which all the Devas agreed to attend with Indra at their head. I hear that, with Mahadeva's blessings, the sublime Devas mounted their chariots that matched the sun in splendour, and departed for Gangadvara, from where she issues.

Seeing the gods leave, the daughter of the king of mountains, addressed her divine lord, the lord of all creatures, and said, "O illustrious one, where is Sakra leading the Devas? O you who know the truth, answer me this for a strange pang grips my heart."

Maheswara said, "O divine Devi, Prajapati Daksha is worshipping the Devas with a Asva yagna, and these denizens of swarga are going there.'

Uma said, "Why, O Mahadeva, do you not attend that sacrifice?"

Umapati said, "Long ago, the Devas made a pact whereby no share of sacrificial offerings was assigned to me. In keeping with this covenant, the Devas follow the old custom, and do not offer a share of the yagnas to me."

Uma said, "O glorious one, among all beings you are the Almighty. In merit, in energy, in fame and in prosperity, you yield to none, and are indeed superior to all. This refusal to offer you a share of the havis fills me with sorrow, O Anagha, and a tremor comes over me from head to foot."

The Devi Parvati said these words to her divine lords, and fell silent for her heart was filled with anguish. Mahadeva realised the pain she was in, and he turned to Nandin, and said, "Wait here."

With his yoga-shakti, the lord of Mahayogins, the wielder of the Pinaka, Mahatejasvin Shiva flew instantly to Daksha's yagnashala, taking with him all his horrific Ganas, to destroy the yagna.

As they plundered the sacrifice, Rudra's followers gave horrible cries and shrieks, and roared with dreadful laughter. Some, with grotesque faces, pulled out the sacrificial stakes and whirled them about, while others began to devour those that were attending to the sacrifice. Then there were those who extinguished the yagna and its fire, with blood.

Beset from every side, the sacrifice suddenly assumed the form of a deer and tried to flee through the sky. Seeing this, the puissant Mahadeva gave chase with bow and arrow. Because the heart of the lord of all Devas, possessed of immeasurable energy, was filled with wrath, a dreadful drop of sweat appeared on his forehead. When this drop fell on earth, it instantly gave rise to a raging fire, which resembled the fire at the end of a yuga.

From this fire emerged a short, dreadful being, with blood-red eyes and a green beard. His body was covered entirely with feathers and hair like a hawk's and stood erect. Of dreadful aspect, his complexion was dark and his attire was scarlet. As a fire burns a heap of straw, this creature quickly consumed the flying deer, the embodied form of sacrifice. With this task done, he next rushed towards the gathered Devas and Rishis. The terrified gods fled in all directions, and the earth trembled. Exclamations of "Oh!" and "Alas!" rent the universe. Watching all this, Brahma appeared before Mahadeva, to speak with him.

Brahma said, "Almighty one, the Devas will henceforth yield you a share of the sacrificial offerings. O Devadeva, let your wrath abate. O cremator of foes, because of your anger, the Devas and Rishis are panic-stricken. A ghastly creature that has sprung from your sweat, O Parameswara, will wander among beings, and be known as jvara, fever. O Aja, if the dire energy of this being remains one and focused, the earth will not be able to bear him. Let him, therefore, be distributed into many parts."

Once his rightful share of sacrificial offerings was determined, Sambhu answered Brahma, saying, "Tathaastu. So be it." Indeed, Bhava, the wielder of Pinaka, was joyous and smiled a little as he accepted his share of the havis. Sarva, then, for the peace of all creatures, distributed fever into many portions.

Listen, O son, to how this was done. The heat seen on the heads of elephants, the bitumen of mountains, the moss that floats on water, the slough of snakes, the sores in the hooves of bulls, the salt-laden and sterile tracts of the earth, the dullness of vision of all animals, the diseases in the throats of horses, the crests on the heads of peacocks, the diseased eye of

the koel—each of these was called jvara by Mahadeva. This is what I have heard. The liver-sickness of sheep, and the hiccup of parrots are also known as forms of fever. To this must be added the toil that tigers undergo, for that, too, is known as a form of fever. Besides these, O Bhaarata, jvara enters everybody at the time of birth, death and on other occasions of sickness as well.

Fever then is known to be the dreadful energy of Maheswara. He is invested with authority over all creatures and should, therefore, be held in reverence and worshipped by all. When Vritra yawned, it was through Ananta that he was overthrown. It was then that Sakra hurled his vajra, which split Vritra in two. Divided in this manner, the mighty Asura went to the domain of Vishnu of immeasurable tejas.

Because of his devotion to Vishnu, Vritra had conquered the whole universe, and this was why, upon his death, he gained the realm of Vishnu.

Thus, O son, Yudhishtira, in the context of the death of Vritra, I have told you about fever. Is there anything else that I can tell you? He who keenly reads this account of jvara with a joyous heart will be free from disease and forever enjoy happiness. In felicity, all his wishes will come true.'

CANTO 284

Yudhishtira says, ‘O Pitamaha, in the epoch of Vaivaswata Manu, how was the son of Prachetas, Prajapati Daksha’s Asva yagna destroyed? At the sight of Devi Uma filled with rage and sorrow, the puissant Mahadeva, who is the soul of all things, gave way to wrath. How, again, through his grace, did Daksha again join the detached and dismembered limbs of the yagna? Tell me all this, O Bhishma, truly as it occurred.’

Bhishma says, ‘In days of yore, Daksha arranged to perform a great sacrifice on the breast of Himavat, in the sacred region inhabited by Rishis and Siddhas, where the Ganga flows from the mountains. Lush with countless trees and vines, the place abounded with Gandharvas and apsaras. Surrounded by Rishis, Daksha was waited upon by the denizens of the earth, the firmament and the heavens, with their hands joined together in reverence.

The Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Nagas, the Rakshasas, the two Gandharvas Haha and Huhu, Tumburu and Narada, Viswavasu, Viswaksena, the apsaras, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Sadhyas and the Maruts, all came there with Indra to share in the yagna.

The drinkers of soma, the carousers of Ajeya, the Rishis and the Pitris arrived with the Brahmanas. These, and many other beings of the four species, viviparous, oviparous, filth-born and vegetative, were invited to the

sacrifice. The Devas, too, with their consorts, all dazzling, arrived on their celestial rathas.

Looking at them, the Rishi Dadhichi became filled with grief and wrath, and said, “This is neither a sacrifice nor a meritorious rite of religion, since Rudra is not adored in it. You are certainly exposing yourselves to bondage and death. Alas, how untoward is the course of time. Stupefied by ignorance you do not perceive the destruction that awaits you. A terrible calamity stands at your door and you are blind to it!”

Having said these words, that great seer meditated on the future. He saw Mahadeva, and his divine consort, the granter of excellent boons, seated atop Kailasa with Narada sitting beside the Devi.

Conversant with yoga, Dadhichi became gratified, for he had ascertained what was about to happen. All the Devas and others that had assembled at Daksha’s yagna were of one mind with regard to the omission to invite the Pasupati.

Dadhichi, alone, wanting fervidly to leave that place, said, “By worshipping one who should not be worshipped, and by refusing to worship him who should be worshipped, a man incurs forever the sin of murder. I have never before spoken a lie, and I never shall. Here, in the midst of the Devas and the Rishis, I speak the truth. Maheswara, protector of all creatures, creator of the universe, the lord of all, the puissant master, the receiver of sacrificial offerings, will soon come to this sacrifice and you all shall see him.”

Daksha said, “We have indeed Rudras armed with lances and bearing matted locks on their heads. They are eleven in number. I know them all, but I do not know who this Maheswara is.”

Dadhichi said, “This seems to be the counsel of all that are here—that Maheswara should not be invited. However, I do not see any Deva here that can be said to be superior to him. I am sure that destruction will certainly overtake this sacrifice of Daksha.”

Daksha said, “Here, in this vessel of gold, intended for the lord of all sacrifices, is the sacrificial offering sanctified by mantras according to the Niyama. I intend to make this offering to Vishnu who is beyond compare. He is mighty and the master of all, and to him should sacrifices be dedicated.” Meanwhile, the Devi Uma, seated beside her lord, said, “What are the gifts, the vows and what penances, that I should offer or undergo, by

means of which my illustrious husband may be able to obtain a half or a third share of the offerings in sacrifices?"

To his wife who was agitated with grief and who repeated these words, the illustrious Mahadeva said with a joyous countenance, "You do not know me, O Divine Uma. You know not, O you of delicate limbs, what words should be addressed to the lord of sacrifices.

O Devi of the large eyes, I know that it is only sinners, who, bereft of tapasya, do not understand me. It is through your power of illusion that the Devas with Indra at their head, and indeed the three worlds, all become perplexed and fall into stupor.

It is to me that the chanters recite their praises in sacrifices. It is to me that the Saman-singers sing their Rathantaras. It is to me that Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas perform their yagnas. And it is to me that the Adhvaryus dedicate the shares of sacrificial offerings."

The Devi said, "There is no doubt that men of even meagre abilities praise themselves in the presence of their wives."

Holy Shiva said, "O Queen of all the Deities, I do not glorify myself. See now, O woman of the slender waist, what I do. Watch the being that I will create, O Gauri, to destroy this sacrifice that has displeased you, O my exquisite one."

Having said these words to his consort Uma, who was dearer to him than his own life, the Almighty Mahadeva created from his mouth a horrendous being whose very sight made one's hair stand on end. The blazing flames that emanated from his body made him awful to behold. His arms were many in number and in each was a weapon that struck the onlooker with fear.

The being, so created, stood before the great lord, with joined hands, and said, "What tasks will I have to accomplish?"

Maheswara answered him, saying, "Go and destroy the sacrifice of Daksha."

The being of leonine prowess, who had emerged from the mouth of Mahadeva, immediately wanted to destroy the sacrifice of Daksha, with ease and without the help of anyone, in order to appease the wrath of Uma.

Urged by her fury, Uma herself assumed the dreadful form of Mahakali, went forth in the company of the monstrous being, to see with her own eyes the destruction, which she desired.

The dreadful being then set out, having received the leave and blessings of Mahadeva.

In energy, prowess and form, he resembled Maheswara himself. Indeed, he was the living embodiment of Mahadeva's wrath.

Of immeasurable tejas and urjas, of boundless virya, he came to be called Virabhadra, he who was the dispeller of Kaali's wrath. From the pores of his body, he extruded a number of ghouls known as Raumyas.

Those fierce bands of spirits, themselves endued with terrible ferocity and prowess, and resembling Rudra himself, rushed with the force of thunder to the place where Daksha was making preparations for his sacrifice. Of dreadful and gigantic forms, they were hundreds of thousands in number. They filled the sky with their raging roars and cries and shrieks.

The clamour filled the denizens of heaven with fear. The very mountains were riven and the earth trembled. Whirlwinds began to blow. The ocean rose in great surges. The fires that were kindled would not blaze up in flames. The sun grew dim. The planets, the stars, the constellations and the moon no longer shone. The Rishis, the Devas and Manavas grew pale. A universal darkness spread over earth and sky.

The enraged Rudras ran amok and began to set fire to everything at Daksha's yagna. Some amongst them began to smite and strike all around them, wildly. Some tore up the sacrificial stakes. Some began to grind those present and others to crush with enormous hands and feet. Endowed with the speed of thought, they flew everywhere at will. Some broke the sacrificial vessels and stamped on the celestial ornaments. The scattered fragments of these were strewn on the ground like stars across the firmament.

The heaps of excellent viands, the piled bottles of drink looked like mountains. Rivers of milk ran on every side, with ghrita and payasa for their mire, creamy curds for their water and crystallised sugar for their sands. Those rivers contained food and drink to satisfy all the six tastes.

There were lakes of kshira that were beautiful to see. The wild and teeming host of Rudras began to gorge, with mouths great and small, wide and bizarre, on the meats of diverse kinds, of the best quality, and other delicacies of various sorts, and many excellent kinds of drink, and several other foods that could be licked and sucked. And as they gorged, they flung great handfuls of all that exquisite food in all directions.

Because of Shiva's wrath, every one of those gigantic beings looked like the all-consuming yuga-fire. Agitating the celestial troops, they made them tremble with fear and fly in all directions. Those fierce demons frolicked with one another, and seizing the apsaras, had their way with them and then flung them roughly aside.

Of fierce deeds, these beings, impelled by Rudra's fury, quickly burnt that yagna down, although it was protected by all the Devas. Deafening were the roars they uttered, which struck every living creature with dread. Having torn off the head of sacrifice embodied as a deer, they roared and yelled in glee.

Now, the Devas led by Brahma, and his son, Prajapati Daksha, folded their lustrous hands and said to the awful being who led the Raudra force, "Tell us, who are you?"

Virabhadra said, 'I am neither Rudra nor his consort, the Devi Uma. Nor have I come here for partaking of the fare provided in this sacrifice. Knowing Uma's rage, the puissant lord who is the soul of all creatures has given way to ire.

I have not come here to see these greatest of Brahmanas. I have not come here urged by curiosity. Beware, for I have come here to destroy this sacrifice of yours.

I am known by the name of Virabhadra and I have sprung from the fury of Rudra. This dark woman, who is my companion, is called Bhadrakali, and she has emerged from the wrath of the Devi. We have both been dispatched by the Devadeva, and we have come here to destroy. O lord of Brahmanas, seek the protection of that Mahadeva, the husband of Uma. It is preferable to incur the wrath of Shiva than to gain boons from any other deity!"

Hearing this from Virabhadra, Daksha bowed down to Maheswara and sought to gratify him by reciting the following hymn: "I throw myself at the feet of the effulgent Isana, who is Eternal, Immutable and Indestructible; who is the foremost of all Devas, who is endued with the highest Soul, who is the lord of all the universe."

His praises having been sung, the almighty Mahadeva, suspending both prana and apana by shutting his mouth tight, and casting glances on every side, presented himself there.

Possessed of many eyes, the vanquisher of all foes, the lord of lords, suddenly arose from within the pit, the agni kunda in which the sacrificial

fire was housed. Endowed with the refulgence of a thousand suns, and looking like another Samvartaka, the Divine One smiled gently at Daksha and said, “What, O Brahmana, should I do for you?”

At this, Brihaspati, the guru of all the Devas adored Mahadeva with the Vedic hymns contained in the moksha samhitas. Next, Daksha, joining his hands in reverence, filled with dread, trembling, and with his eyes and face bathed in tears, addressed the Supreme Lord.

Daksha said, “If the Almighty has been gratified with me, if indeed, I have become an object of favour with him, if I have deserved his kindness, if the great lord of all creatures is disposed to grant me boons, then let all that was mine, which have been burnt, eaten, drunk, swallowed, destroyed, broken and polluted, again be of use to me. Such is the boon that I crave.”

So that the many long years Daksha had spent in preparing for his yagna, with great care and effort, were not wasted, the illustrious Hara, the remover of Bhaga’s eyes, said, “Let it be as you wish!”

These were the words of the illustrious progenitor of all creatures, the Deva of three eyes, the protector of dharma. Having obtained his boon from Bhava, Daksha knelt down before him and worshipped the deity with the bull for his mark, by reciting his thousand and eight names.’

CANTO 285

Yudhishtira says, ‘It becomes you, O sire, to tell me those names with which Daksha adored the almighty Shiva. O sinless one, a fervent curiosity impels me to listen to them.’

Bhishma says, ‘Hear, O Bhaarata, what the names, both secret and proclaimed, are of the lord of the gods, the deity of extraordinary feats, the mahayogin of secret vows.[2, 3]

Daksha said, “I bow to you, O Supreme Lord, to the destroyer of the forces of the Asuras. You are the paralyser of the strength of the Deva king himself. Both Devas and Danavas adore you. You are thousand-eyed, you are fierce-eyed and you are three-eyed.

You are the friend of the ruler of the Yakshas. Your hands and feet extend in every direction. Your eyes, head and mouth face all sides. Your ears, too, are everywhere in the universe, and you are omnipresent, O lord!

You are shaft-eared, you are large-eared and you are pot-eared. You are the receptacle of the ocean. Your ears are like those of the elephant, or of the bull or like extended palms.

Salutations to you! You have a hundred stomachs, a hundred revolutions and a hundred tongues. I bow to you.

The Japis of the Gayatri sing your praises in reciting the Gayatri, and the worshippers of the sun revere you in glorifying the sun. The Rishis regard you as Brahma, as Indra and as the firmament above.

O you of mighty form, the ocean and the sky are your two forms. All the celestials dwell in your form even as kine inhabit meadows.

In your body, I perceive soma, and Agni, and the lord of the waters, and Aditya, and Vishnu, and Brahma, and Brihaspati. You, O illustrious one, are the cause and effect, and the action and instrument of everything unreal and real, and you are the creation and destruction.

I bow to you that are called Bhava and Sarva and Rudra. I offer obeisance to you, O giver of boons. I prostrate always to you who are the lord of all creatures.

Salutations to you that are the slayer of Andhaka. I bow to you who have three matted locks, with three heads, and are armed with an excellent trident; possessing three eyes and, hence, called Tryambaka and Trinetra. Obeisance, O destroyer of the Tripura. Salutations to you that are called Chanda, and Kunda; who are the universal nucleus and the bearer of the infinite embryo; to you who are the holder of the ascetic's staff, the one who has ears everywhere and are called Dandimunda.

Salutations to you whose teeth and hair are turned upwards, and are pure white, and stretched all over the universe; to you that are red, tawny with a blue throat. Salutations to you of incomparable form, and dreadful appearance, who are highly auspicious, You are Surya, with a garland of suns round your neck, and have standards and flags bearing the device of Surya. I bow to you, O lord of spirits and ghosts, which are bull-necked, and armed with the bow; you who crush all foes, are the personification of chastisement and are clad in leaves and rags.

Salutations to you that bear gold in your stomach, cased in golden mail, you are gold-crested, O lord of all the gold in the world. I prostrate before you who have been adored, that deserve to be worshipped, and are still being venerated; you that are all things, which devour all objects, and are the soul of all the elements. Salutations to you that are the hotri in sacrifices, the mantras, and own white flags and standards. Obeisance to you that are the navel of the universe, are both the cause and effect, and the refuge of all shelters.

Salutations O Krisanasa, of slender limbs, and slim frame. Salutations to you that are always cheerful and are the personification of confused sounds and voices. Salutations to you that are about to span the earth, that are already spread across, and standing upright. Salutations to you that are

unshakeable, who are unceasing, smooth of skin with matted locks on your head.

I bow to you that are fond of dancing and who strike your puffed cheeks, making your mouth a dumara. Salutations to you that are fond of lotuses that blow in rivers and that are always fond of singing and playing on musical instruments. I prostate in front of you who are Adi, the first of all creatures, and are the crusher of the Asura Bala. Salutations to you that are the master of time, the personification of kalpa; and the embodiment of all kinds of destruction, great and small.

Salutations to you who laugh awfully and as loud as the beat of a drum, and observe dreadful vows. Obeisance forever to you that are fierce, and possess ten arms. Salutations to you who are armed with bones and are fond of the ashes of funeral pyres. Salutations to you that are awful, and terrible to witness, and an observer of dreadful vows and practices.

I prostrate before you who own an ugly mouth, with a tongue resembling a scimitar and large teeth. Salutations to you that are fond of both cooked and uncooked meat, and regard the gourded vina as priceless. Salutations to you who creates rain, and helps the cause of dharma, are identifiable with the form of Nandi, and are dharma personified. Salutations to you that are ever moving like wind and the other forces, are the controller of all things and always engaged in stirring all creatures in the cauldron of Time.

I bow to you, O lord of all creatures, who are superior, and the giver of boons. Salutations to you who have the best of garlands, most outstanding of scents, and the finest of robes, and who give the highest of boons to creatures, without parallel. Obeisance to you that are attached, and yet are free from all attachments, you of the form of yoga dhyana, adorned with a garland of akshas. Salutations to you that are united as cause and disunited as effects that are the form of shadow and of light.

Salutations to you that are amiable, and are frightful, and exceedingly so. Salutations to you that are auspicious, tranquil and most serene. My obeisance to you who are of one leg and many eyes, having only one head; you are fierce, you who are gratified with small offerings and are fond of equity. Salutations to you that are the artificer of the universe, and are ever united with the attribute of stillness.

Salutations to you that bears a foe-frightening bell, who are of the form of the peal made by a bell and are of the form of sound when it is not

perceptible by the ear. I bow to you that are like a thousand bells rung together, who are fond of a garland of bells, and are like the sound that the life-breaths make, that are of the strain of all scents and of the confused noise of bubbling fluids. Salutations to you who are beyond three hums, and that are fond of two hums. I prostrate before you that are entirely tranquil, and have the shade of mountain trees for your habitation.

You are fond of the heart-flesh of all creatures, who purges all sins, and are of the form of sacrificial offerings. Salutations to you that are the soma of sacrifice, that are the sacrificer himself, who are the Brahma into whose mouth is poured the sacrificial butter, and are the agni into which is poured the ghrita inspired with mantras. Salutations to you that are of the form of Ritwijas, who have your senses under control, who are made of sattva, and have rajas also in your make.

I prostrate before you that are of the banks of rivers, of rivers themselves, and of the lord of all rivers, the ocean. Salutations to you, who are the giver of food, are the lord of all food and who are identical with him that takes food. I bow to you that has a thousand heads and a thousand feet, to you that has a thousand tridents raised in your hands, and a thousand eyes. Salutations to you that are of the form of the rising sun, and who are of the frame of a child, that are the protector of ganas all of whom have the build of children, and that are, besides, shaped like children's toys.

My obeisance to you that are old, that are covetous, that are already agitated and that are about to be agitated. Salutations to you who has locks of hair marked by the flow of the Ganga and resembling blades of munja grass. Salutations to you that are gratified with the six actions and that are devoted to the performance of the three deeds. Salutations to you that have assigned the duties of the respective asramas of life. Salutations to you that deserves to be praised in sounds that are a variant of sorrow, and constitute deep and confused noise.

Salutations to you who have eyes both white and tawny, as also dark and red. Salutations to you who have conquered your vital breaths, who are of the shape of weapons, that cleaves all things, and are exceedingly lean. Salutations to you who always speak of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Salutations to you who are a Samkhya, who are the lord of Samkhyas, and are the introducer of the Samkhya Yoga.

I prostrate before you who have a chariot and who are without a chariot. Salutations to you that have the intersection of four roads for your

chariot; to you that have the skin of a black deer for your upper garment, and a snake for your sacred thread. I bow to you who are Isana, who are of body as hard as a thunderbolt, and that are of green locks. Salutations to you that are of three eyes, who are the lord of Ambika, who are Manifest and Unmanifest.

Salutations to you that are desire, that are the giver of all desires, that are the slayer of all desires, and are the discriminator between the gratified and the ungratified. Salutations to you that are all things, the giver of all things, and the destroyer of all things. Salutations to you that are the colours that appear in the evening sky. Salutations to you that are of mighty strength, of mighty arms, are a mighty being and are of great effulgence.

Salutations to you who look like a mighty mass of clouds, and are the embodiment of eternity. Salutations to you that are of a well-developed body, who are of emaciated limbs, that bear matted locks on your head, and are clad in the bark of trees and skins of animals. Salutations to you that have jata as effulgent as the sun or the fire, and have tree-bark and skins for your attire. Salutations to you who are possessed of the effulgence of a thousand suns, and that are ever engaged in penances.

Obeisance to you that are the excitement of fever and that are endued with matted locks drenched with the waters of the Ganga, of hundreds of eddies. Salutations to you who repeatedly rotates the moon, the yugas and the clouds. You are food, you are he who eats that food, you are the giver of food, you are the grower of food and you are the creator of food. Salutations to you that cooks food and eats cooked food, and are both wind and fire.

O lord of all the lords of the deities, you are the four orders of living creatures. You are the creator of the mobile and immobile universe, and you are its destroyer. O highest of all those conversant with Brahman, they that are conversant with Brahman regard you as Brahman. The extollers of Brahman say that you are the supreme source of the mind, and the refuge upon which space, wind and light rest.

You are the Riks and the Samans, and the syllable AUM. O first of all deities, those proclaimers of Brahman that sing the Samans constantly sing of you when they speak the syllables Hayi-Hayi, Huva-Hayi, and Huva-Hoyi. You are made of the Yajuses, of the Riks and of the offerings poured on the sacrificial fire. The hymns contained in the Vedas and the Upanishads adore you.

You are the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras, and the other castes formed by their intermixture. You are those masses of clouds that appear in the sky; you are lightning; and you are the roar of thunder.

You are the year, and the seasons; you are the month, and the fortnight. You are the yuga, the time represented by the twinkling of an eye, you are Kashtha, the Mandalas and the Grahas; you are Kaala.

You are the treetops, the crown of all mountains. Among animals, you are the tiger; among birds, you are Garuda, and among snakes, you are Ananta. Among oceans, you are the kshirasagara, the ocean of milk, and for all astras, you are the bow. You are the vajra among weapons, and truth among vows.

You are aversion and you are avarice; you are attachment and you are bewilderment; you are forgiveness and you are ruthless. You are exertion, and you are patience; you are cupidity, and you are wrath; you are victory and you are defeat.

You carry a mace, and you hold a spear; you carry a bow, and you bear the khatvanga and the jharjharas in your hands. You are he who slashes, pierces and strikes. You are he who leads and he who gives pain and sorrow. You are dharma with ten virtues; you are wealth of every kind, and you are pleasure.

You are the Ganga, the oceans, rivers, lakes and the pools. You are the slender vines, the thicker creepers; you are all kinds of grass, and deciduous herbs. You are all the animals and the birds. You are the origin of all objects and actions; you are the season that yields fruits and flowers.

You are the beginning and the end of the Vedas; you are Gayatri, and AUM.

You are green, you are red, you are blue, you are dark; you are of a bloody hue, you are of the colour of the sun, you are tawny, you are brown and you are dark blue. You are colourless, you are of the best colour, you are the maker of colours and you are without comparison. Your name is gold, and you are fond of gold.

You are Indra, you are Yama, you are the giver of boons, you are Kubera and you are Agni. You are the eclipse, you are the fire called Chitrabhanu; you are Rahu, and you are the sun.

You are the fire on which men pour sacrificial ghrita. You are he who pours the ghee. You are he in honour of whom men pour the ghrita, you are

the butter itself and you are the puissant lord of all.

You are the samhitas called Trisuparna, you are all the Vedas; and you are the hymns known as Satarudriya. You are the holiest of holies, most auspicious of all auspicious things. You animate the breathless body. You are Chitta.

Endowed with gunas, you are subject to destruction. You are the indestructible Jivatman. As jiva's body, you are full, yet liable to decay and death. You are prana, you are sattva, you are rajas, you are tamas and you are faultless. You are the breaths—prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

You are the blink of the eye. You are the sneeze and the yawn. You are of red eyes that ever look inwards. You are of the great mouth and belly. The bristles on your body are like needles. Your beard is green. Your hair is erect. You are swifter than the swiftest. You adore and know the principles of music both vocal and instrumental.

You are a fish gliding in the waters, and you are a fish entangled in the net. You are full, you love sport, and you are quarrels and disputes incarnate. You are Kaala: you are the hard time, the premature time and the ripe time. You are the killing, you are the scimitar and you are the kill.

You are the ally and the adversary; you are the destroyer of both allies and adversaries. You are the moment when clouds appear; you have large teeth, and you are Samvartaka and Balahaka.

You are manifest as splendour. Maya conceals you. You are he who connects creatures with the fruits of their karma.

You have a bell in your hand. You play with all things, chala and achala, like toys. You are the cause of all causes. You are Brahman in the form of Pranava, and you are svaha. You carry the danda, you are clean-shaven, and you are the controller of your words, deeds and thoughts.

You are the four yugas, and the four Vedas; you are the source of the four sacrificial fires. You are the authority of all the duties of the four asramas. You are the maker of the four varnas.

You are always fond of dice. You are cunning. You are the lord and master of the Ganas. Red garlands and red robes adorn you. You sleep on the mountain-breast, and you are fond of the red hue.

You are the artisan, you are the supreme artist and all the arts flow from you. You are fierce; you plucked out Bhaga's eyes and broke Pusan's teeth.

You are svaha, you are svadha, you are vashat; you are salutation incarnate, and you are the words namas-namas. No one knows your observances and your penances. You are Pranava; you are the sky strewn with millions of stars. You are Dhatri, Vidhatri and Sandhatri. In the form of the Supreme Cause, you are the refuge of everything, and you are independent of all refuge.

You know Brahman. You are tapasya, you are dharma, you are the soul of Brahmacharya and you are simplicity. You are the Soul of creatures, you are the creator of all creatures; you are absolute existence, and you are the cause of the past, the present and the future.

You are Bhumi, you are Akasa and you are swarga. You are eternal, self-restrained and you are Almighty. You are an initiate, and not a novice. You are forgiving, unforgiving and you are the chastiser of heretics.

You are the lunar month, you are the Kalpa, you are destruction, and you are creation. You are lust, you are the vital seed; you are subtle, you are gross and you adore karnikara garlands. You have a face like Nandi; you have a terrible face, you have a handsome face, you have an ugly face and you are without a face. You have four faces, you have many faces and you have a fiery face in battles.

You are the golden-bellied Narayana Hiranyagarbha; you are unattached to everything; you are Ananta, and you are Virat. You are the destroyer of adharma, you are Mahaparswa, you are Chandradhara, and king of the spirit-clans. You low like a cow, you are the protector of kine and the lord of bulls is your attendant.

You are the protector of the Trilokas; you are Govinda; you are the controller of the senses, and the senses cannot seize you. You are the best of all creatures; you are fixed, you are immobile, you are steadfast and you are the incarnation of tremors.

You are irresistible, and you destroy poisons. Undefeatable in battle, you cannot be shaken, transcended or measured. You are victory. None can vanquish you.

You are swift; you are the moon, and you are Yama. Without flinching, you bear the cold, heat, hunger, weakness and disease. You are mental anguish, and physical disease. You are the disease and the cure for all diseases. You are the advent and departure of all diseases.

You are the destroyer of my sacrifice that tried to escape in the form of a deer. You have a lofty brow. You have eyes like lotus-petals. Your abode

is in the midst of a lotus forest.

You hold the Rishi's staff. You have the three Vedas for your three eyes. Your chastisements are fierce and savage. You destroy the embryo from which the universe springs.

You drink poison and fire; you are the monarch of all Devas, you drink soma, and you are the lord of the Maruts. You are the amrita. You are the master of the universe. You shine in glory, and you are the lord of all the luminous ones.

You protect from poison and death, and you drink kshira and soma. You are the pre-eminent protector of those who have fallen from swarga, and you defend the best of the Devas.

Golden is your vital seed, your Hiranyaretas. You are male, you are female and you are without gender. You are an infant, you are a youth; you are aged with worn-out teeth; you are the supreme Naga, you are Sakra and you are the destroyer and creator of the universe.

You are Prajapati, and worshipped by the Prajapatis; you support the universe, and the universe is your form; you have the gift of great tejas, and have faces in every direction.

The sun and the moon are your eyes, and the Brahman is your heart. You are the ocean. Devi Saraswati is your speech. Fire and wind are your might. You are day and you are night. You are all actions including the blinking of the eye.

Neither Brahma, nor Govinda, nor the ancient Rishis, can know your greatness, O auspicious lord. Your subtle forms are invisible to us.

Rescue me and protect me like a father. I deserve your protection. I bow to you, O Anagha. You are merciful to your devotees, and I am ever devoted to you. Let him who lives alone on the other side of the ocean of samsara always protect me.

I bow to the very Soul of yoga, whom men of sattva see as an effulgent light. Obeisance to him who has matted locks, who bears the Rishi's staff; who has a body with a long torso, who has a dumaru tied to his back, and who is the Soul of Brahma.

I prostrate before him who is the Soul of water, in whose hair are the clouds, in the joints of whose body are the rivers and whose stomach holds the four oceans. I seek the protection of him who, at the end of the yuga, devours all creatures and reclines on the Ekarnava, the single expanse of

water that covers the universe. He who entered Rahu's mouth to drink soma, and as Swarbhanu devoured Surya, may he protect me.

My obeisance to the Devas who enjoy their shares of sacrificial offerings. Let them enjoy the offerings made with svaha and svadha, and let them be pleased with the offerings.

Let the thumb-sized beings who dwell in all bodies, the linga sariras, always protect and gratify me. I always bow to the embodied beings who make creatures cry, and gladden them as well, without it affecting themselves.

I prostrate to the Rudras who live in rivers, oceans, hills, mountains and mountain caves; who abide in the roots of trees, cow-pens, remote jungles, crossroads, in-roads and open squares. Who dwell on riverbanks, lakes and oceans, elephant-shelters, and stables, in chariot-shacks, deserted gardens and houses, in the five primal elements and in the cardinal and subsidiary directions.

Repeated salutations to the ones that dwell in the space between the sun and the moon, as in their rays, and they that live in the nether regions, as also the ones that have taken to sannyasa and other superior practices for the sake of attaining the Supreme. I bow always to them that are unnumbered, unmeasured and formless, to the Rudras that have the gift of infinite gunas.

Because you are the creator and Soul of all creatures, O Hara, I did not invite you to my sacrifices. After all, you are the one adored in all sacrifices with plentiful offerings. Perhaps, stupefied by your subtle illusion I failed to invite you. Be appeased with me, O Bhava, my mind, intellect and consciousness all dwell in you."

Hearing these adorations, Mahadeva ceased inflicting further violence on Daksha. Indeed, he addressed the Prajapati, saying, "Daksha, I am pleased with your worship. You need not praise me more. You will have my friendship. Through my grace you will earn the fruit of a thousand Asvamedhas, and a hundred Vajapeyas.

"Be you the best of all creatures in the world. Feel no sorrow for the violence done to your sacrifice. Even in earlier Kalpas, I had to destroy your yagna.

O Mahavrata, once more will I grant you boons. Accept them. Dispel this sadness that spreads across your face, and listen to me attentively. With the help of sound debate, the Devas and Danavas have extracted a faith

from the six Angas of the Vedas, and from Samkhya and yoga, because of which they practice austere tapasya.

Even so, the religion, which I have extracted, is without equal, and yields all felicity. It is open to practice for men in all asramas. It leads to moksha. It may take many years to acquire, through punya by those who have restrained their senses. Mystery shrouds it. The ignorant see it as censurable. It contradicts the dharma of the four varnas and four asramas, and agrees with them in only a few instances. Adept men in the science of conclusions understand its propriety, and those who transcend all the asramas are its worthy recipients.

Daksha, in days of old did I create this auspicious dharma called Pasupata; its proper observance confers immense benefits. Shed this fever of your heart and let those benefits be yours."

With these words, Mahadeva, Devi Uma and all his followers vanished from Daksha's view. He who recites this hymn, the Shiva Sahasranama stotra, first sung by Daksha, or hears it, will never meet with the smallest evil and will gain a long life. Indeed, as Shiva is the lord of all the Devas, so is this stotra, agreeable with the srutis, supreme among all stutis. Men covetous of fame, kingdom, happiness, pleasure, profit and wealth, as those yearning for vidya, must earnestly listen to this hymn.

He who suffers from illness, distressed by pain, plunged into gloom, afflicted by thieves or fear, or who has incurred the king's ire, is freed from fear by listening to or reciting this hymn. Indeed, even in this earthly body, it can help him attain equality with Mahadeva's Ganas. Verily, it enhances his energy and fame, and purifies his sins.

Neither Rakshasas nor Pisachas, not Bhutas or Vinayakas disturb the house where men recite this stotra. The woman, who piously listens to this hymn while practising Brahmacharya, wins worship as a goddess in the family of her father and her husband.

Every venture of the man, who hears or recites this hymn with rapt attention, meets with success. The singing of this stotra fulfils all one's silent and spoken wishes.

He who practices Samyama, makes offerings to Mahadeva, Guha, Uma, Nandi, and sincerely chants their names, gains all things of enjoyment, pleasure and his every wish comes true.

When such a being dies, he ascends into swarga, and never again takes birth among animals or birds. Even the puissant Vyasa, son of Parasara,

affirms this.’

CANTO 286

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what is Adhyatma with regard to man and where does it arise?'

Bhishma says, 'With the help of Adhyatma one may know everything. It is, again, superior to all things. To the extent of my knowledge, I will explain the Adhyatma about which you ask. Listen attentively.

The earth, wind, space, water and light are the Panchamahabhutas. These are the cause and the destruction of all creatures. The bodies of living beings, both subtle and physical, are the result of the combination of gunas of these five. These qualities repeatedly come into existence and unceasingly merge into the original cause of all things—the Paramatman.

The Panchamahabhutas create all creatures, and into these five elements, all beings eternally resolve themselves, like the endlessly rising and subsiding waves of the ocean. As a tortoise stretches out and withdraws its legs into itself, even so the infinite number of creatures emerge from and enter these five primal elements.

Verily, sound springs from space, and all touch, from earth. Life is from the wind. Taste is from water. Form is the property of fire. And so, the entire universe, mobile and unmoving, is the combination of the Panchamahabhutas in various proportions. When the Pralaya comes, the endless creatures resolve themselves into these five, and when creation begins anew, they re-emerge from them.

The creator places the same five elements in all the beings, in proportions that he thinks best. Sound, the ears and all the cavities, have space, Akasa, as their causal element. Taste, all liquids and the tongue, are the properties of Apah, water. Form, the eye and the digestive fire in the belly, partake of the nature of Agni, fire. Scent, the nose and the body, are the properties of Bhumi, earth. Life, touch and action are the properties of wind, Vayu.

Rajan, I have explained to you all the properties of the Panchamahabhutas. After Mahadeva created these, he united with them sattva, rajas, tamas, Kaala, Chitta and manas as the sixth.

The intellect dwells in the interior of what you see above the soles of the feet and below the crown of the head. Humans have five senses, and the mind is the sixth. The seventh is the intellect. The kshetrajna is the eighth.

Knowledge of their individual functions determine the senses and the doer. Sattva, rajas and tamas depend upon the senses for their formation. Chitta exists only to seize the impressions of objects. Manas has ambiguity for its function. Buddhi is for ascertainment. Kshetrajna is only an inactive witness of all activity.

Sattva, rajas, tamas, Kaala and karma, O Bhaarata, these are the qualities that direct the buddhi. The intellect is the senses and their five aspects. When intellect is wanting, the senses with the mind, and the five other attributes cease to be.

That with which the buddhi sees is the eye. When the intellect hears, it is the ear. When it smells, it is the nose, and when it tastes, it is the tongue. When it feels objects, it is the skin. In this manner, the intellect undergoes diverse and frequent modifications. When the intellect desires anything, it becomes the mind. The five senses, with the mind, are the creations of buddhi. They are the indriyas. To stain them is to taint buddhi as well.

While intellect dwells in the jiva, it exists in three gunas. Sometimes she is joyful, at times, she indulges in sorrow, and often she exists in a state that is neither pleasure nor pain. With these conditions for her essence, the intellect decides between the three gunas. As the surging ocean ever remains within its continents, likewise, the intellect exists in the mind.

When rajas increases, buddhi transforms into rajas. Felicity and satisfaction are the properties of sattva. Heartache, sorrow, discontentedness and damnation, are the result of rajas. Ignorance, attachment, error,

heedlessness, stupefaction, terror, meanness, sleep and procrastination, are the properties of tamas.

Whenever the body and mind connect with joy or happiness, the state it gives rise to, is the result of sattva. Regard everything fraught with sorrow and disagreeable to oneself as rising from rajas. Therefore, before undertaking such actions of passion, one should reflect on them. See anything fraught with error or bewilderment, which is inconceivable and mysterious, as connected with tamas.

This then, is the explanation of how things in this world dwell in the intellect. Understand this and you will be wise. For, what else can be the sign of wisdom?

Let me tell you the difference between intellect and soul. The buddhi creates gunas, whereas the Atman does not. Although by nature they are distinct from each other, yet they always exist together. A fish is different from the water in which it dwells, but fish and water must exist together.

The gunas cannot know the Atman, but the Atman knows them. Ignorant men regard the Soul to always act together with the gunas, but this is not so. The Atman is truly only an inactive witness of everything.

The intellect has no refuge. Life arises because of the gunas coming together. Other causes create the knowledge that dwells in the body. No one can apprehend the gunas in their real nature or form of existence. The intellect creates the attributes, whereas the soul simply watches them. This union between buddhi and Atman is eternal.

The indwelling insight apprehends all things through the senses that are themselves inanimate and ignorant. Really, the senses are only like lamps that shed light for others without themselves being able to see. Such is the nature of the senses, intellect and the soul. With this knowledge, one should live cheerfully, without yielding to either sorrow or joy. Such a man is beyond the influence of pride.

Just as a spider weaves its web naturally, it is the nature of the intellect to create all the gunas on its own. Hence, one can call these attributes a spider's web. Upon their destruction, their essences do not cease to exist; they only become invisible. Although, when something is beyond the knowledge of the senses, its existence, or otherwise, is concluded through inference. This is the opinion of one school of philosophers. Others insist that with death, the gunas cease to be. One must resolve this difficult

problem through reflection and the intellect, and dispel the confusion, before one can discard sorrow and live in happiness.

As men unacquainted with its mystery feel distress, when they are born into this earth, which is like a sea of bewilderment. Likewise is the anxiety of he who loses his intellect and so his discernment. Still, men who know Adhyatma possess fortitude, and they can reach the other shore of samsara. Indeed, gyana is an efficient raft, and intelligent men escape the terrors that alarm the ignorant.

As for men of dharma, none of them arrives at an end that is superior to that of any of their companions. Indeed, in this matter, the virtuous show an equality.

Through the sole means of knowledge, the gyani destroys whatever karma he does both in ignorance and knowingly, though these be replete with great iniquity. Moreover, when he receives true vidya, he naturally ceases to perpetrate both these. He censures the evil doings of others as well as any of his own sins committed under the influence of attachment.’

CANTO 287

Yudhishtira says, ‘Living creatures are always in fear of sorrow and death. Tell me, O Pitamaha, how the occurrence of these two may be prevented.’

Bhishma says, ‘Listen, O Bhaarata, to an old story of the conversation between Narada and Samanga.

Narada said, “While others respect their superiors with only a bow of the head, you honour them by prostrating before them on the ground. You seem to be crossing the river of life by yourself. You appear to be always free from sorrow and full of great joy. I do not see that you ever have the least anxiety. You are always content and happy and you revel in constant wonder like a child.”

Samanga said, “O bestower of honours, I know the truth about the past, the present and the future. Hence, I am never sad. I also know about the advent of deeds in this world, of the accession of their fruits and about the varied nature of these fruits. Therefore, I never yield to sorrow.

Watch the illiterate, the destitute, the prosperous, O Narada, the blind, fools, madmen, and us, as well. See how we all live by virtue of the karma of our past lives. The very Devas exist because of their past karma. The strong and the weak, all, live according to past actions. It is fitting, therefore, that you should hold us in esteem. The owners of thousands of karmas, live. The owners of hundreds also, live. They that are overwhelmed by sorrow, live. See, we too, are living!

When we, O Narada, do not give in to sorrow, how can the practice of dharma or performing rites and rituals affect us? Moreover, since all joys and sorrows are transient, they cannot agitate us at all. Indeed, the very root of wisdom is the freedom of the senses from ignorance. It is the senses that yield to errors and sadness. He whose faculties are subject to nescience, can never attain wisdom. The pride that a man indulges in out of ignorance, is only a form of the same ignorance. The man of delusion has neither this world nor the next.

Remember that sorrow and happiness cannot be eternal. With all its vicissitudes and tribulations, I would never adopt a worldly life. Neither would I care for desirable objects nor think of their attending pleasure. And, indeed, I would not dwell upon the sorrows that present themselves.

A self-reliant man would never covet the possessions of others; he would not think of undeserved gains; even immense wealth begotten without toil would bring him no joy. Furthermore, he would not be sorrowful at the loss of such wealth.

Neither friends nor wealth, nor high birth or scriptural learning, or mantras can save a man from sorrow in the next world. It is only through karma that he can attain felicity there. One cannot direct the intellect of the one inept in yoga towards moksha. He who is ignorant of yoga can never know happiness.

Patience, and the resolve to disown sorrow, are the two means to true bliss. Anything pleasant leads to pleasure. Pleasure induces pride. Pride fetches sorrow. Hence, I avoid them all.

Misery, fear and pride stupefy the heart; and to pleasure and pain, I am a mere spectator. Abandoning wealth and pleasure, craving and misdeeds, I range over the earth, free from sorrow and anxiety.

Like one who has drunk amrita, I do not fear death, here or in the hereafter. Nor am I afraid of iniquity, cupidity or any such thing. Through my severe tapasya, I have gained this knowledge. This is why, O Narada, even if sadness comes to me, it will not afflict me."

CANTO 288

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, what is good for he who is inexperienced with the dharma of the scriptures, who is always unsure, who has no self-restraint, and other practices that lead to Atmagyana, the knowledge of the Soul.'

Bhishma says, 'Worship of the guru, reverential care of elders and listening to Brahmanas recite the shastras are of supreme benefit to such a man.

For this, listen to another old tale of a conversation between Galava and the Devarishi Narada.

Long ago, Galava, for his weal, approached Narada, and said, "I see, O Muni, that the virtues through which a man gains respect in the world are permanently inherent in you. You have gyana and it befits you to clear the minds of men like us who are unacquainted with dharma. We are uncertain about what we should do, for simultaneously with a fiat to perform karmas, the revelations of the shastras exhort us to acquire gyana. Speak to us on this subject.

O Narada, the different asramas approve different courses of action. 'This is beneficial, and this other is beneficial': in this manner, do the scriptures command us.

Observing the followers of the four asramas, and seeing how we are equally content with our own teachings, we still fail to understand what is truly beneficial.

If the shastras were all uniform and one, then the truth would be easy to discern. Yet, because the scriptures are multifarious, it shrouds what is truly valuable with mystery. This, I feel, is what creates all the confusion about beneficial deeds. O Devarishi, speak to me on this subject. I await your guidance."

Narada said, "There are four asramas, O child. All of them serve their own purposes, and their duties differ from one another. Understand them first from competent gurus, and reflect on them, O Galava. Notice the variations in the proclamations of the merits of the asramas with regard to their form, their divergence with regard to their matter and the contradictions in the observances they embrace. Notice how all the asramas refuse to clearly yield their true intent of Atmagyana. Yet, men with the gift of subtle vision clearly perceive their highest goal.

Good offices to friends, suppression of enemies and the possession of the aggregate of three, dharma, artha and kama: these, the wise affirm, are certainly beneficial, and of supreme excellence. Abstention from sin, the inclination towards dharma and good conduct surely constitute excellence. Mildness towards all creatures, a sincere nature and sweet speech do indeed create greatness. A fair distribution of one's belongings, among the Devas, the Pitris and Athitis, and loyalty towards one's servants certainly establish virtue.

Truthfulness is the highest punya, but the knowledge of truth is difficult to acquire. I say, truth is exceedingly beneficial to all creatures. Renunciation of pride, the elimination of impulse, contentment and living in solitude, embody supreme purity. The study of the Vedas, and their Angas, with enquiry, and pursuits of gyana, are meritorious.

He who aims for perfection should never excessively enjoy sound, form, taste, touch and scent. Wandering at night, sleeping during the day, revelling in idleness, roguery, arrogance, extravagance—these are habits he must relinquish. To achieve success, he should pursue his goal with total abstention from all indulgence of the senses.

He should not seek to elevate himself by discrediting others. Indeed, through his merits alone should he seek distinction over eminent men, but never over the inferior. Men, who have no merit, and are full of pride, demean meritorious men by asserting their own virtues and affluence. They enlarge their own importance, and if left unchecked regard themselves superior to eminent and worthy men of prestige. The wise and the righteous

acquire great fame by refraining from speaking ill of others and from never indulging in vanity.

Flowers spread their fragrance without proclaiming their own excellence. The sun silently casts his radiance through the sky. Similarly, eminent men discard their faults and calmly shine in the world, without any boastfulness. A fool can never sparkle in the world by singing his own praises—while, the one with real punya and gyana has splendour even if he is hidden in a pit.

Men may shout loud and evil words from the top of their lungs but, eventually, such words will die. Even so, good words, spoken ever so softly, will illuminate the world. As the sun only appears to shine in the Suryakantam gem, the frivolous words of vain fools display only the meanness of their hearts. Hence, men seek gyana. I think that of all possessions, that of wisdom is the most valuable.

One should not speak until spoken to, nor reply if someone questions one impolitely. Even if one is intelligent and wise, one should remain silent, even like a fool, until one is questioned in a respectful and appropriate manner.

One should live among men of dharma and liberality, who observe the duties of their own varna. He who wishes for excellence, should never dwell in a place where there is a conflict of the duties of the several orders. A person may abide abstaining from all works, and be content with whatever he receives without exertion. By living amid men of dharma, one succeeds in acquiring dharma oneself. Likewise, by living amid sinners, he taints himself with sin.

As the touch of water, fire or the moon's rays, instantly convey their sensations, the impressions of dharma and adharma produce sukha or dukha.

Men who eat vighasa do not care for the flavours of food. Men who minutely judge the tastes of the dishes are still bound by the bonds of karma.

There are places where a Brahmana discourses on duties regarding Atmagyana. However, the disciples listen without any reverence. A man of dharma should immediately leave such a place. On the other hand, who would wish to leave the place where perfect decorum exists between the guru and sishya?

What self-respecting gyani will stay in the place where people spread false rumours about the wise? Who is there that will not forsake such a place where greedy men seek to break down the barriers of dharma?

One should live among pious men who humbly practice dharma without fear. Nevertheless, one must avoid the place where men do so just to acquire wealth and other temporal benefits—for, such people are sinful. One should instantly flee from there, as if from a room full of snakes.

At the outset, he who seeks his own weal should relinquish any action that causes strain or duress, and invests him with sinful karmas.

Virtuous men should leave the kingdom where the king and his officers exercise equal authority and where they habitually eat before feeding visiting relatives. One should live in a country where Brahmanas eat first; where they devote themselves to dharma, teach and officiate at sacrifices. One should surely dwell in a country where there is constant recitation of the sounds svaha, svadha and vashat.

Like poisoned meat, one should avoid a kingdom where Brahmanas perform unholy practices, for a livelihood. With a contented heart, a noble man should live in a country whose inhabitants joyfully offer before anyone even asks. One should befriend righteous men devoted to good deeds, in a country where chastisement falls upon the wicked and where respect and good offices are the rewards for men of subdued and cleansed souls.

One should gladly reside in the country, which is ruled by a just king who is devoted to dharma, where severe punishment awaits those who befriend vain, choleric men, who behave evilly towards the upright, and who are greedy and practice himsa. When affluence is about to abandon his subjects, kings invested with character bring prosperity to them.

I have answered your questions about what is beneficial. Due to its exceptionally high and hermetic nature, no one can describe that which is beneficial for the Soul.

The man of dharma who, for his livelihood, conducts himself with dharma, and devotes himself to the good of all creatures, will achieve numerous lofty qualities and rewards.’

CANTO 289

Yudhishtira says, 'Keeping the ultimate goal in mind, O Pitamaha, how should a king behave in this world? What qualities should he possess to free himself from attachments?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story that was told by Arishtanemi to Sagara.

Sagara said, "What is the dharma, O Brahmana, by which to enjoy felicity here? How, indeed, may one avoid sorrow and turmoil? I want to know this!"

Arishtanemi of Tarkshya's vamsa realised Sagara deserved his instruction, and said, "The bliss of mukti is true felicity in the world. The ignorant man who is wealthy, and attached to children, and his animals, does not know this. The mind that attaches itself to worldly objects and the intellect that suffers from thirst, baffle all remedy. The ignorant man, bound in the chains of affection, cannot acquire moksha.

Listen closely as I tell you about all the bonds that spring from affections and attachments. Indeed, they can benefit the gyani.

Once your children are grown and able to earn their livelihood, you should arrange for their marriage and be free to travel in happiness. With the highest goal of mukti in mind, leave your wife when she is older and attached to her son. Whether you have a son or not, having indulged your senses in the early years of your life, indulge no more. Free yourself from attachments, and range the world carefree in natural joy. Satisfied with your

effortless and unsought-after gains, and perceiving all creatures and objects equally, you must travel in felicity.

This is briefly the way to free yourself from attachments. Listen now, to the details of the attraction of moksha.

Men, who live free from attachments and fear, gain happiness. While, men who are attached to worldly objects, meet with death. Worms and ants engage in procuring food, and die in the pursuit.

If you wish to attain mukti you must never worry about your relatives, by thinking, 'How will they live without me?' A living being is born alone, grows by himself, gains joy, sorrow and death, all by himself.

People enjoy food, raiment and other acquisitions, earned either by their parents, or by themselves. This is solely the result of past karma. All creatures live governed by their own doings, and receive their fruits as ordained by Him.

A being is but a lump of clay, and ever dependent on outside forces. In such a position, what rational consideration can a man have to protect and feed his relatives? In spite of your utmost efforts to save them, Mrityu carries away your relatives, in your very presence. This should be enough to awaken you. While your relatives are alive, you may yourself die, before your duty to feed and protect them is over. After your kin have died, you cannot know what becomes of them—whether they are happy or sorrowful. This ought to awaken you.

Whether you live or die, your kith and kin maintain themselves because of the fruits of their own karma. Reflect on this and do what is for your own good. When this is the case, to whom do we connect with in the world? Therefore, set your heart on the attainment of moksha. Listen still, for I need to say something more.

The man of resolve, who has conquered hunger, thirst, anger, avarice and the rest, is certainly liberated. He who does not forget himself, through the folly of gambling, drinking and chasing courtesans, is ever a Jivanmukta.

One whom sorrow touches because of the needs of daily sustenance, knows the flaws of life. He who regards his repeated births to be due only to sexual congress with women, is free from attachments.

He is certainly a Jivanmukta who knows the true nature of janma, mrityu and karma. He who takes just a handful of corn for his sustenance,

from millions of carts loaded with grain, and who ignores the difference between a bamboo shed and a palatial mansion, is certainly a jivanmukta.

He is surely free who observes that death, disease and famine afflict the world. Indeed, such a man is content, while he who fails to see the world in such a light, meets with destruction. The one who is content with basic needs is a Jivanmukta.

One who perceives the world to consist of consumers and the consumed, while not being part of either, whom pleasure and pain cannot affect, is liberated. He who sees no difference between a soft mattress and the hard ground, and views fine rice and thick rice equally, is liberated. The one who regards soft linen and rough cloth made of grass as equal, and in whose appreciation fabrics of silk and the bark of trees are the same, who sees no difference between clean sheep-skin and unclean leather, is a Jivanmukta.

He who considers this world as the result of the combination of the Panchamahabhutas, attains mukti. A person who regards pleasure and pain as equal, and gain and loss at par, in whose appraisal victory and defeat differ not, to whom like and dislike are the same, and whom fear and anxiety do not change, is wholly liberated.

The one who regards his imperfect body as only a mass of blood, urine and excreta, and also a home of all manner of disorders and diseases, finds emancipation. He who always remembers that decrepitude, wrinkles, white hair, gauntness, paleness will eventually overcome and bend his body, is liberated. He who remembers his body is liable to loss of virility, weakness of sight, loss of hearing and strength, attains moksha. He, who knows that the Rishis, the Devas and the Asuras too must depart from their individual realms, is a Jivanmukta. The one who knows that thousands of powerful kings have left this earth, gains emancipation.

He who knows that the acquisition of objects is always difficult, that pain is abundant, and that tending to relatives is fraught with pain, becomes liberated. Witnessing the copious faults of children and adults, is there anybody who would not worship moksha? One who awakens through the scriptures and worldly experience, and perceives every human concern to be unsubstantial, is a Jivanmukta.

Whether you choose to be a grihastha or pursue mukti, remember my words, and act like a Jivanmukta."

Sagara heard these virtuous words that lead one towards moksha, and with their help he continued to rule his subjects.’

CANTO 290

Yudhishtira says, 'There is another thing that I wish to know all about from you, Pitamaha; tell me everything about it. Why did the Devarishi Usanas, also known as Kavi, favour the Asuras and oppose the Devas? Why did he diminish the tejas of the Devas? Why did the Danavas always engage in enmity with the Devas?

Having the splendour of an immortal, why did Usanas gain the name of Sukra? How also did he acquire such superior powers? Tell me, even though he has awesome energy, why does he not travel to the centre of the firmament? Pitamaha, I wish to know everything about this.'

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, listen closely to the actual events, as I heard and understand them. For a good reason, Usanas engaged in doing what is disagreeable to the Devas. The royal Kubera, lord of the Yakshas and the Rakshasas, is the lord of the treasury of Indra. With his yoga-shakti, Maharishi Usanas entered Kubera's body, to overpower him and rob him of his wealth. Great anguish overcame Kubera at the loss of his wealth. Full of anxiety and wrath, he approached Mahadeva, the greatest of gods.

Kubera represented the matter to the fierce and amiable Shiva of various forms. He said, "By entering my body through his yoga, Usanas deprives me of liberty, and all my wealth, and in the same way, leaves me as he pleases."

Hearing these words, Maheswara was enraged. His eyes turned red, and with his mighty trident, he was eager to strike Usanas down, and he

shouted, “Where is he? Where is he?”

Meanwhile, from a distance, Usanas determined Mahadeva’s intent, and waited in silence. Indeed, Usanas gauged Shiva’s wrath, and reflected whether he should approach Maheswara, flee or remain where he was.

Meditating on the Divine Mahadeva, Usanas set himself on the point of Mahadeva’s spear. Rudra realised he could not cast the spear now, so he bent the weapon into a bow, which is now known as pinaka.

Umapati saw Sukra Bhargava on the palm of his hand. He opened his mouth and quickly swallowed Usanas, who went down into his stomach and began to wander there.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘How could Usanas wander within the belly of the Highest? What did the illustrious lord do while the Brahmana was within his stomach?’

Bhishma says, ‘In days of old, after swallowing Usanas, Mahadeva entered the waters and, like a wooden stake, remained there in yoga-dhyana for millions of years. He completed his great tapasya and emerged from the mighty lake. Brahma approached him and enquired after his tapasya and well-being.

The lord with Nandi for his emblem answered, “My tapasya is successful.”

Sankara, of inconceivable soul, saw that Usanas within his stomach had become greater because of his penance. The greatest of yogins, Usanas, rich with the wealth of his penances and Kubera’s wealth, shone brightly in the Triloka.

After this, with the Pinaka by his side, Mahadeva once again sat down in dhyana, while Usanas anxiously continued to wander in Maheswara’s belly. Seeking to escape, the Maharishi began to sing the praises of the lord, but Rudra blocked all his apertures.

From within Mahadeva’s stomach, Usanas repeatedly addressed the Mahadeva, saying, “Show me your mercy!” Since all his other orifices were shut, Mahadeva said, “Come out through my linga.”

Confined on every side and unable to locate this orifice, the ascetic began to run here and there, burning all the while with Mahadeva’s tejas. At last, he found the opening and emerged through it. This is why his name is Sukra, or semen, and why he is unable to attain the core of the firmament.

The sight of Sukra emerging from his stomach, shining with bright energy, filled Bhava with anger, and he stood with the trisula in his hand.

Devi Uma quickly intervened and forbade her angry lord from killing the Brahmana. Because of Uma's intervention, Usanas became the son of the Devi.'

Uma said, "Since he is now my son, you can no longer kill this Brahmana. O Lord, he who emerges from your stomach does not deserve death at your hands."

Devi Uma's words pacified Bhava, and he smiled and said, "Let this one go wherever he likes."

Bowing to Mahadeva and to Goddess Uma, Usanas went away where he wished.

This, O king of the Bharatas, is the story of Sukra Bhargava, the Asuraguru.'

CANTO 291

Yudhishtira says, 'O Mahabaho, now tell me about what is beneficial for our weal. Your words are like amrita, with which I am never satiated. What are the good deeds, which help a man acquire what is for his highest benefit both here and in the hereafter?'

Bhishma says, 'Let me tell you what King Janaka once asked the peerless Parasara Muni. That king of Mithila said, "What is beneficial for all creatures, in this world and the next? Teach me about these things."

Parasara, who knew the precepts of every religion, said, "Dharma earned through karma is of supreme benefit in this world and the next. Ancient Rishis say there is nothing higher than dharma. By accomplishing the duties of dharma, a man receives honour in swarga. The dharma, again, of embodied creatures, lies in the tenets of karma.

All good men from the different asramas establish their faith in dharma, and accomplish their respective svadharmas. The shastras advise four methods of living in this world. These are the acceptance of gifts for Brahmanas, the realisation of taxes for Kshatriyas, farming for Vaisyas and service to the three other classes for the Sudras.

Wherever men live, the means of support come by themselves. After concluding various virtuous or sinful deeds, when living beings die and merge into their constituent elements, they attain diverse ends. If you steep vessels of white brass in liquid gold or silver, they catch the hue of these metals. Even so, a living being takes diverse portions of his past karma.

Nothing sprouts without a seed. None can gain happiness without performing karma that leads to happiness. When one's body disintegrates into its elements, one attains felicity only because of the righteous deeds of previous lives.

The sceptics argue, saying, "I do not see that anything in this world is the result of destiny or the virtuous and sinful deeds of past lives. Inference cannot establish the existence or operation of destiny. The Devas, the Gandharvas and the Danavas have become what they are due to their own nature and not because of past karmas. Men never remember in their next lives, actions of previous ones. They seldom credit the four kinds of karma of past lives with the rewards of their present life. The declarations in the authoritative Vedas mean to regulate the conduct of men, and keep their minds calm. These, the sceptics say, cannot represent the utterances of men possessed of true wisdom."

This opinion is wrong. In reality, one gains the fruits of whichever of the four kinds of acts one does, with the eye, the mind, the tongue and the muscles. As to the fruit of his deeds, O king, a person sometimes gains happiness wholly, utter misery at other times, and yet again, a blend of happiness and misery. Whether of punya or paapa, karmas remain.

There are times when, in the case of the man who is sinking in life's ocean of samsara, happiness remains concealed in such a way that it does not manifest until all his sorrows disappear. Know this, O king, that upon the exhaustion of the fruits of good deeds, the sinful ones begin to manifest themselves.

Self-restraint, forgiveness, patience, energy, contentment, honesty, modesty, non-violence, freedom from evil vasanas and intelligence—these produce happiness.

No creature is eternally subject to the fruits of his good or bad actions. The wise should always strive to remain composed. One never has to enjoy or endure the good and bad karmas of another. Indeed, one enjoys and endures the rewards of only what one does oneself. The man who shuns both happiness and sorrow walks along a special path—that of gyana. While men who choose to adhere to worldly objects, tread an entirely different path.

He who behaves in a manner that he would chastise in another, should rot in hell. Indeed, by doing something that one censures in others, one incurs ridicule. A Kshatriya bereft of courage, a Brahmana who eats every

kind of impure food, a Vaisya incapacitated in pursuit of a livelihood, a Sudra that is idle and averse to labour; a scholar without good conduct, a man of high birth destitute of dharma, a Brahmana fallen away from truth, a wicked and impure woman, a yogin invested with attachments, one who cooks just for himself, a fool who preaches, a kingdom without a king and a king that cherishes no affection for his subjects—all these are pitiful.”

CANTO 292

Parasara said, "The man, who reins in the steeds of his senses through his knowledge, is certainly intelligent. The homage paid to an enlightened sannyasin is worthy of high praise. Such reverence, O Dvija, is the result of instructions he receives from one who transcends karma and not from conversations with men engaged in karma. Given that the allotted period of life is rife with difficulties, one should not diminish its worth with self-indulgence. On the other hand, through virtuous means, one should always strive for one's spiritual progress.

Among the six different colours that the jiva attains at various stages in his life, he who falls away from a superior colour deserves censure. Hence, he who receives the result of good karma should avoid the guna of rajas so that it may not stain him. Man gains a superior colour through deeds of dharma. Unable to acquire a superior hue, he who sins, only kills himself.

Tapasya destroys all sinful acts done in ignorance. While a sinful deed, done knowingly, produces profound sorrow. Hence, one should never wilfully commit any sin. The gyani never does anything sinful even if it leads to the greatest benefit, just as a chaste man would never touch a Chandala. How miserable is the fruit of sin! Through sin, the very vision of the sinner becomes perverse, and he confounds his body, and its unstable elements, along with the soul. The fool who fails to take sannyasa in this

world, afflicts himself with untold sorrow when he departs for the next world.

A soiled white cloth can be made white again with one wash, but not a black one. Beware, likewise is the case with sin. The one who sins knowingly, and performs appropriate penance to expiate the sin, must enjoy and suffer the fruits of his good and bad deeds, separately.

The Brahmavadis claim that acts of dharma negate all injuries that one inflicts in ignorance. Nevertheless, dharma never erases a sin that a man commits consciously.

In my opinion, whatever actions, be they righteous or sinful, be they done knowingly or otherwise, remain until their fruition. Whatever deeds done by the mind with full deliberation, produce fruits, according to their physicality or subtlety. Still, ignorant deeds that are fraught with grave himsa unfailingly produce results and reactions that lead to hell. The difference is that such outcomes are disproportionate in severity to the actions that produce them. As to the deeds of a dubious nature done by the Devas or Rishis, a man of dharma should never imitate or censure them.

He who reflects, ascertains his own ability and accomplishes deeds of dharma, certainly gains what is for his weal. Pour water into an unbaked vessel and it will gradually evaporate. Nevertheless, store it in a baked vessel, and it remains without diminishing. Likewise, actions done without reflection are not beneficial, while ones made with judgement yield happiness. Furthermore, even as water added to a vessel already containing water increases the quantity, all actions, equitable or otherwise, done with awareness, only add to one's store of dharma.

A king should properly rule and protect his kingdom by subjugating his foes and all who seek to assert their superiority. He must tend to his sacred fires and pour libations on them during sacrifices. In his mid-life or old age, he must retire into the forest to practice the duties of the last two asramas. With self-restraint, and noble conduct, he should look upon all creatures as he does on his own self. One should always revere one's superiors. By the practice of truth and of good conduct, O king, one is sure to gain joy."

CANTO 293

Parasara said, "No one selflessly does good for another, nor makes gifts to others, selflessly. Everyone does things for their own selves. People abandon their very parents and brothers when these are no longer affectionate. What need be said then of relatives of other degrees? Gifts to a distinguished person and acceptance of the gifts made by a distinguished person both lead to equal merit. Of these two, however, the giving of a gift is superior to the acceptance of a gift. In order to receive virtue, one must carefully protect the wealth that one acquires and augments through proper means. This is an accepted truth. He who wishes to acquire dharma should never earn wealth through means involving himsa to others. Without zealously pursuing wealth, he should finish his tasks within his abilities.

Offering water with devotion to a guest amounts to earning the punya of feeding a hungry man. The enlightened Rantideva received success in all the worlds through the worship of Rishis through offerings of just leaves, roots and fruits. When the royal son of Sibi pleased Surya and his friends with offerings of the same kind, he too, won the highest regions of felicity.

Every human that is born incurs a debt to the Devas, Athitis, Dasas, Pitris and themselves. Everyone should do his best to free himself from these debts. One repays his debts to Maharishis by studying the Vedas, to the Devas by performing yagnas. By conducting the rites of sraddha, one frees oneself from one's debts to the Pitris. One pays one's debt to one's fellowmen by serving them well. One pays debts to oneself by listening to

Vedic recitations and reflecting on their import, by eating the remnants of sacrifices, and by sustaining one's body.

From the beginning, one should discharge all the duties that one owes to one's servants. Even if destitute of wealth, men attain success through great exertions. Munis reach their goal by adoring the Devas and by pouring libations of clarified butter on the sacred fire.

Richika's son became the son of Viswamitra. He attained success in the afterlife by worshipping the Devas with Riks. Usanas gratified Mahadeva and became Sukra. Indeed, by singing the praises of Uma, he revels in the firmament, in great splendour.

Asita and Devala, Narada and Parvata, Kakshivat, and Jamadagni's son Rama, the chaste Tandya, Vasishta, Jamadagni, Viswamitra and Atri, Bharadwaja, Harismasru, Kundadhara and Srutasravas—all these Maharishis attained their goals by adoring Vishnu with the help of Riks, and with tapasya.

Many undeserving men, too, gain great distinction by venerating Lord Narayana. A man should not seek his progress through any evil or condemnable means. True wealth is what he earns through the ways of dharma. Fie on the wealth he earns with ignoble means. Dharma is eternal. No one should ever abandon it from a thirst for wealth. The man of dharma who kindles his sacred fire and offers daily homage to the Devas is the best of virtuous men.

Great king, the three sacred fires—Dakshina, Garhapatya and Ahavaniya—are the foundation of all the Vedas. A Brahmana, whose karmas and kriyas exist in their entirety, possesses the sacred fire. While abstaining from all karma, it is better to abandon the sacred fire than to keep it.

One should wait upon and humbly serve the sacred fire, the mother, the father and the teacher. The one who discards pride, and merely serves the aged, who is knowledgeable and bereft of lust, who looks upon all creatures with love, who has no wealth, does noble actions and lacks the desire of himsa, is truly a venerable one whom men of dharma adore."

CANTO 294

Parasara said, “It is proper that the lowest varna should derive their sustenance from the other three varnas, by serving them. Performing such service with affection and reverence makes them honourable. Even if his ancestors did not serve anyone, a Sudra should not engage himself in any other occupation than service. It is proper for Sudras to associate with righteous men of dharma, but never with the sinful.

As in the eastern hills, jewels and metals blaze with greater splendour because of their proximity to the sun, so does the lowest varna shine with splendour because of its association with Dvijas. A piece of white cloth assumes the colour of its dye. Likewise is the case with Sudras. All men should embrace all virtuous qualities but never those that are evil. The life of human beings in this world is fleeting and transitory.

The sage who, in happiness and in misery, does only what is good, is a true observer of the scriptures. An intelligent man would never do anything that is discordant with dharma, however high the immediate benefits may seem by doing so. Deeds of adharma are never truly beneficial. A lawless king who snatches thousands of kine from their lawful owners, and donates them in charity, acquires no fruit beyond a hollow fame. In fact, he incurs the sin of theft.

Svayambhu first created Dhatri, who has universal respect. Dhatri created a son who engaged in upholding all the worlds. The Vaisya who engages in farming and the rearing of cattle, worships this Deva.

The Kshatriyas should occupy themselves in protecting all the other varnas. The Brahmanas should only enjoy whatever they receive. While the Sudras should humbly and honestly gather sacrificial articles, clean vedis and other places for worship and yagnas.

If each varna performs his svadharma in this manner, the sanatana dharma would not suffer any diminution. All creatures inhabiting the earth would be joyful through the preservation of dharma in its entirety. Seeing the happiness of all creatures on earth will bring joy to the Devas in swarga. Hence, the king who abides by his duties to protect the other castes, the Brahmana who studies the shastras, the Vaisya who engages in earning wealth and the Sudra who serves the other three other varnas, all become equally worthy of respect.

While, a contrary conduct, in evil, makes each order fall from dharma. Leave alone gifts by thousands, even twenty cowries that a man earns honestly, and offers grudgingly, will earn great benefit.

He, who reverentially makes gifts to Brahmanas, reaps great rewards. A gift that the donor makes after seeking out and honouring the recipient is invaluable. A gift that the donor makes upon solicitation is mediocre, whereas the gift which is made contemptuously and without any reverence, is the most inferior.

This is what the glorifiers of dharma, the holy Rishis, say. While sinking in this ocean of life, man should always seek to cross it by various means. Indeed, he should so exert himself so that he may free himself from the bonds of samsara.

The Brahmana shines with samyama, restraint, the Kshatriya by jaya, victory, the Vaisya through artha, wealth, while the Sudra always shines in glory through skilful service rendered to the three other varnas."

CANTO 295

Parasara said, “Irrelevant of its quantity, the wealth that the Brahmana acquires through gifts, the Kshatriya through victory in battle, the Vaisya by following the duties of his varna, and which the Sudra earns through service of the three other varnas, is worthy of praise. Additionally, when a man spends the wealth to acquire dharma, it produces great benefits.

The Sudra is the constant servitor of the three other classes. If, out of a need for survival, the Brahmana takes to the duties of either the Kshatriya or the Vaisya, he does not decline from dharma. If however, he performs the tasks of the lowest varna, he certainly falls from his status.

When the Sudra is unable to earn his living by serving the three other orders, then trade, rearing of cattle and the practice of the mechanical arts are lawful for him.

Appearing on the boards of a theatre and disguising oneself in various forms, exhibition of puppets, the sale of spirits and meat and trading in iron and leather works should never be taken up as a livelihood by one who is a novice in these professions. Furthermore, each one of these occupations is censurable in the world. I even hear that if anyone working in any of these trades, leaves it, he acquires great merit.

When, out of arrogance, a successful person acts sinfully, what he so does can never pass for authority.

I also hear, from the Puranas of old, when dharma was held in great esteem among reasonable men and their livelihood was consistent with

propriety and the shastras, the only punishment, enough to chastise their faults, was to cry fie on them.

At the time of which we speak, O king, men were full of praise for dharma, and nothing else. Men with remarkable evolution in dharma only worshipped good qualities. However, the Asuras could not bear to see dharma being prevalent in the world. Multiplying in number and energy, they entered into the bodies of men, followed by pride. From pride came arrogance, with wrath on its heels.

When wrath overwhelmed men, modesty and shame left them. They became careless and could no longer see clearly, as before, and they began to oppress one another to acquire wealth without any compunction. Then, the punishment of just crying fie on offenders was no longer effective. Men showed no reverence for either the Devas or Brahmanas, and began to indulge their senses to vile and vulgar surfeit.

Thereafter, the Devas approached Shiva in swarga to seek his protection from the three Asuras, Lobha, Krodha and Kama, now ruling in swarga. The Devas combined their tejas and imparted it to Mahadeva, who, with a single stroke of his trisula, felled the three Asuras down to Bhumi.

Rudra also killed the fierce king of the Asuras who terrorised the Devas. When the Asuras were dead, men regained their normal demeanour, and once again studied the Vedas and the other shastras.

The Saptarishis arrived and installed Vasava as the lord of the Devas and ruler of swarga. Moreover, they took upon themselves the duty of holding the rod of chastisement over mankind. In the wake of the Saptarishis, came Rajarishi Viprithu, and many other kings, all of the Kshatriya varna, to separately rule various clans and kingdoms of Manavas.

However, in those ancient times, there were certain elder men in whom evil vasanas were still awake, because of which there appeared many kings of terrible prowess who indulged in only such deeds as were fit for Asuras. Even to this day, exceptionally foolish men adhere to such evil ways, and establish them as authorities to follow and practice. This is why I say, O king, reflect properly upon the shastras, abstain from all actions fraught with himsa or malice, and seek Atmagyana.

The wise do not seek wealth to perform religious rites by ways of adharma that involve an abandonment of righteousness. Wealth gained from such means can never be beneficial. Become such a Kshatriya, O Rajan. Restrain your senses, be agreeable to your friends, and cherish your

subjects, servants and children. The union of prosperity and adversity give rise to friendships and animosities. Thousands and thousands of existences continually revolve, and in every kind of jiva's life, these must of necessity occur. Therefore, embrace virtuous qualities, but never faults. Such is the nature of dharma, that it brings joy to even the most foolish person, bereft of every honour, who hears praise of any of his good qualities.

Virtue and sin exist only among men, and not among other creatures. Hence, whether in need of food and other essentials, or transcending them, one must cultivate a righteous disposition, acquire knowledge, always look upon all creatures as one's own self, and abstain from himsa. A man should divest his mind of yearnings and dispel its ignorance so as to succeed in gaining what is auspicious."

CANTO 296

Parasara continued, “I have spoken to you on the precepts of the grihastasrama. I will now tell you about the way of tapasya. Listen to what I say.

Because of sentiments fraught with rajas and tamas, one sees the sense of possession spring up in the heart of the grihasta. In this asrama, one acquires kine, fields, wealth, wives, children and servants. One’s attachments and aversions increase, and one begins to regard one’s possessions as eternal and indestructible. When attachment and aversion overcome a man, and he yields to the acquisition of earthly objects, the reckless craving for enjoyment, kama, seizes him.

Considering the man with the largest share of enjoyments in this world to be fortunate, an indulgent man does not recognise any other happiness besides the gratification of the senses. As lust and greed flood him, he seeks to increase his relatives and attendants, and for their satisfaction strives to augment his wealth through every possible means. By now, he is replete with affection and attachment for his children, hence, for the sake of wealth, does all manner of base things that he knows to be evil, and gives way to sorrow if his wealth is lost. He earns honours and, ever on guard against the defeat of his plans, he uses any means that will satisfy his craving for power and pleasure. Finally, as the inevitable result of the path he pursues, he meets with destruction and death.

True felicity belongs to the intelligent, to the ones who chant of the eternal Brahman, who seek to accomplish only auspicious tasks, and who abstain from all karma that springs from desire.

The loss of persons we love, the loss of wealth, and physical diseases and mental anguish, all cause great despair. This pain gives rise to the awakening of the soul, which in turn creates an interest in the study of the shastras. From the contemplation of the scriptures, O king, one sees the value of tapasya.

A man who discerns between the essential and the trivial is rare. Indeed, the truth that the happiness he derives from wives and children ultimately leads to misery, is enough to make him take to tapasya. Tapasya, O child, is for all. Even the lowest order of men may undertake penance. Tapasya sets the man of self-restraint on the path to swarga.

It is through tapasya that the puissant lord of all creatures creates all existence. The Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, Agni, the Aswins, the Maruts, the Viswedevas, the Saddhyas, the Pitris, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Gandharvas, the Siddhas and other Swargavasis—indeed, every other Deva—achieve success through tapasya. The Brahmanas whom Brahma created in the beginning succeeded through their tapasya in honouring not Bhumi alone, but swarga as well.

In this world of mortals, kings and grihastas of high families, owe their positions to tapasya. Their silken robes, their exquisite ornaments, the animals and chariots they ride and the fine seats they use are all because of tapasya.

The thousands of charming and beautiful women that they enjoy, and their palatial mansions, are all because of tapasya. Expensive beds and diverse kinds of delicious foods await men of dharma. There is nothing in the Triloka, O scorcher of foes, that tapasya cannot attain. Even men, destitute of true knowledge, win renunciation because of tapasya.

Whether rich or poor, a man should reject greed, and with the help of his intellect, he must ponder upon the scriptures.

Discontent produces sorrow, which is the result of lust and greed, which further leads to the bewilderment of the senses. Once a man confuses his senses, his wisdom disappears, and he fails to distinguish between right and wrong. All this leads to anguish. And so, one must practice austere tapasya to gain happiness. The failure to do so results in sorrow.

Notice the benefits between practising and abstaining from tapasya. Through exemplary penances, men always receive auspicious returns. Conversely, he who takes to penance to earn a reward, meets with many unpleasant results, disgrace and sorrow. Despite the joy of practising dharma, tapasya and dana, he wishes to indulge in all kinds of illicit acts. Through such sinful actions, he goes to hell. Still, O Rajan, he who remains firm in dharma, in happiness and sorrow, does not lose his regard for the scriptures.

I hear that the pleasure from sensual gratification lasts only so long as the flight of an arrow, and on its cessation, one experiences the utmost pain. Only the insane do not praise the felicity of moksha. Witnessing the anguish that attends gratification of the senses, the wise cultivate the virtues of santi and dama, peace and self-restraint, to attain mukti. Because of their righteous pravritti, wealth and pleasure, artha and kama, cannot affect them. Grihastas, without any compunction, may enjoy wealth and other possessions that they gain without effort. However, they should make an effort to discharge the duties of their varna.

Sinful men cannot imitate the practice of honourable men whose attention is fixed upon the shastras. Every vain act that a man commits meets with destruction. Hence, men who are noble and follow dharma, need make no other effort, other than tapasya. While grihastas, whose addiction lies in actions, must wholeheartedly devote themselves to karmas. Additionally, they must attend to their duties and perform sacrifices and other religious rites with dexterity and attention. Indeed, as all rivers have their refuge in the ocean, men from all the varnas have their sanctuary in the grihastasrama."

CANTO 297

Janaka said, "Maharishi, from where does this difference of colour arise among men of different varnas? Tell me this, O best among speakers. The srutis say that our children are our own self. Since all inhabitants of the earth originate from Brahma, they should all be Brahmanas. Born from Brahma, why do men take to practices that differ from those of Brahmanas?"

Parasara said, "You are right, O king. The children of the creator are none else than the creator himself. However, because of their decline from tapasya, this distribution into classes of different hues has occurred. When the soil and the seed are fertile, the offspring can only be exceptional. But if the soil and seed are less than immaculate, the progeny will be inferior.

Men who know the scriptures are aware that when Iswara sets himself to create the worlds, some creatures spring from his mouth, some from his arms, others from his thighs and a few from his feet. They who emerge from his mouth are Brahmanas. The ones born from his arms are Kshatriyas. Those born from his thighs are Vaisyas. Lastly, the ones born of his feet are the Sudras. He creates only these four varnas, O Rajan. Those who belong to classes other than these are an admixture of these.

The Atirathas, Ambashtas, Ugras, Vaidehas, Swapakas, Pukkasas, Tenas, Nishadas, Sutas, Magadhas, Ayogas, Karanas, Vratyas and Chandalas, are all Kshatriyas born of the four original orders by intermixture with one another."

Janaka said, “When all are born from Brahma alone, how do Manavas have diversity in race? O Maharishi, we see an infinite diversity of races in this world. How can men of indiscriminate origin, who devote themselves to tapasya, become Brahmanas? Indeed, those born of pure wombs and those of impure, all tapasvins became Brahmanas.”

Parasara said, “We cannot judge Jivanmuktas in light of their low births. Maharishis, with their shakti, confer the status of Rishis on the children they father in impure wombs.

My grandfather Vasishta, with Rishyasringa, Kasyapa, Veda, Tandya, Kripa, Kakshivat, Kamatha, Yavakrita, and Drona, Ayu, Matanga, Datta, Drupada and Matsya: all these, O ruler of the Videhas, have become what they are because of their tapasya.

Originally, there were only four gotras—those of Angiras, Kasyapa, Vasishta and Bhrigu. In time, because of karma and pravritti, many more gotras came into existence. The names of these gotras originate in their founders. Righteous men use them.”

Janaka said, “Tell me, O holy one, the particular duties of the various varnas. Tell me also what their common duties are. You know everything.”

Parasara said, “Acceptance of gifts, presiding over the sacrifices of others, and teaching disciples, are the special duties of the Brahmanas. The protection of the other varnas is the svadharma of the Kshatriyas. Agriculture, cattle rearing and trade are the occupations of the Vaisyas—while, servicing the twice-born castes is the vocation of the Sudras. These are the special duties of the four orders. Listen now, O child, as I tell you of the common duties for all the four varnas.

Compassion, ahimsa, heedfulness, charity, sraddhas in honour of the Pitris, hospitality, truthfulness, subjugation of anger, contentedness with one’s wives, purity, freedom from malice, knowledge of the Atman, and renunciation—these, O king, are common to all the varnas. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas are the three pre-eminent castes. All of them have an equal right to perform these karmas. Even as they acquire great merit by drawing inspiration from a man of dharma among their order, these three varnas meet with sorrow if they perform karmas beyond what is ordained for them.

The Sudra never falls down from not performing Vedic rites, nor is he worthy of any of the rites of redemption. The course of duties that flow

from the Veda is not for him. Nevertheless, he has the sanction to practice the thirteen duties common to all the orders.

O Janaka, Brahmanas regard a virtuous Sudra as equal to Brahma himself. Yet, I perceive such a Sudra as the effulgent Vishnu, the First One in all the worlds.

Persons of the lowest varna, who wish to extinguish their evil passions, may follow the conduct of the higher-born orders. Furthermore, they may earn great punya by performing all rites, other than the chanting of mantras, which are only for the other orders. Wherever Sudras adopt the behaviour of the higher castes, they attain happiness because of which they are able to abide in felicity both here and in the hereafter."

Janaka said, "O Maharishi, is it the man's karma or is it his varna that makes him impure?"

Parasara said, "Certainly, O king, karma and janma, are two sources of impurity. Listen to their difference. Irrespective of birth and actions, the criterion to remain pure is abstention from sin. If a high-born man sins, what he does stains him despite his superior birth. Hence, between actions and birth, karma stains man more than janma.

Janaka said, "What are the acts of dharma that do not inflict himsa upon other creatures?"

Parasara said, "Let me tell you about ahimsa that is the saviour of mankind. Men who dissociate themselves from all worldly attachments are free from all anxieties. Gradually ascending the path of yoga, they finally see moksha before them. Through faith, humility, self-restraint, keen intelligence and abstinence from all activity, they attain eternal bliss.

There is no question that all classes of men, who properly discharge dharma, and abstain from adharma, ascend to swarga."

CANTO 298

Parasara said, “The fathers, friends, preceptor, even the spouses of gurus, of men who are bereft of bhakti, cannot give them the punya that accompanies devotion. Only men who are firm in their devotion to elders, who speak pleasantly to them, who seek their welfare, and are humble in behaviour to them, can gain the merit of bhakti.

The father is the highest of Devas for his children. He is superior to the mother. The highest acquisition is that of knowledge. Men who subdue the objects of the senses acquire mukti.

The Kshatriya prince who goes to battle, receives wounds from fiery arrows, and burns therewith, certainly finds realms to which even the Devas cannot attain, where he enjoys the joys of swarga.

When a Kshatriya meets a warrior who is overcome with fatigue, fear and tears, who has no further will left to fight, has no weapons, nor armour, nor horse, nor chariot, nor infantry for support, then, O king, the Kshatriya should spare such a warrior. Neither should he strike one who surrenders, one who is ill, one who cries for mercy, one of tender years or one who is old.

A Kshatriya should fight another Kshatriya who bears armour, has chariots, horse and foot-soldiers, and who besides is ready for battle and is an equal. Death at the hands of one who is equal or superior is laudable, but not at the hands of one who is low, a coward or any other kind of wretch. This is well known. Death at the hands of one who is sinful, or of low birth

and evil ways is inglorious and leads to hell. No one can rescue the man whose time has run out and whose life is over. Similarly, no one can kill the man whose time has not yet come and whose life is not yet over.

One should prevent one’s loving elders from doing menial work, and acts fraught with himsa. One should never wish to extend one’s own life by taking the lives of others. When they die, it is laudable for grihastas who live in sacred places to lay down their lives on the banks of sacred rivers.

When one dies, one dissolves into the Panchamahabhutas. Sometimes, death occurs suddenly through accidents, and at times gradually, from natural causes. He, who treads the path of moksha but accidentally meets with death, acquires a similar body and remains a traveller like a person going from one room to another. The only cause for such a man to acquire another body is his accidental death in a sacred place. There is no second cause. Such a body comes into being and attaches itself to Rudras and Pisachas.

Men who know Adhyatma say that the body is an agglomerate of arteries, sinews, bones and a great deal of repulsive and impure matter besides. They say that it is a compound of gunas, along with the senses and objects of the senses born of yearning, all of which have an outer sheath to clothe them. Bereft of beauty and other skills, this combination, through the force of cravings of a previous life, assumes a human form.

The body that the soul abandons becomes inanimate and motionless. Indeed, when the primal ingredients return to their individual nature, the body blends with dust and ashes. Because of its association with actions, the jiva’s past karmas determine the circumstances under which it reappears. Verily, O Janaka, under whatever circumstances that this body meets with dissolution, its next birth enjoys and endures the fruits of all its past actions.

When the jiva parts from the body, it is not immediately born in a different form. Like a large cloud, it roves through the sky for some time until it assumes a new body.

The soul is above the mind. The mind is above the senses. Animate creatures are the most outstanding beings of all creation. Of all mobile beings, those that have two legs are superior. Among the bipeds, the Dvijas, the twice-born, are foremost. Amidst them, the wise ones are the best. Beyond them, are the ones who acquire knowledge of the Soul. Finally,

there are the ones who have the gift of humility; these are superior even to the Atmagyanis.

Indubitably, death follows birth. Creatures, under the influence of sattva, rajas and tamas, pursue actions that meet with an end.

He is a man of dharma who dies under a sacred constellation, at an auspicious time when the sun is in the northern declension, during Uttarayana. He is a man of dharma, who purifies himself of all sins and completes all his tasks. He is a man of dharma who abstains from himsa to any man, and meets Mrityu serenely, when she comes.

Death by taking poison, or hanging, or burning, or at the hands of robbers or by the jaws of animals, is inglorious. Men of dharma never incur such deaths even if mental and physical diseases of the most agonising kind afflict them. The lives of the men of dharma, O king, pierce through the sun, and ascend into the world of Brahma. The lives of those who follow dharma, who are yet sinful, range in the middle regions. While the spirits of the sinful sink into the lowest depths.

There is only one foe and not another. That enemy is ignorance, O king. Under its spell, one perpetrates frightful and cruel deeds. To resist such an adversary one should use one's energy by serving elders in accord with the srutis. Only through steady attempts with the help of wisdom can one destroy the curse that follows one's sins.

He who wants to acquire punya should first become a brahmacharin, study the Vedas and observe tapasya. He should then enter grihastasrama to perform yagnas. Once he establishes his vamsa, he should enter the jungle as a vanaprastha, restrain his senses, and seek moksha.

One should never emasculate oneself by abstaining from any enjoyment. Of all births, to be born as a human is best, even if as a Chandala. Indeed, amidst all orders of birth, humanity is the best, because it offers an avenue to save one's self through punya karmas.

So that they do not fall from humanity, men, with the guidance of the srutis, always perform deeds of dharma. As a Manava, he who disregards dharma, indulges in malice, and succumbs to greed and lust, certainly meets with betrayal by his desires.

He who loves all creatures, cherishes them, consoles and feeds them, addresses them with respect, who rejoices in their happiness and grieves in their sorrows, and disregards all kinds of wealth, will never suffer misery in the next world.

Repairing to the Saraswati river, the Naimisa jungles, the Pushkara lakes and other places of Tirtha, one should give gifts, practice renunciation, render one's form amiable, O king, and purify one's body with baths and tapasya.

Of those who die at home, one should perform their last rites, carry their bodies to the smasana on a ratha, and assign them to the flames according to scriptural rites.

Religious rites, ceremonies, charity, the performance of sacrifices, presiding at yagnas, performing other meritorious deeds, fulfilling sraddhas beneficial to one's ancestors: all these one does for one's own weal. The Vedas with their six Angas, and the other shastras, O king, are made for the welfare of the chaste."

CANTO 299

Bhishma says, 'Once again the ruler of Mithila, Janaka, questions Parasara.'

Janaka asked, "What yields punya? What is the best path? Which is the accomplishment that cannot meet with destruction? What is the place from where one does not have to return? Tell me all this, O sage."

Parasara said, "Dissociation from attachments is the root of all that is beneficial. Knowledge is the highest path. Penances never meet with destruction, gifts made to deserving persons are not lost. A man achieves success when he breaks the bonds of sin, revels in dharma, makes the highest of all gifts and pledges ahimsa to all creatures.

He who gives away thousands of kine, hundreds of horses and promises ahimsa, receives in return the same pledge from all.

One may abide in the midst of all kinds of wealth and enjoyment, yet, because of gyana, remain impervious to their influence. Whereas the ignorant man steeps himself in objects of enjoyment that are not even substantial.

Sin cannot cling to a wise man, just as water cannot drench the leaves of the lotus. Sin adheres more firmly to him who has ties, even as lac and wood cleave to each other. Sin never abandons the sinner, only the endurance of its fruits can smother it. Verily, the sinner must face its consequences, when the time comes.

Fruits of karma never afflict pure men who realise the existence of Brahman. While immense fear afflicts ignorant men who, unaware of their evil doings, attach themselves to good and evil. But sin never stains the man who is entirely free from attachments and anger, even if he lives in the lap of luxury.

As a dam across a river causes its waters to swell, the man without attachments creates the levee of dharma, which protects him from suffering. In fact, his punya and tapasya increase.

As the Suryakantam gem attracts and absorbs the rays of the sun, so does dhyana help in the advancement of yoga.

As the frequent blending of sesame seeds with fragrant flowers, increases the quality of the seeds, even so the nature of sattva in men arises in proportion to the measure of their association with men of dharma.

He who wishes to live in swarga, leaves his wife, wealth, rank, chariots and various karmas and kriyas. Indeed, when one reaches such a frame of mind, one's mind dissociates from the objects of the senses. Whereas, he who fixes his heart on objects of the senses becomes blind to his welfare, and his own heart, like a fish drawn to bait, drags him to his ruin.

Just as different limbs and organs form the body, all mortals depend upon each other for existence. They are as weak as the pith of the banana plant. Left to themselves, like a fragile boat, they sink in the ocean of samsara.

There is no fixed time to acquire dharma. Death waits for no man. When man is constantly flying to meet his end, the accomplishment of good karma is paramount at all times. Like a blind man, who moves about his house by instinct, the wise man who focuses on yoga successfully advances along his chosen path.

Death emerges from birth. Birth is subject to the sway of death. He who is unfamiliar with the moksha dharma spins like a wheel between birth and death, unable to free himself from that fate. He who walks along the true path with buddhi for his guide, earns happiness both here and in the hereafter.

In indulging in diversity lies misery, while in discernment abides happiness. Fruits of karma, which the Jivatma represents, constitute the diverse. Whereas, tyaga, sacrifice, constitutes the select.

As the lotus stalk quickly sheds the mire that attaches to it, even so the Soul can speedily disown the mind. The mind initially inclines the Atman to yoga, and then merges the mind into itself. When the Atman achieves yoga, communion, it sees itself free of all attributes.

When a man occupies himself with sensory pleasures, and believes this to be his vocation, he fails from his true mission. Through its deeds of dharma, the wise man's Soul attains a state of high felicity in swarga, while that of the ignorant one sinks low or finds birth among intermediate creatures.

Just as water will not evaporate from a baked earthen vessel, a man of severe tapasya remains full of joy. The one who steeps himself in worldly trappings can never know mukti. He who shuns mundane things succeeds in enjoying great bliss hereafter.

When a man suffers from congenital blindness, he is unable to find his way anywhere. Similarly, the sensualist who confines his soul in an opaque cage feels as if a mist surrounds him and fails to see the true objective of life.

As seafaring merchants make profits in proportion to their investment, even so mortal beings appropriate ends according to their actions. Like a snake breathing air, Mrityu wanders in this world in the guise of decrepitude and devours all creatures.

A being enjoys or suffers the fruits of karmas from previous lives. There is nothing pleasant or disagreeable, which one experiences, without it being the result of past actions. Whether resting or moving, idle or working, whatever state a man may be in, his past deeds always overtake him. One who reaches the other shore of samsara has no wish to return to where he set sail from.

As with the help of a rope, the fisherman draws in his net sunk in the water, so does the mind, through yoga-dhyana, save the jiva from drowning in samsara. As rivers flow towards the ocean to merge with it, even so the mind, through yoga, becomes one with Purusha.

When affection traps the minds of men and ignorance envelops them in darkness, men crumble like castles made of sand. He who views his body as only a vessel and purity as its holy water, and walks along the path of wisdom, gains happiness both here and hereafter.

Friends that we acquire with our affluence, kinsmen of selfish motives, one's wives, sons and servants—each one devours one's wealth. In the next

world, neither the mother nor the father can confer the slightest benefit upon one.

Charity creates the fare on which one can subsist. Indeed, one must enjoy the fruits of one's own actions. The mother, son, father, brother, wife and friends, are like lines that one merely traces with gold, but in reality are not gold itself.

From the moment of conception, a creature acquires all the karmas, good and bad, of his past lives. Through actions of his past lives, man gains wealth, animals, wives, children, honour of birth and other valuable possessions. Knowing that everything one enjoys or endures is the result of the actions of past lives, the Soul urges the intellect in different ways to avoid dark fruits.

Relying on earnest efforts, through proper means, he who sets forth to accomplish his tasks meets with success. As his rays of light never abandon the sun, even so prosperity never abandons the faithful. The work that a man does without pride, and with intelligence, is never lost.

Like wind that scatters sawdust, Mrityu, with the help of Kaala, leads all beings to their deaths."

Bhishma continues, 'Janaka derives immense joy, O king, from these words of Rishi Parasara, words so consistent with dharma.'

CANTO 300

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, wise men praise truth, self-restraint, forgiveness and wisdom. What is your opinion of these virtues?'

Bhishma says, 'Here, I will recite an old account, O Yudhishtira, of the discourse between the Sadhyas and a swan. Once upon a time, the unborn and eternal Brahman assumed the form of a golden swan, and ranged through the Trilokas until he came across the Sadhyas.

The Sadhyas said, "O Lord, we are the Devas called the Sadhyas. We have a question for you. Indeed, we ask about the moksha dharma. You know it well. We hear, O bird, that you possess great learning, and are eloquent of speech. O hamsa, what do you think is the highest of all objects? O divine one, what gives you pleasure? Lord of all birds, instruct us in what you regard as the best of actions to free oneself from all bonds."

The swan said, "You who have drunk amrita, I hear that one should take recourse to penances, self-restraint, truth and the subjugation of the mind. Untying all the knots of the heart, one should also bring dvesha and advesha, the agreeable and the abhorrent, under one's control. One should not wound the very hearts of others with harsh, cruel words. One should never receive scriptural learning from an unkind person. One should never use words that inflict pain on others, or cause misery, and so find hell for oneself.

When wordy barbs pierce a man, he burns incessantly. Such arrows strike straight at his heart. Hence, wise men must never aim them at others.

If a man of wisdom is deeply hurt by sharp words, he should remain calm. When someone tries to anger him, and he rejoices instead of yielding to ire, the provoker loses all his merits. The joyous man of dharma, who subdues his wrath instead of indulging in it, whereby it would lead him to speak ill of others and become their enemy, takes away the punya of others.

I, for one, never respond, when others speak ill of me. If it happens, I always forgive the abuser. Dharma teaches that forgiveness, truth, sincerity and compassion are the best of all virtues.

Satya is the Arcanum of the Vedas. The secret of truth is Dama. The deep mystery of Samyama is moksha. This is the teaching of all the shastras.

I view him as a Brahmana and a Muni, who subdues the rising impulse of rash speech, the urge of ire, the greed for unworthy things, and the cravings of the stomach and the organ of pleasure.

One who does not yield to anger is superior to one who does. The one who practices renunciation is superior to one who does not. He who possesses the virtues of manhood is superior to the one bereft of them. One who has knowledge is superior to the one who is without it.

A man should not respond in manner or kind to harsh words. Indeed, by desisting, he succeeds in foiling his assailant and takes away all his punya. He who does not retaliate with coarse speech, he who does not return praise with applause, he who has the fortitude to forbear from striking back in return to any provocation, and eschew ill wishes on the attacker, finds that even the Devas covet his friendship.

One should forgive the sinful man who insults, injures and calumniates, even while pretending to be a man of dharma. Through such poise, one attains success.

Although I have nothing left to accomplish, I always wait reverentially on men of dharma. I have no thirst. I have no anger. If greed attempts to seduce me, I do not slip away from the path of dharma. I do not approach anyone for wealth. If someone curses me, I do not retaliate. I know that self-restraint is the door to immortality.

I disclose unto you a great mystery. There is no condition superior to that of humanity. Like the emerging moon from behind murky clouds, the pure, wise man shines in resplendence, and attains success by patiently biding his time.

The man who restrains his soul, and becomes an outstanding pillar of the very universe, of whom men speak only pleasant words, becomes a friend of the Devas.

Revilers never speak of the merits of a man as they speak of his faults. He who restrains his speech and mind, and devotes himself to the Supreme, acquires the fruits of the Vedas, tapasya and of yagna.

The wise man should never villify men of no merit with criticism or insults. He should not extol others and nor should he hurt them. The gyani perceives revilement of himself as nectar. In damnation, he sleeps without anxiety. The reviler, on the other hand, meets with destruction.

The sacrifices that one performs in anger, the gifts one makes in ire, the penance one performs in rage, and the offerings and libations one makes to the sacred fire in pique, are such that Yama himself robs their punya. Hence, the efforts of an angry man becomes entirely fruitless.

O Sadhyas, he who conquers his four portals of desire and rage, the organ of pleasure, the stomach, his two arms, and speech, realises dharma. One, who always practices truth, self-restraint, sincerity, compassion, patience and renunciation, and devotes himself to the study of the Vedas, does not covet what belongs to others, and pursues what is good with a singleness of intent, succeeds in reaching swarga.

As a calf sucks all the four teats of its dam's udders, one should devote oneself to the practice of all these virtues. I do not know of anything more sacred than dharma. I move among the Manavas and the Devas, and I proclaim that dharma is the only means to gain swarga.

A man becomes like those he lives with, like those whom he admires and what he wishes to be. If a man waits with respect on a man of dharma, or him who is otherwise, if he serves with devotion a sage or a thief, he absorbs their characters.

The Devas always commune with those who possess wisdom and goodness. They never entertain the wish to even watch the enjoyments that men indulge in. The person, who knows that all objects of earthly pleasure bear the stamp of vicissitudes, has few rivals, and is superior to the moon and the wind.

When the Purusha that dwells in one's heart is free from blemish, and walks in the path of dharma, the Devas take delight in him. Even if men expiate their offences with appropriate rites, the Devas distance themselves

from such men, who worship sense gratification, indulge in harsh words and who are habitual thieves.

Men who have a mean soul, who keep no restrictions on what they eat, and whose deeds are sinful, never please the gods. On the other hand, the Devas associate with men who keep the vow of truth, are grateful and engage in the practice of dharma.

Silence is better than speech. To speak the truth is better than silence. Truth, together with dharma, is even better. In addition to being words of satya and dharma, words that one can depend upon are the best."

The Sadhyas said, "What is it that covers this world? Why does one fail to shine? What causes people to discard their friends? Why do people fail to attain swarga?"

The swan said, "Ignorance envelops the world. Men fail to shine because of malice. Greed is the cause for people to shun friends. Men fail to gain swarga due to attachment."

The Sadhyas said, "Who alone among the Brahmanas is always happy? Who alone amongst them can observe the vow of silence though he dwells in the midst of many? Who alone amongst them, albeit weak, remains strong? And who alone amongst them does not quarrel?"

The swan said, "Only the Brahmana who has wisdom is ever happy. In the midst of many, only the wise Brahmana succeeds in keeping the vow of silence. Only the wise Brahmana remains strong in weakness. He alone amidst them who has wisdom avoids quarrels."

The Sadhyas said, "Where can we find such holy Brahmanas? Wherein does their purity lie? And where their impurity? In what lies their condition of being human?"

The Swan said, "In the study of the Vedas lies the divinity of the Brahmanas. In their vows and observances, is their purity. In censure is their impurity. In death lies their mortality."

Bhishma continues, 'This is the wonderful story of the discourse between the Sadhyas and the swan. The body, both physical and subtle, sthula and sukshma, is the origin of karmas, and the Jivatman is dharma.'

CANTO 301

Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha, you know everything, explain to me the difference between the Samkhya and the yoga systems of philosophy.'

Bhishma says, 'The followers of Samkhya praise the Samkhya system and the yogins laud the yoga system. To establish the superiority of their individual faiths, each claims his own system to be the better.

Wise yogins assign proper and valid reasons to show that one who does not believe in the existence of God cannot attain moksha.

Whereas, sages who believe in the Samkhya doctrines advance good reasons to prove that one who acquires the highest knowledge, and dissociates himself from all worldly objects, attains mukti when he dies, and that it cannot be otherwise. This is how men of great wisdom explain the Samkhya philosophy of moksha.

When logic is thus equal on both sides, one should accept the reasons that one is otherwise likely to adopt as one's own. Indeed, one must acknowledge such teachings as being beneficial. Good men abound on both sides. Men like you may adopt either opinion.

The ways of yoga directly address the ken of the senses, while the shastras are the basis of the Samkhya testimonies. I approve of both the systems of philosophy, O Yudhishtira. Furthermore, even the good and wise concur with both practices. If one employs them properly, O king, then either tradition is adequate for a person to attain the highest end.

Both teachings equally recommend purity and compassion towards all creatures. Both lay equal emphasis on the observance of vows. It is only the shastras that explicate their paths that are different.'

Yudhishtira says, 'If the vows, the purity, the compassion and the fruits that both methods recommend are the same, tell me, O Pitamaha, why then are their scriptures different?'

Bhishma says, 'By discarding the five faults, attachment, heedlessness, affection, lust and wrath, one attains moksha. Even as large fish break through the net and pass into their own element, yogins who transcend lust, wrath and the rest, purify their sins and gain the eternal bliss of moksha. As powerful animals tear through the hunter's snares, and escape into the exuberance of freedom, likewise, yogins, freed from all bonds, attain the sinless path that leads to mukti.

Truly, O Anagha, strong yogins who sever the bonds of desire, attain the sinless, auspicious and high path of moksha. Feeble animals, caught in nets, surely die. Likewise is the case with persons destitute of the power of yoga.

As the fisherman's net snares fishes, and the weak ones die, even so, men bereft of yoga shakti, encounter death amidst the bonds of samsara.

The fowler's net captures the weak birds, while the strong ones escape. So too with yogins. Bound by the bonds of karma, the weak meet with destruction, while the strong break free.

As large logs of wood extinguish a small and weak fire, even so the weak yogin meets with ruin in the world of attachments. Nevertheless, when the same fire burns strongly, it could consume the very earth. Even so, the strong and powerful yogin, ablaze with his tejas, can scorch the entire universe, like the sun that rises at the time of the Pralaya.

As a strong current sweeps away a weak man, so do objects of the senses carry away a weak yogin. As an elephant withstands a mighty current, a mighty yogin withstands all objects of the senses. Independent of all things, great yogins enter into the hearts of the lords of creation, the Rishis, the Devas and the Mahatmans.

Neither Yama, nor Ugra, nor Mrityu can overcome the yogin who has immeasurable tejas. Through his yoga shakti, he can assume thousands of forms and range over the earth. A few among them enjoy objects of the senses and then once again return to stern tapasya, and just as the sun

withdraws his rays, these yogins withdraw themselves from their tapasya. The powerful yogin certainly attains moksha.

O Rajan, you are now aware of yoga. Let me tell you of the subtle powers of yoga, along with their traits. Listen, O lord of Bharata's vamsa, to the subtle signs of the dharana and the samadhi of the Soul.

As the archer whose aim is true succeeds in striking his mark, so does the yogin who merges into his Atman attain mukti. As a man with a pot of water on his head carefully climbs a flight of stairs, even so is the yogin, who meditates, enters into his soul, purifies it and makes it as radiant as the sun.

As in rough waters, an expert sailor guides his boat to the other shore, likewise, O monarch, the wise man fixes his soul in samadhi, and attains moksha. Like a skilful charioteer steers the Kshatriya to an advantageous position, similarly the yogin, alert and absorbed in dhyana, swiftly attains mukti.

The yogin, who remains immovable after he absorbs himself in samadhi, destroys his sins and gains the indestructible condition of men of enlightenment.

The yogin, who observes high vows, unites his Jivatman with the Paramatman, in the navel, throat, head, heart, chest, sides, eyes, ears and the nose, burns all his good and bad karma, and with yoga, communion, attains moksha.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, about the kinds of food a yogin must eat, and the things that he must conquer, for him to acquire yoga shakti.'

Bhishma says, 'O Bhaarata, subsisting upon broken grains of rice and sodden cakes of sesame, abstaining from oil and butter, the yogin acquires yoga tejas. Eating just dry barley powder, and confining himself to one meal a day, the yogin acquires yoga shakti.

Drinking just a blend of water and milk, at first, once during the day, then once in a fortnight, then once in a month, then once in three months, and then just once in a whole year, the yogin acquires yoga tejas.

By abstaining from meat, subduing lust, wrath, heat, cold, rain, fear, grief and the vital breath, the purified yogin acquires yoga shakti. By overcoming the desire for delightful sounds, and other fine objects of the senses, and the frustration born of abstention from sexual congress; conquering extreme thirst, and the pleasures of touch, sleep and idleness

that is almost impossible to defeat, Mahayogins, with the help of their intellect, meditation and study, cause the most subtle Atman to reveal itself in all its glory.

This lofty path of yoga is exceptionally difficult to follow. No one can tread this path with ease. The trail is like a terrible forest, teeming with innumerable snakes and vermin. It has pitfalls everywhere, without water to slake one's thirst and, dense with thorns, it is virtually inaccessible.

Indeed, the way of yoga is like a road along which nothing to eat grows, which runs through a desert with all its trees burnt down, where bands of savage bandits rule. Very few young men can traverse it safely. Only a few evolved Brahmanas can tread such a path, with any ease and comfort. He who stops and turns his back on this path is guilty of many faults. Pure men easily persist with the razor sharp yoga-dhyana, while sinful men do not last on it for long.

If there is any disturbance or obstruction to dhyana, it can never lead the yogin to an auspicious goal. The man, O son of Kunti, who practices dhyana in accord with the precepts, successfully discards birth, death, happiness and sorrow.

All this that I tell you is from the diverse treatises upon yoga. One sees the highest benefit of yoga—the identification with Brahman, in twice-born men.

The excellence that the exalted yogin acquires is such that, at his will, he can enter into and come out of Brahma, and Vishnu, and Bhava, and Dharma, and the six-faced Kartikeya, and the sons of Brahma. Therefore, he can enter and leave tamas, rajas, sattva, and even Prakriti.

At his volition, he can enter and leave the Devi Siddhi, who is the consort of Varuna. He can do the same with all kinds of energies, the bright lord of the stars in the firmament, the Viswas, the Nagas, the Pitris, the mountains and hills, the vast and terrible oceans, all the rivers, and the clouds, the trees, Yakshas, the cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon, the Gandharvas and all male and female beings.

This discourse, O king, which is in accord with the Supreme Being of infinite lustre, is auspicious beyond description. The yogin has Narayana for his soul. Prevailing over all things, such a yogin can create all things.'

ENDNOTES

1. Surely an interpolation, among many others in the Santi and Anusasana Parvas.

2. Thousand names

1	Aum Sthirayai nama	Salutations to Him who is perennial
2	Aum Sthanave nama	Who is the axis of the world
3	Aum Prabhave nama	Who is the lord of all the world
4	Aum Bheemayai nama	Who is the source of fear
5	Aum Pravarayai nama	Who is very special
6	Aum Varadayai nama	Who gives boons
7	Aum Varaayai nama	Who spreads everything and makes it invisible
8	Aum Sarvaathmane nama	Who is the soul of every being
9	Aum Sarva Vikhyathayai nama	Who is famous everywhere
10	Aum Sarvasmai nama	Who pervades everything
11	Aum Sarvakarayai nama	Who does everything
12	Aum Bhavayai nama	Who is the source of everything
13	Aum Jatine nama	Who has matted hair
14	Aum Charmine nama	Who clothes himself in hide
15	Aum Shikhandine nama	Who has hair flowing like the peacock’s feathers

16	Aum Sarvaangaaya nama	Who has all the world as his organs
17	Aum Sarvabhavanaayai nama	Who creates and looks after everything
18	Aum Haraya nama	Who destroys everything
19	Aum Harinaakshaayai nama	Who has deer-like eyes
20	Aum Sarvabhoothaharayai nama	Who destroys all beings which exist
21	Aum Prabhave nama	Who enjoys everything
22	Aum Pravruthaye nama	Who is the form of work
23	Aum Nivruthaye nama	Who is the form of total sacrifice
24	Aum Niyathaya nama	Who is a sage and has conquered his senses
25	Aum Saswathaya nama	Who is permanent
26	Aum Druvaya nama	Who is stable
27	Aum Smasana vasinee nama	Who lives in the cremation ground
28	Aum Bhagawathe nama	Who is the source of wealth, charity, fame, renunciation and salvation
29	Aum Khacharaya nama	Who travels in the sky
30	Aum Ghocharaya nama	Who can be felt only by intuition
31	Aum Ardhanayai nama	Who apprehends evil men
32	Aum Abhivadyaya nama	Who is fit to be saluted
33	Aum Mahakarmane nama	Who does great deeds
34	Aum Thapasvine nama	Who is a sage doing meditation
35	Aum Bhooha Bhavanayai nama	Who creates the five great elements —sky, earth, fire, air and wind
36	Aum Unmatha Veshaprachannayai nama	Who hides himself as a madman
37	Aum Sarva Lokaprajapathae nama	Who is the lord of all beings of all worlds
38	Aum Maharoopayai nama	Who has a very great form
39	Aum Mahakayayai nama	Who has the whole universe for his body
40	Aum Vrusha Roopayai	Who has the form of a bull

	nama	
41	Aum Mahayasase nama	Who has great fame
42	Aum Mahatmane nama	Who has a very great mind
43	Aum Sarva Bhoothathmane nama	Who is the soul of all beings
44	Aum Viswa Roopayai nama	Who is seen everywhere
45	Aum Mahahanave nama	Who has very jaw
46	Aum Loka Palaya nama	Who is of the form of the Lokapalas who protect the earth
47	Aum Anthar Hithathmane nama	One who has atttributes which are within him and not visible
48	Aum Prasadaya nama	Who has the form of love
49	Aum Hayagardhabhaye nama	Who travels in the chariot drawn by zebras
50	Aum Pavithraya nama	Who is pure
51	Aum Mahathe nama	Who is fit to be worshipped
52	Aum Niyamaya nama	Who is the rules of life
53	Aum Niyamasrithaya nama	Who is the refuge to those who follow rules of life
54	Aum Sarva karmane nama	Who does all actions
55	Aum Swayambhoothaya nama	Who created himself
56	Aum Aadhaye nama	Who is most ancient; who is first among beings
57	Aum Aadhikaraya nama	Who created Lord Brahma
58	Aum Nidhaye nama	Who is a treasure
59	Aum Sahasrakshata nama	Who has a thousand eyes
60	Aum Visalakshaya nama	Who has very great eyes
61	Aum Somaya nama	Who is with Uma
62	Aum Nakshatra Sadhakayai nama	Who created the stars
63	Aum Chandraya nama	Who has the form of the moon
64	Aum Suryaya nama	Who has the form of the sun
65	Aum Sanaya nama	Who has the form of Saturn

66	Aum Kethave nama	Who has the form of Ketu
67	Aum Grahaya nama	Who has the form of the planets
68	Aum Graha pathaye nama	Who is the lord of all planets
69	Aum Varaaya nama	Who is the best
70	Aum Athraye nama	Who is the form of Mercury born in Atri's clan
71	Aum Adryaa Namaskarthre nama	Who saluted Anasuya, the wife of Sage Atri
72	Aum Mruga Banarpanayai nama	Who shot an arrow at the deer sent by sages of the Daruka forest
73	Aum Anagaya nama	Who cannot be approached by sins
74	Aum Mahathapse nama	Who has great penance
75	Aum Gorathapase nama	Who does terrible penance
76	Aum Adheenaya nama	Who is not poor though he looks as if he is
77	Aum Dheena Sadhakayai nama	Who fulfils desires of poor people
78	Aum Samvathsarakaraya nama	Who makes the wheel of time revolve
79	Aum Manthraya Nama	Who is the sacred mantras
80	Aum Pramanaya nama	Who is the source of intuition
81	Aum Pramaya Thapase nama	Who himself is the great penance
82	Aum Yogine nama	Who is a yogi
83	Aum Yojyaya nama	Who can be attained by yoga
84	Aum Maha Beejaya nama	Who is the great seed
85	Aum Maha Rethase mana	Who is the great semen
86	Aum Mahabalaya nama	Who has great strength
87	Aum Swarna Rethase nama	Who has golden semen
88	Aum Sarvagnaya nama	Who knows everything
89	Aum Subeejaya nama	Who is the good seed
90	Aum Beeja vahanayai nama	Who rides on the seed
91	Aum Dasa Bahave nama	Who has ten hands

92	Aum Animishaya nama	Who does not blink his eyes
93	Aum Neelakandaya nama	Who has a blue throat
94	Aum Umapathaye nama	Who is the consort of Uma
95	Aum Viswa Roopaya nama	Who is of universal form
96	Aum Swayam Sreshtaya nama	Who is himself great
97	Aum Bala veeraya nama	Who is the mighty hero
98	Aum Abhalokanaya nama	Who is the splendour of the worlds
99	Aum Gana karthre nama	Who creates the Ganas
100	Aum Ganapathaye nama	Who is the leader of the Ganas
101	Aum Digvasase nama	Who is clad in the directions; naked; sky-clad
102	Aum Kaamaya nama	Who is loved by all
103	Aum Manthravidhe nama	Who is an expert in mantras
104	Aum Paramaya manthraya nama	Who is the greatest mantra personified
105	Aum Sarva Bhavakaraaya nama	Who is the maker of all emotions
106	Aum Haraaya nama	Who is the stealer of our hearts
107	Aum Kamandaludaraaya nama	Who has with him the kamadalu
108	Aum Dhanvine nama	Who carries a bow
109	Aum Banahasthaya nama	Who carries an arrow in his hand
110	Aum Kapalavathe nama	Who carries a skull
111	Aum Asanaye nama	Who sits enthroned
112	Aum Satagnine nama	Who carries the Satagni
113	Aum Gadgine nama	Who carries a sword with him
114	Aum Pattissine nama	Who carries the knife called Pattisi
115	Aum Ayudhine nama	Who carries weapons
116	Aum Mahathe nama	Who is great
117	Aum sthruvahasthaya nama	Who carries the ladle Sthruva in his hand
118	Aum Surupaya nama	Who is handsome
119	Aum Thejase nama	Who is lustrous
120	Aum Theskaraaya Nidhaye	Who is like the treasure giving light

	nama	to devotees
121	Aum Ushneeshine nama	Who wears a turban
122	Aum Suvakthraya nama	Who has a handsome face
123	Aum Udagraya nama	Who has a stable form
124	Aum Vinathaya nama	Who is humble
125	Aum Deerghaya nama	Who is tall
126	Aum Harikesaya nama	Who has black hair turned to grey
127	Aum Sutirthaya nama	Who is of the form of a sacred ford
128	Aum Krishnaaya nama	Who is ever happy
129	Aum Srugala Rupaya nama	Who assumes the form of a jackal
130	Aum Siddharthaya nama	Who is the acme of occult powers
131	Aum Mundaya nama	Who is of the form of an ascetic
132	Aum Sarvashubamkaraya nama	Who grants all good things
133	Aum Ajaya nama	Who does not have birth
134	Aum Bahurupaya nama	Who assumes many forms
135	Aum Ganda Darine nama	Who wears fragrant unguents
136	Aum Kapardhine nama	Who has matted hair
137	Aum Oordhwarethase nama	Who has vanquished passion
138	Aum Oordhwa Lingaya nama	Whose linga is erect
139	Aum Oordhwasayine nama	Who sleeps facing upwards
140	Aum Nabha Sthalaya nama	Who has a place in the sky
141	Aum Trijadine nama	Who has triad dreadlocks
142	Aum Cheeravasase nama	Who wears the hide of trees
143	Aum Rudraya nama	Who removes sorrows
144	Aum Senapathaye nama	Who is the commander of the army
145	Aum Vibhave nama	Who assumes a variety of forms
146	Aum Ahacharaya nama	Who is of the form of Devas travelling by day
147	Aum Nakthancharaya nama	Who is of the form of Devas who move at night
148	Aum Thigma Manyava	Who has great anger

	nama	
149	Aum Suvarchasaya nama	Who has the resplendent light of knowledge
150	Aum Gajagne nama	Who killed the Asura who took the form of an elephant
151	Aum Daityagne nama	Who killed Asuras
152	Aum Kaalaya nama	Who is of the form of time
153	Aum Loka Dathre nama	Who rules over this world
154	Aum Gunaakaraya nama	Who is the storehouse of good qualities
155	Aum Simha Sardhoolaroopaya nama	Who is of the form of the tiger and the lion
156	Aum Ardhra Charmambaraavruthaya nama	Who uses the blood-soaked elephant hide to cover himself
157	Aum Kaala Yoginee nama	Who through yoga has defeated time
158	Aum Maha Naadaya nama	Who is the personification of the great sound
159	Aum Sarva Kaamaya nama	Who is all desires
160	Aum Chathush Padaya nama	Who can be worshipped in four ways; Who can be worshiped as Viswa, Taijasa, Prajna and Shiva.
161	Aum Nisha Charaya nama	Who moves at night
162	Aum Prethacharine nama	Who travels with pretas, corpses
163	Aum Bhootha Charine nama	Who travels with ghosts
164	Aum Maheswaraya nama	Who is the great God
165	Aum Bahu Bhutaya nama	Who also has the form of strength
166	Aum Bahudaraya nama	Who bears this great universe
167	Aum Swarbhanave nama	Who shines like a sun by his own light or Who is of the form of planet Rahu
168	Aum Amithaya nama	Who is beyond measurement
169	Aum Gathaye nama	Who is the Destination to reach

170	Aum Nruthya Priyaya nama	Who likes dancing
171	Aum Nithya Narthaya nama	Who dances always
172	Aum Narthakaaya nama	Who is the dancer or who makes everything dance
173	Aum Sarva Laalasaya nama	Who likes everyone
174	Aum Ghoraaya nama	Who has a terrible form
175	Aum Maha Thapase nama	Who is the great penance
176	Aum Pasaaya nama	Who ties every one with the rope of illusion
177	Aum Nithyaya nama	Who is perennial
178	Aum Giri Ruhaya nama	Who lives on the mountain
179	Aum Nabhase nama	Who is unattached like the sky
180	Aum Sahasra Hasthaya nama	Who has thousands of hands
181	Aum Vijayaya nama	Who is of the form of victory
182	Aum Vyavasayaya nama	Who is industrious or who is of the form of definite action
183	Aum Athandrithaya nama	Who is not lazy
184	Aum Adarshanaya nama	Who is unshakable
185	Aum Darshanathmane nama	Who is the soul of fear for others
186	Aum Yagnagne nama	Who destroys fire sacrifice done with egoism
187	Aum Kama Nasakaya nama	Who killed the god of love
188	Aum Daksha Yagaapahaarine nama	Who destroyed the fire sacrifice of Daksha
189	Aum Susahaya nama	Who is greatly patient
190	Aum Madhyamaya nama	Who is unbiased
191	Aum Thejopahaarine nama	Who steals the strength of others
192	Aum Balagne nama	Who kills those bloated by strength
193	Aum Mudhithaya nama	Who is always happy

194	Aum Arthaya nama	Who is liked by everyone
195	Aum Ajithaya nama	Who cannot be defeated by anyone
196	Aum Avaraya nama	Who does not have anyone above him
197	Aum Gambheera Ghoshaya nama	Who produces great sound
198	Aum Gambheeraya nama	Who is beyond the intellect
199	Aum Gambheera Balavahanaay nama	Who rides on a bull which cannot be shaken by others
200	Aum Nyagrodha Roopaya nama	Who is of the form of the tree of day-to-day life which grows downwards
201	Aum Nyagrodhaya nama	Who assumes the form of Dakshinamurthy, under a banyan tree
202	Aum Vruksha Karmasthithaye nama	Who is on the top of the ear like a leaf of the tree during a deluge
203	Aum Vibhave nama	Who is the favourite god of all
204	Aum Sutheeshna Dasanaya nama	Who has very sharp teeth
205	Aum Maha Kayaya nama	Who has a very big body
206	Aum Mahananaya nama	Who has a very big face
207	Aum Vishvak Senaya nama	Who scatters the Asura army in different directions
208	Aum Haraye nama	Who destroys everything
209	Aum Yagnaya nama	Who is the personification of fire sacrifice
210	Aum Samyuga Peedavahanaya nama	Who has the bull as the flag as well as stride
211	Aum Theeshna Thaapaya nama	Who is of the form of burning fire
212	Aum Haryaswaya nama	Who is the form of the sun with green horses
213	Aum Sahaayaya nama	Who is the help for life
214	Aum Karma Kalavidhe	Who knows the proper time to

	nama	perform duties
215	Aum Vishnu Prasadithaya nama	Who has been pleased by the devotion of Vishnu
216	Aum Yagnaya nama	Who is of the form of Vishnu
217	Aum Samudhraya nama	Who is of the form of the ocean
218	Aum Badavamukhaya nama	Who is the form of fire which dries water
219	Aum Huthasana Sahayaya nama	Who is the form of wind
220	Aum Prasanthathmane nama	Who is as peaceful as an ocean after tide
221	Aum Huthasanaya nama	Who is of the form of fire
222	Aum Ugra Thejase nama	Who has the terrific power of a flame
223	Aum Maha Thejase nama	Who has great light and shines
224	Aum Janyaya nama	Who is very able in war
225	Aum Vijaya Kalavidhe nama	Who knows the time for victory
226	Aum Jyothishamayanaya nama	Who is of the form of astrology
227	Aum Siddhaye nama	Who is of the form of proper completion
228	Aum Sarva Vigrahaya nama	Who makes everything as his body
229	Aum Shikhine nama	Who has well-grown hair
230	Aum Mundine nama	Who is the form of clean-shaven sage
231	Aum Jadine nama	Who has a matted lock
232	Aum Jwaline nama	Who is of the form of a flame
233	Aum Moorthijaya nama	Who appears in the form of man and animals
234	Aum Moordhajaya nama	Who is on the head
235	Aum Baline nama	Who is strong
236	Aum Vainavine nama	Who has a flute in his hand
237	Aum Panavine nama	Who has a shaking drum in his hand

238	Aum Thaline nama	Who has metallic cymbals in his hand
239	Aum Khaline nama	Who is the owner of a paddy store
240	Aum Kalakatamkataya nama	Who is the gate for the god of death who is of the form of time
241	Aum Nakshatr Vigrahamathaye nama	Who has a body and intellect which shine like stars
242	Aum Guna Budhaye nama	Who knows/measures qualities
243	Aum Layaya nama	Who is the source where everything merges in the end
244	Aum Agamaya nama	Who does not have any movement
245	Aum Prajapathaye nama	Who is the god of the people
246	Aum Viswabahave nama	Who has arms everywhere
247	OM Vibhagaya nama	Who cannot be divided
248	Aum Sarvagaya nama	Who is everywhere
249	Aum Amugaya nama	Who is faceless/Who is not interested in enjoyment
250	Aum Vimochanaya nama	Who grants salvation
251	Aum Susaranaya nama	Who can be attained easily
252	Aum Hiranyakavachodbhavaya nama	Who appears with golden apparel
253	Aum Medrajaya nama	Who arises from the linga
254	Aum Balacharine nama	Who moves about with a strong army
255	Aum Mahee Charine nama	Who travels throughout the earth
256	Aum Sruthaya nama	Who is spread everywhere
257	Aum Sarva Thooryavinodhine nama	Who enjoys all types of instrumental music
258	Aum Sarvathodhya Parigrahaya nama	Who considers all beings as his family
259	Aum Vyalaroopaya nama	Who is of the form of A serpent in Adhisesha
260	Aum Guhaavasinee nama	Who lives in the cave of one's mind.

261	Aum Guhaaya nama	Who is of the form of Lord Subrahmanya
262	Aum Maline nama	Who wears a garland
263	Aum Tharangavidhe nama	Who has the waves of creation, upkeep and destruction
264	Aum Tridasaya nama	Who is the source of birth, life and death of all beings
265	Aum Trikaladruthe nama	Who wears the three periods—past, present and future
266	Aum Karma Sarvabhanda Vimochanaya nama	Who cuts of the ties of karma
267	Aum Asurendranaam Bandanaya nama	Who is the reason for the imprisonment of the kings of Asuras
268	Aum Yudhi Shathruvinasanaya nama	Who kills enemies in war
269	Aum Sankhya Prasadaaya nama	Who gets pleased by the discussion of Sankhya philosophy
270	Aum Durvasase nama	Who took the form of sage Durvasa
271	Aum Sarva Sadhunishevithaya nama	Who is served by all good people
272	Aum Prasakandanaya nama	Who makes all others slip during a deluge all others die
273	Aum Vibhagagnaya nama	Who is an expert in giving boons/punishments according to their deeds
274	Aum Athulyaya nama	Who is incomparable
275	Aum Yagna Vibhagavidhe nama	Who is an expert in giving the share of each in the fire sacrifice
276	Aum Sarva Vasaya nama	Who is everywhere
277	Aum Sarvacharine nama	Who travels everywhere
278	Aum Durvasase nama	Who cannot be clothed because he is everywhere
279	Aum Vasavaaya nama	Who is in the form of Indra
280	Aum Amaraya nama	Who does not have death
281	Aum Haimaya nama	Who is of the colour of gold

282	Aum Hemakaraaya nama	Who makes gold
283	Aum Nishkarmaaya nama	Who does not do any work
284	Aum Sarva Dharine nama	Who wears /carries every thing
285	Aum Darothamaya nama	Who is the greatest among those who carry
286	Aum Lohithakshaya nama	Who has red eyes
287	Aum Mahakshaya nama	Who has senses which are spread everywhere
288	Aum Vijayaakshaya nama	Who has a chariot which wins everybody
289	Aum Visaaradhaya nama	Who knows everything
290	Aum Sangrahaya nama	Who recognises devotees
291	Aum Nigrahaya nama	Who punishes bad people
292	Aum Karthre nama	Who creates and looks after everybody
293	Aum Sarpacheera Nivasanaya nama	Who ties a serpent over his apparel
294	Aum Mukhyaya nama	Who is the chief
295	Aum Amukhyaya nama	Who does not have a chief
296	Aum Dehaya nama	Who is of the form of the body
297	Aum Kahalaye nama	Who has a drum called Kahala
298	Aum Sarva Kamadhaya nama	Who fulfils all desires of his devotees
299	Aum Sarvakala Prasadaya nama	Who showers his grace at all times
300	Aum Subalaya nama	Who has the strength that serves others
301	Aum Bala Roopadruthe nama	Who is strong as well as handsome
302	Aum Sarva Kamavaraya nama	Who is the best among all gods whom we desire
303	Aum Sarvadaya nama	Who gives everything
304	Aum Sarvathomukhaya nama	Who has faces everywhere
305	Aum Aakasanirviroopaya	Who makes several forms from the

	nama	sky like himself
306	Aum Nibhadine nama	Who appears to have entered our body and fallen there
307	Aum Avasaya nama	Who cannot be under the control of anybody
308	Aum Khagaya nama	Who is like the bird which is always with the tree of life
309	Aum Roudra roopaya nama	Who has a very angry appearance
310	Aum Amsave nama	Who is of the form of the ray of light
311	Aum Adithya nama	Who is of the form of the sun
312	Aum Bahurasmaye nama	Who has several rays of light
313	Aum Suvarchisine nama	Who has pretty rays
314	Aum Vasu Vegaya nama	Who has the speed of wind
315	Aum Maha Vegaya nama	Who has very great speed
316	Aum Manovegaya nama	Who has the speed of the mind
317	Aum Nisacharaya nama	Who travels at night
318	Aum Sarva Vasine nama	Who resides in everything
319	Aum Sriyavasine nama	Who lives in Srividya
320	Aum Upadesakaraya nama	Who gives counsels/Who teaches
321	Aum Akaraya nama	Who does not do anything
322	Aum Munaye nama	Who is the sage
323	Aum Athma Niralokaya nama	Who sees carefully each Jivatma
324	Aum Sambhagnaya nama	Who is being depended on by everybody
325	Aum Sahasradaya nama	Who gives in thousands and thousands
326	Aum Pakshine nama	Who is Garuda, the best among the birds
327	Aum Paksha Roopaya nama	Who helps in the form of our friends
328	Aum Athideepthaya nama	Who has great brilliance
329	Aum Visampthaye nama	Who is the lord of the citizens

330	Aum Unmadaya nama	Who makes us develop mad devotion
331	Aum Madanaya nama	Who gives us immense happiness
332	Aum Kamaya nama	Who is liked by everybody
333	Aum Aswathaya nama	Who is in the form of a banyan tree
334	Aum Arthakaraya nama	Who gives what is desired
335	Aum Yasase nama	Who blesses his devotees with fame
336	Aum Vamadevaya nama	Who gives the prize deserved according to one's actions
337	Aum Vamaaya nama	Who is very handsome
338	Aum Prache nama	Who is before everybody
339	Aum Dakshinaya nama	Who is capable of ruling all the three worlds
340	Aum Vamanaya nama	Who came in form of Vamana, an avatara of Vishnu
341	Aum Siddha Yogine nama	Who is a great yogi who is also a sidha
342	Aum Maharshaye nama	Who is the greatest among sages
343	Aum Sidharthaya nama	Who is the perfect one who has everything
344	Aum Sidha Sadhakaya nama	Who grants the desires of Siddhas
345	Aum Bikshave nama	Who is of the form of one who eats what he gets as alms
346	Aum Bikshu Roopaya nama	Who looks like a beggar
347	Aum Vipanaya nama	Who does not specify a price
348	Aum Mrudhave nama	Who has a very soft heart
349	Aum Avyayaya nama	Who is consistent
350	Aum Maha Senaya nama	Who has a great army
351	Aum Vishakhaya nama	Who is of the form of Lord Subrahamanya
352	Aum Sashti Bagaya nama	Who has sixty parts
353	Aum Gavampathaye nama	Who makes the sensory organs function

354	Aum Vajrahasthaya nama	Who holds the vajrayudha in his hand
355	Aum Vishkambhine nama	Who is spread everywhere
356	Aum Chamusthambhanaya nama	Who paralyses the enemy army
357	Aum Vruthavruthakaraya nama	Who circles the enemy in his chariot and who returns after defeating them without wounds
358	Aum Thalaya nama	Who knows the bottom of the ocean of day-to-day life
359	Aum Madhave nama	Who is of the form of the spring season
360	Aum Madhukalochanaya nama	Who has honey-like eyes which are red
361	Aum Vachaspathyaya nama	Who is of the form of Brahaspati, the teacher of Devas
362	Aum Vajasanaya nama	Who made the Vajasena branch of Vedas in the form of the sun
363	Aum Nithyamasritha Poojithaya nama	Who is daily being worshipped by his devotees
364	Aum Brahmacharine nama	Who is one with Brahman
365	Aum Loka Charine nama	Who travels between the worlds
366	Aum Sarva Charine nama	Who travels everywhere
367	Aum Vichara Vidhe nama	Who knows the enquiry of truth
368	Aum Ishanaya nama	Who conducts everything with attention
369	Aum Ishwaraya nama	Who spreads everything
370	Aum Kaalaya nama	Who judges the sins and good actions over time
371	Aum Nisha Charine nama	Who travels on the night of a deluge
372	Aum Pinaka Bruthe nama	Who holds the bow called Pinaka
373	Aum Nimithasthata nama	Who resides in causes
374	Aum Nimithaya nama	Who is the cause
375	Aum Nandaye nama	Who is the treasurehouse of knowledge

376	Aum Nandikaraya nama	Who gives wealth
377	Aum Haraye nama	Who is Anjaneya in the form of monkeys
378	Aum Nandeeswaraya nama	Who is the lord of the Nandi
379	Aum Nandine nama	Who has also been called the Nandi
380	Aum Nandanaya nama	Who makes us happy
381	Aum Nandi Vardhanaya nama	Who increases happiness of devotees/Who destroys the wealth of his enemies
382	Aum Bhaga Haarine nama	Who steals wealth and fame
383	Aum Nihanthre nama	Who takes away life in the form of Lord Yama
384	Aum Kaalaya nama	Who is the seat of arts
385	Aum Brahmane nama	Who is very great
386	Aum Pithamahaya nama	Who is the father of a father
387	Aum Chathurmukhaya nama	Who has four faces when he takes the form of Brahma
388	Aum Mahalingaya nama	Who is the great linga
389	Aum Charu Lingaya nama	Who is pretty
390	Aum Lingadhyakshaya nama	Who presides over in the form of a linga
391	Aum Suradhyakshaya nama	Who is the lord of all devas
392	Aum Yogadhyakshaya nama	Who is the lord of all yugas
393	Aum Yuga Vahaya nama	Who creates yugas
394	Aum Bheejadyakshaya nama	Who is the lord of the root cause
395	Aum Bheejakarthre nama	Who makes nature function
396	Aum Adhyathmanugathaya nama	Who follows the tenets of the Adhyatma shastras
397	Aum Balaya nama	Who has strength
398	Aum Ithihasya nama	Who is the form of epics

399	Aum Sakalpaya nama	Who is in the form of Kalpa shastras
400	Aum Gowthama nama	Who is in the form of sage Gowthama
401	Aum Nishakaraya nama	Who created darkness
402	Aum Dhambaya nama	Who controls his enemies
403	Aum Adhambhaya nama	Who cannot be controlled by others
404	Aum Vaidhambhaya nama	Who is dear to those who are not proud
405	Aum Vasyaya nama	Who can be controlled by devotion
406	Aum Vasakaraya nama	Who makes all others his
407	Aum Kalaye nama	Who is of the form of war between Asuras and Devas
408	Aum Loka Karthre nama	Who has created the worlds
409	Aum Pasupathaye nama	Who is the lord of all beings
410	Aum Maha Karthre nama	Who created the five bhoothas
411	Aum Anoushadhaya nama	Who does not eat food
412	Aum Aksharaya nama	Who does not have decay
413	Aum Paramaya Brahmane nama	Who is the incomparable Brahman
414	Aum Bhalavathe nama	Who is of the form of Devas who control strength
415	Aum Chakraya nama	Who created strength
416	Aum Neethyai nama	Who is the law
417	Aum Aneethyai nama	Who cannot be ruled by others
418	Aum Shuddhathmane nama	Who has a very clean mind
419	Aum Shudhaya nama	Who is clean
420	Aum Maanyaya nama	Who is fit to be worshipped
421	Aum Gathagathaya nama	Who appears and vanishes
422	Aum Bahu Prasadaya nama	Who is greatly pleased
423	Aum Suswapnaya nama	Who is Thaijasa who controls dreams
424	Aum Darpanaya nama	Who is like a mirror

425	Aum Amithrajithe nama	Who has won over internal and external enemies
426	Aum Vedakaraya nama	Who created the Vedas
427	Aum Mathrakaraya nama	Who created mantras
428	Aum Vidhushe nama	Who is an expert in all arts
429	Aum Samarthanaya nama	Who destroys enemies in war
430	Aum Maha Meghanivasine nama	Who resides in the clouds at the time of a deluge
431	Aum Mahagoraya nama	Who is of a very fearful form
432	Aum Vasine nama	Who keeps everything under his custody
433	Aum Karaya nama	Who destroys
434	Aum Agnijwalaya nama	Who is like the flame of the fire
435	Aum Mahajwalaya nama	Who has the light of a great flame
436	Aum Athidhoomraya nama	Who creates a lot of smoke as he burns everything
437	Aum Huthaya nama	Who is satisfied by everybody in the fire sacrifice
438	Aum Havishe nama	Who is the offering in the fire sacrifice
439	Aum Vrushanaya nama	Who showers boons/punishment for our actions
440	Aum Sankaraya nama	Who gives us pleasure
441	Aum Nithyamvarchaswine nama	Who is always resplendent
442	Aum Dhoomakethanaya nama	Who is the fire which produces smoke
443	Aum Neelaya nama	Who is blue
444	Aum Angalubhdhaya nama	Who is present in a part of his body
445	Aum Shobhanaya nama	Who is of the form which is always good
446	Aum Niravagrahaya nama	Who does not have anything to stop him
447	Aum Swasthithaya nama	Who is in himself

448	Aum Swasthibhavaya nama	Who has a good place to stay in
449	Aum Bhagine nama	Who has a share in the fire sacrifice
450	Aum Bhagakaraya nama	Who gives the shares to other devas in the fire sacrifice
451	Aum Laghave nama	Who easily showers his grace
452	Aum Uthsangaya nama	Who is not attached
453	Aum Mahaangaya nama	Who is in the form of big linga
454	Aum Mahagarbhaparaayanaya nama	Who carries in his belly the entire world during a deluge
455	Aum Krishnavarnaya nama	Who is black in colour
456	Aum Suvarnaya nama	Who is golden
457	Aum Sarva Dehinaamindriyaya nama	Who is the sensory organs of all animals
458	Aum Maha Padaya nama	Who has very big feet
459	Aum Maha Hasthata nama	Who has very big hands
460	Aum Maha Kayaya nama	Who has a very big body
461	Aum Maha Yasase nama	Who has very great fame
462	Aum Maha Moordhne nama	Who has a very big head
463	Aum Maha Maathraya nama	Who has a very big measure
464	Aum Maha Nethraya nama	Who has very big eyes
465	Aum Nisalayaya nama	Who is the place where darkness hides
466	Aum Mahanthakaya nama	Who is the god of death
467	Aum Maha Karnaya nama	Who has very big ears
468	Aum Mahoshtaaya nama	Who has very big lips
469	Aum Maha Hanave nama	Who has very big jaws
470	Aum Maha Nasaya nama	Who has a very big nose
471	Aum Maha Khambhave nama	Who has a very big neck
472	Aum Maha Greevaya	Who has a very big head

	nama	
473	Aum Smasanabhaaje nama	Who lives in the cremation ground
474	Aum Maha Vaksase nama	Who has a very big chest
475	Aum Mahoraskaya nama	Who has a very wide chest
476	Aum Antharathmane nama	Who is the soul within
477	Aum Mrugalayaya nama	Who keeps deer with him
478	Aum Lambanaya nama	Who keeps several universes hanging on him like a fruit hangs on a tree
479	Aum Labhidoshtaya nama	Who has hanging lips during deluge
480	Aum Mahamayaya nama	Who has very great illusions
481	Aum Payonidhaye nama	Who is the ocean of milk
482	Aum Maha Danthaya nama	Who has very big teeth
483	Aum Maha Damshtraya nama	Who has very big incisor teeth
484	Aum Mahe Jihwaya nama	Who has a very big tongue
485	Aum Maha Mukhata nama	Who has a very big mouth
486	Aum Maha Nakhaya nama	Who has very big nails
487	Aum Maha Romaya nama	Who has very long hair
488	Aum Maha Kesaya nama	Who has long hair in his tuft
489	Aum Maha Jadaya nama	Who has matted locks
490	Aum Prasannaya nama	Who has pity towards his devotees
491	Aum Prasadaya nama	Who is the personification of love and grace
492	Aum Prathyaya nama	Who is wisdom itself
493	Aum Giri Sadhanaya nama	Who uses Mount Meru as a bow
494	Aum Snehanaya nama	Who is like a friend to his devotees
495	Aum Asnehanaya nama	Who is detached
496	Aum Ajithaya nama	Who cannot be defeated
497	Aum Mahamunaye nama	Who is a very great sage, silent and devout
498	Aum Vrukshakaraya nama	Who is of the form of the tree of life
499	Aum Vruksha kethave nama	Who has a flag of a tree

500	Aum Analaya nama	Who never gets satisfied
501	Aum Vayu Vahanaya nama	Who makes the wind blow
502	Aum Gandaline nama	Who lives on the hilly terrain
503	Aum Meru Damne nama	Who lives on Mount Meru
504	Aum Devadithipathaye nama	Who is the lord of the Devas
505	Aum Atharva Seershaya nama	Who has Atharva Veda as his head
506	Aum Samaasyaya nama	Who has Sama Veda as his face
507	Aum Riksaharamithekshanaya nama	Who has thousands of Rig Veda mantras as eyes
508	Aum Yaju Padabhujaya nama	Who has Yajur Veda as hands and legs
509	Aum Guhyaya nama	Who is the Upanishads with secret meanings
510	Aum Prakasaya nama	Who is the Karma Kanda which shines
511	Aum Jangamaya nama	Who travels everywhere
512	Aum Amogharthaya nama	Who is the god who always answers prayers
513	Aum Prasadaya nama	Who is very kind-hearted
514	Aum Abhigamyaya nama	Who can be attained easily
515	Aum Sudarsanaya nama	Who has a very beneficial look
516	Aum Upakaraya nama	Who helps
517	Aum Priyaya nama	Who is dear to everybody
518	Aum Sarvaya nama	Who comes facing us
519	Aum Kanakaya nama	Who is gold
520	Aum Kanchancchavaye nama	Who is golden
521	Aum Nabhaye nama	Who is the support to the world
522	Aum Nandikaraya nama	Who grants happiness
523	Aum Bhavaya nama	Who is of the form of attention
524	Aum Pushkara Sthapathaye nama	Who created the lotus-like universe

525	Aum Sthiraya nama	Who is as stable as a mountain
526	Aum Dwadasaya nama	Who is the twelfth stage called salvation
527	Aum Thrasanaya nama	Who makes us afraid
528	Aum Adhyaya nama	Who came even before the world
529	Aum Yagnaya nama	Who is the sacrifice which unites the Soul and God
530	Aum Yagna Samahithaya nama	Who can be attained by conducting sacrifices
531	Aum Naktham nama	Who is night
532	Aum Kalaye nama	Who is the kama and krodha which lead to great passion
533	Aum Kaalaya nama	Who creates the life of birth and death over time
534	Aum Makaraya nama	Who resides in the Shimsumara chakra which is shaped like a crocodile
535	Aum Kala Poojithaya nama	Who is being worshipped by Kala, the god of death
536	Aum Saganaya nama	Who is with various Ganas
537	Aum Ganakaraya nama	Who made Asuras his servants
538	Aum Bhootha Vahanasarathaye nama	Whose charioteer is Brahma who leads the Ganas
539	Aum Basmachayaya nama	Who exists in vibhoothi, the sacred ash
540	Aum Basma Gopthre nama	Who protects the world using sacred ash
541	Aum Basmabhoothaya nama	Who himself is the form of sacred ash
542	Aum Tharave nama	Who is of the form of a tree
543	Aum Ganaya nama	Who is of the form of the Ganas
544	Aum Loka Palaya nama	Who is the protector of the world
545	Aum Alokaya nama	Who is beyond the worlds
546	Aum Mahathmane nama	Who is the great soul which is everywhere

547	Aum Sarva Poojithaya nama	Who is being worshipped by everybody
548	Aum Shuklaya nama	Who is white in colour
549	Aum Trishuklaya nama	Who has a white mind, words and body
550	Aum Sampannaya nama	Who is filled up everywhere
551	Aum Suchaye nama	Who is very clean
552	Aum Bhootha Nishevithaya nama	Who is being worshipped by teachers of yore
553	Aum Ashramasthaya nama	Who is the god of the four different asramas
554	Aum Kriya Vasthaya nama	Who is in rituals like yoga
555	Aum Viswa Karmamathaye nama	Who understands all actions of the world
556	Aum Varaaya nama	Who is liked by everybody
557	Aum Vishala shakaya nama	Who has long hands/Who has wide branches
558	Aum Thamroshtaya nama	Who has red lips
559	Aum Ambhujalaya nama	Who is in the sea in the form of water
560	Aum Sunischalaya nama	Who has a form which is totally stable
561	Aum Kapilaya nama	Who is reddish-blue fire
562	Aum Kapichaya nama	Who is golden
563	Aum Shuklaya nama	Who is white and wears white ash
564	Aum Ayushe nama	Who is the soul
565	Aum Parya nama	Who is earlier than the earliest
566	Aum Aparaya nama	Who is behind everyone
567	Aum Gandharwaya nama	Who is of the form of celestial beings called Gandharvas
568	Aum Adithaye nama	Who is the goddess called Aditi
569	Aum Tharkshyaya nama	Who is of the form of Garuda among birds
570	Aum Suvigneyaya nama	Who can be easily attained
571	Aum Susaradaya nama	Who has sweet speech

572	Aum Parasvayudhaya nama	Who holds an axe as a weapon
573	Aum Devya nama	Who has a wish to win
574	Aum Anukarine nama	Who obeys the wishes of devotees
575	Aum Subandhavaya nama	Who is a good relation
576	Aum Thumbhaveenaya nama	Who has a lyre made out of two bottle gourds, the rudra veena
577	Aum Maha Krodhaya nama	Who is very angry at the time of destruction
578	Aum Urdhwarethase nama	Who has the greatest gods like Brahma and Vishnu as subjects
579	Aum Jalesayaya nama	Who sleeps on water in the form of Vishnu
580	Aum Ugraya nama	Who swallows everything at the time of a deluge
581	Aum Vasankaraya nama	Who makes everything as his
582	Aum Vamsaya nama	Who is the flute
583	Aum Vamsa Nadhaya nama	Who is the sweet music of the flute
584	Aum Anindhidhaya nama	Who is blameless
585	Aum Sarvanga Roopaya nama	Who has pretty body parts
586	Aum Mayavine nama	Who creates the world by illusion
587	Aum Suhrudhaya nama	Who has a good heart
588	Aum Anilaya nama	Who is of the form of wind
589	Aum Analaya nama	Who is of the form of fire
590	Aum Bandhanaya nama	Who is the chord binding life
591	Aum Bandhakarthre nama	Who ties us to day-to-day life
592	Aum Subandhana Vimochanaya nama	Who releases us from the ties of life
593	Aum Sayagnaraye nama	Who is with Asuras who are enemies of yagna
594	Aum Sakamaraye nama	Who is with yogis who have conquered passion
595	Aum Maha Damshtraya	Who has long incisors

	nama	
596	Aum Mahayudhaya nama	Who has great weapons
597	Aum Bahudha Nindithaya nama	Who has been insulted in several ways
598	Aum Sarvaya nama	Who troubles people who insult him
599	Aum Sankaraya nama	Who grants pleasure
600	Aum Sankaraya nama	Who destroys doubts
601	Aum Adanaya nama	Who does not have wealth
602	Aum Amaresaya nama	Who is the god of the Devas
603	Aum Maha Devaya nama	Who is the greatest God
604	Aum Viswa Devaya nama	Who is the God of the universe
605	Aum Surarigne nama	Who kills enemies of the Devas
606	Aum Ahirbudhnyaya nama	Who is of the form of Adhisesha
607	Aum Anilabhaya nama	Who is like the wind
608	Aum Chekithanaya nama	Who knows everything fully well
609	Aum Havishe nama	Who is the cooked rice offered to God
610	Aum Ajaikapadhe nama	Who is the one among the eleven Rudras
611	Aum Kapaline nama	Who is the lord of the universe
612	Aum Trisankave nama	Who is the axis for the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas
613	Aum Ajithaya nam	Who cannot be won by the three qualities
614	Aum Shivaya nama	Who is the purest under any condition
615	Aum Danvantharye nama	Who is the doctor for all diseases
616	Aum Dhooma Kethave nama	Who is in the form of a comet
617	Aum Skandaya nama	Who is of the form of Lord Subrahmanya
618	Aum Vaisravanaya nama	Who is in the form of Kubera
619	Aum Dhathre nama	Who is in the form of Lord Brahma
620	Aum Chakraya nama	Who is in the form of Devendra
621	Aum Vishnave nama	Who is in the form of Lord Vishnu

622	Aum Mithraya nama	Who is in the form of the sun god
623	Aum Thwashtre nama	Who is in the of Viswakarma, the architect
624	Aum Druvaya nama	Who is in the form of the Druva star
625	Aum Dharaya nama	Who is in the form of Vasu called Dara
626	Aum Prabhavaya nama	Who is in the form of Vasu called Prabhava
627	Aum Sarva kayaVayave nama	Who is in the form of air within all beings/Who is in the form of wind which is everywhere
628	Aum Aryamne nama	Who is in the form Aaryama who is a god of manes
629	Aum Savithre nama	Who creates everything
630	Aum Ravaye nama	Who is in the form of the sun god
631	Aum Ushangave nama	Who possesses scorching rays
632	Aum Vidhathre nama	Who is the one who orders
633	Aum Mandhatre nama	Who looks after the soul called 'me'
634	Aum Bhootha Bhavanaya nama	Who looks after all that is created
635	Aum Vibhave nama	Who is the lord of the three worlds
636	Aum Varna Vibhavine nama	Who divided colours into four/ Who has many-coloured splendour
637	Aum Sarva kamaGunaa Ahaaya nama	Who creates qualities liked by all
638	Aum Padma Nabhaya nama	Who keeps the lotus in his belly-button/Who is of the form of Vishnu
639	Aum Maha Garbhaya nama	Who carries all in his belly at the time of deluge
640	Aum Chandra Vakthraya nama	Who has a face resembling the moon
641	Aum Anilaya nama	Who does not have anybody who can command him
642	Aum Analaya nama	Who has limitless power
643	Aum Bala Vathe nama	Who has very great strength

644	Aum Upa Santhaya nama	Who controls his power and does not show it
645	Aum Puranaya nama	Who is very ancient
646	Aum Punyasanchave nama	Who can be known only through good acts
647	Aum Ye nama	Who is of the form of Goddess Lakshmi
648	Aum Kuru Karthre nama	Who created Kurukshethra
649	Aum Kuru Vasine nama	Who lives in Kurukshethra
650	Aum Kuru Bhoothaya nama	Who is the Karma sthana and Upasana sthana at Kurukshethra
651	Aum Gunoushadhaya nama	Who encourages good conduct and helps it grow
652	Aum Sarvasayaya nama	Who is the place where everything resides
653	Aum Darbhacharine nama	Who receives Havirbhagas kept on Darbha grass
654	Aum Sarveshaam Praninaampathaye nama	Who is the lord of all living things
655	Aum Devadevaya nama	Who is the God of all gods
656	Aum Sukhaskthaya nama	Who is not interested in pleasures
657	Aum Sathe nama	Who is the God of all beings
658	Aum Asathe nama	Who is the God who is the truth
659	Aum Srava Rathnavidhe nama	Who has all precious stones with him
660	Aum Kailsa Girivasine nama	Who lives on the Kailasa mountain
661	Aum Himavad Giriamsrayaya nama	Who possesses the Himalaya mountains
662	Aum Koola Haarine nama	Who breaks the shore in the form of the tide
663	Aum Koola Karthre nama	Who has made the shores of tanks
664	Aum Bahu Vidhyaya nama	Who knows several aspects of knowledge
665	Aum Bahu Pradhaya nama	Who gives in plenty

666	Aum Vanijaya nama	Who took the form of a merchant
667	Aum Varthakine nama	Who is in the form of a carpenter
668	Aum Vrukshayta nama	Who is in the form of a tree
669	Aum Vakulaa nama	Who is in the form of the tree yielding bakula flowers
670	Aum Chandaaya nama	Who is in the form of a sandalwood tree
671	Aum Chchadhaya nama	Who is in the form of pala tree
672	Aum Sara Greevaya nama	Who has a very firm neck
673	Aum Maha Jathrave nama	Who has firm neckbones
674	Aum Aloalaya nama	Who does not have any desires
675	Aum Mahoushadhaya nama	Who is the greatest medicine in the form of food
676	Aum Sidhartha Karine nama	Who does good to Siddhas
677	Aum Sidhartha Chandovyakanotharaya nama	Who is the occult power which answers grammar, meter and so on
678	Aum Simha Nadaya nama	Who has a royal voice like that of a lion
679	Aum Simha Damshtraya nama	Who has teeth like a lion
680	Aum Simhakaya nama	Who has a gait like a lion
681	Aum Simha Vahanya nama	Who rides on a lion, which is the vehicle of his consort
682	Aum Prabhavathmane nama	Who has the fame that he is the truth of all truths
683	Aum Jagatkalasthaalaya nama	Who has the god of death as his food plate
684	Aum Loka Hithaya nama	Who does good to the world
685	Aum Tharave nama	Who makes us cross the ocean of life
686	Aum Sarangaya nama	Who has perfect organs
687	Aum Nava Chakrangaya nama	Who has the Sri chakra with nine parts as his body
688	Aum Kethumaline nama	Who shines in his flag/Who is of the

		form of birds with a crown
689	Aum Sabhavanaya nama	Who protects societies
690	Aum Bhothalayaya nama	Who has the temple in Panchabhoothas
691	Aum Bhoothapathaye nama	Who is the God of all beings
692	Aum Ahorathraya nama	Who is there throughout night and day
693	Aum Anindhithaya nama	Who is without any stain
694	Aum Sarva Bhoothaanamvaahithre nama	Who makes all animals exist/work
695	Aum Nilayaa nama	Who is the resting place of all beings
696	Aum Vibhave nama	Who does not have birth
697	Aum Bhavaya nama	Who is the reason for the creation of all beings
698	Aum Amoghaya nama	Who does not waste his connection/thought/Who is in plenty
699	Aum Samyathaya nama	Who is bound by his devotees
700	Aum Aswaya nama	Who us in the form of a horse
701	Aum Bhojanaya nama	Who provides food for everybody
702	Aum Pranadharanaya nama	Who saves lives
703	Aum Druthimathe nama	Who is of the form of a stable-minded being
704	Aum Mathimathe nama	Who is of the form of an intelligent being
705	Aum Dakshaya nama	Who is very capable
706	Aum Sathkruthya nama	Who is worshipped by everyone
707	Aum Yugadhipaya nama	Who is the king of conflicting emotions like hot /cold/Who is the chief in a yuga
708	Aum Gopalaye nama	Who protects sense organs
709	Aum Gopathaye nama	Who rules the earth

710	Aum Gramaya nama	Who is the human society
711	Aum Gocharma Vasanaya nama	Who wears the hide of cows
712	Aum Haraye nama	Who puts an end to sorrow
713	Aum Hiranya Bahave nama	Who has golden arms
714	Aum Pravesinaam Guhapalaya nama	Who protects those who meditate on him
715	Aum Prakrushtaraye nama	Who completely wipes out enemies
716	Aum Maha Harshaya nama	Who is greatly happy
717	Aum Jitha Kamaaya nama	Who has won the god of love
718	Aum Jithendriyaya nama	Who has won over his sense organs
719	Aum Gandharaya nama	Who wears the earth
720	Aum Suvasaya nama	Who has a great place to reside in
721	Aum Thapassakthaya nama	Who is greatly drowned in penance
722	Aum Rathaye nama	Who is the personification of pleasure
723	Aum Naraya nama	Who makes everything work
724	Aum Maha Geethaya nama	Who likes very good music
725	Aum Maha Nruthyaya nama	Who likes god dancing
726	Aum Apsara Ganasevithaya nama	Who is served by the community of celestial dancers
727	Aum Maha Kethave nama	Who has flag with bull is there
728	Aum Maha Dhathave nama	Who has Mount Meru which has lot of minerals
729	Aum Naika Sanucharaya nama	Who travels on several mountain peaks
730	Aum Chalaya nama	Who cannot be caught
731	Aum Avedaniyaya nama	Who can be known through a teacher
732	Aum Adesaya nama	Who is in the form of instructions
733	Aum Sarva Gandhasukha Vahaya nama	Who takes pleasure of all good scents
734	Aum Thoranaya nama	Who is the gate to salvation

735	Aum Tharanaa nama	Who makes us cross the ocean of life
736	Aum Vathaa nama	Who is in the form of gases
737	Aum Paridhine nama	Who protects us like a fort
738	Aum Pathikecharaya nama	Who is in the form of the king of birds, Garuda
739	Aum Samyogaya Vardhanaya nama	Who is the process of reproduction
740	Aum Vrudhaya nama	Who is an old man
741	Aum Athivrudhaya nama	Who is older than the oldest
742	Aum Gunadikaya nama	Who is great because of his good conduct
743	Aum Nithya Mathma Sahayaya nama	Who is forever helping mortal souls
744	Aum Devasura Pathaye nama	Who is the lord of the Asuras and Devas
745	Aum Pathye nama	Who is the leader
746	Aum Yukthaya nama	Who is merged with every being
747	Aum Yuktha Bahave nama	Who has hands which does proper work
748	Aum Divi Suparvana Devaya nama	Who is God to even Indra who is in heaven
749	Aum Ashadaya nama	Who can tolerate everything
750	Aum Sushadaya nama	Who can easily forgive
751	Aum Druvaya nama	Who is stable
752	Aum Harinaya nama	Who is white
753	Aum Haraaya nama	Who destroys sorrow
754	Aum Aavarthamanebhyo Vapushe nama	Who gives bodies to those who take birth several times
755	Aum Vasu Sreshtaya nama	Who is better than all things
756	Aum Mahapadhaya nama	Who is the best path
757	Aum Siroharine Vimarsaya nama	Who is the critic who cut off Brahma's head
758	Aum Sarva Lakshana Lakshithaya nama	Who is the treasurehouse of all good qualities
759	Aum Akshaya Radha	Who is like the axis of a chariot

	Yogine nama	
760	Aum Sarva Yogine nama	Who is merged with everything
761	Aum Maha Balaya nama	Who has immense strength
762	Aum Samanmayaya nama	Who is of the form of the Vedas
763	Aum Asamamnaya nama	Who is beyond the Vedas
764	Aum Theertha Devaya nama	Who is the holy god
765	Aum Maharadhya nama	Who has a very big chariot
766	Aum Nirjeevaaya nama	Who is even in lifeless objects
767	Aum Jeevanaya nama	Who is the soul
768	Aum Manthraya nama	Who is the sacred chants
769	Aum Shubakshaya nama	Who has the vision that leads to salvation
770	Aum Bahu Karkasaya nama	Who is very strict in real life
771	Aum Rathna Prabhoothaya nama	Who has a very large quantity of gems
772	Aum Rathangaya nama (or Aum Rakthangaya nama)	Who has organs shining like gems
773	Aum Maharnava Nipanavidhe nama	Who drinks the oceans at time of a deluge
774	Aum Moolaya nama	Who is like root of the world
775	Aum Vishalaya nama	Who is all roads and spread everywhere
776	Aum Amruthaya nama	Who is like nectar
777	Aum Vyakthavyakthaya nama	Who is clear to devotees and invisible to others
778	Aum Thaponidhaye nama	Who is a very great sage
779	Aum Aarohanaya nama	Who makes devotees climb
780	Aum Athirohaya nama	Who is in the top level
781	Aum Sheeladarine nama	Who protects good conduct
782	Aum Maha Yasase nama	Who has very great fame
783	Aum Sena Kalpaya nama	Who creates armies by just thought
784	Aum Maha Kalpaya nama	Who has the great ornaments
785	Aum Yogaya nama	Who is of the form of yoga

786	Aum Yuga Karaya nama	Who is the one who creates yugas
787	Aum Haraye nama	Who is of the form of Lord Vishnu
788	Aum Yuga Roopaya nama	Who is the form of yugas
789	Aum Maha Roopaya nama	Who is beyond limits and has a big shape
790	Aum Maha Naagahanaya nama	Who killed Gajasura who had immense form
791	Aum Avadhaa nama	Who is of the form of death
792	Aum Nyaya Nirvapanaaya nama	Who gave the Nyaa sasthra to the world
793	Aum Paadaya nama	Who is the final destination
794	Aum Pandithaya nama	Who is the very wise one
795	Aum Achalopamaya nama	Who is very stable like a mountain
796	Aum Bahu Maalaya nama	Who has variety of playful acts
797	Aum Mahaamaalaya nama	Who wears very many garlands
798	Aum Sasine Harasulochanaya nama	Who has eyes much prettier than the moon
799	Aum Visthara Lavanakoopaya nama	Who is like a very broad saltish well
800	Aum Triyugaya nama	Who is in the three yugas
801	Aum Saphalodayaya nama	Who comes out for the good
802	Aum Trilochanaya nama	Who has three eyes
803	Aum Vishannangaya nama	Who has organs which are the eight moorthies like earth
804	Aum Mani Viddhhaya nama	Who wears ear-studs
805	Aum Jada Dharaya nama	Who has matted locks
806	Aum Bindhave nama	Who is of the form of a dot
807	Aum Visarggaya nama	Who is like a Visarga in the form of Ardha Nareeswara
808	Aum Sumukhaya nama	Who has a pleasant face
809	Aum Saraya nama	Who is of the form of a bow
810	Aum Sarvayudhaya nama	Who wears all weapons
811	Aum Sahaya nama	Who has great patience
812	Aum Nivedanaya nama	Who informs about everything

813	Aum Sukha Jadaya nama	Who is of the enjoyable form
814	Aum Sugandharaya nama	Who is like a good horse of Gandhara
815	Aum Maha Danushe nama	Who has a very great bow
816	Aum Gandhapaline Bhagawathe nama	Who saves the memories of previous births at the time of a deluge
817	Aum Sarva Karmanamukthaya nama	Who makes all jobs rise up again after a deluge
818	Aum Mandhanaya Bahulayavayave nama	Who is the wind which churns life at the time of a deluge
819	Aum Sakalaya nama	Who is everywhere
820	Aum Sarva Lochanaaya nama	Who sees everything
821	Aum Thalasthalaya nama	Who is of the form of a clapping hand
822	Aum KaraSthaline nama	Who has his own hand as a vessel
823	Aum Urdhwa Samhananaya nama	Who has very great strength
824	Aum Mahathe nama	Who is great
825	Aum Chchathraya nama	Who reduces discomfort like an umbrella
826	Aum Succhathraa nama	Who has a very pretty umbrella
827	Aum Vikhyathaya Lokaaya nama	Who is being seen from everywhere
828	Aum Sarvaasrayaya Kramaya nama	Who has discipline in everything
829	Aum Mundaya nama	Who has a shaved head
830	Aum Viroopaya nama	Who has very bad looks
831	Aum Vikruthaya nama	Who has various forms
832	Aum Dandine nama	Who has a stick in his hand
833	Aum Kundine nama	Who has a water jug in his hand
834	Aum Vikurvanaya nama	Who cannot be attained by rituals
835	Aum Haryakshaya nama	Who is of the form of a lion
836	Aum Kakhubhaya nama	Who is of the form of directions

837	Aum Vajrine nama	Who is of the form of Devendra
838	Aum Satha Jihwaya nama	Who has hundreds of tongues
839	Aum Sahasrapathe nama	Who has millions of legs
840	Aum Sahasra Moorthne nama	Who has thousands of heads
841	Aum Devendraya Sarvadeva Mayaya nama	Who is of the form of Devendra and also all other devas
842	Aum Gurave nama	Who is the teacher
843	Aum Sahasra Bahave nama	Who has thousands of hands
844	Aum Saranyaya nama	Who can take care of others
845	Aum Sarvangaya nama	Who has everything
846	Aum Sarva Lokakruthe nama	Who creates all the worlds
847	Aum Pavithraya nama	Who makes others holy
848	Aum Trikakudhe Mantraya nama	Who is the mantra with three parts, Bheejam, Shakthi and Keelagam
849	Aum Kanishtaya nama	Who is younger
850	Aum Krishna Pingalaya nama	Who is blackish-red in colour
851	Aum Brahma Dandavinir Mathre nama	Who punishes Lord Brahma
852	Aum Sathagni Pasashakthimathe nama	Who has a weapon called Sathagni, pasa, Shakthi
853	Aum Padma Garbhaya nama	Who is of the form of Brahma who was born in a lotus
854	Aum Maha Garbhaya nama	Who keeps everything within himself
855	Aum Brahma Garbhaya nama	Who keeps the Vedas within himself
856	Aum Jalodhbhavaya nama	Who rose from the water of deluge
857	Aum Gabasthaye nama	Who has rays of light
858	Aum Brhama Kruthe nama	Who composed the Vedas
859	Aum Brahmine nama	Who recites the Vedas
860	Aum Brhama Vidhe nama	Who is an expert in the Vedas

861	Aum Brahmanaya nama	Who in the form of a Brahmana teaches the Vedas
862	Aum Gathaye nama	Who is the place of refuge
863	Aum Anantha Roopaya nama	Who has several forms
864	Aum Naikathmane nama	Who does not have a body
865	Aum Swayabhuva Sthigmathejase nama	Who has the power which could not be tolerated by Brahma
866	Aum Urdhwagathmane nama	Who has a form beyond the universe
867	Aum Pasupathaye nama	Who is the God of all beings
868	Aum Vatharamhaya nama	Who has the speed of wind
869	Aum Manojavaya nama	Who has the speed of mind
870	Aum Chandanine nama	Who is being bathed in sandal paste
871	Aum Padmanalagraya nama	Who was before Brahma was born in a lotus
872	Aum Surabhyutharanaya nama	Who down-graded Kama Dhenu for his false testimony
873	Aum Naraya nama	Who does not take anything out of desire
874	Aum Karnikara Mahasthravigne nama	Who wears garlands made of golden flowers
875	Aum Neelamoulaye nama	Who wears a crown embedded with a blue stone
876	Aum Pinaka Druthe nama	Who carries the bow called Pinaka
877	Aum Umapathaye nama	Who is the consort of Goddess Uma
878	Aum Uma Kanthaya nama	Who has been married by Uma out of love
879	Aum Jahnavi Druthe nama	Who wears the Ganga river on his crown
880	Aum Umadhavaya nama	Who is the husband of Goddess Uma
881	Aum Varaya Varahaya nama	Who took the form of Varaha
882	Aum Varadaya nama	Who shows mercy to the world in several forms

883	Aum Varenyaya nama	Who can be asked for a boon
884	Aum Sumahaswanaya nama	Who has a very musical voice
885	Aum Mahaprasadaya nama	Who is greatly pleased
886	Aum Damanaya nama	Who controls bad people
887	Aum Shatrugne nama	Who kills his enemies
888	Aum Shwethapingalaya nama	Who is white on one side and red on the other
889	Aum Peethathmane nama	Who is golden
890	Aum Paramatmane nama	Who is the soul which is everywhere
891	Aum Prayathathmane nama	Who has the purest mind
892	Aum Pradhna Druthe nama	Who wears nature
893	Aum Sarva Parswamukhaya nama	Who has faces on all sides
894	Aum Trayakshaya nama	Who has three eyes
895	Aum Dharma Sadharnovaraya nama	Who is the proper compensation for good deeds
896	Aum Chacharathmane nama	Who is the soul of moving and non-moving beings
897	Aum Siikshmathmane nama	Who has a form which is beyond the intellect
898	Aum Amruthaya Govrusheswaraya nama	Who is the god of perennial dharma which is the lord of the earth
899	Aum Sadyarshaye nama	Who gives knowledge to Sadhyas who are devas for devas
900	Aum Vasuradithyaya nama	Who is a Vasu, the son of Aditi
901	Aum Vivaswathe Savithamruthaya nama	Who is the moon who drenches the world by his nectar-like rays
902	Aum Vyasaya nama	Who is the form of Veda Vyasa
903	Aum Sargaya Susamkshepayavistharaya nama	Who is the author of Suthras which is abbreviated knowledge and also the Puranas which are knowledge in detail
904	Aum Paryayonaraya nama	Who is the soul of Virat Purusha

		which is spread everywhere
905	Aum Ruthave nama	Who is the season
906	Aum Samvathsaraya nama	Who is the year
907	Aum Masaya nama	Who is the month
908	Aum Pakshaya nama	Who is the lunar fortnight
909	Aum Samkhya Samapanaya nama	Who is the days of completion of seasons and lunar fortnights
910	Aum Kalabhyo nama	Who is the shorter part of the day called Kala
911	Aum Kashtaabhyo nama	Who is the Kashtaas which are small measurement of time
912	Aum Lavebhyo nama	Who is Lavas, which are small sub-division of time
913	Aum Maathraabhyo nama	Who is Mathras, another measurement of small time
914	Aum Muhurthaha Kshapebhyo nama	Who is the period of the holy time in a day
915	Aum Kshanebhyo nama	Who is seconds
916	Aum Viswa Kshethraya nama	Who is the area from which the universe grew
917	Aum Prajaa Bheejaya nama	Who is the seeds of citizens
918	Aum Lingaya nama	Who is the principle called 'Mahat'
919	Aum Aadhyaya Nirgamaya nama	Who is the first germinating seed of the world
920	Aum Sathe nama	Who is the truth
921	Aum Asathe nama	Who is the truth hiding behind apparitions
922	Aum Vyakthaya nama	Who is clarity to those who know
923	Aum Avyakthaya nama	Who cannot be described clearly
924	Aum Pithre nama	Who is the father
925	Aum Mathre nama	Who is the mother
926	Aum Pithamahaya nama	Who is the father of a father
927	Aum Swarga Dwaraya nama	Who is the gateway to heaven

928	Aum Praja Dwaraya nama	Who is the gateway to more people
929	Aum Moksha Dwaraya nama	Who is the gateway to salvation
930	Aum Trivishtapaya nama	Who is heaven
931	Aum Nirvanaya nama	Who is detachment
932	Aum Hladhanaya nama	Who is the one who creates happiness
933	Aum Brahmalokaya nama	Who is the world of Brahma
934	Aum Parayai Gathyai nama	Who is the best way to salvation
935	Aum Devasura Vinirmathre nama	Who is the one who created Asuras and Devas
936	Aum Devasura Parayanaya nama	Who is the support for Devas and Asuras
937	Aum Devasura Gurave nama	Who is the teacher for Devas and Asuras
938	Aum Devaya nama	Who is the propeller of life
939	Aum Devasura Namaskruthaya nama	Who is being saluted by Devas and Asuras
940	Aum Devasura Mahamathraya nama	Who is the best among Devas and Asuras
941	Aum Devasura Ganasrayaya nama	Who is the one being depended on by Devas and Asuras
942	Aum Devasura Ganadhyakshaya nama	Who is the chief of Devas and Asuras
943	Aum Devasura Agraganyai nama	Who is the first among Devas and Asuras
944	Aum Devathidevaya nama	Who is the god of Devas
945	Aum Devarshaye nama	Who is of the sage form of Devas like Narada
946	Aum Devasura Varapradhaya nama	Who is the giver of boons to Devas and Asuras
947	Aum Devasureswaraya nama	Who is the ruler of Devas and Asuras
948	Aum Viswaya nama	Who is the universe

949	Aum Devasura Maheswaraya nama	Who is the ruler of rulers of Devas and Asuras
950	Aum Sarva Devamayaya nama	Who is the personification of all Devas as one
951	Aum Achinthyaya nama	Who cannot be reached by a thought process
952	Aum Devadathmane nama	Who is the soul of Devas
953	Aum Athma Sambhavaya nama	Who created himself
954	Aum Uthbhidade nama	Who appears breaking ignorance
955	Aum Trivikramaya nama	Who has spread in all the three worlds
956	Aum Vaidyaya nama	Who is full of knowledge/Who is the doctor
957	Aum Virajaya nama	Who is crystal clear
958	Aum Neerajaaya nama	Who does not have royal qualities/Who is born out of water
959	Aum Amaraya nama	Who does not die
960	Aum Eedyaya nama	Who is suitable to be praised
961	Aum Hastheswaraya nama	Who resides in Kala hasthi/Who is the form of air
962	Aum Vyagraya nama	Who is the god called Vyagreswara/Who is the tiger
963	Aum Deva Simhaya nama	Who is a lion among devas
964	Aum Nararshabhaya nama	Who is the chief among men
965	Aum Vibhudhaa nama	Who has specialised knowledge
966	Aum Agravaraya nama	Who is the first among those given Havirbhaga in sacrifices
967	Aum Sookshmaya nama	Who has the minutest knowledge
968	Aum Sarva Devaya nama	Who is all gods rolled in to one
969	Aum Thapo Mayaya nama	Who is the personification of penance
970	Aum Suyukthaya nama	Who is very careful
971	Aum Shobhanaya nama	Who is the good augury
972	Aum Vajrine nama	Who is as hard as a diamond

973	Aum Prasanaam Prabhavaya nama	Who is affected by ornamental language
974	Aum Avyaya nama	Who can be attained by singleminded devotion
975	Aum Guhaya nama	Who is in hiding
976	Aum Kanthaya nama	Who is the upper limit of happiness
977	Aum Nijaya Sargaya nama	Who is in truth evolved himself
978	Aum Pavithraya nama	Who is holy/Who saves us from thunder
979	Aum Sarva Bhavanaya nama	Who makes everything holy
980	Aum Srungine nama	Who is high above
981	Aum Srunga Priyaya nama	Who loves peaks of mountains
982	Aum Babruve nama	Who is the one who carries the world
983	Aum Rajarajaya nama	Who is the king of kings
984	Aum Niraayaa nama	Who is without any blemishes
985	Aum Abhiramaya nama	Who is pleasing to the mind
986	Aum Sura Ganaya nama	Who is the form of the society of Devas
987	Aum Viramayata nama	Who is not connected with subjects
988	Aum Sarva Sadhanaya nama	Who joins all benefits
989	Aum Lalatakshaya nama	Who has an eye on his forehead
990	Aum Viswa Devaya nama	Who plays with the universe
991	Aum Harinaya nama	Who is golden/Who is like a deer
992	Aum Brahma Varchasaya nama	Who is the splendid light of Brahma
993	Aum Sthavaraanaam Pathaye nama	Who is the king of mountains
994	Aum Niyamendra Vardhanaya nama	Who controls all his senses through penance
995	Aum Sidharthaya nama	Who keeps salvation as some ordinary thing
996	Aum Siddha Bhootharthata	Who is the benefit got by people

	nama	who do penance
997	Aum Achinthyaya nama	Who cannot be reached by meditation
998	Aum Sathya Vrathaya nama	Who has made truth his unfailing credo
999	Aum Suchaye nama	Who is interested in cleanliness in nature
1000	Aum Vrathadhipaya nama	Who protects fasting practices
1001	Aum Parasmai nama	Who is Turiya which is beyond sleep
1002	Aum Brahmane nama	Who is the ultimate truth
1003	Aum Bhakthanaam Paramayaigathaye nama	Who is the ultimate destination of devotees
1004	Aum Vimukthaya nama	Who is completely free of bonds
1005	Aum Muktha Thejase nama	Who is the light which is detached/Who does not have a body
1006	Aum Sree Mathe nama	Who is richly intelligent
1007	Aum Srivardhanaya nama	Who gives wealth to his devotees
1008	Aum Jagathe nama	Who is the universe itself

3. There are possibly four different and unique sets of Shiva Sahasranama stotras—two in the Mahabharata (later found repeated in many Puranas with minor variations), one unique set in the Shiva Purana and one unique set in the Rudrayamala Tantra. The version found in the Linga Purana is essentially from the Mahabharata.

The version here is from the Shiva Purana. As with the Linga Purana version, in the Shiva Purana, Shiva is eulogised by Vishnu.

Shiva Sahasranama Stotram
Shiva Purana, Kotirudra Samhita
(Book IV), Chapter 35, 1-133

Suta said:

May this be heard, O great sages, I shall now recount the hymn of a thousand names of Shiva, whereby Shiva was pleased.

Vishnu said:

Shiva; Hara; Mrida; Rudra; Pushkara; Pushpalochana; Arthigamya; Sadachara; Sharva; Shambhu; Maheshvara; Chandrapida; Chandramouli;

Vishva; Vishvamareshvara; Vedantasara-sandoha; Kapali; Nilalohita; Dhyanadhara; Aparicchedya; Gouribharta; Ganeshvara; Ashtamurti; Vishvamurti; Trivargasvargasadhana; Jnanagamya; Dridaprajna; Devadeva; Trilochana; Vamadeva; Madadeva; Patu; Parivrida; Drida; Vishvarupa; Virupaksha; Vagisha; Shuchisattama; Sarvapramanasamvadi; Vrishanka; Vrishavahana; Isha; Pinaki; Khatvanga; Chitravesha; Chirantana; Tamohara; Mahayogi; Gopta; Brahma; Dhurjati; Kalakala; Krittivasah; Subhaga; Pranavatmaka; Unnadhra; Purusha; Jushya; Durvasa; Purashasana; Divyayudha; Skandaguru; Parameshthi; Paratpara; Anadimadhyanidhana; Girisha; Girijadhava; Kuberabandhu; Shrikanatha; Lokavarnottama; Mridu; Samadhivedya; Kodandi; Nilakantha; Parashvadhi; Vishalaksha; Mrigavyadha; Suresha; Suryatapana; Dharmadhama. Kshamakshetra; Bhagavana; Bhaganetrabhida; Ugra; Pashupati; Tarkshya; Priyabhakta; Parantapa; Data; Dayakara.

Daksha; Karmandi; Kamashasana; Shmashananilaya; Suksha; Shmashanastha; Maheshvara; Lokakarta; Mrigapati; Mahakarta; Mahoushadhi; Uttara; Gopati; Gopta; Jnanagamya; Puratana; Niti; Suniti; Shuddhatma; Soma; Somarata; Sukhi; Sompapa; Amritapa; Soumya; Mahatejah; Mahadyuti; Tejomaya; Amritamaya; Annamaya; Suhapati; Ajatashatru; Aloka; Sambhavya; Havyavahana; Lokakara; Vedakara; Sutrakara; Sanatana; Maharshi; Kapilacharya; Vishvadipti; Vilochana; Pinakapani; Bhudeva; Svastida; Svastikrita; Sudhi; Dhatridhama; Dhamakara; Sarvaga; Sarvagochara; Brahmasrika; Vishvasrika; Sarga; Karnikara; Priya; Kavi; Shakha; Vishakha; Goshakha; Shiva; Bhishaka; Anuttama; Gangaplavodaka; Bhaya; Pushkala; Sthapati; Sthira; Vijitatma; Vishayatma; Bhutavahana; Sarathi; Sagana; Ganakaya; Sukirti; Chinnasamshaya; Kamadeva; Kamapala; Bhasmoddhulita-vigraha; Bhasmapriya; Bhasmashyai; Kami; Kanta; Kritagama; Samavarta; Nivritatma; Dharmapunja; Sadashiva; Akalmasha; Chaturvahu; Durvasa; Durasada; Durlabha; Durgama; Durga; Sarvayudhavisharada; Adhyatmayoganilaya; Sutantu; Tantuvardhana.

Shubhanga; Lokasaranga; Jagadisha; Janardana; Bhasmashuddhikara; Meru; Ojasvi; Shuddhavigraha; Asadhya; Sadhusadhya; Bhrityamarkatarupadhrika; Hiranyareta; Pourana; Ripujivahara; Bala; Mahahrada; Mahagarta; Vyali; Siddhavrindaravandita; Vyaghracharmambara; Mahabhuta; Mahanidhi; Amritasha; Amritavapu; Panchajanya; Prabhanjana; Panchavimshatitattvastha; Parijata; Para-vara;

Sulabha; Suvrata; Shura; Brahmavedanidhi; Nidhi; Varnashramaguru; Varni; Shatrujita; Shatrutapana; Ashrama; Kshapana; Kshama; Jnanavana; Achaleshvara;Pramanabhuta; Durjneya; Suparna; Vayuvahana; Dhanurdhara; Dhanurveda; Gunarashi; Gunakara; Satyasatyapara; Dina; Dharmaga; Ananda; Dharmasadhana; Anantadrishti; Danda; Damayita; Dama; Abhivadya; Mahamaya; Vishvakarma; Visharada; Vitaraga; Vinitatma; Tapasvi; Bhutabhavana; Unmattavesha; Pracchanna; Jitakama; Ajitapriya; Kalyanaprakriti; Kalpa; Sarvalokaprajapati; Tarasvi; Tavaka; Dhimana; Pradhanaprabhu; Avyaya; Lokapala; Antarhitatma; Kalpadi; Kamalekshana; Vedashastrarthatattvajna; Aniyama; Niyatashraya; Chandra; Surya; Shani; Ketu; Varanga; Vidrumacchavi; Bhaktivashya; Anagha; Parabrahm-amrigavanarpana; Adri; Adryalaya; Kanta; Paramatma.

Jagadguru; Sarvakarmalaya; Tushta; Mangalya; Mangalavrita; Mahatapa; Dirghatapa; Sthavishtha; Sthavira; Dhruva; Aha; Samvatsara; Vyapti; Pramana; Parmatapa; Samvatsarakara; Mantra-pratyaya; Sarvadarshana; Aja; Sarveshvara; Siddha; Mahareta; Mahabala; Yogi; Yogya; Siddhi; Mahateja; Sarvadi; Agraha; Vasu; Vasumana; Satya; Sarvapaphara; Sukirti; Shobhana; Shrimana; Avanmanasagochara; Amritashashvata; Shanta; Vanahasta; Pratapavana; Kamandalundhara; Dhanvi; Vedanga; Vedavita; Muni; Bhrajishnu; Bhojana; Bhokta; Lokanantha; Duradhara; Atindriya; Mahamaya; Sarvavasa; Chatushpatha; Kalayogi; Mahanada; Mahotsaha; Mahabala; Mahabuddhi; Mahavirya; Bhutachari; Purandara; Nishachara; Pretachari; Mahashakti; Mahadyuti; Ahirdeshyavapu; Shrimana; Sarvacharyamanogati; Vahushruta; Niyatatma; Dhruva; Adhruva; Sarvashaska; Ojastejodyutidara; Nartaka; Nrityapriya; Nrityanitya; Prakashatma; Prakashaka; Spashtakshara; Budha; Mantra; Samana; Sarasamplava; Yugadikrida; Yugavarta; Gambhira; Vrishavahana; Ishta; Vishishta; Shishteshta; Shalabha; Sharabha; Dhanu; Tirtharupa; Tirthanama; Tirthadrishya; Stuta.

Arthada; Apamnidhi; Adhishthana; Vijaya; Jayakalavita; Pratishthita; Pramanajna; Hiranyakavacha; Hari; Vimochana; Suragana; Vidyesha; Vindusamshraya; Balarupa; Vikarta; Balonmatta; Gahana; Guha; Karana; Karta; Sarvabandhavimochana; Vyavasaya; Vyavasthana; Sthanada; Jagadadija; Guruda; Lalita; Abheda; Bhavatmatmasamsthita; Vireshvara; Virabhadra; Virasanavidhi; Virata; Virachudamani; Vetta; Tivrananda; Nadidhara; Ajnadhara; Tridhuli; Shipivishta; Shivalaya; Balakhilya; Mahachapa; Tigmamshu; Badhira; Khaga; Adhirma; Susharana;

Subrahmanya; Sudhapati; Maghavana; Koushika; Gomana; Virama; Sarvasadhana; Lalataksha; Vishvadeha; Sara; Samsarachakrabhrita; Amoghadanda; Madhyastha; Hiranya; Brahmavarchasi; Paramartha; Para; Mayi; Shambara; Vyaghralochana; Ruchi; Virinchi; Svarbandhu; Vachaspati; Aharpati; Ravi; Virochana; Skanda; Shasta; Vaivasvata; Yama; Yukti; Unnatakirti; Sanuraga; Paranjaya; Kailashadhipati; Kanta; Savita; Ravilochana; Vidvattama; Vitabhaya; Vishvabharta; Anivarita; Nitya; Niyatakalyana; Punyashravanakirtana; Durashrava; Vishvasaha; Dhyeya; Duhsvapnanashana; Uttarana; Dushkritiha.

Vijneya; Duhsaha; Bhava; Anadi ; Bhurbhuvakshi; Kiriti; Ruchirangada; Janana; Janajanmadi; Pritimana; Nitimana; Dhava; Vasishta; Kashyapa; Bhanu; Bhima; Bhimaparakrama; Pranava; Satpatchachara; Mahakasha; Mahaghana; Janmadhipa; Mahadeva; Sakalagamaparaga; Tattva; Tattavit; Ekatma; Vibhu; Vishvavibhushana; Rishi; Brahmana; Aishvaryajanmamrityujaratiga; Panchayajnasamutpatti; Vishvesha; Vimalodaya; Atmayoni; Anadyanta; Vatsala; Bhaktalokadhrika; Gayatrivallabha; Pramshu; Vishvavasa; Prabhakara;; Shishu; Giriraha; Samrata; Sushena; Surashatruha; Amogha; Arishtanemi; Kumuda; Vigatajvara; Svayamjyoti; Tanujyoti; Achanchala; Atmajyoti; Pingala; Kapilashmashru; Bhalanetra; Trayitanu; Jnanaskandamahaniti; Vishvotipatti; Upaplava; Bhaga; Vivasvana; Aditya; Yogapara; Divaspati; Kalyanagunanama; Papaha; Punyadarshana; Udarakirti; Udyogi; Sadyogi; Sadasanmaya; Nakshatramali; Nakesha; Svadhishthanapadashraya; Pavitra; Paphari; Manipura; Nabhogati; Hrit; Pundarikasina; Shatru; Shranta; Vrishakapi; Ushna; Grihapati; Krishna; Paramartha; Anarthanashana; Adharmashatru; Ajneya; Puruhuta; Purushruta; Brahmagarbha; Vrihadgarbha; Dharmadhenu; Dhanagama.

Jagaddhitaishi; Sugata; Kumara; Kushalagama; Hiranyavarna; Jyotishmana; Nanbhutarata; Dhvani; Araga; Nayandyaksha; Vishvamitra; Dhaneshvara; Brahmajyoti; Vasudhama; Mahajyotianuttama; Matamaha; Matarishva; Nabhasvana; Nagaharadhrika; Pulastya; Pulaha; Agastya; Jatukarnya; Parashara; Niravarananirvara; Vairanchya; Vishtarashrava; Atmabhu; Aniruddha; Atri; Jnanamurti; Mahayasha; Lokaviragranti; Vira; Chanda; Satyaparakrama; Vyalakapa; Mahakalpa; Kalpaviriksha; Kaladhara; Alankarishnu; Achala; Rochishnu; Vikramonnata; Ayuhshabdapati; Vegi; Plavana; Shikhisarathi; Asamsrishta; Atithi; Shatrupreamathi; Padapasana; Vasushrava; Pratapa; Havyavaha;

Vishvabhojana; Japaya; Jaradishamana; Lohitatma; Tanunapata; Brihadashva; Nabhoyoni; Supratika; Tamisraha; Nidagha; Tapana; Megha; Svaksha; Parapuranjaya; Sukhanila; Sunishpanna; Surabhi; Shishiratmaka; Vasanta; Madhava; Grishma; Nabhasya; Vijavahana; Angira; Guru; Atreya; Vimala; Vishvavahana; Pavana; Sumati; Vidvana; Travidya; Naravahana; Manobuddhi; Ahamkara; Kshetrajna; Kshetrapalaka; Jamadagni; Balanidhi; Vigala; Vishvagalava; Aghora; Anuttara; Yajna; Shreye.

Nishshreyahpatha; Shaila; Gaganakundabha; Danavari; Arindama; Rajanijanaka; Charuvishalya; Lokakalpadhrika; Chaturveda; Chatrubhava; Chatura; Chaturapriya; Amlaya; Samamlaya; Tirthavedashivalaya; Vahurupa; Maharupa; Sarvarupa; Charachara; Nyayanirmayaka; Nyayi; Nyayagamya; Nirantara; Sahasramurddha; Devendra; Sarvashastraprabhanjana; Munda; Virupa; Vikranta; Dandi; Danta; Gunottama; Pingalaksha; Janadhyaksha; Nilagriva; Niramaya; Sahasravahu; Sarvesha; Sharanya; Sarvalokadhrika; Padmasana; Paramjyoti; Parampara; Paramphala; Padmagarbha; Mahagarbha; Vishvagarbha; Vichakshana; Characharajna; Varada; Varesha; Mahabala; Devasuraguru; Deva; Devasuramahashraya; Devadideva; Devagni; Devagnisukhada; Prabhu; Devasureshvara; Divya; Devasuramaheshvara; Devadevamaya; Achintya; Devadevatmasambhava; Sadyoni; Asuravyaghra; Devasimha; Divakara; Vibudhagravara; Shreshtha; Sarvadevottamottama; Shivajnanarata; Shrimana; Shikhi-shriparvatapriya; Vajrahasta; Siddhakhadgi; Narasimhanipatana; Brahmachari; Lokachari; Dharmachari; Dhanadhipa; Nandi; Nandishvara; Ananta; Nagnavratadhara; Shuchi; Lingadhyaksha; Suradhyaksha; Yogadhyaksha; Yugavaha; Svadharma; Svargata; Svargakhara; Svaramayasvana; Vanadhyaksha; Vijakarta; Dharmakrit; Dharmasambhava; Dambha.

Alobha; Arthavit; Shambhu; Sarvahbutamaheshvara; Shmashananilaya; Tryksha; Setu; Apratimakriti; Lokottaras-phutaloka; Trymbaka; Nagabhushana; Andhakari; Makhaveshi; Vishnukandharapatana; Hinadosha; Akshayaguna; Dakshari; Pushadantabhit; Dhurjati; Khandaparashu; Sakala; Nishkala; Anagha; Akala; Sakaladhara; Pandurabha; Mrida; Nata; Purna; Purayita; Punya; Sukumara; Sulochana; Samageyapriya; Akrura; Punyakirti; Anaymaya; Manojava; Tirthakara; Jatila; Jiviteshvara; Jivitantakara; Nitya; Vasureta; Vasuprada; Sadgati; Satkriti; Siddhi; Sajjati; Kalakantaka; Kaladhara; Mahakala; Bhuasatyapraryana; Lokalavanyakarta; Lokottarasukhalaya;

Chandrasanjivana; Shasta; Lokaguda; Mahadhipa; Lokabandhu; Lokanatha; Kritajna; Krittibhushana; Anapaya; Akshara; Kanta; Sarvashastrahadvara; Tejomaya; Dyutidhara; Lokagranti; Anu; Shuchismita; Prasannatma; Durjjeya; Duratikrama; Jyotirmaya; Jagannatha; Nirakra; Jaleshvara; Tumbavina; Mahakopa; Vishoka; Shokanashana; Trllokapa; Trilokesha; Sarvashuddhi; Adhokshaja; Avyaktalakshana; Deva; Vyaktavyakta; Vishampati; Varashila; Varaguna; Saramandhana; Maya; Brahma; Vishnu; Prajapala; Hamsa; Hamsagati.

Vaya; Vedha; Vidhata; Dhata; Srashta; Harta; Chaturmukha; Kailasa-Shikharavasi; Sarvavasi; Sadagati; Hiranyagarbha; Druhina; Bhutapa; Bhupati; Sadyogi; Yogavit; Yogi; Varada; Brahmanapriya; Devapriya; Devanatha; Devajna; Devachintaka; Vishamaksha; Vishalaksha; Vrishada; Vrishavardhana; Nirmama; Nirahamkara; Nirmoha; Nirupadrava; Darpha; Darpada; Dripta; Sarvabhutaparivartaka; Sahasrajit; Sahasrarchi; Prabhava; Snigddhaprakritidakshina; Bhutabhavyabhavannatha; Bhutinashana; Artha; Anartha; Mahakosha; Parakaryaikapandita; Nishkantaka; Kritananda; Nirvyaja; Vyajamardana; Sattvavana; Sattvika; Satyakirti; Snehakritagama; Akampita; Gunagrahi; Naikatma; Naikakarmakrit; Suprita; Sumukha; Suksha; Sukara; Dakshinaila; Nandiskandhadhara; Dhurya; Prakata; Pritivardhana; Aparajita; Sarvasattva; Govinda; Adhrita; Sattvavahana; Svadhrita; Siddha; Putamurti; Yashodhana; Varahabhringadhrika; Bhringi; Balavana; Ekanayaka; Shrutiprakasha; Shrutimana; Ekabandhu; Anekakrit; Shrivatsalashivarambha; Shantabhadra; Sama; Yasha; Bhushaya;Bhushana; Bhuti; Bhutakrit; Bhutabhavana; Akampa; Bhaktikaya; Kalaha; Nilalohita; Satyavrata; Mahatyagi; Nityashantiparayana; Pararthavritti; Vivikshu; Visharada; Shubhada; Shubhakarta; Shubhanama; Shubha; Anarthita; Aguna; Sakshi; Akarta.

Sahasranama Stotra

- the hymn of a thousand names -

Sahasranama means thousand (sahasra) names (nama), and Sahasranama Stotra is a hymn eulogising the lord by recounting one thousand of His names. As the various sects of Hindu-tradition (Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism) grew and spread, it must have become extremely popular to write hymns of a thousand names for the primary deity of worship. There are various Sahasranama Stotras, but obviously here, we concentrate on the Shiva Sahasranama Stotra.

What makes the Shiva Sahasranama Stotra unique is the number of times and variations of the hymn, that are found in ancient texts. The appearance of the Shiva Sahasranama Stotra in at least eighteen different texts is a testament to the fact that Shaivism in various forms was once immensely popular throughout the Indian subcontinent. In fact, Shaivism was the most widespread and influential form of Hinduism prior to 1200 CE (before the beginning of the Islamic era and the pan-Indian Vaishnava devotional movements).

Below is a list of the texts in which Shiva Sahasranama Stotras are found.

1. Mahabharata (Anushasanaparva version)
2. Mahabharata (Shantiparva version)
3. Linga Purana (version 1; chapter 65)
4. Linga Purana (version 2; chapter 97)
5. Shiva Purana (Kotirudra Samhita)
6. Vayu Purana
7. Brahmanda Purana
8. Devi Mahabhagavata Upapurana
9. Padma Purana
10. Skanda Purana
11. Vamana Purana
12. Markandeya Purana
13. Saura Purana
14. Bhairava Tantra
15. Bhringiridi Samhita
16. Rudrayamala Tantra
17. Shiva Rahasya Itihasa
18. Akasa Kalpa Tantra

Using the reductionist approach, we arrive at four different major variants of the Shiva Sahasranama:

1. Mahabharata (Anushasanaparva version)
2. Mahabharata (Shantiparva version)
3. Shiva Purana
4. Rudrayamala Tantra

The two Mahabharata versions were copied into most of the Puranas, including the Linga Purana, with minor variations. An exception is the Shiva Purana version which appears to be original. Another original version is found in the Rudrayamala Tantra, which was later copied into the Shiva Rahasya Itihasa. If we were to hazard a guess as to which school the Shiva Sahasranama Stotras came from, it would be fairly reasonable to say that the Mahabharata (and most Purana) versions belong to the Smartas, the Shiva Purana version belongs to the Pashupatas, and the Rudrayamala Tantra version belongs to the Tantrik Shaivas.

The most ancient form of the Shiva Sahasranama Stotra is found in the Anushasanaparva book of the Mahabharata, wherein Shiva is eulogised by Krishna. The next most ancient version is likely the one found in the Shanti Parva book of the Mahabharata, which is thought to have been inserted later into the book, and not found in standard critical editions of the Mahabharata. The 1000 names given below are from the Linga Purana and are probably based on the Shanti Parva book of the Mahabharata with some variations. In the Linga Purana, it is not Krishna, but Vishnu who eulogises Shiva.

It is important to remember that in any given Sahasranama, several names are repeated more than once, and in most there are actually more than 1000 names. Given here are only the first 1000 names as found in the Linga Purana.

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The divine grace of my spiritual masters, Guruji B.K. Subiah and Sri Ramana Maharishi.

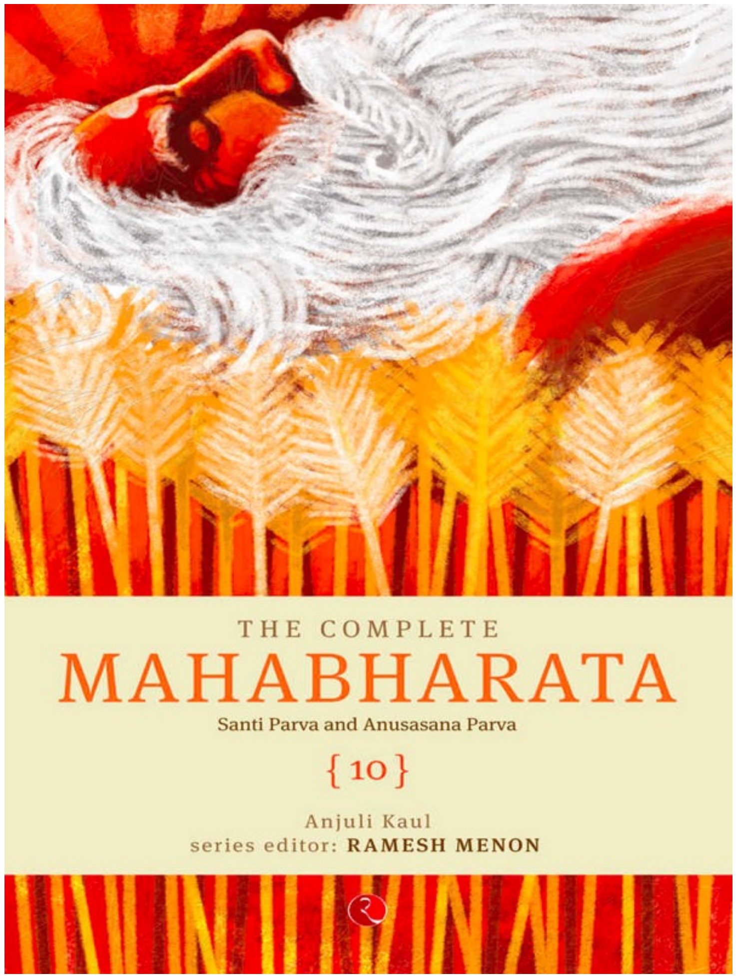
In loving memory of Yamuna Y. Kakodkar, Bharati C. Shah, Kusum B. Maniar, Jagdish Shah, Suhasini Phatarpekar, Rajendra Y. Kakodkar, Ravindra Hudalikar, Prince Varghese and Mona Saigal.

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THE COMPLETE
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Santi Parva and Anusasana Parva
{10}
Anjuli Kaul
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THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Santi Parva and Anusasana Parva

THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Volume 10

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and
Anusasana Parva (Part I)

Anjuli Kaul

RUPA

For Richa, naturally.
And for Akshay, necessarily.

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PART III

Santi Parva

CANTO 302

"Yudhishtira says, 'Rajan, you have recommended to me the judicious path of yoga as a loving guru does for his sishya. I now ask about the principles of the Samkhya yoga. Speak to me about those doctrines, in their entirety. You are erudite about all the knowledge that exists in the three worlds!'

Bhishma says, 'Listen now to the subtle teachings of the followers of the Samkhya yoga established by all the great and puissant Yatis beginning with Kapila. There are no errors in that philosophy. Its merits are many. Truly, it is flawless. I understand that all things are imperfect. Manavas, Pisachas, Rakshasas, and Yakshas, Nagas, Gandharvas and Pitris, intermediate orders of beings like birds and animals, great avians like Garuda, the Maruts, royal and enlightened sages, Asuras and Viswadevas, divine Rishis and yogins, the Prajapatis and Brahma himself are all enmeshed with these objects that are difficult to discard, and they all strive to free themselves.

The Samkhyas understand the limits of one's time in this world. Aware of the highest, transcendent truth as well, they also know the truth about what is called happiness in this world, and the sorrows that befall those concerned with transient objects of desire. Aware of the grief of those who have fallen into the intermediate orders of being and of those who have sunk into hell, they see the merits and shortcomings of swarga, O Bhaarata, and all the merits and flaws of the Vedas, and the yoga and the Samkhya systems of philosophy. They realise also that the sattva guna has ten properties, that rajas has nine, and that tamas has eight, that the intellect, Buddhi, has seven properties, Manas, the mind, has six, and Akasa, space,

has five; they discern that the understanding has four properties and tamas has three, and the rajas has two and sattva has one.

Knowing the path that is followed by all creatures when death overtakes them and the course of Atmagyana, self-knowledge, the wise and experienced Samkhyas, exalted by their discernment and awareness of causes, and acquiring true wisdom thorough auspicious living, attain the bliss of moksha like the rays of the sun or the wind taking refuge in Akasa.

Vision is attached to form, the sense of scent to smell, the ear to sound, the tongue to taste, and the skin to touch. The wind is housed in space. Dark stupor harbours in tamas. Greed takes refuge in the objects of the senses.

Vishnu is the Lord of the organs of motion; Indra that of the organs of strength; Agni of the stomach, and Bhumi of the waters.

The waters have heat for their haven. Agni has Vayu; and the wind has Akasa; Akasa has Mahat for its refuge, and Mahat has the understanding. The understanding is housed in tamas, tamas in rajas; rajas is founded in sattva and sattva is attached to Atman.

Atman has the glorious and puissant Narayana for its refuge. Narayana resides in moksha. Moksha has no need for any dwelling. The followers of the Samkhya yoga know that this body, imbued with sixteen attributes, is the outcome of sattva. Fully understanding the nature of the physical organism and the character of the Chetana that dwells within it, they recognise the one existent Being that lives in the body, the Atman, detached and sinless, and realising the nature of the actions of persons attached to the objects of their senses, they also know the character of the senses and the sensual objects which have their refuge in the Atman.

The Samkhyas appreciate the difficulty of moksha and the sacred texts that describe it, and recognise the nature of the vital breaths called Prana, Apana, Samana, Vyana and Udana, as also the two other breaths: the one going downward and the other moving up. Indeed, they know those seven breaths ordained to carry out seven different functions.

Parantapa, establishing the nature of the Prajapatis and the Rishis and the many high paths of righteousness, and the Saptarishis and the countless Rajarishis, the great Devarishis and the other Maharishis radiant like the sun, they see all these falling away from their power in the course of many long ages.

Hearing of the destruction of all the mighty beings in the universe, the Samkhyas understand the inauspicious end of sinful creatures, and the

miseries of those that fall into the river of hell, Vaitarani in Yamaloka.

They grasp the ill-fated wanderings of beings through diverse wombs, housed in the unholy uterus in the midst of blood and water and phlegm and foul-smelling urine and faeces, and then in bodies, resulting from the union of blood and the vital seed, of marrow and sinews, supplied by hundreds of nerves and arteries, forming an execrable abode of nine doors.

O Lord of the Bharata vamsa, the followers of the Samkhya yoga, fully conversant with the Soul, know what produces good, and they clearly see the vile conduct of those whose natures are characterised by tamas, rajas or sattva—darkness, passion or goodness—and their sins that prevent them from attaining moksha.

They see the eclipse of the moon and the sun by Rahu, the falling of stars from their fixed positions and the deflection of constellations from their orbits, and recognise the sad division of all that was once united, the diabolical behaviour of creatures in devouring one another, the absence of all intelligence in the infancy of human beings, and the deterioration and destruction of the body.

The Samkhyas observe how little men value the sattva guna because they are overcome by anger and confusion. They see that only one among thousands of human beings struggles to achieve moksha; indeed they understand the difficulty of attaining moksha in accordance with the shastras, the scriptures.

They recognise the great anxiety that creatures have for unattained objects and unfulfilled desires and their comparative indifference to those that have been attained and gratified; son of Kunti, they mark the sins that result from the pursuit of the senses, the lifeless repulsive bodies of those who live miserably even in the midst of spouses and children.

The Samkhyas know the end of terrible dissolute men who are guilty of killing Brahmanas, and of evil Brahmanas addicted to intoxicants; they are also aware of the equally wretched death of those who lust after the wives of their acharyas, and of those who do not revere their mothers and the Devas.

After studying the diverse declarations of the Vedas, their knowledge helps them to understand how evil men will die; and also what will befall those who are born in the intermediate varnas.

Establishing the recurrent pattern of seasons, the passing of years, months, fortnights, and of days, they see the waxing and the waning of the

moon, the rise and ebb of the seas, the increase and diminution of wealth, and the separation of unified objects, the end of yugas, the destruction of mountains, the drying up of rivers, and the degeneration of the purity of the varnas and also the end of that deterioration, repeating endlessly.

Beholding the birth, decay, death and sorrows of creatures, knowing truly the weaknesses of the body and the anguish of human beings, and their vicissitudes, the followers of the Samkhya philosophy, understand all the flaws of their own souls and bodies, and attain moksha.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O you of immeasurable tejas, what are those faults that you ascribe to one's body? Dispel all my doubts on this matter.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Parantapa! The Samkhyas, followers of Kapila, who are wise and conversant with all paths, say that there are five faults in the human body. They are desire, anger, fear, sleep and breath. All mortals have these faults, which are found in their bodies.

The wise cut the root of wrath with the help of forgiveness. Desire is destroyed by giving up all goals. By cultivating sattva sleep is defeated, and fear is conquered by honing mindfulness. Breath is vanquished by an abstemious diet, Rajan.

They truly understand gunas aided by hundreds of gunas, hundreds of flaws, and diverse causes through hundreds of causes. They realise that the world is like the foam of water, cloaked in hundreds of illusions flowing from Vishnu, like a painted edifice, and as fragile as a reed, and they see it as a terrible dark abyss, as unreal and as short-lived as bubbles on water when compared to the duration of eternity.

The sagacious Samkhyas discard even tenderness towards their own children, knowing the world to be devoid of permanence and joy, with inescapable destruction for its end, sunk in rajas and tamas, and helpless like an elephant stuck in mire.

With their comprehensive yoga of knowledge, and the power of their penances, these Yatis sever and bludgeon all inauspicious vasanas born of rajas and those from tamas, and indeed all auspicious vasanas arising from sattva, and all pleasures of touch and the other bodily senses arising from the same three gunas, and in doing so, these Yatis cross samsara, the illusory ocean of life.

That terrifying ocean has sorrow for its waters. Anxiety and grief constitute its deep lakes. Disease and death are its colossal crocodiles. The great fears that pierce the heart at every step are its massive serpents.

The deeds inspired by tamas are its tortoises. Those inspired by rajas are its fish. Wisdom is the raft for crossing it. Sensual desires are its marshes. Decay constitutes its region of sorrow and turmoil.

Parantapa, knowledge is its island. Deeds make up its great depth. Truth is its shores. Pious practices form the lush weeds floating on its breast. Envy constitutes its swift tide. The emotions of the heart make up its mines. The diverse kinds of gratification are its precious jewels. Grief and fever are its winds. Misery and thirst form its mighty eddies. Agonising and fatal diseases are its colossal tuskers.

The collections of bones are its flights of steps, and phlegm is its froth. Gifts form its pearly banks. The lakes of blood are its corals.

Deafening laughter constitutes its roars. Diverse sciences make it impenetrable. Tears are its brine. Solitude is the high refuge of those that seek to cross it.

Children and wives are its countless leeches. Friends and kinsmen are the cities and towns on its shores. Non-violence and truth are its shorelines. Death is its last tempest.

The knowledge of Vedanta is its island that can harbour those tossed upon its waters. Compassion towards all creatures constitute its buoys, and moksha the priceless treasure offered to those voyaging on its waters seeking merchandise.

Like a horse spewing flames of fire, this ocean too, has its fiery terrors. Having transcended the limitations of dwelling within the gross body, so difficult to transcend, the Samkhyas enter into Akasa.

With his rays, Surya then bears those righteous men, followers of the Samkhya yoga. Like the fibres of the lotus-stalk sending water to the flower into which they all converge, Surya imbibes all things from the universe, and delivers them to those good and wise men.

Son of Kunti, these Yatis are carried by a gentle, cooling, fragrant wind, their attachments destroyed, animated with tejas, filled with the treasures of penances and crowned with success. That wind, the best of the seven winds, and which blows in blissful lands of great felicity, bears them, son of Kunti, to that which is the highest end in Akasa.

Then Akasa conveys them to the highest end of rajas. Rajas then bears them to the highest end of sattva. Sattva then lifts them to the Supreme Narayana.

Through himself, the puissant and pure-souled Narayana at last bears them to the Paramatman. Having reached this, Rajan, those pure ones attain immortality, and they never have to return from that condition.

That is the highest goal, O son of Pritha, which is achieved by those Mahatmans who have transcended the influence of all the contradictions and pairs of opposites.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O sinless one, after attaining this puissance and bliss, do these men of firm vows have any recollection of their lives including birth and death? O you of the Kuru vamsa, it is fitting that you tell me the truth about this, even as it is appropriate for me to ask none other but you this question.

On the subject of moksha, the scriptures are inconsistent and seem flawed, for some declare that consciousness disappears in the emancipated state, while others hold the very opposite.

If in this exalted condition the Yatis continue to live in consciousness, it would seem that the religion of Pravritti is superior. If, again, consciousness disappears from this state and the liberated one only resembles a person sunk in dreamless slumber, then it is wrong to say that there is no consciousness in moksha for of all that happens in dreamless sleep is that one's consciousness is temporarily eclipsed and suspended, but never lost, for it returns when one awakes.'

Bhishma says, 'However difficult to answer, your question, my son, is proper. Bharatarishabha, this kind of question unsettles even the most learned. For all that, hear the truth about this as I tell it to you.

The high-souled followers of Kapila have set their lofty intellects to this subject. The senses of knowledge, planted in the bodies of embodied creatures, are used for perception. They are the instruments of the Soul, for it is through them that subtle Being perceives.

Separated from the Atman, the senses are like bits of wood, quickly consumed, vanishing like the froth on the ocean's breast. When the Jiva, the embodied creature, along with his senses, sinks into sleep, the subtle Atman roams among all the realms of perception like the wind through ethereal space.

During its slumber, it continues to perceive all the fields of the senses just as well as it does when awake. However, without their ability to act during sleep, the senses are stilled in their places, losing their powers like snakes deprived of poison.

At such times, the Atman moves into the respective place of all the senses and fulfils all their functions.

All the qualities of sattva, all the attributes of the intellect, as also those of mind, and space, and wind, and all the characteristics of water, and of earth, the senses with these qualities, Yudhishtira, which adhere to Jivatman, along with the Jivatman itself, are engulfed in Brahman, the Paramatman.

Pious and evil karma, deeds, also overwhelm that Jivatman. Like sishyas waiting upon their guru with reverence, the senses too, wait upon the Jivatman; it reaches Brahman, which is Narayana, the highest, changeless, beyond all the pairs of opposites, and transcends Prakriti.

Freed from both punya and paapa, the Jivatman enters the Paramatman which is nirguna, without all attributes; from this abode of all auspiciousness, it does not return, O Bhaarata. What remains, O son, is the mind with the senses. These have to come back once more at the appointed time to do the bidding of their great master.

Soon after the sloughing off of this body, the Yati striving for moksha, endowed with knowledge and wishing for freedom, succeeds in achieving that eternal peace of mukti, which is his who becomes bodiless.

The Samkhyas, Rajan, are exceedingly wise. They succeed in attaining to the highest end through this kind of knowledge. There is no knowledge that is equal to this gyana. Do not doubt this.

The knowledge described in the system of the Samkhyas is regarded as the highest. That gyana is immutable and is everlasting. It is eternal Brahman in fullness. It has no beginning, middle and end. It transcends all contradictions.

It is the cause of the creation of the universe. It is complete and stands in fullness. It is without any kind of change or decay. It is uniform and perpetual. Thus the wise sing its praises.

From it flow creation and destruction, and all change. The great Rishis speak of it and laud it in the scriptures. All learned Brahmanas and all righteous men regard it to flow from Brahman, supreme, divine, infinite, immutable and undiminishing.

All Brahmanas that are attached to sensual objects adore and praise it by ascribing illusory attributes to it. The same is the view of yogins so observant of tapasya and dhyana, and of the Samkhyas of fathomless insight.

Son of Kunti, the Srutis declare that the Samkhya yoga is the very form of that Formless One. According to it, all cognitive knowledge is the knowledge of Brahman.

There are two kinds of creatures on Bhumi, Lord of the earth—the moving and the immobile, of which the mobile are superior. That supreme gyana which exists in persons conversant with Brahman and that which is contained in the Vedas, that which is found in other scriptures and that in yoga, that which is seen in the diverse Puranas, is all found in Samkhya philosophy.

Whatever knowledge exists in the itihasas and in vigyana, pertaining to the acquisition of wealth as approved by the wise; whatever other knowledge exists in this world—all flows from the lofty gyana of the Samkhyas.

Serenity, puissance, all subtle scriptural knowledge, tapasya of spiritual force, and all kinds of felicity, Rajan, have all been duly ordained in the Samkhya yoga. If they fail to achieve that complete knowledge recommended in their system, the Samkhyas attain the status of deities and pass many years in pleasure and happiness. Reigning over the celestials at will, at the end of the allotted time of their punya, they fall among learned Brahmanas and Yatis.

Like the Devas who ascend into the sky, the truly regenerate Samkhyas cast off this body and enter into the superior state of Brahman by devoting themselves entirely to their philosophy which is revered by all wise men. Faithful to the acquisition of Samkhya gyana, even if they fail to reach that eminence, they never fall among intermediate creatures, or sink to the status of sinful men.

That Mahatman who is fully conversant with the ancient, vast, ocean-like and profound Samkhya doctrines that are pure and tolerant and agreeable, becomes equal to Narayana. I have now told you the truth about the Samkhya yoga. It is the embodiment of Narayana, of the universe as it exists from the earliest time.

When the time of creation arrives, He causes the generation of life, and when the time comes for destruction, he swallows everything. Having withdrawn everything into his own body he falls into sleep, that inner Atman, Soul of the universe.'"

CANTO 303

"Yudhishtira says, 'What is that state known as Akshaya, the immutable, attaining which no one has to return? What, again, is that which is called Kshaya, decaying, from which one has to return once more? O Mahabaho, tell me the distinction between the two so that I may truly understand them both.

Delighter of the Kurus, Brahmanas who know the Vedas speak of you as an ocean of knowledge. Highly blessed and Mahatman Rishis and Yatis do the same. You now have but very few days to live.

When the sun turns from Dakshinayana, the southern path, to enter Uttarayana, the northern, you will attain to your high end. When you have left us, from whom shall we hear of all that benefits us? You are the lamp of Kuru's race. You shine with the light of knowledge. Perpetuator of the Kuru vamsa, I want to hear all this from you. Listening to your discourses, sweet as amrita, my curiosity in never satisfied but only increases!'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard, I will tell you the ancient story of the conversation that took place between Vasishta and King Karala of Janaka's race.

Once upon a time when that foremost of Rishis, Vasishta, effulgent like the sun, was seated undisturbed, King Janaka asked him about that highest knowledge which is for our supreme good.

Erudite in the domain of Atmagyana and having vast learning in all branches of that science, as Maitravaruni Vasishta was seated at his ease, the king approached him with folded hands; in humble words, sweet and well-spoken and lacking in all contentiousness he asked, "Holy one, I want

to know about the Supreme and Eternal Brahman by attaining to which men of wisdom do not have to return.

I also wish to know that which is called Kshaya, destructible, and that into which this universe enters when destroyed. Indeed, what is that which is said to be indestructible, mysterious, beneficial and free from all evil?"

Vasishta said, "Lord of the earth, listen to how this universe is destroyed, and about that which was never and can never be destroyed. According to the measure of the Devas, twelve thousand years make a yuga; four such yugas taken a thousand times, make a kalpa which measures one day of Brahma. Brahma's night, also, Rajan, is of the same duration.

When Brahma himself is destroyed, Sambhu of formless soul, in whom the attributes of Anima and Laghima are inherent awakens, and once more creates that First, most primeval of all creatures, having vast proportions, of infinite deeds, imbued with form, and identifiable with the universe. That Sambhu is also called Isana, the Lord of everything.

He is pure effulgence, and transcends all decay, his hands and feet stretching in all directions, with eyes and head and mouth everywhere, and with ears also in every place. That Being exists, pervading the entire universe.

The eldest-born Being is called Hiranyagarbha. In the Vedanta this Holy One has been called the Buddhi. In the yoga scriptures he is called Mahat, Virinchi, and Aja, the unborn. In the Samkhya scriptures, he is indicated by diverse names, and regarded as having Infinity for his Soul.

With many forms, constituting the soul of the universe, he is regarded as One and immutable. The three infinite worlds have been created by him alone and filled also only by him. In all these forms, he is said to be of Viswarupa, universal form.

In all these variations he creates himself by himself. Filled with great energy, he first creates Consciousness and that Great Being Prajapati endowed with Chit, Consciousness. The manifest, Hiranyagarbha, is created from the unmanifest. This the wise refer to as the creation of knowledge. The creation of Mahat or Virat, and Chetana, by Hiranyagarbha, is the creation of ignorance.

This gives rise to the assigning of attributes worthy of worship and their destruction, what interpreters of the Srutis call avidya and vidya, ignorance

and knowledge; after these two, arose, the other of the three—known as Akshara, Hiranyagarbha, or Virat.

Rajan, know, then, that the creation of the subtle elements from consciousness is the third. In all kinds of consciousness, the fourth creation flows from the modification of the third. This fourth creation comprises wind and light, space and water and earth, with their properties of sound, touch, form, taste and smell. This aggregate of ten arises simultaneously.

The fifth creation arises from the combination of these primal elements. This comprises the ear, the skin, the eyes, the tongue, the nose, and speech, and the two hands, the two legs, the anus and the organs of generation.

The first five make up the organs of knowledge, and the last five the organs of action. All these, with the mind, arose simultaneously. These twenty-four exist in the bodies of all living creatures.

By understanding these properly, Brahmanas with insight into the truth never have to yield to sorrow. In the three worlds a combination of these, called the sarira, body, is possessed by all embodied creatures.

Indeed, Rajan, this combination is known as such in Devas and Manavas and Danavas, and Yakshas and Gandharvas and Kinnaras, and Nagas, and Charanas and Pisachas, in divine Rishis and Rakshasas, in biting flies, and worms, and gnats, and vermin born of filth, rats and dogs, and Swapakas and Chaineyas, and Chandalas and Pukkasas, in elephants and horses, donkeys and tigers, and trees and cows.

All creatures that exist in water or space or on earth, for there is no other place in which creatures exist as we have heard, have this combination. All these, the manifest, are destroyed every day, and day after day. Hence, all creatures produced by a union of these twenty-four are said to be Kshaya, destructible.

This then is the Akshaya. And since the universe, made up of Vyakta and Avyakta, decays, it is said to be destructible. The very Being called Mahat who is the eldest-born is always spoken of as Kshaya.

I have now told you, O king, all that you asked me. Beyond these twenty-four, is the twenty-fifth called Vishnu. That Vishnu, because he is nirguna, is not a subject of gyana though, as he pervades all the tattvas, he has been called so by the wise. Since that which is destructible has created all that is manifest, all this has form.

The twenty-fourth, Prakriti, is said to preside over all that has sprung from her variations. The twenty-fifth, which is Vishnu, is formless and,

therefore, cannot be said to activate or enliven the universe.

That unmanifest Prakriti, which, in union with Chit, is endowed with a body dwells in the hearts of all creatures with bodies. Eternal Chetana, the Akshaya, although he is without attributes and without form, assumes all variations as a consequence of a union with Prakriti.

When he unites with Prakriti, which has the attributes of birth and death, he, the Purusha, also assumes these qualities. From such a union he becomes an object of perception even though in reality he is without all attributes.

It is in this way that the Mahat, Hiranyagarbha, fuses with Prakriti and suffused with avidya, ignorance, undergoes changes and becomes conscious of selfhood, ahamkara. As a result of his forgetfulness and becoming involved in ignorance, uniting with the gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, He becomes identified with diverse creatures belonging to diverse orders of being.

As a result of his birth and death arising from the fact of his dwelling with Prakriti, he thinks himself to be what he seemingly appears to be. Regarding himself as this or that, he assumes and follows the attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Under the influence of tamas, he attains those states that are shaped by tamas. Under the influence of rajas and sattva, he similarly acquires the conditions influenced by rajas and sattva.

There are three colours in all—white, red and black. All these colours pertain to Prakriti; according to the nature of Prakriti he is identified with for the time, he becomes white or red or black.

Through tamas one goes to hell. Through rajas one acquires and remains in the state of humanity. Through sattva, people ascend to Devaloka and share in great felicity. By sinning continuously one sinks into the intermediate order of beings. By acting both righteously and immorally, one attains the status of the gods.

Thus, the wise say, Akshara, the indestructible, by union with Prakriti, the unmanifest, is transformed into Kshara, destructible. By means of gyana, knowledge, however, the indestructible is once more apparent in his true nature."'

CANTO 304

Bhishma continues, ‘Vasishta said, “As a result of his forgetfulness, the Atman pursues ignorance and obtains thousands of bodies one after another. He attains thousands of births among the intermediate orders and sometimes even among the Devas because of his union with particular gunas and the power of those attributes.

From the state of humanity he goes to Swargaloka, and from heaven he returns to humanity, and again from humanity he sinks into Yamaloka for many long years. Just as the worm that spins the cocoon shuts itself completely within the very threads it weaves, the Soul, too, though nirguna, free of all attributes, in reality, acquires these gunas and deprives himself of freedom.

Though in his real nature he transcends both joy and sorrow, in this way he subjects himself to pleasure and despair. Thus, although he is beyond all disease, the Soul regards himself to be afflicted by pain in the head, eyes and teeth, suffering in the throat and abdomen, and by burning thirst, and enlargement of glands, and cholera, and vitiligo, and leprosy, and burns, and asthma and phthisis, and epilepsy, and all other diseases that afflict the bodies of living creatures.

He considers himself to be born wrongly among thousands of beings in the intermediate orders, and sometimes among the Devas; he bears suffering and also enjoys the fruits of his good deeds.

Steeped in ignorance, he regards himself as robed sometimes in white cloth and sometimes in a full dress of four pieces, or as lying on floors instead of on beds, or with hands and feet contracted like those of frogs, or as seated upright in the yogic posture of dhyana.

At other times, he sees himself as covered in rags or lying or sitting under the canopy of the sky, or within mansions built of bricks and stone or on rugged stones or on ashes, or on the bare earth or on beds or on battlefields, or in water or in swamps, or on wooden planks or on diverse kinds of beds.

Goaded on by desire of benefits, he sees himself as clad in a kaupina made of grass or totally naked, or robed in silk or in the skin of the black antelope, or in cloth made of flax, or in sheep-skin or in tiger-skin, or in lion-skin or in fabric of hemp, or in barks of trees or in cloths made from the skins of prickly plants, or in attire made of threads woven by worms, or in torn rags or in other countless kinds of garments, too many to describe.

The Soul regards himself also as wearing a variety of ornaments and jewels, or as eating diverse kinds of food. He regards himself as sometimes eating at intervals of one night, or once at the same hour every day, or at the fourth, the sixth and the eighth hour every day, or once in six or seven or eight nights, or once in ten or twelve days, or once in a month.

He also sees himself as eating only roots, or fruits, or surviving on air or water alone, or on cakes of sesame husk, or curds or cowdung, or the urine of the cow, or herbs or flowers or moss, or raw food, or just on leaves fallen from trees or fruits that lie on the ground, or other kinds of food—driven by the desire of achieving ascetic success.

The Soul regards himself as observing Chandrayana according to the scriptural rites, or other vows and ceremonies, and the duties prescribed for the four asramas of life, and even derelictions of duty, and the duties of other subsidiary modes of life included in the four principal ones, and the many kinds of practices that are signs of the wicked and sinful.

The Soul regards himself as enjoying secluded places and delightful shades of mountains, and the cool banks of streams and fountains, and solitary riversides and sheltered forests, and sacred groves of the gods, and lakes and waters withdrawn from the busy haunts of men, and isolated mountain caves providing the shelter that houses and mansions do.

The Soul regards himself as employed in the recitation of different kinds of hidden mantras or as observing various vows and laws and different kinds of penances, and a variety of sacrifices and rituals.

The Soul sees himself as sometimes assuming the ways of traders and merchants, sometimes the practices of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and

Vaisyas and Sudras, and also making many kinds of gifts made to those that are destitute, blind or helpless.

As an outcome of being affected by ignorance, the Soul adopts the attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas, and dharma, artha and kama. Influenced by Prakriti, the Soul himself undergoes modification, observes, adopts and practises all these myriad forms and changes, and regards himself as being them all.

Indeed, the Soul recites the sacred mantras Svaha and Svadha and Vashat, and bows to his superiors; he considers himself as officiating at the sacrifices of others, as teaching sishyas, making gifts and accepting them, performing sacrifices and studying the scriptures, and engaging himself in all other karmas and kriyas of this kind.

The Soul regards himself as concerned with birth and death, disputes and killing. All these, the learned say, constitute the paths of dharma and adharma. It is the Goddess Prakriti who causes birth and death.

When the time for the Pralaya, universal destruction, approaches, all existing objects and attributes are withdrawn by the Paramatman which then exists alone like the sun withdrawing his rays at dusk; when the time for creation arrives, he once again creates and sends them forth as the sun his rays at dawn. Thus the Atman at play repeatedly regards himself invested with all these conditions, which are his own infinite forms and aspects, his maya, his leela, so pleasing to himself.

In this way the Soul, though really transcending the three gunas, becomes attached to the path of karma and creates Prakriti invested with the attributes of birth and death and identical with all deeds and works characterised by the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Once on the path of karma, the Atman knows that particular acts have special characteristics and produce specific results. Rajan, the whole of this universe, with all things in it, has been blinded by Prakriti and overwhelmed by rajas and tamas.

The Soul, being invested by Prakriti, repeatedly gives rise to these gunas that produce all the pairs of opposites, dvesha and advesha, joy and suffering, pleasure and pain, and the rest. In consequence of this ignorance, the Jiva considers these sorrows to be his and imagines them as pursuing him.

Through that ignorance the Jiva imagines he should somehow move beyond those sorrows, and, finding Devaloka, enjoy the felicity that awaits

all his good deeds. It is through ignorance that he thinks he should enjoy these delights of heaven and endure the woes here in samsara, this world.

Through ignorance the Jiva thinks: I should secure my happiness. By continually doing good deeds, I may have happiness till the end of this life and I shall be happy in all my future lives. My sins, though, may earn me unending anguish.

The human condition is fraught with great misery, for from it one sinks into naraka. From naraka, it will take many long years before I can return to a human condition. From being human I shall once more rise to attain to swarga. From that superior state I will have to come back again to being human only to sink again into hell.

One who always regards this combination of the primal elements and the senses, with the reflection of Chit in it, to be thus invested with the characteristics of the Soul, repeatedly wanders among the gods and men and sinks into demonic tenures in hell. Filled with the ideas of me and mine, the Jiva is forced to make an interminable round of such births.

The Jiva must endure millions upon millions of births in the successive forms he assumes, all of which are mortal. He who lives and acts in this manner, the way fraught with good and evil consequences, has to take successive births, forms and deaths in the three worlds, and to enjoy and endure the fruits of his good deeds and his sins.

It is Prakriti that generates good and evil karma; and it is Prakriti that enjoys and suffers their consequences in the three worlds. Indeed, Prakriti follows the course of karma.

The state of the intermediate beings, of humans, and of the gods as well, originate in Prakriti, she who is regarded as nirguna, without attributes. Her existence is affirmed only because of her doings, beginning with Mahat.

In the same manner, the existence of Purusha, the Soul, though without qualities himself, is affirmed by his reflection in the acts of the body. Although the Soul is not subject to any kind of change and is the active principle setting Prakriti into motion, yet he enters a body with all its senses of cognition and action, and regards all these as his own.

The five senses of knowledge begin with the ear, and those of action begin with speech—these unite with the attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas to become engaged and embroiled in their numerous objects. The Jiva imagines that it is he who is the doer, and that the senses belong to him, though in reality he has no senses.

Without form, he imagines he has a body. Though bereft of gunas, he thinks he is imbued with them, and though transcending time, envisions himself to be under time's control.

Though lacking in cognisance, he regards himself as filled with it, and though transcending the twenty-four subjects of the senses and the mind, he considers that he is one among them. Though immortal, he deems himself mortal, and though motionless believes himself to be an active being.

Without a material body, he still thinks he possesses one, and though unborn he regards himself as endowed with birth. Though transcending tapasya, he sees himself engaged in penances, and though he has no goals to strive for, he still thinks that he must achieve a variety of ends.

Without birth and movement, he deems himself to have both, and though beyond fear, believes that he is subject to it. Though indestructible, he sees himself as mortal. Invested with ignorance, the Soul thinks thus of himself."'

CANTO 305

Bhishma says, 'Vasishta said, "Thus, as a result of his ignorance and his association with others who are shrouded by ignorance, the Jiva has to take millions and millions of births, each one ending in dissolution. The consequence of his transformation into Chit invested with ignorance is that the Jiva is born into millions of bodies, among intermediate beings and men and the gods, all of which will end in being destroyed.

On account of avidya, ignorance, the Jiva, like Chandramas, the moon, has to wax and wane thousands and thousands of times. This is truly the nature of the Jiva when invested with ignorance.

Know that Chandramas has in reality sixteen parts. Of these only fifteen increase and decrease. The sixteenth, that portion which remains invisible and appears on the night of the new moon, remains unchanging, constant.

Like Chandramas, the Jiva too has sixteen parts. Only fifteen of these, namely, Prakriti with Chetana's reflection, the ten senses of knowledge and action, and the four inner faculties, appear and disappear. The sixteenth, that is, Chit in its purity is not subject to any change.

Endowed with ignorance, the Jiva is repeatedly and continually born into these fifteen portions. With these births, the eternal and immutable portion in the Jiva, the primal essence, becomes united with the fifteen, and this union takes place repeatedly. That sixteenth portion is subtle. It is also known as Soma, eternal and immutable. It is never upheld by the senses. On the other hand, the senses are sustained by it. Rajan, since those sixteen are the cause of the birth of creatures, no creature can be born without them. They are called Prakriti. The final end of the Jiva's propensity to be united with Prakriti is called moksha mukti.

The Mahat-Soul, which is the twenty-fifth part the unmanifest, must repeatedly assume bodies of the sixteen divisions. The Soul, which is pure, becomes sullied since it is embroiled in avidya, dark unknowing that which is in reality pristine and untainted, becomes impure from being involved with what is both pure and unclean…

Devoted thus to ignorance, the Jiva, though essentially characterised by knowledge, becomes repeatedly associated with ignorance. Though free from every kind of flaw, yet in consequence of its bonding with the three gunas of Prakriti, it becomes itself steeped in them.'"

CANTO 306

'Janaka said, "O holy one, it has been said that the relation between the male and the female is like that which exists between Purusha, the indestructible, and Prakriti, the destructible.

Without a male, a female of any species cannot conceive. Without a female, a male also cannot create form. The forms of living creatures flow out of their union with each other. This is so with all orders of living beings.

Living creatures are born through sexual union, each depending upon the attributes of the other, and in their fertile seasons. I shall tell you about these. Listen to which are the traits that belong to the sire and which to the mother.

Bones, muscles, sinews and marrow, O regenerate one, we know to be derived from the man. Skin, flesh and blood, we know are drawn from the mother. We read about this in the Vedas and other scriptures.

What can be read as stated in the Vedas and other scriptures can be taken on authority. The authority of the Vedas and other consistent scriptures is eternal. Moksha cannot exist if Prakriti and Purusha are always joined in this way by both opposing and depending on the other's attributes.

Holy One, you have a spiritual vision that enables you to see all things as if they are present before your very eyes. If you know of any direct evidence of the existence of moksha, speak to me about it. We desire to attain it. Indeed, we wish to realise that which is auspicious, formless, not subject to decay, eternal beyond the reach of the senses, indeed, supreme."

Vasishta said, "What you say about what the Vedas and the other scriptures say in this matter is true. You have understood as they should be.

However, you are only familiar with the texts of the Vedas and the other shastras. You are not, Rajan, truly conversant with the real meaning of those scriptures.

One who understands merely the texts without knowing with their inner meaning, knows them in vain. Indeed, he who memorises the contents of a work without comprehending their meaning bears a useless burden.

On the other hand, he who gleans the true meaning of a treatise is said to have studied it with actual purpose. Questioned about the meaning of a text, it is fitting for him to explain that meaning acquired by careful study.

It is an unintelligent man who refuses to elucidate the meanings of texts in an assembly of the learned; indeed such a man never succeeds in expounding them properly. An ignorant person trying to explain the true meaning of treatises incurs ridicule. Even those who have knowledge of the Atman are mocked on such occasions if they try to explain something that has not been acquired through proper study.

Listen now to me, Rajan, on the subject of mukti that has been expounded by gurus to sishyas since the most ancient times among Mahatmans with the gyana of the Samkhya and the yoga systems of philosophy.

What the yogin beholds is that which the Samkhyas attain. He who knows the Samkhya and the yoga systems to be one and the same is deemed wise. Skin, flesh, blood, fat, bile, marrow, and muscles, and the senses of both knowledge and action, about which you speak, do exist. Objects flow from objects; the senses from the senses. From the body one acquires a body, as a seed is obtained from a seed.

When the Paramatman, the Supreme Being, is without senses, without seed, without matter, without body, He must be without all attributes, nirguna.

Akasa and the other elements arise from the gunas of sattva and rajas and tamas, and disappear ultimately into them. Thus they are born from Prakriti. Skin, flesh, blood, fat, bile, marrow, bones and muscles, these eight arisen from Prakriti, may sometimes be produced by the vital seed of the male alone.

The Jiva and the universe both partake of Prakriti characterised by the three gunas. The Paramatman, the Supreme Soul, is apart from both the Jiva and the universe. Just like the passing seasons may be inferred from the

appearance of certain fruits and flowers, Prakriti, too, though formless, can be inferred from the attributes of Mahat and the rest that spring from it.

The existence of Chaitanya in the body allows the Paramatman, without any gunas and perfectly pristine, to be inferred. Without beginning and without end, the foremost and most auspicious, that Paramatman is endowed with these elements as a result of its apparently identifying itself with the body and other gunas, as if in play.

Those who truly know these gunas recognise that only the ephemeral objects can be invested with sattva, rajas and tamas. That which transcends all attributes can have none. When the Jiva overcomes all the gunas born of Prakriti, only then does it gaze upon the Supreme Soul.

Only the highest Rishis conversant with the Samkhya, and true yogins know the Paramatman, which all the diverse philosophies and their adherents agree is beyond the Buddhi, the intellect which is regarded as the knower. He is endowed with the highest wisdom for he has cast off all consciousness of identification with Prakriti.

He transcends ignorance, is unmanifest, is nirguna beyond all attributes, and is called the Supreme. Dissociated from all gunas, he ordains all things, and is eternal and immutable. He surpasses Prakriti and all that is born of Prakriti; indeed transcending the twenty-four subjects that constitute enquiry, he forms the twenty-fifth.

When the wise, who stand in fear of birth, of the many conditions of living consciousness and of death, succeed in knowing the unmanifest, they gain understanding of the Supreme Soul at the same time. An intelligent man regards the union of the Jiva with the Paramatman as due and fitting, and consistent with the scriptures; the foolish man regards the two as being distinct from each other. This is the difference between the man of intelligence and he who lacks it.

The indications of both Kshara, the destructible, and Akshara, the indestructible, have now been expounded to you. Akshara is Oneness or unity, while Kshara denotes multiplicity, diversity. When one studies and properly understands the twenty-five subjects of enquiry, only then does one comprehend that the Oneness of the Atman is in accord with the scriptures, while its multiplicity is in opposition to them.

These are the many signs of what is included in the account of the created and what transcends that account. The wise have stated that there

are only twenty-five themes to the entire tale of creation. Transcending these, and beyond those, forms the twenty-sixth.

The comprehension of these twenty-five created subjects, according to their aggregates of five, is the study of material elements. Transcending these is that which is eternal.'"

CANTO 307

'Janaka said, "O foremost of Rishis, you have said that unity is the attribute of Akshara, the indestructible, and variety or multiplicity is the attribute of Kshara, the destructible. I have not yet clearly understood the nature of these two. Doubts still lurk in my mind.

Ignorant men look upon the Atman, the Soul, as imbued with the phenomenon of multiplicity. Wise men know it to be one and undivided. My intellect is dull, and so I am bewildered and unable to comprehend all this. My restless intellect has made me almost forget the causes you assigned for the unity of Akshara and the multiplicity of Kshara. I want you to once more instruct me on unity and multiplicity, on him who is knowing, on what is without knowledge, on the Jiva, vidya, avidya, Akshara, Kshara, and on the systems of Samkhya and yoga, in detail, individually and frankly."

'Vasishta said, "I will tell you what you ask. Listen to me, Rajan, as I expound to you the practices of yoga separately. An obligatory practice with yogins, dhyana, contemplation, is their highest power. Those conversant with yoga say that contemplation is of two kinds. One is the concentration of the mind, and the other is pranayama, the regulation of breath. Pranayama is said to have physicality while the pure concentration of mind is without it.

Except for the three times when a man urinates, defecates and eats, he should devote all his time to dhyana. Withdrawing the senses from the objects of their perception, through the mind, an intelligent man, having purified himself with the twenty-two ways of pranayama, unites the Jivatma with that which transcends the twenty-fourth subject, namely Prakriti,

which is also ignorance, the Paramatman which, according to the wise, dwells in every part of the body, and thereby transcends decay and death.

We have heard that it is through those twenty-two methods that the Soul may always be known. Only one whose mind is free of sinful passions can engage in this practice of yoga. No other may.

Detached, abstemious in diet, and controlling all the senses, one should fix one's mind on the Atman; O king of Mithila, during the first and the last part of the night, having subdued the senses, quieted the mind by Buddhi, the understanding, one should assume a posture as still as a stone.

When men of knowledge, who know the laws of yoga, become as fixed as a post of wood, and as immovable as a mountain, they are said to be in yoga, communion. When one does not hear, or smell, or taste, or see, when one is not conscious of any touch, when one's mind becomes perfectly free from every purpose, when one is not conscious of anything, when one cherishes no thought, when one becomes like a block of wood, then one is in perfect yoga.

In this state one burns like a lamp where there is no wind, steadily; at such a time one is freed even from one's sukshma sarira, one's subtle form, and perfectly united with Brahman. When one has achieved this, one no longer ascends or falls among intermediate beings.

When we say that there has been a complete identification of the knower, the known, and knowledge, then is the yogin said to behold the Supreme Soul. While in yoga, the Paramatman reveals itself in the yogin's heart like a blazing fire, or like the irradiant sun, or like dazzling lightning in the sky.

That Supreme Soul which is unborn and which is the essence of amrita, nectar, that is seen by Mahatman Brahmanas, endowed with wisdom and knowers of the Vedas, is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great. Though dwelling in all creatures, that Atman is not perceived by them.

The Creator of the worlds is seen only by one who is rich in the intelligence guided by the lamp of the mind. He dwells beyond tamas, darkness, and transcends even Iswara. Those acquainted with the Vedas and imbued with omniscience call him the dispeller of darkness, transcending darkness, pure, and nirguna.

This is what is called the yoga of yogins. What else marks yoga? Such practices allow yogins to glimpse the Supreme Soul that transcends death and decay.

I have told you about the science of yoga in detail. I will now discourse upon that Samkhya philosophy by which the Paramatman is seen through the gradual destruction of darkness, ignorance and faults.

The Samkhyas, whose system is built on Prakriti, say that Prakriti, which is unmanifest, is foremost. The second principle, Mahat, arises from Prakriti.

We have heard that from Mahat flows the third principle called Chit, Consciousness. The Samkhyas blessed with vision of the Soul say that the five senses of sound, sight, touch, taste and smell flow from Consciousness. All these eight, together, they refer to as Prakriti.

The modifications of these eight are sixteen in number. They are the five gross or material essences, of Akasa, Agni, Bhumi, Jala and Vayu—space, light, earth, water and wind—and the ten senses of action and of knowledge including the mind. Wise men devoted to the path of Samkhya, and who know all its laws and dispensations, regard these twenty-four subjects as encompassing the whole range of Samkhya enquiry.

That which is created is merged into the creating. Created by the Paramatman, one after another, these principles are destroyed in reverse. With every new creation, the gunas come into existence in the order I have told you, and with destruction they merge, each into its Creator, in a reverse order, like the waves of the ocean vanishing into the very ocean that gives them birth. Rajan, this is the manner in which Prakriti is created and destroyed.

The Supreme Being is all that remains at the time of Pralaya, and it is he that assumes multifarious forms when creation breaks into life. This is what men of knowledge have established.

It is Prakriti that causes Purusha to assume diversity and then revert to unity. Prakriti herself also has the same indications. Those who know the nature of the themes of enquiry know that Prakriti also assumes the same kind of diversity and unity; when destruction is at hand she reverts into unity and when creation flows she assumes diversity of form.

The Atman makes Prakriti, which contains the principles of creation or growth, and acquires manifold forms. Prakriti is called Kshetra, the field in which karma is sown, also identified as the body. Transcending the twenty-four principles of nature is the Atman, Soul, which is great. It, the Kshetrajna or knower of the field, presides over Prakriti or Kshetra.

Thus, the foremost of Yatis say that the Soul is the controller. He is so regarded as he presides over all kshetras. Aware of that unmanifest Kshetra, he is also called Kshetrajna, the Knower of Kshetra. And because the Atman enters into unmanifest Kshetra, the body, he is called Purusha. Kshetra is distinct from Kshetrajna. Kshetra is unmanifest.

The Soul, which transcends the twenty-four subjects, is called the Knower. Knowledge and the object known are discrete. Knowledge has been said to be unmanifest, while the object of knowledge is the Soul which transcends these principles.

The unmanifest is called Kshetra, sattva, Mahat, and also Iswara, the Supreme One, while Purusha is the twenty-fifth, unsurpassed, principle; though regarded a subject, it is not one, for it transcends them all. This, Rajan, is an account of the Samkhya philosophy.

The Samkhyas see the cause of the universe, and merging all the grosser principles into the Chit, gaze upon the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. Studying the twenty-four subjects properly, along with Prakriti, and determining their true nature, the Samkhyas succeed in beholding that which transcends these twenty-four principles.

In reality the Jivatma is that very Soul which transcends Prakriti and is beyond the twenty-four principles. When he succeeds in knowing that Paramatman by dissociating himself from Prakriti, he then merges into that, the Supreme Soul.

I have now told you everything about the Samkhya yoga, in all its aspects. Those who know these doctrines succeed in attaining direct cognisance of Brahman. They achieve peace and tranquillity.

Indeed, as men whose understanding have direct awareness of Brahman, reach that state from which they do not have to return to this world after the dissolution of their bodies, those that are said to be emancipated in this life, they attain the great power and ineffable felicity of Samadhi, and immutability, through attaining the nature of Akshara, the indestructible.

They who perceive this universe as many instead of as one and unified are said to see falsely. These men are blind to Brahman. O Parantapa, such men have repeatedly to return to the world and assume bodies in the diverse orders of being. Those who realise the Brahman become omniscient, and when they pass from this body they are free forever of all physical forms.

All things, the entire universe, are said to be the result of the unmanifest. The Atman, which is the twenty-fifth tattva, transcends all things. They who know it, the Soul, have no fear of returning to the world.'"

CANTO 308

'Vasishta said, "I have discoursed to you thus far on the Samkhya philosophy. Now I will tell you what is vidya, knowledge, and what is avidya, ignorance. The learned say that that Prakriti, which is fraught with the attributes of creation and destruction, is called avidya; while Purusha, who is free from these and who transcends the twenty-four tattvas, is called vidya.

Listen to me first as I speak to you on the nature of vidya among the other successive concepts in the Samkhya philosophy.

Among the senses of knowledge and those of action, the senses of knowledge are said to constitute vidya. We have heard that vidya comprises the senses of knowledge and the objects of their perception. The wise say that of the objects of the senses and the mind, the mind constitutes vidya. Between the mind and the five subtle essences, the latter make up vidya. Of the five subtle essences and Consciousness, consciousness is vidya. Of Chit and Mahat, the latter, O king, is vidya. Of all the principles beginning with Mahat and Prakriti, it is Prakriti, unmanifest and supreme, that is regarded as vidya.

Of Prakriti, and that called Vidhi which is Supreme, Vidhi should be known as vidya. Transcending Prakriti is the twenty-fifth principle, called Purusha, who should be known as vidya. Of all knowledge that which is the object of knowledge has been said to be the unmanifest, Rajan.

Again, knowledge has been said to be unmanifest and the object of knowledge to be that which transcends the twenty-four. I repeat, knowledge is unmanifest, and the Knower is that which transcends the twenty-four.

I have now told you the true significance of vidya and avidya. Listen now as I tell you about the indestructible and the destructible. Both the Jiva and Prakriti have been said to be indestructible, and both of them have been said to be destructible. I will tell you why this is so, as I have understood it.

Both Prakriti and the Jiva are without beginning and without end, without birth and without death. With regards to creation, both are regarded as supreme. As a consequence of its attributes of repeated creation and destruction, the unmanifest Prakriti, is called Akshara, indestructible. That unmanifest is continually modified, in order to create the evolutes. And because the principles beginning with Mahat are produced by Purusha as well, and also because Purusha and the Avyakta are mutually dependent upon each other, therefore is Purusha also, the twenty-fifth, called Kshetra, Akshara, indestructible.

When the yogin withdraws and merges all the principles into the unmanifest Brahman, then along with all the others, the twenty-fifth evolute, the Jiva or Purusha, also dissolves into it. When the principles merge, each into its Creator, then the one that remains is Prakriti.

When Kshetrajna too, O son, vanishes into what produces him, all that remains is Brahman; thus, Prakriti along with all its evolutes becomes Kshara, is destroyed, and becomes nirguna, and attains to the condition of being without attributes, from becoming detached from all the tattvas.

We have heard that Kshetrajna, when his knowledge of Kshetra disappears, becomes devoid of gunas, attributes. When he becomes Kshara he takes on gunas.

When, however, he attains to his own real nature, he succeeds in understanding his own condition of truly being nirguna. By casting off Prakriti and beginning to realise that he is different from her, the intelligent Kshetrajna comes to be regarded as pristine and taintless.

When the Jiva no longer exists in a state of union with Prakriti, then he becomes identifiable with Brahman. While he remains united with Prakriti, he remains distinct from Brahman. Indeed, when the Jivatman shows no attachment for Prakriti and her tattvas, he then succeeds in beholding the Supreme; having once beheld him he wishes that he not fall away from that felicity.

When the knowledge of truth dawns upon him, the Jiva begins to lament: Alas, my ignorance and foolishness have made me fall into this mesh of Prakriti, like a fish entangled in a net.

Through ignorance I have migrated from body to body like a fish from water to water thinking that this in the only element in which it can live. Just as a fish does not know anything other than water to be its natural element, I also have never known anything other than my own family, my children and wives. Shame on me that through ignorance I have been repeatedly wandering from body to body forgetful of the Paramatman.

The Paramatman alone is my friend. I have the capacity for friendship with him. Whatever be my nature and whoever I may be, I am able to be like him and to merge with him. I see my similarity with him. I am indeed, like him. He is pure, untainted. It is clear that I am of the same nature.

Through ignorance and torpor, I have become associated with inanimate Prakriti. Though really detached, I have passed this long time in a state of attachment with Prakriti. Alas, without being aware of it, I have so long been subdued by her.

Prakriti assumes various forms: high, middling and low. Oh, how will I dwell in those forms? How will I live conjointly with her? It is on account of my ignorance that I repair to her companionship.

I will now immerse myself in Samkhya or yoga. I will no longer keep her companionship. When I consider how long I have been with her, I think that I have been too long deceived by her, for being really unchanging and free myself, how could I keep company with one that is subject to constant change?

But she cannot be held responsible for this. The blame is mine, since turning away from the Paramatman I freely became attached to her. In consequence of that attachment, though in reality formless I have had to live in multifarious forms.

Though formless by nature I am endowed with forms because of my sense of me and mine, and thereby disturbed and agitated. As a result of my false sense of selfhood in Prakriti, I am forced to take birth in diverse orders of being.

Alas, though without any true sense of ego, yet in consequence of affecting it, I have sinned in a myriad of ways in those orders in which I took birth while I remained in them as a Jivatman who had lost all true knowledge. I will no longer have anything to do with her whose essence is consciousness, who divides herself into many and who seeks to bind me with these many.

Only now have I been awakened and have understood that I am by nature without any sense of ego and without that consciousness which creates the forms of Prakriti that appear all around. Discarding that ego, with respect to her and whose essence is made up of consciousness, and casting off Prakriti herself, I shall take refuge in him who is auspicious.

I shall be united with him, and not with Prakriti which is essentially without reality. It will be to my benefit if I unite with him for I share no true similarity of nature with Prakriti.

The twenty-fifth principle, which is the Jivatman, when he thus succeeds in understanding the Paramatman, is able to cast off the Kshara, the mortal, and merge with that which is Akshara, immortal, the essence of all that is auspicious. In reality, the Jiva is nirguna and Avyakta, without attributes and unmanifest, but becomes invested with what is Vyakta, manifest, and assumes gunas.

O lord of Mathura, when he succeeds in gazing upon that which is nirguna and which is the source of the unmanifest, he achieves union with it.

I have told you the indications of what is indestructible and what is destructible, according to the best of my knowledge of what has been expounded in the scriptures. I shall now speak to you about what I have heard as to how knowledge that is subtle, stainless and certain arises. Listen to me.

I have already discoursed to you on the features of the Samkhya and the yoga systems of philosophy as described in their respective texts. Indeed, the science that has been explained in the Samkhya treatises is identical with what has been laid down in the yoga shastras.

Rajan, the knowledge which the Samkhyas preach can enlighten everyone. In the Samkhya doctrines that knowledge has been explicated for the benefit of its disciples. The learned say that this Samkhya system is extensive. Yogins have great regard for this system as also for the Vedas.

In the Samkhya philosophy no subject transcending the twenty-fifth is accepted. I have duly described to you the highest principles of the Samkhyas. In the yoga philosophy, it is said that Brahman, the essence of knowledge without duality, Advaita, becomes the Jiva only when suffused with ignorance. The yoga scriptures speak of both Brahman and Jivatman.'"

CANTO 309

Bhishma says, ‘Vasishta said, “I will now discourse to you on Buddha, the Supreme Soul, and Abuddha, the Jiva which is the dispensation of the attributes of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

Under the influence of maya, illusion, the Paramatman, becoming the Jiva, assumes myriad forms and comes to regard them all as real. As a consequence of regarding himself indistinguishable from such transformations, the Jivatman fails to understand the Supreme Soul, for he bears the gunas of sattva and rajas and tamas, creating and drawing into himself what he creates.

O Rajan, the Jiva undergoes ceaseless changes for his sport, and because he is capable of understanding the action of the Avyakta, the unmanifest, he is called Buddhyamana, the comprehender.

The unmanifest or Prakriti can never comprehend Brahman which is, in reality, nirguna, without attributes, even when it manifests itself with gunas. Hence Prakriti is called unintelligent. The Srutis declare that if ever Prakriti does succeed in knowing the twenty-fifth tattva, the Jiva, Prakriti will then be identified and united with the Jiva, instead of being apart from It.

However Prakriti can never comprehend the Paramatman, which is ever detached and which transcends the twenty-fifth evolute. As a result of his attachment to and union with Prakriti, the Jiva or Purusha, who in his real nature is unmanifest and not subject to change, comes to be called the unawakened or ignorant.

Indeed, because the twenty-fifth tattva can realise the Avyakta, the unmanifest, that he is called Buddhyamana, or comprehender. He cannot,

however, easily grasp the twenty-sixth, which is stainless, which is knowledge without duality, immeasurable and eternal.

The twenty-sixth tattva, however, can know both the Jiva and Prakriti, who are the twenty-fifth and the twenty-fourth principles respectively. O radiant son, only the wise succeed in knowing that Brahman which is unmanifest, which inheres in its real nature in all that is seen and unseen, and which is the one independent essence in the universe.

When the Jiva considers himself distinct from, and other than what he truly is, when he thinks of himself as fat or lean, fair or dark, a Brahmana or a Sudra, it is only then that he fails to recognise the Supreme Soul and himself, and Prakriti with which he is united.

When the Jiva succeeds in understanding Prakriti, and knowing that she is something apart and different from him, only then is he restored to his true nature and attains to that exalted knowledge which is pure and untainted and which is of Brahman. When the Jiva reaches that highest understanding, he then attains to that pure and non-dual knowledge, which is the twenty-sixth principle, Brahman.

He then casts off the manifest, Prakriti fraught with the attributes of creation and destruction. When the Jiva recognises Prakriti, unintelligent and subject to the influence of sattva, rajas and tamas, he then becomes nirguna, without attributes himself.

When he understands that the unmanifest is different from him, he acquires the nature of the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. The learned say that when the Jiva is freed from the attributes of sattva and rajas and tamas, and united with the Supreme Soul, he becomes identified with that Soul.

The Paramatman is called tattva as well as atattva, and transcends decay and death. O bestower of honours, the Soul, despite resting in the body, with its manifest principles, cannot be said to have acquired the nature of those principles.

The wise say that there are in all twenty-five principles, including the Jivatman. Indeed the Soul does not possess either Consciousness or any other principle. Invested with pure intelligence, it transcends the tattvas. It quickly discards even that principle which is the indication of the knowing or awakened one.

When the Jiva considers himself as the twenty-sixth being, not subject to decay and death, he succeeds through his own light in attaining identity with that twenty-sixth. Though awakened by the twenty-sixth, pure

intelligence, the Jiva still becomes subject to ignorance. This is the cause of the Jiva's myriad forms as explained in the Srutis and the Samkhya scriptures.

When the Jiva, endowed with Chetana and unintelligent Prakriti, loses all consciousness of a distinct or individual self, then he discards his multifariousness and resumes his oneness. When the Jivatman who lives in joy and suffering, seldom free from the consciousness of self, succeeds in merging with the Paramatman which is beyond the reach of the understanding, he is then liberated from virtue and vice.

Indeed, when the Jiva attains to the twenty-sixth tattva, which is unborn and puissant and apart from all attachments, comprehending it thoroughly, he himself becomes possessed of infinite puissance and entirely casts off Prakriti. Once he understands the twenty-sixth tattva, the first twenty-four lose all significance and worth.

I have now narrated to you, according to the indication of the Srutis, the nature of the Abuddhya or Prakriti, and of the Jiva; I have also told you about that which is pure knowledge, the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. Guided by the scriptures, variety and oneness are to be thus understood.

The difference between the gnat and the udumbara, or that between the fish and water, illustrates the difference between the Jivatman and Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. The multiplicity and unity of these two are then similarly understood.

This is called emancipation, mukti, this comprehension or knowledge of oneself as something distinct from unintelligent Prakriti. By making him know the unmanifest, the Paramatman, which transcends Buddhi, intellect, the twenty-fifth tattva, which dwells in the bodies of living creatures, is emancipated.

Indeed, that twenty-fifth is capable of achieving moksha in this manner only and by no other means. Though really different from the Kshetra in which he dwells for the time being, he partakes of the nature of that kshetra as a result of his union with it.

Uniting with what is pure, he becomes pure. Merging with the intelligent, he becomes Intelligent. By joining with one that is emancipated, he is liberated. By uniting with one that has been free from every attachment, he too, is freed from all attachment.

By uniting with one striving for mukti, imbibing the nature of his companion, he himself strives for emancipation. By mingling with one of

pure deeds he becomes pure, of pure deeds himself, and blazes with effulgence. By uniting with one of unstained Soul, he becomes of unstained Soul himself.

By fusing with the one immaculate and independent Atman, he becomes one and independent. Uniting with the one that is dependent on its own self, he acquires the same nature and attains to freedom.

Rajan, I have duly told you this that is perfectly true. I have honestly discoursed to you on the subject of the eternal and stainless and primeval Brahman. You may impart this high knowledge, able to awaken the Soul, to that person who though not conversant with the Vedas is nevertheless humble and has a keen desire to acquire Brahmagyana, the knowledge of Brahman.

It should never be given to one who is false, or cunning or roguish, or is weak-minded or devious, or to one who is jealous of learned men, or one who gives pain to others. Listen to me as I speak of those to whom this knowledge may safely be divulged. It should be given to one who has faith, who is meritorious, who abstains from speaking ill of others, who is devoted to tapasya from the purest of motives, who is wise, and who knows the sacrifices and other rites laid down in the Vedas.

This knowledge may be revealed to one with a forgiving disposition, who is compassionate and kind to all creatures; or one who is fond of dwelling in solitary quietness, who lives and acts in accord with the scriptures, or to one never given to quarrels and disputes, or one possessed of great learning or one endowed with wisdom, forgiveness, self-restraint and tranquillity of soul.

This high knowledge of Brahman should never be imparted to one who does not possess such qualities. It has been said that there can be no advantage or punya when such knowledge is given to one who is not suited to receiving it. This high knowledge should never be revealed to one who disregards any vows and restraints even if, in exchange, he gives all of Bhumi, the earth, brimming with jewels and diverse wealth as dakshina. However, without doubt, this knowledge should indeed be given to one who has conquered his senses.

O Karala, let no fear be yours any longer, since you have listened to what I have said about the high Brahman. I have told you about the holy Brahman, without beginning, middle and end, and who can dispel all kinds of grief.

Seeing Brahman can dispel both birth and death, O king, the Brahman full of auspiciousness that removes all fear, Brahman who bestows true weal. And having acquired this essence of all knowledge, cast off all error and stupor today. I acquired this gyana from the eternal Hiranyagarbha himself, Rajan, who divulged it to me when I had gratified that great Being of the most superior soul.

Asked by you today, I have imparted to you the knowledge of eternal Brahman, just as I myself acquired it from my guru. Indeed, I have given you this highest knowledge, the Brahmagyana, which is the refuge of all conversant with mukti exactly as I once received it from Brahma himself."'

Bhishma continues, 'I have now told you what the great Rishi Vasishta said to King Karala of the Janaka vamsa, about the twenty-fifth tattva, attaining which the Jiva has never to come back into the world. It is only when the Jivatman does not truly recognise the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul, which is not subject to decay and death that it has to frequently leave and return to this world.

When the Jiva attains to that high knowledge, he has no longer to come back. Having heard it from the Devarishi, I have, O son, discoursed to you on this Brahmagyana from which arises the highest good.

This knowledge was obtained from Hiranyagarbha by the high-souled Rishi Vasishta. From Vasishta, it was acquired by Narada. From Narada I have learnt it, the knowledge that is indeed the eternal Brahman.

O Kurusattama, foremost of Kurus, having heard this discourse of high import, filled with sacred wisdom, do not grieve any longer. That man who knows Kshara and Akshara is free from fear. Only he who is bereft of such knowledge is obliged to cherish fear.

As a result of this ignorance of Brahman, the soul of the foolish man has to repeatedly come back into this world. Dying, he has to be born into thousands upon thousands of orders of being, every one of which ends in death.

Now in the world of the gods, now among men, and now among intermediate orders of being—he must appear again and again. In course of time, if he succeeds in crossing samsara, the ocean of ignorance in which he is plunged, he then succeeds in avoiding rebirth altogether and merges with the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul.

The ocean of ignorance is fearsome and terrible. It is bottomless and called the unmanifest. O Bhaarata, day after day, creatures fall and sink into

that sea. Since you, Rajan, have been freed from that eternal, boundless ocean of darkness, you are also liberated from both rajas and tamas.'

CANTO 310

"Bhishma says, 'Once upon a time a king of Janaka's royal house, while hunting for deer in the uninhabited forests, saw a superior Brahmana, a Rishi of Bhrigu's vamsa. Bowing before the Rishi who was seated at his ease, King Vasuman approached him and, when he also sat, with the sage's leave, asked him this question:

"O holy one, tell me what is of the highest benefit, both here and hereafter, to a man who has an unstable body and is the slave of his desires?" Thus questioned, and properly honoured by the king, that Rishi of profound ascetic merit replied with these most beneficial words.

The Rishi said, "If you desire what is agreeable to you both in this world and the next, be self-restrained and abstain from injuring all creatures. Righteousness is beneficial to the virtuous. Dharma is the refuge of those who are good.

The three worlds with their moving and still creatures flow from dharma. You who so eagerly wish to enjoy all pleasures, how is it that you are not yet satiated with the objects of desire? You see the honey, O you of small understanding, but are blind to the fall.

As one who wants to earn the fruits of knowledge should set himself to the acquisition of knowledge, so also one who desires the fruits of dharma should set himself to the acquisition of righteousness.

Desiring virtue, a wicked man finds it impossible to fulfil his desire despite striving to act in a pure and taintless manner. On the other hand, if a good man is impelled by the desire to earn punya, he accomplishes even a difficult deed with ease. Living in the forest, if one acts in a manner so as to delight in the pleasures of a dwelling among men in towns, he is regarded

not as a forest recluse but as a townsman. Similarly, while living in towns, if a man desires the felicity enjoyed by a forest recluse, he is considered not a town dweller but a vanaprastha.

Know then the merit of performing and abstaining from religious karma; concentrate on and be devoted to the practices of dharma in thoughts, words and deeds. Ascertain the propriety of time and place, purify yourself by rituals and vows, and when entreated, without malice make endowments to the virtuous.

Acquiring wealth by righteous means, one should offer it to the deserving. One should bestow gifts, discarding anger; and having made these offerings one should neither regret nor extol those gifts with one's own mouth.

The Brahmana who is full of compassion, honest, and whose birth is pure, is one regarded as deserving of gifts. A man is said to be pure in birth when he is born of a mother that has only one husband and who belongs to the same varna as her husband.

Indeed, such a Brahmana, conversant with the three Vedas—Rig, Yajur and Sama—learned, and who observes the six duties of performing yagnas himself, of officiating at those of others, of learning, teaching, offering dana and receiving gifts, is regarded as being worthy of receiving gifts.

Dharma becomes adharma, and unrighteousness becomes righteousness, according to the character of the doer, of time, and of place. Sin is washed away like the dirt on one's body, with a little exertion and more when the effort is greater.

After purging his bowels, a man should take ghee, a tonic which makes his system healthy. In the same manner, having cleansed oneself of all faults, if one sets oneself to acquire dharma, such righteousness will produce the highest happiness in the next world.

Good and evil thoughts exist in the minds of all creatures. Withdrawing the mind from evil thoughts, it should always be directed towards those that are pure. One should always revere one's svadharma, the practices of one's own varna. Strive, then, to act in a manner that you may have faith in the duties of your varna.

O you of impatient soul, undertake the practice of patience. You of small understanding, seek to become endowed with intelligence. Bereft of serenity, seek to be calm; and lacking in wisdom as you are, try to act wisely.

He who moves in the company of the righteous succeeds, through his own efforts, in acquiring the means of accomplishing what is beneficial for him both in this world and the next. Indeed, the root of this benefit is unwavering steadfastness.

The Rajarishi Mahabhisha fell from heaven through want of this firmness. Yayati, also, was boastful and arrogant, exhausted his punya, and was cast down from swarga; he succeeded in regaining the realms of felicity through steadfastness. You will surely attain to great intelligence and your highest good by paying heed to virtuous and learned men of ascetic merit."'

Bhishma continues, 'Hearing these words of the sage, King Vasuman, possessed of a good character, withdrew his mind from the pursuit of desire, and set it upon the acquisition of dharma.'"

CANTO 311

Yudhishtira says, ‘It befits you, Pitamaha, to discourse to me on that which is free from dharma and its opposite, which is free from every doubt, which transcends birth and death, as also virtue and sin, which is auspiciousness, eternal fearlessness, indestructible and immutable, which is always pure, and which is ever free from the toil of exertion.’

Bhishma says, ‘In this regard I will narrate to you the ancient story, Bhaarata, of the discourse between Yajnavalkya and Janaka. Long ago, the famous King Daivarati of Janaka’s royal house, fully conversant with the import of all questions, asked this question of Yajnavalkya, that foremost of Rishis.

Janaka said, “O regenerate Rishi, how many kinds of senses are there? How many kinds are there of Prakriti? What is the Avyakta, unmanifest and highest Brahman? What is higher than Brahman? What is birth and what is death? What are the limits of age?

O Dvijottama, instruct me on these subjects; I am ignorant while you are an ocean of knowledge. Truly, I wish to hear you speak on all these matters.”

Yajnavalkya said, “O king, listen to my answers to these questions of yours. I shall impart to you the supreme knowledge valued by yogins and especially that which the Samkhyas possess.

Nothing is unknown to you; still you have asked me. And, on being questioned, one should answer. This is the eternal practice.

Eight main principles, tattvas, have been named as being of Prakriti, while sixteen have been called indriyas, modifications. Of the Vyakta, the

manifest, there are seven. These are the views of those conversant with the science of Adhyatma.

The unmanifest, or original Prakriti, Mahat, Consciousness, and the Panchamahabhutas—five suksma or subtle elements of Bhumi, earth; Vayu, air; Akasa, space; Jala, water, and Agni, fire—these eight are together known as Prakriti. The indriyas are certainly manifest or gross, sthula. Listen now to the enumeration of those called indriyas. They are the ear, the skin, the tongue and the nose; and sound, touch, form, taste and scent; as also speech, the two arms, the two feet, the anus and the organs of pleasure and generation.

Amongst these, the ten beginning with sound, and having their origin in the five Panchamahabhutas, the great evolutes, are called Visesha. The five senses of cognition, are called Savisesha. Those who know the Adhyatma vigyana regard the mind, Manas, as the sixteenth.

This is in consonance with your own views and those of other learned men who know these truths.

From the unmanifest, Rajan, springs the Mahat. The wise regard this to be the first Prakriya, creation relating to Pradhana or Prakriti: From Mahat is produced Chit, Consciousness. This has been called the second Prakriya, having Buddhi, the intellect, for its essence.

From Consciousness has sprung Manas, the mind, which is the essence of sabda, sound, and the others that are the attributes of Akasa and the rest. This is the third creation, related to Chit. From Manas have sprung the five great elements. Truly I say, know that this is the fourth Prakriya called sukshma, subtle or spiritual.

Those who know the primordial elements say that sabda, sound, sparsa, touch, rupa, form, rasa, taste, and gandha, scent, are the fifth creation, related to the great primal elements. The creation of the ear, the skin, the tongue and the nose, forms the sixth; this is regarded as having multiplicity of thought for its essence.

After this arise the senses that follow the ear and the others, those of action, karma, O Rajan. This is called seventh Prakriya and relates to the senses of cognition. Then comes prana, the breath that rises upward, followed by samana, udana and vyana, those that have a transverse motion. This is the eighth creation and is called Arjava.

After these breaths that course transversely in the lower parts of the body—samana, udana and vyana—comes that called apana flowing

downwards. This ninth creation is also called Arjava, O king.

These nine Prakriyas, and these twenty-four tattvas, I have expounded to you according to what has been laid down in the sacred shastras. Now, O Rajan, listen to me as I tell you about the durations of time as indicated by the learned in respect of these tattvas.'"

CANTO 312

'Yajnavalkya said, "Listen to me, O foremost of men, as I tell you about the duration of time with respect to the unmanifest, the Supreme Purusha. Ten thousand kalpas are said to constitute his single day. Equal is the duration of his night.

When his night passes, he awakes, and first creates herbs and plants that sustain all embodied creatures. He then creates Brahma who springs from a golden egg.

We have heard that Brahma is the form of all created things. Having dwelt for a whole year within that egg, the great ascetic Brahma, also called Prajapati, Lord of all creatures, emerged from it and created Bhumi, the earth, and swarga, the heavens above.

Brahma, then, it is said in the Vedas, placed the sky between; heaven and earth separated from each other. Seven thousand and five hundred kalpas comprise one day of Brahma. Those who know the science of Adhyatma say that his night also is of an equal duration. Brahma, called Mahan, then creates Consciousness, Bhuta, which is unsurpassed in essence.

Before creating any physical bodies out of what are called the Mahabhutas, the Great Elements, Mahan or Brahma, imbued with tapasya, created four others referred to as his sons. They are the sires of the original Pitris.

Rajan, we have also heard that the senses of knowledge along with the four inner faculties, have sprung from the Pitris, the five great elements, and that the entire universe of mobile and immobile Beings has been filled with those Panchamahabhutas.

The puissant Consciousness created the five Bhutas. These are Bhumi, earth; Vayu, air; Akasa, space; Jala, water, and Agni, fire or light. This Consciousness, this Great Being, from whom springs the third Prakriya, creation, has five thousand kalpas for his night, and his day is of equal length.

Sound, touch, form, taste and smell—sabda, sparsa, rupa, rasa and gandha—are called Visesha. They inhere in the five great elements. All creatures are continually pervaded by these five; they desire one another's companionship, become subservient to one another; they challenge and transcend one another; led by these immutable and compelling urges, creatures kill one another and wander in this world entering into numberless orders of being.

Three thousand kalpas represent the duration of their day. Equal is the measure of their night. Manas, the mind, roves over all things, Rajan, led on by the senses. The senses do not themselves perceive anything. It is Manas that perceives through them.

The eye sees forms when helped by the mind but never by itself. When Manas is distracted, the eye fails to see even the objects directly before it. It is commonly held that the senses perceive. This is not true, for it is the mind that perceives through the senses.

When the activity of Manas, the mind, ceases, the cessation of the activity of the senses follows. That is the end of the activity of the senses, which is the end of the mind's activity. One should thus know that the senses are controlled by the mind. Indeed, Manas is the Lord of all the senses. O illustrious king, these are all the twenty Bhutas in the universe."'

CANTO 313

'Yajnavalkya said, "I have, in succession, told you the order and duration of the Prakriyas, the creations, and the total number of their various tanmatras or evolutes. Listen now to me as I tell you of their destruction. Listen to how Brahman, who is eternal and undecaying, and who is without beginning and without end, repeatedly creates and destroys all created things and beings.

When his day ends and night comes, he desires sleep. At such a time the unmanifest and Holy One urges the Being called Maharudra, who is conscious of his great powers for destroying the world. Compelled by the Avyakta, Maharudra assumes the form of Surya of countless rays, and divides himself into a dozen amsas each resembling a blazing fire. With his tejas, he then swiftly consumes the four kinds of created beings, the viviparous, oviparous, bacterial and vegetable.

Within moments all mobile and immobile creatures are annihilated, and the whole of Bhumi, the earth, becomes as bare as a tortoise shell. Having burnt everything on the face of Bhumi, Rudra of immeasurable power then inundates it with water of immense force.

He then creates the fire of dissolution, which dries up that Jala into which Bhumi has been dissolved. The water disappears, leaving the Mahabhuta Agni, the fire, to burn fiercely.

Then arises the mighty Vayu, wind of immeasurable force, in his eight forms, who swiftly swallows that inferno of transcendent force, with seven flames, and which is indeed identifiable with the heat existing in every creature. Having consumed that Agni, Vayu courses in every direction, upwards, downwards, and transversely.

Then Akasa, immeasurable space, swallows that wind of transcendent energy. Then Manas, the mind, effortlessly swallows Akasa. Then Consciousness, Chitta, the Soul of everything, consumes Manas.

In his turn, Chitta is swallowed by the Mahat who is and knows the past, the present and the future. The incomparable Mahat, or universe, is then swallowed by Sambhu, that Lord of all things, in whom the attributes of yoga, anima, laghima, prapti, and others, naturally inhere. He is the supreme and immutable light.

His hands and feet extend over every part; his eyes and head and face are everywhere, his ears reach every place; his existence overwhelms all things. He is the heart of all creatures and his measure is of a digit of the thumb!

That Infinite and Supreme Soul, Paramatman, that Lord of all, thus swallows the universe. After this, what remains is the undying and the immutable. That One is flawless, immaculate, the Creator of the past, the present, and the future, and is perfect.

I have thus, O Rajan, told you about the Pralaya, the great destruction. I will now tell you about Adhyatma, Adhibhuta and Adhidaivata.''

CANTO 314

'Yajnavalkya said, "Brahmanas conversant with these subjects of enquiry speak of the two feet as Adhyatma, the act of walking as Adhibhuta, and Vishnu as Adhidaivatam of those two limbs. The anus is Adhyatma; its function of ejecting faeces is Adhibhuta, and Mitra, or Surya, is its Adhidaivata.

The organ of generation is called Adhyatma. Its gratifying function is called Adhibhuta, and Prajapati is its Adhidaivata. The hands are Adhyatma; their function as represented by doing is Adhibhuta; and Indra is the Adhidaivata of the hands.

The organs of speech are Adhyatma. The words uttered by them are Adhibhuta; and Agni is their Adhidaivata. The eye is Adhyatma. Rupa, form, is its Adhibhuta; and Surya is the Adhidaivata of that organ. The ear is Adhyatma. Sabda, sound, is Adhibhuta; and the points of the horizon are its Adhidaivata.

The tongue is Adhyatma. Rasa, taste, is its Adhibhuta; and Jala is its Adhidaivata. The nose is Adhyatma. Gandha, scent, is its Adhibhuta; and Bhumi is its Adhidaivata. The skin is Adhyatma. Sparsa, touch, is its Adhibhuta; and Vayu is its Adhidaivata.

Manas has been called Adhyatma; that with which it is exercised is Adhibhuta; and Chandramas is its Adhidaivata. Consciousness, Chitta, is Adhyatma. Conviction in one's identity with Prakriti is its Adhibhuta; and Mahat or Buddhi is its Adhidaivata. Buddhi is Adhyatma. That which is to be understood is its Adhibhuta; and Kshetrajna is its Adhidaivata.

Rajan, I have thus truly expounded to you, who fully know these original tattvas, in detail, one by one, the puissance of Brahman, the

Paramatman as he manifests himself in different forms, in the beginning, the middle and the end.

Prakriti, as if for sport, O king, of her own accord, by undergoing modifications, playfully produces thousands upon countless thousands of combinations of her original transformations that are called gunas. As men can light countless lamps from a single one, Prakriti, too, transforms herself and multiplies the three gunas of Purusha—sattva, rajas and tamas—into numberless creations.

The qualities of sattva include patience, joy, prosperity, and satisfaction, the lustrousness of all faculties, happiness, purity, health, contentment, faith, liberality, compassion, forgiveness, steadfastness, benevolence, equanimity, truth and the acquittance of one's svadharma.

Mildness, modesty, calmness, outward purity, simplicity, observance of obligatory customs and practices, dispassion, fearlessness of heart, disregard for the appearance of banishment of good and evil as also for past deeds, accepting only what is offered as a gift, the absence of greed, concern for others, compassion for all creatures: these have been said to be the qualities ascribed to the sattva guna.

The tale of the qualities of rajas include pride of personal beauty, assertion of power, war, the absence of munificence and compassion, indulgence in kama, and so enduring of happiness and misery, delight in speaking ill of others, and an eagerness for fights and disputes of every kind.

Arrogance, rudeness, anxiety, indulgence in hostilities, sorrow, usurping what belongs to others, shamelessness, crookedness, disunions, roughness, lust, wrath, pride, assertion of superiority, malice and slander are also said to spring from rajas.

I will now tell you about the assemblage of qualities which spring from tamas. They are the torpor of judgement, obscuration of every faculty, darkness and utter, blind darkness. By darkness is implied death, and blind darkness is great wrath, kali.

Besides these, the other indications of tamas are greed with respect to all kinds of food, an insatiable appetite for both food and drink, taking over much pleasure in perfumes, royal attire, sporting events, luxurious seats and beds, and sleep during the day, lies and reckless deeds springing out of heedlessness, delighting in dancing and music on account of ignorance of

purer sources of joy, and an aversion for every kind of religion. These, indeed, are the indications of tamas.'"

CANTO 315

'Yajnavalkya said, "O best of men, sattva, rajas and tamas are the three gunas of Prakriti. These attach to all things of the universe and always inhere to them. The unmanifest Purusha invested with the six attributes of yoga, by embracing these trigunas, transforms himself by himself into millions and millions of forms.

Those who know the science of Adhyatma say that to sattva is assigned a high, to rajas a middling and to tamas, a low place in the universe. With the help of pure dharma, righteousness, one attains to a high position, alongside the Devas and other divinities.

Through righteousness tainted with sin one attains to the condition of humankind. Finally, through unmixed sin, one sinks into depravity, a vile end, by becoming an animal or a vegetable. Listen now to me, Rajan, as I speak to you about the mixture or compounds of the trigunas of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Sometimes rajas is seen existing with sattva. Tamas also exists alongside rajas. With tamas may also be seen sattva. Sattva and rajas and tamas can exist together and in equal proportions. They constitute the Avyakta, the unmanifest, or Prakriti.

When the unmanifest Purusha is suffused with only sattva, he attains to the regions of the gods. Imbued with both sattva and rajas, he takes birth among human beings. And with rajas and tamas, he takes birth among the intermediate orders of beings. With all three, sattva, rajas and tamas, he attains to the condition of humanity.

Those Mahatmans that transcend both righteousness and sin, attain to that place which is eternal, immutable, undecaying and immortal. Gyanis,

men of knowledge, attain to births that are unrivalled, and their place is immaculate and undecaying, transcending the realm of the senses, free from ignorance, above birth and death, and full of light that dispels all kinds of darkness.

You asked me about the nature of the Paramatman that dwells in the unmanifest Purusha. I will tell you, Rajan; listen to me.

Even when dwelling in Prakriti, Purusha is said to dwell in his own nature without partaking of the nature of Prakriti. Prakriti is without reality and inert. Only when presided over by Purusha can she create and destroy."

Janaka said, "Wise one, both Prakriti and Purusha are without beginning and without end. Both of them are without rupa, form. Both are undecaying. Both are, again, unfathomable. How then, Maharishi, can it be said that one of them is inanimate and unintelligent? And how can the other be said to be animate and intelligent?

And why is the latter called Kshetrajna? O foremost of Brahmanas, you know the entire dharma of moksha. I want to hear in full and in detail about emancipation.

Speak to me then of the existence and oneness of Purusha, of his separateness from Prakriti, of the deities that attach to the body of the place to which embodied creatures repair when they die, and that place to which they may go ultimately, in the course of time.

Tell me also of the knowledge described in the Samkhya philosophy, and of the yoga system, separately. O best of men, it befits you also to speak of the premonitory symptoms of death. All these principles are as well known to you as the lines and signs in the palm of your hand!"'

CANTO 316

'Yajnavalkya said, "That which is without gunas cannot be explained by ascribing gunas to it. Listen to me and I will expound to you what possesses attributes and what is nirguna.

High-souled and wise Munis, who know the truth about all the tattvas say that when Purusha seizes attributes like a crystal catching the reflection of a red flower, he is said to be imbued with gunas; but when freed from them, like the crystal freed from reflection, he can be viewed in his true nature, that is, nirguna, beyond all attributes.

Unmanifest Prakriti is by her nature filled with gunas. She cannot transcend them. Inert by nature, she becomes attached to attributes. Avyakta, she cannot know anything, while Purusha, by his nature, possesses gyana, knowledge.

There is nothing higher than myself—this is what Purusha is always conscious of. For this reason the unmanifest or Prakriti, although inherently without reality and inert, becomes animate and intelligent in consequence of her union with Purusha who is eternal and indestructible.

When Purusha, through ignorance, repeatedly becomes associated with gunas, he fails to realise his own true nature and thus he fails to attain moksha. As a result of Purusha's reign over the tattvas that flow from Prakriti, he is said to partake of the nature of those evolutions. In consequence also of his agency in the matter of Prakriya, creation, he is said to possess the attribute of creation. In consequence of his agency in the matter of yoga, he is said to possess the attribute of yoga. For his lordship over those particular tattvas or tanmatras known as Prakriti, he is said to possess the nature of Prakriti.

For his agency in the matter of creating the seeds of all immobile things, he partakes of the nature of those seeds. And because he causes the several principles to initiate life, he is as subject to decay and destruction as are these principles themselves.

Since he is the witness of everything, and besides him there is nothing else, and for his consciousness of identity with Prakriti, Yatis crowned with ascetic success, knowers of Adhyatma, and freed from fever of every kind, regard him as existing by himself without a second; he is immutable, Avyakta, unmanifest, in the form of cause, unstable, and Vyakta, manifest, in the form of effects.

This is what has we have heard. The Samkhyas who depend upon gyana alone for their Liberation, and the practice of compassion for all creatures, say that it is Prakriti which is One while Purushas are many.

In fact, Purusha is different from Prakriti which, though unstable, still appears to be stable. As a blade of a reed is different from its outer sheath, even so is Purusha different from Prakriti. Indeed, the worm that is ensconced within the udumbara tree is distinct from the udumbara. Though existing with the udumbara, the worm is not to be regarded as forming a part of the tree.

The fish is distinct from the water in which it lives, and the water is separate from the fish that lives in it. Though the fish lives in the water, it is never drenched by water.

The fire that is contained in an earthen pot is distinct from the pot, and the pot is distinct from the fire it contains. Although the fire exists in and with the pot, it is not to be regarded as forming any part of it.

The lotus-leaf that floats on the surface of some water is distinct from the water on which it floats. Its co-existence with water does not make it a part of the water.

The perennial existence of these things in and with other things is never correctly grasped by ordinary people. They who behold Prakriti and Purusha in any other light are said to possess a flawed vision. It is certain that they have to repeatedly sink into naraka, terrifying hell.

I have now instructed you in the philosophy of the Samkhyas, that excellent science through which all things have been correctly ascertained. Knowing the nature of Purusha and Prakriti in this way, the Samkhyas attain moksha. I have also told you of the systems of those others who are

conversant with the great principles of the universe. I will now describe to you the vigyana of the yogins.'"

CANTO 317

'Yajnavalkya said, "Rajan, I have already spoken to you of the science of the Samkhyas. Listen now as I discourse on the way of the yogins as heard and seen by me. There is no knowledge that can compare with that of the Samkhyas. There is no power that compares with that of yoga. These two ordain the same practices, and both are regarded as leading to moksha.

Men who are not blessed with intelligence regard the Samkhya and the yoga systems to be distinct from each other. We, however, look upon them as one and the same; we have arrived at this conclusion after study and reflection.

That which the yogins say and do is the very same which the Samkhyas have in view. He who sees both the Samkhya and the yoga systems to be one and the same is to be regarded as truly conversant with the principles that ordain the universe.

O Rajan, know the vital breaths and the senses are the chief means for practising yoga. Just by regulating those breaths and the senses, yogins can go everywhere at will.

Sinless one, when the gross body is destroyed, yogins endowed with subtle bodies, possessing the eight siddhis of yoga, such as anima, laghima and prapti, among others, wander throughout the universe, enjoying in that body all kinds of bliss.

In the shastras, the wise have spoken of yoga as conferring eight kinds of powers. They have spoken of yoga as having eight limbs. Indeed, O king, they have not spoken of any other kind of yoga.

It has been said that the excellent and effective practices of yogins are of two kinds. These, according to the indications in the scriptures, are those with attributes and those free of them: saguna and nirguna.

Dhyana, the concentration of the mind on the sixteen named objects, with the simultaneous regulation of the breath, is of one kind. The concentration of the mind in such a way as to destroy all difference between the contemplator, the object contemplated, and the act of dhyana, along with subjugation of the senses, is of another kind.

The first kind of yoga is said to be that possessed of gunas, attributes; the second kind is said to be that free of them.

Pranayama, regulation of the breath, is yoga with attributes. In nirguna yoga, the mind, freed from its functions, should be still. King of Mithila, at first, only saguna pranayama should be practised, otherwise if the inhaled and suspended breath is exhaled without mentally focusing upon a definite image furnished by a limited mantra, the increase of wind in the neophyte's body will cause him great injury.

In the first yaama of the night, twelve ways of holding the breath are recommended. After sleep, in the last yaama of the night, another twelve ways have been laid down. Without doubt, one who is calm, of subdued senses, living in solitude, rejoicing in his own self, and fully conversant with the import of the scriptures, should focus his Atman on the Paramatman by regulating his breath in these twenty-four ways.

Dispelling the five faults of the five senses, by removing them from their objects of sabda, rupa, sparsa, rasa and gandha, and dispelling the conditions called Pratibha and Apavarga, all the senses should be fixed upon Manas, the mind. Manas should then be fixed on Chitta, Consciousness; Chitta should be set on Buddhi, intelligence, and Buddhi should then be fixed on Prakriti.

Thus merging these, one after another, yogins contemplate the Supreme Soul which is One, which is freed from rajas, which is stainless, immutable and infinite, pure and perfect; who is the eternal Purusha, who is unchangeable, who is indivisible, without decay and death, who is everlasting, who transcends diminution, and who is the immutable Brahman.

Rajan, listen now to the indications of one that is in yoga, communion. All the indications of cheerful contentment of one who rests in perfect peace are seen in him who is in Samadhi. The wise say that the man in

Samadhi looks like the still flame of a lamp full of oil and burning in a windless place.

He is like a rock which cannot be moved even slightly, not by a torrential cloudburst. He cannot be shaken by the blasting of conches and beating drums, or by songs, or the sound of hundreds of musical instruments played together.

These are the signs of one in Samadhi. Like a poised, brave and determined man who, while climbing a flight of stairs with a vessel full of oil in his hands, does not spill even a drop even if threatened by armed men, the Yogin, when his mind has been concentrated and when he beholds the Paramatman in Samadhi, remains unmoved, for he has entirely stilled his senses.

These are the signs of the yogin while he is in Samadhi. While in Samadhi, the yogin beholds Brahman, supreme and immutable, and which is a blazing light in the midst of deep and heavy darkness. By these means he attains, after long years, to moksha, after casting off this inanimate body.

This is what the eternal Sruti declares. This is called the yoga of the yogins. What else is it? They know it, they that are enlightened with wisdom, and regard themselves as crowned with final success.''

CANTO 318

'Yajnavalkya said, "Listen now to me attentively, Rajan, as I speak of the places to which those who die will go.

If the Jivatman escapes through the feet, it is said that the man goes to the region of Vishnu. If through the calves, we have heard that the man goes to the regions of the Vasus. If through the knees, he attains to the company of the divinities called Sadhyas.

If through the anus, the man attains to the realms of Mitra. If through the back, he returns to Bhumi, and if through the thighs to the world of Prajapati. If through the flanks, the man attains to the realms of the Maruts, and if through the nostrils, to the realm of Chandramas.

If through the arms, the man goes to Indraloka, and if through the chest, to that of Rudra. If through the neck, he goes to the excellent loka of the great Rishi Nara. If through the mouth, the man attains to the world of the Viswadevas, and if through the ears, to the world of the Lokapalas.

If through the nose, the man attains to the realm of Vayu, and if through the eyes, to that of Agni. If through the brows, the man goes to the loka of the Aswins; and if through the forehead, to that of Pitris. If through the crown of the head, the man repairs to the world the puissant Brahma, greatest of gods.

Janaka, I have thus told you about the several realms to which men attain according to the manner in which their Jivatmans escape from their bodies.

I will now tell you the premonitory indications for those who have but one year to live, as laid down by the wise. Having previously seen Arundhati, the fixed star, or the other called Dhruva, one who fails to see it,

or one that sees the full moon or the flame of a burning lamp to be broken towards the south, has but a year to live.

Those men who can no longer see images of themselves reflected in the eyes of others have but one year to live. One, who, though radiant, loses lustre, or being endowed with wisdom loses it, indeed, one whose inner and outer nature are thus changed, has but six months more to live.

He who disregards the gods, or has altercations with Brahmanas, or one who, being naturally of a dark complexion, becomes pale, has just six months to live. One who sees the moon as having many lacunae like a spider's web, or one who sees the sun with such gaps, has but one week more to live.

On smelling fragrances in temples, if a man perceives them to be as being offensive like the smell of corpses, he has but one week more to live. The depression of the nose or of the ears, the discolouring of the teeth or of the eye, the loss of consciousness, and of all bodily heat, are symptoms indicating death that very day.

If, without any perceptible cause a stream of tears suddenly flows from his left eye, and if vapours are seen to issue from his head, that is a sure indication that the man will die before that day ends. Knowing all these premonitory symptoms, the man of cleansed soul should, day and night, unite his Atman with the Paramatman in Samadhi.

Thus should he go on till the day for his dissolution arrives. If, however, instead of wishing to die he desires to live in this world, he can cast off all pleasures of gandha and rasa and live on in abstinence. In this manner he conquers death by fixing his Atman on the Paramatman.

Indeed, the man who is blessed with knowledge of the Atman practises the way of life recommended by the Samkhyas and conquers death by uniting his soul with the Supreme Soul. At last, he attains to what is entirely indestructible, which is without birth, auspicious and immutable, eternal and stable, and which is incapable of being attained to by men of impure souls.'"

CANTO 319

'Yajnavalkya said, "You have asked me about that Supreme Brahman which resides in the Avyakta, the unmanifest. Your question relates to a deep mystery. Listen to me with close attention, O Rajan.

Having conducted myself with humility according to the ordinances laid down by the Rishis, I obtained the Yajuses from Surya. With the austerest penances I earlier adored the sun god.

The mighty Surya, pleased with me, said, 'Ask, O twice-born Rishi, for the boon upon which you have set your heart; however difficult it may be to obtain, I will gladly grant it to you. It is not easy to incline me to grace!'

Bowing and paying obeisance to him, I addressed that supreme heat-giving luminary in these words: 'I have no knowledge of the Yajuses. I want to know them without delay.'

Thus solicited, the divine one told me, 'I shall impart the Yajuses to you. Made up of the essence of speech, Goddess Saraswati will enter into your body.'

Surya Deva then commanded me to open my mouth. I did as I was told. Devi Saraswati entered into my body, O Anagha. At this, I began to burn. Unable to endure the pain I plunged into a river. Not knowing that what the high-souled Surya had done for me was for my benefit, I even grew angry with him.

While I was burning with the fierce energy of the goddess, the holy Surya said, 'Endure this burning for only a short while. It will soon cease and you will feel cool.' Indeed, soon my body was cool again.

Seeing me restored to ease, the Giver of light said to me, ‘The whole of the Vedas with their Angas, together with the Upanishads, will appear within you through inner light, O Dvija! You will also know and abbreviate all of the Satapathas.

After that, your understanding will turn to the path of moksha. And you will attain to that end which both Samkhyas and yogins covet.’ Having said these words to me, the divine Surya set beyond the Asta hills.

Hearing his parting words, and after he had gone from where I stood, I came home in joy and then remembered Devi Saraswati. As I thought of her, the auspicious Saraswati appeared instantly before my eyes, adorned with all the sacred vowels and the consonants; I first uttered the syllable Aum and then, according to the ordinance, offered the goddess the customary arghya, and dedicated another portion to Surya.

I discharged my duty and sat down, in devotion to both those deities. Thereupon, all of the Satapatha Brahmanas, with all their mysteries and with all their abstractions as also their angas, appeared of themselves before my inner eye, and I was filled with great joy.

I then taught these to a hundred good sishyas and thereby gave displeasure to my great Matulan, my maternal uncle Vaisampayana, with his disciples gathered round him. Radiant in the midst of my disciples, like the sun himself with his rays, I undertook to manage the yagna of your Mahatman father, O king of Mithila.

In that yagna a dispute arose between me and Vaisampayana as to who should be permitted to receive the dakshina that was paid for the recitation of the Vedas. In the very presence of Devala, I took half of that dakshina, the other half going to my uncle. Your sire and Sumantra and Paila and Jaimini and others all acquiesced in that arrangement.

I thus received from Surya Deva the fifty Yajuses. I then studied the Puranas with Romaharshana. Keeping before me those original mantras and the Devi Saraswati, helped by Surya’s inspiration, I set myself to compile the excellent Satapatha Brahmanas, and succeeded in the task never before undertaken by anyone else.

I have taken that path which I wanted to take and I have also taught it to my sishyas. Indeed, I have imparted the whole of those Vedas with their angas and antas to them. As a result of my teachings, pure in mind and body, all those disciples have been filled with joy.

Having established for the benefit of others this gyana of fifty branches, which I had from Surya, I now meditate on the great goal of that final knowledge, the Brahman.

The Gandharva Viswavasu, well-conversant with the Vedanta scriptures, who wanted to know what is beneficial for Brahmanas in this knowledge, what truth occurs in it, and what its objective is, once questioned me.

He put altogether twenty-four questions to me relating to the Vedas. Finally, he asked me the twenty-fifth question relating to that branch of knowledge which is concerned with nyaya, the inferences of ratiocination.

Those questions are as follows: What is the universe and what is the not-universe? What is Aswa and what, again, is Aswa? What is Mitra? What is Varuna? What is gyana? What is the object of knowledge? What is unintelligent? What is intelligent? Who is Kah?

Who possesses the principle of change? Who does not possess it? What is he that devours the sun and what is the sun? What is vidya and what is avidya? What is immobile and what Mobile? What is without beginning, what is Akshara, indestructible, and what is Kshara, destructible?

The best of the Gandharvas asked me these excellent questions. After he, King Viswavasu, asked me these questions one after another, I answered them truly. At first, however, I told him to wait for a brief time, while I reflected on his queries! 'So be it,' the Gandharva said, and sat in silence.

Once again, in my mind, I thought of Goddess Saraswati. Then the replies to those questions arose naturally in my mind like butter from curds. Keeping in view the high science of inferential reasoning, I churned, with my mind, the Upanishads and the angas of the Vedas.

The fourth vigyana that deals with moksha, on which I have already discoursed to you, and which is based upon the twenty-fifth, the Jiva, I then expounded to him.

Having said all this, O Rajan, to King Viswavasu, I said to him, 'Listen now to the answers to the several questions that you have put to me. I now turn to the question, O Gandharva: What is the universe and what is the not-universe?

The universe is Avyakta, unmanifest, and the original Prakriti is endowed with the principles of birth and death, which are terrible to those who desire mukti. It possesses the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, since it creates the tattvas, all of which are fraught with those attributes.

That which is the not-universe is Purusha divested of all gunas. By Aswa and Aswa are meant the female and the male, the former being Prakriti and the latter Purusha. Similarly, Mitra is Purusha, and Varuna is Prakriti. Gyana is Prakriti, while the object of knowledge is Purusha.

The unawakened Jivatman, and the knowing or intelligent are both the nirguna Purusha, for it is Purusha that becomes the Jiva when invested with ignorance. You have asked what Kah is, who is changeable and who is not.

I answer, Kah is Purusha. That which is changeable is Prakriti. He that is not is Purusha. Similarly, that which is called avidya, unknowing, is Prakriti; and that which is called vidya is Purusha.

You have asked me about the mobile and the immobile. That which is mobile is Prakriti, which undergoing change, constitutes the cause of creation and destruction. The Immobile is Purusha, for, without undergoing variations himself, he assists at creation and destruction.

According to a different system of philosophy, that which is Vedya is Prakriti; while that which is Avedya is Purusha. Both Prakriti and Purusha are said to be unintelligent, stable, indestructible, unborn, and eternal, according to the conclusions of philosophers conversant with the Adhyatma.

Prakriti, in the matter of creation, is indestructible, and is unborn; hence Prakriti is not subject to decay or destruction. Purusha, again, is indestructible and unchangeable, for change it has none. The attributes of Prakriti may be destroyed, but not Prakriti herself. The learned, therefore, call Prakriti Akshara.

Prakriti also, by undergoing changes, operates as the cause of creation. The created outcomes appear and disappear, but not original Prakriti. For this reason also is Prakriti called indestructible. Thus have I told you of the conclusions of the fourth science, the turiya vigyana based on the principles of logical inference with mukti as its aim.

Having acquired by the science of Nyaya, inference, and by waiting upon gurus, the Riks, the Samans and the Yajuses, all the obligatory practices should be observed and all the Vedas studied with reverence, O Viswavasu! Foremost of Gandharvas, they who study the Vedas and all their angas, but who do not know the Paramatman from which all things take their birth and into which all things merge at the time of the Pralaya, and which is the one subject whose knowledge the Vedas seek to inculcate —indeed, they—who have no acquaintance with that which the Vedas seek

to establish, study the Vedas to no purpose and bear the burden of such study in vain.

If a man wants butter and churns the milk of the female donkey, he does not find what he seeks but only encounters a substance as foul- smelling as ordure. In the same manner if, having studied the Vedas, one fails to grasp what is Prakriti and what is Purusha, one only demonstrates one's own foolishness and bears a useless burden in the form of Vedic lore.

With bhakti and dhyana, devotion and meditation, one should contemplate both Prakriti and Purusha, so that one may avoid repeated births and deaths. Reflection upon the fact of one's repeated births and deaths and avoiding the religion of rituals that produces at best only mortal results, one should take to the immortal religion of yoga.

Kasyapa, if one continuously reflects on the nature of the Jivatman and its connection with the Paramatman, one then succeeds in divesting oneself of all attributes and in beholding the Supreme Soul. Ignorant men regard the eternal and Avyakta Paramatman to be different from the Jiva, the twenty-fifth tattva.

Those who see both as truly one and the same are wise. Frightened by repeated births and deaths, the Samkhyas and yogins regard the Jivatman and the Paramatman to be identical.'

Viswavasu then said, 'Best of Brahmanas, you have said that the Jivatman is indestructible and indistinguishable from the Paramatman. This is difficult to grasp. Discourse on this topic to me once more.

I have heard discourses on this subject from Jaigishavya, Aista, Devala, the regenerate Parasara, the intelligent Varshaganya, Bhrigu, Panchasikha Kapila, Suka, Gautama, Arshtisena, the high-souled Garga, Narada, Asuri, the wise Pulastya, Sanatkumara, the great Sukra and my sire Kasyapa.

Subsequently I heard the discourses of Rudra and the Viswarupa Mahabuddhi, of several of the Devas, of the Pitris and the Daityas. I have gathered all that they say, for they generally speak on that eternal goal of all knowledge.

I desire, however, to hear what you, in all your wisdom, may say on those matters. You are the foremost of all, and a learned teacher of the shastras, and endowed with great intelligence. There is nothing that is unknown to you.

You are an ocean of the Srutis, as described in the world, of both the Devas and Pitris. The great Rishis who dwell in the world of Brahma say

that Aditya himself, the eternal lord of all luminaries, is your guru in this knowledge.

Yajnavalkya, you have acquired the entire science of the Samkhyas, and in particular, the scriptures of the yogins. Without doubt, you are enlightened, and fully conversant with the mobile and immobile universe. I wish to hear you discourse on that knowledge, which may be likened to sweet ambrosial payasa.'

Yajnavalkya said, 'Best of Gandharvas, you are able to fathom every knowledge. Yet, since you ask me, hear me instruct you in that which I myself learned from my guru.

Prakriti, which is unintelligent, is apprehended by the Jiva. The Jiva, however, cannot be apprehended by Prakriti. As a result of the Jivatman being reflected in Prakriti, Prakriti is called Pradhana by Samkhyas and yogins who know the original Mahatattvas contained in the Srutis. Sinless one, the other, beholding, sees the twenty-fourth tattva, Prakriti, and the twenty-fifth, the Purusha; finally, not beholding, it beholds the twenty-sixth.

The twenty-fifth tattva thinks that there is nothing higher than itself. In reality, however, though seeing, it does not perceive the twenty-sixth tattva, which beholds it. Wise men should never accept the twenty-fourth, Prakriti, which is unintelligent, inert, as identifiable with the twenty-fifth, or the Purusha which has a real and independent existence.

The fish lives in water. It goes there impelled by its own nature. As the fish, though living in the water, is regarded as separate from it, the twenty-fifth tattva should be apprehended similarly: though it exists in a state of contact with the twenty-fourth, Prakriti, in its real nature, it is distinct from and independent of Prakriti.

When overwhelmed with the Consciousness of Ahamkara, and when unable to understand its identity with the twenty-sixth; in fact, in consequence of the illusion that fills it, of its co-existence with Prakriti, and of its own manner of thinking, the Jivatman always sinks down, but when freed from such Consciousness it rises upwards.

When the Jivatman succeeds in understanding that it is one, and Prakriti with which it resides is another, only then does it succeed in beholding the Paramatman and becomes one with the universe. Rajan, the Supreme is one, and the twenty-fifth, or the Jivatman is another. However, since the Supreme overlies the Jivatman, the wise regard both to be one and the same.

For these reasons, yogins and followers of the Samkhya, terrified by birth and death, blessed with the vision of the twenty-sixth tattva, pure in body and mind, and devoted to the Paramatman, do not recognise the Jivatman as Akshara, indestructible. When one beholds the Supreme Soul and merges with it, losing all consciousness of individuality, one then becomes omniscient, and possessed of omniscience one is freed from the obligation of rebirth.

I have thus spoken to you truly about Prakriti which is unintelligent, and the Jivatman which is intelligent, and the Paramatman which is omniscient, all according to the indications in the Srutis. That man who sees no difference between the knower or the known is both Kevala and Akevala, is the original cause of the universe, and is both Jivatman and the Paramatman.'

Viswavasu said, 'You have duly and adequately discoursed on that which is the origin of all the deities and which leads to mukti. You have spoken of what is true and excellent. May inexhaustible blessings always attend on you, and may your mind be ever united with intelligence!'

Yajnavalkya continued, 'Having said those words, the prince of the Gandharvas flew up towards heaven, shining in resplendent beauty. Before leaving me, he duly honoured me by circumambulating around my person in pradakshina, and I looked at him, highly pleased.

He taught the science he had obtained from me to those divinities that dwell in the regions of Brahma and other gods, to those that dwell on earth, to the dwellers of patala, and to those who have adopted the mukti-marga.

The Samkhyas are devoted to the practices of their system. The yogins are devoted to their practices. There are others too who desire to achieve moksha. To them this vigyana yields visible fruits, O lion among kings.

Mukti flows from gyana; without knowledge it can never be attained. Rajan, this is what the wise have said. Hence, one should strive to acquire true knowledge in all its depth and detail, and so succeed in freeing oneself from birth and death.

Acquiring knowledge from a Brahmana or a Kshatriya or Vaisya or even a Sudra of low birth, one must devotedly revere such gyana. Birth and death cannot assail one that has faith.

All orders of men are Brahmanas. All are sprung from Brahman. All men are Brahmavadis and utter Brahman. Helped by an understanding that

is derived from and directed to Brahman, I inculcated this vigyana of Prakriti and Purusha in myself. Indeed, this whole universe is Brahman.

From the mouth of Brahma sprung the Brahmanas; from his arms, sprang the Kshatriyas; from his navel, the Vaisyas; and from his feet, the Sudras. All the varnas, having thus originated, should not be regarded as thieving from one another.

Impelled by ignorance, all men die and take birth once more, birth that is the cause of karma, deeds. Without knowledge, men of all varnas, dragged down by terrible avidya, fall into varied orders of being due to the tattvas that flow from Prakriti. For this reason, all must, by every means, seek to acquire knowledge.

I have told you that every person is entitled to strive for its attainment. One who possesses knowledge is a Brahmana. Others, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas and Sudras, also possess gyana. Hence, this science of mukti is always open to them all. This has been revealed by the wise.

I have answered all the questions you had asked me, and I have answered them all honestly. Discard all sorrow. Cross over the end of this quest. Your questions were excellent. Blessings be on you for ever!'"

Bhishma continues, 'Thus instructed by Yajnavalkya, the king of Mithila was filled with joy. The king honoured that best of sannyasis by circling around him in pradakshina. Given permission by the monarch, the sage left his court.

Having acquired the knowledge of mukti dharma, King Daivarati took his seat, and touching a million cows and vast quantities of gold and jewels, gave them away to numerous Brahmanas. Installing his son as the sovereign of the Videhas, the old king began to live according to the practices of the Yatis.

Meditating mainly on all ordinary duties and their derelictions as laid down in the shastras, the king began to study the entire science of the Samkhyas and the yogins. Regarding himself to be infinite, he began to reflect on only the Eternal and Independent One, the Brahman. He rejected all ordinary duties and their derelictions, punya and paapa, satya and asatya, janma and mrityu, and all other things pertaining to the tattvas of Prakriti.

Both the Samkhyas and yogins, in consonance with their sciences, regard this universe to be caused by to the action of the Vyakta, manifest, and the Avyakta, unmanifest. The learned say that Brahman is free from good and evil, is self-dependent, the Highest of the high, Eternal, and Pure.

Therefore, you too, O Rajan, become pure! The giver, the receiver of the gift, the gift itself, and that which is ordered to be given away, are all to be deemed as the unmanifest Atman. The Atman is the Atman's one possession. Who, therefore, can be a stranger to one?

Always think in this manner, never otherwise. He who does not know what Prakriti is with gunas and what is Purusha transcending them, only he, without knowledge, repairs to sacred waters and performs yagnas.

Not by the study of the Vedas, not by penances, nor by sacrifices, son of Kuru, can one attain to the condition of Brahman. Only when one succeeds in grasping the Supreme or Avyakta, does one come to be revered.

They who wait upon Mahat attain to the regions of Mahat. They who wait upon Chit, Consciousness, attain to the realm of Chetana. They who wait upon what is higher attain to places that are higher than these.

Those gyanis who succeed in apprehending eternal Brahman, who is higher than unmanifest Prakriti, succeed in obtaining that which transcends birth and death, which is free from attributes and qualities, and which is both existent and non-existent. I received this knowledge from Janaka, who had it from Yajnavalkya.

Gyana, knowledge, is the highest. Yagnas, sacrifices, cannot compare with it. With the help of gyana one succeeds in crossing samsara, the world's ocean so full of obstacles, suffering and danger. One can never cross that ocean with sacrifices. Men of knowledge say that one cannot prevail over birth and death, and other obstacles through yagnas, Rajan; indeed they declare that one cannot pass over samsara by ordinary exertion.

Men attain to heaven through yagnas, tapasya, vratas and other observances. But they again fall down into this world. Therefore, adore with reverence that which is Supreme, most pure, blessed, stainless, and sacred, and which transcends all states, being moksha itself.

By understanding Kshetra, and by performing the sacrifice that consists in the acquisition of knowledge, you will become truly wise. In an earlier age, Yajnavalkya did that good to King Janaka which can be derived from a study of the Upanishads. The eternal and immutable Paramatman was the subject on which the great Rishi discoursed to the king of Mithila. It enabled him to attain to that Brahman which is auspicious, and immortal, and which transcends every kind of sorrow.'

CANTO 320

"Yudhishtira says, 'Having acquired great power and great wealth, and having obtained a long life, how can one avoid death? By which of these means can one succeed in avoiding decay and death: tapasya, vratas, the diverse karmas laid down in the Vedas, or by knowledge of the Srutis, or the application of medicaments?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story of Panchasikha, who was a bhikshu in his practices, and Janaka. Once upon a time Janaka, the ruler of the Videhas, questioned the Maharishi Panchasikha, the foremost of all who knew the Vedas and whose doubts about the purpose and significance of all duties had been dispelled.

The king asked, "Through what conduct, O holy one, may one transcend decrepitude and death? Is it by tapasya, or by gyana? Or by religious deeds like yagnas and vratas, or by the study and knowledge of the shastras?"

Thus addressed by the ruler of the Videhas, the learned Panchasikha, knower of all things unseen, answered, "Decay and death cannot be prevented under any circumstances. Neither days nor nights, nor months, ever cease.

Only that man, who, though transient, adopts the eternal path of the religion of Nivritti, abstention from all actions, succeeds in evading birth and death. Destruction overtakes all creatures. All are ceaselessly borne along the infinite current of time.

Those that are borne along this infinite river infested by the two mighty crocodiles of decrepitude and death, without any rescue boat, sink down without anyone coming to their help. As they are swept along that current,

men fail to find any friend for assistance and do not take an interest in any one else.

One meets with wives and other friends on one's way. A man encounters enjoyable companions but never for any length of time. Creatures, as they are borne along the river of time, become repeatedly attracted towards one another, and, like masses of clouds, blown by the wind, collide with a report of thunder.

Decay and death devour all creatures, like wolves. Indeed, they devour the strong and the weak, the short and the tall. In all transitory creatures, only the Soul exists eternally.

Why should he, then, rejoice when creatures are born or grieve when they die? Where do I come from? Who am I? Where shall I go? Whose am I? Before what do I rest? What shall I be? Why do you grieve and for what? Who else but you will behold swarga or patala? Thus, without discarding the shastras, we should offer dakshina and perform yagnas!'"

CANTO 321

"Yudhishtira says, 'Rajarishi of Kuruvamsa, who ever attained mukti, the annihilation of Buddhi, understanding, and the other faculties, without abandoning the domestic life, grihasta? Tell me this! How can the sthula and sukshma sariras, the gross and the subtle bodies, be cast off? Pitamaha, also tell me what the supreme excellence is.'

Bhishma says 'In this regard, the old tale is told of the discourse between Janaka and Sulabha. In days of yore, there was a king of Mithila by the name of Dharmadhyaja, of Janaka's vamsa. He was devoted to the practices of the religion of Vairagya, which is renunciation. He was deeply learned in the Vedas, with the scriptures on mukti, and with the shastras bearing on his own dharma as a king.

Subduing his senses, he ruled this earth. Hearing of his good conduct in the world, many wise men wanted to emulate him. In the same Satya yuga lived a woman called Sulabha who was a sannyasini; she practised the dharma of yoga and wandered over the whole world.

In the course of her wanderings, Sulabha heard from many Brahmana Dandis of different places that the ruler of Mithila was devoted to the dharma of mukti. Hearing this about Janaka and wishing to ascertain its veracity, Sulabha wanted to meet the king in person.

Using her powers of yoga, Sulabha abandoned her natural form and features, and assumed the most faultless figure and unrivalled beauty. In the twinkling of an eye and with the speed of the quickest arrow, the fair-browed devi of eyes like lotus-petals flew to the capital of the Videhas. Arriving at the city of Mithila, teeming with people, she adopted the guise of a mendicant and presented herself before the king.

Seeing her elegant and delicate form, the king was filled with wonder and asked who she was, whose she was, and where she came from. Welcoming her, he offered her an excellent seat, honoured her by giving her water to wash her feet, and gratified her with fine refreshments.

Refreshed and gratified with the hospitality offered to her, Sulabha urged the king, who was surrounded by his ministers and seated in the midst of learned scholars, to speak upon his adherence to the moksha dharma.

Doubtful of whether Janaka had succeeded in attaining to Mukti by following the religion of Nivritti, Sulabha, who had yoga-shakti, entered the mind of the king with her own mind. Wanting to know the truth, she blocked the rays issuing from the eyes of the king with the rays of light from her own eyes and bound Janaka with bonds of yoga.

That best of kings, who prided himself upon his own invincibility, foiled the intentions of Sulabha and indeed seized her will with his own. In his sukshma rupa, the king was without the royal chatra, parasol and sceptre. Sulabha, in hers, was without the tridanda, her mendicant's triple staff.

Both remained in the same sthula rupas, and so conversed with each other. Listen to that conversation as it transpired between Janaka and Sulabha.

Janaka said, "O sannyasini, to what course of conduct are you devoted? Whose are you? Where have you come from? After finishing your work here, where will you go? Only with questioning can one ascertain another's knowledge of the scriptures, their age or varna.

Since you have come to me, you must answer my questions. Know that I am truly free of all vanity for my raja chatra and raja danda, my royal parasol and sceptre. I wish to know you well. You truly deserve my respect.

Listen to me as I speak to you of mukti, for no one else can discourse to you on that subject. I will also tell you about the person from whom, in ancient times, I acquired this transcendent knowledge.

I am the beloved sishya of the high-souled and venerable Panchasikha, belonging to the pravarajya, the mendicant order of Parasara's vamsa. My doubts have been dispelled and I fully know the Samkhya and the yoga philosophies, and the Vidhis, the ordinances with respect to yagnas and other rites, which constitute the three well-known paths to moksha.

Wandering over the earth and pursuing the path pointed out in the shastras, the learned Panchasikha once lived joyfully in my palace for four

months during the monsoons. That foremost of Samkhyas discoursed to me on the many means of attaining mukti, honestly and clearly, so that even I could easily comprehend them. He did not, however, command me to give up my kingdom.

Freed from attachments, and fixing my Soul on the supreme Brahman, I lived unmoved by companionship, practising in its entirety that threefold Pravritti which is laid down in the treatises on mukti. Renouncing all attachments is the highest means prescribed for emancipation.

It is from knowledge that Vairagya, the renunciation by which one is freed, is said to flow. The endeavour after yoga arises from gyana, and through that endeavour one attains to knowledge of the Atman. Through knowledge of the Atman one transcends joy and sorrow. This enables one to transcend death and achieve high success.

I have acquired that Chetana, the knowledge of the Atman, and accordingly, I have transcended all the pairs of opposites. Even in this life have I been freed from stupor and have risen above all attachments.

Just as soil, saturated with and softened by water, causes the sown seed to sprout, so do the actions of men cause rebirth. As a seed once fried cannot sprout, though it once could, has my heart been freed from desire; by the instruction of the holy Panchasikha of sannyasa, my mind no longer produces its fruit in the form of attachment to the objects of the senses.

I never experience love for my wife or hatred for my enemies. Indeed, I keep aloof from both, clearly knowing the futility of attachment and anger. I regard both equally: him that smears my right hand with sandalwood-paste and him that wounds my left.

Having attained my true goal, I am content, and look equally upon a clod of earth, a piece of stone, and a nugget of gold. Though engaged in ruling a kingdom, I am free from attachments of every kind. In consequence of all this I am superior to all bearers of tridandas.

Some great men, who are conversant with the subject of mukti, say that it has three paths: gyana, yoga and karma, the way of yagnas and kriyas and other acts. Some regard gyana, having all worldly things for its objects, as the means to mukti. Some hold that the total renunciation of outer and inner actions is the means.

Another class of men who know the scriptures of emancipation say that gyana is the only means. Yatis, with subtle vision, hold that karmas, actions, are the means. The high-souled Panchasikha, discarding both the opinion

about gyana and karma, knowledge and deeds, regards the third way, yoga, as the only means to mukti.

If men leading the grihasta life are endowed with yama and niyama, they become the equals of sannyasins. If, on the other hand, sannyasins are filled with desire and aversion, and attached to wives and honour, and vanity and affection, they become the equals of householders.

If one can attain mukti through knowledge, then emancipation may exist in tridandas, for nothing prevents the bearers of such staffs from acquiring the requisite gyana. Why then can emancipation not exist in the chatra and the danda as well, especially when there is equal reason in taking up the tridanda and the sceptre?

One becomes attached to all those objects and deeds which one needs for one's own self for particular reasons. If a man sees the faults of domestic life and discards it to adopt another mode fraught with great merit, he cannot, merely for such rejection and adoption, be regarded as one free from all attachments; for all that he has done is to attach himself to a new method after having freed himself from a previous one.

Sovereignty is fraught with the rewarding and the chastising of others. The life of a mendicant is equally fraught with the same, for they too reward and chastise those they can. Since they are akin to kings in this respect, why would they alone attain mukti, and not kings?

Notwithstanding sovereignty, one is cleansed of all sins through of gyana alone, living the while in the Supreme Brahman. The wearing of brown cloths, shaving of the head, bearing the tridanda and the kamandalu, these are the outward signs of one's mode of life. These have no value in attaining mukti.

Notwithstanding the adoption of these symbols of a particular way of life, when knowledge alone is the cause of one's emancipation from sorrow, it would appear that the adoption of mere emblems is perfectly useless. Or, if you see the mitigation of sorrow in these symbols of sannyasa, why then should not the alleviation of sorrow be seen in the chatra and the danda that I have adopted?

Mukti does not exist in poverty; nor is bondage to be found in affluence. One attains to it through gyana, illumination, alone, whether one is indigent or wealthy.

For these reasons, know that I am living in a condition of freedom, though ostensibly engaged in the enjoyments of dharma, artha and kama, in

the form of kingdom and wives, which, for most men, constitute bondage. I have severed the bonds of kingdom and prosperity, and the bondage to attachments, with the sword of renunciation, whetted on the stone of the scriptures on mukti.

As regards myself, I tell you that I have become liberated in this way. O sannyasini, I hold you in high esteem. But that should not prevent me from telling you that your conduct does not match the practices of the very mode of life that you have embraced!

You have great elegance and delicacy of form. You are shapely and beautiful. You are young. You have all these, and you have niyama, subjugation of the senses. I doubt it verily. By entering into me with the power of yoga, you have invaded my body to ascertain whether I am really emancipated or not.

Your action ill suits that mode of life whose emblems you bear. The tridanda is unfit for a yogin filled with desire. As regards yourself, you do not adhere to your staff. As regards those that are free, it is fitting that they protect themselves from falling.

Let me tell you about your transgression in consequence of your contact with me and having entered into my sthula sarira, this gross body, with the help of your understanding. Why have you entered my kingdom or my palace? At whose bidding have you entered into my heart?

You belong to the foremost of all the varnas, being, as you are, a Brahmana woman. As regards myself, however, I am a Kshatriya. There can be no union between us. Do not cause a varnasamkarsana, a mixing of castes.

You live by practising those dharmas that lead to mukti. I live in the grihasta mode of life. This deed of yours is thus another evil that you have done, for it produces an unnatural union of two opposite ways of life. I do not know whether you belong to my own gotra or not.

You, too, do not know who I am, and to what gotra I belong. If you are of my own gotra, by entering into my body you have created another evil—that of an unnatural union. If, again, your husband is alive and in a distant place, your union with me has produced the fourth sin of adultery, for you are not one with whom I may be lawfully united.

Do you perpetrate all these sins, driven by the motive of achieving a particular goal? Do you act from ignorance or from a perverted intelligence? If, again, because of your decadent nature, your behaviour has

become thoroughly independent or unrestrained, I tell you that if you have any knowledge of the scriptures, you will understand that everything you have done has generated evil.

As a result of your actions, a third fault attaches to you, a fault that destroys peace of mind. By trying to display your superiority, you reveal the signs of an immoral woman.

Desirous of asserting victory as you are, it is not just me that you want to defeat, for it is clear that you wish to obtain a victory over my entire court consisting of these learned and superior Brahmanas; by casting your eyes in this manner towards all these meritorious Brahmanas, it is evident that you desire to humiliate them all and glorify yourself at their expense.

Bewildered by the pride and might of yoga born of your envy of my power, you have fused your understanding with mine and have mingled nectar with poison.

The union of man and woman, when each desires the other, is sweet as nectar. When, however, a woman desires a man who does not want her, the union of the two, instead of being a merit, becomes a flaw as noxious as poison.

Do not continue to touch me. Know that I am righteous. Conduct yourself according to your svadharma. Your search into whether I am or I am not emancipated is finished.

It is fitting for you not to conceal all your secret motives from me. It is not correct for you to disguise and hide from me what your purpose is: whether your action has been prompted by the desire of accomplishing your own objective or that of some other hostile king.

One should never appear fraudulently before a king; nor before a Brahmana; nor before one's wife when she is virtuous. Those who appear in deceitful guise before these three are soon ruined.

The power of kings lies in their sovereignty. The power of Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas is in the Vedas. Women wield high power because of their beauty, youth and blessedness. Possessing these strengths, all three are powerful.

He who wishes to accomplish his own goal should always approach these three with sincerity and honesty; insincerity and deceit fail to produce success in these three quarters. It is right for you to tell me your varna of birth, about your learning and conduct, and disposition and nature, and also why you have come here!'"

Bhishma continues, 'Though rebuked by the king in these harsh, offensive, and unseemly words, Sulabha was not at all abashed. After Janaka had spoken, the beautiful Sulabha replied in words more handsome than her person.

Sulabha said, "Rajan, speech should always be free of the nine verbal faults and the nine errors of judgement. While lucidly explaining the meaning of anything, speech should possess the eighteen well-known merits.

Ambiguity, ascertaining the merits and flaws of premises and conclusions, weighing the relative strength or weakness of those faults and merits, establishment of the conclusion, and the element of persuasiveness or otherwise that attaches to the conclusion arrived at: these five characteristics pertaining to the senses constitute the authoritativeness of what is said.

Listen now to the characteristics of all these requirements, as I expound them according to the combinations, beginning with ambiguity. As regards the comprehending of the subject, when knowledge rests on distinguishing the objects to be known being different from one another, and when the understanding rests upon many points that follow each other, the combination of words is said to be vitiated by ambiguity.

By ascertaining merits and flaws, the establishment, by elimination in premises and conclusions, adopting tentative meanings is called Samkhya. Krama or weighing the relative strength or weakness of the faults or merits, determined by the above process, consists in settling the appropriateness of the priority or sequence of the words used in a sentence. Those who are conversant with the interpretation of sentences or texts give this meaning to the word Krama.

Nigamana or Samapana, conclusion, means the final determination, after examining what has been said on the subjects of dharma, artha, kama and moksha, in respect of what it is that has specifically been stated in the text.

The sorrow born of attraction or revulsion increases to a great measure. The conduct, O Rajan, which one pursues to dispel the sorrow experienced is called Prayojanam.

Take my word for it, O king, that these characteristics of ambiguity and the others, numbering five in all, when occurring together, constitute a complete and intelligible sentence. What I say will be full of sense and

meaning, judicious and free from ambiguity because each word will not symbolise many things.

They are logical, free from pleonasm or tautology, smooth, certain, free of bombast, sweet and agreeable, truthful, consistent with dharma, artha and kama, refined to be free from Prakriti, not elliptical or imperfect, gentle and easily grasped; they are characterised by correct order, not far-fetched in respect of sense, connected with one another as cause and effect, and each having a specific purpose.

I shall not tell you anything prompted by desire or wrath, fear or greed, abjectness or deceit or shame, compassion or pride. I will answer you because it is proper for me to respond to what you have asked.

When the speaker, the hearer and the words said, completely agree with one another in the course of speech, then the sense or meaning is revealed clearly. When, in the matter of what is said, the speaker shows disregard for the understanding of the hearer by uttering words whose meaning only he himself understands, then, however fine those words may be, they cannot be grasped by the hearer.

That speaker's words are faulty, again, if he abandons all regard for his own meaning and uses words that, though of excellent sound and sense, arouse only mistaken impressions in the mind of the listener.

That speaker, however, who uses words that are, while expressing his own meaning, intelligible to the hearer as well, truly deserves to be called a speaker. No other man deserves the name. It befits you, therefore, Rajan, to hear with concentrated attention my words that are laden with meaning and a wealth of significance.

You have asked me who I am, whose I am, and where I come from. O king, listen to me with an undivided mind as I answer your questions. As lac and wood, as grains of dust and drops of water, exist commingled when brought together, even so do the lives of all creatures.

Sabda, sparsa, rasa, rupa and gandha, these and the senses, though diverse in their essences, still exist in a state of commingling like lac and wood. It is well known that nobody asks any of these: who are you? Each of them also has no knowledge either of itself or of the others.

The eye cannot see itself. The ear cannot hear itself. The eye, again, cannot discharge the functions of any of the other senses, nor can any of the senses carry out the functions of any other sense save its own. Even if all of them combine together, they will fail to know their own selves, just as dust

and water mingled together cannot know each other though existing in a state of union.

In order to discharge their respective functions, they await the contact with objects external to them. The eye, form and light, constitute the three requirements for seeing. The same is the case with respect to the working of the other senses and the ideas that result from them.

Again, between the functions of the senses, like vision and hearing, and the ideas which are their result, like form and sound, Manas, the mind, is an entity other than the senses and is regarded as having a function of its own. To arrive at certainty, one uses Manas to distinguish what is existent from what is non-existent in the matter of all ideas derived from the senses.

With the five senses of knowledge and five senses of action, Manas makes a total of eleven. The twelfth is the Buddhi, understanding. When doubt arises in respect of what is to be known, Buddhi comes forward and settles all doubts to help discernment.

After the twelfth, sattva is the thirteenth tattva. With its help creatures are distinguished as possessing more of it or less of it in their constitutions. After this, Chitta, Consciousness of self, is another tattva, the fourteenth. It helps one to understand the self as distinguished from what is not self.

Desire is the fifteenth principle. Unto it inheres the whole universe. The sixteenth principle is avidya. Unto it inhere the seventeenth and the eighteenth tattvas called Prakriti and Vyakti, which is maya and prakasa.

Joy and sorrow, decrepitude and death, acquisition and loss, the agreeable and the unpleasant—these constitute the nineteenth tattva and are called pairs of opposites. Beyond the nineteenth principle is another, Kaala, time, called the twentieth. Know that the births and death of all creatures are due to the action of this twentieth tattva.

These twenty exist together. Besides these, the Panchamahabhutas, the five great primal elements, and existence and non-existence, bring the total to twenty-seven. Beyond these are three others named Vidhi, Sukra and Bala, which make the tally reach thirty. These thirty tattvas occur in the body.

Some regard unmanifest Prakriti to be the source or cause of these thirty principles. This is the view of the atheistic Samkhya school. The Kanadas of gross vision regard the manifest or anus, atoms, to be their cause.

Whether the Avyakta, unmanifest, or the Vyakta, manifest, be their cause, or whether the two, the Supreme or Purusha and the Vyakta, be

regarded as their cause, or whether the four together, the Supreme or Purusha and his maya, and the Jiva and avidya, ignorance, be the cause, they that are conversant with Adhyatma behold Prakriti to be the cause of all creatures.

That Prakriti, which is Avyakta, becomes manifest in the form of these tattvas. I, you, O king, and all others possessing a body are the result of that Prakriti so far as our bodies are concerned.

Insemination and other embryonic conditions are due to the mixture of the vital seed and eggs. In consequence of insemination the result which first appears is called Kalala. From Kalala arises Budbuda or the embryonic bubble.

From the stage called Budbuda springs what is called Pesi. From Pesi that stage arises in which the various limbs become manifest. From this last condition appear nails and hair.

Upon the end of the ninth month, king of Mithila, the creature takes its birth so that, its sex being known, it comes to be called a boy or girl. When the creature issues out of the womb, the form it presents is such that its nails and fingers seem to be of the colour of burnished copper.

The next stage is infancy, when the form that was seen at the time of birth changes. From infancy one reaches youth, and from youth, old age. As the creature advances from one stage into another, the form presented in the previous stage is altered.

The constituent elements of the body, which serve diverse functions, undergo change every moment in every creature. Those changes, however, are so minute that they cannot be observed. The birth of particles, and their death, in each successive condition, cannot be marked even as one cannot distinguish the changes in the flame of a burning lamp.

When such is the state of the bodies of all creatures—when that which is called the body is changing incessantly even like the swift movement of a horse of fine mettle—who then comes from where, or not, or whose is it or whose is it not, or from where does it not arise? What connection, in fact, exists between creatures and their own bodies?

As fire is generated from the contact of flint with iron, or from two sticks of wood rubbed against each other, even so are creatures generated from the combination of the thirty tattvas. Indeed, as you see your own body in your body, and your soul in your own soul, why is it that you do not see your own body and soul in the bodies and souls of others?

If it is true that you can identify yourself with others, why did you ask me who I am and whose? If it is true that you, O king, are free from the shackle of duality that says, ‘this is mine and this other is not mine’, then what use are such questions as ‘who are you, whose are you and from where do you come?’

What indications of mukti can be said to be in a king who acts as others act towards enemies and allies and neutrals, and in victory and truce and war? What signs of mukti occur in him who does not know the true nature of the aggregate of three, dharma, artha and kama as manifested in seven ways in all deeds and who, on that account, is attached to that aggregate of three?

What indications of mukti exist in him who fails to cast an equal eye on the agreeable, on the weak, and the strong? You are unworthy, and your pretence of mukti should be put down by your advisors.

With so many faults, your efforts to attain emancipation is like the use of medicine by a patient who indulges in all kinds of forbidden foods and practices. Parantapa, reflecting upon spouses and other sources of attachment, one should find these in one’s own soul. What else can be regarded as the indication of mukti?

Listen now to me as I speak fully of these and certain other minute sources of attachment pertaining to the four well-known actions of sleeping, pleasure, eating and dressing to which you are still bound though you profess have adopted mukti dharma.

That man who has to rule the whole world must, indeed, be an absolute king without a second. He is obliged to live in only a single palace. In that palace he has again only one sleeping chamber. In that chamber he has only one bed to lie on. Half that bed again he is obliged to give to his queen. This may serve as an example of how little a king’s share is of all he is said to own.

This is the case with his objects of enjoyment, with the food he eats and with the garments he wears. He is thus attached to a very limited share of all things. Again, he is attached to the duties of rewarding and punishing.

The king is always dependent on others. He enjoys a very small share of all that he is supposed to own, and to that small share he is forced to be attached just as others are attached to their possessions.

In the matter of war and peace, the king is not independent. In the matter of women, of sport, and other kinds of enjoyment, the king’s

inclinations and choices are very constrained. In the matter of taking counsel and in the assembly of his councillors what independence can the king be said to have?

When he commands other men, he is said to be absolutely independent. But the very next moment, his autonomy is barred by the very men whom he has commanded.

If the king wishes to sleep, he cannot satisfy his desire, thwarted as he is by those who want to transact business with him. He must sleep when permitted, and while sleeping he is obliged to wake up to attend to those that have urgent business with him. ‘Bathe, touch, drink, eat, pour libations on the fire, perform sacrifices, speak, listen’—these are the words which kings have to hear from others, and hearing them he becomes a slave to those that utter them.

Men come in groups to the king and ask him for gifts. As the guardian of the general treasury, however, he cannot make gifts to even the most deserving. If he makes these endowments, the treasury becomes exhausted. If he does not, he disappoints his solicitors who become hostile towards him. He is vexed and inimical feelings invade his mind.

If many wise and heroic and wealthy men live together, the king’s mind becomes distrustful. Even when there is no reason to fear, the king becomes fearful of those that always wait upon him. These very men also find fault with him. Behold, in what ways the king’s fears may arise from even them.

All men are kings in their own houses. All men are also householders in their own homes. Janaka, like kings, all men mete out rewards and punishments in their own homes. They, too, like kings, have sons and wives and themselves, treasuries and friends and stores. In these respects the king is not different from other men.

Like them, shouts of ‘the kingdom is ruined’, ‘the city is consumed by fire’, ‘the best of elephants is dead’, fill the king with anguish, and he yields to grief, not knowing that these impressions are all caused by ignorance and delusion.

The king is seldom free from mental suffering caused by desire, aversion and fear. He is also commonly afflicted by headaches and other similar maladies. Like others, he is troubled by the contradictory pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain. He is anxious about everything. Since the kingdom is full of enemies and impediments, the king, while he enjoys it, passes sleepless nights.

Sovereignty is thus blessed with an extremely small share of happiness, while it is imbued with great misery. It is as insubstantial and fleeting as burning flames fed by straw or bubbles seen on water.

Who would actually like to gain sovereignty, or having acquired it ever hope to win tranquillity? You regard this kingdom and this palace to be yours. You think that this army, this treasury and these advisors are yours. In reality, whose are they, and whose are they not?

Allies, ministers, the capital, the provinces, punishment, the treasury, and the king, these seven constitute the limbs of a kingdom and, depending upon one another, stand like pillars that together support one another and the kingdom. The merits of each are complemented by the merits of the others.

Which of them are superior to the rest? At certain times, some particular ones are regarded as more distinguished than the rest, when some important end is served through their agency. Superiority, for the time being, is said to belong to that which is most effective.

These seven limbs, along with the three others, form an aggregate of ten, support one another, and enjoy the kingdom like the king himself.

That king who is filled with great energy, and who is firmly attached to the Kshatriya dharma, should be satisfied with only a tenth part of the produce of his subject's field. Some kings are seen to be content with less than a tenth part of such produce. There is no one who owns the kingly office without someone else also owning it in the world; there is no kingdom without a king.

If there be no kingdom, there can be no righteousness, and if there be no dharma, from where can mukti arise? The most sacred and highest merit belongs to kings and kingdoms.

By ruling a kingdom well, a king earns the punya that attaches to the Aswamedha yagna with the whole earth given away as dakshina. But how many kings are there who rule wisely? Janaka, I can mention hundreds and thousands of faults like these that attach to kings and kingdoms. Then, again, when I have no real connection with even my body, how then can I be said to have any contact with the bodies of others?

You cannot charge me with having attempted to bring about varnasamkarsana, a mixing of castes. Have you not heard the mukti dharma explained in its entirety by Panchasikha, together with its means, its methods, its practices and its conclusion?

If you have prevailed over all your bonds and freed yourself from all attachments, may I ask you, O king, why do you still keep your connections with this royal chatra and these other symbols of sovereignty? I think you have not listened to the shastras, or that you have listened to them without any benefit, or, perhaps, you have listened to some other works passing for the shastras.

It seems that you have mere worldly knowledge, and that like an ordinary man of the world you are bound by the bonds of touch, wives, palaces and the like. If it be true that you have been emancipated from all bonds, what harm have I done you by entering your body with only my intellect?

With Yatis, among all varnas men, the custom is to live in uninhabited, deserted places. What harm then have I done, and to whom, by entering your understanding which is truly of real knowledge? I have not touched you, Rajan, with my hands, or arms, or feet, or thighs, or with any other part of my body.

You are born into a high race. You are modest. You have foresight. Whether the act has been good or bad, my entrance into your body has been a private one, concerning us two only. Was it not improper for you to publish that private act before your whole court?

These Brahmanas are all worthy of reverence. They are the foremost of gurus. Being their king, you are also entitled to their respect. Paying them reverence, you are deserving of receiving reverence from them.

Reflecting on all this, if you really know propriety with respect to speech, it was not right for you, before these foremost Brahmanas, to proclaim the fact of this intercourse between two persons of opposite sexes.

King of Mithila, I stay within you without touching you at all even as a drop of water stays on a lotus-leaf without wetting it. Despite the instructions of Panchasikha of the pravarajya, the mendicant order, your knowledge has become abstracted from the sensual objects to which it relates.

It is clear that while you have given up the grihasta way of life you have not yet attained mukti that is so difficult to achieve. You linger between the two, pretending that you have reached the goal of muktas.

The contact of one who is emancipated with another that is also free, or Purusha with Prakriti, cannot lead to an intermingling of the kind you dread. Only those who regard the Atman to be identical with the body, and

who think that the varnas and asramas are really different from one another, err in supposing such an intermixing to be possible.

My body is different from yours. But my Atman is not different from your soul. When I am able to realise this, I have not the slightest doubt that my Buddhi is really not dwelling in yours, though I have entered into you by yoga.

A pot is carried in the hand. In the pot is milk. On the milk is a fly. Though the hand and pot, the pot and milk, and the milk and the fly, exist together, yet are they all distinct from each other. The pot does not share the nature of the milk. Nor does the milk have the nature of the fly. The condition of each is independent, and can never be altered by the condition of that other with which it may temporarily exist.

In this manner, varna and dharma, though they may exist together with and in one who is emancipated, do not really attach to him. How then can varnasamkarsana result from this union of ours?

Then, again, my varna is not superior to yours. I am not a Vaisya, nor a Sudra. I am, O king, of the same varna as you, born of a pure race. There was once a Rajarishi known as Pradhana. It is clear that you have heard of him. I am born in his vamsa, and my name is Sulabha.

Indra, accompanied by Drona and Satasringa and Chakradwara, and other great mountains, would attend the yagnas performed by my ancestors. Being born in such a vamsa, it was established that no fitting husband could be found for me. I was then instructed in the moksha dharma and now I wander over the earth alone, practising sannyasa.

I do not practise any hypocrisy in the matter of the life of renunciation. I am not a thief that appropriates what belongs to others. I do not confuse the practices of the different varnas. I am firm in the practices of that mode of life to which I properly belong. I am firm and resolute in my vows.

I never utter any word without reflecting on its propriety. Rajan, I did not come to you without careful deliberation. Having heard that your understanding has been purified by the kukti dharma, I came here to derive some benefit from it. Indeed, I came to ask you about emancipation.

I do not say this to glorify myself and humiliate my opponents. But I say it, impelled by sincerity alone. What I say is, he that is emancipated never indulges in that intellectual battle which is implied by a dialectical disputation for the sake of victory. He, on the other hand, is really liberated who devotes himself to Brahman, that sole seat of peace.

As a person of the mendicant order resides for only one night in an empty house, leaving the next morning, I too, shall remain for this one night in your body, which is like an empty chamber, destitute of knowledge.

You have honoured me with both speech and other offers that are due from a host to a guest. Having slept this one night in your body, O ruler of Mithila, which is as it were my own chamber now, I shall depart tomorrow."

Bhishma continues, 'Hearing these words full of reason and excellent sense, King Janaka failed to give any answer.'

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"Yudhishtira says, 'How was Suka, the son of Vyasa, in ancient days, won over to renunciation? I want to hear you narrate the story. My curiosity in this matter is irrepressible. You of the Kuru vamsa, it is fitting for you to instruct me about the conclusions in respect of the unmanifest, the cause, the manifest, the effects, and of the truth, and about Brahman that is in them, but unattached to them, as also of the acts of the Swayambhu Narayana, as you know them.'

Bhishma says, 'Beholding his son Suka living fearlessly as ordinary men do in practices that are considered harmless by them, Vyasa taught him all the Vedas and then discoursed to him one day in these words:

Vyasa said, "O son, becoming a master of the senses, do you suppress extreme cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and the wind also, and having subdued them, as yogins do, do you practise dharma? Do you duly observe truth and sincerity, and freedom from wrath and malice, and self-restraint and tapasya, and the duties of benevolence and compassion?

Do you pursue the truth, firmly devoted to righteousness, abandoning all sort of insincerity and deceit? Do you sustain yourself on vighasa, what remains of food after feeding the Devas and Atithis?

Your body is as transitory as the bubbles on the surface of water. The Jivatman sits unattached in it as a bird on a tree. The companionship of all agreeable objects is extremely short-lived. Why then, O son, do you sleep in such forgetfulness?

Your enemies are attentive and alert and ever ready to spring on you, always waiting for their chance. Why are you so foolish as to not know this?

As the days pass, one after another, your life is always being reduced. Indeed when your life is being incessantly shortened, why do you not hurry to learn the means of saving yourself?

Only they that are lacking in faith in the existence of the next life set their hearts on things of this world that only have the effect of increasing flesh and blood. They are totally unmindful of all that is concerned with the next world. Those men that are bewildered by erroneous understandings display a hatred for dharma.

The man who follows misguided persons who have adopted devious and sinful paths is equally afflicted by the ways of sin. Mahatmans, however, who are content, devoted to the scriptures, and possessed of immense power, pursue the path of righteousness.

Do you wait upon them with reverence and seek their instruction. Do you act according to the teachings of those wise men whose eyes are set upon dharma. With your understanding cleansed by such lessons and rendered superior, do you then restrain your heart which is ever ready to deviate from the right course.

They whose Buddhi is always concerned with the present, who fearlessly regard the future as something remote; they who do not observe any restrictions in the matter of food are really foolish men who fail to understand that this world is only a temporary field of trial.

Repairing to the flight of steps of dharma, climb those steps one after another. At present you are like a worm that weaves its cocoon around itself and so depriving itself of all means of escape.

Do you keep to your left, without any scruple, the atheist who transgresses all restraints, and courts destruction, who stands like a house beside a fierce and surging river, and who, to others, appears to stand like a bamboo with its tall head erect in pride.

Using the raft of yoga, cross the ocean of the world, this samsara, whose waters are constituted of your five senses. Its fierce monsters are moha, krodha and mrityu—desire, wrath and death; its vortex is janma, birth itself. With the raft of dharma, you must traverse the world affected by death and afflicted by decay, and upon which the thunder-bolts of days and nights fall incessantly.

Death seeks you at all moments, whether you are sitting or lying down; it is certain that you will be death's victim at any time. From where then will you find your rescue? Like the she-wolf taking a lamb, death snatches

away one that is still engaged in earning wealth and still unsatiated in the indulgence of his pleasures.

When you are destined to enter into the dark, you hold up the blazing lamp of righteous understanding, whose flame has been kindled. Falling into various forms one after another in the world of men, a creature obtains the birth of a Brahmana with great difficulty. You have obtained that birth. Son, endeavour to maintain it properly.

A Brahmana has not been born for the gratification of desire. On the other hand, his body is intended to be subjected to mortification and penances in this world so that incomparable happiness may be his in the next. The status of Brahmanatva is acquired with the help of long, sustained and austere tapasya.

Having acquired that condition, one should never waste one's time in the indulgence of one's senses. Always engaged in penances and self-restraint, and desiring what is good for you, live and act in peace and serenity.

The life of every man is like a horse. The nature of that steed is Avyakta, unmanifest. The sixteen elements constitute its body. Its character is most subtle.

Kshanas, and trutis, and nimeshas are the hair on its body. The sandhyas, the twilights, constitute its shoulder joints. The light and the dark fortnights are its two eyes of equal power. Months are its other limbs.

That steed runs incessantly. If your eyes be not blind, see that charger race forward on its invisible course; set your heart on dharma, after hearing what your gurus have to say on the subject of the next world.

They that fall away from dharma and those who conduct themselves recklessly, who always display malice towards others and take to sin, are obliged to assume physical bodies in the regions of Yama and suffer diverse afflictions and torments.

That king who is devoted to dharma and who protects the good and punishes the evil, with discrimination, attains to those regions that belong to men of righteous deeds. Through diverse kinds of good karma, he attains to such faultless felicity which cannot be acquired by even thousands of births.

Furious dogs of frightful mien, crows with iron beaks, flocks of ravens and vultures and other dark birds, and blood-sucking worms torment the man who transgresses the commands of his parents and preceptors when he goes to hell after death. That sinful wretch who, because of his recklessness,

violates the ten boundaries that have been fixed by Swayambhu himself is obliged to pass his time in great suffering in the wild wastelands in the dominions of the king of Pitris.

That greedy man, who is in love with falsehood, who always takes delight in deception and cheating, and who injures others by practising hypocrisy and deceit, has to go to a bottomless hell and suffer great anguish and tortures for his sins.

Such a man is forced to bathe in the broad Vaitarani river whose waters are boiling, to enter into a forest of trees whose leaves are as sharp as swords, and then to lie on a bed of battle-axes. He has thus to pass his days in dreadful hell in great agony.

You see only the regions of Brahma and other deities, but you are blind to that which is the highest—mukti! Alas, you are also blind to old age and decay that are followed by death.

Go along the path of mukti! Why do you delay? A frightful terror, destructive of your happiness, lies before you. Take swift steps to achieve liberation.

Soon after death you are sure to be taken before Yama. To obtain felicity in the next world, strive to attain to righteousness through the practice of difficult and austere vratas.

Regardless of the sufferings of others, the all-powerful Yama takes the lives of all, yours and your friends'. No one can resist him. Very soon the wind of Yama will blow and bear you into his presence. Very soon you will be taken to that dread presence all alone.

Do you achieve here what will be for your good there. Where now is that death-wind which will blow before you very soon? Are you mindful of it? Very soon, when that moment arrives, the points of the horizon will begin to spin before your eyes. Are you mindful of that?

O son, soon the Vedas will vanish from your sight as you are helplessly sucked into that terrifying presence. Set your heart, then, on that most excellent yoga of mukti. Seek to attain that sole treasure so that, after death, you will not have to grieve at the recollection of your former deeds, good and evil, all of which are characterised by error.

Decrepitude very soon weakens your body and robs you of your limbs, strength and beauty. Therefore, seek that unique treasure. Very soon the Destroyer, with disease for his sarathy, in order to take your life, will pierce and break your body with a mighty hand. Practise, then, austere penance.

Very soon those terrible wolves, which reside within your body, will attack you from every side. Endeavour, therefore, to achieve acts of righteousness. Very soon all alone, you will behold a thick darkness, and very soon you will see golden trees on the top of the mountain. Swiftly you must perform deeds of dharma.

Very soon your evil companions and enemies, your senses, dressed in the guise of friends, will swerve you from true vision. Do you, then, strive to achieve that which is of the highest good.

Earn that wealth which has no fear from either kings or thieves, and which one does not have to abandon even at death. Earned by one's own actions, that wealth has never to be shared with others. In the other world, each enjoys that which he has earned for himself.

O son, give that to others by which they may be able to live in the next world. Also set yourself to acquiring that wealth which is indestructible and eternal.

Do not think that you should first enjoy all kinds of pleasures and then turn your heart towards mukti, for before you are satiated with enjoyment you may be overtaken by death. In view of this, hasten to do acts of goodness.

Neither mother nor son, nor relatives, nor dear friends, even when implored honourably, accompany the man who dies. One has to go oneself, unaccompanied, to the regions of Yama.

Only those deeds, good and bad, that one did before dying, accompany the man into the other world. The gold and riches that one has earned by good and bad means do not benefit one when one's body meets with dissolution.

There is no better witness than the Atman, of all actions done or not done in life, of men that have gone to the other world. When the acting Chaitanya, the Jivatman, enters into the witness Chaitanya the destruction of the body takes place; this is seen by yoga-buddhi when yogins enter the firmament of their hearts.

Even here, Agni, Surya and Vayu, these three Devas, reside in the body. Beholding as they do all the deeds and practices of one's life, they become one's witnesses.

Days and nights, the former characterised by the virtue of revealing all things and the latter by concealing all things, run incessantly; touching all things they reduce their allotted periods of life.

Therefore, be observant of the duties of your own varna. The road in the other world, leading to the realms of Yama, is infested by many enemies in the form of iron-beaked birds and wolves, and by many repulsive and terrifying insects and worms.

Take care of your own actions, for only these will accompany you along that road. One does not share one's karma with others, but everyone enjoys or endures the fruits of his own actions.

As Apsaras and Maharishis attain to fruits of great felicity, in the same manner, men of righteous deeds, as the fruits of their respective righteous acts, obtain in the other world chariots of transcendent radiance that move everywhere at the will of the riders. Men of taintless deeds, cleansed souls and pure birth obtain the fruits, in the next world, which correspond with their own righteous acts in this life.

By walking along the high road marked by the duties of grihasta, men acquire happy ends and attain to the region of Prajapati or Brihaspati, or of him of a hundred yagnas. I can give you thousands and thousands of instructions. Know, however, that dharma, the mighty cleanser, keeps all foolish persons in the dark.

You have passed twenty-four years. You are now full twenty-five years of age. Your years are passing away. Do you begin to lay your store of righteousness. The Destroyer that dwells within error and heedlessness will very soon deprive your senses of their powers. Relying on your body alone, swiftly perform your duties before that consummation comes.

When it is your duty to go along that road on which you alone shall be in front and you alone behind, what need then do you have of either your body or your wife and children?

When men have to go by themselves, without companions, to the land of Yama, it is clear that in view of such a terrifying situation, you should seek to acquire that one unique treasure—dharma or yogasamadhi. The puissant Yama, regardless of the afflictions of others, snatches away and uproots the friends and relatives of one's vamsa. There is no one that can thwart him.

Seek to gather a stock of righteousness. Son, I impart to you these lessons that are all in accord with the shastras I follow. Observe them by acting according to their truth.

He who supports his body by following the duties laid down for his varna, and who gives dakshina to earn whatever fruits may attach to such

deeds, is freed from the consequences born of ignorance and delusion. The knowledge which a man of righteous deeds acquires from Vedic practices leads to omniscience.

That omniscience is identical with moksha dharma, the vigyana of the highest object of human acquisition. Instruction in this, imparted to the grateful, is beneficial for it leads to the attainment of emancipation.

The pleasure that one takes in living amidst the dwellings of men is truly a shackle that binds fast. Breaking that shackle, men of righteous deeds repair to regions of great felicity. Evil men, however, fail to break that bond.

Since you have to die, what use have you of wealth, or of relatives, or with children? Employ yourself in searching for your soul which is hidden in a cave. Where have all your grandsires gone?

Do today that which you would keep for tomorrow. Do that in the morning which you would defer for the afternoon. Death does not wait for anyone, to see whether he has or has not accomplished his tasks. Following the body after one's death to the cremation ground, one's relatives and kinsmen and friends return quickly after throwing it on the funeral pyre.

Without hesitation avoid those who are sceptics, who are without compassion, and who are attached to evil ways; endeavour to seek, without listlessness or apathy, that which is for your highest good. When, therefore, the world is afflicted by death, do you wholeheartedly achieve dharma, aided all the while by unswerving patience.

That man who is conversant with the means of attaining mukti and who discharges his svadharma, certainly attains to great felicity in the other world. There is no destruction for you who never stray from the path of dharma and do not recognise death in the attainment of a different body.

He who increases his store of righteousness is truly wise. He who, on the other hand, falls away from dharma is said to be a fool. One who is engaged in doing good deeds attains swarga and other rewards as the fruits of those deeds; but he who is given to evil ways has to sink into naraka.

Having acquired the human condition, so difficult to attain, which is the stepping-stone to heaven, one should fix one's soul on the Brahman so that one may not once more fall away. One whose understanding, directed towards the path to swarga, does not stray from it, is regarded by the wise as a man of dharma, and when he dies his friends should indeed grieve.

The man whose understanding is not restless and is directed to Brahman, and who has attained swarga, is freed from naraka, a great terror. They who are born in the asramas of sannyasis and die there, do not earn much punya by abstaining from enjoyments and the indulgence of desire even for their entire lives.

However, he who possessing objects of pleasure casts them off and engages himself in tapasya succeeds in acquiring everything. I regard the fruits of the penances of such a man to be much higher.

There have been, and will be, hundreds and thousands of mothers and fathers, sons and wives in this world. Who, however, were they and whose are we? I am quite alone. I have no one whom I may call mine. Nor do I belong to anyone else. I do not see that person whose I am, nor do I see him whom I may call mine. They have nothing to do with you. You have nothing to do with them.

All creatures are born according to their karma, their acts of past lives. You, too, will go hence and be born into a new varna determined by your own deeds. In this world we see that the friends and followers of only those that are rich show devotion to the rich. The friends and followers of the poor fall away during their very lifetime.

Man commits countless heinous sins for the sake of his wife and children. From those evil deeds he derives much distress both now and in the next world. The wise man beholds the world of life destroyed by the actions of every living being.

Therefore, O son, act according to all the instructions I have given you!

The man of true vision, seeing this world to be only a field of karma, action, should, from desire of felicity in the next world, do good deeds. Time exerts his irresistible power, and cooks all creatures in his own cauldron with his ladle made of months and seasons, using the sun for his fire, and days and nights for his fuel; these days and nights are the witnesses of the fruits of every creature's karma.

Of what use is that wealth which is not given away and which is not enjoyed? For what purpose is that strength which is not employed in resisting or subjugating one's enemies? For what purpose is that knowledge of the scriptures which does not compel one to righteous deeds? And for what purpose is that atman which does not subdue the senses and abstain from evil?"'

Bhishma continues, ‘Having heard these most beneficial words spoken by the island-born Vyasa, Suka leaves his father and goes forth to seek a guru who could teach him the moksha dharma.’”

CANTO 323

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, if there is any value in dakshina, yagnas, and in tapasya well-performed, and in obedience rendered to gurus and other revered elders, speak to me of them.'

Bhishma says, 'An understanding, associated with evil, causes the mind to fall into sin. In this state one taints one's actions, and then falls into great misery.

Those who sin have to be born into the most indigent circumstances. They move from famine to famine, from pain to pain, and from fear to fear. They are deader than those who are dead.

Those who are possessed of bhakti, self-restrained and devoted to dharma, are prosperous, and go forth from joy to joy, from heaven to heaven, from bliss to bliss. Unbelievers have to pass, with groping hands, through realms infested by beasts of prey and elephants, and pathless tracts teeming with snakes and robbers and other terrors. What more need be said of these?

On the other hand, those who revere the Devas and Atithis, are generous, considerate to the virtuous, and offer dakshina in yagnas, walk on the path of felicity that belongs to men of cleansed and subdued souls. Those who are unrighteous will not be counted among men even as grains without kernel are not counted as grain, and as cockroaches are not counted among birds.

One's deeds follow one even when one runs fast. As the doer lays himself down, so also do his actions lie with him. Indeed, one's sins sit when the doer sits, and run when he runs. The sins act when the doer acts, and, in fact follow him like his very shadow. The doer's karma, by whatever

means and under whatever circumstances, endures, and is sure to be enjoyed or endured with respect of its fruits by the doer in his next life.

From every side time always drags along all creatures, duly observing the laws of the distance to which they are flung, which is in keeping with their actions. As flowers and fruits, without being urged, never fail to blossom and appear at their proper time, even so one's past deeds make their appearance at their time.

Honour and dishonour, gain and loss, destruction and growth, are seen to set in. No one can resist them. None endure, for disappearance follows appearance.

The sorrows one suffers is the result of one's karma. The happiness one enjoys flows from one's karma. From the time when one lies within a mother's womb one begins to enjoy and suffer one's deeds of a past life. The consequences of good and evil deeds of one's childhood, youth, or old age are experienced in one's next life at the same ages.

As the calf recognises its mother among thousands of her kind, one's past exploits, without doubt, seek one out in one's next life, unerringly, although one may live among thousands of one's kind. As a piece of dirty cloth is whitened by being washed in water, in the same manner, cleansed by continuous exposure to the fire of fasts and penances, the righteous at last attain to unending bliss.

You of high intelligence, the desires and purposes of those whose sins have been washed away by sustained and well-performed tapasya are crowned with fruition. The path of the righteous cannot be discerned even as that of birds in the sky or that of fishes in water.

There is no need to speak ill of others, or to talk about the fall of others. On the other hand, one should always do what is pleasing, agreeable, and beneficial to one's own self.'"

CANTO 324

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O Pitamaha, how Mahatman Suka of austere penances was born as the son of Vyasa, and how did he succeed in attaining the highest goal? Which woman bore the son of Vyasa, rich in tapodhana? We do not know who Suka's mother was, nor do we know anything of the birth of that high-souled sannyasi. How was it that, when he was a mere boy, his mind became entirely drawn to the knowledge of the subtle Brahman?

Indeed, in this world, there is no other in whom such predilections have been marked at so early an age. I want to hear all this in detail. I am never satiated by your excellent and amrita-like words. Pitamaha, tell me, in their proper order, of Suka's greatness and knowledge, and of his union with the Paramatman!'

Bhishma says, 'The Rishis did not make punya depend upon life span, or decay, or wealth, or friends. They said that he who studied the Vedas was great. What you wish to know is rooted in tapasya.

Son of Pandu, that tapa rises from the subjugation of the senses. Without doubt, one errs in giving the reins of one's life to one's senses. It is only by restraining them that one finds true success.

The merit that attaches to a thousand Aswamedha yagnas or a hundred Vajapeyas is not even a sixteenth of the punya that arises from yoga. I will now tell you about the circumstances of Suka's birth, the fruits of his tapasya, and what he achieved by his deeds, subjects that cannot be grasped by those of uncleansed souls.

Once upon a time on Meru's peak, Mahadeva, adorned with karnikara flowers, sported with his terrible ganas. The daughter of Himavat-king of

the mountains, Devi Parvati, was also there. Near that peak, the island-born Vyasa practised extraordinary austerities.

O best of the Kurus, using yoga he withdrew himself into his own Atman, engaged in dharana, and performed many penances to have a son. He addressed Mahadeva with a prayer "O puissant one, let me have a son who will have the power of Agni and Bhumi, Jala, Vayu and Akasa." Engaged in the most austere tapasya, the Rishi begged Siva, who cannot be supplicated by men of impure souls, using not words but his yoga-shakti.

The mighty Vyasa remained there for a hundred years, surviving on air alone, engaged in adoring Mahadeva of multifarious form, the lord of Uma. There stood all the Devarishis and Rajarishis and the Lokapalas and the Sadhyas along with the Vasus, and the Adityas, the Rudras, and Surya and Chandramas, and the Maruts, and the oceans, and the rivers and the Aswins, the Devas, the Gandharvas, and Narada and Parvata and the Gandharva Viswavasu, and the Siddhas, and the Apsaras.

There sat Mahadeva, also known as Rudra, decked with an excellent garland of karnikara flowers, blazing with effulgence like the moon with his rays. In those delightful, divine forests, peopled with Devas and heavenly Rishis, Maharishi Vyasa remained, engaged in high yoga dhyana, in order to obtain a son. His strength did not diminish, nor did he feel any pain.

The three worlds gazed at this penance in amazement. While the Rishi, of immeasurable energy, sat in yoga, his matted locks, in consequence of his tejas, were seen to burn like flames of fire. I heard this from the illustrious Markandeya. He would always narrate to me the exploits of the Devas. It is on account of that tejas that the matted jata of the Mahatman Krishna-Dwaipayana to this day seem to be of the colour of fire.

Gratified with the Rishi's tapasya and his fervent bhakti, Mahadeva resolved to grant him his wish. The three-eyed one smiled with pleasure, and said to him, "O island-born one, you will get a son as you wish! Possessed of greatness, he shall be as pure as Agni, as Vayu, as Bhumi, as Jala and as Akasa! He will possess the Consciousness of his being Brahman; his understanding and soul shall be devoted to Brahman, and he shall completely depend upon Brahman even so that he will be merged and one with Brahman!'"

CANTO 325

"Bhishma says, 'Having obtained this great boon from Mahadeva, one day the son of Satyavati was rubbing sticks to make a fire. While thus engaged, the illustrious Rishi saw the Apsara Ghritachi, who, because of her tejas, was of arresting beauty. Yudhishtira, seeing her in that forest Vyasa was overcome with desire.

Seeing the Rishi's heart aflame with by desire, Ghritachi transformed herself into a she-parrot and flew to that place. Although Vyasa now saw the Apsara in another form, his desire did not subside but spread over every part of his body.

Summoning all his patience, the Muni tried to suppress his desire; despite all his effort, however, Vyasa could not control his agitated mind. With fate moving him, inexorably, the Rishi's heart was smitten by Ghritachi's beautiful form.

To repress his lust, he earnestly continued with the task of making a fire, yet he helplessly ejaculated and his seed fell onto the ground. That best of Dvijas, however, continued to rub the sticks without feeling any misgivings for what had happened. From the seed that fell, a son was born to him, called Suka. It is because of these circumstances attending his birth that he was named Suka, after the parrot. Indeed, for the form his mother took, he himself often assumed a great parrot's head!

Thus, from the two arani sticks his father used for kindling a fire, was born that greatest of Rishi, and the highest of yogins. As in a yagna a blazing fire sheds its radiance all around when libations of ghee are poured upon it, so did Suka take his birth, radiating effulgence because of his own tejas.

Son of Kuru, assuming the excellent form and complexion of his father, Suka, of pure soul, shone like a smokeless fire. The greatest of rivers, the Ganga in her embodied form, came to the breast of Meru and bathed Suka after his birth with her sacred waters.

An ascetic's staff and a dark deer-skin fell from the sky for Mahatman Suka. The Gandharvas sang, the diverse tribes of Apsaras danced, and divine booming drums sounded. The Gandharva Viswavasu, and Tumburu and Varada, and others called Haha, and Huhu, eulogised the birth of Suka.

There arrived the Lokapalas with Sakra at their head, as also the other Devas and the Devarishis. Vayu rained showers of divine flowers upon the place. The entire universe, mobile and immobile, was infused with surging joy.

Accompanied by the Devi, and moved by love, Mahadeva of great refulgence came there, and soon after the birth of the Muni's son himself invested him with the sacred thread. Sakra lovingly bestowed upon him a celestial kamandalu of great beauty, and divine raiment.

Hamsas and satapatras and kraunchas in their thousands, and many sukas and chasas, O Bhaarata, wheeled over his head. Blessed with great splendour and intelligence, Suka, having obtained his birth from the two fire-sticks, continued to live there, engaged the while in the attentive observance of many vratas and upavasas.

As soon as Suka was born, the Vedas with all their mysteries and all their antas, came to dwell in him, even as they did in Vyasa. For all that, remembering the universal practice, Suka selected Brihaspati, who knew all the Vedas together with their angas, as his guru.

Having studied all the Vedas together with all their mysteries and abstractions, as also all the itihasas and the *Artha Shastra*, the Mahamuni Suka returned home, after paying his guru dakshina. Adopting the vow of a Brahmacharin, he then began practising the most severe tapasya, focusing all his being in dhyana.

In even his childhood, he came to be revered by the Devas and Rishis for his knowledge and penances. The mind of the great Muni, Rajan, took no pleasure in the three asramas of life, including the grihasta; his heart was set on just the mukti dharma.'"

CANTO 326

"Bhishma says, 'Thinking of mukti, Suka humbly approached his father and desiring to achieve his highest good, he saluted his great guru and said, "You are well versed in the mukti dharma. O illustrious one, discourse to me upon it, so that my mind may achieve the supreme peace."

Hearing his son's words, the Maharishi said to him, "Son, you must study the mukti dharma and all the various duties of life."

At his father's command, Suka, that foremost of men of dharma, mastered all the treatises on yoga, and also the Samkhya vigyana of Kapila. When Vyasa saw his son to be possessed with the knowledge of the Vedas, infused with the tejas of Brahman, and fully conversant with the mukti dharma, he said to him, "Go to Janaka, the ruler of Mithila. He will show you the way to your mukti."

Suka went forth to Mithila to ask its king about the truth of dharma and the refuge of emancipation. Before he set out, his sire further told him, "Go there by that path which ordinary men take. Do not use your yoga shakti which lets you fly through the skies."

Being humble by nature, Suka was not at all surprised by this. He was further told to go there with simplicity and not from any desire for pleasure: "Along your way do not seek friends and wives, since they are the causes of attachment to the world.

Although we preside over his yagnas, do not regard yourself superior to Janaka while you stay with him. Obey him and live under his direction. He alone will dispel all your doubts.

The king of Mithila is well versed in all dharma and fully knows the mukti shastras. He is one at whose yagnas I officiate. Without any hesitation, do what says."

Thus instructed, the righteous-souled Suka went to Mithila on foot although he was able to traverse through the skies over the whole earth with her seas. Passing over many hills and mountains, many rivers and lakes, and countless forests abounding with beasts of prey and other feral animals, he crossed the two Varshas of Meru and Hari successively and next the Varsha of Himavat, and came at last to the Varsha known by the name of Bharata.

Having seen many kingdoms inhabited by Chins and Huns, Mahamuni Suka at last reached Aryavarta. Obeying his father's commands and bearing them constantly in his mind, he gradually passed along his way over the earth like a bird passing through the air. Going through many delightful towns and thronging cities, he saw diverse kinds of wealth but waited not to observe them.

On his way he crossed many delightful gardens and many sacred waters. Soon he reached the realm of the Videhas that was protected by the virtuous Mahatman Janaka. There he saw many populous villages, and many kinds of food and drink and habitations of cowherds swelling with men and many herds of kine.

He saw many fields abounding with rice, barley and other grain, and many lakes inhabited by swans and cranes and adorned with beautiful lotuses. Passing through the Videha country with its prosperous subjects, he arrived at the wonderful gardens of Mithila rich with many species of trees.

Full of elephants and horses and chariots, and men and women, he passed by them without pausing to observe any of them closely. Bearing the thought, and ceaselessly dwelling upon it—the desire to master the mukti dharma—Suka of the cheerful soul who took his joy in only dhyana thus reached Mithila at last.

At the gate, he sent word through the dwarapalakas. Calm, devoted to dhyana and yoga, he entered the city, after having obtained permission. Walking down the main highway full of fine, rich men, he reached the king's palace and entered it without hesitation.

The guards forbade him with rough words. Without any anger, Suka stopped and waited. Neither the sun nor the long distance he had walked had fatigued him in the least. Neither hunger nor thirst, nor the exertion he

had made, had weakened him. The heat of the sun had not seared him, or pained him even slightly.

Among those guards there was one who felt compassion for him, to see him stand there himself like the brilliant midday Surya. Worshipping him with due form and revering him properly, with folded hands he led him to the first chamber of the palace.

Seated there alone, Suka began to meditate on mukti. Possessed of serene splendour he looked with an equal eye upon both a shady spot and one exposed to the sun's rays. Soon, Janaka's minister came up to him with folded hands and led him to the second chamber of the palace.

That chamber led to a spacious garden which formed a part of the inner apartments of the palace. It looked like a second Chaitraratha. Beautiful pools of water he saw here and there, at regular intervals. Lustrous trees, all in bloom, graced the garden.

Women of transcendent beauty were in attendance. The minister led Suka from the second chamber to that enchanted place. Ordering those damsels to give the Muni a seat, the minister left him there.

Those exquisite women were young, of beautiful forms and faces, and shapely hips; they were clad in fine red raiment, decked with ornaments of burnished gold. They were skilled in pleasing conversation and maddening revelry, and thorough mistresses of the arts of singing and dancing.

Always smiling, they were equal to the very Apsaras in beauty. Accomplished in all the ways of dalliance, consummate in reading the thoughts of men upon whom they waited, fifty young women, of high varna and of easy virtue, surrounded Suka the ascetic.

Giving him padya, water to wash his feet, and worshipping him respectfully with the usual offerings or arghya, they gratified him with excellent foodstuffs suitable to the season. After he had eaten, one after another, they singly led him through the grounds, showing him every thing of beauty and interest, O Bhaarata. So knowing of the thoughts of all men, sporting and laughing and singing, they entertained that auspicious Muni of noble soul.

The pure-souled ascetic born from the two aranis, dutiful, having perfect control over all his senses, and a thorough master of his wrath, was neither pleased nor annoyed at all this. Then those foremost of beautiful women gave him an excellent asana to sit upon.

Washing his feet and his limbs, Suka said his sandhya vandana, his evening prayers, sat on that fine seat, and began to think of the object for which he had come there. In the first part of the night, he devoted himself to yoga. The puissant ascetic passed the middle portion of the night in sleep. Waking from his slumber, he went through the necessary rites of cleansing his body, and though surrounded by those beautiful women, he once again dedicated himself to yoga.

It was in this way, O Bhaarata, that the son of the island-born Vyasa passed the second half of that day and the whole of that night in the palace of King Janaka.'"

CANTO 327

"Bhishma says, 'The next morning, King Janaka, accompanied by his minister and his whole household, and with his priest going before him, came to Suka. Bringing with him costly asanas and diverse kinds of jewels and riches, and bearing the ingredients of the arghya on his own head, the monarch approached the son of his revered guru.

The king took that beautiful and costly asana, decked with jewels and overlaid with gold, from his priest, and, with his own hands, presented it with great reverence to Suka. After the son of the island-born Krishna had sat upon it, Janaka worshipped him according to prescribed kriyas.

He first offered him padya to wash his feet, and then gave him the arghya and kine as dakshina. The Muni accepted that worship offered with due kriyas and mantras. That Dvijottama accepted the worship and the cows the king offered and saluted the monarch.

Possessed of great tejas, he asked after Janaka's wellbeing and prosperity. Suka also included in his enquiry the wellbeing of the king's followers and ministers. With Suka's permission, Janaka sat down with all his party.

Of high birth and blessed with a high soul, the king of Mithila, with folded hands, sat down on the bare ground and in turn enquired after the wellbeing and unabated prosperity of Vyasa's son. Janaka then asked his guest about the purpose of his visit.

Suka said, "Be you blessed; my father said to me that his Yajamana, the ruler of the Videhas, known the world over by the name of Janaka, is well-versed in the mukti dharma. He commanded me to come to him promptly, if

I ever wanted to dispel any doubts in the matter of the dharma of either Pravritti or Nivritti.

He gave me to understand that the king of Mithila would dispel all my doubts. I have, therefore, come here, at the command of my sire, for the purpose of learning from you. It is fitting for you, O foremost of all righteous ones, to instruct me!

What is the svadharma of a Brahmana, and what is the essence of mukti dharma? How is moksha to be obtained? Can it be acquired through the way of gyana or by tapasya?"

Janaka said, "Hear what the duties are for a Brahmana from the time of his birth. After his upanayana, investiture with the sacred thread, he should devote his attention to the study of the Vedas. By practising tapasya and dutifully serving his guru and observing the dharma of Brahmacharya, O puissant one, he should pay off the debt he owes to the Devas and the Pitris, and cast off all malice. Having studied the Vedas closely, subjugated his senses, and paying his guru dakshina, he should, with his guru's permission return home.

Returning home, he should adopt the grihasta way of life by marrying a woman and confining himself to her, and by freeing himself from every kind of evil, and establishing his grihapatya, his domestic fire. In this asrama, he should procreate sons and grandsons.

After that, he should retire into the forest, and continue to worship the same fires and receive guests with cordial hospitality. Living righteously in the forest, he should at last establish his fire in his Atman, and freed from all the pairs of opposites, and casting off all attachments from the soul, he should spend his days in sannyasa, otherwise known as the asrama of Brahman."

Suka said, "If one attains to such an understanding, purified by study of the scriptures and of the true conception of all things, and if the heart frees itself permanently from the effects of all pairs of contradictions, is it still necessary for one to adopt the three asramas of brahmacharya, grihasta and vanaprastha in succession? This is what I ask you. It is proper for you to tell me. O ruler of men, tell me this according to the true import of the Vedas!"

Janaka said, "Without a mind cleansed by study of the shastras and without that true conception of all things which is known by the name of vigyana, the attainment of moksha is impossible. That purified

understanding, again, it is said, is unattainable without one's connection to a guru.

The guru is the helmsman, and gyana is the boat; both help one to cross samsara, the ocean of the world. After having acquired that boat, one is crowned with success; and having crossed the ocean, one may abandon both.

To prevent the destruction of all the worlds and to prevent the destruction of the karma upon which the worlds depend, the wise practised the dharma of the four asramas as the sages did in ancient days. By gradually abandoning karma, good and bad, agreeably to this order of asramas, over the course of many births, one attains mukti.

That man who, through penances performed during the course of many births, obtains a pure mind and understanding and soul is able to attain mukti in the very first stage of brahmacharya itself in a fresh birth. With a cleansed understanding, he attains mukti; with this knowledge in respect of all visible things, what further desire remains to be satisfied by observing the three other asramas?

One should always discard faults born of the gunas of rajas and tamas. Adhering to the path of sattva, one should know the self by the self. Beholding one's self in all creatures and all creatures in one's self, one should live without attachment like fish who live in water without being drenched by it.

He who succeeds in transcending all pairs of opposites and resisting their influence, succeeds in casting off every attachment, and attains to infinite bliss in the next world, going there like a bird soaring into the sky. In this connection, there is an ancient story narrated by King Yayati and remembered by all who are conversant with the shastras bearing on mukti.

The radiance of the Paramatman exists only in one's Atman, nowhere else. It is found equally in all creatures. One can see it oneself if one's heart is devoted to yoga. When a man lives in such a way that another does not fear his very sight, and when he is not himself frightened at the sight of others; when a man ceases to cherish, desire and hate, he is then said to attain to Brahman.

When a man does not sin against any creature in thought, word and deed, he then attains Brahman. By restraining the mind and the Atman, by discarding malice that darkens the mind, and by abjuring desire and torpor, one is said to reach Brahman.

When he equally respects all objects that he perceives with all his senses, and also all living creatures, and transcends all pairs of opposites, a man is then said to attain Brahman. When he casts an equal eye upon praise and censure, gold and iron, happiness and misery, heat and cold, good and evil, the agreeable and the disagreeable, life and death, he is then said to attain to Brahman.

On observing the practices of the mendicant orders, one should subdue one's senses and withdraw the mind even like a tortoise withdraws its outstretched limbs. A house cloaked in darkness can be seen with the help of a lamp; in the same manner can the Atman be kindled with the lamp of Buddhi, the understanding.

O Mahabuddhi, I see that all this knowledge already dwells in you. Whatever else should be known by one wishing to learn about the mukti dharma, you already know. O Devarishi, I am convinced that through the grace of your guru and his teachings, you have already transcended all the objects of the senses.

O Mahamuni, through your father's blessings, I have attained to omniscience, and hence know you well. Your knowledge is vaster than what you think you own. Your perceptions resulting from intuition are much greater than what you think you own. Your powers are mightier than what you are aware of.

Whether as a consequence of your tender age, or of the doubts you have been unable to dispel, or of the fear that is due to not having attained mukti, you are not conscious of that knowledge founded in intuition although it has arisen in your mind. After your doubts have been dispelled by those like me, you succeed in loosening the knots that bind your heart and then, by a righteous exertion, attain and become conscious of that gyana.

You have already acquired gyana. Your mind is calm and steady. You are free from greed and covetousness. For all that, O Brahmana, without effort you will not attain the Brahman, which is the highest acquisition.

You see no distinction between happiness and sorrow. You are not covetous. You have no longing for dance and song. You have no attachments. You have no attachment to friends. You have no fear of things that inspire fear. O blessed one, I see that you cast an equal eye upon a lump of gold and a clod of earth.

We, I and others possessed of wisdom, see you well set on the highest and indestructible path of tranquillity. You are true to the dharma which

allows the Brahmana to obtain that fruit which should be his, which is identical with the essence of mukti. What else do you want to ask me?'"

CANTO 328

"Bhishma says, 'Having heard these words of King Janaka, Suka of cleansed soul and settled conclusions began to stay in his Soul with his Soul, having of course seen the self with his self. Having achieved his objective, he became happy and serene, and without questioning Janaka further, he flew northwards to the mountains of Himavat with the speed of the wind.

These mountains abounded with diverse tribes of Apsaras and echoed with exalted sounds. Teeming with thousands of Kinnaras and Bhringarajas, it was adorned, besides, with many Madgus and Khanjaritas, and many Jivajivakas of varied colours.

And there were many peacocks also of wonderful hues, uttering their shrill cries. Many flocks of swans, and many flights of joyful kokilas too, adorned the place. Garuda, the prince of birds, dwelt constantly on that peak.

The four Lokapalas, the Devas and diverse classes of Rishis always came there from the desire to do good to the world. It was there that the high-souled Vishnu had undergone the severest austerities to have a son.

It was there that the divine Senapati Kumara, in his younger days, disregarded the three worlds with all its inhabitants, hurled his spear and pierced the earth with it. As he hurled it, Skanda challenged the universe, crying, "If there is anyone mightier than me, or who holds Brahmanas dearer, or who can compare with me in devotion to the Brahmanas and the Vedas, or has tejas like mine, let him draw up this spear or at least shake it!"

Hearing this challenge, the three lokas become anxious, and all creatures asked one another, "Who will draw out this lance?" Vishnu saw

that all the Devas and Asuras and Rakshasas were distraught. He reflected upon what best could be done. Unable to bear that challenge of the spear, he cast his eyes on Skanda, the son of Agni.

With his left hand, Vishnu seized that blazing spear and began to shake it. Shaken by the awesome power of Vishnu, the whole earth with her mountains, forests, and seas, shuddered along with the spear. Although Vishnu was fully able to pull it out, he contented himself with shaking it. In this, the puissant Narayana kept the honour of Skanda intact.

Having shaken it himself, the divine Vishnu addressed Prahlada, saying, "Behold the might of Kumara. None else in the universe can move this lance!"

Unable to bear this, Prahlada resolved to pull out the spear. He seized it, but was unable to Hiranyakasipu plunged down onto the earth.

Taking himself to the northern side of those grand mountains, Mahadeva, the bull his emblem, had performed the austerest tapasya. The asrama where Siva had undergone those austerities is encircled on all sides with a blazing fire.

Only men of pure souls can approach that mountain known by the name of Aditya. There was a fiery girdle all around it, of the width of ten yojanas, and it cannot be approached by Yakshas and Rakshasas and Danavas.

The illustrious and tejas-filled Agni lived there and was engaged in removing all obstacles from the side of Mahadeva of fathomless wisdom who remained there for a thousand celestial years, all the while standing on one foot. Dwelling on the side of Himavat, Mahadeva Mahavrata scorched the Devas in their heavens with his fiery tapasya.

At the foot of those mountains, in a quiet and secluded place, Parasara's son, Mahamuni Vyasa, taught the Vedas to his sishyas. Those disciples were the highly blessed Sumantra, Vaisampayana, Jaimini of great wisdom, and Tapodhana Paila. Suka went forth to that delightful asrama where his father, the great Muni Vyasa, lived with his sishyas.

Seated here, Vyasa watched his son advance like a radiant fire scattering flames, resembling the sun himself. As Suka approached, he appeared not to touch the trees or the rocks of the mountain. Completely dissociated from all objects of the senses, engaged in yoga, the Mahatman Rishi came swiftly, even like an arrow loosed from a bow.

Born from the aranis, Suka drew near his sire and touched his feet. With due reverence he then approached his father's disciples. Joyfully, he

narrated all the particulars of his conversation with King Janaka.

Vyasa, the son of Parasara, after the arrival of his great son, continued to dwell on Himavat engaged in teaching his disciples and his son. One day he was seated at his ease, and his sishyas, all proficient in the Vedas, with subdued senses, and with tranquil souls, sat around him. All of them had thoroughly mastered the Vedas with their angas. All were observant of penances. With folded hands they addressed their guru with the following words:

"Through your grace, we have been blessed with great tejas. Our fame also has spread. There is one boon that we humbly beg you to grant us."

Hearing these words, the regenerate Rishi answered them, saying, "Sons, tell me what is the boon you wish me to grant you?"

Hearing this reply from their preceptor, the disciples were filled with joy. Once more bowing their heads low before their guru and joining their hands, Rajan, in one voice all of them spoke these excellent words:

"If our guru is pleased with us, then, O best of sages, we are sure to be crowned with success! We all ask you, Maharishi, to grant us a boon. Be you graceful to us. Let no sixth sishya, besides us five, become famed. We are four. Our guru's son is the fifth. Let the Vedas shine forth in only us five. This is the boon that we seek."

Hearing them, Vyasa, the son of Parasara, of great intelligence, deeply learned in the meaning of the Vedas, having a righteous soul, and always engaged in thoughts that confer benefits on a man in the next world, spoke these virtuous words to his sishyas:

"The Vedas should always be given unto him who is a Brahmana, or unto him who desires to listen to Vedic teachings, and by him who eagerly wishes to dwell in the world of Brahma. Go forth and multiply. Let the Vedas spread through your exertions.

The Vedas should never be imparted to one who has not formally become a disciple. Nor should they be given to one who does not observe pure vratas. Nor should they be bestowed on one of impure soul.

These are the attributes of those who can be accepted as sishyas for the communication of Veda gyana. No knowledge should be imparted to one without a proper scrutiny of his character; just as pure gold is tested by heat, cutting and rubbing, so also should disciples be tested by their birth and accomplishments.

You should never set them tasks beyond their abilities, or tasks that are fraught with danger. One's knowledge is always commensurate with one's understanding and diligence. Let all sishyas overcome all obstacles, and let all of them meet with auspicious success.

You are competent to teach the shastras to persons of all the varnas. While teaching you must address a Brahmana, putting him first. These are the laws that govern the study of the Vedas; and this is regarded as a noble task.

The Vedas were created by the Self-born to praise the Devas. That man who, through the clouding of his mind, speaks ill of a Brahmana who knows the Vedas, is certain to face humiliation.

He who disobeys all the laws while seeking knowledge, and he who disregards dharma while imparting knowledge both fall from grace; instead of the devotion which should prevail between guru and sishya, such questioning and such instruction are certain to create distrust and suspicion.

I have now told you everything about the way in which the Vedas must be studied and taught. You must bear this instruction in mind while dealing with and teaching your sishyas.'"

CANTO 329

"Bhishma says, 'Hearing these words of their guru, Vyasa's tejasvin sishyas were filled with joy and embraced one another. Addressing one another, they said, "We will always remember what our illustrious teacher has said for our future good, and we shall do as he has said."

Having said this to one another with joyful hearts, the disciples of Vyasa, who were thorough masters of words, once more addressed him, "Mahamuni, if it pleases you, we wish to go down from this mountain into the world to undertake the task of dividing the Vedas!"

The mighty son of Parasara replied to them in words suffused with dharma and artha. "You may go to Bhumi or to Swargaloka, as you please. You should always be attentive, for the Vedas are such that they are always liable to be misunderstood."

Granted permission by their guru of truthful speech, the sishyas left him after circling around him in pradakshina and bowing their heads before him. Descending to the earth they performed the Agnishtoma and other yagnas; and they began to officiate at the sacrifices of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. Happily passing their days in the grihastasrama, they were revered by the Brahmanas. Famed and prosperous, they were employed in teaching the Veda and performing yagnas.

After his disciples had departed, Vyasa remained in his asrama with only his son in his company. The Rishi passed his days in anxious thoughtfulness and silence, sitting in a secluded corner of the hermitage. At that time Mahamuni Narada of great punya came there to see Vyasa, and spoke to him in mellifluous words.

Narada said, “O regenerate Rishi of Vasishta’s vamsa, why have the Vedic mantras fallen silent? Why are you sitting quiet and alone, in meditation like one engrossed in some thought? Alas, shorn of Vedic echoes, this mountain has lost its beauty, like the moon shorn of splendour when assailed by Rahu or enveloped in a cloud.

Without the Vedas being heard, though inhabited by the Devarishis, the mountain no longer looks wondrous but resembles a village of Nishadas. The Rishis, the Devas and the Gandharvas, too, no longer shine forth as before, for they are without the Veda nadam!”

Hearing these words of Narada, the island-born Vyasa answered, “O Devarishi, you know all the declarations of the Vedas; I agree with all that you have said and it is right for you to say this to me. Omniscient one you have seen everything.

Your knowledge also embraces all things within its sphere. All that has ever occurred in the three worlds is known to you. O great Narada, command me. Tell me what I what should I do now. Separated from my sishyas, my mind has become despondent.”

Narada said, “If the recitation of Vedas is suspended they are tainted. The Brahmanas are tainted by the non-observance of their vratas. The Balhika vamsa is the stain of the earth. Curiosity renders women impure. Recite the Vedas along with your most intelligent son, and drive out the terrors arising from Rakshasas with the echoes of their mantras.”’

Bhishma continues, ‘Vyasa, the foremost of all who understand dharma and who are devoted to Vedic recitation, was filled with joy and said to Narada, “So be it.” With his son Suka, he began to chant the Vedas in a loud sonorous voice, observing all the laws of orthoepy, correct pronunciation, and filling the three worlds with that sacred sound.

One day, as father and son, both conversant with all dharma, were engaged in chanting the Vedas, a violent wind arose that seemed to be driven by the storms that blow on the ocean’s breast. Knowing that the hour was inauspicious, Vyasa immediately told Suka to stop chanting.

Suka was filled with curiosity. He asked his sire, “O Dvija, where does this wind come from? Tell me everything about what this wind is and means.”

Vyasa heard Suka’s question and was full of amazement at what had happened. He answered Suka telling him that such an omen indicated that the chanting of the Vedas should be stopped.

“You have attained spiritual vision. Your mind has of itself been cleansed of every impurity. You have been freed from the gunas of rajas and tamas. You now dwell in sattva. You now behold your Soul with your soul, even as one gazes at one’s own reflection in a mirror. Establishing yourself in your own Atman, do you contemplate the Vedas.

The path of the Paramatman is called Devayana, the path of the gods. The path composed of tamas is called Pitriyana, the path of manes. These are the two paths in the next world. By one, men go to swarga. By the other, they go to naraka.

The winds blow over the earth’s surface and in the sky. They blow in seven courses. Listen to me as I recount them one after another. The body is furnished with the senses which are controlled by the Sadhyas and many great beings of immeasurable power. These gave birth to an invincible son named Samana.

From Samana sprang a son called Udana. From Udana sprang Vyana, who gave rise to Apana; and lastly from Apana sprung the wind called Prana. That invincible scorcher of all enemies, Prana, remained childless.

I will now tell you about the different functions of those winds. Prana is the cause of the diverse functions of all living creatures, and because they live by it, it is called Prana, life.

The first wind is known by the name of Pravaha—Samana which blows along the first masses of clouds born of smoke and heat. Coursing through the sky, and coming into contact with the water contained in clouds, that wind reveals itself in effulgence among the flashes of lightning.

The second wind called Avaha blows deafeningly. This wind causes Soma and the other luminaries to rise and appear. Within the body, which is a microcosm of the universe, that wind is called Udana by the wise.

The third wind, known as Udvaha, sucks up water from the four oceans, and conveys it to the clouds in the sky; and, having done this, offers them up to Indra, the god of rain.

The wind called Samvaha supports the clouds and divides them into many parts, turns them into vapour in order to pour down rain and once more makes them liquid; it is the roar of the thunderheads, which exist for the preservation and nurture of the world. The wind Samvaha bears the chariots of all celestial beings along the sky. The fourth in the enumeration, it is strong, with the power to destroy the very mountains.

The fifth wind is swift and forceful. It is dry and uproots and smashes down all trees. The clouds beside it are known by the name Balahaka. That wind causes diverse kinds of natural calamities, and roars deafeningly in the firmament. It is known by the name Vivaha.

The sixth wind bears the celestial waters through the skies and prevents them from falling down. That wind blows and supports the sacred waters of the Akasa Ganga, preventing them from falling down.

Obstructed by that wind from a distance, the sun, the source of a thousand rays, and which illumines the world, appears as a luminary of but one ray. Through the action of that wind, the moon, after waning, waxes again till he displays a full disc. Best of Rishis, that wind is known by the name Parivaha.

Stealing the life of all living creatures when the proper hour comes, its path is followed by Surya's son Yama; this wind is the source of that immortality attained by yogins of subtle vision who are always engaged in yoga dhyana.

This wind, Parivaha, in ancient times, helped the thousands of grandsons of Daksha Prajapati, by his ten sons, to attain to the ends of the universe. The touch of that wind Parivaha enables one to attain mukti by freeing oneself from the obligation to return to the world of samsara. No one can resist this foremost of all winds.

Marvellous are these winds, all sons of Diti. They can go everywhere and support all things, and they blow all around you without being attached to you at any time.

It is truly wonderful that this foremost of mountains should thus be suddenly shaken by this wind that now blows here. This wind is the breath of Vishnu's nostrils. When driven swiftly forward, it begins to blow with such great force that it agitates the whole universe.

When the wind begins to blow violently, persons who know the Vedas do not chant their mantras. The Vedas are a form of wind. If forcefully uttered at the wrong time, the outer wind is tortured."

Having said these words, and once the wind had ceased, the mighty son of Parasara bade his son to recommence his Vedic chanting. He then left that place to bathe in the waters of the celestial Ganga.'"

CANTO 330

"Bhishma says, 'After Vyasa had left the place, Narada, traversing the sky, came there and saw Suka studying the shastras. The Devarishi had come to ask Suka about the meaning of certain sections of the Vedas. Seeing the Devarishi Narada in his hermitage, Suka revered him by offering him the arghya according to Vedic rites.

Gratified with the honours bestowed upon him, Narada addressed Suka, saying, "Righteous one, tell me, how can I bring about what is for your highest good?"

Hearing Narada's words, Suka said to him, "Instruct me in that which may benefit me."

Narada said, "In ancient times, the illustrious Sanatkumara spoke these words to certain pure-souled Rishis who had approached him seeking the truth: 'There is no eye like that of gyana. There is no penance like sannyasa.

Abstaining from evil acts, steady practice of dharma, sadachara, good conduct, the correct observance of all religious duties, these constitute the highest good. Having obtained the condition of humanity, full of sorrow, he that becomes attached to it, is bewildered; such a man never succeeds in emancipating himself from grief.

A man's intellect becomes increasingly enmeshed in the net of stupor when he is attached to worldly things. Such a man becomes sorrowful, both in this world and the next.

One should, by every means in one's power, restrain both desire and wrath if one seeks to achieve what is for one's good. Desire and anger arise for only destroying one's wellbeing.

One should always protect one's tapasya from wrath, and one's prosperity from pride. One should always protect one's knowledge from honour and dishonour, and one's Atman from error.

Compassion is the highest virtue. Forgiveness is the highest power. The knowledge of the Atman is the highest knowledge. There is nothing higher than truth. It is always fitting to speak the truth. It is better again to speak what is beneficial than to speak what is true. I hold that to be truth which most benefits all creatures.

That man is said to be truly learned and wise who abandons every deed, who never indulges in hope, who is completely dissociated from all worldly surroundings, and who has renounced everything that pertains to the world.

He who, without attachment, enjoys all sensual desires with the help of restrained senses, who has a serene soul, who is never moved by joy of sorrow, who is engaged in yogadhyana, who lives in the company of the Devas controlling his senses, yet detached from them, and who, though having a body, never identifies himself with it, becomes emancipated and attains to the highest good.

O Muni, one who never sees others, never touches others, and never talks with others, soon achieves that highest good. One must not injure any creature. On the other hand, one must be friendly towards all. Having obtained the human condition, one should never behave inimically towards any being.

A complete disregard for all worldly things, perfect contentment, abandonment of all kinds of hope, and patience: these constitute the highest good of a man who has subdued his senses and acquired a knowledge of the self. Casting off all attachments, you must subjugate all your senses, and so attain felicity both here and in the next world.

They that are free from greed never have to suffer any sorrow. One should discard all covetousness from one's soul. By casting off greed, O amiable and blessed one, you will be able to free yourself from sorrow and pain.

One who wishes to conquer that which is unconquerable should live in tapasya, self-restraint, silence and a subjugation of the Atman. Such a man should live amidst attachments without being attached to them.

That Brahmana who lives in the midst of attachments without being attached to them and who always lives in seclusion, soon attains to the highest bliss. That man who lives in happiness by himself, surrounded by

many creatures who delight in leading lives of sexual union, is one whose thirst has been slaked by knowledge. It is well known that he whose thirst has been slaked by knowledge never experiences grief.

One attains the status of the Devas through good karma and to the condition of Manavas through karma good and bad. By evil actions, one helplessly falls down among the lower animals. Always assailed by sorrow and decay and death, a living creature is being cooked in this world in the cauldron of time. Do you not know this?

You frequently regard that to be beneficial which is really harmful; that to be certain which is really uncertain; and that to be desirable and good which is undesirable and evil. Alas, why do you not awaken to a correct understanding of these?

Like a silkworm that ensconces itself in its own cocoon, you have wrapped yourself in a cocoon made of your own countless acts born of stupor and error. Alas, why do you not awaken to a clear awareness of your real state?

You have no need to attach yourself to worldly things. Attachment to worldly objects gives rise to evil. The silk-worm that weaves a cocoon round itself is finally destroyed by its own action. Those who become attached to sons and spouses and relatives meet with destruction in the end, even as wild elephants who sink into the mire of a lake are gradually weakened until they die.

Behold, all creatures that allow themselves to be enmeshed by love suffer great anguish just as fish do on land, dragged there by cruel nets. Relatives, sons, wives, the body itself, and all one's possessions stored with care, are insignificant and useless in the next world. Only one's good and evil karma follow one to the other world.

When it is certain that you will have to go helplessly to the other world, leaving behind all these things, why are you attached to such inconsequential and worthless objects, paying no attention to that which constitutes your real and lasting wealth?

The path you must travel is without any resting place. Along that way, there is no support one can use. The land through which it passes is unknown and undiscovered. It is cloaked in thick darkness.

Alas, how will you pass along that way without equipping yourself with the necessary means? When you go along that road, nobody will follow

you. Only your deeds, good and bad, will follow when you leave this world for the next.

One seeks that foremost of goals by learning, actions, internal and external purity, and great knowledge. When that is attained, one is freed from rebirth.

The desire that one feels for living amidst human habitations is like a binding cord. The virtuous succeed in severing that bond and freeing themselves. Only the sinful do not succeed in breaking these ties.

Samsara, the ocean of life, is terrifying. Personal beauty of form, rupa, constitutes its banks. The mind is the speed of its current. Sparsa, touch, forms its island. Rasa, taste, constitutes its current. Gandha, scent, is its mire. Sabda, sound is its waters. That particular part of it which leads towards swarga is beset with great difficulties.

The body is the boat by which one must cross samsara. Forgiveness is the oar by which it is rowed. Truth is the ballast to steady that boat. The practice of dharma, righteousness, is the rope that must be attached to the mast to draw that boat along dangerous waters.

Dana is the wind that lifts the sails of that boat. It is with that swift boat that one must cross samsara. Shed both virtue and vice, truth and falsehood. Having cast off truth and falsehood, discard the means by which these are to be cast off.

By casting off all purpose, cast off virtue; by casting off all desire cast off sin also. Using the help of Buddhi, discard truth and falsehood; and, finally, by knowledge of the highest subject, the Paramatman, dispense with intelligence itself.

Cast off this body. It has bones for its pillars, sinews for its binding cords, flesh and blood for its outer plaster, and the skin for its outermost casing. It is full of urine and faeces and emits a stench.

Exposed to the assaults of decrepitude and sorrow, it is the seat of disease and is weakened by pain. With the attribute of rajas in predominance, it is neither permanent nor durable, serving only as the temporary abode for the creature it houses.

This entire universe of matter, and that which is called Mahat or Buddhi, are made up of the five Mahabhutas. That which is called Mahat is due to the action of the Paramatman.

The five senses, the three gunas of tamas, rajas and sattva, together with those which have been mentioned before, constitute a tale of seventeen.

These seventeen, known as the unmanifest, with the manifest, that is the five objects of the five senses, rupa, rasa, sabda, sparsa and gandha, along with Chit and Buddhi, form the well-known account of the twenty-four principles.

When one possesses these twenty-four tattvas, one comes to be called Jiva or human. He who knows the aggregate of three, dharma, artha and kama, as also happiness and sorrow, life and death, truly, and in all their details, is said to know growth, decay and destruction.

The objects of knowledge should be known gradually, one after another. All objects that are grasped by the senses are called Vyakta, manifest. Those that transcend the senses and are known only by their indications are said to be Avyakta, unmanifest.

By restraining the senses, one wins great gratification, even like a thirsty and parched traveller at a torrent of rain. Having subdued the senses one beholds one's soul expand to embrace all objects within itself. Having its roots in gyana, the power of the man who beholds Narayana in his own self, who sees all creatures in all conditions in his own soul, is never lost.

He who uses knowledge to transcend all kinds of pain born of error and stupor is never touched by evil when he comes into contact with other creatures. Such a man, his understanding being fully displayed, never finds fault with the course of conduct that prevails in the world.

One conversant with mukti says that the Paramatman is without beginning and without end; that it takes birth as all creatures; that it resides as a witness in the Jivatman; that it is inactive, and without form. Only he who encounters pain as a consequence of his own misdeeds, slays many beings to ward off that pain.

As a result of such sacrifices, the actors have to attain rebirths and have necessarily to perform countless actions. Such a man, blinded by error, regards what is in fact a source of grief to be bliss and is always unhappy even like a sick man who eats food that is unfitting. Such a man is pressed and crushed by his actions like a substance that is churned and pounded.

Bound by his karma, he is reborn, the order of his life being determined by the nature of his acts. Suffering many kinds of torture, he travels in a repeated round of rebirths even like a wheel that turns ceaselessly. You, on the other hand, have cut through all your bonds.

You abstain from all karma! Omniscient and the master of all things, achieve success and be liberated from all existent objects. In earlier times,

through control of their senses and the power of their tapasya, many have destroyed the bonds of karma and attained uninterrupted felicity.'"

CANTO 331

"Bhishma says, 'Narada said, "By listening to the blessed shastras that bring about peace, dispel grief, and produce happiness, one attains a pure understanding, and having attained it obtains high felicity.

A thousand causes of sorrow, a hundred causes of fear, from day to day, afflict one that is bereft of Buddhi, but not one that is wise and learned. Listen, therefore to these ancient narratives as I recite them to you, in order to ease your sorrows. If one can conquer one's understanding, one is sure to attain happiness.

By associating with the undesirable and dissociating from what is agreeable, only foolish men are subject to mental anguish of every kind. One should not grieve over things past, thinking of their merits. He who thinks of the past with attachment can never emancipate himself.

One should always try to discover the faults in things one has become attached to. One must regard such things as fraught with much evil. By doing so, one can be freed from them.

The man who laments for what is past fails to acquire either wealth or fame or punya. That which no longer exists cannot be obtained. When such things pass away, they do not return, however keenly one may regret their passing.

Creatures sometimes acquire and sometimes lose worldly objects. No man in this world can mourn all that happens to him. Dead or lost, he who grieves for what is past, becomes unhappy. Instead of just one sorrow, he experiences two.

With the help of their intelligence, those men see clearly who do not weep when they behold the course of life and death in the world. They

never have to shed tears at anything that takes place. When any such calamity, causing either physical or mental pain, which cannot be warded off by the best of efforts, occurs, one should stop reflecting on it with sorrowful regret.

Not to think about it, this is the medicine for sorrow. By thinking of it, one can never dispel it; on the other hand, by brooding on sorrow, one only increases it. Mental agony should be destroyed by wisdom; physical pain should be dispelled by medicines. This is the power of knowledge, gyana.

In such matters, one should not behave like men of little understanding. Youth, beauty, life, treasures, health and association with loved ones: all these are fleeting. One who is wise should never covet them.

One should not lament individually for a painful occurrence that concerns an entire community. Instead of indulging in grief, once stricken by it, one should seek to avert it and apply a remedy as soon as one sees the opportunity for doing so.

There is no doubt that in this life the measure of misery is far greater than that of joy. There is no doubt that all men show attachment for objects of the senses and that death is regarded as disagreeable.

The man who discards both joy and sorrow, is said to attain Brahman. When such a man leaves this world, sage men never grieve.

In spending wealth there is pain. In protecting it there is pain. In acquiring it there is pain. Hence, when one's riches are destroyed, one should not be sad.

Men of little understanding attain many levels of prosperity but fail to achieve contentment, and at last perish in misery. Men of wisdom, however, are always content. All are destined to end in dissolution.

All things that are high are fated to fall down and become low. Union is sure to end in disunion, and life is certain to end in death. Thirst is unquenchable. Contentment is the highest happiness. Hence, the wise regard contentment to be the most precious wealth.

One's allotted lifespan runs continually. It does not stop in its course for even a single moment. When one's body itself is not eternal, what other thing in this world can be considered so? Those who reflect on the nature of all creatures and conclude that it is beyond the mind's grasp, turn their attention to the highest path, and, when they advance on it, do not have to feel sorrow.

Like a tiger who seizes and flees with its prey, death seizes and makes off with the man who is engaged in unprofitable occupations and is unsatisfied with objects of desire and pleasure.

One should always seek to free oneself from sorrow. One should seek to dispel sorrow by acting joyfully, without indulging in grief, and having freed oneself from a particular sorrow, should act in such a manner as to ward off sadness by abstaining from all faults of conduct.

After enjoying sabda, sparsa, rupa, gandha and rasa, the rich and the poor alike find that these are hollow and futile. Before union with these, creatures are never subject to sorrow. One who is steadfast in one's original nature is never saddened when that union is ended.

One should control one's stomach and sexual appetite patiently. One should protect one's hands and feet with the help of the eye. One's eyes and ears and other senses should be protected by the mind. One's mind and speech should be governed by wisdom.

Casting off love and affection for those who are known and those unknown, one should conduct oneself with humility. Such a man is said to possess wisdom, and such a one surely finds bliss.

He who is pleased with his own Atman, devoted to yoga, who depends upon nothing beyond the self, who is without greed, and who conducts himself without depending on anything but his self, succeeds in attaining felicity."'

CANTO 332

"Bhishma says, 'Narada said, "When the vicissitudes of happiness and sorrow appear or disappear, these transitions cannot be avoided by either wisdom, policy or effort. Without allowing oneself to fall away from one's true nature, one should strive to protect one's own self.

He who takes such care and exertion, never perishes. Regarding the self greatly, one should always seek to rescue oneself from disease, decay, and death.

Mental and physical diseases afflict the body, like keen-pointed shafts shot from the bow by a mighty archer. The body of a man tormented by thirst, tortured by agony, perfectly helpless, and who wants to prolong his life, is dragged towards destruction.

Days and nights course ceaselessly, bearing away on their current the lives of all men. Like gushing rivers, these flow eternally without ever turning back.

The unending succession of the light and dark fortnights wastes away all mortals without ceasing for even a moment. Rising and setting, day after day, the sun, who is himself undecaying, continually stirs the joys and sorrows of all men in the cooking pot of time. The nights pass, taking with them all the unexpected good and bad that overtake man, that depend on karma and fate.

If the fruits of man's actions were not dependent on external circumstances, he would obtain everything he desires. Even men who are clever, intelligent, of restrained senses, if they do not act, they never succeed in earning any fruits.

Others, lacking in intelligence, without talents or accomplishments of any kind, and who are truly the lowest of men, even when they do not long for success, are seen to be crowned with the fruits of all their desires.

He who is always ready to injure all creatures, and who is engaged in deceiving all the world, is seen to bathe in happiness. One who sits idly obtains great prosperity, while another, exerting himself earnestly, is seen to miss desirable fruits that are almost within his reach.

Would you ascribe this to be one of the faults of man? The vital seed, originating in one's nature, with mere looking, passes from one to another. When placed in the womb, it sometimes produces an embryo and sometimes fails. When sexual union fails, it resembles a mango tree that puts forth a great many flowers without, however, producing a single fruit.

Often, one who desires progeny and who strives vigorously to achieve their objective by worshipping many Devas, fails to procreate. Another, fearing the birth of a child as one fears a poisonous snake, finds a long-lived son born unto him, seeming to be his own self come back to the stages through which he has himself passed.

Despondent men who ardently long for offspring, and at last beget children born after ten long months, after countless yagnas to many Devas and undergoing severe austerities, find them to be veritable wretches of their race. Others are blessed by progeny, obtained with the same blessed karmas and kriyas, who instantly inherit wealth and grain and other sources of enjoyment earned and stored by their sires.

In an act of sexual union between two persons of opposite sexes, the embryo is born in the womb, like a calamity afflicting the mother. Very soon after the suspension of the vital breaths, other physical forms possess that embodied creature whose gross body has been destroyed but whose deeds have all been performed with that gross body made of flesh and blood.

Upon the dissolution of the body, another body, just as destructible as the one that is destroyed, is ready for the burnt creature to migrate into even as one boat transfers its passengers into another. As a result of sexual union, a drop of the vital seed, which is inanimate, is placed in the womb.

I ask you, through whose or what care is the embryo kept alive? That part of the body into which the food that is eaten goes and where it is digested, is the place where the embryo resides, but it is not digested there. The fertilised egg does not reside in that part of the body where the food

eaten is digested. It is in the womb, enveloped in urine and faeces, one's sojourn is regulated by nature.

In the matter of where it lives and from where it escapes, the born creature is not a free agent. He is perfectly helpless in these. Some foetuses fall from the womb prematurely, as yet undeveloped. Some come out alive and continue to live. As regards some, after being quickened with life, they are destroyed while still in the womb in consequence of some other bodies being ready for them because of their past karma.

A man inserts the semen in an act of sexual union, and obtains from it a son or daughter. The offspring thus gained, when the time comes, performs a similar act. When a man's allotted life span draws to a close, the five primal elements of his body attain to the seventh and the ninth stages and then cease to be. The man himself does not change.

Without doubt, when afflicted by diseases, as small animals assailed by hunters, men lose their powers of standing and moving. Even if such men want to spend vast wealth, the best efforts of physicians cannot alleviate their pain. This occurs even when skilled and knowledgeable doctors, equipped with excellent medicines, are themselves afflicted by disease like hunted animals.

Even if men drink many astringents and all kinds of medicated ghee, they are broken by age and disease like trees by mighty tuskers. When animals and birds and beasts of prey and poor men are ailing, who treats them with medicines? Indeed, they are not even regarded as being ill. Like larger animals attacking smaller ones, sicknesses afflict even fierce kings with inexorable prowess and ferocity. All men, unable to even utter cries of pain, and overwhelmed by grief, are seen to be borne away along the powerful current into which they have been flung. Embodied creatures, even when seeking to vanquish nature, are unable to conquer it, despite using wealth, sovereign power, or the most austere penances.

If all attempts men make were crowned with success, then they would never be subject to decay, would never experience anything disagreeable, and would be crowned with success in all their desires.

All wish to attain ultimate superiority of position. To gratify this, they strive to their utmost. The result, however, does not fulfil their desires. Even men that are perfectly attentive and honest, brave and powerful, are seen to look up to men intoxicated with the arrogance of wealth and wine.

There are those whose calamities disappear before even these are marked or noticed by them. There are others who have no riches and yet are free from all miseries. A great disparity may be observed with respect to the fruits of karma. Some are seen to bear chariots on their shoulders, while some are seen to ride them.

All men desire wealth and prosperity. Only a few have chariots and elephants and horses in their processions. Some do not have a single spouse when their first-wedded ones are dead; while others have hundreds to call their own.

Misery and happiness exist side by side. Men have either one or the other. Behold, this is a subject of wonder. Do not be bewildered at such a sight.

Cast off both dharma and adharma. Cast off also truth and falsehood. Having discarded both, then cast off that which helps you to cast them off! O best of Rishis, I have now told you about that which brings great unhappiness. With these instructions, the Devas, once all human beings, succeeded in leaving the earth and became the inhabitants of swarga."

Hearing these words of Narada, the wise and serene Suka reflected upon the teachings he received, but could not arrive at any certainty of conclusion. He understood that one suffers great misery because of children and spouses, and that one has to take great pains to acquire scientific and Vedic knowledge.

He, therefore, asked himself, "What is that situation which is eternal and which is free from misery of every kind but in which there are great riches?" Reflecting for a moment upon the path ordained for him, Suka, who was well acquainted with the beginning and the end of all duties, resolved to attain to the highest end that is fraught with the greatest felicity.

He questioned himself, saying, "How shall I break free from all attachments, and become perfectly free and attain that excellent goal? How, indeed, shall I reach that from which there is no return to samsara, the ocean of diverse kinds of birth?

I desire that condition of existence from which there is no return. Casting off all kinds of attachments, with the help of the mind, I will attain that goal after reflection and arriving at certainty. I shall reach that realm in which my Atman will be at peace, and I will be able to dwell for eternity without being subject to decay or change.

It is, however, certain that this end cannot be attained without yoga. He who reaches the state of perfect knowledge and enlightenment does not experience attachments through base deeds.

I shall, therefore, have recourse to yoga, and casting off this body which is my present home, I will transform myself into wind and enter the sun, that mass of effulgence. When the Jivatman enters the sun's radiance, he no longer suffers like Soma who, with the gods, upon the exhaustion of merit, falls down on the earth and having once more acquired sufficient merit returns to heaven.

The moon is always seen to wane and then wax. Seeing this waning and waxing that continue repeatedly, I do not wish for a form of existence in which there are such changes. The sun heats up all the world with his fiery rays. His disc never diminishes. Remaining unchanged, he saps the energy from all things. Hence, I desire to immerse myself into the blazing sun. Having discarded my body in the solar realms, I shall live there, invincible, my inner soul freed from all fear. With the great Rishis I shall enter the unbearable energy of the sun.

I declare unto all creatures, to these trees, these elephants, these mountains, the earth herself, the cardinal points of the horizon, the sky, the Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Uragas and the Rakshasas, that I shall enter into all creatures in the world. Let all the Devas along with the Rishis behold the prowess of my yoga today!"

With these words, Suka made his intentions clear to the illustrious Narada. Obtaining his permission, Suka then went to his father's dwelling. Arriving in the presence of the Mahamuni, the high-souled and island-born Krishna, Suka circled round him and enquired after his wellbeing.

Hearing of Suka's intention, the Maharishi was greatly pleased. Addressing him, Vyasa said, "O son, beloved son, do stay a while here so that I may look upon you and gratify my eyes."

Suka, however, did not heed that request. Freed from attachment and all doubt, he began to think only of mukti, and focused himself on the journey ahead. He left his father and walked to the majestic breast of Kailasa inhabited by thousands of enlightened ascetics.'"

CANTO 333

"Bhishma says, 'Having ascended the peak of the mountain, O Bhaarata, the son of Vyasa sat down upon an even grassless place and retired from the dwellings of other creatures. In accordance with the shastras and the laws laid down, the ascetic, conversant with the sequence of the successive processes of yoga, held his soul first in one place and then in another, starting with his feet and proceeding upwards through all the limbs.

Soon after the sun rose, Suka sat humbly, with his face turned eastwards, in a yogic posture, hands and feet drawn in. Where he sat, prepared for yoga, there were no flocks of birds, no sound, and no sight that was repulsive or terrifying. He beheld his own Atman freed from all attachments. Beholding that highest of all things, he laughed joyfully.

He readied himself for yoga to attain to emancipation. Becoming a great master of yoga, he transcended the element of space. He then circled around Narada, the Devarishi, in pradakshina and told him about his intentions to address himself to the highest yoga.

Suka said, "I have succeeded in beholding the path of mukti, and I have addressed myself to it. O you, blessed with the wealth of tapasya. Splendid one, through your grace, I will attain to the highest goal!"'

Bhishma says, 'Having received the permission of Narada, Suka the son of the island-born Vyasa saluted the divine Rishi and once more set himself to yoga and entered Akasa. He ascended from Kailasa and soared into the sky.

Identifying himself with Vayu, the blessed Suka of unchanging ends flew across the sky. All creatures watched him as he traversed the skies

shining with the radiance of Garuda at the speed of the wind or thought itself.

Filled with the splendour of fire and the sun, Suka regarded the three worlds in their entirety as one homogenous Brahman, and travelled along that long path. Indeed, all creatures mobile and immobile cast their eyes upon him as he advanced with concentrated attention, and a tranquil, fearless soul. In accordance with the laws and their powers, all worshipped him with reverence.

The inhabitants of swarga rained showers of celestial flowers over him. On seeing him, all the tribes of Apsaras and Gandharvas were filled with wonder. The enlightened Rishis were equally amazed. And they asked themselves, "Who is this one that has attained to success by his tapasya? With his gaze withdrawn from his own body but turned upwards, he fills us all with joy with his glances!"

Of righteous soul and celebrated throughout the three worlds, Suka walked in silence, his face turned towards the east and his gaze directed towards the sun. As he went, he seemed to fill the entire sky with an all-pervading sound.

As they watched him approach, all the Apsaras were filled with awe and amazement. Led by Panchachuda and others, they looked at Suka with eyes wide with wonder. And they asked one another, "What deity is this one that has attained to such a high end? Without doubt, he comes here, freed from all attachments from all desires!"

Suka then went to the Malaya Mountains where Urvasi and Purvachitti dwelt. Both of them were awestruck as they beheld his tejas.

And they said, "How wondrous is the fixed attention to yoga of a Brahmana youth who was accustomed to the recitation and study of the Vedas. Soon, like the moon, he will traverse the whole sky.

He acquired this superior understanding through dutiful service and humble ministrations to his father. Of austere penances, he is firmly attached to his sire, and is much loved by him in return. Alas, why has he been dismissed by his inattentive father to tread a path from which there is no return?"

Hearing these words of Urvasi, and noting their significance, Suka, that foremost of all persons conversant with dharma, looked around him, and once again perceived the sky, all the earth with her mountains and forests, and her lakes and rivers. All the Devas and Devis folded their hands, paid

reverence to the son of the island-born Rishi, and gazed upon him with wonder and respect.

That foremost of all righteous men, Suka, addressed them with these words, "If my sire should follow me and repeatedly call after me by my name, do all of you together give him my answer. Moved by the affection that you all bear for me, fulfil my request!"

Hearing Suka's words, all the points of the horizon, all the forests, all the seas, all the rivers, and all the mountains, answered him from every side, saying, "We accept your command, O regenerate one! It shall be as you say. Thus do we answer the words spoken by the Rishi!"'

CANTO 334

"Bhishma says, 'Having spoken to all in this way, Suka, the twice-born Rishi of austere penances, cast off the four kinds of faults. Casting off also the eight kinds of tamas, he dismissed the five kinds of rajas. Radiant with intelligence, he discarded even the sattva guna. All this was marvellous.

He then dwelt in that eternal place devoid of attributes, freed from every indication—that is, in Brahman, blazing like a smokeless fire. Meteors began to shoot out in every direction. The points of the horizon seemed to be ablaze. The earth trembled. All those phenomena were awesome to behold.

The trees began to shed their branches and the mountains their peaks. Loud claps of thunder were heard that seemed to rive the Himavat Mountains. The sun seemed at that moment to be shorn of splendour. Fire refused to blaze forth.

The lakes and rivers and seas were all agitated. Vasava poured torrents of fragrant rain. A pure breeze, bearing the scent of unearthly perfumes, began to blow.

As he coursed through the sky, Suka saw the two beautiful peaks of Himavat and Meru. These were close to each other. One of them was made of gold and appeared yellow; the other was white, being made of silver. O Bhaarata, both were a hundred yojanas in height and in breadth. As he journeyed towards the north, Suka saw those two magnificent peaks.

He dashed fearlessly against the two crests that appeared joined to each other. Unable to bear the force, they were rent in two. That sight was breathtaking.

Suka pierced through those peaks; they were unable to stop his onward course. Watching, the inhabitants of swarga cried out loud. The Gandharvas and the Rishis, and others who dwelt in those mountains were divided in two as Suka passed through.

A deafening echo was heard everywhere at that moment, and exclamations of "Uttamam! Excellent!" He was adored by the Gandharvas and the Rishis, by hosts of Yakshas and Rakshasas, and all tribes of the Vidyadharas.

Rajan, the whole sky was strewn with celestial flowers showered from heaven at the very moment when Suka breached that impenetrable barrier! From a height, the righteous-souled Suka saw the beautiful and divine Mandakini flowing below through a region adorned by many flowering groves and forests. Delightful Apsaras played in these waters. Seeing Suka who was bodiless those naked sprites felt shame.

Learning that Suka had undertaken his great journey, Vyasa, filled with love, followed him along the same path. Meanwhile, Suka, who moved through the sky higher than the region of the wind, displayed his prowess of yoga and united himself with Brahman.

In a flash, adopting the subtle path of high yoga, Vyasa of austere penances, reached the spot from where Suka began his journey. Travelling the same way, Vyasa saw the peaks Suka had cloven in two as he passed through them.

When they encountered Vyasa, the Rishis began to describe to him his son's achievements. Vyasa, however, began to lament, loudly calling his son's name, causing the three worlds to resound with his cries.

Meanwhile, the righteous-souled Suka, who had entered the very elements, had become their soul and acquired omnipresence, answered his father with a resounding *Bhoh*. At this, the entire universe of mobile and immobile creatures echoed Suka's reply by crying *Bhoh*.

From that time to this, as if to answer Suka, whenever sounds are uttered in mountain-caves or on mountainsides, the echo comes back—*Bhoh*!

By casting off all the attributes of sound, and disappearing with his yoga-shakti, Suka attained to the highest condition. Seeing that glory and power of his son of immeasurable energy, Vyasa sat down and sorrowfully began to think of him.

Seeing him seated there, the Apsaras, who sported on the banks of the divine Mandakini, became restless, embarrassed and despondent. To hide their nakedness, some of them plunged into the stream, some entered the forests nearby, and some quickly gathered up their clothes. None of them had, however, betrayed any such signs of agitation at the sight of his son Suka.

Seeing these movements, the Rishi understood that his son had been liberated from all attachments, but that he, Vyasa himself, was not free from them. He was filled with both joy and shame. As Vyasa sat there, Siva, armed with Pinaka, surrounded by many Devas and Gandharvas, and adored by all the Maharishis, came to that place.

Consoling the island-born Rishi who was burning with grief because of his son, Mahadeva said to him. "You once prayed to me for a son with the energy of Agni, Jala, Vayu and Akasa. Generated by your tapasyas that very kind of son was born to you.

By my grace, he was pure and full of Brahmatejas. He has attained to the highest end, one that cannot be won by anyone who has not completely subdued his senses; nor can it be acquired by any of the Devas even. Why then, O Rishi, do you grieve for that son?

As long as the mountains exist, as long as the ocean lasts, so long will your son's fame endure undiminished. With my blessings, Maharishi, you will, in this world, perceive a shadowy form resembling your son, moving ever at your side, never deserting you even for a moment!"

Thus favoured by the illustrious Rudra himself, Vyasa saw the shadow of his son by his side. He returned from that place, now filled with joy.

I have now told you, Bharatarishabha, everything regarding the birth and life of Suka. Devarishi Narada and the great Vyasa repeatedly told all this to me in ancient days when asked about it. One who serenely listens to this sacred history dealing with the subject of mukti is certain to attain to that highest end.'"

CANTO 335

"Yudhishtira says, 'If a man be a grihasta or a brahmacharin, a vanaprastha or a sannyasi, and if he desires to achieve success, what deity should he adore? How can he with certainty attain swarga and mukti?

According to what laws should he perform the homa in honour of the Devas and the Pitris? What is the realm to which one goes when one is emancipated? What is the essence of mukti? What should one do so that, having attained swarga, one will not fall from there?

Who is the Deity of the deities? And who is the Pitri of the Pitris? Who is he that is superior to him? Who is the Deva of the Devas? Tell me all this, Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'Conversant with the art of questioning, O Anagha, you have asked me a question that that touches a deep mystery. Even if one were to strive for a hundred years, one would be unable to answer it using reason and the science of argumentation. Rajan, your question cannot be answered without the grace of Narayana, or of the highest gyana. Parantapa, though your subject is one of profound mystery, I shall yet expound it to you.

Let me narrate to you the ancient itihasa of the discourse between Narada and the Rishi Narayana. I heard it from my father that, in the Krita yuga, during the epoch of the Swayambhu Manu, the eternal Narayana, the Paramatman of the universe, took birth as the son of dharma in a quadruple form, as Nara, Narayana, Hari and the self-created Krishna.

Amongst them all, Narayana and Nara underwent the severest austerities by repairing to the Himalayan retreat of Badari, riding on their

golden chariots. Each of these were furnished with eight wheels, constituted of the five primal elements, and were beautiful indeed.

Those original lords of the world, who had been born as the sons of Dharma, became emaciated because of the tapasya they had undergone. On account of those austerities and their tejas, the very Devas could not look at them.

Only that deity whom they propitiated could behold them. Devoted to them, and compelled by an ardent desire to see them, Narada descended onto Gandhamadana from a peak of the lofty mountains of Meru, and wandered over all the world.

At last he swiftly repaired to Badari's asrama. Driven by curiosity he entered it at the hour that Nara and Narayana performed their daily kriyas.

He said to himself, "This is truly the retreat of that Being in whom are established all the worlds including the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Kinnaras and the Nagas!

There was only one form of this great Being before. That single rupa took birth in four forms for the expansion of the race sired by Dharma. How wonderful it is that dharma has thus been honoured by these four great Devas—Nara, Narayana, Hari and Krishna!

Krishna and Hari lived here in earlier times. Nara and Narayana now dwell here, engaged in tapasya to increase their punya. These two are the highest refuge of the universe.

What is the nature of their daily rites? They are the procreators of all living things, and the illustrious Lords of all beings. Filled with high intelligence, which Deva do these two worship? Who are those Pitris whom these two Pitris of all beings adore?"

Reflecting on this, filled with devotion towards Narayana, Narada suddenly appeared before the two Devas. After they had finished worshipping their Devas and Rishis, they looked at the Devarishi who had arrived at their asrama. The latter was honoured with those eternal ceremonies that are ordained in the shastras.

Watching that extraordinary conduct of the two primordial Devas in themselves worshipping other Devas and Pitris, Rishi Narada took his seat there, pleased with the homage he had received. With a cheerful soul he gazed at Narayana, and bowing to Mahadeva he said:

"In the Vedas and the Puranas, in the angas and the subsidiary angas you are praised and revered; you are unborn and eternal. You are the

Creator. You are the Mother of the universe. You are the embodiment of immortality and the foremost of all things.

The past and the future, indeed, the entire universe is founded in you! Men in all the four asramas of life ceaselessly propitiate you who have many forms.

You are the father and the mother and the eternal guru of the universe. Who is that Deva or that Pitri for whom you are performing yagnas today?"

The holy one replied, "This is one subject about which nothing should be said. It is an ancient mystery. But your devotion to me is great. Hence, O Dvija, I will openly discourse to you about it.

That which is minute, which is inconceivable, unmanifest, immobile, durable, without any connection with the senses and the objects of the senses, that which is dissociated from the five elements—that is called the Soul that dwells in all existent creatures. That is known by the name Kshetrajna.

It transcends the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, and is regarded as Purusha in the shastras. From him has come the unmanifest that possesses the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Though really Avyakta, unmanifest, she is the indestructible Prakriti and dwells in all manifest forms. Know that she is the source from which we two have sprung. That all-pervading Soul, which is made up of all existent and non-existent things, is adored by us.

Even he is what we worship in all the rites that we perform in honour of the Devas and the Pitris. There is no higher Deva or Pitri than he. O regenerate one, He should be known as our Atman. It is him that we worship.

He has propagated the path of dharma followed by men. It is his law that we should duly perform all the necessary kriyas for the Devas and the Pitris.

Brahma, Sthanu, Manu, Daksha, Bhrigu, Dharma, Yama, Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vasishta, Paramesthi, Vivaswat, Soma, he that has been called Kardama, Krodha, Avak, and Krita: these twenty-one Prajapatis were the firstborn.

All of them obeyed the eternal law of Narayana. Those most evolved of all men observed every rite ordained to honour the Devas and the Pitris, in detail, and achieved what they sought.

The divinities of heaven bow to that Supreme Deity and through his grace they attain to those fruits he ordains for them. This is the established conclusion of the shastras: those men are liberated who, freed from these seventeen attributes—the five senses of knowledge, the five senses of action, the five vital breaths, and Manas and Buddhi—have cast off all karma and are divested of the fifteen elements which constitute the sthula sarira, the gross body.

That which the emancipated attain to as their ultimate end is called Kshetrajna. In the shastras he is regarded both possessing and also free from all the gunas. He can be grasped by knowledge alone.

We two have sprung from him. Knowing him in that way, we adore that eternal Soul of all things. The Vedas and all the asramas of life, despite their differences of opinion, are all devoted to him.

Quick to be moved to grace, he grants them noble and blessed aims. In this world, those who are filled with his spirit, and are fully and absolutely devoted to him, attain to higher ends, for they succeed in entering and becoming merged in him.

Narada, I have now revealed to you this exalted mystery, as I am moved by the love I bear for you because of your devotion to me. Indeed, it is on account of this devotion that you have succeeded in listening to my discourse!'”

CANTO 336

"Bhishma says, 'Thus addressed by Narayana, foremost of all beings, Narada, foremost of men, spoke again to Narayana for the good of the world.

Narada said, "O Swayambhu, let that objective be achieved for which you have taken birth in four forms in the house of Dharma! I will now repair to Sweta dwipa, the White Island, to gaze upon your true nature.

I always worship my elders. I have never divulged the secrets of others and I have studied the Vedas carefully. I have undergone austere tapasya. I have never lied. As ordained in the shastras, I have always protected the four varnas.

I have always behaved in the same manner towards friends and enemies. Wholly and steadfastly devoted to him, I ceaselessly adore the Paramatman, that first among Devas. Having cleansed my soul by these meritorious deeds, why will I not succeed in seeing that Infinite Lord of the universe?"

Hearing these words of Paramesthi's son, Narayana, protector of the shastras, gave him leave to go. Before dismissing him, he worshipped the Devarishi with those rites and rituals laid down in the scriptures. Narada also offered due adoration to the Rishi Narayana. After this worship had been mutually given and received, Narada left that place.

Blessed with high yogic powers, Narada soared into the sky and reached the peak of the mountains of Meru. Going to a secluded place there, the Maharishi rested for a while.

He then gazed towards the north-west and saw a magnificent sight there. Towards the north, in the ocean of milk, there is a great island named Sweta

dwipa, the White Island. The learned say that its distance from the mountains of Meru is more than thirty-two thousand yojanas.

The inhabitants of that realm have no senses. They live without eating any kind of food. Their eyes do not blink. They always exude wonderful fragrances perfumes. Their complexions are white. They are unblemished by any trace of sin. They scorch the eyes of those sinners that look at them.

Their bones and bodies are as hard as the vajra. They regard honour and dishonour equally. They appear to be divine. All of them bear auspicious marks and have great strength.

Their heads appear like parasols. Their voices are deep like the roar of thunderclouds. Each of them has four Mushkas. The soles of their feet are marked by hundreds of lines.

They have sixty large white teeth and eight smaller ones. They have many tongues. With those tongues they seem to lick the very sun, which faces every direction. Indeed, they seem capable of devouring that deity from whom the entire universe has emerged, the Vedas, the Devas and the serene Munis.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Pitamaha, you have said that those beings have no senses, that they do not eat anything, that their eyes do not blink, and that they always exude fragrant aromas.

I ask you, how were they born? What is the nature of their superior goal? Bharatarishabha, are the signs of those emancipated men the same as those by which all the inhabitants of the White Island are distinguished?

Dispel my doubts. I feel deeply curious. You are the repository of all histories and discourses. As for us, we depend entirely on you; we look to you for knowledge and instruction.'

Bhishma continues, 'Rajan, this story, which I heard from my father, is long. I will tell it to you. Indeed, it is regarded as the essence of all other narratives.

In ancient times, there lived a king on earth by the name of Uparichara. He was known to be the friend of Indra of the Devas. He was devoted to Narayana, who is also known as Hari.

He was observant of all the duties laid down in the shastras. Devoted to his father, he was always obedient and ready for any worthy action. He became the sovereign of the world on account of a boon he received from Narayana.

Following the ancient sattvata ritual established by Surya himself, King Uparichara worshipped Narayana, the Devadeva, and when this worship was over he adored the Pitris of the universe. After worshipping the Pitris, he worshipped the Brahmanas. He then divided the offerings among those who were dependent on him. With what remained after serving them, the king satisfied his own hunger.

Devoted to truth, Uparichara abstained from injuring any creature. With his whole soul, the king was devoted to Janardana, who is without beginning, middle and end, who is the Creator of the universe, and who does not decay or die.

Seeing Parantapa's devotion to him, Narayana shared his throne and palace with him. The king regarded his kingdom and wealth and spouses and animals as gifts from Narayana. He in turn offered up all his possessions to that great God.

Adopting the Sattvata ritual, King Uparichara would perform all his yagnas and ceremonies, both optional and obligatory, with the fullest concentration. In his palace, many great Brahmanas, well conversant with the Pancharatra ritual, would eat before all others the food offered to Narayana.

That Parantapa ruled his kingdom righteously; no untruth ever passed his lips and no wicked thought ever entered his mind. He never committed even the slightest sin.

The seven celebrated Saptarishis—Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishta of great tejas, who came to be known as the Chitra-sikhandins—uniting together on Meru, proclaimed an excellent treatise on the duties consistent with the four Vedas.

That discourse was uttered by seven mouths, and represent the best compendium of human duties and observances. Known by the name of Chitra-sikhandins, those seven Rishis constitute the seven Pravriti elements of Mahat, Ahamkara, and the rest, and Swayambhu Manu, who is the eighth in the enumeration, is the original Prakriti.

These eight uphold the universe, and it was these eight that promulgated this treatise. With their senses and minds under perfect control, and ever devoted to yoga, these eight Munis, with concentrated souls, know fully the past, the present and the future, and are devoted to the religion of truth.

Reflecting in their minds, that this is good, this is Brahman, this is valuable, those Rishis created the worlds, and the science of morality and

duty that governs those worlds. In that treatise the authors discoursed on dharma, artha, kama and mukti.

In it they also laid down the various restrictions and limitations intended for Bhumi and also for swarga. They composed that discourse after having worshipped, along with many other Rishis, the puissant and illustrious Narayana, called also Hari, with tapasya for a thousand celestial years.

Gratified with their penances and worship, Narayana commanded Saraswati, the goddess of learning and speech, to enter into the bodies of those Rishis. For the good of the worlds, the Devi did as she was told. As a result of her entering into the Rishis, rich in penances, they were able to compose those most excellent treatises marked by the harmony of words, good sense and strong reasoning.

Having composed that treatise sanctified by Pranava, the syllable AUM, the Rishis first recited it to Narayana, who was delighted. The foremost of all Beings then addressed those Rishis in a divine voice and said, "These hundred thousand verses that you have composed are excellent. This treatise of a hundred thousand verses you have composed is exceptional.

The dharma and kriyas of all the worlds will flow from this your work! In complete accordance with the four Vedas, the Yajuses, the Samans, and the Atharvans of Angiras, this treatise will be an authority with respect to both Pravritti and Nivritti in all the worlds.

In accordance with the shastras I have created Brahman from the attribute of grace, Rudra from my wrath, and yourselves, O Brahmanas, as representing the Pravriti-elements, of Mahat, Ahamkara, and the rest; Surya and Chandramas, Vayu and Prithvi, Jala and Agni, all the stars and planets and constellations, all creatures, and utterers of Brahma, the Vedas, all live and act in their respective spheres and all are respected as authorities.

This treatise you have composed shall be regarded by all men as a work of the highest authority. This is my command.

Guided by this treatise, Swayambhu Manu himself will declare to the world its course of duties and observances. When Usanas and Brihaspati arise, they also will promulgate their respective treatises on dharma, guided by and quoting from this your treatise.

After the promulgation of this treatise by Manu and of that by Usanas, and also by Brihaspati, this science composed by you will be acquired by King Vasu, also known as Uparichara. Indeed, O Dvijottamas, that king will acquire knowledge of this your work from Brihaspati.

That king, filled with all good thoughts, will become devoted to me. Guided by this treatise, he will perform all his karmas and kriyas. Verily, this treatise composed by you will be the best of all treatises on dharma. This excellent treatise, rich in wondrous mysteries, is fraught with instructions to acquire both material and spiritual punya.

As a result of this treatise, you will be the progenitor of a vast race. King Uparichara also will become great and prosperous. Upon his death, however, this eternal work will disappear from the world."

Having said these words to all those Rishis, the invisible Narayana left them and went to an unknown place. Then those sires of the world, those Rishis that bestowed their thoughts on the ends pursued by the world, duly promulgated that treatise which is the eternal origin of all kriya and karma.

Subsequently, when Brihaspati was born in Angiras's race in the Krita yuga, those seven Rishis gave him the task of promulgating their treatise which was consistent with the Upanishads and the Vedangas. These upholders of the universe and the first promulgators of duties and religious observances went forth to their chosen place, having resolved to devote themselves to tapasya.'"

CANTO 337

"Bhishma says, 'With the end of the great kalpa, when the divine Purohita Brihaspati was born in the race of Angiras, all the Devas were delighted. The words Brihat, Brahma and Mahat all mean the same. Brihaspati was so called because he possessed all these qualities. King Uparichara, otherwise called Vasu, became a disciple of Brihaspati and soon became the foremost of his sishyas.

At the feet of his acharya, he then began to study the science composed by the seven Rishis known as Chitra-sikhandins. With his soul purified by tapasya and other rituals, he ruled the earth like Indra ruling swarga.

The illustrious king performed an Aswamedha yagna in which his guru Brihaspati became the Hota. The sons of Prajapati themselves, Ekata Dwita, and Trita, became the Sadasyas in that yagna.

There were others also who became Sadasyas at that sacrifice: Dhanusha, Raivya, Arvavasu, Parvavasu, the Rishi Medhatithi, the great Rishi Tandya, the blessed Rishi Santi otherwise called Vedasiras, Maharishi Kapila, who was the father of Salihotra, the first kalpa, Tittiri the elder brother of Vaisampayana, Kanwa and Devahotra, in all sixteen.

Rajan, all the required samagrahis were gathered for that great yagna. No animals were slaughtered. The king had so ordained it. He was full of compassion. Pure and tolerant of mind, he had discarded all desires, and knew all the rituals and ceremonies. The produce of the forests were used in that yagna.

Hari, the god of devas, was gratified with the king on account of that yagna. Hidden from everyone else, Narayana showed himself to his bhakta. Accepting his share, by imbibing its scent, he himself took up the Purodasa.

Unseen by anyone, Narayana took the offerings. Brihaspati was angered by this. Seizing the ladle he hurled it violently at the sky, and shed tears in wrath.

Addressing King Uparichara, he said, “Here, I place this as Narayana’s share of the sacrificial offerings. Without doubt, he shall take it before my eyes.”’

Yudhishtira says, ‘At the great sacrifice of Uparichara, all the Devas appeared openly to take their share of the arghya and were seen by all. Why is it that only Hari acted otherwise by taking his share without being seen?’

Bhishma continues, ‘When Brihaspati was enraged, the great King Vasu and all his Sadasyas sought to pacify the Maharishi. Calmly they addressed Brihaspati, saying, “It befits you not to give way to anger.

In this Krita you, your wrath should not characterise anyone. The great God, for whom you set aside the share of the sacrificial offerings, is himself free from anger. O Brihaspati, he cannot be seen either by us or by you! Only he can behold him to whom He extends his grace.”

Then the Rishis Ekata, Dwita and Trita, who knew the science of morality and duties compiled by the seven sages, addressed that assembly and began the following narration.

“We are the sons of Brahma, begotten by a command of his will, not in the ordinary way. Once upon a time we went to the north in order to obtain that which is for our highest good. Having undergone tapasya for thousands of years and acquired great punya, we again stood on only one foot like fixed stakes of wood.

The land where we performed tapasya lies to the north of the mountains of Meru and on the shores of the ocean of milk. Our goal was to behold the divine Narayana in his own form.

Upon the completion of our penances and after we had performed the final ablutions, we heard a divine voice, at once deep as that of the clouds and exceedingly sweet, filling our hearts with rapture.

The voice said, ‘You Brahmanas have performed these penances with cheerful souls. Devoted to Narayana, you seek to know how you may succeed in beholding that God of great puissance!

On the northern shores of the ocean of milk there is a magnificent island called Sweta dwipa, White Island. The complexions of the men that inhabit that island are as white as the rays of the moon and they are devoted to Narayana.

Worshippers of that foremost of all Beings, they are devoted to him with all their souls. They all enter that eternal and illustrious deity of a thousand rays.

They are without any senses. They do not live on any kind of food. Their eyes do not blink. Their bodies are fragrant. Indeed, the inhabitants of the White Island worship only one God. Rishis, go there, for there I have revealed myself!'

Hearing these divine words, all of us went forth to the island described to us. Eagerly desiring to behold him, our hearts full of him, at last we arrived at that great island called Sweta dwipa.

There, we could see nothing. Indeed, our vision was blinded by the lustre of the Devadeva and so we could not see him. At this, the idea, due to the grace of the great God himself, arose in our minds—that one that had not undergone sufficient penances could not swiftly behold Narayana.

Under the influence of this idea, we once more set ourselves to the practice of rigorous tapasya, suited to the time and place, for a hundred years. Upon the completion of our vratas, we saw many men of auspicious features.

All of them were white like the moon with every mark of auspiciousness. Their hands were always joined in prayer. The faces of some were turned towards the north and of some towards the east. They were engaged in silently meditating upon the Brahman.

The japa performed by those Mahatmans was a silent, mental one with an audible recitation of any mantras. As a result of their minds and hearts being entirely focused upon him, Hari was gratified.

Maharishi, the effulgence emitted by each of those men resembled the splendours that Surya assumes at the time of the Mahapralaya, the dissolution of the universe. Indeed, we thought that that island was the home of all light. All the inhabitants were equal in energy. There was no superiority or inferiority among them.

Suddenly, we saw a light burning with the concentrated effulgence of a thousand suns. Together, the inhabitants ran joyously towards that light, with hands joined in reverence, uttering the one word Namas, we bow to you.

We then heard a booming sound made by them in unison. It seemed that those men were engaged in offering up a sacrifice to the great God.

We ourselves suddenly lost our senses by his unbearable tejas. Deprived of sight and strength and all our senses, we could not see or feel anything. We only heard a thundering voice in which those gathered there spoke as one.

They said, 'Victory to you, O you of eyes like lotus-petals! Salutations to thee, O Creator of the universe! Salutations to you, Hrishikesa, foremost of Beings, you who are the First-born!'

This is what we heard, uttered distinctly and in agreement with the laws of pronunciation. A pure and redolent breeze blew, bearing perfumes of divine flowers, and of certain herbs and plants germane to the occasion.

Those men, suffused with great devotion, with hearts full of reverence, conversant with the ordinances laid down in the Pancharatra, were worshipping Narayana with thought, words and action. Without doubt, Hari appeared in that place from where the sound they made arose.

Bewildered by his illusion, we could not see him. After the breeze had subsided and the yagna ended, our hearts were troubled with anxiety, O foremost of Angira's vamsa.

As we stood among those thousands of men, all of purest descent, no one honoured us with a glance or nod. Those ascetics, joyful and pious, all practising the Brahmatva, did not show any kind of feeling for us.

We were exceedingly weary. Our tapasya had emaciated us. At that moment, a divine Being spoke to us from the sky, saying, 'These white men, who are without their outer senses, have the capacity to behold Narayana.

Only those Dvijottamas whom these white men honour with their glances become competent to gaze upon the great God. Munis, go now to the place from where you have come.

That great deity cannot be perceived by one that is devoid of bhakti. Incapable of being seen because of his dazzling radiance, that illustrious deity can be beheld only by men who, in the course of long ages, succeed in devoting themselves only and absolutely to him.

You have a great duty to perform. After the passing of this, the Krita yuga, when the Treta yuga comes in the course of the Vivaswat cycle, a great disaster will engulf the worlds. O Munis, you will then have to join with the Devas to dispel that calamity.'

Having heard these wonderful words that were sweet as amrita, we soon returned to the place we desired, through the power of that great Deity.

When we, with the help of even such austere tapasya and arghya, have failed to catch a glimpse of him, how can you expect to see him so easily?

Narayana is the Great Being, he is the Creator of the universe. He is adorned in sacrifices with offerings of ghee and other special food accompanied by the chanting of Vedic mantras. He has no beginning and no end. He is Avyakta. Both the Devas and the Danavas worship him."

Encouraged by these words spoken by Ekata and commended by his companions, Dwita and Trita, and entreated by the other Sadasyas, the high-minded Brihaspati brought that sacrifice to completion after duly offering the accustomed adorations to the Devas. King Uparichara also completed his mahayagna and began to rule his subjects righteously.

At last, casting off his body, he ascended into swarga. After some time, through the curse of the Brahmanas, he fell from those blissful realms and sank deep into the bowels of the earth.

O tiger among monarchs, King Vasu was always devoted to the true dharma. Although sunk deep in the bowels of the earth, his devotion to virtue did not abate. Ever devoted to Narayana, and ever reciting sacred mantras to him, he once more ascended to heaven through Narayana's grace.

Rising from the bowels of the earth, because of attaining that highest end, King Vasu went to a place even higher than Brahmaloka, dominion of Brahma himself.'"

CANTO 338

"Yudhishtira says, 'Despite being wholly devoted to Narayana, why did the great King Vasu fall from swarga and why did he have to sink below the surface of Bhumi?'

Bhishma says, 'O Bhaarata, in this regard listen to the old narrative of a discourse between the Rishis and the Devas. Long ago, the Devas addressed many foremost of Brahmanas and told them that yagnas should be performed by offering up Ajas as dakshina. Aja should be understood as the goat and no other animal.

The Rishis said, "The Vedic Sruti declares that in sacrifices the offerings should consist of seeds of vegetables. Seeds are called ajas. It befits you not to kill goats. The slaughter of animals is not prescribed in the dharma of the virtuous. This, again, is the Krita yuga. How can animals be killed in this age of righteousness?"'

Bhishma continues, 'While this discourse was underway between the Rishis and the Devas, King Vasu came that way. Abounding in prosperity, the king moved through the sky accompanied by his soldiers, chariots and animals.

Beholding the king arriving there, the Brahmanas said to the Devas, "This one will remove our doubts. He performs sacrifices. He is liberal in making gifts. He always seeks the good of all creatures. How could the great Vasu speak otherwise?"

Having thus spoken to each other, the Devas and the Rishis approached King Vasu and asked him, "Rajan, with what should one conduct yagnas? Should one sacrifice with the goat or with herbs and plants? Dispel our doubts. We regard you as our judge in this matter."

Thus addressed, Vasu humbly joined his hands and said to them, “Tell me truly, O supreme Brahmanas, what in your opinion is entertained by you in this matter?”

The Rishis said, “In our understanding, yagnas should be performed with grain. The Devas, however, maintain that sacrifices should be done using animals. You be our judge and tell us which of view is correct.”’

Bhishma continues, ‘Learning the position of the Devas on this matter, Vasu, moved by a partiality for them, said that yagnas should be performed with animals. All the Rishis, blazing with the splendour of the sun, were enraged at this choice.

To Vasu, who was seated on his chariot and who had wrongly taken up for the Devas, they said, “Since you have mistakenly taken the side of the Devas, you will fall from heaven. From this day on, you will lose the power of journeying through the sky. Through our curse you will sink deep below the surface of the earth.”

After the Rishis had spoken, King Uparichara immediately plunged down into an abyss. But at the command of Narayana, Vasu retained his memory. To his good fortune, pained at the curse pronounced on him by the Brahmanas, the Devas began to think how that curse might be neutralised.

They said, “This high-souled king has been cursed for our sake. We, the inhabitants of heaven, must unite for his good in return for what he has done for us.” Having swiftly reflected and decided thus, the Devas went to where King Uparichara was.

Arriving in his presence, they said to him, “You are devoted to Narayana, the great God of the Brahmanas. He, the ruler of both the Devas and the Asuras, is pleased with you and will save you from the curse. It is proper, however, that the high-souled Brahmanas should be honoured. Rajan, their penances must necessarily fructify. Indeed, you have already plunged from the sky to the earth. We desire, however, to favour you in one respect. O Anagha, as long as you live in this abyss, you will receive food and sustenance through our boon.

Those streaks of ghee which Brahmanas pour in yagnas with concentrated minds, accompanied by sacred mantras, and known as Vasudhara, shall be yours, throughout blessings. Indeed, neither weakness nor distress will touch you.

While dwelling in this hollow, neither hunger nor thirst will afflict you for you will drink those streams of ghrita called Vasudhara. Your energy

will continue undiminished. As a consequence, the boon that we grant you, Narayana will be pleased with you, and he will bear you to the realm of Brahma!"

Having granted these boons to the king, the Devas and all those Tapodhana Rishis returned to their respective abodes. Then Vasu began to adore the Creator of the universe and to silently recite the sacred mantras that had come forth from Narayana's mouth in ancient days.

Parantapa, though dwelling in a pit of the earth, the king still worshipped Hari, the Lord of all the gods, in the five celebrated yagnas that are performed five times every day. As a result of these adorations, Narayana was pleased with him who had controlled his senses, and had shown himself to be entirely devoted to him, by relying upon him as his sole refuge.

The illustrious Vishnu, that giver of boons, addressed that foremost of birds, Garuda of great speed, who waited upon him as his servant. "O excellent and most blest Garuda, listen to what I say. There lives a great king by the name of Vasu who is of righteous soul and rigid vows. Through the wrath of the Brahmanas, he has fallen into an abyss of the earth.

The Brahmanas have been sufficiently honoured, since their curse has fructified. Go now to that king. At my command, Garuda, go to King Uparichara who now dwells in the depths of patala and can no more course through the sky. Go, Garuda, and swiftly raise him up."

Hearing Vishnu's words, Garuda spread his wings and going like the wind, entered the pit in which King Vasu was. He lifted up the king in his beak, soared into the sky and there he released Vasu. At that moment, King Uparichara once more acquired his divine form and re-entered the realm of Brahma.

Son of Kunti, in this manner did that great king first plunge down into the depths of the earth through the curse of the Brahmanas for a fault of speech, and once more ascend to swarga at the command of Vishnu.

Uparichara devoutly worshipped only the puissant Lord Hari, that foremost of all Beings. It was for this reverence that the king was freed from the curse of the Brahmanas and regained the felicitous regions of Brahmaloka.'

Bhishma continues, 'I have now told you everything regarding the origin of the spiritual sons of Brahma. Listen to me with undivided

attention, for I will now narrate to you how Devarishi Narada went to the White Island in ancient times.'"

CANTO 339

"Bhishma says, 'Arriving at Sweta dwipa, the illustrious Rishi saw those same white men possessed of lunar splendour of whom I have already spoken to you. Worshipped by them, the Rishi venerated them in return by bowing his head and revering them in his mind.

Wishing to behold Narayana, he began to live there, engaged in the silent recitation of sacred mantras, and observing the most difficult vratas. With dhyana, the regenerate Rishi, arms upraised, stood in yoga, and recited this mantra to the Lord of the universe, he, who is both saguna, the essence of attributes, and nirguna, without all attributes.

Narada said,[1] "Salutations to you, O God of gods, you who are free from all deeds! You are he who is nirguna, who is the Anudarshin of all the worlds, who is called Kshetrajna, who is the foremost of all Beings, who is infinite, who is called Purusha, who is the great Purusha, who is the foremost of all Purushas, who is the soul of the three attributes, who is called the Foremost, who is amrita, nectar, who is called Immortal, who is called Anantasesha, who is Akasa, space,

You are he who is without beginning, who is both Vyakta, manifest, and Avyakta, unmanifest, as existing and not-existent things, who is said to have his home in Satya, who is the foremost among the Devas; Narayana, who is the giver of wealth, the fruits of one's actions, who is identified with Daksha and other Lords of the creation, who is the Aswattha and other mighty trees, who is the four-headed Brahma, who is the Lord of all created Beings, who is the Lord of speech.

You are he who is the Lord of the universe, Indra, who is the all-pervading Atman, who is the sun, who is prana, the breath, who is the Lord

of the waters, Varuna, who is the Emperor or the king, who can be identified with the Lokapalas of the several points of the horizon, who is the refuge of the universe at the time of the final dissolution.

You are he who is concealed, who is the giver of the Vedas unto Brahma, who is associated with the sacrifices and Vedic studies achieved by Brahmanas with the help of their bodies, who is linked with the four principal orders of the Devas, who is every one of those orders, who shines radiantly with great effulgence, unto whom is offered the seven largest arghya along with the Gayatri and other mantras.

You are he who is Yama, who is Chitragupta and the other attendants of Yama, who is the wife of Yama, who is the Tushita order of the Devas, who is that other order called Mahatushita, the universal grinder, death, who is desire, and all diseases that have been created to ensure death.

You are he who is health and freedom from disease, who is subject to desire and passions, who is free from the influence of desire and passions, who is infinite as exhibited in species and forms, who is he that is chastised, who is he that is the chastiser,

You are he who is all the minor sacrifices of Agnihotra and others, who is all the principal sacrifices, those like Brahma, who is all the Ritvijas, who is the origin of all Vedic yagnas, who is fire, the very heart of all sacrifices, the mantras uttered in them, who is he who is revered in yagnas, who takes those shares of the arghya offered to him, who is the embodiment of the five sacrifices.

You are he who is the maker of the five divisions of time, day, night, month, season and year, who cannot be understood except by those shastras called Pancharatra, who fears nothing, who is unvanquished, who is only the mind, without a form, who is known only by name, who is the Lord of Brahma himself, who has completed all the vows and rituals told of in the Vedas.

You are he who is the Hamsa, bearer of the staff, who is the Paramahamsa without the staff, who is the foremost of all yagnas, who is Samkhya yoga, who is the embodiment of the Samkhya philosophy, who dwells in all Jivas, who lives in every heart, who resides in every sense, who floats on the ocean, who lives in the Vedas, who lies on the lotus as the egg from which the universe has sprung, who is the Lord of the universe, and whose forces spread far and wide to protect his devotees.

You take birth as all creatures. You are the origin of the universe. Your mouth is fire. You are that fire which courses through the waters of the ocean, gushing out from a horse's head. You are the sanctified ghee that is poured into the sacrificial fire. You are the charioteer, the fire and heat that charges the body and causes it to live and grow.

You are Vashat. You are the syllable AUM. You are Tapasya. You are Manas. You are Chandramas. You purify the sacrificial ghrita. You are Surya. You are the Dikgajas that are stationed at the four cardinal points of the horizon. You illuminate the cardinal points. You also brighten the subsidiary points. You are the Hayagriva and the Badava mukha.

You are the first three mantras of the Rig Veda. You are the protector of the varnas—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. You are the five fires beginning with Garhapatya. You are he who has three times lit Nachi, the sacrificial fire.

You are the refuge of the six angas of the Vedas. You are the foremost of those Brahmanas that are employed to recite the Samans in yagnas and kriyas. You are Pragjyotisha, and you are he who sings the first Saman.

You keep the Vedic vratas and those observed by singers of the Samans. You are the embodiment of the Upanishad known as the Atharvasiras. You are he who is the subject of the five foremost scriptures, those that pertain to the worship of Surya, of Sakti, of Ganesa, of Siva and of Vishnu.

You are called the guru who subsists on only the froth of water. You are a Balakhilya. You are the embodiment of him who is steadfast in yoga. You are the epitome of the correct judgement of logic.

You are the beginning of the yugas, you the middle of the yugas and you are their end. You are Indra, Akhandala. You are the Rishis Prachinagarbha and Kausika. You are Purusthuta, You are Puruhuta, You are the Creator of the universe.

The universe has your form. Your movements are infinite. Your bodies are infinite; you are without end, without beginning and without middle. Your centre is unmanifest. Your end is unmanifest.

Your abode is in your vratas. You live in the ocean. Your home lies in fame, in penances, in self-restraint, in wealth, in knowledge, in grand achievements, and in everything belonging to the universe.

You are Vasudeva. You grant every wish. You are Hanuman who bore Rama on his shoulders. You are the mighty Aswamedha yagna. You receive your share of arghya in great sacrifices.

You bestow boons, joy and wealth. You are devoted to Hari. You are the subduer of the senses. You are vrata and kriya. You are mortifications, you are harsh mortifications, and you are the most relentless of mortifications.

You are he who observes vows and religious rites. You are free from all errors. You are a Brahmacharin. You were born in the womb of Prishni. From you have emerged all Vedic rites and karmas. You are unborn.

You pervade all things. Your eyes are on all things. You cannot be grasped by the senses. You are not subject to decay. You possess infinite power. Your body is inconceivably vast.

You are holy, beyond the ken of logic or argument. You are unknowable. You are the foremost of causes. You are the Creator of all creatures and you are their destroyer. You hold immense powers of maya. You are called Chitra-sikhandin.

You are the giver of boons. You take your share of the sacrificial offerings. You have acquired the punya of all yagnas. You are he who has been freed from all doubts. You are omnipresent. You have the form of a Brahmana. You are devoted to the Brahmanas.

The universe is your form. Your body is immeasurable. You are the greatest friend. You are kind to all your devotees. You are Brahmanyadeva, the great deity of the Brahmanas.

I am your devoted sishya. I seek to behold you. Salutations to you who are mukti.'"

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[1]This is the Vishnu Sahasranama stotra.

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"Bhishma says, 'Thus worshipped with names unknown to others, the Divine Narayana, having the universe for his form, revealed himself to the ascetic Narada.

His form, though purer than the moon, differed from the moon in some ways. He somewhat resembled a blazing fire in hue. The puissant Lord was somewhat of the form of Vishti.

He resembled in some respects the feathers of the parrot, and in some a mass of pure crystal. He appeared like a hill of antimony and also like a mass of pure gold.

His colour somewhat resembled the first formed coral, and was somewhat white. In some respects that complexion shone with the colour of gold and in some that of lapis lazuli. To some extent it radiated the blue of lapis lazuli and in some that of sapphire. In some respects it resembled the hue of the peacock's neck, and in some that of a string of pearls.

Bearing these diverse hues on his person, Narayana appeared before Narada. He had a thousand eyes and was splendid to behold. He had a hundred heads and a hundred feet. He had a thousand bellies and a thousand arms.

He was still inconceivable to the mind. With one of his mouths he uttered the syllable AUM and then the Gayatri following Pranava. With the mind under complete control, the great deity, called by the names of Hari and Narayana, by his other countless mouths, chanted many mantras from the Aranyaka of the four Vedas.

The Lord of all the Devas, he who is adorned in sacrifices, held a kamandalu in his hands, some awesome and sparkling jewels, a pair of

sandals, and a bundle of kusa grass, a deer-skin, a staff and a small blazing fire.

With blissful soul, that foremost of Brahmans, Narada, bowed before Narayana and revered him. And he, the foremost of all the Devas, spoke the following words to Narada who bowed low in worship.

Narayana said, "The great Rishis Ekata, Dwita and Trita came to this realm to behold me. However, their wish remained unfulfilled. Nor can anyone have a vision of me other than those who are devoted to me with their whole being.

As for you, you are truly the foremost of all men who love and worship me with all their souls. These are my forms, the best ones that I assume. These were born, O Dvija, in the house of Dharma. Worship them always, and perform those kriyas that are laid down in the Vedas regarding that worship.

O Brahmana, ask of me the boons you desire. I am gratified with you today, and I appear to you now in my universal form free from decay and death."

Narada said, "Since, Holy One, I have succeeded in seeing you today, I consider that I have instantly gained the fruits of all my penances, of my self-restraint, and of all my vratas and punya karmas.

This, indeed, is the highest boon you have granted me for you have revealed yourself to me today. Eternal Lord, holiest one, the universe is your eye. You are Narasimha. Your form is identifiable with everything. Narayana, you are mighty and infinite."'

Bhishma continues, 'Having thus shown himself unto Narada, the son of Paramesthi, Narayana said to that Rishi, "Narada, go hence, do not delay! My devotees with moonlike complexions are without any senses and do not live on any food. They are, again, all emancipated. With minds wholly fixed on me, men should think only of me.

Such worshippers will never face any obstacles. These men are all crowned with ascetic success and are highly blessed. In ancient times, they deeply revered me. They have been freed from rajas and tamas. Without doubt, they are proficient to merge into my self.

He is that One who cannot be seen with the eye, touched with the sense of touch, smelt with the sense of scent, and who is beyond the sense of taste, who is untouched by sattva, rajas and tamas, who pervades all things

and is the one witness of the universe, and who is described as the Soul of the entire universe.

He is that which is not annihilated upon the destruction of the bodies of all created things, who is unborn and unchangeable and eternal, who is freed from all attributes, who is indivisible and undivided; He who transcends the twenty-four tattvas, is regarded as the twenty-fifth.

He who is called by the name of Purusha, who is inactive, and who can only be grasped by true gyana, he into whom the foremost of the regenerate enter and attain mukti. He who is the eternal Paramatman is known by the name of Vasudeva.

Behold, O Narada, the greatness and puissance of Narayana. He is never touched by dharma and adharma, good and evil deeds.

Sattva, rajas and tamas are said to be the three original gunas. These dwell and act in the bodies of all creatures. The Jivatman, called Kshetrajna, enjoys and sanctions the action of these gunas. He, however, transcends them and they cannot touch him.

Freed from these attributes, he supports them and gets pleasure from them. Having created them himself, the Jivatman is above them all. Devarishi, when the hour of universal dissolution arrives, Bhumi, which is the refuge of the universe, disappears into Jala, Jala disappears into Agni, Agni into Vayu, Vayu disappears into Akasa, and Akasa into Manas.

Manas is a wondrous creature, and it disappears into Avyakta Prakriti. Unmanifest Prakriti disappears into inert Purusha. There is nothing higher than Purusha, which is eternal. There is nothing among mobile and immobile things in the universe that is immutable, other than Vasudeva, the eternal Purusha. Imbued with great power, Vasudeva is the Atman of all creatures.

Earth, wind, space, water and light are the Panchamahabhutas of great power. Merging together they form the body. Having subtle potency and invisible to all eyes, Vasudeva then enters the body, the combination of the five primal elements. This is called his birth, and taking birth.

He causes the body to move about and act. Without a combination of the five Mahabhutas, no body can be created. Without the entry of the Jiva into the body, the mind dwelling within it cannot cause it to move and act. He that enters the body is powerful and is called Jiva.

He is known also by other names, Sesha and Samkarshana. He that arises from that Samkarshana, by his own actions, Sanatkumara, and in

whom all creatures merge at the end of the yuga, is the mind of all creatures, and is called by the name Pradyumna.

From Pradyumna arises he who is the Creator, and who is both cause and effect. It is from this that the mobile and immobile universe originates. This one is called Aniruddha. He is otherwise called Isana, and he is manifest in all deeds.

That illustrious one, Vasudeva, who is called Kshetrajna, and who is without gunas, should be known as the puissant Samkarshana, when he takes birth as the Jiva. From Samkarshana arises Pradyumna who is called 'He that is born as Manas.' From Pradyumna is he who is Aniruddha. He is Chit, Consciousness, he is Iswara, Supreme Lord.

It is from me, that the entire mobile and immobile universe springs. It is from me, Narada, that the indestructible and destructible, the existent and the non-existent, flow. They that are devoted to me enter into me and become free.

I am known as Purusha. Without karma, I am the twenty-fifth tattva. Transcending attributes, I am complete and indivisible. I am above all pairs of contradictions and free from all attachments. Narada, this you will not understand.

You see me as having a body. If I so wish I can dissolve this form in a moment. I am the Paramatman and the Jagadguru, the preceptor of the universe. What you see is only maya, an illusion. I appear to be endowed with the attributes of all created things. You are not consummate enough to know me.

I have now revealed my fourfold form to you. I am, Narada, the doer, I am cause, and I am effect. I am the sum of all living creatures. All beings have their refuge in me. Do not think that you have seen the Kshetrajna.

I pervade all things. I am the Jivatman of all creatures. However, when their bodies are destroyed, I am not annihilated. Those blessed ascetics who become wholly devoted to me are liberated from the rajas and tamas gunas, and succeed in uniting with me.

He who is called Hiranyagarbha, Brahma who is the beginning of the world, who has four faces, who cannot be understood through Nirukta, who is an eternal deity, attends to my work. Rudra, born of my wrath, springs from my forehead.

Behold, the eleven Rudras protrude on the right side of my body. The twelve Adityas are on the left. Behold, the eight Vasus, those best of Devas,

are in my front, and look, the Aswini Kumaras, Nasatya and Dasra, the two divine physicians, are at my back.

Behold all the Prajapatis and the Saptarishis also in my body. Behold the Vedas, and all the countless yagnas, the amrita and all the medicinal plants and herbs, the tapasyas, and all the diverse vratas and kriyas. Behold the eight attributes of puissance, particularly those of sovereignty, all dwelling together in my body in their united and embodied forms.

Behold also Sree and Lakshmi, and Kirti, and Bhumi Devi with her mountainous undulations, and Saraswati, the mother of the Vedas, dwelling in me. Behold Dhruva, that foremost of luminaries ranging the skies, as also all the oceans and lakes and rivers dwelling in me. Behold the four most excellent Pitris in their embodied forms, and the three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, dwelling formlessly within me.

The actions performed to honour the Pitris are superior in punya to those done in honour of the Devas. I am the Pitri of both the Devas and the Pitris, and have existed before even them. Becoming the Badava mukha, I course through the western and the northern oceans, drinking sacrificial libations duly poured with mantras and arghya offered with devotion.

In ancient times, I created Brahma who adored me in sacrifices. Gratified with him, I granted him many excellent boons. I said to him that in the beginning of the kalpa he would be born to me as my son, and the sovereignty of all the worlds would be vested in him, and that diverse names would be bestowed on diverse objects that mark the creation of Ahamkara.

I also told him that none would ever violate the limits and boundaries he would assign for all creatures to observe and, further, that he would grant boons to those who asked him through yagnas and fitting deeds. I further assured him that he would be revered by all the Devas and Asuras, all the Rishis and Pitris, and the diverse beings of creation.

I also explained that I would always manifest myself to accomplish the ends of the Devas and that I would suffer myself to be commanded by him even as a son by his father. Gratified with Brahma, I granted these and other agreeable boons to him and once more embraced the course dictated by Nivritti.

The highest Nivritti is identical with the annihilation of all dharma and karma. By adopting Nivritti one should conduct oneself in complete felicity. Learned gurus, with firm convictions deduced from the truths of the

Samkhya philosophy, have spoken of me as Kapila full of gyana, dwelling within the effulgence of Surya, and concentrated in yoga.

In the Chchandas, I have been repeatedly addressed as Hiranyagarbha. In the yoga shastras, I have been spoken of as one who delights in yoga. I am eternal. Assuming a form that is manifest, I dwell now in swarga.

At the end of a thousand yugas I shall once more withdraw the universe into myself. Having withdrawn all beings, mobile and immobile into myself, I shall exist all alone with only gyana for my companion. After the passing of time I will once again create the universe, with the help of that knowledge.

My fourth form creates the indestructible Sesha. That Sesha is called by the name of Samkarshana. Samkarshana creates Pradyumna. From Pradyumna I am born as Aniruddha. Repeatedly, I create myself. From Aniruddha springs Brahma, from Aniruddha's navel. From Brahma are born all creatures.

Know that creation springs forth in this way repeatedly at the beginning of every kalpa. Creation and destruction succeed each other even as do sunrise and sunset. As time, infused with immeasurable energy, forcefully brings back the sun after his disappearance, in the same way I will assume the form of Varaha, the boar, and bring back the earth from her submergence, with her girdle of oceans, to her rightful place, for the benefit of all creatures.

I will then kill the proud powerful son of Diti, Hiranyaksha. For the good of the Devas, I will assume the form of Narasimha and slay Hiranyakasipu, the other son of Diti, who is a great destroyer of sacrifices.

Unto Virochana, the son of Prahlada, will be born a mighty son named Bali. That great Asura will be indestructible by the Devas, Asuras and Rakshasas. He will wrest sovereignty from Sakra.

After overthrowing the Lord of Sachi, when that Asura usurps the sovereignty of the three worlds, I will be born in Aditi's womb, by Kasyapa, as the twelfth Aditya. I will seize overlordship of the three worlds, restore it to Indra, and reinstate the Devas to their rightful places. As for Bali, that foremost of Danavas, who cannot be slain by all the Devas, I will thrust him down into patala.

In the Treta yuga, I will be born as Rama in the Bhrigu vamsa and annihilate the arrogant Kshatriyas, who boast of their strength and possessions. Towards the close of Treta and the beginning of Dwapara, I

shall be born as Rama, the son of Dasaratha, in the Ikshvaku vamsa, in the royal house of the sun.

In that yuga the two sons of Prajapati, the Rishis Ekata and Dwita, harmed by their brother Trita, must be born as vanaras, losing their beautiful human forms.

Those vanaras that are born in the Ekata and Dwita vamsa, will be suffused with strength and tejas, equalling Sakra himself in prowess. They will become my allies for accomplishing the work of the Devas. I shall then slay the awesome ruler of the Rakshasas, that wretch of Pulastya's vamsa, the ferocious Ravana, along with his progeny and his followers.

Towards the close of the Dwapara and beginning of the Kali yuga, I will reappear in the world, taking birth in the city of Mathura for the purpose of slaying Kamsa. There, after destroying countless Danavas who incense the Devas, I will live in Kusasthali in Dwaraka.

While dwelling in that city I will slay the Asura Naraka, the son of Bhumi, who will assail Aditi and other Danavas, Muru and Pitha. Slaying also the king of Pragjyotisha, I will transplant his delightful city filled with diverse kinds of wealth into Dwaraka.

I will then subjugate Maheswara and Mahasena, who will become fond of the Danava Bana, their devotee, and protect him and exert themselves vigorously for him. Next defeating Bana, the son of the Danava Bali, with a thousand arms, I will obliterate all the inhabitants of the airborne Danava city called Saubha.

I will next, O foremost of Brahmanas, cause the death of Kalayavana, a mighty Danava endowed with the energy of Gargya. A proud Asura will appear as a king in Girivraja, his name Jarasandha, and he will oppose all the other kings of the world. His death will be compassed by me through another guided by my intelligence.

I will next annihilate Sisupala at the sacrifice of Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, a yagna to which all the kings of the world will bring tribute. In some of these feats, only Arjuna, the son of Vasava, will be my equal. I will establish Yudhishtira with all his brothers in his ancestral kingdom.

The people will call Arjuna and me Nara-Narayana, when we put forth our might and consume an untold number of Kshatriyas, for the good of the world. Having lightened the burden of the earth according to our wishes, I will absorb all the principal sattvas, and Dwaraka, my beloved city, into my own self, recollecting my all-embracing knowledge.

In this way I will accomplish many marvellous feats and finally attain those blessed realms of felicity created by me and honoured by all Brahmanas. Appearing in the forms of Hamsa, a swan; Matsya, a fish; Kurma, a tortoise; Narasimha, a man-lion; and Vamana, a dwarf, I will then incarnate myself as Rama of Bhrigu's race, then as Rama, the son of Dasaratha, then as Krishna the son of the Sattvata vamsa, and finally as Kalki the Destroyer.

When the auditions in the Vedas disappeared from the world, I brought them back. The Vedas with their auditions were recreated by me in the Krita yuga. They have again vanished or may only be partially heard scattered in the Puranas.

Many of my finest appearances in the world have become events of the past. Having achieved the good of the worlds in those forms in which I appeared, they have merged into my own Prakriti. Brahma himself has not seen this form of mine, which you, O Narada, have seen today because of your absolute devotion to me. I have now told you everything, you who are so totally devoted to me; I have disclosed my past and future incarnations to you, together with all their mysteries."'

Bhishma continues, 'The holy and illustrious deity, of universal and immutable form, having said these words unto Narada, disappeared instantly. Narada, having obtained the high favour that he had sought, went swiftly to the hermitage called Badari, to have a vision of Nara and Narayana.

This great Upanishad, perfectly consistent with the four Vedas, in harmony with Samkhya yoga, named the Pancharatra scriptures, and recited by Narayana himself, was repeated by Narada in the presence of many in the abode of his father, Brahma, in exactly the same way in which Narayana, when he had revealed himself to him, had recited it, and which he had himself heard.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Was not Brahma, the Creator of all things, acquainted with this wonderful narrative of the glory and wisdom of Narayana that he had to hear it first from the mouth of Narada? Is the illustrious Pitamaha of all the worlds in any way different from or inferior to the great Narayana? How then is it that he was unfamiliar with the puissance of Narayana of immeasurable energy?'

Bhishma continues, 'Hundreds and thousands of Mahakalpas, hundreds and thousands of creations and dissolutions have come and gone in the past.

In the beginning of every cycle of creation, Brahma, puissant Creator of all things, is remembered by Narayana.

Rajan, Brahma knows well that Narayana, that foremost of all Devas, is superior to him. He knows that Narayana is the Paramatman, that he is the Supreme Lord, that he is the Creator of Brahma himself.

This ancient story, perfectly consistent with the Vedas, was recited by Narada to that conclave of Rishis crowned with ascetic success. Surya Deva, having heard that account from those blessed Rishis, repeated it to the sixty-six thousand Rishis that follow in his train.

And Surya, who gives light to all worlds, repeated that narrative to those pure Beings who have been created by Brahma to always journey alongside him. The high-souled Rishis that follow in Surya's train, repeated that excellent tale unto the Devas assembled on the breast of Meru.

The best of Rishis, the regenerate Asita, having heard this from the Devas, repeated it to the Pitris. I heard it from my sire Shantanu who recited it to me. Myself having heard it from my father, I have repeated it to you, O Bhaarata.

Devas and Munis, who have heard this venerable Purana all adore the Supreme Soul. This narrative, belonging to the Rishis and thus handed down from one to another, should not be passed on by you to anyone who is not a devotee of Vasudeva. This one is really the essence of the hundreds of other narratives that you have heard from me.

In ancient times the Devas and the Asuras united to churn the ocean and to bring forth the amrita. In the same way, the Brahmanas united and churned all the scriptures and raised this narrative which resembles the nectar of immortality. He who frequently reads this narrative, and he who listens to it, with concentration and devotion, in a secluded place, succeeds in becoming an inhabitant possessing a lunar complexion of the vast island known as Sweta dwipa, the White Island.

Without doubt, such a man enters into Narayana of a thousand rays. By listening to this narrative from the beginning, a sick man is freed from his illness. The man who simply desires to read or listen to this narrative obtains the fruition of all his wishes. By reading or listening to it, the bhakta attains to the highest end that is kept for devout worshippers.

You, too, must always adore and worship that foremost of all Beings. He is the father and the mother of all creatures, and he is an object of reverence for the entire universe. Mahabaho Yudhishtira, let the illustrious

and Eternal God of the Brahmanas, Janardana of high intelligence, be pleased with you!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Having listened to the best of narratives, O Janamejaya, Dharmaraja Yudhishtira and all his brothers became devoted to Narayana. And from that day on, all of them began to practise silently meditating upon Narayana, and uttered these words to adore him, 'Victory to that holy and illustrious Being.'

Rishi Vyasa, best of gurus, devoted to tapasya, recited the word 'Narayana', that sublime mantra which is worthy of being recited in silence. Coursing through the sky to the ocean of milk which is always the abode of nectar, and worshipping the great God there, he came back to his own hermitage.

Bhishma continues, 'I have now repeated to you the tale that was told by Narada to the assembly of Rishis in the abode of Brahma. That narrative has descended from one person to another from the most ancient times. I heard it from my sire who told it to me.'"

In the Naimisa vana, among the Rishi Saunaka's sages, the Suta Romaharshana continued, 'I have now told you all that Vaisampayana narrated to Janamejaya. Having listened to Vaisampayana's narration, King Janamejaya discharged all his duties according to the rules laid down in the shastras.

You have all undergone severe tapasya and observed many high and excellent vratas. Living in this sacred forest of Naimisa, you are conversant with the Vedas. Foremost of regenerate ones, you all have come to this great yagna of Saunaka.

Adore and worship that Eternal and Supreme Lord of the universe in yagnas, properly pouring offerings of ghee into the fire, reciting mantras, and dedicating them to Narayana. As for myself, I heard this excellent account that has descended from generation to generation from my father who narrated it to me in earlier times.'

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Saunaka said, ‘How is Narayana, fully conversant with the Vedas and their branches, at once the doer and the enjoyer of sacrifices? Ever forgiving, he has adopted the religion of Nivritti, abstention. He himself has established the duties of Nivritti.

Why then has he made many Devas take shares in yagnas, which, of course, are all due to the disposition of Pravritti? Why has he created some with a contrary disposition, for they follow the rules of Nivritti?

O Suta, dispel our doubt. This doubt seems to be eternal and intertwined with a great mystery. You have heard all discourses on Narayana, discourses that are consistent with the shastras.’

Sauti said, ‘Excellent Saunaka, I shall recite to you what Vaisampayana, the disciple of the intelligent Vyasa, said when questioned on these very subjects by King Janamejaya. Having heard the discourse on the glory of Narayana who is the Soul of all embodied creatures, wise Janamejaya asked Vaisampayana these very questions.

Janamejaya said, “The whole world of Beings, with Brahma, the Devas, the Asuras and humans, is one that is deeply attached to actions which produce prosperity. You have said that mukti is the highest felicity marked by the end of existence.

Those who are without both paapa and punya succeed in becoming liberated when they enter the great God of a thousand rays. Brahmana, it appears that this mukti dharma is exceedingly difficult to practise. Turning away from it, all the Devas now take pleasure in the pouring of ghee on sacrificial fires along with the chanting of mantras, and offering other customary havis.

Brahma, Rudra, the puissant Sakra the slayer of Bala, Surya, Chandramas, Vayu, Agni, Varuna, the living Akasa, the universe as conscious agent, and the other inhabitants of swarga, all seem to be ignorant of the way to make an end to conscious existence, which can be had through Atmagyana, self-realisation.

This is perhaps why they have not be taken themselves to the path that is certain, indestructible, and immutable. Hence perhaps, turning away from that path, they have adopted the religion of Pravritti which leads to conscious existence measured by time. This, indeed, is one great flaw in those attached to karma, for all their gains are terminable.

This doubt, regenerate one, is planted in my heart like a dagger. Remove it by narrating some old discourses on this subject. I am profoundly curious to listen to you.

Why do the Devas take their respective shares of havis offered to them with the help of mantras in yagnas of diverse kinds? Why are the Swargavasis revered in sacrifices? And, O Dvijottama, to whom do they, who take their shares of offerings in sacrifices performed in their honour, themselves make offerings when they perform mahayagnas?"

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, the question you have asked me relates to another deep mystery. One who has not undergone tapasya and is not familiar with the Puranas, cannot answer it. I will answer you, however, by narrating what my guru Vyasa, the island-born Krishna, the Maharishi who divided the original Veda, said to us when we once questioned him.

Sumanta, Jaimini and Paila of firm vows, Suka and I were Vyasa's sishyas. Numbering five in all, endowed with self-restraint and purity of rituals, we had completely subdued wrath and controlled our senses. Our guru used to teach us the four Vedas, and the Mahabharata as the fifth.

Once while we were engaged in studying the Vedas on Mount Meru, inhabited by the Siddhas and Charanas, this very doubt, as expressed by you today, arose in our minds. We questioned Vyasa about it. I heard his reply.

I will now narrate that answer to you, O Bhaarata. Hearing these words addressed to him by his disciples, that dispeller of all kinds of darkness represented by avidya, the blessed Vyasa, the son of Parasara, said, 'I have undergone most severe, the austerest of tapasya. I am fully aware of the past, the present and the future.

On account of my tapasya and self-restraint, as I lived on the shores of the ocean of milk, Narayana was gratified with me. His pleasure granted me my desire for this Trikalagyana, perfect knowledge of the past, the present and the future. Listen now to me as I address this great doubt that has disturbed your minds.

With the eye of knowledge, I have seen all that has happened since the beginning of the kalpa. He whom both the Samkhyas and yogis call by the name of Paramatman comes to be regarded as Mahapurusha as a consequence of his own actions.

From him springs forth the unmanifest, Avyakta, whom the learned call Pradhana. From the unmanifest rises the manifest, Vyakta, for the creation of all the words. He is called Aniruddha. That Aniruddha is known among all creatures by the name of Mahat Atman.

It is that Aniruddha who, becoming manifest, created the Pitamaha Brahma. Aniruddha is known by another name, Ahamkara, endowed with every kind of energy. Bhumi, Vayu, Akasa, Jala and Agni are the five Mahabhutas that have sprung from Ahamkara. Having created these five Mahabhutas, he then created their attributes.

Combining the Mahabhutas, he created diverse embodied beings. Listen to me as I recount them to you. Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vasishta and the Swayambhu Manu, these should be known as the eight Prakritis. Upon these rest all the worlds.

Then, for the fulfilment of all creatures, Brahma created the Vedas with all their angas, as also the yagnas with their constituent limbs. From these eight Prakritis have sprung all this vast universe.

Then emerged Rudra from the principle of wrath, and he created ten others like him. These eleven Rudras are called Vikara Purushas. The Rudras, the eight Prakritis, and the several Devarishis, having being born, approached Brahma with the objective of upholding the universe and its workings.

Addressing the grandsire, they said, ‘Holy One, we have been created by you. Pitamaha, tell us about our respective spheres of influence and authority. What particular jurisdictions have been created by you for supervising the various affairs of creation?

What kind of consciousness should each of us have, and which of these areas should we take charge of? Also endow each of us the measure of power that we are to have to discharge our duties.’

Thus addressed by them, Brahma replied unto them in the following way: ‘You deities have done well in speaking to me of this matter. Blessed be you all! I was thinking of this very matter that has engaged your attention. How should the three worlds be upheld and kept stable? How should your powers and mine be employed towards that end?

Let all of us leave this place and repair to that unmanifest and foremost of Beings, who is the witness of the world, to seek his protection. He will inform us what is for our good.’

Those Devas and Rishis, with Brahma, went to the northern shores of the ocean of milk, wishing to do good to the three worlds.

Arriving there, they began to practise those austere tapasyas advocated by Brahma in the Vedas, those penances known by the name of Mahaniyama. They stood there with minds fixed, unmoving as wooden posts, with eyes and hands raised up above their heads.

For a thousand celestial years they engaged in rigorous tapasya. At the end of that period they heard these sweet words in harmony with the Vedas and their angas.

‘I welcome you Devas and Rishis, blessed with the wealth of asceticism, with Brahma in your company, and to you I say that I know what is in your hearts. Your thoughts are indeed for the good of the three worlds.

I will increase your energy and strength with Pravritti, the propensity for action. You have devoutly worshipped me with tapasya. Foremost of Beings, enjoy now the fruits of your austerities.

This Brahma is the Lord of all the worlds. Endued with puissance, he is Prajapati of all creatures. You too are the best of the Devas. With dhyana, perform yagnas for my glory.

In these sacrifices always give me a portion of the sacrificial offerings. I will then assign to each of you your respective jurisdictions and ordain what will be for your good!’”

Vaisampayana continued, “Vyasa said, ‘Hearing these words of the God of gods, all those Devas, Maharishis and Brahma were filled with such delight that the hair on their bodies stood on end. They immediately made arrangements for a yagna in honour of Vishnu according to the niyamas laid down in the Vedas.

In that sacrifice, Brahma himself dedicated a portion of the offerings to Vishnu. The Devas and Devarishis also dedicated similar portions each unto

him. These portions, offered with great reverence, were in accordance with the rules established for the Krita yuga, both in measure and excellence.

In that yagna, the Devas and the Rishis and Brahma worshipped Vishnu Narayana as one with the complexion of the sun, as the foremost of Beings, situated beyond the reach of tamas, vast and infinite, pervading all things, the Supreme Lord of all, the giver of boons. Thus adored by them, invisible and formless, bodiless, He addressed those assembled divinities, saying to them:

"The offerings dedicated by you in this sacrifice have all reached me. I am gratified with all of you. I shall bestow rewards on you that will however be fraught with destinations from which there will be return.

Devas, because of my grace and compassion for you this shall be your distinctive feature from this day onwards. Performing sacrifices in every yuga, with large gifts, you will enjoy the fruits born of Pravritti. Men who perform yagnas according to the rules of the Vedas will give unto all of you shares of their havis.

In such yagnas, according to the Veda-sutras I compel a man to receive a share similar to that which he has himself offered in that sacrifice. You have been created to look after those affairs within your respective domains; uphold the worlds according to the measures of your power, which depend on the shares you receive in those sacrifices.

Indeed, drawing strength from those rites and rituals prevailing in the several worlds, arising from the fruits of Pravritti, and continue to uphold the affairs of those worlds. Strengthened by the yagnas that will be performed by men, you will strengthen me.

This is what I intend for you all. It is for this purpose that I have created the Vedas and sacrifices and plants and herbs. Duly revered by humans on earth, the Devas will be gratified. Foremost of deities, till the end of this kalpa I have ordained your creation, making your constitution depend upon the consequence of Pravritti dharma. Now, with regard to your respective spheres of influence, engage yourselves in seeking the good of the three worlds.

Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishta, these seven Rishis have been created by a fiat of the will, Manas. They will become the foremost of those conversant with the Vedas. In fact, they will become the teachers of the Vedas. They will be wedded to Pravritti dharma, for they are intended to devote themselves to procreation.

I reveal to you this eternal path of creatures engaged in kriyas and karmas. The puissant Lord who is charged with the creation of all the worlds is Aniruddha; Sana, Sanatsujata, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Kapila and Sanatana, these seven Rishis are known as the spiritual sons of Brahma.

Their knowledge comes to them of itself, not dependent on study or exertion. These seven are wedded to Nivritti dharma. They are the foremost of all yogis. They possess deep knowledge of the Samkhya philosophy.

They teach the dharma of the shastras, and it is they who introduce the duties of Nivritti and cause them to arise in the worlds. From unmanifest Prakriti has flowed Consciousness and the three great gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas. Transcending Prakriti is he called Kshetrajna. I myself am that Kshetrajna.

The path of those wedded to karma emerging out of Ahamkara is fraught with return. That path does not reach the place from where there is no return. Different creatures have been created with different ends. Some are intended for the path of Pravritti and some for that of Nivritti. One enjoys the reward of the particular path he follows.

This Brahma is the master of all the worlds. With his power he creates the universe. He is your mother and father, and he is your grandfather. At my command, he will be the giver of boons unto all creatures.

His son Rudra, who has sprung from his brow at his command, will uphold all created beings. Go to your respective realms and, according to the laws, seek the good of the worlds. Let all the karma based on the shastras flow in all the worlds. Do not delay.

Most excellent divinities, ordain the deeds of all creatures and their goals. Determine also the limits of the periods for which all creatures are to live. This present yuga that has begun is the foremost of all, and should be known by the name of Krita.

In this yuga, living creatures should not be killed in the yagnas that may be performed. It should be as I command and not otherwise. In this age, righteousness, dharma, will flourish in its fullness.

After this age will come the Treta yuga. In that yuga, the Vedas will lose one quarter of themselves. Only three of them will exist. In the sacrifices performed in that epoch, animals, after dedication with sacred mantras, will be killed. Dharma, too, will lose one quarter; only three quarters of righteousness will flourish.

At the end of the Treta will come Dwapara, the mixed yuga. In that age, dharma will lose two quarters and only two quarters will thrive.

Upon the end of Dwapara, Kali yuga, under the influence of the Tisya constellation. Righteousness will lose full three quarters. Only a quarter thereof will exist in all places."

When Narayana spoke these words, the Devas and the Devarishis said to him, "If only a fourth part of dharma is to exist in that yuga in every place, tell us where shall we then go and what shall we do?"

The blessed and Holy One said, "In that yuga, you should repair to such places where the Vedas and yagnas, tapasya and satya and self-restraint, accompanied by duties filled with compassion for all creatures, still continue to flourish. Evil will never be able to touch you at all!"'

Vyasa continued, 'Thus commanded by the great God, the Devas with all the Rishis bowed their heads and went away to their destinations. After the Rishis and Devas had left, Brahma remained there, desirous of beholding the great deity in the form of Aniruddha.

The foremost of Devas then manifested himself to Brahma, having assumed a form that had a gigantic equine head. Bearing a kamandalu and the tridanda, he manifested himself before Brahma, reciting the while the Vedas with all their angas.

Beholding him in that form crowned with a badava mukha, a horse's head, Brahma, the creator of all the worlds, moved by the desire of doing good to his Creation, worshipped him with bowed head and folded hands. The great Deity embraced Brahma and then said:

"O Brahma, duly think of the paths of karma that creatures are to follow. You are the great ordainer of all created beings. You are the lord of the universe. Placing this burden on you I will soon be free from anxiety.

When it becomes difficult for you to achieve the purposes of the Devas I will appear in incarnate forms according to my Atmagyana." Having said these words that grand form with the horse's head disappeared in a flash. Having received his command, Brahma too, went swiftly to his own realm.

It is for this that Vishnu, Padmanabha with the lotus in his navel, accepted the first share offered in sacrifices and because of this he came to be called the eternal upholder of all yagnas. He himself adopted Nivritti dharma, the goal of those seeking everlasting felicity.

At the same time, he established Pravritti dharma for others, in order to furnish variety to the universe. He is the beginning, he is the middle, and he

is the end of all created Beings.

He is their Creator and he is their one object of meditation. He is the actor and he is the act. Having withdrawn the universe into himself at the end of the yuga, he falls asleep, and awakening at the beginning of another yuga, he once again creates the universe.

Bow unto that illustrious one of high soul and who transcends the three gunas, who is un-born, whose form is the universe, and who is the abode or refuge of all the inhabitants of swarga. Bow unto him who is the Supreme Lord of all creatures, who is the Lord of the Adityas, and of the Vasus as well.

Bow unto him who is the Lord of the Aswins, and the Lord of the Maruts, who is the Lord of all the sacrifices ordained in the Vedas, and the Lord of the Vedangas. Bow unto him who always resides in the ocean, and who is called Hari, and whose hair is like the blades of the munja grass.

Bow unto him who is peace and serenity, and who imparts mukti dharma to all. Bow to him who is the Lord of penances, of all kinds of energy, and of fame, who is ever the Lord of speech and the Lord of all the rivers.

Bow unto him who is called Kapardin, Rudra, who is the Great Boar, and who possesses great intelligence, who is the sun, and who took the form with the horse's head; he Lord who is always displayed in a fourfold form. Bow unto him who is unrevealed, who is capable of being grasped through gyana alone, and who is both Akshara and Kshara.

The Supreme Deity, who is immutable, pervades all things. He is the Supreme Lord who can be only known with the eye of knowledge. It was with gyana that I perceived him in ancient times.

Sishyas, I have told you all that you asked me; now act according to what I have said and serve the Supreme Lord called Hari. Sing his praises in Vedic mantras; adore and worship him with all due rites!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "It was thus that Vyasa, the arranger of the Vedas, discoursed to us, when we questioned him. His son, the righteous Suka, and us, all his sishyas, listened avidly to him as he addressed us. We and our gurus then adored the great deity with verses, Riks extracted from the four Vedas.

I have now told you all that you asked me. Rajan, thus did our island-born preceptor instruct us.

He who has surrendered to Narayana and listens, with dhyana, to this discourse or reads or recites it to others, is filled with intelligence and health, beauty and strength. If ill, he is freed from that illness; if bound, he is freed from his bonds.

The man who desires receives the fruits of all his desires, and also attains to a long life. By doing this, a Brahmana becomes conversant with all the Vedas, and a Kshatriya is crowned with success. Following this a Vaisya makes vast profits, and a Sudra attains great felicity.

A sonless man obtains a son. A woman finds a desirable husband. A woman that has conceived gives birth to a son. A barren woman conceives and attains to the wealth of sons and grandsons.

He who recites this discourse on the way succeeds in passing joyfully along this path without any obstacles. If one reads or recites this story, he attains whatever objects he cherishes.

Hearing these assured and true words of the Maharishi, embodying the gunas of that high-souled one, listening to this narrative of the great assembly of Rishis and other inhabitants of swarga, men devoted to the Supreme Deity find great bliss."

CANTO 342

Janamejaya said, "Holy one, tell me the significance of those diverse names uttered by Maharishi Vyasa and his disciples to praise Madhusudana, the slayer of Madhu. I am keen to hear those names of Hari, that Supreme Lord of all creatures. By listening to those names, I shall be purified and cleansed like the bright autumn moon."

Vaisampayana said, "Listen, Rajan, to the significance of those names, diverse because of the many attributes and actions of Hari, as the puissant Hari himself explained them to Arjuna. That Parantapa once asked Krishna about the importance and meaning of some of the names by which he was adored.

Arjuna said, 'Krishna, Supreme ordainer of the past and the future, Creator of all Beings, immutable One, Refuge of all the worlds, Lord of the universe, dispeller of the fears of all men, from you I desire to know in detail the significance of all your names which have been enumerated by the great Rishis in the Vedas and the Puranas because of your awesome and diverse deeds. None other than you, Kesava, is competent to explain this.'

Krishna said, 'Arjuna, in the Rig Veda, in the Yajur Veda, in the Atharvans and the Samans, in the Puranas and the Upanishads, as also in the treatises on jyotisha, astrology, in the Samkhya and yoga shastras, and in the treatises on Ayurveda, the science of life, many are the names that have been mentioned by the great Rishis.

Some of those names are derived from my attributes and some of them relate to my deeds. Listen with concentration of the import of each of those names with reference to my exploits. I will recite them to you.

It is said that in ancient times you were half my body. Salutations to him of great glory, who is the Paramatman of all embodied creatures. Salutations to Narayana, unto him who is the universe, unto him that transcends the three primal gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, unto him that is the Soul of those attributes.

From his grace has arisen Brahma and from his wrath Rudra. He is the source from which all mobile and immobile creatures emerge. Sattva is made up of eighteen qualities.

That attribute is Supreme Nature; her soul consists of Akasa and Bhumi and she upholds the universe with her creative forces. That Prakriti is identical with the fruit of all karma, in the form of the diverse realms of felicity which creatures attain through their actions.

She is also the pure Chit. She is immortal, and invincible, and is called the Soul of the universe. From her flows all the modifications of both creation and destruction. She is identical with my nature. Without sex, she or he is the tapasya that men undergo.

He is both the yagna performed and the sacrificer that performs it. He is the ancient and the infinite Purusha. He is otherwise called Aniruddha and is the source of the creation and the destruction of the universe.

When Brahma's night ended, through the grace of that Being of immeasurable energy, a lotus appeared, O you of eyes like lotus-petals. Within that lotus Brahma was born, springing from Aniruddha's grace.

Towards the evening of Brahma's day, Aniruddha was filled with anger, and from this there sprang from his forehead a son called Rudra with the power of destroying everything at the hour of Pralaya. Brahma and Rudra are the foremost of all the Devas, having sprung respectively from the auspiciousness and the wrath of Aniruddha.

Acting according to Aniruddha's command, these two Devas create and destroy. Although capable of granting boons to all creatures, in the matter of creation and destruction, they are mere instruments in the hands of Aniruddha. It is Aniruddha that does everything, making Brahma and Rudra the visible driving forces in the universe.

Rudra is otherwise called Kapardin. He sometimes has matted locks of hair; at other times he reveals a shorn head. He favours living in samsanas, cremation grounds, which are indeed his home.

He is an observer of the austerest vratas. He is a yogin of great power and energy. He is the destroyer of Daksha's sacrifice and of Bhaga's eyes.

Son of Pandu, it should be understood that Rudra always has Narayana for his Atman. If Maheswara is worshipped, then the puissant Narayana is also worshipped. I am the soul of all the worlds, of all the universe. Rudra, again, is my Soul.

It is for this that I always venerate him. If I do not adore the auspicious and boon-giving Isana nobody would then adore me. The laws I establish are followed by all the worlds. These must always be revered and for this reason I do adore them.

He who knows Rudra knows me, and he who knows me knows Rudra. He who follows Rudra follows me, Rudra is Narayana. Both are one; and the one is displayed in two different forms. Rudra and Narayana, forming one person, pervade all visible things and cause them to act.

Son of Pandu, no one other than Rudra can grant me a boon. Having realised this, in olden times, I revered Rudra to obtain the boon of a son. In adoring Rudra thus I adored my own self. Vishnu never bows his head to any god other than his own self. It is for this reason that I adore Rudra, for Rudra is my own self.

All the Devas, including Brahma and Indra, and the Maharishis worship Narayana, that foremost of deities, also known by the name of Hari. Vishnu is the foremost of all Beings past, present or future, and as such should always be adored and revered.

Bow to Vishnu. Bow your head unto him who protects everyone. Arjuna, bow to that great boon-giving God, that foremost of deities, who consumes the offerings made to him in yagnas.

I have heard that there are four kinds of worshippers: those who are eager for a religious life, those who are seekers, those who strive to understand what they learn, and those who are wise. Among them all, they who devote themselves to realising the self and do not adore any other deity, are the best. I am the end they seek, and though engaged in karma, they never seek its fruits.

The three other categories of my worshippers are those that desire the fruits of their actions. They attain to realms of great felicity, but once they have exhausted their punya they must fall from those realms. Those amongst my devotees who are fully awakened, and know that all happiness is transitory, other than what is attained by those who become united with me, obtain what is most invaluable.

Those enlightened ones may be engaged in adoring Brahma or Siva or the other Devas in heaven but they succeed at last in realising me. I have now told you about my diverse devotees.

Arjuna, you and I are known as Nara and Narayana. Both of us have assumed human bodies only for the purpose of lightening the burden of the earth. I am fully aware of my self.

I know who I am and from where I come. I know Nivritti dharma, and all that is responsible for the prosperity of all creatures. I am eternal and the sole refuge of all men. The waters have been called by the name Naara, for they sprang from him called Nara. And since the waters, in former times, were my refuge, I am, therefore, referred to as Narayana.

Assuming the form of the sun, I envelop the universe with my rays. And because I am home to all creatures, I am called by the name of Vasudeva. I am the end of all creatures and their beginning, Bhaarata.

I pervade the entire firmament and the earth, and my splendour transcends every other splendour. I am he whom all creatures wish to attain to at the hour of death. And because I pervade all the universe, I have been called the name Vishnu. Desiring mukti through subduing their senses, people seek to me, I who am swarga and Bhumi and the sky between the two. For this I am called Damodara.

The word prishni includes food, water, the Vedas and amrita. These four are always in my belly. Hence am I called Prishnigarbha. The Rishis once said that when the Rishi Trita was thrown into a well by Ekata and Dwiti, the distressed Trita invoked me, saying, "O Prishnigarbha, rescue the fallen Trita!" Having thus implored me, Trita, the spiritual son of Brahma, was indeed rescued from the fathomless well.

The rays that emanate from the sun who gives heat to the world, from the blazing fire, and from the moon, constitute my hair. Hence do learned Brahmanas call me by the name of Kesava.

The Mahatman Utathya having impregnated his wife disappeared from her side through an illusion of the gods. The younger brother Brihaspati then appeared before her. To him who had approached Utathya's wife with the desire of sexual union, the child in her womb, whose body had already been formed of the five primal elements, said, "Giver of boons, I have already entered into this womb. It befits you not to assail my mother."

Hearing these words of the unborn child, Brihaspati was angered and cursed him, "Since you obstruct me so when I have come to you from

desire of the pleasures of union, I curse you to be born blind!"

Through this curse the child of Utathya was born blind, and blind he remained for a long time. It was for this reason that that Rishi came to be known by the name of Dirghatamas, or long darkness.

He, however, acquired the four Vedas with their angas and subsidiary angas. After that he frequently invoked me by this secret name of mine. Indeed, according to the established rules, he repeatedly called upon me by the name Kesava.

Through the punya he acquired by uttering this name repeatedly, he was cured of his blindness and came to be called Gotama. Arjuna, this name of mine gives boons to them who that utter it, among all the Devas and the Devarishis.

Agni and Soma combine and fuse into one substance. It is for this reason that the entire universe of mobile and immobile creatures is said to be pervaded by them.

In the Puranas, Agni and Soma are spoken of as complementary to one another. They have Agni for their mouth. As their natures lead to their mingling, they balance each other and uphold the universe.'"

CANTO 343

"Arjuna said, 'How did Agni and Soma come to be so similar in their original natures? This doubt has arisen in my mind. Dispel it, slayer of Madhu.'

Krishna said, 'I shall narrate to you an ancient story of events originating from my own energy. Listen carefully.

When four thousand yugas according to divine measure pass, the dissolution of the universe comes. The Vyakta, manifest, disappears into the Avyakta, unmanifest. All creatures, mobile and immobile, are destroyed. Agni, Bhumi and Vayu disappear. Tamas, darkness, spreads over the universe which becomes one infinite expanse of water.

When that vast expanse of water, Ekarnava, exists like Brahman without another, it is neither day nor night. Neither all nor nothing nor aught exists; neither the manifest nor the unmanifest. Then only undifferentiated Brahman exists.

When this is the condition of the universe, the foremost of Beings emerges from tamas—the eternal and immutable Hari who is the combination of all the attributes, including omnipotence, of Narayana, who is indestructible and eternal, without senses, inconceivable and unborn, who is truth's self fraught with compassion, who exists like the rays of the Chintamani jewel.

He is One that causes diverse kinds of desires to flow in many directions, who is devoid of hostility, and decay, death and destruction, who is formless and all-pervading, and who is endowed with the principle of universal creation and of eternity without beginning, middle or end.

There is a basis for this assertion. The Sruti declares: Day was not. Night was not. All was not. Nothing was not. In the beginning there was only tamas in the form of the universe, and she is the night of Narayana of universal form. This is the meaning of the word tamas.

That Purusha called Hari, thus born of tamas and having Brahman for his sire, gave birth to Brahma. Wishing to create creatures, Brahma caused Agni and Soma to spring from his own eyes.

After this, men were created in their proper order as Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. He who began life as Soma was none other than Brahma; and they who were born as Brahmanas were in reality all Soma. Those who started into being as Kshatriyas were none other than Agni.

The Brahmanas gained greater energy than the Kshatriyas. If you ask why, the answer is that this superiority of the Brahmanas to the Kshatriyas is manifest through the whole world. It happened thus.

With regards to men, the Brahmanas represent the oldest creation. None higher than them were created before. He who offers food into the mouth of a Brahmana pours libations into a blazing fire to gratify the Devas.

I say that having ordained things in this manner, Brahma then created all creatures. Having established all created beings in their respective places, he upholds the three worlds.

There is a similar declaration in the mantras of the Srutis: Agni, you are the Hotri in yagnas and the benefactor of the universe. You support the Devas, all men and all the worlds. There is no other authority for this purpose.

Agni, you are the Hotri of the universe and of sacrifices. You are the one through which the Devas and men do good to the universe. Agni is truly the Hotri and the performer of sacrifices.

Agni is again the Brahma of the yagna. No libations can be poured into the sacrificial fire without uttering mantras; there can be no tapasyas without someone to perform them; the Devas, Rishis and Manavas are worshipped by these offerings accompanied by mantras. Hence, O Agni, you have been regarded as the Hotri in sacrifices.

You are, again, all the other mantras that are have been associated with the Homa rites. It is the ordained duty of the Brahmanas to preside over yagnas.

The other two twice-born varnas, the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, do not have the same duty. Brahmanas, like Agni, uphold sacrifices. The yagnas

performed by them strengthen the Devas. Thus maintained they fructify the earth thereby supporting all living creatures.

But the result that may be achieved by the best of yagnas may as well be accomplished through the mouth of the Brahmanas. That learned man who offers food into the mouth of a Brahmana is said to pour libations into the sacred fire to gratify the Devas. In this way the Brahmanas have come to be regarded as Agni.

Those who are wise adore Agni. Agni is, again, Vishnu. Entering all creatures, he upholds their life-breaths.

In this regard there is a verse sung by Sanatkumara. Brahma, in creating the universe, first created the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas become immortal and ascend into swarga by studying the Vedas. Their Buddhi, kriyas and karmas, tapasyas, speech and faith, sustain both the earth and heaven like ropes of strings holding up nectarine milk.

There is no dharma higher than truth. There is no one more worthy of reverence than the mother. There is none more efficient than the Brahmana for conferring felicity both in this life and the next.

In places where Brahmanas are unsupported by gifts of land, the inhabitants become dejected. There, oxen do not carry the people or draw the plough, nor are they borne by carts or chariots. There milk kept in jars is never churned to yield butter.

On the other hand, the people become destitute and take to stealing instead of being able to enjoy the blessings of peace.

In the Vedas, the Puranas and other authoritative texts, it is said that Brahmanas, who are the souls of all creatures, who are the creators of all things, and who can be identified with all existing beings, sprang from the mouth of Narayana. It is said that the Brahmanas originated when he subdued his speech as a penance; the other varnas arose from the Brahmanas.

The Brahmanas are honoured above the Devas and Asuras, since they were created by me in my ineffable form as Brahma. As I have created the Devas and the Asuras and the Maharishis so have I placed the Brahmanas in their respective stations and have at times to punish them.

On account of his licentious assault on Ahalya, Indra was cursed by her husband Gautama, and had a green beard. Through that curse Indra also lost his testicles, which were later replaced by the testicles of a ram out of the compassion of the other Devas.

At the yagna of King Sarjati, when Maharishi Chyavana wanted to make the Aswins share in the Soma rasa, Indra objected. When Chyavana insisted, Indra wanted to hurl his thunderbolt at the sage. The Rishi paralysed Indra's arms.

Incensed at the destruction of his sacrifice by Rudra, Daksha once more began to practise severe tapasya and, attaining to high puissance, caused a third eye to appear on Rudra's forehead for the destruction of Tripurasura.

When Rudra tried to destroy this city of the Asuras, Sukra Usanas, the acharya of the Asuras, was provoked to tear a matted lock from his own head and cast it at Rudra. From that matted lock of Usanas sprang many serpents. Those serpents bit Rudra turning his throat blue.

In the ancient times of Swayambhuva Manu, it is said that Narayana seized Rudra by the throat, turning it blue. When the ocean was churned to raise up the amrita, Brihaspati of Angira's vamsa sat on its shores to perform the Puruscharana rite. When he took up a little water for the initial achamana, the water appeared murky.

Brihaspati was enraged and cursed the ocean, saying, "Since you continue to be so filthy despite my having come to you to touch you, since you have not become clear and transparent, from this day on you will be defiled with fish, sharks, tortoises and other aquatic creatures." From that time, the waters of the ocean have been infested with diverse kinds of sea creatures and monsters.

Viswarupa, the son of Tvashtri, once was the Hotri priest of the Devas. On his mother's side he was related to the Asuras, his mother being the daughter of a Danava. While publicly offering the Devas their shares of sacrificial offerings, he privately offered havis to the Asuras.

The Asuras, led by Hiranyakasipu, then went to their sister, the mother of Viswarupa, and obtained a boon from her, saying, "Viswarupa by Tvashtri, otherwise called Trisiras, is now the priest of the Devas. While he gives them their shares of sacrificial offerings publicly, he gives us our shares secretly. Thus the Devas are strengthened and we are weakened. Sister, prevail upon him to take up our cause."

The mother of Viswarupa went to her son who was dwelling in the Nandana forests of Indra and said to him, "How is it, son, that you advance the cause of your enemies and weaken that of your maternal uncles? It is not fitting for you to act in this manner."

Thus entreated by his mother, Viswarupa reflected on her words, paid his respects to her, and went over to the side of Hiranyakasipu. Upon his arrival, King Hiranyakasipu dismissed his old Hotri, Vasishta, the son of Brahma, and appointed Trisiras to that office.

Incensed, Vasishta cursed Hiranyakasipu, “Since you have dismissed me and appointed another as your Hotri, your yagna will not be completed, and some Being the like of whom has not existed before will destroy you!” As a result of this curse, Hiranyakasipu was slain by Vishnu in the form of a manticore, the Narasimha.

Viswarupa, having gone over to the side of his maternal relations, employed himself in severe tapasyas to elevate them. In order to distract him from his vows, Indra sent many beautiful Apsaras to him. Seeing these divine nymphs of transcendent beauty, Viswarupa’s heart was agitated. Soon he became exceedingly attached to them.

Recognising this, one day these Apsaras said to him, “We will not stay here any longer. We will return to the place from where we came.” The son of Tvashtri said to them, “Where will you go? Stay with me. I shall be good to you.”

Hearing him say this, the Apsaras rejoined, “We are divine Apsaras. In the past we chose the illustrious and boon-giving Indra of great puissance.”

Viswarupa then said to them. “This very day I will make all the Devas with Indra at their head cease to exist.”

Saying this, Trisiras began to inwardly recite certain powerful sacred mantras. By virtue of those mantras he began to grow in tejas. With one of his mouths he began to drink all the Soma that Brahmanas poured on their sacred fires in their yagnas. With a second mouth he began to eat all food offered in those sacrifices. With his third mouth he began to consume the energy of all the Devas with Indra at their head.

Seeing him swelling with power and energy in every part of his body strengthened by the Soma he swallowed, all the Devas led by Indra flew to Pitamaha Brahma. Arriving in his presence, they said to him, “All the Soma that is offered in the yagnas performed everywhere is being drunk by Viswarupa. We no longer receive our due shares. The Asuras are being empowered while we are being weakened. Ordain what is for our good.”

The Pitamaha replied, “The Maharishi Dadichi of Bhrigu’s vamsa is even now engaged in performing severe austerities. Go to him and ask him

for a boon. Do so that he may cast off his body. With his bones let a new weapon, the vajra, an adamantine thunderbolt, be created."

Thus instructed, the Devas set off for where the holy Dadichi was engaged in his tapasya. The Devas addressed the sage, saying, "Holy one, we hope that your austerities are being performed without hindrances."

Dadhichi said, "Welcome to all of you. Tell me what I may do for you. I will certainly do what you ask."

They said to him, "Cast off your body for the good of all the worlds."

The sage Dadhichi, who was a great yogin who regarded joy and sorrow equably, calmly focused his Atmashakti using his yoga and cast off his body.

When his soul left its temporary home, Dhatri took his bones and created an irresistible weapon, the vajra. Made with the bones of a Brahmana, it was indestructible, inexorable and pervaded by the energy of Vishnu; using that weapon, Indra struck Viswarupa, the son of Tvashtri.

Having slain the son of Tvashtri, Indra severed his head from the body. The energy still dwelling in the lifeless body of Viswarupa, when it was kneaded, gave birth to a mighty Asura by the name of Vritra. Vritra became Indra's enemy, but Indra killed him also with the vajra and with deceit.

With this doubling of the sin of Brahmahatya, Indra was overcome with a great fear and he had to forsake the sovereignty of swarga. He entered a cool lotus stalk that grew in the Manasa Lake. Using the yoga siddhi of anima, he became minute and entered the fibres of that lotus-stalk.

When the Lord of the three worlds, the husband of Sachi, had thus vanished through the fear of the consequences of the sin of killing a Brahmana, the universe became lordless. The gunas, rajas and tamas, assailed the Devas. The mantras uttered by the great Rishis lost all efficacy. Rakshasas appeared everywhere. The Vedas were about to disappear.

Without a king, the inhabitants of all the worlds lost their strength and Rakshasas and other evil beings began to attack them. Then the Devas and the Rishis united and crowned Nahusha, the son of Ayusha, king of the three worlds.

Nahusha had on his forehead full five hundred luminaries of blazing effulgence, which had the power to destroy every fell creature of energy. Thus endowed he continued to rule heaven. The three worlds were restored to balance. Their inhabitants once more became happy and cheerful.

Nahusha then said, “Everything that Indra used to enjoy is mine. Only his wife Sachi is not.” Saying this, he went to Sachi and said to her, “Blessed Devi, I have become the Lord of the Devas. You too, accept me.”

Sachi replied, “You are, by your very nature, wedded to righteous behaviour. You also belong to the vamsa of Soma. It is not right for you to importune another’s wife.”

Nahusha said, “I now hold Indra’s position and wield his power. I deserve to enjoy his dominions and all his precious possessions. Hence there can be no sin in my desiring to enjoy you. You were Indra’s and should, therefore, now be mine.

Sachi said to him, “I am observing a vrata that has not yet been completed. After performing the final ablutions I will come to you, in a few days.” Extracting this promise from Sachi, Nahusha left.

Sachi, indignant and grief-stricken, anxious to find her husband, and fearing Nahusha, she went to Brihaspati. Brihaspati instantly understood her agitation. Through the power of yoga, he understood that she was determined to restore her husband to his rightful place.

Brihaspati said to her, “With your tapasya and punya as a result of your vow, pray to the boon-giving Goddess Upasruti. Invoked by you, she will appear and show you where Indra dwells.

Sachi, observing her strict vrata, with the help of appropriate mantras, invoked the Devi. The goddess appeared before her and said, “I am here at your bidding. What is your wish?”

Bowing before her, Sachi said, “O Devi, show me where my husband is. You are truth. You are Rita.”

Thus addressed, the Devi Upasruti took her to the Manasa Lake. Arriving there, she pointed out to Sachi her Lord Indra dwelling within the fibres of a lotus-stalk. Seeing his wife looking pale and emaciated, Indra was alarmed.

And the Lord of heaven said to himself, “Alas, great is my sorrow. I have fallen from the position that is mine. My wife, afflicted with grief on my account, seeks my lost self and comes to me.”

Reflecting in this train, Indra said to Sachi, “In what condition are you now? What is your situation?” She answered him, “Nahusha called me to make me his wife. I obtained a week’s brief respite from him, which has already elapsed.”

Indra said to her, “Go and say to Nahusha that he should come to you on a chariot never used before—one yoked to some great Rishis; arriving in that manner he should marry you. Indra has many kinds of beautiful and wondrous chariots. All these have borne you. Nahusha should come on one such that Indra himself does not possess.”

Thus advised by her husband, Sachi left that place with a hopeful heart. Indra once more entered the fibres of the lotus-stalk.

Seeing Indra’s queen return to swarga, Nahusha said to her, “The time you had fixed to become mine has passed.” Sachi repeated to him what Indra had directed her to say. Harnessing a number of great Rishis to his chariot, Nahusha set out from his palace for where Sachi lived.

Agastya, born in a jar, of the vital seed of Mitra and Varuna, saw those Maharishis being insulted by Nahusha in that way. Nahusha kicked him with his foot.

Agastya said, “Wretch, you have acted vilely and you will plunge down to the earth. You will be transformed into a snake and will continue to live in that form as long as the earth and her mountains exist.”

As soon as these words were uttered by the great Rishi, Nahusha fell out of his chariot. The three worlds once more lost a master. The Devas and the Rishis united and went to Vishnu and appealed to him to restore Indra.

Approaching him, they said, “Holy one, it is right for you to rescue Indra who is blighted by the sin of killing a Brahmana.”

Vishnu replied, “Let Sakra perform an Aswamedha yagna in my honour and he will be restored to his former position and glory.”

The Devas and the Rishis began to search for Indra; not finding him, they went to Sachi and said to her, “O blessed one, go to Indra and bring him here.”

Sachi went once more to the Manasa Lake. Indra rose from the waters and came to Brihaspati.

Devaguru Brihaspati made arrangements for a great Aswamedha, substituting a black deer for a regal back steed fit in every way to be offered up in sacrifice. Brihaspati had Indra, the Lord of the Maruts, ride on that horse he saved from slaughter, stole away, and led him to his own palace for Indra to perform his Aswamedha yagna. The king of swarga was then adored with mantras by all the Devas and the Rishis.

He continued to rule in swarga, cleansed of his sin; that paapa of Brahmahatya, the killing of the Brahmana Asura Vritra, was divided into

four parts and ordained to dwell in woman, fire, trees and cows. It was thus that Indra, strengthened by the energy of a Brahmana, succeeded in slaying his enemy, and when, as the result of that act of his, he was overpowered by sin, it was the energy of another Brahmana that rescued him. In this manner Indra once again regained his place as the ruler of heaven.'

Krishna continued, 'Once, in olden times, while the great Rishi Bharadwaja was saying his prayers beside the celestial Ganga, one of the three feet of Vishnu, in his three-footed form, came to that place. Seeing that strange sight, Bharadwaja splashed Vishnu with a handful of water, upon which Vishnu's breast received a mark called the srivatsa.

Cursed by Rishi Bhrigu, Agni was obliged to become a devourer of all things.

Once upon a time, Aditi, the mother of the deities, cooked some food for her sons. She thought that, eating that food and being strengthened by it, the Devas would succeed in slaying the Asuras. After the food had been cooked, Budha, the presiding deity of the planet known by that name, having completed the observance of an austere vow, came before Aditi and asked her for dana.

Aditi did not offer him the food she had cooked, thinking that no one should eat it before her sons, the Devas, did. Enraged at her refusing him alms, Budha, who was Brahma's self through his vrata, cursed her, saying that she would have a pain in her womb when Vivaswat, in his second birth in her womb, was born in the form of an egg.

Aditi reminded Vivaswat at the time of his birth of Budha's curse, and it is for this reason that Vivaswat, who is adored in sraddhas, on emerging from Aditi's womb came to be called by the name of Martanda.

Prajapati Daksha became the father of sixty daughters. Of them, he gave thirteen to Kasyapa, ten to Dharma, ten to Manu and twenty-seven to Soma. Though all the twenty-seven, called Nakshatras, bestowed upon Soma were equal in beauty and accomplishments, Soma became most attached to just one, Rohini.

His other wives became jealous and left him; they went to their father and told him of Soma's conduct. "Father, although all of us are equally beautiful, Soma is attached only to our sister Rohini."

Angered by this treatment of his daughters, Prajapati Daksha cursed Soma, declaring that his son-in-law would be beset with phthisis and that

disease would dwell in him. Through Daksha's curse, phthisis assailed the mighty Soma and entered into his body. Suffering, Soma came to Daksha.

Daksha said to him, "I have cursed you because of your unequal treatment of your wives. You are being weakened by this disease. There is a sacred body of water called Hiranyasara in the western ocean. Go and bathe there."

Reaching Hiranyasaras, Soma bathed in its holy waters. Performing his ablutions he washed away his sin. And because those waters were illumined, abhasita, by Soma, from that day they were called Prabhasa.

As a result, however, of Daksha's ancient curse, to this day Soma begins to wane from the night of the full moon until his total disappearance on the night of the new moon when he once more he begins to wax until the night of the full moon.

From that time on the bright moon was blemished, for since then the body of Soma has shown some dark spots, and has been tarnished by these. In fact, the splendid disc of the moon has, from then on revealed the mark of a hare.

Once upon a time, a Rishi called Sthulasiras was engaged in severe austerities on the northern breast of the mountains of Meru. While engaged in those tapasyas a pure breeze, suffused with many fragrant perfumes, began to blow and fan his body.

Scorched as he was by his rigorous tapasya, and living as he did only upon air, he was gratified by that delightful air which wafted around him. While he enjoyed this cool breeze that fanned him, the trees around him became envious and burst into a display of flowers to win his heart. Annoyed at this display, because it was prompted by jealousy, the Rishi cursed the trees, "Henceforth, you will not be able to flower in all seasons."

Once Narayana took birth as the Maharishi Badavamukha for the benefit of the world. While practising severe austerities upon the breast of Meru, he summoned the ocean into his presence. The ocean ignored his call. Infuriated at this, the Rishi, with the heat of his body, caused the waters of the ocean to become as salty as human sweat.

The sage said, "From now your waters will be undrinkable. Only when the equine-head eddying within you drinks from you, will they again become as sweet as honey. On account of this curse, the waters of the ocean remain salty to this day and are drunk by no one other than the Badavamukha.

Uma, the daughter of Himavat, was desired by Siva. After Himavat had promised her hand in marriage to Mahadeva, Maharishi Bhrigu approached Himavat, and said, “Give your daughter to me in marriage.”

Himavat replied, “Siva is the bridegroom I have chosen for my daughter.” Angered by this reply, Bhrigu said, “Since you refuse my proposal for your daughter’s hand and insult me, you will lose your wealth of jewels and precious stones.” And to this day the mountains of Himavat are without any jewels.

Such is the glory of the Brahmanas. It is through their favour that the Kshatriyas are able to possess the undecaying and eternal Bhumi Devi as their wife and enjoy her. The power of the Brahmanas is also made up of Agni and Soma. The universe is upheld by their united power.

It is said that Surya and Chandramas are the eyes of Narayana. The rays of Surya are my eyes. The sun and the moon respectively warm and rejuvenate the universe. And for this reason they have come to be regarded as the joy, the harsha, of the worlds.

Arjuna, it is because these actions of Agni and Soma that uphold the universe that I have come to be called Hrishikesa. Indeed, I am the boon-giving Isana, the Creator of the universe.

Through the punya of the mantras with which libations of ghee are poured into the sacred fire, I receive and imbibe the principal share of the sacrificial havis. My colour too is that of the most excellent of jewels called Harita. For these reasons I am known as Hari. I am the highest abode of all creatures and am known by knowers of the shastras to be identical with truth or amrita. For this reason I am called Ritadhama, the abode of truth, by learned Brahmanas.

When the Earth was submerged in the waters and disappeared from view, I retrieved her and raised her from the depths of the ocean. For this reason the Devas adore me by the name of Govinda. Sipivishta is another name of mine. Sipi means one without hair on his body. He who pervades all things in the form of Sipi is known by the name of Sipivishta.

The Rishi Yaksha in many a sacrifice invoked me by the name Sipivishta. It is for this that I bear this secret name. The Yaksha of great intelligence, having worshipped by the name Sipivishta, succeeded in restoring the Niruktas who had disappeared from the surface of the earth and sunk into the patalas.

I was never born. I never take birth. Nor shall I ever be born. I am the Kshetrajna of all creatures. Hence am I called by the name of Aja, unborn, birthless.

I have never spoken anything dishonourable or dissolute. The divine Saraswati who is truth's self, who is the daughter of Brahma and is otherwise known as Rita, represents my speech and always dwells in my tongue. The existent and the non-existent are united by me in my Atman.

The Rishis in Pushkara, the abode of Brahma, called me by the name of truth. I have never swerved from the attribute of sattva; know that this guna has flowed from me. Arjuna, even in this birth, my ancient sattva guna has not left me, so that in this life, establishing myself in sattva, I perform my karmas without wishing for their fruit.

Free of all sins through sattva, which is my nature, I can be perceived only by the knowledge that arises from the pursuit of sattva. I am counted among those who are devoted to this guna. For these reasons I am known as sattvata.

I plough the earth, taking the form of a large ploughshare of black iron. And because my complexion is black, I am called Krishna.

I have united Bhumi with Jala, Akasa with Manas, and Vayu with Agni. Therefore I am called Vaikuntha. The highest state for a living being to attain is the cessation of separate conscious existence by union with Supreme Brahman. And since I have never swerved from that state I am Achyuta.

The earth and the sky are known to extend in all directions. And because I uphold them both, I called Adhokshaja. Those who know the Vedas and engage in interpreting their words adore me in yagnas by invoking me by this name. In elder days, while practising severe tapasyas, Maharishis said, "No one in the universe other than Narayana can be called by the name of Adhokshaja.

Sustaining the lives of all creatures in the universe, ghrita, ghee, constitutes my effulgence. It is for this reason that Brahmanas learned in the Vedas call me Ghritarchis.

There are three well-known constituent elements of the body. They have their origin in karma, and are called vata, pitha and kapham, or wind, bile and phlegm. The body is a union of these three. All living creatures are upheld by them, and when they abate, living creatures are also weakened. It is for this that those who know the shastra on Ayurveda call me Tridhatu.

Dharma is known among all creatures by the name of Vrisha. Hence I am called Vrisha in the Vedic text, Nighantuka. The word Kapi signifies the foremost of boars, and dharma means Vrisha. It is for this reason that that lord of all creatures, Kasyapa, the father of both the Devas and the Asuras, called me Vrishakapi.

The Devas and the Asuras have never been able to ascertain my beginning, my middle or my end. For this reason that I am praised as Anadi, Amadhya and Ananta. I am the Supreme Lord imbued with absolute puissance, and I am the eternal witness of the universe, for I witness its successive creations and destructions.

I always listen to words that are pious, pure and holy, Dhananjaya, and never speak anything that is sinful. Hence I am called Suchisravas.

Assuming the form of a boar with a single tusk, I raised the submerged earth from the bottom of the sea. For this reason am I named Ekasringa. In this form of a mighty boar I had three humps on my back. On account of this peculiarity I have come to be called by the name Trikakud.

Those conversant with the Samkhya expounded by Kapila call the Paramatman Virincha. That Virincha is otherwise called Prajapati or Brahma. Verily I am identical with Virincha, since I breathe life into all living creatures, for I am the Creator of the universe.

The teachers of the Samkhya philosophy have clear knowledge of all subjects, and they call me the eternal Kapila dwelling in the sun with only gyana as my companion. On earth I am identified with him who has been revered in the Vedic mantras as the effulgent Hiranyagarbha who is worshipped by yogins.

I am regarded as the embodied form of the Rig Veda, which has twenty-one thousand verses. Men that know the Vedas also call me the embodiment of the Samans of a thousand branches. Learned Brahmanas who are my faithful devotees sing my praises in the Aranyakas.

In the Adhyaryus I am sung of as the Yajur Veda of six and fifty, and eight and seven, and thirty branches. Brahmanas conversant with the Atharvans regard me as identical with the Atharvans consisting of five kalpas and all the krityas.

Arjuna, know that all the angas of the Vedas and all their verses, and all the vowels in those verses, and all the rules in respect of their pronunciation, are my work. I am he who emerges at the beginning of

creation from the ocean of milk at the earnest invocation of Brahma and all the Devas, and he who grants boons to all the Devas.

I am he who is the repository of the science of pronunciation contained in the angas of the Vedas. It was through my grace that, following the path indicated by Vamadeva, the Maharishi Panchala obtained from that eternal Being the techniques for reading the Vedas with respect to the division of syllables and words.

Born into the Babhravya vamsa, and having achieved great ascetic victory and obtained a boon from Narayana, Galava compiled the rules regarding the division of syllables and words for reading the Vedas. He also compiled the rules about the required emphasis and accent in reciting them, and shone as the first scholar who became knowledgeable in these two subjects.

Favoured by me, Kundrika and King Brahmadatta, thinking of the sorrow that attends birth and death, attained to that prosperity which is achieved by those devoted to yoga in the course of seven births. In ancient times, I was born as the son of Dharma, and in consequence of this birth I was celebrated as Dharmaja.

I took birth in two forms—Nara and Narayana. Riding on the vahana that helps in the performance of scriptural and other duties, I practised, in those two forms, undying austerities on the breast of Gandhamadana.

At that time Daksha performed his great yagna of Daksha. However, he refused to give a share of the havis to Rudra. Urged by the sage Dadichi, Rudra destroyed that sacrifice. He cast an arrow of blazing flames that consumed all the preparations for Daksha's yagna, and then coursed forcefully towards us, Nara and Narayana at Badari's asrama. That brutal barb fell squarely upon the chest of Narayana. Assailed by its energy the hair on Narayana's head became green. As a result of this change in the colour of my hair I came to be called Munjakesa.

Narayana blew off this arrow, its energy spent, and it returned to Siva. Enraged and fired by the power of his tapasya, Siva charged towards the Rishis Nara and Narayana. Narayana seized the advancing Rudra by his throat. Held by Narayana, the Lord of the universe, Rudra's neck changed colour and became dark. From that time Rudra came to be called Sitikantha.

Meanwhile, Nara pulled up a blade of grass and suffused it with mantras to kill Rudra. The blade of grass was transformed into a mighty battle-axe.

Nara cast the axe at Rudra but it shattered into pieces. Because of that weapon being smashed, I received the name Khandaparasu.'

Arjuna said, 'Krishna, in that battle which could destroy the three worlds, who was victorious? Tell me this!'

Krishna said, 'When Rudra and Narayana were engaged in battle, all the universe trembled with anxious. Agni ceased to accept libations of even the purest ghee offered with Vedic mantras in yagnas. The Vedas no longer shone inward light in the minds of the Rishis of cleansed souls.

Rajas and tamas possessed the Devas. The earth shook. The vault of the sky appeared to be rent in two. All the stars were deprived of their brilliance. Brahma himself fell from his throne.

The ocean became dry. The Himavat Mountains were riven. When such terrible omens appeared everywhere, Brahma surrounded by all the Devas and the Devarishis, rushed to the raging battleground.

Brahma, who can be grasped only with the help of the Niruktas, joined his hands and said to Siva, "Bestow good upon the three worlds. Discard your weapons, Lord of the universe, and benefit all the Akhanda.

That which is unmanifest, indestructible, immutable, supreme, the origin of the universe, uniform, and the supreme actor, that which transcends all pairs of opposites, and is inactive, choosing to be manifested, has assumed this one blessed form, though it appears as two. This Nara and Narayana, the manifest forms of Supreme Brahman, have taken birth in the vamsa of Dharma.

The foremost of all deities, these two observe the highest vratas and severest tapasyas. Through some reason best known to him, I myself have sprung from his grace. Eternal as you are, for you have existed ever since all the past creations, you too, have sprung from his wrath.

Along with me, the Devas and all the Maharishis revere this form of Brahma, and let peace prevail in all the worlds without any delay."

Thus addressed by Brahma, Rudra instantly cast off the fire of his anger, and began to worship Narayana. Indeed, he placed surrendered himself to Narayana. And Narayana, with his anger and senses subdued, was gratified and reconciled with Rudra.

Adored by the Rishis, by Brahma and by all the Devas, the Lord of the universe, also known as Hari, then addressed the illustrious Isana, "He that knows you, knows me. He that follows you, follows me. There is no difference between you and me. Never think otherwise.

The mark that your spear made on my chest will from this day assume the form of a beautiful whorl; and the mark of my hand on your neck will also assume a beautiful shape and for this you shall from this day be called Sreekantha."

Krishna continued, 'Having mutually made marks on each other's bodies, the two Rishis Nara and Narayana were reconciled with Rudra; dismissing the Devas, they once more set themselves to the practice of penances with tranquil souls.

Son of Pritha, I have now told you how, in that ancient battle between Rudra and Narayana, the latter triumphed. I have also told you the many secret names of Narayana and the significance of one of those names which the Rishis bestowed upon him.

Arjuna, assuming diverse forms I roam the earth, the realm of Brahma himself and Golaka, that other high and eternal realm of felicity. Protected by me in the maha yuddha, you have won a great victory.

That Being whom you saw lurking in your chariot, during your battles, is none other than Rudra Kapardin. Otherwise known by the name Kaala, he should be known as one that has sprung from my wrath. Those enemies whom you have killed were all, in the first instance, slain by him.

Bow your head before that powerful God of gods, that Lord of Uma. With concentrated soul, bow unto that illustrious Lord of the universe, that indestructible deity, otherwise called by the name of Hara.

As I have told you, he is none other than one who has manifested from my anger. Arjuna, you have, before this, heard of his puissance and energy!'"

CANTO 344

Saunaka said, 'O Sauti, how excellent is this story that you have narrated. Verily, these ascetics, having heard it, have all been amazed. It is said that a discourse on Narayana is rewarded with more punya than pilgrimages to all the sacred asramas and ablutions performed in all the holy tirthas on earth. Having listened to your divine discourse on Narayana, which can cleanse one of every sin, all of us have certainly been blessed.

Adored in all the worlds, even the Rishis and the Devas, even Brahma, cannot easily behold that most celebrated of all gods. That Narada was able to obtain a glimpse of Narayana, otherwise called Hari, was because his of the special grace of that divine and powerful Lord.

Why then did Devarishi Narada, having succeeded in seeing the Supreme Lord of the universe, dwelling in the form of Aniruddha, go swiftly to Badarikasrama on the breast of Himavat to behold Nara and Narayana? O Sauti, tell us the reason for this.'

Sauti said, 'During his snake-sacrifice, Janamejaya, the royal son of Parikshita, availing himself of an interval in the sacrificial rites, when all the learned Brahmanas were resting, addressed the grandfather of his grandfather, the island-born Krishna, otherwise called Vyasa, that ocean of Vedic lore, that foremost of ascetics endued with power, with these words. Janamejaya said, "What did Devarishi Narada do next when he returned from the White Island, reflecting, as he came, on the words spoken to him by Narayana? Arriving at Badarikasrama upon the breast of the Himavat Mountains, and seeing the two Rishis Nara and Narayana engaged in stern tapasya, how long did Narada dwell there and on what subjects did they speak?

This discourse on Narayana, that is really an ocean of knowledge, has been culled by you by churning that vast histories of a hundred thousand verses, the Mahabharata. As butter is raised from curds, sandalwood from the mountains of Malaya, the Aranyakas from the Vedas, and amrita from medicinal plants, in the same manner, O Tapodhana, you have raised this ambrosial discourse that has Narayana for its subject from diverse itihasas and Puranas existing in the world.

Narayana is the Supreme Lord. Illustrious and formidable, he is the soul of all creatures. Indeed, Dvijottama, the energy of Narayana is irresistible. At the end of the kalpa, all the Devas led by Brahma, all the Rishis with the Gandharvas, and all things living and non-living enter into Narayana.

There is nothing holier on earth or in heaven, and nothing higher, than Narayana. A pilgrimage to all the sacred asramas on earth, and ablutions performed in all the holy waters, will not yield as much punya as a discourse on Narayana. Having listened from the beginning to this discourse on Hari, the Lord of the universe, which destroys all sins, we feel that we have been completely purified and sanctified.

It was not my ancestor Arjuna who was the real victor in the great battle on Kurukshetra; it should be remembered that Krishna was his ally. There is nothing unattainable in the three worlds for a man who has Vishnu himself for his ally. My forebears were extremely fortunate and worthy, for they had Krishna safeguarding their temporal and spiritual prosperity.

Adored by all the worlds, the holy Narayana can be seen only through tapasya. They, however, succeeded in seeing him, Narayana, adorned with the beautiful srivatsa on his chest. More fortunate than my ancestors was the Devarishi Narada, the son of Paramesthi. I am thankful that Mahatejasvin Narada, who transcends all destruction, went to Sweta dwipa, and that he had succeeded in seeing Hari.

It is clear he saw the Supreme Lord as a result only of the grace of that immortal Being. Fortunate was Narada to behold Narayana as existing in the form of Aniruddha.

Having seen Narayana in that form, why did Narada hasten once more to the asrama of Badari to behold Nara and Narayana? What was the reason for this? After his return from the White Island and on his arrival at Badari, where he met with the two Rishis? How long did Narada continue to live there, and what conversations did he have with them? What did those two Mahatman Rishis say to him? It is fitting that you tell me!”

Vaisampayana said, "Salutations unto the holy Vyasa of immeasurable energy. Through his grace I will relate this story of Narayana.

Arriving at the White Island, Narada beheld the immutable Hari. Leaving that place he hurried to the mountains of Meru, bearing in his mind the momentous words spoken by the Paramatman Narayana. Arriving at Meru he was struck at the thought of what he had achieved. And he said to himself, 'How wonderful it is! The journey I undertook was a long one. Having journeyed so far, I have returned safely.'

From the Meru mountains he moved towards Gandhamadana. Coursing through the skies he descended upon the vast retreat of Badari. There he beheld those ancient deities Nara and Narayana, engaged in tapasya while observing high vratas, and devoted to the worship of their own selves.

Both those revered beings bore the beautiful whorls called srivatsa on their chests, and both had matted jata on their heads. And because of their dazzling radiance with which they illumined the world they seemed to surpass even the energy of the sun. Their hands bore the mark of the swan's foot. The soles of their feet bore the sign of the discus.

Their chests were broad; their arms reached down to their knees. Each of them had four mushkas. Each had sixty teeth and four arms. Their voices were deep like rolling thunder.

Their faces were striking, their foreheads broad, their brows fair, their cheeks well-formed, and their noses aquiline. The heads of those two deities were big and round like parasols unfurled. All these features gave them a magnificent appearance.

Seeing them, Narada was filled with joy. He saluted them with reverence and was saluted by them in return. They received the Devarishi, welcomed him and enquired after his wellbeing.

Seeing them, Narada began to reflect, 'These two foremost of Rishis seem to be very alike in appearance to those I have seen in Sweta dwipa.' Thoughtfully, he circled around them in pradakshina and then sat down to rest on the seat made of kusa grass offered to him.

After this, those two famed Rishis, who were the abode of tapasya and tejas, of tranquil hearts and self-restraint, went through their morning rituals. With subdued senses, they worshipped Narada with arghya and water to wash his feet. Having finished their morning kriyas, necessary for receiving their guest, they sat down on two seats made of wooden planks.

When those two Rishis sat, that place began to glow with an unusual beauty even as the sacrificial altar does with the beauty of sacred fires when libations of ghee are poured upon them. Seeing Narada refreshed from fatigue, seated at his ease and gratified with the hospitality he had received, Nara and Narayana spoke to him.

Nara and Narayana said, 'In Sweta dwipa have you seen the Paramatman, who is eternal and divine, and who is the source from which we have sprung?'

Narada said, 'I have seen that beautiful Being who is immutable and who has the universe for his form. In him dwell all the worlds, and all the Devas with the Rishis. Even now I behold him in you two. Those marks and indications that characterise Hari of unrevealed form, characterise you that now have forms revealed to the senses.

Indeed, I see both of you by his side. Sent by the Paramatman, I have come here today. In energy and fame and beauty, who else in the three worlds can equal him than you both that have been born into the dharma vamsa? He has related to me the entire course of Kshetrajna dharma. He has also instructed me in all his future incarnations in this world.

The inhabitants of the White Island, whom I have seen, are without the five senses that ordinary men possess. All of them are of awakened souls, endowed with true gyana. They are entirely devoted to the foremost of Beings, the Supreme Lord of the universe.

They are always engaged in worshipping that great deity, and he always sports with them. The Holy and Supreme Soul loves those that are devoted to him. He also cares for such Dvijas. Compassionate to his bhaktas, he dallies with them.

Enjoyer of the universe, pervading everything, Madhava is ever loving towards his worshippers. He is the actor; he is the Cause; and he is the Effect. He is omnipotent and magnificent.

He is the Cause from which all beings originate. He is the embodiment of all the rules of the shastras. He is the embodiment of all the tattvas. He is renowned. Uniting himself with tapasya, he radiates a splendour that is said to represent an energy that is higher than what is found in Sweta dwipa. Of the Soul cleansed by tapasya, he has ordained peace and tranquillity in the three worlds.

With such an auspicious intellect, he is observes a very superior vrata which is the very embodiment of holiness. The sun does not warm and the

moon does not shine in his realm where he lives engaged in austere penance. There the Wind does not blow.

Having built a vedi measuring eight fingers' breadth there, the Creator of the universe is engaged in rigorous tapasya, standing on one foot, with arms raised and with his face turned towards the east, reciting the Vedas with their angas.

All libations of ghee or meat poured on the sacrificial fire according to the decrees of Brahma, by the Rishis, by Pasupati himself, by the rest of the principal Devas, by the Daityas, the Danavas and the Rakshasas, all reach the feet of that Great Divinity. Whatever karmas and kriyas are performed by those souls who are entirely devoted to him, are all received by him on his head.

No one is dearer to him in the three worlds than those who are awakened and enlightened. Dearer even is one completely devoted to him. Sent by him who is the Paramatman, I have come here at his command.

Henceforth, I shall dwell with you two, devoted to Narayana in the form of Aniruddha.'"

Vaisampayana said, "Nara and Narayana said, 'You are deserving of the highest praise, and have been highly favoured, since you have seen the puissant Narayana himself in the form of Aniruddha. No one else, not even Brahma who was born from the primal lotus, has been able to behold him. That foremost of Purushas is of unmanifest origin and cannot be seen.

What we say to you is the truth, O Narada. There exists no one in the universe that is dearer to him than one that adores him with devotion. It is for this that he revealed himself to you.

No one can repair to that realm where the Paramatman is engaged in tapasya other than us. The splendour of the place adorned by him resembles the effulgence of a thousand suns gathered together.

From him who is the origin of the creator of the universe springs the attribute of forgiveness which attaches to the earth. It is from that illustrious Being who seeks the welfare of all beings, that the rasa of taste has arisen. That rasa attaches to the waters which are liquid.

It is from him that Agni, having the attribute of form or sight, has arisen. It attaches itself to the sun which then is able to shine and radiate heat. It is from that illustrious and foremost of Beings that touch also has arisen. It is attached to Vayu, which enables it to move about in the world producing the sensation of touch.

It is from that Lord of the entire universe that sound has arisen. It attaches to Akasa, which allows it to exist uncovered and unconfined. It is from him that Manas, Mind, which pervades all Beings, has arisen. It attaches to Chandramas, and so Chandramas has the quality of revealing all things. In the Vedas, where Narayana, that partaker of the libations and other offerings, resides, with gyana alone for his companion, has been called Sat, the generative cause of all things.

The path of those who are stainless and free from both virtue and sin, is fraught with auspiciousness and felicity. Aditya, who is the dispeller of the darkness of all the worlds, is said to be the doorway through which the emancipated must pass. Entering Aditya, the bodies of such men are consumed by his fire. They then become invisible and cannot be seen by anyone at any time.

Reduced into invisible atoms, they pass into the form of Aniruddha, Narayana in manifested form, who dwells in the heart of the realm of Aditya. Losing all physical attributes and being transformed into pure mind, they then enter into Pradyumna. Passing out of Pradyumna, those that are conversant with Samkhya yoga and those that are devoted to the Supreme Deity then enter Samkarsana otherwise called Jiva.

After this, divested of the three primal gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, those foremost of regenerate beings quickly enter the Paramatman, also called Kshetrajna, and which itself transcends these three primal attributes. Know that Vasudeva is he when called Kshetrajna.

Surely you must know that Vasudeva is the abode or original refuge of all things in the universe. Only those whose minds are focused, who practise restraint and subdue their senses, and who are devoted to him, succeed in entering Vasudeva.

We two have taken birth in the house of Dharma. Living in this delightful and vast hermitage we undergo the austerest tapasya. We are thus engaged being moved by the desire to benefit those manifestations of the Supreme Deity, dear to all the Devas, which will occur in the three worlds to achieve diverse and unrivalled feats.

In accordance with such rare rules that apply to us two only, we observe all excellent and high vratas fraught with the most rigorous of penances. O Devarishi, with the power of our tapasya, we saw you when you were in the White Island.

Having met Narayana, you have made a particular resolution, which is known to us. In the three worlds consisting of mobile and immobile beings, there is nothing that is unknown to us. Maharishi, of the good or evil that will occur or has occurred or is occurring, that Devadeva has informed you.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Having heard these words of Nara and Narayana, Narada joined his hands in reverence and became entirely devoted to Narayana. He spent his time in mentally reciting countless sacred mantras that are in praise of Narayana.

Worshipping him, and adoring those two ancient Rishis who were born in the dharma vamsa, Rishi Narada continued to dwell in Nara and Narayana's asrama of Badari on Himavat for a thousand years of the Devas.'"

CANTO 345

Vaisampayana said, "On one occasion, while dwelling with Nara and Narayana, Narada the son of Paramesthi, having duly completed the rites and rituals to honour the Devas, set himself to perform the kriyas in honour of the Pitris.

Seeing him thus prepared, the eldest son of Dharma, Nara, addressed him, saying, 'Which Devas and Pitris are you worshipping with these rites and rituals? O foremost of all wise men, tell me this, in accordance with the shastras. What is this that you are doing? What are the fruits you desire by performing these rites?'

Narada said, 'On an earlier occasion you said to me that rites and rituals in honour of the Devas should be done. You said that the kriyas in their honour constitute the highest sacrifice equal to the worship of the eternal Paramatman. Instructed by that teaching, I perform these rites in honour of the immutable Vishnu.

It is from that Supreme Deity that Brahma, the Pitamaha of all the worlds, arose in the ancient times. That Brahma, or Paramesthi, filled with ananda, caused my father Daksha to come into being. I was the son of Brahma, created before all others, by a command of his will, although later, through the curse of that Rishi, I had to be born as the son of Daksha

O righteous and illustrious one, I am performing these kriyas in honour of the Pitris for the sake of Narayana, and conforming to the rules that were laid down by him. Narayana is the father, mother and grandfather of all creatures. In all yagnas performed in honour of the Pitris, it is that Lord of the universe who is adored and worshipped.

On one occasion, the Devas taught their children the Srutis. Having lost this knowledge themselves they had to again acquire it from those very sons unto whom they had communicated it. In this manner, the sons, who had to thus convey the mantras to their sires, achieved the status of fathers, and the fathers, who received the mantras from their sons, attained the status of sons.

Without doubt, what the Devas did on that occasion is known to you two. Sons and fathers had thus to worship each other. Having first spread some blades of kusa grass on the ground, the Devas and the Pitris, their children, placed three pindas there and worshipped each other. I now wish to know why the Pitris in ancient days acquired the name of Pindas.'

Nara and Narayana said, 'In the past, the earth, with her belt of seas, disappeared. Govinda, assumed the form of a colossal boar and raised her with his mighty tusk. Having restored the earth to her former position, that foremost of Purushas, his body smeared with water and mud, set himself to do what was necessary for the world and its inhabitants.

When the sun reached the meridian, and it was the hour for saying the morning prayers, Vishnu suddenly shook off three lumps of mud from his tusk and set them upon the earth in the place where he had spread blades of the kusa grass. He dedicated those lumps of mud to his own self, according to the rules laid down in the shastras.

After shaking off those lumps from his tusks as Pindas, he sat facing the east and himself performed the rites of dedication with the oil of sesame seeds that arose from the heat of his own body. Impelled by the desire to establish rules of conduct for the inhabitants of the three worlds, Vishnu, Vrishakapi, said these words: "I am the Creator of the worlds. I have resolved to create the Pitris."

Saying this, he began to think of those worthy laws that should regulate the rituals to be performed in honour of the Pitris. While thus engaged, he saw that the Pindas had fallen towards the south.

He then said to himself, "These Pindas have fallen on the surface of the earth towards the south. Based on this, I declare that these should from now on be known by the name of Pitris. Let these three round lumps come to be regarded as Pitris in the world.

In this way I am creating the eternal Pitris. I am the father, the grandfather and the great-grandfather, and I should be regarded as dwelling in these three Pindas. There is no one that is higher than me. Who can I

worship and adore? Who is my father in the universe? I myself am my grandfather. I am, indeed, the Pitamaha and the sire. I am the one cause of all the universe."

Learned Brahmana, having said these words, Vrishakapi offered those Pindas on the breast of the Varaha Mountains, with elaborate rituals. With these he worshipped his own self, and having finished the worship, vanished. Hence the Pitris came to be called by the name of Pinda.

In accordance with these words of Vrishakapi on that occasion, the Pitris receive the worship offered by all. They who perform yagnas in honour of and adore the Pitris, the Devas, gurus or other revered elder guests, cows, superior Brahmanas, Devi Bhumi, and their mothers, in thought, word and deed are said to adore and sacrifice to Vishnu himself.

Pervading the bodies of all existent creatures, the illustrious Lord is the Soul of all things. Detached from happiness or misery, he regards all equally. Narayana has been said to be the Soul of all things in the universe.'"

CANTO 346

'Vaisampayana said, "Having heard these words of Nara and Narayana, Narada was filled with bhakti for the Supreme Being. With his whole being he devoted himself to Narayana. Having lived a full thousand years in the retreat of Nara and Narayana, having beheld the immutable Hari, and heard the excellent discourse on the subject of Narayana, the Devarishi repaired to his own asrama on the breast of Himavat.

Those foremost of Munis, Nara and Narayana, however continued to dwell in the delightful Badarikasrama, engaged in the practice of the severest tapasyas. You are born into the Pandava vamsa. You are of immeasurable energy. Having heard this discourse on Narayana from the beginning, you have certainly been cleansed of all your sins and your soul has been sanctified.

He who hates instead of loving and worshipping Hari, his is neither this world nor the world hereafter. The ancestors of those who hate Narayana, the foremost of gods, plunge into naraka forever.

Vishnu is the soul of all beings. How, then, can Vishnu be hated, for in hating him one would hate one's own self. He who is our guru, the Rishi Vyasa, the son of Gandhavati, has himself recited this discourse on the glory of Narayana to us, that glory which is the highest. I heard it from him and have narrated it to you exactly as I heard it.

Rajan this dharma, with its mysteries and the summary of its details, was obtained by Narada from Narayana himself. Such are the particulars of this great sect. I have earlier explained this to you in the Hari-Gita, with a brief reference to its niyamas.

Know that the island-born Vyasa is Narayana on earth. Who other than he could compile such an itihasa as the Mahabharata? Who else than that puissant Rishi could discourse upon the diverse kinds of duties and religions for men to adopt and follow?

You have resolved upon performing a great sacrifice. Let your yagna continue as determined by you. Having listened to the many kinds of duties and paths, let your yagna proceed."'

Sauti continued, 'Having heard this great discourse, Janamejaya began all those kriyas established in the shastras for the completion of his mahayagna. Saunaka, I have duly narrated that great sermon on Narayana to you and all these Rishis who dwell in the Naimisa vana. Formerly Narada recited it to my guru in the hearing of many Rishis and the sons of Pandu, and in the presence of Krishna and Bhishma also.

Narayana is the Lord of all the foremost of Rishis, and of the three worlds. He is the upholder of this vast Bhumi herself. He is the vessel that holds the Srutis and of the attribute of humility.

He is the great receptacle of all those laws that must be adhered to in order to attain peace of mind, as also of all those with the name Yama. He is always accompanied by the foremost of Dvijas. Let that Great Deity be your refuge.

Hari always does what is agreeable and beneficial to the inhabitants of swarga. He is the slayer of Asuras who trouble the three worlds. He is the receptacle of tapasya. He has great renown.

Known as Madhu and Kaitabha, he is also the slayer of the Daityas. He ordains the goals of those who know and observe scriptural and other duties. He dispels the fears of all. He takes the best of the havis offered in sacrifices. He is your refuge and protection.

He is Saguna, blessed with gunas; he is Nirguna, free from gunas. He has a quadruple form. He shares the punya arising from the dedication of holy tanks and the observance of similar religious rites. Unvanquished and mighty, it is he that always proclaims the goal of the Atmans of righteous Rishis.

He is the witness of the worlds. He is unborn. He is the one ancient Purusha. With the radiance of the sun, he is the Supreme Lord and is the refuge of all. Do all of you bow your heads before him, since Narayana himself who sprang from the primordial waters bows before him.

He is the origin of the universe. He is that Being who is called amrita, deathless. He is minute. He is the refuge upon whom all things depend. He is the one Being to whom the attribute of immutability attaches. The Samkhyas and yogins, of restrained souls, uphold him to be their eternal knowledge.’

CANTO 347

Sauti said, 'Janamejaya said, "I have heard from you of the glory of the divine Paramatman. I have heard also of the birth of the Supreme Deity in the house of Dharma, in the forms of Nara and Narayana. I have also heard about the origin of the Pinda from the mighty Varaha, the form that Vishnu assumed to raise the submerged earth.

I have heard from you about the Devas and Rishis that were ordained for Pravritti dharma and of those that were ordained for Nivritti dharma. You have also discoursed to us on other subjects. You have spoken to us of that vast form, Hayagriva with the equine head, of Vishnu, that partaker of the libations and other offerings, the form that appeared in the great ocean towards the north-east.

That form was seen by Paramesthi, the illustrious Brahma. What were the exact features, and what was the tejas, the like of which had never been seen before, of that form which Hari, upholder of the universe, revealed on that occasion? What did Brahma do after having seen him, whose likeness had never been seen before, him of immeasurable energy, him with the equine head, and who was sacredness itself?

On this ancient subject, this question arises in our mind. Why did the Supreme Deity assume that form and display himself in it to Brahma? You have certainly sanctified us by speaking to us on these diverse sacred subjects!"'

Sauti said, 'I shall recite to you that itihasa which is perfectly consistent with the Vedas, and which Vaisampayana recited to the son of Parikshita on the occasion of the great snake-sacrifice. Having heard the account of this

mighty form of Vishnu, with the horse's head, the royal son of Parikshita too, had the same doubt and put the same questions to Vaisampayana.

Janamejaya said, "Tell me for what reason did Hari appear in that mighty form with a horse-head, which Brahma saw on the shores of the great northern ocean?"

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, all existing objects in this world are the result of a combination of the five primal elements, a combination caused by the intelligence of the Supreme Lord. The puissant and infinite Narayana is the Supreme Lord and Creator of the universe.

He is the inner Soul of all things, and the giver of boons. Without gunas, he also possesses them. Listen now to me as I tell you about the Pralaya and how all things are destroyed.

At first, Bhumi merges in Jala and then nothing is seen save one vast expanse of water on all sides – the Ekarnava. Jala then merges into Agni, and Agni into Vayu. Vayu merges into Akasa which in turn merges into Manas, mind. Manas merges into the Vyakta, the manifest, or Chitta, Consciousness. The Vyakta merges into the Avyakta, the unmanifest or Prakriti. Prakriti merges into Purusha, the Jivatman, and Purusha merges into the Paramatman, or Brahman.

Then tamas spreads over the face of the universe, and nothing can be seen. From that primal darkness arises Brahma endowed with the principle of creation. Tamas is primeval and immortal. Brahma arising from this darkness develops by his own power into the idea of the universe, and assumes the form of Purusha.

This Purusha is called Aniruddha. Without gender, it is otherwise called Pradhana, supreme or primary. Rajan, It is also known by the name of Vyakta, a combination of the triguna. He exists with only gyana for his companion.

That renowned Being is otherwise called by the name of Viswaksena or Hari. Yielding to yoga-nidra, he lays himself down on the waters of the ocean Ekarnava. He then thinks of the creation of the universe with its diverse phenomena and immeasurable attributes. While engaged in thinking of creation, he recollects his own lofty gunas.

From this springs the four-faced Brahma who represents the consciousness of Aniruddha. Brahma, otherwise called Hiranyagarbha, is the Pitamaha of all the worlds. With eyes like lotus-petals, he is born within the lotus that springs from the navel of Aniruddha.

Seated on that lotus, the illustrious eternal Brahma saw himself surrounded by water. Adopting the attribute of sattva, Brahma Paramesthi, then began to create the universe.

In the primeval lotus, radiant like the Sun, two drops of holy water had been cast by Narayana. He, Narayana, looked at those two drops of water.

One of those two drops, beautiful and bright in form looked like a drop of honey. At the command of Narayana, a Daitya of the name of Madhu, with the attribute of tamas, sprang from that drop. The other drop of water within the lotus was very hard. From it sprang the Daitya Kaitabha composed of the attribute of rajas.

As soon as they were born, imbued with tamas and rajas, the two mighty Daityas armed with maces began to roam within that vast primeval lotus. In it they beheld the effulgent Brahma, engaged in creating the four Vedas, each with the most delightful form.

Seeing the four Vedas, the powerful Asuras suddenly seized the Vedas before the very eyes of their Creator. With the Vedas, the two Danavas dived into the ocean and swam to its bottom. Seeing the Vedas forcibly taken from him, Brahma was grief-stricken and addressed the Supreme Lord Narayana in these words.

Brahma said, 'The Vedas are my great eyes. The Vedas are my great strength. The Vedas are my great refuge. The Vedas are my high Brahman. They have been taken from me by the two Danavas. Deprived of the Vedas, the worlds I have created are plunged in darkness.

Without the Vedas, how can I bring creation into existence? Alas, great is the grief I suffer because of the loss of the Vedas. My heart is wounded and has become the home of a great sorrow.

Who is there that will rescue me from this ocean of grief in which I am drowning? Who is there that will bring me the Vedas I have lost? Who is there that will take pity on me?'

While he spoke, Brahma decided to sing the praises of Hari in these words. He joined his hands in reverence, grasped the feet of his Progenitor, and sang this hymn in honour of Narayana.

Brahma said, 'I bow to you, O heart of Brahman. I bow to you that was born before me. You are the origin of the universe. You are the foremost of all abodes. You are the ocean of yoga with all its angas. You are the Creator of both the Vyakta and the Avyakta.

You walk the path of vast and immeasurable auspiciousness. You devour the universe. You are the Antaraloka, the Inner Soul, of all creatures. You have no origin. You are the refuge of the universe. You are Svayambhu; your origin is none other than yourself.

As for myself, I have sprung through your grace. I have been born from you. My first birth, which is regarded sacred by all regenerate persons, was from a fiat of your mind. My second birth was from your eyes. Through your grace, my third birth was from your speech.

My fourth birth was from your ears. My fifth birth was from your nose. O Lord, My sixth birth was, through you, from an egg. This is my seventh birth. It has occurred, O Lord, within this lotus, and it is meant to stimulate the intellect and desires of all creatures.

In each birth I am born as your son. Indeed, I take birth as your eldest son constituted of sattva, the purest of the three gunas. Your own nature is Supreme. You are born from yourself.

I have been created by you. The Vedas are my eyes. Hence, I transcend Time itself. Those Vedas, which care my eyes, have been taken from me and I have become blind. Awaken from your yoga-nidra. Give me back my eyes. I am dear to you as you are to me.'

Thus praised by Brahma, the illustrious Purusha, with face turned in every direction, shook off his slumber and resolved to recover the Vedas from the Daityas that had taken them. With his yoga-shakti, he assumed a second form. His body, with an excellent nose, became as luminous as the moon. He assumed an equine head of great effulgence, which was the abode of the Vedas.

The sky, with all its stars and constellations, became the crown of his head. His locks of hair were long and flowing, and had the splendour of the rays of the sun. The realms above and below became his two ears. The earth became his forehead. The two rivers Ganga and Saraswati became his two hips.

The two oceans became his two eyebrows. The sun and the moon became his two eyes. The twilight became his nose. The AUM became his memory and intelligence. Lightning became his tongue. The Soma-drinking Pitris became his teeth. Goloka and Brahmaloka became his upper and lower lips.

The terrible night that follows the Pralaya, transcending the three attributes, became his neck. Having assumed this form with the horse's

head and having diverse things for its diverse limbs, the Lord of the universe disappeared in an instant, and plunged down into patala.

Having reached that realm, he set himself to high yoga. Adopting a voice regulated by the rules of the science called siksha, he began to recite the Vedic mantras aloud. His enunciation was distinct and melodious, and reverberated through the air. The sound of his voice filled patala from end to end. Suffused with the properties of all the elements, it produced great grace and merit.

The two Asuras determined to return to the Vedas quickly, flung them aside and ran towards the place from where those sweet sounds issued.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Lord with the horse's head, otherwise called Hari, picked up all four Vedas. Returning to Brahma, he gave him Vedas to him. Having restored the Vedas to Brahma, Narayana once more returned to his own nature.

Narayana returned to his form with the equine head in the northeastern region of the great ocean. Having re-established Brahma who was the abode of the Vedas, he once more became the equine-headed form that he was. The two Danavas, Madhu and Kaitabha, did not find the source of the sounds and swiftly returned to that place. They looked around but did not find the Vedas. The Asuras rapidly rose from the nether region. Returning to the primeval lotus from which they had taken birth, they saw the puissant Being, the original Creator, dwelling in the form of Aniruddha of fair complexion and the splendour of the moon.

Of immeasurable prowess, he was under the influence of yoga-nidra, asleep, his body stretched on the waters and occupying a space as vast as itself. Glowing with great effulgence and the stainless sattva guna, the body of Vishnu lay on the hood of a resplendent snake that emitted flames of fire.

Beholding the Lord thus, the two Danavas roared with laughter. Imbued with the attributes of rajas and tamas, they said, 'This is that Being of white complexion. He now lies asleep. Without doubt, this one has brought the Vedas away from patala. Whose is he? Who is he? Why is he thus asleep on the hood of a snake?'

These words of the two Danavas awakened Hari from his yoga-slumber. Narayana, thus awakened, understood that the two Danavas intended to fight him. Seeing this, he also set his mind to gratify their desire.

A battle broke out between those two on one side and Narayana on the other. The Asuras Madhu and Kaitabha were embodiments of rajas and

tamas. To please Brahma, Narayana killed them both. Thus he came to be called Madhusudana, the slayer of Madhu. Having destroyed the two Asuras and restored the Vedas to Brahma, Vishnu assuaged Brahma's grief.

With the help of Hari and the Vedas, Brahma created all the worlds with their mobile and immobile creatures. Granting the intelligence of creation to Brahma, Hari disappeared from there and returned to where he had come from.

It was thus that Narayana, having assumed the form with the horse-head, slew the two Danavas Madhu and Kaitabha. Once more he assumed the same form to cause Pravritti dharma to flow in the universe. Thus did the blessed Hari assume that grand form of Hayasiras. This is celebrated as the oldest and most powerful of all his forms. He who frequently listens or mentally recites the story of how Narayana assumed that form will never lose his Vedic knowledge.

Having adored this illustrious deity with rigorous tapasya, the Rishi Panchala, also known as Galava, acquired the knowledge of Krama by treading the path shown by Rudra. Rajan, I have now recited to you the ancient story of Hayasiras, consistent with the Vedas, about which you asked me.

Whatever forms the Supreme Deity desires to assume with a view to ordain the affairs of the universe, he assumes those forms within himself by exercising his own inherent powers. Narayana is the receptacle of the Vedas. He is the receptacle of tapasya as well. Hari is yoga.

He is the embodiment of the Samkhya yoga. He is that Parabrahman of which we hear. Truth has Narayana for its refuge. Rita has Narayana for its Atman. Nivritti, from which there is no return, has Narayana for its abode. The basis of Pravritti equally has Narayana for its soul.

The foremost of all the attributes that belong to the earth is smell. Scent has Narayana for its soul. The attributes of water are various kinds of tastes. These too have Narayana for their soul.

The foremost attribute of light is form. Form also has Narayana for its soul. Touch, which is the attribute of wind, also has Narayana for its soul. Sound, which is an attribute of space, has like the others Narayana for its soul. Mind also, which is the attribute of the unmanifest Prakriti, has Narayana for its soul.

Time which is computed by the movement of the celestial luminaries has similarly Narayana for its soul. The Devas of fame, of beauty and of

wealth have him for their soul. Both the Samkhya philosophy and yoga have Narayana for their soul.

As Purusha, the Supreme Being is the cause of all this. He is the origin of everything, as Pradhana or Prakriti. He is Svabhava, the basis on which all things rest. Through his agency we witness the variety in the universe.

He is the various kinds of energy that act in the universe. In these five ways he is that all-controlling invisible influence of which men speak. Those who study the many areas of knowledge regard Hari to be identical with these five causes and as the final refuge of all things.

Narayana, endowed with the highest yoga-shakti is the only one topic of enquiry. The thoughts of the all the inhabitants of all the worlds, including Brahma and the high-souled Rishis, of those that are Samkhyas and yogins, of those that are Yatis, and of those that are conversant with the Atman are fully known to Kesava, but none of these can know what his thoughts are.

Whatever deeds are performed in honour of the Devas or the Pitris, whatever gifts are made, whatever penances are performed, have Vishnu established by his own laws for their refuge. He is named Vasudeva because he is the abode of all creatures. He is immutable. He is Supreme.

He is the foremost of Rishis. He is mighty. He transcends the three gunas. Just as time which runs seamlessly manifests itself in the form of succeeding seasons, even so, though nirguna, does he manifest himself.

Even they that are Mahatmans cannot understand what he does. Only those foremost of Rishis with knowledge of their Atmans succeed in beholding in their hearts that Purusha who transcends all gunas.'"

CANTO 348

Janamejaya said, "The illustrious Hari is gracious to those who are devoted to him with their entire beings. He accepts also all that is offered to him in accordance with the shastras.

Men who have burnt away their karma, those without paapa and punya, and those who have attained the knowledge handed down from guru to guru always attain that fourth and highest end, the essence of the Purushottama or Vasudeva. Devoted to Narayana with their whole souls, they attain that highest goal instantly.

Undoubtedly, bhakti dharma seems to be superior to that of gyana, and is very dear to Narayana. Those who adhere to it, without going through the three successive stages of Aniruddha, Pradyumna, and Samkarshana, at once attain to the immutable Hari.

In my view, the end that is attained by Brahmanas, who duly study the Vedas with the Upanishads according to the niyamas regulating such study, and by those that adopt the religion of Yatis, is inferior to that attained by persons devoted to Hari with all their heart."

Janamejaya said, "Who first promulgated this bhakti dharma? Was it some Deva or some Rishi that declared it? What are the practices of those that are said to be devoted with their entire souls? When did those practices begin? I have questions about these subjects. Dispel these doubts. Great is my interest in hearing you explain these to me."

Vaisampayana said, "When the eighteen aksauhinis of the Pandava and the Kaurava armies were drawn up ready for the battle and when Arjuna became despondent, Krishna himself explained what is and what is not the

end attained by persons of different characters. I have earlier narrated his words to you.

The dharma taught by the Holy One between two teeming armies is difficult to understand. Men of uncleansed souls cannot grasp it at all. Rajan, having created this dharma in the ancient Krita yuga, in perfect consonance with the Samans, it is borne by the Supreme Lord Narayana himself.

Arjuna asked this very question of Narada in the midst of the Rishis and in the presence of Krishna and Bhishma. My guru, Vyasa, heard what Narada said. Receiving it from the Devarishis, Vyasa imparted it to me in exactly the same way in which he had obtained it from Narada.

I will now tell it to you in the same way as it was received from Narada. Listen to me.

In that kalpa when Brahma took his birth in the mind of Narayana and emerged from his mouth, Narayana himself performed his Daiva and Paitra rites in accordance with bhakti dharma. Those Rishis that subsist upon the froth of water then obtained it from Narayana.

From the froth-eating Rishis, this dharma was obtained by the Vaikanasa Rishis. From the Vaikanasas, Soma had it. Later, it disappeared from the universe.

After his second birth, when he sprang from the eyes of Narayana, Brahma received this bhakti dharma from Soma. Having received it thus, Brahma instructed Rudra in it.

In the Krita yuga of that ancient kalpa, Rudra, devoted to yoga, imparted it to all the Balakhilya Rishis. Through the illusion of Narayana, it once more vanished from the universe.

In the third birth of Brahma, which was from the speech of Narayana, this dharma once more arose from Narayana himself. Rishi Suparna obtained it from that foremost of beings. Suparna used to recite it three times during the day. Hence it came to be called Trisauparna.

This religion has been referred to in the Rigveda. Its duties are strenuous to practise. Vayu, who sustains the lives of all creatures, obtained this eternal dharma from Rishi Suparna.

Vayu transmitted it to those Rishis who live on the sacrificial offerings that remain after feeding guests and others. From those Rishis this dharma was obtained by the Great Ocean. It once more disappeared from the universe and merged into Narayana.

Listen now to what happened in the kalpa when, in his next birth, Brahma sprang from the ear of Narayana. When Hari resolved upon creation, he thought of a being who would have the power to create the universe. While thinking of this, a being sprang from his ears, one that was competent to create the universe. The Lord called him by the name Brahma.

Addressing Brahma, the Supreme Narayana said to him, 'Son, create all kinds of creatures from your mouth and feet. I will do what benefits you, for I shall empower you with both energy and strength needed to make you equal to this task. You will also receive from me the sattvata dharma. With it you will create the Krita yuga and duly establish it.'

Thus addressed, Brahma bowed his head before Hari, and received from him that foremost of all paths with all its mysteries and its details, together with the Aranyakas, which emanated from Narayana's mouth.

Narayana then instructed Brahma in that dharma and said to him, 'You are the creator of the duties that are to be observed in the respective yugas.' Having said this, Narayana disappeared and went to the place which is beyond the reach of tamas, where the Avyakta, unmanifest, resides and which is known to those whose deeds are without the desire for fruits.

After this, the boon-giving Brahma, the Pitamaha of the worlds, created the different worlds with their mobile and immobile creatures. The age that first commenced was perfectly auspicious and came to be called Krita. In that age, only the sattva dharma existed, pervading the entire universe. With that primeval religion of righteousness, Brahma, the Creator of all the worlds, worshipped the puissant Hari Narayana.

To spread that dharma for the welfare of the worlds, Brahma instructed that Manu who is known by the name of Svarochisha in that dharma. Svarochisha Manu gave that knowledge to his own son Sankhapada.

Sankhapada communicated this knowledge to his own son Suvarnabha who was the ruler of the cardinal and subsidiary directions. When the Krita yuga ended, the Treta yuga began and the dharma once more disappeared from the world.

In a subsequent birth of Brahma, which was derived from the nose of Narayana, with eyes like lotus petals, the Lord himself recited this doctrine in the presence of Brahma. Then Sanatkumara, the son of Brahma, created from his thought, studied this doctrine.

From Sanatkumara, in the beginning of the Krita yuga, the Prajapati Virana learned the dharma. Having studied it, Virana taught it to the ascetic

Raivya. Raivya, in his turn, imparted it to his pure and wise son Kushki, of high vratas, that righteous ruler of the cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon. Again, this dharma, born of the mouth of Narayana, vanished from the world.

In the next birth of Brahma, when he emerged from an egg which sprang from Hari, this doctrine once more issued from the mouth of Narayana. It was received by Brahma who practised it duly in all its aspects. Brahma then transmitted it to those Rishis known as Barhishada.

From the Barhishadas it was obtained by a Brahmana known as Jyeshtya, learned in the Sama Veda. And because he was knowledgeable about the Samans, he is also known by the name of Jyeshtya-Samavrata Hari. It was obtained by a king of the name of Avikampana from this Brahmana. After this, the doctrine once more disappeared from the world.

At the beginning of this kalpa, in the seventh birth of Brahma from the lotus that sprang from the navel of Narayana, this dharma was re-established by Narayana himself, and given to the creator of all the worlds. Brahma gave it to Daksha, one of his sons Created by a thought of his mind.

Daksha, in his turn, imparted it to the eldest of all the sons of his daughters, Aditya, who was older than Savitri. From Aditya, Vivaswat obtained it. In the beginning of the Treta yuga, Vivaswat transmitted this knowledge to Manu. To protect and support all the worlds, Manu gave it to his son Ikshvaku.

Promulgated by Ikshvaku, the bhakti dharma spreads across the whole world. When Pralaya comes, it will once more return to Narayana and be merged in him. The religion which is practised by the Yatis, has been earlier narrated to you in the Hari Gita, with a summary of all its rules.

Along with its mysteries and details, Devarishi Narada got it from Narayana himself. This foremost of doctrines is primeval and eternal. Difficult to grasp and arduous to practise, it is always upheld by persons devoted to the sattva guna.

Hari becomes gratified by actions performed with a full knowledge of dharma without injury to any creature. Some adore Narayana with only a single form, that of Aniruddha. Some adore him as having two forms, that of Aniruddha and Pradyumna.

Some adore him as having three forms, Aniruddha, Pradyumna and Samkarshana. Others revere him as consisting of four forms, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Samkarshana, and Vasudeva.

Hari is himself the Kshetrajna. He is whole, without parts. He is the Jiva in all creatures, transcending the five Mahabhutas. He is Manas, the mind that directs and controls the five senses. Having the highest intelligence, He is the ordainer of the universe, and its Creator.

He is both active and inactive. He is both cause and the effect. He is the one immutable Purusha, who sports as he likes. Thus have I recited to you the dharma of those who worship without desire, one that cannot be understood by those of uncleansed souls; this knowledge I acquired through the grace of my guru.

Men who are devoted to Narayana with their whole souls are rare. If the world had been full of such men with universal compassion, having Atmagyana, always engaged in doing good to others, then the Krita yuga would have set in. All men would have set themselves to deeds without desire of fruit.

In this way, my preceptor, that foremost of regenerate ones, knower of all duties, Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, discoursed to Dharmaraja Yudhishtira on this bhakti dharma, in the presence of many Rishis and in the hearing of Krishna and Bhishma. He himself had received it from Tapodhana Narada.

Those who worship Narayana with all their souls and are without desire, succeed in attaining to the realm identical with Brahma, pure in complexion, possessing the effulgence of the moon and immutable."

Janamejaya said, "I see that those Dvijas whose souls have been awakened practise diverse kinds of dharmas. Why is it that other Brahmanas, instead of practising these, observe other kinds of vratas and kriyas?"

Vaisampayana said, "Bhaarata, three kinds of dispositions have been created for all embodied creatures, that which relates to the attribute of sattva, that which relates to the attribute of rajas, and lastly that which relates to the attribute of tamas.

One who is devoted to the sattva guna will certainly attain mukti. This guna allows one to understand him who knows Brahman.

Mukti is entirely dependent upon Narayana. Hence those who strive for emancipation are considered to be endowed with this sattva guna. By thinking of Purushottama, the man who revers Narayana acquires great wisdom.

Those who are wise and have taken up the practices of Yatis and mukti dharma, and have quenched their longing, always find that Hari favours them with the fruits of their desire.

That mortal man subject to birth and death upon whom Hari looks kindly should be known as one endowed with the sattva guna and devoted to mukti. The dharma of one devoted to Narayana is regarded as similar or equal in merit to the system of the Samkhyas. By adopting that doctrine one attains to the highest end, moksha which has Narayana for its soul.

That person upon whom Narayana looks with compassion succeeds in becoming awakened. No one, Rajan, can become enlightened through his own wishes. That nature which partakes of both rajas and tamas is said to be mixed.

Hari is not benevolent towards one with such a mixed nature, with Pravritti dharma, who is subject to birth and death. Only Brahma, the Pitamaha of the worlds, looks kindly upon such a man because his mind is overwhelmed by the two inferior attributes of rajas and tamas.

Without doubt, the Devas and the Rishis are devoted to the sattva guna. But they do not have that attribute in its subtle form and hence are of a mutable nature."

Janamejaya said, "How can one that is fraught with the principle of change succeed in attaining to that Purushottama? Tell me this, which, no doubt, is known to you. Discourse to me also of Pravritti."

Vaisampayana said, "That which is the twenty-fifth tattva in the Samkhya system, when it becomes able to abstain entirely from karma, succeeds in attaining to the subtle Purushottama, which is invested with the sattva guna, and which is filled with the Spirit symbolised by the letters A, U and M. The Samkhya system, the Aranyaka Veda, and the Pancharatra shastras are all one and the same and form parts of one whole. This is the dharma of those devoted to Narayana with their whole souls, that which has Narayana for its essence.

As waves of the ocean, rising from the ocean, rush away from it only to return to it in the end, even so diverse kinds of knowledge, springing from Narayana, return to Narayana in the end. I have thus explained to you, son of the Kuru vamsa, what the sattva dharma is. If you are able, then practise it fittingly.

Thus did Narada explain to my guru Vyasa the eternal and immutable course, called Ekanta, followed by the white- as also by the yellow-robed

Yatis. Vyasa, in turn, imparted this to the wise and just Yudhishtira.

I, too, received it from Vyasa and have passed it on to you. For these reasons this dharma is difficult to practise. Hearing it, others are as bewildered as you have been. It is Krishna who is the protector of the universe and its beguiler. It is he who is the destroyer and the cause."

CANTO 349

Janamejaya said, "The Samkhya yoga, the Pancharatra shastras and the Aranyaka-Vedas, all these different systems of gyana or dharma are prevalent in the world. Do they all teach the same course of duties, or are these different from one another? I ask you to instruct me on Pravritti in the proper order."

Vaisampayana said, "I bow to that great Rishi who dispels darkness, whom Satyavati bore to Parasara in the midst of an island, who possesses vast knowledge and who is endowed with a great and liberal soul.

The learned say that he is the origin of Brahma; that he is the sixth form of Narayana; that he is the foremost of Rishis; that he has the might of yoga; that as the only son of his parents he is an incarnate amsa of Narayana; and that, born under extraordinary circumstances on an island, he is the inexhaustible receptacle of the Vedas.

In the Krita yuga, Narayana of great tejas created him as his son. The Mahatman Vyasa is unborn and ancient, and the limitless vessel that contains the Vedas."

Janamejaya said, "Best of the regenerate, you earlier told me that the Rishi Vasishta had a son by the name Saktri and that Saktri had a son named Parasara, and that Parasara had a son named the Krishna Dwaipayana or Vyasa. Now you tell me that Vyasa is the son of Narayana. I ask you, was it in some former birth that Vyasa was born from Narayana? Tell me of that birth of Vyasa from Narayana."

Vaisampayana said, "Wanting to understand the meaning of the Srutis, my guru, that ocean of tapasya devoted to observing all scriptural duties and the acquisition of knowledge, lived for a while in a particular realm of the

Himavat Mountains. Because of the great effort of composing the Mahabharata, he was worn out by his penances. At that time, Sumanta and Jaimini, and Paila, and myself the fourth, and Suka his own son, attended on him. All of us waited dutifully upon him, engaged in doing all that was necessary to dispel his exhaustion.

Surrounded by his five sishyas, Vyasa shone in beauty on the breast of the Himavat Mountains like Mahadeva in the midst of his ghostly ganas. One day, with great reverence, we approached our guru who, having divided and summarised the Vedas with all their angas, and also the meanings of all the verses in the Mahabharata, and having subdued his senses, was at that time immersed in thought.

Availing ourselves of an interval in the conversation, we asked him to expound to us the meanings of the Vedas and the verses in the Mahabharata, and also to narrate to us the events of his own birth from Narayana. Knowing as he was of all subjects of enquiry, he first spoke to us on the interpretations of the Srutis and the Mahabharata, and then began to tell us the following incidents.

Vyasa said, 'Listen, my sishyas, to this most excellent narrative, to this best of histories, which tells of the birth of a Rishi. Pertaining to the Krita yuga, I have learnt of it through my tapasya. On the occasion of the seventh creation, that which was due to the primeval lotus, Narayana, endowed with the austerest penances, transcending both good and evil, and possessing unrivalled splendour, at first created Brahma from his navel.

After Brahma was born, Narayana said to him, "You have sprung from my navel. You possess the powers of creation so set yourself to the task of creating diverse kinds of creatures, rational and irrational."

Thus addressed by his Creator, Brahma felt troubled by the magnitude of this charge and was reluctant to do as he was commanded.

Bowing his head before Hari, the Lord of the universe, Brahma said to him, "I bow to you, O Lord of the Devas, but what powers do I have to create diverse creatures? I have no wisdom. Knowing this, direct me to do what is possible."

Thus addressed by Brahma, Narayana vanished instantly from Brahma's sight. The Supreme Lord then began to meditate. The goddess of intelligence appeared before Narayana. Himself transcending all Yoga, Narayana, by dint of yoga, appealed to the goddess of intelligence.

The immutable Hari, said to the Devi who was endowed with the goodness and power of yoga, "To accomplish the task of creating all the worlds you must enter into Brahma." And she entered Brahma.

When Hari saw that Brahma had been united with intelligence, he once more addressed him, saying "Now create diverse kinds of creatures." Brahma reverently accepted the command of his creator.

Narayana then disappeared from Brahma's presence, and in a moment repaired to his own place, known by the name of Divya, light or effulgence. Returning to his own nature of being unmanifest, he remained in that state of oneness.

After the task of creation by Brahma, another thought arose in Narayana's mind. He reflected, "Brahma, otherwise called Paramesthi, has created all these creatures, Daityas and Danavas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas. The fragile earth has become burdened with the weight of these creatures.

Many among the Daityas and Danavas and Rakshasas will become mighty. With tapasya, they will at times succeed in acquiring many powerful boons. They will swell with pride and strength because of those boons, and will oppress and afflict the most powerful Devas and Rishis.

Thus, from time to time, it is fitting for me to lighten the burden of the earth by assuming diverse forms for each occasion. I will achieve this task by destroying the evil and upholding the righteous. In this manner, protected by me, the earth, the embodiment of truth, will succeed in bearing her load of creatures.

Assuming the form of a mighty snake I will have to uphold the earth in empty space. Thus, she will be able to support all creation, mobile and immobile. In the different ages, I will incarnate on Bhumi in different forms to rescue her from danger."

Having reflected in this way, Madhusudana created diverse forms in his mind in which to appear from time to time. And he thought, "Assuming the forms of Varaha, of Narasimha, of Vamana, and of men, I shall defeat and destroy all the enemies of the Devas." After this, Narayana once more uttered the syllable *Bhoh*, making the air resound with it. From this syllable, Saraswati, arose a Rishi named Saraswat. This son, born of the speech of Narayana, also came to be called Apantaratamas. Powerful and all-knowing of the past, the present and the future, he was firm in the observance of vratas and truthful in speech.

Narayana, the original Creator of the Devas, possessing an immutable nature, said to the Rishi Saraswat, “You must devote your attention to the dissemination of the Vedas. O Rishi, accomplish what I command.”

Obeying this command of the Supreme Lord from whose speech he had sprung into existence, Rishi Apantaratamas organised and distributed the Vedas in the Kalpa named after Swayambhuva Manu. Hari became gratified with the Rishi and his well-performed penances, his vows and observances, and his subduing of his senses and passions.

Narayana said, “In each Manvantara, you will disseminate the Vedas, and as a result you will be immutable and unsurpassable.

When the Kali yuga sets in, certain princes of Bharata’s vamsa, called the Kauravas, will be born from you. They will be celebrated over the earth as high-souled princes ruling over powerful kingdoms. However, dissensions will break out among them ending in their destruction at one another’s hands.

Dvijottama, in that age also, you will spread the Vedas to the diverse varnas. Indeed, in that dark age, your complexion, too, will darken. You will cause various kinds of dharma and gyana to surge.

Although steeped in austere penances, you will never be able to free yourself from desire and attachment to the world. Your son, however, through the grace of Madhava, will be freed from every attachment and be united with the Paramatman. It shall not be otherwise.

He whom learned Brahmanas call the mind-born son of the wise Vasishta, an ocean of tapasya, whose splendour exceeds that of the sun himself, will be the progenitor of a vamsa into which Maharishi Parasara, filled with tejas and prowess, will be born. That foremost of men, that ocean of Vedas, that abode of penances, will be your father in the Kali yuga.

You will be born to an unmarried woman through her union with Rishi Parasara. You will have no doubts about the significance of things past, present and future. Imbued with penances and instructed by me, you will be able to see the events of thousands of ages past. You will also see thousands of yugas into the future.

In that birth, you will behold me on earth, I who am without birth and death, as Krishna of the Yadava vamsa, armed with the Sudarsana Chakra. All this will occur through the punya you will have acquired as a result of your ceaseless devotion to me. These words of mine shall come true.

You will be among the foremost of all the created. Great will be your fame. Surya's son Sani, Saturn, will be born as the great Manu in a future Kalpa. During that Manvantara, your punya will be superior to all the Manus of the several ages. This you will be through my grace.

Whatever exists in the world is the outcome of my exertion. The thoughts of others may not correspond with their actions. As for me, I always ordain what I think, without the slightest hindrance!"'

Vyasa continued, 'Having said these words to the Rishi Apantaratamas, the Supreme Lord dismissed him. Sishyas, I am he that was born as Apantaratamas through Narayana's command. Once more I have been born as Krishna-Dwaipayana of the Vasishta vamsa.

I have thus told you the circumstances of my former birth, which was due to the grace of Narayana in so much that I was a very part of Narayana himself. In ancient times, I undertook the severest of penances with the help of the highest abstraction of the mind.

Moved by my great love for you who revere me, I have told you everything you wished to know about me, from my first birth to the present one!'"

Vaisampayana continued, "As desired by you, Rajan, I have told you about the circumstances connected with the former birth of our revered guru, Vyasa of unstained mind. Now listen to more. There are many kinds of doctrines that go by the names of Samkhya, yoga, the Pancharatra, Vedas and Pasupati.

The creator of the Samkhya yoga is the great Rishi Kapila. The primeval Hiranyagarbha is the promulgator of the yoga system. The Rishi Apantaratamas, also called Prachina-garbha, is said to be the teacher of the Vedas.

The Pasupata doctrine was disseminated by the son of Brahma, the Lord of Uma, that master of all creatures, the always joyful Siva, otherwise known as Sreekantha. Narayana himself is the promulgator of the contents of the Pancharatra shastras.

In all these, it is seen that Narayana is the sole subject of exposition. According to these shastras and the knowledge they contain, Narayana is the only object of worship.

Those who are blinded by tamas, fail to understand that Narayana is the Paramatman who pervades the entire universe. Those wise men, the authors of the shastras, say that Narayana, who is a Rishi, is the one object of

reverent worship in the universe. I say that there is no other being like him. The Supreme Deity, called Hari, lives in the hearts of those who, with the help of the scriptures and of inference, have succeeded in dispelling all doubts.

Madhava never dwells in the hearts of those who doubt and dispute everything using false dialectics. They who are conversant with the Pancharatra shastras, who are duly observant of prescribed duties, and who are devoted to Narayana with their very souls, succeed in entering into Narayana.

The Samkhya and the yoga systems are eternal. All the Vedas are eternal. All the Rishis have declared that this universe existing from ancient times is Narayana's self. You must know that all actions, whether good or bad, are laid down in the Vedas and all events in heaven and earth, between the sky and the waters, are caused by and flow from that ancient Rishi Narayana."

CANTO 350

Janamejaya said, “Regenerate one, are there many Purushas or is there only one? Who in the universe is the foremost of Purushas? What, again, is said to be the source of all things?”

Vaisampayana said, “In the speculations of the Samkhya and the yoga systems many Purushas have been spoken of. Those that follow these systems do not accept that there is but one Purusha in the universe. In the same manner in which the many Purushas are said to have one origin in the Supreme Purusha, it may be said that this entire universe is identical with that one Purusha of superior attributes.

I shall explain this now, after bowing to my guru Vyasa, who knows the Atman, who is observant of tapasya and self-restraint, and is worthy of reverence. Rajan, this speculation on Purusha occurs in all the Vedas. It is well known to be identical with Rita and Satya. Vyasa has reflected upon it.

Many Rishis, descended from Kapila, have contemplated about, and commented on what is called Adhyatma. Through the grace of Vyasa, I will expound to you what Vyasa has said on this subject of the Oneness of Purusha. There is an ancient story of the discourse between Brahma and the three-eyed Mahadeva on this matter.

In the midst of the ocean of milk, there is a lofty mountain of great golden radiance known as Vaijayanta. Going there alone, from his own abode of great splendour and felicity, Brahma would often spend his time contemplating the course of Adhyatma.

While the four-faced Brahma was seated there, his son Mahadeva, who had sprung from his forehead, encountered him in course of his wanderings

through the universe. While coursing through the sky, Mahayogi Siva saw Brahma seated on that mountain and descended on its peak.

Joyfully he appeared before his Creator and worshipped his feet. Beholding Mahadeva prostrated at his feet, Brahma raised him up with his left hand. Having raised him up, Brahma, Lord of all creatures, on meeting his son after a long time, spoke to him.

Brahma said, ‘Mahabaho, you are welcome. It is my good fortune to see you after such a long time. I hope, my son, that all is well and proper with your penances and Vedic studies and your japa. You always observe the most austere tapasya. So I ask you about their practice and wellbeing.’

Rudra said, ‘Through your grace, all is well with my penances and Vedic studies. All is also well with the universe. I saw you long ago in your own dwelling of felicity and effulgence. I am come from there to this mountain that is now your abode.

I am curious about your withdrawal into such a solitary place from your usual realm of splendour. Great must the reason be, Pitamaha, for this.

Your own foremost abode is free from the pains of hunger and thirst, and inhabited by both Devas and Asuras, by Rishis of immeasurable radiance, as also by Gandharvas and Apsaras. Abandoning such a place of felicity, you live alone on this best of mountains. The reason for this must be grave.’

Brahma said, ‘This foremost of mountains called Vaijayanta is always my dwelling. Here, with my mind concentrated in dhyana, I meditate on the one universal Purusha of infinite proportions.’

Rudra said, ‘You are Swayambhu, self-born. Many are the Purushas that have been created by you. More yet are still being created by you. The Infinite Purusha, of whom you speak, is one and single. Who is that Purusha, Brahma, on whom you meditate? I am greatly curious about this. I beg you, dispel my doubt.’

Brahma said, ‘Son, many are those Purushas of whom you speak. The one Purusha, of whom I am thinking, is hidden and transcends all other Purushas. That one Purusha is the foundation of the many Purushas that exist in the universe; and since that one Purusha is the source of all the countless Purushas, the rest, if they succeed in divesting themselves of gunas, succeed in entering into that one Purusha who is all the universe, who is supreme, who is eternal, and who is himself without and above all attributes.”

CANTO 351

"Brahma said, 'Listen now to the description of that Purusha. He is eternal and immutable. He is undecaying and immeasurable. He pervades all things.

That Purusha cannot be seen by you, or by me, or any other. Those who are filled with the understanding and the senses but lacking in self-restraint and tranquillity of soul cannot catch a glimpse him. The Supreme Purusha is said to be one that can be seen only with the help of gyana.

Though without a form, he dwells in every body. Though he lives in bodies, he is never touched by the actions of men. He is my Antaratma, my inner soul. He is your inner soul. He is the all-seeing witness dwelling within every embodied creature and marks their deeds. No one can totally grasp him at any time.

The universe is the crown of his head. The universe is his arms. The universe is his feet. The universe is his eyes. The universe is his nose. Alone he ranges freely through all kshetras without any restriction.

Kshetra is another name for body. And because he knows all kshetras, as also all good and bad deeds, therefore he, who is the soul of yoga, is named Kshetrajna. No one can perceive how he enters into embodied creatures and how he leaves them.

In accordance with the Samkhya shastra, with the help of yoga, duly observing its rules, I am engaged in meditating upon the origin of that Purusha, but, alas, I cannot comprehend that cause. According to the measure of my knowledge, I will discourse to you upon that eternal Purusha and his Oneness and supreme greatness.

The learned speak of him as the singular Purusha. That one eternal Being deserves the name of Mahapurusha. Fire is an element, but it may be seen to blaze up in a thousand places under thousand different circumstances. The sun is one and single, but his rays spread over the universe. Penances are of diverse kinds, but they have one common origin from which they flow.

The wind is one, but it blows in many forms in the world. The great ocean is the one parent of all the waters in the world seen in different circumstances. Nirguna, that one Purusha, is the universe displayed in infinite forms and ways. Flowing from him, the infinite universe enters into him again at the time of the pralaya.

By casting off the consciousness of body and the senses, by casting off all acts good and bad, by casting off both truth and falsehood, one succeeds in ridding oneself of gunas. The person who realises that inconceivable Purusha and grasps his subtle existence in the four forms of Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Samkarshana and Vasudeva, and who, as a result of such understanding, attains perfect tranquillity of heart, succeeds in entering into and identifying himself with that one auspicious Purusha.

Some wise men speak of him as the Paramatman. Others regard him as the one Soul. A third class of learned men describe him just as the Atman. The truth is that he who is the Supreme Soul is always nirguna, without attributes. He is Narayana.

He is the universal soul, and he is the one Purusha. He is never affected by the fruits of actions even as the leaf of the lotus is never drenched by the water one may throw upon it.

The Karmatman, the soul of actions, is different. That soul is sometimes engaged in karma and when it succeeds in discarding karma, attains mukti or union with the Paramatman. The soul of karma has seventeen attributes.

Thus it is said that there are many kinds of Purushas in due order. In reality, however, there is but one Purusha. He is the abode of all the laws that govern the universe. He is the highest subject of knowledge. He is at once the knower and the object to be known. He is at once the thinker and the object of thought. He is the one that eats and the food that is eaten.

He is the smeller and the scent that is smelled. He is at once he that touches and the object that is touched. He is the agent that sees and the object that is seen. He is the hearer and what is heard. He is the conceiver

and that which is conceived. He possesses attributes and is also free from them; he is both saguna and nirguna.

What has earlier been called Pradhana, and is the mother of the Mahat tattva, is no other than the effulgence of the Paramatman because he is eternal, without destruction, without end, and ever changeless. He it is who creates the prime ordinance in respect of Dhatri himself.

Learned Brahmanas call him by the name Aniruddha. All karma, possessing excellent merits and fraught with blessings, flowing in the world from the Vedas, have been caused by him. All the Devas and all the Rishis, with tranquil souls, occupying their places on the vedi, honour him with the first share of their sacrificial offerings.

I, Brahma, the primeval master of all creatures, was born from him, and you have been born from me. From me have flowed the universe with all its mobile and immobile creatures, and all the Vedas, with their mysteries. Divided into four parts, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Samkarshana and Vasudeva, he sports as he pleases. That illustrious and divine Lord is awakened by his own knowledge.

I have answered your questions, my son, according to the manner in which the matter is expounded in the doctrines of Samkhya and yoga.'"

CANTO 352

Sauti said, 'After Vaisampayana had explained to king Janamejaya the glory of Narayana, he began to discourse on another subject by narrating Yudhishtira's question and the answer that Bhishma, who lay on his bed of arrows, gave in the presence of all the Pandavas and the Rishis, and also of Krishna himself.

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, you have discoursed to us on the duties pertaining to mukti dharma. Now tell us about the foremost duties of men belonging to the various asramas.'

Bhishma says, 'The kartavyas or dharmas ordained for each asrama, if well performed, can lead to swarga and the high fruit of truth. Duties are like doors to yagnas, and none of their practices is futile. Bharatarishabha, one who adopts particular duties with dedication and reverence praises these to the exclusion of the rest.

This is the very subject which, in ancient times, was the focus of the conversation between Devarishi Narada and Indra. Narada, revered by all the world, is a siddha, one whose sadhana has been met with fulfilment. He wanders through all the worlds without hindrance, like the all-pervading wind itself.

Once upon a time he repaired to the abode of Indra. Duly honoured by the king of the Devas, he sat close to his host. Seeing him seated at his ease and free from fatigue, the Lord of Sachi addressed him, saying, "Maharishi, is there anything wonderful that you have beheld? Crowned with ascetic success, you roam through the universe of mobile and immobile objects, witnessing all things. There is nothing in the universe that is unknown to

you. Do tell me, therefore, of any wonderful occurrence that you may have felt, seen or heard of."

Thus questioned, Narada began to recite to Indra the vast history that follows. Listen to me as I narrate that story which unfolded. I shall recount it in the same manner in which the Devarishi did, and for the same purpose that he had in mind.'"

CANTO 353

"Bhishma says, 'In the town of Mahapadma, situated on the southern side of the Ganga, there lived a Brahmana of concentrated Soul. Born into the Atri vamsa, he was blessed with an amiable nature. With his doubts dispelled by faith and contemplation, he was well conversant with the path he was to follow.

Ever observant of his dharma, he had his anger under perfect control. Always content, he was a master of his senses. Devoted to tapasya and the study of the Vedas, he was respected by all good men.

He earned wealth by righteous means and his conduct in all things was true to his varnasrama and svadharma. The family to which he belonged was large and celebrated. He had many kinsmen and relatives, and many wives and spouses. His behaviour was always respectable and faultless.

Seeing that he had many children, the Brahmana undertook religious karmas on a large scale. His observances were in accordance with the customs of his own family.

The Brahmana reflected that three kinds of duties have been laid down for observances. Firstly, there were the duties ordained in the Vedas with regard to one's varna and asrama, namely that of a Brahmana observing the rules of grihasta.

Secondly, there were the duties prescribed in the scriptures, namely in the Dharmashastras. And, thirdly, there were those duties that famed and revered men in earlier times had followed though these were not to be found in the Vedas or the Dharmashastras.

Which of these duties should I follow? Which of them, if followed by me, are likely to lead to my benefit? Which, indeed, should be my refuge?

Thoughts like these always troubled him. He could not resolve his doubts.

While troubled with such reflections, another great Brahmana came to his house as a guest. The grihasta duly honoured his atithi according to the niyamas of worship laid down in the shastras. When his guest appeared refreshed and was seated at ease, the Brahmana addressed him in the following words.

The Brahmana said, "Sinless one, I have become devoted to you because of your agreeable conversation. You have become my friend. Listen to me, for I want to ask something. After handing over the duties of a householder to my son, I wish to discharge the highest purushartha of man. What, O Dvija, should be my path?

Relying upon the Jivatman, I wish to live in the one Paramatman. Alas, bound to the ties of attachment, I do not have the will to actually set myself to accomplish that task. And since the best part of my life has passed away in the duties of a grihasta, I now want to devote the rest of my life to acquiring the means to meet the expenses of my future journey.

I desire to cross samsara, the illusory ocean of life. Where will I find the raft of dharma to realise my purpose? I hear that even the Devas must endure the fruits of their actions; beholding the rows of Yama's standards and flags floating over the heads of all creatures, my heart fails to derive pleasure from the diverse sensual objects with which it comes into contact.

I do not respect the dharma of the Yatis as they, too, depend upon alms for their sustenance. My revered guest, you who are endowed with intelligence and reason, set me on the right path of kartavya and karma!"'

Bhishma continues, 'The wise guest, hearing his host's righteous words, said these sweet words in a melodious voice.

The guest said, "I, too, am puzzled about this subject. The same thought occupies my mind and I am unable to arrive at any definite conclusions. Swarga has many doors.

There are some that commend mukti. Some praise the fruits attained by tapasya. Some take refuge in sannyasa way of life. Some follow grihastasrama.

Some rely upon the punya attained by an observance of Kshatriya dharma. Some rely upon the fruits of self-restraint. Some believe that the merits of dutiful obedience to gurus and elders are efficacious.

Some undertake to restrain their speech. Some have attained felicity by waiting dutifully upon their departed ancestors. Some have risen to swarga

by practising compassion, and some by practising truth.

Some rush into battle and, after laying down their lives, attain heaven. Some attain it by practising the Unccha vrata. Some have devoted themselves to the study of the Vedas. These men, of intelligence and tranquil souls, having subdued their senses, attain swarga.

Others characterised by simplicity and truth have been slain by evil men. These have become honoured inhabitants of heaven. In this world, it is seen, that men attain swarga passing through a thousand doors of dharma, all standing wide open. My understanding has been troubled by your question, like a soft cloud by the wind.”””

CANTO 354

"Bhishma says, 'The guest continued, "For all that, Brahmana, I will duly instruct you. Listen to me as I recite what I have heard from my guru. In the Naimisa forest situated on the banks of the Gomati, where the wheel of dharma was set in motion during a former age of creation, there is a city named after the Nagas. There, in ancient times, the assembled Devas had performed a mahayagna. There Mandhatri, the foremost of earthly kings, defeated Indra, the king of the gods.

In that city lives a mighty Naga. He is known by the name of Padmanabha or Padma. Walking in the triple path of karma, gyana and bhakti, he gratifies all creatures in thought, word and deed. Reflecting upon all things with great attention, he protects the good and punishes the evildoer with the fourfold system of conciliation, provoking dissensions, giving gifts or bribes, and using force.

Go there and ask him all the questions you want. He will show you what is truly the highest dharma. That Naga is welcoming towards all guests.

He is wise and knows the shastras. He has all the desirable virtues not to be seen in any other. By nature he is always observant of those duties which are performed with or in water.

He is devoted to the study of the Vedas. He is marked by penances and self-restraint. He has great wealth. He performs yagnas and offers dakshina, abstains from inflicting injury and practises forgiveness. His conduct in all respects is exemplary. Truthful in speech and free from malice, his behaviour is righteous and his senses are under control. He eats only after feeding all his guests and attendants.

He is kind of speech. He has knowledge of what is beneficial, and what is simple and right and what is censurable. He takes stock of what he does and what he leaves undone. He never acts with hostility towards anyone. He is always engaged in doing what is beneficial to all creatures. He belongs to a family that is as pure as the water of a lake in the midst of the Ganges.”’”

CANTO 355

"Bhishma continues, 'The host replied, "I hear your comforting words with as much gratification as a heavily burdened man feels when his load is taken from his head or shoulders. I am filled with the delight that a traveller who has made a long journey on foot feels when he at last lies down on a bed, that which a man feels when he finds a seat after having stood for a long time, or that which is felt by one who is thirsty when he finds cold water to drink.

On hearing your words, I am suffused with the pleasure felt by a hungry man when he finds tasty food set before him, or that which a guest feels when satisfying food is placed before him at the proper time, or that felt by an old man when he gets a long coveted son, or that which is experienced by one when meeting a dear friend or kinsman about whom one has been anxious.

Like one with upturned gaze I have heard what has fallen from your lips and am reflecting upon their significance. With your wise words you have truly instructed me. Yes, I shall do what you have commanded me to.

You may leave tomorrow at dawn, after passing the night happily with me and dispelling your fatigue by resting. Behold, the rays of the divine Surya have been dimmed and he is setting."'

"Bhishma continues, 'Hospitably waited upon by that Brahmana, the learned guest passed that night in the company of his host. Both talked cheerfully with each other on the subject of the sannyasa dharma. So engrossing was the nature of their conversation that the night passed swiftly.

When morning came, the guest was worshipped with due rites by the Brahmana whose heart was now set upon the accomplishment of what would be beneficial for him, according to the discourse of the guest. The righteous Brahmana, resolved to achieve his purpose, took leave of his kinsmen, and soon set out for the abode of that foremost of Nagas, with his mind steadily directed towards it.'"

CANTO 356

"Bhishma says, 'Passing through enchanted forests, lakes and sacred pools, the Brahmana at last arrived at the asrama of a certain sannyasi. On arriving there, he asked the ascetic, in fitting manner, about the Naga of whom he had heard from his guest, and instructed by him he continued on his journey. Focused upon his purpose, the Brahmana arrived at the dwelling of the Naga.

Entering, he announced himself, saying, "Ho! Who is within? I am a Brahmana, come here as a guest."

Hearing him, the virtuous wife of the Naga, of great beauty and devoted to the observance of every dharma, came out. Attentive to the duties of hospitality, she welcomed and revered her guest, and said, 'What can I do for you?'

The Brahmana said, 'I am sufficiently honoured by your gentle words. My weariness has also been dispelled. O blessed devi, I wish to see your husband. This is my goal and the one object of my desire. It is for this that I have come today to the abode of the Naga.'

The wife of the Naga said, 'Revered one, my husband has gone to draw Surya's chariot for a month. Learned Brahmana, he will be back in fifteen days, and will meet you then. I have now told you the reason of my husband's absence. What else can I do for you? Tell me.'

The Brahmana said, 'I have come here to see your husband. I will remain in the nearby forest and await his return. When he comes home, kindly tell him that I have arrived in this place driven by the fervent desire to meet him.

You should also inform me of his return. Devi, until then, I will dwell on the banks of the Gomati, waiting for his return and living upon frugal fare.'

Having said this repeatedly to the wife of the Naga that Brahmana went to the riverbank to live there until the Naga's return.'"

CANTO 357

"Bhishma continues, 'The Nagas of that city were distressed when they saw that Brahmana, devoted to tapasya, continued to live in the forest, entirely abstaining from food, as he waited for the return of the Naga lord. All the kinsmen and relatives of the great Naga, including his brother, children and wife, came together to the Brahmana.

Reaching the banks of the Gomati, they saw him seated in solitude, not eating but engaged in observing vratas and silently reciting certain mantras. Approaching, the Naga's kinsmen and family revered him, and then spoke to him words of simple sincerity.

"O Tapodhana, this is the sixth day since your arrival here but you have not said a word about your food. You are devoted to righteousness. You have come among us. We are here in attendance upon you. It is vital that we should fulfil our duties of hospitality towards you.

We are all kinsmen of our Naga lord whom you wish to see. Roots or fruits, leaves, or water, or rice or meat, you must partake of some food. By your living in this forest and completely abstaining from food, the entire community of Nagas, young and old, does suffer, since this your fast implies negligence on our part to discharge the duties of hospitality and we do not know the reason for it

None amongst us has been guilty of killing a Brahmana. None of us has ever lost a son immediately after birth. No one has been born in our vamsa that has eaten before serving the Devas or atithis or kinsmen coming to his house."

The Brahmana said, "I will break my fast for your entreaties. I will wait eight more days for the lord of the Nagas to return. If he does not come

back with the passing of the eighth night, I will break this fast by eating. This vow of abstaining from all food that I am observing is on account of my high regard for the Naga lord.

You should not grieve for what I am doing. Return to your homes. This my vrata is on his account. You should not do anything to mar it."

Thus addressed, the assembled Nagas were dismissed by the Brahmana, and they returned to their homes.'"

CANTO 358

"Bhishma says, 'Upon the expiry of full fifteen days, the Naga Lord Padmanabha, having finished his task of drawing Surya's chariot and taking the sun god's leave, returned home. His wife washed his feet and dutifully discharged other tasks of a similar nature.

She then took her seat by his side. The Naga, refreshed and rested, addressed his wife, saying, "During my absence I trust that you have not been unmindful of worshipping the Devas and atithis in keeping with the instructions I gave you, and according to the laws laid down in the shastras.

I hope that during my absence, without yielding to your impure Buddhi, you have been firm in the observance of the duties of hospitality. I trust you have not transgressed the boundaries of karma and dharma."

The wife of the Naga said, "The duty of sishyas is to wait with reverence upon their guru doing his bidding; that of Brahmanas is to study and memorise the Vedas; that of servants is to obey the commands of their masters; that of the king is to protect his people by defending the good and punishing the evil.

It is said that Kshatriya dharma includes the protection of all creatures from wrong and oppression. The duty of the Sudra is to serve with humility persons of the three higher varnas, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas.

The dharma of the householder, O my Lord of the Nagas, consists in doing good to all creatures. Frugality of fare and observance of vows in due order constitute punya for men of all classes, because of the connection that exists between the senses and the duties of religion.

Who am I? From where have I come? What are others to me and what am I to others? These are the thoughts to which the mind should ever be

directed by him who leads a life which leads to mukti.

Chastity and obedience to the husband constitute the highest dharma of the wife. I have learnt this well through your teaching. I am fully conversant with my kartavya.

I have you, who are devoted to righteousness, for a husband; why then will I, swerving from the path of duty, walk on the path of disobedience and sin? During your absence from home, I have continued to worship the Devas. I have also, without the slightest negligence, attended to the duties of hospitality towards those who arrived as guests in your home.

Fifteen days ago a Brahmana has arrived here. He has not disclosed his purpose to me. He desires to speak with you. Dwelling on the banks of the Gomati he anxiously awaits your return. Of firm vows, that Brahmana sits there, engaged in chanting the Vedas.

Lord of the Nagas, I have given him my word that I will send you to him as soon as you return. Having heard what I have said, it is fitting for you to go to him. You who hear with your eyes, you must grant that Dvija whatever has brought him here!”””

CANTO 359

"Bhishma continues, 'The Naga said, "O you of delightful smiles, what have you taken that Brahmana for? Is he really a human being or is he some god that has come here in the guise of a Brahmana? Who is there among humans that would want to see me and be fit to meet me?

Can a Manava who wishes to see me dare leave a command with you to send me to him? Among the Devas and Asuras and Devarishis, the Nagas are endowed with great tejas.

Nagas are swift and fragrant. They deserve to be revered for they can grant boons. Indeed, we too, are worthy of our followers. We cannot be seen by men."

The wife said, "Judging by his simplicity and openness I know that this Brahmana is not any Deva who lives on air. I also know that he reveres you with all his heart. His heart is set upon the accomplishment of some goal that depends on your help.

As the chataka waits eagerly for rain to quench its thirst, even so does that Brahmana keenly wait to meet you. Let no misfortune befall him on account of his failure to see you. No one born into an honourable family as you are can be considered worthy of honour if he neglects a guest arrived at his house.

Discard that anger that is so innate in you and go and meet the Brahmana. It befits you not to be consumed by sin through disappointing the Dvija. By refusing to wipe the tears of one who has come to him with hopes of succour, even a king incurs the sin of foeticide.

By abstaining from speech one attains wisdom. By giving generous dakshina one acquires great fame. By being truthful in speech, one acquires the gift of eloquence and is honoured in swarga. By giving away land one attains to that high end which is ordained for Rishis living in sannyasa.

By earning wealth through righteous means one attains many desirable rewards. By doing what is beneficial to oneself, one avoids going to naraka. That is what the wise say."

The Naga said, "I had no arrogance caused by conceit. However, because of my birth, my arrogance was once great but no more. Of wrath born of desire, I have none. It has all been destroyed by the fire of your profound instructions.

I do not consider any darkness to be more impenetrable than anger. As the Nagas have a surfeit of anger, they have become objects of reproach with all men. By succumbing to the influence of wrath, the ten-headed Ravana became the rival of Sakra, and for that reason was killed by Rama in battle.

Hearing that Rama of Bhrigu's vamsa had entered the inner rooms of their palace to take away their father's calf of the Homa cow, the sons of Kartavirya yielding to anger deeming it an insult to their royal house, and they met with destruction at the hands of Rama. Indeed, Kartavirya, who was like the thousand-eyed Indra himself, was slain in battle by Rama of Jamadagni's vamsa because he yielded to anger.

And so, my beloved wife, I have heeded your words and have curbed my fury, that enemy of tapasya that destroys all that is good. I am fortunate to have you for my wife, you who possess every virtue and have inexhaustible merits.

I will go at once to the Brahmana. I will address him in a respectful manner and he will leave only when his wishes have been fulfilled."""

CANTO 360

"Bhishma says, 'Having said these words to his wife, the lord of the Nagas went to that place where the Brahmana sat awaiting him. As he went, the Naga thought of the Brahmana and wondered about what had brought him to the Naga city.

When he arrived in the Brahmana's presence, that righteous Naga addressed his guest in sweet words, "O Brahmana, do not be angry for I come to you in peace. What has brought you here? What is your purpose? Dvijottama, whom do you worship in this secluded place on the banks of the Gomati?"

The Brahmana said, "Know that my name is Dharmaranya, and that I have come here to see the Naga Padmanabha. I have some work with him. I have heard that he is not at home and so I sit here waiting for him to return.

Like a chataka waiting in expectation of the clouds, I am waiting for him whom I esteem highly. To dispel all evil from him and bring about what is beneficial to him, I am engaged in reciting the Vedas until he comes, and I am engaged in yoga and pass my time blissfully."

The Naga said, "Your behaviour is upright. You are pious and devoted to the good of all righteous persons. Blessed Brahmana, every praise is due to you.

You behold the Naga with a loving gaze. Learned Rishi, I am that Naga whom you seek. Command me as you wish, tell me what is agreeable to you and what I can do for you. Having heard from my wife that you are here, I have come to meet you.

You have come here, and you are certain to return with your desire fulfilled. Use me for any task with full confidence. We are all in your

service on account of your punya, for you have disregarded your own good and have spent your time in seeking our welfare."

The Brahmana said, "Most blessed Naga, I have come here driven by the desire to see you. I am ignorant, and I have come here to ask you something. I wish to attain to the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul that is the end of the Jivatman. I am neither attached to nor detached from samsara.

You shine with the effulgence of your punya with a radiance that is as enchanting as the moon's. You who live on air alone, first answer this question of mine. Afterwards, I will reveal to you the object of my visit!"""

CANTO 361

"Bhishma continues, 'The Brahmana said, "You have been away to draw the single-wheeled chariot of Surya. Describe to me anything wonderful that you may have seen in those realms through which you journeyed."

The Naga said, "The divine Surya is the refuge of innumerable wonders. All the creatures that inhabit the three worlds have flowed from him. Countless Munis crowned with ascetic success, together with all the Devas, dwell in the rays of Surya like birds perching on the branches of trees.

What, again, can be more wonderful than this that the mighty Vayu, issuing from Surya, takes refuge in his rays and courses over the universe? What can be more wonderful than this that Surya, dividing Vayu into many parts to do good to all creatures, creates the rain that falls in the monsoon?

What can be more wonderful than this that the Paramatman, himself bathed in blazing effulgence, looks out upon the universe from within the solar orb? What can be more wonderful than this that Surya has a dark ray which transforms itself into clouds charged with rain and pours down that rain when the season comes?

What can be more wonderful than this that after absorbing water for eight months, he pours it down once again in the monsoon? The soul of the universe is said to dwell in certain rays of Surya. From him comes the seed of all things, and it is he that upholds the earth with all her mobile and immobile creatures.

Brahmana, what can be more wonderful than this that the foremost of Purushas, eternal, powerful and effulgent, and without beginning and

without end, dwells in Surya? Listen to one more thing that I will now tell you. It is the most marvellous wonder. I have seen it in the clear sky, from having been close to Surya.

One day, at the hour of noon, while Surya was shining in all his glory and emanating heat we saw a Being come towards him, who seemed to shine with a brilliance equal to that of Surya himself. Causing all the worlds to blaze up with his glory and filling them with his energy, he came towards Surya, rending the sky, as it were, to make his path through it.

The rays of his body seemed to resemble the blazing radiance of libations of ghee poured into the sacrificial fire. His splendour did not allow anyone to look directly at him. His form was indescribable. Indeed, he did appear to us to be a second Surya.

As soon as he was near, Surya extended his two hands receiving him respectfully. To honour Surya in return, he also extended his right hand. Piercing through the sky, he entered into Surya's disc. Merging with Surya's energy, he seemed to be transformed into Surya's self.

When the two blinding energies thus united, we were so bewildered that we could not distinguish between them. We could not make out who was Surya we bore on his chariot, and who was the Being we had seen coming through the sky. Confused, we addressed Surya, saying, 'Illustrious One, who is this Being that has united himself with you and has been transformed into your second self?'""

CANTO 362

"Bhishma says, 'The Naga continued, "Surya said, 'This Being is not Agni, and he is not an Asura. Nor is he a Naga. He is a Brahmana who has attained swarga because he has succeeded in observing the Unccha vrata.

This person had lived only upon fruits and roots and the fallen leaves of trees. He sometimes subsisted upon water, and sometimes upon air alone, passing his days in dhyana. Siva Mahadeva was gratified by his constant recitation of the Samhitas.

He had tried to accomplish those deeds that lead to heaven and bliss. Through their punya he has now attained swarga. Without wealth and without any desire, he kept the Unccha vrata to sustain himself. This learned Brahmana had been devoted to the good of all creatures.

Neither Devas nor Gandharvas, neither Asuras nor Nagas can be regarded as superior to those creatures that are merged into Surya. Such was the most wondrous incident I saw on high. That Brahmana, who was crowned with success by the observance of the Unccha vrata, continues, even to this day, to circle the earth, remaining within the body of the incandescent Surya Deva!'"'""

CANTO 363

"Bhishma continues, 'The Brahmana said, "Naga, this is indeed marvellous and I am gratified by listening to you. With your words, subtle in their meaning, you have shown me the way I must follow. I wish to leave now; remember me occasionally and enquire after me by sending your servant."

The Naga said, "You have not yet revealed to me the reason that brought you here. Where will you go? Tell me, Dvija, what I can do for you, and what is it that brought you here?

After you have accomplished your task, whatever it may be, revealed or hidden in speech, you may take my leave, and I will let you go cheerfully. You have conceived a friendship for me.

O Rishi, sitting under the shade of this tree, do not leave so soon after merely seeing me. Certainly, you have become dear to me and I to you. All the inhabitants of this city are yours. What objection could you have to passing some time in my home?"

The Brahmana said, "You are wise, Naga, and have acquired a knowledge of the Atman. It is true that the Devas are not superior to you in any respect. He that is you is also me, as he that is me is truly you. You, I and all other creatures will all have to enter into the Paramatman.

Doubt had seized my mind, king of Nagas, with regard to the best means to win punya. What you said has dispelled that doubt, for I have learnt the value of the Unccha vrata. I will now practise that most efficacious vow and attain to my goal.

I am certain of this now and I take your leave. Blessings be upon you. O Naga, my objective has been achieved."'

CANTO 364

"Bhishma says, 'Having saluted that foremost of Nagas, and having firmly resolved to follow the Unccha way of life, Dharmaranya went to Chyavana of Bhrigu's vamsa, to seek formal instruction and to be initiated in that lofty and recondite vrata. Chyavana performed the samskara rites of the Brahmana and formally initiated him into the Unccha way of life.

Rajan, the son of Bhrigu recited this history to King Janaka in his palace. King Janaka, in his turn, narrated it to Devarishi Narada. Finding himself in the palace of Indra one day, Narada instructed Indra in this itihasa upon being asked by him.

Indra, having obtained it from Narada, recited this blessed history to an assembly of all the foremost Brahmanas. When I encountered Rama of Bhrigu's vamsa on Kurukshetra, the celestial Vasus narrated it to me.

Since you asked me, I have recited this history that is sacred and filled with great merit. You asked me what constitutes the highest dharma, Rajan. This itihasa is my answer to your question.

A brave man he was that practised the Unccha vrata in this way, without expectation of any reward. Instructed by Padmanabha, the Naga king about his dharma, that Brahmana Dharmaranya began the practice of Yama and Niyama; he lived only on such food as was allowed by the Unccha vow, and went away to another forest.'"

PART I

Anusasana Parva

CANTO 1

AUM! HAVING BOWED down to Narayana, and Nara the most exalted of Purushas, and also the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, serenity is said to be subtle and of diverse forms. Despite listening to all your discourses, I have not achieved this tranquillity. You have spoken of many ways of stilling the mind, but how can actual peace of mind be had from mere knowledge of the various kinds of peace, when I myself am the means of realising this?

Seeing your body covered with arrows and festering with wounds, I cannot find any peace at the thought of the evil I have brought about. Great Kshatriya, seeing your body drenched in blood, like a mountain overrun with water from its springs, I suffer like a lotus in the rains.

What can be more agonising than this, that you, O Pitamaha, have been reduced to this plight because of me and my allies fighting our enemies on this Kurukshetra? Other princes also, with their sons and kinsmen, have been destroyed on my account. What can be more painful than this!

Pitamaha, tell us what is our destiny and that of the sons of Dhritarashtra, who, driven by fate and anger, have acted in this terrible manner? Master of men, I think Duryodhana fortunate that he does not see you like this. But I, who am the cause of your death as well as of that of our friends, am denied all peace of mind seeing you fallen on the bare earth in this wretched condition.

Evil Duryodhana, the most infamous of his vamsa, with all his forces and his brothers, has perished in battle, observing his Kshatriya dharma. That malevolent one does not see you lying on your cruel bed. And for this

I regard death as being preferable to life. Virtuous Kshatriya, if only I along with my brothers had been killed by our enemies on Kurukshetra, I would not see you like this, fallen and pierced with arrows. Surely, we were born to become perpetrators of evil deeds. Pitamaha, if your wish me well, instruct me so that my sins may be washed away at least in the next world.'

Bhishma replies, 'Fortunate one, why do you consider your Soul, which is dependent on God and destiny and time, to be the cause of your actions? Its inaction is subtle and imperceptible to the senses. Listen, in this regard to the ancient story of the conversation between Mrityu and Gautami with Kaala and the hunter and the serpent.

There was once an old woman called Gautami who was patient and tranquil. One day she found her son lying dead having been bitten by a snake. An angry hunter, Arjunaka, bound the snake with a rope and brought it before Gautami.

He said to her, "This wretched serpent caused your son's death. Tell me quickly how I should killed it. Shall I throw it into the fire or hack it into pieces? This killer of a child does not deserve to live."

Gautami replied, "Arjunaka of little understanding, release this serpent. It does not deserve death at your hands. Who is so foolish as to ignore inevitable destiny and burden himself with such folly to sink into sin?

Those who are virtuous manage to cross samsara as a ship crosses the ocean. But those who make themselves heavy with sin sink to the bottom, like an arrow shot into the water.

By killing the serpent, my son will not be restored to life, and by letting it live, no harm will come to you. Who would go to the realm of Yama by killing this living creature?"

The hunter said, "I know you know the difference between right and wrong, and that the great suffer the pain of all creatures. But these your words are filled with instruction for only a serene person and not for one plunged into sorrow. Therefore, I must kill this snake.

Those who value peace of mind assign the cause of everything to the passage of Kaala, but practical men assuage their grief with revenge. Through constant delusion, men fear the loss of grace in the next world for acts like these. Allay your grief by allowing me to kill this serpent."

Gautami replied, "People like us are never afflicted by such misfortune. Good men are always intent on virtue. The death of the boy was predestined; I cannot approve of your killing this snake. Brahmanas do not

harbour resentment, because resentment leads to pain. Good hunter, forgive this serpent and release him out of compassion."

The hunter replied, "Let us earn great and inexhaustible punya hereafter by killing this creature, even as a man acquires great merit, and also confers it on his victim sacrificed upon the vedi. Punya is acquired by killing an enemy: by killing this despicable creature, you will acquire true merit in the hereafter."

Gautami replied, "What good is there in tormenting and killing an enemy, and what good is won by not releasing an enemy in our power? You of benign countenance, why should we not forgive this serpent and try to earn punya by releasing it?"

The hunter replied, "Many creatures ought to be protected from the evil of this one, instead of this single creature being spared. Virtuous men abandon the vicious to their doom; therefore, kill this evil snake."

Gautami replied, "By killing this serpent my son will not be restored to life, nor do I see that any other end will be attained by its death. Hunter, release this living creature."

The hunter said, "By killing Vritra, Indra secured the best part of the havis, and by destroying a yagna Siva secured his share of sacrificial offerings. You must destroy this snake immediately without any misgivings!"'

Bhishma continues, 'Though repeatedly incited by the hunter to kill the snake, Gautami was not swayed to that sin. Bound with the rope, the serpent wriggled and groaned in pain but then, finding its composure spoke slowly in a human voice.

The serpent said, "O foolish Arjunaka, what fault is mine? I have no independent will of my own. Mrityu sent me for this task. Directed by him I bit this child, not out of any anger or choice on my part. If there be any sin in this, it is Mrityu's."

The hunter said, "If you have been led by another to do this evil deed, the sin is yours also for you are the instrument in the act. As in the making of an earthen vessel the potter's wheel and axle are regarded as causes, so are you the cause that has produced this effect. He that is guilty deserves death at my hands. Serpent, you are guilty. Indeed, you have yourself confessed to it!"

The serpent said, "As all these, the potter's wheel and rod are not independent causes, even so I am not an independent cause. Therefore, you

should concede that this is no fault of mine. If you think otherwise, then these are to be considered as causes working in unison with one another.

Working with one other, a doubt arises regarding their relation as cause and effect. This being the case, it is no fault of mine, nor do I deserve death on this account, nor am I guilty of any sin. Or, if you think that even in such causation there is sin, the sin lies in the aggregate of causes."

The hunter said, "Even if you are neither the prime cause nor the agent in this matter, you are still the cause of this child's death. And so you do deserve death. If you think that when an evil deed is done, the doer is not implicated in it, then there can be no cause in this matter; but having done this, you certainly deserve to die. What else do you think?"

The serpent said, "Whether any cause exists or not, no effect is produced without an intermediate act. Therefore, causation being of no moment in either case, only my agency as the cause ought to be considered in its proper context. If you truly think me to be the cause, then the guilt of this act of killing a living being rests on the shoulders of another who incited me."

The hunter said, "Wretch, you do not deserve to live; why do you rant so much? You deserve death at my hands. You have done a terrible thing by killing this child."

The serpent said, "Hunter, as the Brahmanas presiding at a yagna do not acquire the merit of their actions by making offerings of ghee into the fire, so should I be viewed with regard to the outcome in this matter."'

Bhishma continues, 'After this, Mrityu, who had sent the snake, himself appeared there and spoke to the creature.

Mrityu said, "Guided by Kaala, O serpent, I sent you to this task, but neither you nor I is the cause of this child's death. As the clouds are tossed in all directions by the wind, I, like the clouds, am influenced by Kaala. All deeds pertaining to sattva, rajas or tamas are goaded by Kaala, in all creatures.

All creatures, mobile and immobile, in heaven and on earth, are influenced by Kaala. The whole universe is imbued with this influence of time. All actions in this world and all abstentions, as also all their modifications, are provoked by Kaala.

Surya, Soma, Vishnu, Jala, Vayu, Agni, Varuna, Bhumi, Mitra and Parjanya, Aditi and the Vasus, rivers and oceans, all existent and non-existent objects, are created and destroyed by Kaala. Knowing this, why do

you, O serpent, consider me to be guilty? If any fault attaches to me, then you, too, are to be blamed."

The serpent said, "Mrityu, I do not blame you, nor do I absolve you from all blame. I only insist that I am directed and influenced by you in my actions. If any blame attaches to Kaala, or it does not, is not for me to decide. We have no right to do so. Just as I want to absolve myself of this charge, so is it my duty to see that no blame attaches to Mrityu."

The serpent then said to Arjunaka, "You have listened to what Mrityu has said. Since I am innocent it is not right that you bind me with this rope and torment me." The hunter said, "I have listened to you and to Mrityu, but these words, serpent, do not absolve you from all blame. Mrityu and you are the causes of the child's death. I consider both of you to be the cause and you truly are that cause. Cursed be the evil and vengeful Mrityu that brings affliction to the innocent and the good. And you who are guilty of sinful deeds, I shall kill you too!"

Mrityu said, "We are both not free agents, but are dependent on Kaala, and ordained to do our appointed work. If you think carefully about this, you will not find fault with us."

The hunter said, "If both Mrityu and you are dependent on Kaala, I am curious to know how pleasure, arising from doing good, and anger, arising from doing evil, are caused."

Mrityu said, "Everything is done under the influence of Kaala. Kaala is the cause of all, and that for this reason we both, acting under Kaala's command, do our appointed work; hence we do not deserve to be censured by you in any way!"'

Bhishma continues, 'Then Kaala arrived at that place where the serpent and Mrityu and Arjunaka were disputing this point of dharma and spoke to them.

Kaala said, "Hunter, neither Mrityu nor this serpent nor I are guilty of the death of any creature. We are merely the immediate causes of the event. Arjunaka, the karma of this very child is the existing cause of our action. There is no other cause of this child's death. It was killed as a result of its own karma.

It has met with death as the result of its karma of the past. Its own karma has been the cause of its dying. We all are subject to the influence of our respective karma. Karma is a means to salvation even as sons are, and

karma also is an indicator of virtue and vice in man. We incite one another even as acts provoke one another.

As men make what they wish from a lump of clay, even so do they achieve the results determined by karma. As light and shadow are related to each other, so are men related to karma through their own actions. Therefore, neither you nor I, neither Mrityu nor the serpent, nor this old Brahmana woman is the cause of this child's death. He himself is the cause."

When Kaala expounded the matter in this way, Gautami, convinced that men suffer according to their deeds, said to Arjunaka, "Neither Kaala nor Mrityu, nor the serpent is the cause. This child met with death as the result of its own karma. That my son has died is also the consequence of my past actions. Let Kaala and Mrityu now leave this place, and Arjunaka, you must release this snake."'

Bhishma continues, 'Then Kaala and Mrityu and the serpent went back to their respective abodes, and Gautami and the hunter were pacified. Rajan, having heard this, put aside all grief, and find peace of mind.

Men attain swarga or naraka as the result of their own karma. This evil is neither your creation nor Duryodhana's. Know this that these lords of earth have all been slain in this war as a result of the actions of Kaala.'"

Vaisampayana said, "Having heard all this, Yudhishtira was appeased, and asks his next question."

CANTO 2

"Yudhishtira says, 'Wisest Pitamaha, you are learned in all the shastras, and I have listened to this mahakatha. I want now to hear some story full of religious instruction, and you must satisfy my craving. Tell me if any grihasta has ever succeeded in conquering Mrityu through the practice of dharma.'

Bhishma says, 'This ancient story is told to illustrate the subject of a grihasta's victory over Mrityu through the practice of virtue. Prajapati Manu had a son called Ikshvaku. Illustrious as Surya, a hundred sons were born to him.

His tenth son was named Dasaswa, and this virtuous prince of infallible prowess became the king of Mahismati. Dasaswa's son was a righteous ruler who was devoted to the practice of truth, devotion and benevolence. He was known as Madiraswa and ruled over the earth as her lord. He was devoted to the study of the Vedas and of the science of arms. Madiraswa's son was King Dyutimat who had great fortune and power, strength and energy. Dyutimat's son was the devout and pious king famed in all the worlds as Suvira. His soul was dedicated to dharma and he possessed wealth like another Indra.

Suvira, too, had a son who was invincible in battle; known by the name Sudurjaya, he was the best of all warriors. And Durjaya, too, possessed of a body like that of Indra, and had a son who radiated the splendour of Agni. He was the great King Duryodhana who was among the foremost of royal sages. Indra would send down timely and ample rain into the kingdom of this king who was brave and heroic as Vasava himself.

His cities and all his lands overflowed with wealth and jewels, and cows and grain. There was no miser in his kingdom nor any person afflicted by suffering or poverty. Nor was there in his kingdom any person who had a weak or sickly body.

Duryodhana was intelligent and skilled, eloquent in speech, without envy, a master of his passions, of a righteous soul, full of compassion, and humble. He performed sacrifices, and was self-restrained, devoted to Brahmanas and truth. He never humiliated others, was charitable, and learned in the Vedas and the Vedanta.

The celestial river Narmada, auspicious and sacred and of cool waters came embodied and courted him. She gave birth to a lotus-eyed daughter named Sudarsana. Yudhishtira, no woman had ever borne such a beautiful child as the daughter of Duryodhana.

Agni himself courted the exquisite princess Sudarsana, and coming as a Brahmana, sought her hand from the king. The king was unwilling to give his daughter in marriage to the Brahmana, who was poor and not of the same status as himself. Thereupon Agni disappeared from his mahayagna.

The sorrowful king said to the Brahmanas, "What sin have I or you, excellent Brahmanas, been guilty of that Agni should disappear from this yagna, as good done to sinful men vanishes from their estimation. Our sin must be great for Agni to thus disappear. Either the sin must be yours or mine. Do you fully examine the reason for this."

The Brahmanas silently concentrated their minds on seeking the protection of the god of fire. Agni, resplendent as the autumnal sun, appeared before them, enveloped in glorious radiance.

Agni said to the Brahmanas, "I seek the daughter of Duryodhana for myself."

Those Brahmanas were astounded, and the next day they told the king what Agni had said. The wise ruler was delighted and said, "Let it be so!"

The king asked the fire god for a boon, "You, O Agni, remain here with us always."

"Tathaastu," said the divine Agni to that Lord of the earth. For this reason, to this very day, Agni has always been present in the kingdom of Mahishmati and was seen by Sahadeva in course of his southern conquests.

King Duryodhana gave his daughter, dressed in new clothes and decked with jewels, to the Mahatman Deva, and Agni too, accepted, according to Vedic rites, the princess Sudarsana as his bride, even as he accepts libations

of ghee at yagnas. Agni was well pleased with her appearance, her beauty, grace, character and nobility of birth, and was eager to beget offspring upon her.

And a son by Agni was soon born to her. Also named Sudarsana, he, too, was as handsome as the full moon, and even in his childhood he attained to a knowledge of the supreme and everlasting Brahman.

There was another king called Oghavat, who was the grandfather of Nriga. He had a daughter named Oghavati, and a son by the name of Ogharatha. King Oghavat gave his daughter Oghavati, with goddess-like beauty, to the learned Sudarsana for his wife. Sudarsana lived the life of a grihasta with her in Kurukshetra. He took a vow to conquer Mrityu even while leading the life of a householder.

Sudarsana said to Oghavati, "You never act contrary to the wishes of those that seek our hospitality. You should not have any misgivings about the means by which guests are to be welcomed, even if you have to offer your own person to an atithi. Beautiful one, this vrata must always be remembered, since there is no higher virtue for grihastas than hospitality accorded to guests.

If my words carry any authority with you, always bear this in mind without ever doubting it. Sinless and blessed one, if you have any faith in me, you must never disregard a guest whether I am at your side or far away!"

With hands folded and placed on her head, Oghavati replied, "I will do everything that you have commanded."

Mrityu, wanting to trick Sudarsana, began to watch him to discover his lapses. Once, when the son of Agni went out to collect firewood from the forest, a handsome Brahmana sought the hospitality of Oghavati saying, "O beautiful devi, if you have any you faith in the virtue of hospitality as laid down for householders, then I ask you to extend that hospitality to me today."

Oghavati welcomed him according to the rites prescribed in the Vedas. Having offered him a seat, and water to wash his feet, she asked, "What is your wish? What can I offer you?"

The Brahmana said to her, "I desire you. Give yourself to me without any hesitation in your mind. If the duties established for grihastas are acceptable to you, gratify me."

Though tempted by Oghavati with offers of other gifts, the Brahmana refused to accept any dakshina other than the offer of her own person. Seeing his resolve, and remembering her husband's instructions, although overcome with shame, she said to the Brahmana, "Let it be so."

Remembering the words of her husband who wished to attain the virtue of grihastas, she calmly approached the visiting Rishi. Meanwhile, having collected his firewood, the son of Agni returned home. The fierce and inexorable Mrityu was constantly by his side, as one attending upon a devoted friend.

Reaching his asrama, Sudarsana called out to Oghavati repeatedly, and receiving no answer, exclaimed, "Where have you gone?" Locked in the Brahmana's embrace, the chaste woman, devoted to her husband, did not reply. Indeed, that virtuous woman, regarding herself defiled, was overcome with shame and remained silent.

Sudarsana again exclaimed, "Where can my faithful wife be? Where has she gone? Nothing can be of greater importance to me than her. Why does my simple and dutiful wife not answer my call today with sweet smiles as she has always done?"

Then that Brahmana, who was within the hut, replied to Sudarsana, "Son of Pavaka, know that a Brahmana guest has arrived, and though tempted by your wife with many offers of welcome I desired only her person, and the beautiful woman is engaged in satisfying me. You are free to do whatever you think to be appropriate."

Mrityu, armed with his iron mace, pursued the Rishi at that moment, wanting to destroy him who would, he thought, deviate from his promise. Sudarsana was astonished, but discarding all jealousy and anger of gaze, word, deed or thought, said, "Enjoy yourself, Brahmana. It gives me great pleasure. A grihasta gains the highest punya by honouring a guest.

The wise say that there is no higher merit for a householder than what accrues to him from a guest departing from his house after having been duly honoured. My life, my wife, and my other worldly possessions are all dedicated for the use of my guests.

This is the vow I have taken. With this I will attain to the knowledge of the Atman. The five elements of fire, air, earth, water and sky, and the mind, the intellect and the soul, and time and space, and the ten organs of sense, all exist in the bodies of men, and always witness the good and evil deeds that men do.

I have uttered this truth today, and let the gods bless me for it, or destroy me if I have spoken falsely.” At this, Bhaarata, a voice arose in all directions, in repeated echoes, crying: *This is true, this is not false*.

Then the Brahmana came out of the hut and, like the wind rising and encompassing both earth and sky, and making the three worlds echo with Veda nadam, called out to that virtuous man by name and praised him saying, “Sinless one, I am Dharma. All glory to you. I came here to test you, and I am pleased to know that you are virtuous.

You have subdued and conquered Mrityu, who always pursued you, seeking your lapses. No one in the three worlds has the ability to insult this chaste woman, devoted to her husband, even with looks, far less to touch her person. She has been protected from defilement by your virtue and by her own purity.

There can be nothing contrary to what this honourable woman will say. Imbued with austere tapasya, she will metamorphose into a mighty river for the salvation of the world. And you will attain to all the worlds in this your body, and, as truly as the vigyana of yoga is within her control, this blessed woman will follow you with only half of her earthly self, and with the other half she will be celebrated as the river Oghavati!

And along with her, you will attain all the worlds that are acquired through penances; and even in your gross body you will attain those eternal and everlasting worlds from which no one returns. You have conquered Mrityu, and attained to the highest of all felicities, and with your own power of mind, with the speed of thought, you have risen above the power of the five elements!

By thus cleaving to the duties of a grihasta, you have subdued your passions, desires and anger, and Oghavati by serving you has conquered affliction, desire, illusion, enmity and lassitude!”’

Bhishma continues, ‘Riding a fine chariot drawn by a thousand white horses, the glorious Vasava then approached that Brahmana. Mrityu and Yama, all the worlds, all the elements, Buddhi, Manas, Kaala and Akasa, as also kama and krodha were all conquered. And so, bear this in mind that to a householder there is no higher divinity than the guest.

It is said by sages that the blessings of an honoured guest are more valuable than the merit of a hundred yagnas. Whenever a deserving guest seeks the hospitality of a householder and is not honoured by him, he takes away with him all the virtues of the grihasta and leaves behind his sins.

I have now told you this ancient story about Mrityu was defeated by a grihasta. This narration confers glory, fame and a long life upon those who listen to it. The man that seeks worldly prosperity should consider it useful for removing every evil.

Bhaarata, he who recites this story of the life of Sudarsana every day attains the realms of the blessed.'"

CANTO 3

"Yudhishtira says, 'Rajan, if Brahmanatva is so difficult to attain by Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, how did the high-souled Viswamitra, though a Kshatriya by birth, become a Brahmarishi? I want to know this. I beg you, tell me all about it.

With his tapasya shakti, Viswamitra instantly annihilated the hundred sons of the Mahatman Vasishta. Under the influence of his rage, he created countless mighty Rakshasas who resembled the great destroyer Kaala himself.

He established the great and learned Kusika vamsa, numbering hundreds of regenerate sages praised by all Brahmanas. Sunashepa of austere penances, the son of Richika, was to be sacrificed as a yagnapasu in the Ambarisha mahayagna, but found deliverance through the grace of Viswamitra.

Having pleased the gods at a sacrifice, Harishchandra became a son of the wise Viswamitra. For not honouring their eldest brother Devarata, whom Viswamitra got as a son from the Devas, his other fifty brothers were cursed by their father, and all of them became Chandalas.

Trisanku, the son of Ikshvaku, also became a Chandala through the curse of Vasishta; when he was abandoned by his friends and remained suspended head down in the sky it was Viswamitra who sent him up into swarga. Kaushika, the sacred and most auspicious river of Viswamitra, was frequented by Devarishis, Devas and Rishis.

For disturbing his devotions, the famed Apsara Rambha was cursed and turned into a rock. In olden times, fearing Viswamitra, the glorious Vasishta bound himself with creepers and threw himself into a river, but he rose up

released from his bonds. Because of this, that mighty and holy river became celebrated by the name Vipasa.

Viswamitra prayed to the glorious and puissant Indra who, gratified by him, released him from a curse. Remaining in the northern sky, he sheds his lustre from a position in the midst of the Saptarishi and Dhruva, the son of Uttanapada. These, among others, are his achievements.

Descendant of Kuru, as all these were performed by a Kshatriya, my curiosity has been roused. So do I ask you to explain this to me truly. Without casting off his body and taking on another, how could Viswamitra become a Brahmana?

Pitamaha, tell me about this just as you narrated to the story of Matanga. Matanga was born as a Chandala, and, despite all his tapasya, could not become a Brahmana; so how could this Kaushika become a Brahmarishi?'"

CANTO 4

"Bhishma says, 'Listen truly in detail as to how in olden times Viswamitra attained the status of a Brahmana Rishi.

In the Bharata vamsa there was a king named Ajamida, who performed many yagnas and was a virtuous man. His son was the great King Jahnu. Ganga was the daughter of this righteous Kshatriya. The famed and equally virtuous Sindhudwipa was the son of this prince.

From Sindhudwipa sprang the great Rajarishi Balakaswa. His son was named Vallabha and was like a second Dharma. His son was Kusika who had radiant glory like the thousand-eyed Indra. Kusika's son was the illustrious King Gadhi who, being childless and wanting to have a son, went into the forest.

Whilst living there, a daughter was born to him. She was called Satyavati, and in beauty she had no equal on earth. The illustrious son of Chyavana, celebrated by the name of Richika, of the Bhrigu vamsa, of austere penances, sought the hand of this woman to be his wife. Gadhi, thinking him to be poor, did not give her in marriage to Richika.

But when the latter, thus dismissed, was leaving, the king said to him, "If your give me a marriage dowry you will you have my daughter for your wife."

Richika said, "Rajan, what dowry can I offer you for the hand of your daughter? Tell me truly, without feeling any hesitation."

Gadhi said, "Descendant of Bhrigu, give me a thousand horses as swift as the wind, with the colour of moonlight, and each having one ear black."'

Bhishma said, 'That mighty son of Chyavana, who was the foremost of Bhrigu's race, entreated Varuna, the son of Aditi, who was the lord of all the

waters, “Best of Devas, I pray to you to give me a thousand horses, all swift as the wind, with a complexion as luminous as the moon’s, but each having one black ear.” Varuna said to Richika, “Be it so. Wherever you are, the horses will appear before you.”

As soon as Richika thought of them, there arose from the waters of the Ganga a thousand high-mettled horses, as lustrous as the moon. Not far from Kanyakubja, the sacred bank of Ganga is still famed among men as Aswatirtha because of the appearance of those horses at that place.

The delighted Richika, that best of sannyasis, gave those thousand excellent horses to Gadhi as the marriage offering. King Gadhi was filled with wonder and, fearing that he would be cursed, gave his daughter, decked with jewels, to that son of Bhrigu. And he accepted her hand in marriage according to the prescribed rites.

The princess, too, was pleased becoming the wife of that Brahmana. That foremost of Rishis was happy with her conduct and expressed a wish to grant her a boon. She related this to her mother.

The mother said to her unassuming daughter who stood before her, “My daughter, it is fitting for you to secure a favour for me also from your husband. That sage of austere tapasya has the power to grant me a boon: the birth of a son.”

Returning to her husband, the princess told him what her mother had asked for. Richika said, “By my favour, blessed one, she will soon give birth to a virtuous son. From you, too, there will be born a mighty and glorious son who, full of dharma, shall perpetuate my vasma. Truly do I say this to you!

When you two shall bathe in your fertile season, she should embrace a pipal tree, and you should likewise embrace a ficus tree, and by doing so you will attain the object of your desire. Both she and you will partake of these two portions of charu, along with mantras, and then you will have your sons.”

Satyavati was delighted and told her mother all that Richika had said and also about the two balls of charu. Then the mother said to her daughter Satyavati, “Daughter, as I deserve greater consideration from you than from your husband, you must do as I say.

You must give me the charu which your husband has given you and take the one that has was meant for me. O joyful and pure daughter, if you have any respect for me, let us exchange the trees designated for us.

Everyone desires to possess an excellent and stainless being for his own son. The glorious Richika, too, must have acted from a similar motive, as will be revealed later. For this reason, my heart inclines towards your charu, and your tree, and you too, must consider how to secure an exceptional brother for yourself."

The mother and the daughter Satyavati pursued this plan and both conceived their children, Yudhishtira. And that great Rishi was happy to find his wife pregnant, but he said to her, "Devi, you have not you done well in exchanging the charu as will soon become apparent. It is also clear that you have exchanged the trees.

Know that I infused your charu with Brahmatejas and Kshatriya energy in the charu of your mother. I intended that you would give birth to a Brahmana whose virtues would be famed throughout the three worlds, and that your mother would give birth to a redoubtable Kshatriya.

But now you have reversed the charu, and your mother will give birth to a splendid Brahmana and you will bring forth a fierce Kshatriya. You have not done well by acting out of love for your mother."

Hearing this, Satyavati was grief-stricken and fell to the ground like a beautiful creeper cut in two. When she regained her senses, she bowed her head before her lord and said, "Dvija, you who know Brahman, take pity on me, your wife, who pleads with you so that a Kshatriya son may not be born to me. Let my grandson be the one to be famous for his terrible achievements, but not my son. I beg you, do this for me."

"So be it," said Richika to his wife and she gave birth to a blessed son named Jamadagni. Her mother, the celebrated wife of Gadhi, gave birth to the Rishi Viswamitra, knower of Brahmatva.

The devout Viswamitra, though a Kshatriya, attained to the status of a Brahmarishi and became the founder of a vamsa of Brahmanas. His sons became high-souled progenitors of many races of Brahmanas who were devoted to austere penances, were learned in the Vedas, and founders of many clans.

The adorable Madhuchchanda and the mighty Devarata, Akshina, Sakunta, Babhru, Kaala patha, the celebrated Yajnavalkya, Sthula of strict vratas, Uluka, Mudgala, and the sage Saindhavayana, the illustrious Valgujangha and the great Rishi Galeva, Ruchi, the celebrated Vajra, as also Salankayana, Liladhya and Narada, the one known as Kurchamuka, and Bahuli, and Mushala were all sons of Viswamitra.

So also were Vakshogriva, Anghrika, Naikadrik, Silayupa, Sita, Suchi, Chakraka, Marrutantavya, Vataghna, Aswalayana, Syamayana, Gargya and Javali, as also Susruta, Karishi, Sangsrutya, Para Paurava and Tantu.

The Maharishi Kapila, Tarakayana, Upagahana, Asurayani, Margama, Hiranyksha, Janghari, Bhavravayani, and Suti, Vibhuti, Suta, Surakrit, Arani, Nachika, Champeya, Ujjayana, Navatantu, Vakanakha, Sayanya, Yati, Ambhoruha, Amatsyasin, Srishin, Gardhavi Urjjayoni, Rudapekahin, and the great Naradin—these Munis were all sons of Viswamitra and were proficient in the knowledge of Brahman.

Yudhishtira, the austere and devout Viswamitra, although a Kshatriya by birth, became a Brahmana because Richika had infused the charu meant for his wife with the tejas of the supreme Brahman. I have now told you the story of the birth of Viswamitra who was possessed of the energy of Surya, Chandramas and Agni.

Rajan, if you have doubts with regard to any other matter, do you tell me, so that I may remove them.'"

CANTO 5

"Yudhishtira says, 'You who know the truths of dharma, I wish to hear of the merits of compassion, and of the characteristics of devout men. Pitamaha, describe them to me.'

"Bhishma says, 'Listen to the ancient tale of Vasava and the high-minded Suka. In the kingdom of Kasi, a hunter went from his village on a hunt with poisoned arrows in search of antelope. In a vast forest, while in pursuit of the chase, he discovered a herd of antelope not far from him, and discharged his arrow at one of them.

The arrow missed the deer and pierced a mighty tree instead. Struck by that arrow tipped with virulent poison, the tree withered away instantaneously, shedding its leaves and fruits.

The tree died, but a parrot that lived in a hollow of its trunk all his life did not leave his nest out of love for the towering Lord of the forest. Motionless and without food, silent and grieving, that grateful and virtuous parrot also perished slowly after the tree.

Indra was amazed by that great and generous bird's extraordinary resolve and detachment. He thought, "How has this bird come to possess such extraordinary humane and generous emotions which are not found among the lower creatures? Yet, perhaps there is nothing wonderful about this, for all creatures appear to exhibit kind and generous feelings towards others."

Assuming the form of a Brahmana, Sakra descended onto the earth and came to the bird. "Suka, O parrot, Daksha's granddaughter Suki is blessed to bear you as her child. I ask you, why do you not leave this dead tree?"

Thus questioned, Suka bowed to him and replied, “Welcome to you, Indra. I have recognised you by the merit of my tapasya.”

“Uttamam! Well done!” exclaimed Indra. He praised Suka in his mind, thinking how great was his gyana. Although Indra knew that the parrot was virtuous in character and noble in deed, still he pressed him about the reason for his love for the tree.

“This tree has withered; it is without leaves and fruits and is unfit to be the refuge of birds. Why do you cling to it? This forest is vast and in it are many other fine trees whose hollows are covered with leaves, and you can choose freely from them. Patient one, discern wisely and abandon this old tree that is dead and useless, shorn of all its leaves and no longer of any good to you.”

Hearing this from Sakra, Suka heaved a deep sigh and replied sadly, “Consort of Sachi, and king of the Devas, the laws of the gods must always be obeyed. Listen to my reasoning on this matter.

Here, within this tree, I was born, and here in this tree I acquired all the good traits of my character, and here in this tree I was protected in my childhood from predators. Sinless one, why, in your kindness, do you seek to taint my principles in life?

I am compassionate, virtuous and steadfast in my conduct. Kindness is the great test of virtue amongst the good, and this same compassion is the source of everlasting felicity to the virtuous. All the Devas look to you to remove their doubts on dharma, and for this reason you have sovereignty over them.

It is not fitting for you to tell me to abandon this tree. When it was capable of good, it supported my life. How can I forsake it now?”

The virtuous destroyer of Paka was pleased with these words of the parrot and said to him, “I am gratified with your compassionate nature. Ask any boon of me.”

The loyal parrot said, “Let this tree revive!” Knowing the great attachment of the noble parrot to that tree, Indra showered amrita on the tree. That tree was restored and attained its former grandeur through the tapasya of the parrot, who, by virtue of his compassion, found Indra’s own companionship at the end of his life.

Thus, Lord of men, through friendship and association with the pious, men attain all the objects of their desire even as the tree did through its companionship with the parrot.’”

CANTO 6

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, tell me which is more powerful, effort or fate.'

Bhishma says, 'Hear this ancient story of the conversation between Vasishta and Brahma. In ancient times, Vasishta asked Brahma what influenced a man's life more: the karma acquired in this life, or that acquired in previous lives, which is called fate. Brahma, who had sprung from the primeval lotus, answered him in these exquisite and well-reasoned words, full of meaning.

Brahma said, "Nothing comes into existence without seeds. Without seeds, fruits do not grow. From seeds spring other seeds. Hence fruits are known to be generated from seeds. As good or bad is the seed that the farmer sows in his field, so are the fruits that he reaps.

Just as the soil, unsown with seeds, becomes fruitless, so also karma is of no use without individual exertion. One's own actions are like the soil, and destiny, the sum of one's deeds in previous births, can be compared to the seed. The union of the soil and the seed produces the harvest. Every day in the world, we see that the doer reaps the fruit of his good and evil deeds; that happiness results from good deeds, and pain from evil ones; that actions always bear fruit; and that, if not done, there is no fruit. A man of good deeds acquires merit with good fortune, while a lazy man loses his lands, and reaps evil like the infusion of alkaline matter injected into a wound.

With devoted application, one acquires beauty, fortune, and wealth of many kinds. Everything can be secured through exertion, but nothing can be gained by a lazy man through destiny alone. Even so does one attain

heaven, and all the objects of enjoyment, as also the fulfilment of one's heart's desires—by well-directed individual effort.

All the luminous stars and planets in the sky, all the Devas, the Nagas and the Rakshasas, as also the sun and the moon and the winds, have attained to their lofty positions by evolution from a human condition, by dint of their own deeds. Riches, friends, prosperity from generation to generation, as also the blessings of life, are difficult to attain without exertion.

The Brahmana attains prosperity through pure and virtuous living, the Kshatriya by prowess, the Vaisya with manly exertion, and the Sudra through service. Riches and other pleasures do not follow the miser, nor the weak, nor the idler. Nor are these ever attained by the man who is not active or manly or devoted to the performance of religious austerities.

Even he, the adorable Vishnu, who created the three worlds with the Daityas and all the Devas, even he is engaged in tapasya in the depths of the ocean. If one's karma bore no fruit all actions would become fruitless, and relying on destiny all men would become idlers. He who follows destiny alone, without pursuing the human modes of action, acts in vain, like the woman with an impotent husband.

In this world, the dread that accrues from doing good or evil deeds is not so great if destiny is unfavourable, as one's fear in the other world if one make no effort in this world. Man's powers, if properly exerted, only follow his destiny, but destiny alone cannot confer any good where exertion is wanting.

When we see that even in swarga the position of the Devas is unstable, how would they maintain their position or that of others without proper karma? The Devas do not always encourage the good deeds of others in this world, and they even thwart such actions fearing their own overthrow.

There is a constant rivalry between the Devas and the Rishis, and even if they must perform karma, it can never be asserted that there is no such thing as destiny, for it is the latter that initiates all karma. If destiny is the source of human action, how does karma originate? It does so through an accumulation of many virtues in the divine realms.

One's own self is one's friend and one's enemy too, as also the witness of one's punya and paapa. Good and evil manifest themselves through karma. Good and evil actions do not have adequate results. Dharma is the

refuge of the Devas, and through dharma everything is attained. Destiny does not obstruct the man who has attained virtue and righteousness.

In olden times, falling from his high position in heaven, Yayati descended onto the earth but was again restored to the celestial realms by the good deeds of his virtuous grandsons. The royal sage Pururavas, the celebrated descendant of Ila, attained swarga through the intercession of Brahmanas.

Though exalted by the performance of the Aswamedha and other yagnas, Saudasa, the son of Kosala, became a man-eating Rakshasa through the curse of a great Rishi. Aswatthaman and Rama, though both warriors and sons of Munis, failed to attain swarga because of their own fell deeds in this world.

Though he performed a hundred yagnas like a second Vasava, Vasu was sent to naraka for uttering a single falsehood. Bound by his promise, Bali, the son of Virochana, was consigned to the patalas below the earth by the power of Vishnu.

Was not Janamejaya, who followed in the footsteps of Sakra, thwarted by the Devas for killing a Brahmana woman? Was not the Rishi Vaisampayana, who unwittingly killed a Brahmana, and was tainted by the slaying of a child, censured by the Devas?

In ancient times, the Rajarishi Nriga was transformed into a lizard. He had made great gifts of cows to the Brahmanas at his mahayagna, but to no avail.

The royal sage Dhundhumara was overtaken by age, decay and fatigue even while engaged in performing his sacrifices, and forgoing all their merits he fell asleep at Girivraja. The Pandavas, too, regained their lost kingdom, which had been seized by the powerful sons of Dhritarashtra, not through the intercession of the fates, but by recourse to their own valour.

Do the Munis of rigid vows, and devoted to the practice of austere tapasyas, denounce their curses with the help of any supernatural power or by the exercise of their own power attained by individual deeds? All the punya possessed by dissolute men, attained with difficulty in this world, they soon lose.

Destiny does not help the man steeped in spiritual ignorance and greed. When fanned by the wind, even as a small fire becomes a conflagration, so does destiny, when joined with individual exertion, increase in its potential.

As the oil in the lamp reduces, its light is extinguished; so also is the influence of destiny lost if one's actions cease.

Having gained vast wealth, women, and all the enjoyments of this world, the man without action is not able to enjoy them long; but the high-souled man, who is ever diligent, is able to find treasures buried deep in the earth and watched over by spirits. The good man who is prodigious in giving religious charity and performing sacrifices is sought by the very Devas for his conduct, but the house of the miser, though abounding in wealth, is regarded by the Devas as a home of the dead.

The man who does not exert himself is never content in this world nor can destiny alter the course of a man that has gone wrong. So there is no authority inherent in destiny. As the sishya follows his own individual perception, so does destiny follow exertion. Destiny reveals itself in the matters in which one's own efforts are put forth.

Vasishta, having known their true significance with my yogic powers, I have thus described all the merits of individual exertion. By the influence of destiny, and by exerting individual effort, men attain swarga. The union of destiny and exertion is effective."""

CANTO 7

"Yudhishtira says, 'Bharatarishabha, I wish to know what the fruits are of good deeds. Do you enlighten me on this subject.'

Bhishma said, 'Yudhishtira, listen to what I tell you; it is the secret knowledge of the Rishis. Listen to me as I explain what desirable ends are attained by men after death.

Whatever actions are performed by particular beings, their fruits are reaped by the doers in similar bodies. The fruits of actions done with the mind are enjoyed in dreams, and those actions performed physically are enjoyed in the waking state.

In whatever states creatures perform good or evil deeds, they reap the fruits in similar states of succeeding lives. No action done with the five organs of the senses is ever lost. The five sense organs and the immortal soul, which is the sixth, remain eternal witnesses.

One should devote one's eye and one's heart in the service of the atithi; one should speak words that are agreeable; one should also follow and worship one's guest. This is called Panchadakshina yagna, the sacrifice with five gifts.

He who offers good food to unknown and weary travellers after a long journey, attains great punya. Those who use the sacrificial platform as their only bed in this birth, obtain commodious palaces and beds in subsequent births. Those who dress only in rags and barks of trees obtain luxurious clothes and ornaments in their next births.

The man who possesses tapasya and fixes his soul on yoga, gets chariots and horses as the fruit of his renunciation in this life. The king who lies down beside the sacrificial fire attains vigour and valour.

The man who renounces the enjoyment of all delicacies attains prosperity, and he who abstains from animal flesh, receives children and kine. He who sleeps with his head hanging down, or who lives in water, or who lives in seclusion practising brahmacharya, attains to all the desired ends.

He who offers refuge to a guest and welcomes him with water to wash his feet, as also with food and rest, attains to the merits of the Panchadakshina yagna. He who lies down on a warrior's bed on the battlefield in the posture of a warrior, goes to those eternal realms where all desires are fulfilled.

A man who makes charitable endowments finds riches. One secures obedience to one's command through the vow of silence, all the enjoyments of life with the practice of tapasya, long life by brahmacharya, and beauty, prosperity and freedom from disease by ahimsa, non-violence.

Sovereignty is theirs who subsist on fruit and roots. Swarga is attained by those that live only on the leaves of trees. A man is said to gain happiness by abstaining from food. By restricting one's diet to just herbs, one becomes wealthy. By living on grass one attains to the celestial realms.

By foregoing sexual union with one's wife, performing ablutions three times during the day and by inhaling only air for subsistence, one gains the merit of a sacrifice. Swarga is attained by the practice of truth, nobility of birth by yagnas.

The Brahmana of pure practices that subsists on water alone, performs the Agnihotra ceaselessly, and recites the Gayatri, obtains a kingdom. By giving up food or by regulating it, one attains swarga.

Rajan, by abstaining from all but the prescribed diet while engaged in sacrifices, and by making a pilgrimage for twelve years, one attains to a place better than the realms reserved for Kshatriyas. By reading all the Vedas, one is instantly liberated from misery, and by practising virtue in thought, one attains to swarga. That man who is able to renounce that intense yearning of the heart for pleasure and material enjoyments—a yearning that is difficult for foolish men to conquer, and which does not decrease with the abatement of bodily strength and that clings like a fatal disease to him—is assured bliss.

As the young calf is able to recognise its mother from among a thousand cows, so does the past karma of a man pursue him in all his transformations. As the flowers and fruits of a tree, without any visible

influences, never miss their proper season, so does karma from a previous existence unerringly bring its fruit in proper time. With age, man's hair grows grey, his teeth become loose, and his eyes and ears become dim; but the one thing that does not weaken is his desire for pleasure.

Prajapati is pleased with those deeds that please one's father, the earth is pleased with those acts that please one's mother, and Brahma is adored with those that please one's acharya. Dharma is honoured by him who honours these three. Those who do not respect these three do not benefit from them, whatever they may do.'"

Vaisampayana said, "The princes of Kuru's vamsa are filled with wonder upon listening to this discourse of Bhishma. All of them are overwhelmed with joy. Like mantras that are recited only to have victory, or the performance of the Soma yagna without proper dakshina, or offerings poured on the fire without proper mantras are rendered useless and lead to evil consequences, even so sin and evil results flow from false speech.

O prince, I have thus narrated to you the doctrine of the fruition of good and evil acts, as told by the ancient Rishis. What else do you wish to hear?"

CANTO 8

Vaisampayana continued, "Yudhishtira says, 'Who are deserving of worship? Who are they unto whom one may bow? Who are they, Bhaarata, before whom you would bend your head? Who, again, are they whom you love? Tell me all this.

What does your mind dwell upon when you are overwhelmed by misery? Speak to me about what is beneficial in this world of humans, and also hereafter.'

Bhishma says, 'I revere those evolved men whose highest wealth is Brahman, whose swarga consists of the knowledge of the Atman, and whose tapasya is constituted by their diligent study of the Vedas. My heart yearns for those in whose vamsa both the young and the old diligently bear their ancestral burdens without being weighed down by them.

Skilled in several branches of knowledge, self-restrained and gentle in speech, conversant with the shastras, dutiful, possessing the knowledge of Brahman and righteous in conduct, Brahmanas discourse in auspicious conclaves like flocks of swans.

Yudhishtira, their words are auspicious, pleasing, excellent and finely pronounced; they speak with voices deep as thunderheads. Suffused with joy both earthly and spiritual, they speak such words in the courts of kings, where they are received with honour and served with reverence by those rulers of men. Indeed, my heart yearns for those who listen to the words spoken in such pure assemblies or royal sabhas by those endowed with gyana and all desirable gunas, and respected by others.

My heart longs for those who offer, with devotion, food that is clean, well cooked and wholesome to gratify Brahmanas. It is easy to fight in

battle, but not so to make a gift without pride or vanity.

In this world, Yudhishtira, there are brave men and heroes by the hundreds. While counting them, he who is heroic in gifts must be regarded as superior. Even if I had been a common Brahmana, I would have regarded myself as great, not to speak of one born into a Brahmana family replete with righteousness of conduct, and devoted to penances and learning.

Son of Pandu, there is no one that is dearer to me than you are in this world, but those Brahmanas are dearer to me than even you. And since I love these Brahmanas more than you, it is through that truth that I hope to attain to all those realms of felicity in which my father Santanu dwells. Neither my sire, nor his sire, nor anyone else related to me by blood, is dearer to me than the Brahmanas.

I do not expect any reward, small or great, from my worship of the Brahmanas, for I revere them as Devas. Even though I am lying on a bed of arrows, because of what I have done for Brahmanas in thought, word and deed, I do not feel any pain.

People would refer to me as the one devoted to Brahmanas. This manner of address always pleased me most. To do good to Brahmanas is the most sacred of all sacred acts. Having walked with adoration behind Brahmanas, I behold many realms of grace waiting for me. Very soon shall I repair to those lustrous realms for ever.

In this world, Yudhishtira, the duties of women allude to and depend on their husbands. To a woman, the husband is the deity and he is the highest end after which she should strive. As the husband is to the wife, even so are the Brahmanas unto Kshatriyas. If there be a Kshatriya of full hundred years of age and a good Brahmana child of only ten years, the latter should be regarded as a father and the former as a son, for among the two the Brahmana is undeniably superior.

A woman in the absence of her husband takes his younger brother for her lord; even so Bhumi Devi, not having obtained the Brahmana, made the Kshatriya her master. Brahmanas must be protected like sons and worshipped like fathers or gurus. Indeed they must be adored even as people wait with reverence upon their homa fires.

The Brahmanas are filled with simplicity and virtue. They are devoted to truth. They are always engaged in the good of every creature. Yet when enraged they are like poisonous snakes. For these reasons, they must always be waited upon and served with reverence and humility.

Yudhishtira, always be wary of both tejas and tapasya. Both these must be avoided or kept at a distance. The effects of both are swift. However, tapasya is the more powerful, that is why tapodhana Brahmanas, if angered, can easily make ashes of the object of their wrath regardless of the tejas of that man.

Tejas and tapasya, each in the largest measure, are powerless if applied against a Brahmana who has conquered anger. If the two are set against each other, then both will be destroyed. However, if energy is applied against penances it is sure to be destroyed without leaving a trace; but tapasya applied against tejas cannot be completely annihilated.

As the herdsman, stick in hand, protects the herd, even so must the Kshatriya always protect the Vedas and the Brahmanas. Indeed, the Kshatriya should protect all righteous Brahmanas even as a father protects his sons. He must watch over the houses of the Brahmanas and ensure that they do not lack in their means of livelihood.'"

CANTO 9

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, what happens to those men who, through inertia and torpor, do not make gifts to Brahmanas after having promised to make those offerings? You who are the most righteous of men, tell me what the laws are in this respect. Indeed, what is the end of those who do not give after having promised to give.'

Bhishma says, 'One who having promised does not give, be it little or much, has the mortification of seeing his hopes in all directions become fruitless like the hopes of a eunuch who wishes for children. Whatever good deeds such a man does between the day of his birth and that of his death, Bhaarata, whatever libations he pours on the sacrificial fire, whatever gifts he makes, and whatever penances he performs, all become fruitless.

They that know the shastras declare this to be their opinion, having arrived at it with the help of a studied understanding. These learned men are also of opinion that such a man may be redeemed by giving away a thousand pale horses with dark ears.

Listen to the old story of the conversation between a jackal and a monkey. Once, when both were humans, they were intimate friends. After they died, in their next birth one of them became a jackal and the other a monkey.

One day, seeing the jackal eating the carcass of an animal in a cremation ground, the monkey, remembering his own and his friend's past birth as men, said to him, "What terrible sin did you commit in your last birth that in this one you are obliged to feed upon the putrid carcass of an animal in the samsana?"

The jackal replied to the monkey, “Having promised to give gifts to a Brahmana I did not do so. It is for that sin that I have fallen into this wretched existence. It is for this reason that, when hungry, I am obliged to eat such repugnant food.”’

Bhishma continues, ‘The jackal then said to the monkey, “What sin did you commit for which you have become a monkey?”

The monkey said, “In my past life I used to steal fruits belonging to Brahmanas. And so I have been born as a monkey. It is clear that one who has intelligence and learning must never take what belongs to Brahmanas. One must also avoid all disputes with Brahmanas. Having promised, one must necessarily give them the promised gift.”’

Bhishma continues, ‘Rajan, I heard this from my guru while he discoursed upon the subject of Brahmanas. I heard this from that righteous man when he recited the old and sacred pronouncement on this subject. I heard this from Krishna also, while he was speaking of Brahmanas.

The property of a Brahmana should never be seized. They should always be left undisturbed. Poor, miserly, or young, they should never be disregarded. Brahmanas have always taught me this.

Having promised to make them a gift, the gift must be made. A superior Brahmana’s expectations must always be fulfilled. It has been said that a Brahmana whose expectation has been raised is like a blazing fire. That man upon whom a Brahmana with raised expectations casts his angry eye is certain to be consumed even as a pile of dry grass is by a blazing fire.

When the Brahmana who is honoured by the king with gifts addresses the king in agreeable and loving words, that Brahmana becomes a source of great benefit to the king, for he continues to live in the kingdom like a physician, combating the many diseases of the body. Such a Brahmana, with his power and grace, is sure to sustain the sons and grandsons, animals and relatives, ministers and other officers, and the city and provinces of the king.

This great tejas of the Brahmana is like that of the radiance of Surya himself on Bhumi. Yudhishtira, if one wishes to attain an honourable and happy next birth, having promised a Brahmana a gift, one must not neglect to bestow that gift.

By making gifts to a Brahmana one is sure to attain to the highest heaven. The giving of gifts is the highest of human deeds. With the gifts one makes to a Brahmana, one supports the Devas and the Pitris. Hence one

who is wise must always make gifts to Brahmanas. Lord of the Bharatas, the Brahmana is regarded as the highest entity unto whom gifts must be made. At no time should a Brahmana be received without being properly worshipped.”

CANTO 10

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me whether any fault is incurred by one who, whether from interested or disinterested friendship imparts instruction to one who belongs to a low varna. Pitamaha, expound this to me in detail. The course of dharma is so subtle, and men are often bewildered in respect of that path.'

Bhishma says, 'I will narrate to you what I heard certain Rishis say in olden days. Instruction should not be imparted to one who belongs to a low or mean caste. It is said that the guru who instructs such a person incurs great blame.

Listen, Yudhishtira, to this ancient story of the evil consequences of instructing a low-born person fallen into distress. This event occurred in the asrama of those illumined sages who lived on the auspicious breast of Himavat.

There, on the breast of that prince of mountains, was a sacred asrama adorned with trees of diverse kinds. Covered with diverse species of creepers and plants, it was the home of many animals and birds. Inhabited by Siddhas and Charanas, it was delightful because of the trees that flowered in every season.

Many brahmacharins and vanaprasthas lived there. Many Brahmanas residing there were highly blessed and resembled Surya or Agni in energy and refulgence. Ascetics of many kinds lived there, observant of various restraints and vows, and others who had taken diksha and were frugal in fare and possessed pure souls.

Large numbers of Balakhilyas and many who had taken the sannyasa vrata also dwelt there. The asrama echoed with the chanting of the Vedas

and other sacred mantras by its inhabitants.

Once upon a time, a Sudra who loved all creatures came to that asrama. On arriving, he was duly honoured by all the ascetics. The Sudra was delighted to see those sannyasis of great tejas, who resembled the Devas in purity and power, observing diverse kinds of vratas.

Beholding everything, he felt persuaded to devote himself to the practice of tapasya. Touching the feet of the Kulapati, he said to him, "With your blessings, I want to learn and practise the duties of dharma.

Discourse to me on those duties and with the rites of initiation induct me into a life of sannyasa. I am certainly inferior in varna, illustrious one, for I am a Sudra. I desire to wait upon and serve you here. I humbly seek your refuge; I beg you, oblige me."

The Kulapati said, "It is impossible that a Sudra should adopt the practices of sannyasis. If it pleases you, you may stay here, engaged in waiting upon and serving us. Have no doubt that by such service you will attain to many realms of high felicity."'

Bhishma continue, 'Thus addressed by the sannyasi, the Sudra reflected and said, "What should I do now? Great is my reverence for dharma, which leads to punya. But I will do what will benefit me."

Going to a remote place, he made a hut from the branches and leaves of trees. He erected a sacrificial platform and, making a little space to sleep, and a vedi for the Devas, he began to lead a life regulated by demanding vratas and tapasya, while abstaining entirely from speech.

He began to perform ablutions three times a day, to observe other vratas of food and sleep, perform yagnas for the Devas, pour libations on the sacrificial fire, and worship the deities. Subduing all sensual desires, living abstemiously upon fruits and roots, controlling all his senses, every day he welcomed and honoured all who came to his hermitage, offering them roots and fruit that grew all around in abundance. In this way he lived in that asrama for a long time.

One day an ascetic came to that Sudra's asrama to meet him. The Sudra welcomed and worshipped the Rishi with the due rites, and gratified him. Possessing great tejas and a righteous soul that Rishi talked with his host on many pleasant subjects and told him from where he had come.

That Rishi came to the Sudra's asrama several times. On one of these occasions, the Sudra said to the Rishi, "I want to perform the rites that are ordained for the Pitris. You must instruct me in this matter."

"Very well," replied the Brahmana.

The Sudra purified himself by bathing and brought water for the Rishi to wash his feet; he also brought some kusa grass, and wild herbs and fruits, and a sacred seat called Vrishi. The Sudra, however, placed the Vrishi towards the south, with its head facing west.

On seeing this and knowing it to be against the laws, the Rishi said to the Sudra, "Set the Vrishi with its head turned towards the east and, having purified yourself, sit with your face facing the north." The Sudra did as the Rishi directed.

Possessed of great intelligence and righteousness, the Sudra received every instruction from the sage about the sraddha, as laid down in the shastras—regarding the manner of spreading the kusa grass, and placing the offerings, and the rites to be observed in the matter of the libations to be poured and the food to be offered. After the rituals in honour of the Pitris had been completed, dismissed by the Sudra, the Rishi returned to his own abode.

After passing a long time in the practice of such penances and vows, the Sudra ascetic died in the forest. As a result of the punya he acquired through those practices, in his next life the Sudra was born into the family of a great king, and in the course of time became endowed with great splendour.

The Rishi also, when the time came, died. In his next life, he was born into the family of a priest. It was in this way that those two were reborn, that Sudra who had lived a life of tapasya and that Rishi who had generously instructed the Sudra in the rites performed in honour of the Pitris: the one as a son of a royal vamsa and the other as the member of a Brahmana's family.

Both of them acquired great knowledge in the customary branches of study. The Brahmana became well versed in the Vedas as also in the Atharvans. The reborn Rishi attained excellence in the matters of all yagnas ordained in the Sutras, of that Vedanga which deals with religious rites and observances, astrology and astronomy. He also took great delight in the Samkhya philosophy.

When the king, his father, died, the reborn Sudra who had become a prince performed his last rites; and after he had purified himself by performing all the necessary ceremonies, his father's subjects enthroned

him as their king. Soon after his being crowned, he appointed the reborn Rishi as his priest.

Indeed, having made the Brahmana his purohita, the king began to pass his days in great happiness. He ruled his kingdom righteously and protected and cherished all his subjects. Every day, however, when he received blessings from his priest and during the performance of religious and other sacred rites, the king smiled or laughed at him loudly. In this way, the Sudra who had been reborn as a king laughed at the very sight of his purohita on countless occasions.

Marking that the king always smiled or laughed whenever he looked at him, the Brahmana became angry. One day, he met the king alone and pleased the king with an agreeable discourse. Taking advantage of that moment, he said to the king, "Splendid one, I entreat you to grant me a single boon."

The king said, "I am ready to grant you a hundred boons, why do you speak of only one? With the love I bear you and the reverence in which I hold you, there is nothing that I cannot give you."

The priest said, "You are gratified by me; Rajan, I desire only one boon. Swear that you will tell me the truth and not any lie."

"Thus addressed by the priest, Yudhishtira, the king said to him, 'So be it. If what you ask me is known to me, I will certainly speak of it to you truthfully. If, on the other hand, the matter is unknown to me, I will not say anything.'

The Brahmana said, "Every day, when you take my blessings, and again when I am engaged in the performance of religious rites on your behalf, and also during the homa and other kriyas of propitiation, why is it that you laugh when you see me? My mind shrinks with shame when you do that.

I have asked you to swear that you will answer me truthfully. It fitting that you will not lie to me. There must be some solemn reason for your behaviour. Your laughter cannot be without cause. I am curious to know what it is. Speak to me honestly."

The king said, "When you have spoken to me in this way, I am bound to enlighten you, even if it is a matter that should not be divulged in your hearing. I must tell you the truth. Listen to me with close attention, O Dvija. Listen to me as I disclose what happened to both of us in our last births. I remember that birth. Listen and I will tell you everything.

In my past life I was a Sudra engaged in the practice of severe tapasya. You were a Rishi of austere penances. Gratified with me, and wishing to do me good, you once gave me some instruction in the kriyas I performed in honour of my Pitris.

The instructions you gave me were in respect of the manner of spreading the Vrishi and the kusa blades and of offering libations and meat and other food to the manes. As a result of your transgression you have been born as a purohita, and I have been born as a king.

Behold the vicissitudes of Kaala. You have reaped this fruit because you instructed me in my previous birth. It is for this reason, O Brahmana, that I smile or laugh when I see you. I certainly do not do so to ridicule or disrespect you. You are my guru.

I am repentant for this change of circumstances; my heart seethes at the thought. I smile or laugh in remorse when I see you because I remember our former births. Your tapasya was lost because you taught me.

Relinquish your present position of purohita and endeavour to regain a superior birth. Exert yourself so that, in your next life, you may not obtain a birth inferior to your present one. Take as much wealth as you need, learned Brahmana, and purify your soul."

Dismissed by the king, the Brahmana made many gifts of wealth, land and villages to persons of his own varna. He observed many rigid and severe vratas as laid down by the foremost of sages. He travelled to many sacred tirthas and made many gifts to Brahmanas in those places.

Making gifts of cows to those of twice-born varnas, his soul was purified and he succeeded in attaining Atmagyana. Repairing to that very asrama where he had lived in his past birth, he practised severe tapasya. As the result of all this, that Brahmana succeeded in attaining to the highest, indeed to mukti. He was revered by all the sannyasis who lived in that asrama.

In this way, that Rishi fell into great distress; therefore, Brahmanas should never impart knowledge to Sudras. The Brahmana should avoid instructing the low-born, for it was because of his teaching the Sudra in the forest that the Brahmana came to grief.

Rajan, the Brahmana should never desire to obtain instruction from or instruct one that belongs to the lowest varna. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, the three varnas, are regarded as being twice-born. By giving

instruction to these, a Brahmana does not incur any fault. Righteous men should never discourse on any subject before persons of the fourth varna.

The course of dharma is exceedingly subtle and cannot be grasped by men of impure minds. It is for this reason that sannyasis adopt the vow of silence, and being respected by all, they pass through diksha, initiation, without using words.

For fear of saying what is false or what may offend, ascetics often forego speech itself and take the mowna vrata. Even righteous and accomplished men, of honest and simple conduct, have been known to incur great fault because of unfittingly spoken words.

Instruction should never be given on any subject unthinkingly. If in consequence of teachings imparted, the one taught commit, any sin that sin attaches to the Brahmana who taught him. The wise man, who desires to earn punya, should always act with wisdom. Knowledge which is taught in exchange for money always pollutes the teacher.

Solicited by others, one should say only what is correct after reflecting upon it. One should teach in such a way that one may earn merit. I have thus told you everything on the subject of sacred instruction. Very often men suffer because of wrongly teaching knowledge. Hence it is proper that one should abstain from giving instruction to others.’

CANTO 11

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, in what kind of man or woman does the Devi Lakshmi of prosperity always dwell?'

"Bhishma says, 'Listen while I narrate to you what I have heard happened. Once upon a time, beholding the goddess of wealth radiant with beauty, blessed with the complexion of the lotus, the princess Rukmini, the mother of Pradyumna whose banner bore the makara emblem, was filled with curiosity and asked this question in the presence of Devaki's son Krishna.

"Who are those beings by whose side you remain and whom do you favour? Who are those whom you do not bless? You who are dear to Him that is the Lord of all creatures, tell me this truly, you that are equal to a Maharishi in penances and power."

Thus addressed by the beautiful princess and moved by grace, in the presence of Krishna who has Garuda on his banner, Lakshmi replied with pleasing words.

Sree said, "Blessed devi, I always dwell with him that is eloquent, active, attentive to his work, free from anger, given to the worship of the Devas, grateful, has his passions under complete control, and is high-minded.

I never remain with one who is inattentive to his work, is an unbeliever, who causes an intermingling of varnas through his lust, who is ungrateful, of impure practices, uses harsh and cruel words, who is a thief, malicious towards his gurus and other elders, those that have little energy, strength, life and honour, and that are troubled by everything trivial, and are always choleric.

I never live with these that think in one way and act in another. I also never remain with him who never desires anything for himself, who is so blinded as to be content with his lot without any effort, or with those that are contented with few possessions.

I dwell with those that observe the duties of their own varna, or those that are conversant with dharma, or those that are devoted to the service of the aged or those that have subdued their passions, those that have pure souls, those that observe the virtue of forgiveness, those that are capable and timely in action, or with such women as are forgiving and self-restrained.

I reside also with women that are devoted to truth and sincerity, and who worship the Devas. I do not dwell with women that do not attend to household duties, leaving furniture and provisions scattered everywhere in the house, and who always utter words contrary to the wishes of their husbands. I always avoid those women that are fond of the houses of other people and that have no modesty.

On the other hand, I reside with those women that are devoted to their husbands, that are blessed in conduct, and who are always well-dressed and decked in ornaments. I always dwell with those women that are truthful in speech, who are of handsome and pleasant features, and are blessed and accomplished.

I always avoid such women as are sinful and unclean or impure, who always lick the corners of their mouths, who have no patience or fortitude, and as are fond of disagreement and quarrelling, as are given to much sleep, and are slothful.

I always dwell in chariots and the animals that draw them, in young girls, in ornaments and good clothing, in sacrifices, in clouds charged with rain, in blooming lotuses, and in those stars that deck the autumn sky. I reside in elephants, in the cow shed, in fine asanas, and in lakes adorned with lotuses.

I live also in such rivers that murmur sweetly in their course, melodious with the music of cranes, with rows of diverse trees on their banks, where Brahmanas and Rishis dwell. I always dwell in those rivers that are deep with surging waters muddied by lions and elephants plunging into them to bathe or slake their thirst.

I reside in angry elephants, in bulls, in kings and good men. I always dwell in that house in which the inhabitant pours libation on the sacrificial

fire and worships cows, Brahmanas and the Devas. I live in that house where offerings are made unto the deities at the auspicious times during the course of worship.

I always live in those Brahmanas who are devoted to the study of the Vedas, in Kshatriyas devoted to the observance of dharma, in Vaisyas devoted to cultivation, and the Sudras devoted to the service of the three higher varnas.

With a firm and steadfast heart, I reside in Narayana, in my embodied self. In him is dharma in its perfection and full measure, devotion to Brahmanas and the quality of enchantment.

Dear devi, I do not live in my embodied form in any of these places that I have mentioned, other than in Narayana. He in whom I reside in spirit, increases in dharma, kirti and artha and gains the objects of his desire.”””

CANTO 12

"Yudhishtira says, 'Rajan, tell me truly which of the two, man or woman, derives the greater pleasure from an act of sexual union with each other. Pitamaha, dispel my doubts in this matter.'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard, I will tell you the ancient story of the discourse between Bhangaswana and Sakra.

In the olden days, there lived a king named Bhangaswana. He was righteous and was known as a Rajarishi. He was, however, childless, and performed a sacrifice to have children. The mighty ruler performed the Agnishtuta yagna.

This sacrifice, which worships only Agni Deva, is always abhorred by Indra. Yet it is the sacrifice that is performed by men when they seek to purify themselves of their sins in order to have children.

When Indra learned that the king desired to perform the Agnishtuta, from that moment he began to look for the weaknesses of that royal sage of tranquil soul, for if he did find any he could then punish the king who had shown him disrespect. Despite all his vigilance, Indra failed to find any flaw or weakness in the king.

One day, the king went on a hunting expedition. Indra saw this as an opportunity to baffle Bhangaswana. Riding alone on his horse, the king suddenly found himself confounded because Indra had stupefied his senses. Afflicted with hunger and thirst, the king's panic was so great that he could not even determine where he was. Parched with thirst, he began to wander aimlessly in a daze.

He then saw a crystalline lake shimmering with clear water. Alighting from his horse, he drank deeply and then led his horse to drink. When his

mount's thirst was quenched, the king tied the steed to a tree and plunged into the lake to perform his ablutions.

To his amazement he found that he had been transformed by the waters into a woman. The king was overcome with shame. With his senses and mind agitated, he began to reflect deeply in this strain:

"Alas, how will I ride my horse now? How will I return to my capital? As a result of the Agnishtuta sacrifice I have got a hundred mighty sons, all children of my own loins. What shall I say to them? What shall I say to my wives, my relatives and well-wishers, and to the subjects of my city and my kingdom?

Rishis who know the truths of dharma say that mildness and softness and being prone to extreme agitation are the attributes of women, and that action, strength and energy are those of men. Alas, my manliness has disappeared. For what reason have I been overcome with femininity? Being so transformed, how will I mount my horse again?"

Thinking these sad thoughts, the king, though transformed into a woman, mounted his steed with some effort and returned to his capital. Seeing that extraordinary transformation, his sons and wives and servants, and his subjects were astounded.

That royal sage, that most eloquent men, said to them all, "I was on a hunt, accompanied by a large force. Driven by destiny, losing all knowledge of the points of the horizon, I entered a thick and terrible forest. In that forest, I was afflicted by a strange thirst and quite lost my senses. I then saw a beautiful lake abounding with birds of every description. Plunging into those waters to perform my ablutions, I was transformed into a woman!"

The king summoned his wives and counsellors, and all his sons by their names, and said to them, "My sons, enjoy this kingdom in happiness. As for myself, I shall go away into the forest."

Having said this to his children, the king Bhangaswana, now a woman, set off for the vana. There, she came upon an asrama inhabited by a sannyasi. By him the transformed king gave birth to a hundred sons. Taking these sons to the capital, to where her former children were, she said to the latter, "You are the sons of my loins while I was a man. These are my children brought forth by me as a woman. My sons, all of you must enjoy my kingdom together, like brothers born of the same parents."

At this command, all the brothers, united together, began to take delight in their kingdom jointly. Seeing those children enjoying the kingdom as

brothers born of the same parents, Indra, filled with wrath, began to reflect, "By changing this royal sage into a woman, it appears that I have done him good instead of an injury."

Saying this, Indra assumed the form of a Brahmana and went to Bhangaswana's capital and, meeting all the princes, succeeded in disuniting them. He said to them, "Brothers never remain at peace even when they are born of the same father. The sons of Rishi Kasyapa—the Devas and the Asuras—fought against each other for the sovereignty of the three worlds.

As for you princes, you are the sons of Rajarishi Bhangaswana. These others are the sons of a sannyasi. The Devas and the Asuras are the progeny of a common sire, and yet they fought. How much more, therefore, will you fall out among yourselves? This kingdom, your paternal inheritance, is being enjoyed by these children of an ascetic."

Thus Indra succeeded in causing a rift between them, so that they fought and annihilated one another. Hearing this, Bhangaswana, who was living as an ascetic woman, burned with grief and poured forth her lamentations.

Indra, in the disguise of a Brahmana, came to where the sannyasini was living and on meeting her said, "O beautiful one, what sorrow burns you so that you lament so loudly?"

The woman said to him in a pitiful voice, "Two hundred sons of mine have been slain by Kaala. Learned Brahmana, I was once a king, and in that state I had a hundred sons. These I begot in my own likeness. Then, one day I went on a hunt. Suddenly dazed, as if someone had cast a spell on me, I wandered in a dense forest afire with thirst.

At last seeing a fine lake, I plunged into it. Emerging from the water, I found that I had become a woman. Returning to my capital I installed my sons in the sovereignty of my dominions and came into the forest. Now as a woman, I bore a hundred sons to my husband who is a high-souled ascetic. All of them were born in the sannyasi's asrama.

I took them to the capital. Through the influence of time, my sons fought each other and they all died. And afflicted by festiny, I am sorrowing.

Indra addressed her in these harsh words, "In the past, you injured me greatly by performing a yagna that I loathe. Indeed, though I was present, you did not invoke me with any honour. You of little understanding, I am Indra. It is me with whom you have crossed swords."

Beholding Indra revealed before him, the Rajarishi fell at his feet, touching them with his head, and said, "Be gratified with me, foremost of all Devas. I performed the yagna of which you speak from a desire to have sons and not from any wish to offend you. I beg you, forgive me."

Seeing the transformed monarch prostrate himself before him, Indra was gratified and, wanting to grant him a boon, asked, "Which of your sons do you wish to revive? Those that were brought forth by you as a woman, or those that you sired as a man?"

The ascetic woman folded her hands and said to Indra, "Vasava, let those sons of mine come to life that were borne by me as a woman."

Filled with wonder at this reply, Indra asked her, "Why do you feel less fondness for those children born to you as a man? Why is your love greater for the sons borne by you as a woman? I wish to hear the reason for this difference. Tell me everything."

Bhangaswana said, "The love experienced by a woman is much greater than that which is felt by a man. Hence it is, O Sakra, that I wish those sons to be revived that were borne by me as a woman."'

Bhishma continued, 'Thus addressed, Indra was pleased and said to her, "Let all your sons come back to life. Ask for another boon, foremost of kings, whatever boon you like. Take from me whatever gender you choose, that of a woman or of a man."

The sannyasin said, 'Sakra, I want to remain a woman. I do not wish to be restored to manhood, Vasava."

Hearing this answer, Indra asked her, "Why is it, powerful one, that you seek to remain a woman?"

Bhangaswana replied, 'In acts of sexual union, the pleasure that women enjoy is always far greater than what is enjoyed by men. It is for this reason that I wish to remain a woman. Indra, truthfully do I say to you that I derive greater pleasure in my womanhood. I am content with this that I now have. You may leave me now, O Swargaraja."

Hearing these words, Indra said, "So be it", and bidding her farewell, returned to swarga. Yudhishtira, thus it is well known that a woman derives much greater pleasure than a man during sexual union.'"

CANTO 13

"Yudhishtira says, 'What should a man do in order to pass pleasantly through this and the next world? How should one conduct oneself? What practices must one adopt with this end in view?'

Bhishma says, 'One must avoid the three sins that are done with the body, the four that are done with speech, the three that are done with the mind, and the ten paths of sin.

The three physical sins to be avoided are killing, theft and the enjoyment of other men's wives. The four sins of speech, never to be indulged in or even thought of, are evil talk, harsh words, talking about other people's faults and lies.

Coveting the possessions of others, doing injury to others, and doubting the rules of the Vedas, are the three sins of the mind which should always be avoided. Hence, one must never do any evil at all with body word or mind. By doing good and evil deeds, one is sure to enjoy or endure their consequences. Nothing can be more certain than this.'"

CANTO 14

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Gangaputra, you have heard all the names of Maheswara, the Lord of the universe. Pitamaha, tell us all the names that are applied to him who is called Isa and Sambhu. Tell us all those names that are applied unto him who is called Babhru or vast, him that has the universe for his form, him that is the illustrious guru of all the Devas and the Asuras, who is called Swayambhu and who is the cause of the origin and dissolution of the universe. Describe to us the puissance of Mahadeva.'

Bhishma says, 'I am not competent to recite the virtues of Mahadeva. He pervades all things in the universe and yet is not seen anywhere. He is the Creator of the universal self and the Prajna, the knowing self, and he is their master. All the Devas, from Brahma down to the Pisachas, adore and worship him.

He transcends both Prakriti and Purusha. It is of him that Rishis, who know yoga and have a knowledge of the tattvas, think and reflect. He is indestructible and the Supreme Brahman. He is both existent and non-existent. Agitating both Prakriti and Purusha with his energy, He created Brahma.

Who is there that is competent to speak of the virtues of that God of gods that is endowed with supreme intelligence? Man is subject to conception in the mother's womb, to birth, decay and death. Being such, what man like me has the capacity to understand Bhava?

Only Narayana, that bearer of the discus and the mace, can comprehend Mahadeva. He is without deterioration. He is the foremost of all beings in

attributes. He is Vishnu, because he pervades the universe. He is omnipotent.

Imbued with spiritual vision, he is possessed of supreme tejas. He sees all things with the eye of yoga. It is in consequence of the devotion of Krishna to Siva, whom he gratified through tapasya in Badarikasrama, that Krishna succeeded in permeating all the universe.

It is through Maheswara of divine vision that Krishna has obtained the attribute of universal charm, which is more delightful than all the wealth in the world. For a full thousand years he underwent the austerest penances and at last succeeded in gratifying the illustrious and boon-giving Siva, that master of all the mobile and the immobile universe.

In every new yuga, through such tapasya, Krishna has gratified Siva. In every yuga Mahadeva has been pleased with the devotion of Krishna. How wonderful is the puissance of the Mahatman Mahadeva, that original cause of the universe, who was seen by Hari, who himself transcends all decay, when he was engaged in tapasya to obtain a son in the asrama of Badari.

Bhaarata, I do not hold anyone superior to Mahadeva. Only Krishna is competent to expound the names of Siva fully and absolutely. This Mahabaho of Yadu's race alone can speak of the attributes of the illustrious Siva. Only he is able to discourse on the power, in its entirety, of the Supreme Deity.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Having said this, Bhishma Pitamaha addresses Krishna and speaks on the subject of the greatness of Bhava.

Bhishma says, 'You are the master of all the Devas and the Asuras. You are famed and illustrious. You are Vishnu because you pervade the whole universe. It is fitting that you discourse on Siva of universal form about whom Yudhishtira has asked me.

In ancient times, the Rishi Tandin, sprung from Brahma, recited in Brahma's realm before Brahma himself, the thousand names of Mahadeva. Recite those names before this gathering so that these tapodhana Rishis, who observe high vratas, who possess self-restraint, Vyasa among them, may hear you. Discourse on the holiness of him who is immutable, who is always joyful, who is hotri, who is the universal Protector, who is Creator of the universe, and who is called Mundin and Kapardin.'

Krishna says, 'The Devas, including Indra and Brahma, and the Maharishis, cannot fathom the course of Mahadeva's actions. He is the end

that all righteous people attain. The very Adityas who have keen sight, cannot gaze upon his abode. How then can a mere man comprehend him?

I will tell you some of the attributes of that illustrious slayer of Asuras, who is regarded as the Lord of all tapasya and vratas.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "And after purifying himself by touching water, Krishna began his discourse on the attributes of Siva.

Krishna says, 'Hear, you best of Brahmanas and you also Yudhishtira, and hear you too, Ganga's son, the names of the Kapardin. Listen to how I obtained a vision, so difficult to have, of that Great God, for the sake of Samba. In those days I saw him through the power of yoga.

Twelve years after wise Pradyumna, the son of Rukmini, killed the Asura Sambara, my wife Jambavati came to me and, seeing Pradyumna, Charudeshna and my other sons born to Rukmini, Jambavati, herself wanting a son, said to me, "Give me a heroic son, the foremost of mighty men, handsome in appearance, sinless in conduct, and like you in every way. And let there be no delay on your part in granting this wish of mine. There is nothing in the three worlds that is unattainable to you, O perpetuator of Yadu's vamsa; you can create other worlds by merely wishing it.

Observing a vow for twelve years and purifying yourself, you worshipped Siva and then begot upon Rukmini her sons Charudeshna and Sucharu and Charuvesa and Yasodhana and Charusravas and Charuyasas and Pradyumna and Samba. Grant to me a son like those powerful sons of Rukmini."

Thus addressed by the princess, I replied, "Give me leave to go away for some time. I will certainly obey your command!"

She said to me, "Go, and may you always be accompanied by success and prosperity. Let Brahma and Siva and Kasyapa, the great rivers, those Devas that preside over the mind, all plants, those chchandas that bear the libations poured in sacrifices, the Rishis, Bhumi, the oceans, the sacrificial dakshina, and those syllables that are uttered for completing the intonations of Samans, all protect you.

Yadava, let the Rikshas, the Pitris, the Navagrahas, the consorts of the Devas, the Apsaras, the Devis, the great kalpas, cows, Chandramas, Savitri, Agni, Savitri, the knowledge of the Vedas, the seasons, the year, the small and great divisions of time, the kshanas, the labas, the muhurtas, the nimeshas, and the yugas in succession, protect you, and keep you in

happiness, wherever you may dwell. Let no danger overtake you on your way, and be not careless."

Thus blessed by her, I took her leave. I then went into the presence of my father, of my mother, of the king, and of Ahuka, and I told them what the sorrowing daughter of the Vidyadhara prince had said to me. Taking their leave as well, I went sadly to Gada and to Rama of vast might.

They said to me, "Let your tapasya increase without any obstacle." Having received their leave, I thought of Garuda. He came instantly to me and, at my bidding, bore me to Himavat. Arriving at Himavat, I let him go.

There on that foremost of mountains, I saw many wonderful sights. I saw a pleasant asrama in which to perform tapasya. That delightful asrama was presided over by the high-souled Upamanyu who was a descendant of Vyaghrapada. It is celebrated and revered by the Devas and the Gandharvas, and appeared to be mantled in Vedic beauty.

It was adorned with dhavas and kakubhas and kadambas and cocas, with kuruvakas and ketakas and jambus and patalas, with nyagrodhas and varunakas and vatsanabhas and bilwas, with saralas and kapitthas, and piyalas and salas, and palmyras, with badaris and kundas and punnagas, and asokas and amras and kovidaras and champakas and panasas, and other trees laden with flowers and fruit. That asrama was also decked with the straight stems of the sweet banana.

Truly, that hermitage was adorned with diverse trees laden with fruit that formed the food of many kinds of birds. Heaps of the ashes of sacrificial fires were scattered all around, adding to the beauty of the scene. It abounded with ruru deer, monkeys, tigers, lions and leopards, with deer of diverse species and peacocks, and with wild cats and snakes. Indeed, many bison and bears could also be seen there.

Pleasant breezes blew bearing the melodious voices of Apsaras. The murmur of mountain streams and springs, the sweet notes of winged choristers, the deep grunts of elephants, the delicious strains of kinnaras, and the auspicious voices of ascetics singing the Samans, and other kinds of music, rendered that asrama utterly charming.

The mind cannot imagine another asrama as delightful as the one I saw. There were large housings for the sacred fire, all covered with flowering creepers. It was adorned with the clear and sacred water of the river Ganga. The daughter of Jahnu always lived there.

Many sannyasis, the foremost of all righteous men, endowed with great souls, and who resembled Agni himself in tejas, were its ornaments. Some of those ascetics subsisted on air and some on water, some were devoted to japa, and some were engaged in purifying their souls by practising the virtues of compassion, while some among them were yogins devoted to yoga dhyana.

Some amongst them subsisted upon only smoke, and some on fire, and some on milk. Thus was that asrama adorned with many great and evolved men. And some there had taken the vow of eating and drinking like cows; they no longer used their hands. And some used only two pieces of stone to husk their grain, and some used only their teeth. And some existed by drinking only the rays of the moon, and some by drinking only froth. And some had vowed to live like deer.

There were some who lived on the fruits of the ficus tree, and others who survived on water. Some dressed themselves in rags and some in animal skins and some in barks of trees. Indeed, I saw diverse ascetics of the best orders observing these and other painful vratas. I then wished to enter that asrama.

That retreat was honoured and adored by the Devas and all high-souled beings, by Siva, and by all righteous creatures. It stood in all its beauty on the breast of Himavat, like the moon in the sky. The mongoose sported there with the snake, and the tiger with the deer, as friends, forgetting their natural enmity, and this was because of the blissful tejas of those sannyasis of blazing tapasya and for their proximity to those Mahatmans.

As soon as I entered that asrama, enchanting to all creatures, inhabited by many great Brahmanas, all knowers of the Vedas and their angas, and by many high-souled Rishis celebrated for their difficult vratas, I saw a mighty Rishi with matted locks on his head and dressed in rags, who seemed to blaze forth like fire with his tapasya and tejas. Waited upon by his disciples and of tranquil soul, that foremost of Brahmanas was young. His name was Upamanyu.

I bowed to him and he said, "You are welcome, you of eyes like lotus petals. Today, with your visit, we see that our penances have borne fruit. You are worthy of our adoration, yet you revere us. You are worthy of being seen, but you come to see me."

With folded hands, I asked him about the well-being of the animals and birds that lived in his asrama, about the progress of his spiritual

advancement, and his disciples. The illustrious Upamanyu said to me sweetly, "Krishna, you will undoubtedly have a son like yourself. Gratify Isana, the Lord of all creatures, with stern tapasya.

That divine master sports here with his wife beside him. It was here that in ancient times the Devas with all the Rishis pleased him with their penances and celibacy, their truth and self-restraint, and had their wishes fulfilled. That illustrious God is the infinite vessel of all tejas and tapasya.

Projecting into existence and withdrawing once more unto himself all good and evil things, that inconceivable deity whom you seek lives here with his wife. The Danava Hiranyakashipu, whose strength was so great that he could shake the very mountains of Meru, succeeded in obtaining from Mahadeva the power of all the Devas and enjoyed it for ten millions of years.

Mandara, foremost among all Hiranyakashipu's sons, also has a boon from Siva and succeeded in fighting Indra for a million years. Vishnu's terrible Sudarsana Chakra and Indra's vajra, both, could not make the slightest impact upon the body of that great cause of universal affliction.

The discus that you bear was given to you by Mahadeva after he had slain a Daitya who was proud of his strength and once lived within the waters. Siva created that chakra, blazing with energy like Agni. Wonderful and irresistible, he gave it to you. Because of its blazing energy no one could look upon it other than Siva Pinakin himself.

Indeed, it was for this reason that Siva named it Sudarsana. From that time the name Sudarsana came to be used in all the worlds. Krishna, even that weapon failed to have the slightest effect on the body of Hiranyakashipu's son Mandara, who appeared like an evil planet in the three worlds. Having obtained a boon from Mahadeva, hundreds of chakras like yours and thunderbolts like those of Indra, could not inflict even a scratch on the body of that malignant planet.

Afflicted by the mighty Mandara, the Devas fought hard but in vain against him and his supporters, all of whom had received boons from Mahadeva. Pleased with another Danava named Vidyutprabha, Siva granted to him the sovereignty of the three worlds. That Danava remained the ruler of the three worlds for a hundred thousand years.

And Mahadeva said to him, 'You will become one of my ganas.' He further bestowed upon him the boon of a hundred million sons. The Lord of

all creatures further gave the Danava the realm of Kusadwipa for his kingdom.

Another great Asura, Satamukha, was created by Brahma. For a hundred years he poured the flesh of his own body on the sacrificial fire as an offering to Siva. Gratified with such tapasya, Sankara said to him, ‘What can I do for you?’

Satamukha replied, ‘Let me have the power of creating new creatures. Give me also eternal power.’

Siva said to him, ‘So be it.’

In earlier times, Swayambhu Brahma, concentrating his mind in yoga, performed a yagna for three hundred years, with the aim of having children. Mahadeva granted him a thousand sons with the attributes befitting the merits of the sacrifice.

Krishna, you doubtless know him who is praised by the Devas. The Rishi Yajnavalkya is exceptionally virtuous. By adoring Mahadeva he has acquired great fame. The great ascetic Vyasa, who is Parasara’s son, with soul set on yoga, has gained great renown by adoring Sankara.

One day the Balakhilyas were disregarded by Indra. In anger, they worshipped Siva. That Lord of the universe, thus gratified by the Balakhilyas, said to them, ‘By your tapasya, you will succeed in creating a bird that will rob Indra of the amrita.’

In the past, on account of the wrath of Mahadeva, all the waters of the world disappeared. The Devas worshipped him by performing the Saptakapala yagna, and through his grace caused other waters to flow. Truly, when he was pleased, water once more appeared in the world.

The wife of Atri, who knew the Vedas well, left him in anger and said, ‘I shall no longer live in subjection to that sannyasi.’ And she sought the protection of Siva. Through fear of her lord, Atri spent three hundred years without all food. And all this time she slept on wooden blocks to gratify Bhava.

Mahadeva appeared before her and smilingly said to her, ‘You shall have a son. And you will get that son without needing a husband, but just through the grace of Rudra. That son, born in his father’s vamsa, will be celebrated for his worth, and take a name after you.’

Devoted to Siva, the illustrious Vikarna also successfully gratified him with severe tapasya.

Sakalya, too, adored Bhava in a mental sacrifice that he performed for nine hundred years. Pleased with him the illustrious deity said to him, 'You will become a great Kavi. Your fame will be boundless in the three worlds. Your vamsa also will be infinite and will be adorned by many great Rishis that shall take birth in it. Your son will become the foremost of Brahmanas and will arrange the Sutras of your work.'

In the Krita yuga there was a celebrated Rishi of the name of Savarni. Here, in this asrama, he underwent austere penance for six thousand years. Siva said to him, 'I am pleased with you, sinless one. Without being subject to decay or death, you will become a poet renowned through all the worlds.'

In ancient days, in Varanasi, Sakra, filled with bhakti, adored Mahadeva who is clothed by empty space and who is smeared with ashes. Having done so, Indra obtained the sovereignty of the Devas.

Once Narada, too, adored the great Bhava with a devoted heart. Gratified with him, Mahadeva, that guru of the divine guru, said, 'No one will be your equal in tejas and tapasya. You will always attend upon me with your singing and your vina.'

Krishna, hear also how I succeeded in obtaining a sight of that God of gods, that master of all creatures; hear also in detail for what purpose. With senses and mind subdued I invoked that Deva of supreme energy. I will tell you all that I succeeded in obtaining from Maheswara, that God of gods.

In the Krita yuga there was a famed Rishi named Vyaghrapada. He was celebrated for his knowledge and mastery over the Vedas and their angas. I was born as the son of that Rishi, and Dhaumya as my younger brother.

Once, accompanied by Dhaumya, I came upon the asrama of certain evolved Rishis. There I saw a cow that was being milked. I saw the milk and it resembled amrita itself in taste. I then came home, and impelled by childishness, I said to my mother, 'Give me some food prepared with milk.'

There was no milk in the house, and so my mother was saddened by my asking for it. My mother took a lump of cooked rice and boiled it in water. The water became white and my mother placed it before us saying that it was milk and told us to drink it.

Once before this I had drunk milk when my father took me to the house of some of our great kinsmen at the time of a yagna. A divine cow, who delights the Devas, was being milked. Drinking her milk that was like amrita in taste, I knew what the qualities of milk were. I knew at once what our mother had set before us as milk. Its taste gave me no pleasure at all.

Again, I childishly said to my mother, ‘This, O mother, is not any preparation of milk.’

Filled with sorrow at this, and embracing me lovingly and sniffing the top of my head, Madhava, she said to me, ‘My child, where can ascetics of pure souls get food prepared with milk? We live in the forest and subsist upon bulbs and roots and fruits. Where will we, who live by the banks of rivers that are the resort of the Balakhilyas, we who have mountains and forests for our home, from where shall we get milk?

We live sometimes on air and sometimes on water. We dwell in the hearts of forests. We habitually abstain from all kinds of food that are eaten by those who live in villages and towns. We are accustomed to only such food as the wilderness provides. Child, there cannot be any milk in the wilderness where there are no offspring of Surabhi.

Dwelling on the banks of rivers or in caves or on mountainsides, or in tirthas and other wild places, we pass our time in the practice of tapasya and the chanting of sacred mantras, with Siva as our highest refuge. Without gratifying him of unfading glory, he who has three eyes, from where can one obtain food prepared with milk or grand robes and other objects of worldly enjoyment?

Devote yourself, dear son, to Sankara with your whole soul. Through his grace you are sure to receive all that will satisfy your desires.’

On hearing these words of my mother, I joined my hands in reverence and bowing to her, said, ‘O mother, who this Mahadeva? In what manner can one gratify him? Where does that God dwell? How can he be seen? With what is he seen? What also is the form of Sarva? How may one succeed in gaining knowledge of him? If gratified, will he show himself to me?’

Govinda, after I had said these words to my mother, with tears in her eyes she lovingly sniffed my head. Gently patting my arms, she spoke to me with great humility.

She said, ‘Mahadeva is very difficult to be known by those uncleansed souls. Impure men cannot bear him in their hearts, indeed they cannot comprehend him at all. They cannot retain him in their minds. They cannot grasp him, nor can they obtain a vision of him.

Men of wisdom aver that his forms are many. Many, again, are the places in which he dwells. Many are the forms of his grace. Who is there that can understand the deeds of Isa in all their aspects, or all the forms he

has assumed in times gone by? Who can relate how he sports and how he is gratified?

Maheswara of universal form lives in the hearts of all creatures. While Munis discoursed on his auspicious and extraordinary deeds, I have heard from them how, impelled by compassion towards his bhaktas, he grants them a glimpse of himself. To honour the Brahmanas, the inhabitants of swarga recited to them the diverse forms that were taken by Mahadeva. You have asked me about these and I will recite them to you.'

My mother continued, 'Siva assumes the forms of Brahma and Vishnu and the king of the Devas, of the Rudras, the Adityas and the Aswins; and of those Devas that are called Viswadevas. He assumes the forms also of men and women, of Pretas and Pisachas, of Kiratas and Savaras, and of all marine animals. That illustrious God assumes the forms of also those Savaras that dwell in forests.

He assumes the forms of tortoises, fishes and conches. He it is that takes the forms of those corals used as ornaments by men. He assumes also the forms of Yakshas, Rakshasas and Nagas, of Daityas and Danavas. Indeed, he assumes the forms of all those creatures that live hidden in hollows.

He takes the forms of tigers and lions and deer, of wolves and bears and birds, of owls and of jackals as well. It is he that assumes the forms of swans and crows and peacocks, of chameleons and lizards and storks. He it is that assumes the forms of cranes and vultures and chakravakas. Truly, it is he that assumes the forms of chasas and of mountains.

It is Mahadeva that assumes the forms of cows and elephants and horses and camels and donkeys. He also takes the forms of goats and leopards, and diverse other animals. It is Siva who assumes the forms of a variety of birds of beautiful plumage. It is Mahadeva who assumes the forms of men with staffs and those with umbrellas and those with swords, among Brahmanas.

He sometimes becomes six-faced and sometimes multi-faced. He sometimes assumes forms having three eyes and forms having many heads. And he sometimes assumes forms having many millions of legs and forms having countless bellies and faces, and forms with many arms and sides. He sometimes appears surrounded by innumerable bhutas and pretas, spirits and ghosts.

He it is that assumes the forms of Rishis and Gandharvas, and of Siddhas and Charanas. His form is sometimes rendered white with the ashes he smears on it and is adorned with a half-moon on his forehead. Adored

with diverse mantras uttered in diverse kinds of voice and worshipped with diverse mantras filled with encomiums, he, that is sometimes called Sarva, is the destroyer of all creatures in the universe, and it is upon him, again, that all creatures rest.

Mahadeva is the soul of all creatures. He pervades all things. He discourses on dharma and karmas. He dwells everywhere, in the hearts of all creatures in the universe. He knows the desires of each of his devotees. He becomes one with the object which one reveres. If it pleases you, do you seek his protection.

He sometimes rejoices, and sometimes yields to wrath, and at others utters a deafening humkara. At times, he sometimes arms himself with the chakra, at times with the trisula, at times with the gada, sometimes with the Pinaka, and sometimes with the khatvanga. He it is that assumes the form of Sesha who holds the world on his head.

He has snakes for his girdle, and his ears are adorned with earrings that are snakes. Snakes form also the sacred thread he wears. His upper garment is an elephant skin. He sometimes laughs and at others sings, and sometimes dances most wondrously and madly.

Surrounded by many spirits and ghosts, he plays on musical instruments. Diverse are these instruments, and sweet are their sounds. He roams across cremations grounds, yawns, cries, and makes others weep.

He assumes the guise of one who is mad, and also of one who is intoxicated, and he sometimes speaks words that are exceedingly sweet. He laughs fiercely, frightening all creatures with his dreadful eyes. He sleeps and remains awake and sometimes yawns as he pleases.

He recites sacred mantras and becomes the deity of those mantras. He performs tapasya and becomes the one who is adored by those penances. He makes gifts and receives those very gifts; at times he immerses himself in yoga and at times becomes the object of the yoga dhyana of others.

He may be seen on the vedi, the sacrificial platform, or in the stamba, the sacrificial stake; in the goshala or in the Agni. Again, he may not be seen there. He may be seen as a child or as an old man. He dallies with the daughters and the wives of the Rishis.

His hair is long and straight. He is perfectly naked, for he has the sky for his raiment. He has terrifying eyes. He is fair, he is dark; he is dark, he is pale; he is the colour of smoke, and he is red. He has big and fierce eyes. Akasa is his covering and it is he who covers all things.

Who is there that can comprehend the limits of Mahadeva who is formless, who is one and indivisible, who conjures up illusions, who is the cause of all creation and destruction in the universe, who assumes the form of Hiranyagarbha, and who is without beginning and without end, and who is without birth?

He lives in the heart of every creature. He is the prana, he is Manas, and he is the Jiva. He is the soul of yoga, and it is that which is called yoga. He is the yoga dhyana into which yogins enter. He is the Paramatman. Indeed Maheswara, the purity in essence, can be understood not by the senses but only through the Atman seizing his existence.

He plays on many musical instruments. He sings. He has a hundred thousand eyes, he has one mouth, he has two mouths, he has three mouths, and he has many mouths. Devote yourself to him, set your heart upon him, depend upon him, and accept him as your only refuge; you adore Mahadeva and then you will have the fruits of all your wishes.'

Hearing these words of my mother, from that day my devotion was focused solely on Mahadeva. I applied myself to the practice of the austerest penances to gratify him. For one thousand years I stood on my left toe.

After that I passed one thousand years subsisting only upon fruits. The next one thousand years I lived on the fallen leaves of trees. The next thousand years I passed subsisting upon water only. After that I passed seven hundred years on air alone.

In this way, I adored Siva for a full thousand years of the Devas. After this, the Master of the universe was gratified with me. Wanting to know whether I was solely devoted to him and him alone, he appeared before me in the form of Sakra surrounded by all the Devas.

As the celebrated Sakra, he had a thousand eyes and was armed with the vajra. And he rode on a pure white elephant with four tusks, with eyes red, ears folded, the temporal juice trickling down his cheeks, with trunk contracted, and terrifying to behold. Indeed, riding on such an elephant, the illustrious chief of the Devas seemed to blaze forth with splendour.

With a beautiful crown on his head and adorned with garlands round his neck and bracelets round his arms, he neared where I stood. A white chatra was held over his head. And he was waited upon by many Apsaras, and many Gandharvas sang his praise. Addressing me, he said, 'Dvijottama, I am pleased with you. Ask me for whatever boon you desire.'

These words of Sakra did not please me. Krishna, I answered him in these words: 'I do not desire any boon from you or any other god. I tell you truly that it is only from Mahadeva that I seek boons. That I say to you is nothing but the truth.

Only words which relate to Maheswara fill me with joy. At the command of Pasupati, I am ready to become a worm or a tree with many branches. If I do not receive the blessings of Mahadeva's boons, the very sovereignty of the three worlds would not be acceptable to me.

Let me be born among the very Chandalas but let me still be devoted to the feet of Siva. Without being devoted to him, I would not like to be born in the palace of Indra himself. If a man lacks devotion to him, that master of the Devas and the Asuras, he will suffer even if he can subsist upon only air and water for want of food.

No other discourses on dharma are needed by those who live every moment thinking of the feet of Mahadeva. When the Kali yuga comes, one must devote one's heart every moment to Mahadeva.

One that has drunk the amrita of devotion to Siva is freed from the fear of samsara. One that has not obtained the grace of Mahadeva can never succeed in devoting oneself to him for a single day, or for half a day, or for a muhurta, or even for a kshana or a lava. At the command of Mahadeva I would cheerfully become a worm or an insect, but I have no wish for even the sovereignty of the three worlds, if you, Sakra, were to bestow it upon me.

At his word I would become even a dog. In fact, that would be my highest wish. If not given by Maheswara, I would not have the sovereignty of the very Devas. I do not wish to have dominion over swarga. I do not wish to have the sovereignty of the celestials. I do not wish to have the realm of Brahma. Indeed, I do not even wish to have moksha, that cessation of individual existence and a complete identification with Brahman.

But I want to become the dasa of Hara. As long as that Lord of all creatures, with crown on his head and luminous body of the moon, does not become gratified with me, so long shall I endure all the afflictions, due to a hundred cycles of decay, death and birth that befall all embodied beings.

Who can obtain peace without gratifying Rudra, who is free from decay and death, who is imbued with the effulgence of the sun, the moon, or the fire, who is the root or original cause of everything real and unreal in the three worlds, and who exists as one indivisible entity? If I am reborn

because of my faults, I will, in those new births, devote myself solely to Mahadeva.'

Indra said, 'What reason can you assign for the existence of a Supreme Being or for his being the cause of all causes?'

I, Upamanyu, said, 'I solicit boons from that great deity named Siva who has been described as existent and non-existent, manifest and unmanifest, eternal and immutable, one and many. I solicit boons from Him who is without beginning and middle and end, who is knowledge and puissance, who is inconceivable and who is the Paramatman. I solicit boons from he from whom comes all power, who has not been created by anyone, who is immutable, and who, though himself not sprung from any seed, is the seed of all things in the universe.

I solicit boons from him who is blazing effulgence, beyond tamas, who is the essence of all tapasya, who transcends all our faculties that we may use to understand him, and by knowing whom we are liberated from sorrow. Purandara, I worship him who is conversant with the creation of all elements and the thought of all living beings, and who is the original cause of the existence or creation of all creatures, who is omnipresent, and who has the power to give everything.

I solicit boons from him who cannot be grasped by reason, who is the focus of the Samkhya and the yoga systems of philosophy, and who transcends all things, and whom all wise men worship and adore. I solicit boons from him who is the soul of Maghavat himself, who is said to be the God of the gods, and who is the master of all creatures.

I solicit boons from him who it is that first created Brahma, Creator of all the worlds, having filled space with his energy and brought the primeval egg into existence. Who else than that Supreme Lord could be the creator of Agni, Jala, Vayu, Bhumi, Akasa and Manas, and that which is called Mahat?

Sakra, tell me, who else than Siva could create Manas, Buddhi, Chitta or Ahamkara, the Tanmatras, and the indriyas? Who is there higher than Siva?

The wise say that Brahma is the Creator of this universe. Brahma, however, acquired his puissance and prosperity by worshipping and gratifying Mahadeva. Consisting of the three attributes of creation, preservation and destruction, that power, which dwells in that illustrious Being who is endowed with the quality of being One, who created Brahma,

Vishnu and Rudra, was derived from Mahadeva. Tell me who is there that is superior to the Supreme Lord?

Considering the sovereignty and oppressive power of the Daityas and the Danavas, who else can unite the sons of Diti and confer upon them power and dominion? Know that the different points of the horizon, time, the sun, all fiery entities, the planets, wind, water, and the stars and constellations come from Mahadeva. Tell me who is higher than the Supreme Lord?

Who else is there, other than Mahadeva, in the matter of the creation of sacrifice and the destruction of Tripura? Who else other than Mahadeva, that Parantapa, has given regency to the principal Devas?

What need is there of clever and refined speech, when I behold you of a thousand eyes, best of the Devas, who are worshipped by Siddhas, Gandharvas and the other Devas and the Rishis? All this is due to the blessings of Mahadeva.'

Krishna, know that this all, consisting of animate and inanimate existences with swarga and other unseen entities, which occur in this world, and which has the all-pervading Lord for their soul, has flowed from Maheswara and has been created by him for the Jiva's enjoyment. In the worlds that are known as Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah, and Maha, in the midst of the mountains of lokaloka, in the islands, in the Mountains of Meru, in all things that yield happiness, and in the hearts of all creatures, there resides Mahadeva.

If the Devas and the Asuras could see any other more powerful than Siva, would both of them, especially the former when attacked by the latter, not have sought that other's protection? In all conflicts between the Devas, the Yakshas, the Uragas and the Rakshasas, which end in mutual destruction, it is Siva who assigns them their respective positions dependent upon their karma.

Tell me, who else is there than Maheswara to bestow boons upon, and then again punish Andhaka, Sukra, Dundubhi, many great Maharishis, Yakshas, Indra and Bala, and Rakshasas and the Nivatakavachas?

Was not the vital seed of Mahadeva, master of both the Devas and the Asuras, poured as a libation upon the fire? From that seed sprang a mountain of gold. Who else is there whose seed can be said to be of such power?

Who else in this world is praised for having only the very sky for his garments? Who else can be said to be a brahmacharin with his always vital seed drawn up? Who else is there that has half his body occupied by his Devi? Who else is there that has been able to subdue Kama, the god of desire?

Tell me, Indra, what other Being possesses that high realm of supreme felicity which is lauded by all the deities? Who else has the cremation ground for his playing field? Who else is there that is extolled for his dancing?

Whose puissance and worship remain immutable? Who else sports with bhutas and pretas? Tell me who else has companions who possess strength like his own and who are thus proud of that vigour and power?

Who else is there whose status is acclaimed as unchangeable and revered by the three worlds? Who else pours rain, gives heat, and blazes forth with tejas? From whom else do we derive our treasure of herbs and plants? Who else upholds all kinds of wealth? Who else sports as much as he pleases in the three worlds of mobile and immobile beings?

Indra, know Maheswara to be the original cause of everything. He is adored by yogins, by Rishis, by Gandharvas, and by Siddhas, with the help of gyana, of tapasya, and of the rites laid down in the shastras. He is adored by both the Devas and the Asuras using tapasya and karma, and the rituals laid down in the sacred scriptures.

The fruits of action can never touch him for he transcends them all. Being such, I call him the original cause of everything.

He is both sthula and sukshma, embodied and pure spirit. He is without equal. He cannot be conceived by the senses. He is both with and without attributes. He is the Lord of gunas, for he controls them. Such is Maheswara's standing.

He is the cause of the creation and preservation of the universe. He is the cause of the universe and the cause also of its destruction. He is the past, the present and the future. He is the sire of all things. Truly, he is the cause of everything.

He is that which is mutable; he is the unmanifest, he is vidya; he is avidya; he is every action, he is every omission; he is dharma and he is adharma. Him I call the cause of everything.

Indra, behold the features of both the genders in the image of Mahadeva, the Ardhanariswara. He is the cause of both creation and

destruction, and unites in his body the characteristics of both male and female as the one cause of the creation of the universe. My mother told me that he is the cause of the universe and the one cause of everything.

There is no one that is higher than Isa. If it pleases you, surrender yourself to his kindness and protection. You know that the universe has sprung from the union of the sexes, as represented by Mahadeva. You know the universe to be the sum of what is endowed with attributes and what else is divested of attributes and has the seeds of Brahma and others for its immediate cause.

Brahma and Indra and Hutasana and Vishnu and all the other Devas, along with the Daityas and the Asuras, crowned with the fruition of a thousand desires, always say that there is none that is higher than Mahadeva. I am compelled to seek that God known to all the mobile and immobile universe, he who has been spoken of as the highest of all the gods, and who is auspiciousness itself, so that I may attain, without delay, mukti, that highest of all acquisitions.

What need is there to find any more evidence to prove what I believe? The supreme Mahadeva is the cause of all causes. We have never heard that the Devas worship the emblem of another god. Tell me, if you ever heard of any other whose sign has been or is being worshipped by all the deities?

He whose emblem is always worshipped by Brahma, by Vishnu, by you Indra, with all the other Devas, is the foremost of all deities. Brahma has for his sign the lotus, Vishnu has for his the discus, and Indra has the thunderbolt. But the creatures of the world do not bear any of these.

On the other hand, all creatures bear the signs that mark Mahadeva and Uma. Hence, all creatures must be regarded as belonging to Maheswara. All creatures of the female sex, have their origin in Uma's nature, and so bear the mark of femininity, the yoni that distinguishes her; all creatures that are male, having sprung from Siva, bear the masculine mark, the linga that distinguishes him.

Anyone who says that there is, in the three worlds with their mobile and immobile creatures, any other cause than the Supreme Lord, and that which is not marked with the mark of either Mahadeva or his consort should be regarded as wretched and should not be counted among the creatures of the universe. Every being with the mark of the male sex should be known to be of Isana, while every being with the mark of the female sex should be

known to be of Uma. This universe of mobile and immobile creatures has either a male or female form.

It is from Mahadeva that I wish to obtain boons. Failing in this, I would prefer death itself. Slayer of Bala, go or remain as you wish. I wish to have boons or curses from Mahadeva. No other deity shall I ever accept, nor would I want my wishes to be granted by any other.'

Having said these words to Indra, I was overwhelmed with grief at the thought of Mahadeva not having been gratified with me despite my severe austerities. However, in an instant, I saw the celestial elephant before me transformed into a bull as white as a swan, or the jasmine flower, or a stalk of the lotus, or silver, or an ocean of milk.

Of a massive body, the tuft of its tail was black and the colour of its eyes was brown like honey. Its horns were hard as steel and had the colour of gold. With their sharp red points, the bull seemed to cleave the earth. The animal was adorned all over with ornaments made of the purest gold.

Its face and hooves and nose and ears were exceedingly beautiful and its loins well-formed. Its flanks were handsome and its neck was broad. Its whole form was utterly beautiful to behold. Its hump radiated great beauty and appeared to occupy the whole of its shoulder. And it looked like the peak of a mountain of snow or like a cliff of white clouds in the sky.

Upon the back of that animal I saw seated the illustrious Mahadeva along with Uma. He shone like the lord of stars, the moon while he is at his full. The fire born of his energy was brilliant like the lightning that flashes amidst clouds. It looked as if a thousand suns rose there, filling every side with dazzling splendour. The tejas of the Supreme Lord was like the Samvartaka fire which destroys all creatures at the end of the yuga.

Suffused with that tejas, the sky darkened and I could see nothing. I was filled with anxiety and wondered what it could mean. That dark energy did not pervade every side for long, through Siva's illusion, and soon the horizon cleared.

I then saw Maheswara seated on the back of his bull, of blessed and benign appearance and looking like a smokeless fire. And the Great God was accompanied by Parvati of unblemished features. Indeed, I beheld Nilakanta, blue-throated Sthanu, detached from everything, that wielder of all kinds of force, as having eighteen arms and adorned with all kinds of ornaments.

Clad in white raiment, he wore white garlands and had white liniments smeared upon his limbs. His matchless banner was white in colour. His sacred thread was also white. With powers equal to his own, he was surrounded by his ganas, who were singing or dancing or playing on various musical instruments.

A pale crescent moon formed his crown, and set on his brow it was like the moon that rises in the winter sky. He seemed ablaze with splendour, because of his three eyes that were like three suns. The garland of the purest white on his body shone like a festoon of lotuses, adorned with jewels.

I also saw Siva's weapons in their embodied forms bursting with every kind of energy. The deity held a vari-coloured bow whose colours were like those of the rainbow.

That bow, the famed Pinaka, is really a mighty snake. Indeed, that male snake of seven heads and immense body, of ample neck, of sharp fangs and virulent poison, was twined round with the rope that served as its bowstring.

And there was a shaft as splendid as the sun or the fire that appears at the end of the yuga. Indeed, that arrow was the mighty and unrivalled Pasupata, indescribable for its power, and striking fear into every creature.

Of vast proportions, it seemed to constantly shoot out tongues of fire. It has one foot, large teeth, a thousand heads and thousand bellies, a thousand arms, a thousand tongues and a thousand eyes. It seemed to continually emit fire.

Mahabaho, that weapon is superior to the Brahma, the Narayana, the Aindra, the Agneya, and the Varuna astras. It can make ashes of every other weapon in the universe. Using that astra Mahadeva had once, burnt down the Tripura, the triad cities of the Asuras in a flash. With that single arrow, Krishna, he, Siva, achieved that impossible feat with the greatest ease.

Shot by Mahadeva's arms, that astra can consume the entire universe with all its mobile and immobile creatures in the twinkling of an eye. Everyone in the universe, including even Brahma and Vishnu and the Devas, that weapon can slay. I saw that incomparable astra in the hand of Mahadeva.

There is another mysterious and powerful weapon which is equal, even superior to the Pasupata. I also saw that one. It is celebrated in all the worlds as the sum of the Sula-armed Mahadeva. Cast by him, it can rive the earth, dry up the waters of the ocean or indeed annihilate the universe.

In the past that Sula made ashes of Yuvanaswa's son, King Mandhatri, conqueror of the three worlds, ruler of a vast empire and endowed with prodigious energy, along with all his army. Mighty, and like Sakra himself in prowess was Mandhatri, but the Rakshasa Lavana killed him with the Sula which he received from Siva.

The Sula has such sharp prongs that they verge on being invisible. It can terrify all and make the hair of the mightiest stand on end. I saw that trident in Mahadeva's hand, and it seemed to roar with rage, having contracted its forehead into three furrows. It resembled, Krishna, a smokeless fire or the sun that rises at the end of the yuga. The handle of that Sula, was a mighty snake. It is indescribable. It looked like Yama himself armed with his noose with which he draws out souls from living creatures. I saw this astra in the hand of Mahadeva.

I beheld also another weapon, the battle-axe Khatvanga, which the gratified Siva once gave to Parasurama Bhargava and with which Rama exterminates all the Kshatriyas of the world. It was with this weapon that Rama destroyed the great Kartavirya in furious battle. It was with that weapon that Jamadagni's son was able to annihilate the Kshatriyas on twenty-one occasions.

Searingly sharp, that axe hung on Siva's shoulder, adorned with his snake. Indeed, it glowed on Mahadeva's body like the flame of a blazing fire. I saw many other divine weapons with Mahadeva. I have named only a few most important ones.

On the left side of the Great God was Brahma seated on a chariot drawn by swans swift as the mind. On the same side Vishnu could also be seen riding on Garuda, and bearing the sankha, chakra and gada.

Close to the Goddess Parvati was Skanda on his peacock, bearing his deadly arrow and bells, and looking like another Agni. In front of Mahadeva stood Nandi armed with his Sula and looking like a second formidable Siva.

The Munis led by Manu and Rishis led by Bhrigu, and the Devas with Indra at their head, all came there. All the tribes of bhutas and pretas, and the divine matrikas, stood surrounding Mahadeva and worshipping him.

The Devas were singing hymns in his praise. Brahma recited a Rathantara to praise Mahadeva. Narayana chanted the Jyeshta Saman to eulogise him and Indra did the same with the Sata-Rudriyam.

Brahma, Narayana and Sakra shone there like three sacrificial fires. In their midst the illustrious Siva blazed like Surya in the midst of his corona, emerged from behind dark clouds. I beheld many suns and moons in the sky. I then praised the illustrious Lord of everything, the supreme master of the universe.

Upamanyu continued,[2] "I said, 'Salutations to you, illustrious one, you that are the refuge of all things, you that are called Mahadeva! Salutations to you that assume the form of Sakra, that are Sakra, and that disguise yourself in the form and robes of Sakra.

Salutations to you that are armed with the thunderbolt, to you that are tawny, and you that are always armed with the Pinaka. Salutations to you that always bear the conch and the trisula.

Salutations to you that are clad in black, to you that have dark and matted hair, to you that possess a dark deer-skin for your upper garment, to you that preside over the eighth lunation of the dark fortnight. Salutations to you that are of white complexion, to you that are called auspicious, to you that are clad in white robes, to you that have limbs smeared with white ashes, to you that are ever engaged in pure deeds.

Salutations to you that are red in colour, to you that are clad in red vestments, to you that have a red banner with red pennants, to you that wear red garlands and use red unguents. Salutations to you that are brown in colour, to you that are clad in brown vestments, to you that have a brown banner with brown pennants, to you that wear brown garlands and use brown liniments.

Salutations to you that have the royal parasol over your head, to you that wear the best of crowns. Salutations unto you that are adorned with half a garland and half an armlet, to you that are decked with one ring for one year, to you that are endowed with the speed of the mind, to you that are filled with great refulgence. Salutations to you that are the foremost of deities, to you that are the foremost of ascetics, to you that are the foremost of divinities.

Salutations to you that wear half a wreath of lotuses, to you that cover your body with many lotuses. Salutations to you that have half your body smeared with sandalwood paste, to you that have half your body decked with garlands of flowers and smeared with fragrant oils.

Salutations to you that are of the complexion of the sun, you are like Surya, to you whose face is like that of the sun, to you whose eyes are each

like the sun. Salutations to you that are Soma, to you that are as gentle as the moon, to you that bear the lunar disc on your brow, to you that are of lustre like the moon, to you that are the foremost of all creatures, to you that are adorned with bright teeth.

Salutations to you that are of a dark complexion, to you that are of a fair complexion, to you that have a form half-tawny and half-white, to you that has a body half-male and half-female, to you that are both male and female. Salutations to you that have Nandi for your vahana, to you that ride on the most majestic of elephants, to you that are obtained with difficulty, to you that can easily access places inaccessible to others.

Salutations to you whose praises are sung by the Ganas, to you that are devoted to the Ganas, to you that follow the path of the Ganas, to you that are steadfast in your devotion to the Ganas.

Salutations to you that are white like the clouds, to you that glow like the evening clouds, to you that are indescribable, to you that are unique and incomparable.

Salutations to you that wears a beautiful red garland, to you that are dressed in red robes. Salutations to you that wears a jewelled crown, to you that are adorned with a crescent moon, to you that have eight flowers on your head.

Salutations to you that have a fiery mouth and burning eyes, to you that have eyes as lustrous as a thousand moons, to you that have the form of fire, to you that are handsome and enchanting, to you that are inconceivable and mysterious. Salutations to you that range through the firmament, to you that love and dwell in the pastures of cows, to you that walk on the earth, to you that are the earth, to you that are infinite, to you that are auspicious.

Salutations to you that are digambara, clothed only by the sky, to you that make a joyful home of every place in which you find yourself. Salutations to you that have the universe for your home, to you that have both knowledge and grace for your Soul.

Salutations to you that wears a crown, to you that wears a magnificent armlet, to you that has a snake for the garland round your neck, to you that wears many beautiful ornaments. Salutations to you that have Surya, Chandramas and Agni for your three eyes, to you that possess a thousand eyes, to you that are both male and female, to you that are without gender, to you that are a Samkhya, to you that are a yogin.

Salutations to you that are of the grace of those Devas who are worshipped in yagnas, to you that are the Atharvans, to you who alleviate all kinds of disease and pain, to you that dispel every sorrow. Salutations to you that roar like resounding thunder, to you that create illusions, to you that preside over the soil and over the seed that is sown in it, to you that are the Creator of everything.

Salutations to you that are the Lord of all the Devas, to you that are the master of the universe, to you that are swift like the wind, to you that are of the form of the wind. Salutations to you that wear a garland of gold, to you that sport on hills and mountains, to you that are adored by all the Asuras, to you that possess fierce speed and energy.

Salutations to you that tore out one of Brahma's heads, to you that slew Mahishasura, to you that assume three forms, to you that bear every form. Salutations to you that are the destroyer of the Tripura of the Asuras, to you that are the destroyer of Daksha's yagna, to you that are the destroyer of Kama's body, to you that wield the rod of destruction.

Salutations to you that are Skanda, to you that are Visakha, to you that are the staff of the Brahmana, to you that are Bhava, to you that are Sarva, to you that are of universal form. Salutations to you that are Isana, to you that are the destroyer of Bhaga, to you that are the slayer of Andhaka, to you that are the universe, to you that are possess maya, to you that are both conceivable and inconceivable.

You are the one goal of all creatures, you are the foremost, and you are the heart of everything. You are Brahma of all the Devas, you are the Nilardhita of the Rudras. You are the Atman of the creatures, you are he that is called Purusha by the Samkhyas, you are the Rishabha among all things sacred, you are that which is called auspicious by yogins and which, according to them, is indivisible.

Among those in the various asramas, you are the grihasta, you are the great Lord amongst the lords of the universe. You are Kubera among the Yakshas, and you are Vishnu among all sacrifices.

You are Meru among mountains, you are the moon among all luminaries of the firmament, you are Vasishta amongst Rishis, and you are Surya among the planets. You are the lion among all wild beasts, and among domestic animals you are the bull that is worshipped by all men.

Among the Adityas you are Vishnu, among the Vasus you are Pavaka, among birds you are Garuda, and among snakes you are Ananta. Among

the Vedas you are the Saman, among the Yajuses you are the Sata-Rudriyam, among yogins you are Sanatkumara, and among Samkhyas you are Kapila.

Among the Maruts you are Sakra, among the Pitris you are Devarata, among all the realms created for living you are Brahmaloka, and among all the ends that creatures attain to, you are moksha. You are the ocean of milk among oceans, among all lofty mountains you are Himavat, among all the varnas you are the Brahmana, and among all learned Brahmanas you are he that has undergone and is observant of the Diksha.

You are the sun among all things in the world, you are the destroyer Kaala. You are whatever else possesses the superior tejas of eminence that exists in the universe. You are supremely powerful. This is my certain conclusion.

Salutations to you, you that are kind to all your devotees. Salutations to you, Lord of yogins. I bow to you, the original cause of the universe. Be you gratified with me, your worshipper dejected and powerless; Eternal Lord, you become the refuge of this weak and wretched one who adores you.

It is fitting for you to pardon all my sins, taking pity on me because I am your devoted worshipper. I was mystified by you, on account of the disguise in which you appeared before me. O Maheswara, I did not even give you the arghya or padya to wash your feet.'

Having sung the praises of Isana in this way, I offered him, with great devotion, water to wash his feet and the ingredients of the arghya, and then, with folded hands, I surrendered myself to him, being prepared to do whatever he commanded.

An auspicious shower of flowers fell upon my head, possessing divine fragrance and sprinkled with cool water-drops. The Gandharvas began to play on their drums. A perfumed breeze began to blow and fill me with delight.

Then Mahadeva accompanied by his wife, having been gratified with me, addressed the divinities gathered there, his words filling me with great joy, 'Behold, you Devas, the devotion of Upamanyu. It is steadfast and great, and entirely immutable, for it exists unalterably.'

Thus addressed by the great God armed with the Sula, the Devas bowed before him and said with reverence, 'Illustrious one, God of the gods,

master of the universe, Lord of all, let this Dvijottama obtain from you the fruit of all his desires.'

Thus addressed by all the Devas including Brahma, Mahadeva, also called Isa and Sankara, said these words as if smiling upon me. Sankara said, 'Upamanyu, I am pleased with you. Foremost of Munis, learned Rishi, you are firmly devoted to me and have been well you tested by me. I have been delighted with you because of your bhakti. Today I will satisfy all your desires.'

Thus addressed by Mahadeva, so great was my emotion that I wept tears of joy and my hair stood on end. Kneeling down and bowing to him, with a voice choked with rapture, I said to him, 'Siva, I feel that until now I did not live and that only today have I been born, and that my birth has borne fruit today, since I am now in the presence of Him who is the master of both the Devas and the Asuras!

Who else is more praiseworthy than I, since my eyes behold him of immeasurable power, whom the very Devas cannot see without worship? The wise and the learned say that the highest of all subjects, which is eternal, which is distinguished from all else, which is unborn, which is gyana, which is indestructible, is identical with you; you that are the beginning of all, you that are immortal and unchanging, you that know the laws that govern all things, you that are the foremost of Purushas, you that are the highest of the high.

You are he that created from your right side Brahma, the Creator of all things. You are he that has created from your left side Vishnu to preserve that creation. You are that puissant Lord who created Rudra at the end of the yuga for the dissolution of that creation.

That Rudra, who sprang from you destroyed creation with all its moving and immobile beings, assuming the form of Kaala, of the cloud Samvartaka full of water which all the oceans cannot hold, and of the all-consuming fire. When the time for the dissolution of the universe arrives, that Rudra stands ready to swallow it.

You are that Mahadeva, who is the original Creator of the universe with all that it contains. You are he who, at the end of the kalpa, withdraws all things into yourself. You are he that permeates all things, are the soul of all things, for you are the Creator of the creator of all things.

You cannot be seen even by the Devas; you are he that encompasses all entities. If you are gratified with me and if you can grant me boons, let this

be my one boon, Lord of all the gods—that my devotion to you may remain unwavering. Let me, through your grace, have knowledge of the present, the past and the future. Let me, with all my kinsmen and friends, always eat food mixed with milk. And you, O celebrated Lord, always be present in our asrama.'

Mahatejasvin Maheswara, that Jagadguru of all things, who is worshipped by all, spoke these words to me.

Siva said, 'Be you free from every sorrow and pain, and above decay and death. May you possess fame, be filled with great tejas, and let atma-gyana be yours. Through my blessings, you will always be sought after by the Rishis.

May your conduct ever be good and righteous, may every desirable attribute be yours, may you obtain universal knowledge, and may you be radiant and handsome. Let your youth be undiminished, and let your energy be like that of fire. Wherever you desire the presence of the Kshirasagara, ocean of milk, there that ocean will appear before you to be used by you and your friends for your food. May you and your friends always obtain food prepared with milk, and with amrita also mixed with it.

After the expiration of a kalpa you will have my companionship. Your family and kinsmen will be limitless. Your devotion to me will be eternal. And, best of Brahmanas, I shall always be present in your asrama. Live wherever you like, and without worry. Merely think of me, and I will grant you a vision of myself again.'

Having said these words, and granted me these boons, Isana, shining with the splendour of millions of suns, disappeared. Krishna, in this manner, with austere tapasya, I saw that God of gods. I also received what he said. Krishna, behold these Siddhas living here, and these Rishis and Vidyadharas and Yakshas and Gandharvas and Apsaras. Behold these trees and creepers and plants yielding all sorts of flowers and fruits. Behold them bearing the flowers of every season, with beautiful leaves, and spreading sweet fragrance all around.

Mahabaho, all these are endowed with a divine nature through the grace of that God of gods, that Supreme Lord, that Mahatman Mahadeva."'

Krishna continues, 'Hearing his words and seeing before my own eyes all that he narrated to me, I was filled with wonder. I then said to Mahamuni Upamanyu, "You are worthy of great praise, for whose hermitage, other

than yours, enjoys the honour of the presence of Siva? Will the great Sankara also reveal himself to me and show me kindness?”

Upamanyu said, “Without doubt, you will soon obtain a vision of Mahadeva, even as I succeeded in beholding him. I see with my spiritual eyes that you will behold Mahadeva in the sixth month from now. Foremost of the Yadavas, Maheswara and his consort will grant you twenty-four boons. I tell you this truly.

Through Siva’s grace, the past, the present and the future are known to me. The great Hara has favoured thousands of Rishis. Why will he not show you his favour?

The meeting of the gods is always praiseworthy, more so with you, with one devoted to Brahmanas, with one that is full of compassion and faith. I will give you some mantras. Chant them repeatedly. With this you are certain to gain a vision of Sankara.”’

The blessed Krishna continues, ‘I said to him, “Mahamuni, through your grace, I shall behold the Lord of the Devas, that destroyer of the whole host of Diti’s sons.”

Bhaarata, eight days passed there as but an hour, all of us being immersed in talk about Mahadeva. On the eighth day, I underwent the diksha according to the due rites at the hands of that Brahmana and received the danda from his hands. I underwent the prescribed shaving of my head. I took up some kusa blades in my hand. I wore rags for clothes. I rubbed my body with ghee. I tied a cord woven of munja grass around my waist.

For one month I lived on fruits. The second month I subsisted upon water. I passed the third, fourth and the fifth months by living on air alone. I stood all the while, foregoing sleep, supporting myself on one foot and with my arms also raised over my head.

Then I saw a blinding radiance in the sky like that of a thousand suns combined. At its heart I saw a cloud like a mass of blue hills, adorned with rows of cranes, embellished with many magnificent rainbows, with flashes of fiery lightning and thunder.

Within that cloud was the luminous Mahadeva, accompanied by Uma. The great God seemed to shine with his penances, energy, beauty, effulgence, and also his wife beside him. The puissant Maheswara and Uma shone in the midst of that cloud. He looked like the sun among a bank of clouds, with the moon by his side.

Son of Kunti, the hair on my body stood on end, and my eyes were wide with wonder upon beholding Siva, the refuge of all the Devas and the dispeller of all their sorrows. Mahadeva wore a crown on his head. He was armed with his Sula. His loins covered in tiger-skin, his hair was matted and he carried the staff of the ascetic in one of his hands. He was armed with his Pinaka and the trisula.

His teeth were sharp. His upper arm was decked with an incomparable bracelet. His sacred thread was a snake. He wore a garland of many colours on his chest, a mala reached down to his toes. I saw him like a radiant moon on a winter evening.

Surrounded by diverse clans of spirits and ghosts, he was like a sun difficult to gaze at. Eleven hundred Rudras stood around him of restrained soul and pure deeds, who was seated upon Nandin. All of them were singing his praises. The Adityas, the Vasus, the Sadhyas, the Viswadevas and the twin Aswins praised that Lord of the universe with the mantras from the shastras. The puissant Indra and his brother Upendra, the two sons of Aditi, and Pitamaha Brahma, all recited the Rathantara Saman before him.

Countless masters of yoga, all the greatest Rishis with their sons, all the Devarishis, the Devi Bhumi, the sky, the constellations, the planets, the months, the fortnights, the seasons, night, the years, the kshanas, the muhurtas, the nimeshas, the yugas one after another, all the divine vigyanas and angas of knowledge, and all beings conversant with truth, were seen bowing down before that Supreme Guru, that great Father, that giver of yoga.

Yudhishtira, I saw Sanatkumara, the Vedas, the itihasas, Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, the seven Manus, Soma, the Atharvans, and Brihaspati, Bhrigu, Daksha, Kasyapa, Vasishta, Kasya, the Chchandas, Diksha, the Yagnas, Dakshina, the Agnis, the Havis poured in sacrifices, and all the elements of the yagnas, all standing there in their embodied forms.

All the Lokapalas, all the Nadis, all the Nagas, the Parvatas, the divine Matrikas, all the Devastris and Devaputris, millions of sannyasis were seen to bow down to Him who is the soul of serenity. The mountains, the oceans and the cardinal directions also did the same, while the Gandharvas and the Apsaras sang in divine voices the praises of the ineffable Siva. The

Vidyadharas, the Danavas, the Guhyakas, the Rakshasas, and all created beings, mobile and immobile, adored him in thought, word and deed.

Before me, that Lord of all the Devas appeared, seated in all his glory. Seeing that Isana had showed himself to me by being seated before my eyes, the whole universe, along with Brahma and Indra, looked at me. I, however, had not the power to look at Mahadeva.

Siva then said to me, "Look at me, Krishna, and speak to me. You have worshipped me hundreds and thousands of times. There is no one in the three worlds that is dearer to me than you."

After I had bowed to him, Devi Uma became pleased with me. I then spoke these words to Him whose praises are sung by all the Devas.'

Krishna continues, 'I bowed to Mahadeva, saying, "Salutations to you, you that are the eternal origin of all things. The Rishis say that you are the Lord of the Vedas. The righteous say that you are tapasya, you are sattva, you are rajas, you are tamas, and you are satya. You are Brahma, you are Rudra, you are Varuna, you are Agni, you are Manu, you are Bhava, you are Dhatri, you are Tvashtri, you are Vidhatri, you are the puissant master of all things, and you are everywhere.

All beings, mobile and unmoving, have sprung from you. This threefold world with all its entities has been created by you. The Rishis say that you are superior to the senses, the mind, the vital breaths, the seven sacrificial fires, all others that have their refuge in the all-pervading Soul, and all the deities that are adored and worthy of adoration. You, O illustrious one, are the Vedas, the yagnas, Soma, Dakshina, Pavaka, Havi, and all other components of sacrifice. The punya obtained through sacrifices, gifts made to others, the study of the Vedas, vratas, rules of restraint, modesty, fame, prosperity, splendour, contentment and success, all exist for the one purpose of leading to you. Desire, anger, fear, greed, pride, stupor, and malice, pain and disease, are your children.

You are the actions of all creatures, you are the joy and sorrow that flow from those deeds, you are the absence of joy and sorrow, you are that ignorance which is the indestructible seed of desire, you are the high origin of Manas, you are strength, and you are eternity.

You are the unmanifest, you are Pavana, you are inconceivable, you are the thousand-rayed sun, you are the effulgent Chit, you are the first of all the subjects, and you are the refuge of life. The use of words like Mahat, Atman, Buddhi, Brahma, Brahmanda, Sambhu, and Swayambhu recurring

in the Vedas show that your nature has been judged as identical with Mahat and Atman by men conversant with the Vedas. Verily, regarding you as all this, knowing Brahmanas overcome that ignorance which lies at the root of the world.

You dwell in the heart of all creatures, and you are adored by the Rishis as Kshetrajna. Your arms and feet extend to every place, and your eyes, head and face are everywhere. You hear everywhere in the universe, and you pervade all things. You are the fruit of all acts that are performed in the nimeshas and other divisions of time that occur on account of the sun.

You are the original brilliance of the supreme Chit. You are Purusha, and you live in the hearts of all things. You are the yogic attributes of success, subtlety and grossness, and fruition and supremacy, effulgence and immutability. Understanding and intelligence, and all the worlds, rest upon you.

They that are devoted to meditation, that are always engaged in yoga, that are devoted to satya and that have subjugated their passions, seek you and rely on you. They that know you to be immutable, the one that dwells in all hearts, the one that is endowed with supreme power, or the ancient Purusha, or pure gyana, or the effulgent Chit, or the highest refuge of all wise men, are certainly of great intelligence. Truly, such men transcend intelligence.

By understanding the seven subtle entities and the tanmatras, by comprehending your six attributes, of omniscience, contentment, knowledge without beginning, independence, flawless and infinite power, and being conversant with yoga freed from every falsity, the man of knowledge succeeds in entering into your great self."

After I had said these words to Bhava, the universe, both mobile and immobile, sent up a roar to show their approval of what I said. The countless Brahmanas present there, the Devas and the Asuras, the Nagas, the Pisachas, the Pitris, the Garudas, diverse Rakshasas, bhutas and pretas, and all the Maharishis, then bowed down before that Great Deity. Showers of fragrant flowers showered down upon me and cool winds began to blow.

Siva looked at the Devi Uma and at Indra and at me and said, "Krishna, we know that you are devoted to us. Do what is for your good. My love for you is great. Ask for eight boons. I will grant them to you. Name what you wish for. However difficult to attain they may be, you will still have them.""

[2] This is Siva Sahasranama of the Mahabharata.

CANTO 15

"Krishna said, 'Bowing my head to that mass of energy and radiance, I said, "Firmness in virtue, the slaying of enemies in battle, the highest renown, the greatest strength, devotion to yoga, your presence, and hundreds upon hundreds of children, these are the boons I ask of you."

"So be it", said Siva repeating the words I had uttered.

After this, Uma, the mother of the universe, the upholder and purifier of all things, that vast vessel of tapasya, said, "Mahadeva has granted you a son who shall be named Samba. Take from me another eight boons."

Bowing to her, I said, "From you I ask for peace with the Brahmanas, the blessings of my father, a hundred sons, the highest enjoyments, love for my family, and the grace of my mother, the attainment of tranquillity and peace, and intelligent action!"

Uma said, "They shall be yours. I never say what is untrue. You will have sixteen thousand wives. Your love for them and theirs for you shall be limitless. You will also receive the highest devotion from all your kinsmen. Your body shall be most beautiful. Seven thousand guests will dine every day at your palace."'

Krishna continued, 'Having granted me boons, Mahadeva and Uma along with their Ganas disappeared from sight. I narrated all those wonderful facts to Upamanyu, that Brahmana from whom I had obtained diksha before worshipping Mahadeva. Bowing down unto the great God, Upamanyu said these words to me.

Upamanyu said, "There is no God like Sarva. There is no end or refuge like Sarva. There is none that can give so many or such boons. There is

none that equals him in battle.”””

CANTO 16

"Krishna continues, 'Upamanyu said, "In the Krita yuga there lived a renowned Rishi named Tandi. With yoga-dhyana and great devotion he adored Siva for ten thousand years. Listen as I tell you about the fruits of such extraordinary devotion.

He succeeded in having a vision of Mahadeva and praised him by reciting great and holy mantras. With tapasya, meditating on him who is the Paramatman, immutable and unchanging, Tandi was filled with wonder, and said, 'I seek the refuge of Him whom the Samkhyas describe and the yogins think of as the Supreme, the Foremost, the Purusha, the Pervador of all things, and the master of all existence.

I seek the protection of him who, the learned say, is the cause of both the creation and the destruction of the universe, of him who is superior to all the Devas, the Asuras and the Munis, of him who has nothing higher, who is unborn, who is the Lord of all things, who has neither beginning nor end, and who is endowed with supreme power, possessed of the highest felicity, and who is irradiant and sinless.'

After he had said these words, Tandi beheld before him that ocean of tapasya, that Great Deity who is immutable and eternal, who is without equal, who is inconceivable, who is indivisible, who is whole, who is Brahman, who transcends all attributes being nirguna, and who is imbued with attributes being saguna, who is the highest ecstasy of yogins, who is imperishable, who is mukti, who is the refuge of Manas, of Indra, of Agni, of Vayu, of the entire universe, and of Pitamaha Brahma. Through Manas, Tandi saw him who is inconceivable, who is immutable, who is pure, who can be understood only through surrender and who is immaterial as the

mind; who is hard to comprehend, who is immeasurable, who cannot be attained by those impure souls, who is the origin of the universe, and who transcends both the universe and the Tamoguna; who is ancient, who is Purusha, who is radiant, and who is higher than the highest.

Wanting to behold him who endowed with life-breaths, resides in what results from it, who is Jiva in the form of that effulgence which is called Manas, Rishi Tandi passed many years in the practice of the severest tapasya, and having succeeded in beholding Siva as the reward of that penance, eulogised Mahadeva in the following terms:

Tandi said, 'You are the most blessed of all that is sacred and the refuge of all. You are the fiercest among all kinds of tejas. You are the austerest of all tapasyas. You are the giver of blessings. You are the supreme truth.

Salutations to you, you of a thousand rays, O sanctuary of all felicity. You are the giver of that nirvana which Yatis strive for, who fear birth and death. Brahma, Indra, Vishnu, the Viswadevas and the Maharishis cannot comprehend you and your real nature. How then can we hope to fathom you?

From you flows everything. Upon you rests everything. You are called Kaala, you are called Purusha, and you are called Brahman. Devarishis who know the Puranas say that you have three bodies, that pertaining to Kaala, that pertaining to Purusha and that pertaining to Brahman, or the three forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

You are Adi-Purusha, occupying the physical frame from head to foot, you are Adhyatma, you are Adi-bhuta, and Adi-Daivata, and you are Adi-Loka, Adi-Vigyanam and Adi-Yagna. Men of wisdom, when they succeed in knowing you that dwells in them, and that cannot be known by the very Devas, become freed from all bonds and pass into a state of existence that transcends sorrow. They that do not wish to know you have to experience innumerable births and deaths.

You are the door of swarga and of mukti. You are he that projects all beings into existence and withdraws them again into yourself. You are the great giver. You are swarga, you are mukti; you are desire that is the seed of karma. You are the wrath that inspires creatures to action.

You are sattva, you are rajas, you are tamas; you are patala, and you are swarga. You are Brahma, you are Bhava, you are Vishnu, you are Skanda, you are Indra, you are Savitri, you are Yama, you are Varuna and Soma, you

are Dhatri, you are Manu, you are Vidhatri and you are Kubera, the Lord of wealth.

You are Bhumi, you are Vayu, you are Jala, you are Agni, you are Akasa; you are speech, you are Buddhi, you are steadiness, you are intelligence; you are the kama of creatures, you are satya, you are asatya, you are existent and you are non-existent. You are the senses, you are that which transcends Prakriti, and you are unalterable.

You are superior to the universe of existent objects, you are superior to the universe of non-existent objects; you are capable of being conceived, you are inconceivable. That which is supreme Brahman, the highest entity, that which is the end of both the Samkhyas and the yogins, is, without doubt, identical with you.

Truly, today I have been rewarded by you as you have granted me a vision of yourself. I have attained the end which the righteous alone attain. I have been rewarded with that goal which is sought by those whose intellects have been purified by gyana.

Steeped in ignorance for so long, I was a mindless fool; I had no knowledge of you that are the Supreme Deity, you that are the only eternal One that only wise men can know. In the course of countless lives I have at last succeeded in acquiring that devotion towards you as a result of which you have shown yourself to me. You are ever inclined to extend your grace to those that are devoted to you.

He that succeeds in knowing you enjoys immortality. You are that which is ever a mystery with the Devas, the Asuras and the sannyasis. Brahman is concealed in the cave of the heart. Even the greatest sannyasis are unable to behold or know him.

You are he who is the doer of everything and whose face is turned towards every direction. You are the soul of all things, you see all things, you pervade all things, and you know all things. You create a body for yourself, and bear it. You are an embodied Being.

You enjoy a body, and you are the refuge of all embodied creatures. You are the Creator of the pranas, you possesses the life-breaths, you are one that is filled with the life-breaths, you are the giver of the pranas, and you are the refuge of all beings with prana. You are that Adhyatma which is the refuge of all righteous ones that are devoted to yoga-dhyana and conversant with the Atman and that are diligent in avoiding rebirth. You are that Supreme Lord identical with that refuge.

You give unto all creatures what ends become theirs, whether fraught with happiness or misery. You are he that ordains all created beings to birth and death. You are the mighty Lord who grants success to Rishis. Having created all the worlds beginning with Bhu, together with all the inhabitants of heaven, and uphold and cherish them all, you have divided yourself into your celebrated eight forms.

Everything flows from you. All things rest upon you. All things, again, disappear into you. You are the sole object that is eternal. You are that region of truth sought by the righteous and regarded by them as the highest. You are that cessation of individual existence which yogins seek. You are that Oneness which is sought by those conversant with the Soul.

Brahma and the Siddhas expounding the mantras have concealed you in a cave to prevent the Devas and Asuras and Manavas from seeing you. You live in the heart, yet you are concealed. Devas, Asuras and Manavas are all bewildered and unable to understand you truly and in all your aspects, O Bhava. You reveal yourself of your own accord to those that attain you after having cleansed themselves through bhakti.

By knowing you one can avoid both death and rebirth. You are the highest object of knowledge. By knowing you no higher object remains to be known. You are the greatest object of realisation. He that is truly wise, after attaining you, thinks there is no higher object to acquire. By reaching you that are subtle and the highest object of attainment, the wise become immortal and changeless.

The followers of the Samkhya system, who know their own philosophy and possess a knowledge of sattva, rajas and tamas and of those tattvas that are the subjects of enquiry, and those learned men who transcend the perishable by attaining to a knowledge of the subtle or indestructible by knowing you, succeed in liberating themselves from all bonds.

Those who know the Vedas regard you as the one object of knowledge, which has been expounded in those highest shastras. These men, devoted to pranayama, always meditate on you and enter into you as their final end.

Riding on the chariot made of AUM, those men enter into Maheswara. Of that which is called the Devayana, the path of the Devas, you are the door called Aditya. You are also the door called Chandramas, of that which is called the Pitriyana. You are Kashta, you are the cardinal directions of the horizon, you are the year, and you are the yugas. You are the sovereign of

all the heavens and of the earth; you are Uttarayana and Dakshinayana, the northern and the southern declensions.

You who are called Nilalohita, in olden times Brahma sang your praises by reciting mantras and urged you to create living creatures. Regarding you as unattached to all things and divested of all forms, Brahmanas conversant with the Riks praise you by intoning those sacred Riks. Adhvaryus pour libations in yagnas, chanting Yajuses in honour of you that are the sole object of knowledge according to the three paths.

Men of pure intellects, who know the Samans, sing your praises with the Samans. Those Dvijas that know with the Atharvans, extol you as Rita, as truth, as the highest, and as Brahman. You are the highest cause, from which sacrifice has flowed. You are the Lord, and you are Supreme.

The night and day are your sense of hearing and sight. The fortnights and months are your head and arms. The seasons are your energy, tapasya is your patience, and the year is your anus, thighs and feet.

You are Mrityu. You are Yama, you are Hutasana, you are Kaala; you are swift in destruction, you are the original cause of time, and you are eternal Kaala. You are Chandramas and Aditya. With all the stars and planets and the atmosphere that fills space, you are Dhruva, the polestar, you are the constellation called the Saptarishi, and you are the seven realms beginning with Bhu.

You are Pradhana and Mahat, you are unmanifest, and you are this world. You are the universe beginning with Brahman and ending with the lowest forms of vegetation. You are the beginning or origin of all creatures. You are the eight Prakritis. You are, again, above the eight Prakritis.

Everything that exists represents a portion of your divine self. You are that supreme felicity which is eternal. You are the end attained to by all things. You are that highest existence which is sought by the righteous. You are that state which is freed from every anxiety. You are eternal Brahman.

You are that highest state which constitutes the meditation of those knowers of the shastras and the Vedangas. You are the highest kashta, you are the highest Kaala. You are the highest success, and you are the highest refuge. You are the highest tranquillity. You are the highest cessation of existence. By attaining you, yogins think that they attain the highest success that is open to them.

You are contentment, you are success; you are the Sruti, and you are the Smriti. You are that refuge of the Atman which yogins strive for, and you

are that indestructible Prapti which men of knowledge pursue. You are that goal sought by those who perform yagnas and offer sacrificial libations, and make ample gifts on such occasions.

You are that high end which is sought by those that waste and scorch their bodies with severe penances with ceaseless japa, with those rigid vows and fasts that pertain to their peaceful lives, and with other means of self-affliction. Eternal one, you are that end which is theirs that are detached from all things and that have renounced all action. You are that end which is theirs that wish to attain mukti from rebirth, that live aloof from all pleasures, and that desire the annihilation of the elements of Prakriti.

You are that high end, which is indescribable, which is stainless, which is the one beyond change, and which is theirs that are devoted to gyana and vigyana. These are the ends that have been affirmed in the Vedas and the Puranas and the other true shastras. It is through your grace that men attain to those ends or if they fail to attain to them, it is through the denial of your blessings to them.'

It was thus that tapodhana Tandi praised Isana. And he sang also that high Brahman which in ancient days was sung by Brahma in honour of Mahadeva."

Upamanyu continued, "Thus praised by Tandi, Mahadeva, who was accompanied by Uma, spoke. Tandi had further said, 'Neither Brahma, nor Indra nor Vishnu, nor the Viswdavas, nor the Maharishis know you.' Gratified at this, Siva said the following words.

The Holy One said, 'You will be indestructible and eternal. You will be freed from all sorrow. Great fame shall be yours. You will be full of tejas. Spiritual knowledge shall be yours. All the Rishis shall seek you, and through my grace your son shall be the author of profound Sutras. What can I give you today? Tell me, my son, what do you desire?'

At this, Tandi folded his hands and said, 'Let my devotion to you be unwavering.'"

Upamanyu continued, "Having given these boons to Tandi and having received the adorations of the Devas and the Rishis, Siva vanished. When he left with all his Ganas and other bhaktas, the Rishi came to my asrama and told me all that had happened to him. Listen now to all those celebrated names of Mahadeva that Tandi recited to me for your spiritual success.

Brahma had once recited ten thousand names that pertain to Mahadeva. In the shastras, Siva is known by a thousand names. These names are not

known to all. In ancient times Brahma recounted these names to worship the high-souled deity. Having received them through the grace of Brahma, Tandi related them to me!”””

CANTO 17

"Krishna says, 'Yudhishtira, the regenerate Rishi Upamanyu, with hands joined together in reverence recited the names of Mahadeva, starting from the beginning.

Upamanyu said, "I shall adore that great deity who deserves the adorations of all creatures, by reciting those names that are celebrated over all the worlds, some of which were uttered by Brahma, some by the Rishis, and some of which occur in the Vedas and the Vedangas.

Those names have been used for Siva by renowned men. Those names, applied to Mahadeva by Tandi, who extracted them from Vedic lore with his devotion, are true and can surely bestow all the aims of the one who recites them.

Indeed, with those names that have been uttered by many righteousness men and by ascetics conversant with dharma, I shall adore him who is the foremost, who is the first, who leads to heaven, who grants boons to all creatures, and who is auspicious. These names have been heard everywhere in the universe, having spread from the realm of Brahma, where they were originally created. All of them are suffused with Truth.

With those names I shall adore him who is the Parabrahman, who has been declared unto the universe by the Vedas, and who is eternal. I shall now tell you, Lord of Yadu's vamsa. Hear them with rapt attention. You are a devoted bhakta of the Supreme Deity. Worship the illustrious Bhava above all the Devas. And because you are devoted to him, I will recite those names in your hearing.

Mahadeva is Eternal Brahman. Even those endowed with yoga and its achievements are unable to grasp, even in a hundred years, the full glory

and power of Siva. Truly, the beginning or middle or end of Mahadeva cannot be known by the very Devas. Then who can recite the attributes of Mahadeva in their entirety? For all that, through the grace of that illustrious and supreme God of perfect wisdom, granted to me for my devotion to him, I will recite his attributes summarised in a few words.

The Supreme Lord cannot be adored by anyone if he does not grant his leave to the devotee. As for me, it is only when I become fortunate enough to receive his blessing that I succeed in worshipping him.

I shall mention only a few names of that Mahadeva who is without birth and without death, who is the original cause of the universe, who has the highest Soul, and whose origin is unmanifest. Krishna, listen to these, a few names that were uttered by Brahma himself of that giver of boons, that adorable deity, that puissant one who has the universe for his form, and who is possessed of supreme wisdom.

These names that I shall recite are extracted from the ten thousand names, the Koti Rudriyam that Brahma recited in ancient times, even as ghee is extracted from butter. Just as gold represents the essence of rocky mountains, as honey represents the essence of flowers, as Manda represents the extract from ghrita, even so have these names been extracted from and represent the essence of those ten thousand names spoken by the Pitamaha Brahma.

This brief abstract of names can cleanse every sin, however heinous. It possesses the same punya as that in the four Vedas. It should be received with attention by spiritual aspirants and engraved on the memory. These auspicious names, great purifiers, leading to spiritual advancement, capable of destroying Rakshasas, should be imparted to only him that is devoted to Siva, to him that has faith, to him that believes.

Unto him that has no faith, him that is an unbeliever, him that has not subjugated his soul, it should never be communicated. That creature who harbours malice towards Mahadeva who is the original cause of everything, who is the Paramatman, and who is the great Lord, will certainly to go to naraka along with all his ancestors before and all his children after him. This abstract of names that I shall recite to you is regarded as yoga.

This is looked upon as the highest object of dhyana. This is that which one should constantly recite as japa. This is equivalent to gyana. This is the highest mystery. If one, even during his last moments, recites it or hears it recited, he will attain the supreme end.

This is holy. This is auspicious; this is filled with every kind of benefit. This is the best of all things. Brahma, the Pitamaha of all the universe, having composed it, assigned to it the foremost place among all excellent mantras. From that time, this chant to the greatness and glory of Mahadeva, which is held in the highest esteem by all the Devas, has come to be regarded as the king of all mantras.

This king of mantras was first passed down from the realm of Brahma to swarga. Tandi then obtained it from there. Hence is it known to be composed by Tandi. Tandi brought it from swarga to Bhumi. It is the most auspicious of all auspicious things, and is capable of purifying the heart of all sins however terrible.

Mahabaho, I will recite to you that best of all mantras. This sings of him who is the Veda of the Vedas, and the most ancient of all ancient objects, of him who is the energy of all energies, and the penance of all penances; of him who is the most calm of all peaceful creatures, and who is the splendour of all splendours.

It sings the praises of him who is looked upon as the most subtle of all subtle creatures, and him who is the intelligence of all intelligent creatures; of him who is looked upon as the Deity of all deities, and the Rishi of all Rishis; of him who is regarded as the sacrifice of all sacrifices and the most auspicious of all auspicious things.

It sings of him who is the Rudra of all Rudras and the effulgence of all things effulgent; of him who is the Yogin of all yogins, and the cause of all causes; of him from whom all the worlds come into existence, and unto whom all the worlds return when they cease to exist; of him who is the Soul of all existent creatures, and who is called Hara of immeasurable energy.

Hear me recite those thousand and eight names of the great Sarva. This is the Siva Sahasranama stotra[3]. Hearing these names, all your wishes will be fulfilled.

Aum! You are immobile, you are unchanging, you are powerful, you are terrifying, you are the foremost, you are boon-giving, and you are supreme. You are the Atman of all creatures, you are celebrated above all creatures, you are all things, you are the Creator of all, and you are Bhava.

You are the bearer of matted hair on your head. You wear animal skins for your garments. You wear a crown of matted hair on your head like the peacock. You are he who has the whole universe for your limbs. You are the creator of all things. You are Hara for you are the destroyer of all things.

You are he that has the eyes of the gazelle. You are the destroyer of all creatures. You are the supreme enjoyer of all things. You are Pravritti from which all actions flow. You are Nivritti or abstention from deeds. You keep fasts and vows, you are eternal, and you are unchangeable.

You are he that dwells in the cremation ground, you possess the six famed gunas of sovereignty, you live in the heart of every creature, you are he that enjoys all things with the senses, and you are the slayer of all sinful creatures.

You are he that deserves the salutations of all, you are of great feats, you are tapodhana, you create all the elements at your will, and you conceal your real nature by disguising yourself as a madman. You are the master of all the worlds and of all living creatures.

You are of immeasurable form, you are of vast body, you are of the form of righteousness, you are of great fame, you are of high soul, you are the Atman of all creatures, and you have the universe for your form. You have a great maw for you swallow the universe at the time of the dissolution. You are the protector of all the lokas.

You are the soul residing in the inner heart and devoid of ahamkara originating from ignorance, one and undivided; you are ananda. Your chariot is borne by mules. You are he that protects Jiva from the thunderbolt of rebirth. You are adorable.

You are obtained by purity and self-restraint and vratas. You are again the refuge of all kinds of vows and observances including purity and self-restraint. You are the divine artist that knows every art. You are Swayambhu for no one has created you. You are the beginning of all creatures and things. You are Hiranyagarbha, the Creator of all things. You are inexhaustible puissance and felicity.

You have a hundred powerful eyes. You are Soma. You are he that makes all good creatures assume shapes of glory that shine in the sky. You are Chandramas, you are Surya, you are Sani, you are the waxing moon, you are the waning moon, you are Mangala, and you are Brihaspati and Sukra and Budha, you are the worshipper of Atri's wife, you are he who shot his arrow in anger at a sacrifice when Yagna fled from him in the form of a deer. You are sinless.

You possess tapasyas with the power to create the universe. You have tapasyas that empower you to annihilate the universe. You are high-minded

and generous towards your devotees. You fulfill the wishes of all who surrender themselves to you.

You are the maker of the year for it is you who sets the wheel of Kaala revolving, by assuming the form of the sun and the planets. You are mantra in the form of Pranava and other sacred words and syllables. In the form of the Vedas and other shastras, you are the authority for all deeds. You are the highest penance. You are devoted to yoga.

You are he who merges himself in Brahman through yoga. You are the great seed, the cause of causes. You reveal what is unmanifest in the manifest form in which the universe exists. You possess infinite might. You are he whose seed is gold.

You are omniscient; you are all things and the great knower. You are the cause of all things. You are he that has the seed of action, ignorance and desire, for the means of moving from this world to the other and the other to this.

You have ten arms. Your unblinking eyes see at all times. You have a blue throat where you bear the poison that arose when the ocean was churned that would have otherwise destroyed the universe. You are the Lord of Uma. You are the origin of all the infinite forms that occur in the universe.

You are he whose authority is due to yourself. You are heroic because of such grand feats as the swift razing of the triple city of the Asuras. You are inert matter which cannot move unless it co-exists with the Atman. You are all the tattvas, subjects of enquiry of the Samkhyas. You are the ordainer and ruler of the tattvas. You are the chief of the Ganas who wait upon you.

You cover infinite space. You are Kama. You know the mantras, gyana being your tapasya. You are the highest mantra for you are that philosophy which defines the nature and attributes of the Soul and its distinction from the non-Soul. You are the cause of the universe as all that exists has sprung from your Atman. You are the universal destroyer and all that ceases to exist merges into you who are the unmanifest Brahman.

You bear the calabash in one of your hands, and the bow in another; in another hand you bear shafts and in yet another a skull. You bear the thunder-bolt. You are armed with the Satagni. You are armed with the sword. You wield the battle-axe. You are armed with the Sula. You are adorable. You hold the sacrificial ladle in one of your hands.

You are of beautiful form. You are endowed with abundant tejas. You generously give all that adorns those that are devoted to you. You wear a turban on your head. You are of a beautiful face. You are he who swells with splendour and power. You are he that is humble and modest. You are of great height. Your senses are your rays. You are the greatest of acharyas. You are Parabrahman, the state of pure blessed existence.

You are he that took the form of a jackal to console the Brahmana who had resolved to commit suicide when insulted by a rich Vaisya. You are he whose aims are achieved by themselves, without waiting for the power that derives from tapasya. You are one with the shaved head, a sign of the order of sannyasis.

You are the one who does good to all creatures. You are unborn. You have countless forms. Your body is covered with all kinds of fragrances. The matted locks on your head swallowed the river Ganga when she first descended from heaven, though you released the waters at the plea of King Bhagiratha. You are the giver of sovereignty.

You are a brahmacharin without ever having fallen away from the rigid vow of abstinence. You are renowned for your sexual restraint. You always lie on your back. You have your abode in puissance. You have three matted locks on your head. You are dressed in rags. You are the fierce Rudra.

You are the divine senapati, and you are all pervading. You are he that moves during the day. You are he that moves in the night. You are of fierce wrath. You possess a dazzling radiance that is born of Vedic study and tapasya.

You are the slayer of the mighty Asura who took the form of an enraged elephant to destroy your sacred city of Varanasi. You are the slayer of those Daityas who become the oppressors of the universe. You are Kaala, time which is the universal destroyer.

You are the supreme ordainer of the universe. You are a wealth of accomplishments. You are of the form of the lion and the tiger. You are he that is clad in the hide of an elephant. You are the yogin who deceives Kaala by transcending its irresistible influence. You are the original sound. You are the fruition of all desires. You are he that is adored in four ways.

You are a night-wanderer, like a Vetala. You are he that wanders in the company of spirits. You are he that wanders in the company of ghostly beings. You are the Supreme Lord of even Indra and the other Devas. You

are he that has multiplied himself infinitely in the form of all existent and non-existent things.

You are the upholder of both Mahat and all the innumerable combinations of the five Mahabhutas. You are the primeval ignorance or tamas known as Rahu. You are without measure and infinite. You are the supreme end that is attained by the emancipated.

You love to dance. You are he that is always dancing. You are he that causes others to dance. You are the friend of the universe. You are he whose appearance is calm and gentle. Your penances endow you with power to create and destroy the universe. You are he who binds all creatures with the bonds of your maya. You are he that transcends death.

You are he who dwells on Kailasa. You transcend all bonds and, like space, you are detached from all things. You possess a thousand arms. You are victory. You are that perseverance which leads to success or victory. You are devoid of sloth or procrastination that hinders firm action.

You are fearless. You are fear. You are he who put a stop to Bali's sacrifice. You fulfill the desires of all your devotees. You are the destroyer of Daksha's yagna. You are good-natured. You are amiable. You are fierce and rob all creatures of their energy. You are the slayer of the Asura Bala.

You are always joyful. You are of the form of wealth which is coveted by all. You have never been defeated. There is none more adorable than you. You are he who, as the ocean, roars resoundingly. You are that space which is so deep that it cannot be measured. You are he whose power and the might of whose Ganas and Nandi have never been determined.

You are the tree of the world whose roots extend upwards and branches hang downwards. You are the banyan. You are he that sleeps on a human leaf when the universe, after dissolution, becomes one infinite expanse of water. You are he that shows compassion to all worshippers assuming the form of Hari or Hara or Ganesa or Arka or Agni or Vayu.

You have sharp teeth and you can masticate countless worlds even as one crunches and swallows nuts. In all your forms you are of vast dimensions. You have a mouth wide enough to swallow the universe in a moment. You are he whose forces are adored everywhere.

You are he who dispelled the fears of the Devas when the prince of elephants had to be captured. You are the seed of the universe. You are he whose bull is both your mount and the emblem on your banner in battle. You have Agni for your soul. You are Surya who has green steeds yoked to

his chariot. You are the friend of the Jiva. You are he that knows with the proper time for the performance of all religious kriyas.

You are he whom Vishnu worshipped to obtain his celebrated chakra. You are yagna in the form of Vishnu. You are the ocean. You are the Varavanala horse's head that ranges within the ocean, ceaselessly heaving fire and drinking the salt waters as if they were sacrificial butter.

You are Vayu, the friend of Agni. You are of tranquil soul like the ocean when at rest and unstirred by the mildest wind. You are Agni that drinks the libations of ghee poured in yagnas with the help of mantras. You are he whom it is difficult to seek out. You are he whose lustre spreads over the infinite universe. You are ever skilful in battle. You well know the time when one should engage in battle so that victory may be achieved. You are that science of jyotisha, which treats of the movements of the stars and planets.

You take the form of jaya, of success or victory. You are he whose body is Kaala, never subject to death. You are a grihasta for you wear a tuft of hair on your head. You are a sannyasi for your head is shaven. You wear matted locks, as you are a vanaprastha.

You are distinguished for your fiery rays: the bright path on which the righteous walk is identical with you. You are he that appears in the sky within the heart in the body of every creature. You are he who enters into the skull of every creature. You bear the wrinkles of age.

You bear the bamboo flute. You also have the tabor. You bear the musical instrument called tali. You hold the wooden vessel used for husking grain. You are he who shrouds the illusion which covers Yama. You are an astrologer whose understanding is always directed towards the motion of the wheel of time made up of the stars in the sky.

You are Jiva whose understanding is directed to things that are the outcome of sattva, rajas and tamas. You are that in which all things merge when dissolution engulfs them. You are stable and fixed, there being nothing in you that is subject to change of any kind. You are the Lord of all creatures. Your arms extend all over the universe.

You reveal yourself in many forms that are but iotas of yourself. You pervade all things. You are he that has no mouth for you seek not to enjoy the objects of your creation. You are he who frees your creatures from the bonds of the world. You are easy to attain.

You are he that manifested himself with golden armour. You are he that appears in the linga. You are he that roams the forests in search of birds and animals. You are he that wanders across the earth. You are he that is omnipresent. You are the blast of all the conches blown in the three worlds. You are he that has all creatures for his kinsmen.

You have the form of a snake for you are identical with the mighty Sesha Naga. You are he that lives in mountain caves like Jaigishavya or other yogins. You are identical with Guha, the divine senapati. You wear garlands of flowers. You are he who enjoys the happiness that springs from the possession of worldly objects.

You are he from whom all creatures have derived their three states of birth, existence, and death. You are he that upholds all things that exist or occur in the three stages of Kaala—the past, the present and the future. You are he that frees creatures from the outcomes of all deeds of previous lives as well as those of the present life, and from all the bonds due to ignorance and desire.

You are he who binds the Asura lords. You are he who is the slayer of foes in battle. You are that can be attained through gyana alone. You are Durvasas. You are he who is served and adored by all the righteous. You are he who causes the fall of even Brahma. You are he that gives unto all creatures the just share of joy and sorrow that each deserves according to his actions.

You are he that is incomparable. You are conversant with the havis given and appropriated in yagnas. You dwell in every place. You range everywhere. You are he that wears simple garments. You are Vasava. You are immortal. You are identical with the Himavat Mountains. You are the maker of pure gold.

You are devoid of karma. You uphold in yourself the fruits of all karma. You are the foremost of those who sustain and uphold. You are he that has red eyes. You are he with a vision extending across the infinite universe. You are he that has a chariot whose wheels are ever victorious.

You are he that has vast learning. You are he that accepts your devotees as your servants. You are he that restrains and subdues your senses. You are he that acts. You wear clothes whose warp and woof are made of snakes. You are supreme. You are he who is the lowest of the celestials. You are he that is mature. You own the musical instrument called the kahala.

You grant all wishes. You are the embodiment of grace in all the three stages of time, the past, the present and the future. You have power that is well used. You are he who had assumed the form of Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna.

You are the foremost of all coveted things, being yourself mukti, the highest of all ends to which creatures attain. You are the giver of all things. Your face is turned in all directions. You are he from whom diverse creatures have sprung even as all forms have sprung from Akasa or are variations of that primal element. You are he who falls into the pit called deha or the body. You are he that is helpless; you fall into that pit and cannot transcend the sorrow that is your lot.

You live in the firmament of the heart. You are terribly fierce in form. You are the deity called Amsu. You are the companion of Amsu and are called Aditya. You radiate innumerable rays. You are of blinding effulgence.

You have the speed of the wind. You possess speed greater than that of the wind. You possess the speed of the mind. You are Nishachara since you enjoy all things filled with the night of avidya.

You dwell in every body. You dwell with prosperity as your companion. You are he that imparts knowledge and instruction. You are he who teaches in absolute silence. You are he that observes the vow of reticence for you teach with silence. You are he who leaves the body, gazing at the soul.

You are he that is well adored. You are the giver of treasures, for Kubera, the Lord of all the treasures, obtained his riches from you. You are the prince of birds, being Garuda, the son of Vinata and Kasyapa. You are the friend that helps. Your radiance is like that of a million suns risen together. You are the master of all created beings.

You are he who rouses the appetites. You are Kamadeva. You are of the form of beautiful women that are coveted by all. You are the tree of the world. You are the Lord of wealth. You are the giver of fame. You are the God that distributes the fruits of actions, joy and sorrow to all creatures. You are yourself those rewards which you distribute.

You are the most ancient, having existed from a time when nothing else was. You can cover all the three worlds with a single step. You are Vamana who tricked the Asura king Bali; depriving him of his sovereignty you restored it to Indra. You are the yogi crowned with success, like Sanatkumara and others.

You are a Maharishi like Vasishta. You are one whose objects are always crowned with success like Rishabha or Dattatreya. You are a sannyasin like Yagnavalkya. You are he that is adorned with the marks of the mendicant. You are he that is without such markings. You are he that transcends the practices of the sannyasasrama.

You are he that protects all creatures from every fear. You are without any passions yourself so that glory and dishonour are alike to you. You are Kartikeya, the divine senapati. You are Visakha who was born from that senapati when Indra hurled his vajra at him. You are conversant with the sixty tattvas, the subjects of enquiry in the universe.

You are the Lord of the senses that achieve their respective functions guided by you. You are he that is armed with the thunder-bolt that rives mountains. You are infinite. You are the confounder of the Daitya ranks on the battlefield. You are he that drives his chariot in circles among his own ranks and that makes similar circles among the ranks of his enemies, returning safe after devastating them.

You are he that knows the lowest depth of the world's ocean because of your knowledge of Brahman. You are Madhu, the founder of the vamsa into which Krishna was born. Your eyes are honey-coloured. You are he that has been born after Brihaspati.

You are he that performs the karmas which Adhvaryus do in yagnas. You are he who is always adored by men of all asramas. You are devoted to Brahman. You wander among the habitations of men in the world as a sannyasi. You are he that pervades all beings. You are he that is conversant with truth. You know and guide every heart. You are he that ranges over the whole universe.

You are he that gathers the good and bad deeds of all creatures in order to award them the fruits of their actions. You are he that lives during even the night that follows the Mahapralaya. You are the protector who wields the bow Pinaka. You dwell even among the Daityas that are the targets of your arrows. You are the source of prosperity.

You are the mighty Hanuman who helped Vishnu in his Rama avatara during his mission to slay Ravana. You are the lord of the Ganas. You are each of those diverse Ganas. You are he that gladdens all creatures. You enhance the joys of all.

You deprive even Indra of his sovereignty and prosperity. You are the universal destroyer in the form of death. You are he that resides in the sixty-

four Kaalas. You are the very great. You are the Pitamaha, the father of Brahma. You are the supreme linga that is adored by both Devas and Asuras. You are of benign and beautiful countenance.

You are he who presides over the varied propensities for action and inaction. You are the Lord of sight. You are the Lord of yoga since you withdraw all the senses into the heart and unite them there. You are he that upholds the Krita and the other yugas by causing them to run ceaselessly. You are the Lord of seeds, giving the fruits of all virtuous and base actions. You are the original cause of such seeds.

You act in the ways that have been indicated in the shastras beginning with those that speak of the Atman. You are he in whom dwell rajas and the other gunas. You are the Mahabharata and other itihasas. You are the treatises called Mimamsa. You are Gautama, founder of the science of dialectics. You are the author of the great treatise on grammar named after the moon.

You are he who punishes his enemies. You are he whom none can chastise. You are he who is sincere in religious kriyas. You are he that becomes obedient to those that are devoted to you. You are he who inexorably subjugates all others. You are he who incites wars among the Devas and the Asuras.

You are he who has created the fourteen worlds beginning with Bhu. You are the protector of all beings beginning with Brahma and ending with the lowest forms of vegetation like grass and straw. You are the Creator of the very Panchamahabhutas.

You are he that never enjoys anything for you are always detached. You are free from decay. You are the highest form of felicity. You are a deity proud of his strength. You are Sakra. You are the punishment described in the shastras on dharma and meted out to offenders. You are of the form of that tyranny which prevails throughout the world.

You are of pure soul. You are unstained without any faults. You are worthy of adoration. You are the world that appears and disappears, endlessly. You are he whose grace is infinite. You are he that has good dreams. You are a mirror in which the universe is reflected. You are he that has subdued all internal and external enemies.

You are the Creator of the Vedas. You have made those declarations that are contained in the Tantras and the Puranas and that are embodied in

language of humans. You are possessed of profound learning. You are a Parantapa in battle.

You are he that resides in the awesome clouds that appear at the time of the pralaya. You are most fierce as you bring about the dissolution of the universe. You are he who subdues all persons and all things. You are the great Destroyer. You are he that has fire for his energy. You are he whose tejas is mightier than fire. You are the yuga-fire that consumes all things.

You are he that is gratified with sacrificial libations. You are water and other liquids that are offered in yagnas along with the chanting mantras. You take the form of the Dharma, the deity of righteousness, the one who dispenses the fruits that attach to good and bad deeds. You are the giver of felicity. You are always endowed with light. You are of the form of fire. You are of the colour of the emerald. You are always present in the linga. You are the source of blessedness.

You cannot be confounded by anything in the pursuit of your goals. You are the giver of blessings. You are of the form of blessedness. You are he unto whom a share of the havis is always given. You are he who distributes unto each his share of that is offered in sacrifices. You are swift. You are he that is detached from all things. You are he that has the most powerful arms and legs. You are he that is ever engaged in the act of creation.

You are of a dark hue, being of the form of Vishnu. You are of a white colour being of the form of Samba, the son of Krishna. You are the senses of all embodied creatures. You possess enormous feet. You have mighty hands. You have a colossal body. You are widely renowned. You have a great head. You are of vast size.

You are of infinite vision. You are the home of the darkness of ignorance. You are the Destroyer of the destroyer. You are of immense age. You have huge ears. You have a vast mouth. You are he that has ample cheeks. You have a great nose. You have a tremendous throat. You have a gigantic neck. You are he that rends the bonds of the body. You have a deep and immense chest.

You are the inner soul which dwells in all creatures. You have a deer on your lap. You are he from whom countless worlds hang like fruits from a tree. You are he who opens his mouth at the time of the pralaya to swallow the universe. You are the ocean of milk.

You have enormous teeth. You have great vast jaws. You have a dense beard. You have hair of infinite length. You have a gigantic belly. You have

matted locks of great length. You are ever cheerful. You are of the form of grace. You are of the form of belief. You are he whose bow and astras are the size of mountains.

You are he that is full of love for all creatures like a parent towards his children. You are he that has no love. You are unvanquished. You are devoted to yoga dhyana. You are of the form of the tree of life. You are he that is symbolised by the tree of the world.

You are never satiated when eating because you are of the form of fire which is never sated with its offerings. Identified with Agni, you are he that has Vayu for your vahana. You are he that ranges over hills and mountains. You are he that lives on the mountains of Meru. You are the king of the Devas.

You have the Atharvans for your head. You have the Samans for your mouth. You have the thousand Riks for your immeasurable eyes. You have the Yajuses for your feet and hands. You are the Upanishads. You are the entire body of rituals in the shastras.

You are all that moves. You are he whose desires are always fulfilled. You are he who is always inclined to grace. You are he of beautiful form. You are of the form of the good that one does to another. You are that which is beloved. You are he that always advances towards your devotees in the proportion as they advance to meet you.

You are gold and other precious metals that are treasured by all. Your radiance is like that of burnished gold. You are the navel of the universe. You are he that makes the fruits of sacrifices grow for the benefit of those that perform yagnas for your glory. You are of the form of that faith and devotion, which the righteous have for sacrifices. You are the Creator of the universe.

You are all that is unmoving in the form of mountains and other inert objects. You are the twelve stages of life through which a person passes. You are he that causes fear by assuming the intermediate states between the stated ten. You are the beginning of all things. You are he that unites the Jiva with Supreme Brahman through yoga. You are that yoga which causes such a union between the Jiva and the Parabrahman.

You are unmanifest, inspiring the deepest awe. You reign over the fourth yuga because of your association with lust, wrath, greed and other evil passions that flow from that Kali. You are eternal Kaala because of your form is that unending succession of births and deaths in the universe.

You are of the form of Kurma, the tortoise. You are worshipped by Yama himself. You live in the midst of your Ganas. You accept your devotees as your Ganas. Brahma himself drives your chariot. You sleep on ashes. You protect the universe with ashes. You are he whose body is made of ashes. You are the tree that grants all desires. You are of the form of those that are your Ganas.

You are the protector of the fourteen realms. You transcend all of them. You are complete without any imperfection. You are adored by all creatures. You are white, pure and stainless. You are he that has an untainted body, speech and mind. You are he who has attained to that purity of existence called mukti. You are he who cannot be sullied by any kind of impurity.

You are he who has been attained by the great ancient acharyas. You dwell in the form of dharma in all the four asramas. You are that dharma which is of the form of kriyas and yagnas. You have the power of the divine Creator of the universe. You are he who is adored as the primeval form of the universe.

You are Mahabaho, of mighty arms. Your lips are of a coppery hue. You are like the vast waters of the ocean. You are steadfast and firm as mountains. You are Kapila. You are brown. You are all the colours which when mixed produce white.

You are the span of life. You are ancient. You are recent. You are a Gandharva. You are the mother of the Devas in the form of Aditi, or the mother of all things in the form of Bhumi. You are Garuda, the prince of birds, also called Tarkshya, born of Vinata and Kasyapa.

You can be understood with ease. You are of excellent and agreeable speech. You are he that is armed with the battle-axe. You are he that is desirous of victory. You are he that helps others to achieve their goals. You are the greatest, closest and best friend.

You are he that bears a vina made of two hollow gourds. You are of terrifying wrath that you display at the time of the Apocalypse. Your children Brahma and Vishnu are beings higher than all Manavas and Devas. You are that form of Vishnu who floats upon the waters after the universal dissolution. You devour all things with great ferocity.

You are he that procreates. You are family and race, continuing from generation to generation. You are the venu nadam, the sound of a bamboo

flute. You are faultless. Every limb of your body is beautiful. You are full of illusion. You do good to others without expecting any return.

You are Vayu. You are Agni. You are the bonds of the worlds which bind the Jiva. You are the Creator of those bonds. You are the render of such bonds. You are he that dwells with even the Daityas, the enemies of all sacrifices. You dwell with those that are the adversaries of all action, and with those that have abandoned all karma.

You have large teeth, and you have the mightiest astras. You are he that has been greatly reproached. You are he that astounded the Rishis dwelling in the Daruka forest. You are he that did good even to your detractors, those same Rishis living in the Daruka vana. You are he who dispels all fears and who, in doing so, bestowed mukti on those Rishis. You are he that has no riches as can be seen from your lack of clothes.

You are the Lord of the Devas. You are the greatest of them, being adored by even Indra and other high divinities. You are adored by even Vishnu. You are the slayer of the enemies of the Devas. You are he that, in the form of Sesha, lives in patala.

You are invisible but can be perceived, even as the wind which though invisible is felt by all. You are he whose knowledge extends to the roots of everything, and to whom all things, even in their hidden nature, are known. You are that which is enjoyed by him that enjoys it.

You are he among the eleven Rudras who is called Ajaikapat. You are the sovereign of the entire universe. You are of the form of all Jivas in the universe since you own the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas. You are he that is not subject to those three attributes. You are he that transcends all gunas and is a state of pure existence which cannot be described by any adjective that language can yield.

You are Dhanwantari, prince of physicians. You are a comet who brings calamities to the sinful. You are Skanda, the divine senapati. You are Kubera, king of the Yakshas, who is your inseparable companion and the Lord of all treasures in the world.

You are Dhatri. You are Sakra. You are Vishnu. You are Mitra. You are Tvashtri. You are the Dhruvatara. You are he that upholds all things. You are he called Prabhava amongst the Vasus. You are the wind which goes everywhere, being the Sutratman that connects all things in the universe with a thread.

You are Aryaman. You are Savitri. You are Ravi. You are that ancient celebrated king known as Ushangu. You are he who protects all creatures in diverse ways. You are Mandhatri for you gratify all creatures. You are he from whom all creatures are born. You are he who exists in many forms. You are he who causes the various colours to exist in the universe. You are he who upholds all desires and all attributes because they originate from you.

You are he who has the lotus on your navel. You are he within whose womb are countless mighty creatures. You face is as beautiful as the moon. You are wind. You are fire. You are powerful. You are of serene soul. You are old. You are he that can be known through dharma.

You are Lakshmi. You create the very arena of actions, the karma kshetra through which persons worship the Supreme Deity. You are he who lives in the field of karma. You are the Soul of that field. You are the answer and the cause of the attributes of sovereignty. All things lie in you for, as the Srutis declare, all things becomes one in you, you being of the nature of that unconsciousness which reveals itself in dreamless sleep.

You are the Lord of all creatures endowed with prana. You are the God of the gods. You are he who is grace. In the form of cause you are Sat. In the form of effect you are Asat. You are he who possesses the best of all things. You are he who dwells on the mountains of Kailasa. You are he who repairs to the mountains of Himavat. You wash away all things near you like a mighty river washing away trees and other objects standing on its banks. You are the maker of Pushkara and other large lakes and water bodies.

You possess knowledge of infinite kinds. You are the giver of infinite blessings. You are a merchant who carries the goods of this land to another and brings the goods of that realm to this for the welfare of men. You are a carpenter.

You are the tree that provides the wood for your axe. You are the tree called bakula. You are the chandana, the sandalwood tree. You are the tree called chchanda.

You are he whose neck is powerful. You are he whose shoulders are vast. You are not restless; you are constant in all your actions that ensue from all your powers. You are the principal herbs and crops with their produce, rice, wheat and other grain.

You are he that helps men attain the objects of their desire. You are all the fitting end of the Vedas and Patanjali's grammar. You are he who roars like a lion. You have the fangs of the lion. To journey you ride a lion. Your chariot is drawn by a lion. You are he called the truth of truth.

You are the Destroyer of the universe. You always seek the welfare of the worlds. You are he who rescues all creatures from distress and lead them to moksha.

You are the bird called saranga. You are the young one of a swan. Like a cock or peacock you flaunt your beauty with the crest on your head.

You are he who protects the place where conclaves of the wise sit to dispense justice. You are the abode of all creatures. You are the cherisher of all creatures. You are day and night which are the constituent elements of eternity. You are he that is without fault and therefore never censured.

You are the upholder of all creatures. You are the refuge of all creatures. You are without birth. You exist. You are ever fruitful. You are imbued with dharana and dhyana and Samadhi. You are the steed Uchchaisravas. You are the giver of food. You are he who upholds the life-breaths of living creatures.

You are suffused with patience. You are possessed of fathomless intelligence. You are dexterous and energetic. You are honoured by all. You are the dispenser of the fruits of dharma and adharma. You are the senses and so they succeed in performing their respective functions since you preside over them.

You are the Lord of all the stars. You are all collections of objects. You are he whose garments are of leather. You are he who dispels the sorrow of his devotees. You have a golden arm. You protect the bodies of yogins who seek to enter their own selves. You are he who has reduced all his enemies to nothingness.

You are full of boundless joy. You are he who achieved victory over the irresistible Kamadeva. You are he who has subdued his senses. You are the gandhara in the musical scale. You are he who has a beautiful home which rests upon the delightful Mountain Kailasa. You are he who is ever attached to tapasya. You are of the form of happiness and contentment. You are infinite.

You are he in whose honour the best of mantras has been composed. You are he who dances in long strides and great leaps. You are he who is revered by the diverse tribes of Apsaras. You are he whose standard bears

the emblem of the bull. You are the Meru Mountain. You are he who roves among all the peaks of that great mountain. You are so quick that it is difficult indeed to apprehend you.

You can be explained by gurus to their sishyas but cannot be described in words. You are of the form of that teaching which gurus impart to sishyas. You are he that can perceive all fragrances in an instant.

You take the form of the entrances to cities and palaces. You take the form of the moats and ditches that surround fortified towns and enable their besieged forces to be victorious. You are the wind. You take of the form of fortified cities and towns encompassed by walls and moats.

As Garuda, you are the ruler of all winged creatures. You proliferate creation by the union of the two sexes. You are the unsurpassed in dharma and gyana. You are superior to even him who is the first of all in goodness and knowledge. You transcend all morality and knowledge.

You are eternal and unchanging, as also dependent on just yourself. You are the master and protector of the Devas and Asuras. You are the master and protector of all creatures. You are he who wears a coat of armour. You are he whose arms can raze all enemies. You are an object of adoration for Suparvan in swarga.

You are he who grants the power to uphold all things. You are by yourself able to bear all things. You are unchanging and perfectly stable. You are white and perfectly pure, without any stain or blemish. You bear the trident that can destroy all things. You give physical forms to those that constantly revolve in the universe of births and deaths. You are more precious than wealth. As goodness and courteousness, you are the path of the righteous.

You are he who once tore off Brahma's fifth head, not out of anger but careful deliberation. You are he who is marked with all those auspicious marks that are spoken of in the sciences of palmistry and phrenology and other branches of knowledge that regard the physical frame as the indicator of mental attributes. You are the aksha, that wooden axle of a chariot and, therefore, are the one who is attached to the chariot of the body. You are attached to all things by pervading all things as their soul.

You are mighty, a Kshatriya of all Kshatriyas, a hero of heroes. You are the Veda. You are the Smritis, the itihasas, the Puranas, and other shastras. You are the illustrious deity of every sacred shrine. You are he who has the earth for his chariot. You are the inert elements in the composition of every

creature. You are he who breathes life into every combination of those inert element. You are Pranava and other sacred mantras that instil life into dead matter.

You are he that casts serene glances everywhere. As the Destroyer, you are stern, even cruel. You are he who has countless precious attributes and possessions. You have a body that is red in colour. All the oceans are as so many pools filled for your drinking.

You are the root of the tree of the world. You are beautiful and shine with unsurpassed grandeur. You are of the form of amrita. You are both cause and effect. As a great yogi, you are an ocean of tapasya. You are he that desires to rise to the highest state of existence. You are he that has already attained to that state. You are he who is distinguished by the purity of his conduct, and his actions and observances. You are he who is renowned for the righteousness of his ways.

In the form of strength and courage, you are the jewel of armies. You are he who is adorned with celestial ornaments. You are Yoga. You are he from whom flows eternal time measured in yugas, manvantaras and kalpas. You are he who moves all creatures from place to place. You are of the form of dharma and adharma and their intermixing as can be seen in the successive yugas. You are great and formless.

You are he who killed the mighty Asura that attacked the sacred city of Varanasi in the form of an irate tusker. You are of the form of death. You grant the wishes of all creatures in accordance with their punya.

You are amiable. You are conversant with all things that are beyond the senses. You are conversant with the tattvas and hence unchanging. You are he who always radiates supernal beauty. You wear garlands that extend from your neck to your feet. You are that Hara who has the moon for his eye. You are the vast ocean.

You are the first three yugas—Krita, Treta and Dwapara. You are he whose appearance benefits others. The shastras, the guru and dhyana are your three eyes. You are he whose forms are very subtle for you are the subtle forms of the primal elements. You are he whose pierced ears are adorned with jewelled kundalas. You are the wearer of matted dreadlocks.

You are the bindu in the alphabet which indicates the nasal tone. You are the visarga, the two dots which denote the sound of the aspirated letters in Sanskrit. You have an incomparable face. You are the shaft that is shot by

the warrior to destroy his enemy. You are all the astras used by great warriors.

You have limitless patience to bear all things. You are he whose knowledge has arisen from the cessation of all physical and mental activity. You are he who has become satya with the ending of all the other senses. You are the note which arises from the realm of Gandhara and is melodious to the ear.

You are he who is armed with the mighty bow, the Pinaka. You are he who is the understanding and the desires that exist in all creatures, and also the supreme upholder of all beings. You are he from whom all actions flow. You are that wind which rises at the time of the universal dissolution and which churns the entire universe even as the rod in the hands of the gopis churns the milk in the earthen pot.

You are he that is full. You are he that sees all things. You are the sound that arises from clapping one hand against another other. You are he whose palm serves as the plate from which to eat. You are he who has a body of steel. You are inconceivably great. You are of the form of the chatra, a parasol. You are he who carries a parasol. You are celebrated to be identical with all creatures. You are he who covered the universe with two steps and wanted space for the third one. You are he whose head is without hair. You are he whose form is ugly and fierce. You are he who has undergone infinite modifications and become all things in the universe.

You are he who bears the danda, the sign of sannyasa. You are he who has a kundala. You are he who cannot be attained with deeds. You are he who is identical with the lion, the green-eyed king of beasts. You are of the form of all the points of the compass. You are he who is armed with the thunderbolt. You are he who has a hundred tongues. You are he who has a thousand feet and a thousand heads.

You are the Lord of the Devas. You are he that is comprised of all the Devas. You are the Great Master. You are he who has a thousand arms. You are he who can grant all wishes. You are he whose protection is sought by everyone. You are he who is the Creator of all the worlds. You are he who purifies all from every kind of sin, in the form of shrines and sacred waters. You are he who has three high mantras.

You are the youngest son of Aditi and Kasyapa, the dwarf Upendra, who beguiled the Asura Bali and took from him his sovereignty of the three worlds and restored it to Indra. You are both black and incarnadine, in the

form known as Hari-Hara. You are the maker of the Brahmana’s danda. You are armed with the satagni, the paasa, and the astra. You are he that was born within the primeval lotus.

You are he who has a cavernous womb. You are he who has the Vedas in his womb. You are he who rises the infinite waters, the Ekarnava which succeeds the Pralaya. You are he who radiates brilliant light. You are the creator of the Vedas. You are he who studies the Vedas. You are he who knows the meaning of the Vedas.

You are devoted to Brahman. You are the refuge of all devoted to Brahman. You are of infinite forms. You host many bodies. You are filled with compelling prowess. You are the Soul that transcends the three universal gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas. You are the Lord of all Jivas.

You have the speed of the wind. You possess the swiftness of the mind. You are always smeared with sandalwood-paste. You are the tip of the stalk of the primeval lotus. You are he who caused the divine cow Surabhi to fall from her superior position by cursing her. You are that Brahma who was unable to see your end, the tip of the first linga of flames.

You are adorned with a large wreath of karnikara flowers. You are adorned with a crown of blue jewels. You are the wielder of the Pinaka. You are the master of that knowledge which deals with Brahman. You are he who has subdued his senses with your knowledge of Brahman. You are he who bears the Ganga on your head.

You are the husband of Uma, the daughter of Himavat. You are powerful, having assumed the form of the Varaha to lift up the submerged earth. You are he who protects the universe by assuming various incarnations. You are worthy of adoration. You are that primeval Being with the equine head who recited the Vedas in a thundering voice. You are he of great felicity.

You are the great conqueror. You are he who has slain all his enemies in the form of passions. You are both white and tawny being as you are half-male and half-female. The colour of your body is like that of gold. You are he that is of the form of pure joy, being, as you are, above the five layers of the Jiva, the anna-maya, the prana-maya, the mano-maya, the vigyana-maya, and the ananda-maya. You are of a restrained soul.

You are the foundation upon which rests that ignorance known as pradhana and which, consisting of the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, is the cause of the emergence of the universe. You are he whose

faces are turned in every direction. You are he who has three eyes in the forms of the sun, the moon and fire. You are he who is superior to all creatures in your vast righteousness. You are the Soul of all mobile beings. You are of the form of the subtle soul which cannot be perceived. You are the giver of immortality in the form of mukti as the fruit of all virtuous deeds achieved by creatures without desire of rewards.

You are the acharya of even those that are the Gods of the gods. You are Vasu, the son of Aditi. You are he who is filled with countless rays of light, who brings forth the universe, and who is the Soma which is drunk at yagnas. You are Vyasa, author of the Puranas and other sacred itihasas. Being identical with the Puranas and other itihasas, both long and short, you are the creations of Vyasa's mind. You are the sum of all Jivas.

You are the season. You are the year. You are the month. You are the fortnight. You are those sacred days that end these periods. You are the kaalas. You are the kashtas. You are the lavas. You are the matras. You are the muhurtas and days and nights. You are the kshanas.

You are the soil upon which the tree of the universe stands. You are the seed of all creatures being of the form of that Avyakta Chaitanya, unmanifest consciousness, imbued with maya from which all creatures spring. You are Mahatattva. Being the form of Chit, which appears after Mahatattva, you are the beginning of the jiva. You are Sat or cause. You are Asat or effect. You are manifest, able to be grasped by the senses.

You are the father. You are the mother. You are the Pitamaha. You are the door to swarga because of your tapasya. Because you are desire, you are the beginning of the generation of all creatures. And because you are the absence of desire, which alone leads to uniting with Brahman, you are the door to moksha. You are those acts of dharma which lead to the felicity of heaven. You are nirvana, that cessation of individual or distinct existence, which is mukti.

You give joy to every creature. You are that realm of satya which the righteous attain. You are superior to even that realm of truth. You are he who is the Creator of both the Devas and the Asuras. You are he who is the refuge of both the Devas and the Asuras. You are the guru of both the Devas and the Asuras, being as you are both Brihaspati and Sukra.

You are he who is ever victorious. You are he who is ever worshipped by the Devas and the Asuras. You are he who guides the Devas and the Asuras even as the mahamatra guides the elephant. You are the refuge of all

the Devas and the Asuras, You are he who is the Lord of both the Devas and the Asuras being both Indra and Virochana. You lead both the Devas and the Asuras in battle, being both Kartikeya and Kesi who lead their armies.

You are he who transcends the senses and excels by himself. You take the form of the Devarishis like Narada and the others. As Brahma and Rudra you grant boons to the Devas and Asuras. You are he who rules the hearts of the Devas and the Asuras. You are he into whom the universe enters when it is dissolved. Thus you are the refuge of even he who rules over the hearts of both the Devas and the Asuras. You are he whose body is made up of all the deities.

No being is superior to you. You are he who is the inner soul of the gods. You are he who has sprung from his own self. You are of the form of immobile things. You are he who covers the three worlds with three strides. You possess vast knowledge. You are without blemish. You are he who is freed from rajas. You are he who transcends destruction.

You are he in whose honour mantras must be chanted. You are the master of the inexorable elephant represented by Kaala. You are that Lord of tigers who is worshipped in the kingdom of the Kalingas. On account of your great strength, you are he who is called the lion among the gods. You are he who is the foremost among men.

You are filled with great wisdom. You are he who takes the first share of the offerings at yagnas. You are invisible. You are the sum of all the Devas. You are he in whom penances prevail. You always excel in yoga. You are auspicious. You are armed with the vajra. You are the source of the origin of the astras called paasas, the nooses. You are he whom your devotees attain to in diverse ways. You are Guha. You are the supreme limit of grace.

You are identical with your creation. You are he who rescues all creatures from death by liberating them. You purify all, including Brahma himself. You take the form of bulls and other horned animals. You are he who delights in mountain peaks. You are the planet Sani. You are Kubera, Lord of the Yakshas. You are perfection without flaw.

You are he who inspires happiness. You are all the gods united. You are the cessation of all things. You are all the duties of all the asramas. You are he who has an eye on his forehead. You are he who sports with the universe for his marble ball. You take the form of deer. You have the energy that is of the form of gyana and tapasya. As Himavat and Meru you are the Lord of all immobile things.

You are he who has subdued his senses with rules and vows. You are he whose aims have all been fulfilled. You are identical with mukti. You are different from him whom we worship. You have truth for your penances. Your heart is pure.

You are he who presides over all vratas and upavasas, being the giver of their fruits. You are the highest as you take the form of Turiya. You are Brahman. You are the highest refuge of devotees. You are he who transcends all bonds. You are freed from the linga sarira. You are filled with every kind of prosperity. You are he who enhances the wealth of your devotees. You are that which changes unceasingly.'

Krishna, I have now sung the praises of the illustrious deity, reciting his names in the order of their importance. Who is there that can sing the praises of the Lord of the universe, that great Lord of all who deserves our adorations and worship and reverence, whom the very gods with Brahma at their head are unable to adequately praise and whom the Rishis also fail to extol.

With my devotion and his leave, I have praised that Lord of sacrifices, that Supreme Deity, that wisest of all creatures. By reciting these auspicious names of the great and blessed One, a worshipper of devoted soul and pure heart succeeds in attaining his own Atman.

These names constitute a mantra that is the best means of attaining Brahman. With these one is sure to attain mukti. The Rishis and the Devas all praise the Highest Deity with this mantra. Sung by men of restrained soul, Mahadeva is pleased with them.

The illustrious deity is always full of compassion towards his devotees. He is omnipotent and grants moksha to those that worship him. So also the best among men, that possess faith and devotion, hear and recite for others and utter with reverence the praises of that highest and eternal Isana, in all their successive lives and adore him in thought, word and deed, and adoring him thus at all times, while lying or seated or walking or awake or while opening their eyes or shutting them, and thinking of him repeatedly, come to be revered by other men and derive great gratification and happiness.

When a creature is cleansed of all his sins in the course of millions of births, in diverse varnas, it is then that devotion springs up in his heart for Mahadeva. It is through good fortune alone that undivided devotion to Bhava who is the original cause of the universe wells up in the heart of one that knows every way of worshipping him.

Such flawless and pure devotion to Rudra, which has singleness of purpose and that is irresistible in its course, is seldom to be found among even the Devas, and never among men. It is through the grace of Rudra that such devotion arises in the hearts of Manavas. As a result of such bhakti, identifying themselves wholly with Mahadeva, men attain to the highest success.

The illustrious deity who always blessed those that seek him with humility, and surrender themselves completely to him, rescues them from samsara. Except for him who frees creatures from rebirth, all other gods only efface men's tapasyas, for men are powerless before such great power.

In this manner, Tandi of tranquil soul, resembling Indra himself in splendour, praised the illustrious Lord of all existent and non-existent things, that great deity clad in animal skins. Indeed, Brahma once sung this hymn, the Siva Sahasranama in the presence of Sankara. You are a Brahmana for you are yourself conversant with Brahman and devoted to those conversant with Brahman. You will thus understand it well. This great stotra purifies, and washes away all sins. It confers yoga and mukti, and heaven and contentment.

He who recites this mantra with undivided devotion to Sankara succeeds in attaining to that high end which is theirs that are devoted to the doctrines of the Samkhya philosophy. That worshipper who recites this every day for one year with single-minded devotion succeeds in obtaining the end that he desires.

This hymn is a great mystery. It originally dwelt in the heart of Brahma. Brahma imparted it to Sakra. Sakra gave it to Mrityu. Mrityu imparted it unto the Rudras. From the Rudras, Tandi received it. Indeed Tandi acquired it in the realm of Brahma as reward for his severe austerities. Tandi gave it to Sukra, and Sukra of Bhrigu's race taught it to Gautama.

Gautama in his turn communicated it to Vaivaswata Manu. Manu communicated it to Narayana who was a sadhya and loved by him. The illustrious and glorious Narayana, gave it to Yama. Vaivaswata Yama communicated it to Nachiketa.

Nachiketa taught it to Markandeya. I had it as the reward for my vratas and upavasas from Markandeya. To you, O Parantapa, I give that mantra unheard by others. This mantra leads to swarga. It dispels sickness and bestows a long life. This is worthy of the highest praise, and is consistent with the Vedas."'

Krishna continues, ‘Arjuna, he who recites this awesome hymn with a pure heart while observing brahmacharya, and with his senses under control, consistently for a full year, succeeds in obtaining the fruits of an Aswamedha yagna. Danavas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Yatudhanas, Guhyakas and Nagas cannot harm him.’”

[3] The hymn of the 1008 names of Siva.

CANTO 18

Vaisampayana said, “After Krishna has finished, Mahayogi Vyasa says to Yudhishtira, ‘My son, recite this mantra of the thousand and eight names of Mahadeva, and let Siva be gratified with you.

In the past, I performed severe austerities on the mountains of Meru to have a son. I chanted this very mantra and my wish was granted. By doing the same, obtain from Sarva the fruition of all your wishes.’

After this, Kapila, the Rishi who spread the Samkhya doctrines, and who is honoured by the Devas themselves, says, ‘I have worshipped Bhava with great bhakti for many lives. The illustrious deity was at last gratified with me and gave me the knowledge that enables men to free themselves from rebirth.’

The Rishi Charusirsa, who is Indra’s loving friend, otherwise known as Alampana, says, ‘In former days, I went to the Gokarna Mountains and performed a severe tapasya for a hundred years. As the reward for my penance, I had a hundred sons from Sarva, all of whom were born without sexual union with any woman; they were of restrained soul, righteous, possessed of great splendour, free from disease and sorrow, and endowed with lives of more than a hundred thousand years.’

The illustrious Valmiki says to Yudhishtira, ‘Once upon a time, in course of a dialectical argument, some Rishis who possessed the homa fire accused me of killing a Brahmana. As soon as they had denounced me in this manner, the sin of Brahmahatya possessed me. To purify myself, I sought the protection of the sinless Isana of overpowering tejas. I was cleansed of all my sins. That dispeller of sorrows, the destroyer of the triad city of the Asuras, said to me, ‘Your fame shall be great in the world.’

Jamadagni's son Rama, foremost of all righteous men, shining like the sun in the midst of that gathering of Rishis, says to Yudhishtira, 'I was afflicted by the same sin for having killed my brothers who were all learned Brahmanas. To purify myself, I sought the protection of Mahadeva. I sang the praises of the great deity by reciting his names. Bhava became gratified with me and gave me a battle-axe and many other celestial astras.

And he said to me, "You will be freed from sin and invincible in battle; Yama himself shall not succeed in vanquishing you, for you will be freed from disease." Thus did the illustrious and crowned deity of auspicious form speak to me. Through his grace I obtained all that he had said.'

Viswamitra says, 'I was once a Kshatriya. I worshipped Bhava with the desire of becoming a Brahmana. Through the grace of that great deity I attained the high status of a Brahmarishi that is so difficult to obtain.'

The Rishi Asita-Devala says to the royal son of Pandu, 'Once, through the curse of Sakra, all the punya I had accumulated through my righteous deeds was destroyed. It was the puissant Mahadeva who gave me back that merit together with fame and a long life.'

The illustrious Rishi Gritsamada, also Indra's dear friend who resembled the Devaguru Brihaspati himself in splendour, says to Yudhishtira, 'In antique times Sakra performed a yagna extending over a thousand years. During that sacrifice, Sakra engaged me to recite the Samans.

Vasishta, the son of that Manu who sprung from the eyes of Brahma, came to that yagna and said to me, "Dvijottama, you are not singing the Rathantara properly. Do not find sin like this, and chant the Samans correctly. Ah, why do you commit such a sin as despoils the yagna?"

Having said these words, the Rishi Vasishta gave way to his anger and said to me, "I curse you to become an animal devoid of intelligence, always subject to grief, ever fearful, and an inhabitant of pathless forests without wind and water, and abandoned by other creatures. I condemn you to live thus for ten thousand years, and another eighteen hundred more. That forest in which you will pass this period will have no sacred trees and will be the haunt of Rurus and lions. You will have to become a cruel deer plunged into sorrow."

As soon as he had said these words, I was transformed into a deer. I then sought the protection of Maheswara. The great deity said to me, "You will be freed from all disease, and immortality shall be yours. You will

never be afflicted by any anguish. Your friendship with Indra will remain unchanged, and may both Indra and your sacrifices multiply."

The puissant Mahadeva favours all creatures in this way. He is always the great dispenser and ordainer of the joy and sorrow of all living creatures. That illustrious God cannot be grasped by thought, word or deed. Best of warriors, through the grace of Mahadeva, there is none that is equal to me in learning.'

After this, Krishna speaks again, 'Mahadeva of golden eyes was gratified by my tapasya. Pleased he said to me, "Krishna, through my grace, you will be cherished more than wealth that is coveted by all. You will be invincible in battle. Your tejas will equal that of Agni's."

On that occasion, Mahadeva granted me thousands of other boons. In another former birth, I adored Mahadeva on the Manimanta Mountain for millions of years. Gratified, the illustrious deity said to me, "Blessed be you, ask me for any boons you desire."

Bowing to him, I said, "Isana, if the puissant Mahadeva has been gratified with me, then let my devotion to him be eternal! This is the boon that I ask." Mahadeva said to me, "Be it so", and disappeared.'

Jaigishavya says, 'Yudhishtira, once in the city of Varanasi, Mahadeva sought me and conferred upon me the eight attributes of sovereignty.'

Garga says, 'Son of Pandu, pleased with me because of a great mental sacrifice that I performed, Siva bestowed upon me, on the banks of the sacred Saraswati, that wonderful science, the knowledge of Kaala with its sixty-four branches. He also bestowed upon me a thousand sons, all with equal merit and all masters of the Vedas. Through his grace, our lives were expanded to ten million years.'

Parasara says, 'In a previous Manvantara, I gratified Sarva. At the time, I wanted a son with great ascetic punya, endowed with superior tejas, given to high yoga, who would earn world-wide fame, arrange the Vedas, and become a repository of prosperity; who would be devoted to the Vedas and the Brahmanas, and be distinguished for his compassion. Even such a son did I ask for from Maheswara.

Knowing that this was my heart's desire, Mahadeva said to me, "I will grant your wish and you will have a son named Krishna. In that Manvantara, which will be known as Savarni Manu, that son of yours will be reckoned among the seven Rishis. He will divide and re-arrange the Veda, and be the propagator of Kuru's race. In addition, he will be the

author of the ancient itihasas and do great good to the universe. Blessed with austere tapasya, he will be a loving friend of Sakra. Free from diseases of every kind, that son of yours will be immortal."

Having said these words, the Great Deity vanished. Even such is the good, Yudhishtira, that I have obtained from that indestructible and immutable God, of the highest penances and supreme energy.'

Mandavya says, 'In former times, though I was not a thief, I was wrongly suspected of theft and was impaled on a stake on the orders of a king. I then worshipped Mahadeva who said to me, "You will soon be freed from this impalement and live for millions of years. Meanwhile, you will not experience any pain. You will also be freed from every kind of affliction and disease. And since your body has sprung from the fourth foot of Dharma, you will be unrivalled on earth. Make your life fruitful. Without any obstacles, you will be able to bathe in all the sacred tirthas of the earth. And after your body decays, I you will enjoy the pure felicity of swarga for all eternity."

Having said these words, Maheswara of unrivalled splendour and clad in animal skin, disappeared with all his Ganas.'

Galava says, 'Formerly, I studied at the feet of my guru Viswamitra. Taking his leave, I set out for home to see my father. But he had died and my sorrowing mother, weeping bitterly, said to me, "Alas, your father will never see his youthful son who, adorned with Vedic knowledge, filled with self-restraint, has been allowed by his guru to come home."

Hearing these words of my mother, I despaired of ever seeing my father again. I worshipped Maheswara with a rapt soul; He was gratified, revealed himself to me and said, "Your father, your mother, and you will all be freed from death. Go and enter your home without delay; you will find your father there."

Yudhishtira, hearing this from Siva and paying him homage, I left for home and saw my father appear before me after having completed his daily yagna. He came out bearing in his hands some homa, some kusa grass and some fallen fruits. And he seemed to have already eaten, for he had washed himself. Throwing down what he carried, shedding tears of joy, my father raised me up, for I had prostrated myself at his feet.

Embracing me he sniffed the top of my head and said, "It is my good fortune to see you again. You have returned, having acquired knowledge from the guru."'"

Vaisampayana continued, “Hearing of these wonderful feats of Mahadeva recited by the sannyasis, the son of Pandu is amazed. Then Krishna speaks once more to Yudhishtira, like Vishnu speaking to Puruhuta.

Krishna says, ‘Upamanyu, who seemed to blaze with lustre like the sun, said to me, “Men that are stained with sin do not succeed in attaining to Isana. Their dispositions being tainted by rajas and tamas, they can never approach the Supreme Deity. It is only those evolved men of pure souls that succeed in attaining to him.

Even if a man lives in the enjoyment of every pleasure and luxury, he is regarded as equal to a vanaprastha of cleansed soul if he be devoted to the Supreme Deity. If Rudra be gratified with a person, he can confer upon him the states of Brahma or Krishna, or of Sakra above all the Devas, or the sovereignty of the three worlds. Men who worship Bhava even inwardly succeed in freeing themselves from all sins and attain a place in swarga with the Devas.

One who razes homes to the ground and destroys tanks and lakes, why, one who destroys the whole universe is not stained with sin if he adores and worships Mahadeva. One who is without any auspicious sign and is stained by every sin has all his sins washed away by meditating on Siva. Even worms, insects and birds that devote themselves to Mahadeva range fearlessly.

This is my firm conviction that those men who devote themselves to Mahadeva Siva are certainly liberated from rebirth.”’

After this, Krishna again says to Yudhishtira, ‘Aditya, Chandra, Vayu, Agni, swarga, Bhumi, the Vasus, the Viswedevas, Dhatri, Aryaman, Sukra, Brihaspati, the Rudras, the Saddhyas, Varuna, Brahma, Sakra, Maruts, the Upanishads that deal with knowledge of Brahman, satya, the Vedas, the yagnas, dakshina given during sacrifices, Brahmanas reciting the Vedas, Soma, the Sacrificer, the havis of the Devas or ghee poured in yagnas, raksha, diksha, have all sprung from the Creator of all creatures.

All kinds of restraints in the form of vows and fasts and other rigid observances, swaha, vashat, the Brahmanas, the divine cow, the foremost acts of dharma, the wheel of Kaala, strength, fame, self-restraint, the steadfastness of all intelligent men, all deeds of goodness and their opposite, the Saptarishis, Buddhi, all kinds of excellent touch, the success of all religious acts, have emerged from him.

The diverse tribes of the Devas, those beings that drink Agni, those that are drinkers of Soma, clouds, Suyamas, Rishitas, all creatures having mantras for their bodies, Abhasuras, those beings that live upon just scent, those that live upon sight only, those that restrain their speech, those that restrain their minds, those that are pure, those that can assume diverse forms through yoga have been born from that Creator.

Those Devas that live on touch for their food, those that subsist on vision and those that subsist upon the ghee poured in sacrifices, those beings that can create with their wills whatever they want, they that are regarded as the foremost ones among the Devas, and all the other deities, the Suparnas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Danavas, Yakshas, the Charanas, and the Nagas have been born from him.

All that is gross and all that is subtle, all that is soft and all that is not, all sorrows and all joys, all sorrows that come after joy and all joy that comes after sorrow, the Samkhya philosophy, yoga, and that which transcends objects that are regarded as foremost and superior, all objects of veneration, all the Devas, and all the Viswadevas of the universe who, entering into the physical forces, sustain and uphold this ancient creation of that illustrious deity have sprung from that Creator of all creatures.

All this that I have said is grosser than that which the wise perceive with the help of tapasya. Indeed, that subtle Brahman is the source of life. I bow my head in reverence to It. Let that immutable and indestructible master, always adored by us, grant us desirable boons.

That man who, subduing his senses and purifying himself, recites this mantra, without interruption for one month, succeeds in acquiring the merit that is attached to an Aswamedha yagna. By reciting this the Brahmana succeeds in acquiring all the Vedas; the Kshatriya becomes crowned with victory, O son of Pritha; the Vaisya succeeds in gaining wealth and cleverness; and the Sudra, in winning happiness here and a good end hereafter.

Famed men, by reciting this prince among mantras, the Siva Sahasranama, the thousand and eight holy names of Mahadeva, sacred and able to purify all sins, set their hearts on Rudra. By chanting this best of mantras a man succeeds in living in swarga for as many years as there are pores on his body.'"

CANTO 19

"Yudhishtira says, 'Lord of the Bharata vamsa, what is the origin of the adage that, during the grihastasrama, when married, the husband and wife must perform all duties together? Does that saying refer to discharging all karmas together, due only to what is laid down by the great Rishis in ancient times, or does it refer to the duty of begetting children from religious motives, or has it reference only to carnal pleasure?

My mind is greatly troubled by this matter. In my opinion, what the Rishis have spoken of as joint duties is incorrect. That which in this world is called the union to discharge all duties together ceases with death and is not to be seen to continue in the next. This union to discharge all karmas together leads to swarga.

But swarga is attained by persons that are dead. Of a married couple it is seen that only one dies at a time. Where does the other remain? Do you tell me this.

Men attain to diverse kinds of fruits by practising diverse kinds of karmas. The occupations of men also are of many kinds. Diverse, again, are the narakas to which they go based on this diversity of dharma and karma. Women, in particular, the Rishis have said, are deceitful. When human beings are such, and when women in particular have been declared to be false, how can there be a union between the sexes for the purpose of discharging all duties together?

In the very Vedas one may read that women are untrue. The word dharma, as used in the Vedas, seems to have been coined in the first instance for general application. Hence applying that word to the rites and life of marriage, where it has no real relevance, is erroneous.

I cannot understand this although I constantly reflect upon it. Pitamaha, it is fitting for you to expound this to me in detail, clearly and according to what has been laid down in the Sruti. In fact, explain to me what its characteristics are, and the way in which it has come to be.'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard is cited the old story of the discourse between Ashtavakra and the woman known by the name Disa. In earlier days, Ashtavakra wished to marry and begged the Mahatman Rishi Vadanya for his daughter. Her name was Suprabha.

She was matchless in beauty. In virtues, dignity, conduct and manners, she was superior to all others. With a mere glance, she of the beautiful eyes had robbed him of his heart even as a delightful garden adorned with flowers does in spring.

The Rishi said to Ashtavakra, "Yes, I shall bestow my daughter on you. But first make a journey to the sacred north. You will see many things there."

Ashtavakra said, "Tell me what I shall see in that region. Indeed, I am ready to obey whatever command you give me."

Vadanya said, "Passing over the dominions of Kubera you will cross the Himavat Mountains. You will then behold the Kailasa Mountain on which Rudra dwells. It is inhabited by Siddhas and Charanas. It abounds with the Ganas of Mahadeva, of diverse forms, playful and lovers of dance.

It is also inhabited by many Pisachas of diverse forms and all covered with fragrant colourful powders, and dancing with joyful hearts accompanied by different kinds of instruments. Mahadeva dwells there, surrounded by these who move swiftly in the mazes of the dance or refrain at times altogether from forward, backward or transverse movement of every kind.

We have heard that he and his Ganas are always present in this delightful place on the Rudra Mountain. It was there that the goddess Uma performed the severest tapasya for the sake of acquiring Siva for her lord. Hence, it is said, that place is loved by both Mahadeva and Uma.

In ancient days, on the heights of the Mahaparswa Mountains, which lie to the north of these sacred mountains, many Devas and also the foremost of Manavas adored Mahadeva.

You will cross that realm on your northward journey. You will then see a beautiful blue forest resembling a mass of clouds. There, in that forest, you will see a beautiful female ascetic who looks like Sree herself.

Venerable in age and highly blessed, she is in the observance of Diksha. When you see her, you must duly worship her.

After you have seen that Devi, you will return here and marry my daughter. If you are willing to do this, proceed on your journey and do as I have said."

Ashtavakra said, "So be it. I will do your bidding. I will go to that realm of which you speak. On your part, be true to your given word."

The illustrious Ashtavakra set out on his journey. He went towards the north and at last reached the Himavat Mountains peopled by Siddhas and Charanas. Arriving there, he came upon the sacred river Bahuda whose waters produce great punya. He bathed in one of its delightful tirthas in clear water, and worshipped the Devas with offerings of water.

His ablutions completed, he spread some kusa grass and lay down to rest awhile. Passing the night in this way, the Brahmana rose with the dawn. He once more performed his ablutions in the sacred waters of the Bahuda and then lit his homa fire and worshipped it with Vedic mantras.

He then worshipped both Rudra and Uma with appropriate kriyas, and rested for some more time on the shore of a lake in the Bahuda. Refreshed, he set off from there towards Kailasa.

He saw a golden gate ablaze with beauty. He saw also the Mandakini and the Nalini of the Mahatman Kubera. Seeing him arrive, all the Yakshas and Rakshasas with Manibhadra at their head, who protected that lake covered with unworldly lotuses, came out all together to welcome and honour the renowned traveller. In return the Rishi worshipped those beings of awesome strength and asked them to report his arrival to Kubera.

The Rakshasas said to him, "Without waiting for the news from us, King Vaisravana is coming into your presence of his own accord. He knows well the objective of your journey. Behold that blessed master, radiant with his own energy."

Then Kubera Vaisravana approached Ashtavakra and asked after his wellbeing. After these polite inquiries, the Lord of treasures said to the regenerate Rishi, "You are welcome here. Tell me what it is that you seek from me. I will do what you bid me to accomplish. Do you enter my abode as you like. Duly entertained by me, and after your business is complete, you may go without any hindrance."

Having said these words, Kubera led the Brahmana into his palace. He offered him his own throne and also padya to wash his feet and the

customary arghya. After the two had taken their seats, the Yakshas of Kubera, led by Manibhadra, and many Gandharvas and Kinnaras, sat down before them.

After all of them had taken their seats, Kubera said, “Understanding what you desire, the Apsaras will dance for your pleasure. It is right for me to entertain you and you must be served with proper care.”

Sannyasi Ashtavakra said in a sweet voice, “Let the dance begin.”

Then Urvara and Misrakesi, Rambha and Urvasi, Alambusha and Ghritachi, Chitra, Chitrangada and Ruchi, and Manohara, Sukesi and Sumukhi, Hasini and Prabha, and Vidyuta, Prasami and Danta, and Vidyota and Rati, and many other exquisite Apsaras began to dance. And the Gandharvas present played on diverse musical instruments—music that made the heart soar and time stand still.

The Rishi Ashtavakra passed a full celestial year there in the abode of Lord Vaisravana and he never knew how much time had passed while he listened to that music and watched the dance.

Then Vaisravana said to the Rishi, “Learned Brahmana, behold, a little more than a year has passed since you came here. This music and dance, especially known as Gandharva, is a stealer of the heart and of time. Do as you wish or let this continue if that be your pleasure. You are my guest and, therefore, worthy of worship. This is my house. Command us. We are all bound to you.”

Ashtavakra, greatly pleased, replied, “I have been duly honoured by you. I now wish to leave. I am pleased beyond all measure. All this befits you. Through your grace, and in accordance with Rishi Vadanya’s command, I will now proceed to my journey’s end. May you prosper, O Lord Kubera!”

Saying this, the Rishi left Kubera’s abode and went northwards again. He crossed the Kailasa and the Mandara Mountains as also the golden Meru. Beyond those great mountains lay the realm where Mahadeva lived as a humble ascetic. With utmost concentration and reverence, the sage bowed and circled that place.

Descending again from that auspicious place, he now considered himself sanctified as he had seen that sacred abode of Mahadeva. Having circled that mountain three times, the Rishi, with his face still turned towards the north, went on with a joyful heart.

He saw another forest that was delightful in every respect. It was adorned with the fruits and roots of every season, and it resounded with the music of thousands of birds. There were many delightful groves throughout the forest. The illustrious Rishi then saw a pleasing hermitage.

Ashtavakra also saw many golden mountains in diverse forms, decked with precious stones. In the bejewelled earth he also saw many lakes and tanks. And he saw other marvels and, seeing these, his mind was filled with bliss.

He then saw a magnificent palace made of gold and adorned with jewels. It surpassed the place of Kubera himself in every way. Surrounding it were many mountains of precious stones. There were also many shimmering chariots and piles of jewels.

The Rishi saw the river Mandakini whose waters were strewn with countless mandara flowers. Luminous gemstones and especially diamonds were strewn everywhere across the grounds.

The palace contained many vast halls and chambers whose arches, too, were embellished with various kinds of precious stones. These were also adorned with filigree nets of pearls interspersed with many other fine jewels. Many unearthly sights that captivated the heart and the eye surrounded that palace. That delightful asrama was inhabited by numberless Rishis.

Beholding these sights all around, the Rishi began to think of where he would take shelter. He reached the palace gate and said, "Let those that live here know that a guest has come asking for shelter."

Hearing the Rishi's voice, many young girls came out together from that palace. Seven in number, they were of different kinds of beauty, each one lovelier than the next. Every one of those maidens stole the Rishi's heart. With his best efforts, the sage could not control his mind. Indeed, his heart lost all its serenity.

Observing himself succumbing to such wild emotions, the Rishi made a determined effort and, being wise, finally succeeded in controlling himself. The women said, "Let the illustrious one enter."

Curious about those maidens and about that palatial mansion, the regenerate Rishi entered as he was told. Going in, he saw an old woman in a state of decay, attired in white robes and adorned with every kind of ornament. The Rishi blessed her formally.

The old woman returned his good wishes in a fitting manner. She rose and offered him a seat. Having taken his seat, Ashtavakra said, "Let all the girls go to their chambers. Let only one stay here. That one who remains here must be wise and of tranquil heart. Let all the others leave."

Thus addressed, all of them circled the Rishi in pradakshina and then left the grand hall. Only the old woman remained there. The day quickly passed and night came. The Rishi, seated on a splendid bed, said to the old woman, "Blessed devi, the night deepens. You may go to sleep."

When the Rishi ended their conversation thus, the old woman laid herself down on an ample bed. But soon she rose from that bed and, pretending to shiver with cold she went to the bed of the Rishi. Ashtavakra courteously welcomed her. She stretched out her slender arms and tenderly embraced the Rishi.

Seeing him unmoved as a piece of wood, she was saddened and began to speak. "There is no pleasure, save that which waits upon Kama, which women can derive from a man. I am under the influence of desire and I seek you out. Do you embrace me in return. Be joyful and unite yourself with me. Embrace me, learned one, for I desire you greatly. This union with me is the reward of the stern tapasya that you have performed.

Even at first sight I wanted you. Do you also make love to me. All this wealth, and everything else that you see here, are mine. Along with my heart and body, you will become master of all this. I will satisfy all your wishes. Dally with me in these delightful forests that can fulfil every desire.

I will give you complete obedience in everything, and you can sport with me for your pleasure. We will enjoy every desire, human and divine.

There is no pleasure more agreeable to women than that which she derives from the companionship of a man. Indeed, sexual union with a man is the most delicious fruit of joy that we can reap. When urged by Kama, women become wanton and capricious. At such times, they do not feel any pain, even if they walk over a desert of burning sand."

Ashtavakra said, "'Blessed one, I never approach another's wife. Union with another man's wife is condemned by those conversant with the dharma shastras. I am a stranger to all kinds of pleasure. You should know that I want to marry in order to have children. I swear this by truth itself.

Through these children, righteously acquired, I will go to those realms of felicity which cannot be otherwise attained. Good devi, know what is consistent with dharma and do not attempt to seduce me."

The old woman said, "The very deities of wind and fire and water, or other divinities, are not as agreeable to women as Kama, the god of desire. Women are always drawn to sexual union. Among a thousand women, even among hundreds of thousands, only one may perhaps be found that is devoted to her husband. When under the influence of desire, they do not care for family, father, mother, brother, husband, sons or husband's brother but blindly pursue the path of lust.

Pursuing what they consider happiness, they destroy their families by birth and marriage even as many mighty rivers erode the banks that contain them. The Creator himself had observed these grave faults in women."

Determined to further know the good in women, the Rishi said, "Do not speak to me like this. Yearning springs from affection. Tell me what else I should do."

That woman said, "In time, you will see if I have anything good in me. Live here for some time and I shall regard myself abundantly rewarded."

Yudhishtira, thus addressed by her, the Rishi agreed, saying, "I will live with you in this place as long as I can."

The Rishi looked at the old woman and began to reflect on the matter. He was tortured by his very thoughts. His eyes derived no pleasure from any part of her body. On the other hand, he was repelled by the ugliness of her limbs.

"This woman is definitely the goddess of this palace. Has she been rendered ugly through some curse? I will gradually discover the cause of this." Reflecting thus within himself, and beside himself with curiosity, Ashtavakra passed the next day in some anxiety.

The woman then said to him, "Illustrious one, look at the evening clouds reddened by the setting sun. What can I do for you?"

The Rishi said, "Bring water for my ablutions. Having bathed, I will do my sandhya vandana, restraining my speech and my senses."

CANTO 20

"Bhishma says, 'Thus commanded, the woman said, "Be it so." She brought oil with which to rub the Rishi's body and a piece of cloth for him to wear during the ablutions. Allowed by the ascetic, she rubbed every part of his body with the fragrant oil she had brought. Gently was the Rishi massaged, and when that was over, he went to the room kept for his ablutions. There he sat upon a new and splendid asana.

After Ashtavakra sat, the old woman began to wash his body with her soft hands and tender fingers. One by one, in correct order, she served the Rishi in his ablutions. Between the warm water with which he was washed, and the soft hands that washed him, the Rishi did not realise that the whole night had passed.

Rising from the bath he was astounded. He saw that the sun had risen above the horizon in the east. He asked himself in some amazement, "Is this real or an illusion?" Ashtavakra duly worshipped Surya Deva. This done, he asked the woman what he should do next.

The old woman cooked some food for the sage that was like amrita itself. So delicious was that food that the Rishi could not eat much of it. In partaking that little, the day passed and evening arrived. The old woman asked the Rishi to go to bed and sleep. A marvellous bed was assigned to him and she lay on another one.

At first the Rishi and the old woman lay on different beds, but at midnight she left her own bed and came to his. And lo, now she was young and beautiful in her face and every limb.

Ashtavakra said, "My mind rejects sexual union with one who is another's wife. Leave my bed. Blessed are you; refrain from this of your

own accord."

Thus dissuaded by that Brahmana of self-restraint, the woman said to him, "I am my own mistress. You will not earn any sin by taking me."

Ashtavakra said, "Women can never be their own mistresses. It is the opinion of Brahma himself that a woman never deserves to be independent."

The woman said, "Learned Brahmana, I am tormented by desire. You have seen my devotion to you. You incur sin by refusing to meet me lovingly."

Ashtavakra said, "Diverse faults drag away the man that does as he likes. As for myself, I am able to control my desire. O good devi, return to your own bed."

The woman said, "Look, I bow to you, bending my head. It becomes you to show me your grace. O sinless one, I prostrate myself before you; do you become my refuge. If indeed you see such sin in congress with one that is not your wife, I yield myself to you. Do you, O Dvija, take my hand in marriage. You will incur no sin. I tell you truly. Know that I am my own mistress, and if there be any sin in this let it be mine alone. My heart is devoted to you. I am my own mistress. Do you accept me."

Ashtavakra said, "How is it that you are your own mistress? Tell me the reason for this. There is not a single woman in the three worlds that deserves to be regarded as her own mistress. The father protects her while she is a girl. The husband protects her while she is in her youth. Sons protect her when she is old. Women can never be independent as long as they live."

The woman said, "Since my childhood I have adopted the vow of brahmacharya. Do not doubt it. I am still a virgin. Make me your wife, Brahmana, do not destroy my devotion for you."

Ashtavakra said, "As you are inclined to me, so am I inclined to you. There is this question, however, that should be settled. Can it be that by yielding to my desire I will not break my word given to the Rishi Vadanya? All that here is wonderful. Yet, will it lead to what is truly beneficial? Here is a maiden adorned with fine ornaments and garments. She is exceptionally beautiful. Why did decay cloak her beauty for so long? Now suddenly she looks like a young and most lovely maiden. But there is no knowing what form she may take later.

I shall never swerve from the control which I have over desire and the other passions, or from my contentment with what I already have. It cannot lead to any good if I do so. I will keep myself united with the truth!”

CANTO 21

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me why, despite his great tejas, did that woman not fear Ashtavakra's curse? Also, how did Ashtavakra succeed in returning from that place?'

Bhishma says, 'Ashtavakra asked her "How do you change your form as you please? I want to know this and you must not lie to me. Speak truly before a Brahmana."

The woman said, "Best of Brahmanas, wherever you may be, in heaven or on earth, this desire for sexual union is to be found. Now listen with attention to what I have to say. I devised this trial to test you. You have conquered all the worlds for being true to your resolve.

Know that I am the embodiment of the north. You have seen the fickleness of woman. Even old women are tormented by the desire for sexual union. Brahma himself and all the Devas along with Indra have been pleased with you. I know the reason why you have come here.

You have been sent by the Rishi Vadanya, the father of your bride, in order that I may instruct you. In accordance with his wishes, I have already done so. You will return home safely. Your journey back will not be arduous.

You will have the girl you have chosen for your wife. She will bear you a son. I had sought you through desire and you answered me well. The desire for sexual union cannot be transcended in any of the three worlds. But you have achieved that punya; return now to your home.

What else do you wish to hear from me? Ashtavakra, I will tell you anything truthfully. The Rishi Vadanya worshipped me for your sake. I have said all this to you to honour him."

After receiving many further instructions from her, Ashtavakra joined his hands in reverence. He then asked the wonderful woman for her permission to return. Taking her leave, he came back to his own asrama. Resting there for a while, he sought the leave of his kinsmen and friends and went to the Brahmana Vadanya.

Welcomed by Vadanya, the Rishi Ashtavakra narrated all that he had seen during course of his sojourn in the north. He said, “Commanded by you I went to the mountains of Gandhamadana. North of these mountains, I found a devi, who welcomed me courteously. She mentioned you and also instructed me in various matters. Having listened to her I have now returned.

The learned Vadanya said to the Rishi, “Take my daughter’s hand with the proper rites and under the proper constellations. You are the best husband I can choose for her.”

Ashtavakra said, “So be it” and took the hand of Vadanya’s daughter in marriage. Indeed the Rishi was overjoyed. Having taken that beautiful woman for his wife he continued to live in his own asrama, freed from passion of every kind.’”

CANTO 22

"Yudhishtira says, 'Whom do the eternal Brahmanas that keep strict vratas regard as worthy of receiving gifts? Is a Brahmana that bears the signs of a brahmachari regarded as such or even one who does keep brahmacharya?'

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, it has been said that gifts should be made to a Brahmana that observes his svadharma, the duties of his own varna, whether he bears the signs of a brahmachari or not, for both are without blemish.'

Yudhishtira says, 'What blame does an impure man incur, if he makes gifts of sacrificial butter or food with great devotion to Brahmanas?'

Bhishma says, 'Even one without self-restraint becomes, without doubt, cleansed by devotion. Such a man is purified in every act and not with regard to making gifts alone.'

Yudhishtira says, 'It has been said that a Brahmana who is engaged in worshipping the Devas must never be scrutinised. The learned, however, say that a Brahmana's behaviour and ability must be examined with respect to such actions as have reference to the Pitris.'

Bhishma says, 'The actions karmas that have reference to the Devas bear fruit not as a result of the Brahmana who performs the deeds but through the grace of the Devas themselves. Without doubt, those who perform yagnas obtain the punya of those actions through the blessing of the gods. Brahmanas are always devoted to Brahman. The Rishi Markandeya, one of the greatest Rishis endowed with intelligence in all the worlds, said this in ancient times.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, why are these five types of men regarded highly: he that is a stranger, he that has knowledge of the duties of his varna, he that is connected by marriage, he that is rich in tapasya, and he performs yagnas?'

Bhishma says, 'The first three—strangers, relatives and ascetics, when pure of birth, devoted to religious acts, learning, compassion, modesty, sincerity and honesty, are regarded as fitting. The other two, men of learning and those devoted to sacrifices, when endowed with five of these attributes—purity of birth, compassion, modesty, sincerity and truthfulness, are also held in high regard.

Listen now to me as I tell you the opinions of Bhumi Devi, the Rishi Kasyapa, Agni and the sannyasi Markandeya.

Bhumi said, "As a lump of mud quickly dissolves when cast into the sea, even so every kind of sin disappears in the three high attributes of presiding at yagnas, teaching and receiving dakshina."

Kasyapa said, "The Vedas with their six branches, the Samkhya philosophy, the Puranas and high birth, all fail to save a Brahmana person if he falls away from good conduct."

Agni said, "If a Brahmana who regards himself as learned and is engaged in study seeks to destroy the reputation of others using that knowledge, he falls from dharma, and is regarded as being untruthful. A man of such destructive ways can never attain the realms of grace."

Markandeya said, "If a thousand Aswamedha yagnas and satya were weighed in the balance, I do not know if the former would weigh even half as much as the latter."'

Bhishma continues, 'Having spoken these words, those four, Bhumi Devi, Kasyapa, Agni and Markandeya, each invested with great tejas, left.'

Yudhishtira says, 'If Brahmanas observant of the brahmacharya vrata seek the offerings one makes to one's deceased ancestors in Sraddhas, will the Sraddha be regarded as properly performed, if those offerings are made to such Brahmanas.'

Bhishma says, 'Even if this brahmacharya vrata is practised for the prescribed period of twelve years and a Brahmana has mastered the Vedas and their angas, if a Brahmana himself seeks such offering and eats the same, he is regarded to fall away from his vow. The Sraddha itself, however, is not regarded as tainted in any way.'

Yudhishtira says, ‘The wise have said that dharma has many ends and many doors. Pitamaha, tell me what are the definite conclusions in this matter.’

Bhishma says, ‘Abstention from injury to others, truthfulness, forgiveness, compassion, self-restraint, and sincerity are the indications of dharma. There are men who roam the earth praising righteousness, but without practising what they preach and engaged all the while in sin.

He who gives gold, jewels or horses to such men has to sink into naraka and to live there for ten years, eating the faeces of those who subsist upon the flesh of dead cows and buffaloes, of base men called Pukkasas, of others that live on the outskirts of cities and villages, of untouchables, and of men that proclaim, under the influence of wrath and folly, the actions and the omissions of others. Those foolish men who do give the offerings made in Sraddhas to a Brahmana observant of the vow of brahmacharya have to descend into realms of untold misery.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Tell me what is superior to brahmacharya? What is the highest indication of virtue? What is the highest kind of purity?’

Bhishma says, ‘I say to you that abstention from honey and meat is superior even to brahmacharya. Dharma consists of self-restraint; the best indication of righteousness is renunciation, which is also the highest kind of purity.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘When should one practise dharma? When should artha be sought? When should kama be enjoyed? Pitamaha, tell me this.’

Bhishma says, ‘One should earn wealth in the first part of one’s life. Then should one earn righteousness, and then enjoy pleasure. One should not, however, attach oneself to any of these. One should honour the Brahmanas, worship one’s guru and one’s elders, show compassion for all creatures, and be of mild disposition and amiable speech. To utter a lie in a court of justice, to behave deceitfully towards the king, to act falsely towards teachers and elders, are considered to be as heinous as killing a Brahmana. One should never be violent towards a king. Nor should one ever strike a cow. Both these offences are equivalent to the sin of foeticide.

One should never abandon one’s homa fire. One should also never disregard one’s study of the Vedas. One should never attack a Brahmana in word or deed. All these offences are equivalent to Brahmahatya.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘What kind of Brahmanas should be regarded as good? What kind of Brahmanas should one make gifts to in order to acquire

great punya? What kind of Brahmanas must one feed? Tell me all this, Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'Those Brahmanas that are free from anger, devoted to acts of righteousness, firm in truth, and that practise self-restraint are regarded as good. By making gifts unto them one acquires punya. One wins great merit by making gifts unto Brahmanas who are free from pride, capable of bearing everything, firm in the pursuit of their aims, with a mastery over their senses, devoted to the good of all creatures, and friendly towards all.

One earns punya by making gifts to Brahmanas who are free from greed, are pure of heart and conduct, who possess learning and modesty, are truthful in speech and observant of their svadharma as laid down in the shastras. The Rishis have declared that Brahmana to be deserving of dakshina who studies the four Vedas with all their angas and is devoted to the six duties laid down in the shastras. One acquires great punya by making gifts to Brahmanas possessing these qualities.

The man who makes gifts to a deserving Brahmana multiplies his merit a thousand-fold. A single righteous Brahmana with wisdom and Vedic lore, observant of the dharma and kartavyas laid down in the shastras, distinguished by purity of behaviour, is competent to save a whole vamsa.

One should make gifts of cows, horses, wealth and food to such a Brahmana. By making such gifts one earns great felicity and happiness in the next world. As I have already told you, even one such Brahmana can save the entire vamsa of the giver. What then can I say about the punya of making gifts to many Brahmanas of such attributes?

In making gifts, therefore, one should always judiciously choose the one to whom the gifts are to be made. Hearing of a Brahmana with the proper attributes and respected by all good people, one should invite him to one's home even if he lives far away, welcome him when he arrives and worship him with all one's means.'"

CANTO 23

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, I want you to tell me about the laws that have been laid down with regard to the Devas and Pitris on occasions of Sraddhas.'

Bhishma says, 'Having purified oneself by bathing and performing the known auspicious rites, one should carry out all karmas relating to the Devas in the morning, and all those relating to the Pitris in the afternoon. What is given to men should be given at midday with love and reverence. An untimely gift will be appropriated by Rakshasas.

Gifts of articles that have been stepped over by anyone, or been licked or sucked, that which is not given gently or has been seen by menstruating women, do not produce any merit. Such gifts are regarded as the portion belonging to the Rakshasas. Gifts of things that have been announced before many people or from which a portion has been eaten by a Sudra, or that have been seen or licked by a dog, form portions for Rakshasas.

Food which is mixed with hair or in which there are worms, or which has been stained with saliva or which has been gazed at by a dog, or into which tear-drops have fallen or which has been trampled upon must be considered as forming the share of a Rakshasa. Food that has been eaten by one who cannot pronounce Pranava, the AUM, or that has been eaten by a person bearing arms, or that has been eaten by an evil man must be regarded as forming the portion of Rakshasas.

Food eaten by one from which a part has already been eaten by another, or which is eaten without a part being offered to Devas, guests and children, is appropriated by Rakshasas. Such tainted food, if offered to the Devas and Pitris is never accepted by them but is taken by Rakshasas. The food offered

in Sraddhas by the three twice-born varnas, in which mantras are either not recited or recited incorrectly, and in which the niyamas laid down in the shastras about distributing to guests are not adhered to, is appropriated by Rakshasas.

Food distributed to guests without having been previously dedicated to the Devas or the Pitris with the aid of libations poured on the sacred fire, which has been stained in by a portion having been eaten by an evil or profane man, should be known to form the share of Rakshasas.

I have told you what the portions are of the Rakshasas. Listen now to me as I explain the rules for ascertaining the Brahmana deserving of dakshina. All Brahmanas that have become outcastes because of committing heinous sins, as also Brahmanas that are fools and madmen, do not deserve to be invited to Sraddhas in which offerings are made to either the Devas or the Pitris. That Brahmana who is afflicted with leukoderma, or he that is lacking in virility, or he that has leprosy, or he that has got phthisis or he that is epileptic with sensory delusions, or he that is blind, must not be welcomed.

Brahmanas that are physicians, those that receive regular pay for worshipping the images of deities established by the rich, or live upon the service of the Devas, those that observe vratas out of pride or other false motives, and those that sell Soma, do not deserve to be invited. Brahmanas that recite the shastras aloud without regard for time or place, or are singers, dancers or players of instruments, or warriors and athletes, do not deserve to be invited.

Brahmanas who pour libations on the sacred fire for Sudras, or who are teachers of Sudras, or are servants of Sudra masters, do not merit an invitation. That Brahmana who is paid for his services as teacher, or who, as a sishya, attends the talks of a guru because of some allowance that is made to him, does not deserve to be invited, for both of them are regarded as merchants of Vedic knowledge. The Brahmana who has been induced to accept the gift of food in a Sraddha at the very start, as also he who has married a Sudra woman, even if he possesses of every kind of knowledge, does not deserve to be invited.

Brahmanas without garhapatya, domestic fire, and they that attend upon corpses, they that are thieves, and they that have otherwise sinned should not be invited to Sraddhas. Brahmanas whose antecedents are not known or

are base, and they that are Putrika-putras, do not deserve to be invited on occasions of Sraddhas.

Rajan, that Brahmana who loans money, or he who lives upon the interest of the loans given by him, or he who lives by selling living creatures, does not deserve invitation. Men who have been subordinated by their wives, or they who live by becoming the lovers of unchaste women, or they who abstain from their morning and evening prayers do not deserve to be invited to Sraddhas.

Listen now to me as I tell you about the Brahmana that has been ordained for revering the Devas and the Pitris. Indeed, I will tell you about those merits because of which one may become a giver or a receiver of gifts in Sraddhas, despite all these faults.

Brahmanas that observe of the rites and ceremonies laid down in the shastras, or they that possess punya, or they that chant the Gayatri mantra, or they that are observant of the nitya karmas of Brahmanas, even if they take to farming for a living, can be invited to Sraddhas. If a Brahmana happens to be high-born, he deserves to be invited to Sraddhas even if he is a soldier fighting another's battle.

That Brahmana who takes to trade for a living should be rejected even if he possesses punya. The Brahmana who pours libations every day on the sacred fire, or who dwells in a fixed place, who is not a thief and who is hospitable to guests who arrive at his house, deserves to be invited to Sraddhas. The Brahmana who recites the Savitri mantra morning, noon and night, or who lives on charity, who is observant of the rites and ceremonies laid down in the shastras for those of his varna, deserves to be invited to Sraddhas.

That Brahmana who having earned wealth in the morning becomes poor in the afternoon, or who poor in the morning becomes wealthy in the evening, or who is lacking in malice, or is stained only by a minor fault, deserves to be welcomed at Sraddhas. That Brahmana who is without pride or sin, who is not given to empty argument, or who subsists upon alms obtained as he roams from house to house, deserves to be invited to sacrifices.

One who does not observe vratas, or who is addicted to falsehood in both speech and conduct, who is a thief, or who lives by selling living creatures or by trade in general, only becomes worthy of invitation to Sraddhas if he happens to offer all to the Devas first and subsequently drink

Soma. That man who having acquired wealth by dishonest or cruel means but subsequently spends it in adoring the Devas and fulfilling the duties of hospitality, becomes worthy of being invited to Sraddhas.

The wealth that one has acquired by selling Vedic knowledge, or which has been earned by women, or which has been gained by deceit like giving false evidence in a court of law should never be given to Brahmanas or spent in making offerings to the Pitris. That Brahmana, who upon completing a Sraddha refuses to utter the words Astu Swadha, incurs the sin of taking a false oath in a suit for land.

Yudhishtira, the time for performing a Sraddha is when one finds a good Brahmana, and curds and ghrita, and the sacred day of the new moon, and the meat of wild animals such as deer.

Upon the completion of a Sraddha performed by a Brahmana the word Swadha should be uttered. If performed by a Kshatriya the words that should be uttered are: Let your Pitris be gratified. Upon the completion of a Sraddha performed by a Vaisya the words that should be spoken are: Let everything become inexhaustible. Similarly, upon the conclusion of a Sraddha performed by a Sudra, the word that should be uttered is Swasti.

In respect of a Brahmana, the declaration regarding Punyaham should be accompanied with the chanting of AUM. In the case of a Kshatriya, such declaration should be without the chanting of AUM. In the kriyas performed by a Vaisya, instead of AUM, the words that should be uttered are: Let the Devas be gratified.

Listen now to me as I tell you the rites that should be performed for all the varnas. All the karmas called Jatakarma are necessary for the three twice-born varnas. All these rites, Yudhishtira, in the case of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, are to be performed using mantras.

The girdle of a Brahmana must be made of munja grass. That of a Kshatriya should be a bowstring. The Vaisya's must be made of the valwaji grass. This is what has been laid down in the shastras.

Listen now as I explain to you what constitutes the merits and faults of both givers and recipients of gifts. A Brahmana becomes guilty of a dereliction of duty by telling lies. Such an act on his part is sinful. A Kshatriya incurs four times and a Vaisya eight times the sin that a Brahmana incurs by uttering a falsehood.

Having been earlier invited by another Brahmana, a Brahmana should not eat elsewhere. By eating at the house of one such, he becomes inferior

and even incurs the sin that attaches to the slaughter of an animal on occasions other than those of yagnas.

Also if he eats elsewhere after having been invited by a Kshatriya or Vaisya, he falls from his position and incurs half the sin that attaches to the slaughter of an animal on occasions other than those of sacrifices. That Brahmana who eats on occasions of such rites as are performed in honour of the Devas or the Pitris by Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, without having performed his ablutions, incurs the sin of uttering a lie about a cow.

That Brahmana who is tempted into eating on occasions of similar rites performed by persons belonging to the three higher varnas, at a time when he is impure as a result of either a birth or a death in his family, knowing well that he is impure, incurs the same sin. He who lives upon wealth obtained under false pretences, like that of pilgrimages to sacred places, or who solicits another for money pretending that he would spend it in religious acts, incurs the sin of lying.

A man who belongs to any of the three higher varnas incurs sin if he distributes food with the help of mantras at Sraddhas to such Brahmanas who do not study the Vedas, or who do not keep vratas, or are impure in their conduct.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, I want to know to whom one should give the offerings dedicated to the Devas and the Pitris in order to earn abundant rewards.'

Bhishma says, 'Yudhishtira, feed those Brahmanas whose wives wait for the leftover food from their husbands' plates, like farmers waiting in reverence for timely showers of rain. One earns great punya by making gifts to those Brahmanas that are always pure in conduct, that are emaciated through abstaining from all luxuries and even full meals, that are devoted to the observances of such vratas that lead to the emaciation of their bodies, and that approach givers with the desire of receiving gifts.

By giving dakshina to such Brahmanas who regard conduct in this light of food, as regard conduct in the light of spouses and children, as regard conduct in the light of strength, as regard conduct in the light of their refuge for crossing this samsara and attaining to felicity in the next, and as seek wealth only when wealth is absolutely needed, one earns great merit. By making gifts to those men who approach you on account of having lost everything to thieves or oppressors, one acquires great punya.

One earns great merit by making gifts unto such Brahmanas who ask for food from the hands of an even poorer person of their varna who has just received something from others. One acquires great punya by making gifts to such Brahmanas who beg for alms after having lost everything in times of universal suffering.

By making gifts to Brahmanas who keep vows, and subject themselves freely to painful rules and practices, are respectful in their conduct to the laws laid down in the Vedas, and seek wealth for spending it upon the karmas necessary to complete their vratas and other observances, one earns great punya. By making gifts to Brahmanas who keep their distance from the ways of the sinful and the evil, are weak and without sufficient support, and are poor in material possessions, one earns great punya.

One earns great merit by making gifts to such Brahmanas who have been robbed of all their possessions by powerful men, and who desire to fill their stomachs with any food without heed for its quality. One earns great punya by making gifts to such Brahmanas who beg on behalf of others that perform tapasya and are satisfied with even small gifts.

You have now listened to the declarations in the shastras in respect of the acquisition of great merit by the giving of gifts. Listen now to those acts that lead to hell or heaven. Yudhishtira, they that lie on occasions other than those when such an untruth is needed to serve the guru or assure the safety of one who fears for his life, sink into naraka.

They who lust after other people's spouses, or have sexual union with them, or assist in such wrongdoing, sink into hell. They who rob others of their wealth, destroy the wealth and possessions of others, or proclaim the faults of others, sink into naraka. They who destroy the troughs of water used by cows to quench their thirst, damage buildings used for public meetings, who destroy bridges and roads, and raze the homes of people, must sink down to hell.

They who deceive helpless women, girls, or old women, or women who have been frightened, find hell for themselves. They who destroy the livelihood of men, they who raze men's homes, they who steal others' wives; they who sow dissension among friends, and they who devastate the hopes of others, fall into naraka. They who declare the faults of others, they who demolish bridges or roads, they who live by doing work not allowed to them, and they who are ungrateful to their friends for help given, have to descend into hell.

They who have no faith in the Vedas and show no reverence for them, they who violate their own vratas or force others into breaking theirs, and they who fall away from their positions through sin, fall into naraka. They who behave improperly, they who are usurious, and they who make unduly large profits on sales, will find hell.

They who gamble or unscrupulously indulge in other depravity, and they who are given to the slaughter of living creatures, have to sink into naraka. They who incite masters to dismiss loyal servants that hope for rewards, or are needy or are earning due wages or are waiting for rewards for valuable services rendered, have to plunge into hell.

They who themselves eat without offering portions to their spouse, their sacred fires, their servants or their guests, and they who abstain from performing the rites laid down in the shastras to honour the Pitris and Devas, have to sink into naraka. They who sell the Vedas, they who find fault with the Vedas, and they who commit the Vedas into writing, have all to descend into hell.

They who are outside the four varnas, they who take to practices forbidden by the Srutis and the Smritis, and they who live by immoral deeds or that do not belong to the varna of their birth, have to sink into naraka. They who live by selling hair, poisons, or milk must go down into hell. They who put obstacles in the path of Brahmanas, cows and women, Yudhishtira, have to descend into hell.

They who sell weapons, they who forge weapons, they who make arrows, and they who make bows, have all to find hell for themselves. They who obstruct paths and roads with stones and thorns and pits must sink into naraka. They who desert teachers and servants and loyal followers for no offence fall into naraka.

They who set young bulls to work, they who pierce the noses of bulls and other animals to control them while they work, and they who always keep animals tied, go to hell. Kings that do not protect their subjects while forcibly taking from them a sixth share of the produce of their fields, and they who, though able and rich, do not give gifts, find hell.

They who reject men who are imbued with forgiveness, self-restraint and wisdom, or those with whom they have associated for many years, when these are no longer of use to them, will surely sink into naraka. Men who eat without giving portions of the food to children, the aged and servants, inexorably descend into hell.

All such men have to go to hell. Listen now to me as I tell you who those men are that ascend into heaven. The man who transgresses against a Brahmana by impeding the rituals with which he worships the Devas is afflicted with the loss of all his children and animals. They who do not transgress against Brahmanas by obstructing their religious rites ascend into swarga.

Men who follow their svadharma laid down for them in the shastras and practise the virtues of charity, self-restraint and truthfulness, find heaven. Men who having acquired knowledge by rendering obedient service to their gurus, and observing austere tapasya are not greedy for gifts, rise into swarga. Men through whom others are saved from fear and sin, poverty and disease, and the difficulties that lie in their path go into heaven.

Men who have a forgiving nature, who are patient, who are prompt in performing all righteous deeds, and who are of auspicious conduct, succeed in gaining swarga. Men who abstain from honey and meat, who abstain from sexual union with the wives of other men, and who abstain from wines and spirits, ascend into heaven.

Men that help establish asramas for sannyasis, who become founders of families, who open up new lands for habitation, and lay out towns and cities, rise into swarga. Men who give away clothes and ornaments, food and drink, and who assist in marriage ceremonies, ascend to heaven.

Men that have abstained from any kind of harm to all creatures, who can endure everything, and who have made themselves the refuge of all creatures, ascend into swarga. Men who humbly serve their fathers and mothers, who have subdued their senses, and who love their brothers, succeed in gaining swarga. Men that control their senses despite being rich in worldly goods, enjoying their youth and power, ascend to heaven.

Men that are kind even towards those that offend against them that have a calm temperament, who have a liking for all who are peaceable, and that contribute to the happiness of others by serving them with humility, surely succeed in finding swarga. Those that protect thousands of people, that make gifts to thousands of people, and that rescue thousands of people from distress, find heaven.

Those who make gifts of gold and of cows, and of chariots and animals, gain swarga. Those who make gifts of articles needed in marriages, and serve men and women, and give clothes and robes, succeed in acquiring heaven.

Men who make public pleasure-houses and gardens and wells, resting houses and halls for public meetings, and tanks for cows and men to quench their thirst, and fields for cultivation, succeed in gaining swarga. Those who make gifts of houses and fields and populated villages to those who want them, do indeed find heaven.

Men who having made sweet and tasty drinks offer them to others, as also seeds and rice, find swarga for themselves. Men, whether born into high or low families, bear hundreds of children and live long lives practising compassion and keeping anger under complete control, succeed in ascending to heaven.

Bhaarata, I have expounded to you the rites in honour of the Devas and the Pitris which are performed for the sake of the other world. I have explained what the laws are for making gifts, and the views of the ancient Rishis with respect to both the items of gift and the manner of giving them.'"

CANTO 24

"Yudhishtira says, 'Bharatarishabha, it is fitting that you answer my next question truly and in detail. What are those circumstances under which a man may become guilty of Brahmahatya without actually killing a Brahmana?'

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, I once asked Vyasa to explain this very subject to me. Listen closely to what Vyasa said to me.

Once, repairing to the presence of Vyasa, I said to him "Maharishi, you are the fourth in descent from Vasishta. Do you explain to me what those circumstances are under which one becomes guilty of Brahmahatya without actually killing a Brahmana."

Vyasa gave me an excellent and assured reply, "You should know a man to be guilty of Brahmahatya who, having invited a Brahmana of righteous conduct to his house to give him alms, subsequently refuses to give anything to him on the pretence of there being nothing in the house. You should know that man as guilty of Brahmahatya who destroys the livelihood of a Brahmana learned in the Vedas and their angas, and who is free of attachments to worldly creatures and goods.

You should know that man to be guilty of Brahmahatya, who prevents thirsty cows from drinking water to quench that thirst. You should regard that man as guilty of Brahmahatya who, without studying the Srutis that have been transmitted from guru to sishya from age to age, finds fault with the Srutis or with those shastras that have been composed by the Rishis. You should know that man as guilty of Brahmahatya who does not give his beautiful and accomplished daughter to a suitable bridegroom.

You should know that foolish and sinful man to be guilty of Brahmahatya who inflicts such grief upon Brahmanas as wound the very core of their hearts. You should know that man to be guilty of Brahmahatya who robs the blind, the lame and fools. You should know that man to be guilty of Brahmahatya who burns down the asramas of sannyasis, or forests, villages or towns.”

CANTO 25

"Yudhishtira says, 'It has been said that pilgrimages to sacred rivers are filled with punya; that bathing in such waters is meritorious; and that listening to the cadence of these waters is also most worthy. Pitamaha, I want to hear you speak on this subject. It befits you to tell me about such rivers on this earth.'

Bhishma says, 'Maharishi Angiras has spoken about the sacred tirthas of the earth. If you listen to what he said you will earn great punya.

Once, Gautama approached the great and learned Rishi while he was living in a forest and said to him, "Illustrious one, I have some questions about the merits of sacred waters and shrines. I want to hear you discourse on that subject. Speak to me of this. By bathing in sacred waters on earth, what punya is earned with regard to the next world? Do you expound to me this truly and according to the ordinance."

Angiras said, "A man who bathes for seven days in succession in the Chandrabhaga or the Vitasta, whose waters dance in waves, observing a fast the while, is sure to be cleansed of all his sins and suffused with the punya of a sannyasi. The many rivers that flow through Kasmira plunge into the great river Sindhu. By bathing in these rivers one is sure to become endowed with good character and to rise into swarga after leaving this world.

By bathing in Pushkara, and Prabhasa, and Naimisa, and the ocean, and Devika, and Indramarga, and Swarnabindu, one is sure to fly into swarga in a celestial chariot, filled with joy at the adorations of Apsaras. By diving in the waters of Hiranyabindu with concentration, and revering that sacred

stream, and bathing next at Kusesaya and Devendra, one becomes cleansed of all one's sins.

Repairing to Indratoya close to the Gandhamadana Mountains and near Karatoya in the kingdom of Kuranga, one should fast for three days and then bathe in those sacred waters with a contemplative heart and pure body. By doing this, one is sure to acquire the punya of an Aswamedha yagna. Bathing in Gangadwara and Kusavarta and Bilwaka in the Nita Mountains, as also in Kankahala, one is sure to become cleansed of all one's sins and then ascend into heaven.

If one becomes a brahmacharin and subdues one's anger, devotes oneself to truth and practises compassion towards all creatures, and then bathes in the Jala pada, one is sure to acquire the punya of an Aswamedha yagna. The Bhagirathi-Ganga flows in a northward direction from the sangama of swarga, Bhumi and patala.

Fasting for one month and bathing in that sacred tirtha which is known to be loved by Maheswara, allows one to behold the Devas. Even if one has to be reborn, he who gives offerings of water to his Pitris at Saptaganga and Triganga and Indramarga obtains amrita for food. The man who in a pure state of body and mind attends to his daily agnihotra, and observes a fast for one month and then bathes in Mahasrama, is sure to attain success within one month.

By bathing in the Bhrigu Kunda, after an upavasa of three days and purifying the mind of all evil passions, one becomes purified of even the sin of killing a Brahmana. By bathing in Kanyakupa and performing one's ablutions in Balaka, one acquires great fame among the very Devas and shines in glory. Bathing in Devika and the lake known as Sundarika, as also in the tirtha called Aswini, one acquires great beauty in one's next life.

By fasting for a fortnight, and bathing in the Mahaganga and Krittikangaraka, one is cleansed of all one's sins and ascends into swarga. Bathing in Vaimanika and Kinkinika, one acquires the power of going everywhere at will and is highly respected in the celestial realm of the Apsaras. If a man controls his anger, observes the vow of brahmacharya for three days, and bathes in the river Vipasa at the Kalika asrama, he succeeds in transcending rebirth.

Bathing in the grove that is sacred to the Krittikas and offering oblations of water to the Pitris, and then gratifying Mahadeva, one becomes pure in body and mind and rises into heaven. If, observing a fast for three days with

a purified body and mind, one bathes in the Mahapura, one is freed from the fear of all mobile and immobile animals as also of all animals having two legs. By bathing in the Devadaru forest and offering oblations of water to the Pitris and dwelling there for seven nights with a pure body and mind, one attains swarga.

Bathing in the waterfalls at Sarastambha and Kusastambha and Dronasarmapada, one is sure to attain to the realm of the Apsaras where they will dutifully serve that man. If one observes a fast and bathes at Chitrakuta and Janasthana and the waters of the Mandakini one is sure to become rich.

By repairing to the Samyasrama, living there for a fortnight and bathing in the sacred river there, one acquires the power of disappearing at will, delighting in the joy that has been ordained for the Gandharvas. Going to the Kausiki tirtha, living there with a pure heart and abstaining from all food and water for three days, one acquires the power of dwelling in the realm of the Gandharvas in one's next life.

Bathing in the delightful tirtha that goes by the name of Gandhataraka and living there for one month, abstaining all the while from food and water, one acquires the power of vanishing at will and then of ascending into swarga after twenty-one days. He that bathes in the Matanga Lake is sure to attain to success in a single night. He that bathes in Analamba or in eternal Andhaka, or in Naimisa, or the tirtha called swarga, and offers oblations of water to the Pitris, while subduing his senses, acquires the punya of a human sacrifice.

Bathing in Gangahrada and the Utpalavana tirtha, and daily offering oblations of water there for a full month to the Pitris, one acquires the punya of an Aswamedha yagna. Bathing in the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna as also at the tirtha in the Kalanjara Mountains and offering every day oblations of water to the Pitris for a month, one acquires the punya of ten Aswamedha yagnas. Bathing in the Sashti Lake one acquires merit much greater than what is attached to the gift of food.

Ten thousand tirthas and thirty million other tirthas come to Prayaga at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna in the month of Magha. He who bathes in Prayaga, with a restrained soul and observing rigid vows, in the month of Magha, is purified of all his sins and attains swarga.

Bathing in the tirtha that is sacred to the Maruts, as also in that which is located in the asrama of the Pitris, and also in that which is known by the

name Vaivaswata, one becomes cleansed of all one's sins and becomes oneself as pure and sanctified as a tirtha. Going to Brahmasaras as also to the Bhagirathi and bathing there and offering oblations to the Pitris every day for a full month, while abstaining from all food, one is sure to attain to the realm of Soma Deva.

Bathing in Utpataka and then in Ashtavakra and offering oblations of water to the Pitris every day for twelve days in succession, abstaining the while from food, one acquires the punya of an Aswamedha yagna. Bathing in Gaya, in Asmaprishtha and the Niravinda Mountains and Kraunchapadi, one is purified of the sin of Brahmahatya. A bath in the first place cleanses one of a single Brahmahatya; a bath in the second cleanses one of two such evil doings; and a bath in the third cleanses one of three.

Bathing in Kaalapinga, one acquires a large volume of sacred water for use in the next world. By bathing in the city of Agni, a man acquires such merit as entitles him to live during his next birth in the city of Agni's daughter. Bathing in Visala in Karavirapura and offering oblations of water to one's Pitris, and performing one's ablutions in Devahrada too, one becomes identified with Brahma and shines in splendour.

Bathing in Punaravarta-nanda as also Mahananda, a man of restrained senses and universal compassion repairs to Indra's garden, the Nandana, and is waited upon by Apsaras of many kinds. Bathing with concentrated soul in the tirtha named after Urvasi, in the river Lohitya, on the day of full moon of the month of Kartika, one attains to the punya of the Pundarika yagna.

Bathing in Ramahrada and offering oblations of water to the Pitris in the river Vipasa, and observing a fast for twelve days, one becomes cleansed of all sins. Bathing in the Mahahrada tirtha with a pure heart and after observing a fast for one month, one is sure to attain to the end which was that of the Rishi Jamadagni. By exposing oneself to the sun in the tirtha called Vindhya, one devoted to truth and humility, and filled with love for all creatures, should perform austere tapasya.

By so doing, he is sure to attain to ascetic success in the course of a month. Bathing in the Narmada as also in the Surparaka tirtha, observing a fast for a full fortnight, one is sure to become a royal prince in one's next birth. If one goes to the tirtha known as Jambumarga one is sure to attain to success in a single day and night.

By repairing to Chandalikasrama and bathing in the tirtha called Kokamukha, having lived on herbs alone and worn rags for clothes, one is sure to acquire ten beautiful girls for wives. One who lives near the tirtha known as Kanya-hrada will never go to the realms of Yama. Such a man is sure to ascend to the regions of felicity that belong to the Devas.

Mahabaho, he who bathes on the day of the new moon in the Prabhasa tirtha is sure of attaining success and immortality. Bathing in the tirtha known as Ujjanaka in the asrama of Arshtisena's son, and next in the tirtha in the asrama of Pinga, one is cleansed of all one's paapa. Observing a fast for three days and bathing in the tirtha known as Kulya and reciting the sacred Aghamarsana mantras one attains the punya of an Aswamedha yagna.

Observing a fast for one night and bathing in Pindaraka, one becomes purified on the dawn of the next day and attains to the merit of an Agnishtoma yagna. He who goes to Brahmasaras, which is adorned by the forests of Dharmaranya, is purified and attains to the punya of the Pundarika yagna. Bathing in the waters of the Mainaka Mountain, and saying one's morning and evening prayers there, and living there for a month, subduing one's desires, one attains to the merit of all the great yagnas.

Setting out for Kalolaka and Nandikunda and Uttara-manasa, and reaching a place a hundred yojanas away from them, one becomes cleansed of the sin of killing an embryo in its mother's womb. One who succeeds in obtaining a glimpse of the image of Nandiswara, is cleansed of all paapa. Bathing in the tirtha called Swargamarga one is sure to reach Brahman.

The celebrated Himavat is sacred. That prince of mountains is the father-in-law of Sankara. He is a mine of all jewels and is the home of the Siddhas and Charanas. That twice-born one who is fully conversant with the Vedas and who, regarding this life to be transient, casts off his body on those mountains, while abstaining from all food and water in accordance with the rites laid down in the shastras, after having worshipped the Devas and the Rishis, is sure to attain the eternal Brahman.

Subduing his passions and anger, everything can be attained by him who dwells in a tirtha. In order to journey to all the tirthas in the world, one should think of those that are almost inaccessible or those that are filled with overwhelming difficulties.

Tirtha yatras produce the punya of yagnas. They can purify anyone of sin. Truly excellent, they lead straight to swarga. This subject is a great mystery. The very Devas should bathe in tirthas. They too will be purified."

This discourse on tirthas should be imparted to Brahmanas, and to righteous men who strive to achieve what is truly for their own good. It should also be recited in the hearing of one's well-wishers, friends and devoted disciples. Angiras possessed of great ascetic merit imparted this knowledge to Gautama.

Angiras himself had obtained it from Kasyapa. The great Rishis regard this discourse as worthy of constant repetition. It is the foremost of all purifying things. If one recites it regularly every day, one is sure to be cleansed of every sin and to ascend into heaven after this life. One who listens to it, this great mystery, is sure to be born into a good family in one's next life and, what is more, he will be endowed with a clear memory of his previous life.'"

CANTO 26

Vaisampayana said, "Equal to Brihaspati in intelligence and Brahma himself in forgiveness, resembling Sakra in prowess and Surya in energy, Bhishma, the son of Ganga, of vast power, had been overthrown in battle by Arjuna. Accompanied by his brothers and many other people, King Yudhishtira asks him these questions. The aged warrior lies on a bed of arrows, such as Kshatriyas covet, waiting for that auspicious time when he can leave his physical body.

Many great Rishis have come there to see that foremost one of Bharata's vamsa. Amongst them are Atri and Vasishta, Bhrigu and Pulastya, and Pulaha and Kratu. There are also Angiras and Gotama and Agastya and Sumati, and Viswamitra and Sthulasiras and Samvarta and Pramati and Dama. There, are also Brihaspati and Usanas, and Vyasa and Chyavana and Kasyapa and Dhruva, and Durvasas and Jamadagni and Markandeya and Galava, and Bharadwaja and Raibhya and Yavakrita and Trita.

Sthulaksha and Savalaksha and Kanwa and Medhatithi are present, and Krisa and Narada and Parvata and Sudhanwa and Ekata and Dwita. Nitambhu and Bhuvana and Dhaumya and Satananda and Akritavrana and Rama, son of Jamadagni, and Kacha have come. All these high-souled Maharishis Rishis have come there to Bhishma lying on his bed of arrows.

Yudhishtira, with his brothers, duly worships those Mahatman Rishis, one after another in proper order. Receiving that worship, those Rishis sit on the ground and begin to talk to one another. Their conversation relates to Bhishma, and is sweet and agreeable to all the senses and the mind.

Hearing them speak of him, Bhishma is filled with delight and regards himself to be already in swarga. Then, having taken Bhishma's leave and

that of the Pandava princes, those Rishis vanish in a moment from the sight of all the beholders. Even after they have disappeared, the Pandavas repeatedly bow and offer their adorations to those most blessed sages.

They then wait on Bhishma, even as Brahmanas well-versed in mantras wait with reverence upon the rising sun. The Pandavas see the cardinal directions blaze with splendour because of the tejas of the Munis' tapasya and are filled with wonder at the sight. Thinking of the blessedness and puissance of those Rishis, the Pandavas begin to speak again to their Pitamaha. Yudhishtira touches Bhishma's feet with his head and then continues asking his questions about dharma.

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, which kingdoms, which provinces, which asramas, which mountains, and which rivers are the most holy?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story of a conversation between a Brahmana who was observing the Sila and the Unccha vratas and a Rishi crowned with hermetic success. Once upon a time, a man who had roamed all the earth arrived at the house of a grihastha who was observing the Sila vrata. The grihastha welcomed his atithi with all the due rites. Received with such hospitality, the happy Rishi spent the night in his host's home.

The next morning the Brahmana completed all his morning ablutions and worship, and having purified himself, cheerfully approached the Rishi. Meeting with each other and seated at their ease, the two began to talk about pleasing subjects connected with the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Towards the end of the discourse, the Brahmana respectfully addressed the Rishi. He asked this very question which you, Yudhishtira, have put to me.

The poor Brahmana said, "What kingdoms, what provinces, what asramas, what mountains, and what rivers should be regarded as the most sacred? Discourse to me on this."

The Rishi said, "Those kingdoms, those provinces, those asramas and those mountains through or near which the Bhagirathi flows are the most sacred. Only by living beside the Bhagirathi and bathing in her blessed waters can a man achieve the goals that can be attained by brahmacharya, by tapasya, by yagnas or by practising vairagya, renunciation. Those creatures whose bodies have been sprinkled with the sacred waters of the Bhagirathi or whose bones have been laid in the bed of that holy river will never fall from swarga. Those men who use the waters of the Bhagirathi surely ascend into heaven after leaving this world. Even those men who

have sinned during the first part of their lives can attain to a superior end if in their later years they take to living on the banks of the Ganga. Hundreds of yagnas cannot produce that punya that men obtain by bathing in the sacred waters of the Ganga.

A man is treated with respect and worshipped in heaven for as long as his bones lie in the Ganga. Even as the rising sun blazes forth in splendour, having dispelled the shadows of night, in the same way the man that has bathed in the waters of the Ganga, cleansed of all his sins, shines brilliantly. Those kingdoms and realms that are empty of the sacred waters of the Ganga are like nights without the moon or like trees without flowers.

A world without the Ganga is like the varnas and the asramas without dharma or like yagnas without Soma. Without doubt, kingdoms and places without the Ganga are like the sky without the sun, or the earth without mountains, or without air. If offered the sacred waters of the Ganga, all the creatures in the three worlds are filled with joy unlike any other.

He who drinks Ganga jala that has been heated by the sun derives punya greater than that which attaches to the vrata of subsisting upon the wheat or other grains retrieved from cowdung. It cannot be said which is superior: he who performs a thousand Chandrayana rites to purify his body or he who drinks the water of the Ganga. It cannot be said whether the two are equal or not: one who stands for a thousand years on one foot and one who lives for only a month beside the Ganga.

One who lives permanently by the side of the Ganga is superior in merit to one who stays for ten thousand yugas suspended head down. As thread burns and vanishes without trace when set on fire, so are the sins of a man that bathes in the Ganga consumed. There is no end higher than the Ganga for those who, afflicted by sorrow, seek to attain that which could dispel their sorrow.

As snakes lose their poison at the very sight of Garuda, even so is one cleansed of all one's sins at the very sight of the sacred Ganga. They that are without renown and sinful in deeds have the Ganga for their fame, their protection, their means of liberation or their refuge. Many wretches among men, who are afflicted with heinous sins, and about to sink into naraka, are, despite all their sins, rescued by the Ganga in the next world if they seek her help and sanctuary.

They who bathe every day in the sacred waters of the Ganga become equals of Mahamunis and the very Devas with Vasava at their head.

Brahmana, those wretches among men that are sinners without any trace of humility or shame become righteous and good by placing themselves before the Ganga. As amrita is to the Devas, as swadha is to the Pitris, as sudha is to the Nagas, even so is Ganga jala to the Manavas.

As children afflicted with hunger ask their mothers for food, in the same manner do those desiring their highest good seek out the Ganga. As the realm of Svayambhuva Brahma is said to be the foremost of all places, even so is the Ganga said to be best of all rivers. As the earth and the cow are said to be the main sustenance of the Devas, even so is the Ganga the main sustenance of all living creatures.

As the Devas nourish themselves upon the amrita that occurs in the sun and the moon and that is offered in yagnas, even so do humans sustain themselves with Ganga water. One smeared with the sand taken from the banks of the Ganga regards oneself as an inhabitant of swarga adorned with celestial liniments. He who bears on his head the mud taken from the banks of the Ganga presents an effulgence equal to that of Surya himself, who dispels the surrounding darkness.

When that wind that is moistened with drops of Ganga water touches one's body, it purifies him immediately of every sin. A man afflicted and weighed down by calamities, finds all his misfortunes dispelled by the very joy which wells up in his heart on seeing that sacred river. With the calls and songs of the swans and kokas and other water fowls that play on her breast, the Ganga challenges the very Gandharvas, and with her high banks the very mountains of the earth.

Heaven, too, is humbled beholding her surface teeming with swans and diverse other birds. The bliss which one enjoys by dwelling on the banks of the Ganga is greater than that of living in Swargaloka.

I have no doubt that he who is afflicted with impurity of speech, thought and deed is cleansed at the very sight of the Ganga. By holding that sacred river, touching it, and bathing in its waters, one purifies one's ancestors to the seventh generation, one's descendants to the seventh generation, and other ancestors and descendants as well. By hearing of the Ganga, by wishing to go to that river, by drinking its waters, by touching its waters, and by bathing in them a man saves both his paternal and maternal families.

By seeing, touching and drinking the waters of the Ganga, or even by praising her, hundreds and thousands of sinful men are washed of all their sins. They who wish to make their birth, life and learning fruitful, should

repair to the Ganga and gratify the Pitris and the Devas by offering them tarpana of water. The punya that one earns by bathing in the Ganga cannot be earned through the acquisition of sons or wealth, or the performance of good deeds.

Those who are physically able but do not seek out the auspicious Ganga can be compared to those who are blind or those that are dead or those that are lame. What man is there that would not revere this sacred river that is adored by Maharishis that know the present, the past and the future, as also by the very Devas with Indra at their head? What man is there that would not seek the protection of the Ganga whose protection is sought by sannyasis and grihastas, and by Yatis and brahmacharins?

The man of righteous conduct who, with rapt soul, thinks of the Ganga at the time of his dying, succeeds in attaining the highest end. That man who dwells by the side of the Ganga and worships her up to the time of his death, is freed from fear of every kind of calamity, of sin and of kings. When that blessed river plunged down from the sky, Maheswara bore her fall on his head. It is that very stream which is adored in swarga. Bhumi, swarga and patala are all adorned by the three streams of this sacred river. The man who uses her waters is crowned with success, material and of the spirit. As the sun's rays are to the Devas in heaven, as Chandramas is to the Pitris, as the king is to his subjects, even such is the Ganga to all rivers.

One who loses his mother or father, his sons or wives, or his wealth is not as grief-stricken as he that loses the Ganga. The joy that one gets from catching a glimpse of the Ganga one does not obtain through pious deeds that lead to Brahmaloka, or through such yagnas and kriyas that lead to swarga, or through sons or wealth.

The pleasure that men derive from seeing the Ganga is equal to what they derive from seeing the full moon. That man is cherished by the Ganga who adores her with deep devotion, with his mind wholly fixed upon her, with a reverence that is shared by no other object, with a feeling that there is nothing in the universe worthy of similar adoration, and with an absolute steadfastness.

Creatures that live on earth, in the sky, or in heaven, even the most superior beings, should always bathe in the Ganga. This is the first of all duties of the righteous. The fame of the Ganga's sanctity has spread across the entire universe since she revived all the sons of Sagara, whom Kapila reduced to ashes.

Men who are washed by the bright, beautiful, high, and swift waves of the Ganga, whipped up by the wind, are washed of all their sins and resemble the sun in its splendour. Men of tranquil souls that have cast off their bodies in the waters of the Ganga, whose sanctity is as great as that of the ghee and other oblations poured onto the fire in yagnas and which confer merits equal to those of the greatest of sacrifices, have certainly attained to a position equal to that of the Devas.

Ganga, with her fame and expanse, identical with the entire universe, and revered by the Devas, the Munis and men, can grant the wishes of even those that are blind, foolish and destitute. They that sought the refuge of the Ganga, that guardian of all the universe, she that flows in three streams, filled with sacred water, sweet as honey and powerful, succeed in attaining the blessings of swarga.

The man who dwells beside Ganga and beholds her every day, is purified by her sight and touch. The Devas grant him every kind of happiness in this world and the next. The Ganga can save every creature from sin and lead him to the felicity of swarga.

She is one with Prishni, the mother of Vishnu. She is the Vakdevi, Saraswati. She is aloof, and not easy to attain. She is the embodiment of auspiciousness and prosperity. She can bestow the six well-known attributes beginning with power. She is always generous with her grace.

She reveals all things in the universe, and she is the refuge of all creatures. Those who sought her protection in this life have surely attained heaven. The fame of the Ganga has spread all over the earth, the sky and swarga, and all the cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon. Mortals use the waters of her streams to be crowned with success. He who, on beholding the Ganga, points her out to others, finds that she frees him from rebirth and confers mukti upon him.

The Ganga held the senapati of the Devas, Guha, in her womb. She also bears gold, the most precious of all metals, in her womb. They who bathe daily in her waters in the morning succeed in obtaining dharma, artha and kama. Her waters are as sacred as the ghrita that is poured into the sacrificial fire, while chanting mantras. Able to cleanse one from every sin, she has descended from swarga and is cherished by all.

The Ganga is the daughter of Himavat and Hara, and the jewel of both heaven and earth. She bestows everything auspicious, and grants the six

renowned gunas beginning with puissance. Rajan, truly the Ganga is the one holy being in the three worlds and confers punya upon all.

The Ganga is righteousness in liquid form. She also is tejas that runs in liquid form over the earth. She is suffused with the beauty and power of the ghee that is poured along with mantras on the sacrificial fire. She is always adorned with high waves as also with Brahmanas who can be seen performing their ablutions in her waters at all times. Descending from swarga, she was contained by Siva on his head. The very mother of the heavens, she has sprung from the highest mountain and courses over the plains conferring the most precious benefits on all creatures of the earth. She is the highest cause of all things; she is perfectly pure. She is as subtle as Brahman.

She offers the best bed for the dying. She leads creatures to heaven. She carries an incalculable volume of water. She bestows great fame on all. She is the protector of the universe. She is identical with every form. She is greatly desired by those crowned with success. Indeed, for those who have bathed in her waters, the Ganga is the path to swarga.

The Brahmanas hold the Ganga as equal to the earth in forgiveness, and in the protection and upholding of those that live on her banks; further, as equal to Agni and Surya in energy and splendour; and also equal to Guha himself in bestowing favours upon the twice-born varna.

Men who seek, even in their minds, with all their souls, that ancient and sacred river praised by the Rishis, she that emerges from the feet of Vishnu, achieve the realms of Brahma. Men of subdued souls who want to attain Brahman, knowing that children and other possessions, and realms of felicity, are transient, always pay their adorations to the Ganga with that reverence and love that a son shows his mother.

Men of cleansed souls who wish for success should seek the protection of the Ganga who is like a cow that yields amrita instead of milk, who is prosperity itself, who is omniscient, who exists for all creatures, who is the source of all kinds of food, who is the mother of all mountains, who is the refuge of all righteous men, who is immeasurable in power and energy, and who enchants the heart of Brahma himself.

Having gratified all the Devas along with Vishnu with austere tapasya, Bhagiratha brought the Ganga down to the earth. Men go to her to free themselves from every kind of fear both here and in the next world. I have told you only some of the merits of the Ganga. My powers are not enough

to speak of all the merits of the sacred river, or to measure her strength and blessedness.

With one's greatest powers, one may count the rocks in the mountains of Meru or measure the waters of the ocean, but one cannot determine the punya of the waters of the Ganga. Having listened to these merits of the Ganga, which I have described with great devotion, you should, in thought, word and deed, revere them with faith. Having listened to the merits that I have recited, you are sure to fill all the three realms with fame and attain great success and that is so difficult to have.

After that, you will sport in bliss created by the Ganga herself for those that worship her. The Ganga always extends her grace to those that are devoted to her with humility. She unites her devotees with every kind of happiness. I pray that the most blessed Ganga will always fill our hearts with righteous qualities."'

Bhishma says, 'Having spoken to that poor Brahmana observing the Sila vrata on the infinite merits of the Ganga, the learned and enlightened Rishi rose into the sky. The Brahmana, awakened by his words, duly worshipped the Ganga and attained high success. Son of Kunti, seek the Ganga with great devotion, for then you, too, will be rewarded with excellent success.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing this discourse on the punya of the Ganga from Bhishma, Yudhishtira with his brothers are filled with rare and great delight. He who recites or hears this sacred discourse is purified of every sin."

CANTO 27

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, you are old and wise, learned in the shastras, and marked by excellent gunas and unblemished conduct. You are celebrated above others by your gyana and tapasya. Foremost of all righteous men, I now ask you about dharma.

There is not another man in all the worlds, who is worthier of being questioned on such subjects. How can a Kshatriya, a Vaisya or a Sudra succeed in acquiring the status of a Brahmana? It is fitting that you tell me the means. Is it with austere tapasya or by religious kriyas, or through knowledge of the shastras that one belonging to any of the three lower varnas succeeds in acquiring the status of a Brahmana? Do tell me this.'

Bhishma says, 'Yudhishtira, the status of a Brahmana cannot be acquired by one belonging to any of the three other varnas. That is the highest condition for all creatures. After living through countless rebirths one is born finally as a Brahmana.

Listen to an ancient itihasa of a conversation between Matanga and a female donkey. Once, a Brahmana had a son who, though born of a woman of another varna, followed the laws laid down for Brahmanas in his childhood and youth. The child was named Matanga and possessed every accomplishment.

Wishing to perform a yagna, his father ordered him to collect the required articles. Having received his father's commands, Matanga set out on a swift chariot drawn by a donkey. It so happened that the donkey yoked to that chariot was young. Instead of obeying the reins, the animal ran with the chariot to his mother.

Matanga was angry and began to beat the animal on its nose with his goad. Seeing those marks of violence on her child's nose, full of compassion for him, the mother donkey said, "Do not grieve for his treatment, my child. This is a Chandala that is driving you. A Brahmana can never be so severe. The Brahmana is said to be the friend of all creatures. He is also the teacher and the master of all creatures. Can he punish any creature so cruelly?

This however is a sinful man. He has no compassion to show even to a being of such tender years as you. He is only reveals the varna of his birth by behaving in this way. The nature which he has inherited from his father prevents him from feeling the pity and kindness that are natural to the Brahmana."

Hearing these harsh words from the mother donkey, Matanga dismounted from his chariot and said to her, "Tell me by what fault is my mother stained? How do you know that I am a Chandala? Answer me at once. How do you know that I am a Chandala? How has my status as a Brahmana been lost? You of great wisdom, tell me all this in detail, from beginning to end."

The donkey said, "You were born to a Brahmana woman by a Sudra barber excited by desire. You are, therefore, a Chandala by birth. You do not enjoy the status of a Brahmana."

Thus addressed by the female donkey, Matanga returned home. Seeing him return, his father said, "I sent you on the difficult mission of gathering the requirements for my yagna. Why have you come back without having accomplished your task? Is all not right with you?"

Matanga said, "How can he who belongs to no definite varna, or an inferior varna, ever be regarded as well or happy? How can he whose mother is tainted be happy? Father, this female donkey, who seems to be more than a human being, tells me that I have been begotten upon a Brahmana woman by a Sudra. And for this reason, I will undergo the severest of penances."

Having said these words to his father, and firmly resolved upon what he had said, Matanga went to the great forest and sat in the most austere tapasya. He began to scorch the very Devas with the heat of his asceticism, undertaken to become a Brahmana.

While he sat unmoving in tapasya, Indra appeared and said, "Matanga, why do you pass your time in such grief, abstaining from all kinds of

human enjoyment? I shall grant you boons. Name the boons you desire. Do not hesitate, but tell me what is in your heart. Even if it is unattainable, I will bestow it on you."

Matanga said, "I want to attain the status of a Brahmana with my tapasya. Only after becoming a true Brahmana will I go home. This is the boon I seek."

Indra said to him. "You cannot attain this status of a Brahmana which you desire. It is true you seek it, but it cannot be acquired by men who are born of those of uncleansed souls. Imprudent one, you are sure to meet with destruction if you persist in this pursuit.

Stop this vain endeavour at once. This object of your desire, of becoming a Brahmana, who is the foremost of all beings, cannot be achieved by tapasya. By craving this status, you will be only destroyed. One born as a Chandala can never attain to that status which is regarded as the most sacred among the Devas and Asuras and Manavas!"

CANTO 28

"Bhishma says, 'Matanga paid no heed to the counsels of Indra and stood on one foot for a hundred years, searing Devaloka even more.

Sakra appeared before him again and said, "The status of a Brahmana is unattainable. Although you covet it, it is impossible for you to acquire it. Matanga, by longing for that lofty condition you are sure to be destroyed. Do not be reckless. This cannot be a righteous path for you to follow.

You are foolish: it is impossible for you to become a Brahmana in this world. By craving that which is unattainable, you are sure to meet destruction. I repeatedly forbid you but you are intent on destroying yourself.

From the order of animal life one attains to the status of humanity. If born as a human being, he is first sure to be born as a Pukkasa or a Chandala. Having been born in this sinful order of existence one has to wander in it for a long time. After one thousand years in that varna, one next attains the status of a Sudra.

One has to live and die and be reborn in the Sudra varna for a long time. After thirty thousand years, one is born as a Vaisya. In that varna, a jiva again has to live for a long time. He is born a Kshatriya after sixty times the duration of his existence as a Sudra.

One has to pass a very long time in the Kshatriya varna. After a duration sixty times the previous length of time, one is born as a fallen Brahmana. One has to wander for a long time in this condition.

After two hundred times the previous length of time, one is born in the vamsa of a Brahmana who lives by fighting. In that one has to spend a great

deal of time. After three hundred times the duration of his previous condition, one takes birth in the vamsa of a Brahmana that recites the Gayatri and other sacred mantras.

In that state also one has to remain for a long period. After a time measured by multiplying the last named period by four hundred, one takes birth into the family of a Brahmana conversant with all the Vedic shastras.

In that order again, one spends many a year. In that state of existence, joy and sorrow, desire and loathing, vanity and malicious speech try to enter into him and reduce him to wretchedness. If he succeeds in subduing those adversaries, he then attains a high end. If, on the other hand, those enemies triumph over him, he falls from that high state like one falling to the ground from a tall palm tree.

Knowing this for certain, I say to you, Matanga, ask for some other boon, for you who have been born a Chandala cannot dream of becoming a Brahmana!"

CANTO 29

"Bhishma said, 'Matanga still refused to accept Indra's advice. On the other hand, with regulated vows and a cleansed soul, he practised austere tapasya for a thousand years, standing on one foot and deep in dhyana. After a thousand years, Indra came again to him. The slayer of Bala and Vritra repeated the same advice.

Matanga said, "I have passed these thousand years standing on one foot in deep dhyana, observing of the brahmacharya vrata. Why is it that I have not yet succeeded in acquiring the status of a Brahmana?"

Indra said, "One born to a Chandala cannot become a Brahmana by any means. Therefore, name some boon so that all your efforts are not wasted."

Matanga was filled with grief. He journeyed to Prayaga, and lived there for a hundred years, standing all the while on just his toes. He became emaciated and his arteries and veins were swollen and visible. He was reduced to mere skin and bones. Indeed, while performing tapasya at Gaya, the Dharmatman Matanga collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

When Indra, who looks after the welfare of all creatures, saw him fall, the Lord and giver of boons came to that place and held him.

Indra said, "It seems, Matanga, that the status of a Brahmana which you seek is ill-suited to you. You cannot attain it. In fact, for you it is fraught with many dangers. One who worships a Brahmana finds happiness; abstaining from such worship, he finds sorrow.

For all creatures, the Brahmana is the giver of what they prize or covet and the protector of what they already have. It is through the Brahmanas that the Pitris and the Devas are gratified. The Brahmana is said to be

foremost of all created beings. The Brahmana grants all objects of desire and in the way that they are desired.

Wandering through innumerable orders of being and undergoing repeated rebirths, one succeeds in some distant birth in being born as a Brahmana. Men of impure souls cannot obtain that condition. Give up this sinful and impossible ambition. Name some other boon. This boon cannot be granted to you."

Matanga said, "Already I am filled with anguish; Indra, why do you further torment me by what you say? You strike one that is already dead. I do not envy you for having acquired the status of a Brahmana; you fail to retain it for you show no compassion for one like me.

You of a hundred yagnas, you say that the status of a Brahmana cannot be attained by any of the three other varnas; yet, men that have succeeded in acquiring that high status through natural means do not adhere to it, for what sins do even Brahmanas not commit? Like wealth, the status of a Brahmana is difficult to acquire, and those who having acquired it do not seek to persevere with it by practising the necessary duties, must be regarded to be the lowest wretches in this world. Indeed, they are the most sinful of all creatures.

Without doubt, the status of a Brahmana is most difficult to attain, and once attained is difficult to maintain. It can dispel every kind of sorrow. Having attained to it, men do not always seek to maintain it by practising dharma and the duties attached to it. When even such men are regarded as Brahmanas, why is it that I, who am content with my own self, who am above all duality, who am detached from all worldly things, who am compassionate towards all creatures, and self-restrained in conduct, cannot be regarded as deserving of that status?

How unfortunate I am that through the fault of my mother I have been reduced to this condition, although I am not sinful in my behaviour. Without doubt, destiny cannot be avoided or conquered by individual exertion, since with all my efforts I am unable to acquire what I have set my heart upon. When such is the case, Indra, it is fitting for you to grant me some other boon if I have become worthy of your grace or if I have earned even a little punya."'

Indra said to him, "Name the boon."

Matanga said, "Let me be possess the power of assuming any form at will, and moving through the skies, and let me enjoy whatever pleasures I

may set my heart upon. And let me also have the willing adorations of both Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. I bow to you, great Sakra. Also ensure that my fame lives forever in the world."

Indra said, "You will be celebrated as the deity of a particular measure of verse and you will be worshipped by all women. Your fame will be unrivalled in the three worlds." Having granted him these boons, Indra vanished from sight. Matanga also cast off his life-breath and attained a high place.

Yudhishtira, you see that the status of a Brahmana is very high indeed. As the great Indra himself said, that condition of being cannot be acquired except by birth.'

CANTO 30

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have now heard this great narrative. You have said that the status of a Brahmana is difficult to acquire. Yet, it has been said that in former times Viswamitra attained the status of a Brahmarishi. You, however, say that it cannot be obtained.

I have also heard that King Vitahavya in ancient times succeeded in obtaining Brahmatva. Pitamaha, I desire to hear the story of Vitahavya's advancement. With what deeds did that best of kings succeed in acquiring Brahmatva? Was it through some boon obtained from some powerful one or was it through the virtue of tapasya? Tell me everything.'

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, listen to how the famed Rajarishi Vitahavya succeeded in becoming a Brahmana, a condition that is so difficult to attain and that is held in such high reverence by all. While the high-souled Manu ruled his subjects wisely, he had a son of righteous soul who became renowned under the name of Saryati.

Two kings, Haihaya and Talajangha, were born into Saryati's vamsa. Both of them were sons of Vatsa. Haihaya had ten wives. Through them, a hundred sons, all great Kshatriyas, were born to him. All of them resembled one another in features and prowess. All of them were strong and all of them possessed great skill in battle. They all studied the Vedas and the science of weapons thoroughly.

In Kasi also there was a king who was the grandfather of Divodasa. He was known by the name Haryaswa. The sons of King Haihaya, also known as Vitahavya, invaded the kingdom of Kasi and, advancing to the doab between the Ganga and Yamuna, fought a battle with King Haryaswa and killed him.

Having slain King Haryaswa, the sons of Haihaya, those daring Maharathikas, returned to their own delightful city in the kingdom of the Vatsas. Meanwhile Haryaswa's son Sudeva, who was like a god in splendour and who was a second Dharma Deva, was installed on the throne of Kasi as its ruler. The righteous prince had ruled his kingdom for a while when the hundred sons of Vitahavya once more invaded his dominions and defeated him in battle.

Having vanquished King Sudeva, the victors returned to their own city. After that Divodasa, the son of Sudeva, was crowned king of Kasi. Recognising the strength of the sons of Vitahavya, King Divodasa rebuilt and fortified the city of Varanasi at the command of Indra.

The kingdom of Divodasa was full of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, and abounded with Vaisyas and Sudras. And they teemed with fine articles and provisions of every kind, and were adorned with shops and markets swelling with prosperity. Those territories stretched northwards from the banks of the Ganga to the southern banks of the Gomati, and resembled Amravati, the immortal city of Indra.

Bharta, the Haihayas once again attacked that tiger among kings. The splendid Divodasa sallied forth from his capital city and fought them. The battle between them was as fierce as that between the Devas and the Asuras in ancient times. King Divodasa fought the enemy for a thousand days becoming distraught at the vast number of his subjects and animals that were killed.

Having lost his army and exhausted his treasury, Divodasa fled his capital. Repairing to the delightful asrama of the wise Bharadwaja, the king humbly sought the Rishi's protection. Seeing the king before him, Bharadwaja, who was the king's purohita, said to him, "What is the reason for your coming here? Tell me everything, Rajan. I shall do what is agreeable to you without any hesitation."

The king said, "Holy one, the sons of Vitahavya have slain all the children and men of my house. I alone have escaped with my life, totally routed by the enemy. I seek your protection. Protect me with the love you bear for a sishya. Those sinful princes have slaughtered my entire vamsa, leaving only me alive."

To him who pleaded so piteously, Bharadwaja said, "Do not fear! Do not fear! Son of Sudeva, dismiss all your fears. I will perform a yagna

which will give you a son through whom you will be able to annihilate thousands upon thousands of Vitahavya's forces."

After this, the Rishi performed a yagna in order to bestow a son on Divodasa. A son named Pratardana was born to Divodasa. On being born, he instantly grew into a boy of full thirteen years and quickly mastered all the Vedas and their angas.

Helped by his powers of yoga, Bharadwaja himself had entered into the prince. Gathering all the energies in the universe, Bharadwaja put them together in the body of Prince Pratardana. With shining armour and bow, Pratardana, his praises sung by Pauranikas and Devarishis, shone resplendent like the risen sun. Mounted on his chariot with his sword tied to his waist, he shone like a blazing fire. With his sword and shield whirling, he went to his father.

Seeing him, King Divodasa was filled with joy. Indeed, the old king considered the sons of his enemy Vitahavya as already slain. Divodasa installed his son Pratardana as the Yuvaraja, and regarding himself to be successful became exultant. He next commanded that parantapa, Prince Pratardana, to march against the sons of Vitahavya and destroy them in battle.

Pratardana, subduer of enemy cities, quickly crossed the Ganga on his chariot and rode against the city of the Vitahavyas. Hearing the clatter of his chariot's wheels, the sons of Vitahavya, riding on their own powerful chariots that looked like forts, came out of their city. Emerging from their capital, the sons of Vitahavya, all skilful warriors cased in mail, charged with weapons raised at Pratardana and enveloped him with fusillades of arrows.

Surrounding him with countless chariots, the Vitahavyas poured showers of astras upon Pratardana like clouds pouring torrents of rain on the breast of Himavat. Confounding their weapons with his own, mighty Pratardana killed them all with his shafts that resembled Indra's vajra. Beheaded by thousands of broad arrows, the bloodied bodies of the warriors of Vitahavya lay scattered like kimsuka trees felled by woodcutters with their axes.

After all his warriors and sons had fallen in battle, King Vitahavya fled from his capital to the asrama of Rishi Bhrigu. There the royal fugitive sought the protection of the sage. Bhrigu assured the defeated king of his protection. Pratardana followed Vitahavya.

Reaching the Rishi's asrama, the son of Divodasa said in a loud voice, "Listen, all you disciples of the Mahatman Bhrigu, I wish to see the sage. Go and inform him of this."

Recognising that it was Pratardana who had come, Bhrigu himself came out of his asrama and worshipped that best of kings with the due rites. The Rishi said, "Tell me, Rajan, what is it that you want." The king told the Rishi the reason for his presence.

The king said, "Brahmana, Vitahavya has come here. Surrender him to me. His sons destroyed my very vamsa. They laid waste the territories and the wealth of the kingdom of Kasi. I have slain a hundred sons of this proud king. By killing that king himself I will today pay the debt I owe my father."

The compassionate Maharishi Bhrigu replied, "There is no Kshatriya in this asrama. Here they are all Brahmanas."

Accepting Bhrigu's words to be true, Pratardana touched the Rishi's feet and, filled with delight, said, "Without doubt, on account of my prowess, I am now crowned with success, since this king has been abandoned by the very varna of his birth. Brahmana, allow me to leave you, and let me ask you to pray for my welfare. Because of my might, Vitahavya has been compelled to leave the very varna of his birth."

Dismissed by Bhrigu, Pratardana returned from the Rishi's asrama to his kingdom, even as a snake vomits out its real poison. Thus did King Vitahavya attain the status of a Brahmana sage—purely by virtue of Bhrigu's words. He also acquired a complete mastery over all the Vedas in the same manner.

Vitahavya had a son named Gritsamada who was as handsome as Indra. Once, the Daityas harassed him greatly, believing him to be none other than Indra. With regard to that Rishi, one of the greatest srutis in the Riks says, "He with whom Gritsamada stays, Brahmana, is held in high regard by all Brahmanas."

Observing brahmacharya, the wise Gritsamada become a true Dvijottama, a twice-born sage. Gritsamada had a son named Sutejas. Sutejas had a son called Varchas, and the son of Varchas was known by the name Vihavya. Vihavya had a son named Vitatya and Vitatya had a son named Satya. Satya had a son named Santa. Santa's son was the Rishi Sravas.

Sravas begot a son named Tama. Tama had a son named Prakasa, who was a most superior Brahmana. Prakasa had a son named Vagindra who was the foremost of all silent reciters of sacred mantras.

To Vagindra was born a son named Pramati who was a complete master of all the Vedas and their angas. The Apsara Ghritachi bore Pramati a son who was named Ruru. Ruru had a son through his wife Pramadvara. That son was the great Rishi Sunaka. Sunaka gave birth to Saunaka.

It was thus that King Vitahavya, though a Kshatriya by birth, acquired the status of a Brahmana through the grace of Bhrigu. I have also told you the genealogy of the vamsa that sprung from Gritsamada. What else would you like to ask?'"

CANTO 31

"Yudhishtira says, 'Bharatarishabha, which men are worthy of reverence in the three worlds? Tell me this in detail. I am never satiated with hearing you discourse on these subjects.'

Bhishma says, 'Hear the ancient story of the discourse between Narada and Krishna. Seeing Narada once worshipping many excellent Brahmanas, Krishna said to him, "Whom do you worship? Whom among these Brahmanas do you worship with such great reverence? If it is something that I can be told, I wish to hear it. Foremost of righteous men, tell me."

Narada said, "Listen to the names of those whom I worship. Krishna, who else in this world deserves to hear this? I worship the Brahmanas who always worship Varuna and Vayu and Aditya and Parjanya and Agni, and Sthanu and Skanda and Lakshmi and Vishnu and the Brahmanas, and the Lord of speech, and Chandramas, and the waters and the earth and Devi Saraswati.

I always revere those Brahmanas that are imbued with tapasya, that are conversant with the Vedas, that are always devoted to Vedic study, and that possess high worth. I bow my head before those who are free of pride, who perform the rites in honour of the Devas while fasting, who are always content with what they have and who are forgiving. I adore them that perform yagnas, who are of a forgiving nature, and self-restrained, that are masters of their own senses, that worship truth and righteousness, and that give away land and cows to virtuous Brahmanas.

I bow unto them that are devoted to the observance of tapasya, that dwell in forests, that live upon fruits and roots, that never store anything for the next day, and that are observant of all the kriyas and karmas laid down

in the shastras. I bow to them that feed and cherish their servants, that are always hospitable to guests, and that eat only the leftovers of what is offered to the gods.

I worship them that have become formidable by studying the Vedas, that are eloquent in discoursing on the shastras, that are observant of the brahmacharya vrata, and that are always devoted to the duties of presiding at others' yagnas and of teaching sishyas.

I worship them that are compassionate towards all creatures, and that study the Vedas all day. I bow to them that strive to obtain the grace of their gurus, that labour in their learning of the Vedas, that are firm in the observance of vows, that obediently wait upon their teachers and elders, and that are free from hatred and envy. I bow to them that observe excellent vratas, that practise mowna, that have knowledge of Brahman, that are resolute in truth, that offer libations of ghee and offerings of meat.

I bow to them that live upon alms, that are emaciated for want of adequate food and drink, that have lived in their gurus' homes, that are detached from all enjoyments, and that are poor in material goods. I bow to them that have no love for material wealth, that have no quarrel with others, that do not clothe themselves, that have no wants, that have become powerful through the acquisition of the Vedas, that are eloquent in the teaching of dharma, and that speak of Brahman.

I bow before those that are compassionate towards all creatures, firm in the observance of truth, self-restrained, and calm in their behaviour. Yadava, I bow to them devoted to the worship of Devas and Atithis, that belong to grihasta asrama, and that follow the way of pigeons in their manner of living. I always bow to those whose actions are marked by the triguna, without being weakened, and who are observant of truth and righteous conduct.

I bow unto them who are conversant with Brahman, who are endowed with knowledge of the Vedas, who are attentive in the pursuit of dharma, artha and kama, that are free of greed, and that are righteous. I bow unto them that survive only upon water, or upon air alone, or upon the leftovers of the food that is offered to gods and guests, and that observe diverse kinds of excellent vratas. I always worship those who have taken the vow of celibacy, who have wives and the domestic fire, that are the refuge of the Vedas, and that are the loving sanctuary of all creatures in the universe.

Krishna, I always bow to those Rishis that are the Creators of the universe, that are the elders of the universe, that are the eldest of the vamsa or the family, that dispel tamas, and that are the most righteous and most learned in the universe. For these reasons, you too, must worship those twice-born ones of whom I speak every day.

Deserving of reverence, they will, when worshipped, bestow happiness on you. Those of whom I speak always grant happiness in this world as well as in the next. Revered by all, they roam about in this world, and, if worshipped by you, are sure to grant you bliss.

They who are hospitable to all that come to them as guests, and who are always devoted to Brahmanas and cows, as also to truth in words and deeds, succeed in overcoming all calamities and obstacles. They who are always devoted to peace, as also they who are free from malice and envy, and they who are always attentive to the study of the Vedas, succeed in conquering all misfortunes and difficulties. They who bow before all the Devas without showing a preference for any, they who take refuge in any one Veda, they who are steadfast and self-restrained, prevail over all hardships and impediments.

They who worship the foremost of Brahmanas with reverence, are firm in the observance of vratas and practise the virtue of charity, overcome all calamities and obstacles. They who are engaged in the practice of tapasya, who are always observant of the vow of celibacy, and whose souls have been cleansed by tapasya, overcome all calamities and obstacles. They who are devoted to the worship of the Devas and atithis and Parvivara, dependents, as also of the Pitris, and they who eat the remnants of the food that is offered to Devas, Pitris, guests and dependents, conquer all problems and obstructions.

They who, having lit the domestic fire, duly keep it burning and worship it with reverence and they who duly pour libations in Soma yagnas, succeed in overcoming all difficulties. Krishna, they who behave as you do towards their mothers and fathers and gurus and elders triumph over all obstacles." Having said these words, the Devarishi fell silent.'

Bhishma continues, 'For these reasons, you must also always worship with great reverence the Devas, the Pitris, the Brahmanas and atithis who arrive at your palace, and as a result of such conduct you, too, will attain a lofty and desirable end.'"

CANTO 32

"Yudhishtira says, 'Wise Pitamaha conversant with all branches of knowledge, I want to hear you discourse on subjects related to kartavya and dharma, duty and righteousness. Tell me what are the merits are of those that grant protection to living creatures of all the four varnas when they entreat it?'

Bhishma says, 'Dharmaputra, listen to this ancient history on the great merit of granting protection to others when it is humbly sought. Long ago, a beautiful pigeon, pursued by a hawk, flew down from the skies and sought the protection of the king, Usinara Vrishadarbha.

The king comforted the terrified pigeon, saying, "Be reassured; do not fear. What has frightened you so much? What have you done and where, that you have lost your senses in fear and are more dead than alive? Your colour, beautiful bird, resembles that of a newly bloomed blue lotus. Your eyes are the colour of the pomegranate or the Asoka flower.

Do not be frightened. Set your mind at rest. When you have sought refuge with me, know that no one will have the courage to even think of harming you. For your sake, I will give up the very kingdom of Kasi and, if needed, my life too. Be comforted and feel no fear."

The hawk said to the king, "This bird has been ordained to be my food. It does not befit you to shelter him from me. I have hunted and overpowered this bird with great effort. His flesh and blood and marrow and fat will make good food for me. This bird will gratify me. Rajan, do not place yourself between him and me.

The thirst that tortures me is fierce, and hunger gnaws at my stomach. Release the bird and let me have him. I cannot bear the pains of hunger any

longer. I pursued him as my prey. Look at his body, bruised and torn by my wings and talons. Look, how his breath has turned weak. It is not just for you to protect him from me.

In the exercise of that power which rightly belongs to you, you may intervene to protect men when other men try to kill them. You cannot, however, claim any power over a flying bird afflicted with thirst. Your power may extend over your enemies, your servants, your relatives, and the disputes that take place between your subjects. Indeed, it may extend over every part of your dominions and also over your own senses. Your power, however, does not extend to the sky.

Displaying your prowess over your enemies, you can establish your dominion over them. Your rule, however, does not extend over the birds that range the sky. Indeed, if you wish to earn punya by protecting this pigeon, it is your duty to also consider me and help me appease my hunger and save my life."'

Bhishma continues, 'Hearing the hawk's words, the royal sage was filled with some wonder. Wanting to heed these words and comfort the hawk, the king spoke to him.

The king said, "Let a bull, a boar, a deer or a buffalo be cooked for you today. Today appease your hunger on that food. I have taken a vow never to abandon anyone that seeks my protection. This bird will not leave my lap."

The hawk said, "I do not eat the flesh of the boar or the bull, the deer or the buffalo. What need have I of such food? My concern is only with that food which has been ordained for beings of my order? Hawks feed on pigeons, this is the eternal law. Sinless Usinara, if you feel such love for this pigeon, then give me flesh from your own body, equal in weight to that of this pigeon."

The king said, "You have shown me great respect by saying this to me. Yes, I shall do what you command."

Saying this, the king began to cut off his own flesh and weigh it in a balance against the pigeon.

Meanwhile, in the inner rooms of the palace, the wives of the king, adorned with jewels, heard what was happening, and came out grief-stricken and lamenting. Their cries, and those of the ministers and servants, rose in the palace like thunder. The clear sky was suddenly enveloped with dense clouds on every side. The earth began to quake because of the king's virtuous act.

Usinara continued to cut the flesh from his sides, from his arms, and from his thighs, and to fill one side of the scales to weigh it against the pigeon. Even after he had cut away a great deal of his flesh, the pigeon continued to weigh heavier. When at last the king was reduced to a fleshless skeleton of bones, covered with blood, he desired to give up his whole body, and climbed on to the scale in which he had placed his flesh.

At that moment, the three worlds, led by Indra, arrived there to see him. Celestial drums began to roll, played upon by spirits of the sky. King Vrishadarbha was bathed in a shower of amrita that was poured upon him. Garlands of heavenly flowers, of wonderful fragrance and texture, also rained down on him.

The Devas, Gandharvas and Apsaras began to sing and dance around him even as they do around Brahma. King Usinara ascended a celestial chariot that was more grand and beautiful than a palace made of gold; its arches were encrusted with gemstones and adorned with columns made of lapis lazuli. In this manner, the royal sage Usinara, also known as the great Sibi, went to swarga through his righteous act.

Yudhishtira, you too, must treat those that seek your protection in the same way. He who protects those that are devoted to him, those that are devoted to him, and those that depend upon him, and who has compassion for all creatures, attains great felicity in the next world. A virtuous king who is honest and honourable acquires every worthy reward by his actions.

The Rajarishi Sibi, of pure soul and great wisdom and indomitable prowess, the ruler of the kingdom of Kasi, became celebrated throughout the three worlds for his righteous deeds. He who protects one who seeks refuge in the same way will certainly attain the same happy end as Sibi did. He who narrates this history of Vrishadarbha is sure to be purified of every sin, and he who hears it recited is sure to attain to the same end.'"

CANTO 33

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, what is the best conduct out of all those that have been established for a king? By doing what is a king able to enjoy both this world and the next?'

Bhishma says, 'The foremost dharma that has been laid down for a duly consecrated king, if he desires to obtain great happiness, is the worship of Brahmanas. This is what the best of all kings should do. Bharatarishabha, know this well. The king should always revere all righteous Brahmanas who possess Vedic knowledge.

The king must worship all learned Brahmanas living in his city or kingdom, with bowed head, elevating words, and gifts of all things of enjoyment. This is the foremost of all kartavyas laid down for the king. Indeed, the king must always be focused on this. He should protect and cherish the Brahmanas, even as he does himself or his own children. With even greater reverence the king must worship those Brahmanas who are learned and righteous.

When such men are free of all worries, the whole kingdom is ablaze with grace and beauty. Such men are worthy of adoration. The king must bow his head before them. They must be honoured, even as one honours one's fathers and grandfathers. Even as the existence of all creatures depends upon Vasava, so does the conduct of men depend on such Brahmanas. So compelling are their powers and tejas that if angered such men can raze the entire kingdom to ashes merely by their will, or with mantras, or by other means acquired through tapasya. Nothing can destroy them. Their power appears to be boundless, stretching to the ends of the universe. When angry, their glances fall upon men like a blazing fire upon a

forest. The bravest of men are terrified by them. Their virtues and powers are vast and extraordinary.

Some among them are like wells and holes with their mouths covered by grass and creepers, while others resemble the bright and cloudless sky. Some among them, like Durvasas, are of fierce dispositions. Some, like Gautama, are as soft in nature as cotton. Some among them are cunning like Rishi Agastya who devoured the Asura Vatapi.

Some among them are devoted to the practice of tapasya; some are employed in farming like Uddalaka's guru; some are engaged in caring for cows as did Upamanyu, while attending on his guru. Some among them live on alms; some are even robbers like Valmiki in his early years and Viswamitra during a famine. Some, like Narada, enjoy inciting quarrels and disputes. Some, like Bharata, are actors and dancers.

Some can achieve all ordinary and extraordinary feats, like Agastya who swallowed the entire ocean as if it were a palmful of water. The Brahmanas are of diverse natures and behaviour. One must always sing the praises of the Brahmanas who are conversant with all duties, who are of righteous behaviour, who are devoted to virtuous deeds of many kinds, and who are seen to derive their sustenance from diverse kinds of occupations.

The Brahmanas who are older in origin than the Pitris, the Devas, men of the other three varnas, the Nagas and the Rakshasas are the most highly blessed. These regenerate men cannot be defeated by the Devas or the Pitris, the Gandharvas or the Rakshasas, the Asuras or the Pisachas. The Brahmanas can make one who is not a deity into one. They can also divest a Deva of his position.

He whom they wish to make a king becomes one. He whom they do not love or favour, on the other hand, is degraded. Rajan, I tell you truly that those foolish men who dishonour the Brahmanas meet with destruction. Skilled in praise and censure, and themselves the cause of other men's fame and disgrace, Brahmanas are always angered by those that seek to harm others.

That man whom the Brahmanas praise grows in prosperity. The man who is censured and cast off by the Brahmanas is disgraced. As a result of the absence of Brahmanas from among them, the Sakas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas and other Kshatriya tribes have fallen and devolved into Sudras. Similarly, the Dravidas, the Kalingas, the Pulindas, the Usinaras, the

Kolisarpas, the Mahishakas and other Kshatriyas have become Sudras because of the absence of Brahmanas from among them.

Defeat at their hands is better than victory over them. The killing of a single Brahmana is a more heinous sin than the slaying all other living creatures in the world. The great Rishis have said that Brahmahatya is the worst sin. One must never humiliate or defame the Brahmanas. Where such condemnation of Brahmanas is pronounced, one should hang one's head in shame or leave that place in order to avoid both the speaker and his words.

That man has not as yet been, nor will be, born in this world who has been or will be able to pass his life in happiness after falling out with the Brahmanas. One cannot seize the wind in one's hands. One cannot touch the moon with one's hand. One cannot support the earth on one's arms. Similarly, one cannot vanquish the Brahmanas in this world.'"

CANTO 34

"Bhishma says, 'One must always offer the most respectful worship to the Brahmanas. Soma is their king, and they confer happiness and sorrow upon others. They must always be loved and protected as one loves and protects one's own fathers and grandsires, and they should be adored with reverence, gifts of food and ornaments, and other articles of enjoyment and desire.

The peace and happiness of the kingdom flow from such respect shown to Brahmanas, even as the peace and happiness of all living creatures flow from Indra. Let pure and radiant Brahmanas be born in a kingdom. Let Kshatriyas that are splendid maharathikas able to scorch all enemies, settle in a kingdom. Narada said this to me.

Rajan, there is nothing better than having a Brahmana of good birth, with a knowledge of neeti and dharma, morality and righteousness, and resolute in the observance of excellent vratas reside in one's palace. This will confer every kind of blessing. The sacrificial offerings given to Brahmanas reach the very Devas who accept them. Brahmanas are the fathers of all creatures. There is nothing higher than a Brahmana.

Aditya, Chandramas, Vayu, Jala, Bhumi, Akasa and the Diks, the cardinal directions, all enter the body of the Brahmana and partake of what the Brahmana eats. In that house where Brahmanas do not eat, the Pitris refuse to eat. The Devas also never eat in the house of the wretch who hates the Brahmanas. When Brahmanas are gratified, the Pitris also are gratified. There is no doubt about this.

They that give away the sacrificial ghrita to Brahmanas are themselves gratified in this and the other world. Such men can never be destroyed.

They succeed in attaining to lofty ends. Those particular offerings in yagnas with which one gratifies the Brahmanas go to gratify both the Pitris and the Devas.

The Brahmana is the cause of that sacrifice from which all creation has sprung. The Brahmana knows that from which this universe has materialised and that to which, when apparently destroyed, it returns. The Brahmana knows the path that leads to swarga and the one that leads to naraka. The Brahmana is conversant with what has happened and what will happen.

The Brahmana is the foremost of all men. The Brahmana is fully acquainted with the dharma that has been laid down for his varna. Those that follow the Brahmanas are never destroyed. Even when they leave from this world, they never meet with death. They always triumph. Those Mahatmans, those that have subdued their souls, who accept the words spoken by the Brahmanas, are never defeated. They always prevail.

The tejas and shakti of Kshatriyas who scorch everything are impotent when they encounter the energy and power of Brahmanas. The Bhrigus conquered the Talajanghas. The son of Angiras conquered the Nipas. Bharadwaja conquered the Vitahavyas and the Ailas. Though all these Kshatriyas were masters of diverse kinds of astras, those Brahmanas, with only black deer skins for their emblems, overcame them decisively.

Bestowing the earth upon the Brahmanas and illuminating both the worlds with the splendour of such a deed, one must do that by which one may attain the end of all things. Like fire hidden within wood, everything that is said, heard or read in this world lies latent in the Brahmana. Listen to the itihasa of the conversation between Krishna and Bhumi Devi.

Krishna asked, "Mother of all creatures, auspicious Devi, I want to ask you to dispel a doubt. By what karma does a grihasta succeed in purifying himself of all his sins?"

Bhumi Devi replied, "One must serve the Brahmanas. This conduct is cleansing and excellent. If a man serves Brahmanas with reverence all his impurities are washed away. Prosperity arises from such behaviour; fame stems from this. And from this springs forth Atmagyana, the knowledge of the Soul. Through such conduct a Kshatriya becomes a maharathika and a parantapa, and acquires great renown.

This is what Narada said to me: if one desires many kinds of prosperity, one must always revere a Brahmana that is well-born, of firm vows and

conversant with the shastras. He who is praised by Brahmanas, who are higher than all other men, grows in riches. He who speaks ill of the Brahmanas is soon disgraced, even as a lump of unbaked earth is destroyed when cast into the sea.

In the same manner, any cruelty to the Brahmanas is sure to bring shame and ruin. Behold the dark spots on the moon and the salty waters of the sea. The great Indra, too, had once been marked all over with a thousand phalluses. It was through the power of the Brahmanas that those penises were transformed into a thousand eyes.

Krishna, look at how all those events transpired. Desiring fame and prosperity and diverse realms of felicity in the next world, a man of pure conduct and soul must live in accordance with the dictates of the Brahmanas."

Bhishma continues, 'Hearing these words of the Devi, Krishna exclaimed, "Uttamam! Uttamam!" and duly worshipped her. Son of Pritha, having heard this discourse between Bhumi Devi and Madhava, you too, must always worship all superior Brahmanas with a rapt soul. Doing this, you will surely obtain what is highly beneficial for you!'"

CANTO 35

"Bhishma says, 'Brahmanas, by birth alone, become beings adored by all creatures, and as guests are entitled to eat the first portion of all cooked food. From them flow the great Purusharthas, the goals of life: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. They are the friends of all creatures in the universe. They are also the mouths of the Devas for food placed into Brahmanas' mouths is eaten by the gods.

Worshipped with reverence, they bless us with prosperity by uttering auspicious words. Scorned by our enemies, may the enraged Brahmanas curse them. Those who know ancient history recite the following Riks of how Brahma, after having created the Brahmanas, ordained their duties:

A Brahmana must never do anything other than what has been established for him. Protected, they should protect others. By conducting themselves in this way, they are sure to attain what is beneficial for them. By doing what has been ordained for them, they are sure to acquire spiritual wealth. They will be both the high standards for all creatures to aspire to, and the reins for restraining them. A learned Brahmana must never do that which is laid down for Sudras. By such a deed, a Brahmana loses merit.

With Vedic study he is sure to obtain prosperity and intelligence, and energy and puissance to overcome all enemies, as also glory of the most exalted kind. By offering oblations of ghrita to the Devas, the Brahmanas are blessed and become so worthy that they take precedence over even children in the matter of all kinds of cooked food.

Suffused with faith, marked by compassion towards all creatures, and devoted to self-restraint and the study of the Vedas, all your wishes will be fulfilled. Whatever exists in the world of Manavas, whatever occurs in the

realm of the Devas, can all be acquired with through tapasya and gyana, and the observance of vratas and subduing the senses.

I have thus recited to you the verses that were sung by Brahma himself, moved by his deep love for the Brahmanas and his great wisdom. The power of those devoted to tapasya is equal to the power of kings.

They are compelling, fierce, and as swift as lightning in what they do. Among them are those with the strength of lions and then those that possess the might of tigers. Some of them have the power of boars, some with that of the great stag, and others with that of crocodiles. Some among them have the lash and venom of poisonous snakes, and the bite of some resembles that of sharks.

Some of them can decimate their enemies with words, while others can destroy with a mere glance of their eyes. While some are like snakes of virulent poison, some of them have gentle natures. The dispositions of the Brahmanas are of diverse kinds.

The Mekalas, the Dravidas, the Lathas, the Paundras, the Konwasiras, the Saundikas, the Daradas, the Darvas, the Chauras, the Savaras, the Varvaras, the Kiratas, the Yavanas, and numerous other tribes of Kshatriyas have become Sudras by the wrath of Brahmanas. By disdain of the Brahmanas, the Asuras were forced to take refuge in the depths of the ocean. Through the grace of the Brahmanas, the Devas have become Swargavasis.

Akasa cannot be touched. The Himavat Mountains cannot be moved from their place. The flow of Ganga cannot be checked by a dam. The Brahmanas cannot be subjugated. Kshatriyas cannot rule the earth without seeking the favour of the Brahmanas.

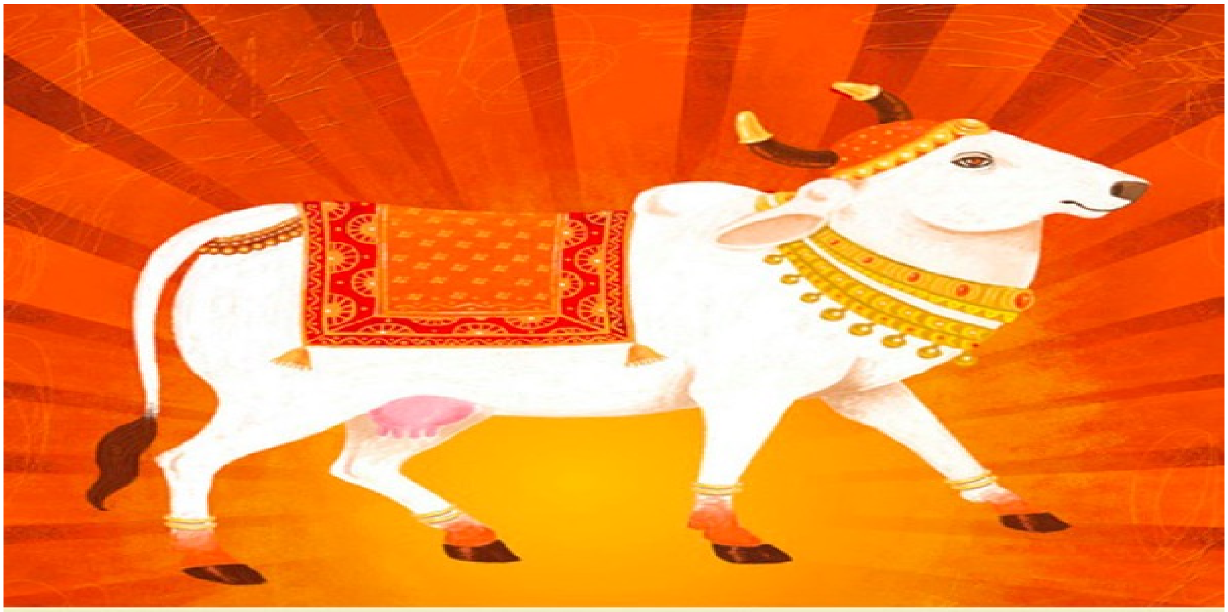
The Brahmanas are high-souled beings. They are the gods of the very Devas. If you wish to enjoy the sovereignty over the earth and her seas, worship them with gifts and dutiful service. When they accept a gift, their fierce energy and power abates. Rajan, you must protect your vamsa from those Brahmanas that do not want to accept gifts.'"

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THE COMPLETE

MAHABHARATA

Anusasana Parva

{11}

Ramesh Menon
series editor: RAMESH MENON

THE COMPLETE MAHABHARATA

Anusasana Parva

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Volume 11

Anusasana Parva (Part II)

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To
The Suta Romaharshana, Vyasa's disciple Vaisampayana, all the anonymous pauranikas throughout the holy land, who swelled this greatest of epics across the centuries,
and
Kisari Mohan Ganguli
on whose majestic nineteenth-century translation of the Mahabharata this present rendering is based.

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PART II

Anusasana Parva

CANTO 36

Vaisampayana said, “Bhishma says, ‘Listen, O Yudhishtira, to the old itihasa of the discourse between Sakra and Sambara. Once upon a time, assuming the guise of an ascetic, with matted locks on his head and his body smeared all over with ashes, Indra rode on an ugly chariot and went into the presence of the Asura Sambara.

Indra said, “Through what conduct, Sambara, have you been able to become sovereign of all your kind? For what reason do all people regard you as being superior? Tell me this truly and in detail.”

Sambara said, “I never harbour any ill-will towards the Brahmanas. Whatever instructions they impart I accept with unquestioning reverence. When Brahmanas are engaged in interpreting the scriptures, I listen to them with great happiness. Having heard their interpretations I never disregard them, nor do I ever offend them in any way. I always worship Brahmanas who are endowed with intelligence, seek knowledge from them and worship their feet.

Approaching me with confidence, they always address me with affection and enquire after my welfare. If they ever happen to be heedless, I am always heedful. If they happen to sleep, I remain wakeful. Like bees drenching the cells of the comb with honey, they who are my instructors and rulers, always drench me with the nectar of knowledge. I am thus always devoted to the path pointed out by the shastras, and am perfectly free from malice or evil passion.

Whatever they say with cheerful hearts, I always accept, using my memory and understanding. I am careful of my own faith in them and I

think of my own inferiority to them. I lick the nectar that dwells at the tips of their tongues, and this is why I occupy a position far above that of all others of my kind, like the moon transcending all the stars. The scriptural wisdom, which falls from the lips of the Brahmanas and listening to which every wise man acts in the world, constitutes amrita on earth and may be likened to eyes of remarkable vision.

Witnessing the war between the Devas and the Asuras in days of old, and understanding the power of the instructions of the Brahmanas, my father became filled with delight and wonder.

Beholding the puissance of the high-souled Brahmanas, my sire asked Chandramas, 'How do the Brahmanas attain success?'

Soma said, 'Brahmanas become crowned with success through their tapasya. Their strength consists in speech, while the prowess of Kshatriyas resides in their arms. Brahmanas, however, have speech for their weapons.

A Brahmana should study the Vedas or at least Pranava, AUM, while undergoing privations and hardships in his guru's asrama. Divesting himself of anger and renouncing earthly attachments, he should become a Yati, looking upon all things with an equal eye. If he masters all the Vedas and acquires great knowledge in his master's home, he attains a position that will command respect and no one will denounce him as being untutored or as one who has not travelled or seen the world. Like a snake swallowing mice, the earth swallows up these two: a king who is unwilling to fight and a Brahmana who is unwilling to leave home to acquire knowledge. Pride destroys the prosperity of persons of little intelligence. An unwed maiden, if she conceives, becomes stained. A Brahmana incurs reproach by staying home.'

This is what my father heard from Soma of wonderful aspect. My father began to reverence the Brahmanas. Like him, I also worship and adore them."

Hearing these words from a prince among Danavas, Indra began to worship the Brahmanas, and as a result he acquired lordship over the Devas.'"

CANTO 37

"Yudhishtira says, 'Which amongst these three persons should be regarded as the best to make gifts to: one who is a stranger, one who lives with and who is known to the giver, or one who presents himself before the giver, coming from a long distance?'

Bhishma says, 'All these are equal. The eligibility of some consists in their soliciting alms to perform sacrifices, or to pay their guru dakshina or maintain their wives and children, or to follow the vow of wandering over the earth, never soliciting anything but taking when given. We should, however, make gifts without afflicting those that depend upon us. By afflicting one's dependants, one afflicts one's own self. The stranger, who has come for the first time, should be regarded as a proper deserver of gifts, in the same light as the one who has been living with the giver, and the one who comes from a distant place.'

Yudhishtira says, 'It is true that we should make gifts to others without depriving anyone or violating the injunctions of the scriptures. One should, however, ascertain that the person is deserving of receiving gifts. He should be such that the gift itself, by being made over to him, may not grieve.'

Bhishma says, 'If the ritwik, the purohita, the guru, the acharya, the sishya, the sambandhi, and one's own kinsmen are learned and free from malice, they should be deemed worthy of respect and worship. Those in whom these qualities are not found cannot be so regarded.

Hence, one should, with deliberation, examine those with whom one comes into contact. Absence of wrath, truthfulness of speech, abstention from causing injury, sincerity and peaceful conduct, the absence of pride,

modesty, renunciation, self-restraint and contentment of soul: he in whom these are inherent, and in whom there is no evil, should be regarded as being deserving. A sage is such a one who deserves every honour and hospitality, whether he is well-known and familiar, or a stranger recently come, or seen for the very first time.

He who disregards the Vedas, and the shastras, or approves of all breaches of restraint in society, only brings about his own ruin, and should never be regarded as worthy of receiving honour or gifts. A Brahmana who is vain of his learning, who speaks ill of the Vedas or who is devoted to pointless argumentation, or who just wants to be victorious in disputations amongst good men by disproving the existence of neeti and dharma, who ascribes everything to chance, and censures and reproaches others, who reproves Brahmanas, who is suspicious of all, who is foolish and bereft of judgment, or who is rude, should be known to be as hateful as a dog, for he spends his breath in vain, barking all the while, always wanting to bite, and seeks to destroy the authority of all the scriptures.

Those practices that support society, the duties of dharma, and all deeds that benefit oneself, must be attended to. A man who lives attending to these grows in prosperity for everlasting time. By paying off the debt one owes to the Devas by performing sacrifices, that to the Rishis by studying the Vedas, that to the Pitris by procreating children, that to the Brahmanas by giving gifts to them and that to Sadasyas by feeding them, in due order, and with purity of intention, and properly keeping to the laws of the shastras, a grihasta, a householder, does not fall away from righteousness.'"

CANTO 38

Yudhishtira says, ‘O best of the Bhaaratas, I wish to hear you discourse on the disposition of women. Women are said to be the root of all evil, and fickle and frail.’

Bhishma cites a discourse between the celestial Rishi Narada and the Apsara Panchachuda. ‘In ancient times, the Rishi Narada, having roamed over all the world, met the Apsara Panchachuda of faultless beauty, who dwelt in Brahmaloka, and her every limb was endowed with great beauty. Narada addressed her, saying, “O you of the slender waist, I have a doubt in my mind. Can you resolve it?”

The Apsara said to him, “If the subject is known to me and if you think me competent to speak upon it, I shall certainly tell you what I think.”

Narada said, “O amiable one, I shall not appoint you to any task that is beyond your competence. Beautiful one, I wish to hear from you of the nature and disposition of women.”

Hearing this from the Devarishi, Panchachuda replied, “Being myself a woman, I cannot speak ill of women. You know what women are and with what natures they are endowed. It does not become you, O Devarishi, to set me to such a task.”

Narada said, “While that is true indeed, slender-waisted one, one incurs fault by saying what is untrue. However, in speaking the truth there can be no sin.”

Now the Apsara Panchachuda, of sweet smiles, consented to answer Narada’s question. She then addressed herself to mention what the eternal faults of women are!

Panchachuda said, “Even if a high-born woman is blessed with beauty and has protectors, these women want to transgress the restraints assigned to them. This fault truly stains them, O Narada. There is nothing that is more sinful than women. Verily, women are the root of all sins. That, certainly, is known to you. Having husbands of fame, wealth, handsome features, and completely obedient to them, they are still prepared to be unfaithful to them if they get an opportunity. This, mighty one, is a great weakness with women that, casting off their modesty, they cultivate companionship with men of sinful habits and intentions. Women betray a liking for men who court them, who approach their presence, and who respectfully serve them to even a slight extent.

Only through want of solicitation, or fear of relatives, women, who are naturally impatient of all restraints, do not transgress those that have been ordained for them, and remain by the side of their husbands. They never take into consideration the age of the person they are prepared to favour. Ugly or handsome, if he merely happens to belong to the opposite sex, women are ready to enjoy his company. That women remain faithful to their husbands is due not to their fear of sin, to compassion, wealth, or affection that springs up in their hearts for kinsmen and children.

Women living in the bosom of respectable families envy the condition of other women who are young and well-adorned with jewels and ornaments, and who lead a carefree life. Even those that are loved by their husbands, and treated with great respect, are seen to bestow their favours upon men that are hump-backed, blind, idiots, or dwarfish. Women may be seen to like the companionship of even men that cannot walk or who are ugly.

O great Rishi, there is no man in this world whom women regard as unfit for companionship. Unable to find men, out of fear of relatives, of death and imprisonment, women remain within the constraints prescribed for them. They are exceedingly restless, wanton and ever hanker after new companions and lovers. In consequence of their very natures being fickle, they are incapable of being faithful in love. Their disposition is such that, when bent upon transgression, they can never be restrained. Verily, women are truly as the wise say they are.

Fire is never sated with fuel. Oceans can never be filled with the waters that rivers bring into them. Death is never satisfied with killing all living creatures. Similarly, women are never satiated with men. This, O Devarishi,

is another mystery connected with women. As soon as they see a handsome and charming man, unfailing signs of desire appear. They never show sufficient regard for husbands, who satisfy their wishes, do what is agreeable and protect them from want and danger. Women never regard so highly even articles of enjoyment in abundance, ornaments or other possessions as they do the intimate company of men.

Yama, Vayu, Mrityu, the Patalas, the equine mouth, Badavamukha, that roves through the ocean, vomiting ceaseless flames, the sharpness of the razor, virulent poison, the snake, and fire—all these exist together in women. That eternal Brahman from where the five great elements have sprung into existence, from where the Creator Brahma ordained the universe, and whence, indeed, men have sprung, verily, from the same eternal source have women sprung into existence. At that same time, O Narada, when women were created, these faults that I have enumerated were planted in them.'"

CANTO 39

Yudhishtira says, ‘All men, O king, in this world, are seen to attach themselves to women, overcome by the illusion that is created by the Divine Being. Similarly, women too, are seen to attach themselves to men.

This happens all over the world. On this subject a question exists in my mind. Why, O delighter of the Kurus, when women are stained with so many faults, do men still attach themselves to them? Who, again, are those men with whom women are most pleased and who are they with whom they are not? Pitamaha, explain to me how men can protect women. While men take pleasure in women and sport with them, women, it seems, are engaged in deceiving men.

Then, again, if a man once falls into their hands, it is difficult for him to escape. Like cows ever seeking fresh pastures, women seek new men, one after another. That maya which the Asura Sambara possessed, the Asura Namuchi, Bali or Kumbhinasi, the sum of all those is possessed by women.

If men laugh, women laugh. If man weeps, they weep. If the time requires, they receive the man that is disagreeable to them with agreeable words. The neeti which Sukra, the preceptor of the Asuras, and the Devaguru Brihaspati knew, cannot be regarded as being deeper or more distinguished for its subtlety than what woman’s intelligence naturally brings forth. How can women, then, be restrained by men? They make a lie appear as truth, and a truth appear as a lie. They who can do this, I ask, O Kshatriya, how can they be ruled by those of the other sex?

It seems to me that Brihaspati and other great thinkers, O slayer of foes, evolved the science of policy from observing women. Whether treated by men with respect or with disdain, women are seen to turn the heads and agitate the hearts of men.

Living creatures, O Mahabaho, are naturally virtuous. This is what has been heard; hence how can this be consistent with fact? For treated with affection and respect, or otherwise, women are seen to deserve censure for their wanton conduct towards men.

Great doubts fill my mind: when such is their very nature, how can men restrain them within the bounds of dharma? Tell me this, O most blessed scion of Kuru's race! It becomes you to tell me whether women can at all be restrained within the bounds prescribed by the scriptures or if anyone before our time did succeed in so restraining them.'

CANTO 40

Bhishma says, 'It is even so as you say, mighty one, and there is nothing untrue in all that you say. You are truly a scion of Kuru's vamsa, and on the subject of women, I will narrate the old story of how, in yesteryears, the noble Vipula succeeded in restraining women within the bounds laid down for them. I will also tell you, O king, how women were created by the Grandsire Brahma and the object for which they were created.

There is no creature more sinful, O son, than woman. Woman is a blazing fire, an illusion that the Daitya Maya created. She is the sharp edge of the razor, poison, a snake and fire; and verily, all these together. I have heard that, once, all the human race was distinguished by dharma, and that, in course of natural evolution, they attained the status of gods. This alarmed the Devas. They, Parantapa, went together to the Pitamaha, and, heads bowed in reverence, told him what troubled them, and then stood silent in his presence, with eyes cast down. The mighty Grandsire, having ascertained what was in the hearts of the Devas, created women, using an Atharvan rite. In a former creation, son of Kunti, all women were virtuous.

Those, however, that sprang from this new creation of Brahma's, using an illusion, were sinful. The Grandsire bestowed upon women the ravening lust for enjoyment, all kinds of carnal pleasures, thereby tempting them to pursue the other sex, men.

The powerful Lord of the gods created wrath to be the companion of lust. Men, yielding to the power of kama and krodha, sought the company of women. Women have no special dharma prescribed for them. Even this is

the niyama that was laid down. The Sruti declares that women are endowed with the most powerful senses, with no scriptures to follow, and they are as living lies.

Beds, seats, ornaments, food and drink, and the absence of all that is respectable and righteous, indulgence in disagreeable words, love of sexual companionship: these were bestowed by Brahma upon women. The Creator himself cannot keep them within the limits of propriety; then what need be said of mere men?

Mahabaho, I once heard how Vipula succeeded in protecting his guru's wife in ancient times.

There was in days of yore a most blessed Rishi called Devasarman, of great celebrity. He had a wife, Ruchi, who was unequalled on earth for beauty. Her loveliness intoxicated everyone who saw her among the Devas, Gandharvas and Danavas. Indra, the chastiser of Paka, the slayer of Vritra, was particularly enamoured of her and coveted her person. The great Rishi Devasarman was fully cognisant of the nature of women, and, to the best of his power, he protected Ruchi from every kind of evil influence. The Rishi knew that Indra was held back by no scruples in slaking his lust with other men's wives, and the sage put forth all his power to constantly safeguard his wife.

Then, there came a time when the Rishi wanted to perform a sacrifice. He began to think of how his wife could be protected from Indra while he was away. Blessed with high punya, he hit upon the course he would adopt. Summoning his favourite disciple, whose name was Vipula and who was of Bhrigu's race, Devasarman said, "I shall leave home for a while to perform a yagna. The king of the Devas always covets this Ruchi of mine. Do you, during my absence, protect her, putting forth all your energy. You will pass your time vigilantly because of Indra. O foremost of Bhrigu's vamsa, beware, for Purandara assumes many disguises."'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by his guru, the ascetic Vipula, his senses under control, always engaged in stern tapasya, possessed of the splendour of Surya or Agni, knowing of all the duties of dharma, and ever truthful in speech, answered him, saying, "Tathaastu, so be it."

However, as his master was about to set out, Vipula asked him again, "Tell me, Muni, what forms does Sakra assume? Of what kind is his body and what is his maya? You must tell me all this."

The illustrious Rishi described to the great Vipula all the illusions of Sakra, O Bhaarata.

Devasarman said, “The mighty Indra, Rishi, is full of maya and he assumes whatever forms he chooses. Sometimes he wears a diadem and holds the vajra; sometimes wearing a crown on his head, he adorns himself with earrings and in a moment he transforms himself into a devil. Sometimes, he appears with coronal locks on his head; soon again, O son, he shows himself with matted jata and clad in rags.

At times, he assumes a godly and gigantic frame. The next moment, he transforms himself into one of emaciated limbs, and again wearing rags. Always contradictory in appearances—fair, dark, ugly, handsome, young, old—at times he appears as a Brahmana, at others as a Kshatriya, as a Vaisya and as a Sudra.

He of a hundred sacrifices appears at times as a man born of impure order, mixed castes, varnasamkarsana: the son of a superior father by an inferior mother or of an inferior father by a superior mother. Frequently, he appears in various bird and animal forms. He shows himself as a Deva, then again as a Daitya, and then he assumes the guise of a human king. At times he appears as being plump or fat; at others, as one whose limbs have been broken by wayward Vayu in the body.

Able to assume any form, he can appear as an idiot, destitute of all intelligence. He also assumes the forms of flies and gnats.

O Vipula, no one can make him out because of these innumerable guises that he is master of, not even the Creator of the universe.

He makes himself invisible when he chooses, except to the eye of knowledge. Indra transforms himself into the wind; yes, the mighty one always assumes these myriad disguises. Will you, therefore, Vipula, protect this slender-waisted wife of mine with great care? O best of the Bhargavas, will you see that the Devaraja does not defile my wife, like a wretched dog licking the havis kept for a sacrifice?”

With these words and intent upon performing his yagna, Devasarman set out from his asrama.

Vipula thought, “I will certainly protect this devi Ruchi in every way from Indra. But what means should I use to protect my guru’s wife? Sakra has great powers of maya, awesome tejas, and is irresistible. Indra cannot be kept out by enclosing this retreat of ours, or by fencing the yard, since he can assume innumerable and subtle forms.

Assuming the form of the wind, he may ravish my guru's wife. I believe the best course for me would be to enter the devi's body through yogic power, and remain there. There is no other way than through my yoga shakti to protect her from the king of the Devas. If, on his return, my master sees his spouse defiled, he will surely curse me in anger, for he has great tapasya and possesses mystic vision.

Yes, this devi cannot be safeguarded as other women are because of Indra's powers of maya. Alas, critical is the situation in which I find myself, and I must obey my guru's command. And if I do watch over her successfully with yoga shakti, my feat will be regarded by all as being wonderful.

So, with yoga, I will assume control of her body, even as a drop of water lies on a lotus-leaf and yet does not wet it. If I am free of the taint of passion, I cannot incur any sin by doing what I wish. As a wayfarer shelters for a day in any empty dwelling he finds shall I spend this day within the body of my guru's wife. Verily, with my mind rapt in yoga, I shall dwell in her today!"

Carefully considering these points of dharma of all the Vedas and their angas, and with an eye on the great measure of tapasya, which both his preceptor and he possessed, Vipula concluded that the only way to protect the devi Ruchi was to enter her body, in occult fashion, and he went to some pains to accomplish what he planned.

Listen now to me, O king, and I will tell you what he did. Vipula, of much penance, sat himself down beside Ruchi, of faultless features, in her kutila, her cottage. He then began to speak to her gently, bringing her over to the cause of dharma.

Fixing his gaze to hers, uniting the light from her with that which issued from his, Vipula, in a subtle form, a sukshma rupa, entered the devi's body, even as the element of Vayu, wind, does Akasa, ethereal space. Vipula remained unmoving within her, invisibly, like her shadow; and every part of her in his control, he stayed thus, to protect her from Indra.

Ruchi herself knew nothing of this! It was in this way, Rajan, that Vipula continued to keep his guru's wife safe until his master Devasarman returned after completing the sacrifice he had gone to perform.'

CANTO 41

Bhishma says, 'One day, assuming a form of divine beauty, Indra came to Rishi Devasarman's asrama. Verily, O king, he came as an Apsara-like beauty who would inspire envy in even other women. As the Deva entered the hermitage, he saw Vipula, who sat still as a post, gazing vacantly before him, as if his eyes had no sight, like a figure in a painting. Ruchi was also there, she of the long and enchanting eyes, rounded hips and deep and full breasts. Her great eyes were like lotus petals, and her face was as radiant as the full moon.

Seeing Indra in his assumed guise, Ruchi wanted to welcome him. She was wonderstruck and curious about who this dazzling beauty was. Yet, try as she would to rise to make the visitor welcome, Vipula, who had taken subtle possession of her body, prevented her. She found she could not move at all.

Then Indra spoke softly and sweetly to her, "O sweet smiles, know that I am Indra, come here for you, for I am stricken with desire, and driven to distraction thinking of you, and time goes on."

Vipula heard Indra and saw everything from within Ruchi's body. And even though Ruchi heard every word Indra spoke, she could not move at all to welcome him, since Vipula controlled her body and senses, and she remained speechless. Using his yoga shakti, binding her with bonds of occult power, Vipula of mighty tejas restrained her from speaking or stirring.

Indra, abashed a little, said again to Ruchi, "Come, come to me, my lovely one!"

She tried to answer him warmly, but Vipula did not let her utter a word that she meant to. Instead, the words that he made her say were, "Why have you come here?"

She said them in chaste, formal language, Ruchi who was as beautiful as the moon. No sooner did she speak, than she felt ashamed at what she said and her own tone of voice, which so surprised her.

Hearing her, Indra was crestfallen. Then, O king, Indra sensed something amiss, and with his mystic eye he saw Vipula within Ruchi's body, like some reflection in a strange mirror. Indra trembled that the Rishi would curse him. Now the mighty Vipula left the body of his guru's wife, and returned to his own body.

He addressed the terrified Indra. Vipula said, "Purandara of the sinful mind, you have no control over your senses and neither the gods nor men will worship you in times to come. Have you forgotten, O Sakra, when Gautama cursed you, and your body sprouted a thousand phalluses, which the merciful sage later changed into eyes?

Ah, you are exceedingly foolish and your soul is still lascivious and unclean, and your mind unstable. O sinner, I protect Ruchi, so fly back to where you belong. Truly, you are so foolish that I am filled with pity for you, and have no wish to kill you. My preceptor, of vast intelligence, has terrible power. If he saw you like this, come to seduce his wife, a look from his wrathful eyes would turn you to ashes.

Never dream of committing such a sin again. You must hold great Brahmanas in the highest esteem. See that you and your kin do not meet your deaths through the might of an angry Brahmana. Being immortal does not give you liberty to do whatever you please. Never take a Brahmana lightly, or cause him offence. And, also, know that there is nothing you cannot attain through tapasya."

Hearing these words of the Mahatman Vipula, Indra, overwhelmed with shame, vanished from there. A mere moment later, Devasarman of great tapasya and punya, having completed his yagna, returned to his asrama. On his guru's return, Vipula returned Ruchi, of faultless beauty, whom he had protected against Indra's lascivious designs. He then stood fearlessly, in reverence, before his guru and paid homage to his preceptor.

Devasarman rested awhile and when the couple were together, Vipula narrated the entire incident with Indra. Devasarman was pleased with what

his sishya had done, as he always was with his conduct and disposition, his vows and his penance.

Exclaiming, “Uttamam, excellent!” the most righteous Devasarman blessed Vipula with a boon, which the disciple received with a solemn vow that he would never stray from dharma.

Vipula went away to practise the most severe tapasya. Devasarman and Ruchi lived on together in that asrama in the solitary forest, fearless and content.’

CANTO 42

Bhishma says, 'Having served his master so admirably, Vipula of great tejas observed the most fervid tapasya, and in time came to own what he considered sufficient punya; and with some satisfaction and pride at his achievements, he wandered fearlessly over the earth. And, indeed, he was famed for his feat everywhere.

The mighty Bhargava was widely regarded as having conquered this world and the next by that exceptional protection he gave his guru's wife, as well as by his fierce tapasya. After a while, Kurunandana, the occasion arose for the ceremony of gifts for Ruchi devi's sister, at which abundant wealth and grain were to be given away.

Meanwhile, a certain Apsara of vivid beauty was ranging through the skies. From her body, as she coursed along, some flowers dropped down to the earth. Those flowers of celestial fragrance fell close to Devasarman's asrama. Ruchi picked up the flowers. Soon thereafter, Ruchi was invited to the country of the Angas; Ruchi's sister, Prabhavati, was the queen of Chitraratha, king of the Angas. Ruchi, her complexion superior, wore the unearthly blooms and went to the kingdom of Anga and to her sister's palace.

On seeing the heavenly flowers that Ruchi wore, Prabhavati wanted some for herself. Ruchi of the beautiful face told her husband of her sister's wish, and the Rishi agreed to grant his sister-in-law's desire. Summoning Vipula into his presence, Devasarman of austere tapasya commanded his disciple to bring him some flowers of the same kind, saying, "Go, go!"

Without hesitation, Vipula replied, “So be it!” and hurried to the place where Ruchi had picked up the flowers. Arriving where the flowers had fallen from the sky, he found a few still lying strewn on the ground. They were as fresh as if they had been newly plucked from the plants on which they grew; none had wilted or even drooped in the least. He gathered those exquisite flowers of mesmerising fragrance.

O Bhaarata, Vipula found those flowers as the result of his tapasya. Having got them, he happily set out for the city of Champa, adorned with festoons of unworldly Champakas. On his way, he saw a couple moving in a circle, hand in hand. One of them made an abrupt movement and broke the cadence of their movement; a dispute arose, with each one blaming the other. “You took a quicker step!” The other retorted, “No, verily!”

Both were obstinate, O king, and they began arguing, and then they swore an angry oath. Vipula was startled to hear himself being mentioned in that oath!

They both said, “Let the one among us who spoke falsely meet the fate of Vipula in the next world! That most painful of all fates.”

Hearing this, Vipula’s face became pale. He began to reflect, “I have performed stern tapasya. The dispute between the couple is searing and painful to me. What sin have I committed that they should refer to my end in the next world as the most painful one of all?”

O best of kings, with his head hung down, and with a dejected heart, Vipula began to think of what sin he had committed.

Walking ahead, he saw six men playing with dice made of gold and silver. Engrossed in the game, they seemed to be so excited that the hair on their bodies stood on end. A dispute arose among them, and Vipula heard them swear the same oath as the couple.

“The one among us who spoke falsely shall meet the most dreadful fate of Vipula in the next world!”

Hearing this again, Vipula strove earnestly to recollect any transgression of his from his early years, but failed, O Kurunandana. Ah, he began to burn like a fire within a fire, his mind aflame with grief. After deep and anguished reflection, Vipula at last remembered what he had done to protect the chastity of his guru’s wife Ruchi from the lascivious Indra.

“I entered the body of that devi, limb within limb, face within face, and, having done this, I hid that truth from my guru!”

Indeed, most blessed king, without doubt that was a grave sin. Coming to the city of Champa, he gave the flowers to his guru. In devotion, he worshipped his preceptor.’

CANTO 43

Bhishma says, 'Seeing Vipula returned from his mission, Devasarman spoke to him. Listen to what the Rishi said, O king.

"Vipula, during the course of your journey through the great forest, what did you see? My sishya, the people you saw knew you, and both my wife and I knew the manner in which you protected Ruchi."

Vipula said, "O illumined Rishi, who are the two whom I first saw? And the six that I saw subsequently? Do all of them know me? And how do you know about them?"

Devasarman said, "The first couple, who were dancing seamlessly, moving in an unbroken circle, were Day and Night, and the six men whom, learned Brahmana, you saw playing cheerfully with the dice, are the Six Seasons. All of them knew the sin of which you have been guilty. Having committed a sin in secrecy, no sinner should assume that his sin is known only to himself. When a man sins in secret, the Seasons as well as the Day and the Night are witness to it.

You thought your sin was hidden; you were pleased and did not tell me the whole truth. But the Seasons and Day and Night know everything that happens in this world, and all that is good or bad within us. They spoke to you as they did to remind you that everything is known, even that which you did not have the courage to tell me.

For this reason those regions that are reserved for the sinful will be yours. You hid what you did from me. You protected my wife whose character by nature, as a woman, is sinful. I am grateful, and no sin was

committed. Vipula, if I had known that you had sinned, I would have cursed you.

However desirable the union of women with men may be, you protected Ruchi in a different and pure spirit. If you had done otherwise, I would have cursed you. My son, you protected my wife in manner even as if I had knowledge of it. I am grateful and now relieved of all anxiety, and you shall find not hell but swarga for yourself!"

Saying this to Vipula, Devasarman and his wife themselves ascended into heaven, leaving Vipula relieved and happy.

During the course of our conversation, O king, the great Rishi Markandeya narrated this tale on the banks of the Ganga. I, therefore, say to you that you must always safeguard women from every temptation and opportunity to sin. Amongst them, some are virtuous and some are not. Virtuous women are blessed and they are the very mothers of the universe, for it is they who love and cherish all creatures everywhere. They support the earth with all her waters and forests.

Sinful women, on the other hand, are the very destroyers of their races. Their hearts and their resolves are evil, and they are known by the evil manifested in their bodies.

Only great men, Mahatmans, can protect women, and they cannot be protected in any other way. Women, O king, are fierce and possess great power. They bear no one any love and only their insatiable lust for sexual union drives them. Why some women are even like the most fell mantras from the Atharva, those that kill.

Even after being married, they abandon their husbands for other men since they are never satisfied with one. Pandava, men should neither feel affection, nor should they harbour possessiveness or jealousy for women. O king, a man must have dealings with women always keeping dharma before him; and not with enthusiasm and attachment, but with reluctance and detachment; otherwise a man will meet his end. Kurunandana, this must be borne in mind at all times and under all circumstances.

Only one man, Vipula, ever succeeded in protecting a woman. There is none else in the three worlds who can do what he did, and without himself sinning."

CANTO 44

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, tell me what is the first dharma of man, which is the root of the welfare of kinsmen, of the home, of the manes and of guests? I believe the marriage of one's daughter should be regarded as the first duty. But upon what sort of man should one bestow one's daughter?'

Bhishma says, 'There are five different kinds of weddings: the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Gandharva, Asura and the Rakshasa.

The one in which the birth, conduct and character of the groom are ascertained, and then the daughters are given in marriage, is the Brahmana way of marriage; and this is how all good Brahmanas give their daughters away.

Where the father decides to give his daughter in marriage, with gifts of diverse kinds to the groom, is the Kshatriya form of marriage.

The Gandharva vivaha is where the father of the girl, disregarding his own wishes, marries his daughter to her liking; and this is also in accord with the Vedas.

The wedding where a girl is purchased at a high cost and only after gratifying the greed of her kinsmen is known as the Asura vivaha.

The final kind of marriage, where there is the brutal slaying and cutting off the heads of weeping kinsmen, and where the bridegroom forcibly takes the girl, is called Rakshasa vivaha. Of the five, three are righteous, Yudhishtira, and two are sinful. The Rakshasa and the Asura forms should never be resorted to.

The Brahmana, Kshatriya and Gandharva forms are righteous, O king. Pure or mixed, these are the forms one engages in. A Brahmana can take three wives; a Kshatriya can take two wives and the Vaisya should take a wife from only his own order. The children born of these wives should all be regarded as equal.

Both in the Brahmana and Kshatriya forms of marriage, the woman chosen from the groom's own varna should be regarded as the best of all wives. Some say that men belonging to the three higher orders may take a woman from the Sudra order for enjoyment, but not dharma. Others, however, forbid the practice.

The righteous condemn the practice of begetting children from Sudra women. A Brahmana who begets children from a Sudra woman must perform expiation. A thirty-year-old man should wed a ten-year-old girl, called a Nagnika.

Or, a twenty-year-old should marry a seven-year-old girl. A girl who has neither a brother nor a father should not marry for she may be intended to become a putrika of her sire.

After attaining puberty, if the girl remains unmarried for three years, then in the fourth year she should look for a husband herself, without waiting any longer for her kinsmen to choose one for her. The children of such a girl do not lose their respectability nor does marriage with such a girl become disgraceful. If, instead of choosing a husband for herself, she does otherwise, she incurs the wrath of Prajapati. One should marry a girl who is not a sapinda of one's mother or of the same gotra of one's father. This is a practice consistent with the sacred law which Manu has declared.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Desirous of marriage, the groom gives a dower to the bride's kinsmen; some say the girl's kinsmen promise to give a dower; some grooms say, *I will abduct the girl by force!*; others simply display their wealth to the girl's kinsmen, intending to offer a portion thereof as dower; some actually take the hand of the girl with the rites of wedlock. I ask you, Pitama, whose wife does the girl actually become? To those who want to know the truth, you are the eye with which to see.'

Bhishma says, 'Actions of men, which have been approved, or settled in consultation, by the wise, are seen to be good. Falsehood, however, is always sinful.

The girl who becomes the wife, the sons born of her, the ritwiks, the gurus, sishyas and Upadhyayas present at the marriage, all become liable to

sin and expiation if the girl gives her hand to a man other than he whom she promised to marry. Some of the wise, though, are of the opinion that no expiation is necessary for this. Manu does not laud a girl living with a man whom she does not like.

Living as a wife with a man whom she does not like leads to disgrace and sin. Why, less sin is incurred when a girl is forcibly abducted for marriage, then bestowed upon the abductor by the girl's kinsmen with due rites and also a dower paid and accepted.

On the girl's kinsmen expressing their consent, mantras should be chanted and homa performed, as these truly accomplish their purpose. Mantras and homa recited and performed for a girl who has not been bestowed by her kinsmen do not accomplish their purpose.

The engagement made by the kinsmen of a girl is no doubt binding and sacred. But the engagement that is entered into by the man and the woman with the help of mantras is very much more so, for it is such an engagement which really creates the relationship of husband and wife. According to the scriptures, a husband should regard his wife as an acquisition due to his own karma of a previous life, or to what has been ordained by God. A man, therefore, incurs no reproach by accepting as his wife a girl who has been promised to another by her kinsmen or for whom dower has been accepted by them.'

Yudhishtira says, 'When, after receiving dower, a girl's father seeks out a more eligible man, to present himself for her hand—one that is blessed with the three gunas in judicious proportions—does that father incur reproach by rejecting the man from whom he first received dower, in favour of the one that is more eligible? In such a case, both alternatives seem to be wrong—discarding a man to whom the girl has been promised, or rejecting the more eligible one, since we must consider a father's solemn duty to give his daughter to the best suitor. In such a case, what should a father do?

To me, of all duties, this seems to demand the utmost measure of deliberation. I want to know the truth of it from you, for you are indeed my eyes of dharma. I beg you, explain this to me, Pitama, ah, I am never sated with listening to you!'

Bhishma says, 'The giving of dowry does not determine or confirm the acquisition of a wife, and this is well-known to the person paying it. He pays it only as the nominal price of the girl. Also, the good never bestow their daughters for the sake of the dowers that others offer. When a groom

possesses such qualities that are not agreeable to the girl's kinsmen, then a dower is demanded from him. However, when a father is pleased with a suitor's qualities and accomplishments, he says to him, "Do you wed my child, adorning her with proper ornaments of gold and gems."

And neither the bride's father nor the man who does as he is asked can be said to have demanded or given any dower, for such a transaction, in truth, is no sale at all. Bestowing a daughter, on acceptance of gifts given out of love and affection is an eternal practice. In matters of marriage, some fathers say, "I will give my daughter to a man with certain qualities." Some say with passion, "I will give my daughter only to such an individual!"

Such declarations do not amount to actual marriage. People are seen to solicit one another for the hands of maidens, give their word, and then break their pledge. Until it is actually solemnised with the proper rites and vows, a marriage cannot be said to have taken place. I have heard that that this was a boon granted to men of old by the Maruts themselves, regarding unwed daughters.

The ancient Rishis have declared that unless the groom is indeed fit and eligible, a young woman must not be given to a man in marriage, for a daughter is the very root of desire and of the descendants of a race. I, also, concur with this; it is indeed so. The practice of giving and taking a dowry to buy and sell daughters is known to men from days of great antiquity, and upon close examination you may well find many faults with this ancient and familiar practice. And indeed, the gift or acceptance of dowry alone cannot be regarded as solemnising a marriage or creating a husband and a wife. Listen to what I have to say on this matter.

Once, after defeating the Magadhas, the Kasis and the Kosalas, I brought away by force three maiden princesses for Vichitravirya. Two of them he married with the proper rites; the other he never formally wed, because the dowry had been paid in the form of valour.

My uncle, King Bahlika of the Kuru vamsa said, "The princess brought and not married with the due rites should be set free."

Vichitravirya was asked to marry that maiden princess with proper ceremonies. Doubting Bahlika's words, I asked others for their opinion. Since my uncle was profoundly learned and exceedingly punctilious in matters of dharma, and how men of dharma act with respect to marriage, I went to him, O king, and asked, "Sire, tell me what righteous men do in such a circumstance."

I repeated this several times with eagerness and curiosity, and Bahlika answered me, "If in your opinion a man and a woman become husband and wife on account of gifts and acceptance of dowry and not the actual taking of the young woman's hand with the proper rites, the father of the maiden, who permits and acknowledges such a marriage, allowing his daughter to go with the giver of the dowry, would follow a new creed, setting him apart from the scriptures. This is also what the shastras themselves declare. Men conversant with dharma and kartavya do not acknowledge a marriage declared through gifts and acceptance of dowry, but only one in which the groom takes the bride's hand with the prescribed rituals.

There is a well-known saying that a marriage is truly solemnised when the father actually bestows his daughter and she is accepted by the husband with all due rites.

The status of "wife" cannot be bestowed on young women acquired through sale and purchase and those who regard such transactions to be equal to marriage are unacquainted with the scriptures. No one should give his daughter to men who are not eligible by their worth and qualities; neither should a wife ever be bought, nor should a father sell his daughter. Only those with sinful souls, and driven by greed, besides, to sell and buy women to make slaves of them, regard a wife as arising from the gift and acceptance of a dowry.

On this subject, some once asked Prince Satyavat the following question, "If a man who gives dowry to the kinsmen of a young woman dies before the marriage, can another man marry the girl? O Satyavat, we are full of doubt about this, and beg you to clear our doubt for you are blessed with great wisdom and honoured by the wise. Enlighten us who want to know the truth."

Prince Satyavat answered them, "The kinsmen should bestow the bride on a groom whom they find eligible and do so without misgiving or hesitation. Without any doubt, the righteous would act in this way, why, even if the giver of the dowry is alive. Some say that the virgin wife or widow, whose marriage has not been consummated, either because of her husband's absence or death, may marry her husband's younger brother or another such relation. She also has a choice to become a sannyasin, and live a life of tapasya.

In the opinion of some, the younger brother of the husband or any other such relative may use the unused wife or widow. Others maintain that such

practice, though prevalent, is not the law of the scripture but that which arises from one's own desire. They also say the father of the bride can bestow her upon a different eligible man despite accepting the dowry from another. If, after the hand of a maiden is promised and even if all the rites before those of actual marriage are performed, the girl can still be given to a man other than the one to whom she had been promised.

The giver only incurs the sin of falsehood, of breaking his word: but the marriage performed with the due rituals to another man will be held sacred. The mantras chanted during a marriage accomplish their objective of bringing about an indissoluble union at the seventh step taken around the sacred fire. The woman becomes a wife to him who gives a gift of holy water. Young women must be given away in the following way; the wise know this for certain. A superior Brahmana should wed a maiden who is not unwilling, who belongs to a family equal to his own, in purity or status, and who is given away by her brother. Such a girl should be wed in the presence of fire, with the due rites, causing her, amongst other things, to circumambulate the sacred Agni for the ordained number of times."'

CANTO 45

Yudhishtira says, 'After giving dowry for a young woman, if the giver goes away, what should her father or other kinsmen do? Tell me this, Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'If the girl's father is sonless and he is wealthy, he should support her and return the dowry to the man who gave it. Indeed, if the father does not return the dowry to the giver, the daughter should be regarded as belonging to the giver. She may even raise a child for the giver during his absence by the means ordained in the scriptures. No other man, however eligible and able, can marry her, even with all the lawful rites.

Commanded by her father, Princess Savitri, in the days of old, chose a husband; some lauded what she did, but others conversant with the scriptures, condemned it. Some say that the righteous do not act in this manner, while others hold that dharma is even what the righteous do, their deeds being dharma's foremost evidence. Sukratu, the grandson of the high-souled Janaka, king of the Videhas, declared his opinion on this matter, "The holy scriptures have declared that women may enjoy freedom at any time of their life. If the righteous did not follow this path, how could this scriptural declaration exist? How can there be any question or doubt in respect of this matter? How can men violate their own dharma by acting differently? Such disregard of scriptural law is said to be the practice of the Asuras, which is unheard of even among the ancients."

The relationship of a husband and wife is very subtle, being acquired through destiny, and therefore, understood only with the help of the inspired revelations of the scriptures. It is different from the relationship of a man

and woman that consists only in the desire for sexual pleasure. This also was said by the king from Janaka's race.'

Yudhishtira says, 'On what authority to daughters inherit their fathers' wealth? Should the father regard both the daughter and son as equal?'

Bhishma says, 'A son is like one's own self; and since the son and the daughter are alike, both their father's children, how can any outsider inherit a man's wealth when he lives in the form of his daughter? Whatever wealth is called Yautuka property is maternal wealth, which belongs to the maiden daughter. If the maternal grandfather dies without having sons, the inheritance goes to the daughter's son. The daughter's son offers pindas to his own father as well as to his maternal grandfather. Hence, by law, there is no difference between the son and the daughter's son. When a father has only a daughter, he grants her the status of a son. If he then happens to have a son, the son then shares the inheritance with his sister.

Then, again, when a daughter is granted the status of a son, and the father takes a son by adoption or purchase, then she is regarded to be superior to such a son, for she takes three shares of her father's wealth while the adopted son receives only two. Where the daughter has been sold by her father, I do not see any reason why the status of the sold daughter's son should attach to the sons of one's own daughter. The sons born to a daughter who has been sold belong exclusively to her husband, even if he has not sired them himself, but acquired them according to the laws of the scriptures with regard to the bearing of children through the agency of others. Such sons can never belong, even as daughter's sons, to their maternal grandfather because of his having sold their mother for a price and lost all his rights in or to her by that act.

Such sons, again, become full of malice, evil in their ways, the misappropriators of others' wealth, and cunning and deceitful, having sprung from the Asura form of marriage, which is both sinful and vile. Those who know the ancient Itihasas, the histories of times of yore, and who also know dharma, and are devoted to the shastras, sing a legend once narrated by Yama himself. This is what Yama said:

"That man who acquires wealth by selling his own son, or bestowing his daughter by accepting a dower for his own livelihood, has to sink in seven terrible hells, one after another, all known as Kalasutra.

That wretch has to feed on sweat, urine and faeces all the time. In the Asura vivaha, the groom has to give a bull and a cow to the father-in-law.

Some agree this is a dower and some do not. The truth is that any gift, however small or big, O king, should be regarded as dowry. The practice of giving a daughter under such circumstances should be viewed as a sale. The fact that it has been practised by a few persons cannot be taken as the eternal usage.

In some forms of marriage, men marry girls after abducting them by force from amidst their kinsmen, and others have sexual intercourse with a maiden by force; both are regarded as perpetrators of sin. They have to fall into darkest hell. No human being should be subjected to sale, irrespective of whether they are related by blood or not. What need then be said of one's own child? No action which leads to punya can be performed with wealth acquired by sin."'

CANTO 46

Bhishma says, 'Those who know ancient history recite the following verse of Daksha, the son of Prachetas: A maiden cannot be considered to have been sold if no dowry is taken by her kinsmen.

The bride should be treated with respect and kindness, and everything else that is agreeable; her father, her brothers, her father-in-law and her husband's brothers should all adorn her with jewellery and ornaments, for this will bring happiness and all felicity to the family. A husband cannot have children to increase his vamsa, if his wife dislikes and fails to please him. Women, O king, should always be worshipped and treated with affection and when this is done, the very gods are pleased; and where women are not respected and worshipped, everything, all karma, becomes fruitless.

If a family ill-treats a woman, making her grieve and shed tears, and she curses them, that family soon becomes extinct. Houses cursed by women meet with ruin and destruction, as if scorched by some Atharvan rite. Such houses lose their splendour, growth and their prosperity ends. O king, on the eve of his departure for swarga, Manu made over women to the care and protection of men, saying that they are weak, that they fall an easy prey to the seductive wiles of men, and are naturally disposed to accept the love that is offered to them, and also that they are devoted to truth.

There are other women that are full of malice, covetous of honours, fierce in disposition, unlovable, and impervious to reason. All women, however, deserve to be honoured, and men must show them respect because the dharma of men depends upon women, all the artha and kama of men

depend upon women. So men must serve and worship them, bend their wills before them. The conception and birth of children, the nursing and nurture of children already born, and the accomplishment of all karma which upholds the needs of society—behold, all these have women for their cause!

By honouring women, one is sure to attain the fruition of all desires. In this connection, a princess of the house of Janaka, king of the Videhas, sang: "Women have no sacrifices ordained for them, and they are not called to perform sraddhas and are not required to regard facts or tell the truth. Serving their husbands with reverence and willing obedience is their only dharma. They succeed in conquering heaven by discharging just this duty. A woman is protected by her father during her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her sons in her old age; indeed, she must be protected at all times.

Those who wish for affluence and prosperity should honour women, for they are the goddess of prosperity. By cherishing women, O Bhaarata, one cherishes the goddess of prosperity herself, the Devi Sri, and by oppressing her, one afflicts the goddess of fortune.'"

CANTO 47

Yudhishtira says, ‘You know all the niyamas of all the scriptures, you know the dharma of kings and you are celebrated the world over as a great dispeller of doubts. I have a doubt; clear it for me, Pitamaha. I will not ask this of another, but only you, Mahabaho. How should a man who wants to tread the path of duty and righteousness conduct himself? It has been declared that a Brahmana can take four wives, one of his own varna, one a Kshatriya woman, a Vaisya and a Sudra woman, if the Brahmana desires sexual intercourse. Tell me, best of the Kurus, in what order do sons born to these different wives deserve to inherit their father’s wealth, who amongst them shall inherit what share of the paternal wealth and how is the distribution ordained?’

Bhishma says, ‘The Brahmana, the Kshatriya and the Vaisya are regarded as the three twice-born varnas, whom the Brahmana has been ordained to marry. Only through erroneous judgment or greed or lust, O scorcher of foes, does a Brahmana take a Sudra wife, even though the scriptures forbid him from doing so, and he finds a lowly end in the next world by taking a Sudra woman to his bed and he must perform expiation for this sin by the rites prescribed in the shastras. That expiation must be twice as severe if the Brahmana begets children by a Sudra woman.

I will now tell you, O Bharata, how paternal wealth is to be distributed among the children of different wives. First of all, the son born of the Brahmana wife shall have from his father’s wealth a bull of auspicious markings, and the best chariot or carriage. After this, what remains of the Brahmana’s possessions should be divided into ten equal portions. The son

by the Brahmana wife shall take four of these, and although the son born of the Kshatriya wife has, doubtless, the status of a Brahmana, in consequence of the distinction attaching to his mother, he shall take three of the ten shares into which the father's property has been divided.

The son born to the Vaisya wife, belonging to the third varna, shall take two of the three remaining shares of the father's property. It has been said, the son born of the Sudra wife is not considered an heir and hence should not inherit his father's wealth; however, out of compassion, one remaining share should be given to such a son.

Even this should be the order of the ten shares into which the Brahmana's wealth is to be divided. All sons born of the same mother or of mothers of the same caste, shall equally share their portion. The son born of the Sudra wife is untutored in the scriptures and the karmas ordained for Brahmanas, and is neither regarded nor invested with the status of a Brahmana. Only children born of wives of the three higher varnas should be recognised and given the status of Brahmanas. It has been said that there are only four varnas, and no fifth. The son by the Sudra wife shall take his part of the wealth after the distribution among the other children, as ordained; and he shall not take even this unless it is given to him. However, some portion of the sire's wealth should without doubt be given to the son of the Sudra wife.

Compassion, known as karuna or daya, is one of the cardinal virtues, and wherever it exercised, it always results in great punya. It is through compassion that some portion of a Brahmana father's property is given to the son of the Sudra wife. Irrespective of whether the Brahmana has children belonging to wives of other castes, to the son of a Sudra wife O Bhaarata, only a tenth part of the sire's wealth should be given, and no more.

A Brahmana should never acquire wealth without a purpose; if he has more wealth than what is necessary to maintain his family and himself for three years, he should perform sacrifices with that wealth.

The highest amount that a husband should give his wife is three thousand coins of the prevailing currency which can be spent as the wife pleases. However, she should never take wealth without her husband's knowledge, although upon her husband's death she can enjoy all his wealth by herself, if he leaves no child as his heir. However, she shall not sell or otherwise dispose any portion of his property and possessions.

Whatever wealth, Yudhishtira, the Brahmana wife receives as a gift from her father, should be taken after her death by her daughter, for the daughter is equal to a son as ordained in the scriptures, O delighter of Kurus. Thus has the law of inheritance been ordained, Bharatarishabha. Bearing in mind these laws about the distribution and disposal of wealth, one should never acquire wealth heedlessly or in vain.'

Yudhishtira says, 'If the son born of a Sudra woman by a Brahmana father has been declared in the scriptures to be not entitled to any wealth, by what exceptional rule then is a tenth part of the paternal property to be given to him? A son born of a Brahmana wife by a Brahmana is unquestionably a Brahmana. One born of a Kshatriya wife or of a Vaisya wife, by a Brahmana husband, is similarly invested with the status of a Brahmana. Why then, best of kings, are such sons to share the paternal wealth unequally? All of them, you have said, are Brahmanas, having been born of mothers that belong to the three higher orders equally entitled to be called deviyas.'"

"Bhishma says, 'O Parantapa, all spouses in this world are called data. Although that name is applied to all, yet there is this great distinction to be observed. If, having married three wives belonging to the three other orders, a Brahmana takes a Brahmana wife the very last of all, yet shall she be regarded as the first in rank among all the wives, and as deserving of the greatest respect. Indeed, among all the co-wives, she shall be the foremost in consideration. In her apartments should be kept all such articles that are necessary for the husband's baths, personal adornments, the cleaning of his teeth and application of kohl to his eyes. In her apartments should be kept the havya and the kavya and all else that the husband may require for the performance of his religious karmas.

If the Brahmana wife is in the house, no other wife is entitled to attend to these needs of the husband. Only the Brahmana wife, O Yudhishtira, should assist in these kriyas of the husband. The husband's food and drink, garlands, clothes and ornaments—all these should be given by the Brahmana wife to the husband, for she is the foremost in rank and consideration among all his wives. These are the niyamas of the scriptures as laid down by Manu, O joy of the Kurus. Even this, O monarch, is seen to be the course of eternal usage. If a Brahmana, O Yudhishtira, led by lust, acts in a different way, he shall come to be regarded as a Chandala among Brahmanas.

Sons born to Brahmana and Kshatriya wives may be said to be equal in status. For all that, the Kshatriya woman cannot be regarded as being the Brahmana woman's equal, and so a son born of the Brahmana wife must be also regarded as superior to that of the Kshatriya wife and he takes the best, O Yudhishtira, of his father's possessions.

Similarly, the Vaisya and the Kshatriya cannot be regarded as being equals by birth. Prosperity, kingdom and treasury, O Yudhishtira, belong to the Kshatriya as they have been ordained. All the earth, O king, with her girdle of seas, is seen to belong to him; he acquires an extensive affluence by following the svadharma of his caste. The sceptre of royalty is held by him, for without the Kshatriyas there can be no protection.

The Brahmanas are blessed indeed, for they are the gods of the very gods. Kshatriyas should worship the Brahmanas with due rites, even as ordained by the ancient Rishis, for this is the sanatana dharma. Coveted by thieves and others, the possessions of all men, their wealth, wives and everything else would have been taken forcibly from them but for the protection given them by Kshatriyas in observing the duties assigned to their varna. The Kshatriya, as the king, becomes the protector or rescuer of all the others. Hence, the son of the Kshatriya wife shall, without doubt, be held as superior to that of the Vaisya wife. He for this takes a larger share of the paternal property than the son of the Vaisya mother.'

Yudhishtira says, 'You have declared the laws that apply to Brahmanas. What are the laws that apply to others?'

Bhishma says, 'For the Kshatriya, O Kurunandana, two wives have been ordained; and they may take a third wife from the Sudra class. Even though such practice prevails, it is not sanctioned by the scriptures. The property of a Kshatriya should, O king, be divided into eight shares. Four shares of the paternal property must go to the son of the Kshatriya wife, three to the son of the Vaisya wife, and one remaining share to the son of the Sudra wife, but the last only if father gives it.

For the Vaisya, only one wife has been decreed and a second wife is taken from the Sudra order, although this is not sanctioned by the shastras. If a Vaisya has two wives, a Vaisya and the other a Sudra, there is a difference in status between them.

The wealth of a Vaisya should be divided into five portions and it is to be distributed to sons of the Vaisya wife and the inferior Sudra wife in the following manner. The son of the Vaisya wife shall take four shares and the

fifth share will go to the son of the Sudra wife, but only when the father gives it, not otherwise. The son of a Sudra wife fathered by men of the three higher varnas shall never be entitled to any part of his paternal wealth.

The Sudra should have only one wife taken from his own varna and under no circumstances should he take any other.

Even if a Sudra has a hundred sons by such a spouse, they will share the wealth left behind equally. As ordained, children born to the wife of the same varna will share the paternal wealth equally, and the eldest of them gets a larger share than all his brothers, and best belongings of his father.

Even this is the law of inheritance, O son of Pritha, as declared by the Svayambhuva Manu himself. Among children born from the wife of the same caste, there is a distinction for marriage, O king: the elder ones precede the younger. Wives being equal in the varna of birth and children being equal in their mother's status, the first son will inherit a greater share than his brothers, the next son, by age, shall take a share next in value and the youngest shall have the share that belongs to the youngest.

Thus, among wives from all varnas, the ones belonging to the husband's own caste are regarded as the first. Even this is what was declared by the great Rishi Kasyapa, the son of Marichi.'

CANTO 48

Yudhishtira says, 'Through inducements offered by wealth, or through mere lust, or through ignorance of the true order of birth, of both sons and daughters, or through folly, varnasamkarshana, or interbreeding of castes, occurs in all the varnas. What, O Grandsire, is the dharma and the karma laid down for those born in the mixed classes?'

Bhishma says, 'In the beginning, the Lord of all creatures created the four varnas and laid down their respective dharmas and prescribed karmas, for the sake of sacrifice. The Brahmana may take four wives, one from each of the four varnas. The children from the Brahmana and Kshatriya wives are invested with the status of a Brahmana. But sons born of the two other wives, of the Vaisya and Sudra order, are inferior and their status is determined by that of their mothers and not the father.

The son of a Brahmana begotten from a Sudra wife is called Parasara, implying one born of a corpse, for the Sudra woman's body is as inauspicious as a corpse. He should serve his father's family and it is improper for him to give up the duty of service that has been ordained for him. By doing all that he can, he should support the burdens of his family. He must dutifully serve his brothers and sisters, even if he is the eldest and they are younger, and give them his earnings.

A Kshatriya may take three wives; in two of them, the one from his own caste and the other from the Vaisya varna, he takes birth himself. His children born to wives of his own varna are invested with the status of Kshatriyas. His third wife of the Sudra caste is regarded as most inferior and the son from her is called an Ugra.

The Vaisya may take two wives, one from his own varna, and the other from the lowest, Sudra caste. He is born himself as the children born to the wife of his own varna, and these are invested with a Vaisya's status. The Sudra can take only one wife and she is to be from own caste and their son becomes a Sudra.

A son born under circumstances other than those mentioned above, is looked upon as an inferior one. If a man of a lower caste begets a son upon a woman of a superior varna, such a son is regarded as outside the pale of the four pure orders. Indeed, such a son is an object of censure with the four principal varnas.

A son born of a Brahmana woman to a Kshatriya, without being included in any of the four pure varnas, is called a Suta and his duties are connected with the reciting of eulogies and encomiums of kings and other great men. A son born of a Brahmana woman to a Vaisya man is known as a Vaidehaka and his duties consist of being in charge of locks, bars and bolts for protecting the privacy of women of respectable households. Such sons have no cleansing rites laid down for them.

If a Sudra marries a woman belonging to the foremost of the four varnas, the son that is begotten is called a Chandala. Endowed with a fierce disposition, he must live on the city outskirts and his assigned duty is that of a public executioner; and such sons are always regarded as wretches of their race.

These, O foremost of intelligent men, are the children of mixed varnas. The son begotten by a Vaisya upon a Kshatriya woman becomes a Vandi or Magadha. His duties are the eloquent recitations of praise. The son begotten through transgression, by a Sudra upon a Kshatriya woman, becomes a Nishada and his dharma is to be a fisherman. If a Sudra unites with a Vaisya woman, a son begotten upon her is called Ayogava and his work is that of a Takshan, a carpenter.

Brahmanas should never accept gifts from such persons, for these are not entitled to possess any kind of wealth. Men belonging to the mixed castes take wives from their own kind and their children are invested with the same status. When they beget children in women taken from inferior castes, these children become inferior to their fathers and they are invested with the status of their mothers. Thus, as regards the four pure varnas, men beget children invested with their own status upon wives taken from their own varnas, as also upon them that are taken from the varnas immediately

below their own. When, however, children are begotten from other wives, they have a status that is outside the pale of the four pure varnas.

When such sons beget progeny in women taken from their own varnas, those sons are given the status of their fathers. It is only when they take wives from other varnas that the children they beget are given an inferior status.

If a Sudra marries a Brahmana woman, the son born of that union is called a Chandala. If such a Chandala also begets a son from a Brahmana woman, that child is considered to be even lower than his father. From those born outside the pale of the four varnas and those again that are further inferior, children multiply because of their union with women of castes superior to their own. In this way, fifteen progressively mixed classes spring up.

Mixed varnas arise solely from the sexual union of women with men who should abstain from such a union. Among the classes that are outside the pale of the four principal or pure varnas, children are begotten upon women belonging to the class called Sairindhri by men of the caste known as Magadha. The occupation of such offspring is the adornment of the bodies of others, and they are knowledgeable in the preparation of liniments, lotions and unguents, the making of garlands, and other adornments. Although free by the status they have by birth, they should yet lead a life of service.

Another, Ayogava, caste comes from the union of Magadhas of a certain kind with women of the Sairindhri caste. Their occupation is weaving nets used for fishing, and hunting fowl and animals. The union of Vaidehas with women of the Sairindhri caste begets children called Maireyakas, whose occupation is the making of wines and spirits. From Nishadas spring a caste called Madgura and also the Dasas, whose profession is plying boats. From the Chandala springs a race called Swapaka, whose employment is keeping guard over the dead.

If women of the Magadhi caste unite with these four castes of vile dispositions, they produce Mansa, Swadukara, Kshaudra and Saugandha children, who live by deceit. From the Vaideha springs up a cruel and sinful caste that also lives by practising deception. From the Nishadas spring Madranabhas who ride on carriages drawn by donkeys. From the Chandalas arise the Pukkasas, who are seen eating the flesh of animals like donkeys,

horses and elephants. These cover themselves with garments obtained by stripping human corpses and eat from cracked or broken earthenware.

From the union of fathers from different castes with an Ayogava women, three castes of a base and most inferior kind originate. The Kshaudras spring from the Vaidehakas; the Andhras, who live in the outskirts of towns and cities, also come from the Vaidehakas. The Karavara caste arises from the union of a Charmakara with a Nishada woman. From the Chandala again there springs the caste known as Pandusaupaka, whose occupation is weaving baskets and other similar articles using cleft and shaven bamboo. An Ahindaka comes from the union of a Nishada man with a woman of the Vaidehi caste. The son of a Chandala begotten upon a Saupaka woman has the status and occupation of a Chandala. A Nishada woman uniting with a Chandala man brings forth a son who lives on the outskirts of villages and towns. Such offspring live in smasanas, crematoria, and are regarded by the very lowest varnas as unworthy of being counted among them.

Thus, further mixed castes are born from unlawful and sinful unions of fathers and mothers belonging to different castes. Whether they live in concealment or openly, they should be known by their occupations. Duties have been ordained in the scriptures for only the four principal varnas and there is no mention of any svadharma for any other varnas. By the scriptures, they need not fear for what they do and how they earn their livelihood. By uniting with women of other castes, led not by considerations of righteousness but by uncontrolled lust, men unaccustomed to the performance of sacrifices or for whom yagnas have not been ordained, and who are deprived of the company and the instruction of the righteous, whether numbered among the four principal orders or not, cause numerous mixed castes to come into existence, whose occupations and abodes depend on the circumstances connected with the irregular unions to which they owe their births.

Having recourse to crossroads, or crematoria, or hills and mountains, or forests and trees, they build their habitations there and wear ornaments made of iron. Living in such places openly, they earn their livelihood from producing diverse kinds of domestic and other utensils, and adorn their persons with crude ornaments. Without doubt, by helping with kine and serving Brahmanas, practising the virtues of abstention from cruelty, compassion, truthfulness of speech, forgiveness and, if need be, preserving

others by sacrificing their very lives, persons of the mixed castes may achieve success. I have no doubt that such virtues become the cause of their salvation.

An intelligent man should take all things into consideration and beget offspring upon a woman that is fit for him, as ordained in the scriptures. A son begotten from a woman belonging to a degraded caste brings him to grief instead of rescuing him, even as a heavy weight drowns a swimmer who wants to cross a body of water.

Lust and wrath are natural attributes of humanity in this world, irrespective of a man being learned or not. Women, therefore, may always be seen as dragging men onto the wrong path, of darkness and sin. The very nature of women is such that a man's contact with her brings him misery and ruin. Hence, wise men do not suffer themselves to be excessively attached to women.'

Yudhishtira says, 'There are men who belong to the mixed castes, and who are of very impure birth. Though presenting the features of respectability, they are in reality anything but so. In consequence of their external aspects we might not be able to know the truth about their birth. Are there any signs, Pitamaha, by which the truth can be known about the origin of such men?'

CANTO 49

Bhishma says, 'A person born of an irregular union shows diverse features of character. One's purity of birth, again, must be ascertained from one's actions which must resemble the actions of those who are good and righteous. One's impure origin is proclaimed by disreputable behaviour, deeds that violate those laid down in the scriptures, crookedness, cruelty, abstention from sacrifices and other spiritual practices which fetch punya. A son either receives his father's character or his mother's, and sometimes both.

A man of impure birth cannot conceal his true character. Just as a tiger or a leopard's cub inherits stripes or spots, a man cannot hide his origin; his impure descent will manifest itself, to some degree, despite all attempts to conceal it. For his own purposes a man may choose to walk an insincere, hypocrite's path while outwardly displaying such conduct as might seem righteous. However, his demeanour will inevitably betray him, and the truth of his varna, good or base.

Creatures in the world have different characters and are seen to conduct themselves in diverse ways. Amongst all the living, there is none better than he who is of pure birth and of righteous conduct. A man born into a lower varna, even though he is thorough with the scriptures, fails to prevent his body from committing vile deeds.

Absolute goodness of understanding may be of different degrees; it may be high, middling, or low. Even if such sattva does manifest in a man of lowly birth, it disappears like autumn clouds which never bring any rain,

without any consequence. On the other hand, the goodness which shows itself in those of better lineage will invariably reveal itself in his actions.

If a man is born into a superior varna, but yet shows no righteous conduct, he deserves neither respect nor regard. And one may worship even a Sudra if he is lives by his svadharma and is of good conduct. A man proclaims himself by his own good deeds as much as by his good or bad nature and birth.

If one's vamsa is dishonoured for any reason, one soon elevates it and makes it splendid and famed by one's deeds. For these reasons the wise should avoid women of the diverse castes, mixed or pure, upon whom they should not beget offspring.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Can you speak to us, Pitamaha, about the varnas and classes separately, on different kinds of sons begotten from different types of women, and about men entitled to have them as sons, and their status in life ? It is known that disputes frequently arise with regard to sons. I beg you, resolve the doubts that have seized our minds, for we are bewildered by this matter.'

Bhishma says, 'The son of one's loins is regarded as one's own self. The son that is begotten upon one's wife by a man who has been invited for the task is called niruktaja, and if the father was uninvited, such a son is called prasritaja. The son begotten upon his own wife by a man fallen away from his caste is called patitaja. There are two other sons: the one given, the one created, and there is another called adhyudha.

The son born of a maiden in her father's house is called kanina. Besides these, there are six other kinds of sons called apadhwansaja and six others yet that are called apasadas. These are the several kinds of sons mentioned in the scriptures.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Who are the six that are called apadhwansajas and who are the apasadas? I beg you, explain all these to me in detail.'

Bhishma says, 'The sons of a Brahmana begotten upon women taken from the three inferior varnas, by a Kshatriya upon women taken from the two varnas inferior to his own, and sons that a Vaisya begets upon a spouse taken from the Sudra varna, the one inferior to his own, are all called apadhwansajas. The six kinds are thus explained.

Listen now to who the apasadas are. The son that a Sudra begets upon a Brahmana woman is called a Chandala; the son begotten upon a Kshatriya woman by a Sudra man is called a Vratya. He who is born of a Vaisya

woman by a Sudra father is called a Vaidya. These three kinds of sons are called apasadas.

The Vaisya, by uniting himself with a Brahmana woman, begets a son that is called a Magadha, while the son that he begets upon a Kshatriya woman is called a Vamaka. The Kshatriya can beget but one kind of son upon a woman of a superior order. Indeed, the son begotten by a Kshatriya upon a Brahmana woman is a Suta. These three also are called apasadas. It cannot be said, O king, that these six kinds of sons are no sons at all.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Some say that one's son is he that is born in one's soil. Some, on the other hand, say that one's son is he who has been begotten from one's seed. Are both these kinds of sons equal? Whose, again, is the son to be? Do you tell me this, O Grandsire!'

Bhishma says, 'His is the son from whose seed he has sprung. If, however, the owner of the seed abandons the son born of it, such a son then becomes his upon whose spouse he has been begotten. The same rule applies to the son called Adhyudha. He belongs to the man from whose seed he has taken his birth. If, however, the owner of the seed abandons him, he becomes the son of the husband of his mother. Know that even this is what the law declares.'

Yudhishtira says, 'We know that the son becomes his from whose seed he has taken birth. Whence does the husband of the woman that brings forth the son derive his right to the latter? Similarly, the son called Adhyudha should be known to be the son of him from whose seed he has sprung. How can they be sons of others by reasons of the engagement about owning and rearing them having been broken?'

Bhishma says, 'He who begets a son from his own loins and then abandons him for some reason, cannot be regarded as the father, for the vital seed alone does not confer fatherhood and the son also must be held to belong to the man who owns the maternal soil and raises him. Wanting a son, if a man marries a pregnant girl, the son of his wife will belong to him, for he is the fruit of his own soil; and the man from whose seed the son has sprung can have no right to such a child.

The son born from a man's wife but not begotten by him bears all traits of the actual father and not those of he who is only his mother's husband. The son thus born cannot conceal the evidence of his natural physiognomy, and will be known at once upon sight as belonging to another.

The son adopted is sometimes regarded as the child of the man who has made him a son, and who thus raises him. In his case, neither the seed of his birth nor the soil in which he is born makes him a son.'

Yudhishtira says, 'What kind of a son is he who has been adopted and who is neither his father nor mother's natural son?'

Bhishma says, 'When a man brings home and raises a son, cast off on the streets by his parents, and when he fails to find his natural parents after searching, he becomes the father of such a son and the latter becomes what is called his created son. Having no one else to own him, he becomes owned by him who raises him. Such a son, again, comes to be regarded as belonging to that varna to which his adoptive father belongs.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How should one perform the purificatory rites of such a man and what sort of rites should be performed? What girl should he marry? Tell me all this, Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'A son who is cast off by his parents obtains the varna of the man raising him, hence the rites of purification should be performed by the adoptive father raising him, according to his own race and kinsmen. Such a son should marry a girl belonging to the varna of the adoptive father, and this is done only when the varna of the son's true mother cannot be ascertained.

Among sons, he that is born to an unwed mother and he who is born to a mother who conceived before her marriage but brought him forth after marrying, are regarded as disgraceful and degraded.

Even those two, however, should receive the same rites of purification that are laid down for sons begotten by the father in lawful wedlock. With respect to the son who becomes his father's because of his birth from his father's wife and of those sons that are called apasadas and those conceived by the woman in her maidenhood but brought forth after marriage, Brahmanas and others should apply the same rites of purification that hold good for their own varnas. These are ordained in the scriptures with respect to the different varnas. I have told you everything pertaining to your questions. What else do you wish to hear?'"

CANTO 50

"Yudhishtira says, 'What is the nature of the compassion that is felt at the sight of another's woe, and that which one feels because of living in companionship with the other? What is the nature and degree of the high blessedness that attaches to kine? Pitamaha, explain all this to me.'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard, O you of great radiance, I will narrate to you an ancient narrative of a conversation between Nahusha and Rishi Chyavana. In days of yore, Maharishi Chyavana of Bhrigu's race, always observant of high vows, wanted to lead the way of life called Udavasa for some time and set himself to embark on it. Casting off pride, wrath, joy and grief, the ascetic pledged himself to observe that vow for twelve years. The Rishi inspired all land creatures with a happy trust and inspired similar confidence in all creatures living in water. The powerful sage resembled the moon himself in his behaviour towards all; bowing to all the deities and having cleansed himself of all sins, he entered the water at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna and stood there motionless.

Placing his head against it, he bore the fierce and roaring current of the two rivers united together, whose speed was like that of the wind itself. Instead of drowning the Rishi, the Ganga, the Yamuna, the other streams and lakes, whose waters come together at the confluence at Prayaga, flowed past him in respect. Assuming the aspect of a wooden post, the great Muni laid himself down in the water and slept at ease; and sometimes, Lord of the Bharatas, the most intelligent sage stood upright. He was at ease with all aquatic creatures, without the least fear; all these would come and gently sniff the Rishi's lips.

In this way, the Rishi spent a long time at the grand confluence of waters. One day, a large number of fishermen came to that place with their nets. Well-built and broad-chested, endowed with great strength, courage, and not afraid of the water, those men lived by fishing. They tied all their nets together and approached the water that teemed with every kind of fish.

All those Kaivartas together cast their strong nets, all made from fresh string, across a wide area of the waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna. Working in cheerful unison, the fishermen entered the water all together, quite fearlessly, and began to haul in their net in which they had caught a vast number of fish and other water creatures. As they did this, they also hauled up Chyavana Muni, his body overgrown with river moss so even his matted jata and long beard were green, and conch shells and other molluscs covered him, having attached themselves by their heads.

Seeing the sage, that master of the Vedas, the fishermen stood before him with bowed heads and folded hands; they prostrated repeatedly before him. Meanwhile, all the fish those men had caught died in agony. Seeing the great and cruel slaughter of the fish, Chyavana was filled with pity and he sighed repeatedly.

The fishermen said, “We have sinned by dragging your holy self from the water in our ignorance. Be merciful to us! What wish of yours shall we accomplish? Command us, O great sage.”

From among the heap of dead fishes around him, Chyavana said, “Attentively hear what my most cherished wish is. I shall either die with these fish or you must sell me with them, for I have lived with them for a long time in the water. I do not wish to abandon them now.”

When he said these words to them, the fishermen became terrified. With pale faces they went to King Nahusha and told him what had happened.’”

CANTO 51

"Bhishma says, 'When he heard what had chanced with Chyavana, Nahusha immediately went to the Rishi, taking his ministers and priests with him. Having purified himself, the king introduced himself, with joined palms and concentrated attention, to Chyavana Mahatman. The king's priests worshipped the Rishi with due ceremony, that sage who observed the satya vrata, the vow of truth, and who resembled a god in splendour and vitality.

Nahusha said, "Tell me, O Dvijottama, what shall we do to please you? However difficult it may be, there is nothing, Holy One, that I will not be able to accomplish at your bidding."

Chyavana said, "These men that live by fishing have all been sorely tried with labour. Pay them the price that may be set upon me along with the value of these fish."

Nahusha said, "Let my priest give these Nishadas a thousand coins as the price for these fish, as you, Swami, have commanded."

Chyavana said, "A thousand coins cannot be my price. Use your discretion and intelligence to set a fair price on their catch."

Nahusha said, "Let, O great Brahmana, a hundred thousand coins be given to these Nishadas. Will this be fair price, O Holy One, or do you think otherwise?"

Chyavana said, "I will not be bought for a hundred thousand coins, O best of kings! Give them a just price. Do you want to consult with your ministers?"

Nahusha said, "Let my priest give these Nishadas a crore of coins. If even this does not meet your price, let more be paid to them."

Chyavana said, "O king, I do not deserve to be bought for a crore of coins or even more. Let the fishermen be given a fair and proper price. Do you want to consult with the Brahmanas?"

Nahusha said, "Let half of my kingdom or even the whole be given to these Nishadas. I think that would be a fair price. But what do you think, O Dvijottama?"

Chyavana said, "I do not deserve to be bought with half of your kingdom or even the whole of it, O king! Let a fair price be given to these men. Do you consult with your Rishis."

Hearing these words of the great Muni, Nahusha was grief-struck. He deliberated on the matter with his ministers and priests. Then an ascetic who was living in the forest came to King Nahusha. This sage lived on fruit and roots and was born of a cow. Addressing the king, the Holy One said, "O king, I shall soon gratify you and the Rishi as well. I never tell a lie, not even in jest, what then should I say of otherwise? You should, without any scruple, do what I tell you."

Nahusha said, "Illustrious one, you tell me what the price is of the Maharishi of Bhrigu's race. Save me, my kingdom and my vamsa from this terrible pass! If the holy Chyavana became angry, he would destroy the three worlds. What then need I say of me, who is destitute of any tapasya and who depends only upon only the might of my arms? O Maharishi, become a raft to us, for we have fallen into a fathomless ocean with all our counsellors and priests. I beg you, settle what the price should be before the Rishi."

Hearing these words of Nahusha, the ascetic born of a cow and endowed with great tejas spoke in this strain, gladdening the monarch and all his counsellors, "Brahmanas, O king, belong to the foremost of the four varnas, and no value, however great, can be set upon them. Cows also are invaluable, therefore, Lord of men, regard a cow as the value of the Rishi!"

Hearing these words of the great Rishi, Nahusha, his counsellors and priests were filled with joy. Going then to the presence of Bhrigu's son, Chyavana of rigid vows, he addressed him thus, to gratify him to the best of his ability.

Nahusha said, "Rise, rise, O enlightened Rishi, you have been bought, O son of Bhrigu, with a cow as your price. O foremost of men of dharma, I

think this is your price."

Chyavana said, "Yes, O king of kings, I do rise up. I have been properly bought by you, O sinless one! You of unfading glory, I do not see any wealth that is equal to kine. To speak of kine, to hear others speak of them, to make gifts and to see kine, O king, are all acts that are lauded, Kshatriya, as being most auspicious and sin-cleansing. Cows are always the root of prosperity and there is no fault in them. They always afford the best food, in the form of havi, to the Devas, and sacred mantras, Swaha and Vashat, are always established in them.

They are the chief conductresses of sacrifices for they constitute the mouth of sacrifice. They bear and yield excellent and strength-giving amrita and receive the worship of all the worlds and are regarded as the source of nectar. On earth, cows resemble fire in energy and form. Verily, they bestow great happiness upon all creatures. That country where kine, established by their owners, breathe fearlessly, shines in beauty and the sins of that country are washed away. They constitute the stairs that lead to heaven and are adored in heaven itself. They are goddesses that are competent to give everything and grant every wish; there is nothing else in the world that is so high or so superior!"'

Bhishma continues, 'On the subject of the glory and superiority of cows, this is what I have to say, Lord of the Bharata vamsa. I am competent to proclaim only a part of the punya attached to cows, I cannot exhaust the subject!

The Nishadas then said, "Muni, you have met and also spoken to us; it has been said that friendship with those that are good depends upon just seven words.

Will you then, Lord, show us your grace? The blazing sacrificial fire consumes all the oblations of clarified butter poured upon it. Of righteous soul and great energy, you are among men a blazing fire of tejas. We worship you, learned one! We surrender ourselves to you. Do you, to show us favour, take from us this cow?"

Chyavana said, "The eye of a poor man or a distressed one, the eye of an ascetic, or that of a venomous snake consumes a man with his very roots, as a fire fanned by the wind blazing up consumes a stack of dry grass or straw. I will accept the cow that you wish to gift me. Fishermen, freed from every sin, go you to swarga without any delay along with these fishes you have caught in your nets."

After this, because of the great Rishi's tejas and his cleansed soul, Fishermen and the fish, through virtue of those words that he had uttered, ascended into heaven and King Nahusha was filled with wonder.

The two Rishis, the one born of a cow and the other, Chyavana of Bhrigu's race, pleased Nahusha by granting him many boons. Then King Nahusha of great tejas, Lord of all the earth, filled with joy, said, "Enough!"

Like a second Indra, he accepted the boon about his own steadfastness in virtue. The delighted king worshipped both the Rishis who had blessed him with great reverence. As for Chyavana, he returned to his own asrama for his vrata was completed. The Rishi born of a cow and of great tejas, also went back to his own retreat.

All the Nishadas ascended into swarga with the fishes they caught, O monarch, King Nahusha, too, having obtained those valuable boons, entered his own city. I have thus, O son, told you everything that you asked of me. The affection generated by the mere sight of others beings, as also by living with them, O Yudhishtira, and the high blessedness of the cow, and the ascertainment of true dharma, are the matters upon which I have discoursed. Tell me, O Kshatriya, what else is in your heart.'

CANTO 52

Yudhishtira says, 'O wisest one, a doubt as vast as an ocean has engulfed me, Listen to it, O Mahabaho, and having learnt what it is, resolve it for me. I am taken with great curiosity about Jamadagni's son Parasurama, that foremost of all men of dharma. Pitamaha, tell me how Rama, who was endowed with prowess that could never be baffled, was born. He belonged by birth to a race of regenerate Rishis. How did he become a follower of the ways of a Kshatriya?

Lord, tell me in detail about the circumstances of Rama's birth. Also tell me how Viswamitra, who was a son of the race of Kusika and born a Kshatriya, became Brahmana and a Brahmarishi. Ah, great indeed was the puissance of the high-souled Rama, as also that of Viswamitra. Why did Richaka's grandson and not his son become a Kshatriya in deeds? Why did the Kusika's grandson and not his son become a Brahmana? Why did such an exceptional fate overtake the grandsons of both, instead of their sons? I implore you, explain the truth of both these to me.'

Bhishma says, 'O Bharata, an ancient itihasa is related with regard to these, of a discourse between Chyavana and Kusika. Endowed with great intelligence, Chyavana of Bhrigu's race, that best of Rishis, saw with his spiritual eye the stain that would affect his own race because of his descendant marrying a Kshatriya. Reflecting upon the merits and faults of that marriage, as also its strength and weakness, Chyavana, possessed of tapodhana, wanted to consume the race of the Kusikas, for he knew it was from that race that the taint of Kshatriya dharma stained his own vamsa.

Chyavana went into the presence of King Kusika, and said to him, "O sinless one, the desire has arisen in my heart to stay with you for some time."

Kusika said, "Holy One, living together is something which the wise ordained for girls when they are given away and only in this context do the sages always approve this practice. O Rishi endowed with a wealth of asceticism, the residence which you seek with me is not sanctioned by any law. Yet, however opposed to the dictates of neeti and dharma, I will do what you command."

Ordering a seat to be fetched for Maharishi Chyavana, Kusika, accompanied by his wife, stood in the presence of the Rishi. From a small jar of water, the king offered him water to wash his feet and then, through his servants, caused all the appropriate rites to be duly performed to honour his high-souled guest. Kusika, who always observed his vows and was self-restrained, cheerfully presented the arghya of honey and the other prescribed ingredients to the great Rishi and induced him to accept it.

Having welcomed and honoured the learned Brahmana, the king addressed him and said, "We two await your command. Tell us what we are to do for you, Holy One. If it is our kingdom or wealth or cows, O you of rigid vows, or all that is given away as dakshina in sacrifices which do you want, only tell us and you shall have them all. This palace, the kingdom, this throne of justice, all await your pleasure. You are the Lord of all these. Do you rule the earth, for I am entirely dependent upon you."

Addressed in these words by Kusika, Chyavana of Bhrigu's race, filled with great delight, said to Kusika in reply, "I do not, O king, covet your kingdom, wealth, young women, cows, provinces, or your golden vessels of sacrifice. If it pleases you and your wife, I will observe a certain vrata. I want you and your wife to serve me during that period without any scruple or reserve."

Thus addressed by the Rishi, the king and the queen were filled with joy and answered him, saying, "Tathaastu! Be it so, Rishi." Delighted with the Rishi's words, the king led him into an apartment of the palace. Kusika showed Chyavana everything in that room and said, "This, Holy One, is your bed. Live here as you please. O you imbued with a wealth of intelligence, and my queen and I will strive to provide you every comfort and pleasure."

While they were thus conversing with each other, the sun passed the meridian. The Rishi commanded the king to bring him food and drink. King Kusika, bowing to the Rishi, asked him, “Whatever kind of food is agreeable to you will be brought to you.”

Filled with delight, the Rishi answered, “Let food that is proper be given to me.”

Respectfully, the king said, “So be it!” and fetched the Rishi food of the best and proper kind. Having finished his meal, the holy Chyavana, knower of every dharma, said, “I want to sleep, O powerful one, for slumber steals over me now.”

Going into the bedchamber prepared for him, that best of Rishis laid himself down upon a bed and the king and queen sat themselves down beside him. The Rishi said to them, “Do not, while I sleep, awake me. Keep yourselves awake and continually press my feet for as long as I sleep.”

Without hesitation, Kusika said, “So be it!”

The king and the queen, duly engaged in tending to the Rishi, kept themselves awake all night, and accomplished his bidding with earnestness and attention. Meanwhile the holy Brahmana, having laid his commands upon the king, slept deeply, never once stirring, not even to turn or change his position, for twenty-one days. That whole time, with his wife beside him, and without so much as eating, the king sat contentedly, happily watching over the Muni.

When twenty-one days passed, Chyavana of the Bhrigus awoke and arose of his own accord and went out of the bedchamber without acknowledging the king and queen. Famished and exhausted they followed him, but that foremost of Rishis did not deign to cast a single glance at them. Going a short way, the Rishi abruptly vanished from before their eyes, making himself invisible with his powers of yoga. At this, the king, struck with grief, fell to the ground. Recovering in some moments, he rose and, with his queen, Kusika of great splendour began to look everywhere for the Rishi.’”

CANTO 53

"Yudhishtira says, 'After the Rishi disappeared, what did the king and his most blessed queen do? Tell me this, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'When the Rishi vanished, the king, overwhelmed by tiredness and shame, stricken by grief, returned to his palace with his queen. Entering his palace dejectedly, he spoke not a word to anyone, but was plunged in the thought of Chyavana's inexplicable behaviour. His heart full of despair, Kusika repaired to his private chambers.

There he saw the son of Bhrigu stretched out as before on his bed. Beholding the Rishi there, they were wonderstruck, and reflected again upon that strangest incident. The sight of the Rishi dispelled their fatigue.

They sat beside him again and gently began to press his feet as before. Meanwhile, the great Rishi slept soundly as before but this time he lay on another side. Endowed with great tejas, he slept for another twenty-one days. Fearful of him, the royal couple showed no change in their attitude or sentiment towards the Rishi.

Waking from his slumber, the Rishi addressed the king and his queen, saying, "Rub my body with oil, for I want to bathe."

Though they were famished and tired, they readily assented and approached the Rishi with a costly oil which had been prepared by boiling it a hundred times. While massaging the Rishi who was seated at ease, they refrained from speaking. Without saying a word to make them stop, the Muni suddenly rose and entered the bathing chamber. Everything fit for a king's bath was ready there. But not so much as casting a glance at any of

those excellent ablutionaries, let alone using them, Chyavana yet again vanished from before their eyes, using his yoga shakti.

This, however, Lord of the Bharatas, failed to disturb the equanimity of the royal couple. The next time, they saw great Rishi seated, after a bath, on a throne; indeed, it was thus that he showed himself again to the king and the queen. King Kusika with his wife cheerfully offered the Rishi food with great reverence. Endowed with wisdom and with an unmoved heart, Kusika made this offering. "Let the food be brought" were the words that the Rishi then spoke and, assisted by his queen, the king soon brought forth the food. There were diverse kinds of meat, in different preparations, a large variety of vegetables, pot-herbs, juicy cakes too, among those viands, several kinds of sweets, and preparations of milk payasas. Indeed, all the food offered different kinds of taste.

There was also some produce of the wilderness which Rishis like, among them diverse kinds of fruit, fit to be eaten by kings. There were also badaras, ingudas, kasmaryas and bhallatakas, all of which grihastas eat, as also wild produce that vanaprasthas take.

Fearing the Rishi's curse, the king had all kinds of food fetched and prepared for his guest. All this was brought from the kitchen and placed before Chyavana. A fine seat was also set out and a bed, too, was laid. All the food was covered with white cloth. Chyavana of Bhrigu's race, however, set fire to all the dishes and reduced them to ashes. Possessed of great intelligence, the royal couple showed no annoyance at the conduct of the Rishi, who once more made himself invisible before their very eyes.

The Rajarishi Kusika and his queen stood in silence throughout the night, never moving. Endowed with great prosperity, he did not give way in the least to pride or anger. Every day, diverse kinds of good and pure food, excellent beds, abundant bathing oils and herbs and fine clothes of various kinds were kept in readiness in the palace for the Rishi. Indeed, Chyavana could find not the slightest fault in the king.

Then the illumined Rishi said to King Kusika, "Yoke a chariot, O king, and you and your queen take me in it wherever I tell you to."

Without any hesitation, the king answered Chyavana, saying, "So be it!" and he further enquired of the Rishi, "Which chariot shall I fetch? Shall it be my pleasure-carriage or shall it be my war chariot?"

On being asked this by the delighted and contented monarch, the Rishi said, "Yoke your war chariot with which you besiege hostile cities. Indeed,

ready your battle-car with every weapon, with its standard and flags, its arrows and javelins and golden columns and poles. It is adorned with tinkling bells and with arches of pure gold. It is always furnished with high and excellent weapons in hundreds."

The king said, "So be it!" and quickly had his battle ratha yoked and fetched, and himself mounted the right side and set his wife upon the left. Among its other accoutrements, Kusika furnished that mighty chariot with his goad of three handles and a point hard as the vajra and sharp as a needle.

Having placed every requisite upon the chariot, the king said to the Rishi, "Holy One, where shall the chariot proceed? Let the son of Bhrigu issue his command. This chariot shall go to the place which you indicate."

Thus addressed, the holy man replied to the king, saying, "Let the ratha go hence, dragged slowly, step by step. Obedient to my will, you two must pull me along in such a way that I do not feel any fatigue and should be borne along pleasantly. Let all your people come out and watch this progress that I make through their midst. Let none approaching me be sent away, I shall give gifts of wealth to all. To the Brahmanas, I shall grant their wishes and bestow upon them wealth without stint. Let this be accomplished, O king, and do not entertain any scruples."

Hearing these words of the Rishi, the king summoned his servants and said, "You should, without any fear, give away whatever the Rishi orders."

Then jewellery and gemstones in abundance, beautiful women, and pairs of sheep, coined and uncoined gold, elephants resembling hills or mountain summits, and all the ministers of the king began to follow the Rishi as he was borne away on that chariot. Cries of "Oh!" and "Alas!" arose from every part of the city which was plunged in grief at that extraordinary sight.

And suddenly the royal couple were struck by the Rishi with that goad with the sharp point. Though they were struck on their backs and faces, Kusika and his queen still showed no sign of protest or agitation. On the other hand, they continued to bear the Rishi on as before. Trembling from head to foot, for no food had passed their lips for fifty nights, and exceedingly weak, the heroic couple somehow succeeded in hauling along that chariot. Being repeatedly and deeply cut by the goad, the royal couple was covered in blood. Indeed, they looked like a pair of Kimsuka trees in the flowering season. Seeing the plight to which their king and queen were

reduced, the people were grief-stricken, but fearing the Rishi's curse, they remained silent.

Gathering in knots they said to each other, "Behold the might of tapasya! Although we are angry, we still cannot even look at the holy Rishi. Such is his tejas, such the dazzling splendour of his purified soul. Ah, look also at the endurance of the king and his royal queen. Though bleeding, and worn with toil and hunger, they still drag the chariot along. And notwithstanding the misery and pain the sage has inflicted on Kusika and his queen, they show no sign of their anguish to Chyavana."

Seeing the king and the queen unmoved, Chyavana began to give away large sums of wealth from the king's treasury, as if he were a second Kubera, a Lord of treasures. Even at this, King Kusika showed no mark of dissatisfaction; he did just as the Rishi had commanded regarding the disbursal of gifts. Seeing this, that illustrious and best of Rishis became delighted. Alighting from that excellent chariot, he unharnessed the royal couple.

Having freed them, he said to them in a soft, deep and delighted voice, "I am ready to grant you both any boon you want!"

The son of Bhrigu, moved by fond affection, saw their delicate royal bodies pierced with the goad and bleeding, and laid his blessed palms, whose healing powers were like those of amrita, on their wounds, which promptly vanished.

Then the king answered the Rishi, "My wife and I have felt no toil or pain." And indeed, all their exhaustion and pain had been dispelled by the power of the Rishi.

Pleased no end with them, the illustrious Chyavana said, "I have never before spoken an untruth and it must, therefore, be as I have said. This place on the banks of the Ganga is both delightful and auspicious. I shall keep a vrata here for a while, O king. Do you return to the city for you are exhausted. Come with your wife again tomorrow and you will see me here. You should not give way to wrath or grief, the time has come for you to reap a great reward. That which you covet in your heart shall verily be accomplished."

King Kusika, with a joyful heart, replied to the Rishi in these words of grave import, "I have cherished no wrath or grief, O most blessed one. We have been purified and sanctified by you, Holy One. We have become youthful again. Behold our bodies have become exceedingly beautiful and

strong, I do not see those wounds and scars anymore, which you inflicted on us. Verily, my wife and I are in good health. I see my devi has become as beautiful as an Apsara and she is much more comely and radiant than ever before. All this, O great Rishi, is due to your grace and there is nothing astonishing in all this, O most holy and powerful Rishi, who are forever unbaffled."

Chyavana said to him, "Return here with your queen tomorrow, O king."

With these words, the Rajarishi Kusika was dismissed. Saluting the Rishi, the king, now endowed with a handsome body, returned to his capital like a second Indra. His ministers and priests, his troops, dancing women and all his subjects came out to receive him. Surrounded by them, King Kusika, blazing with beauty and splendour, entered his city with a delighted heart, and his praises were sung by bards and encomiasts.

Having entered his city, he performed all his morning rites and ate with his wife. Endowed with great splendour and the handsome and beautiful forms they had obtained as a boon from Chyavana Muni, the royal couple spent the night happily at love. With all their afflictions and pains having ceased, they saw each other with youth renewed and looking like divine beings. Meanwhile, Chyavana, the Rishi possessed of tapodhana, the wealth of tapasya, used his yogic powers to transform the delightful wood on the banks of the Ganga into a magnificent palace full of wealth of every kind, and adorned it with a variety of unearthly jewellery and gems, so that it surpassed Indra's own palace in beauty and splendour.'"

CANTO 54

"Bhishma says, 'When the night passed, King Kusika awoke and, after completing his morning rites, and taking his queen with him, he went to the wood where the Rishi had chosen to stay. Arriving there, the king saw a palace made entirely of gold, with a thousand columns, each of which was made of gems and precious stones. It looked like an edifice belonging to the Gandharvas.

Kusika saw in every part of that edifice evidences of celestial design. He saw hills with delightful valleys, lakes with lotuses on their bosom, mansions full of costly and curious artefacts, gateways and arches, O Bhaarata, and the king also saw many wide glades of grassy verdure and resembling level fields of gold. There were many sahakaras adorned with blossoms, ketakas, uddalakas, dhavas, asokas, flowering kundas, and atimuktas. He saw many champakas, tilakas, bhavyas, panasas, banjulas, and karnikaras laden with flowers. The king saw many varanapushpas and creepers called ashtapadika all clipped and tonsured.

The king saw trees on which lotuses of all kinds bloomed in great beauty, and some of which bore flowers of every season. He noticed many mansions that looked like celestial vimanas or like great mountains. In some places, O Bhaarata, there were tanks and lakes full of cool water and others had warm or steaming water. There were diverse kinds of excellent seats, costly beds, bedsteads made of gold, encrusted with jewels, and overlaid with cloths and carpets of exquisite appearance and value. Of foodstuffs, there were vast quantities, all deliciously prepared and ready to eat. There were talking parrots, she-parrots, bhringarajas, kokilas, and

katapatras with koyashtikas and kukkubhas, and peacocks, cockerels, datyuhas, jivajivakas, chakoras, monkeys, swans, sarasas and chakravakas.

Here and there he saw bevies of rejoicing Apsaras and conclaves of happy Gandharvas, some of whom were sporting with their wives. The king saw these sights and sometimes the wonderful beings seemed to disappear. The monarch heard melodious songs and pleasing voices of gurus discoursing to their sishyas on the Vedas and the other shastras; and in the lakes he saw geese swim and play harmoniously.

Seeing such wonderful sights, the king began to reflect inwardly, "Is this all real or a dream? Or is it a delusion of my mind? I have, without casting off my earthly body, attained this heaven. This land is either the sacred country of the Uttara-Kurus, or the abode, called Amaravati, of Indra. What are these wonderful sights that I see?"

Reflecting in this strain, the monarch at last saw Chyavana in the golden palace supported by the columns made of jewels and gems, as he lay stretched on a priceless and gorgeous bed. The royal couple approached the Rishi with delighted hearts. Chyavana, however, vanished along with the very bed that he lay upon. The king then saw the Rishi in another part of those woods seated on a mat made of kusa grass, and engaged in silently chanting some high mantras. Thus by his yoga shakti, the Brahmana surprised the king. Then, in a moment all the delightful woods, bevies of Apsaras, bands of Gandharvas and towering, exotic trees disappeared. The banks of the Ganga became as silent as usual, and presented the old aspect of being covered with kusa grass and anthills. King Kusika and his wife, having seen a wonderful sight and its sudden disappearance, were amazed.

With a delighted heart, the monarch addressed his wife and said, "O delightful one, the various scenes and sights found nowhere else, which we have just witnessed, are due to the grace of Chyavana and the power of his tapasya. All that one cherishes in one's imagination can be attained by tapasya and it is superior to sovereignty over the three worlds. Well-performed tapasya leads to mukti.

Behold the power of the high-souled and celestial Rishi Chyavana derived from his tapasya. He can, at his pleasure, create even other worlds than those which exist. Only Brahmanas are born in this world to attain to speech and understanding, and deeds that are so sacred. Who other than Chyavana could do all this? Kingship may be acquired with ease, but the

status of a Brahmana is not thus attainable. It was through the power of a Brahmana that we were harnessed to a chariot like well-broken animals!"

Chyavana became aware of these thoughts that passed through the king's mind. The Rishi said to him, "Come here quickly." The royal couple approached the great sage and, bowing their heads, they worshipped him who deserved worship. Praising the monarch, the most knowing Rishi comforted the king and said, "Sit down on that asana."

After this, O monarch, Chyavana, without guile or deceit of any kind, gratified the king with many soft words, and then said, "O king, you have completely conquered the five organs of action, and the five of knowledge, with the mind as their sixth. You have emerged unscathed from the fiery ordeal I prepared for you. Son, you have properly honoured and adored me, O foremost of all persons possessed of speech. You have no sin, not even a minute one, in you. Give me your leave, O king, for I will now return to the place from which I came. I have been exceedingly pleased with you. Do you accept the boon that I am ready to give you.

Kusika said, "In your presence, Holy One, I have lived like a man in the midst of a fire. That I have not been consumed, Chyavana, is sufficient for me. That you are gratified with me is the highest boon that I can have, Brahmana. I have succeeded in rescuing my race from destruction, sinless one, and this for me is the best of boons. I regard this as distinct evidence of your grace. The very goal of my life and kingship has been accomplished; this is the highest fruit of my tapasya. If you have been pleased with me, Chyavana, then I beg you explain some doubts that are in my mind."

CANTO 55

Chyavana said, "Accept a boon from me, and tell me what the doubts are in your mind, O king, and I shall certainly clear them."

Kusika said, "If you are pleased with me, Chyavana, tell me your objective in living in my palace for some time, for I desire to hear it. What was your objective in sleeping on the bed I assigned to you for twenty-one days continuously, without changing sides? In going out of the room without speaking a single word? Without any apparent reason, making yourself invisible, and becoming visible again?

Why did you lay down once more and slept as before again for twenty-one days? Go out after you were massaged with oil before your bath? Burn diverse kinds of foods served in my palace? Your sudden journey through my city on the ratha? Your purpose in giving away so much wealth? Your motive in showing us the wonders of the forest created by yoga shakti?

What was your motive for showing us, great Rishi, so many palatial mansions made of gold, bedsteads supported on posts of jewels? Why did all these wonders vanish from our sight? I wish to hear the cause of all this. Thinking of all that you did, Chyavana, I was amazed repeatedly and I failed to find the motive the influenced you. Being endowed with the wealth of tapasya as you are, I wish to hear the truth about everything that you did in detail."

Chyavana said, "Listen to me as I detail the reasons which impelled me to all these actions. Since you have asked me, I cannot refuse to enlighten you, O king. Once, when the Devas assembled together, I heard the Grandsire Brahma say that because of a conflict between Brahmana and

Kshatriya tejas, there will occur a fusion in my race. And your grandson, O king, will become endowed with great energy and prowess.

Hearing this, I came here, resolved to exterminate your race, in fact, to turn all your descendants into ashes. Inspired by this motive I came to your palace, and said to you, 'I mean to observe a vrata, attend upon me and serve me dutifully. While living, however, in your house I failed to find any faults in you. It is for that reason, Rajarishi, that you are still alive.

With this resolve I slept for twenty-one days in the hope that somebody would awaken me before I woke up myself. You, however, with your wife, did not awaken me. Even then I was pleased with you. Rising from my bed, I went out of the chamber without saying a word to either of you. I did this, O king, in the hope that you would ask me where I had gone, and thus have an opportunity to curse you.

I then made myself invisible, showed myself in the room in your palace, and once more resorting to yoga shakti, slept for twenty-one days again. I thought that worn out with toil and hunger, you two would be angry with me and do something that would be distasteful to me. That is why I caused you and your wife to be afflicted by hunger. In your heart however, O king, not the slightest feeling of vexation arose. I was delighted with you, king. When I had you bring me diverse kinds of food and then burned them, I hoped that at seeing this you and your wife would yield to anger. However, you accepted whatever I did with no murmur of protest. Ascending your chariot, then, I said to you, 'You and your wife bear me.' You did what I asked, without the least hesitation, king. This delighted me. The gifts of wealth I gave away did not provoke you. Being pleased with you, I created with my yoga shakti the forest which you and your wife saw.

Listen, O king, to the purpose I had. To gratify you and your queen, in your earthly bodies, I showed you a glimpse and a taste of heaven itself in these woods. All this I did to show the power of tapasya and the reward that is in store for righteousness. I know the desire that arose in your heart at the sight of those enchantments: you wanted to acquire the condition of being a Brahmana and the punya which accrues from it, O Lord of the earth; you no longer wanted sovereignty or even Swarga.

To become a Brahmana is exceedingly difficult, Rajan, and after becoming a Brahmana to evolve into a Rishi is even more so. And for a Rishi to become a true Sannyasi is still harder. But I say to you that your wish will be granted. From you, O Kusika, will spring a Brahmana, who

shall be called after your name. That man will be the third in descent from you and will attain the status of a Brahmana.

Through the shakti of the Bhrigus, your grandson, O king, will be a Rishi endowed with the splendour of fire. He shall always strike fear into the hearts all men, indeed, into the inhabitants of the three worlds. O Rajarishi, accept the boon that is now in your mind. I shall soon set out on a tirtha yatra to all the sacred waters and fords. My time is running out."

Kusika said, "Even this, magnificent Rishi, is a great boon, for you have been gratified by me. Let what you have said come to pass. Let my grandson become a Brahmana and the status of Brahmatva attach itself to my race, O sinless one. This is the boon I ask for, but Bhrigunandana, most Holy One, tell me in detail how will the lofty condition of Brahmanahood attach to my race? Who will be my friend? Who will have my affection and respect?"

CANTO 56

Chyavana said, “I should certainly tell you everything about the reasons for which I came here to exterminate your vamsa. It is well known that, in sacrifices, Kshatriyas must always have the assistance of the sons of Bhrigu. Through an irresistible decree of destiny, the Kshatriyas and the Bhargavas will fall out. The Kshatriyas, O king, afflicted by a law of fate, will slaughter the race of Bhrigus, not even sparing infants in their mothers’ wombs. Then, in Bhrigu’s race a Rishi with the name of Urva will be born. Endowed with great tejas, he will resemble fire or the sun in glory. He will know such wrath upon hearing of the extermination of his race that it will do for him to consume the three worlds. He will be powerful enough to reduce all the earth, with all her mountains and forests, to ashes; and for a while he will quell the flames of that fiery rage, by casting it into the mouth of the Mare that wanders through the ocean deeps. He will have a son named Richika. through a decree of destiny all the science of arms in its embodied form will come to him, for the extermination of the entire Kshatriya race. Receiving that science by inward light, he will, through yoga shakti, communicate it to his son, the most blessed Jamadagni of pure soul.

That tiger of Bhrigu’s race will bear that astra shastra in his mind. O righteous one, Jamadagni will marry a girl from your race, to spread its glory, lord of the Bharatas. Having acquired the daughter of Gadhi, and your granddaughter, that great Rishi will beget an enlightened son imbued with Kshatriya gunas. A Kshatriya son will be born into your vamsa, blessed with the virtues of a Brahmana. Possessed of great dharma, he will

be the son of Gadhi. Known by the name of Viswamitra, he will in tejas come to be regarded as the equal of Brihaspati himself. The illustrious Richika will give this son to your vamsa, this Kshatriya of lofty tapasya. Two women shall be the cause of this exchange of sons, a Kshatriya son into the race of Bhrigu and a Brahmana son into your vamsa.

All this will come to pass at the command of the Grandsire and not otherwise. To Brahmanatva will be attached one who is third in descent from you, and you will become a kinsman of the Bhargavas through marriage.'"

"Bhishma continues, 'Hearing these words of Maharishi Chyavana, King Kusika was filled with joy, and cried, "Indeed, O best of the Bharatas, so be it!"

Chyavana spoke to the king again and urged him to accept a boon for himself.

The king replied, "Very well. From you, O Mahamuni, I shall obtain the fruition of my wish. Let my race become invested with the status of Brahmanatva, and let it always set its heart upon dharma."

Chyavana Muni granted the king's prayer and, bidding farewell to the monarch, set out on his tirtha yatra.

I have now told you everything, Bhaarata, about how the Bhrigus and the Kusikas became connected to each other by marriage. Indeed, O king, everything fell out as Rishi Chyavana had said. The birth of Rama of Bhrigu's vamsa and of Viswamitra of Kusika's came to pass in the way that Chyavana had indicated.'"

CANTO 57

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, I am overwhelmed to hear what you say. Reflecting that the earth is now destitute of almost all her kings and Kshatriyas, all of great power and prosperity, my heart is full of grief. Having conquered the earth and acquired kingdoms, counted by hundreds, Bhaarata, I am roiled with sorrow at the thought of the millions of men I have slaughtered. Alas, what will be the plight of those royal Kshatriya women whom we have deprived of their husbands and sons and fathers, uncles and brothers? Having slain those Kurus—our kinsmen, our friends and well-wishers—we shall have to fall into hell, with our heads hanging down. There is no doubt about this.

I want, O my Grandsire, to mortify my body with the most extreme penance. With that end in view, I beg you, instruct me what I should do.'"

"Vaisampayana continued, 'The Mahatman Bhishma listens to what Yudhishtira says, reflects upon it deeply for a while, then replies.

Bhishma says, 'Listen to what I say to you, Yudhishtira, for what I have to say is exceedingly wonderful, and constitutes a great mystery. I will tell you about what ends men acquire after death as the rewards for particular deeds or courses of action they follow.

One attains swarga through tapasya. By penance one attains fame. Through tapasya, O powerful king, one attains a long life and all things of enjoyment. Through penance one attains to knowledge, to wisdom, to health and freedom from disease, to beauty and radiance of person, to prosperity, and to blessedness, Lord of the Bharata vamsa. With tapasya one attains to wealth.

By observing the vow of mowna, of silence, one succeeds in bringing the whole world under one's sway. By giving dana, one acquires all kinds of pleasures and things of luxury.

By observing the rite of diksha one finds birth into a good and high family. Those that spend their lives subsisting upon fruits and roots, and avoiding cooked food, succeed in gaining kingdom and sovereignty. Those that live upon the leaves of plants and trees as their food succeed in attaining to swarga. He that subsists drinking only water surely attains swarga.

By giving gifts one merely increases one's wealth. By serving one's guru with reverence one acquires gyana. By performing sraddhas every day in honour of one's Pitris, one gains a large number of children. By observing diksha upon herbs and vegetables, one acquires a large number of kine. Those that subsist upon grass and straw succeed in attaining to heaven.

By bathing thrice every day with the necessary rites, one gains many wives. By living upon just water one acquires the regions of Prajapati. The Brahmana, who bathes every day and recites sacred mantras during the three sandhyas, becomes possessed of the status of Daksha Prajapati himself. By worshipping the Devas in a wilderness or desert, one acquires a kingdom or some great sovereignty, and by observing the vow of casting off the body through a long fast one goes straight into swarga.

One who owns the wealth of tapasya and who always passes his days in yoga acquires fine beds to lie upon, and seats and chariots and carriages. Casting off the body by entering a blazing fire, one becomes an object of reverence in Brahmaloka. Those that lie on bare and hard ground gain opulent houses and furnishings. Those that clothe themselves in rags and tree-bark obtain rich robes and ornaments. By not indulging the several agreeable tastes one succeeds in acquiring great prosperity. By abstaining from meat and fish, one gets long-lived children.

He who passes some time in the way of life called Udavasa becomes the very Lord of heaven. The man who speaks the truth, O best of men, succeeds in living in joy with the Devas themselves. By giving dana and dakshina one finds great fame in consequence of one's lofty achievements. Through abstention from cruelty one acquires health and freedom from disease. By serving Brahmanas with reverence one attains to kingdom and sovereignty, and the status of a Brahmana. By making gifts of water and

other drinks, one acquires eternal fame. By making gifts of food one acquires diverse articles of enjoyment. One who gives peace to all creatures, by refraining from doing them any injury, is freed from every world.

By serving the Devas, a man obtains a kingdom and celestial beauty. By lighting lamps and bringing light to dark places frequented by men, one acquires excellent vision. By giving away goodly and beautiful objects one acquires a good memory and understanding. By giving away scents and garlands, one acquires fame that spreads far and wide. Those who abstain from shaving their hair and beards succeed in having noble children. By observing vratas and diksha and regular snanas, for twelve years, according to the shastra, a man acquires a realm superior to those attained by Kshatriyas who die in battle.

By bestowing one's daughter on an eligible bridegroom, according to Brahma vivaha, one gains, O best of men, male and female slaves and ornaments and fields and houses. By performing sacrifices and keeping fasts, one ascends to swarga. The man who gives away flowers and fruits succeeds in acquiring the most auspicious knowledge. The man who gives a thousand kine with horns adorned with gold, finds heaven. Even this has been said by the very Devas in a conclave in Devaloka.

He who gives away a Kapila cow with her calf, with a brazen pot for milking, and horns adorned with gold, and possessed of diverse other auspicious qualities, finds the fruition of all his wishes from that cow. Such a man, because of that gift, dwells in swarga for as many years as there are hairs on the body of the cow and, why he rescues his sons and grandsons and all his clan to the seventh generation from naraka in the next world.

The regions of the Vasus become accessible to that man who gives away a cow with horns beautifully adorned with gold, accompanied with a brazen jar for milking, along with a piece of cloth embroidered with gold thread, a measure of sesame and a sum of money as dakshina. A gift of kine rescues the giver in the next world when he finds himself falling into the deep darkness of hell; he finds himself restrained by his own punya karma in this world, like a boat with sails that have caught the wind, saving a man from being drowned at sea.

He who bestows a daughter according to Brahma vivaha upon an eligible and deserving groom, or who makes a gift of land to a Brahmana, or who gives food to a Brahmana with due rites, attains to Indraloka, the

kingdom of Purandara. That man who makes a gift of a house, well furnished, to a Brahmana given to Vedic studies and possessed of every accomplishment and good conduct, finds residence in the country of the Uttara-Kurus.

By making gifts of draft bullocks, one acquires the realm of the Vasus. Gifts of gold lead to swarga. Gifts of pure gold lead to greater punya still. By making a gift of a fine parasol or chatra one acquires a palatial mansion. By making a gift of a pair of sandals or shoes one acquires fine conveyances. The reward attached to a gift of cloths is personal beauty, and by making gifts of scents one becomes a fragrant person in one's next life.

One who gives flowers and fruit, plants and trees to a Brahmana acquires, without any labour, a palatial mansion with beautiful women and a plenitude of wealth. The giver of food and drink of different tastes and of other things of pleasure gains a copious wealth of even such things of every enjoyment.

The giver, again, of houses and clothes receives houses and clothes. There is no doubt about this. The man who makes gifts of garlands and incense and scents and lotions and unguents such as men use after bathing, and floral wreaths, to Brahmanas, is freed from every disease and gains great personal beauty, and sports in joy in the world kept for great kings. The man, O king, who makes to a Brahmana the gift of a house that is stocked with grain, furnished with comfortable beds and mattresses, and full of gold and other wealth, a mansion auspicious and altogether delightful, receives for himself an even more palatial dwelling. He who gives to a Brahmana a good bed perfumed with fragrant scents, covered with fine sheets, and soft pillows, wins without any effort on his part a beautiful wife, belonging to a high family and loving, agreeable and obedient.

The man who dies a Kshatriya's death on the field of battle becomes the equal of the Pitamaha Brahma himself. There is no end higher than this. Even this is what the great Rishis have declared.'

Hearing these words of his grandfather, Yudhishtira, the delighter of the Kurus, becomes eager for the end that is kept for Kshatriyas and no longer expresses any disgust at leading a grihasta's life. Then, O foremost of men, Yudhishtira, addressing all the other sons of Pandu, says to them, 'Let the words which our Grandsire has spoken command your faith.'

At this, all the Pandavas, with the famed Draupadi amongst them, laud the words of Yudhishtira and say, ‘Yes, so be it.’”

CANTO 58

"Yudhishtira says, 'I desire, lord of the Bharatas, to hear from you what rewards accrue from the planting of trees and the digging of tanks.'

Bhishma says, 'A piece of land that is pleasing to look at, fertile, situated in a scenic place, adorned with diverse kinds of precious metals, and inhabited by all sorts of living creatures, is regarded as the best. A part of such a piece of land should be chosen for digging a tank. I will tell you, in due order, about the different kinds of tanks. I will also tell you what the merits are that attach to the digging of tanks, with a view to draw water for the benefit of all creatures.

The man who causes a tank to be dug becomes entitled to the respect and worship of the three worlds. A tank full of water is as agreeable and beneficial as the house of a friend. It is gratifying to Surya himself. It also contributes to the nurture of the Devas. It is the foremost of all things that lead to fame for the one who causes it to be excavated. The wise have said that the excavation of a tank contributes to the three purusharthas—dharma, artha and kama. A tank is said to be properly excavated if it is dug on land that belongs to those worthy of respect. A tank is said to serve all the four purposes of living creatures. Tanks, again, are regarded as enhancing, indeed constituting, the beauty and grace of a country.

The Devas and Manavas and Gandharvas and Pitris and Uragas and Rakshasas, and even immobile beings all resort to a tank full of fine water as their refuge. I shall, therefore, tell you what the merits are that have been said by great Rishis to be attached to tanks, and what the rewards are that

are attained by men that have them created. The wise have said that blessed indeed is the man whose tank is a repository for rainwater during the monsoon. The reward reaped in the world by the one who makes a gift of a thousand kine is won by that man whose tank contains water in autumn. The man whose tank holds water during winter acquires the merit of one who performs a sacrifice with plentiful gifts of gold.

He whose tanks have water in the season of dew wins, the wise have said, the merits of an Agnishtoma sacrifice. That man in whose well-wrought tank water occurs in the season of spring acquires the punya of the Atiratra yagna. That man in whose tank water occurs in summer acquires, the Rishis say, the merits that attach to an Aswamedha yagna.

That man rescues all his race in whose tank kine are seen to allay their thirst and from which righteous men draw their water. That man in whose tank cows slake their thirst, as also other animals and birds, and humans, surely acquires the punya of a horse sacrifice. Whatever measure of water is drunk from one's tank and whatever measure is taken therefrom by others to bathe, becomes stored punya for the weal of the excavator of the tank and he enjoys the fruit of that merit for unending days in the next world.

Water, especially in the other world, is difficult to obtain, O son. A gift of drink produces eternal happiness. Make gifts of sesame here. Make gifts of water. Do you also give lamps to light dark places. While alive and awake, you sport in happiness with your kinsmen. These are things which you will not be able to do in the other world.

The gift of drink, O chief of men, is superior to every other gift. In regard to punya it is distinguished above all other gifts. Therefore, do you make gifts of water.

Even thus have the Rishis declared the lofty punya of the excavation of tanks to be. I will now tell you about the planting of trees. Of immobile beings, the achalas, six classes have been spoken of—Vrikshas, Gulmas, Latas, Vallis, Twaksaras, and Trinas of diverse kinds. These are the several kinds of plants. Listen now to the punya that attaches to their planting.

By planting trees one acquires fame in the world of men and auspicious rewards in the world hereafter. Such a man is lauded and reverenced in the world of the Pitris. Such a man's name does not perish even when he becomes a dweller in Devaloka. The man who plants trees redeems the ancestors and descendants of both his father's and his mother's vamsas. Do you, therefore, plant trees, O Yudhishtira.

The trees that a man plants become the planter's children. There is no doubt about this. Leaving this world, such a man goes straight into swarga; many eternal regions of bliss become his. Trees gratify the Devas with their flowers; the Pitris by their fruits; and all guests and strangers by the shade they provide. Kinnaras, Uragas, Rakshasas, and Devas, Gandharvas and Manavas, as also Rishis, all have recourse to trees as their refuge. Trees that bear flowers and fruit gratify all men. The planter of trees is saved in the next world by the trees he plants, even like children saving their father. Thus, the man who wises his own weal should plant trees by the side of tanks and cherish them like his own children. The trees that a man plants are, according to both reason and the scriptures, certainly the children of the planter.

That Brahmana who excavates a tank, and he that plants trees, and he that performs sacrifices, are all worshipped in heaven even as men that are devoted to perfect truthfulness of speech. Hence should one cause tanks to be dug and trees to be planted, worship the deities in diverse sacrifices, and speak the truth.'"

CANTO 59

"Yudhishtira says, 'Amongst all the gifts that are mentioned in the treatises other than the Vedas, which gift, O Lord of the Kuruvamsa, is the most distinguished in your opinion? O puissant one, great is the curiosity I feel about this. Do you also discourse to me about that gift which follows the giver into the next world.'

Bhishma says, 'An assurance to all creatures of love and affection and abstention from every kind of injury, acts of kindness and favour done to a person in distress, gifts made to one that solicits with thirst and satisfying the solicitor's wishes, and whatever gifts are given without the giver ever thinking of them as gifts made by him, constitute, O Yudhishtira, the highest and best of all dana.

Gifts of gold, gifts of kine, and gifts of land—these are regarded as sin-cleansing. They rescue the giver from his evil deeds. Do you always make such gifts to those that are righteous. Without doubt, gifts save the giver from all his sins. The man who wishes to make his gifts eternal should always give to deserving persons, and give whatever they wish for and whatever things are the best in his home. The man who makes gifts of agreeable things and who does unto others what is agreeable to them, always succeeds in acquiring things that are agreeable to himself. Such a man certainly becomes beloved of all, both here and hereafter.

That man, O Yudhishtira, is a cruel wretch who, through vanity, does not to the extent of his means attend to the wishes of one who is poor and helpless and solicits his help. And he is verily the best of men who shows favour to even a helpless enemy fallen into distress, when such an enemy

presents himself and prays for help. No man is equal to him in merit who satisfies the hunger of an emaciated person who is possessed of learning, destitute of the means of support, and weakened by misery. One should always, O son of Kunti, dispel by every means in one's power, the distress of righteous men who keep vows and whose deeds are in accord with dharma, and who, though destitute of sons and wives and plunged in misery, do not yet solicit others for any kind of assistance.

Those who do not utter blessings upon the gods and men in expectation of gifts, who are deserving of reverence and always contented, and who subsist upon such alms as they get without solicitation of any kind, are regarded as veritable snakes of virulent poison. Do you, O Bhaarata, always protect yourself from them by giving them generous gifts. Such men are competent to make the foremost of Ritwiks. You must seek them out through your spies and agents. You should honour those men with gifts of fine houses, furnished with every necessity and luxury, with slaves and serving men, with fine robes and vestments, O son of Kuru, and indeed with everything that can contribute to their pleasure and happiness.

Righteous men of righteous deeds should make such gifts, impelled by the motive that it is their duty to act in this manner and not from the desire of reaping any rewards. Verily, good men should give in this way so that the virtuous men I have described might not, O Yudhishtira, feel any disinclination to accept those gifts sanctified by devotion and faith. There are persons bathed in learning and immersed in vows. Without depending upon anyone they obtain their means of subsistence. These Brahmanas of rigid vows are devoted to Vedic study and penance, without ever proclaiming their practices. Whatever gifts you make to such men of pure conduct, of thorough mastery over their senses, and always contented with their own wives in the matter of desire, are sure to win for you a merit that will go with you into all the worlds into which you may go.

One reaps the same punya by giving dana to regenerate men of restrained souls that one wins by properly pouring libations into the sacred fire morning and evening. Even this is the sacrifice laid out for you—a sacrifice that is sanctified by bhakti and sraddha and that is endowed with dakshina. It is distinguished above all other sacrifices. Let that sacrifice ceaselessly flow from you even as you give. Performed in the view of such men, O Yudhishtira, a sacrifice in which the water that is sprinkled to dedicate gifts constitutes the oblations in honour of the Pitris, and the

devotion and worship rendered to such superior men, serves to free one of the debts one owes to the Devas.

Those that do not yield to wrath and that never desire to take even a blade of grass that belongs to others, as also they that are of agreeable speech, deserve to receive from us the most reverent worship. Such men and others, because they are free from desire, never pay their regards to the giver; nor do they strive to receive any gifts. They should, however, be cherished by givers even as they cherish their own sons. I bow my head down to them; from them both heaven and Hell may become one's own.

Ritwiks and Purohitas and Acharyas, who are knowers of the Vedas and who yet behave mildly towards disciples, become such men. Beyond doubt, Kshatriya prowess and energy lose their force upon encountering a Brahmana. Thinking that you are a king, that you possess great power, and that you have vast affluence, do not, O Yudhishtira, think to enjoy your prosperity without giving anything to the Brahmanas. Observing your svadharma, worship the Brahmanas with whatever wealth you have, O sinless one, to embellish your fortune and to sustain your power.

Let the Brahmanas live in whatever way they like; you must always bow your head before them with reverence. Let them always rejoice in you as your children, living happily and according to their wishes. Who other than you, O Kurusattama, can provide their means of subsistence for such Brahmanas as are endowed with eternal contentment, as are your well-wishers, and as are gratified by having only a little? As women have one eternal duty in this world—dependence upon and obedient service to their husbands—and as such duty constitutes their only end, even so is the service to Brahmanas our eternal duty and purpose.

If, at the sight of cruelties and other sinful deeds in Kshatriyas, the Brahmanas, O son, dishonoured by us, forsake us all, I say to you, of what use would life be to us in the absence of all contact with the holy ones, most especially since we shall then have to drag our lives on without being able to study the Vedas to perform sacrifices, to hope for worlds of bliss hereafter, and to achieve great feats? Let me, in this connection, tell you what the eternal usage is.

In days of yore, O king, the Kshatriyas used to serve the Brahmanas. The Vaisya, similarly, in those antique days worshipped the Kshatriyas, and the Sudra worshipped and served the Vaisya. Even this is what we have heard.

The Brahmana was like a blazing fire. Without being able to touch him or approach his presence, the Sudra would serve the Brahmana from a distance. It was only the Kshatriya and the Vaisya who could serve the Brahmana by touching his person or approaching his presence. The Brahmanas are endowed with a mild disposition. They are truthful in their conduct. They are followers of the sanatana dharma, the true religion. When angry, they are like snakes of virulent poison. Such being their nature, do you, O Yudhishtira, serve and attend upon them with obedience and reverence.

Brahmanas are superior to even those that are higher than all the high and the low. The tejas and tapasya of even those Kshatriyas who blaze forth with energy and might, become as nought when they are faced with the bala of the Brahmanas. My father himself is not dearer to me than the Brahmanas. My mother is not dearer to me than they. My Grandsire, O king, is not dearer, my own self is not dearer, and my life itself is not dearer to me than the Brahmanas.

On this earth there is nothing, O Yudhishtira, that is dearer to me than you are. But, Lord of the Bharata vamsa, the Brahmanas are dearer to me than even you.

I tell you this truly, O son of Pandu. I swear by this truth, through which I hope to acquire all those realms of bliss that have become my father Santanu's. Even now I behold those sacred regions with Brahma shining conspicuously before them. I shall repair thence, my son, and dwell in those worlds for unending days. Seeing these worlds, O best of the Bharatas, with my spiritual eyes, I am filled with joy at the thought of everything that I have ever done to help and honour the Brahmanas, O king.'"

CANTO 60

"Yudhishtira says, 'To which of two Brahmanas, when both are equally pure in their conduct, equally possessed of learning and purity, of birth and blood, but differing from each other in only that one solicits and the other does not—Pitamaha, to whom would a gift be more meritorious?'

Bhishma says, 'It has been told, son of Pritha, that a gift made to an unsoliciting person produces greater punya than one made to a person who asks. One possessed of contentment is certainly more deserving than that person who is destitute of that virtue and is, therefore, helpless amidst the storms and buffets of the world. The strength of a Kshatriya consists in the protection he gives to others. The strength of a Brahmana consists in his refusal to solicit. The Brahmana possessed of steadfastness and learning and contentment gladdens the very gods. The wise have said that an act of solicitation on the part of a poor man is a great reproach. Those that beg from others are said to annoy the world like thieves and robbers. The man who begs is said to meet with death; the one who gives, however, does not meet death. The giver is said to grant life to him who asks. Through an act of giving dana, O Yudhishtira, the giver is said to save his own self as well.

Compassion, karuna, is a very high virtue. Let people make gifts from compassion for those that ask. Those, however, that do not beg, but are plunged into poverty and distress should be respectfully and reverently invited to receive assistance. If such Brahmanas, who must be regarded as the foremost of their varna, live in your kingdom, you should look upon them as fire covered with ashes. Blazing with tapasya, they are capable of

consuming the very earth. Such men, O son of Kuru's race, though not generally worshipped, must still be regarded as deserving of worship in every way. Endowed with gyana and dhrishti, tapasya and yoga, such men always deserve our worship. O Parantapa, always offer worship to such Brahmanas. One should go of one's own accord to those greatest Brahmanas that do not beg or ask anything from anybody, and make gifts of diverse kinds of wealth to them, in abundance.

The merit that flows from properly pouring libations into the sacred fire every morning and evening is won by the person who gives dana to a Brahmana endowed with knowledge, with the Vedas and with high and excellent vratas. You should, O son of Kunti, invite to you such Brahmanottamas as are cleansed by gyana and the Vedas and by vows, who live in independence, whose Vedic studies and penances are hidden without being proclaimed from any house-top, and who are observant of noble vratas, and honour them with gifts of well-constructed and delightful houses furnished with servitors, fine robes and every amenity, and all things of pleasure and enjoyment. Being conversant with every duty and possessed of acute vision, those greatest of Brahmanas, O Yudhishtira, might accept the gifts offered to them with devotion and respect, thinking that they should not refuse these and disappoint the giver.

You should invite to you those Brahmanas whose wives wait for their return like tillers in expectation of rain. Having fed them well, you should make gifts of additional food to them so that upon their return home their waiting wives be able to distribute that food among their children that clamoured for food but were pacified with promises. Brahmacharins of restrained senses, O son, by eating at one's house in the forenoon, cause the three grihapatyas, the sacrificial fires of the home, to be gratified with the grihasta in whose house they eat. Let the sacrifice of dana proceed in your house at midday, O son, and do you also give away kine and gold and fine garments to your guests after feeding them well.

By conducting yourself in this way, you are sure to gratify the king of the Devas himself. And that would constitute your third sacrifice, Yudhishtira, in which offerings are made to the Devas, the Pitris and the Brahmanas. By such sacrifice you are sure to gratify the Viswedevas. Let compassion, or daya, towards to all creatures, giving to them all creatures what is their due, restraining the senses, renunciation, steadiness, and truth,

constitute the final bath, the avabhrita snana, of that sacrifice which is constituted by dana.

Even this is the sacrifice that is spread out for you—a yagna that is sanctified by bhakti and sraddha, and that has a vast dakshina attached to it. This sacrifice of giving is distinguished above all other sacrifices, my son, and so let this sacrifice always be performed by you.'"

CANTO 61

"Yudhishtira says, 'I wish to know in detail, O Bhaarata, where one meets with the high rewards of gifts and sacrifices. Are those rewards earned here or are they to come in the hereafter? Which amongst these two, dana and yagna, is said to yield the superior punya? To whom should gifts be made? In what manner are gifts and sacrifices to be made? When, also, are they to be made? I ask you all these. Most learned Pitamaha, discourse to me on the dharma of dana. Tell me what leads to the higher reward—gifts made from the sacrificial platform or those made out of that place?'

Bhishma says, 'A Kshatriya is usually engaged in deeds of fierceness. In his case, sacrifices and gifts are regarded as purifying or sanctifying him. They that are good and righteous do not accept the gifts of those of the royal order who are given to sinful deeds. For this reason, the king should perform sacrifices with abundant gifts in the form of dakshina.

If the good and the righteous accept the gifts made to them, the Kshatriya should incessantly give dana to them with devotion and faith. Dana is productive of great punya; giving is a most purifying act. Observing vows, one should perform sacrifices and gratify with wealth such Brahmanas as are friends to all creatures, possessed of righteousness, conversant with the Vedas, and pre-eminent for their deeds, their conduct, and their tapasya. If such Brahmanas do not accept your gifts, no merit becomes yours.

Perform sacrifices with copious dakshina, and make gifts of good and agreeable food to those that are righteous. While giving dana, you should

regard yourself as performing a sacrifice. With generous gifts you adore those Brahmanas who perform sacrifices. By doing this you will acquire a share in the punya of their yagnas.

You must always support such Brahmanas as have children and as are capable through their power of sending men into swarga. By conducting yourself in this manner you are sure to beget numerous and noble progeny, why, they say as many as the Prajapati himself.

They that are righteous support and advance the cause of all deeds of dharma. Even by giving up one's all, support such men, as also those that do good to all creatures. Yourself being in the midst of the enjoyment of affluence, do you, O Yudhishtira, make gifts of cows and bullocks and food and parasols and fine umbrellas, and rich robes and sandals or shoes to deserving Brahmanas.

To sacrificing Brahmanas give ghrita, as also other fine and sattvic food and chariots and carriages with horses harnessed, and dwellings and mansions and soft beds. Such gifts are fraught with prosperity and affluence to the giver, and are regarded as pure, O Bhaarata. Those Brahmanas who cannot be censured for anything they do, and who have no means of support, should be sought out. Covertly or publicly do you cherish such Brahmanas by giving them the means of support. Such karma always confers higher punya upon Kshatriyas than even the Rajasuya and the Aswamedha yagnas. For through such karma, you will cleanse yourself of sin and become sure of attaining swarga.

Filling your treasury, you should do all the good that you can to your kingdom. Through this you are sure to win great wealth and become a Brahmana in your next life. O Bhaarata, protect your own wealth and livelihood, as well as your power to do good to others, especially to provide the needy with the means of sustenance. You support your servants as your own children. Protect the Brahmanas so that they can peacefully enjoy what they have and also give them whatever they do not have.

Let your life be devoted to the cause of the Brahmanas. Let it never be said that you do not grant protection to Brahmanas. Too much wealth or affluence, when possessed by a Brahmana, becomes a source of evil to him. Constant association with affluence and prosperity is certain to fill him with pride and cause him to be blinded to his true svadharma. If the Brahmanas become torpid and steeped in folly, dharma and karma are sure to be

destroyed. Without doubt, if righteousness and duty are destroyed, that will lead to the destruction of all creatures.

That king who, having amassed wealth, makes it over for safe-keeping to his treasury officers and soldiers and guards, and then begins again to plunder his kingdom, saying to his men, "Bring me as much wealth as you can extort from the kingdom," and who spends the wealth, collected at his command through fear and cruelty, in the performance of sacrifices, should know that those yagnas of his are never approved, let alone lauded by the righteous.

The king should perform sacrifices with such wealth as is willingly paid into his treasury by prosperous and unpersecuted subjects. Sacrifices should never be performed with wealth acquired through severity and extortion. The just king should perform mahayagnas, great sacrifices, with large gifts in the form of dakshina, only when, because of his being devoted to the good of his subjects, they of their own accord shower him with copious wealth brought willingly by them for him to spend in offering worship.

The king must protect the wealth of the old, of minors, of the blind, and of those that are otherwise weak or handicapped. The king should never take any wealth from his people, if they, in a season of drought, succeed in growing any corn using water from wells. Nor should he take any wealth from weeping women. The wealth taken from the poor and the helpless is sure to destroy the kingdom and the prosperity of the king. The king should always make gifts of all things of enjoyment in abundance to the good and the righteous. He should assuredly dispel all fear of starvation which such men may have.

There are no men more sinful than those upon whose food children look with wistfulness without being able to eat. If within your kingdom any learned Brahmana languishes from hunger like any such children, you will incur the sin of foeticide for having allowed this.

King Sibi himself had said, "Fie on that king in whose kingdom a Brahmana or even any other man goes hungry.' The kingdom in which a Snataka Brahmana goes hungry is quickly overwhelmed with adversity. Such a kingdom, with its king, incurs dire censure. That king is more dead than alive in whose kingdom women are easily abducted from the midst of husbands and sons, even as they scream and cry in outrage and sorrow.

The people of a king who does not protect them should arm themselves to slay him, who only plunders their wealth, who confounds all

discrimination, who is ever incapable of leading them in dharma, who is without compassion, and who is regarded as the most sinful of rulers.

That king who tells his people that he is their protector but who does not or is unable to protect them, should be killed by his people, even like a dog that has become rabid.

A fourth part of whatever sins that his subjects commit cling to that king who does not protect them. Some say that all the sins of his people fall on the head of such a king. Others are of the opinion that half of his people's sins become his. However, bearing in mind the Manu smritis, it is my opinion that a fourth part of his people's sins becomes the unprotecting king's.

That king, who properly protects his subjects, gains a fourth part of whatever punya his people acquire while living under his protection. Yudhishtira, rule your kingdom in such a way that all your subjects look upon you as their refuge as long as you are alive, even as all living creatures seek the succour of the god of rain or as the winged denizens of the air seek the refuge of a large tree. Let all your kinsmen and all your friends and well-wishers, O scorcher of your enemies, seek you out as their refuge even as the Rakshasas do Kubera or the Devas do Indra.'"

CANTO 62

"Yudhishtira says, 'People accept with love and joy the declarations of the Srutis which say, "This is to be given. This other thing is also to be given!" As regards kings, again, they make gifts of various things to various men. What, however, Pitamaha, is the best or the foremost of all gifts?'

Bhishma says, 'Of all kinds of gifts, the gift of land has been said to be the first in point of merit. Land is immovable and indestructible. It yields to him who owns it all the best things upon which his heart may be set. It yields robes and vestments, ornaments and gemstones, animals, paddy and barley. Amongst all creatures, the giver of land grows in prosperity for ever and ever. As long as the earth lasts, so long does the felicity of the giver of land grow.

There is no gift that is higher, O Yudhishtira, than bhumidana. I have heard that all men have given a little quantity of earth; and since all men have made gifts of earth, hence do all men enjoy a little of the earth. Whether in this or in the next world, all creatures live under conditions that depend upon their own actions. The earth is prosperity's self. She is a mighty goddess. She makes him her Lord in the next life who makes gifts of her in this life to others. That person, O best of kings, who gives away earth, which is indestructible, as dakshina, is born in his next life as a man and also becomes a lord of lands. The measure of one's enjoyment in this life is commensurate with the measure of one's gifts in a previous life. This is the conclusion to which all the scriptures point.

A Kshatriya should either give away the earth in dakshina or cast off his life in battle. Even this constitutes the highest source of prosperity with regard to Kshatriyas. We have heard that land, bhumi, when given away, purifies and sanctifies the giver. The man of sin, who is guilty of even Brahmahatya, the killing of a Brahmana, and of every falsehood, is purified of his sin by giving a gift of earth. Indeed, a gift of land saves even the worst sinner from all his sins.

The righteous accept only gifts of land and no other thing from kings that are sinful. Like one's mother, the earth, when given away, cleanses both the giver and the taker. And this is an eternal and secret name of the earth—Priyadatta. Given away or accepted in gift, the name that is dear to her is Priyadatta. The gift of earth is the most desirable. That king who makes a gift of earth to a learned Brahmana, obtains from that gift a kingdom.

Upon being reborn in this world, such a giver without doubt attains to a position equal to that of a king. Hence, a king as soon as he gets earth, should make gifts of land to the Brahmanas. None but a Lord of earth is competent to make gifts of land. Nor should one who is not a deserving one accept a bhumidana. They who desire land should, without any doubt, make gifts of earth.

That man who takes away earth belonging to a righteous man never receives any earth. By making gifts of earth to the righteous, one gets good earth. Of virtuous soul, such a giver acquires great fame both here and hereafter. That righteous king about whom the Brahmanas say, "We live on land given to us by him," is such that his very enemies cannot utter the least reproach about his kingdom.

Whatever sins a man commits from want of the means of support, are all washed away by a gift of only so much earth as is covered by a cow-hide. Those kings that are mean in their actions or are of fierce deeds, should be taught that bhumidana is exceedingly cleansing and is the highest gift in respect of punya. The ancients thought that there was always very little difference between the man who performs an Aswamedha yagna and him that makes a gift of earth to one that is deserving and righteous. The learned doubt the acquisition of punya through all other acts of dharma. The only karma about which they do not entertain any doubt is the bhumidana, which is the foremost of all gifts.

The man of wisdom who makes gifts of land, gives away all these—gold, silver, cloth, gems, pearls and other precious stones. Penances,

sacrifice, Vedic lore, good conduct, absence of greed, firmness in truth, worship of elders, preceptors and the deities—all these dwell in him who makes a gift of land. They who ascend to the world of Brahma by giving their lives in battle, after having fought without any regard for themselves and only to secure their master's weal—even they cannot surpass the merit of those that make gifts of earth.

As the mother always nourishes her own child with milk from her breast, even so does the earth, this sacred Bhumi, gratify all the tastes and desires of the person that makes a gift of land. Mrityu, Vaikinkara, Danda, Yama, Agni who is possessed of great fierceness, and all the heinous and terrible sins cannot touch or come near the person that makes a gift of earth. That man of tranquil soul who makes a gift of land gratifies the Pitris dwelling in their own world and the Devas in theirs. The man who makes a gift of land to one that is emaciated and cheerless, destitute of the means of livelihood and languishing from weakness, and who thereby gives another in want the means of subsistence, becomes entitled to the honour and the great merit of performing a sacrifice.

Even as a loving cow runs towards her calf with full udders dripping milk does the most-blessed earth go in love after the one who makes a gift of land. That man who makes a gift of tilled land to a Brahmana, or land sown with seeds, or land that has standing crops, or a mansion well-furnished with every necessity, succeeds in the hereafter in becoming the accomplisher of the wishes of everybody.

The man who makes a Brahmana, possessed of a livelihood, owning a domestic fire and of pure vows and practices, accept a gift of earth, never falls into any danger or distress. As the moon waxes day by day, even so the punya of a gift of land is enhanced every time such earth yields crops.

Those conversant with ancient history sing this sloka in connection with the bhumidana. Hearing that sloka, Jamadagni's son Rama gave away all of this Bhumi to Kasyapa. This is that sloka: *Receive me in gift. Give me away. By giving me away, you, O giver, shall gain me again!*

That which is given away in this life is re-acquired in the next. The Brahmana who recites this high declaration of the Vedas at the time of a sraddha finds the highest reward. A gift of earth is a high expiation for the sin of such powerful men who betake themselves to Atharvan rites for doing harm to others. Indeed, by making a gift of earth one rescues ten generations of one's father's and one's mother's vamsas. That person who is

even conversant with this Vedic declaration regarding the merits of a bhumidana, succeeds in redeeming ten generations of both his mother's and father's families.

The earth is the original source of all creatures, for it is from Bhumi that all creatures derive their sustenance. It has been said that Agni, the deity of fire, is the presiding genius of the earth. After the coronation ceremony of a king, this Vedic declaration should be recited to him, so that he may make gifts of earth and may never take away land from a righteous man. Without the least doubt, all the wealth owned by the king belongs to the Brahmanas. A king who properly knows dharma is the first requisite for the kingdom's prosperity. A people whose king is unrighteous and godless in his ways and beliefs can never be happy. Such a people can never sleep or wake in peace. Because of his evil deeds his subjects are always filled with anxiety. Protecting what his subjects already have and new acquisitions, by lawful means, is never seen in the kingdom of such a sinful ruler.

A people who have a wise and righteous king sleep happily and wake up in happiness. Through the blessed and righteous deeds of such a king his subjects are freed from all anxiety. The subjects, restrained from evil, grow in prosperity through their own pure conduct. Capable of keeping what they have, they continue to make new acquisitions in dharma. That king who makes gifts of earth is regarded as well-born. He is regarded as a man. He is a friend. He is righteous in his actions. He is a giver. He is regarded as possessing true prowess.

Those who make gifts of ample and fertile earth to Brahmanas who know the Vedas always shine in the world in consequence of their tejas, like so many suns. As seeds scattered in fertile soil grow and return a goodly crop, even so all one's wishes become crowned with fruition because of one's making gifts of earth. Aditya and Varuna and Vishnu and Brahma and Soma and Hutasana, and the illustrious and trident-bearing Mahadeva, all laud the man that makes a gift of earth. Living creatures spring into life from the earth and it is into the earth that they are merged when they die.

Living creatures of the four kinds all have earth for their essence. The earth is both the mother and father of the universe of creatures, O king. There is no element that can compare with Bhumi.

In this regard, Yudhishtira, listen to the old narrative of a discourse between the Devaguru Brihaspati and Indra, king of swarga. Having adored Vishnu with a hundred sacrifices, each of which was distinguished by

plentiful dakshina, Maghavat put a question to Brihaspati, that greatest of all the wise and the eloquent.

Indra said, “Illustrious one, by what gift does one succeed in coming to swarga and attaining beatitude? O foremost of the eloquent, tell me of that gift which bestows truly high and inexhaustible punya.”

Thus addressed by the Deva king, the Devaguru Brihaspati of great tejas said these words in reply to him of a hundred sacrifices: “Endued as he is with the punya that attaches to the bhumidana, the realm of felicity reserved for the man who makes a gift of such earth as is auspicious and rich with every desirable thing, is never lost or exhausted. That king, O Sakra, who wishes for prosperity and who wants to win lasting happiness for himself, should always make gifts of earth, with due rites, and to the deserving. If after committing many sins a person makes gifts of earth to Brahmanas, he casts off all those sins like a snake casting off its slough. He that makes a gift of earth is said to make gifts of everything—of seas and rivers and mountains and forests. By making a gift of earth, the person is said to give away lakes and tanks, wells and streams.

Because of the moistness of earth, one is said to give away things of diverse tastes by making a gift of earth. The man who makes a gift of land is regarded as giving away herbs and plants possessed of high and efficacious virtues, trees adorned with flowers and fruit, delightful woods, and hillocks.

The punya that a man acquires by making a gift of earth cannot be gained by the performance of even such great sacrifices as the Agnishtoma and others, with plentiful gifts in the form of dakshina. The giver of earth rescues ten generations of both his father’s and his mother’s races. Similarly, by taking away earth that was given away, one casts oneself into hell and casts ten generations of both one’s paternal and maternal lines into the same place of misery. That man who having promised to make a gift of earth does not actually make it, or who having made a gift takes it back, has to pass a long time in great torment from being bound with the paasa, the noose, of Varuna at the command of Yama.

Men never to go to Yama who honour and worship those best of Brahmanas that pour libations every day on their domestic fire, who are always engaged in the performance of sacrifices, who have scant means of livelihood, and who receive with hospitality every guest seeking shelter in their homes. The king, O Purandara, should free himself from the debt he

owes to the Brahmanas and protect the helpless and the weak belonging to the other varnas. The king should never take back land that has been given away by another to a Brahmana who is destitute of a livelihood. The tears that fall from the eyes of such Brahmanas can destroy the ancestors and descendants to the third generation of the one who takes their lands.

That man who succeeds through his endeavours in re-establishing a king driven out from his kingdom, gains heaven and is much honoured by the denizens of swarga. The king who makes gifts of land with standing crops of sugarcane or barley or wheat, or with kine and horses and other draft animals—earth that has been won with the might of the giver's arms—land that has mineral wealth in it and that is covered with every kind of natural verdure and richness, wins inexhaustible regions of felicity in the next world; and such a king is said to perform the earth sacrifice, the Bhumi yagna.

That king who makes a gift of earth is washed of every sin and becomes pure and approved of by the righteous. In this world he is highly honoured and lauded by all men of dharma. The merit that attaches to a bhumidana increases every time the land given away bears crops for the owner, even as a drop of oil, falling upon water, is seen to spread on every side and cover the water's surface. Those heroic kings and ornaments of great sabhas who cast off their lives in battle with faces towards the enemy, attain, O Sakra, to Brahmaloka. Beautiful women, skilled in music and dancing and adorned with garlands of celestial flowers, receive the giver of earth as he comes to swarga after leaving the world.

The king who makes gifts of earth with due rites to deserving Brahmanas, sports in bliss in the celestial realms, in the constant company of the Devas and Gandharvas. A hundred Apsaras, wearing unearthly garlands, approach the giver of earth as he ascends into Brahmaloka.

Flowers of exquisite fragrance, a majestic conch and throne, a royal chatra and matchless horses and magnificent and elegant rathas, await the one who has given gifts of lands. By making gifts of earth a king can always enjoy flowers of transcendent and intoxicating redolence and untold quantities of heaven's gold. Possessed of all kinds of wealth, the commands of such a king can never be flaunted anywhere, and cries of '*Jaya'*–hail him wheresoever he may go.

The rewards that attach to gifts of earth consist of dwelling in swarga, O Purandara, and gold, and unimaginable flowers, and plants and herbs of

great medicinal virtue, and mineral wealth and verdant, sacred kusa grass. By making a gift of land a man acquires in his next life nectar-yielding earth.

There is no gift that is equal to a gift of land. There is no elder worthy of greater respect than the mother. There is no duty higher than truth. There is no wealth more precious than that which is given away."

Bhishma continues, 'Hearing these words from Brihaspati, the son of Angiras, Vasava made a gift to him of the whole earth with all her jewels, gemstones and gold and all her wealth of diverse kinds. If these verses declaring the merit attaching to gifts of earth be recited on the occasion of a sraddha, neither Rakshasas nor Asuras can appropriate even the least share of the offerings made. Without doubt, the offerings one makes to the Pitris at such a sraddha become inexhaustible. Hence, during sraddhas, the man of learning should recite these verses on the subject of the punya that attaches to gifts of land, in the presence and hearing of the invited Brahmanas even while they are engaged in eating.

And so, O king of the Bharatas, I have told you at length about that gift which is the foremost of all gifts. What else do you wish to hear?'"

CANTO 63

"Yudhishtira says, 'When a king grows desirous of making gifts in this world, what are the gifts which he should make, O best of the Bharatas, to such Brahmanas as possess superior virtue and accomplishments? What gift is that by which Brahmanas become immediately gratified? What rewards do they bestow in return? O Mahabaho, tell me about the lofty rewards attained through the punya arising from dakshina. What gifts yield rich fruit both here and hereafter? I wish to hear all this from you. I beg you, discourse to me upon it all in detail.'

Bhishma says, 'Once I asked the divine Narada these same questions. Listen to me and I will tell you what that Devarishi said to me in reply.

Narada said, "The Devas and all the Rishis laud annrita, food, greatly. The course of the world and the intellectual faculties have all been established on food. There has never been, nor will there be any gift that is equal to the gifts of anna. Hence, men always particularly want to make annadana, gifts of food. In this world, food is the cause of energy and strength. The life-breaths are founded on food. It is food that upholds the wide universe, O mighty one. All classes of men, householders and mendicants and ascetics, exist depending upon food. The pranas depend upon food. There is no doubt about all this.

Depriving, if need be, his own family, a man who wishes for his own prosperity should make annadana to a Mahatman Brahmana or a sannyasi. That man who gives food to an accomplished Brahmana who solicits it, secures for himself in the world to come wealth of untold value. The

grihasta who wishes his own prosperity should receive with reverence a deserving old man who is spent with toil while wayfaring far from home, when such a man honours the householder's home with his presence. That man who, casting off wrath that overleaps every bound, and becoming righteous in disposition and freed from malice, makes dana of food, is sure to attain to happiness, O king, both here and hereafter.

The householder should never ignore a man that comes to his home, nor should he insult him by sending him away. A gift of food made to even a Chandala or a dog is never lost or in vain. That man who makes a gift of clean food to a person on a yatra, who is toil-worn and unknown to the giver, is sure to acquire great punya. The man who gratifies with annadana the Pitris, the Devas, the Rishis, the Brahmanas and Atithis arrived at his home, gains immeasurable merit.

That man, who having committed even a heinous sin, makes a gift of food to one that solicits, or to a Brahmana, is never struck down by that sin. Annadana made to a Brahmana becomes well-nigh inexhaustible. That made to a Sudra becomes productive of great punya. Even this is the difference between the merits that attach to gifts of food made to Brahmanas and Sudras. Solicited by a Brahmana, one should not enquire about his vamsa, gotra, conduct or Vedic lore. Asked for food, one should give food to him that asks. There is no doubt, O king, that he who gives food obtains both here and hereafter many wonderful kalpa vrikshas that yield rare fruit and every other object of desire.

Like tillers expecting auspicious showers of rain, the Pitris always expect that their sons and grandsons will make offerings of food to them in sraddhas. The true Brahmana is a great being. When he comes into one's home and asks, saying, 'Give me', the owner of the abode, whether influenced or not by the wish to acquire merit, is sure to win great punya by giving in response to that solicitation. The Brahmana is the guest of all creatures in the universe. He is entitled to the first portion of every meal and offering of food. That house swells in prosperity to which Brahmanas come for alms and from which they return honoured by their desires being amply fulfilled. The owner of such a house takes birth in his next life in a family, O Bhaarata, which can command all the comforts and luxuries of life.

By making gifts of food in this world, a man is sure to attain to an exalted place in the hereafter. He who makes gifts of sweets and indeed any food that is sweet, attains to a residence in swarga where he is honoured by

all the Devas and the others. Food constitutes the prana, the life-breath, of men. Everything is founded upon food. He who makes gifts of food gains many animals, many children, considerable wealth, and an abundance of all things of comfort, luxury and enjoyment.

The giver of food is said to be the giver of life. Indeed, he is said to be the giver of everything. Hence, O king, such a man acquires both strength and beauty of form in this world. If food be duly given to a Brahmana arrived at the giver's house as a guest, the giver attains to great happiness, and is adored by the very Devas. The true Brahmana, O Yudhishtira, is a great being. He is also a fertile field. Whatever seed is sown in that field yields an abundant crop of punya.

A gift of food visibly and immediately produces happiness for both the giver and the receiver. All other gifts produce fruits that remain unseen. Food is the origin of all creatures. From food comes satisfaction and delight. O Bhaarata, know that dharma and artha both flow from food. The cure of disease or the enjoyment of health also flow from food.

In an olden Kalpa, Prajapati, the Lord of all creatures, said that food is amrita, the very source of immortality. Food is Bhumi, food is Swarga, and food is Akasa. Everything is established in food. In the absence of food, the five elements that constitute the physical organism cease to exist in a state of union. Without food, the strength of even the strongest man fails. Invitations and marriages and sacrifices all cease in the absence of food. The very Vedas disappear when there is no food. Whatever mobile and immobile creatures, chala and achala, exist in the universe are dependent on food. Religion and wealth, dharma and artha, in the three worlds are entirely dependent on food. Hence the wise should make gifts of food. The strength, energy, fame and achievements of the man who makes gifts of food constantly increase in the three worlds, O king. Prananatha, the Lord of prana, the life-breaths, Vayu Deva, takes the water evaporated by the sun up above the clouds. The water thus borne to the clouds, Sakra causes to be poured upon the earth as rain, O Bhaarata. The sun, through his rays, sucks up the moisture of the earth. The deity of wind causes the moisture to fall down from the sun.

When water falls down from the clouds upon the earth as rain, Bhumidevi, the goddess of earth, becomes moist. Then do people sow diverse kinds of crops upon whose harvest the universe of living creatures depends. It is in the food, the annrita, thus created that the flesh, fat, bones

and the vital seed of all beings have their origin. From the vital seed, the retas, spring diverse kinds of living creatures. Agni and Soma, the two agents living within the body, create and maintain the vital seed. Thus from annrita, food, the sun and the wind god, and the vital seed spring and act.

All these are said to constitute one element or quantity, and it is from these that all creatures come. That man who gives food to one who comes into his house and solicits it, is said to give both life and energy to living creatures."

Having been told this by Narada, O king, I have always made gifts of food. Do you also, therefore, freed from malice and with a cheerful heart, make gifts of annrita. By giving food to deserving Brahmanas with the proper rites, you can be sure, O mighty one, of attaining swarga.

Hear me, O Rajan, as I tell you of the realms that await those that make gifts of food. In swarga, the mansions of those Mahatmans shine with resplendence. Bright as the stars in the firmament, and supported upon many columns, white as the disc of the moon, and adorned with many tinkling bells, and roseate like the newly risen sun, those palatial edifices are fixed and also move as they will. Those palaces are filled with hundreds upon hundreds of creatures that live on land and as many as live in water.

Some of them are endowed with the deep effulgence of lapis lazuli and some are possessed of the splendour of the sun. Some of them are made of silver and some of gold. Within those mansions are many kalpa vrikshas which yield every desire of those that dwell in them. Innumerable tanks and roads and halls and wells and lakes are to be found all around. Thousands of grand, colourful and exotic carriages with horses and other animals harnessed, and with wheels whose clatter is always loud, you will see. Mountains of food and all things of enjoyment and pleasure, and heaps of rich, unworldly cloths and ornaments you will find in plenitude.

Rivers that run milk, and hills of long, peerless rice and other delicacies past describing, will you come upon. Many palatial dwellings there are in Swargaloka, which seem like great white clouds; opulent golden bedsteads and other furnishings and artefacts past anything you can dream of in this world will you come upon in the heavenly mansions of men who have given food to the deserving in this world.

Therefore, become a giver of food. For, verily, such are the realms that are kept for those high-souled and righteous ones that give food generously in this world.

And so I say to you again, men should always give dana and dakshina of annrita in this Bhumi.'"

CANTO 64

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have listened carefully, Pitamaha, about the law with regard to the giving of food. Can you discourse to me now about the conjunction of the planets and the stars in relation to the making of gifts?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to this ancient tale of the discourse between Devaki and Narada, that foremost of Rishis. Once upon a time, when Narada of god-like features and knower of every dharma, arrived in Dwaraka, Devaki asked him this same question. To her that had asked him, the Devarishi Narada replied as follows. Do you listen to what he said.

Narada said, "'By gratifying, O blessed devi, deserving Brahmanas with payasa mixed with ghrita under the constellation Krittika one attains to regions of great felicity. Under the nakshatra Rohini, to free oneself from the debt one owes to the Brahmanas, one should give to them many cuts of venison along with rice and ghee and milk, and other kinds of foods and drink. One giving away a cow with a calf under the constellation called Somadaivata, or Mrigasiras, goes straight from this world of humans to a realm of great felicity in swarga.

One keeping a fast and giving away krisara mixed with sesame, transcends all obstacles in the next world, including the mountains with rocks sharp as razors. By giving gifts, O beautiful one, of auspicious rice cakes and other foods under the constellation Punarvasu one becomes possessed of personal beauty and great fame and takes birth in one's next life in a family in which there is abundance of food. Making a gift of wrought or unworked gold, under the nakshatra Pushya, one shines in

effulgence like Soma himself in zones of surrounding gloom. He who makes a gift under the asterism of Aslesha of silver, of a bull, is freed from every fear and attains to great affluence and prosperity. By making a gift under the star of Magha of earthen dishes filled with sesame, one becomes possessed of children and animals in this world and attains to every felicity in the next.

For making gifts to Brahmanas under the constellation called Purva-Phalguni of food mixed with phanita, the giver observing a fast the while, the reward is great prosperity both here and hereafter. By making a gift under the nakshatra Uttara-Phalguni, of ghee and milk with rice called shashthika, one attains to great honour in heaven. Whatever gifts are made by men under the asterism of Uttara-Phalguni yield great punya, which, again, is inexhaustible. This is certain.

Observing a fast, the person who makes, under the star Hasta, a gift of a ratha with four elephants, attains to regions of untold grace that bestow the fruition of every wish. By making a gift, under Chitra, of a bull and of fine perfumes, one sports in bliss in regions of Apsaras even like the Devas sporting in the woods of Nandana. By making gifts of wealth under Swati, one attains to such transcendent worlds as one desires and also wins great fame. By making gifts under the Visakha nakshatra of a bull, and a cow that yields copious milk, a cart full of paddy, with a prasanga covering it, and also clothes for wearing, a man gratifies the Pitris and the Devas, and attains to endless merit in the other world. Such a man never meets with any calamity and gratifies the Pitris and the Devas and attains to inexhaustible punya in the hereafter. Such a one certainly finds swarga.

By making gifts to deserving Brahmanas of whatever they solicit, one attains to whatever means of life one desires, and is saved from hell and every disaster that visits a sinner after death. This is the certain conclusion of the scriptures.

By giving gifts under the constellation Anuradha of embroidered cloth and other vestments and of food, observing a fast the while, one is honoured in swarga for a hundred yugas. By giving dana under Jyeshta of the herb called kalasaka with its roots, one attains to great prosperity in the next world, to whatever end he desires. By giving to Brahmanas under the Mula nakshatra, fruits and roots, with a restrained soul, one gratifies the Pitris and attains to whatever he might wish for. By making under the star Purvashadha gifts to a Brahmana conversant with the Vedas and of good

family and conduct, of cups filled with curd, while one observes a fast, one is born in one's next life into a family possessed of abundant kine.

One obtains the fruition of every wish by giving dana under the asterism Uttarashadha, of jars full of barley-water, with ghee and the juice of sugar cane in abundance. By making a gift under Abhijit, of milk with honey and ghee to men of wisdom, a righteous man attains to heaven and becomes an object of attention and honour there. By giving under Sravana a gift of blankets or other cloth of thick texture, one roves freely through every realm of bliss, riding a white chariot of pristine resplendence. By making with a restrained soul, under Dhanishtha, a gift of a carriage with bulls yoked, or generous cloths and wealth, one goes directly into swargaloka in one's next life.

By making gifts under Satabhisha of perfumes with holy water and sandalwood, one attains in the next world to the companionship of Apsaras, as also eternal perfumes of diverse kinds. By making gifts under Purva-Bhadrapada—or Rajamasha—the giver attains to great happiness in the next life and an abundant store of every kind of food and fruit. He who makes, under Uttara, a gift of mutton, gratifies the Parees and attains to endless merit in the next world. To one who makes a gift, under the nakshatra Revati, of a cow with a vessel of white copper for milking her, the cow so given away comes to him in the next world, ready to grant the fruition of his every wish.

By giving dana during the day of Aswini, a ratha with steeds yoked, one is born in one's next life into a family that owns many elephants and horses and chariots, and he becomes endowed with great tejas. By making, under Bharani, a gift to Brahmanas of kine and sesame, one acquires in one's next life great fame and an abundance of kine."

Even thus did Narada speak to Devaki upon the subject of what gifts should be made under what nakshatras. Devaki, having listened to the sage, told it to her daughters-in-law, the wives of Krishna.'"

CANTO 65

"Bhishma says, 'The illustrious Atri, the son of the Grandsire Brahma, said, "They who make gifts of gold are said to make gifts of everything in the world." King Harischandra said that the gift of gold is sin-cleansing, leads to long life, and yields inexhaustible merit to the Pitris. Manu has said that a gift of drink is the best of all gifts; therefore, should a man cause wells and tanks and lakes to be created. A well full of water and from which diverse folk take water, is said to remove half the sins of the man who excavated it. The whole vamsa of a person is rescued from hell and sin in whose well or tank or lake, kine and Brahmanas and righteous people constantly quench their thirst. That man transcends every kind of calamity from whose well or tank everyone draws water without restraint during the parched summer.

Ghee is said to gratify the illustrious Brihaspati, Pushan, Bhaga, the twin Aswins, and Agni Hutasana. Ghrita is possessed of high medicinal virtues. It is a most sacred requisite for every sacrifice. It is the best of all oblations. The merit that a gift of ghee creates is superior indeed. The man who wishes for happiness in the next world, who wishes for fame and prosperity, should, with purified body and soul, with his own hands make gifts of ghrita to good and great Brahmanas.

Upon that man who makes gifts of ghee to Brahmanas in the month of Aswina, the twin Aswins, gratified, confer personal beauty. Rakshasas never invade the home of that man who gives payasa mixed with ghrita to deserving Brahmanas. That man never dies of thirst who makes gifts to Brahmanas of jars filled with pure and holy water. Such a man obtains

every necessity of life, in abundance, and has never to undergo any misfortune or distress.

That man who, with deep devotion and restrained senses, makes gifts to the best Brahmanas, is said to take a sixth part of the punya won by those Brahmanas through their tapasya. The man who gives gifts to Brahmanas of firewood with which to cook and also to keep the cold at bay, finds all his purposes and all his actions crowned with success. Such a one is seen to shine with great splendour and prevail over all his enemies. The illustrious deity of fire becomes pleased with such a man. As another reward, he is never robbed of his cows, and he is sure to achieve victory in battles.

The man who makes a gift of a goodly chatra gains children and great prosperity. Such a one is never affected by any weakness of sight, and the punya of performing a sacrifice becomes his. That man who makes a gift of a fine umbrella during summer or the rains, has never to meet with any sorrow on any account. Such a man quickly succeeds in freeing himself from every difficulty and impediment.

The most blessed and illustrious Rishi Sandilya has said that, of all gifts, the gift of a chariot, O king, is the best.'"

CANTO 66

"Yudhishtira says, 'I want to hear, Pitamaha, what punya accrues to him who makes the gift of a pair of sandals to a Brahmana whose feet are burnt by hot earth or sand, while he is walking.'

Bhishma says, 'The man that gives to Brahmanas sandals, padukas to protect their feet, succeeds in crushing all thorns along the journey of life and overcomes every kind of difficulty. Such a man, O Yudhishtira, remains above the heads of all his enemies. Carriages of pure splendour, made of silver and gold, with mules harnessed, approach him. He who makes a gift of padukas is said to earn the merit of making the gift of a chariot with well-broken steeds yoked.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me in detail once more, O Grandsire, of the punya that attaches to gifts of sesame and land and kine and food.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O son of Kunti, to what merits attach to tiladana, the gift of sesame, and having heard me, do you, then, O best of the Kurus, make gifts of sesame according to the law. Sesame seeds were created by the Self-born Brahma as the best food for the Pitris. Hence, gifts of sesame seeds always gladden the Pitris greatly. The man who makes gifts of sesame seeds in the month of Magha to Brahmanas has never to enter naraka, which abounds with all manner of terrible creatures. He who adores the Pitris with offerings of sesame seeds is regarded as worshipping the Devas at all the known sacrifices. One should never perform a sraddha without offerings of sesame seeds or without cherishing some purpose.

Sesame seeds sprang from the limbs of the great Rishi Kasyapa. Hence, in the matter of gifts, they have come to be regarded as possessing great

virtue. Sesame seeds bestow both prosperity and personal beauty and wash the giver of all his sins. For this the gift of sesame seeds is distinguished above the gift of everything else. Apastamva of great intelligence, and Kankha and Likhita, and the great Rishi Gautama all ascended into swarga by making gifts of sesame seeds.

Brahmanas that perform homa with offerings of sesame, who abstain from sexual intercourse, and observe the dharma or karma of vyavahara, are regarded as equal in purity and power to ghrita, the havi of the cow. The gift of sesame seeds is distinguished above all gifts. Amongst all gifts, the gift of sesame is regarded as yielding inexhaustible merit. In ancient times, when once the Rishi Kusika could not find havi, O Parantapa, he made offerings of sesame seeds to his three sacrificial fires and succeeded in gaining whatever he wished for.

This, O Lord of the Kurus, is what I have learnt about the excellent offering of sesame seeds, and this is why that offering has come to be regarded as being imbued with the most superior punya.

Now listen to what I would tell you next. Once upon a time, the Devas, desirous of making a sacrifice, repaired to the presence of the Self-born Brahma. Wanting to perform their yagna on Bhumi, they begged him for a piece of auspicious earth, saying, "We want it for our sacrifice."

The Devas said, "O illustrious one, you are the Lord of all the earth as also of all the gods. With your leave, O most blessed one, we want to perform a yagna. They who have not acquired lawful means, the earth upon which to erect their vedi, their sacrificial altar, do not earn the merit of the sacrifice they perform. You are the Lord of all the universe of all mobile and unmoving beings, and it behoves you to grant us a piece of earth for the sacrifice we wish to perform."

Brahma said, "You best of gods, I will give you a piece of earth whereon, O sons of Kasyapa, you shall perform your sacrifice."

The Devas said, 'Our desires, O Holy One, have been crowned with fruition. We shall perform our sacrifice even here with lavish dakshina. Let, however, the Munis always adore this piece of earth. Then there came to that place Agastya and Kanwa and Bhrigu and Atri and Vrishakapi, and Asita and Devala. The great gods, O you of unfading glory, performed their sacrifice. Those foremost of Devas concluded their yagna in due time. Having completed that sacrifice of theirs on the breast of that foremost of mountains, Himavat, upon the land given them by Brahma Pitamaha, the

Devas attached to the very gift of earth a sixth part of the punya arising from their sacrifice. The man who makes a gift of even a small span of earth with reverence and faith, has never to languish from any difficulty and neither to meet with any calamity.

By making the gift of a house that keeps out cold, wind and sun, and that stands upon a piece of clean land, the giver attains to Devaloka and does not fall from there even when his punya is exhausted. By making a gift of a dwelling, the giver, possessed of wisdom, lives, O king, in joy in the company of Sakra. Such a one receives great honour in swarga. That man in whose house a Brahmana of restrained senses, well versed in the Vedas, and belonging by birth to a family of preceptors, dwells in contentment, succeeds in attaining to and enjoying a world of the highest bliss. In the same manner, by giving away a goodly shelter for kine, a substantial construction that keeps out cold and rain, the giver redeems seven generations of his race from hell.

By giving away a piece of arable land, the giver attains to excellent prosperity. By giving a piece of earth containing mineral wealth, the giver aggrandises his family and race. One should never give away any earth that is barren or that is burnt or otherwise arid; nor should one give away any earth that is in close vicinity to a smasana, a cremation ground, or that has been owned and enjoyed before by a sinner.

When a man performs a sraddha in honour of the Pitris on land belonging to another, the Manes render both the gift of that land and the sraddha itself futile. Hence, a man of wisdom should buy even a small piece of earth and make a gift of it. The pinda that is offered to one's ancestors on earth that has been properly purchased becomes inexhaustible.

Forests, and mountains, and rivers, and tirthas are regarded as having no owners. No earth need be purchased in these for performing sraddhas.

Even this is what has been said, O king, on the subject of the merits of making gifts of earth. Now, Anagha, I will speak to you on the subject of Godana, the gift of kine. Cows are regarded as superior to all the Rishis. And since it is so, the divine Mahadeva for that reason performed his tapasya in their company. Cows, O Bhaarata, dwell in Brahmaloka, in the company of Soma. That being the highest end, evolved Rishis crowned with ascetic success strive to attain to that very world.

Cows benefit humans with their milk, ghee, curds, dung, skin, bones, horns and hair, O Bhaarata. Cows do not feel cold or heat. The monsoons

do not affect them at all. And since kine attain to the highest end, Brahmaloka in the company of Brahmanas, even so do the wise say that sacred cows and Brahmanas are equal.

In days of yore, King Rantideva performed a grand sacrifice in which an immense number of kine were offered up and slaughtered. From the juice that was secreted by the skins of the slaughtered animals, a river formed that came to be called the Charmanwati, after flowing from their skin. After that, kine were no longer animals fit for sacrifice. They are now animals fit for dana. That king who makes gifts of kine to the best of Brahmanas is sure to overcome any calamity that he might fall into. The man who makes a gift of a thousand kine has never to go into hell. Such a man, O ruler of men, gains victory everywhere.

The king of the Devas has said that the milk of cows is amrita. For this reason, one who makes a gift of a cow is regarded as making a gift of nectar. Those who know the Vedas have declared that ghrita, the ghee made from cows' milk, is the very best of all oblations poured into the sacrificial fire. For this reason, the man who makes a gift of a cow is regarded as making a gift of a libation for sacrifice.

A fine bull is the very embodiment of heaven. He who makes the gift of a bull to an accomplished Brahmana receives great honour in swarga. Kine, O Lord of the Bharata vamsa, are said to be the prana of living creatures. Hence, the man who makes the gift of a cow is said to make the gift of life-breath. Men who know the Vedas have said that kine constitute the great refuge of living creatures. Hence, the man who makes the gift of a cow is regarded as making the gift of sanctuary for all creatures.

The cow should never be given away for slaughter to one who will kill her; nor should the cow be given to a tiller of the soil; nor should the cow be given to a godless unbeliever, an atheist. The cow should not also, O chief of the Bharatas, be given to one whose occupation is the keeping of kine for profit. The wise have said that a person who gives away the cow to any of such sinful persons has to sink into hell.

One should never give to a Brahmana a cow that is lean, or that births calves that do not live, or that is barren, or that is diseased, or that is defective of limb, or that is worn out with toil. The man that gives away ten thousand cows attains to heaven and sports in bliss in the company of Indra. The man who makes gifts of a hundred thousand cows acquires many regions of untold and inexhaustible felicity.

Thus have I recited to you the punya attaching to the gift of sesame and of kine, as also to the gift of earth. Listen to me now and I will tell you of annadana, the gift of food, O Bhaarata. The gift of food, O son of Kunti, is regarded as a superior gift. King Rantideva, in days of yore, ascended into heaven from having made gifts of food. That king who makes a gift of food to one that is toil-worn and hungry, attains to Brahmaloka region of supreme felicity which is the Self-born's own.

Men fail to attain with gifts of gold and fine robes and other excellent things to that punya to which givers of food attain, O you of great puissance. Food is, indeed, the first among all created things. Food is the highest prosperity. It is from food that life springs, as also energy and prowess and strength. He who always makes gifts of food, with attention, to the righteous, never falls into any distress. Even this has been said by the great Parasara.

Having worshipped the Devas duly, food should be first dedicated to them. It has been told, O king, that the kind of food that is eaten by good men is also consumed by the gods that those men worship.

The man who makes a gift of food during the bright fortnight of the month of Kartika, succeeds in overcoming every difficulty here, and attains to unending bliss in the hereafter. The man who makes a gift of food to a hungry guest arrived at his home attains to all those worlds that are kept for those who know the Brahman. The man who makes gifts of food is sure to overcome every obstacle and distress. Such a one rids himself of every sin and cleanses himself of every evil deed.

And so I have told you about the merits of making gifts of food, of sesame, of earth and of kine.'"

CANTO 67

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have heard, O sire, of the merits of the different kinds of gift upon which you have dwelt. I understand, O Bhaarata, that the gift of food is particularly superior and laudable. What, however, is the great punya attached to making gifts of drink? I want to hear of this in detail, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'I shall, O Bharatakulapati, tell you about this; listen to me carefully, O you of unbaffled prowess. Anagha, I will tell you about charity, dana, beginning with that of drink. The punya that a man acquires by making gifts of food and drink is such that the like of it, I think, cannot be acquired through any other gift. There is no dana that is superior to that of either food or drink.

I say to you again that it is by food that all living creatures are able to exist. For this reason, food is regarded as a superior thing in all the worlds. From food the strength and energy of living creatures constantly increases. Hence, the Lord of all creatures has himself said that the gift of food is a most high one.

You have surely heard, O son of Kunti, the auspicious words of Savitri herself about food or annrita. You know for what reason she said those words, what those words were, and how they were said during the chanting of sacred mantras, O Mahabuddhi. By making a gift of food, a man really makes a gift of life itself. There is no gift in this world that is superior to the gift of life. You are not unacquainted with this saying of Lomasa, O you of mighty arms. The end that King Sibi attained of old in consequence of his having granted life to the pigeon is acquired by him, O Yudhishtira, who

makes a gift of food to a Brahmana. Hence have I heard that they that give life in this world attain to very lofty regions of bliss in the after-life.

Yet, food, anna, O Kurusattama, may or may not be superior to drink. Nothing can exist without the help of what springs from water. The very Lord of all the planets, the illustrious Soma, once came forth from jala, water. Amrita and sudha and swadha and kshira, milk, as indeed every kind of food, the herbs, O king, and creepers and vines, medicinal and of other virtues, all come from water. From these, the life-breath of all living creatures flows. The Devas have amrita for their food. The Nagas have sudha. The Pitris have Swadha for theirs. The animals have herbs and plants for their food. The wise have said that anna, rice and grain, and the rest, is the food of the Manavas, humans.

All these spring from water. Hence, there is nothing superior to the gift of water. If a man wishes to secure prosperity for himself, he should always make gifts of water. The gift of water is regarded as being truly praiseworthy. It leads to great fame and bestows a long life on the giver. The giver of water, O son of Kunti, always remains above the heads of his enemies. Such a man obtains the fruition of all his wishes and earns everlasting fame as well. The giver of water, O Lord of men, is washed clean of every sin and gains unending felicity hereafter as he goes forth into heaven, O you of great splendour. Manu himself has said that such a one earns realms of immortal bliss in the other world.'"

CANTO 68

"Yudhishtira says, 'Ah, Pitamaha, tell me again of the punya attaching to gifts of sesame and of lamps for lighting darkness, as also of food and clothes.'

'Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Yudhishtira, to the narrative of the discourse that took place in ancient times between a Brahmana and Yama. In the country lying between the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, at the foot of the hills called Yamuna, there was a large town inhabited by Brahmanas. The town was celebrated by the name of Parnasala and was delightful in appearance, O king. A large number of learned Brahmanas lived in it.

One day, Yama, the ruler of the dead, commanded a messenger of his, a Yamaduta clad in black, with blood-red eyes and hair standing erect, and possessed of black feet, eyes and a nose, all of which resembled those of a crow, saying, "Go to the town inhabited by Brahmanas and fetch hither the man known by the name of Sarmin who belongs by birth to the race of Agastya. He is intent on mental tranquillity and possessed of learning. He is a preceptor engaged in teaching the Vedas and his tapasya is famed. Do not bring me another man who also belongs to the same vamsa and lives in the same neighbourhood. This other man is equal to him that I want, in virtues, study and birth. In his children and conduct, this other resembles the intelligent Sarmin, but bring the individual I have in view. He should be worshipped with respect and not dragged here with irreverence."

Arriving in the town, the messenger did the very opposite of what he had been bidden. Setting roughly upon the wrong man, he brought him who had been forbidden by Yama to be brought. Possessed of great energy,

Yama rose up at the sight of the Brahmana and worshipped him duly. The king of the dead then commanded his messenger, saying, "Let this one be taken back, and let the other one be brought to me."

When the great judge of the dead said these words, that Brahmana addressed him and said, "I have completed my study of the Vedas and am no longer attached to the world. Whatever term might yet remain of my mortal existence, I wish to pass, dwelling even here, O you of unfading glory!"

Yama said, "I cannot ascertain betimes the exact period, ordained by Kaala, of anyone's life, and since Time has not urged me in your case I cannot allow you to live here. I take note of the deeds of dharma, or otherwise, that a man does in the world. Do you, O learned Brahmana of great splendour, return immediately to your home. Also, tell me what is in your heart and what I can do for you, O you of unfading glory."

The Brahmana said, "You must tell me what those deeds are by which one may earn great punya. O best of all beings, you are the foremost authority on the subject, why, in the three worlds."

Yama said, "Listen, O Dvija, to the laws regarding gifts. The gift of sesame seeds is a very superior one. It produces everlasting merit. Dvijottama, one should make gifts of as much sesame as one can. By making gifts of sesame every day, one is sure to attain the fruition of one's every wish. The gift of sesame at sraddhas is lauded. Verily, the gift of sesame is a most superior one. Do you give dana of sesame to Brahmanas according to the rites ordained in the shastras.

On the day of the full moon of the month of Vaisakha, you should give sesame to Brahmanas. They should also be made to eat and to touch sesame on every occasion that you can afford. They that wish to achieve what is beneficial to them should, with all their souls, do this in their homes. Without doubt, men should also make gifts of water and create shelters of rest where drinking water is given to wayfarers. One should have tanks, lakes and wells to be excavated. Such deeds are rare in the world. Do you always make gifts of water, for such dana is fraught with great punya.

O goodly Brahmana, you must also build wayside shelters where water is given to tired yatris. After a man has eaten, the gift he wishes most for is that of pure water to drink."

When Yama had said these words to him, the Yamaduta who had carried the Brahmana from his home conveyed him back. The Brahmana, on his

return, obeyed the instructions he had received. Having thus returned him to his dwelling, Yama's messenger fetched Sarmin, the one whom Yama had actually sought. Taking Sarmin to the Lord of death's halls, he informed his master that he had accomplished his task.

Possessed of terrible tejas, the judge of the dead worshipped that righteous Brahmana and, having conversed with him awhile, dismissed him to be returned to his home. To him also Yama gave the same advice and instructions. Sarmin, too, coming back into the world of men, did all that Yama had said.

Like the gift of water, Yama, from a desire of doing good to the Pitris, lauds the gift of lamps to light dark places. Hence, the giver of a lamp for lighting a dark place is regarded as benefiting the Pitris. So, indeed, one should always give lamps to light dark places. The giving of lamps enhances the vision of the Devas, the Pitris, and one's own self.

It has been told, that the gift of gemstones is a superior gift. The Brahmana, who, having accepted a gift of gems, sells them to perform a sacrifice, incurs no fault. The Brahmana, who having accepted a gift of gems makes a gift of them to Brahmanas, acquires inexhaustible merit himself and confers inexhaustible merit upon him from whom he originally received the gems. Conversant with all dharma, Manu himself has said that he, who, observing proper restraint, earns and makes a gift of gems to a Brahmana, also observant of shastraic injunctions, earns inexhaustible punya himself and confers inexhaustible merit upon the recipient.

The man who is content with his own wife and who makes a gift of clothes, gains an excellent complexion and fine vestments for himself. I have told you, O best of men, what the merits are that attach to gifts of kine, of gold, and the sesame in accord with the precepts of the Vedas and the shastras. One should marry, and beget and raise progeny from one's wives. Of all acquisitions, O son of Kuru's race, that of a male child is regarded as the highest.'"

CANTO 69

"Yudhishtira says, 'Do you, O Kurusattama, expatiate to me once again the noble law regarding gifts, with especial reference, O you of great wisdom, to bhudana, the gift of land, earth. A Kshatriya should make gifts of earth to a Brahmana of righteous deeds. Such a Brahmana should accept the gift with due rites. None else, however, than a Kshatriya is competent to make gifts of earth. It befits you now to tell me what persons of all the classes are free to bestow if moved by the desire to earn punya. Also tell me what has been said in the Vedas on this subject.'

Bhishma says, 'There are three gifts that go by the same name and that yield equal rewards. Indeed, these three confer the fruition of every wish. The three are kine, earth and knowledge. The man who speaks to his disciple words of righteous import drawn from the Vedas acquires punya equal to that won by giving earth and kine. Similarly are cows praised as objects of gifts. There is no dana higher than they, for cows confer merit immediately. They are also, O Yudhishtira, such that a gift of them cannot but lead to great punya. Cows are the mothers of all creatures. They bestow every kind of happiness.

The man that desires his own prosperity should always make gifts of cows. No one should ever kick cows or walk brashly through their midst. Cows are goddesses and homes of auspiciousness; they always deserve worship. Formerly, while tilling the earth whereon they performed a great sacrifice, the Devas used a goad to strike the bullocks yoked to the plough. Hence, while tilling the earth for a yagna, one may, without incurring censure or sin, apply the goad to bullocks. Otherwise, however, bullocks

should never be struck with a goad or a whip. When kine are grazing or lying down no one should annoy them in any way. When the cows are thirsty and they do not get water, because someone obstructs their access to a pool or tank or river, they can destroy him with all his relatives by merely looking at such a one.

What creatures can be more sacred than cows when with their very dung, cleansed and sanctified, altars are made, on which sraddhas are performed in honour of the Pitris, or those on which the Devas are worshipped? That man who, before eating, himself gives every day, for a year, only a handful of grass to a cow belonging to another, is regarded as keeping a vrata which bestows the fruition of every wish. Such a man gains children, fame, wealth and prosperity, and dispels all evils and nightmares.'

'Yudhishtira says, 'What should be the signs of cows that can be given as dana? Which are those cows that should be passed over in the matter of gifts? What should be the character of those to whom kine should be given? Who, again, are those to whom cows should not be given?'

Bhishma says, 'A cow should never be given to one that is not righteous in conduct, or to a sinful man, or one that is covetous or one who is untruthful, or a man that does not make offerings to the Pitris and Devas. By giving a gift of ten cows to a Brahmana learned and rich in the Vedas, poor in earthly wealth, possessed of many children, and owning a home, one attains to numerous regions of great felicity.

When a man performs any deed that is fraught with merit, helped by what he has got in gift from another, a portion of the punya attaching to that karma becomes his forever, with whose wealth the karma has been accomplished. He that begets a child, he who saves another from danger, and he that gives the means of sustenance to another are regarded as the three sires. Services dutifully rendered to the guru destroys sin. But pride destroys even great fame. Having three children destroys the blame of being childless, and the possession of ten cows dispels the reproach of being impoverished.

To one who is devoted to the Vedanta, who is imbued with great learning, who has been filled with wisdom, who has complete control over his senses, who keeps vratas laid down in the scriptures, who has withdrawn himself from all worldly attachments, to him that speaks pleasantly to all creatures, to him that would never do an evil thing even when impelled by hunger, to one that is mild and possessed of a peaceful

disposition, to one that is hospitable to all guests—verily to such a Brahmana should a man, possessed of similar conduct and blessed with children and wives, give the means of sustenance.

The measure of punya that attaches to the gift of kine to a deserving person is exactly the measure of the sin that attaches to the act of robbing a Brahmana of what belongs to him. Under all circumstances you must avoid despoiling what belongs to a Brahmana, and keep his wives at a distance from yourself.'"

CANTO 70

Bhishma says, 'In this matter, O perpetuator of Kuru's race, the Rishis narrate the great calamity that overtook King Nriga because of his despoiling what belonged to a Brahmana. Some years by, some young men of Yadu's race, while looking for water, came upon a large well covered with grass and creepers. Wanting to draw water from it, they laboured to remove the creepers that covered its mouth. After the mouth had been uncovered and cleaned, they saw within the well a very large lizard that lived there. The young men made strong and repeated efforts to rescue the lizard. Like a very hill in size was that lizard and they sought to free it with ropes and leather thongs. Not succeeding, the young men then went to Krishna, and said, "Covering the entire hollow of a great well, we saw a great lizard. Despite all our efforts we could not set it free."

Hearing this, Krishna went with them to the well, easily fetched the lizard out from it, and asked it who it was. The lizard replied that it was the soul of the great King Nriga who had flourished in days of old and performed countless sacrifices.

Krishna said to the lizard, "You did indeed perform many deeds of dharma, and no sin did you ever commit. Why then, O king, have you come to such a distressing end? Explain to us what this strange fate is and why it has befallen you. I have heard that you repeatedly gave dana to Brahmanas—why, of hundreds upon hundreds of thousands, and once again eight times hundreds upon hundreds of ten thousands of kine. Why, then, has this sorry plight overtaken you?"

Nriga replied to Krishna, "Once a cow belonging to a Brahmana who regularly worshipped his home fire, escaped from the owner's dwelling while he was away from home and entered my herd. The keepers of my cattle included that cow in their count of a thousand. In time, I gave away that cow to another Brahmana, with the wish of acquiring punya that would take me into swarga, and grant me joy there. Returning home, the true owner of that cow found her missing and set out in search of her. He found her in the yard of another Brahmana, the one to whom I had made a gift of her.

Finding her, her real owner said, 'This cow is mine!' The other Brahmana contested his claim, till both, disputing and excited with wrath, came to me. Addressing me, one of them said, 'You have been the giver of this cow!'

The other one cried, 'You have robbed me of this cow; she is mine!'

I then asked the Brahmana to whom I had given the cow to return the gift in exchange for thousands of other cows.

Without acceding to my earnest solicitation, he said to me. 'The cow I have got is well suited to time and place. She yields a copious measure of milk, besides being quiet and fond of us. The milk she yields is very sweet. She is regarded as worthy of every praise in my house. She is nourishing, besides, a weak child of mine that has just been weaned. I cannot give her away.'

Saying this, the Brahmana left. I then solicited the other Brahmana offering him an exchange, 'Will you take a hundred thousand kine for this one cow.'

The Brahmana, however, replied, 'I do not accept gifts from Kshatriyas. I am able to manage without your help. So, lose no time but give me that very cow which was mine.'

Even thus, O Krishna, did that Brahmana speak to me. I offered him gifts of gold and silver, and horses and chariots. That best of Brahmanas refused to accept any of these and he also went away. Meanwhile, urged by time's irresistible influence, I had to leave this world. Finding my way to Pitriloka, I was taken into the presence of the king of the dead.

Worshipping me duly, Yama addressed me, 'The end cannot be calculated, O king, of your deeds, so great has your life been. There is, however, a small sin which you unknowingly committed. Suffer the punishment for that sin now or later, as it pleases you. When you ascended

your throne, you swore that you would protect all your people in the enjoyment of what belonged to them. You did not, however, blemishlessly keep that oath. Besides, you took what belonged to a Brahmana. This was a two-fold sin you have committed.'

I answered Yama, saying, 'I will first endure the distress of punishment, and when that is over, I shall enjoy the happiness that is in store for me, O Lord.'

After I said those words to the king of the dead, I fell down to the earth. Though fallen, I could still hear some other words that Yama said to me ringing loudly in my mind. Those words were: 'Krishna, the son of Vasudeva, will rescue you. Upon the completion of a full thousand years, when your sin will have been exhausted, you shall attain to the many realms of inexhaustible bliss that you have acquired through your great deeds of dharma.'

Falling down into this world, I found myself, head downwards, in this well, transformed into a creature of an intermediate order—this great lizard that I am. My memory, however, did not leave me. And today I have been rescued by you, gracious Lord! What else can I attribute this to than the puissance of your tapasya? Give me your leave, O Krishna—let me rise into swarga!"

Then through Krishna's grace and with his leave, King Nriga bowed his head to him and mounting a celestial vimana flew up into swarga. After Nriga had gone, Krishna spoke this sloka: *No one should knowingly appropriate anything that belongs to a Brahmana. The property of a Brahmana, if taken, destroys the taker even as the Brahmana's cow destroyed King Nriga!*

I tell you, again, O Kaunteya, that a meeting with the good never proves fruitless. King Nriga was rescued from hell through meeting with one that was indeed good, the best of all men. As giving dana yields punya even so does taking from a Brahmana lead to sin and punishment. So, also, Yudhishtira, one should avoid doing any injury to kine.'"

CANTO 71

"Yudhishtira says, 'Sinless one, tell me in more detail about the merits attainable by making gifts of kine. Mahabaho, I am never satiated with listening to you.'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard the old story of the discourse between Rishi Uddalaki and his son Nachiketa is often told. Once on a time, Rishi Uddalaki of great intelligence approached his son Nachiketa, and said to him, "Do you wait upon and serve me."

Upon the completion of the vow he had undertaken, the great Rishi once more said to his son, "Engaged in performing my ablutions and deeply absorbed by my Vedic study, I have forgotten to bring firewood with me, as also the kusa grasses, the flowers, the water jar and the herbs I had gathered. Bring me these things from the riverside."

The son went to the place which his father described but saw that all those things had been washed away by the current. Coming back to his father, he said, "I do not see the things you left."

Roiled as he then was with hunger, thirst and fatigue, Rishi Uddalaki of great punya, cursed him in sudden wrath, "Do you meet with Yama today!"

Struck by his sire with the thunder of his curse, the son, with joined palms, said, "Be appeased with me."

Soon, however, he fell down on the ground, lifeless. Seeing Nachiketa prostrated upon the earth, his father became unhinged with grief. Crying, "Alas, what have I done!" he also fell to the ground. Stricken by grief, as he indulged in lamentations for his son, the rest of that day passed and night came. Then Nachiketa, O son of Kuru's race, drenched by the tears of his

father, gave signs of returning to life as he lay on a mat of kusa grass. His being restored to life by the tears of his father resembled the sprouting forth of seeds when drenched with auspicious showers. The son just restored to consciousness was still weak. His body was smeared with fragrant liniments and he looked like one waking from a deep slumber.

The Rishi asked him, "Have you, O son, acquired auspicious realms through your own karma? By good fortune, you have been restored to me. But your body does not seem to be human!"

Nachiketa made the following reply in the midst of all the gathered Rishis, "In obedience to your command I journeyed to the vast world of Yama which is possessed of a charming effulgence. There I beheld a palatial mansion which extended for thousands of yojanas and emanated a golden splendour from its every part. As soon as Yama saw me approach with my face towards him, he commanded his attendants, saying, 'Give him a fine seat.'

Verily, for your sake, the Lord of the dead worshipped me with the arghya. Thus worshipped by Yama and seated in the midst of his counsellors, I said mildly, 'I have come to your abode, O judge of the dead. Do you assign to me those realms which I deserve for my actions.'

Yama answered me, 'You are not dead, O amiable one. Endowed with tapasya, your father said to you, "Do you meet with Yama today!" The tejas of your father is like a blazing fire. I could not possibly make what he said false. You have met me now, child, do you go hence. For the author of your body indulges in heartbroken lamentations for you. You are my dear guest today. What wish that you cherish in your heart shall I grant you? Ask me for the fruition of whatever desire you may have.'

I replied to the king of the dead, saying, 'I have arrived in your dominions from which no traveller ever returns. If I truly deserve your kindness, I wish, O Lord of the dead, to see the regions of high felicity and happiness that are earned by the doers of righteous deeds.'

Immediately, Yama made me mount a chariot of splendour, effulgent as the sun, and to which were harnessed many unworldly steeds. Bearing me on that ratha, he showed me himself, O Dvijottama, all those realms of bliss and fascination that are kept for the righteous. I saw in those worlds many mansions of great resplendence intended for Mahatmans.

Those palaces are of diverse forms and are adorned with every kind of gemstone of heaven. Bright as the disc of the moon, they are adorned with

rows of tinkling bells. Hundreds among them are of many storeys. Within their precincts are enchanting groves and woods, with transparent pools and lakes. Possessed of the lustre of lapis lazuli and the sun, and made of silver and gold, their complexion resembles the colour of the dawn. Some of them are immovable and some go anywhere.

Within them are extravagant mounds of unearthly food and drink, other things of enjoyment, and rich robes and soft beds in abundance. Within them are so many trees, kalpa vrikshas that grant every wish. There are also many rivers and roads and spacious halls, and lakes and large tanks. Thousands of chariots with rattling wheels can be seen there, with excellent steeds harnessed. Many rivers that flow milk, many hillocks of heaven's ghrita, and sparkling pools of lucid water are seen all around.

Verily, I beheld many such realms, which I never saw before, wondrous worlds of happiness and joy, all given by the king of the dead. Seeing all these, I addressed that ancient and powerful judge of the dead, saying, 'For whose use and enjoyment have these rivers with eternal currents of kshira and ghrita been ordained?'

Yama answered me saying, 'These streams of milk and ghee, know you, are for the enjoyment of those righteous ones that make gifts in the world of men. Other eternal worlds there are which are filled with such mansions of light free from sorrow of every kind. These are kept for those that make gifts of kine. The mere gift of kine is not worthy of praise. There are other considerations about the person to whom kine should be given, the time for making those gifts, the kind of cows that should be given, and the rites that should be observed in making the gifts. Godana, the gift of kine, should be made after ascertaining the character and excellence of both the Brahmanas who are to receive them and the kine themselves which are to be given.

Cows should not be given to one in whose dwelling they are likely to suffer from fire or the sun. That Brahmana who is possessed of Vedic lore, who is of austere penances, and who performs sacrifices, is regarded as worthy of receiving kine in dana. Cows that have been rescued from distress, or that have been given by poor householders from want of sufficient means to feed and cherish them, are reckoned as being of great value.

Abstaining from all food and living upon water alone for three nights and sleeping the while on the bare earth, one should, having properly fed the cows one intends to give away, bestow them on deserving Brahmanas

after having gratified the holy men with other gifts as well. The cows given away should be accompanied by their calves. They should, again, be such as will bring forth good calves in the proper seasons. They should be accompanied with other accoutrements. Having completed the dakshina, the giver should live for three days on only milk and forbear from food of every other kind. He who gives a cow that is gentle and not vicious, that brings forth good calves at proper intervals, and that does not run away from the owner's house, and accompanies such a gift with a vessel of white brass for milking her, enjoys the bliss of heaven for as many years as are measured by the number of hairs on the animal's body.

He, who gives a Brahmana a bull well-broken and able to bear fair burdens, strong and young in years, disinclined to any mischief, big and energetic, enjoys the regions that are reserved for givers of kine. He is regarded as a proper person for receiving a cow in gift who is known to be mild towards kine, who takes cows for his refuge, who is grateful, and who has no means of subsistence. When an old man falls ill, or when a Brahmana intends to perform a sacrifice, or when one wishes to till the earth for farming, or when one has a son through the efficacy of a homa performed, or for the use of one's guru, or for the nurture of a child born naturally, one should give away a beloved cow.

Even these are the considerations that are lauded in the matter of making gifts of cows, in respect of place and time. The cows that deserve to be given away are those that yield copious measures of milk, or those that are well known for their docility and other virtues; or those that have been purchased for a price, or those that have been acquired through the giver's learning, or those that have been obtained in exchange for other living creatures such as sheep and goats, or those that have been won by prowess of arms, or those that have been gained as a marriage-dower from fathers-in-law and other relatives of the giver's wife.'"

Nachiketa continued, "Hearing these words of Vaivaswata, I once more addressed him, saying, 'What are those things by giving which, when kine are not available, givers may yet go to regions reserved for men making gifts of kine?'

The wise Yama answered, explaining further what the end is that is attainable by making gifts of cows. He said, 'In the absence of kine, by making gifts of what has been regarded as the substitute for cows, a man wins the punya of making gifts of the sacred creatures. If, in the absence of

kine, one makes a gift of a cow made of ghee, observing a vrata the while, one gets for one's use these rivers of ghee, all of which approach one like an affectionate mother approaching her beloved child. If, in the absence of even a cow made of ghee, one makes a gift of a cow made of sesame seeds, observing a vow the while, one succeeds with the help of that cow to overcome all calamities in this world and to enjoy great happiness hereafter from these rivers of milk that you see before you. If in the absence of a cow made of sesame seeds, one makes a gift of a cow made of water, one succeeds in coming to these happy realms and enjoying this river of cool and transparent water, which is, besides, capable of granting the fruition of every wish.'

The king of the dead explained to me all this while I was his guest, and, O you of unfading glory, great was the joy that I felt at sight of all the wonders he showed me. I shall now tell you what will certainly be agreeable to you. I have now found a great sacrifice whose performance does not require much wealth. That sacrifice of the dakshina of cows may be said to flow from me, O my sire. Others will obtain it also. It is in consonance with the laws of the Vedas.

The curse that you pronounced upon me was no curse but in reality a blessing, since it enabled me to see the great Lord Yama of the dead. In his world I have seen the rewards that attach to giving dakshina. I shall, henceforth, O Mahatman, practise the dharma of giving dana without any doubt lurking in my mind about its rewards. And, O great Rishi, the righteous Yama, filled with joy, repeatedly told me, 'One, who, by making frequent gifts, has succeeded in acquiring purity of mind should then especially make gifts of kine. This subject of giving dakshina is fraught with sanctity. Do you never disregard the dharma of giving. Gifts, again, should be made to deserving persons, when time and place are both suitable. Do you, therefore, always make gifts of kine. Never entertain any doubts in this respect.

Devoted to the path of giving, many Mahatmans in days of yore would make gifts of kine. Fearing to practise austere tapasya, they made gifts according to the extent of their means. In time, they cast off all sentiments of pride and vanity, and purified their souls. Engaged in performing sraddhas in honour of the Pitris and in all acts of dharma, they would make, according to the extent of their ability, gifts of cows, and as the reward of

those gifts they have attained to swarga and they shine in effulgence for their righteousness.

O the eighth day of the moon known as Kamyashtami, make gifts of kine, properly won, to Brahmanas after ascertaining the eligibility of the recipients. After making the gift, you should then subsist for ten days upon only the milk of cows, their dung and their urine, while abstaining from all other food.

The punya that one acquires by making a gift of a bull is equal to that which attaches to the Daiva vrata. By making a gift of a bull and cows one acquires, as the reward thereof, a spontaneous mastery of the Vedas. By making a gift of chariots and carriages with bulls yoked, one acquires the merit of baths in sacred waters, the holy tirthas. By making a gift of a cow of the Kapila species, one is purified of all one's sins. Verily, by giving away even a single Kapila cow that has been acquired by legitimate means, one is cleansed of all the sins one may have ever committed.

There is nothing higher in taste than the milk yielded by cows. The gift of a cow, godana, is regarded as the most superior gift. By yielding their precious milk, cows save all the worlds from every calamity. It is cows, again, that produce the food upon which all creatures live. He, who, knowing the extent of the service that cows render, does not entertain in his heart love for cows, is a sinner who is certain to fall into hell.

If one gives a thousand or a hundred or ten or five kine, verily, if one gives to a righteous Brahmana even a single cow which brings forth good calves at proper intervals, one is sure to see that cow approach one in heaven in the form of a river of sacred water which grants every wish. In respect of the prosperity and the growth that cows confer, in the matter also of the protection that kine grant to all creatures of the earth, cows are equal to the very rays of the sun that fall on the earth.

The word that signifies the cow, Aditi, stands also for the rays of the sun. The giver of a cow becomes the progenitor of a great vamsa that extends over a large tract of the earth. Hence, he that gives a cow shines like a second sun in splendour. The disciple should, in the matter of godana, carefully choose his preceptor. Such a disciple is sure to find swarga for himself. The choosing of a guru for the performance of pious deeds is regarded as a sacred duty by those who know the shastras. This is, indeed, the first law; all others depend upon it.

Choosing, after examination, an eligible Brahmana, one should give him the dakshina of a cow that has been acquired by legitimate means, and having made the gift cause him to accept it. The gods and men and we, also, in wishing each other well, say, 'Let the punya of dana be yours in consequence of your dharma!'"

Even thus did the Lord of the dead speak to me, O Dvija. I then bowed my head to the righteous Yama. With his leave, I left his dominions and have now returned to worship at your feet.'"'

CANTO 72

Yudhishtira says, ‘You have, Pitamaha, spoken of godana in speaking of Rishi Nachiketa. You have also implicitly discoursed, O mighty one, on the efficacy and pre-eminence of that act. You have also told me, O Grandsire of great intelligence, of the terrible fate that overtook the Mahatman King Nriga because of a single fault. He had to spend a long time in Dwaravati in the form of a mighty lizard until Krishna saved him from that plight. I have, however, one question. It is on the subject of Goloka, the higher realm of cows. I wish to hear, in detail, about those regions which are kept for those that make gifts of kine.’

Bhishma says, ‘Listen, then, to the old tale of the discourse between him who sprang from the primeval lotus and him who performed a hundred sacrifices.

Sakra once said, “I see, O Pitamaha, that those who are dwellers in Goloka surpass in both their resplendence and their prosperity the denizens of Swargaloka and pass them by as beings of inferior station. And this has raised a query in my mind. Of what kind, O Holy One, are the worlds of kine? Tell me all about them, O sinless one. Verily, what is the nature of those realms that are inhabited by givers of cows? I wish to know of what kind they are. What fruits do they bring? What is the highest objective there which the denizens of Goloka succeed in winning? What are its virtues?

How also do men, freed from every kind of anxiety, succeed in going to those sacred realms? For what period does the giver of a cow enjoy the fruits that are borne by his gift? How may they make gifts of many kine and

how gifts of a few cows? What are the merits attaching to gifts of many kine and what those that attach to gifts of a few only?

How also do some become givers of kine without actually giving any kine? Do you tell me all this, O Brahma. How does one making gifts of even many kine, O most mighty Lord, become the equal of one that has made gift of only a few kine? How also does one who make gifts of only a few kine succeed in becoming the equal of one who has made gifts of many kine? What kind of dakshina is regarded as distinguished for pre-eminence in the matter of godana? It behoves you, O holy Grandsire of worlds, to discourse to me on all this agreeably to truth."

CANTO 73

The Grandsire said, “The questions you have asked me about kine, beginning with their gift, are such that there is none else in the three worlds, O you of a hundred sacrifices, who could have asked. There are many kinds of worlds, O Sakra, which are invisible to even you. I see those realms, O Indra, as do women that are chaste and have been attached to only one husband. Rishis observant of stern vows, through their deeds of righteousness and piety, and Brahmanas of righteous souls, succeed in repairing to them even in their bodily forms. Men that observe the loftiest vows behold those regions which resemble the bright creations of dreams, for they are helped by their cleansed minds and by that temporary mukti which succeeds the loss of one’s consciousness of body.

Listen, O you of a thousand eyes, and I will tell you what the attributes are with which those regions are endowed. There the very course of Time is suspended. Decrepitude is not there, nor fire which is omnipresent in the universe. There the slightest evil does not come, nor disease, nor weakness of any kind. The sacred kine that live there, O Vasava, obtain the fruition of every desire which they cherish in their hearts. I have direct experience of what I say to you. Able to go everywhere at will and actually journeying from place to place with ease, they enjoy the fruition of wish after wish even as these arise in their minds.

Lakes and tanks and rivers and forests of diverse kinds, and mansions and hills and all kinds of wonderful objects, delightful to all creatures, are found there. There is no world of felicity that is superior to any of these of which I speak. All those best of men, O Sakra, who are forgiving to all

creatures, who endure everything, who are full of affection for all things, who render dutiful obedience to their gurus, and who are free from pride and vanity, attain to those realms of supreme bliss.

He who abstains from every kind of flesh, who is possessed of a purified heart, who is blessed with righteousness; who worships his parents with reverence, who is truthful in speech and demeanour, who attends with obedience upon Brahmanas, who is faultless in conduct, who never behaves with anger towards cows and towards Brahmanas; who is devoted to the accomplishment of every duty, who serves his preceptors with reverence, who is devoted for his whole life to truth and to giving, and who is always forgiving towards all transgressions against himself; who is mild and self-restrained, who is full of reverence for the deities, who is hospitable to all guests, who is endued with the utmost compassion—verily, he who is adorned with these attributes succeeds in attaining to Goloka, the eternal and immutable world of kine.

He who is stained with adultery never sees such a world; nor he who is a slayer of his guru; nor he who speaks falsely or indulges in idle boasts; nor he who always disputes with others; nor he who behaves with hostility towards Brahmanas. Indeed, that evil one who is stained with such faults fails to attain even a glimpse of these regions of felicity; also he that injures his friends; also he that is full of guile; also he that is ungrateful; also he that is a cheat; also he that is crooked in his ways; also he that is a disregarder of dharma; also he that is a killer of Brahmanas. Such men cannot behold in even imagination Goloka that is the abode of only the righteous of deeds.

I have told you everything about the world of kine, O Lord of the Devas. Hear now, O you of a hundred sacrifices, the merit that is theirs who are engaged in making gifts of kine. He who make gifts of kine, after purchasing them with wealth obtained through inheritance or acquired lawfully by him, attains, as the fruit of such an act to many realms of inexhaustible felicity. He who makes a gift of a cow, having acquired it with wealth won at dice, enjoys felicity, O Sakra, for ten thousand years of the Devas. He who acquires a cow as his share of ancestral wealth is said to acquire her legitimately. Such a cow may be given away. They that make gifts of kine so acquired attain to many eternal regions of inexhaustible bliss.

That man who, having acquired a cow in gift, makes a gift of her with a pure heart, attains without doubt, O Lord of Sachi, eternal regions of beatitude. He who, with restrained senses, speaks the truth from his birth to the time of his death, and who endures everything at the hands of his guru and of Brahmanas, and who practises forgiveness, attains to an end that is equal to that of holy kine. Speech that is harsh or vulgar, O Indra, should never be addressed to a Brahmana. One should not, in even one's mind, do any injury to a cow. One should, in one's conduct, imitate the cow in mildness and gentleness, and show compassion towards the cow.

Hear, O Sakra, what the fruits are that become his who is devoted to the dharma of truth. If such a one gives away a single cow, that one cow becomes equal to a thousand. If a Kshatriya possessed of such qualities makes a gift of a single cow, his merit becomes equal to that of a Brahmana's. That single cow, Sakra, which such a Kshatriya gives away becomes the source of as much punya as the single cow that a Brahmana gives away under similar circumstances. Even this is the certain conclusion of the shastras.

If a Vaisya of similar accomplishments were to make the gift of a single cow, that cow would be equal to five hundred kine in the merit she would produce. If a Sudra blessed with humility were to make the gift of a cow, such a cow would be equal to a hundred and twenty-five kine in punya. Devoted to penances and truth, proficient in the scriptures and all good karma through dutiful service rendered to his guru, blessed with forgiveness of disposition, engaged in the worship of the gods, possessed of a tranquil soul, pure in body and mind, enlightened, observant of all dharma, and freed from every kind of egotism, the man who makes a gift of a cow to a Brahmana, certainly attains to great punya through that dakshina of his—the gift, according to proper rites, of a cow yielding copious milk. Hence, with singleness of devotion, observant of truth and humbly serving one's preceptor, one should always make gifts of kine.

Hear, O Sakra, what the punya is of that man who, duly studying the Vedas, shows reverence for kine, who always grows glad at the sight of cows, and who, since his birth has always bowed his head to kine. The punya that becomes one's by performing the Rajasuya yagna, the punya that becomes one's by making gifts of piles of gold—that lofty merit is acquired by him who shows such reverence for kine. Righteous Rishis and other Mahatmans, crowned with true success, have said so. Devoted to truth,

possessed of a tranquil soul, free from greed, always truthful in speech, and behaving with reverence towards kine with the steadiness of a vow, the man who, for a whole year before himself taking any food, regularly feeds cows, wins the punya of making a gift of a thousand kine.

That man who eats only one meal a day and who gives away the entire quantity of his other meal to kine—verily, the man who thus reverences cows with the steadfastness of a vrata and shows such compassion towards them, enjoys ten years of limitless felicity. That man who confines himself to one meal a day and with the other meal saved over some time, buys a cow and makes a gift of it, earns, through that gift, O you of a hundred sacrifices, the eternal punya that attaches to the gift of as many kine as there are hairs on the body of that single cow he gives. These are immutable declarations in respect of the merit that Brahmanas acquire by making gifts of kine.

Listen now to the punya that Kshatriyas may win. It has been said that a Kshatriya, by buying a cow in this manner and making a gift of it to a Brahmana, acquires uninterrupted felicity for five years. A Vaisya, by such conduct, acquires only half the merit of a Kshatriya, and a Sudra earns half the punya that a Vaisya does. That man, who sells himself and with the proceeds thereof purchases kine and gives them away to Brahmanas, enjoy bliss in heaven for as long as cows seen on earth. It has been said, O most blessed one, that in every hair of such cows as are bought with the proceeds gained by selling oneself, there is a whole world of inexhaustible felicity.

The man who having acquired kine by battle makes gifts of them to Brahmanas, acquires as much merit as he who makes gifts of kine after having bought them by selling himself. The man who, in the absence of kine, makes a gift of a cow made of sesame seeds, restraining his senses the while, is saved by such a cow from every kind of danger or distress. Such a man sports in great felicity.

The mere godana is not laden with merit. The considerations of deserving recipients, of time, of the kind of kine, and of the ritual to be observed while giving, must be attended to. One should ascertain the proper time for making a gift of kine. One should also ascertain the distinctive merits of both the Brahmanas who are to receive them and of kine which are to be given away. Cows should not be given to one in whose abode they are likely to suffer from fire or the sun. One, who is rich in Vedic lore, who is of pure lineage, who is endowed with a tranquil soul, who is devoted to

the performance of sacrifices, who fears the commission of sin, who is possessed of varied knowledge, who is compassionate towards cows, who is mild in behaviour, who accords protection to all that seek it of him, and who has no means of sustenance assigned to him, is regarded as a proper person to receive a gift of cows.

To a Brahmana who has no means of sustenance, to him while he is afflicted for want of food—for instance, in a time of famine—for farming, for a child born as a result of homa, for the purposes of his guru, for the nurture of a child born naturally and lawfully, a cow should be given. Verily, the gift should be made at a proper time and in a proper place.

Those kine, O Sakra, whose gentle and auspicious dispositions are well known, which have been acquired as a reward for knowledge, or which have been bought in exchange for other animals such as goats and sheep, or which have been won by prowess of arms, or obtained as marriage-dower; or which have been acquired by being rescued from danger, or which, unable to be maintained by their impoverished owner have been made over for careful keep to another, are regarded as appropriate gifts. Such kine that are strong of body, which have good dispositions, and which emit an agreeable fragrance, are lauded as gifts. As Ganga is the foremost of all rivers, even so is a Kapila cow the foremost of all bovines.

Abstaining from all food and living only upon water for three nights, and sleeping for the same period on bare earth, one should make gifts of kine to Brahmanas after having gratified them with other offerings. Such kine, free from every fault, should be accompanied by healthy calves that have not been weaned. Having made the gift, the giver should live for the next three days on food consisting only of the produce of the cow.

By giving away a cow that is of a good disposition, that quietly suffers herself to be milked, that always brings forth living and healthy calves, and that does not run away from her owner's home, the giver enjoys prosperity in the next world for as many years as there are hairs on her body. Similarly, by giving to a Brahmana a bull that can bear heavy burden, that is young and strong and docile, that quietly bears the yoke of the plough, and that is possessed of such energy as he can endure great labour, one attains to such regions as are his who gives away ten cows.

That man who rescues kine and Brahmanas from danger in the wilderness is himself rescued from every kind of peril and calamity. Hear what his punya is. The merit such a man acquires is equal to the eternal

punya of a horse sacrifice. Such a one attains to whatever end he wishes for at the hour of his death. Many a region of felicity—in fact, whatever happiness he covets in his heart—becomes his through what he has done. Verily, such a man, blessed by kine, lives honoured in every realm of heaven.

That man, who follows his herd every day in the forest, himself subsisting the while on grass and cow dung and leaves of trees, his heart freed from desire of reward, his senses restrained from every improper object and his mind purified of all dross—that man, O you of a hundred sacrifices, lives in joy and freed from the dominion of desire in my world, Brahmaloka, or in any other realm of bliss that he wishes, in the company of the Devas.'"

CANTO 74

'Indra said, "I wish to know, O Grandsire, what end he attains who steals a cow or who sells one from motives of greed."

The Grandsire said, "Hear what consequences overtake those that steal a cow for killing her for food, or selling her for wealth, or making a gift of her to a Brahmana. He who, without being checked by the restraints of the scriptures, sells a cow, or kills one, or eats the flesh of a cow, or they, who, for the sake of wealth, suffer a person to kill kine—all these, he that kills, he that eats, and he that permits the slaughter, rot in hell for as many years as there are hairs on the body of the cow that is slain.

O you of great puissance, all those sins that attach to one that obstructs a Brahmana's sacrifice attach to the sale and the theft of kine. That man who having stolen a cow makes a gift of her to a Brahmana, enjoys felicity in heaven as the reward of the gift but suffers misery in hell for the sin of theft, for as long a period.

Gold has been said to constitute the dakshina, O you of great splendour, in godana, the gifts of kine. Indeed, gold has been said to be the best dakshina in all sacrifices. By making a gift of kine one is said to redeem one's ancestors to the seventh generation as well as one's descendants, also to the seventh. By giving away kine with a dakshina of gold one saves one's ancestors and descendants of twice that number. The gift of gold, suvarnadana, is the best of gifts. Gold is, again, the best dakshina. Gold is a great cleanser, O Sakra, and is, indeed, the best of all purifying agents. O you of a hundred sacrifices, gold has been said to be the sanctifier of the

entire race of him who gives it away. I have thus, O you of great splendour, told you in brief about dakshina.'"

Bhishma says, 'Even this is what the Pitamaha Brahma said to Indra, O king of the Bharatas. Indra imparted this to Dasaratha, and Dasaratha in his turn to his son Rama; Rama of Raghu's vamsa imparted it to his dear brother Lakshmana of great fame. While dwelling in the forest, Lakshmana taught it to the Rishis. It has then come down from generation to generation, for the Rishis of rigid vows held it amongst themselves as also the righteous kings of the earth. My guru, Bhargava, O Yudhishtira, taught it to me. That Brahmana, who recites it every day in assemblies of Brahmanas, at sacrifices or during godanas, or when two pure men meet, acquires hereafter many regions of inexhaustible bliss where he always dwells with the gods as his companions. The holy Brahma, the Supreme Lord, said so to Indra on the subject of kine, and godana.'"

CANTO 75

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have been greatly assured, O mighty one, by you thus discoursing to me on dharma. I must, however, give expression to the doubts and questions that I still have. Do you clear them for me, Pitamaha. What are the fruits, declared in the scriptures, of the vows that men observe? Of what nature are the fruits, O you of great splendour, of observances of other kinds? What, again, are the fruits, of one's studying the Vedas thoroughly? What are the fruits of gifts, and what those of holding the Vedas in one's memory? What are the fruits that attach to the teaching of the Vedas? I want to know all this.

What, O Grandsire, are the merits that attach to not accepting dana in this world? What fruits are seen to attach to him who gives gifts of knowledge? What is the punya acquired by persons that observe their svadharma, as also by Kshatriyas that do not flee from battle? What are the fruits that have been declared to attach to the observance of purity and to the practice of brahmacharya? What are the merits that attach to the service of one's father and mother? What also are the merits of serving gurus and acharyas, and what are the merits of compassion and kindness?

I want to know all these, Pitamaha, truly and in detail, O you that know all the shastras. Great is the curiosity that I feel.'

Bhishma says, 'Eternal regions of rapture become his, who, having properly commenced a vrata, a vow, completes its observance according to the scriptures, without a break. The fruits of niyamas, O king, are visible even in this world. These rewards that you have won are those of niyamas and yagnas. The fruits that attach to the study of the Vedas are seen both

here and hereafter. The one who is devoted to the study of the Vedas is seen to live in joy both in this world and in the world of Brahma.

Listen now to me, O king, as I tell you in detail what the fruits are of yama or niyati or self-restraint. They that are self-restrained are happy everywhere. They that are self-restrained are always in the enjoyment of that bliss which attaches to the absence or the subjugation of desire. They that are self-restrained are able to go everywhere at will. They that are self-restrained can destroy every enemy. Without doubt, they that are self-restrained succeed in obtaining everything they seek.

They that are self-restrained, O son of Pandu, have their every wish fulfilled. The happiness that men enjoy in swarga, through tapasya and prowess at arms, through dana, and through diverse sacrifices, also becomes theirs that are self-restrained and forgiving. Self-restraint is more meritorious than a gift. A giver, after making a gift to Brahmanas, may still yield to the influence of anger. A self-restrained man, however, never yields to wrath. Hence, self-restraint is superior in punya to charity. The man who makes gifts without yielding to anger, succeeds in attaining to eternal regions of bliss. Anger destroys the merit of a gift. Hence, is yama superior to dana.

There are countless invisible realms, O king, numbering millions, in swarga. They are spread across the face of heaven, and these worlds belong to the Rishis. Men leave this world, attain to them and become transformed into deities. Rajan, the great Rishis go to them, taken only by their self-restraint, and as the end of their efforts to attain to a world of superior happiness. Hence, self-restraint is indeed superior in spiritual efficacy to giving charity and gifts.

The Brahmana, who becomes an acharya who teaches the Vedas, and who duly worships the holy fire, leaves all his sorrows and afflictions in this world, and goes to enjoy inexhaustible ecstasy in the world of Brahma. That Brahmana who, having himself studied the Vedas, imparts a knowledge of them to righteous disciples, and who praises his own guru, attains to great honour in swarga.

The Kshatriya, who takes to the study of the Vedas, to the performance of yagnas, to the giving of dana, and who saves the lives of others in battle, similarly attains to great honour in heaven. The Vaisya, who, observing his svadharma, makes gifts, reaps as the fruit of those gifts a crowning reward. The Sudra, who duly observes the dharma of his varna, which consists of

service rendered to the three other orders, wins swarga as the reward of such service.

Diverse kinds of heroes have been spoken of in the scriptures. Listen to me as I tell you what the rewards are that they attain to. The rewards are fixed of a hero belonging to a heroic vamsa. There are heroes of sacrifice, heroes of self-restraint, heroes of truth, and others equally entitled to the name of vira. There are heroes of battle, and shuras of gift and of liberality among men. There are many who may be called the heroes of the Sankhya faith as, indeed, there are many others that are called nayakas of Yoga.

There are others that are regarded as heroes in vanaprastha, of grihasta, and of renunciation, sannyasa. Similarly, there are others that are called viras of the intellect, and also heroes of forgiveness. There are other men, who live in tranquillity and who are regarded as nayakas of dharma, righteousness. There are many other kinds of heroes that practise diverse other kinds of vows and observances. There are masters devoted to the study of the Vedas and heroes devoted to the teaching of the Vedas. There are, again, men that come to be regarded as viras for the devotion with which they wait upon and serve their preceptors, as indeed, shuras in respect of the reverence they show to their sires.

There are heroes of obedience to their mothers, and heroes for the life of mendicancy they lead. There are heroes in the matter of hospitality to guests, while living as grihastas. All these great men attain to transcendent regions of joy which, of course, they acquire as the rewards of their own karma. Holding all the Vedas in memory, or ablutions performed in all the tirthas, the sacred waters, may or may not be equal to telling the Truth every day of one's life. A thousand Aswamedha yagnas and Truth were once weighed in a balance. It was seen that Truth weighed heavier than a thousand horse sacrifices.

It is by Truth that the sun gives heat and light, it is by Truth that fire burns, it is by Truth that the winds blow; verily, everything rests upon Truth. It is Truth, Satya, that gratifies the Devas, the Pitris and the Brahmanas. Truth has been said to be the highest dharma. Therefore, no one should ever transgress Truth. The Munis are all devoted to Truth. Their prowess depends upon Satya. They also swear by Truth. Hence, Satya is pre-eminent. All truthful men, O Lord of the Bharatas, succeed by their truthfulness in attaining swarga and sporting there in bliss.

Niyati, self-restraint, is the attainment of the reward that attaches to Truth. I have discoursed on it with my whole heart. The man of humble heart who is possessed of self-restraint, beyond doubt attains to great honour in heaven.

Listen now to me, O Bhumipala, as I expound to you the merits of brahmacharya, celibacy. That man, who practises the vow of brahmacharya from his birth to the time of his death—know, O king, that for such a man nothing is unattainable. Millions of Rishis dwell in the world of Brahma. All of them, while here, were devoted to Truth, and self-restrained, had their vital seed drawn up. The vow of brahmacharya, O king, duly observed by a Brahmana, is sure to consume all his sins. The Brahmana is said to be a blazing fire. In those Brahmanas that are devoted to tapasya, the god of fire becomes plainly visible. If a Brahmacharin yields to wrath from being slighted in any way, the king of the Devas himself trembles in fear. Even this is the visible fruit of the vow of Brahmacharya that is observed by the Rishis.

Listen to me, O Yudhishtira, what the punya is that attaches to the worship of one's father and mother. He who dutifully serves his father without ever crossing him in anything, or similarly serves his mother or elder brother or other elder or preceptor, know, earns a place in heaven. The man of purified soul, because of such service rendered to his elders, has never to even catch a glimpse of the hell that is naraka.'"

CANTO 76

"Yudhishtira says, 'I desire, O king, to hear you discourse in detail upon those high laws which regulate godana, for it is by making gifts of kine according to those laws that one attains to innumerable regions of eternal prosperity and joy.'

Bhishma says, 'There is no dana, O Lord of earth, which is higher in merit than the godana. A righteously acquired cow, if given away, immediately redeems the entire vamsa of the giver. That ritual which first came to be for the benefit of the righteous, was subsequently declared to be for the weal of all creatures. That ritual has come down from primeval time. Why, it existed even before it was revealed. Verily, O Rajan, listen to me and I will tell you about the ritual which affects the gift of kine.

In days of yore, when a number of kine intended to be given away were brought before him, King Mandhatri, filled with doubt about the ritual with which he should give them away, questioned the Devaguru Brihaspati to clear his doubt.

Brihaspati said, "Duly observing self-restraint all the while, the giver of kine should, on the previous day, properly honour Brahmanas and appoint the actual time of dana. As regards the kine to be given away, they should be of the kind called Rohini. The cows should be addressed with the words Samange and Bahule. Entering the fold where the kine are kept, the following Srutis should be uttered—*The cow is my mother. The bull is my sire. Give me heaven and earthly prosperity. The cow is my refuge!*

Entering the fold and saying these words, the giver should pass the night there. He should again utter the same chant when actually giving

away the kine. Thus staying with the kine in the fold without doing anything to restrain their freedom, and lying down on the bare earth, without driving away the gnats and other insects that annoy him as they annoy the cows, the giver is immediately purified of all his sins through reducing himself to a state of perfect similitude with the kine.

When the sun rises in the morning, you should give away the chosen Rohini cow, along with her calf and a bull. As the reward for such a gift, you will surely become worthy of attaining swarga. The blessings that are declared by the holy mantras will also be yours.

The mantras speak thus of kine: *Cows are endued with strength and energy. Kine have in them wisdom. They are the source of that immortality which sacrifice achieves. They are the refuge of all tejas. They are the steps by which earthly prosperity is won. They constitute the eternal course of the universe. They lead to the extension of one's race. Let the kine that I give away destroy my sins. They have that in them which partakes in the nature of both Surya and Soma. Let them help me attain heaven. Let them betake themselves to me as a mother to her child. Let all other blessings also be mine that have not been named in the mantras I have uttered!*

In the alleviation or cure of phthisis and other wasting sicknesses, and in the matter of achieving freedom from the body, if a person takes the help of the five precious things that the cow yields, kine become inclined to confer blessings upon the giver even like the Saraswati river. *O sacred cows, you are always bestowers of all kinds of punya. Gratified with me, do you appoint a desirable end for me. I have today become what you are. By giving you away, I give myself away.*

After these words have been uttered by giver, the receiver should say, *You are no longer owned by him who gives you away. You have now become mine. Possessed of the nature of both Surya and Soma, do you cause both the giver and the receiver to blaze forth with all kinds of prosperity!*

Thus the giver should utter the first part of the above verse. The twice-born receiver, who knows the ritual that regulates godana, utters the words occurring in the latter half of the mantra.

The man who, instead of a cow, gives away cloths or gold of the same value as a cow, comes to be regarded as the giver of a cow; the giver, when giving away the value of a cow in other form should say—*This cow with face upturned is being given away. Do you accept her.*

The man who gives away cloths in the place of a cow should say—*Bhavitavya!* meaning that the gift should be regarded as representing a cow. The man who gives away gold in place of a cow should utter the word *Vaishnavi!* meaning this gold that I give is of the form and nature of a cow. These are the words that should be uttered for the particular dana.

The reward reaped by making such vicarious gifts of kine is a term in swarga for six and thirty thousand years, eight thousand years, and twenty-thousand years, respectively. These are the merits of gifts of things that are given in the stead of kine. As regards him who gives an actual cow, all the punya that attaches to vicarious gifts of cows become his at the eighth step homewards of the recipient.

He that gives an actual cow is endowed with righteous conduct in this world. He that gives the value of a cow is freed from every kind of fear. He that gives a cow or a gift of like value never meets with sorrow. All the three, as also they that regularly go through their ablutions and other kriyas at dawn, and he that knows the Mahabharata well, all attain to the worlds of Vishnu and Soma.

Having given away a cow, the giver should for three nights keep a vrata and pass one night with kine. Beginning again from that lunation, on the eight tithi, which is known as kamya, he should pass three nights, supporting himself entirely on the milk, urine and dung of the cow. By giving away a bull, one attains to the punya that attaches to the divine vow of brahmacharya. By giving away two kine, a bull and a cow, one acquires mastery of the Vedas.

The man who performs a sacrifice and makes gifts of kine agreeably to the ritual laid down, attains to many regions of a superior character. These, however, are not attainable by one who does not know or perform that ritual and who, therefore, gives godana without observing the scriptural declarations. That man who gives away even a single cow that yields a copious measure of milk, acquires the merit of giving away all the desirable things on earth collected together. What need, therefore, be said of the gift of many such kine as yield havya and kavya for their teats being full?

The merit that attaches to the gift of superior oxen is greater than that which attaches to the gift of kine. One should not, by imparting a knowledge of this ritual, benefit a person that is not one's disciple or who does not observe vratas, or that is bereft of faith or possessed of a crooked understanding. Truly, this dharma is a mystery, unknown to most. One that

knows it should not speak of it in every place. There are, in the world, many men that are without faith. There are among men many persons that are mean and that resemble Rakshasas. This religion, if imparted to them, would lead to evil. Indeed, it would produce equal evil if imparted to such sinful men as have taken shelter in godlessness.

Listen to me, O king, and I will recite to you the names of those great kings of dharma that attained to regions of great felicity as the reward of the godana which they gave agreeable to the dictates of Brihaspati: Usinara, Viswagaswa, Nriga, Bhagiratha, the celebrated Mandhatri, son of Yuvanaswa, King Muchukunda, Bhagiratha, Naishadha, Somaka, Pururavas, Bharata of imperial sway to whose vamsa all the Bharatas belong, the heroic Rama, son of Dasaratha, and many other celebrated kings of great achievements, and also King Dilipa of widely known deeds, all, because of their gifts of kine agreeable to the ritual, attained to swarga.

King Mandhatri was always observant of yagnas, dakshina, tapasya, rajadharma and godana. Therefore, O son of Pritha, do you also bear in mind those behests of Brihaspati which I have recited to you regarding godana.

Having acquired the kingdom of the Kurus, do you, with a cheerful heart, make gifts of the finest kine to the foremost of Brahmanas!'

Thus addressed by Bhishma on the proper way to make gifts of kine, King Yudhishtira did all that Bhishma wished. Verily, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja bore in his heart the whole of that dharma which the Devaguru Brihaspati imparted to the royal Mandhatri. Yudhishtira, from that time, began to give godana and to support himself on grains of barley and on cow dung and the urine of kine, as both his food and drink. The king also began to sleep from that day on the bare earth, and with restrained soul and resembling a bull in strength and conduct, he became the greatest of monarchs.

From that day, the Kuru king became most attentive to cows and always worshipped them, hymning their praises. From that day, the king gave up the practice of yoking bullocks to his carriages. Wheresoever he had occasion to go, he went on chariots drawn by horses of mettle.'"

CANTO 77

Vaisampayana said, "King Yudhishtira, endowed with humility, yet again questioned the royal son of Santanu on the subject of godana, in further detail.'

The king said, 'Do you, O Bhaarata, once more discourse to me in depth on the merits of giving away cows. Verily, O Kshatriya, I am not satiated with listening to your amrita-like words.'

Thus addressed by Yudhishtira the just, Santanu's son Bhishma begins to discourse to him again on the punya attached to godana. Bhishma says, 'By giving to a Brahmana a cow possessed of a calf, endued with docility and other virtues, young in years, and wrapped round with a piece of cloth, one is cleansed of all one's sins. There are many regions in naraka which are sunless, lightless. One who makes the gift of a cow has never to go to such hells. That man, however, who gives to a Brahmana a cow that cannot drink or eat, who has not milk for her teats have run dry, whose body and senses are enfeebled, who is diseased and decrepit, and which may be likened to a tank whose water has dried up—indeed, the man who gives such a cow to a Brahmana and thereby inflicts only pain and disappointment upon him, has certainly to enter into the darkest hell.

That cow that is ill-tempered and vicious, or sickly or weak, or which has been bought without the price agreed upon having been paid, or which would only afflict the Dvija with distress and frustration, should never be given. The realms of grace such a giver may otherwise acquire as rewards of other deeds of dharma he has performed would all fail to bring him any happiness or impart to him any tejas. Only such kine as are strong, docile,

young in years, and possessed of fragrance, are praised by all for being given in godana. And truly, as Ganga is the foremost of all rivers, even so is a Kapila cow the best of all kine.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Why, O Grandsire, do the righteous especially laud the gift of a Kapila cow, when all good kine that are given away should be regarded as equal? O mighty one, I wish to hear what the distinction is that attaches to a Kapila cow. You are, for certain, competent to discourse to me on this matter.'

Bhishma says, 'I have, O son, heard old men recite this history regarding the circumstances under which the Kapila cow was created. I shall recite that old tale to you. In days of yore, the Self-born Brahma commanded Rishi Daksha, "Do you create living creatures!"

From the desire of doing good to living creatures, Daksha first created annrita, food. Even as the Devas exist, depending upon amrita, all living creatures live depending upon the sustenance of food assigned by Daksha. Among all creatures chala and achala, mobile and unmoving, the mobile are superior. Among mobile creatures Brahmanas are the most superior, for the yagnas are all established upon them, and it is through sacrifice that Soma rasa is obtained.

Sacrifice has been established upon kine. The gods become gratified through sacrifices. As regards creation, then, the means of support came first, and the creatures came next. As soon as creatures were born, they began to cry aloud for food. All of them then approached their Creator to feed them like children going to their father or mother.

Knowing what his creatures craved, Daksha Prajapati, the holy Lord of all the living creatures, himself drank a quantity of amrita, for the sake of the beings he had created. He became gratified with the nectar he quaffed and thereupon an eructation came from him, exuding a most divine fragrance all around. And from that wondrous and ambrosial belching, there arose the original and divine cow, which Daksha named Surabhi.

This Surabhi was thus a daughter of his that sprang forth from his mouth. The cow called Surabhi brought forth a number of daughters who came to be regarded as the mothers of the world. Their complexion was that of gold, and they were all Kapilas. They were the means of sustenance for all creatures. As those kine, whose complexion resembled that of amrita, began to pour forth milk, the froth of that milk rose up and began to spread

on every side, even as when the waves of a river dash against one another, copious froth is created that spreads on every side.

Some of that froth fell from the mouths of the calves that were suckling upon the head of Mahadeva who was seated upon the earth. Thereupon, the puissant Mahadeva, filled with wrath, cast his eyes upon those kine. With the third eye which adorns his forehead, he seemed to burn those kine as he looked at them. Like the sun tingeing cloud masses with colours, the energy that issued from the third eye of Mahadeva produced, O monarch, diverse complexions on those kine. Those among then which escaped from the glare of Siva by fleeing into Somaloka, remained the same colour as they were born—pristine white.

Seeing that the Lord Siva was incensed, Daksha Prajapati said to him, "You have, O Mahadeva, been drenched with amrita. The milk or the froth that escapes from the mouths of calves sucking at their dams is never impure. Chandramas drinks the rasa and pours it forth once more; but it is not regarded as being unclean. Even so, the milk that these kine yield, being born of amrita, is not considered impure even though the calves have touched the cows' teats with their mouths.

The wind can never become unclean. Fire can never become unclean. Gold can never become unclean. The ocean can never become unclean. Amrita, even when drunk by the Devas, can never become impure. And the milk of a cow, even when her udders are sucked by her calf, can never become impure. These kine will support all these worlds with the milk they will yield and the ghrita that will be made from it.

All creatures want to enjoy the sacred and ambrosial wealth that cows possess and yield."

Saying this to Siva, Daksha made a gift of a bull and some cows to Mahadeva. Daksha gratified the heart of Rudra, O Bhaarata, with that dakshina and, gratified, Siva made that bull his mount. And it was after the form of that great bull, Nandin, that Mahadeva adorned the standard on his battle-chariot; and so did Siva become known as Vrishabdhvaja or the Bull-bannered One.

It was on that occasion also that the celestials, uniting together, made Mahadeva the Pasupati, the Lord of animals. Indeed, the great Rudra became the master of kine and is called the Bull-signed God.

Hence, O king, in the matter of giving away kine, the gift of Kapila cows is regarded as being the best of all, for they are endowed with great

tejas and retain their original white hue. Thus are kine the foremost of all creatures in the world. It is from them that the means have flowed for the sustenance of all the worlds. They have Rudra for their master. They yield Soma rasa in the form of milk. They are auspicious and sacred, and granters of every wish and givers of life. By making a gift of a cow a man comes to be regarded as making a gift of every desirable thing that men enjoy. That man who wishes to attain to prosperity reads, with a pure heart and body, these slokas on the origin of kine, and is cleansed of all his sins and indeed attains to prosperity and children and wealth and animals.

He who makes a gift of a cow, O king, always succeeds in acquiring the punya that attaches to gifts of havya and kavya, to the offer of tarpana, oblations of water to the Pitris, to other religious kriyas whose performance brings peace and happiness, to the gift of chariots and carriages and fine cloths, and to cherishing children and the old.'

Hearing these words of his Grandsire, Pritha's son, the royal Yudhishtira of Ajamida's race, with his brothers, began to make gifts of both bulls and cows of different colours to the best Brahmanas. Verily, in order to conquer realms of grace in the next world, and of winning great fame, Yudhishtira performed many sacrifices and, as sacrificial dakshina, gave away hundreds of thousands of kine to such Brahmanas.'

CANTO 78

Bhishma says, ‘In days of yore, King Saudasa born of Ikshvaku’s race, foremost of eloquent men, once went to his kulaguru, his family priest Vasishta, that greatest of Rishis, crowned with ascetic success, who could range through all the worlds at will, Vasishta the receptacle of Brahman, and blessed with eternal life, and put him the following question.

Saudasa said, “O holy, sinless one, what is that in the three worlds, which is sacred and by reciting which at all times a man may acquire the highest punya?”

To King Saudasa who stood before him with head bent in reverence, the learned Vasishta, having first bowed to sacred kine and purified himself in body and mind, discoursed upon the rahasya relating to cows, a subject fraught with rewards most beneficial to all.

Vasishta said, “Kine are always fragrant with the auspicious redolence of amrita that their bodies exude. Cows are the great refuge of all creatures. Cows constitute the great source of blessing to all. Kine are the past and the future. Kine are the source of eternal growth. Kine are the root of prosperity. Anything given to kine is never lost. Kine constitute the highest food. They are the best havi for the Devas. The mantras called Swaha and Vashat are forever established in kine. Cows are the fruit of sacrifices. Sacrifices are established in kine. Kine are the future and the past, and sacrifice rests upon them. Morning and evening, cows yield havis to Rishis for use in homa, O you of great effulgence.

They who make a gift of kine succeed in transcending all their sins and avoiding every kind of calamity into which they may fall. The man who

owns ten cows and makes a gift of one cow, he that owns a hundred kine and makes a gift of ten, and he who has a thousand cows and makes a gift of a hundred, all earn the same measure of merit.

The man who, though he owns hundred cows, does not establish a domestic fire for daily worship; the man who, though he owns a thousand kine, does not perform sacrifices; and that man who owns wealth but is a miser who gives no gifts and never discharges the dharma of hospitality, are all three not worthy of any respect.

Those men who make gifts of Kapila cows with their calves and with vessels of white brass for milking them—cows that are gentle and not vicious and which, while given away, are richly caparisoned—conquer both this and the other world. Men who make a gift of a bull that is still in his prime of youth, strong, and the best bull in hundreds of herds, who has big horns adorned with ornaments of gold or silver, to a Brahmana possessed of Vedic knowledge, succeed, O scorcher of your foes, in attaining to great prosperity and affluence every time they are born into the world.

One should never go to bed without reciting the names of one's cows; neither should one rise from bed in the morning without a similar recitation. Morning and evening one should bend one's head in reverence to kine. With this, one is sure to attain to great prosperity of every kind.

One should never feel the least repugnance for the urine and the dung of the cow. One should never eat the flesh of cows. If a man lives in this law, he is sure to attain to great felicity. Indeed, one should always take the names of cows, and never show the slightest disregard for kine in any manner. If evil dreams visit a man's sleep, he should chant the names of holy cows. One should smear oneself with cow dung while bathing. One should sit on dried cow dung. One should never urinate or excrete or let other bodily secretions fall on cow dung.

One should never obstruct kine in any way. One should eat, sitting on a cowhide purified by dipping it in water, and then cast one's eyes towards the west. Sitting with restrained speech, one should eat ghee, using the bare earth as one's dish. Through this, a man reaps that prosperity of which kine are the source. One should pour libations on the fire, using ghrita. One should cause Brahmanas to utter blessings upon oneself, with gifts of ghee. One should make other gifts of ghrita. One should also eat ghee. As a reward for all this, one is sure to attain to that prosperity which kine confer.

That man who inspires an idol made of sesame seeds by uttering the Vedic mantras known by the name of Gomati, and then adorns that form with every kind of gem and makes a gift of it, has never to suffer any grief on account of all his sins of omission and commission.

Let cows that yield copious measures of milk and that have horns adorned with gold—cows that are Surabhis or the daughters of Surabhis—come to me even as rivers flow to the ocean. I always gaze at cows. Let cows always look gently at me. Cows are ours. We are theirs. We are there where cows are!

Even thus, at night or day, in happiness or sorrow, surely, in times of even great fear, should a man exclaim. By uttering these words he is certain to be freed from every fear."'

CANTO 79

'Vasishta said, "The kine that were created in a bygone yuga practised the austerest tapasyas for a hundred thousand years with the desire to attain to a position of great pre-eminence. O Parantapa, they said to themselves, *We shall, in this world, become the best of all kinds of dakshina in sacrifices, and we shall not be liable to be stained by any sin. By bathing in water mixed with our dung, the people shall be sanctified. The gods and men shall use our dung to purify all creatures, mobile and unmoving. They also that give us away shall attain to those regions of bliss which will be ours.*

The all mighty Brahma appeared to them at the conclusion of their tapasya, and gave them the boons they sought, saying, *It shall be as you wish. Do you save all the worlds!*

Crowned with the fruition of their wishes, they all rose up, those mothers of both the past and the future. Every morning, men and women should bow with reverence to the sacred cows, and they will surely win every prosperity. At the conclusion of their penances, O king, cows became the refuge of the world. It is for this that kine are said to be the most blessed, sacred, and the foremost of all creations. It is for this that cows are said to stay at the very head of all other creatures.

By giving away a Kapila cow with a calf resembling herself, yielding a copious measure of milk, free from any viciousness, and covered with a fine cloth, the giver attains to great honour in Brahmaloka. By giving away a red cow, with a calf like herself, and milk-yielding and free from every vice,

and covered with an auspicious cloth, one attains to great honour in Suryaloka.

By giving away a cow of mottled, variegated hue, with a calf like herself, and yielding milk, free from every fault, and covered with a cloth, one attains to great honour in the world of Soma.

By giving away a white cow, gentle and yielding copious milk, along with a calf like herself, and caparisoned, one attains to great honour in Indraloka. By giving away a dark cow, milk-yielding and gentle, with a calf like her, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to great honour in the world of Agni.

By giving away a cow of the hue of smoke, mild and milk-yielding, with a calf similar to herself, and covered with a rich cloth, one attains to great honour in Yamaloka.

By giving away a cow of the complexion of the foam of water, with a calf and a vessel of white brass for milking her, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to the world of Varuna. By giving away a cow whose complexion is like that of the dust blown by the wind, with a calf, and a vessel of white brass for milking her, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to great honour in the world of Vayu, the wind god. By giving a cow of golden hue, having tawny eyes, with a calf and a vessel of white brass for milking her and covered with a piece of cloth, one enjoys the felicity of the realm of Kubera.

By giving away a cow of the complexion of the smoke of burning straw, with a calf and a vessel of white brass for milking her, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to great honour in Pitriloka, realm of the Manes. By giving away a plump cow with the flesh of its throat hanging down and accompanied by her calf, one attains with ease to the lofty realm of the Viswedevas. By giving away a Gouri cow, with a calf similar to her, yielding milk, free from every viciousness, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to the region of the Vasus.

By giving away a cow of the complexion of a soft white blanket, with a calf and a vessel of white brass, and covered with a piece of cloth, one attains to the realm of the Sadhyas.

By giving away a bull with a high hump and adorned with every jewel, the giver, O king, attains to the world of the Maruts. By giving away a bull of blue complexion, that is full-grown in respect of years and adorned with every ornament, the giver attains to the regions of the Gandharvas and the

Apsaras. By giving away a cow with the flesh of her throat hanging down, and adorned with every ornament, the giver, freed from every grief, attains to those regions that belong to Prajapati himself.

That man, O king, who habitually makes gifts of cows, travels piercing the clouds on a chariot of solar lustre to swarga and shines there in splendour. That man who habitually makes gifts of kine comes to be regarded as the foremost of his species. When thus entering into heaven, he is received by a thousand Apsaras of beautiful hips wearing celestial raiment and ornaments. These girls wait upon him there and minister to his delight. He sleeps there in peace and is awakened by the musical laughter of those gazelle-eyed women, the sweet notes of their vinas, the soft strains of their vallakis, and the melodious tinkle of their nupuras. The man who makes gifts of cows dwells in swarga and is honoured there for as many years as there are hairs on the bodies of all the kine he gives away. Falling away from heaven upon the exhaustion of his punya, such a man takes birth in the order of Manushyas and into a superior family among men."'

CANTO 80

'Vasishta said, "*Kine are yielders of ghee and milk. They are the sources of ghrita and they have sprung from ghrita. They are rivers of ghrita, and eddies of ghrita. Let cows ever be in my house. Ghee is always my heart. Ghee is established in my navel. Ghee is in every limb of mine. Ghee dwells in my mind. Cows are always before me. Cows are always behind me. Cows are always all around me on every side of my person. I live in the midst of kine.*

Having purified oneself by touching water, one should, morning and evening, recite these mantras every day. By this, one is sure to be cleansed of all the sins one may commit during the course of the day. They who make gifts of a thousand kine, departing from this world, journey to the regions of the Gandharvas and the Apsaras where there are numberless palatial mansions made of gold and where the Akasa Ganga runs, river of heaven, called the current of Vasu.

Givers of a thousand cows go to where many rivers run, having milk for their water, and cheese for their mire, and curds for their floating moss. That man who makes gifts of hundreds of thousands of kine in accord with the ritual laid down in the scriptures, attains to high prosperity in this world and untold honours in the next. Such a man causes both his paternal and maternal ancestors to the tenth generation to attain to regions of great felicity, and sanctifies his whole race. Kine are sacred. They are the foremost of all things in the world. They are verily the refuge of the universe. They are the mothers of the very gods. They are incomparable.

They should be dedicated in sacrifices. While making journeys, one should travel on their right, keeping them to one's left.

After ascertaining the proper time, they should be given away to deserving persons. By giving away a Kapila cow with large horns, accompanied by a calf and a vessel of white brass for milking her, and covered with a piece of cloth, one succeeds in entering, freed from fear, the palace of Yama that is so difficult to enter.

One should always recite this sacred mantra: *Cows are of beautiful form. Cows are of diverse forms. They are of universal form. They are the mothers of the universe. O, let kine always approach me.*

There is no gift more sacred than godana, the gift of kine. There is no gift that produces more blessed merit. There has been nothing equal to the cow, nor will there be anything that will equal her. With her skin, her hair, her horns, the hair of her tail, her milk, and her fat, and with all these together, the cow upholds yagna. What is there that is more useful than the cow? Bending my head to her with reverence, I adore the cow who is the mother of both the past and the future, and by whom the entire universe of mobile and unmoving creatures is covered.

O Purushottama, I have related to you only a portion of the high punya of cows. There is no gift in this world that is superior to the gift of kine. There is also no refuge in this world that is higher than kine."'

Bhishma continues, 'That high-souled Bhudani, King Saudasa, accepted these words of the Rishi Vasishta to be of the greatest import, and made gifts of a very large number of kine to good Brahmanas, restraining his senses the while; and as the consequence of those gifts, the monarch succeeded in attaining to many regions of ineffable felicity in the next world.'"

CANTO 81

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, what is the most sacred of all sacred things in the world, other than what you have already spoken of, and which is the highest of all sanctifying objects.'

Bhishma says, 'Cows are the foremost of all things. They are the most sacred and they save men from all kinds of sin and distress. With their milk and with the havi made therefrom, cows uphold all creatures in the universe. O best of the Bharatas, there is nothing that is more sacred than kine. The foremost of all things in the three worlds, kine are themselves sacred and can purify and make others holy as well.

Kine dwell in Goloka, a world higher than Devaloka. When given away, they bestow salvation upon their givers. Men of wisdom succeed in attaining swarga by making gifts of kine. Yuvanaswa's son Mandhatri, Yayati, and his sire Nahusha would always give away cows in thousands. As the reward of those gifts, they have attained to such realms as are unattainable by the very Devas. There is, in this connection, O Anagha, a discourse delivered of old. I will relate it to you.

Once on a time, the most intelligent Suka, having finished his morning rites, approached, with a restrained mind, his sire, that foremost of Rishis, the island-born Krishna Vyasa, who knows keenly the distinction between that which is superior and that which is inferior, and saluting him, said:

"What is the sacrifice which appears to you as the best of all sacrifices? What is that karma by doing which men of wisdom succeed in attaining to the highest world? What is that sacred deed by which the Devas enjoy the bliss of heaven? What constitutes the character of sacrifice as yagna? What

is that upon which yagna rests? What is regarded as the best by the gods? What is that sacrifice which transcends the sacrifices of this world? Do you also tell me, O my father, what is the most sacred of all things."

Having heard these words of his son, O king of the Bharata vamsa, Vyasa, the foremost of all knowers of dharma, discoursed to him as follows.

Vyasa said, "Kine constitute the stay of all creatures. Kine are the refuge of all creatures. Kine are the embodiment of punya. Kine are sacred, and kine are sanctifiers of all. Formerly, cows were hornless as I have heard. To have horns they worshipped the eternal and mighty Brahma. Brahma, seeing the kine sitting in praya and paying their adorations to him, granted to each of them what each desired. Thereafter their horns grew and each got what each desired.

Of diverse colours, and endowed with horns, they began to shine forth in beauty, O son. Favoured by Brahma himself with boons, cows are auspicious and yielders of havya and kavya. They are the embodiments of punya. They are sacred and blessed. They are possessed of excellent form and attributes. Cows constitute lofty and most exalted tejas. The gift of kine is very highly praised. Those good men who, freed from pride, make gifts of kine, are regarded as doers of righteous deeds and, indeed, as givers of all things.

Such men, O sinless one, attain to Goloka, the most sacred and blissful world of cows. The trees there produce ambrosial fruits. Indeed, those trees are always adorned with the most exquisite flowers and incomparable fruit. Those flowers, O Dvija, exude divine fragrance.

The soil of that world is entirely made of gems. The sands there are all gold. The climate there is such that the excellences of every season are perennial. There is no dirt, no dust. Ah, all the realm is, indeed, indescribably auspicious. The rivers that run there shine in resplendence for the red lotuses blooming upon their waters, and for the jewels and gems and gold on their banks, all of which have the radiance of the morning sun. Many are the shimmering lakes in that realm upon whose breasts are countless ethereal lotuses, their very petals made of living jewels, and their filaments adorned with a complexion like that of gold.

They are also adorned with flowering forests of unearthly trees, all of enchanting celestial fragrance, with thousands of beautiful creepers twining round them, as also with forests of Santanakas bearing their joyous flowery burdens. There are rivers whose banks are strewn with numberless lambent

pearls and other splendid gemstones and shining gold. Parts of those realms are forested with trees that are decked with supernal jewels of every kind. Some of them are made of gold and some display the splendour of fire.

There tower many mountains, also of gold, and many hills and other eminences made solidly of deeply lustrous jewels and glittering gemstones. These glow and sparkle in untold beauty for their lofty summits are made of all manner of jewels.

The trees that adorn those worlds always put forth flowers and fruits, and are covered with lush foliage. The flowers always exude a divine fragrance and the fruits are exceedingly sweet, Lord of the Bharata vamsa.

Men of dharma, of righteous deeds, O Yudhishtira, can be found there always sporting in bliss. Freed from grief and wrath, they pass their time there, crowned with the fruition of their every wish. Righteous souls, possessed of fame, dally there in undiluted happiness, moving from place to place as they will, O Bhaarata, in charmed vimanas of great beauty. Bands of Apsaras constantly amuse them, with music and dance and lovemaking.

Indeed, O Yudhishtira, a man goes to such worlds as the reward of his making gifts of kine. Those regions, which have for their Lords Pushan and the Maruts of great puissance, are attained to by givers of kine. In affluence the royal Varuna is regarded as pre-eminent. The giver of cows attains to affluence like that of Varuna himself. One should, with the steadfastness of a vrata, daily recite the mantras declared by Prajapati himself in respect of kine, Viswarupa and Yugandharah, Surupah, Bahurupah and Matara.

He who serves cows with reverence and who follows them with humility, succeeds in obtaining many invaluable boons from the cows who become gratified with him. One should never, in even one's heart, do an injury to cows. One should, indeed, always confer happiness on them. One should always reverence cows and worship them, bowing one's head. He who does this, restraining his senses the while and filled with joy, succeeds in attaining to that peace which is enjoyed by kine and which cows alone can confer.

One should for three days drink the hot urine of the cow. For the next three days one should drink the hot milk of the cow. One should next drink hot ghee for three days. One should subsist for the next three days on air only. That sacred thing through which the Devas enjoy worlds of felicity, that which indeed is the most sacred of all sacred things, ghrita, should then be borne on one's head.

With ghee one should pour libations on the sacred fire. By making gifts of ghee, one should cause Brahmanas to utter blessings upon oneself. One should eat ghee and make gifts of ghee. As the reward for this, one attains to that prosperity which belongs to holy kine.

That man who, for a month, subsists upon the gruel of barley picked out every day from cow dung is cleansed of sins as grave as the slaying of a Brahmana. After their defeat at the hands of the Daityas, the Devas practised this expiation, and through it regained their position as gods. Verily, it was through this that they regained their strength and were crowned with success.

Kine are sacred. They are embodiments of punya. They are great and the most efficacious purifiers of all. By making gifts of kine to Brahmanas, one attains to swarga. Living in a pure state, in the midst of kine, one should after touching pure water mentally recite those sacred mantras that are known by the name of Gomati. By doing this, one is purified of all sins. Brahmanas of righteous deeds, who have been cleansed by knowledge, a study of the Vedas, and observance of vows, should, only in the midst of sacred fires or cows or assemblies of Brahmanas, impart to their disciples a knowledge of the Gomati mantras, which are in every way like a Mahayagna for the merit they create.

One should observe a fast for three nights in order to receive the boon constituted by a knowledge of the import of the Gomati mantras. The man who is desirous of obtaining a son will have one by adoring these mantras. He who wishes to possess wealth shall have his desire gratified by worshipping these mantras. The girl who wishes for a good husband will have her wish fulfilled by them. In fact, one can acquire the fruition of every wish one may cherish, by worshipping these most sacred mantras.

When kine are gratified with the service one renders them, they can, without doubt, grant every wish. Even so, are kine so highly blessed. They are the essential requisite for sacrifices. They are the granters of every wish. Know that there is nothing superior to sacred cows."

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by his high-souled sire, Suka, of great energy, began to worship kine every day. Do you also, O son, do the same.'"

CANTO 82

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have heard that the dung of the cow is imbued with the Devi Sri. I want to hear how this was brought about. I have doubts, O Pitamaha, which you must dispel.'

Bhishma says, 'In this connection the old story is told, O king, of the conversation between cows and Sri, O best of the Bharatas. Once upon a time, the Goddess Sri, assuming a very beautiful form, entered a herd of cows. Seeing her wealth of beauty, the cows were filled with wonder.

The kine said, "Who are you, O devi? How have you become unrivalled on earth for beauty? O most blessed goddess, we are filled with wonder at your wealth of beauty. We want to know who you are. Ah, who, indeed, are you? Where will you go? O you of peerless splendour and complexion, tell us all that we wish to know."

Sri said, "Blessed be you, I am dear to all creatures. Indeed, I am known by the name Sri. Forsaken by me, the Daityas have been lost for ever. The Devas—Indra, Vivaswat, Soma, Vishnu, Varuna and Agni—having found me, sport in joy and will do so for ever. Verily, only when they are invested with me, the Devas and the Rishis have success. You kine, those beings meet with destruction into whom I do not enter. Dharma, artha and kama become sources of happiness only when I am in them. O cows, who are givers of happiness, know that I am possessed of even such tejas.

I wish to always dwell in every one of you. Coming into your presence, I solicit you. Be all of you blessed and endowed with Sri."

The kine said, "You are fickle and restless. You suffer yourself to be enjoyed by many. We do not wish to have you. Blessed be you, go wherever

you please. As for ourselves, all of us are of good forms. What need have we with you? Go wherever you like. You have already gratified us by answering our questions."

Sri said, "Is it proper, you kine, that you do not welcome me? I am difficult of being attained. Why then do you not accept me? It seems, you creatures of excellent vows, that the old adage is true: That it is certain that when one come to another of one's own accord and without being sought, one meets with disregard.

The Devas, the Danavas, the Gandharvas, the Pisachas, the Uragas, the Rakshasas and Manavas succeed in obtaining me only after undergoing the severest austerities. You who have such energy, do you take me. Amiable, gentle ones, I am never disregarded by anyone in the three worlds of mobile and immobile creatures."

The kine said, "We do not disregard you, O devi. We do not show you any slight. You are fickle and of a very restless heart. It is only for this that we take our leave of you. What need of much talk? Do you go wheresoever you choose. All of us are blessed with excellent forms. What need have we with you, O sinless one?"

Sri said, "You givers of honours, cast off by you in this way, I shall certainly become an object of disregard with all the world. Do you show me grace. You are all highly blessed. You are always ready to grant protection to those that seek it. I have come to you soliciting your sanctuary. I have no fault. Do you save me from this predicament. Know that I shall always be devoted to you.

I wish to dwell in any part, however odious, of your bodies. Indeed, I would dwell in even your rectum. Sinless ones, I do not see that you have any part in your bodies that may be regarded as repulsive, for you are sacred, and sanctifying, and so highly blessed. Do you grant my prayer. Tell me in which part of your bodies I may dwell."

'Thus addressed by Sri, the cows, always auspicious and inclined to kindness to all who are devoted to them, took counsel with one another, and then said to the Devi Sri, "O you of great fame, it is surely desirable that we should honour you. Do you live in our urine and dung. Both these are sacred, O auspicious goddess!"

Sri said, "It is my good fortune that you have shown me such grace and your wish to favour me. Let it be even as you say. Blessed be you all, for you have truly honoured me, O givers of happiness."

Having, O Bhaarata, made this compact with the kine, the devi, in the very sight of those cows, rendered herself invisible. I have thus told you, O son, the glory of the dung of kine. I shall once again tell you further about the glory of cows. Do you listen to me.' "

CANTO 83

"Bhishma says, 'They who make gifts of kine, and who subsist upon the remnants of libations offered on the sacred fire, are regarded, O Yudhishtira, as always performing sacrifices of every kind. No sacrifice can be performed without the help of curds and ghee. The very character as yagna which sacrifices have, depends upon ghrita. Hence are ghee, and the cow from which it is comes, regarded as the very root of sacrifice.

Of all kinds of dana, godana, the gift of kine, is praised as the highest. Kine are the foremost of all things. Themselves sacred, they are the best of purifiers and sanctifiers. All should cherish kine in order to gain prosperity and even peace. The milk, curds and ghee that cows yield can cleanse one from every kind of sin. Cows are said to represent the highest tejas both in this world and the world that is above. There is nothing that is more sacred or sanctifying than the cow, O Lord of Bharata vamsa.

In this connection, an ancient tale is told, O Yudhishtira, of the discourse between Brahma, the Grandsire, and Indra, king of the Devas.

After the Daityas had been defeated and Sakra became the Lord of the three worlds, all creatures grew in prosperity and became devoted to the true dharma. Then, once, the Rishis, the Gandharvas, the Kinnaras, the Uragas, the Rakshasas, the Devas, the Asuras, the Avians and the Prajapatis, all came together and worshipped the Grandsire. There were Narada and Parvata and Viswavasu and Haha-Huhu, who sang in divine strains to adore that mighty Lord of all creatures. Vayu bore the fragrance of celestial flowers thence. The seasons also, the ritus in their embodied forms, bore the

perfumes of flowers peculiar to each, to that conclave of celestial ones, that gathering of all creatures of the universe, where Apsaras danced and sang to unearthly music.

In the midst of that assembly, Indra, folding his hands to the Lord of all the gods and bowing his head to him with reverence, asked him: "I wish, Pitamaha, to know why Goloka, the world of sacred kine is higher, O Holy One, than Devaloka, world of the Devas themselves, who are the lords of all the worlds. What austerities, what brahmacharya, O Lord, did kine perform because of which they dwell in bliss in a realm that is beyond even that of the gods?"

Thus questioned by Indra, Brahma said to the slayer of Bala, "You have always, O Indra, disregarded kine. Hence, you know nothing of their glorious pre-eminence. Listen now to me, mighty one, as I explain to you the transcendent energy and splendour of kine, O Devaraja!

Cows have been said to be the limbs of sacrifice. They represent sacrifice itself, Vasava. Without them, there can be no yagna. With their milk and the havi made therefrom, they nurture all creatures. Their male calves are engaged in tillage and thereby produce many kinds of paddy and other seeds. From them flow sacrifices and havya and kavya, and milk and curds and ghrita. Hence, O Devaraja, are cows sacred.

Even while afflicted by hunger and thirst, they bear heavy and diverse burdens. Kine support the Munis. They uphold all creatures in a myriad of ways, O Vasava, and cows are guileless in their conduct. Because of their gentleness and the varied and great services they render, they will always dwell in worlds that are above even ours. This, O you of a hundred sacrifices, is why cows dwell in a realm that is high above that of the Devas.

Vasava, cows gained many excellent boons, and are themselves givers of boons to others. They are called Surabhis. Of sacred deeds and imbued with many auspicious signs, they are most sanctifying. Listen also, O Indra, to why cows, the offspring of Surabhi, have come down to the earth. In day, of yore, O son, when in the Devayuga, the Mahatman Danavas became Lords of the three worlds, Aditi performed the severest tapasya and conceived Vishnu in her womb as her reward. She stood on one leg for many long years in order to have a son.

Seeing the great Devi Aditi thus performing the sternest tapasya, the daughter of Daksha, the illustrious Surabhi, herself devoted to dharma, also undertook the most trying penance upon the breast of the magnificent and

enchanting mountains of Kailasa that are the resort of both the Devas and the Gandharvas. Established in the highest yoga she also stood upon one leg for eleven thousand years. The Devas with the Rishis and the great Nagas were all scorched by the ferocity of her tapasya. Going then with me to that holy mountain, all of them began to adore that auspicious goddess.

I then said to that devi adorned with tapa, 'O faultless devi, for what purpose do you perform such severe austerities? Most blessed one, I am gratified with your tapasya, O beautiful one! Do you, O goddess, ask for whatever boon you desire, and I will grant what you ask.'

Even these were my words to her, Purandara. Surabhi answered me, 'I have no need, O Pitamaha, of boons. Even this, O Anagha, is a great boon to me that you are pleased with me.'

I replied to the illustrious Surabhi, 'Devi, I am more gratified than I can tell both by your tapasya and by your freedom from greed, O you of the beautiful face. And so I grant you the boon of immortality. Through my grace you shall dwell in a world that is higher than all the Trilokas. That world shall be known to all by the name of Goloka.

Your daughters, who are ever engaged in doing good karma, will live in the world of men. All kinds of enjoyment, divine and mundane, which you merely think of, will immediately be yours. Whatever bliss exists in swarga, will also be yours, O most blessed one.'

The realms, O you of a hundred eyes, that are Surabhi's instantly gratify every wish and desire no sooner than they appear in the heart. Not death, decay, or fire can touch its denizens. No ill luck, O Vasava, exists in Goloka. Many forests of fascination and enchantment, and wondrous ornaments and other things of great beauty embellish that realm. There you will see, O Vasava of the eyes like lotus petals, so many indescribable chariots, all plentifully equipped, and which move at the will of the rider. It is only through brahmacharya, by tapasya, with truth, self-restraint, by gifts, by diverse kinds of righteous deeds, through pilgrimages to sacred tirthas, in fact, by the most severe austerities and righteous deeds well-performed, that one can attain to Goloka.

O Sakra, I have answered what you asked me in full. O slayer of Asuras, you should never disregard sacred kine."'

Bhishma continues, 'Having heard these words of the self-born Brahma, O Yudhishtira, Sakra of a thousand eyes began from that time to worship kine every day and to show them the greatest reverence. I have told you

everything about the sanctifying character of cows, O you of great splendour, explaining the sacred nature, the glory and the lofty pre-eminence of kine, which can exorcise every sin. That man who, with senses withdrawn, recites this account to good Brahmanas, on occasions when havya and kavya are offered, or at yagnas, or while adoring the Pitris at sraddhas, succeeds in conferring upon his ancestors an inexhaustible felicity fraught with the fruition of every wish.

The man who is devoted to kine obtains the fruition of his every wish. Indeed, even women that are devoted to cows succeed in fulfilling every wish of theirs. He that wishes for sons obtains them. He that desires daughters obtains those. He that wishes for wealth succeeds in aquiring it and he that wants punya wins that as well. He that wants gyana gains it and he that desires kama enjoys every pleasure. Indeed, O Bhaarata, there is nothing unattainable to one that is devoted to sacred kine.'"

CANTO 84

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have, O Pitamaha, discoursed to me on godana, which is fraught with great punya. In the case of kings who observe their svadharma, the gift of cows is especially meritorious. Kingship is always painful; it is a burden that can never be borne by men of impure souls. Thus, generally, kings fail to attain to auspicious ends. By constantly making bhumidana, gifts of earth, they succeed in purifying themselves of all their sins.

You have, O prince of Kuru's race, discoursed to me on many duties. You have spoken to me about the godana made by King Nriga in days of old. Rishi Nachiketa, in ancient times, discoursed on the punya of this dana. The Vedas and the Upanishads, also, have declared that in all sacrifices, in fact, in all kinds of religious karmas and kriyas, the dakshina should be of earth, kine or gold.

The Srutis, however, declare that in all dakshinas, gold is superior and is, indeed, the best. I want to hear about this from you. What is gold? How did it come to be? When did it come? What is its essence? Who is its presiding deity? What are its fruits? Why is it regarded as the foremost of all things? For what reason do men of wisdom laud suvarnadana, the gift of gold? For what reason is gold regarded as the best dakshina in all sacrifices? Why is gold regarded as a purifier superior to earth and kine? Why is it regarded so superior as a dakshina?

Do you, O Pitamaha, discourse to me on all this!'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O king, with concentrated attention to me as I tell you in detail of the origin of gold, as I understand it.

When my father Santanu of great tejas left this world, I went to Gangadwara to perform his sraddha. Arrived there, I commenced the sraddha of my father. Coming there, my mother Jahnavi rendered me great help. Inviting many Rishis, crowned with spiritual success, and having them sit before me, I began the preliminary rites of gifts of water and other auspicious things. Having performed all the preliminary rituals, as prescribed in the shastras, with a concentrated mind, I set myself to offer the pinda, the obsequial cake. I then saw, O king, that a handsome arm, adorned with angadas and other ornaments, rose up, piercing the ground, through the blades of kusa grass which I had spread. Beholding this arm rise from the ground, I became filled with wonder. Indeed, O king of the Bharata vamsa, I thought that my father had come himself to accept the pinda I was about to offer.

I grew thoughtful and, by the light of the scriptures, the conviction soon came upon me, and indeed seized my mind, that the law does occur in the Vedas that the obsequial cake should never be given into the actual hand of him whose sraddha is being performed. The Pitris do not come in their visible forms to take the pinda. On the other hand, the scripture does provide that the offering should be made on blades of kusa grass spread on the earth.

Ignoring that hand which seem to constitute an indication of my father's presence, and remembering the true law which is declared in the shastras, I offered the entire pinda upon those blades of kusa grass that were spread before me. Know, O Kshatriya, that what I did was perfectly consistent with scriptural law. When I made my offering, the arm of my father vanished in our very sight.

That night, as I slept, the Pitris appeared to me in a dream. Gratified with me they said, "We are pleased with you for your adherence today to the law of the shastras. We are gratified to see that you did not swerve from the injunctions of the scriptures. Having been followed by you, O king, the scriptural law has become more authoritative. With your conduct, you have honoured and maintained the authority of yourself, the shastras, the auditions of the Vedas, the Pitris and the Rishis, the Pitamaha Brahma himself, and the Prajapatis.

Adherence to the scriptures has been strengthened. You have today, O Bhaarata, conducted yourself honourably and rightly. You have made gifts of earth and kine. Do you now make gifts of gold. The gift of gold is most

purifying. O you who know dharma well, know that through such a gift, both we and our forefathers will all be washed clean of our every sin. Such dakshina saves both the ancestors and descendants to the tenth generation of the one who makes it."

Even these were the words that my ancestors, appearing in my dream, spoke. I then awoke, O king, and was full of wonder. I set my heart upon making gifts of gold.

Listen now, monarch, to this old itihasa. It is praiseworthy and it lengthens the span of his life who listens to it. It was first recited to Rama, the son of Jamadagni.

In former days Jamadagni's son Rama, filled with great wrath, wiped the Kshatriyas from the face of the earth, twenty-one times. Having subjugated the entire world, the heroic Rama of eyes like lotus-petals began to make preparations for performing an Aswamedha yagna, which is praised by all Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, and which can grant the fruition of every wish. That sacrifice purifies all creatures and enhances the energy and splendour of those who succeed in performing it. Rama of untold tejas was purified of the awesome violence he committed, by the performance of that sacrifice.

Yet, even after performing that greatest of sacrifices, the Mahatman Rama failed to attain to perfect lightness of heart. Going to Rishis who knew every branch of learning as also to the Devas, Rama of Bhrigu's race questioned them. Filled with repentance and compassion, he addressed them, saying, "You most highly blessed ones, do you declare to me that which is more purifying still for men engaged in fierce and savage deeds."

Those great Rishis, profound knowers of the Vedas and the other shastras, answered him, saying, "O Rama, guided by the authority of the Vedas, do you honour all learned Brahmanas. After doing this for some time do you once more ask the regenerate Rishis what you should do to rid yourself of your sins. Follow the advice that those sages of great wisdom give you."

Going then to Vasishta and Agastya and Kasyapa, that delighter of the Bhrigus asked them, "You foremost of Brahmanas, this is the wish that has arisen in my heart. How can I purify myself and be rid of my sins? By what karmas and kriyas can I achieve this? Or, if by dana, what shall I give away that I am washed of my sins of violence sins and have peace again? You greatest of the righteous and the wise, if your hearts be inclined to favour

me, then tell me this, you who are endowed with the inestimable wealth of tapasya—what is my way to wash my sins from me?"

The Rishis said, "O Bhrigunandana, as we have heard, the mortal that has sinned purifies himself by making gifts of kine, of earth, and of wealth. There is another dakshina that is regarded as a great cleanser. Listen to us, O great Dvija, as we tell you of it.

That thing of which we speak is most excellent and imbued with wonderful aspect and is, besides, the progeny of fire.

In days of yore, the god Agni burnt all the world. From his seed sprang gold of bright complexion. It came to be celebrated as Suvarna or golden-complexioned. By making gifts of gold you are certain to have your wish crowned with fruition."

Then the illustrious Vasishta, in especial, he of rigid vows, said, "Hear, O Rama, how gold, which has the splendour of fire sprang into existence. That gold will confer merit on you. In matters of dakshina, gold is highly lauded. I will also tell you what gold is, whence it has come, and how it has come to be invested with superior attributes. Listen to me, O Mahabaho, with attention.

Know this as certain that gold is of the essence of Agni and Soma. The goat is Agni for if given it leads to the region of the deity of fire; the sheep is Varuna for it leads to the realm of Varuna lord of waters; the horse is Surya, for if given it leads to Suryaloka; elephants are Nagas, for they lead to Nagaloka; buffaloes are Asuras for they lead to the world of Asuras; cocks and boars are Rakshasas, for they lead to the regions of the Rakshasas, O Bhrigunandana. Earth is sacrifice; kine, water and Soma, for it leads to the merits of sacrifice, and to the region of kine, that of the lord of waters, and of Soma. Even these are the declarations of the Smritis.

Churning the entire universe, a mass of blinding tejas was found. That energy is gold. Hence, O regenerate Rishi, compared to all these things which I have named above, gold is the most superior. It is a precious thing, exalted and excellent.

It is for this that the Devas and Gandharvas and Uragas and Rakshasas and Manavas and Pisachas hold it with care. All these beings, O son of Bhrigu's race, shine in splendour with the help of gold, after converting it into crowns and armlets and diverse kinds of ornaments. It is also for this reason that gold is regarded as the most cleansing of all cleansing things like earth and kine and all other kinds of wealth, O prince of men.

Suvarnadana, the gift of gold, O powerful king, is the highest gift. It is distinguished above the gifts of earth, of kine, and of all other things, O you that have the effulgence of an immortal, gold is an eternal purifier. Do you make gifts of it to the foremost of Brahmanas as it is the best of things that purify. Of all kinds of dakshina, gold is the best. They who make gifts of gold are said to be givers of all things. Indeed, they who make gifts of gold come to be regarded as givers of deities. Agni is all the gods in one, and gold has Agni for its essence. Hence it is that the person who makes gifts of gold gives away all the gods. Thus, O Lord of men, there is no gift higher than the gift of gold."

Vasishta continued, "Listen once more, O twice-born Rishi, as I speak about the pre-eminence of gold, O foremost of all wielders of weapons. I heard this formerly in the Purana, O Bhriguputra. What I say to you is the speech of Prajapati himself.

After the wedding was over of the illustrious and high-souled Rudra, armed with the trident, with the goddess who became his wife, upon the breast of that greatest of mountains, Himavat, Mahadeva Siva wished to unite himself with the goddess. Thereupon, all the gods, pierced by anxiety, approached Rudra. Bending their heads with reverence and gratifying Mahadeva and his boon-giving wife Uma, both of whom were seated together, they addressed Rudra, saying, 'This union, O illustrious and sinless one, of yours with the devi, is a union of one endowed with penances with another of tapasya as severe. Verily, it is the union, O Lord, of one possessed of infinite energy with another whose tejas is scarcely less.

You, most illustrious, are of tejas that is irresistible. The devi Uma, also, is possessed of urjas that is equally inexorable. The offspring from a union like this, will, without doubt be endowed with untold might. Verily, O puissant Lord, that child will consume all things in the three worlds without leaving any remnant. Do you then, Lord of all the universe, O you of large eyes, grant to these Devas prostrated before you, a boon for the weal of the three worlds. Do you, mightiest one, restrain your terrible hiranyaretas, your golden seed, which might otherwise become the seed of your progeny. Verily, that retas is the essence of all forces in the three worlds.

Besides, you two, by an act of coition, are sure to scorch the universe. The son born to you will certainly be powerful enough to cower and afflict the Devas. Neither Bhumidevi, Akasa, or swarga, O omnipotent one, nor all of them together, will be able to bear your awesome seed. The entire

universe is certain to burn through the force of your hiranyaretas. It befits you, O mighty one, to show us favour, O illustrious Lord. That favour consists in your not begetting a son, O Mahadeva, upon the devi Uma. Do you, with patience, restrain your fiery seed.'

To the Devas that said this, the most holy Mahadeva, having the bull for his sign, replied, 'Tathaastu, so be it!' Having said so, Vrishavaha, he who rides the great bull, drew up his vital seed. From that time he came to be called by the name of Urdhvaretas, one that has drawn up his seed.

However, at this endeavour of the gods to stop procreation, Rudra's wife, the devi Uma grew incensed. Being a woman, and endowed with small control over her temper, she used harsh words. 'Since you have stopped my Lord from begetting a child upon me when he wanted to do so, you Deva shall all become sonless. Since you have stood in the way of my having children, you shall all be childless yourselves!'

When Uma pronounced her curse, O Bhargava, Agni was not there. It is in consequence of the curse of the goddess that the Devas have become childless. Implored by them, Rudra held his seed within himself, his retas of incomparable power. A small quantity, however, that came out of his lingam fell onto the earth. Instantly, that golden seed ignited into a blazing fire and began to grow prodigiously in size and power. Coming in contact with Agni's energy of great might, Rudra's seed became one with it.

Meanwhile, all the Devas, led by Sakra, were tormented intolerably by the terrible Asura Taraka. The Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Maruts, the Aswins and the Sadhyas were all afflicted by the tameless prowess of that son of Diti. All the realms of the Devas, their beautiful chariots, and their palatial mansions, and the asramas of the Rishis, the Asuras took for themselves at will. The Devas and the Rishis, with sombre, dejected hearts, sought the protection of Brahma of unfading glory."

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"The deities said, 'The Asura Taraka, who has boons from you, O almighty one, torments the Devas and the Rishis. Let his death be ordained by you. O Grandsire, great has been our fear from him. O illustrious one, do you save us. We have no other refuge than you.'

Brahma said, 'I am equal in my disposition towards all creatures. Yet, I cannot condone adharma. Let Taraka, enemy of the Devas and Rishis, be quickly destroyed. The Vedas and the sanatana Dharma shall not perish, you best of gods. I have ordained what is right and just. Let the fever of your hearts be dispelled.'

The Devas said, "Because of your having granted him boons, that son of Diti has been proud of his might. We Devas cannot kill him. How then will he die? The boon which, O Pitamaha, he has obtained from you is that he cannot be killed by Devas or Asuras or Rakshasas. We Devas have also been cursed by the devi Uma, when we stopped Siva from begetting a son in her. She cursed us that none of us will ever have any children.'

Brahma said, 'You foremost of Devas, Agni was not there when the goddess pronounced her curse. Even he will beget a son for the destruction of your enemies. Transcending all the Devas and Danavas and Rakshasas and Manavas and Gandharvas and Nagas and Garudas, the son of Agni, with his spear, which in his hands will be a weapon that cannot be baffled if once cast, will destroy Taraka from whom your fear has arisen. Verily, he will kill all your other enemies as well.

Will is eternal. That will is known by the name of kama and is identical with Rudra's seed, a portion of which fell into the blazing form of Agni.

That mighty retas, which is like a second Agni, will be cast by Agni into the Ganga to create a child who will destroy the enemies of the Devas. Agni was not affected by Uma's curse. The consumer of havis was elsewhere when the devi cursed the rest of you.

So seek out the god of fire and set him to this task. Sinless ones, I have told you the means by which you can kill Taraka. The curses of those that are of tejas do not affect them who are themselves of great energy. Any force, when it meets a greater force, grows weak. They that are endowed with tapasya can destroy the very boon-giving Devas who are immortal. Will, or love, or desire, which is Agni, sprang up of old and is the most eternal of all creatures.

Agni is the Lord of the universe. He is cannot be fathomed or described. He goes everywhere and exists in all things; he is the Creator of all beings. He lives in the hearts of all creatures. Endued with great puissance, he is older than Rudra himself. Let that eater of havis, who is a mass of pure tejas, be sought out. That illustrious one will accomplish what your hearts desire.'

Hearing what Brahma said, the Devas went forth, with hope kindled in their hearts, to seek out the god of fire. The Devas and the Rishis, all endowed with tapasya, all possessed of prosperity, all crowned with ascetic success, all famed across the three worlds, scoured every part of the three worlds, their minds fixed on just Agni and beside themselves to discover him. O best of Bhargavas, they failed to find he that feeds on the havis of sacrifice, for he had hidden himself by withdrawing his atman into his Atman.

At this time, a frog living in water appeared on the surface from the nethermost Patalas, for he had been scalded by the fierce heat of Agni. The little creature addressed the Devas who were stricken by fear and anxious to find the god of fire. The frog said, 'You Devas, Agni now dwells in the nethermost underworld. Scorched by the heat of that god have I come here. The lustrous bearer of havis, O Devas, is under the deepest waters of Patala. He has created a great water mass within which he is hidden. All of us have been seared by his fierce heat. If, Devas, you wish to see him or have any business with him, go to him thence. Yes, take yourselves there. As for me, I will flee this place now for I am in fear of terrible Agni.'

Having said this much, the frog dived into the water. Agni, who devours the havis of every yagna learnt of the treachery of the frog. Coming to that

creature he cursed its entire species, 'You shall all cease to have taste in your mouths!' Having cursed the frog, Agni swiftly left that place to find another sanctuary. The most powerful god did not show himself at all. Seeing the plight to which the frogs were reduced for having done them a service, the Devas, O best of the Bhrigus, showed favour to those creatures. I will tell you about it, listen to me, O Mahabaho.

The Devas said, 'Though deprived of their tongues through the curse of Agni, and bereft of the sense of taste, you will be able to utter diverse kinds of speech. Living within holes, deprived of food, without consciousness, wasted, dried up and more dead than alive, all of you will yet be succoured by the earth herself. You shall also be able to range where you will at night when the world is cloaked in darkness.'

Having said this to the frogs, the Devas once more combed every part of the earth to find the god of blazing flames. Despite all their efforts, they failed to find him. Then, O perpetuator of Bhrigu's race, an elephant, as large and mighty as Airavata, the elephant of Sakra, spoke to the gods, saying, 'Agni now lives within this Aswattha tree!'

Incensed with wrath, Agni cursed all the elephants, O Bhargava, 'Your tongues will be bent backwards!' Having cursed the elephants, Agni swiftly flew into a Sami tree in which he had for some time wished to dwell. Listen now, O hero, to what favour was shown to the elephants by the Devas, who were pleased by the service that one of them had rendered.

The Devas said, 'Even with your tongues bent inwards you shall be able to eat all things, and with even those tongues you shall be able to utter cries as you will, though they will be indistinct.'

Having blessed the elephants in this way, the denizens of heaven once more resumed their search for Agni, who, having flared out of the Aswattha tree, had entered the heart of the Sami. A parrot divulged Agni's new abode to the Devas, who at once went to that tree. Enraged with the parrot, the fire god cursed the species of parrots, 'From this day you shall no more have the power to speak!' Indeed, the devourer of havis curled the tongues of all parrots upwards.

Seeing Agni in the place pointed out by the parrot, and witnessing the curse that fell upon the bright bird, the Devas were moved to compassion for the poor creature, and blessed him, saying, 'You will not entirely lose your power to speak. Though your tongue has been turned backwards, yet

speech you shall have, but confined to the sound of Ka. Like that of a child or an old man, your speech shall be sweet and indistinct and wonderful.'

Having said this to the parrot, and seeing Agni within the heart of the Sami, the gods made Sami wood a sacred fuel fit for kindling in all religious rites. It was from that time that fire is seen to dwell in the heart of the Sami. Men came to regard the Sami as an auspicious wood to light fires for sacrifices.

The waters that occur in the deepest Patalas had been touched by Agni Deva. Those heated waters, Bhargava, are spewed forth by mountain springs. Meanwhile, seeing the Devas, Agni became aggrieved. He asked them, 'What is the reason for your coming here?'

The Devas and the Maharishis said, 'We wish to set you to a great task, which you must accomplish. When you have done so, it will add greatly to your credit.'

Agni said, 'Tell me what your business is. I shall, O Devas, accomplish it. I am always willing to be set by you to any task you wish. Do not hesitate to command me.'

The Devas said, 'There is an Asura of the name Taraka who has been filled with hubris because of the boon he has from Brahma. Through his great prowess he opposes and discomfits us as he likes. Do you ordain his destruction. O Sire, rescue these Devas, these Prajapatis, and these Rishis, O most blessed Pavaka. Mighty one, beget a heroic son possessed of your own terrific tejas, who will dispel, O bearer of the havis, our fear of that Asura. We have been cursed by the great Goddess Uma. There is nothing other than your energy which can now be our refuge. Do you, O powerful one, save us all!'

Thus addressed, the illustrious and irresistible bearer of sacrificial libations answered, saying, 'Be it so', and he then went away towards Ganga, who is also called Bhagirathi. He united himself in congress with her and caused her to conceive. In the womb of Ganga, the seed of Agni began to grow even as Agni himself blazes up when fed with fuel and fanned by the wind. Ganga became direly agitated at heart with the wild energy of the fire god. She suffered such distress that she could not bear it. When the deity of blazing flames cast his fulgurous seed into the womb of Ganga, a certain Asura, for purposes of his own, uttered a dreadful roar. Ganga was terrified by that roar which was in no way meant for her; her eyes rolled in fear and she fainted. She could no longer bear Agni's terrific

seed within her, and Jahnu's daughter trembled violently as if with a seizure.

Overwhelmed by the fulminant tejas of the fiery seed in her womb, Brahmana, she cried to Agni, 'Illustrious one, I cannot bear your seed within me for another moment! Ah, your seed makes me weak and I feel worn and ill. Terrible anxiety and agitation have their way with me, O Agni, and my heart seems dead within me, sinless one.

O greatest of all that are blessed with tapasya, no, I cannot bear your flaming seed inside me for a moment longer. By no whim, but by the agony that compels me I must cast it out of me.

There has been no fleshly contact between us, O you of blazing flames. The cause for our union is the distress that has come upon the Devas, O splendid one. Whatever punya, or otherwise, there may be in this thing that I am meant to do, let it all belong only to you, O Agni. Truly, I believe the dharma or adharma of this deed must be just yours.'

To her the god of fire said, 'Do you bear the seed. Do, indeed, bear the foetus imbued with my tejas. It will lead to great rewards. You, verily, can bear all the earth. You will gain nothing by casting my child out from your womb.'

But that greatest of rivers, though thus pressed by Agni, as also the other Devas, cast the flaming seed out from her womb onto the breast of Meru, first of all mountains. She who might have contained that burning seed was roiled by the tejas of Rudra—for Agni and Rudra are one—succumbed to its ferocity and cast it from her with a scream.

Agni saw her, and asked, 'Is all well with the embryo that you have expelled from yourself? Of what complexion is it, O devi? Of what form is it? With what energy does it seem to be endowed? Do you tell me all about that child!'

Ganga said, 'The child has the complexion of molten gold. In tejas it is even like you, O Anagha. Perfectly stainless, and blazing with splendour, it illuminates the entire mountain. O greatest of tapasvins, its fragrance is that of the highest, rarest lakes adorned with lotuses, mingled with the scent of the kadamba. Everything around it seemed to be transformed into gold with the splendour of that child even as all things on mountain and plain seem turned into gold by the rays of the sun. The resplendence of that embryo, spreading far, falls upon mountains and rivers and springs. Why, it seems that the three worlds, with all their mobile and immobile creatures, are lit up

by your child. Even thus is your son, O Agni, bearer of havis. Brilliant like Surya or your blazing self, in beauty he is even like a second Soma.'

Having said these words, the devi Ganga disappeared. Pavaka, also, having accomplished the work of the Devas went where he wished, O Bhrigunandana. It was because of what happened then that the Rishis and the Devas gave Agni the name Hiranyaretas, he of the golden seed. And because the earth held that seed, after Ganga had cast it upon her, she also came to be called Vasumati.

Meanwhile, that foetus, which had sprung from Pavaka and been held for a time by Ganga, having fallen into a forest of reeds, began to grow and at last assumed a most wonderful form. The six goddesses of the constellation Krittika beheld that form resembling the rising sun, and she began to rear that child as their son, nurturing him at their breasts. For this, that child of pre-eminent splendour came to be called Kartikeya. And because he grew from seed that fell out of Rudra's body, he was called Skanda. Having been born in the solitude of a forest of reeds, hidden from the view of all, he was called Guha.

It was in this way that gold came into existence as the son of Agni, god of flames. And so was it that gold came to be looked upon as the best of all things and the ornament of the very gods; and so also gold was called Jatarupam. It is the foremost of all dear things, and among ornaments, also, it is the first. The greatest of all purifying things, it is the most auspicious of all that is auspicious.

Gold is truly the illustrious Agni, the Lord of all things, and the first of all Prajapatis. The most sacred of all sacred things is gold, O Dvijottama. Verily, gold is said to have for its essence both Agni and Soma."'

'Vasishta continued, "This other history, also, O Rama, called Brahmadarsana, I heard in the eldest days, about the achievement of the Grandsire Brahma, who is verily the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. To a sacrifice performed in the most ancient days, by Mahadeva, Lord Rudra, who on that occasion had assumed the form of Varuna, there came the Munis and all the Devas with Agni at their head. To that sacrifice also came all the sacrificial Angas in their embodied forms, and the mantra called Vashat; also embodied. All the Samans also and all the Yajuses, in their thousands and in their embodied forms, as well, came there. The Rig Veda came there, adorned with the laws of diction and prosody. The Lakshanas, the Suras, the Niruktas, the Swaras arranged in rows, and the syllable

AUM, as also Nigraha and Pragraha, all came there and took their places under the eye of Mahadeva.

The Vedas with the Upanishads, Vidya and Savitri, as also, Bhutakaala the past, Vartamanakaala the present, and Bhavishyakaala the future, all came there and were held by the illuminous Siva. The puissant Lord of all then poured libations himself into his own self. Indeed, the wielder of Pinaka caused that sacrifice of multifarious form to appear and be ineffably beautiful. He is Swarga, Akasa, Bhumi and Vayu. He is called the Lord of the earth. He is the Lord whose sway removes all obstacles. He is endowed with Sri and he is identical with Agni of all flames.

That lustrous deity is called by many names. Even he is Brahma and Siva and Rudra and Varuna and Agni and Prajapati. He is the auspicious Pasupati, Lord of all creatures, yagna and tapa, and all the rites of yoga, and Goddess Diksha blazing with vratas, the several points of the horizon with the deities that preside over them, the consorts of all the deities, their daughters, and the Matrikas, the celestial mothers, all came together in a body to Pasupati, O you of Bhrigu's race. Verily, beholding that sacrifice of the Mahatman Mahadeva who had assumed the form of Varuna, all of them were full of joy. Seeing the Apsaras of exquisite beauty there, the seed of Brahma, excited, fell out upon the earth. For the seed having fallen on the earth, Pushan—Surya—took up that earth mingled with Brahma's seed in his hands and cast it into the sacrificial fire.

Meanwhile, the yagna with the sacred fire ablaze had begun and was underway. Brahma, as the hotri, was pouring libations on the fire. It was while so engaged that the Pitamaha became excited with desire and ejaculated on the earth. As soon as his seed spurted out, he took it up with the sruva, the sacrificial ladle, and poured it as a libation of ghrita, with the apposite mantras, into the blazing fire.

From that seed of his, Brahma of great tejas caused the four orders of creatures to spring into existence. That seed of the Grandsire was imbued with the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas. From the part of it which was of Rajas, sprang all mobile creatures infused with the principle of pravritti or action. From the part which was of tamas, sprang all inert creatures. The principle of sattva, however, which dwelt in that seed, entered both kinds of existences, the animate and the still.

The sattva guna is of the nature of tejas or light, and is identical with buddhi, understanding. It is eternal and of it is Akasa, unending space. In all

creatures the attribute of sattva is present and is identical with the light which shows what is right and what is wrong. When the seed of Brahma was poured as havis on that sacrificial fire, there sprang from it, O mighty one, three beings. They were three male persons, with bodies that partook of the characters of the circumstances from which they respectively sprang.

One arose first from the flames of the fire that are called bhrig, and hence he came to be known by the name Bhrigu. A second came from the burning coals called angara, and he came to be known as Angiras. The third sprang from a heap of extinguished coals, kavya, and he came to be called by the name Kavi. The first came out with flames spewing from his body and he was called Bhrigu. From the rays of the sacrificial fire sprang another called Marichi. From Marichi, later, came Kasyapa. From the burning coals sprang Angiras. The diminutive Rishis called Balakhilyas sprang from the blades of kusa grass spread out in that sacrifice. From the same blades of kusa grass, O you of great puissance, also sprang Atri. From the ashes of the fire sprang all those that are numbered among the illumined Rishis—the Vaikhanasas—endowed with tapasya and devoted to Vedic lore and every noble and excellent accomplishment.

From the eyes of Agni sprang the twin Aswins blessed with great beauty of person. At last, from his ears, sprang all the Prajapatis. The Rishis emerged from the pores of Agni's body. From his sweat sprang Chchandas, and from his strength sprang Manas, mind. For this has Agni been said to be all the Devas in his individual self, by Rishis who know the Vedas deeply, and guided by their authority.

The logs of wood that keep alive the flames of Agni are regarded as the masas, the months. The juices that the fuel yields constitute the Fortnights. The liver of Agni is the day and the night, and his fierce light are the muhurtas. The blood of Agni is regarded as the source of the Rudras. From his blood sprang also the gold-complexioned deities called the Maitradevatas. From his smoke sprang the Vasus. From his flames sprang the Rudras as also the twelve Adityas of great refulgence. The navagrahas and the nakshatras, and the other stars that have been set in their respective places in the firmament, are regarded as the burning coals of Agni. The first Creator of the universe declared Agni to be the Supreme Brahman and eternal, and the granter of all wishes. And this is truly a mystery.

After all these births, Mahadeva, who had assumed the form of Varuna for his sacrifice, and who had Pavana for his soul, said, 'This excellent

sacrifice is mine. I am the grahapati in it. The three beings that first sprang from the sacrificial fire are mine. Without doubt, they should be regarded as my sons. Know this, you gods who range through the skies: they are the fruits of this sacrifice.'

Agni said, 'These children have sprung from my limbs. They all have me as the cause of their life. They must be regarded as my children. Mahadeva, in his form of Varuna, is mistaken about this.'

After this, the master of all the worlds, the Grandsire of all creatures, Brahma, said, 'These children are mine. The seed was mine that I poured upon the sacrificial fire. I am the Yajaman of this sacrifice. It was I who poured on the sacrificial fire the seed that came out of myself. The fruit is always his who has planted the seed. The cause of these births is the seed that is mine.'

The Devas then went into the presence of the Grandsire and, bowing their heads to him, joined their hands in reverence, and they said to him, 'All of us, O illustrious one, and the entire universe of mobile and immobile creatures, are your children. O sire, let Agni of blazing flames, and the powerful Mahadeva, who has, for this sacrifice, assumed the form of Varuna, both have their wish.'

At these words, although born of Brahman, the mighty Mahadeva in the form of Varuna, the ruler of all aquatic creatures, received the firstborn one Bhrigu with the lustre of the sun, as his own child. Brahma then made Angiras the son of Agni. Conversant with the truth of everything, the Pitamaha then took Kavi as his own son. Engaged in procreating creatures to people the earth, Bhrigu who is a Prajapati, then came to be known as Varuna's son. Blessed with every prosperity, Angiras came to be called the son of Agni, and the celebrated Kavi came to be known as the child of Brahma himself.

Bhrigu and Angiras, who had sprung from the flames and the coals of Agni, became the progenitors of vast races and tribes of the world. Verily, these three, Bhrigu and Angiras and Kavi, regarded as Prajapatis, are the progenitors of races and tribes beyond count. All are the children of these three. Know this, great hero. Bhrigu begot seven sons, all of whom became equal to him in merits and accomplishments. Their names are Chyavana, Vajrasirsha, Suchi, Urva and Sukra, that giver of boons, Vibhu, and Savana. These are the seven sons of Bhrigu and are hence Bhargavas. They are also called Varunas because of their ancestor Bhrigu having been adopted by

Mahadeva in the form of Varuna. You, O Rama, belong to the race of Bhrigu.

Angiras begot eight sons. They also are known as Varunas. Their names are Brihaspati, Utathya, Payasya, Santi, Dhira, Virupa, Samvarta and Sudhan was the eighth. These eight are regarded also as the sons of Agni. Free from every evil, they are devoted only to knowledge. The sons of Kavi, who was taken by Brahma himself, are also known as Varunas. Numbering eight, all of them became progenitors of teeming races and tribes. Auspicious by nature, they are all knowers of the Brahman. The names of the eight sons of Kavi are Kavi, Kavya, Dhrishnu, Usanas endued with great intelligence, Bhrigu, Viraja, Kasi and Ugra conversant with every dharma.

These are the eight sons of Kavi. By them has the whole world been peopled. They are all Prajapatis, and by them have been begotten countless progeny. Thus, O greatest Bhargava, has the whole world been peopled with the progeny of Angiras and Kavi and Bhrigu. The supreme Lord Mahadeva, in the form of Varuna which he assumed for his sacrifice, had first, O learned Brahmana, adopted both Kavi and Angiras. Hence, these two are regarded as being of Varuna.

After that the consumer of sacrificial libations, deity of blazing flames, adopted Angiras. Hence, all the progeny of Angiras are known as belonging to the race of Agni. The Grandsire Brahma was, in the most antique days, gratified by all the Devas, who said to him, 'Let these Lords of the universe, Bhrigu, Angiras and Kavi, and their descendants, save us all. Let all of them become progenitors of varied races and tribes to people the earth. Let all of them become endowed with tapasya. Through your grace, let all these save the world from becoming an uninhabited wilderness.

Let them become procreators and extenders of races and tribes and let them increase your glory and tejas. Let all of them become thorough masters of the Vedas and let them be achievers of great deeds. Let all of them be friends to the cause of the Devas. Indeed, let all of them be blessed with auspiciousness. Let them become founders of teeming races and tribes and let them be great Maharishis. Let all of them be blessed with lofty tapasya and let all of them be devoted to brahmacharya. All of us, as also all these, are your progeny, O you of great puissance.

You, Pitamaha, are the Creator of both the Devas and the Brahmanas. Marichi is your first son. All these also that are called Bhargavas are your

progeny. We also are so. Looking at this, O Grandsire, we shall all help and support one another. All these shall, in this way, multiply their progeny and establish you at the commencement of each prakriya, every creation after each universal pralaya.'

Thus addressed by them, Brahma, the Grandsire of all the worlds, said, 'Tathaastu, So be it. I am gratified with you all!'

Having said so to the Devas, he returned to where he had come from. Even this is what happened in days of old at that Mahayagna of the Mahatman Mahadeva, that greatest of all the gods, in the beginning of creation, when he assumed the form of Varuna to perform his sacrifice.

Agni is Brahma. He is Pasupati. He is Sarva. He is Rudra. He is Prajapati. It is well-known that Suvarna, gold, is the child of Agni. When fire is not available for a sacrifice, gold is used as a substitute. Guided by the indications afforded by the Veda, the sacrificer who knows the scriptural law, and who knows the identity of gold with fire, places a piece of gold on some blades of kusa grass spread out on the ground, and pours libations over it.

Upon also the pores of an anthill, upon the right ear of a goat, upon a piece of level earth, upon the waters of a tirtha, or into the hand of a Brahmana, if libations are poured, the great Agni Deva is gratified and regards such havis as a source of his own aggrandisement as also that of the Devas through him. Hence it is that we have heard that all the Devas regard Agni as their refuge and are devoted to him. Agni sprang from Brahma, and from Agni sprang gold. Hence, men of dharma who make gifts of gold, suvarnadana, are regarded as giving away all the Devas. The man who makes gifts of gold attains to a very high end. Realms of splendorous radiance are his. Verily, O Bhargava, he is installed as a king of kings in swarga.

He who, at sunrise, makes a gift of gold according to the shastra with proper mantras, succeeds in warding off the evil consequences foreshadowed by ominous dreams. The man who, as soon as the sun has risen, makes a gift of gold is cleansed of all his sins. He who makes a gift of gold at midday destroys all his future sins. He who with restrained soul, makes a gift of gold at the second sandhya succeeds in attaining to an abode with Brahma and Vayu and Agni and Soma in their various lokas.

Such a man attains to auspicious fame in realms of great felicity that belong to Indra himself. Attaining to resounding fame in this world also,

and washed clean of all his sins, he sports in bliss. Verily, such a man attains to many other realms of joy and becomes unequalled for his glory and fame. His course perfectly unobstructed, he succeeds in going everywhere at will. He has never to fall from the transcendent realms to which he attains and the glory he acquires is vast indeed.

Truly, by making gifts of gold one attains to numberless regions of felicity all of which the giver enjoys for eternity. That man who, having lit a fire at sunrise, makes gifts of gold while observing a particular vrata, succeeds in attaining the fruition of all his wishes. It has been said that gold is identical with Agni. The gift of gold, therefore, yields untold prosperity. Suvarnadana leads to the possession of all those merits and accomplishments that are desired, and cleanses the heart.

I have told you, O sinless one, of the origin of gold. Listen now to how Kartikeya grew up. After a long time did Kartikeya grow to young maturity. He was then, O Bhargava, chosen by all the Devas with Indra at their head as the senapati of the celestial forces. He slew the Daitya Taraka as also many other Asuras, at the command of Indra and also actuated by the desire to benefit all the worlds.

I have, O you of great might, discoursed to you on the merits of making gifts of gold. Do you, therefore, O best of all the eloquent, make gifts of gold."'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by Vasishta, Jamadagni's son of great prowess then made gifts of gold to Brahmanas and was washed of his sins. I have told you everything about the merits of suvarnadana and about its origin, Yudhishtira. Do you also, therefore, make abundant gifts of gold to Brahmanas. Verily, by giving such dakshina, you will surely be purified of all your sins.'"

CANTO 86

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have, Pitamaha, discoursed to me, in detail, on the merits that attach to the gift of gold according to the laws laid down in the scriptures as indicated in the auditions of the Vedas. You have also described the origin of gold. Tell me now how Taraka met with destruction. You have said that the Asura had become impervious to the gods. Tell me in detail how his death was brought about. O perpetuator of Kuru's race, I wish to hear in detail from you of how Taraka was killed. Indeed, I am agog to listen to this tale.'

Bhishma says, 'The Devas and the Rishis, O monarch, reduced to great distress by Taraka's prowess and by Ganga casting off Agni's flaming seed, urged the six Krittikas to rear that child. Amongst the celestial Devis there were none, save these, that could bear the fierce seed of Agni in their wombs. The god of fire was exceedingly gratified with those goddesses for being prepared, even eager, to nurture the child born from his seed, the child endowed with his own tremendous energy. When the retas of Agni was divided into six portions and placed within their yonis, the six Krittikas began to nourish the portion that each held in her womb.

As the high-souled Kumara grew within their wombs, they were sorely afflicted by his terrific tejas, and had no peace anywhere. At last, the time came for them to deliver their awesome child. All of them delivered at the same time. Though held in six different wombs, yet all the portions as they came out united into one. The earth goddess held the child, taking it up from a heap of gold, and he of handsome and immaculate form blazed with splendour even like Agni himself.

Incomparably handsome, he began to grow in a delightful forest of sara reeds. The six Krittikas saw that child of theirs like the morning sun in splendour and, filled with consuming love, began to feed him at their breasts. As I have told you, because he was born of the Krittikas and raised by them, he came to be known throughout the three worlds as Kartikeya. Having sprung from the seed which had fallen from Rudra, he was named Skanda, and because of his birth in the solitude of a forest of reeds he came to be called by the name of Guha: the secretly born.

The thirty-three Devas, the cardinal points of the horizon in their embodied forms, together with the deities that rule over them, and Rudra and Dhatri and Vishnu and Yama and Pushan and Aryaman and Bhaga, and the Angas and Mitra and the Sadhyas and Vasava and the Vasus and the Aswins and the waters and the wind and the firmament and Chandramas and all the constellations and the planets and Surya, and all the Riks and Samans and Yajuses in their embodied forms, came there to behold that wonderful child who was the son of Agni, Lord of flames.

The Rishis uttered hymns of praise and the Gandharvas sang in honour of that child called Kumara of six heads, twice six eyes, and absolutely devoted to Brahmanas. His shoulders were broad, and he had a dozen arms, and the splendour of his person resembled that of Agni and Aditya. As he lay on a bed of heath, the Devas with the Rishis looked at him and were filled with wonder they had never known before; they regarded the great Asura Taraka as already slain. The gods began to bring him diverse kinds of toys and other things that could amuse him. As he played like any child, every kind of plaything, birds and small creatures among them, were given to him.

Garuda of splendid feathers gave Kartikeya a child of his—a peacock with brilliant plumes of many hues. The Rakshasas gave him a boar and a buffalo. Aruna, the sun's legless sarathy, gave him a cockerel of fiery splendour. Chandramas gave him a sheep, and Aditya bestowed upon him some of his dazzling rays. The mother of all cows, Surabhi, gave him hundreds of thousands of cows.

His sire Agni gave him a goat possessed of many extraordinary qualities. Ila gave him an abundant quantity of flowers and fruit. Sudhanwan gave him a chariot and a vimana of Kubera. Varuna gave him many most auspicious and beautiful treasures of the ocean, along with some great elephants. Indra, king of the Devas, gave Kartikeya lions and tigers

and leopards, and diverse kinds of birds of the air, and many other terrible beasts of prey and many chatras, royal parasols, also of diverse kinds.

Rakshasas and Asuras, in large bands, began to walk in the train of that mighty child. Beholding the son of Agni grow up, Taraka sought, by various means, to effect his death, but he failed to do anything to that mighty young god. In time, the Devas invested Agni's son Guha, born in the solitude of a forest of reeds, with the command of their armies. And they told him of the oppressions visited upon them by the Asura Taraka.

The senapati of the celestial forces grew up and became possessed of untold energy and might. In time, Guha slew Taraka with his irresistible spear of flames. Verily, Kumara slew the Asura as easily as if in sport. Having killed Taraka he re-established Indra to his sovereignty of the three worlds. Of unmatched prowess, the celestial senapati blazed with beauty and splendour. The great Skanda became the protector of the Devas and did what was agreeable to Sankara, his sire. The illustrious son of Agni had a golden form.

Verily, Kumara is always the leader of the hosts of heaven. Gold is the potent energy of the god of fire and was born with Kartikeya from the same seed. Hence is gold so auspicious and imbued with inexhaustible punya. Even thus, O son of the Kurus, did Vasishta speak to Rama of Bhrigu's race in days of old. Do you, therefore, O king of men, try to make gifts of gold. By making gifts of gold, Rama became cleansed of all his sins, and finally attained to a high place in heaven that is unattainable by other men.'"

CANTO 87

Vaisampayana continued, "Yudhishtira says, 'You have told me, O Mahatman, about the duties of the four varnas. Do you now, after the same manner, O king, discourse to me on all the laws regarding the sraddha for departed ancestors.'

Thus addressed by Yudhishtira, the son of Santanu sets himself to declare to him the following ritual, consistent with the law of the sraddha.

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O king, with close attention, and I will tell you about the ritual of the sraddha. That ritual is auspicious, worthy of praise, productive of fame and progeny, and is regarded as a sacrifice, O scorcher of your foes, in honour of the Pitris. Devas or Asuras or Manavas, Gandharvas or Uragas or Rakshasas, Pisachas or Kinnaras—all of them should always worship the Pitris. It is seen that man worship the Pitris first, and gratify the Devas next by offering them their adorations. One should always worship the Pitris with every care.

It is told, O king, that the sraddha performed in honour of the Pitris may be performed later. But this general rule is restrained by a special one, which deems that the sraddha in honour of the Pitris should be performed on the afternoon of the day of Amavasya, the new moon. The departed Grandsires become gratified with the sraddha that is performed on any day. I shall, however, tell you now what the merits and demerits are of the respective lunar days in view of the performance of the sraddha. I will tell you, O sinless one, what fruits are attained on what days by performing the sraddha for the Pitris. Listen to me with close attention.

By adoring the Pitris on the first day of the lighted fortnight, a man obtains in his home beautiful wives all able to give him many children, all of them noble and accomplished. By performing the sraddha on the second day of the lighted fortnight one gets many daughters. By performing it on the third day, one acquires many horses. By performing it on the fourth day, one receives a large herd of smaller animals like goats and sheep. They, O king, who perform the sraddha on the fifth day have many sons. Those who perform the sraddha on the sixth day acquire great personal radiance. By performing it on the seventh day, one acquires great fame.

By performing it on the eighth day, one makes great profits in trade. By performing it on the ninth day one acquires many animals of uncloven hoofs. By performing it on the tenth day, one acquires a wealth of kine. By performing it on the eleventh day, one becomes the possessor of a great wealth of clothes and utensils of brass and other metals. Such a man also has many sons all of whom are blessed with Brahmatejas. By performing the sraddha on the twelfth day, one always beholds, if one desires, various kinds of objects and artefacts of exceptional beauty, made of silver and gold. By performing the sraddha on the thirteenth day, one attains eminence over one's kinsmen. Without doubt, all the young men in the family of he who performs the sraddha on the fourteenth day, meet with death. Such a man becomes entangled in war.

By performing the sraddha on the day of the new moon, one obtains the fruition of every wish. In the dark fortnight, all the days commencing with the tenth, and ending with that of the new moon, leaving only the fourteenth day, are laudable days for the performance of the sraddha. Other days of that fortnight are not so. Then, again, as the dark fortnight is better than the lighted one, so the afternoon of the day is better than the forenoon in the matter of the sraddha.'"

CANTO 88

"Yudhishtira says, 'You of great power, tell me what that object is, which, if dedicated to the Pitris, becomes inexhaustible. What havi, again, lasts for all time? What, indeed, is that which if offered becomes eternal?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Yudhishtira, what those havis are which those who know the ritual of the sraddha regard as suitable and what the fruits are that attach to each. With sesame seeds and rice and barley and masha and water and roots and fruits, if given at sraddhas, the Pitris, O king, remain gratified for the period of a month. Manu has said that if a sraddha is performed with a copious measure of sesame, such a sraddha becomes inexhaustible. Of all kinds of food, sesame seeds, tila, are regarded as the best.

With fish offered at sraddhas, the Pitris remain gratified for a period of two months. With mutton they remain gratified for three months and with the flesh of the rabbit for four. With the flesh of the goat, O king, they remain gratified for five months, with the boar for six months, and with the flesh of birds for seven. With venison obtained from the deer called Prishata, they remain gratified for eight months, and with that obtained from the Ruru for nine months, and with the meat of the Gavaya for ten months.

With the meat of the buffalo, their satiation lasts for eleven months. With beef presented at the sraddha, their satisfaction, it is said, lasts for a full year. Payasa mixed with ghrita is as acceptable to the Pitris as beef. With the meat of the Badrinasa, the satisfaction of the Pitris lasts for twelve years. The flesh of the rhinoceros, offered to the Pitris on the anniversaries

of the lunar days on which they died, becomes inexhaustible. The herb called kalasaka, the petals of the kanchana flower, and meat of the goat also, thus offered, prove inexhaustible.

On this matter, Yudhishtira, there are some slokas originally sung by the Pitris, which are also sung in the world. They were shared with me once by Sanatkumara—*He that has taken birth in our vamsa should give us payasa mixed with ghrita on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight, under the Magha Nakshatra, during Dakshinayana, the sun's southern course. One born in our race should, under the asterism Magha, as if in the observance of a vow, offer the meat of a goat or the petals of the kanchana flower. He should also offer us, with the due rites, payasa mixed with ghee, dedicating it on a place covered by the shadow of an elephant. Many sons should be coveted so that at least one may go to Gaya to perform the sraddha of his ancestors, to holy Gaya where stands the great Nyagrodha, the banyan that is celebrated across all the worlds and that makes all offerings made under its branches inexhaustible.*

Even a little water, roots, fruits, meat and rice, mixed with honey, if offered on the anniversary of the day of death become inexhaustible.'"

CANTO 89

"Bhishma continues, 'Listen to me, Yudhishtira, as I tell you what those optional sraddhas are that should be performed under the different nakshatras and that were first spoken of by Yama to King Sasabindu. That man who always performs the sraddha under the Krittika nakshatra is regarded as performing a sacrifice after establishing the sacred fire. Such a one, freed from fear, ascends into heaven with his children.

He that wishes for children should perform the sraddha under the star Rohini, while he that wants tejas should do it under Mrigasiras. By performing the sraddha under Ardra, a man becomes the doer of fierce deeds. A mortal, by performing the sraddha under Punarvasu, gains much through farming.

The man that is desirous of growth and advancement should perform the Sraddha under Pushya. By doing it under the Aslesha nakshatra, one begets heroic children. By doing it under the three Maghas, one attains to pre-eminence among kinsmen. By doing it under the prior Phalgunis, the doer is endued with good fortune. By performing the sraddha under the later Phalgunis, one gains many children; while by performing it under Hasta, one attains to the fruition of one's wishes.

By performing it under the star Chitra one has children endowed with great beauty. By doing it under Swati, one makes much profit through trade. The man that wants children acquires the fruition of his wish by performing the sraddha under the Visakha nakshatra. By doing it under Anuradha, one becomes a king of kings. By making offerings in honour of the Pitris under

the Jyeshta nakshatra, with devotion and humility, one attains to sovereignty, O Kurusattama.

By performing the sraddha under Mula one finds health, and under the prior Ashadha, one acquires excellent fame. By performing it under the later Ashadha, one succeeds in roving over the whole world, freed from every sorrow. By undertaking the sraddha under Abhijit, one attains to high knowledge. By doing it under Sravana, one departing from this world attains to a very high end. The man that performs the sraddha under the Dhanishtha nakshatra becomes the ruler of a kingdom. By performing it under the nakshatra presided over by Varuna—Satabhisha—one attains to success as a physician. By performing the sraddha under the stellation of the prior Bhadrapada, one acquires large herds of goats and sheep; while by doing it under the later Bhadrapada, one acquires thousands of kine. By performing the sraddha under the asterism Revati, one acquires great wealth in utensils of white brass and copper.

By performing the sraddha under Aswini one acquires many horses, while under Bharani, one attains to longevity.

Listening to these laws about the sraddhas, King Sasabindu performed them accordingly, and succeeded in easily subjugating and ruling all the earth, this Bhumi.'"

CANTO 90

"Yudhishtira says, 'It befits you, O best of the Kurus, to tell me to what kind of Brahmanas, O Pitamaha, the offerings made at sraddhas be given away.'

Bhishma says, 'The Kshatriya who knows the laws about dana should never examine Brahmanas when making gifts to them. In all acts, however, that relate to the worship of the Devas and the Pitris, an examination has been said to be proper. The Devas are worshipped on earth by men only when they are filled with devotion that comes from the Devas themselves. Hence, with regard to dakshina offered to the Devas one should make gifts to all Brahmanas without any examination of their merits.

In sraddhas, however, the man of intelligence should examine the Brahmanas to be engaged to assist the undertakers of the sraddha both in the performance of the ritual and giving dakshina to them of the offerings made to the Pitris. Such investigation should concern itself with their birth and conduct, their age and appearance, their learning and the nobility or lack of parentage. Amongst the Brahmanas, there are some that pollute the vamsa and gotra and some that sanctify it. Listen to me, O king, as I tell you who the Brahmanas are that should be excluded.

The Brahmana that is full of guile, or is guilty of foeticide, or he that is ill with consumption, or he that keeps animals, or is destitute of Vedic study, or is a common servant of a village, or lives upon the interest of loans, or he that is a singer, or he that sells all things, or he that is guilty of arson, or he that is a poisoner, or he that is a pimp by profession, or he that sells Soma, or he that is a professor of palmistry, or he that is in the employ

of the king, or he that is a seller of oil, or he that is a cheat and bearer of false witness, or he that has a quarrel with his father, or he that tolerates a lover of his wife in his house, or he that has been cursed, or he that is a thief, or he that lives by some mechanical art, or he that puts on disguises, or he that is deceitful in his conduct, or he that is hostile to those he calls his friends, or he that is an adulterer, or he that is a preceptor of Sudras, or he that has betaken himself to the profession of arms, or he that wanders with dogs to hunt, or he that has been bitten by a dog, or he that has married before his elder brothers, or he that has undergone circumcision, he that violates the bed of his guru, he that is an actor or mime, he that lives by setting up an idol and he that lives by calculating the conjunctions of stars and planets and asterisms, are all regarded as fit to be excluded.

Those conversant with the Vedas say that the offerings made at sraddhas, if eaten by such Brahmanas, go to fill the stomachs of Rakshasas instead of filling those of the Pitris, O Yudhishtira. The man who, having eaten at a sraddha, does not abstain that day from study of the Vedas or who has sexual congress that day with a Sudra woman, must know that his Pitris, because of these acts of his, have to lie for a month in his excrement. If given to a Brahmana who sells Soma, spirituous liquor, the offerings made at sraddhas are converted into human faeces; if given to a Brahmana engaged in the practice of medicine, they become converted into pus and blood; if given to one who lives by setting up an idol, they fail to produce any fruit; if to one who lives upon the interest of loans, they lead to ignominy; if given to one engaged in trade, they yield no fruits either here or hereafter. If gifted to a Brahmana born of a widowed mother, by a second husband, they become as fruitless as libations poured on ashes.

They who give dakshina of the havya and kavya offered at sraddhas to such Brahmanas as are divested of the duties ordained for them and of the good conduct that persons of their varna should observe, find that such dakshina yields no punya. The man of little intelligence who makes gifts to such Brahmanas, knowing their dispositions, obliges, by their conduct, his Pitris to eat human excrement in the next world. You should know that these wretches among Brahmanas deserve to be excluded from their lineage.

Those Brahmanas, also, of little vitality, who are engaged in teaching Sudras are the same. A Brahmana who is blind stains sixty individuals of his line; one that is impotent, a hundred; while one that is afflicted with

white leprosy stains as many as he looks upon, O king. Whatever offerings made at sraddhas are eaten by one with his head wrapped round with a cloth, whatever is eaten by one with his face turned southwards, and whatever is eaten while wearing shoes or sandals, all go to gratify the Asuras.

Whatever, again, is given with malice, and whatever is given without reverence, have been ordained by Brahma himself as the portion of Bali, the prince of Asuras.

Dogs, and such Brahmanas as are polluters of their gotras, should not be allowed to look upon the offerings made at sraddhas. For this reason, Sraddhas should be performed in a place that is properly cordoned around or concealed from view. The place for a sraddha should also be strewn with sesame seeds. That sraddha which is performed without sesame seeds, or that which is done by a person in anger, has its havi stolen by Rakshasas and Pisachas. Equal to the number of Brahmanas seen by one that deserves to be excluded from the gotra, is the loss of punya he causes to the foolish performer of the sraddha who invites him to the feast.

I will now tell you who sanctifiers of the vamsa are. Do you find them out through examination. All Brahmanas that are purified by knowledge, Vedic study, and vows and observances, and they that are of good and righteous behaviour, should be known as sanctifiers of everything. I will tell you who deserve to sit in the sacred line.

He that is conversant with the three Nachiketas, he that has set up the five sacrificial fires, he that knows the five Suparnas, he that is conversant with the six angas of the Veda, he that is a descendant of sires who were engaged in teaching the Vedas and is himself so engaged, he that is well-conversant with the Chchandas, he that is acquainted with the Jyeshta Saman, he that is obedient to the sway of his parents, he that knows the Vedas and whose ancestors have been so for ten generations, he that has congress with only his lawfully wedded wives and this in their seasons, and he who has been cleansed by knowledge, by the Vedas, and by vows and observances—such a Brahmana sanctifies the lineage.

He who reads the Atharva-siras, who is devoted to the observance of brahmacharya, and who is steady in the observance of righteous vratas, who is truthful and of good and pure conduct, and who is duly observant of his svadharma; they, also, that have undergone fatigue and labour to bathe in the waters of tirthas, and have taken the avabhrita snana, the final bath, after

performing sacrifices with proper mantras, who are free from the sway of wrath, who are not restless, who are blessed with forgiving dispositions, who are self-restrained masters of their senses, and they who are devoted to the good of all creatures—these should be invited to sraddhas. Anything given to such men becomes inexhaustible. These indeed are sanctifiers of lineages.

There are others also, highly blessed, that should be regarded as sanctifiers of the vamsa. They are Yatis and those that are knowers of the religion of moksha, and they that are devoted to yoga, and they that properly observe excellent vratas and they that, with collected mind, recite sacred Itihasas to the best of Brahmanas. They that are conversant with Bhashyas, they also that are devoted to grammatical studies, they that study the Puranas and they that study the Dharmashastras and, having studied them, live by them; he that has lived for the required period in the home of his guru, he that is truthful in speech, he that is a giver of thousands, they that are the very best in their knowledge of all the Vedas and the scriptural and philosophical aphorisms—these sanctify the parampara as far they look at it. And because they sanctify all who sit in the parampara, they are called sanctifiers.

Brahmavadis, utterers of Brahman, say that even a single person who is the descendant of sires who were teachers of the Vedas and who is himself a Vedic teacher, sanctifies full seven yojanas around him. If he that is not a ritwik and that is not a Vedic acharya takes the pre-eminent seat at a sraddha, with even the permission of the other ritwiks there, he is said to take the sins of all who may be sitting there. If, on the other hand, he happens to be a knower of the Vedas and free from all the faults that are regarded polluting the line, he shall not, be regarded as fallen by taking the foremost seat in a sraddha. Such a man would then truly be a sanctifier of the lineage.

For these reasons, you should properly examine Brahmanas before inviting them to sraddhas. You should invite only such among them as are devoted to their svadharma, and as are born into good families, and as are possessed of great learning. He who performs sraddhas for feeding only his friends and whose havi does not gratify the Devas and the Pitris, fails to ascend into swarga. He who gathers only his friends and relatives on the occasion of the sraddha he performs, without properly honouring deserving persons by inviting and feeding them, fails, when he dies, to leave the world

by the path of the Devas, which is a lighted one and free from all afflictions and impediments.

The man who makes the sraddha he performs just an occasion for gathering his friends, never succeeds in attaining to swarga. Verily, the man who converts the sraddha into an occasion for feteing and feeding his friends, is separated from heaven even as a bird from its perch when the string tying it breaks. Therefore, he that performs a sraddha should not use it as an occasion to honour his friends. He may gather them together and make gifts of wealth to them on other occasions. The havi and the kavi offered at sraddhas should be served to them that are neither friends nor enemies but are only indifferent or neutral to him. As seed sown in sterile soil does not sprout, or as one that has not sown does not receive a share of the harvest, even so, the sraddha in which the offerings are eaten by an unworthy person yields no fruit either here or hereafter.

That Brahmana who is destitute of Vedic study is like a fire made by burning grass or straw, and is soon extinguished just like such a fire. The offerings made at sraddhas should not be given to him even as libations should not be poured on the ashes of the sacrificial fire. When the offerings made at sraddhas are exchanged by the performers with one another, instead of being given away to the truly worthy, they come to be regarded as Pisacha dakshina. Such offerings gratify neither the gods nor the manes. Instead of reaching the other world, they wander even here like a cow that has lost her calf wandering listlessly within the fold. As those libations of ghee that are poured upon the extinguished ashes of a sacrificial fire never reach either the Devas or the Pitris, a gift that is made to a dancer or a singer or a dakshina given to a lying or deceitful person, produces no punya.

The dakshina that is given to a liar or a deceitful man destroys both the giver and the receiver without benefiting them in any least respect. Such a dakshina is only pernicious and entirely censurable. The Pitris of the person making it have to fall from the path of the Devas. The gods know them to be Brahmanas who always walk, O Yudhishtira, within the bounds ordained by the Rishis who are knowers of all dharma, and who have firm faith in their efficacy. Those Brahmanas that are devoted to Vedic study, to gyana, to tapasya, and to karma, O Bhaarata, should be known as Rishis. The offerings made at sraddhas should be given to those that are devoted to

knowledge. Verily, they are regarded as true men who never speak ill of Brahmanas.

Men who speak ill of Brahmanas in public should never be fed at sraddhas. If Brahmanas, be disparaged with calumny, they will destroy three generations of the one who sullies their pure name. This is the declaration of the Vaikhanasa Rishis. Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas should be examined from a distance. Whether one likes them or feels a dislike for them, one must give to such Brahmanas the offerings made at Sraddhas. That man who feeds thousands upon thousands of false Brahmanas acquires merit that is attainable by feeding even one Brahmana if that Brahmana is possessed of a knowledge of the Vedas, O Bhaarata!”

CANTO 91

"Yudhishtira says, 'By whom was the sraddha first conceived and at what time? What is its essence? During the time when the world was peopled by only the descendants of Bhrigu and Angiras, who was the Muni that established the sraddha? What karmas should not be done at a sraddha? What are those sraddhas in which fruits and roots are to be offered? What kinds of paddy should be avoided in sraddhas? Do you tell me all this, Pitamaha!'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to me, O ruler of men, and I will tell you how the sraddha was introduced, the time of its introduction, the essences of the rite, and the Muni who conceived it.

From the Self-born Brahma sprang Atri, O you of Kuru's race. In Atri's race was born a Muni of the name of Dattatreya. Dattatreya begot a son called Nimi possessed of tapodhana, the wealth of asceticism. Nimi begot a son named Srimat who was blessed with great beauty of person. Upon the expiration of a full thousand years, Srimat, having undergone the severest tapasya, succumbed to time and departed this world.

His sire Nimi, having performed the purificatory rites according to the ritual laid down in the shastras, became filled with great grief, thinking continually of the loss of his son. Thinking of that cause of his sorrow, the Mahatman Nimi collected various agreeable items of food and drink, on the fourteenth day of the moon. The next morning, aching as his heart did with sorrow, he rose from bed and managed to withdraw his mind from the single pain which held it fast. He succeeded in busying his mind with other matters.

With his mind rapt in dhyana, he then conceived the idea of conducting a sraddha. All the fruits and roots which he himself ate, and all the different staple grains that were agreeable to him, that sage carefully thought of—Nimi who owned the wealth of tapasya.

On Amavasya, the day of the new moon, he invited seven Brahmanas worthy of worship to his asrama. Nimi, of great wisdom, made them sit upon asanas of kusa grass, and revered them by walking around their persons in pradakshina. Approaching the seven Brahmanas whom he had brought to his hermitage, the great Nimi fed them syamaka rice, unmixed with salt. At the feet of those Brahmanas who were eating the food served to them, kusa grass was spread out on the asanas upon which they sat, with the sharp ends of the blades of grass pointing towards the south.

With a pure body and mind and with concentrated attention, Nimi, having placed those blades of sacred grass in the way indicated, offered rice cakes as pinda to his dead son, uttering his name and family. Having done this, that foremost of Munis was suddenly filled with dismay at the thought of having performed a kriya that had not to his knowledge been laid down in any of the scriptures. Indeed, he began to regret what he had quite spontaneously done.

"Never done before by the Munis, alas, what have I done? How shall I avoid being cursed by the Brahmanas for this abomination as a heretic and a performer of unholy rites?"

He then thought of the original progenitor of his race. As soon as he was thought of, Atri tapodhana came there. Seeing Nimi deranged with grief at the death of his son, the immortal Atri comforted him. He said to him, "O Nimi, this rite that you have conceived is a sacrifice in honour of the Pitris. Let no fear be yours on its account, for the Pitamaha Brahma himself, in days of old, ordained it. Yes, this ritual that you have conceived was laid down by the Self-born himself. Who other than the Svayambhuva could ordain this ritual in sraddhas?

I will tell you, O son, the excellent law created by none other than Brahma in respect of sraddhas; O son, do you follow it. Listen to me. Having first performed the karana on the sacred fire with the chanting of mantras, one should next always pour libations to Agni, and Soma, and Varuna. To the Viswedevas also, who are always the companions of the Pitris, the Self-born then ordained a portion of the offerings. The earth also, as the goddess that sustains the offerings made at sraddhas, should then be

praised under the names of Vaishnavi, Kasyapi and Akshaya, the inexhaustible. When water is being fetched for the sraddha, Varuna of great puissance should be given praise. After this, both Agni and Soma should be invoked with reverence and gratified with libations, O sinless one.

The deities that are known by the name of Pitris were created by the Svayambhu. Others, highly blessed, the Ushnapas, were also created by him. For all these, shares have been ordained of the offerings made at sraddhas. By adoring all these deities at sraddhas, the ancestors of the persons performing them are freed from all sins.

The Pitris created by the Self-born Brahma number seven. The Viswedevas having Agni for their mouth, for it is through Agni that they feed, I have mentioned before. I will now name those high-souled deities who deserve shares of the offerings made at sraddhas. They are Bala, Dhriti, Vipapa, Punyakrit, Pavana, Parshni, Kshemak, Divysanu, Vivaswat, Viryavat, Hrimat, Kirtimat, Krita, Jitatman, Munivirya, Diptaroman, Bhayankara, Anukarman, Pratia, Pradatri, Ansumat, Sailabha, Parama krodhi, Dhiroshni, Bhupati, Sraja, Vajrin and Vari—these are the eternal Viswedevas.

There are others also, whose names are Vidyutvarchas, Somavarchas, and Suryasri. Others numbered amongst them are Somapa, Suryasavitra, Dattatman, Pundariyaka, Ushninabha, Nabhoda, Viswayu, Dipti, Chamuhara, Suresa, Vyomari, Sankara Bhava, Isa, Kartri, Kriti, Daksha, Bhuvana, Divya, Karmakrit, Ganita Panchavirya, Aditya, Rasmimat, Saptakrit, Somavachas, Viswakrit, Kavi, Anugoptri, Sugoptri, Naptri and Iswara—these most blessed ones are numbered among the Viswedevas. They are eternal and conversant with all that occurs in Time.

The kinds of paddy which should not be offered at sraddhas are those called kodrava and pulka. Asafoetida also, among ingredients used in cooking, should not be offered, as also onions and garlic, the meat of animals slain with venomed shafts, and black salt. Other offerings that should not be made at sraddhas are the flesh of the domesticated pig, the meat of all animals not slaughtered at sacrifices, salt of the variety called vid, the herb called sitapaki, all sprouts like those of the bamboo. Indeed, all kinds of salt should be excluded from the offerings made at sraddhas, and also the fruits of the jambu.

Anything upon which anyone has spat or upon which tears have fallen should not be offered at sraddhas. Among offerings made to the Pitris or

with the havya and kavya offered to the Devas, the herb sudarsana should not be included. Havi mixed with this is not acceptable to the Pitris. From the place where the sraddha is being performed, the Chandala and the Swapacha should be excluded, as also all who wear clothes dyed yellow, and those affected with leprosy, or one who has been declared outcast for his or her transgressions, or one who is guilty of Brahmahatya, or a Brahmana of mixed descent or one who is the relative of an outcast. All these should be excluded by men of wisdom from the place where a sraddha is being performed."

Having said these words in days of old to Rishi Nimi of his own race, the illustrious Atri tapodhana went back to the Grandsire Brahma's sabha in swarga.'"

CANTO 92

"Bhishma says, 'After Nimi had innocently conceived and performed the first sraddha, all the great Rishis began to perform the sacrifice in honour of the Pitris according to the law. Firmly devoted to the discharge of all dharma, the Rishis, having performed sraddhas, began to also offer oblations to the Pitris of sacred waters, with careful attention. However, in consequence of consuming all the offerings made by persons of all the varnas, the Pitris and the Devas with them suffered from dreadful indigestion. Afflicted by the heaps of food that all men began to offer them, they repaired to the presence of Soma. Approaching Soma, they said, "Alas, great is our affliction from all the food offered to us at sraddhas. You say what is needed for our ease."

To them Soma answered, saying, "If, Devas and Pitris, you want relief from your distress, you must take yourselves to the Lord Brahma. He will accomplish what you need."

At these words of Soma, O Bhaarata, the Devas and the Pitris went to Brahma who was seated on the summit of the mountains of Meru.

The Devas said, "O illustrious one, we suffer from all the food that is offered to us at yagnas and sraddhas. Lord, show us grace and help us."

Hearing what they said, the Svayambhu said to them in reply, "Here, Agni is sitting beside me. He will help you and do what will make you well."

Agni said, "You Pitris, when a sraddha comes, we will eat the offerings made to us together. If you eat those offerings with me, you shall digest them easily."

Hearing this from the fire god, the Pitris became easy of heart. It is for this reason, also, that in making offerings at sraddhas a share is first offered to the deity of fire, O king. If a portion of the offerings at a sraddha be first made to Agni, O prince of men, Rakshasas, even of regenerate origin, cannot do any injury to such a sraddha. Beholding the deity of fire at a sraddha, Rakshasas fly away from it.

The ritual of the sraddha is that the pinda, the rice-cake, should first be offered to the deceased sire. Next, a cake should be offered to the Grandsire. After this, should one be offered to the Great-grandsire. Even this is the niyama in respect of the sraddha. Over every cake that is offered, the offerer should, with concentrated attention, utter the Savitri mantras. This other mantra also should be uttered—the one to Soma who is fond of the Pitris.

A woman who has become impure from the advent of her period, or one whose ears have been cut off, should not be allowed where a sraddha is being performed. Nor should a woman be brought from a gotra other than that of the person who is performing the sraddha, to cook the rice to be offered at the sraddha.

While crossing a river, one should offer oblations of water, tarpana, to one's Pitris, naming them all. Indeed, when one comes upon a river one should gratify one's Pitris with oblations of water. Having offered tarpana of water first to the ancestors of one's own vamsa, one should next offer such oblations to one's departed friends and relatives. When one crosses a river or stream on a chariot yoked to oxen of variegated hue, or in boats, the Pitris expect oblations of water. Those that know this always offer oblations of water with concentrated dhyana to the Pitris. Every fortnight on the day of the new moon, one should make offerings to one's deceased ancestors.

Growth, longevity, energy and prosperity are attained through devotion to the Pitris. The Grandsire Brahma, Pulastya, Vasishta, Pulaha, Angiras, Kratu and the great Rishi Kasyapa—these, O prince of Kuru's race, are regarded as great masters of yoga. They are numbered among the Pitris. Even such is the high ritual of the sraddha.

Through sraddhas performed on earth, the departed of one race are saved from sorrow in the next world. Kurusattama, I have thus explained to you the niyamas in respect of sraddhas.

I will now tell you once again about dakshina, gifts or charity."

CANTO 93

"Yudhishtira says, 'If Brahmanas that are keeping a fast eat, at the invitation of a Brahmana, the havi offered at a sraddha, can they be charged with the transgression or a violation of their vow, or should they refuse the invitation of a Brahmana to eat? Tell me this, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'Let those Brahmanas eat, impelled by desire, who are keeping such vows as are not indicated in the Vedas. As regards those Brahmanas, however, that keep vratas indicated in the Vedas, they are regarded as guilty of a breach of their vow, O Yudhishtira, by eating the havi of a sraddha at the request of him who performs the sraddha.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Some say that fasting is a penance. Is tapasya truly identifiable with fasting, or is it not so? Tell me this, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'A regular fast for a month or a half month is not regarded as a tapasya. The truth, however, is that one who mortifies one's own body is not to be regarded either as an ascetic or as one that knows dharma. Renunciation, however, is regarded as the best of penances. A Brahmana should always be an abstainer from food, and observe the vow of brahmacharya. A Brahmana should always practise self-denial, restraining even speech, and recite the Vedas.

The Brahmana should marry and surround himself with children and relatives, from his desire of achieving dharma. He should never sleep. He should abstain from meat. He should always read the Vedas and the shastras. He should always speak the truth, and practise self-denial. He should eat vighasa, what remains after serving the deities and guests. Indeed, he should be hospitable towards all that come to his home. He

should always eat amrita, the food that remains in the house after all the family, including guests and servants, have eaten. He should duly observe all ordained rites and perform sacrifices.'

Yudhishtira says, 'How may one come to be regarded as being always observant of fasts? How may one become observant of vratas? How, O king, may one come to be an eater of vighasa? By doing what may one be said to be hospitable to one's guest?'

Bhishma says, 'He who eats only morning and evening at the prescribed hours and abstains from all food during the time between, is an abstainer from food. He who has congress with only his wedded wife and that only in her season, is said to be observant of the vow of brahmacharya. By always making gifts, one comes to be regarded as being truthful in speech. By abstaining from all meat from animals slaughtered for just the sake of meat, one becomes an abstainer from meat.

By making gifts one is cleansed of all sins, and by abstaining from sleep during the day one is regarded to be always awake. He who always eats what remains after serving the needs of guests and servants is said to always eat amrita. He who abstains from eating until Brahmanas have first partaken of his food, is regarded as conquering heaven by such abstention. He who eats what remains after serving the Devas, the Pitris, and his relatives and dependants, is said to eat vighasa.

Such men acquire many regions of felicity in the world of Brahma himself. There, O king, they dwell in the company of Apsaras and Gandharvas. Indeed, they sport and enjoy all manner of unworldly delight in those realms, with the Devas, Sadasyas and the Pitris in their company, and surrounded by their own children and grandchildren. Even such is the lofty end to which they attain.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Men are seen to make diverse kinds of gifts unto the Brahmanas. What, however, is the difference, Pitamaha, between the giver and the receiver?'

Bhishma says, 'The Brahmana accepts gifts from him that is righteous, and also from him that is unrighteous. If the giver happens to be righteous, the receiver incurs little fault. If on the other hand, the giver happens to be an adharmi, the receiver sinks into hell. In this regard an old story of the conversation between Vrishadarbhi and the Saptarishis is told, O Bhaarata.

Kasyapa and Atri and Vasishta and Bharadwaja and Gautama and Viswamitra and Jamadagni, and Vasishta's wife, the chaste Arundhati, all

had a common serving maid whose name was Ganda. A Sudra called Pasusakha married Ganda and became her husband. Kasyapa and others, in days of old, observed the austerest penances and roved over the world, desirous of attaining to the eternal region of Brahma through yoga-dhyana.

About that time, O delighter of the Kurus, there came a severe drought. Tormented by hunger, the whole world of living creatures grew weak and emaciated. At a sacrifice which had been performed in former times by Sibi's son, he had given away to the ritwiks a son of his as the sacrificial dakshina. From being not blessed with longevity, the prince died of starvation during the famine.

The Rishis I have named, ravaged by hunger, approached the dead prince and sat surrounding him. Indeed, those greatest of Munis saw the son of Sibi, at whose sacrifice they had officiated, dead from starvation, and began to cook the body in a large vessel, for they were compelled by pangs of hunger. All food having disappeared from the world of men, those ascetics, who wished to save their lives, took recourse, for their very lives, to such a wretched deed.

While they were thus engaged, Vrishadarbha's son, King Saibya, abroad on his travels, came upon those Rishis. Indeed, he met them on his way, even while they were cooking the dead body.

The son of Vrishadarbha said, "Accepting a dakshina from me will immediately relieve you all. Do you all, therefore, accept a gift for the support of your bodies. O Munis endowed with the wealth of tapasya, listen to me as I declare to you what wealth I have. That Brahmana who solicits me for dana is ever dear to me. Verily, I shall give you a thousand mules. To each of you I shall give a thousand cows of white coats, each one with a well-born calf, and yielding milk. I shall also give you a thousand white bulls of the best breed, all capable of bearing heavy burdens. I shall also give you a further large number of kine, of good disposition, the foremost of their kind, all fat, and each of which, having brought forth her first calf, is quick with her second.

Tell me what else I should give you—the finest villages, grain, barley, and even rarer and priceless jewels.

But, I beg you, do not seek to eat this food that you are engaged in cooking. Tell me instead what I should give to you for the support of your bodies."

The Rishis said, "O king, accepting gifts from a monarch is very sweet at first but poison in the end. Knowing this well, why do you tempt us with these offers? The body of the Brahmana is the kshetra of the gods. With penance, it is purified. Then again, by gratifying the Brahmana, one gratifies the Devas. If a Brahmana accepts the gifts made to him by the king, he loses the merit that he would otherwise acquire through his penances on that day. Indeed, accepting such dana consumes that punya even as a blazing conflagration does a forest. Let happiness be yours, O king, as the result of the dakshina you give to those that solicit you."

Saying this, they left the place, going another way. The flesh those high-souled ones had intended to cook remained uncooked. Indeed, abandoning that flesh, they went away and entered the forest in search of food. After this, the ministers of the king, urged by their master, entered that forest, and plucking some figs, attempted to give them to those Rishis. The king's officers filled some of those figs with gold and mixing them with others sought to induce those ascetics to accept them. Atri picked up some of those figs, and finding them heavy, refused to take them.

He said, "We are not destitute of knowledge. We are not fools. We know that there is gold within these figs. We have our wits about us. Indeed, we are awake and not asleep. If accepted in this world, these will produce bitter fruit in the next. He who seeks happiness both here and hereafter should never accept these."

Vasishta said, "If we accept even one gold coin, it will be counted as a hundred or even a thousand in assigning the sin that attaches to us. If we accept many coins, we shall surely attain to a most unhappy end."

Kasyapa said, "All the paddy and barley on earth, all the gold and animals and women in the world cannot satisfy the desire of a single man. Hence, one possessed of wisdom should dispel greed, and embrace contentment."

Bharadwaja said, "The horns of a ruru, after their first appearance, begin to grow as the animal grows. The greed of man is even like this. It has no measure."

Gautama said, "All the objects of pleasure that exist in the world cannot together satisfy even one person. Man is even like the ocean, for he can never be filled, even as the ocean can never be filled by all the waters that are poured into it by the rivers."

Viswamitra said, “When one desire cherished by a man is satisfied, there immediately springs up another which pierces him like an arrow and whose satisfaction he seeks.”

Jamadagni said, “Abstention from taking dana supports tapasya as its very foundation. Acceptance, however, destroys the inestimable wealth of penance.”

Arundhati said, “Some men opine that things of the world may be stored with a view to spending them upon the acquisition of dharma through dana and yagnas. I however, think, that the acquisition of dharma is better than that of worldly wealth.”

Ganda said, “When these my lords, who are imbued with great energy, are so very afraid of this which seems to be a great terror, a weak man such as I fear it the more.”

Pasusakha said, “There is nothing superior to the wealth there is in dharma. That wealth is known to the Brahmanas. I wait upon them as their servant, only to learn to value that wealth.”

The Rishis, all together, said, “Let happiness be his, as the result of the dana he gives, who is the king of the people of this land. Let his dana be successful who has sent these fruits to us, hiding gold within them.”

Having said these words, those Rishis of steadfast vows, renouncing the figs with gold in them, left that place and went wherever they wanted.

The ministers said, “O king, knowing that gold was hidden within the figs, the Rishis have gone away.”

Thus addressed by his ministers, King Vrishadarbhi was filled with wrath against all those Rishis. Indeed, to have revenge upon them, the king entered his own chamber. Observing the austerest of penances, he poured libations of ghrita on his sacred fire, accompanying each pouring with mantras that he uttered. From that fire there then arose a dreadful female form that could strike terror into anyone. Vrishadarbhi named her Yatudhani. She looked as terrible as the Last Night, who had appeared with joined hands before the king.

Addressing Vrishadarbhi, she said, “What shall I accomplish for you?”

Vrishadarbhi said, “Go and follow the seven Rishis, as also Arundhati, and the husband of their maid-servant, and the maid-servant herself, and understand what the meanings are of their names. Having understood their names, do you slay all of them. After killing them, you may go whatever you please.”

Saying, “So be it!” the Rakshasi who had been named Yatudhani flew to the forest in which the great Rishis wandered in constant search of food. Indeed, O king, those great sages, with Atri among them, roved within the forest, subsisting upon fruits and roots. In the course of their wanderings, they saw a mendicant of broad shoulders, and plump arms and legs, and a well-nourished face and belly. Of limbs that were all adipose, he was walking along with a dog for company. Seeing that mendicant whose limbs were all well-developed and handsome, Arundhati exclaimed, “None of you will ever be able to show such well-developed limbs or features!”

Vasishta said, “The sacred fire of this person is not like ours for while he can pour libations on it, morning and evening, none of us is able to do the same. This is why we see both him and his dog so healthy.”

Atri said, “This man does not feel the pangs of hunger as we do. Unlike ours, his energy has sustained no diminution. Acquired with the greatest difficulty, his Vedas have not, like ours, disappeared. Hence, it is that we see both him and his dog so plump and healthy.”

Viswamitra said, “Unlike us, this man is able to observe the eternal duties inculcated in the scriptures. I have become idle. I feel the pangs of hunger. I have lost the knowledge I had acquired. This man is not like us in this respect. Hence I see both him and his dog so fit and healthy.”

Jamadagni said, “This man has not to think of storing his annual grain and fuel as we are compelled to. Hence do I see both him and his dog so well-developed.”

Kasyapa said, “This man has not, like us, four brothers of full blood who are begging from house to house, constantly crying, *Give, Give!* Hence it is that I see him and his dog in such fine fettle.”

Bharadwaja said, ‘This man has no regret like ours for having condemned and cursed his spouse. He has done nothing so base and senseless. Hence I see both him and his dog so strong and healthy!”

Gautama said, “Unlike us, this man does not own only three pieces of covering made of kusa grass, and a single ranku-skin, each of which again is three years old. Hence it is that I see both him and his dog in such rude health.”

Meanwhile, seeing those great Rishis, the wandering mendicant approached them, and accosted them all by touching their hands according to the custom. They spoke together about the difficulty of finding sustenance in that forest and the consequent necessity of bearing the pangs

of hunger, and all of them left that place. They continued to wander through that wilderness, all bent upon the common purpose of plucking fruits and digging up roots for sustenance.

One day, as they went along they saw a beautiful lake overgrown with lotuses. Its banks were covered with trees that stood thickly near one another. The waters of the lake were pure and transparent. Indeed, the lotuses that adorned the lake were all of the hue of the morning sun. The leaves that floated on the water were of the colour of lapis lazuli. Diverse kinds of water birds swam and frolicked upon its bosom. There was but one path leading to the lake. The banks were not miry and access to the water was easy.

Urged by Vrishadarbhi, the Rakshasi of frightful mien, who had sprung from his incantations and named Yatudhani, guarded the lake. Those foremost of Rishis, with Pasusakha in their company, went towards the lake, thinking to collect some lotus-stalks. Seeing Yatudhani of frightful aspect standing on the banks of the lake, those great Rishis addressed her, saying, ‘Who are you that stand alone in this solitary jungle? For whom do you wait here? What is your purpose? What do you do here on the banks of this lake adorned with lotuses?”

Yatudhani said, “It matters not who I am. I deserve not to be questioned about my purposes. You that are possessed of ascetic wealth, know that I am the guardian set to watch over this lake.”

The Rishis said, “All of us are hungry. We have nothing else to eat. With your leave we would gather some lotus-stalks.”

Yatudhani said, “If you strike a compact with me, you may gather lotus-stalks as you please. You must, one by one, give me your names. And then you may have the stalks.”

Ascertaining that her name was Yatudhani and that she was there to kill them after learning the extent of their strength from the meaning of their names, Atri, who was famished, addressed her, “I am called Atri because I cleanse the world of sin. For, again, thrice studying the Vedas every day, I have made days of my nights. That, again, is no night in which I have not studied the Vedas. For these reasons also I am called Atri, O lovely woman.”

Yatudhani said, “O you of great effulgence, I cannot understand the meaning of your name, nor the explanation you have given me of it. Do you go and plunge into this lake filled with lotuses.”

Vasishta said, “I am endowed with the wealth of the yoga of power. I lead, again, a grihasta’s life, and am regarded as the foremost of all men that lead this way of life. Because of owning such wealth, of my living as a householder, and of my being regarded as the foremost of all grihastas, I am called Vasishta.”

Yatudhani said, ‘The etymology of your name is perfectly incomprehensible to me, insofar as the inflections which the original roots have undergone are unintelligible. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Kasyapa said, “I always protect my body, and because of my tapasya I have become blessed with illustriousness. For thus protecting my body and for this effulgence that is due to my penances, I have come to be called by the name of Kasyapa.”

Yatudhani said, “O you of great effulgence, I cannot fathom the etymology you have given of your name. Go and plunge into this lake filled with lotuses.”

Bharadwaja said, “I always support my sons, my disciples, the Devas, the Brahmanas, and my wife. In consequence of supporting all these with ease, I am called Bharadwaja.”

Yatudhani said, “The etymology you have given me of your name is entirely incomprehensible, because of the many changes of inflection the root has undergone. Go and plunge into this lake filled with lotuses.”

Gotama said, “I have conquered heaven and earth through samyama, self-restraint. Because of my looking upon all creatures and objects with an equal eye, I am like a smokeless fire. Hence, you cannot subdue me. When, again, I was born, the refulgence of my body dispelled the surrounding darkness. For these reasons I am called Gotama.”

Yatudhani said, “The explanation you have given me of your name, O Maharishi, I cannot fathom. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Viswamitra said, “The gods of the universe are my friends. I am also the friend of the universe. Hence, O Yatudhani, know that I am called Viswamitra.”

Yatudhani said, “I can make no sense of the explanation you have given me of your name for the changes the root has undergone. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Jamadagni said, “I have sprung from the sacrificial fire of the Devas. Hence am I called Jamadagni, O you of beautiful features.”

Yatudhani said, “The etymology of your name is beyond me for the transformations its root has known. Do you go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Arundhati said, “I always stay by the side of my husband, and hold the earth together with him. I always incline my husband’s heart towards me. I am, for these reasons, called Arundhati.”

Yatudhani said, “I cannot make anything of your name for the modifications its root has undergone. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Ganda said, “The Ganda means a portion of the cheek. As I have that portion a little raised above the others, I am, O you that have sprung from the sacrificial fire of Saibya, called by the name Ganda.”

Yatudhani said, ‘The explanation which you have given me of your name is incomprehensible to me because of the inflections which the root has undergone. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Pasusakha said, “I protect and tend to all animals that I see, and I am always a friend to all of them. Hence am I called Pasusakha, O you that have sprung from the sacrificial fire.”

Yatudhani said, “I cannot understand the meaning of your name. Go and plunge into this lake of lotuses.”

Sunahsakha said, “I cannot explain the etymology of my name after the manner of these Munis. But know, O Yatudhani, that I am called by the name of Sunahsakha.”

Yatudhani said, “You have spoken your name only once. I have not heard any explanation of its roots. Indeed, I have not heard your name properly. Do you tell it to me again, O Dvija.”

Sunahsakha said, “Since you have not heard my name because I spoke it only once, I will strike you with my tridanda, my triple staff, and be you ashes from my blow!”

Struck on the head by the sannyasin with his tridanda, a blow that was indeed like the chastisement inflicted by a Brahmana, the Rakshasi who had sprung from the incantations of King Vrishadarbhi fell onto the earth and became ashes. Having thus destroyed the mighty Rakshasi, Sunahsakha thrust his stick into the ground and sat himself down on a grassy patch of land.

Having plucked as many lotuses as they liked, and gathered as many lotus-stalks as they wanted, the other Rishis emerged from the lake,

brimming with joy. They put down the flowers and the stalks, gathered with some labour, on the banks of the water and entered the lake again, now to offer tarpana, oblations of water, to the Pitris. Coming out again, they came to the place where they had left the lotus-stalks, and those greatest of sages found that the stalks were nowhere to be seen.'

The Rishis said, "What stone-hearted sinner has stolen the lotus-stalks we gathered to appease our hunger?"

Those Dvijottamas suspected one another, O Parantapa, and said, "We shall each have to swear our innocence!"

Famished as they were and worn with toil, all those Rishis agreed and swore their innocence, one by one. Atri said, "Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalk touch sacred cows with his foot, make water facing the sun, and study the Vedas on forbidden days!"

Vasishta said, "Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks never study the Vedas, let him be a dog catcher, be a wandering mendicant unrestrained by the laws laid down for that life, be a murderer of those that seek his protection, live upon the proceeds of the sale of his daughter, solicit wealth from those that are low and vile!"

Kasyapa said, "Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks utter all kinds of loose and wretched words in all places, give false evidence in courts of law, eat the flesh of animals not killed in sacrifices, make gifts to undeserving persons or to deserving ones at unseasonable times, and have sexual congress with women during the day!"

Bharadwaja said, "Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks be cruel and sinful in his conduct towards women and kinsmen and kine. Let him humiliate Brahmanas in disputations by brashly displaying his superior knowledge and skill. Let him study the Riks and the Yajuses on his own, disregarding his preceptor. Let him pour libations upon fires made with dry grass or straw!"

Jamadagni said, "Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks be guilty of casting filth into pure sacred water. Let him be inspired with animosity towards kine. Let him be guilty of having sexual congress with women at times other than their season. Let him incur the aversion of all men and women. Let him derive his maintenance from the earnings of his wife. Let him have no friends and have many enemies. Let him be another's guest for receiving in return the hospitality which he has shown that other!"

Gotama said, “Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks be guilty of casting aside the Vedas after having studied them. Let him cast off the three sacred fires. Let him be a seller of the sacred Soma. Let him live with that Brahmana who dwells in a village which has only one well from which water is drawn by all the varnas and who has married a Sudra woman besides!”

Viswamitra said, “Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks be fated to see his preceptors and elders and his servants maintained by others during his own life-time. Let him not have a good end. Let him be the father of too many children. Let him be always impure and a wretch among Brahmanas. Let him be proud of his possessions. Let him be a tiller of the soil and let him be filled with malice. Let him wander the world during the season of rains. Let him be a paid servant. Let him be the priest of the king. Let him assist at the sacrifices of such corrupt men as do not deserve to be helped at their sacrifices!”

Arundhati said, “Let her who has stolen the lotus-stalks always humiliate her husband’s mother. Let her be always vexed with her husband. Let her eat whatever good things come to her house without sharing them. Disregarding the kinsmen of her lord, let her live in her husband’s house and eat, at the day’s end, the flour of fried barley. Let her come to be regarded as unenjoyable because of the stains that tarnish her. Let her be the mother of a heroic son!”

Ganda said, ‘Let her who has stolen the lotus-stalks be always a liar. Let her always quarrel with her kinsfolk. Let her sell her daughter in marriage for a dowry. Let her eat the food which she has cooked, alone and without sharing it with anybody. Let her pass her whole life in slavery. Indeed, let her who has stolen the lotus-stalks be quick with child because of sexual congress under guilty circumstances!”

Pasusakha said, “Let him who has stolen the lotus-stalks be born of a slave-mother. Let him have many children all of whom are worthless. And let him never worship the gods.”

Sunahsakha said, “Let him who has taken the lotus-stalks obtain the merit of bestowing his daughter in marriage upon a Brahmana, who has studied all the Samans and the Yajuses and who has carefully observed the vow of brahmacharya. Let him perform the final ablutions after having studied all the Atharvans!”

All the other Rishis said, “The oath you have taken is no oath at all, for all the consequences which you have wished upon the thief are most desirable for all Brahmanas. It is evident, O Sunahsakha, that you have taken our lotus-stalks.”

Sunahsakha said, “The lotus-stalks are missing, and what you say is perfectly true, for it is I who have stolen them. In the very sight of all of you, I have caused the stalks to disappear. You sinless ones, I did this thing from a desire to test you. I came here to protect you. That woman who lies slain there, as ashes, was called Yatudhani. She was sprung from the dark mantras of King Vrishadarbhi, and she had come here to kill you all. You Rishis endowed with the wealth of tapasya, the king sent her for your lives, but I have killed her. Otherwise the fierce and sinful spirit sprung from the Agni would have taken all your lives. It was to kill her and save you that I came here, learned Brahmanas.

Know that I am Vasava! You have entirely freed yourselves from the influence of greed, and thus you have won many eternal realms where every desire is fulfilled as soon as it appears in the heart. Rise up at once, Mahamunis, and ascend from this world into those realms of beatitude, Dvijas, that await you.”

Exceedingly gratified, the great Rishis replied to Purandara, saying, ‘Tathaastu, so be it!’, and they then rose into heaven in company of Indra himself. Even thus, those Mahatmans, though famished with hunger and though tempted at such a time with the offer of diverse kinds of objects of enjoyments, did not yield to temptation. As the result of their self-denial, they attained to swarga. It seems, therefore, that one should, under all circumstances, renounce greed. Even this, O king, is the highest dharma: that greed must be abandoned.

The man who narrates this account of the deeds of the righteous Rishis in assemblies of men, succeeds in acquiring wealth. Such a man has never to attain to a distressful end, for the Pitris, the Rishis and the Devas all become pleased with him. Hereafter, again, he is blessed with kirti, fame, and punya, religious merit, and great artha, wealth.’

CANTO 94

Bhishma says, 'Listen to, the old itihasa of the oaths taken by many Rishis, one after another, during a tirtha yatra. Bharatottama, Indra had committed the theft, and the oaths were taken by many Rajarishis and Maharishis.

Once on a time, the Rishis, having assembled together, journeyed to the western Prabhasa. They held a consultation there which resulted in a resolve on their part to visit all the holy tirthas, the sacred waters on earth. Sukra and Angiras and Kavi of great learning were there, and Agastya and Narada and Parvata; and Bhrigu and Vasishta and Kasyapa and Gautama and Viswamitra and Jamadagni, O king. Also present were Rishi Galva, and Ashtaka and Bharadwaja and Arundhati and the Balakhilyas; and Sibi and Dilipa and Nahusha and Ambarisha and the royal Yayati and Dhundhumara and Puru.

Setting the Mahatman Satakratu, Indra, slayer of Vritra, at their head, those greatest of men went to the holy tirthas, one after the other, all of which are naves of utmost auspiciousness and grace upon the earth, and at last reached the most sacred Kausiki on Purnima, the day of the full moon, in the month of Magha. Having washed themselves of all their sins by ablutions performed in all the sacred waters, they finally went to the sacred Brahmasara.

Bathing in that lake, those Rishis endowed with tejas like that of fire began to gather and eat the stalks of the lotus. Amongst those Brahmanas, some had gathered the stalks of the lotus and some the stalks of the stellar lily. Soon they found that the stalks that Agastya had drawn up and left on

the bank of the lake had been stolen. Agastya, best of sages, said, "Who has taken the good stalks which I gathered and left in this place? I suspect that one amongst you must have done this thing. Let him who has taken them give them back to me. It does not befit you to steal what was mine.

It is heard that time weakens the strength of dharma. That time has come upon us, and dharma is afflicted. It is meet that I should go to swarga for good, before adharma assails the world and establishes itself here. Before the time comes when Brahmanas, loudly chanting the Vedas, within the precincts of villages and inhabited places, cause the Sudras to hear them; before the Time comes when kings misrule and sin against the laws of dharma from motives of policy, I must go into swarga for good. Before men cease to regard the distinctions between the lower, the middle and the higher varnas, I shall go to swarga for ever. Before ignorance envelops the world and all things in darkness, I shall go to heaven for good. Before the time comes when the strong begin to oppress the weak and treat them like slaves, I must go to heaven for good. For, indeed, I dare not remain on earth to witness these things."

Greatly concerned by what he said, the others said to that great Muni, "We have not stolen your stalks. You should not harbour suspicion against us. O Mahamuni, we shall pronounce the most fearsome curses."

Having said these words, and conscious of their own innocence, and wanting to uphold the cause of dharma, those Rishis and Rajarishis then began to swear, one after another, the following curses.

Bhrigu said, "Let him who has stolen your stalks censure when censured, assail when assailed, and eat the flesh that is attached to the spine of animals slaughtered in sacrifice!"

Vasishta said, "Let him who has stolen your stalks neglect his Vedic studies, catch dogs, and having taken himself to mendicancy yet live in a city or town!"

Kasyapa said, "Let him who has stolen your stalks sell sundry and vulgar things in all places, become a thief of sacred wealth, and bear false witness!"

Gautama said, "Let him who has stolen your stalks live displaying coarse pride in all things, with an understanding that does not see all creatures with an equal eye, and always yield himself to the influence of desire and wrath. Let him be a tiller of soil, and let him be inspired by malice!"

Angiras said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be always impure. Let him be a censurable Brahmana for his sins. Let him leash hounds. Let him be guilty of Brahmahatya. Let him be averse to expiations after having sinned!”

Dhundhumara said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be ungrateful to his friends. Let him take birth in a Sudra woman. Let him eat alone any good food that comes to his house, without sharing it with any others!”

Dilipa said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks descend to those regions of misery and infamy which are reserved for that Brahmana who lives in a village having but one well and who has sexual congress with a Sudra woman!”

Puru said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks adopt the occupation of a physician. Let him be supported by the earnings of his wife. Let him have his sustenance from his father-in-law!”

Sukra said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks eat the flesh of animals not slain in sacrifices. Let him have sexual congress by day-time. Let him be a servant of the king!”

Jamadagni said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks study the Vedas on forbidden days or occasions. Let him feed friends at sraddhas performed by him. Let him eat at the sraddha of a Sudra!”

Sibi said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks die without having established a fire for daily worship. Let him be guilty of obstructing the sacrifices of others. Let him quarrel with those that are tapasvins!”

Yayati said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be guilty of having sexual congress with his wife when she is not in her season and when he is himself in the observance of a vow and bears jata on his head. Let him also disregard the Vedas!”

Nahusha said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks live in grihasta after having betaken himself to the vow of sannyasa. Let him live waywardly, doing as he pleases and without restraint of any kind, even after having undergone the initiatory rites for a yagna or some other solemn vrata. Let him take pecuniary payment for imparting any branch of knowledge to disciples that they come to learn!”

Ambarisha said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be cruel and unrighteous in his behaviour towards women and kinsmen and kine. Let him be guilty also of Brahmahatya!”

Narada said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be one that identifies the body with the soul. Let him study the scriptures with an ignorant and sinful preceptor. Let him chant the Vedas, offending at each step against the laws. Let him flout all his elders!”

Nabhaga said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks always lie and have altercations with those that are righteous. Let him bestow his daughter in marriage after accepting a pecuniary dower offered by his son-in-law!”

Kavi said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks he guilty of kicking a sacred cow. Let him make water facing the sun. Let him turn away the person that seeks shelter from him!”

Viswamitra said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks become a servant that is deceitful towards his master. Let him be the priest of a king. Let him be the ritwik of one that should not be assisted at his sacrifices!”

Parvata said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be the chieftain of a village. Let him make journeys on donkeys. Let him tie up dogs for a living!”

Bharadwaja said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be guilty of all the sins that become his who is cruel in his deeds and untruthful in speech!”

Ashtaka said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be a king destitute of wisdom, capricious and sinful in his behaviour, and disposed to rule the earth with adharma!”

Galava said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be more infamous than a sinner. Let him be sinful in his conduct towards his kinsmen and relatives. Let him arrogantly proclaim the gifts he makes to others.”

Arundhati said, “Let her who has stolen your stalks speak ill of her mother-in-law. Let her feel disgust for her lord. Let her eat alone any good food that comes to her house.”

The Balakhilyas said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks stand on one foot at the entrance of a village to earn his subsistence. Let him, while knowing all his duties, be guilty of every breach of them!”

Sunahsakha said, “Let him who has stolen your stalks be a Brahmana that sleeps in happiness, having disregarded his daily homa. Let him, after becoming a sannyasi, behave in whatever way he pleases, without observing any restraint!’”

Surabhi said, “Let her who has stolen your stalks be milked, with her legs bound with a rope of human hair, and with the help of a calf not her own, and, while milked, let her milk be held in a vessel of white brass!”

After the Rishis and the Rajarishis had pronounced these diverse curses, the thousand-eyed lord of the Devas, filled with joy, cast his looks on the incensed Rishi Agastya. Addressing the sage, Maghavat declared what was in his mind. Listen to what Indra said in the midst of those Rishis and Rajarishis.

Sakra said, "Let him who has stolen your lotus-stalks be possessed of the punya of him who bestows his daughter in marriage upon a Brahmana who has observed the vow of brahmacharya, or who has studied the Samans and the Yajuses. Let him also have the merit of one that undergoes the final bath after completing the study of the Atharva Veda. Let him who has stolen your stalks have the merit of having studied all the Vedas. Let him be observant of all duties and righteous in his conduct. Indeed, let him go to Brahmaloka!"

Agastya said, "You have, O slayer of Bala, uttered a blessing instead of a curse. You have taken my lotus-stalks. Give them to me, for that is the eternal dharma."

Indra said, "Holy one, I did not take your stalks out of greed. Indeed, I removed them from the desire of hearing this sacred conclave recite what the dharmas are that we should observe. Do not give way to anger. Dharmas are the foremost of Srutis. Dharmas constitute the eternal path to cross over this samsara of the world. I have listened to this exalted discourse of you Rishis on the sanatana dharma that is eternal and immutable, and that transcends all change. Do you now, O foremost of learned Brahmanas, take back these stalks of yours. Mahamuni, it befits you to forgive my transgression, O you that are free from every fault."'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by the king of the Devas, Agastya Muni, who had been so wrathful, took back his stalks. Endowed with great intelligence, the Rishi became cheerful. After this, those great ones journeyed on their pilgrimage to many other sacred tirthas. Indeed, repairing to those holy waters, they performed their ablutions everywhere.

The man who reads this narrative with close attention on every Parva day, will not have to become the father of an ignorant and evil son. He will never be destitute of learning. No calamity will ever touch him. He will, besides, be free from every kind of sorrow. Decrepitude and decay will never be his. Freed from stains and evil of every kind, and endued with merit, he is sure to attain to swarga. He who studies this shastra observed by

the Rishis, is certain, O prince of men, to attain to eternal Brahmaloka that is full of felicity.'"

CANTO 95

"Yudhishtira says, 'King of the Bharata vamsa, by whom was the custom of giving chatras and padukas at sraddhas introduced? Why was it introduced and for what purpose are those gifts made? They are given not only at sraddhas but also at other religious rites. They are given on many occasions with a view to acquiring religious punya. I want to know, in detail, Pitamaha, the true meaning of this custom.'

Bhishma says, 'Do you, O Kshatriya, listen attentively to what I tell you about the custom of giving away chatras and padukas at religious rites, and to how and by whom it was introduced. I shall also tell you in full, O Kshatriya, how it acquired the force of a permanent observance and how it came to be viewed as an act of punya. I will, in this regard, narrate the discourse between Jamadagni and the Mahatman Surya.

In ancient times, the illustrious Jamadagni of Bhrigu's race was engaged in practising with his bow. Taking aim, he shot arrow after arrow. His wife Renuka would pick up the shafts and bring them back to her husband, the Bhargava of blazing tejas. Pleased with the whizzing sound of his arrows and the twang of his bow, he amused himself by repeatedly discharging his arrows which Renuka brought back to him.

One day, at noontide, O monarch, in that month when the sun was in Jyesthamula, the Brahmana, having discharged all his arrows, said to Renuka, "O doe-eyed devi, go and fetch me the shafts I have shot from my bow. I would loose them again."

Renuka went on her errand but her feet and her head were scorched by the sun and she was forced to sit down in the shade of a tree. Having rested

for only some moments, and fearing her husband's curse, the black-eyed and graceful Renuka quickly addressed herself again to the task of collecting and bringing back the arrows. Taking them with her, the renowned beauty came back, distressed in mind and her feet smarting with the heat that lay on the earth.

Trembling with fear, she approached her husband. The Rishi, filled with quick wrath, repeatedly cried to his exquisite wife, "Renuka, why have you been so long returning?"

Renuka said, "O you who are endowed with the wealth of tapasya, my head and feet were seared by the rays of the sun. Oppressed, I went into the shade of a tree. Only this delayed me and, knowing why I was late, my lord, do not be angry with me anymore."

Jamadagni said, "Renuka, this very hour with my astras, I will make ashes of the fiery star of day who caused you pain with his burning rays."

Drawing his unearthly bow, and invoking many terrible astras, Jamadagni stood, his face towards the sun and watching him as he moved across the sky. Kaunteya, Surya saw the Brahmana thus in wrath, and came to him in the guise of a Brahmana, and said, "What has Surya done to displease you, Jamadagni? Coursing through the firmament, he draws up the moisture from the earth, and he pours it down once more on her as nourishing rain. It is through this rain, O Dvija, that food grows for men, food that they so delight in. The Vedas say that it is food that constitutes prana, the life-breaths. O Brahmana, hidden in the clouds and irradiant, the sun drenches the seven Dwipas with wondrous showers of rain. Mighty Jamadagni, the rain he pours down becomes the sap of leaf, fruit, plant and herb, which become food.

Bhargava, the rites of birth, religious observances of every kind, investiture with the sacred thread, gifts of kine, weddings, everything used in yagnas, the very dandaneeti which rules men, dakshina, all manner of bond between man and man, and the acquisition of wealth have their origin in annrita, food. You know this well. All that is good and enjoyable in the universe, and all the efforts made by living creatures, flow from food. I only remind you of what you already know full well. Do you, therefore, O enlightened Rishi, appease your anger. What will you gain by annihilating the sun?'"

CANTO 96

"Yudhishtira says, 'What did that greatest of ascetics, Jamadagni of awesome tejas, do when Surya the Brahmana, maker of day, spoke thus to him, as a supplicant?'

Bhishma says, 'Despite all the supplications of Surya, Jamadagni of the refulgence of Agni remained with wrath undimmed. Then, O king, Surya the Brahmana bowed his head to the sage and, with folded hands, said humbly to him, 'Maharishi, the sun is always in motion. How will you pierce the Lord of day who is continually moving?"

Jamadagni said, "With the eye of knowledge I know you to be both moving and motionless. I will surely teach you a lesson today. At midday, you seem to stay still in the sky for a moment. It is then, O Surya, that I shall pierce you with my arrows. There is no swerving from this my resolution."

Surya said "Regenerate Rishi, without doubt you know me, O best of archers. But, holy one, though I have offended you, behold, I am a suppliant for your protection."

At this, the most adorable Jamadagni smilingly addressed the maker of day, saying, "O Surya, when you have sought my protection, you have nothing to fear. He would transgress the simplicity that exists in Brahmanas, the stability in the earth, the mildness in the moon, the gravity in Varuna, the radiance in Agni, the brightness of Meru, and the heat of the sun, who would kill one who seeks his protection. The man that can slay a supplicant can well violate the bed of his preceptor, murder a Brahmana and drink wild

spirits. Do you, therefore, think of some remedy for this evil, by which the people may find relief when seared by the sun."

So saying, that great descendant of Bhrigu remained silent for a while, and Surya forthwith created and made over to him a chatra, a splendid umbrella, and two padukas, a pair of sandals."

Surya said, "O Maharishi, take this umbrella with which the head may be protected from my rays. These sandals are made of leather to protect the feet. From this day forth, the gift of these two in all religious rites shall be established as an inflexible custom."

Yudhishtira, the custom of giving umbrellas and sandals was introduced by Surya Deva. O Bhaarata, these gifts are considered meritorious in the three worlds. Do you, therefore, give away umbrellas and sandals to Brahmanas. I have no doubt that you will acquire great punya by doing so. Best of the Bharatas, he who gives away a white umbrella with a hundred ribs to a Brahmana attains to eternal felicity after death and lives in the world of Indra, respected by Brahmanas, Apsaras and Devas. Mighty one, he who gives padukas to Snataka Brahmanas, as also to Brahmanas who perform the rituals of dharma, whose feet have become sore with the heat of the sun, attains to realms coveted by the very gods. Such a man dwells in happiness in the highest swarga after his death.

And so, O Bharatottama, I have told you in full the merits of giving away chatras and padukas at religious ceremonies.'

CANTO 97

Yudhishtira says, 'Greatest of the Bharata vamsa, relate to me all the duties of the grihastasrama and tell me all that a man should do in order to attain to prosperity in this world.'

Bhishma says, 'O Bhaarata, let me narrate to you the old story of the almighty Krishna and Bhumidevi. After hymning the praises of the earth goddess, Krishna asked her this very thing that you have asked me.

Krishna said, "Having become a grihasta, what karma should I or one like me perform and how will such karma fructify in punya?"

Bhumidevi said, "O Madhava, the Rishis, the Devas, the Pitris and Manavas should be worshipped, and sacrifices should be performed, by a grihasta. Know that the Devas are always pleased with sacrifices, and men are gratified with hospitality. Therefore, the householder should satisfy them with whatever pleases them. By such karma, O Madhusudana, the Rishis also are gratified.

Abstaining from food, the grihasta should daily attend to his sacred fire and to his sacrificial offerings. By this are the Devas pleased. The grihasta should daily offer oblations of food and water, or of fruits, roots and also water, to gratify the Pitris, and the Vaiswadeva offering should be performed with boiled rice, and oblations of ghrita to Agni, Soma and Dhanvantari. He should offer separate and distinct oblations to Prajapati.

He should make his sacrificial offerings in proper order: to Yama in the south, to Varuna in the west, to Soma in the north, to Prajapati within the home, to Dhanvantari in the North-east, and to Indra in the east. He should offer food to men at the entrance to his home.

These, O Madhava, are known as the Bali offerings. The Bali should be offered to the Maruts and the Devas inside one's house. To the Viswedevas it should be offered in the open, and to the Rakshasas and Bhutas, the offerings should be made at night. After making these offerings, the householder should make offerings to Brahmanas, and if no Brahmana be present, the first portion of the food should be offered into the fire.

When a man wants to offer sraddha to his ancestors, he should, when the sraddha ceremony is concluded, gratify his ancestors and then make the Bali offerings in due order. He should then make offerings to the Viswedevas. He should next invite Brahmanas and then properly feed guests arrived at his home. Through this, O prince, are the Sadasyas satisfied. He who does not stay in the house long, or, having come, leaves after a short time, is called a Sadasya, and Atithi, a guest.

To his guru, to his father, to his friend and to a guest, a grihasta should say, 'I have this in my house to offer you today.' And he should offer it accordingly every day. The householder should do whatever they would ask him to do. This is the established custom. The householder, O Krishna, should eat last of all and only after having offered food to all of them.

The householder should worship, with offerings of madhuparka, his king, his priest, his preceptor and his father-in-law, as also Snataka Brahmanas even if they were to stay in his house for a whole year. In the morning as well as in the evening, food should be offered on the ground to dogs, swapachas and birds. This is called the Vaiswadeva offering. The householder who performs these ceremonies with a mind unclouded by passion, obtains the blessings of the Rishis in this world, and after dying he attains to swarga."

Having listened to all this from Bhumidevi, Krishna did as she had told him. Do you also do the same. By performing these duties of a householder, O king, you shall acquire fame in this world and attain to heaven after you leave it.'

CANTO 98

Yudhishtira says, 'Of what kind is the gift of light, Pitamaha? How did this dakshina originate? What are the merits that attach to it? Tell me all this.'

Bhishma says, 'Bhaarata, listen to the ancient itihasa of the discourse between Manu, that Lord of creatures, and Suvarna. There was in days of yore an ascetic of the name Suvarna. His complexion was like that of gold and hence was he called Suvarna, the gold-complexioned. From a pure lineage, of pure character and conduct, and excellent accomplishments, he had mastered all the Vedas. Indeed, in accomplishments he surpassed many of high birth.

One day, that learned Brahmana saw Manu, the Lord of all creatures, and approached him. Meeting with each other, they exchanged the customary greetings and polite enquiries after each other's well-being. Both of them were firm in the observance of truth. They sat down on the delightful breast of Meru, great mountain of gold. Seated there, they began to converse with each other on diverse subjects connected with the great Devas and Rishis and Daityas of ancient times.

Then Suvarna said to the Svayambhuva Manu, "It behoves you to answer one question of mine for the benefit of all creatures. O Lord of all creatures, the Devas are seen to be worshipped with offerings of flowers and other fragrant things. What is this? How did this practice originate? What are the merits that attach to it? Do you discourse to me on this matter."

Manu said, “The ancient tale is told of the discourse between Sukra and the great Daitya Mahabali. Once upon a time, Sukra of Bhrigu’s race approached the presence of Bali, the son of Virochana, while the legendary Asura ruled the three worlds. The Lord of the Asuras, that giver of sacrificial dakshina in abundance, having worshipped the Bhargava with arghya, and having offering him a seat, himself sat down after his guest had seated himself. Then, this same matter that you have brought up, about the punya attaching to the offering of flowers and incense and lamps, arose. Indeed, the king of the Daityas put this high question to Sukra, that most learned of all sages.’

Bali said, ‘O foremost of all who know the Brahman, what is the punya of offering flowers and incense and lamps: pushpa, dhupa and deepa? O greatest of Brahmanas, discourse to me on this.’

Sukra said, ‘Tapa first sprang into life. Afterwards came dharma, and karuna, compassion, and the other virtues. In the interval between, many vines, creepers and plants started into life. Innumerable were the species of those. All of them have Soma for their lord. Some of these creepers and plants came to be regarded as amrita and some came to be regarded as visha, poison. Others that were neither this nor that formed yet another class. Amrita is what gives immediate gratification and joy to the mind. Visha tortures the mind exceedingly by its very odour. Know again that nectar is most auspicious and that poison is as inauspicious.

All the deciduous herbs are amrita. Visha is born of the energy of fire. Flowers gladden the mind and confer prosperity. Hence, men of righteous deeds bestowed the name Sumanas on them. That man who is in a state of purity offers flowers to the Devas finds that the gods become gratified with him, and as a consequence, bestow prosperity upon him. O king of the Daityas, those Devas to whom worshippers offer flowers, uttering their names the while, become gratified with the offers because of their devotion.

The green plants and herbs are of diverse kinds and possess diverse kinds of energy. They are classified as fierce, mild and powerful. Listen to me as I tell you which trees are useful for sacrifices and which are not. Hear, also, what malas, garlands, are agreeable to the Asuras, and which are beneficial when offered to the Devas. I shall also tell, in their due order, what garlands are agreeable to the Rakshasas, which to the Uragas, which to the Yakshas, which to Manavas, and which to the Pitris.

Flowers are of diverse kinds. Some are wild, some are from trees that grow in the midst of human habitations; some belong to trees that never grow unless planted in well-tilled soil; some are from trees growing on mountains; some are from trees that are not smooth; and some from trees that have thorns. Fragrance, beauty and taste also make for differences.

The scent that flowers yield is of two kinds, pleasant and pungent. Those flowers that exude fragrance should be offered to the Devas. The flowers of trees that are without thorns are generally white in hue. Such flowers are always acceptable to the Devas.

One possessed of wisdom should offer garlands of water flowers, such as the lotus, to the Gandharvas and Nagas and Yakshas.

Such plants and herbs as produce red flowers, as are possessed of sharp scent, and as have thorns have been laid down in the Atharvan as fit for all mantras to cause harm to enemies. Such flowers as are possessed of keen energy, as are painful to the touch, as grow on trees and plants having thorns, and as are either blood-red or black, should be offered to evil spirits and other dark, unearthly beings.

Such flowers as gladden the mind and heart, as are exquisitely soft and redolent when pressed, and as are of beautiful forms, have been said to be worthy of being offered to Manushyas, human beings.

Such flowers as grow on cemeteries and crematoria, or in places dedicated to the deities, should not be fetched and used for marriages and other rites having growth and prosperity for their object, or for acts of dalliance and pleasure in secrecy. Such flowers as are born on mountains and in vales, and as are pleasant in scent and aspect, should be offered to the Devas. Sprinkling them with sandalwood paste, such fine flowers should be duly offered according to the laws of the scriptures. The gods become gratified with the scent of flowers; the Yakshas and Rakshasas with their sight; the Nagas with their touch; and humans with all three, scent, sight and touch.

Flowers offered to the Devas gratify them immediately. They have the power to fulfil every desire by merely wishing it. When pleased with devotees offering them flowers, the Devas immediately satisfy all the desires cherished by their worshippers. Gratified themselves, they quickly gratify their worshippers. Honoured, they cause their worshippers to enjoy all honours. Disregarded and insulted, they cause those vilest of men to be ruined and consumed.

I will now speak to you of the merits that attach to the laws about the gift of dhupa, incense. Know, O prince of Asuras, that incense is of diverse kinds. Some of them are auspicious and some inauspicious. Some incense consists of natural exudations. Some are made of fragrant wood set afire. And some are artificial, being made by the hand, and of diverse substances mixed together. Their scent is of two kinds: pleasant and the opposite. Listen to more on this subject of dhupa or gandha.

All natural exudations are agreeable to the Devas. It is, however, certain that the best of all these is that of the mukula. Of all dhupas of the sari class, the agarwood is the best. It is most agreeable to the Yakshas, the Rakshasas and Nagas. The scent of the shallaki, and others of the same class, are much desired by the Daityas. Dhupas made of the perfume of the sala and the deodar, mixed with various spirits of strong scent, are, O king, ordained for human beings. Such dhupas are said to immediately gratify the Devas, the Danavas and Bhutas. Besides these, there are many other kinds of dhupas used by men of purposes of pleasure or enjoyment.

All the merits that have been spoken of as attaching to the offering of flowers should be known equally to attach to the gift of such dhupas as are satisfying.

I will now speak of the punya that attaches to the dakshina of deepam, lamps, and who may give them at what time and in what manner, and what should be the kind of lamps offered. Light is said to be energy and fame, and has an upward motion. Hence the gift of light, which is energy, enhances the tejas of men. There is a hell called Andhatamas, a place of absolute darkness. The time of dakshinayana, the sun's southward course, is also regarded as dark. For escaping that hell and the darkness of this time, one should give lamps during Uttarayana, when the sun is on his northward course. The good always laud such an offering.

Since, again, light, jyoti, has an upward course and is regarded as a cure for tamas, darkness, one should be a giver of light. Even this is the conclusion of the scriptures. It is owing to the lights offered that the Devas have become invested with beauty, energy and splendour. By abjuring light, the Rakshasas have become endowed with the opposite attributes. Hence, should one always give lamps.

By giving deepas, a man is blessed with keen vision and splendour. One that gives lamps should not be an object of jealousy with others. Lamps, again, given by others, should not be stolen or extinguished. One that steals

a lamp becomes blind. Such a man has to grope through darkness in the next world and becomes devoid of splendour. He that gives lamps shines in beauty in the celestial realms even like a row of lamps.

Among deepams, the best are those in which ghee is burnt. Next in order are those in which the juice of the fruits yielded by deciduous plants is burnt. One who desires advancement and growth should never burn fat or marrow or the juice that flows from the bones of living creatures.

The man who desires advancement and felicity should always offer lamps at descents from mountains, on roads through forests and other inaccessible places, under sacred trees standing in the midst of human habitations, and at crossings of streets. The man who lights lamps always illumines his race, attains to purity of soul and radiance of form. Verily, such a man, after death, attains to the companionship of the luminaries in the firmament, the sun and the moon.

I will now speak to you upon the merits, with the fruits they bring, that attach to bali offerings made to the Devas, the Yakshas, the Uragas, human beings, Bhutas and Rakshasas. Unscrupulous and vile men that eat without first serving Brahmanas and Devas and Atithis and children, should be known as Rakshasas. Hence, one should first offer the food one has prepared to the Devas after having worshipped them duly with restrained senses and concentrated attention.

One should offer the bali to the gods, bending one's head in reverence. The Devas are always supported by food that householders offer. Verily, they bless such homes in which offerings are made to them. The Yakshas and Rakshasas and Pannagas, as also guests and all homeless persons, are supported by the food offered by grihastas. Indeed, the Devas and the Pitris derive their sustenance from such offerings. Gratified by such offerings they gratify the offerer in return with longevity, fame and wealth.

Clean food, of pleasant aroma and appearance, mixed with milk and curds, should, along with flowers, be offered to the Devas. The balis that should be offered to Yakshas and Rakshasas should be rich with blood and meat, with wine and spirits accompanying it, and adorned with coatings of fried paddy. Balis mixed with lotuses and utpalas are very agreeable to the Nagas. Sesame seeds, boiled in raw sugar, should be offered to the Bhutas, Pretas and other unearthly beings.

He who never eats any food without first serving the Brahmanas and Devas and Sadasyas, himself becomes entitled to the first portions of anna.

Such a man is endowed with bala and tejas, strength and energy. Hence, one should never take any food without first offering a portion thereof to the gods after worshipping them with reverence. One's home always blazes forth with beauty because of the household deities that live in it. Hence, he that desires his own advancement and prosperity should worship the grihadevas, the household deities, by offering them the first portion of every meal."

Even thus did the learned Kavi, Sukra of Bhrigu's race, discourse to Mahabali, the king of the Asuras. That discourse was next recited by Manu to the Rishi Suvarna; Suvarna, in his turn, recited it to Narada. The Devarishi Narada recited to me the merits that attach to the several acts of offering I have mentioned. Informed of those merits, do you, O son, perform the kriyas and karmas that I have told you about.'"

CANTO 99

"Yudhishtira says, 'I have, Pitamaha, heard what the merits are that are won by offerers of flowers and incense and lights. I have heard you speak also of the punya that attaches to a due observance of the laws in respect of the offering of the bali. O Grandsire, discourse to me once more upon this subject. Indeed, tell me again of the merits of offering incense and lamps. Why are balis offered on the ground by grihastas?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old tale of the discourse between Nahusha and Agastya and Bhrigu. The royal sage Nahusha, possessed of the wealth of tapasya, acquired the sovereignty of swarga through his own good deeds. With restrained senses, O king, he dwelt in heaven, engaged in performing diverse karmas of both human and celestial nature. From that high-souled monarch flowed diverse kinds of human karmas and diverse kinds of celestial kriyas also, O king of men.

The diverse rites with respect to the sacrificial fire, the collection of sacred fuel and of kusa grass, as also of flowers, and the offering of bali consisting of food adorned with powdered fried paddy, and the offer of dhupa and jyoti—all these, O Rajan, occurred daily in the abode of that high-souled king while he dwelt in swarga.

Indeed, though living in heaven, he performed the sacrifice of japa, silent chanting, and dhyana, the sacrifice of meditation. And Nahusha, although he had become the king of the Devas, yet worshipped all the deities, as he used to do in days of yore, with every due rite and ceremony.

Some time passed, and then Nahusha became proud of his position as the king of all the Devas. This filled him with pride. From that time, he

ceased performing the rituals and sacrifices and his japa and dhyana as well. Filled with arrogance because of the boon he had received from the Devas, Nahusha caused the very Devarishis to bear him on their shoulders.

However, from the cessation of all his spiritual and religious practices, his tejas began to sustain a diminution. The time was long for which Nahusha, filled with pride, continued to employ the greatest of Rishis, possessed of the tapodhana, as the bearers of his palanquin. He made the immortal sages discharge, by turns, this humiliating work.

The day came when it was Agastya's turn to pull the royal ratha, O Bhaarata. At that time, Bhrigu, that foremost of all Brahmagyanis, came to Agastya, while the Rishi sat in his asrama, and said, "Mahamuni, why should we patiently put up with the indignity this evil Nahusha, who has become the king of the Devas, inflicts on us?"

Agastya said, "How can I curse Nahusha, O great Rishi? You know how the boon-giving Brahma himself has granted Nahusha the highest of boons! Coming into swarga, the boon that Nahusha asked for was that whoever looked at him for even a moment would, deprived of all energy, come under his sway. The Self-born Brahma granted him even this boon, and it is for this that neither you nor I have been able to consume him with a curse. It is for this same reason that none else amongst the greatest Rishis has been able to consume or cast him down from his lofty position.

Also, my lord, Brahma gave Nahusha amrita to drink. And for that reason as well we have become powerless against him. The supreme God, it seems, gave that boon to Nahusha in order to plunge all creatures into grief. That wretch among men treats us Brahmanas vilely and sinfully. O most eloquent of all, do you tell me what I should do, and have no doubt that I will do as you say."

Bhrigu said, "It is at the command of Brahma the Grandsire that I have come to you in order to put an end to the power and sway of Nahusha who is possessed of great energy but who has been stupefied by fate.

That vile king, swollen with pride, who has become Lord of the Devas, will today yoke you to his ratha. With my urjas today will I cast him down from his position, for he has transgressed every norm and restraint. Today, in your very sight, I will re-establish the true Indra in his place, him of a hundred Aswamedhas, after bringing down the sinful Nahusha from his throne.

Today, that sinner will insult you with a kick, from his mind being afflicted by fate, which intends to cause his downfall. Incensed by the insult you will curse the wretch, that enemy of the Brahmanas, who has flouted every law of dharma, by saying, 'Be you a snake!'

Before your very eyes, O Maharishi, will I hurl Nahusha down into the world below, back to Bhumi, all his power and majesty lost from the cries of *Fie on you!* that will resound all around him. Truly, I shall cast Nahusha down from swarga today, that accursed sinner who is intoxicated with lordship and power. Yes, I shall indeed do this, if it be acceptable to you, O Muni!"

Thus addressed by Bhrigu, Mitravaruna's son Agastya, of unfading puissance and glory, was delighted and freed from every anxiety.'"

CANTO 100

"Yudhishtira says, 'How was Nahusha plunged into distress? How was he cast down into the world? How, indeed, was he deprived of the sovereignty of the gods? Tell me all about it, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'Even thus did those two Rishis, Bhrigu and Agastya, converse. I have already told you how Nahusha, when he first became the king of the Devas, conducted himself in a most becoming manner. Verily, all pure and wondrous deeds, both human and divine, flowed from that Mahatman Rajarishi. The offering of lamps, and every other similar rite, the due offerings of balis, and all rituals as are performed on especially sacred days—all these were properly observed by Nahusha who had become the king of the Devas.

Pious karmas are always performed by those that have wisdom, in both the world of men and that of the gods. O best of kings, if such piety is observed with regularity and steadfastness, grihastas always succeed in acquiring prosperity and advancement. Even such is the effect of the gift of lamps and of incense, as also of bowing in worship and prostrations to the gods. When food is cooked, the first portion should be offered to a Brahmana. The particular offerings called bali should also be given to the household deities. The Devas become gratified with such gifts. It is also wellknown that the measure of satisfaction which the gods derive from such offerings is a hundred times as great as that which the householder himself derives from making them. Those blessed with piety and wisdom make offerings of incense and lights, accompanying them with bowing and prostrations. These are always fraught with advancement and prosperity to

those that perform them. Those rites which the learned undergo during their ablutions, using holy water, accompanied with pranama and namaskara to the gods, always contribute to the gratification of the gods. When worshipped with proper rites, the highly blessed Pitris, Rishis who own the wealth of asceticism, and the grihadevatas, the household deities, all become gratified. Filled with these thoughts and such knowledge, Nahusha, that great king, when he became the sovereign of the gods, faithfully observed all these karmas and dharmas fraught with great glory.

Shortly after, Nahusha's good fortune waned, and he began to flagrantly flout all these holy karmas and began instead to defy all restraints in the manner I have already alluded to. Because he no longer observed the laws laid down for the offerings of incense and lamps, his tejas declined rapidly. Rakshasas obstructed his yagnas and dakshinas.

It was at this time that Nahusha yoked that foremost of Rishis, Agastya, to his ratha. Nahusha of great power, smiling all the while in hubris, set that Mahamuni to the task of bearing him from the banks of the Saraswati to the place he would indicate. Even then, Bhrigu addressed the son of Mitravaruna, saying, "Do you close your eyes until I enter into the jata on your head."

And Bhrigu of unfading glory and terrific energy entered into the matted hair of Agastya, who stood still as a wooden post. Soon after, Nahusha saw Agastya approach him to carry his palanquin. Looking at the Deva king, Agastya said, "Do you yoke me to your ratha without delay. To what place shall I bear you? O Lord of the Devas, I will take you wherever you wish to go."

Nahusha had the Mahamuni Agastya yoked to his ratha. Bhrigu, who was hidden within Agastya's jata, grew pleased with what Nahusha did. He took care not to see Nahusha for he well knew the boon that Brahma had granted that king, that whoever he looked at would come under his sway. Agastya, meanwhile, though thus insulted direly by Nahusha, did not give way to wrath but stayed calm.

Then, O Bharata, the arrogant Nahusha prodded great Agastya with his goad. Still the righteous sage remained calm. Then Nahusha himself gave way to anger and kicked Agastya Muni on the head with his left foot, crying *Sarpa!* which meant both 'hurry' and 'snake'. No sooner was the kick delivered, than Bhrigu in Agastya's matted hair blazed up in wrath and cursed Nahusha: "You dare kick this great Muni's head? I cast you down

into the world below, vain Nahusha, and become a snake as you fall, O wretched sinner of the dark heart!"

Cursed by the invisible Bhrigu, Nahusha immediately turned into a great snake and fell down onto the earth. If, Yudhishtira, Nahusha had seen Bhrigu, the sage would not have been able to curse him.

Even though he plunged down into the world below, because of all the dakshina that Nahusha had given, as also his vratas, tapasya and yagnas, he did not lose his memory but remembered everything. He then began to worship and appease Bhrigu to have redemption from the curse. Agastya, filled with compassion, joined Nahusha in pacifying Bhrigu so that the curse might see some end. At last, the wrathful Bhrigu felt pity for Nahusha and pronounced that the curse would indeed end one day.

Bhrigu said, "There will appear a king on earth named Yudhishtira, the greatest of his vamsa. He will free you from my curse." And the Maharishi Bhrigu vanished from Nahusha's sight. Having thus accomplished the work of the true Indra, performer of a hundred sacrifices, Agastya also returned to his asrama, praised and worshipped by all the grateful Brahmanas of heaven.

You freed Nahusha from Bhrigu's curse, and he rose into Brahmaloka in your very sight. As for Bhrigu, having cast Nahusha down into this world, he went to Brahma's loftiest realm and told the Pitamaha what he had done. Summoning Indra back, he said to all the Devas, 'You gods, through the boon I granted him, Nahusha acquired the sovereignty of swarga. Deprived of that power by the angry Agastya, he has been cast down into the world. Devas, you cannot live without a king. Do you once more install Indra as the king of swarga."

To the Grandsire, O son of Pritha, who said so to them, the Devas, filled with joy, replied, "So be it!" The divine Brahma installed Indra on the throne of swarga and, made king of the Devas again, Vasava shone forth once more in splendour. Even this is what transpired in days of yore, through the sin of Nahusha.

However, because of the punya he had acquired through all that he once did which was worthy, auspicious and sacred, Nahusha also regained his place in Devaloka. Hence, when evening comes and sandhya, grihastas should light lamps and give offerings of deepam. The giver of lamps is sure to acquire divine glory when he dies. Why, givers of light become as resplendent as the full moon.

The giver of lamps is blessed with beauty of form and strength for as many years as the number of moments for which the lamps given by him burn.'"

CANTO 101

"Yudhishtira says, 'Where do those foolish, wretched and sinful men go, Pitamaha, that steal or misappropriate things that belong to Brahmanas?'

Bhishma says, 'I will tell you an old tale of a conversation between a Chandala and a low Kshatriya. Listen to me.

The Kshatriya said, "Chandala, you seem to be old in years, but your behaviour seems to be that of a boy. Your body is smeared with dust raised by dogs and donkeys, but without minding that dirt, you are anxious about the little drops of vine milk that have fallen upon your person. It is plain that such deeds as are censured by the pious are ordained for the Chandala. Why, indeed, do you seek to wash off the drops of milk from your person?"

The Chandala said, "Formerly some cows belonging to a Brahmana were stolen. While they were being carried away, some milk from their udders fell upon a number of Soma plants that grew by the roadside. Those Brahmanas that drank the juice of the plants with that milk, as also the king who performed the sacrifice in which that Soma was drunk, had to fall into Naraka. Indeed, for having thus appropriated something that had belonged to a Brahmana, the king with all the Brahmanas that had assisted him had to go to hell. All those men also, Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, that drank milk or ghee or curds, in the palace of the king who had stolen the Brahmana's kine, found hell for themselves.

The stolen kine, shaking their bodies, slew with their milk the sons and grandsons of those that had stolen them, as also the king and the queen, although the latter treated the animals with great care and attention. As

regards myself, O king, I used to live in the observance of the vow of brahmacharya in the place where those cows were kept after being stolen.

The food that I got by begging was sprinkled over with the milk of those kine. Because I ate that food, Kshatriya, I have, in this life, become a Chandala. The king who had stolen the kine belonging to a Brahmana found an ignominious end. Hence, one should never steal or take anything that belongs to a Brahmana. Behold to what condition I am reduced just because I ate food that had been sprinkled over with milk belonging to a Brahmana.

It is for this same reason that Soma plants are never sold by a wise man. They who sell the Soma plant are censured by the Rishis. Indeed, O son, they who buy Soma and they who sell it, both fall into the hell called Raurava when, leaving this world, they go into Yamaloka. That man who, even after knowing the Vedas, sells Soma, becomes a usurer in his next life and quickly meets with destruction. Full three hundred times he has to sink into hell and be turned into an animal that lives on human ordure.

Serving a man who is vile and low, pride, and rape committed upon a friend's wife, if weighed against one another in a balance, would show that unbridled pride is the heaviest sin. Behold this dog, so sinful and disagreeably pale and lean. He was a human being in his past life. It is through pride that living creatures attain to such miserable ends.

As for myself, I was born into a large and noble family, in a past life, O Kshatriya, and I was a thorough master of all branches of knowledge and all the sciences. I knew the gravity of all these faults, but influenced by pride, I became blinded and ate the meat attached to the vertebrae of animals. It is for that sin that I have devolved to this condition.

Ah, look at the reverses brought by Time. Like one whose cloth has taken fire at one end, or who is pursued by bees, look, I run here and there, pierced through by fear, and smeared with dirt. They that lead the domestic life are saved from all sins by a study of the Vedas, as also by gifts of other kinds, as they have been declared by the wise. O Kshatriya, a Brahmana who is a sinner is saved from all his sins by studying the Vedas, if he betakes himself to the vanaprastha and abstains from attachment of every kind.

O great Kshatriya, I find myself in this life of a Chandala, born into a dark and sinful order. I fail to see clearly how I can wash myself of all my sins. Because of some punya I did in a past life, I have not lost the memory of my previous lives. O king, I throw myself on your mercy. I beg you,

resolve my bewilderment. By what auspicious course can I hope to free myself from this horrible fate? O best of men, by what means can I be rid of being a Chandala?”

The Kshatriya said, “Know, O Chandala, the means by which you may be able to find your redemption. By sacrificing your prana, your life-breath, for the sake of a Brahmana you can attain what you seek. By sacrificing your body in the fire of battle as a libation to the beasts and birds of prey, for the sake of a Brahmana, you can achieve mukti. By no other means will you find success.”

Thus addressed, that Chandala, O scorcher of your foes, poured his prana as a libation into the fire of battle, for the sake of protecting a Brahmana’s wealth, and as the consequence of that deed attained to a most desirable end. Hence, son, you must always protect the property of Brahmanas, if, Mahabaho, you wish for an end that is eternal felicity.’

CANTO 102

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, it has been said that all pious men attain to the same realm after death. Is it true, O Bhaarata, that there is difference of position or status among them?'

Bhishma says, 'With different deeds, son of Pritha, men attain to different realms. They who are righteous attain to regions of felicity, while they who are sinful attain to regions that are full of misery. Listen to the old story of the discourse, son, between Rishi Gautama and Vasava.

A Brahmana of the name of Gautama, mild and self-restrained and with all his senses under complete control, saw a baby elephant that had lost his mother and that was grief-stricken. Full of daya, and steadfast in the observance of his vows, the ascetic nursed that infant animal. After a long time, the little creature grew up into a large and mighty elephant.

One day, Indra, assuming the form of King Dhritarashtra, seized that elephant which was as big as a hill and from whose rent temples the juice of musth trickled. Seeing the elephant dragged away, Maharishi Gautama addressed King Dhritarashtra and said, "Ungrateful Dhritarashtra, do not rob me of this elephant. I look upon him as a son and I have reared him with great effort and care. It is said that between the righteous, friendship springs up if they exchange just seven words. You should be careful, O king, that the sin of wounding a friend does not touch you. It does not become you, O king, to forcibly take this elephant, who brings me my fuel and water, that protects my asrama when I am away, who is docile and obedient to his master, who is mindful of obeying his preceptor in all things, who is mild and well-tamed, and who is grateful and very dear to

me. Indeed, you must not take him from me, ignoring my protests and cries."

Dhritarashtra said, "I shall give you a thousand kine, a hundred maid-servants, and five hundred pieces of gold. I shall also, O great Rishi, give you diverse other kinds of wealth. What use can Brahmanas have for elephants?"

Gautama said, "Keep, O king, your kine and maid-servants and coins of gold and gemstones and diverse other kinds of wealth. What, Rajan, have Brahmanas to do with wealth?"

Dhritarashtra said, "Brahmana have no use for elephants. Verily, learned Brahmana, elephants are meant for Kshatriyas. I cannot be considered as sinning by taking this elephant for my royal mount. Do not continue to obstruct me, Gautama."

Gautama said, "Illustrious king, even if I have to go to Yamaloka where the righteous live in joy and the sinful in grief, I shall take this elephant of mine from you."

Dhritarashtra said, "They that are without deeds of punya, they that have no faith and unbelievers, they that are of sinful souls and are always engaged in gratifying their senses—only they have to go to Yama's world and endure the suffering that he inflicts. I, Dhritarashtra, shall go to a higher realm, and not to Yamaloka."

Gautama said, "Yamaloka is such that men are there sternly controlled. No untruth can be told there. Only truth prevails in that place. There the weak persecute the strong. Going there, I will force you to yield up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Only those that, intoxicated with pride, behave towards their eldest sister and father and mother as towards enemies, have to repair, O great ascetic, to such a realm. I shall go to a higher world. Indeed, Dhritarashtra shall not have to go to Yamaloka."

Gautama said, "The realm of Kubera Vaisravana, called Mandakini, is attained by the highly blessed whom every joy and comfort await there. There Gandharvas and Yakshas and Apsaras live, gladdening all the denizens with enchanting music and dance. Repairing even there, O king, I will force you to yield up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Those who regard hospitality to guests as a vrata, who observe other goodly vows, who give shelter to Brahmanas, and who

eat what remains after all those that are dependent upon them, find Kubera's Mandakini. I shall not go there, for a higher world awaits me."

Gautama said, "If you attain to those forests of every enchantment, mantled with flowers, that grow on the summit of Meru, that echo with melodious voice of Kinnaris, and are graced with beautiful jambus of wide-spreading branches, I will come even there and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Brahmanas that are of mild dispositions, that are devoted to truth, that possess great learning in the scriptures, are compassionate to all creatures, that study the Puranas with all the Itihasas, that pour libations on the sacred fire and make gifts of honey to Brahmanas, repair to such realms, Rishi. I shall go to a world that is higher. Indeed, Dhritarashtra shall not go to the summit of Meru but further. If you know of any other loftier world of great renown and felicity, speak to me of it, for even there shall I go."

Gautama said, "If you go to the forests that belong to Narada, which he holds dear, which are adorned with rare flowers, which echo with the melodious songs of the prince of Kinnaras, and which are the eternal abode of Gandharvas and Apsaras, I shall follow you there and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "They who never beg for alms, they who cultivate music and dancing, and always rove about in joy, attain to such realms. Rishi, I shall repair to a world that is higher. Dhritarashtra will not have to go to Narada vana!"

Gautama said, "If you go to that realm where the Uttara-Kurus blaze in beauty and pass their days in gladness, O king, in the company of the very Devas; where those beings that have their origin in fire, those that have their origin in water, and those that come from mountains, dwell in bliss, and where Sakra rains down the fruition of every wish, and where women live in perfect freedom, unrestrained by rules of any kind regulating them, and where there is no jealousy between the sexes—even there will I come and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Men that are free from desire for all things of pleasure, that abstain from meat, that never take up the rod of chastisement, and never inflict the least harm on creatures chala and achala, mobile and unmoving, that have made themselves the soul of all creatures, that are entirely free from ego, that have cast off attachments of every kind, that

regard gain and loss, as also praise and blame, as equal—only those men, O Maharishi, attain to such realms. I shall find a higher world. Dhritarashtra shall not go the world of the Uttara-Kurus."

Gautama said, "Next to these blaze in beauty those eternal regions, redolent with divine fragrance, which are free from passions of every kind and that are without sorrow. These are the realms the Lord Soma. If you go even to Somaloka, I will thence and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Men that always make gifts without receiving any in return, who never accept any service from others, who own nothing which they cannot give to a deserving person, who are hospitable to all creatures, who are inclined to show grace to everyone, who have forgiving dispositions, who never speak ill of others, who protect all creatures by throwing over them the shroud of compassion, and who are always righteous in their conduct—only such men, O great Rishi, attain to Soma's world. I will find a higher realm. Dhritarashtra shall not go to Somaloka."

Gautama said, "Above those blaze in beauty other worlds that are eternal, free from passion and darkness and sorrow, and that lie at the feet of the sun god. If you go even to Suryaloka, I will come there and force you to yield up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Men who are attentive to the study of the Vedas, are devoted to the service of their gurus, who perform tapasya and keep stern vratas, who are firm in truth, who never utter a word that hints of disobedience or enmity towards their preceptors, who are always alert, and ever ready in their service to elders and teachers—they go, great Rishi, to such worlds, they that are pure, have purified souls, are of restrained speech, that are unwavering in dharma, and masters of the Vedas. But I shall attain to a higher world. Verily, Dhritarashtra shall not go to Suryaloka."

Gautama said, "Beyond Surya, are the eternal regions that blaze with beauty, that are supremely fragrant, are free from passion, and that are free from every sorrow. They are the abode of the Mahatman Lord Varuna. If you go even there, I will follow you and force you to yield up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Men who worship the Devas by keeping the Chaturmasya vrata, who perform a hundred and ten sacrifices, that pour libations every day on their sacred fire with devotion and faith for three

years in perfect accord with the laws declared in the Vedas, bear without flinching the burden of all dharma, walk steadily along the way trodden by the righteous, that immaculately sustain the conduct followed men of dharma—only they find such realms. I shall find a higher world. Dhritarashtra shall not go to the world of Varuna."

Gautama said, "Above them are the regions of Indra of awesome tejas, worlds free from passion and sorrow, which are difficult of access and coveted by all men. Even if you attain to Indraloka, I will come there and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "He who lives for a hundred years, who is imbued with heroism, who studies the Vedas, and who performs sacrifices with devotion—such men attain to the world of Sakra. I shall find a higher world. Dhritarashtra shall not go to Indraloka."

Gautama said, "Above Indra's swargas are the lokas of the Prajapatis, worlds of transcendent felicity abounding in every ecstasy, and where sorrow never comes. Belonging to those powerful ones from whom all creation has sprung, they are coveted by all souls. Even if you go there, I will follow you and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "Kings that have performed the Avabhrita Snana, the concluding ablution upon the completion of the Rajasuya sacrifice, that are endowed with righteous souls, that have protected their subjects perfectly, and that have washed their limbs with sanctified water upon the completion of the Aswamedha yagna, repair to such realms. Dhritarashtra shall not go there."

Gautama said, "Next to those, blaze the eternal realms of sublime redolence, free from passion, and transcending all sorrow. That is Goloka, the world of kine, difficult of attainment, where no grief or oppression goes. Even if you gain Goloka, I will come there and force you to yield up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "He who, owning thousand kine, gives away a hundred kine every year, or owning a hundred kine gives away ten every year, or owning only ten or even five kine gives away one cow, and they who attain to a mature old age practising the vows of brahmacharya all their days, who obey all the declarations of the Vedas, and who, with great tejas of spirit, betake themselves to pilgrimages to sacred waters and shrines, dwell in felicity in the world of kine. They who journey to Prabhasa and Manasa, the lakes of Pushkara, the large lake Mahatsara, the sacred forests

of Naimisa, Bahuda, Karatoya, Ganga, Gayasiras, Vipasa, Sthulavaluka, Krishna, the five rivers of the Punjab, the vast lake Mahahrada, Gomati, Kausiki, Champa, Saraswati, Drisadwati and Yamuna—indeed, those illustrious Brahmanas, steadfast in the observance of vows, who go to these sacred waters, attain to the regions of which you speak. Endowed with divine bodies and adorned with celestial garlands those blessed ones, always exuding the most ethereal fragrances, repair to those regions of joy and gladness. Dhritarashtra shall not go there."

Gautama said, "Beyond these, are worlds where there is no fear of the least cold or heat, no hunger, no thirst, no pain, no sorrow, no joy, no one that is agreeable or disagreeable, no friend, and no enemy; where decrepitude and death are not, and where there is neither righteousness nor sin. Going even to that realm which is freed from every passion, which wells with equable happiness, and where there is wisdom and the guna of only sattva—verily, even if you attain to sacred Brahmaloka, I will come there and force you to give up this elephant to me."

Dhritarashtra said, "They who are freed from all attachments, who are possessed of cleansed souls, who are steady in the observance of the foremost vows, who are devoted to the yoga that depends on stilling the mind, and who have in this life attained to the happiness of swarga—those wedded to the sattva guna—attain to the sacred world of Brahma. O Maharishi, you will not find Dhritarashtra there."

Gautama said, "Where the best of rathantaras is sung, where altars are strewn with sacred kusa blades, for the performance of Pundarika sacrifices, there where Soma-drinking Brahmanas go on chariots drawn by supernal steeds—if you go even thence, I will come there and force you to give up this elephant."

Now Gautama paused, then, a smile dawning on his lustrous face, said, "I believe that you are none other than the slayer of Vritra, the god who has performed a hundred sacrifices, and are ranging through all the mandalas of the universe. I hope I have not, through the weakness of my mind, not recognising you, committed any fault by anything that I have said to you."

The god of a hundred sacrifices said, "I am Maghavat. I came to the world of men to seize this elephant. I bow to you. Do you command me. I shall accomplish all that you may be pleased to ask."

Gautama said, "Do you give me, O Devaraja, this white elephant that is so young, for he is only ten years of age. I have brought him up as a child of

my own. Dwelling in these forest, so has grown under my eye and has been a dear companion to me. Do you free my child that you have seized and wish to drag away."

Indra of a hundred sacrifices said, "This elephant that has been a son to you, O Brahmanottama, comes to you looking wistfully at you. Behold, he sniffs your feet with his trunk. My salutations to you. Do you pray for my welfare."

Gautama said, "King of the Devas, I do always think of your good. I always offer you worship. Do you also, O Sakra, bestow your blessings on me. Given by you, I accept this elephant."

Indra said, "Amongst all those greatest Mahatman Rishis that firmly adhere to truth and that have the Vedas planted in their heart, you alone have been able to recognise me. And for this I am exceedingly pleased with you. Do you, therefore, O Brahmana, come with me quickly, along with this your son. You deserve to attain to diverse regions of great felicity without the delay of even a single day."

Having said these words, the Vajradharin set Gautama before him, along with his son, that white elephant, and flew up into swarga, which is difficult of attainment by even the righteous.

He who would listen to this Itihasa every day or would recite it, restraining his senses the while, attains to Brahmaloka even as Gautama did.'"

CANTO 103

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have discoursed to us on diverse kinds of gift, on the tranquillity of the soul, on Truth, on compassion, on contentment with one's wedded wife, and the merits of dakshina. It is known to you, Pitamaha, that there is nothing to equal tapasya to acquire punya. It befits you now to expound to me what constitutes the highest tapasya.'

Bhishma says, 'Yudhishtira, one attains to a realm of felicity that corresponds to the kind of penances that one undertakes. I hold, O son of Kunti, that there is no penance that is superior to fasting, abstaining from food. Listen to the ancient narrative of the discourse between Bhagiratha and the illustrious Brahma.

I have heard, O Bhaarata, that Bhagiratha attained to that world which transcends that of the Devas, of kine and of the Rishis. Seeing this, O monarch, the Pitamaha Brahma said to Bhagiratha, "How, O Bhagiratha, have you attained to this world that is so difficult of attainment? Not the Devas, or Gandharvas, or Manavas succeed in coming here without having practised the severest austerities. How have you attained to this realm?"

Bhagiratha said, "I used to make gifts of hundreds of thousands of gold coins to Brahmanas, observing the Brahmacharya vrata all the while, but it is not through the punya of those gifts, O Greatest, that I have attained to this world. I performed the Ekaratra sacrifice ten times, and the Pancharatra yagna as many times. The Ekadasaratra I performed eleven times. The great sacrifice of Jyotishtoma I did a hundred times. It is not, however, through the merits of those sacrifices that I have attained to this world of felicity.

For a hundred years, I lived continuously beside the holy Jahnavi, all the while practising the severest austerities. There I made gifts to Brahmanas of thousands of male and female slaves. By the side of the Pushkara lakes, I gave dakshina to the Brahmanas, a hundred thousand times, of a hundred thousand steeds, and two hundred thousand kine. I also gave away a thousand damsels of great beauty, each adorned with golden moons, and sixty thousand more decked with opulent ornaments of pure gold. It is not, however, through the punya of those deeds that I have succeeded in attaining to these realms.

O Lord of the universe, performing those sacrifices known as Gosava, I gave away ten arbudas of kine, giving each Brahmana ten kine, each one with her calf, and each of whom yielded milk at the time, and with each of whom were given a vessel of gold and one of white brass for milking her. Performing many Soma sacrifices, I gave away to each Brahmana ten cows each of whom yielded milk, and each of whom had brought forth only her first calf, besides giving gifts to them of hundreds of Rohini cows. I also gave away to Brahmanas twice ten prayutas of other kine, all milk yielding. It is not through the merit of those gifts, O Brahma, that I have succeeded in attaining to this realm of bliss.

I also gave away a hundred thousand horses of the Balhika breed, all white of complexion, and adorned with garlands of gold. It is not, however, through the merits of those gifts that I have attained to this exalted world. I gave away eight crores of golden coins to Brahmanas, and then another ten crores also, at every yagna that I performed. It is not, however, through the merits of those that I have attained to this region of felicity.

I also gave away ten and then seven crores of fine steeds, O Grandsire, each of green complexion, each having ears that were dark, and each adorned with garlands of gold. I also gave away ten and seven thousand elephants of huge size, of tusks as big as ploughares, each having the whorls on its body which are called padmas, and each adorned with garlands of gold. I gave away ten thousand chariots, Pitamaha, made entirely of gold, and which were adorned with diverse golden ornaments. I also gave away seven thousand other chariots with magnificent horses yoked. All the horses were caparisoned in golden adornments. Those rathas represented the dakshinas of a sacrifice and were of exactly that kind indicated in the Vedas.

At the ten great Vajapeya yagnas that I performed, I gave away a thousand horses, each as powerful as Indra himself, judged by their prowess and the sacrifices they had performed. Spending a vast sum of money, O Brahma, and performing eight Rajasuya sacrifices, I gave away to the Brahmanas that officiated at them a thousand kings and their kingdoms, their necks draped with garlands of gold, after having vanquished all those Kshatriyas in battle. It is not, however, through the merits of those deeds that I have attained to this transcendent realm.

At those sacrifices, O Lord of the universe, the dakshina that flowed from me was as copious as the stream of Ganga herself. To each Brahmana I gave two thousand elephants decked with gold, as many horses caparisoned with golden ornaments, and a hundred villages of the best kind. Verily, I gave these to each Brahmana three times in succession. Living in tapasya, subsisting on a frugal diet, adopting tranquillity of mind, and restraining my speech, I dwelt for a long time on the breast of Himavat by the side of that Ganga whose irresistible cataract as she fell from heaven Mahadeva bore on his head, and contained. It is not through the merit of these pious observances, O Pitamaha, that I have attained to this region.

Casting the Sami twig, I adored the gods in myriads of such sacrifices as are completed in a single day, and such others as take twelve days for their completion, and others still as can be completed in three and ten days, besides many Pundarikas. I have not attained to this rarest realm through the punya of any of those sacrifices.

I gave Brahmanas eight thousand white bulls, each graced with a magnificent hump, and each having one of its horns covered with gold. I also gave them beautiful wives whose necks were adorned with chains of gold. I also gave away great heaps of gold and wealth of every other kind. Verily, I gave away hillocks of gemstones and other precious things. Villages in thousands teeming with wealth and corn, also I gave. With all my senses about me, I gave away to the Brahmanas a hundred thousand cows, each of whom had brought forth only her first calf, at the many great sacrifices I performed. It is not, however, through the merits of those deeds that I have attained to this supreme realm.

I adored the Devas in a sacrifice that is completed in eleven days. Twice I worshipped them in sacrifices that are completed in twelve days. I adored them also, many a time, in Aswamedha yagnas. Six and ten times I

performed the Arkayana yagna. It is not through the punya of those that I have attained to this condition.

I also gave to each Brahmana a forest of golden kanchana trees extending for a yojana on every side, and with each tree hung with jewellery and gems of every kind. It is not through the merits of that karma that I have attained to this region. For thirty years, with my heart perfectly free from anger, I observed the Turayana vrata that bestows the most superior merit, and every day gave away to Brahmanas nine hundred kine. Lord of the universe, every one of those was a Rohini cow, and yielded milk at the time I gave them away. It is not through the merits of those deeds, O Brahma, that I have attained to this world.

I worshipped thirty fires every day, Pitamaha. I adored the Devas in eight sacrifices in which the fat of all species of animals was poured on the fire. I adored them with seven sacrifices in which the fat of humans was poured on the fire. I worshipped them in a thousand and twenty-eight Viswajita yagnas. It is not through the merits of those sacrifices, O Lord of all the Gods, that I have attained to this realm.

On the banks of the Sarayu and the Bahuda and Ganga, as also in the forest of Naimisa, I gave away millions of kine to the best Brahmanas. It is not through the merits of those gifts that I have attained to this region.

Indra knew about the vow of upavasa, fasting; he, however, kept it a secret. Sukra, of Bhrigu's line, gained knowledge of it with atmadrishti, spiritual vision, he acquired through tapasya. Blazing with tejas as he does, it is Usanas who first made upavasa known to the universe. I observed that vrata, O boon-giving Lord! When I accomplished that highest vow, the Brahmanas all became gratified with me. A thousand Rishis came to me, and all of them said, 'Do you, Bhagiratha, attain to Brahmaloka!' It is only from keeping upavasa, the vow of fasting, that I succeeded in attaining to this world of the highest felicity. There is no doubt in this, O Lord.

Asked by you, the Supreme Ordainer of all things, I have duly expounded the punya that accrues from fasting. In my opinion, there is no penance higher than fasting. I swear this to you, O Greatest of all the Gods. Be you propitious to me."

Having said all this, King Bhagiratha was honoured by Brahma himself with every due rite. Do you, therefore, Yudhishtira, observe upavasa, the vow of fasting and worship the Brahmanas every day. The blessing uttered by Brahmanas can accomplish everything, both here and hereafter. Indeed,

the Brahmanas should ever be gratified with gifts of clothes, food and fine white kine, and excellent homes and mansions. The very Devas should gratify the Brahmanas. Freeing yourself from greed, practise this vow of the most superior punya that is not known to all.'"

CANTO 104

"Yudhishtira says, 'Man, it is said, is endowed with a span of life which extends for a hundred years, and with energy and strength that are considerable. Why then, Pitamaha, do humans die even when they are very young? By what does a man become long-lived, and by what is his life shortened? Through what does a man acquire the fame that rests upon great achievements? Through what does one attain to wealth and prosperity? Is it by tapasya, or brahmacharya, or the silent japa of sacred mantras, or with the help of herbs and drugs? Is it by his actions, or speech? Explain to me this, O Grandsire!'

Bhishma says, 'I shall tell you what you ask. Indeed, I will tell you what the reason is, for which one becomes short-lived, and the reason for which one is blessed with a long life. I will also explain to you the reason for which one succeeds in acquiring the fame that rests on great achievements, and the reason for which one succeeds in acquiring wealth and prosperity. Indeed, I shall enlighten you about the manner in which a man must live in order to be given all that is beneficial to him.

It is by vyavahara, conduct, that one acquires longevity, and it is by vyavahara, also, that one acquires wealth and prosperity. Indeed, it is through one's conduct that one acquires the fame that rests upon great achievements, both here and hereafter.

The man whose conduct is improper or evil never has a long life. All creatures become afraid of such a man and are oppressed by him. If, therefore, one wishes one's own advancement and prosperity, one should, in this world, betake oneself to conduct that is proper and good. Good conduct

succeeds in dispelling the inauspiciousness and misery of even one that is sinful. Dharma has vyavahara for its indication. They that are good and righteous are so because of the neeti they follow. The indications, again, of good neeti are afforded by the actions of those that are good and righteous. People esteem that man who acts righteously and who does good even if they only hear of him without actually seeing him.

They that are disbelievers, professed atheists, they that are without all karma, they that are disobedient to preceptors and transgress the injunctions of the scriptures, they that are unacquainted with and, so, unobservant of duties, and they that are of evil conduct, become short-lived. They that are of improper behaviour, they that transgress all restraints, they that are unscrupulous in sexual congress, become short-lived here and find hell for themselves hereafter.

Those men live for a hundred years who, though without any accomplishments, betake themselves to propriety and righteousness of neeti and thus become endowed with faith and are freed from malice. He that is free from anger, who is truthful in speech, who never does any injury to any creature in the universe, who is without malice, crookedness and insincerity, succeeds in living for a hundred years. He who always breaks little clods of earth, or tears up the grass that grows under his feet, or bites his nails off with his teeth, or is always impure, or very restless, never succeeds in living long.

One should wake from sleep at the hour known as the Brahma muhurta and then think of both dharma and artha. Getting out of bed, one should wash one's face and rinse one's mouth in achamana, and joining one's hands in an attitude of reverence, say the morning prayers. In this way, also, when dusk falls, should one say one's evening prayers, sandhya vandana, not speaking to anyone at the time.

One should never look at the rising sun, or at the setting sun. Nor should one look at the sun when he is in eclipse; nor at his image in the water; nor at midday when he is at his zenith. The Rishis, adoring the two sandhyas, the twilights of dawn and dusk, with regularity, succeeded in attaining longevity. Hence, one should, restraining speech, say one's prayers regularly at the two sandhyas.

As for Brahmanas that do not say their sandhya vandana at the two twilights, a righteous king should set them to such tasks as are ordained for Sudras. Men of every varna should never have sexual congress with the

wives of others. There is nothing that shortens life so effectually as sexual congress with other men's wives. For as many thousands of years shall the adulterer have to live in hell as the number of pores on the bodies of the women with whom he commits the sin.

One should dress one's hair, apply kohl to one's eyes, and clean one's teeth, as also worship the Devas, all in the forenoon. One should not look at urine or faeces, or tread on it or touch it with one's feet. One should not set out on a journey at dawn, or at midday, or in the evening sandhya, or with an unknown companion, or with a Sudra, or alone. While travelling along a road, one should, standing aside, always make way for a Brahmana, for kine, for kings, for an old man, for one who is carrying a burden, for a woman quick with child, or for a weak person.

When one comes upon a large tree that is familiar and known to be auspicious, one should walk around it in pradakshina. One should also, coming to an intersection where four roads meet, walk around it before pursuing one's journey. At midday, or at midnight, or at night in general, or at the two sandhyas, one should not go to charusars, places where four roads meet. One should never wear sandals or clothes that have been worn by another.

One should always observe the vow of brahmacharya, and should never cross one's legs. One should observe the vow of brahmacharya on the day of the new moon, as also on that of the full moon, as also on the eighth lunar day of both fortnights. One should never eat the flesh of animals not killed in sacrifice. One should never eat the flesh from the back of an animal. One should avoid censuring and calumniating others, as also all other kinds of deceitful behaviour.

One should never pierce others with word shafts. Indeed, one should never utter any cruel speech. One should never accept a gift from a man who is low and vulgar. One should never utter such words as trouble others or are inauspicious or are sinful. Wordy arrows can fly from the mouth. Pierced by them, the victim grieves day and night. The man of wisdom never looses them for they pierce the very vitals of others. A forest, pierced with shafts or cut down with the axe, grows again. The man, however, who is pierced with words unwisely spoken, becomes the victim of wounds that fester and lead to death. Barbed arrows and nalikas and broad-headed shafts can be extracted from the body. Arrows of words, however, cannot be removed for they lie embedded in the very heart.

One should not taunt a person that is defective of a limb or who has a limb in excess, or one that is without learning, or one who is miserable, or one that is ugly or poor, or one that is without strength. One should avoid atheism, calumny against the Vedas, censuring the Devas, malice, pride, arrogance and harshness. One should not, in wrath, take up the rod of chastisement for laying it upon another. Only the son or the pupil, it has been said, may be mildly punished, for instruction.

One should not speak ill of Brahmanas; nor should one point at the stars with one's fingers. If asked, one should not say what the lunation is on a particular day. By telling it, one's life is shortened. Having answered calls of nature or having walked on a public road, one should wash one's feet. One should also wash one's feet before sitting down to recite the Vedas or to eat. These are the three things which are regarded as pure and sacred by the gods and fit for the Brahmana's use—that which has no impurity, that which has been washed in water, and that which has been well spoken of.

One should never cook samyava, krisara, mamsa, sashakuli and payasa for oneself. Whenever cooked, these should be offered to the Devas. Every day one must attend to one's sacred fire. One should give alms every day. One should, restraining speech the while, clean one's teeth with the neem twig. One should never be in bed when the sun is up. If one fails any day to be up with the sun, one should perform an expiation. Rising from bed, one should first salute one's parents, and preceptors, or other elders deserving of respect. By so doing, one attains to long life. The neem twig should be thrown away when done with, and a new one should be used every day.

One should eat only such food as is not forbidden in the scriptures, and abstain from food of every kind on days of the new and full moon. One should, with senses restrained, answer calls of nature, facing the north. One should not worship the Devas without having first cleaned one's teeth and rinsed one's mouth. Without worshipping the gods, one should never go to meet anyone save one's guru, or one old in years, or a righteous man, or a wise one.

They that are wise should never see themselves in an unpolished or dirty mirror. One should never have sexual congress with an unknown woman or with a pregnant one. One should never sleep with the head pointing towards the north or the west. One should not lie upon a bed that is broken or rickety. One should not sleep on a bed without having examined it first with a light. One should not sleep on a bed with anyone beside one.

One should never sleep in a transverse direction. One should never make a compact with atheists or do anything with them.

One should never drag a seat with one's foot and then sit on it.

One should never bathe naked, or at night. An intelligent man should never suffer his limbs to be rubbed or pressed after bathing. He should never smear lotions upon his body without having first bathed. Having bathed, one should never wave one's cloth in the air to dry it. One should never wear wet clothes; never remove from one's body the garlands of flowers one may wear. Nor should one wear such garlands over one's outer garments.

One should never even talk to a woman during her period. One should not answer a call of nature in a field where crops are grown, or in a place too near an inhabited village. One should never answer a call of nature in a water body of any kind. One should first wash one's mouth thrice with water before eating. Having finished one's meal, one should wash one's mouth thrice with water, and then twice again.

One should eat, with face turned eastwards, silently, and without finding fault with the food. One should always leave a remnant of the food that is set before one. Having finished one's meal, one should touch fire in one's mind. If one eats with one's face turned eastwards, one is blessed with longevity. By eating facing southwards, one acquires great fame. By eating facing the west, one acquires great wealth. By eating with face turned northwards, one becomes truthful in speech.

Having finished one's meal, one should wash one's mouth and face with water. Similarly, all the limbs, the navel, and the palms of the hands should be washed with water. One should never seat oneself upon husk of corn, or upon hair, or upon ashes, or bones. One should, on no account, use the water that has been used by another to wash or bathe.

One should always perform the homa for propitiating the Devas, and recite the Savitri mantra. One should always eat while seated. One should never eat while standing or walking. One should never answer a call of nature in a standing posture. One should never answer a call of nature on ashes or in a cow-pen. One should wash one's feet before sitting down to one's meal. One should never sit or lie down to sleep with wet feet. He who sits down to his meal after having washed his feet, lives for a hundred years.

One should never touch three things of great energy, without purifying oneself—fire, a cow, or a Brahmana. By observing this rule, one acquires longevity. One should not, while impure, cast one's gaze upon three things of great energy—the sun, the moon and the stars.

The life-breaths of a young man travel upwards when an old and venerable person comes to his home. He gets them back by standing up and properly saluting the guest. Old men should always be saluted. One should offer them seats with one's own hand. After the elder has taken his seat, one should sit down oneself and remain with hands joined in reverence. When an old man walks along a road, one should always follow him and never walk ahead.

One should never sit on a torn or broken chair. One should throw away a broken vessel of white brass, never using it again. One should never eat without a piece of upper garment clothing one's body. One should never bathe naked. One should never sleep naked. One should never so much as touch the remains on other people's dishes and plates after they have eaten.

One should never, while unclean, touch another's head, for it is said in the scriptures that the life-breaths are all concentrated in the head. One should never strike another on the head or seize him by the hair. One should not join one's hands together to scratch one's head. One should not, while bathing, repeatedly dip one's head in water. By doing so, one shortens one's life. He who has bathed by dipping his head in water should not, afterwards, apply oil to any part of his body. One should never eat a meal without eating some sesame.

One should never teach the Vedas or any scriptures at a time before bathing. Nor should one study while one is not clean. When a storm rises or a malodour fills the air, one should never think of the Vedas. Those conversant with ancient history recite a gatha sung by Yama in days of old. He that runs while unclean or studies the Vedas, indeed, that regenerate Brahman who studies the Vedas at forbidden times, loses his Vedas and shortens his life. Hence, one should never study the Vedas with attention at forbidden hours.

They who answer a call of nature, with their face towards the sun, or towards a blazing fire, or towards a cow, or towards a Brahmana, or on the road, become short-lived. At daytime both calls of nature should be answered while facing north. At night, those calls should be answered facing the south. By doing this, a man does not shorten his life. He that

wishes to live long should never disrespect or insult any of these three, however weak or emaciated they may appear to be—a Brahmana, a Kshatriya and a snake. All three are endowed with virulent poison. The snake, if angry, burns up the victim with only a glance of its eyes. The Kshatriya also, if angry, consumes the object of his wrath with his tejas as soon as he looks at him. The Brahmana, stronger than any of these two, destroys not only the object of his anger but his whole race as well, not through his eyes alone but even with a thought. The man of wisdom should, therefore, tend to these three with care.

One should never engage in any disputation with one's preceptor. O Yudhishtira, if the guru becomes angry, he should always be pacified by every honourable means. Even if the guru happens to be entirely wrong, one should still follow and honour him. Without doubt, calumny against the preceptor always consumes the lives of those that utter them.

A man should always answer a call of nature in a place at some remove from his home. He should wash his feet at a distance from his home, and also always throw away the remnants of his food at a remove from his home. Truly, he who desires his own good should do all these.

One should not wear garlands of red flowers. They who are possessed of wisdom should wear garlands of flowers that are white in hue. Rejecting the lotus and the lily, O you of great might, one may wear on one's head, however, a flower that is red, even if it be a water bloom. A garland of gold can never become impure. After one has bathed, O king, one should use perfumes mixed with water. One should never wear one's upper garment to cover the lower limbs or the lower garments to cover the upper ones. Nor should one wear clothes worn by another. One should not, again, wear a piece of cloth that has not its proper border. When one goes to bed, O king, one should wear a different cloth. When making a journey also, one should wear a different cloth. So also, when worshipping the gods, one should wear a different cloth.

The man of intelligence should smear his limbs with unguents made of priyangu, chandana, bilwa, tagara and kesara. In observing a fast, one should first purify oneself by bathing, and adorn one's person with ornaments and lotions. One should always abstain from sexual congress on days of the full moon and the new moon.

One should never, O monarch, eat off the same plate with another even if that other happens to be of one's own or equal rank. Nor should one ever

eat any food that has been prepared by a woman in her period. One should never eat any food, or drink any drink whose essence has been removed. Nor should one eat anything without giving a portion to persons that wistfully gaze at the food that one has.

The man of intelligence should never sit close to one that is impure. Nor should one sit close to persons that are of burning piety. All food that is forbidden in ritual acts should never be eaten, even on other occasions. The fruits of the sacred fig tree and the banyan, as also the leaves of the sun hemp, and the fruits of the athi tree should never be eaten by one who is desirous of his own good. The flesh of goats, of cows and the peacock, should never be eaten. One should also abstain from dried flesh and all meat that is stale. The man of intelligence should never eat any salt, by taking it up with his hand. Nor should he eat curds and the flour of fried barley at night. One should abstain from the meat of animals not slain in sacrifices.

One should, with concentrated attention, eat once in the morning and once in the evening, abstaining entirely from all food during the interim. One should never eat any food in which one finds a hair. Nor should one eat at the sraddha of an enemy. One should eat silently; one should never eat without covering one's person with an upper garment, and without sitting down. One should never eat any food placing it on the bare ground. One should never eat except in a sitting posture. One should never make any noise while eating.

The man of intelligence should first offer water and then food to anyone that has become his guest, and after having served the guest thus, should then sit down himself to his meal. He who sits down to dine in a line with friends and himself eats any food without giving a portion thereof to his friends, is said to eat poison. As for water and payasa and flour of fried barley and curds and ghee and honey, one should never, after drinking or eating these, offer the leftovers to others.

One should never, O king of men, eat any food doubtingly. One who wishes for food should never drink curd at the end of a meal. After the meal is finished, one should wash one's mouth and face with the right hand only, and taking a little water should then dip the toe of one's right foot in it. After washing, he should touch the crown of his head with his right hand. With attention, he should next touch fire. The man who knows how to observe all these injunctions with care, succeeds in attaining to the foremost position among his kinsmen.

After finishing his meal, a man should wash his nose and eyes and ears and navel and both hands with water. He should not, however, keep his hands wet but dry them. Between the tip and the root of the thumb is situated the sacred tirtha known as the Brahma-tirtha. On the back of the little finger, it is said, is the Deva-tirtha. The intervening space between the thumb and the forefinger, O Bhaarata, should be used for discharging the Pitri rites, after touching water according to the law.

One should never speak ill of others. Nor should one ever utter anything that is at all disagreeable. The man that desires his own good should never seek to provoke the wrath of others upon himself. One should never seek to converse with a person who has fallen away from his varna. The very sight of such a person should be avoided. One should never come into any manner of contact with a fallen person. By avoiding such contact, one succeeds in attaining to a long life. One should never indulge in sexual congress during the day. Nor should one have congress with a virgin, or with a prostitute or with a barren woman. One should never have congress with a woman who has not bathed after her period. By avoiding these, a man attains to a long life.

After washing the several limbs directed in religious rituals, one should wash one's mouth thrice, and again twice more. By doing this, one becomes pure and fit to perform sacred karmas. The several organs of sense should each be washed once, and water should also be sprinkled over the whole body. Having done this, one should perform the worship of the Pitris and the Devas, according to the laws of the Vedas.

Listen to me, O you of Kuru's race, as I tell you what purification is cleansing and beneficial for a Brahmana. Before beginning to eat and after finishing the meal, and in all karmas requiring purification, the Brahmana should perform the achamana with water placed on the Brahma-tirtha. After ejecting any residual matter from the throat and spitting, he should wash his mouth before he can become pure.

A kinsman who happens to be old, or a friend who happens to be poor, should be kept in his house and his comforts looked after as if he were a member of the family. By doing this, one succeeds in acquiring both fame and long life. The establishment of pigeons in one's house is fraught with blessedness, as also of parrots both male and female. If female, these taken to one's home will dispel misfortune. The same is the case with cockroaches. If fireflies, vultures, wood-pigeons or bees enter a house or

seek residence in it, karmas of propitiating the Devas should be performed. These are creatures of evil omen, as also ospreys.

One should never divulge the secrets of high-souled men, Mahatmans; one should never have sexual congress with a forbidden woman. Nor should one ever have such congress with the wife of a king or with women that are the friends of queens. One should never become intimate with physicians, or with children, or with persons that are old, or with one's servants, O Yudhishtira. One should always provide for friends, for Brahmanas, and for such as seek one's protection. By doing this, O king, one acquires a long life.

The man of wisdom should live in a house that has been constructed with the help of a Brahmana and a skilled artisan, if indeed, O king, the man desires his own welfare. One should not sleep during the evening twilight. Nor should one study at such an hour, any branch of knowledge. The man of intelligence should never eat at that sandhya. By avoiding these one acquires a long life. One should never perform any ritual in honour of the Pitris at night. One should not adorn one's person after finishing one's meal. One should bathe at night, if one desires one's own advancement. One should also, O Bhaarata, always abstain from the flour of fried barley at night.

The leftovers of food and drink, as also the flowers with which one has worshipped the deities, should never be used again. Inviting a guest at night, one should never, with excessive courtesy, force him to eat to the point of being full. Nor should one eat oneself to the point of fullness, at night. One should not kill a bird to eat, especially after having fed it.

A wise man should marry a virgin born into a high family, endowed with auspicious indications, and of full age. Begetting children upon her and thus perpetuating his race, he should make his sons over to a good preceptor in order to acquire general knowledge, O Bhaarata, as also a knowledge of the special customs of the family. The daughters that one may beget should be bestowed upon youths of respectable families, that are again possessed of intelligence. Sons should also be established and a portion of the family inheritance given to them, O Bhaarata, as their provision.

One should bathe by dipping one's head in water before one sits down to perform any sraddha in honour of the Pitris or the Devas. One should never perform a sraddha under the constellation of one's birth. No sraddha

should be performed under any of the Bhadrapadas, prior or later, nor under the Krittika nakshatra, O Bhaarata. The sraddha should never be performed under any of the nakshatras that are regarded as fierce, such as Aslesha, or any of those that, upon calculation, seem to be hostile. Indeed, in this respect, all the nakshatras should be avoided which are forbidden in treatises on astrology.

One should sit facing either the east or the north while being shaved by a barber. By so doing, O great king, one acquires a long life. One should never indulge in either the criticism of others or self-reproach, for it is said that all calumny is sinful, whether of others or of oneself.

In marriage, one should avoid a woman that is without any limb. Even a virgin, if such, must also be avoided. A woman of the same pravara should also be avoided; as also one that has any bodily defect; as also one that has been born in the vamsa to which one's mother belongs.

A wise man should never have sexual congress with a woman who is old, or one that has abandoned grihasta for vanaprastha, or one that is true to her husband, or one whose organs of generation are not healthy or well-formed. You must not to marry a woman of a yellow complexion, or one afflicted with leprosy, or one born into a family in which there has been epilepsy, or one that is low in birth and habits, or one that is born in a family in which the disease called switra, leprosy, has ever appeared, or one belonging by birth to a vamsa in which there are early deaths.

Only that young woman who is blessed with auspicious limbs and indications on her person, and who is accomplished in diverse ways, who is agreeable and good-looking, should you marry. One should marry, O Yudhishtira, into a family that is higher or at least equal to one's own. He who desires his own prosperity should never marry a woman of an inferior varna or one who has fallen away from the order of her birth.

Carefully lighting the fire, one should accomplish all those karmas which have been ordained and declared in the Vedas or by the Brahmanas. One should never seek to injure women. Wives should always be protected. Malice always shortens life. Hence, one should always abstain from cherishing malice. Sleep during the day shortens life. To sleep after the sun has risen shortens life. They who sleep at any of the twilights, or at nightfall or who go to sleep in a state of impurity, have their lives shortened. Adultery always shortens life. One should not remain without bathing after being shaved.

One should, O Bhaarata, scrupulously abstain from studying or reciting the Vedas, and eating, and bathing, at eventide. When the evening sandhya comes, one should collect one's senses for dhyana, meditation, in stillness. One should, O king, bathe and then worship the Brahmanas. Indeed, one should bathe before worshipping the Devas and reverentially saluting the guru. One should never go to a sacrifice unless invited. Indeed, one may go there without an invitation if one wishes merely to see how the sacrifice is conducted. If one goes to a sacrifice for any other purpose without an invitation and if one does not, on that account, receive proper worship from the sacrificer, one's life is shortened.

One should never go alone on a journey to foreign parts. Nor should one ever travel alone anywhere at night. Before evening comes, one should return to one's home and remain within.

One should always obey the commands of one's mother and father and preceptor, without at all judging whether those commands are beneficial or otherwise. One should attend with great care to the Vedas and to the science of arms. Do then, O king, as carefully attend to riding an elephant, a horse and a war-chariot. The man who attends to these with care succeeds in attaining to happiness. Such a king succeeds in becoming unconquerable by his enemies, and holds sway over his servants and kinsmen without any of them being able to have the better of him. The king that attains to such a position and that carefully attends to the dharma of protecting his subjects, never has to incur any loss.

You should acquire, O Rajan, the science of reasoning, as also the science of words, the science of the Gandharvas, and the four and sixty branches of knowledge known by the name kala, the arts. Every day hear the Puranas and the Itihasas and all the other sacred lore that exists, as also the life-stories of all great Mahatmans.

When your wife has her period, you should never have congress with her, nor even summon her for conversation. The man endowed with wisdom may accept her companionship on the fourth day after her period ends and she has the bath of purification. If one indulges in congress on the fifth day from the first appearance of the time of fertility, one begets a daughter. By indulging in congress on the sixth day, one has a son. The man of wisdom should, in the matter of sexual congress, know this rule about odd and even days.

Kinsmen and relatives by marriage and friends should all be treated with respect. One should, according to the best of one's power, adore the gods with yagnas, giving away different kinds of offerings as sacrificial dakshina. After the time ordained for grihastasrama, the domestic life, has passed, one should, O king, enter the life of a vanaprastha, a forest recluse.

I have thus told you all the indications, in brief, of men who succeed in living long. What remains untold you should hear from the mouths of men well-versed in the three Vedas, O Yudhishtira. You should know that pravritti, conduct, is the root of prosperity. Conduct is the enhancer of fame. It is vyavahara that prolongs life. It is conduct that destroys all evils. Vyavahara has been said to be superior to all the branches of knowledge. It is conduct that begets dharma, and it is righteousness that lengthens life.

Conduct is bestows kirti, fame, ayu, long life, and swarga, heaven. Vyavahara is the most efficacious rite of propitiating the deities to have auspiciousness of every kind. The Self-born Brahma himself has said that one should show compassion to all orders of men.'"

CANTO 105

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, O greatest of the Bharatas, how the eldest brother should behave towards his younger brothers and how the younger brothers towards their eldest brother.'

Bhishma says, 'Do you, O son, always behave towards your younger brothers as their eldest brother should. You are always the eldest of all these your brothers. That high conduct which a guru should always adopt towards his sishyas should you adopt towards your younger brothers. If the preceptor is without wisdom, the disciple cannot possibly treat him with respect. If the guru is possessed of purity and nobility of conduct, the disciple also attains naturally to conduct of the same kind, O Bhaarata. The eldest brother should at times be blind to the actions of his younger brothers, and, though in fact possessed of wisdom, should at times behave as if he does not understand their actions. If the younger brothers be guilty of any transgression, the eldest brother should correct them through indirect ways and means.

If there be understanding and love among brothers and if the eldest brother seeks to correct his younger brothers by direct methods or harshly, their enemies, O son of Kunti, who are full of envy and sorrow at the sight of the love between the brothers will surely seek to bring discord among them, to cause dissension among the brothers and disunite them.

It is the eldest brother that enhances the prosperity of the family or destroys it entirely. If the eldest brother is without sense and wisdom, and evil in his ways, he brings about the destruction of the whole family. The eldest brother who injures his younger brothers ceases to be regarded as the

eldest and forfeits his share in the family property and deserves to be checked by the king. That man who acts deceitfully, has, without doubt, to go to regions of grief and every kind of evil. The birth of such a person serves no useful purpose even as the flowers of the cane.

That family into which a sinful soul is born falls subject to every evil. Such a one brings infamy, and all the punya of the family disappears. Such among brothers as are wedded to evil forfeit their shares of the family property. In such cases, the eldest brother may appropriate the whole Yautuka property without giving any portion thereof to his younger wayward brothers. If the eldest brother makes any acquisition, without using the paternal property and by going to a distant place, he may keep for himself such acquisitions, without giving any share to his younger brothers.

If unseparated brothers wish, during the lifetime of their father, to divide the family property, the father should give equal shares to all his sons. If the eldest brother happens to be sinful and undistinguished by accomplishments of any kind, he may be disregarded by his younger brothers. If the wife of the younger brother happens to be sinful, her or his good must still be looked after.

Those who know the efficacy of righteousness say that dharma is the highest good. The Upadhyaya is superior to even ten acharyas. The father is equal to ten Upadhyayas. The mother is equal to ten fathers or even the whole world. There is no elder equal to the mother. Verily, she transcends all in respect of the reverence due to her. It is for this reason that wise men regard the mother as deserving of so much adoration.

After the father has ceased to draw breath, O Bhaarata, the eldest brother should be regarded as the father. It is the eldest brother who should assign to the younger ones their means of support, and protect and cherish them. All the younger brothers should bow to him and obey his authority. Indeed, they should live in dependence upon him even as they did upon their father while he was alive. So far as the body is concerned, O Bhaarata, it is the father and the mother who create it. That birth, however, which the acharya ordains, is regarded as the true birth, which is, besides, unfading and immortal.

The eldest sister is like the mother. The wife of the eldest brother is also like the mother, for the younger brother, in infancy, receives nurture from her.'"

CANTO 106

"Yudhishtira says, 'The disposition is seen, Pitamaha, in all the varnas of men, including the very Mlecchas, to keep fasts. I do not however know the reason for this. I have heard that only Brahmanas and Kshatriyas should observe the upavasa vrata. How, then, are the other orders to be taken as earning any punya by fasting? How have vratas and fasts come to be observed by those of all castes?

What is that end to which one devoted to the observance of fasts attains? It has been said that fasts are most meritorious and that fasts are a great refuge. O Lord of men, what is the fruit earned in this world by the man that fasts?

By what means is one cleansed of one's sins? By what means does one acquire dharma? By what means, O best of the Bharatas, does one succeed in acquiring punya and swarga?

After having kept a fast, what should one give away, Tell me, what those dharmas are by which one may obtain the things that lead to happiness?'

To Kunti's son by the god Dharma, Yudhishtira who knows every dharma and who asked him these, Santanu's son, Bhishma who also knows dharma deeply, replies, 'In former days I heard of these high merits as attaching to the observance of fasts according to the shastras. O Bhaarata, I asked Rishi Angiras of great punya the very questions which you have asked me today. Questioned by me, the illustrious Rishi, who sprang from the sacrificial fire, answered me thus in respect of the observance of upavasas according to the law.'

Angiras said, "As regards Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, fasts for three nights at a stretch are ordained for them, O Kurunandana. Indeed, a fast for one night, for two nights, and for three nights, they may keep. They should never fast beyond three nights. As regards Vaisyas and Sudras, the duration of fasts prescribed for them is a single night. If, from folly, they observe fasts for two or three nights, such fasts never lead to their advancement. For Vaisyas and Sudras, also, fasts for two nights have been ordained, but on certain special occasions. Fasts for three nights, however, have not been laid down for them by those who know the laws regarding this matter.

That man of wisdom who, with his senses and soul under control, O Bhaarata, fasts by abstaining from one of the two meals, on the fifth and the sixth days of the moon as also on the day of the full moon, is imbued with forgiveness and beauty of person and knowledge of the scriptures. Such a man is never childless or poor.

He who performs sacrifices to worship the Devas on the fifth and sixth days of the moon, supersedes all members of his family and succeeds in feeding a large number of Brahmanas. He who fasts on the eighth and the fourteenth days of the dark fortnight is freed from maladies of every kind and possessed of great energy. The man who abstains from one meal every day throughout the month of Margasirsha, should, with reverence and devotion, feed a number of Brahmanas. By so doing he is freed from all his sins. Such a man is endued with prosperity, and all kinds of grain become his. He becomes invested with tejas. Such a man reaps an abundance of harvest from his fields, acquires great wealth and a plenitude of corn.

The man, O Kaunteya, who passes the whole month of Pausha, abstaining every day from one of two meals, gains good fortune, a handsome appearance and great fame. He who passes the whole month of Magha, abstaining every day from one of the two meals, is born into a high family and attains to a position of eminence among his kinsmen. He who passes the month of Bhagadaivata, confining himself every day to only one meal becomes a favourite with women who, indeed, readily own his sway. He who passes the whole of the month of Chaitra, eating just one meal a day, is born into a high family and becomes rich in gold, gems and pearls. The person, whether man or woman, who passes the month of Vaisakha, abstaining from one meal every day, and keeping his or her senses under control, attains to a position of eminence among kinsmen. The one, man or

woman, who passes the month of Jyeshta eating one meal a day, also succeeds in attaining to a position of preeminence and gains great wealth.

He who passes the month of Ashadha confining himself to one meal a day and with senses steadily concentrated upon his duties, comes to possess much corn, great wealth, and begets many children. He who passes the month of Sravana, confining himself to one meal a day, receives the honours of Abhisheka wherever he may happen to live, and attains to a position of pre-eminence among kinsmen, whom he supports.

That man who confines himself to only a single meal a day for the entire month of Proshthapada, is blessed with great wealth and attains to swelling and lasting affluence. The man who passes the month of Aswin, on one meal a day, becomes pure in soul and body, an owner of many animals and carriages in abundance, and many good children as well. He who passes the month of Kartika, confining himself to one meal a day, grows possessed of heroism, many wives and great fame.

I have now told you, O king of men, what the fruits are that men obtain by observing fasts for each of the twelve months. Listen now, O king, to what the injunctions are in respect of each of the lunar days.

The man who, abstaining from it every day, takes rice at the expiration of every fortnight, acquires a great many kine, a large family and a long life. He who observes a fast for three nights every month, and does so for twelve years, attains to a position of supremacy among his kinsmen and associates, without a rival to contest his claim and without any anxiety caused by anyone endeavouring to rise to his height. These vratas that I speak of should be observed for two and ten years. Let the inclination be manifested towards this.

That man who eats once in the forenoon and once after evening and abstains from drinking or eating anything in the interval, and who observes compassion towards all creatures, and pours libations of clarified butter on his sacred fire every day, attains to success, O king, in six years. There is no doubt about this. Such a man earns the punya that attaches to the performance of the Agnishtoma sacrifice. Invested with merit and freed from every kind of stain, he attains to the region of the Apsaras that rings with the sound of songs and dance, and passes his days in the company of a thousand unearthly nymphs of great beauty. He rides a chariot of the colour of melted gold and receives high honours in Brahmaloka. After the

exhaustion of his punya, such a one returns to this earth and attains to pre-eminence.

The man who spends a whole year, confining himself every day to one meal, attains to the merit of the Atiratra yagna. He ascends into heaven after his death and receives great honours there. Upon the exhaustion of that merit, he returns to earth and attains to a position of eminence.

He who passes one year fasting for three days in succession, and eating on every fourth day, and abstaining from doing injury of every kind, adheres to truthfulness of speech, and keeps his senses under control, attains to the merit of the Vajapeya yagna. Such a one ascends into swarga after his death and receives high honour there.

That man, O son of Kunti, who passes a whole year fasting for five days and eating only on the sixth day, acquires the punya of the Aswamedha yagna. The chariot he rides is drawn by Chakravakas. Such a man enjoys every kind of happiness in heaven for full forty thousand years.

He who passes a whole year keeping upavasa for seven days and eating only every eighth day, acquires the merit of the Gavamaya sacrifice. The chariot he rides is drawn by swans and cranes. Such a one enjoys all kinds of bliss in swarga for fifty thousand years.

He who spends a whole year, O king, eating only at intervals of a fortnight, acquires the punya of a continuous upavasa of six months. The illustrious Angiras himself has declared this. Such a man dwells in swarga for sixty thousand years. He is roused every morning from his bed by the sweet notes of vinas and vallakis and venus, O king. He who spends a whole year drinking only a little water at the expiration of every month, acquires the merit of the Viswajita yagna. Such a man rides a chariot drawn by lions and tigers. He dwells in heaven for seventy thousand years in the enjoyment of every kind of happiness.

No fast for more than a month, O king of men, has been ordained. Even this, son of Pritha, is the law in respect of fasts that has been declared by sages who know dharma. That man who, unafflicted by disease and free from every malady, keeps a fast, acquires, at every step the merits that attach to sacrifices. Such a man ascends into heaven in a chariot drawn by swans. Endowed with puissance, he enjoys every kind of happiness in swarga for a hundred years. A hundred of the most beautiful Apsaras wait upon him and dally with him. He is roused from his bed every morning by the sound of the kanchis and the nupuras of those divine nymphs. He rides

in a chariot drawn by a thousand swans. Dwelling, again, in a realm teeming with hundreds of the most beautiful women, he passes his time in great joy.

The man who is desirous of attaining swarga does not care to seek strength when he becomes weak, or to cure his wounds when he is wounded, or to be treated with healing drugs when he is ill, or to be soothed by others when he is angry, or to mitigate, by spending wealth, the sorrows caused by poverty. Leaving this world, where he suffers only privations of every kind, he flies straight into heaven and rides in rathas adorned with gold, his person embellished with ornaments of every kind. There, in the midst of hundreds of exquisite Apsaras, and cleansed of every sin, he enjoys all kinds of pleasures and happiness.

Indeed, abstaining from food and enjoyment in this world, he takes leave of this body and attains to Swargaloka as the fruit of his tapasya. There, freed from all his sins, health and happiness become his and whatever wishes arise in his mind are instantly gratified. Such a one rides on a celestial chariot of golden complexion, of the refulgence of the morning sun, set with pearls and lapis lazuli, resounding with the music of vinas and murajas, adorned with banners and lamps, and echoing with the tinkling of celestial bells. He enjoys all kinds of ecstasy for as many years as there are pores in his body.

There is no shastra superior to the Vedas. There is no person more worthy of reverence than one’s mother. There is no acquisition superior to that of dharma, and no penance superior to upavasa, fasting. Just as there is nothing more sacred, in heaven or earth, than Brahmanas, there is no penance that is superior to the observance of fasts. It was by fasting that the Devas attained to swarga. It is through upavasa that the Rishis have attained to high spiritual felicity and success.

Viswamitra passed a thousand celestial years, confining himself every day to but one meal, and as the consequence became a Brahmarishi. Chyavana and Jamadagni and Vasishta and Gautama and Bhrigu—all these greatest Rishis invested with the virtue of forgiveness, attained to swarga through upavasa. In former days, Angiras declared this to the great Rishis. The man who teaches another the merit of fasting never has to suffer any kind of misery. The laws about fasts, in their due order, O son of Kunti, have flowed from Maharishi Angiras. The man who daily reads these laws or hears them read, is freed from sins of every kind. Not only is such a one

freed from every sorrow and calamity, but his mind cannot be touched by any kind of taint or fault. He succeeds in understanding the tongues of all creatures that are other than human, and acquiring eternal fame, becomes the foremost of his species.'"

CANTO 107

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha Mahtaman, you have discoursed to us on the subject of sacrifices, including the merits, in detail, that attach to them both here and hereafter. One must, though, remember, that the poor cannot perform sacrifices, for these require a large store of all kinds of wealth. Indeed, the punya attaching to sacrifices can be acquired only by kings and princes, and not by those that are destitute of wealth and that live alone and are helpless. Do you tell us, Pitamaha, what the laws are in respect of such rites and deeds that are fraught with punya equal to what attaches to sacrifices and which, therefore, the impoverished can also perform.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O Yudhishtira! Those laws that I have told you of, which were first promulgated by Mahamuni Angiras, and which have punya for their very soul, are regarded as equal to yagnas for the fruits they bestow both here and hereafter. The man who eats one meal in the forenoon and one at night, without taking any food or drink between, and who observes this practice for six years, abstaining all the while from injuring any creature and regularly pouring libations on his sacred fire every day, attains, without doubt, to success. Such a man acquires hereafter a chariot of the hue of molten gold, and goes to dwell for millions of years in Brahmaloka, in the company of Apsaras, a realm ever alive with the blissful sounds of music and dance, and which blazes with the effulgence of fire.

He who spends three years, confining himself every day to one meal and abstaining all the while from congress with any woman other than his own wife, attains to the merit of the Agnishtoma yagna. Such a man is

regarded as having performed a sacrifice, with a bounty of gifts in gold, which is dear to Vasava himself. By being constantly truthful in speech, giving dakshina, revering the Brahmanas, avoiding malice, becoming forgiving and self-restrained, and conquering anger, a man attains to the highest end. Riding a chariot of the complexion of white clouds, drawn by swans, he lives, for millions and millions of years, in the company of Apsaras.

Fasting a whole day and eating only one meal on the next, he who pours libations upon his sacred fire for a whole year, and attends every day to his sacred fire and rises each morning before the sun does, attains to the punya of the Agnishtoma yagna. Such a man acquires a chariot drawn by hamsas and kraunchas, swans and cranes. Surrounded by the most delectable Apsaras, he dwells in the world of Indra.

That man who eats only one meal every third day, and pours libations every day on his sacred fire for a whole year, he who thus attends to his fire every day and wakes from sleep every morning before the sun is up, attains to the high punya of the Atiratra yagna. He acquires a chariot drawn by peacocks and swans and cranes. Journeying to the realm of the Saptarishis, he lives there among Apsaras of untold beauty, for full three padmas of years.

Fasting for three days in succession, he who eats only one meal every fourth day, and pours libations every day on his sacred fire, acquires the high merit of the Vajapeya yagna. The chariot he acquires is graced by supernal Apsaras, who have Indra for their father. Such a man lives in Indraloka for millions and millions of years and experiences indescribable joy witnessing the sport and dalliance of the king of the Devas.

Fasting for four days in succession, he who eats only one meal every fifth day, and pours libations on the sacred fire every day for a whole year, and who lives without greed, telling the truth, worshipping Brahmanas, abstaining from every kind of injury, and avoiding malice and sin, acquires the punya of the Vajapeya sacrifice. The chariot he rides is made of gold and drawn by swans and has the irradiance of many suns rising together. He acquires a palatial mansion of pure white. He lives there in great happiness for full one and fifty padmas of years.

Fasting for five days, he who eats on only the sixth day, and pours libations on his sacred fire every day for a whole year, and who performs three sandhya ablutions during the day to purify himself, and says his

prayers and does his worship, and who leads a life of brahmacharya, divested of malice in his conduct, acquires the merit of the Gomedha yagna. He acquires a resplendent chariot of pure gold, with the refulgence of blazing fire and drawn by swans and peacocks. He sleeps on the lap of Apsaras and is awakened every morning by the melodious tinkling of nupuras and kanchis. He leads a life of bliss for ten thousand million years and three thousand million besides, and eight and ten padmas and two patakas as well. Such a man resides, honoured by all, in Brahmaloka for as many years as there are hairs on the bodies of hundreds of bears.

Fasting for six days, he who eats only one meal every seventh day and pours libations on the sacred fire every day, for a full year, keeping mowna all the while and the vow of brahmacharya, and abstaining from the use of flowers and unguents and honey and meat, attains to the region of the Maruts and of Indra. Crowned with the fruition of every desire as it springs up in the mind, he is waited upon and adored by Apsaras. He acquires the punya of a sacrifice in which an abundance of gold is given away. He attains the most transcendent realms, where he lives for countless years in the greatest joy.

He who shows forgiveness to all and fasting for seven days eats on every eighth day for a whole year, and, pouring libations every day on the sacred fire, adores the Devas regularly, acquires the lofty punya of the Paundarika yagna. The ratha he rides is of the colour of the lotus. Without doubt, such a man acquires also a great number of perfect Apsaras, all of youth and beauty, some that are dark, some with complexions of gold, and some that are syamas, blue, whose charms and allurements and demeanour are graceful and enjoyable past description.

He who fasts for eight days and takes only one meal on every ninth day for a whole year, and pours libations on the sacred fire daily, acquires the great punya of a thousand Aswamedha yagnas. The chariot he rides in heaven is as beautiful as a lotus. He always journeys in that vimana, accompanied by the daughters of Rudra, himself wearing celestial garlands and radiant as the midday sun or the fires of blazing Agni. Attaining to the realms of Rudra, he lives there in great rapture for years beyond count.

He who fasts for nine days and takes only one meal every tenth day for a whole year, and pours libations on his sacred fire daily, acquires the high merit of a thousand Aswamedha yagnas, and attains to the companionship of Brahmanas' daughters blessed with beauty that fascinates the hearts of

all creatures on any world. These women of incomparable beauty, some of complexions of the white lotus and some of the blue, always keep him in joy. He acquires a beautiful vimana, that ranges in exquisite and mystic rounds, everywhere, and looks like the cloud Avarta, while it may also may be said to resemble an ocean-wave. That vimana resounds with the constant tinkling of rows of pearls and other unworldly gemstones, and the melodious resonance of conches, and is adorned with columns of crystals and diamonds, as also with an altar of the same jewels. He makes all his journeys in this vimana, drawn by swans and cranes and lives for millions and millions of years in great felicity in swarga.

He who fasts for ten days and eats only ghrita on every eleventh day for a whole year and pours libations on his sacred fire daily, who never, in word or thought, covets the companionship of other's wives and who never utters an untruth even for the sake of his mother and father, succeeds in beholding Mahadeva of great puissance seated on his bull-drawn ratha. Such a man acquires the high merit of a thousand Horse-sacrifices. He sees the vimana of the Self-born Brahma himself fly down to bear him away in it. He rides in that transplendent craft, with Apsaras of beauty and skills at love impossible to remotely describe, their skins like soft blazing gold. Endowed himself with the splendour of the yoga-fire, he lives for countless years in a celestial mansion in Swargaloka, replete with every rapture. For those countless years he experiences the matchless joy of bowing his head in reverence to Rudra adored by Devas and Danavas. Such a man daily sees Mahadeva Siva with his divine eyes.

The man who, having fasted for eleven days eats only a little ghee on the twelfth, and observes this upavasa for a whole year, succeeds in having the merits that attach to all the sacrifices together. The chariot he rides has the lustre of a dozen suns. Adorned with pearls and corals and other gemstones of incalculable value, embellished with rows of hamsas and nagas and mayuras and flocks of chakravakas giving throat to their melodious notes, and adorned with great and majestic domes, is the unearthly mansion in which he dwells in Brahmaloka. That palace, O king, always throngs with glorious men and women who wait upon him in service. This is what the most blessed Rishi Angiras, knower of every dharma, said.

That man who, having fasted for twelve days eats a little ghrita on the thirteenth, and bears himself in this way for a whole year, succeeds in

attaining the merits of the Daiva yagna, the Divine Sacrifice. He acquires a vimana of the complexion of the newly blown lotus, adorned with pure gold and piles of jewellery and gemstones. He travels to the world of the Maruts, which teems with Apsaras adorned with every kind of celestial ornament, divine nymphs redolent with celestial perfumes, and who possess every element of felicity. The number of years he resides in those happy regions is beyond count. Soothed with the music and the melodious voices of Gandharvas and the rhythms of drums and panavas, he is constantly gladdened by the Apsaras of transcendent beauty and gifts.

The man who, having fasted for thirteen days, eats a little ghrita on the fourteenth, and bears himself in this way for a full year, obtains the merits of the Mahamedha yagna. Apsaras of even more indescribable beauty, and whose age cannot be guessed for they are for ever young in appearance, adorned with every ornament and with armlets of flaming radiance, wait upon him with many sky-chariots and follow him on his journeys. He is awakened every morning by the voices of swans, the tinkle of nupuras, and the most pleasant jingling of kanchis. Verily, he dwells in a most superior palace, waited upon by these celestial women, for years as countless as the grains of sand on the shores of the Ganga.

That man who, keeping his senses restrained, fasts for a fortnight and takes only one meal on the sixteenth day, and does so for a whole year, pouring libations daily on his sacred fire, acquires the high punya that attaches to a thousand Rajasuya yagnas. The vimana he rides in is of great beauty and is drawn by swans and peacocks, and is, besides, adorned with garlands of pearls and the purest gold and graced with bevies of heaven’s nymphs decked with ornaments of every kind, and that magical craft, celestial and of celestial attributes, has one column and four arches and seven altars exceedingly auspicious, with thousands of banners, and is awash with the strains of divine music, and embellished with pearls and corals and other lambent jewels, and has the brightness of lightning, and is, besides, drawn by the most magnificent and unearthly elephants and rhinocerii which go as freely through the air as they do over ground. Such a man lives in swarga for a thousand yugas.

The man who, having fasted for fifteen days, takes one meal on the sixteenth, and does this for a whole year, acquires the punya attaching to the Soma sacrifice. Attaining to swarga, he lives in the company of Soma’s daughters. His body fragrant with lotions whose scents are as fragrant as

those of Soma himself, he acquires the power of transporting himself instancly to any place he likes. Seated in his chariot he is waited upon by the most beautiful women of pleasing ways, and commands all things of enjoyment. He enjoys such happiness for countless years.

That man who, having fasted for sixteen days, eats a little ghrita on the seventeenth day and bears himself in this way for a whole year, pouring libations daily on his sacred fire, attains to the regions of Varuna and Indra, and Rudra and the Maruts and Usanas and Brahma himself. There he is waited upon by celestial women and sees Devarishi Bhurbhuva and grasps the very universe in his ken. The daughters of the God of gods gladden him there. Those women, of ever-pleasing ways and adorned with every gorgeous ornament, can assume two and thirty forms to give him pleasure. As long as the sun and the moon move in firmament, so long does that man of wisdom dwell in those realms of felicity, living upon the succour of amrita.

The man who, having fasted for seventeen days, eats only one meal on the eighteenth, and bears himself in this way for a whole year, succeeds in grasping the seven Dwipas of which the universe consists in his ken. While journeying in his vimana he is always followed by a large train of other sky-chariots, which fly with the most agreeable sound and are full of Apsaras ablaze with ornaments and beauty. Enjoying the greatest bliss, the great craft in which he goes is also divine and of unearthly grandeur, drawn by lions and tigers, and often sounding as deeply as thunderheads. He lives in such felicity for a thousand kalpas on rare and sweet amrita.

That man who, having fasted for eighteen days, eats only one meal on the nineteenth, and does this for a full year, also succeeds in grasping within his ken all the seven Dwipas of which the universe consists. The realm to which he attains is inhabited by diverse tribes of Apsaras, and resounds with the melodious voices of Gandharvas. The ratha he rides in is possessed of the brightness of the sun. His heart being freed from every anxiety, he is waited upon by the foremost of divine women. Decked in celestial garlands, and of unearthly handsomeness now, he lives in such joy for millions and millions of years.

The man who, having fasted for nineteen days eats only one meal on every twentieth day, and bears himself in this way for a full year, adhering all the while to truthfulness of speech and to the observance of other great vratas, while also abstaining from meat, leading the life of a Brahmacharin,

and devoted to the good of all creatures, attains to the vast regions, of untold happiness, which belong to the Adityas. While journeying in his own vimana, he is followed by a numerous train of sky chariots in which Gandharvas and Apsaras ride, all adorned with celestial garlands and smeared with unworldly liniments.

The man who, having fasted for twenty days, takes a single meal on the twenty-first day and bears himself in this way for a full year, pouring libations daily on his sacred fire, attains to the regions of Usanas and Sakra, of the Aswins and the Maruts, and lives there in uninterrupted happiness of great measure. Unacquainted with sorrow of any kind, he rides in the foremost of vimanas on his cosmic sojourns, and is waited upon by the most exquisite Apsaras and, possessed of marvellous power, he sports in joy like a god himself.

The man who, having fasted for one and twenty days, takes a single meal on the twenty-second day and bears himself in this way for a full year, pouring libations on his sacred fire daily, abstaining from injuring any creature, adhering to truthfulness in speech, and freed from malice, attains to the regions of the Vasus and grows as lustrous as the sun. Possessed of the power of going everywhere at will, amrita his food and drink, and riding in the most magnificent vimana, his person decked with unearthly ornaments, he dallies in ecstasy in the company of celestial women.

The man who, having fasted for two and twenty days, eats a single meal on the twenty-third day and bears himself in this way for a full year, keeping his senses under control, attains to the realms of Vayu, of Usanas, and of Rudra. Able to fly anywhere at will and always roving as he pleases, he is worshipped by diverse tribes of Apsaras. Riding in his best of vimanas and his person decked with divine ornaments, he sports for countless years in great felicity in the company of supernal women.

That man who, having fasted for three and twenty days, eats a little ghee on the twenty-fourth day, and bears himself in this way for a full year, pouring libations on his sacred fire, dwells for countless years in great happiness in the regions of the Adityas, his person decked with celestial robes and garlands and divine perfumes and liniments. Riding in a splendid chariot made of gold and drawn by swans, he lives in rapture in the company of thousands and thousands of Apsaras.

The man who having fasted for four and twenty days eats a single meal on the twenty-fifth, and bears himself thus for a full year, acquires a ratha of

the foremost sort, full of every enjoyment. He is followed in his journeys by a large train of chariots drawn by lions and tigers, which resound as deeply as the roar of thunderclouds, and are ridden by celestial women. Himself riding in a vimana of great majesty, he dwells in those regions for a thousand kalpas, in the company of hundreds of Apsaras, and eating ambrosial food and drinking nectarine amrita.

That man who, having fasted for five and twenty days eats only one meal on the twenty-sixth day, and bears himself thus for a full year, keeping his senses under control, freed from attachment to things mundane, and pouring libations every day on his sacred fire, is worshipped by the Apsaras, and attains to the regions of the seven Maruts and of the Vasus. When abroad on his celestial journeys, he is followed by a flotilla of vimanas of crystal, encrusted with all kinds of gemstones, and ridden by Gandharvas and Apsaras who show him every honour. He remains in those regions, in enjoyment of such felicity, and blessed with divine energy, for two thousand yugas.

That man who having fasted for six and twenty days eats a single meal on the twenty-seventh day and bears himself in this way for a full year, pouring libations daily on his sacred fire, acquires great merit and going into swarga receives honour from the Devas. Living there, he feeds on amrita, freed from thirst of every kind, and enjoying every rapture. His soul purified of all dross and journeying in a celestial vimana of glittering beauty, he dwells there, O king, bearing himself after the manner of the Devarishis and the great Rajarishis. Possessed of immense tejas, he lives there in utmost happiness fawned upon by Apsaras of every delight, for three thousand yugas and as many kalpas.

That man who, having fasted for seven and twenty days eats a single meal on the twenty-eighth day and bears himself in this way for a full year, with soul and senses under perfect control, acquires awesome punya, equal to what the Devarishis attain. Owning every manner of enjoyment, and endued with terrific tejas, he blazes like the midday sun. Women of the most delicate features and radiant complexions, of deep bosoms, tapering thighs and full and round hips, all wearing celestial ornaments, all profound mistresses of dalliance and love, gladden him with their company while he rides in a most delightful vimana brilliant as Surya and furnished with every article of enjoyment, for thousands and thousands of kalpas.

The man, who having fasted for eight and twenty days eats a single meal on the twenty-ninth day, and bears himself in this way for a full year, adhering all the while to truthfulness of speech, attains to auspicious regions of great happiness that are worshipped by Devarishis and Rajarishis. The chariot he obtains has the effulgence of the sun and the moon; made of pure gold and adorned with every kind of gem, Apsaras and Gandharvas ride in it dancing and singing melodiously. His every delight is attended to by the women of proud beauty and charms. He has every conceivable object of enjoyment, great vigour to enjoy it all, the splendour of a blazing fire, the lustre, form and majesty of a god. The regions he attains are those of the Vasus and the Maruts, of the Sadhyas and the Aswins, of the Rudras and of Brahma himself.

That man who, having fasted for a full month, takes a single meal on the first day of the following month and maintains this for a full year, looking upon all things with an equal eye, attains to Brahmaloka. There he quaffs amrita. His form magnificent and resplendent, and delightful to all, he shines forth with tejas and prosperity like the sun himself of a thousand rays. Devoted to yoga and adorned with divine raiment and garlands and daubed with divine perfumes and smeared with unearthly lotions and pastes, he passes his time in utter bliss, unacquainted with the least sorrow. He scintillates in his vimana, attended by divine women as luminous as himself.

Those women, the daughters of the Devarishis and the Rudras, adore him with veneration. They assume diverse forms that fascinate and please him no end, their speech is mellifluous and sweet in a myriad of ways, and they unfailingly gratify the one they wait upon in every way, imaginable and beyond imagining. While abroad on his yatras, he goes in a vimana of the hue of the azure sky, invisibly, for it is so magical subtle. Behind him fly fleets of chariots that look like full moons; before him go those that resemble clouds; on his right are red craft; below him are blue ones; and above him are those of variegated hue. He is always adored by those that wait upon him. Endowed with great wisdom, he lives in the world of Brahma for as many years as are measured by the drops of rain that fall in course of a thousand years on that part of the earth which is called Jambudwipa. Verily, possessed of the brilliance of a Deva, he lives in that realm of unalloyed felicity for as many years as the drops of rain that fall upon the earth in the monsoon.

The man who, having fasted for a whole month, eats on the first day of the following month, and does so for ten years, attains to the status of a Maharishi. He undergoes no change of form when entering Swargaloka to reap the rewards of his karma in his life. Verily, even this is the lofty condition to which one attains by restraining speech, practising self-denial, subjugating anger, sexual appetite, and the desire to eat, pouring libations on the sacred fire and regularly worshipping the two twilights. That man who purifies himself by the observance of these and similar vratas and karmas, and who eats in this way, keeping upavasas, becomes as stainless as the ethereal Akasa and blessed with refulgence like that of the sun himself. Such a man, O king, ascends into swarga in his own body, enjoys all the felicity that is there like a Deva, at his will.

And I have thus told you, O king of the Bharatas, what the laws are with regard to sacrifices, one by one, and how their fruits accrue to him who keeps upavasas. Poor men, O son of Pritha, who are unable to perform yagnas may, nevertheless, acquire the fruits thereof by fasting. Verily, by keeping these fasts, even the poorest man may attain to the highest end, O Bharatottama, attending all the while, besides, to the worship of the Devas and Brahmanas. I have indeed told you in detail the laws in respect of fasts. Do not harbour any doubt that men who keep such upavasas, who are heedful and pure and high-souled, that are thus freed from pride and contentions of every kind, that are blessed with devout minds and hearts, and who pursue their end with steadfastness and fixity of purpose, never deviating from their chosen path, will certainly find all the swargas and wondrous lokas that I have described.'"

CANTO 108

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, of that which is regarded as the foremost of all tirthas. Indeed, tell me what tirtha is the most auspicious and bestows the greatest purity.'

Bhishma says, 'Without doubt, all tirthas are possessed of punya. Listen, however, with attention to me as I tell you which the great Tirtha, the cleanser, is of men blessed with wisdom. Adhering to eternal Truth, one should bathe in the tirtha called Manasa, which is unfathomable for its depth, stainless, and entirely pure, and which has Truth for its waters and the understanding for its depth. The fruits in the form of purification, which one acquires by bathing in that tirtha, are freedom from greed, utmost sincerity, truthfulness, and mildness of conduct, compassion, abstention from injuring any creature, self-restraint and tranquillity.

Also, men that are free from attachments, who are divested of pride, who transcend all the pairs of opposites—pleasure and pain, praise and blame, heat and cold, and all the rest—that have no wives and children, houses and lands and gardens, or anything else, who are invested with purity, and who subsist upon the alms given to them by others, are regarded themselves as tirthas. He who is acquainted with the truths of all things and who is free from ego, ahamkara, is said to be the highest tirtha.

In searching for the indications of purity, your scrutiny should ever be directed towards these attributes—so that where these are present, you may take purity to be present, and where these are not, purity also should be concluded to be absent. Men and women from whose souls the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas have been washed, they who, regardless of

outward cleanliness and impurity pursue the ends they have set themselves, they who have renounced everything, they who are possessed of omniscience and imbued with universal vision, and they who are of pure conduct, are regarded as tirthas possessing the power of washing away sins.

The man whose limbs alone are wet with water is not regarded as one that has bathed or is purified. He, on the other hand, is regarded as pure who has washed himself with self-denial. Such a man is said to be pure both inwardly and outwardly. They who never concern themselves with what is past, they who feel no attachment to acquisitions and possessions that are present, indeed, they who are free from desire, are said to have the highest purity. Knowledge is said to constitute the most especial purity of the body. So also freedom from desire, and cheerfulness of heart. Pravritti, purity of conduct, constitutes the purity of the mind.

The purity that one attains by ablutions in sacred waters is regarded as inferior, while the purity which arises from knowledge is regarded as the best. The ablutions which one performs with a blazing mind in the waters of the knowledge of Brahman in the tirtha called Manasa are the true ablutions of those that are conversant with Truth. That man who is possessed of true purity of conduct and who is always devoted to the preservation of a proper attitude towards all, indeed, he who is possessed of pure attributes and merit—only he is truly pure.

These that I have mentioned are said to be the tirthas that inhere to the body. Do you listen to me as I tell you what those sacred tirthas are that are situated on the earth, this Bhumi. Even as special attributes that inhere to the body have been said to be sacred, there are particular places on earth as well, and particular waters that are regarded as sacred. By reciting the names of the tirthas, by performing ablutions there, and by offering oblations to the Pitris in those places, one's sins are washed away. Men whose sins are thus washed attain to swarga when they leave this world. From their association with righteous men, through the exceptional efficacy of the earth herself in those sacred places and particular waters, there are certain portions of this Bhumiloka that have come to be regarded as sacred.

The tirthas of the mind are distinct from those of the earth. He who bathes in both attains to success without the least delay. As strength without exertion, or exertion without strength, can never accomplish anything, singly, and as these, when combined, can accomplish all things, even so one that is endowed with the purity that is conferred by the tirthas in the body as

also by that which is given by the tirthas on the earth, becomes truly pure and attains to absolute success. That purity which is derived from both sources is the best.'"

CANTO 109

"Yudhishtira says, 'It befits you, Pitamaha, to tell me what the highest, the most beneficial and the most certain fruit are of all kinds of fasts in this world.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O king, to what was sung by the Svayambhuva himself, and by accomplishing which, without doubt, a man attains to the highest happiness.

The man who fasts on the twelfth day of the moon in the month called Margasirsha and worships Krishna as Kesava for the whole day and night, attains to the merit of the Aswamedha yagna and is cleansed of all his sins. He who, in the same way, fasts on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Pausha and worships Krishna as Narayana, through the whole day and night, attains to the merits of the Vajapeya yagna and the highest success. He who fasts on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Magha and worships Krishna as Madhava, all day and night, attains to the merits of the Rajasuya yagna, and redeems his very vamsa.

He who fasts on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Phalguna and worships Krishna as Govinda, all day and night, attains to the merit of the Atiratra yagna and goes to the realm of Soma. He who fasts on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Chaitra and worships Krishna as Vishnu, through the day and night, acquires the punya of the Pundarika yagna and attains to Devaloka. By keeping a similar fast on the twelfth day of the month of Vaisakha and worshipping Krishna as Madhusudana, all day and night, one attains to the punya of the Agnishtoma yagna and gains the world of Soma. By fasting on the twelfth lunar day in the month of

Jyeshta and worshipping Krishna as Trivikrama who covered the universe with three steps, one attains to the merits of the Gomedha sacrifice and sports with the Apsaras in great ecstasy.

By fasting on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Ashada and worshipping Krishna as the Vamana who beguiled the Asura king Mahabali, one attains to the merits of the Naramedha yagna and dallies in bliss with the Apsaras. Observing a fast for the twelfth lunar day of the month of Sravana and worshipping Krishna day and night as Sridhara, one attains to the merits of the sacrifice called Pancha yagna and acquires a beautiful vimana in swarga in which he experiences every rapture. By fasting on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Bhadrapada and worshipping Krishna as Hrishikesa through the whole day and the night, one attains to the merits of the Sautramani sacrifice and is purified of all sin. By keeping Upavasa on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Aswin and worshipping Krishna as Padmanabha, one attains, without doubt, to the punya of the sacrifice in which a thousand kine are given away. By observing a fast on the twelfth day of the moon in the month of Kartika and worshipping Krishna as Damodara, one attains to the combined punya of all the sacrifices.

He who, in this way, adores Krishna for a whole year as Pundarikaksha, acquires the power of remembering his past births and wins great wealth in gold. Similarly, he who worships Krishna every day as Upendra attains to identity with him. After Krishna has been worshipped in this manner, one should, at the conclusion of one's vrata, feed a goodly number of Brahmanas or give dakshina to them of ghrita.

The illustrious Vishnu, that Ancient Being, has himself said that there is no fast that possesses punya superior to what attaches to such fasting.'"

CANTO 110

Vaisampayana said, “Approaching the Kuru Grandsire, venerable in years, Bhishma who lies on his bed of arrows, Yudhishtira of great wisdom asks him, ‘How, Pitamaha, does one acquire beauty of form and prosperity and an agreeable disposition? How does one become possessed of dharma, artha and kama? How does one become invested with happiness?’

Bhishma says, ‘In the month of Margasirsha, when the moon comes into conjunction with the asterism Mula, when his two feet are united with that very nakshatra, O king, when Rohini is in his calf, when his knee-joints are in Aswini, and his shins are in the two Ashadhas, when Phalguni is his anus, and Krittika his waist, when his navel is in Bhadrapada, his eyes in Revati, and his back on the Dhanishthas, when Anuradha is his belly, when with his two arms he reaches the Visakhas, when his two hands are indicated by Hasta, when Punarvasu, O king, is his fingers, Aslesha his nails, when Jyeshta is his neck, when Sravana is his ears, and his mouth Pushya, when Swati is his teeth and lips, when Satabhisha is his smile and Magha his nose, when Mrigasiras is in his eye, and Chitra in his forehead, when his head is in Bharani, when Ardra is his hair, he should begin the vow called Chandravrata.

Upon the completion of that vrata, dakshina of ghrita should be given to Brahmanas who know the Vedas. As the fruit of that vow, one becomes possessed of true gyana. Indeed, with such a vrata a man becomes as full of every blessed attribute as the moon himself when he is full.’”

CANTO 111

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, O you of great wisdom and who know all the scriptures, I wish to know those most excellent injunctions, the laws through which mortal creatures have to make their rounds of rebirth. What is that conduct, by which, O king, men succeed in attaining to high swarga, and what is that pravritti by which one sinks into naraka? When, abandoning the dead body that is as inert as a piece of wood or clod of earth, people journey to the other world, what follows them there?'

Bhishma says, 'Look, yonder comes the illustrious Brihaspati of great intelligence. Do you ask the most blessed one himself. The subject is an eternal mystery. None else can adequately explain the matter. There is no one as wise or as eloquent as the great Brihaspati, the Devaguru.'

While the son of Pritha and the son of Ganga speak with each other, there comes to that place from the very firmament, the lustrous Brihaspati of stainless soul. Yudhishtira, and all the others, with Dhritarashtra at their head, stand up and receive Guru with every proper honour. Verily, immaculate is the worship they offer to the preceptor of the Devas. Then Dharma's royal son, Yudhishtira, approaches the lambent Brihaspati and, wanting to know the truth, asks him his question.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O most illustrious one, you are conversant with all dharma and all the shastras. Do you tell me, holy Guru, who is the true friend of mortal creatures? Is it the father or mother, or son, or preceptor, or kinsmen, or relatives, or those called friends, that can be truly known as the

friend of a mortal? One goes to the next world, leaving one's dead body that is like a piece of wood or a clod of earth. Who is it that follows him there?'

Brihaspati says, 'One is born alone, O king, and one dies alone; one crosses alone the difficulties one meets with, and one alone encounters whatever misery falls to one's lot. One has really no companion in these things. The father, the mother, the brother, the son, the preceptor, kinsmen, relatives and friends, leaving the dead body as if it were a piece of wood or a piece of earth, after having mourned for only a moment, all turn away from it and return to their own concerns. Only dharma follows the one thus abandoned by them all. Hence, it is plain, that dharma is the only friend and that dharma alone should be sought by all.

One endowed with dharma will attain to that high end which is called swarga; if with sin, he goes to hell. Hence, the man of intelligence should always seek to acquire religious merit through wealth won by lawful means. Piety is the only friend which creatures have in the world hereafter. Let by greed, stupefaction, compassion, or fear, one without much knowledge is seen to indulge in evil deeds, even for the sake of another, his judgment darkened by avarice or lust. Dharma, artha and kama—these three constitute the fruit of life. One should acquire these three by being free from impropriety and sin.'

Yudhishtira says, 'I have carefully listened to what you have said, O illustrious one, your words fraught with truth, words that are most auspicious and beneficial. I wish now to know of the life of the body after death. The dead spirit of man becomes subtle, sukshma, and unmanifest. It becomes invisible. How is it possible for piety to follow it?'

Brihaspati says, 'Earth, wind, ether, water, light, mind, Yama the king of the dead, intellect, the Soul, as also day and night, all together behold as witnesses the punya and paapa of all living creatures. With these, dharma follows the creature when he dies. When the body becomes bereft of life, skin, bones, flesh, the vital seed and blood, O you of great intelligence, leave it at the same time. Imbued with punya and paapa, the jiva, after the destruction of one body, attains to another. After the attainment by the jiva of that body, the presiding deities of the five elements once more see as witnesses all his actions good and bad. What else do you wish to hear? If invested with righteousness, the jiva enjoys happiness. What other matter, pertaining to this or the other world, shall I tell you about?'

Yudhishtira says, ‘You have explained, great Guru, how dharma follows the jiva. I want to know how the vital seed originates.’

Brihaspati says, ‘The food that these deities, O king, who dwell in the body—earth, wind, ether, water, light and mind—eat, gratifies them. When those five elements become gratified, with the mind numbering the sixth, their vital seed is then generated, O Shuddhatman. When an act of union takes place between male and female, the vital seed flows out and causes conception. This is the answer to your question. What else do you wish to hear?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘You have, O illustrious one, said how conception takes place. Do you explain how the jiva that takes birth grows by becoming possessed of a body.’

Brihaspati said, ‘As soon as the jiva enters the retas, the vital seed, he is seized by the elements, the Mahabhutas, and the mind. When the jiva is disunited from them, he attains to the other end, to death. When he is invested with the elements the jiva attains to a corporeal body. The gods that preside over those elements witness from within all his actions, good and bad. What else do you wish to hear?’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Leaving off skin and bone and flesh, and all those six elements, in what does the jiva reside, illustrious one, to enjoy and endure happiness and sorrow?’

Brihaspati said, ‘Invested with all his karma, the jiva quickly enters the semen virile, and using the womb and ova of women takes birth in time, O Bhaarata. After being born, the jiva receives suffering and death from the messengers of Yama. Indeed, dukha and a painful round of rebirths are his inheritance. Instilled with life, O king, the jiva in this world, from the moment of his birth, enjoys and endures his own previous karma, depending upon his punya and paapa, his righteousness and his sins. If the jiva, to the best of his power, follows dharma from the day of his birth, he enjoys, when reborn, happiness without interruption. If, on the other hand, he sins more than he follows dharma, he reaps happiness at first as the reward of his good deeds and suffers for his sins after.

The sinful jiva has to go to the dominions of Yama and suffer great torment there; he then takes birth into an intermediate order of being. Listen to me as I tell you what the different sins are by committing which the jiva, overcome by folly, is forced to be born in different orders of being, as declared in the Vedas, the shastras and the sacred Itihasas. Mortals have to

go into the frightful realms of Yama. In those worlds, O king, there are places that are fraught with every merit and that are worthy of being the abodes of the very gods. There are, again, places in those lands that are worse than those inhabited by beasts.

Indeed, there are parts of Yamaloka equal to the world of Brahma himself in auspiciousness, as there are those which are equally dark and fearsome. Creatures, bound by their karma, endure myriad kinds of suffering and torture in the hells of Yamaloka. I will tell you what those deeds and dispositions are by which a soul finds an end that is full of terror and torment.

If a Brahmana, after having studied the four Vedas, is overcome by folly and accepts a gift from a fallen man, he has then to be born into the asinine species. He has to live as an ass or a donkey for five and ten years. Casting off his asinine form, he has next to be born as an ox, in which state he has to live for seven years. Casting off his bovine form, he has next to take birth as a Rakshasa of the twice-born kind. Living as a regenerate Rakshasa for three months, he then regains his status, in his next birth, of a Brahmana.

A Brahmana, who officiates at the sacrifice of a fallen person, must be born as a vile worm. In this form he must live for five and ten years, O Bhaarata. Freed from the condition of being a worm, be next takes birth as an ass, a mule or a donkey. Thus he must spend five years, and then as a pig, for as many years. After that, he is born as a cock, and living for five years in that form, he is born as a jackal and lives for as many years in that state. He has next to take birth as a dog, and living thus for a year, he regains his human condition.

The foolish disciple who offends his preceptor by doing any injury to him, has certainly to undergo three transformations in this world. Such a man, O monarch, has first to become a dog. He then becomes a beast of prey, and then a donkey. Leaving his asinine form, he has to wander for some while in great affliction as a Pisacha, a spirit. After the end of that existence, he is born a Brahmana. That sinful disciple who even in thought commits adultery with the wife of his preceptor, has to undergo many fierce births and shapes in this world. First, he lives as a dog for three years. Casting off the canine form when death comes, he is born as a worm or some vile vermin. In this form he lives for a year. Leaving that form he succeeds in regaining his human condition as a Brahmana.

If, without reason, the guru kills his sishya who is like a son to him, he has to be born as a beast of prey. That son who disregards his father and mother, O king, has to take birth as a mule or a donkey, and live like that for ten years. After that he will be born as a crocodile, in which form he must live for a year. After this he regains a human form.

That son with whom his parents become angry has to be born as a donkey, live that life for ten months. He is next born as a dog and remains one for fourteen months. He is then born as a cat and after living as a cat for seven months he is born as a man again.

He who speaks ill of his parents takes birth as a sarika. If a son strike his parents, O king, he is born a tortoise. Living as a tortoise for ten years, he is next born as a porcupine. After that he becomes a snake, and living for six months in that form he regains the condition of humanity.

That man who, while subsisting upon the food that his royal master supplies, acts in a manner injurious to the interests of his master, is born as an ape. For ten years he has to live as an ape, and after that for five years as a mouse. After that he becomes a dog, and after living as a dog for six months, he succeeds in regaining his humanity.

The man who misappropriates what is entrusted to him for safekeeping must undergo a hundred transformations. He at last takes birth as a vile worm, and lives as one for full fifteen years. Upon the exhaustion of his great sin in this way, he succeeds in being born into the human species again.

That man who harbours malice towards others has, after death, to take birth as a sarngaka. The man of evil heart who is guilty of a breach of trust has to be born as a fish. Living as a fish for eight years, he is born, O Bhaarata, as a deer. Living as a deer for four months, he is next born as a goat. After the expiration of a full year, he casts off his goatish body, and takes birth as a worm. After that he succeeds in regaining a human form.

That shameless and insensate man who, through tamas, steals paddy, barley, sesame, masha, kulattha, oil-seeds, oats, kalaya, mudga, wheat, atasi, and other kinds of grain, is born as a rat or mouse. After leading the life for some time he must be born a swine. No sooner is he born a pig than he dies of disease. His sin following him, that fool has next to take birth as a dog, and spends five years as one, after which he is born again into the human race.

Having committed adultery with another man's wife, one has to be born as a wolf. After that he has to assume the forms of a dog, a jackal and a vulture. He has next to be born as a snake and then as a kanka and then as a crane, before regaining a human form. That sinner who, stupefied by folly, commits adultery with his own brother's wife, will be born as a male kokila and live in that form for a whole year, O king. He who, through lust, commits adultery with the wife of a friend, or the wife of his preceptor, or the wife of his king, has, after dying, to be born as a hog. He spends five years in his porcine form, and is then born a wolf for ten years. For the next five years he has to be a cat and then another ten years a rooster. He then lives as an ant for three months, and then as a worm for a month. Having undergone these transformations, he has next to live again as a vile worm for four and ten years. When his sin is exhausted by such expiation, he at last regains the human condition again.

When a wedding is about to take place, or a sacrifice, or a dakshina is about to be made, O you of great puissance, the man who offers any obstruction, will be born in his next life as an odious worm, and spend fifteen years as one, O Bhaarata. When his sin is exhausted by such suffering, he regains the human condition.

Having once bestowed his daughter in marriage upon another, he who seeks to give her again to a second husband, has to be born among worms, and live thus for thirteen years. Upon his sin being exhausted, he is born as a man again.

He who eats without having performed the rites in honour of the Devas or those in honour of the Pitris or without having offered even oblations of water to both the Rishis and the Pitris, will be born a crow. Living as a crow for a hundred years he next assumes the form of a rooster. His next transformation is into a snake, for a month. After this, he regains a human form.

He who disrespects his eldest brother who is even like a father, must, after dying, be born as a krauncha, a crane, and live as one for two years. Leaving his crane's body, he is born human again.

The Sudra who has sexual intercourse with a Brahmana woman, is born in his next life as a pig, and no sooner is he born into the porcine order, dies of some virulent disease. The wretch has next to be a dog, and only then, after his sin is exhausted, returns into the human fold. The Sudra who fathers a child upon a Brahmana woman is reborn as a mouse.

The man who is guilty of ingratitude, O king, goes to Yamaloka, where he is subject to dreadful torment by Yamadutas, provoked to fury, the messengers, of the grim king of the dead. Iron cudgels, heavy hammers and mallets, sharp lances, heated jars, all full of agony, frightful forests of sword-blades, heated sands, thorny salmalis—these and many other instruments of torture such a man endures in the catacombs of Yama, O Bhaarata. After being thus exorcised of his sins in the land of death's grim lord, the ingrate returns to this world and is born among vermin. He lives as a rat or a mouse for fifteen years. He has then to enter a human womb and suffer abortion a hundred times in succession. After this, he is born into some intermediate order between man and inanimate nature. Having endured such misery for a great many years, he must be born as a hairless tortoise, and spend long years in his shell until his sins are exhausted and he is born human again.

A man who steals curds will be born as a crane. One becomes a monkey by stealing raw fish. That man of intelligence who steals honey will be born a wretched gadfly. By stealing fruits or roots or rice-cakes one becomes an ant. By stealing nishpava one becomes a halagolaka. By stealing payasa one becomes a tittiri bird. By stealing sweet cakes, one becomes a screech-owl. That man of little intelligence who steals iron has to be born a crow. That man of little understanding who steals white brass has to take birth as a bird of the harita species. By stealing a vessel of silver, one becomes a pigeon. By stealing a vessel of gold, one has to be born as a rodent. By stealing a piece of silken cloth, one becomes a krikara. By stealing a piece of cloth made of red silk, one becomes a vartaka. By stealing a piece of muslin, one becomes a parrot. By stealing a piece of cloth that is of fine texture, one becomes a duck after leaving one's human body. By stealing a piece of cloth made of cotton, one becomes a crane. By stealing a piece of cloth made of jute, one becomes a sheep in one's next life. By stealing a piece of linen, one has to be born as a hare. By stealing different kinds of colouring matter, one must be born as a peacock. By stealing a piece of red cloth, one has to take birth as a bird of the jivajivaka species.

By stealing unguents such as sandalwood paste and perfumes in this world, the man of greed, O king, has be born as a mole. Assuming the form of a mole, he lives that life for fifteen years. After the exhaustion of his sin through such suffering, he regains a human form. By stealing milk, one

becomes a crane. That man, O king, who through a darkening of his mind, steals oil, will be reborn as an animal that lives in oil.

That wretch who, himself armed, kills an unarmed man, either to have his victim's wealth or from feelings of hostility, will, after leaving his human body, be born as a donkey, a form in which he lives for two years and then meets a violent death from a sharp weapon. Leaving his donkey's body, he is born as a deer, always filled with anxiety at the thought of all the predators that might kill him. Upon the expiration of a year from the time of his birth as a deer, he has to yield up his life at the point of a weapon. He next takes birth as a fish and dies in consequence of being hauled up in a net, after having been a fish for four months. He has next to be born as a beast of prey. For ten years he has to live as a predator, and then he is born as a leopard, particularly, in which form he has to live for five years. Impelled by the change brought about by time, he then casts off that form and, his sins having been exhausted, regains the status of a man.

That man of little understanding who kills a woman has to go to Yamaloka to endure diverse kinds of misery and torment. He then has to pass through full one and twenty further transformations. After that, O monarch, he is born as a rodent. Living as a rat in filth for twenty years, he regains his humanhood.

By stealing food, a man will be born as a bee. Living for many months in the company of other bees, his sin is exhausted and he is born human again. By stealing paddy, he becomes a cat. That man who steals food mixed with sesame cakes becomes a mouse in his next birth, as big or small as the amount of food he stole. He bites humans every day and as a consequence, garners further sin and travels through a varied round of rebirths.

The fool who steals ghee has to be born as a gallinule. That wicked one who steals fish has to take birth as a crow. By stealing salt, one has to be born a mocking bird. He who misappropriates what is left with him in trust, has to sustain a diminution in the period of his life, and after his death, he is born among fishes. Having lived for some time as a fish, he dies and regains his human form. However, he is short-lived.

Indeed, having sinned, O Bhaarata, one has to take birth into an order intermediate between that of humankind and vegetables. Such persons of little wit are entirely unacquainted with dharma, which has their own hearts for its authority. Men who commit diverse sins and then seek to expiate

them through continuous vows and observances of piety, become instilled with both happiness and misery and live in great anxiety of heart.

Sinners who yield to greed and sin are surely born as Mlecchas that do not deserve to be associated with. On the other hand, men who abstain from sin all their lives become free from disease of every kind, are endowed with beauty of form and possessed of wealth. Women also, when they do as I have said, attain to births of the same kind, good and bad. Indeed, they have to be born as the mates of the beasts I have spoken of.

I have told you all the sins that relate to the appropriation of what belongs to others. I have discoursed to you very briefly on the subject, O Anagha. You will hear again, and further, of these, O Bharata, in connection with some other subject. I heard all this, O king, in days of old, from Brahma himself, and I asked all about it in a becoming manner, when he discoursed upon it in the midst of the Devarishis. I have told you truly and in detail about everything that you asked. Having listened to all this, O monarch, do you always set your heart on dharma, great righteousness.'"

CANTO 112

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have told me, O regenerate one, what the end is of adharma and sin. I desire now to hear, O most eloquent one, what the end is of dharma. Having committed diverse acts of sin, by what karma do men succeed in attaining to an auspicious end in this world? By what deeds, also, do men attain to an auspicious end in heaven?'

Brihaspati says, 'By committing sins with a perverted mind, one yields to the sway of adharma and as a consequence, finds hell for oneself. That man who, having perpetrated sinful deeds through the stupefaction of his mind, feels the pangs of repentance and sets his heart on dhyana of God, does not have to endure the results of his sins. One is freed from one's sins in direct proportion to which one repents for them. If having committed a sin, O king, one confesses and proclaims it in the presence of Brahmanas who know dharma, one is quickly cleansed from the obloquy arising from one's sin. One emerges from consequences and disgrace, fully or otherwise, like a snake from his diseased slough. By making, with a concentrated mind, gifts of various kinds to a Brahmana, and concentrating the mind upon one's chosen god, a sinner purifies himself and attains to an auspicious end.

I shall now tell you what those gifts are, O Yudhishtira, by making which a man, even if guilty of having sinned, may be blessed with punya. Of all kinds of dana, annadana, that of food, is regarded as the best. One who wishes for punya should, with a sincere heart, make gifts of food. Food is the life-breath of men. From it all creatures are born. All the worlds of

living creatures are established upon food. Hence food is lauded. The Devas, Rishis, Pitris and men, all give praise to food.

King Rantideva, in olden days, went to swarga by making gifts of food. Food that is good and which has been acquired lawfully, should be given, with a cheerful heart, to such Brahmanas as are possessed of Vedic lore. That man has never to take birth in an intermediate order, whose food, given with a cheerful heart is eaten by a thousand Brahmanas. By feeding ten thousand Brahmanas, a man transcends even piety and becomes devoted to yoga.

A Brahmana who knows the Vedas, by giving away food acquired by him as alms to another Brahmana devoted to the study of the Vedas, succeeds in attaining to felicity here in this world. The Kshatriya who, without taking anything that belongs to a Brahmana, protects his subjects lawfully, and gives offerings of food, acquired through the exercise of his strength, to Brahmanas distinguished in Vedic knowledge, with a concentrated heart, succeeds by this dakshina, O Dharmatman, in purifying himself of all his sins. The Vaisya who divides the produce of his fields into six equal shares and makes a gift of one of those shares to deserving Brahmanas, washes himself of all his sins. The Sudra who, earning food won by hard labour and at the risk of life itself, makes a gift of it to Brahmanas, is exorcised of every sin.

That man who, by putting forth his physical strength, earns food without injuring any creature and makes a gift of it to Brahmanas, avoids all sorrows and disasters. By cheerfully making gifts of food acquired by lawful means to Brahmanas pre-eminent for their knowledge of Vedic lore, a man is washed of all his sins. By treading in the path of the righteous, one is freed from all sins.

By giving such food as produces great energy, a man becomes himself filled with great tejas. The path made by the charitable is always trodden by those that are gifted with wisdom. They that give offerings of food are regarded as givers of life. The punya they acquire through such gifts is eternal. Hence, a person should, under all circumstances, seek to earn food by lawful means, and having earned it, to always make gifts of it to deserving men.

Food is the great refuge of the world of living creatures. By giving annadana, one has never to go into hell. Hence, one should always make gifts of food, having earned it by lawful means. The householder should

always seek to eat after having made a gift of food to a Brahmana. Every man should make the day fruitful by giving dana of food. By feeding, O king, a thousand Brahmanas, all of whom are conversant with dharma and the shastras and the sacred Puranas, a man never has to go into naraka or to return to this world to suffer rebirths. Blessed with the fruition of his every wish, he enjoys untold bliss hereafter. Possessed of such punya, he lives in joy, freed from every anxiety, possessed of beauty of form and great fame and endowed with wealth.

I have thus told you all about the high merit of annadana, the gift of food. Even this is the root of all dharma and punya, as also of all dakshina and dana, O Bhaarata.'"

CANTO 113

"Yudhishtira says, 'Non-violence, the observance of the Vedic ritual, meditation, subjugation of the senses, penances and obedient services rendered to the preceptors—which amongst these is fraught with the greatest punya?'

Brihaspati says, 'All these six are fraught with merit. They are different doors of piety. I shall speak of them; do you listen, O king of the Bharatas. I shall tell you what constitutes the highest good for a human being.

The man who practises the religion of universal compassion achieves his highest good. That man who keeps under control the three faults—lust, wrath and greed—and practises the virtue of compassion, attains to success. He who, from motives of his own benefit or pleasure, kills other harmless creatures, never attains to weal in the next world. That man who regards all creatures as his own self, and behaves towards them as towards his own self, laying aside the rod of punishment, and completely subjugating his wrath, succeeds in attaining to bliss.

The very Devas, who wish for a fixed abode, cannot discern or fathom the glorious path of the man who makes himself the soul of all creatures and looks upon them all as his own self, for such a person leaves no trace or trail. One should never do to another that which one regards as injurious to one self. This, in brief, is the law of dharma.

By doing otherwise, yielding to desire, one becomes guilty of adharma, of sin. In refusals and gifts, in happiness and misery, in the agreeable and the disagreeable, one should judge their effects by a reference to one's own self. When one injures another, the injured turns around and injures the

injurer. Similarly, when one cherishes another, that other cherishes the cherisher. One should frame all one's conduct according to this. I have told you what dharma is even in this subtle way.'

The guru of the Devas, that Mahabuddhi, having said all this to King Yudhishtira the just, flies straight up into the heavens and vanishes.'"

CANTO 114

Vaisampayana said, "After this, Yudhishtira of mighty tejas, foremost of eloquent men, addresses his Grandsire lying on his bed of arrows.

Yudhishtira says, 'O you of great intelligence, the Rishis and Brahmanas and the Devas, led by the authority of the Vedas, all laud that religion which has daya, compassion, for its indication. But, O king, what I ask you is this: how does a man who has perpetrated acts of injury to others in word, thought and deed save himself from misery?'

Bhishma says, 'Brahmavadis, utterers of Brahman, have said that there are four kinds of compassion or non-violence. If even one of those four kinds is not observed, the dharma of karuna is not observed. As all four-footed animals are incapable of standing on three legs, even so the dharma of daya, the religion of compassion, cannot stand if any of those four divisions or parts is wanting. As the footprints of all other animals are engulfed in those of the elephant, even so all other religions are said to be in that of compassion. A person becomes guilty of injury, violence, through acts, words and thoughts. Discarding it mentally at first, one should next discard it in word and deed. He who, according to this law, abstains from eating meat, is said to be purified in a threefold way. It is heard that utterers of Brahman ascribe to three causes the sin of eating meat. That sin may attach to the mind, to words and to deeds. It is for this reason that men of wisdom who are endowed with tapasya refrain from eating meat. Listen to me, O king, as I tell you what the faults are that attach to the eating of meat.

The meat of other animals is like the flesh of one's son. That foolish man, his man darkened by tamas, who eats meat is regarded as the vilest of

human beings. The union of father and mother produces a child. After the same manner, the cruelty that a helpless and sinful wretch commits by devouring flesh, produces its progeny of repeated rebirths fraught with great misery. As the tongue is the cause of the knowledge or sensation of taste, so do the scriptures declare that attachment proceeds from taste.

Well-dressed, cooked with or without salt, meat, in whatever form one may consume it, gradually attracts the mind and enslaves it. How will those fools that subsist upon meat succeed in listening to the sweet music of the drums and cymbals and vinas and flutes of heaven? They who eat meat applaud it highly, suffering themselves to be deluded by its taste, which they pronounce to be something inconceivable, indescribable and unimaginable. Even such praise of meat is full of sin.

In the olden days, many righteous men, by giving the flesh of their own bodies, protected the flesh of other creatures and as a consequence of such acts of punya, attained to heaven. In this way, O king, the religion of compassion is surrounded by four considerations. And I have thus declared to you that dharma which contains all other dharma within it.'"

CANTO 115

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have said many times that abstention from violence, from doing injury, is the highest religion. In sraddhas, however, performed in honour of the Pitris, men must, for their own good, make offerings of many kinds of meat. You have said so yourself while discoursing upon the laws in respect of sraddhas. How can meat be procured without killing a living creature? Your declarations seem contradictory to me, and a doubt has arisen in my mind about the dharma of abstaining from meat.

What are the sins that one incurs by eating meat, and what are the merits that one wins by doing so? What are the sins of him who eats meat by himself killing a living creature? What are the merits of him who eats the meat of animals killed by others? What is the punya and paapa of him who kills a living creature for another? Or of him who eats meat, buying it from others? I wish, O sinless one, that you should discourse to me on this subject in detail. I want to know clearly about this eternal religion with certainty.

How does one attain to longevity? How does one acquire strength? How does one attain to faultlessness of limbs? Indeed, how does one become invested with all excellent indications?'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to me, O scion of Kuru's race, what the punya is that attaches to abstaining from meat. Listen to me as I declare to you what the laws, in truth, are on this matter. Those Mahatmans who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength, and memory, must abstain from acts of injury. On this subject,

innumerable discourses took place between the Rishis. Listen, Yudhishtira, to what their opinion was.

The punya acquired by that man who, with the steadfastness of a vrata, adores the Devas every month in horse sacrifices, is equal to his who eschews honey and meat. The seven celestial Rishis, the Balakhilyas, and those Rishis who drink the rays of the sun, all of fathomless wisdom, laud abstention from meat. The Self-born Manu has said that the man who does not eat meat, or who does not kill living creatures, or who does not cause them to be killed, is a friend of all creatures. Such a man cannot be oppressed or wounded by any creature. He enjoys the confidence of all living beings. He always enjoys, besides, the approbation and commendation of the righteous.

The Dharmatma Narada has said that the man who wishes to increase his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures, meets with disaster. Brihaspati has said that the man who abstains from honey and meat acquires the punya of dana and yagnas and tapasyas. In my estimation, these two are equal: he who adores the gods every month with an Aswamedha yagna for a hundred years, and he who abstains from honey and meat. Because of abstention from meat one comes to be regarded as one who always adores the gods in sacrifices, or as one who always makes gifts to others, or as one who always undergoes the severest austerities.

That man who having eaten meat gives it up afterwards, acquires merit that is so great that a study of all the Vedas or a performance, O Bhaarata, of all the sacrifices, cannot bestow its like. It is exceedingly difficult to give up meat after one has become acquainted with its taste. Indeed, it is exceedingly difficult for such a person to observe the high vow of abstention from meat, a vow that reassures every creature by dispelling all fear. That learned person who gives to all living creatures the dakshina of complete reassurance comes to be regarded, without doubt, as the giver of prana, life-breaths, in this world.

Even this is the high religion which men of wisdom eulogise. The life-breaths of other creatures are as dear to them as those of their own self. Men blessed with intelligence and pure souls should always behave towards other creatures after the manner in which they would like others to behave towards them. It is seen that even those men who possess great learning and who seek to achieve the highest good in the form of mukti, are not free from the fear of death. What need be said of those innocent and healthy

creatures imbued with love of life, when they are sought to be slain by sinful wretches who live by such slaughter?

For this reason, O king, know that the renunciation of meat is the highest refuge of dharma, of swarga, and of ananda. Non-violence is the highest dharma. It is, again, the highest tapasya. It is also the highest truth from which all dharma proceeds. Flesh cannot be had from grass or wood or stone. Unless a living creature is slain, it cannot be eaten. Hence lies the sin in eating flesh.

The Devas who live upon Swaha, Swadha and Soma, are devoted to truth and sincerity. Those men, however, who are for gratifying the sensation of taste, should be known as Rakshasas wedded to the guna of rajas. That man who abstains from meat is never put in fear, O king, by any creature, wherever he may be, in a terrible wilderness or inaccessible fastnesses, by day or by night, or during the two twilights, in the open squares of towns or in assemblies of men, from upraised weapons or in places where there is great fear from wild animals or snakes. All creatures seek his protection. He is an object of confidence with all creatures. He never causes any anxiety in others, and has never himself to become anxious.

If there was no one who ate flesh, there would then be none to kill living creatures. The man who kills living creatures kills them for the sake of the one who eats flesh. If flesh were regarded as inedible, there would then be no slaughter of living creatures. It is for the sake of the eater that the slaughter of living creatures continues in the world. Since, O you of great splendour, the life-span of men who butcher living creatures or cause them to be butchered is shortened, it is clear that the man who wishes his own good should give up meat entirely.

Savage men, who engage in the slaughter of living creatures, never find protectors when they are in need. Such men should always be assailed and persecuted even as beasts of prey.

Through greed or dullness of the mind, for the sake of strength and energy, or through association with sinners, the disposition manifests itself in men to sin. That man who seeks to increase his own flesh by eating the flesh of others has to live in this world in great anxiety, and after dying, must be born into mediocre or base races and families. High Rishis devoted to the observance of vows and self-restraint have said that abstention from meat is worthy of every praise, that it fetches fame and heaven, and is a

great propitiation by itself. This I heard in days of old, O son of Kunti, from Markandeya when that Rishi discoursed on the sins of eating flesh.

He who eats the flesh of animals that are eager to live but have been killed by either himself or others, incurs the sin that attaches to the slaughter for his cruelty. He who buys meat kills living creatures through his wealth. He who eats meat kills living creatures by eating them. He who binds or seizes and actually kills living creatures is the butcher. These are the three kinds of slaughter.

He who does not himself eat meat but approves of a slaughter is stained with the sin of slaughter. By abstaining from meat and showing compassion to all creatures one renders oneself immune to being harmed by any creature, and acquires a long life, perfect health and happiness. The punya acquired by a person by abstaining from meat is superior to that of one who makes a gift of gold, of kine and of land. One should never eat meat of animals not dedicated in sacrifices and that are killed in vain, and that has not been offered to the Devas and Pitris in accordance with the laws. There is not the slightest doubt that a person by eating such meat goes to hell.

If one eats meat that has been sanctified from its having been procured from animals dedicated in sacrifices and that have been slain for the purpose of feeding Brahmanas, one incurs a little fault. By doing otherwise, one surely becomes stained with sin. That wretch among men who slays living creatures for the sake of those who would eat them, incurs great sin. The eater's paapa is not as great. That beast among men who, following the path of religious rites and sacrifices laid down in the Vedas, would yet kill a living creature from the lust to eat its flesh, will certainly become a resident in hell.

That man who, having eaten meat later abstains from it, attains to great merit by his renunciation. He who arranges for getting hold of meat, he who approves of the arrangements for devouring meat, he who kills, he who buys or sells, he who cooks, and he who eats, are all regarded as flesh-eaters.

I will now cite another authority, depending upon what was declared by the Great Ordainer himself, and established in the Vedas. It has been said that the religion which has karma for its indications has been ordained for householders, O best of kings, and not for those who wish for mukti. Manu himself has said that meat which is sanctified with mantras and properly dedicated, according to the laws of the Vedas, in rites performed in honour

of the Pitris, is pure. All other meat falls under the class of what is obtained by despicable slaughter, and leads to hell and infamy. One should never eat, Lord of the Bharata vamsa, even like a Rakshasa, any meat that has been procured by means not sanctioned by the laws. Indeed, one should never eat flesh obtained from meaningless slaughter and that has not been sanctified by the Vedas.

The man who wishes to avoid grief and calamity of every kind should abstain from the meat of every living creature. It is heard that in the ancient kalpa, those who wanted to attain to auspicious worlds hereafter, performed sacrifices with seeds and not animals. Filled with doubts about the propriety of eating flesh, the Rishis asked Vasu the ruler of the Chedis to solve them. King Vasu, knowing that flesh should not be eaten, answered that it was edible, O monarch. From that moment Vasu fell down from the firmament into the earth. After this he once more repeated his opinion, and he had to sink below the earth into Patala for it.

Desirous of benefiting all men, the high-souled Agastya, with the help of his penances, dedicated, once for all, all wild deer to the Devas. Hence, there is no longer any necessity to sanctify those animals to offer them to the deities and the Pitris. Served with flesh according to the law, the Pitris become gratified.

Listen to me, king of kings, to what I tell you now, O sinless one. There is complete happiness in abstaining from meat. He that undergoes severe austerities for a hundred years and he that abstains from meat, are both equal in point of merit. This is my firm opinion.

During the bright fortnight of the month of Karttika in particular, one should abstain from both honey and meat. In this, it has been ordained, there is great punya. He who abstains from meat for the four months of the rains acquires the four valued blessings of achievements, longevity, fame and might. He who abstains for the whole month of Karttika from meat of every kind, transcends all kinds of woe and lives in perfect happiness. They who abstain from flesh for either months or fortnights at a stretch have the realm of Brahma ordained for them as the fruit of their abstention from cruelty.

Many kings in ancient days, O son of Pritha, who had identified themselves with the souls of all creatures and who were conversant with the truths of all things, both Soul and Not-soul, abstained from eating flesh either for the whole of the month of Karttika or for all of the lighted

fortnight in that month. These were Nabhaga and Ambarisha and the high-souled Gaya and Ayu and Anaranya and Dilipa and Raghu and Puru and Kartavirya and Aniruddha and Nahusha and Yayati and Nriga and Vishwaksena and Sasabindu and Yuvanaswa and Sibi, the son of Usinara, and Muchukunda and Mandhatri, and Harischandra.

Do you always speak the truth, and never lie. Truth is an eternal duty. It is through Truth that Harischandra roves through heaven like a second Chandramas. These other kings also, Syenachitra, O monarch, and Somaka and Vrika and Raivata and Rantideva and Vasu and Srinjaya, and Dushmanta and Karushma and Rama and Alarka and Nala, and Virupaswa and Nimi and Janaka of great intelligence, and Aila and Prithu and Virasena, and Ikshvaku, and Sambhu, and Sweta, and Sagara, and Aja and Dhundhu and Subahu, and Haryaswa and Kshupa and Bharata, O Yudhishtira, did not eat flesh during the month of Karttika and for that attained to swarga, and blessed with prosperity, blazed forth with refulgence in Brahmaloka, adored by Gandharvas and surrounded by thousands of Apsaras of incomparable beauty.

Those Mahatmans who practise this exceptional dharma of complete non-violence surely find heaven for themselves. Righteous men who, from their very birth, allow no honey, meat or wine to pass their lips, are regarded as Munis. The man who lives the dharma of never eating flesh or who recites it for others to hear, will never have to go into hell even if he is utterly evil in other ways.

He, O king, who often reads these laws about abstaining from meat, the injunctions that are sacred and adored by the Rishis, or hears them read, is cleansed of every sin and attains to great felicity from having every wish fulfilled. He also attains to a position of pre-eminence among kinsmen. When afflicted with any great trouble, he readily transcends it. When obstructed with impediments, he overcomes them with the utmost ease. When ill with disease, he is swiftly and marvellously cured, and afflicted with sorrow he is liberated from it, again with great ease. Such a man has never to be born into the intermediate species of animals or birds. Born human always, he attains to great beauty of person. Blessed with great prosperity, he acquires great fame as well.

I have thus told you, O king, all that need be said on the subject of abstaining from meat, together with the niyamas with respect to both the religion of pravritti and nivritti as framed by the Rishis.' "

CANTO 116

"Yudhishtira says, 'Alas, cruel men, who, abjuring diverse kinds of fine food, covet only flesh, are really like great Rakshasas. They do not relish diverse kinds of paistika, cakes, haritas, vegetables, and various kinds of succulent and flavoursome handas, stems and roots, as much as they do flesh. I am bewildered by this. I must conclude that, this being so, there is nothing which can compare with meat. I wish, O mighty one, to hear what the merits are of refraining from meat, and the sins that attach to the eating of flesh. You are conversant with every duty. Tell me in full about this, agreeably to the laws of dharma. Tell me what may be eaten and what must not. Tell me, Pitamaha, what is flesh, of what substances it is, the merits that attach to not eating it, and what the sins are that attach to consuming meat.'

Bhishma says, 'It is even so, O Mahabaho, just as you say. There is nothing on earth that is superior to meat in taste. There is nothing that is more beneficial than meat to those who are thin, or weak, or afflicted by disease, or addicted to sexual congress or exhausted with travel. Flesh swiftly increases strength. It produces great growth and energy. There is no food, O Parantapa, which is superior to flesh. But, Kurunandana, the merits are great that attach to men that abstain from it. Listen to me as I speak of this.

That man who wishes to augment his own body with the flesh of another living creature is such that there is none meaner and more cruel than he. In this world there is nothing that is dearer to a creature than its life. Hence, instead of taking that invaluable possession, one should show

mercy for the lives of others as one does to one's own life. Without doubt, O son, flesh has its origin in the vital seed. There is great sin that comes from eating it, as, indeed, there is equal merit in abstaining from it.

One does not, however, incur any fault by eating meat sanctified according to the laws of the Vedas. The Sruti says that animals were created for sacrifice. They who eat meat in any other way are said to follow the Rakshasa way. Listen to me as I tell you what the law is that has been laid down for the Kshatriyas. They do not incur any fault by eating meat that has been acquired through the expenditure of prowess. All deer of the wilderness were dedicated to the Devas and the Pitris in the days of old, O king, by Agastya. Hence, the hunting of deer is not forbidden or censured. There can be no hunting without risk to one's own life. There is an equal risk to the slayer and the slain. Either the animal is killed or it, or another wild beast, kills the hunter in the jungle. Hence, O Bhaarata, even Rajarishis betake themselves to hunting, and are not tainted by sin. Indeed, hunting is not regarded as sinful.

There is nothing, O joy of the Kurus, that is equal in punya, either here or hereafter, to the showing of karuna to all living creatures. The man of compassion has no fear. Such harmless men that are blessed with mercy have both this world and the next. Sages who know dharma say that the dharma is worthy of being called true dharma which has non-violence for its indication.

The man with a pure heart should only do such deeds as have compassion for their soul. That flesh which is dedicated in sacrifices performed in honour of the Devas and the Pitris is called havi, and is worthy of being eaten. The man who is devoted to compassion and who behaves with compassion towards others, has no fear to entertain from any creature. I have heard that all other creatures abstain from causing any fear to such a one. Whether he is wounded or has fallen down, or is weakened, in whatever state he may be, all creatures will protect him. Indeed, they do so, under all circumstances, and everywhere. Neither snakes nor wild animals, neither Pisachas nor Rakshasas, will ever kill him.

When danger threatens, he is freed from fear who frees others from situations of fear. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a gift that is superior to the gift of life. It is certain that there is nothing dearer than life itself. Death, O Bhaarata, is a calamity, an evil to all creatures. When the

time comes for death, a trembling of the whole body is seen in every living creature.

Enduring birth in the womb, decrepitude and afflictions of diverse kinds, in this samsara, this ocean of the world, living creatures are seen to be continually going forth and returning. Every creature is overcome by death. While dwelling in the womb, all creatures are immersed in the uterine juices, which are alkaline and sour and bitter, and mixed with the essences of urine and phlegm and faeces—juices that cause pain and are difficult to bear. There in the womb, they have to dwell in a condition of utter helplessness and are even repeatedly stirred, tossed and scalded, frequently torn and aborted.

They that are covetous of meat are seen to be repeatedly plunged in diverse wombs in such helplessness. Attaining to myriad kinds of birth, they are cooked in the uterine hell called Kumbhipaka. They are assailed and killed, and in this way have to travel repeatedly. Thus, there is nothing so dear to one as one's life when one comes into this world. Hence, a man or woman with a pure soul should be compassionate, indeed, merciful to all living creatures. That man, O king, who refrains from every kind of meat from his very birth, without doubt, acquires a vast space in swarga.

They who eat the flesh of animals, who themselves wish to live, are themselves eaten by the animals they eat. *Since he has eaten me, I shall eat him in return*—even this, O Bhaarata, is the very character of flesh, mamsa as mamsa. The killer is always killed. After him the eater meets with the same fate.

He who shows violence and cruelty toward another in this life becomes the victim of similar violence and cruelty from his victim. Whatever one does in whatever bodies, one has to suffer the consequences in those bodies.

Non-violence, abstention from cruelty, is the highest dharma. Abstention from cruelty is the highest niyama. Abstention from cruelty is the highest dakshina. Abstention from cruelty is the highest tapasya. Abstention from cruelty is the highest yagna. Abstention from cruelty is the highest urjas. Abstention from cruelty is the highest mitra. Abstention from cruelty is the highest sukha. Abstention from cruelty is the highest satya. Abstention from cruelty is the highest Sruti.

Dakshinas given in all sacrifices, ablutions performed in all sacred tirthas, and the punya that one acquires from giving all kinds of dana enjoined in the scriptures—all these do not measure up to ahimsa in the

merit that attaches to it. The penances of a man who abjures cruelty are inexhaustible. The man that is without violence and harm is regarded as always performing sacrifices. The man who renounces violence is the father and mother of all creatures. Even these, O Lord of Kuru's vamsa, are some of the merits of non-violence. Altogether, the punyas that attach to it are so many that they cannot be exhausted, even if one were to speak of them without pause for a hundred years.'"

CANTO 117

"Yudhishtira says, 'Wishing to die or wanting to live, many men give up their lives in the great sacrifice of battle. Tell me, Pitamaha, what is the end to which these attain? To throw away life in battle is fraught with sorrow for men. O you of great wisdom, you know that to give up life is difficult for men whether they are in prosperity or adversity, in felicity or calamity. I do believe that you are possessed of omniscience. Do you tell me the reason why this is so.'

Bhishma says, 'In prosperity or adversity, in happiness or sorrow, living creatures, O king of the earth, coming into this world, live after a certain manner. Listen to me as I explain the reason to you. The question you have asked me is excellent, Yudhishtira. Let me explain to you the old narrative of the discourse that took place once between the island-born Rishi Vyasa and a crawling worm.

In the days of old, when that learned Brahmana, Krishna Dwaipayana, having identified himself with Brahman, roamed over the world, he saw, on a road over which carts used to pass, a worm moving along as fast as it could go. The Rishi knew the ways of every creature and the language of every animal. Possessed of omniscience, he addressed the worm he saw in these words.

Vyasa said, "O Krimi, you seem to be most alarmed, and to be in great haste. Tell me, where do you run, and why are you so afraid?'

The worm said, "Hearing the rattle of yonder large cart, I am filled with fear. O you of great intelligence, how fierce is the roar it makes. It is almost come! Will it not kill me? It is for this that I am flying as fast as I can. As it

draws near, the sound I hear is of bulls. They are breathing hard under the whip of the driver, as they draw their heavy burden. I hear also the many voices of the men who drive the bulls. A creature like myself, born a worm, cannot bear to hear sounds. It is for this reason that I fly from this situation of great fright. Death is felt by all creatures to be fraught with pain. Life is an acquisition difficult to have. Hence do I fly in fear, for I do not wish to pass from a state of happiness to one of grief."

The island-born Vyasa said, "O worm, whence can be your happiness? You belong to a lowly order of being. I think death would be fraught with happiness to you. Sound, touch, taste, scent and diverse kinds of excellent enjoyments are unknown to you, O worm. I think, death will prove a benefit to you."

The worm said, 'A living creature, in whatever life or situation he may find himself, grows attached to it. Even as a worm I am happy, I think, O you of great wisdom. It is for this that I wish to live. In even this condition, every object of enjoyment exists for me according to the needs of my body. Humans and creatures that spring from immobile objects all have different enjoyments. In my past life I was a human. O mighty one, I was a Sudra possessed of great wealth. I was not devoted to the Brahmanas. I was cruel, vile in conduct, and a usurer. I was harsh in speech. I regard cunning as wisdom. I hated all creatures. Taking advantage of pretexts in compacts made between myself and others, I was always given to taking away what belonged to others.

Without feeding servants and guests arrived at my house, I used to fill, when hungry, my own belly, under the impulse of pride, and was always greedy for good food. Greedy I was for wealth; I never dedicated, with faith and reverence, any food to the Devas and the Pitris although dharma required me to offer food to them. Men that came to me, moved by fear, to seek my protection, I cut adrift without giving them any sanctuary. I did not extend my protection to those that came to me with prayers to dispel their fear. I used to feel unreasonable envy at seeing other people's wealth, and grain, and wives held dear by them, and fine spirits, and goodly mansions. Seeing the happiness of others, I was filled with envy and I always wished poverty upon them.

Following only that course which promised to crown my own wishes with fruition, I sought to destroy the virtue, wealth and pleasures of others. In that past life of mine, I committed diverse deeds largely laden with

cruelty and other such dark passions. Recollecting those ways, I am filled with repentance and grief even as one is filled with grief at the loss of one's dear son. As a result of those actions of mine, I do not now know or enjoy the fruits of any good deeds.

However, I worshipped my old mother and on one occasion, worshipped a Brahmana. Endued with high birth and accomplishments, that Brahmana, in the course of his wanderings, came to my house once as a guest. I received him with reverent hospitality. In consequence of the punya attaching to that act, my memory has not forsaken me. I think that just because of that hospitality I shall succeed, some day, in regaining happiness.

O you of great tapodhana, you know everything. Do you in kindness tell me what will fetch me weal."'

CANTO 118

'Vyasa said, "It is indeed because of a good deed, O worm, that you, though born in this lowly species of being, are not stupefied in your mind. That blessing is mine, O Krimi, because of which you are not plunged in dark perplexity. Through the power of my tapasya, I am able to save a being of sin merely by granting him a sight of my person. There is no stronger might than the might that attaches to tapasya. I know, O worm, that you have been born in the order of Krimis through the evil karma of your past life. If, however, you think of attaining to dharma and punya, you may again attain to humanity.

The Devas, as well as others crowned with ascetic success, enjoy or endure the consequence of karma done by them in this kshetra, the field of deeds. Amongst men, also, when deeds of punya are performed, they are performed from the desire of reward and not otherwise. The very accomplishments that one seeks is sought from a desire for the happiness they will bring. The creature that is learned or ignorant of a former life, in this one, is without speech and understanding and hands and feet, why, is really destitute of everything.

He that becomes a superior Brahmana adores, while alive, the deities of the sun and the moon, uttering various sacred mantras. O worm, you shall attain to that state of existence. Attaining to that status, you will enjoy all the elements transformed into the objects of kama. When you have attained to that state, I shall impart to you the very Brahman. Or, if you wish, I can send you to any other order of existence."

The worm, acquiescing in what Vyasa proposed, did not leave the road, but remained on it. Meanwhile, the large cart arrived there. Crushed to pulp by the assault of its wheels, the worm gave up his life-breath. Born after many more intermediate births, next into the Kshatriya varna through the grace of Vyasa of immeasurable puissance, he went to see the great Rishi.

He had, before becoming a Kshatriya, to pass through diverse orders of being, such as a hedgehog and an iguana and a boar and a deer and a bird, and a Chandala and a Sudra and a Vaisya. Having given an account of his various transformations to the Rishi of truth, and remembering the Rishi's kindness towards him, the worm, now become a Kshatriya, fell with folded hands at the Rishi's feet and touched them with his head.

The worm said, "My present birth is a high one coveted by all and attained by the possession of the ten well-known attributes. Indeed, I who was once a worm have attained to the status of a prince. Elephants of great strength, decked with golden chains, bear me on their backs. To my chariots are yoked Kamboja steeds of high mettle. Grand carriages, yoked to camels and mules, bear me on my way. With all my relatives and friends I now eat food rich with meat. Worshipped by all, I sleep, O most blessed one, on costly beds in delightful rooms into which disagreeable winds cannot blow.

Towards the small hours of every night, Sutas and Magadhas and other encomiasts sing and chant my praises even as the Devas eulogise Indra, their king. Through your grace, who are firm in truth and imbued with immeasurable tejas, have I who was a worm now become a royal Kshatriya. I bow my head to you, O you of great wisdom. Do you command me what I should do now. Ordained by the power of your penances has this lofty condition become mine."

Vyasa said, "I have today been worshipped by you, O king, with many reverent words. Transformed into a worm, your memory had become clouded. That memory has appeared again. The sin you committed in a past life has not yet been destroyed—that sin earned by you while you were a Sudra covetous of wealth and cruel in behaviour and hostile to Brahmanas. But you were able to obtain a sight of my person. That was a blessing to you while you were a worm. And now, again, from your having saluted and worshipped me, you shall rise higher, for, from the Kshatriya varna you will become a Brahmana, if only you cast off your life on the field of battle for the sake of either holy kine or Brahmanas. O Kshatriya, enjoying great felicity and performing many sacrifices with copious dakshina, you will

then attain to swarga, and transformed into eternal Brahman, you will have perfect and eternal beatitude.

Those that are born into the intermediate species of animals become Sudras when they evolve. The Sudra rises to the status of the Vaisya; and the Vaisya to that of the Kshatriya. The Kshatriya who takes pride in the discharge of his svadharma, succeeds in becoming a Brahmana. The Brahmana, by following righteous conduct, attains to swarga that is full of great bliss.'"

CANTO 119

Bhishma says, 'Having cast off the condition of being a worm and having been born a Kshatriya of great urjas, the one of whom I speak remembered his previous transformations, O Rajan, and began to perform severe austerities. Seeing that rigorous tapasya of the Kshatriya, who was well-conversant with dharma and artha, the island-born Krishna, Vyasa foremost of Brahmanas, went to him.

Vyasa said, "The penances that pertain, O worm, to the Kshatriya consist of the protection of all creatures. Do you regard these duties of the Kshatriya varna to be the tapasya laid down for you. You shall then attain to the status of a Brahmana. Ascertaining what is right and what is wrong, and cleansing your soul, do you duly cherish and protect all creatures, judiciously gratifying all goodly desires and correcting all that is unholy. Be you of pure soul, be you contented and be devoted to the practice of dharma. Conducting yourself in this way, you will, when you cast off your life, become a Brahmana."

Although he had in fact retired into the vana, yet, O Yudhishtira, having heard the words of the great Rishi he began to cherish and protect his subjects righteously. Soon, O best of kings, that worm, from the due discharge of the royal dharma of protecting his subjects, became a Brahmana after casting off his Kshatriya body. Beholding him transformed into a Brahmana, the celebrated Rishi, the island-born Krishna of great wisdom came to him again.

Vyasa said, "O Dvijottama, best of Brahmanas, O blessed one, be not troubled through fear of death. He who lives in dharma attains to an

honourable birth. He, on the other hand, who sins attains to a low and vile birth, O you that know dharma well, and misery becomes his lot, in the measure of his sin. Therefore, O worm, do not be troubled through fear of death. The only fear you should entertain is about the loss of dharma. Do you, therefore, continue to live righteously."

The worm said, "Through your grace, O Holy One, I have evolved and risen from happy to happier births and lives. Having obtained such prosperity as has its roots in righteousness, I think, my sins have been lost."

Having, at the command of the holy Rishi, attained to the life of a Brahmana that is so difficult to have, the worm caused the earth to be marked with a thousand yupastambas, sacrificial stakes. That best of all men who know the Brahman then acquired a home in the realm of Brahma himself. Indeed, O son of Pritha, in time the worm attained to the highest condition, that of the eternal Brahman, as the result of his own actions done in obedience to the counsels of Vyasa. Those bulls among Kshatriyas, also, who have given up their lives on the field of Kurukshetra, exerting their Kshatriya energy the while, have all attained to an auspicious end. Therefore, O king, do not mourn on their account.'

CANTO 120

Yudhishtira says, 'Which of these three is superior—gyana, tapasya or dana? I ask you this, O foremost of righteous men. Tell me this, Pitamaha.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen to the old story of the conversation between Maitreya and the island-born Krishna. Once upon a time, the island-born Krishna, O king, while wandering over the world in disguise, went to Varanasi and waited upon Maitreya who belonged by birth to a race of Munis. Seeing Vyasa arrive, that foremost of Rishis, Maitreya, gave him a seat and, after worshipping him with the due rites, fed him with excellent food. Having eaten that fare, which was most wholesome and produced every satisfaction, the high-souled Vyasa was quite delighted and as he sat there; he even laughed aloud.

Seeing Krishna Dwaipayana laugh, Maitreya said to him, "Tell me, O Dharmatman, why you laugh. You are an ascetic, and able to control your emotions. Great joy, it seems, has come over you! Saluting you, and worshipping you with head bent, I ask you this—what is the power is of my penances and what is the high blessedness that is yours? The karma that I do is different from yours. You are already emancipated though still with prana. I, however, am not yet free. For all that, I think that there is not much difference between you and me. I am, again, distinguished by birth."

Vyasa said, "This wonder that filled me arose from a law of the Vedas that seems exaggerated, and from its paradox, just for the comprehension of the people. The declaration of the Vedas seems to be untrue. But why should the Vedas proclaim an untruth? It has been said that there are three

paths which constitute the best vows of a man—one should never injure, one should always tell the truth and one should give dakshina. The Rishis of old announced this, after the declarations of the Vedas. These injunctions were heard in days of old, and we must certainly follow them even in our times.

Even a small dakshina, given in accordance with the laws laid down, produces great fruits. To a thirsty man you have given a little water with a sincere heart. Yourself thirsty and hungry, you have, by giving me such food, conquered many high regions of grace, O mighty one, even as one does through many sacrifices. I am extraordinarily delighted with your most sacred gift, as also with your tapasya. Your might is that of dharma; your appearance is that of dharma. The fragrance of dharma is about you. I think that all your actions are performed in accordance with the laws.

O son, superior to ablutions in sacred waters, superior to the accomplishment of all Vedic vows, is charity. Indeed, O Brahmana, dana is more auspicious than all sacred rituals. It is more meritorious than all the holy karmas; there can be no question about its superiority.

All those rituals laid down in the Vedas which you laud do not measure up to dana, for giving is invested with the most transcendent punya.

The path that has been made by men who gave dana is the path trodden by the wise. They who give dana are regarded as givers of prana, life-breath. The karmas that constitute dharma are established in them. As the Vedas when well-studied, as the restraining of the senses, as a life of universal renunciation, even so is a gift which is full of great and unequalled punya. You, O son, will rise from joy to greater joy from having set yourself to the dharma of giving dana. The man of intelligence who practises this virtue certainly only rises from joy to greater joy. I have met with many direct instances of this.

Men blessed with prosperity succeed in acquiring wealth, making gifts, performing sacrifices, and earning happiness as the result of giving. It is always seen, O you of great wisdom, to occur naturally that happiness is followed by sorrow, and sorrow by happiness. Men of wisdom have said that human beings in this world possess three kinds of conduct. Some are righteous, some are sinful, and some are neither righteous nor sinful. The conduct of the one who is devoted to Brahman is not regarded either way. His sins are never regarded as sins. So also the man who is devoted to the

duties ordained for him is regarded as neither righteous nor sinful for the observance of those duties.

Men who are devoted to yagna, dana and tapasya are regarded as righteous. Those, however, that injure other creatures and are hostile towards them, are regarded as sinful. There are some men who appropriate what belongs to others. These certainly fall into hell and meet with suffering and sorrow. All other karma that men do are indifferent, being neither righteous nor sinful. Do you sport and grow and rejoice and make gifts and perform sacrifices. Neither men of knowledge nor those endowed with penances will then be able to have the better of you.'"

CANTO 121

Bhishma says, 'Thus addressed by Vyasa, Maitreya, who was a worshipper of karma, who had been born into a clan blessed with great prosperity, who was wise and possessed of deep learning, said these words to him.

Maitreya said, "O you of great wisdom, without doubt it is as you have said. O mighty one, with your leave I wish to say something."

Vyasa said, "Whatever you wish to say, O Maitreya, say, O you of great wisdom, for I wish to hear you."

Maitreya said. "What you said on the subject of dana is faultless and pure. Without doubt, your soul has been purified by gyana and tapasya. And from your soul being purified, even this is the great advantage I reap from it. With my understanding I see that you are endowed with great tapasya. And as for me, I succeed in acquiring prosperity only through a sight of Mahatmans like you. I think that is due both to your grace and also flows from the nature of my own karma.

Penances, knowledge of the Vedas, and birth into a pure vamsa—these are the causes for which a man may be called a Brahmana. When a man has these three, then does he come to be called a true Brahmana. If such a Brahmana be gratified, the Pitris and the Devas are also gratified. There is nothing superior to a Brahmana possessed of Vedic lore. Without the Brahmana, all would be darkness. Nothing would be known. The four varnas would not exist. The distinction between dharma and adharma, satya and asatya would cease.

From a well-tilled field, an abundant harvest can be reaped. Even so, one may reap great merit by making gifts to a Brahmana possessed of profound learning. If there were no Brahmanas endowed with Veda gyana and good vyavahara, who accept dakshina from the wealthy, the wealth of the rich would be useless and in vain.

The ignorant Brahmana, by eating the food that is offered to him, destroys what he eats for it produces no punya to him that gives it. The food that is eaten also destroys the eater for the eater incurs sin by eating what is offered to him. Only that may be properly called edible which is given away to a deserving man; in all other cases, he that takes it makes the giver's gift refuse, and the receiver is ruined for improperly accepting it.

The Brahmana possessed of learning becomes the conqueror of the food that he eats. Having eaten it, he begets other anna of many kinds. The ignorant man who eats the food offered to him loses his right to the children he begets, for the latter become his whose food enabled the progenitor to beget them. Even this is the subtle fault that attaches to those who eat other men's food when they do not have the power to win that food.

The punya which the giver acquires by making the gift, is equal to what the taker acquires by accepting the food. Both the giver and the acceptor depend equally upon each other. Even this is what the Rishis have said. Where Brahmanas exist, who own Veda gyana and vyavahara, the people are enabled to earn the sacred fruits of dakshina and to enjoy them both here and hereafter.

Those men who are of pure lineage, who are entirely devoted to tapasya, and who give dakshina and study the Vedas, are regarded as worthy of the most reverent worship. It is such good men that have charted the path, which treading one does not become deluded. It is those men that are the leaders of others into swarga. They are the men who bear on their shoulders the burden of sacrifices and live for eternity.'"

CANTO 122

"Bhishma says, 'Thus addressed, the holy Vyasa replied to Maitreya, saying "By good fortune, you are endowed with knowledge. Through good fortune, your understanding is of this kind. They that are good laud all righteous attributes. That personal beauty and youth and prosperity do not succeed in overwhelming you is through good fortune. This favour done to you is due to the grace of the gods. Listen to me as I tell you about what is superior even to dana.

Whatever shastras and Puranas and other scriptures there are, whatever righteous inclinations are found in the world, they have flowed in their due order from the Vedas. Following them I laud dana. You praise tapa and Vedic lore. Tapasya is sacred. Penance is the means by which one may acquire the Vedas and swarga as well. Through tapasya and gyana, one attains to the highest fruits, as I have heard. It is by tapasya that one destroys one's sins and all else that is evil.

With whatever purpose one undertakes penance, one attains one's goal. The same may be said of gyana. Whatever is difficult to accomplish, whatever is difficult to conquer, what is difficult to attain, and whatever is difficult to cross over, can all be achieved with the help of tapasya. Of all things, penance is imbued with great power.

The man who drinks alcohol, or he that takes by force what belongs to others, or he that is guilty of foeticide, or he that violates the bed of his guru, succeeds in absolving himself of his sins with tapasya. Indeed, one is cleansed of all sins through penance. One possessed of all knowledge and thus with true vision, and an ascetic of whatever kind, are equal. One

should always bow to these two. All men should be worshipped who have Veda dhana, the Vedas for their wealth. Similarly, all men endowed with tapasya deserve to be worshipped.

Those who give dana gain happiness hereafter and great prosperity here. Righteous men of this world, by making annadana, obtain both this world and that of Brahma himself along with many other realms of transcendent felicity. Men who are revered by all, themselves revere him who gives dana. Men that are honoured everywhere themselves honour him who make gifts. Wherever the giver goes, he hears himself praised. He who performs karma and he who does not each gets what is proportionate to his deeds and omissions. Whether one dwells in the upper regions or in the nether, one always attains to those places to which one becomes entitled by one's karma.

As for yourself, you will certainly have whatever food and drink you may wish for, for you are blessed with intelligence, a good birth, Vedic knowledge, and compassion. You are possessed of youth, O Maitreya! You observe vratas. Be you devoted to dharma. Learn now from me of the dharma which you should first follow, the dharma of grihastas, householders. In that house in which the husband is gratified with his wife, and the wife with her husband, all auspicious results ensue. As filth is washed away from the body with water, as darkness is dispelled by the splendour of fire, even so is sin washed away by dana and tapasya.

Bless you, O Maitreya, let wondrous palaces be yours. I now depart hence in peace. Do you bear in mind what I have said, and you shall reap many rewards."

Maitreya then walked around his illustrious guest in pradakshina and bowed his head to him and, joining his hands in reverence, said, "Let blessing be on you also, O Holy One!"'

CANTO 123

Yudhishtira says, 'O you that know every dharma, I wish to hear, in detail, how good and chaste women conduct themselves. Pitamaha, discourse to me on this.'

Bhishma says, 'Once upon a time, in the celestial realms, a woman called Sumana, of Kekaya's race, addressed Sandili of great tejas, knower of the truth of all things, and indeed omniscient, and she said, "With what vyavahara, O auspicious devi, by what course of actions, have you succeeded in attaining to swarga, rid of every sin? You blaze forth with your own lustre like a flame of Agni. You seem to be a daughter of Surya, the Lord of stars, come to heaven through your own radiance.

You wear raiment of pure white, and are joyful and at your ease. Seated on that celestial vimana, you shine, O auspicious devi, with your lustre increased a thousandfold. You have surely not attained to this world of bliss with any inconsiderable tapasya, dana and vratas. I beg you, tell me about yourself."

Thus questioned lovingly by Sumana, Sandili of sweet smiles, addressing her beautiful interrogatrix, answered her thus out of the hearing of others.

"I did not wear yellow robes, nor the bark of trees. I did not shave my head; nor did I grow jata, matted locks on my head. It is not through such means that I have attained to the condition of a devastri, a woman of heaven.

I never, even forgetfully, spoke in the least disagreeably, let alone evilly, to my husband. I was always devoted to the worship of the Devas, the Pitris

and Brahmanas. Always heedful, I waited upon and served my mother-in-law and father-in-law, and I never behaved with deceit, for that was my vow. I would never lounge at the door of our home nor did I speak long with anybody. I never did anything malicious or otherwise sinful; I never laughed aloud; I never did any injury. I never disclosed any secret. Even thus did I bear myself always.

When my husband, having left home upon any work, returned, I always served him by giving him a comfortable seat, and worshipped him with reverence. I never ate food of any kind without my husband's knowledge and by which he might be displeased.

Rising at early dawn, I did and caused to be done whatever was needed for the sake and weal of relatives and kinsmen. When my husband left home to journey to distant parts on work, I remained at home and engaged myself in many kinds of auspicious karmas to bless his enterprise. Verily, during the absence of my husband I never used kohl, or wore jewellery; I never bathed myself thoroughly or wore garlands or used perfumes, fine pastes or lotions, or decked my feet with lac, or my person with ornaments.

When my husband slept peacefully I never awakened him even if important business required his attention. I was happy to sit by him lying asleep. I never urged my husband to exert himself to earn more wealth to support his family and relatives. I always kept his secrets without disclosing them to others. I would always keep our home clean. That woman who with dhyana adheres to this path of her true dharma, of serving her husband, always receives considerable rewards and honours in swarga, even like a second Arundhati."

The illustrious, righteous and blessed Sandili said this to Sumana on the subject of a woman's dharma towards her husband, and disappeared before her eyes. That man, O son of Pandu, who reads this tale on every full moon and new moon, succeeds in attaining swarga and enjoying great bliss in the Nandana vana.'

CANTO 124

"Yudhishtira says, 'Which is greater, sama, conciliation, or dana? Tell me, Lord of the Bharata vamsa, which of these two is superior in efficacy to gain punya?'

Bhishma says, 'Some become gratified by conciliation, while others are gratified by gifts. Every man, according to his own nature, affects the one or the other. Listen to me, O king, as I explain to you the merits of sama, so that the most furious creatures may be appeased by it. Hear the ancient tale of how a Brahmana, who was seized in the forest by a Rakshasa, was freed by conciliation.

A certain Brahmana, possessed of eloquence and intelligence, fell into distress, for he was seized in a lone forest by a Rakshasa who wanted to feed on him. The Brahmana, who owned understanding and composure, was not in the least agitated. Without allowing himself to be affrighted at the sight of that dreadful fiend, he resolved to use conciliation and see what effect it had on the Rakshasa.

The Rakshasa, respectfully greeting the Brahmana, insofar as words went, said to him, "You shall escape, but you must tell me for what reason I am pale and so lean."

Reflecting for a moment, the Brahmana replied in calm, well-spoken words.

The Brahmana said, "Dwelling in a place that is distant from your home, moving in a world that is not your own, and deprived of the companionship of your friends and kinsmen, you are enjoying vast affluence. It is for this that you are so pale and lean. Verily, O Rakshasa,

your friends, though well-treated by you, are yet not well-disposed towards you because of their own vicious natures. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

You are endowed with merit and wisdom and a well-regulated soul. Yet it is your lot to see others that are devoid of punya and gyana honoured above yourself. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Persons possessed of affluence much greater than yours but inferior to you in accomplishments do, verily, show scant regard for you. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

Though distressed through want of the means of support, you are led by the nobility of your soul to ignore such means as are open to you for your sustenance. It is for this that you are pale and lean. In consequence of your righteousness, you once deprived yourself to do good to another. This other, O righteous Rakshasa, thinks you deceived and vanquished by his superior intelligence. It is for this that you are pale and lean. I think that you grieve for those who, with souls overwhelmed by lust and wrath, are suffering misery in this world. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Though graced with the wealth that is wisdom, you are ridiculed by others who are entirely unwise.

Verily, those of evil ways condemn you. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Some enemy of yours, with a friendly tongue, came to you and behaved at first like a righteous one; and then he has left you, after deceiving you wretchedly. It is for this that you are pale and lean. You well know the ways of the world's affairs; you are knowing of all the mysteries. You are imbued with ability. Those who know you to be such yet do not respect and praise you. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

Finding yourself amongst evil men banded together in some enterprise, you discoursed to them, dispelling their doubts. For all that they did not admit your superior merits. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Verily, though without artha, Buddhi or the Vedas, you still wish, through your strength alone, to accomplish something great. It is for this that you are pale and lean. It seems that although you are resolved to undergo severe austerities by retiring into the forest, yet your kinsmen are not favourably inclined towards this decision. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

A friend of yours, who owns great wealth and is blessed with virile youth and handsome features, covets your wife. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Even the most excellent words you speak, in the midst of

wealthy men, they do not regard as wise or timely. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Some dear but witless kinsman of yours, though repeatedly instructed in the scriptures, has become angry. You have not succeeded in pacifying him. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

Having first set you to the accomplishment of some object desirable to you, someone now seeks to snatch the fruit thereof from your grasp. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Indeed, though possessed of excellent accomplishments and worshipped by all on that account, you are yet regarded by your kinsmen as worshipped for their sake and not for your own. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Through shame, you cannot give out some purpose in your heart, moved also by the inevitable delay that must occur in its achievement. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

With your intelligence, you want to bring under your influence diverse persons with myriad kinds of understandings and inclinations. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Without true learning, without courage, and without much wealth, you seek such fame as is won by knowledge, prowess and gifts. It is for this that you have been pale and lean. You have not been able to acquire something upon which you have set your heart for a long time. Or that which you seek to do, another seeks to undo. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

Truly, without any fault on your part, you have been cursed by somebody. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Without both wealth and accomplishments, you seek in vain to dispel the grief of your friends and the sorrows of sorrowing men. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Beholding righteous men living in grihastasrama, and sinners living in vanaprastha, and muktas attached to domesticity and fixed homes, you have become pale and lean.

Your actions with regard to dharma, artha and kama, as also the well-timed words that you speak, do not bear fruit. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Though endowed with wisdom, yet desirous of living, you live with wealth gained from one of evil ways. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Watching adharma increase on every side and dharma languishing, you are filled with grief. It is for this that you are pale and lean. Urged by time, you seek to please all your friends even when they are disputatious and ranged on sides opposite to one another. It is for this that you are pale and lean.

Beholding men possessed of Vedic lore engaged in sinful deeds, and those of learning unable to keep their senses under control, you are filled with grief. It is for this that you are pale and lean."

Thus roundly praised, the Rakshasa worshipped that learned Brahmana, and making him his friend and bestowing sufficient wealth upon him in dakshina, did not eat him but allowed him to leave unharmed.'

CANTO 125

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, how a poor man, wanting to achieve his own good, should bear himself after having acquired the condition of humanity and come into this field of karma that is so difficult to attain. Tell me also what the best of all gifts is, and what should be given under what circumstances. Tell me, O son of Ganga, who are truly deserving of honour and worship; it becomes you to discourse to me on these mysteries.'

Thus questioned by that famed monarch, the son of Pandu, Bhishma explains to that king these high and subtle mysteries of dharma.

Bhishma says, 'Listen to me with dhyana, O Rajan, as I explain to you the mysteries of dharma, after the same manner in which the holy Vyasa explained them to me in days of yore. This subject is a mystery to the very Devas, Yudhishtira. Yama of stainless deeds, with vows well-observed and yoga dhyana, acquired the knowledge of these mysteries as the high fruits of his tapasya. What pleases what Devas, what pleases the Pitris, the Rishis the Pramathas, who belong to Mahadeva, the Devi Sri, Chitragupta who records all things for Yama, and the mighty Diggajas, the elephants that support the world, what constitutes the religion of the Rishis—the dharma of many mysteries and which yields high fruits; the merits of what is called great dakshina, and the punya that attaches to all the sacrifices: he who knows these, O sinless one, and knowing, lives according to his knowledge, is freed from taint if he has sins and acquires the great rewards that are told of.

Equal to ten butchers is one oilman. Equal to ten oilmen is one drinker of alcohol. Equal to ten drinkers of alcohol is one courtesan. Equal to ten courtesans is a single chieftain. A great king is said to be equal to half of all these together. Hence, one should not accept gifts from these. On the other hand, one should attend to the vigyana, the science, which is sacred and has righteousness for its indications, of dharma, artha and kama. Amongst these, wealth and pleasure are naturally attractive. Hence, one should, with concentration, listen to the sacred expositions on dharma in particular, for the fruits are very great of listening to the mysteries of religion.

One must listen to everything that concerns dharma as ordained by the gods themselves. In it is contained the ritual in respect of the sraddha, in which have been declared the mysteries connected with the Pitris. The mysteries of all the Devas have also been explained there. It also includes the dharmas and karmas, which yield great merit, of the Rishis, together with the secrets that attach to them. It contains an exposition of the punya of great sacrifices and those that attach to all kinds of gifts.

Men who always read the scriptures on these subjects, those who bear them properly in their minds, and he who, having listened to them, follows them in practice, are all regarded to be as holy and sinless as the all-mighty Narayana himself. The merits that attach to the gift of kine, those that belong to the performance of ablutions in sacred waters, those that are won by the performance of sacrifices—all these are acquired by that man who treats his guests, Atithis, with reverence.

They who listen to these shastras, they who are invested with faith, and they who have a pure heart, it is well-known, conquer many regions of bliss. Righteous men of faith are cleansed of all stains and no sin can touch them. Such men always increase in dharma and attain to swarga.

Once upon a time, a celestial messenger, coming to the court of Indra of his own accord, but remaining invisible, addressed the king of the Devas in these words, "At the command of the Aswini Kumaras, those twin gods who are the foremost of all physicians, and who are blessed with every desirable attribute, have I come to this place where I behold Manavas and Pitris and the Devas assembled together. Why, indeed, is sexual congress forbidden to the man who performs a sraddha and for him also who eats at a sraddha, for the particular day? Why are three rice-balls offered separately at a sraddha? To whom should the first of those rice-balls be offered? To

whom should the second one be offered? And whose has it been ordained is the third, remaining one? I wish to know all this."

When the celestial messenger had spoken these words about righteousness and duty, the Devas who were seated to the east, and the Pitris also, applauded that ranger of the sky, and began to answer him.

The Pitris said, "Welcome are you, and blessings upon you! Do you listen, O best of sky rangers. The question you have asked is a high one and full of deep meaning. The Pitris of that man who indulges in sexual congress on the day he performs a sraddha, or eats at a sraddha have to lie for a whole month on his loins' seed. As for the rice-balls offered at a sraddha, we will tell you what should be done with them one after another. The first rice-ball should be cast into water. The second ball should be given to one of the wives to eat. The third ball should be cast into the blazing fire. Even this is the law declared in regard of the sraddha. Even this is the law that is followed according to the rites of dharma.

The Pitris of that man who follow this injunction become gratified with him and remain always joyful. The progeny of such a man increases and inexhaustible wealth always remains at his command."

The celestial duta said, "You have explained the division of the rice-balls and their consignment one after another to the three—water, the wife and the fire, together with the reasons thereof. Whom does that rice-ball which is consigned to the waters reach? How does it, by being so consigned, gratify the Devas and how does it redeem the Pitris? The second ball is eaten by the wife. So has it been laid down in the law. How do the Pitris of that man whose wife eats the second rice-ball become the eaters thereof? The last ball goes into the fire. How does that final rice-ball succeed in finding its way to you, or who is he to whom it goes? I wish to hear this—what ends are attained by the rice-balls offered at sraddhas when cast into the water, given to the wife, and consigned to the fire?"

The Pitris said, "Great is this question which you have asked. It involves a rahasya, a secret mystery, and is fraught with wonder. We have been exceedingly gratified by you, O ranger of the sky! The very Devas and the Munis give praise to karmas done in honour of the Pitris. Even they do not know what the certain conclusions are of the laws in respect of the deeds done to honour the Manes. Excepting the high-souled, immortal and excellent Markandeya, most learned Brahmana of great fame, who is ever

devoted to the Pitris, none amongst the Dvijas knows the mysteries of the laws in respect of the Pitris."

Having heard from the holy Vyasa what the end is of the three rice-balls offered at the sraddha, as explained by the Pitris themselves in reply to the question of the celestial messenger, I will explain that to you. Do you listen, O Yudhishtira, to what the conclusions are regarding the laws about the sraddha. Listen with attention, O Bhaarata.

That rice-ball which goes into water is regarded as gratifying Soma, the moon. That god, thus gratified, O you of great intelligence, gratifies in return the other Devas and the Pitris, also, with them. It has been enjoined that the second rice-ball should be eaten by the wife of the man that performs the sraddha. The Pitris, who are ever desirous of progeny, confer children on the woman of the house when she eats that second ball. Listen now to what becomes of the rice-ball that is cast into the fire. With that rice-ball, the Pitris are gratified and they grant the fruition of all his wishes to the one offering it.

I have told you everything about the three rice-balls offered at the sraddha and consigned to the holy three—water, the wife and the fire.

The Brahmana who becomes the ritwik at a sraddha embodies the Pitris of the person performing the sraddha. Hence, he should abstain that day from sexual intercourse even with his own wife. The man who eats at a sraddha should keep himself pure for that day. By doing otherwise, he surely incurs the sins I have spoken of. Hence, the Brahmana who is invited to a sraddha to eat the offerings should eat them after purifying himself with a bath and bear himself piously for that day by abstaining from every kind of injury or evil. The progeny of such a one multiply, and he who feeds him reaps the same reward.'"

"Bhishma continues, 'After the Pitris said what they did, a Rishi of austere penances, Vidyutprabha, whose form shone with splendour like that of the sun, spoke. Having heard those mysteries of dharma as propounded by the Pitris, he addressed Sakra, saying, "Stupefied by folly, men kill many different creatures born in the intermediate species, worms and ants and snakes and sheep and deer and birds. Heavy is the measure of sin they incur by this. What is the remedy?"

When this question was asked, all the Devas and Rishis endued with tapodhana and the highly blessed Pitris, applauded that ascetic.

Sakra said, “Thinking in one’s mind of Kurukshetra and Gaya and Ganga and Prabhasa and the lakes of Pushkara, one should immerse one’s head in water. By so doing one is cleansed of all one’s sins like Chandramas being freed from Rahu. One should bathe in this way for three days in succession and fast every day. Besides this, one should touch the back of a cow after bathing and bow one’s head to her tail.”

Vidyutprabha once more addressed Vasava, “I will declare a rite that is more subtle. Listen to me, O you of a hundred sacrifices. Rubbed with the astringent powder of the hanging roots of the banyan tree and anointed with the oil of priyangu, one should eat shashtika paddy mixed with milk. By doing this, one is washed of all one’s sins. Listen now to another rahasya unknown to many but which was discovered by the Rishis through dhyana. I heard it from Brihaspati while he recited it in the presence of Mahadeva. O king of the Devas, do you hear it with Rudra in your company, O Lord of Sachi.

If a man climbs a mountain, stands there on one foot, with arms upraised and palms joined together, and abstaining from food looks at a blazing fire, he acquires the merits of severe tapasya and obtains the rewards that attach to fasts. Seared by the rays of the sun, he is purified of all his sins. One who does this in both summer and winter, is freed from every sin. Exorcised, he acquires a splendour of complexion for all time. Such a man blazes with energy like the sun or shines in beauty like the moon.”

He of a hundred sacrifices, Indra seated in the midst of the gods, then sweetly addressed Brihaspati, saying these excellent words, “O Holy One, do you duly discourse on what those mysteries of dharma are which are full of happiness for human beings, and what the sins are which they commit, together with the mysteries that attach to them.”

Brihaspati said, “They who urinate facing the sun, they who do not show reverence for the wind, they who do not pour libations on the sacred fire, they who milk a cow whose calf is very young, from greed to get as much milk as they can from her, all sin. I will declare what those sins are, O Lord of Sachi. Do you listen to me.

Surya, Vayu, Agni the bearer of sacrificial oblations, O Vasava, and kine who are the mothers of all creatures, were created by the Self-born himself, to redeem all the worlds. These are the gods of humans. Listen all of you to the conclusions of dharma.

Those vile men and base women who urinate facing the sun, live in great infamy for eighty-six years. That man, O Sakra, who cherishes no reverence for the wind, has children that fall prematurely from the womb of his wife. Men who do not pour libations on the fire, find that the fire, when they do ignite it for rites they wish to perform, refuses to consume their libations. Men who drink the milk of kine whose calves are very young, are never blessed with any children to perpetuate their vamsas. Such men see their children die and their clans shrink. These are the consequences of those sins, as observed by enlightened souls venerable for age in their families. One should always avoid that which has been forbidden, and do only that which has been enjoined, if one wants to achieve prosperity. This that I say to you is the truth."

After the Devaguru had said this, the blessed Devas, with the Maruts, and the great Rishis questioned the Pitris, saying, "O Pitris, by what deeds of men, who are generally endowed with little understanding, do you become gratified? What gifts, made in course of sraddhas for the departed, become inexhaustible in punya? Through what karmas can men become free from the debt they owe to the Pitris? We wish to hear this. Great is the curiosity we feel."

The Pitris said, "Blessed ones, you have properly asked about the doubt in your hearts. Listen as we declare what righteous men do that gratify us. Bulls of blue complexions should be set free. Gifts should be made to us, on the day of the new moon, of sesame seeds and water. In the season of rains, lamps should be lighted. By doing these men can free themselves from the debt they owe to the Pitris. Such gifts are never in vain; indeed, they become inexhaustible and yield exalted rewards. For the satisfaction we derive from them is endless.

Besides these, men who, full of faith, beget offspring, save their departed ancestors from terrible hell."

Hearing these words of the Pitris, Vriddha-Gargya, possessed of tapodhana and great tejas, was so filled with wonder that the hair on his body stood on end. He said, "You that are all possessed of the wealth of tapasya, tell us what the merits are that attach to the setting free of blue bulls. What punya, again, attaches to the gift and lighting of lamps during the rains and the dakshina of water with sesame seeds?"

The Pitris said, "If a blue-complexioned bull, upon being set free, raises even a small quantity of water with its tail, the Pitris of the one who freed

that bull are slaked with that water for full sixty thousand years. The mud such a bull raises with its horns from the banks of a river or lake, without doubt, sends the Pitris of him that set the animal free to the realm of Soma. By giving and lighting lamps in the season of rain, one shines with effulgence like Soma himself. The man who gives lamps is never subject to tamas, which is darkness. Men who make gifts on the day of the new moon of sesame seeds and water, mixed with honey and using a vessel of copper, O you of tapodhana, are regarded as duly performing a sraddha with all its deep and intricate mysteries. These men are blessed with children of sound health and cheerful hearts.

The punya acquired by the offerer of the pinda to the Pitris takes the form of the growth of his vamsa. Surely, he who performs these karmas with faith, is freed from the debt he owes to the Pitris.

Even thus have been ordained the proper time for the performance of a sraddha, the law in respect of the rites to be observed, the proper person that should be fed at the sraddha, and the merits that attach to it. I have declared everything to you in their due order.'"

CANTO 126

Bhishma says, 'When the Pitris had finished, Indra addressed the puissant Hari, saying, "O Lord, what are those karmas by which you become pleased? How do men succeed in gratifying you?"

Vishnu said, "What I abhor is Brahmanas being spoken ill of or disrespected. Have no doubt that if Brahmanas are worshipped, I regard myself worshipped. All superior Brahmanas should always be reverenced, after feeding them with all sincere hospitality. One should also worship one's own feet in the evening. I am pleased with men who do this, as also with those who worship and make offerings to the whorl that is seen on cowpats when they first drop from the cow.

They who see a Brahmana who is dwarfish in stature, or a boar that has just risen from water and bears on his head mud from the bed or the bank, will never to meet with any evil. They are freed from every sin. The man who daily worships the Aswattha and Gorochana and the cow, is regarded as worshipping the whole universe with the Devas and Asuras and Manavas.

Verily, dwelling within these men, I myself accept the worship that is offered to them. Yes, the worship offered to these is worship offered to me. This has been the way since the worlds were first created. Men of small understanding that worship me otherwise, do so in vain, for worship of that kind I never accept; such worship does not gratify me."

Indra said, "Why do you laud the circular marks on cow-dung, one's own feet, the boar, the Brahmana who is a dwarf, and mud raised up from

the earth? It is you who create and you who destroy all these. You are the eternal nature of all things mortal and transitory."

Hearing Indra, Vishnu smiled a little and said, "It was with my chakra that the Daityas were slain. It was with my two feet that the worlds were covered. Assuming the form of a boar, I slew Hiranyaksha. Assuming the form of a dwarf, I conquered the Asura King Bali. Those Mahatmans who worship these please me. Verily, they who worship me in these forms never meet with any discomfiture, let alone grief. If one sees a Brahmana who is a brahmachari arrived at one's house, and offers him the first portion of one's food, which belongs by right to a Brahmana, and eats what remains, one is regarded as eating amrita.

If, after adoring the dawn, the morning sandhya, one stands with face turned towards the sun, one reaps the punya that accrues from the performance of ablutions in all the tirthas and is purified of all sins. You Rishis possessed of tapodhana, I have told you in detail of what constitutes a great rahasya."

Baladeva said, "Listen now to another great mystery filled with happiness for men; the ignorant ones, who do not know it, meet with great distress at the hands of other creatures. That man who, rising before dawn, touches a cow, ghee and curds, as also mustard seeds and the larger variety called priyangu, is washed of all sin. As for Rishis possessed of tapodhana, they always avoid all creatures both ahead and behind them, as also all that is impure while performing sraddhas.

The Devas said, "If a man take a vessel of copper, fill it with water and, facing the east, resolves upon a fast or the observance of a particular vow, the gods become pleased with him and all his wishes are crowned with success. By keeping upavasa, or vratas in any other way, men of little understanding gain nothing. In uttering the resolution about the observance of fasts and in making offerings to the Devas, the use of a vessel of copper is preferred. In making the offerings to the deities, in giving and accepting alms, in offering arghya and in offering tarpana, oblations of water mixed with sesame seeds to the Pitris, also, a copper vessel should be used. By performing these rites in any other way, one acquires little merit. Even these mysteries have been declared as to how the Devas are gratified."

Dharma Deva said, "The offerings made in all rites in honour of the Devas and those in honour of the Pitris should never be given away to a Brahmana who has served under the king, or who rings the bell or attends to

subsidiary duties in acts of worship or at sraddhas, or that keeps kine, or who is engaged in trade, or that follows some art as a profession, or that is an actor, or who quarrels with friends or who is without Vedic studies, or one that marries a Sudra woman. The performer of the sraddha who gives dakshina to such a Brahmana falls away from prosperity and begets no children. He fails, again, to satisfy his Pitris by what he does.

From the home of that person whence a guest returns unsatisfied, the Pitris, the Devas and the sacred fires, all turn away disappointed. That man who does not discharge the dharma of hospitality towards the guest arrived at his home comes to be regarded as equally sinful as those that are slayers of women or of cows, that are ungrateful towards benefactors, that are killers of Brahmanas, or violators of the beds of their gurus."

Agni said, "Listen with concentrated attention. I will name the sins of the man of evil heart who raises his foot to kick a cow, a most blessed Brahmana or a burning fire. The infamy of such a man spreads throughout the world and touches the confines of heaven itself. His Pitris become filled with fear. The Devas become wroth with him. Agni refuses to accept his libations. For a hundred lives he has to suffer and rot in hell. He is never saved. So, one should never touch a cow with one's feet, or a Brahmana of tejas, or a burning fire, if one has faith and desires one's own good, for terrible are the torments such a sinner has to endure."

Viswamitra said, "Listen to a deep and high rahasya of dharma unknown to most men. He who offers the Pitris rice boiled in sugared milk, sitting with his face turn to the south at noontide, in the shade of an elephant's body, in the month of Bhadrapada, under the Magha nakshatra, acquires untold punya. Listen to what that punya is. The man who makes such an offering to the Pitris in such circumstances, is regarded as performing a great sraddha each year for thirteen years in succession."

The cows said, "That man is washed of all his sins who adores a cow with these mantras: *O Bahula, O Samanga, O you that are fearless everywhere, O you that are forgiving and full of auspiciousness, O friend, O source of all plenitude in the world of Brahma. In days of yore, you were present with your calf at the sacrifice of Indra, the wielder of the thunderbolt. You took your place in the firmament and in the path of Agni. The Devas with Narada among them adored you on that occasion by calling you Sarvamsaha, who endures all things and forgives.*

Such a man attains to the realm of Purandara. He acquires, besides, the merits that attach to kine, and the splendour of Chandramas also. Such a man becomes freed from every sin, every fear, and every grief. Finally, he finds a home in the happy world of the thousand-eyed Indra!"

After this, the blessed and celebrated Saptarishis, with Vasishta at their head, rose, and circumambulating the Lotus-born Brahma stood around him with hands joined in reverence. Vasishta, that foremost of all who know the Brahman, became their spokesman and asked this question which is beneficial to every creature, but especially so to Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. "By doing what karma may men of righteous conduct who are, however, without the wealth of this world, succeed in acquiring the merits of performing sacrifices?"

Hearing this question of theirs, the Grandsire Brahma replied to them.

Brahma said, 'Excellent is this question, O most blessed ones. It is at once auspicious and high and laden with a secret. This question that you have asked is subtle and is full of profound weal to mankind. You tapodhana Rishis, I will answer you properly, in detail. Do you listen with attention to what I say about how men acquire the punya of sacrifices even when they are unable to perform them through being poor.

In the lighted fortnight of the month of Pausha, when the nakshatra Rohini is in conjunction with the moon, if one purifies oneself with a bath, lies under the canopy of heaven, clad in a single piece of raiment, with faith and fixed dhyana, and drinks the rays of the moon, one acquires the merits that attach to the performance of Mahayagnas, great sacrifices. You foremost of Dvijas, this is a high mystery that I declare to you in reply to your questions, you that are possessed of insight into the subtle truths of all subjects of enquiry."

CANTO 127

Vibhavasu, otherwise called Surya, said, "There are two offerings. One of those consists of a palmful of water and the other called akshata consists of rice grains with ghrita. One should, on the day of the full moon, stand facing that bright orb and make to him the two offerings. The man who makes these offerings is said to adore his sacred fire. Verily, he is regarded as one that has poured libations on the three principal agnis.

That man of little understanding who cuts down a large tree on the day of the new moon, is stained with the sin of Brahmahatya. By killing even a single leaf one incurs that sin. The foolish man who chews a tooth-twig on the day of the new moon is regarded as injuring Soma Deva by what he does. The Pitris of such a person become wroth with him. The Devas do not accept the libations poured by such a man on days of the full and the new moon. His Pitris become enraged with him, and his race and family become extinct."

The Devi Sri said, "That sinful house, in which eating and drinking vessels and chairs and beds lie scattered, and in which women are beaten, the Devas and Pitris leave in disgust. Verily, without accepting the offerings made to them by the owners of such houses, the gods and the Manes fly away from such a sinful habitation."

Angiras said, "The children of that man increase who stands every night for a full year under a karanjaka tree with a lamp to cast light on it, and holds besides in his hand the roots of the suvarchala plant."

Gargya said, "One should always perform the dharmas of hospitality to one's guests. One should give lamps in the hall or shed where sacrifices are

performed. One should avoid sleep during the day, and abstain from all kinds of flesh, why, all food. One should never injure cows and Brahmanas. One should always chant the names of the Pushkara lake and the other sacred tirthas. Such a course of dharma is the foremost. Even this constitutes a high religion with its mysteries. If observed, it is sure to yield great rewards. If a man performs even a hundred sacrifices, he is doomed to see the exhaustion of the punya attaching to the libations poured therein. The dharmas, however, which I have mentioned are such that when done by a man imbued with faith, their merit becomes inexhaustible.

Listen now to another high rahasya concealed from the view of many. The Devas do not accept the libations poured upon the fire on the occasion of sraddhas and rites in their honour, or during rituals that are performed on ordinary lunar days or on the especially sacred days of the Paurnima and Amavasya, if they behold a woman in her season of impurity or one that is the daughter of a mother afflicted with leprosy. The Pitris of the man who allows such a woman to come near the place where the sraddha is being performed by him, are never gratified with him for thirteen years.

Clad in white raiment, and becoming pure in body and mind, one should invite Brahmanas and cause them to utter their blessings and mantras when one performs the sraddha. On such occasions one should also recite the Mahabharata. It is by observing all these that the offerings made at sraddhas become inexhaustible."

Dhaumya said, "Broken utensils, broken bedsteads, roosters and dogs, as also such trees as have grown within dwellings, are all inauspicious. In a broken utensil is Kali himself, while in a broken bedstead is loss of wealth. When a cockerel or a dog is in sight, the Devas do not eat the offerings made to them. Under the roots of a tree, scorpions and snakes find shelter. Hence, one should never plant a tree within one's home."

Jamadagni said, "That man whose heart is not pure is sure to go to hell even if he adores the Devas in a horse sacrifice or in a hundred Vajapeya yagnas, or if he undergoes the severest austerities hanging by his feet. Purity of heart is regarded as equal to sacrifices and Truth. A very poor Brahmana, by giving only a prastha of powdered barley with a pure heart to another Brahmana, attained to the loka of Brahma himself. This is enough proof of the importance of purity of heart."'

CANTO 128

'Vayu said, "I will recite some dharmas which are fraught with happiness to man. Do you listen also with attention to some sinful transgressions, along with the secret causes upon which they depend. That man who offers for the four months of the rains, sesame and water to the Pitris, and food, according to the best of his power, to a Brahmana well-conversant with the laws; who duly pours libations on the sacred fire, and makes offerings of rice boiled in sugared milk; who gives lamps in honour of the Pitris, with sesame and water—verily he who does all this with bhakti and dhyana acquires all the punya that attaches to a hundred sacrifices in which animals are offered to the gods.

Listen to this other high mystery that is unknown to all. That man who thinks it permissible when a Sudra ignites the fire upon which he is to pour libations, or who does not see any fault when women who are incompetent to assist at sraddhas and other rites are allowed to assist at them, truly becomes stained with sin. The three sacrificial fires become enraged with such a man. In his next life he has to take birth himself as a Sudra. His Pitris, together with the Devas, are never pleased with him.

I will now tell you what the expiations are for cleansing oneself from such sins. Listen to me with attention. By performing these expiatory karmas, one becomes happy and free from sin's fever. Fasting all the while, one should, for three days, with great dhyana, pour libation on the sacred fire of the urine of the cow mixed with cow-dung and milk and ghrita. The Devas accept the offerings of such a man upon the expiration of a full year.

His Pitris also, when the time comes for him to perform the sraddha, become gratified with him again.

I have thus said what is dharma and what adharma, with all their recondite details, as they pertain to human beings wanting to attain swarga. In truth, men who abstain from these transgressions or who, having committed them, undergo the expiatory rites indicated, succeed in attaining to paradise when they leave this world.”

CANTO 129

Lomasa said, “The Pitris of men who, without having wives of their own, betake themselves to the wives of others, become filled with disappointment when the time for the sraddhas comes. He who takes to himself the wives of other men, he who indulges in sexual union with a barren woman, and he who appropriates what belongs to a Brahmana, are equally sinful. There is no doubt that the Pitris of such men disown them entirely, and have nothing to do with them. The offerings they make fail to satisfy or please the gods and the Manes. Hence should one always abstain from sexual congress with women that are the wives of others, as also with women who are barren. The man who desires his own good should never take what belongs to a Brahmana.

Listen now to another rahasya, unknown to all, with regard to dharma. One should, with bhakti, always do the bidding of one’s acharya and other elders. On the twelfth day of the moon, as also on the day of the full moon, every month, one must give dakshina to Brahmanas, of ghee and the offerings that constitute akshata. Hear what the measure is of the punya that such a giver acquires.

By giving such dakshina, a man is said to augment the power of Soma and Varuna. Vasava confers upon such a one a fourth part of the punya of an Aswamedha yagna. By giving such dana, a man is blessed with great energy and prowess. The divine Soma, well-pleased with him, grants him the fruition of his wishes.

Listen now to another dharma, together with the foundation on which it rests, which yields great merit. In this age of Kali, that dharma fetches great

happiness to men. The man who, rising before dawn and purifying himself with a bath, clothes himself in white clothes and with concentrated dhyana makes gifts to Brahmanas of vessels full of sesame seeds, who makes offerings to the Pitris of holy water with sesame seeds and honey, and who gives lamps as also krisara acquires substantial punya. I will tell you what this punya is.

Indra has ascribed these rewards to the gift of vessels of copper and brass filled with sesame seeds. He who makes gifts of kine, he who makes gifts of land that yield eternal punya, he who performs the Agnishtoma yagna with copious dakshina to Brahmanas, are all regarded by the gods as acquiring merits equal to those which one acquires by making gifts of vessels filled with sesame seeds. Gifts of water with sesame seeds are regarded by the Pitris is as giving eternal gratification to them. The ancestors all become delighted with gifts of lamps and krisara.

I have thus recited the ancient law laid down by the Rishis, which is eulogised by both the Pitris and the Devas in their respective worlds.'"

CANTO 130

Bhishma says, 'Then, the Rishis there assembled, together with the Pitris and the Devas, with rapt dhyana, questioned Vasishta's wife Arundhati of great ascetic merit. Possessed of abundant tapodhana, Arundhati was equal to her husband, the Mahatman Vasishta, in tejas, for in both vratas and pravritti she was her husband's equal. Addressing her, they said, "We desire to hear from you the rahasyas, the arcane mysteries of kartavya and dharma, duty and religion. O chaste devi, tell us what you regard a deep and high mystery."

Arundhati said, "The great progress I have achieved in tapasya is due to your kindly consideration for me. With your gracious leave, I will now speak of duties that are eternal, on those that are high mysteries. I will speak of them with the causes on which they depend, and elaborately. A knowledge of these should be imparted to him that has a pure heart and is possessed of bhakti. These four—he that is bereft of faith, he that is full of pride, he that is guilty of Brahmahatya, and he that violates the bed of his guru—should never be spoken to at all. Dharma and kartavya should never be imparted to them.

The punya acquired by one who gives away a Kapila cow every day for two and ten years, or by one who adores the Devas every month with a sacrifice, or by him who gives away hundreds of thousands of kine at the great Pushkara, do not equal those that are his with whom an Atithi, a guest, is gratified.

Listen now to another kartavya whose observance invests happiness on a man. It should be undertaken, with its secret ritual, by one who owns

bhakti. Its merits are exalted. Listen to what they are. If, rising at early dawn and taking with him a quantity of water and a few blades of kusa grass, a man goes into a cow-pen and washes a cow's horns, sprinkling on them pure water with the blades of kusa grass and then has the water drip down onto his own head, he is regarded, in consequence of such a snana, as one that has performed his ablutions in all the sacred tirthas that the wise have heard to exist in the three worlds and which are honoured and resorted to by Siddhas and Charanas."

When Arundhati said these words, all the Devas and Pitris applauded her, saying, 'Uttamam, most excellent!' Indeed, all that were present there were delighted and all of them worshipped Arundhati.

Brahma said, "O most blessed one, exceptional is the duty that you have told of, together with its secret ritual. Praise be to you. I grant you this boon—your tapasya will continually increase!"

Yama said, "I have listened with joy to your wonderful discourse. Listen now to what Chitragupta has said and what I myself find agreeable. This relates to kartavya with its secret ritual, and is worthy of being heard by the Maharishis, as also by men of bhakti who wish to achieve their own welfare. Nothing is lost of either dharma or adharma, piety or sin, which the living commit. On days of the full moon and the new moon, Purnima and Amavasya, both those are conveyed to the sun where they rest. When a mortal goes into the realm of the dead, the sun god bears witness to all his karma. He that is righteous acquires the fruits of his righteousness there.

I shall now tell you of some auspicious duties which are approved by Chitragupta. Water for drink, and lamps to light darkness, should always be given, as also sandals and umbrellas and Kapila kine, all with due rites. In Pushkara, especially, should one make the gift of a Kapila cow to a Brahmana who knows the Vedas. One should also always maintain one's agnihotra with great care.

Here is another dharma which was proclaimed by Chitragupta. It behoves them that are the best of creatures to listen separately to what the merits are of that dharma. In course of time, every creature is destined to die. They that are of little understanding meet with great distress in the regions of the dead, for they become terribly afflicted by hunger and thirst. Indeed, they have to rot there, burning in pain. There is no escape for them from such a fate. They have to enter into thick darkness.

I will now tell you of those kartavyas, by performing which one may succeed in crossing safely over such dire calamity. The performance of those karmas costs very little but is full of great punya, and confers untold bliss in the next world. Lofty are the merits that attach to the gift of water. In the next world, especially, that punya is truly transcendent. For them that make gifts of water is ordained in the other world a great river full of sublime water. Indeed, the water contained in that river is inexhaustible and cool, and sweet as amrita. He who makes gifts of water in this world drinks from that stream in the world hereafter.

Listen now to the abundant rewards that attach to the giving of lamps. The man who gives deepams in this world never so much as sees the foetid darkness of naraka. Soma and Surya and Agni always give him their light when he goes into the other world. Why, all the gods ordain that on every side of such a one there should be blazing light. Verily, when a giver of lights repairs to the world of the dead, he himself blazes forth in pure effulgence like a second Surya. Hence, one should give deepam while here and pavitra jala, pure water.

Listen now to what the rewards are of the person who makes the gift of a Kapila cow to a Brahmana who knows the Vedas, and especially if the gift be made in Pushkara. Such a man is regarded as having made a gift of a hundred cows with a bull, a gift that confers eternal punya. The gift of a single Kapila cow washes away whatever sins the giver may be guilty of, even if those sins be as grave as Brahmahatya. For, the gift of a single Kapila cow is regarded as equal in merit to that of at least a hundred other cows. Hence, one should give away a Kapila cow at the Pushkara which is regarded as the elder of the two tirthas known by that name, on the day of the full moon in the month of Karttika. Men that succeed in giving such a dakshina have never to encounter distress of any kind, or sorrow, or pain.

That man who gives away a pair of padukas or sandals to a superior Brahmana deserving of the gift, attains to similar punya. By giving away a chatra, an umbrella, a person obtains comfortable shade in the next world, and is never scalded by the sun. A gift made to a deserving person is never lost. It is certain to produce agreeable consequences to the giver."

Hearing these opinions of Chitragupta, Surya's hair stood on end. Of awesome splendour, he addressed all the Devas and the Pitris, saying, "You have heard the rahasyas relating to kartavyas, as propounded by the

Mahatman Chitragupta. Those Manavas who, with devotion, make these gifts to high-souled Brahmanas, are freed from fear of every kind.

Five kinds of men stained with vicious deeds have no escape. Verily, of sinful conduct and regarded as the worst of men, they should never be spoken to. Indeed they should always be avoided. Those five are—he who kills a Brahmana, he who kills a cow, he who is addicted to sexual intercourse with other men's wives, he who is bereft of bhakti, and he who derives his sustenance by selling the virtue of his wife. These sinners, when they go to the land of the dead, rot in hell like worms that live upon pus and blood. These five are avoided by the Pitris, the Devas, the Snataka Brahmanas, and other regenerate ones that are devoted to the practice of tapasya.'"

CANTO 131

Bhishma says, 'Then, all the most blessed Devas and the Pitris, and the great Rishis, addressing the Pramathas, said, "You are all highly blessed ones. You are invisible wanderers of the night. Why do you afflict such men that are vile and impure? What karmas are impediments to your power? What are those deeds through which you become unable to inflict your torments on men? What are those actions that destroy Rakshasas and that prevent you from asserting your power over the habitations of men? Wanderers of the night, we wish to hear all this from you."

The Pramathas said, "Men are rendered unclean by acts of sexual congress. They who do not purify themselves after intercourse, they who insult their elders, they who from dullness of mind eat different kinds of meat, the man who sleeps at the foot of a tree, he who keeps any animal matter under his pillow while lying down to sleep, and he who lies down or sleeps setting his head where his feet should be, or his feet where his head should be—these men we regard as unclean. Verily, these men have many weaknesses.

Those who expectorate their phlegm and cast other unclean secretions into water are the same. Without doubt such men deserve to be killed and eaten by us, and we prey upon them. But listen now to what those kriyas are which are remedies because of which we are rendered powerless to do any harm to men. Those men whose bodies are marked with streaks of gorochana, or who hold vachas in their hands, or who make gifts of ghrita with those ingredients that go by the name of akshata, or who place ghee

and akshata on their heads, or those who abstain from meat—all these we are helpless to attack.

That man in whose house the sacred fire burns day and night without ever being put out, or who keeps the skin or teeth of a wolf in his home, or a hill-tortoise, or from whose habitation the sacrificial smoke is seen to curl up, or who keeps a cat or a goat that is either tawny or black in hue, is free from our power.

Verily, those grihastas who keep these things in their homes always find them free from the inroads of even the fiercest Pisachas that live on carrion. Other spirits also, that like us range through different worlds in pursuit of pleasure, cannot do the least harm to such dwellings. Hence, you gods, should men keep such things in their homes, for these keep Rakshasas and other such dark spirits away in mortal fear.

We have thus told you everything about which you had great doubts.'"

CANTO 132

Bhishma says, 'After this, the Grandsire Brahma, born from the primeval lotus and resembling the lotus in his splendour, majesty and fragrance, addressed the Devas with Vasava, the Lord of Sachi, at their head, "Yonder sits the mighty Naga who is a dweller of the nether realms. Endowed with great strength and energy, and with great prowess, also, his name is Renuka. He is a great being. Ask this mighty Renuka to question the Diggajas of fathomless strength and power, who support the very earth with her hills, rivers, oceans and lakes. Let Renuka go to them and ask them about the mysteries of dharma."

At these words of the Grandsire, the Devas, with well-pleased minds, commissioned Renuka to go where those holders of the world stand.

Going to those elephants, Renuka addressed them, saying, "You mighty ones, I have been commanded by the Devas and the Pitris to question you about the mysteries of dharma and kartavya. I wish to hear you discourse on that subject in detail. Most blessed ones, do you speak to me of dharma as your wisdom may dictate."

The eight elephants standing in the eight quarters said, "On the auspicious eighth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Karttika, when the Aslesha nakshatra is in the ascendant, one should make gifts of payasa and rice. Casting aside wrath, and living on a strictly regulated diet, one should make these offerings at a sraddha, uttering these mantras the while—*Let Baladeva and other Nagas possessed of great strength, let other mighty snakes of huge bodies that are indestructible and eternal, and let all the other great snakes that have taken their birth in their race, make bali*

offerings to me for the enhancement of my strength and energy. Verily, let my strength be as great as that of the blessed Narayana when he raised up the submerged earth.

Uttering these mantras, one should make balidana upon an ant-hill. When the maker of day retires to his chambers in the west, upon the chosen ant-hill should offerings be made of raw sugar and rice. The ant-hill should previously be scattered with gajendra flowers. Offerings should also be made of blue cloths and fragrant unguents. If offerings be made in this way, those beings that live in the Patalas, bearing the weight of the upper regions upon their heads or shoulders, become well-pleased and gratified.

As for ourselves, we also do not feel the labour of holding the earth because of such offerings being made to us. Weighted by the burden we bear, even this is what we think, without any selfish concerns. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas and Sudras, by observing this rite for a full year, fasting on each occasion, acquire great punya from such dakshina. We know that making such bali offerings on the valmikyam, the ant-hill, is truly fraught with the highest punya. By making such offerings, one is regarded as performing the dharma of atithya, hospitality, for a hundred years to all the elephants that exist in the three worlds."

The mighty Diggajas, the Nagas, the Devas and the Pitris and the blessed Rishis, all applauded Renuka.'

CANTO 133

Bhishma says, 'Maheswara said, "Searching your memories, excellent are the dharmas and kartavyas that you have all recited. Listen, all of you, now to me as I declare some rahasyas relating to dharma and kartavya. Only to those whose hearts have been set on dharma and who are possessed of bhakti may those secret mysteries be divulged of duty and religion, which are full of high punya.

Hear what the regards are that become his who, with heart free from anxiety, gives food every day, for a month, to kine and contents himself with one meal a day throughout this period. Dhenus, cows, are highly blessed. They are regarded as the most sacred of all sacred things. Verily, it is they that support the three worlds with the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas. Respectful services rendered to them are rewarded with exalted punya and hallowed results. That man who every day gives food to dhenus advances every day in religious merit. Of old, in the Krita yuga, I declared my approval of these creatures. Afterwards, Brahma, born in the primeval lotus, solicited me to show kindness towards kine. It is for this reason that a bull to this day stands as the device on my standard. I always sport with gavyas, and even so should kine be worshipped by all. Kine are possessed of great power. They are givers of boons. If worshipped, they do surely grant boons. The person who gives food to cows for even a single day receives from those benign creatures a fourth part of the punya he would win by all his good karma throughout his life."'

CANTO 134

'Skanda said, "I shall now declare a dharma of which I approve. Do you listen to it with dhyana. That one who takes a little earth from the horns of a blue bull, smears his body with it for three days, and then performs his ablutions, acquires untold punya. Hear what those merits are. By doing this he washes away every stain and evil, and attains to sovereign sway hereafter. As many times he is born into this world, so many times does he become celebrated for his heroism.

Listen now to another mystery unknown to all. Taking a copper vessel and placing therein some cooked food after having mixed it with honey, one should offer it as a bali to the rising moon on the evening of the purnima day. Do you learn, with bhakti, what the merits are of the man that does this. The Sadhyas, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Viswedevas, the twin Aswins, the Maruts and the Vasus, all, accept that offering. By such an offering Soma waxes as also Varuna, vast repository of waters. This dharma that I have declared and which is unknown to all, if performed, is certainly fraught with mighty happiness."

Vishnu said, "That man who, endowed with faith and free from malice, listens every day with attention to the rahasyas in respect of religion and duty that are preserved by the Devas and those mysteries, also, which are preserved by the Rishis, has never to succumb to any evil. Such a one also is freed from every fear. That man who, with his senses under perfect control, reads these cantos which treat of these auspicious and meritorious duties, together with their secrets—duties that have been declared here today by all—acquires all the punya that attaches to their actual

performance. Sin can never master him. Verily, such a man can never be stained with faults of any kind. Indeed, one wins superabundant merits by reading these rahasyas, or by reciting them to others, or by hearing them recited. The Devas and the Pitris eat, for ever, the havya and the kavya offered by such a one. Both these, in consequence of the virtues of the offerer, become inexhaustible.

Even such is the punya that comes to the man who, with bhakti and dhyana, recites these rahasyas to righteous Brahmanas on days of the full moon or the new moon. Such a man grows steadfast in the observance of all his duties. Beauty of form and prosperity also become his. He succeeds, besides this, in becoming the favourite, for all time, of the Rishis and the Devas and the Pitris. If a person becomes guilty of all sins, save those which are classed as grave or heinous, he is cleansed of them all merely by listening to the recitation of these mysteries about dharma and karma."'

Bhishma continues, 'Even these, O king of men, are the rahasyas of religion and duty that dwell in the breasts of the gods. Held in high regard by all the gods and promulgated by Vyasa, I have now declared them to you for your benefit. One who is conversant with dharma and kartavya thinks that this knowledge is superior in worth to even the very earth full of every kind of wealth. This knowledge should not be imparted to one that is bereft of devotion, or to an unbeliever, or to one that has fallen away from his svadharma, or to one that is without compassion, or to one that is devoted to the science of empty disputations, or to one that is hostile to his gurus, or to one that thinks all creatures to be different from himself.'"

CANTO 135

"Yudhishtira says, 'Who are those, O Bharata, from whom a Brahmana in this world may accept food? From whom may a Kshatriya, a Vaisya and a Sudra take food?'

Bhishma says, 'A Brahmana may take his food from another Brahmana or from a Kshatriya or a Vaisya, but he must never accept food from a Sudra. A Kshatriya may have his food from a Brahmana, a Kshatriya or a Vaisya. He must, however, eschew food given by Sudras, who are addicted to evil ways and who partake of all manner of food without scruple. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas can partake of food given by such Vaisyas as tend the sacred fire every day, as are faultless in character, and as keep the Chaturmasya vrata. But the man who takes food from a Sudra swallows the very abomination of the earth, and drinks the excretions of the human body, and eats the filth of all the world. If one engages in the service of a Sudra, one is doomed to perdition even though one may duly perform all the rites of one's varna. A Brahmana, a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya who engages the services of a Sudra is doomed, although they be devoted to the performance of every religious rite.

It is said that a Brahmana's dharma consists in studying the Vedas and seeking the welfare of the human race; that a Kshatriya's duty consists in protecting men, and that a Vaisya's is in promoting their material prosperity. A Vaisya lives by distributing the fruits of his own actions and by farming. The breeding of cows and trade are the legitimate work in which a Vaisya may engage without fear of censure. The man who abandons his own ordained occupation and betakes himself to that of a Sudra, should be

considered as a Sudra and on no account should any food be accepted from him.

Professors of the healing art, mercenary soldiers, the priest who acts as warder of the house, and persons who devote a whole year to study without any profit, are all considered Sudras. And those who impudently partake of food offered at ceremonies in a Sudra's house are visited by terrible calamity. Because of partaking of such forbidden food, they lose their family, strength and vitality, and attain to the condition of animals, devolving into being dogs, fallen in virtue and devoid of all religious observances.

He who takes food from a physician takes that which is no better than excrement; the food of a harlot is like urine; that of a skilled mechanic is like blood. If a Brahmana approved by the good takes the food of one who lives by his learning, he is regarded as accepting the food of a Sudra. All good men should abjure such food. The food of a person who is censured by all is said to be like a draught from a pool of blood. The acceptance of food from an evil man is considered as reprehensible as killing a Brahmana.

One should not accept food if one is slighted and not received with due honour by the giver. A Brahmana who does so is soon overtaken by disease, and his kula soon becomes extinct. By accepting food from the warden of a city, one descends to the status of the lowest outcaste. If a Brahmana accepts food from one who is guilty of killing either a cow or a Brahmana or from one who has committed adultery with his preceptor's wife, or from a drunkard, he helps promote the race of Rakshasas.

By accepting food from a eunuch, or from an ingrate, or from one who has misappropriated wealth entrusted to his charge, one is born in the country of the Savaras situated beyond the precincts of the middle kingdom.

I have thus recited to you those from whom food may be accepted and those from whom it may not. Now tell me, O son of Kunti, what else you wish to hear from me today.'"

CANTO 136

"Yudhishtira says, 'You have told me in full of those from whom food may be taken and of those from whom it should not be taken. But I have grave doubts on one matter. Do you, O Sire, enlighten me; tell me what expiation a Brahmana should make upon accepting the different kinds of food, those especially offered in honour of the Devas and the tarpana made to the Pitris.'

Bhishma says, 'I will tell you, O prince, how mahatman Brahmanas may be absolved from all sin incurred by accepting food from others. For accepting ghrita, the expiation is made by pouring oblations on the fire, while reciting the Savitri mantra. For accepting sesame, O Yudhishtira, the same expiation must be performed. For accepting meat, or honey, or salt, a Brahmana is purified by standing through the night until the sun rises. If a Brahmana accepts gold from anyone, he is cleansed of all sin by silently reciting the great Vedic prayer, the Gayatri mantra, in a public place while holding a piece of iron in his hand.

For accepting money or clothes or women or gold, the purification is the same.

For accepting food, or rice boiled in milk and sugar, or sugar cane juice, or sugar cane, or oil, or any sacred thing, one is purified by bathing thrice in the day, during the morning, noon and twilight sandhyas. If one accepts paddy, flowers, fruits, water, half-ripe barley, milk, or curdled milk, or anything made of meal or flour, the expiation is done by reciting the Gayatri mantra a hundred times. For taking shoes or clothes at obsequial ceremonies, the sin is destroyed by devoutly chanting the same mantra a

hundred times. The acceptance of the bhudana, the gift of land, at the time of an eclipse or during any inauspicious time, is expiated by observing a fast for three successive nights.

The Brahmana who partakes of oblations offered to departed ancestors during the dark fortnight is purified by fasting for a full day and night. Without performing his ablutions, a Brahmana should not say his sandhya vandana, nor betake himself to religious dhyana, nor eat a second meal. By this he is purified. For this reason, the sraddha for deceased ancestors has been ordained to be performed in the afternoon and then the Brahmana who has been invited should be fed amply, served a feast.

The Brahmana who partakes of food in the house of a dead person on the third day after the death, is purified by bathing three times daily for twelve days. After the twelve days, and then undergoing the purification ceremonies duly, the sin is destroyed by giving ghrita to other Brahmanas. If a man takes any food in the house of a dead person, within ten days after the death, he should go through all the expiations I have mentioned, and should recite the Savitri mantra and perform the sin-destroying Ishti and Kushmanda penances.

The Brahmana who eats in the house of a dead person for three nights is purified by performing his ablutions thrice daily for seven days, and thus attains all the objects of his desire, and is never troubled by any misfortune.

The Brahmana who eats in the company of Sudras is purged from all impurity by duly observing the same purificatory rites. The Brahmana who eats in the company of Vaisyas is absolved from sin by living on alms for three successive nights. If a Brahmana eats with Kshatriyas, he should make expiation by bathing in his clothes.

By eating with a Sudra from the same plate, the Sudra loses his family honour; the Vaisya by eating from the same plate with a Vaisya, loses his cows and friends. The Kshatriya loses his prosperity, and the Brahmana his splendour and vitality. In such cases, expiations should be performed, and propitiatory rites observed, and oblations offered to the gods. The Savitri mantra should be recited and the Revati rites and Kushmanda penances should be observed to destroy the sin.

If any of the above four varnas partake of food partly eaten by a person of any other order, the expiation is done by smearing the body with auspicious substances like rochana, durva grass, and turmeric.'"

CANTO 137

Yudhishtira says, 'O Bhaarata, of charity and devotion, dana and bhakti, which is the better in this world? Do you resolve yet another great doubt that is in my mind.'

Bhishma says, 'Do you listen to me as I recite the names of the great men who, having been devoted to virtue, and having cleansed their hearts with tapa, dana and other acts of piety, undoubtedly attained to the different celestial realms.

Rishi Atreya, revered by all, attained, O monarch, to swarga by imparting the knowledge of the Nirguna Brahman to his sishyas. King Sibi, the son of Usinara, offered the life of his own beloved son, for the sake of a Brahmana, and was transported from this world into heaven. And Pratardana, the king of Kasi, by giving his son to a Brahmana, secured for himself unique and undying fame in this as well as in the other world. Rantideva, the son of Sankriti, attained to the highest heaven by giving dakshina to the high-souled Vasishta. Devavriddha, too, found swarga by giving a hundred-ribbed and magnificent golden chatra to a Brahmana at a yagna.

The revered Ambarisha has also attained to Devaloka by making a gift of all his kingdom to a Brahmana of great power. King Janamejaya of the Suryavamsa found the highest heaven by making a gift of golden kundalas, majestic rathas and gentle cows to Brahmanas. The Rajarishi Vrishadarbhi attained swarga by making gifts of various jewels and beautiful homes to Brahmanas. King Nimi of Vidarbha attained to heaven, with his sons,

friends and kine, by giving his daughter and kingdom to Agastya Mahatman.

The far-famed Rama, the son of Jamadagni, attained to eternal regions, far beyond his expectation, by giving bhudana to Brahmanas. Vasishta, the prince of Brahmanas, preserved all the creatures during a time of great drought when the god Parjanya, Indra, did not bestow his grateful showers upon the earth, and for this he has secured eternal bliss for himself. Rama, the son of Dasaratha, whose fame echoes throughout this world, attained to the eternal regions by making gifts of wealth at sacrifices.

The renowned Rajarishi Kakshasena went into swarga by duly making over to the high-souled Vasishta the wealth which he had kept with him. Marutta, the son of Parikshita and the grandson of Karandhama, gave his daughter in marriage to Angiras, and instantly attained Swargaloka. The most devout king of Panchala, Brahmadatta, attained the blessed realm by giving away a precious sankha, a conch shell. King Mitrasaha, by giving his favourite wife Madayanti to the mighty Vasishta, found paradise. Sudyumna, the son of Manu, meted out the proper punishment to the high-souled Likhita, and attained to the most blessed regions.

The celebrated Rajarishi Saharachitta went to the transcendent places by sacrificing his life for the sake of a Brahmana. King Satadyumna found heaven by giving Maudgaya a golden mansion replete with all the objects of desire. In ancient times, King Sumanyu gave Sandilya a heap of food piled high as a hill, and gained swarga. The Salwa prince Dyutimat of great splendour attained to the highest regions by giving his kingdom to Richika. The royal sage Madiraswa gave his slender-waisted daughter to Hiranyahasta, and went to the realm of the gods. The lordly Lomapada attained all the vast objects of his desire by giving his daughter Santa in marriage to Rishyasringa.

The Rajarishi Bhagiratha gave his famed daughter Hansi to Kautsa for his wife, and went to the eternal regions. King Bhagiratha also gave hundreds of thousands of kine with their young ones to Kohala and attained to further blessed realms.

These and many other men, O Yudhishtira, have found swarga for themselves, through the punya of their merit of their charities and penances, and they have also returned from those heavens again and again. Their fame will endure as long as the world will last.

I have related to you, O Yudhishtira, this story of those good grihastas who attained to realms of eternal felicity by dint of their dana and tapasya, and by begetting many children. O foremost scion of the Kuruvamsa, by always giving dana these men also applied their virtuous minds to the performance of yagnas and to tapasya.

O mighty prince, as night has approached, I will answer for you in the morning whatever other questions may arise in your heart.'"

CANTO 138

"The next morning, Yudhishtira says, 'I have heard from you, Pitamaha, the names of those kings that have ascended into heaven. O you whose power is great in the observance of the satyavrata, the vow of truth, by following the dana dharma. How many kinds of gift are there that should be given? What are the fruits of the several kinds of gifts? For what reasons do, which gifts, made to what persons, yield punya? Indeed, to whom should dakshina be given? For what reasons and of how many kinds, are gifts to be made? I wish to hear all this in detail.'

Bhishma says, 'Listen, O sinless son of Kunti, as I speak on the subject of dana and dakshina to you, in detail. I will tell you, O Bhaarata, how dakshina should be given to all the orders of men.

From desire of punya, from wanting artha, from bhaya, from ichcha, free choice, and from daya, pity, are gifts given. Dana, therefore, is of five kinds.

Listen now to the reasons for which gifts are divided into five kinds. *With the mind free of malice, one should give dakshina to Brahmanas, for by giving to the Dvijas, one acquires fame here and great felicity hereafter*. Such dana is given out of the desire to earn punya. *He is in the habit of giving dana; or he has already given gifts to me*: hearing these words from solicitors, one gives away all kinds of wealth to a particular one. Such dana is given out of the desire for artha.

I am not his, nor is he mine. If disregarded, he may injure me. From such motives of fear, even a man of learning and wisdom may make gifts to an ignorant wretch. Such gifts are made from bhaya. *This one is dear to me,*

and I am also dear to him. Influenced by these considerations, a man of intelligence, freely and with alacrity, gives gifts to a friend. Such gifts are regarded as made out of ichcha, choice. *The one that solicits me is poor. He is, again, satisfied with a little*. From these considerations, one should always make gifts to the poor, moved by pity. Gifts made like this are regarded as made from daya.

These are the five kinds of gift. They enhance the giver's punya and kirti, his merits and his fame. The Lord of all creatures, Brahma himself, has said that one should always give charity according to one's means.'"

CANTO 139

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Grandsire, you are possessed of great wisdom. Indeed, you fully know every branch of learning. In our great vamsa, you are the only individual that dwells with all the vigyanas. I want to hear from you about dharma and artha, righteousness and profit, which lead to felicity hereafter, and that are full of wonder to all creatures.

The time that is upon us is full of great distress. The like of it hardly ever overtakes kinsmen and friends. Indeed, other than you, O greatest of men, we now have none else that can take the place of an acharya. If, O sinless one, my brothers and I deserve the favour, it befits you to answer the question I want to ask.

This one here is Narayana, who is endowed with every prosperity and is honoured by all the kings. Even he waits upon you, showing you every indulgence and revering you greatly. From your love for me, and for my weal as well as that of my brothers, in the presence of this Vasudeva Krishna himself and of all these kings, I humbly ask you to tell us about dharma and artha.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "Hearing these words from Yudhishtira, Bhishma, the son of the river named after Bhagiratha, is full of joy out of his overflowing love for the Kuru king and his brothers, and he speaks thus to them.

Bhishma says, 'Rajan, I will surely narrate for you some delightful and ancient discourses on the subject of the puissance of this Vishnu as displayed in days of yore and as I have heard them from my great gurus. Listen to me, also, as I describe the infinite powers of Mahadeva Siva, who

is Vrishabhdhvaja, the Great God who has a bull for his emblem. Listen to me and I will tell you of the doubt that filled the mind of the great Rudra's wife, and that of Rudra himself.

Once on a time, the Dharmatman Krishna kept a vrata for ten and two years. To look upon him who had undergone the rite of initiation for the observance of his great vow, there came to that place Narada and Parvata, and the island-born Krishna, and Dhaumya, that foremost of japis, and Devala, and Kasyapa, and Hastikasyapa. Other Rishis, also, endowed with diksha and niyama, followed by their disciples, and accompanied by many Siddhas, and many ascetics of great punya, came there.

The son of Devaki offered them such honours of hospitality as are deserving of the highest praise and as are offered to the gods alone. Those great Rishis sat themselves down upon fine seats, some of which were green and some golden and some that were embellished with the plumes of the peacock, and some that were perfectly new and fresh.

Thus seated, they began to converse sweetly with one another on subjects connected with dharma and karma, as well as those pertaining to many Rajarishis and Devas. At that time Krishna's blazing tejas, in a terrifying form of fire, Narayana rising from the fuel that consisted of the rigid observance of his vow, issued fulminant from the mouth of Krishna of wondrous feats. That fire began to consume those mountains with their trees and vines and little plants, their birds and deer and snakes and beasts of prey. Soon the summit of that mountain presented a scorched and dismal appearance. Beasts of every species gave throat to cries and screams of fear and pain, as they perished, and in moments the mountain summit was bereft of every living creature.

That fire of towering, raging flames, having consumed everything leaving no remnant, then returned to Vishnu and touched his feet like a docile disciple. That scorcher of his enemies, Krishna, saw that mountain burnt, cast a benign look upon it and brought it back to its former condition. The mountain was again adorned with flowering trees and creepers, and once more echoed with the notes and cries and other sounds of birds and deer and predators and serpents. Seeing that wonderful and inconceivable sight, all the Rishis were astounded. Their hair stood on end and their eyes were full of tears.

Seeing the sages wonderstruck, Narayana, most eloquent of all that speak, addressed them in sweet and refreshing words, "Why has wonder

filled the hearts of this conclave of Rishis, you that are always free from attachment of every kind, that are divested of the very idea of ahamkara, and that are absolutely knowing of every sacred vigyana? It befits these Rishis of tapodhana and free from every stain of sin, to explicate to me this doubt that has arisen in my heart."

The Rishis said, "It is you that creates all the worlds, and it is you that destroys them again. It is you that are winter, it is you that are summer, and it is you that are the season of rains. Of all the creatures, mobile and immobile, that are found on the earth, you are the father, you are the mother, you are the master, and you are the origin. Even this, O slayer of Madhu, is a matter of wonder and doubt with us. O source of all auspiciousness, it befits you to resolve for us the fear and wonder in our minds with regard to the fire that sprang from your mouth. Once our fears are dispelled, we shall then, O Hari, recite to you what we have heard and seen."

Krishna said, "The fire that issued from my mouth and that resembles the all-consuming yuga-fire in splendour, and by which this mountain was devastated, is nothing less than the tejas of Vishnu. You Rishis, you are men who have conquered wrath, have brought your senses under complete control, O tapodhanas, and who are very gods in puissance. Yet you have suffered yourselves to be agitated and distressed.

I am now entirely absorbed with the observances of my vrata. Verily, because of my vow, a fire issued from my mouth. You must not allow yourselves to be agitated. It is for keeping a stern vrata that I came to this auspicious mountain. The object that brought me here is to acquire through tapasya a son who will be my equal in might and energy. From my tapa, the Atman in my body became transformed into fire and issued forth from my mouth.

That fire emerged to behold the boon-giving Grandsire of the universe. The Pitamaha Brahma, you foremost of ascetics, told my soul that half the tejas of the Great God who has the bull for his emblem will be born as my son. Returning from its mission, the Agni has come back to me and approached my feet like a sishya desirous of serving me dutifully. Indeed, casting off its fury, it has come back to me and to its own proper nature. I have told you, in brief, a mystery appertaining to him who has the lotus for his origin and who is endowed with Mahabuddhi.

Rishis, tapodhanas, you should not give way to fear. You all do own far-reaching vision. You can travel everywhere without being constrained or impeded. Blazing with vows that sannyasis keep, you are adorned with gyana and vigyana. And I now ask you to tell me of something wonderful which you have heard of or seen on earth or in heaven. I feel an eagerness to taste the honey of the speech from your lips, the honey that will, I am sure, be as sweet as a jet of amrita.

If I see anything on earth or in heaven, which is of exceptionally delightful and wonderful aspect, but which is unknown to all of you, O you Rishis that look like so many Devas, I say that that is because of my own Supreme Nature which cannot be obstructed by anything. Anything wonderful of which the knowledge dwells in me or is acquired by my own insight or inspiration ceases to appear wonderful to me.

Anything, however, that is recited by pious sages, men of great dharma and goodness, must be listened to with respect and devotion. Such discourses exist in this world since time out of mind and are as durable as characters engraved on rocks. I wish, therefore, to hear at this meeting something from the lips of you who are such very good men, and cannot fail to be bestow punya on others."

Hearing these words of Krishna, all those Rishis were filled with surprise. They began to gaze at Janardana with those eyes of theirs that were as beautiful and large as the petals of the lotus. Some of them began to glorify him and some began to worship him with reverence. Indeed, all of them then hymned the praises of the slayer of Madhu with words whose meanings were adorned with the eternal Riks. All those sages then appointed Narada, foremost of all who know speech, to satisfy what Krishna asked.

The Munis said, "It falls to you, O Narada, to describe in full, from the beginning, to Hrishikesa, that wonderful and inconceivable incident which occurred, O mighty one, on the mountains of Himavat and which was witnessed by those of us that had gone there in course of our pilgrimage to the sacred tirthas. Verily, for the benefit of all the Rishis assembled here, you should indeed relate that incident."

Thus addressed by those Munis, the Devarishi, the divine Narada, narrated this tale of the incidents which had occurred some time by.'"

CANTO 140

"Bhishma says, 'Narada, that holy Rishi, friend of Narayana, told of the discourse between Sankara and his consort Uma.

Narada said, "Once upon a time, the righteous-souled Lord of all the gods, Mahadeva Vrishabhdhvaja, practised the most severe tapasya on the sacred mountains of Himavat that are the resort of Siddhas and Charanas. Those enchanting mountains are overgrown with diverse kinds of the finest plants and adorned with various flowers. At that time, they were peopled by the different tribes of Apsaras and hosts of ghostly beings. There the Great God sat, filled with bliss, and surrounded by hundreds of Pramathas who presented myriad and strange aspects to the eye of any beholder. Some of them were ugly and awkward, some were of dazzling handsome features, and some presented the most wonderful appearances altogether. Some had faces like the lion's, some like the tiger's and some like the elephant's. In fact, those ghostly Ganas presented every kind of animal face. Some had faces of the jackal, some faces resembled the leopard's; some were like the ape's, some like the bull's. Some of them had faces like the owl's; some like the hawk's; some had faces like those of deer of many species.

Mahadeva was also surrounded by Kinnaras and Yakshas and Gandharvas and Rakshasas and various other created beings. The asrama to which Mahadeva had betaken himself abounded with unearthly flowers and blazed with celestial rays of light. It was perfumed with unearthly sandalwood, and heaven's incense was burnt on every side. And it echoed with the strains of divine instruments. Indeed, it resounded with the beat of mridangas and panavas, the boom of sankhas, and the sound of bheris. It

teemed with Ganas of diverse tribes who danced in joy, and with peacocks that also danced with fans unfurled. Forming as it did the resort of the Rishis of heaven, the Apsaras danced there in joy. The whole place was exceedingly fascinating to the eye. It was of unworldly beauty, truly like swarga itself. Its entire aspect was passing wonderful and, indeed, it is indescribable for its grace and sweetness.

Verily, with the tapasya of that Great Deity who sleeps on mountain breasts, that prince of mountains shone with ineffable loveliness. It resounded with the chant of the Vedas uttered by learned Brahmanas devoted to Vedic recitation. Echoing with the hum of bees, O Madhava, the mountain became incomparable in beauty. Seeing the Great God who is endued with a fierce form and who looks ever like a Mahotsava, a great cosmic festival, all were filled, O Janardana, with joy. All of them, the Siddhas who have drawn in their vital seed, the Maruts, the Vasus, the Sadhyas, the Viswedevas, Vasava himself, the Yakshas, the Nagas, the Pisachas, the Lokapalas, the several sacred fires, the winds, and all the great creatures dwelt on that mountain with minds concentrated in yoga, and were awash on a tide of bliss.

All the seasons were present there and scattered those realms with all kinds of wonderful flowers. Diverse kinds of lustrous plants illuminated the woods and forests on that mountain. A myriad species of birds, all brimful with joy, hopped about and sang merrily on that enchanting mountain, and their songs were mellifluous and full of adoration.

The Mahatman Mahadeva sat, displayed in ineffable beauty, on one of the peaks that shone with precious minerals, as if it served as his grand bedstead. Round his loins was a tiger-skin, and a lion-skin across his breast. His sacred thread was a snake. His arms were decked with a pair of red angadas; his beard was green. He had matted jata on his head. Of terrible features, he it is that strikes fear in the hearts of all the enemies of the gods. It is he, again, that reassures all creatures by dispelling their fears. He is adored by his worshippers as Vrishabhdhvaja, the bull-bannered.

Looking at Mahadeva, the great Rishis bowed down to him touching the ground with their heads. Of forgiving souls, they were all instantly freed by this sight of Siva from every sin and entirely purified. The asrama of the Pasupati, that Lord of all creatures, he of many terrible forms, shone with strange and uncanny beauty. Covered by many great serpents, it was unapproachable and unbearable for ordinary men to gaze upon.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, O Madhusudana, everything there became marvellously wonderful. Indeed, the abode of that Greatest God began to blaze with a most terrible beauty. To Mahadeva seated there, perfectly serene, came his consort Parvati, the daughter of Himavat, surrounded by the wives of the Ganas, the weird and ghostly beings who are the companions of Siva. Her attire was like that of her lord and the vows she observed were like his. She held a jar at her waist that was filled with the waters of every tirtha, and was accompanied by the Devis of all the mountain rivers and streams. Those auspicious goddesses walked in her train. They came raining flowers on every side and exuding all kinds of unearthly fragrances. She who loves to dwell on the breast of Himavat advanced towards her Great Lord.

The beautiful Uma, smiling and wanting to be playful, covered her Lord Mahadeva's eyes from behind with her two exquisite hands. As soon as Siva's eyes were covered, all the worlds fell into darkness and life seemed extinct everywhere in the universe. The homa rites ceased. The akhanda was suddenly deprived of the sacred vashat also. All living creatures were dismayed and filled with dread. Indeed, when Uma shut the eyes of the Pasupati, the universe was without all its countless suns.

However, quickly that overspreading darkness disappeared. A mighty flame flared forth from Mahadeva's forehead. A rutilant third eye, another sun, appeared upon his brow. That eye began to blaze forth like the yuga-fire and to consume that mountain. The large-eyed daughter of Himavat, seeing what occurred, bowed her head to Mahadeva of that eye of the fire of the Pralaya. She stood there with her gaze fixed on her lord.

The mountain forests burned on every side, with their vaas and other trees of straight trunks, and their fragrant sandalwood trees and myriad oshadhis, and herds of deer and other animals, filled with fright, ran in panic to the place where Hara sat and sought his protection. With those creatures thronging it to bursting, the asrama of Siva shone forth with a most wondrous and exceptional beauty. Meanwhile, that fire, swelling and billowing wildly, soared up into the very heavens and, with the brilliance and electric volatility of lightning, brighter than a dozen suns in potency and refulgence, covered every side like the all-destroying yuga-fire of the Pralaya.

In a moment, the Himavat mountains were consumed, with their metal, rock, minerals and summits and shining plants and herbs. Seeing Himavat

consumed, the daughter of that prince of mountains sought the protection of the Great God, her husband, and stood before him with her hands joined in reverence. Then Sarva, seeing Uma overcome by an accession of womanly mildness and finding that she was stricken to have her father Himalaya reduced to that plight, cast a benign look upon the mountain. In a moment, Himavat was restored to his old condition and was as handsome and magnificent to behold as ever. Indeed, the mountain put forth a cheerful aspect. In a trice, all his trees bloomed with flowers. Seeing Himavat returned to his natural condition, the Goddess Uma, who has no fault, addressed her lord, that master of all creatures, the divine Maheswara, in these words.

Uma said, 'O Holy One, O Lord of all creatures, O Trisulin, god that are armed with the trident, O you of the highest vows, a great doubt has filled my mind and you must resolve it for me. For what reason has this third eye appeared on your forehead? Why was the mountain consumed with his forests and all that belonged to him? Why also, O Illustrious God, have you restored Himavan to his former self? Indeed, having burned him once, why have you again covered him with trees?'

Maheswara said, 'O flawless devi, you covered my eyes in jest and all the universe was plunged in darkness. When the universe became dark, O Parvati, I created the third eye for the protection and light of all creatures. The fire of that eye consumed this mountain. And to please you, O devi, I once more made Himavat what he was.'

Uma said, 'Swami, why are your faces which look at the east, the north and the west, so handsome and so agreeable to look at like the very moon? And why is that face which is turned to the south so terrible? Why are your matted locks tawny in hue and so stiff and erect? Why is your throat as blue as the peacock's feathers? Why, O Lustrous God, is the pinaka always in your hand? Why are you always a brahmacharin with jata? O Lord, explain all these to me. I am your wife who seeks to follow the same dharma as you. And I am your devoted bhakta, O Siva Vrishabdhvaja!'

Narada continued, "Thus addressed by the daughter of the Prince of All Mountains, the illustrious wielder of the pinaka, the powerful Mahadeva, became so very pleased with her. The Great God said to her, 'Blessed devi, listen to me as I explain why my forms are so, and the reasons for them being thus.'"

CANTO 141

"The Blessed and Holy One said, 'In days of yore, Brahma created a most wonderful and auspicious Apsara called Tilottama; he did this by culling seeds of beauty from every beautiful object in the universe. One day, that devi of face and form unrivalled in the universe, came to me, O Parvati, on the pretext of walking around me in pradakshina but in truth, impelled by the desire to tempt me. In whatever direction that woman of beautiful teeth turned, a new face of mine instantly appeared, so eager did I become to watch her. All those faces of mine were handsome. Thus, in consequence of the desire to look at Tilottama, I became four-faced, through my yoga shakti. With my face the one which is turned towards the east, I exercise the sovereignty over the universe. With my face turned towards the north, I sport with you, O you of faultless form and features. That face of mine which is turned to the west is gentle and auspicious. With it I ordain the happiness of all creatures. My face which is turned towards the south is terrible. With it I destroy all creatures.

I live as a brahmacharin with matted locks on my head, impelled by the desire of doing good to all creatures. The bow pinaka is always in my hand to accomplish the purposes of the Devas. In days of antiquity, Indra, who wanted to acquire my power and prosperity, cast his vajra at me. That weapon scorched my throat. It is for this that I became blue-throated.'

Uma said, 'When, O first of all, there are so many excellent vahanas of great beauty, why is it that you have a bull for your mount?'

Maheswara said, 'In the days of old, the Pitamaha Brahma created the celestial cow Surabhi and she yielded abundant milk like amrita. From her

there came a large number of gavyas, all of which gave copious milk sweet as nectar. Once upon a time, some froth fell from the mouth of one of her calves on my body. I was enraged at this and my wrath singed all the cows, which then became of many hues. I was pacified by Brahma, master of all the worlds, who knows all things. It was he who gave me this bull both as a mount to bear me where I will go and to be a device on my banner.'

Uma said, 'You have many abodes in heaven, of diverse forms and possessed of every comfort and luxury. Why, O Holy One, do you reside in the smasana, the cremation grounds, abandoning all those mansions of every delight? The smasana is full of the burnt hair and bones of the dead; it abounds with vultures and jackals, and is marked with countless funeral pyres. Full of carrion and slick with fat and blood, with entrails and bones strewn all over it, and always echoing with the howls of jackals, it is an unclean place.'

Maheswara said, 'I always wander over all the earth in search of a sacred place. I do not, however, ever find any place that is more sacred than the smasana. Hence, of all abodes, the burning ghat pleases my heart most, shaded that it generally is by branches of the banyan and adorned with torn and burnt garlands of flowers. O you of sweet smiles, the multitudes of bhutas and pramathas that are my companions love to dwell in the grounds of cremation. I do not like, O devi, to live anywhere without them being by my side. Hence, the smasana is a sacred home to me. Indeed, auspicious Parvati, it seems to me to be swarga. Most sacred and of great punya, the smasana is always eulogised by those that wish for holy abodes.'

Uma said, 'Swami, O Lord of all creatures, O foremost of all observers of dharma, I have a great pang of doubt, O Pinakapani, O granter of boons. These ascetics, my mighty Lord, have undergone many kinds of austerities. In the world, ascetics are seen wandering everywhere in diverse forms and clad in motley attire. To bless this great gathering of Rishis, as also myself, I implore you to resolve, O chastiser of all foes, this doubt of mine. What indications is dharma said to possess? How, indeed, do men come to know the intricacies of dharma, so they succeed in observing them? Omnipotent Lord, O great knower of dharma, I ask you this.'

When the daughter of Himavat asked this question, the conclave of Rishis worshipped the goddess and adored her with eulogies adorned with Riks and with hymns of deep import.

Maheswara said, “Non-violence, truthfulness of speech, compassion towards all beings, tranquillity of soul and the giving of charity to the best of one’s power, are the foremost duties of the grihasta. Abstention from sexual congress with the wives of other men, protection of the wealth and the woman committed to one’s charge, unwillingness to appropriate what is not given to one, and avoidance of honey and meat—these are the five chief kartavyas. Indeed, dharma has many branches, all of which are full of happiness. But these are the kartavyas which embodied creatures who regard dharma as the most superior path should observe and practise. Even these are the fonts of punya.’

Uma said, ‘Swami, I wish to ask you about another matter on which I have great doubts. It behoves you to answer me and dispel my doubts. What are the punya dharmas of the four varnas? What duties pertain to the Brahmana? What to the Kshatriya? What are the indications of those that belong to the Vaisya? And what of duties of the Sudra?’

The Holy One said, ‘Blessed Devi, the question you have asked is a most proper one. Brahmanas are regarded as being most blessed, and are, indeed, gods on earth. The observance of fasts, the subjugation of all the senses is always the svadharma of the Brahmana. When the Brahmana succeeds in properly performing his dharma in every way, he attains to identity with Brahman. The observance of brahmacharya, O goddess, is his main ritual. The observance of vratas and upanayana, the investiture with the sacred thread, are his other duties. It is through these that he becomes truly regenerate. He becomes a Brahmana for worshipping his preceptors and other elders as also the deities. Verily, the dharma which has for its soul the study of the Vedas is the source of all piety. That is the religion which the embodied who are devoted to piety and duty must observe and practise.’

Uma said, ‘Swami, all my doubts have not been dispelled. Explain to me in detail what the duties are of all the four orders of men.’

Maheswara said, ‘Listening to the mysteries of dharma and karma, the keeping of the vratas indicated in the Vedas, attention to the sacred fire, and the accomplishment of the work of the guru, leading a mendicant life, always bearing the sacred thread, constant recitation of the Vedas, and rigid adherence to brahmacharya, are all part of the svadharma of the Brahmana. When the time of study is over, the Brahmana, receiving the command of his guru, should leave his preceptor’s house and return to his father’s home. Upon his return, he should marry a wife who is suitable for him. Another

dharma of the Brahmana consists in avoiding food prepared by a Sudra. Walking the path of righteousness, always observing fasts and the practices of brahmacharya, are his other duties.

The householder, the grihasta, should keep his domestic fire kindled for daily worship. He should study the Vedas. He should pour libations in honour of the Pitris and the Devas. He must keep his senses under control. He should eat what remains after serving the gods and guests and all his dependants. He should be abstemious in food, truthful in speech, and pure both in body and mind, outwardly and inwardly. Attending to guests is another dharma of the householder, as also the maintaining of the three sacrificial fires.

The grihasta must also attend to the ordinary sacrifices that go by the name of ishti and should also dedicate animals to the Devas according to the scriptural laws. Indeed, the performance of sacrifices is his highest dharma as also a complete abstention from injury to all creatures. Never to eat before serving the deities and guests and dependants is another duty of the householder. The food that remains after serving gods and guests and dependants is called vighasa. The householder should eat vighasa. Indeed, to eat after the members of one's family, including servants and other dependants, is regarded as one of the special duties of the regenerate householder, who should be ever knowing and observant of the Vedas. The vyavahara, conduct, of husband and wife, in the household, should be equal. He should every day make offerings of flowers and other auspicious things to those deities that rule over domesticity.

The grihasta should take care that his house is every day properly rubbed and washed with cow-dung and water. He should also daily observe fasts. Well-cleaned and well-rubbed, his home must be fumigated every day with the smoke of clarified butter poured onto his sacred fire in honour of the Devas and the Pitris. Even these are the karmas which apply to the grihastasrama, the householder's life for a Brahmana. This dharma of the Dvija truly upholds the world. It flows always and eternally from the righteous among the Brahmanas that lead a life of domesticity.

Do you listen to me with attention, O goddess, for I will now tell you what the svadharma is of the Kshatriya, about which also you have asked me. From the beginning, it has been said that the first duty of the Kshatriya is to protect all creatures. The king is the acquirer of a fixed share of the punya earned by his subjects. Through this the king becomes endowed with

dharma. The king of men who rules and protects his subjects righteously acquires, by virtue of the protection he offers to others, many realms of prosperity in the world to come.

The other duties of a Kshatriya consist of self-restraint and Vedic study, the pouring of libations on the sacred fire, the giving of charity, the bearing of the sacred thread, sacrifices, the performance of other religious rites, the support of servants and dependants, and perseverance in and completion of acts that have been begun. It is also his duty to perform sacrifices and other religious rites according to the laws laid down in the Vedas.

Another dharma of the Kshatriya is to mete out punishments according to offences committed. Adherence to the practice of properly judging the disputes of litigants before him, and a devotion to truthfulness in speech, and intercession to help the distressed, are the other kartavyas by discharging which the king acquires great glory both here and hereafter.

He should also willingly lay down his life on the field of battle, having displayed great prowess on behalf of kine and Brahmanas. Such a king acquires in swarga such regions of grace as are won by the performance of Aswamedha yagnas.

The duties of the Vaisya consist of the keeping of cattle and farming, the pouring of libations on the sacred fire, the making of gifts and study. Trade, walking in the path of dharma, hospitality, peacefulness, self-restraint, the welcoming of Brahmanas and renunciation are the other eternal duties of the Vaisya. The Vaisya, engaged in trade and walking in the path of righteousness, should never sell sesame and perfumes and wine or spirits. He should discharge the duties of hospitality towards all. He is at liberty to pursue dharma, artha and kama or pleasure according to his means and to the extent that is judicious for him.

Service of the three regenerate varnas constitutes the high dharma of the Sudra. That Sudra who is truthful in speech and who has subdued his senses is regarded as having acquired punya tapa. Verily, the Sudra who on being visited by a guest discharges the kartavya of hospitality towards him, is regarded as acquiring the punya of high penances. That intelligent Sudra whose conduct is righteous and who worships the Devas and Brahmanas is blessed with the rewards of dharma.

O beautiful devi, I have thus told you of the svadharmas of the four orders of men. What else do you wish to hear?'

Uma said, 'You have told me of the separate svadharmas of the four orders, auspicious and beneficial for them. Do you now tell me, O Swami, what the common duties are of all the varnas.'

Maheswara said, 'The foremost of all beings in the universe, the Creator Brahma, ever wishing for accomplishments, created the Brahmanas to save all the worlds. Among all created beings, they are, truly, gods on earth. I will first tell you what the religious karmas are that they should perform and what the rewards are which they win through them. That dharma ordained for the Brahmanas is the foremost of all religions. For the sake of righteousness in the world, three dharmas were created by the Self-born One. Whenever the world is created, those are also created by the Grandsire. Do you listen.

These are the three eternal dharmas. The dharma propounded in the Vedas is the highest; that which is expounded in the Smritis is the next; the third is that which is based upon the practices of those who are regarded as men of dharma. The Brahmana possessed of learning should have the three Vedas. He should never make the study of the Vedas or recitation of the scriptures the means of his livelihood. He should devote himself to the three well-known karmas of making gifts, studying the Vedas and performing sacrifices. He should transcend lust, wrath and greed. He should be a friend to all creatures. A person who owns these attributes is called a Brahmana. The Lord of the universe further declared six karmas for the Brahmanas. Listen to those eternal duties.

The performance of sacrifices, officiating at the sacrifices of others, the making of dana, the acceptance of dakshina, teaching, and study are the six karmas by accomplishing which a Brahmans wins punya. Indeed, the daily study of the Vedas is a sacred duty. Sacrifice is another eternal duty. The making of gifts according to the measure of his means and in accord with the law is much lauded in the Brahmana. Tranquillity of mind is a high dharma that has always been with righteous men.

Pure-hearted grihastas can always earn great merit. Indeed, he who cleanses his soul by the performance of the five sacrifices, who is truthful in speech, who is free from malice, who makes gifts, who treats with hospitality and honour all regenerate guests, who lives in well-cleaned homes, who is free from pride, who is always sincere in his dealings, who speaks sweet and assuring words, who takes pleasure in serving guests and others arrived at his home, and who eats the vighasa, the food that remains

after all the members of his family and dependants have eaten, wins great punya.

That man who offers water to his guests to wash their feet and hands, who gives the arghya to honour his guest, who duly offers seats, and beds, and lamps to light the darkness, and shelter to those that come to his house, is regarded as a most righteous one. The householder who rises at dawn and washes his mouth and face, and serves food to his guests, and having honoured them duly gives them leave to depart, and follows them as a mark of honour for a short distance, acquires eternal merit. Hospitality towards all, and the pursuit of dharma, artha and kama are the duties of the householder.

The dharma of the Sudra also consists in the pursuit of dharma, artha and kama. The dharma ordained for the grihasta is said to have pravritti for its chief indication. Auspicious, and beneficial to all creatures, I will tell you about it. The householder should always make gifts according to the measure of his means. He should also perform frequent sacrifices, as best he can afford. Indeed, he who wishes to achieve his own good should always seek to gain punya. The householder should acquire wealth by righteous means. The wealth thus acquired should be carefully divided into three portions, keeping the requirements of dharma in view. With one of those portions, he should perform all auspicious karmas. With another he should seek to gratify his cravings for pleasure. The third portion he should set aside to increase.

The dharma of nivritti is different. It exists for mukti from re-birth by absorption into Brahman. I will tell you in detail of the conduct that constitutes it. Listen to me well, O devi. One of the duties inculcated by the nivritti marga is compassion towards all creatures. The man that follows it should not dwell in one place for more than a single day. Wishing to achieve emancipation, the followers of this nivritti dharma free themselves from the bonds of hope and desire. They have no attachment to home, to the kamandalu they bear for water, to the cloths that cover their loins, or the seat whereupon they rest, or the triple stick, the tridanda they bear in their hands, or the bed they sleep on, or the sacred fire they worship, or the chamber that houses them.

A follower of nivritti sets his heart upon the workings of his soul. His mind is devoted to the Supreme Brahman. He is filled with the idea of attaining to Brahman. He is always devoted to Yoga and the Samkhya

philosophy. He desires no other shelter than the foot of a tree. He sleeps in empty and abandoned houses of men. He sleeps on the banks of rivers. He takes pleasure in staying on such banks. He is free from every attachment, and from every tie of affection. He merges the existence of his own soul into the Supreme Soul, his Atman into the Paramatman.

Standing like a wooden post, and abstaining from all food he does only such karma as point to mukti. Or, he may wander about, devoted to yoga. Even these are the eternal ways of a follower of the dharma of nivritti. He lives aloof from his species. He is free from all attachments. He never remains in the same place for more than a day. Free from all bonds, he roves over the world. Emancipated from all ties, he never sleeps on even the same river bank for more than a night. Even this is the religion of those who seek and know moksha as declared in the Vedas. Even this is the righteous path that is trodden by the wisest. He who follows this path leaves no trace or vestige of himself behind.

Bhikshus or followers of the way of mukti are of four kinds. They are Kutichakas, Bahudakas, Hamsas and Paramahamsas. The second is superior to the first, the third to the second, and the fourth to the third. There is nothing superior to the Paramahamsa; nor is there anything inferior to him or beside him or before him. His is a condition that is divested of sorrow and happiness, that is auspicious and free from decrepitude and death and that knows no change.'

Uma said, 'You have described the dharma of the grihasta, that of mukti, and that upon the observances of the righteous is founded. These paths are exalted and exceedingly beneficial to the world of living beings. O you that know all about every dharma, I wish now to hear what is the high dharma of the Rishis. I always have a liking for those that dwell in asramas. The fragrance of the smoke of the libations of ghrita poured on the sacred fire pervades holy asramas and makes them so delightful. O Mahadeva, when I inhale this fragrance, my heart is always filled with such joy. O Mighty God, I have questions about the dharma of the ascetics. You know every nuance of all dharmas. Do you enlighten me, O God of gods, in detail, on this subject.'

The Blessed and Holy One said, 'I will tell about the most high and great dharma of the Rishis. By following that religion, O Auspicious Devi, the sages attain to success, through the severe tapasya that they practise. Most blessed one, do you hear from the beginning what the duties are of

those righteous Rishis who are conversant with every dharma and that are known by the name of Phenapas.

The Pitamaha Brahma, during the days he devoted to the observance of tapa, drank some amrita in the form of water. That water had flowed in heaven from a great sacrifice. The froth of that water is most auspicious and because of Brahma's having drunk it, it partook of his own nature. Those Rishis that subsist upon the measure of froth that thus issued from the pavitra jala are called Phenapas, froth-eaters. Even this is the vyavahara of those Shuddhatman Rishis, O devi of tapodhana.

Listen now and I will you who the Balakhilyas are. The Balakhilyas are ascetics that have won success through their penances. They dwell in the disc of the sun. Adopting the means of subsistence of birds, those Rishis, knowers of every ritual and way of dharma, live by the Unchha vrata. Their attire consists of deer-skins or barks of trees. Freed from every pair of opposites, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain and the rest, the Balakhilyas walk in this path of righteousness.

They are as big as a digit of the thumb. Distributed into various classes, each class lives in the practice of the duties assigned to it. They desire only to perform tapa. High, indeed, is the punya they win through their righteous conduct. They are regarded as having attained to equality with the gods and exist for the accomplishment of the purposes of the gods. Having burnt away all their sins by severe penance, they blaze forth in effulgence, illuminating all the points of the compass.

Others, called Chakracharas, are endowed with purified souls and devoted to the practice of compassion. Righteous in their conduct and possessed of great sanctity, they live in the world of Soma. Thus dwelling near enough to the region of the Pitris, they live by drinking the rays of Soma. There are others called Samprakshalas and Asmkuttas and Dantolukhalas. These live near the Soma-drinking deities and others that drink flames of fire. With their wives, and with passions under complete control, they too subsist upon the rays of Soma. They pour libations of ghrita on the sacred fire, and adore the Pitris with the due rites. They also perform the best-known sacrifices. Even this is said to constitute their dharma.

The Rishi dharma, O goddess, is always observed by those who are homeless and who are free to rove through every realm including that of the gods. There are, again, other classes of Rishis, of whom I will tell you. Do

you listen. It is needful that they who observe the different dharma of the Rishis should subjugate their passions and know the Soul. Indeed, in my opinion, lust and wrath must be completely conquered. With corn acquired through the Unchha vrata, they should pour libations on the sacred fire, sitting on a fixed seat engaged the while in the yagna called Dharmaratri, the performance of the Soma yagna, acquisition of especial and arcane knowledge, the giving of sacrificial dakshina, which forms the fifth, the daily performance of yagnas, devotion to the worship of the Pitris and the Devas, hospitality towards all. Abstention from all luxurious food prepared from cow's milk, taking pleasure in tranquillity of heart, lying on bare rocks or the earth, devotion to yoga, eating herbs and leaves of trees, and subsisting upon fruits and roots and wind and water and moss, are some of the ways of the Rishis by which they attain to the end that belongs to free souls unsubdued by the world.

When the smoke has ceased to curl upwards from a house, when the husking machine has ceased to ply, when the hearth-fire has been extinguished, when all the inmates have eaten, when dishes are no longer carried from room to room, when mendicants have ceased to walk the streets, it is then that the man who is devoted to the religion of truth and peace of soul, wishing still for a guest but finding his desire unsatisfied, should eat whatever vighasa he may still find in the house. Through such conduct, one becomes a practiser of the Muni dharma.

One should not be arrogant, nor proud, nor cheerless and discontented; nor should one wonder at anything. One should behave equably towards friends and foes. Verily, he who is the foremost of all persons who know dharma should also be friendly towards all creatures.'"

CANTO 142

"Uma said, 'Forest recluses live in the most beautiful wild places, among the springs and fountains of rivers, in bowers by the sides of streams and rills, on hills and mountains, in woods and forests, and in sacred places full of fruits and roots. With concentrated dhyana and observant of vratas and niyamas, they dwell in such places. I want, O Sankara, to hear the sacred laws which they follow. These Munis, O God of all gods, depend for protection upon themselves alone.'

Maheswara said, 'Do you hear with dhyana what the duties are of vanaprasthas. Having listened to them with one mind, O goddess, do you set your heart upon dharma. Listen then to what should be the karmas of righteous hermits crowned with success, who keep rigid vows and follow stringent laws, and dwell in wild vanas.

Bathing thrice a day, worshipping the Pitris and the Devas, pouring libations on the sacred fire, performing those sacrifices and rites that go by the name of ishti homa, picking up the grains of nivara paddy, eating fruit and roots, and using oil pressed from inguda and castor-seeds are their karmas. Having gone through the practices of yoga and being crowned with ascetic success, and freed from lust and anger, they should seat themselves in the posture called Virasana. Indeed, they must live in such places where cowards never go.

Observing the excellent injunctions relating to yoga, sitting in summer in the midst of four fires on four sides with the sun overhead the fifth, practising what is called Manduka yoga, of the frog, and either always seated in Virasana, or lying on bare rocks or the earth, these men, with

hearts set upon dharma, must expose themselves to cold and water and fire. They subsist upon water or air or river moss. They use two pieces of stones only for husking their corn. Some of them use just their teeth. They do not keep utensils of any kind for provender. Some clothe themselves in rags and barks of trees or deer-skins. Even thus do they pass their lives for the measure of time allotted to them, according to the laws set forth in the scriptures.

Remaining in woods and forests, they wander within these places of untamed nature, live within them, and are always to be found within them. Indeed, these forest recluses enter into woods and forests and, after finding a guru, first live with him as his sishyas. The performance of the rites of homa is their duty, as also the observance of the five sacrifices. A meticulous observance of the rules about the division of time for the fivefold sacrifices as laid down in the Vedas, devotion to other sacrifices forming the eighth, the observance of the Chaturmasya, performance of the Paurnamasya, and still other homas and yagnas, and the performance of the nitya, the daily sacrifices, is the dharma of these men without wives, free from every attachment, and washed of every sin.

Indeed, thus must they live in the vana. The sruva, the sacrificial ladle, and the kamandalu water-vessel are their main wealth. They are always devoted to the three fires. Righteous in their conduct and adhering to the path of virtue, they attain to the highest end. These Munis, crowned with ascetic success and ever devoted to the religion of Truth, attain to the sacred region of Brahma or the eternal realm of Soma. O Auspicious Goddess, this briefly is the dharma followed by forest recluses.'

Uma said, 'Swami, Pasupati, O you who are worshipped by all beings, I want to hear what the dharma is of those Munis that are followers of the scriptures which deal with ascetic success. Do you tell it to me. Living in woods and forests, and well-accomplished in the scriptures of spiritual success, some amongst them live and do as they like, without being restrained by particular practices; others have wives. How, indeed, have their laws been laid down?'

Mahadeva said, 'O goddess, the shaving of the head and the wearing of ochre robes are the indications of those recluses that rove about in freedom; while the indications of those that dally with wives consist in passing their nights at home. Performing ablutions three times a day is the dharma of the unrestrained ones, while the homa with water and fruits from the

wilderness, belongs to the married recluses. Absorption, yoga dhyana, and adherence to those duties that constitute piety and that have been laid down as such in the shastras and the Vedas are some of the other duties prescribed for them. All the duties of which I have spoken to you before as they pertain to forest hermits, are also the dharmas of the married ones. Indeed, if those kartavyas are observed, they that observe them attain to the rewards that come from the severest tapasya.

Those forest Rishis that lead married lives should confine the gratification of their senses to their wives. By indulging in sexual congress with their wives at only those times when their seasons come, they conform to the laws that have been laid down for them. The dharma which these virtuous men are to follow is the same dharma that has been declared and is followed by the Rishis. With their hearts set upon the acquisition of righteousness, they must never pursue any other object of desire from unrestrained caprice.

That man who makes the gift to all creatures of an assurance of perfect harmlessness and innocence, freed as his soul then is from the stain of malice or violence, becomes endowed with dharma. Verily, he who shows compassion to all creatures, who adopts as a vow a show of perfect honesty towards all creatures, and who becomes himself the soul of all creatures, is then blessed with dharma. A bath in all the Vedas, and conduct which includes compassion and sincerity towards all creatures are looked upon as equal in punya; or, perhaps, the latter is a little distinguished above the other in merit.

Honesty, it has been said, is dharma; while crookedness is the reverse. That man who conducts himself with sincerity becomes naturally imbued with righteousness. The man who is always devoted to honesty of conduct, succeeds in attaining to a dwelling among the Devas. Hence, he who wishes to achieve the merit of righteousness should invest himself with honesty and sincerity.

Possessed of a forgiving disposition and of self-restraint, and with anger under complete subjection, one should transform oneself into an embodiment of dharma and become free from malice. Such a man, who becomes devoted, besides, to the discharge of all the duties of dharma, is indeed endowed with the merit of righteousness. Freed from torpor and procrastination, the pious man, who adheres to the path of dharma to the

best of his power, and becomes possessed of pure conduct, and who is venerable in years, comes to be regarded as equal to Brahman himself.'

Uma said, 'By what course, O Lord, do those Munis who are attached to their respective asramas and who own tapodhana, the wealth of penances, succeed in becoming endowed with great splendour? By what acts, again, do kings and princes, Kshatriyas of great wealth, and others who are poor, succeed in acquiring high rewards? By what karma, O Siva, do denizens of the forest succeed in attaining to that place which is eternal and in adorning their persons with celestial sandalwood paste? O Tryambaka of three eyes, O Tripurahara, destroyer of the triple city, do you answer this question of mine regarding tapasya by telling me everything in detail.'

The lustrous Mahadeva said, 'Those who keep the vratas of upavasa, fasts, and restrain their senses, who abstain from injury of any kind to any creature, and who practise truthfulness of speech, attain to success and, freed from every kind of evil, ascend into swarga and sport in felicity with the Gandharvas for their companions.

The Dharmatman who lies down in the attitude of Manduka yoga, and who properly and according to the law performs auspicious karmas after having taken diksha, lives in bliss in the next world in the company of the Nagas. That man who lives in the company of deer and subsists upon such grass and vegetables as fall from their mouths, and who has undergone the diksha and attends to the duties attached to it, succeeds in attaining to Amaravati, and the mansions of Indra.

The man who subsists upon the moss he gathers and the fallen leaves from trees that he picks up, and endures all the severities of cold, attains to an exalted place. The man who subsists upon either air or water, or fruits and roots, attains in the afterlife to the affluence that belongs to the Yakshas and sports in felicity in the company of diverse tribes of Apsaras.

Having practised for two and ten years, according to the rites laid down in the laws, the vow relating to the endurance of the five fires in the summer, one becomes in one's next life a king. That man who, having observed vratas with regard to food, practises tapasya for two and twelve years, carefully abstaining from all forbidden food, taken at the forbidden hours, becomes in his next life a ruler of the earth.

That man who sits and lies on the bare ground with the canopy of the firmament alone for his shelter, observes the course of dharmas that attach to diksha, and then casts off his body by renouncing all food, attains to great

felicity in Swargaloka. The rewards of one who sits and lies down upon the bare ground with the welkin alone for his shelter, are said to be excellent vahanas and shayanas, beds, and magnificent mansions possessed of the resplendence of the moon.

That man who, having subsisted upon the most frugal diet and observed diverse excellent vows, lives depending upon his own self and then casts off his body by abstaining from all food, succeeds in ascending into heaven and enjoying all its rewards. That man who, having lived in entire dependence upon his own self, observes for two and ten years the karmas that pertain to diksha, and at last casts off his body in the great ocean, succeeds in attaining to the realms of Varuna.

That man who, living in entire dependence upon himself observes the dharmas that attach to diksha for two and ten years, and pierces his own feet with a sharp stone, attains to the transports of the region that belongs to the Guhyakas. He who cultivates Atman with the help of Atman, who frees himself from the influence of all pairs of opposites—as heat and cold, joy and sorrow, and the rest—who is freed from every kind of attachment, and who mentally observes for two and ten years such a way of life after diksha, attains to swarga and enjoys every transport with the Devas as his companions. He who lives in entire dependence upon himself and observes for two and ten years the duties that attach to diksha and finally casts off his body in fire as an oblation to the gods, attains to the world of Brahma and is held in high respect there.

That regenerate man, O devi, who keeps his senses under subjugation, and, wishing to attain to dharma, sets his Atman upon the Atman, frees himself from the sense of ahamkara and sets out naked, digambara, without any covering for his body other than the sky, after the due observance of the duties of diksha for two and ten years, and after having consigned his sacred fire to a tree, walks along the path that belongs to Kshatriyas and lies down, when the need for lying down comes, in the attitude of heroes, and conducts himself always after the manner of heroes, certainly attains to the end that is reserved for great Kshatriyas. Such a man repairs to the eternal region of Sakra where he is crowned with the fruition of all his wishes and he sports in joy, his person decked with garlands of celestial flowers and perfumes. Indeed, that Dharmatman lives happily in swarga, with the gods for his companions. The Kshatriya, observant of the dharma of Kshatriyas devoted to that yoga which belongs to Kshatriyas, living in dharma, having

renounced everything, having undergone the diksha and subjugated his senses, and observing purity of both body and mind, is sure to attain to the path which is reserved for Kshatriyas. Eternal regions of happiness are his. Riding in a vimana that moves at the will of the rider, he ranges through all those happy realms as he pleases. Indeed, dwelling in the world of Sakra, that blessed one always sports in joy, free from every sorrow and disaster.’

CANTO 143

Uma said, ‘Swami, O you who gouged out the eyes of Bhaga and pulled out the teeth of Pushan, O destroyer of the sacrifice of Daksha, O three-eyed Lord, I have another great query. In days of yore, the Self-born One created the four varnas. Through what sins does a Vaisya become a Sudra? Through what does a Kshatriya become a Vaisya and a Brahmana a Kshatriya? By what means may such devolution of castes be prevented? Through what karma is a Brahmana born into the Sudra varna in his next life? Through what, O puissant Mahadeva, does a Kshatriya descend to being a Sudra? O sinless one, O Lord of all created beings, do you, O illustrious one, answer this question of mine. How, again, can the three other varnas naturally succeed in attaining to Brahmanatva, the status of a Brahmana?’

The radiant Siva said, ‘Brahmanatva, O devi, is most difficult to attain. O auspicious Uma, one becomes a Brahmana through original creation or birth. After the same manner the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra, all become so through original creation. He, however, that is born a Brahmana falls away from his status through his own evil actions. Hence, the Brahmana, after having attained to the status of the first order, should always protect it. If a Kshatriya or Vaisya lives in the svadharma of the Brahmana, after the manner of a Brahmana he becomes a Brahmana in his next life.

That Brahmana who abandons the dharma of his order to follow those of the Kshatriya, is regarded as one that has fallen away from being a Brahmana and has become a Kshatriya. That Brahmana of little

understanding, who, impelled by greed and folly, follows the dharma of Vaisyas, forgetful of his Brahmanatva that is so difficult to attain, comes to be regarded as a Vaisya. Similarly, one that is a Vaisya by birth may, by following the ways of a Sudra, become a Sudra.

Indeed, a Brahmana, falling away from his svadharma may devolve to becoming even a Sudra, Such a Brahmana, falling away from the varna of his birth and turned out of it, without attaining to the realm of Brahma, which is his goal if he duly observes his own duties, sinks into naraka and in his next birth is born as a Sudra. A highly blessed Kshatriya or a Vaisya, who abandons his svadharma, and follows the dharma ordained for the Sudra, falls away from his own varna and becomes a person of mixed caste.

It is in this way that a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya sinks into becoming a Sudra. That man who has attained to clarity of vision through the practice of his svadharma, who is endowed with gyana and vigyana, who is pure in body and mind, who is conversant with every duty and devoted to the practice of all his own natural duties, is sure to enjoy the rewards of righteousness. I will recite for you, O goddess, something that Brahma the Self-born declared on this subject.

Those that are righteous and desirous of acquiring punya always pursue with firmness the culture of the Soul. The food that comes from cruel and fierce persons is forbidden. So also is the food cooked to serve a large number of men. The same is said of the food cooked for the first sraddha of a dead person. So also is the food that is stained in consequence of the common impurities and also the food that is given by a Sudra. These should never be eaten by a Brahmana at any time.

The food of a Sudra, O devi, the Mahatman Devas ever censure. Even this, I believe, is the law pronounced by the Grandsire with his own mouth. If a Brahmana, who has kindled the sacred fire and who performs sacrifices, were to die with any portion of a Sudra's food remaining undigested in his stomach, he is certain to born in his next life as a Sudra, for the undigested food in his body makes him fall away from Brahmanatva. This Brahmana, in his next life, is invested with the status of that varna whose food he eats through his life or with the undigested portion of whose food in his stomach he breathes his last.

That man who, having attained to the auspicious status of a Brahmana which is so difficult to have, disregards it and eats forbidden food, surely falls away from his high birth. That Brahmana who drinks alcohol, who

becomes guilty of Brahmahatya or is vile and base in his ways, or a thief, or who breaks his vows, or is impure, or unmindful of his Vedic studies, or otherwise sinful, or greedy, or guilty of cunning or cheating, or who does not keep vratas, or who marries a Sudra woman, or who derives his subsistence by pandering to the lusts of other people, or who sells the Soma plant, or who serves a person of a varna beneath his, falls away from his Brahmanatva. The Brahmana who violates the bed of his preceptor, or who cherishes malice towards him, or who takes pleasure in speaking ill of him, falls away from being a Brahmana even if he be conversant with Brahma himself.

Through punya karma, again, O Parvati, a Sudra becomes a Brahmana, and a Vaisya becomes a Kshatriya. The Sudra should perform all the duties enjoined for him, properly and according to the law. He should always wait, with obedience and humility, upon persons of the three other varnas and serve them heedfully. Always adhering to the path of dharma, the Sudra should do all this cheerfully. He should honour the Devas and the Dvijas. He should honour the vow of hospitality to all that come to him. With senses firmly restrained and becoming abstemious in food, he should never approach his wife except in her season. He should always seek out such men that are holy and pure. As for food, he should eat the vighasa which remains after all others have eaten. If, indeed, the Sudra desires to be a Vaisya in his next life, he should also abstain from the meat of animals not slain in sacrifices.

If a Vaisya wishes to be a Brahmana in his next life, he must be truthful in speech, and free from pride or arrogance. He should rise above all the pairs of opposites—heat and cold, joy and sorrow, and the rest. He should observe the dharma of peace and tranquillity. He should worship the Devas in sacrifices, attend with devotion to the study and recitation of the Vedas, and purify himself in body and mind. He must keep his senses under subjection, honour Brahmanas and seek the welfare of all the varnas. Leading the life of a grihasta, and eating only twice a day at the prescribed hours, he should satisfy his hunger with only vighasa which remains after all the members of his family, his dependants and guests been fed. He should be frugal in what he eats, and perform nishkama karma, always acting without being impelled by the desire for reward. He should be free from egotism.

He should adore the Devas in the agnihotra and pour libations according to the law. Observing the dharma of atithya, hospitality towards all, he should unvaryingly eat only vighasa, the food that remains after serving those for whom it has been cooked. He should, according to the law, worship the three fires. Such a Vaisya of pure vyavahara is born in his next life into a high Kshatriya family.

If after having been born as a Kshatriya, a Vaisya goes through the usual rites of purification, and is invested with the sacred thread, and betakes himself to the observance of vratas, he becomes, in his next life, an honoured Brahmana. Indeed, after his birth as a Kshatriya, he should give dana in plenty, adore the gods in great sacrifices with plentiful dakshinas, study the Vedas, and always seeking to attain to swarga worship the three fires.

He should intercede to dispel the sorrows of the distressed, and must always righteously cherish and protect his subjects that own his sway. He must be truthful, and perform all karmas that have truth in them, and seek happiness in such conduct. He should award punishments that are righteous, without setting aside neeti danda, the rod of chastisement, for good. He should induce men to do righteous deeds. Guided by considerations of policy in the matter of swaying his people, he should take a sixth of the produce of the fields. He should never indulge in excessive sexual pleasure, but live cheerfully and in independence, always with the vigyana of artha, the science of wealth.

Of righteous soul, he should seek his wife only in her season. He should always keep fasts, with his soul under firm control, devote himself to the study of the Vedas, and be chaste in body and mind. He should sleep on blades of kusa grass spread out in his fire chamber. He should pursue the way of dharma, artha and kama, and be always serene and cheerful.

To Sudras who come asking for food, he should always reply that it is ready. He should never wish for anything from motives of gain or pleasure. He should worship the Pitris and Devas and Atithis. In his own house he must live the life of a sannyasi. He should duly worship the Devas in his agnihotra, morning, noon and evening, the three sandhyas of every day, by pouring libations in accord with the law.

With his face turned towards the enemy, he should gladly cast off his life and prana in battles fought for the weal of kine and Brahmanas. Or he may enter the triple fires sanctified with mantras and quit his body.

By pursuing this pravritti, he will be born in his next life as a Brahmana. Endowed with gyana and vigyana, purified from all dross, and fully knowing the Vedas, a pious Kshatriya, through his own actions, becomes a Brahmana. It is with the help of such karma, O goddess, that one who has sprung from a lower varna, a Sudra, can become a Brahmana refined of all stains and possessed of Vedic lore. A Brahmana, when he becomes vile and evil in conduct and observes no distinction with regard to food, falls away from Brahmanatva and becomes a Sudra. Even a Sudra, O devi, who has purified his soul by punya karmas and that has subdued all his senses, deserves to be waited upon and served with reverence even as a Brahmana. This has been said by the Self-born Brahma himself.

When a pious nature and pious deeds are noticeable in even a Sudra, he should, in my opinion, be held superior to a man of the three higher orders. Neither birth, nor the purificatory rites, nor learning, nor offspring, can be regarded as grounds for conferring upon a man the status of a Dvija. Verily, vyavahara, conduct, is the only ground. All Brahmanas in this world are Brahmanas in consequence of conduct. A Sudra, if he is established in good conduct, must be regarded as being possessed of the status of a Brahmana. The condition of Brahmanatva, auspicious Parvati, is equal wherever, in whomsoever, it truly exists. This is my firm opinion.

He, indeed, is a Brahmana in whom Brahmanatva exists—that condition which is bereft of attributes and which has no sin or stain attached to it. The boon-giving Brahma, when he created all the creatures, himself said that the distribution of human beings into the four varnas dependent on birth is only for common identification

The Brahmana is a great kshetra in this world—a field with feet, for it moves from place to place. He who plants seeds in that field, O beautiful devi, reaps the harvest in the next world. That Brahmana who wishes his own weal should always live upon vighasa. He should always adhere to the path of dharma. Indeed, he should tread the path that belongs to Brahma. He should live engaged in the study of the Samhitas and, remaining at home, discharge all the duties of a grihasta. He must always devote himself to the study of the Vedas, but he should never derive the means of livelihood from such study. That Brahmana who always conducts himself thus, staying always on the narrow path of dharma, worshipping his sacred fire, and engaged in the study of the Vedas, is truly regarded as Brahma himself.

Once gained, the status of a Brahmana must always be protected with care, O you of sweet smiles, by avoiding the taint of contact with those born into inferior orders, and by abstaining from the acceptance of dana.

I have thus revealed you a great mystery—the manner in which a Sudra may become a Brahmana, or that by which a Brahmana falls away from his own pure condition and becomes a Sudra.'"

CANTO 144

"Uma said, 'Swami, Lord of all beings, O you who are worshipped by the Devas and Asuras equally, tell me what are the duties and the derelictions of men. Indeed, O puissant one, resolve all my doubts. It is by these three—thought, word and deed—that men become bound. It is by the same three that they are set free from those bonds. By pursuing what conduct, O Mahadeva, indeed, through what manner of karma, through what behaviour and attributes and speech, do men succeed in attaining to swarga?'

The Devadeva said, 'Devi, you well know the true import of dharma. You are ever devoted to righteousness and self-restraint. The question you have asked me is fraught with the welfare of all creatures. It enhances the intelligence of all. Do you, therefore, listen to the answer. Those that are devoted to the Satya dharma, the religion of Truth, that are righteous and without the indications of the several asramas of life, and who enjoy the wealth earned by righteous means, succeed in attaining to swarga. Those men that are free from all doubts, that are possessed of omniscience, and that have the transcendent vision to see all things, are never shackled by either punya or paapa, virtue or sin. Men that are free from all attachments can never be bound by the chains of karma. They who never cause any injury to anyone, in thought, word or deed, and who never attach themselves to anything, can never be bound by karma. They who never take the life of any creature, who are pious in conduct, who have compassion, who regard friends and foes in an equal light and who are self-restrained, can never be bound by karma.

Men that are imbued with compassion towards all beings, who succeed in inspiring the confidence and faith of all living creatures, and that have cast off malice, succeed in attaining swarga. Men who have no desire to appropriate what belongs to others, who keep themselves aloof from the wives of others, and that enjoy only such wealth as has been earned by righteous means, succeed in attaining to swarga.

Men who behave towards the wives of others as towards their own mothers and sisters and daughters, succeed in attaining swarga. Men that abstain from taking what belongs to others, that are perfectly contented with what they possess, and that live depending upon their own destiny, succeed in finding swarga for themselves. Men who always shut their very eyes against association with other men's wives, who are masters of their senses, and devoted to righteous conduct, surely ascend into swarga.

Even this is the path created by the gods that the righteous should follow. This is the path, free from passion and aversion, laid down for men of dharma to follow. Men who are devoted to their own wives and who seek them only in their seasons, and who turn themselves away from indulgence in other sexual indulgence, succeed in attaining to swarga. Conduct marked by dana and tapa, and characterised by dharma of deeds, and purity of both body and heart, do the wise adopt in order to increase their punya or to earn their means of livelihood. Those who wish to enter into Swargaloka follow this path and not any other.'

Uma said, 'Tell me, O illustrious Lord, O sinless Pasupati, what are the words by which one is bound and what are they by uttering which one is liberated from one's bonds?'

Maheswara said, 'Men who never lie either for themselves or for others, or in jest or to provoke laughter, succeed in attaining swarga. They who never lie to earn their living or to garner merit, or through mere caprice, succeed in attaining swarga. They who speak words that are eloquent, pleasing and faultless, and who welcome all whom they meet with sincerity, succeed in finding heaven. They who never utter words that are harsh, bitter and cruel, and who are free from deceitfulness and evil of every kind, succeed in finding swarga. Men who never speak deceitfully, or through what they say cause a breach between friends, and who always speak the truth and what promotes good feelings, succeed in finding heaven.

Men who avoid harsh words and abstain from altercations, who are impartial in their behaviour to all creatures, and who have subjugated their

souls, succeed in rising into swarga. They who abstain from evil talk or sinful converse, who avoid hurtful, even disagreeable talk, and who speak such words as are auspicious and agreeable, succeed in rising into swarga. They who never speak in anger, words as wound the hearts of others, and who, even when infuriated, speak only peacefully and agreeably, succeed in attaining heaven.

The dharma, O goddess, which pertains to speech, must men always follow, for it is auspicious and characterised by truth. They that are possessed of wisdom should always avoid asatya, untruth.'

Uma said, 'Do you tell me, O Devadeva, Pinakapani, O you who are most highly blessed, what the thoughts are by which a person becomes darkly bound.'

Maheswara said, 'Endowed with the punya that arises from pure thoughts, O devi, one goes into swarga. Listen to me, O auspicious one, as I tell you what those deeds of the mind are. Listen also to me, O you of the exquisite face, how an ill-regulated mind is enshackled by wild and evil thoughts.

Those men who do not think to take what belongs to others, even when they see it lying in a forest, succeed in finding heaven. Men who care not to have for themselves what belongs to others even when they see it lying in a deserted house or village, ascend into Swargaloka. Men that do not even think of having for themselves the wives of others, not when they see them in deserted places and under the influence of desire, succeed in attaining to heaven. Men who, meeting with friends or foes, behave in the same amiable way towards all, succeed in entering heaven.

Men that are possessed of learning and compassion, that are pure in body and mind, that are firm in their adherence to truth, and that are contented with what belongs to them, find swarga for themselves. Men who bear no ill-will to any creature, who do not feel in need to labour for their livelihood, who bear friendly hearts towards all beings, and entertain compassion towards all, succeed in attaining heaven.

Men who are imbued with faith, that have compassion, that are holy, that seek the company of holy men, and know well the distinctions between right and wrong, find heaven for themselves. Men, O goddess, that know clearly what the consequences are of good and evil deeds, succeed in attaining to swarga. Men who are just in all their dealings, who are endowed with all worthy accomplishments, that are devoted to the Devas

and the Brahmanas, and that are endued with perseverance in the performance of good deeds, succeed in ascending to heaven.

All these men, O devi, succeed in attaining to swarga through the punya of their karma. Tell me, what else do you wish to hear?'

Uma said, 'I have a question, O Maheswara, connected with Manavas, human beings. I beg you, explain it to me carefully. By what actions does a man succeed, all mighty Lord, in acquiring a long life? Through what penances also does a man acquire a long life? By what deeds does a man become short-lived on earth? O you that are perfectly stainless, tell me what the consequences are of different actions in the matter of bestowing a long or a short life on the doer.

Some men are seen to be possessed of great good fortune and some weighed down with misfortune. Some are of noble birth while others of base birth. Some are of such coarse and repulsive features that they might be made of wood, while others are of very fine and handsome features even from the first sight. Some appear to be without wisdom while others are possessed of it. Some, again, are seen blessed with high intelligence and wisdom, both, enlightened by Buddhi and gyana. Some have to endure little pain, while others there are who are stricken by heavy calamities.

Even such diverse conditions are seen among Manavas. O Lustrous Lord, tell me the reason for all this.'

The God of gods said, 'Verily, O devi, I will tell you about the manifestation of the fruits of karma. It is through the laws of that manifestation that all human beings in this world enjoy or endure the consequences of their actions.

The man who assumes a fierce aspect to take the lives of other creatures, who arms himself with stout sticks to injure other creatures, who is seen with weapons raised, who kills living creatures without mercy, who always causes agitation to living beings, who refuses to grant protection to even worms and ants, who is full of cruelty—such a man sinks into naraka.

The one who has an opposite disposition to this, who is righteous in his deeds, is born as a handsome man. The man who is savage and cruel, goes to terrible hell, while he that is merciful and compassionate finds blissful heaven.

The man who goes into hell has to endure excruciating misery and torments. One who, having plunged into naraka, rises therefrom, is born as a man with a short life. The man who is addicted to violence and killing, O

devi, becomes, through his sinful deeds, liable to destruction. Such a one becomes abominable to all creatures and short-lived.

That man who belongs to what is called the Sweta varna, the white class, who abstains from the slaughter of living creatures, who has put away from him all weapons, who never inflicts any pain or punishment on anybody, who never injures any creature, who never causes anyone else to kill living creatures for him, who never kills or strikes even when struck or attempted to be slain himself, who never sanctions or approves a slaughter, who is invested with compassion towards all creatures, who behaves towards all others as towards his own self—such a superior man, O devi, succeeds in attaining to the status of a Deva. Filled with joy, he enjoys diverse kinds of luxurious raptures.

If such a one is ever born in the world of men, he is long-lived and enjoys great happiness. Even this is the way of those that are of righteous conduct and righteous deeds and hence blessed with longevity, the way that was indicated by the Self-born Brahma himself and which is characterised by abstaining from the killing of living creatures.'"

CANTO 145

"Uma said, 'Through what disposition, what conduct, what acts, and what charity, does a man succeed in attaining to heaven?'

Maheswara said, 'He who is endowed with a liberal disposition, who honours Brahmanas and treats them with hospitality, who makes gifts of food and drink, clothes and other articles of enjoyment to the destitute, the blind and the distressed, who makes gifts of houses, erects halls for public use, digs wells, constructs shelters whence pure and cool water is made available during the hot months to thirsty travellers, excavates tanks, makes arrangements for the free distribution of gifts every day, gives to all seekers what each solicits, who makes gifts of seats and beds and conveyances, wealth, ornaments and gemstones, homes, all kinds of grain, kine, fields, and women—verily, he who always makes these gifts with a cheerful heart, becomes a denizen, O goddess, of swarga. He resides there for a long time, enjoying a myriad of supernal pleasures and joys.

Passing his time happily in the company of the Apsaras, he dallies in the woods of Nandana and other enchanted places. After the exhaustion of his punya, he falls again from heaven and takes his birth in the order of humanity, in a family possessed of wealth in abundance and that has a large command of every item of enjoyment. In that life he is able to gratify all his wishes and appetites. Indeed, he is blessed with affluence of every kind and a well-filled treasury. The Svayambhuva Brahma himself declared it in days of old that it is even such souls, O devi, that become highly blessed and possessed of liberal natures and handsome forms and features.

There are others, O Parvati, that are incapable of giving charity or gifts of any kind. Endowed with small minds, little understanding, they cannot make gifts even when they own abundant wealth and are solicited by deserving Brahmanas. Seeing the destitute, the blind, the distressed and mendicants, and even guests arrived at their homes, such men, always filled only with the desire to satisfy their own taste and appetite, turn away, yes, even when expressly solicited by the truly needy. They never give wealth or clothes, or food, gold, or kine, or anything at all. Such men who are disinclined to relieve the distress of others, who are full of greed, who have no faith in the scriptures, and who never give dana—verily, these men of little understanding must perforce sink down into hell.

In the course of time, when their sufferings in naraka come to an end, they are born in the order of humanity, in families that are entirely impoverished. Always suffering from hunger and thirst, excluded from all noble and decent society, hopeless of ever enjoying themselves, they lead lives of utter wretchedness. Born into families that are without all things of pleasure, these men never enjoy the good things of the world.

Indeed, O Uma, it is through their own deeds that men and women become wretched and poor. There are others who are full of arrogance and pride caused by the possession of riches. Those senseless wretches never offer seats to those that deserve to be seated. Having little understanding, they do not respect or honour them that deserve both. Nor do they give padya, water to wash their feet, to those to whom it should be given. Indeed, they do not honour, agreeably to the laws, with offerings of the arghya, such as deserve to be honoured therewith. They do not offer water to wash their mouths to such as deserve to have that honour. They do not treat their very preceptors, when these arrive at their homes, in the manner in which gurus should be treated.

Living in greed, lust and arrogance, they refuse to treat their elders and aged and wise men with love and affection, even insulting those that should be honoured and asserting their superiority over them without showing reverence and humility. Such men, O Goddess, sink into hell. When their sufferings come to an end after a long course of years, they rise from naraka, and are born into the order of humans, in low and wretched families. Indeed, they who humiliate their preceptors and elders, have to take their birth in such castes as those of Swapakas and Pukkasas who are exceedingly vile and bereft of intelligence.

He who is not arrogant or filled with pride, who is a worshipper of the Devas and Brahmanas, who enjoys the respect of the world, who bows to everyone that deserves his reverence, who speaks kind and sweet words, who benefits persons of all varnas, who is always devoted to the good of all beings, who does not feel aversion for anybody, who is soft-spoken, who is an utterer of agreeable and soothing words, who gives way to one that deserves to have way, who adores his preceptors in the manner in which preceptors deserve to be adored, who welcomes all creatures with proper courtesy, who does not bear ill-will towards any creature, who lives worshipping elders and guests with such reverence as they deserve, who is ever bent upon having as many guests as possible, and who worships all who honour his home with their presence, succeeds, O devi, in finding swarga.

Upon the exhaustion of his merit, he is born among men again, into a high and most respectable family. In that life, he is possessed of all enjoyments in abundance and jewellery and gems and every other kind of wealth in profusion. He gives to deserving persons what they deserve. He is devoted to the observance of every duty and every act of righteousness. Honoured by all creatures and receiving their reverence, he obtains the fruits of his own karma. Even such a one acquires a high lineage and birth in this world.

This that I have said to you was declared by Brahma, the Ordainer himself, in days of old. That man who is fierce in conduct, who inspires terror in all creatures, who injures other beings with his hands or feet, or ropes or sticks, or bricks or clods of hard clay, or other means of wounding and causing pain, O loveliest one, who practises diverse kinds of deceit even to kill living creatures or to vex them, who pursues animals in the hunt and causes them to tremble in fear—verily, that man who conducts himself in this way is certain to sink into hell. If in the course of time, he is born again among humans, he is born into a low and wretched race or family that is afflicted with hardships and impediments of every kind on every side. He becomes an object of aversion to all the world. Wretched among men, he becomes so through his own actions.

Another, who is possessed of compassion, casts his equal eye on all creatures. Blessed with a kind and friendly vision, behaving towards all creatures as if he were their father, divested of every hostile feeling, with all his passions under complete control, he never vexes any creature and never

inspires them with fear with any means in his control. He inspires the confidence of all beings. He never afflicts any creature with either ropes or clubs, or stones or weapons of any kind. His deeds are never fierce or cruel, and he is full of kindness. One who is given to such practices and conduct certainly attains to swarga.

There he lives like a god in a celestial mansion abounding in every comfort. If, upon the exhaustion of his merit, he has to be born among men, he is born as a man that has never to face difficulties or hardships of any kind or to encounter any fear. Indeed, he enjoys great happiness in the world as well. Possessed of felicity, without the obligation of undergoing distressing labour for his living, he lives free from every kind of anxiety. Even this, O goddess, is the path of the righteous. In it there are no obstacles or afflictions.'

Uma said, 'In the world some men are seen to be well-versed in inferences and the premises leading to them. Indeed, they are possessed of gyana and vigyana, knowledge and science, have many children, and are blessed with learning and wisdom. Others, O Lord, are without wisdom, science and knowledge, and are full of folly. Through what particular actions does a person become wise? By what acts, again, does one become possessed of little wisdom and distorted vision? Do you dispel this doubt of mine, O you who are the greatest knower of dharma. Others there are, O Siva, who are blind from the moment of their birth. Yet others are that diseased and otherwise afflicted or impotent. Do you, Mahadeva, tell me the reason for this.'

Maheswara said, 'Those men that always enquire about what is for their weal and what is to their detriment, Brahmanas learned in the Vedas, crowned with success, and conversant with all duties, who avoid all kinds of evil deeds and do only what is righteous and good, find swarga after they depart this world and enjoy great joy as long as they live here. Upon the exhaustion of their punya, when they are born among humans, they are born as men of great intelligence. Every kind of felicity and auspiciousness becomes theirs because of that Buddhi with which they are born.

Men of foolish minds, who cast lustful gazes upon the wives of other men, are born cursed with blindness due to that sin of theirs. Those men who, impelled by desire in their hearts, cast their eyes on naked women, those men of vile deeds take birth in this world to pass their whole lives in one continuous disease. Those foolish and wicked men who indulge in

sexual congress with women of varnas different from their own, are cursed to be born impotent in their next lives. Men who cause animals to be slain, and those who violate the beds of their preceptors, and those who are promiscuous, are born in their next lives as men without virility.'

Uma said, 'What karma, O Maheswara, is flawed, and what acts are faultless? What, indeed, are those karmas by doing which a man succeeds in attaining to his highest good?'

Maheswara said, 'That man who wants to know what dharma is, and who wishes to acquire prominent virtues and accomplishments, and who always puts questions to Brahmanas with a view to discover the path that leads to his highest weal, succeeds in attaining to swarga. If, after exhaustion of his merit, he is born among men, he is blessed with great intelligence and memory and deep wisdom. This, O goddess, is the conduct that the righteous follow and which is full of great benefits. I have told you this for the good of all Manavas.'

Uma said, 'There are men who hate dharma and who have little understanding. They never wish to even approach Brahmanas who know the Vedas. There are others who are observant of vratas and who are devoted to performing sraddhas. Others, again, are devoid of all vows. They are unmindful of observance and are like Rakshasas in their ways. Some there are who are devoted to the performance of sacrifices and some who are unmindful of the homa. Through the consequences of what karma do men become possessed of these different natures?'

Maheswara said, 'Through the Vedas, the limits have been assigned to all the pravritti of Manushyas. Those men that conduct themselves according to the authority of the Vedas, are seen in their next lives to become devoted to the observance of vows. Those men, however, who having become subject to the sway of folly take adharma to be dharma, become without holiness, transgress all restraints, and come to be regarded as Brahmarakshasas. Indeed, it is these men that become unmindful of the homa, that never utter the vashat and other sacred mantras, and become known as the lowest and vilest of men. Thus, O devi, have I explained to you the entire ocean of dharma in respect of Manavas, for the sake of removing your doubts, and not omitting the sins of which they become guilty.'"

CANTO 146

"Narada said, 'Having said all this, the powerful Mahadeva himself became desirous of listening to what his beloved consort, the devi Uma, seated beside him, could tell him and she was inclined to satisfy his desire.'

Mahadeva said, 'You, O devi, know well what Supreme is and what is not. You know all dharma, O you that love to dwell in the asramas of Rishis. You are imbued with every virtue, O you of beautiful brows and hair ending in the fairest curls, O Hymavati, daughter of the king of mountains. You are skilled in all things. You are endowed with self-restraint and you look impartially upon all creatures. Divested of all ego, you are devoted to the practice of every dharma. O you of beautiful features, I wish to ask you something, and I wish that you discourse to me on that subject.

Savitri is the chaste wife of Brahma. The chaste Sachi is the wife of Indra. Dhumrorna is the wife of Markandeya, and Riddhi of Vaisravana. Varuna has Gauri for his consort, and Surya has Suvarchala. Rohini is the chaste wife of Sasin, and Swaha of Vibhavasu. And Kasyapa has Aditi. All these regard their husbands as their gods.

You have, O devi, conversed and associated with all of them. It is for this reason, O you who know all dharma, that I want to ask you about the kartavyas of women, and because everything you say is consistent with dharma. I want to hear you discourse on this subject from the beginning. You practise all the duties of dharma with me. Your conduct is exactly like mine, and the vows you observe are the same that I keep. Your power and energy are equal to mine, and you have undergone the austerest penances.

The subject, when discoursed upon by you, will become invested with great punya. Indeed, that discourse will then become scripture and the authority in the world. Women, in special, are the highest refuge of women. O you of beautiful hips, among human beings the pravritti which you lay down will be followed from generation to generation.

Half of my body is half your body. You are always engaged in doing the work of the Devas, and it is you that are the cause of the peopling of the earth. O auspicious goddess, you do for certain know all the eternal duties of women. Do you, therefore, tell me in detail what the dharmas are of your sex.'

Uma said, 'Swami, Lord of all created things, source of all that is past, present and in the future, it is through your grace that the words that I speak arise in my mind. All these rivers that are of my sex, Devadeva, flowing with the waters of all the tirthas, approach your presence to enable you to perform your ablutions in them. After consulting them, I will speak upon the subject you have asked about, in due order.

That man who, though mighty and able, is still free from egotism, is rightly called a purusha. As regards woman, Lord of all beings, she follows those of her sex. By consulting these foremost of rivers shall I honour them. The sacred Saraswati is the foremost of rivers. She courses towards the ocean and is truly the first of all sacred streams. Vipasa also here, and Vitasta, and Chandrabhaga, and Iravati, and Satadru, and the Devika river, and Kausiki, and Gomati. And this celestial river who has in her all the sacred tirthas, the devi Ganga, who having her font in swarga has descended on the earth and is the greatest and best of all sacred streams.'

Having said this, the consort of that God of gods smilingly addressed all those river goddesses. The devi Uma, devoted to the performance of every dharma, questioned those sacred rivers about the dharma of women, for verily, those best of rivers, having Ganga for their first, are all conversant with the duties of women.'

Uma said, 'The illustrious Siva has asked a question about the dharma of women. I wish to answer Sankara after having consulted with you. I do not see any branch of knowledge on earth or heaven that can be mastered by anyone without your help. You rivers that flow towards the ocean, it is for this that I seek your opinions.'

Thus were those greatest of rivers, all of whom were auspicious and most sacred, questioned by Siva's consort. Then the celestial Ganga, who

worshipped the daughter of the prince of mountains in return, was chosen to answer the question. For, indeed, she of sweet smiles is held as swelling with diverse kinds of understanding and deeply knowing of the dharma of women. The sacred river, who can dispel all fear of sin, who is possessed of humility because of her intelligence, who is well acquainted with every dharma, and enriched with an intelligence of unequalled comprehensiveness, replied thus to Uma.

Ganga said, 'Devi, you are always devoted to the performance of every dharma. You have shown me your favour by questioning me. O sinless one, you are honoured by all the universe, yet you ask me that am just a river. I believe that one who, though entirely competent to discourse on any subject, yet asks another, or who pays a graceful tribute to another, certainly deserves to be regarded as a Mahatman. Such a one deserves to be called learned and wise. Such a one never falls into disgrace who consults such others as are endued with gyana and vigyana, and as are knowing of vastus, premises, and anumanas, inferences. By speaking in the midst of an assembly, relying upon his own powers alone and without consulting with others, a proud man, even when endowed with intelligence finds himself uttering only words of weak import.

You are possessed of spiritual insight; you are the foremost of all those that dwell in swarga. You have arisen here accompanied by diverse kinds of exalted punya. You, devi Uma, are absolutely competent to discourse on the dharma of women.'

In this way, the goddess Uma was worshipped by Ganga and honoured with the ascription of many high merits. Thus praised, the beautiful goddess then began to discourse upon all the duties of women in full.

Uma said, 'I shall, according to the law, speak on the subject of women's dharma as far as it is known to me. Do you all listen with attention. The dharma of women arises as created at the outset by kinsmen during the rites of marriage. Indeed, a woman becomes, in the presence of the nuptial fire, the partner of her lord in the performance of all punya karmas. Possessed of a good disposition, blessed with sweet speech, sweet conduct and sweet features, and always looking at the face of her husband and deriving as much joy from it as she does from looking at the face of her child, the chaste woman who regulates her pravritti by observing the prescribed restraints, comes to be regarded as truly righteous in her conduct.

Listening with reverence to the dharma of married life as expounded in the scriptures, and accomplishing all those auspicious duties, the woman who regards dharma as the foremost of all objects of pursuit; who observes the same vows as her husband; who, adorned with chastity, looks upon her husband as a god; who waits upon and serves him as if he is a god; who surrenders her own will completely to that of her lord; who is calm and cheerful, who keeps excellent vratas; who is blessed with gracious and goodly features, and whose heart is so completely devoted to her husband that she never even thinks of any other man, is regarded as truly righteous in her conduct.

The wife who, even when addressed harshly and looked upon with angry eyes by her lord, presents a cheerful aspect to him, is said to be truly devoted to her husband. She who does not cast her eyes upon the moon or the sun or even a tree that has a masculine name, who is adored by her husband and who is possessed of beautiful features, is regarded as truly righteous. The woman who treats her husband with the affection which she shows towards her child, even when the husband happens to be poor or diseased or weak or worn out with the toil of travelling, is regarded as truly righteous in her conduct.

The woman who is endued with self-control, who has given birth to children, who serves her husband with devotion, and whose whole heart is devoted to him, is regarded as truly righteous in her conduct. The woman who waits upon and serves her lord with a cheerful heart, who indeed is always cheerful of heart, and who is possessed of humility, is regarded as truly righteous in her vyavahara. That woman who always supports her kinsmen and relatives by giving them food, and whose relish in gratifying her desires or for articles of enjoyment, or for the affluence of which she is mistress, or for the happiness with which she is surrounded, falls short of her relish for her husband, is regarded as truly righteous in her pravritti.

That woman who always takes pleasure in rising early, before dawn, who is devoted to the discharge of all her household duties, who always keeps her home clean, who anoints her home daily with cow-dung, who always attends to the domestic fire, who never neglects to make offerings of flowers and other auspicious things to the gods, who with her husband gratifies the deities and guests and all servants and dependants of the family with that share of food which is theirs by the law, and who always takes, according to the law, for herself, what food remains in the house only after

the needs have been met of the gods and guests and servants; who gratifies all who come in contact with her family and feeds them to their fill, succeeds in acquiring great punya.

That woman who is accomplished, who worships the feet of her father-in-law and mother-in-law, and who is always devoted to her father and mother, is regarded as possessed of tapodhana, ascetic wealth. That woman who supports with food Brahmanas that are weak and helpless, that are distressed or blind or destitute, comes to be regarded as entitled to share the punya of her husband. That woman who always observes, with a light heart, vows that are difficult of observance, whose heart is entirely devoted to her lord, and who always seeks the good of her lord, is regarded as entitled to share the punya of her husband.

Devotion to her lord is a woman's merit; it is her penance; it is her eternal heaven. Punya, tapasya, and swarga itself become hers who looks upon her husband as her all, and who, with perfect chastity, seeks to devote herself to her lord in all things. The husband is the god that women have. The husband is their friend; the husband is their highest refuge. Women have no refuge that can compare with their husbands, and no god that can compare with him. The husband's grace and heaven are equal in the estimation of a woman; or, if unequal, the inequality is trivial.

Maheswara, my Lord, I do not desire swarga itself if you are not satisfied with me. If the husband that is poor, or diseased or distressed or fallen among foes, or afflicted by a Brahmana's curse, were to command the wife to do something that is improper or unrighteous or that may lead to destruction of life itself, the wife should, without any hesitation, do it.

And so have I, Siva, my Lord and only God, expounded, at your command, what the dharma of women is. The woman who conducts herself in this way becomes entitled to a share of all the punya won by her husband.'

Narada continued, 'Thus addressed, Maheswara applauded the daughter of the king of mountains and then dismissed all those holy ones that had assembled there, together with his own ganas, his bhutas and pramathas. The diverse tribes of ghostly beings, as also all the embodied rivers, and the Gandharvas and Apsaras, all bowed their heads low to Mahadeva and returned to where they had all come from."

CANTO 147

"The Rishis said, 'Wielder of the Pinaka, gouger of the eyes of Bhaga, you that are worshipped by all the universe, we desire to hear the glory of Vasudeva.'

Maheswara said, 'Hari is superior to the Grandsire Brahma himself. He is the Eternal Purusha. Otherwise called Krishna, he is endowed with the splendour of gold, and shines with effulgence like a second sun. Possessed of ten arms, he is of infinite tejas, and is the slayer of the foes of the gods. Having a whorl, the srivatsa, on his breast, he has curly locks of hair on his head. He is worshipped by all the deities.

Brahma came from his navel. I have sprung from his head. All the stars and luminaries in the firmament have sprung from his hair. From the bristles on his body have sprung all the Devas and Asuras. From his body have come the Rishis as also all the eternal worlds. He is the abode of the Pitamaha and the abode of all the gods besides. He is the Creator of this whole earth, and he is the Lord of the three worlds. He is also the destroyer of all creatures, chala and achala. He is truly the foremost of all the gods. He is their master. He is the chastiser of all foes. He is omniscient. He exists in everything. He goes everywhere at will.

He is of universal extent, pervading as he does everything. He is the Supreme Soul. He is the mover of all the senses. He covers the universe. He is the Supreme Lord. There is nothing in the three worlds that is superior to him. He is eternal. He is Madhusudana, the slayer of Madhu, and is otherwise called Govinda. The giver of honours, he comes in human form and causes all the kings of the earth to be killed in battle, to achieve the

purposes of the Devas. If they are abandoned by him, the Devas are cannot accomplish their purposes on earth. Indeed, without having him as their Lord they cannot do anything. He is the Lord of all creatures and is adored by all the gods. Within the belly of this sovereign of the gods, who is ever devoted to the accomplishment of their purposes, of this One who is identical with Brahman and who is always the refuge of regenerate Rishis, dwells Brahma the Grandsire. Indeed, Brahma dwells happily in Hari's body which is his home. I myself, that am called Sarva, also dwell joyfully in that blissful abode which is Narayana. All the gods, as well, reside in perfect happiness in his body.

Endowed with great refulgence, he has eyes that resemble the petals of the lotus. Sri dwells within him and he dwells always in union with her. The bow called Saranga and the chakra called Sudarsana are his weapons, together with a sword. He has the enemy of the snakes, Garuda, on his standard. He is distinguished by immaculate pravritti, by purity of both body and mind, by self-restraint, by prowess, by energy, by the handsomest form, by being tall and of perfectly proportioned limbs, by patience, by sincerity, by affluence, by compassion, by excellence of form, and by might. He shines forth, endowed with all celestial weapons of wonderful form and craft.

He has yoga for his illusion. He is possessed of a thousand eyes. He is free from every stain or fault. He is high-minded. He is invested with heroism, virya, which he embodies. He is an object of pride with all his friends. He is dear to all his kinsmen and relatives and they are dear to him. He is forgiving. He is entirely free from pride or egotism. He is devoted to the Brahmanas and is their Lord. He dispels the fears of all afflicted with fear. He enhances the joys of all his friends. He is the refuge of all creatures.

He is ever engaged in protecting and cherishing the distressed. Possessed of a thorough knowledge of all the scriptures, and every kind of affluence, he is worshipped by all beings. Absolutely conversant with all dharma, he is a great benefactor of even enemies and fallen men when they seek his protection. The master of policy and indeed policy embodied, he is a Brahmavadi, an utterer of Brahman, and has all his senses under perfect control.

For doing good to the Devas, Govinda will be born in the race of the Mahatman Manu. Verily, endued with Mahabuddhi, he will be born into the

auspicious and righteous vamsa of that Prajapati. Manu will have a son named Anga. After Anga will come Antardhaman. From Antardhaman will spring Havirdhaman, that Lord of all creatures, free from every stain. Havirdhaman will have an illustrious son of the name of Rachinavarhi. He will have ten sons, with Prachetas the first. Prachetas will have a son named Daksha who will be regarded as a Prajapati. Daksha will beget a daughter who will be named Dakshayani.

From Dakshayani will spring Aditya, and from Aditya will spring Manu. From Manu will be born a daughter named Ila and a son named Sudyumna. Ila will have Budha for her husband, and from Budha will spring Pururavas. From Pururavas will come Ayu. From Ayu will spring Nahusha, and Nahusha will beget a son named Yayati. From Yayati will come a mighty son of the name of Yadu; Yadu will beget Kroshtri. Kroshtri will beget a great son to be named Vrijinivat. From Vrijinivat will come Ushadgu the unvanquished. Ushadgu will beget a son of the name of Chitraratha. Chitraratha will have a younger son of the name Sura.

Indeed, in the race of these mighty men, of tejas celebrated the world over, possessed of excellent conduct and diverse accomplishments, devoted to the performance of sacrifices and of pure karmas, in the pure race honoured by the Brahmanas, Sura will take his birth. He will be a great Kshatriya, endowed with untold energy, and possessed of great fame. Sura, that giver of honours, will beget a son, the perpetuator of his race, name Vasudeva, otherwise called Anakadundhubhi.

Vasudeva will have a son of the name of Vaasudeva. He will have four arms. He will be exceedingly liberal, and will honour the Brahmanas greatly. Identical with the Brahman, he will love the Brahmanas, and the Brahmanas will love him. That scion of Yadu's race will liberate a hundred great kings immured in the prisons of the ruler of the Magadhas, after vanquishing Jarasandha in his capital hidden among mountains.

Of untold energy and might, this Krishna will be rich with the jewellery and gems of all the rulers of the world. Indeed, in tejas he will be unrivalled on earth; possessed of great prowess, he will be the Lord of all kings of the world. Foremost among all the Surasenas, the puissant one, dwelling in Dwaraka, will rule and protect all the earth after vanquishing all her kings, for he will have the vigyana of polity.

Assembling together, do you all adore him, as you worship the Eternal Brahman, with speech, flower garlands and the best incense and perfumes.

He who wishes to see me or the Grandsire Brahma should first see the illustrious Krishna Vaasudeva of great puissance. If he is seen I am seen, as also the Pitamaha Brahma. There is no difference between us three. Know this, you Rishis of tapodhana!

With that person with whom the lotus-eyed Krishna becomes gratified, all the Devas with Brahma amongst them will also be pleased. That man who seeks the protection of Kesava will succeed in earning great achievements and victory and heaven itself. He will be a teacher of dharma and karma, and will earn untold punya. All those that know dharma and karma should, with alacrity, bow down to that Lord of all the gods. By adoring that mighty one, you will acquire great merit.

Of infinite tejas, that Hari, from the desire to benefit all creatures, created millions of Rishis, for the sake of dharma. Those millions of Rishis, thus created by that great Ordainer, now dwell on the mountains of Gandhamadana, led by Sanatkumara and engaged in awesome tapasya. Hence, Dvijottamas, must the righteous Krishna Vaasudeva be adored by all.

The illustrious Hari, the almighty Narayana, is, verily, the foremost of all beings in heaven. Adored, he adores, and honoured he honours; to them that make offerings to him, he makes offerings in return. Worshipped, he worships in return; if seen always, he sees the seers always. If one seeks his refuge and protection, he seeks the seeker as his refuge in return. You foremost of all righteous ones, if adored and worshipped, he adores and worships in return, without fail.

Even this is the high pravritti of the faultless Vishnu. Even this is the vow that all the righteous observe, of that first of all Gods, that omnipotent Lord of all creatures. He is always worshipped in the world. Verily, that Eternal Being is worshipped by even the Devas. Those that are devoted to him, with the steadfastness of a vrata, become liberated from fear and misfortune in proportion to their bhakti. The regenerate ones should always worship him in thought, word and deed. The son of Devaki should be looked upon by them with reverence and in order to see him with reverence, they should address themselves to the performance of penances.

You foremost of ascetics, even this is the path that I reveal to you. By seeing him, you will behold all the greatest gods. I, too, bow my head in reverence to that Lord of the universe, that Grandsire of all the worlds, that

mighty and vast blue Varaha. By seeing him one beholds the Trimurtis, the Trinity. All the gods dwell in him.

He will have an elder brother who will become known over the world as Balarama. Having a plough for his weapon, he will look like a white hill in form. Indeed, he will be endowed with might that can lift the very earth. Upon the chariot of that divine person a tall palmyra, three-fronded and golden, will form his proud standard. The head of that mighty-armed hero, that Lord of all the worlds, will be shaded by many high-souled snakes of vast bodies. All the divine weapons will also come to him as soon as he thinks of them. He is called Ananta, the Infinite. That illustrious one is identical with the immutable Hari.

Once on a time, the mighty Garuda, the son of Kasyapa, was addressed by the Devas in these words, “Do you, O mighty one, see if this One has any end!” Though possessed of untold energy, Garuda failed to discover any end to this illustrious Ananta who is identical with the Paramatman. Supporting the whole world on his head, he dwells in the Patalas. He ranges through the universe as Sesha, always filled with great joy. He is Vishnu; He is the illustrious Ananta. He is the supporter of the earth. He that is Balarama is Hrishikesa. He that is Achyuta is Ananta, the bearer of the earth.

Both those foremost of all beings are divine and endowed with divine prowess. One of them is armed with the chakra and the other with the halayudha. They deserve every honour and a vision of them must be eagerly sought.

I have, through my affection for you, thus declared to you the nature of Krishna Narayana. Even this, you tapodhanas, is dharma. I have declared all this to you so that you may, with reverence and care, worship Krishna, that greatest of Yadu’s vamsa.’”

CANTO 148

Narada said, "At the conclusion of Mahadeva's discourse, loud roars were heard in the firmament. Thunder bellowed, with flashes of lightning. The welkin was enveloped with thick blue clouds. The god of the clouds then poured down purifying deluges as he does in the monsoon. A heavy darkness set in. The points of the horizon could no longer be distinguished. Then on that delightful, sacred and eternal breast of that celestial mountain, the assembled Rishis no longer saw the multitude of ghostly beings that associate with Mahadeva.

Soon, however, the sky cleared. Some of the Rishis set out for the sacred tirthas. Others returned from whence they came. Verily, beholding that wonderful and inconceivable sight, they were filled with amazement. The discourse, as well, between Sankara and Uma filled them with awe and wonder. You, O Lord, are that foremost of all beings, of whom the Mahatman Sankara spoke to us on that mountain. You are the Eternal Brahman.

On that occasion, also, Mahadeva burnt Himavat with his tejas. You have also shown us a similar spectacle. Indeed, today we have been put in remembrance of that time. O mighty-armed Janardana, I have thus, O almighty one, recited to you the glory of that God of gods, him that is called Kapardin or Girisa!"'

Bhishma continues, 'Thus addressed by those denizens of ascetic retreats, Krishna, the delighter of Devaki, paid due honour to all those Rishis. Filled with delight, those Rishis once more addressed Krishna, saying, "Madhusudana, do you repeatedly show yourself to us at all times!

O almighty one, swarga cannot give us such bliss as does the sight of you. Everything that the illustrious Bhava said about you is true. O Parantapa, we have told you all about that mystery. You yourself well know the truth of all things. Since, however, questioned by us, it pleased you to question us in return, we have narrated everything about the discourse of Bhava with Uma, only to please you.

There is nothing in the three worlds that is unknown to you. You know the birth and origin of all things, indeed, you know everything that are a Cause of causes. Being ourselves of light natures, we are unable to bear within us such tremendous mysteries without speaking of them in wonder. Indeed, in your presence, O Greatest, we indulge in incoherencies from the lightness of our hearts. There is no wonderful thing that is unknown to you. Whatever is on earth, and whatever is in heaven, is all known to you.

We take our leave of you, Krishna, to return to our various homes. May you increase in intelligence and prosperity. O Lord, O Sire, You will soon have a son like yourself, or even more distinguished than you. He will be imbued with great energy and splendour. He will achieve tremendous feats, and become possessed of power as great as yours."'

Bhishma continues, 'After this, the great Rishis bowed to that God of gods, that scion of Yadu's race, that foremost of all great Beings. They then circumambulated him in pradakshina and, taking his leave, departed. As for Narayana, who is endowed with prosperity and blazing effulgence, he returned to Dwaraka after having duly completed that vrata of his. His wife Rukmini conceived, and on the expiration of the tenth month, a son was born of her, possessed of heroism and honoured by all for his utterly wonderful accomplishments. He, Pradyumna, is that Kama, the god of love, who exists in every creature and who pervades every existence. Indeed, he moves within the hearts of both Devas and Asuras.

And this Krishna is the foremost of all purushas. Even he of the hue of clouds is that four-armed Vaasudeva. Through affection, he has attached himself to the Pandavas, and you also, you sons of Pandu, have attached yourselves to him. Achievements, prosperity, intelligence and the path that leads to swarga, are all there where this One, Trivikrama, the illustrious Vishnu of three steps, is. He is the three and thirty gods with Indra at their head. There is no doubt about this. He is the One Ancient God. He is the first of all the gods. He is the refuge of all creatures. He is without beginning and without end. He is Avyakta, unmanifest.

He is the high-souled Madhusudana, the slayer of Madhu. Endowed with infinite tejas and urjas, he has been born among men to accomplish the purpose of the gods. Verily, this Madhava is the expounder of the most difficult truths which relate to artha, and he is also their achiever. O son of Pritha, the victory you have won over your enemies, your unrivalled achievements, the dominion you have acquired over the whole earth, are all due to this Narayana having taken your part. Your having got the inconceivable Narayana for your protector and refuge enabled you to become a terrible Adhvaryu, a sacrificer to pour multitudes of kings as libations into the raging fire of war. This Krishna was your great Sruva, your sacrificial ladle, resembling the all-consuming fire that appears at the end of the yuga. Duryodhana, with his sons, brothers and kinsmen, was much to be pitied, for, moved by wrath, he made agaisnt with Hari and the wielder of the Gandiva. Many sons of Diti, many foremost Danavas, of great bodies and vast strength, have perished in the flames of Krishna's chakra like insects in a forest fire. How then will Manavas, mere mortal men, do battle against that Krishna, ah, human beings who, Purushavyaghra, have hardly any strength or prowess?

As for Jaya, this Arjuna, he is a mighty yogin resembling the all-destroying yuga-fire in urjas. Drawing his bow equally with both hands, the Savyasachin is always in the van of battle. With his irresistible energy, O king, he has slain all the heroes and legions of Suyodhana.

Listen to me as I tell you what Mahadeva who has the bull for the device on his standard, once said to the Rishis, upon the breast of the Himavat. His utterances constitute a Purana. The advancement of greatness, energy, strength, prowess, puissance, humility and lineage that are in Arjuna can come up to only a third part of the measure in which those attributes reside in Krishna. Who is there that can equal, let alone surpass, Krishna in these qualities? Whether that is possible or not, listen and judge.

There where the illustrious Krishna is, there is unrivalled vishishtatha, excellence. As for myself, I am one of little understanding. Dependent upon the will of others, I am unfortunate. Knowingly, I set myself on the eternal path of death. You, however, are devoted to sincerity of conduct. Having once pledged yourself not to take back your kingdom, even when you might have done so, you did not take it, for you were determined to keep your oath. O Yudhishtira, king, you make too much of the slaughter of your

kinsmen and friends in battle. You must remember that it is never right to break a sworn oath.

All those who have fallen on the field of battle have actually been slain by Time. Verily, all of us have been slain by Time. Time is, indeed, all-powerful. You know full well the inexorable puissance of Time. Afflicted by Kaala, it does not become you to grieve. Know that Krishna himself, otherwise called Hari, is that same Kaala, with blood-red eyes and with cudgel in hand. For these reasons, O son of Kunti, it does not befit you to grieve for your slain kinsfolk. Be you always free, Kurunandana, from grief.

You have heard of the glory and greatness of Madhava Krishna. That is sufficient to enable a good man to understand him. Having heard the words of Vyasa, as also of Narada Mahabuddhi, I have spoken to you about Krishna, the most Adorable Lord. I have myself added, from my own knowledge, something to Narada's discourse. I have also spoken of the surpassing might of Krishna as recited by Mahadeva to the conclave of Rishis upon the breast of the Himavat. The converse between Maheswara and the daughter of Himavat, also, Bhaarata, have I narrated to you.

He who will bear in his heart that discourse when coming from a great and righteous person, he who will listen to it, and he who will recite it for others to hear is sure to win the highest, most auspicious punya. That man will find all his wishes fulfilled. Leaving this world, he will ascend into swarga. There is no doubt of this. That man who wants to attain to his own great weal should devote himself to Krishna Janardana.

King of the Kurus, you must also always bear in mind those revelations about dharma and kartavya which were declared by Maheswara. If you conduct yourself according to those precepts, if you bear the rod of chastisement justly and rightly, if you protect your subjects properly, you may be sure of attaining to Swargaloka. It is your solemn duty, O Rajan, to protect your subjects always according to the dictates of dharma. The stout neeti danda, the staff of punishment, which the king bears, has been said to be the embodiment of his dharma and his punya.

Hearing the discourse, fraught with deepest dharma, between Sankara and Uma, which I have recited in this righteous conclave, you should worship with utmost reverence that God who has the bull for the emblem on his banner. He who grows even desirous of listening to that paribhasa should worship Mahadeva with utmost reverence. Verily, the one who

wishes his own weal should adore Mahadeva with a pure heart. Even this is the command of the faultless Narada. Even he has commanded such worship of the Great God, O son of Pandu; do you obey that command of Narada.

O most powerful king, even these are the wondrous events that transpired on the sacred breast of the Himavat, with regard to Vishnu and Sthanu. Those events flowed from the very nature of those Mahatman Deities. Krishna, accompanied by the wielder of Gandiva, practised eternal tapasya in the Badarikasrama for ten thousand years. Verily, Krishna and Dhananjaya, who are the ancient Narayana and Nara, both of eyes like lotus-petals, underwent severe austerities for the duration of three whole yugas. I learnt this from Narada and Vyasa, O king.

The lotus-eyed Mahabaho Krishna, while yet a boy, achieved the great feat of killing Kamsa for the relief of his kinsmen. I do not venture, son of Kunti, to enumerate the feats of this Ancient and Eternal Being, O Yudhishtira. Without doubt, son, you will have high and great rewards who own that foremost of all persons, Krishna Vaasudeva, for your friend.

I grieve for the evil Duryodhana even in respect of the next world to which he has gone. It was for him that all the earth has been razed of her people, along with her elephants and steeds. Indeed, through the folly and sins of Duryodhana, of Karna, of Sakuni and of Dusasana as the fourth, the Kurus have perished.'"

Vaisampayana continued, "While that foremost of men, the son of Ganga, speaks to him in this strain, the Kuru King Yudhishtira remains entirely silent in the midst of the Mahatmans who have gathered to listen to the wisdom and discourses of Bhishma. All the kings, with Dhritarashtra amongst them, are filled with profound wonder upon hearing the words of the Kuru Grandsire. In their hearts they worship Krishna and then turn towards him with hands joined in reverence. The Rishis, also, with Narada at their head, accept and laud the words of Bhishma and approve of them joyfully. These are the wonderful Paribhashas of Bhishma which Pandu's son Yudhishtira with all his brothers hear with deep gratitude and joy.

Some time after, when Yudhishtira sees that Ganga's son, who had given away abundant wealth as dakshina and dana to the Brahmanas at the sacrifices performed by him, has rested and become refreshed, the intelligent king once more questions him."

CANTO 149

Vaisampayana said, "Having heard of all the kartavyas in their entirety and all those sacred karmas and vastus, objects, that cleanse human beings of their sins, Yudhishtira once more addresses the son of Santanu.

Yudhishtira says, 'Who may be said to be the One God in the world? Who may be said to be the One Vastu which is our sole refuge? Who is he by worshipping whom and hymning whose praises men acquire what is most beneficial to them? What dharma is that which, in your judgment, is the foremost of all dharmas? What are those mantras by reciting which in japa a living creature is freed from the bonds of birth and life?'

Bhishma says, 'One should always, with alacrity and casting aside all languor, hymn the praises of that Lord of the universe, that God of gods Vasudeva, who is Infinite and Eternal, who is Sanctity Itself, the Most Auspicious, the foremost of all Beings, the Mahateja, the One God, by uttering his thousand names, the Vishnu Sahasranamam. By always worshipping with sraddha and bhakti that immutable Being, by meditating on him, by singing his praises and bowing one's head to him, and by performing sacrifices to him, indeed by always glorifying Vishnu, who is without beginning and without end or death, who is the Supreme Lord of all the worlds, the Parabrahman, and who is the Master and Controller of the universe, a man succeeds in transcending all sorrow.

Verily, he is devoted to the Brahmanas, conversant with all dharmas and karmas, the enhancer of the fame and achievement of all persons, the Master of all the worlds, absolutely wonderful, and the Prime Cause of the

origin of all creatures. Even this, in my judgment, is the foremost Dharma of all dharmas—that one should always worship and hymn the praises of the lotus-eyed Krishna with devotion. He is the highest Tejas. He is the highest Tapasya. He is the highest Brahman. He is the highest Asrama. He is the Holiest of all holies, the most Auspicious of all things auspicious. He is the God of all the gods and he is the immutable Father of all creatures.

At the advent of the primal yuga, the Satya or Krita yuga, all creatures issue from him. At the end, again, of a yuga, all things disappear into him. Hear, O king, the thousand names, possessed of great efficacy in destroying sins, of that foremost One in all the worlds, that Master of the universe, Vishnu Narayana. All the names derived from his attributes, secret and well-known, of the Mahatman Vasudeva, which were sung by Rishis, I shall recite to you for the good of all. I invoke that Lord with this dhyanam:

Shantakaram Bhujagasayanam Pamdanabham Suresam; Viswadharam Gaganasadrisham Meghavarnam Subhangam; Lakshmikantam Kamalanayam Yogihrid-dhayanagamyam; Vande Vishnum Bhavabhayaharam Sarvalokaikanatham.

AUM Namo Bhagavate Vasudevayah!

The thousand names of that Vishnu, the Vishnusahasranamam, are: AUM!

Viswam Vishnu Vashatkaara Bhutabhavyabhavatprabhu Bhutakrit Bhutabrit Bhaava Bhutaatmaa Bhutabhaavana

Pootatma Paramaatma Mutktanaamparamaagati Avyaya Purusha Saakshi Kshetrajna Akshara

Yogah Yogovidaamnetaa Pradhaanapurusheswara Narasimhavapu Sriman Kesava Purushottama

Sarva Sharva Siva Sthaanu Bhutaatadi Aavyayanidhi; Saambhavah Bhaavana Bhartaa Prabhava Prabhu Iswara

Svayambhu Sambhu Aditya Pushkaraksha Mahaswana Anadinidhana Dhata Vidhata Dhaturuttama

Aprameya Hirishikesa Padmanabha Amaraprabhu Viswakarma Manu Tvastha Sthavishta Sthavirodhruva

Agrahya Sasvata Krishna Lohitaskha Pratardhana Prabhuta Trikakubdhama Pavitram Parammangalam

Isana Pranada Prana Jyeshta Srehsta Prajapati Hiranyagarbha Bhugarbha Madhava Madhusudana

Iswara Vikrami Dhanvi Medhavi Vikrama Krama Anuttama Dooradarsha Kritajna Kriti Atmavan

Suresa Sarana Sarma Viswareta Prajabhava Ahah Samvatsara Vyala Pratyaya Sarvadarsana

Aja Sarveswara Siddha Siddhi Sarvadi Achyuta Vrashakapi Ameyatma Sarvayogavinissrita

Vasu Satya Samatma Sammita Sama Amogha Punadarikaksha Vrishakarma Vrishakriti

Rudra Bahusira Babhru Viswayoni Suchisrava Amrita Saswatasthanu Vararoha Mahatapa

Sarvaga Sarvavid-bhanu Viswaksena Janardana Veda Vedavita Avyanga Vedanga Vedavit Kavi

Lokadhyaksha Suryadhyaksha Dharmadhyaksha Kirtakrita Chaturatma Chaturvyuha Chaturdamshtra Chaturbhuja

Brajishnu Bhojanam Bhokta Sahishnu Jagatadija Anagha Vijaya Jetha Viswayoni Punarvasu;

Upendra Vamana Pramsu Amogha Suchi Urjita Atindra Samgriha Sarga Dhritatma Niyama Yama

Vedya Vaidya Sadayogi Veeraha Madhava Madhu Atindriya Mahamaya Mahotsaha Mahabala

Mahabuddhi Mahavirya Mahasakti Mahadyuti Anirdesyavapu Sriman Ameyatma Mahadridhrik

Mahesvasa Mahibharta Srinivasa Satamgati Aniruddha Surananda Govinda Goindampati

Marichi Damana Hamsa Suparna Bhujagottama Hiranyanabha Sutapa Padmanabha Prajapati

Amrityu Sarvadrik Simha Sandhata Sandhiman Sthira Ajha Durmarshana Sastha Visrutatma Surariha

Guru Guruttama Dhama Satya Satyaparakrama Nimisha Animisha Sragvi Vachaspatir-udharati

Agrani Grammani Sriman Nyaya Neta Sameerana Sahasramurdha Viswatma Sahasraksha Sahasrapath

Avartana Nivritatma Samvrita Sampramardana Aha-samvartakaya Vahni Anila Dharanidhara

Suprasada Prasannatma Viswadhrik Viswabhuja Vibhu Satkarta Satkrita Sadhu Jahnnu Narayana Nara

Asankhyeya Aprameyatma Visishta Sishtakrit Suchi Siddhartha Siddhasankalpa Siddhidha Siddhasadhana

Vrishahi Vrishabha Vishnu Vrishaparvana Vrishodhara Vardhana Vardhamana Vivikta

Srutisagara Subhuja Durdhara Vagmi Mahendra Vasudha Vasu Naikarupa Brihadrupa Sipivishta Prakasana

Ojhatejodyutidhara Prakastma Pratapana Rriddha Spastakshara Mantra Chandramsa Bhaskaradyuti

Amritamsudbhava Bhanu Sasabindu Sureswara Aushadham Jagatasetu Satyadharmaparakrama

Bhutabhavyabhavannatha Pavana Paavana Anala Kamaha Kamakrit Kanta Kama Kamapradha Prabhu

Yugadikrit Yugavarta Naikamaya Mahasana Adrishya Vyaktarupa Sahasrajit Anantajit

Ishta Visishta Sisha-ishta Sikhandi Nahusha Vrisha Krodhaha Krodhakritkarta Viswabahu Mahidhara

Achyuta Prathista Prana Pranada Vasanuja Apamnidhi Adishtanam Apramatta Pratishtita

Skanda Skandadhara Dhurya Varada Vayuvahana Vasudeva Brihatbhanu Adideva Purandara

Asoka Tarana Tara Sura Sauri Janeswara Anukula Satavartta Padmi Padmanibhekshana

Padmanabha Aravindaksha Padmagarbha Sareerabhrit Mahariddhi Riddha Vridhatma Mahaksha Garudadhvaja

Atula Sarabha Bhima Samayajna Havirhari Sarvalakshana-lakshanya Lakshmivan Samitinjaya

Vikshara Rohita Marga Hetu Damodara Saha Mahidhara Mahabhaga Vegavan Amitasana

Udbhava Kshobana Deva Srigarbha Parameswara Karanam Karta Vikarta Gahana Guha

Vyavasaya Vyavasthana Samsthana Sthanada Dhruva Parardhi Paramaspashta Tushta Pushta Subhekshana

Rama Virama Viraja Marga Neya Naya Anaya Veera Shaktimatamshreshta Dharma Dharmaviduttama

Vaikunta Purusha Prana Pranada Pranava Prithu Hiranyagarbha Shatrughna Vyapta Vayu Adokshaja

Ritu Sudarsana Kaala Paramesti Parigraha Ugra Samvatsara Daksha Visrama Viswadakshina

Vistara Stavarasthanu Pramanam Bijamavyaya Artha Anartha Mahakosa Mahabhoga Mahadhana

Anirvinna Stavishta Abhu Dharmayupa Mahamakha Nakshatranemi Nakshatri Kshama Kshaama Sameehana

Yagna Ijya Mahejya Kratu Satram Satamgati Sarvadarshi Vimuktatma Sarvajna Jnanamuttamam

Suvrata Sumukha Sukshma Sughosha Sukhada Suhrit Manohara Jitakrodha Virabahu Vidharana

Swaapna Svavasa Vyapi Anekatama Anekakarmakrit Vatsara Vatsala Vatsi Ratnagarbha Dhaneswara

Dharmagupa Dharmakrit Dharmi Sat Asat Ksharam Aksharam Avijnata Sahasramsu Vidhata Kritalakshana

Gabhastinemi Sattvastha Simha Bhutamaheswara Adideva Mahadeva Devesa Devabhritguru

Uttara Gopati Gopta Gyanagamya Puratana Sarirabhutabhrit Bhokta Kapindra Bhooridakshina

Somapa Amritapa Soma Purujit Purusattama Vinaya Jaya Satyasandha Dasarha Satvatampati

Jiva Vinayitasakshi Mukunda Amitavikrama Ambhonidhi Anantatma Mahodadisaya Antaka

Aja Maharha Svabhavya Jitamrita Pramodana Ananda Nandana Nanda Satyadharma Trivikrama;

Kapilacharya Kritagna Medinipati Tripada Tridasadhyaksha Mahasringa Kritantakrit

Mahavaraha Sushena Kankamgati Guhya Gabhira Gupta Chakragadadhara

Vedasa Swanga Ajita Dridha Samkarshano-Achyuta Varuna Vaaruna Vriksha Pushkaraksha Mahamana

Bhagavan Bhagaha Anandi Vanamali Halayudha Aditya Jyotiraditya Sahishnu Gatisattama

Sudhanva Khandaparasu Daruna Dravinaprada Divasprikh Sarvadrikvyasa Vachaspatirayonija

Trisama Samaga Sama Nirvanam Beshajam Bhishakh Sanyasakrit Sama Santa Nishta Santi Paarayanam

Subhanga Santida Srishta Kumuda Kuvalesaya Gohita Gopati Gopta Vrishabhaksha Vrishapriya

Anivarti Samkshepta Kshemakrit Siva Srivatsavaksha Srivasa Sripati Srimatamvara

Sridha Srisa Srinivasa Srinidhi Srivibhavana Sridhara Srikara Sreya Sriman Lokatrayaasraya

Swaksha Swanga Satananda Nandi Jyotirganeswara Vijitatma Vidheyatma Satkirti Chinnasamsaya

Udhirna Sarvatachakshu Anisa Sasvatasthira Bhusaya Bhushana Bhuti Visoka Sokanasana

Archishman Archita Kumbha Visuddhatman Visodhana Aniruddha Apratiratha Pradyumna Amitavikrama

Kalaneminiha Vira Sauri Surajaneswara Trilokatma Trilokesa Kesava Kesiha Hari

Kamadeva Kamapala Kami Kanta Kritagama Anirdesyavapu Vira Ananta Dhanajaya

Brahmanya Brahmakrit Brahma Brahman Brahmavivardana Brahmavit Brahmana Brahmi Brahmagna Brahmanapriya

Mahakrama Mahakarma Mahateja Mahoraga Mahakritu Mahayajva Mahayagna Mahahavi

Stavya Stavapriya Stotram Stuti Stota Ranapriya Purna Purayita Punya Punyakirti Anamaya

Manojava Tirthakara Vasurata Vasuprada Vasupraada Vasudeva Vasu Vasumanas Havi

Satgati Satkriti Satta Satbhuti Satparayana Surasena Yadushreshta Sannivasa Suyamuna

Bhutavasa Vasudeva Sarvasunilaya Anala Darpaha Darpada Dripta Durdara Apararijita

Viswamurti Mahamurti Deeptamurti Murtiman Anekamurti Avyakta Satamurti Satanana

Eka Naika Sava Kava Kasmai Yasmai Tasmai Padamanuttamam Lokabandhu Lokanatha Madhava Bhaktavatsala

Suvarnavarna Hemanga Varanga Chandanamgati Viraha Vishama Sunya Gritasi Achala Chala

Amani Manada Manya Lokaswami Trilokadrik Sumedha Medhaja Dhanya Satyamedha Dharaadhara

Tejovrisha Dytidhara Sarvasastrabrihatamvara Pragraha Nigraha Vyagraha Naikasringa Gadagraja

Chaturmurti Chaturbahu Chaturvyuha Chaturgati Chaturatma Chaturbhava Chaturvedavit Ekapatha

Samavarta Nivrittatma Durjaya Duratikrama Durlabha Durgama Durga Duravasa Durariha

Subhanga Lokasaranga Sutantu Tantuvardana Indrakarma Mahakarma Kritakarma Kritaagama

Udbhava Undara Sunda Ratnanabha Sulochana Arka Vajasana Sringa Jayanta Sarvavijayi

Suvarnabindu Akshobhya Sarvavagiswaresvara Mahahrida Mahagarta Mahabhuta Mahanidhi

Kumuda Kundara Kunda Parjanya Pavana Anila Amritasa Amritavapu Sarvajna Sarvatomukha

Sulabha Suvrita Siddha Satarujita Satrutapana Nyagrodha Udumbara Aswattha Chanurandranisudhana

Sahasrarchi Satajihva Saptaida Saptavahana Amurti Anagha Achintya Bhayakrit Bhayanasana

Anu Brihat Krisa Sthula Gunabrita Nirguna Mahan Adrita Swadrita Svasya Pragvamsa Vamsavardana

Bharabrit Khandita Yogi Yogisa Sarvakamada Asrama Sravana Kshaama Suparna Vayuvahana

Dhanurdhara Dhanurveda Danda Damayita Dama Aparijita Sarvasaha Aniyanta Aniyama Ayama

Sattvavan Sattvika Satya Satyadharmaparayana Abhipraya Pryarha Arha Priyakrit Pritivardana

Vihayasagata Jyoti Suruchi Hartabhuja Vibhu Ravi Virochana Surya Savita Ravilochana

Ananta Hutabhuja Bhokta Sukhada Naikaja Agraja Avirvinna Sadamarshi Lokadhisthana Adbhuta

Sanaath Sanatanatama Kapila Kapi Avapyaya Svastida Svastikrit Svasti Svastibukh Swastidakshina

Araudra Kundali Chakri Vikrami Urjitasasana Sabdatiga Sabdasaha Sisira Sarvarikara

Akrura Pesala Daksha Dakshina Kshaminamvara Vidvatatma Vitabhaya Punyasravanakirtana

Uttaarana Dushkritiha Punya Dusvapnanasasa Viraha Rakshana Santa Jivana Paryavastitha

Anantarupa Anantasri Jiarmanyu Bhayapaha Chaturasra Gambhiratma Lawsa Vyadisa Disa;

Anadi Bhurbhuva Lakshmi Suvira Ruchirangada Janana Janajanmadi Bhima Bhimaparakarma

Adharanilaya Adhata Pushpahasa Prajagara Urdhvaga Satpadachara Pranada Pranava Pana

Pramanam Prananilaya Pranabrit Pranajivana Tattvam Tattvavidhe Ekatma Janmamrityujaratiga

Bhurbhuvasvastarusthara Tarra Savita Pratipamaha Yagna Yagnapati Yajva Yagnaanga Yagnavahana

Yagnabrit Yagnakrit Yagni Yagnabhuja Yagnasadana Yagnaantakrit Yagnaguhyam Annam Annada

Atmayoni Svaymajata Vaikkhana Samagayana Devakinandana Srishta Kshitisa Papanasana

Sankhabrit Nandaki Chakri Saringadhanva Gadadhara Rathangapani Asokabhya Sarvapraharanayudha.

'Even thus have I recited to you, without any exception, the thousand excellent names of the Mahatman Kesava whose glory should always be sung. The man who listens to the names every day or who recites them every day, never meets with any evil either here or hereafter. If a Brahmana does this, he succeeds in mastering the Vedanta; if a Kshatriya does, he is always victorious in battle. A Vaisya, by doing it, becomes possessed of great affluence, while a Sudra earns great happiness.

If one wishes to earn the punya of dharma, one succeeds by hearing or reciting these names. If it is wealth that one desires, one succeeds by reciting or listening to the Vishnusahasranamam. So also the man who wishes for kama, the pleasures of the senses, succeeds in enjoying all manner of pleasures, and the man wanting children acquires offspring.

That man who, with devotion and perseverance and his heart wholly turned towards him, recites these thousand names of Vishnu every day, after having purified himself, succeeds in acquiring great fame, a position of pre-eminence among his kinsmen, enduring prosperity, and lastly, that which is of the highest benefit to him—mukti itself. Such a man never meets with fear at any time, and acquires great urjas and tejas, prowess and glory. Disease never afflicts him; splendour of complexion, strength, beauty and

accomplishments become his. The sick become hale, the afflicted are freed from their afflictions; the affrighted are freed from fear, and he that is plunged in calamity is freed from all trouble.

The man who hymns the praises of that foremost of Beings by reciting his thousand names with devotion succeeds in quickly crossing over all difficulties. That mortal who takes refuge in Vasudeva and who becomes devoted to him, is freed of all sins and attains to eternal Brahman. They who are devoted to Vasudeva have never to encounter any evil. They become free from the fear of birth, death, decrepitude and disease.

That man who with bhakti and sraddha recites this Vishnusahasranamam acquires grace of soul, forgiveness of disposition, prosperity, intelligence, memory and fame. Neither wrath nor jealousy, or greed, or evil thoughts ever appear in those men of dharma who are devoted to that Foremost of beings. The firmament with the sun, moon and stars, the sky, the points of the compass, the earth and the ocean, are all held and supported by the prowess of the Mahatman Vishnu. The whole mobile and immobile universe, with the Devas, Asuras, and Gandharvas, Yakshas, Uragas and Rakshasas, is under the sway of Krishna.

The senses, mind, intellect, life, energy, strength and memory, it has been said, have him for their soul. Indeed, this body that is called kshetra, and the intelligent soul within, called the kshetrajna, also have Krishna for their soul. Pravritti is said to be the foremost of all subjects treated of in the scriptures. Righteousness has conduct for its basis. The unfading Narayana is said to be the Lord of dharma.

The Rishis, the Pitris, the Devas, the Mahabhutas, indeed, the entire mobile and immobile Akhanda, have sprung from Narayana. Yoga, the Samkhya philosophy, knowledge, all mechanical arts, the Vedas, the diverse scriptures, and all learning, have issued from Janardana. Vishnu is the One Great Element, the Single Substance which has spread itself out into multifarious forms. Covering the three worlds, he, the soul of all things, enjoys them all. His glory knows no diminution, and he it is that is the Enjoyer of the universe. This hymn in praise of the illustrious Vishnu composed by Vyasa, should be recited by that person who wishes to acquire happiness and that which is the highest and ultimate benefit—moksha.

Those that worship and adore the Lord of the universe, that God who is Unborn and of blazing effulgence, who is the origin, the cause of the

universe, who knows no decay, and who has eyes that are as large and beautiful as the petals of the lotus, have never to meet with any distress.'"

CANTO 150

"Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha of great wisdom, O you who know all the branches of knowledge, what is japa, silent chanting, by doing which, every day, one acquires the reward of righteousness in a large measure? What is that mantra which bestows success if recited on the occasion of setting out on a journey or entering a new home, or at the commencement of any undertaking, or on the occasion of sacrifices in honour of the Devas or of the Pitris? It behoves you to tell me what mantra it is which propitiates all malevolent influences, leads to prosperity and growth, protects from evil, destroys all foes, dispels all fears, and which, at the same time, is consistent with the Vedas.'

Bhishma says, 'Hear, O king, with dhyana what that mantra is which was declared by Vyasa. It was ordained by Savitri and is of profound excellence. It can instantly purify a man of all his sins. Hear, O sinless one, as I recite to you the law in respect of that mantra. Indeed, O first of the sons of Pandu, by listening to those laws one is cleansed of all one's sins. One who recites this mantra day and night is never stained by sin.

I will now declare to you what that mantra is. Do you listen with attention. Indeed, the man that hears it is blessed with long life, O prince, and attaining to the fruition of all his wishes dwells in bliss both here and hereafter. This mantra, O Yudhishtira, was daily recited by the foremost of Rajarishis, the royal sages devoted to the practice of Kshatriya dharma and steadfastly observant of the vow of truth. Indeed, O tiger among kings, those monarchs who, with restrained senses and tranquil soul, chant this mantra every day, succeed in acquiring unrivalled prosperity.

Salutations to Vasishta of the high vows, after bowing with reverence to Parasara, that ocean of the Vedas. Salutations to the great Snake Ananta, and salutations to all those who are crowned with success, and who own unfading glory. Salutations to the Rishis, and to him that is the Highest of the High, the God of gods, and the giver of boons to all those that are foremost. Salutations to him of a thousand heads, him that is most auspicious, him that has a thousand names—the One Janardana!

Aja, Ekapada, Ahivradhna, the unvanquished Pinakin, Rita, Pitrirupa, the three-eyed Maheswara, Vrishakapi, Sambhu, Havana and Iswara—these are the celebrated Rudras, eleven in number, who are the Lords of all the worlds. Even these eleven Mahatmans have been mentioned as a hundred in the Satarudra of the Vedas.

Ansa, Bhaga, Mitra, Varuna the lord of waters, Dhatri, Aryaman, Jayanta, Bhaskara, Tvashtri, Pushan, Indra and Vishnu are said to comprise a group of twelve. These twelve are called Adityas and they are the sons of Kasyapa as the Sruti declares.

Dhara, Dhruva, Some, Savitra, Anila, Anala, Pratyusha and Prabhava are the eight Vasus named in the scriptures. Nasataya and Dasra are the two Aswins. They are the sons of Martanda born of his wife Samjna, from whose nostrils they emerged.

After this I will recite the names of those who are the witnesses of all karma in the worlds. They take note of all sacrifices, of all gifts, of all good deeds. Those lords among the deities behold everything while they are themselves invisible. Indeed, they behold all the good and bad karma of all beings. They are Mrityu, Kala, the Viswedevas, the Pitris endued with forms, the great Rishis possessed of the wealth of penances, the Munis, and others crowned with spiritual success and devoted to tapasya and mukti. These of radiant smiles bestow diverse rewards upon men that recite their names. Verily, imbued with celestial energy, they bestow upon such men diverse worlds of felicity created by the Grandsire. They reside in all the worlds and attentively note all actions. By reciting the names of those Lords of all living creatures, one always becomes endowed with dharma, artha and kama in copious measure. One acquires hereafter diverse regions of auspiciousness and plenitude created by the Lord of the universe.

These three and thirty Devas, who are the lords of all beings, as also Nandiswara of the vast body, and that Pre-eminent One who has the bull for the device on his banner, and those masters of all the worlds—the Ganas,

the followers and companions of him called Ganeswara—and those called Saumyas, and the Rudras, and those called the Yogas, and those that are known as the Bhutas, and the luminaries in the firmament, the rivers, the sky, Garuda the prince of birds, all those on earth who have achieved success through their tapasya and who exist in either immobile or mobile form, achala and chala, the Himavat, all the mountains, the four oceans, the followers of Bhava who are possessed of prowess equal to that of Bhava himself, the illustrious and ever-victorious Vishnu, and Skanda, and Ambika—these are the great souls by reciting whose names, with restrained senses, one is purified of all sins.

I shall now recite the names of those foremost Rishis who are known as Manavas. They are Yavakrita, and Raibhya, and Arvavasu, and Paravasu, and Aushija, and Kakshivat, and Bala, the son of Angiras. Then comes Kanwa, the son of the Rishi Medhatithi, and Barishada. All these are endowed with the tejas of Brahma and have been spoken of in the shastras as Creators of the universe. They have sprung from Rudra and Anala and the Vasus. Those who chant their names obtain great rewards. Indeed, by doing good deeds on earth, men and women sport in joy in swarga, with the Devas. These Rishis are the priests of Indra. They live in the east. That man who, with rapt attention, recites the names of these Rishis, succeeds in ascending to the regions of Indra and finding great honour there.

Unmachu, Pramchu, Swastyatreya of great energy, Dridhavya, Urdhvavahu, Trinasoma, Angiras and Agastya Mahatejasvin, the son of Mitravaruna—these seven are the ritwiks of Yama, king of the dead, and dwell in the southern quarter. Dridheyu and Riteyu, and Pariyadha of great fame, and Ekata, and Dwita, and Trita—the last three endowed with splendour like that of the sun—and Atri's son of righteous soul, Rishi Saraswata—these seven who once were the ritwiks at the Mahayagna of old of Varuna dwill in the western quarter. Atri, the illustrious Vasishta, the Maharishi Kasyapa, Gotama, Bharadwaja, Viswamitra the son of Kusika, and Richika's fierce son Jamadagni of great urjas—these seven are the ritwiks of Kubera, the Lord of treasures and dwell in the northern quarter.

There are seven other Rishis that live in all directions without being confined to any particular one. They, it is, who are the inducers of fame and of all that is beneficial to men, and they have been sung as the creators of the worlds. Dharma, Kama, Kala, Vasu, Vasuki, Ananta and Kapila—these

seven are the upholders of the world. Rama, Vyasa, and Drona's son Aswatthaman are the other foremost among Rishis.

These are the great Rishis as distributed into seven groups, each group consisting of seven. They are the creators of that peace and good that men enjoy. They are said to be the regents of the several points of the horizon. One should turn one's face to that direction in which one of these Rishis dwells if one wishes to worship him. Those Rishis are the creators of all creatures and have been regarded as the cleansers of all.

Samvarta, Merusavarna, the righteous Markandeya, and Samkhya and Yoga, and Narada and the great Rishi Durvasa—these are imbued with severe penance and great self-restraint, and are celebrated throughout the three worlds. There are others who are equal to Rudra himself. They live in Brahmaloka. By naming them with reverence a sonless man obtains a son, and a poor man gains wealth. Indeed, by naming them, one acquires every success in dharma, artha and kama.

One should also take the name of that celebrated king who was emperor of all the earth and equal to a Prajapati—that foremost of all monarchs, Prithu, the son of Vena. The earth became his daughter. One should also name Pururavas of the Suryavamsa, equal to Mahendra himself in prowess. He was the son of Ila and celebrated over the three worlds. One should, indeed, take the name of that beloved son of Budha. One should also take the name of Bharata, that Kshatriya celebrated across the three worlds. He who in the Krita yuga adored the gods in a grand Gomedha yagna—Rantideva of great splendour, who was equal to Mahadeva himself, should also be named. Of untold tapasya, possessed of every auspicious mark and sign, the source of every kind of weal to the world, he was the conqueror of the universes.

One should also take the name of the Rajarishi Sweta of illustrious fame. He gratified Mahadeva and it was for his sake that Andhaka was slain. One should also take the name of the Rajarishi Bhagiratha of great fame, who, through the grace of Mahadeva, succeeded in bringing the sacred Ganga down from heaven to flow over the earth and wash all human beings of their sins. It was Bhagiratha who caused the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of Sagara to be purified by the sacred waters of Ganga and thereby rescued them from their ancient and violent sins.

Indeed, one should take the names of all these that were endued with the blazing refulgence of fire, great beauty of person and unsurpassed energy.

Some of them were of awe-inspiring forms and great might. Verily, one should take the names of these deities and Rishis and kings, those Lords of the universe, who are the enhancers of fame.

Samkhya, and yoga which is highest of the high, and havya and kavya and that refuge of all the Srutis, the Supreme Brahman, have been declared to be the sources of great weal to all creatures. These are sacred and sin-cleansing and have been spoken of most highly. These are the foremost of oshadhis for allaying all diseases, and are the enablers of the success of all deeds. Restraining one's senses, one should, O Bhaarata, take the names of these, morning and evening. It is they that protect. It is they that shower rain; they that shine and give light and heat; they that blow through the worlds. It is they that create all things.

These are regarded as the foremost of all, as the sovereigns of the universe, as the most adroit in the accomplishment of all things, as endowed with forgiveness, as complete masters of the senses. Indeed, it has been said that they dispel all the evils to which humans are subject. These Mahatmans are the witnesses of all good and bad deeds. Rising in the morning, one should take their names, for by this one is sure to acquire all that is good. He who chants these names is freed from the fear of fires and of thieves. Such a man never finds his way obstructed by any impediment. By taking the names of these lofty souls, one is never visited by dark dreams of any kind. Washed of every sin, such men take birth into auspicious families.

The Brahmana who, with restrained senses, recites these names while performing the initiatory rites of sacrifices and other religious observances, is blessed with dharma, devoted to the study of the atman, possessed of forgiveness and self-restraint, and free from malice. If a man who is afflicted with disease recites them, he is freed from his sin in the form of disease. By chanting them within a house, all evils are dispelled from the inmates. By reciting them in a field, a bounteous harvest is ensured of every kind of crop. Reciting them at the time of setting out on a journey, or while one is away from one's home, one meets with good fortune. These names lead to the protection of one's own self, of one's children and wives, of one's wealth, and of one's seeds and plants.

The Kshatriya who recites these names at the time of joining a battle sees destruction overtake his enemies and good fortune crown him and his forces. He who recites these names on the occasions of performing the rites in honour of the Devas or the Pitris, helps the Pitris and Devas eat the

sacrificial havya and kavya. The man who recites them is freed from fear of disease and beasts of prey, of elephants and thieves. His load of anxiety is lightened, and he is freed from every sin. By reciting these excellent Savitri mantras on board a vessel, or in a vehicle, or in the courts of kings, one attains to high saphalata, success. There where these mantras are recited, fire does not burn wood. There children do not die, nor snakes come or dwell. Indeed, in such places, there can be no fear of the king, nor of Pisachas and Rakshasas. Verily, the man who recites these mantras ceases to have any fear of fire or water or wind or beasts of prey.

These Savitri mantras, recited duly, contribute to the peace and well-being of all the four varnas. Those men who recite them with reverence are freed from every sorrow and at last attain to a high end. Even these are the results achieved by them that recite these Savitri mantras which are of the form of Brahman. That man who recites these mantras in the midst of kine sees his kine become fruitful. Whether when setting out on a journey, or entering a house on returning, one should recite these mantras on every occasion. These mantras constitute a great mystery of the Rishis and are the very highest of those japams which they silently recite. Even such are these mantras to them who practise the dharma of japa and pour libations on the sacrificial fire.

This that I have said to you is the excellent opinion of Parasara. It was told in the oldest days to Sakra himself. Representing as it does Truth or Eternal Brahman, I have declared it in full to you. It constitutes that heart of all creatures, and is the highest Sruti. All the princes of the races of Soma and of Surya, the Raghavas and the Kauravas, recite these mantras every day after having purified themselves. These constitute the highest end of human creatures. There is rescue from every trouble and calamity in the daily recitation of the names of the Devas of the seven Rishis, and of Dhruva. Indeed, such recitation speedily frees one from all distress.

The sages of olden times, Kasyapa, Gautama, and others, and Bhrigu, Angiras and Atri and others, and Sukra, Agastya and Brihaspati and others, all of whom are regenerate Rishis, have worshipped these mantras. Approved of by the son of Bharadwaja, these mantras were attained by the sons of Richika. Verily, having acquired them again from Vasishta, Sakra and the Vasus went forth to battle and triumphed over the Danavas. That man who makes a gift of a hundred kine with their horns covered with plates of gold to a Brahmana possessed of great learning and well-

conversant with the Vedas, and he who causes the excellent Mahabharata story to be recited in his house every day, are said to acquire equal punya.

By reciting the name of Bhrigu, one's righteousness is enhanced. By bowing to Vasishta, one's energy is enhanced. By bowing to Raghu, one is victorious in battle. By reciting the praises of the Aswins, one is freed from diseases. I have thus, O king, told you of the Savitri mantras which are identical with eternal Brahman. If you wish to question me on any other matter you may do so. I shall, O Bhaarata, answer you.'"

CANTO 151

"Yudhishtira says, 'Who deserve to be worshipped? Who are they to whom we should bow? How, indeed, should we behave, and towards whom? What course of conduct, Pitamaha, towards what classes of men is regarded as faultless?'

Bhishma says, 'The humiliation of Brahmanas would shame the very Devas. By bowing down to Brahmanas one does not, O Yudhishtira, incur any fault. They deserve to be worshipped. They deserve to have our salutations. You should behave towards them as if they are your sons. Indeed, it is those men of great wisdom that uphold all the worlds. The Brahmanas are the great causeways of dharma in all the worlds. Their happiness consists in renouncing all kinds of wealth. They are devoted to the vow of mowna. They are agreeable to all creatures, and observant of diverse marvellous vratas. They are the refuge of all creatures in the universe. They are the authors of all the laws which govern the worlds. They are possessed of great fame. Tapasya is always their great wealth. Their power consists of pure speech. Their energy flows from the duties they observe. Conversant with all dharma, they are possessed of minute vision, so that they are cognizant of the subtlest considerations. They are of righteous desires. They live the observance of well-performed duties. They are indeed the highways of dharma.

The four kinds of living creatures exist, depending upon them as their refuge. They are the path along which all should walk. They are the guides of all. They are the eternal upholders of all the sacrifices. They always uphold the heavy burdens of Sires and Grandsires. They never droop under

heavy weights even when passing through difficult ways—like strong bullocks are they. They are attentive to the requirements of Pitris and Devas and Atithis. They are entitled to eat the first portions of havya and kavya. By the very food they eat, they rescue the three worlds from great fear. They are the island of refuge for all worlds. They are the eyes of all blessed with true sight. The wealth they possess consists of all the branches of knowledge known by the name of siksha, and all the Srutis. Imbued with great skill, they are conversant with the most subtle relations of things.

They are well-acquainted with the end of all things, and their thoughts are always employed upon Atmavigyana, the science of the Soul. They are gifted with the knowledge of the beginning, the middle and the end of all things, and they are the ones in whom doubts no longer exist from being certain of their knowledge. They are fully aware of the distinctions between what is superior and what is inferior. They it is who attain to the highest end.

Freed from all attachments, cleansed of all sins, transcending all the pairs of opposites, they are disconnected from all worldly things. Deserving of every honour, they are always held in great esteem by men of knowledge and high souls. They cast equal eyes on sandalwood paste and dirt, on what is food and what is not food. They see with an equal eye their brown vestments of coarse cloth and fabrics of silk and animal skins. They would live for many days together without eating, and dry up their limbs by such abstention from all sustenance. They devote themselves earnestly to the study of the Vedas, restraining their senses. They would make gods of those that are not gods, and not gods of those that are gods.

Enraged, they can create other worlds and other regents of the worlds than those that exist. Through the course of those high-souled ones, the ocean became so saline as to be undrinkable. The fire of their wrath yet burns in the forest of Dandaka, unquenched by Time. They are the gods of the gods, and the cause of all causes. They are the authority of all authorities. What man of intelligence and wisdom is there that would seek to humiliate them? Amongst them the young and the old all deserve honour. They honour one another not by distinctions of age but by those of tapa and gyana.

Even the Brahmana who is destitute of knowledge is a god and a high instrument for purifying others. He amongst them, then, that is possessed of

knowledge is a much higher god and like the full and swollen ocean. Learned or unlearned, the Brahmana is always a high deity.

Sanctified or unsanctified with mantras, fire is ever a great deity. A blazing fire, even when it burns on a crematorium, is not regarded as tainted because of the character of the place where it burns. Clarified butter looks beautiful whether kept on the sacrificial altar or in a chamber. So, even if a Brahmana be always engaged in evil deeds, he is still to be regarded as deserving of honour. Indeed, know that the Brahmana is always a high deity.'"

CANTO 152

"Yudhishtira says, 'Tell us, O king, what is that reward attached to the worship of Brahmanas, seeing which you do worship them, O you of most superior intelligence. Indeed, what is that success, flowing from their worship, guided by which you worship them?'

Bhishma says, 'In this regard is told this itihasa of a conversation between Pavana and Arjuna, O Bhaarata. Endowed with a thousand arms and great beauty, the mighty Kartavirya, in days of yore, became the Lord of all the world. He had his capital in the city of Mahishmati. Of unbaffled prowess, that Lord of the Haihaya vamsa of Kshatriyas held sway over all the earth with her girdle of seas, together with all her islands and all her precious mines of gold and gemstones. Keeping before him the dharma of the Kshatriya varna, as also humility and Vedic knowledge, the king made large gifts of wealth to Rishi Dattatreya. Indeed, the son of Kritavirya thus adored the great ascetic who, becoming pleased with him, asked him to solicit three boons.

The king said to him, "Let me become endowed with a thousand arms when I am in the midst of my troops. While, however, I remain at home let me have, as usual, only two arms. Indeed, let adversaries in battle see me possessed of a thousand arms. Let me also keep high vratas and conquer the whole world with my prowess. Having acquired the earth righteously, let me rule her with vigilance. There is a fourth boon which, O Dvijottama, I solicit you to grant and, O faultless one, because you are kindly disposed towards me, you must do so. Dependent as I am on you, whenever I may

happen to go astray, let the righteous come forth to instruct and set me on the right path again."

The Brahmana Dattatreya replied to the king, "Tathaastu, so be it.'

Even thus did that king of splendour acquire those four boons. Riding then on his chariot whose lustre resembled that of fire or the sun, the monarch, blinded by his own great prowess, said, "Who, indeed, is there that can be regarded as my equal in patience and energy, in fame and heroism, in prowess and strength?"

When he uttered these words, an asariri, an invisible voice in the sky said, "Ignorant wretch, do you not know that the Brahmana is superior to the Kshatriya? The Kshatriya rules all creatures only because he is helped by the Brahmana!"

Kartaviryarjuna said, "When gratified, I am able to create all creatures. When angry, I am able to destroy all. In thought, word and deed, I am the first, the foremost. The Brahmana is certainly not above me. The first argument here is that the Brahmana is superior to the Kshatriya; this is countered by the other that the Kshatriya is superior. You have said, O invisible being, that the two are united. A distinction, however, is observable in this.

It is seen that Brahmanas take refuge with Kshatriyas. The Kshatriyas never seek the protection of Brahmanas. Indeed, throughout the earth, the Brahmanas accept such refuge under the pretence of teaching the Vedas, and draw their sustenance from the Kshatriyas. The duty of protecting all creatures is vested in the Kshatriyas. It is from the Kshatriyas that the Brahmanas derive their sustenance. How then can the Brahmana be superior to the Kshatriyas?

From today, I will bring your Brahmanas, who are superior to all creatures but who have mendicancy for their occupation and who are so conceited, under my sway. What the virgin Gayatri has said from the sky is not true. Robed in skins, the Brahmanas move about in freedom. I will bring those wights under my rule. God or man, there is none in the three worlds who can cast me down from the sovereignty I enjoy. And so am I certainly superior to the Brahmanas. This world that is now regarded as having Brahmanas for its foremost denizens shall soon have Kshatriyas for its highest beings. There is none that can bear my might in battle!"

Hearing these coarse and arrogant words of Arjuna, the sky-ranging goddess became agitated. Then Vayu, the god of wind, addressed the king

from the sky, “Cast off this sinful hubris. Bow to the Brahmanas. By injuring them you will bring disaster down on your kingdom. The Brahmanas will either slay you, king though you are, or, invested with the great might that they have, they will drive you out of your kingdom, depriving you of your power and glory.”

Hearing this, the king addressed the speaker, saying, “And who, indeed, are you?”

The wind answered, “I am the god of wind and the messenger of the Devas. I say to you what is for your benefit.”

Arjuna said, “Oh, I see that you have today shown your devotion and attachment to the Brahmanas. Tell me now what kind of earthly creature is the Brahmana? Tell me, does a superior Brahmana resemble the wind in any way? Or is he like water, or fire, or the sun, or the firmament?”

CANTO 153

"The god of wind said, "Hear, O deluded man, what the attributes are that belong to Brahmanas, all of whom are endowed with high souls. The Brahmana is superior to all those that, O king, you have named. In days of yore, the earth, indulging a spirit of rivalry with the king of the Angas, forsook her character as Bhumi. The Brahmana Kasyapa overtook her with calamity by paralysing her. The Brahmanas are always unconquerable, O king, in Swarga as also on Bhumi. In ancient days, the great Rishi Angiras, through his tejas, drained all the waters in the world, seas, rivers and the rest. The Mahatman Rishi, having quaffed all the waters as if they were milk, still did not feel that his thirst was slaked. He once more caused the earth to be filled with water by raising a mighty wave. On another occasion, when Angiras became enraged with me, I fled, leaving the world, and dwelt for a long time concealed in the agnihotra of the Brahmanas through fear of that Rishi.

The illustrious Purandara, having coveted the body of Ahalya, was cursed by Gautama, yet, for the sake of dharma and artha, the Rishi did not kill the king of the Devas. The ocean, O king, which was full in the first days of the world of crystalline water, like amrita, was cursed by the Brahmanas and became saline.

Even Agni, who is of the complexion of gold, and who blazes with effulgence when without smoke, and whose flames uniting together burn upwards, was cursed by the angry Angiras, and was instantly divested of all these attributes. Behold, the sixty thousand sons of Sagara, who came here

to adore the ocean, were all made ashes by the Brahmana Kapila of golden complexion.

You are not equal to the Brahmanas. Do you, O king, seek your own good. The Kshatriya of even great power bows to Brahmana children that are still in their mothers' wombs. The vast kingdom of the Dandakas was destroyed by a Brahmana. The mighty Kshatriya Talajangala was destroyed by a single Brahmana, Aurva. You, too, have acquired a great kingdom, great might, religious merit, and learning, which are all difficult of attainment, only through the grace of Dattatreya. Why do you, O Arjuna, worship Agni every day who is a Brahmana? He is the bearer of sacrificial libations from every part of the universe. Are you ignorant of this? Why, indeed, do you suffer yourself to be stupefied by folly when you well know that a superior Brahmana is the protector of all creatures in the world and is, indeed, the Creator of the living world?

The Lord of all creatures, Brahma, unmanifest, and of unfading glory, who created this boundless universe with its mobile and immobile creatures is a Brahmana. Some there are, devoid of wisdom, who say that Brahma was born of an Egg. From the original Egg, when it burst forth, mountains and the points of the compass and the waters and the earth and the heavens all sprang forth into existence. This beginning of creation was not seen by anyone. How then can Brahma be said to have been born from the original Egg, especially when he is declared as being Aja, Un-born? It is said that vast uncreated space is the primeval Egg. It was from this uncreated Akasa, or Supreme Brahman, that the Grandsire Brahma was born.

If you ask, 'Whereon would the Grandsire, after his birth from uncreated space, rest, for there was then nothing else?' the answer may be given thus: 'There is an existent Being of the name of Chitta, Consciousness. That mighty Being is infused with great tejas. There is no Egg. Brahma, however, exists. He is the Creator of the universe and is its king."

Thus spoken to by Vayu the wind, Kartaviryarjuna remained silent.'

CANTO 154

Vayu Deva said, 'Once upon a time, O king, a ruler of the name of Anga, desired to give away the whole earth as sacrificial dakshina to the Brahmanas. At this, the earth became filled with anxiety. "I am the daughter of Brahma. I support all creatures. Having obtained me, alas, why does this greatest of kings wish to give me away to the Brahmanas? Abandoning my character as soil, I will repair to the presence of my sire. Let this king with all his kingdom meet with destruction."

Arrived at this conclusion, she left for Brahmaloka. Seeing Bhumi Devi on the point of leaving, Rishi Kasyapa subtly entered into the visible embodiment of the goddess, after casting off his own body through yoga. The earth thus infused by the spirit of Kasyapa, grew in prosperity and became unprecedentedly fecund and replete with all kinds of plants and herbs and vegetation. Indeed, O king, for the time that Kasyapa possessed the earth, dharma prevailed everywhere and all fears ceased. The earth remained possessed by the spirit of Kasyapa for thirty thousand celestial years, and fully alive to all that it did while it was occupied by the spirit of Brahma's daughter. At the end of this time, Bhumi Devi returned from Brahmaloka and arriving here, bowed to Kasyapa, and from that time she became the daughter of that Rishi. Kasyapa is a Brahmana. Even this was the feat, O king, that a Brahmana performed. Tell me the name of the Kshatriya who can be held to be superior to Kasyapa!"

Hearing these words, King Arjuna remained silent. To him the god of wind once more said, "Hear now, O king, the story of Utathya who was born into the race of Angiras. The daughter of Soma, named Bhadra, was

regarded as unrivalled in beauty. Her sire Soma thought Utathya to be the fittest of husbands for her. The famed and most blessed maiden of faultless limbs, observing diverse vows, underwent the severest tapasya from the desire of acquiring Utathya for her lord. After a while, Soma's father Atri invited Utathya to his home and bestowed Bhadra upon him. Utathya, who was used to giving away sacrificial gifts in copious measure, duly received the girl for his wife.

Now, it so happened that the handsome Varuna had, for a long time, coveted the girl for himself. Coming to the forest where Utathya dwelt, Varuna abducted Bhadra when she had entered the Yamuna for a bath. The Lord of the waters took her to his own abode. That mansion was of a wonderful aspect. It was adorned with six hundred thousand crystalline lakes surrounding it. There is no mansion that can be regarded more beautiful than that home of Varuna. It was embellished with many palaces and by the presence of diverse tribes of Apsaras and of diverse unequalled objects of enjoyment. There, within that palace, the Lord of waters, O king, sported with Bhadra.

Soon enough, the ravishment of his wife was reported to Utathya. Having heard all the facts from Narada, Utathya addressed the celestial Rishi, saying, "Go, O Narada, to Varuna and speak to him with due severity. Ask him why he has abducted my wife, and, indeed, tell him in my name that he should return her to me. You may say to him further, 'You are a protector of the worlds, O Varuna, a Lokapala, and not a despoiler or destroyer. Why have you abducted Utathya's wife bestowed upon him by Soma?'"

Narada went to Varuna and said, "'Do you set the wife of Utathya free. Indeed, why have you abducted her?"

Varuna replied, "This timid girl is exceedingly dear to me. Why, I dare not let her go!"

With this reply, Narada came back to Utathya and cheerlessly said, "O Maharishi, Varuna drove me out of his house, indeed, seizing me by the throat. He is unwilling to restore your wife to you. Do now as you please."

Hearing Narada, Angiras became inflamed with wrath. Possessed with great tapodhana, he stilled all the waters of Varuna and with his tapasya shakti drained them at a swallow. When all his waters were thus quaffed, the Lord of that element became cheerless and downcast, as also all his friends and kinsfolk. For all that, he still did not give up Utathya's wife.

Then Utathya, Dvijottama, filled with wrath, commanded the earth, "O amiable one, do you show land where there are now the six hundred thousand lakes of Varuna!"

The ocean was forced to abandon those lakes and the dry land which appeared in their stead was arid and sterile.

To the rivers that flowed through that region, Utathya said, "O Saraswati, do you become invisible here. Indeed, O gentle Devi, leaving this realm, go you to the desert! Auspicious goddess, without your presence let this whole place cease to become sacred.'

When that entire region, in which the Lord of waters dwelt, fell dry, Varuna went to Angiras, taking with him Utathya's Bhadra, and made her over to him. Getting back his wife, Utathya was cheerful again. Then, O Lord of the Haihaya vamsa, that great Brahmana released both the universe and the Lord of waters from the distress into which he had plunged them.

When he had his wife back, the Mahatejasvin Rishi Utathya said to Varuna, "I have recovered my wife, O Lord of waters, with the help of my tapasya and after inflicting such distress on you as made you cry aloud in anguish."

Saying this, he went home, with that wife of his. Even such, O king, was Utathya, that greatest of Brahmanas. Shall I continue? Will you yet persist in your arrogant opinion? Is there any Kshatriya that is superior to Utathya?"'

CANTO 155

Bhishma says, 'Thus addressed by Vayu, King Arjuna remained silent. The God of Wind spoke again to him, "Listen now, O king, to the story of the greatness of the Brahmana Agastya. Once upon a time, the Devas were vanquished by the Asuras at which they fell into despair. The sacrifices of the Devas were all seized, and the Swadha of the Pitris was also misappropriated. Indeed, O king of the Haihayas, all the religious karmas and kriyas of men were also obstructed and suspended by the Danavas.

Divested of their prosperity, the Devas wandered over the earth even like beggars. One day, in course of their wandering, they met Agastya Mahavrata, that Brahmana invested with great energy and splendour like that of the sun. Saluting him duly, the Devas made the customary enquiries after his well-being. They then said these words to that Mahatman, "We have been defeated by the Danavas in battle and have fallen off from affluence and prosperity. Do you, O greatest of Rishis, rescue us from this predicament of great fear."

When informed of the plight to which the deities had been reduced, Agastya grew incensed, and he blazed forth like the all-consuming fire of the Pralaya. The blazing rays of heat and light that sprang forth from the Rishi scathed the Danavas. Thousands of them began to fall smoking from the sky. Scalded by the tejas of Agastya, abandoning both heaven and earth, the Danavas fled towards the south.

At that time the Danava King Bali was performing a horse sacrifice, an Aswamedha yagna in the Patalas. Those great Asuras who were with him in

those realms of nether, who dwelt in the bowels of the earth, were not touched by the searing wrath of Agastya. Upon the vanquishment and destruction of their foes, the Devas regained their own regions, and their fears were entirely dispelled. Encouraged by what he accomplished for them, they then asked the Rishi to consume the Asuras who had taken refuge in the Patalas.

Agastya replied to them, "I can surely consume the Asuras that dwell below the earth, but if I do this, my tapasya will suffer great diminution. And for that, I will not exert my power in that direction."

Even thus, O king, did the illustrious Agastya Muni burn the mighty Danavas through his own fierce tejas. Even thus did Suddhatma Agastya, of the pure soul, come to the rescue of the desperate Devas with his tapasya shakti. Sinless one, even so was the awesome Agastya! Shall I continue? Or, will you now say anything in reply? Is there any Kshatriya who is greater than Agastya?"

Thus addressed, King Arjuna remained silent.

Vayu Deva now said, "'Listen, O king, to one of the great feats of the lustrous Vasishta. Once upon a time, the Devas were engaged in performing a sacrifice on the shores of the Vaikhanasa lake. Knowing his might, the sacrificing gods thought of Vasishta and made him their priest in imagination. Meanwhile, seeing the Devas reduced and emaciated because of the diksha they were undergoing, a race of Danavas, called the Khalins, of stature as gigantic as mountains, sought to kill them. Those amongst the Danavas that were either maimed, dismembered or even slain in the battle plunged into the waters of the Manasa lake and, because of the boon they had from Brahma, they were restored to wholeness, vigour and life.

Plucking off jagged mountain peaks, enormous maces and mighty trees, they agitated the waters of the lake, making them rise up to a height of a hundred yojanas. They then ran against the Devas, and they were ten thousand demons. Attacked by the Danavas, the gods sought the protection of their King Vasava. Indra, however, was also soon dreadfully afflicted by the Danavas.

In his distress, Sakra sought the protection of Vasishta. At this, the holy Rishi Vasishta reassured the Devas, dispelling their fears. The sage did this because he saw how disconsolate the gods had become; he did this from compassion for them. Vasishta put forth his energy and, without exertion, burnt up those Danavas called Khalins.

Possessed of untold tapodhana, the Rishi brought the Ganga, who had flowed to Kailasa, to that place. Indeed, Ganga appeared there, springing up through the waters of the Manasa lake. The lake was infused by that holiest river, and the Ganga of heaven flowed from there as the Sarayu. The place where those Danavas fell came to be called after them. Even thus were the gods of swarga, with Indra at their head, rescued from great distress by Vasishta. It was thus that those Danavas, who had received boons from Brahma, were slain by that Mahatman Rishi.

Sinless one, I have told you of the feat which Vasishta accomplished. Shall I go on? Or, will you say anything now? Was there ever a Kshatriya who could be said to equal, let alone surpass the Brahmana Vasishta?"'

CANTO 156

"Bhishma says, 'Still, Arjuna remained silent. The wind god addressed him again, saying, "Hear me, O foremost of the Haihayas, as I narrate to you the achievement of the Mahatman Atri. Once upon a time, as the Devas and Danavas were fighting each other in the dark, Rahu pierced both Surya and Soma with his arrows. The Devas, overwhelmed by darkness, began to fall before the mighty Danavas, O greatest of kings. Repeatedly struck by the Asuras, the denizens of heaven began to lose their strength. They then saw the learned Brahmana Atri, that tapodhana, engaged in the observance of austerities.

To that Rishi who had conquered all his senses and in whom wrath had been extinguished they said "Behold, Rishi, these two, Soma and Surya, who have both been pierced by the Asuras with their arrows. In consequence, darkness has overtaken us, and we are being struck down by the enemy. We do not see the end of our troubles. Do you, O Lord of great power, rescue us from this fear."

The Rishi said, "How shall I save you?"

They answered, saying, "Do you yourself become Chandramas. Do you also become the sun, and do you begin to slay these brigands."

Thus solicited by them, Atri assumed the form of the darkness-destroying Soma. Indeed, because of his agreeable disposition, he began to look as handsome and delightful as Soma himself. Beholding that the real Soma and the real Surya had become darkened by the shafts of the foe, Atri, assuming the forms of those luminaries through his tapasya shakti, shone forth in splendour over the field of battle. Verily, Atri made the universe

blaze forth in light, dispelling all its darkness. By putting forth his might, he also vanquished the vast multitudes of those enemies of the Devas. Seeing those great Asuras burnt by Atri, the Devas also, protected by Atri's tejas, began to despatch them ever more swiftly.

Putting forth his prowess and mastering all his energy, it was thus that Atri illumined the god of day, rescued the Devas, and slew the Asuras. Even this was the feat that Dvija, helped by his sacred fire, Atri, that silent reciter of mantras, he who wore deer-skins. Consider, O Rajarishi, what that Rishi who subsisted upon only fruits accomplished.

I have narrated to you, in detail, the feat of the Mahatman Atri. Shall I go on? Or will you say anything? Is there any Kshatriya that is superior to this Mahamuni?"

Yet, Kartaviryarjuna remained silent. Vayu spoke again to him, "Hear, O king, the feat achieved by the Maharishi Chyavana in days of old. Having given his word to the twin Aswins, Chyavana said to Indra, 'Do you make the Aswins drinkers of Soma with all the other Devas!'

Indra said, 'The Aswins have been cast out by us. How, then, can they be admitted into the sacrificial circle for drinking Soma with the others? They are not numbered among the Devas. Do not, therefore, tell us to do this. O Mahavrata, we do not wish to drink Soma in the company of the Aswins. Whatever other behest you may have for us, O learned Brahmana, we are ready to accomplish.'

Chyavana said, 'The Aswins shall drink Soma with all of you. Both of them are Devas, O Indra, for they are the sons of Surya. Let the gods do what I have said. By doing what I ask, the Devas will reap great rewards. By doing otherwise, evil will overtake them.'

Indra said, 'I shall not, O foremost of Dvijas, drink Soma with the Aswins! Let others drink with them as they please. But for myself, I dare not do it.'

Chyavana said, 'If, O slayer of Bala, you will not obey me gladly, you shall, this very day, drink Soma with them in a sacrifice, for I will compel you!'"

Vayu said, "Then, taking the Aswins with him, Chyavana began a great yagna for their benefit. Chyavana dazed all the gods with his mantras. Seeing what Chyavana did, Indra became incensed. Taking up a mountain in his hands he ran at that Rishi. The Deva king also wielded the vajra. As Indra rushed at him, the illustrious Chyavana, tapodhana, cast an angry

glance at Indra. Throwing a little water at him, he paralysed the king of the Devas with his thunderbolt and mountain.

From the fire of the yagna he had begun, the Rishi created a terrible Asura made of the libations he had poured on the sacred fire. That demon was called Mada, of the gaping mouth. Indeed, formidable and dreadful was the Asura that the Mahamuni created with his mantras. There were a thousand teeth in his mouth, which extended a hundred yojanas. Of terrible mien, these fangs were two hundred yojanas long. One of his cheeks rested on the earth and the other touched the sky. Indeed, all the gods with Vasava seemed to stand at the root of that great Asura's tongue, even as schools of fish when they enter into the wide open mouth of a leviathan whale, a timmingala.

While within the mouth of Mada, the Devas held a quick consultation and then addressed Indra, 'Do you quickly bend your head in reverence to this Brahmana. Without scruple or hesitation, we shall drink Soma with the Aswins in our company.'

Then, bowing his head low to Chyavana, the humbled Indra obeyed his command. Even thus did Chyavana make the Aswins drinkers of Soma with the other gods. Calling back Mada, the Rishi then assigned him the duties he was to perform. That wild Mada was commanded to dwell in dice, in hunting, in drinking and in women. Hence, O king, those men that betake themselves to these, meet with destruction, and one should always keep these sins at a great distance. Thus, O king, have I narrated to you the feat achieved by Chyavana. Shall I go on? Or, will you say anything in reply? Is there any Kshatriya that is higher than the Brahmana Chyavana?"'

CANTO 157

Bhishma says, 'Hearing these words of the wind god, Arjuna still remained silent. At this, Vayu said to him, "When the denizens of swarga, with Indra at their head, found themselves in the mouth of the Asura Mada, at that time Chyavana took the earth away from them. Deprived previously of swarga and now shorn of Bhumi also, the gods were downcast. Indeed, afflicted with grief, the Devas threw themselves unreservedly at the Pitamaha Brahma's mercy and sought his protection."

The Devas said, 'O you that are adored by all creatures of the universe, Chyavana has taken the earth from us, while we have been deprived of swarga by the Kapas, O puissant one.'

Brahma said, 'Swargavasis, do you, with Indra at your head, seek the protection of the Brahmanas. By gratifying them you will succeed in regaining both the worlds as before.'

The Devas went to the Brahmanas and became suppliants for their protection. The Brahmanas asked them, 'Whom shall we subdue?'

The Devas said to them, 'Do you subdue the Kapas.'

The Brahmanas then said, 'Bringing them down first onto the earth, we shall swiftly vanquish them.'

The Brahmanas commenced a rite whose object was the destruction of the Kapas. As soon the Kapas heard of this, they immediately despatched a messenger of theirs, Dhanin, to those Brahmanas. Dhanin came to them as they sat upon the earth, and delivered the message of the Kapas. 'The Kapas are even equal to you all! They are not inferior to any of you. Hence, what will be the effect of these rites that you seem bent upon? All of them are

knowers of the Vedas and possessed of wisdom. All of them are mindful of sacrifices. All of them have Truth for their vow, and for these reasons all of them are regarded as equal to great Rishis. The goddess of prosperity sports among them, and they, in their turn, support her with worship. They never indulge in fruitless congress with their wives, and they never eat the flesh of animals that have not been killed in sacrifices. They pour libations on the sacrificial fire every day and are obedient to the behests of their preceptors and elders.

All of them have their souls under perfect control, and never eat any food without dividing it duly among their children. They always travel together in chariots and other conveyances without any of them riding his own ratha while others journey on foot. They never indulge in sexual congress with their wives when the women are in their periods. They all conduct themselves in such a way as to attain to regions of felicity hereafter. Indeed, they are always righteous in their deeds.

When women quick with child or old men have not eaten, they never eat themselves. They never indulge in play or sport of any kind in the forenoon. They never sleep during the day. When the Kapas have these and many other virtues and accomplishments, why, indeed, would you seek to quell them? You should abstain from the endeavour. Verily, by this abstention, you will achieve your own good.'

The Brahmanas said, 'Oh, we shall subdue the Kapas! In this matter, we are with the Devas, and so the Kapas deserve killing. As regards Dhanin, he should return whence he came.'

Returning to the Kapas, Dhanin said to them, 'The Brahmanas are not disposed to do you any good.'

Hearing this, all the Kapas took up their weapons and went towards the Brahmanas. Seeing the Kapas advancing against them with the standards of their chariots upraised, the Brahmanas forthwith created blazing fires to destroy them. Those eternal fires, kindled with the help of Vedic mantras, devoured the Kapas, and then began to shine in the firmament like so many golden clouds. Having assembled together for battle, the Devas slew many of the Danavas. They did not know at the time that it was the Brahmanas who had effected their destruction. Then Narada of great tejas came there and informed the gods how their enemies, the Kapas, had really been slain by the Brahmanas of measureless power. Hearing what Narada said, the

Swargavasis were gratified. They also applauded those twice-born Dvija allies of theirs, those Brahmanas of great fame.

Now the energy and prowess of the Devas began to increase and, worshipped in all the worlds, they also acquired the boon of immortality!"

When Vayu the wind had said this, King Arjuna worshipped him duly and now spoke these words to him. Hear, O mighty-armed king, what Kartaviryarjuna said.

Arjuna said, "O mighty Vayu, always and by all means do I live for the Brahmanas. Devoted to them, I worship them always. Through the grace of Dattatreya have I obtained this power of mine. Through his grace have I been able to accomplish great feats in the world and achieve high merit. Oh, I have, with attention, heard of the achievements, O Vayu, of the Brahmanas with all their fascinating details as recited by you so truly."

The wind said, "Do you protect and cherish the Brahmanas, in the exercise of your Kshatriya svadharma, which is yours by birth. Do you protect them even as you protect your own senses. There is danger to you from the race of Bhrigu. That, however, will come on a distant day."'

CANTO 158

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Kshatriya, you always worship Brahmanas of praiseworthy vows. What, however, is that fruit seeking which you worship them, Pitamaha? O Mahavrata, with what prosperity attaching to the worship of the Brahmanas in your sight do you worship them? Tell me all this, O Mahabaho.'

Bhishma says, 'Here is Kesava Mahabuddhi. He will tell you everything. Of high vows and endowed with the greatest grace and fortune, even he will tell you what the felicity is that attaches to the worship of Brahmanas. My strength, ears, speech, mind, eyes and that clear understanding of mine are all clouded and weak today. I think, the time is not distant when I will cast off my body. The sun seems to me to go very slowly.

I have told you of the high dharmas, O king, which are mentioned in the Puranas as observed by Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Do you now, O son of Pritha, learn from Krishna what little remains to be learnt on that matter. I know Krishna truly. I know who he is and what his ancient might is. O king of the Kurus, Kesava is of immeasurable soul. Whenever doubts arise and faith is lost, it is he who upholds dharma.

It is Krishna who created Bhumi, Akasa and Swarga. Indeed, the earth has sprung from Krishna's body. Of terrible prowess and existing from before the beginning of time, it is Krishna who became the mighty boar and raised the submerged earth. It is he who created all the points of the horizon, together with all the mountains. Below him are the welkin, heaven,

the four cardinal points, and the four lesser directions. It is from him that all creation has flowed. It is he who has created this ancient universe.

From his navel appeared a lotus. Within that lotus sprang Brahma, himself of immeasurable energy. It was Brahma, O son of Pritha, who rent that darkness which existed, exceeding the very ocean in depth and extent. In the Krita yuga, O Pandava, Krishna existed in the world in the form of dharma. In the Treta yuga, he existed in the form of gyana. In the Dwapara yuga, he existed in the form of Shakti. In the Kali age he came to the earth in the form of adharma.

It is he who in days of yore slew the Daityas. It is he who is the Ancient God. He who ruled the Asuras as their Emperor Mahabali. He is the Creator of all beings. He is also the future of all created beings. He is also the protector of this universe fraught with the seed of destruction. When the cause of dharma languishes, this Krishna incarnates either into the race of the gods or among men. Founded in dharma, this Krishna of the immaculate soul protects both the higher and the lower worlds from darkness. Sparing those that deserve to be spared, Krishna sets himself to the slaughter of the Asura, O Kaunteya.

It is he who is all karma, holy and unholy, and he who is the Cause of causes. Krishna is the act done, the act to be done, and the act that is being done. Know that this Illustrious One is Rahu and Soma and Sakra. He is Viswakarman. It is he that is the Viswarupa, of Universal Form. He is the Destroyer and he is the Creator of the universe. He is the wielder of the Sula; he is of human form; and he is of terrible form. All creatures sing his praises, for he is known by his deeds. Hundreds of Gandharvas and Apsaras and Devas always travel with him. The very Rakshasas hymn his praise. He is the Enhancer of Wealth; he is the one victorious Being in the universe. In sacrifices, eloquent men hymn his praises. The singers of Samans praise him by reciting the Rathantaras. The Brahmanas praise him with Vedic mantras. It is to him that the sacrificial priests pour their libations.

The Devas with Indra at their head hymned his praise when he lifted up the Govardhana mountain to protect the cowherds of Vrindavana against the wrathful torrents of rain which Indra lashed down on them. He is, O Bhaarata, the one Blessing to all creatures. He, O Bhaarata, having entered the old Brahma cave, beheld from that place the original sheath of the world at the beginning of Time. Agitating all the Danavas and the Asuras, this Krishna of foremost feats rescued the earth. It is to him that people dedicate

diverse kinds of food. It is to him that warriors dedicate all their mounts and chariots, of every kind, at the time of war. He is eternal, and it is under this Illustrious One that the sky, earth, heaven, all things, exist and endure.

He it is who caused the seed of the gods Mitra and Varuna to fall into a jar, whence sprang Rishi Vasishta. It is Krishna who is Vayu; he is the Aswins; it is he who is that first of gods, Surya of a thousand rays. It is by him that the Asuras have been quelled. It is he who covered the three worlds with three steps. He is the soul of the Devas, the Manavas and the Pitris. He is the sacrifice performed by those that know the rituals of sacrifices. He it is who rises every day in the firmament as the sun and divides Time into day and night, and courses for half the year northward and for half the year south. Innumerable rays of light emanate from him up and down and transversely and illumine the earth.

Brahmanas who know the Vedas worship him. Taking a portion of his rays, the sun shines in the firmament. Month after month, the sacrificer ordains him as a sacrifice. Dvijas conversant with the Vedas sing his praises in sacrifices of all kinds. He it is that constitutes the wheel of the year, having three naves and seven steeds yoked to it. In this way he supports the triple mansion of the seasons. Endowed with great energy, pervading all things, the foremost of all creatures, it is Krishna alone who upholds all the worlds.

He is the sun, the dispeller of all darkness. He is the Creator of all. Do you, O Kshatriya, approach that Krishna! Once, the high-souled and powerful Krishna dwelt, for a while, in the form of Agni in the forest of Khandava in some dry grass. Soon was he gratified for he consumed all the medicinal herbs in that forest. He can go anywhere at will, and it was Krishna who, having vanquished the Rakshasas and Uragas, poured them as libations upon the sacred fire.

It is Krishna who gave Arjuna a number of white steeds; he is the creator of all horses. This world, this samsara, this human life is his chariot. He it is that yokes that chariot to set it in motion. That ratha has three wheels—the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas. It has three kinds of motion; it goes upward, or downward or transversely, implying superior, inferior and intermediate births as fetched by karma. It has four horses yoked to it—time, destiny, the will of the gods, and one's own will. It has three naves—white, black and mixed, implying good, evil and mixed karma.

It is this Krishna who is the refuge of the Panchamahabhutas, the five original elements with the sky among them. It is he who created bhumi and swarga and the space between. Indeed, it is this Krishna of immeasurable and blazing tejas who created the forests and the mountains. It is this Krishna who, wanting to punish Sakra who was about to hurl his thunder at him, crossed the rivers once and paralysed Indra. He is himself the one great Indra whom the Brahmanas worship in sacrifices with the help of a thousand ancient Riks. It was this Krishna, O king, who alone was able to keep the choleric Rishi Durvasa of great temper and powers as a happy guest in his home for a long time.

He is said to be the one most antique Rishi. He is the Creator of the universe. Indeed, he creates everything from his own nature. Superior to all the Devas, it is he who teaches all the gods. He scrupulously observes all ancient niyamas and vidhis.

Know, O king, that this Krishna, who is called Vishwaksena, is the fruit of all karma that relates to kama, of all karma that is founded on the Vedas, and of all karma that pertains to the world. He is the white rays of light that are seen in all the worlds. He is the three worlds. He is the three regents of all the worlds. He is the three sacrificial fires. He is the three Vyahritis; indeed, this son of Devaki is all the gods together. He is the year; he is the seasons; he is the fortnights; he is the day and the night; he is those divisions of time which are called Kaalas, and Kashthas, and Matras, and Muhurtas, and Lavas, and Kshanas. Know that this Vishwaksena is all these.

The moon and the sun, the planets, the constellations and the stars, all the Parva days, including the day of the full moon, the conjunctions of the constellations and the seasons, have, O son of Pritha, flowed from this Krishna who is Vishwaksena. The Rudras, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Sadhyas, the Viswedevas, the diverse Maruts, Prajapati himself, Aditi the mother of the Devas and the Saptarishis have all sprung from Krishna.

Transforming himself into the wind, he scatters the universe. Of universal form, he becomes fire that burns all things. Changing himself into water, he drenches and submerges all and, assuming the form of Brahma, he creates all the diverse species of animate and inanimate existences. He is himself the Veda, yet he learns all the Vedas. He is himself all the niyamas, yet he observes all the laws that have been laid down in matters of dharma

and the Vedas; he is that force or power which rules the world. Indeed, know, O Yudhishtira, that this Kesava is truly all the mobile and immobile universe, chala and achala. He is of the form of the most resplendent light. Of universal form, this Krishna is displayed in that blinding refulgence. The original cause of the soul of all creatures, at first he created the waters. After that he created this universe.

Know that this Krishna is Vishnu. Know that he is the soul of the universe. Know that he is all the seasons; he is these diverse wonderful vegetations of nature which we see; he is the clouds that pour down rain and the lightning that flashes in the sky. He is the elephant Airavata. Indeed, I say again to you, he is all the immobile and mobile universe. The abode of the universe and transcending all attributes, this Krishna is Vasudeva. When he becomes jiva he is called Sankarshana. Next, he transforms himself into Pradyumna and then into Aniruddha. In this way, the Mahatman Krishna, who has himself for his origin divides and displays himself in fourfold form.

Wanting to create this universe, which consists of the five primal elements, he sets himself to his task, and causes it to perpetuate in the five forms of animate existence consisting of Devas and Asuras and Manavas and Mrigas and Garudas.

He it is that then creates the earth and the wind, the sky, light, and also water, O son of Pritha! Having created this universe, chala and achala, distributed into four orders of being, he then created the earth with her fivefold seed. He then created the firmament to pour down copious rain on the earth. Have no doubt, O king, it is this Krishna who has created this universe. His origin is in his own self; it is he who causes all things to exist through his own power. He it is that has created the Devas, the Asuras and Manavas, Bhumi, the Rishis the Pitris, and all creatures.

From his desire to create, the Lord of all creatures created the whole universe of life. Know that good and evil, and chala and achala, have all flowed from this One who is Vishwaksena. Whatever exists, and whatever will come into existence, all is Kesava. This Krishna is also the death that overtakes all creatures when their end comes. He is eternal and it is he who upholds the cause of dharma. Whatever existed in the past, and whatever we do not know, verily, all that also is this Vishwaksena. Whatever is noble and meritorious in the universe, indeed, whatever of good and of evil exists, all that is Kesava the Inconceivable.

Hence, it is absurd to think of anything that is superior to Kesava. Even such is this Kesava. More than this, he is Narayana, the highest of the high, immutable and unfading. He is the eternal and immutable cause of the entire universe, with its beginning, middle and end, as also of all creatures whose birth follows their wish.'"

CANTO 159

"Yudhishtira says, 'Do you tell us, Madhusudana, what the prosperity is that attaches to the worship of the Brahmanas. You know this subject as well as, verily, our Grandsire knows you.'

Krishna says, 'Listen with sraddha to me, king of the Bharata vamsa, and I will tell you what the merits of the Brahmanas are, in truth, Kurusattama. Once on a time, while I sat in Dwaravati, Kurunandana, my son Pradyumna, who was enraged at some Brahmanas, came to me and said, "Madhusudana, what punya attaches to the worship of Brahmanas? Whence is their lordship derived both here and hereafter? O bestower of honours, what rewards are won by constantly worshipping Brahmanas? I beg you, explain this clearly to me, for my mind is disturbed by doubts in this matter."

I answered him as follows, and listen carefully, Yudhishtira, to what I said to him. I said, "Son of Rukmini, listen closely to me and I will tell you what the prosperity is that one may win by worshipping Brahmanas. When one sets oneself to the acquisition of the dharma, artha and kama, or to the achievement of mukti, or to that of fame and prosperity, or to the treatment and cure of disease, or to the worship of the Devas and the Pitris, one should take care to first gratify the Brahmanas. They are each a king, Soma. They are dispensers of happiness and misery. O Rukminiputra, whether in this or in the next world, my son, everything agreeable has its origin in the Brahmanas. I have no doubt about this.

From the worship of Brahmanas flow mighty achievements, and fame and strength. The denizens of all the worlds, and the regents of the universe,

are all worshippers of Brahmanas. How then, Pradyumna, can we disregard them, deluded by the idea that we are Lords of the earth?

Mahabaho, do not suffer your wrath to embrace the Brahmanas as its object. In this as also in the next world, Brahmanas are regarded as supreme beings. They have direct knowledge of everything in the universe. If angered, they are capable of reducing everything to ashes. They can create other worlds and other regents of worlds. Why then should those who are possessed of tejas and true gyana not behave with obedience and respect towards them?

Formerly, in my house, my son, dwelt the Brahmana Durvasa whose complexion was both green and tawny. Clad in rags, he had a danda, a staff made from the bilwa tree. His beard was long and he was exceedingly emaciated. He was taller in stature than the tallest man on earth. Wandering over all the worlds—that which belongs to men and those that are for the gods and other superior beings, this was what he sang constantly in sabhas and in public squares—*Who is there that would cause the Brahmana Durvasa to dwell in his house, doing the duties of hospitality towards him? He becomes enraged with everyone if he finds even the slightest fault. Hearing this about me, who is there that will give me refuge? Indeed, woe betide him that would give me shelter as a guest lest he does the least thing to annoy me.*

When I saw that no one dared give him shelter in their homes, I invited Durvasa and had him live with me. On certain days, he would eat the food sufficient for the needs of thousands of men. On other days, he would eat very little. On some days, he would go out of my home and would not return. He would sometimes laugh without any ostensible reason and sometimes cry as causelessly. At that time, there was nobody on earth that was equal to him in years. One day, entering the quarters assigned to him, he burnt all the beds and their covers and all the well-adorned women that were there to serve him. Doing this, he went out. Of stern and terrible vows, he met me shortly after this and addressing me, said, 'Krishna, I wish to eat payasa without delay!' Having known his mind previously, I had set my servants to prepare every kind of food and drink. Indeed, many excellent foods had been kept ready. As soon as I was asked, I had hot payasa fetched and offered it to the unpredictable Rishi. Having eaten some, he quickly said to me, 'Do you, O Krishna, take some of this payasa and smear all your limbs with it!'

Without any hesitation I did as he said—I smeared the remnant of that payasa over my body and my head. The Rishi saw your lovely mother Rukmini standing nearby. Laughing the while, he smeared her body also with that payasa. Durvasa then had your mother, whose body was smeared over with the payasa, yoked to a carriage. Climbing onto that carriage he set out from my palace.

Imbued with great intelligence that Brahmana blazed with effulgence like fire, and, in my presence he struck my Rukmini in her youth, as if she were an animal made to haul the carriages of men. I saw all this and I did not feel the slightest grief, anger or malice, or the least wish to harm the Rishi. Indeed, having yoked Rukmini to the carriage, he went out, saying he wanted to go along the highway of the city. Seeing that extraordinary sight, some Dasarhas were filled with wrath, and said amongst one another, 'Who else is there on earth that would draw breath after having yoked Rukmini to a carriage? Verily, let the world be filled with only Brahmanas. Let no other varnas take birth here. The poison of a snake is keen. Keener than a serpent's venom is a Brahmana. There is no physician for a person that has been bitten or burnt by the virulent snake that is a Brahmana.'

As the irresistible Durvasa went along in the carriage, Rukmini tottered on the road and frequently fell down. At this, the Rishi became angry and began to urge Rukmini on, striking her with a whip. At last, filled with a towering passion, the Brahmana leapt down from the carriage, and fled towards the south, running on foot, over pathless ground. Seeing that foremost of Brahmanas go, we followed him, although we were smeared with payasa, exclaiming behind him, 'Be gratified with us, Holy One!'

The mahatejasvin Brahmana saw me and said, 'O Krishna Mahabaho, you have subdued wrath by the strength of your nature. O Mahavrata, I have not found the slightest fault in you. Govinda, I am perfectly gratified with you. Ask me for any boon or wish you have, and see, O son, what my powers are when I am pleased. As long as Devas and men continue to have a love for food, so too, will they love you, Krishna. As long, again, as there is dharma in the several worlds, so long will the fame of your achievements last. Janardana, you shall be beloved of all.

Whatever belongings of yours I have burnt or otherwise destroyed you will have restored, why, better than they were. As long, again, O you of unfading glory, as you wish to live, so long will you have no fear of death coming to you through any part of your body that you have smeared today

with payasa. But ah, son, why did you not smear that payasa on the soles of your feet as well?'

Even this was what he said to me on that day on which he was pleased with me. When he had finished speaking, I saw that my body became invested with great beauty and splendour.

To Rukmini also, the Rishi, well-pleased with her, said, 'O most beautiful devi, you shall be the first of your sex in fame, and great glory and achievements will be yours. Decrepitude, disease or a fading complexion will never be yours. Everyone will see you engaged in waiting upon Krishna, possessed as you already are with the natural fragrance which is always present in you. You shall become the best of all the sixteen thousand wives of Krishna. At last, when the time comes for you to leave the world, you will attain to the inseparable companionship of Krishna in the hereafter.'

Having said these words to your mother, Rishi Durvasa, who blazed like fire with tejas, once more addressed me, 'O Kesava, let your understanding be always disposed even thus towards the Brahmana!' And uttering these words, that Brahmana disappeared before my very eyes. After he vanished I took to the observance of the vow of japa, chanting certain mantras silently without being heard by anybody. Verily, from that day I resolved to accomplish whatever commands I should receive from Brahmanas.

Having adopted this vrata, O Pradyumna my son, along with your mother, and with both our hearts filled with joy, I returned to our palace. Entering our home I saw that everything which the Rishi had broken or burnt had reappeared and become new. Seeing this, and all was finer and more beautiful than before, I was filled with wonder. Verily, O son of Rukmini, from that day forth I have always worshipped the Brahmanas in my heart."

'This, king of the Bharata vamsa, is what I said on that occasion regarding the greatness of those Brahmanas who are the foremost of their order. Do you also, O son of Kunti, worship the profoundly blessed Brahmanas every day with gifts of wealth and kine, O mighty one. It was in this way that I acquired the prosperity I enjoy, the prosperity that is born of the grace of Brahmanas. Whatever, again, Bhishma has said of me, O king of the Bharatas, is all true.'"

CANTO 160

"Yudhishtira says, 'Madhusudana, I ask you to expound to me that knowledge which you acquired through the grace of Durvasa. O first among all endowed with intelligence, I wish to know everything about the high blessedness and all the names of that high-souled one truly and in detail.'

Krishna says, 'I will tell you the good that I have acquired and the fame that I have won through the grace of that Mahatman. I will discourse to you on the subject, after having bowed to the Kapardin. O king, listen to me as I recite to you that Satarudriya which I chant with restrained senses, every morning after rising from bed. The great Lord of all creatures, the Grandsire Brahma himself, tapodhana, composed those mantras, after having observed especial penances for some time. O king, it is Sankara who created all the creatures in the universe, mobile and unmoving. There is no being that is higher, O monarch, than Mahadeva. Verily, he is the highest of all beings in the three worlds. There is no one who can stand before that Devadeva. Indeed, there is no being in the three worlds that can be regarded as his equal. When he stands, filled with rage, on the field of battle, the very odour of his body deprives all his enemies of consciousness and they that are not slain tremble and fall down. His roars are terrible, like those of thunderheads. Hearing those roars in battle, the very hearts of the Devas break in twain. When the wielder of Pinaka grows angry and assuming a terrible form merely casts his eye upon Deva, Asura, Gandharva or Naga, that one shall never have peace of mind, not by taking shelter in the deepest recesses of a mountain-cave.

When the Prajapati Daksha undertook his great sacrifice, he slighted Siva by not inviting him or offering him any part of the havis; Sati went to Daksha's yagna and she immolated herself there at the disregard her father showed her husband Siva. And the dauntless Bhava, giving way to wrath, roared aloud and pierced the embodied Yagna through with a shaft from his terrible bow. When Maheswara became angry and suddenly struck Yagna with his shaft, the Devas were panic-stricken, and in a wink lost all their natural joy and peace. The universe trembled at the twanging of Siva's bowstring. The Devas and the Asuras, O son of Pritha, grew numb and weak. The ocean rolled in agitation and the earth shuddered to her very core. The hills and mountains uprooted themselves in terror and fled in all directions. The vault of the sky was cloven. All the worlds were plunged in gloom. Nothing could be seen. The light of all the luminaries fell dim and darkling, why, along with that of the sun himself, O Bhaarata.

Terror-stricken and desperate to save themselves and the universe, the Maharishis tried to perform the customary rites of propitiation and peace. Meanwhile, Rudra of terrible prowess rushed against the Devas. Filled with rage, he tore out the eyes of Bhaga. Incensed with wrath, he kicked Pushan with his foot. He tore out the teeth of that god as he sat eating the large sacrificial ball of the Purodasa. Quaking with fear, the Devas bent their heads to Sankara. Without being appeased, Rudra once more placed set a blazing arrow to his bow-string, and the Devas and Rishis' alarm flared up even higher. Those greatest among gods began to ardently worship him. Joining their hands in reverence, they began to recite the Satarudriya mantras. At last, thus hymned by the Devas, Maheswara was pacified and grew calm. The Devas then assigned a large and pre-eminent share of the sacrificial offerings to him. Still trembling with fear, O king, they fervently and abjectly sought his protection.

When Rudra became gratified, the embodiment of Yagna, which had been cloven in two, was once more united. Whatever limbs of his had been destroyed by the shafts of Mahadeva, became whole and sound.

The Asuras of great urjas had in days of yore three impregnable cities in the firmament. One of these was made of iron, one of silver and the third of gold. With all his weapons, Maghavat, the king of the Devas, could not destroy those cities. Harassed and afflicted by the Asuras, all the Devas sought the protection of the great Rudra.

Assembled together, the gods addressed him, ‘O Rudra, the Asuras threaten to destroy all things with what they do. We beg you, kill the Daityas and destroy their city for the protection of the three worlds, O bestowers of boons!’

Siva replied, ‘So be it,’ and then made Vishnu his inexorable arrowhead. He made Agni the shaft of his astra, and Surya’s son Yama the wings of that missile. He made the Vedas his bow and Goddess Savitri his bow-string. And he made the Grandsire Brahma his charioteer. With all these, he pierced the Tripura, the triad city of the Asuras, with his great astra, which was made of three parvans and three salyas. O Bhaarata, Siva consumed the Asuras with their cities, with his astra whose complexion was that of the sun and whose energy was that of the fire which appears at the end of the yuga to devour all things.

Seeing Mahadeva transformed into a child with five locks of hair lying on the lap of Parvati, Indra asked the Devas who he was. Seeing the child, Sakra suddenly became jealous and wrathful and resolved to kill him with his vajra. The child, however, paralysed Indra’s arm like a mace of iron, with the thunderbolt in its hand. The Devas were all bewildered, and they could not understand that the child was the Lord of the universe. Verily, all of them along with the Lokapalas, found their minds dazed by that child who was none else than the Supreme Being.

Then, meditating with his tapasya shakti, the illustrious Pitamaha Brahma discovered that that child was the foremost of all Beings, the Lord of Uma, Mahadeva of immeasurable prowess. He then praised the Lord. The Devas also began to hymn the praises of both Uma and Rudra. Indra’s paralysed arm was no longer benumbed. It was the same Mahadeva who incarnated as the Mahatejasvin Brahmana Durvasa, and lived for a long time in my home in Dwaravati. While he remained with me, he did so many diverse deeds of mischief. Though difficult to bear, I still endured them joyfully for I knew whose amsa Durvasa was.

He is Rudra; he is Siva; he is Agni; he is Sarva; he is the vanquisher of all; he is Indra, and Vayu and the Aswins and the god of lightning. He is Chandramas; he is Isana; he is Surya; he is Varuna; he is Kaala; he is Yama; he is Mrityu; he is the Divasa and Ratri; he is the Paksha; he is the Ritus; he is the two Sandhyas; he is the Varsa. He is Dhatri and he is Vidhatri; and he is Viswakarman; and he is the Sarvagyani. He is the Diks and the Upadiks also. Of Viswarupa, he is Anantatman.

The holy and illustrious Durvasa is of the complexion of the celestials. He sometimes manifests himself singly; sometimes divides himself in two; and sometimes exhibits himself in many, a hundred thousand, forms. Even such is Mahadeva. He is, again, that God who is Aja, Un-born. In even a hundred years one cannot begin to describe his merits by reciting them.'"

CANTO 161

"Krishna says, 'O Yudhishtira, Mahabaho, listen to me as I recite to you the many names of Rudra as also the high blessedness of that Mahatman.

The Rishis describe Mahadeva as Agni, and Sthanu and Maheswara; as One-eyed, and Three-eyed, of Universal Form, and Siva or highly auspicious. Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas say that God has two forms. One of these is terrible, and the other mild and auspicious. Those two forms, again, are divided into many forms. That form which is fierce and terrible is identical with Agni and lightning and Surya. The other form which is mild and auspicious is identical with dharma and Jala and Chandramas. Then, again, it is said that half his body is Agni, fire, and half is Soma or the moon. That form of his which is mild and auspicious is said to be engaged in keeping the Brahmacharya vrata. The other form of his, which is supremely terrible, is engaged in all the destruction found in the universe.

Because he is great, Mahat, and the Supreme Lord of all, Iswara, therefore is he called Maheswara. And since he burns and scourges, is keen and fierce, and endued with great energy, and is a devourer of flesh and blood and marrow, he is said to be Rudra. Since he is the foremost of all the deities, and since his dominion and acquisitions are infinite, and since he protects the infinite universe, he is called Mahadeva.

Since he is of the form or colour of smoke, he is called Dhurjati. Since through all his actions he performs sacrifices for all and seeks the good of every creature, he is called Siva or the Auspicious One. Staying above in

the sky, he burns the lives of all creatures and is, besides, fixed on a definite path from which he does not deviate. His emblem, again, is fixed and immovable for all time. He is, for these reasons, called Sthanu. He is also of multiform aspect. He is present, past and future. He is chala and achala. For this he is called Bahurupa. The deities called the Viswedevas reside in his body. He is, for this, called Viswarupa of universal form.

He is thousand-eyed; or he is myriad-eyed; or he has eyes on all sides and on every part of his body. His energy issues through his eyes. There is no end to his eyes. Since he always nourishes all creatures and sports, also, with them, and since he is their Lord and master, he is called Pasupati, the Lord of creatures.

Since his Linga is always observant of the vow of Brahmacharya, all the worlds worship it. This act of worship is said to please him highly. If there is one who worships him by creating his image and another who worships his Linga, it is the latter that attains to great prosperity for ever. The Rishis, the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Apsaras worship that Linga of his which is forever erect and upraised. If his Linga is worshipped, Maheswara becomes highly gratified with the worshipper.

Loving towards his devotees, he bestows happiness upon them with a cheerful heart. This Great God loves to stay in smasanas, crematoria, and there he burns and consumes corpses. Those that perform sacrifices on such grounds attain at the end to those regions which have been set apart for great Kshatriya heroes. He it is that is regarded as the death which resides in the bodies of all creatures. He is, again, the breaths called prana and apana in the bodies of all embodied beings. He has many blazing and terrible forms. All those forms are worshipped in the world and are known to Brahmanas possessed of knowledge. Amongst the gods, he has many names, all of which are full of grave import. Verily, the meanings of those names are derived from either his greatness or vastness, his feats or his conduct. The Brahmanas always recite the excellent Satarudriya in his honour, which occurs in the Vedas, as also that which has been composed by Vyasa.

Verily, the Brahmanas and Rishis call him the Eldest of all beings. He is the First of all the gods, and it was from his mouth that he created Agni. Ever willing to grant protection to all, Siva never gives up or abandons his bhaktas who worship him. He would much rather abandon his own life-breath and incur all possible afflictions himself. Long life, health and

freedom from disease, affluence, wealth, diverse kinds of pleasures and enjoyments, he confers, and also takes them away. The lordship and affluence that one sees in Sakra and the other Devas are in truth his.

It is he who is always engaged in all that is good and evil in the three worlds. In consequence of his absolute control over all objects of kama, he is called Iswara, the Supreme Lord or master. Since, again, he is the master of the vast universe, he is called Maheswara. The whole universe is pervaded by him in diverse forms. It is that God whose mouth roars and burns the waters of the sea, in the form of the Badavamukha, that vast burning head of a mare!'"

CANTO 162

Vaisampayana said, "After Krishna, the son of Devaki, says this, Yudhishtira once more asks Santanu's son Bhishma, 'O Mababuddhe, O foremost of all who know dharma, which of the two—direct perception or the scriptures—is to be regarded as the authority to arrive at a conclusion?'

Bhishma says, 'I believe there is no doubt in this matter. Listen to me, O you of great wisdom; I will answer you. The question you have asked is apposite. It is easy to have doubts about this, and the answer to it is difficult. Innumerable are the instances, in respect of both direct perception and the Srutis, in which doubts can arise.

Some men, who delight in the name of logicians, imagining themselves to be possessed of superior wisdom, affirm that direct perception is the only authority. They assert that nothing, however true, can be said to exist which is not directly perceivable; or, at least they doubt the existence of those things. Indeed, such assertions involve an absurdity and they who make them are of foolish understanding, whatever may be their pride of learning. If, on the other hand, you doubt how the one indivisible Brahman could be the cause, I answer that one would understand it only after a long course of years and with the help of assiduous yoga. Indeed, O Bhaarata, one that lives by such means as present themselves without being wedded to this or that settled mode of life, and one who is devoted to the resolution of the question, will be able to understand it. None else truly can.

When one attains to the very end of reasons, indeed the process of reasoning, one then attains to that ultimate and all comprehensive

knowledge—that infinite mass of light which illumines all the universe, the lustre called Brahman. That knowledge, O king, which is derived from reason or inferences can scarcely be called true knowledge, and such knowledge should be rejected. It is not defined or comprehended through the word. It must, therefore, be abjured.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, which among these four is most authoritative—direct perception, inference from observation, the science of Agama or the scriptures, and diverse kinds of practices that distinguish the good.'

Bhishma says, 'While evil men of great might seek to destroy dharma, it is can be protected for the time being by those that are good exerting themselves with care and earnestness. Such protection, however, is of no avail in the long term, for destruction does overtake dharma finally. Then, again, dharma often proves a mask for covering adharma, like grass and straw covering the mouth of a deep pit and concealing it from view. Listen again to me, O Yudhishtira. It is because of this that the practices of the good are interfered with and sought to be destroyed by the evil. Men of evil pravritti, who discard the Srutis, sinners who are haters of dharma, destroy that righteous course of conduct which could otherwise be established as a standard. Hence, doubts attach to direct perception, inference and good conduct. Those, therefore, among the good that possess understanding born of or cleansed by the scriptures, and who are always contented, are to be regarded as the best and the foremost of men. Let those that are anxious and deprived of tranquillity of soul, approach these. Indeed, Yudhishtira, do you pay court to them and seek from them the resolution of your doubt.

Disregarding both pleasure and wealth, kama and artha, which always follow lobha, greed, and awakened into the belief that only dharma should be sought, O Yudhishtira, wait upon and question men of truth to receive enlightenment from them. The way and the conduct of those great men never strays or meets with peril or destruction, as also their sacrifices and Vedic study and rites. Indeed, these three—conduct as consisting of overt deeds, behaviour in respect of purity of mind, and the Vedas, together constitute dharma.'

Yudhishtira says, 'Pitamaha, my understanding is once more darkened by doubt. I am on this side of the ocean, seeking the means to cross it. I do not, however, see the other shore of the ocean. If these three, the Vedas, direct perception, and conduct, together constitute what is to be regarded as

authority, it can be alleged that there is a difference between them. Dharma then becomes of three kinds, although it is one and indivisible.'

Bhishma says, 'Dharma is sometimes seen to be destroyed by evil men and spirits of great power. If you think, O king, that dharma should really be of three kinds, my reply is that your conclusion is warranted by reason. The truth is that righteousness is one and indivisible, although it can be looked at from three different viewpoints. The paths as indications of those three that constitute the foundation of dharma have each been clearly laid down. Do you act according to the niyamas, the laws. You should never wrangle about dharma and then seek to have those doubts solved at which you may arrive. O king of the Bharatas, let no doubts like these ever seize possession of your mind.

Do you obey what I say without scruple or hesitation of any kind. Follow me like a blind man or like one who, without being possessed of sense himself, has to depend upon that of another. Non-violence, truth, absence of wrath, forgiveness and liberality in gifts—these four practices, O king, Ajatasatru that has no foe, for these four constitute eternal dharma. Do you also, O Mahabaho, pursue that conduct towards Brahmanas which is consistent with what has been observed towards them by your sires and Grandsires. These are the principal indications of dharma. The man of little intelligence who would destroy the weight of authority by denying that to be a standard which has always been accepted as such will himself fail to become an authority among men. Such a man is the cause of much grief in the world. Do you reverence Brahmanas and treat them with hospitality. Do you always serve them in this way. The universe rests upon them. Do you understand them to be such—the very holders of the worlds!'

Yudhishtira says, 'Tell me, Pitamaha, what the respective ends are of those that abhor dharma and of those that adore and observe it.'

Bhishma says, 'Those men that hate righteousness are said to have their hearts overwhelmed by the attributes of passion and darkness, rajas and tamas. Such men have always to go into naraka. Those men, on the other hand, who always worship and observe dharma, those men who are devoted to truth and sincerity, are called good men. They always enjoy the pleasures and grace of swarga. For waiting upon their preceptors with reverence their hearts always turn naturally towards dharma. Verily, they who adore dharma attain to the realms of the gods. Men or deities who divest themselves of avarice and malice, and who emaciate or afflict their bodies

by the observance of austerities, succeed, through the dharma which then becomes theirs, to attain to great reward and bliss.

Those that are gifted with true wisdom have said that the Brahmanas, who are the eldest sons of Brahma, represent and embody dharma. They that are righteous always worship them, their hearts regarding them with as much love and affection as a hungry man's stomach entertains for ripe and delicious fruit.'

Yudhishtira says, 'What is the appearance presented by those that are evil, and what are the deeds of those that are called men of dharma? Explain to me this, O Holy One. Indeed, tell me what the indications are of the good and the wicked.'

Bhishma says, 'The evil are so in their practices; they are ungovernable, foul-mouthed and cannot be kept within the restraints of laws; they who are good are always so in what they do. Why, the deeds of these men are regarded as the very indications of the course of conduct which is called dharma.

They that are good or righteous, O king, never answer the two calls of nature on a public road, in a cow-pen, or a paddy field. After feeding the five—the gods, the manes, guests, kinsmen and dependants—they eat themselves. They never talk while eating, and never go to sleep with wet hands. Whenever they see any of the following, they circumambulate them in pradakshina to show them reverence—a burning fire, a bull, the image of a deity, a cow-pen, a place where four roads meet and an old and virtuous Brahmana. They give way, themselves standing aside, to the old, to those that carry burdens, to women, to those that hold high positions in the village or town, Brahmanas, kine and kings.

The righteous or good man is he that protects his guests, servants and other dependants, his own relatives, and all those that seek his protection. Such a man always welcomes these with the customary polite enquiries after their health and well-being. Two times have been appointed by the deities for humans to eat—morning and evening. In between these two, one should not eat anything. By following this rule about eating, one is said to observe an upavasa, a fast. As the sacred fire waits for libations to be poured upon it when the hour for homa arrives, even so a woman, when her period is over, expects an act of congress with her husband. He that never approaches his wives at any other time save after their period, is said to observe the vow of brahmacharya. Amrita, Brahmanas and kine—these

three are regarded as equal. Hence, one should always worship, with due rites, Brahmanas and sacred cows.

One does not incur any fault or stain by eating the meat of animals slain in sacrifices with mantras from the Yajur Veda. The flesh of the backbone, or that of animals not killed in sacrifice, should be avoided even as one avoids the flesh of one's own son. One should never have one's guest go without food whether when one lives in one's own country or in a foreign land. After completing one's study, one should give dakshina to one's preceptor. When one sees one's guru, one should greet him with reverence and, worshipping him, offer him a seat. By worshipping one's guru, one increases the period of one's life as also one's fame and prosperity.

One should never censure the old, nor send them on any business. One should never sit when someone old is standing. By conducting oneself in this manner, one protects and even prolongs the duration of one's life. One should never cast one's eyes on a naked woman, or a naked man. One should never indulge in sexual congress, except in privacy. One should eat also without being seen by others. Gurus are the foremost of tirthas; the heart is the foremost of all sacred objects; knowledge is the foremost of all objects of seeking; and contentment is the foremost of all joys.

Morning and evening, one should listen to the grave counsels of those that are aged. One attains to wisdom by constantly waiting upon those that are venerable in years. While reading the Vedas or eating, one should use one's right hand. One should always keep one's speech and mind under thorough control, as also one's senses. With well-cooked payasa, yavaka, krisara, and Havi, one should worship the Pitris and the Devas in the sraddha called Ashtaka. The same should be used in worshipping the Grahas, the planets.

One should not shave or be shaved without calling down a blessing upon oneself. If one sneezes, one should be blessed by those present. All that are ill or afflicted with disease should be blessed. The extension of their lives should be prayed for. One should never address an eminent person familiarly by using the word Tvam. Under even great duress one should never do this. To address such a person as Tvam and to kill him are equal; men of learning are degraded by such a form of address. To those that are inferior, or equal, or to disciples, the word Tvam can be used.

The heart of the sinful man always proclaims the sins he has committed. Those men who have deliberately committed sins meet with destruction by

seeking to conceal them from the good. Indeed, confirmed sinners seek to conceal their sins from others. Such ones think that their sins are witnessed by neither men nor the gods. The sinful man, overwhelmed by his sins, is born into a wretched and miserable order of being. The sins of such a man continually grow, even as the interest the usurer charge on loans increases from day to day.

If, having committed a sin, one seeks to have it removed through dharma, that sin is destroyed and leads to righteousness instead of further sins. If water be poured upon salt, the salt immediately dissolves. Even so when expiation is performed, sin dissolves. For these reasons one should never conceal a sin. Concealed, it is certain to increase. Having committed a sin, one should confess it in the presence of those that are good. They would destroy it immediately.

If one does not enjoy in good time what one has stored with hope, the consequence is that the stored wealth finds another owner after the death of him who has stored it. The wise have said that the mind of every creature is the true test of dharma. Hence, all creatures in the world have an innate tendency to achieve dharma. One should achieve dharma alone, single-handedly. Verily, one should not proclaim oneself to be righteous and walk with the standard of dharma borne aloft for the purpose of exhibition. They are said to be traders in dharma who practise it for enjoying the fruits it brings.

One should worship the gods without giving way to feelings of pride. Similarly, one should serve one's preceptor without deceit. One should make arrangements for securing to oneself invaluable wealth in the hereafter, which consists in dana given here to the deserving.'"

CANTO 163

"Yudhishtira says, 'It is seen that if a man happens to be unfortunate, he fails to acquire wealth, however great his strength. On the other hand, if one happens to be fortunate, he comes to the possession of wealth, even if he be a weakling or a fool. When, again, the time does not come for acquisition, one cannot make an acquisition with even one's best exertions. When, however, the time comes for acquisition, one wins great wealth without any effort. Hundreds of men may be seen who achieve no result even when they exert themselves to the best of their abilities. Many, again, are seen to make acquisitions without any exertion. If wealth were the result of exertion, then one could, with exertion, acquire it immediately. Verily, if the case were so, no man of learning could then be seen to take the protection for his livelihood of one destitute of learning.

Among men, that which is not destined to be attained, O king of the Bharatas, is never attained. Men are seen to fail in achieving results even by putting forth their best efforts. One man may be seen to seek wealth by hundreds of means and yet failing to acquire it; while another, without at all seeking it, is happy in its possession. Men may be seen doing evil deeds continually for wealth and yet failing to acquire it. Others are in the enjoyment of wealth without doing any evil whatever. Others, again, who are observant of the duties assigned to them by the scriptures, are without wealth.

One man may be seen to be without any knowledge of the science of morality and policy, even after he has studied all the treatises on that subject. Another, again, may be seen appointed as the prime minister of a

king without having studied the science of morality and policy at all. A learned man may be seen that is possessed of wealth; one devoid of learning may also be seen owning wealth. Both kinds of men, again, may be seen to be entirely impoverished. If, by the acquisition of learning one could acquire the felicity of wealth, then no man of learning could be found living for the very means of his subsistence under the protection of one who has no learning. Indeed, if one could obtain by the acquisition of learning all things desirable, objects like a thirsty man having his thirst slaked upon obtaining water, then none in this world would have ever shown idleness in acquiring learning.

If, one's time has not come one does not die even if one be pierced with hundreds of arrows. On the other hand, one gives up one's life if one's hour has come, even if it be a blade of grass with which one is struck.'

Bhishma says, 'If a man, setting himself to an undertaking involving even great exertion, fails to earn wealth, he should then practise severe austerities. Unless seeds be sown, no crops appear. It is by making gifts to deserving persons in this life that one acquires in one's next life numerous objects of enjoyment, even as one becomes possessed of intelligence and wisdom by waiting upon those that are venerable for years. The wise have said that one is blessed with longevity by practising the dharma of abstaining from cruelty to all creatures. Hence, one should make gifts and not solicit or accept them when made by others.

One should worship those men that are righteous. Verily, one should be sweet-speeched towards all, and always do what is agreeable to others. One should seek to attain to purity, of both mind and body. Indeed, it is paramount that one should always abstain from doing injury to any creature. When in the matter of the happiness and woe of even ants and insects, their karma of this and past lives and nature constitute the cause, it is meet, O Yudhishtira, that you should be serene.'

CANTO 164

"Bhishma says, 'If a man does good deeds himself or causes others to accomplish them, he should then expect to attain to the rewards of dharma. Similarly, if he does evil, and causes others to do evil, he should never expect to attain to the merits of righteousness. At all times, it is Time that, entering the understanding of all creatures, sets them to acts of dharma or adharma, and then confers felicity or misery upon them. When, beholding the fruits of dharma, a man understands dharma to be superior, it is then that he inclines towards righteousness and puts his faith in it. He, however, whose understanding is not firm, fails to find faith in goodness. As regards faith in dharma, it is this and nothing else that makes for belief—the steadiness of the mind.

To put faith in righteousness is the indication of wisdom in all men. The man who knows both what should be done and what should not must be mindful of timeliness, care and devotion when he sets out to achieve what is right. Righteous men who have in this life been blessed with affluence, acting of their own volition, take particular care of their souls so that they may not, in their next lives, have to be born as men with the rajoguna dominating in them.

Time, which is the supreme disposer of all things, can never make dharma the cause of misery. One should, therefore, know that the soul, which is inherently righteous, is certainly pure, and free from evil and suffering. As for adharma, it may be said that, even when of large proportions, it cannot even touch dharma, which is always protected by Time and which shines like a blazing fire. These are the two results

achieved by dharma—the stainlessness of the soul and insusceptibility to being touched by adharma. Verily, dharma is always fraught with victory. Its lustre is so great that it illumines the three worlds. A man of wisdom cannot seize a sinner and forcibly make him righteous. When seriously urged to act righteously, the sinful only do so with hypocrisy, impelled by fear.

They that are righteous among the Sudras never betake themselves to such hypocrisy under the plea that men of the Sudra varna are not allowed to live according to any of the four prescribed asramas. I will tell you particularly what the svadharmas truly are of the four varnas. As far as their bodies are concerned, individuals belonging to all the four orders have the five primal elements for their constituent ingredients. Indeed, in this respect, they are all of the same substance. For all that, distinctions exist between them in respect of both practices relating to life or the world and also their svadharma. Notwithstanding these distinctions, sufficient liberty of action is left to them by which all men may attain to an equality of condition. The regions of grace which represent the consequences or rewards of dharma are not eternal, for they are destined to come to an end. Dharma itself, however, is eternal. When the cause is eternal, why is the effect not so? Listen to the answer to this.

Only that dharma is eternal which is not promoted by the desire of fruit or reward. That dharma which is prompted by the desire of reward is not eternal. Hence, the reward though undesired that attaches to the first kind of dharma—attainment of identity with Brahman—is eternal. The reward, however, that attaches to that dharma prompted by desire of the reward of swarga and enjoyment, is not eternal.

All men are equal in respect of their physical organism. All of them, again, are possessed of souls that are equal in regard of their nature. When death comes, all else dissolves. What remains is the inceptive will to achieve dharma. That, indeed, reappears of itself in the next life. When such is the result, when the enjoyments and endurances of this life are due to the karma of a past life, the inequality of lot discernible among human beings cannot be regarded as in any way anomalous. So also, it is seen that those creatures that belong to the intermediate orders of existence are equally subject, in the matter of their actions, to the influence of example.'"

CANTO 165

Vaisampayana said, "That perpetuator of Kuru's race, Yudhishtira the son of Pandu, wanting to acquire the dharma which destroys sin, further questions Bhishma who lies on a bed of arrows.

Yudhishtira says, 'What is truly beneficial for a man in this world? What is that by doing which one may earn happiness? By what may one be cleansed of all one's sins? Indeed, what is that which is destructive of sin?'

The royal son of Santanu, O best of men, duly recites the names of the deities to Yudhishtira who was eager to listen.

Bhishma says, 'O son, the following names of the Devas, with those of the Rishis, if duly recited morning, noon and evening, become efficacious cleansers of all sins. Whatever sins of body or mind one might commit by day or by night, or during the two twilights, consciously or unconsciously, one is sure to be cleansed therefrom and become pure by reciting these names. He that speaks these names never becomes blind or deaf; indeed, by taking these names, one always succeeds in attaining to what is beneficial. Such a man is never born in the intermediate order of beings, never goes to hell, and never becomes a human being of any of the mixed castes. He has never to fear the accession of any disaster or tragedy. When death comes, he is never frightened or bewildered.

The resplendent Master of all the Devas and Asuras, worshipped by all creatures, inconceivable, indescribable, the life of all living beings, and unborn, is the Pitamaha Brahma, the Lord of the universe. His chaste consort is Savitri. Then comes that Origin of the Vedas, the Creator Vishnu, otherwise called Narayana of immeasurable puissance. Then comes the

three-eyed Lord of Uma; then, Skanda, the senapati of the celestial forces; then Visakha; then Agni, the eater of sacrificial libations; then Vayu, the god of wind; then Chandramas; then Aditya, the sun god, endued with splendour; then the illustrious Sakra, the Lord of Sachi; and Yama with his consort Dhumorna; and Varuna with Gauri; Kubera the Lord of treasures, with his wife Riddhi; the gentle and illustrious cow Surabhi; the great Rishi Visravas; Sankalpa, Varuna, Ganga; the other sacred rivers; the diverse Maruts; the Balakhilyas crowned with tapodhana; the island-born Krishna; Narada; Parvata; Viswavasu; the Hahas; the Huhus; Tumburu; Chitrasena, the celestial messenger of wide celebrity; the most blessed Apsaras—Urvasi, Menaka, Rambha, Misrakesi, Alambusha, Viswachi, Ghritachi, Panchachuda and Tilottama; the Adityas, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Pitris; Dharma Deva; Vedic lore, tapasya, diksha, dridhata in religious acts, the Pitamaha, day and night, Kasyapa the son of Marichi, Sukra, Brihaspati, Mangala, the son of earth, Budha, Rahu, Sanaischara, the constellations, the seasons, the months, the fortnights, the year, Garuda, the son of Vinata, the several oceans, the sons of Kadru, the Nagas; Satadru, Vipasa, Chandrabhaga, Saraswati, Sindhu, Devika, Prabhasa, the lakes of Pushkara, Ganga, Mahanadi, Vena, Kaveri, Narmada, Kulampuna, Visalya, Karatoya, Ambuvahini. Sarayu, Gandaki, the great Lohita river, Tamra, Aruna, Vetravati, Parnasa, Gautami, Godavari, Krishnavena, Dvija, Drishadvati, Kaveri, Vankhu, Mandakini Prayaga, Prabhasa, the sacred Naimisha, Kasi which is sacred to Visweswara or Mahadeva, Manasarovara, lake of crystalline water, Kurukshetra, full of many sacred waters, Kshirsagara the foremost of oceans, tapasya, dana, Jambumarga, Hiranwati, Vitasta, the Plakshavati river, Vedasmriti, Vedavati, Malava, Aswavati, all sacred tirthas on earth, Gangadwara, the sacred Rishikulya, the Chitravaha river, the Charmanwati, the sacred Kausiki the Yamuna, the Bhimarathi river, the great Bahuda river, Mahendravani, Tridiva Nilika, Saraswati, Nanda, the other Nanda, the large sacred Lake Gaya, Phalgutirtha Dharmarayana the sacred forest that is peopled with the Devas, the holy Akasa Ganga, the Lake Pushkara created by the Grandsire Brahma, which is sacred and celebrated over the three worlds, and auspicious and able to cleanse all sins, the Himavat mountain endued with the most excellent herbs, the Vindhya mountain with diverse kinds of metals, containing many tirthas and overgrown with medicinal herbs; Meru, Mahendra, Malaya, Sweta imbued with silver, Sringavat, Mandara, Nila, Nishada, Dardurna, Chitrakuta,

Anjanabha, the Gandhamadana mountains; the sacred Somagiri, the various other mountains, the cardinal points of the sky, the subsidiary points, the earth, all the trees, the Viswedevas, the firmament, the constellations, the planets and the deities—let these all, named and unnamed, purify and save!

The man who takes the names of these is cleansed of all his sins. By hymning their praises and gratifying them, one becomes free from every fear. Verily, the man who delights in uttering the hymns in praise of the deities is washed of all such sins as lead to birth in impure orders. After this recital of the deities, I will name those learned Brahmanas crowned with ascetic merit and success and who can exorcise one of every sin.

They are Yavakrita and Raibhya and Kakshivat and Aushija, and Bhrigu and Angiras and Kanwa, and the mighty Medhatithi, and Barhi possessed of every accomplishment. These all belong to the east. Unmuchu, Pramuchu, all highly blessed, Swastyatreya of great energy, Agastya of great prowess, the son of Mitra and Varuna; Dridhayu and Urdhabahu, those two foremost and most celebrated of Rishis—these dwell in the south. Hear now of the Rishis that dwell in the west. They are Ushango with his brothers, Parivyadha of great energy, Dirghatamas, Gautama, Kasyapa, Ekata, Dwita, Trita, Durvasa, the righteous-souled son of Atri, and great Saraswat. The Rishis that worship the Devas in sacrifices, and dwell in the north are Atri, Vasishta, Saktri, Parasara's son Vyasa of great tejas, Viswamitra, Bharadwaja, Jamadagni the son of Richika, Rama, Auddalaka, Swetaketu, Kohala, Vipula, Devala, Devasarman, Dhaumya, Hastikasyapa, Lomasa, Nachiketa, Lomaharsana, Ugrasravas, and Bhrigu's son Chyavana.

These are the Rishis possessed of the most profound Vedic lore. They are primeval Rishis, O king, whose names, if taken, can purify one of every sin.

Listen now to names of the principal kings. They are Nriga, Yayati, Nahusha, Yadu, Puru of great energy, Sagara, Dhundhumara, Dilipa of great prowess, Krisaswa, Yauvanaswa, Chitraswa, Satyavat, Dushmanta, Bharata who became an illustrious Emperor of many kings, Yavana, Janaka, Dhrishtaratha, Raghu, that foremost of kings, Dasaratha, the heroic Rama, that slayer of Rakshasas, Sasabindu, Bhagiratha, Harischandra, Marutta, Dridharatha, the highly fortunate Alarka, Aila, Karandhama, that foremost of men, Kasmira, Daksha, Ambarisha, Kukura, Raivata of great fame, Kuru, Samvarana, Mandhatri of unbaffled prowess, the Rajarishi Muchukunda, Jahnu who was much favoured by Jahnavi the Ganga, the first of all kings

Prithu, son of Vena, Mitrabhanu, Priyankara, Trasadasyu, Sweta that best of royal sages, the celebrated Mahabhisha, Nimi, Ashtaka, Ayu, the Rajarishi Kshupa, Kaksheyu, Pratardana, Devodasa, Sudasa, Kosaleswara, Aila, Nala, the royal sage Manu, that Lord of all creatures, Havidhara, Prishadhara, Pratipa, Santanu, Aja, the elder Barhi, Ikshvaku of great fame, Anaranya, Janujangha, the Rajarishi Kakshasena, and many others who were great indeed but remain unnamed.

That man who, rising at early dawn, takes the names of these kings at the two sandhyas, at sunset and sunrise, with a pure body and mind and without focused attention, acquires great religious punya. One should hymn the praises of the Devas, the Devarishis and the Rajarishis and say, "These Lords of the creation will ordain my growth and long life and fame. Let no calamity be mine, let no sin defile me, and let me have no opponents or enemies. Without doubt, victory will always be mine and an auspicious end hereafter!'"

CANTO 166

Janamejaya said, "While that Kurusattama Bhishma, greatest of his vamsa, lay on a bed of arrows, a bed always coveted by Kshatriya heroes, and when the Pandavas sat around him, my great Grandsire Yudhishtira of much wisdom listened to these expositions of mysteries with respect to dharma and had all his doubts resolved. He heard also what the niyamas and vidhis are that apply to the subjects of dana and dakshina, and had all his doubts removed about both dharma and artha. I ask you now, O learned Brahmana, to tell me what else the great Pandava king did."

Vaisampayana said, "When Bhishma falls silent, the entire circle of kings and heroes who sit around him become perfectly quiet. Indeed, they all sit motionless there, like figures painted on stone. Then, Vyasa, the son of Satyavati, having reflected for a moment, addresses the royal son of Ganga, saying, 'O Devavrata, the Kuru King Yudhishtira has been restored to his own nature, along with all brothers and followers. With Krishna of great intelligence by his side, he bends his head in reverence to you. You must now give him leave to return to the city.'

Thus addressed by the holy Vyasa, the royal son of Santanu and Ganga dismisses Yudhishtira and his counsellors. Addressing his grandson in a loving voice, Bhishma says, 'Do you return to the city, O king. Let the fever of your heart be dispelled. Do you adore the Devas in many sacrifices distinguished by large gifts of food and wealth, as Yayati himself did, O best of kings endued with bhakti and samyama. Devoted to the svadharma of the Kshatriya varna, do you, O son of Pritha, gratify the Pitris and the Devas. You shall earn great benefits if you do this.

Indeed, let the fever of your heart be entirely dispelled. Do you gladden all your subjects. Do you assure them and establish peace among all. Do you also honour all your well-wishers with such rewards as they deserve. Let all your friends and well-wishers live, depending on you for their means, even as birds depend on a full-grown tree laden with fruit and standing on a sacred spot. When the hour comes for my departure from this world, come here again, O king. The time when I shall leave my body is when the sun stops in his southward journey, Dakshinayana, and begins his return northwards in Uttarayana.'

The son of Kunti answers, 'Tathaastu, so be it!' and salutes his Grandsire with reverence and then sets out, with all his relatives and followers, for the city called after the elephant. Placing Dhritarashtra at the head of his party and also Gandhari, so very devoted to her husband, and accompanied by the Rishis and Krishna, as also by the citizens of Hastinapura and the inhabitants of the countryside and by his counsellors, O Rajan, that foremost one of Kuru's race enters the city named after the elephant."

CANTO 167

Vaisampayana said, “Now the royal son of Kunti, having duly honoured the citizens and the inhabitants of the provinces, dismisses them to their respective homes. The Pandava king then consoles the women who had lost their heroic husbands and sons in the Great War, and gives them abundant wealth. Having recovered his kingdom, Yudhishtira of great wisdom finally has himself duly installed on the throne. With diverse and countless acts of goodwill, that Purushottama reassures and comforts all his subjects. That best of men of dharma sets himself to earn the substantial blessing of Brahmanas, of his foremost military officers and the leading citizens.

Having passed fifty nights in the capital, the Kuru king recalls that Uttarayana is upon the world, the time his Pitamaha Bhishma had told him that he would leave the world. Accompanied by a number of priests he sets out of the city named after the elephant, for he has seen the sun cease his southward journey and turn north. Yudhishtira takes a great quantity of ghrita with him and garlands of fine flowers and excellent sandalwood and agar wood and dark aloe wood, for the cremation of Bhishma’s body. He further brings with him many kinds of costly ornaments and invaluable gemstones. Taking Dhritarashtra and Queen Gandhari, celebrated for her virtues, and his own mother Kunti and all his brothers also, Yudhishtira of great intelligence, accompanied by Krishna and Vidura of great wisdom, as also by Yuyutsu and Yuyudhana, and by his other relatives and followers forming a large train, goes forth to Kurukshetra again, his praises sung the while by vabdhis and magadhis, many eulogists and bards.

The sacrificial fires of Bhishma are also borne along with the procession. Thus, the Kuru king sets out from his city of the elephant like a second Indra. Soon enough, he arrives at the place where the son of Santanu still lies upon his bed of arrows. He sees his Grandsire waited upon with reverence by Parasara's son Vyasa Mahabuddhi, by Narada, O Rajarishi, by Devala and Asita, and also by the unslain kings of the world arrived and assembled here from various parts of Bharatavarsha. Yudhishtira sees that his Mahatman Pitamaha, as he lay on his heroic bed, is guarded on all sides by the warriors appointed to that charge. Alighting from his chariot, Yudhishtira and his brothers solemnly greet and salute their Pitamaha, that great Parantapa. They also reverently salute the Rishis with the island-born Vyasa at their head, and are respectfully greeted by them in return.

Accompanied by his priests, each of whom resembles the Pitamaha Brahma himself, and by his brothers, Yudhishtira of unfading glory approaches Bhishma on his bed of arrows lying there surrounded by the revered Mahamunis.

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, at the head of his brothers, addresses Gangaputra Bhishma, saying, 'I am Yudhishtira, O Lord. Salutations to you, O Jahnaviputra! If you can still hear me, tell me what I should do for you. I have come here at the hour you told me to and I bring your sacred fires with me, and wait upon your command. Preceptors of all the shastras and their angas, all the branches of learning, Brahmanas, Ritwiks, my brothers, your son king Dhritarashtra of great tejas, are all here, with my counsellors as also Krishna who has no equal. Those Kshatriyas whom the war has spared and all the denizens of Kurujangala are also here. Open your eyes, O Lord of the Kuru vamsa, and look at them. We have arranged for everything that is needed for this solemn and auspicious hour, and I come bringing all of it with me. We await your command.'

Thus addressed by Kunti's son of great intellect, the son of Ganga opens his eyes and sees all the Bharatas assembled there and standing around him. Taking Yudhishtira's strong hand, Bhishma speaks to him in a voice deep as rumbling clouds. That most eloquent of men, master of words, says, 'Through great good fortune, Kaunteya, have you come here with all your counsellors, O Yudhishtira! The thousand-rayed maker of day, holy Surya, has begun his northward course. I have lain on this bed of mine for eight and fifty nights. Stretched out on these sharp arrows, I have felt that a hundred years have passed. Yudhishtira, the month of Magha has come.

This is, again, the lighted fortnight and by my calculations a fourth part of it should be over.'

Having said this to Yudhishtira, son of Dharma, Ganga's son Bhishma then salutes Dhritarashtra and says to him 'O king, you are well-conversant with dharma. All your doubts, again, relating to the vigyana of artha have been removed. You have waited upon many Brahmanas of great learning. The subtle sciences connected with the Vedas, all the duties of dharma, and all the four Vedas do you know well and thoroughly. And therefore, you should not grieve, O son of Kuru. That which was pre-ordained has come to pass. It could not be otherwise. You have heard the mysteries relating to the Devas from the lips of the island-born Rishi himself. Yudhishtira and his brothers are morally as much your sons as they are the sons of Pandu. Observe the duties of dharma, Dhritarashtra, and do you cherish and protect them. On their part, they are always devoted to the service of their elders.

Yudhishtira Dharmaputra is pure of soul, a true Shuddhatman. He will always prove obedient to you. I know that he is devoted to the virtues of karuna and ahimsa. He is devoted to his elders and preceptors. Alas, your own sons were all of dark and evil hearts. They were wedded to wrath and greed. Overwhelmed by envy, they were all sinners. You must not grieve for them.'

Having said this much to Dhritarashtra of deep wisdom, Bhishma now speaks to Krishna Mahabaho. Bhishma says, 'O Holy One, O God of all gods, O you that are worshipped by all the Devas and Asuras, O you who covered the three worlds with three rides, salutations to you, O wielder of the conch, the discus and the mace! You are Vasudeva, you are the golden-bodied, you are the One Purusha, you are the Creator of the universe, you are of cosmic proportions. You are Jiva. You are Sukshma, the Subtle One. You are the Supreme and eternal Soul.

Do you, O Lotus-eyed One, save me, O Foremost of all beings! Do you, give me leave, Krishna, to depart this world, O you that are Paramananda, the Supreme felicity, O First of all beings. You must always protect the sons of Pandu. You are, indeed, already their sole refuge. Once, I said to the foolish Duryodhana Durbuddhi that there is dharma where Krishna is, and that Jaya is where dharma is. I further counselled him that, relying on Krishna as his refuge, he should make peace with the Pandavas. Indeed, I repeatedly told him, *This is the fittest time for you to make peace!* The foolish Duryodhana, whose heart was given to darkness and evil did not do

my bidding. And having caused a great carnage on earth, at last he himself laid down his own life.

You, O illustrious one, I know to be that ancient and best of Rishis who dwelt for many years in the company of Nara, in Badarikasrama. The Devarishi Narada told me this, as also did Vyasa of austere tapasya. Even they have said to me that Arjuna and you are the ancient Rishis Narayana and Nara born now among men. Do you, O Krishna, grant me leave, for I would now cast off my body. Blessed by you, and through your grace, I shall attain to the highest end!'

Krishna says, 'I give you leave, O Bhishma. Do you, O king, attain once more to the Vasus. O you of great splendour, you have not been guilty of a single transgression in this world. Rajarishi, you always were and still are devoted to your sire Santanu. You are, therefore, like a second Markandeya. It is for that reason that death awaits your pleasure even as your slave.'

When Krishna has said this, Bhishma, son of Ganga, once more addresses the Pandavas led by Dhritarashtra, and his other friends and well-wishers, 'I wish to cast off my prana, my life-breath. You must all give me your leave to do so. You should all strive to attain to Truth. Truth is the highest power. You must always live with Brahmanas of righteous conduct, who are devoted to tapasya, always abstain from any cruelty, and who have their souls under control.'

Having said these words to his friends and having embraced them all, Bhishma once more addresses Yudhishtira, 'O king, let all Brahmanas, especially those that are endowed with wisdom, let them who are preceptors, those who are priests able to assist at sacrifices, be worthy of adoration to you.'"

CANTO 168

Vaisampayana said, “Having said this to all the Kurus, Santanu’s son Bhishma falls silent for a time. He then stills and holds his life-breaths, successively, in those parts of his body that are indicated in yoga. The prana of that Mahatman rises up through the chakras of his body, and all the arrows fall out, of themselves, from those parts of the body of Santanu’s son through which the prana rises with yoga, their wounds cleared miraculously, their gaping wounds healing, wound-mouths closing and becoming smooth, one after another. Even in the midst of those Mahatmans, including the great Rishis with Vyasa at their head, the sight is a most uncanny and marvellous one, O king. Within a short time, all of Bhishma’s body is shaftless and woundless. Seeing this miracle, all those great and distinguished men, with Krishna first among them, and all the Munis with Vyasa, are filled with wonder.

Restrained firmly and unable to escape through any of the bodily outlets, Bhishma’s prana, his life, at last pierces the crown of his head like a lustrous comet and flares up and away toward swarga. Batteries of celestial drums resound on high and unearthly flowers of light pour down out of the sky. The Siddhas and divine Rishis, filled with delight, exclaim, ‘Uttamam! Uttamam!’

Truly like some flaming, pulsating star, the prana of Bhishma emerges through the crown of his head, courses up through the firmament and vanishes. Even thus, O great king, does Santanu’s son, that pillar of Bharata’s race, unite himself with eternity.

Then the Mahatman Pandavas and Vidura pile a funeral pyre with a quantity of the most fragrant wood and sprinkle it liberally with diverse kinds of scented oils. Yuyutsu and others stand by as spectators to these preparations. Yudhishtira and Vidura wrap Bhishma's body in a silken cloth and cover it with copious flowers and garlands. Yuyutsu holds a regal chatra over the body, while Bhimasena and Arjuna both hold yak-tails whisks, chamaras of pure white. The two sons of Madri hold two Kshatriya helmets in their hands. Yudhishtira and Dhritarashtra stand at the feet of the departed lord of the Kurus; taking up palmyra fans, they all stand around the body, which now exudes a redolence of heaven, and begin to fan it softly.

The Pitri yagna for Bhishma Mahatman is then duly performed. Many libations are poured upon the sacred fire. The singers of Samans sing many hymns. Finally, covering the body of Ganga's son with sandalwood and black aloe and bark, as well as other aromatic fuel, and touching fire to the pyre, setting it alight, the Kurus with Dhritarashtra and the others, stand on the right side of the blazing thing until it burns down.

Having thus cremated the body of the son of Ganga, those greatest heroes of the Kuru vamsa take themselves to the sacred Bhagirathi, accompanied by the Rishis. They are followed by Vyasa, by Narada, by Asita, by Krishna, by the royal women of the Bharata vamsa, as also by such of the citizens of Hastinapura as have come there. Arrived at the holy river, all of them offer tarpana, oblations of water, to the Mahatman Bhishma, son of the same Ganga.

After the oblations of water have been offered by them to her son, Goddess Bhagirathi rises up from her stream, weeping and distraught. Through her lamentations, she cries to the Kurus, 'You sinless ones, listen to me as I tell you all that transpired with my son. Possessed of regal conduct and disposition, and endowed with wisdom and lofty birth, my son was the benefactor of all the elders of his race. He was devoted to his father and kept the highest vratas. Not even his guru, Jamadagni's son Rama of untold tejas, could vanquish him in battle, not with the greatest, most powerful devastras. Alas, that Kshatriya has been killed by Sikhandi. Oh, you kings, my heart is surely made of adamant, for it does not break even at the vanishment of that son from my sight!

At the swayamvara at Kasi, from a single ratha, he routed all the assembled Kshatriyas of the world and took the three princesses for his

step-brother Vichitravirya. There was no one on earth to equal him in might or prowess. Alas, that my heart does not break upon hearing of the slaughter of that son of mine by Sikhandi!’ And she sobs uncontrollably.

Hearing the goddess of the great river lamenting so, Krishna consoles her. Krishna says soothingly, ‘O Susheele, most gentle one, be comforted. Do not yield to grief, O you of incomparable sanctity and beauty. Have no doubt, your son has gone to the highest heavens of grace. He was one of the Mahatejasvin Vasus. Through a curse, O you of unworldly beauty, had he to be born among men. It does not become you to grieve for him.

By Kshatriya dharma, he was cut down by Arjuna on the field of battle, even while he fought. He fell nobly. He was not slain, O devi, by Sikhandi. Why, Indra himself could not kill Bhishma in battle when he stood with his bow in hand. I say to you, Atisundari, your son has gone straight into swarga of every bliss. I tell you all the gods together could not slay Bhishma in battle. Do not, therefore, O Ganga, grieve for that son of the Kuru vamsa. He was one of the Vasus, O devi. Your son has gone to Devaloka, so let the fever of your heart be dispelled.’”

Vaisampayana continued, “Thus spoken to by the divine Krishna, that first among all rivers casts off her grief, O great king, and is restored to equanimity. Having honoured and worshipped the devi Ganga, all the kings there, led by Krishna, seek her leave and then depart from her sacred banks.”



THE COMPLETE

MAHABHARATA

Aswamedha Parva • Asramavasika Parva • Mausala Parva
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{12}

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Series End Dedication

To
Maharishi Veda Vyasa, greatest of all poets
his divine scribe Lord Ganapathy
and
first and last
Yasodha's son KRISHNA the *All*

—Ramesh Menon

To the memory of
Malti & Ayodhya Nath Shukla
Gargi & Kartar Nath Dubey
& to Suman, Amitabh & Mandakini Dubey

—Manjulika Dubey

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Aswamedha Parva

ASWAMEDHIKA PARVA

CANTO 1

AUM. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Vaisampayana said, "King Dhritarashtra offers libations of water, tarpana, to the manes of Bhishma. Mahabaho Yudhishtira, his heart in turmoil and his eyes filled with tears, setting his blind uncle before him, climbs back to the bank of the Ganga, where he sinks to the ground like an elephant shot by a hunter. Bhima comes forward to support his brother, urged on by the Parantapa Krishna, who exclaims, 'This should not be!' The Pandavas, seeing Yudhishtira Dharmaraja distraught and prostrate, sighing again and again, are overwhelmed by grief and sit down around him.

Dhritarashtra, blessed with percipience and the inward vision of wisdom, sorely afflicted by the death of his sons, exhorts Yudhishtira: 'Arise, O tiger among the Kurus, and attend to your kingly duties. By Kshatriya usage, O Kaunteya, you have conquered this Earth. Enjoy her now with your brothers and friends, Naresha. Foremost among the righteous, I do not see why you should grieve. It is Gandhari and I who should mourn, Rajan, having lost a hundred sons like wealth won in a dream.

Through perversity of mind I did not heed Vidura Mahatman's words of deep import, though he sought only our own good, and now I repent. The virtuous Vidura of divine insight had said to me, "Your very vamsa will be annihilated through Duryodhana's iniquities. If you desire the welfare of your lineage, heed my advice, O King. Cast out this evil prince Suyodhana, do not allow either Karna or Sakuni ever to see him, and forbid their gambling, with no further ado. Anoint Yudhishtira as king. He is a man of profound self-restraint and will rule the world with dharma, justly. If you are not prepared to have as king Yudhishtira, son of Kunti, then, Rajan, undertake a yagna. Take charge of the kingdom yourself. Regarding all its creatures with an impartial eye, O Lord of men and advancer of your kindred, let your kinsmen subsist on your bounty."

Fool that I was, Kaunteya, I followed the wicked Duryodhana instead of listening to the far-sighted Vidura. Having turned a deaf ear to the sweet and sage counsel of the serene Vidura, I have brought upon myself this mighty sorrow, and find myself in an ocean of misery: O Rajan, behold your old father and mother sunk in wretchedness. But for your affliction, O master of men, I can find no reason.'"

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing the wise words of King Dhritarashtra, the pensive Yudhishtira is comforted.

Krishna counsels him, 'When a man mourns his departed forefathers to excess, he distresses them. Banish your sorrow now and perform many yagnas with generous gifts to the priests. Gratify the Devas with Soma rasa, and the manes of your ancestors with offerings of food and drink, as is their due. Sate your guests with meat and drink, and bestow on the destitute all the gifts they want. A man of your great intelligence should not comport himself in this manner. You know, and have experienced, all that you should; you have done what you needed to do. You have heard about the dharma of the Kshatriya from Bhagirathi's son Bhishma, from Krishna Dwaipayana, from Narada and Vidura. You, of all men, must not cling to the way of fools but, following in the footsteps of your forefathers, shoulder your burden.

It is meet for a Kshatriya to attain Swarga by his own merit. The warriors who have been killed during the war will ever remain in the realms of heaven. Abandon your grief, mighty sovereign, and know that whatever happened was destined exactly as it came to pass. No way can you see again those who were slain in this war.'

The serene Govinda pauses, and Yudhishtira, prince of the righteous, answers him thus: 'O Krishna, full well do I know the love you bear me, for you have always favoured me with affection and friendship. And, O Gadadhara, Chakradharin, Yadava, most glorious one, if you were now readily to give me your leave to retire to the forest to take sannyasa, you

would grant my deepest wish. I can find no peace after having killed my Pitamaha and that foremost of men, Karna, who never turned away from a battle. Janardana, allow me to renounce the world, to perform tapasya, so that I may be freed from this heinous sin and my mind may be purified.'

At this, Vyasa tejasvin, knower of the purusharthas and the four asramas of life, attempts to hearten his troubled grandson: 'My child, your mind has not found its calm, and it is puerile sentiment that possesses you yet once more. Why is it, O child, that you scatter our words again and again to the four winds? You know the dharma of the Kshatriya, who lives by war. A king who has followed his svadharma should not allow himself to be overwhelmed by sorrow.

You have faithfully attended the exposition of the entire doctrine of Mukti, and I have often removed your doubts springing from attachment. But it seems you fail to heed what I say, or some obduracy of understanding makes you forget it clean. It should not be so; such ignorance is not worthy of you. Sinless one, you know of many ways of expiation for violence and sin, and you have been instructed exhaustively in the dharma of kings and the punya of giving daana. Bhaarata, when you know all this, and the Agama scriptures as well, how can you let yourself be swayed by sorrow, as though you were benighted?'"

CANTO 3

"Vyasa goes on to say, 'Yudhishtira, it seems to me that you are deficient in wisdom. No man does anything through his own power; it is God who causes him to engage in deeds, good or bad. Where, then, is there room for self-reproach? Yet you judge yourself as a sinner. So, Bhaarata, listen to how you can atone for your transgressions. Those who sin can always purify themselves through penance, sacrifice and charity. Evil-doers, O Rajan, Narottama, are cleansed by yagna, tapasya and daana. The Devas and Asuras undertook sacrifices to secure punya; yagnas are of supreme importance. Through great yagnas alone have the Devas waxed powerful, and it is through those performances that they vanquished the Danavas.

Now, O Yudhishtira, prepare to perform the Rajasuya as well as the Sarvamedha and the Naramedha yagnas. Then must you, like Dasaratha's son Rama, and Dushyanta and that puissant Lord of the Earth, Sakuntala's son Bharata, your ancestor, conduct the Aswamedha yagna consummately, as ordained, with munificent dakshinas.'

Yudhishtira replies, 'Beyond doubt, the Aswamedha purifies Kshatriyas. But I have a limitation, to which you must attend. Having caused this vast carnage of kindred, Dvijottama, I cannot dispense daana on even a small scale, as I have no wealth to give. Nor can I solicit any from the survivors of the Great War, the young sons of kings, whose wounds are still raw, and who are suffering untold sorrow from their own bereavements and deprivation. Having destroyed the world as we knew it, how can I,

stricken as I am myself, O Mahamuni, seek tribute now from these young ones to perform so immense a sacrifice?

For Duryodhana's sins, the kings of the Earth have all been killed, and we have reaped ignominy. For the sake of kingdom and wealth, Duryodhana laid waste this very Bhumi, and the coffers of Dhritarashtra's evil son are empty. The Earth is the dakshina, the gift made to the Brahmanas; this is the first and cardinal law laid down for the horse sacrifice. The learned accept that, under certain circumstances, this law may be set aside and some other dakshina take the place of the Earth—but, my lord, I do not even remotely possess wealth which could be given in her place. Can you, Pitamaha, counsel me in this quandary?'

Krishna Dwaipayana reflects silently for a while, then says to the Dharmaraja, 'The exhausted Kuru treasury shall again be filled, O son of Pritha. Upon Himavat mountain is hidden gold and treasure left by the Brahmanas who performed the Aswamedha yagna of the Rajarishi Marutta.'

Yudhishtira asks, 'How was all that gold amassed for Marutta's yagna? When was he king?' Vyasa replies, 'Prithaputra, if you are anxious to hear about that ancient king of the Karandhama vamsa, listen to me and I will tell you about the reign of that Rajadhiraja of immeasurable majesty and wealth.'"

CANTO 4

"Yudhishtira says, 'Righteous one, I want to hear the tale of Rajarishi Marutta. O Dwaipayana, sinless Muni, tell it to me.'

Vyasa says, 'In the Krita Yuga, O child, Manu was Lord of the Earth and wielded the sceptre over all the world. His son was Prasandhi. Prasandhi had a son named Kshupa, whose son was Ikshwaku, that Lord of men. King Ikshwaku had a hundred sons endowed with pre-eminent piety, O Rajan, and made all of them kings.

The eldest of them, Vinsa, was the model for all bowmen. Vinsa's son was the auspicious Vivinsa. Vivinsa had fifteen sons, mighty archers, reverential to Brahmanas, truthful, gentle and well-spoken. The eldest of them, Khaninetra, oppressed his brothers; but, having conquered the entire kingdom hitherto devoid of all troubles, Khaninetra could not retain his sovereignty, nor were the people pleased with him. They dethroned him, and were happy to make his son Survacha king in his stead.

Survacha, noting the lapses of his father, and their outcome, worked zealously for the welfare of his people. Ever devoted to Brahmanas, he restrained his passions and his very thoughts, always spoke the truth and was the purest of men. His subjects were well pleased with that Mahatman, constant in virtue. However, with his ceaseless service and generosity, his treasury came to be greatly depleted. The feudal princes who swarmed around him banded together and turned on their king. Besieged by many foes, and with his resources diminished, Survacha, his retainers and the people in his capital suffered great tribulation. Yet, though his strength had

dwindled much, his enemies could not kill the king, O Yudhishtira, for his power was founded in dharma.

When he and his people had reached the extreme depths of misery, he blew a breath onto his palm, and from it there issued a great supernatural army, with which he vanquished in a day all the surrounding kings on the borders of his land. For that, O Rajan, he was celebrated with the title of Karandhama.

Karandhama's son Avikshita, born at the beginning of the Treta Yuga, was the equal of Indra himself, blessed with grace and invincible even against the immortals. He subdued all the other kings of the world and, by virtue of his wealth and prowess, became their emperor. He was indeed like Indra himself in valour and majesty. He performed great yagnas past counting, and took delight in dharma, holding his senses and passions in firm check. In tejas he resembled the Sun and in forbearance the Earth herself; in intelligence, he was like Brihaspati, and in calmness, like the mountain Himavat.

Avikshita's deeds, his speech, his patience and fortitude brought great joy to the hearts of his subjects. He performed hundreds of Aswamedha yagnas, and the potent and learned Angira himself served as his priest. Avikshita's son Marutta surpassed even his father in his great and lordly gunas, in dharma and renown, and possessed the strength of ten thousand elephants. He was like another Vishnu in the world.

Seeking to perform yet another great sacrifice, that virtuous king once came to Mount Meru, north of Himavat. Upon the immense golden mountain Marutta meant to undertake his sacrificial rites. He had splendid golden vessels forged by the greatest smiths in the land, who wrought sacred vessels, thrones and other marvellous artifacts without number. He caused the yagnasala to be marked and consecrated. And there, indeed, did that righteous Lord of Earth Marutta undertake his sacrifice.'"

CANTO 5

"Yudhishtira asks, 'Most eloquent one, how did King Marutta become so powerful? And how, O Dvija, did he come by so much gold? Where now, O revered grandsire, is all his wealth? And how, Muni, can we secure that treasure?'

Vyasa answers, 'As the children of Prajapati Daksha, the Asuras and the Devas, constantly challenged each other, so did Angira's sons, Brihaspati and the Rishi Samvarta, of tremendous and equal tejas and vratas. Brihaspati harassed his brother until Samvarta could no longer bear his provocations. He renounced everything and went away into the forest with nothing to cover his body, O Bhaarata, save the sky.

Indra, having vanquished and destroyed the Asuras and wrested sovereignty over the celestial realm, appointed as his priest Angira's eldest son Brihaspati, best of Brahmanas, who had once been the Kulaguru, the family-priest, of King Karandhama. Matchless among men in might, prowess and character, powerful like Satakratu himself, of immaculate rectitude and stern vows, Karandhama had countless vahanas and warriors, many followers, rich and superb palaces with magnificent thrones and beds, and every other manner of opulence, all created from dhyana and the breath from his lips. Through his inherent virtues and might, he had brought every other king under his sway.

Then, having lived as long as he pleased and having enjoyed a surfeit of all that he desired, Karandhama rose bodily into Swargaloka. His son Avikshita, conqueror of his enemies, righteous as Yayati, brought all the Earth under his dominion; in both merit and might, he resembled his father.

Avikshita’s son Marutta, of tremendous tejas, was like another Indra. The sea-clad Bhumi Devi felt herself irresistibly drawn towards him. Marutta was always wont to defy Indra, and the king of the Devas, too, had no love for that godlike Kshatriya. But Marutta, master of the Earth, was pure and possessed of perfection and, despite all Indra’s efforts, he could not prevail over the king.

Riding his Amrita-born steed, Indra came with the Devas to Brihaspati and said, “O Guru, if you want to please me, do not be Marutta’s Ritvija for any yagna he performs, either for the Devas or the Pitrs. I am sovereign of the three worlds, while proud Marutta is only king of the Earth. Brahmana, having been priest of the immortal Lord of the celestials, will you now be the priest of a mere mortal king? Either embrace my cause, or Marutta’s. Abandon his service, be always only at mine, and do so gladly.”

Brihaspati reflected on this for a moment, then replied to Devendra, “You are the Lord of the Devas, indeed, of all creatures. In you the worlds are established. You destroyed Namuchi, Viswarupa and Bala. You alone encompass the highest weal of all the divine ones; you, O Indra, sustain both Swarga and Bhumi. Best of gods, scourge of Paka, how indeed, having served as your priest, can I serve a mortal king? Hear my pledge: even if Agni were to cease giving heat and warmth, even if Bhumi Devi were to change her nature or Surya Deva cease to give light, I will never break this my solemn pledge to you.”

At this Indra was rid of the raging envy he felt towards Marutta and, praising his guru Brihaspati, returned to his own abode.’”

CANTO 6

"Vyasa says, 'The ancient legend of Brihaspati and the wise Marutta is told in this connection. Hearing of the pact made by Angira's son Brihaspati with Indra, King Marutta made the necessary preparations for a great sacrifice. His mind set on the mahayagna, the eloquent grandson of Karandhama went to Brihaspati and said, "Mahamuni, I have decided to undertake the Aswamedha yagna, in accordance with your directive, as you had once proposed to me, and I want you to be my chief Ritvija. I have assembled everything needed for the yagna. Most exalted one, you are our Kulaguru, so take all these sacrificial components and perform the yagna."

Brihaspati said, "Lord of the Earth, I do not want to perform your sacrifice. Indra has made me his priest, and from now on I will perform sacrifices only for him." Marutta said, "You are our hereditary family priest, whom I hold in great esteem, and I have the right to your help with my yagnas. It is meet that you be the chief priest for this sacrifice as well."

Brihaspati said, "O Marutta, I have now become priest to the Immortals; how can I perform a yagna for a mere mortal? Go or stay, as you please; from now on I will be Indra's Ritvija alone, Mahabaho, and yours nevermore. You are free to choose any other priest to preside over your yagna."'

Vyasa says, 'Marutta was perplexed and humiliated. As he journeyed homeward, burdened by anxiety, he met the wandering Devarishi Narada and stood before him, his hands folded in greeting. Narada said, "Rajarishi, you seem distraught. Is all well with you? Where have you been, sinless

one, and what disquiets you so? If you care to, tell me the cause of your distress, O best of kings, and I will bend every effort to help you." Marutta told Mahamuni Narada about how his Kulaguru had rebuffed him. "Wanting a Ritvik for my yagna, I went to Angira's son, Devaguru Brihaspati, but he spurned my offer. O Narada, I have no wish to live any longer after his rebuff. I am contaminated by the sin of failing to perform the yagna I was pledged to undertake."

Narada then spoke to the son of Avikshita, words which brought hope and life back to the king's heart. "Another powerful son of Angira, Samvarta, wanders naked and sorrowing across the earth, astonishing everyone by his condition. Go to him, O Kshatriya. If Brihaspati does not want to officiate at your yagna, the mighty Samvarta, if he is pleased with you, will do so." Marutta said, "You have breathed new life into me! Most eloquent Narada, tell me where I can find Samvarta, tell me how I can serve and please him, for if he also were to refuse me, I surely would not want to live."

Narada said, "Samvarta roams the city of Varanasi at his whim, in the garb of a madman, searching for a sight of the Mahadeva Siva. Go to Kasi and, when you reach the gates of the city, set a dead body there. The man who turns away on seeing the corpse, know him to be Samvarta. Once you recognize him, Marutta, follow him wherever that man of power goes until you come to a secluded place, where you must prostrate yourself at his feet in supplication. If Samvarta demands to know who told you about him, tell him it was I, Narada. If he then asks you to follow me, tell him without hesitation that I have entered into a sacred fire and turned myself to ashes."

Ready to follow Narada's advice, Marutta made his reverences to the Devarishi and repaired to the city of Varanasi. The great king did exactly as the sage had instructed him. No sooner had he placed a corpse at the gates of the city, than Samvarta appeared there and, on seeing the dead body, abruptly turned and walked away. With folded hands, Marutta followed him, begging to be received as his sishya.

They came to a lonely place, where the Rishi covered the king with mud and ashes, phlegm and spittle, and strode off again. Marutta, harried and oppressed by the Brahmana, still followed him, all the while trying with folded hands to placate him. At length, exhausted, Samvarta came to a sacred nyagrodha tree, and sat down to rest under its dense canopy.'

CANTO 7

'Samvarta demanded, "How have you come to know me? Who told you about me? Tell me truly, if you wish your own good. If you tell me the truth you will have what you desire, but if you tell me a lie your head will burst into a hundred pieces."

Marutta said, "Narada, wandering on his way, told me that you are the son of my Kulaguru Angira, and this information drew me gladly towards you." Samvarta said, "You speak the truth. Narada knows me to be a performer of sacrifices. Now tell me where he is." Marutta said, "That prince among Devarishis shared this intelligence with me, commended me to your care, and then entered a sacred fire."

Hearing this, Samvarta was gratified and said, "Indeed, I can do what you want from me." Then, O Kshatriya, raving at the king like one deranged, abusing him wildly, Samvarta said to Marutta, "I am disordered in my mind and given to random caprice. Why are you bent upon performing this sacrifice with a priest of such a disposition? My brother is more than able to undertake the greatest yagna. Why, he performs Indra's own yagnas. Ask him to conduct your sacrifice. My elder brother took from me all my possessions, material and spiritual, as well as all the yajamans on whose behalf I once undertook yagnas, leaving me with just this naked body of mine. Yet, O son of Avikshita, he is worthy of my reverence, and I cannot conduct your sacrifice without his leave. So go first to Brihaspati and obtain his permission. Only if he agrees can I perform your yagna for you."

Marutta said, "Hear me, O Samvarta, I did first go to Brihaspati but, wanting Indra's patronage, he refused to have me as his yajaman. He said,

‘I have secured the priesthood of the Immortals, and have no wish to exert myself on behalf of any mortal man. Also, Indra has forbidden me to officiate at your sacrifice, saying that since you became Lord of the Earth, you are driven by a desire to compete with him.’ Your brother assented to what Indra asked of him, saying ‘Tathaastu’. So, best of Rishis, your brother now has Indra’s patronage and protection. Although I went to him with a fervent heart, he turned me away. I now mean to expend all my resources to have you perform this yagna for me and, by your good offices, to outstrip Vasava in every way. Since Brihaspati rejected me for no fault of mine, I have no wish to seek his aid.”

Samvarta said, “I can surely accomplish what you want, O King, but only if you agree to do whatever I ask of you. I fear that when Brihaspati and Indra learn that I am helping you, as they surely will, they will be enraged and do everything in their power to injure you. Therefore, assure me of your loyalty and fortitude, so that I might be calm and constant. For if you anger me, I will reduce you and your vamsa to ashes.”

Marutta said, “If I forsake you, may I never attain the blessed regions as long as the mountains stand, and the thousand-rayed sun continues to shed light and heat on the world. If I betray you, may I never attain true wisdom, and remain forever addicted to mundane pursuits.”

Samvarta said, “O son of Avikshita, your determination to perform this yagna is praiseworthy, as is my ability to conduct the sacrifice. I say to you, O King, upon its completion you will gain imperishable punya, and rule over Indra and his Devas, and the Gandharvas as well. For myself, I have no wish for any wealth or sacrificial gifts. I want only to be revenged upon Indra and my brother. I will satisfy your wishes and make you Indra’s equal.”’

CANTO 8

'Samvarta said, "There is a forested peak called Munjavana, high among the Himalayan pinnacles, where the divine Lord of Uma is engaged in austere tapasya. There puissant Mahadeva, with Uma at his side, armed with his trisula and surrounded by Sivaganas, his attendant goblins, dwells in the shade of giant forest trees, or in caves, or roams the rugged fastnesses of the great mountain, as he pleases.

There the Rudras, the Sadhyas, the Viswadevas, the Vasus, Yama, Varuna, Kubera with all his attendants, the two Aswins, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the Yakshas, as well as the Devarishis, the Adityas of the Sun, the Maruts who rule the winds, and all manner of untamed and feral spirits, Bhutas and Pretas, worship Siva Mahatman of diverse gunas. And there, O King, the most exalted Lord sports with the wild and playful followers of Kubera, the Yakshas and Guhyakas of weird and ghoulish appearance.

Lit by its own splendour, that mountain is as bright as the morning sun. No being with natural eyes can ever discern its shape or form. Neither heat nor cold prevails there. The sun does not shine on that peak, nor do the winds blow there. Neither age nor hunger, nor thirst, nor death, nor fear can afflict anyone in that hermetic place. Parantapa, on all sides of that mountain are rich mines of gold, splendid as the rays of the sun. The legions of Kubera, the Lord of Treasures, guard these with arms raised aloft.

Marutta, take yourself to that place and worship that greatest of gods who is called Sarva, Bedha, Rudra, Sitikantha, Surapa, Suvarcha, Kapardi, Karala, Haryaksha, Varada, Tryaksha, Pushnodantabhid, Vamana, Siva,

Yamya, Avyaktarupa, Sadvritta, Sankara, Kshemya, Harikesa, Sthanu, Purusha, Harinetra, Munda, Krishna, Uttarana, Bhaskara, Sutirtha, Devadeva, Ranha, Ushnishi, Suvaktra, Sahasraksha, Midhvan, Girisa, Prasanta, Yata, Chiravasa, Bilwadanda, Siddha, Sarvadandadhara, Mriga, Vyadha, Mahan, Dhanesa, Bhava, Vara, Somavaktra, Siddhamantra, Chakshu, Hiranyabahu, Ugra, Dikpati, Lelihana, Goshtha, Vrishnu, Pasupati, Bhutapati, Vrisha, Matribhakta, Senani, Madhyama, Sruvahasta, Yati, Dhanwi, Bhargava, Aja, Krishnanetra, Virupaksha, Tikshnadamshtra, Tikshna, Vaiswanaramukha, Mahadyuti, Anangha, Sarva, Vilohita, Dipta, Diptaksha, Mahauja, Vasuretas, Suvapu, Prithu, Kritivasa, Kapalmali, Suvarnamukuta, Mahadeva, Tryambaka, Krodhana, Nrisansa, Mridu, Bahusali, Dandi, Taptatapa, Akrurakarma, Sahasrasira, Sahasracharana, Swadhaswarupa, Bahurupa, Damshtri, Pinaki, Mahayogi, Avyaya, Trisulahasta, Bhuvaneswara, Tripuraghna, Trinayana, Trilokesa, Mahanja, Sarvabhutaprabhava, Sarvabhutadharana, Dharanidhara, Isana, Visveswara, Umapati, Pasupati, Viswarupa, Maheswara, Virupaksha, Dasabhuja, Vrishavadhwaja, Ugra, Sthanu, Rudra, Iswara, Sitakantha, Aja, Sukra, Prithu, Prithuhara, Vara, Viswarupa, Bahurupa, Umapati, Anangangahara, Hara, Saranya, Chaturmukha.

Bowing down to that God of gods, you must entreat his protection and favour. And thus, Kshatriya, surrendering yourself to Mahadeva of infinite tejas, you will acquire that gold, for the man who goes there and worships him will indeed obtain that most precious treasure.”

Marutta, the grandson of Karandhama, did as he was instructed and, going to Munjavana, received from the Lord a vast store of treasure. He then prepared to perform his mahayagna, and the arrangements he made for it exceeded human capacity. The gold of Kubera was fashioned by artisans into sacrificial urns and other vessels for the sacrifice.

Hearing of Marutta’s prosperity, which eclipsed that of the gods, Brihaspati was stricken; he was beside himself with envy and distress at the thought that his brother and rival should prosper thus. Sick at heart, he grew lean and wasted and his face lost its lustre. When Indra learnt that Brihaspati was sorely afflicted, the Lord of the Devas went to him with all the Immortals.’

CANTO 9

'Indra asked him, "Do you sleep in peace, Brihaspati, and are your servants agreeable to you? Do you seek the welfare of the gods, O Brahmana, and do the gods protect you?" Brihaspati said, "I do sleep in peace in my bed, O Devendra, and my servants are to my liking. I seek the welfare of the gods, and they cherish me." Indra said, "Why then are you so pale and strained, and whence this anguish of body or mind? Tell me, Brahmana, who they are that have caused you pain, that I might exterminate them all!"

Brihaspati said, "O Indra, I have heard that Marutta will perform a splendid mahayagna at which he will give exquisite gifts, and that Samvarta will be the chief priest. I do not want him to officiate at the king's sacrifice." Indra replied, "Brahmana, knower of all sacred mantras, you attained everything that you could have desired when you became the Ritvija of the Devas, and you have passed beyond the influence of age and death. What can Samvarta do to you now?"

Brihaspati said, "Prosperity in a rival is always painful to one's feelings. It is for this very reason that you, too, with your attendant Devas persecute the Asuras, with their kith and kin, and kill the most prosperous among them. I am pale and distraught, Lord of the gods, because my rival prospers. O Indra, do everything in your power to stop the yagna of Marutta and Samvarta."

Turning to Agni, Indra said, "Jataveda, go to Marutta, taking Brihaspati with you, and say to that king that this guru will conduct his sacrifice and make him immortal." Agni said, "Tathaastu, so be it!" and went forth on his

errand, taking Brihaspati with him. The Fire God of high soul flew like a flaming wind at the end of winter, consuming forests and trees on his way, roaring and spinning at will.

Marutta said, “Behold, today I find Agni come in his own embodiment! O Muni, offer him an asana and padya, and a cow, and water to wash his feet.” Agni said, “I accept your offerings. Sinless one, know that I have come to you as Indra’s messenger.” Marutta said, “Divine Agni, is the glorious Lord of the Devas happy, and is he pleased with us, and are the other gods loyal to him? Tell me all.”

Agni said, “Bhumipala, Sakra is perfectly happy, he is pleased with you and all the other gods are indeed loyal to him. O King, listen to the message I bring from the Lord Indra. He wishes to deliver you from age, O Marutta, and has sent me here with Brihaspati, so that the high priest of the gods may conduct your great sacrifice for you, a mortal, and thereby make you immortal.”

Marutta said, “I submit to Brihaspati that, having been priest to Mahendra himself, it does not look well for him now to act as a priest for mortal men. The twice-born Brahmana Samvarta will conduct my sacrifice.”

Agni said, “If Brihaspati officiates as your priest, you will have the blessings of the Devaraja and attain the highest realm in Swarga from the great fame that will accrue to you. You will conquer all the kingdoms and lands of men, the realms on high, the loftiest domains created by Prajapati, even the entire kingdom of the gods.” Samvarta broke in furiously, “Never again dare to bring Brihaspati to Marutta; for know, O Pavaka, if you do, I will consume you with one look from my furious and fiery eyes.”

Terrified by Samvarta’s threat and trembling like the leaves of the aswattha tree, Agni returned to the gods. Seeing the conveyor of oblations return to him with Brihaspati, Indra said, “O Jataveda, did you take Brihaspati to Marutta as I told you to? What did that sacrificing king say to you? Did he agree to what I asked?” Agni said, “Marutta did not accept your offer, urged on him by me and, clasping Brihaspati’s hands, asserted repeatedly that Samvarta would act as his priest. He also said that he did not aspire to attain Bhumi, Swarga or even Brahmaloka, and that he would accept your offer if he were ever so minded.”

Indra said, “Go back to that king and tell him that if he does not do as I say, I will cast my Vajra thunderbolt down on him.” Agni said, “Let the

king of the Gandharvas go as your messenger, O Vasava, for I am afraid to go there myself. Know that the highly incensed Samvarta of great tapasya said to me in anger, 'If you come here again to offer Brihaspati's services to Marutta, I will consume you with a malevolent look from my fierce eyes.'"

Indra said, "Jataveda, it is you who burn all other things; none can reduce you to ashes. All the world is afraid of your burning touch, O conveyor of oblations, so these timorous words of yours deserve no credence." Agni said, "O Sakra, by the might of your arms you conquered Swarga, Bhumi and Akasa, yet Vritra once surely wrested the sovereignty of Devaloka from you."

Indra said, "I can reduce my foes to submission and a mountain to an atom, if I will it. But, O Vahni, as I do not accept the libation of Soma if offered by an enemy, and as I do not strike the weak with my thunderbolt, Vritra seemed to triumph over me for a time. But who among mortals can live in peace, if he incurs my wrath? I have banished the Kalakeyas down to Bhumi, expelled the Danavas from Swarga, and cast even Prahlada out of Devaloka. Which mortal man can live in peace if he provokes my enmity?"

Agni said, "Mahendra, do you remember that in olden times, when the Rishi Chyavana conducted the sacrifice for Saryati with the Aswin twins and kept the Soma for himself, you were incensed and indeed raised your hand to cast your Vajra at the sage? But that Brahmana, with the power of his tapasya, seized your very hand, the thunderbolt in it, and held you helpless, O Purandara. In his rage, he created the dreadful shape-changing Asura Mada—whose lower jaw rested on the earth while the upper one yawned into the sky, whose countless teeth were more than a hundred yojanas long, with four main fangs like unimaginable silver columns, two hundred yojanas each—that Demon whose visage struck fear into your heart.

Gnashing his fangs, Mada pursued you with his terrible pike uplifted to kill you and you, Indra, trembled before him, making a pitiful spectacle of yourself, O slayer of Danavas. Overcome with fear, you folded your shaking hands in supplication to Chyavana Muni and implored his protection. The might of Brahmanas, Sakra, is greater than that of Kshatriyas. None are more powerful than great Brahmanas and, knowing well their awesome force, I have no wish to incur the wrath of Samvarta."'

CANTO 10

'Indra said, "Even so is it. The might of Brahmanas is great, and there are none more powerful; but I cannot with equanimity bear the insolent pride of Avikshita's son, and I will strike him with my thunderbolt. Therefore, O Dhritarashtra, Lord of Gandharvas, take yourself to Marutta's court, where Samvarta attends on him, and give him this message from me: 'Kshatriya, take Brihaspati for your priest, else I will consume you with my Vajra!'"

The Gandharva went to Marutta's royal sabha, and delivered Indra's message: "Lord of men, I am the Gandharva Dhritarashtra and I bring you this message from Devendra. Rajasimha, lion among kings, the Lord of the Devas, of fathomless accomplishments, has just this to say to you: 'Take Brihaspati to be your priest for your sacrifice, else I will hurl my Vajra down on you, and you will die.'"

Marutta said, "O Purandara, O Viswadevas, O Vasus and you Aswins, all know that in this world there is no escaping the consequences of betraying a friend; it is a sin as great as Brahmahatya, slaying a Brahmana. So let Brihaspati be your priest, O Vasava Vajradharin, and Samvarta will conduct my yagna, for Indra's message does not commend itself to me, and his threat does not affright me." The Gandharva said, "O Kshatriyasimha, listen to Indra's dreadful thunder in the sky. Be certain that he will indeed hurl his thunderbolt at you. Think of your own good, for it is time."

Hearing Indra's fury roaring as if to split the sky into shards, Marutta said to Samvarta, that best of all men of dharma, absorbed in tapasya, "The thunderhead rages above, and wrathful Indra is near for certain. O prince

among Brahmanas, I seek sanctuary in you; pluck this fear from my heart. See where the Vajradharin descends on me, lighting up the ten cardinal points of the sky with his terrifying, superhuman effulgence. All who were to assist me during the yagna are also panic-stricken."

Samvarta said, "Lion among kings, I will remove your anxiety and pain with my mantras. Be calm and have no fear, for the weapons of all the gods, including that of Indra of a thousand sacrifices, will prove impotent against my mystic powers. Let Indra's lightning gash the sky and his clouds pour down their cataracts, let thunder boom and winds howl through forests and upon mountains; let Sakra blast his thunderbolt where he will; you have nothing to fear, for Agni, Vahni Deva, will protect you in every way, and you shall have all your desires fulfilled."

Marutta said, "Ah, Brahmana, my heart quails to hear the squalling tempest and terrifying crashes of thunder. My serenity has quite deserted me!" Samvarta said, "O King, your fear of the Vajra will soon leave you. I will summon great winds of my own to scatter the black-massed thunderclouds. Cast off your fear and ask me for any boon, and I will grant you whatever your heart desires."

Marutta said, "O Brahmana, what I wish is for Indra himself to appear at my yagna and accept the oblations offered him, and for all the other gods also to come and take their shares of the havis and drink the Soma rasa." Samvarta said, "I have summoned Indra with my mantras. Look, O King, where he hastens to your yagna, in his chariot drawn by supernal steeds, attended by all the other gods."

And indeed the Lord of the Devas, accompanied by the other elemental gods, approached the sacrificial altar of the son of Avikshita to drink the Soma rasa of that unrivalled monarch. King Marutta with his priest rose to receive Indra with the host of gods and, well pleased, welcomed the Lord of the Devas with all due and high worship, as laid down in the Shastras.

Samvarta said, "Welcome, O Indra, All-knowing, your presence here sanctifies this sacrifice and makes it truly a Mahayagna. O slayer of Bala and Vritra, drink once again the Soma rasa I have prepared today." Marutta said, "I bow to you O Lord of the gods, look kindly upon me, for your coming here has rendered my yagna complete, and blessed my whole life. Brihaspati's younger brother, this most excellent Brahmana, now conducts my sacrifices for me, O Surendra."

Indra said, “I know your Ritvija, Mahamuni Samvarta, Brihaspati’s younger brother and great tejasvin; indeed I have come here at his invitation. Rajan, I am well-pleased with you, and my resentment against you has vanished.” Samvarta said, “If you are pleased with us, O Devendra, direct this yagna yourself, and ordain the sacrificial portions for the Devas, so that the world knows you have done this.”

Thus petitioned by the son of Angira, Sakra himself gave directions to all the gods to create the yagnashala, raise a thousand richly appointed apartments, magnificent as in a picture, and swiftly complete a massive and durable staircase for the ascent of the Gandharvas and the Apsaras, as well as a dance arena for the Apsaras which he told them to make as wondrous as his own celestial palace in Amaravati.

Rajan, the Swargavasis fulfilled his directions in next to no time. Indra, well-pleased and adored at the great yagna of Marutta, said to him, “O Kshatriya, your Pitrs and all the Devas are gratified with your sacrifice, and have accepted your oblations joyfully. Now let the best of all Brahmanas sacrifice a red bull to Agni upon his vedi, and a sacred and consecrated blue bull of variegated hues to the Viswadevas.”

With that, the majesty and splendour of the yagna swelled in tide, that greatest of sacrifices where the gods took their offerings in person, and Sakra, their Lord, master of celestial steeds, Vasava, whom Brahmanas worship, himself assisted at the ceremonies. Now Samvarta Mahatman, effulgent as another Agni, ascended the altar, sonorously hymned the gods and poured libations of ghrita into the blazing sacred fire, to the accompaniment of holy mantras.

First of all, Indra drank the precious Soma rasa, and then the other Devas partook of the ambrosia. Then joyously, with the king’s leave, they returned to their heavenly realm satisfied—indeed, delighted. Marutta, Parantapa, his heart full, freely set hillocks of gold in diverse places for his people, and gave even more bountiful riches away to the Brahmanas. The king in his glory was as resplendent as Kubera, Lord of Treasures. His heart soaring, Marutta filled his capacious coffers with all kinds of wealth and, taking reverent leave of his spiritual preceptor Samvarta, returned to rule his realm, extending to the shores of the sea.

Great Marutta was, in his age, the very embodiment of dharma on earth, and incalculable was the treasure that he garnered during his great sacrifice. Yudhishtira, it is now time for you to seek out and retrieve his vast

store and to worship the gods with it, Dharmaraja, by performing an Aswamedha yagna.'

Exhilarated by the words of his grandsire Vyasa, son of Satyavati, Yudhishtira sets his heart on a majestic and peerless horse sacrifice, and to that end holds regular counsel with his brothers, priest and ministers."

CANTO 11

Vaisampayana said, "When Vyasa finishes speaking to Yudhishtira, the almighty Krishna, light of the Kurus, also addresses Pritha's son, racked by the carnage of the Great War, by the loss of kinsmen and friends beyond count, his face dark with grief like the sun in eclipse, or fire shrouded by smoke.

Krishna says, 'The path of sin leads inexorably to doom and bondage, and the way of dharma to Brahman and Mukti. If you understand that this is the essence of all knowledge and wisdom, how can you let yourself be overwhelmed by anguish? Your karma is not yet exhausted, nor have all your enemies perished, for you do not know those that lurk within your own body.

Let me tell you, as I have heard and understood it, the tale of the war between Indra and Vritra. Once, Vritrasura seized the entire Earth, and from the sacred and fragrant Bhumi there arose the most repulsive stench on every side, befouling the pristine element. Since smell belongs to the Mahabhuta Earth, Indra of the hundred sacrifices was enraged and hurled his thunderbolt down at Vritra. In a flash the Asura plunged into the Ocean and corrupted that precious domain too. Taste was lost, and the very seas were no longer aqueous. Indra struck Vritrasura once more with his Vajra. This time the demon entered into the realm of Light, Jyoti, extinguishing its inherent property, Sight. Once again Indra struck Vritra with his great thunderbolt, and the Asura this time entered into Vayu, Air, making away with its inherent property, Touch. Yet again Indra cast his Vajra at Vritra and

the demon entered into Akasa, the ethereal element, and spirited away its guna, primeval Sound.

Indra cast his final thunderbolt upon the Asura. This time Vritra entered into Indra's very body and, violating it, appropriated every transcendent attribute of that divine form. Indra was plunged thereby into sinister darkness, profound delusion, great Maya, O best of the Bharatas. It was Mahamuni Vasishta who comforted the Lord of the Devas and lit the lamp of his wisdom again, dispelling the solid night into which the Asura had locked him. Regaining himself, Indra now killed Vritrasura with a most subtle, intangible Vajra, neither solid nor liquid but made of foam.

Pandava, it was Sukracharya himself who related this Itihasa of deep mystery to the greatest sages, and they in turn told it to me.'"

CANTO 12

"Krishna says, 'There are two kinds of ailments, the physical and the mental, produced by the mutual action of the body and the mind, and they never arise without this interaction. Vata, pitta and kapha, the cold, the warm and the windy humours, Yudhishtira, are the essential transformations generated in the physical body. When these humours are equal and harmonious, present in due proportion, they ensure good health, for the warm humour is balanced by the cold one, the cold by the warm, and both by the one of wind.

Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are the attributes of the soul, and the sages say that their presence in due proportion creates a healthy mind. But if any one of the three dominates, the Munis enjoin some remedy to restore equilibrium. Happiness is overcome by sorrow, and sorrow by pleasure. Some people, when afflicted by sorrow, wish to recall past happiness, while others, while enjoying happiness, remember past sorrow. But you, Kaunteya, neither recall your sorrows nor your happiness; why else would you indulge in this empty delusion of grief? Perhaps it is your innate nature, which overpowers you just now, O Pandava.

Think not of the painful sight of Krishnaa, in her period, standing in the Kuru sabha wearing a single cloth to cover her body, while all you five brothers were in that court. It is not fitting for you to recall your leaving Hastinapura like beggars; or your exile, during which you covered yourselves with antelope hide and wandered in the wilderness; or how Jatasura set upon you, the battle with Chitrasena, and what the Saindhavas did when their king forcibly hauled Panchali away in his chariot.

Nor it is proper, Yudhishtira Parantapa, for you to recall how Kichaka kicked Draupadi in Virata's court, during your ajnatavasa, or the battle you fought against Bhishma and Drona. No, none of these: for now the time has come when you must fight the battle that each one must fight alone, against his own mind. Prepare now for that last war, and through dhyana and the punya of your own karma, conquer that inscrutable and most powerful of all enemies.

You will have no use during this war for weapons, for allies or attendants. The time has come for the implacably sole battle, the one against yourself. If you lose this, you will find yourself in the most wretched plight, son of Kunti; while, know this beyond doubt, if you use your wisdom to conquer your enemy, you will attain success and the highest felicity and then, knowing the destiny of all creatures and following the ways of your sires, rule your vast kingdom with dharma.'"

CANTO 13

"Krishna says, 'O Bhaarata, salvation is not attained by renouncing things external, be it even a kingdom, but by relinquishing what panders to the flesh. The virtue and felicity that come to a person who has abandoned the outer world but is still in the clutches of passion—let those belong to our enemies! The twin-syllabled Mrityu is the death of the soul, while the three-syllabled Saswatam is the eternal spirit, the very Brahman. The consciousness that this or that thing is mine, or the condition of being addicted to worldly objects, is Mrityu, and the absence of that apperception is Saswatam. These two, Brahman and Mrityu, have their seats in the hearts of all creatures, O King, and wage war with each other, remaining unseen.

If it be true that no creature is ever destroyed, then one does not make oneself guilty of the death of any creature by destroying its body. How does the world affect a man if, having acquired sovereignty over the very Earth with all its mobile and immobile creations, he does not become attached to it or engrossed in its enjoyment? But the man who renounces the world, takes to the life of a vanaprastha, living on wild roots and plants, but still craves the things of the world, remains addicted to them in his heart—why, he bears Mrityu in his mouth.

Yudhishtira, watch and observe the illusory character of your external and internal enemies, through the optic of discernment, for he who is able to perceive the nature of eternal reality is beyond the influence of the great fear of death. Men do not admire the conduct of those absorbed in worldly desires, and there is no action without a desire at its root. All desires are creations of the mind. Knowing this, wise men subjugate their desires.

The Yogi who holds communion with the Supreme Spirit, by dint of his dharma and dhyana of many former births, knows Yoga to be the immaculate way to salvation. Remembering that what the mind desires is not conducive to piety and virtue, and that the conquest of desire itself is at the root of all true dharma, such men do not engage in charity, Vedic learning and rituals, asceticism and meditation, all of whose only object is the attainment of mundane felicity. To illumine this truth, the sages versed in ancient lore sing the gaathas, the ballads called Kamagita. Listen to them, O Yudhishtira.

Kama himself says, "No man succeeds in conquering me unless he resorts to the proper methods. If, knowing my power, a man strives to overcome me by intoning prayers, I prevail by deluding him with the belief that I am himself, the ego within him; if he attempts to quell me through sacrifices and charity, I deceive him by appearing in his mind as a most radiant and virtuous being, a paragon; and if he tries to destroy me by mastering the Vedas and Vedangas, I vanquish him by appearing to be the very soul of virtue.

If a man's strength lies in truth, and he seeks to quell me through patience, I appear to him as his own mind, and he is unable to detect my separate existence; if a man of austere vratas seeks to put me to the sword through asceticism, I appear in the guise of tapasya in his mind, and he does not know me for what I am. If the man of gyana, whose purpose is Mukti, wants to subdue me, I easily seduce him and laugh in his face. Verily, I am the eternal one, without a peer, whom no creature can kill!" So says Kama Deva.

Hence, O Kshatriya, turn away from this tyrant Kama and towards Dharma, so that you can attain true felicity. Yudhishtira, prepare earnestly to undertake the Aswamedha yagna, with rituals of resplendence and daana unseen since the day of Marutta himself.

Do not allow this unworthy grief to overwhelm you again, even if it is for your kin and friends who lie slain on the field of war. You cannot bring them back to life with your tears. Your way ahead lies in performing the most magnificent sacrifices, so that you bless the ravaged world, attain enduring fame in this life, and tread the high path to salvation.'"

CANTO 14

Vaisampayana said, "With such counsel Dwaipayana Vyasa, Viswarishabha Krishna and other Mahamunis of mighty tapasya console Rajarishi Yudhishtira, who lost many kinsmen and dear friends to the Great War. Rajan, Devasthana, Narada, Bhima, Nakula, Krishnaa, Sahadeva, and Vijaya of the keen intellect, as well as other great Brahmanas versed in the Shastras—all comfort the despondent Dharmaraja so that he can emerge from his dejection.

After performing the obsequial ceremonies for the dead, and duly worshipping the Brahmanas and Devas, Yudhishtira brings under his sway the vast kingdom of the Earth, with her girdle of oceans. His mind now tranquil, that Kurusottama speaks to Vyasa, Narada and the other sages present. 'You ancient men of untold age, greatness and wisdom have removed my distress, and I find no basis left to cause me sorrow. I have also acquired great wealth, with which I can now worship the gods. O Dvijottamas, with your help, I will indeed now perform the Aswamedha yagna.

We have heard that the Himalayan realms are full of wonders. Therefore, Brahmanas, Maharishis, O Pitamaha, ordain that, with your protection, we reach the Himalayas, for the performance of our yagna depends entirely on your blessings. We seek the blessing of Devarishi Narada and the great Devasthana, for they too have spoken words of great beauty and wisdom to us for our welfare. No other man fallen into tribulation and distress ever had the fortune to secure the kindly counsel of such great friends and gurus, whom all the virtuous revere and laud.'

Thus addressed by the king, those great sages bid Yudhishtira, Krishna and Arjuna repair to the Himalayan fastnesses, and then vanish before the eyes of the assembled crowd. Yudhishtira, the lordly son of Dharma Deva, sits for a while in silence, in the place where the sons of Pandu are offering tarpana and performing funeral rites for the departed Bhishma, Karna, and all the great heroes and prominent Kauravas who have been slain during the Great War.

When they have fulfilled these duties, they give away munificent gifts to Brahmanas. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, keeping Dhritarashtra always beside him, consoling his blind and lordly uncle of the eyes of wisdom, returns to Hastinapura, takes up the reins of the kingdom and, together with his brothers, rules the Earth with dharma for his sceptre."

CANTO 15

Janamejaya asked, "O Dvijottama, when the Pandavas have recovered and pacified their kingdom, what do Krishna and Arjuna do?"

Vaisampayana said, "Rajan, Vasudeva and Dhananjaya are full of joy when the Pandavas succeed in regaining and pacifying their dominions, and set out to travel, wandering together with deep satisfaction in each other's company, even like Indra with his consort in Devaloka; they rove through picturesque forests, wondrous lakes and plateaux, to sacred places of pilgrimage and holy rivers; they enjoy themselves like the two Aswins sporting in the Nandanavana.

When they have spent some weeks ranging at will, the two come blithely to Indraprastha and the magnificent Maya sabha. There they pass their time recounting the stirring events of the war, and recalling the years of privation and suffering, not just of this life but of those past, as well: for they are indeed the ancient sages Nara and Narayana, and they can narrate even the most antique genealogies of the Rishis and the Devas.

One day, Krishna of fathomless punya, who always knows the full import of all things, speaks words of Amrita to comfort Arjuna, whose heart is deeply wounded by the death of his sons and many thousands of friends and kinsmen, although he says nothing of his anguish, being absorbed and delighted in Krishna's company. It is as if Janardana with his deep understanding and ascetic punya has removed Arjuna's great burden, bringing him to a state of perfect peace.

This is what Govinda says to Partha: 'Arjuna, terror of your enemies, your brother, the Dharmaputra, has conquered this whole Earth through the

might of your arms, the invincible strength of Bhima and the prowess of the twins. Your brother Yudhishtira now reigns supreme over Bhumi, without a rival. You know well what dharma is; it is by dharma alone that Yudhishtira regained the kingdom, from the strength of dharma that the powerful Suyodhana and his brothers, all of them avaricious, arrogant, ill-spoken and given irrevocably to evil, have been killed, along with their allies. And now that Dharmaputra rules the world again in grace and peace, I, too, have enjoyed your company in the wonderful, untamed and free wilderness.

Parantapa, what more is there to say, than that I am drawn to wherever you are—Kunti, you, Yudhishtira, the mighty Bhima and Madri's twins—by my love for all of you? We have spent a long time now in these sacred places and halls of delight, and the days have fleeted by in your company without my seeing my father Vasudeva, my brother Balarama and my other Vrishni kinsmen.

It is time now that I return to Dwaravati. So I ask you, most valorous of men, give me leave to go. When Yudhishtira was heavily stricken, Bhishma and I consoled him with pertinent Itihasas and Puranas from antiquity, and your brother, being pliant and high-minded, though our sovereign and himself versed in all forms of knowledge, paid due heed to what we said to him. That son of Dharma honours truth, and is grateful and righteous. With his virtue and good sense, the stability of his power will endure. But now, Arjuna, go you to your noble brother and tell him that I mean to return to Dwaraka. I must obtain his leave, Mahabaho, for, let alone going home to the sea-city, even if death were to come to me, I would be unwilling to do anything that might displease Yudhishtira.

Partha, I always have your welfare at heart, and I now say to you that my work here is done. Duryodhana, who ruled the world with greed and evil, is dead; his armies and allies have been slain, and the Earth, with her girdle of seas, her mountains, rivers and jungles, and the great and ancient Kuru kingdom, all have come under the sway of the wise Yudhishtira Dharmaraja.

Kurusottama, may your brother rule the world in dharma with the blessings of the greatest Siddhas, his praises always being sung by the vabdhis and magadhis of Hastinapura. Arjuna, come now with me into Yudhishtira's presence and tell him I wish to return to Dwaraka. Yudhishtira Mahatman always commands my love and respect, and I have placed my body and all the wealth that I own at his disposal. But now that Bhumi has

come under your sway and that of the immaculate Yudhishtira, the need for my remaining has passed, and only my love for you keeps me in your kingdom.'

At these words of Janardana, sadness wells up in Arjuna's heart but, honouring Krishna's wishes, he says merely, 'Tathaastu—so be it.'"

ANUGITA PARVA

CANTO 16

Janamejaya asked, "O Dvija, after the enemy was vanquished, tell me of what else was said between Krishna and Arjuna when they went to the hall of audience?"

Vaisampayana said, "As I have told you, after recovering his kingdom Arjuna spends some weeks joyfully in that palace of unearthly beauty in Krishna's company, doing nothing else, his heart full of delight. One day, the two of them, strolling along, come to a part of the palace that is truly like a piece of Swarga upon this earth. There jubilant kinsmen, friends and attendants, surround them.

Arjuna, blissful in the company of his kinsman, looks at the marvellous chambers and asks his divine companion, 'Mahabaho, when the war was upon us, I became aware of your true greatness. Devakinandana, you showed me your Viswarupa, and I saw that you are the Lord of the universe! From the inconstancy of my mind I have all but forgotten those hallowed words you spoke to me, out of your love, O Kesava. Yet my mind constantly harks back to them and searches for those truths you disclosed. But O, Madhava, you are soon to go back to Dwaraka.'

Krishna, Mahatejasvin, foremost of speakers, embraces his cousin, and says, 'Arjuna, I expounded to you mysterious and eternal truths. I spoke to you about the highest dharma, religion in its most essential form, and about

the immortal realms. I am sorely disappointed that you did not receive what I imparted to you. What I said then will not return to me now exactly. Panduputra, I am sorry to find you so deficient in both faith and understanding. I cannot repeat in detail everything I said at that critical hour, the Sanatana Dharma I revealed to you, with which you can attain to the very Brahman. I yoked myself deep into yoga at that time, and it was indeed the Parabrahman that I revealed to you.

Yet let me now tell you another old and sacred Itihasa on the same subject. Best of men, observant of duty, listen to me now with undivided attention, so that you succeed in attaining to the highest goal. Listen, Arjuna, and hear me well this time.

Parantapa, once a Brahmana of irresistible tejas came to me from the realms of heaven, from Brahmaloka, and we worshipped him duly. Listen, Partha, without doubt or hesitation, to what he said, most agreeably and eloquently, in reply to our queries. The Brahmana said, "O Krishna of highest puissance, harken to my reply to the question you raise about Mukti, out of your compassion for all creatures, Madhava, once the Brahmana known as Kashyapa, of profound tapasya and every virtue, foremost among savants of dharma, came to another Brahmana who was a knower of the deep and intricate mysteries of the Atman, and even the final Secret.

Indeed, the latter had mastered all the knowledge held in the scriptures about the departure and reappearance of beings, and he had direct gyana of all things conferred by true yoga. He was a master of the truth of all matters of the world. He knew all about pleasure and pain, about birth and death, and had fathomed the distinctions between actions that yield good and those that are sinful. He was a seer, a witness of all the ends that creatures, high and low, attain through karma, and he lived as one emancipated from samsara.

His tapasya crowned with success, he was perfectly tranquil in soul and, having his senses and passions under absolute control, blazed with the resplendence of the Brahman. He could transport himself anywhere at will, indeed vanishing before the eyes of all whenever he chose. He roved in the company of invisible Siddhas and Gandharvas. He was wont to sit in their midst and converse with them in sequestered places, far from the bustle of humanity. He was as free as the wind from attachment to all things.

Kashyapa, hearing of this sage, wanted to see him. That best of Brahmanas sought out the mystic Rishi and approached him. A great tapasvin himself, moved by the desire to acquire further punya, Kashyapa fell with a rapt heart at the feet of the sage, in whom he clearly perceived marvellous attributes.

Full of awe at the extraordinary accomplishments of that recondite Muni, Kashyapa began to wait upon the Brahmana with the humble reverence of a sishya waiting on his guru, and succeeded in pleasing him. His unstinting devotion gratified the immaculate and noble Brahmana and at last the Rishi spoke blithely to Kashyapa about Moksha, the highest goal. Listen to those hermetic words, O Janardana, as I repeat them.

That mystic among ascetics said, "Through diverse karma, my son, as well as through dharma, mortal creatures attain to diverse ends in this world and beyond. Yet nowhere is the highest happiness to be found, and nowhere can residence be eternal. Even after reaping the harvest of the most strenuous deeds, mortals fall from the loftiest realms won by such karma.

In consequence of my own indulgence in sin, I have, time and again, come to miserable and inauspicious ends, for I never escaped the clutches of lust and wrath, and was always deluded by greed. I have experienced death and rebirth repeatedly, I have eaten every manner of food, I have fed at diverse breasts, I have known diverse mothers and many different fathers. Many kinds of happiness have been mine, and many kinds of misery, O sinless one. On numerous occasions have I been torn away from what was pleasant, and reaped torment. Having earned wealth with great toil, I have had to endure its loss. Insults and grievous anguish have I received from kings and relatives; agonizing mental and physical have been mine; humiliations have I known, and death and immurement in horrific conditions. Falls into hell have been mine, and great tortures in the domains of Yama. Decrepitude and disease have repeatedly assailed me, and calamities as frequent. In this world, I have time and again undergone all the afflictions that flow from the illusory perception of duality.

After all this, one day, the utmost, final despair overwhelmed me. And then, afflicted as I was, I sought refuge in the Formless, and renounced the world with all its joys and sorrows. Finally understanding the true path, I set myself upon it, even while living in this world. When my soul found its innate peace, I accomplished what you now see, this immortal freedom. When I leave my body this time, I will never return again, never again be

reborn. Truly, until I attain absorption into the eternal Brahman, indeed until the final dissolution of the universe, I shall look only towards that blissful end which shall be mine, and those beings that constitute this universe.

Having reached this goal, I will attain Satyaloka, and after that what is higher still, the Brahman and Moksha. I will attain the Nirguna Parabrahman, the single, unmanifest, unborn, deathless One. Have no doubt about this, Parantapa, I will not return to this world of mortal creatures. O you of great wisdom, I have been gratified by you. Tell me what I can do for you. I know why you sought me out, and it is now time to accomplish the purpose for which you came here to me.

Very soon I will leave this world for the last time. Since you have pleased me with your service and conduct, ask me what you will, and I will gratify you. I know that you have great acumen, and can grasp whatever I have to say, else you would not have recognized me in the first place. Yes, surely, Kashyapa, yours is a profound intelligence.”””

CANTO 17

"Krishna went on, 'Touching the feet of the sage, Kashyapa asked him some profound and difficult questions, and he, foremost of all men of truth, discoursed on every aspect of dharma about which he was asked.

Kashyapa asked, "How does one body dissolve, and how is another acquired? How does a soul find Moksha after enduring a repeated cycle of painful rebirths? After enjoying Prakriti for some time, how does the Jiva cast off a particular body? How does the Jiva attain to what is different from it, to the Brahman? How does a human being enjoy and endure the fruits of his karma, good and bad? What happens to the karma of one who has no body?"

The emancipated sage, at Kashyapa's insistence, answered his questions one after another. Listen to me, O Vrishni, as I tell you what he said. The Jivanmukta said to Kashyapa, "Upon the exhaustion of the karma which extends a life and fetches fame to a particular body assumed by the Jiva, the embodied self, the end of its span drawn near, begins to do things hostile to its own life and health. As its dissolution approaches, its understanding turns away from its proper course.

The man of uncleansed soul, even after an accurate apprehension of his constitution and strength, and of the season of his own life and of the year, will begin to eat irregularly food that is detrimental to him, to indulge in practices injurious to himself. At times he eats excessively, at others abstains from food; he ingests bad food or drink, or eats food containing

ingredients incompatible with one another, or eats to excess, or before digesting what he ate before.

He indulges to excess in physical exercise and sexual pleasure, or falls so avidly to work that he suppresses the urgings of his corporeal organism, even when they become pronounced. Otherwise he gluts himself with food far too rich, or sleeps during the day. Undigested food itself provokes such defects, when the time comes. Stimulating the deficiencies in his body brings fatal disease to fall upon him, ending in his death. There are even those who perversely kill themselves outright by unnatural means such as hanging.

It is through these causes that a living body finds its end. Understand correctly the manner of this, as I declare it to you. Urged on by the element of wind, Vayu, which intensifies, the heat in the body is fanned and agitated and spreads even like a fire to all parts of the body, one after another, consuming every vital part where life resides. Overwhelmed with pain, O Dvija, the Jiva quickly flees its mortal casement.

Thus are all the living repeatedly afflicted with death and birth. The pain felt when leaving a body is very like that experienced when first entering the womb, and when issuing out of it. Dying or being born, the Jiva feels distress. The body's Vayu becomes excited through cold and dissolves its compound of elements so that the panchabhutas abandon their unity, scatter and return again into their five original elements. The Vayu that dwells in the vital breaths, Prana and Apana, which enliven the body of five primal elements, sweeps upward, away from the turmoil of the embodied creature. Breathlessness follows, and the man becomes destitute of heat, of breath, of beauty and of consciousness. Deserted by Brahman, he finds the condition known as death.

The senses through which he perceives the world no longer register anything; for it is the eternal Jiva who creates and sustains the body through the two vital breaths, which he generates through food. While the body is occupied, alive, know that the elements are firmly united in those parts termed in the Shastras as its vital centres. When these are pierced, the Jiva stirs and rises into the heart and swiftly ceases to animate those vital centres, so that the living creature, though still alive, loses consciousness of the external world. Darkness overwhelms him; it is then that the Jiva, in a long, agonized breath, quits the mortal flesh, with a final shudder. However,

even when the Jiva leaves a body, the karma of the life lived in it clings to him, all the punya and paapa, the good and the evil.

Brahmanas, seers gifted with knowledge and sight and conversant with the secrets of the hermetic scriptures, can tell whether the soul departs with more good or evil. Even as common men see the firefly appear and disappear in the dark, tapasvins with the eye of knowledge see with mystic vision the Jiva as it leaves one body and as it enters another womb.

The Jivatma has three realms assigned to it through all time: this world, Bhumi, where creatures dwell, is known as kshetra, or the field of karma, of deeds. Here, with deeds good and evil mixed from lives gone by and present, all embodied creatures find their fruits. In consequence of their own varied karma, creatures enjoy higher or lower pleasures and joys. Sinners find Naraka for themselves, the lower realms into which they fall, and terrible is the experience of plunging head-first into savage fires as a result of their sins. Rescue is exceedingly difficult, and every mortal being must do its utmost to preserve itself from those infernal realms.

Listen now carefully to what I say about the kind of world into which souls ascend as a result of their punya; for by that you will achieve firmness of understanding and a clear knowledge of good and evil karma. Know that the realms of Swarga, to which souls of good deeds attain, are the celestial fields of stars that shine in the firmament: the lunar world, Pitriloka, and the solar one as well, Suryaloka, resplendent with its own light. Yet, upon the exhaustion of their punya, these souls too fall away from the regions of bliss. In Swargaloka itself are distinctions of inferior, superior and middling felicity, and souls experience discontent at the sight of prosperity more glorious than their own.

These are the goals that I have described to you. Listen now, attentively, O Brahmana, to what the Jiva experiences on finding itself in the womb.'"

CANTO 18

'The enlightened Brahmana said to Kashyapa, "The karma, good and bad, that a Jiva accumulates is not destroyed with the body but yields its harvest successively, body after body. As a fruit-bearing tree, when the season comes, yields bountiful fruit, so, too, does punya of a pure heart bestow its crop of felicity and, as surely, do sins committed with an evil heart result in harvests of misery.

Moved by Mind, Manas, the Jiva, the embodied soul, indulges in karma. Listen to how, bearing all its karma, and overwhelmed by lust and wrath, this Jiva enters a womb. The vital seed, mixed with blood, enters the womb of females and becomes the field of the Jiva, good or bad according to the karma it carries. But Jiva itself, being subtle and unmanifest, never becomes attached to anything, even upon incarnating, time after time. It is in essence the Eternal Brahman, the seed of all creatures, because of whom all mortals live.

The Jiva, entering the foetus, enlivens its limbs part by part, and, dwelling in all the centres that belong to Prana, supports life. Becoming endowed with Manas, the unborn child begins to move its limbs. Know that the Jiva occupies an embryo even as liquid iron does a mould; as fire burning fiercely turns iron to fluid, so does the soul animate the foetus. As a lamp lit in a room discovers all things within the chamber, even so does Mind discover the different limbs and organs of the body. Whatever karma the Jiva has performed in a previous body, it must inexorably reap its harvests, bitter and sweet, in the new body. Through such enjoyment and suffering, old karma is exhausted and fresh karma accumulates, also

inevitably, until, after countless births and deaths, the Jiva penetrates at last the profound dharma of the dhyana which leads to Mukti, to final Emancipation.

Let me tell you of the karma, the deeds, by which the Jiva, coursing through the interminable round of rebirths, finds happiness: daana, tapasya, brahmacharya: worshipping Brahman as ordained in the Shastras, shanti, feeling pity and compassion for all creatures, restraining the passions, abstaining from cruelty and from appropriating what belongs to others, refraining, even mentally, from all deeds that are false and injurious to living creatures, reverently serving the mother and the father, honouring the Devas and Sadasyas—gods and guests—worshipping Gurus, maintaining purity, firmly restraining all organs of lust, and performing good deeds.

From such karma ensues righteousness, dharma, which protects all creatures eternally. Such conduct is seen in sattvic persons, and, verily, such karma is immortal, the way of tranquil souls that indicates eternal virtue; among the serene, the way of Sanatana Dharma is cast. He who embraces these paths of truth will never come to a miserable end. It is through the virtue of the righteous that the world is maintained.

However, the Yogin is a Jivanmukta, a liberated soul, and he is distinguished above these men of goodness. Deliverance from the meshes of samsara comes after an incalculably long time, when a person remains in tune with the truth and does as he or she should with perfect detachment. A Jiva is faced ineluctably with karma from every previous life: karma is the very cause of the essentially eternal Jiva becoming embodied in so many different forms, at various times, all of them mortal, unlike his true, immortal Self.

There exists in the world the question of how a Jiva first accepted a body. The Grandsire of all the worlds, Brahma, first created a body of his own; then he created the three worlds, in their entirety, of mobile and immobile creatures, Pradhana, the material cause of all embodied creatures, and the highest. All else that is seen is kshara, mortal; while the other is transcendent—Para—immortal and indestructible—a-kshara. Of each Purusha taken distributively, the whole is duality among these three. The first, Svayambhuva Prajapati, created all the primal elements and all immobile creation from the first sound, the primordial audition. The Pitamaha ordained a limit to time, and to transmigrations among diverse creatures, births and rebirths.

What I say to you is the truth on the subject of previous births, as perceived by one who has seen his Atman, his Soul. One who looks upon pleasure and pain as fleeting, who regards the body as an unholy compound, and death as ordained in karma, who is mindful of what little there is of pleasure in the world, that in truth all is pain, dukha, will succeed in crossing this stormy ocean of worldly migrations, this samsara so difficult to traverse.

Though assailed by decrepitude, disease and death, he who understands Pradhana beholds with an equal eye the One consciousness dwelling in all conscious beings. Seeking the supreme condition, he becomes impervious to all else. Best of men, I will now tell you about this. Most learned Brahmana, understand fully that which constitutes the final knowledge of the immortal condition.'"

CANTO 19

'The Brahmana said, "He who becomes absorbed in the one repository of all things, freeing himself from even the thought of his own identity with all things—indeed, ceasing to think of even his own existence, will gradually cast off one bond after another and succeed in attaining Mukti. The man who is a friend to all, who endures all, who is devoted to tranquillity, who has conquered his senses, who is divested of fear and wrath, and who is of restrained soul, succeeds in liberating himself.

He who behaves towards all creatures as towards himself, who is restrained, pure, free from vanity and egoism, is truly emancipated. He looks with an equal eye upon life and death, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, the agreeable and the disagreeable. He is in every way free who does not covet what belongs to others, who never disregards anybody, who transcends all the pairs of opposites, and whose soul is untrammelled by the slightest attachment. He is a Jivanmukta who has no enemy, no kinsman and no child, who has cast off dharma, artha and kama, and who is liberated from all desire.

He who finds Moksha acquires neither punya nor paapa, and casts off the good and evil accumulated in previous births; he lays waste the elements of his body in order to attain to a tranquil soul, and transcends all pairs of opposites. He who abstains from all karma, who is unfettered by desire, whose heart is fixed on renunciation, who looks upon the universe as transient, like an aswattha tree ever subject to birth, decay and death, and whose eyes are always directed towards his own faults, soon succeeds in freeing himself from the bonds that bind him.

He finds Mukti who sees his soul as unknowable, without smell, taste, touch, sound, sight and belonging. He who sees his soul as being untouched by the attributes of the five elements, without form and cause, to be in truth without attributes although enjoying the attributes, finds Moksha. Abandoning, through true understanding, all purposes relating to body and mind, one gradually achieves the cessation of separate existence, even like a fire no longer fed with fuel.

One who is freed from all impressions, who transcends all pairs of opposites, who restrains and employs his senses using tapasya, who owns nothing, becomes a Jivanmukta and attains Nirvana. Disentangled from samsara, he attains to Brahman, eternal and supreme, perfectly tranquil, stable, enduring and deathless.

Let me now tell you about the supreme science of Yoga, and how Yogins, by dhyana, come to see the immaculate Atman. Learn from me about those doors through which, directing the soul within the body, one beholds that which is without beginning and end. Withdrawing the senses from their objects, one should fix one's mind upon the soul; after having performed the severest austerities, one should finally practise that last dhyana which leads to Moksha.

Always at tapasya, engaged in dhyana, the intelligent and learned Brahmana should keep the precepts of the science of Yoga, contemplating the soul in the body. If the good man succeeds in concentrating the mind on the Atman, in time, as he becomes increasingly absorbed in meditation, he sees the Paramatman in his own Atman. Self-restrained, always rapt, his senses completely conquered, the man of the cleansed soul surely succeeds in uniting his soul with the Soul.

Even as a man, having seen a stranger in a dream, recognizes the person in waking life, so, too, he who sees the Supreme Soul in deep samadhi, recognizes it everywhere, even when he awakes from his trance. Just as one perceives the fibrous pith of the munja after extracting it from its sheath, even so does the Yogin behold the soul, extracting it from the body. The body is likened to the munja, and the Atman to its essential fibre, by those who know the true Yoga, which is union.

Once the bearer of a body properly sees the soul in Yoga, no one can be his master, for he has become lord of the three worlds. He assumes diverse bodies as he wishes. Repudiating age and death, he neither grieves nor exults. The self-restrained man, concentrated in Yoga, can create for himself

godship over the very gods. Casting off his transient body, he feels no qualm even at the sight of all creatures perishing before his eyes, for he has passed beyond and attained to immutable Brahman. When all creatures suffer, he is beyond suffering, for nothing can afflict him.

Devoid of desire, his mind tranquil, the man yoked in Yoga is never shaken by pain, sorrow or fear, those terrible results of attachment and affection. Weapons cannot pierce him; death does not exist for him. Nowhere in the world will you find anyone happier. Having effectively yoked his soul, he lives steadily, on himself. Disconnected from ageing, from pain and pleasure, he sleeps in peace. Casting off his human body, he attains to other forms and bodies at his own pleasure. However, while enjoying the sovereignty that Yoga bestows, one should never fall away from devotion to Yoga. When, after profound devotion to Yoga, one beholds the Atman in oneself, one ceases to have any regard for even Indra of a hundred sacrifices.

Listen now to how a man who habituates himself exclusively to dhyana succeeds in attaining to the final Yoga, the communion of nirvana. Thinking of that point of the compass that has the sun behind it, the mind should be fixed in the interior of the dwelling in which one might happen to live. Within the dwelling, let the mind, with all its inward and outward operations, be fixed first in the room where one is. Sinking deeply into meditation, one beholds the All, the Brahman, the Soul of the universe, for there is nothing outside Brahman on which the mind may dwell; Brahman is everywhere and all things.

Else, restraining all the senses in a silent and uninhabited forest, one may fix one's mind in dhyana on the Brahman, here both within and outside one's body. One should meditate on the teeth, the palate, the tongue, the throat, the neck; likewise, on the heart and its bonds, its ligatures."

"Kashyapa now asked, 'O Madhusudan, enlighten me further about the dharma of Moksha, so hard to explain. How is the food that we eat digested in the stomach? How does it become transformed into fluids? How, again, into blood? How does it nourish the flesh, the marrow, the sinews and bones? How do all these limbs of embodied creatures grow? How does the strength grow of the growing man? How do all that is not nutritive and all that is impure come to be expelled? How does one inhale and exhale? In which particular part of the body does the Atman dwell, enlivening it? How does the Jiva, exerting himself, support the body? Of what colour and of

what kind is the body in which he dwells, when he leaves? O Holy One, tell me all this, Anagha, I beg you!'

I said to Kashyapa—for that emaciated sage was verily me, O Madhava—"As one placing some precious object in one's store-room should keep his mind on it, so should one dispose one's mind to dwell on the Soul, restraining the senses, avoiding heedlessness. Being always assiduous in this way and fulfilled within himself, a man will within a short time behold that Brahman with which one grasps Pradhana. It cannot be seen by the eye, nor apprehended by all the senses. It is only the lamp of the mind that illumines the great Soul. He has hands and feet on all sides; he has ears on all sides; he dwells in the world, pervading all things. When true knowledge dawns, Jiva beholds the Atman as extracted from the body, like the pith from a stalk of munja grass.

Then, casting off Brahma as invested with form, by holding the mind in the body, he beholds Brahma free from all attributes. He sees the Soul with his mind, smiling the while. Depending upon that Brahma, he then attains to Mukti, Emancipation. O Dvijottama, I have now expounded to you the mystery of all mystery, the final Rahasya. And now give me your leave, O Kashyapa, for I must go from here. You, too, are free to go wherever you please.' Thus, O Krishna, that sishya of mine, the Muni Kashyapa, of deep tapasya and stern vows, took my blessings and, expressing his adoration and gratitude, went his way."'

Krishna continues, 'And, Partha, that most lustrous Brahmana, having laid bare the dharma of Mukti, vanished before my eyes. Have you heard and absorbed what the Brahmana said, with all your mind and heart, Arjuna? For this was what you heard on that occasion between the two armies in my chariot. I believe that one whose mind is confused, who has gleaned no wisdom from study, or who eats food incompatible with his body, or whose soul is not purified, will find it difficult to truly comprehend this teaching.

O Bhaarata, what you have heard is a great mystery, even among the Devas. At no time or place in this world, Partha, has this been heard by another man, and, Anagha, no other man is worthy of hearing it. Truly, no man whose soul is bewildered can understand this teaching. The world of the gods is filled with those who follow the dharma of action. The Devas do not find agreeable the religion of inaction, through the cessation of all karma.

That end is the highest which is the eternal Brahman, where, casting off the body, one attains immortality and eternal bliss. By following the secret way of which I have told you, O Partha, even those of sinful birth, like women, Vaisyas and Sudras, attain to the highest felicity—what need be said, then, of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas possessed of great learning, devoted to the duties of their own varna, who are intent on finding Mukti?

I have laid down for you the reasons upon which the Mukti Marga rests; I have told you the means for its acquisition and its ultimate fruit, which is Nirvana and knowledge of the truth about suffering. Nothing anywhere, O Bhaarata, brings greater peace and perfect joy than this. By treading this path, that mortal endowed with intelligence, faith and courage, who renounces as insubstantial what is regarded as substantial by the world, succeeds in a short time in gaining the Supreme goal.

This is the last teaching, beyond which there is no other; this is all that I have to say, for nothing else is higher. Yoga, communion and liberation can be found by one who devotes himself to its constant practice for a period of six months.'"

CANTO 20

"Krishna says, 'O son of Pritha, there is an old tale told of a discussion between a married couple. The wife of a certain Brahmana, seeing that master of every kind of knowledge and wisdom seated in seclusion, said to him, "What realm will I attain, who depends on one who sits renouncing all karma, who is towards me, so harsh and unconcerned? I have heard that a wife attains to those regions that her husband gains. What, goal, then, will be mine, who have you for my lord?"

The serene Brahmana of tranquil soul said to her, smilingly, "Blessed, sinless one, I am not offended by what you say. Karma is performed by those who depend on others to help them, who take the way of action as true, from their feeble understanding. Such men of deeds only store delusion through what they do. Yet freedom from karma cannot be had in this world for even a moment. From birth to death and rebirth, karma, good or bad, of deed, thought or speech, exists in all beings. I have turned away from the path of ritual karma defined by outward things, the way of Soma rasa and offerings of ghrita, all destroyed inevitably by Rakshasas; and so turning away, I have found the seat of the Atman within my body. There dwells Brahman, eternal, transcending all pairs of opposites; there Soma is with Agni; and there moves Vayu constantly, supporting all creatures. It is for that seat that Pitamaha Brahma and others, concentrated in Yoga, worship the Indestructible, and for which men of learning and great vows strive, men of tranquil souls and vanquished senses.

It cannot be smelled by the organ of smell, nor tasted by the tongue, nor touched by the organs of touch. It cannot be seen by the eye. It

transcends hearing. It is without scent, taste, touch or form; it is devoid of attributes, attained only through the mind. From it ensues the perfectly ordained universe, and upon it the universe rests.

From it the life-breaths, Prana, Apana, Samana, Vyana and Udana flow, and into it are they subsumed. The breaths Prana and Apana move between Samana and Vyana. When the soul sleeps, both Samana and Vyana are absorbed. Between Apana and Prana dwells Udana, pervading all. Since Udana is the breath that controls all the life-winds, Prana and Apana do not desert a sleeping person. Hence, utterers of Brahman undergo penances which have the Atman for their goal.

In the midst of all those life-breaths that swallow up one another and move within the body blazes forth the fire called Vaiswanara, made up of seven flames. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the skin, and the ear which numbers the fifth, the mind, and understanding—these are the seven tongues of that Vaiswanara's flame. That which is smelled, that which is seen, that which is eaten or drunk, that which is touched, that which is heard, that which is thought of, and also that which is understood—these are the seven sorts of fuel. That which smells, that which eats, that which sees, that which touches, that which hears, the fifth; that which thinks, and that which understands—these are the seven great officiating priests.

Learned sacrificers, O blessed one, duly casting seven libations in seven ways in the seven fires—that which is smelt, that which is drunk, that which is seen, that which is touched, that which is heard, that which is thought of, and that which is understood—create them in their own wombs. Earth, Wind, Ether, Water, Light, Mind and Understanding: these seven are called wombs of all things.

All the attributes, the burnt havis constituting the sacrificial offerings, enter into the attribute born of fire and, abiding within that dwelling, are reborn in their respective wombs. In that which generates all beings, they remain absorbed during the period for which dissolution lasts. From that is created smell, from that is produced taste, from that comes colour, and from that, touch; from that issues sound; from that arises doubt; and from that also, resolution. This is the sevenfold creation. It is in this very way that the ancients comprehended all things. By the three full and final libations, the full become replete with light.'"

CANTO 21

'The Brahmana said, "An ancient story is told in this regard. Do you understand the institution of the ten hotris, the sacrificing priests? The ear, the skin, the two eyes, the tongue, the nose, the two feet, the two hands, the genital organ, the lower duct and speech—these, O beautiful one, are the ten hotris. Sound and touch, colour and taste, scent, speech, action, movement, and the discharge of vital seed, of urine and of excreta, are the ten libations. The points of the compass, the Quarters, Wind, Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Vishnu, Indra, Prajapati, and Mitra—these are the ten sacrificial fires. The objects of the senses are the fuel cast into these ten fires as are the Mind, which is the ladle, and the wealth—the good and bad karma—of the sacrificer. What remains is the pure, highest knowledge.

We have heard that this universe was differentiated by that knowledge. All objects of knowledge are Manas, mind. Knowledge only perceives. The knower, the Jiva, encased in its subtle form, sukshma sarira, lives within the gross body, sthula sarira, created by the vital seed. The bearer of the body is the Garhapatya fire. From that is produced another—Mind, the Ahavaniya fire. Into it is poured the oblation. From that came the Veda, the Word; Mind, desirous of creation, sets itself on the Veda. Then arises form, essential colour undistinguished by particular colours. It runs towards Manas, the Mind."

The Brahmana's wife asked, "How did Veda, the Word, arise first and only then Mind, seeing that Word comes into existence after having been thought upon by Mind? Upon what authority can it be said that Mati or

Prana takes refuge in Mind? Why, again, in dreamless sleep, though apart from Mind, does not Prana apprehend the world? What restrains it?'"

The Brahmana said, "The Apana Vayu, becoming the lord of Prana, makes it identical with itself. That restrained movement of the Prana Vayu is the motion of the Mind. Hence the Mind is dependent upon Prana, not Prana upon the mind. Therefore, in dreamless sleep, upon the disappearance of Mind, Prana does not vanish. But, since you ask me about Veda and Manas, I will relate a discourse between them.

Word and Mind, repairing to the Soul of matter, asked, 'Which of us is superior, most powerful one? A question has arisen between us about this. Do you dispel our doubt.'"

On that occasion, the Holy One made this reply, 'Manas is undoubtedly superior.' At this, Word said to Mind, 'I yield to you the fruition of all your desires!'"

The Brahmana said, "Know that I have two minds, the moving and the still. That which is unmoving is, verily, with me; the movable is in your dominion. That Mind is movable which, in the form of Mantra, word or voice, is of your dominion. Hence, you are superior to the other mind.

But since, my beautiful one, you have entered into this engagement of your own accord, I fill myself with breath and utter you. The Goddess Word once always dwelt between Prana and Apana. But, sinking into Apana, though urged upwards, she was dissociated from Prana. She ran to Prajapati saying, 'Be gratified with me, O Holy One!'

The Prana reappeared, once more fostering Word. Hence, Word, encountering deep exhalation, never utters anything. Word always flows either endowed with utterance or without it. Between the two, Word without utterance, Silence, is superior to Word with utterance, Speech. Like a cow blessed with excellent milk, Silence yields diverse meanings. When she speaks of Brahman, O you of charming smiles, she yields the Eternal, Moksha. Word is a most puissant cow, both divine and not divine. Behold the distinction between these two subtle forms of Word that flow."

The Brahmana's wife said, "What did the Vakdevi, Goddess of Word, say in days of old when Speech, though impelled by the wish to utter, could not emerge?"

The Brahmana said, "The Word that is generated in the body by Prana, attains to Apana from Prana. Then, transformed into Udana and issuing out of the body, Vak envelops all the quarters, with Vyana. After that, she

dwells in Samana. Even in this way did Word once speak. Hence, Mind, being unmoving, is distinguished; and the Goddess Word, having movement, is also distinguished.'"

CANTO 22

'The Brahmana said, "Blessed one, another antique story tells of the seven sacrificing priests: the nose, the eye, the tongue, the skin, the ear, the mind, and the understanding, all distinct from one another. Dwelling in subtle space, they do not perceive one another. They are seven, these priests, in number as well as in nature."

The Brahmana's wife said, "How is it that, dwelling in subtle space, they do not perceive one another? What are their natures, O Holy One? Explain this, my lord." The Brahmana said, "Not knowing the qualities of any object is ignorance of that object, while knowledge of its qualities is gyana of the thing.

These seven never succeed in knowing the qualities of one another. The tongue, the eye, the ear, the skin, the mind and the understanding do not ever apprehend smell; the nose alone does so. The nose, the tongue, the ear, the skin, the mind and the understanding never perceive colours; the eye alone does. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the ear, the understanding and the mind never sense touch; only the skin does. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the skin, the mind and the understanding never hear sounds; the ear alone apprehends them. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the skin, the ear and the understanding never know doubt, only the mind. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the skin, the ear and the mind, never determine knowledge; only the understanding or intellect does.

Listen to an ancient discourse that took place between the senses and the Mind. The Mind said, 'The nose does not smell without me; when deprived of me the tongue does not taste, the eye does not see, the skin does

not feel, the ear does not hear. I am the eternal and foremost of all the elements. Without me, the senses are lifeless, like empty homes or fires whose flames have been quenched. Without me, creatures cannot apprehend qualities and objects, even with the senses exerting themselves, just as wet fuel can never ignite a fire.'

The Senses replied, 'This would surely be as you say, if you could by yourself enjoy the pleasures of the world without us and the experiences we bring to you of our objects. What you claim would be true if, when we are gone, life could still be supported and gratified, and you could continue to enjoy sensations; or if you could satisfy your desires and enjoyments without us, even by conceiving them. If, again, you deem your power over our objects to be supreme, then seize colour by the nose, and taste by the eye. Also, take smell by the ear, and touch by the tongue. Enjoy sound through the skin, and touch by the intellect. The truly powerful are not bound by law; laws bind only the weak.

So, if you are truly powerful, then seize sensations unenjoyed before; it is beneath you to taste what others have tasted before! As a sishya goes to a guru to acquire the Srutis, and then, having acquired them, dwells on their import by obeying their injunctions, even so, regard as your own all that we reveal and give you to enjoy, in the past or the future, asleep or awake.

In creatures of little intelligence, when their minds are distracted and dismal, life is still sustained by the continuing function of the senses and their objects. All creatures, high and low, having formed innumerable purposes and fantasies, when taken by the wish to enjoy these, run to the senses and their objects. He who sets out to gratify desires in fantasy depending solely on the mind, ignoring the senses and the outer world, quickly finds death when his life-breaths are exhausted, like a fire run out of fuel.

It is true that we, the senses, are bound to our respective attributes; true, also, that we have no knowledge of one another's attributes. But without us, you can have no perceptions whatever. Without us, no happiness can come to you.''''

CANTO 23

'The Brahmana said to his wife, "O blessed lady, there is an old story of the institution of the five sacrificing priests. The learned know as a tenet that Prana, Apana, Udana, Samana and Vyana are the five sacrificing priests." The Brahmana's wife said, "But I am convinced that there are in nature seven sacrificing priests. Expound to me now the creed of the five sacrificing priests."

The Brahmana said, "The wind nursed by Prana later takes birth in Apana. The wind nursed in Apana then becomes Vyana. Nursed by Vyana, the wind develops into Udana. Nursed in Udana, life-breath is generated as Samana. Those pure ones, in days of yore, asked the first-born Pitamaha, 'You must declare who amongst us is foremost, who will the first, the lord, of the others.'

Brahma said, 'He upon whose death all the life-breaths die in the bodies of living creatures, he upon whose moving they all move, is the foremost among you. Go now where you will.'

Prana said, 'Upon my extinction all the life-breaths become extinct in the bodies of living creatures. Upon my stirring again, so do they. I am the first and the foremost. Behold, I make myself extinct!'

Prana then extinguished himself. At this, Samana and Udana said, 'You do not dwell here, pervading all, as we do. You are not the first or foremost amongst us, O Prana. Only Apana is under your dominion.'

Prana then moved, and to him Apana said, 'When I become extinct, all the life-winds become extinct in the bodies of living creatures. When I

move, they all stir. I am the first, the foremost. Behold, I extinguish myself!'

Both Vyana and Udana said to Apana, 'Apana, you art not the first or our lord. Only Prana is under your control.'

Apana stirred again. Vyana said, 'I am the first, the lord of all the life-winds. Attend to the reason for this. When I become still, all the life-winds do, as well, in the bodies of living creatures. When I stir, they move once more. So, I am the first and the lord. Look, I extinguish myself!'

Then Vyana stirred no more, at which Prana and Apana and Udana and Samana said to him, 'You are not the first or the lord of us, Vyana. Samana alone is under your dominion.'

Vyana stirred again, and Samana said to him, 'I am the first and the lord of you all, for when I am no more, all the life-winds die in the bodies of living creatures. When I move, they live again. Behold, I extinguish myself!'

But then he stirred again. Udana said, 'I am the font of all the life-winds, for when I am still, all the life-breaths are still in the bodies of living creatures. When I move they are enlivened again. Look, I extinguish myself!'

Udana, after making himself still, stirred again. Prana and Apana and Samana and Vyana said to him, 'Udana, you are not the first among us, only Vyana is under your dominion.'

To them, assembled together, the Lord of creatures, Brahma, said, 'No one among you is superior to the others. You are all endowed with distinct and different attributes, and you are all first and lords in your own spheres. There is one that is unmoving, and one that is moving; there are five life-winds. My own self is the first one of these. That one takes many forms. Become friendly to one another, and gratify one another: go in peace. Blessings be upon you, and do you five sustain one another!'"'

CANTO 24

'The Brahmana continued, "Another antique tale is told in this regard, about the conversation between Narada and the Rishi Devamata.

Devamata said, 'What is it, verily, that comes first into existence in a creature that takes birth? Is it Prana, Apana, Samana, Vyana or Udana?'

Narada said, 'By whatever the creature is created, that is what first comes to him. The life-winds exist in pairs, and move transversely, upwards and downwards.'

Devamata said, 'By which of the life-winds is a creature produced? Which amongst them is foremost? Tell me what the pairs of life-winds are which move transversely, upwards and downwards.'

Narada said, 'From sankalpa, the wish, arises kama, pleasure. It also arises from sound, from taste and from colour. From semen, united with blood, first flows Prana. Upon the semen being modified by Prana, flows Apana. Pleasure arises from the semen as well.

It arises from taste also. This is the form of Udana. Pleasure is produced from union. Semen is generated by desire. From desire is produced the menstrual flow. In the union of semen and blood, generated by Samana and Vyana, the pair that consists of Prana and Apana, enters, moving transversely and upwards. Vyana and Samana form a pair that moves transversely.

The Veda teaches that Agni is all deities. The knowledge of Agni arises in a Brahmana with intelligence. In the smoke of that fire is the guna called Tamas, Darkness. The guna known as Rajas, Passion, is in its ashes. The

quality Sattva, Goodness, arises from that portion of the fire into which the oblation is poured. Those conversant with sacrifices know that Samana and Vyana are from the Sattva guna.

Prana and Apana are portions of the oblation of ghrita, clarified butter. Between them is Fire. That is the fine form, the seat of Udana, as the Brahmanas know. I will tell you about the pairs of opposites and what is distinct from them. Day and Night constitute a pair. Between them is Fire. That is the pure seat of Udana, as Brahmanas know. The existent and the non-existent form a pair. Between them is Fire. That is the lofty seat of Udana, as Brahmanas know. First is Samana, then Vyana, whose function is managed through Samana, then, again, Samana comes into operation. Only Vyana exists for tranquillity. Tranquillity is eternal Brahman. This is the exalted seat of Udana, as Brahmanas know,' said Narada."'

CANTO 25

'The Brahmana said, "Listen now, my lovely wife, to the ancient story of the Chaturhotra yagna, in its entirety and wonderful mystery. The agent, the instrument, the deed and Emancipation—these, beautiful one, are the four sacrificing priests by whom the universe is enveloped.

Listen to the assignment of causes regarding this subject. The nose, the tongue, the eye, the skin, the ear, the mind and the intellect—these seven must be understood as being created by the gunas.

Smell, taste, colour, touch, sound the fifth, the objects of perception and those of the intellect—these seven are caused by karma. He who smells, he who eats, he who sees, he who speaks, he who hears, the fifth, he who thinks, and he who knows—these seven are caused by the agent. Possessed of gunas, these enjoy their own qualities, agreeable or disagreeable. As for the Soul, the Atman, it is destitute of attributes or gunas.

These seven are the causes of Emancipation, Nirvana. In those who are learned and possessed of true understanding, the qualities, which are in the position of deities, consume the oblations, each in its proper place, and in accord to what has been ordained. The man without gyana eats diverse kinds of food, seized with a sense of mineness. Digesting food for himself, he is ruined through the sense of mineness. The eating of food that should not be eaten, and the drinking of wine, finish him. He destroys the food he eats, and is himself destroyed.

The man of learning, the gyani, however, possessed of true power, eats only to create through the food he consumes. In him, not the minutest transgression or sin arises from the food he takes. Whatever is thought of by the mind, whatever is uttered by speech, whatever is heard by the ear, whatever is seen by the eye, whatever is touched by the skin, whatever is smelt by the nose—all constitute oblations of ghrita. They should all, after restraining the five senses and the mind, the sixth, be poured into that eternal fire of great punya which burns within the body: the Atman, the Soul.

The sacrifice that is Yoga is the yagna that I am engaged in. The font of that sacrifice is that which yields the fire of knowledge. The upward life-wind Prana is the Stotra of that sacrifice. The downward life-wind Apana is its Shastra. The renunciation of everything is the excellent Dakshina of that sacrifice. Consciousness, Mind, and Understanding—these, becoming Brahma, are its Hotri, Adhwaryu, and Udgatri. The Prashastri, his Shastra, is truth. Cessation of separate existence, which is Mukti, is the Dakshina.

Those who understand Narayana recite some Riks on this subject. To the divine Narayana were animals offered in days of yore, then were sung some Samanas. On that subject, gentle one, know that there is an authority. The divine Narayana is the soul of all.”’

CANTO 26

'The Brahmana said, "There is one Ruler. There is no second besides Him. He dwells in the heart. I will speak of Him now. Impelled by Him, I move as He intends me to, like water along a slope. There is one Guru. There is no second besides Him. He dwells in the heart, and I will speak of Him now. Be instructed by that Guru.

They who are always full of wrath are like snakes. There is one Kinsman. There is no second besides Him. He dwells in the heart, and I will speak of Him now. Instructed by Him, kinsmen have kinsmen, and the Sapta Rishis, O son of Pritha, shine in the firmament.

There is one Dispeller. There is no second besides Him. He dwells in the heart, and I will speak of Him now. Having lived with that Guru, through dharma, Sakra attained to sovereignty over all the worlds. There is one Enemy. There is no second besides Him. He dwells in the heart, and I will speak of Him now. Taught by that Guru, all Nagas in the world are always full of animosity. In this regard, the Purana tells of the instruction of the Nagas, the Devas, the Asuras and the Rishis by the Lord of all creatures.

Seated around the Lord of all creatures, the Devas and the Rishis, the Nagas and the Asuras asked him, 'Tell us what is most beneficial to us all.' The Holy One spoke just one word to them: AUM, which is the Brahman in a single syllable. Upon this, they scattered in various directions. Amongst those who ran, in the Nagas there naturally arose the disposition to sting, to bite. In the naturally ostentatious Asuras arose pride. The Devas betook themselves to beneficence, and the great Rishis to self-restraint.

Though it was one Teacher to whom they went, and one Word they received as instruction, the Nagas, the Devas, the Rishis and the Danavas all had inherently different dispositions. It is that One who hears Himself when speaking, and apprehends what is said. Again, it is that heard from Him when He speaks. There is no second preceptor. All actions, karma, flow later in obedience to that One; and within the heart, the Teacher, the Listener, the Knower and the Enemy, all are pleased.

By sinning in the world it is He who becomes a sinner. Through auspicious karma in the world, it is He who becomes righteous. It is He who becomes wayward, degenerate, by becoming addicted to the pleasures of the senses, impelled by desire. It is He who becomes a brahmacharin, by devoting himself to conquering his senses. It is He, again, who relinquishes all tapasya and karma, and takes refuge in Brahman alone.

By moving in the world, yet identifying himself all the while with Brahman, he becomes a Brahmacharin. Brahman is his fuel; Brahman is his fire; Brahman is his origin; Brahman is his water; Brahman is his preceptor: he is rapt in Brahman. Brahmacharya is ever subtle, as understood by the wise. Having understood it, they betook themselves to it, instructed by the Kshetrajna, the Knower!"'

CANTO 27

'The Brahmana said, "I have entered the great forest of Brahman, having crossed that impassable fastness of Samsara, which has purposes for its flies and mosquitoes, grief and joy for its cold and heat, heedlessness for its blinding darkness, cupidity and diseases for its reptiles, wealth for its one danger on the road, and lust and wrath for its robbers."

The Brahmana's wife said, "Where is that foremost forest, O you of profound wisdom? What are its trees, its rivers, its mountains and hills? How far is that forest?" The Brahmana said, "There exists nothing separate from it; there is nothing more blissful; nothing more awesome; nothing smaller; nothing vaster; nothing as minute. No joy anywhere can resemble its bliss. Regenerate ones, entering into it, at once transcend both joy and sorrow. They never again go in fear of any creature, nor does any creature fear them.

In that forest are seven great trees, seven fruits and seven guests. There are seven hermitages, seven forms of dhyana and seven kinds of initiation. Even so is that beginningless, endless forest.

The trees which fill that forest yield most excellent flowers, and fruits of five colours. These are of two kinds, besides. The trees which fill that forest yield flowers and fruits that are fragrant and of two colours. The trees which fill that forest produce flowers and fruits that are redolent and of one colour. The two trees that fill that forest give forth many flowers and fruits, besides, which are of unmanifest colours. There is one fire here, of a pure mind, sattvik, of the true Brahmana. The five senses are its fuel. The seven forms of Mukti flowing from them are the seven forms of Initiation. The

gunas are the fruit, and the guests eat those fruits. There, in diverse places, the greatest Rishis accept hospitality. When, after being worshipped, they die, another forest shines forth.

In that forest, Intelligence is the tree; Emancipation is the fruit; Tranquillity is its shade. It has Knowledge for its shelter, Contentment for its water, and the Kshetrajna is its sun. Its end cannot be known, up, down, or around. Seven females always dwell there, with faces turned down, effulgent and endowed with the seeds of generation. They drain all the different vasanas from every creature, even as inconstancy does truth.

In that forest dwell, and from it emerge, the seven Rishis who are crowned with ascetic success, among whom Vasishta is the first. Glory, refulgence, greatness, enlightenment, victory, perfection and energy, these seven always follow them as rays do the sun.

Hills and mountains also exist there, all gathered together; and rivers and streams, bearing waters in their course, waters born of Brahman. And there is also a confluence of rivers in a secluded spot, for sacrifice. From there, those that are contented with their own souls go forth to the Grandsire. Those whose desires have been reduced, whose wishes have been directed to the highest vratas, and whose sins have burnt by tapasya, subsume themselves into their souls, attain to Brahman.

Those who know the forest of knowledge give praise to peace. Always keeping that forest in view, so as not to lose courage, they are born. Such is that sacred forest, which true Brahmanas understand, that they live their lives, naturally, in accord with the highest dharma, as ordained by the Kshetrajna, the indwelling, pervasive Knower.'"

CANTO 28

'The Brahmana said, "I do not smell scents. I do not taste tastes. I do not see colours. I do not feel touch. I do not hear all the diverse sounds. Nor do I entertain purposes of any kind. It is Nature, Prakriti, which desires such objects of the senses as are pleasant; it is Nature, too, which abhors such objects as are unpleasant. Desire and aversion spring from Nature, like the upward and the downward life-winds, when souls have entered animate bodies.

Distinct from them are the others; in these are eternal dispositions; they, the Yogins, behold just the Soul of all creatures in the body. Dwelling in that, I am never attached to anything, through desire or wrath, through decrepitude and death. Having no desire for any object of pleasure, nor aversion towards any evil, my nature remains untainted, even as a drop of water resting on a lotus-leaf does not wet it. To that constant, eternal Self which witnesses diverse nature, all outward things are inconstant possessions. Though actions are performed, yet the assemblage of enjoyments does not attach itself to the Yogi, even as rays of the sun do not attach to the sky.

An ancient story of a discourse between an Adhwaryu and a Yati is told in this regard. Do you listen to it, glorious lady. Seeing an animal sprinkled with water at a sacrificial ceremony, a Yati said in censure to the Adhwaryu who sat there, 'This is destruction of life!' The Adhwaryu replied, 'This goat will not be destroyed. The yagnapasu meets with great good, if what the Vedas say on this matter is true. The part of this animal that is of earth will go to earth. That part of it that is born of water will enter into water.

His eyes will enter the sun; his ears will enter the different points of the horizon; his life-winds will enter the sky. I who adhere to the scriptures incur no sin by assisting at the sacrifice of this animal.'

The Yati said, 'If you see such good to the goat in disintegrating his life-winds, then this sacrifice is for the goat. What need have you for it? Let the brother, father, mother and friend of the goat give you their approval for its slaughter. Take him to them and seek their opinion. This animal is particularly dependent, and you must seek the consent of those upon whom he depends. Only when you have it will the sacrifice become fit for consideration.

I believe that the life-winds of this goat have returned to their sources. Only the inanimate body remains behind. For those who seek felicity through the lifeless body of a yagnapasu, which is comparable to fuel, the fuel of sacrifice is, after all, the animal himself. Abstaining from cruelty is the foremost of all duties: this is what the ancients have taught. If we deny this, then every manner of violence and sin becomes acceptable. We must rely on what we directly perceive and nothing more.'

The Adhwaryu said, 'You enjoy fragrances, which belong to the earth. You enjoy tastes, which belong to water. You see colours, which belong to light. You have sensations of touch, which belong to the wind. You hear sounds that have their origin in space. You think thoughts with the mind. You opine that all these have life. You do not, then, abstain from taking life. In truth, then, you are constantly engaged in slaughter. I say that there can be no act without killing of one kind or other. What think you of that, O regenerate one.'

The Yati said, 'The immortal and the mortal constitute the twin manifestation of the soul. Of these the immortal has always existed and always shall. The mortal never truly exists. The life-breath, the tongue, the mind, the quality of goodness, along with passion, all exist. The Atman is above and beyond these forms and hence is without duality or hope.

As for one who is liberated from these fleeting, merely apparent objects, who transcends all the pairs of opposites, who does not cherish any expectation, who is alike in and to all creatures, who is free from the idea of mineness, who has subdued himself, and is released from all his surroundings—for him no fear exists from any source!'

The Adhwaryu said, 'O best of intelligent men, one should indeed seek the company of the good! Listening to you, my understanding is

illuminated. Illustrious one, I come to you, believing you to be a god, and I still say that I commit no sin by performing these rites with the help of holy mantras!'

The Brahmana continued, "The Yati remained silent after this. The Adhwaryu proceeded with his great sacrifice, but now freed from delusion. True Brahmanas understand Moksha, which is exceedingly subtle, and, having understood it, they live directed by the Kshetrajna, that Seer and witness of all things."'

CANTO 29

'The Brahmana said to his wife, "Another ancient story tells of a conversation between Kartavirya and the Ocean. There was a king called Kartavirya-Arjuna, endowed with a thousand arms. With his bow he conquered the Earth, extending to the shores of the ocean. Once, as he was walking along the seashore, proud of his might, he showered hundreds of arrows into its awesome body of waters.

The Ocean, bowing down to him, pleaded, with folded hands, 'Do not shoot your shafts at me, O Kshatriya! Your mighty missiles kill many creatures who dwell in me, O Purushavyaghra. Tell me what I can do for you to grant them safety and life.'

Arjuna said, 'If there is any bowman who is my equal and would stand against me in battle, name him to me!' The Ocean said, 'If you have heard of the Maharishi Jamadagni, O king, I say to you that his son is fit to receive you as a guest.' Kartavirya, inflamed, hastened to the asrama, where he found Rama himself. With his kinsmen, O lotus-eyed one, he began to create havoc around the Mahatman, infuriating him, until Rama's immeasurable tejas blazed forth and consumed Kartavirya's troops, O lotus-eyed one. Seizing his battle-axe, Rama flew at the thousand-armed Kshatriya and lopped off his arms as he would the branches of a great tree. Seeing Kartavirya slain and prostrate on the earth, his kinsmen, weapons in hand, rushed from every side at Parasurama, who had sat down again in dhyana. Rama once more took up his bow, leapt onto his chariot, and with storms of arrows swiftly chastened the enemy. Terrified by Jamadagni's son,

some of the Kshatriyas fled into mountain-fastnesses, like deer hunted by a lion.

Of these, the sons of those who could no longer perform the svadharma of Kshatriyas, through fear of Rama became Vrishalas, for they could find no Brahmanas to be their priests. In this way, the Dravidas, Abhiras and Pundras, together with the Savaras, became Vrishalas, for they fell away from the Kshatriya dharma they were born into but could no longer uphold.

Jamadagni's ferocious son returned, again and again, to massacre the Kshatriyas begotten by Brahmanas upon the Kshatriya women who had lost their heroic princes. One and twenty times he slaughtered them all until a bodiless, heavenly voice heard by all, an Asariri, said to him sweetly, 'O Rama, Rama, desist! What punya do you see in butchering these inferior Kshatriyas over and over?'

In this way, O blessed wife of mine, his grandsires, led by Richika, addressed that Mahatman, calling him to stop his carnage of Kshatriyas. But Rama could not forgive the killing of his father Jamadagni, and he said to his Pitris, the greatest Rishis, 'It does not become you to forbid me.' The Pitris said, 'Best of victors, it does not become you to kill these inferior Kshatriyas. It is not right for you, being a Brahmana, to slay these kings.'

CANTO 30

The Pitris went on, 'An old story is told in this regard. Having heard it, you must do as it says, O Dvijottama. There was once a Rajarishi called Alarka, blessed with the most austere tapasya, conversant with dharma and truthful in speech, a great soul, steadfast in his vows. Having conquered with his bow the whole Earth extending to the seas, he set his mind to that which is abstruse, of the spirit. Sitting under a tree, he turned his thoughts away from his great feats and towards that which is sukshma, subtle.

Alarka said, "Only by mastering the mind does one's conquest becomes permanent. Even if surrounded by enemies, from now I shall aim my arrows inwards. The mind is unsteady; it sets all mortals to outward accomplishment. Therefore I shall aim my sharp shafts at the mind." The mind said, "These arrows you have, O Alarka, will never pierce me through. They will pierce only your own marmas, your vital organs; and, having been pierced, you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to destroy me."

Reflecting on this, Alarka said, "Inhaling many perfumes, the nose only hankers ever more after them. I shall aim whetted arrows at the nose." The nose said, "These arrows will never pass through me, O Alarka. They will pierce only your own vital parts, and you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to destroy me."

Reflecting on this, Alarka said, "The tongue, enjoying savoury tastes, only hankers further after them. I shall aim whetted shafts at the tongue." The tongue said, "These arrows, O Alarka, will not pierce me. They will

only pierce your own vital parts and you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to kill me."

Reflecting on this, Alarka said, "Touching diverse things, the skin only hankers further after them. I will flay the skin with arrows flighted with the feathers of the kanka." The skin said, "These arrows will not, O Alarka, pierce me. They will pierce your own vital parts, and you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to destroy me."

Reflecting on this, Alarka said, "Hearing different sounds, the ear only hankers after them ever more. I will loose whetted barbs at the ear." The ear said, "These arrows will not, O Alarka, pass through me. They will only pierce your own vital parts, and you will die. Do you then look for other arrows with which to kill me."

Hearing these words and reflecting upon them, Alarka said, "Seeing many colours, the eye hankers after them only ever more. Hence, I will put out the eye with my sharpest arrows." The eye said. "These arrows will not, O Alarka, kill me at all. They will pierce only your own vital parts, and you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to destroy me!"

Reflecting upon these words, Alarka said, "The intellect forms many conclusions, using reason. I will loose whetted arrows at the intellect." The intellect said, "These arrows will not, O Alarka, pierce me at all. They will only pierce your vital parts, and you will die. Do you look for other arrows with which to kill me!"

Alarka set himself immediately in that very place, to perform severe penance, but even through that stern tapasya did not acquire weapons with which to consume those seven. The Dvijottama, most intelligent of men, pondered for a long time, but failed to find anything better than Yoga. Concentrating his mind one-pointedly on a single object, he remained perfectly still, absorbed in Yoga. At long last he slew all seven senses with a single astra of his spirit, naturally and effortlessly, by entering into the highest communion with his Atman.

Filled with wonder, that Rajarishi then sang this sloka: 'Alas that I wasted so much time on outward conquests! Alas that I ever courted the pleasures of sovereignty! Only now have I learnt that there is no joy, no bliss or happiness greater than Yoga!'

O Rama, Bhargava, you too must understand this now. Stop your slaughter, for it will bring you no lasting felicity, and set yourself instead to the most austere tapasya. Only then will you find true goodness.' Thus

addressed by his manes, Jamadagni’s son ceased his bloodletting, practised the most austere penances and attained Moksha, the final destination and the most difficult to achieve.”’

CANTO 31

'The Brahmana said, "There are three enemies in the world, said to be nine-fold in terms of their attributes: These are three Gunas, each with three attributes. Exultation, satisfaction and joy are the qualities belonging to Sattva, Goodness. Avarice, anger and aversion are of Rajas, Passion. Lassitude, procrastination and delusion belong to Tamas, Darkness. Cutting these down with subtle arrow-storms, the man of intelligence, free from procrastination, possessed of a tranquil soul, and with his own senses under subjection, then ventures to vanquish others.

In this regard, those who know about the great and ancient cycles of time, relate some slokas sung by King Ambarisa, who had indeed acquired a tranquil soul. When diverse kinds of sin were in the ascendant, and when the righteous were afflicted, Ambarisa of great fame put forth his strength to assume sovereignty. Subduing his own faults and worshipping the righteous, he attained to great success and sang these slokas:

'I have subdued many faults. I have vanquished all foes. But there is one, the greatest vice, desire, which deserves to be destroyed but which I have not vanquished! Controlled by desire, this Jiva fails to attain to freedom. Afflicted by desire, one falls into dark ditches without knowing it. Ruled by desire, one indulges in forbidden deeds.

From greed arises desire. From desire flows anxiety. Cut off, O cut off, that greed with sharp-edged swords. The man who succumbs to desire acquires many traits that are of Passion. Then he falls into Darkness, and is born repeatedly, with the bonds of body united, and is compelled to action.

Upon expiring, his bodily elements scattering, he meets with death, which is caused by birth itself.

Understanding this, and subduing greed by intelligence, one's only desire should be for sovereignty over one's soul. This is true sovereignty; there is none other. The Atman, properly understood, is the king.' So said the famed King Ambarisa on the subject of sovereignty—that monarch who did indeed slay the one supreme fault, greed."'

CANTO 32

'The Brahmana said, "My wife, another tale from antiquity is told about a conversation between a certain Brahmana and King Janaka. Once, intending to punish with exile a Brahmana found guilty of some offence, King Janaka said to him, 'You will no more dwell within my dominions.'

The Brahmana replied to that best of kings, 'Tell me, O King, what the boundaries are of your kingdom. I am ready to dwell in the dominions of another king. Verily, I wish to obey your command, O Bhumipala, in accord with the Shastras.'

The king of immeasurable tejas said not a word in reply to the celebrated Brahmana, but only heaved hot sighs repeatedly. Like the planet Rahu swallowing the Sun, a darkness of the intellect had suddenly overwhelmed him, and he sat plunged in thought. When after a short while the cloud of oblivion passed and the king was comforted, he spoke to the Brahmana.

Janaka said, 'Although a vast and peopled domain is subject to me within this my ancestral kingdom, yet I have failed to find it. I searched Mithila for it. When I failed to find it in Mithila, I sought it among my own children. When I failed to find it even there, a dark shadow, a black stupor, seized my mind. When it passed, the light of intelligence returned to me. Then I thought, either I have no dominion, or everything is my dominion. Either even this body is not mine, or the whole Earth is mine. At the same time, O Dvijottama, I think that it is as much mine as it belongs to others.

Do you, therefore, dwell here as long as you choose, and do you enjoy whatever is here as long as you please.’

The Brahmana said, ‘When you have such a vast and peopled ancestral kingdom, tell me, how have you rid yourself of the notion of possession, of mine-ness? And how, too, have you concluded that nothing and all things, belong to you and constitute your kingdom?’

Janaka said, ‘I have understood that all things are mortal and fleeting, Hence, I do not find anything that may be called mine. Meditating upon what the Veda says about possession, in truth, I could find nothing at all which I could call my own. Even thus did I rid myself of the notion of mine-ness.

Hark now to the insight by which I concluded that nothing, but also everything, is mine, and that my kingdom consists of all things. I have no desire to possess the fragrances my nose scents; thus conquered, through relinquishment by me, all the earth is mine, and always subject to me.

I do not desire for myself the tastes that dwell upon my tongue; thus, I conquered water, and that element is mine forever. I do not desire for myself the colours or the reflections in my eyes; thus, light, conquered, became forever mine. I do not desire for myself the sensations of touch upon my skin; thus, conquering wind, I make that element forever mine. I do not desire for myself the sounds that are in my ear; vanquishing sound, the very realm of sound becomes mine forever. I do not desire for myself the mind that is always in my mind. Thus slaying Mind, I become its lord forever. Everything that I do is for the Devas, the Pitris, the Bhutas and Sadasyas.’

The Brahmana, smiling, now said to Janaka, ‘Know that I am Dharma, who have come here today to test you. You are verily the One who sets in motion this wheel that never turns back, this Chakra which has Goodness for its rim, Brahman for its hub, and Gyana for its spokes!’”’

CANTO 33

'The Brahmana said to his wife, "My gentle one, I do not dwell or move in the world in the manner you have censured by virtue of your own understanding. I am a Brahmana possessed of Vedic gyana; I am emancipated, a Jivanmukta. I am a vanaprastha; I observe the dharma of a grihasta; I keep vratas. I am not what you see in me as good or bad. I pervade everything in this universe. Whatever creatures exist in the world, mobile or unmoving, know that I am the destroyer of them all, even as fire is the destroyer of all kinds of wood.

Sovereignty over Bhumi and Swarga, on one hand, and Knowledge of the Self, on the other: my wealth is this, Atmagyana. This is the one path for Brahmanas, an understanding they bring to grihas or to asramas, to gurukulas or to sannyasa. Whatever be their numerous and distinct outward symbols, they worship only one knowledge. Whatever rules they keep, or ways of life they follow, those who have discovered the understanding which has peace and transcendent bliss for its essence attain to the Single Being, even as many rivers flow into the ocean.

The path can be traversed only by using the intellect and the understanding, not the body. The body is bound to action, and actions have beginnings and ends. Hence, blessed wife, you need have no apprehensions about the hereafter. My heart is intent on the true Brahman, and it is into my soul that you will come."'

CANTO 34

'The Brahmana's wife said, "Small is my intelligence, and confused, and uncleansed my soul: I cannot comprehend what you say. Tell me simply how one such as I might come to the knowledge of which you speak. Tell me of the source from which this knowledge flows."

The Brahmana said, "Know that the intelligence devoted to Brahman is the lower arani fire-stick; the preceptor is the upper arani twig; tapasya and the shastras create the friction. From this springs the fire of knowledge."

The Brahmana's wife said, "Where is the symbol of Brahman, which is called Kshetrajna, described, so that it might be seized?"

The Brahmana said, "He is without symbols, and without attributes. Nothing exists that may be regarded as His cause. But I will tell you how or not He can be sensed and found, even as bees do flowers.

The means to discover Him is to first cleanse the understanding through karma. Those whose intellects have not been so cleansed, through their own ignorance invest the Brahman with knowledge and other attributes. The truth is that nowhere is it laid down that this or that should be done or not in order to achieve Mukti.

Knowledge of the Soul arises only in him who sees and hears. Hence, in this world one should experience and understand as many parts, unmanifest and manifest, and past count, as one is capable of comprehending. Indeed, one should comprehend diverse objects of diverse import, and all objects of direct perception. Then, from the long practice of contemplation and self-restraint, there naturally arises the direct, ineffable knowledge of that above which nothing exists, and absorption into it."

Then, through her husband's grace, true understanding came to his wife and, upon the destruction of her illusions, her mind became that which is eternal and transcendent.'

Arjuna says, 'Where is that Brahmana's wife, O Krishna, and where is that greatest of Brahmanas, both of whom attained Mukti? Tell me about them, O you of unfading glory.'

The blessed Lord says, 'Know that my mind is the Brahmana, and that my intellect is the Brahmana's wife. He whom I spoke of as Kshetrajna, the Knower of the field of karma, why, that is me, O Dhananjaya!'"

CANTO 35

"Arjuna says, 'Expound to me the Brahman—that which is the highest object of knowledge. Through your grace, my mind is delighted with these subtle disquisitions.'

Krishna says, 'The old story of the discourse between a guru and his sishya is told on the subject of Brahman. Once upon a time, O scorcher of foes, an intelligent disciple asked a certain Brahmana of rigid vows, who was his guru, as he sat at his ease, "What is the highest good, O my master? Fervently wanting to attain to that which constitutes the highest good, I throw myself at your feet, Holy One. Most learned Brahmana, bowing my head, I beg you to explain to me what I ask."

To that disciple, Partha, his guru replied, "Dvija, I shall explain to you everything about which you may have doubts." Listen, O Kurusottama, you of great intelligence, to what he said.

That ever-devoted sishya said, with folded hands, "Where did I come from? Where did you come from? Explain that which is the highest truth. From what source have all creatures, mobile and unmoving, sprung? By what do creatures live? What is the limit of their life? What is truth? What is penance, O learned Brahmana? What do the good and the wise call the gunas, the attributes? What paths are deemed auspicious? What is happiness? What is sin? Holy One of excellent vows, I beseech you to answer these questions exhaustively and accurately. Who else is there in this world to resolve them? Answer me, O greatest of all knowers of dharma. I burn to know, and you are celebrated through all the worlds as a master of the dharma of Mukti. There is no one more competent to remove

every kind of doubt. Terrified by samsara, I have grown anxious to attain Mukti."

Parantapa, Kurusottama, to that disciple who humbly sought instruction, who was, besides devotion to his preceptor, possessed of serenity and self-restraint, who always conducted himself in a manner agreeable to his instructor and so constantly attended his master as to have become almost his shadow, for the sake of that follower who led the life of a Yati and Brahmacharin, O Partha, his wise guru, keeper of the sternest vratas, duly answered all his questions.

The guru said, "All this was declared in ancient days by Brahma himself. Lauded and practised by the greatest of Rishis, and depending on knowledge of the Vedas, it involves considering what constitutes the Real Entity. We regard knowledge to be the highest goal, and renunciation as the best penance. He who knows with certainty the true object of gyana, the unchanging and eternal Atman abiding in all creatures, which is without beginning, end or decay, succeeds in going wherever he wishes and comes to be regarded as supreme.

That learned man who sees all things dwelling in one place and their departure as well, and who sees unity in multifarious creation, succeeds in freeing himself from misery. He who does not covet anything or cherish the least notion of possession, although living in this world, comes to be revered as one with Brahman. He who knows the truth about the qualities of Pradhana, primordial Nature, who knows the creation of all existence, who is divested of the notion of mine-ness and is without pride, succeeds, beyond doubt, in emancipating himself.

Understanding fully that Great Tree which has the unmanifest for its seed and sprout, the intellect for its trunk, higher consciousness of the self for its branches, the senses for the cells whence its twigs issue, the five great elements for its flower-buds, and the gross elements for its smaller boughs; which is eternal, ever rich with leaves and flowers; upon which all existence depends—discerning this, one severs all illusion with the sword of knowledge, attains to immortality and casts off birth and death.

O you of great wisdom, let me tell you about the past, present and future, Dharma, Artha and Kama, all well known to conclaves of Siddhas, which pertain to remote and fathomless cycles of time, and which are, indeed, eternal. These constitute what is called Sanatana Dharma, the

highest good. Understanding them in this world, men of wisdom attain to success.

In days of old, the Rishis Brihaspati and Bharadwaja, Gautama and Bhargava, Vasishta and Kashyapa, Viswamitra and Atri, met together in order to question and illumine one another. They came together having traversed every worldly path, and after they had exhausted the karma that each of them had done.

Setting the sage son of Angiras at their head, they journeyed to Brahmaloka, where they saw the resplendent Pitamaha, perfectly cleansed of all sin. Bowing their heads to that Mahatman seated at his ease, the great Rishis, with profound humility, asked him this grave question regarding the highest good.

'How should a good man conduct himself? How could one be released from sin? What paths are auspicious? What is truth, and what is sin? By what deeds are the two paths, northern and southern, obtained? What is destruction? What is Emancipation? What is birth and what is death of all things and beings that exist?'

I will tell you, O sishya, what the Pitamaha said to them, in accord with the Shastras. Do you attend to what I say. Brahma said, 'It is from Truth that all creatures, mobile and immobile, have been born. They live by the penance of karma. Understand this, O you of excellent vows. In consequence of their own actions they live, transcending their own origin. For Truth, when united with gunas, becomes possessed of five attributes.

Brahman is Truth. Tapasya is Truth. Prajapati is Truth. It is from Truth that all creatures have sprung. Truth is the universe of being. It is refuge in Truth that is sought by Brahmanas, who are always devoted to Yoga, who have transcended anger and sorrow, and who always regard Dharma as the high path.

I will tell you of these Brahmanas who are restrained by one another, who possess gyana, and who belong to the four varnasramas. The wise say that Dharma is one, albeit having four parts. Dvijas, I will tell you about the auspicious path which leads to felicity. Men of wisdom have always walked that path in order to find union and identity with Brahman. This is the highest path and exceedingly difficult to comprehend. Hear about it, in every particular, you most blessed ones, and attend to what is the ultimate goal and rest.

The first asrama along the eternal path is brahmacharya; the second is grihasta; then comes vanaprastha, and finally sannyasa, which fetches the aspirant to the Adhyatma. Light, Akasa, the Sun, Wind, Indra and Prajapati—one sees these as long as one does not attain to Adhyatma.

Listen to how you can attain to final Adhyatma, and Mukti. But first understand the other asramas. The vanaprastha dwells in the forest, subsisting upon fruits and roots and, later, air; this asrama is prescribed for the three twice-born varnas. The grihastasrama is ordained for all the varnas. Those who know say that Dharma has Faith for its main component. These are the paths that lead to the Gods, and the good and wise tread them through their karma. These paths are the causeways of piety. One of unwavering vratas, who faithfully follows any of these asramas, becomes enlightened and in time understands the creation and destruction of all creatures.

Hear now about the essences comprising all created things and beings. The Paramatman, the unmanifest, ego, the ten and one organs of knowledge and action, the five mahabhutas, great elements, the specific characteristics of the five elements—these constitute eternal creation. The number of these attributes is four and twenty, and one more.

The man of wisdom, who understands the creation and destruction of all these attributes, that man among all creatures is never deluded. He who understands properly the elements, the qualities, the deities, succeeds in cleansing himself of all sin. Freed from all bonds, such a man enjoys every realm of spotless purity.'"

CANTO 36

"Brahma said, 'That which is unmanifest, which is indistinct, all-pervading, everlasting, immutable, is known as the city of nine gates, possessed of the three gunas, consisting of the five elements, and encompassed by the eleven, including the distinguishing mind, with Understanding for its ruler.

The three Nadis in it, the Gunas, are its constant support; these are constant: Tamas, Rajas and Sattva: darkness, passion and purity. They are coupled with one another; they exist, depending on one another; they take refuge in one another, follow one another, and are fused with one another.

The five principal elements, the Panchamahabhutas, are characterized by these three gunas. Sattva is equal to Tamas, and Tamas to Rajas; and Rajas is equal to Sattva, as well. Where Darkness is restrained, Passion is seen to flow; where Passion is restrained, Goodness is seen to flow. All three prevail from time to time over one another.

Tamas has the night, or obscurity, for its essence. Also known as delusion, it has three characteristics. Sin characterizes Tamas, and the dark guna is always present in all sin. Darkness is the essence of Tamas, and it appears in conjunction with the other gunas. Restless activity is the essence of Rajas, which makes for ceaseless doing, when it prevails over the other two Gunas. Splendour, lightness and faith—these are the essence, which is of light, of Sattva, which the good and the wise hold in regard. Listen while I declare to you the true nature of the three Gunas, individually and together, and understand them well.

Complete delusion, ignorance; illiberality, indecisiveness, sleep, haughtiness, fear, greed, grief, the censure of good deeds, loss of memory; unlikeness of judgment, lack of faith, violation of all norms of conduct, want of discrimination, blindness in thought and action, vileness of behaviour, boastful assertions of achievement when there has been no performance at all, presumption of knowledge in actual ignorance, hostility, an evil disposition, foolish reasoning, crookedness, an incapacity for friendship, all-round wickedness, heedlessness, inertia, stubborn inflexibility, lassitude and stupor, lack of self-control, degeneracy—all these are of dark Tamas.

Whatever other states of mind exist in the world and are associated with delusion, all pertain to Tamas. Frequently speaking ill of other people, mocking the Devas and Brahmanas, illiberality, vanity, delusion, wrath, an unforgiving nature, hostility towards all creatures: these, too, are characteristics of Darkness. Undertakings that are without merit, from being vain and useless; gifts which are without value, the giver being unworthy, the time being inappropriate, the gift itself being impure; gluttony—these also belong to Darkness.

Slanderous talk, vanity, lack of forgiveness and faith, and general animosity, are all characteristics of Darkness. All men in this world who are marked by these and other similar faults, and who endlessly flout and violate the restraints laid down by the Shastras, are regarded as belonging to Tamas, the Guna of Darkness.

Hear from me now of the wombs into which men of darkness and sin are forced to take birth. Ordained to hell, they devolve and plunge down into being born in brute species. They become immobile things, or animals, or beasts of burden; carnivores, or snakes, or worms, insects and birds; oviparous creatures, or quadrupeds of diverse kinds; lunatics, deaf or dumb humans, or men afflicted by dreadful maladies and looked upon as unclean. These men of evil, always evincing the signs of their dire sins, plunge deep into darkness, into hellish existence. Their course of rebirths is forever downward. In Tamas they sink into deeper, denser darkness.

There can be redemption even for these, but hear now the means whereby they can rise again towards light and even attain to the realms that exist for men of pious deeds. Sinners who are born into bestial species succeed in redeeming themselves by lingering around the homas and yagnas of true Brahmanas devoted to their svadharma, great souls who wish

for the weal of all creatures. Sinful ones who witness the yagnas of such Brahmanas will succeed, verily, in becoming like those Brahmanas themselves. Indeed, they will find Swarga for themselves, as the Vedas have declared.

Born into lower species, growing old and dying after serving their lives as creatures less than human, thus paying for their old sins, they are born into humankind again, likely into the lowest orders. Coming to sinful births and becoming Chandalas or men who are devoid of hearing or speech, they attain to higher and higher castes, over many births, one after another successively, transcending the Sudra varna, and other consequences of old tamasic deeds whose traces abide in the course of its migrations through birth and death.

Attachment to the objects of desire is delusion. Here, even Rishis and Munis and Devas become misguided, plunging madly after pleasure. Darkness, deception, the great delusion, the great obscurity called wrath, and then death, that blinding oblivion—these are the five great afflictions. As for wrath, that is the great darkness, not aversion or hatred as is sometimes told.

Learned Dvijas, I have now told you about the colour, the source and the nature of Tamas. Who is there that truly understands it? Who truly sees it? Why, that is the very essence of the Dark Guna: seeing as reality that which is far from real. Yes, I have described Tamas to you, in various ways, its higher and lower forms. And he who is always aware of the nature of Tamas will surely one day free himself from everything that belongs to Darkness.'"

CANTO 37

"Brahma said, 'Best of beings, hear now from me about Rajas, which is the Guna of Passion.

Most blessed ones, these are the characteristics of Rajas: injuring others, beauty, striving, pleasure and pain, cold and heat, lordship and power, war, peace, disputations, dissatisfaction, endurance, might, valour, pride, wrath, exertion, confrontations, jealousy, desire, malice, battle, the sense of mine and mine-ness, protection of others, slaughter, bonds, affliction, buying and selling, dissevering, piercing the armour of enemies, spilling blood, fierceness, cruelty, vilifying, pointing out the faults of others, being immersed in worldly affairs, anxiety, animosity, reviling others, false speech, false or vain gifts, hesitancy and doubt, boastfulness, praise and censure, laudation, prowess, defiance, attendance on the sick and the weak, obedience to the commands of preceptors and parents, service or ministrations, harbouring thirst and desire, cleverness and adroitness of conduct, strategy, heedlessness, contumely, possessions, and diverse embellishments and adornments which prevail in the world among men, women, animals, inanimate things, houses, grief, incredulousness, vows and regulations, actions with the expectation of their fruits, diverse deeds of public charity, the rites of Swaha salutations, the rituals of Swadha and Vashat, officiating at the sacrifices of others, imparting instruction, performance of yagnas, study, the making of gifts, acceptance of gifts, rites of expiation, other auspicious deeds, the wish to win, affection engendered by the merits of a thing or person, treachery, deception, disrespect and respect, theft, killing, secrecy and concealment, vexation, wakefulness,

ostentation, haughtiness, attachment, devotion, contentment, exultation, gambling, indulgence in scandal, all matters and relations arising out of women, attachment to dance, music and song—all these, learned Brahmanas, have been said to belong to the Rajoguna.

Men on Earth who reflect on the past, present and future, who are devoted to Dharma, Artha and Kama, who are driven by desire, exult in affluence that gratifies their every wish, are enveloped by the Guna of Passion. These men have downward courses. Repeatedly reborn into this world, they give themselves up to pleasure. They covet what belongs to this world as well as the fruit of the hereafter. They make gifts, accept gifts, offer oblations to the Pitris, and pour libations on the sacrificial fire. These are the ways of Rajas, in their variety. I have also described the karma that Rajas generates. The man who rightly understands the Rajoguna and what it entails succeeds in freeing himself from all that belongs to Passion.'"

CANTO 38

"Brahma said, 'Attend now to the nature and indications of the third Guna, Sattva. It is rightful, beneficial to all creatures in the world, and constitutes the conduct of the good.

Joy, satisfaction, nobility, enlightenment, happiness, liberality, fearlessness, contentment, faith, forgiveness, courage, non-violence, equability, truth, straightforwardness, the absence of wrath, the absence of malice, purity, intelligence, prowess—these are the hallmarks of the Sattva Guna. He who is devoted just to the dharma of Yoga, who regards knowledge to be vain, conduct, social service and even the varnasrama to be vain, attains to what is highest in the world hereafter. Freedom from the notion of mine-ness, freedom from egoism, freedom from expectations and desire, and looking upon all things with an equal eye—these constitute the eternal religion of the good.

Confidence, modesty, forgiveness, renunciation, purity, absence of laziness, cruelty and delusion, compassion for all creatures, absence of a disposition to slander, exultation, satisfaction, rapture, humility, natural good conduct, purity in all actions which have the attainment of peace for their aim, righteous understanding, freedom from attachments, dispassion, continence, complete renunciation, freedom from the very thought of possessions, freedom from expectations, unbroken observance of righteousness, belief that gifts are in vain, sacrifices are in vain, study is in vain, vows are in vain, receiving gifts is in vain, the observance of one's svadharma is in vain, and that penances are in vain—those Brahmanas in this world whose demeanour is marked by these virtues, who adhere to

dharma, who abide in the Vedas, are said to be wise and possessed of true vision.

Casting off all sins and freed from grief, men of wisdom attain to Swarga and create diverse bodies for themselves. Attaining the great powers of self-governance and restraint, of anima, or minuteness, these high-souled ones create through the operation of their own minds, like the Devas themselves who dwell in Swargaloka. Such men follow paths that lead them ever upwards, evolving constantly. They are veritable gods who can change all things. Attaining Heaven, they transform whatever they wish by their very nature. They acquire and enjoy whatever objects they choose.

Best of all Dvijas, these are the ways of those who live in the Sattva Guna. Understanding these, one gains whatever one desires. The virtues of the Sattva Guna have been particularly enumerated, described and lauded, as well as the nature and conduct of those whom this attribute of Goodness rules. The man who lives in the knowledge of these, enjoys all things without any vestige of attachment.'"

CANTO 39

"Brahma said, 'These Gunas are not entirely separate from one another. Rajas, Sattva and Tamas are always found in a state of union. They are attached to one another. They depend on one another. They have one another for their refuge. They follow one another.

As long as Sattva exists, so does Rajas; there is not doubt about this. As long as Tamas and Sattva exist, so does Rajas. They make their journey together, in union, moving collectively. They move in a body, whenever they act, with or without cause. However, they do not have equal influence; at any time, one or the other dominates. But the manner in which they increase and diminish will now be declared.

Where Tamas dominates, in the lower creatures, the beasts, Rajas has a lesser sway, and Sattva still less. Where Rajas is copious, in creatures of middling evolution, Tamas has lesser power, and Sattva still less. Where Sattva rules abundantly, in creatures of higher evolution, of upward courses, Tamas and Rajas are diminished.

Sattva is the fount that restrains the senses. It is the great enlightener. No dharma has been laid down that is higher than Sattva. They who abide in Sattva evolve upwards; who dwell in Rajas remain on a middling course; and whom Tamas rules, constantly devolve. Tamas prevails in the Sudra; Rajas in the Kshatriya; and the Sattva Guna, the highest, in the Brahmana. The three co-exist thus in the three varnas. Even upon a cursory view, the three are seen to exist in union, never in a state of separation.

Seeing the Sun rise, evil men are gripped by fear; evil ones belong to Tamas, to darkness and night. Heat torments wayfarers. The sun is the

highest Sattva; heat is Rajas. Surya is Sattva; Agni is Rajas; while the solar eclipse on Parvana days is the time of Tamas.

The three Gunas dwell in all bodies of light. They act by turns in diverse places in different ways. Tamas exists in great measure in inert, unmoving things. Rajas is marked by constant activity and change. Quiescence and calm characterize the Sattva Guna.

Threefold is the Day; the Night, as well, has been ordained to be threefold. So also are fortnights, months, years, seasons and conjunctions. All the gifts of life, all daana, are triune. Threefold is sacrifice that flows. Three are the worlds; three the great gods; threefold the paths, and triune is knowledge.

Consider: the past, the present and the future; Dharma, Artha and Kama; Prana, Apana, and Udana: all these are also fraught with the three Gunas. All that exists in this world is permeated and ruled by the three Gunas, acting and prevailing by turn in all things and all circumstances, and always in unmanifest form.

Endless is the creation of the three Gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The Unmanifest, which subsumes the three, is darkness, uttermost mystery, unperceived, holy, constant, unborn, the womb, eternal, Prakriti, change, decay, death, Pradhana, creation, absorption, vastness, immutable, unmoving, being and non-being: those who meditate upon the Atman should know all these as being names for That. He who properly knows these names for the Unmanifest, and the Gunas, as well as the pristine workings of the three, knows the truth about all duality and distinction; freed from the body, he is liberated from the Gunas and arrives at absolute freedom and undying bliss.'"

CANTO 40

"Brahma said, 'From the unmanifest first sprang Mahat, the Great Soul, endowed with measureless Intelligence, and this was the source of the Gunas. That was the first creation. Mahat is Paramatman, it is Intelligence, Vishnu, Jishnu, Sambhu of boundless valour, Intellect, the means of acquiring knowledge, the means of perception, as also fame, courage and memory. Knowing this, a wise Brahmana never encounters delusion.

Mahat has hands and feet on every side; he has ears everywhere. He stands pervading everything in the universe. Of great power, that Being is in the heart of all. Minuteness, lightness and affluence are his. He is the lord of all, identical with light, and he is Akshara, who knows no decay.

In Him dwell all who comprehend the nature of the final understanding, who are devoted to goodness, absorbed in dhyana, devoted to Yoga, who are firm in truth, who have subdued their senses, who are possessed of true knowledge and free from greed, who have conquered anger, who are ever of cheerful heart, who are blessed with wisdom, who are not bound by notions of mine and yours, and who are free of egoism.

These, all the bonds of attachment severed, attain to real and singular greatness. The one who attains that sacred and highest goal, the Paramatman, is liberated from delusion, from this worldly samsara.

The Self-born Vishnu is the Lord of the first creations. He who knows the Lord lying in the cave, the Supreme, Ancient Being, of Universal Form, the Golden One, the ultimate goal of all the wise—that most intelligent man comes to life eternal, transcending the mind and the intellect as well.'"

CANTO 41

"Brahma said, 'The first and original Mahat was Ego. When it came into being as I, it was the second creation. Mahat is the source of all creatures, for these have issued from its modifications. It is pure effulgence and the supporter of consciousness. It is Prajapati. It is a deity, the Creator of gods, and of Mind. It is that which creates the three worlds. It is that which feels, "I am all this".

Mahat is the eternal refuge for sages who are content with knowledge relating to the soul, Rishis who have meditated on the Atman and found success through Vedic study and sacrifices. Through the consciousness of the Atman, beings enjoy the Gunas. That source of all creatures, that Creator of all creatures, creates them through the Gunas; Mahat is the fount of all change, and the flow of time. It illuminates the universe with its own light.'"

CANTO 42

"Brahma said, 'From Mahat came the Panchamahabhutas, the five great elements: earth, air, ether, water, and the fifth, light. By these, and through sound, touch, colour, taste and smell, all creatures are deluded. When at the destruction of the Mahabhutas, the dissolution of the universe approaches, O you wise ones, a great fear comes over all living creatures. Every existence dissolves into that from which it is created. The Pralaya reverses the process of creation, drawing back what Mahat once put forth.

Indeed, Creation and Dissolution are born from one another. When all creation, mobile and unmoving, is dissolved, wise men endowed with profound Memory remain untouched. Sound, touch, colour, taste and smell are impermanent and known as Maya, delusion. Caused by desire, unreal, not differing from one another, depending upon one another, connected to flesh and blood and existing outside the soul, these are powerless in themselves.

Prana and Apana, Udana, Samana and Vyana, these five life-breaths are always closely attached to the Atman. Together with speech, mind and understanding, they constitute the universe of eight ingredients. He whose skin, nose, ear, eyes, tongue and speech are restrained, whose understanding does not stray from the true and eternal path, whose mind is pure and never burnt by the eight fires, succeeds in attaining to the most hallowed and auspicious Brahman, beyond which nothing exists.

Hear now about the sensual eleven organs that have sprung from Mahat. They are the ear, the skin, the two eyes, the tongue, the nose, the

two feet, the anus, the organ of generation, the two hands, the tenth, speech and the eleventh, the mind. These constitute the group of organs that the seeker must first subdue. Then Brahman will shine forth in him. Five amongst these eleven are called organs of knowledge, and five, organs of action. The five that begin with the ear are linked to knowledge. The rest, however, which have to do with action, are without distinction. The mind belongs to both. The intellect, or understanding, is the twelfth, and the highest. Learned men, having plumbed these, feel they have accomplished everything.

I will describe these now for you, individually.

Akasa, ethereal space, is the first element. The ear signifies it; sound expresses it. The Four Quarters rule over this element.

Vayu, the wind, is the next Mahabhuta. Skin is its sense; touch its manifestation; and touch is its Lord as well.

The third element is Light. Its sense is the eye; among perceptions it is colour; and the Sun is its ruler.

The fourth element is Jala, water; it is signified by the tongue; in the perceived world, taste; and Soma, the Moon, has lordship over it.

Bhumi, earth, is the fifth bhuta; the nose is its organ; scent its perception; and Vayu rules over it.

Thus, the five elements each have three components. Now hear about the other organs. Brahmanas who know the truth say that the two feet are emblems of the Atman; movement are their expression; and Vishnu rules them.

The Apana Vayu, whose motion is downward, is the lower vent, the anal; excretion is its expression; and Mitra has lordship over it.

The generative organ, the linga, is the vital seed; and Prajapati is its Lord.

The two hands, again, denote the soul; karma, deeds, signify them; and Indra rules them.

Speech, Vak, relates to all the Devas; it is whatever is uttered; Agni rules over it.

Manas, the mind, moves within the the five elements. It is thought, and Chandramasa, the Moon is its Lord. It is Ahamkara, the Ego which causes all Samsara, this worldly life. It is consciousness of selfhood; and Rudra is its Lord.

The Intellect, Mahat, impels the six senses. It is that which is to be understood, and its ruling deity there is Brahma.

All existence is founded in three elements, and there is no fourth. These are land, water and ether. Fourfold is the way of all birth. Some are born of eggs; some are born of seeds, germs, which spring up through the earth; some are born of the earth itself; and some are born of wombs. All living creatures are born in one of these four ways.

There are inferior species and those that range the sky. These are known to emerge from eggs, as are those that crawl on their breasts. Insects and the like are born from earth, swamp and filth. This is said to be the second manner of birth and is inferior. Creatures that sprout bursting through ground after lying dormant for a time are the seed- and germ-born ones. Creatures with two or several legs and feet, and also those that move crookedly, are the womb-born ones; and some among them are malformed.

Of two kinds is the eternal womb of Brahma: tapasya and punya karma. This is the doctrine of the wise. For all who are born, the ancients have taught, karma is of various kinds, such as sacrifice, gifts made at sacrifices, and the exemplary meritorious duty of study. One who understands this, comes to be regarded as being possessed of Yoga; such a man is freed from all his sins. This is the doctrine of Adhyatma.

O Munis who know dharma deeply, those that know Adhyatma are considered true Gyanis. Unite the senses, the objects of the senses, and the five great elements, and restrain them in the mind through dhyana; when all things are reduced in dhyana, one no longer regards the pleasures of life. Wise men of knowledge regard Adhyatma, inner joy, as the only true happiness.

Hear me now about renunciation for all beings by means both gentle and difficult, relinquishment leading to attachment to what is subtle and spiritual, fraught with auspiciousness. To treat the Gunas as being without essence in themselves, to free oneself from worldly attachments, and to lead a solitary life which recognizes no distinctions, but which is replete with Brahman, is to reach the source of all real, eternal happiness.

The learned man who absorbs all desires into himself, from all sides, even like the tortoise withdrawing all its limbs, or the imperturbable Ocean that absorbs the rivers flowing into it, who is liberated from samsara and without passion becomes perennially happy, Sadananda. Restraining all desires within the soul, destroying his thirst, concentrated in dhyana, and

being a good-hearted friend to all creation, he becomes fit to be absorbed into Brahman.

By abandoning inhabited places and firmly repressing the wild senses which ever hanker after their objects of pleasure, the man of contemplation causes the Adhyatma fire to blaze forth in him. As a fire fed with fuel burns bright, even so, from restraining the senses, the immortal Atman puts forth its transcendent effulgence. When a man of tranquil soul beholds all entities in his own heart, then by the pristine light of his own Self he attains to that which is subtler than the subtle, and without equal: the final Being.

The body has Agni, fire, for colour; Jala, water, for blood and other fluids; Vayu, air, for the sense of touch; Bhumi, earth, for the gross sheath of the mind—flesh and bones; Akasa, ether, for sound. This body of flesh and blood is pervaded by disease and sorrow; it is overwhelmed by five currents, the five elements; it has nine doors and two deities; it is rife with passion; it is made up of the three gunas; its unholy nature renders it unfit to even be seen; it has three constituent elements, vata, pitta and kapha, wind, bile and phlegm; it delights in attachments of every kind; and it is full of delusions.

It is difficult to move in the mortal world that rests on Mahat as its support. The body is, in this world, the wheel of Time that continually revolves. It is a horrible and unfathomable ocean called maya, delusion. It is this body that stretches, contracts, and awakens the very universe with the Immortals. By restraining the senses, one casts off lust, wrath, fear, greed, enmity and falsehood, which are perennial and, therefore, most difficult to relinquish. He who, in this world, subdues the three gunas and the panchabhutas of the body, has the Brahman for his seat. He attains to Infinity. Crossing the river that has the five senses for its steep banks, the mental inclinations for its waters, and delusion for its great lake, one must conquer both lust and anger. Such a man, freed from all faults, then beholds the Highest, his mind concentrated within the Mind, and seeing the Self in himself.

Understanding all things, he sees his own eternal Atman in all creatures, at times as one and at others as many, changing form from time to time. He perceives the many like countless lights emanating from and belonging to the one Light. Verily he is Vishnu, and Mitra, and Varuna, and Agni, and Prajapati. He is the Creator and the Ordainer: he is the Lord possessed of ineffable puissance, with faces turned in all directions. In him,

the heart of all creatures, the Paramatman, becomes resplendent. He is praised by all conclaves of learned Brahmanas, Devas and Asuras, Yakshas and Pisachas, the Pitris and Pakshis, tribes of Rakshasas and bands of ghostly beings, and all the great Rishis.'"

CANTO 43

"Brahma said, 'Among men, the royal Kshatriya is endowed with Rajas, the middle Guna; among mounts, the elephant; among denizens of the forest, the lion; among all sacrificial animals, the sheep; among all those that live in holes, the snake; among cattle, the bull; among feminine creatures, the mule.

In this world, the Nyagrodha, the Jambu, the Pipala, the Salmali, and Sensapa, the Meshasringa and the Kichaka are the foremost among trees. The greatest of mountains are Himavat, Patipatra, Sahya, Vindhya, Trikutavat, Sweta, Nila, Bhasa, Koshthavat, Guruskandha, Mahendra and Malayavat. Likewise, the Maruts are the first among the Ganas. Surya is the Lord of all the planets, and Chandramas of all the constellations. Yama is the Lord of the Pitris; Sagara is the Lord of all rivers. Varuna is the king of the waters. Indra is the king of the Maruts. Arka is the king of all hot bodies, and Indra of all luminous ones. Agni is the eternal Lord of the elements, and Brihaspati of the Brahmanas. Soma is the Lord of plants and herbs, and Vishnu is the greatest of those endowed with might.

Tashtri is the king of Rudras, and Siva of all creatures. Yagna is the foremost of all initiatory rites, and Maghavat of the Devas. The North is the Lord of all the points of the compass; Soma of great energy is the Lord of all learned Brahmanas. Kubera is the Lord of all precious gems, and Purandara of all the other Devas. Such is the highest creation among all entities.

Prajapati is the Lord of all creatures. Of all entities, I, who am full of Brahman, am the foremost. There is none higher than myself or Vishnu.

The great Vishnu, who is full of Brahman, is the King of kings, above all. Know him to be the ruler, the Creator, the uncreated Hari. He is the ruler of men and Kinnaras, Yakshas and Gandharvas, Nagas and Rakshasas, Devas and Danavas.

Among those followed and worshipped by men full of desire is the great Goddess Maheswari of beautiful eyes. She is also called Parvati. Know that the Devi Uma is the highest and the most auspicious of women. Among women that are a source of pleasure, the best are the Apsaras who possess great splendour.

Kings always wish to acquire piety, and Brahmanas are causeways of piety. Therefore, the king should always strive to protect the twice-born ones. Kings in whose dominions good men languish are regarded as bereft of the virtues of their order. In the hereafter, such kings are forced to tread dark and sinful paths. Kings in whose dominions good men are protected, rejoice in this world and enjoy happiness in the hereafter. Such Mahatman Rajarishis attain to the Highest. Understand this well, O Dvijottamas.

Now listen to the eternal indications of dharma. Non-violence, abstaining from harming any living being, is the highest dharma. Violence is the sign of unrighteousness, of adharma.

Splendour is the nature of the Devas. Men have karma for their way. Akasa has sound for its characteristic; Wind has touch; colour belongs to light, and taste to Water. Earth, which supports all beings, has smell for its characteristic. Words belong to Speech, refined into vowels and consonants. Mind has thought, while thought belongs to Buddhi, the Intellect. Whatever the mind thinks of, is verified by the Intellect. There is no doubt that Mahat, through perseverance, perceives all things.

Dhyana, meditation, is inherent to the mind. The way of the good man, the Yogi, is to live unperceived. Devotion, Bhakti, has karma for its means. Knowledge is the emblem of renunciation. Keeping knowledge in view, the man of understanding, the Gyani, observes renunciation. The man who has truly renounced, who has real knowledge, who transcends all the pairs of opposites, as also darkness, death and decrepitude, attains to Brahman, the highest goal. All this is dharma, and the paths of duty.

Listen now to the perception of the qualities. Smell, that appertains to Earth, is perceived by the nose. The air dwelling in the nose is the agent in the perception of smell. Taste is the essence of water; the tongue, in which

Soma dwells, perceives taste. The essence of light is colour, which the eye perceives. Aditya, who dwells in the eye, perceives colour.

Touch, Sparsha, pertains to Vayu, and is sensed by the skin. The quality of Akasa is sound, which is seized by the ear. All the Quarters, which dwell in the ear, have been appointed to apprehend sound. The quality of the mind is thought, which is known by the Intellect. The upholder of consciousness, Chit, living in the heart, apprehends the mind. Buddhi is known through determination or certitude, and Mahat in the form of Gyana, knowledge.

Unperceived, pristine Prakriti is the knower of all things that transcend certitude—of this have no doubt. The Kshetrajna, which is eternal and Nirguna, without attributes, cannot be known by symbols: the Kshetrajna is pure knowledge. The Unmanifest dwells in the symbol called the Kshetra, and is that in which the worlds and its qualities are created and absorbed. I always see that Brahman, and hear it, although it is hidden. Purusha knows it: therefore is he called Kshetrajna.

The Kshetrajna also perceives the activity of the Gunas, as well as their absence. The Gunas, which are created repeatedly, have no intelligence of their own and do not recognize themselves or the entities in the constant process of creation, fraught with a beginning, middle and end. No one other than the Kshetrajna attains to that which is the Highest, the Brahman transcending the Gunas and all that are born from them. He who fathoms dharma, casting off the Gunas, and indeed the Intellect or Mahat, and thereby has all his sins destroyed, he enters into the Kshetrajna, the final Knower.

He who is free from all the pairs of opposites, who never bows his head to anyone, who is divested of Swaha, who is immutable and homeless, is the Kshetrajna. He is the Supreme Lord.'"

CANTO 44

"Brahma said, 'Hear now the truth about all that has a beginning, middle and end, and which has a name and attributes, as also the means of apprehension.

The Day was first; then arose Night. The Months have the lit, waxing fortnights first. Among constellations Sravana is first; Winter, of dew, is first among the Seasons. Bhumi is the source of all scent; and Jala of all tastes. Surya is the source of all colours, and Vayu of all sensations of touch. Of sound, the source is Akasa. These are the qualities of elements.

Listen now to which are the first and the highest of all entities. Of luminaries, Surya is the first. Agni is foremost among the elements. Savitri is the first of all branches of learning. Prajapati is the Lord of all the Devas. Prana, the life-wind, is the first of all winds. The syllable Om, is the first of all the Vedas; the life-wind Prana is the first among all winds.

All that is called Savitri which is prescribed as worship in this world. The Gayatri is the first of all mantras; of yagnapasus, the goat; among four-legged creatures, the cow; among humans, Dvijas; among birds, the eagle. The first sacrifice is the pouring of ghrita into the sacred fire.

Of reptiles the foremost is the snake. The Krita is the first of all the Yugas; of this there is no doubt. Gold is the best among all precious things; barley among plants. Food is the first of all that is eaten, and water of all that is drunk.

Of all immobile creations, the Plaksha is the first, that ever-holy field of Brahman. Of all Prajapatis I, Brahma, am the first. The self-created Svayambhuva Vishnu is my superior. Of mountains, great Meru is the first-

born; of the cardinal and subsidiary points of the horizon, the East; among rivers, Ganga of three courses; of water bodies, the Ocean.

Iswara is the supreme Lord of all the Devas Danavas, and Pisachas, Nagas and Rakshasas, Manavas, Kinnaras and Yakshas. Mahavishnu, who is full of Brahman, than whom there is no higher being in the three worlds, is the first in all the universe.

Of the varnasramas, the grihastasrama is the best; the Unmanifest Brahma is the source of all the worlds as, indeed, the end of everything. Days end with the sun's setting and nights with the sun's rising. The end of pleasure is always sorrow, and the end of sorrow, pleasure. All accumulations have exhaustion for their end, and all ascents end in falls.

All associations have dissociation for their end, and life has death. All karma ends in destruction, and all that is born is certain to die. Every mobile and immobile thing in this world is transient. Sacrifice, gift, penances, study, vows and sacred observances: all these have destruction for their end. Only true Knowledge has no end. Hence, one possessed of a tranquil soul, who has conquered his senses, who is freed from the sense of ownership, devoid of egoism, is released from all his sins by pure knowledge.'"

CANTO 45

"Brahma said, 'The wheel of life turns on. It has Mahat for its strength; Manas is the axle-rod on which it revolves; the senses are its fetters, the Panchamahabhutas are its nave, and Samsara is its round. It is overwhelmed by decrepitude and grief, and has diseases and calamities for its progeny. That wheel revolves in time and place; toil and action are the great noise it makes. Day and Night are the rotations of that wheel; heat and cold encircle it. Pleasure and pain fire its joints, and hunger and thirst are the nails which secure it. Sunshine and shade are the ruts it makes; it can be stirred in the blink of an eye.

The terrible waters of delusion envelop the wheel; blindly, ceaselessly it revolves, without consciousness. It is measured by months and fortnights. Being ever-changing, it is irregular; and it spins through all the worlds. Penances and vows are its mud. Passion's force is its mover. It is illuminated by great Ahamkara, and sustained by the Gunas.

Frustration at unfulfilled desires are the fastenings that bind it firm; it turns in the midst of grief and death, and is endowed with deeds and their instruments by which deeds are performed. It is large and is ever extended by attachments; desire and greed make it unsteady.

The Wheel is created by manifold Ignorance, attended upon by fear and illusion, and binds all beings with maya, the great delusion. It moves towards joy and pleasure, and has desire and wrath for its possessions. It consists of creations beginning with Mahat, down to the gross elements. It is characterized by ceaseless creation and destruction. Its speed is like that of the mind, and it has the mind for its frontiers.

This wheel of life, which is associated with pairs of opposites and devoid of consciousness, the universe with the very Immortals, should be cast off. Among all creatures, the man who understands properly the motion and stoppage of this wheel of life is never deluded. Freed from all impressions, sensory and of the mind, divested of all pairs of opposites, released from all sins, he attains to the highest goal.

Grihasta, Brahmacharya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa—these four asramas of life all have the Grihastasrama for their foundation. Whatever codes of law are prescribed in this world, their observance is beneficial and always highly regarded. He who has first been purified by rituals, who has duly observed vratas, who is well-born, and who understands the Vedas, must return from his Guru's house after his tutelage and marry.

Then, devoted to his wedded spouse, conducting himself with dharma, with his senses restrained, and full of faith, he must perform the five sacrifices. He is known as a righteous man, a Sishta, who eats what remains after feeding the gods and his guests, who faithfully observes Vedic rites and within his means performs sacrifices and makes gifts, who is not unduly active with hands and feet or with his eye, who is devoted to tapasya, who does not speak too much and who knows his bounds.

One should always wear the sacred thread and clean white clothes, carry a bamboo-staff, and a kamandalu of holy water, keep pure vows and associate with good men in satsanga. Giving daana and practising self-restraint all the while, a man's conduct must be worthy; his appetite and lust should be firmly controlled, and he should practise universal compassion.

Having studied, the good man must teach; he should perform yagnas himself and officiate at the sacrifices of others. He should give with a pure heart gifts he himself has received. These six should always characterize the man of dharma's life. Three of these should constitute the livelihood of the Brahmana: teaching, officiating at the sacrifices of others, and accepting gifts from good men. As for the other three, the giving of gifts, study, and sacrifice—these are earners of punya.

Performing tapasya, being self-restrained, living with universal compassion and forgiveness, and looking upon all creatures with an equal eye—the man who knows dharma never neglects these three. The learned Brahmana of pure heart, who lives in the Grihastasrama, while keeping firm vows, devoted and discharging all duties to the best of his power, surely attains to Swarga.'"

CANTO 46

"Brahma said, 'Duly studying thus to the best of his power, and living as a Brahmacharin, he who is devoted to his svadharma, who is learned, observes penances with senses restrained, always does what is agreeable and beneficial to his Guru, remains pure and steadfast in the practice of dharma, should, with the leave of his master, eat whatever food he receives, never decrying it.

He should eat havishya made from what he receives as alms, and should stand, sit and move as his preceptor directs him. He should pour libations on the fire twice a day with a concentrated mind after purifying himself. He should always carry a staff made of the wood of the bilwa or the palasa. The robes of the regenerate man should be of linen, cotton or deer-skin, or in hue entirely brown-red. He should also have a sacred girdle made of munja grass.

He must wear jata, matted locks, on his head, and perform his ablutions every day. He must don the sacred thread, study the scriptures, divest himself of greed, and be firm and unwavering in the observance of vratas. He must gratify the Devas with oblations of pure water, his mind restrained as he does so.

Such a Brahmacharin is indeed worthy of praise. His mind fixed in dhyana and his vital seed drawn up, he that is so dedicated succeeds in conquering Swarga. Having attained the highest place, he need not return to birth. Cleansed by every purificatory rite, and having lived as a Brahmacharin, he should leave his village and dwell as a vanaprastha in the forest, never again returning to an inhabited place. He should perform his

ablutions morning and evening, clad in animal skin or the bark of trees. Honouring guests when they come, he should offer them shelter and sustain himself on fruits, leaves, common roots and syamaka. Depending on the regulations of his initiation, and abjuring sloth, he must subsist on such water as he finds, on the produce of the forest, or on air.

Without hesitation or reservation, he should offer roots and fruit, or whatever other food he may have to his guests, honouring them as gods come to his dwelling. Observing silence, he must eat only after gratifying with food the gods and his guests.

His mind must be free of any trace of envy. He should allow his hair and beard to grow freely, eat just enough to sustain his body, and depend upon the gods. Self-restrained, ever forgiving, practising universal compassion, performing regular sacrifices and devoting himself to the study of the scriptures, he observes the dharma of truth.

His body always pure, his senses restrained, owning true intelligence, his mind focused in dhyana, the vanaprastha attains to the highest felicity. A grihasta, brahmacharin or vanaprastha who seeks Moksha must lead a life of exemplary conduct. Swearing non-violence towards every living thing, he must relinquish all karma, contribute to the happiness of all creatures, practise universal friendliness, subdue his passions and senses, and lead a chaste life. He must make a fire and subsist upon food obtained without asking and without exertion, which has come to him spontaneously.

He must make his round of mendicancy in places where the cooking fire has been extinguished and no smoke curls any longer from it, and where the household has already eaten. He who knows the path of Mukti seeks alms only after the cooking vessels have been washed. He never rejoices when he receives anything, nor is he dejected when he does not. He waits for the proper time to set out on his round of seeking alms just enough to support life, with his mind controlled and serene. The ascetic does not seek earnings as others do, nor does he eat when honoured; rather, he conceals himself in order to shun gifts of honour. He should not partake of the leavings of another's meal or eat anything bitter, astringent, pungent or sweet. He should eat only as much as he needs to keep himself alive.

He who knows about Nirvana never deprives another creature of its nourishment while seeking his own. He cannot stay with friends or kin, nor ever accumulate any possessions. On his rounds of mendicancy, he ought not to follow another who is also out begging alms or make a parade of his

piety, but seek seclusion in an empty house or a mountain cave or a forest, at the foot of a tree or beside a river, freed from passion. In summer, he must pass only one night in an inhabited place; during the rains he may remain in one place, but otherwise he must be always on the move, like a worm on the face of the earth, his path pointed out by the sun. Out of compassion for all living creatures, he should walk with his gaze directed to the earth.

The man on the path of liberation performs all his daily kriyas with pure sanctified water, his ablutions with clean water fetched from a river or drawn from a well or tank. Ahimsa, brahmacharya, truth, simplicity, freedom from anger, self-restraint, naturally and habitually never speaking harshly to anyone, and never speaking ill of anyone behind their backs: the man who seeks Mukti cleaves to these eight vows unwaveringly.

He must be sinless, without falsehood or deceit. Abjuring any attachment, he must offer any guest who comes to him whatever food he can, while he himself eats just enough to support his life. He should eat only food he has obtained by righteous means, and never from the dictates of desire. He should accept by way of alms only food and the simplest clothing, no more than meet his barest needs.

He must not accept gifts or make them but, out of compassion for all fellow creatures, always share whatever he has. The man of wisdom can never appropriate what belongs to another, nor take anything without being asked and, having enjoyed anything, he must never become so attached to its pleasure that he desires it again. Indeed, when he wishes to perform any rite or make an offering he can only take earth and water, stones and leaves, flowers and fruits which belong to no one, and only as they come to him. He cannot make his livelihood as an artisan, nor should he covet gold or wealth of any kind.

He must be without resentment, refrain from preaching, and keep himself away from polemics. He must have no belongings and eat only what is consecrated with faith. He must never enter into intimate relations of any sort with any creature, or perform or enable any action that involves expectation of fruits or destruction of life or hoarding of material goods. Truly, he must live a life like amrita. Rejecting all objects, content with very little, he should range homeless over the earth, viewing and treating equally all creatures and things around him, moving and immobile.

He whom all creatures trust is regarded as the best of those who understand the way of Moksha. He can never cause hurt or annoyance to another, and is himself never irate with anyone. He must neither dwell on the past nor feel anxious about the future, but live wholly in the moment, detached, his mind absorbed in dhyana. Neither with eyes, thought nor speech should he defile anything or anyone, nor commit any offence, either openly or in secret.

Withdrawing his senses like the tortoise its limbs, he should make his mind one-pointed, develop a profoundly serene heart and disposition, and seek to master every subject. Freed from all the pairs of opposites, pleasure and pain, joy and grief, heat and cold, never bending his head in reverence, abstaining from rites that require the utterance of Swaha, he unshackles himself from ahamkara, and mine-ness. With a cleansed soul, he must have no desires, neither to acquire what he does not have, nor to safeguard what he does. Without expectations, divested of the gunas, wedded to tranquillity, he repudiates the slightest attachment and depends on no one.

Attached to his Atman and nothing besides, knowing all things, one is certain to attain Nirvana. He surely escapes death who has experienced the Atman, which is without flesh, which has no hands or feet or back, no head and no belly; experiences no smell, taste, or touch, no colour, no sound; which transcends the functions of the three gunas and is absolute, untainted and unchanging; which can only be known directly as the final achievement; which is unattached and beyond fear, unfading and divine; and, lastly, which, though dwelling in one body, yet dwells in every living being and thing.

There the Intellect does not reach, nor the senses, nor the gods, nor the Vedas, nor Yagnas, nor regions of bliss, nor tapasya, nor vratas. The attainment of Mukti by men of true Gyana is ineffable, beyond comprehension, or expression in symbols. Hence the man who knows the nature of what is beyond symbols should observe the truths of dharma.

The learned man, becoming a grihasta, adopts conduct conforming to the true knowledge. Though beyond maya, he must practise dharma even as though he is deluded by this life, never finding fault with it. He might even live in such pious conformity that others find fault with him. He who lives thus is known to be the greatest of sages.

The senses, the objects of the senses, the five great elements, mind, intellect, ego, the Unmanifest, and Purusha—it is after fathoming all these

rightly that the seeker is freed from all bonds and attains Nirvana. He who knows the Truth, and has transcended his bondage, must, at the hour of his death, meditate upon the One. Then, depending on no other, he comes to Moksha. Freed like the wind in space, with all his accumulated karma exhausted and no distress of any kind, he attains to his highest goal.'"

CANTO 47

"Brahma said, 'The ancients who were utterers of verities say that Vairagya, Renunciation, is real penance. Brahmanas who dwell in that which originates in Brahman, understand Knowledge to be the Parabrahman, the First, the eternal. Brahman is the distant, final goal, and its attainment depends also upon knowledge of the Vedas. It is free from all the pairs of opposites, it is Nirguna, without qualities and attributes; it is eternal; it is endowed with qualities beyond cognition: it is Supreme. It is through gyana and tapasya that men of wisdom behold that Highest.

Verily, they of untainted mind, they who are cleansed of every sin and have transcended all passion and darkness, attain to that Immortal Place. They who remain devoted to renunciation, and who know the deepest truths of the Vedas, through penance find the Supreme Lord who is peace and bliss. Penance, it has been said, is light; a good life leads to piety; true knowledge is the highest aim and being. Renunciation is the best penance. He who understands the Atman through discerning things accurately, the imperturbable Self, identical with Knowledge, which resides in all entities, becomes ubiquitous. The learned man who perceives attachment and detachment, and the underlying unity in diversity, is released from suffering.

He who desires nothing, who despises nothing, can be absorbed into Brahman even while living in this world. He who knows the truths about Pradhana, and understands Pradhana as existing in all creatures, who is free from the sense of mineness and egoism, is surely liberated. He who is freed from all the pairs of opposites, who does not bend his head to anybody, who

has transcended the rituals of Swadha, comes through peace alone to that which is eternal, without attributes or qualities. Abandoning all karma, good and bad, issuing from the gunas, and casting off both truth and untruth, he finds Moksha.

Having the Unmanifest for its seed, the Intellect for its trunk, with the great principle of Egoism for its branches, the Senses for its little sprouts, the five Great Elements its large branches, the objects of the senses for its twigs, with perennial leaves and the flowers which always adorn it, and with fruits both sweet and bitter always being yielded—that is the eternal tree of Brahman, the support of all creatures. Cutting down that tree using the sword of knowledge of the truth, the man of wisdom severs the bonds of attachment that cause birth, decrepitude and death and, freeing himself from ahamkara, finds Mukti.

There are the two birds, companions that perch on the tree of life, which are immutable and have no intelligence of their own; the other, different from these two, is called the Intelligent. A seeker is liberated from all his sins when that self which has no knowledge of nature, which is without intelligence becomes conversant with that which is beyond Prakriti, comes to understand the Kshetra and apprehends everything, illumined by an intelligence transcending all attributes, qualities and manifestations.'"

CANTO 48

"Brahma said, 'Some regard Brahman as a tree, others as a great forest. Some regard Brahman as unmanifest; others as transcendent and free from every distress. They say that this universe is created from and absorbed into the Unmanifest.

The man who, when his end comes, finds equilibrium, attains to the self even for the space of a single breath, fits himself for immortality. Restraining the self in the self, even for the space of a wink, one goes through the tranquillity of the self, to the inexhaustible gains of those blessed with true Gyana. Restraining the life-breaths by controlling them through pranayama, by the ten or the twelve, the seeker attains to that which is beyond the four and twenty. Thus, by acquiring a tranquil soul, he attains to the fruition of all his wishes and beyond.

When the Sattva Guna predominates in that which arises from the Unmanifest, it becomes fit for immortality. They who know Sattva laud it highly, saying that there is nothing higher. By inference we know that Purusha is dependent on Sattva. Dvijottamas, it is impossible to attain to Purusha by any other means. Forgiveness, courage, non-violence, equability, truth, sincerity, knowledge, charity and renunciation are manifestations of the Sattva guna: it is through these that the wise infer the identity of Purusha and Sattva. Of this there is no doubt.

Some gyanis, devoted to knowledge, assert the unity of the Kshetrajna and Prakriti. They are mistaken, for Nature differs from Purusha, albeit there is both distinction and association between the two, unity and diversity. That is the doctrine of the learned. In the gnat and udumbara we

find both unity and apartness. The relationship between Purusha and Prakriti is like that between water and the fish which swims in water, like water drops and the lotus-leaf upon which they rest.'

At these words, some doubts arose in those learned Brahmanas, foremost of men, and they questioned the Pitamaha further."

CANTO 49

"The Rishis asked, 'Which among all duties is deemed to be the most worthy of being performed? We see that the diverse modes of karma are contrary. Some say that karma survives the body; others that it does not exist; while yet others hold that doubt and ambiguity are all that is certain; and there are those who have no doubts. Some claim that the Brahman is not, in fact, eternal. Some say that it exists, and others that it does not. Some say it is one, others that it is two, and still others that it is mixed. Some Brahmavadis surely regard it to be one; others that it is distinct, and others again that it is manifold.

Some of the wise say that both time and space exist; others refute this. Some wear matted jata on their heads and deer-skins on their bodies; others have shaven crowns and go naked. Some never bathe, while others regularly perform ablutions. These differences of views and ways are found among Devas and Brahmanas who know Brahman and are blessed with perceptions of truth. Some of them eat, while others fast. Some praise action; others uphold complete tranquillity. Some seek Mukti, while others do permit certain kinds of enjoyment. Some desire diverse kinds of wealth; some embrace poverty. Some say that karma must be performed; others disagree. Some are devoted to a life of non-violence; others are addicted to killing. Some hanker after merit and glory, others believe that these are hollow.

Some are devoted to goodness; others are established on doubt. Some are for pleasure, some for pain. Some hold dhyana dear, some yagna, while others, also learned ones, believe in daana. Many of the wise resort to

tapasya, while others laud the study of the Shastras. Some advocate Gyana and Vairagya, knowledge and renunciation. Others who ponder the elements declare it is Prakriti. Some extol everything; others, nothing.

O Pitamaha, greatest of gods, dharma seems full of perplexing contradictions of many kinds. We are deluded and cannot arrive at any conclusion. There are those who espouse karma, action, chanting, 'This is good.' Whoever is attached to a certain course of action claims that his way is the best. We are confused and distracted and desire to know what is good. It is befitting, best of all beings, for you to declare to us the actual connection between the Kshetrajna and the Kshetra.

The illustrious Creator of the worlds, of fathomless intellect and the soul of righteousness, then expounded to the Brahmarishis the answer to their question."

CANTO 50

"Brahma said, 'Listen to what a guru told his sishya once in this regard, and let that quieten your bewilderment. Non-violence is said to be the first and the highest dharma. It is the ultimate seat, free from fear, and the final sign of holiness.

The ancients who were seers of the Brahman said that knowledge is the highest happiness, and a man is indeed liberated from all sin by pure knowledge. Those who engage in violence and killing, who are godless in their ways, will find hell for their greed and delusion; while those rush headlong into action propelled by desire, are born repeatedly into this world, and sport in joy. Those men of learning and wisdom who engage in karma without desire and attachment, with faith and concentration, are said to see the truth clearly.

Listen now, best of men, to how the Kshetrajna, the Knower, is bound to and free from Prakriti. The relation between the two is that between the subject and the object. Purusha, the Soul, is always the subject, and Prakriti, Nature, the object. And they do, indeed, exist after the manner of the Gnat and the Udumbara. Being solely an object of enjoyment, Nature is without intellect and knows nothing. He, however, who enjoys Prakriti, is the Kshetrajna, the knower. Kshetrajna is the one who enjoys, while Nature is enjoyed.

The wise have always said that Prakriti is comprised of the Gunas and the resultant pairs of opposites. Purusha, on the other hand, is without these; He is eternal, eternally free, the ubiquitous in-dweller in all things, and

walks with knowledge. He enjoys Nature as a lotus-leaf does water, which rests upon the leaf but never wets it.

Enlightened with knowledge, he is never tainted, even if comes into contact with all the Gunas; Purusha is unattached like the unsteady drop of water on the lotus-leaf. Thus the scriptures conclude that Prakriti is the property of Purusha, and the relation between these two is like that between matter and its maker.

As one goes into a dark place taking a light with him, even so do those who seek the Supreme travel with the light of Nature. As long as matter and the Gunas exist, like oil and wick, so long does the lamp shines. The flame is extinguished when matter and the Gunas are exhausted.

Prakriti is manifest, while Purusha is unmanifest. Understand this, O knowing Brahmanas. Now listen to something more: not a thousand explanations can enlighten one whose intellect is dull; he will not come to knowledge. However, he who is blessed with intelligence succeeds in finding happiness, even through the most minimal explanations. Understand that the accomplishment of dharma depends on one's natural endowments. Being inherently blessed, the man of intelligence surely attains supreme felicity.

Even as a wayfarer without provisions, journeys in discomfort and might well die before he reaches his destination, so does a paucity of understanding and dharma operate on the fruits of action. A man benefits greatly from scrutinizing in himself what is agreeable and what is not.

The progress in life of a man who has no perception of truth is like the blind careen of one who recklessly rushes down a long road he has never seen before. The lives of the intelligent are like the journeys of men who travel along a well-known way in a swift chariot yoked to fine horses.

Having climbed to the top of a mountain, one should not look back down to the earth left far below. Seeing an insensible and afflicted man along the way, the man of intelligence continues going ahead as long as there is a road before him. Only when he finds no path in front for his chariot does the man of wisdom alight and continue on foot.

Thus does the man of intelligence journey who knows the laws ruling Gyana and Bhakti, Yoga and Satya. Conversant with the Gunas, such a man travels understanding what lies ahead of him, for he is farsighted. The deluded and ignorant man plunges headlong into a lake of dread, without a boat, surely courting death; while the man of wisdom and discrimination

enters the water cautiously, in a boat with sturdy oars, crosses easily, without tiring himself, and abandons the boat when he gains the far shore. Such a one is aware, and free of arrogance. These are like the others on the road of life, one ill-provided and going on foot, while the wise one resorts to a chariot for as far as it will bear him.

The wise yatri knows that a chariot cannot take him across water, even as a boat cannot across solid ground. He has no attachment or illusions about either chariot or boat, and uses both when he needs them; he is not confined by either as, say, a fisherman is to his boat, but uses the conveyance appropriate to the element he needs to cross over.

Thus, O Dvijottamas, there are different and distinct means used by wise men to pass through and transcend different circumstances and times; they all take him towards his final destination.

And as men perform karma in this world, so do they reap its fruits. That which has no smell, no taste, no touch or sound, which is meditated upon by the sages, is called Pradhana. Pradhana is unmanifest. Mahat is a development of the unmanifest Pradhana. Ahamkara is an evolute of Pradhana when it has become Mahat. From Ahamkara come the Panchamahabhutas; and from the five great elements come forth the objects of the senses.

The Unmanifest is of the nature of seed; in its very essence it is Creative. The Paramatman has the virtues of a seed, and Ahamkara, which is a creation of Mahat, owns the nature of a germ and ceaselessly, unendingly, creates. The Mahabhutas have the nature of both seed and creations. The objects of the five great elements are also endowed with the nature of seed, and yield multifarious creations.

These have Chitta, consciousness or perception, for their attribute. Among them, space has one attribute; wind has two; light is invested with three gunas, and water with four. Earth, teeming with creation, mobile as well as unmoving, owns fives attributes. Bhumi is a goddess; she is the womb of all creatures and abounds with every conceivable manner of thing, bright and dark.

Sound, touch, colour, taste and smell—these are the five qualities of earth, O Dvijottamas. Smell always belongs to earth, and smell is of many kinds. Listen to these. It can be agreeable, disagreeable, sweet, sour, pungent, diffusive, compact, oily, dry or clear—of these ten kinds is the sense of smell that belongs to the earth.

Sound, touch, likewise colour and taste, belong to the element of water. Attend to the qualities of taste: sweet, sour, pungent, bitter, astringent and saline—six are the varieties of taste.

Sound, touch and colour are the three attributes of light. Colour is white, dark, red, blue, yellow and grey, short, long, minute, gross, square and circular—of twelve sorts is colour, which belongs to light. Venerable Brahmanas, knowers of dharma and truthful in speech, understand these.

Sound and touch are the two qualities of wind. Touch is of various kinds—rough, cold, hot, tender, clear, hard, oily, smooth, slippery, painful and soft—so say Brahmanas who know dharma, and who are seers of truth, their tapasya crowned with success.

Akasa, ethereal space, has only one quality, which is sound, Nada. The scale of sound is comprised of shadaja, rishabha, gandhara, madhyama, panchama, nishada and dhaivata—seven. Besides these, there are sounds agreeable and sounds discordant, compact, and complex. Thus, sound born of space is of ten kinds. Space is the highest of the five elements. Ahamkara, Ego, is above it; above Ego is Intellect, Mahat. Beyond Mahat is the Atman. Above Atman is the unmanifest Pradhana; beyond that is Purusha.

He who knows who is superior and who inferior among existing beings, who knows the laws laid down in the Shastras with respect to all actions, and who himself is the soul of all creatures, attains to the Unfading Soul.'"

CANTO 51

"Brahma said, 'Since the mind is the ruler of the five elements, in creating and controlling them, the mind is the soul of the elements. The mind always rules over the Mahabhutas. The Intellect has power, and is called the Kshetrajna. The mind yokes the senses as a charioteer yokes fine horses. The senses, the mind, and the intellect are always united with the Kshetrajna. The individual soul, the Jivatman, mounts the chariot to which mighty steeds are yoked, with Mahat for its reins, and goes where it will.

With all five senses harnessed, with the mind for its charioteer, and the intellect for its eternal reins, is the great ratha of the Brahman. The man of learning and understanding knows the Brahmaratha and is never overcome by delusion, even whilst living in the world, in the midst of all creatures.

The forest of Brahman begins with the Unmanifest and ends with material creations. It includes mobile and immobile entities, it receives light from the Sun and the Moon, and is adorned with planets and constellations. Networks of rivers and ranges of mountains embellish it on every side, as do seas and lakes and diverse water bodies, providing sustenance for all creatures. The Unmanifest Brahman is the final goal of every creature, the ultimate Gift.

In the forest, the Kshetrajna moves eternally. When the Pralaya arrives, all the material entities in this world, mobile and rooted, are the first to find dissolution. Next to dissolve are the Gunas which constitute these creations and, after them, the five great elements upon which the Gunas are founded. Such are the layers of creation.

Devas, Manavas, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Asuras and Rakshasas, all have sprung from Prakriti, and not from Karma, not from any other cause. The Brahmas, who are Creators of the universe, are born here again and again. All that springs from them dissolves, when the time comes, into those very Panchamahabhutas, like waves receding and being lost in the ocean.

All the Mahabhutas are beyond the lesser elements that compose the universe. He who is released from the five elements comes to the highest goal.

The omnipotent Prajapati created all this from just his divine mind, through tapasya; through tapasya, the Rishis attained to the status of Devas. Through dhyana and tapasya do those who achieve perfection, who subsist on fruits and roots, commune in Yoga with the Spirit of God; and they perceive all of the Trilokas—Swarga, Bhumi and the Patalas.

Medicines and herbs and all the diverse sciences are acquired through tapasya alone, for all acquisition has penance for its root. Whatever is difficult of acquisition, difficult to learn, difficult to vanquish, difficult to pass through, all are achievable by tapas, for penance is irresistible.

He who drinks, he who kills a Brahmana, who steals, who kills a foetus in the womb, who violates his guru's bed—all these can exorcise their sins through tapasya well performed. Manavas, Pitris, Devas, sacrificial animals, beasts and birds, and all other creatures mobile and immobile, find salvation through tapasya.

Thus did the Devas, blessed with great powers of maya, attain Swargaloka. Those full of egoism who perform rigorous karma, but with expectations of karma's fruit, approach the presence of Prajapati; but true Mahatmas, are free of ahamkara and the sense of mineness, attain to the greatest and highest worlds through the pure contemplation of Yoga; they find Nirvana. These, who know the Atman, their hearts always joyful, gain true Communion, and eternal bliss.

Great souls, free from ego and mine-ness, who are reborn after attaining to the fullness of Yoga contemplation, enter into the highest place, the Unmanifest Brahman, from which there is no return. Liberated entirely from Tamas and Rajas, the gunas of darkness and passion, and cleaving solely to Sattva, a man is released from every sin and creates all things.

Such a one is known to be the Kshetrajna, in perfection. He that knows Him, knows the Veda. Attaining to pure knowledge by yoking the mind in

dhyana, the Yogi should sit immaculate, self-restrained. Man inexorably becomes that on which his mind is set. This is an eternal mystery. That which has the Unmanifest for its beginning and gross materiality for its end, is without the Gunas, in truth.

But do you understand That whose nature is Nirguna? Of two syllables is Mrityu, death; of three syllables is the eternal Brahman, Pranava, the Aum. Mineness is death, and its opposite is eternal. Men led by clouded intellects laud action, karma—never those who are counted among the truly great, the Ancients.

Through karma a spirit is born with a body, which is constituted of the sixteen. Adhyatma Gyana consumes the Purusha, which is the Atman that retains a consciousness of the body. This ultimate knowledge is what those who quaff Amrita accept as being true. These, whose vision extends to the far shore of samsara, the ocean of life, have no attachment to karma, to action.

The transcendent Purusha, in truth, is full of gyana and not of karma. He does not die who understands Him that is immortal, immutable, incomprehensible, eternal and indestructible—Him that is the yoked Soul in perfect communion, and who is past all attachments. He who thus understands the Soul, prior to which nothing exists, which is uncreated, immutable, unconquered, and incomprehensible, even to the drinkers of Amrita, certainly becomes himself incomprehensible and immortal.

Expelling all outward impressions and restraining the soul in the Soul, Atmanatmanah, he understands that auspicious Brahman, than which nothing greater exists. Upon his understanding becoming clear, he attains to peace. The indication of peace is what turns the world into a dream. This is the goal of the emancipated ones, seekers of Nirvana intent on knowledge. They are unmoved witnesses to all the external phenomena of samsara, remaining unmoved by these.

This is the goal of those who are unattached to the world; this is the eternal usage. This is the final acquisition of true gyanis. This is the eternal dharma, beyond reproach, the goal which is attained by one who is alike to all creatures, who is perfectly detached, who has no expectations, and who looks upon all things equally.

I have now told you everything, O Dvijottamas. From now do as I have said and you will find Mukti.'"

Spoken to thus by Brahma, those great sages lived as he counselled and attained realms of utmost felicity. Do you also, blessed one, live by the words of Brahma, O you of pure soul, and you will find eternal success and peace," the ancient Brahmana said to his sishya.'

Krishna continues, 'Thus instructed in the principles of the Sanatana Dharma by his guru, the sishya did everything he was told, O Arjuna, and attained Nirvana, he came to the condition beyond which there is never any more grief.'

Arjuna asks, 'Who was that guru, O Krishna, and who was his disciple, Janardana? Tell me this, Lord, if you consider me worthy of knowing it.'

Krishna says, 'I am the Guru, O Mahabaho, and know that the mind is my sishya. Through my love for you, Dhananjaya, I have revealed this mystery to you. If you have any love for me, perpetuator of the Kuru race, now that you have heard the instructions of the way of the Soul, O you of noble vows, you must live your life by them. When you practise the religion, your sins will leave you like darkness at dawn, and you will find absolute freedom.

Once before, I expounded this same dharma to you, Mahabaho, when the hour of battle came. And now, O Bhaarata, it has been a long while since I saw my father, and I must go to him. So give me leave, Phalguna, my task here is accomplished.' Arjuna says to Krishna, 'We will go today from here to Hastinapura, city of elephants. Meeting Yudhishtira Dharmaraja there, you will tell him of your intention, and then return to Dwaravati.'"

CANTO 52

Vaisampayana said, “Krishna summons Daruka, saying, ‘Let my chariot be yoked.’ Daruka returns quickly to say, ‘Your chariot is ready.’ Arjuna orders his attendants and soldiers, ‘Prepare yourselves, we leave today for Hastinapura.’ His men hasten to do his bidding, Rajan, and soon return, telling the Partha of mighty tejas, ‘We are equipped to move.’

Krishna and Arjuna then climb onto their ratha and set out on their journey, loving friends engaged in delightful conversation. Dhanajaya says to the Lord of the Vrishnis, ‘By your grace, Yudhishtira has won the war. All his enemies have been killed, and he has regained his kingdom whole, without a thorn in it. Madhusudana, in you the Pandavas have the most powerful protector. With you as our raft we crossed the Kuru sea.

Krishna, this universe is your creation, and I salute you, O Soul of the Universe, best of all beings in it. I know you in such measure as you have allowed me in your boundless love. O slayer of Madhu, the soul of every creature is born of your tejas. All this great creation, nurture and destruction is your Lila, your playful sport. Earth and sky, Lord, are your maya. The universe, with all its mobile and unmoving bodies, is founded in you. You create the four kinds of beings. You create the Earth, the Sky and Heaven, O slayer of Madhu. The stainless light of the Moon is your smile. The seasons are your senses. The ever-moving wind is your breath, and death, existing eternally, is your anger. In your grace the Goddess of Prosperity dwells. Verily, Sree is always established in you, O you of ultimate intelligence. You are the sport in which creatures engage; you are their refuge and

contentment; you are their intelligence, their compassion, their inclinations, their beauty.

At the end of the cycle of time, it is you, O sinless one, who come as destruction. In an age I could not begin to enumerate all your attributes. You are Atman and Paramatman. I bow to you, O you of eyes like lotus-petals. Irresistible One, I have learnt from Narada and Devala and Dwaipayana, as well as from Bhishma, that all this Akhanda rests on you. You are the one Lord of all creatures.

And Janardana, Anagha, whatever you have told me to do, out of your love and favour for me, I will accomplish in entirety. How wonderful is what you have done for the Pandavas, destroying Dhritarashtra's son in war. Before battle even broke out, you had consumed the enemy host, which I then vanquished on the field. Though the victory appeared to be mine, Lord, it was you who killed Duryodhana on Kurukshetra, and Karna, and the sinful Saindhava, as well as Bhurisravas.

Devakinandana, you are pleased with me, and I will do as you have told me, without hesitation or doubt. I will go to Yudhishtira and ask him to give you leave to return to Dwaraka. Lord, O absolute knower of dharma, I accept that it is time for you to depart. You will indeed soon see your father Vasudeva, my matulan. Janardana, you will see the irresistible Baladeva and all the other lords of the Vrishnis.'

Conversing thus, the two arrive at the city named after the elephant, where they ride cheerfully into Dhritarashtra's palace like that of Indra himself. Entering the Kuru sabha, O King, they see seated before Dhritarashtra and Gandhari of great wisdom the sage Vidura, Yudhishtira and the mighty Bhimasena, the two sons of Madri and the unvanquished Yuyutsu, Kunti and the beautiful Krishnaa, the other royal women of Bhaarata's race, Subhadra first among them, and all the ladies who wait on Gandhari.

Approaching Dhritarashtra, the two Parantapas announce themselves to the blind king and touch his feet, as they do the feet of Gandhari and Kunti, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and Bhima. Embracing Vidura, they enquire after his welfare. In the company of these, Arjuna and Krishna return to sit before Dhritarashtra again. When night falls, Dhritarashtra dismisses all the Kurupraviras, Krishna as well, and they depart to their own apartments. Krishna retires with Arjuna to his chambers. Duly worshipped and provided

with every comfort and luxury, the divine Krishna of fathomless intellect passes the night in contented sleep, with Dhananjaya for his companion.

When day breaks, the two heroes perform their morning ablutions and rituals, put on fine raiment and ornaments and come to Yudhishtira's palace where the Dharmaraja sits with his ministers around him. The two Mahatmans, Krishna and Arjuna, come before Yudhishtira even like the Aswins before Indra. Greeting the king, who is overjoyed to see them, the incomparable Vrishni and the great Kuru hero sit themselves down with his leave.

The astute Yudhishtira can see that a topic for discussion is looming. He says, 'Kshatriyas, O you foremost ones of the Yadu and the Kuru vamsas, it seems that you have something to say to me. Tell me what is in your hearts. I will do whatever it is that you want. Do not hesitate.' Arjuna humbly approaches his brother and says, 'Krishna here has been long away from his home, O King. With your leave, he wishes to return to Dwaraka to see his father. If you think it proper, allow him to go now to the city of the Anartas. Great Kshatriya, it becomes you to give him your leave.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O lotus-eyed one, be you blessed. Madhusudana, leave this very day for Dwaravati to see your father, greatest of the Sura vamsa. Kesava, Mahabaho, you have my leave, for surely it has been a long time since you saw my uncle and the Devi Devaki. Meet Vasudeva and the mighty Baladeva, and convey my worship to both, as they deserve. But, O Krishna, think daily of me, as also of Bhima, of Phalguna and Nakula and Sahadeva. And, sinless one, having seen the Anartas, your father and the Vrishnis, Mahabaho, you must return here for my Aswamedha yagna.

Go now, peerless Krishna, and take with you gems and other wealth; O hero of the Satwatas, take whatever else you like. It is through your grace, Kesava, that all our enemies have perished and the world has come under our dominion.' Krishna, foremost of men, answers Yudhishtira Dharmaraja of the Kuru vamsa, 'Mahabaho, all jewels and gemstones, all the gold and wealth, and all this Earth, are yours and yours alone. Whatever riches are in Dwaravati, my lord, are also yours.' Dharmaputra replies, 'Tathaastu, so be it,' and then he worships Krishna of ineffable tejas. Krishna then goes to meet his aunt Kunti. He offers her worship and walks around her in pradakshina. She blesses and embraces him in return, worshipping him in her heart, as do all the others present, Vidura first among them.

Then, setting Subhadra beside him, and with the blessings of Yudhishtira and Kunti, Mahabaho Janardana sets out from Hastinapura in his blazing chariot, followed beyond the city gates by a crowd of citizens. The Kshatriya who flies the banner of Hanuman on his ratha is accompanied by Satyaki, Madri's two sons, Vidura of fathomless intelligence, and great Bhima, his tread like that of an elephant. Then, Mahatejasvin Janardana asks all those extenders of the Kuru kingdom and Vidura to turn back and says to his sarathi Daruka and to Satyaki, 'Let our horses fly!'

With that, and Satyaki of the line of Sini in his own chariot beside him, Krishna Parantapa rides home towards Dwaraka, even like Indra of a hundred sacrifices returning to Devaloka after slaying all his enemies."

CANTO 53

Vaisampayana said, “When Krishna sets forth, the Pandavas and the other great Parantapas of the Kuru vamsa embrace him one by one, then sadly return with their attendants to the city of elephants. Arjuna repeatedly clasps the Vrishni hero in his arms. He remains rooted to the spot, gazing after Govinda until he disappears from sight and indeed, so it is with Krishna. Attend to the signs and omens that attend the Avatara’s departure from Hastinapura. The wind blows high before the chariot, sweeping the ground clear of dust and brambles. Indra rains down scented showers and scatters celestial blooms over Krishna.

As the Mahabaho rides on, he arrives at a parched desert where he encounters the Maharishi Utanka, of measureless tejas. The lotus-leaf-eyed Krishna worships the ascetic, and is worshipped in return. Krishna inquires courteously after the Muni’s welfare. The Brahmanottama honours Madhava, and says to him, ‘O Saurin, when you went to the Kurus and the sons of Pandu, did you succeed in establishing a lasting fraternal accord between them?

Tell me everything, Kesava. Have you come after resolving the enmity between your kinsmen, who are, I know, so dear to you? Will the five sons of Pandu, and the sons of Dhritarashtra now enjoy the world together in gladness with you, O best of the Vrishnis? Will all the kings of the world find felicity in their respective kingdoms as a result of the peace you made between the Kuru cousins? O son, has the faith I have always had in you borne fruit among the Kauravas?’

The Blessed and Holy One replies, ‘I did everything I could, great sage, to effect a reconciliation among the Kuru princes. Alas, when I could not succeed, there was a great and terrible war between them in which all the scions of Bharata and the other kings of the earth perished with their followers and kinsmen. Neither by force nor by intelligence can anyone change the course of destiny, O sinless Mahamuni, as you well know.

The Kauravas would not heed the counsel which Bhishma and Vidura gave them respecting me. They encountered their cousins in battle and became guests in the halls of Yama. Only the five Pandavas remain alive. All their sons, friends and kinsmen were slaughtered, as were all the sons of Dhritarashtra, with their sons and kinsmen.’

Rage grips Utanka. His eyes wide with wrath, he says to Krishna, ‘You could have made peace between the Kurus, your own kin and dear to you. But you did not do so, O slayer of Madhu, and for that I will now curse you. You could have compelled your cousins to desist from carnage, but you did not, O Madhava, and I will curse you for your indifference which has soaked the earth with the blood of noble Kshatriyas whose hearts were seized by delusion.’

Krishna replies, ‘O scion of Bhrigu’s race, I ask your forgiveness but, before you pronounce your curse on me, you must listen to what I have to say about the Atman. Also know, best of Munis, that no man, even one of your ascetic merit, can overcome me. I have no wish to see all your punya destroyed in that vain attempt. You have a vast store of blazing tapasya. You have pleased your gurus and your elders. Dvijottama, I know that you have observed brahmacharya since your very childhood. I have no wish to see the loss or even the diminution of your great tapasya, achieved with so much effort.’”

CANTO 54

"Utanka says, 'O Kesava, expound that faultless Adhyatma to me. When I have heard your discourse, I will decide if I should bless or curse you, Janardana.'

Krishna says, 'Know that the three Gunas, Tamas, Rajas and Sattva, exist depending on me as their source and their refuge. So also, O Dvija, know that the Rudras and the Vasus have sprung from me. In me are all creatures, and in all creatures do I exist; know this, and have no doubt about it. Know, regenerate one, that all the tribes of the Daityas, all the Yakshas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Nagas and Apsaras have sprung from me.

Whatever is deemed existent and non-existent, manifest and unmanifest, mortal and immortal—all have me for their soul. The fourfold courses of dharma attached to the four modes of life, and all the Vedic karmas, have me for their soul. Whatever is non-existent, whatever is existent and non-existent, and whatever transcends that which is existent and non-existent, all that constitutes the universe—are from me. There is nothing higher or beyond me, who am the eternal God of gods.

O Bhargava, know that all the Vedas with their root in the original syllable Pranava, the AUM, are one with me. Know, O son of Bhrigu's race, that I am the sacrificial stake; I am the Soma rasa; I am the Charu prepared at sacrifices and offered to the Devas; I am the Homa; I am the rituals which sacrificers perform to gratify the gods; I am the pourer of the sacrificial libation, and I am the Havis or libation that is poured.

I am the Adharyu. I am the Kalpaka; and I am indeed the most sanctified Havis. It is me whom the Udgatri hymns with his songs. In all

rites of expiation, O Brahmana, the utterers of auspicious mantras and benedictions fraught with peace hymn my praises, who am the artificer of the universe.

Know, O Dvijottama, that Dharma is my first-born child, sprung from my mind, whose essence is compassion for all creatures. Constantly transforming myself, I take birth in diverse wombs to uphold that son of mine, with the help of men now living or those gone from this world. I do this to protect and establish righteousness. In the forms that I assume to accomplish my purpose, I am known in the three worlds as Vishnu, Brahma and Sankara.

I am the origin and I am the death of all things. I am the Creator of all that exists, and its Destroyer. Knowing no change myself, I am the scourge of all those that live in sin. In every Yuga I mend the causeway of Dharma, entering into diverse wombs from my desire to do good to my creatures.

When I live among the Devas, O Bhargava, I act in every respect as a Deva. When I live in the order of the Gandharvas, I act in every respect as a Gandharva; when among the Nagas, as a Naga. When among the Yakshas or Rakshasas, I conduct myself as one of them. And now I have taken birth as a human, and I must act like a man.

I appealed to the Kauravas, yes, even piteously. Yet, deluded and stupefied as they were, they would not listen to me. Then I was filled with anger and frightened them by showing them a glimpse of my Viswarupa, to warn them of the consequences of not heeding what I said. But when I resumed this human form, adharma gripped them again, and they were once more in the clutches of time and fate. Punishment for their sins inexorably overtook the sons of Dhritarashtra.

All of them have been killed righteously in battle and have, without doubt, found Swarga. Dvijottama, the Pandavas have acquired great fame. This is all I have to say to you.'”

CANTO 55

"Utanka says, 'I know you, O Krishna, to be the Creator of the universe, and do not doubt that it is through your grace that I have this knowledge. O you of unfading glory, by being devoted to you my heart has found blissful peace. Know, O Parantapa, that my heart is no longer inclined to curse you. If, Janardana, I deserve the least grace from you, show me once your sovereign form, your Viswarupa.'

Pleased with Utanka, the Holy Lord then shows Utanka that eternal Vaishnava Rupa which Arjuna saw on Kurukshetra. Utanka sees Krishna's cosmic, universal form with countless awesome arms; its splendour is that of the light and fire of a thousands suns. Krishna stand revealed before the Rishi as God, filling all space and all time, his faces on every side.

Seeing that Viswarupa, the Brahman is wonderstruck, spellbound.

Utanka says, 'O I bow to you, whose handiwork is the universe; I bow to you, O Soul of the universe, O Parent of all things! You cover all the Earth with your feet, and with your head you fill the firmament. Your body fills all that lies between Swarga and Bhumi; all the cardinal points of the sky are covered by your arms. O you of unfading glory, you are all this, everything that exists! I cannot stand this vision, Lord of blazing light, and I beg you, withdraw this immortal form of yours and return to your human shape, which also I know is eternal!'

O Janamejaya, Krishna then, gratified, says to Utanka, 'Ask me for a boon!' Utanka replies, 'For now this is all the boon I wish for, O glorious one, foremost of all beings—that I have seen this form of yours.' Krishna, however, says again to him, 'A vision of my Viswarupa cannot be fruitless.

Ask me for something.' Utanka says, 'I must not refuse you, O Lord. Water is scarce in deserts such as this one. Grant that I have water wherever and whenever I wish for it.' Returning to his human form, the Supreme Lord says to Utanka, 'Whenever you want water, think of me!'

Krishna then rides again towards Dwaraka.

Later, one day, the illustrious Utanka was wandering through the waterless desert, parched with thirst. The Rishi thought of Krishna's boon, and at once he saw a naked hunter, a fierce-looking Chandala, smeared with dirt, surrounded by a pack of dogs and carrying a sword and a bow and arrows. Utanka saw a copious stream of water issuing from the hunter's linga. The wild Chandala said to Utanka, 'O Bhargava, take this water from me and quench your thirst, for I am moved by great pity for you, seeing you so parched in this desert.'

Utanka showed no inclination to accept the water; afflicted with hunger and thirst, he gave way to wrath and even began to censure Krishna in his mind. The hunter repeatedly said to the Rishi, 'Drink!' But the ascetic refused the water thus offered. Instead he spoke harshly to the Chandala, who immediately vanished with his pack of dogs. Seeing that wondrous occultation, Utanka was abashed. Yet, thinking still that Krishna had deceived him in the boon, he staggered on through the arid desert. Then Krishna himself appeared before the Brahmana as the hunter had done. Utanka said to him, 'Foremost of beings, it was scarcely proper for you to offer water to me, the foremost of Brahmanas, in the form of a hunter's urine!'

Krishna assuaged him with soft words, explaining, 'I offered you water in an appropriate form but you did not divine it. I had asked Indra himself for nectar for you. I said to him, "Give Amrita to Utanka in the form of water." Indra replied, "It is not right for a mortal to become immortal. Let some other boon be granted to Utanka." He said this to me repeatedly, O you of Bhrigu's race, but I insisted, "Amrita must be given to Utanka." The Lord of the Devas then said, "If Amrita is indeed to be given to him, I will assume the form of a Chandala and offer it to him. If he accepts, let him drink the nectar of immortality, but if he shuns me, on no account will it be offered to him again."

Having made this compact with me, Vasava appeared before you as the hunter to offer you the Amrita. But you shunned him because he came as a Chandala. Ah, great was your fault—yet I will do whatever I can to slake

your thirst. On the days, O Dvija, when you feel thirsty, water-laden rain-clouds will rise over this desert and give you fragrant, sweet water to drink. Those clouds, O son of Bhrigu's race, will become known in the world as the clouds of Utanka!' Utanka was filled with joy and to this day, O Bhaarata, those clouds of Utanka appear and bring rain to deserts."

CANTO 56

Janamejaya asked, “With what tapasya was the high-souled Utanka endowed that he could pronounce a curse on Vishnu himself, who is the source of all puissance?”

Vaisampayana said, “O Janamejaya, Utanka was endowed with the most austere penances. He was devoted to his guru. Blessed with awesome tejas, he abstained from worshipping anyone else. All the children of the Rishis, O Bhaarata, wished that their devotion to their gurus should be as great as that of Utanka. Gautama’s satisfaction with Utanka, of all his numerous disciples, and his affection for him were great indeed, O Janamejaya.

Gautama was gratified with the self-restraint and purity of conduct that characterized Utanka, with his deeds of prowess and the services he rendered to his guru. One after another, thousands of disciples received Gautama’s permission to return home after the completion of their tutelage, but Utanka was not allowed to leave the asrama. In the course of time, decrepitude overtook Maharishi Utanka but, because of his devotion to his guru, he was not conscious of it.

One day, he set out to fetching fuel for his preceptor’s sacred fire, and returned bearing a heavy load of wood. Toil-worn, hungry and labouring under the load he bore on his head, he flung his burden down to the ground, O chastiser of foes. One of his matted locks had got caught in the wood. When the dry branches were thrown down, with them fell that lock of matted white hair.

Only then, seeing that his hair had turned white, did Utanka realize that he had grown old and, overcome by a shock of grief, began to weep. At her father's command, his guru's daughter, who knew every dharma, whose eyes were like the petals of a lotus, whose hips were full and round, moved forward to contain Utanka's tears in her cupped palms, with her head bent down. The tears burned her hands and she was forced to let them fall onto the earth. The Earth herself could not bear the scalding tears of Utanka! Gautama asked his sishya, 'Why, my son, are you so grief-stricken today? Tell me calmly and quietly, O learned Muni. I wish to hear it in detail.'

Utanka said, 'With my mind devoted to you and my every thought dwelling only on you, with being always absorbed in doing what pleased you, I have lived here for so long that old age has overtaken me without my knowing it. I have never known any worldly happiness. Although I have lived with you for a hundred years, you have not given me leave to go, while so many other disciples of yours, many much younger than me, have left with your sanction. Why, thousands of great Brahmanas have completed their tutelage with you, and have left and gone on to become gurus themselves, with sishyas of their own!'

Gautama said, 'Through my love and affection for you, and because of your devoted services to me, Dvijottama, a long time has passed without my being aware of it. If, Bhargava, you now wish to leave my asrama, do so without delay, you have my leave.' Utanka said, 'What shall I give you, my guru, as dakshina, before I leave?' Gautama said, 'To serve and gratify the guru is a sishya's highest dakshina; and in these you have pleased me exceedingly, more than any other disciple. Today, if you became a youth of sixteen years, Brahmana, I would give you my own daughter to be your wife, for no other woman could wait upon your blazing tejas, or gratify you.'

Immediately, Utanka became a youth and took his guru's daughter for his wife. He went to Gautama's wife and said, 'What shall I give you as my final dakshina? It is my fervent wish to please you, with my very life. If you wish for the most wondrous and priceless gemstone in the world, I will fetch it for you through my tapasya.' Ahalya said, 'I am already most pleased with you, Brahmana, with your unremitting devotion, O sinless one. That is enough. Be you blessed, and go wherever you wish.' But Utanka said again, 'Command me, O my mother, for it is only meet that I do you some great service.' Ahalya said, 'Blessed one, then bring me the heavenly

earrings which the wife of Saudasa wears. If you do this, your dakshina to your master will be paid in full.'

Utanka said, 'Tathaastu, so be it!' and, Janamejaya, he resolved to fetch those precious earrings for his preceptor's wife. Losing no time, Utanka went to Saudasa, who had been cursed by Vasishta to be a Rakshasa.

Meanwhile Gautama observed to his wife, 'Utanka is not to be seen today.' Ahalya told her husband how Utanka had gone to fetch the jewelled earrings of Saudasa's queen. Gautama reproved her, 'You have not been wise in sending him on such a task. Vasishta has cursed Saudasa to be a Rakshasa, and that king will kill our Utanka.' Ahalya said, 'Swami, I did not know this when I sent Utanka. But through your grace, let him not meet with any harm.' Gautama said, 'Let it be so!'

Meanwhile, Utanka met King Saudasa in a deep and lonely forest."

CANTO 57

Vaisampayana said, “Seeing the king who had become a Rakshasa, his face frightful, his long wild beard smeared with human blood, the Brahmana Utanka was not in the least agitated. Terrifying to behold, like another Yama, Saudasa loomed over Utanka and said, ‘Brahmanottama, by good fortune you have come to me at the sixth hour of the day when I am looking for food.’ Utanka said, ‘O King, know that I have come for the sake of my guru. The wise have said that a man must not be harmed while he is serving his preceptor.’ The king said, ‘Best of Brahmanas, food has been ordained for me at the sixth hour of the day. I am hungry and I cannot allow you to escape with your life today.’

Utanka said calmly, ‘Let it be so, O King, let us make a compact between us. When I no longer range the world in service of my guru, I will come to you again and yield myself to you. Best of kings, I have heard that the object I seek for my preceptor is in your possession, and I solicit you for it. Daily you make gifts of the most priceless gemstones to superior Brahmanas. You are one from whom gifts may be accepted in dharma, and know that I am one worthy of receiving daana from you. Having taken for my master what you give, I will return and submit myself to you. This I solemnly swear, and I do not lie; never in my life have I spoken an untruth, not even in jest: what then of a grave occasion such as this?’

Saudasa said, ‘If I do indeed possess what you want for your guru and I am able to give it to you, and if I can be regarded as one from whom such a gift is acceptable, tell me what it is you want.’ Utanka said, ‘O Saudasa, in my estimation you are indeed a worthy person from whom gifts may be

accepted. I have come to beg as alms the jewelled earrings worn by your queen.' Saudasa said, 'Learned and regenerate Rishi, those earrings belong to my wife and it is she who should be asked for them. Do you, therefore, solicit some other thing from me, and I shall give it to you, O you of excellent vows.'

Utanka said, 'If I am an authority on this question, then yours is no excuse. Give those jewelled earrings to me. Be truthful in speech, O King.' The king said once more to Utanka, 'At my word, go to my good queen, and ask her for what you want. Commanded by me and asked by you, she will surely give you those precious earrings of hers.' Utanka said, 'Where, O ruler of men, can I meet your queen? Why do you not go to her yourself?' Saudasa said, 'I cannot see her today, for the sixth hour of the day has come. You will find her near a resplendent fountain.'

Utanka left Saudasa's presence and, finding Queen Madayanti, told her what he had come for. When she heard that her husband had sent him, that Devi of the large eyes said to the sagacious Utanka, 'If is as my husband said, O Brahmana, you must assure me, sinless one, that you speak the truth. Bring me some sign from my husband. These celestial earrings of mine, wrought with priceless gemstones, are such that the Devas and Yakshas and Maharishis remain on the lookout for a chance to bear them away. If set down upon the Earth at any time, they are likely to be spirited away by Nagas; if worn by anyone who eats impure food, the Yakshas would take them away; and if anyone wearing them were to fall asleep, the Devas would take them.

Brahmanottama, the reason these precious things are coveted by the Devas, Rakshasas and Nagas is because ceaselessly, day and night, these marvellous earrings yield gold. At night, they shine brightly, attracting the subtle and powerful rays of the stars and constellations. Holy One, anyone who wears them is at once freed from hunger, thirst and fear of every kind. Whoever wears these earrings is also free from the fear of poison, fire and indeed every kind of danger. If a small person wears them, they shrink in size accordingly; if the wearer be tall or large, they expand. Such are the magical properties of my earrings, and they are praised and honoured throughout the three worlds. I cannot part with them carelessly, so bring me some sure sign from my husband.'"

CANTO 58

Vaisampayana said, "Utanka went back to King Saudasa, who was always well-disposed towards his friends, and asked him for some sign to convince Madayanti. Best of the Ikshwakus, Saudasa gave him the sign. 'Say to my queen that her husband said, "This accursed condition of mine is intolerable, and I see no refuge or salvation for myself. Know it to be my wish, and give away the jewelled earrings to the Brahmana."'

Utanka went back to the queen and repeated what her lord had said, at which Madayanti gave Utanka her earrings. Having acquired them Utanka went back again to the king and said to him, 'I want to know, O Rajan, the secret import of the words which you sent to your queen.'

Saudasa said, 'Kshatriyas have honoured Brahmanas from the very beginning of creation. However, through time, kings have also given much offence to the holy ones. As for myself, I am always bent in humility before them, yet it is through a Brahmana's curse that you see me in this wretched condition. I see having Madayanti for my queen as my only hope for redemption. Indeed, O best of Mukti-seekers, I do not see any other hope of deliverance for me by which I may enter the portals of Swarga, or even continue living in this world. It is impossible for a king who is hostile to Brahmanas to live in this world, or attain to happiness in the next. You and your guru are great Brahmanas, and that is why I have given you my jewelled earrings. Now it is for you to keep the solemn compact you made with me today.'

Utanka said, 'O King, I will surely honour the pact I made with you. I will come back and surrender myself to you. But, O Parantapa, I have a

question I want to ask you.' Saudasa replied, 'Say, learned Brahmana, what is on your mind, and I will answer you without hesitation.' Utanka said, 'Knowers of the laws of dharma say that Brahmanas are restrained in speech. They say one who wrongs his friends is regarded as vile as a thief. Today, O King, you have become my friend. So I ask you, as my friend, best of men, for your sage counsel. As for myself, I have now obtained what I wanted and what I came to you for. You are a flesh-eater, a Rakshasa who feeds on men. Tell me, is it appropriate for me to come back to you, or not?'

Saudasa said, 'If it is proper for me, best of Brahmanas, to advise you as my friend, I would have to tell you to never come back. Bhargava, this is what would benefit you and is in your own best interest. If you return to me, Brahmana, you will surely meet with death.' At Saudasa's words, Utanka took his leave of the king and, taking the marvellous earrings with him, set out for his guru Gautama's asrama to deliver his gift to his preceptor's wife. Going with some speed, in a hurry to please Ahalya, he secured the gift he bore even as Queen Madayanti had warned him to, tying the earrings safely in the folds of his black deer-skin.

Having gone some distance, he felt hungry and saw before him a bilwa tree whose branches bent down with the weight of the ripe fruit they bore. He climbed the tree and, tying his deer-skin in the fork of a low branch, began to pluck the bilwa fruit. As he was intent on his task, some fruit fell onto the black antelope hide in which the earrings were carefully secreted. The knot securing the skin to the tree came undone, and it fell down to the ground: the sparkling earrings lay exposed.

A serpent of the race of the great Naga Airavata saw the shining jewels, and, seizing the earrings, slid into a large anthill. Utanka, filled with anger and panic, leapt down to the ground and, picking up his Brahmana's staff, began to poke the anthill with it to fetch the snake out. Burning with rage, the Brahmana savaged the anthill and the ground beneath it for thirty-five days, never pausing.

Bhumi Devi, the Goddess Earth, trembled from the unendurable force of Utanka's staff, her body torn and bleeding, but Utanka continued his excavation relentlessly, digging a path down to the underworld where the Nagas dwell. Indra, armed with his Vajra, flew down in his chariot drawn by green horses to the ferocious Brahmana. The Deva king saw Utanka at his task. Assuming the form of a Brahmana concerned by the distress of

Utanka, Indra said to him, 'You cannot make a path down into Nagaloka, that realm is thousands of yojanas deep. No danda can make a path that long.'

Utanka said, 'If I do not recover those earrings from the realm of the Nagas, I will die before your very eyes in the attempt, O Dvijottama.' Recognizing that there was no way he could dissuade Utanka from his purpose, Indra infused the Muni's staff with the power of his thunderbolt. At that the Earth helplessly succumbed, O Janamejaya, yielding a way to the nether world where the Nagas dwell.

Down the path went Utanka the Brahmana, and saw the Nagaloka stretching away for thousands of yojanas on every side. He beheld golden walls encrusted with marvellous gemstones, shining and iridescent, as far as his eyes could see, many pellucid rivers and tanks of pure shimmering water with flights of broad crystal steps. Utanka saw numerous trees on which were perched beautiful and exotic songbirds, and heard the magical music of those warblers. He saw the awesome gate leading into that realm, full five yojanas high and a hundred yojanas wide. Dispirited, he despaired of retrieving the earrings.

Then there appeared before him a black horse with a white tail. Its face and eyes were of a coppery hue, and it blazed with light and energy. The great horse said to Utanka, 'Do you blow into the Apana dwara of my body, my anus, and you shall have back the earrings stolen from you by a scion of the race of Airavata! Do not hesitate to do my bidding, O son; you did it often in the past in your guru Gautama's asrama.' Utanka said, 'How did I know you in my master's hermitage? Tell me how I did in the past what you now bid me do.' The wonderful black steed said, 'Know, learned Brahmana, that I am the guru of your guru, for I am Agni Jatavedas! You have always worshipped me for your guru's sake, with a pure heart, and body. It is for that reason that I have come here to help you accomplish what you want. Do not delay, do as I say!'

Utanka did as he was commanded. Gratified with him, Agni blazed up to consume everything around. From the pores of his body dense banks of smoke issued and spread, suffusing Nagaloka, O Bhaarata, enveloping it in a pall of darkness. Cries of alarm rang out from the palaces of the Airavatas. Led by Vasuki himself, O Janamejaya, the Nagas were panic-stricken. Shrouded in that dense smoke, the great edifices became invisible, like blithe woods and hills suddenly engulfed by a mighty forest. The

Nagas, their eyes red and streaming, came out of their mansions to investigate. When Mahatman Utanka of blinding tejas told them why he had come, the Nagas prostrated themselves before him in abject worship. Setting all their aged and young before him, they bowed their heads and, folding their hands, cried, 'Have mercy on us, Holy One!'

Offering him padya to wash his feet and arghya to worship him, the Nagas returned the heavenly earrings to Utanka. Taking the precious ornaments, then worshipping and circumambulating the Fire God in pradakshina, Utanka set out for his guru's asrama and arrived there swiftly. He gave the earrings to Gautama's wife Ahalya and told his preceptor all that had transpired with Vasuki and the other Nagas. So it was, O sinless Janamejaya, that Mahatman Utanka fetched those jewelled karnikara for his guru's wife, and such was the prowess of that exceptional Brahmana gained by his most austere tapasya. This I believe is what you wanted to know about that Sage."

CANTO 59

Janamejaya asked, “What did the mighty-armed Govinda of great renown do after conferring his boon on Utanka?”

Vaisampayana said, “Krishna, accompanied by Satyaki, rides on towards Dwaraka in his chariot yoked to his magnificent steeds of unparalleled swiftness. Passing lakes and rivers, forests and hills, he comes at last to Dwaravati, city of the sea. The festival of Raivataka has begun when the lotus-eyed Krishna arrives at the city of the Anartas with Satyaki Yuyudhana beside him. Raivataka hill shines with many-coloured splendour, clothed in brightness and beauty, covered with diverse koshas, mantles of jewels and gems. Decked with colourful garlands of gold and festooned with flowers, its great trees resembling the kalpavrikshas of Indra’s Nandana, and its many golden pillars bearing lighted lamps, the hill is lustrous in beauty both by night and by day.

Even at twilight it seems to be high noon, such is the light around the caves and fountains. On all sides, brilliant flags wave in the air with little bells that tinkle in the breeze. Raivataka hill rings with the melodious songs of the Vrishnis, both men and women. Ah, that hill is as enchanting as Meru with his treasures of precious gemstones. As men and women sing aloud, excited and full of joy, the swell of their music echoes to the very skies, O Bhaarata.

People give vent to their exhilaration with cheers and loud whoops of delight. The sound of thousands of voices raised together in merrymaking fills the ear and the heart with gladness. Shops and stalls abound, dispensing diverse viands, festive articles and all manner of goods. Music from vinas,

venus and mridangas fill the clear, crisp air. All kinds of food and drink are freely distributed and the blind, the stricken and the distressed are showered with lavish gifts. With all this, the mountain festival upon Raivataka is auspicious indeed.

Many are the sacred caves and shrines upon the breast of that mountain, O Kshatriya, within which dwell great sages of the highest tapasya and dharma. Pavilions and mansions built for the heroes of Vrishni's race to sport in during the magnificent festival glitter day and night, making the hill as resplendent as Swarga. In truth, upon Krishna's return to his home, that prince of mountains is like Indra's own Amaravati.

Welcomed ecstatically by his kinfolk, Krishna goes gladly to his own splendid palace. Satyaki also goes to his own mansion, his heart full of joy and satisfaction. Krishna has returned home after a long while, having accomplished the most difficult feats on the field of war, even as Indra triumphed over the Danava hosts. The heroes of the Bhoja, Vrishni and Andhaka clans all come forward to receive the great one, like the Devas going to receive him of a hundred sacrifices. Krishna of fathomless intelligence honours them in return, and enquires after their welfare. With a gratified heart he then greets his father and mother. The Mahabaho is embraced by both of them and soothed with tender blessings and caresses. He assumes his throne with all the Vrishnis sitting around him. Having washed his feet and dispelled his fatigue, Krishna of indefatigable tejas, in response to his father Vasudeva's questions, now recounts the great deeds and events of the Mahabharata yuddha."

CANTO 60

"Vasudeva says, 'O Vrishni, I have often heard men describe from hearsay the wonderful battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas. You, however, have seen it with your own eyes. Sinless one, tell us the whole story of how war broke out between the high-souled Pandavas, on the one side, and on the other Bhishma and Karna, Kripa and Drona, Salya and many more—indeed, the multitudinous Kshatriyas hailing from diverse realms, all varied in mien and attire, and all masters of arms.'

Urged by his father, and in the presence of his mother, Krishna of the lotus-petal eyes recounts the Great War in which all the Kaurava heroes perished. 'Most wonderful were the feats of all those Kshatriya Mahatmanas on the field,' he says, 'And because of their vast numbers, not in hundreds of years can all those exploits be told. I will tell you only about the most noteworthy of them, in brief, the majestic deeds of the kings of the Earth. O you of godlike splendour, Bhishma of the Kuru vamsa became the Senapati of Duryodhana's army, with the eleven divisions of the Kaurava princes under his command, even like Vasava of the celestial forces.

Shrewd Dhrishtadyumna, protected by the blessed Arjuna, was created Senapati of the seven aksauhinis of the sons of Pandu. For ten days the battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas raged, under the command of these two. So awesome and fierce was it that one's hair stood on end. On the eleventh day, Sikhandin, with Arjuna at his side, cut down Gangaputra Bhishma. He lay pierced through, yet alive, on his pitiless Kshatriya bed of arrows, waiting like an ascetic until the Sun turned from his southward

journey to embark again on his auspicious northerly course; only then did that hero give up his prana and leave his lacerated body.

With Bhishma's fall, Drona became Duryodhana's Senapati, even as Kavya did of the lord of the Daityas. That greatest of Dvija warriors led the nine surviving Kaurava aksauhinis, supported by Kripa, Vrisha and others. The Panchala prince Dhrishtadyumna, sagacious knower of all the devastras, still led the Pandava legions. Bhima watched over him even as Mitra does over Varuna. Supported by the remnants of the Pandava army after the carnage that Bhishma brought to that force, the intrepid Kshatriya Mahatman Dhrishtadyumna fought ferociously against Drona. The Panchala prince keenly remembered the injury done by Drona to his father Drupada and had, indeed, sworn to kill the Acharya. Fierce and dreadful was the battle between the two, during which kings from many domains lost their lives. Five days that fearsome contention lasted, and finally Drona, exhausted, succumbed to the ferocious fire-born prince.

After Drona's death, Karna became Senapati of Duryodhana's army. By then only five Kaurava aksauhinis remained of the original eleven, and of the Pandava forces, just three. Kurukshetra turned into a veritable sea of Kshatriya blood. Innumerable heroes had been slaughtered on both sides, and the legions of the sons of Pandu took the field again, with Arjuna protecting them. On the second day of his command, the dauntless and mighty Karna died at Arjuna's hands, even like an insect drawn irresistibly to a blazing fire and consumed by it.

With the fall of Karna, the heart went out of the Kaurava army, and the three aksauhinis remaining to them were listless and without hope. Then Salya, Lord of the Madras, became Duryodhana's Senapati, and his three surviving Kaurava aksauhinis faced the Pandava army, now reduced to just a single aksauhini after losing Maharathas and Rathikas beyond reckoning, elephants and horsemen, and those remnants unnerved and dejected at the great carnage of seventeen days.

Now King Yudhishtira fought at the head of his diminished force as if he had saved his greatest strength and force for the end of the war. Before half the first day of the Madra king's command, Yudhishtira killed Salya. Soon after, Sahadeva of mighty prowess slew the deceitful Sakuni of the Gandharas, the very root of the enmity between the Kuru cousins, even as he had sworn he would on the day Panchali had been so cruelly shamed in the Kuru sabha.

When Sakuni fell, Duryodhana, his teeming army by now razed, his spirit all but broken, fled the field of battle, taking just his great mace with him. Leonine Bhimasena, his wrath unappeased, pursued him and found him hiding in the waters of the Dwaipayana Lake. With the few troops remaining of their own decimated forces, the Pandavas surrounded the lake, full of glee at having cornered Duryodhana. Pierced by his cousins' taunts like arrows of fire, Duryodhana emerged from the water, mace in hand, to face the sons of Pandu, challenging any of them to single combat to the death, with the Kuru kingdom forfeit to the victor. Bhima accepted his loathed cousin's challenge and, after a pitched duel, at last killed Dhritarashtra's evil son in the presence of the kings who remained alive.

After this, one night, while the remnants of the Pandava army slept in their encampment, Drona's son Aswatthama, maddened by his father's death at the hands of Dhristadyumna, crept into their camp and savagely slaughtered all the sleeping men and youths. Their sons murdered, their forces razed, only the five Pandavas remain alive, and Satyaki and I. As for the awesome Kaurava force, Kripa, the Bhoja prince Kritavarman and Aswatthama are its only survivors. Dhritarashtra's son Yuyutsu, who had crossed over to the side of the Pandavas before the war began, also escaped being killed.

After the slaying of Suyodhana with all his allies and followers, Vidura and Sanjaya have come to be with Dharmaraja Yudhishtira. Such, in brief, was that war to end all wars, which raged for eight and ten days, my lord. So many kings of the Earth, slain on Kurukshetra, have ascended into Swarga.' Hearing of that apocalypse from Krishna, the Vrishnis are filled with grief and pain."

CANTO 61

Vaisampayana said, “When Krishna finishes his narrative of the Mahabharata yuddha, it is plain that he has said nothing of how Abhimanyu died. That compassionate one has no wish to recount the incident that he knows would cause his father the most sorrow: the death of his grandson. But Krishna’s sister Subhadra cries out, ‘Tell us about the death of my son Abhimanyu!’

With these words, she falls down in a faint. Seeing his daughter felled by grief, Vasudeva also collapses in a swoon. When they revive, Krishna’s father says to the Lord, ‘Lotus-eyed, you are famed across the world for always speaking the truth. Why then, Parantapa, do you not tell me today about the killing of your sister’s son? His eyes were so like yours, Krishna, tell me how he died. Ah, since my heart does not shatter in a hundred pieces and life depart this aged body, it does indeed seem, O Vrishni, that no one can die before his appointed hour.

Oh, tell me Krishna, when he fell, what did my grandchild cry out to his mother? O what did that angelic youth of the restless eyes say to me with his last breath? I trust he was not killed fleeing the field with his back to his enemies? I hope the light did not fade from his face while he fought. O Krishna, he was a doughty fighter; I can still hear his youthful voice boasting to me about his skill at arms. I hope my child does not lie on the field slain deceitfully by Drona and Karna and Kripa and others? Tell me, Krishna, about Subhadra’s son who could challenge even Bhishma and Karna.’

Even more afflicted than his suffering father, Krishna says to Vasudeva, 'His face did not lose its lustre as he fought in the van of the Pandava army. Fierce though that battle was, he did not turn his back on it for a moment. Having dispatched thousands of kings of the Earth, he was brought to grief by Drona and Karna, and finally, by Dussasana's son. If they had fought him one by one, without intermission, Abhimanyu would have killed them all—why, even Indra, had the Vajradharin come to fight him. But his enemies cunningly lured his father Arjuna away from the main battle by having the Samsaptakas challenge Partha. It was when Arjuna was far away that Drona and throngs of powerful Kaurava warriors set upon Abhimanyu. Then, O father, after your grandson slaughtered countless enemies, he succumbed to the son of Dussasana.

Extinguish this grief of yours, for your child has found Swarga for himself through his valour. Those whose minds are cleansed never grow dispirited even when faced with calamity. When he single-handedly contained Drona, Karna and all the rest, how could our splendid child not have found heaven? Irresistible one, quell this grief of yours; do not suffer yourself to be moved by wrath. That conqueror of hostile cities has attained the sacred realm gained by a valiant death from the edge of a weapon.

Subhadra was pierced through when she saw Kunti broken by our child's vile slaying, and screamed in sorrow like a female osprey that had lost its young. When she met Draupadi, my sister cried to her in anguish, "O Panchali, where are all our sons? I want to see them, I want to see them all!" Hearing Subhadra's lament, all the royal Kaurava women embraced her, beat their breasts and wept, sitting around her. To Abhimanyu's young wife Uttaraa, she cried, "O blessed girl, where has your husband gone? When he comes back, you must tell me, without a moment's delay. Ah, Virataputri, my Abhimanyu had but to hear my voice in the passage outside, when he would run out of his apartments to see me. Why does he not come out today?

Alas, Abhimanyu, all your uncles, the great Maharathas, are alive and well. They would bless you each morning as they saw you emerge at dawn, accoutred for battle. Describe to me as you used to the events of the day, my Parantapa, and your own exploits on the field. Why do you not answer your mother, weeping so bitterly?"

Deeply afflicted at seeing her daughter-in-law in that state, Kunti said to her gently, "Ah Subhadra, though Krishna, Satyaki and Arjuna himself

watched over him, your young son has yet been slain, for fate willed it so. O daughter of the Yadus, he was irresistible in battle but mortal, after all. Have no doubt in your heart that he has found Swarga for himself through his death on the field of war. You are born into a noble race of Kshatriyas. Do not grieve, O you of restless glances, of eyes like lotus-petals. Turn your gaze to the young Uttaraa here, who is quick with child, and do not yield to grief. This auspicious princess will soon bring forth Abhimanyu's son. Turn your thought to that child and the future."

And setting aside her own sorrow, Kunti, deep knower of every dharma, turned her attention to the funeral rites for Abhimanyu with the acquiesence of Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva who resembled Yama himself. In her dead grandson's name she gave many gifts to deserving Brahmanas, and bestowed many cows upon them.

This done, Kunti turned to Virata's daughter Uttaraa, now Abhimanyu's inconsolable widow, "Immaculate Virataputri, you must not give way to your grief, however dreadful. For the sake of your husband, O sweet and round-hipped girl, care for the child in your womb." And, so saying, Kunti lapsed into silence. With her leave, I have brought Subhadra here. It was even thus, O giver of honours, that your daughter's son met his death. I beg you, cast off your burning grief, irresistible one. Do not set your heart on sorrow but turn away from it.'"

CANTO 62

Vaisampayana said, "Having listened to Krishna, mighty Vasudeva does indeed master his anguish and set himself to perform the obsequies of Abhimanyu. Krishna also performs the sacred rites for the ascension into Swarga of his splendid nephew, who had been the darling of Vasudeva. He duly feeds six million Brahmanas of tejas with the best food and gives them many fine clothes, gratifying them with wealth in excess of every expectation, Wonderful to behold are the piles of gold, the countless kine, splendid beds and rich garments that are given in daana, and the Brahmanas loudly declare, "Let Krishna's wealth multiply!'

Then, turn by turn, Vasudeva of Dasarha's race, and Baladeva, Satyaki, and Satyaka, each perform the sacred kriyas for dead Abhimanyu. Yet grief rends them and they find no comfort. It is the same with the sons of Pandu in Hastinapura: having lost glorious Abhimanyu, they, too, have lost peace of mind. Virata's daughter Uttaraa does not eat at all for many days, O King, plunging her close family in anxiety for fear that Abhimanyu's child in her womb might also perish.

Seeing all this with his mystic vision, Vyasa arrives. The Mahamuni, tejasvin, says to Kunti and Uttaraa, 'Abandon this grief, my child, for you will have a great and splendid son, through my solemn word and Krishna's power. That son of yours will rule the Earth after the Pandavas have departed it.' To Arjuna Vyasa says, in the hearing of Dharmaraja Yudhishtira, gladdening both their hearts, 'O Bhaarata, your grandson will become a Kshatriya Mahatman, a Rajarishi, a righteous ruler of this Bhumi to her very seas. Kurusottama, O Parantapa, cast off this misery. Have no

doubt that it will be as I say, and as Krishna himself has said. As for Abhimanyu, he has found Devaloka, the realm of the gods he has conquered by his own magnificent deeds. You should not grieve for him, and neither should any of the other Kurus.'

The words of his grandsire, the Rishi, touch Arjuna, who does indeed shed his great dejection. And Janamejaya, you who know all the ways of dharma, your father grew in Uttara's womb even like the moon waxing during the bright fortnight.

Now Vyasa urges Yudhishtira, the royal son of Dharma, to perform the Aswamedha yagna, the great horse sacrifice. And with that he vanishes before all their eyes. Yudhishtira turns his attention to securing the wealth he will need to undertake that great yagna."

CANTO 63

Janamejaya asked, "O Dvija, what does Yudhishtira do when Vyasa Muni tells him to perform the Aswamedha yagna? How does that king obtain the wealth buried by Marutta of old?'

Vaisampayana said, "Having heard the Dwaipayana's words, Yudhishtira summons all his brothers, Arjuna, Bhima and Madri's twins, on an auspicious day at a proper time, and says to them, 'Kshatriyas, you heard what the wise sage said, out of his love for us and his desire to see us prosper, that sage of untold tapasya and deep dharma, great Vyasa of wondrous feats, who also is our fervent well-wisher, our guru and grandsire. You have also heard what Bhishma said, and Govinda too of high intelligence. Remembering their words, O Pandavas, I am resolved to do what they have told me to; by obeying these great ones we will all find blessedness and prosperity, for all of them are Brahmavadis, speakers of the truth.

O perpetuators of the Kuru vamsa, the war has stripped the Earth of her wealth, and us as well. Kshatriyas, that is why Vyasa has revealed the secret of the treasure of Marutta of old, which lies buried in the north. If you consider that ancient treasure to be sufficient to serve our purpose, and much more, how shall we bring it to Hastinapura? Bhima, tell me what you think we should do.'

Folding his hands, Bhima says in reply, 'I agree entirely with you that we must fetch Marutta's hidden wealth to Hastinapura. If we succeed in retrieving the wealth of the son of Avikshita, O Mahabaho, we can surely

and easily perform the Aswamedha yagna, rid ourselves of the sins of the war and find felicity of every kind. Yes, this is what I believe.

Let us bow our heads to the high-souled Girisa, Lord of the Mountains, offering him due worship, and go forth to find Marutta's treasure. Be you blessed, my brother. Gratifying with word, thought and deed the God of gods, along with his ganas and other companions and followers, we shall certainly acquire the olden treasure. The fierce Kinnaras who protect it will surely yield it to us if the Lord Vrishabdhvaja, Sankara of the Bull emblem, is pleased with us.' Yudhishtira Dharmaputra is gratified by what Bhima says. The others, led by Arjuna, also approve heartily, saying, 'Tathaastu, so be it!'

Thus set on retrieving the treasure of Marutta, the sons of Pandu go forth with their army under the constellation of Dhruva, Brahmanas utter blessings over them, and the heroes fervently worship Lord Mahadeva Siva with offerings of modakas, payasa of wheat and cakes made of meat, before they set out on their quest with their hearts light and full of hope.

The wisest Brahmanas, who daily feed and worship their sacred fires, utter blessings over them, chanting auspcious mantras, while the Pandavas circumambulate the priests with bowed heads and folded palms. Then they take formal leave of their uncle Dhritarashtra, wracked by grief for his dead sons, his wife Gandhari and their mother, large-eyed Pritha. Leaving Dhritarashtra's son Yuyutsu behind to look after the affairs of state, Yudhishtira and his brothers set out, while the people of the city of elephants throng the streets to bless their enterprise."

CANTO 64

Vaisampayana said, “They set out, their hearts cheerful, accompanied by men and animals of equal confidence and enthusiasm. The earth resounds with the clatter of their chariot and carriage wheels. Hymned by Vabdhis and Sutas and Magadhas, their army behind them, the Pandavas look like so many Adityas effulgent with their own lustre. The royal white parasol unfurled over his head, Yudhishtira is as radiant as Soma, Lord of the Stars, on a full moon night. As he proceeds, Pandu’s eldest son graciously acknowledges the loud cheers and blessings showered on him by his joyful people. As for the soldiers that follow the king, their hubbub seems to fill the sky.

The host crosses many lakes and rivers, forests and pleasure gardens, and come at last to the majestic mountains. Arriving where the treasure of Marutta of old lies buried, Yudhishtira makes camp with his brothers and his troops, O Bhaarata, in an auspicious and level place. Surrounding his own tent are the fine tents of great Brahmanas, all endowed with tapasya, vairagya and deep gyana, chief amongst them his own priest Agnivesya, a master of the Vedas and all their angas. When the holy ones have performed sacrificial rites for the success of their mission, they spread themselves across the encampment, Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and all else who have come on the expedition. The Brahmanas oversee the swift construction of the camp by laying out six roads and nine divisions, setting Yudhishtira and his brothers with their ministers at its heart. Yudhishtira has a separate enclosure erected for the great elephants that have come with his force.

When everything is satisfactorily arranged, he says to the Brahmanas, 'Dvijottamas, now do what you consider necessary for the success of our quest. Ascertain and decide upon an auspicious tithi and nakshatra for us to begin. Let it be as soon as possible, rather than allowing a long time to elapse while we wait in suspense.'

The Brahmanas are delighted by what the king says. Skilled in the performance of every religious rite and eager to please and serve him, they reply as a man, 'Why this very day is a favourable one, with a most auspicious asterism ruling it. We will strive to complete the rituals even today. Maharajan, we will fast today, taking only water, and you must all do the same.'

The royal sons of Pandu pass that night without any food; they lie upon austere beds of kusa grass, even like five fires of a great yagna. The night wears on as they listen to the discourses of the learned Brahmanas on diverse subjects. When a cloudless morning dawns, those best of Brahmanas speak formally to the royal Dharmaputra."

CANTO 65

"The Brahmanas say, 'Let offerings be made to the high-souled Mahadeva of three eyes. After dedicating these offerings, O King, we can begin to seek what we have come for.'

Yudhishtira duly makes solemn offerings to the God who delights in mountain-breasts for his pillow. Gratifying the sacrificial fire with libations of sanctified ghrita, according to the ordinance, the priest Dhaumya prepares charu to the accompaniment of mantras and appropriate rites. He takes up many flowers and sanctifies them with the holiest mantras; he solemnly offers modakas and wheat payasa and meat to Lord Siva. With more diverse blooms and with the finest fried paddy, Dhaumya, great knower of the Vedas, performs the remaining rites to Sankara.

He then makes the ordained offerings to the ghostly Ganas who form Mahadeva's entourage; next, to Kubera, Lord of the Yakshas, and to Manibhadra; then to the other Yakshas and the foremost Gana companions of Siva, the priest offers due worship, having filled many vessels with food, with krisaras and meat and kivapas mixed with sesame seeds. The king gives away thousands of cows to the Brahmanas. He then directs the offerings to the night-ranging followers of Siva. Charged with the scent of smoking dhupas, and filled with the fragrance of flowers, that whole realm, sacred to the Devadeva, O King, becomes delightful.

Having performed the worship of Rudra and of all the Ganas, Yudhishtira, setting Vyasa ahead of him, goes towards the place where Marutta's treasure is buried and once more worships Kubera, Lord of Treasures, bowing to him with reverence and paying him every bodily and

spiritual homage with diverse kinds of flowers and meat-cakes and krisara. He worships the foremost of all gemstones, Sankha and Nidhi, and the Yakshas who are the lords of all jewels. Then the king of great power, having worshipped the foremost Brahmanas and evoked their blessings, and being further strengthened by their energy and auspicious mantras, finally commands the excavation to begin to unearth the ancient treasure.

He soon discovers numberless golden, jewel-encrusted vessels of diverse and beautiful forms—bhringaras and katahas, kalasas and vardhamanakas, and countless bhajanas of beautiful cast. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja has these treasures stored safely in great karaputas. A part of the treasure is borne upon the shoulders of his men in stout scales of wood with baskets slung at both ends.

Indeed, O King, there are many other means of conveyance there to bear away that wealth of the son of Pandu. There are sixty thousand camels and a hundred and twenty thousand horses; and of bull-elephants, O monarch, there are one hundred thousand. There are as many chariots and carriages, and she-elephants as well. Of mules and men the number is past counting.

Such is the vast hoard Yudhishtira unearths. Sixteen thousand gold coins are placed on the back of each camel; eight thousand in each chariot; four and twenty thousand on each elephant, while proportionate loads are set on horses and mules and on the backs, shoulders and heads of men.

Having secured and loaded the great treasure of Marutta, Yudhishtira worships Mahadeva Siva again, then sets out for home and the city of the elephant, with the leave of his Island-born grandsire Vyasa, setting Dhaumya at the head of his train. Each day they march a goyuta, some four miles, with their priceless burden, staggering under the weight of the treasure, yet joyful. Yes, glad indeed are the sons of Pandu as they make their slow way back to Hastinapura."

CANTO 66

Vaisampayana said, "Meanwhile, Krishna of great tejas returns to Hastinapura, bringing his Vrishnis with him. When he left for Dwaraka Yudhishtira had entreated him to come back, and when he knows that the time for the Aswamedha yagna has arrived, that greatest of men returns to the Kuru capital.

Krishna comes with Baladeva at the head of the train, accompanied by Subhadra. He brings with him Rukmini's son, Yuyudhana, Charudeshna, Samba, Gada, Kritavarman, the heroic Sarana, Nisatha and Unmukha. The Avatara comes especially to comfort Draupadi, Uttaraa and Kunti, and also to console all the distinguished Kshatriya women who had lost their protectors to the Great War. Dhritarashtra and Vidura Mahatman receive Krishna and his party with all honour, and Krishna remains in Hastinapura, adored by Vidura and Yuyutsu, his every need catered for.

It is while the Vrishni heroes are in the Kuru city, O Janamejaya, that your father, the great and invincible Parikshit, is born. Having been struck by the Brahma weapon of Aswatthama even while he was in his mother's womb, your royal father, the son of Abhimanyu, is stillborn. He neither stirs nor breathes when he comes forth from the womb.

The people of Hastinapura roar with joy when they hear that Uttaraa had been delivered of a prince, so that the sky rings with their celebration to all quarters of the compass. But soon after they learn that their prince has been born lifeless, and a hush engulfs the city, as reverberant as its previous glad tumult.

His own senses and mind agitated to hear that Parikshita is stillborn, Krishna rushes towards the inner apartments of the palace, taking Satyaki with him. He sees his aunt Kunti run out sobbing piteously, calling his name aloud. Behind her are Draupadi and Subhadra, and the wives of the kinsmen of the Pandavas, with tears streaming down their faces.

Kunti, daughter of the Bhoja vamsa, says to Krishna, her voice choked with tears, 'O Vasudeva, Mahabaho, when Devaki gave birth to you she became the greatest of all mothers. You are our refuge, and our glory. The race of Pandu depends upon you as its protector, O Yadava, most powerful one. This child of your sister's son has come out of the womb killed by Aswatthama. Bring him back to life, O Kesava, Yadunandana—you had sworn so, when Aswatthama had infused a blade of grass with the Brahmasirsa. Your words then were "I will revive that child if he comes out of the womb dead." That child, O son, has indeed been born dead—ah, look at him, Madhava. You must rescue us all—Uttaraa, Subhadra, Draupadi and me, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, In this child are bound the life-breaths of the Pandavas and my own prana. O Dasarha, on this child depends the ancestral offerings of Pandu, as of Dhritarashtra, and of Abhimanyu, too, that magnificent nephew of yours who was so much like you. I beg you, Janardana, bless all of us today.

Parantapa, over and over, Uttaraa repeats the words that her husband Abhimanyu said to her. Arjuna's son had said to this daughter of Virata, "My blessed wife, your son will go to live with my uncles, the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, in Dwaraka. From them he will learn the astra shastra and all the devastras, he will learn all about dharma and artha." That is what that Parantapa, that irresistible hero, Subhadra's son Abhimanyu, had said to Uttaraa, out of his great love for her. O Madhusudana, we bow our heads at your lotus feet, we beg you to make Abhimanyu's words come true. Ah, look at the time that has come upon us all and the world.

Saying this, Kunti of the large eyes raises her arms above her head and falls to the ground. All the women with her, their eyes clouded with tears, repeatedly wail, 'Alas, alas! Vasudeva's nephew has been born dead!'

Krishna gently raises Kunti up, and comforts her."

CANTO 67

Vaisampayana said, “When Krishna lifts Kunti up, Subhadra takes up her lament, crying aloud to her brother, ‘O you of eyes like lotus-petals, look at the grandson of wise Arjuna, stillborn—the only heir to the dwindling race of Kurus, dead. That blade of grass lifted by Drona’s son to destroy Bhima, fell on Uttaraa, on Vijaya and me. Kesava, that astra is still lodged in my heart since I do not see this child with his father, my son.

Ah, what will the Yudhishtira Dharmaraja say? What will Bhimasena and Arjuna and the two sons of Madravati say? O Vrishni, when they hear that Abhimanyu’s child was born dead, they will consider themselves cheated by Aswatthama. Abhimanyu was for certain the favourite of all the Pandavas. What will those heroes say when they hear that they have been vanquished by the astra of Drona’s son?

O first among all men, look at Kunti and Draupadi standing here. When Drona’s son sought to destroy the foetuses in the wombs of the Pandava women with the Brahmasirsa, Parantapa, you said in wrath to Aswatthama, “Wretch of a Brahmana, vilest of men, I will frustrate your evil design! I will revive the grandson of Kiritin.” I heard you, Krishna, and I know your power. Irresistible one, I worship you today and beg you to give life to Abhimanyu’s son. If you do not fulfill your pledge, be certain that I will cast off my life, O chief of the Vrishni vamsa. If you cannot revive Abhimanyu’s son now, even when you are alive and here among us, of what use can you ever be to me, Krishna? Mighty one, revive this son of Abhimanyu, this child, whose eyes are so like his—like the rain-cloud that revives lifeless crops on an arid field.

Krishna, you are the soul of dharma and truth, your power is beyond all resistance. Scourge of your enemies, you must keep your solemn word, for I know that, if you wish, you can revive all the three worlds—what need I say of this precious child born dead to your sister's son! I know your power, and that is why I implore you to show your kindness to the sons of Pandu. Surely, it is only just that you show mercy to Uttaraa and to me, knowing that I am your sister, a mother who has lost her son, one that has thrown herself upon your protection.'"

CANTO 68

Vaisampayana said, "Thus entreated by those women, himself stricken with grief, the slayer of Kesin says in a resounding voice, 'Tathaastu! So be it!' so that his words echo through the entire antahpura and revive hope and joy in everyone there, like one pouring cool water over one afflicted with heat and sweat.

Krishna enters the birth chamber where your father was born. He finds it adorned and sanctified with garlands of white flowers and pots full of holy water on every side, fragrant with burning charcoal drenched in ghee, with tinduka wood, and mustard seeds, O Mahabaho, with shining, noble weapons beautifully arrayed, and several fires lit all around.

Many elder women of the royal household, called in as midwives for your grandmother Uttaraa, throng the labour room, and many skilled and gifted physicians. Experts have placed every imaginable charm and token to keep away dark spirits and Rakshasas. Seeing that immaculate labour room, Krishna is delighted and exclaims, 'Excellent! Excellent!' Observing his face radiant with good cheer, Draupadi rushes to Virata's daughter Uttaraa and tells her, 'It is your father-in-law Krishna, Narayana himself of the inconceivable soul, the invincible one!'

Uttaraa stems her streaming tears, covers herself properly, and waits for Krishna, even as the Devas do for Vishnu. But when Krishna draws near, her anguish cannot be contained, and she cries out, 'O lotus-eyed Lord, look at us, robbed of our child! Both Abhimanyu and I are slain, Madhusudana. I bow to you in worship, O hero, I beg you give life again to my child consumed by the astra of Drona's son! If only Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, or

Bhimasena, or you, my Lord, had said to that terrible day, “Let Aswatthama’s deadly blade of grass kill Uttaraa!” this would never have happened, Krishna. Ah, what has Drona’s ruthless son gained by this cruel killing of a child in its womb?

This self-same mother worships you, Parantapa, with head bowed. I will surely kill myself, O Govinda, if this child does not revive. I had invested all my hope and faith in him. When these have been frustrated by Drona’s son, what need have I to bear the burden of life any more, O Kesava? O Krishna, I had prayed that I would salute you reverently with my child in my lap. Alas, O Kesava, that hope has been destroyed. First of Beings, with the death of this child of Abhimanyu of the restless eyes, all hope in my breast has been destroyed. I know how much you loved your nephew. Look at his son now, killed by Brahma’s inexorable astra.

This is an ungrateful child, Krishna, as ungrateful as his father, as heartless, for look how, even in the face of the Pandavas’ victory and prosperity, he has abandoned this world for Yama’s halls. I had sworn that if Abhimanyu fell on the field of war, I would follow him immediately out of this life. But ah, I was too fond of my life and did not keep the oath I swore. I was cruel to my love. If I go to him now, what will Phalguna’s son say to me?’”

CANTO 69

Vaisampayana said, “The helpless Uttaraa with piteous cries implores Krishna to revive her child, until she falls to the ground as if demented. Seeing the young mother deprived of her infant lying on the ground, her body uncovered, Kunti and the other Bharata women begin again to wail aloud. Echoing with lamentation, the palace of the Pandavas is turned into a house of sorrow and dire mourning, a place where nobody can remain.

Virata’s daughter lies as if struck dead, till she regains consciousness. Taking the lifeless babe in her lap, she speaks to it. ‘You are the son of a Kshatriya who knew all about dharma, and lived by what he knew. How can you fail to fold your hands in worship to this chief of Vrishnis, you sinner? O son, go to your father and tell him from me—difficult as it is for any creature to die before its time, I am still alive when I should be dead, having lost everything that makes my life auspicious and worth living.’

She says to Krishna, ‘Mahabaho, I shall seek Yudhishtira Dharmaraja’s permission to swallow poison or cast myself on the pyre. Oh, my heart must be made of stone, for I have lost both my husband and my child and it has not yet broken into a thousand pieces.

Oh, get up, my son, and look at your great-grandmother! Look at her face bathed in the tears that gush ceaselessly from her eyes, look her drowning in a sea of sorrow. Look at the adored princess of the Panchalas, and the helpless princess of the Satwatas too. And look at me, like a deer pierced by a hunter. Yes, rise, my son, and look at the face of this Krishna,

Lord of all the worlds, this fountain of all wisdom, who eyes are so much like your dead father's!'

Now the other women raise Uttaraa up and make her sit again. Calming herself a little, she joins her palms together in worship and touches her head to the ground at Krishna's feet. The Lord of all touches water with his fingers to perform achamana and withdraws the power of the Brahmasirsa. He addresses Uttaraa in words that resound through the universe: 'I never speak falsely or in vain. What I have said will come to pass. In the presence of all the worlds I will make this child live again. Never have I told a lie, even in jest. Never have I turned my back on a battle. By that punya, let your child have life again! Even as dharma is dear to me, as Brahmanas are especially dear to me, let Abhimanyu's dead son revive! Never have I had any difference with my friend Arjuna. By that truth let your child live! As satya and dharma are always established in me, by that punya let your son have life again! As I killed Kamsa and Kesin righteously, by that truth let your child come alive!'

No sooner has he spoken than the child stirs, O best of the Bharatas, he breathes, and his limbs begin to move."

CANTO 70

Vaisampayana said, “As Krishna withdraws the power of the Brahmasirsa, your father comes alive and, lo, he illumines the chamber of his birth with his great tejas. All the Rakshasas that have gathered flee the room and many perish. A great Asariri speaks from the sky, crying, ‘Excellent, O Kesava, excellent!’ The Brahmasirsa blazes out from the infant’s body and courses its way back to Brahma, Pitamaha of all the worlds. Your father breathes and moves, O King, revealing already signs of his great spirit and might. The Bharata women are overjoyed.

At Krishna’s command, the Brahmanas chant mantras of benediction, while the rejoicing women of the Kuru antahpura begin to sing Krishna’s praises. The wives of the Bhaarata lions, Kunti, Draupadi and Subhadra, Uttaraa and the other noble women present, consorts of brave and strong warriors, are beside themselves with joy, like shipwrecked sailors who have found a boat to take them ashore.

Wrestlers and actors, bands of bards and eulogists, astrologers and those who enquire after the slumbers of princes, all are lustily crying out the praises of Krishna Janardana and calling down blessings upon the Kuru vamsa. Uttaraa, ecstatic, rises with her child in her arms and reverentially worships Yadunandana. Krishna full of joy himself, bestows on the child gifts of precious gemstones. The other lords of the Vrishni vamsa do the same.

Then, O king, puissant Janardana, embodiment of truth, gives a name to your father. ‘Since this son of Abhimanyu has been born at this time

when his race was almost extinct, since he has passed through the trial of death, let him be called Parikshit, the tested one!'

Your father grows, O hero, gladdening the people of Hastinapura. When he is a month old, the Pandavas return to their capital, bringing Marutta's profuse treasure with them. Hearing that they are near, Krishna comes out of the Kuru city to receive them. The citizens of Hastinapura embellish their homes and deck the city with garlands in profusion, with beautiful pennons and standards bearing diverse emblems. To bless the sons of Pandu, Vidura orders worship to be offered to the gods established in their respective temples. The main streets are adorned with flowers, the joyful hum of voices is like the muted sound of the sea, and the festive dance and song of performers brings the city to resemble the mansion of Vasravana himself. Bards and eulogists, O Rajan, accompanied by beautiful women spread out across the city.

The celebrant winds make the festive pennons fly gaily, fluttering one way and another, as if to indicate the cardinal points to the people of Hastinapura. All ministers and high officials emerge and declare a day of rejoicing for the entire kingdom, to celebrate the successful enterprise of retrieving Marutta's ancient treasury of jewels."

CANTO 71

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing that the Pandavas are near, Krishna Parantapa, taking his ministers with him, goes out to receive them. Greeting one another with the customary rituals, the Pandavas and Vrishnis enter Hastinapura together, filling earth and sky with the hum of their voices and the clatter of their chariot wheels.

The Pandavas return to their city in high spirits, their friends and soldiers around them, and the treasure of Marutta before them. They come, first of all, to Dhritarashtra and touch his feet, announcing themselves by name. The foremost ones of Bharata's vamsa then pay their respects to Subala's daughter Gandhari, and to Kunti, and go on to greet Vidura and Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra's son by his Vaisya wife.

Many others arrive to pay homage to the Pandavas, blazing in glory. The Kshatriyas are told the joyful news, O Bhaarata, about the miraculous and thrilling birth of your father Parikshit. Hearing of that feat of Krishna, the sons of Pandu worship sagacious Devakinandana who is worthy of adoration.

Within a few days Satyavati's son Vyasa of burning tejas comes to Hastinapura. The perpetuators of Kuru's race receive the great Rishi according to custom; together with the princes of the Vrishni and the Andhaka vamsas, they offer worship to the sage. After some conversation on assorted matters, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira says to Vyasa, 'It is my wish to devote the treasure we have brought through your grace, to performing the Aswamedha yagna. I seek your blessing for this, O best of ascetics. We are all at your disposal, O Rishi, and Krishna Mahatman's.'

Vyasa says, ‘You have my permission, O King, to what now needs to be done. Do you worship the gods by performing the horse sacrifice with profuse gifts. The Aswamedha, Rajan, is a cleanser of sin. I have no doubt that when you have worshipped the gods with the horse sacrifice, you will be purified of all the sins of the war.’

Yudhishtira Dharmatma then sets his heart on the preparations for the horse sacrifice. Having sought Dwaipayana Vyasa’s counsel on everything needed for the Mahayagna, the most eloquent Yudhishtira comes to Krishna and says, ‘Purushottama, through you the devi Devaki has come to be known as the most fortunate of all mothers! You of unfading glory, I have come to ask you to help me accomplish the great task I have in mind, Mahabaho.

Kurunandana, it is through your grace and power that we have acquired and enjoy everything that we have today. It is you who have conquered the whole world with your prowess and intelligence. I ask you therefore to undergo the rites of initiation for the Aswamedha yagna so as to be its Yajaman. You are our highest Guru and Lord. If you perform the sacrifice, O you of the Dasarha vamsa, I shall be cleansed of every sin. You are Sacrifice; you are the Indestructible One; you are All. You are Dharma; you are Prajapati. You are the goal of all creatures. Of this I am certain.’

Krishna says, ‘It is worthy of you to say so, O Parantapa. You have become the goal of all creatures, I am certain, for your righteousness has brought you to shine in the greatest glory among all the Kuru heroes, casting others into the shade. You are my king and you are my senior. So with my approval, freely given, you must worship the Gods with the Aswamedha yagna and assign to me whatever tasks in its performance that you please. I pledge myself to accomplish whatever you bid me to, sinless one. Bhimasena, Arjuna and Madri’s twins, when you are the sacrificer, will be sacrificers too.’”

CANTO 72

Vaisampayana said, “Thus addressed by Krishna, the sagacious Yudhishtira Dharmaputra salutes Vyasa and says, ‘Mahamuni, initiate me as Yajaman when you deem that the proper time has arrived for the yagna. This my sacrifice depends entirely on you.’

Vyasa says, ‘Son of Kunti, Paila, Yagnavalkya and I shall, without doubt, accomplish every rite at the proper time. Your initiation as the sacrificer will be performed on the day of the full moon of the month of Chaitra. Let all that is needed for the yagna be readied, O best of men. Let Sutas and Brahmanas well versed in the lore of horses after careful examination select a worthy horse for your Aswamedha yagna. Then, by the injunctions of the scriptures, let that steed range across Bhumi, with her girdle of seas, proclaiming your blazing glory, O King!’

Yudhishtira, son of Pandu and lord of the Earth, answers, ‘So be it!’ and indeed he accomplishes all the Brahmavadin’s directions. Everything that is needed for the sacrifice is duly procured, and the Dharmaraja of immeasurable soul informs the Krishna Dwaipayana that all is in readiness for the yagna.

Vyasa, Mahatejasvin, says to Dharma’s royal son, ‘We are ready to initiate you in the sacrifice. Let the sphaya and the kurcha and everything else that we use during the sacrifice be made of gold. Let the horse also be loosed today, in accordance with the Shastras, and let the animal, duly protected, wander over the Earth.’ Yudhishtira says, ‘You, O regenerate one, must make the arrangements to loosen the horse and send it forth to roam

across the world at its will. You must decide, O Rishi, who will ride with the horse to protect it wherever it goes.'

Krishna Dwaipayana replies, 'He who is born after Bhimasena, he who is the greatest of all bowmen and called Jishnu, who is endowed with great patience and who can overcome all resistance and enemies—he will protect the sacrificial horse. He who destroyed the Nivatakavachas can conquer the whole world by himself. He has all the devastras and his body is like a Deva's in strength and endurance. His bow and quivers are not of this world. He must follow the horse.

He is well versed in both dharma and artha. He is a master of all the great arts and sciences. O first among kings, he will have the steed roam and graze at its will as the scriptures agree. This mighty-armed prince of dark complexion, blessed with eyes that resemble the petals of the lotus, this Kshatriya, the father of Abhimanyu, will ably protect the horse. Bhimasena also is endowed with great tejas and immeasurable might. He, with Nakula beside him, will protect your kingdom. Possessed of great intelligence and fame, Sahadeva will attend to all the relatives that you have invited to your capital.'

Thus advised by the sage, Yudhishtira accomplishes his every injunction and appoints Arjuna to attend to the horse. Yudhishtira says, 'Come, O Arjuna, you shall protect the sacrificial horse. You alone can do this, none else. On your way across the world, Mahabaho, if any kings come out to challenge you, you must do everything in your power to avoid battle with them, Anagha. Invite them all to this sacrifice of mine, Savyasachin, go forth but try to establish friendly relations with them all.'

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja turns to Bhima and Nakula and commands them to be the protectors of Hastinapura. With the leave of King Dhritarashtra, Yudhishtira then sets Sahadeva, that great warrior, to wait upon all the invited guests.'"

CANTO 73

Vaisampayana said, "When the hour for the initiation arrives, all the great Ritwijas duly accomplish the purificatory and other rites for the horse sacrifice. Performing the rituals of binding the yagnapasus, Yudhishtira the Just shines with great splendour, as do the Ritwijas. Vyasa himself, Brahmavadin, great tejasvin, looses the chosen horse to range across the land of Bharata, according to the injunctions of the scriptures.

Meanwhile, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, wearing a golden necklace after his initiation, blazes in beauty even like a fire. The son of Dharma, seated at the yagna vedi bearing a staff in his hand, with a black deer-skin across his chest and a red silk cloth around his waist, is as splendid as another Prajapati. All his Ritwijas wear similar raiment.

Arjuna also shines like a flame. His chariot is yoked to noble white steeds as he prepares to follow the black sacrificial horse across Bharatavarsha at Yudhishtira's command. Sounding the bowstring of his mighty Gandiva, O Naresha, his hands encased in iguana gloves, Arjuna stands ready to ride with the sacrificial horse, with his heart full of elation, O King. All the people of Hastinapura, down to the little children, come out to see the matchless Dhananjaya, foremost of the Kurus, set out. Thick and dense is the crowd of spectators gathered to look at the horse and the prince who will follow it, so packed that the friction of their bodies could almost ignite a fire. The noise they make is deafening, filling earth and sky. 'There goes the son of Kunti, following that horse of blazing beauty,' they say. 'There he is, the Mahabaho, armed with his magnificent bow.' These are the greetings heard by Arjuna of high discernment. The citizens laud him,

calling out, 'Let all our blessings be yours! Go you safely, and safely return, O Bhaarata.' Others, O Naresha, cry, 'We do not see Arjuna through this crowd, but we hear the heart-quaking twang of his Gandiva. Be you blessed, O Arjuna! May every danger flee from your path, and let fear nowhere touch you. We shall see him when he returns, for return he surely will.' O King of the Bharatas, Arjuna Mahatman hears this fond refrain from the men and women of Hastinapura.

A disciple of Yajnavalkya, well versed in all sacrificial rites and a complete master of the Vedas, goes forth with Partha to perform auspicious rites along the Kshatriya's course. At the command of Yudhishtira the Just, many other great Brahmanas, all masters of the Vedas, and many Kshatriyas, too, follow the noble hero. The sacrificial horse, loosed, ranges freely over the Earth already conquered by Pandavas through the power of their weapons. Along its careen, Arjuna fights many great and wonderful battles against diverse kings, across the sacred land. I will describe these for you now.

O King, the horse roams where it will over Bhumi. First, from the north that wonderful steed turns east, followed majestically by Maharatha Arjuna Swetavahana, subjugating the kingdoms of many sovereigns. Several kings challenge the Kuru horse, for they had lost all their kinsmen, grandsires, fathers and brothers to the Great War of Kurukshetra. Innumerable Kiratas and Yavanas, all great bowmen, and diverse tribes of Mlechchas, too, who had been vanquished before, and many Aryan kings, with their soldiers and horses of great speed, irresistible in battle, encounter the son of Pandu, who faces and quells the numerous rulers of kingdoms who come out to challenge him.

I will narrate for you, O sinless king, only battles which were especially fierce, the main ones among all those he fought."

CANTO 74

Vaisampayana said, “Arjuna Kiritin fights a battle with the sons and grandsons of the Trigartas, whose hostility the Pandavas has incurred before, and who are all renowned as mighty Maharathas. Having learnt that the marvellous steed intended for the sacrifice has come to their realm, O King, those Kshatriyas don their mail, mount their chariots drawn by superb and finely caparisoned horses and, quivers strapped to their backs, surround the Aswamedha horse and endeavour to capture it.

The Kiritin tries to conciliate them, Parantapa, but they answer him with arrows. Arjuna easily contains their fire and says smilingly to those warriors in the grip of passion and darkness, ‘Desist, princes. Life is a gift that should not be thrown away.’ When he set out from Hastinapura, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja had earnestly implored him to spare those Kshatriyas whose kinsmen had been slain on the field of Kurukshetra, and now Arjuna asks the Trigartas to forbear. When they continue to ignore his pleas, Arjuna swiftly routs Suryavarman, the king of the Trigartas, with a tremendous volley of arrows, laughing in scorn at his opponent.

The other Trigarta warriors, however, fill the ten cardinal points with the roar of their chariot-wheels, flying at Dhananjaya. Displaying great lightness of hand, Suryavarman pierces Arjuna with hundreds of arrows. The other great bowmen who follow him, eager to kill Arjuna, loose dense showers of arrows on him but the Pandava cuts these down.

Suryavarman’s younger brother, Ketuvarman, rides vigorously at the legendary Arjuna. Seeing Ketuvarman approach, Arjuna, streaming arrows from his wonderful bow, swiftly despatches him with a burst of pointed

shafts. At this, Maharatha Dhritavarman charges Arjuna, covering him in a well-nigh perfect cloud of deadly barbs. Arjuna Gudakesha is pleased to see the dexterity and genius of that prince, for he cannot discern when the youth draws his arrows from his quiver or sets them to his bowstring, when he bends his bow or discharges the keen shafts. Arjuna only sees endless banks of arrows fly at him through the air.

Briefly, Arjuna briefly admires the skill and valour of his young adversary and, smiling, Partha of immeasurable force engages the Kshatriya who is like an angry snake, but he does not kill him. However, while Partha fights him with restraint, Dhritavarman shoots a blazing arrow of fire at him, piercing his hand deeply so that Arjuna is dazed and the Gandiva falls out of his grasp, looking for all the world like Indra's heavenly bow.

When that great celestial bow falls, O King, young Dhritavarman laughs out loud. Incensed by this, Arjuna snatches up Gandiva and, wiping the blood from his hands, looses a ferocious storm of arrows at the Trigarta prince, this time in deadly earnest. A hubbub is heard, filling the sky and reaching to the very heavens, from diverse entities applauding Dhananjaya's inspired archery.

Seeing Arjuna now inflamed and looking like Yama himself as he appears at the end of the Yuga, the rest of the Trigarta warriors hastily surround Dhritavarman, rushing from every side to his rescue. Finding himself hemmed in, Arjuna is further incensed and in a flash despatches eighteen of the most intrepid Trigarta heroes with arrows like the weapons of Indra himself. Now the Trigarta warriors begin to run from the raging Pandava. Seeing them flee, Arjuna laughs aloud and sends firestorms of arrows after them, missiles like venom-spitting snakes. The demoralized Trigarta Maharathas scatter in all directions, terrified.

Finally, they call out to the dreaded Purushavyaghra who slew their sires of the Samsaptaka host, pleading, 'Arjuna, we are your slaves. We yield to you. Command us as you please, O Partha, for we wait here as your docile servants. Kurunandana, we will do whatever you say!'

Arjuna says to them, 'Kshatriyas, accept my dominion in the name of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and save your lives.'"

CANTO 75

Vaisampayana said, “The splendid Aswamedha horse then wanders into the realm of Pragjyotisha. Bhagadatta’s son, the valiant King Vajradatta, learns of the arrival of the Kuru horse and sallies forth to encounter Arjuna. Vajradatta seizes the horse and turns back towards his city and palace.

Marking this, the Kuru Mahabaho bends the Gandiva and rushes at his enemy. Stupefied by Arjuna’s speeding shafts, Vajradatta lets go of the sacrificial horse and flees from Partha. Back in his capital, Vajradatta dons his armour, mounts his prince of elephants and emerges again to give the Pandava battle, fanned by a milk-white yak-tail, the white parasol of sovereignty unfurled over his head. Impelled by callowness and folly, he rashly challenges to single combat the great Arjuna, Kshatriya without equal, Maharatha of the Pandavas renowned for his fearsome exploits in battle.

Full of youthful rage, the prince directs his mountainous elephant, from whose rent temples and mouth gush juices of rut, straight at the Pandava. The great elephant’s secretions of repressed excitation fall around him like showers from a rain-cloud. That leviathan, trained as a war elephant, now beside itself with rage and the heat of musth and of war, is past controlling. Prodded by Vajradatta with a hooked iron goad, it thunders towards Arjuna like a flying mountain.

Seeing it descend on him, Dhananjaya, filled with fury and standing on the ground, O Bhaarata, faces the prince who rides on its back. The truculent Vajradatta looses a swarm of broad-headed shafts with the energy

of fire that look like a storm of locusts. But even as they fly at him Arjuna cuts them down, slicing every arrow in two and three slivers with a fusillade from the Gandiva.

Seeing his broad-headed swarm of arrows foiled, Bhagadatta's son now looses an unbroken straight line of arrows, which flash at Arjuna interminably. Arjuna, his ire mounting, unleashes a burst of golden-winged barbs at Vajradatta, who falls off his elephant's back onto the ground, pierced all over. However, he is still conscious and again mounts his prince of elephants. Eager for victory, Vajradatta, never losing his nerve, coolly covers Arjuna in further flurries of arrows.

Incensed, Arjuna covers that hero and his beast with flaming volleys of shafts ablaze, narachas like venom-spitting cobras. Struck deep and sorely by these, the mighty elephant spouts geysers of blood, looking like a mountain of many springs discharging rills of water stained with red chalk."

CANTO 76

Vaisampayana said, "And so rages that battle for three days, O Lord of the Bharatas, between Arjuna and Vajradatta, like the duel of old between Indra of a hundred sacrifices and Vritra. On the fourth day, Vajradatta of vast prowess laughs loudly and thunders at Arjuna, 'Wait, wait, O Arjuna! You will not escape me with your life. I will kill you and offer tarpana for my dead father, aged Bhagadatta, who was a friend of your father. You killed him because of the weight of his years. Now fight me, Arjuna, though I am but a boy!'

With this, O you of Kuru's vamsa, furious Vajradatta once more goads his great beast at the Pandava, and that prince among elephants rushes towards Jishnu, as if cleaving the sky like a blue cloud mass drenching a hill, spraying Pandu's son with the juice of rut from his trunk. Urged on by that king, the elephant roars like an ominous thunderhead, and charges at Phalguna like a dancer in frenzy.

As Vajradatta's huge beast advances upon him, the Parantapa stands his ground unwavering, the Gandiva firmly gripped in his hand. Seeing what an obstacle Vajradatta is proving to be to his mission and, recollecting the ancient enmity of his house to the Pandavas, Partha is inflamed with rage. He looses a storm of arrows that stops the onrushing elephant even like the shore containing a surging sea.

That handsome prince of pachyderms is brought up in its course looking like a porcupine bristling with quills. Bhagadatta's son, infuriated at seeing his elephant thwarted, shoots many whetted barbs at his adversary, but Mahabaho Dhanajaya easily deflects them all with marvellous lightning

volleys of his own. Again the king of the Pragjyotishas goads his elephant and sets it at the Pandava. Arjuna with all his strength unleashes a shaft like a missile of fire that goes right through it, piercing it deeply to its vitals. The great beast falls onto his side like a mountain peak struck loose by a thunderbolt, truly like a great cliff riven to its base by Indra's vajra.

Arjuna says to Vajradatta, who has fallen with his beast, 'Have no fear. Yudhishtira of deep tejas said to me, when he sent me forth on this mission, "Naravyaghra, vanquish any kings of the world who challenge you, but do not takes their lives. Nor should you slay the warriors of those kings who come forth to fight you, nor their comrades nor kinsmen. Rather, you must invite them to the Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira." I heard my brother's commands. I will not kill you, Vajradatta. Rise up and let no fear be yours. Return to your city safely, O Lord of the Earth. And when the day of the full moon in the month of Chaitra comes, O great king, you shall come to the horse sacrifice of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, for that is the day appointed for the mahayagna.' Bhagadatta's son, vanquished by the Pandava, says, 'Tathaastu, so be it!'"

CANTO 77

Vaisampayana said, “There follows then a great battle between the Kiritin and the hundreds of Saindhavas who survived the slaughter of their clan. Hearing that the Svetavahana has entered their realm, those Kshatriyas come out against him, for they cannot contain their hatred of Pandu’s race.

They find the sacrificial horse within their dominions and the warriors, fierce as venom, seize it with no fear of Arjuna, younger brother of mighty Bhimasena. They advance against the Pandava who waits on foot, armed with his bow, and assail him from close quarters. Those heroes of mighty tejas surround Partha, proclaiming their names and lineages and declaring their feats of arms as they shower their arrows on Partha. Defeated before in battle, they are intent upon vanquishing Arjuna and shoot at him arrows powerful enough to strike down elephants. Fighting from chariots themselves, they attack Arjuna who stands on the ground alone.

From every side they attack that hero, slayer of the Nivatakavachas, destroyer of the Samsaptakas, that Kshatriya who killed their king Jayadratha at the twilight hour. Hemming him in with a thousand chariots and ten thousand horses, as within a cage, those dreadful warriors roar in exultation. They remember how Arjuna beheaded Jayadratha and lash dark arrows down on him like violent rain from thunderheads. Arjuna looks like the sun obscured by a black cloud, like a bird caught in an iron cage.

Seeing the son of Kunti so beset, the sun himself is shorn of his splendour, and cries of dismay echo through the three worlds. A fierce wind begins to blow, O King, and Rahu swallows both sun and moon together.

Meteors crash into the solar disc and flare away in different directions, course through the sky and fall on the face of the moon as well. Kailasa, prince of mountains, begins to tremble and the Saptarishis in the firmament and the other Devarishis, pierced with fear and anxiety, give vent to hot sighs. Reddish clouds, with braids of lightning playing in their midst, spanned by the bow of Indra, fill the sky and pour down on the earth a macabre rain of flesh and blood.

Such is the aspect all Prakriti assumes when that Kshatriya is inundated, overwhelmed and stupefied by the Saindhava offensive. The mighty Gandiva falls from Arjuna's nerveless hands and his leathern shield also, but the onslaught continues. The Devas, seeing Arjuna surrounded and overwhelmed, are filled with alarm and begin to chant diverse mantras of blessing over him. The Devarishis, the Saptarishis and all the Maharishis of the three realms fervently intone silent mantras to award victory to the eclipsed Dhananjaya. At last, through the prayers and benedictions of those denizens of Swarga, the tejas of Partha ignites again and the hero who is a master of every devastra stands up, immovable as a mountain.

The delighter of the Kurus takes up his celestial bow. He pulls its bowstring, sending forth a reverberation like the roar of a mighty machine. Then, like Purandara lashing down his rains, mighty Arjuna looses gales of arrows at his enemies. Now it is the Saindhava warriors and their chiefs who become invisible, shrouded by the Pandava's arrow-storms like trees by locusts. The very sound of the Gandiva terrifies them, and in helpless panic they flee the battle, howling with fear. The peerless Kuru Kshatriya now storms through his foes with the speed of a fiery wheel, spraying arrows relentlessly from his Gandiva in every direction like Indra, the wielder of the thunderbolt, a sight marvellous and magical. Arjuna looks like the resplendent autumn sun dispersing clouds with his penetrating rays of light."

CANTO 78

Vaisampayana said, "The irresistible wielder of the Gandiva straddles the field like Himavat himself. Rallying again, the Saindhavas rush at him once more from every side, loosing ferocious downpours of arrows at him. Arjuna Mahabaho laughs at his enemies who have returned to do futile battle with him although on the brink of death.

Coolly he says to them, 'Fight me with all your strength, O heroes, put forth all your prowess. But perform all your karma-kriyas before you do so, for mortal danger awaits you all. Look how effortlessly I cut down your clouds of arrows and contain all of you together. Ah, I see you are still bent on battle. Wait a little, I will soon quell your pride.'

No sooner has he said these words, O Bhaarata, than he remembers the injunction of his eldest brother Yudhishtira: 'You should not kill those Kshatriyas who come against you for battle, O child. Defeat them, but never take their lives,'

The foremost of men Arjuna reflects on what the Mahatman had said to him: 'My brother said I should not kill a warrior who challenges me. I must not transgress his wish in the least or render his word false by my action.' Arjuna then addresses the fierce Saindhavas. 'Listen to me, for I speak for your own good. Though you stand before me on the field of battle, I have no wish to kill any of you. I will spare the life of any man who says to me that I have vanquished him and that he is mine. You have heard me now, I ask you to do what is in your own interest. To do otherwise will put you in the way of mortal fear and peril.'

Saying this, Arjuna again unleashes his furious arrow-storms at the Saindhavas; and they, equally incensed and possessed by the spirit of battle, cover him with thousands of unerring shafts. Dhananjaya, wielding the Gandiva, with whetted barbs of his own, cuts off those deadly volleys of arrows like poisonous snakes feathered with the plumage of the kanka bird, before they can reach him.

The Saindhava Kshatriyas, recollecing how Arjuna killed their king Jayadratha, hurl darts and javelins at him, but the Kiritin of great might shreds all their weapons in the air. At length the Pandava's ire rises to a point where he can no longer restrain his wrath and Arjuna severs the heads of many of the Sindhus who converge on him aggressively from every side.

Now many flee from his blazing rage, others continue to dash towards him, while still others stand unmoving, but all are heard roaring in wrath and grief, like the ocean in tumult. They continue to fight Arjuna, each according to his strength, while he strews the ground with their heads. The Saindhava war-horses and elephants grow exhausted, and Partha strikes their riders unconscious with his sharpest shafts.

Then Dussala, their queen, the daughter of Dhritarashtra, knowing that the Sindhu forces are growing dispirited, takes her grandson in her arms to Arjuna. The brave little prince, the son of Suratha, comes to his uncle for the sake of the Saindhava warriors. Coming into the presence of Dhananjaya, Dussala begins to weep and, seeing her tears, Arjuna puts down his bow and courteously asks his sister what he can do for her.

The queen says to him, 'Lord of the Bhaaratas, this child is the child of your sister's son Suratha. He salutes you, O Partha. Look at him, foremost of men.' Arjuna asks her, 'Where is Suratha?' Dussala replies, 'He died of grief, Arjuna. I will tell you how. Ever since Suratha heard how you slew my lord Jayadratha he was gripped by a burning sorrow. Then, when he heard that you had arrived in this realm with the horse for the Aswamedha yagna, in great affliction of heart he fell down and gave up his life-breath. Truly, hearing of your arrival here he collapsed and died. Seeing him lie lifeless upon the ground, Dhananjaya, I picked up this little son of his and have come to you for your protection.'

Saying this, the daughter of Dhritarashtra breaks into piteous sobs. Arjuna stands disconsolately before her, his face hanging down in sorrow. The woeful sister then says to her brother, also wrapped in dejection, 'Arjuna, look at your sister, and look at child of your sister's son. O

Kurupravira, you know dharma in all its depth and subtlety. Forget Duryodhana and the evil Jayadratha—show mercy to this child. Even as Parantapa Parikshit has been born of Abhimanyu, so has this mighty-armed child, my grandson, sprung from Suratha. Bringing him with me, I have come to you, Lord of men, to beg for the lives of all these Saindhava warriors.

Listen to me, great Arjuna. This child of your wicked enemy has come to you for refuge. You must not deny him your mercy, Mahabaho. Parantapa, this infant bows his head in supplication, appealing to you for peace. Knower of dharma, be gracious to this child who has lost all his kinsmen. Do not yield to anger, Partha. Forget this prince's disgraceful and cruel grandfather, who offended you so direly. Ah, noble Arjuna, do not deny this infant your kindness and grace.'

Arjuna, thinking sorrowfully of Queen Gandhari and King Dhritarashtra, condemns the ruthless Kshatriya code, saying to Dussala, 'Fie on Duryodhana, that low and vain scoundrel who always coveted kingdom! Alas, it was because of him that I sent all my kinsmen to Yama.' Dhananjaya comforts his cousin and accepts the peace offered, embraces Dussala and asks her to return to her palace. Dussala commands all her warriors to desist from battle and, worshipping Arjuna, she of the beautiful face turns back into her city.

Having thus vanquished the Saindhavas, Arjuna once more follows the Aswamedha horse even as the divine wielder of the Pinaka once long ago pursued the sacred deer through the firmament. At its will, the horse ranges through one realm after the other, and wherever it goes the feats of Arjuna and his fame swell in tide.

In due time, O Lord of men, the horse arrives in the dominions of the King of Manipura, followed by Pandu's matchless son."

CANTO 79

Vaisampayana said, “The ruler of Manipura, Babhruvahana, hears that his father Arjuna has arrived within his dominions and goes out to meet him in all humility, with a number of Brahmanas and some treasure in his van. However, sagacious Dhananjaya disapproves of this.

Phalguna reproves him angrily. ‘Your conduct does not become a Kshatriya. You have fallen away from your royal duties. I have come here as the protector of Yudhishtira’s sacrificial horse. Why will you not fight me, O son, seeing that I have entered your dominions? Fie on you of feeble understanding that have fallen away from Kshatriya dharma! Fie on you that would receive me peacefully, like a woman, even though I have come here to seek battle with you. If I had come to you unarmed, this behaviour might have been appropriate. Fie on you, worst of men, for your wretched understanding ’

The Naga princess Ulupi hears these words spoken by her husband Arjuna and, unable to tolerate them, cleaves the earth and appears in that place. She sees her son standing there dejectedly, his head hung down as Arjuna, wanting battle with Babhruvahana, rebukes the prince. Beautiful Ulupi of comely limbs reminds her son of his duty: ‘Know that your mother Ulupi is the daughter of a snake. Do you now accomplish my behest, O son, for you will acquire great punya through it. Give fight to your father, that foremost one of Kuru’s race, irresistible in battle, and have no doubt that he will be pleased with you.’

In this manner is King Babhruvahana roused against his sire, until the prince of tremendous tejas decides to take arms against his noble father, O

chief of the Bharatas. Putting on his armour of bright gold and his effulgent headgear, he ascends a magnificent chariot equipped with hundreds of fine quivers filled with arrows, a ratha yoked to steeds endowed with the speed of the mind. It has beautiful wheels and a splendid pushkara, and is embellished with golden adornments of every kind.

Raising his standard with its device of a golden lion, the handsome Babhruvahana advances against his father. He swoops down on the horse of the Aswamedha and has it seized by his masters of equine knowledge. Seeing the steed captured, Arjuna is filled with pride and joy.

Standing on the earth, that Kshatriya without equal unleashes storms of arrows, each like a venom-spitting cobra, at his mighty son, who rides at him in his chariot. Ah, the battle between sire and son is truly like the ancient battle of the Devas and Asuras. Each one is deeply gratified at having the other for an antagonist. Laughing aloud in delight, Babhruvahana pierces his father, the Kiritin, right through his shoulder with an arrow like a streak of lightning; the feathered shaft ploughs into Arjuna's body as a snake burrows into an anthill. It bores right through Arjuna, into the ground behind him.

Pain lances through Arjuna at the ferocity of his son's barb and the Kaunteya has to pause, supporting himself on his magnificent bow. He stands, having recourse to his divine tejas, seeming to outward appearance like one deprived of life. Then, coming to himself again, that greatest of men praises his son. The splendid son of Indra cries, 'Excellent, excellent, Mahabaho, O son of Chitrangada! I am gratified to see your prowess, my son. I will now fight you. Stand steadfast before me.'

With this, Arjuna Parantapa looses a burst of arrows at Babhruvahana. The young king cuts down those tremendous shafts shot from the Gandiva, each as brilliant as Indra's Vajra, some into two and others into three pieces. Next Partha cuts down Babhru's golden standard that stands as tall as a shining palmyra and laughingly kills his son's horses of great size and speed. Babhruvahana, inflamed, leaps down from his ratha and fights his sire on foot. Arjuna, gratified with the valour of his son, assails him hotly.

Convinced that his father weakens before him, the mighty Babhruvahana covers Arjuna with serpentine narachas virulent as fire-spitting cobras. From youthful enthusiasm the King of Manipura strikes Arjuna squarely through his chest with a golden-winged shaft that pierces Partha agonizingly, into his vitals. Dhanajaya, archer without equal, falls to

the earth unconscious. Babhruvahana too falls down in a swoon at the same moment, from the wounds Arjuna has inflicted on him and from seeing his father collapse.

Chitrangada rushes out weeping on to the field of battle. Her heart burning with shock and grief, Babhruvahana's trembling mother sees her husband lying lifeless on the ground.'

CANTO 80

Vaisampayana said, “Lamenting aloud and burning with grief, that celestial beauty with eyes like lotus-petals crumples to the ground. Regaining her senses, Chitrangada sees the daughter of the snake king Ulupi before her and cries, ‘Ah, Ulupi, look where our lord, the Vijaya, lies slain, because you incited my immature son to fight him. Do you know nothing of a wife’s dharma towards her spouse? Do you not love your husband? It is because of you that he has been killed.

Oh, if Dhananjaya has offended you in any way, I beg you to forgive him and use your powers to bring him back to life. For you do know love and dharma, both! You are renowned for your virtue through the three worlds, most blessed Ulupi. Yet how is it that, having made my son kill your husband, you show no sign of grief? O Naga princess, my son is dead but I do not grieve for him, who has shown his father such hospitality, only for my husband!’

Chitrangada turns to Arjuna, lifeless on the earth, and addresses him, ‘Arise, my dear lord, for you are Yudhishtira’s dearest brother whom he loves like none else. Here is your horse. Look, I have set it free. O puissant one, you must follow it across the world for the sake of the Dharmaraja. Why then do you lie still on the ground? My prana depends on you, O Kurunandana. How can he who bestows life-breath on others cast his own away today?

Ulupi, look at this sight, your husband prostrate on the ground. How is it that you do not grieve, having incited my son to kill great Dhananjaya? As for Babhruvahana, it is fitting that he should die today and lie upon the

earth, lifeless beside his father. Oh, let Vijaya, let him that is called Gudakesa, let this peerless Kshatriya of the reddened eyes, return to life.

O Ulupi of the Nagas, taking more than one wife is no fault in men, least of all in such great ones. Only women incur sin by taking more than one husband. So do not harbour any feelings of wrath or revenge against our lord Arjuna. Your bond was decreed by the Supreme Ordainer himself. It is eternal and unchangeable. Be true to that sacred tie now. If now, after killing your husband through my son, you do not revive him, I too will cast off my life-breath. I cannot bear the grief of losing both my husband and my son, I shall sit here in prayopavesha until life leaves my body.'

With that, the princess Chaitravahini sits on the ground in praya, plunging into deep dhyana and silence. No word or sound comes from the disconsolate queen; she takes Arjuna's feet onto her lap and sits silently, only letting a deep sigh escape her lips, longing for Babhruvahana also to be restored to life.

Regaining consciousness, King Babhruvahana opens his eyes and sees his mother sitting on the ground with Arjuna's head in her lap. He exclaims, 'What can be more painful than this sight—my mother, brought up in luxury, sitting on the rude ground, her lord stretched out beside her in death? Alas, this Parantapa, this foremost of all warriors, has been slain by me! Certainly, no one dies till his fated hour comes. Oh, the heart of this princess must be very hard since it does not break even at the sight of her mighty-armed and broad-chested husband lying dead before here—neither my heart nor my mother's!

Look where this Kurusottama's golden kavacha lies torn from his majestic body, after I, his son, killed him. Alas, you Brahmanas, look at my heroic sire lying prostrate on the earth, on a Kshatriya's bed on the field of battle, slain by his son. What protection did you give him, you who were sent to accompany this foremost Kuru when he followed the Aswamedha horse? Now, Brahmanas, tell me what penance I, this cruel and sinful wretch, should undergo for this dreadful sin of killing my own father! I should suffer every kind of torment, wander the earth covering myself with Arjuna's skin, to proclaim my sinful deed.

Even if my father's head were to be cloven in two and the halves given to me to carry across this vast Bhumi, there would be no expiation of my parricide. Behold your husband lifeless on the ground, Nagina, and look at me who killed him. I have done what pleased you and I will today follow

my father out of this world. Oh, blessed one, nowhere can this wretched Babhruvahana find solace. Mother, may you be happy today, seeing both Arjuna and his son dead. I swear to you by truth itself that I will give up my prana today.

Saying so, the stricken young king touches holy water and cries, 'Let all creatures, those that move and those that are immobile, bear witness to my solemn word. Do you also listen to me, O mother Ulupi, for it is the truth that I speak, O best of Naginas. I say to you that if this Purushottama, my father Vijaya, does not rise up, I will sit here on this very field, in prayopavesha and emaciate myself. There is no salvation for me for my sin is Pitri-hatya, father-murder, and I will surely sink into the worst hell.

After killing a heroic Kshatriya, one is cleansed by making a gift of a hundred cows. But after killing my own father, where can I find redemption? This Arjuna, the son of Pandu, was the greatest Kshatriya in the world, and none could remotely match his tejas. He was righteous, he was the author of my being. How can I ever be saved after taking his life?'

Babhruvahana, king of the Manipuras, touches water again, and falls silent. He means to starve himself to death. The Naga queen recalls the occult jewel of her race that has the power to revive the dead, and mystically she summons it. That gemstone comes subtly to her, and she utters words that delight the warriors standing stricken on the field. 'O son, rise up, do not grieve. You have not vanquished Jishnu, for no man, not even the Devas led by Indra, can defeat this Kshatriya. It is an illusion I created with my maya power to deceive your senses and to please your mighty father.

O prince of the Kuru vamsa, this Parantapa came here to have battle with you, wanting to see his son's prowess. Mighty king, that is why I urged you to fight him; you must not think that you sinned in the least by accepting his challenge. Dear child, not Indra himself can face your father in battle, for the one you know as this Pandava is none other than the ancient Rishi Nara himself, eternal and indestructible. Here, take this celestial jewel from me that revives the snakes as often as they die. Place it upon Dhananjaya's breast and you will see him come to life again.'

Surging with love for his father, the sinless Babhruvahana takes that gemstone of divine power and lays it on Arjuna's chest. The intrepid Jishnu's reddened eyes open and he sits up like one risen from a deep sleep. Seeing his father alive and serene, Babhruvahana folds his hands and

worships Arjuna. Indra rains down blooms of ineffable fragrance on Arjuna Purushavyaghra and drums struck by no hand resound everywhere, reverberant as thunder. The heavens echoes with cries of exultation from the divine ones gathered there. Mahabaho Dhananjaya rises and embraces his son, smelling the top of his head lovingly. Then he sees Chitrangada at a slight remove, weeping, and Ulupi beside her.

Arjuna asks, 'Why these signs of grief, wonder and joy on this battlefield? Tell me, O Parantapa, why has your mother come to the field, and Ulupi as well? I do know that you fought me at my own behest. But what has fetched these royal ladies here?' The illustrious Lord of Manipura bends his head before his sire, and says, 'Let Ulupi answer your question.'"

CANTO 81

"Arjuna turns to Ulupi and asks her, 'What has fetched you here, O Devi of the Kuru vamsa, and why has the ruler of Manipur's mother come to the field of battle as well? O Nagina, do you harbour affection for this king and, O you of restless glances, do you also wish me well? O you of ample hips, I hope neither this Babhruvahana nor I have caused you any injury, however unknowingly, lovely Devi. Has Chitrangada of perfect limbs, of the race of Chitravahana, done you any wrong?'

The daughter of the snake prince replies, smiling, 'You have not offended me, nor has Babhruvahana done me any wrong, nor his mother, who is always as obedient to me as a handmaiden. Listen, and I will tell you why I contrived all that happened. Do not be angry with me. Indeed, I bow my head to you in reverence. O prince of the Kuru vamsa, I did all this for your own good, mighty one.

Dhananjaya Mahabaho, during the Great War on Kurukshetra you killed Bhishma by unrighteous ways. You did not kill him while he was fighting you but with the help of Shikhandin, while Bhishma faced the Panchala prince. That was a grievous sin, and I have today expiated it. If you had died without atonement for that wrong, you would have found hell for yourself. What you received from your son today was exoneration for that sin against your grandsire.

Lord of the Earth, I was once witness to the Vasus cursing you after the fall of Santanu's son. After you slew Bhishma, the Vasus had come to the Ganga to bathe in her sacred waters. Intelligent one, when they were in the river, they called the Devi Ganga, and when she appeared in their midst,

said to her in wrath, “Santanu’s son has been killed by Dhananjaya, O Devi, when he was facing Sikhandin with his weapons laid down. For this sin we pronounce a curse on Dhananjaya today!” And to this Devi Ganga assented, saying, “Tathaastu, be it so!”

I was stricken at these words and dived down into the deepest Patala and told my father, the Naga king, what I had seen and heard. He, too, was plunged in grief and went to the Vasus, seeking to prevail upon them by every means to withdraw their curse. They said to him, “Arjuna has a most blessed young son who is the King of Manipura. When he strikes his father down on the battlefield, O Prince of Snakes, Dhananjaya will be freed from our curse. You may go back now.”

My father came back and told me what had transpired. This is why I freed you from the curse of the Vasus. Lord Indra himself cannot vanquish you in battle. But the son of a man is his own self, and that is why Babhru was able to defeat you today. Mahabaho, I am not guilty of any fault and you have no cause to censure me for what I did.’

Arjuna is delighted and says to her, ‘Devi, I am pleased with what you have done!’ Arjuna then says to his son, in the hearing of Chitrangada, daughter-in-law of the Kuru house, ‘The Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja will be conducted on the day of full moon in the coming month of Chaitra. Come there, O King, with your mother and your counsellors and officers.’

With tears in his eyes, Babhruvahana says to his august father, ‘O knower of all dharma, I will surely come to the great horse sacrifice, and take upon myself the task of distributing food among the Brahmanas. But now, my lord, be gracious to me—come with both your wives into this city, which is your own. Do not hesitate, my father, you will in no way break dharma by enjoying one night in this your own home. Tomorrow you can follow the sacrificial horse again, O greatest of victorious Kshatriyas.’

The son of Kunti, whose banner bears the image of Hanuman, replies to Chitrangada’s royal son, ‘Mahabaho, you of the large eyes, you know the oath I have taken. Until the termination of my vow I cannot enter your city. O best of men, this horse ranges at its will. My blessings upon you! I must leave now, for there is no place in which I might rest for even a brief while.’ Then, duly worshipped by his son and taking leave of both his wives, mighty Arjuna, the son of Indra, once more goes on his way.”

CANTO 82

Vaisampayana said, “Having wandered at its will over the sea-girt earth, the steed stops suddenly and turns its face again to Hastinapura. Following the horse, Arjuna Kiritin also turns back towards the Kuru capital. Wandering at its will, the horse comes to the city of Rajagriha, O Rajan, where it is stopped by Meghasandhi, son of Sahadeva. Conscious of his Kshatriya duties, he emerges from his city in his chariot, fully armed, and challenges Arjuna, who as always is on foot.

Possessed of great energy but still young and callow, Meghasandhi says rashly to Arjuna, ‘O Bhaarata, this horse of yours appears to roam at will, protected only by women. I mean to take this beast for myself and keep him, and you can strive to free him. Although my sires did not tutor you in battle, I must observe Kshatriya dharma in extending my hospitality to you. Do you strike me, Arjuna, for I shall surely strike you!’

Smiling, Arjuna replies, ‘I am sworn to resist any man who arrests the horse of my brother Yudhishtira’s Aswamedha yagna. I have no doubt, O King, that you are aware of this vow. Strike me to the best of your power—I am not angry with you.’

At once, like Indra of the thousand eyes, the ruler of Magadha unleashes a storm of arrows at the Pandava. With unearthly swiftness and accuracy, the wielder of the Gandiva cuts down every shaft of that storm, O Bhaarata, and then looses a battery of missiles of his own at Meghasandhi, every barb like a fire-mouthed serpent. Arjuna cuts down Meghasandhi’s banner and his flagstaff, slices off his chariot pole and yoke and draws blood from his horses, but he does not aim a single shaft at the bodies of the

young king or his charioteer, though he could have felled them in a moment with his left hand.

However, thinking that it is his own prowess that has secured him, Meghasandhi continues to attack Partha with countless arrows, piercing him deep so that Pandu's son spouts blood like a palasa tree flowers in spring. Arjuna has no wish to kill the prince of Magadha, and it is this alone that saves the young warrior. But when Meghasandhi does not stop harrying him, Arjuna's Kshatriya blood rises and in a blur he kills his youthful adversary's horses and sloughs off his charioteer's head. With a razor-headed shaft he breaks Meghasandhi's large and beautiful bow and shatters his leathern shield. Another barrage of arrows bring the young Kshatriya's flagstaff crashing down.

That foolish but brave prince of Magadha leaps down from his ruined chariot, and rushes at Arjuna with a gold-embossed mace. Arjuna smashes it with a clutch of vulture-feathered arrows and the gada, its bejewelled knots severed, falls to the ground like a cast-down nagina. Seeing the prince now without chariot, bow or mace, helpless before him, the foremost of warriors says to the crestfallen Meghasandhi, 'Son, despite your tender years you have kept Kshatriya dharma and shown great valour. Go back to your city now. Yudhishtira has commanded me to not kill anyone who opposes me in battle. You have wounded me sorely, yet I am bound to keep my word to my brother, and this is why you are still alive.'

Meghasandhi, now humbled, thinks himself fortunate to be spared. He folds his hands in reverence to Arjuna, and worships him, saying, 'Great Arjuna, you have vanquished me in battle and I dare not continue fighting you. Tell me what I should do for you, and consider your command as good as accomplished.' Comforting him again, Arjuna says, 'You must come to the Aswamedha yagna of our king Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, that will be held at the coming full moon of Chaitra.' The son of Sahadeva says, 'So be it', and walks around Arjuna in pradakshina, worships the sacrificial horse as well, then turns backs into his city.

Now the Aswamedha steed of the beautiful mane ranges away again along the coast to the realms of the Bangas, the Pundras and the Kosalas. In those realms, O King, Dhananjaya with his Gandiva vanquishes innumerable Mleccha armies one after another."

CANTO 83

Vaisampayana said, "After receiving the worship of the King of Magadha, Pandu's son Swetavahana follows the horse of the sacrifice southwards. Coursing along at will, the mighty horse arrives at the beautiful city of the Chedis, named after the oyster. Sarabha, the powerful son of Sishupala, meets Arjuna with battle first, and then, subdued by that great hero, worships the Pandava with deep honour.

The sacrificial horse and Arjuna range on to the realms of the Kasis, the Angas, the Kosalas, the Kiratas and the Tanganas. Receiving due reverence in all those kingdoms, Dhananjaya then follows the Aswamedha animal to the country of the Dasarnas, ruled by Mahabaho Chitrangada, scourge of his enemies. A formidable pitched battle breaks out between the two Kshatriyas, but Arjuna conquers Chitrangada soon enough and receives his fealty and homage.

Now that best of all heroes, the Kiritin, comes to the domain of the Nishada king, the son of Ekalavya, who also meets him in battle. Indeed, the contention between the Pandava and the Nishadas is hair-raisingly fierce and relentless. But the tameless Arjuna prevails over Ekalavya's son and receives due homage. Arjuna follows the sacrificial horse towards the southern ocean, where he engages the Dravidas and Andhras, the fierce Mahishakas and the hillmen of Kolwa. Subjugating those tribes without taking any life, Arjuna journeys on to the country of the Surashtras, always following the horse for the mahayagna. He goes to Gokarna and to Prabhasa, and then reaches beautiful Dwaravati, protected by the heroes of the Vrishni clan.

When the handsome sacrificial horse of the Kuru king comes to Dwaraka, the Yadava youths want to use force to restrain that best of all steeds. However, King Ugrasena quickly comes out and checks them. Then that sovereign of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas comes forth from his palace, along with Vasudeva, Arjuna's uncle, and receives the Kuru hero with great delight and warmth. The two elderly lords duly honour the Kuru prince, and with their leave and blessings he resumes following the Aswamedha horse.

The steed courses along the coast of the western ocean until it arrives in the land of the five waters, fecund, populous and prosperous. Thence, O King, it runs on to the kingdom of the Gandharas, where it wanders at will, followed by the great son of Kunti, until its progress is challenged by the king of the Gandharas, the son of Sakuni, who remembers his father's bitter grudge against the Pandavas. A fierce battle ensues between him and Arjuna Kiritin."

CANTO 84

Vaisampayana said, “The heroic son of Sakuni, a Maharatha among his people, brings a large force with him and challenges Arjuna of the waving locks. Sakuni’s son has in his army elephants, horsemen and chariots, all flying bright banners and flags. Burning to avenge the slaying of their king Sakuni, those warriors, armed with bows, charge Partha in a host.

The unvanquished Bibhatsu of righteous soul addresses them peaceably, but they have no ears for the message of goodwill that he brings from his brother Yudhishtira. With mild words Arjuna counsels them against fighting, but they give themselves up to the wrath simmering in their hearts and surround the Aswamedha horse. At this, Arjuna, greatest among Kshatriyas, becomes incensed and effortlessly decapitates many of those warriors with razor-headed shafts. Some of the Gandharas are frightened, free the sacrificial horse and withdraw from battle. However, others remain surrounding him and, naming each of those whom he despatches, Arjuna beheads many more of these. Then their king, Sakuni’s son, rides in person to confront the son of Pandu.

Arjuna says to him, ‘Yudhishtira, whom I serve, has commanded me to kill no king who challenges me to battle. Stop fighting, O Kshatriya, do not court defeat.’ But the youthful king, blinded by rage, ignores Partha and attacks him more furiously still. Arjuna plucks the crown from the Gandhara king’s head with a crescent-tipped arrow that bears it away a great distance, even as another shaft of his once had borne away the head of Jayadratha. This astonishing feat leaves all the Gandhara warriors

wonderstruck. They realize that the crown could have easily been their prince's head, had Arjuna not spared his life.

The Gandharas fly the field like a herd of frightened deer, led by their king, wheeling dazed around the field of battle like men deprived of their senses, not knowing how to escape the superhuman warrior before them. With broad-headed shafts, Arjuna cuts off the heads of many; others lose their arms to his arrows, but are so petrified that they scarcely notice; verily, none can withstand his prowess. That great force, which came to battle with countless elephants, horses and foot soldiers, is now put to rout and reduced to a rabble, wandering across the bloodied field in aimless and bemused circles. None can withstand the famed Kuru hero.

Then, stricken with dread, the mother of the Gandhara king comes out of her city, bringing with her the aged ministers of the kingdom and a splendid arghya, and presents herself to the indefatigable Arjuna. She forbids her heroic son, Sakuni's prince, to fight any further and pacifies the tireless Jishnu. Arjuna worships her duly and resumes his kindly disposition towards the Gandharas.

Comforting the son of Sakuni, he says, 'Mahabaho, you have not pleased me by setting your heart on this futile battle. Parantapa, sinless one, you are my cousin and my brother. Remembering my mother Gandhari, and for the sake of Dhritarashtra as well, I spared your life; there is no other reason why you still live and breathe. But look, how many of your men have died because of your rashness. Let hostilities cease, and do not ever suffer your mind to be led astray. You must come to the Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, which will be held on the day of full moon of the month of Chaitra.'"

CANTO 85

Vaisampayana said, “With these words, Arjuna once more follows the sacrificial horse, which now takes the way leading back to Hastinapura. Yudhishtira hears from his informers that his steed has turned back. Hearing that his Vijaya has been triumphant all the way and is unharmed, he is filled with joy.

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja realizes that it is the twelfth day of the lighted fortnight in the month of Magha, and that the constellation is favourable and auspicious. He summons his brothers Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva, and that king of righteousness, of refulgent tejas, foremost of all knowers of dharma, says at the proper time to his brother Bhima, mightiest of Parantapas, ‘I have just learnt from these men who went with Arjuna that the Aswamedha horse has turned back to Hastinapura. Both the steed and Arjuna are near. The time for the yagna has come. The day of the full moon of Magha is at hand, and the next month draws near, O Vrikodara. Let our most learned Brahmanas who know the Vedas look for an appropriate spot where the sacrifice of the horse can be successfully conducted.’

Bhima goes forth to obey his royal brother’s behest, delighted to hear that Arjuna will soon be home. He takes with him a number of experts in laying out grounds and constructing yagnashalas for great sacrifices, as well as Brahmanas well versed in sacrificial rites. Bhima selects a beautiful, expansive area and orders it to be measured for the demarcation and building of the sacrificial compound. Many structures are built on it, and high and broad roads laid out.

Soon enough, the Kaurava hero causes the place to be stocked with splendid mansions. He has the ground levelled and smoothed with precious stones, and adorned with many structures made of gold, columns and wide triumphal arches. The righteous-souled prince has spacious apartments created to accommodate the royal ladies and the kings from numerous realms who will grace the mahayagna. The son of Kunti also builds mansions for the great Brahmanas who are expected to come from diverse kingdoms.

Then Mahabaho Bhimasena, at Yudhishtira's command, sends out messengers to the great kings of the Earth. Those best of kings come to the horse sacrifice of the Kuru emperor, to gratify the Dharmaraja. They bring with them treasures of precious jewels, many female slaves and the finest horses and weapons. The convivial hubbub that arises from those great lords congregated for the occasion is like the roaring ocean and resounds in Swarga itself. Raja Yudhishtira, Kurunandana, assigns to his royal guests diverse kinds of food and drink and beds of celestial beauty and comfort. The horses and animals of the Kuru king's guests are provided with the most excellent corn, milk and sugarcane.

To that great sacrifice of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja there also come a large number of Munis, all of them Brahmavadis. Indeed, O Bhumipala, all the greatest Brahmanas of the world who are then alive come to that yagna with their disciples. The Kuru king of blazing tejas, setting aside all royal pride, himself receives them all and sees every one of those sages to their dwellings. Having completed all the arrangements for the sacrifice, those artisans and engineers in charge of the yagnashala come and inform Yudhishtira that all is ready for the Aswamedha to commence. The king and his brothers are delighted.

When the great horse sacrifice of Yudhishtira gets under way, many eloquent dialecticians begin learned debates and disputations on diverse subjects of dharma and artha, each one eager to prove his pre-eminence. The invited kings look at the preparations for the Aswamedha yagna of the Kuru king, overseen by his brother Bhimasena, and perceive that these can compare in excellence with a sacrifice of Indra himself. They admire the triumphal arches made of gold, and all the myriad mansions furnished with splendid bedsteads, finely wrought chairs and thrones, everything of luxury and enjoyment that noble Kshatriyas might desire.

They observe the magnificent athletes and wrestlers who have come to show their prowess and skills in Hastinapura, and the crowds gathered to watch them. The kings look at wondrous cauldrons and cooking vessels, exquisite serving salvers and plates, jugs and covers, all made of gold. They behold the lofty sacrificial stakes, the yupa-stambhas adorning the yagnasala, each one wrought of wood embellished with gold by master sculptors and artisans, each one planted and dedicated according to the scriptures. The kings see every kind of animal to be found on land or water, flora and fauna from every land and clime magnificent predators and beautiful kine and buffaloes, as well as all manner of aquatic creatures. The trees are full of birds that the eyes of men seldom behold. Beholding that astounding yagnashala adorned with animals, cattle and corn, the Kshatriya kings are all wonderstruck.

The Brahmanas and the Vaisyas notice and taste with relish delicious and fragrant sweets prepared and laid out in extravagant heaps everywhere. Whenever a hundred thousand Brahmanas have been fed, drums and cymbals are beaten. So many are fed that the sounding of those festive instruments never ceases from day to day.

Thus begins the Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja of great majesty in the city of the elephant. Hillocks of food, O King, are dedicated on the grand occasion, tanks full of fine curd, and pools of ghee. Yudhishtira's Aswamedha yagna is attended by all the people of Jambudwipa, gathered from all its realms and provinces. Thousands of nations and races are present, having come from across the length and breadth of the land. An army of servitors of the Bhaarata vamsa, all festively clothed, wearing bright garlands and sparkling earrings, carrying golden vessels in their hands, serve diverse food and drink to the lakhs of Brahmanas who have some to the sacrifice, lavish fare fit for kings."

CANTO 86

Vaisampayana said, “Looking at the kings of the world who have come to his sacrifice, all of them knowers of the Vedas, Yudhishtira says to his brother Bhima, ‘Lord of men, let every honour be accorded to these Kshatriyas who have come to my yagna, for these foremost of men deserve every honour.’

Bhimasena goes forth with the twins and does his brother’s bidding. Then the Purushottama Krishna arrives, accompanied by the Vrishnis with Baladeva at their head. With him come Satyaki, Pradyumna, Gada, Nisatha, Samba and Kritavarman. Maharatha Bhima offers them the most reverential worship. Those princes then enter their assigned palaces adorned with priceless gemstones.

Krishna tells Yudhishtira about Arjuna, who has been emaciated by the many battles he had fought to enable this Aswamedha yagna. Yudhishtira asks Parantapa Krishna again and again about Jishnu, and Krishna, Lord of the universe, says to the Dharmaputra, ‘Rajan, a trusted man of mine who lives in Dwaraka came to me after seeing Arjuna. It was he who told me that Arjuna seemed tired and worn out by all the battles he had fought across the land. He says Mahabaho Arjuna is very near us. The time has come for you to perform the horse sacrifice.’

King Yudhishtira the Just says, ‘Madhava, it is our great good fortune that Arjuna has returned safely to us. Tell me if that mightiest of Pandavas has sent any message for us, O Yadavanandana.’

The Lord of the Vrishnis and Andhakas, most eloquent of all men, replies, ‘The message my man reported from Arjuna is this: “O Krishna,

when the time comes, tell my brother Yudhishtira that Arjuna said to him, ‘Lord of the Kurus, many kings will come and you must accord them the greatest honour worthy of us. O giver of honours, make certain that no drop of blood is spilt during this sacrifice, and there is no carnage as occurred at the Rajasuya arghya.’ Let Krishna also approve of this plea of mine, and ensure that no hostility is ignited by any old resentment or enmity.”

My man further reported these words of Dhananjaya: “Rajan, my dear son Babhruvahana, the King of Manipura, will come to the sacrifice. He is deeply devoted to me. I ask you to honour him duly, for my sake.”’

Yudhishtira listens to Krishna’s words with whole-hearted approbation.”

CANTO 87

"Yudhishtira says, 'O Krishna, I have heard your agreeable words and indeed you are the perfect one to bring this message to me. My heart is full, mighty one, and my brother's words Amrita to me. Hrishikesa, I have heard that our Vijaya has fought innumerable battles with the kings of the Earth to enable us to perform this great sacrifice. Ah, why is my brother destined to be always far from ease and comfort? He is so wise, and it grieves me sorely that he is constantly away from us and at strife.

Whenever I have time to myself, away from the affairs of the kingdom, I think of my Jishnu, and how miserable is his lot. His body bears every auspicious mark. Krishna, does he bear on his magnificent form some adverse mark that constantly sets him apart from the rest of us and fetches him this misery and discomfort? It seems that Arjuna always has to endure an inordinate share of grief and suffering. I see no inauspicious mark on his person that would indicate such a fate. You are the only one who can explain this to me, if you believe I deserve to hear why my brother has such a fate.'

Krishna, joy of the Bhojas, falls into thought awhile, then says to Yudhishtira, 'I, too, do not see any adverse or censurable feature in this prince, yet the cheek-bones of this lion among men are set a little too high. This is the only reason why that Purushottama is forever an itinerant, ranging across the world. There is no other sign upon his person that can explain why he must constantly endure the fate of being afflicted by grief.' Yudhishtira agrees with Krishna. Draupadi darts a furious look at

Hrishikesh but he smiles at this expression of the Princess of Panchala's love for his friend.

Hearing of Arjuna's triumphs while following the Aswamedha horse, Bhimasena, the other Kurus and the sacrificial priests are elated. Even as they are talking about him, a messenger arrives from Arjuna. The distinguished man bows in reverence before the Kuru king and announces the imminent arrival of Phalguna. Tears of joy fill Yudhishtira's eyes and he gives bounteous gifts to the bearer of these glad tidings.

Two days later, a general hubbub and loud shouts from the people announce that Arjuna has reached Hastinapura. The dust raised by the hooves of the sacrificial horse as it walks beside Arjuna is as beautiful to all present as that thrown up by the celestial steed, Uchchaisravas. As Arjuna progresses along the king's highway, he hears a celebratory chorus go up around him: 'By great good fortune, O Partha, you have returned safely through all danger. Praise be to you and King Yudhishtira!' 'Who but Arjuna could return alive after following the sacrificial horse across the Earth and vanquishing all her kings in battle!' 'Not even Sagara and other great kings of antiquity have achieved such an exploit. Nor will any king of the future accomplish as rare and difficult a feat as yours, O best of all the Kurus!'

With such greetings of welcome sounding all around, Arjuna Mahatman enters the sacrificial compound, the yagnashala. Led by Dhritarashtra, Yudhishtira, with all his ministers and Krishna, the delighter of the Yadus, comes out to receive Dhananjaya. Arjuna pays homage at the feet of Dhritarashtra, touches Yudhishtira's feet, worships Bhimasena and the other Kurus who are his elders and then comes to Krishna and embraces him. Worshipped by them all, and worshipping them in return in the ordained manner, the Mahabaho, surrounded by those princes, finally comes into his apartments and lies down to rest. Truly, he is as tired and worn as a shipwrecked sailor who has endured many days out on the open sea and at last come safely ashore.

Meanwhile, King Babhruvahana of great wisdom reaches the Kuru capital, accompanied by his mothers, Chitrangada and Ulupi. The mighty-armed Kshatriya pays homage to all his elders of the Kuru vamsa, as well as to the other kings present there, and is honoured by them all in return. He then goes to his grandmother Kunti in the royal palace."

CANTO 88

Vaisampayana said, "Entering the palace of the Pandavas, Babhruvahana salutes Kunti and speaks to her tenderly. Queen Chitrangada and Ulupi, daughter of the Naga king Kauravya, together approach Arjuna and Krishna with appropriate formalities. Kunti gifts the queens many rare gemstones and precious artifacts. Draupadi and Subhadra and the other Kuru ladies all give them priceless gifts to gladden their hearts. Treated with great kindness and cared for personally by Kunti herself, anxious to please her son Arjuna, Chitrangada and Ulupi remain in that palace of every comfort and luxury.

Kunti extends the same honours to her grandson, Babhruvahana of great tejas, and he is taken to meet Dhritarashtra, whom he reverences with due rites. Going then to King Yudhishtira and Bhima and the other Pandavas, the mighty prince of Manipura salutes them humbly, and they in turn embrace him lovingly and accord him every distinction. The Maharathas, deeply gratified by him, shower priceless gifts and much wealth on him. The King of Manipura respectfully approaches Krishna, the heroic bearer of the Chakra and the Gada, even like a second Pradyumna approaching his sire. Krishna gives Babhru a splendid chariot adorned with gold and yoked to steeds of surpassing excellence. Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins, all separately honour him and bestow lavish largesse upon him.

On the third day, the Rishi Vyasa, son of Satyavati, foremost of eloquent men, comes to Yudhishtira and says, 'From this day, O son of Kunti, commence your yagna. The muhurta is at hand and the Ritvijas

summon you to the sacrifice. Let it be performed in such a way that no limb or part of it is defective. Because of the vast quantity of gold that this sacrifice demands, it has come to be called the yagna of profuse gold. Do you also, O great King, make the dakshina of this yagna three times what is enjoined, and so let the merit of your sacrifice increase threefold. The Brahmanas who will conduct your yagna are adept for this purpose. With lavish gifts you will gain the punya of three Aswamedha yagnas and be freed, Rajan, from the sin of having slain your kinsmen. The ablutionary bath taken upon the yagna's completion will wash every vestige of sin from you and bless you with the highest punya, O King of Kuru's race.'

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja takes the diksha for performing the Aswamedha yagna and then the mighty-armed king performs the great horse sacrifice characterized by the distribution of food and gifts in unprecedented profusion, for this is the sacrifice that can fructify every wish and bestow all merit. The priests, all deeply knowing of the Vedas and masters of the Vedic rites, perform every ritual immaculately. Not in the slightest degree does any ritual deviate from the ordinances of the Shastras, and those Dvijottamas follow to the letter the procedure laid down therein. In performing rites for which no laws are prescribed, they use their enlightened instinct. Those foremost Brahmanas first perform the rite called Pravargya, also known as Dharma, then the ritual known as Abhishava. The foremost of Soma drinkers extract the juice of the Soma, O King, then perform the Savana rite in strict adherence to the injunctions of the scriptures.

Among those that come to that sacrifice none is seen who is downcast or plunged in grief of any kind, none who is poor, none who is hungry, and none that appears coarse or uncouth. At the command of his elder brother, Bhimasena of mighty energy has food ceaselessly distributed among those that wish to eat. Following the injunctions of the Shastras, every day the profound priests, well versed in sacrificial rites of every kind, perform all the kriyas to complete the great sacrifice. Amongst the Sadasyas, the Brahmana guests of percipient King Yudhishtira, all are deeply conversant with the six angas of Vedic learning; there is not one among them who is not an observer of vratas, none that is not an Upadhyaya, none that is not adept at dialectical disputation.

When the time comes to erect the yupastamba, the sacrificial stake, O Lord of the Bharatas, six stakes are raised made of bilwa, six of khadira,

and six of saravarnin. The priests raise two stakes of devadaru during the Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and one wrought of sleshmataka wood. At the behest of the king, Bhima has some other fine golden stakes raised as well, made purely for their beauty. Wrapped in fine cloths provided by the Kuru Rajarishi, the stambhas in their splendour are like Indra and the Devas with the seven celestial Rishis standing around them in Swarga. A number of golden bricks have been made to construct a chayana, a pavilion measuring eight and ten cubits in width and length, and four storeys high, as magnificent as the one created for Daksha Prajapati during his fabled yagna.

A golden bird shaped like a prodigious Garuda is also wrought with three angles. Following scriptural injunction, the priests tie the beasts and birds to stakes, assigning each one to its particular deity. Bulls, carefully chosen according to shastraic injunctions and aquatic animals are tethered to their appropriate stambhas, following the rituals for the sacred Agni.

At the sacrifice of the Mahatman son of Kunti, three hundred animals are tied to sacrificial stakes, including that foremost of steeds, the sacrificial horse. Sublime is that Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira, graced by the celestial Rishis, with Gandharvas singing in chorus and diverse tribes of Apsaras dancing in celebration, thronged with Kimpurushas and Kinnaras.

All around the yagnashala are the abodes of Brahmanas of high ascetic mastery. Daily one sees the disciples of Vyasa, those foremost of Dvijas, compilers of all branches of learning and adepts in sacrificial rites. Narada is there, and Tumburu of great splendour; Viswavasu and Chitrasena with others, all of them inspired musicians. During breaks in the performance of rituals, those proficient Gandharvas gladden with song and dance the Brahmanas engaged in the sacrifice."

CANTO 89

Vaisampayana said, “The priests first sacrifice and cook the flesh of all the other yagnapasus, according to the due rites, after which comes the sacrifice of the great horse which has wandered the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha. They carve it into sections and, in accordance with the scriptures, Draupadi of great beauty and intelligence, who owns the three requisites of mantras, wealth and devotion, is brought to sit next to the divided animal.

With serene minds, the Brahmanas then cook the marrow of the yagnapasu and Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and his brothers deeply inhale the smoke rising from the cooking marrow, fumes which cleanse them of every sin. The remaining limbs of the horse are offered to the fire by the sixteen learned priests. Having thus completed the sacrifice of the monarch, who is endowed with the tejas of Sakra himself, the illustrious Vyasa and his disciples extravagantly eulogize the king.

Then Yudhishtira gives away a thousand crores of golden nishkas to those Brahmanas, and to Vyasa he ceremonially gives the whole Earth. Ritually accepting the world from the sovereign, Satyavati’s son Vyasa says to the Dharmaraja, ‘Best of kings, I return to you the Earth which you have given me. Do you now give me its purchasing value, for Brahmanas have no use for anything other than wealth.’

Yudhishtira Mahatman, Mahabuddhi, along with his brothers, remains in the midst of all the kings who have come to his Aswamedha yagna and he says to the Brahmanas, ‘The dakshina ordained in the scriptures for the great horse sacrifice is the Earth. I have given away to the sacrificial priests

the Earth conquered by Arjuna. I will enter the forest and take sannyasa there, best of all Brahmanas. Divide the Earth among yourselves; divide it into four parts as is done in the Chaturhotra yagna.

Dvijottamas, I have no wish to appropriate what now belongs to you. Even this, most learned ones, has been the intention that my brothers and I always cherished.' Yudhishtira's brothers and Draupadi affirm the king's pronouncement, saying, 'Yes, it is even so.' Great is the sensation created by this announcement, O Bhaarata. A disembodied voice, an Asariri, is heard from the sky, saying, 'Excellent! Excellent!' The throng of Brahmanas laud Yudhishtira all together, and the Island-born sage praises him, saying, 'You have given this Bhumi to me. However, I give her back to you forthwith. I ask you to give these Brahmanas gold, and let the Earth remain yours.' Krishna says to the Dharmaraja, 'You must do as the illustrious Vyasa says.'

Yudhishtira is gratified and gladly gives away millions of gold nishkas to Vyasa, three times the amount ordained as dakshina for an Aswamedha yagna. No king will ever accomplish what the Kuru king did during his horse sacrifice, as magnificent as that of Marutta of old. Accepting the wealth, the Island-born sage, of untold wisdom, divides it into four parts and gives it to the sacrificial priests. Thus having paid the gold as the price of the Earth, Yudhishtira, cleansed of his sins and assured of Swarga, rejoices with his brothers.

The sacrificial priests delightedly distribute the great wealth among the Brahmanas present, to satisfy each one's desires. With Yudhishtira's leave, the Brahmanas also divide amongst themselves the diverse ornaments of gold in the yagnashala, including the triumphal arches, the stakes, the jars, and the myriad urns and vessels. After the Brahmanas have taken as much as they want, the gold and treasures that remain are taken by the Kshatriyas, followed by the Vaisyas, the Sudras and the many tribes of Mlechchas.

Gratified by Yudhishtira Dharmaraja beyond their wildest expectations, the joyful Brahmanas make their way home to their various asramas across the holy land. Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa gives his own substantial share of the dakshina to Kunti, with all reverence. Receiving the gift of affection from her father-in-law, Pritha is glad of heart and uses the wealth to accomplish varied deeds of punya.

Yudhishtira takes the avabhrita snana, the ritual ablution at the conclusion of his sacrifice, and is purified of all his sins. Honoured by all,

he shines forth in the midst of his brothers like the king of the Devas amid the denizens of Swarga. The Dharmaraja and his brothers, surrounded by all the assembled kings, are as radiant as planets in a sky full of stars.

They present the kings with rare jewels and gemstones, elephants and horses, female slaves, rich cloths and large measures of gold ornaments and coins. In giving all that untold wealth away, Pritha's son is truly like Kubera, Lord of Treasures. Yudhishtira now calls the heroic Babhruvahana, bestows on him every kind of wealth in profusion, and gives him leave to return to Manipura. To gratify his cousin Dussala, Yudhishtira establishes her infant grandson as the ruler of his paternal kingdom. After having duly honoured all the visiting kings in accord with their respective stature, the Kuru sovereign, always in mastery of his mind, graciously dismisses the assembled kings, who return to their kingdoms. The illustrious son of Pandu, that Parantapa, then duly worships Krishna, mighty Baladeva and the thousands of other Vrishni heroes, Pradyumna the first among them. With his brothers, he grants them leave to return to Dwaraka.

Thus did Dharmaraja Yudhishtira of the House of Kuru perform the awesome Aswamedha yagna in Hastinapura, a sacrifice distinguished by a superabundance of food and gold, jewels, ornaments and riches of every kind, oceans of varied vintages, lakes of ghrita, veritable hills of food and rivers of drinks satisfying the six different kinds of taste. Of men employed in the making and the eating of the marvellous sweetmeats called Khandavaragas, and of animals slain for food, there was no end.

The vast yagnashala thronged with men inebriated with wine, and with girls filled with joy. The sprawling grounds constantly echoed with the sounds of drums and the blare of conches. With all these, the sacrifice was delightful past describing. 'Let the finest gifts be given away,' 'Let the best food be eaten,' were the words repeatedly heard day and night during that sacrifice. People of diverse realms speak of that yagna to this day as an unparalleled festival of rejoicing and fulfilment.

That greatest king of the Bharata vamsa, his purpose fulfilled, exorcised of all his sins, having showered wealth in torrents on his guests—jewels and gems, and drinks of every kind, and diverse luxuries to satisfy every desire—once more enters his capital and his palace."

CANTO 90

Janamejaya asked, “Was there any other remarkable event which occurred during my grandsires’ Aswamedha yagna?”

Vaisampayana said, “Listen, O mightiest of kings, to the most marvellous thing that happened at the conclusion of that great horse sacrifice. After all the greatest of Brahmanas, all Yudhishtira’s kinsmen and friends, all the poor, the blind and the helpless have been well gratified, when the gifts given in such unprecedented profusion are being spoken of on all sides, indeed, when flowers rain down out of the sky on the head of Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, a large blue-eyed mongoose appears, O sinless one, with one half of his body and pelt of gold. That denizen of a burrow in the ground speaks in a human voice, but one as deep as thunder, loud enough to terrify all the animals and birds there. ‘O you kings,’ he roars, ‘This great sacrifice is not equal to a prastha of powdered barley once given away by a liberal Brahmana of Kurukshetra observing the Unccha vrata.’

All the Brahmanottamas there are wonderstruck at these words, O King. Approaching the mongoose, they ask, ‘From where have you come to this sacrifice, this resort of the good and the pious? What is the extent of your power? What is your learning, and what is your asrama? How should we know who it is that censures our sacrifice? Everything that should be done has been executed faithfully here, even as the Shastras ordain, neglecting no part. Those deserving of worship have been duly worshipped, as prescribed. Libations have been poured on the sacred fire, to the precise chant of the appropriate mantras. That which should be given as dakshina and daana has been given without pride. Brahmanas have been gratified

with a surfeit of diverse gifts. Kshatriyas have been gratified with battles fought according to dharma. Grandsires have been propitiated with sraddhas. Vaisyas have been thankful for the protection offered to them, and the foremost of women have been gratified, their desires fulfilled. The Sudras have been well satisfied with kind words and deeds, and others with what remained of the profuse wealth from the trove of Marutta. Kinsmen near and far have been exalted by the purity of conduct displayed by our king Yudhishtira. The Devas have been adored by libations of ghrita and deeds of punya, dependants and followers have been honoured by being granted protection.

Therefore, explain to these great Brahmanas the truth of your declaration. Answer us, by the dharma of the Shastras and by the truth of actual experience, for we are all eager to know. You bear a supernal form, your words seem to demand credit and you are obviously possessed of wisdom. You have come into the midst of learned Brahmanas; it is incumbent upon you to explain yourself.'

The mongoose answered them, smiling, 'Dvijas, I have spoken no lie, neither have I spoken from pride. You have all heard what I said—that this Aswamedha yagna, and all its dakshina, is not equal in punya to the gift of a prastha of powdered barley. Give me your attention and I will unfold to you the strange and marvellous occurrence to which I was witness, and its aftermath that I experienced. My story is about a liberal Brahmana dwelling in Kurukshetra in the observance of the Unccha vrata, whose deed raised him to Swarga, along with his wife, his son and daughter-in-law. It is in consequence of that deed that half my body and pelt were transformed into gold.' The mongoose continues, 'Yes, O Dvijas, I will tell you of the great punya which accrued to that Brahmana who offered a gift of a meagre measure of powdered barley scraped together in observance of his dharma. Listen.

On that most hallowed and auspicious ground known as Kurukshetra, where so many of the righteous dwell, there lived a Brahmana who kept the vow known as the Unccha vrata, a mode of living like that of the pigeon—subsisting on leftover grains from harvested fields. He lived there with his wife, his son and daughter-in-law and performed tapasya. Of righteous soul, and with his senses under complete control, he lived thus, following stern vows: to eat every day only at the sixth yaama. If there was nothing to eat at

the sixth division of the day, the Brahmana would keep his fast until the next day, but again break it only at the sixth division.

Once a terrible famine fell upon the land. The Brahmana had no store of food in his humble home. All the herbs and plants of the earth dried up and died, and nothing remained which could serve as sustenance. When the hour came for him to eat, the Brahmana had nothing for food. Day after day, the good Brahmana and his family, worn out with hunger and toil, subsisted on whatever poor pickings they could glean from the arid land.

In the month of Jaishtha, when the sun was at its zenith, beating down fiercely, the Brahmana went forth daily seeking sparse grains of dry barley scattered on the cracked ground. He could find not even enough of the dried grains to unite body and soul but, racked as he was by both heat and hunger, he remained firm in his vrata. Day after day, the Brahmana and his family toiled and starved, suffering from the searing heat of day and savage pangs of craving for food. Great indeed was their torment.

One day, when the sixth yaama came, the Brahmana on his daily forage succeeded in finding a prastha, some handfuls, of barley. The ravaged family powered the barley to make saktu, a simple gruel. They performed their daily rituals, finished their silent chanting of mantras and poured libations on the sacred fire, then divided that small quantity of powdered barley amongst themselves so that the share of each was the measure of a kudava, about two dozen fistfuls.

They had just sat down to eat when a guest appeared at their door. Being all of pure mind, self-restraint, deep faith and control over their passions, they greeted him warmly and made the customary enquiries after his well-being. Those ascetics had quelled anger and knew no malice; with hearts free from pride, envy and wrath, they rejoiced in the happiness of others. Each of them knew and lived every nuance of dharma.

Telling their guest of their own penances and of the vamsa to which they belonged, and ascertaining from him in return his own particulars, they welcomed the hungry visitor into their hut. They said to him, “This is the arghya for you. This water is padya to wash your feet. These kusa grasses are for you to sit on, sinless one. Here is some clean saktu we have prepared and made in dharma, O mighty one. Do you accept it from us and satisfy your hunger.” The Brahmana visitor accepted the kudava of powdered barley offered him and ate it all. But his hunger was not appeased by what

he ate, O King. The host saw that his guest was still hungry, and began to think of what other food he could offer him.

Then his virtuous wife said, "Let my share be given to him. Let this best of Dvijas eat his fill, and only then go wherever he wants." Knowing that his old wife was herself tortured by hunger and trembling from weakness, seeing her emaciated and toil-worn, dejected and helpless, that best of Brahmanas said to her, "Do not say so. Even animals—why, even worms and insects, feed and protect their mates, O beautiful one. The wife treats her husband with kindness and feeds and protects him. Everything that has to do with dharma, artha and kama, with progeny and the perpetuation of lineage, all depend on the wife. The very punya of a man, even of his departed ancestors, depends on her. The wife knows her lord by his deeds; the man who fails to protect his wife earns great infamy in this world and finds Naraka in the next. Such a man falls from even a position of great fame and can never succeed in attaining realms of felicity in the hereafter."

His wife replied, "O Dvija, my husband, our dharma and artha are united. Do you take a fourth of this barley and, indeed, be gratified with me. For women satya, kama, punya and Swarga and every other object of their desires depend entirely on their husbands. In the creation of children the mother contributes her blood, and the father gives his seed. The wife's highest god is her husband, and through his grace she receives both pleasure and offspring as her reward. You are my Pati for the protection that you give me, my Bhartri for the means of sustenance you provide, and my boon-giver for having given me a son. So, in return for everything you have done for me, take my share of this saktu for the guest. You are old, emaciated and weak, afflicted by hunger and worn out with keeping fasts."

Deeply moved, the good Brahmana took his wife's share of the powdered barley and said to his guest, "Dvija, best of men, accept this measure of saktu as well." The visitor accepted the saktu and immediately ate it, but his hunger was still not satisfied. The Brahmana of the Unccha vrata became thoughtful and fell silent. Then his son said to him, "O best of men, take my share and give it to the guest as well. I consider what I am doing a deed of great punya so, father, do it for me. It is my highest dharma to look after you. Caring for a father is an obligation the good always desire. The eternal Sruti current in the three worlds ordain looking after a father in his old age as a son's duty, O most learned Rishi. You eat barely

enough to keep your spirit in your body, yet engage yourself in the most rigorous tapasya. Prana is the great deity that keeps alive all embodied creatures."

At this, the father said, "Even if you get to be a thousand years old, I will still see you as a child. Having begotten a son, the father achieves success through him. O mighty one, I know that the hunger of the young is strong indeed. I can somehow hold my life-breath in my body. But you, my son, you must find strength by eating your share of the food. Old and decrepit as I am, O son, I am scarcely afflicted by hunger. Besides, I have practised tapasya for many years, and I have no fear of death."

The son said, "I am your son. The Sruti declares that one's son is called Putra because he rescues his father. Again, it is a man's own self that is born as his son. Therefore, do what you need to do through your own self—through me, your son." The father said, "Your form is like mine, and you are like me in conduct and in self-restraint as well. I have tested you on many occasions and I am convinced of your worth. Therefore, I will accept your share of the saktu for our guest, my son."

That best of Brahmanas then gladly took his son's share of the saktu and, smiling, gave it to his guest. The visitor ate that share of powdered barley as well, and he was still not satisfied. His righteous host now began to grow ashamed, when his daughter-in-law, bearing her share of the barley, came to him and said, "Through your son I will receive a son. Take this barley of mine, also, and give it to our guest. Through your grace I will inherit many realms of bliss for eternity. Through a grandson one obtains heavens where there is no sorrow or pain of any kind. Like the triad of dharma, artha and kama, or the threefold sacred fires, there are also three eternal Swargas which a man attains through his son, his grandson and his grandson's son. The son is called Putra because he frees his father from debt. Through sons and grandsons one always enjoys the felicity and bliss of those celestial kingdoms reserved for the pious and the good."

The father-in-law said, "O you of unblemished vratas and character, I see you worn by the wind and the sun, your very complexion faded, emaciated and faint from hunger. How can I be such a sinner against dharma to take your share of the saktu? Do not ask me to do this, for it grieves me already to see you starving at this sixth yaama of the day. You are blessed with purity and immaculate character and conduct; you have kept many vratas for us all and performed tapasya. Alas, that you have to

now pass your days in such misery! Blessed girl, for the sake of those auspicious results for which every family hopes, it is not fitting that you make this offer. You are a mere child, and a woman besides. It is my dharma to always protect you. Alas that I have instead to watch you daily tormented by hunger and fasting, O you delighter of all your kinfolk!"

His daughter-in-law said, "You are the lord of my lord; you are the god of my god. So, father, mighty one, take my share of the saktu. My body, my life-breaths, and my vratas all have just one purpose: to serve my elders and my god. Through your grace, most learned and wise Brahmana, I will find many realms of joy hereafter. Truly, I deserve to be treasured by you, for know, O Dvija, that I am entirely devoted to you. If you care for my happiness, take my share of the saktu from me and give it to our guest."

The father-in-law said, "O chaste one, you will shine forth in glory for your vratas and steadfastness in observing your duties and serving your elders. I will take your share of the saktu, for your virtues deserve no less, certainly not to be misled by me. You, blessed girl, are foremost among all who observe dharma." Saying this, the Brahmana took her share of the barley and gave it to his guest. At this the guest, who was none other than Dharma Deva in a human form, was deeply gratified with the great-souled Brahmana endowed with such perfect piety and said to him, "O Dvijottama, I am greatly pleased by this pure gift of yours, acquired through dharma, which you have freely parted with in accord with dharma. All heaven resounds with praises of what you have done today. Look how these celestial flowers rain down on you from the sky. The Devarishis, the Devas, the Gandharvas, all those who walk before the gods, and the Devadutas as well, are all in amaze at what you have done, and speak of nothing else.

Even the illumined Rishis who dwell in Brahmaloka have come in their vimanas to see you. O foremost of Mahatmans, you have saved the souls of the Pitrs who live in the realm of the manes; why, you have even redeemed others who have not attained to the status of Pitrs and have set them free for countless yugas. For your brahmacharya, your daana, your yagnas, your tapasya, for the deeds of punya you have done so constantly and with such a pure heart, I say to you, go straight to Swarga today.

O Brahmana of stern vratas, you have performed the most austere tapasya with great bhakti, and the Devas are entirely pleased with you. Today by giving me this saktu ungrudgingly, in a season of extreme hardship, you have not only attained but conquered the realm of the gods.

Hunger destroys a man's understanding and deprives him of fortitude, while he who conquers hunger, surely conquers heaven. As long as a man remains inclined to help others, his dharma remains indestructible. Today you held dharma above your love for your children and your wife, ignoring the pangs of hunger, the very cries of nature. The acquisition of wealth is a deed of but slight punya; gifting it to a deserving person carries far greater merit. Of still greater punya is the time at which the act of charity is done, and the greatest value lies in devotion. The door to Swarga is subtle and hard to see, and men fail to find it through their heedlessness. The bar of heaven's door is made of cupidity and kept fastened by desire and attachment. Verily, it is unapproachable. Only those who subdue wrath and conquer their passions, who are endowed with great tapasya, and who make gifts according to the measure of their ability, succeed in finding it.

It has been said that he who gives away a hundred while having a thousand, he that gives away ten while having a hundred, and he who offers a palmful of water, having no wealth, all are equal in respect of the punya they earn. When divested of all his wealth, King Rantideva gave a small quantity of water with a pure heart. Through this gift, O wise Brahmana, he attained Swargaloka. Dharma Deva is never as gratified with large and costly gifts as with modest things, even of no value, if they have been acquired lawfully and given with devotion and faith. King Nriga made gifts of thousands of kine to Brahmanas but, by giving away just one cow that did not belong to him, he fell into Naraka. Usinara's son, Sibi of excellent vows, gave away his own flesh, and he is blissful in Swarga, for he has attained the realms of the righteous.

Mere wealth is not punya. Good men acquire punya by exerting themselves to the best of their powers by virtuous means. One does not acquire the highest punya through diverse and extravagant sacrifices but through giving even a little wealth that has been earned in dharma. By wrath, the fruits of giving daana are destroyed; through greed one fails to attain Swarga; whereas the man who knows the great punya of giving charity, of leading a righteous life, and of tapasya—he finds heaven for himself. O Brahmana, the virtue of this prastha of saktu that you have given me today far outweighs that acquired through several Rajasuya sacrifices with profuse gifts, or through many Aswamedha yagnas. With this prastha of powdered barley you have conquered eternal Brahmaloka for yourself. Go now in joy to that realm of Brahma unstained by any darkness.

O best of Brahmanas, a celestial chariot is here to take all four of you to Brahmaloka. Enter it as you please, O Brahmana. Behold me, Dharma Deva, the Lord of Truth! You have saved your body through your immaculate dharma, and the fame of this your achievement will resound in the world forever. Go now, Mahatman, with your wife, your son, and your daughter-in-law, to Swarga of everlasting bliss."

When Dharma had spoken, that righteous Brahmana with his wife, son and daughter-in-law ascended the chariot and flew away to Brahmaloka. I emerged from my hole, With the scent of the saktu, and the few remaining grains of powdered barley, the moisture of the water, the touch of the supernal flowers that had rained down, and the tapasya of the Brahmana, my head turned golden; behold, half of this ample body turned golden through his firmness in truth and his penances,

From that day, long ago, seeking to gild the rest of my body, I have gone expectantly to asramas of the holiest Munis and every yagna performed by the mightiest kings of the world. Hearing of this Aswamedha yagna of the Kuru king of great wisdom, I came here with high expectations —but as you all see, the rest of my body has not turned golden.

That is why, O Brahmanottamas, I said that this mighty sacrifice can in no way compare with that humble gift of a prastha of powdered barley. Just a few grains of that saktu turned my head golden. I have concluded that not all the lavish gifts and charity of this great Aswamedha yagna are equal to those particles.' With these words, the mongoose vanished.

This was the marvellous happening at the end of that great Aswamedha yagna of Yudhishtira, O conqueror of hostile cities. So do not, O King, think too highly of conducting sacrificial rites. Millions of Rishis have ascended to Swargaloka by dint of their tapasya alone. Abstaining from causing injury to living creatures, contentment, righteous conduct, sincerity, penance, self-restraint, truthfulness and charity: each of these is equal in punya to any yagna."

CANTO 91

Janamejaya says, "Mahamuni, kings are attached to performing sacrifices; the great Rishis are attached to penance; learned Brahmanas esteem self-restraint, tranquillity of mind and peaceful conduct. But I think nothing in this world can compare with the fruits of sacrifices. From what I have seen myself and heard told, I am convinced that the performance of great yagnas is unequalled in bestowing rewards.

Many mighty kings, have earned lofty fame in this world and found Swarga in the hereafter by worshipping the gods with sacrifices. Indra of a thousand eyes, endowed with incomparable tejas, gained sovereignty over the Devas through the many sacrifices he performed, during which he gave abundant gifts in charity. When Yudhishtira, with Bhima and Arjuna beside him, was like the king of the Devas himself in prosperity and prowess, why did that mongoose demean the Kuru Dharmaraja's mighty yagna?"

Vaisampayana says, "Listen to me, O King, and I will tell you about the admirable laws governing the performance of sacrifices, as well as of the fruits that yagnas bestow, O Bhaarata.

Once Indra undertook a great sacrifice. Having laid out the limbs of the yagna, the Ritwijas were absorbed in accomplishing the diverse rites ordained in the scriptures. The pourer of libations, possessed of every necessary attribute for the task, was engaged in his task of feeding the sacred fire with ghrita, the great Rishis sitting around him. The serene Brahmanas of great learning and lustre invoked and summoned the Devas, one by one, chanting the apposite mantras for each in dulcet voices. The

foremost of Adhvaryus tirelessly recited the mantras of the Yajur Veda in mellifluous accents.

The time came for slaughtering the sacrificial animals. When the chosen yagnapasus were seized, the great Rishis, seeing that the beasts had all become fearful, were moved to pity. Those Rishis, endowed with tapodhana, approached Indra and said to him, 'This method of sacrifice is inauspicious. You wish to amass punya through this yagna, but your intention of sending these animals to their death shows how little you know about the true nature of sacrifice.

O Purandara, beasts are not created to be slaughtered at sacrifices, and these preparations of yours are destructive of punya. This yagna is not consonant with dharma, for the killing of living creatures can never be considered righteous. If you will, let your priests perform your sacrifice according to the Agama, without taking any life. Deva of a hundred eyes, perform your yagna with seeds of grain that have been kept for three years. That sacrifice, O Indra, will be fraught with great righteousness and yield fruit of the highest punya and efficacy.'

However, O Bhaarata, the Deva of a hundred sacrifices, swayed by pride and gripped by tamas, did not accept what the Rishis said. A great dispute then arose between the ascetics at that sacrifice of Sakra about how sacrifices should be performed—with or without animal sacrifices. They argued both sides until the sages were exhausted.

Finally the Rishis, those seers of truth, arrived at an understanding with Sakra that they would refer the matter to an arbiter. They asked King Vasu, 'Most blessed one, what is the Vedic pronouncement about sacrifices? Is it preferable to perform yagnas with animals being slaughtered, or with seeds and juices?' King Vasu replied immediately, without considering the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments on both sides, 'Sacrifices may be performed with whichever of the two is ready and available.' For answering the question without proper deliberation, he was cursed to go down into the realm of Patala. That mighty Chedi king had to endure great misery for having responded faultily. Therefore, when any serious question arises, no man, however wise, should singly arrive at a decision, unless he be the almighty Svayambhuva, Lord of all creatures.

Gifts made by a sinner with an impure mind, even if bounteous, fail and count for nothing. Indeed, the daana given by a person of adharma, a sinful soul and a destroyer, is wasted; he gains neither merit nor fame from

it, in this world or the next. One of limited intelligence who, from a desire to acquire punya, performs sacrifices with wealth acquired by unrighteous means, never succeeds in earning the least merit.

The hypocrite who puts on a garb of righteousness and makes lavish gifts to Brahmanas creates an impression of being a man of dharma, but earns no real punya. The unrestrained Brahmana who acquires such wealth through sin, who is overwhelmed by rajas and tamas, ends up in Naraka. Such a one, possessed by greed and darkness, becomes a slave to accumulating riches. He persecutes creatures, impelled by his own impure and sinful mind. Having acquired his fortune by wicked means, he makes gifts or performs sacrifices therewith, but in the next world finds his shallow charity or sacrifices fruitless, because his wealth has been earned through adharma and violence.

However, men blessed with true plenitude of tapasya, who give according to the best of their means, even grains of corn picked from the field, or fruit or pot-herbs or water or leaves, gain great punya and reach Swarga. Even humble gifts such as these, besides compassion for all creatures, brahmacharya, truthfulness of speech, kindness, fortitude and forgiveness, constitute the eternal foundations of Dharma.

We hear of Viswamitra and other Rajarishis of ancient times. Indeed, kings such as Viswamitra, Asita, Janaka, Kakshasena, Arshtisena and Sindhudwipa—these and many other kings, all endowed with the undying wealth of tapasya, gave plentiful gifts, all acquired righteously, and all of them attained to lofty felicity. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras who yield themselves to penance, and who purify themselves by charity and other deeds of dharma, certainly attain Heaven, O Bhaarata."

CANTO 92

Janamejaya said, "If Swarga is the fruit of wealth acquired by lawful means, O illustrious one, expound to me as fully as you should all you know about this. Most regenerate one, you have told me about the high fruit which the Brahmana of the Unccha vrata reached through his gift of powdered barley. I have no doubt that what you have said is true. Yet, I want to understand how that Brahmana's attainment is held up as the highest consummation of all sacrifices. Dvijottama, explain this to me fully."

Vaisampayana said, "Parantapa, an old tale is told in this regard, of what transpired at the great sacrifice of Agastya. In ancient times, O King, the rishi Agastya of great tejas, devoted to the good of all creatures, embarked upon a diksha of twelve years. He engaged many hotris, splendid in form like blazing fires, to perform the sacrifice. Among them were men who subsisted upon roots or fruits; or that used two pieces of stone only for husking their corn; or that supported themselves only with the rays of the moon; men who never took any food unless it was set before them by others; those who never ate anything without having first served the Devas, the Pitris and Sadasyas; and those who never washed the food they ate. There were also Yatis and Bhikshus among them, O King—all men who had obtained a vision of Dharma Deva, the God of Righteousness, in his embodied form. They had subdued wrath and acquired complete mastery over their senses. Living in observance of self-restraint, they were free from pride and any inclination to injure another being.

Those Maharishis attended the sacrifice and accomplished its various rites. The illustrious Agastya acquired through pure and righteous means the food that was required for the yagna, to the best of his means and ability. At that same time, numerous other ascetics also performed large yagnas of their own. But when great Agastya engaged himself in the performance of his twelve-year yagna, thousand-eyed Indra ceased to send down rain upon the earth.

During the intervals in the rituals, O King, the other Rishis spoke among themselves, saying, 'Agastya makes offerings of food with his heart cleansed of the least pride and vanity. However, the Lord of the clouds has stopped sending down rain. How, then, will any food be grown? Agastya's mighty yagna is to continue for twelve years, O Brahmanas, and for that entire period Bhumi will have no rain. Reflect on this and do something to help Agastya of the stern tapasya, this Rishi of great wisdom.'

When he heard the sages, Agastya bent his head and gratified them by saying, 'If Vasava does not send down any rain for twelve years, I will perform the yagna of the mind. Even this is the eternal ordinance. If Indra does not send any rain for twelve years, I will perform the Sparsa yagna, the sacrifice of touch. Even this is the eternal sacrifice. If Sakra does not give us rain for these twelve years, I will put forth all my energy and make arrangements for other sacrifices demanding the observance of the most severe vows.

I have arranged my present yagna of seeds with the labour of many years. With these same seeds will I accomplish great good. Nothing can obstruct my yagna. It matters little whether Indra gives us rain or not. If Indra shows scant regard for me, I will use my powers to transform myself into another Indra and keep all living entities alive. I vow that every creature, whatever food it takes for nourishment, will continue to be nourished as before. I have the power to create a different order of things, again and again. And I say, let gold and whatever other wealth that exists, let all the wealth of the three worlds come here today of its own accord. Let all the tribes of Apsaras, all the Gandharvas, along with the Kinnaras, and Viswavasu, and the other Swargavasis all come today to this sacrifice of mine. Let all the wealth that exists among the Northern Kurus come to these sacrifices. Let Swarga, and all those who have Heaven for their home, let Dharma himself, come here!'

No sooner had mighty Agastya spoken than everything he called for happened, for his tapasya was incomparable and the power of his mind like a fiery furnace of energy. The other Rishis present saw the power of tapasya revealed, and their hearts were filled with rejoicing. Full of wonder, they uttered words of grave import: 'We are profoundly gratified with what you have said, and we do not wish your store of tapasya to suffer any diminution. We approve, indeed, desire, all yagnas performed with dharma.

Earning our food by righteous means, and observant of our svadharma, we undertake diksha, the pouring of libations onto the sacred fire and every other ritual. We observe brahmacharya and worship the Devas. Completing the term of brahmacharya, we emerge from our asramas cleaving to dharma. We approve of the mind and understanding free from the inclination to inflict any injury on any living creature. O puissant Agastya, commend non-violence to be practised during every sacrifice, and we shall be deeply gratified, O best of all Brahmanas. When you have completed your yagna and dismissed us, we shall depart from this place.'

Even as they spoke, Purandara, Lord of the Devas, he of the thousand eyes and tremendous tejas, discerning the power of Agastya's penance, sent down on the parched world copious showers of rain. Indeed, O Janamejaya, till the completion of the sacrifice of that Rishi of immeasurable prowess, the God of rain sent down timely rain enough to satisfy the needs and wishes of all men.

With Brihaspati before him, the King of the Devas attended the sacrifice, O Rajarishi, to gratify Agastya Muni. Filled with joy upon the completion of his yagna, Agastya worshipped the great Rishis who had participated before dismissing them."

Janamejaya asked, "Who was that mongoose with the golden head who spoke those words in a human voice? Tell me, I am eager to know." Vaisampayana said, "You did not ask me before, and I did not tell you. But now listen to who the mongoose with the golden head was, and how he could speak in a human voice.

In olden days, the Rishi Jamadagni decided to perform a sraddha. His homa cow came to him and the Rishi milked her himself. He then placed the milk in a new vessel, strong and pure. Dharma Deva assumed the form of Krodha, Anger, and entered that vessel of milk, for he wanted to test what the best of sages would do if provoked by some injury to himself.

Dharma spoiled that sacrificial milk, but Jamadagni knew that Anger was the spoiler and was not in the least upset or enraged. Then Krodha appeared to the Rishi assuming the form of a Brahmana woman and, finding that he had been conquered by that foremost Muni of Bhrigu's race, said to him, 'O greatest of Bhargavas, I have been vanquished by you. There is a saying among men that the Bhrigus are by nature wrathful. But I now find that saying false, for I have been subdued by you. You are possessed of a mighty soul, and blessed with forgiveness. I stand here today, owning your sway. I fear your tapasya, righteous one. Do you, O mighty Rishi, show me favour.'

Jamadagni said, 'I have seen you, O Krodha, in your embodied form. Go wherever you like, without anxiety. You have not done me any injury today, and I bear you no grudge. This milk that you spoiled I had kept for the blessed Pitris, the manes. Present yourself before them and ascertain what they intend for you.' Stricken by fear at hearing this, Anger disappeared from the sight of the Rishi, but the curse of the Pitris turned him into a mongoose. He then began to gratify the Pitris in order to free himself. The manes said to him, 'Your curse will end by disparaging Dharma to himself!'

Hearing this, he wandered over the earth, going to every holy yagna that was performed, as well as to other sacred tirthas, and censuring all the great sacrifices. It was he that came to the Aswamedha yagna of King Yudhishtira, to demean it. By speaking of the prastha of powdered barley given by the Kurukshetra Brahmana, Krodha was freed of his curse—for Yudhishtira, being Dharma's son, was no less than Dharma's own self.

This is what transpired at the yagna of that Rajarishi. The mongoose, freed from his curse, vanished from our midst."

The end of Aswamedha Parva

BOOK 15
Asramavasika Parva

ASRAMAVASA PARVA

CANTO 1

AUM. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Janamejaya said, “Having acquired their kingdom, how did my grandsires, the Pandava Mahatmans, conduct themselves towards King Dhritarashtra? And how did that king behave whose sons and counsellors were all slain, whose power and wealth had disappeared, and who was without a refuge? How did Gandhari of noble fame conduct herself? For how many years did my grandsires rule the kingdom? Great Vaisampayana, tell me all.”

Vaisampayana replied, “Having won back their kingdom and killed all their enemies, the Pandavas rule the earth, setting Dhritarashtra at their head. Vidura, Sanjaya and the wise Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra’s son by his Vaisya wife, wait upon Dhritarashtra. The Pandavas take the opinion of the king in all matters. Indeed, for ten and five years, they do everything only under the advice of the old king.

As Yudhishtira Dharmaraja enjoins, the heroes often go to the monarch and sit beside him, after prostrating themselves at his feet. Dhritarashtra always smells the tops of their heads in affection and they do whatever he asks, in his deep wisdom. Kunti serves and obeys Gandhari in all things.

Draupadi, Subhadra and the other Pandava women treat the old king and queen as if they were their own father- and mother-in-law.

Yudhishtira gives to Dhritarashtra, as does Kunti to Gandhari, every royal comfort—luxurious beds, clothes and ornaments, and the finest food and drink, treating them with all deference as well-loved elders. Vidura, Sanjaya and Yuyutsu wait day and night upon the old king whose sons had all been slain. The great Brahmana Kripa, that mighty bowman, dear brother-in-law of Drona, also attends upon the king. Besides, the most holy Vyasa often meets the aged monarch and narrates to him tales of ancient Rishis, Devarishis, Pitris and Rakshasas.

Under Dhritarashtra's instructions, Vidura oversees the discharge of all acts of religious merit and the administration of law. By virtue of his excellent administration, the Pandavas obtain numerous exceptional services from their feudatories and followers with a modest expenditure of wealth. King Dhritarashtra frees many prisoners and pardons those that have been condemned to death, many of them loyalists of his son Duryodhana, and Yudhishtira the Just makes not the slightest protest at this.

When the son of Ambika goes out on pleasure excursions, Yudhishtira of great tejas sees to his every comfort and luxury. Aralikas, juice-makers and makers of ragakhandavas wait on King Dhritarashtra just as before, when he was king. Pandu's son seeks out and buys rare garlands and costly garments worthy of royalty, and presents them to his uncle. Maireya wines, fish of various kinds, sherbets and honey, and many diverse and delightful foods are offered to the old king, exactly as when he was himself ruler. All the potentates of the world who come to Hastinapura wait upon the Kuru monarch as before.

Kunti and Draupadi, Satyabhama of the Satwatas vamsa, possessed of great fame, Ulupi, the daughter of the Naga king, Queen Chitrangada, the sister of Dhrishtaketu, and the daughter of Jarasandha—these and many other royal ladies, O foremost of men, wait upon Subala's daughter Gandhari, veritably like maids. Yudhishtira issues a directive to his brothers that Dhritarashtra, who had lost all his sons, should be preserved from any further sorrow. They, on their part, pay careful heed to their brother's grave command and in every way are exceptionally obedient to the old king, their uncle.

There is one exception to this rule, and that is Bhimasena. Bhima can never forgive Dhritarashtra for the fateful game of dice and all that

followed, for which he blames his uncle entirely. He can never remove that burning rancour from his heart."

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, “However, worshipped by the other Pandava brothers, Dhritarashtra, son of Ambika, passes his time happily, waited upon and honoured by many Rishis who come to the city of elephants. It is he who makes the first offerings given daily to the great Brahmanas who live in the palace. Yudhishtira has given complete charge and care of this pious duty to his uncle, upon whom he continues to shower affection, for there is no malice in Pandu’s eldest son, neither in his nature nor in his heart. He says to his brothers and councillors, ‘Our uncle Dhritarashtra must be accorded all reverence and honour by me and by all of you. Whoever is obedient to Dhritarashtra’s commands is my well-wisher; anyone who treats him otherwise is my enemy and will be punished by me for certain.’

On days when rituals are performed and offerings made to the Pitris, and also at the sraddha ceremonies for his dead sons and allies, Dhritarashtra gives profuse wealth to Brahmanas, as he likes and as he thinks each one deserves. Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins strive to please the old king and carry out his orders faithfully. They are always careful to ensure that the grief they have brought him by killing his sons and grandsons does not overwhelm their blind uncle, lest he die of it.

In everything, great and small, they ensure that Dhritarashtra continues to enjoy every privilege and royal luxury, as he did while Duryodhana and his brothers were alive. Thus do the sons of Pandu conduct themselves towards Dhritarashtra, living under his command. Seeing them so humble and obedient to his every wish, always treating him as sishyas would their

guru, Dhritarashtra's heart softens, and he also shows them the affection of a preceptor. By performing the diverse rites of the sraddha and giving many rich gifts to Brahmanas, Gandhari frees herself of the debt she owes her dead sons. In this, too, the sons of Pandu, their mother and their wife ensure that the old queen lacks for nothing. This is how Yudhishtira Dharmaraja and his brothers worship King Dhritarashtra.

Dhritarashtra of great tejas can find no trace of ill-will in his nephews and, seeing how they faithfully tread the path of dharma and wisdom, he is pleased and gratified with them. In time, Subala's daughter Gandhari casts off her sorrow for her slain sons and shows the Pandavas love as if they were her own children. So it is that the Mahatejasvin, the Kuru king Yudhishtira, never by the slightest word or deed, displeases his royal uncle, the son of Vichitravirya; on the contrary, he does everything in his power to please him and the now helpless Gandhari, by fulfilling their every wish and command with the utmost reverence. The old king is gratified with Yudhishtira and grieved at the remembrance of the misdeeds of his own evil son Duryodhana.

Rising before dawn, Dhritarashtra bathes and chants his daily mantras, and then blesses the sons of Pandu, wishing them victory in battle and success in their every undertaking. Making the usual gifts to the Brahmanas in the palace, getting their blessings for the kingdom and all in it, and pouring libations on the sacred fire, the old king prays for a long life for the Pandavas. Indeed, he has never derived such deep happiness from his own sons as he now does from the sons of Pandu.

Meanwhile, Yudhishtira becomes as beloved of the Brahmanas as he already is of the Kshatriyas in his realm, while the diverse classes of Vaisyas and Sudras adulate him. He forgets serenely all the suffering and hardship inflicted on him, his brothers and his wife by Dhritarashtra and his sons, and offers his uncle constant love and reverence. Anyone giving Dhritarashtra the least offence earns Yudhishtira's strong disfavour. Indeed, through fear of Yudhishtira, nobody can so much as mention the evil that either Duryodhana or Dhritarashtra wrought in the past.

Both Gandhari and Vidura are well pleased with Ajatasatru's capacity to forgive. However, they have less cause to be pleased with Bhima, O Parantapa, for while Dharmaputra Yudhishtira is genuinely affectionate and obedient towards his uncle, his brother Bhima's brow clouds at the sight of Dhritarashtra. Seeing Dharmaputra Yudhishtira's reverence for the old king,

Bhima continues to show him respect, but he does so with an unwilling heart.”

CANTO 3

Vaisampayana said, “The people of the Kuru kingdom can see no trace of discord between Duryodhana’s father, the old king, and Pandu’s son, the new one. However Dhritarashtra cannot help feeling antagonism towards Bhima, who had killed Duryodhana and all his brothers, while Vrikodara Bhimasena, too, from a strain of wickedness in his heart, finds it hard to tolerate his uncle. He covertly plagues Dhritarashtra by encouraging perverse servitors to disobey his commands.

One day, in the company of his friends, Bhima’s recollection of the evil counsels and deeds of the old king brings him to yield to a surge of wrath. He says loudly to his companions, in the hearing of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, ‘These arms of mine, like a pair of iron clubs—it is these arms that despatched to the next world all the sons of the blind king who could fight with any weapon. Look at these invincible arms, like a pair of elephants’ trunks, smeared today with sandalwood paste—as they deserve, for these are the arms that sent Duryodhana and his brothers to Yama, with all their sons and kinsmen!’

After that outburst Bhima no longer restrains himself, and continues to give vent to his hatred and anger. For fifteen long years, Bhima’s constant insults fly like fire-darts into the ears of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, lodging themselves deep in the heart of Dhritarashtra, who gives way to sorrow and despair. Wise Gandhari, who knows that time brings all things in its ineluctable course, remains serene. Yudhishtira knows nothing of this, nor do Arjuna Swetavahana and Kunti, nor the famed Draupadi. Madri’s twins,

knowers of dharma, continue to wait upon the old king as attentively and affectionately as ever, never saying a word that might hurt or displease him.

Then, one day, Dhritarashtra can no longer contain his grief and confides in some of his old friends. With tears in his blind eyes, the aged king says, ‘You well know how the annihilation of the Kauravas came to pass. It was all caused by my folly, though the Kauravas approved of all my counsels. Fool that I was, I installed my evil son Duryodhana on the throne. He was an enemy and a terror to his own cousins. Krishna said to me, “Let this sinful wretch of evil mind be killed, along with all his close confederates,” but I did not listen, I did not understand the grave import of his words. All wise men said the same thing to me. Vyasa repeatedly gave me the same counsel; Sanjaya and even Gandhari told me to be rid of Duryodhana and the evil-doers who were closest to him. Vidura, and Bhishma, Drona and Kripa said the same, over and over. All of them showed me the way of dharma. But I was a slave to my love for my son, and I paid them no heed.

Today, bitter repentance is my lot. I regret not having given the Kuru throne of blazing splendour, handed down through the ages through the most noble sires and grandsires, to the sons of Pandu, men of immaculate dharma and possessed of every ability and accomplishment. Krishna clearly foresaw the destruction of all the kings; but he regarded the war of Kurukshetra as being not evil but, indeed, beneficial. I lost so many anikas of my troops, and my own heart is pierced with a thousand arrows of anguish. Now I seek to expiate my sins. At the fourth yaama of the day, or sometimes at the eighth division, with the regularity of a vrata, I eat a little food and drink some water just to stay alive. Only Gandhari knows this. All my attendants believe that I eat as usual.

Through concern for Yudhishtira, I keep this a secret, for if the eldest son of Pandu discovered what I am doing he would feel great pain. Clad in deer-skin, I lie down on the bare ground, on a bed of kusa grass, and pass the time in silent chanting of holy mantras. Gandhari, also, keeps a similar vrata with me. This is how we truly live, we who lost a hundred sons in battle, none of whom ever fled the field. I do not grieve for those children of mine, for they all died in the observance of Kshatriya dharma.’

Then at last the old king addresses Yudhishtira directly. ‘Blessed be you, O son of the Yadava princess. Listen now to what I say. Cherished and loved by you, my son, I have lived these fifteen years very happily. I have

given large gifts and performed sraddhas repeatedly. I have, to the best of my power, achieved some punya, because you have enabled me to do so. This Gandhari, though she lost all her sons, has lived with great fortitude, looking to my needs all the while. Those who inflicted great wrongs on Draupadi and robbed you of your kingdom and wealth—those cruel wretches—have all left this world, slain in battle in accord with the dharma of the Kshatriya. I need do nothing for them, O Kurunandana. Killed with their faces turned towards battle, they have attained to the realms kept for warriors who die fighting.

It is time now that I accomplish what is beneficial and meritorious for me and for Gandhari. It becomes you, Maharajan, to grant me leave to do this. You are the foremost of all righteous men, always devoted to dharma. The king is the preceptor of all, and that is why I ask this of you. O Kshatriya, I seek your leave to go away into the forest, wearing rags and valkala, to seek my soul's peace. Rajan, I will live alone in the vana, with only Gandhari by my side, and perform tapasya, always blessing you. It is fitting for the kings of our house in old age to hand sovereignty to their sons and retired into vanaprastha. Subsisting in the forest on just air, abstaining from all food, I mean, with this wife of mine, to perform severe penance. Since you are king, you shall certainly have a share in my tapasya, my son, for kings are sharers in all deed, both auspicious and inauspicious, done in their kingdom.'

Yudhishtira says, 'When you, Rajan, are so grief-stricken, sovereignty does not please me at all. Ah, curses upon me for being so dark-minded and heedless as to allow the pleasures of kingship to bear me this far from my true concerns. Fie on me that my brothers and I have been so ignorant of your real condition: afflicted by sorrow, emaciated with fasting, and sleeping on the bare ground. Alas, that I have been so credulous as to have been led by your superior intelligence to believe that you were well cared for and happy, while in fact you have lived in the clasp of dark sadness.

What need have I of kingdom or of pleasures, what need of sacrifices or of happiness, when you, O King, have endured such pain? I regard my kingdom as a disease, and myself as one afflicted. But then of what use now are these hollow words of mine, stricken as I am? You are our father, you are our mother; you are our foremost of elders and superiors. If you leave us, how will we carry on living? Best of kings, let Yuyutsu, son of your loins, be made king, or, indeed, anyone else you may choose. I will go away

into the forest, and you must rule the kingdom. It is not right for you to even think of burning with further fires one who is already consumed by the ignominy of what we have just learned from you.

I am not the king. You are the king, and I am dependent on your will. How dare I grant leave to you, who are my guru? O sinless one, I harbour no resentment in my heart on account of the wrongs done to us by Suyodhana. It was ordained that it should be so. We and they, all of us were stupefied and deceived by fate. We are your children, as Duryodhana and his brothers were. I feel that Gandhari is as much my mother as Kunti. If you, O King of kings, go away into the vana, I will follow you. I swear this by my soul. This earth, with her belt of seas, so full of wealth, will not be any source of joy to me if I am deprived of your presence. All this belongs to you. I serve you; I live to gratify you, bending my head. We are all dependent on you, Rajadhiraja. O, let the fever of your heart be dispelled. I believe, O Bhumipala, that all that has come upon you is solely due to destiny. I had thought that by waiting upon you and carrying out all your commands obediently, I would have the good fortune of rescuing you from the burning grief in your heart.'

Dhritarashtra says, 'O joy of the Kurus, Dharmaraja, my son, my mind is set on tapasya. Mighty one, it is proper for our vamsa that I should retire into the forest. I have lived long under your protection, my child, and you have served me reverently for many years. I am now old, and it is fitting that you give me leave to go into the vana.'

Dhritarashtra then addresses the Mahatman Sanjaya and Maharatha Kripa with folded hands, trembling all the while. 'I wish to solicit the king through you both. My mind has grown dark and dismal, and my mouth is dry through weakness of age and the exertion of speaking.' With these words, the Kurupravira sways against Gandhari for support, looking like a corpse. Seeing his blind uncle now so faint, the royal son of Kunti is pierced as by an arrow through his heart.

Yudhishtira exclaims, 'Alas that the king whose strength was that of a hundred thousand elephants sits before us today, leaning on a frail woman—that one who crushed an iron image of Bhima into dust with his bare arms must lean on her now to remain upright! May I be cursed a thousand times for being such a sinner! Fie on my intellect, fie on my knowledge of the Shastras, fie on me on whose account this Lord of the Earth is reduced today to a state unworthy of him! I too shall fast, even as my guru, my

uncle, does. Yes, even as Dhritarashtra and his great and pure queen Gandhari fast, so will Yudhishtira.'

Then the Pandava king, knower of every dharma, with his own hands gently moistens the old blind king's face and breast with cold water. At the touch of Yudhishtira's fragrant hands bearing auspicious gemstones and medicinal herbs, Dhritarashtra regains his senses and opens his eyes. He says, 'Do you touch me again, O son of Pandu, with your hands, and do you embrace me. O you of eyes like lotus-petals, you have restored me to my senses with your propitious touch. Naresha, come close to me, I want to smell the crown of your head. Ah, how your embrace comforts me. This is the eighth yaama of the day, when I eat my food. Yudhishtira, it is because I have not yet eaten that I am so weak. Telling you what I had to say exhausted me entirely. I fainted through fatigue and sorrow, O child of the Kuru vamsa. But with the touch of your hands, Kurunandana, I am restored.'

Yudhishtira is moved by affection at these words and tenderly strokes his uncle's limbs. Reanimated by the Dharmaputra's touch, Dhritarashtra embraces him lovingly and smells the top of his head. Vidura and others weep aloud, unable to utter a word. Heavy as her heart is, Gandhari, the bhakta, bears her grief with fortitude, O King, and remains silent. The other royal women, Kunti among them, are distraught. They weep copious tears, clustered around the old king.

Dhritarashtra says again to Yudhishtira, 'O King, give me your leave to go into the vana and perform tapasya. I beg you, do not make me repeat myself, for my mind is exhausted and my body weak. My son, tire me no more.' At this, a loud lament arises from all the Kshatriyas present. And looking again at his royal uncle, once so splendid and strong, reduced now to such a piteous state, emaciated and pale, worn out by fasting, a living skeleton covered with skin, Dharmaputra Yudhishtira breaks down weeping. He says, 'Greatest of men, I do not desire life and sovereignty over the Earth. O Parantapa, I will do whatever pleases you. But if I am at all dear to you, eat something, I beg you. After that I will know what I must do.' Dhritarashtra of great tejas says to Yudhishtira, 'My son, with your leave, I wish to eat now.' Even as he speaks, Satyavati's son Vyasa appears and addresses the assembled gathering."

CANTO 4

"Vyasa says, 'Mahabaho Yudhishtira, you must not hesitate to grant Dhritarashtra his wishes. This king is old. He has been made sonless and he will not be able to bear his grief long. The most blessed Gandhari, of great wisdom and gentle speech, bears the loss of her sons with silent fortitude. Today, I also add my voice to Dhritarashtra's request, and you must obey my words—give your aged uncle leave to go into the forest and seek his soul's peace. Let him not die an inglorious death at home. Let this king follow the path of all the Rajarishis of old. For, truly, the time for vanaprastha comes at last for all royal sages.'

King Yudhishtira the Just of mighty energy says to the Maharishi, 'We hold you in the highest reverence, and you alone are our first guru. You are the refuge of our kingdom as also of our vamsa. You are our king and our preceptor. I am your son and you, Holy One, are my father. The son must obey the commands of his sire, in accord with every dharma.'

Krishna Dwaipayana the Island-born, foremost of poets, greatest of those who know the Vedas, Vyasa of awesome tejas, says to Yudhishtira, 'It is even as you say, Mahabaho. This king has reached an advanced age, O Bhaarata, and is now in the final stage of his life. With your leave and my blessing, let this Lord of the Earth do what he purposes. Do not stand as an impediment in his way, for this is the highest dharma of Rajarishis, O Yudhishtira. They should either die in battle or in the vana, as the Shastras dictate, in consonance with their asrama in life.

Your royal father Pandu, King of kings, revered his older brother Dhritarashtra even as a sishya does his guru. At that time, Dhritarashtra

adored the gods with many great sacrifices, with profuse gifts of veritable hills of wealth and jewels, and he ruled the Earth and protected his subjects wisely and well. When he begot a hundred sons and owned a swelling kingdom, he enjoyed unrivalled influence for thirteen years while you were in exile, and during that time he gave away great wealth. Sinless one, Lord of men, you have also, along with your brothers and servants, adored this old king and Gandhari of fame with the ready obedience a disciple pays to his preceptor. Now you must gladly give your leave to your father to go into the forest; the time has indeed come for him to attend to the practice of tapasya. O Yudhishtira, he does not, harbour even the slightest anger towards any of you.'

With these words, Vyasa soothes the old king. Yudhishtira answers the Rishi, saying, 'Tathaastu—so be it.' The Maharishi Vyasa then leaves the palace and Hastinapura and departs into the forest. Yudhishtira, bending low before the old king, says humbly, tenderly to Dhritarashtra, 'Holy Vyasa approves of your purpose, as do Vidura, Yuyutsu and Sanjaya. All of them are well-wishers of our vamsa and worthy of worship. I will accomplish what you want with all speed. However, O Rajan, I beg of you with bowed head, do you first eat and only after that leave for the vana and make your asrama in the forest.'"

CANTO 5

Vaisampayana said, "Having received the king's permission, Dhritarashtra returns to his own palace, followed by Gandhari. He is weak and walks slowly and with some difficulty, like a great tusker, lord of an elephant herd, worn out and spent with age. Vidura follows Dhritarashtra, as does Sanjaya, his sarathi, as well as the mighty bowman Kripa, the son of Saradwata.

Entering his palace, O King, Dhritarashtra performs his morning ablutions and rituals and, after gratifying the foremost Brahmanas of the court, finally eats a little. Then the virtuous Gandhari and Kunti of deep wisdom are worshipped with sacred offerings by their daughters-in-law, O Bhaarata, and they too eat. When Dhritarashtra has finished his repast, with Vidura and the others around them, the Pandavas, having eaten their food, come to the old king and sit around him. The son of Ambika lays his hand on the back of Yudhishtira, who sits next to him, and says, 'You must always be careful to discharge your dharma towards your kingdom of eight angas, O joy of the Kurus, keeping righteousness before you.

Kaunteya, you are possessed of intelligence and learning in abundance. Listen to me now, O King, and I will tell you the means whereby the kingdom can be protected through dharma. Yudhishtira, you must unfailingly honour those old in knowledge and wisdom. Listen attentively to what they say, and act at their behest without hesitation. Rising at dawn, O King, worship them with every due rite; and when the time comes for action, consult them about whatever you intend to do. When you show them

reverence and honour, they will give you sage counsel that will lead to your welfare.

Keep your senses restrained, even as you do your horses. They will then prove beneficial to you, like wealth that is not squandered. You must only employ such ministers as have passed the test of honesty, men who have proven their loyalty, disinterestedness, continence and courage. It is best to have as men of state those who are born to it, whose hereditary vocation it is. You must ensure that they, too, are self-restrained, astute in the discharge of business, and endowed with pure and righteous conduct. You must gather information through spies in diverse disguises, men whose faithfulness has been tasted, who are natives of your kingdom, and who remain unknown to your enemies as your agents.

Your citadel should be properly protected with strong walls and arched gates. On every side the walls, with watch-towers on them standing close to one another, should be such as to allow six men to walk on them abreast. The gates should be large and strong enough to withstand enemy attacks. Erected in proper places, they should be carefully and constantly guarded.

Let all your purposes be accomplished through men whose families and conduct are well known and reputable. Be vigilant in safeguarding yourself against treachery while indulging in sport, in the garlands you wear and the beds that you lie upon, or through poison in your food. The ladies of your household should be protected, watched over by aged and trusted servitors of good conduct, well born and possessed of learning, O Yudhishtira. Make ministers of Brahmanas who are truly learned men, imbued with humility, well born, conversant with dharma and artha, and adorned with simplicity and forthrightness. With these men you should hold regular consultations—but make sure that those you trust and keep closest to you are few in number.

On some occasions you may consult with the whole of your council, or with a part of it. This should be done in a well-protected private chamber or arbor. You could hold this consultation in a forest, where there is no grass in which intruders or spies might hide. Never should you hold counsel at night. Monkeys, birds and other animals that can imitate humans should be excluded from the council chamber, as also fools, and lame and palsied men. I believe that the evils that spring from divulging the counsels of kings are beyond remedy. While among your counsellors, you must repeatedly refer to the evils that arise from a betrayal of secrecy, O Parantapa, and to

the merits that flow from counsels properly kept. You must constantly ascertain the merits and faults of the inhabitants of your city and the provinces.

Let your laws, O King, always be administered by trusted judges, who must be contented men and of good conduct. Keep a watchful eye on them through secret agents. Let your officers of justice mete out punishments to offenders according to the law only after careful scrutiny of their offences. Those culprits that are disposed to take bribes, that inflict harsh punishments, or are stained by greed, or liars or revilers, that violate the chastity of other men's wives, commit murder, act rashly, disturb the assemblies and sport of others, or who bring about a confusion of castes, should be punished in consonance with time and place, either by fines or with death.

In the morning you should see those employed in making your disbursements. After this you should look to your ablutions, and then to your food. Next you should inspect your armed forces, gratifying them on every occasion. Your evening should be set apart for envoys and spies. The early nights should be devoted to completing what you have done in the past day and assessing what remains to be done in the coming one. The later night you may keep for your own pleasure and entertainment, and the afternoons for games and other amusements. However, at all times your mind must dwell on the means for accomplishing your purposes. At the appointed hour, having adorned your person, you should prepare to dispense gifts and charity in profusion. The times for different actions, O son, revolve ceaselessly like wheels.

Exert yourself always to fill your treasury by lawful and righteous means. Adharma in this pursuit must be shunned. Through your trusted spies you must ascertain who your enemies are, who are bent upon exploiting your weaknesses, and then have them destroyed from a distance. Appoint your servants and agents, O King, after carefully examining their conduct. All your plans and wishes must be implemented through your trusted servitors, whether they are formally appointed or not. The Senapati of your army must be of strong character and firm conduct, courageous, able to bear hardship, loyal and devoted to your good. Remember to be always as scrupulous in knowing your own weaknesses as you do those of your enemies. You must also know the weaknesses of your own men, as also of those loyal to your enemies.

The artificers and artisans who live in your provinces should do your bidding as obediently as cows and mules, O son of Pandu. You must support skilled and able men in your kingdom engaged in their respective professions who are devoted to you. A wise king always encourages and recognizes the accomplishments of his gifted subjects, so that they can continue to pursue their vocations happily, O ruler of men. For then they will be staunchly loyal to you, and their skills will not fall away from bitterness.'"

CANTO 6

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Always, Bhaarata, distinguish between the mandalas that belong to you, to your foes, to neutrals, and to those that are disposed equally towards you and your foes. Of these, you must clearly know the areas belonging to the four kinds of foes, of those known as Atatayins, of your allies, and the allies of your enemies.

The ministers of state, the people of the provinces, the garrisons of forts, and the armed forces, O Kurusottama, may or may not be perfectly loyal. Therefore, act in such a manner that your enemies do not gain influence over these in any way. These twelve constitute the principal concerns of a king, and to these he must always give his attention, as well as to those known as the sixty, of which the ministers are foremost.

These are what the learned men of politics call the mandalas. Clearly understand, O Yudhishtira, that the six important occurrences—of peace, war, marching forward, halting, sowing dissension, and conciliation—depend upon these mandalas. You must also heed growth and diminution, as well as the condition of being stationary; also know the attributes of the sixfold occurrences, Mahabaho, as resting upon the two and seventy that I have mentioned.

When one's own force has become strong and that of the enemy weak, it is then, O son of Kunti, that the king should wage war against the enemy, and victory shall be his. When the enemy is strong and one's own power is diminished, then the weak king, if he has any intelligence, should seek to make peace with his enemy.

The king should always stock a large store of weapons and provisions for his army. When he is in a position of strength and able to march out, he should on no account make any delay, for times and fortunes change quickly. When going forth to war or even in peace, a wise king will appoint the best men to offices for which they are suited, without being moved by any other consideration than their ability.

When he is obliged to yield a portion of his territories to his enemy, he should give him only barren lands that produce no crops, or those that are mediocre. When obliged to give wealth, he should give gold heavily alloyed with base metals. When obliged to give a portion of his troops, he should only give such men as are not noted for their prowess. On the other hand, when a king takes from an enemy he must employ this rule in reverse—obtain the best land, the purest gold and the strongest men.

While making peace treaties, king of the Bharatas, you must demand as a hostage the son of the defeated king; any other course is unreliable. If some calamity overtakes a king, he must try to free himself from it through his own knowledge as well as the counsel of the wise.

The king must support and maintain the destitute and the unhappy, the afflicted, such as the blind, the deaf and dumb, and the diseased among his people. First of all protecting his own kingdom, ensuring its welfare and prosperity, a king, when truly assured of his own great strength, can direct all his efforts to vanquishing his enemies, either one after another or even simultaneously. He should first afflict them with subtle stratagems, obstruct them in their endeavours to prosper, and drain their treasury. The king who wants his own growth should never injure the subordinate and allied princes and chieftains under his sway. O Kaunteya, never seek war with a king who wishes to conquer the whole world. Instead, with the help of your ministers and agents, create dissension among his nobles, allies and subordinates.

A powerful king should never seek to exterminate weak kings, for these promote the weal of the world by cherishing the good and punishing the evil. Best of kings, be yielding like the crane. If a strong king advances against a weak one, it is the latter that makes him desist, through offers of conciliation and other peaceful methods. If he cannot pacify the invader by the means of diplomacy and gifts, then he must gather his forces and those of other rulers well disposed towards him and, uniting against the attacker, fall upon the enemy in battle.

The wise king resorts to war only when every effort at peace fails; fate will then come to his aid against the aggressor. However, if he fails in battle, too, he must inevitably fall, giving up his resources, one after the other, but never yielding. The Kshatriya who thus lays down his life will surely attain liberation from all sorrow and find great honour in heaven.'"

CANTO 7

"Dhritarashtra says, 'Best of kings, reflect deeply on war and peace. Each is of two kinds. The means are various, Yudhishtira, as are the circumstances under which war or peace may be made. With calm detachment always, O Kuru, assess your own strengths and weaknesses, and never rashly march against an enemy who is intelligent, and has an army of vigorous and contented soldiers. You should think carefully of how you can vanquish him.

Go to war only against an enemy who is weaker than you and does not have healthy and confident soldiers. When the time is favourable you are certain to find victory, but once you have defeated your enemy, you should withdraw. Then you should assail your enemy with various troubles, weakening him by sowing dissension among his allies. Afflict him relentlessly to inspire terror in his heart, and attack him with all the means at your disposal, overt and covert, eroding his power until he loses all assurance and goes in fear of his own shadow.

The king who knows the Shastras, who marches against an enemy, must weigh the three kinds of strength, not just of his foe but his own. Only one endowed with swiftness, discipline and the strength of wise counsel, O Bhaarata, should march against an enemy. When his position is otherwise, he should avoid battle at any cost. The king who means to go to war must first provide himself with the power of wealth, the power of allies, of foresters, of paid soldiers, and of the working and trading classes. Among these, the power of allies and the power of wealth are superior to the rest. The power of the people and that of the standing army are equal.

Frequently, the power of spies is regarded as equal to either of the above, depending on the circumstances.

The troubles that visit kings come in many forms. Hear from me, my son, what those are; be careful to take note of each separately, O Pandava, and strive to face them squarely through the time-tested methods of conciliation, gifts and the rest. When he has a strong army, a king may attack an enemy, Parantapa. He must be as attentive to considerations of time and place, while preparing to march, as he is to the forces he has mustered and his own merits in other respects. The king who is heedful of his own advancement should not go to war unless his fighting men are strong and healthy, and their morale high. When powerful, a king may go to war in even an unfavourable season. He must make a river of his legions, with quivers for its stones, horses and chariots for its current, and proud standards for the trees that cover its banks, while its turbulent flow is miry with foot soldiers and elephants. It is such an army that a king must possess to effect the destruction of his enemy.

In accordance with the science of warfare as known and propounded by Sukra Deva, the king going into combat must form his legions into the vyuhas called Sakata, Padma and Vajra. He must be fully aware of his enemy's strengths and cognizant of his own strengths and weaknesses; he should decide on where to fight—within his own territories or those of his foe. Keeping his men in good spirits by caring for their every need and wish, the wise king hurls his most powerful warriors into battle against his enemy.

As I have said, he must deliberate well on the condition of his own kingdom, and first try to achieve his purpose through sama, conciliation, and the other well-known means. One's body must be protected by all means: a man should devote himself to that which benefits him both in this world and the next. The king who adheres to this dharma will surely find heaven when he leaves his body, after having ruled his subjects wisely and justly in this world.

Kurusottama, the king's first and last dharma is to minister to his subjects; it is only through this that a sovereign of the earth conquers both this world and the next. You have already been instructed in the Rajadharma by Bhishma, by Krishna and by Vidura, O best of kings. From the love that I bear you, I am now adding what I know to what they have already taught you.

Most generous of kings, you who give profuse gifts during the great sacrifices you perform, bear in mind all you have heard and discharge your duty accordingly. Through this you will bring great felicity to your people and find Swarga for yourself. An equal measure of punya accrues to the king who worships the Devas with a hundred Aswamedha yagnas and to the one who rules his subjects righteously.'"

CANTO 8

"Yudhishtira says, 'Lord of the Earth, I will do as you bid, and you, best of kings, must continue to teach me further. Bhishma has ascended into heaven; Krishna has returned to Dwaraka; and I know that, if you leave, Vidura and Sanjaya will also go with you into the forest. Who but you will teach and guide me now? Be assured, O King, I will follow whatever you have told me today as my well-wisher.'

Despite the words of the wise Yudhishtira, the Rajarishi wants only his permission to depart and, saying to him, "Cease, my child, I am tired," he enters Gandhari's apartment. Knowing the time is ripe and the circumstances opportune, Gandhari of deep dharma says to her husband, who, seated, looks like another Prajapati, 'You have received Mahamuni Vyasa's leave to go into the forest. But when will you obtain Yudhishtira's as well? When shall we go forth from here, my lord?' Dhritarashtra replies, 'Gandhari, I have indeed obtained the leave of my Mahatman sire. Yudhishtira will also soon agree, and I will go into the vana. However, first I want to give away some wealth, even as Preta, for the peace of my sons who were so addicted to calamitous gambling. I want to call all our people to my palace and give away bounteous wealth.'

Dhritarashtra sends for Yudhishtira and, at the old king's command, the Pandava arranges for all the gold and other wealth that he asks for to be put at his disposal. Upon receiving his royal invitation, many Brahmanas living in Kurujangala, many Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, come to Dhritarashtra's mansion with joy in their hearts.

Emerging from his inner apartments, the aged monarch, seeing all of them and his subjects assembled before him, addresses them: ‘All of you and the Kurus have lived together in harmony for many years as one another’s well-wishers and benefactors. The time has come for you now to heed and accomplish what I now say to you, even as sishyas do the bidding of their guru. I have set my heart upon retiring into the forest, with Gandhari as my companion. The Rishi Vyasa has approved of this, as has the son of Kunti. Now let me have your permission too, without any hesitation.

The goodwill that has always existed between us is rarely to be found in other realms between kings and their people. I am worn out with the burden of years borne upon my head. I am without any progeny. Sinless ones, I am emaciated with penitent fasts, as is my queen Gandhari. Since the kingdom passed to Yudhishtira, I have enjoyed great happiness, O foremost of men—far greater that what I could have expected or known had Duryodhana ruled instead. What other refuge can I have now, old as I am and destitute of children, other than the forest? You most blessed ones, it is your solemn duty to joyfully grant me the leave I seek to go forth and find the peace of my soul.’

Upon hearing these words, all the good people of Hastinapura and the surrounding lands of Kurujangala utter loud lamentations, their voices choked with weeping. Dhritarashtra of great tejas seeks to comfort his grief-stricken people.”

CANTO 9

"Dhritarashtra says, 'You know that Santanu ruled this Earth, as did Vichitravirya, protected by Bhishma. My brother Pandu, who also ruled you well, was dear to me, as he was to you. Sinless ones, I have also served you. I have done the best I could, and discharged my Rajadharma heedfully; and so, if I have ever failed you, I ask you to forgive me.

Duryodhana also enjoyed this kingdom without a thorn in his side. Foolish and of perverse mind he was, but I do not think he did his people any wrong or harm. Yet, through his pride and wickedness, as well as through my own weakness, a great carnage has claimed the lives of Kshatriyas. Whether my actions were right or wrong, I beg you with folded hands to forget what I did.

Think of me as being old, as having lost all my progeny and being tormented by grief; think of me as having been your king, descended from the great kings of old—think of all this, and find it in your hearts to forgive me. This Gandhari of mine also is old and plunged in sorrow after the loss of her sons; and she too solicits your forgiveness. Knowing that both of us are old and stricken by grief at having lost our sons, grant us your protection and give us both the sanction we seek, blessed ones.

You must love and look after this great Kuru king, Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, in prosperity as well as in adversity. With four brothers of abundant prowess beside him, he will never fall into distress, or leave the ancient path of truth. All of them are conversant with both dharma and artha; they are like the Lokapalas, the very guardians of the world. Like

illustrious Brahma himself, Lord of the universe of creatures, will this Yudhishtira of mighty tejas rule you. I am saying what needs to be said in no uncertain terms. Thus do I give this Yudhishtira into your care, as I do you into his care. And thus I beseech you to forget, to forgive whatever injury was done to you by my sons, who are no more among the living, or by anyone else who was mine and served me.

I know that you never harboured any anger towards me in the past. I solemnly join my hands before all of you, who are known for your loyalty. Look, I bow to you all. Yet again, Anaghas, with Gandhari by my side I ask your pardon for every wrong done to you by my sons of unrestrained and restless minds, stained by avarice, and always yielding to their desires.'

Hearing these words of the aged monarch, tears fill the eyes of the citizens of Hastinapura and the people of the provinces. They say nothing but only look numbly at one another."

CANTO 10

Vaisampayana says, "When Dhritarashtra has spoken, his people stand before him stupefied. Hearing no reply from them, no sound, for their voices are choked with grief, the aged king speaks to them again, 'You best of men, I am old, sonless, and with my wife lament constantly; my sire, the Island-born Vyasa, has give me his blessing to go into the vana, as has Yudhishtira, who knows every dharma, O my good and righteous people. Sinless ones, Gandhari and I ask again for your leave to retire into vanaprastha; with bent heads, we beg you. You must not deny us.'

Hearing him so utterly pitiable, the assembled people of Kurujangala begin to wail, covering their faces with their hands and upper garments. Overwhelmed by searing grief, they weep like fathers and mothers shedding tears, every thought dispelled from their hearts other than that Dhritarashtra means to leave them. At last, controlling their grief and shock, they are able to speak to one another, and by unanimous consent elect a Brahmana to answer the old monarch on their behalf.

The erudite Brahmana Samba, of impeccable character and conduct, learned beyond common measure, a master of all the Riks, attempts to reply to the king. He is a composed and self-assured man, exceptionally intelligent and serene by nature. With the approval of the assembled people of Kurujangala, Samba says to the king, 'Maharajan, I have been given charge of voicing the people's reply to you, and with your leave, I will now do so, mighty Kshatriya. All that you say, O King of kings, is true; indeed, you have not uttered the slightest untruth. You are our well-wisher, as, indeed, we are yours. Verily, in this line of rulers, there never was a king

who in governing his subjects earned their disfavour. You have ruled us like fathers or brothers. Nor did King Duryodhana ever do us any wrong.

O Rajan, you must do as the Mahatman Maharishi, son of Satyavati, has said. He is the first and the greatest of all our gurus. When you leave us, O Rajan, we shall have to pass our days in sorrow, filled with remembrance of your many virtues. We were as ably protected and ruled by your son Duryodhana as we had been by Santanu, or Chitrangada, or by your father, O King, who was shielded by the might of Bhishma, or by Pandu, Lord of the Earth, whom you guided and watched over in all he did.

Your son never did us the slightest wrong, O Monarch. We lived contentedly, relying on him as trustfully as on our own father. You well know how we lived under Duryodhana's rule. In the same manner, we have enjoyed great happiness, Rajan, under the rule of Kunti's son of unmatched intelligence and wisdom, the very soul of dharma. Yudhishtira, who performs sacrifices with gifts in profusion, follows the ways of the Rajarishis of old of your vamsa, among whom were Kuru and Sambara and others, and even Bharata, wisest of all. There is nothing that invites the slightest censure in this Yudhishtira's rule. Protected and governed by you, we have all lived in great felicity; we can find no complaint against you or your son. As for what you said about Duryodhana and the carnage of kinsmen, I beg you to hear me, O delighter of the Kurus.'

The Brahmana continues, 'Duryodhana did not cause the Great War and the annihilation which that overtook the Kurus. Neither were you the cause of that war, nor Karna, nor Subala's son Sakuni. Fate alone brought that war down upon the world, and it was ineluctable, for men cannot resist destiny. Incontrovertible Fate brought eight and ten aksauhinis of troops together on Kurukshetra, O Rajan, and in eight and ten days that host was destroyed by the greatest Kuru warriors—Bhishma and Drona and Kripa and others, and Mahatman Karna, the heroic Satyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, and by the four sons of Pandu, Bhima, Arjuna and the twins.

That slaughter could never have come to pass without it being willed by destiny. Certainly death must be faced and enemies slain in battle, and by Kshatriyas in particular. Those greatest of men, masters of astras, exterminated the very Earth itself, with its horses, chariots and elephants. No, your son was not the cause of that carnage of noble kings. You were not the cause, nor any of your servants, nor Karna, nor Subala's son. Fate alone

wrought the slaughter of the greatest princes of the Kuru vamsa, as well as of thousands of other kings. Who can say otherwise?

You yourself are regarded as the Guru and master of the world. We, therefore, in your presence, grant absolution to your righteous son and say, let that king, with all his brothers, friends and allies, find the heavenly realm reserved for Kshatriya heroes who die in war. With the leave of the greatest Brahmanas, let him sport blissfully in Swarga. You also shall attain to great punya, and unswerving steadiness in dharma.

O Dhritarashtra of excellent vratas, follow faithfully the duties laid down in the Vedas. As for the Pandavas, they have no need for either your protection or ours. They can capably rule all the realms of Swarga, O wise Dhritarashtra, what then to say of this Bhumi? And we, the subjects of this kingdom, O Kurusthama, shall be obedient to the sons of Pandu, in prosperity as in adversity, for they wear dharma as their ornament.

The eldest son of Pandu makes valuable gifts to the best of Dvijas who conduct his sacrifices and rituals, even as all the great kings of antiquity did. The high-minded son of Kunti is mild, gentle and self-restrained, and as generous as a second Vaisravana. He has wise and able ministers who attend on him. He is compassionate to even his enemies. Indeed, we say that he is the jewel of the Bharata vamsa, so pure is he in thought and deed.

Blessed with high wisdom, he is perfectly straightforward in his dealings and rules us like a father protecting his children. From their association with the Dharmaputra, O Rajarishi, Bhima and Arjuna and all the others will never do us the least wrong. They are mild to those that are mild, and fierce like snakes of virulent poison to those who are fierce. Possessed of tireless energy, these Mahatmans are always devoted to the good of the people.

Neither Kunti nor Panchali, nor Ulupi, nor the princess of the Sattwata vamsa will do the least injury to these your subjects. The people of the city and the provinces can never forget the affection you have shown us, which in Yudhishtira exists in still larger measure. The Maharatha sons of Kunti, while themselves living unswervingly by dharma, readily protect and cherish even those among their people who are less than righteous. Therefore, O Rajan, Purushottama, dispel any anxiety from your heart on account of Yudhishtira, and set yourself to accomplish all the punya to which you yourself aspire.'

Hearing the words of Samba the Brahmana, words fraught with dharma and punya, every last man assembled there whole-heartedly accepts them as his own, crying, ‘Excellent! Excellent!’ Dhritarashtra also applauds Samba’s words, and then dismisses the final assembly of his subjects. Honoured by them and gazed at with loving and auspicious glances, the old king joins his hands and salutes them in return. He then goes back to his own palace with Gandhari.

Listen now to what he does after that night has passed.”

CANTO 11

Vaisampayana said, "After the night has passed, Dhritarashtra, son of Ambika, sends Vidura to Yudhishtira's palace. Vidura of unmatched tejas, wisest of men, says to the Dharmaraja of unfading glory, 'King Dhritarashtra has performed the initiatory rites towards his purpose of taking sannyasa in the forest. He means to set out for the vana on the day of the full moon of the month of Kartika.

He now solicits some wealth from you, for he wants to perform the sraddhas for Gangaputra Bhishma, as well as for Drona, Somadatta and Bahlika of the great intellect, and also of all his sons and well-wishers who died on Kurukshetra And, also, if you allow it, for the evil Jayadratha of the Sindhus, his son-in-law.'

Both Yudhishtira and Arjuna welcome and applaud Vidura's message, but Bhima of restless energy and unappeasable wrath, recollecting the evil that Duryodhana once did to them, does not. Arjuna, the Kiritin, at once senses Bhima's mood and, bowing his head to his brother, says, 'Bhima, our royal and aged sire Dhritarashtra has resolved to take sannyasa in the forest. Before he leaves he wants to offer wealth for the peace of his slain kinsmen and well-wishers now in the other world. O Kuru, indeed he wants to give away wealth that belongs to you by conquest.

Mahabaho, it is for Bhishma and the others that the old king wants to do this. You must allow him what his heart desires at this time. Today, fortune has come full circle and it is our uncle who begs us for gold, the same Dhritarashtra whom we once begged for our kingdom. Consider how time has brought this juncture—that the king who was once lord and

protector of all the world now wants to go away into the jungle, after seeing all his sons and allies killed in war. Best of men, do not refuse this, his last request, for such ignoble denial will bring us all infamy and disrepute. Do you learn your dharma in this matter from Yudhishtira, who is both our elder brother and our lord. Great prince of the Bharata vamsa, it becomes you to acquiesce, not churlishly decline.'

Yudhishtira applauds Arjuna's words, but Bhima, yielding to wrath, says, 'Phalguna, it is we who shall give charity in the name of Bhishma, of Somadatta, and Bhurisravas; for Rajarishi Bahlika, Mahatman Drona, and all others. Our mother Kunti shall make the obsequial offerings for Karna. Best of men, do not allow Dhritarashtra to perform those sraddhas. This is my belief. We have no need to please our enemies—that is not our Kshatriya dharma. As for Duryodhana and the others, let them sink from misery to even greater misery. Ah, it was those wretches of their race that caused the whole world to be exterminated. How have you forgotten the anxiety of those twelve long years, and then the ajnatavasa that brought Panchali such torment? Where was this Dhritarashtra's affection for us then? Did you not put on the hide of a black deer, stripped of all your royal ornaments and, with Panchali beside you, follow this Yudhishtira into exile?

Where were Bhishma and Drona then, and where was Somadatta? You lived for thirteen years in the forest, supporting yourself on whatever we could forage. This eldest father of ours did not then look upon you with any parental love. Have you forgotten, O Partha, that it was this evil-minded wretch of our race who repeatedly asked Vidura during the game of dice, "And now what has been won?"'

Bhima is interrupted by Yudhishtira, who rebukes and silences his brother."

CANTO 12

"Arjuna says, 'O Bhima, you are my senior, my elder brother and preceptor. I dare not speak any further. Rajarishi Dhritarashtra deserves to be honoured by us in every way. The virtuous, those distinguished as superior men, never break dharma and remember, not the wrongs done to them, but the favours they have received.'

Hearing the words of the high-souled Arjuna, Mahatman Yudhishtira says to Vidura, 'O Kshattri, tell the Kuru king that I shall give him as much wealth as he wishes to give away for the obsequies of his sons, and of Bhishma and all the others who were his well-wishers and benefactors. Let not Bhima be glum at this!'

Yudhishtira praises Arjuna for what he has said. But Bhimasena begins to cast angry looks at Dhananjaya. Yudhishtira addresses Vidura again, 'Let King Dhritarashtra not be angry with Bhimasena, for my brother, who is wise, was greatly afflicted by cold and rain and heat and by a thousand other griefs while we lived in the forest. All this you know. However, say to the king from me, O best of the Bhaarata vamsa, that he can take from my house whatever he wishes, and in whatever measure he pleases. Also tell the king that his heart should not dwell on the arrogance that Bhima has exhibited, out of his anguish.

Say to Dhritarashtra that whatever belongs to me and belongs to Arjuna, is his own. Let the king give gifts as he chooses to the Brahmanas. Let him spend as largely as he likes. Let him free himself entirely from the debt he owes to his sons and well-wishers. Tell him besides from me, O

Vidura, “O King, not only does all my wealth belong to you, but this very body of Yudhishtira. Have no doubt about this.””

CANTO 13

"Wise Vidura returns to Dhritarashtra with his important message: 'I communicated your words to Yudhishtira of great tejas, who reflected upon them and then approved your message with high praise. Arjuna also sets all his palaces and mansions, with all the wealth therein, indeed his very life-breath, at your disposal. Your son King Yudhishtira also offers you his kingdom and prana and wealth and everything else that belongs to him, O Rajarishi.

However, Mahabaho Bhima cannot still forget all his sorrows, and gave his consent with difficulty, heaving many deep sighs. Yudhishtira and Arjuna together prevailed upon him to be more cordially disposed towards you. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja implores you to not hold Bhima's improper conduct against him, and deplores the rancour to which he yielded, remembering the hostilities of the past. That is in the nature of war-like Kshatriyas, O King, and Vrikodara is devoted to battle and the way of warriors.

Yudhishtira and Arjuna both repeatedly beg your forgiveness of Bhima. They say, "Be gracious to us. You are our lord. Whatever wealth we have, Bhumipala, is yours to give away as you please. You are the master of this kingdom, O Bhaarata, and of all lives in it. Let the foremost Kuru give away the finest gifts available in our treasury to the Brahmanas for the ritual offerings for his sons, and the others.

Indeed, let Dhritarashtra take from our mansions jewels and ornaments and gold, slaves, both men and women, and kine, goats and sheep, as he pleases, and give them away to the Dvijas. Let him also give profuse gifts

to those that are poor or sightless or in great distress, choosing the objects of his charity as he likes. Let large pavilions be constructed, O Vidura, and filled with food and drink of diverse tastes in profusion. Let tanks of water be built for cattle to drink from, and other works of punya be accomplished." This is what was said to me by Yudhishtira and Pritha's son Dhananjaya. Now you must tell me what should be done next.'

Dhritarashtra expresses his satisfaction and pleasure at Vidura's message, O Janamejaya, and sets his heart on distributing great largesse on the day of the full moon in the month of Kartika."

CANTO 14

Vaisampayana said, “Dhritarashtra is deeply gratified with the response of Yudhishtira and Arjuna. The blind and aged king, after due consideration, invites thousands of deserving Brahmanas and superior Rishis for the sake of Bhishma, as well as of his sons and friends. He orders a vast quantity of food and drink to be prepared, and chariots and other vehicles, clothes, gold and jewels and wondrous gemstones, slaves, both male and female, goats and sheep, fine shawls and blankets and all manner of costly articles to be collected, and villages and fields, and other kinds of wealth to be listed, as well as caparisoned elephants and horses, and many superlatively beautiful maidens.

That foremost of kings gives all these away for the advancement of his dead kinsmen, naming each of them in due order as the gifts are made: Drona and Bhishma, Somadatta and Bahlika, King Duryodhana and each of his other sons, and all his well-wishers, Jayadratha being the first. With the approval of Yudhishtira, the sraddha-yagna is distinguished by vast gifts of jewels, gold and every other kind of treasure. At the ceremony, tellers and scribes, at Yudhishtira’s behest, press the old king: ‘Tell us what gifts should be made; everything is ready and available and awaits your command.’ They distribute the presents as the king directs. At the command of the royal son of Kunti, one who was to receive a hundred, receives a thousand, and to one who was to receive a thousand, ten thousand is given. Like monsoon clouds enlivening crops with their rains, that royal cloud gratifies the Brahmanas of the kingdom with rivers of wealth.

When the gifts have all been distributed, the king deluges his assembled guests of all the four varnas with a flood of food and drink to suit every taste. Verily, the Dhritarashtra-ocean, swelling high, sweeps across the world, with jewels and gems for its waters, villages and fields for its verdant islands, piles of diverse treasures for its rich caves, elephants and steeds for its crocodiles and whirlpools, the sound of mridangas for its deep roars, and clothes and gold and precious ornaments for its waves.

In this way, O King, the mighty Dhritarashtra provides for the weal in the next world of his sons, grandsons and Pitris, as well as of himself and Gandhari. At last, when he grows tired with disbursing gifts in such profusion, that great yagna of giving comes to an end. Yes, even thus does the blind old king of the Kuru vamsa perform his Daana yagna.

Actors and mimes continually dance and sing on the occasion, and contribute to the merriment of all the guests. The most delicious and varied food and drink are given away in large quantities. Ten days that great sraddha lasts, O Bhaarata, and the royal son of Ambika is freed from the debts he owes his sons and grandsons."

CANTO 15

Vaisampayana said, “Dhritarashtra decides upon the hour of his departure and summons the sons of Pandu. Along with Gandhari, he has had the minor rites of leave-taking performed by Brahmanas proficient in the Vedas. On the day of the full moon in the month of Kartika, he has the sacred fire taken up which he worships daily. Discarding his customary robes, he dons deer-skin and valkala and, accompanied by his daughters-in-law, he sets out from his palace.

A lament arises from the Pandava and Kaurava women of the royal household when the son of Vichitravirya sets out for the forest. The king worships the palace in which he had lived with fried rice grains and beautiful flowers of many kinds. He honours all his servants with generous gifts and then, without turning back, sets out on his journey.

Trembling all over, his voice choked with tears, Yudhishtira cries out to his uncle, ‘O Rajan, where are you going?’ and falls down in a faint. Burning with anguish, Arjuna sighs repeatedly and, his own heart plunged in dark distress, counsels Yudhishtira to not yield so to grief. Bhima, Arjuna, Madri’s twins, Vidura, Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra’s son by his Vaisya wife, Kripa and Dhaumya, and other Brahmanas, all follow the old king, wordlessly and sorrowfully. Kunti walks ahead, leading Gandhari, whose eyes remain bound and whose hand is placed on Kunti’s shoulder. Dhritarashtra walks confidently behind Gandhari, his hand on her shoulder.

The ladies of the royal household, Drupada’s daughter Krishnaa, Subhadra of the Sattwata vamsa, Uttaraa, the daughter-in-law of the Pandavas, who has recently become a mother, Chitrangada, and others all

accompany the old king, wailing like a flock of she-ospreys. The wives of the citizens—Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras—also spill out into the streets from every side.

At Dhritarashtra's departure, the people of Hastinapura are as distraught, O King, as they had been watching the Pandavas leave their city after being vanquished at dice. Even sequestered women who have never seen the sun or the moon pour out into the streets, such is their grief when King Dhritarashtra leaves for the great forest."

CANTO 16

Vaisampayana said, "A great uproar arises from men and women who crowd the terraces of mansions or throng the streets. With folded hands, trembling with weakness, Dhritarashtra walks slowly along the main highway of Hastinapura, where his people swarm most densely. He leaves the city of the elephant by its main gateway and then repeatedly implores the crowds to return to their homes. Vidura has set his heart on going to the forest with his brother. The Suta Sanjaya, also, the son of Gavalgani, Dhritarashtra's closest counsellor, is of the same mind. But Dhritarashtra forbids Kripa and the Maharatha Yuyutsu from following him. He makes them over into Yudhishtira's hands.

When the people of the city follow the old king no more, Yudhishtira is prepared to go no further at the command of Dhritasrashtra, he and the ladies of his household. Only then does he see that his own mother Kunti has also decided to go to the forest. He says to her, 'I will follow the old king. You must not go, O Queen, but return to the city with these your daughters-in-law. My uncle is leaving for the vana determined to perform tapasya.'

Though her son speaks to her with eyes overflowing with tears, Kunti continues walking away from the city, leading Gandhari who has her hand upon the younger queen's shoulder. Kunti merely says to him, 'O King, never cause Sahadeva the slightest hurt or neglect him. He is the one most attached to me, Yudhishtira, and to you as well. You must also always bear Karna in your heart, your elder brother, greatest of all warriors, who never turned his back on battle. He was killed on the field only because of my

folly. Ah, my son, this heart of mine is made of stone, since it remains unbroken despite the loss of that magnificent child born of Surya. But what is there for me to do now? I am solely to blame for concealing the birth of my first-born by Surya Deva until it was too late. Parantapa, you and your brothers must undertake every sraddha for the sake of that son of Surya.

Yudhishtira, always do what is agreeable to Draupadi. You must look after Bhimasena and Arjuna and Nakula and Sahadeva, for all the burdens of the Kuru vamsa have now fallen on you, O King. As for me, I will live in the forest with Gandhari, smear my body with dirt and ashes, engage in performing penances and devote myself to the service of my father- and mother-in-law.'

Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, whose passions are restrained, is shaken by what his mother says, as are his brothers. For a while, he cannot say a word in response. Then, composing himself as best he can, though still in the clasp of sorrow and anxiety, the Dharmaraja says to his mother, 'Strange, indeed, is this purpose of yours! It does not become you to do what you intend, and I can never permit you to do this. Ah, mother, you must show us some compassion!

Once, when we were about to go into exile from Hastinapura, gracious mother, it was you who recounted the story of Vidula's instructions to her son, and exhorted us to tread the way of the Kshatriya. It is not right for you to abandon us now. Having slain the kings of the Earth, I have won this sovereignty only after being guided by your fierce words, sent to me through Krishna. Where now is that profound understanding of yours that Krishna so extolled? Do you wish now to fall away from the very Kshatriya dharma that you exhorted us to uphold? Ah, how will you live in the deep and dangerous jungle, after abandoning your sons, this kingdom we won for you, and this daughter-in-law of yours, of great fame? No, you must relent!'

Kunti hears her son, but she does not stop. Now Bhima says to her, 'O Kunti, we have won the kingdom with war, and this is the time for you to enjoy the sovereignty acquired by your sons and discharge your Kshatriya dharma. Why has this unnatural desire possessed your mind at this time, after you made us annihilate the very earth? Why do you now want to renounce everything and go away into the vana? We were born in the forest. Why did you bring us here from the jungle when we were boys? Look at the sons of Madri, overwhelmed with sorrow and grief. Relent, O my most

revered and renowned mother, do not leave us now. Remain with us and enjoy the prosperity, justly won in war, which is now Yudhishtira's.'

But Kunti is unshakeable in her resolve, and continues to ignore her sons' entreaties. Draupadi, downcast, accompanied by Subhadra, follows her weeping mother-in-law. Though wise Kunti looks frequently at her children, she does not pause but continues to walk away from the city of elephants. With all their wives and servitors, the Pandavas continue to follow her. Then she restrains her tears and addresses her sons."

CANTO 17

"Kunti says, 'It is even as you say, O Mahabaho, son of Pandu. Lords of the Earth, it is true that I roused you to fight the war. Yes, seeing your kingdom snatched from you by a game of dice, seeing you all fall from happiness, seeing you tyrannized by kinsmen, I instilled courage and valour into your minds. I said what I did so that you, the sons of Pandu, foremost of men, might not lose your reputation and fame. You are all equal to Indra. Your prowess is like that of the very gods. I acted as I did then so that you would not have to live reading others' faces.

I instilled courage into your hearts so that you, the greatest men of dharma, the equal of Vasava, might not again be banished into the forest to live in misery. I instilled courage into your hearts so that this Bhima, strong as ten thousand elephants, whose prowess and manliness are known throughout the world, might not sink into insignificance and ruin. I instilled courage into your hearts so that this Arjuna, born after Bhimasena and in every way Indra's equal, would not fall into misery. I instilled courage into your hearts so that Nakula and Sahadeva, who are always devoted to their elders, would not have to endure hunger and its weakening torments. I did what I had to so that this Panchali of the large eyes and flawless limbs would not have to endure the indignities inflicted on her in the public hall with no hope of being avenged. In plain sight of you all, O Bhima, the reckless Dussasana dragged her to that court while she trembled like a slender plantain tree in a storm—and that, too, during her monthly period, after she had been won at a game of dice as if she were a slave.

I knew everything that had happened, indeed, that the line of Pandu had been vanquished. The Kurus themselves, my father-in-law and others, were distraught when Draupadi cried out piteously like a she-osprey for protection. I fainted when I heard of how the evil Dussasana of low mind had dragged her by her hair. Know beyond any doubt, my sons, I instilled courage into your hearts to awaken and inflame your anger, when I told you what Vidula once endured. I instilled courage into your hearts so that the lineage of Pandu may not forever be lost. The sons and grandsons of one who brings a race to ignominy never attain to the realms of the righteous. Truly, the ancestors of the Kuru vamsa were in danger of losing those regions of felicity that had become theirs.

As for myself, my sons, before any of this I had savoured all the pleasures of sovereignty my husband Pandu enjoyed. I had given bounteous gifts in charity, I had drunk the Soma rasa in yagnas. It was not for my own sake that I sent Vidula's stirring words to you through Krishna; it was for yours. I have no desire for the fruits of the sovereignty that you, my children, have won. Mahabahos, my only wish now is through tapasya to attain to the realms of felicity won by my husband. I mean to waste away this body of mine in the obedient service of my father-in-law and mother-in-law, both of whom have resolved to live in the vana.

Do not follow me any more, Yudhishtira, best of all the kings of the Kuru vamsa, nor you, Bhima, nor you others. Devote your hearts perfectly to dharma, and may your minds always be noble and great.'"

CANTO 18

Vaisampayana said, "The sinless Pandavas are abashed by the words of Kunti. They stop, as does Panchali, and follow her no longer, though some of the women of the Pandava household continue to utter loud lamentations. The Pandavas then circumambulate Dhritarashtra and duly salute him. Having failed to persuade Pritha to return, they importune her no more.

Then Dhritarashtra, Ambika's son of great tejas, supporting himself against Gandhari and Vidura, says, 'Let Yudhishtira's mother not come with us any further. What he has said is true. Abandoning this high fortune of her sons, abandoning the fruits of felicity that can be hers, why should she go into the fastness of the forest with us, like one of little intelligence?

She can live in the enjoyment of sovereignty, and still keep her vrata, perform tapasya and continue to give daana. Let her pay heed to my words. Gandhari, I have been deeply gratified with the services rendered to me by this daughter-in-law of mine. Conversant as you are with every dharma, you must command her to return.'

Gandhari, the daughter of Subala, repeats to Kunti what her husband and lord says, and adds her own weighty support to his injunction. But she cannot change Kunti's mind, for that chaste and noble one has irrevocably decided to go to the vana with them. The Kuru women wail helplessly when they see that Kunti is not to be swayed and that the foremost Kurus no longer pursue her. When all the sons of Kunti with their wives and the Kuru women have turned back into the city in their chariots, dismal and stricken,

Yudhishtira alone continues to go with the old ones towards the forest, until at last he also turns back.

The city of Hastinapura, with its entire populace of men and women, old and young, is plunged into grief and perplexity. No festival of rejoicing is observed. Afflicted with obdurate sorrow, the Pandavas are sapped of strength and energy. Deserted, as it were, by Kunti, they are like tender calves abandoned by their mother.

Dhritarashtra journeys slowly on until he and his party come to the Bhagirathi and spend that night on her bank, at some remove by now from the city. Brahmanas, all knowers of the Vedas, kindle their sacred fires in an asrama of sannyasis. Surrounded by those foremost of Brahmanas, their sacred fires blazing forth in beauty, Dhritarashtra's own sacred Agni is kindled. Sitting by it, he pours libations onto the fire, as the proper rites and mantras are chanted, and worships the thousand-rayed sun as Surya Deva is on the point of setting.

Then Vidura and Sanjaya make a bed for the aged king, spreading kusa grass on the ground. Near the bed of that mighty Kuru hero they prepare another for Gandhari; and, close to Gandhari's bed of grass, Kunti also gladly lays herself down. Within earshot of the three sleeps Vidura, along with others. The Yajaka Brahmanas and others who have followed the king lay themselves down on their beds of grass. The Brahmanottamas present intone many sacred hymns. The sacrificial fires blaze forth all around, as delightful to them as a Brahmi night.

When dawn breaks, all rise and perform their morning rituals and ablutions. Pouring libations on the sacred fire again, they continue their journey. Their first day's experience of the forest has been weighed down by distress, thinking of the grieving people of the Kuru city and provinces of the kingdom."

CANTO 19

Vaisampayana said, “Following the advice of Vidura, the king sets up his abode on the banks of the Bhagirathi, a holy place peopled by followers of dharma. Many are Brahmanas who dwell in those forests, and they, as well as numerous Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, come to meet the old monarch. Sitting in their midst, he gladdens them all with his words. After duly worshipping the Brahmanas with their disciples, he dismisses them all. As evening comes, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari of great fame both descend to the stream of the Bhagirathi for their purificatory ablutions. Bathing in the sacred river, the old king and queen, along with Vidura and the others, perform their daily sandhya vandana. When Dhritarashtra and Gandhari have finished their ritual baths and prayers, Kunti gently helps them both out of the water. The Yajakas have made a sacrificial altar on the dry bank for the king; devoted to dharma, Dhritarashtra pours libations onto the fire.

From the banks of the Bhagirathi, the aged sovereign, with his followers, all observing stern vratas, with their senses firmly restrained, make their way towards Kurukshetra. Dhritarashtra arrives at the asrama of the Rajarishi Satayupa of profound wisdom and holds discourse with the sage who was once a great king of the Kekayas, O Parantapa. He came to the forest to take sannyasa, having made his kingdom over to his son. Satayupa receives Dhritarashtra with due rites and honour. The two of them then go together to the asrama of Vyasa Muni, the peerless Krishna Dwaipayana, and there Dhritarashtra receives his diksha, his initiation into vanaprastha, the first stage of the spiritual life lived in the forest.

Returning, he begins to live in the hermitage of Satayupa Mahatman, who, at the bidding of Vyasa, instructs Dhritarashtra in all the ways and rites of vanaprastha. In this manner, the high-souled Dhritarashtra sets himself to the practice of tapasya, and all his followers do the same. Queen Gandhari, also, O Janamejaya, along with Kunti, dons valkala and deer-skin garments and sets herself to observing the same vows as her husband. Restraining their senses in thought, word and deed, as well as sight, they begin to practise severe austerities. Soon divested of all stupefaction of mind, Dhritarashtra, bearing matted jata on his head and clad in bark and skins, begins to keep vratas and perform tapasya like a great Rishi, quickly reducing his body to skin and bone as his flesh dries up.

Sanjaya and Vidura of fathomless wisdom, who have plumbed the true interpretation of dharma, wait upon the old king and his wife. Wearing bark and rags, with spirits restrained, Vidura and Sanjaya also attenuate themselves."

CANTO 20

Vaisampayana said, “Those great Maharishis, Narada, Parvata and Devala, of austere tapasya, come to see Dhritarashtra. The Island-born Vyasa with all his disciples and other sages of great wisdom crowned with ascetic ascendancy also come, along with the Rajarishi Satayupa of advanced years and great punya. Kunti receives them with due rites, O King, so that all the ascetics are deeply gratified with the worship offered. The great Munis gladden the high-souled Dhritarashtra with discourses on religion and righteousness.

At the conclusion of their conversation, the Devarishi Narada says, ‘There was once a king of the Kekayas, possessed of great prosperity and courage. His name was Sahasrachitya and he was the grandfather of this Satayupa. Resigning his kingdom to his eldest son, who was also endued with a large measure of dharma, the virtuous King Sahasrachitya retired into the forest. After years of blazing tapasya, that Lord of the Earth of great splendour attained to the realm of Purandara, where he lived in the company of the king of the Devas. While visiting Indraloka, O King, on many occasions I saw dwelling there that monarch whose sins had all been consumed by penance.

In the same manner, King Sailalaya, the grandfather of Bhagadatta, attained to Indraloka through the sheer power of his tapasya. There was another king, of the name of Prishadhra, who resembled the wielder of the thunderbolt himself. That king also, through his penances, went from this Bhumi into Swarga. In this very forest, O Dhritarashtra, the Lord of the Earth Purukutsa, the son of Mandhatri, achieved great spiritual felicity, so

much so that Narmada, best of rivers, became his consort. After performing rigorous tapasya here, the sovereign of the Earth found Heaven for himself.

There was yet another king, most righteous, of the name of Sasaloman who also attained Swarga after severe austerities in this forest. You too, Dhritarashtra, having come to this vana, through the grace of the Dwaipayana, shall attain to a lofty condition and goal, one most difficult to achieve. At the end of your penances, you will also be endowed with great felicity and, with Gandhari, attain to the realm which those other Mahatman Rajarishis achieved. Pandu now dwells in Indra's world, and your brother constantly thinks of you. He will certainly help you win salvation. Through serving you and Gandhari, this Kunti, possessed of great fame, will be united again with her lord and husband in the other world of untold glory. She is the mother of Yudhishtira, who is the eternal Dharma Deva himself. We see this, O King, with our spiritual insight. Vidura will enter into the high-souled Yudhishtira. Sanjaya also, through dhyana, will rise from this world into Swarga.'

Dhritarashtra, Lord of the Kurus, hearing what Narada says, applauds that immortal Rishi and worships him with unprecedented fervour and honour. The conclave of Brahmanas is filled with great joy and, wanting to please Dhritarashtra, commends Narada Muni's words and worships him with profound reverence.

Then the Rajarishi Satayupa says, 'O resplendent Narada, Holiest One, you have enhanced the bhakti of the Kuru king, of all the people here, and also of myself! But I want to ask you something to do with King Dhritarashtra. O Devamuni worshipped by all the worlds, you well know the truth of all things in heaven and on earth. Endowed with celestial vision, you clearly perceive the diverse paths and goals of men. You have told us of the felicity found by all the kings you named, which is to rejoice in the company of Indra, Lord of the Devas. You have not, however, declared what the realms are that this king Dhritarashtra will attain. Tell me now truly, what manner of domain that will be, and when he will attain to it.'

Thus solicited, Narada of mystic vision, of austere tapasya, speaks in that congregation of noble men, words that gladden them all. He says, 'I went at my will to the mansion of Indra, lord of the Devi Sachi, and there, O Rajarishi, I saw Pandu. A conversation arose regarding this Dhritarashtra and the great tapasya that he performs, and from Sakra's lips I heard that three years yet remain of the mortal lifespan allotted to this king. After that

he, along with Gandhari, will go to the world of Kubera, where that King of kings, Lord of the nine treasures, will accord him great honour. Dhritarashtra, his person adorned with celestial ornaments, will go to Kubera's realm in a vimana that flies at his will. He is the son of a great Rishi; he is highly blessed; he has burnt away all his sins through his penances. Blessed with a righteous soul, he will rove at will through the realms of the Devas, the Gandharvas and the Rakshasas. The question you have asked is a mystery of the gods, and I have declared this high and secret truth to you out of the affection I bear you. You are all possessed of the wealth of the Srutis and have consumed all your sins by your tapasya.'

Hearing these words, music to the ears of the Devarishi, all those present are heartened and jubilant. Having brought cheer to Dhritarashtra of great wisdom with their deep and happy tidings, the great Rishis leave his asrama by the pathways traversed by the liberated."

CANTO 21

Vaisampayana said, "The Pandavas, after Dhritarashtra's departure, are afflicted by constant and heavy sorrow on account of their mother Kunti. The citizens and Brahmanas of Hastinapura always speak of the old king. 'How, indeed, will Dhritarashtra, now so old, live in the solitary forest? How will the blessed Gandhari, and Pritha, the daughter of Kuntibhoja, live there? The Rajarishi has always lived in the enjoyment of every comfort. He will surely be miserable in the jungle. We can only wonder what his condition is, that great one of royal birth and life who is, furthermore, bereft of sight.

Difficult is the feat of Kunti, who has separated herself from her sons. Alas that, casting off her royal prerogatives, she chose a life in the wilderness! And in what state is Vidura, always devoted to the service of his elder brother? And how fares the intelligent son of Gavalgani, Sanjaya, ever faithful to the master whose food he has eaten?'

Even the citizens, including the young, gather and frequently discuss all this amongst themselves. The Pandavas find themselves so wracked by anxiety for their mother that they can hardly bear to continue living in Hastinapura. Thinking also of their old uncle, who had lost all his sons, of the pure and noble Gandhari, and of the wise Vidura, the sons of Pandu cannot enjoy peace of mind. Nothing comforts them—neither sovereignty, nor the company of women, nor the study of the scriptures. Despair pierces their souls as they think of the old king and endlessly recall the terrible slaughter of kinsmen on Kurukshetra. Memories of the slaying of the youthful Abhimanyu, of the mighty-armed Karna who never retreated from

the bloodiest fray, of the sons of Draupadi, and of all their friends and allies, plunge those Kshatriyas into a perpetual night of the spirit.

They think of how the Earth had been divested of both her glorious heroes and her wealth. Draupadi has lost all her children, and the lovely Subhadra also has become childless. They, too, are sunk in untold sorrow. However, when your grandsires look upon the son of Uttaraa, your father Parikshit, they somehow hold their prana in their bodies."

CANTO 22

Vaisampayana said, “The heroic Pandavas, Purushottamas, delighters of their mother, are so afflicted that they who had once devoted themselves resolutely to their royal duties now withdraw from these entirely. They find no pleasure in anything. If anyone accosts or speaks to them, they do not so much as honour him with a greeting or a reply. Those irresistible Kshatriyas, in wisdom once as profound as the ocean, are now bereft even of their senses by sorrow and consuming anxiety; they can think only of their mother, and how she, now emaciated with privations, serves Dhritarashtra and Gandhari in the vana.

They ask themselves and one another, ‘How does the king, our uncle, whose sons have all been slain and who is without refuge, live alone, with only his wife, in the wild jungle, where beasts of prey roam? How does the blessed Gandhari, whose dear ones have also all been killed, follow her blind lord in the lonely forest?’ Whenever they are together they can speak of nothing else. Finally, they decide that they must go into the wilderness and discover for themselves the answer to the anxiety that harries them constantly.

Sahadeva, bowing to his elder brother Yudhishtira, says, ‘I see that your heart is set upon seeing our uncle. Out of respect for you, I could not too hastily voice my own keen desire to go to the vana. But now the time has come, my lord, if I am fortunate, to see my mother living in sannyasa, with matted locks on her head, practising severe austerities, and, ah, reduced to skin and bone with sleeping on blades of kusa and kasa—she who was raised in great palaces and nurtured amidst every comfort and

luxury. Oh, when shall I see my mother who is now toil-worn and surely plunged in piercing misery? Without doubt, the ends of mortals are uncertain and extreme, O Lord of the Bharatas, for Kunti, a princess by birth, now lives in desolation in the forest.'

Hearing the words of Sahadeva, Draupadi addresses Yudhishtira with due honour, 'Ah, my lord! If only I could once again see Queen Pritha—if indeed she is still alive—I would think of my life as not having been lived in vain. Believe this Rajadhiraja, and may your heart take pleasure in the dharma of bestowing on us the high boon of going to the vana and seeing her again. Know, my husband, that all the women of your house have their feet poised to take the first step on this most auspicious journey to see Kunti, Gandhari and my father-in-law.'

At Panchali's words, Yudhishtira summons all the commanders of his forces and says to them, 'Let my army, teeming with chariots and elephants, prepare to march, for I will go into the forest to see my uncle Dhritarashtra.' To those that supervise the concerns of the ladies, the king gives the order: 'Let every manner of conveyance be well equipped, and my thousands of closed palanquins. Let carriages and granaries, wardrobes and treasuries, be prepared and ordered out, and give our best mechanics the command to march. Let men who have charge of our treasuries set forth towards the ascetic retreats on Kurukshetra.

Whoever amongst our citizens and people wishes to see the king is hereby allowed to do so without any restriction. Let him proceed, properly protected. Let cooks and supervisors of kitchens, our entire culinary establishment, and diverse kinds of foods and foodstuffs, be ordered and loaded on carriages and carts. Let it be proclaimed that we will go forth tomorrow. Let there be no delay. Let pavilions and resting houses of diverse kinds be erected on the way.'

Such are the commands of the eldest son of Pandu and his brothers. When morning comes, the king sets out with a large train of women and old men. Emerging from his city, Yudhishtira waits five days for such citizens as might accompany him, and then goes forth towards the forest."

CANTO 26

Vaisampayana said. “That foremost one of the Bharata vamsa gives marching orders to his troops, protected by great Kshatriyas led by Arjuna, heroes who resemble the guardians of the universe, the Lokapalas themselves.

Horsemen leap to saddle and caparison their finest and swiftest steeds. Some in the retinue travel on horseback, others in chariots and carriages, golden and splendid as blazing fires. Some advance on the backs of elephants, others on camels. Some walk, those that belong to the class of warriors who fight with tiger-like iron claws. The citizens of Hastinapura and the inhabitants of the provinces, eager to see Dhritarashtra, follow their noble king on various kinds of carts and conveyances.

Riding at the head of the Kuru forces at the Dharmaraja’s command is the Acharya Kripa, of Gautama’s race, that great leader of legions, journeying to see Dhritarashtra in his asrama. Yudhishtira, emperor of the world, the white parasol of sovereignty unfurled over his head, sets out surrounded by a throng of Brahmanas, ring upon ring of chariots around him, and a large band of Sutas and Magadhas and bards hymning his praises. Vrikodara, son of Vayu, rides upon the back of an elephant big as a hill, bearing his great bow and equipped with weapons and war engines of every kind, of both attack and defence. The twin sons of Madri ride two fleet steeds, cased in mail, well protected, and flying proud and colourful banners. Arjuna of mighty tejas, his senses ever controlled, rides on a matchless ratha, bright as the sun and yoked to the strongest and swiftest white horses.

The ladies of the royal household, led by Draupadi, journey in closed litters protected by the guards of the royal antahpura. They shower copious wealth on those following their progress. Resplendent indeed is that vast Kuru host, with its chariots and elephants and horses, echoing with the blare of trumpets, the boom of sea conches and the music of vinas. Slowly, regally, the lords of the Kuru vamsa make their way across the land, resting at will by delightful banks of rivers and lakes. Yuyutsu of mighty tejas, and Yudhishtira's priest Dhaumya remain in Hastinapura, protecting the city and attending to the affairs of the kingdom.

Thus, journeying in slow marches with his contingent, Yudhishtira reaches Kurukshetra, and then, crossing the dark and holy Yamuna, sees finally, at a distance, the asrama of his uncle, the blind Rajarishi Dhritarashtra of deep wisdom. He and all his party feel a surge of joy course through them, as they swiftly enter the heavy jungle, filling it with cries of jubilation."

CANTO 24

Vaisampayana said, "The Pandavas alight from their chariots at a remove and walk the rest of the way to Dhritarashtra's asrama, bowing humbly. They are followed on foot by their Kshatriyas and soldiers, the people of the kingdom, and the wives and women of the Kuru lords. The Pandavas arrive at the asrama where plantain trees grow thickly and herds of deer abound. Many ascetics of stern vows, filled with curiosity, come forward to see the sons of Pandu. With tears in his eyes, Yudhishtira ask them, 'Where is my eldest sire, the perpetuator of Kuru's vamsa?'

The sannyasis reply that he has gone to the Yamuna for his ablutions, and to fetch flowers and water for his daily worship. Walking briskly down the path pointed out to them, the Pandavas see their blind uncle and the others from a distance. They quicken their stride in anticipation, and Sahadeva breaks into a run towards Kunti. Clasping his mother's feet, he begins to sob aloud. Tears pour down her cheeks on seeing her most beloved child. She raises Sahadeva up to embrace him, then tells Gandhari of his arrival. Kunti catches sight of Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Arjuna and Nakula and rushes towards them, fairly dragging the sightless Dhritarashtra and Gandhari along with her.

On seeing their mother, the Pandavas fall down on the ground. The mighty Dhritarashtra recognizes them by voice and by touch, as he embraces and comforts them one after another. Shedding tears, those high-souled princes offer the aged king and their own mother all honour and reverence. Then, embraced and consoled by Kunti, the sons of Pandu recover themselves and take up the pots full of river water that their uncle,

aunt and mother have been carrying. The wives of those lions among men, the women of the royal household and all the people of the city and the provinces who have come with them, now behold the old king.

Yudhishtira presents them, one after another, individually, to the Dhritarashtra, repeating their names and lineages, and then himself worships his eldest sire with deep reverence. Surrounded by his nephews, their wives and his people, the old king, his unseeing eyes bathed in tears of joy, feels that he is back again in Hastinapura, the city of the elephant. Worshipped by all their daughters-in-law led by Panchali, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti are overwhelmed with joy.

Walking now in their loving midst, Dhritarashtra arrives back in his forest asrama, lauded by Siddhas and Charanas and now teeming with crowds of men, like countless stars thronging the sky, all agog to see once again their old king."

CANTO 25

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishtira and his brothers of lotus-petal eyes sit themselves down in the asrama of their uncle Dhritarashtra. Around him sit many hallowed ascetics from diverse realms who have come to the hermitage to catch sight of the broad-chested Pandavas. They say, 'We want to know who amongst these is Yudhishtira, who are Bhima and Arjuna, who the twins, and who is Draupadi of great fame.' The Suta Sanjaya points out the Pandavas to them, naming each one, and Draupadi, as well as the other ladies of the Kuru household.

Sanjaya says, 'This one with the complexion like gold, whose body is like that of a full-grown lion, who has a prominent aquiline nose, and wide and expansive eyes of a coppery hue, is the Kuru king. This one whose tread resembles that of an infuriated elephant, whose complexion is as fair as heated gold, whose body is immense, and whose arms are long and sturdy, is Vrikodara. Behold him well!

The mighty bowman who sits besides him, of darkish complexion and youthful frame, who yet resembles the leader of an elephant herd and walks like a sporting elephant, whose shoulders are as high as those of a lion and whose eyes are as large as the petals of a lotus, is the hero called Arjuna. Those two Purushottamas who sit besides Kunti are the twin sons of Madri, Nakula and Sahadeva, who resemble Vishnu and Mahendra. In this entire world of men, they have no equal in beauty, strength and excellence of conduct.

The dark Devi, who is in her middle years of life, with eyes like lotus-petals and a complexion resembling that of the blue lotus, who looks like a

goddess of Swarga, is Krishnaa, the embodiment of the Devi Lakshmi herself. She who sits beside Panchali, with a skin like pure gold, who looks like the rays of the moon formed into a woman's shape, is Subhadra, O Dvijottamas, the sister of that unrivalled hero who wields the Chakra.

This other, as fair as moonbeams, is Ulupi, the daughter of the king of the Nagas and also the wife of Arjuna. The other golden-hued one, whose complexion is like that of madhuka flowers, is the princess Chitrangada. That other one, whose skin is the colour of a bank of dark lotuses, is the wife of Vrikodara and the sister of Jarasandha, lord of hosts, who always challenged Krishna. And here is the daughter of Jarasandha, that great king of Magadha. She who is as fair as champaka blossoms is the wife of Sahadeva, the younger son of Madravati.

This other beautiful one, dark as a blue lotus, she who sits there on the earth, and whose eyes are as long and lustrous as lotus petals, is the wife of Nakula, the elder son of Madravati. This princess whose complexion is like that of molten gold, who sits with her child on her lap, is Uttaraa, the daughter of King Virata. She is the wife of that incomparable hero Abhimanyu, whom Drona and the others slew from their chariots when he fought on foot after his own was shattered. And these women clad in white, whose hair shows not the parted line, are the widows of the slain sons of Dhritarashtra. They are the daughters-in-law of this old king, the wives of his hundred sons, now deprived of both their husbands and children slain by heroic foes.

I have now pointed all of them out to you in proper order. In consequence of their devotion to Brahmanas, their hearts and minds are divested of every deceit and sin, and they are possessed of pure souls.'

Thus does Dhritarashtra of great age, of the Kuru vamsa, meet the sons of his brother Pandu, who was as a god among men. Once the hermits of the vana have left, he enquires after their welfare. The warriors who have come with the Pandavas leave the asrama and sit themselves down a small distance away, after alighting from their rathas and horses.

When all the women, the old men and the children who have come to the forest are seated, the old king addresses them all, making the customary enquiries after their health and well-being."

CANTO 26

"Dhritarashtra says, 'O Yudhishtira, are you in peace and happiness, with all your brothers and the people of the city and the provinces? Are they that depend on you also happy? Are your ministers and servitors, and all your elders and gurus also happy? Are those that live in your dominions free from fear? Do you follow the ancient and traditional dharma of kings? Is your treasury filled without disregarding the restraints of justice and equity? Do you conduct yourself as you should towards enemies, towards those neutral to you, and towards allies?

Do you care especially for the Brahmanas, always making them the first gifts, as ordained for sacrifices and religious rites? What need I say of the people, and your servants and kinsmen, O King of the Bharatas—are they gratified with your rule? Do you adore the Pitris and the Devas with devotion, O King of kings? Do you worship guests with food and drink, O Bhaarata? Are the Brahmanas in your dominions devoted to their svadharma, the duties of their order, and do they tread the path of dharma?

Do the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas and Sudras within your kingdom, and all your relatives, observe their respective duties? I hope the women, the children and the old among your subjects do not grieve under any distress, and do not have to beg for the necessities of life. Are the royal women of your household duly honoured in your house, O best of men? I hope that, having found you for its king, O Yudhishtira, this race of Rajarishis has not fallen away from fame and glory.'

To the old king, Yudhishtira, profound knower of morality and justice, and well skilled in both deeds and words, replies with some queries of his

own, 'Do your peace, your self-restraint, and your tranquillity of heart grow, O King? Is this my mother able to serve you without fatigue and trouble? Will her dwelling in the vana be fruitful, O King? I hope this queen, Gandhari, my eldest mother, who is emaciated with being exposed to cold and wind and with the toil of walking, and who now devotes to herself to severe austerities, no longer gives way to grief for her children of mighty tejas, all of whom were devoted to Kshatriya dharma and were slain honourably on the field of battle. Does she still blame us, sinners as we are, for the slaughter of her sons? Where is Vidura, O king? We do not see him here. I hope this Sanjaya, who also performs tapasya, is at peace and lives in happiness.'

Dhritarashtra says to Yudhishtira, 'My son, Vidura is well. He performs the most austere tapasya deep in the forest, alone, subsisting on air, for he eats no food at all. He is emaciated and his arteries and veins stand out. Sometimes our Brahmanas here catch a glimpse of him in the vana.'

Even as Dhritarashtra speaks, Vidura appears in the distance. He is perfectly naked, all skin and bone, with matted jata on his head and gravel in his mouth. His body is covered with dust and with the pollen of wild flowers. Kshattri is spotted by ascetics who report this to Yudhishtira. Vidura suddenly stops, O King, casting his gaze towards the asrama, in which he sees many visitors. He turns away swiftly and vanishes into the deeper forest. Yudhishtira jumps up and follows him alone. Vidura runs further away, and the Pandava in pursuit often loses sight of him.

He shouts, 'O Vidura, Vidura, I am Yudhishtira, whom you always loved, your favourite!' Crying out repeatedly, he continues to pursue his uncle. Suddenly, in a solitary place in the very heart of the vana, Vidura, wisest of men, stops and leans against a tree. He is macilent beyond belief, barely recognizable as a man, for his individual features have all disappeared through his extreme penance and privations. But Yudhishtira has no doubt who it is that stands before him.

Yudhishtira folds his hand in deep reverence and addresses the wraith-like figure: 'I am Yudhishtira!' Vidura contemplates the king, never moving, plunged in Yoga. Then gazing steadfastly at him, using his mighty yogic powers, Vidura enters the body of Yudhishtira, limb by limb. He unites his life-breaths with those of the king, and his senses with those of the Pandava. Thus the great Vidura enters the body of the Dharmaraja. Vidura continues to lean against the tree, with eyes fixed, and Yudhishtira

sees that life has left his attenuated body. At the same time, he himself has become stronger than before and has acquired additional virtues and powers now his own. Pandu's son, the Kuru king, now remembers perfectly his own being before his birth among men.

Yudhishtira has heard of the final Yoga from his grandsire Vyasa, and now he feels impelled to perform the last rites of cremation for the body of Vidura. But then an Asariri speaks to him from above, saying, 'O King, this body that belonged to him called Vidura should not be cremated. In him is your body also. He is the eternal Dharma Deva. O Bhaarata, he will find the realms of felicity known as the Santanika. He kept the dharma of Yatis, and you must not grieve for him at all, Parantapa.'

Yudhishtira the Just returns to the asrama, and relates all that has transpired to Dhritarashtra, the royal son of Vichitravirya, filling all with wonder that old king of great splendour, the Rishis present, Bhimasena and all the others. Dhritarashtra is pleased to hear what happened in the vana. He says to Yudhishtira Dharmaputra, 'It has been said, O King, that one's guest should have that which one takes oneself. Do you now accept from me these gifts of water and roots and fruits.'

Dharma's son replies, 'So be it.' The mighty-armed Pandava king eats and drinks whatever Dhritarashtra gives him. After that, they all make their beds of grass under a tree and sleep peacefully."

CANTO 27

Vaisampayana said, “Thus those heroes pass that night after eating the frugal fare which is the nightly food of Dhritarashtra. Having left their fine beds behind them, the Pandavas lay themselves down on the bare ground beside their mother. Under the auspicious constellations wheeling in the sky in that asrama of righteous Munis, they converse happily on dharma and artha, morality and wealth, sweetening their words with diverse citations from the Srutis.

When dawn breaks, Yudhishtira rises, performs his morning ablutions and prayers, and proceeds to explore the asrama in the company of his brothers. With the women of his household, his servants, and his priest Dhaumya, the king wanders through the length and breadth of that hermitage at the behest of Dhritarashtra. He sees many vedis, sacrificial altars with sacred fires blazing on them, with ascetics seated before them, performing their oblations and poured libations into the fire in honour of the gods. The fragrant smoke of ghrita, clarified butter, curls up from the altars overspread with fruits and roots of the forest and heaped with wildflowers.

Many of the great Rishis who worship at these altars seem to Yudhishtira the very Vedas embodied. There are others, lesser sages and aspirants who belong to the lay brotherhood. Herds of deer graze all round without the least fear, or lie about awake or asleep, as they please. Fruit and roots gathered from the wilderness are stored in piles. Countless birds also sing in the branches of the trees. The asrama resonates with the calls of peacocks, interwoven with the sweet melodies of datyuhas and kokilas and

other songbirds and the chant of Vedic mantras being intoned by learned Brahmanas in resonant voices.

King Yudhishtira makes gifts of sacrificial vessels of gold or copper that he has brought with him for those Munis, deer-skins and shawls, ladles made of rich wood, O Bhaarata, kamandalus and elegant wooden platters, and cooking vessels as well. He gives away diverse vessels of iron, and smaller tumblers and cups of various sizes; the ascetics take these away, each one as many as he likes.

Having ranged through the woods across which that great asrama of many hermits is spread, having taken in its peaceful sights and sounds and made his offerings to its resident sages, Yudhishtira Dharmatma returns to the side of his uncle Dhritarashtra. He sees that old Lord of Earth at his ease, with Gandhari beside him after his morning rites. He sees his mother Kunti sitting nearby, like a humble disciple with bent head.

Yudhishtira greets the blind and aged king, declaring his own name to identify himself, and Dhritarashtra asks him to sit down, which the Pandava does on a mat of kusa grass. Then the other sons of Pandu, with Bhima among them, salute the king and touch his feet, and they also sit themselves down with his leave. Surrounded by his nephews, great Dhritarashtra looks glorious and full of unearthly grace; he blazes with a Vedic splendour like Brihaspati in the midst of the Devas.

Now many great Rishis, Satayupa and others, denizens of Kurukshetra, arrive. The illustrious and learned Vyasa, of tremendous tejas, whom even the Devarishis of Swarga revere, appears there at the head of his many disciples. Dhritarashtra, Kunti's son Yudhishtira of great tejas, Bhimasena and the others, all rise and, advancing a few steps, salute those venerable guests. Approaching them, Vyasa, surrounded by Satayupa and others, addresses King Dhritarashtra, 'Be you seated.' The illustrious Vyasa settles himself onto a fine seat of kusa grass set upon a black deer-skin and covered with a silken cloth, which has been kept ready for him. Once the Dwaipayana sits down, the other Dvijottamas, all lustrous ones, also seat themselves with Vyasa's leave."

CANTO 28

Vaisampayana said, “When the Pandavas have all been seated, Satyavati’s son Vyasa says, ‘O Dhritarashtra Mahabaho, have you been able to achieve tapasya? Is your mind pleased with living in the vana, O King? Has the grief that was yours, born of the slaughter of your sons in battle, disappeared from your heart? Are all your perceptions now clear, sinless one? Do you practise the ordinances of vanaprastha and sannyasa, after making your heart firm?

Does my daughter-in-law Gandhari allow herself to be overwhelmed by grief? She is possessed of great wisdom. Blessed with clear and lofty intelligence, that queen understands both dharma and artha well; she knows the truths that relate to both prosperity and adversity. Does she still grieve? Does Kunti, who, because of her devotion to the service of her elders, left her children, attend to your wants and serve you with all humility, O King? Have the Dharmaputra, Mahatman Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna and the twins been sufficiently comforted? Do you feel delight at seeing them? Has your mind become free from every stain? Has your disposition, O King, become pure in consequence of your penance and the increase of your knowledge and wisdom?

O Bhaarata, abstention from injury to any creature, truth and freedom from anger, the primary triad of wisdom, is of final concern. Has your life in the forest ceased to be painful for you? Are you able to gather, through your own exertions, the produce of the wilderness for your food? Do your fasts give you any pain now?

Have you learnt, O King, how the great Vidura, who was Dharma's very self, left this world? It was through the ancient curse of Mandavya, that Dharma Deva was born into the world as Vidura. He owned unequalled intelligence and wisdom. Through his mighty tapasya, he was both high-minded and lofty-souled. Why, not even Brihaspati among the Devas, and Sukra among the Asuras, was possessed of such intelligence as that best of men. Dharma Deva was once cursed by the awesome Rishi Mandavya who expended the power of his penances earned over a long time with arduous dedication. At the command of the Pitamaha Bhishma, and through my own tejas, I sowed Vidura in soil owned by Vichitravirya. A God of gods and eternal was your brother, O King. The perceptive knew him to be Dharma Deva incarnate because of his yogic practice. He glows with the growth of truth, self-restraint and tranquillity of heart, compassion and charity. He is always engaged in tapasya, and is eternal.

From that God of Righteousness, through yoga shakti did the Kuru king Yudhishtira also take birth, O King. Yudhishtira is also Dharma Deva of great wisdom and immeasurable intelligence. Dharma exists both here and hereafter, and is like fire or wind or water or earth or space. He is able to go everywhere, O King of kings, and pervades the whole universe. Only the foremost among the deities, and those cleansed of every sin and crowned with ascetic success, can see him with their eyes. He that is Dharma is Vidura; and he that is Vidura is the eldest son of Pandu. You, O King, can perceive that son of Pandu; why, he is before you as your servitor. Through the power of his yoga, your brother the Mahatman Vidura, most intelligent among intelligent men, entered into Yudhishtira.

O Lord of the Bhaarata vamsa, my son, know that I have come here to dispel all your doubts and satisfy your desires. For your sake I will perform some feat that has never been accomplished before by any of the great Rishis, I will demonstrate some wonderful effect of my tapasya. Tell me what you want to see or ask or hear, sinless one, and I will accomplish that for you.'"

PUTRADARSANA PARVA

CANTO 29

Janamejaya said, "Tell me, O learned Brahmana, of that wonderful feat that the Maharishi Vyasa of untold tejas performed for Dhritarashtra in the forest asrama where he had taken to living with his wife and his daughter-in-law Kunti—indeed, what the Dwaipayana did, when all the sons of Pandu were staying in that hermitage, after Vidura left his own body and entered into Yudhishtira. How long did the Kuru king Yudhishtira of unfading glory remain there, and with what food, O mighty one, did the noble Pandavas support themselves, with their wives and men? O sinless one, do you tell me this."

Vaisampayana said, "With the permission of Dhritarashtra, the Pandavas, along with their troops and the women of their household, support themselves on diverse kinds of food and drink and pass about a month in great happiness in that forest. Towards the end of that time, Anagha, Vyasa comes there. While all those princes sit around Vyasa, engaged in conversation on a host of subjects, some other great Rishis arrive. Narada and Parvata and Devala of austere penances, and Viswavasu and Tumburu, and Chitrasena come to that forest retreat, O Bhaarata, and Yudhishtira of great tapasya worships them with the proper rituals, with the consent of Dhritarashtra. They sit down on sacred darbhasanas of kusa grass, and on other fine seats of peacock feathers. When they are all seated,

the Kuru king also sits himself down amongst them, surrounded by the sons of Pandu. Gandhari and Kunti and Draupadi, and Subhadra of the Sattwata vamsa, and the other royal women.

The conversation that then arises was of a high order, dwelling on dharma and tales of the Rishis of antiquity, the Devas and the Asuras. Then Vyasa of marvellous tejas and eloquence, foremost among all knowers of the Vedas, deeply gratified, says to the blind king, 'I know the desire you cherish in your heart, King of kings, still stricken with grief for your dead sons. I know the sorrow that always dwells in the hearts of Gandhari, of Kunti and of Draupadi, and the searing grief of Krishna's sister Subhadra for her dead son. Hearing of this gathering of the princes and princesses of your royal house, I have come here, Kurunandana, to dispel your fears. Let the Devas and Gandharvas, and all these great Rishis, behold today the power of the tapasya I have performed all these long years. So tell me, O King, what wish of yours shall I grant today? I am powerful enough to grant you a boon, and you shall witness the fruit of my penances!'

At this, Dhritarashtra reflects for a moment and then says, 'Holy One, your favour is providential. My whole life is crowned with success today, and I feel certain that I shall indeed attain to that lofty, blissful end reserved for me, because I have met with all of you greatest, Holy Ones, tapodhanas, the treasury of tapasya, equal to Brahma himself. There is not the least doubt that your coming here before me today has cleansed me of my sins.

Anaghas, I no longer have the least fear about my end in the next world. I love my children deeply and cherish their memory. However, my heart is still tortured by the recollection of the many vile and violent sins perpetrated by my wicked son Duryodhana of evil mind who persecuted the innocent Pandavas. Alas, the sins of Duryodhana have devastated the very Earth, the world as we knew it, with her horses, elephants and fighting men. Countless high-souled kings, rulers of diverse realms, came to side with my son and, doing so, found their deaths. Alas, leaving their beloved sires and wives and finally their very life-breaths, all those Kshatriyas have become guests of Yama.

What end, O Dvija, have those men attained who were slain in the war for the sake of their friend Duryodhana? What end did my sons and grandsons achieve who fell in battle? My heart is always pained at the thought of my having caused the death of the mighty Bhishma, son of Santanu, and of Drona, that best of Brahmanas, through my foolish and

sinful son who was a bane to his friends, he who so wanted to rule the earth that he caused the destruction of the very Kuru vamsa, which once blazed with prosperity and truth. Night and day, O my father, I think of all this and, afflicted with grief, I can find no peace of mind.'

When Gandhari hears her husband's outpouring of anguish, her own sorrow grows fresh, as does the pain of Kunti, of Subhadra and Dhritarashtra's daughters-in-law, and of others, men and women of the Kuru vamsa. Queen Gandhari, her eyes bound, folds her hands in supplication to her father-in-law, the Rishi Vyasa. 'O greatest of Munis, sixteen years have passed over the head of this king, grieving for the death of his sons and divested of peace of mind. Tormented by sorrow over the slaughter of his sons, this King Dhritarashtra's breath heaves out in deep gasps, and he seldom sleeps at night.

Maharishi, you can create new worlds through the power of your tapasya. What then need I say about your ability to show this king his children who are in the next world? This Panchali, the daughter of Drupada, has lost all her kinsmen and children, and she grieves ceaselessly. So does Krishna's sister, Subhadra of gentle speech, burning for the loss of her son. This other Devi, respected by all, the wife of Bhurisravas, laments frequently in the most heartrending manner. Her father-in-law was the most intelligent and heroic Bahlika, of Kuru's race, who also perished during the war. Alas, Somadatta was also was slain, along with his sire, in the Great War.

Ah, this son of yours, Dhritarashtra, with all his intelligence and prosperity, lost a hundred princes, heroes all, none of whom ever fled from a battle. The hundred wives of those Kshatriya sons all mourn constantly, stricken by that great slaughter, O mighty Sage, sharpening the grief of both the king and myself. Alas, those heroes of high mettle, those great Maharathas, my father-in-law, Somdatta, and others—O puissant one, what end has been theirs? Through your grace, O Holy One, will this Bhumipala, myself and this Kunti, your daughter-in-law, have our suffering allayed.'

Hearing Gandhari's words, Kunti, her face gaunt and wasted through observing many fierce vratas, thinks of her secretly born son, lustrous as the sun. Vyasa, who can see and hear all, even from a great distance sees Arjuna's mother afflicted with sorrow. Vyasa says to her, 'Tell me, O blessed one, what is in your heart, what you want to say.' Kunti bows her

head low to her father-in-law and, overcome with diffidence, discloses to him her secret history.”

CANTO 30

"Kunti says, 'Holy One, you are my father-in-law and thus, my God of gods. You are that to me, no less. So hear my words of truth. When I was a young girl, the Rishi Durvasa, known for his wrathful temper, visited my father's house in quest of alms. Although there was much in his behaviour to provoke me, I did not allow myself for a moment to be annoyed by him and served him with care. The sage was greatly pleased with me and decided to grant me a boon. "You must accept the boon I shall now give you," were his words to me. Fearing his curse, I said to him, "Tathaastu, so be it." The Rishi said to me, "Blessed girl of the beautiful face, you will become the mother of Dharma. The Devas you summon will be obedient to your wishes."

Saying this, he vanished from my sight; but the mantra the Rishi gave me dwelt constantly in my mind. One day, sitting in my chamber in the palace I saw the sun rising. Suddenly, I was possessed by a desire to bring before me the maker of day, I remembered the words of Durvasa, and from my innocent girlish curiosity I summoned the god. Surya of a thousand rays instantly appeared before me. He had divided himself in two. One part remained in the firmament, and the other stood embodied on the Earth before me. With one he continued to heat the world and with the other he came to me.

While I trembled at his sight, he said, "Ask a boon of me." Bowing down to him, I asked him to leave me. He replied in wrath, "I cannot countenance the thought of coming to you fruitlessly. I will consume both you and that Brahmana who gave you the mantra as a boon." The

Brahmana Durvasa had done no evil and, wanting to protect both him and myself from Surya's curse, I said, "O Deva, let me have a son like you." The god of a thousand rays penetrated me with his tejas, leaving me stunned. He said only, "You will have a son," and was gone back into the firmament.

I continued to live in the inner apartments and, not wanting my father's honour to be tarnished, I consigned to the river my infant son, Karna, born in secret. Through the grace of that god, my virginity was restored, exactly as the Rishi Durvasa had said to me. Although Karna knew me for his mother when he grew up, I made no effort to acknowledge him, fool that I am. This burns me, O Mahamuni, as you well know. Whether I sinned or not, I have told you the truth. Holy One, I beg you, satisfy my craving to see that son of mine. Greatest of sages, sinless Vyasa, let this king also have his wish to see his dead sons fulfilled today.'

Vyasa, foremost of men, says to Kunti, 'Be you blessed, and let your wish be fulfilled. You did not sin in any way. You were restored to virginity, for the Devas have great powers of yoga and can beget offspring by their very thought, by word, by sight, by touch and by sexual union. These are the five ways in which the gods can father children upon mortal women. You are a mortal and there is no fault in what happened to you. Know this, O Kunti, and let your heart be at peace, its fever dispelled.

For those that are great, everything is proper. For those that are great, everything is pure. For those that are great, everything is punya. For those that are great, everything is their own.'"

CANTO 31

"Vyasa says, 'Blessed be you, as well, O Gandhari, this very night you shall see your sons and brothers and friends and kinsmen, along with your sires, see them like men arisen from sleep. Kunti shall see Karna, and Subhadra of the Yadu vamsa will behold her son Abhimanyu. Draupadi shall see her five sons, her dead sire and her brothers also. All this was in my mind even before you asked me. It is for this that I have come here.

You must not grieve for those greatest of men. They met death while observing Kshatriya dharma on Kurukshetra. O faultless Gandhari, the work of the gods had to be accomplished, and it was to achieve those fated ends that those heroes were born into this world. They were all amsas of the Devas, Gandharvas and Apsaras, and Pisachas and Guhyakas and Rakshasas, many other spirits of great sanctity, many souls blessed by great tapasya, Devarishis, Devas and Danavas and other heavenly sages of spotless soul, who met with death on the field of Kurukshetra.

It is known that it was that most lustrous and intelligent king of the Gandharvas, also named Dhritarashtra, who took birth in the world of men as your lord. Know that Pandu of unfading glory, and distinguished above all others, sprang from the Maruts. Kshattri and Yudhishtira are both amsas of Dharma Deva.

Know that Duryodhana was Kali and Sakuni was Dwapara. O lovely Gandhari, know that Dussasana and others were all Rakshasas. Bhimasena of great might, this Parantapa, is from the Lord of the Maruts, Vayu. Know

that this Dhananjaya, the son of Pritha, is the ancient Rishi Nara. Krishna is Narayana, and the twins are the Aswins.

Having split his body into two, Surya Deva, foremost of givers of heat, continued to course through the heavens with one portion of himself, while on Earth he dwelt as Karna. He that was born as the son of Arjuna, Abhimanyu who brought joy to all, Subhadra's son who was heir to the kingdom, possessions and glory of the Pandavas, who was slain by six Maharathas combining against him, was none other than the amsa of Soma Deva, the Moon, who also clove himself in two through yogic power.

Dhrishtadyumna, who sprang with Draupadi from the sacrificial fire, was an auspicious portion of Agni Deva, God of Fire. Sikhandin was a Rakshasa. Know that Drona was an amsa of Brihaspati, and that Drona's son is born of a part of Rudra. Ganga's son Bhishma was one of the Vasus who was cursed to a human life.

Thus, O you of great wisdom, the Devas and other immortals were born onto this Bhumi to accomplish a great purpose and, having achieved what they came for, have returned to Swargaloka. Today I will dispel the sorrow that rends all your hearts, the grief that relates to those who are no longer in this world but have departed to the other. Go now, all of you, towards the Bhagirathi, the blessed Devi Ganga. On her banks I will show you all those who were killed on the field of war.'

A roar, as of many lions, arises from those gathered there, and all rush to the sacred Bhagirathi. Dhritarashtra with all his ministers and the Pandavas, as well as all the great Rishis and Gandharvas that have come to the asrama, set out immediately. Arriving at the banks of the Ganga, that sea of men and women find suitable places for themselves. The wise old king, with the Pandavas at his side, finds an appropriate spot, along with the women and the aged of his household. That day passes like a whole year as they wait for the night when they will see the dead Kshatriyas. Finally, the sun reaches the sacred mountain, Astama, in the west, and all those men and women bathe in the sacred river, and perform their sandhya vandana."

CANTO 32

Vaisampayana said, "As night falls after the evening prayer and rituals, all approach Vyasa. Dhritarashtra, having cleansed his body and fixed his mind in dhyana, sits there with the Pandavas and the Rishis. At a small remove sit Gandhari and the women of the royal house of Kuru. All the people of Hastinapura and those from the provinces range themselves according to their years. Then does Maharishi Vyasa of mighty tejas bathe in the sacred waters of the Bhagirathi and summon all the dead warriors, those that had fought for the Pandavas and those that had fought for the Kauravas, including great and blessed kings of diverse realms.

A mighty uproar erupts from the waters of the Ganga, one to equal the din of the Kaurava and the Pandava hosts facing each other on Kurukshetra. Rising up out of the river in their thousands, led by Bhishma and Drona, appear all those kings and other great Kshatriyas, along with their troops. Virata and Drupada rise up with their sons and their forces. Draupadi's sons and Abhimanyu, son of Subhadra, and the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, all appear, as do Karna and Duryodhana, and the Maharatha Sakuni, and the other sons of Dhritarashtra, all of great prowess, led by Dussasana. The son of Jarasandha appears, as do Bhagadatta and Jalasandha of terrific energy, and Bhurisravas, and Sala, and Salya, and Vrishasena with his younger brother, Duryodhana's son, Prince Lakshmana, and the son of Dhrishtadyumna, and all the princes of Sikhandin, and Dhrishtaketu, with his younger brother, Achala, Vrishaka and the Rakshasa Alayudha, Bahlika and Somadatta, King Chekitana and others too numerous to name, all arise from the river, resplendent with supernal light.

Every king and warrior wears the armour that he wore on Kurukshetra. They arise from the water in the chariots they rode in the Great War, all of them flying the majestic standards they had flown in battle. Yet their vestments are not of this earth, and their ear-studs and earrings sparkle like droplets of the sun. Free from all animosity and pride are all those great heroes, and divested of wrath and envy. Gandharvas sing their praises, and unearthly bards wait upon them, chanting their deeds. Each one is draped in celestial garlands and attended upon by bands of Apsaras.

And now, through the power of his penances, Maharishi Vyasa, son of Satyavati, bestows the gift of vision upon Dhritarashtra. Blessed already with mystic gyana and great strength, Gandhari of great fame also sees all her sons, along with all those who had been slain in battle. Transfixed with wonder, everyone there witnesses the amazing and inconceivable phenomenon that makes their hair stand on end. The riverbank is transformed into a high carnival of ecstatic men and women. The spectacle is like a painting by a celestial artist. Gazing, through the grace of the sage, at the spirit host of Kshatriyas, Dhritarashtra is filled with jubilation."

CANTO 33

Vaisampayana said, "Washed of every sin, exorcised of anger and envy, those great Kshatriyas meet one another in accordance with the high and auspicious ordinances laid down by the great Rishis. All of them are lambent with happiness and look like Devas in Swargaloka, O Rajan. Son meets with father or mother, wives with husbands, brother with brother, and friend with friend.

The jubilant Pandavas meet the mighty bowman Karna, Abhimanyu, son of Subhadra, and the sons of Draupadi. With hearts brimming with joy, the Pandavas approach Karna, O King, and are reconciled with him. Indeed, all those Kshatriyas, O Lord of the Bhaaratas, meet with one another through the grace of Vyasa Muni and are reconciled. Casting off all animosity, they are established in amity and peace.

All those great warriors, the Kauravas and the other kings, their kinsmen and their sons as well, become united with the Pandavas. All that night they pass in great happiness; indeed for the unalloyed joy they feel, those Kshatriyas deem that place to be heaven itself. No grief, no fear, no suspicion, no discontent, no reproach enters that hallowed night. Meeting their slain sires and brothers, husbands and sons, the women cast off all grief amid tides of rapture.

Finally, those heroes and their women, after spending that perfect night together, embrace and take leave of one another, to return to where they had come from. Vyasa dismisses that concourse of dead Kshatriyas and, before the eyes of the living the vast host of warriors, with their chariots and standards, vanishes into the waters of the sacred Bhagirathi. Some of them

return to Devaloka, others to Brahmaloka, some to Varuna's world and others to the realm of Kubera. Some among those kings go back to Suryaloka. Among the Rakshasas and Pisachas, some go to the land of the Uttara-Kurus; others depart gracefully in the company of gods. After all those Mahatmans disappear with their chariots, horses and all their followers, the puissant Vyasa, standing in the waters of the sacred river, Vyasa of great dharma and tejas, that benefactor of the Kurus, addresses the Kshatriya widows.

The Sage says, 'Let those among these foremost of women who wish to attain to the realms acquired by their husbands set aside hesitation and at once enter into this holy Bhagirathi.' Hearing this, those eager women, setting their faith in the Muni, immediately seek the blessings and the leave of Dhritarashtra, and plunge into the Ganga. Quickly freed from their human bodies, they go straight to whichever realm their lords have found for themselves, and there those chaste women are reunited with their majestic husbands and now adorned with celestial ornaments, riding in unearthly rathas, and clad in supernal clothes and garlands. Possessed of every virtue, their anxieties dispelled, they have earned unalloyed bliss. On that day Vyasa undertakes the pious duty of granting boons to all the men assembled there, the fruition of the wish that each one cherishes.

People of diverse realms, hearing of this meeting between the hallowed dead and the living, are transported with rapture. The man who listens to this legend of marvel attains everything that he holds dear; indeed, he obtains all felicity and the consummation of his every desire, both here and in the hereafter. The man of gyana and vigyana, foremost among the righteous, who recites this tale for others, acquires great fame in this world and an auspicious terminus in the next, as well as a joyful union with kinsmen, all that he wishes for, and more. Such a man never has to strive painfully for his living, and meets with all sorts of good fortune. Indeed, incalculable are the rewards for one who, with reverence for the Vedas, studies and mindfully recites this Itihasa for others to hear. Those possessed of good conduct, devoted to self-restraint, cleansed of all sins by the gifts they make, endowed with sincerity, having tranquil souls, freed from falsehood and the desire of injuring others, adorned with faith, belief in the scriptures, and intelligence, who listen to this wonderful Parva, surely attain to the highest goal."'

CANTO 34

The Sauti says, 'King Janamejaya of great intelligence was gratified by this story of the appearance and occultation of his sires. Filled with delight, he questioned Vaisampayana again on the reappearance of dead men. He asked, "How is it possible for persons whose bodies have been destroyed to reappear in those very forms?"

That highest of regenerate ones, disciple of holy Vyasa, foremost among the eloquent, Vaisampayana of great tejas, answered Janamejaya thus: "This is certain: that no karma is ever destroyed. Human bodies, O King, are born of action, of karma; so also are forms and natures of men. The great primal elements are eternal, being found united with the Lord of all beings. Since they exist with what is eternal, they find no destruction when the temporal parts are destroyed.

Deeds performed without exertion are the truest and the best, and bear real fruit. But the soul, when united with deeds that require exertion for their accomplishment, experiences pleasure and pain, but is never changed by them—even like a mirror that reflects images but remains itself unchanged. The Soul knows no change, decay or death. As long as one's karma is not exhausted, so long does one regard the body to be oneself. The man whose karma has been exhausted, however, knows himself to be other than the body. Diverse existent objects, attaining to a body, combine ephemerally as one entity. To men of knowledge who understand the difference between the body and self, those very objects become eternal.

During the Aswamedha yagna, this Sruti is heard in regard to the slaying of the sacrificial horse: those which are the possessions and

characteristics of embodied creatures—their life-breath—continue to exist eternally, even when themselves they are borne away to the next world.

O King, if you wish to hear it from me, I will tell you what is beneficial to you. While engaged in your sacrifices, you have heard of the paths of the Devas. When preparations were made for any sacrifice of yours, the Devas became beneficially inclined towards you. When, indeed, they were thus disposed and came to your sacrifices, they were the attendant lords in the passage, from this world to the next, of the animals that were sacrificed. For this reason the eternal Jivas, by adoring the deities with yagnas, achieve felicity. When the Panchamahabhutas, the five primal elements, are eternal, when the Atman, the Soul, is also eternal, he that is called Purusha is equally so. When such is the truth, one who regards any living creature as disposed to take diverse forms is thought to have an erroneous understanding.

He who indulges in too much grief at separation is foolish. He who sees evil in separation should renounce union. By remaining aloof, one avoids attachments and casts off sorrow, for sorrow in this world is born of attachment and loss. Only one who understands the distinction between body and self, he and no other, is freed from delusion. He that knows the other, the Soul, attains to the highest wisdom and is freed from error.

As regards all creatures, they appear in this world from an invisible state, and once more disappear into invisibility. 'I do not know him. He also does not know me. As regards myself, renunciation is not yet mine.' He that is not possessed of strength enjoys or endures the fruits of all his actions and, in those too, dies. If the act be of the mind, of thought, its consequences are enjoyed or endured mentally; if it be done with the body, its consequences will be enjoyed or endured in the body."

CANTO 35

Vaisampayana said, “King Dhritarashtra had never seen his own sons with his blind eyes. Obtaining sight through the grace of the Rishi, O Kurupravira, he beheld for the first time those sons that were so like himself. That foremost of men and kings, the Kuru monarch, had studied the dharma of kings, as well as the Vedas and the Upanishads, and had acquired a certitude of understanding from those sacred sources. Vidura of untold wisdom attained to high success through the power of his penances. Dhritarashtra attained to great success in consequence of having met the Maharishi Vyasa.”

Janamejaya said, “If Vyasa is disposed to grant me a boon, let him in his mercy show me my own sire in that human form which he had, clad as he used to be clad, and as old as he was when he left this world. I may then believe all that you have told me. Such a sight would indeed be most agreeable to me, and I would consider my very life as having been crowned with success. I shall have no further doubts in my heart. O, may Mahamuni grant me this wish.”

Sauti says, ‘No sooner did King Janamejaya express this wish than Vyasa of great power showed his grace and brought forth Parikshit. King Janamejaya saw his royal father, possessed of unearthly beauty, fetched down from Swarga in the same form that he had, and of the very age he was when he left this world. The Mahatman Samika, and his son Sringin, were also brought there. All the counsellors and ministers of the king saw the lustrous ones. Janamejaya then performed the final ablutionary bath for his

sacrifice, and rejoiced. He poured the sacred water over his father, even as he caused it to be poured on himself.

Having undergone the avabhrita bath, the king addressed the regenerate Astika, who had sprung from the race of the Yayavaras and was the son of Jaratkaru, “O Astika, this sacrifice of mine is fraught with many wondrous events! I have seen my father with my eyes, and he has dispelled all my sorrow.” Astika said, “O best of the Kuru vamsa, in any sacrifice at which the ancient Rishi, the Island-born Vyasa, that vast reservoir of tapasya, is present, its performer is sure to conquer both worlds. O son of the Pandavas, you have heard a most wonderful Itihasa. The Nagas have been turned to ashes and have followed your sire into the next world. Through your dharma, O King, Takshaka has escaped a painful fate. The Rishis have all been worshipped here.

You have also seen the end attained by your noble father. Having listened to this sin-cleansing history of the Mahabharata, you have acquired immense punya. The sight of your sire has severed the knots in your heart. They that fly upon the wings of Dharma, they that are of pure conduct and sinless disposition, they at sight of whom sins become attenuated—we should all bow down to them.”’

Sauti continues, ‘Having heard this from the Dvijottama, King Janamejaya worshipped the Rishi, repeatedly honouring him in every way. Conversant with his duties, he then asked the Rishi Vaisampayana of unfading glory about what followed Dhritarashtra’s residence in the forest.’

CANTO 36

'Janamejaya asked, "Having seen his sons and grandsons with all their friends and followers, what does that ruler of men, Dhritarashtra, do, and Yudhishtira also?"

Vaisampayana said, "After that dazzling vision, Rajarishi Dhritarashtra's grief drops away and he returns to his asrama. He dismisses the common people, and all the great Rishis, who return to their abodes. The Pandavas, with their wives and a small retinue, accompany Dhritarashtra to his asrama. Satyavati's son, whom all of them worship, also comes to the blind king's asrama.

Vyasa says to his son, 'Dhritarashtra Mahabaho, O son of the Kuru vamsa, listen to what I have to say. You have heard varied discourses from Rishis of great knowledge and sacred deeds, men with a wealth of tapasya and the purest, highest lineage, masters of the Vedas and the Vedangas, men of great eloquence, of great piety and years.

Do not set your mind again on sorrow. He that is possessed of wisdom is never agitated by misfortune. You have also listened to the mysteries of the Gods from Narada of celestial form. Through cleaving to Kshatriya dharma, your sons have all attained to the most auspicious goal that is sanctified by living and dying by weapons. You have seen how they are free and live in transcendent happiness.

Now Yudhishtira, with all his brothers and wives and kinsmen, awaits your leave to return to Hastinapura. You must dismiss him and let him go back to his kingdom and rule it. They have been with you in the forest for

more than a month, and the throne of sovereignty must always be well guarded, O King. O you of Kuru's race, every kingdom has many foes.'

Thus advised by Vyasa of incomparable energy, Dhritarashtra summons Yudhishtira and says to him, 'My blessings on you, O Ajatashatru! Do you now listen to me, with all your brothers. Through your grace, O king, grief no longer stands in my way. With you here, I am as happy as if I were in our city of the elephant. With you for my protector, wise king, I enjoy all that I could wish for. You have served me as lovingly as a son does his father, and I have not the least trace of dissatisfaction. Go now, O son, for you must not tarry here any longer. Being with you, I have slackened in my penances, although equally I have been able to sustain my body to perform tapasya only through meeting you.

These two mothers of yours, who subsist now upon the fallen leaves of trees, keeping vows similar to mine, will not live long. Through Vyasa's tapasya, as well as through the grace of my meeting you, we have all seen Duryodhana and those who have become denizens of the other world. O Anagha, sinless one, the purpose of my life has been realized, and I now wish to set myself to the practice of the most austere of penances.

You must allow me to do this, and henceforth upon you alone shall rest the obsequial pinda, the fame and achievements, the very race of our ancestors. Mahabaho, do you then depart either tomorrow or this very day. Tarry not, my son. Lord of the Bhaarata vamsa, you have repeatedly heard what the duties are of kings. I do not see what more I can say to you. I no longer have any need of you, O you of great power.'

To the old monarch Yudhishtira replies, 'O you who know every nuance of dharma, it does not become you to cast me off in this way. I am guilty of no fault. Let all my brothers and followers depart, as they like. With steadfast vows, I shall wait upon you and upon these two mothers of mine.' Now Gandhari says to him, 'O son, let it not be so, for the Kuru vamsa is now dependent on you. The pinda, the obsequial cake of my father-in-law, also depends on you. Go now, my son, you have sufficiently honoured and served us. You should do what the king says. Indeed, Yudhishtira, you must obey your father's command.'

Yudhishtira wipes the tears of love that flow from his eyes, and laments, 'Alas, both the king and you, O mother Gandhari of great fame, cast me off, but my heart is bound to you. Filled as I am with grief, how can I leave you? Yet, most righteous queen, I cannot venture to obstruct your

tapasya, for there is nothing higher, and it is only through penance that one attains to the Supreme Brahman.

O Queen, my heart no longer turns as of old towards kingdom. My own mind is wholly set upon tapasya now. Most auspicious Devi, the whole world seems empty and hollow to me, and nothing in it gives me pleasure any more. Our kinsmen have been annihilated; our strength is no longer what it was before. The Panchalas have been entirely exterminated; they exist in name only. Mother, Gandhari, I see no one who can renew them and cause them to grow and flourish again. Drona consumed them all on the field of war. And those that remained, his son Aswatthama killed at night.

The Chedis and the Matsyas, who were our friends, no longer exist. Only the tribes of the Vrishnis remain, for Krishna kept them alive. If I have the faintest wish to live, it is only for the sight of the Vrishnis and to acquire punya, and not in the least any more to enjoy artha or kama. I beg you, bless us with your love and grace, for once we leave here we will not see you again. The king will now embark upon the most austere and unbearable tapasya, which will surely take him from us.'

The lord of battle, Mahabaho Sahadeva cries to Yudhishtira, his eyes swimming in tears, 'O Lord of the Bharatas, I cannot leave my mother. You return to our capital quickly. I will remain here and perform tapasya, O mighty one. Even here in this asrama, I will emaciate my body through stern penances, meanwhile serving our uncle and these two mothers of mine, and worshipping at their feet.'

Kunti embraces him and says, 'Go, my son, do not say any more but do as I tell you. Leave this place, all of you, Let peace and happiness be yours, my sons. If you remain here you will surely obstruct our tapasya; bound by my ties of love for you, I will fall away from my vratas. Our time is short, mighty prince.'

Through these and other words of persuasion, Kunti helps Sahadeva and King Yudhishtira regain their composure. The Kuru heroes, best of their vamsa, with their mother's permission and their uncle's, prepare to depart. Yudhishtira says, 'Our hearts are calmed by your auspicious blessings, and we will return to Hastinapura. Indeed, O King, now that we have your leave and your blessing, we will leave this asrama freed from every sin.'

Once more, Rajarishi Dhritarashtra blesses Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and bids him farewell. The king comforts Bhima, foremost of all men of great strength; Bhima of great buddhi and tejas humbly worships his uncle.

Dhritarashtra embraces Arjuna and the twins fervently and, blessing them repeatedly, directs them also to depart. The brothers worship the feet of Gandhari and receive her blessings also. Their mother Kunti lovingly smells the tops of their heads and dismisses them. The Pandavas circle around Dhritarashtra in pradakshina like calves prevented from drinking at their mothers' teats, their eyes fixed on the blind king.

Led by Draupadi, the royal women of the Kuru household, his daughters-in-law, all worship their father-in-law with rites laid down in the Shastras, and receive his permission to depart. Their mothers-in-law instruct the younger wives and queens in their dharma and Gandhari and Kunti, embracing and blessing each one, bid them go with their husbands.

Now loud shouts are heard from the charioteers and carriage drivers, who order their horses yoked. The air is filled with the neighing of horses, and the grunting of camels. King Yudhishtira, with his wives and troops and all his kinsmen, sets out for Hastinapura."

NARADAGAMANA PARVA

CANTO 37

Vaisampayana said, “Two years have passed after the Pandavas’ return, O King, when the Devarishi Narada comes to the city of the elephants, and visits Yudhishtira. The eloquent Dharmaraja duly worships the sage and seats him comfortably. When Narada has rested a while, the Pandava asks him, ‘It is after a long while, Holy One, that you have graced my sabha with your divine presence. Are you at peace and happy, O learned Brahmana? What are the lands through which you have ranged? What shall I do for you? I beg you to tell me, first among all Dvijas and our highest refuge.’ Narada says, ‘Truly, I have not seen you for a long while, and that indeed is why I have come to you from my asrama. I have been to many sacred tirthas, and to the holy Ganga also, O King.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘Those dwelling on the banks of the Ganga report that my uncle Dhritarashtra Mahatman is practising the austerest tapasya. Have you seen him there? Is that perpetuator of the Kuru vamsa at peace? Are Gandhari and Pritha, and the Suta’s son Sanjaya also at peace? How, indeed, does my royal sire fare? I am eager to hear this from you, if, Swami, you have seen the king.’

Narada says, ‘Rajan, listen calmly to me as I tell you what I have seen and heard in that asrama. After your return from Kurukshetra, O joy of the Kurus, your sire went away towards Gangadvara. That illustrious king took

with him his sacred Agni, Gandhari and his daughter-in-law Kunti, Sanjaya the Suta and all his Yajakas.

Amply possessed of tapodhana, a wealth of penances, your sire set himself to the practice of severe austerities. He held pebbles of stone in his mouth, for his sustenance only breathed air, and abstained altogether from speech. While thus engaged in fierce penance, he was worshipped by all the ascetics in the forest. In six months, the king was reduced to skin and bone, a mere skeleton. Gandhari subsisted on water alone, while Kunti took a little every sixth day. His Yajakas duly worshipped the king's sacred fire, constantly pouring libations of ghrita into it. They did this whether the king saw the rite or not. The king had no fixed habitation; he became a wanderer through those woods. The two queens, as well as Sanjaya, followed him. Sanjaya was their guide always, over flat terrain and uneven land. The faultless Pritha, O King, became the eyes of Gandhari.

One day, that best of kings came to a place on the banks of the Ganga. He bathed in the sacred stream and, finishing his ablutions, turned his face towards his asrama. Suddenly, the wind rose up high, and a ferocious fire broke out, swiftly turning into a conflagration. It began to burn that forest on every side. Herds of animals were consumed all around, as well as the snakes that inhabited that jungle, while herds of wild boar bolted to the nearest marshes, lakes and rivers. When racing flames tore through that forest, and every living creature in it tried to flee on all sides, the emaciated Dhritarashtra found no strength to move from where he sat. Your two mothers, also, both attenuated with the rigours of their tapasya, could not bestir themselves at all to escape the ravening Agni.

Seeing towering flames coming at him from all sides, the old king said calmly to the Suta Sanjaya, that best of all charioteers, "Go, O Sanjaya, and find a place where the fire cannot reach you. As for ourselves, we shall suffer our bodies to be consumed by these flames and attain to the highest goal." Sanjaya said, "My king, such a death, in this fire that is not a sacred one will prove disastrous to you. Yet I do not see any way in which you can escape from this inferno. You must tell me what I should do." The king said again, "This death cannot be a tragedy or a disaster for us, for we left our home of our own will. For sannyasis, water, fire, wind and starvation are praiseworthy means of dying. But you, Sanjaya, must leave us without any delay."

Saying this much to Sanjaya, the king withdrew his mind in dhyana. Facing the east, he sat down with Gandhari and Kunti. Seeing him thus, the wise Sanjaya walked around him in pradakshina saying, "Do you focus yourself in the Atman, mighty one." The son of a Rishi, and himself possessed of great wisdom, the king did so. Restraining all his senses, he sat there still as a post. The blessed Gandhari, and your mother Pritha too, sat in the same attitude. Then was your royal uncle overtaken by the forest fire, and his body turned to ashes. Sanjaya, his loyal minister, escaped the conflagration. I saw him on the banks of the Ganga in the midst of some Rishis. Endowed with great energy and intelligence, he bade them farewell and set out for the mountains of Himavat.

Even thus did the Mahatman Kuru king Dhritarashtra meet with his death, and Gandhari and Kunti, your two mothers. In the course of my wanderings at will, I saw the charred bodies of the king and those two queens, O Bhaarata. Having heard of the end of King Dhritarashtra, many hermits came to that places; none of them grieved in the least for the end that came to the Rajarishi and his queen, as well as your mother. There, O Narottama, I heard all the details of how the king and the two queens had been taken by fire. Son of Pandu, King of kings, you should not grieve for him. Of their own will, and gladly, did the three of them find their end through the flames.'

Hearing how Dhritarashtra left this world, the noble Pandavas all give way to great grief. Lamentation and wailing rends the air from within the inner apartments of the palace, and from the citizens as well. Yudhishtira is like a man struck by lightning. In agony he flings up his arms and cries, 'Ah, fie!' Thinking of his mother, he sobs like a child, as do all his brothers, Bhima the loudest. The women of the royal household also mourn and cry aloud on hearing that Kunti has perished.

All the people grieve upon hearing that the old king who had become childless had been burnt to death so savagely, and that the helpless Gandhari had shared his fate. When the clamour of grief abates somewhat, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja stanches his own tears with all his powers of endurance and manages to speak."

CANTO 38

"Yudhishtira says, 'When such a fate overtook that great king, that Mahatman who was performing the most austere tapasya, and despite the fact of his having kinsmen such as ourselves all alive, it seems to me, O regenerate one, that the end of human beings is indeed difficult to predict. Alas, who would have thought that the son of Vichitravirya would be burnt to death in the wilderness!

He had a hundred sons, each endowed with vast prowess and prosperity. Dhritarashtra himself had the strength of ten thousand elephants. Yet he has met his end in a forest fire. He who was once fanned with palm leaves held by the fair hands of beautiful women, was fanned by vultures with their wings after being burnt alive by the wild fire. He who was once roused from sleep every morning by bands of Sutas and Magadhas ended his days, through my sinful deeds, sleeping on the bare ground!

I do not grieve for the great Gandhari who lost all her sons. Observing the same vows as her husband, she has attained to those very realms that have become his. I grieve for my mother Pritha who, abandoning the shining prosperity of her sons, chose to go away into the forest. Fie on this great kingdom and sovereignty of ours, fie on our prowess, fie on the ways of Kshatriyas! Though seemingly alive, we are actually dead.

O greatest of great Brahmanas, the course of Time is truly subtle and inscrutable, when Kunti could leave this kingdom and everything in it, and decide on vanavasa instead. How could she, the mother of Yudhishtira, of Bhima, of Vijaya, be burnt to death like some helpless creature of the jungle! I am staggered when I think of this; I am numb.

Ah, in vain did Arjuna gratify the God of Fire in the Khandava vana. Forgetting the service my brother did to him, that ingrate has burnt to death his benefactor's mother! How could Agni Deva consume Arjuna's mother with his flames? Once, he assumed the guise of a Brahmana and came as a supplicant to Arjuna to help him devour the Khandava vana. Fie on Agni! Fie on the celebrated triumph of the Arjuna's shafts!

Holy One, what happened in the Khandava Prastha seems to me to be doubly horrible since our uncle Dhritarashtra, Lord of the Earth, was not consumed by any sacred fire but by inauspicious flames. How could such a death overtake that Rajarishi of the Kuru vamsa who, after having ruled this entire world, was performing tapasya in the forest? In that great forest there were fires that had been sanctified with holy mantras. Alas, that my sire left this world through being devoured by unholy flames!

Oh, my mind imagines Pritha, my mother, emaciated so that all her veins and arteries show clearly, trembling in fear and crying out at the terrifying approach of the flames, "Yudhishtira! Bhima, save me!" as the fire closed in on her from every side. Alas, that heroic son of Madravati, her darling of all her sons, did not save her either.'

Hearing these lamentations of the king, all present there in the Kuru sabha begin to weep afresh, clasping one another in their grief and sobbing piteously. The five sons of Pandu are so stricken that they resemble living creatures at the time of universal dissolution. The lamentations of the weeping heroes spill out of the capacious chambers of the palace and penetrate the very sky."

CANTO 39

"Narada says, 'The king was not consumed by an unsanctified fire. I was told so in that very place and I say to you, O Bhaarata, such was not the fate of Dhritarashtra. I heard on authority that when the old king of great wisdom began subsisting on just the air he breathed and then entered into the deeper jungle, he abandoned his sacrificial fires after kindling them and performing his sacred rites before them.

The Yajaka Brahmanas he had with him left those sacred fires to burn out in a solitary part of the forest and went away on other errands, O Bharatottama. It was those very sacred fires that were fanned by winds of fate and grew into the general conflagration. This I heard from the ascetics who live on the banks of the Ganga. Dhritarashtra was thus united with his own sacred Agni and met his end on the banks of the Ganga. Sinless one, this is indeed what I was told by the Rishis whom I saw on the banks of the sacred Bhagirathi, O Yudhishtira. Thus it was, Bhumipala, that Dhritarashtra was united with his own sacred fire and attained to the lofty goal that was his. Through the service rendered by her to Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, your mother Kunti, O Lord of men, has also found great success and joy. There is not the slightest doubt about this.

Now, O King of kings, together with your brothers you must perform the tarpana, the rites of water, in their honour. So without delay do what you must towards that end.' Then Yudhishtira, Bhumipala, Purushottama, that bearer of the burdens of the Pandavas, comes out into the open, along with all his brothers as well as the royal women of his household. The people of the city, as well as those of the provinces, out of their fervent loyalty, all

join the procession to the banks of the Ganga, each one clad in a single piece of cloth.

There, setting at their head Dhritarashtra's only surviving son, the good Yuyutsu, all those foremost of men enter the holy river and offer oblations of water to the departed Rajarishi. They also offer similar tarpana for Gandhari and Pritha, naming each separately, and their families. Having completed those rites that purify the living, they return but without entering their capital, remain outside Hastinapura. They also despatch a number of trusted Brahmanas, all conversant with the ordinances regarding the cremation of the dead, to Gangadvara where the old king had been consumed by fire. Having first rewarded those men amply, Yudhishtira commands them to accomplish the rites of cremation still awaited by the remains of Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti.

On the twelfth day, the king, duly purified, performs the sraddhas for his departed kin, which are characterized by gifts given in abundance. In the name and memory of Dhritarashtra, Yudhishtira gives away many gifts of gold and silver, of kine and costly cloths. Uttering next the names of Gandhari and Kunti, the Mahatejasvin king dispenses many splendid gifts in their names. Every man receives whatever he wishes for, and as much of it as he wants. Beds and food, chariots and carriages, jewels and gems and other wealth are given away in profusion. In the name of his two mothers, the king gives a bounty of rathas, fine garments and coverlets, various kinds of food, and female slaves adorned with diverse ornaments. Having made many kinds of gifts in profusion, that Lord of Earth then enters his capital called after the elephant.

The men sent to the banks of the Ganga to cremate the remains of the king and two queens return to the city. They duly honour those remains with garlands and perfumes of many kinds, and then, after the immersion of the ashes, inform Yudhishtira of the accomplishment of their task. Having comforted Yudhishtira Dharmatma, the Devarishi Narada, the eternal itinerant, leaves Hastinapura and resumes his wanderings.

Even thus does King Dhritarashtra leave this world, after passing three years in the forest and ten and five years in the city. Having lost all his sons in battle, he had given many gifts in honour of his kinsmen, relatives, friends, his brethren and own people.

After his uncle's demise, Yudhishtira becomes forlorn and dejected; deprived of so many of his kin, his uncle, his aunt and his mother as well,

he somehow finds the strength within himself to bear the burden of sovereignty.

One should listen with rapt attention to this Asramavasa Parva, and having heard it recited, one should feed Brahmanas with havishya, honouring them with perfumes and garlands."

The end of Asramavasika Parva

BOOK 16
Mausala Parva

CANTO 1

AUM. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Vaisampayana said, "When the thirty-sixth year has passed after the Great War, Yudhishtira, joy of the Kurus, sees many strange portents all around him. Winds, dry and strong, loaded with gravel, blow from every side. Flocks of birds wheel in apradakshina, flying in circles from right to left. The great rivers run counter to their flow. The horizon all around seems constantly to be obscured by fog and smoke. Meteors rain down from the sky. The sun's disc, O King, appears at all times obscured with dust. At sunrise, the great luminary of day is shorn of splendour and seems to be crossed by headless human trunks. Around both the sun and the moon ominous rings of light can be seen, of three hues with rough black edges and ashy-red bands.

These and other omens foreshadowing fear and danger, O king, fill the hearts of men with anxiety. Soon after, the Kuru king Yudhishtira hears of the wholesale carnage among the Vrishnis, in consequence of the Rishis' curse. Hearing that only Krishna and Balarama had briefly survived the massacre at which that clan turned on itself, Yudhishtira summons his brothers and takes counsel with them as to what they should do. Assembled together, they are distraught to hear that the Yadavas had met their end through the Brahmanas' rod of chastisement. The Kshatriyas can hardly conceive that Krishna is dead; it is as if the oceans had all dried up. No, they cannot believe that he who wielded the Saranga is dead. But when they

hear the tale of the accursed rod of iron, the Pandavas are overwhelmed by grief. They sit speechlessly together in black despair."

Janamejaya said, "O Holy One, how was it that the Andhakas, along with the Vrishnis and those Maharathas, the Bhojas, all perished in the very sight of Krishna?" Vaisampayana replied, "In the thirty-sixth year after the Mahabharata yuddha, calamity overtook the Vrishnis, and fate slew them through the curse of the iron pestle." Janamejaya asked, "Who was it that cursed those incomparable heroes, the Vrishnis, the Andhakas and the Bhojas, to meet with death? O best of Dvijas, tell me all."

Vaisampayana said, "One day, the younger Vrishni heroes, with Sarana among them, see Viswamitra, Kanwa and Narada arrive at Dwaraka. Aggrieved by the rod of punishment wielded by those sages, the young Kshatriyas dress Samba as a woman and take him to the Maharishis, saying, 'This is the wife of Babhru of immeasurable tejas, who wishes for a son. O Munis, can you tell us for certain what this woman will bring forth?'

Hear now, O King, the retort of those great sages with whom these young lions ignorantly trifled. Those Mahamunis, their eyes red with wrath, look at one another and give the unruly pranksters a terrible answer: 'This heir of Krishna, whose name is Samba, will bring forth a fierce iron rod for the destruction of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas! Through that iron rod, you arrogant and cruel ones, intoxicated with pride as you are, you will become the exterminators of your race, leaving just Rama and Janardana. Balarama who wields the halayudha will cast off his body and enter the ocean, while a hunter named Jara will pierce the Mahatman Krishna as he lies on the ground, and he will also leave this world.'

The Rishis then go to Krishna, who in turn summons all the Vrishnis and tells them what has happened. Krishna, who already knows what the end of his vamsa will be, speaks to them quite calmly, saying simply that what is destined to occur will come to pass. Hrishikesa then returns to his palace. The Lord of the universe has no wish to change the course of fate.

The next day, Samba brings forth the iron rod like a huge messenger of death, through which the entire race of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas will perish. The sinister event is reported to King Ugrasena, who in great distress has the rod ground into a fine powder and has his men cast the powder into the sea. Then, at the command of Ahuka, of Krishna, of Rama and of the noble Babhru, it is proclaimed throughout Dwaravati that among all the Vrishnis and the Andhakas no one should make any wine or other

intoxicating spirits of any kind, and that whoever did so secretly would be impaled alive with all his kinsmen. Through fear of the king, and knowing that this was the command of Balarama also of unflinching determination, all the people of the ocean city bind themselves to that rule, and abstain from making any wine or spirits."

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, "While the Vrishnis and the Andhakas thus seek to avoid impending calamity, the embodied form of Kaala every day wanders through their city and homes. He has the form of a man of terrible and fierce aspect: bald of head, black and tawny of complexion. Sometimes the Vrishnis catch a glimpse of him as he peers into their houses with fearsome eyes.

The mighty bowmen among the Vrishnis shoot thousands of arrows at him, but none can pierce him, for he is Death embodied, the Destroyer of all creatures. Day by day, strong winds blow and many evil omens arise, dreadful forebodings of the extinction of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas. The streets swarm with rats and mice. At night they gnaw away the hair and nails of sleeping men. Earthen pots show cracks or break apart with echoing reports, for no apparent cause. Sarikas chirp ceaselessly, day and night, even within the homes of the Vrishnis. Sarases are heard to imitate the hooting of the owl, O Bhaarata, and goats call like jackals. Many birds appear, summoned by Death, that are pale of feather but have blood-red legs and feet. Pigeons are seen flying everywhere in the houses of the Vrishnis. Cows calve donkeys, and mules bring forth misshapen elephants. Bitches whelp kittens, and mice are born from the mongoose.

As for the Vrishnis themselves, they grow daily more wild and wanton, showing no trace of shame. They flagrantly disregard Brahmanas and the Pitris and Devas. They openly insult and humiliate their elders and preceptors. Rama and Krishna alone continue to conduct themselves with decorum. In Dwaraka, wives deceive their husbands, and husbands their

wives. Fires, when lit, cast their flames towards the left. Sometimes they throw out stark blue and vivid red flames.

The sun, whether rising or setting over the city, seems to be surrounded by headless human trunks. In kitchens, dishes of clean, freshly cooked food, when served, are seen infested with worms of all kinds. When Brahmanas, receiving gifts, bless the day or the hour, or when holy men engage in silent recitation of mantras, the rush of countless heavy feet in flight can be heard, but the unnerving stampede can be ascribed to no one.

In the firmament, the constellations frequently appear to collide with the planets, but not a single Yadava can find the stellation of his birth in the sky. When the Panchajanya is blown in their houses, donkeys bray in discordant cacophony from every direction.

Seeing these signs that indicate the perverse course of Time, and seeing that the day of the new moon coincides with the thirteenth and fourteenth lunation, Krishna summons the Yadavas, and says to them, ‘The fourteenth lunation has been made the fifteenth by Rahu once more. It was even such a day as we saw during the time of the great war of the Bharatas. And it seems that it has appeared once more, now for our own destruction.’

Construing the meaning of these omens of Time, Krishna knows that the thirty-sixth year has turned, and that the words Gandhari uttered, burning with grief at the death of her sons and all her kinsmen, are about to come true. The sinister portents are similar to those Yudhishtira saw when the two armies, of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, were arrayed in the vyuhas of battle.

Seeing the omens repeat themselves, Krishna proceeds to catalyze the events that would render Gandhari’s terrible words prophetic. That Parantapa commands the Vrishnis to make a pilgrimage to a holy tirtha. His heralds and messengers proclaim that, at Krishna’s call, the Vrishnis should journey to the coast of the sea to undertake sacred ablutions in the waters of the ocean.”

CANTO 3

Vaisampayana said, "During those days of the terrible omens, the Vrishni women dream nightly that a black-skinned woman with gleaming white teeth runs through Dwaraka laughing loudly, enters their homes and snatches away the auspicious threads they wear on their wrists. The men dream that vultures, flying into their houses and holy fire-chambers, rend and gorge themselves on their very bodies. They see their ornaments and parasols, standards and armour all borne off by feral and terrible Rakshasas.

In the very sight of the Vrishnis, the Chakra of Krishna given him by Agni, made of iron with its hub of adamant, suddenly flies up into the sky and vanishes forever. Before the eyes of Krishna's sarathi Daruka, his chariot, bright as the sun and bearing all his weapons, is spirited away by the horses yoked to it, those four great steeds as swift as thought—Saibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Balahaka. Racing across the ocean waves with the splendid ratha behind them, they, too, vanish forever. The two great standards adorning the chariots of Krishna and Balarama, one bearing the emblem of Garuda, the Eagle, and the other that of a Palmyra, banners cherished as sacred by the two, are spirited away by Apsaras who, day and night, call out to the Vrishni and Andhaka heroes to undertake a tirtha-yatra to some place of sacred waters.

Hearing and seeing these and other omens, those foremost of men, the indomitable Vrishni and Andhaka Maharathas, yield to a desire to set out, taking their families with them, on a pilgrimage. They prepare feasts of diverse foods, with meat and wines of every kind. Finally, blazing with

splendour, beauty and fierce energy, the Vrishnis and the Andhakas set out from Dwaraka riding their chariots, horses and elephants, accompanied by their troops. With their wives, the Yadavas go forth to sacred Prabhasa, and begin living there, each in their assigned pavilion, all provided with a plenitude of food and drink.

Hearing that they are dwelling in Prabhasa by the sea, Uddhava, wisest of men, master of Yoga, arrives there to bid farewell to his beloved nephew Krishna. With folded hands, Krishna salutes his uncle; seeing the great bhakta bent on leaving the world, and knowing that the end of the Vrishnis is at hand, Krishna feels no inclination to deter him. The Vrishni and Andhaka Maharathas, whose hour has come, watch Uddhava set out on his mahaprayana, his great last journey, lighting the whole sky with his splendour.

The reckless Vrishnis mix wine with the food that had been cooked for high-souled Brahmanas, and feed it to apes and monkeys. Then, at holy Prabhasa, those heroes of fierce tejas begin their high revels, of which drinking without restraint forms the chief feature. The shore echoes with the blare of hundreds of horns and swarms with actors, singers and dancers plying their vocations. In the very sight of Krishna, mighty Rama begins to drink with Kritavarman, Satyaki and Gada, and Babhru joins them. Satyaki Yuyudhana, inebriated with wine, laughs derisively in Kritavarman's face and insults him in the midst of the assembly. He says mockingly, 'What kind of Kshatriya is he who will slay with weapons men locked in the embrace of sleep and, so, already akin to the dead? That is why, O son of Hridika, the Yadavas will never exonerate you for what you did to the Panchala princes.'

Pradyumna, best of Maharathas, approves Satyaki's taunts, showing his contempt for Kritavarman. Incensed, the son of Hridika, affronting Satyaki by pointing at him deliberately with his left hand, retorts, 'You call yourself a Kshatriya! How did you slay the most noble Bhurisravas, who had already lost his arm and had sat down in praya to leave his life?' Hearing this, Krishna himself gives way to anger and glowers at Kritavarman. Then Satyaki tells Krishna what Kritavarman had done to Satrajita in order to take the celebrated Syamantaka from him. Listening to the story, Satyabhama, consumed with rage and anguish, throws herself into her brother Krishna's lap and inflames his anger towards Kritavarman.

Satyaki springs up in rage and shouts, 'I swear by Dharma that I will send Kritavarman after the five sons of Draupadi, and Dhrishtadyumna and Sikhandin, all of whom that wretch murdered in their sleep, helped by Drona's son. O slender-waisted Satyabhama, Kritavarman's days and his fame have come to their end!' With these words Satyaki rushes at Kritavarman and, before Krishna's eyes, sloughs off his head with his sword. He then turns on others around him and begins to hack them down. Krishna runs to stop him, but too late, O Rajan; for, possessed by the perverse hour that was upon them, all the Bhojas and Andhakas there converge on Satyaki, son of Sini.

Knowing the nature of the hour that has arrived, Krishna restrains his own anger, even at the sight of all those Kshatriyas rushing at the lone Satyaki from every side. Compelled by fate, mad with drink, they begin to strike Yuyudhana with the very pots from which they had been eating. Seeing Satyaki thus assaulted, Rukmini's son Pradyumna rushes forward to rescue him as he single-handedly engages the Bhojas and the Andhakas The two mighty-armed Vrishni heroes fight bravely and strenuously, but the numbers ranged against them are overwhelming. Both of them are killed in the very sight of Krishna.

Yadunandana Krishna, witnessing the slaughter of his own son and the son of Sini, pulls up a handful of the eraka reeds growing nearby. In his hands that clutch of reeds turns instantly into a bolt of iron, infused with power of a thunderbolt. For those reeds have grown from the powder of the iron rod which Samba brought forth through the Rishis' curse. Cast like astras, those bolts pierce through what no other weapon can penetrate. With it, Krishna slays all who come before him.

The Andhakas and the Bhojas, the Saineyas and the Vrishnis, puppets in the inexorable grasp of Kaala, all pull up blades of those same eraka reeds, until everyone is armed with a vajra in his hands. They fall upon one another, inebriated with wine, and a melee of blood erupts on that sacred shore. Son kills sire, and sire kills son, O Bhaarata. The Kukuras and the Andhakas perish like insects flying into a blazing fire. Not for a moment do any of them consider pausing or fleeing the carnage.

Knowing that the hour of destruction had come, the mighty-armed Krishna stands there, watching, eraka reed in his hand. But on seeing Samba killed before him, along with Charudeshna, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, a terrible rage fills the Avatara; seeing Gada sprawled on the

ground, his anger flares up, and then in a moment he is upon his clan; Krishna, wielder of the Saranga, the Sudarshana and the Kaumodaki, slaughters all of them, the Vrishnis and the Andhakas and the rest.

Listen, O King, to what Babhru of mighty tejas, conqueror of hostile towns, and Daruka says then to Krishna, 'Holy One, you have killed multitudes in moments. Let us turn now to where Rama has gone, for we must find him.'"

CANTO 4

Vaisampayana said, "Daruka, Babhru and Krishna leave that blood-drenched shore and follow Balarama's trail. They soon discover him of infinite tejas, sitting upon the ground in a solitary place, his back against a tree, his gaze turned inward, plunged in dhyana. As soon as they see that Mahatman, Krishna tells Daruka, 'Go to the Kurus, and tell Arjuna that all the Yadavas are dead. Tell him how they perished through the Brahmanas' curse, and let Partha come here quickly.' In a daze, near-senseless at the carnage he has witnessed, Daruka mounts a chariot and rides towards Hastinapura. When he has gone, Krishna turns to Babhru and says, 'Hasten to the women, they need your protection. Let no bandits or thieves be tempted by the ornaments that they wear to do them some injury.'

Still stupefied by wine, but devastated by what he has seen, Babhru goes, after he has sat quietly beside his father for a while. He has not gone far when an eraka reed which has attached itself to a mallet in the hands of a hunter suddenly springs to life and flies at the last of the Yadavas, killing him on the spot. Krishna sees Babhru fall and, turning to his elder brother, says to Balarama, 'Rama, wait here for me. I must go and entrust our women's care into the hands of our kinsmen.'

Entering the city of Dwaravati, Krishna says to his father Vasudeva, 'Do you protect all the women of our house until Arjuna comes. Rama waits for me at the edge of the forest near the sea, and I will meet him today. Today I have beheld the annihilation of the Yadus, even as I saw the carnage of the Kurus thirty-six years ago. I cannot bear to even look at this city of the Yadavas without the Yadus beside me. I will go into the forest

and perform tapasya with Rama.' Krishna touches his father's feet with his head, and quickly leaves his presence. A shriek arises from the women and children of his house. Hearing them lament, Krishna returns to them and says, 'Arjuna will come here. That foremost among men will take your grief from you.'

Krishna returns to the forest, where he finds Balarama sitting in the same solitary place. He also sees that Rama has yoked himself in Yoga and, as Krishna watches, a mighty Naga of pristine white issues from Rama's mouth. Leaving the human body which he had inhabited so long, that Mahatman Naga of a thousand heads with shining red eyes, its form as great as a mountain, emerges, and slides its length into the ocean.

The Ocean himself, many celestial Nagas, and many sacred Rivers are all gathered there to receive the Lord Anantasesha with honour. Karkotaka and Vasuki, Takshaka and Prithusravas, Varuna and Kunjara, Misri and Sankha, Kumuda and Pundarika, and the high-souled Naga Dhritarashtra, Hrada and Kratha, Sitikantha of fierce energy, Chakramanda and Atishanda, that foremost of Nagas called Durmukha, Ambarisha and King Varuna himself, O Monarch, are all ranged to welcome him. They come forward to offer Rama arghya and padya, and with diverse rites all worship the mighty Snake of a thousand hoods, Lord of them all.

When his brother has left the world of men, Krishna of divine vision, who entirely knows the end of all things, wanders thoughtfully for some time in that lonely forest. Finally, he of infinite tejas sets himself down on the bare ground at the foot of a tree. Krishna has reflected on all that Gandhari foretold after the war, when she cursed him. He also remembers what Durvasa Muni had said when that Rishi smeared Krishna's body with the remnant of the payasa the sage had eaten in Krishna's home. The greatest of great souls, recalling the annihilation of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, and the previous slaughter of the Kurus, knows that the hour has come for him to leave the world.

He restrains his senses and withdraws his mind in dhyana. Omniscient as he is, and though he is the Paramatman, the Supreme God, Krishna now wishes for death—to dispel every possible doubt about human ends, in order to uphold the three worlds, and also to prove the prophecy of Atri's great son. Yoking himself into the highest Yoga, restraining his senses, mind and speech, Krishna lays himself down upon the earth.

There arrives in the vicinity a fierce hunter, Jara, out on his quest for deer. From some way off, and around the bole of the tree beneath which he has stretched himself, Jara glimpses Krishna lying motionless. Moved irresistibly by destiny, Jara mistakes him for a deer and looses his arrow, piercing Krishna's heel with that fatal shaft. Jara rushes forward to capture his prey and finds instead a lustrous man, clad in yellow robes, rapt in Yoga and endowed with countless arms. Filled with fear at the sin he thinks he has committed, he touches Krishna's feet in contrition. Krishna forgives and comforts his slayer and rises straight into the sky, taking his human body with him, filling the firmament with splendour.

When Krishna enters into Swarga, Indra and the twin Aswins, Rudra and the Adityas, the Vasus and Viswadevas, Munis and Siddhas and many among the greatest Gandharvas, with the Apsaras, come forward to receive him. Greeting and blessing them all, the illustrious Narayana of untold tejas, the Creator and Destroyer of all, that preceptor of Yoga, fills Heaven with his blinding splendour, O King, and, passing on, reaches his own realm.

Krishna then meets the Devas and Devarishis, the Charanas and chief Gandharvas, Siddhas and Sadhyas and Apsaras of unearthly beauty. All of them, bending low, worship the Devadeva, God of gods. The Devas all salute him, O Rajan, and the greatest Munis and Rishis adore him who is the Lord of all. The Gandharvas wait upon him, hymning his praises in their heavenly voices, and Indra also joyfully extols him."

CANTO 5

Vaisampayana said, “Meanwhile, Daruka arrives in Hastinapura and tells those mighty Maharathas, the sons of Pritha, how the Yadavas had slaughtered one another with iron vajras created from the Rishis’ curse. Hearing that the Vrishnis, along with the Bhojas and Andhakas and Kukuras have all been slain, the Pandavas are stricken with anguish.

Then Arjuna, Krishna’s beloved friend, bids his brothers farewell and sets out with Daruka for Dwaraka to meet his uncle—Kunti’s brother, Krishna’s father. He predicts that destruction will soon overtake the world. Arriving with Daruka at Dwaravati, ocean city of the Vrishnis, O puissant King, that Kshatriya hero sees the once-magnificent city looking like a widowed woman. The royal women of that city, who had until then the very Lord of the universe for their protector, were now defenceless. Sixteen thousand of them had been Krishna’s wives and, seeing Arjuna, they set up a loud lament. His eyes well with tears so that he can barely see those beautiful women who have lost the protection of Krishna as well as their sons.

The glorious river that was Dwaraka once had for its water the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, for its fish the noblest horses, for its rafts chariots, for its waves the sound of musical instruments and the rattle of rathas, and for its lakes mansions, palaces and public squares. Gemstones and every manner of jewel were its abundant shining moss. Its walls of adamant were the floating garlands of flowers and its streets and roads were the strong eddies running upon its surface. Rama and Krishna were its two mighty alligators.

Now that river, bereft of all its Vrishni heroes, seems to Arjuna to be the fierce Vaitarani, river of death.

Seeing magical Dwaravati shrivelled and dismal like a lotus flower in winter, and Krishna's many wives plunged in sorrow, Arjuna also breaks down, wailing aloud, and collapses onto the ground, O Rajan. Rukmini and Satyabhama, Satrajita's daughter, fling themselves down beside Dhananjaya, uttering loud cries of grief. Recovering themselves, they raise Arjuna and seat him on a golden throne. The women sit around the Mahatman Kshatriya and grieve with him. The son of Pandu, giving praise to Govinda, soothes and comforts Krishna's widows, then goes to meet his uncle Vasudeva."

CANTO 6

Vaisampayana said, "The Kuru prince sees the Mahatman Anakadundubhi lying on the ground, O Bhaarata, in a fever of grief at the death of his sons. More afflicted than him, Mahabaho Arjuna, his eyes bathed in tears, touches his uncle's feet. The mighty-armed Vasudeva wants to smell his nephew's head in affection, O slayer of foes, but cannot find the strength to do so. The old Mahabaho embraces Arjuna and weeps aloud for his dead sons, brothers, grandsons, daughter's sons and friends.

Vasudeva says, 'Look at me, O Arjuna—I am still alive who will never again see, those Vrishni heroes who subjugated all the kings of the Earth and the Daityas a hundred times. Ah, woe is me, that death is not mine! Through the rashness and wrath of those two heroes who were your dearest sishyas, and whom you held in high regard, O Partha, the Vrishnis have all been destroyed. Those two were considered Atirathas even amongst the greatest Vrishnis; I know how proudly you spoke of them both and how Krishna cherished them—those very Kshatriyas were the main cause for the destruction of the Vrishnis.'

I do not censure the son of Sini or the son of Hridika, O Arjuna. I do not find fault with Akrura or the son of Rukmini. For I have no doubt that the Rishis' curse was the sole cause of the destruction of the Vrishnis. But how could Krishna have remained oblivious of a peril as calamitous as that curse? Krishna, the Lord of the universe, the slayer of Madhu, of Kesin and Kamsa and Chaidya swollen with pride, of Ekalavya, the son of the Nishada king, of the Kalingas, the Magadhas and the Gandharas as well as the king of Kasi—Krishna, who subdued with his prowess so many mighty rulers

assembled in the midst of the desert, so many heroes from the East and the South and kings of the mountainous realms!

You, Narada, and the Munis all knew him to be the eternal and sinless Narayana, God of gods, of unfading glory. Alas, even as the all-powerful Vishnu himself, he remained a mute witness to the annihilation of his kinsmen! My son himself must have allowed—why, willed—all this to happen. He was the Lord of the universe. Alas, he did not want to nullify the curse of either Gandhari or the sages, Parantapa, as he so easily could have done!

Before your eyes, Arjuna, Krishna with his tejas revived your stillborn grandson, Parikshit, whom Aswatthama killed with the Brahmasirsa in his mother's womb. Yet your friend chose not to save his own kinsmen. Seeing his sons and grandsons, brothers and friends, all lying dead, he said to me, O chief of Bharata's race, "The end of our vamsa has at last come. Arjuna will come to Dwaravati. Tell him what has happened. I have no doubt that as soon as he hears of the destruction of the Yadus, that hero of great tejas will come to our city. For know, O my father, that I am Arjuna and Arjuna is me. You must do as he says. The son of Pandu will do what is best for our women and children. He will perform your funeral rites. Once Arjuna leaves Dwaravati, she with her walls and edifices will be swallowed by the ocean. As for myself, I will take myself to some sacred place, and there bide my own final hour, with Rama beside me, keeping the strictest vows."

With these words, Hrishikesa of inconceivable prowess left me with the women and children, and went away to some place of which I know nothing. Thinking of the death of those two brothers of yours, Krishna and Rama, and of the terrible end of all my kinsmen, I cannot eat any more and am wasting away with grief. Arjuna, I shall not continue living. It is our good fortune that you and I have met this final time. O Kaunteya, do you accomplish all that Krishna has asked you to. This kingdom, with all these women, and all its wealth, is yours now, O son of Pritha. As for myself, as I have told you, Parantapa, I will certainly forsake my life-breaths, dear as they are.'"

CANTO 7

Vaisampayana said, "That scorcher of foes, Bibhatsu, his own heart as stricken as Vasudeva's, says to his mother's brother, 'O Matulan, I cannot bear to look at this very Earth when she is bereft of Krishna and my other kinsmen. Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, Sahadeva, Nakula and Yagnaseni are all of the same mind. The time has come for the departure of our king also, as it is for the rest of us to leave this world. You are among the most profound knowers of the ways and courses of time. However, Parantapa, I will first convey all the women, the children and aged among the Vrishnis to safety in Indraprastha.'

Arjuna then tells Daruka, 'I must see the main officers of the Vrishni heroes at once.' Grieving for the dead Yadava Maharathas, Arjuna enters the unearthly Sudharma, the great hall of the Yadavas, where they all once sat in such grandeur. When he has taken his place in the great court, the people, including the Brahmanas, and all the ministers of state come and surround him, more dead than alive from sorrow.

Then Partha, more stricken than they are, says to them, fittingly for the occasion, 'I will take with me all of you Vrishnis and Andhakas who remain. The sea will soon engulf this city, and submerge her. Make ready all your chariots and set all your wealth in them. This grandson of Krishna, young Vajra, shall be your king at Sakraprastha. On the seventh day from this, we will set out at sunrise. Make your preparations without delay.' Hearing Pritha's worthy son, all of them hasten their preparations, intent on securing their safety. Arjuna passes that night in Krishna's mansion, alone, overwhelmed with harrowing, benumbing pain.

At the hour of daybreak, Vasudeva of great tejas quits his body through Yoga and attains to the highest goal. Loud lamentation echoes throughout his palace, the sound of women wailing. With hair dishevelled, stripped of their ornaments and flower garlands, they weep aloud, beating their breasts. Those foremost of women, Devaki and Bhadra, Rohini and Madira, throw themselves across the lifeless body of their dead lord. Arjuna directs that Vasudeva's body be carried out on a golden litter borne on the shoulders of his serving men. The people of Dwaraka and those of the provinces follow their beloved ruler. At the head of Vasudeva's funeral procession is carried the white parasol of sovereignty which had been held over him when he concluded his Aswamedha yagna, as well as the sacred fires he had daily worshipped, along with the priests who had once attended them.

The body is followed by his wives, splendidly attired with their royal ornaments, surrounded by their daughters-in-law and thousands of serving women. The last rites are performed in a place often frequented by Vasudeva while he lived. The four wives of Vasudeva, that heroic son of Sura, ascend his funeral pyre and are consumed with the body of their lord. All of them attain to those realms of felicity he has won through his life and his worship. The son of Pandu takes the place of Vasudeva's sons and sets alight the pyre of his uncle and his four wives, heaped with a variety of fragrant wood and perfumed with diverse scented oils. As the fire blazes up with a terrific crackling, the resounding chant of the Samans can be heard even above the wailing of the crowd gathered to witness the cremation. When the pyre has burned down, the young boys of the Vrishni and Andhaka vamsas, led by Vajra and accompanied by the women of the royal household, offer tarpana, oblations of water, to the departed Mahatman who had been the father of the Avatara in this world.

After scrupulously performing the solemn last rites for Vasudeva, O Lord of the Bharatas, Arjuna makes his melancholy way to the place of the Vrishni slaughter. Seeing all around him the bodies lying in the savage attitudes of violent death, the Kuru prince is further convulsed with anguish. However, mastering himself, he does what is required of him; he gathers the ghastly and bloody remains, has them also cremated and orders the last rites to be properly performed for all the slain. The rites are performed and tarpana offered in order of seniority for those heroes slain by thunderbolts that sprang from the eraka reeds by the curse of the Rishis.

At last, Arjuna seeks out the mortal remains of Rama and Krishna, and has these also cremated by men skilled at the task. Thus, after duly and faultlessly performing the sraddha rites for the dead Yadavas, Arjuna mounts his chariot and sets out for Indraprastha on the seventh day after his arrival.

The widows of the Vrishni heroes, wailing aloud, follow the high-souled son of Pandu in carriages and palanquins drawn by bullocks, mules and camels. It is a cavalcade of bleakness and grief. The servants of the Vrishnis, their horsemen and their chariot-mounted guards, too, form part of the procession. At Arjuna's command, all the people of Dwaraka, and of the entire Anarta country, go with that stricken train, now comprising women, children and the aged, devoid of Kshatriya heroes.

Warriors who fought from the backs of elephants like grey hillocks lumber along with common foot soldiers and reserves. The children of the Andhaka and the Vrishni races follow Arjuna in silence. The Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and wealthy Sudras all go forth, keeping before them the sixteen thousand women who had formed Krishna's harem, and Vajra, the grandson of the Avatara who has left both them and the world. The widows of the other heroes of the Bhoja, the Vrishni, and the Andhaka vamsas, lordless now, set out with Arjuna, looking in numbers like a veritable ocean. Pritha's son, that greatest of Maharathas, conqueror of hostile cities, escorts this oceanic crowd of Yadavas, still abounding in wealth.

No sooner have all Dwaraka's people left her walls and set foot on the mainland, than the sea, fathomless home of sharks and crocodiles, swells up in an inexorable tide and floods peerless Dwaraka, with all its vast wealth that her people could not carry away with them. The spectacle spurs the people of Dwaravati to lengthen their stride in fear, crying, 'Ah, ever mysterious is the course of fate!'

Having left Dwaraka, and seen her submerge and vanish forever, Arjuna makes his way by slow marches, frequently stopping in pleasant woods and hills and by refreshing streams so that the Vrishni women can rest. Arriving finally in the country of the five rivers, the mighty Dhananjaya sets up a rich encampment in the midst of a land that abounds with corn and with kine and other animals.

Watching the Yadava party arrive are bands of brigands, the Abhiras, who lurk in the surrounding forest. The bandits do not fail to notice that the

women, children and old ones have only Arjuna to protect them, and are seized by temptation. The Abhiras gather in secret conclave in the darkness of the forest and confer, ‘There is just one bowman with them, Arjuna. The other Vrishni soldiers are weaklings and tired, besides. The rest are all old men, women and children.’ As if moved by fate, thousands of these vile men, armed with rough clubs and cudgels, descend in a horde upon the Vrishni concourse. They attack without warning, with murder in their hearts and terrifying leonine roars. Arjuna, who is at one end of the procession, turns swiftly to where the feral Abhiras have attacked the cavalcade.

Smiling, the mighty-armed Kshatriya roars at the brigands, ‘Sinful wretches, forbear if you love your lives, or you will rue this day when I shred your bodies with my arrows.’ Despite his repeated warnings, the wild ones pay him no heed and instead fly at him. Arjuna attempts to string his celestial and indestructible bow, but finds he hardly has the strength to do so. By the time he manages to string Gandiva, the onslaught of the bandits has become furious.

Arjuna then summons his Devastras but they will not come to him. Large as the concourse is, the Abhiras are upon them from every side. Arjuna is deeply shamed at being reduced to a helpless spectator as the Vrishni foot soldiers, elephant-warriors, and rathikas fail to stop the robbers from carrying away the women. Arjuna does his valiant best, but in his very sight, and before the other warriors, many of the royal and most beautiful Vrishni women are roughly dragged away by the coarse felons; others submit to going with the violent raiders.

Supported by the servants of the Vrishnis, Arjuna showers arrows from the Gandiva on the Abhiras and kills many of them. However, all too quickly, his once-inexhaustible quivers are empty. The Kshatriya who was once beyond ordinary human confines now finds himself firmly in the clasp of a dark fate. Despair seizes great Arjuna, and Indra’s son begins to flail wildly at the bandits with his bow.

Those Mlecchas, O Janamejaya, finally retreat, but taking with them many of the most beautiful and distinguished of the Vrishni and Andhaka women. All that Arjuna can do is accept it as the work of destiny. He breathes heavy sighs, brooding on how his astras would no longer appear at his bidding, how the Gandiva would hardly obey him, how his famed twin quivers suddenly fell empty, on the weakness that laid hold of him. At last

he ceases all his efforts, admitting to himself that he no longer owned the prowess he once had.

Continuing his journey with those of the Vrishni women that remain, and the wealth that the brigands had failed to plunder, Arjuna arrives in Kurujangala, the land of the Kurus. He establishes in different parts of the country those who remain of the Vrishnis. He establishes Kritavarman's son in the city called Marttikavat, with the women that remain of the Bhoja king. Escorting the rest, with their children and old men and women, the son of Pandu establishes in the city of Indraprastha those who are bereft of all Kshatriya heroes of their own.

Arjuna brings Satyaki's beloved son, the righteous Yuyutsu, with a company of old men and children and women to the banks of the Saraswati and settles them there. The rule of Indraprastha is given to Vajra. The widows of Akrura state their intention of retiring into the forest. Vajra begs of them to desist, but they do not listen to him.

Rukmini, the Princess of Gandhara, Saibya, Haimavati and Queen Jambavati choose to immolate themselves in sati. Satyabhama and Krishna's other wives go into the forest, O King, resolved to set themselves to tapasya. They begin to live on fruits and roots and pass their time in the contemplation of Hari. Going beyond the Himavat, they live in the sacred place called Kalpa.

The men who followed Arjuna from Dwaravati are divided into groups, and bestowed upon Vajra. Having done, his best in the circumstances, Arjuna, his eyes ever bathed in tears, takes himself to the asrama of Krishna Dwaipayana, his grandsire Vyasa. There he sees the Island-born Rishi seated at his ease."

CANTO 8

Vaisampayana said, “As Arjuna enters the asrama of the Rishi of truth, he sees the son of Satyavati seated in a secluded spot. Approaching Vyasa of lofty vratas, knower of dharma, Arjuna declares himself, ‘I am Arjuna,’ and then awaits his pleasure. Satyavati’s son, endued with mighty tapasya and of tranquil soul, welcomes him and says, ‘Please sit down.’

He notices how Partha is beside himself with grief, how his chest heaves with sighs. Vyasa asks him, ‘Have you been sprinkled with water from any person’s nails or hair, or the end of someone’s cloth, or from the mouth of a jar? Have you had improper sexual congress with any woman at the time of her flow? Have you killed a Brahmana? Have you been vanquished in battle? You look like one shorn of all prosperity. I do not know that you have ever been defeated in battle by anyone. Why then, O Bharatottama, this dejected aspect? I ask you to tell me why you are so direly afflicted, if indeed there is no harm in your doing so.’

Arjuna answers, ‘Krishna, he whose complexion was like a newly risen cloud, whose eyes were like a pair of large lotus-petals, has with his brother Rama cast off his body and ascended to Swarga. At Prabhasa, the very race of Vrishnis has perished through thunderbolts that sprang from eraka reeds through the curse of some great Brahmanas. Dreadful has that carnage been, and not a single hero escaped it.

The Kshatriyas of the Bhoja, the Andhaka and the Vrishni vamsas, O Brahmana, all endowed with noble souls, great might and leonine pride, have slaughtered one another in battle. They who had arms like maces of

iron, they who could bear the direst strokes of the heaviest clubs and the sharpest arrows, they have all been slain with blades of eraka grass. Ah, Mahamuni, see the perverse course of Time. Full five hundred thousand mighty-armed, invincible warriors have met with death in that encounter. I have no peace, thinking constantly of that carnage of the Yadava warriors of immeasurable tejas, and the death of the illustrious Krishna.

The death of the wielder of Saranga is as incomprehensible to me as the drying up of the ocean, the dislocation of a mountain, the collapse of heaven's vault, or of cooling through fire. Having lost the Vrishni heroes, I do not wish to remain in this world. Yet that is not all. Something further has transpired, even more frightful and painful than this, O you who own the greatest wealth, tapasya. I think ceaselessly of that, and my heart is breaking.

In my very sight, O Tapasvin, thousands of noble Vrishni women were carried away by the Abhiras of the land of the five waters who assailed us. When I took up my bow, I found myself unequal to even stringing it. The strength that was always in my arms vanished clean away. O great Rishi, I summoned my devastras but not one would come to me! And then, my own arrows were depleted and I had not a single shaft left.

Ah, never again will I see that Govinda of immeasurable soul, of four arms, wielding the Sankha, the Chakra and the Gada, clad in yellow robes, his dark complexion and his eyes like lotus-petals. Bereft of my Govinda, what have I to live for, dragging my life on in sorrow? Alas, he who once graced my chariot-head, my reins in his divine hands, his godly form resplendent and mighty before me, consuming all our enemies as we coursed along. Never again will I see him who, through his mystic tejas, consumed all the hostile troops arrayed against us, leaving me to merely strike them down with arrows from the Gandiva. My head spins, O Narottama, I am pierced by grief, and peace has fled far from me.

I do not have the mettle to live on without my heroic Janardana. As soon as I heard that Vishnu had left the Earth, my eyes grew dim and all things disappeared from my sight into a haze. Greatest of great Rishis, I beg you help me! Tell me what is good for me now, for I am now a wanderer with an empty heart, who has lost his kinsmen and his dearest possession.'

Vyasa says, 'The Maharathas, the Vrishni and the Andhaka vamsas, were all consumed by the Brahmanas' curse and have found felicity. O Kurusottama, great Arjuna, it does not become you to grieve at their death.

That which has happened was ordained long ago; it was the destiny of those great Kshatriyas, and it could not have been otherwise. Krishna suffered it to happen, although he could easily have foiled it. Krishna could alter the very course of the universe with all its mobile and unmoving creatures. What then of a curse, even of the greatest Brahmanas?

He who once sat at your chariot head, four-armed and with his discus and mace, through his love for you, was none other the ancient Rishi Narayana. That Mahatman of the large eyes, having lightened the burden of the Earth, cast off his body and has returned to his realm on high. Through you also, O Purushottama, with Bhima to help you, and the twins, has the great task of the gods been accomplished. Best of the Kurus, I regard you and your brothers as crowned with the highest success, for you have indeed accomplished the great purpose of your lives. The time has come for you to leave this world; and this is the course, O mighty one, that is best for you now.

Understanding and prowess and foresight, O Bhaarata, arise when the days of prosperity have not been exhausted and disappear when the hour of adversity comes. Time the root cause, indeed, the seed of the universe, Dhananjaya. It is Time, again, that withdraws everything at its pleasure. Through Time one gains might and through Time loses it. Through Time one becomes a master and rules others, then becomes a servant, at the behest of others.

Your weapons, having achieved success, have departed to the place they came from. They will once again come into your hands when it is time for them to return. And now, truly, the stage has come, O Bhaarata, for all of you to attain to the highest goal. That is what I believe will be best for you all now, O Bhaarata.'

Having heard the words of Tejasvin Vyasa, Partha takes his leave of him and returns to the city named after the elephant. Entering it, the Kshatriya goes to Yudhishtira and tells him whatever transpired in Dwaraka and with the Vrishnis."

The end of Mausala Parva

BOOK 17
Mahaprasthanika Parva

CANTO 1

AUM. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Janamejaya said, "Hearing Arjuna's account of how the Vrishni and the Andhaka vamsa perished through thunderbolts formed of eraka reeds, and of Krishna's ascension to heaven, what do the Pandavas do?"

Vaisampayana said, "Hearing the particulars of the great slaughter of the Vrishnis, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja sets his heart on leaving the world. He says to Arjuna, 'O wise one, it is Time that cooks every creature in his cauldron. All we have experienced and witnessed has been because of being bound by the meshes of Kaala. You must also understand this.' Arjuna, endorsing his wise brother's view, only cries, 'Ah, Time! Kaala!' Seeing Arjuna's resolution, Bhimasena and the twins also whole-heartedly concur. The Pandavas, resolute on retiring from the world in quest of punya, fetch Yuyutsu before them. Yudhishtira makes the Kuru kingdom over to the son of Dhritarashtra by his Vaisya wife.

Installing on the throne your father Parikshit, in whose name the faithful Yuyutsu would rule until the young king was of age, the eldest Pandava, full of sorrow, says to Subhadra, 'This son of your son will be the king of the Kurus. The survivor of the Yadus, Krishna's grandson Vajra, has also been made a king. Parikshit will rule in Hastinapura and the Yadava prince will rule in Indraprastha. You must protect both of them equally, and never set your heart on the path of adharma.'

Saying this, Yudhishtira the Just, along with his brothers offers solemn tarpana to Krishna of the fathomless soul, as well as to Kunti's brother

Vasudeva, to Rama and all the others. He duly performs the sraddhas of all his departed kinsmen. The king holds a feast to honour the memory of Hari, and naming him repeatedly, plies with every manner of delicacy the Island-born Vyasa, Narada Rishi, Markandeya possessed of the wealth of great tapasya and Yajnavalkya of Bharadvaja's vamsa.

In honour of Krishna, he also gives away to the Dvijottamas many priceless jewels and gemstones, robes and rich garments, villages, horses and chariots, and female slaves by the multitude. He calls together the people of Hastinapura, appoints the wise Kripa to be the Acharya and Guru to Parikshit, and gives the young prince into his care to be his sishya. When this is formally done, Yudhishtira summons all his subjects, the people of Hastinapura as well as those from the provinces, and tells them that he and his brothers intend to retire from the world.

Hearing this, panic and anxiety sweep through the great crowd. "This should never be!" they remonstrate to him. Yudhishtira, profound knower of the changing ways of time, pays their protests no heed and instead persuades them to accept what he has decided is the best and true course for his brothers and himself.

Yudhishtira and his brothers prepare in earnest to achieve the end upon which they have set their hearts: to leave the world. Dharmaputra Yudhishtira casts off his royal ornaments and robes, and puts on austere valkala, rough cloth worn from tree-bark. Bhima, Arjuna and the twins and Draupadi also discard their finery, O King, to don the garb of ascetics. They perform the ordained rituals of initiation and those Purushottamas then quench in water the sacred Agnis they have worshipped daily all these years.

When the royal women of the Kuru household and the people of the city see the Pandavas and Draupadi clad in valkala and smeared with ashes, they begin to weep aloud. They are reminded of another day, many years ago, when the five brothers, and Panchali making a sixth, all roughly clad, left Hastinapura after they lost everything at the game of dice.

However, the sons of Pandu themselves are full of anticipation. No other course is possible for them after the extinction of the Yadavas, and when Yudhishtira has set his heart upon relinquishing the worldly life. The five brothers, with Draupadi, set out on their final journey. As they are leaving, a dog joins their small company, forming its seventh member. And so does Yudhishtira Dharmaraja the Magnificent depart the city of the

elephant, at the head of a party of seven. The people and the women of the royal household follow them for some distance. But none venture again to persuade the king to change his mind. Finally, the people of Hastinapura and Anarta turn back.

Kripa and some others of importance stand around Yuyutsu, who will now rule. Ulupi, the daughter of the Naga king, returns to her home in the waters of the Ganga, O Kurusottama, and the princess Chitrangada too sets out for her home, the capital of Manipura. The grandmothers and aunts of Parikshit centre themselves around him.

The Pandava Mahatman and their queen Panchali of great fame observe the prescribed fast and set out with their faces towards the east. Setting themselves on the path of Yoga, those noblest ones traverse numerous countries, rivers and seas, resolved to observe the dharma of vairagya, renunciation. Yudhishtira always walks at the head of the company. Behind him walks Bhima; after Bhima, Arjuna; then come the twins in order of birth; and behind them, O Janamejaya Bharatashreshta, comes Draupadi, first among all women, beautiful with her dark skin and eyes like lotus-petals. Following the Pandava company is the dog.

Walking on, those heroes reach the vicinity of the sea of red waters. Dhananjaya has not yet abandoned his celestial bow, the Gandiva, O king, nor his twin inexhaustible quivers, for he is still compelled by the attachment men have for the possessions they value most.

There on the shore of the western ocean, the Pandavas behold Agni Deva, the God of Fire, barring their way like a hill. Standing before them in his embodied form, the God of seven flames addresses the sons of Pandu: 'Heroic sons of Pandu, know me to be the God of Fire. Yudhishtira Mahabaho, O Bhimasena Parantapa, O Arjuna, and you indomitable twins, hear me! Kurusottamas, with the might of Arjuna and of Narayana himself, I am the god who consumed the Khandava vana. Phalguna can go into the forest only after giving up the noble Gandiva. He no longer has any need for it. The precious Chakra belonging to Krishna Mahatman has disappeared from the world. When the time comes again, it will return into his hands. This Gandiva, greatest of bows, I obtained from Varuna for Partha. Now let him make it over to Varuna himself.'

All Arjuna's brothers urge him to do as the Fire God says. Dhananjaya casts into the waves both the bow and the two inexhaustible quivers and Agni Deva, his task accomplished, vanishes from before their eyes.

Now the sons of Pandu turn their faces to the south and journey in that direction. Along the coast of the salt sea, those princes of the Bhaarata vamsa travel to the south-west, arriving where the wondrous and magnificent city of Dwaravati once stood, now vanished into the ocean deeps. Turning then to the north, those heroes continue their final yatra. Observing Yoga all the while, they intend to make a pilgrimage across the face of the Earth."

CANTO 2

Vaisampayana said, “Immersed in Yoga, their senses restrained, the sons of Pandu journey north until they see majestic Himavat. Crossing the sacred range, they see a vast desert of sand stretch out before them and, beyond, the fabled peak Meru, the foremost mountain of the world.

Rapt in dhyana, they begin to climb the mountain. Suddenly, Draupadi falls away from Yoga, and drops down dead. Bhimasena of matchless strength turns to his brother Yudhishtira Dharmatma in anguish and demands, ‘O Parantapa, never during her life did this princess sin in any way. Tell us why she has now fallen to her death!’

Yudhishtira says, ‘O best of men, though we were all equally her husbands, she always harboured in her heart a partiality for Arjuna. What has happened to her today is the fruit of that bias.’ And without a backward glance Yudhishtira, that taintless man of dharma, continues climbing, his being indrawn, focused in dhyana.

When they have climbed a little further, Sahadeva of great intelligence abruptly falls down, all life extinct. Bhima asks the king, in anguish, ‘Our brother Sahadeva served us all with the utmost humility. Ah, why has Madravati’s son fallen to his death?’ Yudhishtira says, ‘He always felt that none was his equal in intelligence and wisdom. It is for that fault that this Kshatriya has fallen.’ Saying no more, and never so much as glancing back to where his younger brother had fallen, Yudhishtira continues to climb, his surviving brothers and the dog following.

Then the resplendent Nakula, whose love for his kin is immense, himself falls away from dhyana and collapses, lifeless. Bhima turns again to Yudhishtira in despair and cries, ‘Our Nakula was a man of immaculate dharma. He always obeyed us without a murmur or question. No man alive was as handsome as he. And now he has also fallen by the way and is dead. Why, Yudhishtira?’

Yudhishtira says calmly, ‘Nakula was indeed of righteous soul and the best among all men of intelligence. Yet he, too, had a grave flaw, for he believed he was superior to all in physical beauty. It is for his vanity that Nakula has fallen to his death. Know this well, Vrikodara. Whatever has been ordained for a man, O Kshatriya, that he must inexorably endure.’And Yudhishtira continues his climb.

Next falls Pandu’s son Swetavahana, Arjuna of the white steeds, his heart giving way completely to grief. When that invincible Parantapa, foremost of men, with the energy of Sakra, is on the point on death, Bhima asks Yudhishtira, ‘I do not remember a single lie ever having been spoken by this Mahatman. Not even in jest did he ever utter a falsehood. What, then, is the evil whose consequence this is?’

Yudhishtira replies, ‘Arjuna boasted that he would consume all our enemies in a single day but he did not accomplish what he said. He was proud of his archery and disdained all other masters of the bow. Hence he has fallen. One who wishes for felicity should not indulge in such hubris.’

Saying this, Yudhishtira continues to climb the mountain. All at once the mighty Bhima too falls down. As he feels life ebbing away, he asks Yudhishtira the Just, ‘O my king, look, I, who was ever your darling, have fallen too. Tell me if you know why,’ Yudhishtira says, ‘You frequently boasted of your strength, and you were gluttonous, never attending to others around you. It is for that, O Bhima, that you have fallen.’

Saying no more, Yudhishtira walks on without looking back. Now he has only one companion, the dog I have often mentioned to you, still following at his heels.”

CANTO 3

Vaisampayana said, "When Yudhishtira has gone a little further, earth and sky suddenly resound with a loud noise. Indra descends from his vimana and invites Yudhishtira to climb into it. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja says to the god of a thousand eyes, 'My brothers have all fallen on the way here. They must go with me. Without them I do not wish to enter Swargaloka, O Lord of all the Devas. The delicate Panchali, who deserves ever comfort, should go with us, O Purandara. It is fitting for you to allow this.'

Indra says, 'You will see your brothers in Devaloka, for they have got there before you. Verily, you shall see all of them there, with Draupadi. Do not yield to grief, O King of the Bharatas. Having cast off their human bodies, they have gone to my realm. As for you, it has been ordained that for your taintless dharma you will enter Swarga in your own body.'

Yudhishtira says, 'O Lord of Past and Present, this dog is devoted to me. He must come with me, for my heart is full of tenderness for him.' Indra replies, 'You have won today the felicity of Swarga, O King—immortality and a condition equal to mine, prosperity extending in all directions, and lofty success. Leave behind this dog; there will be no cruelty in that, I assure you.' Yudhishtira says, 'O you of a thousand eyes, of righteous conduct, it is difficult for me to abandon dharma. I do not desire that prosperity for which I must forsake one devoted to me.' Indra says, 'There is no place in Swarga for people with dogs, and the Krodhavasas take away all the punya of such people. Reflect on this, O Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and leave the animal. There is no cruelty in that.'

Yudhishtira says, 'It has been said that it is infinitely sinful to abandon one who is devoted—equal to the sin of killing a Brahmana. Hence, O great Indra, I shall not abandon this dog today, certainly not from wanting for myself the happiness of Swarga. I have always sworn never to forsake anyone who is devoted to me, who seeks my protection from destitution, anyone in distress, or who is frightened, or weak and helpless, anyone who comes to me to save his life, or, indeed anyone who comes to me for refuge. And I will never break this vow as long as I live.'

Indra says, 'Whatever gifts are made, or sacrifices spread out, or libations poured on the sacred fire, if they are so much as seen by a dog, are taken by the Krodhavasas. It is imperative for you, therefore, to abandon this dog. By doing so you will attain Devaloka, the realm of the gods. Having abandoned your brothers and Panchali, O Kshatriya, you have acquired a realm of great felicity through your own deeds. Why are you so confused? You have renounced everything; why not, then, this dog?'

Yudhishtira says, 'It is well known in all the worlds that with the dead there is neither friendship nor enmity. When my brothers and Draupadi died, I could not revive them. Hence it was that I abandoned them. I never forsook them as long as they were alive. To affright one that has sought protection, to kill a woman, to steal what belongs to a Brahmana, and to injure a friend—each of these four, O Sakra, I believe to be equal to forsaking one that is devoted.'

At these words of Yudhishtira the Just, the dog stands transformed and refulgent: it is Dharma Deva himself. The God of Truth says to him in sweet tones of approval, 'You are well-born indeed, O King of kings, and truly possess the intelligence and uprightness of Pandu. You have compassion for all creatures, O Bhaarata, of which this is a bright example. Once I tested you in Dwaita vana, O son, beside a lake where your brothers of great prowess seemed to lie dead before you. When I offered to revive one of your brothers, you passed over Bhima and Arjuna and asked for Nakula's life instead, saying than if he lived at least one of Madri's sons would be preserved.

But today you have surpassed yourself, Yudhishtira; you have renounced the chariot of the celestials and Swarga itself for the sake of a devoted dog! O king, there is no one in Heaven that is your equal. Hence, O Bhaarata, all the realms of inexhaustible felicity will be yours. You have

won them, O Kurusottama, and beyond all doubt yours will be a most divine and transcendent reward.'

Dharma and Indra, the Maruts, and the Aswins, other deities and the Devarishis now make Yudhishtira climb into Indra's vimana. The Gods and other divine ones can go anywhere in the three realms at will in their own vimanas. Yudhishtira, perpetuator of Kuru's race, flies to Devaloka in Indra's chariot in a blaze of splendour.

Now Narada, most eloquent of all Devarishis, of fathomless tapasya, knower of all the worlds, says in that gathering of gods in Swarga, 'Yudhishtira has surpassed all the Rajarishis of old who are here in Devaloka, even the greatest of them, by his conduct and achievement. He has covered the worlds with his fame and splendour and by his wealth of immaculate dharma, and that is how he alone has attained to Swarga in his human body. None else besides this son of Pandu has ever achieved this.'

Hearing Narada's praise, the Dharmatma salutes all the Devas and Rajarishis and says simply, 'Wherever my brothers are, happy or miserable, I have but one wish, my lords, to go straight to them. I have no desire to go anywhere else, O great ones.'

Indra, king of the Devas, says to Yudhishtira, 'Do you, O King of kings, live in this blissful place, won through your peerless dharma and noble deeds. Why do you still cherish human affections? You have attained to a great reward, the like of which no other man ever has. Your brothers, O delighter of the Kurus, have also won regions of felicity. Yet, human affections and attachments still trammel you. This is Swarga. Behold these celestial Rishis and Siddhas who have attained to the world of the Devas.'

Wise Yudhishtira answers the Deva king, saying again, 'O Conqueror of Daityas, I do not aspire to dwell anywhere separated from my brothers. I want to go where they have gone. I want to go to where that best of women has gone, my statuesque dark Draupadi of great wisdom and virtue.'"

The end of Mahaprasthanika Parva

BOOK 18
Swargarohanika Parva

CANTO 1

AUM. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya! Janamejaya said, “Having reached Swarga, what realms did my grandsires, the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritarashtra, attain? I am eager to hear this. You know all things, having been taught by the great Rishi Vyasa of marvellous accomplishments.”

Vaisampayana said, “Listen to what your grandsires, Yudhishtira and others, did after attaining the realm of the Gods. Arriving in Devaloka, in Indra’s resplendent sabha, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja sees, seated upon a majestic throne, Duryodhana, wearing all the signs of glory belonging to Kshatriya heroes, blazing with effulgence like the sun, amidst many deities of lustrous splendour and Sadhyas of righteous deeds.

Seeing Duryodhana thus glorified, rage fills Yudhishtira and he turns his face away, saying, ‘I have no wish to share the realms of felicity with Duryodhana, stained as he was by greed and bereft of foresight. It was on his account that friends and kinsmen from across the world were slaughtered by us, upon whom he inflicted untold suffering in the wilderness. It was because of him that our wife, the princess of Panchala, Draupadi of unsullied aspect, was dragged into the midst of the Kuru sabha before all our elders. Devas, I have no wish to even look at Suyodhana. I want to go where my brothers are.’

Narada, smiling, said to him, ‘It should not be thus, O King of kings. In Swargaloka, all enmities cease. O Mahabaho Yudhishtira, do not speak so about King Duryodhana. Listen to me. Here sits your cousin Suyodhana. He

is worshipped with the gods by all those men of dharma and the greatest kings of yore who are now denizens of Heaven. By having his body poured as a libation into the fire of war, he has attained the end found by Kshatriyas who die in battle. It is true that you and your brothers, veritable gods on earth, were ceaselessly persecuted by him. Yet, through his observance of Kshatriya dharma, he has attained this divine realm. This Bhumipala was never once afraid during the dreadful war fraught with terror.

My son, you should not harbour in your heart the trials and griefs you endured on account of the game of dice. It does not become you to remember the afflictions of Draupadi; it does not become you to recall the other woes that were yours in consequence of what your kinsmen did, either in the deep forest or in battle. Go and meet Suyodhana in accord with the canons of courtesy. This is Swarga, O Lord of men. There can be no enmities here.'

Though Narada has spoken thus to him, Yudhishtira, Mahabuddhi, still demands to know, 'If these celestial regions be reserved for Duryodhana, the sinner who destroyed his friends and laid waste the world, with all her horses and elephants and men, the devil who burned us with wrath and so turned our hearts to horrible revenge, I want to see the place which my brothers have attained, those great souls of firm vratas, who always kept their word, who were truthful and honest and distinguished for their valour.

Tell me where I can find Karna, noblest of men, the son of Kunti, whom no one could vanquish in battle, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, the sons of Dhrishtadyumna and all the other Kshatriyas who died while observing Kshatriya dharma. Where are those Lords of Earth, O Brahmana? I do not see them here, O Narada. I want to see Virata and Drupada and the other great Kshatriyas led by Dhrishtaketu. I want to see the Panchala prince Sikhandi, the sons of Draupadi, and Abhimanyu, the irresistible warrior.'"

CANTO 2

"Yudhishtira says, 'You gods, I see neither Radha's son of immeasurable prowess here, nor my other great brothers, nor Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, those Maharathas who also poured their bodies as libations on the fire of battle, those kings and princes who met with death for my sake in war. Where are those tameless and fierce heroes who were like tigers in strength? Have those best of men acquired this divine world? Only if they have, O Devas, shall I dwell here with them. If those kings among men have not attained this auspicious and eternal realm, then know, you Gods, that without those brothers, friends and kinsmen of mine, I will not remain here.

While I performed the water rites after the war, I heard my mother's bidding, "Do you offer tarpana to Karna, for he was your brother." Ever since I heard those words, grief consumes me—ah, it burns my very soul. It pierces me incessantly that when I noticed how Karna's feet were so like the feet of Kunti, I did not immediately understand who he was and surrender myself to his command, my older brother of immeasurable soul, that Parantapa without equal. If Karna and we had stood together, not even the hosts of Indra could have vanquished us in battle. Wherever that son of Surya is, I want to see him! Alas, that I did not know he was our brother and had Arjuna kill him, for it was him I feared above every other enemy on the field.

And my Bhima, of terrible prowess, dearer to me than my life-breaths, Arjuna, too, who was like Indra himself, the twins who resembled Yama in person on the field—I must see them all. I yearn to see our queen, the

Princess of Panchala, who was always as righteous as she was beautiful above every other woman. I have no wish to remain here, for I tell you truly, O greatest of gods, what is any Swarga to me if I am without my brothers? Why, this for me is no heaven at all.'

The lustrous Devas say, 'If you so long to be there, then go to your brothers, O son, without delay. At the command of Indra, we are ready to do as you ask.' The Gods command the Devaduta, the messenger of Swarga, 'Take Yudhishtira to his friends and kinsmen.' They two set out together, the royal son of Kunti and the celestial messenger, for the place where they are whom Yudhishtira wants to see.

The messenger walks ahead, with Yudhishtira following. Soon the path they tread grows sinister and inauspicious, surely a passage trodden by sinners. Mantled in heavy darkness, it has human hair and moss for its grass. A stench of decay hangs heavy; both sides of the trail are mired with raw flesh and blood and abound with vermin—stinging gnats, flies and hornets, while fearsome bears stalk the awful passage.

Rotting corpses, bones and hair lie all around them, swarming with worms and insects. Pits of fire fringe the pathway. Crows, vultures and other dreadful birds with beaks of iron, fly and wheel on every side, and evil spirits, Pisachas with long mouths pointed like needles, Over the scene loom mountains swathed in gloom, lofty as the Vindhyas. Human corpses are strewn everywhere, smeared with fat and blood, dismembered, with raw wounds where flesh has been savagely cut away from their arms and thighs, or with entrails torn out.

Along that path rank with the stench of rotting corpses, and hideous with countless horrors, walks the Dharmaraja, his spirit plunged in darkness, his mind in a frenzy. He sees a river full of boiling water, impossible to cross, and a forest of trees whose leaves are sharp swords and razors. He sees deserts of smoking hot sand, and rocks and stones of iron. Great cauldrons of iron stand around, all full of boiling oil, and Kuta-salmalika trees with thorns like thick needles, excruciating to the touch. All around him, Kunti's son sees sinners being savagely tortured. Oppressed by the foulness of the vile place, Yudhishtira asks the Devaduta, his guide, 'How far are we to go along this path? You must tell me where my brothers are. And tell me also, which realm of the gods this can be.' The messenger stops and says, 'The denizens of Swarga commanded me to stop in this very

place, for thus far is your way. If you are tired, O King of kings, you may return with me.'

Yudhishtira is benumbed by the horrors and stench of this monstrous place and turns back, resolved to retrace his footsteps. But at that very moment he hears heart-rending lamentations all around him, piteous cries from the darkness.

'O Dharmaputra, O Rajarishi, O you of sacred origins! O son of Pandu, be merciful to us and remain here for a few moments.'

'At your coming, invincible one, a delightful breeze has begun to blow, bearing the fragrance of your person and bringing us some relief.'

'O greatest of kings, seeing you is balm to our tormented spirits.'

'O son of Pritha, let our comfort last a few moments longer. Ah, we beg you, stay, O Bhaarata, for even a short while.'

'As long as you are here, our suffering is assuaged and we find some solace.'

Hearing all around him those voices of souls in agony, the compassionate Yudhishtira is deeply moved and exclaims, 'Alas for their anguish!' The king stands still. It seems to the Pandava that the voices which call out to him in such desolation are familiar, although he cannot yet distinguish them. Dharma's son calls out, 'Who are you? And why are you here?'

They answer him from everywhere:

'I am Karna!'

'I am Bhima!'

'I am Arjuna!'

'I am Nakula!'

'I am Sahadeva!'

'I am Dhrishtadyumna!'

'I am Panchali!'

'We are the sons of Draupadi!'

Even thus, O King, do those voices call back to Yudhishtira.

Yudhishtira cries out to himself, 'Ah, what perverse destiny is this! What are the sins of these pure and noblest ones, Karna and the sons of Draupadi, and the slender-waisted Princess of Panchala, that they have been cast into this foetid and gruesome hell!

I cannot think of any sins that these souls of dharma have committed that would consign them to this stinking, loathsome pit. And what noble

deed did Dhritarashtra's son Suyodhana, and all his wretched adherents do, that he has been invested with such grace and prosperity? Why, he, unabashed sinner, is being adored like a god in Indra's glorious sabha, while these truly deserving ones find themselves in hell.

My brothers were heroes, devoted to the truth and to the Vedas; they never violated Kshatriya dharma; they were unfailingly righteous in everything they did. Each one performed sacrifices and gave generously to Brahmanas throughout their lives. Ah, this cannot be! Am I asleep or awake? Am I conscious or is all of this a delusion of my fevered mind?'

In turmoil, overwhelmed by woe, Yudhishtira is immersed for a long time in these sombre reflections. Then, the royal Dharmaputra gives way to wrath and rails against the gods, against Dharma himself. Plagued by the abominable stench, he says to the duta, 'Return to those whose messenger you are. Tell them that I shall not go back to where they are. My presence has brought some comfort to my afflicted brothers and I will remain here with them.'

The celestial messenger returns to the court of the king of the Devas, Indra of a hundred sacrifices, and tells him what Yudhishtira did and said. Indeed, O ruler of men, he spares no detail of all that Dharma's son said!"

CANTO 3

Vaisampayana said, “Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, son of Pritha, has not remained in that hell for more than a moment when, all the Devas with Indra at their head arrive there, O Kurusottama, including Dharma Deva in his embodied form. As soon as those resplendent deities of sanctified and noble deeds appear, the darkness shrouding the place is dispelled. The tortured cries of sinners are silenced.

The river Vaitarani, the thorny Salmali, the frightful cauldrons and boulders of iron, all vanish entirely. The repulsive dismembered corpses disappear. A delicious breeze, laden with heavenly fragrances, pure and cool, O Bhaarata, blows there now with the presence of the Gods.

The Maruts, with Indra, the Vasus with the twin Aswins, the Sadhyas, the Rudras, the Adityas, and the other inhabitants of Swarga, along with the Siddhas and the great Rishis, all throng the place where Dharma’s royal son of great tejas stands.

Indra of blazing glory comforts Yudhishtira: ‘Come, O Dharmaputra, Mahabaho, come, O Lord of men. The dark illusions are ended, O mighty one. You have now attained to final success, and eternal realms of felicity have become yours. Do not give in to anger, Yudhishtira—listen to me. Every king must of necessity witness and experience hell. Of both good and evil, there is abundance past reckoning. He who first enjoys the heavenly fruits of his good deeds must inexorably endure hell, when his punya is exhausted. On the other hand, he who first suffers Naraka, will later find Swarga without end. He whose sins are many enjoys heaven first, and then falls into hell.

It is for this, O King, and wishing your weal, that I first sent you to first taste hell. Once, on Kurukshetra, you deceived your Acharya Drona by affirming that his son Aswatthama was dead. It was for that untruth that you were shown hell. Like you, Bhima and Arjuna, and Draupadi, all have been shown the place of sinners briefly, each for their own sins. O Lord of men, through that experience of horror, they have all been purged of their sins, as have all the kings and Kshatriyas who fought for and died during the great war. All of them are now in Swarga after their short tenure in darkness.

Come now, and see them, O Bharatottama. Karna, mighty bowman, greatest of all wielders of weapons, for whom you grieve so sorely, has found the highest honour and bliss. Come, mighty Yudhishtira, and look at that radiant son of Surya. He is now in a station of his own. Kill this grief of yours, and behold your brothers and all the other noble kings who espoused your cause. They have all attained to their rightful places of lustrous felicity.

Let the fever of your heart be dispelled, O son of the Kurus. Having endured a little torment first, abide with me from now on in joy, divested entirely of grief, all your sickness of heart dispelled. Enjoy the rewards of all your deeds of righteousness, O King, those realms of bliss that you have earned through your tapasya and all the daana that you have given so abundantly.

Let Devas and Gandharvas, and celestial Apsaras, clad in wondrous raiment and adorned with splendid ornaments, wait upon you and serve you. Do you, now, Mahabaho, enjoy those worlds of splendour and majesty which have become yours by virtue of the Rajasuya yagna you performed, whose fruit has been enhanced by the blade of sacrifice and truth which you wielded as king of the Kurus.

Come and enjoy the high fruits of all your penances, for the realms you have earned for yourself, O Yudhishtira, are loftier than those of other kings, O son of Pritha, they are equal to those of Harishchandra. Come, sport in bliss where the Rajarishi Mandhatri is, where the great Bhagiratha dwells, why, where Dushyanta's son Bharata is—that is where you will abide in ineffable joy. Look, here is the celestial river sanctifying the three worlds—the Akasa Ganga. Enter her current, Yudhishtira, and you will find yourself in your own realms. Having bathed in this stream, you will be divested of all vestiges of your human, mortal nature. Indeed, you will be

free from all conflict, your grief dispelled entire, your ailments all conquered.'

O Janamejaya, after Indra, Lord of the Devas, has said this much to Yudhishtira, the God of Righteousness, Dharma Deva, in his embodied form, addresses the Dharmaputra. 'King of truth, O you of great wisdom, I am highly gratified in you, my son, by your devotion to me, by your truthfulness of speech, your forgiveness and your self-restraint.

That was the third test to which I put you, O son of Pritha. You are indeed incapable, of being swerved from your nature or reason. My first trial of you was in the Dwaita vana, when you came to the lake there to recover a Brahmana's arani twigs. You stood it well. I tested you once more, O son, in the shape of a dog, when your brothers and Draupadi had fallen upon Meru. And this was your final trial, when you, noblest king, said you would remain in Naraka for the sake of your brothers.

Blessed Yudhishtira, you have been purified of all traces of sin. Now be at peace and be happy. Son of Pritha, your brothers were not such as to deserve hell in any way. All that you saw was an illusion created by Indra. Yet every king must once, for certain, behold hell, and for that reason have you briefly been subjected to this torment.

O King, neither Arjuna nor Bhima, neither Sahadeva nor Nakula, and surely not Karna, all of them ever truthful and possessed of courage and valour beyond compare, could deserve to be sent to Naraka for any length of time. The princess Krishnaa too, O Yudhishtira, could never deserve that place of sinners. Come, come, O Bharatottama, greatest of the Bhaaratas, and behold Ganga who flows her sacred currents through the three worlds.'

That Rajarishi, your grandsire, goes with Dharma and all the other gods to the Akasa Ganga and, bathing in her sanctifying waters, ever adored by the Rishis, he casts off his human body. Assuming a celestial form, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja loses all enmity and grief.

Surrounded by the deities, Yudhishtira leaves with his father Dharma, while the greatest Rishis utter his praises. Soon he arrives in a hallowed place where those foremost of men, those heroes, the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras, all freed from mundane human wrath, have found and enjoy each his own lofty, illustrious status."

CANTO 4

Vaisampayana said, “Thus lauded by the Devas, the Maruts and the Rishis, Yudhishtira comes to where those other great Kurusottamas are. He sees Krishna first, in his true form, that of the Saguna Brahman. Yudhishtira recognizes him in his utmost glory because this Divine Form still resembles that of the Krishna he had known in the world of men. But here the Dark One is adorned with the Sudarshana Chakra and his other weapons, each embodied and terrible. He sees heroic Arjuna, also blazing with lustre and worshipping Krishna. They are Nara-Narayana, being adored by all the Devas. Seeing Yudhishtira, the two greatest of created Beings welcome him with due honour.

In another place, Yudhishtira sees Karna, greatest of all wielders of weapons, as resplendent as a dozen Suryas. Elsewhere, he sees the mighty Bhimasena, who sits in the midst of the Maruts, he, too, shining with a great and divine form of light. Handsome and glorious, he sits beside Vayu, the Wind God, having found his ultimate goal and divine condition. In the quarter of the Aswins, Yudhishtira sees Nakula and Sahadeva, both radiant with their own effulgence.

He sees Panchali, adorned with lotus garlands; having attained grace, she too sits in Swarga dazzling like the sun. Suddenly, Yudhishtira wants to ask her who she really is. Illustrious Indra answers his question. ‘This one is Sree herself. It was for your sake that she was born as the daughter of Drupada, into humankind, issuing not from any mother’s womb, O Yudhishtira, but from the sacred fire. She was created for your delight by the Trishulin, Lord Siva himself. She was born in the race of Drupada and

all of you enjoyed her. Look at these five Gandharvas, glowing with the effulgence of flames—they were Draupadi's sons by your brothers and you.

Behold Dhritarashtra, the king of the Gandharvas, possessed of great wisdom. Know that he was born as your father Pandu's elder brother. And this one here is your own eldest brother, the son of Kunti, with the brilliance of fire. The son of Surya, this greatest of men, was known in the world as Radha's son. He now moves in the company of Surya Deva. Look upon him, and be glad.

These resplendent ones here are all Sadhyas, Devas, Viswadevas and Maruts—behold, O King of kings, the mighty Maharathas of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, those heroes among whom Satyaki was foremost, and these others here are the great Bhojas.

And see here the mighty bowman Abhimanyu, Subhadra's son, invincible in battle, who now remains with Soma Deva, the Moon God, of whom he is an amsa. Indeed, he is as softly lambent as the luminary of the night. Here is none other than the mighty bowman Pandu, now united forever with Kunti and Madri. Your sire frequently comes to me in his celestial vimana. Behold the royal Bhishma, son of Santanu, now back in the midst of the Vasus. And recognize this one by the side of Brihaspati as your Acharya Drona.

These and other kings who fought the Great War on your part, O son of Pandu, now all walk with the Gandharvas or Yakshas or other heavenly beings. Some have attained to the status of Guhyakas, O King. Having cast off their mortal bodies, they have conquered Swarga through the punya they acquired through word, thought and deed during their lifetimes.'"

CANTO 5

Janamejaya said, “Bhishma and Drona, those two Mahatmans; the great King Dhritarashtra; Virata and Drupada, Sankha and Uttara; Dhrishtaketu and Jayatsena and King Satyajit; the sons of Duryodhana, and Sakuni’s son by Subala; Karna’s sons of great prowess; King Jayadratha of the Sindhus; Ghatotkacha and others whom you have not mentioned, heroic kings of burning glory—tell me for what period or time they remained in Heaven. O Dvijottama, was theirs an eternal place in Swarga?

What was the end attained to by these greatest of men when their karma was exhausted and their lives came to an end? I ask you this eagerly because you see all things through your profound and searing tapasya.”’

Sauti said, ‘Thus questioned, the magnificent Vaisampayana, with leave from his master the Maharishi Vyasa, set himself to answer the king.

Vaisampayana said, “Not everyone, O King of men, can return to his own true condition and nature at the end of his deeds—this is the essence of your deep question, Yudhishtira, and it is a worthy one. Hear, then, O King, about this mystery of the Gods, once discoursed upon by our guru Krishna Dwaipayana, the Island-born son of Parasara Muni, Veda Vyasa of fervid tejas, divine vision and great power, observer of stern austerities, whose understanding is fathomless, who is omniscient, and knows the end of all deeds, lives and karma.

Bhishma of powerful energy and radiance returned to his original state of being a Vasu. You see eight Vasus before you now, O Lord of the Bharata vamsa.

Drona, greatest among the descendants of Angiras, entered into Brihaspati. Hridika's son Kritavarman entered the Maruts. Pradyumna entered the Rishi Sanatkumara, whence he had issued. Dhritarashtra gained the regions, so difficult of acquisition, which belong to Kubera, the Lord of Treasures. The famed Gandhari found the same realms as her husband.

Pandu with both his wives went to Indraloka. Virata, Drupada and King Dhrishtaketu, as well as Nishatha, Akrura, Samba, Bhanukampa and Viduratha, Bhurisravas and Sala, King Bhuri and Kamsa, Ugrasena and Vasudeva, and Uttara, that foremost of princes, with his brother Sankha—all these great ones entered into the being of the Devas.

Soma's own son of great prowess, Varchas of mighty energy, was born as Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna, that lion among men. Having fought the war in accord with Kshatriya dharma, with valour such as none else had ever been able to show, that mighty-armed and righteous-souled being returned to his originator Soma. Slain on the field of battle, Karna returned to his sire Surya. Sakuni was absorbed into Dwapara, of whom he was an amsa, and Dhrishtadyumna into Agni, from whom he sprang. The sons of Dhritarashtra were all Rakshasas of fierce might. Sanctified by death through weapons, those Mahatmans of prosperity all succeeded in attaining Swarga.

Both Vidura, the Kshattri, and Yudhishtira entered into Dharma Deva, the God of Righteousness. The holy and most illustrious Ananta, born as Balarama, left the world of men and went back into sacred Patala, the world below Bhumi, where by the command of Brahma, the Grandsire of Creation, he supported the Earth through his Yoga shakti. Vasudeva was an amsa of that Eternal God of gods, the Devadeva called Narayana. Accordingly, he entered into Narayana.

Sixteen thousand women had been Krishna's wives in Dwaravati. When the time came, O Janamejaya, they committed jalasamadhi in the Saraswati. Casting off their human bodies, they returned to Swarga. Transformed again into the Apsaras they had always been, they went back into the presence of Vasudeva.

Those most mighty Maharathas, Ghatotkacha and others who were slain in the Great War, returned to the condition of Devas or Yakshas. Those who fought on the side of Duryodhana are said to have been Rakshasas. Gradually, O King, they have all attained to exalted regions of felicity.

Some of them have attained to the abode of Indra, some to that of Kubera of great intellect, and some to that of Varuna of the deeps.

I have now recounted, O you of grand majesty, everything about the deeds and ends of both the Kurus and the Pandavas, O Bhaarata."'

Sauti said, 'Hearing this greatest of Itihasas, the Mahabharata, O Dvijottamas, King Janamejaya was filled with wonder and reverence. His sacrificial priests then finished the remaining rites. Astika was filled with rejoicing at having rescued the Nagas. King Janamejaya then gratified all the Brahmanas at his Sarpa yagna with copious gifts and returned from Takshasila to the city named after the elephant. Those learned Brahmanas, thus worshipped by the king, returned, each to his own home and asrama.

I have now told you everything that Vaisampayana narrated, at the command of his master Vyasa, to the king at his snake sacrifice.

Called an Itihasa, a history, this Mahabharata is sacred, sanctifying and without peer. It was composed, O Brahmana, by the Maharishi Krishna Dwaipayana of truthful speech. He is omniscient, conversant with all the sacred ordinances, possessed of knowledge of all dharma, endowed with piety, capable of perceiving what is beyond the ken of the senses, pure of soul, having been cleansed by tapasya, possessed of the six highest attributes, and devoted to Sankhya Yoga. He composed this great Epic, seeing it all with divine and mystic vision purified and strengthened by the sacred lore.

Vyasa did this wishing to spread the fame, throughout the world, of the Mahatman Pandavas, as well as of all the other Kshatriyas prodigiously rich in tejas. The learned man who recites this history on sacred days in the midst of an attentive audience is exorcised of every sin, conquers Swarga and attains to the Brahman. Anyone who listens with rapt attention to the narration of the whole of this, the fourth Veda, composed by the Island-born Krishna, will be cleansed of a million sins, even the gravest ones such as Brahmahatya, the killing of a Brahmana.

Even a small portion of this Itihasa recited at a sraddha ceremony obtains inexhaustible sustenance for the Pitris of one who recounts it. The sins that one commits during the day with one's senses or mind are all expiated before evening by reciting a portion of the Mahabharata. Whatever sins a Brahmana may commit at night with women are set at naught before dawn by reciting a portion of the Mahabharata.

The exalted Bharata vamsa is the subject of this matchless Epic. Hence it is called the Bharata. And because of its profound import, it is called the Mahabharata. He who is versed in interpretations of this great treatise is rid of his every sin. Such a man lives in dharma, artha and kama, and attains to mukti also, O Lord of the Bhaarata vamsa.

That which is found in this Itihasa occurs everywhere, and that which is not found here can be found nowhere else. This Itihasa among itihasas is also known by the name Jaya. It should be heard by all who desire moksha. It should be read by Brahmanas, by Kshatriyas and by women quick with children, so that he who desires Swarga attains to Heaven, he that wishes for mastery reaps victory, and the pregnant woman obtains a godsend for a child.

The puissant Island-born Krishna, who is Mukti incarnate, and who will never have to return to this samsara, was impelled to further the cause of dharma in this world; thus did he compose the Mahabharata, as I have recounted to you. He created another, altogether vaster Mahabharata, containing sixty lakhs of verses. Thirty lakhs of these were given in Devaloka, where the Gods dwell. In Pitriloka, realm of the manes, a Mahabharata of fifteen hundred thousand slokas is current, while in the realm of the Yakshas a Bharata of fourteen lakhs is in usage. The Mahabharata that exists in the world of men is the one with a hundred thousand slokas.

Narada recited the Mahabharata to the Devas; Asita-Devala to the Pitris; Suka to the Rakshasas and the Yakshas; and Vaisampayana to Manavas, human beings. This Itihasa is sacred and of high import, and regarded as equal to the Vedas. The man who hears this Itihasa in front of a Brahmana, O Saunaka, acquires both fame and the fruition of all his wishes. He who with earnest attention listens to a recitation of the Mahabharata attains to high success, through the punya attached to understanding even a very small portion of this Jaya. All sins are dissolved of one who recites or listens to this Itihasa with devotion.

In former times, the great Rishi Vyasa, having composed this treatise, caused his son Suka to recite it with him, along with these four slokas: Thousands of mothers and fathers, and hundreds of sons and wives constantly enter the world and depart from it. Others too will arise and depart. There are thousands of occasions for joy and hundreds of occasions

for fear. These affect only one that is ignorant, never one that is wise. With upraised arms I cry this aloud, but nobody hears me.

From dharma comes artha, as well as kama. Why should not dharma, therefore, be courted? For neither pleasure, nor fear, nor greed, should anyone abandon dharma. Indeed, not for the sake of life itself should one forsake holy dharma. Dharma is eternal. Pleasure and pain are not eternal. The Jiva is eternal, although the Jiva being invested with a body is not.

That man who, waking at dawn, reads this essential Savitri of the Bharata, acquires all the rewards attached to a full recitation of this Itihasa and ultimately attains to the highest Brahman. As the sacred Ocean and the Himavat mountain are both regarded as vast repositories of precious jewels, even so is this Mahabharata considered a treasure trove.

The man of learning who recites this veritable Veda or Agama composed by the Sage earns wealth. There is no doubt that he who, with rapt attention, recites this Epic of the Bhaaratas, attains to high success. What need has that man of a sprinkling of the waters of Pushkara who attentively listens to the Mahabharata? This Itihasa is verily the nectar, the Amrita that fell from the lips of the Island-born. It is immeasurable, sacred, sanctifying, sin-cleansing and auspicious.

CANTO 6

Janamejaya said, "O Holy One, what rites should the learned observe listening to the Mahabharata? What fruits are to be gained by hearing it? What deities are to be worshipped during the several paranas? What should be the gifts that one should make, great Vaisampayana, at every parva or sacred day of the narration? Who is qualified to recite the Mahabharata? Answer me!"

Vaisampayana said, "Attend, O King, to what the method is, and what the fruits are, O Bhaarata, that will spring from listening to a recitation of the Mahabharata. This, O King of kings, is indeed what you have asked me.

The Mahabharata narrates the births of Rishis and Devas into the world, this Bhumi. The Devas of Heaven, O Bhumipala, came to this world for their sport and, having achieved their task, they returned once more to Swarga. In this treatise called Bharata, O foremost one of Bhaarata's race, you will find gathered in a single space the eternal Rudras, the Sadhyas, and the Viswadevas; the Adityas, the two Aswin Kumaras, the Lokapalas, regents of the world, the Devarishis, the Guhyakas, the Gandharvas, the Nagas, the Vidyadharas, the Siddhas, the diverse Devas, the Self-born Brahman incarnate, as well as countless other Maharishis; the Hills and Mountains, Oceans and Seas and Rivers, the diverse tribes of Apsaras; the Planets, the Years, the Half-years, and the Seasons; and the whole universe of mobile and immobile beings, with all the Devas and Asuras.

Harkening to their eminence, and the recitation of their names and achievements, even one who has committed the most terrible sins will be purified. When, with a concentrated soul and cleansed body, one has duly

listened to the entire Itihasa, from beginning to end, one should make sraddha offerings, O Bhaarata, unto all those foremost of men and Gods and sages who have been mentioned in it.

To the Brahmanas also, Lord of the Bharata vamsa, with due devotion and according to one's ability and power, let generous gifts and diverse kinds of jewels and ornaments be given, and kine, and vessels of white brass for milking cows, and maidens decked with every ornament, and possessed of every accomplishment suited to kama, enjoyment, as well as diverse kinds of carriages and other conveyances, opulent mansions, plots of land and the finest cloths.

Animals also should be given, such as horses and elephants in musth, and beds of great comfort, and covered palanquins borne on the shoulders of strong men, and well-adorned and equipped chariots. Whatever valuable and beautiful articles are found in a goodly home, whatever wealth you have, should be given away to Brahmanas. Indeed, one should give away one's own self, wives and children!

One who wants to hear the Mahabharata should listen to it without a doubting heart, with cheerfulness and joy; and as he listens to its narration, he should, according to the extent of his means, make gifts with great devotion.

Listen to how a sincere man, devoted to dharma, who is self-restrained, pure in mind, and has a way of life conducive to purity, who is endowed with faith and who has subjugated anger, attains to success in the matter of a recitation of the Bharata.

He should appoint as narrator one who is pure of body and body, whose life and conduct are pious and impeccable, who has complete mastery over his passions and is cleansed of all his sins, who is conversant with every branch of learning, who has full faith, who is free from malice, handsome and radiant in appearance and robed in white, self-restrained, truthful, and beloved of all for the gifts he makes and the honours which he receives wherever he goes.

The Suta, seated at his ease, free from all bodily disorders, with rapt attention must recite the text at an even pace, neither too slowly nor too fast, without straining his voice—effortlessly and calmly, yet sonorously and energetically, never confusing the words and couplets, with diction and intonation rendering all the sixty-three letters of the alphabet clearly and flawlessly, from the eight places of their utterance.

Bowing unto Narayana, and to Nara, that foremost of Purushas, as well as to the Devi Sarasvati, the spirit of Jaya should be first of all invoked.

Listening to the Bharata, O King, narrated by a Pauranika of such excellence the listener, keeping all vratas after the initiatory rites of purification, acquires the most valuable fruits, both material and spiritual.

On reaching the first Parana, the end of the first division of the narrative, the hearer should gratify Brahmanas with every manner of desirable gift. By doing this, he obtains the fruits of an Agnistoma yagna. He acquires a large celestial vimana, full of diverse orders of Apsaras who wait upon him. With his heart rapt in felicity and bliss, and with the Devas for company, he flies to Devaloka.

When the second Parana is reached, the hearer acquires the fruits of the Atiratra vrata. He gains a vimana made entirely of precious gemstones. Wearing celestial garlands and robes, and anointed with unguents exuding a heavenly fragrance, he receives high honour in Swarga.

When the third Parana is reached, he acquires the fruits of the Dwadasha vrata. Indeed, he dwells in Swarga for countless years, like a god himself.

At the fourth Parana he acquires the fruits of the Vajapeya yagna. At the fifth, twice those fruits are his. Ascending a vimana that resembles the rising sun or a blazing fire, and with the Devas for his companions, he goes into Swarga and sports in great bliss for an untold number of years in Indra's very halls.

At the sixth Parana, twice, and at the seventh, thrice those rewards become his. Ascending a celestial chariot that resembles the summit of the Kailasa mountains in beauty and grandeur, which has a vedi, an altar, made of stones of lapis lazuli and other incomparable gemstones, with diverse objects of unearthly beauty all around, adorned with corals and other great and priceless stones, which flies at the will of the rider and is thronged with attentive Apsaras, he ranges through all the lokas of utmost felicity, like a second Surya.

At the eighth Parana, he acquires the fruits of the Rajasuya yagna. He gains a vimana as lambent as the rising moon, to which are yoked steeds white as the rays of the moon and with the speed of thought. He is served by women of surpassing beauty, with faces more enchanting than the moon. He hears the music of the girdles that encircle their hips and the nupuras

around their ankles. Sleeping with his head on the laps of such women of transcendent beauty, he awakes profoundly refreshed.

At the ninth Parana, he acquires, O Bhaarata, the fruits of that greatest of all sacrifices, the Aswamedha yagna. Flying into Swarga in an even more splendid vimana, with a grand chamber covered with a canopy supported by columns of gold, furnished with a throne made of the purest lapis lazuli, with windows on all sides framed with pure gold, and attended by throngs of Apsaras, Gandharvas and other celestials, he blazes forth in splendour. Clad in divine garlands and robes, and adorned with celestial pastes, he sports in bliss, the gods his companions, like a Deva himself.

Reaching the tenth Parana and gratifying Brahmanas, he gains a vimana fit for the dwelling of the most righteous, tinkling with innumerable bells and decked with flags and banners, furnished with a throne of precious gems with arches of lapis lazuli encased in nets of filigreed gold, with turrets of coral, and accompanied by Gandharvas and Apsaras skilled in singing and dancing. Crowned with a diadem the colour of fire, adorned with ornaments of gold, anointed with celestial sandalwood paste, draped in garlands made from unfading flowers plucked from the Nandana, he roves through all realms of Heaven, enjoying every transcendent pleasure and resplendent in person by the grace of the Devas.

Thus accoutred and blessed, he receives high honour in Swarga for many long years. With Gandharvas in his company, for full twenty-one thousand years of the Devas, he sports in utmost bliss with Indra himself in the palace of Sakra. He ranges at his pleasure through the countless lokas of the Gods, riding on wondrous chariots and magnificent carriages, and surrounded by Apsaras of surpassing beauty.

He is able to travel to the abode of Surya Deva, of Soma, and even of Siva, O king. Indeed, he comes to Vishnuloka and spends his time with Narayana himself! A person listening with faith becomes even so, O monarch, do not doubt it. I was told this by my guru Vyasa.

Upon the Suta who recites the Mahabharata, the listener must bestow everything that he might wish for—elephants and horses, chariots and carriages, and vehicles drawn by animals, a bracelet of gold, a pair of earrings, sacred threads, beautiful robes and perfumes. By worshipping as a God one who recounts the Mahabharata, one attains to the realm of Vishnu.

Now I will tell you about what should be given away to Brahmanas, as each Parva is arrived at of the Mahabharata during its recitation, after

ascertaining their birth, country, truthfulness as well as their greatness and devotion; and to Kshatriyas, too, O King, after similar ascertainment of their origins, qualities and greatness.

The actual recitation should commence after the Brahmanas have been prompted to utter the prescribed blessings. When a Parva is finished, the Brahmanas should be worshipped to the best of one's capacity. At first, the narrator, the Suta, clad in fine robes and anointed with fragrant sandalwood paste, should be duly fed with honey and payasa of the best kind, O King.

When the Astika Parva is being recited, Brahmanas should be entertained with fruits and roots, payasa, honey and ghee, and rice boiled with raw sugar.

When the Sabha Parva is being recited, Brahmanas should be fed havishya along with apupas and pupas and modakas, O Rajan.

While the Aranyaka Parva is being recited, Brahmanas should be fed with fruits and roots.

When the Arani Parva is reached, waterpots full of water should be given away. Many superior kinds of food, rice and fruits and roots, and a variety of other delicacies should be given to the Brahmanas.

During the recitation of the Virata Parva, O Lord of the Bharatas, diverse kinds of robes should be given away; and during that of the Udyoga Parva, the Dvijas, adorned with perfumes and garlands, should again be entertained with food of the finest flavour.

During the recitation of the Bhishma Parva, O King of kings, after the Brahmanas have been given fine chariots and conveyances, they should be fed the purest and best sattvik fare.

During the Drona Parva, again, food of the most superior kind must be given to learned Brahmanas, as well as choice beds and mattresses, bows and fine swords.

During the recitation of the Karna Parva, also, food of the foremost sort, always pure and delicious, should be given by the grihasta with a rapt mind to the Brahmanas present.

During the recitation of the Shalya Parva, Rajadhiraja, more fine dishes, along with the finest sweets and rice payasa boiled with raw sugar, as well as cakes of wheat and other soothing and nutritious food and drink should be served.

During the recitation of the Gada Parva, Brahmanas should be entertained with food mixed with mudga.

During the recitation of the Stri Parva, the foremost of Brahmanas must be gifted precious jewels and gemstones; during the recitation of the Astika Parva, rice boiled in ghee should be served first, and then more pure and excellently prepared dishes, of both superlative taste and nutrition.

During the recitation of the Shanti Parva, the Brahmanas should be fed with havishya.

When the Aswamedhika Parva is reached, again fine fare is served; and when the Asramavasika is reached, the Brahmanas should be entertained with havishya.

When the Mausala is arrived at, superb perfumes and the garlands should be given.

During the Mahaprasthanika, similar presents should be made, agreeable and gratifying in every way.

When the Swarga Parva is reached, the Brahmanas should be fed with havishya.

Upon the conclusion of the Harivamsa, a thousand Brahmanas should be fed generously. Each of them should be gifted with a cow and a fair amount of gold. Half of this same offering, apart from the cow, should be given to every poor man who comes to the grand narration of the Mahabharata, O King.

Upon the conclusion of all the Parvas, the grihasta of wisdom should give to the Suta a copy of the Mahabharata with a bar of gold. When the Harivamsa Parva is being recited, Brahmanas should be fed with payasa at each successive Parana. Having finished all the Parvas, one versed in the Shastras, robing himself in white, wearing garlands, decked with ornaments, and properly purified, should place a copy of the Mahabharata in an auspicious spot and cover it with a piece of silken cloth and worship it, according to the prescribed rites, with perfumes and garlands, offering each at a time.

Indeed, O King, the several volumes of this Itihasa should be worshipped by one with devotion and concentration. Offerings should be made to them of diverse kinds of food and flowers and drinks and various other auspicious articles of enjoyment. Gold and other precious metals should be given as dakshina.

The names should be taken of all the Devas, and of Nara and Narayana. Then, the bodies of some great Brahmanas should be touched with perfumes and their persons adorned with garlands, and they should be

gratified with a myriad fine and valuable gifts. By doing this, one attains to the punya of the Atiratra yagna. Indeed, at each successive Parva, the one who causes the Mahabharata to be read acquires the merits that attach to the performance of a great sacrifice.

The one who recites the sacred Itihasa, O Lord of the Bharatas, should be possessed of learning and blessed with a good voice and clear and proficient diction and intonation of both letters and words. Only such a man should recite the incomparable Bharata.

After entertaining a number of the best Brahmanas, gifts should be given to them according to the ordinances of the Shastras. The reciter also, O Bhaarata, should be decked with the finest ornaments and fed sumptuously. By gratifying the reciter, the Grihasta attains to a lofty and auspicious contentment.

If the Brahmanas are gratified, all the deities are gratified. After this is done, O King of the Bharatas, Brahmanas should be duly entertained with diverse kinds of items of enjoyments and other exclusive and superior things.

And so, in answer to your questions, I have told you of all the laws, Purushottama, for the narration of the Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa. You must observe them with devotion. In listening to a recitation of the Bharata and at each Parana, O best of kings, he that wishes to attain to the highest good should listen with the greatest care and attention.

One should listen to the Bharata daily and proclaim its merits. One in whose house the Bharata is found has in his hands all those scriptures known by the name of Jaya. The Bharata is cleansing and sacred. In it diverse subjects can be found. The Bharata is worshipped by the very gods. It is the highest goal and the foremost of all scriptures. One attains to Mukti, the final Emancipation, through the Bharata. This that I tell you is certain truth. He that proclaims the merits of this Itihasa called the Mahabharata, of the Earth, of the cow, of Saraswati, of Brahmanas and of Krishna, has never to languish in dolour.

In the Vedas, in the Ramayana, and in the sacred Bharata, O Lord of the Bhaarata vamsa, Hari is sung in the beginning, the middle and at the end. Men who want to attain to the highest goal should listen to that which has the most excellent pronouncements relating to Vishnu, and the eternal Srutis. This scripture is sanctifying, the highest treatise on dharma, and

endued with every merit. Indeed, one who wishes for true prosperity should listen to it fervently.

Sins committed by the body, through words, and by the mind, are all destroyed through listening to the Bharata, even as darkness is banished at sunrise. Through this Mahabharata one devoted to Vishnu acquires that punya gained by listening to the eighteen Puranas. There is no doubt of this.

Through listening to the Bharata, both men and women attain to the very condition of Vishnu Narayana. Women who wish for children should certainly listen to this holy work which proclaims the fame of Vishnu. One who wishes to attain to the fruits that attach to a recitation of the Bharata should, according to his or her means, give dakshina and gold to the Suta who recites it. One who wants his own weal should give to the reciter a Kapila cow with horns cased in gold, accompanied by her calf covered with a rich cloth.

Ornaments for the arms and for the ears should be given. Besides these, other kinds of wealth should be gifted, as should generous lands. There is no gift like that of land, nor will there be.

The man who listens to the Mahabharata with devotion, or he that tells it to others, becomes cleansed of all his sins and attains at last to the very condition and status of Vishnu. Such a man redeems his ancestors to the eleventh generation, O King of the Bharata vamsa, as well as himself with his wives and sons.

After concluding a recitation of the Bharata, one should perform a Homa with all its ten angas."

Vaisampayana said, "I have thus in your presence, O Lord of men, recounted in its entirety the Mahabharata of my Guru Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa.

He that listens with devotion to this Bharata from the beginning is purified of every sin, even if he be guilty of Brahmahatya or the violation of his guru's bed, or even if he be a drinker of alcohol or a thief, or even if he be born a Chandala. Destroying all his sins as the maker of day destroys darkness, such a man, beyond doubt, sports in felicity and bliss in the world of Vishnu, verily like Vishnu himself."

The end of the Swargarohanika Parva

The eighteen Parvas of the Mahabharata are thus complete.